

# Civil Society

**CHETAN MAINI'S REVA STUNS EUROPE AND JAPAN**

## CLEAN WORLD CAR

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TASTE  
DEFEAT**

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# Read us. We read you.



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

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## COVER STORY



### THINK ELECTRIC

India's crowded and polluted cities need clean automobile technology. The Reva, produced in Bangalore and feted in Europe and Japan is perhaps the answer.

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# Civil Society

## Showcase the Reva

THE Reva electric car is an example of how a small group of skilled and entrepreneurial Indians can build a world class technology. Such efforts come with remarkable innovations and efficiencies. They deliver at great speeds because they carry no baggage and are oriented towards a single mission. The makers of the Reva, for instance, were focused entirely on electric vehicles. No big car company working with combustion engines can afford to do this. Since Reva-like enterprises seek out new identities in old markets, they also address real problems and build business plans around them. An electric car's profitability, for instance, is based upon providing an answer to urban pollution and over-dependence on oil. These enterprises, therefore, have a social relevance in addition to their commercial goals.

The Reva has drawn intelligently on a range of Indian scientific specialisations. This serves the dual purpose of being cost-efficient and globally advanced at the same time. The Reva is one-third the price of an equivalent small and clean car in the developed world. It is being applauded in Europe and Japan where it gets huge subsidies. Showcasing the Reva is, therefore, good for the image of India. Moreover, we are signatories to the Kyoto Protocol, which means we should be supporting technologies that cut carbon emissions.

Now ask your self why we know so little about the Reva in our own country. One reason is that its promoters do not have the money to pour into expensive advertising and marketing. Such costs would also play havoc with the price of the car at low volumes. But a more important reason is the absence of government policy which recognises the worth of innovation. Governments in Japan and Europe actively pursue technologies that improve the quality of life. But the Indian government is unimaginative, sluggish and hostage to vested business interests. Even as our cities choked, it took India 15 years to move to four-stroke engine technology while Bajaj continued to amass a fortune out of noisy and polluting scooters.

Similarly, the telecom revolution in the country was delayed by a decade because someone decided to kill Sam Pitroda's C-DOT. All kinds of bizarre charges surfaced against Pitroda and the project. To some of us who were reporting on C-DOT it seemed crazy that the country couldn't understand the importance of developing a switch and giving telecom its true place as a catalyst of economic growth. Was the government just ignorant or was it acting in that manner because money had been pressed into some sweaty palms by multinationals which did not want India to own a lucrative technology? With hindsight, the answer is fairly clear.

Governments and policy-makers have a special responsibility towards new technologies that improve the way we live and bring economic growth. They need to mother them so that they take off and find market mechanisms to make them viable. How else do new efforts compete against entrenched commercial interests?

With this issue we are happy to announce a Business section in Civil Society. The idea is to go beyond the mundane notion of profit. Private investment should not only bring in financial returns, but also improve the quality of life and help create widespread prosperity. Enterprises that aspire to these goals are interesting to track. By reporting on them in a lively and anecdotal style, we hope to inspire other entrepreneurs. First on our list is Fuad Lokhandwala, the toilet tycoon of Delhi.

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Write to Civil Society at E-2144 Palam Vihar, Gurgaon, Haryana 122017 Ph: 9811787772, E-mail: civil\_society@rediffmail.com. Editor: Rita Anand

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# MKSS, GRP taste defeat in elections

Civil Society News  
Delhi/Gurgaon

TWO efforts by people's groups to enter politics and be counted by contesting elections seem to have met with reverses.

Col Ratan Singh, the candidate of the Gurgaon Residents' Party (GRP) for the Haryana Assembly, was defeated, and in Rajasthan, of the 12 candidates supported by the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in the panchayat polls, only two won.

The GRP foray into politics was based on the growing number of middle-class voters in the newly developed parts of Gurgaon. The feeling among them was that they were not being served well by politicians who depended on rural votes for victory. A middle-class candidate, in this case Col Ratan Singh, it was believed, could win with support from people in housing colonies and condominiums.

The GRP was barely a month old when it faced the election. Perhaps that was not enough time to put in place an organisation that could bring people to the booths in sufficient numbers. Col Ratan Singh's chances hinged on turnout and finally it was not sufficient.

The MKSS, founded by Magsaysay winner Aruna Roy, has been into grassroot politics for quite some time now. The defeat of 10 of its 12 candidates, particularly in two seats where the MKSS had won the last time, is much more serious and calls for introspection. Is it merely rejection or is the political weave now more complex and demanding?

Both the GRP and the MKSS claim victory in defeat. The very process of engaging with the political system is improving the quality of politics, they say. It is reordering issues and raising standards. In Gurgaon the Congress, the BJP and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) have been forced to sit up and take note of middle-class residents, whom they previously ignored. In Rajasthan, too, the agenda of the MKSS was picked up and replicated by mainstream political candidates.

The MKSS says candidates were not specifically selected because their chances of winning were bright. Most volunteered to contest after making a commitment to follow MKSS norms.

MKSS candidates contested for the posts of *sarpanch* in five blocks in the districts of Ajmer, Rajsamand, Bhilwara, and Pali. Three were women and one was contesting an open seat. Of the male candidates three were Dalits fighting from unreserved seats. Four male candidates were OBCs and one was a general candidate.

Kalu Ram, a Dalit from Vijayapura in Rajsamand District, won from an open seat, defeating a former *sarpanch* by 350 votes. Kalu Ram is an activist who had done good work for the local panchayat. He spent Rs 695 on his election campaign.

Babu Lal Rav won from Kalesria panchayat, Rajsamand district, by a slender margin of four votes. He had led a successful campaign with his youth group to expose, and finally jail a powerful and corrupt ration dealer.

Two candidates, whom the MKSS was confident would win, lost the election. Ram Singh contesting the Badkochra panchayat seat in Ajmer district, was defeated by the former *sarpanch* Koop Singh by 200 votes. Tara lost the Kushalpur seat in Rajsamand district by 41 votes.

His defeat surprised the MKSS because Narayan Singh of the MKSS had won the seat the last time.



Gurgaon's middle-class plunged into politics, but couldn't contend with the rough and tumble of an election

## Gurgaon residents learn a thing or two

Civil Society News  
Gurgaon

WHEN middle-class residents of Gurgaon in Haryana decided to get into politics and launch their own party they did so in the belief that the 75,000 newly registered voters would be decisive in an Assembly election. Col Ratan Singh was fielded as the candidate of the Gurgaon Residents' Party (GRP) not so much because it was sure that he would win, but so that he would set a trend. His candidature would also encourage residents' welfare associations to mobilise people to cast their votes.

Gurgaon's problem has been low voter turnout among the middle-class and the elite during the Assembly elections. The result has been that the elected representative does not take urban problems seriously. If the middle-class vote could be made to count, urban problems would be given the attention they deserve, was the argument. As an extension to that, a candidate of their own in the Assembly would be even better. And so it was that Col Ratan Singh was chosen.

But his defeat shows many things. First, the GRP, being barely a month old, did not have an organisational machinery for facing an election. It had decided to raise money from residents, but failed to do so. They were depending on the RWAs to mobilise people, but this too did not happen. Invariably, there were not enough volunteers to campaign or do booth duty.

There were internal conflicts and jealousies. Leading lights of the RWAs were busy pulling each other down for petty reasons. Finally, on voting day itself, the turnout was just 35 per cent or so, which was way below the huge support that the GRP had dreamed of. People either vanished for work in Delhi, or just did not turn up at polling stations or couldn't find their names on the lists of voters.

One explanation was that it is tough to get the elite to relate to a contest between Bhajan Lal of the Congress and Om Prakash Chautala, leader of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). The RWAs were successful in getting more people to come out for the Parliamentary election last year because the middle-class is more interested in national issues and political personalities. Also the poll date was on a Sunday when everyone was in Gurgaon and not in office in Delhi.

"Voter participation from the educated segment is traditionally low during state elections," said Sanjay Kaul of People's Action who mobilised the resident welfare associations (RWAs) to form the GRP. "Voter apathy for a Chautala-Bhajan Lal contest was at an all time high."

But Kaul nevertheless insists that the turnout was still a big improvement on the Assembly elections of 2000, when a booth at Sikandarpur Ghosi recorded just one percent polling. "Our estimate is that if we take the participation of the educated middle-class at even 35 percent this time, it represents a five to six times increase over the numbers of 2000," says Kaul. In that sense Col Ratan Singh's defeat is a partial victory. And it has prompted the GRP and People's Action to plunge into the panchayat polls which are coming up. It is an oddity that many of the glitzy urban areas in Gurgaon are really a part of panchayats. The urban residents in fact far outnumber the rural voters. The only thing is that no one knows this and therefore the people in housing colonies don't vote in the panchayat elections.

The GRP is therefore preparing to test political waters for the second time. Once again it is bracing itself to learn from almost certain defeat.

LAKSHMAN



# How to take over a dead govt school

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
Gurgaon

FOR two years, Commander KK Choudhary, a retired naval officer in Gurgaon, requested the Haryana government to allot him land to build a school for children of migrant workers. His school, Sankalp, catered to 200 such children in a cramped, lousy tin shed. The government wasn't interested. Then four ladies, living in Laburnum, an upmarket apartment block in Gurgaon, came to his rescue. They lobbied tirelessly. The Haryana government's child welfare department finally relented and signed a joint venture agreement with the Sankalp Foundation, handing over one of their many vacant schools on a two-year lease.

Surabhi Kakar, Anna Godura, Radhika Sethi and Damayanti Mukherji enjoy being with each other. What binds them together? The answer is activism.

"The four of us came together in late 2002 because we needed to do something with our time. We then discovered Sankalp. The Sriram School provides them midday meals. My daughter studies there," says Surabhi, who graduated from the Xavier Labour Research Institute (XLRI) in 1983.

The commander's spirit was rather low. In 1998, he had applied to the Haryana government for some land. After sitting on the files for two years the government told him to buy it at an open auction. "Land comes in sizes of 500 square yards. That meant I needed at least Rs 60 lakhs. It was out of question," recalls Choudhary. He decided to raise funds for a building on his own. "I organised two walks and a carnival and collected Rs 2.5 lakhs," he recalls. He put together Rs 8 lakhs but ran into financial trouble when Degremont, a French firm which had promised Rs 20 lakhs, pulled out of the project.

Meanwhile, the four women heard that Neelima, another resident of Laburnum, ran a school for children of migrant workers in a vacant government school that had been allotted to her. But she was politically well connected. When the four women found out that many more government schools were lying unused, they decided to launch a campaign. They got 25 residents of their apartment block to sign a petition, went to the media and showed reporters all the empty schools and the chicken coop in which 200 children were studying.

A couple who lived in Laburnum were friends of the former Deputy Commissioner (DC), Anurag Rastogi, and they chipped in. Choudhary got support from the Rotary Club of Cama Place in New Delhi. A youngster who worked there mentioned that his uncle, LS Yadav, was the district child welfare officer (DCWO) of Gurgaon. So a lot of personal pressure was applied from that quarter.

The four women accompanied Choudhary to the DC's office. "Whenever he needs to show a team, we are there," says Radhika, a former investment banker. "Once there is pressure from two or three sides, it seems like there is a lot of community support. They helped us convince the DC," says Aradhana Gupta, a volunteer at Sankalp, who worked as a management consultant with Tata Consultancy Services for 14 years.

LS Yadav, the DCWO, suggested a vacant primary



From left: Damayanti, Radhika, Anna and Surabhi

school could be handed over under a joint venture agreement between the child welfare department and Sankalp Foundation. Accordingly, a two-year lease agreement was signed in January 2004, on a verbal assurance that the number of students enrolled would go up from 200 to 400 in two years. In return, Sankalp pays the Haryana government Rs 1000 a month as lease fee. The number of stu-

try and make most of living here. People run when they see us now," jokes Damayanti, who has just returned with her family from the US. They sourced paint, brushes and turpentine and whitewashed the walls along with children from Sankalp.

Choudhary went ahead and raised funds for his other school building that now houses 70 children. "Cargill, Rotary Club and Xansa bailed him out.

Aradhana put in one and a half lakh from her personal money. The building was built but there was no money to run this school," recalls Radhika. "So we focused on the needs of the school and went on a fund-raising campaign," says Anna, a techie born in the US and now married to an Indian. They made presentations to several corporates. Gurgaon-based Incentive Destinations gave them Rs 1 lakhs. Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) gave them money to fund the salaries of three teachers. "CAF funding required extensive periodic reporting and we helped out with that," says Radhika. They raised Rs 17,000 from some Laburnum residents for textbooks.

But there were still no funds to run the school on a day-to-day basis. Radhika's husband worked for the Commercial Finance Group in GE. A friend from GE advised the four ladies to get savvy and design a brochure. Sankalp had been talking to GE's commercial finance group for sometime but nothing had happened. Then suddenly the group got a new head. Radhika Gulati, the head's wife also lives in Laburnum. She pushed the case. A group from GE visited Sankalp. The ladies sent them the brochure that they had designed. It costs about Rs 2500 per child per year to take care of the school's expenses.

The GE group supports the school with Rs 35,000 a month. "The Laburnum ladies are a conduit between the corporate sector and Sankalp," says Aradhana, who had got Cargill India to fund Sankalp as her husband was working there.



Commander K.K. Choudhary's school

dents enrolled is already 350.

After six months of pushing files, the school premises were finally allotted to Sankalp. But the fully furnished red brick school, built on an acre of land, lay idle for about four years. It was in no condition to be occupied. "The building was used as a shit house by slum dwellers. The *chowkidar*, appointed by the government used to take money and let people sleep in the paved front yard. I told them that I did not want him," says Choudhary. He had to spend money to repair the school premises.

In the winter of 2002, the Laburnum ladies had raised money to buy sweaters, socks and blankets for the children. They got into action again. A Laburnum resident worked in ICI. The ladies appealed to him and he got his company to donate some paint. "We



## Living through a flood

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**L**AST monsoon, Islampur in Bangladesh sailed through a furious flood. So did a village in Nepal's Terai region and another in India. Local flood management committees took charge. They got information about the looming flood from met departments and informed the people. Mobile phones, drums, radios, flags on treetops and walkie-talkie sets relayed their message. Emergency and relief services were on stand by. The end result was that damage caused by floods was minimal.

"The movement of people was orderly, relief supplies were well organised, medicines and water purifying tablets were in place. Snakebite cases were also reduced," said Dr QK Ahmad, chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) at a symposium on sustainable water management organised by SCOPE in New Delhi.

Every year people in South Asia grapple with inundation during the monsoons. About 20 to 30 percent of Bangladesh goes under water. Twenty five percent of cultivable land in India gets flooded. Nepal too is prone to flash floods in the Terai region. People get reduced to penury.

The BUP along with the Institute for Resource Management and Economic Development (IRMED) New Delhi and the Jalsrot Vikash Sanstha in Kathmandu (JVS) have prepared manuals on how to help people cope with floods, reduce risks and restore their lives quickly once the waters subside. The manuals are based on participatory rapid appraisals (PRAs) done in selected areas of each country.

The three NGOs first found out what local communities and government officials did during and after a flood, and then worked out how these systems could be strengthened.

It was found during major floods people were badly hit. Information from met departments wasn't available. There was also a time lag before relief got to them. They depended on the government or voluntary organisations for relief and rehabilitation.

During a flood, each individual tends to fend for himself. The three NGOs realised community institutions were needed for efficient flood management. The manuals, which have been synthesised, recommend setting up of Community Flood Management Committees and Flood Management Committees (CFMC/FMC) in flood prone areas with important local people who can liaise with the government and help their community.

Last monsoon the manuals were field-tested. Flood management teams set up by BUP, IRMED and JVS, galvanised key local people into forming CFMCs and FMCs. The results were good. "Forecasting generally went well though we need to increase lead time," said Dr Ahmad. Information was available from only five met stations in India. Bangladesh's mid region got a lead time of just 24 hours.

For manuals, e-mail [bup@citechco.net](mailto:bup@citechco.net)

## Forum for whistleblowers

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**W**HISTLEBLOWERS have been having a really tough time. It is one thing to have the courage to expose corruption and quite another to contend with the harassment that follows. Invariably it means tangling with powerful people and there is no one to turn to for help.



LAKSHMAN

But now whistleblowers can rest a little easier. The Citizens' Forum Against Corruption (CFAC) invites whistleblowers to bring their cases before a forum of eminent citizens with information and evidence.

The forum includes well-known lawyers Prashant Bhushan, Kamini Jaiswal and Colin Gonsalves. Arvind Kejriwal of Parivaratan, Muchkund Dubey, former foreign secretary, and SK Jha former chief commissioner of Income Tax are also members.

CFAC is primarily interested in taking up corruption cases in which senior officials are involved or where a lot of money has changed hands. It also wants to hear

cases that reveal grave lacunae in the system.

A working group of the panel will examine evidence provided by the whistleblower and prepare a summary document of the case. Summary documents of all the cases received between successive meetings of the panel will be presented to the panel in the subsequent meeting.

If it is established that a prima facie case exists, the panel will first write to the department concerned, the

Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), the CBI and other investigative agencies asking them to conduct an inquiry and take proper action. If CFAC does not receive a response, or if the forum feels that the action taken by the department or government agencies is improper or insufficient, CFAC can decide to publicise the case by bringing it to the notice of the public. As a last resort, this forum may take the case to court.

Satyendra Dubey was a whistleblower who died

because he dared to expose corruption taking place in the construction of highways in Behra. There are several government officers like Dubey, who have information on corruption and are in possession of crucial evidence. But they do not complain or report corrupt practices because they do not have faith in the existing government mechanisms. They also fear professional victimisation and physical harm.

Whistleblowers can contact: Naveen, C- 67, Sector- 14, NOIDA.

Email: [tk.naveen@gmail.com](mailto:tk.naveen@gmail.com).

For complete list of eminent members:  
[www.civilsocietymagazine.com](http://www.civilsocietymagazine.com)

## Tuning into the youth

Shailey Hingorani and Tonusree Basu  
New Delhi

**A** national youth outreach programme, called Karm Yuva, was launched in New Delhi by I-CONGO (Indian Confederation of NGOs) and IRAM, supported by ActionAid India. Cricketer Murali Kartik and DJ Narain of the rock group Aryans inaugurated the programme. A torch-bearing ceremony was led by cricketer Akash Chopra, through Ansal Plaza, a popular shopping mall in south Delhi.

The Karm Yuva programme aims to combine "corporate social responsibility with youth social responsibility." Young people between the ages of 16 and 28 can enroll as Karm Yuva Cadet Corps (KYCC) at a nominal one-time entrance fee. The funds will go to communities supported by the programme. In turn, KYCC members will be entitled to certain privileges, benefits, scholarships and freebies such as free passes to concerts, club memberships, credit cards, gift hampers. Jerry Almeida of ActionAid defended the programme against criticisms of being a consumerist, market-oriented idea. He said giving benefits and membership perks were essential to sell the idea to the youth and initiate them. He claimed that their previous programme, Karma Mitra, showed a sustainability rate of 65 percent even after the freebies

were stopped.

DJ Narain said that in the past he has been part of various music concerts on the theme of peace, which have been immensely popular. ANHAD too has organised peace concerts to mobilise the youth to secularism.

Opinion leaders like Amitabh Bachchan and Sachin Tendulkar have been used to appeal to the youth. These efforts have been hugely successful.

Shabnam Hashmi of ANHAD admitted at having certain reservations about the idea but said that the organisers' stand on secularism was very positive. "They did not mince words while condemning forces of hatred from such a platform, something that even members of NGOs are sometimes hesitant to do. And that sends out a very important message," she said.

Cricketer and youth icon Murali Kartik said that today everybody takes a stand on various social causes, but they do so within the confines of their homes. Nobody wants to take it up further. Intention to do good is important, but action is as crucial.

Whether this project is just another corporate gimmick, only time will tell. The concept has shades of corporatisation. Whether the idea of voluntarism has been diluted with freebies or given a fresh start is a subjective thought. Many feel that social good has to come from the heart and not calculated by returns.

# Rations flow in Sundernagari

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

THE transformation in Sundernagari, a down and out resettlement colony in east Delhi, is unbelievable. After a two-year battle by Parivartan, the Public Distribution System (PDS) has started to work. Ration shop-owners are actually going house-to-house asking people to please collect their rations.

In 2003, when Parivartan began work here, the PDS was steeped in corruption. Parivartan began a campaign to make sure poor people got their correct rations. They exposed corruption in the PDS by holding *Jan Sunwais*. They held protest marches and dharnas. Ration shop-owners in connivance with food officials beat up Parivartan activists. Last month, goons attacked Santosh, a Parivartan worker, and even slashed her throat. The government did not budge.

On Republic Day, a large number of people decided they'd had enough. The government wants to fatten the bureaucracy and ration shop owners with food meant for the poor? Fine. We don't want the government's subsidised food. They decided to forego their ration entitlements for one month and express solidarity for Parivartan activists, who were being attacked every other day by goons.

The people said they would only collect rations if these were given with honesty and dignity. If getting rations meant violence, corruption and abuse, then no thanks. We don't want it, they said.

Since February 1, incredible things began happening in Sundernagari. The Delhi government

started keeping a strict vigil on each ration shop. Armed with a video camera, the Food Inspector filmed activities in each shop. The Assistant Commissioner and the Food Officer hung around to make sure shops remained open and there was sufficient stock. The shops, which used to open for just a few days in a month, are open every day, even during the lunch hour!

Supplies of food to ration shops would never arrive before the 25th. This month, all shops got their supplies on February 1. Earlier, shopkeepers would abuse poor people and cheat them, every time they came to collect their rations. The same shop-owners are going to each house and pleading before people to come and take their rations.

A daily report of the number of people collecting their rations in each shop is being prepared and sent to top authorities in the Delhi government. There are 9,000 ration card-holders in Sundernagari. According to government records, by the middle of February, about 2500 people had picked up their rations.

Many people said they feared the rations they sacrificed, as a mark of protest, would be siphoned by unscrupulous elements. The Chief Minister,



A public hearing in Delhi

Sheila Dikshit, assured Parivartan that arrangements would be made for people to inspect distribution records and check if those rations have been returned to the government.

The illicit incomes of the shop-owners took a severe beating in February. Their regular incomes also went down drastically since people did not pick up their rations voluntarily.

The lesson from this entire turnabout is that the government can provide clean and just governance. The government's complaints that it does not have the resources, manpower or systems to run a better PDS are just lame excuses. What governments lack is political will. Parivartan has shown how the people can force the government to act.

## Ashoka is 25 and still innovating

Rina Mukherji  
Kolkata

SOCIAL entrepreneurs from across Asia, selected as Innovators for the Public by the Ashoka Foundation, met in Kolkata for a three-day workshop.

Since 1980 Ashoka has invested 'social venture capital' in individuals with great ideas.

The world has big problems, but there are people with new solutions who need encouragement and support. Ashoka identifies them and backs them with money and professional assistance. In this way over 25 years Ashoka has helped 1400 social entrepreneurs in 52 countries get projects off the ground.

Ashoka was started by Bill Drayton, an American who had been a student activist at Harvard and then went on to serve as a consultant to McKinsey, the management firm.

The workshop brought Ashoka Fellows past and present together. It also felicitated the new fellows.

There was Dr Armida Fernandez who pioneered India's first human milk bank at Mumbai's Sion hospital and is now educating women in healthcare at Mumbai's Dharavi slum. There was Dr Subroto Das and his wife Sushmita who have started a highway rescue project for victims of accidents. (see Page 9). Anil Shaligram presented his project on IT for development.

Katayun Currawalla talked about her work with dyslexic children. Rather than lament about her

son's learning disabilities, she nurtured his remarkable talent in sports. She set up the Maharashtra Dyslexia Association to help other parents.

Anshu Gupta's 'Goonj' did a lot of good work during the recent tsunami disaster. He organises the distribution of surplus clothing and food from the rich to India's drought-prone, poorer regions.

Mihir Bhatt is well known for his work in disaster management. He set up India's first Disaster Mitigation Institute, which works on food, habitat, livelihood and water security during a disaster through flexible packages planned in consultation with affected communities.

Visually challenged Monsur Ahmed Choudhuri, the director and trustee of Impact Foundation, Bangladesh, got the government to enact legislation for the rights of the disabled. He helps rural women grow nutritious vegetables in home gardens through his mothers' clubs and also works on healthcare for the disabled.

Taher Khilji has been providing healthcare to transsexuals in Lahore, Pakistan. He has courageously filed a public interest litigation in court, demanding the rights of transsexuals as citizens of Pakistan.

There was also Supinya Klangnarong from Thailand. Her crusade to democratise the media in Thailand and free it from corporate control was an eye-opener for Indians.

Films on some Ashoka fellows were also

shown. One was on WW Singham who has been rehabilitating woman-headed families in politically sensitive Vavuniya in Sri Lanka.

There was a lively interactive media interface with senior journalists. Fellows complained about the media's indifference to developmental news. Journalists Anish Gupta (Hindustan Times) and Ananya Chatterjee (ex-Tara Bangla), tried to defend their brethren.

### Youth Awards For Social Change

Pravah and Ashoka: Innovators for the Public are pleased to announce 'CHANGE LOOMS', a program that recognizes young people engaged in social action through an award of Rs. 20000 and an opportunity for training and exposure to other social initiatives all over the country. Apart from the award, outstanding projects are eligible for a grant of Rs. 40,000/-

If you are between 17- 25 years, have demonstrated leadership in a social initiative in your school, college or community or started a social venture and have inspired others to engage with it, then we are looking for you.

Teams or individuals are encouraged to apply by **15th March 2005**

**Action Bytes** - Other than the above, we also invite case studies and inspiring stories for a book we are compiling on 'young people in social action'

Application forms available at - [www.younginfluencers.com](http://www.younginfluencers.com)

For further information contact Payal: 2nd Floor, Pravah 15/10 Kalkaji, N. Delhi -19. Tel - 011-26420776, e-mail - pravah@vsnl.com

**CHANGE LOOMS - a tapestry of dreams in action**

Supported by Sir Ratan Tata Trust



# Taking the Dalit cause global



The World Dignity March through Porto Alegre's streets

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

THE Dalit struggle for dignity has gone truly global with the fifth World Social Forum (WSF) held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, officially agreeing that a World Dignity Day, symbolising solidarity for Dalits across the world, will be celebrated internationally for the next ten years.

For the first time, Ashok Bharti, national coordinator of the National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), along with Mukul Sharma, convenor of World Dignity Forum (WDF), were invited to inaugurate and conclude the WSF. People joined a humungous World Dignity March carrying flags and shouting slogans.

Porto Alegre's night sky was illuminated with torches lit during the 'Thousand Lights of Dignity' programme.

In an interview to **Civil Society**, Ashok Bharti says the Dalits successfully globalised their movement, not by hammering away at governments or the UN, but by winning over hearts and minds.

## How did you influence international opinion?

The Dalits had no role or stake in the WSF prior to WSF 2004. They had participated in the Asia Social Forum 2003, but that hardly influenced international opinion. Neither did the UN-sponsored World Conference Against Racism in 2001. NACDOR learned a great deal from these experiences.

While most Dalit NGOs and other political parties try to influence the state and international bodies, we believe in influencing wider civil society and their organisations, where people working in different capacities in the state and international bodies congregate.

Therefore we presented the case of the Dalits at those forums where civil society gathers internationally to discuss issues of common concern. WSF is one such platform. But this cannot be done without adding innovation and value to these processes. Before the WSF 2004, NACDOR forged an alliance of the Dalits with progressive and dem-

ocratic civil society organisations. We then organised the first-ever World Dignity Forum (WDF) focusing on rampant discrimination against the Dalits in India, the Blacks, Burakumins, Quilambola, in fact, all indigenous people globally. We created a platform for dignity, which is a common and essential agenda for all. It was a huge success.

## What are the three key issues you highlighted at WSF?

We highlighted the fact that dignity is non-negotiable and second to none, even to the right to life. Secondly, that globalisation is hurting the Dalits of the world. Thirdly, that the Dalits need a global alliance to oppose globalisation and protect the dignity and rights they have secured and are being advanced through their struggles.

## Isn't the caste system crumbling in India?

No! It is not crumbling as some academicians have said. But it is certainly in crisis. People are questioning and challenging the domination and hegemony of the upper castes. One thing that can surely be said is that caste is not the same as it used to be.

Caste, a double-edged sword, is no more a monopoly of the upper castes. It is currently changing hands. Dalits and other intermediary castes can also wield it

movement in India, ever made the removal of caste their key agenda.

This primary agenda gave Dalits a sense of purpose and unity and they have used it to penetrate all walks of life and anyone ignoring their presence. But the Dalits have had to pay a heavy price for their activism. Many, many enlightened people have also played a significant role in removing the barriers of caste.



Ashok Bharti



Mukul Sharma

today and use it for the same purpose as it was used by the upper castes. I guess caste is in its last phase of survival. I think this is its most violent phase. But to finally bury it, we may have to wait for a century or two.

## How far has the rise of the Dalits helped to remove barriers of caste?

The rise of the Dalits has helped to remove the barriers of caste but it has not been easy. This is because the Dalits were at the bottom of the caste edifice. Once they decided not to bear the burden of caste, they made its removal the prime agenda of their movement. No other movement, be it the labour or feminist or human rights

## Do you think the creamy layer should get reservation?

This question of creamy layer is quite absurd in the Indian context. I suppose it is based on a misunderstanding of the reservation issue. Reservation is not a benefit, it is a policy, which was adequately debated at the time of its formulation. It was adopted to remove historical shortcomings of our society that impair the functioning of democracy and its institutions. Moreover, caste is not an economic institution. It is an institution that prevents the normal participation of communities. Can we guarantee that once a person becomes economically sound, his or her children will not face any discrimination for being born into a Dalit family? If that did not happen with Babu Jagjivan Ram or the former President of India, KR Narayanan, then how can an ordinary Dalit survive the omnipresent discrimination in India?



# Picking up the pieces on India's deadly highways

Rina Mukherji  
Kolkata

A brave doctor and his determined wife have set up a meticulous lifeline medical service for the injured stranded on highways. Some years ago they too escaped death in a traumatic road accident.

In 1999, Dr Subroto Das, his wife Sushmita and another couple were driving from Baroda to Cambay on a national highway, when they met with an accident. "Thirty two pieces of glass shards entered my arm," recalls Dr Das. "Sushmita's knees were seriously injured. My doctor-friend, who was driving, received chest injuries, while his wife was badly hurt." Stranded at 1.30 am on a highway just 22 km from Baroda and fairly close to Anand, there was no way they could get any medical attention.

Finally, at 5 am, a milkman cycling to Anand noticed them. He blocked the road with his bike and stopped a passing bus, which took the hapless Dr Das and his co-passengers to a hospital in Baroda. They arrived there at 6 am.

"My hand was so bad... so full of dirt and blood that the first medico who examined me declared it would have to be amputated," recalls Dr Das. Fortunately, another doctor saved Dr Das's mangled hand with some effort.

After they recovered Sushmita suggested they do something for the thousands who died in accidents on highways every year. Her husband agreed. "She told me: We are lucky to be alive. Let's make sure that others don't die on the highways," says Dr Das.

And that's how Lifeline Foundation's Highway Rescue Project, a critical helpline for highway accident victims came into being.

Dr Das started by examining emergency medical infrastructure in the US and Europe. "Hospitals every few kilometres and trauma centres all over were models that could not be replicated here. I realised that an alternative had to be worked out."

The biggest difference was that in those countries most road accident deaths were caused by the impact of the collision, while in India bleeding and lack of timely medical assistance resulted in death, points out Dr Das.



Dr Subroto Das and his wife Sushmita

So Dr Das and Sushmita began mapping highways. Initially, they would set out every Sunday morning and walk a few kilometres, noting every landmark and jotting details on a map. This was meticulously done, with even hoardings, culverts and temples finding a place.

Dr Das and Sushmita set about customising acquired ambulance vans in keeping with the needs of emergency services. Meanwhile, they started liaising hospitals and informed them that no law stood in the way of transporting injured accident victims across inter-state borders for emergency medical treatment.

They approached companies for sponsorship. Birla Tyres, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, UTI Bank, and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust were the first to respond. Hutch in Gujarat, and Idea Cellular in Maharashtra enthusiastically tied up with the Lifeline Foundation to provide emergency dialing services. Indian Oil Corporation financially supported the project with a monthly contribution. The National

Highways Authority of India (NHAI), Maruti Suzuki, Hero Honda, Mahindra, HDFC were among 21 others who sponsored the project.

Backed by the corporate world, Dr Das and Sushmita trained their ambulance drivers in Airway Breathing and Circulation (ABC) emergency first aid for six months. They advertised their accident helpline phone number every 5 km on roadside boards, inside STD booths, on state transport buses, petrol pumps, roadside eateries and two-wheelers.

The Highway Rescue Project was launched in July 2002. It has 113 ambulances with metal cutters and cranes to extricate victims. On receiving a call, a central control room equipped with advanced communication systems spots the site of the accident and notifies the nearest ambulance and hospital. The police station is alerted.

The first stretch of the project covered 263 km between Ahmedabad and Surat on National Highway 8. Services were also made available on a 196 km length of road between Bhuj and Morbi on National Highway 8A.

In March the project hopes to cover 121 km from Kajri in Gujarat to Dahisar on the outskirts of Mumbai. After that services will be extended to the old Mumbai-Pune highway and Mumbai-Pune Expressway. The project will be funded by UTI Bank for three years.

By the end of 2005, Lifeline Foundation plans to move into Tamil Nadu and provide services along the Hosur-Chennai highway through their local partner Ashok Leyland. It will

also extend services to the Asansol-Bally route in West Bengal next year.

Dr Subroto Das and Sushmita received international recognition for their selfless work when they were awarded the 2004 Prince Michael International Road Safety Award. Ironically, they have never ever worked on road safety.

"In fact, we come in when all road safety fails," says Dr Das with a smile.

Dr Das is a fellow with Ashoka Innovators for the Public.



**Dr Das and Sushmita began mapping highways. Initially, they would set out every Sunday morning and walk a few kilometres noting each landmark and jotting details on a map.**

Accident helpline numbers:  
Gujarat: 9825026000  
Maharashtra: 9850026000  
E-mail: info@highwayrescue.org



# Jangali's high altitude miracle

**Rakesh Agrawal**  
Kotmalla

PEOPLE lovingly call him Jangali. Why, no one knows. What they do know is that this 54-year-old man, whose formal name is Jagat Singh Chaudhary, has brought about a revolution in his little village of Kotmalla, in Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag district, by successfully implementing mixed forestry on 100 hectares of fallow land.

Most of these species are ecologically impossible to grow at an altitude of about 1,300 metres. Some can grow only above 2,240 metres, others at less than 800, but Jangali has made them adapt to the new climate. He is growing 60 tree species, 20 varieties of evergreen grass, 25 species of herbs, unseasonal vegetables, tea, and flowers on the land, of which he owns 1.5 hectares. His most notable achievement is the generation of oak. The trees are thriving at an altitude of only 640 metres.

"My experiment shows that mixed forests are the answer to the state's fragile ecology and livelihood requirements of the people," he says.

When Jangali was a young boy, all the village land was fallow. The women of his village, his mother and sisters among them, spent hours and walked miles to collect fodder.

When Jangali grew up, he joined the army, but the women's hardships stayed with him. When he returned, he started experimenting on his own land. Slowly, he persuaded the village leaders to let him extend his innovations to the rest of the village land.

Geographically, the Forest Department possesses about 64 per cent of Uttarakhand's forest land, but satellite imagery confirms that forests cover only 43 per cent of the land, while dense forests with 60 per cent canopy cover, occupy a mere five per cent area of the state.

Good forests are the backbone of Uttarakhand's ecology and economy. The lives of the state's eight million people depend on forests. It has been estimated that one unit of agriculture needs the support of 10 units of forests in the hills.

The main problem in the region is the monoculture of chir, first by the British and later by the Forest Department. Massive forest fires, loss of water sources and a population explosion have



Jagat Singh Chaudhary (left), working on his land

worsened the state's fragile ecology. Male migration to cities in search of jobs is high and there is mounting work pressure on the women.

Jangali sought to solve this twin problem with a single stroke. He thought of propagating the mixed forestry model by growing a variety of trees, shrubs, herbs, vegetables, fruits, and spices.

He has successfully grown trees that provide fodder, such as *banj*, *bhimal*, *kharik*, and *khaina*, trees that provide fuel and timber such as *chir*, *kail*, and *deodar*, and fruit and medicinal plants such as *jamun*, *cheora*, *reetha*, and *jaitoon*. Plus, there are cash crops like hill mint, cardamom, ginger, turmeric, and tea, and herbs such as *ilaru*, *silphadi*,

and *brahmi*.

Jangali has adapted a unique technique to grow all these species successfully. The technology involves planting fodder and fuel wood tree species, and separating them from the existing trees by creating a bio-fence between them. He has planted other species elsewhere and grown grasses and moss on stones. Then he dug pits and filled them with primary species. Earth was put on the pits and that supported many new species, stopped soil erosion, and recharged the groundwater.

This experiment has ensured the constant availability of fuel wood, fodder, herbs, food grain, and vegetables and also earned people a substantial cash income.

Jangali's mixed forestry concept has now been applied elsewhere in the state, too, so that it does not remain a mere model.

A voluntary organisation, called *Daliyoan ka Dagadya* (Friend of the Trees), based in Srinagar, Garhwal, has decided to replicate Jangali's model on 10 hectares of wasteland in Malupani village, in Tehri Garhwal district.

In 1999, Jangali undertook a *padayatra* (foot march) from his village to Delhi to promote mixed forestry. The march proved very popular, and today, his efforts are appreciated by Indian and foreign experts.

Professor A N Purohit, noted environmentalist and former vice-chancellor of Garhwal University, is among his admirers. Students, teachers, and scientists from the Natural Resource Institute, Manitoba University, Canada, and scientists from Delhi and Rohtak Universities visited Jangali's village in June 2004 and came back suitably impressed.

The Union ministry of environment and forests awarded him the *Indira Priyadarshini Vrikshmitra Puraskar* in 2001. The government of Uttaranchal honoured him with the *Uttaranchal Rajyapal Puraskar* in 2003.

## Rural artisans wow Sharjah shoppers

**Awanish Somkuwar**  
Sharjah

A group of rural artisans from India, including 40 master craftsmen, went to Sharjah to take part in the Ramadan Festival of Shopping during Id-ul-Fitr and did brisk business.

"Would you like to stay in Sharjah and continue adorning the palms of our sisters and mothers," inquired a group of Arab families of Sushma Jain a *mehndi* artist from Bhopal. Jain earned more than Rs 8 lakh in a couple of weeks. "My designs were deeply appreciated," she says.

"I earned a net profit of Rs. 65,000 by selling Kalamkari works," says Shashi Kori of Ujjain, who uses vegetable colours to paint natural landscapes and floral patterns on cloth. "Profit and loss hardly matter for me. The biggest satisfaction is that it encourages me to keep alive my family tradition".

"It was a business promotion enterprise to showcase our rural crafts in the global market," explained Narendra Singh Tomar, minister for rural development.

Crafts of Madhya Pradesh including *Chanderi* and *Maheshwari* saris, bell metal, wood, leather crafts, *Zardozi*, terracotta and betel nut artifacts were displayed. And in contrast to branded products displayed in steel and glass markets, Indian artisans took great pains to look different in the midst of bland concrete.

Abhinandan Kunder of Rewa uses betel nut to sculpt table lamps, walking sticks and replicas of India's great monuments. His beautiful model of the *Dar-e-Kaba* was treated like a gem at Sharjah.

"I never thought my jute-craft would take me abroad one day," said Shamim Bano of Bhopal. "My file covers, *jhoomars*, hand bags and wall-hangings sold very well."

Govind Sharma a leather crafts master from Indore said his purses, toys and handbags fetched him handsome profits. Devideen Prajapati, a terracotta artiste from Chhatarpur was overjoyed about the sale of his decorative art pieces. "The Sharjah experience will keep on motivating me to vigorously continue my creative pursuits," he added.

Nasreen Khan, a *Zardozi* artiste from Sehore, is happy to have showcased her art outside the country. Sharing her Sharjah experience, she says, "Foreigners have a special liking for Indian garments and *Zardozi* work."

"The magic weavers create designs which textile mills cannot even think of," says Rajender Bichhve who is promoting the Maheshwari sari. "Let international markets first realise the value of rural craftsmanship before our crafts enter such markets."

(Charkha Development Communication Network)





Chetan Maini (extreme left) with promoters of the Reva on a London street

# THINK ELECTRIC

**A battery-operated car will reduce pollution and improve our cities**

**Umesh Anand**  
New Delhi / Bangalore

IMAGINE a car without an engine and smelly exhausts, but fully loaded with air-conditioner, temperature-adjusted seats and stereo. A car so loved that governments shower you with subsidies when you buy it and then waive parking fees and congestion taxes when you take it out on the street.

Where in the world would you find such encouragement for driving a benign and efficient electric vehicle? We can give you two cities to choose from: London and Tokyo.

And in which technologically advanced country do you think it would be manufactured? Why, India, of course.

To be precise, the car is called the Reva and it is made at a nondescript factory near Bangalore by Chetan Maini, 34, an engineer by training and an uncompromising champion of clean automotive technology.

For almost a decade, Maini has worked in the US and India on





## THE ANATOMY OF AN INNER-CITY CAR

**Rs 2.5 lakhs to Rs 3.3 lakhs**

**Runs on battery**

**No gears, easy to drive**

**No pollution**

**Recharge anywhere**

**80 km in single charge**

**40 paise per km**

**Remote-controlled AC**

**Two onboard computers**

**Climate-control seats**

**Speed 65 kmph**

**Dent-proof body**

**All-round safety**

**Tubeless tyres**

**Low maintenance**



developing and now commercially producing the Reva, a small battery-run car with stunning good looks and many unique features.

It was an idea which came to him after he developed a solar car in the US. Maini worked on the assumption that a battery car would be ideal for congested and polluted Indian cities. But in a weird twist to his saga, Maini's car has been ignored by the Indian government and is instead being picked up and vigorously promoted in Japan and Europe.

From December, anyone who buys the Reva in Japan gets \$2600 as an incentive from the Japanese government. In Britain, a Reva buyer gets 1000 pounds. London's congestion tax has been waived for the Reva and there are no charges for parking.

The Reva, in fact, is being ranked as the most energy-efficient vehicle in Europe.

It is also much cheaper than any comparable automobile in Europe. "Ford used to make a small car the same size as Reva. It used to sell for \$ 25,000 in Europe. Today the Reva in Europe sells for roughly \$10,000," says Maini.

In the five years or so since it was launched in 1999, the Reva has found just 800 customers in India, mainly in the southern cities of Bangalore and Hyderabad. By comparison, Maini hopes to sell 500 cars in the coming year in Britain alone where the Reva is known as GWiz.

But it is in India that a small electric car is most needed. In the absence of adequate public transport, thousands of personal cars and two-wheelers come onto the streets of cities each year.

Urban air pollution has reached alarming levels and almost all of it is linked to the use of petrol and diesel. By one estimate, if there were even just 40,000 Revas on the road in India with an annual driving distance of 12,000 km a vehicle the harmful effects of 30,000 tonnes of pollutants would be avoided.

The Reva is also cheap to run. At a unit price of Rs 4 for electricity, the Reva does a kilometre in just 40 paise! Once fully charged, its battery lasts for 80 km. Commuters within Indian cities don't tend to do more than 30 to 40 km in a day.

It is capable of zip and does respectable speeds of 40 to 60 kmph with ease. With a turning radius of 3.5 metres, it is ideal for congested cities and can be parked easily. The body is made of dent-proof plastic and the bumpers are moulded from the same material that water tanks are made from.

A remote-controlled air-conditioner and temperature adjustments for seats add to driving comfort in the Reva's high-end model, which has leather seats and a stereo. The high-end model comes for Rs 3.3 lakhs and the base one Rs 2.5 lakhs.

What did it take to enter developed markets and win this support? "Very little," says Maini. "The moment we told them we have an electric car they wanted to see how they could get more on the road. In Britain we got a chance to show it to 40 MPs. They were very proactive because it is a technology which can improve the environment."

In India, on the other hand, Maini's presentation to MPs had no effect. The Reva does get a few state level tax concessions, but he has had to work hard for them and they don't really mean much. There is a Rs 75,000 subsidy for Union government purchases. But in the absence of strategic support for clean technologies, government departments aren't buying the Reva or variants, like battery buses, which could come off Maini's assembly line.

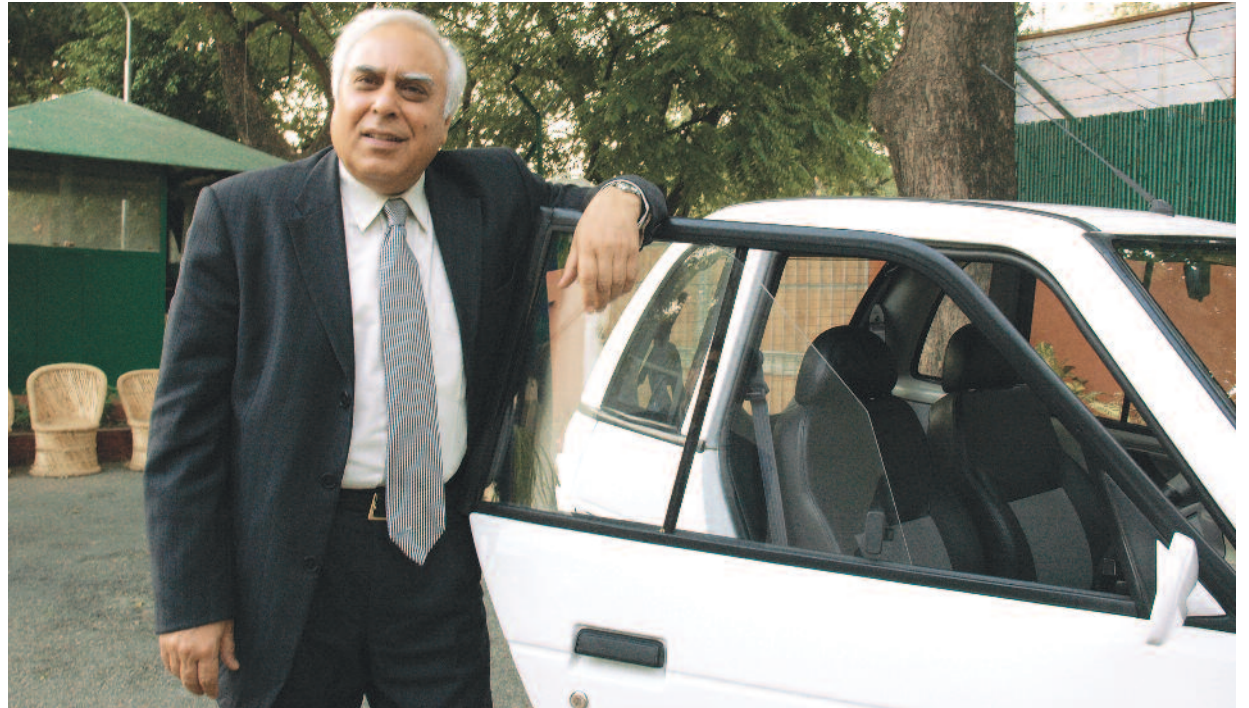
The important thing is to get individuals to opt for a car like the Reva so that

clean personal transport becomes a movement and pollution comes down or is curtailed. For this the government has to step in with meaningful incentives, as in Japan and Britain, and make a statement in support of a healthy environment and against polluting engines. At one level it means setting up charging stations and giving tax breaks. At another level, it involves making a non-polluting, small car something worth aspiring to.

Switzerland, for instance, gives 30 percent off on the purchase price of all electric vehicles. China is investing \$100 million in a technology mission to put

## Sibal's a fan, but will policy change?

LAKSHMAN



**Kapil Sibal is Union minister of state for science and technology. At his house on Teen Murti Marg, you will find a Sonata, a Honda Accord and an Esteem. Squeezed amid them is a white Reva. Sibal is a Reva fan. He likes driving his little electric car around, but as minister**

**he doesn't get much time. Will Sibal's interest in the Reva do anything for changing the policy on electric vehicles? Sibal says he has written to the Prime Minister's Office and the Finance Ministry asking for tax breaks and other forms of support.**

1000 battery-operated buses in operation before the 2008 Olympics.

Mothering by the government is important because a new technology competes with well-entrenched commercial interests. In the case of automobiles, brands come to India with a long history of using fossil fuel engines. They shape preferences through huge advertising budgets. These economies of scale are difficult to contend with.

Chetan Maini's father's business involves automobile components and battery operated material handling equipment. This experience helped in developing Reva technology at low costs. But building a market presence and service and dealer networks is an altogether different game. It is also very expensive and in financial resources the Reva Electric Car Company and the Maini family do not come anywhere close to automobile majors.

In 1997-98, Maini had been given by the Indian government a subsidy of Rs 1 lakh per car. The excise duty was set at eight percent when it was 40 percent for other cars. But two years were spent making the Reva entirely indigenous except for eight parts. By the time it was ready to roll, the subsidy vanished. Excise on all cars came down to 16 percent.

This was a major blow from which the Reva never recovered even though it received a warm response in Bangalore at the time of its launch.

"Everywhere, globally products like this get initial support to create enough awareness. After that market forces take over. If there was the right direct support at that time, it would have really helped us," says Maini.



# Quiet crusader for clean technology

**C**HETAN MAINI is the managing director of the Reva Electric Car Company, but he emerges more as a technology change leader than a businessman in search of rapid returns on investment. So convinced is he of Reva's technological prowess that he soldiers on with a business which as yet brings in little or nothing by way of profits.

He believes that small teams working on new technologies can give India world class products. It is important to encourage such operations with injections of finance and subsidy at the right junctures to see them along.

"When you are doing new technologies in a large organisation," says Maini, "your overheads, your cost structure is very different. As a small team we were working very quickly and there was only one goal: to make an electric car."

Since the designing was done from scratch, there was the chance to use unique processes. The dent-proof plastic body panels, for instance. These turned out to be low-cost. But had the company been doing steel panels for 30 years, it would not have found it easy to switch over. The same is true of the car's bumpers, which are from the recycled material that water tanks are made from.

He draws comparisons with IT and biotech where companies do not carry the baggage of five decades and therefore can be efficient and innovative. In the case of electric vehicles, Indian teams can draw on high skill levels in multiple disciplines like computer systems, software, aero-space engineering and a reliable base in automotive components.

"If 10 more players do this, India can become a leader in this kind of technology, like it has done in IT," says Maini.

Maini's own quest began when he went to the University of Michigan as a student of engineering. He got involved in a project on solar electric cars. It was chosen by the US department of energy among projects from 75 colleges. The goal was to make a car which would run on solar energy for 3,000 km across America. A year and a half was spent designing the vehicle and Maini's group won the race.

The student team from Michigan were sponsored to go to Australia to

participate in the solar challenge there in November 1990. The race was from Darwin to Adelaide and Maini's team finished third behind Honda.

"What really excited me was that we could run 3,200 km on solar energy and the potential for this in a country like India," says Maini.



Chetan Maini

After graduation Maini joined a start-up to produce electric cars. The firm was founded by Dr Lon Bell of Amerigon. But he felt the need for more specialised knowledge in electrical and automotive engineering and went back to campus, this time at Stanford. There he developed a hybrid-electric car with a small engine. This was in 1992. Now Toyota makes that kind of vehicle.

Maini went back to Amerigon and suggested to Dr Lon Bell that there was a huge potential market in electric vehicles in India and China because of the problems both countries had with fuel, infrastructure, pollution and congested cities.

It was at this time that Maini's father met Dr Bell and the Maini Amerigon Car Company was launched as a joint venture to produce electric vehicles. That was in 1994 and Reva was on the drawing board. The collaboration later took the current name of Reva Electric Car Company.

It took seven years to develop the Reva by teams in India and the US. Maini flew up and down four times in a year, often carrying components.

The project has spawned eight global patents and several other innovations, which make the car one-third the price of comparative technology elsewhere in the world.

The car is also relevant to Indian conditions by being small, noise-free, pollution-free and easy to maintain. Since there are few moving parts in the Reva, it can be kept in working condition quite easily.

If the government were to step in with an appropriate subsidy, the Reva could well be the people's car the country has been aspiring to have for the past three decades.

Maini's factory can produce 6,000 vehicles a year, but it rolls out merely a few hundred. As international demand picks up, his assembly line will get busy. But that means the world will use India's clean car even as Indians continue to buy the world's ageing dirty technologies.



Bob Hoekstra with the Reva bought by Philips

## 'It's easy to use. Like a bicycle'

**B**OB Hoekstra, CEO of the Philips Software Centre in Bangalore, drives a Reva. "It's a symbol of what people can do to contribute in a positive way to a better quality of life," he says.

About two years ago, on World Environment Day, Philips were wondering how to celebrate the occasion. "We saw a demonstration of the Reva that day and decided to buy one. It's like a symbol of the environmental responsibility we have as a company."

"It's a real city car and I use it for moving around in the city. It is very easy to use, almost like a bicycle. It's much easier to use than a larger car like the Safari, which takes up so much space. In Holland," says Hoekstra who is Dutch, "people use bicycles for commuting to office. Of course, here it is not easy to cycle on these roads."



# 'We started from scratch and there were no limitations'

Chetan Maini spoke to *Civil Society* on how the Reva was developed and how a market niche was carved out for it.

## Why is the Reva cheaper than any global product?

One, it is made in India. Secondly, we do a lot of technology patents critical for success. That's why it took us seven years of development. Typically, when people go into this they have not looked at certain key areas in technology breakthrough. That's what got us cost reduction. Thirdly, most car companies at that time were joint ventures and had brought a plant from Japan or America or Europe into India.

I think that's very different to what we did. We started from scratch designing the car so we had the chance to use unique processes that were apt for India. For example we used dent-proof body panels which were actually low cost but if you've already been doing steel panels for the last 30 years, you can't overnight switchover because what do you do with your equipment, engineers, everything?

In a new technology area, we had no baggage with us. We could start anything, do anything differently. There was no set way to do it. That's not true with ordinary cars. Our bumpers are recycled and made from the same process as you make tanks. No engineer looks at that though it's a process which is available in India and done very cheaply. We use different technologies because we start from scratch. All this gave us an advantage combined with our group strength of automotive components and batteries-operated materials handling equipment.

When you are doing new technologies in a large organisation your overheads, your cost structure is very different. As a small team you are working very quickly and there is only one goal—to make an electric car. For most large organisations, alternative fuels is a small part of what they do. At Reva, EV technology is everything.

## How much cheaper is the Reva as compared to an equivalent car made by say Ford?

Ford used to make a small car the same size as the Reva. It used to sell for \$ 25,000 in Europe. Today the Reva in Europe sells for seven thousand pounds roughly \$ 12,000. That's a huge difference. People there are very green oriented. It's got to make cost sense first and if people there had to make a decision at a similar price point, they would take a green product and that is what Reva was able to do. It was low-cost, good value for money and then, yes, also environment friendly.

## So it makes a lot of sense for our country which has a wide base of technological skills to support this kind of entrepreneurial activity?

I think there are two things there. First, why have we been successful in IT and biotech? It's because there wasn't fifty years of backlog. You could get people, you could create. Electric vehicles is one area where we as a country are on a par with the rest of the world.

The Reva draws on computer systems, software, aerospace engineering, an automotive components base: India as a country has strengths in all these. And since electric vehicles have not sold mass for 30 years we have no disadvantage compared to other countries.

## The Reva is a success in Europe and Japan. What's keeping it back in India?

We are really looking for clear government policies. That's not been very forthcoming. Secondly, I think the market has changed a lot in the last three or four years. Also, for us, being a small company to go national becomes difficult. We need to focus on a few cities, make that successful

because in a new technology it takes a lot more time for a customer to understand. Today someone comes to a showroom and they have no idea what an electric car is. So you are first educating them about the technology, the importance of pollution free city mobility and then they say 80 km is not enough. We rent the car to them for a week and they say: "You know I drop my kids. I get to work. Everything works fine." A lot of this takes time and I think it's an awareness issue more than anything else.

How do we create awareness? We let people drive the product. So we think the purchase decision is taking a lot more time but it's slowly creating awareness. I think if there were five more players it would have been easier because everyone would be creating awareness. We are small and that is why we want to be successful first in one city, for instance Bangalore, and then move to another city. In Europe we are focussing on London and hoping to get more electric cars there than any other company in the world.

## Is the lack of infrastructure an impediment?

Infrastructure is not a limitation. Charging the Reva is as easy as charging your cellphone. What UK has done is put plug points in all its key parking lots. We are actually working in Bangalore to install about a 100 plug points with smart cards. In theatres, in malls and in key government areas. I think if we do it successfully in one city (Bangalore) then we can replicate it in others. In Los Angeles, 500 plug points came up in no time. The top grocery store did it, the next store followed. One parking lot did it and then the others followed. It became a combination of government, society and industry coming together to say OK lets see how we can set the infrastructure up.



The Reva factory floor

## You spoke of auto majors blocking regulation in the US. Has anything like this happened here?

To be honest, I don't know.

## At no industry forum is the need for an electric car ever raised.

I think it's been a difficult task, but in the last six months there's been a change. Kapil Sibal is driving a Reva. It's a big change to say okay I want to showcase a new technology. It is a technology which can change the face of transportation as it is used tomorrow in three-wheelers and larger cars. Look at the history of the last few years. Although four stroke was available it took them 15 years to make the switch. Here you are talking of a completely new technology. Companies will invest for early returns. But if there are policies at the central level which point to where everyone will be in say five or ten years, then a lot more people will align themselves.

## Who are the people who buy the Reva?

In India anybody from 18 to 72 can drive the Reva as it is easy to drive being fully automatic. The biggest population is 35 to 45. Forty percent are second car buyers. In Britain, the Reva is used as a second car to commute around London. A lot of small businesses as well as councils also use the Reva.

## How long would it take electric to take on say Honda?

We have an advantage. Once it becomes a mass product then the big players will look at it. Today it's too small. We have done some international joint projects with global automotive players who want to understand how we have done things much lower and we have had discussions with companies in India who are very interested in partnering us for our technology. Today technology is considered different from the product.



# Art works as very special therapy

**Priyanka Malik**  
New Delhi

**T**HIS artist is ten years old. His mother says he finds it difficult to concentrate on any task for more than ten minutes. But, to everyone's amazement, he was engrossed, for three hours at a stretch, painting a portrait of the dark god Krishna.

Dr Meera Singh, secretary of Very Special Arts India (VSAI) is convinced that art has a magical effect on children with disability.

On 10 February, VSAI organised a two-day Sri Krishna Leela Art camp in New Delhi. Twelve hearing and mentally challenged artists were invited from special schools in the capital to participate. Writer and painter Bulbul Sharma supervised the camp. She was helped by the Sukla brothers, renowned artists from Orissa, who are hearing impaired.

VSAI's art camps are growing more and more popular. Working with eminent artists, children with disability learn self-expression, techniques and the importance of sharing. Many VSAI children have discovered hidden talents and bloomed.

"One of our children is 14 years old and hearing impaired. This budding artist had been winning prizes at all our art camps and was very bright at maths. Today we are testing her for computers so that she can pursue a graphic designing course at NIIT," said Meera Singh.

In an interview Meera Singh says, VSAI believes in staying small.

**What inspired you to make a difference to these gifted special children?**

We are a small group of professionals on the brink of retirement with our children well-settled. We

wanted to do something to contribute to society. That's when we met a young, enterprising lady from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi who introduced us to 'therapy through arts'. So in 1986 we started VSAI to promote the abilities of special children through the creative, visual and performing arts.

**What is the purpose of the art camp?**

We organise an art camp every year. In this camp, the kids were taught five techniques – painting without a



**Dr Meera Singh**

brush, batik on crushed paper, paper collage, canvas with oils and portraits. Working with eminent artists gives children an opportunity for self-expression. Most importantly, they learn to share their paints, brushes and colours. They eat together and interact with children who have other disabilities. They actually realise how lucky they are.



**Painting Sri Krishna on canvas**

It's great fun. I am 63, but I never get tired!

**Do you see these children getting admission into bigger design institutions?**

Oh yes most definitely! One child, who has been with us since 10 years, is mentally challenged. She had a tragic childhood, the memories of which haunted her.

It took us five years of interaction to get to know her whereabouts. One day while cooking 'poha' in the kitchen, she suddenly exclaimed "My mom used to cook this at home." Her roommates would make fun of her since they thought her good for nothing. But this child's gift was her voice! We encouraged her to sing. Today she performs at the India International Centre. She also goes to a normal school. Her roommates respect her. Treat children as human and create opportunities for them so that they can look forward to each new day.

## A CLEAN India with schools

**Civil Society News**  
New Delhi

**E**VERY person on this planet leaves behind a trail of dirt. How can adults ensure a less messy environment for the next generation? Ask children from Development Alternatives' CLEAN (Community Led Environment Action Network) programme. They have been helping communities spruce up neighbourhoods.

Every year, CLEAN's schoolchildren arrive in New Delhi to showcase their work at an annual jamboree. This year's theme was community action. Schoolchildren put up stalls at the Chinmaya Centre for World Understanding. Using charts, models, placards and pamphlets, they patiently explained to interested adults, the best way to catch rain, grow herbal gardens, respect rivers, nurture trees and recycle paper.

"See, Dwarka, where we study is a concrete jungle. So we are encouraging resident welfare associations to harvest water and grow trees," say girls at the Delhi Public School (DPS) stall. Every year during the festival of Van Mahotsav the school plants trees for residents. They are especially keen to green footpaths.

DPS Vasant Kunj, has been promoting

rooftop rainwater harvesting in an area where residents chase fleeing water tankers. "We educated the residents and told the government we want rooftop water harvesting done. We informed the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) too and we'll continue to pursue it, though our schemes are drowning in red tape," says a determined Eva. CLEAN schools in Indore spot a new building coming up and inform the builders about government incentives for rooftop water harvesting. One Indore school uses sawdust to clean floors. Another is helping villagers dig ponds to capture water.



**Dr Alexander Spachis at the CLEAN meet**

The Ayyagappa school in Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu, works with self-help groups to promote herbal medicines. "The project has made botany more interesting, but it's also made us aware of the problems local communities face," said Shivam, a student.

Many schools were making products from recycled paper or from waste. Carmel Convent in New Delhi was producing paper bags and giving these to local vendors. Sanskriti School was promoting natural colours and recycled products. There were schools doing vermi-composting and helping farmers. Many were promoting eco-friendly festivals.

The European Commission supports the programme and Dr Alexander Spachis, minister counsellor, delegation of the European Commission, was the chief guest. Impressed by CLEAN's efforts, Spachis said communities were pivotal for changing attitudes and for environmental sustainability and that CLEAN was helping to empower people.

Trophies were awarded to CLEAN schools in Gwalior, Dindigul and Aurangabad for community action. A stall on vermi-composting by CLEAN-Bangalore got the 'best stall' prize. Carmel Convent and Salwan Public School in Delhi got the first prize for clay modelling and placard making. Salwan Public School won the best CLEAN-Delhi school award.

(E-mail: mahluwalia@devalit.org)



## G-19 plans another world

Debra Anthony and José Antônio Silva  
Porto Alegre

NINETEEN high-profile World Social Forum (WSF) activists hammered out a consensus for a conference that prides itself on not producing any. Launched at a safe distance from WSF territory, the Porto Alegre Manifesto is a 12-point document that highlights the main themes discussed at WSF 2005.

"Now, nobody can say we have no programme," said Ignacio Ramonet, editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*, president of Media Watch Global and one of 19 who toiled to bring this gift of coherency to the WSF. "We have the Porto Alegre Consensus and we are sure that the great majority will agree with this proposal," he said.

The Consensus includes debt cancellation, adoption of the Tobin tax on financial money transfers, dismantling of tax havens, promotion of equitable forms of trade, a guarantee on the sovereignty of a nation's right to produce affordable food and police its food supply, implementation of anti-discrimination polices and democratisation of international organisations, including moving the United Nations headquarters far South from its current New York location.

The manifesto unleashed speculation about the purpose of this new group, which has been instantly dubbed the G-19. Most are founders of the WSF and International Committee (IC) members. Two Nobel Prize winners are included. Signatories include Samir Amin, Walden Bello, Bernard Cassen, Tariq Ali, José Saramago, Emir Sader and others.

Francisco (Chico) Whitaker, a non-signatory, played down the importance of the document though he did admit it carried weight because the G-19 is an influential group, which includes two Noble Peace Prize winners.

[www.choike.org](http://www.choike.org)

# Immigrants on leash

AS the European Union goes through a major transformation, by more than doubling its previous membership of 10 to its current of 25, there is a ripple of unease sweeping the continent and even crossing the channel. The richer European economies have their colonial histories to thank for the advantages that have led to their current rankings and ever since they realised that labour naturally follows capital, they have tried their best to restrict this movement and retain their advantage. Hence, the birth of immigration with all its current connotations.

International laws were created to give legitimacy to all of this but one can surely guess who were the powers that designed the laws. The same age-old fears of the haves, that the have-nots were out to rob them of their 'legitimate' wealth plays across the economic cross-section of the European family. Decades ago it was fear of hordes from Portugal sweeping across France and Germany. It didn't happen. Today it is the Polish and the other Eastern Europeans who loom large in the nightmares of their richer European cousins. While the extreme right envisage extreme barriers to prevent the East European invasion, the left (currently in power in the UK) has been devising whatever means it can from ID cards to stricter laws to prevent and restrict immigration.

Yet the conundrum of inviting, nay seducing, the highly skilled economic immigrant while rejecting the low-skilled one is still unresolved. The former is guaranteed to generate wealth for society. The low-skilled, while indispensable, since no white British, French, German or Dutch will do the dirty, difficult or dangerous jobs, at least not for the wages that are paid or in the conditions that are offered, could become a drain on a society that has built some social

safety nets for the poor and unemployed and at the same time mar the social and cultural fabric of a society that prides itself with a "higher quality of life". The solution across the board has been to turn a blind eye to illegal immigration. The UK, France, Germany... have all been consistently guilty of selfishly allowing illegal immigrants to fill menial job slots without which local economies would grind to an instant halt. Example: Sainsbury's chicken packing state-of-the-art Lloyd Maunder meat factory near Tiverton. Business gains by getting cheap, unregulated labour while government loses on taxes but isn't burdened with additional social responsibilities. When the economy is on the downturn, deportation becomes an option.

Unlike the UK, Spain has surprisingly taken another path. It has generously offered to regularise its over one million illegal immigrants, more than half of

whom are low-skilled. This left-of-centre government, new in office, took into account factors often forgotten by the scaremongers of the right. They are: the looming and drastic changes in demographics facing the developed world which will have major consequences on the revenue/expenses functions of social welfare; and legitimising otherwise illegal business operations and collecting taxes on them and reducing crime attached to them. The USA has long proved that immigration is where its real strength always lay, fuelling and rejuvenating its national engine. Last year it showed its ingenuity by offering citizenship to mercenary soldiers from Latin American countries when local recruitment dropped drastically because of opposition to the Iraq war. Hopefully, by the time the EU is ready to accept Romania, Bulgaria and most importantly, Turkey, they will have learnt something and welcome immigration instead of repelling it.

## LETTER FROM EUROPE



Riaz Quadir in Versailles

# Bolivia ends French water deal

WATER activists at the WSF celebrated one great victory. In El Alto, a controversial contract for water and sewerage services that the Bolivian government had signed with French transnational Suez was finally cancelled. In Bolivia, Federación de Juntas Vecinales (FEJUVE), ran a vigorous and successful movement which spread to villages and towns.

At a crowded meet on "Social Movement Strategies to Defend Water: Challenging the International Financial Institutions and Free Trade Agreements," activists were all ears as Abel Mamani, president, FEJUVE related a brief account of the anti-Suez campaign.

He said in 1997, former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's government signed a 30-year contract with the company Aguas del Illimani, controlled by Suez, to operate and expand drinking water and sewerage services in El Alto and La Paz. The World Bank, through the International Finance Corporation (IFC), partnered Aguas del Illimani.

The deal was pushed through despite public protest. Bolivia's legal provisions were even altered to suit the company. The contract ended up exclud-

ing poorer people in El Alto and La Paz from drinking water and sewerage services. The company and the government pretended everything was just fine. The truth was 70,000 people had no access to water because fees had been increased to \$ 445 dollars. Another 130,000 people, living within the concession area of Aguas del Illimani, were left without services. Suez claimed \$ 60 million was invested in infrastructure. But Mamani said only \$ 3 or 4 million had been invested. In 2003, Suez's earnings from the contract totalled some \$51.508 million, said Mamani.

"We believe the government consists not of politicians but us, the people," he said. In July 2004, FEJUVE strongly denounced the privatisation fiasco and the World Bank.

The government turned a deaf ear. On December 20, the people of El Alto went on an indefinite and peaceful civic strike to force the government to intervene. Although the government of Carlos Mesa tried twice to revise the contract with Suez-Aguas del Illimani, the transnational company rejected the authority of the Superintendency of Basic Sanitation, or of any other Bolivian official

body. On January 10, a general strike was launched in El Alto. Other Bolivian villages and cities joined in solidarity, demanding the right to water for all. Three days later, the government cancelled the contract with Suez-Aguas del Illimani.

The company has not accepted termination of the contract and has threatened to sue the Bolivian government for \$120 million dollars before the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes. Since the World Bank holds 8 per cent shares in Aguas del Illimani, if this legal action goes forward, the institution will be acting both as a judge and an interested party.

"We are not willing to pay anything, instead people should be suing the company for all damages caused," said Mamani. He sought support for forming a block that would oppose water transnationals.

Activists are asking for a United Nations treaty on the human right to water.

Several groups mooted the idea of forming a multinational lobbying network and campaigning for an international law that would unequivocally establish the right to water for all.

[www.choike.org](http://www.choike.org)



# Business

## BEYOND PROFIT

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

## The toilet tycoon of Delhi



LAKSHMAN

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**D**ELHI must have the most swanky outdoor advertising boards. They are backlit and framed by pleasing, red-brick structures that meld well into their surroundings. Now enter one of these red-brick structures. What do you find? A public toilet.

The one at Lodhi Garden, Delhi's historic green lung, for example, has polished brass signage and an eye-catching aquarium occupying an entire wall. The facility is well lit with sunlight streaming in from the bay windows. There is a hand faucet, rather than toilet paper. The pots are spotless and the green marble floor, dry. There is liquid soap and a drier, exhaust fans to suck out odours and ceiling fans to keep waiting customers cool. There is even a wall clock and a full-length mirror. Charges? Two rupees per use for the pot and a rupee each time for the urinal.

The facilities are the brainchild of Fuad Lokhandwala, a US-educated, self-made businessman, and Mehru, his wife, a self-taught designer.

Lokhandwala runs 25 such toilet facilities in Delhi.

**Fuad Lokhandwala in his spanking clean Lodhi Garden facility in Delhi**



Pioneer Advertising rents out the exteriors. The toilets have been built by Lokhandwala's firm, Fumes International. The hoardings bring in revenue, but the business goes much beyond that. It is about providing citizens a high quality service and running, at the same time, a self-sustaining, even profitable facility.

"Nearly 10,000 people use these loos every day. That's the figure from my ticket sales, but I suspect it's at least 50 per cent more," claims Lokhandwala, standing before one of the five toilets he has set up in Lodhi Garden. Just then a woman comes out and complains that the cashier at the toilet took money from her, but did not give her a coupon, confirming what Lokhandwala has just been saying.

"See, building these is easy, but maintaining them and running them professionally is a long haul," adds Lokhandwala, who now employs 10 supervisors and 150 janitors. He is on a quick inspection tour of the Lodhi Garden facilities. Four of the toilets do not smell. One does. Lokhandwala, as he steps into his Mercedes Benz, is quick to admit that he has a long way to go.

But the one smelly toilet does not detract from the fact that Lokhandwala is providing a public service that is way ahead of anything that government agencies have to offer.

A gentleman at Bahri's magazine stall in posh Khan Market, for example, never ever used the NDMC (New Delhi Municipal Corporation) toilet in the complex. Now he regularly uses the Fumes toilet. Natasha Chona, who owns a restaurant in Khan Market, says she, too, depends on the Fumes facility when in the past she would trek to the toilets in the nearby Taj Ambassador hotel.

The Fumes facility in the parking lot of the Indira Gandhi International Airport offers hot water showers for a charge of Rs 5. "I can't give you soap and a towel for that price. The shower facility at the Frankfurt airport cost me five Euros, that amounts to Rs 350!" says Lokhandwala.

Lokhandwala has come up with a business model where the government is now seen as providing high quality services and even earning revenue for that while making no investments of its own. "I'm told this was one of the feel-good factors that brought the Congress

*(Continued on next page)*



# HOW TO RAISE MONEY



## CEOs cook for a cause



Civil Society News  
New Delhi

**C**AUSES need money. How do you get people to chip in? NGOs and change leaders often have to go to great lengths to fund a new idea. It isn't that money isn't available. The problem is in getting to the right people and making them feel good about their contribution.

Prema Sagar of Genesis PR decided to do a fundraiser for her Genesis Foundation by asking CEOs to become chefs for one Sunday afternoon. The Genesis Foundation pays for the treatment of medically challenged children in the hope that they can live normal lives.

For Sagar, getting the CEOs wasn't particularly difficult. They were mostly her clients. It wasn't a great deal of work to sell a place at a table for Rs 10,000 and have the CEOs do some fun cooking as well.

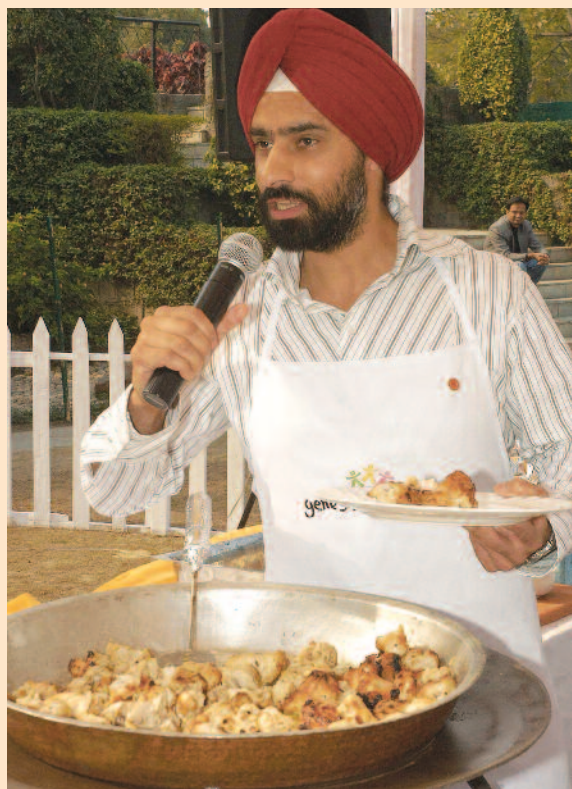
We don't know for sure how much was raised, but given the

line-up the sum would definitely be substantial.

Oracle's Shekar Dasgupta and BILT's Gautam Thapar and Jyoti Sagar booked entire tables. In addition, support came from corporates like Alchemy Pan India Consultants, Avian Media, British Gas, Backstage Productions, Foster's India, ITC Hotels, Lighthouse Partners, Mawana Sugars, Moet Hennessy, Petronet LNG, Reebok, UT Starcom, WNS Knowledge Centre to name a few.

And what did the CEO chefs serve up at the Maurya Sheraton's Nandiya Gardens? Nigel Shaw of British Gas did a great Lamb with Spring Onions in Garlic Sauce while in the Chinese section Ruchir Godura of UT Starcom created a spicy Kung Bao Chicken. Preety Kumar of Amrop with Natalino Duo of India.com did a pasta followed by Strawberry and Peach Flan. Ranjan Pal, formerly of Pulsar Knowledge, with Sheila Singla of Chrsyalis HRD, did a Shrimp Jambalaya. From Siddharth 'Chikoo' Shriram of Mawana Sugar and Subinder Singh of Reebok came Galoti Kebabs and Murg Malai Kebabs.

So, if you've got a good cause and are looking for people with hearts of gold to back it, may be Prema's idea of a fundraiser is something you could try. As for getting to all those generous CEOs, we wish you luck.



(Continued from previous page)

government in Delhi back to power in the in the last elections," he chuckles. He has a memorandum of understanding and build-operate-transfer contracts with the various Delhi authorities. The investment in each facility varies, but Lokhandwala pegs it at an average Rs 7 lakh.

Lokhandwala mostly converts existing government toilet facilities. He pays a monthly licence or lease fee that ranges from Rs 5000 to Rs 50,000, depending on the location and the government agency. He, in turn, gets between Rs 40,000 and Rs 80,000 for the advertising space. Lokhandwala claims that his average pay-back period is two years. His average monthly expense, including electricity (for the ad space too), salary and maintenance (he claims he gets the buildings painted four times a year), is Rs 25,000.

It took Lokhandwala six months to get his first

contract. In 1998,

when India had just

tested a nuclear bomb,

Lokhandwala saw a

Jay Leno show on

CNBC Late Night, in

which Leno joked that

India was a nuclear

power, but it had no

loos. The "joke" hit a

raw nerve in

Lokhandwala, who

called up K J

Alphonse, the activist

bureaucrat and an

a c q u a i n t a n c e .

Alphonse introduced

him to Ram

Jethmalani, the fire-

brand criminal lawyer

and then minister for urban affairs. Jethmalani was

genial with the Bishop Cotton School educated,

cigar-smoking Lokhandwala, but a trifle patronising.

"You don't look like a guy who can clean loos.

You NRIs want to come to India and convert it into

another America. This is a dirty country and difficult

to change," he told Lokhandwala.

Lokhandwala was back again in 10 days, armed

with an acrylic model of his toilet. Jethmalani bit the

hook. He introduced him to B P (Bobby) Mishra, then

chairman of NDMC. "He was a man who wanted

new ideas," Lokhandwala chuckles, recollecting the

meeting. They haggled back and forth. The future

toilet tycoon wanted 50 facilities at one go. Mishra

was willing to give him only seven.

But the differences were soon resolved. When

Lokhandwala was looking for advertisers for the

first loo, Mishra called up the managing director of

the State Bank of India and it was the first company

to advertise.

The Khan Market facility was the test site. It

worked. But, in spite of all his haggling,

Lokhandwala's idea remains unprotected and open

to imitation. At least 10 others have got similar

contracts. He now has to bid for the licence fee and

has just submitted a proposal to transform 190

Municipal Corporation of Delhi toilets. "Any loo

that stinks is not mine," says Lokhandwala, clearly

miffed. "They don't understand that this is not a

business. The standards in this country have to be

raised. This is about delivering a high quality, self-

sustaining service to the citizens."

Lokhandwala says he wants to work with large

volumes now - about 500 instead of one at a time -

because he can then set up a training institute to

ensure service standards. Are the authorities

listening?

**Lokhandwala converts government facilities. He pays a monthly licence or lease fee that ranges from Rs 5000 to Rs 50,000.**



# Follow Footprint: Non-profit ventures need patient capital

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**K**IRAN Menon started The Footprint a year ago to assist corporates come up with a strategy for their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and help them implement it. Menon got this inspiration when, as a student, he worked with AISEC, a multinational student organisation and helped volunteers across the world work with Indian NGOs. He then felt that the development sector needs "patient capital" and not grants. Corporates and other donors need accountability and reporting from the projects they invest in. So he has come up with a blueprint to float a social venture fund. Excerpts from an interview about his plans.

## How did the idea of a social venture fund come up?

We started The Footprint about a year ago in the still unknown field of corporate social responsibility. We realised certain glaring similarities in the way companies approached the issue. We found out that most of them start by giving money. That is the easiest 'method' for them to contribute to social development. However, we were looking to advise them on more complex issues. And through consistent research I learnt more and more about the Social Venture Capital movement in Europe and USA. I spoke to a few people. Seems like a feasible idea, was their first reaction.

One of the key focus areas that we were researching was capacity-building among NGOs. Therefore the Social Venture Fund idea seemed to fit perfectly like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle coming together.

## When you say capacity-building for NGOs what exactly do you mean? What areas?

We are fundamentally seeking to build on their present capabilities in goal setting, strategy, performance measurement and planning, revenue generation, external relationships, human resource management, organisational structure and systems and infrastructure --the whole gamut of management and operations. The vision for the Fund and the Incubation and Capacity Building assistance is to make the portfolio orgs financially sustainable and enjoy exponential growth in operations.

## How do social venture funds in Europe and the US operate? Will you fund the entire needs of an organisation to begin with? At what stage will you begin?

The way it works is very similar to a venture capitalist in business. As the investor we invest in the potential of the organisation. Therefore we will not possibly look at seed funding but other stages. And the period for funding will be pre-determined-- for a period of three to five years at the end of which there will be an exit strategy.

## The venture can be both for-profit and non-profit? What will the exit strategy be in either case? Are you looking for returns for the investment too?

At the present moment we are looking at investing in not-for-profit ventures, but those that have the capacity or potential to achieve financial self suffi-

ciency through different means. We will contemplate moving into for-profit social enterprises at a later stage.

This will be an investment specific strategy. However, we will aim to define an exit period that will be appropriate to see the organisation through most of its capacity-building initiatives and on its road to achieve financial self sustainability.

Our Venture Fund model is something new to the Indian environment. We are going to bring in people with experience. We are in dialogue with



**investor, we invest in the potential of the organisation. Therefore, we will not possibly look at seed funding, but at other stages and the period for funding will be predetermined - for a period of three to five years at the end of which there will be an exit strategy. We will contemplate moving into for-profit social enterprises at a later stage.**

leaders who run such enterprises. Therefore the eventual team will be one that comprises of individuals with specific core strengths who come together to manage the fund -- from corporate investor relations to capacity building.

## How did you come up with the details for the fund?

We did a lot of research on how companies and NGOs work with each other. Most often their relationships fall out. We interacted a great deal with top NGOs and the biggest corporate houses in India while at AISEC.

## What kind of assignments are you doing in CSR now?

The work that we do is very niche in India. We provide advisory, research, implementation and social investment management services for organisations with a goal to integrate sustainable management in every process and technology. For example, a com-

pany with 600 people, which is a large investor in social development, wants its employees involved. There were rather a handful of employees who were involved, however the vision for us is to increase it so that most, if not all, the employees are involved in social development...

We first started the project with initiating dialogue with more than 600 employees of the company - to understand their views on how they would want to be involved, what would they face as constraints, which issue would they want to support. It is imperative that you understand what the employees want before tying up with an NGO and then starting off programs. We are presently working with three companies from different sectors.

## How is your work different from what Partners in Change does?

Partners in Change primarily works on policy making and developing partnerships with companies and NGOs. We are working only on developing partnerships. But our key differentiator is that we work from the company's side -- by developing implementation plans. We develop strategies and programs that make business sense as well.

When an IT products company looks at taking ICT to the rural communities -- it is expanding its network. It is addressing the 'Bottom of the

**The way it works is very similar to a venture capitalist in business. As the**

**investor, we invest in the potential of the organisation. Therefore, we will not possibly look at seed funding, but at other stages and the period for funding will be predetermined - for a period of three to five years at the end of which there will be an exit strategy. We will contemplate moving into for-profit social enterprises at a later stage.**

Pyramid' through 'Sustainable Livelihoods' programs. At the same time it is expanding its market -- even if it is at a price that is lower than its normal market price.

## What is the corpus of the fund?

We are initially aiming at close to Rs 1 crore a year as an investment corpus. It has got to be in this bracket to be sustainable and make a difference. We will invest in only about three or four organisations a year!

## Is this fund going to be like the Ashoka Foundation?

No it will not be like Ashoka. We invest in the organisation not in the person.

Therefore one person from the management of the fund will be responsible for the portfolio organisation as its advisor, board member and consultant.



# Doors meet is coming to Delhi

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**Y**OU have a car that is not being used for almost six hours during daytime. A lady in the locality needs a car to pick up someone from the railway station. Can she borrow your car for three hours?

Yes she could, if there was an exchange system and if the car insurance supported someone who was using a car for just a few hours.

According to John Thackara, this is already beginning to happen in Germany and Holland. "I live in Amsterdam and don't own a car. When I need a car I just borrow one from Green Wheels, a company



that is a joint venture with the Amsterdam government. The government allows these cars to park at concessional rates in protected spaces across the city.



**John Thackara**

I can get insurance. Now what is happening? The car has not been re-designed, neither has the city. But it is infrastructure coming up supporting innovation, whether it is technology or government policy," he explains.

According to him, design is not about experts helping non-experts. It is about providing tools and infrastructure so people can create services for themselves.

Jogi Panghaal, a visiting professor at National Institute of Design (NID) and SPA (School of Planning and Architecture) points out that Ezio Manzini, a professor of sustainable design at the Milan Polytechnic

Institute, wants a way of life where there are no products at home. "Instead of washing machines in every home he wants a washing service that is designed differently. That would make less demands on natural resources," he points out.

On his website Thackara describes himself as a symposiarch – that is, someone who designs collaborative events, projects, and organisations. In these, designers, grassroots innovators, and citizens, develop new service concepts.

In 1993, Thackara started Doors of Perception from the Netherlands Design Institute. It was a conference meant to discuss how technologies like the Internet and mobile computing would sprout innovation. Since 2000, Doors has had three Doors East conferences in India. The last one was held in Bangalore in 2003. This year Doors is being held in Delhi, in March. The theme is "Infra" – infrastructure for social innovation.

Asked to elaborate, Thackara talks about a system he came across, designed in the UK by Wingham Rowan called Neighbourhood e-Markets (NEMs). "People talk of eBay. In three or four years there is going to be an eBay for exchange of time. If you have six hours can you exchange that with someone who grows tomatoes in the local garden or a car mechanic?"

Anil Gupta, a professor at IIM Ahmedabad, who built the Honey Bee Network is going to be a speaker at Doors. The Indian Society of Agricultural Professionals (ISAP) another network started by Sunil Khairnair, has connected people related to agriculture.

Will the conference be able to mesh these carefully? "That is a concern," says Vibodh Parthasarathy, a graduate of development studies from The Hague in Netherlands and a communications design teacher at Jamia Millia, who was present at Doors last year. He says that Doors traditionally has been where industry and design meets. But if we are to discuss social innovation, a lot of civil society organisations and the government have to be present.

## 'Social innovation is key'

**Vidya Viswanathan**  
New Delhi

**A**DITYA Dev Sood is an architect and an anthropologist. He has set up the Centre for Knowledge Studies (CKS), a user research consulting company in Bangalore. He uses ethnographic techniques to observe users and consults for technology companies like Nokia and HP. He is the co-host of Doors of Perception, a cutting-edge design conference taking place in Delhi this March.

### What is Doors of Perception about?

The conference has always had an orientation towards global cultural values, ecological design and themes of sustainability. Can emerging technology suggest new ways of working and living that are more human and humane? How do we imagine and then design such technology?

Technology has the potential to become increasingly inclusive. More people can participate in technology mediated experiences. They don't have to have reading and writing skills or specialised training or device literacy.

India has crossed the 50 million mark in mobile phones. There are now more mobile phone users than, you would say, middle class citizens in India. So the mobile phone for me is an extraordinary platform because it is the most complicated technology platform that has achieved this kind extraordinary penetration and adoption. And we are going to see it being used by households and individuals who have never used any technology device as sophisticated and complex. The device really should not be called a media-mixing device. I think people are going to discover extraordinary applications and uses for it in the next several years.



**Aditya Dev Sood**

The Doors conference in Delhi is going to be about infrastructure for social innovation...

Yes, the one word tag is 'Infra.' Infra, I take to mean supra. We look at what are the appropriate relationships between different kinds of institutions and societies: schools and colleges, technological companies, service providing companies, policy makers, educationists, non-profit entities... How do these different sectors and constituencies work together and how can they interact and promote innovation. So that is broadly the subject of the conference.

### And how is it going to be explored?

We expect a cross section of students from design, architecture, new media, communications and film studies to

get involved and think of design from a multidisciplinary standpoint. In our education system, often, architects don't get a chance to meet filmmakers who don't get to meet product designers. We're able to aggressively mix and match all of them and we offer an opportunity to work with an international expert for three days.

We are having a social innovation salon. This is a five-day exhibit open to the public. People who are not registered as speakers but are attending, will be able to show, in a peer-2-peer way, innovation software, innovative designs, or user experiences, or other projects that they may have done elsewhere.

We also have a kind of project clinic. Six interesting grassroots or business model innovations will be presented publicly. They will then receive criticism and feedback by the public who will be a sort of peer jury. It's going to be an opportunity for the people to roll up their sleeves and talk in a very productive and bold way on how to improve that project and not simply appreciate it silently.



# Perspectives

## CATCHING TRENDS

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

# Do economists have real answers?

ARUN MAIRA



## Let's Talk

wanted to study economics but I studied physics in St. Stephen's College because the Principal would not let me switch from physics to economics. He said physics would teach me to think clearly, which would stand me in good stead through life. For 40 years, I have worked as a manager and a consultant to business corporations. I have thought a lot about the role of corporations in society. For the past few years, I have been reading and thinking a lot about economics. I was at the World Economic Forum in Davos last month. At the commencement, several hundred business leaders voted in a 'global town hall' meeting to determine issues uppermost on their minds. Clear winners were: 'poverty', 'equitable globalisation', and 'climate change'. "The World Economic Forum now sounds like the World Social Forum," a journalist commented. While some people would be delighted with this apparent change of heart amongst profit-obsessed businessmen, others, like *The Economist*, would be aghast. In its recent issue focussing on Corporate Social Responsibility, the journal argues that good economics (citing Adam Smith to explain good economics, as it often does) requires that corporate leaders' social responsibility must be limited to the pursuit of profits for their shareholders and nothing else.

On the same January days, meeting in warm Porto Alegre, far from frigid Davos, participants at the World Social Forum slept on the ground in tents and railed against the corporations of the world and berated their erstwhile hero, President Lula of Brazil, for betraying them by going to Davos. And at Davos, a prominent social worker (from India) chastised business leaders for not coming down to earth to listen to the people on the ground. Perhaps the time has come for the two forums to listen to each other and shape one World Forum. And for fundamentalist economists to question their orthodoxies and build more real models of the world, rather than abstractions based on false assumptions about the nature of man. Perhaps the most erroneous assumption in economics is that men and women take purely rational decisions driven only by self-interest. If this were so, why do economists, like those who write for *The Economist*, and financial analysts who believe in the sagacity of markets, have to explain the changes in market indices with words such as 'moods', 'sentiment', 'fear' and 'confidence' – words more associated with emotions than pure reason?

They do this because they do not have models to explain even economic phenomena such as the 'behaviour' (another tricky word) of stock markets in purely rational terms.

Economists tend to over-simplify their assumptions to enable mathematical modelling. For example, *The Economist* says, "Measuring profits is fairly straightforward; measuring environmental protection and social justice is not. The difficulty is partly that there is no single yardstick for measuring progress in those. How is any given success for environmental action to be weighed against any given advance in social justice – or for that matter, against any given change in profits? Measuring profits – the good old single bottom line – offers a pretty clear test of business success." This is sheer intellectual laziness. If Newton had decided to ignore the concept of gravity merely because, when it occurred to him, he did not have the means to measure it, or Faraday ignored the force of electromagnetic induction because he did not have instruments to gauge it, physics could not have developed its power to change man's world.



The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre

Market movements are caused by perceptions, as well as perceptions about others' perceptions. Which causes markets to swing up and down, even when there is no change in the 'fundamentals' (to use another popular term amongst financial analysts and economists, and also a vague term because they cannot agree what these fundamentals are). Businessmen and investors cite the need for confidence and trust as factors that influence their investment decisions. And businessmen would like their stakeholders, be they investors, customers, suppliers, or employees, to have confidence and trust in them because this gives their business economic advantage by way of lower costs in attracting capital, acquiring customers, and retaining employees. Hence they spend time and money in confidence building measures, such as brand creation and advertising, which are considered necessary for business. Then

why are 'corporate social responsibility' programmes, which aim to build bridges between corporations and society, dismissed by some economists as bad for business?

In his book, "Complexity", M. Mitchell Waldrop describes a meeting between physicists and economists (including some Nobel Prize winners on both sides) that took place at the Santa Fe Institute some years ago. As the axioms and theorems and proofs marched across the overhead projection screen, the physicists could only be awestruck at (the economists') mathematical prowess – awestruck and appalled. "They were almost too good," says one young physicist, who

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# Fighting corruption with Gandhi

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



## The Right To Know

**M**ahatma Gandhi is still alive. His strategy of satyagraha still works. And it works better than any other method.

On Republic Day, a large number of people in Sundernagari, a resettlement colony in East Delhi, decided that they would forego their ration entitlements (wheat, rice and sugar) for one month in February to

condemn the repeated violence on the people fighting against corruption in the Public Distribution System in Delhi and to express their solidarity.

In the last few months, there have been a series of violent attacks on people who had been exposing corruption in the distribution of rations to the poor people. The last attack took place on 30 December when the throat of a 20-year old girl in Sundernagari was slit by vested interests. Naturally, the people of Sundernagari were enraged. They wanted to protest. But the question was, how do they register their protest effectively? Should they take out a peaceful rally or should they sit on a day-long dharna? A series of meetings took place in Sundernagari in which this issue was discussed in detail. It was felt that a rally or a dharna of a few hundred people would hardly make a difference to the powers that be. The people said in these meetings that they wanted to take rations only if it were given

to them with honesty and dignity. They did not want rations if it involved violence, corruption and abuses. It was also expressed in these meetings that the shops exist as long as the people take rations. The Food Department officials also exist so long as people take rations. If the people decided not to do so, neither would the shops exist nor would the jobs of Food officials. This thought gave that spark. It gave strength to the people. It was decided that the people should forego their ration entitlements for a month to express their solidarity and to condemn violence. It was a novel way of expressing protest, a gentleman's way, by undergoing self-sacrifice.

During Republic Day celebrations, speaker after speaker exhorted a gathering of about 700 people to forego their rations for a month. The decision was formalised and a letter sent to the Chief Minister of Delhi. And it had impact.

Since 1 February, almost unbelievable things are happening in Sundernagari. The Delhi Government

is keeping a strict vigil on each of the shops. The Food Inspector is moving around with a video camera to record the movement in each shop. The Assistant Commissioner and the Food Officer are moving around to ensure that the shops are open and there is sufficient stock. The shops which used to open for just a few days in a month are opening daily (even during the lunch hour!). The supplies never used to arrive before the 25th of any month. This month, the supplies reached on the 1st day of February in all the shops. Earlier, the shopkeepers would abuse the poor people and cheat them, when they would go to the shops to take rations. The same shop owners are going to each house and pleading before the people to come and take rations. A daily report of the list of people who took rations in each shop is being prepared and pasted on a notice board outside respective shops. A copy of this report is also being sent to the top authorities in the Delhi Government.

Sundernagari has a population of almost a lakh of people out of which 9000 families possess ration

unscrupulous elements. However, the Chief Minister assured that necessary arrangements would be made to allow people to inspect distribution records on the 5 March. The people will be able to see whether the rations foregone by them had been returned to the government.

Normally, the ration shop owners sell some rations to the regular card-holders and sell the rest in the black market by making false entries in their records. In the month of February, their illicit income is taking a severe beating because daily stock position and distribution records are being put up on the notice boards every day. They are unable to fudge entries this month because they know that their records would be thrown open for public inspection on 5 March. If any card-holder finds a wrong entry made in his name on that day, the shop could face cancellation and criminal charges. During February, the regular incomes of the shop owners has also taken a beating since a number of families are foregoing their entitlements.

This whole exercise raises some interesting questions. All this while, the people kept pleading with the government to provide them proper rations but the government claimed helplessness. The government forwarded complex theories on how there were serious systemic deficiencies and how the present system could not be made to work. But when the people declared their intentions to forego their rations, how did the same system suddenly start functioning? On receiving clear directions from his bosses, the local Assistant Commissioner came back to his area and simply directed all the shop owners that they had to deliver. And strangely, the shop owners followed his directions. Why is it that the shop owners suddenly decide to fall in line? Why is



cards. It is not that 100 percent of people in Sundernagari are foregoing rations. By the middle of February, as per government records, almost 2500 families had picked up their entitlements. But it should not be looked at as a game of numbers. It should not be looked at from the perspective of losses or victories. Such people, who wished to condemn violence, are doing so by foregoing their rations. The number of such people could be a few hundred or a few thousand. It would be cruel and unjust if we reduced it to an exercise in numbers. If a poor family is foregoing a month's ration, it is much more than a symbolic gesture. The sacrifice of each of these people needs to be recognised and appreciated. The reasons why they are doing this needs to be appreciated. And if things do not improve in future, this may be the first step to a more intense struggle.

A number of people had expressed fears that the rations that they forego might be siphoned off by

it that the same Assistant Commissioner was unable to tame shop owners earlier? This means that he has the necessary powers and resources to provide good governance. He did not have the intentions earlier.

This is true for all spheres of governance. Aren't the constraints talked about by the governments just excuses? The governments do have the capacity to provide clean and just governance. What lacks is its purity of intentions.

It also shows the people's power. That the people are not helpless. That the role of the people in making democracy work is critical and that when the people act, the vested interests run for cover. The people will have to tell the governments in an unambiguous and determined manner – "We want clean and just governance. If you can provide it with honesty and dignity, we will accept it. Else we do not want your services." This simple statement made with determination has the potential to shake the existence of the governments.



# Jobs and London's Boost Bond

RAM GIDOOMAL



## Through NR Eyes

In fact the Maharashtra scheme created more problems than it solved as shown by a study by World Bank economists Martin Ravallion, Gaurav Dutt and Shubham Chaudhuri in 1993.

The problems of unemployment, and the growing rich poor divide are not unique to any one country or region. It was a particularly severe problem in Britain in the 1970's and '80's and resulted in the famous advert put out by the Conservatives when they were in opposition: 'Labour isn't working'.

Around the world, it is in our cities that we see wealth and poverty coexisting side by side. The slums of Mumbai or Delhi may seem more obvious but the reality is the same everywhere, including Britain, Europe and the USA.

Take London. For centuries it has been a city of extremes, where wealth and poverty co-exist. Charles Booth's 'poverty map' of London in 1889-90 shows very high levels of poverty, alongside wealth and privilege, the City of London generally being a symbol of wealth.

Nineteenth-century poverty was often due to exploitation of employees and the lack of an adequate system of worker protection and social rights. The record of the past is sobering.

Today, the differential is linked to the status of the City of London as a world financial centre. Salaries and bonuses maintain parity, of necessity, with equivalent institutions in New York, Geneva, Hong Kong and the like. In recent years the inequality gap has widened. London became a more divided city between 1981 and 1991. The gap between the affluent and the poor widened, as did the gap between the affluent areas and the poor areas.

The life expectancy of a baby boy born in Newham is likely to be almost six years less than one born in Westminster (a decade ago the gap was only five years). A baby born in Hackney has more than double the risk of dying in the first year of life than one born in Bexley.

Next door to the City, the Boroughs of Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Newham are the first, second and third most disadvantaged local authority districts in the country, measured by a range of social indicators including employment, health and housing. Hackney, for example, has the highest number of deprived housing estates in the country. Yet Hackney lies just two hundred metres north of Liverpool Street Station, and Tower Hamlets begins only yards away across Bishopsgate. Modern London is, in truth, a tale of two cities.

I was intrigued to read that India's coalition government, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), wants to guarantee employment for the rural poor along the lines of a similar measure that the state of Maharashtra invoked following the drought in 1972-1973. At that time the state of Maharashtra issued a standing guarantee of employment, at the legal minimum wage to anyone who wanted work.

While such measures may be justified in times of distress, the dangers of such policy initiatives were highlighted by the Famine Commission set up by India's British rulers as the devastating Indian famine of 1877-79 came to a close. The Famine Commission argued then that if the poor were entitled to relief in times of distress, they might soon demand relief at all times.

Two-thirds of households interviewed did not have any member in receipt of earned income (Shoreditch New Deal Trust). 'People in many areas of London are excluded from the benefits of the wealth generated by its growing economy'. Yet many employers have to import foreign workers to fill vacancies, or employ teenagers on gap year.

### Ethnic Issues

In Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets, unemployment among ethnic minority groups is higher than that in the white population and also higher than the UK population as a whole. Among Afro-Caribbean East Londoners it is four times the level (15-30%) for the white population and among Asian young people the rate is 20-30%. Inequality leads to resentment; the communal cake is perceived as being unfairly divided. In recent years the depth of that resentment has been demonstrated by urban unrest and violence.

The cost of accommodation remains the major burden for those in the poorer sectors. High property prices mean people spend a higher proportion of their income on housing in the capital than elsewhere. Overcrowding is great and families with children are the most overcrowded.

### What can be done about it?

One approach that appealed to me is the concept of the 'Employment Bond'

Encouraged by the good results in Sheffield and Newcastle I agreed to chair the steering committee that introduced the idea into East London under the



LAKSHMAN

name: Boost London ([www.boostlondon.org.uk](http://www.boostlondon.org.uk)). The Bond is now being introduced in Edinburgh, Bristol, North West London and several other cities and regions across the United Kingdom. It is a simple but effective approach to tackling some of the problems we face in our cities, by trying to bring a direct connection between 'rich' and 'poor' – the two cities that exist side by side.

The concept is simple - invite people to invest in a bond from which they will not receive any interest but are guaranteed the return of their capital at the end of five years. Their money is used to buy property, which will appreciate in value. The proceeds - and the building themselves - are used to

address unemployment, the root of so many urban problems. The aim is the creation of opportunity and getting people back to work. There is a range of projects, including support for budding entrepreneurs, workspace developments, new small business support, community-run enterprises and employability agencies; the bond also supports mixed developments including social housing, retail units and childcare centres, and work with local voluntary and community organisations. Since its launch last year, the Boost Bond has attracted just under £2million and the team is currently implementing some of the above ideas in East London. The three Bond issues to date have so far helped over 800 unemployed people into work and released over £3.5 million towards capital projects.

### What does it have to do with me?

For many who work in the City, it's simply a place where their work happens to be. 'I come in by train from outside London. I go to the office. I deal with clients on the other side of the world. Then I go home again' But 'No man is an island', as the poet John Donne observed. 'I am involved with mankind.' We're inter-connected. The security staff in the office foyer, the man or woman behind the station news kiosk, the retailer who sells us a lunchtime sandwich

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remembers shaking his head in disbelief. "It seemed as though they were dazzling themselves with fancy mathematics, until they couldn't see the forest for the trees...I thought they often weren't looking at what the models were for, and what they did, and whether the underlying assumptions were any good. In a lot of cases, what was required was just common sense."

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a fundamentalist school of capitalism has dominated both politics and management practice: the school in which markets are supreme, nations are merely economies, corporations are merely profit-making machines, and citizens are merely consumers. This school traces its recent political roots to Thatcherism and Reaganomics, named after the two leaders who together stood against the 'Evil Empire', which, in their minds, was as much the military empire of the Soviet Union as it was the socialist view of economics prevailing within their own countries.

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Fukuyama claimed that history had ended because there was no longer any threat to capitalism, and the Washington Consensus of capitalism prevailed

unchallenged. But there are as many schools of capitalism as there are varieties of Heinz pickles, said Harold Minsky, the economist. Therefore, why cannot a country that provides social services through the public sector and does not priva-

## For a better world to emerge, as well as a more credible, scientific, and human model of economics, the participants of the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum must enter into a dialogue.

tise in a big bang, describe itself as capitalist without an apology to The Economist? Fundamentalist economists who came to reign after 1989, and against whose domination civil society has begun to react, should read the book, "20:21 Vision, Twentieth-Century Lessons For The Twenty-First Century", by Bill Emmott, the editor-in-chief of The Economist, no less. Emmott says that capitalism has to evolve much further, and if

it does not it will remain under threat, because the predominant school of capitalism is "unpopular, unstable, unequal and unclean".

"Human society is also about respect and relationships, not merely profits," says Francisco Whitaker, founder of the World Social Forum. A better model of human society (and the business corporation) can emerge from a dialogue between experts who, like the blind men confronting the elephant, see only a narrow view of reality from the perspective of their own discipline.

For a better world to emerge, as well as a more credible, scientific, and human model of economics, the participants of the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum must enter into a dialogue, rather than harangue and denigrate each other, as they are wont to. My hope is that India will take the lead to sponsor this integrative World Forum and also create an inclusive model for development for its own development, integrating the country's social, economic, and political development. A better idea is needed than what economic theory has been able to provide so far.

*(Arun Maira is chairman of the Boston Consulting Group in India. This is the second instalment of the exclusive column he is writing for Civil Society.)*

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– such people are part of our lives and we are part of theirs. And that isn't just theory. The links are immensely practical. There is a relationship – we need each other!

The concept of relationship is central to the Boost Bond. This is not only something between individuals. It affects whole societies. It's through relationships that we have a sense of identity, of purpose, of what we are becoming. Relationships define not only our interpersonal lives but also the structure and context of how we live.

If we ignore the neighbours next door, meaningful relationships are unlikely to develop. That will be a loss on a number of levels. Relationships only work on the basis of parity. There has to be mutual respect and an acknowledgement of interdependence. Otherwise relationship-making is almost impossible.

Such thinking implies a radical change in how businesses have traditionally seen themselves- it leaves little room for old-style paternal, one way patronage.

We called the East London Bond 'Boost' because there is much excellent work already being done. There are already large numbers of initiatives in which business is actively addressing the needs of stakeholders, and in which there is no financial

inducement for the sponsoring party. A great deal of expertise, time and money has already been invested. (In 2001-2, around £300 million and 70,000 hours of staff time were given by City firms to East End organisations and projects.)

The Boost Bond supports existing schemes and funds new projects in employment and enterprise development. Its distinctive contribution is the emphasis on relationship and partnership.

Mentoring is one of the keys to developing effective relationships. Clients are introduced to experienced advisers in a one-to-one teaching situation. They are available for advice, encouragement and practical help, in a relationship that is intended to run for as long as needed.

For example, The Prince's Trust, which has been responsible for many start-ups by young people in East London, assigns mentors at the earliest stages of an application for a grant – a mentor is assigned to help the applicant prepare the business plan which is an essential part of the application process.

The Boost Bond is just one contribution to the immense task of developing fairer relationships. But it is significant, because it is not only a financial measure. It has huge symbolic value, and by its very existence it creates relationship.

I am reminded of one of the proposals that

emerged from the conference that I attended in Delhi last year: 'Twinning' links between cities in South Asia and the Diaspora.

### We propose:

Establishing 'twinning' links between cities in South Asia and the Diaspora that have been identified as more susceptible to communal violence and those with good records of community relations, in order to establish sources of conflict and establish appropriate forums for communication

Perhaps we should aim for joint Bond issues between cities facing similar issues in the Diaspora and India as one way of implementing this proposal.

The people with the relevant skills are there. While writing this column, I came across the story of Anshu Jain, a rising star at Deutsche Bank in the City of London, who brings in 'about half of the Frankfurt-based bank's pre-tax profit' (according to the story in Bloomberg Markets magazine). But the challenge is to harness the potential of NRI's like Anshu - who is just one of many successful NRI's that we find today in the City of London and other financial capitals in Europe and the USA and indeed Mumbai and Bangalore.

*(Ram Gidoomal CBE, Chairman, South Asian Development Partnership, London)*

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# The world's a stage for Neelam



**Rathi A Menon**  
Chandigarh

At the Avignon Theatre Festival in France in 1995, the son of the famous French playwright, Jean Giraudoux, embraced Neelam Man Singh Chowdhary and told her, "You have resurrected my father!" The diminutive director from Chandigarh had just presented Giraudoux's play, *Mad Woman of Chaillot*, at the festival, but with a difference – as *Shaher Mere Di Pagal Aurat* in Punjabi! Despite the language barrier, the play received a standing ovation. Neelam had accomplished her mission.

Neelam is Punjab's only truly globetrotting theatre personality. Her plays are regularly featured at almost all the leading theatre festivals in the world, be it at Perth, Singapore or London. In India, her plays run to packed halls, even if the audience does not understand Punjabi.

But sadly, in Punjab, Neelam is accused of being an outsider, of catering just to the elite. She retorts, "My vegetable vendor took a bunch of passes from me for *Kitchen Katha* and *Sheher Mere Di Pagal Aurat*. Now, if you call that being elitist, what can I say?" Another accusation is that Neelam always works with the same group. She asks indignantly, "Do you change your children? I am nothing without my group. We grew up and progressed together."

In 1984 Neelam settled in Chandigarh and started her theatre group, 'The Company', after honing her skills with Pearl Padamsee in Mumbai and at Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal. She shot into the national limelight in 1989 with Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*. Neelam is particularly adept at exploring the complex female psyche, and her plays usually focus on the woman protagonist.

Just when a third accusation was being levelled at Neelam, that her plays tended to be repetitive, she came up with an experiment called *Kitchen Katha* a play within a play, which told the story of the average Indian woman whose dreams and aspirations get crushed in the kitchen along with the garlic and the ginger. As the protagonist, Tara, says, "Rasoi meri kahani, rasoi meri kavita." (The kitchen is my story, the kitchen my poetry.) Wherever it

went, it met with packed halls.

Neelam then went on to produce two more innovations: the bilingual monologue, *An Unposted Love Letter*, and *Sibo in the Supermarket*. The monologue, based on a short story by Doris Lessing, was her dig at the system, which does not give whole-hearted support to theatre. "In the present dim scenario of more expenditure and fewer sponsorships, it is becoming increasingly difficult to produce large-cast ventures."

*Sibo in the Supermarket* is Neelam's take on globalisation. Like *Sibo*, we also take seeds from our past to reap our present and future, but as the play stresses, it is up to us what seeds we take and how we reap them. *Sibo* proved a success wherever it was staged. Neelam is now taking it to Pakistan in March.

#### What are the difficulties you face in staging a play?

The birth pangs are with my own creativity. I experience a constant anxiety not to repeat myself. I have to reinvent myself for my group so that they can reinvent themselves for each new set of demands. For every aspect of the play, I have to start on a new canvas. For example, in *Sibo in the Supermarket*, there are the twin worlds of the past and the present, of the supermarket and the village. The audience felt a smooth passage between both, but the process to make it smooth was complex. The success of the play lay in helping the audience experience *Sibo*'s reminiscences as a smooth journey.

#### Is it tougher to stage a play here than abroad?

You don't face any infrastructure problems abroad.

Everything is organised, you don't have to run around arranging food and transport. The tragedy in India is that no one has any idea how to treat artistes. A lot depends upon the sensibility of the organiser. We have had terrible experiences of going without food after a play. But there have been memorable days, too. In Thrissur, people would bring us steaming hot Kerala delicacies.

Abroad, festivals have been going on for 25-30 years and they have their heart in it. There is respect and regard for artistes, but here, except in Chandigarh, no journalist can be found at a play venue. Artistes love to perform in Chandigarh for they get wonderful coverage here. I face fewer infrastructure problems in Chandigarh for I have my own support base. The attitude of the sponsors is too impersonal as they believe in just handing over a cheque, a cold-headed discharge of their responsibility. There is nobody even to usher in the guests. So, my husband and I stand at the entrance.

#### In *Sibo in the Supermarket* did you choose the supermarket as a ploy to bring in the concept of globalisation?

Before this play, Dr Surjit Patar, who drafts my scripts, and I had done a project for the BBC. Ten directors from different parts of the world were given an idea, 'A Packet of Seeds' – what happens when a seed is planted. I thought of many things, but finally decided on what happens when you

take the seeds of your life and plant them elsewhere. Then I read a short story, *Supermarket Soliloquy*, by Moira Crosbie Lovell. The supermarket was the perfect place to position my protagonist as it is a standardised and sanitised structure, with no history, no past. You can't get a more synthetic contrast to the earthy vibrancy of a village.

**You have brought the *Naqqals* (the female impersonators of Punjab) on to the international stage. Otherwise, their tradition would have died a natural death. How have you nurtured this relationship?**



Neelam Man Singh Chowdhary

Once you have sown the seed of a relationship, you have to go on. The *Naqqals* are deeply connected with life. We should not see them as illiterate – they are very intelligent for they draw their experience from the school of life. Tradition is not static, it is dynamic. They have brought that dynamism into my plays.

I pay them fairly and on time, and they know I am not making any money out of them. From our first trip abroad, they bought land; with the second trip, they made houses. When we travel, everyone travels in the same class and stays in the same place. It is not just a director-actor relationship. I am part of their family. *Natyasastra* says, theatre can be done and supported only by those who have a family. Yes, I have a big family to support and nourish my theatre.



# Light the lamp within, Teacher

SUBROTO BAGCHI

THE people who write my textbooks and the ones who prescribe the syllabi will not tell you how important inclusion is for me to do well in life. Without the sense of inclusion, I will not know that boundaries are meant to be pushed – not to be lived in.

Take for example the fact that I clean my house but empty my garbage on the road. That is because the road is not "included" in what I deem to be my own.

I feed my own child but do not enquire if the maid has eaten today. Her hunger is not included in my hunger.

I take my child to the movies but do not ask him to call the neighbour's child. That child's seclusion is outside my zone of parenting. So, Teacher – teach me inclusion.

## I pray to you to teach me to communicate

More I am caught in the rat race of the common entrance tests and cut throat competition – everyone will tell me that my survival depends on my power to impress and in that urge, more I impress, the less I will communicate. Teach me to speak and be able to write such that I am able to convey what I feel.

Teach me to communicate with the simplicity of the child and the nakedness of the flower.

Teach me to communicate with those who cannot speak and hear.

Teach me to communicate with people less gifted, less privileged than I am.

Teach me to communicate with those who have come before me and those who will follow.

Teach me to communicate with things animate and inanimate.

## I pray to you to teach me to understand the nature of things

Teacher, teach me "sense making" in an increasingly senseless world. Teach me not just what is good or what is bad. I may not always be lucky to be in situations that will be simply either black or white.

In a world in which Gods will have feet of clay and Godmen will be more men and less God, teach me how to make sense of things such that I am able to see the larger picture. I am able to understand things around me without the intermediation of soothsayers and spiritual Gurus. Teach me such that I am able to, and willing to, receive inputs from everywhere and wisdom from some.

But in moments of crisis, teach me such that I am able to come to my own conclusions.

## As you teach me to deal with moments of crisis - teach me how to come out of them without residual toxicity.

For there will be moments in life when I will see the failing of those I have admired. I will see cracks in the walls of those who had taught me the meaning of strength and solidity. In those difficult moments, I should know that sometimes situations make people who they are. Teach me such that cynicism does not impair my power to behold the beautiful nature of creation of which the human nature is also a part.

## I pray to you to make me learn. More than that, Teacher, teach me how I can learn to learn

As you prepare me for the wide world in which I need to fend for myself and for others, one-time learning will not be good enough. I will have to have the ability to learn newer things and more difficult things. Some of it I will need to learn in increasingly lesser time. In all this, what will become critical is the process of learning itself, more than just what I am able to learn. Help me to learn newer ways to learn. And that will make learning a joy for me.

## As you teach me to learn how to learn, I pray to you to teach me to learn from unusual sources

Teach me how I can learn from small people. As people come and touch my lives, as they do small things for me, teach me how I can learn from them - things that no classroom will ever teach.

Teach me to learn sense of duty from the driver of the school van who must rise before I do.

Teach me to learn compassion from the Sisters of Charity in whose fragile arms, even death can sleep like a baby.

Teach me to learn contentment from the traffic policeman who is paid to inhale carbon monoxide for the 76,800 hours of his life that he has to stand in the middle of the road.

Teach me to learn to work unsupervised like the ant and the bee who do not need anyone to breathe down their neck so they add value each new day as they wake up to work.

## As I learn to learn from unusual sources, I pray that you teach me to appreciate the interconnected nature of things

Teach me, not just about the way the waves rise but what causes them to engulf. Teach me to appreciate that the trees I fell, the small creatures I kill with indiscriminate use of fertilisers and pesticides on the ground, the urban decay I cause with my consumptive ways – all catch up with awesome imbalances in the natural state of things that cause death and destruction and can one day, engulf me and whatever else I am trying to leave behind.

Each time I see a scavenging bird on my city's skyline, Teacher, tell me why the singing birds are going away. And tell me how I can see them again, perched on my windowsill.

I pray to you to teach me not just the ability to answer, but also the power to question

It is because everyone is telling me to do as told. Before I know, I am becoming enslaved in a social, economic and political state in which progress is held hostage because we do not ask questions. Only if we ask the questions, we can get the answers. If we get the answers, we can explore how to establish a higher order of things. If we ask the questions, we will also learn to be accountable. We will be more willing to accept that when we ask the questions, we can be questioned too. In that mutuality, truth will emerge and balance itself.

As you teach me the ability to ask questions, I also pray to you to teach me the ability to say, "I do not know"

In all humility, I must admit Teacher, that not always will I have all the answers. When I do not have the answer, teach me to say, "I do not know". I know it takes courage, and self-confidence to say that I do not know. So often I see people around me keep silent when admission of ignorance could have opened them to new relationships and new knowledge. Teach me the power to say "I do not know" even if it causes me momentary disgrace. Because Teacher, when I develop the self-confidence to say that I do not know, I will be comfortable in being who I am. That will make me more real in an increasingly make-believe world.

Just as you teach me to say, "I do not know", I pray to you to teach me to actively seek help

Higher my achievements and greater my position of power, the more helpless I will become; the less I will know about the state of things. In those moments of my helplessness, my ego will come in my way of seeking help. My workplace will make me falsely believe that seeking help is a sign of weakness.

Teach me to seek help from small people. Teacher. Teach me that the flower needs help from the bee to pollinate. The water needs help from the air to raise itself to the sky.

O' Teacher, please teach me such that I understand that even the Lord of the Universe can do with a little help from me. Hence, I have no shame in seeking help from others.





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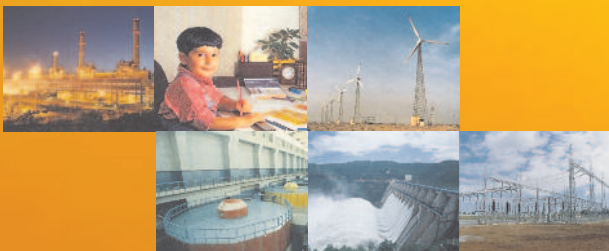
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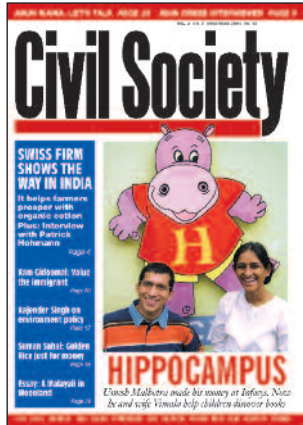
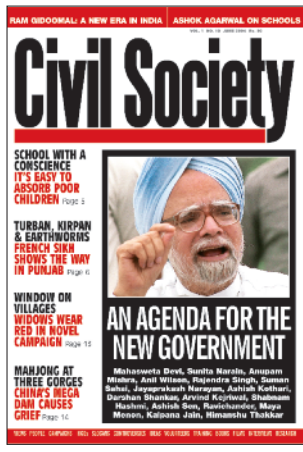
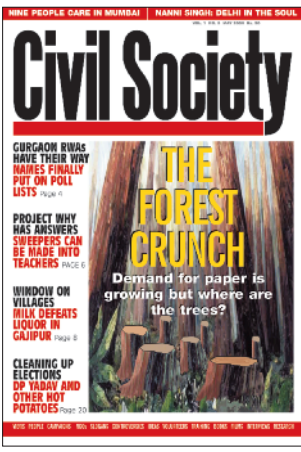
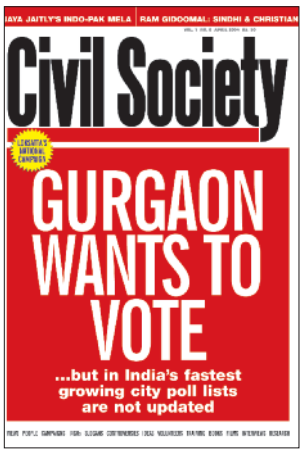
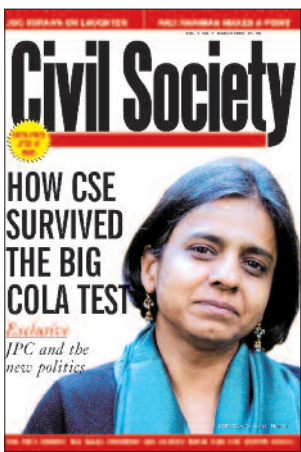
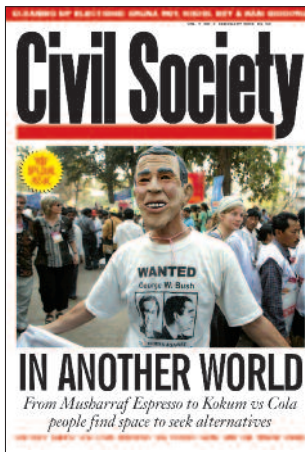
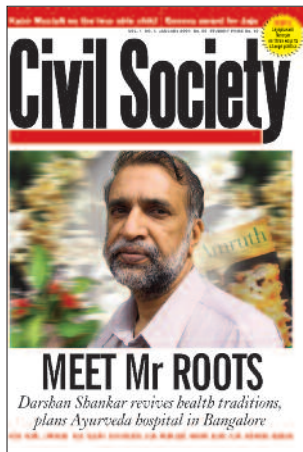
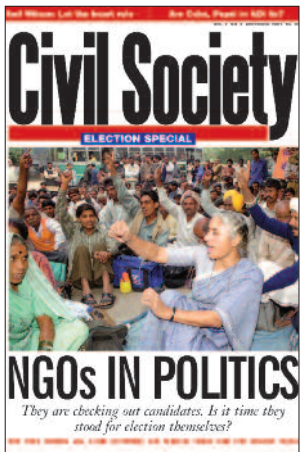
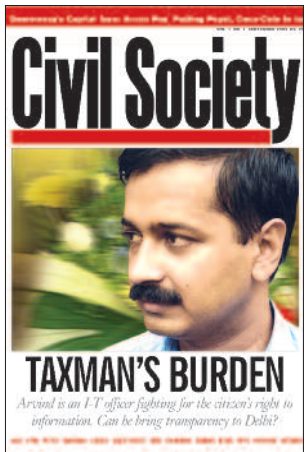
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