

NO. 0

NGOs abetting infiltration: IB

SUBHENDU MAITI
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Nov. 9. — Some NGOs operating along the Indo-Bangladesh border in North and South 24-Parganas are reportedly helping Bangladeshis cross the border and settle in India.

The Intelligence Bureau has reported this to the ministry of home affairs recently. The IB has identified about 10 such NGOs in the two districts during the past few weeks. The operations started after the BNP government came to power in Bangladesh, an IB official said.

The official said the matter has also been conveyed to the state home department and district magistrates and SPs of the two districts.

He said more than 100 Bangladeshis entered the two districts with the help of these NGOs. The IB report also states, about 2,500 Bangladeshis came to West Bengal through districts in north and south Bengal since the first week of October.

The NGOs operating in North



Bangladeshis at the Petrapole border, waiting to enter West Bengal on Friday. — The Statesman

and South 24 Parganas have their bases in Habra, Maslandapur, Swarupnagar, Basirhat, Gosaba, Basanti, Canning and Sunderbans, IB investigation has revealed.

Officials found that the NGO workers have taken about Rs 150 from each Bangladeshi to help them settle in West Bengal. Some persons working for these NGOs in Maslandapur,

Habra and Bongaon have also been identified.

The officials said these people have links with a section of BSF personnel.

Incidentally the chief minister had asked the state intelligence branch to look into the infiltration problem and file a report.

■ **Bangla panel to probe attack on minorities: page 9**

BSF to intercept Bangla refugees

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MALDA, Nov. 9. — Local officials of the BSF, supervising border security in the Malda, North and South Dinajpur districts have reportedly been instructed by their higher authorities in Delhi to intercept Hindu families from Bangladesh who are crossing the Indo-Bangladesh border and seeking refuge in West Bengal.

As a follow-up to the directive, the BSF has stepped up vigil along the Indo-Bangladesh border. The forces are also preparing to intercept and push back those trying to cross the border.

Sources said BSF officials have been given such instructions for the first time since 15 October, when many Hindu families from Bangladesh entered West Bengal and sought refuge in the border districts after alleged attacks by fundamentalist groups across the border.

THE STATESMAN

10 NOV 2001

Blacklisted NGO manages to corner government grant

By Akshaya Mukul
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: If some NGOs have been asked for a 'cut' from the grant they would get from the ministry for tribal affairs (MTA), others are being funded despite having once been blacklisted.

Praja Abhyudaya Seva Samiti (PASS), an NGO in Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh, applied to the MTA for money to run its computer centres. The application came to the notice of Maneka Gandhi, who was then minister of state for social justice. She wrote to tribal affairs minister Jual Oram on July 25, 2000, that PASS, which had earlier received funds from her ministry, has not been performing well and that further funding should be reviewed. Her letter was based on the ministry's inspection report.

Earlier in January 1998, Chittoor collector P. Krishnalal had written to the social justice ministry that PASS "has been indulging in anti-social activities and has already been kept under fund restriction which amounts to blacklisting."

However, early last year the same collector recommended a grant to PASS. This ratification to

the MTA was also seconded by an MTA team, including Tarun Coomar, director, NGO division, and one desk officer. Ms Gandhi's letter to Mr Oram arrived around this time.

On January 3, a senior official put up a note to the minister explaining how PASS was earlier blacklisted. The official expressed surprise at the change in the collector's view. He also vetoed the MTA team's clearance and sought that "we may not sanction any further funds and initiate criminal and civil cases against K. Lokanatham (secretary of PASS)". On January 5, Mr Oram approved the action against PASS. And three days later, the same official asked that a show-cause notice be issued to PASS. However, nothing happened.

At times, the concerned file could not be located or the concerned officer was on leave. Finally, on March 21 — more than two months later — Mr Coomar noted in the file that since he "physically inspected the NGO's projects and recommended the cases, it may not be in order to issue the show-cause notice under my signature." On April 16, the senior official wrote

that the show-cause notice was being issued. The next day, the secretary apprised the minister of this development. A month later, on May 20, Oram scribbled on the secretary's appraisal note: "As our team inspected and found it to be satisfactory, hence we may release the instalment."

What happened to the show-cause notice and its reply? After the minister's approval of the grant, the secretary wrote on the same note: "Any reply to show-cause notice?". On May 30, I.S. Bhardwaj, desk officer, NGO division, replied that just when the notice was being issued, "the file was called for by the office of the minister, which has been received now." Meanwhile, PASS received the first instalment of its grant.

Five months later, Mr Oram has a knee-jerk reaction to offer. "I don't remember the details of this case", he told this correspondent. "I do remember that our officials had recommended grant after inspecting the work of PASS." He also does not remember why the file was called by his office after the decision to issue a show-cause notice was made.

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NGOs working on visas for Afghan minorities

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, OCT. 16. The Indian High Commission in Islamabad has sent New Delhi a list of 112 Afghan Hindus and Sikhs who managed to cross over to Pakistan following the U.S. air strikes in Afghanistan. The list has been forwarded to concerned non-governmental organisations here for verifying the antecedents of the enlisted persons through their relatives in Delhi.

Afghan Sikhs and Hindu refugees here are eagerly awaiting the arrival of their relatives from war-torn Afghanistan. The president of the Khalsa Diwan Welfare Society, Sardar Manohar Singh, said

his organisation received the list three days ago.

"We have sent the list to Kabuli Gurdwara in West Delhi so that the refugees visiting the gurdwara can identify their relatives," he said, adding that the organisation was also in contact with Sikh pradhans from various places in Afghanistan who could help identify them.

Mr. Singh said the Afghan Hindu Sikh Welfare Society, was also actively involved in procuring visas for people of Indian origin from Afghanistan.

Mr. Gyan Singh, sewak of the Kabuli Gurdwara, said in Afghanistan there were no visa offices for

the past several years and there was no provision to obtain visas.

"The only way left for them was to cross over to Pakistan and wait for months to get a visa to India. Taking into account the ongoing scenario, the External Affairs Ministry and the Home Ministry took up the matter on our repeated requests," Sardar Manohar Singh, said.

At present, over 400 people of Indian origin, who managed to cross over to Pakistan following the attack, have taken refuge in the Punja Sahab Gurdwara in Hassan Abdal, about 35 km from Islamabad. Over a hundred of them have taken shelter in Gurdwara Bhai Joga Singh in Peshawar.

THE HINDU

17 OCT 2001

NGOs give false figures to attract foreign funds

BY MANISHA JAIN

AA 3
New Delhi, June 23: Alarming figures make governments sit up and take notice. Be it figures of declining sex ratio or the number of AIDS deaths in the country.

Small wonder then that NGOs in the social sector fudge figures in order to ensure greater funding by foreign donors. The recent controversy over the AIDS figures brought to light the insidious manner in which vested interests jeopardise the entire gender equity, population and health programme, not just in India but across the globe.

Sources said that the "bungling" of figures related to AIDS deaths may not be entirely inadvertent. In fact, both Naco and UNAIDS are equally to blame as they are supposed to work in close coordination with each other.

Sources added that the whole AIDS programme in India relied heavily on foreign funding. The larger the number of victims of disease, pestilence and discrimination shown officially, the fuller the coffers.

Several unscrupulous practices that are prevalent include exaggerating the extent of the problem, be it illiteracy among women, shortage of primary healthcare centres, condoms or contraceptive pills. This involved government agencies and NGOs alike. Once the donor released the funds, often only a portion of the funds reached the needy.

Sources said the mid-term review, which was generally conducted after a programme was well underway, was grossly misused. Vested interests often veered the whole programme to their end and caused the donor to abruptly stop funds and withdraw its expertise. As a result, the whole programme goes haywire.

The funds are garnered depending upon the enormity of the issue. Often the government shows an acute shortage of funds.

THE ASIAN AGE

NGOs fret over funds delay

QINDRILA MUKHERJEE
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SEXUAL HEALTH PROJECT

KOLKATA, May 25. - The West Bengal Sexual Health Project, funded by the British government's Department for International Development, was transferred to the state on 1 April. The transition phase has proved painful for NGOs, with funds yet to be released.

DFID was the direct donor agency for 17 contracts with 14 NGOs. With an increase in funding by UK, DFID decided to enter into partnerships with the governments of West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

"We chose these governments because they have proved to be pro-poor", said Mr Shumon Sengupta, DFID representative in West Bengal.

...But...as a donor agency, it is

not our role to implement," he said. So, henceforth, DFID's funds will go to the National AIDS Control Organisation, from where they will be distributed as per Naco guidelines.

DFID chose to tie up with the state rather than NGOs or the private sector in order to maximise impact. "We believe that working with the policy making body will make projects more effective," said Mr Sengupta.

However, there is a feeling among NGOs that the government will not be as flexible as DFID. They will miss facilities like the substantial technical assistance offered by DFID. They are also apprehensive about delays in fund flow. Even though the transfer took effect on 1 April, funds have yet to be

released for the present quarter due to clearance delays.

Mr Trilochan Singh, project director, West Bengal State AIDS Prevention and Control Society, said, "The budgets were approved at a meeting today. We will release the funds as soon as we get them from DFID".

Phase Two of the WBSHP, which is expected to commence within the next six months, has a projected outlay of £10 million, said Mr Sengupta. "The NGOs have to realise that the government is a permanent body, whereas our presence here is not. The transfer is in their long term interest", he said.

But some Naco guidelines are being doubted by NGOs.

Mr Biswajit Panda, project manager, Bhoruka Public Wel-

fare Trust, a DFID funded NGO, said that Naco guidelines did not provide for counsellors and full time medical officers in clinics.

Naco also stipulates that NGOs will have to incur 10 per cent of the cost in cash or kind, which NGOs resent. Mr Singh said, "The NGOs claim to be voluntary organisations. It is only fair that they contribute, in order to become partners in the real sense."

DFID officials foresee a 20 per cent divergence between the State AIDS Society and NGOs, which they hope "will get smoothed over the next two years".

One casualty of the transition was CARE, an American NGO that offered interventions in industrial and red light areas of Asansol. Naco and the state AIDS society decided it was not possible to sustain and CARE wrapped up its sexual health program in the state in March.

THE STATESMAN

CMC schools may be handed over to NGOs

SWATI SENGUPTA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

POOR ATTENDANCE BLAMED

KOLKATA, May 24. - Poor attendance in some CMC schools have led the civic body authorities to consider "handing over" these schools to NGOs.

Though officials admit of having shortlisted 22 schools on the basis of poor attendance, they are tight-lipped about the other details. This is because involving NGOs in such a "take over" can imply that the CMC is not doing much to improve the conditions of these schools.

The MIC (education), Mr Moynul Haque Chowdhury, said: "People have a pre-conceived notion that CMC schools don't function properly and teachers don't come to classes. So it's extremely difficult for us."

Mr Haque Chowdhury said the CMC was considering the matter because most of the stu-

dents are not interested in attending classes.

He, however, maintained that the CMC was not "closing down any school".

Shyam Square East (Day) School in ward number 8 and Peary Mohan Sur Day School in ward number 16 have two students each.

However, he refused to say he was washing his hands of in not luring students to these schools as part of the CMC's own initiative.

Two NGOs are already working at five CMC schools with Unicef funds. Which brings one to the question, if the NGOs can do it, why not the CMC?

Working with NGOs need not have any negative implications, he said. It is only to ensure that more students attend classes,

Mr Haque Chowdhury held.

The NGOs are likely to either open computer centres in these 22 buildings or run the schools themselves, he said. The mayor-in-council said the NGOs will have to run the schools by providing free education to 25 per cent of the students.

Mr Kanti Ganguly, leader of Opposition in the CMC, said one should first see that "quality education" is provided in these schools before such a hasty decision is taken.

He criticised the move to allow NGOs to impart computer education in these schools. "That is for the state government to do. It's not the civic body's job," Mr Ganguly said.

Ms Archana Bhattacharya, CPI-M councillor of ward 98 and former MIC (education),

said there was no point in shortlisting the names of the CMC schools for transfer to NGOs without discussing the matter with the Opposition.

Moreover, she said if the attendance at a particular school was poor, there are also areas in the city where there is an immediate need for schools. "So, the infrastructure could be shifted," she suggested.

At present, there are 308 CMC primary schools (in addition to one being opened at Garden Reach) and 38,000 students attending them. The CMC spends approximately Rs 16 crore annually on the schools.

"In many of the schools antisocial activities are going on unabated," Mr Haque Chowdhury said and added that he had discussed the transfer of the 22 schools with the the mayor and a final decision will be taken at a mayor-in-council meeting soon.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2001

Slow govt. action prompts Kutchis to look towards NGOs for houses

By Vidyadhar Date

The Times of India News Service

BHUI: The intense May heat is adding to the misery of earthquake victims struggling for survival in tents in Gujarat. Bhuj and adjoining areas, among the worst-affected by the quake, are hotter than other parts of Kutch which are closer to the sea. Hot winds easily pierce the tents, increasing the discomfort.

It will be long before the Gujarat government is able to implement its promise to construct houses for the victims. The government's own machinery was badly hit by the earthquake and so the initial problems related to rescue and relief operations could be understood.

But now, it is felt the government machinery ought to act with more speed.

"We wish the government had flatly told us on January 27, the day after the quake, that it would not be able to provide us shelter. We would have made our own arrangements and got some proper shelter by now," said Hirji Dhanji, a Harijan of Bhojay village, his body bent by the trauma of the quake but his spirit still fairly high.

It is more than 100 days now since the quake and villagers here were realising the importance of voluntary work and they are being helped by the Sarvodaya medical trust. "We do not want to impose pre-conceived notions of housing on the villagers. We want to let them build their houses according to their needs," said Leeladhar Gada, a trustee.

At present the trust is helping villagers build houses in 18 villages

and this has enthused other voluntary agencies to start similar work. Some villagers are in a hurry to construct the houses as the monsoon is not far away. Although rain is scarce in this area, there are times when it comes down really heavily. That can disrupt life, said Mumbai-based social worker Deepak Mepani who has been camping in Kutch ever since the quake rocked the area.

"We are concentrating on villages which are in remote areas where the government and non-government agencies have not reached," said Gada. Unfortunately, most of the agencies have only visited villages which are easily accessible by rail or are along the main road.

In Bhojay village, 50 families of poor and backward classes have been identified by the Sarvodaya trust. They are given Rs 7,500 to Rs 8,000 per house.

The trust coordinates the supply of basic construction materials like cement blocks and cement bags. The families will get a house of 175 sq ft. Three families pool their labour to construct one house. Most of the houses have been completed.

Every house will have a smokeless chulha and neem trees planted around. The villagers are using rubble as raw material apart from cement blocks provided by the trust. The blocks are manufactured in different villages to save transportation costs.

In Nagrecha village with its 400-year-old fort, Vikramsinhji Jadeja, belonging to the erstwhile ruling family, sheds his ego and joins other villagers in the reconstruction effort.

The earthquake has also taught many lessons to the people of Kutch. The housing colony of IFFCO in Gandhidham has remained intact while buildings around have crumbled.

The good condition of the IFFCO colony is attributed by the people to the thick tree cover provided in the colony. The trees apparently absorbed the shocks, said Jawahar Shahani, an official of the Indian Airlines coordination cell who hails from Gandhidham. His old mother survived the quake but his house was badly damaged.

"People of different communities from other parts of the country rushed to Kutch to provide relief but chose only members of their own communities. This created a lot of problems and heartburn," said Deepak Mepani.

There is also need for greater caution on the part of the medical fraternity in carrying out emergency operations, said Dr Nobhojit Roy of the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre in the latest issue of the journal *Issues in Medical Ethics*. Other sources said military doctors could have done without so many amputations.

While Kutch has lost many of its historic buildings and artisans, even the Kutchi language is now under threat though this issue is not necessarily linked to the quake. Kutchi, with its sprinkling of Urdu and Rajasthani, is richer than Gujarati.

But Kutchis now prefer to talk in Gujarati than in their own sweet dialect. The Halai Memons of Kutch speak Kutchi in a particularly endearing way, said Deepak Mepani.

Gujarat in a mess as NGOs abandon relief work

BY DEEPA TREVEDI

Gandhinagar, May 4: A hundred days after the deadly earthquake, the Gujarat government led by Keshubhai Patel has no clue about over 3.18 lakh houses that are required to be reconstructed besides repair over 4.5 lakh damaged ones for the quake-hit people. With temperature crossing over 43 degrees, over two lakh quake-affected people are living in tin sheds with no hopes of a permanent home in the near future. The government says it is "satisfied" with its rehabilitation package and has given valuable pieces of land for reconstruction. But the victims earnestly feel that the state government is shying away from its

responsibilities. And to the sheer despair of the Gujarat government, at least eight non-governmental organisations have voluntarily withdrawn from the scene leaving the quake-affected to the mercy of the Gujarat government which has been not doing anything substan-

Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan governments, which are "seriously rethinking" their decisions of adopting villages in Kutch.

The Gujarat government is desperately looking for agencies willing to adopt villages since the early enthusiasm of corporate houses

Sources in the Secretariat confirmed that the coming days are going to be very crucial for the quake-hit regions especially Kutch, where the government has not been able to really chalk out any concrete restructuring and rehabilitation plans. "The govern-

putting the government and the victims in a very embarrassing situation," a senior bureaucrat told *The Asian Age* on Friday night.

Its not just the NGOs and corporate houses leaving the Gujarat government in lurch. The Gujarat Narmada Valley Fertilisers Limited may also banish its noble idea of rebuilding Khambhra, a small hamlet in Anjar. Reliance had decided to reconstruct Anjar town but has now voluntarily withdrawn and has not even bothered to give any concrete reasons to the Gujarat government.

Interestingly, the Gujarat government has no proper testimony of the NGOs and corporate houses' desire to participate in the rehabilitation process.

100 DAYS AFTER GUJARAT QUAKE

tial except making tall claims.

Sources confirmed that Reliance has voluntarily withdrawn from Anjar. Sahib Singh Varma's Rashtriya Swabhiman Trust which had enthusiastically decided to adopt Dudhai village is also rethinking its decision just like

and NGOs have now waned away completely. The ambitious schemes announced by the much hyped American India Foundation who had also organised former US President Bill Clinton's visit to Kutch and a grant of over \$60 million also remains on paper only.

ment had been banking too much on NGOs. In the initial stages, people did not want to help through the government and trusted the NGOs more. The government too went ga ga over the NGOs. Several of them have now disappeared or have simply abandoned the work

THE ASIAN AGE

5 MAY 2001

LEAVE THEM ALONE

Flip-flop on NGOs does Navin no credit

IT happens when state governments have a lot of explanation to do. As during the devastating floods in North Bengal when relief work was politicised, was misdirected or never reached victims at all. The real solace came from voluntary organisations who did the best they could in the face of pathetic administrative lapses. At one point Alimuddin Street chose to compel NGOs to work in tandem with the local administration, meaning themselves — and have the programmes approved by Writers' Buildings, which is the party again. The implication was clear: government would make nonsense of the avowed objective of non-governmental organisations to function without hindrance or political bias. The resistance from right-thinking sections of society prompted the CPI-M to see reason. Now it seems the Marxists have found an unlikely ally in the Biju Janata Dal who proposes to "regulate" the functioning of NGOs. The pattern is the same: make them "accountable" to government which actually means making them do their bidding.

The immediate provocation has not been spelt out by the planning and coordination minister who has taken the initiative but the inference is that it is part of damage control in the context of the state government's conspicuous failure on the relief front. It cannot afford to be upstaged by NGOs whose performance might well confirm that it is not lack of resources but lack of will that causes so much distress — a happy signal for Navin's party. Black sheep do exist even among NGOs but accountability in general may actually amount to a perverse form of control over voluntary organisations which have been doing commendable work in cyclone and drought-hit areas. Many of them have petitioned Navin who cannot afford to forget that his government had relied on these same organisations during the difficult early months of the disaster. The turnaround does his government no credit. The best way his party can change the popular perception of its performance is, first, to motivate the administration to make use of the relief that has arrived in abundance and get down to reconstruction and, second, to sort out matters with the disgruntled BJP, which is trying desperately to sustain a presence in the state. When political tensions cast a shadow on NGOs, it is relief and rehabilitation that suffer. Leaving them alone to work without constant hindrances will be recognition of a time-tested principle.

THE STATESMAN

30 APR 2001

NGOs use cash

■ Continued from Page 1

Asian Age: "These people with no base get on the international bandwagon, why don't they work for their people here." He said that President K.R. Narayanan had told him that it was important for the struggle for equality to remain indigenous and that "we should fight for our rights on our soil."

The United Nations has not been playing a direct role in encouraging the campaign for inclusion of caste in the overall agenda against racism. However, at several preparatory meetings organised as the run-up to the Durban conference, the NGOs concerned have built up a systematic campaign for the inclusion of dalit oppression by highlighting caste-based discrimination and oppression within India.

At the first preparatory committee meeting at the United Nations in Geneva last year, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Secretary General of the world conference against racism, Ms Mary Robinson, admitted that in her view as well the dalit issue requires attention. A regional preparatory meeting held at Tehran last month witnessed an intense campaign by the NGOs for the expansion of the definition of racism to include "discrimination based on descent." The terms caste or dalit were, however, not included in the final resolution adopted at this meet. Interestingly, the UN sub-commission on human rights has already appointed an expert to study racial discrimination in relation to the caste question. At a meeting organised recently in Delhi by The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, CPI leader D. Raja cautioned against the organisation's efforts to internationalise the issue of caste-based oppression. He also spoke out against the usage of foreign money in what should be an indigenous struggle for equal rights and justice.

India has been resisting the efforts by the non-governmental organisations to get the UN recognition for caste under the racism agenda. Several preliminary meetings have been held in different parts of the world, including Iran and Geneva, where voluntary groups have hotly debated the issue. Several Western NGOs have been active in spearheading the campaign to include caste-based discrimination, including the better known Human Rights Watch and the Lutheran World Federation.

THE ASIAN AGE

26 APR 2001

NGOs use foreign cash to pressure UN on caste bias

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA *AP/1*

New Delhi, April 25: Foreign funds siphoned off through non-government organisations are being used to exert sufficient pressure on the United Nations to include caste-based oppression in India as part of the accepted agenda against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

These NGOs have also been demanding a special UN rapporteur on caste in a concerted bid to internationalise the issue. The government of India, which has been resisting this pressure, has come up against international human rights groups and specific dalit organisations, which have been stepping up the campaign for the UN acceptance of what they describe as "occupation and descent-based discrimination against dalits."

Several preparatory meetings have been held for the finale at Durban in September where the effort will be to include caste as part of the official declaration of

the UN world conference against racism.

The point person of the sponsored campaign appears to be Mr Martin Macwan, who has been honoured by the Human Rights Watch in New York last year. He has also received the Robert F. Kennedy award for human rights in Washington. He has presented papers, at various international fora focusing attention on the plight of the dalits, and making a passionate case for the UN endorsement of caste-based discrimination. Significantly, Mr Macwan is not as well known in India although he runs a Gujarat-based NGO.

A dalit leader with recognised grassroots experience in India was particularly critical "of these people who use our problems to network abroad."

On condition of anonymity, this otherwise plain-speaking leader, who has organised several major rallies to focus attention on the plight of the dalits in Delhi and elsewhere, told *The*

SPOTLIGHT

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THE ASIAN AGE

26 APR 2001

Orissa NGOs under scanner

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, April 10. —
The Navin Patnaik government
put NGOs under the scanner
empowering itself with pro-
visions to ensure their audit and
performance assessment.

A resolution moved in this
regard was adopted in the
Assembly well past midnight
yesterday with ruling BJD
members attacking some NGOs.

The planning and coordination
minister, Mr Ramakrushna
Patnaik, said he had been guided
by the members' sentiments who
had expressed concern over the
functioning of some NGOs par-
ticularly after the supercyclone.

He tried to emphasize the point
that the government wasn't
opposed to NGOs. It is for this
purpose that the resolution
clearly states that a
partnership between NGOs and
government needs to be done
and that NGOs have done
commendable work in national
building activities, he stated.

Mr Patnaik told members he
would bring a legislation in this
regard during the next Assembly
session but in the meantime the
resolution empowers the
government to issue executive
instructions to make NGOs
more accountable to the state
and the people. Several ruling
BJD members alleged that some
NGOs were running parallel
governments with the blessings
of top bureaucrats.

THE STATESMAN

31 APR 2011

Clinton shares his vision with NGOs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 7. - The former US President, Mr Bill Clinton, visited the city today. A true citizen of the world, Mr Clinton shared with people his thoughts about how to improve rural life in India.

He met representatives of various NGOs who informed him about their current activities, future plans and what their primary requirements were. When some of them complained about doctors' reluctance to work in rural areas, Mr Clinton said the problem exists in the USA too.

He recalled how he overcame the problem as the Arkansas Governor by giving

doctors several incentives such as higher salary and other benefits. He asked whether such a policy had been tried in India.

The NGOs which met Mr Clinton at Raj Bhavan this afternoon included Ramakrishna Mission and Bharat Sevashram Sangha.

Mr Clinton, who is here on a mission of the America-India Foundation to help reconstruct quake-hit Gujarat, later told reporters that he was grateful to the NGOs for sharing their views for the future. He said the foundation, which he heads, will spread its work in other parts of India as well.

No specific projects were discussed with the NGOs, Mr

Clinton said and the extent of the foundation's involvement in future projects will depend "on how much money we can raise". The Governor also said no projects were discussed, though provision of aid to Orissa, ravaged by the supercyclone in 1999, did come up.

The foundation, Mr Clinton said, will focus on economic development, healthcare, education and extension of micro credit in rural communities. It is also interested in building permanent partnerships with NGOs for long-term reconstruction work.

The AIF, formed by Indian Americans, is primarily funded by NRI businessmen. Among them are Mr Purnen-

du Chatterjee and Mr Rajat Gupta, who were present at the Raj Bhavan meeting. City industrialists and editors of leading city newspapers were also invited.

Mr Clinton arrived at Raj Bhavan at 12.45 p.m. He got down from the third car, a Mitsubishi Pagero, and was received by Mr Viren J Shah. A ballet troupe of Tanusree Shankar welcomed him with a dance performance.

The Governor then led Mr Clinton to the court room on the first floor for the meeting. The former President skipped a sumptuous lunch arranged for him at Raj Bhavan, met the press for about five minutes and left for the airport to catch his flight to Delhi.

THE STATESMAN

- 8 APR 2001

NGO opens window to widow plight

FROM MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, March 28: If it isn't poverty, it's loneliness. The ills plaguing Indian widows are not limited to Vrindavan or Varanasi. Widows outside India may not have to battle poverty, but they are left to grapple with an all-consuming loneliness. "It is the same for widows everywhere," said Mohini Giri of the Guild of Service, a non-government organisation campaigning for the rights of widows.

Giri, who has been meeting widows not just in Varanasi where she runs a home for 100 such unfortunate women, but in developed countries like England and the US as well, said the problems vary, but the status of widows is much the same the

world over.

Though much has to be done to better the lot of widows, her struggle to highlight the plight of widows has brought some reward. After pressing for a hike in financial allocation for some time, the recent budget marked an increase.

But no increase seems sufficient enough to take care of 33 million widows in India. In the 60-above age group, 64 per cent women are widows while only 6 per cent are widowers. "The high gender gap primarily reflects a high incidence of remarriage among widowers," said a Guild of Service report on widows.

Despite the large numbers, widows have remained invisible, pushed to the sidelines of the collective consciousness. "Their

marginalisation has made them invisible, even to the women's movement," the report said. It does not seem to be much off the mark because widows have never

NHRC gesture

New Delhi, March 28 (PTI): The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) today directed state governments not to use expressions like "widow", "widvah" and "beta" while addressing the wife of a dead person.

"Expressions like wife of late Zauja Mahroom or *sharampani* (for those whose husbands had sacrificed their life for the cause of nation) should be used," the commission said.

really been on the agenda of women's organisations. Less than a handful of NGOs have been highlighting the degrading status of widows. "We get Rs 13 lakh annually for running a home for 100 widows," Giri said.

The report lists several reasons for shunning a widow. In many cases, it is property the relatives are after.

"When a widow tries to manage land on her own without adult sons, her brothers-in-law often insist on sharecropping or managing her land themselves — this is simply an attempt to deprive her of her legitimate right to property," the report said.

It also said that over 13 per cent of the widows interviewed confessed to sexual attacks. "Eighteen of them were seduced, mo-

lested or assaulted by family members or close kin, including brother-in-law, sister-in-law's husband and brother," the report said.

The remaining eight, the report added, were attacked by neighbours, employers, male colleagues or friends' brothers.

As part of its effort to highlight the widows' plight, the guild is organising a seminar for widows in Saarc countries later this week in Delhi. Giri wants to follow it up with an international meet that will bring into focus their widespread neglect.

She had recently written to former defence minister George Fernandes, asking for a review of the rehabilitation of Kargil war widows. "The government said there was no need for it," Giri rued.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 MAR 2001

Foreign funding sources of NGOs under scanner

SHIVNATH JHA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HEAT ON CONGRESS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 12. - Foreign funding sources of certain NGOs are being scrutinised by the government, which is considering amending the provisions of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976.

The official worry, according to home ministry officials, is use of hard currency for "subversive and insurgency-related" activities. Helping the home ministry in the scrutiny are the ministries of finance and law.

A finance ministry official confirmed that Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act is being reviewed.

The home ministry is examining all documents related to receipt of funds and utilisation certificates furnished by registered NGOs.

Ministry sources said registered had received Rs 3402.90 crore in 1998-99, the most recent year for which data are available, from various foreign agencies and donors thorough "legal routes".

Home ministry officials refused to identify non-governmental organisations which are suspected to have violated the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act.

But officials said "if a through investigation is carried out, over hundred such organisations, reportedly engaged in various socio-educational and other developmental works, can be expected to come under the investigation of various law enforcement agencies."

The home ministry is the nodal agency for receiving and processing information on non-governmental organisations. Investigations, if any, into foreign funding will, however, be carried out by the Central Bureau of Investigation and/or the Enforcement Directorate

Home ministry officials said there has been considerable growth in the number of registered non-governmental organisations in recent years, and some of these, the government suspects, are fronts for insurgents and militants.

Officials said the hawala route is being used frequently by some of these non-

NEW DELHI, March 12. - The additional solicitor-general, Mr KK Sud, has urged Delhi High Court to make the Congress responsible for receiving foreign contribution "illegally".

Arguing for the government in the FCRA violation case, in which former All India Congress Committee treasurer Sitaram Kesri was involved, Mr Sud has submitted before the court that the in-charge of the party should be made responsible for it.

governmental organisations.

Officials also said "hundreds of non-governmental organisations have not filed their income and utilisation certificates to the ministry".

The filing is required under

the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act.

The Act prescribes annual filing of income and utilisation statements, duly certified by a chartered accountant.

The Foreign Contribution

(Regulation) Act empowers the government to inspect the accounts of non-governmental organisations which do not fulfil the requirements.

Official sources said 22,340 associations were registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act which include 321 Hindu organisations followed by 10 Sikh, 205 Muslim, 5100 Christians, 70 Buddhist and 963 other organisations.

Refusing to divulge the sections of the act which are to be amended, home ministry sources said "the main objective is to correct the loop-holes and curb the increasing economic offenses in the country."

THE STATESMAN

13 MAR 2001

Sex workers' mela irks NGOs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 3. — Everyone is talking about the four day Millennium Milan Mela, which was inaugurated by the sheriff, Ms Suchitra Mitra, today. The art camps, the return of traditional performances, the handicrafts, are all being celebrated as "a carnival of sex workers". But many people are strongly opposed to the 'Mela'.

Even as Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee hails it as an effort to "decriminalise adult prostitution, secure social recognition of sex work as a valid profession and establish sex workers' right of self-determination", several NGOs such as Sanlaap, Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti, Swayam and the National Association of Women's Organisations have risen up in arms against what they insist is not a profession like any other, but "degradation of women, violation of their rights, and therefore not meant to be legitimised".

Highlighting DMSC's achievements over the last few years, Dr Smarajit Jana said that entry into prostitution in the red light areas of Rambagan, Sethbagan and Tollygunge was now 100 per cent voluntary. When asked what other options the entrants had, however, he admitted that these were "limited".

Referring to agencies that opposed the demand for legal-

isation of prostitution and the 'Mela', Dr Jana said: "Efforts on the part of some NGOs to force sex workers out of their profession is also a form of trafficking."

According to Ms Indrani Sinha of Sanlaap, and Ms Rami Chhabra, a social rights activist, little effort was being made to prevent prostitution or arrange for rehabilitation.

Dr Jana said that since their Sonagachi Project had kicked off in 1992, the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other STDs among sex workers had become "stable".

But according to Dr DK Neogi, head of virology at the School of Tropical Medicine about 27.3 per cent of the state's prostitutes are HIV positive.

Dr Neogi said HIV/AIDS cases were increasing rapidly. "Earlier there were 10 cases a year at the STM, then 100, now there are two cases a day. Some NGOs and other agencies say there is a declining trend to try and prove their efficiency," he added.

About 85 per cent of the HIV victims are resident prostitutes from Kolkata, Mumbai and other places, he said and added that Hepatitis B and other sexually transmitted diseases are also on the rise.

DMSC officials, however, alleged that the STM study was of "a biased sample" and that there was "no scientific basis for an increase".

THE STATESMAN

MAR 03 2001

3 MAR 2001

NGOs put Gujarat govt through quake school

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Ahmedabad, Feb. 28: NGOs with first-hand experience in disaster management are accusing the government of being totally out of sync with the ground realities in quake-ravaged Gujarat.

"It seems that the government hasn't learnt any lessons from Latur," said Rajendra Desai of the National Centre for People's Action in Disaster Preparedness. Desai, who has been working in Latur for the past seven years, today faxed a copy of his "lessons" to chief minister Keshubhai Patel, asking him to look at the issue of rehabilitation and long-term disaster mitigation from a more "social" than a political periscope.

NGOs who have rallied around Desai and his activist wife, Rupal, are now confronting the government with "questions it doesn't want to seek answers to".

Aghast at the government's rehabilitation package, which some of them quip has been prepared by a "bunch of idiots", NGOs say that promises of offering the homeless pre-fabricated structures within six months is not an answer to the shelter needs.

"The government is in a tremendous hurry to score a political point. Any haste at this stage will only complicate the problem and jeopardise the prospect of meaningful rehabilitation. The need of the hour is good quality short-term shelters which are cyclone and quake resistant," said Rajni Patwardhan, a social worker.

The NGOs feel that the govern-

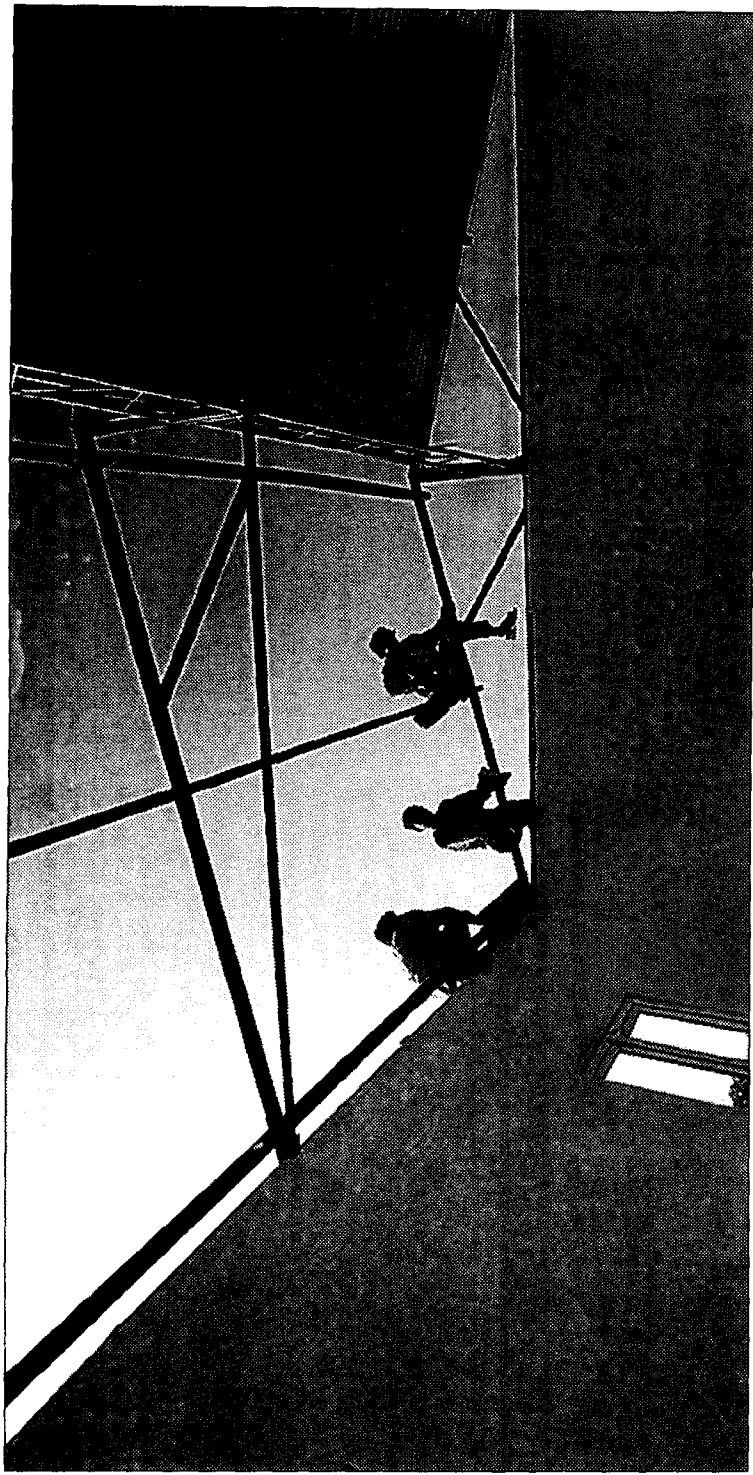
ment's emphasis on cement-and-steel technologies have serious flaws that will only result in a false sense of security. "Moreover, the most crucial aspect of any long-term plan is the transfer of technology to villagers," said Desai.

He added that soon after big contractors from Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad executed some cement-and-steel constructions in Latur, the villagers continued to build houses in "pretty much the same way as before as they were ignorant of the earthquake-resistant building technology".

Stressing that replicability is the key to sustainable rehabilitation, Desai said traditional technologies most commonly practised by villagers are the most replicable. "The existing technologies should be upgraded instead of superimposing newer, more alien ones," he added.

NGOs are also scoffing at the government's promise of offering people "modern houses, with latest amenities". "In Latur, the houses that came up after the quake had very little semi-covered spaces. They forgot that in rural areas a weaver would have to accommodate his loom in addition to other things and a carpenter would need space to do his work," Desai's colleagues said. They added that the urban setup doesn't have the flexibility needed in rural areas. "Urban houses are actually of very little use in villages."

Graham Saunders of the American voluntary agency, CRS, said it is crucial to involve village



Workers put up semi-permanent houses for the homeless in Gujarat. (AFP)

communities in the design and construction process.

"Instead of leaving villagers with no option but to live in so called modern homes doled out by an overzealous government, the idea is make house that resonate culturally. Local materials should be used as villagers adopt non-alien material more easily. They are sure that the materials will be available for later upkeep, repair

and maintenance. Only then will they be able to overcome their fears," Saunders said.

"In Latur, the people in their new earthquake-safe houses simply did not sleep indoors for months after occupying them since they had little confidence in the new houses," Desai said.

NGOs also accuse the government of totally ignoring the need for public awareness campaigns.

In an urgent note to the Gujarat government, Desai's organisation has said that if public awareness campaigns are not kicked off immediately, the rehabilitation programme could fail or go off tangent. "People are not being told facts about earthquakes, that lives are lost not by the tremors but by buildings, they are not being told why their old, fractured houses are unsafe," Desai said.

"Only an effective awareness campaign can ensure that the need for safety against an earthquake does not die after a few months when the actual construction or repair and retrofitting process begins. In Latur, many survivors who received as much as 20 to 40 bags of cement in assistance sold it all in the grey market. They were simply not bothered about a future quake, he added.

NGOs help census enumerators

By Ramya Kannan

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CHENNAI, FEB. 28. Around 15 NGOs in the city got their act together late Wednesday evening to help Census enumerators cover the street children population for Census 2001.

It is for the first time that NGOs have been roped into the largest head count of the nation, thereby setting a precedent. The organisations were approached by the Census department and their co-operation sought to enlist the 'houseless' population, including street children.

Though counting street children in is not new to the decennial ritual, what is unique is the participation of non-Census personnel, according to Dr. C. Chandramouli, Census Commissioner, Tamil Nadu. The decision to approach the children through the NGO volunteers they are familiar with, was made, so as to make the task of enumeration easy and the coverage more comprehensive. Children would also find it more comfortable to answer questions if they were asked by people they were interacting with on a day to day basis, it was said.

The voluntary organisations, besides helping enumerators on their rounds in the streets also provided the head count and details of street children in their respective shelter homes and orphanages. "We first prepared a list of the children staying with us and

even those who take temporary shelter here. This was followed by a street-to-street enumeration drive", according to Ms. Girija Kumarababu, of the Indian Council for Child Welfare, one of the agencies involved in the operation.

Volunteers from the NGOs accompanied the enumerators to spots which were identified as 'street children intensive areas' or their regular haunts, on the last day of the enumeration phase of Census 2001.

In order to make things convenient for the enumerators, some of the organisations had also asked the children to be present at a particular location between 6 p.m. and 10 p.m. "As most of the street children are also rag pickers, we asked them to gather at the 'waste-paper' shops. The shop owners also co-operated with us on this issue," according to Mr. Susai Raj, of the Tamil Nadu NGO Forum.

The Central and Egmore stations were also scanned for street children, with the aid of NGOs who work regularly there. Beginning at 6 p.m., the exercise concluded by around 10 p.m. with the Forum splitting up to cover 'high risk' areas in North and South Chennai.

While it was earlier decided to do the rounds of 'girls' homes' and hostels by 4 p.m., it was later decided not to make the distinction and enumeration was carried out after 6 p.m.

THE HINDU

1 MAR 2001

NGO bid to shield Balco sell-off

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 27: Non-government organisations are jumping into the fight over the privatisation of Balco, an issue that has fast become a test of the Centre's will to privatise the public sector.

The Centre for Civil Society (CCS), an NGO patronised by reformers — mostly economists — is going to court to preempt public interest litigation cases that it suspects will be initiated by trade unions and environment groups.

CCS contends that the privatisation of public sector units is in the "first order public interest" as it is the only way to reform these companies. The cases challenging privatisation are of parochial private interests, said its president, Parth J. Shah, an economist and former professor at the University of Michigan, US. The CCS litigation will not confine itself to Balco but to privatisation as a whole.

"It is in the larger public interest to privatise public sector units as fast as possible. For instance, if the government had taken a strategic partner for VSNL two years ago, it would have got 10 times the price that the VSNL scrip commands today. Thus the government has lost out on revenue that is crucial for development expenditure," said Shah.

Though the CCS claims it has no interest in Balco, its case has the support of industry and the apex chambers of commerce. If its case is upheld, it will strengthen the argument for privatisation and threaten to take the wind out of the sails of the opposition.

A court order against public interest litigations filed by the Balco Employees' Union will mean that any opposition to any of the proposed privatisation measures will be devoid of legal sanction.

The CCS argues that delay in privatisation will mean the public sector units that are ripe for the picking will have to be sold cheap. Balco's profitability, too, has been going down over the years. In 1995-96, it earned a profit after tax of Rs 106 crore. In 1999-2000, that was down to Rs 55.89 crore. In 2000-2001 it is reported to be slipping to around Rs 25 crore.

If the arguments of the CCS echo those of the chambers and pro-reforms economists, it is no surprise.

The centre is packed with *laissez faire* scholars. Its chairman is Kanwal Rekhi of IndUS. Among its patrons are Isher Judge Ahluwalia of the Indian Council for Research in International Economic Relations, Jagdish Bhagwati (Columbia University), Surjit S. Bhalla, Kirit Parikh, Bibek Debroy (Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies), Vinay Bharat Ram (DCM Industries) and Siddharth Sriram.

THE TELEGRAPH

28 FEB 2001

Govt's new found love for NGOs is a political game plan

By Bharat Desai

AHMEDABAD: Last week, during a meeting of the cabinet ministers, chief minister Keshubhai Patel was unveiling one plan after another for the rebuilding of Kutch, when one of the ministers sitting in a corner of the meeting hall commented *kuch bhi kar lo, ab vote to nahin milega* (do whatever you want, but you will never get the votes).

Several ministers turned in the direction from where the whisper had and the concerned minister had a sheepish smile for having been heard. But other ministers also seemed to agree with his sentiments and gave out a collective chuckle.

For the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the earthquake has shaken the very foundations on which its political support lies. Or is it so?

A member of the 35-strong delegation from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, USAID and the U.S. embassy, which has been camping in Gujarat for the last one week, had a very pointed observation at a common thread which ran through his discussions with almost every government functionary. "NGO is the key word here and for the government, any organisation which is not linked with the government is an NGO, be it a corporate house, a voluntary agency or a religious outfit and they seem to be very keen to hand over almost everything to these NGOs".

The delegate remarked that there seems to be an overwhelming agreement among all government officials, including politicians, that most of the rebuilding work should actually be handed over to the NGOs. It would not only ensure more involvement of the people and the representatives in the decision making, execution and monitoring but would also ensure that transparency is ensured in the system.

But why is there this new-found appreciation in the abilities of the NGOs? The answer perhaps lies more in political ground realities than the government's own willingness to hand over most of the rebuilding activities to these agencies which are now pouring in to Kutch.

With the state assembly elections due two years from now — which is about the time when the rebuilding process would be completed — the BJP leadership perhaps wants to distance itself from most of the activities in order to escape the blame for things which may go awry.

And there is already signs of rumbling within the government which say that while it may be relevant to involve the people and their representatives in this decision making process, it may not be possible to take tough decisions — like relocation of towns and villages — under the proposed system. Besides, the government cannot really abdicate its responsibility and accountability by just passing the buck to the grass-roots. Also, there is the question of which NGOs, out of the army of outfits currently camping in Kutch, to select.

Gagan Sethi, who is now associated with the Kutch Navnirman Abhiyan, one of the better known and credible groups, says "those organisations which already have a relationship with the people have a crucial role in this, others can play a supportive role with specific inputs in terms of finances, competence and skills or just play the watchdog". He says the Abhiyan has also approached the chartered accountants association to examine all the spending so as to ensure transparency.

Transparency and involvement of people in the decision making are two issues which all the big lenders like the World Bank and ADB are emphasising on at the government level. Besides, some NGOs like Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) are getting direct funding from foreign organisations and even governments who are more comfortable with financing reputed outfits rather than governments.

Kutch district collector Anil Mukim says, "I see a big role for the NGOs in the coming days, the people's shall be supreme provided it does not compromise on the aspect of safety for the community". Officials said a detailed draft on the modalities of implementation of the rebuilding activity, with specific roles for the government, NGOs and people's representatives, had been sent to Gandhinagar by the Kutch administration and was awaiting clearance any time now.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

25 FEB 2001

NGOs to help collect census data on homeless

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, FEB. 14. Non governmental organisations will, for the first time, be involved in census operations in the State, helping the enumerators collect details about the homeless and street children on February 28.

The assistance of voluntary organisations had been sought for enumeration of the "houseless" population and street children on the night of February 28, Dr. C. Chandramouli, director of census operations, told presspersons today. "Those NGOs who are working among these groups of people and are familiar with their circumstances have volunteered to help us," he added. Around 40 NGOs in the State and 15 in the city would undertake the operations at midnight on February 28. A network of NGOs, the Tamil Nadu NGO Forum, is also co-ordinating assistance activities throughout the State.

Arrangements have also been made at the three major ports — Chennai, Ennore and Tuticorin — to enumerate all persons aboard the ships anchored there, as of 00.00 hours of March 1. This would include not only ships berthed inside ports, but also those in the Indian waters. An officer of the Port Trust had

specifically been appointed for the purpose and trained by the directorate.

Special arrangements have been made to enumerate personnel working in the armed forces and paramilitary outfits stationed in the State on "special charges." It would include personnel in the army, navy, air force, coast guard, CRPF, CISF, BSF, RAF and other such detachments. The census in this case, would be conducted by military officers themselves.

In Tamil Nadu, 59 special charges have been formed and 59 military census officers have been appointed. There are 184 enumerators and 65 supervisors belonging to the military and paramilitary outfits spread over 15 districts, engaged in the enumeration of the defence personnel in the State.

One of the new features of Census 2001 is slum demography, a separate demarcation of the population count in slums. In the present exercise, slums have been identified in 67 towns having a population of 50,000 and above. A total of 3,500 identifiable enumeration blocks have been carved out and designated 'Slum Blocks.' In Chennai Corporation limits, 25 per cent of the 5,800 enumeration blocks have been identified as Slum Blocks.

The civic body is undertaking enumeration in these special blocks in the city.

The enumeration has hitherto been quite successful, Dr. Chandramouli said, except for a few incidents of non-cooperation. However he warned that non-cooperation would attract legal punishment, which could go upto three years rigorous imprisonment.

The preliminary statistics would be available 10-15 days after the revisional round which would be completed on March 5. After that statistics would be made available on a periodic basis, as and when they had been fed by department staff, Dr. Chandramouli said.

Two fatally knocked down

SATTUR, FEB. 14. Two persons were fatally knocked down from their two-wheeler by a bus, plying between Rajapalayam and Sattur, this evening.

They were identified as Chandrasekar (57), a clerk in a school and Narasimhan (40) of Sattur. Police have registered a case.

NGOs to move court on quake relief bias

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Ahmedabad, Feb. 11: A forum of NGOs will file a public interest litigation against Gujarat and the RSS for allegedly "communalising relief and rehabilitation" and doling out quake aid on lines of caste and religion.

The PIL, possibly the first of its kind, will be filed tomorrow by the Earthquake Affected Relief and Rehabilitation Services based on first-hand reports of nearly 1000 volunteers.

In its report, the forum of 52 NGOs has alleged that "relief efforts in Kutch and Saurashtra are biased against Dalit and Muslim victims. Sangh parivar organisations, in connivance

with the state administration are systematically ensuring that the vulnerable groups do not get adequate relief and compensation."

According to the forum, preliminary investigations have revealed that relief has bypassed 76 villages in Kutch, Bhuj, Bhachau, Surendranagar and Rajkot. These villages "ignored by the state" need immediate attention, it said.

The forum will also petition the NHRC and the Governor. Wilfred D'Costa of the Indian National Social Action Forum said the NGOs are forced to file a PIL because "aid coming from all over the world is being directed to specific communities".

Union home minister L.K.

Advani, however, denied any bias. He said the Centre and the state were jointly trying to work out a "concrete rehabilitation plan" for quake victims.

The Gujarat government and the RSS are accusing "vested interests" of politicising matters "in the time of disaster". They have decided to sue some newspapers for creating a controversy by "false and biased reporting".

The NGO forum is, however, firm that Muslims and Dalits are being given a raw deal. D'Costa said matters were worse because the state government had allowed the RSS to take the upper hand, which was inappropriate relief material and distribut-

ing it in any manner it thought fit.

A missionary, who went to the razed Himgiri apartments with six volunteers two hours after the quake, was barred from lending a helping hand, D'Costa said. RSS volunteers allegedly told him they reserved the prerogative to "look after the people".

Another volunteer, who returned from Rajkot, said the RSS was deliberately diverting relief material from Maliya, a village of 85 per cent Muslims. Of the 52 people who died in Maliya, 38 were Muslims and the rest Dalits.

"It is good if the RSS wants to help but does it have the right to

stop others? Don't people from other communities have the right to social service?" Father Cedric Prakash of St. Xavier's Social Service Society asked.

Gujarat PCC vice-president Hasmukh Patel said he had "evidence" of the RSS unloading relief material from a Turkish plane and distributing it in a village of upper-caste Durbars.

RSS spokesman Pradeep Jain, however, trashed the allegations. "You think we ask people which community they belong to before supplying relief material? Everyone knows we have been working very hard, there are some who want to take that goodwill away from us," he said.

Shabir Shah for NGOs to monitor J&K polls

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 10. While supporting the peace initiative in Jammu and Kashmir, the J&K Democratic Freedom Party president, Mr. Shabir Shah, today urged the Indian Government to avail of the "golden opportunity" offered by Pakistan's "positive response" to the peace process.

At a press conference here, Mr. Shah said the Indian Government should "not take lightly the response shown by Pakistan to the peace process. The response being positive, offers a golden opportunity to resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully."

Condemning the recent killing of six Sikhs in Srinagar, Mr. Shah said it was part of a "deeper conspiracy to malign the ongoing movement in Kashmir and in that

context to offset the peace initiative."

Asked whether the Pakistan Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf's tough talk on "Kashmir Solidarity Day" on February 4 was indicative of the fact that things might not turn out to be smooth in the long run, Mr. Shah said such indications were only "initial hiccups" and pointed towards domestic compulsions.

Describing the Ramzan ceasefire offer of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, as a "gracious and welcome step" in the right direction, he regretted that some quarters opposed the move for their own vested interests.

Mr. Shah demanded elections in the State under the supervision of NGOs and prominent intellectuals to bring to the fore "real and

genuine" representatives of the people. He even dared the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, to face elections under such a supervision. "I have full faith in intellectuals from India, they will shoulder their responsibility of overseeing the elections in a fair manner."

He supported the proposal of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference leadership to visit Pakistan to talk to militant and political leaders but criticised the Centre for "dilly-dallying" in giving them passports.

"This clash of egos must stop. The Hurriyat leaders should be given passports to travel to Pakistan. The Indian Government should be serious and sincere in resolving the Kashmir issue," he said.

THE HINDU

11 FEB 2001

HO-15

U.N. networking with NGOs

972

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 6. The United Nations has no plan of adopting any specific area in quake-hit Gujarat, in response to an appeal made by the Indian Government, but has instead decided to network with known NGOs in mounting relief and rehabilitation efforts with focus on women and children.

The U.N., with the help of bilateral and multilateral donors, has contributed \$30 million in cash supplies and expects that the figure will go up to \$50 million, the U.N. Resident Coordinator and UNDP representative, Dr. Brenda Gael McSweeney, said here today.

Saluting the tremendous solidarity shown by the Indian people in the aftermath of the quake, she said the U.N. had redeployed its teams in the State for a convergence of approach. The overall strategy was to reach the poorest and the unreached.

A representative of the U.N. Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDACT), Mr. Joe Barr, who returned from the disaster zone, said that by one estimate about 2,50,000 people might have been rendered homeless. Using basic population figures, the UNICEF

team estimates that 10 to 15 per cent children under five and 22 per cent children between 5 and 14 years may have been affected. As such 15,000 schools were affected and 80 per cent villages and districts near the epicentre would have been affected.

Mr. Barr said despite all the relief and rehabilitation work being done, the conditions were not good and community life was being disrupted. "Recovery will take time. There are several buildings in Kutch that have developed cracks and people are scared of going into them."

He was all praise for the quick response to the tragedy by the survivors, doctors, NGOs and the armed forces, which, he said, saved many lives. There was no estimate of the people still buried under the rubble, nor of the number of deaths.

Answering persistent questions on the response of the administration, Mr Barr said, "Coordination becomes a problem in view of the enormity of the catastrophe when people are missing and resources were scarce." He identified provision of shelter from cold as the most pressing need for the moment.

The UNICEF representative, Ms. Maria Cali-

vis, said that over the next three months an additional \$10 million would be provided to address the special needs of children and women. So far the agency had given approximately \$4 million in relief supplies. The focus would be on provision of water, sanitation facilities and rebuilding schools.

Describing the quake affected area as "food insecure", the Country Director of the World Food Programme, Mr. Pedro Medrano, said it had suffered drought in the last two years. The earthquake had destroyed infrastructure, storage, warehouses, etc. This would take some time to restore.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) representative in India and Bhutan, Mr. Peter Rosenegger, said a six-member team had been sent to Bhuj to assess the damage to agriculture and facilities against drought conditions.

According to Dr. Robert J. Kim-Farley of the World Health Organisation, surveillance teams had been set up to monitor any outbreak of epidemic. There was none so far.

He said the bodies of the victims were not a public hazard. Only culturally it was important to give them a decent funeral.

THE HINDU

- 7 FEB 2001

NGOs beat govt in Dalit relief race

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 5: In Samavas, a 7,000-strong Dalit village in Bhuj, it was not government relief which reached first, but NGOs. The roads were choked with the debris of collapsed houses, the survivors cut off. Perhaps its only fault, if some NGOs are to be believed, is that it is a Dalit village, and so, low down in the priority list for relief and rescue work.

"It was one locality which was totally untouched by relief supply. The condition of women and children was terrible," say the field staff of Actionaid India, an NGO, which a year ago had played a leading role in the rehabilitation of cyclone victims in Orissa.

And it is not just this village that was discriminated against, allege NGOs, but all those where people do not have a voice — villages of tribals and minorities. Upper-caste people and the well-off are the first to corner relief material; there have been instances of hoarding even.

When the relief team from Actionaid reached the Narayanpur village, inhabited by Kolis, a tribal community, it found that while relief had reached the upper-caste village half a kilometre away, it had given Narayanpur the miss.

"This village is a little off the main route and the community is forced to go to the main road to get

relief material," says the Actionaid report.

The earthquake came as a double blow to remote Narayanpur that had been in the grip of drought for the past three years. "According to the villagers, it may take more than a year to reconstruct the houses and the next rainy season could turn out to be a nightmare if there is no government relief," says an Actionaid official.

Khari Rohar, a village a 10-minute drive from Gandhidham, has lost 28 people in the earthquake. A majority of its population is Muslims and Dalits. "They have had no alternative but to purchase food and water at four times the normal price," says the Actionaid report.

Concerned at the discrimination, Muslim organisations have stepped in. Several NGOs, including the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and Jamiat-e-Ulema, have sent volunteers to Kutch to take care of "their own". Maulana Asad Madni of Jamiat-e-Ulema has gone to Bhuj to identify the dead from his community.

They are upset over the hurried manner in which the dead are being buried without identifying their religion. "It is binding upon the kith and kin of the dead Muslim to see that the person is given a decent burial," says Madni.

Where the state has faltered the NGOs have pitched in. And



Children scavenge for scrap items of value in piles of rubble in Bhuj on Monday. (AFP)

these are large tracts, on the margins of towns, inaccessible and peopled by the poor and the weak. "There is total abdication of state responsibility," says a person attached to an NGO who has just returned from Gujarat.

According to Actionaid, medical teams have poured into the state from various corners but the government was not able to effectively use them. "A majority of

government dispensaries has been destroyed. Apart from this, there has been a total lack of information management system," says Actionaid.

Its report quotes Hussain Sodha and Urmila Behn of Chand Chowk: "The relief vans move on the main roads. They do not come into the interiors. We have to come on to the main road and wait for someone to throw

food packets at us."

The NGO says its rehabilitation will centre on children, single women, the old and the disabled — the most vulnerable.

"These are times when the male members try to grab property from widows and single women. So, one of our focal points is to make the people aware of their rights," says an Actionaid official.