

# Custom-weary Khasi men wage patrilineal battle

## Social custom of lineage Bill awaits Governor's consent

SHILLONG, June 7  
William Shakespeare may well have proclaimed, "What's in a name. A rose would smell as sweet

by any other name..." But in the hills of Meghalaya, young Khasi men, who have traditionally accepted their mother's name in one of the oldest matrilineal systems, are now revolting.

They would like to change the mother/wife dominated system to a patrilineal one where children would inherit their father's name and the male would have greater authority as well as responsibility for the family.

Mr Snenglem A. Kurbah, general secretary of the Snyngkhong Rympei Thymmai (SRT), a seven-year-old organisation campaigning for change, admits: "I am not happy in my matrilineal system. I want a family that bears my name." Soundig very much what women would call an MCP, he maintains that, "Culturally and genetically men are superior." And to support his theory, which is backed by some 800 families in the Khasi

hills, he quotes a Khasi proverb that says: "A man has 12 strengths or powers as against one of women."

Like several other young men of Meghalaya, he has challenged his mother and grandmother and dismissed their views on the issue as old fashioned and outdated. A Christian, he has married a woman who bears his name and his six children too are known as their father's progeny.

With the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council trying to codify Khasi customs and traditions through the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill, 1997, the debate on who is a Khasi has acquired a shrill pitch. In every home in Shillong, as well as in the rural areas, conversation invariably veers to the Bill which is awaiting the Governor's consent.

By Usha Rai

Can laws save a culture from erosion and change? Can a law wipe away a man's status as a member of a particular ethnic group?

While the SRT men, stifled by the weight of tradition, are determined to see that the Bill does not come through, those supporting it maintain that, "a large number of people have been misusing the Khasi social custom of lineage for their personal interests." Khasis and other tribes do not have to pay income-tax, have job reservation and privileges for starting businesses or owning land that the non-tribals do not. Mr G. S. Masser, a respected legislator of the State who supports the Bill and the traditional matrilineal system, says the Bill seeks to stop people from using just the name to get facilities. Many have become Khasis through an affidavit.

In Meghalaya, the articulate and

progressive Khasi women are marrying "outsiders". The new lineage Bill says a man who inherits his father's name cannot be a Khasi. However, if a Khasi man marries a non-Khasi woman, she and her children, after some rituals, could take on the name of a Khasi clan and the matrilineal system would continue.

While the child of a rank outsider could become a Khasi, the child of a purely Khasi alliance is nearly excommunicated if he takes on his father's name, representatives of the SRT and other protesting youth groups point out.

Apart from the gender dimensions of the Bill, there is genuine concern over the dilution of Khasi tradition. An estimated 60 per cent of the Khasi have converted to Christianity. They continue to enjoy the privileges of the Khasis while practising Christianity.

## FACE TO FACE

Usha Rai meets  
A. T. Ariyaratne

**T**HERE are two parallel forces working for development in most countries of the world, says Dr A. T. Ariyaratne, recipient of the Mahatma Gandhi Peace Award for 1996. While a section believes that the road to progress is through economic liberalisation, consumerism, glamour, and moneypower, others believe in a people's movement for development based on cultural moorings and spiritual values.

The apparently dominant force — because of its showmanship — is the first. But it is a destructive force — drawing people like moths to a fire, warns Sri Lanka's man of the masses whose strength and inspiration comes from Mahatma Gandhi, Vinoba Bhave and Jaiprakash Narain.

Ariyaratne is confident that ultimately the people-centred process to human development will triumph. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (SSM), of which he is the President, is the alternative model working in 11,300 of the 24,000 villages of Sri Lanka. The Shanti Sena, as he calls it, has close to five million active supporters. By harnessing the goodness of man it is possible to have a total awakening of families, village communities, national communities and finally the world community says the diminutive, white haired Gandhian from Sri Lanka.

Despite the glamour of the bright city lights, a lot of people stay back in the villages and the SSM tries to fulfil their 10 basic needs — ranging from clean environment and adequate supply of water and food to basic health care, modest housing and total education. In doing so the movement fleshes out an oft quoted

aphorism that the earth can provide for everyone's needs but not their greed.

In a unique blend of Gandhian values and Buddhist philosophy, people work through *shramdan* — build roads and construct tanks. When their physical needs are met by self reliance, the group becomes a cohesive unit and thinks of solutions to other problems. The Buddhist face of the movement is in the practice of *dana*, principle of sharing according to the needs of the members of the family; *priyavachana* or use of pleasant language at all times.

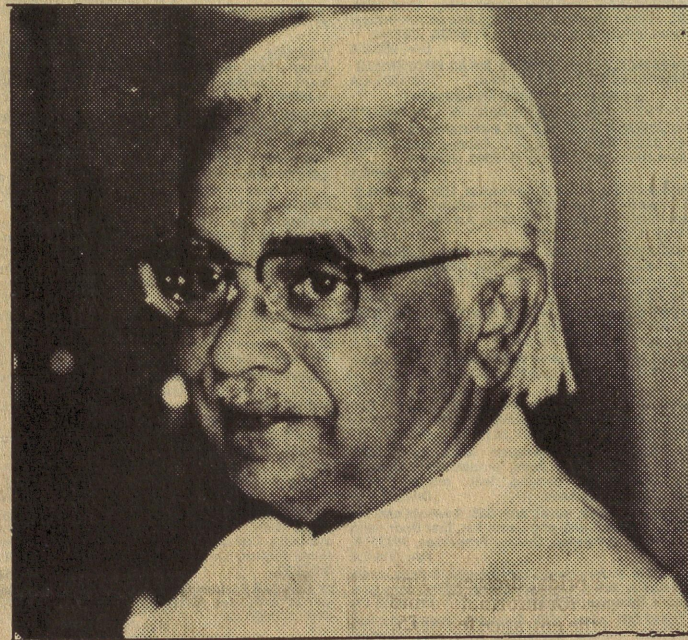
Beginning in a small, informal way in 1958, the movement has spread like wild fire through the villages of the emerald island. Today it looks after those affected by the violence in the North and East; rehabilitation of youth held in detention camps, provides residential care for orphans, physically and mentally handicapped and senior citizens; nutrition feeding programmes for the malnourished child, primary health care and vocational training for physically handicapped women. Five out of six pre-schools in Sri Lanka are run by Sarvodaya.

Grassroot leadership is developed whether it is in youth, women who will run the mothers programme, farmers, teachers or the labourers'. They register as legal entities or Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies with powers to employ local people. Women run the savings and credit facilities service. Today there are four management institutes of the movement training village level managers.

Ariyaratne has not met Medha Patkar or Sunderlal Bahuguna but supports their paradigms of de-

# It must be people centred

Development



A. T. Ariyaratne: In Gandhi's footsteps

velopment. He does not favour massive projects that threaten the ecology of a place. "Smaller, coordinated projects are less corruptible and obtain the same results," he assures. And strikes and gheraos are not the chosen forms of protest.

The movement for a non-violent transformation of rural communities by empowering them economically, socially, politically and technologically began when he was just 21. He met Vinobha thrice — in 1959, 1962 and 1965 and at each meeting he drank deeply from his philosophy. He met Jaiprakash Narain four times, twice in India

and twice in Sri Lanka. He has also spent some time with Baba Amte in Anandwan.

Ariyaratne's confidence in the new path he is paving is touching. "You can see the seeds of destruction in the existing form of governance," he says. Greed has been multiplied by the system. Earlier corruption was in Rs 2 and Rs 3. Now it is in billions. When we were small we hardly ever heard of crime — of gold bangles and necklace being taken off a woman. With greed hatred has increased leading to violence.

This has seeped down in the form of sex crimes against chil-

dren. If such crimes existed earlier there were social checks and better instincts flourished.

Now everything — political as well as economic aspects of human life — is centralised. "Qualities like love, sacrifice, forgiveness and cooperation can be nurtured only in small groups like families and village communities. They cannot be manifest at a national level," says Ariyaratne.

He does not blame individuals who take a bribe but disapproves of centralised governance where the citizen has no role to play after he casts his vote.

With such radical views, development work has not been easy. His relationship with Premadasa, former Sri Lankan President and Prime Minister, soured when he disapproved of his attempts to inject politics into the movement and tried to project himself. Between 1989 and 1993 when Premadasa was President, he did everything to destroy the movement, Ariyaratne recalls. "People were told not to support us. We were in great danger".

The only kind of protest that the SSM organised was 3 hours of meditation by 50,000 against the construction of a hotel. "We wanted to show we were capable of direct action." But after Premadasa's death, the next Government went ahead and built the hotel, he says with a small smile.

The recipient of nine international awards including Mag-saysay, Hubert Humphrey and Niwano Peace Prize, and two major Sri Lankan awards, Ariyaratne propagates two ideas where ever he goes. "Macro thinking will destroy the world. But micro thinking and humane scale organisations if

linked through communication can save the world." But the Gandhian laments that the marvels of information technology are being used for military purposes and economic growth and not for growth of a humane society.

As a result of the Shanti Sena revolution, people stooping on bended knees before politicians and bureaucrats now stand up and demand their rights in a non-violent manner. If a village needs a road and the Government ignores its demand, the people go to the villagers and get land directly from them. Ninety of 100 persons give a small portion of their land. The 10 who holding back also fall in line and through *shramdan* the road is constructed. When politicians visit the village they show the work they have done and shame the Government into constructing the culverts and bridges needed.

To register displeasure at the cutting of forests, the villagers grow saplings. "Majority of our people are simple people with simple problems that need simple solutions — not those provided by economists and politicians," says Ariyaratne.

For the first 17 years, SSM ran on the humble salary of a school teacher which is what Ariyaratne was. But his wife Neetha was constantly by his side and the villagers lent support by providing school buildings etc. Soon Belgium, The Netherlands, Canada and some communities contributed to the movement. Now the SSM is generating its own funds. A few Japanese organisations also support the grassroot movement. With self reliance as its motto, the SSM does not attach much importance to money. But help without strings is welcome.

# Manna for Orissa drought-hit?

**W**HILE globalisation is the talk of the urban elite, in drought-affected western Orissa, even if you flood the market with foodgrains, people do not have the capacity to buy. It was a former Chief Secretary of Orissa who after his retirement in the late eighties, who made this telling comment on the low income group people. Today the picture is even grimmer.

Mass migration has become an annual feature. For the landless, whose numbers are increasing, there is no employment. Mr Kapil Tiwari, former MLA and convenor of the Khariar Citizens Committee, says in Amlapli, where Rajiv Gandhi visited as Prime Minister, 90 per cent of the land have been mortgaged for small loans.

As the independent MLA from Bolangir put it, "There is no irrigation, no industry, not an inch of the national highway and an abysmally low rate of literacy". Ravaged by the struggle for survival and lack of health care, people in the area die young — in their 30s and 40s.

Poverty is forcing families to send young girls into prostitution. They are herded away to Raipur, Calcutta and Bombay. Till 1986, when the Government stopped sale of blood by professional donors, in the Gandhi Nagar ward of Khariar, rickshaw-pullers survived by selling blood. The first AIDS case in Orissa was from Khariar, says Mr Tiwari.

Money lenders have worked out an efficient network into the vil-

pening all the time and they have got desensitised. The Chief Minister has, in fact, issued a fiat to collectors that they would be held responsible for starvation deaths. So many collectors, instead of trying to get succour for the needy, are bullying villagers and even journalists to shut up.

If the Indravati hydel project, started 30 years ago, had taken off some two lakh acres of land in drought-hit western Orissa would

ment.

Neither Indira Gandhi nor Morarji Desai had any special plans for the region. But Rajiv Gandhi did. The Area Development Approach for Poverty Termination (ADAPT) was mooted in 1986-1987. It was a Rs 100-crore project of existing development funds. Several water harvesting structures in the undivided Kalahandi were constructed under ADAPT.

panacea in the form of a Rs 4,557-crore Kalahandi-Bolangir and Koraput (KBK) project. Existing resources were to be pooled in and over a five-year period the problems of unemployment and drought ironed out. KBK was scrapped and a new poverty alleviation programme was started by Prime Minister Mr Deve Gowda.

Some immediate solutions that would not require much investment are processing of tendu leaf and bidi manufacture in western Orissa. So far the leaf is plucked and sent to Jabalpur, Calcutta and Bombay for processing.

The 22 other minor forest produce like mahua, khironji and neem seeds can be processed for oil extraction by local people. So far these seeds are bought from tribals and the local population at Rs 5 to Rs 7 a kg and sold by middlemen in Raipur at Rs 150 a kg and Bombay at Rs 300. Bamboo instead of being sold at throwaway prices to the paper mills should be given to the local tribals for making bamboo baskets and even cane furniture.

Orissa handloom fabrics are much in demand. If some of the looms could be converted into powerlooms, or the women are taught to make well-stitched garments from these fabrics, there would be a greater demand for Orissa textiles. And money would go directly to the resident population.

There are good leather tanneries in Khariar and other places and people with skill to fashion modern footwear. Labour-intensive economy will have to be supported for a few years. If no action is taken today, tomorrow we may have to tackle an Ethiopian hunger.

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lages through their agents. Mr Tiwari says the agents take the money from the Marwaris and lend it to the villagers. At harvesting time they descend on the villages and force the farmers to sell the paddy at a cheaper rate so that they can repay the loan with interest to the Marwaris. There are even instances of villagers working on their own mortgaged land as casual labour.

But people in the State seem unmoved by stories in the local newspapers about starvation deaths and mortgage of little girls. It is hap-

have benefited. There could even have been a double crop. The power generated would have encouraged industries to come up. But the project seems to have run aground.

From 1965 and the first major drought of western Orissa, five Prime Ministers have visited the area, expressed their concern and assured money and development for the region. But the region continues to languish for the political representatives from the region lack the clout to put pressure on the Centre and the State Govern-

ment. But when Biju Patnaik came to power in 1990-91 he dismissed it as "bakwas" (non-sense) and started a zero employment programme. Three years went in planning the scheme.

By 1993 the focus shifted to watershed development, thanks to Rural Development Secretary B. N. Yugandhar. The fact that there was a Congress Government at the Centre and Janata Dal one in Orissa slowed down the pace of development in western Orissa.

When Mr Narasimha Rao visited the area, he proposed a

# Starvation deaths may occur but can't be disclosed

by Usha Rai

**BOLANGIR** - Starvation deaths and mass migration for jobs are two annual features of drought-prone areas like Bolangir, Koraput, Kalahandi and Malkangiri.

This year, however, almost half the state has been affected. As many as 6,097 villages have been declared drought-affected in the districts of Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Rayagada and Sambalpur. Over 1,660 of the 1,727 villages of Sundergarh have been reeling under famine and hunger.

With the state government announcing that district collectors would be held responsible for proven cases of death from starvation and severe action taken against them; no one wants to admit 'hunger' deaths.

Officers who were earlier quick to report such deaths, are now going out of their way to dismiss them as due to old age and malnutrition. In a state which has a

shocking infant mortality rate of 146 per 1,000; where malaria, TB, diarrhoea and dysentery is rampant and there is a high degree of malnutrition, a few days without food could send you keeling over the brink. How will a bureaucrat, with a Damocles sword hanging over his head, describe such deaths?

In 1989, after the High Court confirmed a starvation death in Deypur village, compensation of Rs 25,000 had to be paid to the victim's deaf and dumb wife. In a state which is starved of funds, would it therefore not be more prudent to brush aside starvation deaths as natural?

Kalahandi collector Ashok Dalwai says though 200 deaths were reported, only 43 could be substantiated - most of them in Lanjigarh and Thuamal Rampur. Lanjigarh was one of the blocks that the Prime Minister visited in his whirlwind tour of drought-affected areas. The ration shop

put up as a show piece for his visit disappeared two days later when this correspondent visited the village. The solar light had functioned for just one day.

On the highway running alongside Turkal village, young boys were waiting to exchange their day's collection of babool seeds for some salt. The going rate of barter was 8 kgs of babool seeds for 4 kgs of coarse salt.

Chennumaji (50) of Phapsi village died at the end of March. The district administration says he died of epilepsy. Paleng, his first wife, who allowed him to take another wife because she could not conceive, says there was no food in the house when he died. Too weak to get up he had asked for food. "I killed my husband because I could not feed him," she says weeping. Anu, the second wife, now goes out to beg for food, to feed 3-year-old son Bhim and Paleng. The family's meal is millets soaked in water and red chillies.

Brindawan Mishra, president of the

Regional Federation of Youth Clubs, says Dalimbo Sahoo (45) of Navpada village died of starvation. Her husband, Akuro, who had about 10 acres of land, sold it off in bits and pieces over as many years to stave off hunger after repeated crop failure. The last bit of land was exchanged for two or three bags of rice. He became landless and even sold his pucca house. The federation tried to feed Dalimbo but she suffered from acute malnutrition and died. Heart-broken Akuro has disappeared.

Village after village lies empty and fields are barren. Only the very old and the very young are left behind. The official figure for migration from Bolangir is 55,000. Like vultures, labour contractors and their agents hang around, promising jobs in Raipur and Hyderabad. At the Nawakhoi festival in August/September, soon after the rains, they advance sums varying from Rs 800 to Rs 1,500 which the farmers blow up in clothes and festivity, hoping to pay

back the loan after harvest. But the rains fail.

From November they are rounded up like cattle for work outside the state by the munificent contractors. Then the exploitation begins. From the daily wages, (it is Rs 25 a day in Orissa but very few actually get this amount) the villagers pay off their loans. Many villagers, who own half to an acre of land, mortgage it for the trip to the cities. Many never get it back.

But this year's drought has touched those with large land holdings too.

Ashok Dalwai admits that both land and rainfall distribution is skewed in Kalahandi. Seventy per cent of the land in Kalahandi is owned by 31 per cent of the landlords. Sixty-nine per cent of the farmers hold less than 5 acres each and 40 per cent are landless. The inequity continues to grow. In the adjoining Bolangir district this correspondent met a businessman who boasted that the income-tax authorities had

seized Rs 42 lakh from his house, the largest haul in eastern India!

Though Bolangir, Kalahandi and Koraput receive between 1,300 to 1,450 mm of rainfall annually, it is not well distributed.

The lack of industries in western Orissa, rich in bauxite, graphite and other minerals, and some Rs 5,000 to Rs 6,000 crore of untapped wealth in precious stones like rubies, diamonds, emeralds and sapphires, is attributed to all chief ministers, except R.N. Singhdeo, coming from coastal Orissa.

Less than a quarter of the state's arable land is irrigated. The Hirakud dam irrigates just two blocks of Bolangir district. The Indravati project would irrigate 2.5 lakh hectares and generate 600 mw of power. It would be a boon for Koraput and Kalahandi districts but the project, initiated in 1978, may not be ready till 1996.

# No officer reports starvation deaths out of fear

by Usha Rai

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This year, however, almost half the state has been stricken. A whopping 6097 villages have been declared drought affected in the districts of Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Rayagada and Sambalpur. Over 1660 of 1727 villages of Sundergarh have been reeling under famine and hunger.

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Officers who were earlier quick to report such deaths, are now going out of their way to dismiss them as due to old age and malnutrition. In a state which has a shocking infant mortality rate of 146 per 1000; where malaria,

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The District Collector of Kalahandi, Ashok Dalwai, says though 200 deaths were reported only 43 could be substantiated - most of them in Lanjigarh and Thuamal Rampur. Lanjigarh was one of the blocks that the Prime Minister visited in his whirlwind tour of drought-affected areas. The ration shop put up as a show piece for his visit disappeared two days later when this correspondent visited the village. The solar light had

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hunger after repeated crop failure. The last bit of land was exchanged for two or three bags of rice. He became landless and even sold his pucca house. The Federation tried to feed Dalimbo but she had acute malnutrition and died. The heart broken Akuro has disappeared.

At Tamgurah, a tribal village on the lower reaches of a hillock of Lanjigarh block, they drew their sustenance from mango starch, roots of bamboo, 'pitha kanda', another edible root, powdered tamarin and tanga seeds. No one in this tiny settlement had any property. They sold firewood and other minor forest products. Conditions are worse in the villages on top of the hill.

Village after village lies empty and the fields are barren. Only the very old and the very young are left behind. The official figure for migration from Bolangir is 55,000. Like vultures the labour contractors and their agents hang around promising jobs in Raipur and Hyderabad. At the Nawakhoi festival in August-September, soon after the rains, they advance sums

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But this year's drought has touched those with large land holdings too. The zamindar of Dumeria village in Kalahandi district has 60 acres of land but both his son's have set off in search of work. One of them plies a rickshaw in Raipur and the other is in Bombay. The zamindar pleads not to publicise this fact for then who would marry his sons?

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cent of the landlords. Sixty-nine per cent of the farmers hold less than 5 acres each and 40 per cent are landless. The inequity continues to grow. In the adjoining Bolangir district this correspondent met a businessman who boasted that the income tax authorities had seized Rs 42 lakhs from his house, the largest haul in eastern India!

Though Bolangir, Kalahandi and Koraput receive between 1300 to 1450 mm of rainfall annually, it is not well distributed. Since September there has been no rain and the paddy cultivated is lost. Employment of some form, other than agriculture, is therefore vital. But hardly any industries have come up.

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Strategy to fight J & K militancy

## BIZ HIGHLIGHTS

The noose is tightening



## WEATHER

Local forecast for Monday: Maximum temperature will continue to be 2 to 3 deg. C. above normal. Thunder clouds may develop in the evening.

Sunday's readings  
NUNGAMBAKKAM MEENAMBAKKAM  
Max: 36.6°C (97.7°F) 39.7°C (103.4°F)  
Min: 28.0°C (82.4°F) 27.7°C (81.8°F)  
Humidity: 79% 70%  
Sun sets Monday 6.24 p.m., rises Tuesday 5.47 a.m.  
Moon rises Monday 3.39 p.m., sets 3.36 a.m.

## mourning

NEW DELHI - Flags flew at half mast and no official entertainment was planned as India began observing a three-day state mourning from Sunday as a mark of respect to the slain Sri Lanka President Ranasinghe Premadasa.

The former Sri Lankan President, Junius Jayewardene, currently attending the international seminar on "Rajiv Gandhi memorial initiative for the advancement of human civilisation" here, left by a special aircraft for Colombo.

•UNI

... of governments of various foreign countries. Enough justification, thought the publicity-hungry men in power, to have themselves shown on television. And those eager to please were ever ready to oblige.

Instructions were given to Doordarshan - at the last minute - to cover the show, described as the Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Initiative, and cover it live. The argument, that the event was of such importance and had such currency that it had to be covered live, was conveniently forgotten where other government media were concerned. Doordarshan has always been considered the most important.

... clear, as officials were not available for comment on Sunday: they had been called by the Minister for briefing on Parliamentary questions for Monday.

Sonia Gandhi, chairperson of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation, on Sunday led a delegation of eminent world personalities to meet President Shankar Dayal Sharma and present him a copy of the declaration adopted at the end of two-day meeting of the Rajiv Gandhi initiative for the advancement of human civilisation.

Mrs Gandhi briefed the President about the deliberations of the two-day conference organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation.

... chief Rohit Choudhary.

The SSP said Rachpal Singh was also a member of the policy-making Panthic committee (Usmanwala). This was one of three apex bodies of various militant outfits in Punjab which conceived and planned various diabolical crimes in and outside Punjab, the other two being Panthic committee (Sohan Singh) and Panthic committee (Zaffarwal).

A medium machine gun of 7.91 bore, first of its type ever found in Punjab, a general purpose machine gun, a .30 mauser, two rockets along with chargers, two detonators and fuse wire besides a large quantity of live and spent ammunition were recovered from the encounter site. • UNI

Hardly three years ago a Madras IIT mechanical engineering student, who was under severe stress, took an overdose of sleeping pills after locking himself up in his hostel room, as he had failed in an examination. But the suicide bid proved abortive.

In the latest case, one of the students is still in hospital, but his condition is stable. The other student was discharged a few days ago. Speaking to *Indian Express*, and pleading with the reporter not to mention her son's name, the anxious mother of one of the students, who had come from Bangalore, said, "I cannot understand what made my only child take such a deci-

the pressure," a group of electrical engineering students said. They confirmed that the two students from their department who had taken sleeping pills, were unable to bear the strain.

However, students of other departments did not share this view. Venkatraghavan of chemical engineering said, "Of course, academic pressures are there, but they are not serious enough to warrant an overdose of sleeping pills. The problem some students face is that having topped their classes in school, when they don't do so well here, they reel under pressure".

Criticising the grading system, a woman student who wished to remain anonymous, said, "Students are targeted. Though rela-

there are so many avenues for releasing pressure like participating actively in cultural events like the Mardi Gras".

Professor of mechanical engineering N. Venkatrayulu did not agree that the grading system was faulty. "And there are sufficient avenues for extra-curricular activities at the IIT, for a student to relax." He said it was a class committee which decided about grading and not individual professors.

An aerospace engineering student said, "Just because there are a few stray incidents, it would be totally unfair to blame the entire system. The parents are also to blame to some extent for they sometimes expect too much from us".

## Man-made disasters

# Kalahandi: The nightmare of environmentalists

by Usha Rai

### BHUBANESHWAR

ORISSA'S unending agony of cyclones, floods and drought following in a vicious cycle is a man-made environmental holocaust. Forests have been ruthlessly plundered and the old traditional systems of storing water have been encroached on or destroyed.

The principal secretary to the Chief Minister, P.M. Mahapatra, says that without the tree cover when it pours in July and August there is extensive run-off creating floods downstream and drought upstream. "Cuttings, pond-like structures, closed on three sides with an opening for irrigation, the old tried and tested traditional methods of storing rain water, have got silted. In some places, land hungry villagers have grabbed them for cultivation.

The cycle of floods has been as severe as drought. In Kalahandi there were floods in 1965, 1977, 1980, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991 and 1992. In 1991-1992 it is estimated that some 8,995 hectares of cultivable land was covered with sand from the rivers in spate. In coastal Orissa, where a large number of Bangladeshi immigrants are cultivating paddy, mangrove swamps, which provided some protection from the cyclones have been hacked away for firewood.

Rajiv Gandhi, with his concern for

environment, had announced Rs 22 crore for drought-hit western Orissa in 1987-1988. Under the Area Development Approach and Poverty Termination (ADAPT) programme, in addition to poverty alleviation a large number of water harvesting structures were to be built. But to quote Mahapatra "the water harvesting programme became a money harvesting one for some people." Today there is no sign of the water harvesters. The ADAPT scheme itself was terminated by V.P. Singh. After the Prime Minister's recent visit to Orissa hopes of revival of the scheme are high.

Mahapatra said, in acknowledgement of the link between deforestation and drought and floods, official felling of trees in forest land in all districts has been stopped since last year. Though the state no longer gets its revenue from forests, largescale smuggling of timber continues. So does bamboo extraction for the paper industry. Mountains of harvested bamboo and timber can be seen in Kalahandi. The Orissa gazette of 1863 shows that Kalahandi used to have two crops of rain-fed paddy every year. During the Great Bengal Famine rice was sent to Bengal from this district. Dharmgarh is the rice bowl of Kalahandi and it is from this one block that most of the district's rice is procured.

But in a century 90 per cent of the state's forests was ravaged, says Mahapatra. Naturally this changed the rainfall pattern. Most of the rain in Western Orissa is received in just two or

three days of July/August and there may be a shower in September. In the ensuing floods there is heavy loss of top soil. Shifting cultivation continues to be practised by the tribals. Each drought only hastens the next one for in the absence of food people turn to the

forests.

Kalahandi is criss-crossed by rivers—the Indravati, Nagabali, Pansadhara, Hathi, Sajada, Sunder, Udanti, Jhonk, Rahud, Ret and the Tel. All except the Tel originate in the hills of Kalahandi and are perennial rivers.



Officially the cutting of timber has been banned, but the destruction continues in Kalahandi. *Express*

Towards the end of April most of these rivers were dry. The traditional water storage system of cuttass and 'mundas', large square structures for containing water at the entrance to each village, have not been maintained.

So far short term, temporary solutions to drought and floods were being applied. To provide employment and money to the starving people, kutcha roads and water harvesting structures were constructed... then washed away. In Titlagarh city (Bolangir), which is facing one of its worst water crises, the more affluent get drums of water carted on bullock carts and trucks every day. There are not enough tube wells and 30 per cent of those installed don't work.

But now every district collector talks of long term projects to heal the wounds inflicted on nature. All over Bolangir it was heartening to see neatly cordoned off "village wood lots" coming up. Funded by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) the social forestry division has been growing fuelwood and fodder plantations to meet the needs of the people. When three years old the plantations are handed over to the care of villagers.

Bolangir district collector is focussing on watershed development because even when the Indravati dam project comes up, his district will not benefit from it. Four micro watershed development projects have been launched and another five are proposed. Titlagarh sub collector Parida is focussing on dug wells so

that people even in a drought year there is enough water for growing onions if not paddy. The Ministry of Rural Development should think of extending its 'million wells' scheme, so far limited to SC and ST to the poor and marginalised farmers of drought-prone areas like Titlagarh. Under the scheme Rs 13,200 is provided by the Centre for each well.

Kalahandi district collector Ashok Dalwai has drawn up a 10-year integrated plan for land and water use. Wastelands are to be developed as a community asset. In the next three years 20,000 hectares under revenue and forest department is to be treated. Some 2.5 lakhs of the 4.5 lakhs are to be irrigated—1.9 lakhs by the Upper Indravati and the rest from the three medium irrigation projects proposed on the Upper Jhonk, Sunder and Saipala. Some 1300 water harvesting structures, 200 percolation tanks every year and 24,000 wells are proposed in the next 10 years. For the long term action plan, B K Patnaik, has been appointed as Administrator, special projects at Bhawanipatna.

Agriculture is to be diversified from water-intensive paddy to groundnuts, onions, tomatoes and sugar cane in Bolangir. In Kalahandi where there is excellent black soil, cotton is to be grown. All these are marvellous plans. District Collectors should not be transferred till they translate paper dreams into reality.

# Starvation deaths

Continued from Page 1

has 60 acres of land but both his son's have set off in search of work. One of them plies a rickshaw in Raipur and the other is in Bombay. The zamindar pleads not to publicise this fact, for then who would marry his sons?

Ashok Dalwai admits that both land and rainfall distribution is skewed in Kalahandi. Seventy per cent of the land in Kalahandi is owned by 31 per cent of the landlords. Sixty nine per cent of the farmers hold less than 5 acres each and 40 per cent are landless. The inequity continues to grow. In the adjoining Bolangir district this correspondent met a businessman who boasted that the income tax authorities had seized Rs 42 lakh from his house, the largest haul in eastern India!

Though Bolangir, Kalahandi and Koraput receive between 1300 to 1450 mm of rainfall annually, it is not well-distributed. Since September there has been no rain and the paddy cultivated is lost. Employment of some form, other than agriculture, is therefore vital. But hardly any industries have come up.

The lack of industries in western Orissa, rich in bauxite, graphite, other minerals and some Rs 5000 to Rs 6000 crore of untapped wealth in precious stones like rubies, diamonds, emeralds and sapphires, is attributed to all chief ministers, except R.N Singhdeo, coming from coastal Orissa.

Less than a quarter of the State's arable land is irrigated. The Hirakud dam irrigates just two blocks of Bolangir district.

# Where starvation deaths go unreported

by Usha Rai

BOLANGIR

**S**TARVATION deaths and mass migration for jobs are two annual features of drought-prone areas like Bolangir, Koraput, Kalahandi and Malkangiri.

This year, however, almost half the State has been stricken. A whopping 6097 villages have been declared drought-affected in the districts of Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Keonjhar, Mayurbanj, Rayagada and Sambalpur. Over 1660 of the 1727 villages of Sundergarh have been reeling under famine and hunger. But with the State Government announcing that district collectors would be held responsible for proven cases of death from starvation and severe action taken against them no one wants to admit 'hunger' deaths.

Officers who were earlier quick to report such deaths, are now going out of their way to dismiss them as due to old age and malnutrition. In a State which has a shocking infant mortality rate of 146 per 1000; where malaria, TB, diarrhoea and dysentery is rampant and there is high

degree of malnutrition, a few days without food could send you keeling over the brink. How will a bureaucrat, with a Damocles sword hanging over his dead, describe such deaths?

In 1989 after the High Court confirmed a starvation death in Deypur village, compensation of Rs 25,000 had to be paid to victim's deaf and dumb wife. In a State which is starved of funds would it therefore not be more prudent to brush aside starvation deaths as natural and not man-made?

The District Collector of Kalahandi, Ashok Dalwai says though 200 deaths were reported only 43 could be substantiated - most of them in Lanjigarh and Thuamal Rampur. Lanjigarh was one of the blocks that the Prime Minister visited in his whirlwind tour of drought-affected areas. The ration shop put up as a show piece for his visit disappeared two days later when this correspondent visited the village. The solar light had functioned just for one day. On the highway running alongside Turkal village, young boys were waiting to exchange their day's collection of babool seeds for some salt. The going rate of barter was 8 kgs of babool seeds for 4 kgs of coarse salt.

Chennumaji, 50, of Phapsi village died at

the end of March. The district administration says he died of epilepsy. Paleng, his first wife, who allowed him to take another wife because she could not conceive, says there was no food in the house when he died. Too weak to get up he had asked for food. "I killed my husband because I could not feed him," she says weeping. Anu, the second wife, now goes out to beg for food, to feed 3-year-old son Bhim and Paleng. The family's meal was millets soaked in water and red chillies.

Brindawan Mishra, the president of the Regional Federation of Youth Clubs, says Dalimbo Sahoo, 45, of Navpada village died of starvation. Her husband, Akuro, who had about 10 acres of land sold it off in bits and pieces over as many years to stave off hunger after repeated crop failure. The last bit of land was exchanged for two or three bags of rice. He became landless and even sold his pucca house. The Federation tried to feed Dalimbo but she had acute malnutrition and died. The heart broken Akuro has disappeared.

At Tamgurah, a tribal village on the lower reaches of a hillock of Lanjigarh block, they drew their sustenance from mango starch, roots of bamboo, 'pitha kanda', another edible root, powdered tamarind

and tanga seeds. No one in this tiny settlement had any property. They sold firewood and other minor forest products. Conditions are worse in the villages on top of the hill.

Village after village lies empty and the fields are barren. Only the very old and the very young are left behind. The official figure for migration from Bolangir is 55,000. Like vultures the labour contractors and their agents hang around promising jobs in Raipur and Hyderabad. At the Nawakhoi festival in August/September, soon after the rains, they advance sums varying from Rs 800 to Rs 1500 which the farmers blow up on clothes and festivity, hoping to pay back the loan after harvest. But the rains fail. From November they are rounded up like cattle for work outside the State by the munificent contractors. Then the exploitation begins. From the daily wages, (it is Rs 25 a day in Orissa but very few actually get this amount) the villagers pay off their loans. Many villagers who own half to an acre of land, mortgage it for the trip to the cities. Many never get it back. But this year's drought has touched those with large land holdings too. The zamindar of Dumeria village in Kalahandi district

Continued on Page 7

# Where hunger deaths are dubbed natural

by Usha Rai

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Officers who were earlier quick to report such deaths, are now going out of their way to dismiss them as due to old age and malnutrition. In a state which has a shocking infant mortality rate of 146 per 1000; where malaria, TB, diarrhoea and dysentery is rampant and there is high degree of malnutrition, a few days without food could send you keeling over the brink. How will a bureaucrat, with a Damocles Sword hanging over his head, describe such deaths?

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A famished family awaiting their fate

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Less than a quarter of the state's arable land is irrigated. The Hirakud dam irrigates just two blocks of Bolangir district. The Indravati project would irrigate 2.5 lakh hectares and generate 600 mws of power. It would be a boon for Koraput and Kalahandi districts but the project, initiated in 1978, may not be ready till 1996.



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# 'Starvation deaths took place in Orissa'

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, May 20

Did some 50 to 60 people die of starvation in the past three months of 1996 in Bolangir, Nuapada and Kalahandi districts of Orissa? The National Human Rights Commission which visited the area and conducted investigations has confirmed deaths and severe malnutrition but the State Government has denied that they were due to starvation.

In fact the State has responded to the NHRC report by listing all the marvellous things it is doing to alleviate the suffering of the hungry and malnourished — sinking of tubewells, opening of fair price shops etc. "To insinuate that Government apathy led to deaths is not fair," it maintains.

With two such contradictory reports, the big wigs in the NHRC have not been able to take a decision on how they should handle the situation. A copy of its own findings and the State denial has been sent to the Agriculture Minister Chaturanan Mishra who had asked the Commission to inquire into the 26 cases of starvation death reported to him.

However the Commission wants to stay neutral and steer clear of any political mud slinging. The NHRC investigations were con-

ducted by the Secretary General R. V. Pillai and Director General investigations Shankar Sen. But a member of the Commission pointed out that no Government would like to admit starvation deaths. Even at the height of the great Bengal famine, the Government was maintaining there was no famine. Meanwhile some precious six months have been lost for the NHRC report cited the need for speedy action.

At the end of its investigations, the NHRC concluded that because of the high level of deprivation prevailing in the area, extensive crop damage, malnourishment and the inadequate income levels, and an insufficient outreach of relief measures, the possibility of some of the deaths having taken place due to prolonged malnutrition and hunger compounded by diseases cannot be ruled out.

The NHRC refers to the case of Dhanubudha Majhi of Mohulkot village, Nuapada, who the authorities claim had died of natural causes but according to the villagers had died of starvation not having found enough to eat after his son migrated.

In the case of Dhaneshwar Majhi, also of Nuapada, who was working as a labourer in Raipur and had died at Khariar Road, the postmortem showed he had died of lung ailment. Other details of the

postmortem — that nothing was found in his stomach — was glossed over. In the case of Panu Naik of Saurapadar village, Kalahandi, who died on November 8, the administration claimed he died of fever. But the villagers present at the time of the team's visit asserted that he had become weak due to malnutrition and had died.

The people reported to the NHRC team that the drought situation this year was unprecedented. The team felt that famine conditions were likely to worsen in the coming months unless ameliorative steps were intensified immediately.

The State Government's white paper on the drought situation has spelled out six measures like emergency feeding for old and indigent; increased allocation of foodgrains, intensification of efforts to provide potable water etc to cope with the situation.

The NHRC team, however, found that a number of old, disabled and widowed were not receiving their pension. The team ordered hospitalisation of some very weak persons and it has recommended extension of the welfare measures to cover all deserving persons.

In one village the team was informed that ration cards had been distributed just a day before its

visit. It found that the grain component of the Food for Work Programme was not given in many cases; full wages were not paid in some cases and the quantum of labour intensive work was insufficient leading to exodus.

The NHRC report also points out that it found little evidence of the District Level Natural Calamities Committee, with a strong component of NGOs, that the Supreme Court had recommended to review progress of relief work.

Collectors have complained to the investigating team about non-availability of rigs to undertake boring of new tube wells. Non-availability of doctors has been a major constraint in providing medical care to the people. Though a number of doctors had been posted to the rural health centres they did not join duty, the NHRC report states.

The NHRC report is critical of the proformas filled up by tehsildars inquiring into starvation deaths. In some blocks of Bolangir there was a 90 to 95 per cent failure of crops. But the tehsildar's report says there was no economic distress.

In fact the NHRC report exposes the manner in which bureaucracy covers its tracks. But because of political compulsions it may never see the light of day.

# Rights panel probing loss of land in Majuli

From Usha Rai

MAJULI, June 11

The recently set up Assam State Human Rights Commission, headed by Justice S. N. Bhargava, has begun investigating what could be a landmark case of loss of land as violation of human rights and the fundamental right to life.

The case hinges around the largest riverine island of the world — Majuli — a verdant 450 sq kms expanse at the heart of the Brahmaputra, home to over one and half lakh people and an extremely well preserved Vaishnav culture. The island is eroding so rapidly that in 40 to 45 years it has shrunk to a third of its size.

With large sections of the embankment caving in almost every day in the monsoon season, some 10,000 families or 75,000 people have become landless. While some have accepted the compensation of land given in Jorhat or Tinsukia, others have

stayed back to work as landless labourers. Though the floods have not yet come this year, three houses have already been washed away.

So the visit of the human rights team at the invitation of AVARD North-East, an NGO working on the island for over a year, was something of a celebration. In a desperate attempt to save the island, its fascinating culture preserved in the *satras* or ancient Vaishnav monasteries and unique paddy strains, cultivated organically, AVARD has been lobbying for World Heritage Site status for the island. In fact, Justice Bhargava's first halt was at a *satra* where he was able to appreciate the culture that everyone was talking about. Of the 62 *satras* that once dotted Majuli only 22 remain.

He then visited some of the displaced islanders living in shacks on a sliver of land that could get washed away. Some 300 people turned up for the meeting and recounted the pauperisation of

almost half the population of Majuli. It was a litany of woes — of schools that got washed away and those that survived not having sufficient teachers, of the poor quality of roads and the non-existent transport and health facilities. Of the 20 bridges connecting different parts of the island, 17 are not working.

In the absence of proper communication, business has suffered. No agency is willing to visit the island to sell its products. Those interested have to travel to Jorhat, Lakhimpur and Guwahati to get their goods.

Just a month ago eight deaths due to post-measles bronchopneumonia were reported in Selek village and three due to typhoid from Mohorichuk. Though there is a civil hospital on the island, it does not have sufficient medicines or doctors. And to get to Jorhat, the river has to be crossed twice.

Anjali Thakur and Archana Bora apprised the Commission about the lack of health facilities. In

the presence of the sub-divisional magistrate, they pointed out that though Majuli was made a subdivision in 1979, not a single hospital on the island has been completed. There are no gynaecologists, no child-care facilities, no vaccination drives.

While Justice Bhargava assured he would raise the issue of human rights violation with the top executives of the State, the representatives of the Brahmaputra Flood Control Board could offer no sops. A master plan for controlling erosion of Majuli has been drawn up. It spells out storage of the river waters in the upper catchment — at Dihang and in the Subansiri reservoirs. This would cost Rs 1,400 crore and neither the State nor the Centre has that kind of money. Only the World Bank or a multinational can make that kind of investment. But as long as insurgency continues in the State, no multinational would be willing to come forward.

# Social workers in N-E face threat to life

By Usha Rai

MAJULI, June 12

Wildly beautiful, torn by insurgency and seething with corruption, the North East is singularly lacking in NGO initiatives. But a team of committed workers who have come together under AVARD (North East) and have chosen to work on the shrinking emerald island of Majuli, are finding it difficult to retain their idealism when faced with death threats.

The organisation's manager for operations on the island, Bhagirah, has already had to move out of Assam. The threats have now extended to his brother.

Young graduates from the National Institute for Fashion

Technology, National Institute of Design, IIT (Bombay), the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, School of Architecture (Delhi) and others who are still fired by a sense of patriotism, have been working with local craftsmen, weavers and bamboo workers to improve the marketability of local products. They were stunned at being called "unwanted outsiders."

It is still not clear who was behind the rash of posters that appeared on the island a month ago accusing the NGO of being a RAW agent. Was it the ULFA, some other militant outfit or was it a group of disgruntled contractors who found their takings affected with the villagers doing *shramdan* to check erosion of the fragile island? With the support of AVARD, two kilometres of the

river bank had been reconstructed by the villagers. This spirited show of people-power was obviously viewed with suspicion.

The monthly newsletter *Dweep Alok* brought out by AVARD(NE) in Assamese lists the beneficiaries of each DRDA scheme and the rules for different development projects in order to maintain greater transparency in public dealings. Those who found this kind of social audit disconcerting called up individual members of the editorial team, largely Assamese, and told them in no uncertain terms to back off.

The Deputy Commissioner at Jorhat and the SDM on the island, who are extremely supportive of the NGO, are baffled by the smear campaign. For a month now, a whispering campaign has been

launched and the organisation has been accused of pocketing Rs 40 lakh of the DRDA funds. Besides corruption charges, even the *salwar kameez* clad girls have been accused of ruining the *mekhala-chador* (Assamese traditional dress of half sari) culture of the island.

Tension on the island was palpable the day the State Human Rights Commission held its public hearing. Seven truck loads of slogan shouting demonstrators, largely students of primary school, presented a memorandum to the SDM asking him to evict the NGO from the island. "We do not want Tata/Birla money ruining our culture," they screamed.

Since the demonstrators did not seem to be from Kamalabari, the

Continued on page 8 col. 2

## Social workers in N-E

Continued from page 1 col. 5

area where AVARD is working, Sanjoy Ghose, the secretary general of AVARD(NE) asked them to come for a public audit of AVARD(NE)'s work the following day. If the people of the island have lost faith in us, we will move out, he assured.

The following morning, there was a large turn out for the meeting. AVARD's entire team was introduced with their credentials. The NGO's income and expenditure statement, its history and objectives in the North East were clearly spelt out. Certificates from DRDA and the Public Health Engineering Department denying they had paid money or given pumps to the NGO were displayed.

If any dissenting outsiders were present at the meeting, they chose to stay silent as some 31 speakers — teachers, women, and representatives of AASU (Majuli) and other political groups came up one by one to express solidarity with the young workers who have adopted Majuli. Even the SDM sat through the meeting. An agitated Kishori Mohan Pal, school teacher, told the gathering that "public opinion formed at the point of a gun is no public opinion. In this atmosphere of fear, despite my age, I find it difficult to speak

out the complete truth. Yet, I would like to say that no other sangathan has done so much for Majuli in such a short time."

Padma Pegu, lecturer in Jengraimukh college, condemned the anonymous poster campaign. "Had they been real militants, they would not be afraid of putting their names and revealing their identity. They must be fake militants," he stated. The entire congregation requested in one voice that their "beacons of hope" should continue working for the development of Majuli.

But will they? Can the local administration and the political system ensure their safety? Committed workers are hard to come by and there is plenty to do in other parts of rural India.

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# Hotline on AIDS counselling planned

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, June 14

A 24-hour hotline to give personalised counselling on AIDS is to be set up in Delhi by the National AIDS Control Organisation before International AIDS Day, Dec. 1.

The MTNL is being approached for a toll-free service. Confidentiality is being assured and the counselling service will have the support of specialists. Called Helpline, it will be run by an NGO to ensure that AIDS awareness acquires a human face even if it is only through a voice on the phone.

A woman social worker, who is successfully running such a service in Chennai gets varied questions from "how do I get my husband to use a condom, he travels so much," to "I think I have AIDS—where do I go for a test?" or "should I have a baby, I am HIV positive?"

After 10 a.m. when the men go

off to work there is a deluge of phone calls from their wives—many of them highly educated women. During lunch hour, when the executives are out, it is the class of four staff that seeks information and advice. While there is great demand for information on AIDS, fear of social boycott keeps people from walking into a doctor's clinic.

A lot of the queries are from young boys. One of them rang up saying I am being courted by a much older woman and now she wants sex. He was advised to use a condom. He called back a few days later to say that since the woman was insistent that he should not use a condom, he had backed off.

The woman running the counselling service was elated. She felt she had saved a life. In another case a man who had never used a condom and found that his wife had AIDS came in for a demonstration on how to use one.

On Helpline while answers to routine questions on sexuality and AIDS will be computerised, for

specific questions that the computer service cannot handle, it will give the caller a reference number and the person can call back and get his answer in 48 hours.

With the April-end survey on HIV and AIDS showing 18.3 per cent of 1000 population sero-positive, a major effort is on to increase AIDS awareness. Fifty per cent of those infected are below 35. Seventytwo per cent of the infected were hetero-sexuals. In 6.6 per cent cases the infection was from blood transfusion, in 1 per cent from blood product infusion, 1.3 per cent contracted it from their spouse, 9.2 per cent through intravenous drug use and 0.3 per cent were homosexuals.

Simultaneously, general information on AIDS and counselling is to be done through FM channels in Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta and Goa. Interspersed with groovy music and entertainment, the AIDS messages, some subtle others not

so subtle, will be in Konkani and Bengali in Goa and Calcutta respectively and in Hindi in the other two cities. The FM programmes, between 1 and 2 p.m., will also give information on sexually transmitted diseases and the do's and don'ts of blood transfusion. Most people do not know that blood pouches are supposed to carry the inscription "free of AIDS virus".

A phone-in voice mail service will be part of the FM channel package. Personalised, interactive communication is the order of the day and NACO has no intention of being left behind.

Simultaneously, NACO is trying to sensitise truck drivers, the major carriers of infection, through specially prepared audio cassettes that they can play as they hurtle down national highways and past inviting brothels. The music will be a constant reminder that danger in the form of a virus may be lurking around any corner and they should be vary.

# Hotline on AIDS is ringing non-stop

Despite media hype, 21,500 calls received over past 50 days

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 3  
Delhi's toll-free hotline on AIDS 1097, has been ringing non-stop since it was set up by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) two months ago. While the average number of calls received every day is 1100, some days 1500 are registered.

Despite all the hype in the media about AIDS, analysis of the some 21,500 calls received over the last 50 days shows an amazing ignorance about HIV and how it is transmitted. A lot of young people are asking questions about their sexuality and seeking to come to terms with the pangs of growing up.

So a common query of adolescents is about masturbation and the chances of their contracting AIDS if they indulge in a bit of sex on their own. Older people want to know if oral sex is safer.

Most callers want to know about HIV/AIDS. "What is it," is a common refrain. What are the symptoms of this killer disease? A lot of them want to know where they can go for testing. Some want specific information on support and care for persons living with AIDS.

The list of government hospitals testing for AIDS — AIIMS, Safdarjang, Guru Teghbahadur, Maulana Azad Medical College and the National Institute of Communicable Disease — does not satisfy them. Many of them want information on the private hospitals and clinics testing for AIDS.

If the callers are not satisfied with the computerised information dishes out, they are asked to call a number where counsellors, both of them highly-qualified psychologists, answer personal queries. At these one to one interactive, though rather brief sessions of two to four minutes on the phone, the commonest questions after the ones on masturbation and

AIDS are on how to use a condom and anal sex and chances of contracting AIDS. Eightyfive per cent of the callers are male. Counsellors attached to the hotline service have also received calls from 13-year-old boys and young girls of 14 and 15.

In the young minds there is a lot of confusion about the spread of AIDS. Does kissing cause AIDS, is a common query. However, just before the New Year there were questions on "smooching" and "blow job" and the chances of contracting AIDS. While a few of the 100-odd personal calls received every day are 'prank' calls, most of them are serious callers, desperate for information and counselling. There have been cases of women breaking down while seeking information on the phone. Counselling is invariably advised for these cases.

The question on how to use a condom is also genuine. A NACO-funded study showed that 45 per cent of the taxi drivers in Delhi did not know how to use one. Of

course some even seek advice on the brand of condom to be used and where they can get it. Nirod is seen as a family planning tool and not as an AIDS preventive.

Women are asking if lesbians can contract AIDS. If the relationship is monogamous between two women, they are told they are safe but if any of the partners is heterosexual they could contract AIDS.

Some disturbing questions are being asked on rape and child abuse. The callers are told firmly that rape is a crime and those contemplating it should consider the consequences — a long jail sentence.

Similar telephonic counselling is available in Calcutta, Guwahati and Mumbai. In fact the MTNL has agreed to make 1097 a national AIDSline. NACO is looking for committed NGOs to run the counselling facility. There is need to increase the lines for the telephonic service in Delhi for the existing two lines are so busy that callers could get put off.

# Health care not on parties' agenda

## Birth, death are part of a life in remote tribal areas

From Usha Rai

DHULE, Feb. 17

In the tribal heartland of Akalkuan and Dhadgaon every family has seven to eight children and the maternal mortality rate is a whopping 25 per 1000 live births, if not more, as against the national average of 4 per 1000. Infant mortality rate too is much more than the national average.

Not all tribals want such large families but they don't know how to keep their families small. Chances are that the primary health centre is 50 kms from their 'padas' or hamlets and may not be properly equipped to provide birth control facilities, doctors play hookey and medicines are seldom available.

"Condoms are available but someone has to teach them how to use them," says Dr A. B. Solepure, head of the Physiology Department, SBH Government medical college, Dhule.

But no political party — neither the Congress nor the Bharatiya Janata Party talks of population control or about the lack of health facilities.

The death of innumerable

young women in child birth does not seem to bother them. "Real issues never figure in the elections", maintain college students of the area.

Tribal leader Manikrao Dave of the Congress, fighting to retain his seat for the fourth time from Nandurbar constituency, has not raised such basic issues. His main opponent is BJP's Janardhan Valvi, ex-MLA of Rampur, an MA in anthropology and a reader in the University.

In the adjoining reserved tribal constituency of Dhule two former bureaucrats are being fielded for the first time. While, Mr D. S. Ahire, has resigned from the State Civil Service and his post of Deputy Collector, to contest on a Congress ticket; the BJP's candidate is Mr Ram Das Gavit, who has just retired from the civil service.

Birth and death are a part of life in the remote tribal areas. So a woman who goes into labour while working in the fields just turns to a woman friend for help. She will most likely cut a bamboo, sharpen one end with her sickle and cut the umbilical cord. If there is no time to find a bamboo the sickle is used. Since the woman are not immunised against tetanus she or the

child may end up dying of tetanus or septicaemia.

In both Akalkuan and Dhadgaon 10 to 20 per cent of the deliveries are conducted by men, very often the holy men of the tribe called Devrishees. They are called in when the attendant is not available. Abnormal practices of delivery have been recorded in these areas — the male attendant sitting on the woman's stomach, using physical force to push out the baby. This could result in the uterus rupturing or the woman bleeding to death.

So it was heartening to see a dozen tribal girls learning the basics of health care and midwifery at Hire Medical College, Dhule. One of the girls had walked 45 kms so that the hospital van could pick her up for the 15 days course, followed by a refresher course after six months.

Instead of political leaders providing the impetus for such programmes that would make life more meaningful for the tribals, it is Dr Solepur who has sought funding from CIDA and designed a course that would put "Tribal health in tribal hands".

So far 40 tribal girls who have

finished school have been trained in the two talukas to cater to a population of 40,000 to 60,000.

The new "doctrine basis," as they are called, are taught how to conduct normal delivery, learn about obstructed delivery and risks, how to treat snake bite, scorpion bite and wounds and the basics of family planning and child care.

They have begun distributing iron tablet and referring difficult cases to PHCs. Most of them keep in touch with the doctors, who trained them, and seek help and guidance for the cases that come to them.

One of the girl's has become a celebrity after she delivered live triplets. The first baby who was stuck had to be turned around and the next two babies came out smoothly. The esteem of the 'doctorine bais' has soared since the birth of the triplets. The local heroine was offered rice and a live goat by the grateful parents, which she refused.

Many of these trained workers are now keen to become fully trained nurses. They want to do their bit for their community and to move ahead irrespective of which political leader rules over their constituency.

# Profit-sharing concept for hospitals mooted

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, March 26

To improve the efficiency of Central Government hospitals and stem the exodus of the brightest and best doctors, technicians and nurses to the private sector, the Health Ministry is seriously considering plans to share the revenue earned by the hospitals with all these professionals.

In an effort to bring in a whiff of the 'private hospital culture' to Government hospitals, the Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, Mr Salim Shervani, proposes to present his carefully worked out plan to the governing body of the All India Institute for Medical Sciences on April 4. It is only after the approval of high-powered body that the profit-sharing concept would be tried out in AIIMS as a pilot project.

Though only two to three per cent of the doctors at AIIMS have left recently to set up their own practice or join private hospitals, the Health Ministry is concerned because they represented the cream of their discipline — like Dr A. K. Banerjee, Dr Ravi Bhatia and Dr A. N. Malviya.

With private hospitals like Apollo and Escorts paying anything from Rs 40,000 to Rs 60,000 a month to their specialists, in addition to various perks like a generous house rent and car, even the proposed profit-sharing venture may not be a good enough match. Still, it is being seen as a positive initiative.

AIIMS earns Rs three to four crore a year through its various facilities. Most of this money goes back to the Government exchequer. If part of it is shared by the

Continued on page 11 col. 7

## Profit-sharing hospitals

Continued from page 1 col. 1

hospital staff, it could jack up wages from Rs 2,000 to Rs 4,000 a month, says Mr Shervani.

It seems that the idea was conceived by the young Minister who, as an industrialist, believes that profit-sharing must be linked to productivity. Each department would thus be motivated to improve its efficiency and productivity. The revenue generated would be shared by all those in the unit including the income-generating cat scan, blood test, MRI and others.

A lot of expensive equipment in

Government hospitals lies perpetually out of order with no one to take responsibility for their maintenance and repair. But the private sector counts its loss every second in this regards. The new proposal aims to create interest in Government hospitals to keep the expensive equipment in good health as it would help the department make profits and in the process earn a little for itself.

To increase cleanliness in hospitals, the Minister is keen on hiring sanitary staff on contract. But this can be done only when the existing staff retires.

# Slow poisoning at the hearth

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, March 27

If outdoor pollution, largely from vehicles, is killing half-a-million every year in India, four times as many people (2.2 million) are dying as a result of indoor (largely cooking on low grade fuels) and outdoor pollution put together, according to the Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI).

In Delhi, the health impacts from particulate matter are 2.5 times higher than those predicted by studies on outdoor pollution only, the TERI study reveals.

Based on the findings of the World Bank project on impact of environment on a country's GNP, Mr Sumeet Saxena and Mr Vikram Dayal of TERI looked at "total exposure" as a basis for the economic valuation of air pollution in India. "They found that in Delhi alone, if all the households using dung cake for cooking were to switch to kerosene, the net economic gain would be at least Rs 280 million.

Based on particulate matter pollution the World Health Organisation had declared, Delhi as the fourth most polluted city of the world. But all the hue and cry in India, so far, has been about vehicular pollution. TERI's study,

however, shows that the rural population is bearing 84 per cent of the total pollution burden.

Particulate matter concentrations in kitchens due to the burning of bio-fuels are known to be 30 times the standard set by WHO, which is 40 micrograms of particulate matter per cubic metre of air. Concentration at the workplace for primary workers could be 12 times the WHO standard, the study shows. Every 10 micrograms increase in particulate matter in a cubic metre of air, increases the mortality rate by one per cent.

Women, in particular those who live in slums, are most vulnerable to pollution and have the highest mortality rate. "Weaker sections who don't have a voice in decision-making are more prone to asthmatic attacks, greater loss of wages and greater medical expenses," says Sumeet Saxena.

To look at the impact of particulate matter in West Delhi slums, TERI conducted a study in two large slums—Kathputly colony in Delhi and Kusumpuri Pahari in South Delhi (4000 households). They then zeroed in on 160 houses, with infant, using fuelwood and kerosene for cooking. The study was conducted from December 1994 to February 1995, a period when the ambient air quality is at its worst.

In Kathputli colony, where the dominant population is from Rajasthan, there was a preference for

fuelwood but in Kusumpuri, kerosene was being used extensively. Ninety-seven per cent of the houses in Kathputly colony were electrified as compared to 54 per cent in Kusumpuri Pahari. Even homes which had a ration card and therefore access to kerosene preferred using wood-fire.

While the kerosene users tended to cook indoors, with their infants also inside the house, most wood users cooked outside their homes and depending on the season kept their children indoors or outdoors. There was considerable overlap of exposure levels for infants in both cases.

While the upward shift towards a cleaner fuel (kerosene) may reduce the exposure, the effect is probably countered by shifting to a less ventilated environment and increased duration of cooking, the study shows.

The daily exposure of women and infants living in slums to pollution exceeded that of people living in rural areas. Further, in urban slums the share of outdoor sources of pollution (Kathputli colony is adjacent to the Shadipur flyover) is significant compared to indoor sources.

The TERI study therefore, advocates a detailed scientific study of the fuel supply and demand situation in slums keeping in mind economic, social and environmental considerations.

# Mid-day meal scheme runs into trouble

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, April 14

The Human Resource Development Ministry's grandiose dreams of attracting children to schools through a nourishing, hot mid-day meal, a la the Tamil Nadu model, have run into serious trouble.

Haryana's enthusiasm for prohibition has led to the hot meal scheme being dropped. Desperately seeking to make up the financial losses it suffered by introducing prohibition, the State is now distributing only dry rations. It's literally a case of food being taken away from the mouths of children to keep the men off the bottle.

In militancy-ravaged Jammu and Kashmir, a hot meal was seen as a positive incentive to bring children to schools — braving bullets. It was also a sure way of steering them away from the educational units run by the militants. Now in J and K too, the hot meal scheme has been curtailed.

While Haryana and J and K are backtracking on the hot meal deal, other States have informed the Centre in no uncertain terms that they will provide hot meals to primary schools only if the Centre picks up the entire bill.

Chief Ministers and Education Ministers, who met here a few months ago to see how education can be made compulsory, have

asked the Centre to bear the cost of conversion of the dry rations scheme to one of hot meals. This means the Centre would have to bear an expenditure of Rs 3,600 crore in 1997-98 for providing the cooked meal to close to 11 crore children in 5.90 lakh schools of the country.

Paying at the rate of 70 paise per meal per child, for dry rations alone, the Centre picked up a bill of Rs 1,400 crore in the Eighth Plan. The cost of a hot meal was tabulated at an additional Rs 1.50 to Rs 1.80 per head.

When former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao announced the scheme from the ramparts of the Red Fort less than two years ago, the States were to provide the additional fund. Now there is danger of the entire scheme being grounded.

Ironically, the CMs and Education Ministers were meeting to see how they can comply with the Supreme Court mandate to make education compulsory. A hot meal was seen as a positive incentive for education in the backward and poorer districts of the country where nutritional levels are low.

Educational Secretary P. R. Dasgupta recalled that when he had gone to J and K to look at the functioning of the scheme, the day's menu was written on a school black board. It was rice and dal. In

the Secretary's presence, a little boy went to the board and added potatoes. There could not have been a more direct way of informing the *sahib* from Delhi that he would love some potatoes with his meal.

While there is little data on the impact of the scheme on enrolments etc, from centres where hot meal is served there have been heart-warming reports of how children look forward to the meal.

Now only Tamil Nadu and Gujarat are pursuing the mid-day meal scheme in right spirit.

"From the beginning, we knew its success depended on community participation," says Mr Dasgupta. So, in consonance with the Rural Development Ministry, money was to be provided through the Jawahar Rozgar Yojna for constructing the sheds where the hot meal was to be cooked. Funds were also provided for recruiting cooks.

However, the fuel, spices and utensils for cooking were to be provided by the States and the village community. The Centre was to provide the transport subsidy at the rate of Rs 25 per quintal. In two years, it was mandatory for the States to convert to the hot meal. In Tamil Nadu, support for the project was ensured by the AIDMK leadership. Monitoring at the grass roots level was done by

the community. Widows and destitute women cooked the meal and earned their livelihood.

What was meant to be an innovative educational scheme to improve enrolments and reduce dropouts has remained "a food distribution scheme of the Central Government," laments the Education Secretary. He now wants a re-look at the scheme and greater involvement of panchayats.

No proper assessment of the benefits of the scheme, if any, can be done since the schools have not adopted the computer management system. Collection of data continues to be manual.

There have also been problems in transporting the food grains to the schools. Since recovery of the money spent on transport has been slow, the offtake of grains from the FCI godowns has been tardy.

Some States wanted to lift three/ four months allotment of wheat or rice in one trip and this, the FCI would not permit. In the hill areas of UP, where the food has to be carried up in head-loads, the transport subsidy was found grossly inadequate.

However, if the scheme works as conceived, primary education would get a boost. For, preliminary reports from the UP plains indicate that enrolment has gone up and there has been a fall in the dropout rate.

# Indian cobbler booted; UNDP steps in

From Usha Rai

BADU (Nagaur Distt) Sept. 8  
As Reebok, Nike and other big names of multinational footwear swamp the Indian market, threatening to drive out the traditional cobbler who for centuries has fashioned the *jhootis* and *mojaris*, UNDP has stepped in with a \$ 15 million intervention to upgrade traditional footwear and increase its marketability.

As the first cycle of help comes to an end, a second tranche of funds has been assured for artisans in the \$ 200 million programme of UNDP assistance to India between 1997 to 2001. On Saturday UNDP administrator Gus Speth took a helicopter ride to Badu village to see for himself how the UN initiative was changing the lives of Padma Ram and other leader artisans.

For the humble reghars, a

helicopter landing in their backyard, was more exciting than the transformation being brought in their lives by the combined efforts of the National Leather Development Programme, Rajasthan's rural non-farm development policy (RUDA) and the half a dozen designers of the National Institute of Fashion Technology.

The villagers came from miles around to see the big bird land. The turnout was as large as for an election rally by a Prime Minister.

Mr Speth was equally enchanted not just by the reception, the pugree gift that admitted him to their fold but the fantastic *jhootis* and *mojaris* on display. He glowed to see the impact of the "little money" given by UNDP. He treasured the pair of *jhootis* gifted to him and bought a large, handmade bag for his wife.

As the standardised *jhootis*, with a distinct left/right identity, guaranteed not to pinch and

decorated with semi-precious stones or elegantly embroidered to suit the urban taste hit the bigger markets of Eab India and Distakar, incomes will go up. A couple team who could earlier make one or two pairs in a day, can now make three pairs with the new technology and designs.

Mr Vinay Oberoi of UNDP says the traditional virtue of the *jhooti* inside the *jhootis* the temperature is 15 degrees cooler than outside when trudging through the deserts in the summer months — has been retained while preparing it for competition from western brand names.

With incomes going up, even if it is by just Rs 20 to 30 in a day, the NLDP hopes to contain the migration of the *mochis* to the big cities of Ahmedabad and Bombay to work in leather factories.

Similar, small but important interventions have been made by the NLDP in Karnataka, Bihar, Calcutta and Delhi. Soon NLDP is

to move into Madhya Pradesh. Beginning with skill upgradation of the Reghar community, UNDP hopes to bring in interventions in health and education too.

Infact except for three large programmes, most of the new assistance from UNDP will be for smaller programmes for those living below the poverty line. The big challenge will be to make artisans into entrepreneurs with micro-credit from this March. In Badu some 1000 households have been targeted.

Mr Amarendra Sinha, head of the NLDP, sees the 3.4 million livestock population Nagaur and the availability of raw hides and skins as an opportunity to create marvellous *jhootis* and leather goods. NIFT designers are already finding other uses for the abundance of hides. But will the individual artisan be able to work as a collective to fulfil the large demands of Delhi's fashion houses or export orders?

# Baby boom may follow target-free approach

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept. 22

The Government's population control programme in three of the four most backward States of the country, with high population growth rate, has suffered a setback because of the target-free approach.

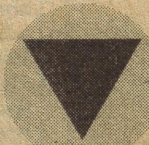
This is a cause of worry for the officials in the Ministry of Health and Family Planning who feel the political climate in the country in 1996 was not favourable for just going off all targets. For 40 years the country had been driven by targets of sterilisation and condom distribution, set by the Centre. And miracles cannot be achieved in a year by removing all controls, an official stated.

Three of the four BIMARU States, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, had a sexual freedom. With no constraints of condoms or Copper Ts, a baby boom is expected out of the liberated libidos of 1996-97.

In Bihar, there will probably be 50 per cent more children born than in the previous year. Uttar Pradesh, where several foreign donor agencies, particularly USAID, have been pumping in money for health and family plan-

**TARGET-FREE APPROACH FAILS**

Percentage change in 1996-97 as compared to 1995-96



|                | Sterilisation | IUD Insertions | OP Users | Condom Users |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------|--------------|
| BIHAR          | -69.0         | -42.1          | -35.2    | -47.8        |
| MADHYA PRADESH | -4.7          | -22.0          | -4.4     | -10.4        |
| RAJASTHAN      | +19.0         | +21.5          | +63.1    | +37.3        |
| UTTAR PRADESH  | -49.7         | -26.7          | -9.5     | -30.1        |

Source: Deptt. of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India

ning, is also expected to register at least 40 per cent more births.

The phenomenal increase in the birth rate is directly related to the 69, 4.7 and 49.7 per cent drop in sterilisations in Bihar, MP and Uttar Pradesh as compared to the previous year. The use of the most popular contraceptive with the least user hassles or side effects—the condom—has dropped drastically—47 per cent in Bihar, 30 per cent in UP and 10 per cent in Madhya Pradesh.

In the three States, insertion rate of the IUD (intra uterine device) and use of oral pill is also dismal—a dramatic drop from the previous year.

However, Rajasthan offers a ray of hope. The authorities here pre-

pared a master register of those wanting to limit their family size and zeroed in on them with contraceptives and reproductive care facilities. There has been a 63 per cent increase in use of oral pills and 37 per cent in use of condoms in Rajasthan.

Unlike other States, Rajasthan has shown strong political, academic and research commitment to family planning. It has a framework for improved management and implementation of the family planning programme conceptualised by the Indian Institute of Health Management.

Despite the drawbacks, the Centre has no plans of reversing the target free approach. Even if one admits that the old figures pro-

vided by the States, regarding sterilisations and contraceptive distribution, are exaggerated, a 69 per cent drop in sterilisations or 40 to 50 per cent drop in use of pills and condoms is worrying.

There will be some quiet introspection in the Ministry on the factors that have set back the national programme for a zero population growth rate. In Bihar and UP the administration has been unstable and bureaucrats have been constantly shuffled like a pack of cards.

The grassroot network of ANMs, health workers and doctors, which should be extra efficient and vigilant in a target-free approach, has just not worked.

Though our population growth rate has dropped from 2.14 per cent to 1.9 per cent, the population base is so enormous that we will be overtaking the population figures of China. Like our literacy goals, we have been constantly pushing back the population control and health-for-all targets. India was to achieve a net reproductive rate of one and a couple protection rate of 60 by 2000. Now very quietly it has been pushed back to 2016. And it may be pushed back further given the poor performance of States in the target-free approach.

# Politics plays havoc with tribals' progress in M-P

From Usha Rai

KHARGONE, Sept. 27

Politics is stymieing development in the *adivasi* heartland of Khargone and Khandwa districts of Madhya Pradesh. Tribals, who were on course to attaining their own empowerment and growth for five years have been pitted against one another by a powerful political group.

This June, Deputy Chief Minister, Subhash Yadhav, who is from Khargone, floated the Adivasi Samaj Sudhar Shanti Sena (ASSSS) to contain the growing influence of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan, which has been working in the region for five years now, and has 12,000 members.

It is not so much the numerical strength of the Sangathan as its ability to counter corruption, be it of the liquor lobby or the timber mafia, underchecking the exploitation of the tribals that was worrying the Sena, says an AMS leader.

The fact that three young people, who were not from Madhya Pradesh — Bijya, Madhuri and Nikunj — were spearheading the AMS was cause for further resentment among the home-grown Patels, backed by the Congress. While the AMS has strains of the Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha with its raised-fist *zindabad* salute, its philosophy of *gram swaraj* is Gandhian.

However, a vicious campaign is building up and the AMS workers, who are reviving the *adivasi* self-rule culture, are being labelled as Naxalites.

Chief Minister Digvijay Singh said he had been encouraging the AMS workers. But recently these workers have been inciting violence. However, the CM admitted that criminal elements are there on both sides. He said he was planning to call a meeting of tribal leaders like Kanta Behen to bring peace to the region.

Since July, the rivalry and efforts to squash the AMS has snowballed into a kind of gang war, in which many of the opponents are close relatives, even brothers. The fields and village hamlets have been splattered with blood.

There have been three murders — Jirbhan Patel and Jagadiya Patel, the latter the block president of the Congress, and Kalia, an AMS leader. Bows, arrow and spears have been used in these murders. Though there were three policemen present when Jagadiya Patel was murdered and 16 when Kalia was killed, they could not stop the gruesome killings. In fact, Kalia was killed in police custody while being taken to his village for investigations.

Kalia's wife, Namlubai, has been gangraped. Since she has been hiding in the jungles, terrified for her life, no case has been registered. Five other women have filed complaints of rape, which are being investigated by the National Commission for Women. Four people have been reported missing and some 400 frightened families, have been on the run for a month — most of them hiding in the forests.

At Rama Ki Phalia, Kabri, the first few families are slowly

trickling back into the villages. Though the houses are intact, the grain, cots, wooden poles and other household items have been looted. "We have nothing to eat," they wept.

Two women complained that the Shanti Sena had barred their entry into their homes. "If you are with the Sangathan go to their villages," Kulamtibai was told at her home at Sagmuli Phalia. She had returned home on Wednesday night and had slept in her hut. The next morning four men, with faces covered, asked her to leave her house. "If you don't leave, we will cut off your head," they threatened. Only her old father-in-law was allowed to stay.

Naizabai, Kabria's sister, who was arrested for the murder of Jagadiya Patel, came to her maternal home at Roop Ki Phalia on Thursday. She told this correspondent that she was not allowed to enter. In fact, she was told, the houses and land were theirs now. "You cannot enter," they said.

District Collector C. P. Arora, however, said the disgruntled people were the immediate relatives of those arrested for murder and rioting.

Even as cries of 'revenge' and 'finish them' rent the air, the excellent crop of jowhar and maize is waiting to be harvested. The police and local administration, which seem to be supporting the Deputy CM, but do not want to admit it, is in a tizzy. Some 86 people have been charged with rioting, extortion and assault.

Twenty people have been charged with murder of whom 16 have

surrendered. If the villagers do not return and harvest the crops, it will be a bleak year for many families, till the next harvest.

While the AMS has been working in some 200 villages in three blocks of West Nimad District, the Sena, with their growing political clout, backed by muscle power, is active in just half a dozen villages. The AMS too has its share of hot heads.

What sparked off the present confrontation is not clear. The administration and the AMS have such divergent views that it is difficult to get at the truth.

According to Gajanand Brahne, chief of AMS at Chattli, Bhim Singh Patel and Dongar Patel, two brothers of Jhulwania, had been fighting over land for several years. In July, as per the tradition that AMS has been supporting, five people from each side worked out a settlement and a fine of Rs 13,000 was imposed on Bhim Singh who was also the village Patel. Bhim Singh reportedly felt slighted but promptly paid up Rs 2500.

But by the time the date for the next payment came up, he allegedly employed two people to kill Dongar and Kalia, a key person who tried to sort out the dispute. Bhim Singh is said to have got the support of Jagadiya Patel and Mangal of the Shanti Sena who were waiting to destroy the AMS. For three days from August 22, Kalia was chased till he disappeared into the jungles beyond Kamod. Both Kalia and Dongar Patel's houses were destroyed.

However, according to

Commissioner Iqbal Ahmed and Collector Arora the present conflagration can be traced to the ASSM's rise in a very short time and the challenge they posed to the AMS. At Kabria, Jagadiya Patel assumed power as the Patel of Kabri defeating Rema Patel, the *sarpanch* who was with the AMS. In adjoining Jhulwani, Kalia lost the fight to become *sarpanch* to Bhim Singh's son, Attar Singh. At Kaniapani, Kalia's nominee is said to have been defeated by Jirbhan Patel, whose body was found the day after the killing of Jagadiya Patel.

"People can kill to grab important posts," Mr Ahmed stated, and the post of Patel is an important one. He gets money when there is a marriage in the village and when a dispute is resolved with his help. He is also supposed to protect encroachments on forest land.

"The AMS was doing good work, creating awareness of rights among the villagers," he said. "However, some criminal elements have got into the Sangathan. There are no forests left in Khargone," said Mr Ahmed reiterating a complaint voiced by Congress Deputy Chief Minister Subhash Yadhav. Since 1992 some 38,000 hacs of forest land have been encroached upon by *adivasis* doing *Newad* or crop rotation on forest land. In Burhanpur, Khandwa district, the AMS is also operating 7000 hacs of forest land under *Newad*, he pointed out.

Quite clearly while stoking a fire no one realised it would rage out of their control.

(To be continued)

## Where dissent is dubbed as Naxal voice

From Usha Rai

KHARGONE, Sept. 28

It is difficult to think of a tribal belt where alcohol, even the traditional mahua, is shunned. But in Khargone and Khadwa districts when a tribal becomes a member of the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan (AMS) he picks up a fistful of *jowhar* and some water and pledges to abstain from liquor.

It's been a long struggle to wean away the tribals from the pleasures of alcohol — a struggle that was not appreciated by the strong liquor lobby in the districts. In fact, not only did they abstain from drinking but protested against the opening of liquor vends in tribal areas. On Oct. 2, 1993, dharnas were held for eight days in front of liquor shops all over Khargone. Women broke *bhatties* and liquor bottles in Warla too.

This was resented by some local Congress leaders who were in the liquor business. They started speaking against the AMS and offered free booze to other tribals, who were not members of the Sangathan.

In fact, a people's organisation, led and managed by tribals, and taking up issues like land *pattas* for tribals, land alienation, opposing money-lending or the exploitation in the cotton market found itself opposed by vested interests all around. The work of the Sangathan has so impressed the Thakkar Bapa Trust that for two consecutive years it has been receiving its award of Rs 50,000. Other national networks like the Bharat Jan Andolan, National Front for Adivasi Self Rule and the Azadi Bachao Andolan have also been supporting the AMS.

With most of the Sangathan members on the run these days, the group at Chatli in Sendhawa tehsil has become the centre of the AMS operations. Information filters in throughout the day — of persons picked up by the police, the fate of women and children and the standing crops. It was at Chatli that this correspondent met Gajanand Brahne, Gendram

Dava, Jagdish Bhai, Kumsigh Khartia and Sumlibai, who are in-charge of women's welfare.

While the district administration has accused the Sangathan of encroachment of forest land, the team at Chatli says for years the district forest officers were allowing the tribals to cultivate forest land after taking a fee that varied from Rs 2,000 to Rs 10,000 per family. The Sangathan said no money should be given for 'newad' (cultivation on forest land) and demanded that *pattas* for those living on forest land prior to 1980.

When the forest officials and patwaris found they could no longer exploit the organised tribals they turned against them. Gajanand recalls how two villages gave 70 kg of dal, 70 kg of chillies, eight quintal of jowhar, makka, etc. In some cases Rs 3,000 is taken before the sowing starts and another Rs 3,000 when the crop is harvested. When they refuse to pay the *newad* fee, the forest officials threaten to grow plantations on land they have been cultivating for years.

The classic case, however, is of Nansingh of Tallaw village, Neewal range of Sendhwa. When he refused to bribe forest guard Sharma, a forest plantation was grown on the *newad* land. One Maggen Patel is said to have offered Rs 81,000 for *newad* on the same 20/25 acres that Nansingh had been cultivating. The just shown plantation was razed to the ground. Maggen Patel, in turn, recovered his money and probably more by parcelling out the fertile land to 10 farmers. In some cases, some 30 people are fighting for the same piece of land.

What the local administration and forest department need to do immediately is give *pattas* to those who were living on the forest land prior to 1980 so that further encroachments are checked. "Instead of appreciating our work we are being called Naxalites and implicated in false cases", says Jagdish.

In Warla, Bhagwanpura and Dhoul, 200 members of the Sangathan patrolled the forest areas

for 12 days to check the timber mafia. Thirty-nine tribals from 10 villages were caught illegally extracting timber. Cases were registered against 26 people. The *mukhia* would collect a fee from the villagers for this illegal extraction and share it with the forester.

To facilitate movement of the timber across the border to Maharashtra, temporary houses were constructed with the timber. An application was then moved to shift the old house to a new location and a permit procured for transferring the timber. So, all those disenchanted by the Sangathan's activities and its patrolling joined the Shanti Sena.

In Serwal range, Jirnia tehsil, a settlement department surveyor collected Rs 1.65 lakh at the rate of Rs 1,500 per family and assured them *pattas* of the forest land. When the Sangathan got to know about it, it retrieved the money and had it returned to the villagers. All the money grabbing activities by people in responsible positions were stopped in 200 vanigrams (forest villages) of Khargone and Khandwa. This could not be stomach.

The AMS also stopped the exploitation of the poor tribals by money lenders. Lokha of Jirjami village, Sendhwa had kept 3 kg of silver under mortgage for a loan of Rs 8,000 with one Radhe Shyam Agarwal. Lokha had paid him back in cotton, worth Rs 18,000. But Agarwal refused to recognise Lokha till the Sangathan showed him receipts of the cotton bags that were sent to him.

The Sangathan has over the last couple of years enabled 1,000 tribals to recover their goods from money lenders. Some 200 cases of land mortgaged to money lenders that the Sangathan has taken up are lying with the Badwani revenue courts. Gopal Reddy, the former collector of Khargone and Pramod Agarwal, SDM, Badwani were helping the Sangathan in recovery of the mortgaged land. Both were transferred.

(To be continued)

# AMS under attack for accepting foreign funds

From Usha Rai

**KHARGONE, Sept. 30**  
When there is no stick to beat a voluntary organisation involved in creating social awareness and challenging the existing structures, the social activists are accused of Naxalism and receiving foreign funds.

In the conflagration between the Adivasi Samaj Sudhar Shanti Sena (ASSSS) and the Adivasi Mukti Sangathan (AMS), the latter has been accused of receiving foreign funds. While there is nothing wrong about receiving money for development from any source, it is pertinent to point out that the AMS had taken a conscious deci-

sion at its inception not to accept foreign funds.

The unaudited statement of AMS from April 1992 to March this year shows that it has Rs 7.93 lakh in its kitty. This includes Rs 1 lakh it has received as award money from the Thakkar Bapa Trust over two years. Membership fees and community donations for rallies, dharnas and publicity material is a little over Rs 6 lakh. The membership fee per head is Rs 50 a month. Friends and supporters have contributed a little over Rs 92,000.

Rahul Bannerji and Subhadra Kharpade, a young couple, who have received the MacArthur fellowship for a women and health project in Madhya Pradesh, have

also come in for attack as recipient of foreign funds. In fact one of the regional papers had a headline that screamed 'foreign funds for Dalit woman.' Does this mean that the so-called protectors of Indian nationalism would have no objection if the funds had been given to an upper caste woman.

Ms Poonam Muttreja of the MacArthur Foundation said of the 22 fellowships given by the Foundation in the last three years, four have gone to a husband and wife team. Rahul and Subhadra have received about Rs 22 lakh for a three-year project. The fellowship is a coveted one and the grant could vary from Rs 1 lakh a year to Rs 8 to 10 lakh depending on the project.

Most of the fellows are working on women and health or employment and skill upgradation related project. The Foundation supports activism that would change the fabric of society to empower women. However, what the so-called keepers of the nation's conscience do not know is that most of the funds go into the project itself. Very little money is retained as their wage. Some in fact keep just Rs 3,000 to Rs 4,000 a wage as their salary.

The work of the MacArthur fellows is constantly reviewed by experts and the special inputs they need to make a success of their project are given after due assessment.

# Condoms on a platter to cap the meals

*Renuka suggests novel way to check population boom*

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 15  
The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has decided to go bananas over condoms. Condom vending machines in public places,

a bowl of condoms on the tables of senior officials in the Ministry and a red carpet for the London Rubber Company's new brands for the elite classes.

With the removal of family planning targets and a mind boggling 20 million being added to the population of India every year, the Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Mrs Renuka Chowdhury, has decided to follow in the footsteps of Thailand's condom king, Mr Michai Verawaty, and demystify the rubber.

Visitors to her room can see a map of India made out of multicoloured condoms. If Mr Michai can blow up the condom and distribute it to children, Mrs Chowdhury does not see why after a meal hotels cannot serve a condom along with the *naan* and *supari*. In five-star hotels if moisturiser and perfumed liquid

soap are provided, why not condoms — a la the class of the hotel? The tete-a-tete with the hotel industry, however, has yet to take place.

In keeping with the new spirit, at the V Channel awards it is learnt that condoms are to be displayed and distributed to the fun-loving music buffs.

The sudden increase in the status of the condom stems not only from its importance in the population control programme but its indispensability for the AIDS programme. After a hue and cry was raised, the quality of condoms in the Indian market is now at par with those used in the West. World Health Organisation (WHO) standards have been met.

In fact, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) has found that many people still don't know how to use the condom. So demonstrations on

how to put on a condom and how to take it off and dispose of it are being worked out — though this responsibility has been largely left to the NGOs. To the more prudish in her Ministry, Mrs Chowdhury has been saying, "There is more rubber in a ball than in a condom, so why this fuss about publicly handling the condom?"

In fact, there is a marked shift in the condom distribution programme. No more free supplies for the users. The good old Nirodh has been repackaged and its quality improved with some lubrication. Earlier, the Centre kept a regular supply of condoms but there was great wastage at the user end because no one quite respected the free doles.

Now the health workers get the supply and sell it for 10 paise a piece. At the end of the day an enterprising worker may make a tidy Rs 2 to Rs 5. Utilisation of the

condom is ensured when the user expresses a demand for it. The Ministry has also sent out a message that health workers must explain how the condom is to be used as they garner their paisa.

While free supplies are being phased out, commercial and social marketing of the condom is picking up. In the last financial year, 260 million pieces of the priced condoms were sold as against 160 million in 1995-96.

Condom vending machines are to be set up in airports and hotels. They will be placed in a fairly quiet corner so that privacy is ensured for those collecting them. In some pockets of Bombay, the condom vending machines are being put up by the Family Planning Association. They were functioning well in the Sulabh toilets where there is a person to explain how to operate the machines.

39 pc rural population under poverty line

## *For them, even buying potatoes is a dream*

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 3

Staggering 16 per cent of the rural population of India have access to less than Rs 3 a day which is less than the price of potatoes. Another 18 per cent are slightly better off—they can scrape together Rs 5 a day.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research, after four years of study of 33,000 rural household in 16 States looking at 300 parameters has come out with a human development profile of rural India that should shudder down the spines of development authorities and the affluent who are putting down hard cash for their second Cielo, their third BPL television set or the latest micro oven.

The 1994 report, which was released in Bhopal last Saturday at a Government of Madhya Pradesh/UNDP workshop on State level Human Development Reports reveals that 39 per cent of the rural population is living below the poverty line or earning less than Rs 2,444 per capita per year. It may be recalled that the Planning Commission about a year ago had claimed that the population living below the poverty line was 19 per cent and not 36 per cent. Subsequently it had to retract. According to the Government those earning less than Rs 11,000 a year are said to be below the poverty line.

According to the NCAER survey, however, the all India annual income in Village India is Rs 4,485. In Orissa and West Bengal, which have never been included in the BIMARU category, the

annual per capita is Rs 3,028 and Rs 3,157 respectively. It is considerably lower than Bihar's Rs 3,169, UP's Rs 4,185, MP's Rs 4,166 and Rajasthan's Rs 4,229.

Experts who had gathered at Bhopal said Orissa and West Bengal should be included in the list of Bimaru States so that they could receive the special attention needed to bring them out of the poverty trap. A great deal of surprise was expressed at the low income and high poverty level of West Bengal, a State that had introduced panchayati raj or people's rule at the grass root as far back as 1978.

The survey shows that 55 per cent of the rural population of Orissa is living below the poverty line and in West Bengal 51 per cent of the population is in the poverty trap. Dr Abusalef Shariff, princip-

al economist and head of the Human Development Programme Area—NCAER, says "the poor are everywhere — even behind palaces. They are frightened, ignorant, insecure and lack direction. They survive without knowing where the next meal will come from and their families are not cohesive units." Poverty like beauty cannot be defined.

The highest per capita in rural India is in Punjab Rs 6,380, followed by Haryana—Rs 6,368. But even these affluent States have pockets of rural poverty. Thirty-two per cent of the rural poor in Punjab and 27 per cent in Haryana live below the poverty line. The survey shows relatively higher poverty estimates from Punjab which most people will find unacceptable, says Mr Shariff. This could be because of the high prop-

ortion of wage labour from Bihar and UP—many of who have formed migrant slums, says Dr Shariff.

Within poor households, children, the elderly and women have less access to resources than the man and are poorer.

Poverty can also be measured by the poor's access to piped water, electricity, 'kutcha' or 'pucca' houses and the public distribution system. A staggering 55 per cent of the rural population of the country still live in kutcha houses. Despite the Government's much touted schemes for electrification, barely 16 per cent of the rural homes in West Bengal and about 19 per cent in Orissa have electricity.

Though about 50 per cent of the rural households in the most backward States have potable water, pipe water supply is still like manna from heaven in most villages.

## 37 pc rural Indians landless

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 4 — If the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar's lament was that he did not even have *do gaz zameen* for his final resting place, 37 per cent of rural India's bigger lament is that they are landless and cannot hope to harvest even a single meal on their own turf.

The 63 per cent of the rural households that do own land have about 4.5 acres per house, says the National Council of Applied Economic Research's (NCAER) human development profile of rural India. Because of the large number of landless, the average land holding works out to 2.8 acres.

Not only is there a huge mass of landless humanity but those working as agricultural labour find employment only for 137 days in a year. Non-agricultural labour gets work for 152 days in a year. Both the Census and National Sample Survey categorise as workers only those who work for 180 days in a

year. This means that they are underestimating the number of those living on daily wages.

The NCAER report, based on a survey of 33,000 households, makes it abundantly clear that lack of employment stability in rural areas is a major reason for the high percentage of rural poverty (39 per cent).

The all-India agricultural labour's wage rate, revealed by the survey of 16 States, is Rs 21 and the rate for non-agricultural labour Rs 28. (The average annual agricultural wage income per worker is Rs 2848 and from non-agriculture employment Rs 4313). This seems to be substantially lower than the minimum wages fixed by State Governments for casual labour. While in Pondicherry the official minimum wage rate is just Rs 19.50, in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi it varies from Rs 65 to Rs 70 a day.

In Haryana and Punjab, the NCAER survey reveals an agriculture wage rate of Rs 42 and Rs 35 respectively. But the catch is that

they offer employment just for 75 to 88 days in the whole year, says Dr Abusaleh Shariff, NCAER's principal economist and head of the Human Resource Development Programme Area.

Kerala has an agriculture wage employment rate of Rs 40 a year and provides work to casual labour for at least 130 days in a year. In fact employment stability is higher in all southern States. The one plus point brought out by the survey is that non-agricultural wage rates are higher than for agriculture labour and the employment stability is marginally better.

The survey also shows what Dr Shariff calls the "feminisation of the wage worker" and the gross difference in the wages earned by men and women despite all the thunder and fury over "equal pay for equal work". While 35 per cent of the men in rural areas are wage earners, 43 per cent of the rural women subsist on daily wages.

While men get 145 days work in a year, women get work only for 124 days.

# Potable water still a mirage in villages

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 5

Fifty years after Independence, piped water remains a pipe dream in rural India. Neither the fanfare of a Water Decade nor all the carefully nurtured plans to the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission have brought the trickle of aqua pura to village homes.

Just 25 per cent of rural homes have a tap which can be turned on to quench a family's thirst, says the NCAER's human development profile of rural India. Just how many of these taps function or produce the trickle is another issue. At the bottom of the heap is Bihar where just 4 per cent of the household have piped water. In the North East and West Bengal about 9 per cent of rural homes have this manna of a piped supply. The best rural piped water distribution is in Himachal Pradesh—71 per cent.

Like piped water, rural electrification remains a mirage. National leaders would do well to ponder on the literacy and education levels of those 57 per cent of the

rural household that continue to depend on candles, oil wicks or kerosene lamps to dispel darkness. Can Bihar and West Bengal, where just 10 to 15 per cent of the rural households have electricity, be pulled out of the bottomless pit of gloom?

In its attempt to document material well being of rural India and its assets, the NCAER has looked at land holdings, house ownership, cattle wealth, availability of potable water, pipe water, electricity, public distribution system and ownership of TV sets, bicycles and radios.

Though 72 per cent of rural homes have potable water, in Orissa and Rajasthan just 49 and 46 per cent of the households have access to safe drinking water. Yet, the availability of clean water determines the health status of rural poor.

Though 95 per cent of the rural households are house owners, 55 per cent of them live in kutcha houses or make-shift huts. In fact the most important asset of a villager is land and as pointed out in an earlier report 37 per cent are land-

less.

The second most important asset is cattle. But the average cattle wealth of 330 million rural households is astonishingly low — just one draught animal and one milch animal. And yet for all those without land, milch animals are an important source of livelihood. Milch cattle ownership is highest in MP, Orissa, Rajasthan, Punjab, HP and Haryana. It is lowest in the Southern States.

The survey reveals that 54 per cent of the rural households own bicycles. It is even higher in the backward States of UP, Bihar and MP where a cycle reflects the failure of the State to provide a public transport system. Though in Punjab and Haryana 75 to 80 per cent of the households own cycles, most of them are the fancy bikes which provides joy rides for the youngsters. Just 3.9 per cent of the rural population have graduated to owning a motorcycle.

The idiot box is still out of the reach of 88 per cent of rural homes. While TV ownership is as high as 38 to 40 per cent in Punjab and Haryana, in Bihar, Orissa,

West Bengal, UP and Rajasthan just six to eight per cent of the homes enjoy the luxury of electronic entertainment. Twentyfive to thirty per cent of these homes do, however, own radios or transistors as against 60 per cent in Kerala, Haryana and the North Eastern region.

Directly linked to availability of electricity is the ownership of fans. While 78 per cent of rural households have fans in Punjab and Haryana; in Western and Southern India 30 per cent have fans and in the five most backward states they continue to sweat it out. Just 15 per cent have fans. In Bihar and West Bengal the percentage drops to 4.4 and 8 per cent, respectively.

Dr Abusaleh Shariff, principal economist — NCAER, says a separate kitchen reflects space provided to the woman of the house. Just 42 per cent of rural households have a separate kitchen. Children of homes with separate kitchen show an 8 per cent higher level of nutrition than those in household where there is no separate kitchen, says Dr Shariff.

# Meal scheme leaves no room for kids

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9

The mid-day meal scheme, started by former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao with great fanfare, is supposed to fill empty bellies and enthruse children to attend school. But in some 68 primary schools in Rewari district of Haryana, grains have been stocked in classrooms and children squat out in the open.

This shocking state of Haryana's primary education came to the notice of an NCERT team which is implementing a six-month innovative pilot project on universalisation of primary education among the disadvantaged.

In Haryana, children with 80 per cent attendance are given grains that they can take home. But Haryana is a grain surplus state and no one needs to depend on

Government doles. So the classrooms are bursting with grains as if they are Food Corporation of India godowns.

The NCERT team noticed both fake enrolment and over-enrolment in the schools. This could be because now it is mandatory to come through the Government school system to get into the much sought after Navodaya schools.

Utilisation of available space is poor not only in primary schools, but also in the anganwadis where three-fourths of the area is utilised to stock food for infants and pre-primary toddlers.

Yet Haryana is one State where a lot of effort has gone in to improving the infrastructure for primary education. Most schools have drinking water and toilet facilities, and some even have a boundary wall. But there are no proper clas-

srooms and the existing ones have been used to stock grains. The special equipment provided under Operation Black Board is lying in cupboards in the locked rooms.

Though Haryana has spent a lot of money on school infrastructure, no provisions have been made for its maintenance. There are no *chowkidars* to guard the property of the schools.

In Ballabgharh, children were seen walking out of the school for water. The brass taps of the school were stolen and the plastic ones did not last even a day. Often the school authorities gave up the effort to install a tap that worked.

In the absence of a guard in Noh, the villagers were seen defecating inside the school building, and in one school even inside a classroom.

It's been difficult to trial 290

head teachers and teachers in gender equity, quality education and joyful learning when there are no classrooms, desks or black boards.

As the students sit out in the open without desks or stools on which they can place their note books, then handwriting is not good and trying to rectify it is a challenging task.

The more progressive schools in Delhi insist on pencils being used till class three or four. But in the Haryana primary schools children slough over their books on the ground and use ball-point pens.

Though most of the panchayats have VECs, there is a power struggle between the head teachers of the school, who are the executive officers of the committees, and the panchayats.

# Row over patent right for malaria drug

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec 13

**D**R D CHATTOPADH-  
YAY, a scientist working  
at the regional centre of  
the Indian Council of Medical  
Research (ICMR) in the  
Andamans, has discovered a  
plant extract which is effective in  
treatment of malaria per se and  
the P Falciparum variety of  
cerebral malaria in particular.

The discovery of a natural  
plant extract, endemic to the  
Andaman Islands, should have  
scientists whopping in elation for  
cerebral malaria is on the rise and  
has claimed over 650 lives  
(official figures) in the first eight

months of this year.

But an ugly controversy is  
brewing on who should hold the  
patent rights. While the  
indigenous tribals of the region,  
the Onges, have used the plant  
extract for centuries to fight  
fever, the confirmation of its  
immense potency in combating  
malaria has made others keen to  
claim the fruits of the discovery.  
The director of the regional  
centre of the ICMR, it is learnt, is  
keen to publish the findings in his  
own name and subsequently  
claim a patent.

Mr Samir Acharya of the  
Society for Andaman and  
Nicobar Ecology, who has been  
watching over the ICMR studies,  
says the project was initiated by  
Dr Chattopadhyay after he

noticed that the Onges of the  
Little Andamans managed to stay  
free of malaria though it was  
rampant among the non-tribal  
population of the island. Dr  
Chattopadhyay started testing the  
plants the Onges used for  
medicinal purposes. One  
particular plant, he found, was  
being used routinely for fever and  
gastro-intestinal disorders. The  
anti-malarial effect of this plant  
extract was confirmed by Dr P C  
Mahajan, head of the  
Parasitology Department of the  
PGI, Chandigarh.

The plant extract was found  
effective even in P Falciparum  
cases that have developed  
resistance to the common  
anti-malarial drugs. What is more  
the dosage required was

exceedingly low — 30  
micrograms of aqueous crude  
extract per ml.

The plant, whose name is  
being deliberately withheld, is  
one of the 221 species of plants  
found only in the Andamans.  
About 45 plants, endemic to the  
region, are used by the tribes for  
medicines.

The discovery is likely to  
re-ignite the debate about patents,  
community knowledge and  
tribals rights, says Ashish  
Kothari, lecturer at the Indian  
Institute of Public  
Administration. Dr  
Chattopadhyay, who discovered  
the anti-malarial properties of the  
plant, Mr Samir Acharya and Mr  
Kothari would like the benefits  
arising from the use of the plant

to be shared with the Onges.

Mr Kothari has, in fact, sought  
the assistance of the Environment  
and Forest Minister, Mr Rajesh  
Pilot, in acknowledging the Onge  
tribe's contribution to the  
discovery by sharing the benefits  
that accrue.

If the director of the regional  
centre of the ICMR is allowed to  
patent the discovery in his own  
name, it would amount to serious  
violation of the commitment of  
the Government to protect the  
rights of local communities, Mr  
Kothari has pointed out.

He has pleaded that the  
concerned plant species be  
protected from outside agencies  
till the rights and contributions of  
the Onge tribe are publicly  
recognised.

## **BOTTOMLINE**

# Health for all—a receding mirage

*The Regional Report of WHO has a dismal message to convey—the millennium will end without the goal of “Health for all” being anywhere near achievement, writes Usha Rai*

**W**ITH just three years to go for the Health For all target to be achieved, the South, East Asia Region of WHO has expressed with regret that there is no way that the goal can be reached.

In fact, what is probably unique about the profile of this region is the double burden of disease that it carries—the old ones that cling on and the ugly, new ones that are emerging. Diseases of poverty and affluence co-exist claiming millions of lives.

In its first Regional Health Report, WHO has pointed out that old scourges like cholera and tuberculosis still dominate the disease pattern and malaria, plague and kala-azar, which were on the verge of extinction, have reappeared.

An added cause of concern, for India in particular, is the appearance of drug resistant strains of tuberculosis, gonococcal infections and malaria.

Tuberculosis still kills more

adults than any other single infectious disease and 80 per cent of the deaths are of those in the reproductive age of 15 to 59. Last year there were 3.5 million new cases, which is 40 per cent of the global burden, and it is estimated that 1.2 million people died.

The most cost-effective way to stop the spread of the disease is to cure it and this could be done only when health workers personally watch patients take each and every dose of the medicine for the prescribed number of months. In India where patients are spread across the rural hinterland and there is a continuous shortage of health workers, the WHO strategy may not work.

And yet TB needs to be tackled on a war footing as HIV-positive persons, with a prior TB infection are specially vulnerable to developing active tuberculosis. Sixty to 80 per cent of the AIDS patients in India, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand develop tuberculosis.

Malaria too has staged a comeback and the emergence of drug-resistant malaria and its rapid spread has become a major concern for all endemic countries of this region. In 1994, of the 2.9 million cases reported in this region, 7494 died.

In addition to viral hepatitis A, B and C, hepatitis E is emerging as a health problem in this region. Between 1983 and 1995, there were 50 large outbreaks of this form of hepatitis in India.

However, what is truly shocking is the phenomenal number of maternal deaths reported worldwide—585,000. Of these 99, are in developing countries and 235,000 from this region. In fact there is not even proper data on the subject and statistics put out by national governments and the UN agencies differ. In India for every 100,000 live births, 580 women die.

In the industrial and affluent pockets there had been a spurt in

heart ailments. In India 8, lakh people die annually of heart disease and 6, lakh from a stroke.

UN reports are seldom critical. But this one points out that despite 4 to 5 million people in India suffering from severe mental disorders, mental hospitals in this region are still mainly custodial and inward looking and do little to help the mentally ill.

Between 1971 and 1991 there was 277 per cent increase in road fatalities in India. In 1994 60,000 people were killed in accidents and this number will rise further, the Report warns. Cancer has never been considered a major killer. However, in India over a thousand people die of cancer every day.

The Report suggests remedies—trained midwives to reduce maternal mortality, reversal of the trend for expensive medicines and clear government policies on privatisation so that health care does not go out of the reach of poor in the region.

**W**HEN you teach rural artisans and craftsmen to talk... to support themselves in the market driven economy of today... they could end up running — creating joyfully, earning well and reaching for the stars.

For a non-government organisation working in remote desert tracks of the country there could be no greater satisfaction than to see the poorest of the poor taking charge of their lives, marketing their skills and crafts.

In 1987-88 when Urmul Rural Health Research and Development Trust began working in the desert district of Bikaner, western Rajasthan was going through one of its worst droughts. Urmul's band of workers looked at various alternatives for a livelihood for the women and struck gold with spinning. Some 500 women were engaged in making yarn from sheep wool.

The next problem was finding an outlet for the yarn. At a mela in Jodhpur, the young NGOs saw traders selling a colourful *pattu* (shawl) and decided to convert the yarn into shawls. But Lunkaransar, Urmul's operational base, did not have many traditional weavers. Then they met Ramchander, a traditional weaver, at Pokharan tehsil of Jaisalmer who came with four other weavers to Lunkaransar, took the yarn back to his home and came back with the finished product.

The five weavers then moved to Lunkaransar and for two years stayed on at the project site, training villagers — largely scheduled caste men — in weaving. A student of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, on a visit to the pro-

# Tapping rural talent

*Weavers and others find sustenance under an NGO umbrella in western Rajasthan, reports USHA RAI*

ject decided to stay on working on the *pattu*, designs and ensuring that the rich colours of black, red, blue and green did not bleed.

In 1990 Ramchander and his team decided to go back to their homes in Phalodi, Jodhpur district, and set up their own society of weavers. If it did not succeed, they agreed to come back to Lunkaransar after a year.

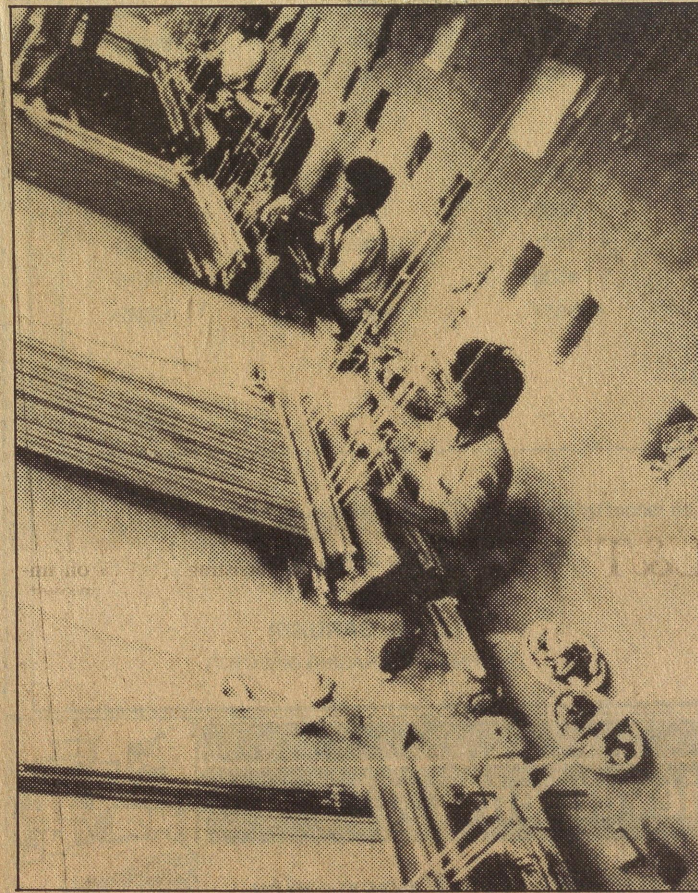
The weavers have not looked back. In 1990 they registered the Urmul Marusthali Bunker Vikas Samiti with 70 weavers. By 1996, 170 weavers joined the Samiti. The vibrant colours of Rajasthan were woven into an amazing variety of shawls, *durries* and cushion covers. Sales soared from Rs 18 lakh in 1992 to Rs 38 lakh in March this year — 50 per cent of the turnover being exported to Japan, Switzerland, Italy and New Zealand.

In 1993 the Samiti realised that the weavers' income was rising but their educational standards were poor. So it entered into development work and began to improve its own people. Today, the Samiti runs 35 primary schools under the Shiksha Karmi Yojana, 14 angan-

shalas for girls (the only model of its kind for girls' education) in Phalodi, is involved in implementing the Lok Jumbish basic education project and is working on integrated rural development in 10 other clusters.

The transformation of the humble weaver has been phenomenal. Major decisions are taken collectively by the Samiti. Some of them, like the decision not to drink alcohol or consume drugs are extremely progressive. It was also decided that no wedding *baraat* would stay for more than a night at the bride's village. The wives of the weavers have formed small groups and are running their own credit facility service. The Bunkar Vikas Samiti is the only group of its kind in western Rajasthan — where from the income generated from weaving they have gone into other development work. In all, the weavers are working with close to 40,000 people from 60 villages of Jodhpur (Phalodi block) and Jaisalmer (Pokharan block).

In Bajju block of Bikaner, Urmul was working in basic prim-



*Weaving shawls at Phalodi*

ary education and health care. The women who had moved into the area from Pakistan in the early eighties had been skilled in embroidery traditionally but 10 years in camps and the trauma of relocation had resulted in de-

terioration of their skill. Those born in India were almost ignorant about embroidery.

Today, 100 women do embroidery for Urmul. They choose their own colour combinations and embroider kurtas, caps, cushion

covers and bedspreads. Two of the Bajju women act as community facilitators. They offtake the threads and fabrics from Bajju and distribute the work among the women and bring back the finished product for quality check. The women have now come out of their shells and they supplement the family income with Rs 300 to Rs 600 a month. The facilitators get commission from the women as well as from Urmul.

In Sikar district of Rajasthan, the Urmul network extended a helping hand to the Reghar community of traditional tanners. With the modernisation of tanning processes their traditional method was not good enough. So they switched to making *jooties*, and the women provided that little dash of embroidery to make the *jooties* sell.

In 1994 Abhay Anusthan society of the *jootie* makers was set up with the support of the district collector. Urmul provided the management support, the design ideas, helped source raw material at cheaper rates and found access to alternate markets.

The Reghar community no longer finds it embarrassing to work as cobblers. Even graduates have gone back to making classy *jooties*. Of the 37 Reghars manufacturing *jooties* 10 are women. With the support of Footwear Design and Development Institute and Footwear Technology Institute, their average monthly income for the past one year varies from Rs 1500 to Rs 1800.

Every year these four societies come to Delhi under the Urmul umbrella to organise one big exhibition-cum-sale of their latest creations.

## Keeping Track

**T**HERE is a caste system among the half a dozen Commissions that have come up under political compulsions to address specific problems of the different sections of society, whether they be the minorities, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the backwards or women.

Except for the National Human Rights Commission set up under western pressure to counter charges of human rights violation in Kashmir, and was therefore given special status, most of the Commissions, exist on sufferance. There are the vaishyas and shudras in the hierarchy of the Commissions. At the bottom of the heap is the Safai Karamchari Commission. The NHRC is at the top — the Brahmin — says P. S. Krishna,

# More omissions than commissions

*Set up under political compulsions, most Commissions simply exist on sufferance.*

*Usha Rai on why they have proved ineffective*

member secretary of the National Commission for Backward Classes and former Secretary for Welfare. Most Commissions just exist. They are unable to achieve much.

An important reason for their ineffectiveness is the kind of members nominated to these Commissions — largely political appointments of the party in power. Very few are persons of substance who can push the cause of the caste, community or gender they are supposed to promote/protect.

Damned by neglect, these Commissions have been allotted office space and staff according to their perceived status. Little or no action is taken on recommendations made by these Commissions. The Law Commission for example submitted 143 reports, out of which only 53 have been implemented. The NCW too is constantly complaining about its reports and proposals getting stuck in the labyrinth of bureaucracy at Shastri Bhavan.

The Commission for Safai Karamcharis was established in 1994 on the demands of this community. Little is known about its achievements, but its term has recently been extended by five years. The Safai Karamchari Commission and the Backward Classes Commission were born out of political compulsions and as a mandate of the Supreme Court respectively. In fact there was no need for these Commissions when there is an umbrella, the National Commission for the SC, ST (NCSCST).

There seems to be an overlap of work done by the NHRC, the NCSCST and the National Commission for Women. Instead of working on policies, the NCSCST is bogged down by routine complaints of discrimination on transfers and promotions. Even the NHRC has not been spared these minor responsibilities.

Handicapped without full infrastructure, power and status, the NCW has recently begun a dialogue on 'statutory Commissions and their effectiveness.' Justice Venkatachaliah of the NCHR welcomed what he called the social audit of the Commissions outside the realm of government. Representatives of the statutory bodies are airing their problems and discussing whether they should have powers of adjudication or they should be happy just sending in their recommendations to the states for implementation.

Justice Venkatachaliah tried to assuage the feelings of the other Commission representatives by pointing out that "they had not been set up as competitors to the courts or other judicial bodies." They were supposed to be inquisitorial, merely aiding in the settlement of cases. The Authority of the Commission is one of morality, political neutrality and high competence.

Justice Jayachandra Reddy, chairman of the Law Commission, said his commission had no statutory or disciplinary control over its staff. It was only an advisory body

— its function was to study the justice administrative system all over the country and review the existing laws.

The chairperson of the NCW, Mohini Giri, has been on the verge of throwing in her towel several times. Taking on the work of the Commission with a great deal of expectation, she found that lack of infrastructure and committed staff made it tough to function. While the NHRC has a staff of 233 and is headed by a secretary, the NCSCST has a staff of 314, the Minorities Commission — 83 and the NCW just 25 as against the sanctioned strength of 37. The Department of Women instead of servicing the work of the Commission was constantly vetting its reports — acting as if the NCW was its rival. Giri has voiced her anguish at incompetent, political persons being dumped on the Commission as members.

She was equally critical of the move to erode whatever little powers the Commission had by appointing a National Council on Women presided over by the PM.

Dr Tahir Mahmud said the Minorities Commission also suffered from lack of autonomy. It had been reduced to a subordinate office of the government. However, an official who worked with the Minorities Commission says there is lack of clarity on how it should benefit minorities and whether they needed to be helped. The Commission, he says, represents the government to minorities and

not minorities to the government.

Another former member of the Commission said its four members represented four minority communities. Each member looked into individual problems of the community they represented instead of taking a holistic view of the problems. Though the Commission had the power to act as a civil court it had not taken up a single case. Its lone achievement in the 20 years of existence was the recognition of Jains as a minority community.

The NCSCST has failed to spell out long term policies whether on credit facilities or employment that could transform lives of the dalits. It has failed to mainstream their needs in all plans and programmes of the government. Most SC, ST use the Commission as an agency for getting a gas connection, a promotion or a transfer.

However, last year the Commission was able to ensure that 3000 vacancies for SC, ST were filled up at the Food Corporation of India.

Kamla Mankekar of the Delhi State Commission for Women feels the state commissions lack autonomy. Many are set up by an order of the government and are not statutory bodies. In fact there is no clear demarcation of the area of work of the NCW and the state Commissions and this is causing problems.

The debate on Commissions has just begun. But mere words cannot whip dead or half dead Commissions alive.

## • DEVELOPMENT •

# Is there vision beyond the smokescreen?

Only a collective sense of responsibility can combat the vehicular pollution that has blackened metro lungs, says **Usha Rai**

**I**S there hope of a reprieve from the pollution that has made life impossible in the major metropolitan cities of the country? Will our eyes smart less and the number of cases of respiratory ailments actually come down? Not while we have a policy of industrial growth that encourages cars and two-wheelers to clog the main arteries of our cities with or without catalytic converters.

Not while the quality of fuel continues to be poor — with a high content of not just lead but other pollutants like sulphur, benzene, phosphorous, cetane and gum; not as long as petrol continues to be adulterated with the much cheaper kerosene and State governments continue to ignore the need of growing cities for good mass transport systems.

A consumer culture and status consciousness determined by the number of imported cars just cannot jell with the conservation consciousness needed to reduce pollution. A large number of families in the cities have a separate vehicle for every member. Cielos, Hondas, Mercedes Benz and Peugots symbolise class — not the individual's simple and environment-friendly style of living.

With vehicles responsible for 70 per cent of the air pollution in our metros, keeping the air breathable is no longer the responsibility of just the Environment Ministry. It has to be shared by the ministries of Industry, Petroleum, Surface Transport as well as State governments. The last should prioritise provision of good, mass transport in fast-growing cities. So despite the thunder and fury of Menaka Gandhi, the carrot and stick policy of Kamal Nath and now the gentle nudging by Rajesh Pilot, there seems little hope for a reprieve for our metros.

Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Ahmedabad, Pune, Madras and Hyderabad, in that order, continue to be our most polluted cities. Those inhabiting them have to contend with the 871, 548, 253, 244, 243, 212, 188 and 169 tonnes of pollutants respectively (carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, oxides of nitrogen, sulphur dioxide and particulates) discharged into the air every day.

The total number of vehicles in India has increased from 11 million in 1986 to over 21 million in 1991. With economic liberalisation, there has been a faster growth of vehicular traffic in the last four years. Seventy per cent are two and three-wheelers which cause maximum

pollution as their two-stroke engines have poor combustion efficiency. As much as 30 per cent of their unburnt fuel is discharged as hydrocarbons accounting for the burning sensation in the eyes, says Dilip Biswas, Chairman, Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). The two-wheeler industry needs to improve its design and go in for four-stroke engines. But because this means heavy investments, industry is holding back.

Though catalytic converters are now mandatory for all new cars, the powerful automobile lobby has been haggling for a 30 per cent efficiency of these converters as against the 50 per cent specified. We are 10-15 years behind Japan and other countries in modernising our oil refining units for the better grade of fuel. The refining sector maintains it needs Rs 3,000 crore to modernise its units. Other experts maintain it can be done with just one-third the amount.

Every department of the government and the public per se has to be involved in reducing pollution. It is no longer any one person or department's responsibility. The CPCB has drawn up an action plan to improve fuel quality and reduce pollution as well as the mass emission standards for petrol and diesel vehicles from April, 1996 to the the year 2000. It has said that washed coal should be the precondition for seeking environmental clearance for thermal power projects and that the supply of unleaded petrol be increased to cover the entire country by 1999.

Among the more radical suggestions for pollution control is an annual deregistration of 10 per cent of the vehicles aged more than 20; smoke-emission test facilities in every bus depot and a mandatory check of every vehicle before it is allowed to ply; provision of fuel by petrol pumps to only those vehicles that have Pollution Under Control certificates; surprise checks at fuelling stations and of vehicles on the road to control adulteration of fuel with kerosene.

Mr Biswas has pleaded for incentives for disposal of old vehicles. If the Government is serious about reducing pollution, it should not advance loans for vehicles over five years. Otherwise like Don Quixote we will only be tilting at windmills.

## DEVELOPMENT

# Does amelioration address the fine print of misery?

Planners could do well by looking beyond the sophistry of statistics, says Usha Rai

DR Ashish Bose, well known demographer and member of the Independent Commission on Health, has come out with a rather unusual but valuable Household Misery Index (HMI) which zeroes in on the most deprived blocks, districts and states of the country.

This index needs to be studied by planners in the Government who in fact have raised resources for rural development in 1995-96 from Rs 7,700 crore to Rs 8,500 crore and again upped it this week by another Rs 2000 crore in the hope of garnering votes in an election year.

With our 'top down' approach, do people sitting in Delhi really know who are the most vulnerable and miserable in this vast country?

Based on the 1991 census of basic facilities at the household level, Dr Bose has calculated the HMI for rural and urban households as well as a composite weighted index.

Bose's indicators of misery are lack of a *pucca* house, safe drinking water, toilet facilities and electricity. The fifth parameter of misery is the dependence on cow dung cakes and fuel wood for cooking.

"These are people living on the other side of the moon - people left out of the grand development schemes hatched at the Centre," says Bose.

So far planners, particularly those looking at fertility rates, have focussed on Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and UP as the most backward states of the country. In fact, the commonly used term, BIMARU, was coined by Bose.

Now his misery index shows that it is the people of Orissa who are the most deprived, followed by the seven sisters of the North East.

Dr Bose ranks the BIMARU states third in a scale of 0 to 100 (0 representing those saturated with the good things of life and 100 those on the brink of hell).

Orissa's misery index is 79.2 and the most deprived live in Phulbani district.

In the North East, the most miserable live in the beautiful State of Meghalaya (MI 75.2), followed by Assam (MI 74.6), Manipur (69.5), Tripura (68.9), Nagaland (67.3), Arunachal Pradesh (62.9) and Mizoram (61.9).

Andhra and Kerala are ranked 11 and 12.

But Dr Bose has reservations about the Kerala position. He doubts the availability of safe water being just 18.9 per for Kerala as shown in the census

when it is 46.3 per cent for Andhra and 67 per cent for Tamil Nadu.

Punjab with its high income levels and brick houses even in rural areas is lowest on the misery index. Better living is also evident in Maharashtra and Gujarat.

In the middle level with 58 to 50 points in the HMI are Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. The most livable city is Chandigarh with the lowest misery index of 14.

In West Bengal the most miserable district is Purulia; in Andhra it is Srikakulam; Bihar - Gumla, Palamau; Gujarat - Dang; Haryana - Jind; Karnataka - Raichur; Kerala - Wynad, MP - Panna; Rajasthan - Barmer; Tamil Nadu - Ramnathapuram; Maharashtra - Gadchiroli and in UP - Hardoi and Pratapgarh.

What, however, comes as a major shock is the high misery index of the N-E States. This is despite a fairly high literacy and low fertility rate. Dr Bose feels that in the North East, miseries can partially be traced to the high population growth rates.

Between 1981 and 1991, the population of these states shot up by 30 to 40 per cent whereas the national growth rate was 23 per cent. There has been a massive influx from the neighbouring Bangladesh, Myanmar, Tibet and Nepal and even internal migration to these states.

There is such a vast difference within the same block, that the Planning Commission's standard allocation of resources are meaningless.

In Kurnool district of Andhra, while 72 per cent of the workers are landless in Pagidyalablock, in Srikakulam (in the same district) just 1 per cent are landless.

In West Godavari district's Penumantra block, female literacy rate is 55 per cent. But in the Dahegaon block of Adilabad it is just over 4 per cent.

So a blanket approach and vertically run programmes in a country of India's diversity just will not work. There is just too much intra-state and intra-district variation.

The only hope of development taking place at the grassroots is when planning is done by panchayats and political as well as financial resources are given to them. NGOs, can provide the technical support for effective functioning of gram sabhas and panchayats, says Bose.

## DEVELOPMENT

# Perverted justice

Our legal system has miserably failed to provide succour to sexually assaulted Dalit women, says Usha Rai

**T**HOUGH the rape of Bhanwari Devi, the satellite working with the Women's Development Programme, hit the headlines and got the full support of women's groups in Rajasthan, she has still not got justice. But there are hundreds of cases of rape, which neither get public attention nor reprieve.

And if the victim is a Dalit from some small town or village there is even less hope. A MARG (Multiple Action Research Group) study of 50 cases of rape in Meerut and Banda districts of Uttar Pradesh between 1991 and 1994 shows that these women have still not received adequate redressal for being sexually discriminated and victimised. Seventeen of the 50 Dalit victims were minors — one just four-year-old.

There were just two convictions and three acquittals. The rest of the cases are pending. This is despite the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes (prevention of atrocities) Act of 1989. With provision for special courts and special prosecutors under the Act all cases should be disposed off without delay. But this does not happen. While the courts and the police are twiddling their thumbs, the National Crime Records Bureau shows that in Uttar Pradesh, there was a 70 per cent increase in rape of Dalit women between 1991 and 1992.

Fifty per cent of the cases registered in 1991 in the two districts were pending trial for two to three-and-a-half years. Delay, particularly in the case of minors, makes it more difficult to ensure justice for they are not in a position to narrate clearly what they have been through. Take the case of the minor girl who was kidnapped when she had gone out in the morning to ease herself in July 1992. The case of kidnap and rape was still pending when the MARG report was submitted to the government in last year. Stigma forced the family to shift residence. The girl has discontinued her education. She is still too frightened to talk and the accused, out on bail, has threatened her.

The rape of a four-year-old ended in conviction. But the sentence was for two years imprisonment (not seven) because the father did not have the money to pursue the case and there was pressure to settle it soon.

Judicial delay also prolongs social ostracism and adds to the stress of the victim and her fam-

ily. A student of Class V who was repeatedly raped over a 15-day period in January 1992 has stopped going to school. Her parents want to get her married but because of gossip in the village, she has not received a single proposal.

Another 15-year-old rape victim has been sent to the city to stay with her brother. But if the case is not settled quickly her urban relatives too will get to know about her trauma.

Though the law makes it mandatory to provide a lawyer for the victim, they are either not provided or are so ineffective that the victims have to hire private lawyers who sometimes extract money from them to oppose bail for the accused. One victim had to pay the lawyer Rs 2,000 out of the Rs 5,000 compensation awarded her. MARG studies show that neither legal aid nor travelling and maintenance expenses are provided to the rape victims who file complaints under the SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

Most victims, however, are not aware that they are entitled to compensation. In four cases, 40 per cent of the money went to lawyers and middlemen and in one case the mother-in-law spent Rs 2,000 of the money in her younger son's wedding.

Rape victims are supposed to be accompanied by police woman for medical examination. But this does not happen. The success or failure of these cases hinges on the medical report. But the study shows that there is not much difference in the reports of the minor unmarried victims and the adult married victims. Routinely the medical reports contain statements like "there is no mark of external or internal injury", "the vagina admits two fingers", "hymen tear old and healed", "vaginal smear taken for analysis" and "no opinion of rape can be given as the person is used to sexual intercourse".

In one case bite marks visible to the researchers a month after the rape were not mentioned in the medical report. Such careless reports are responsible for acquittals.

MARG has recommended proper guidelines on medical reports of rape victims and has suggested speedy compensation for the victim irrespective of the conviction of the offender. It has also suggested compensation from the offender. Simultaneously these women need social and economic empowerment.

## DEVELOPMENT

# A bold vision for Madhya Pradesh

Funding is what will realise the ambitions of the Government's Human Development Report which analyses and recommends innovative steps to improve life in this backward State, says Usha Rai

**M**ADHYA PRADESH Chief Minister Digvijay Singh is embarrassed that the State he represents is bracketed with Bihar, Rajasthan and UP as a BIMARU State. As the first step in dropping the ignominious tag, Madhya Pradesh has come out with a Human Development Report (HDR).

Modelled on the lines of the Report of the United Nations Development Programme, it's a gutsy effort to document the ground realities in education, health, women's status, and the low per capita income — then work out strategies to pull the State up by its boot straps.

The Report has identified inter-district disparities in the levels of human development and come out with a State human development index. This would enable the Government to concentrate resources and management skills on districts with a poor record.

The State's most committed bureaucrats, headed by Rajan Katoch, and assisted by NGOs and academicians, have brought out this profile of the State. Now the State should give them the necessary power and support to translate a vision into a reality for keeping a balance between sustainable development and economic growth, which is not going to be easy.

Mr Singh wants to come out with a HDR every year. It would be better to come out with one every alternate year — actually measuring progress or lack of it.

Madhya Pradesh has a long way to go but an important beginning has been made. The Human Development Index constructed by K. Seetha Prabhu in 1992 for 312 districts of India shows that except for Indore, the remaining MP districts fall under the category of low human development. Thirty-three of the 43 districts of MP ranked beyond 200. Jhabua was ranked 309.

In 1988-89, the State's per capita income was Rs 2,739, the fourth-lowest among 15 major States, against a national average of Rs 3,835. Forty per cent of the State's population lives below the povertyline. In the rural areas, it translates to a staggering 3 crore. The average family income of Rs 4,653 per annum is less than half the rural povertyline of Rs 11,000 per family per year.

An NCERT study revealed

that 93 and 74 per cent of the sample schools in the State were unable to achieve 40 per cent in maths and language respectively. Another study showed that only half the 35,000 non-formal education centres were functioning. Though some 7 lakh children were enrolled, only 5 per cent of the boys and 3 per cent of the girls could pass the class V examination. Thirty-five per cent of the schools had one teacher and 34 per cent, two teachers. Most of these under-staffed schools were in rural, backward areas where children need more time from teachers since they have no parental support for learning.

The State's health picture is even grimmer. Fifty per cent of the State's children are malnourished, 71 per cent of the deliveries are at home without trained help; the crude birth rate is high — 33.4; there is one doctor for a population of 7,829 as against the national average of 2,393; the per capita expenditure on public health is Rs 19.25 against the national average of Rs 32.85.

"Alternative schooling" has been suggested for those who cannot attend regular school in 400 schools that come under the district primary education programme. A separate system of certification that recognises the child's creative and cognitive skills is proposed. Barefoot teachers or shiksha karmis are proposed for remote areas where qualified teachers do not wish to live. The mid-day hot meal scheme needs to be extended to all blocks.

For improving health care, it has been suggested that local communities be involved for preliminary diagnosis and preventive treatment. The report highlights the revival of the derelict Maharaja Yashvantrao hospital in Indore by charging a nominal registration fee.

The chapter on women's empowerment is particularly interesting because the proposed policy seeks to increase women's control over land and other common resources like village common lands. It seeks to reserve 30 per cent of the jobs in Government for women; increase credit access to women by setting up a mahila bank and free textbooks for all girls upto class VIII.

But the bottomline for all development projects is money and enhanced allocation for the social sector.

## • DEVELOPMENT •

# Nurture can't wait until tomorrow

Only an extensive network of creches can reach out to children of the worst hit - working mothers in the unorganised sector, says Usha Rai

**P**AEDIATRICIAN Dr Shanti Ghose has pointed out that between two months and six years, a child is in a perpetual state of hunger. Her deep need is not just for food but caring. These early years are critical and will determine the child's sense of security, confidence and growth pattern.

Those most in need of this nurturing are children of working women, particularly of those in the unorganised sector.

About 60 million children of working mothers - all below the poverty line - have no such care, says FORCES (Forum for Creche and Child Care Services), a national consortium of organisations committed to the welfare and development of children and women.

The existing government-sponsored schemes like ICDS, Creches for Working and Ailing Mothers and the National Creche Fund reach out to just 5 per cent of these children - about 300,000.

In fact, existing schemes are only brief interventions. Their responsibility seems to end with providing nourishment and immunisation. Most schemes cover children up to 3 years of age. There is neither a policy nor a scheme for children of 3 to 6 years. They need sustained care from 8.30 am to about 4.30 pm.

It is estimated that about 93 per cent of the working women are in the unorganised sector and providing day care to their children will increase their productivity and pull the family out of poverty.

Ms Devika Singh of Mobile Creches finds that with increasing migration to urban areas and more women coming into the labour force, family support systems are breaking down calling for greater care of young children.

FORCES will approach political parties to set aside their differences and ponder over the fate of these children who form the human resource for the 21st century. "Sixty million poor children can't vote for your future. But you certainly can, for theirs," is the appeal of the Forum.

Can their concerns for children be reflected in their election manifestoes? Is corruption reflected only in *hawalas*? Is it not corruption to turn a blind eye to the needs of these children?

Just a commitment of Rs 5 per day per child from the nat-

ional budget could make all the difference to these children, says FORCES. Of course, this means a staggering Rs 30 crore a day which no government can commit to.

Perhaps, UNICEF, OXFAM, Action Aid and organisations like the National Foundation of India can contribute to form the nucleus of this fund for child care.

Beggars in India mop up Rs 10 crore a day, says Ms Brinda Singh - showing we have the necessary resources. What is needed is the will to tap it for the right cause.

Mobile Creches, which provides day care facilities at construction sites, has at least a dozen people on its rolls who came in as babies seeking that special attention but are now working with it as teachers and helpers.

Vimla, who works with two and three-year olds at the Shadipur camp, is still remembered as *machli* because she wriggled like a fish in her carry-cot at the Creche 20 years ago. "I was 45 days old when my mother brought me to the creche," she recalls. Her father, a cobbler fell ill seriously and could not work. Her mother began working as a domestic help in different homes. So Vimla, her two sisters and later three brothers were left at the Creche. When she turned six, the Creche registered her in a government school. Vimla would come back for help with home work. A confident young lady who has completed her 12th, Vimla says "without the Creche, we would have been doomed."

The story of Malti who is in charge of the Creche near the Chinese Embassy is equally moving. Her father did cycle repair and her mother was a cook. The children stayed with their grandmother and saw their parents only on weekends. Though five, when admitted to Mobile Creches, Malti was quickly put through the paces and admitted to class III in a government school. A graduate today, Malti has fond memories of Mamta Didi who taught crafts and music and was her role model.

Gabriela Mistral's little quotation should inspire our political parties. "Many things can wait. The child cannot. Right now his bones are being made, his senses are being developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow. His name is TODAY."

# Only 33 pc rural poor have access to PDS

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI:

If the pampered Delhiwala is crying about wheat prices going up and shortages in the fair price shops, spare a thought for the rural outbacks of the bimaru States where the poorest of poor live but barely five per cent of the households draw cereals from the Public Distribution System.

The National Council of Applied Economic Research's human development profile of rural India shows that (survey between January and June 1994) in Bihar, UP and Orissa just 5.2 per cent of the households are drawing from the PDS. In the heartland of the CPM, West Bengal, just 11 per cent of the households tap the PDS.

This indicates that food grains are not available in the fair price shops; people do not have the purchasing power to buy even the subsidised food grains as and when

they are available or there are great leakages.

This poorest section of society, with access to Rs 3 to Rs 5 a day, logically should have greatest dependence on the PDS. However so even poor the quality of the grain, most poor people would like to buy from the ration shop.

Despite satisfactory food production — 185 million tonnes annually and 8 to 10 per cent of this amount going to the PDS, just 33 per cent of the rural households in the country use the PDS or have access to it.

Dr Abusaleh Shariff, principal economist of NCAER, said a 1984 survey had revealed that tribal converts to Christianity in Medak district were denied ration cards. It is possible that specific communities in Bihar and UP too are denied their passport to fair price shops though there is no proof of this.

In Haryana and Punjab too just 9 and 6 per cent of the rural households use the ration shops. But this could be because these are rich

States with surplus food grains and a large number of families eat what they have grown in their own fields.

By contrast the utilisation of the PDS is high in all southern States, particularly Tamil Nadu and Kerala — 82 and 78 per cent respectively. In Himachal Pradesh too 76 per cent of the rural households draw from the fair price shops.

Ironically, the Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) based on women's illiteracy, undernutrition of children at birth and subsequent stunting in growth is high in the same rural households that have least access to the PDS. In Bihar and Rajasthan the CPM is as high as 66 per cent, in UP it is 61 per cent and West Bengal — 53 per cent. By contrast in Kerala, it is as low as 12 per cent.

The high CPM and low access to the PDS indicates that the children from these States have a bleak future.

Quite clearly the PDS which was to be the social safety-net for the

poor has failed. Though the food grain production in the country has been adequate, its distribution and access of the poor to the PDS has been skewed. According to the NCAER study, the per capita consumption of food grains in rural India averages to 14 kgs a month or 467 grams per day.

In Kerala and Gujarat where tapioca, edible oils, nuts, fruits and vegetables are consumed in plenty, the per capita consumption of foodgrains in a month is just 10 kgs. In Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, where there are climatic extremes and not much cereal substitutes, the average per capita consumption of food grains in a month 17 kgs.

Consumption levels are lower for landless labourers, those living below the povertyline and those in larger households. The NCAER study shows the need for review of the PDS and reallocation of foodgrains (without leakages) to areas with high capability poverty measures (CPM).

# Thailand working on dengue vaccine

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 29

With all four kinds of dengue on the upsurge in South East Asia, Thailand is working on a dengue preventive vaccine which should be available in the market in two or three years.

Last year, 1,05,521 cases of dengue were reported in the nine countries of the SEARO region of WHO and there were 1,118 deaths. This year, so far, 36,930 cases of dengue and 639 deaths have been reported — 310 from India. Top experts on management of dengue epidemic are meeting here under the auspices of WHO to discuss mechanisms to monitor control activities during and after an outbreak.

Though reducing the source of breeding of the dengue mosquito is the best preventive, Prof Natth Bhamarapravati, president of the Centre for Vaccine Development, Mahidol University, and chairperson of the current meeting in the Capital, says the vaccine produced by his university is currently

undergoing a phase 1 trial on 300 persons in Thailand.

Vaccine Tetra Valent is also being produced by a French company and tried on 20 American volunteers. But large efficacy trials are needed before the vaccine is licensed for public use, says Prof Natth. The two-shot vaccine could provide immunisation for life, should the current human efforts fail.

In most countries dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) is due to rapid urbanisation and downgradation of the environment. Wherever there is a problem of water supply, people have to store water and drainage facilities are poor, vector *Ae Aegypti* breeds in profusion. In South East Asia, dengue reared its ugly head 40 years ago with the migration to the big cities.

Though the dengue vector has developed resistance to DDT, Dr Natth is confident it can be controlled by other chemicals. However, all experts maintain that community discipline and better civic management are vital for control of the disease. Though the highest incidence of DHF is in the

post-monsoon period, sustained, year-long effort is needed to prevent recurrence of DHF.

Dr Kalyan Bannerji, director of the National Institute of Virology, Pune, is concerned because a disease that was once considered a problem of urbanisation is spreading to villages. It was a routine check of blood samples of all cases of high fever that showed that dengue has spread to rural areas of Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. The eggs of *Ae Aegypti* are transported in cement water tanks made in urban areas and despatched to rural areas. They are also transported through used tyres.

The first dengue epidemic in 1965 affected the whole east coast, Dr Bannerji recalled. It is for the first time this year that haemorrhagic dengue was seen in Delhi. But in 1992 there were similar dengue epidemics in Jammu and Shahjahanpur. In 1994 Surat was hit by DHF. But for the media it is an issue only when it hits the Capital, says Dr Bannerji.

Dr U. T. Vitarana, adviser Ministry of Science and Technology, Sri Lanka, and member of the Task Force managing DHF for the

last 20 years, is all praise for the Sri Lankan President for the multi-sectoral action plan drawn up for tackling dengue. This year there were 1,000 cases of DHF and 43 deaths — most of them in Colombo and Greater Colombo.

In Sri Lanka, like in Indonesia and Thailand, school children have been involved in reducing the identified sources of mosquito breeding. As a part of their school science project, in every town — teachers with school children visit houses and tell families how to eliminate mosquito breeding. In exercise books children note the address of the home visited, the number of breeding points in each home and how they have motivated the family. The programme will be followed through by the same children year after year till the source is eliminated. December 5 is being observed as National Dengue Control Day.

Dr Uton Muchtar Refei, regional director of WHO, made it abundantly clear that there were no short cuts to tackling dengue. It will have to be a long, tenacious battle.

# MBBS degree not worth even a paper

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept. 10

Hundred and ten students who have graduated from the Jhelum Valley College of Medical Sciences and Hospital in Srinagar find that their hard-earned MBBS degree is not worth the paper on which it is printed because the Medical Council of India has not recognised the private college.

Set up with the noble objective of reaching health care to the far-flung villages of the Valley in 1988, the college seems to have run into problems even as it threw open its portals. Militancy had erupted in the Valley and a responsible official the MCI is believed to have stated there is no question of giving recognition to a college set up to raise funds for militancy.

But students, who have paid capitation fee of Rs 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, are not willing to be put off. Some of them have come and met the Health and Family Welfare Minister Salim Shervani and sought his intervention. Now thanks to him, the issue is coming up before the meeting of the executive committee of the MCI in Bangalore later this week.

The secretary of the MCI, Ms M. Sachdeva, said the inspection of the college had been done recently and a decision on the recognition would be taken soon. Asked why it had taken the Council so many years to look into the case, she said the college had sought recognition under the 1956 IMC Act where the recogni-

tion is considered only when students are in the final year of the MBBS course. The IMC Act was amended in 1993 making inspection and recognition a speedier process.

"We are feeling orphaned," a final year MBBS student stated. Most of the founder-trustees have died or left Srinagar. While Dr A. A. Guru was shot dead two years ago, Mufti Merajuddin is behind bars. Another trustee, Dr Merajuddin, has gone off to the US, Dr Mustafa Kamal, brother of Farooq Abdullah, is incommunicado. Mr G. M. Shonthu also left the Valley but was forced by the students to come back.

In fact, 15 members of the College Faculty left the Valley because of the disturbance. After the death of Dr Guru, the Hurriyat Advisory Board took over the administration of the college and this may have added to the political colouring given to what should have been purely an academic issue.

Even in the election climate when political parties are bending backwards to appease the local people, not much attention has been given to status of the unrecognised medical college or the fate of its students.

Because of the disturbance, students admitted in 1988 were able to pass only in 1995. No one in this batch of 55 doctors has got a job. The second batch is doing its internship and will soon be in the job market.

# Tribal fair raises ugly controversy

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI - An ugly controversy follows the highly successful tribal fair - Dongar - held in Koraput, Orissa, from March 15 to April 4, with Mr K.C. Panigrahy, director of the Tribal Museum at Koraput, accusing the co-sponsor, Mr Rajeev Sethi of INTACH, of trying to alienate the tribals, grabbing their land and using the fair to collect ethnic artefacts for decorating what he has termed a "star hotel" in Delhi.

Mr Sethi, who also runs an organisation for artisans and craftsmen in Delhi called Sarathi, is seething with anger at such "baseless accusations." In his four-page letter to the Orissa Chief Secretary, Mr R.N. Das, Mr Sethi has said, "It is a great pity that Mr Panigrahy continues to consider the tribal awakening all around the museum complex as a non-secular act... More than 2,000 tribals thanked us for Dongar and advised us on how to make it more productive for the tribals. I am sure the Jagannath Mandir Trust that runs COATS (the Council of

Analytical Tribal Studies) and the museum would find the recommendations made by the tribals - without the prodding or plotting ascribed to us - useful."

In recorded statements, the tribals have levelled serious charges of proselytisation, of not being paid minimum wages - women are paid only Rs 25 but have to sign receipts for Rs 50 - and of lack of representation on boards for tribal welfare.

In fact, their first recommendation in the four pages that have now been sent to the chief secretary says, "We have our own religion and our festivities are related to our survival. For some years, outside religious forces, both Christian and Hindu, have encroached on our religious systems, cultural values and spiritual life. We are losing day by day our ancestral knowledge of worship and festivity. Proselytisation and Sanskritisation should be stopped. Our festivals must have more importance in our regions."

They have talked of the need to give community land to villages instead of individuals; of displacement and pauperisation of tribals due to NALCO,

Machkund, HAL and other such big projects; of common property like Dongars being taken away to plant commercial crops like coffee and cashew; of their inability to compete in the markets with non-tribals who have a higher purchasing power.

They have demanded a detailed study on marketing societies like LAMPS, TDCCS and others.

Mr Sethi pointed out that even Nishani Munda, the tribal sacred space, was also being managed by the temple trust. He maintains there is no direct conflict between him and the museum and the COATS authorities, but they resent his giving a voice to the tribals. The Jagannath temple at Koraput, he said, was secular and allowed entry to foreigners, Muslims and tribals. But though the temple has a tribal prefix - Sabri Shrikhethra - it has no tribal priests.

When the tribals pointed this out they were told they would have to learn the temple rituals. So all the bitterness and anger that was simmering below the surface seems to have burst out at Dongar '95.

In fact, there has been massive

land grabbing in these areas by tribal institutions that have come up in the land vacated by the Dandakaranyana project offices, Mr Sethi said. Public interest litigations have been filed.

Mr Panigrahy, who has been quite vitriolic in his letters of complaint against Mr Rajeev Sethi to the secretary of the Lalit Kala Akademi in Delhi as well as the district magistrate of Koraput, even succeeded in getting the magistrate, Mr J.P. Dash, to issue a notice to Sethi to wind up and leave on March 31, four days before the fair was to close.

However, when Mr Sethi wrote back and assured Mr Dash that there would be no law and order problem and expressed a desire to complete the interaction of artists and craftsmen that had begun so well, he was allowed to complete the fair. Some 50 people, including several Indian and foreign artists like Julian Sainsbury, Carol Smethers, Paline Vinceati, Manjit Bawa, Dr Chandramouli as well as tribals appended their signatures to the appeal to the district collector.

Mr Sethi who had taken with him Mr Roy Burman and Mr Chandri Prasad Bhatt as well as the artist, Anjali Ela Menon, maintains the fair was a grand success. Some 2,500 tribals from 138 villages participated in the workshops and 148 vegetable dyes and 210 herbal medicines have been identified in Koraput. "There are a thousand Medha Patkars among the tribals now. They don't need us to lead them," Mr Sethi said.

Mr Panigrahy has even accused Mr Sethi of not settling the boarding and lodging bills of his team. Mr Sethi has clarified that not only has he settled all bills but has left Rs 1 lakh with Mr Panigrahy that has still to be accounted for.

In his letter to the chief secretary, Mr Sethi has said, "If the administration so desires we can give the 'true story' of Dongar as we see it as well as explain exactly how, why and when Mr Panigrahy went against us.... However, what concerns us more is the administration's point of view, especially since Mr Panigrahy has chosen to represent it."

# Heart ailments on the increase in urban Delhi

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI

**T**HERE is a sharp increase in coronary heart diseases in urban Delhi due to the high levels of pollution. In fact, the escalation in heart ailments is four to five fold in the urban areas as compared to the rural environment, even if it just 50 kms from the Capital, say nutrition expert, Dr C Gopalan.

It is a well-known, medically established fact that asthma and other respiratory ailments are on the increase in Delhi because of the high levels of pollution. Now

Dr Gopalan has added another diabolical dimension — coronary heart disease — to the health problems created by the 1280 tonnes of pollutants discharged into the air every day by the mounting tide of vehicles.

Studies show that the increase in heart ailments in urban areas is not due to the richer diet of the urban population or the sedentary nature of their jobs alone.

In fact, there are more fats in the diet of the rural socio-economic groups living on the outskirts of city than in the diet of urban poor living in slums. So air pollution has to be considered an important factor for increased coronary heart

diseases (CHD), says Dr Gopalan.

The new co-relation between increased heart disease and pollution has been dealt with in the latest issue of the Nutrition Foundation of India bulletin.

Mr S L Chadha, Mr Radhakrishnan, Mr S Ramachandran, Mr K Kaul and Mr Gopinath had reported in 1990 that the CHD in urban Delhi was 46.1/1000 among the high socio-economic groups and 14.0/1000 in the low socio-economic group. This means a prevalence rate for the urban population as a whole of 31.9/1000.

This rate was strikingly higher than the 5.9/1000 in the rural

population barely 50 kms away.

It would be reasonable to infer that the higher prevalence rate of CHD in the urban group is due to the increased consumption of energy-rich foods and saturated fats, relatively sedentary occupations and increased stress of urban life. However, in the follow-up study on the same population group Chadha and others failed to find any convincing differences in the dietary patterns of urban and rural groups.

Even in the affluent urban lot there was no evidence of the high levels of fat intake generally reported in Europe or North America. The study showed that

the diets of the rural group (who had a CHD rate of 5.9/1000) actually contained more fat than the diets of the low socio-economic group (who had a CHD prevalence of 14/1000).

Therefore, one has to look beyond the conventional explanations for other factor(s) that account for the striking urban-rural difference in CHD prevalence, says Dr Gopalan.

Dr Gopalan feels data on comparative incidence of CHD in other polluted cities like Bangkok and their immediate rural environs would show a pattern similar to that of Delhi.

The high concentration of pollutants in the air in urban

Delhi could add a menacing dimension to problem of atherosclerosis (a degenerative thickening of the arteries) through conversion of lipoproteins to the more dangerous oxidised form, he warns

Being in the polluted, closed chambers of urban Delhi is like passively inhaling dozens of cigarettes every day. One of the most polluted cities of the world, Delhi tops in oxides of nitrogen and ranks second in sulphur dioxide and suspended particulate matter. The State has to take responsibility and counter the new monsters of unchecked pollution, says Dr Gopalan.

To cope with pollutants with their pro-oxidation properties, Dr Gopalan advocates increased Vitamin E and C in the urban diets. This could also be provided by green leafy vegetables and fruits. Where diets fail to meet this increased demand, deleterious results may be expected.

"Air pollution may be a major factor contributing to conditioned deficiencies of essential micro-nutrients and antioxidants in urban populations constantly subjected to high levels of air pollution, and this could be an important factor or the higher incidence of CHD in urban populations."

