

## VISIT TO EARTHQUAKE - AFFECTED VILLAGES IN LATUR AND UMARGA

From October 8th to 13th, 1993 - KRPA.

General When T Pradeep (oldtime SCI volunteer who has worked in earthquake and flood/cyclone affected areas) and I decided to drive down to Latur on the 7th, we were not sure if we would get through into the affected areas, as the last news was that the Government had clamped severe restrictions on entry and that there miles-long" queues in the roads leading into Latur and Umarga. We, therefore, decided to enter Latur through Ambajogai, after contacting Dr. Lohia of Manav Lok and OXFAM people who were said to be available between there and Latur.

Though we had thought of taking HAM radio volunteers with us, because of uncertain access, we had put it off. However, Maharashtra Government invited HAM operators to help and waived all entry restrictions for them. So two HAM vols, Nataraj and Niranjana joined us.

We had some problem with the steering and stopped at a garage at Tumkur. The workers who fixed it, after learning that we are headed to Latur, decided not to charge us, that being their contribution to the earthquake-affected. We stopped at AMBAGAI (Jalahalli, Raichur Dist) that night picked up Pandu, Nataraj and Yael, physio-therapist vol from ACTION HEALTH, UK, to assess the status of disabled, which was one of our terms of reference. Entering Latur from AUSA was no problem as the Government restrictions on entry were off by then.

AT LATUR Hotel Venkatesha, the lobby hall was like a Kalyana Natapa hall, with the OXFAM-initiated NGO Coordinating Council's desk operating at one corner and the rest carpeted and converted to a meeting, resting and sleeping place for vols from all over. Relief material were also around. The Council had around 50 groups and organisations under its umbrella. They ranged from some rural reading room to an organisation like Manav Lok, which is a huge institution funded by a dozen agencies. Dr. Lohia of Manav Lok is the Chairman of the Council. As on 8th/9th, the Council's 'members' were working in around 11 villages, having been allocated those by the Collector of Latur. They had set up six camps with vols, at Haregaon, Hasalgaon, Limbala, Javalgaon, Sinsal and Chincholi Jogani.

Deaths The Govt. figure is under 10,000, while unofficial figure varies from 40 to 50,000. Many bodies were cremated in the first two days by people in their own homes with timber pulled out from the collapsed houses. The Govt. has kept account of only the bodies which were identified and for which panchnama was done. Some hundreds of students of Tata Instt. of Social Sciences, Bombay have been engaged by the Govt. to carry out a survey. Many organisations are also collecting data of death and losses in the villages they are working in. They see this as a priority. Predictably, this would be highly contentious issue.

Some groups and organisations are also collecting specific information on the more disadvantaged, like orphaned children, widowed women, aged, disabled and other supportless people.

Food Many organisations are still offering cooked food. Government is giving out dry rations. But no one has a clear picture of whether distribution is adequate and reaching the interior villages. I heard mention of some 11 villages 'where aid had not reached'.

Health In the villages along the main road, one sees many groups running clinics (in tents). There is also a constant flux in these, with organisations replacing one another. The DRDO medical teams were going round, too. They were also asking all the clinics what they needed. In the roadside villages doctors abound. But interior villages picture was not clear. The NGO Coordinating Council wanted to set up a mobile medical team. We agreed that doctors from Bangalore would be part of this.

Medical supplies Again seem plenty. But one clinic was asking for scissors, sutures and needles, which apparently no one had.

Mention of extensive mental trauma by volunteers who were working in close contact with villagers. This period of course was the first ten days, which certainly are terrible. When and if the doctors and volunteers themselves get out of the daze (more likely the next batches), they may be able to reach out to the counselling needs. Another big need that would come up soon is when the hundreds of hospitalised return home. Exact nature of disabilities will come to light then. The healing of all would also depend on what they see as worth returning to.

Housing The damage to houses and building has to be seen to be believed. The massive stone and mud-mortared structures (random rubble construction) have crumbled down into piles of sheer rubble. The stones which crushed people to death under them actually look quite innocent. When one looks at them now, 10 days after the disaster, it is difficult to believe that thousands of people and animals were lying dead under them on that fateful day. Looking at what was once Shivaji Teli's house in Limbala, it was impossible for me to imagine that two buffaloes and seven women and children had died there. He was sleeping in the field and had survived. The houses in this area have a special structure. They often are enclosed by an outer 8-12 feet high wall of stone masonry, which adds to the mass and rigidity of the structure.

One finds an odd wall (which has been redone recently) surviving in the middle of it all. Other structures not affected are the water tanks which are on 40-45 feet high stilts and newly constructed concrete buildings. In fact I found one such building in a hamlet of Killari, which was the epicentre of the quake.

In Nagarsoga village (population:7000), 2000 houses have

collapsed but there is not been any death (of humans presumably). People have received minor injuries. Such villages (where no death or serious injuries have occurred) are not on anybody's list for relief. I also found one village, Tapegoan, where people had moved out of their houses and camped under tin sheets or any shacks they could devise. As tremors continue to occur in the area, people are in the grip of panic and do not want to sleep inside their houses.

The Government/ PWD is putting up long tin sheds comprising rows of 'houses'. As on 13th October, very few sheds had been handed over to the people. Most people were still in the shacks and tents. In Pethsangvi, which is a biggish roadside village with many groups and agencies working, the inside of the sheds were all wet and mucky.

To give an illustrative profile, Pethsangvi has a population of 3300. No of families: 334. Deaths: 366; injured: 500 (of which 400 have returned and 100 are still in the hospitals. Animals: 1,335 of which 300 have died. Housing: 250 tin sheds; American army tents: 22; rest in shacks.

Water As of now, water is being tankered in by the Govt. The tankers are sitting in villages for long hours. One does not have a clear picture of whether all the villages are being reached. But with no storing facilities, people have no water for washing. What they get from the tanker is used for cooking. We saw several plastic storage tanks lying around but none plumbed and installed. Already some lids are missing. AFPRO is drilling some wells. I met one, Dasharath Nanaware from Prerana Pratishthan, from Phaltan, Satara Dist. who was to take up restoration of handpumps in 50 villages in Latur and Umarga dists. With some small changes and attention, water supply in many places can be made more efficient, convenient and wastage avoided.

Sanitation The state of sanitation and drainage are highly unsatisfactory to non-existent. With rains pouring in the black clay soil, the whole place is mucky. Paul Sherlock, the OXFAM water and sanitation expert in disasters, has been raising the issue of sanitation, need to put up washing places for women and putting up storage facilities so that tankers can be released. But it seems to be on no one else's list of priorities.

Agriculture The lush green fields belie the tragedy that surrounds them. The standing crops (jowar, bajra and sunflower) need to be harvested and rabi sown in the coming week. People wait upto to half a day in lines to collect seeds that the Govt. is giving. Who needs help in these is not yet clear. Atleast one organisation I met, wanted to hire a tractor and plough and sow two acres for every family in the four villages it was working in. With many families having lost the men or draught animals or both, some one needs to carry out this task. I saw three widowed women waiting in the line for seeds at Limbala.

NGO Response and coordination The NGO's are wide-ranging. All parties and political groups are in, too. Shiv Sena and RSS are quite prominent. There are other religious groups like some Math or the other, the Jain Sangh, city municipalities and citizens groups from anywhere in the country, labour unions like the Shrama Jeevi Sanghata and Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha. The NGO CC, based at Hotel Venkatesha is working rather like a reception committee and clearing house for many, though some 50 groups and orgns. are under its wings. The Committee takes decisions through a core group, which meets everyday. Presently, they have decided to work in around 30 villages. Each gp/ orgn. has been allocated certain number of villages. What they do there is left to them. Shrama Jeevi Sanghata, for example, is salvaging buried articles from the debris and restoring them to the owners. They say that this is a very important work as the articles of great value to the people, including of sentimental value.

There are a couple of crucial questions around this:

- (a) The groups/ orgns. are doing what they have resources for and consider important. They dont necessarily take into account all the basic and immediate needs of the people.
- (b) Some resources need to be raised to meet the immediate needs. Some are available with other groups. Some coordination can optimise the resources much more than what is happening presently.

Many orgns., especially, the big ones, are preoccupied with only long term development plans and not enough attention is paid to the immediate relief and rehab needs. There is a great flush of money both through the Govt. and other funding agencies channeling it through the NGO's. This, unfortunately, is the cause of the other agendas dominating. A lot is being done but lot more needs to be and on an emergent basis.

Conclusions & Suggestions The immediate work that needs to be taken up to make people's lives a little better as well as try to put back some normalcy and self-reliance, in my opinion, are:

- (1) Trauma care post hospital care and disability.
- (2) Sanitation & Drainage Proper trenches have to be dug around all the sheds. Some kind of gravel flooring has to be done to keep the ground dry. Soakpits for wash places need to be done.
- (3) Harvestin and Rabi sowing In some instances, this may be better carried out like an operation with vols and tractors.
- (4) Shelter: Urgent, as winter is approaching. Material from collapsed houses may be salvaged.
- (5) Employment Govt. is carrying out all the work through labour hired from outside. We heard that wages for locals have depressed. 2 to 4 above can be taken up through wagelabour, employing local people.