

# janata

Vol. 72 No. 22  
June 18, 2017

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Editor :  
**G. G. Parikh**

Managing Editor : Guddi

D-15, Ganesh Prasad,  
Naushir Bharucha Marg,  
Mumbai - 400 007.

Email : [janataweekly@gmail.com](mailto:janataweekly@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.janataweekly.org](http://www.janataweekly.org)

## Criterion for Presidents'

**Kuldip Nayar**

THE BharatiyaJanata Party (BJP) cannot hide its anti-Muslim fangs. Instead of building consensus behind the candidature of Hamid Ansari for presidentship, the party has appointed its top three leaders to find a candidate who commands the consent of most political parties.

I cannot understand what is wrong with vice-president Ansari. He has handled the RajyaSabha extremely well and before that he made the Aligarh Muslim University a really thriving academic institution during his tenure as the vice-chancellor. His erudition is beyond doubt and his commitment to secularism is without any blemish.

The non-BJP parties have come together to adopt vice-president Ansari who is acceptable to all parties. It would be embarrassing for him to be the opposition candidate when he is the country's vice-president. Dr Abdul Kalam, former President, was the popular choice of several opposition parties for a second term but had to face a similar predicament before pulling out. So, all that he got was the re-naming of the Aurangzeb Road as Dr Abdul Kalam Road.

The BJP is ultimately going to tick the choice of the RSS. It has indicated that it would keep in mind the secular ethos of the county. But it is neither here nor there because when it comes to selecting a person for the top constitutional post, a Muslim candidate would be far from the thought of the RSS.

It would ultimately depend on Prime Minister NarndraModi to nudge the party to choose a person of his choice. And from the speeches made by the BJP president, Amit Shah, quite clearly indicated that the person thus chosen would be anybody but a Muslim. He has been touring the different parts of the country, including the southern states, and exhorting that the choice of a presidential candidate should be someone who is acceptable to the ruling party.

The two houses of parliament and the state legislatures which comprise the Electoral College suggest that the BJP will have its way. The BJP's appointment of a three-member committee—Rajnath Singh, ArunJaitley and Venkaiah Naidu—who are part of Prime Minister Modi's cabinet, makes it clear that

the party's top leadership will ultimately decide who should go to RashtrapatiBhavan.

Speaker SumitraMahajan, who was initially, supported by the ruling party has been dropped. She is not being considered by either the DMK or the AIADMK. Understandably, the person has to be acceptable to the southern states like Andhra, Telangana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Even L.K. Advani looked like the candidate of the BJP. Probably, the court verdict on Babri masjid demolition may have forced the party to look elsewhere as he has been charged as being a part of a conspiracy to destroy the masjid. Over the years, the rough ends in Advani had been rounded off and he is more like a person who went to Karachi and laid a wreath at the mausoleum of Qaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah.

If one were to look back, controversies between the President and Prime Ministers have not been rare. Of the seven previous presidents, only Dr. Zakir Hussain and Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed left office without any public confrontation. Zakir Hussain, who died in harness, confined himself to scholarly pursuits while Ahmed was one of the most pliable heads of state India has ever had. It was during his tenure that the Emergency was declared and he signed the proclamation without verifying whether it had the Cabinet approval or not.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and DrRajendra Prasad had many constitutional run-ins. Dr S. Radhakrishnan had even succeeded in getting defence minister Krishna Menon sacked after India's debacle

at the hands of the Chinese in 1962. In 1967, Radhakrishnan embarrassed the ruling Congress by allowing the Swatantra Party to parade its MLAs in RashtrapatiBhavan to prove their majority in the Rajasthan assembly.

Even V.V. Giri, a prominent trade unionist who was elected with the help of Indira Gandhi, then Congress President, to the presidency, often expressed his reservations over anti-labour legislations. Thus he objected when the Centre wanted to dismiss striking Railway employees. He also registered his protest over the supersession of Supreme Court judges.

Then acting president B.D. Jatti, who succeeded Giri temporarily, proved more assertive. When requested by the Janata government to sign the ordinance dissolving nine assemblies in states ruled by the Congress, Jatti prevaricated, pleading that the Centre had no powers to prematurely dissolve duly-elected assemblies without proper reason. Then Prime Minister Morarji Desai was forced to hold out the threat of his resignation if Jatti delayed the ordinance and the Janata Party even organised angry demonstrations against the President.

Matters hardly improved even after the Janata Party installed Sanjiva Reddy. Reddy and Desai could not get along and the latter prevented the President from going abroad even on ceremonial visits. Reddy, nursing a grouse against the Janata government, made constitutional history when he invited Charan Singh to form a government after Morarji Desai lost his majority in the Lok Sabha. Reddy set yet another precedent when he

dissolved the Lok Sabha on the advice of a prime minister who could not prove his majority. Even Zail Singh installed Rajiv Gandhi soon after Mrs Gandhi's assassination even before he was elected to the parliamentary party. It is another matter that both -Zail Singh and Rajiv Gandhi - were at loggerheads more often than not.

I wish Pranab Mukherjee had utilized his term to erase the decision which he took during the Emergency. He was the right-hand man of Sanjay Gandhi, an extra-constitutional authority. Hence, his name will not go down well in the history. Like his predecessors, he too was mired in controversies particularly when he published a book while in office. He could have waited for his retirement to pen down experience at RashtrapatiBhavan.

Meanwhile, the present government at the centre must explain how secularism can survive when softHindutva is spreading in the country. By elevating Ansari as President the BJP would have assured the people that the country's ethos cannot go astray and do things which do not fit into the idea of India: democratic and secular.

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## BJP Strategy for 2019

**Rajindar Sachar**

Raj Nath, the Union Home Minister, speaking proudly of the achievements of three years of the Modi Government proclaimed, “We have by and large, provided security to the country. India is the second largest country as far as Muslim population in the world is concerned and can say with full responsibility that despite such a large population (of Muslims), the IS has not been able to set foot”.

Frankly it is not clear whether he meant it to be a compliment for patriotism and nationalism of Indian Muslims or was he only praising his security agencies that not with standing such a large population of Muslim his intelligence agencies have been able to control it. I hope it is not the latter because it would be uncalled for and unjustly maligning the Muslim community.

Raj Nath should openly say that the patriotism, nationalism of Indian Muslims is no less than that of any other community including Hindus. And that any one even remotely suggesting otherwise is talking treason, as some of the sickening communal Hindu bodies are doing.

Muslims do not have to show their patriotism on their sleeves — to suggest this would be calumny. In fact, not with standing the provocation from the RSS fanatics, the equanimity shown by Muslims is praiseworthy. If Raj Nath is really keen to keep peace in the country, he needs to persuade Narendra Modi to immediately withdraw the deliberately provocative recent

Animal Slaughter legislation which is being opposed by many states apart from being challenged in the High Courts. The legislation, purporting to be for prevention of cruelty to animals, is a ploy to snatch jurisdiction by the Centre, on a subject of cattle market which, squarely falls within the jurisdiction of State legislation. Even the BJP accepts this, as is clear from BJP State President of Arunachal Pradesh openly announcing that the Centre’s ban on the role of cattle for slaughter could not be binding on those states. The whole of North East is on a boil with this legislation.

Minister of Environment Harsh Vardhan says diplomatically that the government is open to suggestions. This sounds hollow considering that half the States are opposed to this legislation which in reality is a camouflage to appease the Gau Rakshaks and to allow them to spread terror. This legislation has been deliberately brought up by the BJP for further communalizing the situation and also ensuring ruination for poor Muslims who earn their living through these sales.

The atmosphere has been further violated by the installation by RSS Nagpur bosses of Yogi Adityanath as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh who already has spread deep fear amongst Muslims in the state, by openly praying at the make-shift Ram Temple near Babri Masjid demolition site — this is deliberately communalising the situation in India which is the election strategy of the BJP for 2019 Elections.

The Prime Minister needs to be reminded of how he described these Gau lovers in August 2016 thus; *“It makes me angry that people are running shops in the name of cow protection....Some people indulge in anti-social activities at night, and in the day masquerade as cow protectors.”*

Modi government is not even making a sham excuse to counter suggestions that its actions are weakening the morale of minorities. In that connection the way Modi has handled the formation of National Minority Commission shows that he only wants to keep a shell. The present Commission has been constituted after remaining vacant for months and that too of five persons comprising one Muslim as Chairperson and others from one each from other minorities. And this also has been done only after the High Court asked the government for response to a writ petition filed before it.

According to Census dated 2011, Hindu are 79.8%, Muslim 14.2%. Thus the rest 6% are other minorities like — Christians 2.3%, Sikhs 1.7%, Buddhists 0.7%, Jains 0.4%, and Parsees. It can’t be denied that the object of National Minority Commission is to create a mechanism which would give confidence to the minorities in India to feel that they have equal stakes in the running of the state and are equal beneficiaries of state programmes. It is hoped that the other two members to be appointed will be Muslims either from amongst

well known academicians or public figures from the community to give some reassurance to the Muslims.

The report of UN Human Right council, Forum on Minority issued on December 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010 has also made some significant recommendations on minorities and their effective participation in economic life, which each country is mandated to follow;

“The Council emphasizes, Consequently, the right of minorities to participate effectively in economic life must be fully taken into account by governments seeking to promote equality at every level. From implementing non-discrimination in employment and enforcing protection laws in the private sector to developing national economic development and international development assistance schemes.”

It is unfortunate that the opposition has not come up with any concrete or specific programme which it intends to fight the 2019 elections. In fact the opposition has become a debating / TV phenomena. It has no specific programme for action. I feel that in the way Congress and other political parties withered away an opportunity which arose from the rising of Dalit forces in Saharanpur speaks ill of their commitment.

There already seems to be a competition between Chief Minister of UP and Modias to who will be greater favourite of SanghParivar after 2019 Parliamentary elections assuming BJP wins the majority. Yogi Adityanath has given a boost to the mischief mobsters posing as GauRakshaks as indicated by UP Director General of Police issuing instructions to all police officers that all involved in cow slaughter should

be booked under National Security Act — a legislation meant to deal with

Jehadi / terrorists. Has BJP lost all sense of balance and proportion?

## The Danger of being Urjit Patel

**Mrinal K. Biswas**

Urjit Patel was declared Governor of Reserve Bank of India on 20 August 2016 and assumed charge as the chief regulator of the country's monetary affairs on 4 September to succeed maverick Raghuram Rajan in the midst of highly secretive discussions followed soon by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 8 November stunning disclosure of demonetization of 500 and 1000 rupee notes with immediate effect. The new RBI chief kept himself off the scene as far as possible when central government's finance ministry high-ups apparently took charge to alleviate the agonized people's discomforts with a trudging RBI process of remonetization by supply of new 500 and 2000 rupee notes as legal tenders carrying signatures of Urjit Patel.

He carried on as a good ploughman: Faced a parliamentary committee on the demonetization issue, warded off RBI employee union's concerns about the central bank's autonomy and lowered the repo rate even when the note ban was in the offing. The government was happy as erstwhile governor Raghuram Rajan's intransigence on relaxation of banking interest rate persisted too long. Urjit Patel seemed to be pliable in the new scheme of things by cutting down repo rate to 6.25 per cent at the first meeting of monetary policy committee (MPC) on 4 October last year, a month before demonetization. But Urjit Patel's unexpected turn-about on 7 June this year was too emphatically

demonstrated when he chaired the MPC and decided against any further tinkering with repo rate, with one dissenting note.

MPC was the central government's ploy to influence repo rate which is the rate at which RBI lends short term funds to commercial banks when they have a sudden shortfall. The repo rate is actually the benchmark rate for the banking system as lenders to determine, revise their lending rates for trade, industry and business. They prefer low interest rates to access cheap money and reversely resent higher rates as money becomes dearer to avail themselves of it from financial institutions.

MPC was constituted last year for the first time in 82 years of RBI history before which the Governor was the sole authority to fix repo rate. MPC now comprises six members including three nominated by the finance ministry. Governor being the MPC chairman RBI deputy governor Vishal Acharya and executive director Michel Patra have been in the committee from the central bank. It was external member Rabindra Dholakia who demurred on continuing with 6.25 per cent repo rate and wanted revision downwards.

There were some twists and turns before Urjit Patel stuck to present rate even by ignoring clear signals from finance minister Arun Jetley to lower this benchmark. Governor

asserted his authority by seeing to it that MPC members at his behest declined to attend a meeting with finance ministry officials ahead of the RBI decisions on rates. He was reported to have tersely said, "the meeting did not take place. All the MPC members declined the request of the finance ministry for that meeting." RBI autonomy secured? Let us wait and see.

It was perhaps not the first time RBI Governor waded a different path than following a track indicated by the government at centre. Raghuram Rajan preferred to unseat himself from the chair than succumbing to government pressures. Ex-governor Duvvuri Subbarao wrote down in his book *Who Moved My Interest Rate* narrating how the then exasperated finance minister P Chidambaram pushed hard against RBI and how his ministry officials outflanked RBI in various ways. Because Subbarao would not bend and cut interest rate.

This time the finance ministry was not ready for a pugnacious Urjit Patel, soon after his signature samples in English and Hindi were added to the newly designed 500 and 2000 currency plates in dramatic circumstances followed by his cutting down interest rate a month before demonetization.

The government smarting under GDP growth falling to poor 6.1 per cent in January-March quarter wanted desperately to trigger the economy with lower than 6.25 per cent repo rate and encouraging the business go in for credit off takes freely. Urjit Patel remembered what his predecessor Raghuram Rajan said before departing, "the central bank serves the economy and the

cause of growth by keeping inflation low and stable." He repudiated the notion of a trade-off between growth and inflation. According to him, growth vs. inflation debate is not relevant. Earlier Duvvuri Subbarao had said while the business of growth with low interest rate was aired too loudly the consequent effect of inflation was conveniently forgotten. This was bound to give push to upward price-spiraling causing sufferings to overwhelming silent majority.

In the current situation the wide

spreading farm loan waivers and increasing number of non-paying up bank loans has created a big pent up inflation situation. This is a big debt bomb indeed. Urjit Patel is seemingly not impressed by retail inflation falling to 2.99 per cent in April from 5.47 per cent a year back. So he stays put with 6.25 per cent repo till August. He poses a danger as evident from government chief economic adviser Arvind Subramanian's statement saying inflation forecast errors by RBI has been large and systematically one-sided in overstating inflation.

## Privatization of Railway Stations

Whether traveling or transporting goods, Indian Railways is the lifeline of the whole country. This is one of the largest railway services in the world. The British used railway for the economic exploitation of India and the strengthening of its empire.

The creation and extension of rail service in independent India was aimed at strengthening the country's contact system, economy and military system. In the construction of Indian Railway Service, the country's most valuable resources and labour are spent.

For the last few years the ruling class has been trying to privatize the railway. But railway unions have raised their voices against it. The present BJP government has cleared the intention to privatize the railway by initiating the sale of railway stations in private hands.

The Socialist Party of India has decided to launch an awareness campaign against this anti-constitutional and anti-people

decision of the government. Under this campaign, the workers of the party will explain the reality of the arguments given to the citizens in favour of the privatization of the railway by the ruling class.

The campaign will start from Delhi on June 22. On that day the Socialist Party, Delhi Pradesh will conduct 'Save Indian Railways' march from Mandi House to Jantar-Mantar. After that, all state units will organize programmes in their respective states. The party will hold a national convention on this issue with Hind Mazdoor Sabha.

**Dr. Abhijit Vaidya**  
Spokesperson, SPI

**Janata**

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## Research in India on Finland\*

B. Vivekanandan

Finland has bewitched me ever since I met its outstanding Social Democratic Prime Minister, and world statesman, Kalevi Sorsa, in July 1985, at his residence 'Kesaranta' in Helsinki. Mr. Sorsa was a symbol of goodness in Finland. For the first time in my life, I saw a Prime Minister residing in a house, with its entry gate wide open, with no security guard around, even to keep an eye on a foreign visitor, who was going in, with a brief case in hand, to meet the Prime Minister. That openness, his warm reception, and his thoughtful responses to my questions, marked the beginning of a long-lasting warm relationship between us. As a result, on my invitation, Mr. Kalevi Sorsa graciously visited India, in November 1995, and inaugurated an International Seminar on Social Democracy, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in New Delhi. In 1997, he wrote a scintillating 'Foreword' to my book, *International Concerns of European Social Democrats*. As a mark of my deep respect for him, in 2000, I dedicated my book, *Building on Solidarity: Social Democracy and the New Millennium*, to Mr. Kalevi Sorsa. Indeed, Mr. Sorsa cemented my close relationship with Finland, which, after his death, is being continued by my other dear Finnish friend, Prof. J. P. Roos, of the Helsinki University.

At the outset, I may mention that, Finland was not a focal point of study and research in India, until I joined

the faculty of the West European Studies Division of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, and decided to widen my academic interest to the Nordic region. I took the initiative in that direction in mid-1980s, offered a post-graduate-level course, on "Social Democrats of Western Europe", in Jawaharlal Nehru University, and made "Social Democrats of Finland", as a part of that. It was in that context that I came to Finland in 1985, and researched various facets of Finland's Social Democratic Party.

The canvas of my study at that time was very wide. It encompassed the ascendancy of the SDP in Finland's political arena, the evolution of its principles and programmes, its organisational set-up, its relationship with trade union confederations like the SAK, and TVK its relationship with its affiliates like the Social Democratic Youth (SNK) and the Social Democratic Women. It also encompassed the SDP's role in building up the Consumer Cooperative Movement in Finland, in the activities of the Workers' Educational Association, and in the International Solidarity Foundation. In addition, my study included the SDP's role in the permeation of the idea of equality at all levels of the Finnish society, and in the restructuring of the Finnish society on egalitarian lines, by building up coalitions with other parties around significant reforms, like the establishment of the Welfare State System in Finland. The study

enveloped also the SDP's electoral performance during the 20th Century, and the impact of Collective Agreements between Employers' and Employees' organisations, which has reduced the possibility of strikes in Finland. Another facet of SDP which I deliberated was the Party's foreign policy perspectives, based on the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line of neutrality, and the role it played in the Socialist International.

Indeed, my study and research on the SDP, enabled me to understand the texture of politics in Finland. For the completion of this study, I made another visit to Finland in 1989. My book, *Pathfinder: Social Democrats of Scandinavia*, published in 1991, contains the outcome of my research on the Finnish SDP.

## II

In subsequent years, I have widened my research and also studied its Welfare State System. Fundamentally, this study was about people's day-to-day life, vis-a-vis the government's responsibility in it.

Finland's advanced Welfare State System, which gives social protection for everyone in the country, always fascinated me - its pillars like the full-employment policy, steeply progressive taxation system, a strong, benevolent and resourceful, democratic state, endowed with the authority to regulate the economic and social life of people, and a dominant public sector.

\* Keynote speech at Indo-Finnish joint seminar, May 2017

I examined the Finnish Welfare State System in the context also of various challenges it faced, like Finland's economic crisis in 1990s, the Globalisation-Liberalisation-Privatisation drive, and Finland's drive for obtaining eligibility to become a member of the European Union and the Euro-Zone.

The study also included the ethical urge of the Finnish Welfare State to reduce income disparity and elevate the quality of life of the underprivileged, and its visionary strategy, aimed to minimise the adverse impact of unemployment, sickness, homelessness, and other unpredictable developments, which would impede people's quality of life.

The economic crisis in Finland in early 1990s, had a debilitating effect on the welfare state system in the country. And, I found that this avoidable economic crisis was put on course partly by thoughtless piecemeal steps taken by some Finnish administrators to strengthen Finland's eligibility to become a member of the European Union, and partly by the structural changes made in Finland's economy to integrate itself with the global economy through liberalisation and privatisation, which were inimical to the functioning of Finland's Welfare State System. The financial deregulation policy was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Cumulatively all those unwise moves had weakened Government's control over the State's economy and finance, and its ability to administer the Welfare state. I have dealt with the issue in depth in my article, published in 2012, in India's journal, *International Studies*.

This crisis caused a sudden rise in unemployment in Finland - from

3.5 per cent in 1990, to 20 per cent in 1995. It caused the widening of inequality in the country, and a change in the pattern of State funding of the Municipalities. The earmarked matching grant system to Municipalities, was replaced by a Block Grant system, which was considered retrograde. There was a horizontal squeeze on all welfare state provisions. But, notably, there was no total withdrawal of any welfare or social security provisions, in Finland despite the economic crisis.

Though the Welfare State System in Finland has survived the economic crisis of 1990s with limited damages, there are still other potential challenges to it. The potential challenge, from an intrusive European Union bureaucracy in Brussels, to the Finnish welfare state system is still a strong one, because, basically, the EU is not a pro-welfare institution. It is essentially, pro-market and pro-profit. It may be noted that, during the EU referendum in Finland, the focus was mainly on agriculture and foreign policy, and not on social policy. It was assumed, at that time, that social policy would remain exclusively in the national domain, under EU's Subsidiarity principle. But, that assumption is eroding. If European Union's tax policy gets attuned to reduction of tax-base of member states, it would deplete Finland's Welfare State System's resource base. Finland's joining the Euro-Zone has weakened the position of the Bank of Finland vis-a-vis the European Central Bank, in Frankfurt, in the management of Finland's financial sector. Moreover, Globalisation has caused a general erosion of fiscal policy autonomy of the State of Finland, which is important for successful functioning

of the Welfare State System.

In the social map of the world, Finland occupies an exalted position, because of the advanced welfare state system in the country. It provides an impressive model for human development in the world, which radiates inspiration for other countries to emulate. It is imperative to preserve that position of Finland in World's social map.

There are several other Indians too, doing research on Finland. One of them is my former student at JNU, Sanal Edamaruku, President of the Rationalist International, who is doing research on Finland's Educational System and the Status of Religion in Finland. His book on the History of Religion, Conscience and Tolerance in Finland, is expected to be published later this year. Another on-going research is on the Health Care sector of Finland's Welfare State System, by Dr. Ritu Priya, Professor of Social Medicine and Community Health in Jawaharlal Nehru University. At the same time, I am aware that well-known Finnish scholars like Professor Anna Rotkireh, Professor Minna Saavala and Dr. Kaari Mattila have done notable research on Indian families. The list of paper presenters at this Seminar, from Finland, shows that many other Finnish scholars are also engaged in research on India.

### III

And, finally, the question is: How do such studies and researches matter in the relationship between India and Finland? It is my conviction that long-lasting and healthy relationship between countries can be built up only on the basis of informed mutual understanding. Academics in Universities have a

key role to play in building up this understanding through their studies and research on society, politics and cultural ethos and habits of potential friends. I am very proud to have played a pivotal role in ensuring Finland has highervisibility in academic discussions in India today.

In India, discussion on the Welfare State System is catching up in a

significant way. When I convened an International Seminar on the Welfare State System in the World, at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in April 2001, Finland was represented by two outstanding Finnish scholars — Prof JP Roos and Dr. Jukka Pekkarinen. The Finnish and Swedish models are reference points in these discussions. I have seen some Indian newspapers

writing editorials in support of the establishment of a welfare state system in India, citing the Scandinavian example, including the Finnish example. People take note of the Finnish model, when they find Finland among the top ten in the Human Development Index. I will always endeavour to bring India and Finland closer, by promoting understanding of each other.

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## Ken-Betwa River Link to Cut 2 Million Trees

**Bharat Dogra**

Trees are our precious resource, each and every tree needs to be nurtured and protected. Not a single tree should be cut unless it can be clearly shown that there is some overwhelming need for it. This was always true, but in times of climate change this is even more important than before. It is equally true that the destruction of trees in natural forests can never be fully made up by plantations that are raised in the name of compensatory afforestation.

So clearly there is a need to protest if one sees that there are plans to cut nearly 18 lakh trees for implementing the Ken-Betwa River Link Project, a project which has been publicized as India's first river-link project and whose rationality has been widely questioned for a host of different reasons. Some other estimates mention a higher number of affected trees.

The viability and desirability of the proposed aim of transferring water from Ken to Betwa river with the help of a dam and 250 km. canal has been questioned from day one, as also the unnecessary displacement of people of several villages and the

endangering of the habitats of several threatened animals and birds including tiger, gharial and vultures.

What is more this is the first in a series of several river-link projects which taken together as a whole have been criticized as being disastrous for our rivers, environment and people by many independent experts.

On May 2 a letter signed by 30 experts and activists was sent to the Union Minister of Environment and Forests, registering a strong protest against this project and the arbitrariness involved in its implementation. This letter says, "The project has been plagued by sloppy, intentionally misleading and inadequate impact assessments, procedural violations and misinformation at every step of the way."

The signatories to this letter include Dr. Bhartendu Prakash, the author of two extensive studies on the water-resources of Bundelkhand region and Himanshu Thakkar, Coordinator of South Asia Network of Dams, Rivers and People who has written innumerable reports and

letters on the issue of river-links. The signatories also include Amita Bavaskar, former member of Forest Advisory Committee and EAS Sarma, former Secretary, Govt of India.

This letter says that basic information about the water availability in the two rivers has not been made available and other basic information has been held back from project affected people. The project has been pushed in the name of helping people of Bundelkhand but on the one hand it involves transferring water from Bundelkhand to Upper Betwa region and on the other hand its adverse impact on groundwater recharge in the downstream areas of Bundelkhand region is being ignored.

This letter whose signatories include wild life experts also expresses serious concern about the very adverse impacts of this project on Panna Tiger Reserve and Ken Gharial Wildlife Sanctuary. It is indeed a cruel irony that on the one hand tribals are being evicted for such wild life

*(Continued on Page 15)*

# How the ‘ChaturBaniya’ May Yet Save Us All

Sarim Naved

Grappling with the possibility that your life’s work has been a failure must be a terrible state to be in. Imagine that you’re Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and you have devoted your life to ahimsa, to questioning the hegemony of the modern industrial world, to communal peace and to the end of untouchability. Now imagine that you’re in 1947, when ahimsa and communal amity are being rejected so savagely that you’re forced to question whether the freedom struggle had really been non-violent as you had thought? Your chosen successor does not see eye to eye with your idea of an India based on a model of empowered self-governing villages, and caste-based discrimination, despite all your efforts, is as entrenched as ever.

This was the reality faced by Gandhi from 1945-1948, the period covered in Sudhir Chandra’s *Gandhi: An Impossible Possibility* (translated into English by Chitra Padmanabhan). Concentrating on what was the most trying time of his life, the book presents Gandhi in a light which our hagiographies often ignore.

In popular imagination Gandhi is seen as a cocksure idealist — a man who is so cocooned by his belief in his ideals that he is beyond the pale of any self-doubt. Historians may know better but it is fascinating, as a lay reader, to come face to face with a Gandhi who realises that the freedom movement led by him had never actually adhered to ahimsa, but only to passive resistance masquerading as ahimsa. As Gandhi

himself noted, “There was a time when everyone believed in Gandhi because Gandhi showed them the way to combat the British.... At that time the purpose seemed more achievable through ahimsa, so Gandhi was much in demand. No one had taught us how to make the atom bomb then. If we had possessed that knowledge then we would have seriously considered obliterating the British with it. But since no such option was available, I was accepted and my authority prevailed.”

This is a Gandhi who travels to Noakhali in 1946 to give strength to the Hindus against whom violence has been unleashed by Muslims. He goes in the midst of people to “reason with them and create such circumstances that would prompt Hindus and Muslims to begin living on good terms with each other again”. He tries to control the riots in Bihar that follow soon, where violence has been unleashed by Hindus on Muslims. As independence approaches, the people whom he has led during the freedom struggle no longer seem to have much use for his leadership or message. He is perceived as a dreamer, unaware of the ‘real’ world. He finds his connection with the people is weaker. They no longer listen to him.

It is at this point that the strength of Gandhi, the leader, asserts itself in a wholly unexpected manner. On the eve of independence he decides to go to Noakhali. It is a symbolic statement that unless mutual hostility ceases, freedom would never be secure. When he reaches Calcutta,

he is begged by the city’s Muslim leadership, which till recently had derided him as only a Hindu leader, to stay and ensure calm in the city. Gandhi extracts a promise from them that he would stay in Calcutta if they ensured that no harm would come to the Hindus of Noakhali where he was bound.

It is an extraordinary moment. In Calcutta, Gandhi faces irate mobs, reaches out to Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy — the man who had been responsible for the ‘great Calcutta killings’ of 1946, who now finds the courage, in Gandhi’s company, to admit to a crowd of angry Hindus that it was he who had been responsible for the Calcutta killings. The tension breaks. People of both communities come together on August 15, 1947. But this calm is broken violently two weeks later and Gandhi goes on a fast unto death. Young volunteers go out and try to stop the violence. Some even lose their lives while doing so. In the end, the ‘miracle of Calcutta’ is achieved and Gandhi breaks his fast. The dark moment when a bloodbath seemed imminent has passed.

Interestingly, this narration is not intended to make Gandhi seem like a great leader who was always sure of his method and achieved his objective. Rather, a study of his actions and his concerns in those days convey a deep sense of helplessness. Yet, he perseveres. Chandra dwells on moments when Gandhi “was surrounded by an impenetrable darkness”. In 1946 he tells noted anthropologist N.K. Bose,

his interpreter and Bangla tutor in Noakhali, that his “body just gives way”, admitting that his mind had never before been so hazy. Gandhi, Chandra writes, was “overcome with a weariness of body and spirit”.

What is of note is the fact that Gandhi, in the final years of his life, while fighting the same battles that he has fought all his life, seems to be doing so only out of conviction, with no great hope that people would listen to him. The fact that he succeeds in Calcutta and in his final Delhi fast surprises him more than anybody else. This is a man who acts despite grave risks to his safety and his health, not because his idealism makes him feel secure but because it leaves him so vulnerable that he has no option but to follow his convictions.

It is the vulnerability of this frail old man that is so moving. If it moves you as a reader separated in time from the man by about seven decades, then one can imagine the effect on those living at that time and subject to this emotional onslaught from a man who bewilderingly and repeatedly asked them to rise above themselves.

Gandhi, the tallest leader that this country has had, presents a very interesting quandary regarding the role of a leader and his relationship with his people. If the role of a leader is to lead, the question of trust does not arise. They are to be told what is good for them and are to be persuaded to act accordingly. If, however, a leader chooses to listen, to observe and to engage with his people, does he cease to lead? Does he become less of a leader because he feels “each one must look at oneself, without worrying whether others are looking at themselves”, thereby asking them to recognise the

possibilities in themselves?

Gandhi chose to inspire, not lead. This fragile republic, which rests and struggles to survive on the ideas of Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, would do well to remember that. If India, which was not given a great chance for survival after its tumultuous experience of independence and partition, still stands, it is not because of force of arms or feat of diplomacy but because there was a sense of a moral consensus that this country chose to abide by. Regardless of the passions that led people to commit unspeakable crimes in those days, they came around to Gandhi’s way of thinking, moved by the sheer force of his will. This, then was a moral consensus presented by Gandhi who never, despite all his weariness and doubts about being able to convince people to see reason, let go of his convictions.

It is, perhaps, the intuitive understanding of this politics of morality that has kept this country together, despite many travails. It is also this very politics of morality that promises a way out of the state that India finds itself in today.

By morality one does not mean the present-day conception of moral judgements passed on individuals to define acceptable and unacceptable modes of behaviour. This kind of morality is limiting. It tries to fit a person into a box. There is a larger political morality, however, which seeks to liberate. The beauty of this political morality is that it need not promise riches or power, it only needs a message that everyone will be safe and will be cared for. It is the most basic message a democracy can convey to its citizens.

Political morality is a function of

deep-rooted personal convictions. It defines the parameters of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in public life. Derision of this kind of morality leads us to the situation we are in, when lies become ‘post-truth’ and leaders are as likely to be celebrated for their powers of manipulation as their governance.

It is not surprising that people, not only in India but all over the world, seem to be flocking to leaders who intend to challenge this lack of political morality. Seen widely across Europe, it became even more apparent in the US, where the people chose to trust a person totally untested in politics just because he represented a break from the vacuous politics that had so become the norm. India is clearly no stranger to this phenomenon.

Often, it is not what the leader believes that moves people, but it is the strength of that belief. This is not what democracy is, or should be about. Democracy needs to be a dialogue between the leader and the ‘led’, neither of them perhaps fully understanding the other but also without having any contempt for each other. Contempt by the government for the governed, or vice versa, can be fatal to democracy.

In times of fear and insecurity, much of it manufactured, it is only a politics of morality that can come up with an appropriate response. A politics of morality that even if it is not pegged to high ideals such as ahimsa, speaks of enabling people to have an orderly civic existence, go about their lives normally. In his last days, Gandhi, known as Mahatma to many and as a ‘chaturbaniya’ to some, saw this as his message and contrary to his own fears, may yet save us all. —*The Wire*

# Samajwadi Shikshak Training Camp - A Report

We the Socialist Institutions organized a unique four days national level camp for teachers working in socialist educational institutions. The camp was conducted from May 31' 17 to June 3' 17 at Yusuf Meherally Center, Tara (Panvel) in Maharashtra. A total of 50 teachers from various states attended the camp.

## Background

*We the Socialist Institutions* was formed with the blessings of Bhai Vaidya at the National Conference of socialist institutions at Tara in September 2015. It is committed to bringing together on a common platform socialists of all hues to face the current challenges in our country.

At one of its meetings in Pune, it was decided to organize a meeting of socialist educational institutions on March 18, 2017 at Yusuf Meherally Center, Tara. A detailed agenda was worked out in a meeting during the All India Socialist Youth Conference in January 2017. The meeting was presided over by G G Parikh and attended by Manju Mohan, Dr. Sunilam, Shahid Kamaal, Neeraj Jain, Sadashiv Magdum, Sushila Morale, Dr. Sukan Baranth, Rajabhau Avasak, J S Walia and others.

The March 18 meeting was attended by prominent socialist educationists from all over the country. The following questions were raised and discussed:

- How are the Socialist run institutions different from other educational institutions?
- To what extent are these

institutions inculcating socialist values among the students studying in their schools and colleges?

- How committed are the teachers in these institutions to spread the socialist culture?
- If socialist institutions are not very different from the conventional institutions, what should be done to transform their character?

After much discussion, it was decided to conduct a training workshop for teachers teaching in various socialist institutions throughout the country. Yusuf Meherally Center, Janata Trust, Rashtra Seva Dal and Lokayat took active part in organizing the camp.

## Why this Training Camp?

Socialists have done a lot of work in the field of education in the past several decades. This training camp was conducted to address the teachers associated with socialist institutions. It comprised high quality sessions by experts on the need for socialism in today's context, its various facets and techniques to impart socialist values in classrooms. Another aim of the camp was to demonstrate to participating teachers how we can use constructivism (*gyan-rachnawad*) in classrooms.

This training camp should also be seen as the first step of our endeavour towards building a strong network of teachers who are willing to walk together on the path of

socialism and transforming their students and parents community.

## Participation

The camp drew a fantastic response with about 50 teachers participating from various samajwadi schools in Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP and Karnataka.

The inaugural session was attended by socialist leaders like Allauddin Shaikhji, Sadashiv Magdumji, Matin Diwanji, Subhash Ware, Neeraj Jain and others.

## Sessions & Activities at the Camp

### Day 1

The camp started with a well delivered orientation speech by **Subhash Ware**. He presented a brief outline of the various challenges that face our country and the significance of socialist thought. He also spoke about how teachers should think about social issues and contribute in spreading socialist values by their thought and actions. He argued that the teacher has a higher responsibility than any other professional because the teacher is responsible for shaping the mindset of the entire generation. He talked about the provisions of social equality, justice and education in the Constitution. He also briefly touched upon the provisions about education which were not sanctioned by the parliament while passing adopting the constitution.

**Anjali Chipalkatti**, a science popularizer associated with the organization ThinQ (Pune), facilitated the first session on

scientific thinking, rational thought and critical questioning. She provoked the participants into questioning basic science textbook facts that we all take for granted. For instance, she asked the participants to come up with a few models of how we could arrange the sun and earth in order to keep the pattern of days and nights unchanged. Next she asked them to prove why they thought their model would work. The emerging discussion made everyone realize how easily we believe facts from our textbooks without giving them much thought. Later in her session, she made the participants make simple helicopters from strips of paper and observe the change in its flight by changing the design. The session made teachers think about science in a different way.

## Day 2

On the second day of the camp, **Prof. Apoorvanand Jha**, a professor of Hindi from Delhi University, spoke about the meaning and purpose of education. He went on to discuss the concept of nation and nationalism, and emphasized on the need to understand the difference between education to make a good human being and education to make a good citizen. He also talked about the need to promote secular values in schools and classrooms.

There were many activities interspersed between the various talk sessions delivered by Prof Jha. One of the activities was to expose the true face of the Skill India & Make-in-India programmes. This was an exciting activity in which all the participants were arranged as groups of *labourers* working at several floors in a mobile handset manufacturing unit. They were to

pass a brick to the adjacent person as if working on an assembly line. The *labourers* had to match the speed of passing the bricks with the beating of a drum. It was a simulation of work in a factory which made the participants realize the plight of workers. After the work was over, the workers had to make several price tags to be put on the mobile handsets. Once this was over, the workers were given their wage. This was done in such a way that exposed the true nature of transfer of wealth from the poor workers to the rich owners!

Another activity was to introduce the NaiTalim thought process among the teachers. The participants were again split into groups and given an object each, for instance a cup of tea or a waist belt. Their task was to enlist as many topics and subjects that could be taught using the objects and to come up with as many questions as possible regarding their object.

Apart from these activities, several *cooperative games* were introduced to the teachers, which promote collaborative spirit rather than competition among students. The games were well received by teachers and many went on playing them even after dinner.

## Day 3

The third day started with an awe-inspiring session by **Rupesh Gesota**, who is an engineer-turned-teacher in Mumbai. He works with students of a municipal corporation school on building mathematical reasoning and logical thinking. His session, *Let's Play Maths*, was appreciated by all teachers as he introduced the technique of exploring and learning maths through games.

He emphasized on challenging students and making them think about various concepts rather than giving a simple explanations. He showed several tricks which could be worked out using mathematical equations and made the teachers arrive at the correct reasoning for each trick. Many teachers were engrossed in the tricks and their solution in their free time before and after dinner as well.

The afternoon session was conducted by **Simantini Dhuru**, who is activist and cinematographer from Mumbai. She is also associated with the Avehi Abacus Project, which works with municipal schools across Mumbai on promoting a spirit of social justice among students, teachers and parents. In her session, she discussed about the use of storytelling as a powerful medium to interact with students and make them analyze the world around them. Later in her session, she also exposed government policies on education like the RTE Act of 2009 and the recent National Policy on Education.

## Day 4

The last day of camp had only one session, the morning session. It started with the screening of and discussion on two short animation films on the destruction of environment and the impact of modern school system on children.

After discussion on films, the teachers worked in groups to work out ideas and strategies to inculcate socialist values like scientific temperament, gender equality, secularism and environment consciousness among students and other teachers. The suggestions

prepared by teachers are as follows:

- Economic Disparity
- Secularism
- Gender Equality
- Environment Awareness
- Suggestions to inculcate Scientific Temperament

### **Outcome of the Camp**

The camp proved to be quite successful as was evident from the feedback from teachers as well the kind of bonding and sense of comradeship developed among teachers. Many teachers expressed their willingness to form a platform of teachers in their own network to work on common goals.

### **The Road Ahead**

This teacher training camp was a good beginning. Unfortunately, there was little participation from outside Maharashtra and Yusuf Meherally groups, and in that sense there was not much success. It is now time that we realise the need to take this initiative ahead in our own regions. As a follow-up of this camp, we are in the process of planning some activities and programs in schools from Bhandup, Panvel and Pune.

This project requires repeated interactions with teachers, monitoring their progress, giving them more ideas, working with them to solve problems and so on. For this we will require activists who can be trained to participate in this initiative. We must put in efforts and our resources to form a dynamic network of socialist activists and teachers across various states.

—*Raushal Heena Anand*

## **Growing Authoritarianism, Majoritarianism**

We are a group of retired officers of All India and Central services of different batches, who have worked with the Central and state governments in the course of our careers. We should make it clear that as a group, we have no affiliation with any political party but believe in the credo of impartiality, neutrality and commitment to the Indian constitution. A sense of deep disquiet at what has been happening in India has prompted us to write this open letter to chronicle our reservations and misgivings about recent developments in the body politic. What has gone wrong?

It appears as if there is a growing climate of religious intolerance that is aimed primarily at Muslims. In Uttar Pradesh, in the run-up to the elections, an odious and frankly communal comparison was made between the relative number of burial grounds and cremation grounds. The question was also asked as to whether electricity was being supplied equally to different communities during their religious festivals. All this, without any basis in fact or evidence. The banning of slaughter-houses targets the minorities and affects their livelihoods as well. Such intolerance breeds violence in a communally charged atmosphere — even to the extent of a local leader in UP provoking an attack upon the residence of a superintendent of police, whose family was terrorised.

Vigilantism has become widespread. An Akhlaq is killed on the basis of a suspicion that the meat he has is beef and a Pehlu Khan is lynched while transporting to his

place two cows he had bought and for which he had the necessary papers. Nomadic shepherds are attacked in Jammu and Kashmir on some suspicion as they practice their age-old occupation of moving from one place to another along with their cattle and belongings.

Gau-rakshaks function with impunity and seem to be doing so with the tacit complicity or active encouragement of state machinery. Punitive action against the perpetrators of violence does not take place promptly but cruelly, the victims have FIRs registered against them. The behaviour of vigilantes — who act as if they are prosecutor, judge and executioner rolled into one — flies in the face of law and jurisprudence. These actions undermine the rule of law and the Indian constitution since only the state — through its various organs and institutions — has the power to enforce the law.

Vigilantism has become popular as ‘anti-Romeo’ squads threaten young couples who go out together, hold hands and are perhaps in love with each other. A thinly-veiled effort to prevent a Hindu-Muslim relationship or marriage, there is no justification in law to harass these couples, particularly when there is no complaint from the woman of being ill-treated.

Student groups and faculty members on campuses like Hyderabad and JNU, who raise troubling questions about equality, social justice and freedom, are subject to attack by the

administration, with a supportive government to back them. In Jodhpur, a planned lecture by a renowned academic was cancelled under pressure and the faculty that organised the event subjected to disciplinary action. What happened in Jodhpur has happened at other institutions as well. Argumentation and discussion about different perspectives — the life-blood not only of institutions of learning but of democracy itself — are being throttled. Disagreement and dissent are considered seditious and anti-national. Such attitudes have a chilling impact on free speech and thought.

Several reputed NGOs and civil society organisations are being charged with violating the provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act and the Income Tax Act. While we agree that genuine violators should be identified and penalised, we note with dismay that several of the targeted groups are those who have taken stands against government policies, expressed dissent or supported communities in cases against the state.

We are also seeing an ugly trend of trolling, threats and online intimidation of activists, journalists, writers and intellectuals who disagree with the dominant ideology. How does this square with free speech?

There is a growing hyper-nationalism that reduces any critique to a binary: if you are not with the government, you are anti-national. Those in authority should not be questioned — that is the clear message.

In the face of a rising authoritarianism and majoritarianism,

which do not allow for reasoned debate, discussion and dissent, we appeal to all public authorities, public institutions and constitutional bodies to take heed of these disturbing trends and take corrective action. We have to reclaim and defend the spirit of the Constitution of India, as envisaged by the founding fathers.

-Vivek Agnihotri, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary General, Rajya Sabha; S. Ailawadi, IAS (Retd.), former Chairman, Electricity Regulatory Commission; P. Ambrose, IAS (Retd.), Additional Secretary, Ministry of Shipping and Transport, GoI.; Ishrat Aziz, IFS (Retd.), former Ambassador to Brazil; Balachandran, IAS (Retd.), former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal; Balachandran, IPS (Retd.), former Director General of Police and Chairman, Tamil Nadu Police Housing Corporation, Govt. of Tamil Nadu; Balagopal, IAS (Retd.), former Resident Representative, UNICEF, North Korea; SundarBurra, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Govt. of Maharashtra; Chandramohan, IAS (Retd.), former Principal Secretary, Urban Development and Transport, Govt. of NCT of Delhi; Kalyani Chaudhuri, IAS (Retd.), former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal; Anna Dani, IAS (Retd.), former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of Maharashtra; Vibha Puri Das, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GoI; Surjit K. Das, IAS (Retd.), former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Uttarakhand; Keshav Desiraju, IAS (Retd.), former Health Secretary, GoI; G. Devasahayam, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary to Govt. of Haryana; P. Fabian, IFS (Retd.), former Ambassador; Bhaskar Ghose, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, GoI;

Hirak Ghosh, IAS (Retd.), former Principal Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal; Meena Gupta, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, GoI; Ravi Vira Gupta, IAS (Retd.), former Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India; Wajahat Habibullah, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, GoI, and Chief Information Commissioner; Deepa Hari, IRS (Resigned); Vivek Harinarain, IAS (Retd.); Sajjad Hassan, IAS (Retd.), former Commissioner (Planning), Govt. of Manipur; K. Jaswal, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Department of Information Technology, GoI; N. Kakar, IAS (Retd.), former Additional Secretary, Ministry of Surface Transport, GoI; John Koshy, IAS (Retd.), former State Chief Information Commissioner, West Bengal; Dhirendra Krishna, IA&AS (Retd.), former Financial Controller, Irrigation Department, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh; Ajai Kumar, Indian Forest Service (Resigned), former Director, Ministry of Agriculture, GoI; Arun Kumar, IAS (Retd.), former Chairman, National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority; Brijesh Kumar, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Department of Information Technology, GoI; Harsh Mander, IAS (Retd.), Govt. of Madhya Pradesh; Lalit Mathur, IAS (Retd.), former Director General, National Institute of Rural Development, GoI; Sonalini Mirchandani, IFS (Resigned); Sunil Mitra, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Finance, GoI; Deb Mukharji, IFS (Retd.), former Ambassador to Nepal; Ruchira Mukerjee, P&T Finance Accounts Service (Retd.), former Adviser, Telecom Commission, GoI; Anup Mukerji, IAS (Retd.), former Chief Secretary, Govt. of Bihar; Pranab Mukhopadhyay, IAS (Retd.), former Director, Institute of Port Management, GoI; Nagalsamy,

IA&AS (Retd.), former Principal Accountant General, Tamil Nadu and Kerala; Hari Narayan, IAS (Retd.), former Chairman, Insurance Regulatory Authority, GoI; AmitabhaPande, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Inter-State Council, GoI; Niranjan Pant, IA&AS (Retd.), former Deputy Comptroller and Accountant General of India; AlokPerti, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Coal, GoI; K.R.Punia, IAS (Retd.), former Principal Secretary, Govt. of Haryana; R. Raghunandan, IAS (Retd.), former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, GoI; K. Raghupathy, IAS (Retd.), former Chairman, Staff Selection Commission, GoI; Babu Rajeev, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, GoI;

Ramani, IAS (Retd.), former Director General, YASHADA, Govt. of Maharashtra; Julio Rebeiro, IPS (Retd.), former Adviser to Governor of Punjab and Ambassador to Romania; SayeedRizvi, IAS (Retd.), former Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, GoI; Aruna Roy, IAS (Resigned); Manab Roy, IAS (Retd.), former Additional Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal; UmraoSalodia, IAS (Retd.), former Chairman, Rajasthan State Roadways Transport Corporation, Govt. of Rajasthan; Deepak Sanan, IAS (Retd.), former Principal Adviser (AR) to the Chief Minister of the Govt. of Himachal Pradesh; A.S. Sarma, IAS, (Retd.), former Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, GoI; ; C.Saxena,

IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Planning Commission, GoI; Selvaraj, IRS, former Chief Commissioner, Income Tax, Chennai, GoI; ArdhenduSen, IAS (Retd.), former Chief Secretary, Govt. of West Bengal; Rahul Sharma, IPS (Retd.), Govt. of Gujarat; Raju Sharma, IAS (Retd.), former Member, Board of Revenue, Govt. of Uttar Pradesh; HarMander Singh, IAS (Retd.), former Director General, ESI Corporation, GoI; JawharSircar, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Ministry of Culture, GoI, and CEO, Prasar Bharati; P. Sudershan K. Sudhakar, IAS (Retd.), former Secretary, Govt. of Punjab; GeethaThoopal, IRAS (Retd.), former General Manager, Metro Railway, Kolkata.

(Continued from Page 8)

protection areas and on the other hand the existing protection areas are allowed to be devastated by highly dubious projects.

I also spoke to some of these experts separately. Dr. BhartenduPrakash showed me his well-documented studies in which several low-cost methods of solving the water-scarcity problems of Bundelkhand region have been described which do not also have any adverse side-effects. The benefits of such small-scale works are limited but certain. On the other hand the benefits of the Rs. 18000 crore Ken-Betwalink are highly uncertain and questionable while its adverse impacts such as cutting of about 18 lakh trees and displacing people of 10 villages are certain.

Dr. BhartenduPrakash also told me that basic questions about this project were raised at a very early stage and several well-informed persons and activists of

Bundelkhand had organized a JalSansad or a Water Parliament in which the reasons for opposing this project were provided very clearly. Senior experts from outside the region like Dr. Vandana Shiva were also involved in these efforts, he said.

His own detailed reports on water resources of Bundelkhand region detailing low-cost alternatives were written first in collaboration with the IIT, Delhi and later in collaboration with the Madhya Pradesh Government. So all along the government was well-informed about these low-cost alternatives but opted instead for a highly expensive, highly dubious project like the Ken-Betwa link.

One of the low-cost alternatives recommended by Dr. Prakash related to the famous yet neglected Mangal turbine innovated by farmer scientist Mangal Singh. Dr. Prakash recommended its widespread use in suitable locations in Bundelkhand

region but this has not been done yet while Mangal Singh has been badly victimized.

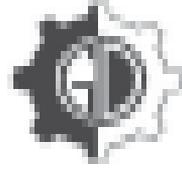
Several low cost efforts to find decentralized, local solutions to water scarcity have worked well in several villages. These efforts were successful because villagers were closely involved in these efforts with the help of social organizations and activists who have the trust of villagers. Some of these efforts have involved the creation of panipanchayats in some villages and the selection of some women as jalsahelis among them who have carried forward the work of finding low cost solutions and mobilizing people for this purpose.

People are asking—why waste Rs. 18000 crore and why cut 18 lakh trees for a project of highly uncertain and suspect benefits when low-cost alternatives of certain benefits and no adverse side-effects are available.

Postal Registration No. MCW/275/2015-2017.

License to Post without prepayment WPP License No. MR/Tech/WPP-210/West/2017

Published on Sunday, June 18, 2017 & Posted on Wednesday June 21, 2017 at Mumbai Patrika Channel, Mumbai GPO-1



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### *REGD. OFFICE :*

*New Excelsior Building, (3<sup>rd</sup> Floor),  
A. K. Nayak Marg, Fort, Mumbai 400 001.  
Tel.: 022 2205 1231 Fax : 022-2205 1232*

Office : Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai & New Delhi