POWER FIRMS ON THEIR OWN TRIP IN DELHI
Prayas study says regulator to blame

Finally, a legal Taungiya village

Many wonders among Ashden awards

Ayurveda for those sparkling eyes

Delhi Police campaign on female foeticide

NAXAL REALITY
A citizen's report by Harivansh

PLUS The Gondwana Tribal Party Interview with Ramchandra Guha
Naxals from up close

PERCEPTIONS abound about Naxalites who now virtually rule a band of territory in eastern India – all the way up to the border with Nepal. There are the idealists who see them as liberators of the poor. There are others who regard them as brigands. The truth, as in all matters, lies quite boringly, somewhere in between. The important thing is that Naxalites have managed to spread their influence to such an extent without the rest of India cottoning on. It is our belief that even today there is little realisation of what is happening. Urban India is far too immersed in its own understanding of economic change to figure out that large parts of the country are adrift. There has been so little accountable governance in these areas that they are quite happy to submit themselves to Naxalism.

Ministers and administrators who occasionally besmirch themselves, have a good scratch and call for police action may actually have lost the chance to enforce the writ of the government. So effete have our political parties become that they have no real presence in areas where the Naxalites are supreme. The contractors who used to pay the politicians now pay the Naxalites.

Attempts to Chhattisgarh to counter the Naxalites through tribal activism aligned with the government are fraught with their own problems. A civil war-like situation could easily run wild and result in even more complex problems.

Over a year ago, as we chatted with Harivansh in Ranchi, we suggested that Prabhat Khabar, of which he is chief editor, join Civil Society in doing an extensive report on the Naxalites. Prabhat Khabar and Civil Society are editorial allies. Our regard for Harivansh’s journalism is expressed in our cover story “Mr Editor” (May 2005).

We were then of the view that it was important to take the Naxalite movement in all its complexities, to urban readers. Like all small outfits beset with problems of growth and survival, both of us couldn’t get our act together though we tracked the story.

Recently, Harivansh visited Chhattisgarh as a member of a team of independent citizens to assess the situation there. Other members of the team were BG Verghese, Ramchandra Guha, Farah Naqvi, EAS Sarma and Nandini Sundar.

We felt that this was a good time to get Harivansh to do a status report on the spread of Naxalism and the many realities with which it confronts the country. We have chosen to avoid using words like “menace” and “problem” when referring to Naxalites because we believe that their existence is intimation of a breakdown in governance. People are turning to Naxalites because there is no one to address their real problems of land, water, forest rights, education, health and so on. The Naxalites, therefore, represent a reality that comes in many layers and the sooner we seek to understand them the better.

What are power firms up to in Delhi? Prayas takes a close look

National policy on rehabilitation is making progress

Slum schools in Kolkata show how it pays to go in for solar energy

National Alliance of People’s Movements meets in Bangalore

Business: Seen Kriti’s diary? Buy it and help good causes

Perspectives: Rural job funds should result in more assets

Good Living: Orissa has many vegetarian dishes it is proud of

For those sparkling eyes, Ayurveda has natural solutions

PRIVATE power distribution firms have had the run of the Delhi market in the absence of a vigilant regulator and well-informed consumers who can question their tariffs and investment plans.

The first independent assessment of power privatisation in Delhi by Prayas, the Pune-based NGO, has expressed surprise over data provided by two of the three private distributors.

The functioning of the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission (DERC) has come in for plenty of serious criticism. The regulator has failed to question the claims of the companies and ensure quality of service.

The DERC has failed to provide transparency and the availability of essential information in the public domain. Both are critical for privatisation to succeed.

Much of the blame must also be laid at the door of the Sheila Dikshit-led Congress government. It did not strengthen the regulatory process and failed to empower consumers to deal with privatised services.

This assessment has been published by Prayas as one of its occasional reports. Prayas seeks to use professional knowledge and skills for a better understanding of issues relating to the rather complex energy sector.

Prayas believes in providing strategic but sensitive responses. With adequate information, the consumer can make serious interventions that hold commercial entities to account. The NGO has a formidable reputation for serious work in protecting consumer interests in Maharashtra.

Last year, Delhi’s residents took to the streets in protests over a hike in power tariffs. (See Civil Society September 2005: Middle Class Anger.) The outpouring of anger and emotion resulted in a partial rolling back of tariffs, but Prayas’ report is the first clinical account of power privatisation in Delhi.

Power distribution in Delhi was handed over to three companies. North Delhi Power Ltd (NDPL) was under the Tatas. BSES, controlled by the undivided Ambanis then and now Anil Ambani, set up BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Ltd (BYPL).

Most of the protests in Delhi were directed at BRPL and BYPL. The Tata-run NDPL was by and large seen as being better managed, though areas under it were not without their problems.

Prayas, too, has questions chiefly with regard to the functioning of BRPL and BYPL. It finds NDPL to be largely on course.

Figures for consumers in certain categories, consumption and capital investments needed to have been scrutinised by the regulator. For instance, BRPL and BYPL showed a decline in the number of industrial consumers. The average billing rate (ABR) also varied without any apparent basis. The lowering of the ABR results in the reduction of aggregate technical and commercial (ATC) losses. This is one measure by which the performance of the private distributors is judged. It also has bottom line implications.

However, when asked for data so that the movement of consumers from one slab to another and the billing rate changes could be understood better, BRPL and BYPL said they could not provide it. Prayas finds this strange.

“NDPL’s ABR increased from year to year as expected,” says the report. “However, the trajectory of ABRs departed significantly from expectations for BRPL and BYPL. Both BRPL and BYPL said they could not provide it. Prayas finds this strange.

"NDPL’s ABR increased from year to year as expected," says the report. "However, the trajectory of ABRs departed significantly from expectations for BRPL and BYPL. Both BRPL and BYPL showed a decline in the ABR in 03-04 even though the tariffs were increased in that year."

Prayas says that the regulator should have analysed the reasons for the variations in billing rates as well as the much lower billing rate of NDPL compared to BRPL in 2002-03.

Similar question marks hang over capital investments. These are important because higher capital investments translate into higher tariffs. In the case of the Tata-run NDPL, the actual investments for the years 2003-04 came up to 85 percent of the projections. But in the Ambani-run BRPL and BYPL...
Shantanu Dixit of Prayas, the Pune based NGO, which has filed a report on Delhi's power privatisation

The regulator is key to all this. "Many times we found that the commission staff had difficulties locating documents," says Prayas. The staff then had to rely on the companies to update the commission's records. The commission also does not make public its spreadsheets on the basis of which its calculations are done. This is a failing with other regulators in the country as well. But the problem that results from it is that the consumer or an organization like Prayas cannot get to the basis of numbers that the commission puts out.

Prayas clarifies that it is not imputing motives to what the companies have done. But the questions it is raising needed to have been put to the companies by the regulator in the interests of the consumer. "Delhi's residents will have to rely more on hard information and learn to make probing inquiries if the privatisation effort is to work to the benefit of everyone," Shantanu Dixit, one of the members of the Prayas Energy Group, told Civil Society on phone from Pune.

Dixit says the way forward is to understand the technicalities of the power sector. To do so residents need to build groups of professionals, particularly with a background in power.

Interventions will have to be made at junctures when they are needed. For instance, the rationale for capital investments has to be questioned when they are being proposed by the companies because they finally influence tariffs. Unwarranted investments need to be stopped at the proposal stage.

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The actual investment was only 25 to 26 percent of the tariff order issued for that year. A privatised service regime requires a vigilant regulator to ensure that the consumer gets a fair deal. In the case of power distribution in Delhi the angry displays by residents on the roads were the result of two years of virtually no serious monitoring.

Prayas points out that at first the DERc had only a Chairman when it should have had several members and access to a variety of expert opinion. Then the Chairman retired and the post remained empty till recently. Two commissioners were appointed between January and February 2005 after the last date for filing for tariffs. This meant that they had no scope for review and assessment.

The DERc anyway has just six technical staff members. Most of them are on deputation for short tenures. Prayas worries about this because it impairs institutional memory.

Privatisation of utilities requires a process of transition. Transparency and education and empowerment of the consumer are of huge importance. It is important to have systems of accountability that fit the new arrangements.

The policy itself envisages institutional structures that will assess any project displacing people:

1. There shall be set up, through an Act of Parliament, a National Rehabilitation Commission. This National Commission must have the statutory responsibility of assessing all projects (and activities, initiatives) that would displace people. It will be empowered to give statutory clearances to such projects, similar to the statutory clearances being given from the environmental angle under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986.

2. Such a clearance will only be given when the Commission is satisfied that displacement of people is essential for the proposed project (or activity) and that the project, nevertheless, involves the smallest extent of displacement necessary; that despite the displacement involved, the project is viable; and that the process of rehabilitation and compensation is in keeping with government policy.

The rationale for capital investments has to be questioned when they are being proposed by the companies because they finally influence tariffs. Unwarranted investments need to be stopped at the proposal stage.
Finally, a legal Taungiya village

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

FIFTY-two-year old Ganga Devi, a resident of Pathri village on the outskirts of the Rajaji National Park, has always lived in perpetual fear of the forest department. On a chilly January morning in 2003, she recalls, a forest ranger turned up with a truckload of policemen. They bulldozed her makeshift hut and destroyed her tiny 0.40 ha field. Ganga Devi had nowhere to go with her four children.

"We have been living here since 1927," she says. "We have even paid land dues up to 1986. Land records including mutation papers are with us. But the forest ranger refused to recognise any of this." Pathri is a Taungiya village. The Taungiya system was first started in the forests of Myanmar and introduced by the British in India.

It forced people to work as bonded labour to grow commercial forests. In return they were allowed to live on small plots of land on the periphery of the forest and cultivate crops for their survival.

Uncertainty about the legal status of these villages has forced thousands to live without any facilities for health, education or even a post office. Taungiya settlements are just a cluster of makeshift huts with a little land and some bare necessities.

No pucca construction was allowed in these villages.

In 2004, after a lot of lobbying by the National Forum of Forest People and Forest Workers (NFFPW), the Uttarakhand government recommended to the central government that 104 Taungiya settlements in Haridwar and Dehradun districts be recognised as revenue villages. The Central government has now given the green signal to this proposal, though the order has yet to be notified.

Uncertainty about the legal status of these villages has forced thousands to live without any facilities for health, education or even a post office.

I can finally see a better future for my children," says Ganga Devi. Decades ago, her husband's ancestors came to Pathri from Garhwal to work as bonded labour growing sal trees for the British.

"Since the forest department does not allow us to collect fuel and fodder, we depend on cow dung to cook and our cattle survive on leftovers. Some have even died by eating polythene bags," says 51-year old Kishuni Devi, of Aithal village in Haridwar district.

Development work was stopped when the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 came into effect. Taungiya villagers relate several stories of harassment by the forest department. Fake cases were lodged against many of them. The Wildlife

In Orissa watch the White Ribbon

Biswajit Padhi
Bhubaneswar

THE Orissa chapter of the White Ribbon Alliance (WRA), an international network has launched an awareness campaign on safe motherhood. Rallies are being held in all 30 districts of Orissa to educate people on maternal health and government health schemes. Several NGOs are joining hands with WRA to strengthen the government's health delivery system.

The WRA got government agencies, NGOs, the media and Oriya film stars together in April to discuss what each of them could do to make the campaign a success.

Ushashi Mishra, one of Orissa's top film stars has lent her name to the cause. "Despite being a science student I didn't know that pregnancy can be so life-threatening. Mothers bring us into the world.

They deserve a better deal and I am going to do my best," said the young star, emphatically.

According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) 29 women die everyday in Orissa due to complications caused by pregnancy. The state government refuses to believe the NFHS. It claims 11 women die everyday and the state's maternal mortality rate (MMR) is merely 376 per 100,000 live births.

Local activists denounce the Orissa government's figures as pure fiction. After all the NFHS pegs the state's MMR at 707 per 100,000 live births. "In the tribal districts of Koraput, Kalahandi and Bolangir, MMR rates are not less than 800 per 100,000 live births," says Niranjan Das, an activist from Kalahandi. "Because of the hilly terrain and lack of roads, health workers can't get to villages and pregnant women don't even bother to seek medical advice."

While cynics in the government say dismissively that more people die due to road accidents on the National Highway between Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the cold fact is that maternal mortality rates can be brought down.

"Almost all these deaths are preventable," says Dr Sarojini Sarangi, professor, SCB Medical College, Cuttack.
Protection Act was used to throw villagers into prison for allegedly killing wildlife. But no compensation was paid if someone was hurt or killed by an animal.

To put an end to atrocities and ensure villagers got basic facilities the NFPPFW took up the Taungya cause as one of its key goals. In 1999, it launched a forum called the Ghad Kashtra Mazdoor Sangarsh Samiti (GHMSS) in Dehradun, Haridwar and Udham Singh Nagar districts of Uttarakhand as well as in Bijnaur and Lakhimpur Khiri districts of UP.

NFPPFW started networking and organising people, holding workshops and conducting surveys to gauge ground reality.

"We began direct action and staged a series of sit-ins, demonstrations and rallies. We also questioned forest department officials," says Munni Lal, convenor of GHMSS.

In 2004, the GHMSS was extended to the whole of Uttarakhand and re-christened as the Van Avam Bhumi Adhikar Manch (VABAM).

"The VABAM took up the issue in all 194 Taungya villages and asked the state government to convert them into revenue villages," says Hari Ram, a VABAM activist from Haripur Taungya village in Haridwar district.

Thousands of VABAM supporters demonstrated in front of the DFO's office at Haridwar on 25 November 2004. They also presented petitions and applications to the government.

When 50 armed forest department workers burnt about 40 ha fields belonging to Taungya villages, VABAM forced the district administration to act against the culprits.

Village level institutions were established in all 194 villages. "We also provided legal education to people to fight for their rights," says Ram. For the first time a government school was constructed in Haripur Taungya village.

The government's decision to regularise 194 villages in Uttarakhand is indeed a victory for about 7,000 people living on the margins since years.

(With inputs from Roma)

of safe motherhood

Setting aside bitter differences over statistics, NGOs are now joining hands with the government to bring down the MMR.

"Every nation is looking at India to make a significant drop in the MMR. India alone contributes 20 percent of MMR globally," said Aparajita Gogoi, national coordinator of WRa. "Ninety two percent of all maternal deaths have one or more avoidable factors."

The Orissa government has launched the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) under which women are encouraged to opt for institutional deliveries. About 60 percent of deliveries are conducted at home. One Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) has been appointed to serve a population of 1,000. But very few women are aware of the government's schemes.

Dharmadhan Majhi, state minister for health and family welfare, has appealed to NGOs to inform people about government programmes.

WRa started its campaign as a response to the minister's appeal. Sudhanshu Mohan Das, state coordinator, WRa, said apart from holding rallies, WRa also plans to appoint a peer educator in each district to spread the message.

One problem is that only 12 percent of government run health centres have facilities to conduct deliveries. Majhi has promised more staff, including doctors and health workers to man these centres.

Anemia is a major concern. Shaktidhar Sahoo, chairman of WRa, said there were several myths prevailing about iron foli c tablets. Some tribal communities wrongly believe that the tablets increase the size of the foetus making delivery more difficult for the woman. NGOs will be educating people about the benefits of taking iron foli c tablets.

Infection or sepsis is a serious cause of maternal deaths. Often the umbilical cord is cut with sharp stones or arrows. The NGOs will promote the 'Five Cleans: clean surface, clean hand, clean blade, clean thread and clean stump.' Low cost delivery kits will be marketed through self-help groups (SHGs).

When a makeshift school in Tamil Nadu caught fire some years ago killing many children, the West Bengal government got worried. An official directive was issued. It said that all educational institutions which did not have pucca structures, adequate ventilation, two doors and fire safety measures would be closed down. The fire department even ordered two non-formal centres to renovate their structures or shut shop.

Right Track got anxious. It did not want its schools to be closed. The main reason non-formal schools caught fire was because they had to illegally tap power from a jangle of wires. Since slums are deemed illegal, there was no way they could get power companies to supply electricity though the legal route.

The NGO got in touch with their funding agency, Goal India, and sought a solution. Right Track needed lights and fans for their schools but drawing on existing power lines was hazardous.

"To circumvent this problem, we decided to go in for solar panels to light up our centres," explains Mohammed Shakeel Haider of Right Track.

In 2004 Right Track began its solar energy project in right earnest. The NGO worked with local self-help groups and basti committees it had helped organise over the years. Each committee was told about the government's directive and taught how solar panels should be maintained. The basti committees were more than willing to comply. All they had to do was ensure that the solar panels were kept clean.

"It meant low cost, easy maintenance and lack of dependence on the conventional electric supply," explains Shakeel. Right Track also gave each centre a fire extinguisher to doubly ensure schools were fire proof.

Right Track then found out that other NGOs were also worried about their schools being closed down by the government. So they called a meeting of all NGOs working on non-formal education and offered them funds and assistance to set up solar energy systems.

So far, 50 non-formal schools have such systems. These include two non-formal education centres near Brace Bridge in Taratala, and similar schools in Narkeldanga, Tiljala, Garia, Dhaparashbari road, Rajabazar and Garden Reach.

Since 2005, Right Track has broadened its horizons. Under a two-year solar energy programme costing Rs 1 crore, it is offering solar energy systems to one hundred and fifty such schools in Kolkata, Howrah, Hooghly, and north and south 24 Parganas will benefit. Each school is being given a solar energy system costing between Rs 40,000 to Rs 70,000. The school can state its requirements. For instance, the Cathedral Relief Services (CRS), which runs a non-formal school at Chinsurah, needed just one fan and two lights. So they opted for a less expensive system.

Right Track's project is on the right track. The schools now get cheap, safe and reliable power supply.

Schools go solar in Kolkata slum

LOCATED off Brace Bridge, near Taratala, Khalkbari is one of Kolkata's dirtiest slums. Pigs roam around feasting on mounds of garbage. Lanes and by lanes are in a seething mess.

But turn into the Surjodhya Prathamik Vidyalaya, a non-formal school, and encounter a difference. Run by the Jay Azad Club, a local youth group, the school, consisting of two rooms, is neat, spacious and attractive. Ram Naresh Rajbhar, secretary of the club, is truly proud of it.

Three fans and three lights run on solar energy. Installed at a cost of Rs 60,000, it is a system with uninterrupted power.

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Ride on FERRY in Bengal

Abhijit Gupta, executive secretary of FERRY.

For nearly 25 years, the Foundation for Economic Rehabilitation of Rural Youth (FERRY) has been helping people in villages of West Bengal become economically self-sufficient so that they do not have to migrate to cities to eke a living. FERRY was set up in 1983, by a group of 14 persons. Sibabrata Ghosh, its primary founding member, closed down a flourishing business to concentrate on social work. He believed that independent income," says Gupta. However, there may be times when an individual has no inclination to finish schooling. We accept these persons into our courses to provide them with the possibilities of employment. Otherwise, they may always be unemployed." Often, FERRY has to turn away applicants due to lack of space, but it makes every effort to accommodate them in subsequent courses.

One of the oldest FERRY sites is at Rampurhat in Birbhum district. Here students have been taught courses in machine knitting of woollen garments and two-wheeler maintenance. Farida Begum who learnt machine knitting now runs a profitable business. She has enabled FERRY to train other Muslim women. Many two-wheelers ply in Rampurhat. It is near a highway that has a number of garages. So the two-wheeler maintenance course is helping youngsters earn a good living.

At Kalanabagram in Bardhaman district, poultry-keeping was one of the most popular courses. When FERRY first offered the course, residents were lukewarm. They thought poultry was not commercially viable. FERRY established a model poultry farm and once the course had ended there were around a hundred poultries flourishing in a few years time. After being accredited by the Regional Transport Authority, FERRY conducted courses in auto-rickshaw driving. Classes in carpentry and repair of electronic goods have been held at the Bardhaman and Birbhum sites.

FERRY’s centre at Rampurhat was a rewarding experience. Currently, sessions in machine embroidery are in progress, and plans are on to start a second carpentry course. In the embroidery classes, girls learn to stitch bed sheets, pillow covers, curtains and saris. Mamata and Meera, who are attending this course said: "We want to be self-sufficient and this course will help us." Biswanath Konai, who was a student of the last carpentry course remarked: "The classes benefitted me immensely. I’m looking forward to talking to the new class of prospective carpenters about how this course helped me and sharing my work experiences with them." Trainees were also shown how a solar cooker works and informed of its merits. In future, residents might be taught how to make a solar cooker.

At least 80 percent of FERRY’s funds go into financing their courses. Once FERRY members feel that they have no more training to offer at a site, they leave. “We do not want residents to become dependent on FERRY for their economic well being. We consciously restrict our activities because we realise that growth or expansion need not necessarily improve the quality of work done by a voluntary organisation,” says Gupta.

FERRY organises follow-up appraisals to ascertain the success of their courses and assess whether their trainees are enjoying economic and professional independence.

[If you would like to donate to FERRY, you can contact the agency at 033-24256926.]
It is three-thirty in the afternoon. Arijit Roy of Jagran is standing on a stage that has been set up at Pitampura village, in Saraswati Vihar, in the north-west periphery of Delhi.

"No need for tickets or money," he yells. "We are showing you a play and it's free." Santosh, the woman head constable of the area, dives into lanes to drum up an audience. Soon, nearly 200 children sit giggling on a cotton carpet across from the stage. Women peep from balconies. Men hang around.

Northwest Delhi is infamous for its marauding criminal elements. Women don't feel safe here. The male-female ratio is the worst in the Indian Capital.

Jagran's performance is aimed at reducing some of this stress and creating awareness.

More interestingly, Jagran is here at the invitation of the police, who want to explore new ways of getting into neighbourhoods and preventing crime.

An enterprising officer, Sagar Preet Huda, additional DCP north-west, has been running a campaign called Parivartan since November 2005. He hopes this will work better than wielding a stick.

"Even if all our 60,000 policemen in the city were to be sensitised to violence against women, we can't stop crime. We cannot be on each doorstep to prevent domestic violence and in each office to stop sexual abuse," says Huda, who is a sociologist with a PhD in gender issues.

One of the big problems that Huda's campaign addresses is of female foeticide. Others are domestic violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, child molestation, harassment for dowry and sexual harassment.

These problems mostly lurk below the surface. Sexual harassment, for instance, abounds within families. Making a difference means influencing thinking and changing environments. The plays with Jagran combine entertainment with education. There are 20 pantomimes being staged this month.

The first play is about a boy who gets lured into drugs. He sells his clothes to pay for his addiction. The mafia gets rich. At the end the children are asked what they saw. All of them scream "Nasha nahin lena chahiye" (Narcotics addiction is bad).

The second play is about a man who tells his wife he has no money to pay school fees but when he goes out with his friends he pays for the booze. He beats his wife and in the end gets caught by the cops. The third is about a family of four which has a studious girl. They invite a man who is supposed to be a friend but is in reality a lecherous creep. One day when the family leaves him alone with the girl, he molests her. This was a play that Delhi police got specially written.

As the plays end, two women head constables are invited on stage to talk to residents. The idea is to improve the status of women constables. Huda has already begun deploying women constables in larger numbers in crime-prone areas of Seemapuri and Mongolpuri. The women constables go door to door talking to residents. They also train girls in self-defence techniques.

With this, it is hoped that the force will show greater sensitivity and become more accessible.

Along with Rajat Mitra, a clinical psychologist and founder of the Swanchetan Society for Mental Health, the police are holding workshops in schools to educate children about sexual abuse. They have also created a helpline for children.

So intractable are the issues that lead to crimes in areas under Huda that the only way out for him is to change perceptions even if that means taking the road less travelled to better policing.
NAPM decides to fight on

'The fifth biannual conference of the National Alliance of People's Movements (NAPM), held in Bangalore, ended with a decision to launch a non-violent movement to counter the government's 'anti-people' development policies.

Programmes were drawn up for the next two years. Activist Sandeep Pandey of Adivasis will lead a 'visa free and nuclear free South Asia programme' from 6-9 August in Lahore. This month, yatras to the Narmada Valley are taking place. In September, a 'national action against displacement' programme is planned in cities. Padayatras will be intensified in every river valley to protest the government's river linking project. The agitation against Coca-Cola is to be deepened.

NAPM will continue its struggle against displacement caused by big dams, mining projects and agricultural distress. It will oppose industrial policies that force rural artisans, marginal farmers and agricultural labour to migrate to urban areas. It will fight against attempts to privatise water.

Medha Patkar, convenor of NAPM, said that people's movements were forging a political union to challenge communal and divisive politics nationally. "India's anti-people and anti-environment development policies are further exacerbated by the forces of global politics in the form of multi-lateral bodies like the World Bank and the IMF," said Patkar.

NAPM's three-day meeting was attended by hundreds of activists, NGOs and intellectuals. Literary stalwart Ur Ananthamurthy, who inaugurated the meet, said India was in a state of civil war.

"People are being displaced by dams and other projects, thrown into slums in cities and eventually evicted from there as well. The IT sector hungry for farmers' land. Water is being privatised and poisoned. Politicians are mere managers for the affluent."

"People are being displaced by dams and other projects, thrown into slums in cities and eventually evicted from there as well. The IT sector hungry for farmers' land. Water is being privatised and poisoned. Politicians are mere managers for the affluent." she said.

NAPM expressed support for reservations in higher education and in the private sector for Dalits, Adivasis and backward communities. "Reservation is not a favour but a realisation of their creativity and productivity," said one activist.

Young students, said NAPM, must unite and fight against common adversaries – national and international corporations and imperial vested interests.

NAPM condemned 'the deliberate lethargy on the part of the government regarding implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations.'

In September a 'national action against displacement' is planned in cities. Padayatras will be intensified to protest the government's river linking project.

NAPM also demanded changes in the government's elitist education policy. It said that the common school policy should be strengthened and there should be a common technical and higher education system as well.

They demanded an end to corporatisation of education and said all institutions should follow public policies.

Activists expressed their support to the Narmada movement. They criticised the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for "his refusal to protect the lives and rights of the project-affected people and for siding with Narendra Modi."

Patkar emphasised the need for "a national action against displacement' is planned in cities. Padayatras will be intensified to protest the government's river linking project."

"The dam will cross the 122 metre height by June 30 and the houses and lands of more than 35,000 families will get submerged this monsoon. This illegality cannot be tolerated. The affected people have not been rehabilitated according to the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award," she said.

Also condemned was the Bush-Mannohmar nuclear deal and WTO's Hongkong Declaration of 2005. In the West, nuclear power plants are being closed down while in India outdated nuclear plants are being dumped alleged Sandeep Pandey. "His group. Asha. is carrying out a survey near the Narora nuclear plant in UP. Several people have died mysteriously and there is a state of illness, he said.

Opposition was expressed to the government's plans of creating Special Economic Zones (SEZs). According to activist Rajni Dave, "SEZs will further alienate farmland, grazing land and lead to exploitation of labour. The nation will be deprived of taxes."

Dave led a struggle in Kutch against the Mundra port, the first privatised port. set up by the Adanis. Mangroves were cut, the livelihood of fisher folk affected and marine biodiversity ruined. he said. Mundra, considered the rose garden of Kutch. is devastated. The Adanis constructed a railway line connecting the area. Pastoral communities lost their grazing land. None of the people were given jobs as promised. Dave said the government is unconcerned about the ecological impact of the SEZ and of the security problems in border areas of Kutch.

"In India anti-people and anti-environment development policies are further exacerbated by the forces of global politics in the form of multi-lateral bodies like the World Bank and the IMF," said Patkar.

NAPM's three-day meeting was attended by hundreds of activists, NGOs and intellectuals. Literary stalwart Ur Ananthamurthy, who inaugurated the meet, said India was in a state of civil war.

"People are being displaced by dams and other projects, thrown into slums in cities and eventually evicted from there as well. The IT sector hungry for farmers' land. Water is being privatised and poisoned. Politicians are mere managers for the affluent."

Patkar said the government is determined to implement the river linking project. "It is a gold mine for them. Several global corporates are in the process of signing contracts and this is being seen by companies as a source for privatisation of water," she said.

"Reservation is not a favour but a realisation of their creativity and productivity," said one activist.

Young students, said NAPM, must unite and fight against common adversaries – national and international corporations and imperial vested interests.

NAPM condemned 'the deliberate lethargy on the part of the government regarding implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations.'

In September a 'national action against displacement' is planned in cities. Padayatras will be intensified to protest the government's river linking project.

"The dam will cross the 122 metre height by June 30 and the houses and lands of more than 35,000 families will get submerged this monsoon. This illegality cannot be tolerated. The affected people have not been rehabilitated according to the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award," she said.

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Aruna Roy of the MKKS talked about the right to information (RTI) which has empowered farmers and landless labour and is helping to make the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) a success in Rajasthan. NAPM resolved to spread use of the RTI so that people could assert their rights.

A new legislation for urban land ceiling was demanded. Regularisation of slums was also asked for. The Tamil Nadu unit of NAPM said the Sethusamudram project must be stopped. The Tuticorin port project should also be put on hold since it destroys the livelihood of fisher folk and labour working in the harbour. They also wanted the nuclear fast breeding reactor in Kalkakkam closed.

R. Geetha, NAPM's Tamil Nadu representative, said the state government was the main beneficiary of the tsunami disaster. It had evicted fisher folk from the confluence of the Adyar river to make way for a seven-star hotel.

The National Commission for Women (NCW), which had organised a public hearing, said women affected by the tsunami tragedy were not regarded as workers and were therefore not being compensated.

The NCW recommended that the government close illegal prawn farms. All fishing panchayats should give 50 percent representation to women. Women must be given priority in all schemes for employment, housing and health, it said.

NAPM activists say countries in Latin America are casting off US domination and emerging as a role model. "The new global power is China. Latin America has shifted to Chinese investments. Venezuela is emerging as a leading exporter of oil. The uprising against the US in Iraq is growing. The time is ripe for people's movements to strengthen. We should take inspiration from the people's movement in Nepal," said Sergio of Global People's Action who attended the meet to express solidarity.
ON 1 June, 12 policemen travelling in bullet-proof vehicles in the Singhbhum district of Jharkhand were killed when landmines planted by Naxalites exploded. This area has seen 52 policemen killed in such attacks in the past two years. The Naxalites have gone from strength to strength and the police have become more vulnerable. The attack added an ominous notch in the escalating violence that has taken hold of a swathe of perhaps 20 percent of Indian territory. The immediate loss has been in terms of men, weapons and vehicles. As the numbers keep going up, the official estimate is that Naxalites are taking a bigger toll than extremists in Kashmir. More importantly, they have succeeded in eroding the authority of the government in ways more enduring and complex than other extremist groups in the country.

The influence of the Naxalites has grown steadily, which is one reason why the response to it has been inadequate. It is as though a trickle has become an unmanageable expanse. The acts of violence have often been dubbed as random news reports, but the reality is that strung together they create a disturbing picture. In district after district, the Naxalites have come to replace the administration. Police and civil officials do not dare to enter areas where the Naxalite writ runs. Across urban India there is little understanding of the Naxalites and

India must wake up to the upsurge in its poorer eastern states, reports Harivansh

Harivansh is chief editor of Prabhat Khabar, one of eastern India’s most influential dailies.
The Centre and the states have all spoken in different voices. It seems that each side wants to thrust its responsibility on the other. The typical urban response has been either of neglect or romantic idealism. Both have dangerous consequences. By the time the neglect becomes awareness it will be far too difficult to govern large parts of the country.

the control they now exercise. There is therefore, no sense of them being a national danger. Only urban India would be able to articulate this concern. But the areas the Naxalites operate in are on the fringes of the current consciousness governed by talk of a market economy and reforms that favour industry. The Naxalite strongholds are also geographically remote. Steeped as they are in poverty these areas have long been counted out, deleted as it were from the map of modern India. No one in Mumbai, Delhi or Bengaluru has time to think about Singhbhum or Dantewada. It is this space, vacated by the State and citizens at large, that the Naxalites have filled.

The typical urban response has been either of complete neglect or romantic idealism that sees the Naxalites only as liberators of the poor. Both have dangerous consequences. By the time the neglect becomes awareness it will be far too difficult to govern large parts of the country. The idealists on the other hand forget that though the Naxalites may be speaking for the poor, they are also responsible for corruption and violent excesses.

Perhaps the most worrisome reality should be that politicians no longer have an answer to the Naxalites. No major political party has bases in the areas over which the Naxals hold sway. Local political leaders don't dare to enter these areas any more and naturally no national leader will even think of visiting Naxalite territory.

According to the Delhi-based Institute for Conflict Management, Naxalites were active in 55 districts in nine states in 2003. A year later, in 2004, the number rose to 170 districts spread over 13 states. Now it is believed that Naxals are running parallel governments in 55 districts spread over 12 states.

The Union government has assessments that should be reason for prompt action. It is perhaps a measure of its own helplessness that it cannot draft an effective strategy. Minister of State for Home, Prakash Jaiswal, informed the Lok Sabha that Naxalites held sway in 12 states. Jaiswal said that apart from Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, parts of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Naxalites were also having an impact in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

The Naxal movement that started in 1967 fragmented over the years and some factions moved from violence to constitutional means. But after this fragmentation the Naxal movement re-emerged in a new and more organised form. As compared to the past, it was more violent, better organised and equipped with modern gadgets, weaponry and an up to date communication network. Naxals came together with the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar and Jharkhand. Then they united with the People’s War Group active in Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. Now the Communist Party (Maoist) has emerged as a unified organisation. For the first time, from Andhra Pradesh to Jharkhand, the Naxals have emerged as a unified force. They have forged strong links with the Maoists in Nepal and periodically news about the supply of weapons and the imparting of training comes to the fore.

In reality, the ‘Naxal problem’ has been discussed endlessly from 1967 onwards. But till today no serious initiative has been undertaken to solve it. The Centre and the various states have all spoken in different voices. It seems that each side wants to thrust its responsibility on the other. The Centre says that this is a law and order problem, but its roots lie in socio-economic issues and the state governments should find ways of tackling them. The state governments say that the problem is spread over several states, therefore only an integrated plan can be successful in tackling the issue. But, till today neither the Centre nor the states have a policy to counter the Naxalites.

On 13 March, the Union Home Minister presented a report on the Naxal problem in the Lok Sabha – Status Paper on Naxal Problem. The minister said, “…we were telling them that we do have a policy and we are following the directions given in that policy and yet every now and then we were told we lack a policy. So we thought of putting together the policy in a booklet form and giving it to the honourable members.”

The day the Home Minister was distributing copies of the booklet on Naxal policy to the MPs, the chief minister of Chhattisgarh was saying that confusion continues to reign over policy matters. He said that there is no coordination among the affected states and called for a national policy in this regard. Just before this, following Naxalite violence in some districts during the election campaign in West Bengal, chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya spoke in tough forms of evicting Naxals from the state. He ordered strict measures against them. In August last year, the CPI(M)’s Sitaram Yechury said in Hyderabad that there can be no national policy with regard to the Naxal problem.

Recently an independent ‘citizens’ team’, of which I was a member, visited the Bastar-Dantewada area of Chhattisgarh. This area is severely affected by the Naxalite movement in Chhattisgarh. Some parts of this area are considered ‘liberated zones’. Here a government supported anti-Naxalite movement, the Selva Judam, is underway. Talking to members of this team, a district collector wanted to know how to deal with Naxal groups that flitted across states. They used bases in Maharashtra, Andhra, Orissa and Jharkhand.

West Bengal’s chief minister has already stated that Naxalites from Jharkhand spread violence in the districts of Bengal. On the other hand the Jharkhand government believes that this movement is being led by non-Jharkhandis (from Andhra Pradesh or West Bengal). In Bihar it is said that people from Bengal sowed the seeds of Naxalism. This same allegation is heard in Chhattisgarh where it is said that leaders from Andhra are carrying out operations.

The booklet tabled by the Union government in the Lok Sabha says in paragraph three that “Naxalism being an inter-state problem the states will adopt a collective approach and pursue a coordinated response to counter it.” On various earlier occasions the Union government has made similar declarations, but it is clear that substantial differences exist at the policy level among the states. Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Tamil Nadu have banned
funding of 30 per cent so that it is possible to pay a levy to the Naxalites. At the political level, Jayaprakash Narayan, or JP, as he was known, was the last leader to challenge the Naxalites. In 1972, when Naxalites threatened to kill a Sarvodaya worker associated with JP, he went to the Musahari village in Muzafarpur district to be with the worker. JP roamed among the local villagers, met the Naxalites and raised issues relating to the rising corruption in the government and administration and lack of land reforms. He admitted that politicians and the state had overlooked basic questions. Based on his Musahari experience he brought out a booklet - Face to Face - that became rather well known.

Today no Indian politician would be capable of JP’s response. A recent trip to the worst affected districts in Chhattisgarh revealed that from Abujhamad to various parts of Dantewada and Bastar, neither the government nor the political parties have been able to do any substantive work over the past 50 years. No schools, no health centres, no arrangements for a public distribution system, no construction of roads, no efforts to create employment. On the other hand, the increasing influence of corrupt contractors in the jungles has created the circumstances for Naxalites to establish roots in these areas of Chhattisgarh. Government officials openly state that no one can enter the Abujhamad area consisting of 130 villages. And if some do enter, they cannot return. Recently when the Chhattisgarh chief minister went to one village of Abujhamad by helicopter, he was fired upon.

Over the past 39 years, the strength of the Naxalites has continued to increase. The bitter truth is that questions related to the poor are raised only by the Naxalites. They live among them. The leaders of the movement have shed their class privileges and have become a part of the very poor and deprived. The Naxalite movement has capital built out of the dedication, commitment and renunciation of its leaders. They also have the same commitment among the rank and the file. In the midst of dense jungles they have ensured the construction of water tanks as well as initiated several projects for the common good.

Educated but unemployed youth in the villages have joined the Naxalites on a large scale. In Jharkhand alone the government spends Rs 200 crore on higher education. Over 60,000 students graduate every year, but of these only 5,000 get jobs. When young people return to their villages and remain unemployed they are easy to recruit. By becoming Naxalites they earn between Rs 1,500 and Rs 2,000 a month. In addition they get weapons and a sense of purpose in their lives.

If the State machine has failed, so have politicians. The various political parties are divided. The situation at the grassroots is such that no leader of any political party can organise a function in the Naxalite areas without the help of Naxal organisations. During elections the political parties take the help of Naxalites. Several important leaders have links with Naxalite leaders in their respective states. The intelligence wings of various state and central agencies are well aware of this. Recently the state government in Jharkhand called an all-party meet over this issue. Representatives from some political parties did not attend, others chose to indulge in banalities. The leaders are afraid that raising their voices against the Naxals could be counterproductive.

The Jharkhand government concedes that of the 22 districts in the state, the Naxalites have a presence in 18. But rarely, if ever, has the matter come up for discussion and debate in the Jharkhand Assembly or has there been an initiative to plan a strategy on the issue. The same is true for Bihar. Police outposts in Jharkhand are being shut down out of fear. In May, in the industrial area of Ramgarh in the Hazaribagh district, three police outposts (Basal, Urimimari and Bhadaninagar) were vacated. Of these, all the rifles at the Bhadaninagar outposts had been looted by Naxalites a year earlier. Because the police posts could not be protected the entire area was left unprotected. In Mcluskieganj a police post was blown up a day after it was vacated. The police have stopped operations against the Naxalites. While preparing the budget for development activities in Naxalite areas, provisions are made for additional...
The fight against extremism. He has authored a book, Hai re Ugravaad, where a boy or girl from each household is required to join the movement and this is cause for disenchantment after the first flush of initiation is a growing trend. The naxalites perhaps don’t know how to deal with it. But one from the other.

Naxal violence. The naxalites perhaps don’t know how to deal with it. But one from the other.

In Dantewada and Bastar, the anti-Naxalite Selva Judam movement supported by the Chhattisgarh government is underway. Naxalites admit that their supporters among the tribals have been drifting into this movement. Recently, in the course of a visit to this region, I was witness to people from several villages questioning the manner in which Naxalites function. They said that at their meetings Naxalites don’t give villagers a chance to speak. Naxalites force every household to contribute foodstuffs or cattle or land. A boy or girl from each household is required to join the movement and this is cause for disenchantment. Recently, in the course of a police raid in the jungles of Jharkhand, a diary was recovered from Naxalite hideouts which revealed that even they are getting divided on caste. Several cases of atrocities on girls have emerged. The question has also begun to be asked how Naxalites can maintain their principles after coming into contact with corrupt contractors and officials. Perhaps the biggest challenge to the Naxalites comes from tribal aspirations to prosper and modernize. If young tribals turn to the Naxalites because they get little from the state, they also become disillusioned when they don’t see the Naxalites ushering in development either. An example is the Naxalite opposition to the construction of roads because of the access this will give the administration. There are villages in Jharkhand from which it has been reported that Naxalites decide on who will own a cell phone. Such control is being resented, especially by the young who have access to TV and education. Oppression from the young is new and has much to do with the spread of technology. The Naxalites perhaps don’t know how to deal with it. But disenchantment after the first flush of initiation is a growing trend.

In Jharkhand the former chief minister Babulal Marandi has left the BJP and has announced that he will launch an anti-Naxalite movement. He organised a function in Ranchi where he brought some of the extremely poor who have had their limbs chopped off by the Naxalites. A man named Kuchu Marandi had his ear chopped off. Pappu Marandi and Mansur Ansari had a hand chopped off. In Marandi’s Parliamentary constituency in Giridih district, on 11 September, 16 persons in Shevaghati village were lined up and shot, their hands tied behind their backs. All of them were very poor.

In May, after leaving the BJP, one of the issues that Marandi has taken up is the fight against extremism. He has authored a book, Hai Re Ugravaad, where he has cited his case and has also included several pictures of the victims of Naxal violence.

Many sources have been used to compile information pertinent to this write up, in particular the piece - Policy to Fight Naxalism – by General VP Malik (retd) and Dr PV Ramanna. The following are some of them:

- Harivansh is Chief Editor of Prabhat Khabar. He is based in Ranchi.
- Many sources have been used to compile information pertinent to this write up, in particular the piece - Policy to Fight Naxalism – by General VP Malik (retd) and Dr PV Ramanna.
- The citizens team which went to Bastar-Dantewada area of Chhattisgarh consisted of Ramchandra Guha, historian and columnist, Bangaluru, Harivansh, Farah Naqvi, writer and social activist, New Delhi, EAS Sarma, retired Secretary to the Government of India, Nandini Sundar, Professor of Sociology, Delhi University and BG Verghese, former editor, The Hindustan Times and Indian Express.
The current edition of the Economic and Political Weekly has two interesting articles on the Naxal issue. One is a pro-Naxalite propaganda piece by Gautam Navlakha and the other is a deeply sensitive piece by K Balagopal. It is the best piece I have read that specifically deals with the Selva Judam and Dantewada. It describes the crimes and excesses of both the Selva Judam and the Naxals. After travelling through the area, the author has concluded that even Mahendra Karma recognises that matters have gone out of hand and the Selva Judam is now little more than a collection of goondas unleashing violence. But politicians find it very difficult to accept mistakes.

By the govt’s reports, more than 40,000 persons have been displaced. This may even be deliberate but it is a shocking commentary on what is happening there.

Mahendra Karma recognises that matters have gone out of hand and the Selva Judam is now little more than a collection of goondas unleashing violence. But politicians find it very difficult to accept mistakes.

Moreover, the tribals are concentrated in certain parts. Even in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand they make up only 30 per cent of the population. In Orissa they are concentrated in the uplands while in Maharashtra they are restricted to certain districts. Hence they can only influence the vote in a few pockets. Unlike the tribals, the Dalits are scattered over a majority of the districts and can influence votes almost anywhere. So if nothing else, most political parties are forced to pay lip service to the cause of the Dalits.

The tribals in comparison lack political influence. The Maoists in such regions offer short-term protection of tribal interests. But they live with the fantasy of wielding political power in Delhi through an armed struggle. Over
EVERY year, on the day of the mid-January poonam festival, Gond tribes from the surrounding districts of Madia and Dindori pour into the pilgrim town of Amarkanta in Madhya Pradesh. No railway staff dares to ask for tickets on the trains headed to the nearby station of Pendra Road and in the bit- ing winter cold of the Maikal Hills, even the early morning buses into town have dozens of men clinging to the roof.

It is rare to see this level of dedication among workers of a political party, but for these Gonds the Gondwana Gantantra Party (GGP) is much more than a political formation. It is at the heart of a cultural renewal, which is in part a reinvention, in a region where the Gonds had slowly lost touch with their lan- guage and traditions.

The evening gathering overlooking the source of the Narmada bears this out. In much the manner of a political rally anywhere leader after leader speaks of the quest for political power in MP, an unrealistic possibility but a clear indica- tion of the success the party has enjoyed in the 2003 Assembly elections. Seated on stage with the political leaders are a number of Gond holy men who are as much part of this revival as the politicians.

This is clear in the stalls lined along the congregation where it is not just the politics or the food on offer that attracts crowds. Among the multi-coloured Gondwana banners, people gather to buy books and pamphlets in large num- bers. Written in Hindi they range from books such as Gondwana ka Sanskriti itihaas, which claims to list out the cultural history of the Gonds from pre-Vedic times to the present, to far more specific pamphlets like Gondwana Darshan. The book has an introduction by GGP chief Hira Singh Markam and describes the rituals for worship of Bada Deo as well as birth and death rites. The word darshan is used in the old Indian sense of a philosophy of life, and the book emphasises particularly that the nature worship of the Gonds and its later refinements far predates Hinduism.

It has been this cultural aspect that has seen the GGP rise from a marginal player in 1992 to a party that had Kamal Nath on the run in Chhindwara dur- ing the previous Lok Sabha elections. At Amarkantak the party is lead by Thunu Singh Maharaj, a 68-year-old Gond said: “I came in touch with the Gondwana samaj a decade ago. I learn about Gondwana Sanskriti and realised we have a religion different from the Hindus. Sikhs or the followers of Kabir. They call us Shudras but our job is to sustain all living creatures. Hum palanhar hain, our chal chalan is not of the Shudras. Neither are we Christians or Muslims. We have to revive our history.”

For the GGP this has meant the worship of the Supreme Deity Bada Deo, unmediated by pandits. They have with equal vigour opposed the presence of the Christian missionaries and the Naxals. Armed revolution is another thing for them. Some of the literature is in Gondi, written in the Devnagari script. As Thunu Maharaj says, no one has spoken the language in and around Amarkantak for over a generation. But in the adjacent areas of Dindori and Mandla district the GGP runs several schools where teaching is carried out in Gondi and it has opened several ‘banks’ in Mandla and Dindori districts. Gond women deposit a handful of rice twice a times a day against which money is cred- ited to their accounts. The banks also give loans to tribals at very low rates of interest.

Even the GGP election campaign unites the political with the cultural. Workers of the Gondwana Gantantra Party canvassing for votes. Fan out hold- ing aloft the Gondwana banner, wielding the party symbol, an ax. They carry with them a plateful of turmeric rice. A handful is placed on every doorstep, a traditional invitation for a propitious occasion such as a marriage. and in this case an invitation to vote for the GGP. Tribal custom ensures that their work propagates itself. The household where the turmeric rice is placed will in turn invite everyone they know to the occasion, in this case the voting at the near- est polling booth.

While the party originated in Chhattisgarh, it is here in the relatively undis- turbed areas of Madhya Pradesh that the party has enjoyed its greatest success. In 10 out of 45 districts where the Congress failed to win a single seat in the Digvijay Singh rout, four lie in the Gond belt. And in this region the Gondwana Gantantra Party has a strong presence. A party that had not even registered a second place finish in 1998, won three seats and took the second place in five other seats with very close margins.

The GGP, as is clear from the statistics, can grow much stronger. The tribals form over 20 per cent of the population in MP, and the Gonds are the largest tribal group in the state, concentrated in the southeast. In districts such as Mandla, Dindori and Shahdol they form over 45 per cent of the population thus effectively deciding who wins and who loses.

Interestingly the rise to public prominence of the GGP has exposed the party to the vagaries of parliamentary democracy. Kamal Nath went out of his way to try and split the party to ensure his own electoral success in Chhindwara. The party leaders have been accused of taking funds in turn from the BJP and the Congress but this has only underlined their importance in state politics.

Equally significant has been their ability to keep both the RSS and the Naxals at bay. In the Bhil dominated areas of western Madhya Pradesh the work of the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad has had a significant impact but the organisation has made no inroads in Gond areas. While much of this area is sometime termed Naxal-affected, the presence of the Maoists is not a major factor. The cultural appeal of the GGP is something they can never fulfill. and much of the self-affir- mation they hope to provide the tribal in the region has already been brought about by the GGP.

The traditional interaction of the tribal with the local patwari or thanedar has seen a sea change ever since the GGP gained in strength and it is something officials admit on their own. Policemen here complain that the Advisory no longer think much of telling them what to do. GGP workers often mediate adminis- trative power in the region.

In these areas, which should have been part of Naxal territory, the GGP is a clear example that a movement which springs from the tribals can counter the Naxals better than the Indian state.

Nepal. He said that the Maoists there are different and may well take part in negotiations. But in both Kashmir and the northeast. A lot of people will suffer and die.

If I give you an absolutely objective prognosis, in Kashmir it took the death of 60,000 persons for people to realise both sides were horribly wrong. in the same way, either people like Navlakha somewhat absurdly speak of the Maoists as if they are imbued with the same moral principles as a Mandela or a Nehru or there are others who take equally misguided positions centered on the role of the State where they assume the problem can be solved by throwing in more money and arms. I see the same tragedy being repeated over the next 15 years.
Everyone owns a shrinking planet. People count more than governments. Track change before it becomes news.

Hope for Nepal Dalits

Nepal has been declared an ‘untouchability and discrimination free nation’ by its House of Representatives. It has also been declared a secular State. Till the recent political changes, the country was the world’s only official Hindu kingdom, although half its population of 25 million, belonging to more than 50 ethnic groups, did not practise Hinduism.

“The practice of untouchability will now onwards be considered as a social crime and the government will enact laws in such a way that the inhuman and discriminatory practice is more punishable,” Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Narendra Bikram Nembang, told Nepal’s House of Representatives. There will be a fair representation of Dalits, comprising almost 22 percent of the population, in the process of forming the constituent assembly and a new Constitution.

Nembang also assured the government that special arrangements would be made for the education and employment of Dalits, besides the ongoing provision of scholarships for Dalit students in schools and reservations in higher studies.

Activists say untouchability must be made a punishable offence. “If they want to make the country free from untouchability, they must pass a law...the whole nation is in favour of this, including the Maoists,” says Ratna Bahadur Bagchand, executive director of Nepal’s Lawyers’ National Campaign Against Untouchability (LANCAU).

In 1955, Nepal’s revised civil code outlawed untouchability. In 2002, the government created the National Dalit Commission. Three years ago a new leadership pledged to bring charges against anyone accused of discriminating against untouchables.

Since then police have opened just two cases and neither has reached the courts. “Incidents are happening day after day in every corner of the country and are reported in the media but no one has spent one hour in jail,” says Bagchand.

More than a year ago, Nepal’s Supreme Court ordered the government to strengthen its law against untouchability. “We watched and waited for the government to do something, but it did nothing, so we thought we have to do something ourselves.” After six months of work, LANCAU has submitted a draft bill to the House of Representatives.

“We are economically and socially behind everyone. Our literacy rate is just 17 percent for men and 10 percent for women. As for life expectancy it is only 42 years.” Moti Lal Nepali, chairman, Dalit Welfare Organisation told Civil Society, when he was in Delhi.

Dalits, who comprise about 22 percent of the population, own just two percent of land. Bonded labour and the system of paying in kind instead of cash continue because of Nepal’s feudal land system.

Dalit organisations are asking the government for free education for Dalits, women and ethnic tribes from primary school to college. They have also asked for job reservation in the civil services and private sector: 10 percent for Dalits, 15 percent for women and 20 percent for ethnic groups. “All the political parties support us and then do nothing,” said Nepali. Concerned citizens hope this scenario will change.

‘The practice of untouchability will be considered a social crime and the government will enact laws in such a way that the inhuman and discriminatory practice is more punishable.’
Dam buster Yu not ready to give up

WHILE China builds big dams with impunity to divert water and power to cities, 55-year-old Yu Xiaogang does the reverse. When a dam built by the government destroyed the ecology of Lake Lashi in Yunnan province and ruined the livelihood of farmers and fishermen, Yu stepped in. He restored the lake's watershed and increased the incomes of ruralfolk.

"It is the first watershed management project in China that involves the participation of NGOs, local governments and residents," says Yu, winner of the 2006 Goldman Environmental Prize.

Yu, an environmental scientist, came to Lashi to do research on the social impact of the dam built at Lashi Lake for his Ph.D. He found that the dam had ruined farmland so more people turned to fishing. Then, as fish stocks dwindled, birds ate the seeds and grain from the remaining fields. The people lost their source of livelihood.

Lashi Lake is an internationally protected wetland reserve, home to thousands of Naxi and Yi ethnic people and 80,000 migratory birds.

Yu calls himself a 'fundamentalist communist' whose mission is to fight for the underprivileged. He got the Lashi county government, private entrepreneurs and villagers to form a watershed management committee. He also formed a fisheries association and got schools and a microfinance scheme going.

The agro-forestry project plants fruit trees on mountain farmland. "That controls erosion and generates an income," says Yu. "We've also tried to maintain the waterway to control floods, so that more land becomes fertile. We encourage organic agriculture, which has very good production. Some people have increased their income four- to five-fold through organic agriculture." More than 40,000 fruit trees have been planted and river canals cleaned. Crop harvests have increased in the past four years.

In 2002, Yu founded Green Watershed, an NGO. "It's about good governance, social justice and ordinary people's rights," he says. In bureaucratic China, his NGO works on participatory management with ordinary people.

Yu also studied the effects of the Manwan dam on the Mekong river. He found out that relocated residents had not benefited from the project. "Cost efficiency" had been achieved by cutting compensation to dam oustees. After their fields were submerged most oustees began to work as rubbish collectors. His research paper led to the provincial government finally paying them compensation.

In 2003 the Yunnan government announced plans to construct 13 new dams on the Nu river. It is one of only two rivers in China that hasn't been dammed. This region has Three Parallel Rivers, the Nu, the Jinsha (Yangtze) and the Lancang (Mekong). The surrounding watersheds are a World Heritage site with virgin forests, endangered species and rich biodiversity. The dams would displace 50,000 people and affect the livelihoods of millions in China, Burma and Tibet.

Yu rushed to the Nu River and conducted research. He got NGOs together to discuss the Yunnan government's plans and he voiced his concerns at international conferences.

Yu educated villagers living near the Nu river about the impact dams would have on their lives. He took them in a bus to the Manwan dam site and introduced them to dam affected communities. Villagers saw for themselves how men and women were picking through garbage dumps for scrap to sell.

The campaigns paid off. Premier Wen Jiabao ordered a suspension of the Nu dam saying that it should be "seriously reviewed and decided scientifically."

But the dams were merely put on hold.

Wahidullah Amani
Kabul

IT'S finally official. Afghanistan's new national anthem was played in Kabul on May 14. It has replaced the old version and is becoming a farce.

The national anthem is meant to unite the country, inspire patriotic emotions and help heal the wounds of war. But it has taken over two years of bitter debate to get the nation's power elite to agree on it. The Constitution mandates that the anthem should be in Pashtu, contain the words 'God is great', and mention the country's main ethnic groups.

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Hafiz Mansoor, editor of a political magazine called the Voice of the Mujahed. Mansoor, who is a Tajik and therefore has Dari rather than Pashtu as his main language, is a perennial critic of government policies, and the anthem is a particular irritant for him.

"I want the anthem in seven languages," he said. "If the government is giving preference to one ethnic group over others, it is very dangerous. I do not
Construction of the Xiluodu dam, the country's second-largest hydroelectric dam on the lower Jinsha, has already begun. Three other dams are in the exploration stage, including one on Tiger Leaping Gorge in upper Jinsha, one of the world's deepest canyons. If built, the dam would affect up to 100,000 people and supply electricity to Shanghai.

After damming the Jinsha and Nu rivers, China plans to build dams on the Brahmaputra in Tibet. "Our purpose is not to stop the damming of one or two rivers. Our real goal is to let all ordinary people participate in the decision-making process on China's hydroelectric projects," says Yu.

Since the communist takeover in 1949, 16 million people in China have been displaced by reservoirs. Some 10 million of them still live in poverty. Today China has about 46 percent of the world's dams. In its search for energy to power its eye popping economic growth, China has zeroed in on hydro-electricity. It may not have rich oil reserves but it controls most of Asia's rivers.

Green activists might have lost the battle against the humongous Three Gorges dam but they are not changing tactics. Their objective is to save China's last virgin rivers and to ensure that people affected by dam construction finally have a say. They want social impact assessments which are independent and involve the people.

China has today about 280,000 NGOs. The most vibrant among them are environmentalists. From highlighting the adverse effects of dams they have begun to gradually organise and represent the people.

But showing the top heavy Chinese government a different reality is not easy. Yu has been dubbed a troublemaker by the Yunnan government and his NGO branded as an extremist organisation.

He conceded that the new song had some problems, since so much of the text was dictated by the constitution. "The poets had some difficulties," he said.

"That is something sacred. We are supposed to recite these words in mosques and holy places, not play music to them. It is not allowed in Islam," said Jahani in a telephone interview from his home in Washington. "Still, it is finished, and if people like it, then good luck to them."

The requirement that all major ethnic groups be honoured in the text also created problems. Since Afghanistan has dozens if not hundreds of individual groups. In the end, 14 were singled out for mention, giving the hymn a bit of a shopping-list quality. It also angered some, like Hindus and sikhs, who are not changing tack. Their objective is to save China's last virgin rivers and to ensure that people affected by dam construction finally have a say. They want social impact assessments which are independent and involve the people.

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Source: goldmangito.org, tgo.org

**Cutting greenhouse emissions**

THE Kyoto Protocol will cut the developing world's greenhouse gas emissions by at least one billion tonnes by the end of 2012, according to the United Nations.

The organisation announced that projects planned under the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which encourages companies to invest in reducing emissions in the South, had reached the one billion milestone.

The expected emissions reductions are equivalent to eliminating the combined annual emissions of Spain and the United Kingdom.

The programme has recorded more than 800 projects that are already underway or planned. They include wind farms, power plants that burn sugar cane waste, and efforts to capture gases emitted from landfill sites.

Nearly 300 projects have registered or are in the process of registering with the CDM scheme, and the UN expects the remainder to register as well.

Most projects are in Brazil and India, although Africa is lagging behind. The continent has seen a five-fold increase in CDM projects over the past year.

Source: SciDev.net

**Bangla kids ask for health services**

CHILDREN from across Bangladesh have demanded quality health service through schools including nutritious tiffin, doctors and an adequate stock of medicines in hospitals.

They also suggested a special health service monitoring cell, a hot line to receive complaints, supply of free disposal syringes in hospitals and free treatment for disabled children. The children said measures should be taken to eradicate malaria from hill tracts.

The demands were raised recently in the national children's parliament jointly organised by Save the Children Australia, Plan-Bangladesh, Academy for Educational Development (AED) and USAID. The children have been assured that the number of doctors will be increased and a free health service provided to poor and disabled children.

Source: The Asian Human Rights

**Fishing rights denied to Pak fishermen**

PAKISTAN'S Sindh province is in the process of auctioning fishing rights. The auction, which started on 6 June, will continue till 30 June. Some 1200 fishing spots, traditionally used by local and indigenous fisher folk, will be sold to private contractors. A minimum of 200,000 people who depend on traditional fishing will find it impossible to fish and will be forced out from their traditional occupation.

In protest against the auction, the Pakistan Fisher Folk Forum, an association of local fishermen, has started a movement including daily public demonstrations. However, the Sindh government has refused to talk with representatives of the Forum. Many fishermen and their families will suffer from acute starvation as a direct result of the poverty forced upon them.

Source: The Asian Human Rights

**Dhaka prepares for floods**

THE Sylhet region of Bangladesh is in the grip of flash flood. More areas are likely to be inundated.

Flood preparation, including adequate provision of emergency supplies, their fair distribution and management of the entire relief efforts, assume critical importance.

The mobilisation plan has to include building up in advance, stocks of water purification tablets, oral saline, food grains, salt, matches.

The past experience in Bangladesh points to the need for a plan ahead of time as well as its efficient execution.

Source: The Independent, Dhaka

**Musicians**

respect this anthem, and if it is played on any occasion, I will not stand up for it. It’s (President Hamed) Karzai’s anthem - let him stand.”

Others – including even Jahani, who wrote the words – object to the use of “Allahu Akbar” in the text.

"That is something sacred. We are supposed to recite these words in mosques and holy places, not play music to them. It is not allowed in Islam," said Jahani in a telephone interview from his home in Washington. "Still, it is finished, and if people like it, then good luck to them."

The requirement that all major ethnic groups be honoured in the text also created problems. Since Afghanistan has dozens if not hundreds of individual groups. In the end, 14 were singled out for mention, giving the hymn a bit of a shopping-list quality. It also angered some, like Hindus and sikhs, who were left out.

But most people nevertheless agree that the new anthem is an improvement on the old one, which dates from the mid-nineties and sings the praises of the mujahedin who helped drive out the Soviets. Many Afghans are bitter about the destruction of the factional wars that followed the end of communist rule in 1992. When the mujahedin engaged in a bitter power struggle, wreaking havoc in the process.

"The old song was a mujahedin anthem," said academic Habibullah Rafi. "Repeating that one with this new anthem is a very good thing."

He conceded that the new song had some problems, since so much of the text was dictated by the constitution. "The poets had some difficulties," he said.

"Rafi should know – he himself composed an earlier version of the anthem, which was first accepted but later scrapped by the president. Still, he professes himself satisfied with the new song," in the end, we did what the constitution said," he said.

The production of Afghanistan’s new anthem cost $ 40,000 and called on the services of more than 70 singers. Famous expatriates such as Nashmas and Miss Afsha were on hand for the recording, and the final version is quite stirring.

"I heard the new anthem on television," said Hamayoun, 17, who sells fruit in the centre of Kabul. "It made me very happy. After such a long time, we have a national anthem that belongs to all the people." Hamayoun was scornful when asked about the language issue, saying, "Those who complain that it is in Pashtu do not want peace in this country."

"It is very beautiful," said Nooraza, who sells dishes on the street in Kabul. "It does not matter whether it is in Dari or Pashtu or whatever. It is religious and it is also modern."

But engineering student Hedayatullah, 28, was not pleased with the use of sacred words set to music. "The anthem is nice but it isn’t good to play music to ‘Allahu Akbar.’ That is sacred. As for the language, it doesn’t matter if it is in Pashtu. That is the language of the majority. For the last ten years the anthem has been in Dari, and no one complained. We shouldn’t complain now," From: iwpr.net

Source: www.iwpr.net
The moral content in what is legal and what is not is becoming increasingly less relevant.

Do rules improve lives?

It seems that the path modern democracies have taken as they evolve into the future is one that is leading them into becoming increasingly legalistic societies.

Examined historically, we have always been proud – and rightfully so – when we could claim our community had instituted laws and that it functioned on the basis of such laws. Civilisations defined themselves by their laws – and their successful implementation. To be labelled lawless was akin to being uncivilised. From Hammurabi in Mesopotamia to Ashoka in India, the highlights of antiquity lay as much (if not more so) in its capacity to create a lasting legal framework within which its people could exist, as it did in its material achievements.

Moses, Mohamed, Manu... all added their own prescriptions of what was legitimate for society at large and what was not. The principal determiner of legitimacy has always been – that is till now – a moral principle. The source of such moral principles for most of recorded history has been a divine one, giving way to a more secular humanism of the recent centuries. Legality and morality were yoked together in a union that seemed eternal.

A couple of weeks ago a rude shock awakened me to question this union in more than a cursory way. I had gone to see off a friend at the Charles de Gaulle Airport outside Paris and parked my car in the parking lot, outside which the payment rates were written. Starting at two Euros for the first ten minutes they went up by increments of two Euros and seemed to stop at eight Euros for the hour. Usually, the first hour was the most expensive and then the rates taper off for the successive ones, generally ending with a proportionately much lower flat rate for a 12 or 24 hour period. It was an expectation confirmed by personal experience in most places in the world, which offered such modern facilities as the readers will probably confirm. Imagine my shock when on inserting my parking ticket into the slot on the exit turnstile I was told (electronically that is) that I owed the machine 33 Euros for one hour and three minutes. I was trapped between two electrically operated turnstiles and had absolutely no way of exiting without making the payment.

What was really shocking was that there had been no mistake (caveat emptor of course). It was clearly marked that after the first hour the customer would be charged 33 Euros. The parking lot is owned by ADP – Aéroports de Paris, which is not a private company. This is what brought me to the question of legality. Modern man lives, mending as it were, through a nightmarish maze of endless laws, rules and regulations that, instead of improving the quality of his life makes it all the more stressful.

Why do we feel this way? What then is the basis of legislation today? Is there a moral criteria that is applied to law-making or have we as a society been taken over by the functional criteria that merely serves our economic being. Our material wants that seek instant gratification. The Americans have successfully narrowed down the lofty Jeffersonian ideas as seen in their Declaration of Rights, which provides that "all men are... endowed by their Creator with... rights... (to) the pursuit of happiness." It is this narrow interpretation of happiness by material means that has unleashed the unbridled excesses of capitalism that we witness today. The story of American Independence is an economic one. It was inevitable from its inception that the State would become the protector and eventually the facilitator of property owners who have evolved to become today’s business interests. Nothing succeeds like success. And the love affair between the American Government and American business proved to be its path to superpowerdom. Having exhausted its own shores it continued to successfully export the dynamics of its success (with the accompanying ethos of course) throughout the planet.

A team from Dell France (a very successful American company) told me the other day how different the business culture was in their company; different from the traditional business culture of other French companies that is. There must be many Americans in your French Office I ventured to ask. Only to learn that there were but three Americans in an office of over 350 people. Amazing how culture is created by organisational structure. Add to that the power of the American Pension Funds that hold financial sway over your national stock markets and the transition is fairly complete.

What is frightening is not only the power of the logic of "success" but the ease with which we are adapting to it. The moral content in what is legal and what is not is becoming increasingly less relevant. How accurately Solzhenitsyn saw the rise of this legalistic State and its concurrent moral decline which he brilliantly outlined in his 1978 Commencement Address Delivered at Harvard University. America never recovered from that speech. Its honeymoon with the great Russian prophet over, and Solzhenitsyn was once again sent to the Gulag of non-existence in the American media.

What he had said of the West then is the virus that has now become globalised and a worldwide reality. The question is whether we are doomed to an Orwellian existence in the future or our very instinct for survival will lead us to safety from self destruction. Perhaps we can take solace in Solzhenitsyn’s cryptic answer that there wasn’t "any other way left but – upward".

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H ow do you get people's movements on to desks and into minds and make a little money to keep a capacity-building NGO afloat as well? That's simple. Print a diary that tells the stories of change-makers.

Kriti has become one of a long line of organisations that have found ways around funding traps by building a business that fulfills a social purpose.

Kriti's 'Our Diary' comes in two sizes big and small. The big one costs Rs 175 and the smaller one Rs 125. Kriti prints about 1,000 diaries every year and is able to sell all of them. Orders are placed in advance. The diaries make enough money to finance the next cycle of production. They are a big hit. Students, companies, bureaucrats and social activists are the buyers of 'Our Diary'.

"Every year we first shortlist about 20 people's movements and then further shortlist them to seven," says Aanchal Kapur, a member of the Kriti team. "Then we proceed to collect as much information as possible about the movements. Finally, the story of struggle is presented in the style of a feature as part of the diary. An analytical framework binds the diary together. It is not thematic."

Kriti works as a support group, providing professional expertise in research, documentation, capacity-building, organisational development, monitoring and evaluation, design and communication to trade unions, women's groups, government and civil society organisations. Kriti members have skills in dealing with issues like education, health, labour, environment and gender.

"We at Kriti were upset with the newspaper reportage of the movements. In the media, they were being covered as one-time events rather than as ongoing processes," says Aanchal.

Suman Bisht, another member of the Kriti team explains. "We also realised that movements themselves were not documenting their own struggles because of a variety of reasons like lack of skills or resources. We understood that this should not deter them or anybody else to put to paper their struggles. That's why we decided to pool our resources and start tracing the trajectories of various movements."

Every diary includes a 'movement map' that locates these struggles on the map of India. This, explains the Kriti team, "builds a physical and human geography of people's movements in India."

Each diary also provides a contact list of resource groups and people's movements along with other references so that diary users are able to get in touch, if they want to. Like other diaries, Kriti's diary too is available in the market and has a year planner. What sets it apart is the documentation of people's movements that is interspersed with the planner.

Some stories of the landless, the marginalised and the displaced enter and leave the public consciousness subject to the attention span of the media. Yet these people's movements continue to wage their struggle in obscurity against unbridled power and the status quo for change, and for a new way of life. Through these movements the people create a history: ideologies, issues and strategies are all part of it. Kriti recognised the need to acknowledge this history and then try and make it a part of popular culture.

So the diary recounts the voices of different people's movements against the denial of social, cultural and political rights from all over India and across the globe. Kriti uses primary and secondary sources to write features on people's movements. As the team explored people's movements, it was also able to put things into perspective, analyse events and link happenings to the bigger picture. Class, gender, religion and region, came under their scanner.

'We get in touch with the people directly engaged with the movements and also conduct independent research of our own through other sources,' explains Aanchal. This helps Kriti maintain a balanced perspective while writing a feature.

Each year's diary is unique. The 2006 diary introduces the user to the world of people's movements via documentary films. This diary is, explains Kriti, a 'documentary journey on rights, on the access to and control over power, resources and lives... a journey that we hope will inspire many more films that reflect the politics, the ideology and the contradictions that make struggles for rights an inevitable part of our ground reality'.

Some of the films which have been profiled are: A Night of Prophecy, When Women Unite; A story of an Uprising, Development Flows from the Barrel of the Gun, Ek Minute Ka Maun and Work in Progress.

Kriti's diary is itself the story of a struggle by a committed group to bring forth long forgotten, obliterated scraps of history and to ensure that stories of the people are not lost in the labyrinth of corporate globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation.
BRICKS fired from agricultural waste instead of wood, an inexpensive treadle pump for a small farmer’s field, a smoke-free stove that rustles up tortillas were some of the innovative projects which won at the 2006 Ashden Awards for Sustainable Energy in London.

The Prince of Wales, Patron of the Ashden Awards, personally congratulated all the winners in a separate private ceremony. He said he hoped that these practical, simple and economical solutions would be used on a larger scale.

Four awards were given in recognition of the way sustainable energy has been used to improve access to light, to food, to promote enterprise and to improve health. An Africa Award was given in recognition of the urgent need to address environmental degradation and lack of access to resources in this region. We profile five of the prize winners.

FIRED BY BRICK

Although Mwanza is situated on the southern shores of Africa’s largest lake, it is far from lush. The region is arid with a high incidence of poverty. The quality of housing is very poor. Most people live in ramshackle mud structures.

The Mwanza Rural Housing Programme (MRHP), Tanzania wanted to improve the quality of housing. But the area was badly deforested and 100-year-old mango trees were being cut to produce wood to fire bricks.

MRHP came up with a brick-firing kiln that produces good quality bricks without burning a single tree. Instead, it uses agro waste like cotton waste, rice husk, coffee husk and sawdust to fire the kiln.

MRHP has helped villagers set up sustainable brick-making businesses by providing training and loans. Together they have produced enough bricks to build an impressive 100,000 homes. The quality of the bricks is also high and they are being used to build 3000 houses under one of Tanzania’s largest pension funds, the Parastatal Pensioners Fund.

Not only has this project radically improved the quality of housing for 50 per cent of the region’s inhabitants, it has also trained unemployed young men and helped them set up businesses in clean brick making. There is now a thriving local industry in the area that has lifted people out of poverty and fostered a genuine entrepreneurial spirit.

WALK UP WATER

In Uttar Pradesh and other parts of eastern India, small farmers migrate to cities because their tiny rainfed fields yield only one crop. A second harvest requires irrigation. But diesel is costly and polluting while hand pumps and wells are ineffective.

The treadle pump is tailor made for this problem. It uses human power to lift water from either shallow aquifers (via a tubewell) or surface waters such as lakes or canals. It is a brilliantly effective and environment friendly alternative.

To pump up the water the user stands on two bamboo or metal treadles, pumping each foot up and down in a walking movement. It’s no harder than pedalling a bicycle up a slight incline, yet it can lift water from a depth of some eight metres with an output of 3,500 to 5,000 litres per hour. Anyone can ‘pedal’ a pump – from children to grandmothers.

The pumps, called ‘Krishak Bandhu’, (farmer’s friend) are made by 17 manufacturers under license from the International Development Enterprises India (IDEI). Water is released in a steady flow over fields. In contrast, farmers using diesel pumps often experience problems with soil erosion as the pumps churn out water at a fierce rate. This can wash away soil and nutrients, and doesn’t suit
The ARTI biogas plant uses food waste and is suited to urban homes in India.

SMOKE FREE TORTILLAS

In rural Mexico 95 percent of households cook on open wood fires. This harms health, leads to deforestation and increases carbon emissions. In the Central Mexican highlands the situation is particularly bad. Here there are many poor indigenous households and thousands of women earn a living selling hand-made tortillas cooked on open fires. The Mexican government has encouraged the use of LPG for cooking, but LPG stoves are not adapted for tortilla making and, more importantly, the poorest families can’t afford it.

The cost of a treadle pump on its own is around Rs 400. Dealers often offer farmers 120 days’ credit so they won’t have to pay the full cost until they have benefited from the first harvest on their newly-irrigated land.

Treadle pumps increase farmer’s incomes substantially by enabling them to cultivate a range of crops outside the traditional growing season. Most farmers who use a treadle tend to double their available income, especially when the savings from not using diesel are taken into account.

RENT A SOLAR HOME SYSTEM

Grameen Shakti has installed nearly 65,000 solar home systems in rural Bangladesh. A typical solar home system can power four to six low energy lights, plus a socket for TV, radio or battery recharging, and a mobile phone-charging unit. Each system consists of a solar photovoltaic panel, mounted on the house roof. Depending on its size, this provides between 40W and 75W of electricity in full sunlight.

Grameen Shakti has come up with a method known as a micro-utility model to finance solar home systems. It has become very popular in rural market places because it allows a number of people to share the cost and benefit of a solar home system. The way it works is that one individual is responsible for paying the instalments, which he collects by renting lights to neighbours. Once the instalments are paid, he becomes the owner.

Grameen Shakti is also setting up a network of technology centres, managed mainly by women engineers, which will train hundreds of local women each year to be solar technicians, equipped with tools providing servicing, repairs, spares and accessories to their neighbours.

BIOGAS FROM FOOD WASTE

The Appropriate Rural Technology Institute’s (ARTI) new compact biogas technology developed by Dr Arvind Karve and his team of engineers, needs only vegetable residues, waste food and grain. Its daily consumption is just one kg of feedstock (such as waste flour, leftover food, spollt grain, spollt milk, overripe fruit, green leaves and oil cakes) as opposed to the 40 kg of cow dung needed for traditional plants. From this small amount of feedstock it produces 500 litres of gas. The digestion process is also much quicker – taking place within 48 hours instead of the 40 days required when using dung.

The biogas plants are made from cut-down HDPE water tanks. The standard plant uses two tanks of incremental sizes so the smaller fits inside the other. The smaller tank holds the gas and the larger contains the slurry. The basic water tanks, which are mass produced, often from recycled plastic, are adapted with the help of a heat gun and standard HDPE piping. The plant is filled with a starter mix, either cattle dung mixed with water and starch or effluent from an existing plant mixed with starch (waste flour). The feeding of the plant is built up over one or two weeks until it provides a steady supply of gas.

Its relatively small size means it can be used in urban houses and even apartments, which is a break-through in the world of biogas production. It has even attracted keen interest from the Pune municipal administration who are keen to find an effective disposal system for the growing food waste in the area. Installing these systems and supplying feedstock to users also offers good business opportunities to rural enterprises – made possible by the fact that ARTI has decided not to patent its design.
tata motors ad
Da Vinci protests cause for worry

RAM GIDOOMAL

I was recently called by the BBC to comment on a breaking news story relating to the controversy surrounding the release in India of a movie based on Dan Brown's bestselling thriller *The Da Vinci Code*. I was surprised to hear of the growing opposition to the movie because I had read the book and could not immediately understand what the fuss was all about. I bought the book from the best-seller's fiction section at the airport bookshop just before departing for my holidays last summer. It was an interesting read but full of humbug parading as facts. As a student of comparative theology, with a special interest in early church history, I found the theories espoused in *The Da Vinci Code* pure fantasy without a shred of supporting academic research to support the story. Dan Brown forced to stop the show after violent protests broke out outside the theatre in Birmingham.

In May this year, London-based Asia House hosted its first solo exhibition of India's most renowned artist Maqbool Fida Husain, showing rarely seen works from a private collection. The exhibition was inaugurated by His Excellency Kamalesh Sharma, The Indian High Commissioner to Britain. MF Husain's career and success mirrors closely the meteoric rise of contemporary Indian art on the international stage. Yet Asia House caved in to a campaign by Hindu religious groups and cancelled the exhibition after two paintings were destroyed and "threats" made by "irate Hindu vandals". A painting of Mother India in the nude was cited as one of the works of art that had caused "distress and hurt amongst Hindus". Commenting on the rise in religious protests, Sunny Hundial, editor of *Asians in Media* in the UK, said: "It is surely a bizarre state of affairs that we have reached a point where religious organisations are competing against each other for victimhood status".

One of the factors accounting for the rise in such protests may be the greater importance given to spiritual matters in Asian society compared with the West. The strength of feeling for spiritual issues was clearly demonstrated by the violent protests that followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the protest by Muslim communities over offensive books and cartoons published in Denmark.

There may also be a political element to the rising protests as some community leaders seek to capitalise on any controversy to enhance their personal reputation and popularity. This had happened in a previous controversy in India that followed the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the protest by Muslim communities over offensive books and cartoons published in Denmark.

I purchased the book from the bestseller's fiction section at the airport bookshop just before departing for my holidays last summer. It was an interesting read but full of humbug parading as facts.
Reforms Report

A MAR Singh belongs to a scheduled caste. Aged around 60, he heads a household of five members. Amar Singh lives in village Adori in Bisra Block of Balaghat district. Madhya Pradesh. Baria Bikhiliben Ramanbhai is the only member of her family. She is 45 and lives in village Nadisar of Bhamariya Panchayat, in the Godhra block of Panchmahal district in Gujarat. Anand Rao Sakharam Manikar, 69, lives with his wife Bhirabai aged 55, in village Kokebad (M) located in the Bhadravati block of Chandrapur district in Maharashtra. They are also members of a scheduled caste.

I have never been to these villages. Nor do I know these people in person. I came to know a little about them from cyber space. Amar Singh and his family members have been assigned an identification number MP-38-000-044-001/100. The identification number for Baria Bikhiliben is GJ-14-001-059-001/16. Anand Rao and his wife are identified by the number MH-29-002-000-001/23374.

Although they live in three different states and in all probability know nothing about each other, they share a common concern. All are registered jobseekers under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA). I don’t really know if we are to rejoice or feel sorry that people even at the age of 69 are keen to join the job market.

To go into a little detail, by 15 June, 176,74,560 individuals from 62,91,882 households across the country registered themselves as willing to offer their labour under the provisions of NREGA (see www.nrega.nic.in for details). The scheme has been operational in 200 districts since February, ostensibly to alleviate the miseries of India’s poverty-stricken population.

More than 60 percent of these registered individuals are from districts of Madhya Pradesh while another 30 percent are residents of Orissa. The concentration of jobseekers under NREGA in these two states may be purely incidental. Perhaps other states are yet to get over the process of registering jobseekers. Perhaps it is an indicator of the general socio-economic status of people in these two states. Will NREGA be able to bring these people out of the scourge of poverty? Are the provisions of the Act in its present form sufficient to achieve the objectives it has set for itself? The question is far more relevant in view of the growing resentment being noticed in the central part of the country as this month’s cover story shows.

Ragunur Norkse once said, “A country is poor because it is poor” and advanced his famous argument on the vicious circle of poverty way back in 1952. What applies to a country applies by default to an individual as well. A poor individual begins with a very low level of asset base that yields income too meagre to take care of her basic needs. She can save little. Savings serve two important functions. First, today’s savings can be used for consumption tomorrow. In case there is an unexpected fall in income – a sort of insurance for the future. Second, savings may be used to purchase an asset that yields continuous income to its owner over its shelf life. Moreover, some part of the income generated out of the asset is necessarily spent to maintain the productive capacity of the asset. Enhance their future levels of income on a continuous basis.

However, one should note carefully that creation of wage-income in the hands of the poor cannot be a long-term solution. Such programmes consume considerable resources and if their use cannot guarantee creation of public assets, the resources are as good as being wasted. Public assets, once created through employment guarantee programmes should be put to economic use to generate additional income for the beneficiaries who helped create them. The logic of economics also suggests that the income so generated must be large enough to enable proper maintenance of the assets. As most of the assets thus created are for use by local communities, it is imperative that they are capable of apportioning a certain amount of their enhanced income towards maintaining the asset in question. If the asset cannot guarantee such enhancement in income, the objective of alleviating poverty remains unfulfilled.

Experiences from employment guarantee schemes in India reveal that the assets thus created failed to boost the income of the poor on a long term sustainable basis. The programmes were mostly completely synchronised with the five-year political cycle ‘democratic’ India is linked to. The funds were simply used with the myopic obsession of influencing the people’s verdict in elections. It is heartening to note that the guidelines of the employment guarantee scheme, in its new avatar, have explicitly mentioned the need to link employment to creation of productive community assets. This is a necessary condition to help achieve the goal of poverty alleviation. The guidelines are not sufficient, though.

Assets can generate income as long as they are productive. A necessary condition for ensuring the productive capacity of assets is to unambiguously assign property rights of the asset to some identified individual or group of individuals. (Continued on page 28)
Indian Muslims weak and well off

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

In secular India, Muslims the largest religious minority face various problems and paradoxes. Constitutionally, India is secular and provides equal opportunities to all irrespective of caste and creed. But certain castes and communities are neither equal in practice nor are provided with equal opportunities, in reality.

Historically, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST) have suffered immense-ly. They have been rightly provided with reservations in educational institutions and in government jobs. Reservations are being extended to OBCs (Other Backward Classes) among Hindus. However, the history of Indian Muslims is a lit-tle different. A section of Muslims formed the ruling class for more than 800 years. But today a large section of the community comes from Dalits and backward caste Hindus who converted to Islam throughout the medieval ages. Nearly 90 percent of Indian Muslims are from these weaker and backward sections. The creamy layer of the Muslim community migrated to Pakistan from north India during partition in 1947.

Those who remained in India are mostly at the margins of society like the SC/ST. Herein lies the paradox. A community, a section of which was at the helm of affairs, has almost been marginalised. Political, social and economic data clearly points out that Muslims have slipped below the level of Dalits. In other words, today they are more backward than even the Dalits.

No doubt a section of Muslims is availing of opportunities provided by eco-nomic development in India. However, this segment is very small and their social base quite narrow. This section, it is interesting to note, is coming from low caste Muslims who are mainly traditional artisans or professionals like weavers, gardeners, bangle makers, butchers and so on.

Although three Presidents of India, three Chief Justices of the Supreme Court and two chief ministers (in Rajasthan and Maharashtra) came from the Muslim community – and this is cited proudly as an achievement of secular India – a vast majority of Muslims live either on or below the poverty line. This is another paradox Indian Muslims face.

Some political parties woo them for votes whereas communal parties like the BJP and Shiv Sena indulge in Muslim bashing. They consider wooing of Muslim votes by secular parties like the Congress, Samajwadi Party or Janta Dal, as ‘appeasement of minorities’. This is the third paradox Indian Muslims face. The fact is that Muslims are completely sandwiched between ‘wooing’ and so-called ‘appeasement’. The former creates false illusions whereas the latter threatens their very existence.

Several promises were made by the Congress but were never fulfilled. Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appointed the Gopal Singh committee to recommend measures to improve the economic condition of minorities in 1980. The committee did good work and submitted its report in the early eighties. Before Indira Gandhi could examine the report she was assassinated in November 1984. The report was not even tabled in Parliament. I drew the attention of VP Singh, when he was Prime Minister, to the report. He was not even aware of its existence. Nevertheless, he promised to table it but before he could do so, his government fell in 1989.

Indira Gandhi had announced a 15-point programme for the economic uplift of Muslims but our monitoring clearly showed that the bureaucracy turned a blind eye towards it. The government hardly has the political will to implement such programmes. Now the Manmohan Singh government has appointed a high-powered committee to look into the grievances of Muslims under the chairmanship of Justice Sachar.

The data collected on the plight of Muslims by the Sachar Committee from states like UP, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra etc. is really shocking. There is no doubt that the report being prepared by this committee will be useful and beneficial. But again the real problem is whether it will ever be implemented. I want to place before the Committee a general outline of suggestions for their consideration.

First, it is important to note that Muslims should not be treated as a homog-enous community. There are both horizontal and vertical cleavages and regional differences. Since the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, a caste consciousness has also emerged among north Indian Muslims, particularly in Bihar and UP. Low caste Muslims, referred to in the past as kamiz zatem (lowly Muslims), feel that they have always been left out and upper caste Muslims have cornered the benefits of whatever has been given to them by political parties.

This vertical cleavage among Muslims should be borne in mind. The all-inclusive approach should apply to the entire Muslim community as much as to the entire country. I feel there should be a three-tiered approach to the Muslim problem – political, educational and economic.

It is ironic that the Muslim elite fought for adequate political representation during the freedom struggle. Jinnah even demanding 33 percent representa-tion for Muslims in Parliament. But in the post partition period the representa-tion of Muslims in Parliament has never gone beyond seven percent and has generally remained at five percent. Short of reservations, the government has to seriously think about representation of Muslims in proportion to their pop-u-lation or at least ensure a 10 percent representation of Muslim members in Parliament. The secular parties should ensure 10 percent of tickets to Muslims including Muslims of low caste biradaris to make their presence all-inclusive.

In the post partition period the representation of Muslims in Parliament has never gone beyond seven percent and has generally remained at five percent.
Building assets with NREGA

(Continued from page 26)

The hue and cry in favour of participatory development derives its justification from this simple logic. The ownership norms of the assets created through NREGA need to be clearly defined. Attempt at institutionalising Users' Association is a correct step towards such direction. However, we have come across a number of cases where such efforts met with utter failure. Documentation of failed experiments in institutionalising Forest Protection Committees under Joint Forest Management or Water Users' Associations for irrigation systems are abundantly available in literature on collective action. However, there are success stories as well – in a comparatively less number though.

Assigning of property rights in an unambiguous manner does not necessarily ensure that the asset in question can

- generate enough income in the hands of the owner
- be effectively protected by the owner and thereby
- help alleviate the poverty of the owner.

The failure of IRDP clearly supports these arguments. Thus a sufficient condition for NREGA to be successful is to ensure that necessary efforts are in place so that people like Amar Singh and his family members, Baria Bihikhen and Anand Rao and his wife are capable of protecting the assets created from their hard labour. An asset in the hand of its owner is productive as long as its owner, be it an individual or a community, has access to other complementary resources to generate an income out of it. Such complementary resources include, among others, relevant skills to put the asset to productive use, marketing infrastructure to realise remunerative prices for the products generated and availability of proper credit facilities in right doses at the right time.

Once ensured of access to such complementary resources Amar Singh and his colleagues will definitely consider deleting their names from the jobseekers' list. They would rather keenly look forward to taking their products - agricultural, horticultural, livestock-based, fish, non-timber forest products, handicrafts – for sale to the nearby market through the village road they constructed with support from NREGA. Yes, they expect to earn enough not only to maintain the livelihood of their families, but also to contribute to the annual cost of maintaining the road. Mind you, they will not be available to offer labour under NREGA. Poverty has thereby been truly alleviated.

The success of NREGA will be indicated by the number of years it is in force. The lesser the number, the greater its success.

Indian Muslims weak and well off

(Continued from page 27)

The Congress could take a lead by giving tickets to Muslims.

In state assemblies the position is even worse. Muslim women should also be given some tickets to contest elections by political parties. This may not be in the terms of reference of the Committee but it could be informally suggested. Muslims should be given important positions in political parties. The political visibility of Muslims is important for the community.

On the economic level a more comprehensive approach is needed. Most Muslims are urban or semi urban artisans. They need loans from banks to run their small businesses or to acquire looms and other machines. The data shows that bank loans are not available to Muslims as they are generally not considered credit-worthy. The government should ensure that loans are made available to them. Nationalised banks should be asked to rigorously enforce this provision. This will greatly benefit artisans.

Polytechnics should be established to train artisans and help them understand export-import rules so that they can export their products. Such polytechnics can be established in cities like Meerut, Moradabad, Aligarh, Bhivandi, Malegaon etc. where Muslim artisans and workers are concentrated.

Bank loans could be extended to Muslim businessmen who run small business establishments or who want to establish small-scale industries. A finance corporation for minorities could also be established or its capital increased as in the case of the Maulana Azad Financial Corporation. Central and state governments could contribute. Such measures will help backward sections of Muslims as new entrepreneurs are emerging from amongst them.

The presence of Muslims is very poor in the administration, the police or military services. Even in lower levels of administration like clerks, grade four employees etc. the Muslim presence does not exceed five to six per cent. For jobs at these levels no special qualification is needed. There are enough matriculates and even graduates available to take up these posts.

For jobs in the IAS, IPS, IFS etc., the Muslim presence is four percent or even less. Again, short of reservations, the government should take all possible measures, including special efforts to train Muslims, to bring their representation to 10 per cent in the next 10-15 years. Today Muslims feel left out. More affirmative action is needed to make them feel included.

Another measure is to let Muslims fully avail of reservations as OBs under the Mandal Commission as these reservations are not on the basis of religion but on the basis of backward classes. There are corresponding categories among Muslims, under the Mandal Commission, like dhobi (washerman), dyers (raz-gret), weavers (julaha), dalegis, laqars etc. This will greatly benefit the community as a whole.

For educational purposes minorities should be given more facilities to open their own institutions especially in engineering, medicine, management and education. Currently they find it very difficult to get recognition for their institutions.

Secondly, the government should encourage madrasas to modernise and establish madrasa boards that have equivalent qualifications for matriculation, graduation etc. by introducing secular subjects like mathematics, physical and social sciences. In this way the existing infrastructure can be easily utilised by giving some financial aid to current institutions.

Also, the state and central governments should establish educational institutions in Muslim localities to encourage more children to attend school. It is noted that there are no educational facilities in such localities and children have to travel a long distance which discourages them from going to school. As far as possible, facilities should be provided for education in the mother tongue.

Good primary education is the foundation for higher education. It provides children the ability to compete in the market. Let us remember that government jobs are shrinking and the private sector is becoming more important for employment. Thus reservation is losing its charm because of the enhanced role of the private sector. Though reservation for Muslims is desirable as they are on par with Dalits and OBs but this is no remedy since communal forces would raise hell for Muslims. If the government were ever to agree to it, Muslims would get very little and lose much more in terms of security and well-being.

These are some suggestions which could help improve the political, economic and educational status of Muslims as a whole.

Da Vinci protests cause for worry

(Continued from page 25)

The issue of co-belligerency has rarely been as well expressed as it was by Martin Niemoller, pastor in the Confessing Church during Nazi Germany, who was imprisoned for his church's stand against Hitler, from 1937 until 1945 in Sachsenhausen and Dachau. Niemoller said:

"They came for the Communists, and I didn't object, because I was not a Communist; They came for the Socialists, and I didn't object, because I was not a Socialist; They came for the union leaders, and I didn't object, because I wasn't a labour leader; They came for the Jews, and I didn't object, because I was not a Jew; Then they came for me, and there was no one left to object."

While it was good to see different elements of civil society in India joining together to object, these protests do beg the question of where to draw the line between freedom of expression and respect for community sensitivities. A balance needs to be achieved but who has ultimate accountability to resolve such issues?

In the case of The Da Vinci Code, the information minister stepped in to personally vet the film before the Indian Board of Film Censors finally allowed its release (one week later than its worldwide premiere). The release was only authorised after reaching a compromise with the film’s distributors to display a clear statement saying the film is fictitious and giving it an adult rating.

The head of the national film censor board, Sharmila Tagore, herself a former Bollywood star, was critical of the intervention of the information minister and commented about increasing worries about political intervention in the media. She would do well to remember what the late John Kenneth Galbraith, former USA Ambassador to India, said about political intervention: ‘Politics is not the art of the possible. It consists of choosing between the disastrous and the unpalatable!’

Ram Gidoomal, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership
BENGALI food invariably comes to mind when one thinks of cuisine from eastern India. But people who have explored this region will beg to differ. Oriya food, though akin to Bengali cuisine because of certain overlapping methods of cooking, has its own unique and varied flavour.

There is a difference in the food habits of coastal, western and southern Orissa. For instance, tomato-khaju khatta, a tantalising chutney made of tomato and dates, uses jaggery as an ingredient. But in western Orissa, the same chutney is cooked traditionally without jaggery. Southern Orissa, on the other hand, draws heavily from south Indian cuisine.

Rice is the staple food of the state. A variety of vegetables are grown. The Bay of Bengal provides ample scope for great non-vegetarian fare but Oriya vegetarian food is equally tempting. In fact, certain days of the week are observed as strictly vegetarian.

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An Oriya meal is a fine balance of piquant and bland tastes. Food is hot, spicy, tangy and sweet. Popular ingredients include peppercorn, paanch phutana (a five-spice mixture of cumin, mustard, fennel, fenugreek and nigella seeds), mustard paste and coconut.

Some famous dishes include dalma which is made of lentils cooked with vegetables, saga bhaja or fried spinach, dahi baingan which is brinjal cooked in curd, khajuri khatta, a spicy cottage cheese curry, santula, a dry mixed vegetable and besara or vegetables cooked in mustard paste.

Badi, another typical food item, is made by sun drying lentils and ash gourd. These pieces are used as curry or added to any curry to enhance taste.

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They are called kudua placed over each other. Dishes are cooked in earthen vessels of rice, vegetables, dal, and salt. Neighbors invite each other to their houses where dishes are cooked in earthen vessels. At least 50 varieties of bhog in the form of rice, vegetables, dal and sweet dishes are cooked in earthen vessels called kudua placed over each other.

No meal is complete without a dessert. Desserts seem to be the state's forte. There is chhenapoda, a baked sweet made of cheese and semolina. The rasagulla, rasmalai and malpua. You can also pamper your taste buds to a variety of pitha made of rice or wheat flour.

**Tomato-khajuri khatta**

**Ingredients**
- Tomatoes: 3 large, finely chopped
- Dates: 7-8, slpit and deseeded
- Paanch phutana: ½ tsp
- Ginger: 1 inch, finely sliced
- Curry leaves: 7-8 leaves
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Chilli powder: ¼ tsp
- Oil: 1 tbsp
- Jaggery to taste

**Method:** Heat oil. Add paanch phutana. When it splutters, add ginger, curry leaves, chopped tomatoes, turmeric and chilli powder. When tomatoes are done, add water to suit the consistency you want. Add salt and jaggery. Cook for a while. Add dates and simmer for a few minutes. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve when cool. Tastes great with paranthas and goes well with any meal.

**Dahi baingan**

**Ingredients**
- Brinjal: 2 medium-sized, cut length-wise
- Curd: 2 small glasses
- Mustard oil: 3 tbsp
- Turmeric powder: ½ tsp
- Paanch phutana: 1 tsp
- Curry leaves: 7-8
- Chilli powder: ¼ tsp
- Ginger: ½ inch (optional), sliced
- Salt to taste

**Method:** Rub turmeric and salt on brinjal pieces. Heat oil and fry. Keep aside to cool on paper napkin. This will drain extra oil. Mix curd with water to form a nice flowing consistency. Heat remaining oil and splutter paanch phutana. Add curry leaves and chilli powder. Here you can add ginger if you like. Add this to curd. Add salt and mix well. Add brinjal to curd. Enjoy this dish with rice.

**Dhal**

**Ingredients**
- Arhar dal: 3/4 cup
- Ghee or oil: 1 tsp
- Cumin seeds: ½ tsp
- Mincd ginger: 1 tbsp
- Sugar: ½ tsp
- Salt to taste

**Method:** Boil 4 cups of water and add dal. Take out the spices. Add cumin seeds and sugar. Cook till dal is half done. Add vegetables and cook till done. Serve hot with steamed rice.

**Aloo potol tarkari**

**Ingredients**
- Parwal: 250 gm, cut horizontally into halves
- Potato: 250 gm, cut into big squares
- Onion: 1 big, finely sliced
- Ginger-garlic paste: 1 tsp
- Tomato: 1 large, chopped
- Oil: 4 tbsp
- Green cardamom: 2-3
- Bay leaves: 1-2
- Cumin seeds: ½ tsp
- Sugar: ½ tsp
- Coriander, cumin, turmeric and chilli powder mixed with a little water to form a fine paste: 1 ½ tsp

**Method:** Heat oil. Fry parwa and potato till light brown. Remove from oil and keep aside. Add sugar to hot oil. Follow with cardamom, bay leaves, cumin seeds and onion. Fry onion till light brown. Add ginger-garlic paste and continue frying. Then add tomato. Fry till done. Add masala paste and salt. Cook on low flame till aroma starts wafting. Add gourd and potato. Mix and cook for a while. Serve hot with rice or roti.

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- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Chilli powder: ¼ tsp
- Oil: 1 tbsp
- Jaggery to taste

**Method:** Heat oil. Add paanch phutana. When it splutters, add ginger, curry leaves, chopped tomatoes, turmeric and chilli powder. When tomatoes are done, add water to suit the consistency you want. Add salt and jaggery. Cook for a while. Add dates and simmer for a few minutes. Garnish with coriander leaves and serve when cool. Tastes great with paranthas and goes well with any meal.

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Unravel the magic of mustard

India’s food diversity is, to a large extent, based on oilseeds. Different regions consume mustard, coconut, groundnut, sesame, linseed and safflower oil. Eight percent of edible oil is processed in the small-scale sector on ‘ghanis’ which operate on tiny amounts of capital but provide pure and nutritious oil to local consumers.

Sarson or mustard seed is one of the most popular spices traded in the world today. It is central to India’s diverse health and food systems. Mustard is the symbol of spring and renewal. The yellow of the mustard flower is the colour of spring (Basant). The mustard flower oil is the preferred edible oil. Hilsa fish in the south, mustard seeds in the northern and eastern regions of India, mustard oil in the winter season, mustard oil is used as a circulatory stimulant and joint pains. Mustard oil is used as a digestive aid in moderation, helps ward off an upset stomach.

As mustard grows well in temperate climates, the areas that produce the greatest amount of mustard seeds currently include Hungary, Great Britain, India, Canada and the United States.

As a medicine
The unique healing properties of mustard seeds can partly be attributed to their home among the Brassica foods found in the cruciferous plant family.

Mustard seeds emerged from our food ranking system as a very good source of omega-3 fatty acids as well as a good source of iron, calcium, zinc, manganese, magnesium, protein, niacin and dietary fiber. Mustard not only stimulates the appetite by increasing saliva up to eight times, it also has digestive, laxative, antiseptic and circulatory stimulant properties. As a digestive aid in moderation, mustard neutralises toxins and helps ward off an upset stomach.

Navdanya brings you organic kachhi ghani mustard oil (and seeds) at its outlets in Dilli Haat and D-26 Hauz Khas, New Delhi. Mustard seeds also qualify as a very good source of selenium, a nutrient that has been shown to reduce the severity of rheumatoid arthritis, and help prevent cancer. The seeds also qualify as a good source of magnesium. Like selenium, magnesium has been shown to reduce the severity of asthma, lower high blood pressure and restore normal sleep patterns in women having difficulty with the symptoms of menopause. Mustard seeds also help reduce the frequency of migraine attacks, and prevent heart attack in patients suffering from atherosclerosis or diabetic heart disease.

Since mustard seed has high oil content and can be processed locally, it is available to the poor at low cost.

As a food
In the northern and eastern regions of India, mustard oil is the preferred edible oil. Hilsa fish in mustard oil is the ultimate delight in Bengal and north Indian mandis like their pakoras fried in it because of its unique taste and aroma. In the south, mustard seeds are the preferred seasoning for Upma, vegetables, curd rice etc. Whole mustard is used as a flavoring agent in Bengali fish curries.

Deepawali lamp acts as an environmental purifier and pest control agent reducing disease, destruction of stored grains and cleaning the atmosphere of homes and villages. The replacement of mustard oil lamps by candles of paraffin wax transforms an environmentally cleaning festival into an environmentally polluting one.

Tips for storage
Just as with other dried spices, try to select organically grown mustard seeds or powder since this will give you assurance that the herbs have not been irradiated. Mustard powder and mustard seeds should be kept in a tightly sealed container in a cool, dark and dry place. Prepared mustard and musturd oil should both be refrigerated.
The eyes are the most important external organs of the body. Indian wisdom says that the eyes can even receive solar energy and convert it into bio-energy for body functions. A living example of this truth is a person from Ahmedabad who for the last 20 years or so has not taken any food apart from gazing at the sun in the morning for a particular period of time.

The application of cooling oil on the feet every day has an amazing outcome on the health of the eyes. If done every day this massage on the feet can prevent or delay cataract.

For common eye diseases like dryness, itching and mild infections with phlegm formation one can use Elaneer Kuzhambu (available in any Ayurvedic shop).

One teaspoon of Thripala choorana mixed with one teaspoon of pure cow's ghee taken at bedtime and followed with a cup of warm water is very good for preventing eye diseases.

Thripala (Harad, Baheda and Amla) is said to be the Aghraushadha (the best medicine) for eye care. Here are some tips to prevent and cure eye diseases and to enhance your eyesight.

- Take three gm of sphatik (alum) powder. Mix with one glass of cold water. Filter it and keep the mix in a sterilized bottle. Applying two drops of this water in both eyes, morning and evening. This is very good for eye pain due to stress and overwork and for any infection. It also improves eyesight.

- For watery eyes make a paste of Ilanji seeds (Mimusops Elengi) in water and apply to both the eyes.

- Take the root of Punarnava (Boerhavia Diffusa) and apply it in the eyes. This is easily transmittable. So do not use the same towel or treatment and medicines for any type of eye ailment, or any personal items as the infected person.

There are many kinds of kajal available in the market. But it is best to make kajal at home. It is very simple procedure. Here is the method: Take about 50 ml of Sahadevi (Vernonia Cineria) juice.

- Dip a small, clean, cotton cloth of 3 inch x 5 inch in it.

- Now dry the cloth in the shade.

- Dip again in fresh sahadevi juice.

- Dry the cloth yet again.

- Repeat the procedure three or seven times.

- Cut this cloth into two wicks.

- Take castor oil and light these wicks in a lamp.

- Above the lamp keep a clean, sterilised copper or stainless steel plate upside down so that the smoke from the burning wick can touch the interior of the plate and get accumulated.

This can be kept overnight. So that one can get enough black kajal. Mix the kajal with pure ghee to make a good paste. Keep it in a sterilized bottle. This Kajal is excellent for eye care. If used daily it prevents infection, improves sight and delays or prevents cataract formation.

Ayurveda advocates in its daily regimen application of kajal every morning which is the time of Kapha vitiation. The kajal applied at this time can remove excess vitiated Kapha of the eyes and keep them healthy.

**CONJUNCTIVITIS:** Red eyes or conjunctivitis are a common infection of the eyes. It affects almost everyone in the hot-wet climate. Washing of eyes with Thripala kashayam twice a day is very good for curing conjunctivitis. You can also try the following.

- Take one teaspoon of dhania (coriander) in water and apply it in the eyes. This can be kept overnight, so that one can get enough extract. Kapha of the eyes and keep them healthy.

- Take the juice of Nandyarvattam (Tabernaemontana Coronaria) and apply it in the eyes.

- Apply one teaspoon of ilanji seeds (Mimusops Elengi) in water and apply to both the eyes.

- Take the juice of Sahadevi (Vernonia Cineria) or other personal items as the infected person.

There are very few centres of excellence of Ayurvedic ophthalmology in India. One of them is the Sudarshan Nethra Chikitsalaya in Thiruvalla. To get reliable advice or treatment and medicines for any type of eye ailment, or any personal items as the infected person.

For people with eye diseases it is always good to take elaneer Kuzhambu (available in any Ayurvedic shop).

For severe pain in the eyes one can safely apply the juice of the tender leaves of sigru (Moringa oleifera), mixed with honey once a day for a few days. This is very good for eye pains.

For those sparkling eyes

Dr G G GANGADHARAN

WHERE ARE WE READING?

Civil Society is going places...


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Some of Delhi's top doctors find the time to serve the poor in a resettlement colony called Molarband where they have revived a health centre. Civil Society discovered them.
INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

WHERE TO VOLUNTEER

CanSupport India
Kanika Durga Basti Vikas Kendra, Sector 12 R.K. Puram Near DPS School New Delhi-110022
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: cansup_india@hotmail.com

Hanshi Anuradha Bhaskar, Ajit Vas& Kavita Kendra, Sector 12
R.K. Puram Near DPS School New Delhi-110022
Tel: 26102851, 26102859, 26102869
E-mail: can_sup_india@hotmail.com

Youthreach
A volunteer team at Youthreach helps to match the skills and interests of young people with the needs of their partner organisations. This exchange is monitored and facilitated from beginning to end by the assessor team. The team also partners other organisations that are working with children, women and the environment.
Contact: Asha or Pia 11 Community Centre, Saket, New Delhi - 110 017
Phone/Fax: (91) 2112653250/2520
Email: yrd@youthreachindia.org

Deepalaya
They work economically, socially, disabled, physically and mentally challenged children. They believe in helping children become self-reliant and lead a healthier and happier life. They promote education, health, skill training and income enhancement. Community guidance Centre, 46 Institutional Area, 2 Block Janakpuri New Delhi - 110 058 Phone: 26554263, 25590473 Website: www.deepalaya.org

Mobile Crèches
Mobile Crèches pioneered intervention into the lives of migrant construction workers by introducing the mobile crèche where working parents can leave their children. They work in the following areas: health, education, community outreach, networking and advocacy, resource mobilisation and communication. You can volunteer by filling out a simple online form.
Contact: Prerna Area, Raza Bazaar Sector IV New Delhi-11001 Phone: 91-11-23347695 / 23347695
Website: www.crèches.org

WHERE TO DONATE

Indian Red Cross Society
The society provides relief, hospital services, maternal and child welfare, family welfare, nursing and community services.
Contact: Red Cross Bhavan, Golf Links New Delhi-110003 Phone: 24061895, 24061735
Website: www.redcross.org

Child Relief and YOU (CRY)
CRY, a premier child relief organisation, believes that every child is entitled to survival, protection, development and participation. You can sponsor a child’s education, healthcare, or a health worker and a teacher.
Website: www.cry.org

Community Aid and Sponsorship Program (CASP)
CASP enhances collaboration among families, children and communities through participation and advocacy leading to sustainable development and empowerment.
Contact: ActionAid India C-48, South Extension New Delhi-110049
Website: www.actionaidindia.org

ACTIONAID
ActionAid is an international development organisation which works with poor and marginalised women, men, girls and boys to eradicate poverty, injustice and inequality and to transform the lives of the poor who build and run them. You can volunteer with us as per your time, interest and skills on issues such as child rights, livelihoods, Polio, evacuation, Access to Information, Development Communication etc.
Contact: Supriya Chhotani 92-94, 3rd Floor, Pratap Market Village, Delhi - 87 Phone: 26174245, 26184406, 9811103379, cazcnservind@gmail.com

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Vinyas has got it right

I have been a regular reader of your magazine and enjoy the variety that it offers. The stories are unusual but very topical and relevant. I particularly liked this month’s cover story on Vinyas and how it has transformed drab-looking schools with its ingenious ideas. I wish schools everywhere were to adopt these simple innovations and follow this model to make education an interesting and interactive experience, which is what it always should be.

It is refreshing to see a strong emphasis on photographs as it contributes to a more complete experience. The photo story by Ruhani Kaur in the January issue had some powerful images. It was a difficult theme handled very well. I do feel, though, that the covers of the magazine could be more visually interesting and not always so people-centric as they are now.

The reading experience these days is so limited and confined to popular tastes, but your magazine with its positive outlook and focus on issues that matter to us all, comes as a welcome change. The stories from all over the country of the voices of change have found a place where they can be heard and their experiences learnt from.

Gautam Singh

Schools need ideas, not money

I am a fan of Civil Society for its uniqueness and have loved reading it since its inception. But the last issue was exemplary. The cover story “Schools by design” was of course the showpiece that it deserved to be. (Where were you Mr Karan Vajpeyi when I was in school?). But equally riveting was the brilliance of Conserve’s Anita Ahuja. This kind of commitment to a social cause makes me feel completely self-centred for being preoccupied with eking out an honest day’s living.

That was not all. Harshot Singh Bal’s interview with Aruna Roy on the undelivered promise of Sonia Gandhi’s National Advisory Council and his field report on how the RTI Act is keeping the rural employment scheme on track in Rajasthan, were just as absorbing. As was the interview with Dunu Roy and his disillusionment with the courts of law in defending the rights of the urban poor. I could go on but I suppose so much saccharine is not good even for Civil Society.

The cover story shows that education in India suffers not from lack of money but from fresh ideas, Vajpayee has shown us how much innovation matters and how inexpensive it can be.

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Anchal K. Gupta

Follow the TVS example

‘With TVS, everyone rides pillon’ made interesting reading. How I wish there were more companies like TVS which realised their social responsibilities and did their bit for the have nots of society. I think the work done by the TVS group needs to be given wide publicity so that other companies emulate their example and take similar initiatives in areas near their factories.

BV Rao

Bureaucracy is a hard nut

Arvind Kejriwal’s column ‘RTI cases pile up like CIC dawdlers’ in the June issue of your magazine was very timely. What he has discovered in the working of the RTI Act was all along waiting to happen. These bureaucrats are very hard nuts to crack. No reforms, social, economic, or political would produce any results unless there are drastic reforms in the functioning of the bureaucracy. Remember all these commissioners including Waqahat Habibullah, Chief Information Commissioner, were once bureaucrats and therefore it would be naïve to expect them to act against a fellow bureaucrat.

Arvind Lal Kaur

Cities for the poor

The story in your June issue entitled “Time to forget the courts” was very balanced. It sought to remind us that a city belongs to the rich and the poor. Demolishing slums on so called public land which constitutes, according to the writer 78 percent of slums would be a big tragedy. Ways have to be found to see that the poorest of the poor get as much, if not more help, from the government as well off traders and shopkeepers with huge unauthorised construction got in Delhi recently.

Lavleen Singh

No conscience in government

The edit on NAC by Umesh Anand made one sit up and take note. Some very thought provoking observations have been made by him. Everybody would completely agree with him that it would be foolish to ignore reality. Governments do not run on conscience and they are fuelled by give and take. But the tragedy is that Civil Society has very little circulation. It does not get read by the masses, or by the people who govern the lives of the masses.

Anchit K. Gupta

Natural is best

I immensely liked the article by Dr G G Gangadharan. “A leafy cure for the common cold”. I am a naturalist. What I have found in my interaction with people is that they do not have much patience. Slight physical discomfort sends them running to doctors and chemists. People just do not allow their natural immune system to get a chance to fight the infection. Modern medicine is after all not so old. Shun medicines and embrace nature and see a sea change in not only yourself but in everything around you.

Neha Sharma

An appeal

The Nahi Kali project reaches out to over 5,000 little girls in India. It has provided about Rs 8.33 crores as grants, scholarships and loans to over 10,000 beneficiaries. The project believes education can transform the life of a girl child.

Started in 1996 by the KC Mahindra Education Trust, to provide primary education to the disadvantaged girl child, the Nahi Kali project now wants to reach out to many more little girls. With this in mind the KC Mahindra Education Trust has formed a partnership with the Naandi Foundation chaired by Dr Anjali Reddy, chairman of Dr Reddy’s Laboratories. The Nahi Kali project proposes to:

- Provide textbooks, uniforms, exam fees, learning material etc to the girl child.
- Improve school infrastructure, capacity building of teachers and the overall learning environment of the girl child.
- Sensitive parents and the community to gender equity
- The sponsorship options are:
  - Rs 1,800 per year to support girls from Class 1 to Class 7
  - Rs 2,500 per year to support girls from Class 8 to Class 10

Any number of girls can be sponsored. This could be done through:
- Organisations could sponsor the education of a larger group of at least 50 girls.
- Individuals could sponsor one or more girls.
- Or the organisation can sponsor a larger group of girls and requests their employees for individual sponsorships by pasting the information on the Intranet.

Profiles of the children along with photographs will be sent to the donor. We also send progress reports every six months to keep donors updated on the progress of their sponsored children.

Please do visit our website www.nanhikali.org and www.naandifoundation.org

Or contact: Vinita Jhorey at 98908 88992.

Mango festival

The report on Navdanya’s mango festival in your June issue was very interesting. Perhaps you should track more such events and write about them.

They will introduce people to excellent offbeat destinations and are also an education. Many people are interested in organic farming. Perhaps Navdanya could do an organic farming weekend package and invite people to enjoy the Doon Valley and learn to farm organically as well.

Ravi Prasad

The Mall Battle

Shopping malls all across the country have become a menace. There has been no control on builders. Even after the collapse of infrastructure in our cities, governments do not seem to realise the need for sustainable growth.

Vinita Singh

A clarification

In the June issue of Civil Society the stor: Pierre Cardin raincoats from Delhi plastic bags’ erroneously gave the impression that Conserve employs children. The reference was really to the children of Conserve’s workers. The NGO does not employ any children.