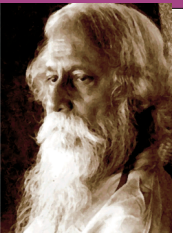


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From the Editor's Desk

The universe is a commodity. Everything under the sun is up for sale - the miracles of Mother Nature, a glimpse of the blue sky and now, land on the moon!

We have learnt to pay even for our rights. In our adrenaline pumped noisy lives, even silence is sold...We live in a commodity embraced empire. In today's world, the market plays on our psychology. The story of 'price' is in the corridors of our civilization, as old as the drops of the first rain. It starts with our instinctive provocation- desire that sleeps under our skin. "Thy ancient greed" is what the market manipulates. It is the only too ancient game of pushing us into the eternal inertia of longing. The market lulls us into a false sense of wanting till our absurd and abstract desire becomes our necessity.

And all through this currency plays the sweet fiddle. It spares none. From the top to the lowest rung of the ladder, even the spaces in between. The market knows what titillates. The game is always on. Before we know it, our greed for more commodities sneaks into our mind...And after greed has delivered its blow there's the game of monopolizing the market. The principle is simple - an artificial calamity that leads to price rise. As our country went through the various steps of slavery, feudalism and in the end capitalism, from the first tick of time, the snakes and ladders of price variation have been weaving its intricate web.

Sir Charles Spencer "Charlie" Chaplin or popularly known as Charlie Chaplin, an English comic actor, film director and composer best known for his work during the silent film era, produced a film 'The Kid' which describes this principle when the little child goes and breaks windows, just so his father can later come in and repair the glass a while later, and further his business. That is the bread of middlemen- creating an artificial calamity so the supply never meets the demand and the price rises. Then they strut in with their extra stock and reap the payback.

In today's scenario, this is what seems to be happening in our nation. The farmers are not gaining from the rising food prices. The coins never jingle down to them but only clink in the middlemen's pockets. And this is what we, the spark of India Tomorrow, choose to write about.

Mahatma Gandhi had pertinently said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." So as we embark on the first leg of our journey with "The Peace Gong", we make a promise not just to ourselves but to the world - a promise to be the "Gong" and bring in social change.

Welcome to our world through "The Peace Gong" which has truly transcended physical and geographical boundaries from Karnataka to Assam and from West Bengal to Delhi, and become a beacon of hope for countless children. It is our belief that our thoughts can mould the world and our actions shape the future. Through The Peace Gong we hope to bring together our friends not only across the country but also abroad to be catalysts for a non-violent world with a foundation of equality, justice and universal understanding of each other's concerns. To us The Peace Gong is a 'bridge of friendship' amongst children of the world.

Also through The Peace Gong we wish to reach out to our adults with a message that we too can contribute for a just and peaceful world and have a right to participate in issues concerns us and the society as a whole.

I and all my friends wish to call upon other young people to join us in our endeavour to create a culture of peace and contribute to the progress of humankind.

This belief is what reverberates though the very name "The Peace Gong"- the loud booming wakeup call that takes you into reality and paves the path for peace.

We look forward to all your suggestions and comments. We hope to incorporate these in our next edition.

Spandana Bhattacharya

'Poor rainfall root cause of food insecurity'

Seema Basavraj Tadasanapar & Aishwarya Shirvanand
Dupalamathi

Farmers of Munnayan village in the Belgaum district of Karnataka are a worried lot. The scanty rainfall in the last couple of months has taken away smiles from the faces of poor farmers as they have lost hopes of getting enough food in the coming months. A farmers' meeting, organized by the children of Gokak Shishu Panchayat at the Munnayan village, on the eve of the World Food Day, concluded that it was high time to think of alternative cropping to deal with the food insecurity in the village. Farmers, attending the meeting, confirmed that dependence on a single crop and poor rainfall have led to a situation of food insecurity in the village, coupled with rising prices. The meeting was attended by nearly 40 farmers - big and small farmers.



Shishu Panchayat members at the discussion in the village

Till 1960s, these farmers lived a trouble free life. Explaining the changing pattern of village food security system, Venkat Rao Naik, an elderly land owner of the village said the farming practice was earlier based on cooperative system. In drought conditions, the big farmers provided grains to the poor in the village without any money. So they were not much affected. That is not the case anymore. No one offers grains to others any more, he lamented. Naik had donated more than 200 acres of land to landless villagers in late 60s.

Shishu Panchayat members asked if he regretted his decision, he replied in negative. He said it was instrumental in ensuring harmony between him and the farmers. Srinivas Naik, a farmer of the village felt people were more honest earlier which gave the sense of unity to villagers. Such feeling of oneness is fast declining.

Most participants agreed the food insecurity was one of the root cause of their problems. Taking part in the discussion, Siddaram Chepalkatti, the headmaster of a local school said because of lack of rainfall this year in the months of June to September, the main crop of the area, jowar would not grow. This would compel them to change food habits, as majority won't be able to buy jowar. Instead they will have to eat maize. The worse affected will be the landless and poor as they will have to compromise with food and its nutritional value. Farmers in the village were mainly growing maize,



moong dal, wheat, Bengal gram and turmeric for their own consumption.

Chepalkatti regretted that less rainfall has compelled farmers to grow few crops leading to food insecurity in the village. Big farmers too were affected by it, Srinivak Naik observed. On the Public distribution system, Basavraj, a farmer said that the PDS was not really benefitting the poor as he alleged that those who were getting food grains from the ration shops, were selling it in the open market to earn profit.



“Food Security v/s Malnourishment”

Shreya Grover

Is malnourishment directly linked to food security? The answer is yes. Malnutrition is caused due to inadequate or excess intake of protein, energy and vitamins.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), food security is a complex sustainable development issue and linked to health through malnutrition. The Food security is physical and economic access of people to food which can meet their dietary needs as well as food preferences. The 1996 World Food Summit has defined food security as existing “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life”. In many countries, health problems related to dietary excess are an ever increasing threat, In fact, malnutrition and food-borne diarrhea are become double burden.

Cases of malnutrition are mostly found in children living in both rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the problem is more acute due to lack of awareness and financial constraints among parents. Malnutrition at early age i.e. from the womb to two years of age, affects the whole life of the child and the coming generation. By two years of age the brain attains 80% of its growth. Maternal malnutrition, low birth weight (LBW) and recurrent infections are other important factors that lead to malnutrition.

Socio-demographic causes like neglect of the girl child, large family size and lack of child spacing and family welfare methods (unplanned maternity) have an adverse affect on child survival and child development. Environmental factors like parental education, socio-economic status, sanitation, standard of living, parental attitudes and child rearing practices influence the growth and development of the child.

“The basic calorie needed for infants and small children is 100 kilo cal per kg of weight in one day. The essential food and drinkable items needed by each person in one day are: in grains- rice and wheat, 5 servings of fruit (i.e. fruits of different colours- apple, papaya, mango, orange, blue grapes, green grapes), vegetables (specially green vegetables), pulses and milk and

milk products”, says Dr. Garima Garg, Consultant - Paediatric ICU, Max Super Speciality Hospital, Saket. Experts on health say that rural children do not get enough food and hence their dietary needs are not met. The result is malnourishment deaths in the country.

In urban areas, the problem is peculiar. Most parents in urban areas are working and they provide easily available food to their children which may not be nutritious. This may make children underweight or may lead to obesity. “Problems caused due to underweight are mainly infections.

As the weight goes down, our immunity goes down, so the body is susceptible to all kinds of infections in the environment. Infections like pneumonia, diarrhoea, anaemia and various mineral deficiencies such as iron, iodine, etc. can lead to life threatening situations in children”, says Dr. Rajat Kumar Gupta, Consultant. -Paediatric Cardiology, Escorts Heart Institute, Okhla.

Is their enough food for feeding the whole world? Is this the reason why so many people in the world suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition? Experts on food security in India however assure that the proposed food security bill would help in bringing down the child malnourishment deaths in the country.

The issue of malnourishment has emerged as a cause of concern for experts on health and food security and the government. The United Nations’s Food and Agriculture Organisation data has expressed its concern over the number of undernourished people in India. The FAO’s 2001-2003 figures show that there were 218 million(approx) undernourished people in India who consumed less than the minimum amount of food energy in kilocalories per capita per day necessary for an average person to stay in good health. Thirty million have been added to the ranks of the hungry since mid 1990s in India. Among children, 46 per cent are underweight. But then, the Right to Life of the Indian Constitution clearly states the right to a good nutritional food everyday to avoid malnutrition.

“Food security-a way to eradicate Hunger from India”

Tithi Jeena

The Indian government is working overtime to bring National Food Security Bill in the parliament to ensure food security to the poor and downtrodden. The bill proposes to cover up to 75 per cent of the rural population and 50 per cent of urban households with a proposed monthly entitlement of seven kilogram food grains per person-at Rs three per kg for rice, Rs 2 for wheat and Rs 1 per kg for coarse grains. However, the task will be tough to get the bill passed, as nationwide consensus is required to pass the bill which will pave the way to eradicate hunger from the country.

Food security can be provided only when there are sufficient food and food items in the country. The ground situation is known to all. India is more or less self-sufficient in cereals but there is a deficit in pulses and oilseeds. With the changing pattern in consumption, the demand for fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, poultry, and ?series has risen many times. Therefore, there is a need to go for crop diversification and improve allied activities.

Besides, there is a need to take some more steps. Opportunities for employment should be provided and emphasis should be laid on social protection programmes. The problem of malnutrition is one of the main problems the country is facing. The level of malnutrition in India is almost double than many African countries. Hence a multi-disciplinary approach is required to deal with this problem and also cover diet diversification including micro-nutrients, women’s empowerment, education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

The government has been running several programmes like mid-day meal to improve food and nutrition level in the country. The famous Mahatma Gandhi NREGA scheme and self employment schemes are being implemented to improve overall situation in the country. Social protection programmes have undoubtedly improved the income level of people in rural areas to some extent. Still, there are number many gaps in these social protection programmes which need to be filled.

The proposed food security bill would provide rice and wheat to the poorest of poor at Rs 3 per kilogramme and Rs 2 per kilogramme respectively. This is too narrow an approach for implementing Right to Food. The Right to Food campaign which talks about food and nutritional security has stated that the draft bill lacked “minimises government’s obligations, restricts people’s entitlements and is devoid of any accountability”. The Right to Food campaign said the proposed draft had no commitment towards nutritional security or to see production, procurement (including local procurement), storage and distribution as an integrated process in order to address issues of food and nutritional security.



Poster made by Sumedha



'The Plight of Fish Vendors in Delhi'

Arindam Som and Santanu

Majrid Kasim Khan has been selling over five varieties of fishes for the past ten years and for the past four years at the Gazipur Fish Wholesale Market in New Delhi. He sells medium sized prawns at the price of 180 rupees a kilo. It is ironic to note that this same prawn at the INA Market costs around 400 rupees and in a *Mandi* in East Delhi the profit earned by Mannu – retail seller in the seller in the East Delhi *Mandi* – stands at a

Ram Mohan Raj – a fish transporter – Gazipur area to be a major cause. "At times directly at our market. They often ask to poultry market, where the state of the roads is

Further, Dev Kumar also believes that the middlemen has further affected their trade. number of times a single kilogram of produce a local market, via transporter. Then from the generally via road – to wholesale markets in wholesale dealers at Gazipur it goes to another to the sub-distributors. Large retailers buy then go on to sell it to the small scale vendors" Fish Vendors' Federation(East Delhi fish

The Gazipur market is bustling with are fish laid out on ice in front of every stall, stream of thermocol ice-boxes being or just by the side of the road. It is muddy inevitably dirty. This is a kind of market which getting obsessed with hygiene, may not

Mohammed Riaz, a vendor in the INA of the entry of big business houses into the poultry sector.

Over 60 per cent of the small vendors in the INA Market and the East Delhi *Mandi* are looking for alternate avenues to earn their livelihood. However, Dev Kumar also emphasizes on the dearth of alternatives they are poised with - "The plight of the vegetable, poultry and the horticulture markets are all the same. And on the other hand, we are unskilled to undertake other tasks. In other areas, the risk is high and we don't have liquid cash that we may pool in! What do you expect us to do in such a situation?"

Ram Mohan Raj on the other hand blames spiraling oil prices as the root cause of this price crisis as transport is extremely costly these days!

On thorough introspection, it can be established with great ease that people like Dev Kumar have been cornered into such dilemmas not by one single cause but due to the multiple causes. It is imperative to take immediate action with respect to this impending soaring prices in the fish industry. A regulatory mechanism needs to be enforced which shall take into account menaces like the role of middlemen, lack of an easy credit system and many more.



Poster made by Wamika Bansal

it shall not be less than 380 rupees! Moreover, INA market – and by Dev Kumar – a retail meager Rs 65 rupees a kilogram!

blames the pitiable state of the roads in the suppliers deny making the supply available receive our supplies from a place near the much better", remarks Majrid.

excessive competition in the market between This fact stand evident when one looks at the changes hands. "From the fishermen it goes to local market the supply is again transported – the cities, like the Gazipur Market. From the fish distributor, who in turn sells the produce these produce from the sub-distributors and states a report published by the Poorva Dilli vendors federation).

activity even before it is six in morning. There catfish flopping about in tanks, and an endless catalogued, opened, and displayed—in stalls because of the melting ice and hence any member of a society, which is slowly decide to go for.

Market, says fish vendors' sorrow is progeny retail business, especially in the fish and the



'Price rise-roadblock to festivity'

Spandana Bhattacharya



Kolkata's Gariahat Market

India is waging a war against soaring prices. Kolkata is no different.

The Peace Gong's Kolkata Bureau visited various markets of the city to see the ground reality.

The festivity is at peak in Kolkata these days. Residents of the city became active with Durga Puja and Lakshmi Puja as they took part in the puja with little or no means. Their enthusiasm remained intact despite the fact that prices have badly hit their budget. This year the "revelry" isn't the same.

The rising prices of perishable items like sweets that are considered must in puja, have discouraged many to celebrate in style. Reasons for soaring prices are many. Top among them is hoarding of essential items. The middlemen have allegedly created this situation which has led to rise in the prices of essential items.

Another reason is untimely rain in the region which compelled traders and shopkeepers to sell essential items at high rate. "Vegetable saplings rotted prematurely due to the untimely rain during autumn and so the supply couldn't meet the demand", says Shyamal, a vegetable vendor in Gariahat market, a popular grocery shopping destination in the city.



Towards a New Paradigm of Development

For the past few years prices of all commodities are spiralling as agricultural production and distribution are against many odds, and schemes are breeding more grassroots level corruption and idleness than real development. Our Silchar Bureau(SB) members talked to Development Communication expert Professor K V Nagraj (KVN) on alternative ways to address these challenges. He is currently Professor and Head, Department of Mass Communication, Assam University, Silchar. This department conducted first-ever development communication experiment from completely Indian perspective for rural development from 1998-2001 with great success.

SB: Welcome Sir to 'Talk the Issue'. As children we are baffled that despite so much of fund spent, we have large number of poor who are below the poverty line (BPL). They are unable to get two square meals a day. On the other hand, so much of fund is almost looted. How can we come out from this crisis?

KVN: Actually the number of those below the poverty line will increase till two aspects of development are taken care. First, our family welfare programs should be devised and implemented in such a way that the rise in population is contained for all sections of people without further delay. Second, corruption of the educated in all fronts including government officials, NGO people, development executives and politicians need to be eliminated. Otherwise it's difficult to change the state of affairs.

SB: But there is neither any sign of decrease in corruption, nor that of population. Do you have any prescription?

KVN: It's difficult to prescribe. But we can take lessons from success of Assam University Rural Communication Project (AURCP) 1998-2001 undertaken by our department under headship of Professor Partha Chatterjee. Dr Biplab Loh Choudhury formulated the project based on own resources of three adjacent villages Nayabil, Barjalenga Grant and Chotjalenga (duckbunglow) with very little outside financial assistance. It considered rural development as inclusive growth of all the segments of the village community while sustaining natural resources in a condition of ecological balance. Such a

development to be successful from the point of sustainability (trans-generational and ecological) demands full involvement of community not only in the pursuit of development, but also creating a sense of belongingness towards every asset created. These aspects are missing in our programs.

SB: What do you suggest then?

KVN: AURCP tried to solve the problems by shifting from outside-inside model of development and followed a plan to "developing community from within" model. First, AURCP brought down the expenditure of development. A canal for irrigation was reconstructed at a cost ten times less than the government agency estimated. In fact all our development schemes are having hugely inflated budget that offers scope of corruption. The people are involved as beneficiaries, not arbiters of their own progress. They are continuing to be targets in terms of money spending. This brings down their self-esteem. No community can really prosper without self-esteem. AURCP program was created realizing these. AURCP did not take single paisa from government for development. It was mostly villagers money, physical resources, labour and pride in own tradition that did wonder. We used a different communication approach where the communicator is not merely a person or group commissioned for campaign, but the person who is emotionally jelled with the community. The basic to development is the right ethics and the urge to work for community welfare.

SB: How did villagers utilize this communication approach?

KVN: Through training, action-initiatives of villagers for agricultural improvement, health improvement and educational improvement over three years, villages were in growth path. They utilized their folk media to create right ethos for development, their rituals for enhancing sharing and tree plantation, social communication network for immunization success, own labour-indigenous agricultural knowledge-networking for developing agriculture. An effort was made to enable them to identify the villagers own resources, own development needs, problems, natural leaders and followers, and from most pressing to least pressing problems. Utilizing the method, they were able to plan their action initiatives in phased manner. The result was excellent. Nayabil, among the poorest South Assam villages, became a prosperous one in three years. Chotjalenga, most developed among the three started its own high school. Barjalenga grew tremendously in agriculture and organization building. Its youth club, Pioneer Sangha became the best NGO in Assam by 2003.

SB: Tell us something about the improvement in agriculture?

KVN: AURCP interim report on agricultural communication recorded rituals and beliefs associated with farming practice, and songs and idioms associated with agricultural communication. During action phase such beliefs and practices rediscovered own meanings and bolstered healthy agricultural practices. Farmers in three villages informed about adoption of buffalo plough. AURCP recorded this appropriate rural technology in its reports and urged villagers to feel how great commonsense-scientists their forefathers were.

SB: Thank you Sir. Your last words please.

KVN: Our development should be slow but steady through generations and based on our own transgenerational achievements along with absorption of the new.



Poster made by Arti Chauhan