

NGO issues defamation notice against Medha Patkar

The Times of India News Service
and PTI

BHOPAL: The National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), an Ahmedabad-based NGO, has issued a defamation notice against Narmada Bachao Andolan leader Medha Patkar.

In a statement, the NCCL said it had issued an advertisement captioned, 'True Face of Medha Patkar and her NBA'. In response, Ms Patkar had claimed in a press note on November 24 that NCCL president V.K. Saxena had personally gone to Malegaon, praised the NBA and given a cheque for Rs 40,000 to the Lok Samiti. This press release was displayed in the Gujarati edition of a popular website. The NCCL said it was challenging this claim of Ms Patkar.

The NBA, on its part, has already filed a criminal defamation case against the NCCL for sponsoring newspaper advertisements which accused the NBA of compromising national security interests by releasing sensitive documents to interested foreign parties.

Mr Saxena claimed that Ms Patkar had been totally isolated at the recent meeting of the World Commission of Dams (WCD) in London. "She was on the defensive and did not refer to the Sardar Sarovar Project even once," he asserted.

According to Mr Saxena, "The WCD's work was advisory in nature and not investigatory. Unlike a judicial commission, the WCD was not set up to adjudicate on specific disputes. The experience of the commission demonstrates that common ground can be found without compromising individual values or losing a sense of purpose. What's more, it also shows that all parties concerned must enter into the process in good faith if the issues surrounding water and energy resource development are to be resolved. It is a process with multiple heirs and no clear arbiter. We must move forward together or we will fail."

Mr Saxena argued that Ms Patkar was reluctant to sign the WCD document (which is why she gave an additional note) largely because of the WCD's clear views on the subject.

Meanwhile, the Nimar Sarvoday Manch has urged the Madhya Pradesh government to take urgent and stern measures against anti-dam activists for violently disrupting and delaying the relief and rehabilitation work in progress.

Manch spokesperson Umesh Goswami accused NBA leaders of raising a hue and cry on the work in hydel projects. He said their "double talk" had been exposed when NBA activists repeatedly "threatened and beat up" officials engaged in the development of new sites for the dam oustees.

He alleged that the NBA activists constantly disrupted the development and construction works of the Maheshwar Hydel Project at Lepa and Malegaon villages. When the work began, the workers were allegedly threatened and forced to stop work. On two occasions, tractors deployed at Malegaon and brick-laying work were reportedly damaged by NBA activists, he alleged.

Mr Goswami said the matter was reported to the local authorities, but no action was taken. Earlier, NBA activists had reportedly damaged two newly-built school buildings at the new rehabilitation site at Bahegaon, causing a loss of Rs 22 lakhs.

Meanwhile, Ms Patkar appealed to President K.R. Narayanan on Monday to use his powers given under the Indian constitution to stop implementation of the supreme court verdict on the Narmada dam issue.

Terming recent supreme court verdict on the issue as violative of human rights, Ms Patkar said, "The judgment overlooks the ousted people's right to live enshrined in the constitution at the cost of justifying the neglected rehabilitation work for the last 13 years."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

9 11 2001

Govt to monitor NGOs, seeks resolution in House

GA HF-7
19/12

Soumyajit Pattnaik
Bhubaneswar, December 16

THE STATE Government, if need be, will move a resolution in the Assembly to monitor the non-Governmental organisations working in the State.

Finance Minister Ramakrushna Patnaik stated this while replying to an adjournment motion on the working of the NGOs on Saturday.

Participating in the motion, several members expressed concern that several NGOs were involved in misappropriating funds meant for reconstruction in the cyclone-affected areas. The finance minister also favoured changing the Orissa Criminal Procedure Code to proceed against the erring NGOs.

Patnaik admitted that the NGOs are outside the purview of the Government at present. Thus the existing framework, where the Government does not have any supervising powers, has to be changed.

Patnaik also asserted that the Government and the Union

Ministry of Finance would blacklist corrupt NGOs and External Affairs would be apprised of the decisions.

Earlier in the day, the House was adjourned amid uproarious scenes as Congress member Santosh Singh Saluja sported slogans in his dress demanding water and food for the people of western Orissa. The Speaker asked Saluja to leave the House as his sense of dressing "degraded the dignity of the House". Speaker Sarat Kumar Kar asked Saluja to go out and come to the House without sporting any slogans.

BJD member Prabhat Tripathy raised the issue during the Zero Hour. The Speaker said as the Opposition chief whip, Saluja has got certain responsibilities for maintaining the dignity of the House. His dress code violated the rules and regulations of the House, the Speaker commented.

Saluja then sought to raise a point of order, but the Speaker ruled that the House would not take up any business as long as the former would not change his dress.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 DEC 2000

RSS can reconvert Christians peacefully: NGOs

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, DEC. 29. About a dozen voluntary organisations, including some of the Christians' bodies, have said they have no objection to the Sangh Parivar reconverting Christians in a peaceful way.

Talking to presspersons here today on the findings of the voluntary teams regarding the "peaceful Christmas" in the tribal-dominated Dangs and other districts in south Gujarat this year, the NGOs demanded that the Central and State Governments notify the administration and the police not to give any support to the forces campaigning against conversions.

Claiming that conversion was a Constitutional right, Ms. Radhika Desai, representative of the All-India Democratic Women's Association, which led the NGOs, said they could not have any objection to the Sangh Parivar reconverting Christians provided it did not use force or violence.

The AIDWA sent the representatives of voluntary organisations just before Christmas to Ahwa, headquarters of the Dangs district, and Chhindia, Halmodi and Pipalwada villages in Surat district, which

had witnessed attacks on Christians during the last two years.

Thanking the authorities for ensuring a peaceful Christmas this year, the teams said this was only a "small victory" and did not mean that the problems brewing in the region in the last few years owing to the heightened activities by the "outside forces" representing the Hindu militant outfits had been resolved. The Christmas violence was a "symptom of the deeper and graver problems."

Accusing the police of complicity in the violence, the NGOs urged the Gujarat Government to ensure that the administrative machinery remained unbiased and normal activities were not prevented under the plea of maintaining the law and order.

They demanded action against those who indulged in criminal and violent actions in the name of religion and said the Christmas celebrations under heavy police guards "giving the villages the appearance of under occupation" could not be called normal.

Ms. Desai said copies of the report on the findings would be sent to the Governor, Mr. Sunder Singh Bhandari, and the Union Home Ministry.

Third force emerging, says Deve Gowda

By Our Special Correspondent

BANGALORE, DEC. 29. The former Prime Minister and President of the Janata Dal (Secular), Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, said that a "third force" with secular credentials was emerging in the country.

Speaking to presspersons here on Friday he said the meeting of senior leaders, including Mr. Lallo Prasad Yadav, Mr. Jyoti Basu, Mr. Mahanta and himself, at Thiruvananthapuram recently, had given enough indication of the urgent need for a third political force.

The meeting, initiated by the CPI(M), was the first step in evolving a third force with democratic and secular credentials. The Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, was likely to join hands with it, he added. He reiterated his stand that the Janata Dal(S) would support any party which kept away from both the BJP and the Congress(I).

THE HINDU

30 DEC 2000

Orissa NGOs face rigours of social audit

FROM DEBABRATA MOHANTY

Erasama, Nov. 2: Bachani, a widow of Krushnachandrapur village in Erasama block, asks fellow villager Sanjukta Mallik why she did not get her quota of rice and dal under a food security programme. Another villager, Sabitri, also demands an answer as she has got less than her quota under a food-for-work programme.

As Mallik, in-charge of a food-for-work programme run by an NGO, Action Aid, tries to explain her position, the number of complaining voices goes up.

At first glance, it appears nothing more than a group of villagers quarrelling over mundane matters like with a local shopkeeper. But at Krushnachandrapur vil-

lage of cyclone-ravaged Erasama block, the villagers are in the process of conducting a social audit. As Mallik is in charge, she faces the flak.

As non-governmental organisations and other semi-voluntary agencies swarmed to this block in Jagatsinghpur district in the aftermath of the supercyclone, the relief and rehabilitation process became a sort of charity, where people had no choice but to accept what they were getting. It is only through the social audit that villagers are demanding answers from voluntary agencies over the quality of work and, more importantly, their source of funds.

Action Aid, along with Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti started such a social audit at Siali village in

Padmapur gram panchayat of Erasama in December last year. Though the term "audit" initially baffled the villagers, Action Aid made it simple for them through Oriya phrases like "Ama dhan ama hisab" (our money, our account)." It was followed by a second social audit at Gara village of Gadaharishpur gram panchayat in Erasama block. Such audits have been conducted at over 150 villages of Erasama till now.

Action Aid and BGVS have brought their food-for-work programmes under the ambit of social audit. As part of programme, the day-to-day work chart containing the number of persons working on that particular day is displayed at a public place. The nature of work, rice stock at disposal

and cash to be disbursed is also exhibited on the work site on a blackboard or a chart.

"Transparency is important. Regular flow of information like displays at public places can help in bringing about transparency," said Jagatsinghpur team leader of Action Aid Basanta Kar.

Sanjeev Bhanja, another worker of Action Aid, said duplication of the same programmes in the same area can also be addressed through social audit. "But more than anything, it would help in curbing corruption," Bhanja said.

Kar added, "If the Naveen Patnaik government institutionalises social audit, then his rhetoric of a clean and transparent government can be meaningful."

It is yet to be known if social

audit has curtailed corruption. But it has threatened the hegemony of the elected representatives of the gram panchayat institutions in parts of Erasama. As social audit brings into question the role played by village *sarpanches* in development work, it heightens their feeling of insecurity. But they have no choice. "You can't take the people for a ride every time. Social audit would help the villagers in asking questions to us," said Krushnachandrapur *sarpanch* Saroj Mohapatra.

Other NGOs in the area do not seem to like the concept. When CYSD, a Bhubaneswar-based NGO, was asked by the people of Erasama about its funding, it refused to give any information. The villagers then gheraoed its office.

Soren miffed
over NDA allies'
cold shoulder

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 2

JMM LEADER Shibu Soren was clearly unhappy with his allies as he arrived in Delhi today. He was here to make a final bid to secure the NDA's backing to his claim to be Jharkhand's first chief minister. The new state will be formed on November 15.

However, till late night there was no indication of a meeting either with the Prime Minister or with NDA leaders. JMM sources had earlier hinted that Soren would contact Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on November 5 to seek Naidu's endorsement to his claim.

Soren renewed his demand that the NDA spell out its stand openly. He questioned the viability of the alliance if meetings were not called to discuss such issues.

He is expected to be here for four days to pursue his claim.

He said though the JMM was still a part of the NDA, his party would have to review its relations if the NDA failed to honour its commitment and give him the chief minister's post, especially since the JMM had backed Nitish Kumar as Bihar Chief Minister.

NGOs unhappy over termination of grant

Apratim Mukarji
New Delhi, November 2

NON-GOVERNMENTAL organisations (NGOs) are shocked over the sudden decision of the Government to terminate grants five years hence which, they feel, will ultimately jeopardise benefits and services presently available to disabled persons.

"This is an irrational executive order," they say.

The decision to reduce progressively and terminate grants altogether after the cut-off date of 2005 pertains to those NGOs, which have received grants for over five years. In the case of other NGOs, the phase-out period is 10 years and the yearly rate of reduction is 10 per cent.

Ironically, grants are allowed to be continued after five years only in the case of those whose work is adjudged exemplary. It is the better-run NGOs, therefore, which will be put into difficulty by the decision to withdraw grants after five years. NGOs also find the decision of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to reduce grants progressively by 20 per cent from this year arbitrary and unacceptable.

There is an equal degree of

unhappiness over the Ministry's advice to NGOs to start charging, on an income and slab-related basis, for services offered.

"Are we witnessing," the NGOs ask, "the beginning of a commercialisation process in welfare? Are NGOs being advised to make profit out of welfare just as private hospitals built on government land are being allowed to for treating patients?" Grants are usually extended to help NGOs run special education, vocational training, aids and appliances schemes and other empowerment programmes which are continuous in nature.

The Ministry explains its decision by arguing that there should be a more equitable distribution of scarce funds and that programmes in "unreached" areas should be encouraged. This is absolutely reasonable, say the NGOs. But does this reasoning imply that programmes in Punjab, Haryana or Delhi should be terminated and that only thereafter programmes in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh or Sikkim can be taken up?

The formulation to treat "salary" as synonymous with "honorarium" also throws the NGOs' work into disarray because no service benefits would then accrue to the recipients of honorariums.

Rlys will not
be privatised,
says Mamata

THE RAILWAYS would not be privatised although certain sections of railway activity had been opened for "private participation," Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee said at a gathering of railways' technical staff on Thursday.

"Certain areas" of the railways were opened to private participation to generate resources for infrastructure development, she said. Minister of State for Railways Digvijay Singh assured employees that the railways would not be privatised. Apart from being a major transport organisation, the railways would continue to be a public utility service, he said. Singh claimed the railways were the first to provide help to the Orissa cyclone victims as well as to the drought-stricken people of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Banerjee said the railways were committed to provide better travel and transport to passengers. The allocation for passenger amenities had been raised from last year's Rs 115 crore to Rs 200 crore in the current financial year. She said income from passenger traffic had increased considerably in spite of no increase in passenger fares.

HTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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No Go NGOs 3910

'Have visa, will travel' has today become synonymous with the Third World NGO. Indeed, poverty brokering has become a major growth industry. The modern day NGO glides between the abject deprivation of his own home country to the gilded conference halls of western capitals guilt-tripping with practised ease the remorseful aid-giver. Though this is not to suggest that all NGOs are riding to success on the back of poverty and misery, there have been more than a few wormy apples who have given the fraternity a bad name. In this context, the Delhi high court's directive to the Union government not to release any more grants to NGOs until they produce a certificate of utilisation of previous grants is an encouraging signal. With over Rs 7,500 crore in grants to NGOs yet to be accounted for, the court is justified in its concern. It is precisely because the government has failed to protect a citizen's right to basic needs that the NGO has stepped in. But when an NGO itself becomes unaccountable, it must be asked what justification it has to claim to be an interlocutor for the disadvantaged. Given the intricacies involved in actually getting access to funding, a number of NGOs have been set up by ex-government officials or their families. Most of these are NGO only in name, their real purpose is to exploit the jet-setting lifestyle and perks that come with the territory. True, many NGOs in India work in conditions of extreme adversity to bring succour to the underprivileged. Who can forget the example of Sanjoy Ghose who paid with his life for attempting to better conditions for the poor in Assam?

But equally we have instances of NGOs functioning under the guidelines of foreign funders at the risk of offending local sensibilities. In a recent instance, an NGO booklet on AIDS used language that was so sexually explicit that the matter went to court. This gave politicians with an eye to the main chance an opportunity to cast themselves in the role of preservers of local culture and heap calumny on all NGOs working in the area. A while ago, a collective of NGOs took out advertisements exhorting people to vote against the BJP. While every NGO is within its rights to espouse a particular political ideology, it becomes counterproductive when this begins to colour and influence the main task at hand — that of giving a voice to the voiceless. In not submitting accounts, the defaulting NGOs cannot be unaware that they are violating the law. All NGOs, including those registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976 are required to file annual expenditure statements. In fact, NGOs have long been lobbying against the Act, terming it undemocratic and violative of human rights. The government, in its turn, has responded by saying that the Act, in its present form, is far too lax and if anything needs to be made more stringent. Ideally, NGOs and government ought to work in partnership, but unfortunately, in India the relationship between the two tends to be adversarial. By proving that they are functioning in an accountable and transparent manner as the court has sought, NGOs stand to gain public approval and confidence, making it all the more difficult for predatory politicians to encroach on their preserve.

THE STATESMAN

7 NOV 2000

CRISIS IN ORISSA

Damning NGOs cannot conceal state's lapses

EXPERIENCE suggests that no state government readily acknowledges the performance of non-governmental organisations, specially when their failures are shown up in providing relief to victims of natural disasters. In West Bengal the CPI-M even tried to compel NGOs to function according to the dictates of Writers' Buildings. Fortunately, strong reactions to blatant efforts to politicise NGOs and, failing that, to make them non-functional often induces better sense. But the attitude of politicians hasn't changed if one is to go by the outbursts of a minister of another state belonging to another party. The Orissa panchayati raj minister has no defence against a report prepared by members of the Biju Janata Dal that widespread migrations have taken place from drought-hit western parts to escape the nightmare of starvation and deaths. Navin Patnaik can offer no consolation to the hapless other than the fact that his recent visit to Delhi will result in a tour by a Central team. It brings no comfort to victims who have experienced the ineptness of the local administration all these months.

This does not imply that there is nothing wrong with NGOs. Black sheep are everywhere. But it is churlish of the minister to suggest that these organisations are solely in search of publicity acquired "by entertaining the right people". By pointing an accusing finger at retired bureaucrats who head NGOs and "indulge in luxury", the minister, Surendranath Nayak inadvertently also damns bureaucrats across the board. Predictably, there is no reference to luxuries indulged in by ministers, quite often beyond limits and reason. The minister, indeed, has a lot more to answer for — like why the youth wing of the ruling BJD echoes the distress of the CPI-M-controlled DYFI over the failure to generate employment and get food-for-work programmes started in affected villages. To this has been added the scourge of drinking water scarcity, water-borne diseases and middlemen cashing in on distress. When the reality is so glaring it doesn't make any sense to launch a tirade against NGOs when several voluntary organisations have distinguished themselves. Navin Patnaik's credibility is at an appalling low; his ministers need not make it worse by speaking out of turn.

THE STATESMAN

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9/10

No Go NGOs

Profession: Writer, animal activist, environmentalist. This is how Union minister of state for social justice and empowerment Maneka Gandhi is described in her ministry's website. What it fails to mention is that she is a politician, too, now into her fourth term as a Lok Sabha MP. Known for her activism in the field of environment and animal welfare, she was minister of state for environment and forests during 1989-91. Heading the ministry of social justice and empowerment for the last two years, Maneka has trained her guns on NGOs that are given grants by the ministry for misutilisation of funds. Scrutinising files, even locating missing files herself to pin down erring NGOs, she tells Parul Chandra that the buck stops with her now:

Recently, you were quoted as saying that you want to have a 'user-friendly' ministry. Have any steps been taken by you to make it so?

When I became a member of Parliament, I approached this ministry and said, "Tell me, what can I do?" I was told that there are no schemes and was asked to go away. So when I became the minister here, I informed each MP about the schemes the ministry has so that they know what they can ask for. Since MPs kept complaining that they didn't know who we were giving money to, we sent them a list of the NGOs given grants by the ministry that were working in their area. And the form which was earlier provided by the ministry to apply for grants given by it has been reduced from 27 pages to two pages.

Besides, earlier, it would take the ministry more than a year to sanction grants to NGOs while it went through the whole rigmarole of getting applications from state governments. Now, NGOs can apply straight to the ministry. Also, earlier when an NGO sent a proposal, the average bureaucrat would throw it away inside a cupboard. One in five files in this ministry would get lost with no respect for the NGO which had spent time and money preparing the application along with the documents. And the NGO would simply be asked to send another application. I finally found a file that I had been asking for and which had been missing for two years in the ministry. Now, everything is disarranged. We also wrote to hundreds

of NGOs asking them to send me a copy of their application at my residence and also e-mail to me. That's the way to catch them (officials).

Has the ministry also taken measures to do away with schemes that no longer have relevance?

We are sorting our schemes out. The ministry has done away with such schemes and introduced new ones. When I inherited the ministry, 50 per cent of the schemes were irrelevant while 50 per cent of them had not even used the money allocated to them. There was no linkage between social welfare and what the ministry actually did.

There was a scheme meant to provide money to run hostels for girls belonging to scheduled tribes studying in class I. We found out that there were no such hostels but the money was being sanctioned anyway. So where did it go? And money meant for old age homes was being given to the relatives of MPs and bureaucrats. It was going down the drain. Then the ministry was giving two crore rupees annu-

ing, all in an area of merely 1,400 square feet. Yet, the ministry had sanctioned the money. In another case, when an inspector was sent to a children's home, he came back to report that he had found it very clean. So I sent another inspector who was asked to find out for how long the children had been there. He found that all the kids had been moved into the home on the morning of the inspection.

Does the ministry plan to take any action against ministry officials who overlooked this misutilisation of funds?

One problem is that bureaucrats keep moving. Besides, they write in files in such a way that none of them can be held responsible. But I am happy to take responsibility. I also go through each file myself. What is the point of being a minister if I am going to let things be as they are? Anything needing sanction for over two lakh rupees has to come to me.

What kind of monitoring systems have been put in place in order to ensure greater checks on NGOs being given grants by the ministry?

I am trying to train our people to look at files in detail and to inspect. Inspection forms are also being formalised and an Inspectorate of Inspectors is also being set up. Work in the ministry is being computerised. Computerisation was delayed by the ministry for nearly a year-and-a-half.

The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act provides for three per cent reservation in government jobs to the disabled. But isn't it true that these provisions remain on paper?

It's quite true and it will never be done. Despite repeated reminders from our ministry to the personnel ministry asking it to identify posts for the disabled, it has not been done. But my ministry will be happy to give money to NGOs that can help the disabled get jobs. The ministry has also, on a trial basis, asked a private agency in Calcutta to assist the disabled get employment.

What is Project OASIS (Old Age Social and Income Security) all about?

It is a scheme formulated to provide old age security to those who belong to the unorganised sector by helping them to build savings while they work. The project report has taken two years to complete and is now with the cabinet.



“So far 185 NGOs have been scrutinised and 30 blacklisted. It is for the first time that this has been done. I encouraged MPs to write to me telling me if an NGO was doing good or bad work.”

ally to the railways to have an anti-liquor statement printed on the back of tickets — as if this would prompt a man who read it to go home and tell his wife, 'Maine sharaab chhor di hai' (I have stopped drinking).

In the wake of an inspection conducted by the ministry, several NGOs given grants by the ministry have been blacklisted while state governments have been asked to seize the assets of many others. What prompted this action?

So far 185 NGOs have been scrutinised and 30 blacklisted. It is for the first time that this has been done. I encouraged MPs to write to me telling me if an NGO was doing good or bad work. It was while going through the files that I came across the most absurd things. For instance we found that four NGOs were all audited by one auditor, all with the same figures! Another NGO claimed it was taking care of 500 children and giving them vocational train-

NGOs under scanner for links with ULFA

Utpal Parashar
Guwahati, September 4

FIVE GUWAHATI-based Non Governmental Organisations are under police investigation for their alleged links with the banned United Liberation Front of Assam.

According to police sources, these organisations are involved in carrying out publicity and organisational work for the banned outfit. The police, however, refused to divulge the names of the NGOs as it might hamper investigations.

The dealings of the NGOs with the United Liberation Front of Assam came to light recently following the disclosure made by some militants of the banned outfit. One of the NGOs under investigation has a very wide network in the region and also receives huge amounts in aid

from international organisations, said a senior police official on condition of anonymity.

According to preliminary investigations, at least two of the NGOs under police scanner are actively involved in carrying out various illegal activities of the banned outfit, the official informed.

We are keeping a close watch on the movements and activities of the people running these Non Governmental Organisations. As

soon as we collect enough evidence, they are going to be arrested and interrogated, the official stated. He added that investigations are also on to ascertain whether ULFA was using these NGOs to transfer money from India to foreign countries and vice versa.

According to police sources, the link between the ULFA and the NGOs was unearthed last week following statements made to the police by two senior leaders of the outfit.

The statements made by Nirupam Deka and Amal Kalita, both belonging to the military intelligence unit of ULFA revealed that the NGOs were helping the banned outfit in carrying out various jobs in

The link between the ULFA and the NGOs was unearthed last week following statements made to the police by two senior leaders of the outfit.

Guwahati. Based on these statements, we started our investigations against the NGOs named by the militants, the official said.

The police from the Bhetapara area of the city arrested the ULFA leaders on August 31. Both the militants are at present in police custody and interrogations are on to verify the statements made earlier by them and also to find out the role of other NGOs, the official said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 SEP 2000

Social Justice Ministry blacklists 30 NGOs

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 14

15/9 HT-11

THE MINISTRY of Social Justice and Empowerment has blacklisted about 30 NGOs in an effort to weed out dubious and non-performing organisations. Details of the blacklisted organisations, along with the persons heading it, are to be put on the ministry's website to caution others against routing funds through them and to ensure transparency and accountability in the grant and use of funds, Minister of State Maneka Gandhi told newsmen today.

The ministry surveyed over 185 NGOs in recent months. The largest number of defaulting agencies were from Andhra Pradesh, with 16 of the 41 NGOs inspected being blacklisted. The largest percentage was from Manipur, with four of the five NGOs scrutinised found to be wayward.

However, the website presently shows only 24 NGOs which have been blacklisted or whose grant has been stopped, with some of them reportedly figuring on the list before the ministry undertook its recent survey.

Meanwhile, action is being contemplated against the errant organisations. "We have asked the State governments and the District Magistrates concerned to recover the money given to these NGOs and seize or auction their assets," the minister said as she launched the updated website which gives details about the grants-in-aid released since 1998-99.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 SEP 2000

NGOs fund peace-loving visit to Pak

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Two organisations known to be getting foreign funds from a variety of sources have financed the visit of five former diplomats to Pakistan to make contact with key individuals in the military regime. The Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, recently endorsed the visit by stating that a group had been authorised to play a role on the Track II level of diplomacy.

The delegation, which has been addressing meetings in Lahore and Islamabad urging a dialogue between India and Pakistan, includes former foreign secretaries M.K. Rasgotra and

Salman Haidar and former ambassadors Alan Nazareth, Manorama Bhalla and C.V. Ranganathan. The composition of the team was reportedly determined by Mr Rasgotra following instructions from the Prime Minister's Office that it should include minority representatives to offset the perception in Pakistan that minorities in India were being persecuted.

An NGO run by Mr Nazareth, Sarvodaya Organisation for Mutual Understanding, has been associated with the week-long trip. This organisation is known to receive foreign funds and had not been included in the ministry of external affairs' list of favoured organisations precisely for this reason.

Mr Nazareth is, incidentally, the younger brother of Congress leader Margaret Alva.

The good offices of the India-Pakistan Forum for Peace and Democracy have also been used for the trip. This is a carefully created network of academics, former bureaucrats, journalists and others in both countries who have held several meetings and adopted resolutions for peace between the two countries. This NGO, whose convener and founder member Tapan Bose now lives in Kathmandu, has also been receiving money from foreign organisations.

Mr Bose runs the South Asian Forum for Human Rights from Kathmandu.

The foreign office has steered clear of this NGO as well because of the foreign funds involved. Mr Bose is a regular visitor to Pakistan and the recognised moving spirit behind the India-Pakistan Forum, which has organised large conferences in both countries. Kashmir has been high on its priority list, and the forum has been attacking the Indian government over continued human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir.

The fact that this organisation has been involved to host the visit of senior diplomats has created ripples within the government. The composition of the team has also created some interest

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NGO's fund Pak

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as, apart from Mr Rasgotra, none of the others have ever had any direct dealings with Pakistan during their official careers. Mr Salman Haidar did so only after he became foreign secretary. A former diplomat, wondering aloud, reflected: "Perhaps the fact that they had not dealt with Pakistan went to their credit. None of them carry the baggage of Indo-Pakistan relations and are virtuous, without the attitudes they might have inherited otherwise." Mr Rasgotra has had dealings with the present foreign minister of Pakistan, Mr Abdus Sattar, and former foreign secretary Niaz Naik. Mr Sattar has hosted a lunch for the visiting delegation in Islamabad. The members have had intensive interaction with a wide range of individuals in Islamabad and Lahore, where they have spoken of the need for better relations and a bilateral dialogue. Mr Rasgotra has been quoted in the Dawn newspaper as saying, "There is a realisation that Pakistan will have to be consulted while resolving the Kashmir dispute. But Islamabad would have to play its role in stopping violence in the held Valley for paving the way for a meaningful dialogue." Mr Rasgotra, according to the newspaper, hoped that some way would be found for negotiations to resolve the dispute. The ceasefire announced by the Hizbul Mujahideen was an opening for a dialogue but still there was some confusion about it, he reportedly said.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 AUG 2000

Govt permits NGO aid for Midnapore

BY A STAFF REPORTER

The state government has agreed to allow non-government organisations to provide relief material to victims of political clashes in Midnapore district.

The move was announced by deputy chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya after West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee spokesperson Manas Bhuniya met him at Writers' Buildings on Friday.

Bhattacharya said NGOs could approach the district magistrate for the distribution of relief to the affected villagers. He pointed out that, officially, there was no provision for the government to arrange for assistance to victims of political clashes, as opposed to natural calamities.

Villagers and supporters of the CPM, the Trinamul Congress and the Congress have suffered loss of life and property with rival party supporters destroying crops, looting property and torching houses in almost all the blocks of the district.

"People are living in most inhuman conditions as a result of the clashes which started in Keshpur and neighbouring areas almost two years ago," Bhuniya

19/8
said after the meeting.

"In Sabang alone, there are 400 homes that no longer exist. With the monsoon having set in, the villagers are going through hell. There is no food, shelter or clothing, and the district administration has provided no relief in any form whatsoever," the PCC official, who hails from Sabang, added.

Last week, a six-member National Democratic Alliance team of parliamentarians visited several villages near Midnapore town and Keshpur to carry out an on-the-spot survey.

The members were unanimous in their opinion that whatever be the political affiliation of the villagers, the government and the local administration should have come forward with relief measures for those affected by the clashes.

"The plight of the Adivasis, Dalits and other minorities is the worst, and there has been no compensation or ex-gratia to the victims, in many cases, for two whole years.

"The government has not fulfilled even its minimum responsibility towards the villagers who have been suffering for months," Bhuniya said.

19 AUG 2000

Govt unhappy with limited NGO reach

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 19. — The Union ministry of social justice and employment is unhappy with the performance of NGOs because of their limited reach and their furnishing of non-viable projects under various welfare schemes, including that of pre-examination coaching for SC-STs and OBCs.

A recent report of the ministry said though the government had extended financial assistance worth crores of rupees to some 2,134 NGOs, "the absence of good, established and known voluntary organisations has been a factor for the limited reach of government policies and programmes in far-flung areas of the country".

For 1999-2000, the ministry earmarked Rs 177.19 crore for various NGO-run schemes for SCs, STs, OBCs, physically disabled and the elderly.

Expressing concern over the growth of these NGOs, which thrive exclusively on government aid, the report also stressed the need for a policy to extend financial assistance to them only for a limited period so that they could become economically viable.

"The scarce resources should be available to the organisations according to the regions and sectors that require intervention, which will be decided by the government," the report stated.

To assess their performance and utilisation of central assistance, the government has also proposed to designate the School of Social Work and the National Institute for the Handicapped, universities and other institutions to inspect the working of NGOs as limited manpower of the states result in unnecessary delays in filing performance reports and releasing funds.

"Once it is effectively in place, it will help in streamlining the system of inspection and timely release of annual grants to the organisations," the report said.

A senior ministry official said: "There has been a mushroom growth of NGOs during the past five years. They have become money-making organisations as the ministry has no direct control to assess their performance."

In 1998, the government had launched pre-examination coaching for SCs and OBCs to enable them compete in the

entrance examinations for professional courses and services. The ministry spent over Rs 4 crore during the past two years as several organisations came forward to run these coaching classes. "But the government was not getting any viable project under this scheme," the report said.

According to the report, Rs 98 lakh was given to 15 organisations (till December 1999) against Rs 2.85 crore in 1998-99 to 27 organisations for SCs, and Rs 2.13 crore for OBCs (till January 2000) followed by Rs 1.03 crore to 45 organisations to coach weaker sections, including minorities, based on economic criteria.

For the SCs, the report stated that besides the government's direct participation in welfare measures, over 600 projects were being run by 370 NGOs and Rs 17.50 crore was released this year.

For rehabilitation and integration of the physically handicapped, the government has spent Rs 20.30 crore on 390 NGOs with financial assistance of Rs 36.02 in 1998-99. The budget provision for the disabled has gone up from Rs 64.89 crore in 1996-97 to 177.33 in 1999-2000.

STATESMAN

20 AUG 2000

Orissa bars NGO from work

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, July 15. — The Orissa urban development ministry has decided not to assign any work to Sulabh International — an NGO likely to be blacklisted by the Centre soon.

The government will instead engage local youths and NGOs in the construction and management of public toilets, Mr Samir Dey, urban development minister, told the Assembly today.

He was responding to Opposition-led adjournment motions and call attention notices given by the ruling BJD-BJP members.

The Speaker, Mr Sarat Kar, asked other departments of the government not to assign any work to the NGO.

Several MLAs demanded a probe into the functioning of Sulabh International. The head of the organisation should be arrested immediately and the NGO's bank accounts should be frozen, they said.

The government did not take into cognisance the present chief secretary's report on the work done by Sulabh International, Mr Ashok Das of the JD-S alleged.

Mr Das challenged the ministers' contention that the BJP-BJD government had not issued a work order to the con-

cerned NGO. He said the rural development department had given over Rs 2 crore worth of work order to the organisation in March.

When Mr Dey refused to respond, Mr Das walked out of the House

Government chief whip, Mr Pradip Maharathi, said Rs 5.68 crore had been allotted for construction of 50,913 public toilets in the state, of which only 23,225 had been completed.

Mr Dey conceded that some of the allegations were true. He said a PIL against the Sulabh International is pending in the High Court and the government will abide by the court's decision.

THE STATESMAN

16 JUL 20

Basu stress on NGOs' role in healthcare

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, July 22. — The involvement of private and non-governmental sectors in health care and research is important, but minimal at the national level, Mr Jyoti Basu said today.

At the inauguration of the annual scientific conference of Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan's Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences, the chief minister said: "In West Bengal, we encourage the private sector, NGOs and individuals to set up medical units."

Mr Basu further said at the function which coincided with the 69th foundation day of the Pratishthan: "A comprehensive healthcare system is needed, along with improvement in research and development."

He added that the government would follow the Centre's example in trying to build AIDS awareness among adolescents, as set in the National Population Policy report to be launched tomorrow.

The theme of this year's conference is adolescent healthcare needs. Mr Basu admitted that "access of adolescents to information about health and hygiene is limited", and stressed on the need to rectify the situation because of the spread of AIDS.

He told participants at the conference that psychiatric programmes and socio-economic development also needed to be discussed. "The government would take note of all deliberations," he said.

Dr AC Chandhoke, dean of the institute, said: "We have acquired a plot with the government's help and hope to start an undergraduate medical college."

The guest of honour, Dr M Bhattacharya, said: "The standard of education in Calcutta University is disheartening. Regular monitoring is needed to see if students are doing their work properly. Basic sciences have to be developed."

One of the speakers at the inauguration hoped that Mr Basu "would cross 90".

THE STATESMAN

23 JUL 2000

Centre heat on seven NGOs

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 26: Seven non-government organisations (NGOs), who had put out advisements of a political nature in the run up to the 1999 general elections, have been warned not to indulge in activities in contravention of the provisions of the Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA), 1976.

In a statement, the Union home ministry said today the NGOs have been informed that the government has "closed" the matter but these organisations have also been "advised to adhere to the provisions of the Act in letter and spirit in future". A home ministry spokesman said: "Otherwise, the NGOs might find their registrations for getting foreign contributions cancelled." The NGOs were Indian Social Institute, Centre for Education and Communication, Ankur Society for Alternatives in Education, Kali for Women, Asmita Resource Centre for Women, Women's Centre and National Alliance for Women.

Section 5(1) of the FCRA provides that no organisation of a political nature shall accept any foreign contribution without the prior permission of the Centre.

THE TELEGRAM

Govt., NGOs differ on women's status in India

By Anita Katyal

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Indian government and NGOs will present a contrasting picture to the world about the status of women in the country at the special session on women in New York next week. It is aimed at reviewing how member countries have implemented the commitments they made at the 1995 Beijing conference.

The government's country paper, prepared by the department of women and child development (WCD), has compiled various official schemes for women but does not assess how effectively these are being implemented. The report hides more than it reveals as it sidesteps sensitive issues like the impact of globalisation on women, and ends up telling only part of the story.

The country report admits it had committed to formulate and operationalise a national policy on women, set up a commissioner for women and increase the education budget to six per cent of the GDP. The NGO report points out that none of these promises have materialised even five years after the Beijing conference. The national policy on women, drafted in 1996, is yet to be approved while the move to set up a national commissioner has been turned down by the home ministry, says the NGO report.

Admitting its commitment to six per cent of GDP for education has not been met, the country paper

promises to make up for this through a special programme of free education for girls up to college level, never mind that this scheme is yet to take off and after two years is still doing the rounds of various committees. The government paper has done a real tightrope walk while dealing with the issue of the impact of globalisation on women. Noting that such an assessment is not easy, it, however, claims that initial assessments show the lot of a sizeable section of women has 'improved due to fall in inflation, expansion of employment opportunities and cheaper white goods providing greater comfort'. At the same time, the report admits that studies on the impact of liberalisation on women indicate a need for re-framing policies for access to jobs and preserving them.

The government cites the National Crime Records Bureau figures to accept that crimes against women have increased, but says it has taken several measures to deal with the problem like setting up all-women police stations in 14 states and strengthening existing laws, an exercise undertaken by the National Commission for Women (NCW). The government paper does not mention that most states now want to close down these "ineffective" police stations while the NCW's 200-odd recommendations, including amendments to laws on dowry and trafficking, have been virtually ignored.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 2 JUN 2000

Bengal govt. not doing enough to abolish child labour: NGOs

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: A controversy has erupted regarding the extent of child labour in West Bengal with statistics provided by the state government differing from the data collected by NGOs.

About a dozen NGOs participating in a programme to highlight the plight of child labourers in the state at Alipore zoo garden on Sunday said at least one million children below 14 years were engaged as labourers in the state. Out of them 700,000 worked in hazardous industrial units.

Both state government representatives and NGOs were present at the function organised by a coordinating umbrella of NGOs called Samannay Samity on the occasion Anti Child Labour Day.

Principal secretary of the West Bengal labour department N.K. Jhala said, "As no authentic survey has been conducted so far, the fig-

ures quoted by the NGOs are nebulous. As far as our knowledge goes, 25,000 children in the state work in hazardous industrial units."

Mr Jhala said he believed that the number of children working in hazardous industrial units in the state was smaller since there were fewer units in the state as compared to other parts of the country. "The state government has been able to spend 95 per cent of the fund assisted by the central government and brought eight districts under the anti-child labour programmes," he added.

According to Mr Jhala, the state government has set up 40 centres in each of the eight districts like North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Medinapore, Nadia, North Dinajpore, Murshidabad and Calcutta. "But we have requested the central government to grant us funds to cover the entire state," he said.

While the centres provides non-formal education and vocational training for child labourers, Mr Jhala admitted that there are no health care facilities at the centres for children working in hazardous industrial units. "We are holding talks with the health department so that health care facilities could be extended to the children."

However, coordinating committee convener Gobindo Chakraborty alleged that Central funds were not being utilised and the grants were not increasing since the state government had failed to satisfy the central government with fund utilisation documents.

Mr Chakraborty also said it was not possible for the state government to eliminate the problem of child labour just by opening centres and imposing fines on the employer. So far, the state government has only identified 253 employers for exploiting child labour.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 MAY 2000

A little tact wouldn't hurt

MF-15
215

THE CONSTERNATION over the arrest and subsequent denial of bail to the activists associated with Sahayog, an Almora-based NGO working on health-related issues, testifies to the deep divisions within the development community about the style and mode of working of many of our NGOs. At a time when an increasing number of development programmes, particularly those relating to the social sector, seek the participation of NGOs, including those supported by foreign-donor agencies, both the State and wider community response to NGO interventions raise issues which demand serious debate. But first, the background.

Sahayog, as part of its work on reproductive health concerns, had last September prepared a booklet *AIDS aur Hum*. The booklet, designed to enhance the awareness about AIDS, reproduces comments and observations of those interviewed on sexual practices and customs prevalent in the Almora region. The booklet was seen by many as offensive, if not downright pornographic. What many found even more objectionable were sweeping statements about widespread sexual promiscuity and references to the prevalence of homosexuality and incest in the region.

Those who go through the booklet are likely to be disturbed with both the cultural insensitivity and the tendency to pass off stray remarks as social scientific findings. As much as the language deployed or the sweeping generalisations, is the troubling fact of violation of basic ethical norms in reporting what are claimed as 'research' findings. Though much is made in the Foreword about the need to maintain confidentiality, critical when dealing with sensitive issues, it is not difficult at all to identify the villages, and in some cases even the individuals, who participated in the focus group discussions. The resultant public ire comes as no surprise.

And yet, despite accepting the widespread dismay, even anger, at the 'foolishness' of the concerned NGO, it is equally evident that what is termed 'public protest' has been carefully organised and orchestrated. For

HARSH SETHI SAYS

**ALMORA IS ANGRY WITH
NGOs FOR INTRUDING
INTO THEIR LIVES**

nearly a month before the offices of Sahayog were attacked, staff roughed up, and leading activists arrested, the local media had been carrying on a campaign against the group, more so the booklet.

It is significant that the entire political spectrum — the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Congress, the Left, the various groups spearheading the Uttarakhand agitation, other local NGOs, and even leading senior citizens — were clearly ill-disposed towards the group. Once the situations took a grave turn and violence was perpetrated on the NGO, the local administration stepped in, seized the remaining copies of the booklet, arrested Sahayog activists on charges of distributing pornographic material and creating conditions conducive to the disturbance of peace, as also proscribed the organisation.

It is equally significant that though the charges levelled are bailable (Sections 292, 293 and 505 of the IPC), no local lawyer was willing to take up Sahayog's case. Nor did any local NGO, political group or citizen's association decry the heavy-handedness of the administration or the partisan behaviour of the police in not stopping violence. On the contrary, various political leaders demanded that the activists be arrested under the National Security Act! The administration has further expressed its inability to provide protection to the NGO. Reportedly, the landlords concerned have asked Sahayog and its leading lights to vacate their property. The High Court in Allahabad has turned down the bail application. The organisation remains proscribed and its functionaries languish in jail.

How is it that the situation has turned so vicious? Almora, like many of our hill regions, is marked by a high male out-migration, resulting in a dis-



Don't bruise her sensibility

torted male-female ratio, particularly in the reproductive age groups. It is thus not inconceivable, at least as a working hypothesis, that single male migrants in large cities would contract sexual encounters, possibly with high-risk groups, and may consequently place local populace too at risk. Or that the specific context of those left behind influences their sexual behaviour. The exploration of this thematic, however, demands both a sophisticated and ethical research methodology, even more if the results are to be reported, not in a specialised journal, but in a public education booklet. There is little doubt that Sahayog has badly muffed up.

The complication arises because its specific form of presentation makes it easier for hostile parties to portray the exercise as one of denigrating local culture and populations. And when these exercises are carried out by non-local NGOs, that too with support from foreign foundations, the charges can more easily stick. Sahayog should have realised that a region which has experienced a high degree of mobilisation against 'outsiders' as part of a regional autonomy/statehood movement, is unlikely to take kindly to such characterisations.

Did no one bother to read and vet the booklet before publication and distribution? Without making a case for pre-

ensorship, surely the research advisory committee, either of the group or of its donors, should have been able to sense that the report needed major modification. Or is it that groups claiming technical proficiency are so enamoured of their skills that they consider elaborate vetting procedures an unnecessary restriction?

Equally important are the issues related to the functioning of many of our NGOs — not just funding, or transparency, but the degree of local accountability. It is alleged that those locally active against Sahayog were already upset with its prior work on local level power structures, in particular how the local social structure is biased against the interests of Dalits and women; that in this latest case they found a 'perfect' excuse to hound the group out. This may well be true, but does not totally explain the widespread hostility. For a group which has been active in the region for over eight years, to have not built up a local support base does reflect badly on it.

For NGOs and voluntary groups foregrounding the importance of local concerns and participation, often in contradistinction to state actors and interventions, Almora-like situations raise major conceptual and political challenges. We cannot lionise local action only when it supports our positions, and classify it as chauvinist, reactionary and conspiratorial when directed against us. Both NGOs and their donor and support networks need to understand the importance of engaging with and working through local structures, that is if they believe in democratic processes.

None of the above reservations should, however, be read as an endorsement of the state action. To have failed in providing adequate protection, to have proscribed the organisation, and more generally to have explicitly or implicitly collaborated in the creation of a climate of fear and intimidation, does little to inspire confidence. NGOs are today expected to play a major role in the development process. They can hardly be expected to operate fearlessly and creatively if the environment provides little space for them to articulate their point of view.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 MAY 2000

Exaggerate & humiliate

IF MOST "social scientific findings" are taken at face value, India is sitting on an AIDS powder keg. Fortunately, people are not dropping dead even years after the first round of sirens started blaring. Despite such an apocalypse always being postponed, most NGOs insist that the population is under great threat from the disease. As a result, funds are regularly pumped in to fight the "war against AIDS" thereby giving diseases like tuberculosis and cancer (clearly a more serious threat in India) scant attention. One reason for AIDS being on top of every respectable NGO's hit list is that it is a much more "fashionable" disease to fight against than, say, tuberculosis. (After all, who's heard of pinning a red ribbon on your jacket for TB victims?) So Western funds are easier to come by when one is battling a mythicised demon disease than one which never makes it to the panel of experts on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*.

If such exaggerations and generalisations were not bad enough, there is also the fact that most NGOs are insensitive to local cultures. In the most recent case, the Almora-based organisation, Sahayog, had published a booklet to "create awareness" about AIDS in the Uttarakhand region. It made sweeping statements about promiscuity and homosexuality among the local population. The findings made little effort to maintain confidentiality of the individuals who had participated in the discussions related to sexual practices. On the basis of its "research" — which boiled down to interviews and focus group discussions — Sahayog "educated" the people of Almora about their incestuous and homosexual habits.

Sahayog members were arrested for peddling "pornography". The NGO's office has been ransacked and no local lawyer is willing to defend them in court. It is unfortunate that the protests against Sahayog turned ugly. But the public outcry against it is understandable. Villages and individuals are livid that their sexual habits are there for anyone to flip through. There is no doubt that both ethical and scientific considerations were ignored by Sahayog. It would be wise to leave such matters to specialised organisations — or at least see to it that someone is there to check the facts and the way they are presented.

NGOs seek Basu help for S 24-Parganas

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 15

A NUMBER of South 24-Parganas-based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has appealed to Chief Minister Jyoti Basu to speed up development work in the district. In a memorandum to Basu, the NGOs said the combined efforts of voluntary organisations, local bodies and the State Government have not succeeded in bringing the fruits of development to the district.

Nearly 7,000 members of the NGOs marched from Sealdah station to Writers' Buildings recently to submit the memorandum. While reiterating faith in Basu's leadership, the NGOs provided a detailed description of socio-economic and geographical conditions of the area. The memorandum pointed out the district has no large-scale industry. Heavy siltation of the distributaries of Hooghly that irrigate the district has resulted in diminishing their carrying capacities, thus affecting

their irrigation capabilities. Increasing salinity of groundwater is another problem faced by the residents. The effect on mangrove forests has led to degeneration of aquatic life as well flora and fauna.

The memorandum lists 21 demands. It spoke of the need to upgrade communication facilities to link the district with the rest of the State and massive afforestation programmes to prevent topsoil erosion.

The NGOs have also demanded desiltation of the distributaries,

laying of more irrigation canals, distribution of surplus land acquired by the Government under the Land Ceiling Act to the landless, afforestation of new islands, purification of arsenic-contaminated groundwater, setting up of cold storages for agricultural and marine products and opening of more flood relief and cyclone relief centres in the Sunderbans.

Other demands include the NGOs' involvement in implementing poverty alleviation projects and providing better education.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 MAY 2000

Gujarat NGO to pilot water study

FROM BASANT RAWAT

Ahmedabad, May 17: Vishwa Gujarati Samaj, a voluntary organisation, has decided to set up a permanent trust to monitor and guide research in water management.

An expert committee will study problems relating to water scarcity to find a permanent solution to the problem in Saurashtra and north Gujarat, Samaj president Krishnakant Vakharia told **The Telegraph**.

The organisation will provide financial assistance and technical knowhow to local people to recharge wells and promote water harvesting and conservation.

Instead of giving temporary relief, "Vishwa Gujarati Samaj wants to provide assistance to people to find lasting solutions, which include digging of wells. And all financial assistance will be given by us," Vakharia said. He added: "We want to dig wells in large numbers so that water is available for at least two years in Saurashtra and north Gujarat, currently reeling under severe drought."

Vakharia has appealed to Gujarati associations in 128 countries to liberally donate money to the Samaj for drought relief. Earlier this week, the organisation held a meeting in Mumbai, which was attended by prominent Gujaratis who showed keen interest in providing assistance to the drought-hit through NGOs.

The president said the Federation of Gujarati Associations of North America has already set up Gujarat Drought Relief Fund. Gujarati associations in UK and Africa, too, have promised help.

Asked how the Samaj intended to help the drought affected, Vakharia said: "We will help voluntary organisations doing excellent work in rural areas."

On Monday, the Samaj held a meeting to discuss ways and means to "find a permanent solution" to the water problem. It was attended by noted Gandhian, C. Vai-

dya, representatives from NGOs and two Gujarati industrialists from Mumbai. They also passed a resolution, condemning Medha Patkar, who is spearheading an agitation against the Narmada dam.

The Samaj appealed Patkar to appreciate the genuine demands of the people of Saurashtra and north Gujarat and to allow them to use Narmada water.

Mumbai-based industrialist Chandresh Virvadia, who is running a cattle camp in his hometown Radhanpur, said he has been getting an overwhelming response from philanthropists who have donated Rs 1 crore.

Virvadia who was here to attend the meeting says he requires Rs 2 crore to feed 5,500 cattle-heads till monsoon.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 MAY 2000

Govt's entry into water harvesting worries NGOs

21-4 25/5
Nivedita Prabhu

NEW DELHI 27 MAY

JOLTED BY the severity of the drought, politicians from the parched states of Rajasthan and Gujarat, and even the Prime Minister, have discovered a new mantra — water harvesting.

Suddenly, after spending thousands of crores on development of water resources for years, with little emphasis on drought prevention, chief ministers are setting aside huge budgets for building check dams, tanks and recharge wells.

But their new-found enthusiasm for traditional water harvesting structures is worrying NGOs, who feel that the government should keep out of community-based water harvesting systems.

Water harvesting is not about building simple traditional structures to collect rainwater. It involves social mobilisation, said Anil Aggarwal, director, Centre for Science and Environment.

Mr Aggarwal feared that the government approach of fixed targets, and setting up of committees and departments of government officials will be disastrous. "Unless communities are mobilised, made aware and involved, the whole exercise will be futile," Mr Aggarwal said.

Any community-based exercise will require building the confidence of the community first, he pointed out. "This is long-term work because it involves a process of social mobilisation," he added. The government cannot hope to fight drought by putting up water harvesting structures overnight. "Structures can be made by any contractor with some money. An effective water harvesting structure starts off with a process of self-management," said Mr Aggarwal.

The centre's director said the first came from rural development minister Sunderlal Patwa, who said he wanted to replace a government-oriented programme by a people oriented and decentralised one.

The Economic Times

28 MAY 2000

UP muzzle on NGOs; PWD takes over

5-8
1079
HEMENDRA NARAYAN
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, April 9. — Nearly 1,000 non-governmental organisations in Uttar Pradesh have been debarred from undertaking development work under the Golden Jubilee Urban Employment Scheme and National Slum Development Programme following detection of a major racket in the execution of the projects.

These schemes were being executed through the NGOs for the State Urban Development Authority.

All construction works would now be undertaken by Public Works Department or other related departments on master roll basis as per norms and rates fixed by the government, according to urban development minister, Mr Lalji Tandon.

Already cases involving more than Rs 10 crore have been registered against more than a dozen NGOs executing work in several districts.

It was expected that the number of cases would go up as the teams which have been asked to investigate into the bunglings submit their report.

The government has concluded that the district urban development agencies violated not only their jurisdiction but also the guidelines issued by

the Centre by assigning the work of employment generation and poverty alleviation programmes to these NGOs.

The Centre was providing major portion of the funds under the scheme whose budget was of the order of Rs 120 crores in the last financial year.

Cases of irregularities have been reported from the districts of Kanpur, Jaunpur, Gorakhpur, Balrampur and Barriely.

During the review of the work carried out in some districts it was found that the works which had been assigned to NGOs should have actually been allocated to the different sectoral departments of the government.

According to the guidelines issued by the Centre only the non-existing basic minimum services were to be provided in the slums of the urban areas.

The idea was to generate opportunities of employment and create assets for future use. But the district urban authorities related to SUDA bungled on this count and assigned the work to the NGOs.

There has been widespread allegations of the connivance of project officers.

The project officers it has been said in some cases not only initiated their own NGOs or provided funds to the

favoured one to execute the schemes.

One aspect of the racket was that the Assistant Project Officer, a much junior level official, were not only assigning jobs to the NGOs but were also the drawing and disbursing officials for these schemes.

They had complete control over funds which were released without any verification of fund utilisation.

Racket was unearthed after teams were formed for physical verification of the work done by these NGOs.

The work done in the previous years by these NGOs was also going to be investigated.

These teams had been asked to give a report after a detailed inquiry into the funds allocated to the NGOs and the work done by them.

These investigations were ordered after reports several irregularities in connivance with the officials of the Urban Development Agencies by these organisations had been unearthed.

The work to be done included providing of drinking water, laying and repairing of roads and improvement of hygiene situation in the slum areas.

After investigation it was found that in some towns recycled hand pumps had been installed. In one case the bricks were laid upside down in the name of repair of roads.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2000

NGO brings pollution charge against PCB

KSHAUNISH SARKAR

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, April 29. — A survey by the Nagarik Mancha, an NGO, has accused district offices of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board of looking the other way and in fact acting in collusion with polluters who include owners of illegal brickfields in Jalpaiguri and North 24-Parganas, stone-crushing units in Birbhum and tea gardens in north Bengal.

The survey report, a copy of which has been sent to the WBPCB secretary, Mr Rama Subban, says fertile agricultural land is converted into brickfields in the Sisujhumra, Dangapara, Jogijhora-Bordak and Narsinghpur moujas in the Birpara and Falakata areas of

Jalpaiguri endangering the embankment of the river Dimdima.

The PCB has allegedly passed the buck to the district magistrate even though it has the power to implement environmental laws, the survey says.

In Birbhum, the survey quotes recent government studies to point out that the 105 quarries and 125 stone-crushing units in the Mallarpur area have increased the SPM and noise level during quarrying and crushing activities way above the permissible limit. Prevalence of bronchial asthma and silicosis, a disease caused by inhaling silica dust, is high among people in the area, it adds.

The Nagarik Mancha study accuses tea gardens in north

Bengal of using pesticides far above the acceptable level despite a WBPCB team having issued warnings about the adverse environmental effects of such excessive use.

Local citizens' groups, the study says, had requested the Mancha survey team not to inform the PCB alleging that any complaint to the board is instantly communicated to the polluters by its officials in the local district office.

The member secretary of the PCB, Mr Rama Subban, said he had just received the complaints and would look into them. Asked whether he agreed with the allegations, the secretary said: "Any complaint should be taken seriously. I would not say that every complaint is valid but we will definitely look into them."

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2 1980

NGO proposes alternative women's quota bill

BY SHILPA BANERJI

New Delhi, Feb. 23: The Forum for Democratic Reforms, an NGO represented under Manushi, CSDS and Lok Satta, has proposed an alternative women's reservation bill instead of the existing one tabled during the last session of Parliament.

In a petition, the forum states that the "present bill has serious defects... and urge that this alternative bill be tabled and debated in Parliament along with the current bill so that the best possible legislation be enacted to facilitate an increase in women's representation in our legislatures." According to *Manushi* editor Madhu Kishwar, "the forum has sent a copy of the alternative bill to various parliamentarians and we are urging it to be discussed in the House."

The petition states the problems associated with the present bill. A key provision is one-third of all seats in the House shall be

reserved for women. However, if such reserved seats are rotated in every general election, it will result in two-thirds of incumbent members being forcibly unseated in every election while the remaining one-third will be left in limbo until the last moment, not knowing if their constituency will be part of the randomly selected seats.

Secondly, such reservation shall also apply to seats reserved for SC/STs. The forum says that this will inevitably lead to justified demands for rotation of seats reserved for SC/STs even where their population is not large, which will further rock the polity. With SC/ST population as high as 35 per cent or more in some states, in the event of seat rotation (women plus SC/ST), every single seat will be rotated in every poll. This would mean every MP will be unseated in every general election.

Such a compulsory unseating, according to the critique, is violative of the very basic principles of democratic representation.

Politicians will not be able to nurture their constituencies, corruption and plunder will increase and women will not be able to contest twice from the same constituency, thereby undermining their credibility.

Such a policy in which voters are forced to vote for a woman would not only go against the basic tenets of the theory of representation, but would also lead to the

resentation in the Rajya Sabha and the Legislative Councils. It also does not address the issue of participation of backward castes and minorities. Neither does it address the basic issue of marginalisation of women in politics itself.

Finally, in countries like Nepal, the Philippines and the erstwhile Soviet Union where fixed quotas in elections was tried, it produced unsuccessful results for women's political representation.

The alternate bill drafted by the forum says that a law should be enacted making it compulsory for all parties to nominate women candidates in one-third of the constituencies. The party can choose where it wishes to nominate women candidates. For SC/ST reserved seats for women also, one-third of the candidates must be women. To prevent a party from nominating women candidates in states or constituencies where it is weak, for purposes of this Act, for Lok Sabha the unit for con-

sideration shall be a state or a UT, and for state Legislative Assembly, it shall be a cluster of three Lok Sabha constituencies. In the event of any party failing to nominate one-third women candidates, for the shortfall of every woman candidate, two male candidates of the party shall be treated as Independents. An amendment should be enacted providing for reservation of one-third of the seats, elected or nominated, to the Rajya Sabha or Legislative Councils for women. The merits of this model include the freedom of political parties to choose their female candidates and constituencies based on socio-political factors rather than pre-fixed lottery-based constituencies. When seats are not reserved, there will be a large pool of credible and serious women candidates in the fray who are not mere proxies or political lightweight. Thus, the democratic choice of voters is not restricted to compulsorily electing only women candidates.

SPOTLIGHT

concept of "safe" constituencies where men push in proxy female relatives to keep their seats "safe" till the next elections.

With a 33 per cent quota, it is unlikely that women politicians will ever be regarded as heavyweight politicians with any serious issues to nurture their constituencies.

The critique also states that the bill is completely silent about women's repre-

'Anti-national' NGOs under scanner

ANUPAM DASGUPTA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BEHRAMPORE, Jan. 22. Undisclosed foreign funding, suspicious behaviour of office-bearers and seizure of anti-national documents from their premises have brought a number of NGOs in Murshidabad under the police scanner.

Police are keeping a close watch on these organisations. However, no arrest has been made yet.

At least 21 NGOs operate in the district. Officials say many more have mushroomed in recent years, most of which do not bother to get themselves registered. Police stations have been asked to prepare a detailed list of such organisations.

The ASP, Mr Pabitra Kumar Das, told The Statesman: "The district is known to be a hiding

ground for terrorist groups. They are apparently trying to utilise the NGOs' infrastructure."

The district police has prepared a list of "suspicious" NGOs. Heading the list is Al-Bashir, which apparently provides medical to the rural poor. But police has of late found the behaviour of some of its workers "questionable".

Also under scrutiny is a "social group" which has links with Iran. A police officer said the group was planning to set up a Khomeini Trust Library

at Panchanantala on the outskirts of Behrampore. Police have found that the organisation receives foreign funds in the name of the late spiritual leader. During a recent raid, police seized anti-national literature from its office members. Anti-India literature and other documents seized from Raninagar, Dhulian, and adjoining areas indicate that some NGOs are in close touch with organisations like the Students Islamic Movement of India, Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind and the Tabligh-e-Jamaat.

THE STATESMAN

23 JAN 2000

NGO bid to break women-as-womb paradigm

■ By making women conduct self-examination, MASUM hopes to 'empower them to gain control over their bodies'

NANDINI RAMNATH
SASWAD, JAN 29

STRANGE things take place when women walk into the Sreevadi Kendra at Saswad, 25 kilometres out of Pune. Women walk in to discuss headaches and end up revealing that they suffer from a sexually transmitted disease. They shake off their deep-rooted social conditioning, their tongues get loosened and they speak unfettered about their gynaecological ailments.

It's almost revolutionary, considering that Indian women, especially rural, are loath to discussing something seen as most private and even dirty. An attitude tacitly encouraged by a government health policy that has seen women only as child-bearers and rearers and has ignored other aspects of women's health. There's a veil of silence and shame shrouding gynaecological problems, and few rural women simply walk into the local Public Health Centre (PHC) for treatment. But the Sreevadi Kendra, run by the Pune-based NGO Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsha Mandal (MASUM), hopes to go beyond the women-as-womb paradigm and talk about debilitating ailments like vaginitis, excessive white discharge, irregular menstrual bleeding, Reproductive Tract Ailments (RTIs) and pelvic disorders, just like any other illness.

By making the women conduct self-examinations and understand their bodies better, MASUM hopes to "empower women to gain control over their bodies. After all,



Women standing outside the Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsha Mandal - Express Photo by Nandini Ramnath

Drug-Counter located at Malshiras. Run by Shaila Magar, the centre sells essential drugs as well as herbal remedies for minor illnesses. In fact, promoting the use of herbal medicine is big on the centre's agenda: the women make the herbal medicines themselves and sell them for anything up to Rs 10. More serious ailments are referred to the government hospital.

Reveals Shaila Magar, who runs the drug counter, "We would never even step out of our homes. The question of participating in meetings or discussing one's personal health never arose. The village woman had just two images before her: the *chula* and her children."

But when Gupte landed at Malshiras 12 years ago, Shaila stepped out beyond her threshold. "Few women wanted to join MASUM at the time; to begin with, they were outsiders. But after Manisharai started visiting our homes, the women were encouraged to speak out." Now, Shaila feels the difference between the PHC and their centre. "Here, we don't treat patients like patients but like our own. Also, PHCs don't differentiate between a physically ill and a psychologically disturbed woman."

Adds Lakshmi Memane from Pargaon, "The PHC in my area isn't even open half the time! And when it is, the doctors simply give you a pill, ask you if you've brought any money along and send you off. We never observe our own bodies, and know very little about ourselves. The women were much more reserved earlier and would

rather suffer their discomfort in silence than show themselves to a male doctor. Now, they talk about their problems, physical or psychological."

The paragnatocological health workers say the centre has helped them loosen some of their shackles. "Earlier, my world was my home. Now, I can step out alone outside, even at night. I also know a great deal of medicine, just like any doctor," says Mangal Magar, who has studied till the seventh standard. "Rural women need to assume control of their bodies, be it a question of intercourse or pregnancy," she feels.

Over the years, the government has acknowledged such non-governmental efforts by also speaking the language of the alternative. Under the central Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) programme, the government supports five NGOs in the field throughout Maharashtra. "The government has changed its approach, and we now emphasise adolescent health, reproductive health and illnesses like anaemia. The stress is not just on women for sterilisation purposes," acknowledges Seema Dhamdhare, Deputy Secretary, Public Health Department.

Recalls Kranti, "The ultimate aim of the self-help training was not to replace the government, but to empower the women to demand such facilities from the government." Till the government catches up, the Saswad centre will remain a space for the unsaid and the undone.

the Pargaon, Amble, Naigaon, Waghpur and Malshiras villages.

The centre provides a range of services designed to ensure sexual health as well as maternal health services. Counselling for women suffering from abuse or marital problems are also offered by the NGO.

And linked closely to the health programme is the Lokseva Aushadhalay, or the the Rational

programme, and they in turn reach out to other village women.

The programme's name was suggested by women participating in a training module — they wanted their health to *sada phulne* (bloom forever), they wanted to heal like the life-giving *sadaphuli*, the periwinkle flower. Now, eight *sadaphulis*, armed with speculums, gloves and herbal medicines which they prepare themselves, work in

women's health is not just about guaranteeing against cough and cold," says Samata Sengupta, a volunteer.

In February 1994, the centre's founder, Manisha Gupte, invited two reputed activists in the field of women's health, Sabla and Kranti, to train the women. Women drawn from the Purandar taluka, in which Saswad is nestled, receive training under the 'Sadaphuli' pro-