



Adjusting with the Price Rise, with sigh

Swastik Loha Choudhury

Price rise continues bothering common man very much for few years on trot. The growing middle class often vent their anguish that it is a Himalayan task for them to make their both ends meet in this high price market. How the poor face this price rise? Do they make any change in their expenses pattern to adjust? What effect it has on their food options? Do they really differ amongst themselves facing price rise? Swastik Loha Choudhury reports from Santiniketan, West Bengal talking to a cross section of poor people.



Not all the poor, but the self-employed among them are the hardest hit due to spiralling price rise, reveals a rapid survey during October in and around Santiniketan, the Tagoreland.

Bhabataran Sardar is a rickshaw puller who maintains a family of 8. He earns Rs. 150 on average every day and he works 25 days a month. He stays in father-in-law's hut at Bolpur, a subdivisional town of West Bengal. His wife earns Rs 600 a-month as a maid servant. Bhabataran narrates his living while pulling his rickshaw. He says "The food prices are on fire. Now a days we don't have even a small amount of money for our recreation or savings. All we earn goes on buying food. Even then we can't afford eating meat once in a month." Earlier he could take meat once-a-month and fish once-every week. He had one savings account with United Bank of India, which is not operational for last one year. He says, "We have hiked rickshaw fare during last one year. Even then we can't save. It's the God who can only save us if we fall ill. We would have starved if my ration card was not there."

Mahadeb Mondal, a gardener, gives an interesting statement. "Of course there is price rise and it is affecting us very much. But the daily labourers who get their payment on daily basis are not affected as much as ourselves who get their payment on monthly basis. Because a daily labourer now a day's makes an minimum income of Rs.100 daily, but we who get our payment on monthly basis and get maximum Rs.500-600 monthly from one garden," says Mahadeb, who maintains garden of 4 houses at Santiniketan and he is 60. He finds it difficult to continue his Life insurance policy. He gets his breakfast in one house, has meal in own house and often completes his dinner with puffed rice (Muri) in water sprinkled with sugar. His wife cooks

in a house for another 1000 a-month. Mahadeb hails from a village. He went to the village during Puja holidays. He observes, " Farmers of our village grow paddy for marketing. They buy their other items from their earning. Now they are in trouble as West Bengal Government has brought down the price of rice substantially while all other prices are very high. They are unable to get good sum by selling paddy but have to spend on buying vegetables and other items. Many of them are deciding to grow vegetables and rice for themselves now so that they don't have to depend on market."

Sarthak Chakraborty a milk-man from Goalpara near Santiniketan has few cows. He ekes out his living by selling milk in several houses in Bolpur-Santiniketan area. He has own house, parents, wife and a kid. He says, "Now a days prices have become so high that it is difficult on our part to run our household smoothly. Earlier (before the price rise) we used to eat fish or meat in a gap of a week. After price rise we hardly eat fish or meat. We don't have a pond. Earlier I deposited some money in my post office account. But after this price-rise it is off." Sarthak observes that despite hiking milk price, he is unable to balance. He comments, " The government should be strict that the fodder price rice is checked. Already my customers have cut down their milk requirement. It's not only me, but price rise hits health of our kids too."

What is the effect of price rise over nutrition of poor people? Dr. Satyadeb Saha, a retired military doctor and Voluntary Medical Officer, goes to tribal and Muslim villages regularly. He answered, "Price rise is there but there is no special effect of it on the nutrition of poor people in general. The people who earn their livelihood as a rickshaw puller or as a daily labourer are habituated with the meal having lack of protein and calorie. Many of them get required calorie from the liquor which they take on a regular basis. However they need to shift their food preference for maintaining protein requirement and keeping the effect of price rise at bay. Pea pulses are obtained at a much less cost than the Masoor or Mung dal. It has almost same protein content. It should be brought to practice."



Dr. Saha in his Clinic in Santiniketan

'Escaping from hungry eyes'

Nirjara Mahanta

It was 13th Nov last year- my friend's birth day. I phoned her in the early morning and sent to wish her. I was among the first few to wish her. Her parents had made elaborate arrangements on that day and so she chose to give us a treat at 'Dominos' the next day. She did not come to school on that day. After participating in the 'Children's Day' programme at school, we came home straight to change our dress and then headed for 'Dominos'-a joint for pizza and Chinese items, in Guwahati.

We were hungry since 6.30am as we had not eaten anything after breakfast. The birthday girl ordered for pizza and chicken fry for all of us. We started chatting. Subjects of the conversations were anything- from the trivial to the 'serious' ones like, 'how many new restaurants have come up in Guwahati in the recent months', 'what's the best menu at 'King Chilly' etc. In the meantime the pizzas and other items were served.

Food was extremely delicious and we gorged ourselves as if we had not eaten for days.

After coffee, we headed for the door. As I was approaching the exit door, I saw four-five children peeping inside from the big glass of the main door. They were skinny, dirty and dishevelled. One of them, a girl managed to come inside. She extended her palm and stood in front of me. I was confused. I kept staring at her. A security guard followed that girl and chased her away. I was relieved. I came back home but was disturbed because I felt as if I was caught in the act of stealing.

I know that we are poor country. I also know that 47% of the children in our country, are unfed and under-nourished. I know that our people, who run the government are insensitive towards the poor. They would prefer rotting of food items stored as 'buffer stock' in government godowns

rather than distributing it to the hungry. They are lakhs in numbers. So it is the government and government officials, who should be uncomfortable about poor condition of millions and not me.

It is they who think that by just spending Rs 32 per day per head in urban area, one can not only survive but live respectfully. It is these people, who have thought of food security bill after 64 long years of independence, not sincere about it.

Nevertheless, I still feel that those hungry eyes stare at me and I get disturbed. I feel secure only when I have my food away from the gaze of those children within the opaque four-walls of home. As if, the opaque four-walls of my home or any such house is a sanctuary for me.



Rs 32, FAREWELL THEE ???

Minu Mathew

32 seem to be the talk of the town everywhere I go. Let it be school market place, to places of faith's' worships to the restless hue of Chandni Chowk, everywhere might be even that Kitty parties too would be brewing this debatable 'fare' 32 This is probably not introspection in retrospect but gathering the loose eternal strands of the Planning Commission report which officially read in bold-that Rs.32 figure is arbitrary and is designed to conceal how many poor people we really have in this nation, which I think is fallible measure of demarcating the poverty struck multitudes.

In the urban India Rs. 32 a day is the official poverty line. "Rs. 32" a day can buy you a kilo of wheat and one underwear, which is all you need to survive in this sweltering weather. "Proudly quoted by Anuja Chauhan. THE WEEK.

As to me a school going girl Rs 32 will bring me 10 rupee cool bar, a 15 rupee bread roll and the rest 7 to shed-in to the rickshaw puller to stroll into my residential campus. It seems that our Government is lost in the curious hue of gruesome yet brimming eccentricities to show forth it's so called concern in demarcating the upcoming community from among the 3.75 million and still counting population So gradual as it has been and will be

Where're we heading to? Is 32 rupee enough to meet the needs? Are our poor labourers able to fill their terribly transient families engraved with illusions of death, the peril and ordeal of torn entrails..... the dreams of quivering severance?

We can take on this "32" criterion even further. If traffic can move more than 32 km/ph in the hole in some roads of our country, big deal accomplished. Hence, proved by the theory that we are a road rich

country. If we are acknowledged to less than 32 scams annually we are a morally rich country. If we have less than 32 molestation and rape and murder cases across the country, we are an ethically rich country. If we have less than 32 people earning Rs. 32 in every 32 days of after completion of each 32 years, we are an economically remarkable nation.

If we have less than 32 crore been caught from scamsters of this ethically, legally, economically, culturally, religiously and morally rich country we are indeed tagged as a scam free yet corruption free country.

This irritant saga of 32 is eternal in the country. Farmer suicides, food inflation and on the other side the irksome news of rather geographic mounds of rotten wheat and "fresh" wheat overflowing in FCI's all across the nation and with the number of people taking out a three times meals in a day been - 37 per cent out of the whole country's population reaching unsung heights.

A poor wage labourer cannot stoke his dwelling with Rs 32 per day. This is impossible, the oxymoron or the paradoxical statement being possibly that purchase of one kilo wheat can be met with other needs on the priority lists. Travel, domestic accessories few clothes all this with only the single entity earning at home. Not to forget and shun the ingloriously malicious fashion of alcoholism in men who drink whatever their priorities are or have been and then lashing out and whacks and slaps and kicks at the lady..... Who withstand with might, to bring up her children and fill their bellies with a morsel or two breathing contentment at her lad enjoying the food.

Questions unanswered, issues unheard and 32 becomes an unearthed lump of compulsions and pressure upon the multitudes of our country.

'Understanding the Poverty Line'

Kanwar Kelde

What is the mechanism to identify poor in the country? This question has become relevant in the wake of public outrage on the recent reports that the official definition of poverty would be daily income, of Rs 26 in rural areas and Rs 32 in urban areas. Although the government has denied such reports yet the issue has raised doubts about the government's intentions. The existing mechanism is being used to ascertain income or expenditure to identify the 'poor' on the ground.

To understand what is poverty line and its advantages and disadvantages. The poverty data generated at aggregative level is used by the government to allocate funds to the poor and downtrodden under anti-poverty programmes. Our reporter KANWAR KELDE interviewed senior business journalist, Nitin Pradhan, Deputy Chief of Bureau in the national hindi daily, Dainik Jagran to know about poverty line and its impact on the poor and downtrodden.

Q. What is poverty and how it is measured?

A. When people can't meet their basic needs of life such as food, shelter and clothing, they are known as poor. They are treated as people living below poverty line. The government has decided criteria of identifying such people on the basis of minimum monthly income and size of a family. It is Rs 3980 per person in rural areas. If a person earns less than it he/she comes under poverty line

Q. What is poverty line?

A. The government has set a line to distinguish rich from poor. This line gives the ratio of below poverty line people and above poverty line people. Below poverty line is known as BPL and above poverty line is referred as APL. If an individual in rural areas earns less than Rs 3980 in a month and has a family of five then he/she comes under below poverty line. And if a person

earns less than Rs 4250 in an urban areas in a month and has a family of five then he/she come above poverty line.

Q. What is the ground of the declaring poor?

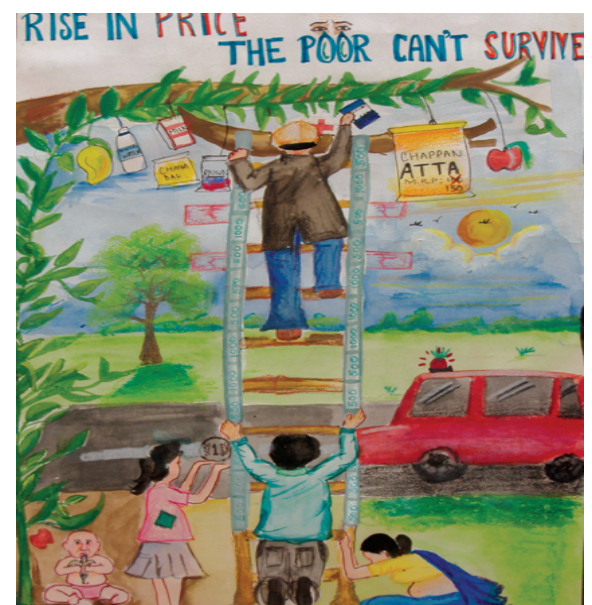
A. The ground of declaring poor is intake of minimum 240 calories in a day by one person. If a person takes less than 240 calories in a day, he/she is considered 'poor'.

Q. What is a new criterion for identifying rich and poor?

A. Now the government has adopted new criteria to distinguish rich from poor. According to new criteria, if a person has a mobile phone, TV, Cycle then he/she will not be considered 'poor'.

Q. What is your opinion about poverty Sir?

A. We need to draw a line between rich and poor so that poor can be helped to improve their lives. But we need be very careful to set this line. The government should not only focus to decrease poverty but try to improve the overall condition of poor.



Poster made by Kanika Dawan



Need for Universal Food Security

In a freewheeling interview with Senior Journalist, T K Rajalaxmi, our reporter, Karan Grover explored on why universal food security was needed to ensure food for all in the country.

1: Why do we need Food Security bill in the country? Is it because the Government is not able to provide enough food to the people of this country?

A. A Food Security Bill aspires to make statutory the entitlement to a minimum package of nutrition for everyone in the country. As food comprises nearly 40 per cent of the consumption basket for an individual and considering that 77 per cent of the population lives on Rs 20 a day, consuming food at market prices is an unsustainable proposition for the vast majority. Hence, there is a need for a universal food security Bill that ensures a basic minimum to one and all.

2: As an expert on food security, your comments on the drawbacks in the proposed food security bill?

A. The present Bill does not cover everyone in the country. In fact, it covers only a proportion of the population that is BPL. The present draft Bill is a misleading as it has in one stroke excluded 25 per cent of rural India and 50 per cent of urban India from the PDS as compared to the more than 80 per cent coverage of PDS under BPL and APL categories at present.

3: Do you think that the proposed bill will help distinguish between the poorest and rich?

A. The idea of a food security Bill is not to make any distinctions. The rich are already food secure – they suffer from problems of plenty. The distinctions, if any, are already there in consumption patterns and levels. The Food Bill if made universal will only seek to give a somewhat level playing field as far as the nutrition of the very poor are concerned.

4: How is it going to benefit women and children?

A. If it is made universal, it will benefit all including women and children, who are at present deprived due to the market dependence of families for their basic food requirements. The distribution of food within families then gets heavily biased against women and girl children especially.

5: Do you think the food security bill will be able to tackle malnutrition which is a growing problem in the country, because the Integrated Child and Development Services scheme which had started in 1975, has failed to keep a check on malnutrition deaths in the country?

ICDS was a rural scheme but over the last decade it was extended to urban areas. This scheme hardly pays attention to children below the age of three. Is it the age when nutrition is needed for normal growth of a child?

A. It is wrong to blame the ICDS for malnutrition levels. Malnutrition cannot be checked by opening a few ICDS centres that are already overburdened, who have ill-paid overworked anganwadi workers and helpers as well as inadequate supplies. The scheme needs to be taken further, expanded and strengthened and made into an Act of Parliament. Then only it will have some statutory legal standing and a firm financial commitment. The centres do give nutritional supplements to breast-feeding mothers. There is nothing that prevents the government from strengthening its own schemes and converting them into proper entitlements if it wants. The problem is that the issue is not a priority for the policy makers; rate of growth is.

6: The yardstick for identifying poverty line, a suggestion by the Planning Commission, in rural and urban areas is Rs 26 and Rs 32 per day. The Commission has already drawn flak from several quarters, including civil society, for pegging poverty in urban areas at Rs. 32 per capita per day. The figure in rural areas is Rs. 26 a day. Is it not impractical? Your comments.

A. It is not only impractical; it is unrealistic and cruel. The Planning Commission cannot pretend that double digit food inflation does not exist. In any case, the calorie requirement for urban and rural areas cannot be met with the kind of food prices that are today. For instance, the price of bananas was Rs 60 for a dozen during the last few months. Rs 32 would buy a person six bananas a day at that rate. Is that enough to sustain especially if one is doing hard manual work?

7: Don't you think that there is a need to rethink on issues relating to employment guarantee, mid-day meals, the public distribution system, land rights, starvation deaths, coercive displacement, forest rights and social exclusion before the government talks about Food Security Bill?

A. No, all these issues are not mutually exclusive of each other but are related. There is no reason why all cannot go hand in hand and be part of overall policy making.

Gokak Shishu Panchayats Conducts Study on Cropping Patterns in Villages

Food is necessary for all living organisms. With this view food storage is very necessary but farmers are more interested in growing only commercial crops. Earlier their was a trend of growing food grains and followed mixed and other cropping system. Now farmers have shifted to mono cropping system.

A study was conducted by the Shishu Panchayats of Gokak, Karnataka on different issues related to agriculture in two villages of Kankanawadi village of Raibag taluk and Yaragudi and Munyal villages of Gokak taluk, Belgaum district. The selection of the villages were based 3 criteria's like 1. Irrigation, 2. Rain fed and 3. River belt.

Here are excerpts of the Study:

Irrigation:

Contacted farmers of Kank-anawadi

village of Raibag taluk

Farmer's Name: Vasant Vittal Pujari

When we contacted Vasant Vittal Pujari, he told that most of the area is been covered by commercial crops like sugarcane, turmeric, banana and maize. As farmers of this area are not growing food grains, they are dependent on nearest market for procurement of food grains.

Rain fed and Irrigated:

Contacted river belt farmers of Yaragudri village, Gokak taluk, Belgaum district.

Farmer's Name: Siddaram Chippalkatti and other farmers.

Some farmers of this village are growing food grains like jowar, green gram, bajra, wheat Bengal gram and rabi, jowar. But these farmers are dependent on rainfall for agriculture other farmers are growing sugarcane

by using water resource.

River belt:

The study conducted at Munyal Farmers used to store food grains using traditional methods. But now the most of the farmers are growing commercial crops like sugar cane vanishing because of under ground because this village is situated on drainage system. There is lack of Ghataprabha river belt and the farmers community based rural godown for are also utilizing water through flood storage, hence they are forced to sell irrigation so this area is been converted food grains immediately after the to water logged area and has become harvest of crops. Now a days farmers are unsuitable for growing food crops. using chemical fertilizers and pesticides

The overall result from these three for procuring higher yield. This has led villages signified that the farmers are to deterioration of soil health. Farmers not growing food grains. Earlier are included to grow commercial crops farmers were growing food grains. Now instead of food grains and vegetable a days farmers have shifted from mixed crops. They are dependent on nearest inter-cropping to mono cropping market for their food grains and system. Priority farmers were using vegetable requirements.

stored seeds from their farm for the next (This story has been translated from season, now farmers are using corporate Kannada)

seeds from private firms. These seeds cannot be used for next season.



Kesar's School – her oasis of happiness

Vitasta George

Kesar loves to go to school as she gets her favourite meal -dal chawal in the school. She also gets a chance to learn drawing and dancing tips.

Nine-year old Kesar had not seen school till a year ago, as she was looking after two toddler sons of her sister, Jayanti, and did all the chores after her mother, Shambai, would go for cleaning and cooking in the swanky flats around her jhuggi in Indirapuram, UP. Each morning, Kesaw would see off her eight year old brother, Galiram, to school.

A year ago, Kesar's life had changed after an activist persuaded her mother Shambai to send Kesar to school, housed in a nearby big house. Shambai said, "She told me that Kesar will get breakfast and lunch in the school too – I was happy." As Kesar and two kids were left in the Jhuggi, Shambai was always worried about her safety. Now school would be a safer place, she thought.

Kesar's parents are economic migrants from Madhya Pradesh. Her father, Mukund Ram, had sold his 90-bigha land in Damodh village to pay a lawyer's fee. Ram had no savings since his land was not irrigated and therefore did not yield much. Seven years ago, Shambai had taken the bold decision of moving to a city, which has helped the family survive.

Though Kesar still longs for her village, she loves to go to school, here. Each day she reaches school at 9 am. She is served biscuits or dalia (wheat porridge) for breakfast. There are some 100 girl students in the school. She is very happy being there till 3 pm. "We read A,B, C and do counting but my favourite period is of dance," Kesar told this reporter.

Kesar and other children get hungry by 1 pm and that is the time when the Dal-chalwal (lentil-rice) meal is served to them. Often, she says, she ends up taking more food than she can eat. But she wishes that school meal would have more variety. "In between, when our helper-auntie goes to her village we do not get dal-chawal," says Kesar.

At home, Kesar's father beats her up if she demands for more food. "He tells me fruit and vegetables are very expensive," says Kesar. She does not like living in jhuggi. She misses her big mud and wood house and orchard in the village. But, then, she knows that unless she goes through the hardships, she can not realise her dream of becoming a teacher.

This is the 150th birth anniversary of Nobel Laureate

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore

Inspired by this poem of his, The Peace Gong team aims to build bridges of friendship amongst children of the world and work for positive social change:

*Where the mind is without fear
And the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken
Up into fragments by narrow domestic wall,
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving
Stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason,
Has not lost its way into the
Dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward
By thee into ever-widening
Thought and action-
Into that heaven of freedom;
My Father,
Let my country awake !!!*

Hunger-health risk factor

Ruchi

From Punjab or Andhra Pradesh, hunger has emerged as one of the major health risk factor in India. A large number of people are not receiving sufficient food which is needed to lead a healthy and active life. Challenges before food security are enormous. While the poor and lower middle class families are fighting to ensure two square meal for their families; their daily intake is going down in a big way due to inflation. They can no longer afford different varieties of vegetables which lead to malnutrition. Though there have been protests across the country against soaring prices, there has been no impact and people continue to suffer. India has been struggling with rising food inflation, which has hit nearby 20 percent late last year.

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