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APRIL - 2000

News You Can Use a development mediascan

I, too, want to play I, too, want to study I, too, have my dreams



ANINDYA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

Time Warner and America Online, two of the biggest communications companies, announced a groundbreaking merger on Monday

Anger test may identify those at risk of heart attack

MPRESSION
Rajasthan Pathrika
19 April 2000

"The effort is to narrowcast the procedures to enable serve those who live below the poverty line through ward sabha. The sabha will be the forum for future rural development mandatory to have the ward sabha... Joshi, rural development... Chayati raj min"

This media merger...
...department...
...Social Sciences (TISS)...
...lack of proper education at the employment facilities is resulting the menfolk turning their ire women. Many women have forced to work as domestic make both ends meet. More CO-run schools are English medium and village children fi to cope with new language al jobless villagers have lettino houses, turnin



A monthly publication from
Communication for
Development and Learning

Asthma worse than AIDS

UNITED NATIONS: The World Health Organisation (WHO) has estimated that the man and economic burden associated with asthma surpasses that of AIDS and tuberculosis

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NEWS YOU CAN USE (NYCU) is a specially formulated development media scan directed to meet the specific information needs of NGOs. Published on a monthly basis, NYCU presents a comprehensive compilation of selected media clippings of news that could be direct use to NGOs working at the grassroot level. This publication can also serve as a ready reckoner for development news on a monthly basis.

NYCU includes a selection of news items/feature/articles/editorials/letters from leading national newspapers and newsmagazines. Each news item carries the source, name of publication and date of publication. The compilation is categorised under appropriate heads with an index for easy reference.

This issue : Rs. 30.00

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Behind each edition.....

News You Can Use (NYCU) is a monthly publication designed to serve as a development update for NGOs and development workers located in remote parts of the country. In the existing era of information highways and global villages for information networking, the NYCU aims to focus on groups where access to basic channels of information is not available. Newspapers is one such channel that is seldom available in its 'city-form' to NGOs located in the remote rural areas.

The publication was started in 1998 with support from the National Foundation for India (NFI). It may be mentioned here that the publication was a part of an earlier project, also supported by NFI, titled 'What Makes News? Understanding Media for Advocacy'. As a part of this project, CDL had come to house a vast amount of development news, news that we believed was not known, nor available to other NGOs. NYCU emerged as a vehicle to share this information and the first edition was mailed in July 1998. A nominal subscription amount was invited from readers who wished to receive the publication on a regular basis.

From the time the first subscription came in, the response to the publication continues to be positive. The number of subscribers has consistently grown, though we must admit to periods of trepidation, anxiety and long waits for renewals. Vimmi, our circulation manager tried various creative means to stretch a negligible marketing budget to attract readers to stay with the publication.

Today, though the total subscriber list is not a large number by itself, it is surely indicative of a spontaneous response from a user community, generally used to receiving literature that is "free of cost". The fact that this group is willing and even volunteering to pay to receive another NGO publication confirms that this indeed, has a 'use value'. Renewals and bulk subscriptions are other indicators of appreciation.

In an evaluation of the programme carried out in October 1999 by NFI, the evaluator had this to say :

"Compiled from different sources, not all of them readily accessible to smaller NGOs, it is more than likely that they may not get to know about these developments, but for this digest..... it is a very good experiment and may well outlast the period of the current



project I have sampled the issues that have come out so far and am impressed by the production qualities and diversity of contents.Its contents should widen the horizons of NGOs, some of whom may not be au fait with development areas other than their own. The journal thus helps create freemasonry of NGOs and makes possible collaboration and synergy as a follow-up.

Readers have found it to be a good documentation effort, a valuable reference source, useful for training programmes and for locating data for fund raising. Some have offered to contribute material. All this bespeaks exceptional reader involvement and a result-oriented approach from people with felt needs in the context of their own work....."

While this certainly contributed to the morale of the group, it didn't absolve us of our yearly tensions. The difficulty in ensuring financial support, combined with the increase in the cost of paper and printing, and the occasional postal hikes, makes the production of each volume a challenge. Our production manager, Shobha looks progressively tired - trying to get the issue to the press in time.

Yet, it is our commitment to ensure that NYCU not only continues to provide this service but also extends the reach of this information base to other areas, as well as through other channels.

In the third year of its production, we propose to initiate some changes to enhance the use value of the publication, while maintaining the focus of its objectives. As such the major thrust will rest on reproduction of relevant news clippings in the form that it appears in the original publication. The emphasis as before, will be on innovative, easy-to-replicate and interesting innovations on issues of relevance to the development sector. The next edition will also include classified information such as advertisements, publications, workshops, programmes, announcements etc.

Your comments on this are welcome. Please forward any suggestions that you may have on building this publication. Because eventually, NYCU is designed to meet your information needs. And who is the better guide on this, than you, our readers.

A feedback form is enclosed within this edition. Please use it for sending us your immediate comments.

Shangon Das Gupta

April 2000

APRIL 2000
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Have You
renewed
your subscription
to NYCU

Watch out for

May 1 - May Day

May 2 - Sankalp Din

May 15 - International
Family Day

May 31 - World No
Tobacco Day

Does diabetes plague someone in your family? Having a problem with fitness, exercise or nutrition during pregnancy? Want access to support groups, or worried grey about what you can do to help your child with disability? Rx: Knowledge

Does this prescription seem strange? Rather than lengthy prescriptions for various pills, an unusual service in the Indian city of Mumbai advocates that the best prescription for the patient is knowledge! It strongly makes out a case that the best patient is a well-informed one. Even from a doctor's point of view.

Help (Health Education Library for People), located in Mumbai is the largest medical-consumer library in the world, says UNESCO. It is packed with information, and its shelves have books enough to comprise a mini tropical rainforest! Each day, it draws both general and specialised visitors.

"People often feel that medical issues are too esoteric. We're trying to overcome that. The idea is to educate them so they don't get misled or misguided. Patients shouldn't be made into guinea-pigs or taken advantage of just because they're not very well versed with medical knowledge," says the lady doctor who guided this journalist round the centre during a recent visit.

"In order to encourage the rational use of drugs, rather than focus only on medical practitioners, I feel we need to concentrate on patients as well," adds HELP founder Dr Aniruddha Malpani.

This, notes Malpani, makes sense. Patients themselves have the "most to lose" if drugs are started unwisely by them. "We have access to information on every health and medical topic under the sun, explained in terms that the layperson can understand," says Dr Malpani confidently.

"We are a public library.

Prescription for information

Help (Health Education Library for People), located in Mumbai is the largest medical-consumer library in the world, according to UNESCO. **FREDERICK NORONHA** describes how it can help consumers

Everyone is welcome, entry is free," is the motto of HELP. Institutional members have to pay though. Those unable to come personally can also send in queries via post or email. They can rely on something quaintly acronymed MISS-HELP (Medical Information Search Service for HELP).

In keeping with the Cyber Age, HELP's Internet link even provides information on the latest medical research from all over the globe. HELP has become a prototype of the modern digital library too. Its web site <http://www.healthlibrary.com> has many full-text health books and magazines. So visitors can browse them for free.

Each month the site receives some 60,000 visitors (500,000 hits), says HELP. "This lets us extend our outreach services by providing consumer health information to Internet users from all over the world," adds Dr Malpani proudly.

This initiative was launched by Dr Anirudha and Anjali Malpani, famous fertility specialists. They found that patients abroad were well-aware of medical issues, as against ignorance reigning here. The site's visitors currently include a lot of lay people, journalists, researchers, medical students and interns, housewives, senior citizens and even some very reputed doctors. Many queries come in via email too, says Dr Hufriha Suraliwala, a dentist and the medical information manager. It is run by a non-profit trust. Currently, it has 50 CDroms, 500

video cassettes, 7000 books and pamphlets, kits, newsletters and journals. All is free of medical jargon and is focussed at the consumer.

"There's not a single book from the medical curriculum," says Dr Suraliwala proudly. "It's a consumer library, meant to provide information to the

the now popular reiki, taichi, yoga, massage therapy, aromatherapy, unani, acupressure, acupuncture, and even - believe it or not - something as exotic as tickle-therapy.

There's even information from the world of nutrition, dietetics, spiritual healings, etc. On each first and third Saturday, lectures



layman. Doctors can easily find their own information; but this often proves to be very difficult for the average person."

Information doesn't come in only from the world of allopathy. Other curative means of medicine are also used, including homeopathy, ayurveda, music therapy,

of medical importance are held at the library. HELP's aim is to promote healthy doctor-patient relationships by informing the patients better. It says it also wants to prove to be a useful resource for writers and journalists, as this could improve the quality and accuracy of reporting on medical

topics by the mainstream media.

In addition, it hopes that over time it could act as a stimulus for patients with a particular disease to get together, form self-help groups, and help each other cope with their illnesses.

More knowledge could also prevent health fraud and quackery. "Ultimately we hope that well-informed patients will demand the best treatment available, and this will act as an incentive for doctors to update their skills and for hospitals to improve their facilities," adds Dr Malpani.

HELP also has access to specialised foreign medical databases like MEDLINE, Cancerlit, AIDSLINE and HealthStar to answer queries. On sending in a query, the confidential reply comes on about 50-100 pages, or on floppy in seven days, by registered post. Of course, this is not meant to be a substitute for the doctor!

"People in India often don't bother to take a second or third opinion on even major health issues. They take everything lying down, and don't bother to research their condition," says Dr Suraliwala.

HELP is also trying to get doctors to "prescribe information". It has printed Information Prescription pads, which are freely distributed to doctors on request. Instead of just giving a list of medicines, the doctor could suggest to the patient what he or she needs to know about the disease or ailment. Doctors can thus indirectly educate their patients with a Prescription for Information. Then, doctors need to discuss the results of this information search with the patient, so that the doctor can guide patients to locate which information is relevant to their particular problem. There's perhaps no better way to spread information, believes this centre. Doctors and patients can thus become partners in making medical decisions.

Deccan Herald
01 April 2000

Hybrid mail casts its net on villages

Ankur Uppal and Abhllash Gaur
Chandigarh, March 31

IT IS in fact e-mail and your postman working in tandem. Hybrid mail, they call it. With letters from relatives abroad taking at least a fortnight to reach far-flung areas in the region, enterprising cyber-cafe owners, and even a Government department, are offering facilities to residents of villages and small towns of sending and receiving e-mail.

A cyber-cafe owner S.S. Grewal offers this service for which you have to shell out Rs 250 or \$20 as security.

"My many clients are from Canada, UK and US who need to communicate with their relatives in Punjab. As normal letters take 15-20 days to reach here, they find this method much better," says Mr Grewal.

"I receive e-mail from them on my address, take a print-out and post it, which is free of cost. While sending mail, I just scan the letter and e-mail it, charging Rs 20 per mail," adds Mr Grewal. "Scanning a letter is much easier and a better option than typing it. Errors might creep in while typing but not while scanning. And also, letters in any language can be scanned and sent."

But what prompted him to start this service? "My customers themselves gave me the idea. Many used to come from villages and suggested that I should start doing this. Thus I started it in March 1999," replies Mr Grewal. "But I must add it is not very profitable as I have not been able



Illustration: Kripal

to advertise about it. Yet, I do this as a social service," adds he.

Mr Grewal has gone a step further and also offers voice mail service i.e. he also calls up the customers when he receives mail. His charges are Rs 10 per mail.

Another cyber-cafe owner R.K. Sharma is undeterred by the profitability factor. "I have heard about it and am keen on offering this service to my customers. I have had many enquiries about it," says Sharma.

Interestingly, while private cyber cafes have introduced this service only recently, the Department of Posts has been providing a somewhat similar facility for over four years now. Called "Hybrid Mail", the service makes use of the department's VSAT network spanning over 70 centres in India.

In order to avail of this service, one has to approach the nearest VSAT station from where a typed message can be conveyed to the receiving station via satellite.

Thereafter, the department offers the addressee a choice between receiving a hard copy of the message through a postman or downloading it on to his own floppy.

In addition to being fast, the service is also affordable. According to Col. Tilak Raj, Chief Postmaster General, Punjab circle, it takes Rs 20 to mail a single A4 size document. Additional matter is charged for at the rate of Rs 5 per sheet. Yet, despite its many advantages, the Hybrid Mail service has not caught on.

The Hindustan Times
01 April 2000

New methods will exploit bamboo to replace timber

Bangalore, March 31: The Indian Plywood Industries Research and Training Institute here has developed simple technologies to exploit bamboo as a good alternative to forest timber in construction industry.

With the estimates suggesting 40 per cent of approximately 30 million cubic metres of forest timber consumption in construction applications, scientists here feel, increased use of bamboo to replace forest timber for various applications would ultimately reduce the dependence on forest wood and therefore cut down

deforestation significantly. Institute director, A.K. Bansal said a simple technology of laminating bamboo mattings could yield durable products like bamboo mat corrugated sheets for house roofing and cost-effective bamboo shelters. And this would provide cheaper and more durable alternatives to forest timber.

Mr Bansal said, bamboo mats woven from the cottage industry sector were procured from areas where it was grown in abundance.

These mats were hotpressed in different layers after mixing phe-

nolic resin at 140 to 150 degrees celcius at a pressure of 20 kg/sq.cm.

The end product could also be layered with plantation wood like silver oak, rubberwood and eucalyptus timber to provide the material with additional thickness and strength.

Mr Bansal said bamboo was known to be one of the fastest growing woody plant with some species known to grow up to 1 metre a day.

A majority of bamboo species grow to a height of about 30 metres before maturing. (PTI)

The Asian Age
01 April 2000

Centre to amend laws on disabled

NEW DELHI, March 31 (PTI)

Centre will bring in legislation to amend the existing laws relating to the welfare of disabled people to ensure them more jobs. Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment Maneka Gandhi said here today.

The proposed amendment in the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act (PDA), 1995 has already been sent to the cabinet for consideration. Ms Gandhi told PTI.

The amendment will also widen the scope of the word 'disabled' to include all sorts of disabilities - physical, mental or otherwise, she said.

Earlier, participating in the inaugural session of a seminar "Towards an enabling legal environment: Rights of persons with disabilities," she said PDA was a well intended Act but somehow it

Contd...

Contd...

was not working properly and an amendment had become necessary to make it more stronger and effective.

The minister said Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Act will also be amended to provide a better rehabilitation regime for the disabled people. RCI will set up six regional centres in the country to effectively monitor various projects undertaken by it, she added.

Ms Gandhi lamented that "we do not have exact number of disabled in our country," and blamed it on the general attitude of not coming out for registration of the disabled persons.

She called for sensitising people about the rights of the disabled as they were not able to articulate their needs.

Earlier, inaugurating the two-day seminar organised by the Indian Law Institute, Justice S P Bharucha called for changing the attitude of the society towards the disabled people.

Deccan Herald
01 April 2000

Woman power

Meet Bhagyamma, Anasuya and Manjula, all newly elected panchayat members in the villages on Bangalore's outskirts. Bubbling with enthusiasm, they are yet to get over the hangover of their victory in the just-concluded elections.

For Bhagyamma of Kothnur gram panchayat, it is the second term while Anasuya and Manjula have tasted electoral success for the first time. Having been in the hustle-bustle of panchayat politics (Panchayats are supposed to be non-political bodies, but that is just on paper), illiterate Bhagyamma says "If I had a little education like you, I would have done wonders!" Not necessarily a tall claim. That she has managed to win a second term is a barometer of her popularity in the locality. And confidence has followed her success.

Ask her what she achieved during her first term and pat

comes the reply: "Well, tell me what I haven't done?" After a brief pause, she reels off a long list - helping her electorate get water and sometimes mediating with the police on behalf of people involved in roadside brawls.

In which paper are you going to write all these, she asks. And then, "Why don't you write for a Kannada paper so that the people here can read?"

A few narrow roads and dingy by-lanes from Kothnur is Subramanyapura gram panchayat, where Anasuya and Manjula were elected.

What prompted them to contest the elections? "Panchayat decides things for the people here. And I have always wanted to become someone in the Panchayat," says Anasuya.

She has studied upto PUC. I'm curious about her understanding of the Panchayat system. "Panchayats make roads. They provide the people with borewells. I want to see that the women in my village walk fewer miles to fetch a pot of water than what they have to do now..."

So what if she does not know, about all the 73rd Constitutional

Amendment; the three-tier panchayat system? This lady means brief pause, she reels off a long business.

Manjula has done her matriculation cards, pension, drinking water and sometimes mediating about panchayats right now, but I will learn about it. And I want to work for the people"

What work? "Just drive down this road and you will know what all I have to get done for this village," she says, pointing to the pathetic roads around.

"You people have water in your kitchen, but here even pregnant women trudge for miles in search of water. I want to do something for them."

Bhagyamma's husband has deserted her, but Anasuya and Manjula have no marital problems. "Our husbands are quite happy that we are in the panchayat," say both women.

Bhagyamma, Anasuya and Manjula represent thousands of women panchayat members all over the state who are preparing to juggle their duties as housewives and local leaders. Confident, enthusiastic and full of zeal to "do something," one wishes them all the best.

A NARAYANA
Deccan Herald
01 April 2000

Conservation work in offing to save Majuli

IN ORDER to preserve cultural heritages and eco-system of Majuli Island in Jorhat district of Assam, the Bhopal-based Indira Gandhi National Museum of Man set up in early 1980s, is going to take up conservation work.

This was disclosed by museum's Director Dr K K Chakravarty at a Press conference here on Friday.

Majuli Island, said to be the world's largest inhabited riverine island is more than 3,000 km away from Bhopal and is in the middle of the Brahmaputra river.

This island, is supposed to be the place wherein Majuli Krishna is believed to have played with his consorts which is thousands of km away from Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, the birth place of Krishna.

According to Dr Chakravarty the Museum of Man is running 50 such projects in India where work for protecting 76 primitive tribes is going on. "We act as a catalytic agent while local people act as captains for seeking aid at the national as well as international level," he said.

Significant aspect of the latest project of the Museum of Man that functions under Central Government's Ministry of Culture is that for the first time a team of inhabitants led by chief of the Anuiati Satra (monastery) Dr Pitamber Deb Goswami has descended at the museum.

Size of Majuli used to be 1,256 square km in 1991 which has now been reduced to 875 square km. This is attributed to earthquakes and soil erosion.

It may sound strange, but Majuli which has 50 per cent of fishing tribes among 1.52 lakh people, but the island has all the basic facilities that one may not expect in a village -- like STD connection, electricity, water pumps among others. This is a different thing that there are there are frequent power cuts particularly in the evening when the power is most needed.

Environmentalists say that already more than one third of the island is gone. The great earthquake of 1950 hit the region with such an intensity that the bed of the river was pushed upwards causing it to change its course. Since then the Majuli Island has fallen prey to constant erosion. Fishing tribes had reached Majuli from Arunachal Pradesh generations ago. Dr Goswami said "our wife is 'sadhna' (that is prayer) as we lead a bachelor's life. In Satras devotion gets precedence over knowledge." Dr Goswami was thrilled to be here and hoped that the this part of the country would appreciate hardships being faced by the inhabitants.

Deccan Herald
01 April 2000

Where slow is real cool



Dhano, dhanye, pushpe bhara, amader ei bo sundhara....wrote the eminent Bengali poet Dwijendralal Roy. The song is still being hummed and sung by thousands in Bengal who place it at the top of their list of patriotic songs. But how many of us know Roy wrote these lines in Orissa, and not, as you would have supposed, in Bengal. Dhenkanal, a small district town in Orissa, still evokes the same feelings the poet experienced

years ago, surrounded as it is by green hills.

Once a princely state, it is now evolving as a seat of education and considered happening. Ever since the Indian Institute of Mass Communication was established here in 1993, the rest of the country has woken up to its existence. But why teach media management in a place which doesn't even figure in the touchdown time for TV crews. If they had to establish a centre in Orissa, couldn't it have been Bhubaneswar or even Cuttack?

The answer is rather a straightforward one. It's all courtesy the then Information and Broadcasting Minister K.P. Singh Deo, the Lok Sabha candidate and Raja of Dhenkanal. Respectability came as the institute was treated at par with its Delhi branch and not merely as a country cousin. Now, the town will be getting its own TV channel, Dhenkanal Television (DTV).

Passouts from IIMC, Dhenkanal, are currently flourishing in both the electronic and print media. The SIET (Synergy Institute of Energy and Technology) has also been set up here recently, drawing students from other states. Their arrival is slowly transforming the town and giving it a more cosmopolitan outlook. But the grey-haired elders haven't quite come to terms with the new development.

Conservative mores rule and the sight of young boys and girls hanging out together is still apt to raise an admonitory finger. Young women in jeans and western outfits, always associated with progressive thinking for some unfathomable reason, are still a rare sight. But their "intrusion" has affected the local market economy. Soft drinks and ice-creams are major sellers. Fast-food counters are mushrooming and PCs with e-mail and site surfing facilities do good busi-

ness. Garment shops stock designs that reflect the taste of big city fashion. Brand names like Pepe, Allen Solly and Polo also have their showrooms here.

For the beauty conscious, well-equipped parlours have set up shop offering the latest in beauty treatment facilities. Then there are hotels, restaurants, shopping complexes and wine shops. Interestingly for a small town, Dhenkanal has a science centre sprawled over two acres and housing around 100 exhibits. Although most of these are not in working condition yet, they attract many visitors because of the small planetarium that has been constructed in the vicinity.

From Lakshmi Bazaar, the town's nerve centre, Dhenkanal is bubbling with life and looks ready to meet the future head on. On the occasion of Lakshmi Puja every year, the whole town is lit up, but this year the festival was washed away because of the disastrous super cyclone. Though it did not figure on the cyclone's "hit-list", Dhenkanal did not go unspared. Around 32 people were killed and many more lives affected. Houses were wrecked, trees uprooted and schools ravaged. It's a wonder IIMC, the town's image-maker, was spared the worst.

Dhenkanal accommodates a school for the blind and hearing impaired, in addition to an orphanage for girls. Both organisations have done commendable work despite being hindered by financial constraints. There is an old-age home, located some 8 km away.

To a visitor, Dhenkanal has an exportable brand name in the form of its famous *vada*, made with pulse (*urad ki dal*), chillies and other spices. They call it "the taste of Dhenkanal." You can always spot students lounging around at Bhaina's *mishti* shop, one of the most popular eating joints in this town. Life in Dhenkanal trails at a leisurely plod. Shops close for lunch at 12 noon and open again at 4 pm. Only to down shutters again by 8.30 pm.

Apart from a few stray incidents of theft and trespassing, Dhenkanal is by and large a peaceful place to lay your load down. Hours before this millennium, a computer theft was reported from the Aptech Computer Centre. The incident created a sensation in the public and among journalism students but soon passed over.

One of the town's drawbacks that has affected its growth is its sluggish progress in drawing private capital for industry. With the exception of a sugar mill, there are not many industries there. The Kalinga Spinning Mill and other such units are tottering on the brink of closure.

But the bright side of the story is that Dhenkanal is pollution-free. This has made it a popular health and holiday resort. Known for green hills, its ponds and foggy mornings, Dhenkanal is also a destination for pilgrims. The Kunjakanta temple, where the main deity is Lord Krishna, is about 100 years old and supposedly made by the erstwhile king of Dhenkanal. The DTV has already prepared programmes on *Sapta-sajya* (a temple located on a hill nearby), Kapilash (a tourist spot for the pilgrims), and Unnakotishwar.

But the town's beauty ends with summer heat, when the verdant city becomes a fuzzy boiling cauldron. Every year an average of 50 people die from heatwave and sunstroke.

The Pioneer
02 April 2000

Reborn

WHEN Dhanna Lal natural drainage of the river at Gurjar said, "dharti ka source. "It's because of the pet bhar jayega to nadi 'johads' that the wells of the phoot padegi", nobody had really village are full of water despite paid attention to the wisdom of two years of drought in the his words. But when the seasonal region". By this time, the Tarun river Arvari really came back to Bharat Sangh (TBS), a voluntary life after years of dried up spell, organisation had begun to gain the secretary of Tarun Bharat roots in the region. Its secretary, Sangh realised the worth of Rajendra Singh thought it Dhanna's prediction. A simple, prudent to follow Mangu Patel's plain uruth which he had stated in advice and the 'johads' proved to his own rustic way, was in fact, be a turning point in the life of the key to traditional watershed both Tarun Bharat Sangh and the development. Following this very villagers. While the 'johads' trans-traditional approach, Bhaonta- formed the ecology and economics Kolyala, the twin villages of the region, it also established Thanagazi block in Alwar district TBS in the region. And the vil- of Rajasthan found a solution to lagers' toil bore the ultimate fruit the water crisis in the region. And in the form of regeneration of it proved doubly rewarding. They Arvari.

Rajendra Singh told **Sunday Spotlight** at Bhikampur village, the head quarters of Tarun Bharat Sangh that he had never thought or even imagined that Arvari will become perennial one day. But Dhanna Gurjar did predict it years back when he said, 'jab dharti ka pet bhar jayega to nadi phoot padegi', meaning if the ground water table is high the water will automatically come up from the course of river. The region is facing drought for the second consecutive year and the river is not flowing at present, but there is water, though shallow, an indication of the fact that the groundwater has not depleted, he added.

Bhaonta-Kolyala, the twin vil- lages located on the periphery of Sariska Tiger Reserve were facing acute water shortage in the 1980s. With four consecutive droughts, there was widespread poverty, no hopes of cultivation and the ground water table so low that even diesel water pumps were of no help. At that time, the idea of building 'johad' - small earthen check-dams was floated by Mangu Patel, a resident of Gopalpura. The residents of Bhaonta-Kolyala, drought-stricken and poor, decided to replicate what Mangu Patel had suggested. They started with repairing old 'johads' and gradually a whole train of rain harvesting system emerged.

Inspired by their initiative, about 70 other villages joined the movement of making 'johads' and to the villagers' surprise, river Arvari was revived. Of the two main sources of the river, one stream originates near Bhaonta-Kolyala and the other near Agar.

So, the process of injecting life into the river was started at Bhaonta-Kolyala. Kanhaiya Lal of Bhaonta village, who is also the secretary of Arvari parliament said 'johads' recharged the

flagged off each year on the eleventh day after Diwali, goes to different villages highlighting the virtues of 'johad' in rain har- vesting. Padyatras have also been held in Saurashtra and Kutch re- gions of Gujarat, Tikamgarh in Madhya Pradesh and Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh.

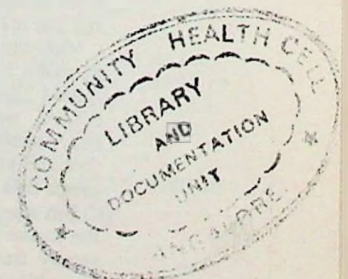
'Johads' - the small earthen check-dams which capture and conserve rainwater, improve per- colation and groundwater recharge, is catching up with the imagination of villagers as the tra- dition was already there some- where in their collective subcon- scious. 'Johads', popularly known as tanks are a well known tradi- tional system of water storage for lean periods in many other parts of the country also. The simple mud and rubble barriers built across the contour of a slope to arrest rainwater, 'Johads' are the ingenious and cost effective inter- ventions which have stood the test of time in terms of recharging the groundwater table. Revival of 'johads' does not entail any largescale investment but its ben- efits are immense - it serves water for drinking and irrigation pur- poses, provides water for live stock and more importantly sta- bilises ecological balance. There was a time when the Rajasthan government had declared four blocks - Thanagazi, Rajgarh, Lachmangarh and Bansur as dark zones. But with the ecology trans- formed due to villagers' effort, many companies reportedly set their eyes on the region.

The state government granted leases for fishing in '96 to some contractors and the villagers had to go on a satyagrah to press the government to cancel the con- tracts. Then, there arose the question of Arvari's ownership. To find an answer to the question, a 'jansunwai' was held on December 18, 1998, attended by a large number of social activists and environmentalists. Mr Anil Agrawal, one of the commis- sioners of world water com- mission who was also present on the occasion suggested that where conflicts exist over river basins between different countries, a commission is formed to settle the disputes. So why not form the Arvari sansad (parliament)? Accordingly, the Arvari sansad

was formed the next year com- prising 142 members under the chairmanship of Chhaju Ram and two coordinators - Phool Chand Meena and Kanhaiya Lal.

Arjun Singh Gurjar, belonging to Kolyala village, also a member of Arvari sansad says, "Arvari sansad ne chawal, mirchi, aur ganne ki kheti par rok laga rakhi hai. Sansad gaon walo ke hith ka pura khayal rakhti hai. Is ilake me shikar par bhi pabandi hai. Yadi sarkar hamare khilaf kuch karegi to hamari sansad uska mukabala karegi" (The Arvari sansad had im- posed restrictions on the cultivation of rice, chillies and cane. The sansad also takes note of the welfare of the villagers. There is also restriction on hunting in this region. If the government ini- tiates any action against us, then the sansad will reply back). They have forest conservation com- mittee and a gram kosh also to lend advise and support to vil- lagers. When asked what would they do with the one lakh cash award the village community has received, he said they will deposit the money in the bank and utilise the money for further devel- opment of the village. A 'johad' has become synonymous with development in Alwar district and TBS is working as a catalyst. The 'johad' watershed has brought prosperity to the region, as a village woman Rupa Devi de- scribed, "gaon me khushhali chha rahi hai" and the traditional system has come out as one of the best possible options in any agro- climatic situation for recharging groundwater.

Abha Sharma
Deccan Herald
02 April 2000



The rural connection

PRASHANT DHAVAN *encounters a group of migrants who keep in touch with their village by meeting in the city regularly*

It's evening on a weekend day at Kotwal Garden in Dadar, a central Mumbai borough. One can see at least five different groups of Chakarmanis — natives from the Konkan region settled in the metropolis for generations — chatting, cracking jokes and relaxing.

"We have collected some funds for repairing the temple back in our village. The job has to be finished this May, so we have to hurry up," a senior member of the group can be heard telling his fellow villagers.

"Friends, I am retiring next month. I won't be with you for long since I intend to immediately leave for my village," a frail-looking Chakarmani from another group murmurs.

These migrants always seek their return to their roots. These informal exchanges help them return to the more familiar settings of their village. A middle-aged man, probably a mill worker, tells one of his colleagues: "I won't be able to go to the village this May. Since you are going, please hand over this packet to my brother."

All trivial nuggets of information are shared during these *gawki* meetings. Around 10 to 15 Chakarmanis usually turn up. For now, there are not more than five members since

many of them have left for their villages to attend the annual religious fair. The meetings virtually stop in April and May since a large chunk of Chakarmanis enjoy an extended stay in their villages during the summer vacation.

Says Tukaram Kerkar, who hails from Sindhudurg district: "I have come to the city to eke out a living, but I miss the coziness of my village. The *gawki* helps me remain in touch with my fellow villagers. These meetings give us a feeling of togetherness. In the hectic city life, we manage some moments of respite."

Similar meetings also take place at Five Gardens in Matunga and in Girgaum, too. Preparations for the annual religious fair, construction of a school building, match-making for prospective bridegrooms and even settling family disputes are on the agenda of these meetings. On certain days, the villagers may have nothing to discuss. Still, they make it a point to be there as it gives them a sense of identity in an alien city. Says Sadoba Kanade: "I can't visit my village frequently, but I want to do my bit for it. I wish to retain my connections with it. The *gawki* gives me an opportunity to mingle with fellow-

Chakarmanis."

Young faces are missing from the get-togethers. Old-timers complain that the younger generation of Chakarmanis is not attached to their native place. Says Prabhakar Teli: "These boys merely eye the village property. They want to sell it off, and make easy money. They don't bother about their commitment to their native place."

Owing to the discouraging trend, the attendance at the *gawki* meetings has slowly decreased. A decade ago, there would be many more mandals at the same venue in Dadar. The Chakarmanis then would passionately discuss every small matter related to their village. Now, old-timers rue, the zeal and the passion is missing. Young fellows like Chandu Kadam, hailing from Sawantwadi, see the *gawki* as a fruitless exercise. Says he: "I have severed all my ties with the village, so what's the point in attending these meetings? I would rather buy a decent house in Mumbai than waste money on repairing the village home."

The Observer
02 April 2000

Former guerrillas turn to modern farmers

Syed Zarir Hussain

Bakota Parijat (Assam)

GUNS AND explosives were his passion till last year, when he decided to come out of the jungles to join the mainstream in Assam.

Manoranjan Baruah, a hardcore guerrilla leader of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), was one of the outfit's sharp shooters and a weapons instructor, known to the cadres as a tough task master.

But away from the jungle and the sound of staccato gunfire, the stocky Baruah has transformed himself into a modern farmer with a band of followers, toiling hard in the fields from dawn to dusk to

earn his livelihood.

"Life has changed a lot ever since I decided to come overground last year. You can behave like God when you have a gun in your hand. But at the end of the day there is no personal satisfaction in killing or terrorising people at gunpoint," Baruah said.

This man from Bakota Parijat, a remote village in eastern Assam's Sibsagar district, 410 km from the capital Guwahati, joined the ULFA some time in 1986. He rose from the ranks to become one of the best known arms instructors in the group, imparting training to cadres in the use of various weapons, including improvised explosive devices.

Last year, Baruah, along with a

dozen other hardcore ULFA guerrillas, surrendered before Army officials with a pledge to start life afresh. More than 1,000 extremists have laid down arms and come overground during the past three years. The Army was quick to offer help to Baruah and his associates at Bakota Parijat to enable them to earn a living under a project called Operation Amaranth (one that does not fade).

"We pumped in some money and offered technical assistance to start an integrated farm comprising poultry, piggery, fishery and an orchard so that surrendered militants could work and earn a livelihood," Brigadier Ajmer Singh, commander of Second Artillery Mountain Brigade, said. IANS

The Pioneer
02 April 2000

7th NATIONAL ESSAY COMPETITION ON LITERACY/ADULT EDUCATION

National Literacy Mission (NLM) has adopted the campaign model as the principal strategy for eradicating illiteracy throughout the country. Literacy, an important tool for communication, learning and information, is a virtual precondition for an individual's evolution and national development. NLM aims at imparting functional literacy to the 15-35 age group in order to achieve the threshold, sustainable level of 75% literacy by the year 2005.

With a view to stimulating and encouraging creative contribution from students, teachers, writers etc. in support of the literacy programmes in the country, entries for our Essay Competitions are cordially invited from different sections of society on the following topics:

FOR STUDENTS AT SECONDARY/SR. SECONDARY LEVELS (3000 WORDS)

Topic: Literacy Empowers the individual	
Prizes	Amount
1st Prize	Rs. 6,000/-
2nd Prize	Rs. 5,000/-
3rd Prize	Rs. 4,000/-
Consolation prize	Rs. 2,000/- each

FOR STUDENTS AT COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY LEVELS (3000 WORDS)

Topic: Literacy - Our Window to the World	
Prizes	Amount
1st Prize	Rs. 12,000/-
2nd Prize	Rs. 8,000/-
3rd Prize	Rs. 5,000/-
Consolation Prize	Rs. 3,000/- each

FOR TEACHERS AT PRIMARY, MIDDLE AND SECONDARY LEVELS (5000 WORDS)

Topic: Literacy for All - The Way to a Learning Society	
Prizes	Amount
1st Prize	Rs. 15,000/-
2nd Prize	Rs. 12,000/-
3rd Prize	Rs. 9,000/-
Consolation Prize	Rs. 5,000/- each

GENERAL - OPEN TO ALL INCLUDING PROFESSIONALS, JOURNALISTS, EDUCATIONISTS, PROFESSORS, WRITERS, EDITORS, COLUMNISTS ETC. (5000 WORDS)

Topic: Literacy - Critical Factor for the Knowledge Revolution	
Prizes	Amount
1st Prize	Rs. 20,000/-
2nd Prize	Rs. 15,000/-
3rd Prize	Rs. 12,000/-
Consolation Prize	Rs. 5,000/- each

CLOSING DATE : 25 MAY, 2000 LANGUAGE : ENGLISH OR HINDI

— RULES OF ENTRY —

1. There is no entry fee or entry form.
 2. The competition is open to all Indian nationals except the employees of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Elementary Education and Literacy, including its Subordinate Offices and their dependents.
 3. A certificate that the essay is original work written by the entrant himself/herself is to be submitted with the essay entry. Student participants should enclose a certificate from the concerned school/college, certifying that he/she is a bonafide student. Teachers should enclose a certificate from the concerned school authorities.
 4. Participants should send two copies of the essay. One copy should include name, address, topic, language etc. in capital letters with the signature of participant while the other copy need not show any such particulars. Both these copies should be sent to the Directorate of Adult Education, New Delhi. Only one essay entry per participant on the suggested topic should be submitted.
 5. Submission of the essay entry to the competition implies the acceptance of the rules and regulations of the competition. No correspondence will be entertained in this regard. Each envelope containing the entry should be superscribed with words 'National Essay Competition 2000-2001'.
 6. In all matters of dispute, the decision of the Director, Directorate of Adult Education, New Delhi will be final and binding.
- The invited essay entries complete in all respects should reach on or before the 25th May, 2000 (By hand/post) to:



The Director
Directorate of Adult Education
Block -10, Jamnagar House, Shahjahan Road, New Delhi - 110 011.

The Indian Express
01 April 2000

30,000 kids among 3.5 lakh people are HIV positive

ABOUT 16,000 AIDS patients are added in the world population every day. In 1998, 25 lakh were killed by the dreaded diseases.

In India, one per cent of the population, i.e. 3.5 lakh people are HIV positive. In 1999, 30,000 children were suffering from HIV positive in India and 1.20 lakh died from AIDS.

These facts were revealed at a seminar on AIDS by Indian Health Management Institute, Jaipur, sponsored by the Family Welfare Training Institute here yesterday. It was suggested in the seminar by many experts to provide 'female condom' to women for their safety. In European and other developed countries, such 'female condoms' are provided to the women. It was also suggested in the seminar that the women involved in the sex trade should be given full information about AIDS and Government and voluntary organisations should provide them safety measures. Like vasectomy, mass publicity should be given to dangers AIDS through audio and video media. People should get their blood examined regularly.

Teenage sex is very common in western countries like Britain, France, Italy and USA. But the percentage of AIDS patients is much lower in these countries compared to India. The people are using safe measures of sex there.

But in India, people are illiterate and have little knowledge about AIDS. And perhaps this is the reason the number of AIDS patients are fast increasing.

It was also suggested that the tourists who visit India should go for HIV tests. If they are found HIV affected, they may not be allowed to visit the country.

The Hindustan Times
03 April 2000

Polio cases challenge eradication drive in Bihar

The Times of India News Service

GAYA: The detection of polio case in village Usari under Manpur block of the district has put a question mark on the polio eradication drive through mass immunisation. The World Health Organisation (WHO), which has been monitoring the pulse polio campaign has seriously taken up the incidence of polio reported even after the massive drive. Expressing concern over this, the WHO representative Somi Anand, addressing health workers at a programme organised by the department of audio visual publicity, in the IMA Gaya premises, attributed the detected polio case to migration of the polio carrier from the Chandauti area of the district.

When contacted, the Gaya civil surgeon while confirming the incidence of polio in the Usari village

of Manpur block ruled out the possibility of carrier migration. The civil surgeon told this newspaper that preliminary investigation revealed that the affected child had all through remained in the village and as such the migration theory did not hold good. Further investigation was going on and at this stage, he was not in a position to make a categorical statement except ruling out the migration theory.

However, a medical professional, closely associated with the pulse polio programme in the region says that the detection of the polio case can mean only two things. Either the cold chain of the vaccine could not be maintained or a large chunk of child population of the district had remained uncovered. The civil surgeon kept mum on being asked about the maintenance of the cold

chain and the possibility of a large chunk being left out of the immunisation drive.

According to experts, secondary immunisation also takes place as the vaccine virus, released by the children who are administered anti-polio drops on mass scale, is inhaled by others. The immunised child releases vaccine virus through defecation for about 45 days after the administration of the drops. That way, the polio case detected in Usari village means that a large chunk of child population of the area remained uncovered during the different phases of pulse polio drive.

Sources say that the WHO has conveyed its findings to the civil surgeon and the organisation has also questioned the authenticity of the claims made by the health offi-

cials about the progress of pulse polio drive in the district. The civil surgeon conceded that the detection of the polio cases even after the eradication drive was a serious matter.

According to WHO representative Somi Anand, five polio cases were detected in different parts of Gaya district in 1999 and of these three detections were made in Gaya town itself while one case each was detected in the Bodh Gaya and Barachatti blocks.

While speaking at the DAVI programme, Dr U S Mishra informed that 90,000 children were born in the Gaya district each year and 10 per cent of the infants in the 0-1 age group died and of the average 9,000 infant deaths in the district each year, 4,500 died of vaccine preventable diseases.

The Times of India
03 April 2000

AIDS training for teachers

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

KOHIMA, April 4. — The Nagaland State AIDS Control Society will impart training on HIV/AIDS to school teachers from this year following an alarming growth in HIV-positive cases in the state.

Dr Vizolie Suokhrie, deputy project director of NSACS, said the organisation decided to introduce AIDS education in the state's school curriculum as the disease was preventable through mass awareness.

Dr Suokhrie said 49 AIDS and 700 HIV cases were detected in the state so far. Of these, 10 AIDS cases were reported between 1992-97, nine in 1998, 22 in 1999 and eight in the first two months of this year alone.

Besides involving NGOs in various anti-AIDS programmes, NSACS has been imparting regular training to medical officers, nurses, public leaders, church leaders, and health workers to work with the patients and to spread awareness among the community.

The Statesman
05 April 2000

Cyber-savvy smart schools in pipeline

Udayan Namboodiri
New Delhi, April 2

THE HUMAN Resource Development (HRD) ministry has decided to speed up the pace of introducing computer education in schools. Between now and March 2002, the government hopes to introduce computer literacy in at least 10,000 government and aided schools, computer-aided learning in 1,000, and wants to begin computer based learning in 100 "Smart" Schools across the country.

HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi said the recommendations made by the Prime Minister's task force on introduction of information technology in the education sector will be followed to the hilt. The task force has suggested that students, teachers and management of schools desiring to buy computers will be extended attractive financial packages.

Named "Vidyarthi", "Shikshak" and School Computer schemes, these will be supported by governmental intervention leading to lowering the cost of personal computers, easy installment bank

loans, computer donations by IT companies, bulk donations of computers by NRI organisations, large-volume bargain price imports and multi-lateral funding.

"The 'smart' schools will not just emphasise information technology in schools, but also on the use of skills and values that will be important in the next millennium. Pilot projects will be started in each state soon", the minister said. The first pilot project will be launched in Dakshin Kannada and Udipi districts of Karnataka.

There is no uniform definition of 'smart' schools. Under the scheme they will be required to avail IT in the teaching and learning processes. It is hoped that at least one section (of 40 students) in classes 9 through 12 will be fully computerised. A school having 160 computers will be dubbed "smart". Realising that the target cannot be achieved in one go, it is proposed to provide 40 computers to 100 such identified schools in the initial phase. The schools will be selected one each from the states and the rest will be distributed among the Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas.

The Hindustan Times
03 April 2000

An eye-opener

A young girl and an old man nudged their way inside a crowded bus. On finding the man blind, he was offered a seat by one of the passengers. The girl stood near him holding him. When they reached their destination, the girl helped the old man get down. And only when the bus started moving, did the passengers realise that the girl too was visually handicapped for she was found unfolding the stick in her hand to walk.

The Indian Express
03 April 2000

Credit as a human right

◆ By ARINDAM BANIK

POVERTY across marginal farm and non-farm households is one of the greatest concerns in developing countries. This is precisely why the conditions of non-farm households, which account for a major proportion of India's population, assume importance.

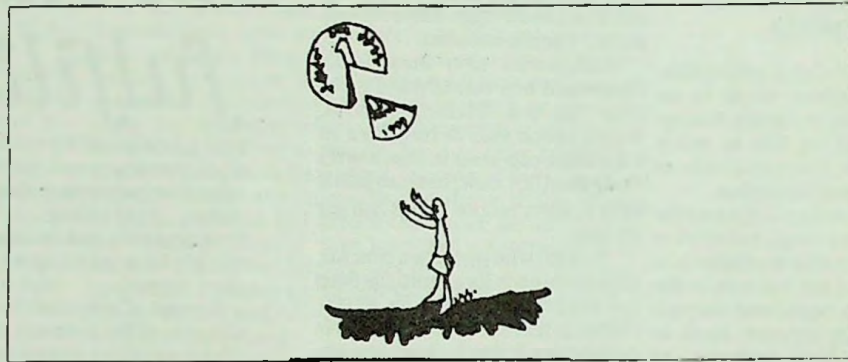
Cheap and plentiful institutional credit is not an entirely satisfactory solution. If private credit is dear, the first step is to establish why this is the case. There are several ways in which the government can reduce the lender's business costs; if market power keeps private credit dear, government could step in. In both cases, however, indirect intervention may be best.

In any event, it should now be clear that the extension of highly regulated, institutionalised banking services, which has been so vigorously pursued by the government, is not the sole means of realising economic efficiency and distributive justice as far as dealings in credit markets are concerned.

The government is unlikely to forsake this path entirely; nevertheless it is important that the associated policy be pursued in the right way. What is needed is more work on the nature and consequences of competition between the regulated and unregulated sources of credit, with special attention being paid on ways to create competition.

Experts often favour policy intervention in the credit delivery system. In this context it must be pointed out that conventional banking practices, like requirements of physical collateral and daunting paperwork, do not work for the rural poor. Paperwork should be minimal and 'social' or any other common responsibility system must be used to determine the credit-worthiness of the poor.

The Grameen Bank Approach (GBA) seems to have found an effective institutional method of reaching the poor in the non-farm sector. Credit is a fundamental human right. It may be mentioned that giving such an opportunity to the poor to



increase their own incomes would provide them with their livelihood necessities.

The Grameen bank concentrates its lending to poor women as they make better borrowers than men, since they tend to utilise their loans only for income generating activities and ensure that they promptly pay back their loans from their profits. Women are also the ones most directly responsible for meeting household needs, even to the point of going hungry so that there is enough food for the family. The GBA has been successfully replicated in various parts of the developing world. It has also been adopted in Canada, France and the United States, where it is being used to help people on welfare to become income-generators.

It is time to integrate development processes in a concerted way, involving large and small NGOs. However, one must follow a local approach. There is no single workable blueprint for providing financial services to the poorer sections in every location. Technical support and training are preconditions for success. Regulations to protect savings and minimise loan defaults are necessary, but they should be flexible enough to recognise informal institutions and allow local organisations to frame their own rules.

There are certain factors which have to be considered in the Grameen context. It is not clear how the situation is to be managed during periods of uncertainty, when savings are marginal. After all, disasters

like floods and cyclones are a regular feature in this part of the world. It also leaves open the pressing question of what the future of microfinance is in situations of national and global economic instability. For microcredit programmes to attend full sustainability, subsidy dependency may need to be reduced over time, using a combination of policies like raising interest rates, reducing administrative costs and improving staff productivity. This will help make microcredit programmes less vulnerable to disasters.

It may be mentioned here that rural finance alone will not be able to alleviate poverty, because more credit does not necessarily mean less poverty. Appropriate policies and good governance are critical for creating an environment in which financial services can make a positive difference to the poor. Besides, people must be sufficiently educated and healthy to make productive use of credit. Efficient, functioning markets too are critical if small-scale farmers and entrepreneurs are to obtain the inputs and outputs they need to produce and market their products.

The writer is ACC Chair Professor in the International Management Institute, New Delhi

The Indian Express
04 April 2000

Big catch for cellphones

FROM RAMAKRISHNA
UPADHYA

Kochi, April 3: Call it celling fish.

The fishsellers' trade is no longer the same in Kerala. Fishermen are catching fish as much with the hook, line and sinker as with Nokias and Motorolas.

Once Mohandas — the mobile-toting man in a *lungi* and shirt is not everyone's idea of a fisherman — would send out his men to the sea in *vanchis* (boats) and keep his fingers tightly crossed. Back in his Munambham harbour, he would have no idea about the day's catch till the men came back. Their return would start another headache: the fish, depending on both the variety and the quantity, would have to be sent to the right markets.

But the cellphone changed it all. Now a techie Mohandas sends his men into the sea all right, but gets arms them with cellphones too. If there is a big catch, they get back to him immediately. "Whenever the catch is big, I divert it to Kollam where I get Rs 20,000 to Rs 25,000 more though my diesel cost may go up by about Rs 3,000," says the soft-spoken 50-year-old, his Nokia peeping from his shirt pocket.

When he is not directing his men to markets, Mohandas is contacting markets along the coast — in Kozhikode, Kannur, Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam or Ponmani — and sending his boats to where the best price is being offered.

Mohandas is not alone. Fisherman alone account for 5,000 BPL Mobile cellphone connections.

The new technology has paid rich dividends, literally. The cellphone-brigade makes sure the fish fetches the right price, sounding a warning to the middlemen.

Says Sudhish Kumar, a trader in marine products: "Now it is not possible to exploit the mobile-savvy fishermen as they contact markets across Kerala and even Mangalore or Goa to find out the prevailing price and divert the boats from midsea."

"Seer fish, for instance, which earlier used to fetch only Rs 70,

now gets Rs 100 to Rs 110 per kg and it makes a huge difference to them," Kumar explains.

Cellphones also mean that fishermen are venturing deeper into the sea. Fishing parties, which spend four to five days on high seas, can keep in touch with their families now, besides being able to alert rescue teams during trouble.

Rajesh, who owns two *vanchis*, says since each foray into the deep sea costs Rs 35,000 to Rs 40,000, communication among boats via cellphones helps to lead one another to big catches.

"Earlier, we had no option. It was like trading blind-folded and we had to take whatever was being offered at the local market. Now, we are more or less able to control the trade, eliminating the middlemen. Unlike in the past, all grades of fish, shrimp or prawn, get a price and there is no wastage," says Rajesh.

Smaller fishermen like Sulaiman and M.A. Rafi, who have also acquired cellphones but use them only during *chaakara* (the big catch season), agree wholeheartedly that the wireless handset has made a difference.

That leaves cellphone companies fishing for more fishermen. In fact, the credit of hooking fishermen to cellphones goes to BPL. Mobile business operations head K.A. Mohammed Saleem. He had driven home to the fishermen in the utility of the mobile phone, which was at first dismissed as a luxury.

While BPL Mobile already boasts of 5,000 fishermen-customers, its regional rival, Escotel, is also eyeing the fishing community wistfully.

Saleem is still marketing his ware aggressively among fishermen. "We are negotiating with a fishermen's federation to offer 10,000 mobile phones on most competitive rates so that we can reach out to small and marginal fishermen as well," says Saleem.

BPL Mobile has already put in place the infrastructure to cover the entire 700 km coastal belt of Kerala, reaching 77 towns and al-

most 70 per cent of the population. So the high seas promise to keep ringing: with the sound of cellphones.

The Telegraph
04 April 2000

Labour of love to fulfill a dream

TEN KILOMETRES from infamous Manoharpur -- the scene of Australian missionary Graham Staines' grisly killing. Thakurmunda and its adjoining villages have taken up an exemplary project.

Starved of irrigation facility, villagers of the area are digging a 20-km canal for a permanent source of irrigation. This is a cent per cent "people's project" with practically no support from the Government.

In fact, it was the Government's indifference to their problems which provoked them to launch their own project.

The popular movement for irrigation facilities in the area started way back in 1986, when people under the banner of a Gandhian organisation Lokmandal held demonstrations in the Thakurmunda belt and met the Block Development Officer with their demands.

After he turned a deaf ear to them, about 900 people, including 300 women, began their trek to Karanjia and staged a sit-in dharna there for five days.

The agitators were attacked by hooligans and several attempts were made to break the morale of rural folks fighting for their rights.

However, their number kept swelling and finally the Government was forced to call for negotiation. The officials promised to fulfill the demand for irrigation water in phases, but later, the assurance turned out to be empty words.

It was then that these folks decided to take the challenge of digging a canal on their own. The

20 feet wide canal is being dug in the most hostile terrain full of rocks and trees.

Something or the other keeps cropping up at every step but using their native wisdom and indigenous expertise, nearly 800 people, including women and children, are fighting all odds for the last two years. Working to shape their own future, it is for them a labour of love.

Nearly half the canal is complete. The completed portion is situated at a height of about 800 feet above the sea level at the neck of Similipal hills.

The people, who have been toiling ceaselessly for such a long time, recently met at Khediaposh village to celebrate the second anniversary of the Keranjia movement, which set the ball rolling.

Having seen the results of their endeavour, those who had once opposed have stopped becoming hostile. Some have even turned friendly and were present at the anniversary celebrations to complement the brave ones who had done the region proud.

"This area became notorious following the alleged macabre of Dara Singh. But the project has given it a new positive image."

It symbolises the triumph of man's resolve to sort out his problems on his own," said Chittaranjan, convenor of Lokmandal, which has been the guiding force behind the movement.

Ashutosh Mishra
The Pioneer
04 April 2000

Women for environment

Women around the world have been playing a crucial role in the protection of the ecosystem and the conservation of natural resources that sustain life on earth. In fact, the widely acclaimed document "Our common future" brought out by the World Commission on Environment and Development is dedicated to the millions of women worldwide who are part of the growing movement for the protection of the living world, environmental health and security and alleviation of poverty.

As the developments around the world have shown, women participate actively in the protection of the biological diversity through their many roles and responsibilities. In the developing countries women tend the fields and grow food to feed their families. Women also collect water and fetch firewood, often covering a distance of upto six kms. In fact, one of the reasons women raise alarm over the depletion of forest stretches is because of the fact that the depletion of forests has an adverse impact on water resources and fuelwood availability.

It was the determined womenfolk of the Garhwal region of the Himalayan Uttar Pradesh who had launched a vigorous campaign against the forces of deforestation under the banner of famous Chipko movement in the early 1970s. These women would hug the trees physically to avoid their feeling by contractors and thus save the tree. Significantly, these hill women were well aware that their well being was closely tied up with the conservation of the forests. They were also aware that forests provided more than just timber.

In the poverty stricken Himalayan region, while men were all too eager to sell the village forests to make quick money, the women, who struggled all the day in the field for food and fodder in the hill terrain, were determined to assert their rights. These women knew that deforestation would mean the extra burden of walking still longer distances to collect their days fuel and fodder. They felt that they should have the primary right to manage the forests.

The first major incident took place in March 1974 when 27 women of Dungri village successfully protected the local forests from the axes of the contractor. Despite the threat and humiliation, village women struck to their guns and did not let the men fell the trees. In 1978, another group of women resisted attempts to cut trees in Bhyunder to meet the fuel needs of the 250,000 odd pilgrims visiting the famous Badrinath shrine.

Not only India, in the other parts of the third world too women have recognised the need to protect biodiversity and to restore and recreate it. Wangari Maathai founded the Kenyan Green Belt movement involving 80,000 women in the planting of the trees. The Kenyan Green Belt movement also maintains more than 1000 nurseries and plantations and also a variety of trees to provide for human and non human needs.

Similarly, women in the Borneo Island have been struggling hard to protect what is left of the rainforests. The rate of harvesting them is clearly not sustainable and the rate of species estimation accompanying it is appalling. For these women, belonging to the lower socio-economic strata, ecological degradation and deforestation means a grim ordeal in the form of drudgery and disaster for their health.

Even in Bangladesh, women continue to play an important role in the protection of the coastal ecology and biological diversity. Under the food for work programme women have set up the first line of defence against floods

by planting trees and building embankments in the coastal zones. Women are best motivated, and also suited, to manage the environment. In rural India, women are primarily responsible for collecting resources from nature. Consequently, they have proportionately greater knowledge of the status of such resources and are affected by the scarcity of natural resources.

In the picturesque, snow clad Himachal Pradesh, women have been at the forefront of local conservation initiative. Responding to the scarcity of fodder, women's groups or "Mahila Mandals" have successfully protected the patches of forests in many parts of the state. For instance, when the tubewell dug up by a cement company led to the drying up of the traditional water resources in Darlaghat, women of the village got together to shift the tubewells elsewhere. In the villages of Mulbagal taluk in Karnataka women under the banner "Mahila Okkoota" have launched a campaign to desilt the tanks. The Okkoota (unity in the local Kannada language) members go from village to village, talk to village elders and others and urge them to take steps to improve the tanks.

All these go to point out that in the years ahead women can play a far more significant role in averting ecological degradation through a sustained action at the grassroot level.

The Pioneer
04 April 2000

A new mantra to empower women

Women, by and large, have remained the silent sufferers of eve-teasing, roadside assault and other such kinds of harassment. In fact, often the men or the culprits do not get reprimanded even when a formal complaint is lodged against them. The fact that virtually no action is ever taken against the culprits, encourages the anti-social elements to repeat their acts. Some women now assert that only preventive vigilance can assure them safety.

Says, Ms Vibha Parthasarathy, chairperson of the National Commission for Women (NCW), "A kind of preventive vigilance in society needs to be established for things to change. Something that is a social process and not an administrative one and which is need based, contextual and goal-oriented."

Many organisations are now adopting this approach. The NCW, too, in its endeavour to check this social evil, is launching a project in some of the women's colleges aimed at creating awareness and aiding the young women with skills to cope with the problems.

The project due to be launched in mid-2000, has two modules: awareness building and empowerment. The module on awareness building includes creating legal literacy, media literacy and also literacy on sex and sexuality. Under this module, the students will also be educated about their rights and receive information regarding

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Once barren M'shtra wastelands now produce mangoes

India Abroad News Service

SINDHUDURG

BARREN rocky hillsides have been turning into lush mango orchards in a transformation of wastelands in coastal Maharashtra that borrows from Israeli and Thai techniques.

"In the next 10 years, many areas you see barren now will be green," said a confident Ajit Shirodkar, a Purdue University (US)-educated pharmaceutical technologist who has shifted to horticulture and is currently experimenting with boosting mango productivity on wastelands in this area.

Sindhudurg district — coastal Maharashtra's southernmost region just north of Goa — has some 236,000 hectares which could be classified as wasteland. But for Shirodkar "there is no such thing as wasteland, but only wasted land."

This hilly, balmy coastal region

is home to the famed Alphonso mango — locally called the 'Hapus' — which had its origins in nearby Goa when it was under Portuguese rule.

Today the mango fetches lucrative prices for local horticulturists, who send them for sale by the truckload to Mumbai, some 400 km north of here. Mango's potential was realised in this narrow coastal stretch of Maharashtra some 60 years ago.

While commercial production and farming started 25-30 years ago, the real revolution started only in the past couple of years. The dramatic change is being brought about by a three-pronged approach — high density planting, blasting for pit-making in rocky areas and improving nurturing techniques.

Productivity is up 2.5 times. More significantly, it is now possible to grow mangoes on eroded hillsides that lacked tree cover and faced topsoil losses of five

tonnes per hectare or more.

Sunil Kulkarni said, a transporter who has land near Devgad, from where many of the famed Alphonso mangoes come: "I have just started using these techniques this season. But the prospects are already promising."

Instead of planting mango trees 10-12 metres apart, as was done traditionally, only a five-metre distance is kept. Orchards commence yielding in just four years as against the 8-10 years it took earlier to start getting economic returns. This offsets the fairly high initial cultivation expenses and allows more people to take up mango cultivation.

Using the new techniques, Shirodkar has been able to boost productivity of the Alphonso from 3.5 to four tonnes per hectare to over double on his own plantations and hopes to touch 15 tonnes gradually.

That would still be under one-fifth of the productivity achieved

in countries like Israel, he pointed out. Israelis are world leaders when it comes to best use of land and water. Thai practices gave this region the idea of giving growing mangoes more access to sunlight, by centre-cutting of the tree.

"We need not go in for the Israeli way of doing things. But even if a farmer gets the idea that water is precious, and he must use it judiciously, then that is enough. It is better that he picks up the concept and applies it in his own way," said Shirodkar.

A small group of farmers has set up a forum that allows them to share their knowledge and popularise innovations. They also keep aside 5 per cent of their land for experimental purposes to encourage further innovation.

Said Shashikant Muchandi, who built sugar factories and spinning mills before opting for horticulture: "Initially my knowledge was nil. I was called a fool. People came and said, 'Do not plant mango here'. But we got help from the forum, from manuring to marketing. We do not expect anything from the government. Government people come, visit and go. "I can now see a bandwagon effect taking root. Two years back it was difficult to convince others," said Shirodkar.

Balkrishna Jamadagni, who runs the mulde agri-research station, said things have changed radically over the past decade. He said with its average 37 degrees Celsius temperature and high rainfall, south coastal Maharashtra is a 'natural greenhouse' ideal for growing of many crops. "You can not expect more ideal conditions," he added. Said Shirodkar: "Much of the cultivable and not-so-cultivable wasteland of the Konkan region could be brought under mango cultivation using blasting techniques for pit-making and high density plantation." □

The Observer
04 April 2000

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health and nutrition and consumer literacy.

The other module of the project encompasses the empowerment. It includes skills and measures to build up self confidence among women. Further, they will also be taught about management of time, finances, and such other activities which will empower them, not only against the society but also against their own family members. An important part of this module will be the training given to handle crisis such as violence, sexual harassment and dowry that they might have to face. They will also be given training in weaponless combat to enable them to protect themselves instead of cowering in fear or waiting for others to come to their rescue.

Under the programme, camps, festivals, and theatre and film shows will also be organised to build up their communication skills and bring them together facilitating them to discuss their problems and issues.

The project is especially meant for those girls who for the first time venture out in the world from the protected environments of their home and school. It is also for those who realise that the men in their neighbourhood whom they always thought of as the 'bhaiya' next door has suddenly turned into a leaching monster.

The college students are only too happy even while they anticipate these workshops. Says Prateek Solanki, a student of Kamala Nehru College, "Even a co-educational school does not prepare one for the conditions outside. With such a drastic change in environment one does need some help. I think the idea of the project is very good and it will equip us with all the necessary to handle any untoward incident."

Adds Sapna Sunny, a student of St Stephen's College "I think the same should be launched in co-educational colleges as well and should not be confined to girls colleges. Even boys need to be educated regarding these matters to make them more sensitive."

Some, however, feel that though the project is a good one it may not succeed in what it aims to achieve with the kind of problems such schemes generally generate. Red tapism and bureaucratic involvement, that goes with college authorities as well, apart from other practical problems may create several hurdles in its way.

Whatever the problems in the future, at least the idea put forward is a very good one and if implemented properly will yield definite results.

Neha Kohli
The Pioneer
04 April 2000

At 6pm, San Cristobal is deserted. Not a soul is on the streets of this mountainous, south-eastern suburb of Bogota (Colombia). People lock themselves up in their houses before the sun sets. The silence is deafening.

Perched at an altitude of over 3,000 metres is the suburb called La Belleza ("Beauty", an ironic name for an area which is the haunt of drug traffickers and where the violence is endemic). It is here that the French NGO, CIELO, set up the first toy library in Colombia, in collaboration with the Colombian Foundation Apoyar and the backing, amongst others, of UNESCO's Co-Action Programme.

CIELO draws its life blood from the determination and participation of a group of local young people from the area. The idea was to create a harmonious space where games can be used to teach children and adolescents a set of codes and behaviour patterns that will keep violence at bay. The kids understand that a toy library can help preempt delinquency. Colombia's homicide rate is by far the highest in Latin America, at 77 deaths per 100,000 people — way ahead of Brazil, which has 24 deaths per 100,000.

Isabel, 15, is from the San Cristobal area: "My elder brother died two years ago. He was just 17. The police and the army literally carry out elimination campaigns against delinquent groups in our area. There are several groups like that here. The problem is when they move in at night, they don't take the time to identify them properly and distinguish those who belong to a group, from those who are simply returning home after a party. They shoot at random. That's how my brother died."

The NGO opened its first toy library in 1996 in Chile. Located in Penalolen, one of the most underprivileged suburban areas of Santiago; the capital, it was an immediate success. The community's enthusiasm and creativity helped surmount all obstacles and make the most of the modest \$4,000 start-up budget.

Later this year, a toy bus will start game tours. Filled with toys and games, the bus will travel through three areas of Santiago. The children

Learning lessons with toy libraries

have already named it "Father Christmas' sledge," but this sledge has an unbeatable advantage: it will run the whole year round.

In Colombia, the San Cristobal toy library opened on February 13, 1998. But only a few months later, the CIELO coordinator, Claudia Rodriguez, was attacked while buying a big stock of toys. She could have given up, but was determined to carry on. It proved, she says, that "Colombia has to learn to win the tug of war against violence." She is not the only one in this adventure however, and the tiny 30 square metro pre-fabricated room has been transformed into a resistance base against violence.

From the very beginning of the Chilean project, CIELO president, Patrick Bernard and the head of the toy library in Santiago, Myriam Salas, started a training programme for supervisors working in the library. Myriam, who grew up in a poblacion (slum) in Penalolen, near Santiago, shares her professional experience with her Colombian colleagues — she, like them, knows the rules of survival and the language of exclusion.

Children form a large part of San Cristobal's 600,000 strong population and they have quickly adapted to the pink and blue library with its toys and games. And even if most of them come alone, they meet other children,

who are also victims of violence. Gradually, they learn the rules taught in the establishment, especially how to respect other children and public property — when they get a game with 20 pieces, they promise to return it with the same number of pieces. The results are encouraging: 220 children from the area used the toy library in the first two months, and the number keeps growing.

In September 1998, two social workers who received training from CIELO opened two new toy libraries. One in Monteria, in

the Caribbean region of Colombia, and the other in Nohsa, north-east of Bogota. The first is situated in a refugee town, which houses more than 40,000 displaced people, victims of violence. CIELO has also established toy libraries in Bolivia and Ecuador, and funding is now being sought to get them going in the countries of Central America.

These libraries facilitate the psychological rehabilitation of children traumatised by violence, providing "treatment" through games. This activity, as old as humanity itself, can open up new horizons and instill hope. Playing helps children enter into contact with others, to relax and sometimes share experiences with other children or adults, to understand the importance of the rules and follow them. It also helps them to vanquish their fears. It is an essential element in the emergency education packages developed by UNESCO for refugee children or those living in war zones for example.

As the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda once wrote: "a child who does not play is not a child, but the man who doesn't play has lost for ever the child who lived in him and who he will miss terribly."

Source: UNESCO
The Pioneer
05 April 2000

Clinton invites Indian NGO to conference

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 4. There may or may not have been any immediate dividends from the U.S. President Mr. Bill Clinton's visit to India last month, the American President was apparently so impressed with one of his interlocutors — Ms. Mirai Chatterjee — that he has invited her to the high-powered White House Conference of Economy, beginning today.

Ms. Chatterjee was one of the seven "young leaders" who were invited to an idea powwow with Mr. Clinton at Cafe Royale in Mumbai.

Ms. Chatterjee works for the

Self-Employed Women's Association, essentially a labour union which organizes women working in the informal sector.

Mr. Clinton was apparently interested in listening to SEWA's innovative strategies in helping poor women mobilize their meagre resources, skills and labour for productive uses.

Within days of Mr. Clinton's return to Washington, Ms. Chatterjee found herself invited to share SEWA's experience with the participants at the third session of the White House Conference on Economy: the first two are devoted to American economy.

Panel for the third session on international economic divide. Mr. James Wolfson, President, World Bank; Professor Amaratya Sen, Nobel laureate, and Ms. Chatterjee; chair: Mr. William Jefferson Clinton.

The Hindu
05 April 2000

A slice from a disabled's life

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 5. — Naresh Sharma, an Arjuna Award winning shooter, is denied enrolment in the sports category for a job only because he walks on crutches. Disability does not pain him as much as society's "reminder" that he is disabled.

Naresh is just one among many who have to suffer humiliation because of their handicaps, their brilliant achievements notwithstanding. For them, they have had enough and no longer want "categorisation and sympathy" as it shakes their confidence.

The Invisible Minority, a docu-fiction by a psychiatrist-turned director, Dr Parvez Imam, is an attempt to put across the disabled's point of

view. The 28-minute film portrays real characters with various disabilities.

Dr Imam, who has worked with the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences at Shahdara, says "mechanical" drugs therapies will not work, unless the diagnosis has the understanding of traditional socio-cultural values.

The 28-minute film, which will be screened at Max Mueller Bhavan on 11 April, shows real disabled persons facing the society's scorn, and two fictitious characters portraying the "constant confrontation" between the disabled and the society.

"I have introduced chess, a level-playing game, in an attempt to draw parity between a normal person and the disabled", says Dr Imam.

Piyush Mishra, who represents society in his different appearances, challenges Salil, a wheelchair bound person to play chess. As Piyush loses game after game, he starts taking Salil seriously.

The game continues throughout the film, and everytime, Piyush is the loser. In the last scene of the film, he is shown throwing chessboard on Salil's face, says Dr Imam.

The film, interspersed with portrayal of some real characters, tries to strike a balance between fact and fiction. Akhil, who was "written off by the doctors in his childhood with down-syndrome", is now doing a job in a Delhi-based company.

Dr Imam says Akhil's father's recounts the doctors' apathy showing how medical

profession has become a "routine-affair" over the years.

Shivani, another real character, who worked with a hotel was refused petty jobs after breaking her legs in an accident. Determined, she chose to paint and won laurels.

"Tell me how can you call her disabled. Disability is more a mental state than physical", asks Dr Imam.

Suggesting that the government should incorporate some traditional forms of diagnosis in primary healthcare systems, he says most of the rituals to treat people in remote villages are explainable.

He says, "If the government has to reach out to masses it has to absorb some part of the system, which is ingrained in the minds of the people."

The Statesman
06 April 2000

WATERING HOLE

In what seems to be a standard pattern at international get togethers these days, nongovernmental organizations, ministers and economists clashed again at the recent second world water forum at the Hague in the Netherlands. Crudely, the debate could be said to be about how much water should be defined as a commodity and how much it should be treated as a fundamental right. Many NGOs argue that since water is a human necessity it cannot be subject to the banality of prices and markets. This seems like an obvious, humane viewpoint. But it could not be more wrong. There is a simple reason water cannot be placed in the same category as freedom or equality. Its supply is severely limited. Unlike political rights, it cannot be provided in infinite quantity to everyone without eventually becoming unavailable to anyone. Pricing water sensibly helps stimulate investment in its harvesting, storage and distribution. Pricing also helps restrict wastage by consumers. The worth of water is not automatically understood by most human users. Its worth, and why they should not abuse its wealth, is recognized by most people only when it comes with a price tag. To put it philosophically, rights come with responsibility. And the right to water only makes sense if it means understanding its true economic cost.

NGO activists argued at the Hague that pricing would

make water too expensive for the poor. The reality could not be less truthful. Analysis after analysis has shown that the most crucial problem — availability — cannot be accomplished if there is insufficient investment in water infrastructure. Generally the public sector and subsidies are used to effect this investment. However, not only have governments found it hard to find that much money, of the \$ 30 to 40 billion governments spend on water subsidies each year, the lion's share goes to the well off. It is a common third world sight, visible from Calcutta to Caracas, to see upper class housedwellers wasting water because it is free while slum dwellers pay for exorbitant private water tankers. The greatest sinner is farming. Irrigation represents nearly 70 per cent of worldwide water usage. Half the water so allotted goes to waste and wealthy farmers benefit disproportionately. Combining pricing with subsidies carefully targeted at the poor should be a country's water goal. Implementing such a strategy is best left to the private sector. Rich, poor and the environment all benefit when the water business is handled by private players. One reason is costs. It is estimated the world must invest about \$ 150 billion a year for 25 years to ensure taps do not run further dry. At present, a billion people live with water shortage. In 25 years the figure will rise to four billion. Time to dub water as liquid gold and treat it with as much respect.

The Telegraph
06 April 2000

Participatory policing launched in Andhra Pradesh

By K. Srinivas Reddy

HYDERABAD, APRIL 5. Maithri, a programme aimed at popularising the concept of participatory policing, was launched here by the Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu in Gundlapochampally village of Rangareddy district, about 30 km from here, on Wednesday. "This programme would effectively bridge the gap between the police and the people", the Chief Minister asserted.

Similar programmes were tried out in different districts in the past under the names of Praja Durbars, Peace Committees and Praja Seva Kendras but once the district SPs got transferred, they were shelved.

Realising that such programmes were being well-received by the people, the Government has introduced the Maithri programme which would be extended all over the State in a phased manner.

Under the programme, a unit comprising 50 to 100 people would be formed in each village or locality. The Station House Officer (SHO) of the police station concerned would identify the members and nominate them to the Maithri unit.

In the unit, different groups are formed and entrusted with the job of assisting the police in specific jobs of maintenance of law and order, crime prevention, road safety, women's issues and other problems.

Each Maithri unit would have a constable or a Head Constable as a liaison officer and he, in turn, would report to the SHO.

The Maithri unit is expected to discuss problems, identify solutions and implement them on their own. Only in case of difficulties, the unit would approach the senior officers.

The Chief Minister, who was in an expansive mood, spent more than 90 minutes at the meeting eliciting opinions of the unit members and questioning them on how they would react to an emerging situation in the village.

"Tell me what would you do if you find someone harassing his wife for dowry?" he questioned a woman Maithri member. "We will convene a meeting and convince the man that asking for dowry is wrong", a shy but firm answer came amidst loud cheers from the 1000-odd gathering which sat through the meeting braving scorching sun.

"What if he would not listen to your advice?" The woman member said that she would call the police in that event.

Another member told the Chief Minister that his group, which would prevent crimes, was well-versed in martial arts. "If we would find any thieves, we will beat them and hand them over to the police. I broke the leg of a thief an year ago and handed him over to the police", the youngster re-

plied to persistent questions of Mr. Chandrababu Naidu. The forthright answers in dealing with thieves evoked laughter all around.

A member of the road safety unit informed the Chief Minister that there was lot of vehicular traffic during evenings and on Sundays in the village, which is situated near the recently established Apparel Export Park.

"We will have to regulate the traffic and ensure that vehicles are cleared. This would reduce the accidents".

The village, which has a 6,000 population, recorded two dozen road accidents last year.

A cheerful Mr. Chandrababu Naidu sought to know from the villagers whether those selected for the Maithri units were good people or not. He repeatedly asked the gathering to tell him if there were any bad people in the selected list.

He cautioned the members not to use their position to settle their political scores. "The programme should be run apolitically and all the members should be fair, so that the village would stand as a role model for the State".

In his elaborate speech, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu recounted the programmes initiated by his Government for an all-round development. But there were some people who were bent on creating trouble and they killed the Panchayat Raj Minister, A. Madhava Reddy.

"They are the most confused persons without any ideology. They land themselves in problems and create problems for others", he remarked obliquely referring to the naxalites.

The problem in Rayalaseema area was entirely different. People would kill each other for petty reasons and one would wonder whether people in that area were living like human beings. Similarly, there were politicians who use the communal passions for their survival.

A time has come to put an end to all these, he added. Mr. Chandrababu Naidu told the villagers that the Government would train all the youth so that they could get employment in the Apparel Export Park. Villagers whose lands were acquired for the Park would be given compensation immediately.

Unprecedented security arrangements were made for the Chief Minister's programme. The sides of the road were ploughed by the police in a bid to locate any landmines planted and Mr. Naidu flew to the village, hardly 30 km from Hyderabad, in a helicopter.

The Home Minister, Mr. P. D. Vendar Goud, the Roads and Buildings Minister, Mr. K. Vijaya Rama Rao, the DGP, Mr. H. J. Dora, the district collector Ms. Ram Kumudini and the SP, Mr. N. V. Surendra Babu spoke on the occasion.

The Hindu
06 April 2000

Free HIV test kits to voluntary agencies

Rathin Das
Ahmedabad, April 6

IN AN attempt to control the spread of AIDS through blood donations, the Gujarat government has decided to supply HIV test kits free to the various voluntary agencies engaged in AIDS

control activity.

Moreover, private blood donation camps run in unhygienic conditions would be stopped, Gujarat's Health Minister Ashok Bhatt announced here today.

Accepting blood from professional donors has already been banned in the State for some time

now.

Addressing a Press conference here on the eve of the World Health Day, Mr Bhatt said that the theme adopted for this year's health campaign would be 'Safe blood, Safe life'. The health theme earlier was 'Safe Motherhood', the Minister added.

As Gujarat is prone to water-borne diseases like gastro-enteritis, typhoid and jaundice, especially in the summer months, the Minister said that preventive measures would be taken this year.

Mr Bhatt has also appealed to the people not to take the mango

pulp and juice sold on the roadside, which has been identified as the main carriers for typhoid and jaundice. The Minister said that the people should prepare mango juice and pulp only at home and consume them while still fresh.

It may be mentioned here that in Gujarat, fresh mangoes are made into pulp and stored with sugar added, thus exposing it to contamination within a few days.

Prevalence of water-borne diseases in Gujarat can be directly related to water scarcity.

The Hindustan Times
07 April 2000

Cultivating profits on barren lands

By B S Satish Kumar
DH News Service

BANGALORE, April 7

They are not show masters and are dressed in a very simple way. But they are the ones who are silently making serious efforts to revolutionise the concept of farming in the Indian context.

Yes, these 10 odd lesser-known farmers from Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh - who met at a farm near here recently to share their innovations under a joint farm development project taken up by the Governments of India and the Netherlands and implemented by voluntary organisation, Agriculture Man Ecology - have not only disproved the common notion that farming is non-profitable in the cyber-age, but turned barren & dry lands highly fertile, surprising even agricultural scientists.

A team of development journalists from foreign countries, which camped with them for two days, was appreciative of their innovative ways which are simple, but effective.

These farmers have reaped rich harvests from the barren lands braving the adverse conditions through sustainable methods like organic farming and by saying good-bye to chemical fertilisers. They believe in the concept that it is possible to get good yield continuously when



One of the groups of progressive farmers sharing their experiences at a farm in Doddaballapur. DH photo

there is harmony between the nature and man and hence practice minimum cultivation.

Progressive farmer Narayana Reddy, in whose farm they met, outsmarts even farm scientists when it comes to innovative farm practices. The 65-year-old Reddy, whose state-record of growing highest quantity of ragi per acre in 1973 is yet to be broken, points to a quarter-acre stretch in his farm at Doddaballapur and confidently says that he would earn an annual income of about Rs 2 lakh from it in a couple of years from now.

This stretch comprises two 15X400 feet strips which run through the farm. He has grown 30 coconut trees, 25 arecanut

trees, 25 butter fruit trees, 100 coffee saplings, and about 80 pepper creepers on them. Besides there are hundreds of teak and silver oak trees which are being managed through organic farming. In fact, Mr Reddy himself is one of the pioneers of organic farming in India.

Speaking to Deccan Herald, Mr Reddy noted that he had ploughed his land after a long gap of five years and that he would not be ploughing it for the next five years. At a time when farmers complain that farming is non-viable, Mr Reddy challenges that he can make profit even from barren land in Gulbarga district.

Another farmer Yettinamani of Hagaribommanahalli taluk of

Bellary district has left the lucrative job of a bank manager to practice agriculture. He proudly says that he is making a profit of about Rs 1.65 lakh a year from two-acre banana garden itself while his total income from other crops touches Rs 6 lakh. Interestingly, he planted tissue culture bananas about four years ago and has since then been getting rotational yield every year.

In yet another case, a young farmer Madhusudhan from Chikkanayakanahalli taluk of Tumkur district has set an example in the efficient utilisation of space. He is growing four different varieties of crops in the same field. Originally a coconut farm, he has now grown arecanut trees. While he has helped pepper climb these trees, he has also grown coffee in the space below. This has helped him increase his income four-fold.

Mr Ganapathy, a small farmer from Pudukote district of Tamil Nadu, is practicing integrated farming in a half-acre stretch of the farm. He has taken up fish rearing in the paddy field in a methodical way. While his 50 ducks eat the paddy weeds and insects, his small variety of fishes eat the excreta of ducks and some weeds. The big fish eat the small ones. What is astonishing is the systematic way in which he maintains the food chain to ensure that ducks did not eat the fish.

Deccan Herald
08 April 2000

Gujarat governor extends curb on NGO

The Times of India News Service

VADODARA: Oasis, a non-government organisation (NGO) based in Sherghi village, which had been asked to stop all its activities for one year on the ten-acre plot near the village following objections raised by the villagers against the alleged "socially unacceptable activities", has got a further extension of six months from the governor.

A case was filed against Oasis by

the village panchayat and the Jagrut Nagrik Samiti. Based on preliminary observations, the court had issued prohibitory orders and ordered that all activities on the ten-acre plot should be stopped. Following this a writ petition was filed against the prohibitory orders in the Gujarat high court which in turn referred the matter to the state governor.

After hearing both sides, some strong evidence was found that the activities of the members of Oasis were socially unacceptable. The governor, therefore, in his order increased the duration of the prohibitory order for six more months.

The Times of India
09 April 2000

Maneka cracks down on defaulting NGOs

By NIRMALA GEORGE

New Delhi, April 7: The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has blacklisted defaulting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and initiated action against those which have misused government funds. So far 17 NGOs have been blacklisted, funding to them stopped and other related Ministries have been alerted against any funding to these organisations, said Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, Maneka Gandhi.

Further, the Ministry would also file FIRs to prosecute NGOs which may have misappropriated funds in the past in order to recover the funds, Gandhi told the Conference of Editors on social sector issues.

In the last two years, funding for NGOs from the Ministry has come under close scrutiny, and any organisation where even the slightest doubt exists about the misuse of funds, invites immediate stoppage

of funds and further investigation into its functioning.

One of the reasons, the Minister said why NGOs were able to get away with misappropriation of funds was because the rules governing NGO funding were very complicated.

In the process, she added many genuine welfare organis-

The Ministry would file FIRs to prosecute NGOs which have misappropriated funds

ations daunted by the laborious paperwork preferred not to apply for government funding. Only those intent on making money persisted with the labyrinthine bureaucratic red tape.

The Ministry has now got its act together and has simplified the system of availing govern-

ment funds, Gandhi said. A book containing information on resources available for different categories of welfare organisations and the documents required has been brought by the Ministry.

"Earlier the rules were so complex that those who had the information and knew the rules formed a nexus with those applying for funds", said the Minister. In fact, some of the bureaucrats had applied for funds in the names of their wives and other close relatives, she said.

Starting next year, the Ministry will send out evaluators to check the functioning of voluntary organisations.

Besides, organisations interested in applying for government funding can now approach the Ministry directly.

While monitoring and accountability of voluntary organisations was being tightened, efforts are also being taken to ensure proper utilisation of funds, the Minister said.

The Observer
10 April 2000

'Family planning policies hurt women'

Observer Political Bureau

NEW DELHI

A vital document prepared by six national organisations of women has stated that the family planning strategies in India have tended to be paternalistic, prescriptive and coercive.

"The family planning programmes not only victimise women, but they do not effectively work. Not only this, the population control programmes have included introduction of harmful contraceptives which have been

resisted by women's organisations," points out the document.

The document was prepared by the All India Democratic Women's Association, India Women's Conference, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Joint Women's Programme, National Federation of Indian Women, besides Young Women's Christian Association of India.

The document laments that the demographic and health picture of the country still constituted

a cause for serious and urgent concern. The major negative trends of an urban elitist bias in medical education and in administration continue and there seems to be no apparent remedy to the training and value-orientation of doctors.

The volume expresses concern over the expenditure patterns on healthcare which are grossly skewed in favour of urban areas.

"Today, over 25 per cent of the primary health centres are completely non-functional," the document states. Not only this, out of 2.5 million cases of TB reported annually, five lakh people die due to the lack of treatment, it states.

The report states that a major detriment of the morbidity and

mortality in the country is malnutrition. According to it, approximately 35 per cent of poor rural households are headed by women.

In order to provide food to all the members of the family in an economic crisis, women often adopt a host of different strategies. They go out looking for extra work and sometimes take on the most menial jobs available in order to earn a little extra for the basic needs of the family.

It says that the structural adjustment policies (SAP), introduced in 1991, have worsened food security, particularly for the poorest households. These policies also led to a sharp decline in the offtake of foodgrain from the PDS despite the fact that the food subsidy bill in India was not very high as compared to expenditures in other developing countries like Sri Lanka.[]

The Indian Express
08 April 2000

Empowered to be proactive

THE men of Bejra village of Bolepur block were really taken aback when Tunu and Pratima, two housewives of the village, repaired a handpump that had been lying broken and unused some time in a dry. They're the tubewell caretakers of the village. There are hundreds of such women mechanics of tubewells and handpumps working in a number of villages of Midnapore and Birbhum. Women in fact are playing a more important role than men in the drinking water supply project in this area. It's only women who really understand the importance of water. Because walking miles in the scorching heat and standing for hours in queue to collect water are the daily chores of women in Indian villages. Yet they have never been involved in any water project. Nor are they taken into consideration when tubewells with their heavy pressure handles are installed.

Possibly this is the first time women have been directly involved in any water project. An Indo-German project, it is being financed by KfW, a German bank, and carried out by the Public Health Engineering Department of West Bengal. GKW is the consulting agent. It is practically a community project where the users contribute a certain amount of money every month to meet the cost of operation and maintenance. This is a new approach. The other important thing is the involving of women right from the planning stage. There are two aspects to the project — water supply through pipelines and deep tubewells or handpumps, and involving the community through NGOs. One standpost or tubewell is installed for 30 families or about 50 people. A water or user committee is formed comprising five to eight members from these 30 families, and one-third of the members are women. Two women from each committee are caretakers of that particular tubewell or standpost. This committee has to

take the responsibility of maintenance, collection of water tariff and creating a fund for upkeep and repairs, and negotiating with the municipality, panchayat and so on.

Tagore Society trained 40 women in October last year. "We thought it wouldn't be easy for women to do the repair work but they've learnt nicely and are now doing the job quite well", says Asoke Mukherjee, a spokesman of Tagore Society. He says PHED in collaboration with KfW will install 976 tubewells in 114 *moujas* (out of 170 *moujas*) of the Bolepur Block. Users' groups are being formed in nine gram panchayat areas, and 485 tubewells have been installed already. A fund is also being created from contributions of one or two rupees from each family.

The women are responsible for maintaining the environment around the tubewell sites as well. The water project is connected with a health and sanitation programme. Mukherjee informs they've been able to involve 59 per cent of the women.

This enthusiasm is visible in the urban locality of Bolepur also. Pipeline for water supply will be installed in 75 slums of the Bolepur municipality. Women Interlink Foundation (WIF) selected standpost sites for 223 pipelines after consultation with users' groups, and especially with the women. Ruma Singh and Saraswati Sardar are the secretaries of the women's committee formed by the Bolepur municipality with the local councillor as the head. Saraswati is a widow with two little children, and Ruma is a young girl. Both feel that men can't really comprehend the problem of water. And hence the two women are eager to do all types of jobs to get water near their homes. They also don't mind paying for it. In fact most of these poor women are ready to contribute whatever amount they can afford to get water within their reach.

The chairman of the Bolepur municipality, Shyamsunder Konar, holds that women possess more sense of responsibility than men. "This we have seen from our earlier experiences. They even return the money taken as loan in time, which is not too common among the men. So we decided to allo-

cate different types of work in connection to the water project to women", says he.

Councillor Shyamali Ghosh of Ward 11, who took the initiative to form the women's committee in the Bolepur municipality, and Parul Mondal of Ward 10 say "women of the slums are so enthusiastic that we feel sure they will run the project smoothly."

While the project in Bolepur is in progress, that in Midnapore is almost complete. Unicef and Ramkrishna Mission's Lok Shiksha Parishad are jointly involved with the project here. Chandan Sengupta, the Unicef project officer of water and sanitation, says they have already installed 8000 handpumps and tubewells in 54 blocks of Midnapore, and involved 16,000 women caretakers. Unicef has been working from 1991. According to him another 7000 tubewells will be installed in the current year. So another 14000 women will take charge. Sengupta says this is a self-sustained decentralised scheme that gives a sense of ownership to the women, and by converting them into mechanics from mere users, it raises their status in the family as well as society.

Aloka Mitra of WIF also feels that women have been empowered to be proactive, which is the most notable contribution of this project. Hopefully, this project is just the beginning of many such projects in our country. ■

MALA DUTTA ROY
The Statesman
09 April 2000



Orissa project brings hope for poverty-stricken tribals

By Rajaram Satapathy
The Times of India News Service

KEONJHAR: Even before the sun lights up the cluster of dilapidated huts, 22-year-old Sarojini sets out for a grim battle—just to survive. A tattered dhoti draped over her frail frame, she rushes to the stream down the hill to take a bath and wash her dhoti before the village wakes up. She stands behind thick bushes, waiting for her only article of clothing to dry so that she can wear it and return home.

Back in her hut, she prepares a frugal meal of millet for her children and then leaves for the forest to collect something for the next meal. For Sarojini and thousands of other Juang tribals of Baragada in the thick forests of Bansapal block of this district, this is the daily routine that keeps them alive. But death due to starvation, malnutrition and disease isn't far away for Juang tribals and their population is dwindling. Spread over nearly 190

villages of Keonjhar and Dhenkanal districts, the last two census showed the Juang population had declined from 19,751 to less than 18,000.

Alarmed at this trend, the Centre has launched a three-year project to alleviate the economic conditions of the tribe with the help of voluntary organisations like the Centre for Social Development (CSD), a sister organisation of the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT). The project was formally launched last week. But given the popular perception about the functioning of voluntary organisations, will the Centre's approach yield any dividend? Director of tribal affairs in the ministry of social justice and empowerment, P.K. Mohanty, and his counterpart in the science and technology department, C.J. Jhony, however, appear quite confident. "The present step has been taken after a careful assessment of the entire scenario and

the ability of the implementing agency. We are sure it would yield a fruitful result," they observed citing the irrigation project being taken up at Guptaganga village.

Those who doubt such ventures cannot really be blamed. In 1974, the Centre had set up the Juang Development Agency (JDA) to improve their standard of living. The JDA was entrusted with the 50 most backward villages so that development could be achieved in a planned manner. About Rs 150 crore has been allotted for this development in the last two decades, including about Rs 40 crore by the JDA alone. The plight of the villagers, however, tells a different story. "The money has only helped officials, contractors and middlemen to enrich themselves. The Juangs continue to be mere exhibits for politicians and subjects of research for scholars," says Malay Mohapatra, a social worker.

On an average, 525 of 1,000 Juang

children die before they turn five. This is one of the highest ever casualty figure calculated for any community in India. The infant mortality rate (IMR) and death of pregnant Juang women are equally staggering, largely due to hunger, malnutrition, malaria and other diseases. "I lost my 12-year-old daughter Nisi because I had no money to take her to the hospital," says Kusa Juang of Guptaganga village. The words were echoed by Natukala, the village "dihuri" (priest), whose 21-year-old son Bharat died recently.

Almost all Juangs are landless and resort to shifting cultivation to grow rice in the foothills that barely sustain them for two months. While seasonal fruits like mango and jackfruit help them live for another two months, the rest of the year they roam in the jungles, eating wild roots and leaves. Now that the forest cover too is getting depleted, many Juangs are migrating to urban areas in search of livelihood.

The Times of India
10 April 2000

Ministry to launch bio-diversity action plan

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 10. The Union Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF) is all set to launch a detailed Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) here tomorrow.

The Union Minister for Environment & Forests, Mr. T.R. Baalu, is expected to announce the plan, which had been made possible following funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The BSAP project envisages assessment and stock taking of bio-diversity information at State level including distribution of endemic and endangered species and site-specific threats and pressures.

A national policy and macrolevel action strategy on bio-diversity was earlier prepared by the ministry taking into account all policies, gaps and further action needed for conserva-

tion and sustainable use of biological diversity. However, a need was felt to prepare a detailed microlevel action plans at State and regional levels, according to an official spokesman.

Keeping the existing policy as a base document, the new project emphasises on de-centralised State-level planning besides intensive use of inter-disciplinary working groups to involve all sectors working for conservation. Once the microlevel action plans are executed successfully, the ministry plans to integrate them all into a consolidated national action plan.

The BSAP will be initially launched for a period of two years at a total cost of 9.68,200 \$, which will be incurred by the GEF.

The MoEF is the executing agency for the project and wants them to be implemented not only by utilisation of available infrastructure and funds

but also with augmentation and further inputs from domestic and external resources.

For implementation of the BSAP project, a consortium arrangement between Biotech Consortium India Ltd and Kalpavriksh, an NGO, has been worked out.

To oversee the implementation of the project, a steering committee has been constituted under the chairmanship of Special Secretary, Mr. Vinod Vaish, in the MoEF.

The Joint Secretary (Environment), Mr. R.H. Khwaja, is the Member Secretary. The committee also consists of representatives from Ministries of Agriculture, Science & Technology, Social Justice & Empowerment, Department of Economic Affairs, Planning Commission and the UNDP. The committee also has five expert members.

The Hindu
11 April 2000

Against the Tide

Do Not Foreclose Big Dam Options

By R K PACHAURI

THE World Water Forum held in the Hague last month attracted participants from all over the world, including government officials, international bureaucrats, water resource specialists, NGOs and corporate executives. The Indian presence was very visible on the occasion — and noticeably vocal — with activists like Medha Patkar and her recently acquired compatriot, Arundhati Roy. It is reported that much heated debate took place between a minister from Gujarat on the one hand and Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy on the other.

Annasaheb Hazare, who has done remarkable work in water harvesting in the village of Ralegaon Siddhi situated in Maharashtra was clearly ill at ease with this discord between India's officialdom and NGO activists, and he gently suggested that these domestic issues need not be brought to an international forum. The Forum itself was not confined to discussion on big dams versus small and solutions involving river waters, but focused on the looming problem of water scarcity in several parts of the world, the deprivation of hundreds of millions of people lacking access to clean drinking water; the coverage included policy as well as technical issues related to water supply and consumption. To that extent a discussion by the Indian participants on the Narmada project in an international forum of this nature, to the exclusion of larger issues of water management, revealed a limited view.

21st Century Dams

However, attention on large dams has increased throughout the world in recent years, and it was against this background that the World Bank and the IUCN established the International Commission on Large Dams (ICOLD) in February 1998. The Commission was required to carry out a two-year review of the effectiveness of large dams and develop standards and guidelines for advising nations on future dam-building decisions and an assessment of alternatives. Meanwhile, in March 1999 WWF International published a useful

discussion paper entitled *A place for dams in the 21st century?* This publication was brought out obviously in response to a need for an objective and comprehensive view of large dams in general, and identifying their benefits and costs.

Unfortunately, much of the debate on large dams has become polarised and generalised. Yet, by their very nature the impacts of dams are very location specific, and need to be analysed comprehensively, which is often a very complex exercise. Typically, those responsible for the construction of dams take a narrow and limited view of the quantitative benefits achieved in harnessing large volumes of water for distribution in areas that are deficient and generating electricity often at costs that appear financially attractive. Opponents are not prepared to accept that large dams have any benefits at all. Undoubtedly, these hardened positions have come about as a result of neglect of a wide range of impacts apparent in several projects in the past, heightened greatly by impoverishment and loss of welfare of those displaced.

Negative Impact

Interestingly, there are several NGOs in the developed countries who oppose large dams in the developing world, even though the earliest examples of large dams are found predominantly in the developed countries. In the case of India, it should be accepted that only about 12 per cent of the country's hydropower potential has been exploited, as against 52.3 per cent in Canada, 86.8 per cent in Switzerland, 56.3 per cent in Norway, 56.1 per cent in the US and 68 per cent in Japan.

There are several negative impacts of dams which require rigorous assessment. According to the WWF international, India lost an estimated 4,79,000 hectares of forest land to various river valley projects between 1950 and 1975. Dams can also lead to changes in chemical water quality, sedimentation, erosion and unfavourable effects on fish production, because they block migration of fish resulting in overall loss of quantities of fish as

well as their diversity. Other impacts often noticed include landslides, seismic activities, changes in groundwater level, changes in flow and impact on downstream hydrology in a river. Perhaps, in a highly populated country like India the most serious and certainly the most visible negative effect of dams lies in the displacement of people.

All of this may suggest that we are at the end of the big dam era. Yet, it may be a mistake to foreclose the option of constructing big dams for all time to come. Even if one excludes the potential of generating power from hydro projects, in several cases the irrigation benefits themselves could make a compelling case for dams as possible solutions. If demand for food is to double by the year 2030, water will have to be used far more efficiently for agriculture, but this may not eliminate the need for larger areas under irrigation.

Humane Dimension

However, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) predicts that the growth rate of irrigated land in developing countries would slow down from the peak of an annual increase of 2.2 per cent in the 1970s to 0.8 per cent in the future. But larger irrigation can also lead to unfavourable impacts on agriculture. Salinisation and water logging are common problems which have negative impacts not only on agriculture but on soil quality in general. In future, therefore, the impact of specific projects on natural resources such as soil, biodiversity and forests would have to be considered explicitly. For too long the economics of dams has been confined only to a very narrow assessment of project accounting and an optimistic assessment of benefits.

The WWF document comes out with a set of conclusions and recommendations which are not revolutionary in nature, but reinforce the common sense that has been developed by those concerned with development strategies, which are consistent with environmental protection. In essence, the approach to be followed in future dam-building activity in India would have to deal with a number of issues that have

emerged from past experience. Dams have serious environmental impacts which need to be systematically evaluated. However, these impacts are neither uniform nor equal. Hence, a single strategy is not desirable.

In essence, a flexible and open approach has to be adopted in assessing future projects, and in a country like India the human dimensions of this challenge need serious and sensitive handling. A clear policy should be adopted both by the Centre and the states in assessing environmental risks associated with dams as well as in the resettlement and rehabilitation of those who are displaced as a result. But despite the seriousness of problems that have already occurred with several dams, it would be shortsighted to adopt a policy that places a complete ban on the construction of new large dam.



The Times of India
10 April 2000

CBSE manual to train teachers released

DH News Service

NEW DELHI, April 11

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), along with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), has released a manual on training of teachers in adolescence education.

Titled "Population and Adolescence Education Training Package," the manual has been designed as part of the ongoing population and development education project supported by UNFPA.

The manual was released yesterday by Dr Michael Vlassoi UNFPA Representative for India at a function attended by CBS Chairman, Mr B P Khan Delwa and Consultant with CBSE Prof S Muley. Although adolescence education has been introduced in schools, current courses on teachers' education do not offer them tips on how to handle questions related to adolescent health and sexuality.

Contd.

Andhra villagers get treatment through telemedicine

By R. BHAGWAN SINGH

Aragonda (Andhra Pradesh), April 12: The Apollo Hospitals Group has linked this bullock-cartage village in Andhra Pradesh to its medical specialists across the country by using "telemedicine."

This method is the transfer of medical information and data related to diagnosis and treatment of ailments using electronic communication networks.

The Union information technology minister Pramod Mahajan will formally inaugurate the hi-tech facility at the new 50-bed Apollo Hospital here, built at a cost of Rs 5 crores, to cater to the healthcare needs of the 4,000 villagers at Aragonda and another 50,000 in the surrounding villages.

The hospital has been functioning for over a month now and has

already saved a few lives, according to Dr Pratap C. Reddy, chairman of the Apollo Hospitals Group which is now Asia's largest and world's seventh largest healthcare provider.

Dr Reddy chose this remote Andhra village in Chittoor district, about 180 km northwest of Chennai, to launch the ambitious hi-tech healthcare programme as it is his native village. He used to trek to school behind a bullock-cart which carried the books for him and his cousins. Dr Reddy recalled at a press conference at the hospital, while taking pride that he was now bringing a Union minister by helicopter to launch telemedicine "for the first time in this part of the world."

Since the majority of Indian population lives in the villages, telemedicine would be a great

boon in bringing IT to help providing healthcare in the remotest of places. Apollo's project in its second phase would connect 125 primary, 25 secondary and three tertiary centres in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

Phase-III will connect 2,500 primary centres, 500 secondary and 100 tertiary centres all over the

TELEMEDICINE

country, and attempt to extend the services to the developing world. "It will also extend the services beyond national boundaries to connect international centres of medical excellence with local medical institutions via telemedicine link," Dr Reddy said, adding: "Within the next 100 days, Apollo will connect all over India and even

abroad." In telemedicine, the patient's records with clinical information and diagnostic images are converted into electronic digital data and sent through telephone/ISDN/VSAT lines to a medical expert located in the tertiary hospital. This electronic digital data is converted into its original medical format for the expert to analyse and diagnose. The expert opinion is sent back to the referring physician/hospital again. All this happens in a few minutes and at very little cost.

While the Isro provided the satellite facility, Citadel and GE Wipro have extended support to the ambitious project, the cost of which is yet to be fully assessed. The investment in telemedicine could be very less if the promised pipeline of gigabytes is established across the country.

Said Dr Reddy: "Telemedicine could be more dramatic in an emergency situation where a patient in a linked village hospital is easily managed during the crucial first hour in a multi-trauma situation." Two poison cases were saved during the last couple of weeks thanks to linking to the Poison Centre at Chennai Apollo.

To illustrate the crucial role that the IT facility could play in medicare, Dr Reddy presented a live demonstration in which five-year-old Tejesh, born with multiple heart defects, was scanned by a team of doctors at Aragonda and the images were simultaneously transmitted to a paediatric cardiologist at Chennai Apollo who after examining the data, advised an early surgery. "This boy will soon be operated at our Chennai hospital free of cost," Dr Reddy said.

The Asian Age
13 April 2000

Fund schools in MP with a mouse-click

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, April 11: In Diggy Raja's Madhya Pradesh, netizens can fund a school in Bastar, Guna, Betul or Bilaspur with a paltry \$ 400 a year with a click of the mouse a year and monitor its performance from the US, Europe, Australia or South Africa.

Netizens, concerned with education in India, can now log in to www.Fundaschool.org. The government scheme is for sponsoring 26,000 Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) schools. Every cent invested would be accounted for and available on the Net along with information about the school, students, and annual performance. In addition, the sponsor will be the state guest, each time he or she decides to visit the school.

Itching to catch up with his Andhra Pradesh counterpart Chandrababu Naidu on information technology, Digvijay Singh today launched the website aimed

at removing illiteracy in the remote rural areas of Madhya Pradesh to get rid of the infamous BIMARU (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) status, known for illiteracy, poor health services, gender discrimination and alarming rate of population growth.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi was present on the occasion. Suitably impressed with Digvijay, Sonia urged the Centre to earmark six per cent of the Gross Domestic Product for education to remove illiteracy in the country. "No children can have a better life without education. By not making all children accessible to education we are denying them their basic rights," Sonia said.

According to Digvijay, the credit of Fundaschool should go to two of his key officers, Gopalakrishna and Amita Sharma. Gopalakrishna is the secretary to the chief minister while Amita is the project director of the Rajiv Gandhi Primary School Mission, which has designed the EGS.

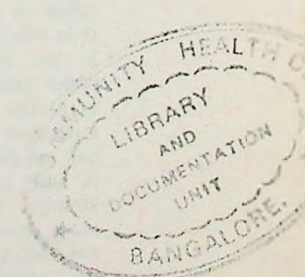
The EGS system operates like this. Primary schools have local teachers who are accountable to the community; the schools are located close to each habitation and have been set up on the basis of the demand of the community and the curriculum has been designed to be creative and interactive.

The Telegraph
12 April 2000

Contd...

Feedback from the classroom has shown that topics related to sex education were perhaps the most uncomfortable part of the syllabus and teachers were often reported to be rushing through these topics.

It was therefore decided that a special training package would be designed for teachers, who would then teach students. In the first phase, CBSE will train 1,200 teachers of Bihar, UP, MP, Rajasthan and Haryana.



Lessons in leadership from Clinton's visit

N K Singh

TWO thousand year back, like China, Singapore and Burma, Chanakya had mentioned that the best leader is one who wins a war without fighting a battle. Clinton precisely did that as he won the hearts of the people in India without giving much immediately on the political and economic fronts, as many critics had pointed out. Yet, the visit has not only been acclaimed all over the world but also amongst the masses in India. He could have easily won an election for the highest political job — such was the spell of his personality and the way the visit was conducted!

It would be interesting to examine the emotional and psychological impact on the people of India and hone some lessons in leadership rather than debating on the most debatable issues relating to membership of Security Council, WTO matters, lifting of sanctions and solution of the Kashmir problem.

Adaptation to Change

The foremost quality of a leader is to understand the strategic awareness and cope to the myriad changes taking place in the environment. Clinton has shown great perspicacity and vision in noticing the changing global scenario, especially in the East, where India represents the largest skilled and scientifically trained manpower. The fact, which is being repeated time and again in meetings and seminars, is that 47 per cent start ups in the Silicon Valley are by Indians. Besides the software, both in medical as well as in other sectors, including management, India has a number of teachers and practitioners today in the United States, in addition, to their noticeable presence in many European countries. If the world of future is going to be of knowledge, then this changing scenario, reflected in the Indian talent, represents a major change in the emerging portfolio of stocks and of talent as the most innovative country whose foundation lies on invention and discovery. India is sure to be a more positive and stronger ally of United States than many other countries. Added to this is the fact that despite military rule in the neighbourhood and regimented management of state in many countries,

like China, Singapore and Burma, India represents the largest democracy functioning in the world.

Empathy for Poor and Downtrodden

The intelligent design of the visit, including visit to some of the villages in Rajasthan and Clinton's whole-hearted participation in the function of a women's organisation had a major impact in transmitting a message of a leader's care for the have-nots. Those who have watched or seen the person of Clinton and his questions to the women in that organisation in a village are sure to notice genuine warmth and appreciation of a caring leader and appreciation of self-reliance amongst rural women in human development of a developing country. And he talked about it not only in India but also after he went back. Despite tight security, he could dance with the village folks and received a shower of flowers without Black Cats or visible signs of any control or security in the village. Consider the remark of Clinton to the village woman: "You could be elected anywhere in the world." It not only indicates his wit and wisdom but his appreciation of the confidence in the ability of village folks and their grace with which they dealt with him.

Inter-cultural Understanding

When coming to a country with a rich cultural heritage and wildlife, he ensured that his family not only participates in Holi function but also visits a wildlife sanctuary. These visits displayed his human side and an insight in the cultural context of India's multi-coloured diversity.

Grace and Courtesy

A leader of the world power need not be one who exhumed arrogance. Everywhere the speech of Clinton and his conduct displayed a great consideration for the people as well as the traditions of the country. At no point of time a streak of arrogance or comments mentioning his own strength were noticed. Even when the Prime Minister could stand to his own position by not agreeing to sign the CTBT or in other matters, there was no trace of dis-

courtesy on both sides. Even the conduct of the Prime Minister of India has revealed a great deal of grace and maturity. These are the ingredients which make a leader. Although many a scribe may be happy to imagine that Clinton gave hell to Pakistan, the fact is that even in his visit to Pakistan he never behaved discourteously with the powers of that country. Whatever he had to say it was tampered with balance and equanimity.

He displayed a great sense of wit and humility in accepting the transformation which IT revolution has brought in its wake by narrating in his speech at Hyderabad his own impressions of terms used, such as chips for potato chips and discs for music records. It is a pity that despite this some writers in newspapers exaggerated their own personal experiences of not being able to visit some floors of a hotel in most derogatory words when much more discourtesy and problems arise out of security of Indian leaders.

Mass Appeal

In his speeches and address to the people, Clinton exhibited great charm and mass appeal without throwing his weight about as world's super power. The magnetism of a leader depends on how he relates himself to the people. He went out of his way to meet and shake hands with the staff of the hotels where he stayed in contrast to our leaders' obsession with isolation and exclusiveness. No doubt, such gestures are bound to make him most popular.

Leadership is a phenomenon much discussed and written about in the corporate world and in political spheres. It is not an outcome of a leader's inaccessibility and showoff of his power as is commonly practiced in our country. It is not the number of Black Cats or cars driving behind a leader but his personal rapport with the people and his graceful conduct which create the phenomenon of a truly democratic leader. These lessons need to be honed and practiced by Indian leaders, including those in the corporate sector.

Implications for Corporate Leaders

The latest researches done on leadership in the US and reported by Daniel Goleman in the March-April, 2000 issue of *Harvard Business Review* are Contd...

Govt. must finance public health: experts

By Rupa Chinal

The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD: National experts attending a recent conference here on health-care financing have registered the strong plea that the government has a constitutional responsibility to fund public health institutions, so that 50 per cent of the country's poor can access health care regardless of their ability to pay.

The participants, having examined various options of health-care financing, including charging 'user fees' in public institutions, community health financing schemes and the role of private health insurance, said that in the absence of government support, these options would still not cover the needs of the poor.

The five-day conference, focusing on issues such as health financing, public-private partnerships, the quality of health care and health insurance, was organised by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and brought together a cross-section of more than 100 health experts from across the country.

According to Abusaleh Shariff, researcher at the National Council of Applied Economic Research, Delhi, the government is currently spending only Rs 100 per capita per year as public health expenditure. While health and family welfare gets less than one per cent of the budget, social sector and poverty alleviation barely account for ten per cent of the total. With traditional

systems of social support, such as private philanthropy, eroding, the government allocations are far short of what is required, the experts said.

Calling for strengthening the public health system, Mr Shariff pointed to the paucity of trained medical and para-medical personnel in the rural areas and their undue concentration in urban pockets.

Given this situation, the poor were adopting 'coping strategies' that focused on diversification of income through seasonal migration, which was giving rise to gender-based inequalities, among other problems.

Demonstrating a model of social security for the poor, the Gujarat-based NGO, Sewa, reported on how 30,000 of its women members working in the informal sector had developed their own insurance pool for the development of maternal benefits, with subsidies from their trade union wing.

Each woman pays Rs 30 per year, or Rs 500 in a fixed membership scheme. At the time of delivery, she receives coverage of up to Rs 1,200 per year at an institution of her choice.

The Sewa women have demonstrated that the very poor are capable of understanding health insurance, and are willing to purchase it provided the cost of the premium is between Rs 90-Rs 111 per year, said Mirai Chatterjee, a Sewa representative. Other studies of community

financing of health care by Barun Kanjilal, a researcher from the Indian Institute of Health Management Research, Jaipur, show that the concept has been successful in homogeneous communities that have organised themselves around milk cooperatives, weaving societies or mahila mandals. His findings show that income-generation schemes have strengthened sustainable health programmes. Such efforts do not, however, meet the total health needs of the community in the absence of free public health care.

According to Mr Kanjilal, panchayats also present a flexible option for promoting community control of health financing. But he has added several caveats.

While having a legal status and providing scope for political and social control, the institution is vulnerable to the dominance of power groups and misplaced priorities, he said.

The conference on health insurance saw the convergence of all the stake-holders—consumers, providers (medical industry), insurance companies, 'third party' administrators (a new breed that pursues payments from insurance companies on behalf of the consumers), and are representative of the Insurance Regulatory Development Authority (IRDA), who is mandated to protect the interests of consumers.

Today, barely two per cent of India's population is covered by the various government insurance

schemes. The recent passage of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority Bill, opening health insurance to private-sector entry, will force changes that could increase the cost of health care, speakers said. The conference focused on how private insurance companies should be regulated by the IRDA, how the interests of consumers can be protected and how insurance companies can benefit the poor.

Consumer activist Manubhai Shah cited instances of how malpractices and short-cuts by insurance companies had become the norm. The regulatory authorities must ensure that the unequal terms of contract dictated by insurance companies are fair to policy holders, he said.

Participants also insisted that the IRDA's Tariff Advisory Committee play a role in controlling the cost of premiums charged by the insurance companies and in achieving the social objectives of health care. The last referred to making health insurance accessible to the poor, in incorporating policies on maternal care, preventive services and catastrophic illnesses, and the guaranteed renewal of policies.

Considerable attention was also given to the Employees State Insurance Scheme, emphasising the huge and under-utilised resources available with this body, and its failure to provide quality services to those insured.

The Times of India
11 April 2000

Contd...

based on 3,871 executives selected from a data base of more than 20,000 executives worldwide. These researches show that the critical mass of various competencies linked to emotional intelligence show results. Six types of leaders identified in this piece of research include coercive, authoritative, affiliative, democratic, pacesetter and coaching. Out of these, the most favoured style is authoritative leadership creating strongly positive results. It mobilise people towards a vision with empathy. Similar results have been reported in my book: *Eastern & Cross-Cultural Management*. In fact, authoritative word is a misnomer and a more apt description is mission-oriented leader. A mission-oriented or relational leadership can direct the organisation towards greater results achievement. In fact, 'authoritative' term used does not connote the essence of leadership and can be better described in terms of mission or relational aspects of leadership. Clinton during his Indian visit in his conduct and interaction with the people — political, social and under-privileged ones — showed great empathy as well as awareness of a great mission which he has for his country. No wonder he made an impact so much that people believed in his sure victory in an election to the top post in India if he fights one. These lessons need to be absorbed by powerful leaders with humility.

■ Dr Singh is international management advisor & president, Delhi School of Business. The Observer
13 April 2000

Citizens join hands to make a difference

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: Citizens' initiative to set things right got a boost on Sunday with nearly 2,000 people from all over Mumbai gathering at Don Bosco school, Matunga, to form joint action groups (JAG).

Residents of each of the 24 civic wards in the city formed a JAG with the aim of jointly identifying and tackling local problems with the help of residents' organisations, voluntary institutions such as Rotary Clubs, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The JAGs will coordinate with NGOs possessing required knowledge and reach, e.g. Bombay First, Citizens' Forum for Protection of Public Spaces, Dignity Foundation, Police-Public Mohalla Committees, YUVA and PRAJA to tackle problems including solution by a ward office/police station. The networking will help them pursue matter appropriately with the right authority and at the right level.

The JAGs also hope to evolve a democratic process to help an elected representative spend his or her annual discretionary fund, which varies from Rs 20 lakhs for a corporator to Rs 2 crore for an MP.

The formation of the JAGs across the city was the culmination of a long process by the Action for Good Governance and Networking in India (AGNI), which completed one year of its existence on Sunday.

During this time, AGNI has formulated schemes to prevent monsoon flooding, organised meet-your-candidate sessions before the state polls and meet-your-MLA sessions after the elections. It also raised 200 metric tonnes of clothes and blankets for the Orissa cyclone victims, supported Khar resident Edwin Britto who is fighting the encroachment mafia and of late it helped the municipal corporation run skeletal services during the civic strike.

"We have come to the conclusion that only citizens are for citizens," Gerson DaCunha of Agni said in his introductory remarks. The experiences of the citizens' associations of Mahim, Andheri East and Breach Candy bore him out.

"Only when all groups in a locality come together does one see results," said Dinesh Ahir of Pragat Mahim. The residents in 13 localities in the G-North ward here have formed Advanced Locality Management teams which are encouraging separation of dry and wet garbage in households and are adopting pavements so that they can be free of hawkers.

Olive Pereira of the Citizens' Forum of Andheri East spoke about how they had set a deadline for projects in consultation with their MLA, Suresh Shetty. The projects include a pedestrian overbridge outside the railway station at Andheri East, the fencing off of public spaces, and the provision of a market for Andheri east residents. "We have managed to befriend four of the 14 corporators and they have promised us that their discretionary funds would be spent in consultation with the forum.

K. Ramchandani of the Breach Candy Residents Association said their greatest achievement was the "bond that had developed between citizens, administrators and politicians in D ward". With 'consultation not confrontation' as their mantra, the residents' association had managed to solve the traffic problem, the problem of telephone trenches, and were now moving towards zero garbage with the help of Dignity Dialogue.

Where are funds for AIDS going?

AS INTERNATIONAL agencies pump crores into India's health sector amid fresh reports of alarming increase in the number of AIDS and HIV-infected people to an estimated 3.5 million, several health activists and NGOs, are miffed with the way funds are being channelised.

National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), the apex body for funding, as also the state health departments have recently drawn a flak as activists are calling for more transparency.

"Even the money that is there seems to be going for all the wrong reasons," charges Dr Bir Singh, Community Medicine, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), which runs the premier medical institute's AIDS Counselling Cell.

The World Bank Anti-AIDS Project got underway in 1998 following the bank's 84 million dollar US AIDS control Project, which ran from 1992-1997. The second phase of the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) received the approval of the Union Cabinet last August with an outlay of Rs 1425 crore.

"Last year Delhi AIDS Cell Department spent a few crores of rupees but do we even get an impact of this?" asks anjali Gopalan of Naz Foundation, an NGO.

Conceding that states have been ineffective in tackling the disease, NACO Joint Director Neelam Kapur says, "that is why we have set up the State AIDS Society and they are a little more effective than the routine bureaucracy."

"But we often blame NACO, though states themselves are not equipped, they are not distributing funds not inviting NGOs and therefore not spending the money," says Sushma Sen Gupta, founder Chairperson of Drishtikon, an NGO.

"If you look at the last 15 years, money given to spend is enormous," says Gopalan noting there is no accountability.

And in institutes like AIIMS, there are no funds to meet even the basic requirements of running the only counselling centres even as patients increase by the day, says Dr Bir Singh.

"We only get a token grant from AIIMS and funds remain a big problem," he says.

The centre runs a telephone helpline amongst other activities, but there is no infrastructure for trained personnel and work is carried on by only two officials and one telephone, rues Singh.

"We cannot reprint a book we compiled on the basis of the telephone calls, which we want to send out to schools and colleges and another major complaint is that the phone is always engaged," says Dr Singh.

In India, funds come to NACO, which allocates the money to the states, who are the main functionaries. Very few special projects are directly funded by NACO, while most taken care of by the states.

The eighth five-year plan allocated an amount of Rs 280 crore for prevention and control of AIDS in India, according to NACO's annual report. These funds were utilised by issuing two sanctions, one for Rs 222.66 crore and another for Rs 45.22 crore for implementing the approved scheme.

An expenditure of around Rs 505 crore till March 31, 1999 has been incurred to cover the total credit US \$ 84 million, the report states.

But HIV infection needs a lot of skill and expertise to tackle and states are not equipped with the expertise to handle the same, alleges Gupta. Even application forms which states send out to NGOs are meant for medical institutions inquiring on the number of beds available, she says. Of the six-page form with its 20 columns, only one column asks for description of the project, she rues adding they are not concerned with project and form related to HIV and nobody is looking into it.

We have to, first of all, understand that it is not a grant but a huge amount of loan, which runs into millions of dollars that the World Bank is giving us, says Gopalan noting that the World Bank is lending us because we have a track record of paying back and hence all the more reason there should be accountability.

What we are trying to say is that the mechanism through which the money is going has failed so why insist on something that has not worked, asks Gopalan.

What about NGO's accountability? "If there is transparency for NGOs, then there should be transparency for people in every sphere," says Nalini Sahay, Vice-President of Torch, an NGO.

Transparency is important when funding is there, she says noting NGOs must first of all be run by professionally qualified people and it is essential to know what are the qualifications of the people in the organisations.

"But where is the problem?" she asks adding there are guidelines within which one has to write the protocol on a written format.

The Hindustan Times
14 April 2000

The Times of India
11 April 2000

CALLING ALL CHILDREN

Sheikh Munna and Sukur, boys picked up from the streets of Anwar Shah Road by development workers and brought to a shelter a few years ago, are having the time of their lives at a fair.

Sukur comes running, having recognised the "paper *didi*". His face lights up with joy as his eye catches the dictaphone.

Munna, 'the self-proclaimed *mastaan*', is having loads of fun someplace else. Sukur soon scampers off to join him and his other friends at play.

The six-day Shishu Vikas Mela is being held on the premises of the Institute of Psychological and Educational Research (IPER). The first such fair — of children and for children — has brought 27 NGOs and hundreds of underprivileged children together for fun 'n' games and some competitions as well.

The kids mill about, their constant chatter punctuated by shrieks. The cacophony all but drowns the gentle voices of Kanika Bandopadhyay and Suchitra Mitra, wafting across the courtyard. But Sukur and his friends do not really have much time for Rabin drasangeet. *Kaho Na... Pyar Hai* is more "our type", proclaim some of the kids.

Nothing can dampen the spirit of the kids these days. After all, it's all play and no work — a welcome break from studies for some, from hard labour for others.

Instead, the afternoons are spent playing ring-a-ring-a-roses, 'manning' the stalls or gorging on fried rice and *aloo-potoler torkari*.

The stalls put up by the NGOs wear a bright, festive look — dotted with cheerful posters and colourful items. There are plenty of soft toys, all very reasonably priced, *bandhni* handkerchiefs, wax dolls, *diyas*, craftwork and

block-printed saris.

No, they have not been bought from outside. They have all been "handmade" by the children at several shelters.

And they are the ones who managing the stalls as well. The fair, after all, belongs to them. So, they've made the stuff, decorated the stalls and are now selling their creations to visitors.

Fifteen-year-old Sarbani Dey had always dreamt of "selling" one of her toys. Today, this dream came true, with some help from nine tiny co-managers of the stall. But the joyous moment is left incomplete. "My father works at a furniture shop and my mother is a maid. I can't expect them to come from Bansdrani," says Sarbani, tears welling up in her eyes.

Cuddling a cute black-and-orange teddy, soft-spoken Sarbani adds: "You know, *Didi*, I made this... I haven't studied much. Toy-making is all that I know and so I want to take it up as a profession when I grow up..."

The six-day fun fest raises a vital question — that of the underprivileged child's right to recreation. "Have you noticed that we are calling the *mela* a child development fair and not simply a fair?" asks Bijli Mullick, assistant director, IPER.

"We firmly believe that all children, irrespective of class and

creed, have a right to recreation. But these kids, can hardly ever have fun," laments Mullick, eyes scanning the courtyard full of happy, smiling faces.

Girls like Ganga, Rinku, Bittu and Kalpana, all have tales of trauma and strife to tell. Tales which have shocked some of the schoolchildren participating in the fair.

Students from A.K. Ghosh Memorial, Rammohun Mission, Tollygunge Girls, Adarsh Hindi High and Rajendranath Shiksha Sadan are also at the fair. They are not competing, but are spending time with kids their age, who've lived very different life.

And the "raw talent" of the underprivileged children — all too evident as they dance, act and recite their way to prizes and plaudits — has surprised many. The magic and puppet shows put up by kids proved such a huge hit that children from the neighbourhood almost gatecrashed on Monday and Tuesday.

Says young Rajarshi Aich of A.K. Ghosh: "We had no idea how deprived these children were and also how talented they are. This has been a most educative experience for us." His classmate, Raka Das, nods in agreement, "We are enjoying ourselves thoroughly while learning about some facts of life."

STORY OF SUKUR

The 11-year-old lives with his father and siblings in a slum off Prince Anwar Shah Road. He has vague memories of his mother. He still doesn't know why she left her father and all of them, so suddenly, five summers ago.

His mornings and evenings are spent at a grocery shop. The afternoons are devoted to school. He is the lone bread-earner of the family, his alcoholic father refuses to budge. He is fully aware of his responsibilities of "feeding the family".

He doesn't have a clue about 'child labour laws'. What he does know is that he would rather spend all his time at school, studying and playing with his friends — with a Hindi film a week thrown in.

The Shishu Vikas Mela will also help hone the talents of those who top the competitions which are being held every day. Not only will they be sponsored but put into training schools and tutored.

"Now, you see why we are calling it a child development fair?" smiles Mullick. The NGO plans to turn this fair into an annual affair

The excitement is building up — Rinki, Preeti, Jaya are raring to go to Nicco Park. But they are sad for friend Ruksana, who is missing all the fun. The 16-year-old was forcibly married off a few days before the fair started

Though some children are hurt at their parents' staying away, there's a lot to cheer about. On Poila Baishakh, 150 kids will be taken to Nicco Park.

The curtains will come down on the fair with the screening of *Baby's Day Out*, *Goopee Bagha Phire Elo* and *Aladdin*.

The excitement is building up — the trip to Nicco Park is already the talking point. Rinki, Preeti, Jaya are all raring to go. But they are sad for friend Ruksana, who is missing all the fun. The 16-year-old was forcibly married off a few days before the fair started.

And as the delicious aroma of *luchi* and *aloo dum* — the afternoon snack — draws all children, the NGO workers struggle to keep the noisy kids' army in line.

The presence of just one stern lathi-wielding '*didi*' is just not enough to stop the little ones from having what they seldom have — good, clean fun.

Pallabi Biswas

The Telegraph
13 April 2000

TN mill awarded for making paper without cutting trees

THIS summer some school students in Tamil Nadu are doing their homework in 'eco-friendly' notebooks that were not made by cutting down trees. This has been made possible by the Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Paper Ltd (TNNPL), which experimented with alternative and renewable sources of wood pulp to avoid damage from deforestation.

For its effort, TNNPL has been awarded the 1999 Mother Teresa award for the corporate citizen by the Dr M A M Ramaswamy endowment. The award, instituted by the Loyola Institute of Business Administration to mark its 20 years, is given to a professionally managed company with a social vision. The college was established to provide "ethic-based management education in the framework of compassion and social responsibility."

The award is unique because it recognises a model corporate citizen's concern for eco-friendly technology and the uplift of the disadvantaged in its neighbouring community.

An annual turnover of not more than Rs 1,000 crore, quality and value addition for shareholders are among the criteria for selecting the winner. Delivering the memorial oration on the 'human dimensions of development,' planning commission member Montek Singh Ahluwalia said that the award "deep down reflects a perception that the objective of policy, which should be 'humane development,' is being missed out." "Economic development is just one aspect of development. We have to have a holistic approach," he said, calling for a policy consensus on emancipation of the excluded groups.

The system must be revamped and structured in such a manner that "not only the productive capacity for private goods must expand but public goods must also expand," Singh added.

The strategy must be humane, gentle, protect the environment and the cultural concerns of society amidst this "process of

globalisation." "What we want is not ossification of culture but growth of culture" and the winner of this year's Mother Teresa award is an example of a corporation's "unfailing commitment to sustainable development," Singh said.

A paper mill's prime resource is usually wood obtained from deforestation, which has massive environmental implications that cannot be easily set right. Wood is also difficult to bleach and the resultant effluent cannot be easily treated to the required safety standards.

Experimenting with alternative and renewable resources, the TNNPL plant uses sugarcane waste or bagasse. It was set up in Kagithapuram in Karur district of Tamil Nadu in the early eighties with a World Bank aid of \$100 million. The plant, given an expansion aid of \$75 million later, occupies 1,440 acres and provides employment to 10,000 people in the district.

Steam is exchanged for the bagasse acquired from the sugar mills in this cane-growing district. It is stored in an 800,000-tonne hillock during the harvesting season with indigenous technology to prevent degradation. About five tonne of bagasse yield one tonne of pulp but it is more easily bleached and the effluent is less toxic.

The treated effluent, conforming to river water discharge standards, is being given to farmers in the arid region in the neighbourhood. An irrigation society has been set up by the TNNPL at a cost of Rs 40 million to help farmers lift the treated water to the high land.

Facing litigation for letting out effluents that stagnated, the TNNPL took the help of the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University to solve the problem at a cost of Rs 240 million. This has changed the face of the rural landscape in the neighbourhood, bringing undreamt of prosperity to the local farmers.

The pith, the non-fibrous component of the bagasse residue,

is dried and the solid waste is recycled as furnace fuel. It is today India's most energy-efficient mill. It also developed two 15 megawatt wind farms in Tirunelveli district which has reduced dependence on the main power grid. □

The Observer
15 April 2000

A newspaper collector

NAME any English, Hindi or Punjabi newspaper of India and he has it. Neatly bound and stacked, Sarabjit Singh's collection could put to shame many a librarian, institution or even newspaper store. A chronicler of sorts, this deeply religious social worker has pursued a passion that could be described as a devotion to the goddess of learning. For more than 35 years now, the frail old man has been collecting all the Hindi, Punjabi and English publications

available in Amritsar city in pursuit of 'learning' and his eagerness to 'learn more'. "I observed that from the newspapers we not only get information but we also learn about different aspects of life," recalls Singh fondly of that day in 1965 when he just decided to stack newspapers. His two-room house in Chowk



Farid is a virtual treasure-trove of information. There are regional papers, national dailies, weeklies and magazines of all sorts. He is fondly referred to as Santji (a holy soul) by people in the neighbourhood. Singh's collection boasts of 22 dailies, 30 weeklies, 14 fortnightlies and 22 monthlies and periodicals. About 25 magazines are also purchased by him regularly. He spends about Rs 4,000 every month on his prize collection of the total of Rs 7,500 that he earns as rent on ancestral property.

The Observer
13 April 2000

'Developmental schemes lack proper implementation'

Pradeep Kapoor

LUCKNOW

MAJORITY of the minority community see the developmental programmes not to have been so beneficial to them thus failing to uplift their economic conditions.

According to a survey conducted by the Giri Institute of Economic Growth here on employment and income generation for minorities (Muslims) through various developmental programmes with case study of Rampur district exposes weakness of various government sponsored programmes and their implementation.

Rather, the study reveals that beneficiaries of the schemes are the same privileged class in stead of the deprived section of the society.

Rampur was selected for the case study as Muslims happened to be the majority of the local population and has been represented by a member of the community always both in the Lok Sabha and state Assembly.

About 84 per cent of artisans, 60 per cent of skilled workers and 39 per cent of self employed expressed dissatisfaction over the government schemes and their implementation.

The study says a down world market demand, and irregular earning for skilled workers and financial constraints for self-employed emerged as principal reasons for dissatisfaction.

In Rampur 61.76 per cent of males and 38.24 per cent of females are found benefitted from Total Literacy Campaign while from Non-formal Education and coaching for competitive examinations only males are found benefitted.

From the view point of minorities schemes like IRDP, TRYSEM,

Nirbal Varg Avas Yojna and PMRY are found to be of high importance as minorities are receiving benefits from these programmes. Remaining programmes have yet to play their role for the development of minority community.

As per the study, beneficiaries under IRDP were 61.17 per cent, TRYSEM 52.27 per cent, PMRY 6.16 per cent and under Nirbal Varg Avas Yojna 86.81 per cent. In Rampur the value of financial assistance per person comes to Rs 13,619 and employment to about 87 days per person. Income generated from these programmes come to Rs 4,543 per person and employment generated is found higher from self employment in trade/business — 210 days.

Majority of the minority community wishes to start general store, cloth selling, pan selling, tea stall, atta chakki and cycle repairing activities. To start a new activity in rural area require Rs 32,755 per person. In urban areas bidi making, zari works, rickshaw pulling, TV, radio, motor binding are principal source of income. The findings of the study underlines general store in rural, urban and self employed trade/business activity with a higher employment and income generating potential. The study has recommended that these activities need to be encouraged for the socio-economic development of minorities by adopting effective policy measures and concerted efforts need to be made to overcome the problems faced by self-employed trade-economic activity. □

The Observer
15 April 2000

It's women's world

WOMEN In a small village in Kerala have been provided a platform to be trained as masons in a forty day programme. This is the first effort of its kind in Kerala where women are being trained in a field which has been man's forte, said Raja,

head of Nedmangdu block, centre of the training programme. "We have formatted a scheme for giving training to the womenfolk to generate employment in the field of construction work where usually men are dominating", he said.

The idea to train women as masons initially came up in the wake of health and hygiene problems arising due to lack of toilets in many villages. Most men in the Negumagad venture out of the village to earn their living. It was then that women took it upon themselves to bring a change in their lives. Women are able to learn construction work such as building toilets in the initial stages and later they will be able to construct small buildings. This forty day training will enable them to nurture their skills and hence choose masonry as a profession.



The Observer
15 April 2000

Now cartoons teach Maths, Geography...

IMAGINE Batman teaching you two plus two and Superman crisscrossing the world to spruce up your geography. For the consolation of hypertense parents whose children stay glued to favourite cartoons for hours, there is a whole range of new interactive software for tiny-tots, which has their idols complimenting classroom education imparted to them. A host

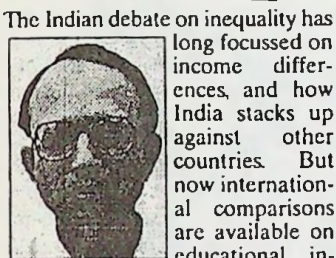
of conceivable comic characters from Simba, Aladdin, Casper, Superman and Spiderman are teaching anything from simple mathematics, English pronunciation, vowels, geography and history. "School children in India are under severe pressure to do well in studies. But, unfortunately the child does not always want to learn. He would



rather spend time playing and having fun. Thus educational multimedia software is a solution to this challenge, where learning is done through exploration, discovery and adventure, says Geetanjali Sharma of NIIT. "Through our project LEDA (learning through exploration, discovery and adventure), the child feels he is playing, and at the same time he learns," she says.

The Observer
15 April 2000

India's terrible educational inequality



The Indian debate on inequality has long focussed on income differences, and how India stacks up against other countries. But now international comparisons are available on educational inequality (Lopez, Thomas and Wang 1998. Addressing the Education Puzzle: The Distribution of Education and Economic Reform). These show India in a truly terrible light. Educational inequality is a far more serious problem than income inequality.

Economists measure inequality by a yardstick called the gini coefficient, which ranges from 0 (total equality) to 1 (total inequality). The researchers have measured the inequality in years of schooling between different income groups. They find India has one of the highest gini coefficients in the world.

The vast majority of developing countries have less educational inequality than India.

Take a look at the accompanying tables, which give data for selected countries. India's educational gini has declined very slowly from 0.76 in 1970 to 0.69 in 1990. By contrast, Korea's educational gini has plummeted from 0.51 to 0.22. That is a major

pared with inequality in other developing countries.

Far greater income inequality is evident in Brazil (0.60), South Africa (0.59) and Mexico (0.56), the last of which has been ruled by an avowedly socialist government for almost a century. Clearly, India's main problem of inequality is not in income but education.

Had politicians and economists grasped this basic fact five decades ago, India would have been far richer and more equal today.

The issue is presented in even starker terms in another research paper (Filmer and Pritchett, 1999). This looks at the average number of years of schooling of youngsters between the ages of 15 and 19. It gives data for the poorest 40 per cent and richest 40 per cent of the population in different countries. Once again, India stands out as one of the most unequal. The average (median) years of schooling is almost zero for the poorest 40 per cent, but in excess of 10 years for the richest 40 per cent.

Pakistan has long been pilloried by international experts for neglecting education. But even Pakistan is more equal than India in education. Filmer and Pritchett's data show that the gap in median years of schooling between the richest and poorest 40 per cent of people in Pakistan is 9 years, slightly less than India's 10. Measured by the gini coefficient, Pakistan was more unequal (0.85) than India (0.76) in 1970. But by 1990, Pakistan (0.64) had become more equal than India (0.69).

It is truly ironic that Nehru, who set out to create an egalitarian society, ended up creating one of the most unequal educational societies in the world. The Indian constitution pledged to achieve universal literacy by 1965, but no politician took that seriously. Nehru wanted to show that the brown man could do as well as the white man.

Educational inequality (gini coefficients)		
	1970	1990
India	0.76	0.69
Korea	0.51	0.22
Pakistan	0.85	0.64
Algeria	0.82	0.60
China	0.60	0.42
Brazil	0.50	0.39
Indonesia	0.59	0.41

reason why Korea has fared better.

Many Indian leftists claim that if only India had enacted the sort of land reforms that Korea did in the 1950s, greater income equality would have spurred more prosperity. However, the second accompanying table suggests that income inequality in India and Korea has been roughly of the same order for decades, and is very modest com-

Income inequality (gini coefficients)		
	India	Korea
1970	0.30	0.33
1992	0.32	0.33*

* (data are for 1988)

Source: Lopez, Thomas and Wang 1998

So he set up world class Indian Institutes of Technology and Management while grossly neglecting primary education.

The outcome is there for all to see. India's highly-educated upper crust is world class, and so it has become the second biggest computer software exporter in the world. Companies like Infosys and Wipro now have a bigger market value than several venerable American and British software companies. Over 1.5 million Indians have migrated to the U.S. and become the richest, most skilled ethnic group there. At the same time, illiteracy in India (38 per cent in 1997) is far worse than in African countries like Zimbabwe (12 per cent), Kenya (20 per cent) or Tanzania (26 per cent), and is deep-

est among the poorest and socially excluded (dalits and tribals).

The immense opportunities created by globalisation have been seized by the well-educated Brahmin. But the illiterate dalit remains out in the cold. The Nehruvian educational model has produced horrendous inequalities, the very opposite of what the Nehruvian economic model strove for. Some silly people blame this outcome on globalisation. In fact, it lies in absurdly bad educational policies. The answer is not to stop globalisation, which is largely technological and so unstoppable anyway. The answer is to urgently provide education for the masses so that they too can clamber aboard the globalisation train.

The Times of India
16 April 2000

Power be to people!

MYSORE:

ERRATIC electric supply and power cuts are no problem to many people including farmers in and around Mysore and the neighbouring districts. Absence of electricity does not agitate them absolutely.

They have a wonderful pump that can be manually operated or driven by domestic animals to lift water from wells. Manufactured by the Centre for Appropriate Rural Technology (CART) from locally available materials and skills, the pump can lift even muddy water — a task that may damage an electric pump — something more suited to rural context.

Using this pump, water can be obtained from an open well, pond and lake. Anybody can handle the pump without much strain. A man can spin the wheel at a speed of 35-40 rotations per minute lifting 130-150 litres of water from a depth of 10 feet. The pump easily works up to a depth of 60 feet.

The people of Melukote in Mandya district were the first to use this machine and since then CART has sold more than 800 pumps. Many more people are rushing to buy one.

Good bye, power board!

P M RAGHUNANDAN
Deccan Herald
16 April 2000

The Agony of Patha

PATHA region, spreading over Mau and Manikpur blocks of Chirakut district and Shankargarh block of Allahabad district, and in a small part of Madhya Pradesh, has been synonymous with the twin menace of extreme exploitation of weaker sections and terror of dacoits. However, with the intervention of voluntary organisations, one can feel the winds of change.

The worst sufferers of this highly deprived region have been the bonded labourers and particularly the Kol tribals. Apart from numerous massacres that have taken place here periodically, this is the region, where in the forest of Shankargarh, the brother of former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh was killed by dacoits.

But dacoits are not the only terror in Patha. Tales of extreme exploitation of weaker sections and bonded labour also abound, often leading to suicide by these unfortunate people. For example, in Helagaon village, the 'master' of two bonded labourers Sataiyam and Panda Kol took a loan in their names. Though he used the money, the recovery notice came in the names Sataiyam and Panda Kol. They were locked up and subjected to a lot of ill-treatment. Their harassment ultimately led them to commit suicide. Another bonded labour, Buchaiya, was also driven to suicide as he couldn't pay back the loan.

Unfortunate people like Manbharan, a Harijan youth of Opncha Dih village and a personal acquaintance, have been bonded labour for generations. And even when due to the help of some social organisations, they got back their land and freedom, they were still not allowed to cultivate the land and physically threatened. Buchiya often told me that he would desert the village and he actually deserted it one day without leaving any trace of his whereabouts.

When I visited Patha in October 1999, I had met Mataiya Kol of Markandi Purva village. He, also like his forefathers, was born to slavery. However, with a local voluntary organisation, Akhil Bhartiya Samaj Seva Sansthaan (ABSSS), he got back his land. Still, the joy proved to be shortlived as he discovered that his 'master' had taken a loan in his name by giving their land as security. ABSSS helped them save their land but not everybody is as fortunate as

him.

The stories of the repression of women are even worse. Shakuntia was forced by a policeman to live as his mistress. She had to undergo three abortions. When she refused the fourth time, she was pushed out by the policeman.

Suakali of Sarhat village first experienced distress when she was raped, but later when she reported it, she had to face even more distress at the hand of the same person. The police took her from one place to another for tests without caring for her. The culprit got her husband Ram Pratap arrested after implicating him in false legal cases and destroyed the standing crop in their field.

Many other stories of extreme distress are buried in the villages and hills of Patha, but this entire distress is the result of man-made factors. Nature has provided resources to Patha to feed all the villagers living here and meet the basic needs. But when few people, out of greed, grab the natural resources of the village, using it only for their profit and deprive others of access to the same resources, then this becomes the real factor leading to large-scale poverty and hunger.

As Gopal Bhai, director of ABSSS says: "The most important question is how the resource-base of farmland, forests and water is being used."

According to him, Patha having plenty of forest resources like *anila*, honey, *mahuwa*, *chrunji*, gum and tendu leaves which can provide employment to people here, the contractor system has led to the exploitation of tribals for several years.

"There is also no shortage of farmland, but land that should rightly belong to the poor tribal and Harijan families has been grabbed by a few rich and powerful feudals," he rues.

The pastures are plentiful and even provide fodder for cattle of other places, but lack of opportunities to weaker sections and lack of veterinary care has kept away the local/small peasants from realising the potential of animal husbandry," he says.

Patha has been generally considered a water scarce area, but Rajabua, another social activists says, "the water scarcity is the result of failure to use the available resources properly. First the potential of tanks, check dams, and other small-scale efforts were ignored and later, when this work

was started, a lot of money was wasted by corrupt contractors."

The root cause of poverty in Patha lies in inequalities, corruption and the misuse of resources. Vasudeva, who edits a small news bulletin from this area says: "A-grade silica and other mirror minerals available here can provide reasonably well-paid employment to a large number of workers, but the present pattern of their working is to exploit workers including child workers ruthlessly while destroying the environment at the same time."

This exploitative system has become more complex and cruel due to the activities of several dacoit gangs. The smuggling in forest produces become easier because of the presence of dacoits. If landlords cannot unleash repression directly on social activists struggling for rights of the weaker sections, then dacoits are called to terrify them. Thus the feudal exploiters and the dacoits compliment each other.

But this does not mean that there is no ray of hope in this darkness of oppression and terror. Even in these extremely difficult conditions some voluntary organisations have kept alive the voice of hope.

Rajan Kol of Patha Kol Adhikar Manch (Forum for the Rights of Kol Tribals of Patha) says, "despite very adverse conditions, a growing number of Kol youths are coming forward to challenge this oppressive system, and change their life of exploitation and repression. The struggles for forests, land and water are moving ahead. The results can be seen in the improved living conditions of hundreds of families. Jamunihal village of Tikariya Panchayat is a clear example of these changing conditions.

Due to increased social awareness and works of voluntary organisations, things are indeed changing dramatically as Daddy Mavaiya says, "most families have now got farming plots with adequate irrigation facilities. Work is also going on soil conservation. Where there was barren land, now you can see green fields of paddy."

Sitaram Mavaiya adds proudly, "we have managed to stop the consumption of liquor and gambling in this village. This has been possible only due to our Panchayat which decided about this social reform. Most people agree voluntarily but a few had to be prevailed upon with more difficulty.

Almost all children are going to primary Contd...

U.N. booklet on AIDS prevention an 'over-reaction'

By Kalpana Jain

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: A peek into a UN official's vehicle these days, is likely to reveal more than just a first-aid kit: disposable syringes and needles, life-saving drugs and fluids like plasma expanders, to name a few. It is meant to protect UN employees against AIDS infection, in case of a road accident.

And to minimise the risk of accidents, UN resident coordinators are being advised to use seat belts, check drug abuse by drivers, avoid driving vehicles, and ensure that all motorbike riders wear helmets.

All the 'dos and don'ts' have been put in a 53-page special handbook, with a foreword from Secretary General Kofi Annan, on the AIDS virus "ravaging the developing world". Although the HIV situation is grim, with 2.6 million deaths reported last year, senior health officials here consider the UN advisory as an "over-

reaction." The best prevention against HIV is avoiding unsafe sex, they say.

The handbook leaves an ordinary reader feeling utterly unprotected against AIDS. For example, it advises UN employees against using locally manufactured condoms, where high quality ones from the private sector are not available.

Described as a "prophylactic that can prevent AIDS," the booklet says condoms should be made available through the UN Population Fund or the World Health Organisation. Access should be free, simple and discreet.

As HIV virus is often passed on through contaminated blood, needles or sex with an infected person, the "protective measures" advise employees against using anything not approved by the UN. Thus, the UN medical service has been asked to provide disposable syringes and needles to staff travelling in areas where proper sterilisation of these is not guaranteed. The stocks should have a certificate in all UN official languages, explaining why these are being car-

ried, the document says.

The booklet says that all UN staff and their families should be told where safe blood may be obtained. For this, the WHO Blood Safety Unit, in cooperation with the UN Medical Service, should list reliable and operational blood transfusion centres, and the list should be circulated at UN headquarters, regional offices and duty stations. The UN Medical Service should ensure that blood transfusions are performed only when absolutely necessary.

It also cautions employees to ensure complete sterilisation when going for skin-piercing procedures such as ear or body piercing, tattoos or acupuncture, practices common in certain African as well as Asian countries.

If these are the ways of preventing HIV transmission, experts here say governments perhaps need to update their education material as well. For what holds good for UN employees, should hold good for others too, when it comes to prevention of HIV/AIDS.

The Times of India
14 April 2000

Nayla village 'nets' first place with information kiosks

The Times of India News Service

JAIPUR: Nayla, a village about 22 km from the Pink City which U.S. President Bill Clinton visited recently, and the first village of the state with an information kiosk has now opened the floodgates for the information technology. Chief minister Ashok Gehlot will launch the state's IT policy on Saturday.

Apart from several unique features of its own, the policy has taken the best features of other states, IT policies and provisions of the national IT plan to attract industry to the state. "One special feature of the policy is to take IT education to rural and semi-rural areas through ac-

tive private sector participation. This will help raise employment opportunities," said Rohit Singh, director-IT.

"As part of promoting and strengthening IT infrastructure, the state has given IT the status of industry. Special incentives will be given to pioneering companies to start operations in the state," said D.C. Samant, chairman of Rajasthan Industrial Investment Corporation. The Rajnidhi information kiosk project is part of the state government's vision of governance aimed at using IT, especially Internet, to replace traditional form of governance and its accompanying deficiencies with a modern, more transparent and responsive service delivery system.

The Times of India
15 April 2000

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school where they are taught properly, minor forest produce, primary education, The teacher makes a lot of effort," and women's self-help groups."

For this dramatic changes, people This message of change against thank voluntary groups like ABSSS, heavy odds in very difficult conditions Kallu Prasad says that most of this is emanating from not just Jumunihal success is the result of the efforts of but from several other village and the ABSSS. This voluntary organisation hamlets of Patha as well. The terror at has worked steadily on several fronts several levels has not ended yet, but in this village (as well as several there has been enough signs, of hope neighbouring villages) in the area of for the long oppressed people to identification and distribution of land, weave dreams of a new life free from improving the terms of collection of oppression.

Bharat Dogra

The Observer
15 April 2000

The Asian Age
16 April 2000

100 schools to be named 'Smart schools'

Coimbatore, April 15: The Centre is considering to declare 100 schools in the country as "smart schools," with an emphasis on computer education, A N Maheshwari, chairperson of National Council for Teachers' Education said on Saturday.

On a pilot basis, one school in each state would be selected as "smart school," based on its performance and infrastructural facilities, Ms Maheshwari said in an interaction session at a symposium on "challenges for teachers education in the new millennium" organised at Avinashilingam deemed university here.

According to the proposal 32 Kendriya Vidyalayas, 32 Navodaya schools and 36 private schools would be declared as "smart schools," Ms Maheshwari said, adding that the schools should conform to the parameter-set by the council.

A sum of Rs 25 crore had been earmarked for the purpose and Rs 25 lakh would be provided to each school for developing infrastructure for imparting computer education, he said. (PTI)

Flower power

JASMINE that adorns a woman's hair and finds a place in the *pooja* room is hardly the item to revolutionise the fledgling floriculture industry. The long, tapering petals of the Mangalore *mallige* whose scent mingles with the gentle sea-breeze in coastal Karnataka, belong more to novellas set in rural Karnataka of the Fifties.

In Shankarapura, a tiny village off the highway between Mangalore and Udupi, with a population of 3,000, the flower bears testimony to the enterprise of its women. Shankarapura springs up quite suddenly, not long after we turn off the highway, 10 km short of Udupi. We pass sprawling old houses, the last vestiges of the typical Udupi dwellings.

All houses have gardens and backyards. Most of the men are likely to be away, making their pile in the Gulf, or in the U.S., or in Mumbai. How the "Gulf widow" turned a jasmine entrepreneur, a trade with a daily turnover of Rs. 1.5 lakh during the peak period, is the story of the Shankarapura phenomenon.

Even before the exodus of men from Shankarapura began, the jasmine enterprise was a woman's show. The day begins early in most homes, as the women go out into the gardens at dawn, picking out the buds sighted the evening before. Soon all the jasmine is picked, and the rest of the household, by now awake, joins in stringing them.

Shankarapura women have made jasmine stringing into a fine art. Generations of them have been doing it in this place. Jasmine is strung in a similar fashion in every house. As many as 800 flowers placed alternately, stalk up and down, form a length called a *chendu*. When four *chendus* each folded six times over, are packed and tied with banana fibre, one *atte* of jasmine is ready to be taken to the *mallige katte* or the auction yard on the main street.

Auction agents, mostly men, have their shops here. The jasmine growers do not sell directly to consumers. Sometimes an entrepreneur brings in just a solitary *atte*. When demand overtakes supply, a single *atte* can fetch Rs. 360 or Rs. 400. And unlike the flower markets of Bangalore or Mysore, where jasmine is sold loose, Mangalore *Mallige* is sold only in the form of a *chendu*.

Before noon, most of the stringing is done, and the "auction centre", a ramshackle table under a banyan tree on the main street is ready for auction. *Attes* these days have begun coming in from neighbouring villages as well. Bus drivers drop precious loads while plying past. Youth wheel in a few bundles on bicycles. Little girls and old women bring in the odd *atte* or two. Entries are made in the account book for every *atte* received, against the person who gave it in. The grower collects her money a week later.

The commission that the agents earn on every *atte* is Rs. 2. The rest of the money goes to the grower, irrespective of the fluctuation in rates. When the demand peaks during the wedding season, the daily turnover can touch

Rs. 1.5 lakh.

Although women dominate the scene there are some tasks that men do. The agents are all men, and it is they who move the *attes* to the auction centre, and take care of the transportation once the price is fixed.

Why are men preferred to act as auction agents? The women call this delegation of work. Many young men who failed to make it good overseas return home and take up this work. Besides, the women can maintain their gardens and balance the accounts. "It is our show, and the men respect that," says Carmina Quadris, the only woman who once participated in the daily auction, but who gave it up when she began keeping indifferent health.

At noon, the oldest agent, Maurice Martis, young Andrew Mendonca, and a few others gather under the banyan tree and assess the day's collection. The rate is fixed after considering the position that day. The daily rate of jasmine in Shankarapura is quoted in the dailies.

Flower-power has a vast reach. Consignments are sent to Udupi, Kundapura, Mangalore, and Kasargode and Kallikote. From Mangalore's Bajpai airport, it is off to Mumbai and then out of the country.

Most of the time, Shankarapura meets the annual requirement of jasmine. Many gardens grow the less popular orange coloured *kanakambara* and *jaji* alongside, but the money is in jasmine.

Picking and stringing the flowers takes up all morning, since the *attes* have to reach the auction centre before noon. Evenings see watering, weeding, spraying insecticides and tending.

Nearly all the players in the jasmine enterprise belong to the Konkani-speaking Christian community. The brahmin families are more into growing coconut, areca, banana, mango and other fruits on larger holdings. If jasmine is the livelihood for some families, for some women like Molly Corda, a Gulf widow who lives with her children, it is a hobby. "Summane" is the philosophy that drives Corda. "What can I achieve just sitting around?"

Old Michael Martis, who says that jasmine cultivation in the village was fairly established 60 years ago remembers the time when a *chendu* sold for two *annas*. Seventy-three-year-old Maurice Martis, in the business for over 50 years, speaks of the time when there was no bridge over the Gurupura river. "Agents used to cycle to Mulki, Mangalore to deliver the flowers. Agent Andrew Mendonca pitches in. "My grandfather was in the business, making him a third generation jasmine agent."

And if you care to ask Corda and Quadris — no longer coy when curious journalists ask questions, or when cameras pan their gardens and pry into their lives demanding answers — there is nothing more empowering for a woman than to sit cross-legged on the *jagli*, stringing jasmynes, and earning without leaving their homes. Even if it is their only way

of filling a void in their lives, caused by absent spouses or siblings working abroad. "No pain no gain," the two concede. Sometimes they pretend it is they who have left their husbands to strike it out on their own. Stringing jasmine with the sturdy, dependable banana fibre accords them the luxury of transcending the mental borders. Empowerment, like charity, begins at home; in the backyard, to be precise.

And then, there are men like Freddie, who apparently had no job to speak of, or others who could leave behind their jobs in the Gulf when it suited them and come home to unemployment. For the trusty wives of Shankarapura can be relied upon to provide for them. Flower-power or women's empowerment — the names do not matter. The jasmine women show the way. ■

The author is a fellow of the National Foundation for India and this article is part of the fellowship series.

ALLADI JAYASRI.

The Hindu
16 April 2000

She gives time, meaning to nursing

The Times of India News Service

NEW YORK: Heroes can be found in some unlikely places. *TIME* magazine found one in a village in Tamil Nadu. She is 32-year-old Nirmala Palsmay who heads the Village Health Nurse Association in the state.

For her work in advocating family planning choices in India, Nirmala has been named one of *TIME*'s "Heroes for the Planet." There are seven others to be named in the magazine's first-ever global special edition, "How to Save the Earth." The edition will hit newsstands worldwide for one month starting April 19 in advance of Earth Day which is on April 22.

It is workers like Nirmala who have given India more humane and effective family planning choices. She told her superiors that birth-rate targets made mothers distrust nurses and resist the policy — and that nurses would gladly forego sterilisation bonuses if allowed to do their jobs without government interference. "The state's population growth rate has dropped from 1.5 per cent in 1991 to 1 per cent in 1999 — compared with 1.8 per cent for India as a whole," according to *TIME*.

Nirmala complains that men don't concern themselves with choices of birth control: "Family planning is a social responsibility," she says, "but everything is targeted to women. You can't really call it family planning until the whole family is involved."

The Times of India
17 April 2000

Commonwealth lauds India's role in women empowerment

Kumkum Chadha
New Delhi, April 16

EVEN WHILE political parties here battle over whether or not the Women's Reservation Bill should be passed in Parliament, the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development specifically mentions India among those countries where strategic actions have been taken to increase the critical mass of women in decision making.

In the Secretary General's report to be presented at the sixth conference of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs beginning tomorrow, the 84th Constitutional Amendment finds a mention under "good practices".

As against this, India does not figure among the ten top reporting countries on Women's participation in the National Executive or Cabinet, and Parliament. While New Zealand tops the list with 30 per cent of women in its National Parliament or Assembly, United Kingdom is the lowest ranking in the list with 18 per cent women representation. India, on its part, had only 7.8 per cent women representatives in Parliament last year. The representation in the Cabinet was a mere 8.57 per cent as against The Gambia's 30.8 per cent - the highest in the top ten - and Antigua and Barbuda with 17.6 per cent.

In the context of the local Government's, however, India ranks third in the series with 33.5 per cent representation of women. Its record is bettered by Seychelles with a 54 per cent and Uganda with 40.8 per cent women representation.

The report also mentions India's

"committed and systematic approach" to mainstreaming gender in areas such as education, health, rural and urban development as well as community development. The "substantial outcomes", listed in the report, include the Women's Component Plan to ensure that no less than 30 per cent of the funds and benefits flow from other development sectors to women; an integrated approach to empower women through effective use of financial, physical and human resources in both women specific and general programmes and dissemination and enforcement of guidelines on sexual harassment. While noting that economic empowerment of women and the availability of alternative employment are seen as "viable strategies" to be looked at by Governments in their search for ways to end violence against women, many countries are linking the exploitation of women and children to national programmes on economic development, poverty alleviation and employment creation. India, the report records, has taken measures which include the provision of alternative, gender sensitive employment for the rehabilitation of sex workers and their children and the voluntary sector has initiatives to end the cycle of the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Even while India has to ensure effective action to its seemingly impressive fact-sheet, the report underlines the need for implementation of effective gender equality policies and programmes which "must go beyond words to action at policy, planning and operational levels". Political commitment, it further points out, is critical cou-

pled with resource availability to National Women's Machinery's (NWM's). According to the report in 1999, all but six countries have had some constraints placed on their capacity and ability to implement the national women or gender policy. In many countries "tight constraints on either human or financial capacity" and lack of technical training and resources have resulted in lower performance levels: "NWMs and their parents Ministries receive less than 0.5 per cent of the national budget," the report states adding that most NWMs budgets represent only a fraction of that of their Ministry's overall allocation ranging between 0.2 per cent and 1.46 per cent. India is also mentioned as one of the six countries which are analysing the gender impact on national budgets.

The report, however, notes with concern the "significant lack of progress" for the majority of countries in strengthening the capacity of their NWMs since 1996 especially in the areas of strategic co-ordination and monitoring of programmes or advocacy and policy advice roles: "Factors such as low public awareness of gender issues, strong traditional practices and values, the caste system, religion and lack of co-operation from key stakeholders as well as under representation of women in decision making positions have compounded the difficulties" the report notes. It points out that 88 per cent of the NWMs have a "continuing need" for training in gender issues.

More than 45 member countries of the Commonwealth will attend the three-day conference which will deliberate on all aspects of gender.

Light music to create awareness on AIDS

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, APRIL 15. An awareness campaign to prevent and control HIV infection will be spread through light music programmes the Health Minister, Mr. Aron Veerasamy announced on Friday.

Releasing two audio cassettes with messages on road safety and health the Minister said that the music programmes would be sponsored by the State AIDS cell and organised in all the districts.

Commenting on the cassettes, he said, as autorickshaw drivers themselves have penned and lent their voices, it would definitely have an impact among the drivers. This gains significance as studies reveal that lorry drivers were vulnerable to the disease.

The Minister, said it was appropriate to give the task of conducting music programmes to Mr. Shankar Ganesh who had scored the music for the present audio cassettes without any monetary benefit. The Minister also released a souvenir brought out by the owners of driving schools in Central Chennai. While the City Police Commissioner Mr. P. Kalimuthu received the first cassette, the JCP (Traffic) Mr. R. Sekar received the first copy of the souvenir.

The RTO (Central) Mr. R. Chandran who was instrumental in bringing out the cassettes said they also proposed to produce a documentary film with the songs to spread the message of road safety.

The Hindu
16 April 2000

The Hindustan Times
17 April 2000

'Deaf vulnerable to sexual abuse'

Mumbai, April 16: Lack of communication and absence of sex education have made the deaf in India vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse both within their family and outside, according to Project Signpost, a research study conducted in India.

The study conducted by research scholars attached to the project, Ms Shilpa Patil and Mr Y.C. Gopinath, says, there was virtually no information on sexual health and aware-

ness raising material that had been prepared with the needs of non-verbal, non-hearing populations in mind. As a result available information was not likely to be effective to bring out a change in behaviour patterns of the high-risk deaf group.

The study chronicles tragic incidents of the exploitation of the deaf. Low levels of education, undeveloped social skills and lack of communication rob India's deaf

of the conceptual framework needed to understand, discuss, explore and analyse certain issues of sexual health. Many of them had tenuous understanding of the concept of blood relationships. In a questionnaire-based survey of the deaf several of them believed that incest was "alright" while many named close relatives, servants and chauffeurs as offenders, the study says.

The sense of isolation and with-

drawal experienced by the deaf makes them easy targets for sexual abuse as their helplessness and inability to communicate is well known to family members, the study said.

When abuse takes place within the family it may increase a deaf person's loneliness but more than that it deepens the mistrust and fear that the person feels for the hearing

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India catching up on its literacy rate

Apratim Mukarji
New Delhi, April 16

INDIA IS finally catching up in one of its weakest social sectors of development - literacy. It is now predicted with a fair amount of confidence that the literacy rate will touch 75 per cent by 2005 against the previous target date of 2011. The figure is 62 per cent.

Despite the enormous handicap of a fast growing population, India has moved up in the international literacy chart by overtaking Egypt, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and Uganda. In its immediate neighbourhood, it is far ahead of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. However, it is way behind Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

Literacy levels are growing at an annual rate of nearly two per cent.

If this rate is maintained, India should reach a literacy level between 66 and 86 per cent by 2001. Assuming, however, that full literacy for India means the "sustainable threshold level" of 75 per cent, the country should achieve it between 2004 and 2005.

The most literate part of India today is the Andaman and Nicobar islands where the literacy rate is 97 per cent. Lakshadweep is a close second at 96 per cent.

Kerala is no longer the most literate state. Its literacy rate is 93 per cent, behind Mizoram's at 95 per cent, which now tops the list. Tamil Nadu has risen from 63 per cent in 1991 to 70 per cent in 1997.

The figures were in the annual report of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy and the Department of

Secondary Education and Higher Education of the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

But the pleasant surprise is the progress shown by the traditional laggards - the Hindi heartland of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

Between 1991 and 1997, Rajasthan has improved its literacy rate from 38.55 per cent to 55 per cent, Uttar Pradesh from 41.6 per cent to 56 per cent, Bihar from 38.5 per cent to 49 per cent and Madhya Pradesh from 44.2 per cent to 56 per cent.

Sikkim at 79 per cent, Assam at 75 per cent, Maharashtra at 74 per cent, WB at 72 per cent and Gujarat at 68 p.c. continue to be high achievers among the States.

Much of the confidence in achieving a creditable progress in

spreading literacy stems from the obviously encouraging results of the literacy drive among women. The annual report refers to a study undertaken in Dumka district of Bihar which reveals that the economic impact of literacy is proving to be significant.

The Dumka campaign demonstrates how adult education has helped women take charge of their lives. The literate women have formed a group called "Jago Behna" (Awake Sisters) seeking to sensitise fellow-women to the need of collective action against social evils and for greater participation in economic activities.

The women have set up a "Didi Bank" (Sister Bank) which promotes thrift. They have also learned to maintain and repair handpumps.

The Hindustan Times
17 April 2000

A green library

The government has decided to conserve 90 important medicinal plants on a priority basis and will set up a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) to protect India's ancient knowledge, R A Mashelkar, Director General of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) said,

reports PTL TKDL, once set up, will help

Ninety medicinal plants which are attracting a maximum global attraction have been identified by a governmental task force that submitted its report recently, Mashelkar said.

The task force has submitted its report recently, Mashelkar said. The library will be created from documents available in languages like Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Persian. Documents like "Bharat Bhaisiya Ratnakar", "Charak Samhita", "Sushruta Samhita", "Sarangadhar Samhita" and "Astrang Hridaya" would be used to collect the information.

TKDL also aims at reducing loss of traditional knowledge, preserved by individuals for centuries, Mashelkar said.

The library will be created from documents available in languages like Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Persian. Documents like

sustainable use of medicinal plants was set up in January this year by the Planning Commission with an objective to protect India's medicinal plant reserves and traditional knowledge.

The plants have been identified keeping in view the rise in

patent claims worldwide for non-Indian original inventions based on various use of Indian medicinal plants, Mashelkar said at a conference on Indian systems of medicine, jointly organised by the health ministry and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) here.

At the same time, the national medicinal plants and to ensure quality of ayurvedic products.

TKDL, once set up, will help receive digitised data on India's medicinal plants which are attracting a maximum global attraction have been identified by a governmental task force that submitted its report recently, Mashelkar said.

It would not only help avoid grant of patents to foreign companies and individuals but also assist in bringing out India's traditional knowledge to the world as TKDL would be accessible on the internet, Mashelkar said.

TKDL also aims at reducing loss of traditional knowledge, preserved by individuals for centuries, Mashelkar said.

The library will be created from documents available in languages like Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit and Persian. Documents like

"Bharat Bhaisiya Ratnakar", "Charak Samhita", "Sushruta Samhita", "Sarangadhar Samhita" and "Astrang Hridaya" would be used to collect the information.

Data collection, digitisation, organisation and retrieval of documents irrespective of the lan-

guage would be done by an expert committee comprising scientists, IT experts and traditional medicine practitioners, the CSIR chief said. CSIR is also a part of the project. The task force also recommended creation of a medicinal plants board for sustainable cultivation of medicinal plants and to ensure quality of ayurvedic products.

The current international market of herbal medicine is worth 60 billion US dollars per year and is growing at an annual rate of seven per cent.

India at present exports herbal products worth Rs 446.3 crore which can be raised to Rs 3000 crore by 2005 if proper measures are taken, according to the task force report.

Mashelkar said innovative packaging, aggressive marketing, standardisation and networking of laboratories are needed to improve India's export of herbal products.

Deccan Herald
18 April 2000

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The deaf are endangered by their ignorance and low levels of awareness as also by their friendly affection seeking temperament that makes them prone to high-risk behaviour with little forethought or attention to the consequences.

Already marginalised by deafness, they are doubly discriminated when they become infected by HIV too. Absence of an Indian sign language is also a problem while evolving a curriculum on sexual health and HIV/AIDS (PTI)

The Asian Age
17 April 2000

Women self-help scheme to be extended

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, APRIL 17. A major project for empowerment of poor rural women in Tamil Nadu through the formation of self-help groups (SHG), would be extended to town panchayats and municipal areas from this year.

Announcing this in the Assembly today, the Social Welfare Minister, Mrs. S. P. Sarkuna Pandian said the project so far had helped evolve 25,000 women SHGs throughout Tamil Nadu, commanding a total membership of 4.5 lakh rural women.

The SHGs established at the village level under this scheme, renamed "Annai Bangaru Ammaiya Ninaivu Mahalir Thittam", has so far generated a savings corpus of Rs. 35 crores, the Minister said replying to the debate on the demands for grants for her Department. The percent-

age of scheduled tribe women members in the SHGs had risen from 21 per cent in 1998 to 43 per cent now.

Stating that the expansion of the women's development scheme would require stronger NGO support than in the past, Mrs. Sarkuna Pandian said the Government was considering to set up an Authority to facilitate identification of NGOs and strengthening the voluntarist ethos and movement.

The Government also proposed to establish an autonomous resource centre, ("Maanila Thonduruvu Thondargal Aadharai Maayam") to coordinate the activities of the NGOs State-wide among others, the Minister disclosed.

Family counselling centres will be set up in four more places this year, at Nagapattinam, Theni, Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram,

she said, adding, the annual expenditure limit for each of these centres was being raised from Rs. 79,000 to Rs. 85,000.

The monthly assistance to teachers of special schools imparting training to various types of handicapped people was being raised from Rs. 300 to Rs. 400, Mrs. Sarkuna Pandian further announced.

The monetary incentive to normal persons marrying disabled persons will be raised from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 7,000 this year, the Minister said. This would include a cash payment of Rs. 2,000 and National Savings Certificates for Rs. 5,000.

Intending to further expand the project of offering grants-in-aid to NGOs which come forward to set up 'shelter homes' for mentally retarded girls above the age of 14, Mrs. Sarkuna Pandian said three more districts of Kancheep-

uram, Kanyakumari and Coimbatore were proposed to be covered from this year. Presently six such homes have been set up by NGOs in Madurai, Salem, Tuticorin, Sivaganga, Thanjavur and Vellore.

The State Government's grant component of loans sanctioned by nationalised banks for the economic rehabilitation of the handicapped will be doubled to Rs. 2,000 from this financial year, the Minister said, adding, the number of beneficiaries under this scheme was also being raised from 800 to 1000 per year.

With regard to the marriage assistance schemes, Mrs. Sarkuna Pandian said the Government would ensure that the income certificate of the families of would-be brides was given to them through their respective schools itself.

The Hindu
18 April 2000

ICCW on the look-out for foster parents for Orissa orphans

By Radha Sharma
The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD: If your heart weeps for the thousands of children orphaned in the Orissa cyclone, here is a chance to give them some familial warmth. The Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) has devised a unique programme to encourage foster families to adopt children orphaned in Orissa and other similar natural disasters.

Children are the worst-affected community in any natural disaster. Last year's cyclone left more than 60,000 children without a mother or father, with nearly 50 per cent of them losing both parents.

"Of course, the government, with the help of voluntary agencies, has tried to help such children by creating shelter homes and SOS villages, but society also needs to contribute. And what better way than to provide an orphan with a set of new parents," says convenor, ICCW

(west zone), Dr Sukhdev Joshi.

The project developed by ICCW is simple. Couples can volunteer for adoption of such orphan children, and the ICCW will in turn pay Rs 400 for sharing the expenses incurred for bringing up the child.

Couples who are unable to adopt the child but nevertheless desire to do something for the needy children can sponsor a child by paying an annual sum of Rs 6,000.

"We are planning to kick-start the project by arranging family care for 100 children orphaned in the Orissa cyclone through foster parents. Once the feasibility of the project is confirmed, we will try to cover as many children as possible," said Mr Joshi.

Throwing light on the modus operandi, Mr Joshi said the ICCW will appoint a social worker for each block to assess the number of needy children and prospective foster parents in the region in order to

facilitate the smooth operation of the project. Meanwhile, once the child is adopted, respective workers will make repeated follow-ups so as to ensure that the child is being brought up well.

Mr Joshi said the ICCW does not wish to restrict the project to cyclone-affected victims alone. "HIV/AIDS is posing a major threat with as many as one crore children likely to lose their parents to the deadly disease in the near future. ICCW plans to gear up to meet the challenge from now only," says Mr Joshi.

The Times of India
19 April 2000

Children waiting for revolution

Children in urban slums have three common problems—exploitation of labour, sexual abuse and abandonment. All these problems of children are complex and overlap in many cases.

Most children suffer from poor health. Their health is affected due to dirty and dangerous work, lack of proper food and nutrition and unhygienic environment. Educational facilities — both formal and non-formal education — do not exist for them. Socio-culturally too they don't grow.

Due to lack of opportunity for healthy socialisation and education during the formative years of life, these children become alienated from the mainstream. The lack of educational opportunities breeds illiteracy and mars their intellectual development.

The Constitution of India has enshrined special provisions for the case, protection, prevention of exploitation as well as moral and material abandonment of children. Article (24) lays down that "no child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any hazardous employment".

Further Article 39(F) proclaims, "childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against

moral and material abandonment". Above all the Article (45) declares that "the state must endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children till the age of 14 years".

Technically, the slum children are the members of an alienated society. Generally they develop a negative attitude towards life which is reflected in their participation in petty crime and illegal activities in formative years of life in large numbers.

Take one of Delhi's largest slums, Yamuna Pushta. This slum, situated on the wasteland of Yamuna river in Delhi with a population of about 1.60 lakh has nearly 8000 neglected children living in deplorable conditions. Circumstances forces these children to work at the tender age of 5-6 years. A large proportion of inhabitants of this slum are living below the poverty line and in inhuman conditions.

These children are engaged in begging, rag picking and many are involved in petty crimes. Some are domestic servants and acrobats.

The parents of these children are rickshaw pullers, pickpockets, thieves, drug addicts or prostitutes. They have migrated from West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and the adjacent states of

Delhi.

The urban slum children like those in Yamuna Pushta seek education and other basic necessities to mitigate their black future. The non-formal education programmes run by NGOs will undertake including extra-curricular activities, diversity in learning activity and with a provision of games and sports and related equipment plays and skits and special attention is given to girls in this area. Part-time courses and vocational job oriented courses have been started in the slums.

Objective and value free education can be helpful to change the faulty pattern of behaviour to the children. Renowned American educationist Jonathan Cozol says in his famous book, *Children of the revolution*. "Till we won't correlate education with the basic essential human needs like food, shelter and health care, we can not think to make it a revolution".

Until all the slum children of Pushta are educated the slum will never grow out of its poverty

A H Faizee
The Pioneer
18 April 2000

Freedom at last! self-help group rescues bonded labourers

Sushanta Talukdar

BURGUR (Erode, TN): The story of bondage was writ large on her face. Six years back Chinmady's father Madheya, just before his death, had told her to try if she could release the two tamarind trees that he had mortgaged to a moneylender 20 years back for Rs 3,500.

A mother of three children, Chinmady, who was deserted by her husband 10 years back, could never dream of freeing the family of this bondage and had to suffer the same mental agony like many other downtrodden families of Thallamalai atop Burgur hills of Erode district in Tamil Nadu.

The moneylender used to take the yield

of the two trees as interest on the loan while a helpless Chinmady sweated in someone else's field. But a determined Chinmady decided to fight back with the support of the members of her Manjal Karai Marummu Mahilir Sangham — a women self-help group (SHG) formed way back in 1991 at the initiative of Mysore Resettlement Development Agency (MYRADA). She started sparing more amount of the hard earned money in her savings account with the group.

In 1995, she was given a loan of Rs 3,500 by her group to release the trees. Initially, the moneylender refused but finally gave in as he realised that Chinmady was not alone. As decided by the SHG, Chinmady pledged both the trees to the group and

started paying back the loan amount in monthly instalments.

Within two years, she returned the entire loan amount to the group and for past three years Chinmady has been earning on an average Rs 6,000 a year. A triumphant Chinmady did not look back. She also paid back Rs 10,000 to the Anthiur branch of the Canara Bank to release the gold ornaments which were mortgaged by her mother.

"I paid back the entire amount to the bank with the money earned from the trees to release the gold ornaments which were mortgaged by my mother at the time of my marriage. I am happy today that my mother could feel the freedom from the age-old bondage before she died last year," Chin-

Contd...

'Blue' revolution booms in green Haryana now

Contd...

nady said with a choking voice. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she was narrating her story of bondage as hundreds of villagers were making a beeline to the Bangleswara temple atop the Burgur hills while he gold ornaments that she was wearing were telling the success story.

There are many poor villagers like Chinmady. Each tamarind tree fetches Rs 1,500 to 3,500 which is a substantial amount for down-trodden families like that of Chinmady. But moneylenders were exploiting them. In 1994, the federation of the SHGs in the area discussed the issue and decided to release the trees by utilising the money from the common fund.

"The SHGs gave loans to release the trees, which were then pledged to the respective group till the member cleared the loan. The group would auction the trees till then to derive an income from the trees," said P. Alagesan, project officer of Thalavady project of MYRADA which covers the Bargur sector.

Do the moneylenders come back. They do with an offer of leasing out the trees on yearly basis for a sum to be mutually decided. But Chinmady and other poor villagers like her who have freed their families from bondage, will not. Because they have a strong peoples institution — the SHG — for meeting their need.

The Times of India
19 April 2000

The Times of India
19 April 2000

Sudhir Kalia

CHANDIGARH: In Haryana, green revolution is passe, blue revolution is in. The state, once known for its ghee and milk, today boasts of producing over 32,000 tonnes of fish, every year, against just 600 tonnes produced at the time of its inception in 1966.

What is more creditable is that Haryana produces 4,193 kg of fish per hectare per year against the national average of 2,187 kg per hectare. At present, over 7,000 hectare water area is under fish culture against only 60 hectare water area in 1966.

Though the fish seed production in the state has increased tremendously, the fisheries department has to rely on other sources for the procurement of quality fish seed. Production and distribution of quality fish seed in an optimum quantity is a pre-requisite for sustaining and increasing fish production.

Currently, 84 fish farmers are engaged in fish seed production and rearing of spawn for commercial supply. Besides, as many as five Chinese circular hatcheries with the production level of 200 lakh fish seed a year have also been set up in the private sector.

Utilisation of sewerage water for

fish farming is on the priority list of the state fisheries department. It has already constructed a sewerage-fed fish farm at Bhiwani and plans to set up such farms in other districts also.

Besides, the department has appealed to the Indian Council for Agriculture Research (ICAR) to evolve some suitable technology that may assist in utilising saline water for fish farming. More than 28,000 square km area has saline water which is not suitable for fish that is being cultured here at present.

Experts feel that once the state starts utilising saline water for fish culture, it would give renewed boost to fish production.

What is worrying the experts is the increasing pollution and decreasing water levels in natural water bodies which are the traditional sources of fish. The fish production from these sources has been reducing gradually.

On the request of the state fisheries department, ICAR has set up a research centre at Karnal to find ways and means to augment fishery in the natural water bodies such as river Yamuna, Ghaggar, Tangri, Markanda and their tributaries.

In addition, with the evolution

of fish farming technology, village ponds are being used for fish culture in a big way.

There is more than 10,000 hectare village pond area of which 2,000 hectares is perennial and the remaining 8,000 hectares is seasonal.

These village ponds play an important role in re-charging of sub-soil water.

Fish farming is picking up even in the foothills of Shivalik Range where the uneven land is being converted into ponds.

A general complaint of fish farmers is that they pay higher water and electricity rates for fish farming which is more or less part of their regular agricultural activities.

However, the state fisheries department provides technical know-how to those engaged in fish farming by conducting special training programmes and five-day refresher courses. Stipend is also given to the trainees.

In addition, the state government has set up a training-cum-research centre under the World Bank programme for the benefit of fish farmers. With the assistance of the central government, three fish markets have been constructed at Faridabad, Panipat and Yamunagar.

Kottayam's 'ladies with the lamp'

KOTTAYAM: The Red Cross in Kottayam district makes Florence Nightingales out of poor girls. For 13 years, the society-trained nurses have been helping the sick and the old, and in turn, earning a regular income themselves.

There are about 24,000 such nurses today. The result: scores of people from all over the country flock to the Red Cross office in the hope they'll be cared and looked after.

The society's mission began when secretary K.T. Ouseph lost an old friend because the latter had no one to look up to. Ouseph began with lending a hand to the ones and

two of his neighbourhood, which gradually encouraged other strangers to turn to him.

The society girls are generally from poor families who cannot otherwise hope for a decent earning thanks to lack of professional training. But three months of in-house training by the Red Cross, including treating the sick, gives them the confidence and skill for the job.

What makes the endeavour of Red Cross Kottayam different from similar services now mushrooming everywhere is the strict discipline that ensures near-total safety of its inmates. The rules

make it clear that the home nurse is not a domestic servant and she will attend to the patient only. She will not cook, wash clothes or shop. She will also not attend to male patients below 70 years of age.

"Nurses will be sent only if a lady relative of the patient comes, identify herself and take the nurse with her. No nurse shall attend a patient for more than three months," says the rule book.

Ouseph says "our strength is the discipline. These girls are of marriageable age and we do not want them to be ill-treated. Sexual harassment hasn't been heard in the

society's 13-year history probably because we take care not to provide a nurse unless we are satisfied the case is genuine." And no less important is the fact that the society does not deduct even a rupee from the girls' earning. The registration fee taken from the relatives is the only sum the society claims for itself.

One such nurse, Rajamma, is just 21 and has already served for six months an epileptic patient at Dindikal, Tamil Nadu. "I faced no ill-treatment so far," she says

The Times of India
19 April 2000

Experts plan model of BR Hills experiment

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, April 18: Conservationists including environmentalist H. Sudarshan will meet principal chief conservator of forests S.K. Chakrabarti on Tuesday to develop an institutionalised joint forest management plan at B.R. Hills. The plan, which has been successfully implemented on an informal basis in the wildlife sanctuary, will include active interaction between the forest department, locals and conservationists.

According to Dr Sudarshan, the plan emerged out of a three-day

national consultation on wildlife conservation and peoples livelihood rights at the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary.

"Since the plan will be the first of its kind, we do not have a defi-

SPOTLIGHT

nite model, but have worked out rough modalities. The strongest thing we have going is the success of the informal experiment at B.R. Hills," Dr Sudarshan said. Collaborative work at the sanctuary between the Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, the

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the environment and the forest department has successfully converted sustainable harvesting of forest produce into a profitable industry. "Our experience with the Soliga tribe in B.R. Hills and the efficiency with which produce like honey and medicinal plants were harvested and sold using a participatory marketing model has encouraged us to institutionalise the experiment," Dr Sudarshan.

Dr Kamaljit Bawa of Atree said the proposal to be placed before Mr Chakrabarti will involve the use of scientific techniques of sustainable harvesting forest produce

and maintaining the ecological balance at B.R. Hills. "We have already seen that this integrated approach has worked well. All we need to do now is formalise it with involvement of non-governmental organisations, the forest department, locals and research workers," he said.

The national consultation has also recommended that wildlife habitat integrity be maintained, commercial and industrial threats to protected areas be checked, tourism and pilgrimages to such areas be environmentally and culturally sensitive, the rights of indigenous people be recognised, internally aided projects be given preference over externally aided ones, the Wildlife Act be amended, joint forest management plans give greater importance to wildlife conservation, natural eco-systems outside the protected areas be maintained by local communities and an information base on conservation and ecological issues be maintained.

The Asian Age
19 April 2000

'Wired' Siddapur now part of global village

The Times of India News Service

HYDERABAD: "We are proud owners of a computer which has an Internet connection," was the message that residents of Siddapur village dropped into the mailbox of cmndirect@ap.nic.in on Sunday.

It was Siddapur's way of telling the IT-savvy chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu that it had just earned the distinction of being the first village in the state to get wired. Siddapur is in Nandipet mandal of Nizamabad district.

The excitement was palpable as residents gathered around the village's only computer in the gram panchayat office on Sunday. They realised that Siddapur had now become a part of the global village. Pride lay in the fact that it was their decision — taken at a gram sabha about two months ago — to get a computer, and their own idea to contribute Rs 50,000 for the purchase.

A Nizamabad-based computer firm ATS Computer Services offered a free Net connection to the gram panchayat and even trained the clerk there in computer applications.

Fifteen years ago, it was a different story. Facing submersion from the backwaters of the Godavari because of the Sriramsagar project, many of Siddapur's 1,200 residents barely had a roof over their heads.

Repeated pleas to the government went unheeded. Balakonda Congress MLA K.R. Suresh Reddy claims it was his representation in 1994 that facilitated the payment of compensation.

The villagers then began rebuilding their lives and their homes. "Now it is a planned village with roads and 350 houses that do not face nature's fury," he says. Many residents here, like the rest of the district, have relatives working in the Gulf. "Now that they can send e-mails to their relatives."

But getting wired will really be beneficial only when the Naidu government delivers on its promise of putting commodity prices on the Net. In that case, villagers won't get cheated as happens now.

The youth will perhaps benefit the most. "Many saw a computer for the first time and this might inspire them to become tomorrow's IT moghuls," hopes Reddy.

14 yrs likely as minimum age for employment

NEW DELHI, April 19 (UNI)

The Centre proposes to enact legislation fixing 14 years as the minimum age for employment in all occupations, "excluding agriculture in family and small holdings producing for own consumption", the Lok Sabha was informed during question hour today.

However, for employment and work which is likely to jeopardize the health, safety or morals of young persons, the minimum age would be 18, Minister of State for

Labour and Employment Muni Lal said in a written reply.

Inter-ministerial consultation has been completed on the proposed legislation and the relevant bill would be drafted shortly, the minister said.

The number of job seekers registered with employment exchange till the end of 1999 was placed at 40.37 million, against 40.08 million and 39.13 million by the end of the previous years.

West Bengal topped the list with 5.6 million, followed by Tamil Nadu with 4.36 million.

THE DISABLED: The number of handicapped persons approaching employment exchanges was on the rise in the last years. Mr Muni Lal said.

Deccan Herald
20 April 2000

NGOs in Aids scheme

●The Government will involve 400 new Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the second phase of the National Aids Control Programme (NACP) for its effective implementation, according to a health ministry official, reports PTI from New Delhi. By the end of this year, 600 NGOs will participate in the programme, J V R Prasad rao, head of the National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) said at the National Convention of NGOs.

The Times of India
19 April 2000

Deccan Herald
21 April 2000

Chief Seattle SPEAKING

EARTH DAY is just two days away. Today we voice concern for the environment. But perhaps one of the most profound and beautiful testaments on the subject was written over 150 years ago — by an American Indian, Chief Seattle.

Here are extracts from a letter he wrote to the President of the United States in reply to an offer to purchase a large tract of his tribe's land.



"HOW can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and man — all belong to the same family. The shining water that moves in the streams is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must teach your children that it is sacred...

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is... his enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on... He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert.

I do not know. Our ways are different than your ways. The sight of your cities pains the eyes of the red man. There is no quiet place in the white man's cities. No place to hear the unfurling of leaves in spring or the rustle of the insect's wings. The clatter only seems to insult the ears. And what is there to life if a man cannot hear the lonely cry of the whippoorwill or the arguments of the frogs around the pond at night?...

The Indian prefers the soft sound of the wind darting over the face of a pond and the smell of the wind itself, cleaned by a midday rain, or scented with pinon pine...

We will consider your offer to buy our land. If we decide to accept, I will make one condition — the white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers. I am a savage and do not understand any other way. I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be made more important than the buffalo that we kill only to stay alive.

What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from a great loneliness of the spirit. For whatever happens to the beasts, soon happens to man. All things are connected.

Teach your children that we have taught our children that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of earth. If men

spit upon the ground, they spit upon themselves.

One thing we know which the white man may one day discover; our God is the same God. You may think now that you own Him as you wish to own our land; but you cannot... The earth is precious to Him. and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.

The whites too shall pass; perhaps sooner than all other tribes. Contaminate your bed and you will one night suffocate in your own waste. But in your perishing you will shine brightly fired by the strength of the God who brought you to this land and for some special purpose gave you dominion over this land and over the red man. That destiny is a mystery to us, for we do not understand when the buffalo are all slaughtered the wild horses are tamed, the secret corners of the forest heavy with the scent of many men and the view of the ripe hills blotted by talking wires.

Where is the thicket? Gone. Where is the eagle? Gone.

The end of living and the beginning of survival." The Statesman

20 April 2000

Karnataka tops list in misusing welfare funds

Observer Political Bureau

NEW DELHI

KARNATAKA topped the list of those social and voluntary organisations which 'misutilised' funds to the tune of Rs 52 lakh, released to them by the government for various development and welfare programmes during last five years, barring 1997-98 and 1998-99. During these two years, no misutilisation of funds was reported. According to a list provided by Union minister for rural development Sunderlal Patwa to the Rajya Sabha in his written answer to an unstarred question, the Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), which sanctions funds to these organisations, has taken action or initiated action against as many as 52 of these organisations.

Most of these organisations (13 in number), which misutilised the funds, were Karnataka-based. Karnataka was followed by Bihar, where 10 such organisations were listed for misutilising funds during the same period.

Uttar Pradesh, with six such NGOs, was followed by Rajasthan where five organisations misutilised the funds. In West Bengal and Manipur, three each such organisations were found responsible for misutilising funds.

In Haryana, two organisations misappropriated funds while in Assam, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra one each was found responsible for misutilising funds. Overall, Rs 92,01,541 sanctioned to these organisations during 1995-96. Of this, Rs 52,03,088 were released to them until the date of blacklisting.

In Karnataka, these social organisations were sanctioned Rs 48,52,600 for the year 1995-96, however, only Rs 29,99,428 were sanctioned to them till blacklisting. No action was taken against two such organisation in Karnataka.

The voluntary organisations of Bihar were sanctioned Rs 11,73,015 during 1995-96. Till blacklisting, an amount of Rs 7,87,215 was released to them.

During 1996-97, total amount sanctioned to such organisations was to the tune of Rs 1,01,28,818. Of this, a sum of Rs 48,43,505 was released to them till the time of blacklisting. No action was taken against three (one each in Bihar, Nagaland and West Bengal) organisation as no funds were released to it till the date of blacklisting. During 1999-2000, only Rs 1,14,35,230 were sanctioned for the social organisations, however, only Rs 90,63,663 were released to them till blacklisting. □

The Observer

22 April 2000

THOUGH it is some years now telephone lines in his village were installed, Sarpanch Roop Chand of Chandoli village in Haryana has yet to hear from the authorities about his application he sent three years ago for a connection.

Cashing on the plight of people like Roop Chand, private cellular operators are now targetting the rural customer to bring modern communication to the doorstep of every villager. Companies like Escotel, Koshika and Tata Cell are now eyeing the villages as a promising area.

Targetting about 2000 villages in the states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Kerala, Escotel which recently launched the 'Grameen Phone Project', says the project with its highly subsidised calling charges and cost of mobile handsets emphasises more on welfare than revenue generation.

"Under the new telecom policy, the government has laid down a target of one village telephone for every village, but a lot of villages do not have any means of communicating with the outside world," says Manoj Kohli, Chief Executive Officer, Escotel.

Can Indian villages repeat the story of Bangladesh where the Grameen banks came forward to fund the highly successful Grameen cell phones?

"The rural customers are today a ripe area for cellular phone companies. In a village, one does not make a local call, villagers walk across to talk and they need communication for long distance calls, which is ideal for mobile phones," says T V Ramachandran, executive director, Cellular Operator Association of India (COAI).

For the villager, the cell phone is important for the purpose of receiving calls from relatives from abroad or anywhere outside, for keeping a tab on market rates and taking the agricultural produce to the market, he says.

In Bangladesh, women are empowered as a result of the Grameen cell phone out of which they earn a margin by running across houses to give messages.

'Bharat' To Go Cellular

Connectivity and easy accessibility are on the cards with the cellphone in rural areas



The same is true of those in India as cell phones augment a source of income in the villages, says Ramachandran.

So how does the Grameen phone work? In September 1998, Escotel introduced prepaid services under the brand name V-Tel which was launched in Haryana and Kerala in May 1999.

Under the scheme, each of the villages that are covered by a district would be offered a handset package with a V-Tel card at a subsidised package price of Rs 5565 with a talktime of Rs 750 in Haryana and subsidised packaged price of Rs 5450 with a talktime of Rs 750 in Uttar Pradesh.

"The concept is based on the fact that presently more than

1200 villages in UP (West) and 450 in Haryana are being covered by Escotel," says Kohli noting that there exists a potential in terms of covering these villages and providing one telephone connection as a PCO per village, says Kohli.

The airtime charges are Rs 4.50 per minute for incoming and outgoing calls, says Kohli.

The package would be offered on the recommendation of the village mukhiya/sarpanch with preference to the handicapped, ex-servicemen, war widows and other unemployed needy persons to launch this service.

"Our project began four months ago and over 300 Grameen phones already have been installed, he says adding

over 2000 villages in UP and Haryana will eventually benefit," he says. For Naresh Pawar, farmer at Chandoli village the nearest STD booth from his fields is six km. "I have to call up the market to find out the rates of the crops and also to find out if there are any holidays, which is why the cell phone is handy to us, otherwise I end up taking the whole produce only to find the market closed sometimes."

Similarly, there are a few others in his village who are endorsing the advent of the slick cell phone. When some of our villagers go the town or cities for some major operations, this is the easiest way to pass messages, says Shyam Lal, the village shopkeeper and proud owner of a cellphone, who plans to attach philanthropic activities to it like passing messages and so on.

Besides, instant connectivity and easy accessibility are other attractive packages, which comes with it, says Shyam Lal.

However, issues like cost remain unresolved. "For a PCO, under the dot service structure, one pays about Rs 8 per minute and Rs 2 service charge for a 100 to 200 km band but what we pay with the mobile phone is Rs 4.50 plus Rs 1.25 plus Rs 3 compared to the DoT structure. The moment it goes to 200 km band, DoT charge is Rs 15.60 but the charge on the mobile phone does not change", says Vivek Chandel, deputy general manager, marketing, Escotel.

The advantage is beyond that, he says noting that there is reliability even on prime time when DoT lines are congested.

Here the village operator also benefits as he makes Rs 3 to Rs 5 per call (depending on local conditions) as service charge, says Chandel.

The operator will charge from the customer making call on this phone Rs 3 to Rs 5 per call as service charge plus amount indicated by the account balance inquiry on V-Tel.

An enticing offer, but is the rural customer listening? ▷(PTI)

Lalaram Indira

The Observer
22 April 2000

Water, water

HERE is a story to lap up for all those thirsting for good developmental news. It is a report from Dewas, a low-profile town near the capital of the hardly high-tech Madhya Pradesh, about a wonder of a water conservation mission, and it makes two noteworthy revelations. It shows what an individual agent of development can do about the distress of a drought-prone area, and what India can do about one of its perennial problems. Collector M. Mohan Rao is no mere rain-maker; his has been the rarer miracle of meeting the problem, to which a merciful monsoon was supposed to be the only solution, with a simple but scientific solution backed by popular initiative and mobilisation. Dewas is today a picture of water-harvesting structures on building roofs, all raised during a one-year drive, which testify really to the success of a groundwater-tapping and conservation programme. Funded largely by public contributions and carried forward with near-complete public participation, the pilot scheme under a 'groundwater recharge mission' has proved a pioneering experiment, inviting similar other efforts in the neighbourhood. Clearly, the example cries out for emulation elsewhere in the state and the country as well. The objective of the programme - effective management and utilisation of groundwater resources - is to tackle an intractable issue which has impeded development. Other similar issues that escape solution range from recurring droughts over large parts of the country to inter-state river disputes. There are many a dust-gathering expert study urging adoption and expansion of dry farming as the ideal remedy to both these afflictions.

It is not as if science alone can achieve the objective or the community as a whole can be counted upon to cooperate in every case. The task has called for a tough will even in the MP town, and it has been displayed by a Rao determined to regulate use of groundwater resources and their reckless exploitation by the richer sections of the community. The task, enlarged manifold for the country as a whole, will call for a proportionately tougher political will. Easy optimism on this score is not encouraged by the country's experience of the political clout of the affluent farmers' lobby prevailing over public interests, including those of agriculture.

Illustratively, the National Bank of Agricultural Research and Development has, for long years, been trying to persuade states, particularly the drought-prone ones, to legislate for some regulation of groundwater tapping - and trying in vain. It is common knowledge that free or heavily subsidised power for farmers has only increased the extent of the scarce water resources' inexcusably inefficient use, but the consideration has not compelled any serious contemplation of even steps short of the NABARD's suggestion. Attempts at introduction of drip and sprinkler farming, water-saving tech-

niques known to have helped a desert bloom in Israel, have never taken off. Industries have been extremely reluctant to encourage such initiatives and innovations in sectors of farming that feed them, with the sugar industry and sugarcane farming providing a striking instance. If the right lessons are drawn from it, Dewas can lead to a much bigger success story.

The Indian Express

19 April 2000

AIDS booklet leads to controversy in Almora

Sunita Aron

Lucknow, April 22

AIDS AUR Hum, a 35-page booklet published by the voluntary organisation Sahyog, has ignited passions in the hill district of Almora, and is now threatening to kick off a major controversy in both Lucknow and Delhi.

Though women activists insist that their report focused on the possibilities of AIDS spreading in the Uttarakhand region, the Almora police officials insist that it "contained obscene language and material".

Dumb-founded by the unwarranted "police excesses", angry social organisations in Almora, Delhi and Lucknow are preparing for a massive demonstration besides rushing their delegations to Almora.

Office bearers of VAMA and UPVHA met in Lucknow today and condemned police action. They demanded the immediate release of arrested volunteers.

Yesterday, the police arrested 11 prominent volunteers of Sahyog, sealed their Almora office and confiscated copies of the controversial booklet *Aids Aur Hum*.

"We fail to understand the objection of both the political parties and police six months after the booklet had been distributed to

other NGOs engaged in women and health programmes, besides the five villages covered in the study," said Namita Rawat, an activist associated with the Panchayati Raj wing of Sahyog.

"It contains nothing vulgar. Only we have used the local dialect to effectively convey our message. After all we have been working in this area since 1992," said Neelam on telephone from Almora.

According to Sahyog secretary Jashodhara Dasgupta, who too was rounded up by the police yesterday, some local youths attacked their head office at Pokharkhali at about three in the afternoon.

They stormed into the secretary's room, hurled abuses at her and smashed the windows. They also attacked staff member Surendra Dhapola.

An hour later, the secretary who along with another activist, Sunita was detained at Mahila thana. Before being sent to the jail she has alleged that "an hour later senior police officials came to the office and sealed it after seizing the remaining copies of the booklet". They also charged them of publishing obscene and unsubstantiated information.

According to the secretary, a mob also attacked their field office at Jageshwar, 35 kms from Almora.

The Hindustan Times
23 April 2000

Farming a career

THE Konkan region, which forms part of Maharashtra coastline, stretches all the way from southern Gujarat coast to the northern tip of Goa. Close to Karnataka, this region is working to boost agricultural activities by building up the right kind of skills among its young people.

With colleges of agriculture and fisheries, agricultural schools, research stations and a wide network of scientists and institutions, efforts are underway to boost agricultural skills in the entire region. All these schools and colleges come under the umbrella of Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth or Konkan Agricultural University. Keeping in mind all the specific agricultural problems of the Konkan region, the university aims to promote research, education and extension activities of agriculture.

This agricultural university has activities along the Konkan coastline. Southernmost of Konkan is the district of Sindhudurg. It lies just north of Goa and above it is Ratnagiri. Further to the north is the district of Raigad, which lies just outside Mumbai. Northernmost in the Konkan is the district of Thane, which lies north of Mumbai. In all these districts, the agricultural university has various outposts, spreading skills and offering new technologies to farmers and youth interested in the field. Despite the problems associated with government organisations, this one has been able to make a difference to the lives of farmers and youth around it.

The university's headquarters is situated in Dapoli, in Ratnagiri district. Located over 189 hectares of land, it offers graduate and post-graduate level education in agriculture, horticulture and

forestry. It also offers research on agronomy, breeding, field-crop protection, forage crop, and horticulture crops.

In addition it conducts research on animal husbandry, rubber plantation, tissue culture, agri-engineering and post-harvest technology. The university's work includes seed-production, nursery activities and extension activities. For those interested in a career in farming, the agricultural schools of this university also offer diploma-level courses. The courses are in Agronomy, Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Seed Production and Nursery Activities. The agricultural schools are located at Roha and Lanja.

The university also runs a Fisheries College in Ratnagiri. This institution offers graduate and post-graduate level education and research in fisheries. A part of this university is the Bombay Veterinary College in Mumbai. This institution offers graduate and post-graduate level education in veterinary science. It conducts research and extension activities in veterinary, poultry, animal husbandry and forages.

The agricultural university also has a number large of research stations in various parts of coastal Maharashtra. There are, in total, 19 research stations. In Sindhudurg district, adjoining Goa, there are six such stations at Vengurla, Rameshwar, Phondaghat, Mulde and Nileli. Mumbai also has a research station called the Taraporevala Marine Biological Research Station, while Ratnagiri has the Marine Biological Research Station.

Over the years, the university has been working on a 'crop improvement programme'. Crops like rice, groundnut, ragi (finger-millet), lablab bean, cowpea, horsegram, and arhar have been worked on.

The Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth has released a total of 18 high yielding varieties of rice, which can grow in between 90 to 150 days. Its latest rice variety, Sahyadri, claims to be able to produce 7 tonnes per hectare.

It has also released new varieties of the Alphonso mango

(Ratnaand Sindhu, named after Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg districts respectively). Its new cashew varieties include V1, V2, V3, V4, V5, V6 and V7 - all named after Vengurla, the town outside Goa. One of its new coconut varieties - based on Goa's famed *Benaulim coconut* - is called *Pratap*, after a former agricultural scientist. An arecanut variety is named *Srivardhani*, after the coastal village which is a haven for arecanut growing. Its claimed produce is 2.5 kg per palm.

Likewise, it has worked on new varieties in *kokum* or *binna* (Konkan *Amruta*), *cinnamon* (Konkan *Tej*) and *nutmeg* (Konkan *Sugandha*). Some of the vegetable crop varieties it has selected are the *Sonali tomato*, *Sweta snake gourd*, *Konkan*

Tara bittergourd, *Konkan Harita ridge gourd*, *Sheetal cucumber*, *Konkan Kirtichilli*, *Konkan Bhushan dolichos beans*, and the *Konkan Ruchira drumstick*.

Each year, the institution distributes about 1.5 million seedlings of mango, cashew, coconut, chikoo and spices to farmers of the Konkan and other parts of Maharashtra. "We will certainly help farmers from neighbouring areas of the Konkan (as coastal western India is called) too. Our doors are open. If they come, we will guide them," says Dr Balkrishna M Jamadagni, the officer incharge.

Since coastal Karnataka shares so much in common with this part of Konkan region, the youth as well as farmers of the State could make full use of the services of the agricultural university.

Youth interested in pursuing a career in farming could contact Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli, Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra, Pin 415 712. Email: kkv.dapoli@mailcity.com.

Deccan Herald
23 April 2000

Lacunae in AIDS control programme

Saroj Nagi
New Delhi, April 21

SEVERAL GAPING holes remain in the National Aids Control Programme (NACP). And these were identified by none other than some of the NGOs involved in HIV/AIDS control activities. A one-day convention of the NGOs here highlighted that the high-visibility HIV/AIDS campaign in urban areas stood in stark contrast to the slow and inadequate action in rural and remote regions.

With nearly 80 per cent of the country's population living in the rural areas, much more remains to be done at HIV/AIDS awareness. The HIV/AIDS project which was launched in 1992 entered its second phase in 1999 with an estimated 3.5 million people afflicted by AIDS in the country.

The NACO is now planning to

extend its family health awareness campaign to the entire country with a programme from June 1 to 15, said NACO project director JVR Prasada Rao. To be observed as AIDS awareness period, it would be followed by a similar drive every six months, he said.

While a review of the second phase of the programme showed that it has undergone a rapid expansion in the last six months, Mr Rao said he intended to give it a further boost by trying to involve as many as 600 NGOs from the present 220 by the end of the year for a sustained partnership of at least three to four years.

Increased NGO participation is the only way to ensure greater involvement of people to implement strategies like targetted intervention for high risk groups, care and support of AIDS patients and health awareness campaigns successfully, he said.

The Hindustan Times
22 April 2000

In drought-affected India what can IT do?

THE concern of Parliament with like Bihar. The accounts of Sainath the cricket scandal when it reveal an insight into the nature of should actually be shocked to endemic poverty in our country. For learn about several farmers in several politicians it is politically profitable to keep the poor in perpetual der the pressure of indebtedness in poverty. Flood or drought, the misery the wake of crop failure and drought, of the people translates itself into fat should be shocking. Drought and contracts for 'relief' works, out of drinking water scarcity in the states which only a trickle reaches the really of Rajasthan and Gujarat have reached poor. The Star TV's reporter caught scandalous proportion. This is not many people working at relief sites adequately reflected in the issues getting a paltry Rs five as daily wage Parliament right now discusses. but the politician back in Ahmedabad

There are other frustrations that the media headlines are blaring out. One favourite is the Nasdaq and Sensex crash of the infotech shares. Almost half the market cap has been wiped out of these shares over the last three weeks. And more is expected. This is happening despite the impressive performance of the IT firms like the people. Influential local leaders HCL, NIIT, Satyam Infoway, Infosys, and their mentors in state capitals Hughes, VisualSoft in the first one or should be singing with My Fair Lady: two quarters of their financial year. "All I want is a drought somewhere, "HCL net up 144 per cent", Hughes Loverly, Loverly....." profit increases 157 per cent" say the headlines in one newspaper on the same day that saw the bottom falling out of technology stocks.

As if in response to the regret Rajesh Pilot has expressed, some media members have decided to put the people's suffering in drought-affected areas as the lead stories for the next few days. The *Indian Express* among the newspapers, and the Star News among TV channels, begin with the focus on the human suffering in villages of Rajasthan and Gujarat where a drop of drinking water is standing between life and slow death. The widespread tragedy of farmers in Mehaboobnagar district of Andhra pre-ferring suicide to the shame of seeing Tarun Bharat group in Rajasthan and their land attached by creditors is Sanjay Ghosh in Assam had shown now daily stuff in the news media, how the vicious cycle of poverty, even if it is not in Parliament.

Why is this contrast? Parliament that should be the barometer of people's problems is less concerned with drought and death of farmers; as Pilot bemoans, the media that is supposed to cater to the affluent, is leading news stories with the people's problems at the grassroots level.

Journalist P Sainath wrote, after a year spent in research and site visit, how politicians love drought in some of the problem states of the country

Year after year in states after states, floods or droughts entail enormous expenditure in relief works. No one in Parliament seems to ask the following simple question: "Why is it that despite spending so much money, there is as yet no scientifically credible works that could harvest rain water, increase groundwater recharge, protect tanks and bunds that hundreds of years ago formed a chain across the country and helped preserve water, increase moisture in the air, raise greenery and in return reduce impact of floods and famines?"

Grassroots work of honest people like Annasaheb Hazare in Maharashtra, Tarun Bharat group in Rajasthan and Sanjay Ghosh in Assam had shown how the vicious cycle of poverty,

environmental degradation and human desperation, could be broken and the virtuous cycle of prosperity spun out of what appeared to be hopeless condition. Why is it that these experiments are not replicated? Instead the 'relief work' involve nothing more than digging at one place and filling at another while year after year floods and droughts alternate and death and destruction follow with no respite.

The mystery behind the killing of Sanjay Ghosh in Assam at the hands

of the Ulfa, has not been fully revealed. The apprehension is that the politician-contractor nexus that became concerned by Ghosh's experiments that could protect people against floods at very low cost, had bribed the Ulfa to bump him off as his presence would affect their annual milking of the public treasury in the name of flood relief. In Rajasthan the efforts of several NGOs to unravel the truth behind the employment generation programmes did not get any support at political level. Why go that far? Right in Delhi a four-day exhibition and symposium on environment and water had organised display of several environment-friendly technologies and water conservation measures. How many MPs visited this exhibition held last week?

Prof Partha S Dasgupta, who has done special studies on the nature of poverty, environmental degradation and population, in an article in the *Scientific American* in 1995 had delved deep into the endemic nature of the poverty cycle. Why is poverty so endemic in countries like India? It is mainly due to the prevalence of subsistence economies. "The rural folk eke out a living" points out Prof Dasgupta, "by using products gleaned from plants and animals. Much labour is needed even for simple tasks. In addition, poor rural households do not have access to modern sources of domestic energy or tap water. In semi-arid and arid regions the water supply may not even be nearby. Nor is fuelwood at hand when forests recede".

In such a situation inefficient production methods, malnutrition, and declining resources form a closely knit vicious cycle of increasing deprivation, rising population and failing resources that inbreed and perpetuate poverty. This is the story in Kalhandi in Orissa, or Palmau in Bihar and in much of the rural hinterland of the poorer states of the country.

A multi-disciplinary approach could make some dent into this vicious cycle. Local energy solutions, maternity and child care services and imparting of new skills of higher productivity could and have achieved some result. But the topdown development programmes are mired in corruption leaving schools without teachers, hospitals without doctors and medicines, and village telephones defective. Some dramatic results have been achieved

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Illiterate Orissa villagers show the might of woman power

The Times of India
24 April 2000

By Rajaram Satapathy

The Times of India News Service
BHUBANESWAR: Debrapalli is just a few hours drive from the district headquarters town of Anugul. But for Janak Sahoo, Surya Bali Budyak and Sanjukta Chanda, all illiterates, life had never moved beyond scouting for wild leaves and roots in the deep forests around and the meandering hills across the village.

But life has changed beyond recognition for the trio today. The daily search for succour to fill the stomachs of their hungry children have changed to attending conferences, workshops and village meetings. Janak, Surya Bali and Sanjukta are not the only women who have changed their fortunes themselves.

The transformation has come for the entire Debrapalli village, and for that matter to hundreds of poverty-stricken villages in Orissa. All this is courtesy a special project initiated by the Union government. The novel programme was primarily aimed at involving women to set up cooperative societies for dairy development to improve their economic conditions and empower them socially. Rs 20 crore was sanctioned for the purpose and the Orissa Milk Federation (OMFED), a state government undertaking, was entrusted the task of implementing it.

"The scheme has achieved phenomenal success. We could not initially believe that the women would welcome it so overwhelmingly. It is not just a few cooperative societies being run by women, but the project has turned into a mass movement," remarked OMFED managing director Suresh Mohapatra.

In the male-dominated society, women were a neglected lot although they had the major responsibility of running their homes. Although they would do the bulk of the work, they were never allowed to participate in the decision-making process. But the dairy project has changed it all by putting women in the forefront of the decision-making process, everything — from rearing of cows to selling milk to receiving money. This has given a boost to the self-confidence of women in rural areas, who once depended on their men for everything in life.

Mr Mohapatra pointed out that of the nearly 1,400 cooperative societies under OMFED, 500 were being run exclusively by women, with the total membership exceeding 40,000. "There was a time when none of these women had any money to spend. But today, they are not only running their families but are lending money to others too," he said, adding that in several villages women had become so conscious of their rights that they had become

functionaries in local the panchayat bodies and were spearheading anti-liquor movements in their areas.

Besides, he said, it had been found that societies run by women were free of groupism and politicking. The office-bearers were nominated rather than elected and their earning falls between Rs 7 crore and Rs 8 crore per annum.

With a view to enlightening them, groups of members from these societies are regularly taken to Gujarat to see the Anand experiment there. "It has been a wonderful experience for these women who had never crossed their village boundaries," he observed.

According to Mr Mohapatra, almost 300 such societies were located in the coastal region. "But the October 29 super cyclone could not do much damage, although nearly 15,000 of the estimated two lakh crossbred cows were killed. Since then, things have improved a lot. A grant of Rs 11 crore has since been arranged and efforts are on to re-build the infrastructure and provide about 5,000 crossbred cows to the beneficiaries. In a way, the women's societies are instrumental in ensuring a high profit for OMFED," he pointed out, adding that plans were on to expand the women dairy project to other areas.

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where grassroots organisations or initiatives have intervened, like the schol on demand programme of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh. With the MPs funds cannot these servants of the people start grassroots initiatives to conserve water, deepen the rivers, construct high ground for flood protection, etc?

Instead of denouncing high technology as unsuitable for Indian rural areas, it would be better if the benefits of high technology are utilised fully. Hydrological studies, for instance have pointed out that in Bihar one of the main reasons for annual floods is the blocking of the mouth of the tributaries of the Ganga by silt. Dredging of these mouths could reduce floods and, of course there has to be a sustained watershed development to back it up and prevent further silting. To help solve the problem of water availability on a countrywide basis, Isro had used remote sensing techniques to map underground aquifers first in 18 drought prone districts and subsequently in 120 districts. How many governments have made use of the knowledge that Isro has uncovered? I am told that engineers are not willing to work on such unglamorous projects like ground water recharge when large projects like dams are more interesting.

Ultimately high technology can only show you the path to prosperity; it cannot spoon feed you. If our policy makers truly and sincerely want poverty to end, high technology from space from ground and through information technology has the solution. The question is: Do the policy makers really want the poverty to go?

Rajendra Prabhu

The Observer
24 April 2000

Charity, not earnings, matter most: Gardi

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: For the past 35 years, he has been helping the needy. Even at the age of 85, his ardour for social work has not waned. A staunch follower of Jainism, Dipchand Gardi continues to help the needy. His aim is to make the world a better place to live in for as many underprivileged people as possible.



D. Gardi

Mr Gardi practised law for 30 years before he retired in 1975 to work full-time for the poor. He has donated lakhs of rupees for charitable causes, but he has preferred to stay away from the limelight. He has also declined to accept awards "because there is someone more deserving than me. I do not perform charity to gain publicity. I believe that charity should be coupled with modesty", he told this newspaper.

But word of his munificence has spread far and wide. He receives letters from persons living as far away as Assam, Bengal and Tamil Nadu who seek assistance.

He has established several trusts and more than 500 institutions, including schools, ashrams, hostels, health centres, technical schools and homes for the aged in different parts of the country.

He regards the beneficiaries of his generosity as his gurus since they give him the opportunity to serve god. Born in a village near Rajkot, Mr Gardi came to Mumbai at the age of 18. As a barrister, he had an excellent practice. But he continues to live a life of simplicity. He doesn't buy new shoes, but gets the old ones repaired. "If I can spend the money thus saved in getting a child admitted to a school, why should I spend it on new shoes?" he asks.

Mr Gardi says that it takes a lot of courage to hear people's problems all through the year. He recalls the instance of an old and ailing man who had lost his leg and had three school-going daughters and an asthmatic and diabetic wife to support. "It is so depressing at times," he admits. "But I should be courageous if I have to give strength to others."

He wants his children to follow in his footsteps. "I do not ask them how much they earn, but how much they donate," he says.

The Times of India
25 April 2000

Attack on NGO criticised

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24. A large number of organisations and social activists have protested the reported attack on some leading members of Sahayog, an NGO, by a mob in Almora, Uttar Pradesh, on April 20.

In a statement, representatives of nearly 40 voluntary bodies, demanded action against those responsible for the attack saying the incident had created a sense of insecurity among NGOs working in the area.

The Sahayog had been working on issues related to health, panchayati raj and women's empowerment in the Uttarakhand region for over a decade, and what happened on April 20 was unprecedented. Members of Sahayog were attacked by a mob and later arrested. Its founder members, Ms. Jashodara Dasgupta and Dr. Abhijeet Das, were attacked in their office in Almora, and simultaneously a group of trainees who had come to attend a Sahayog training programme were "gheraoed, abused and harassed for several hours".

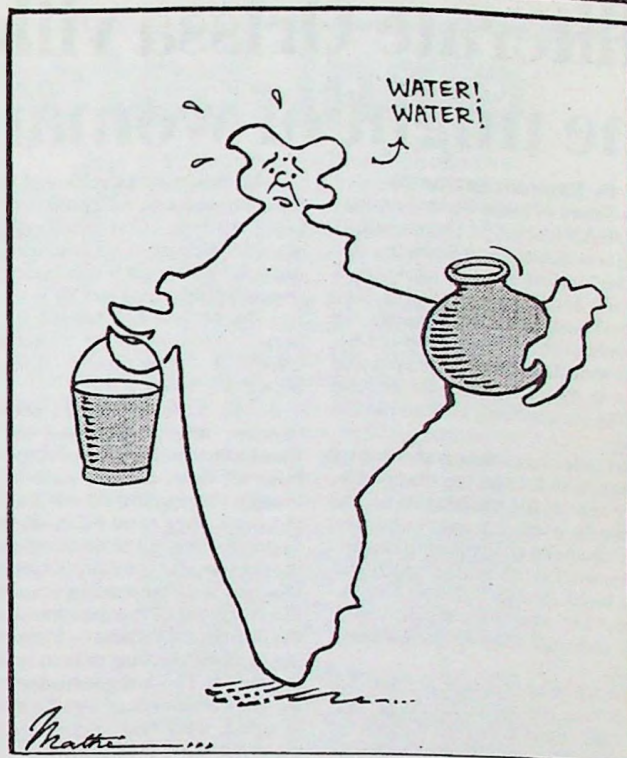
"The group included two

mothers and their children who were locked up in the field office of Sahayog for several hours. Two activists of Sahayog, Sunita and Dinesh, were abused and beaten by the crowd in the presence of the police and tahsildar and the attacks were followed by the arrest of Sahayog activists by the police," the statement said.

The mob, it pointed out, was protesting against a Sahayog publication *Aids Aur Hum* (Aids and us), parts of which were found to be offensive by some people. The signatories to the statement conceded that greater care should have been taken while drafting the publication but emphasised that there was "no malafide intent on the part of the authors as they sought to quote the interviewees verbatim".

The signatories included the Voluntary Health Association of India, National Alliance for People's Movement, Johar Jharkand, Naga People's Movement for Human Rights, Committee of Concerned Citizens (Hyderabad), Setu (Ahmedabad), Nocer India (Kerala), RRDS (Andhra Pradesh) and several Delhi-based women's and human rights bodies.

The Hindu
25 April 2000



The Indian Express
26 April 2000

Innovative modules on public health developed

Observer Political Bureau
NEW DELHI

INNOVATIVE health-care modules — aimed at fulfilling the management information needs of the district and primary health care centres by synergising the compulsions of public health training and health management training — has been jointly developed by the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Sevagram, and the Aga Khan Foundation.

Entitled as the 'Healthcare Management Advancement Programme (MAP) modules,' these have been split up into five units, with each module designed to help managers collect, process

and interpret information for a different management purpose.

The first of these is the 'Information Needs Assessment and Documentation' module which helps managers to identify the information needs, set priorities and determine which Health MAP module is likely to be most useful for the specific local conditions".

The other modules are as follows: 'The Health Planning and Project Management' module has been designed for enabling managers to collect the effect and impact data for a proper assessment of the coverage levels and health status in one particular region.

'The Planning and Assessing Health Workers Activities' module, meanwhile, helps in eliciting specific output information to determine who is and who is not receiving needed health services and products.

The module for 'Assessing Quality of Services and Management' concerns itself with "process data" for enabling supervisors to assess the quality of service and management services. The last of these modules has been designed to provide 'Cost and Sustainability Analysis' for assisting managers to examine and explain how resources were used to provide and support services. □

The Observer
24 April 2000

Women pradhans resent being used as dummies

By Radhika D Srivastava
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Kamini Devi, a pradhan from Alwar district in Rajasthan is a frustrated woman. Till 1996, all she knew was how to draw water from the well, cook and feed her family. Later, the panchayat head's post was reserved for a woman and Kamini was fielded from the district.

The victory brought along with it a whole bag of troubles. Though educated only till class three, she knew she could take decisions for the welfare of the villages which came under her. But, according to her, she was kept out of the decision-making process. It was made clear to her that she was just a prop

and the show would be run by the male members of the panchayat, some belonging to her family.

Being the pradhan, she was keen to attend gram sabha meetings. And of course, no meeting could be organised without notifying her officially. So, she used to be notified, and told that the next meeting would be in a place eight miles away from her home at 8 p.m. in the night. This was enough to ensure her absence.

"I am disheartened. I am a woman and nobody wants to involve me. And the male members of my family support those who are trying to keep me out. I know where to have a tube well," she told the audience at the Constitution

Club on Tuesday afternoon.

Around 260 elected women representatives from various panchayats and zilla parishads all over the country were in the capital to celebrate "Women's Political Empowerment Day" on April 24 and 25. Though they spoke of problems particular to their states, all of them agreed on one point — men did not like women pradhans and did not allow them to work independently.

Twenty-one-year-old Savithri is the pradhan of a village in Karnataka. Being the youngest in the area to occupy the post, she had to put up with a lot of opposition. The worst came when her husband gave her a choice of either continuing to be his wife or carry on as pradhan.

Savithri chose the latter, and her husband divorced her.

The group of pradhans and panchayat members from Haryana sounded most helpless. "We have many factors working against us. Men are comparatively more educated and therefore they feel they know what is good for us. But I can tell them where to have a tube well as it is women who get water," said Kiran Bala, a pradhan from Sirsa district. Social norms also add to her problems. Since her father-in-law is a member of the panchayat, she is never able to attend the meetings of the gram sabha. "In our caste we follow a strict system of purdah and I have never sat face to face with my father-in-law," she said.

The Times of India
27 April 2000

Lack of sight does not dampen their zeal to teach

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: The West Bengal government might be hostile to visually handicapped applicants interested in teaching careers, but a few such teachers have been successfully carrying out their duties in different schools across the state.

Debabrata Chakraborty, a blind teacher, has taught in several government and non-government schools for nearly 18 years. Chakraborty, a Ph.D. in history from Jadavpur University, has just been transferred to Barasat Government School. He has had stints in Ramakrishna Vivekananda Mission, Taki Government School and Barrackpur Government High School.

Mr Chakraborty says he has not faced any problems at school. "What the School Service Commission says about the inability of the blind to teach is absolutely false. Of course, we do have a handicap, but there are ways and means to overcome it," he says. On the complaint that blind teachers are unable to maintain discipline, he says he usually appoints a student to report any indiscipline in classrooms. In fact, principal of Barrackpur Government High School Pabitra Adhikary is quite satisfied with Chakraborty.

Another grouse is that blind teachers cannot do boardwork. But he says that it does not

apply to teachers of humanities and social sciences, who use the board sparingly. "From invigilation to examining papers I do everything a normal teacher does. I have even caught people cheating during exams," says another blind teacher.

The Times of India
26 April 2000

IBRD okays \$700-m aid for 5 Indian projects

Washington

The World Bank has approved five new development projects in India involving a total loan of \$743.68 million following a prior promise by the US not to oppose them as an exception to the economic sanctions it had slapped on New Delhi to protest its May 1998 nuclear tests.

The projects cleared at the Bank's board meeting yesterday included three of the Uttar Pradesh government -- fiscal reform and public sector restructuring, power sector restructuring and health systems development. The other two are the central government's immunisation strength-

ening project and Rajasthan's district poverty initiatives project.

Four of these five projects fall in the category of basic human needs which the US had already exempted from the sanctions. The fifth -- Uttar Pradesh's power sector restructuring project -- could have attracted sanctions.

Official sources here maintain that there is no formal change, as such, in the US sanction policy in pursuance of which it has been objecting to World Bank funding for India's infrastructural projects. This has resulted in stalling four projects involving \$1.6 billion in the past two years.

However, they indicate that the

US may adopt a more liberal attitude towards the long-pending projects for the development of infrastructure without which India cannot sustain its intended higher growth path of over 7 per cent.

World Bank president James Wolfensohn had assured finance minister Yashwant Sinha that he would present the long-stalled projects before the board for consideration.

The bank granted a loan of \$100.48 million from its concessional lending facility, the International Development Association (IDA), for Rajasthan's district poverty initiatives project.

The Telegraph
26 April 2000

Food for thought

One of the more important changes announced by the finance minister, Yashwant Sinha, in this year's rather lacklustre budget was the restructured prices in the public distribution system. The main feature of the new price structure which has become effective from April is that consumers with incomes above the poverty line will have to pay the "economic cost" incurred by the government in supplying the foodgrains. The subsidy will thus be restricted to those with incomes below the poverty line. The allocation of foodgrains to those below the poverty line has also been doubled.

However, one of the ironies of the public distribution system is that the system is distributionally neutral. In other words, its customers are spread more or less uniformly across all income classes, although its essential purpose is to provide food security to the more vulnerable sections of society. This means the bulk of its consumers actually have incomes above the poverty line.

Thus, the increase in the rationed quota for consumers below the poverty line will probably have only a negligible effect on the total offtake from the public distribution system.

It is quite likely that the net effect of the restructured prices may actually be a reduction in offtake. This is because the relatively poor may not be able to take full advantage of the increase in their rationed quota because they may be constrained by their low levels of income — many of them do not have enough income to purchase the additional quantities of food grains. On the other hand, consumers above the poverty line will in all probability respond to the increased PDS prices by diverting their demand to the free market.

The possibility that offtake from the PDS may actually decline has caused a lot of eyebrows to be raised in pained surprise. From all accounts, the Food Corporation of India is today holding on to more stocks of grain than can be possibly consumed in the near future. Successive years of bountiful harvests have ensured the warehouses of the FCI are overfull. Food prices will almost certainly remain stable even if the next couple of harvests are relative disasters. So we have hungry mil-

lions without enough to eat coexisting with surplus stocks. Surely, to use a cliché, "this does not make much sense."

How can India be producing too much food when we cannot provide even one square meal a day to roughly one third of the population? Amartya Sen would refer to his theory of entitlements and point out that the poor have very low entitlements. Put in every day language, the poor who do not get enough to eat are simply unable to pay for the food that they so desperately want or need. They are priced out of the market since they do not have the incomes or purchasing power with which to back their demand for food. So our total production of food today is too large relative to the market demand for food.

There has been a fair amount of discussion about ways in which the excess food stocks can be delivered to the poor. There are problems with the "obvious" solution of lowering the price of food grains sold through the public distribution system to the poor and increasing their quota even further.

First, the overwhelming majority of the poor are outside the ambit of the public distribution system. So, this will only ensure delivery of food to a relatively small number of the poor.

Second, even if there is a sudden drop in food production causing the excess stocks to disappear, no government will find it politically feasible to reverse the reduction in the price or increase in the quota of food supplied to the poor. Hence, an action taken as a short-term corrective measure can become a problem in the long-term.

Another possibility which has also found favour in some quarters is to channel a much larger volume of food grains in rural works programmes. The essential idea is to employ workers in the creation of rural infrastructure, using the excess food stocks to pay workers in kind. Rural works schemes of this kind have often been touted as ideal anti-poverty programmes because they are said to incorporate a degree of targeting. This is because only the poor and needy will agree to work in such programmes in view of the inadequate remuneration.

Unfortunately, this solution also has some fundamental problems. If the main purpose of such schemes is to provide additional employment or simply to use up the excess food stocks, then the projects which can be carried out must be highly labour-intensive. This places a constraint on the kind of infrastructure or assets which can be created. Typically, these will be assets which are not particularly durable — roads which are washed away during the first monsoon being a good example. This obviously implies a waste of the non-labour inputs used up in the programmes. One might

as well ask labourers to dig up holes and then fill them up!

On the other hand, if primacy is given to the creation of durable assets, then the projects which will be chosen cannot be very labour-intensive. So, for any given volume of non-food resources which the government is willing or able to deploy in the rural works programmes, only a small labour force can be employed. This will in turn imply that only a small fraction of the excess food stocks can be liquidated in rural works programmes, given the overall scarcity of non-food resources with the government.

Another possibility is to allow Indian farmers to export food. The usual argument against removal of export restrictions on food grains is that this will lead to an unduly large increase in domestic prices. Given the huge stocks available with the FCI, even a substantially generous export ceiling will have had a negligible effect on domestic prices. Typically, Indian governments have been unduly cautious in stipulating fairly conservative export ceilings.

But it is debatable whether even a generous export ceiling would generate a sufficient increase in demand. What is more likely is that farmers would be able to export only the superior qualities of food grains. Hence, there would still be overproduction of all other qualities of food grains.

The only proper long term solution is to increase the incomes of the poor. Our current level of food production will be just about adequate once the poor can back up their demand with purchasing power.

In the short run, the government must reverse its policy of caving in to the demands of the farm lobby and assuring farmers high procurement or guaranteed prices. The procurement price today is way above the market price. A lower guaranteed price would force farmers to allocate land in line with market demands, leading to diversification in favour of high value products.

In the short run, a smaller area of land would be devoted to food grains. A more prosperous agriculture would result in larger employment and increased incomes in the hands of the poor. An increase in incomes of the poor and hence in their demand for food grains would provide farmers the incentive to reallocate their land so as to enable them to supply the right quantity of food. Thus, the short term solution will actually merge with the long term solution.

BHASKAR DUTTA

The Telegraph
28 April 2000

Jungle-age to cyber-age

From straight out of their abodes in the depths of the thick forests in the Shivalik ranges of north west India, the sprightly children of the nomadic pastoral community of Van Gujjars are having fun learning the ABC of computers as part of their innovative education programme being run by the Dehra Dun based NGO (Non Govt Organisation) Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra (RLEK). At the ultra-modern and well-equipped schools meant exclusively for the children of marginalised Van Gujjars-at Mohand and Daula Thappar in Uttar Pradesh-computer training and videography form a part of the curriculum. The children of Van Gujjars in their traditional dress, complete with the colourful and dexterously patterned Krishna cap are having a veritable brush with cyber age. What's more, sometime last year Andrew Raw, an English teacher from Great Britain taught these children how to speak, read and write without going through the hassles of familiarising with "unscientific grammar". According to Avadesh Kaushal, Chairperson of RLEK children of this nomadic community are being exposed to computers, videography and other gadgets of modern technology so as to prepare them for a challenging future ahead. Kaushal is clear in his perception that the children of Van Gujjar tribe should not be deprived of the opportunities held out by the all pervasive cyber age.

The innovative and challenging literacy programme for Van Gujjars launched by RLEK has won for it the prestigious UNESCO literacy award. Right from the outset, RLEK has been clear in its perception that literacy is the key to opening up of the minds of the marginalised and exploited community to gear

up to fight for their rights and save them from victimisation. In fact, the thrust of the RLEK sponsored literacy programme has been on equipping the members of Van Gujjar nomads with vocational skills that could go along way in making the community self reliant in its true sense.

As it is, continuing education and post-literacy programme now on Van Gujjar settlements deep inside the forests of Shivalik ranges not only facilitates them in accessing academic learning but also provide them opportunities for upgrading their dairy skills and environmental knowledge. Further, it would also make them aware of their health and sanitary situation. This five year long programme is expected to become sustainable through the increased income of the community through innovative programmes that are an integral part of the project. Some of the salient features of this continuing education and post-literacy programme include providing reading materials in the form of books, newspapers and periodicals, imparting legal and health education and providing training in dairy production and bee-keeping. Thanks to the literacy programme launched by RLEK way back in late 1993, today as many as 29,000 Van Gujjar, men, women and children have become literate. Literacy has brought in a remarkable change in the perception and attitude of the community that had all along been under the dark shadow of ignorance and illiteracy.

Since the virile and colourful Van Gujjars had their dwellings in the depths of the forests and eked out their living by selling buffalo milk, they had for long remained aloof from the mainstream society.

Moreover, their nomadic lifestyle put hurdles in the way of educating them in the conventional sense. The involvement of RLEK in the literacy campaign for Van Gujjars had a rather dramatic beginning. Way back in September 1992, the simmering conflict between the authorities of the Rajaji National Park (RNP)-the winter abode of Van Gujjars-and the community

reached a flashpoint when the latter were stopped from entering the park area on return from their summer grounds in the upper reaches of the Himalayas. However, the Van Gujjars were determined not to give into the machinations of the RNP authorities, and move into the inhospitable marshy area of Ppathri where a resettlement colony had been built for them. For that would have meant certain death to their distinctive way of life. Not willing to be blackmailed, the Van Gujjars pitched their tents along the periphery of the park and put up in the area together with their buffaloes. Since the intention of creating

RNP spread over an area of 825 sq.km across the four western districts of Uttar Pradesh was made public in 1983, Van Gujjars have been under great pressure to move out of the park area.

For the good luck of the much harried nomads, Avadesh Kaushal threw his lot behind their struggle to live in their forest homes of centuries. Soon, the movement took on a radical shape and RNP authorities were left with no other choice but to allow the Van Gujjars a passage into the park.

During the course of his association with Van Gujjars, Kaushal realised that it was ignorance and illiteracy which made this unspoilt community vulnerable to all sorts of machinations and manipulations by the civilised society around. And hence it was felt that it was vital for the Van Gujjars to acquire the 3R's to change their perceptions, broaden their mental horizons and ultimately turn them into a confident and self reliant community. At the same time, he wanted literacy to empower Van Gujjars against blackmailing from traders and middlemen.

But then the task of educating

the Van Gujjars was as tough as it was daunting on account of their nomadic lifestyle and habitation deep inside the forests. As such, Kaushal hit upon the idea of imparting education right at the doorsteps of the tribe members. Towards this end, a forest academy of sorts was created with the support of 350 highly motivated volunteer teachers who were trained and deployed in batches in the Van Gujjar settlements. These dedicated "literacy missionaries" chose to give up the comfort of their homes and hearths and live in the modest forest dwellings of the community. Living and moving with the nomadic Van Gujjars was an exciting experience for them.

The most important part of this literacy campaign was designing the primers called Naya Safar (New Journey) which had to take into account the vocabulary, experience and physical environment of the community. These primers aimed at imparting functional skills than just providing library knowledge.

Normally classes were held under the shade of tress in the Van Gujjar dwellings. The timings of the classes were fine-tuned to the needs of the community. To prevent recidivism, the teachers trekked up and down during their annual migrations with their pupils and stayed with them in the highland pastures during the summer months. This way, more than 20,000 Van Gujjar adults were turned literate. The development of innovative primers and the involvement of the dedicated volunteer teachers were found to be instrumental for the unqualified success of this unique adult literacy programme.

It was the confidence instilled in by the literacy programme that led Van Gujjar elders to urge RLEK to educate their children. This led RLEK to launch a formal education programme for the children of Van Gujjars. The Van Gujjar schools at Mohand and Daula Thappar today impart three R's to more than 200 children of the community. These schools are a part of a proposed chain of such schools meant to

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90 million working children in India: ILO

THERE are at least 90 million working children in the age group of five to 14 years in India, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO). ILO director Mary Johnson told a United Nations inter-agency media workshop on the 'Worst Forms of Child Labour' that some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) put the number of working children at over 100 million, while the government places the figure at 11.28 million going by the 1991 census. "No society can afford to build its economy on the back of working children," UN coordinator in India, Brenda Gael McSweeney, said, and sought the media's help to raise public awareness on child labour and mobilise action to rehabilitate the children.

She said that child labour was often justified in the name of poverty. Yet, children who start working at a very young age tend to become unempowered, illiterate, unskilled adults, thus perpetuating poverty. Unless there was an expansion of schooling, the vicious cycle would not be broken and efforts to eliminate child labour or eradicate poverty would not make a dent, she said. McSweeney noted that many poor had internalised a belief that education had no relevance to their lives. "To change this, there has to be a social mobilisation to convince the poor of the value of education for their children," she added. Johnson said that the Indian government itself had in 1998-99 identified that about

106,000 children were employed in hazardous industries.

The government claims that about 400,000 children employed in non-hazardous industries have been brought into formal systems of education in a rehabilitation drive.

Some of the worst abuses of child labour include slavery, sale and trafficking of children for forced labour, debt bondage, recruitment for armed conflict, prostitution, use of children in illegal activities like pornography, drug trafficking and dangerous vocations that compromise the health, safety or morals of children, the workshop was told. McSweeney urged India to ratify the ILO convention which already had been ratified by 13 countries and applied to children under 18 and required the ratifying states to take action to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of labour.

The Observer
29 April 2000

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cater to the needs of Van Gujjar children spread thinly across the forest stretches of Shivaliks

An informal literacy programme on the lines of the adult literacy programme has been launched to benefit poor children. In this case the teachers stay with the community to impart three R's to the children through about 200 educational centres. About three hundred Van Gujjar children derive benefit from this literacy scheme.

RADHAKRISHNA RAO
Deccan Herald
30 April 2000

INDIAN HYPOCRISY

Obscenity is a convenient excuse

THE arrest of two social workers in Almora on a charge of obscenity showcases yet again the hypocrisy that is deeply rooted in the Indian psyche. AIDS is a serious problem not just in the US, but increasingly in India as well. Refusal to recognise this could stymie efforts to prevent it from spreading. In any case, it is usually NGOs or private agencies who are generally in the forefront of the campaign against AIDS. The near hysterical reaction of local citizens and the police's precipitate arrest of social workers reputed to be doing good work in the region arises from a stubborn refusal to face the facts which is so typical. There is an implicit, and mistaken, notion that Western societies are prone to uncontrolled promiscuity. This is contrasted to "traditional" Indian society in which sexual activity is channelled through the marriage, because sexual activity is seen to be fundamentally for procreation. The attitude is a legacy of colonially transmitted Victorian mores, and prevalent more among the middle class.

This hypocrisy does no one any good. Especially in the context of the campaign against AIDS. Work is being done in big cities, especially among prostitutes. That again is the result of stereotyping. We have to realise that small towns and villages are equally vulnerable. Victimising social workers is not the way forward. What is especially disturbing is that the police should act on the basis of random reactions. The Deepa Mehta parallel is striking. The recent incident is not just about AIDS, it is also about intolerance. The Indian (especially Hindu) civilisational ethos is supposedly characterised by tolerance. This is untrue. Intolerance and illiberalism are fundamental characteristics of the Indian social ethos. And that is because India has rejected modernity.

The Statesman
28 April 2000

11 NGO members arrested in Almora

HT Correspondent
Nainital, April 26

ELEVEN MEMBERS of an Almora-based NGO, Sahyog, have been arrested for projecting an allegedly distorted and wrong image of sex life in the Kumaon hills in their report on the possibilities of AIDS in Uttarakhand. Five of them were, however, released on bail on Tuesday.

Secretary of the organisation Dr Abhijeet Das and his wife, Mrs Yashodhara Das, who is also the convenor, are among those arrested. This study has been done under the lucrative though controversial McArthur Fellowships in the US. District Magistrate of Almora Dr D. K. Varma has banned all the activities of the members for two months, even the circulation of the

report has been banned.

Certain objectionable comments made in the said report, especially those made on the women, invited widespread condemnation.

An irate mob in Almora attacked the Sahyog office and damaged it. But for the timely intervention of the police things could remain under control.

Several social and students organisations, including the UKD, have branding the Sahyog report as an attack on the vanity and pride of the hills.

Five of the 11 arrested members have been released on bail. The convenor and secretary of the society, however, are still behind bars.

Officials from several NGOs in Delhi and Lucknow have reportedly reached the district headquarters to lobby for the release of the Sahyog members still behind bars.

The Hindustan Times
27 April 2000

Communication for Development and Learning (CDL) is a Bangalore-based non-profit voluntary organisation working to integrate communication more effectively into the development process. Realising the importance of working closely with the mainstream media, CDL works closely with professional journalists to ensure that issues related to social justice and development are given a planned and sustained exposure in the media.

CDL also undertakes:

- Media research to study patterns in development news in the mainstream publications
- Documentation of NGO experiences
- Design and production of communication support material
- Public service advertising
- Media management of development events.

CDL is the Regional Coordinator for Charkha - a national level network for development communication.

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