



Editorial

Climate Crisis: Struggle for Equity and Justice

The growth model based on the world view that the resources of planet earth are unlimited and that humans can master and subjugate all of those through technology has led to a pattern of production and consumption that builds itself intensively on the notion of nearly limitless availability of natural resources.

Under capitalism the environment is more and more transformed into a contested object of human greed. The exploitation of natural resources and their degradation by a growing quantity of pollutants, results in a man-made scarcity of human resources; leading to conflicts over access to these resources, which is uneven and unequal, and results in relation of man to nature conflict-prone. The 'ecological footprints' of people in different countries and regions of the world varies in size, reflecting severe inequalities of income and wealth. Ecological injustices therefore can be discussed usefully only if a social class contradiction which includes unsustainable consumerist life-style and the production of inequality in the course of capital accumulation is taken into account. This also entails an economy based on low carbon use.

The increased incidence of extreme climate changes is likely to be very severe in the tropics. The people of the South, especially the people of South Asia, are witnessing increased natural disasters that have devastating impacts. The dominant economic system of corporate globalisation with its inherent quest for profit-maximization and its consequent disregard for human and ecological needs has made the situation worse. Local livelihoods are thus sacrificed for the sake of exploitation of natural resources that are transformed into commodities, and later marketed. The waste products are then dumped back into the South. The burden of this climate crisis will be and is already being faced especially by people living in poverty in rural areas. The impact will severally hit farmers, peasants, pastoralists, fisher-folk, and other marginalized groups.

Given that around 70% of the population of South Asia depends on climate sensitive sectors like agriculture for survival, the implications of climate change are enormous.

Climate change will affect the water sector the most. This is also the core of development for rural communities dependent on agriculture and hence the need for focus on water security. Women will be especially vulnerable to the climate phenomenon. The rural communities, especially the women as victims of climate change, should form the base for understanding the climate change impact and should provide the perspective to plan a new development paradigm to mitigate and adapt climate change.

Copenhagen Accord: Recipe for a hotter planet. The climate change COP15 meeting among some 192 countries at Copenhagen has ended in "climate change denial" believing that the climate is not changing. After two week of delays, theatrics and last minute manipulative deal making the final accord, a 12 paragraph manufactured document was a statement of intention; not a binding pledge to begin action on global warming. The deal does not commit any nation to emissions cut beyond a general acknowledgement that global temperatures should be held along the lines agreed to by leading nations in July to 2°C goal and there are no overall emissions targets for rich countries. The already agreed-upon emissions cuts fall far short of an action needed to avoid potentially dangerous effects of climate change that



is seen as a threshold for dangerous changes such as more floods, droughts mudslides, sandstorms and rising seas. It is a bail out of the industrialised countries of historical responsibility for the climate change, eliminate the distinctions between developed and developing countries and fatally undermine efforts to renew the Kyoto Protocol. It also changed the framework based on equity and historical emission in the process. Seventeen years after the signing of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, a real global strategy to avoid climate catastrophe remains elusive. The Copenhagen Accord is a travesty of what the world needs to protect the “atmospheric common”. Instead of effective, equitable, binding with stringent measures in emission cut targets for the developed nations, the accord is a mockery on the poor nations especially on the island nations to limit global warming to 1.5 c. above pre-industrial level.

It's official. Rich countries, especially the US-the world's biggest fuel guzzler and the leading polluter continues to pollute more than ever, and this is evident from the greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) figures released by the UN FCCC. Developed countries emitted 12.8% more GHGs in 2007 than in 1990 (the base year for calculating emissions according to the Kyoto Protocol) despite many of them agreeing to cut back emissions under the protocol's mandate. The US's CO₂ emissions have increased by 20% in Seventeen years. And if the gas concentration exceeds in the “atmospheric common” at this rate, the warming will rise to 4°C. This spells the near-extinction of 40-odd island states and consigns two billion people to growing hunger, dispossession and displacement through cyclones, floods and droughts, aggravated by glacier melting, deforestation and desertification. The political fall out of the climate deal at Copenhagen is the increasing marginalisation of the UN System as a collective political agency to evolve a shared global concern to protect the planet and it also signifies a major shift in the global distribution of power. Oligarchic formations like the G-20 will be the new syndicate for manufacturing global consensus on vital global issues affecting environment, trade and finance. Copenhagen also exposed the limitations of universalism and bilateral agreements. Small Group Pacts may become more important than multilateral treaties. The world needs to take steps to limit temperature rise to 2°C, an aim that will require global emissions to peak and begin falling within the next 5-10 years. The smallest increase in the global stocks of carbon in the atmosphere can have catastrophic effect on climate and will impact every aspect of human life. Obviously, the poor nations and the poor in all nations, who have the least coping capacity, will suffer more. Climate change will affect South Asia in various ways. This was highlighted by the dramatic holding of an underwater cabinet meeting in the Maldives and, at the opposite pole, at the base of Mt. Everest in Nepal. Bangladesh and Maldives are also extremely vulnerable, given the prospect of a rise in sea levels. Averting the tragedy of the “atmospheric commons” will require binding, equitable arrangements between countries, big and small, as well as a clear rich-poor differentiation of responsibility for the carbon ‘stock’ that are historical accumulations for which the developed countries are indeed responsible. We need a strong equitable climate deal! This will not happen unless people's movements seize the climate agenda.

The Tasks : It is of course neither prudent nor possible to leave all actions regarding climate change to the official governments of various nations and wait in hope of effective and meaningful measures. Civil Society Organisations, including SAAPE, will need to seize the initiative and set the agenda. This can only be done through a four pronged approach.

- i) The component of research and education. This should investigate the truth of climate change – including the effects of ‘clean’ projects. The findings need to be communicated widely to the real victims of climate change who also form our basic constituency.
- ii) Advocacy and campaigns to sensitise, educate, and pressurise official bodies including national governments and regional formations to take stands and steps to counter climate change.
- iii) The struggles against specific policies and projects that are environmentally and climatically disastrous.
- iv) The development with the people of ecologically sensible alternative practices – including those of energy production and consumption, production processes and techniques, and of protection and conservation of natural resources.

The present historical juncture demands that we rise to the challenge and take up these tasks.

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Saape News and Events

Saape General Assembly

The 3rd General Assembly (GA) and 2009 Annual General Meeting of SAAPE was held on 8-9 August in Kathmandu, Nepal based on the theme “*Global Financial Crisis and Implications in South Asia*”. The GA, which is held after every three years, was attended by representatives from the SAAPE constituency in South Asia, involved in the overarching issue of poverty and injustices in the region. They mainly represented peasant organisations, women’s organisations, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, grassroots social movements, community-based organisations, independent akademiks, the informal sector, the media, human rights defenders and peace advocates. Representatives from the European civil society and SAAPE network partners also participated in the two-day event.

Based on the issues and concerns that emerged in the various plenary sessions and workshops, the assembly endorsed the following decisions:

Mobilisation at the Grassroot level

It was unanimously decided that the focus of the SAAPE activities should be mainly on the campaigns and advocacy rather than study and research in isolation per se. Conferences, seminar, research and workshop may fail to link the grassroots social, political, economic and cultural movements if they are not appropriately coordinated and linked. Therefore, SAAPE’s priority needs to concentrate on campaign activities like people’s mobilisation.

Publications

SAAPE’s publications should be made in the local languages as far as possible so that they can be used by the people at the grassroots. Each thematic group needs to identify at least one activity that is directly related to the poor people in South Asia.

The preparation of documents at the centre (Secretariat and RTFO level) and translating them

into the local languages should be discouraged. Rather, SAAPE should identify issues by working with the grassroots people, prepare documents based on their news and views and then translate them into the documents understandable to all. These documents need to be used for advocacy works rather than for other people to use it as the study materials.

Rotation and Restructuring of SAAPE

The thematic groups that are the hearts of SAAPE should discuss among themselves how they are going to rotate and who take the responsibility. In this regard, the thematic members of the Gender Group decided to shift its RTFO from Bangladesh (Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangh) to Pakistan (Women Workers Helpline) to be effective from January 2010. It was agreed that the transition period for shifting the RTFOs should remain till December 2009. The rotation of the thematic group needs to be at least not more than one RTFO in one country.

The assembly unanimously decided that the existing Secretariat of SAAPE based in Rural Reconstruction Nepal, Kathmandu should be continued in future, too.

Action Agenda

From August to December 2009, the Secretariat should develop a comprehensive programme with the help of the Core Committee members, the thematic groups and other SAAPE members.

The SAAPE secretariat, in coordination with the thematic groups, should work mainly on what activities SAAPE can really do within next three years (2010-2012), the rotation of the thematic groups, other restructuring issues, budget and the like.

Programmatic Activities and Outcomes

The thematic groups agreed to set the realistic activities yielding concrete outputs. Their activities should be directed towards achieving

their end goals and objectives. SAAPE is also working on publishing the South Asia poverty and vulnerability report (third issue) and it should concentrate on the gender disaggregated data on South Asia's poverty, as far as possible.

The activities of the thematic groups presented in the various sessions are just black and white pictures now. The groups are advised to go back to their countries, discuss among the country groups, develop more ideas and the RTFO should reschedule the activities and submit to the SAAPE secretariat within November 2009.

Membership and Linkages

Expanding membership means building additional blocks and it should be crosscutting across movements of the thematic groups. Criteria for membership developed by SAAPE may need to be revisited as necessary.

Expanding members for formality cannot contribute to SAAPE's movement against poverty. Certain strategies need to be developed for expanding membership within each thematic group. Issues of inclusion are equally important for SAAPE to keep in mind.

How to make linkage with the South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is another issue SAAPE needs to seriously work out because SAAPE's mandate is to lobby the South Asian governments and SAARC is the official intergovernmental organisation of the region.

Resource Mobilisation and Coordination

Generating resources from the SAAPE members were also discussed and it was decided that SAAPE will stand more as a facilitator for the grassroots movements. The sources of the resources need to be diversified as far as possible.

Inter and intra-thematic group coordination mechanism should be built up in the coming days so that each thematic group owns the issues raised by SAAPE. It will fulfil the gaps appeared currently for the joint movement against poverty in South Asia.

The current structure of SAAPE is developed by the SAAPE members themselves and can be subject to change or modify to suit the present context and issues. SAAPE will not accept any conditionality imposed from elsewhere.

SAAPE will create an environment how the poor themselves represent this assembly and so the meaning of linking our movement with the grassroots can be materialised.



3rd South Asian workshop on International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the Debt Crisis

The "3rd South Asian workshop on International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and the Debt Crisis" have called for region wide resistance movements against anti-people policies of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs). This conference has been jointly organized by SAAPE, VAK and IED. Around 150 participants from various organizations across different countries of the region have taken part in this workshop.

The workshop witnessed the participation of activists, academicians, students, teachers, trade unionists and others from all across the country. There was a notable presence of around 30 participants from other districts and divisions of Bangladesh apart from Dhaka. All divisions, viz. Rajshahi, Sylhet, hittagong, Khulna,

Barisal and Dhaka were represented. Various networks and movements viz. environmental, human rights, women, trade-union, teachers, students, journalists, indigenous people (both from the plains and the hills), etc. And their leading representatives were present in the workshop. It was remarkable to note the presence Wajedul Islam, president of Trade Union Centre and Roy Romesh, General Secretary of Jatiyo Shramik League. Both leaders pledged that their unions would play an active role in the campaign against debt and the International Financial Institutions.

The workshop also witnessed international participants from Pakistan, India & Belgium. The inaugural session was chaired by Retired Justice,

Golam Rabbani who was also the convenor of the People's Tribunal against the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank in Bangladesh. Various representatives from different countries lighted the lamp to signal the beginning of the conference. Mr. Ajit Muricken chaired the first working session. Mr. Eric Toussaint in his presentation, pointed out the crisis of the WB and IMF and how the global crisis helped them to come back to the global scene as the lender of the last resort. Prof M M Akash in his presentation "Global Economic Crisis and Bangladesh explained the impacts that this crisis had on Bangladesh. He also said that when it seems that the advanced western nations are coming out of the crisis, Bangladesh is getting increasingly affected by it. Prof Anu Mohammad, a Bangladeshi Economist and political activist, in his presentation on 'IFIs and their impacts on Bangladesh' chronologically laid down the interventions of the IFIs in Bangladesh, both before and after the independence and their horrible consequences.

In the other session of the day, Monower Mostafa spoke about the role of WB-IMF in the Bangladesh energy sector. The continuous attempts by the IFIs have eroded the public sector and have increased the privatisation. This was amply demonstrated in the presentations. Sushovan Dhar presented to the audience on behalf of B Skanthakumar on the debt and governance in Sri Lanka. It was unfortunate that Mr Skanthakumar could not be present in the workshop due to technical problems. Mr. Arefin from the Dhaka University chaired the session.

Each session was followed by live discussions and interactions which contributed immensely to the workshop. The second day started with a presentation by Sushovan Dhar on the WB funded NALCO project in Orissa. The project apart from resulting in loss of lives and livelihoods of indigenous population is also an environmental catastrophe.

In the other session of the day Masud Ali, presented a case study of the IFI led privatisation of the jute sector in Bangladesh. He explained the horrible consequences of the WB led privatisation of the Adamjee Jute Mill of Dhaka. There was another presentation by Farooq Tariq from Pakistan on the Pakistani political situation and the impacts of the IMF conditionalities on the common people of Pakistan. Eric Toussaint

explained the global economic crisis and its impact on the third world. The session was chaired by SAAPE core-committee member Mohiuddin Ahmed.

The final session of the day was strategy and planning to carry forward the campaign. Participants laid special emphasis on strong grass-root mobilisation through campaign and awareness building against the IFIs. It was also decided to carry the message forward to all districts and divisions and to create a larger network of the various sections of the society to strengthen the campaign. The session was chaired by Dr Rasheed-e-Mahbub.

The major themes highlighted in the conference were the attempts by the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to privatize the basic & essential services, to privatise industries endangering the livelihoods of workers connected to it and the imposition of stringent conditionalities for providing aid. The participants observed that the privatization of state owned enterprises under neo-liberal agenda minimizes the state's sovereignty and welfare role and strengthens the repressive mechanisms which serve the interests of the multinational companies at the cost of the people. The ecological and environmental degradation wrought by IFI funded projects were also dealt in detail.

Various other presentations demystified and condemned the roles of IFIs in increasing the burden of debt, privatizing basic services and thus making it out of control of the working poor, clear violations of Human Rights and environmental concerns, etc. It was observed that all this was done in the name of development and progress.

It was observed with sadness that no governments in South Asia dared to confront the hegemonies of the IFIs in spite of tremendous mass mobilizations and demands from below. In order to strengthen South-South co-operation the assembly gave a call for the "Bank of the South". The future course of action decided to take the issue forward in terms of mass awareness campaigns and mobilizations to force the South Asian governments in the various countries of the region to resist the anti-people policies imposed by the IFIs, to say "no" to the conditionalities imposed by the IFIs and also to get the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) out of the region.

SAAPE 3rd GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECLARATION

We the citizens of South Asia, representatives of civil societies from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, met in the Third General Assembly of the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication in Kathmandu from 8 to 9 August 2009. This Declaration represents the collective will of the members present to work against neo-liberalism. We embrace sustainable development for the definitive eradication of poverty and the betterment of the lives of all people in the region, particularly those living in poverty and without rights, those suffering injustice and the effects of conflict and discrimination.

We call on all governments of the region, and the international community as a whole to unreservedly ensure the universal right of all to life, shelter, social security and livelihood. All the hard won rights must be preserved and built upon. We demand that all governments of the region recognize the global failure of the neo-liberal model to bring equitable development to all. The global economic crisis is symptomatic of the broader failures of commoditisation of the world's resources and exploitation of nature.

While we recognise the threat of climate change the solution does not lie in either displacing people from the forest and land, or in international carbon trade. The International Financial Institutions have accentuated land grab and displacement of forest and rural communities, loss of traditional livelihoods and a sharp increase in hunger and farmer suicides. We demand a reversal of neo-liberal economic policies and the restoration of public management and ownership. The restructuring of South Asian economies has led to the loss of millions of jobs and rampant poverty and intensification of poverty in both urban and rural communities. Elitist growth-led economic strategies have reduced possibilities for overall livelihood concerns in economic policy.

Neo-liberal policies have led to an attack on democratic struggles including the use of anti-terror laws against people's movements. The states cannot claim impunity since these are in violation of international human rights law. In view of the crushing debt burden there must be cancellation of debt by the IFIs and Northern lenders. South Asian governments must not borrow any more funds from the IFIs.

Therefore, we commit here to redoubling our efforts as a united South Asian community to act in solidarity with people's movements in the region- Dalits, indigenous peoples, labour (including migrant workers), fisherfolk, women, peasants, refugees, minorities, displaced peoples, and all other excluded peoples. The access of youth to secure futures must be ensured. Travel within South Asia should be visa free. Our solidarity extends to people and movements worldwide.

We demand governments to recognise and support the emerging diverse development alternatives initiated by communities that have successfully incorporated principles of gender justice, ecological sustainability and participatory democracy. Adequate resources must be allocated to implement these alternatives on a national and regional scale. The state must respect, protect and fulfil the basic legal, social and economic rights of all citizens, including food sovereignty. This will require increased prioritisation of financial resources to this end.

The people of South Asia are witness to the increased militarism and militarisation in the region, and the heightened arms race and trade, while poverty and destitution, civilian deaths, and insecurity are on the rise. There is a need for a collective action by South Asian states to combat extremism and to significantly reduce military expenditures. South Asia should be declared a nuclear- weapons free zone. Security in the region can only be achieved by just and sustainable social and economic development. All disputes between South Asian countries should be resolved by transparent negotiations. The people of South Asia deserve clean and people- friendly governments.

We resolve to struggle against all forces that create poverty, conflict and violence. Our governments must fulfil their constitutional obligations to secure peace and social justice.

Report of SUPRO organized Human Chain on the accession of the 7th WTO Ministerial Conference at Geneva.

On December 1, 2009 SUPRO (a national network of grassroots NGO's in Bangladesh for Campaign for Good Governance) organized a Human Chain at Dhaka focusing on 7th WTO Ministerial Conference demanding "ENSURE FAIR TRADE"

The other major demands were:

i. Duty free and Quota free market access has to be ensured for all Bangladeshi exportable goods & items to

the developed countries.

ii. The movement of Bangladeshi natural persons (semi-skilled and unskilled labor) has to be ensured around the world.

iii. The agriculture sectors of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) including Bangladesh has to be excluded from the WTO policies and the farmers and agriculture sectors of Bangladesh has to be secured

through providing required subsidies.
 iv. The right to food issues has to be included in the policies of WTO without considering agriculture as a trade issues for the Least Developed Countries (LDC) including Banglades.

v. The safe and secured employment of climate refugees of Bangladesh along with the Least Developed Countries (LDC) has to be ensured.



SAAPE Core Committee Meeting

9-10 January 2010, New Delhi

DAY 1, 9 January: Chaired by Rukmini Rao and Mohiuddin Ahmad

The deliberations took place along the concrete recommendations of the final evaluation report of SAAPE on a point-by-point basis:

- ◆ The vision of SAAPE was revisited and there was a consensus that the vision was clear enough for all however this shared vision needs to be put in writing by each thematic group, reflecting what change we envision in Southasia. The key is whether we're internalising our vision into our strategies and activities. Enhanced grassroots linkages; broadening SAAPE through the existing design via thematic groups; urgent undertaking of solid campaigns as processes rather than only events and production of materials; non-duplication of work in the region; the need for shaping up SAAPE as a political process as opposed to NGO process and hence not driven by funds alone, were the issues discussed. The importance of country processes was debated upon and highlighted while maintaining the regional character of SAAPE.
- ◆ SAAPE's poverty reports have been qualitatively different from the usual UN, WB reports and hence have their own added value as an advocacy tool. None of the reports have been commissioned to external consultants with authors being identified from our own constituencies. The idea behind every report has been to involve wider social groups and people's organisations in the writing of the report so that people can own it while making their contributions. The upcoming report should embody the same spirit and vision.

The current status of the production of the report was shared by Ajit. The key problem still lies in collection of data and case studies from the grassroots. About 60% of the work is completed and the rest is now totally dependent on inputs from the country level.

It was decided that all documentation of the poverty report should be completed by the end of January'10 and the report would be published by the end of March'10. An editorial team was formed comprising of Ajit, Arjun, Mohiuddin, Sandeep and Shobha. Country representatives will take responsibility of ensuring their respective contributions.

- ◆ SAAPE needs to maintain a balanced position on the issue of resources. Funding is not a problem however relying on funds is detrimental to SAAPE as being a political process as well as in terms of increased vulnerability to donor conditionalities. Making SAAPE a part of our respective work will minimize the problem of resource allocation for SAAPE work alone. Timely delivery of work commitments based on our submitted work plan to donors is key in avoiding the often problem of unspent funds including apparent control over the use of funds by the secretariat, as there is no flexibility of ad-hoc change of budget lines and hence, the secretariat is contract bound with regard to release of funds. Maybe there should be a deadline on deliverables with the Secretariat and the Consultation Committee making a check at least at the end of each quarter and then coming up with subsequent decisions. However, it was reiterated that the

secretariat doesn't take any lead in decision-making as well as the Consultation Committee only advises the Secretariat and doesn't make any decisions.

It was decided that any issue to be discussed and decided within the Core Committee would be posted by the Secretariat in a time-bound manner. A no-response from members within the stipulated time would be deemed as an endorsement to the issue in question.

It was decided that unspent budgeted funds would be reallocated to other potential thematic activities in order to ensure the efficient use of available resources. The Secretariat would communicate to the Core Committee of such a situation (of unspent budgeted funds) and a relevant decision of reallocation would be taken by consensus.

- ◆ **Committee to draft the gender policy was formed, comprising of: Zeenat (labour), Ramoo (food sov.), Kumar (peace & demil.), Sharmila (gender), Zarmina (representing Afghanistan), Fathmath (representing Maldives) and Mohiuddin (representing Bangladesh). The committee was formed maintaining a balanced representation of the thematic groups as well as the respective countries.**

It was decided that the first draft would be submitted by 31 January and the same would be finalised by 28 February.

- ◆ There was a consensus on the relevancy of the SAARC vis-à-vis our policy advocacy & campaigns and the need for enhanced engagement with the official body recognizing it as still a challenge for SAAPE. Maybe SAAPE should start by regularly following up and documenting the SAARC's entire annual activities including corresponding decisions/declarations, and then produce SAAPE's own annual report card carrying people's alternatives in response to the official SAARC proposals and policies. Additionally, with regard to overall lobbying capacity-building of SAAPE, we should be increasingly engaging with think-tanks, research institutions and the

like regionally and internationally and such initiatives/activities should be reflected in SAAPE's lobby strategy based on our knowledge, capacity and politics.

Committee to draft the lobby strategy was formed, comprising of: Karamat, Kumar led by Arjun. It was decided that the draft lobby strategy would be submitted by 31 January.

It was decided, in addition, that a senior full-time staff should be designated at the Secretariat to take charge of SAAPE lobbying, advocacy and campaigns.

- ◆ There was a consensus on the significance of media mobilization as a key lobby strategy and hence, the need for enhanced engagement with the media.

It was decided that the involvement of the media in SAAPE activities should be increased including extending the SAAPE membership to the media.

- ◆ In order to involve members throughout rather than only in events as well as to develop the SAAPE process, campaigns are necessary both at the national and regional levels that would bring together SAAPE members. And, new prospective members should be properly oriented with SAAPE's vision and politics.
- ◆ SAAPE's governance and organisational structure was revisited.

It was decided that the new Core Committee will comprise of 2 country representatives (1 male+1 female ensuring gender balance), the 5 RTFOs, 1 representative from the Secretariat and 1 representative from our European partners, bringing the numerical strength to a total of 23. The present member from Afghanistan would continue while in the case of Bhutan and the Maldives, there would be a replacement and new members respectively. The tenure of the current Core Committee has been extended till 31 March.

It is envisioned that the old and new Core Committee members would convene on the occasion of the People's SAARC tentatively scheduled in April 2010.

- ◆ There was renewed endorsement for the current Consultative Committee.

It was decided that Mohiuddin, Shobha, Zakia and Sarba would continue as members of the Consultative Committee.

- ◆ **Reaffirming the significance and consolidation of the country processes, it was decided that the respective country consultations/ processes would be completed by 31 March. If possible, the 5 thematic groups would be identified in each country; however, this need not be strictly followed considering the different country situations and needs. In view of specific constraints in the case of Sri Lanka with regard to organising the country process, it was decided that Ajit would facilitate the process in his capacity as a Core Committee member.**
- ◆ With regard to the issue about creating SAAPE's independent legal entity, it was discussed and agreed that while founding SAAPE, it was a collective political decision not to create another "NGO". This understanding of retaining the movement character of SAAPE remains intact.
- ◆ **It was decided that an independent recruitment process would be followed to hire SAAPE staff for the next programme period. The recruitment process would start once the new contract is signed with donors. All SAAPE staff would be working on a full-time basis. This decision would be included in the new proposal to be submitted to donors.**
- ◆ **It was decided that SAAPE member database would be updated and the criteria for membership would be broadened by including the People's SAARC declarations in addition to the Manesar declaration. The ACCs would develop updated lists and send them to the Secretariat for maintaining a central database with complete details. A questionnaire to be sent to existing members to perceive their levels of engagement with SAAPE.**

- ◆ **It was decided that Arjun would continue as the honorary Co-ordinator of SAAPE.**

- ◆ The need for enhancing the country process in India was discussed recognising the role of India in the region and how the capital New Delhi is politically strategic to our lobby & advocacy. Alliance-building with other networks like SANGAT, SA Peace Alliance, Ekta Parishad, CNDP, NTUI and the like is necessary. Engagements need to be focussed towards the North-East and Kashmir which has always been a gap in our work.

It was decided that there should be a SAAPE presence in New Delhi. One of like-minded institutions could provide the work space and SAAPE would define the terms of reference. Arjun would speak to some of our key Indian friends to explore the options and organize a meeting in this regard with at least a 3-week prior notice. Babu would lead the process.

DAY 2, 10 January: Chaired by Rokeya Kabir

The deliberations started with a recap of day one's major decisions and proceeded with a focus on the People's SAARC 2010 planning process, SAAPE's draft strategy plan 2010-12 and any other business:

- ◆ Recognising the fact that there is no budget for the salary of SAAPE staff for the period January-March 2010 and that work needs to be continued regardless, there was a discussion on how to manage the issue.

It was decided that the current organisations where the Secretariat staff and the ACCs are based, would continue the financial support – the Secretariat staff by RRN, the gender ACC by BNPS, the food sov ACC by ANFPa, the peace & demil ACC by HRA and the governance ACC by VAK and Gramya Resource Centre (for 2 months and 1 month respectively). Please note that due to Karamat's absence, no decision was taken in the case of continuing support to the ACC based at PILER.

- ◆ In the context of absence of budget for the organization of country consultations in order to consolidate the country processes, there was similar discussion on the local mobilization of resources.

It was decided that the country consultations would be financially managed by the respective country focal organizations. In the case of India, being spatially large and hence logistically difficult, Babu has offered to support the country process that will be led by Ajit.

- ◆ The official SAARC Summit 2010 is scheduled in April for the first time in Thimpu, Bhutan. It was discussed that mass mobilization in Bhutan looks difficult hence the need for multiple/alternate plans to organize the People's SAARC. Possible strategic venues could be Thimpu (Bhutan), Phuntsoling (Bhutan), Jaigaon (Bhutan), Jhapa (Nepal), Siliguri (India) and Calcutta (India) depending on the feasibility of proposed actions. Synchronised demonstrations could be organized in the Embassies of Bhutan in the region. This time, due to the absence of civil society base in the country, different dynamics are in play and hence, a different approach needs to be taken. Common issues understood by the common people should be highlighted e.g. food for all, health, education however not embracing all the issues plaguing the region. Focus should nevertheless be on the need for genuine democratic reforms in Bhutan.

SAAPE would continue to collaborate with other organizations to organize the People's SAARC. The existing Steering Committee of the process had a proposal to register the People's SAARC and establish its permanent secretariat which SAAPE is not in favour of. There is a need for a new Steering Committee.

It was decided that SAAPE's proposals would be taken to the meeting on People's SAARC - convened on the sidelines of the Indo-Pak peace meeting by its participants - by Karamat et al representing SAAPE.

- ◆ On the occasion of Tagore's 150th birth centenary in 2011, Mohiuddin will lead the process in preparing a concept note on the significance of culture as an uniting force and to appropriate the humanist, secular and other positive values of Tagore and other writers, poets, painters and the like. The issue can be raised at the AGM to raise further collaboration with various other groups in the league.

- ◆ The organization of the Peace Conference scheduled on 28-30 January was revisited in terms of logistical preparations and the prospective invitees. It was discussed and agreed that the conference should be properly prepared and result-oriented, maybe even feed into the People's SAARC, and hence the dates could be postponed if need be. Involvement and inclusion of wider peace activist groups in the region, victims of war and conflict, rather than "peace experts" as resource persons, should be encouraged.

It was decided that the dates could be revised based on the overall preparations and hence the feasibility of the proposed conference.

- ◆ The draft strategy plan 2010-12 was thoroughly discussed and revised, led by the respective RTFOs. The revised strategy plan document would be soon submitted to the donors.
- ◆ With regard to the proposed PME workshop scheduled in February, the Secretariat has drafted the ToR for the prospective consultant. Feedback on the draft ToR is awaited from the Core Committee members. Shobha has already given a recommendation on the choice for consultant and Karamat can also give some other recommendations.

It was decided that the different recommendations would be circulated to the Core Committee by the Secretariat and a decision would be made on the best option.

- ◆ With regard to future SAAPE-EU advocacy, Simon's email was discussed as well as the past cooperation with European partners. There was recognition of the fact that the joint advocacy work on the EU-Southasia development cooperation has been considerably successful and forward-looking and hence, it was agreed that the cooperation should continue.

It was decided that Arjun and Simon are requested to draw up a strategy vis-à-vis the future SAAPE-Eurostep cooperation which would then be shared with the Core Committee for any decision-making.

SAAPE - Eurostep letter to the European Parliament

Brussels, 15 September 2009

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you on your election in the European Parliament. Our experience in co-operating with the European Parliament has been good and we have found European Parliamentarians being responsive to important issues of our region. We would like to bring to your attention an issue that is affecting South Asian countries: the plight of the forgotten Bhutanese refugees who are residing in Nepal and India, and the ongoing democratic process in Bhutan.

The Bhutanese refugees have spent almost two decades in Nepal and India, and have been incamps since 1990, after political problems emerged in Bhutan. The Bhutanese refugee problem emerged in the region when the Lothsampa people from South Bhutan demanded political reforms and the practice of ethnic and cultural rights in Bhutan. The reactionary regime expelled some one-third of the Lhotsampa population from 1990 to 1994. Later, other ethnic groups, particularly the Sharchops from eastern Bhutan, were also victimized when they joined hands for democratic reform in Bhutan. The Sharchops are one of the indigenous ethnic groups in Bhutan and the Lothshampa have been living in the country for over a century. In total 130.000 Bhutanese are currently living outside the country, of whom 110.000 were living in the UNHCR registered camps in Nepal prior to the launch of the third country resettlement program. This is out of a total population for Bhutan which is reported to be 700.000 approximately.

In recent years there has been some constitutional reform, however we note with dismay that the rights of the citizens are not adequately safeguarded by the constitution or by its implementation. Bhutan is still essentially governed by an autocratic monarchic system of governance and the constitution was not drafted on the basis of true democratic principles and not implemented in the spirit of an inclusive democracy. There are still 90 political prisoners in Bhutan; meanwhile freedom of press and freedom of speech have continued to be denied. The refugees have been demanding dignified repatriation to Bhutan for the last twenty years and there have been several rounds of negotiations between the government of Bhutan and Nepal to resolve this issue amicably. There have been no bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal since the elected Prime Minister took office in Bhutan. The refugees had to pass through Indian Territory to seek asylum in Nepal but due to the special relationship between Bhutan and

India, India decided not to get involved in the bilateral negotiations, which technically could have been a trilateral issue to be solved by the three countries. As the countries could not resolve this problem and India decided to keep away from the refugee issue, the international community had to intervene and came up with the proposal of third country resettlement. We believe that India can play a greater role to settle this political problem amicably.

The refugees are primarily peasants and subsistence farmers who have little skill to adjust in the economies of developed countries. Today some 20.000 refugees who have been resettled in various western countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, are facing serious adjustment problems, due to isolation leading to depression and making the resettled people vulnerable to committing suicide. While the resettlement might be an interim, practical solution for the young and upcoming generation, it is surely not an appropriate solution for the older people. In addition, there is a significant group among the refugees who have not expressed willingness to participate in the third country settlement programme. These refugees should be allowed to enjoy their right to nationality and to repatriate to their country of origin. The resettlement programme should in no way become effectively a policy that legitimizes political persecution or ethnic cleansing and the programme should strongly reflect the refugees right for return if they so wish. The European Union has been supporting Bhutan in its effort to build a democratic polity and the European Parliament had sent election observers for the election held in Bhutan in 2008. We would like to request you to ask the European Commission and the European Council to clarify the EU policy in relation to the rights of refugees to return. We would also welcome an EP resolution that would clearly identify the principles on which any resettlement programme should be based. Furthermore we seek a clarification from the European Community Humanitarian Office in its dealing in this matter and we would welcome its continued support to fund the camps until an appropriate solution is agreed. We finally would hope that the EU can take up this matter in its ongoing political dialogue with India and Nepal, as well as Bhutan.

Dr. Sarba Raj. Khadka

Simon Stocker

Coordinator SAAPE

Director of Eurostep

Statement on South – South Co-operation

1. Your Excellency, Mr President of the South South Co-operation Conference
2. Heads of Delegations and representatives of Member States,
3. Colleagues and Representatives of the Business Sector and of Parliaments
4. Dear Civil Society Colleagues
5. Ladies and Gentlemen

We, the members of civil society organizations and networks from the Southern countries, would like to issue a statement in view of the current topical and timely discussions of the South – South Co-operation.

We are grateful for this opportunity to present a brief statement of our issues to you today. We urge you to listen and take full account of the voices and key recommendations of civil society in your discussions, conclusions and follow-up actions.

Today the world is consumed by urgent crises of finance and climate that not only threaten the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people, in the South, but also the stability of the world's economies. The Northern governments and financial system are responsible for the current crises, but the costs and the impacts are paid for by the entire world, and by the poorest countries in particular.

Overcoming these crises requires decisive action and leadership from the global community. To date however, such leadership has been sorely lacking.

The swift and massive response of governments to bail out banks and private financial institutions with more than three trillion US dollars of public guarantees and funds, stands in stark contrast to their failure to respond decisively to the unabated crisis of poverty, and marginalization that has afflicted the majority of peoples in the world. South – South cooperation therefore must prove its capability by raising the sum necessary to tackle poverty. We note that South–South

Cooperation has catalyzed the debate around aid effectiveness reform as well as reforms in the governance structure of the IMF, and the World Bank. In the last 30 years, these institutions have pushed for increased capital flows and market liberalization, resulting in the erosion of national policy space, and the violation of national sovereignty. They are among the major institutions responsible for the current situation, have no legitimacy and no credibility to play such a role in the reform of the international financial system, let alone to start a self-reform process. It is with this in mind that we call for deepening and strengthening South – South cooperation.

Such cooperation however must meet basic requirements in promotion of human rights, solidarity and equity of the partners, environmental sustainability, and development ownership.

We demand that South – South Co-operation promotes the development of global economic structures and policies that put peoples' rights first, that respect and promote human rights, gender equality, as well as social and environmental justice. We demand policies that ensure decent work based on employment opportunities, respect for labor rights, social protection, social dialogue, sustainable livelihoods, provision of essential services such as health, education, housing, water and clean energy, and that take account of the care economy, largely dependent on women. Southern people need to have greater control over resources and the decisions that affect their lives.

Mr President, distinguished delegates we are convinced that the South – South Co-operation conference is key to reaching enduring solutions to the multiple human crises we have outlined. We call on governments to agree to a strong South – South follow-up process that brings together all institutional stakeholders, not only the governmental and intergovernmental organisations, but also the International Labor Organization and civil society Mr President, distinguished delegates, the Civil Society would like to raise the following issues on South – South Co-operation:

People based South – South Cooperation

The co-operation of the peoples of the south is key in supporting the activities and initiatives of the south - south cooperation. Unfortunately their participation is currently limited due to financial and other capacity problems. We call for an integrated approach to the South – South Co-operation with governments of the south committing resources for facilitating CSO processes. We believe that civil society can play an important role in furthering the objectives of the south – south co-operation. Governments should encourage and financially support Civil Society engagement, and recognize the key role they play in implementing and monitoring programs and policies. We urge for their structured inclusion in future deliberations and programs of the South – South Cooperation.

On aid

On the question of Aid we contend that South – South cooperation to further improve the quality of aid in its co-operation through strengthening of democratic ownership, with a greater focus on targeting gender justice, and ending tied policy conditions. Such conditions undermine ownership, increase poverty, and with the goals of poverty eradication and increased aid effectiveness.

On Investment

We are convinced of the need to institute a holistic approach to South - South investment that includes, among others, the social development aspects, sustainable technology transfer. South - South should follow environmentally and socially sustainable production systems, and align its operations with national and local economies.

Appropriate regulatory frameworks should be put in place to ensure corporate accountability,

including the ILO Declaration on Multinational Enterprises and social policy. Bilateral investment and free trade agreements should be discussed with all relevant stakeholders, notably national parliaments, social partners and civil society ensuring democratic ownership.

On Debt

We call for the total and unconditional cancellation of odious debts as well as decisive actions to stop the re-accumulation of such debt.

South – South co-operation governments should establish a new debt architecture that is inclusive, participatory and democratically accountable to the peoples it aims to serve. The United Nations should play a key role in its development, and the institutions and mechanisms should be subject to international human rights norms and treaties. Among other needs, the new binding institutional framework should revise the current debt sustainability framework so as to include domestic debt, human development and environmental and climate justice considerations. There is also an urgent need to establish fair and transparent debt work-out mechanisms that are independent from the INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

In Conclusion, Mr President, distinguished delegates, In the face of the multiple crises, we urge governments to take the side of women and men workers, farmers, youth and children of the South to promote environmental sustainability by taking an alternative economic path. We, civil society networks, representing millions of people from the South, therefore call for change in Nairobi that puts effective development, poverty eradication, human rights, gender equality, decent work, and environmental sustainability at the forefront of the discourse, the policies, and the search for enduring solutions.

Finance for Socioeconomic and Climate Justice

We, the undersigned social organizations, movements and networks working towards climate and socioeconomic justice, gathered for an International Strategy Meeting on Climate and Finance in parallel to the Bangkok United Nations climate talks, call for:

- * the recognition of the Global North's historical responsibility and obligation to guarantee reparations for ecological debt, including climate debt, owed to the Global South;

- * the creation of alternative funding mechanisms and flows that recognize the above and respect, protect and promote the sovereignty and rights of peoples and nature;

- * an immediate end to any role for International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in climate financing, and other financial mechanisms and institutions that exacerbate and intensify climate change and increase ecological and other debts;

- * rejection of market-based instruments because they do not solve the climate crisis, but instead they increase climate debt and allow the North to offset its own greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligations and thereby transfer its responsibilities and the problem to the South.

Reparations Now!

We recognize that each human being has an equal right to ecological and climate space. Climate debt is a part of the larger ecological debt the Global North owes the Global South, accrued through centuries of theft of natural resources and violation of human rights. Reparation of ecological debt includes the complete restoration of territories and ecosystems, reconstruction of basic infrastructure, recovery of social rights and recuperating agriculture, implying the restoration of the well being of the peoples of the Global South, based on curtailing rampant consumption in addition to immediate cuts in emissions in the North. Reparations need to be based on the self-determination of all peoples

and the guarantee of non-repetition.

Alternative Funding Mechanisms and Flows
Genuine reparations must come from public sources and be founded on the sovereignty and respect for the rights of peoples and nature. These funds should not reinforce political and economic models that cause climate change. Instead, they must prioritize financial, food, and energy sovereignty, strengthening small-scale agriculture, women, indigenous populations, fisher communities, and the defense of peoples' rights to protect their forests and other resources. They must enable the transition to non-hydrocarbon-based, sustainable societies and be additional to the unconditional annulment of illegitimate debts imposed on countries of the South.

International Financial Institutions Out!

IFIs, such as the World Bank, regional, and national development banks – responsible for the current economic, financial, and climate crises - are using these crises to increase their lending and influence to maintain the status-quo and continue to fuel the climate crisis by supporting extractive industries and other harmful industrial sectors. These institutions are selling market-based false solutions and pushing new loans on countries of the Global South to deal with a catastrophe they did not cause.

No more false solutions!

People and the planet are experiencing a systemic crisis due to the false logic of unlimited "growth" in an ecologically limited reality. Solutions to this crisis should overcome unsustainable and unjust forms of production and consumption and fundamentally transform economic systems. False solutions include carbon markets, offsetting, nuclear power, monoculture agrofuels and tree plantations, mega-infrastructure projects, and carbon capture and storage. False solutions perpetuate climate and social injustice and financial instability: they are unacceptable.

Within this context of urgency, we will continue

to struggle and mobilize for socioeconomic and climate justice for all.

The struggle goes on.

IFIs and private corporations out of climate finance
Restitution of ecological debt and reparations now!!

SIGNATORIES:

- * Acción Ecológica
- * Africa Jubilee South
- * Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL), Philippines
- * AMA Kilusang Mangingisda, Philippines
- * Association pour la Taxation des Transactions Financieres et pour l'Aide au citoyens – Togo (ATTAC-TOGO)
- * Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino, Philippines
- * Campagna par la Riforma della Banca Mondiale (CRBM), Italy
- * Comite Centroamericano de Cambio Climático
- * Coastal Women's Movement, India
- * Daughters of Mumbi Global Resource Center, Kenya
- * Equity BD, Bangladesh
- * FASE, Brasil
- * Focus on the Global South
- * Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippines
- * Friends of the Earth International
- * General Federation of Nepalese Trade Union
- * Gitib Inc. Pilipinas
- * Global Forest Coalition
- * Himalaya Niti Abhiyan, India
- * IBON Foundation
- * Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF), India
- * Institute for Essential Services Reform (IESR), Indonesia
- * International Federation of Hawker and Urban Poor
- * Jubilee South Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JS APMDD)

- * Jubilee South/Americas
- * Jubilee South
- * Just Environment USA
- * Kerala Independent Fish Workers Federation (KSMTF), India
- * Klimax Copenhagen, Denmark
- * Koalisi Anti Utang, Indonesia
- * Kongreso ng Pagkakaisa ng Maralitang Lungsod, Philippines
- * Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation (ICPTU), Korea
- * Labor Party – Philippines
- * LDC Watch
- * LRC-KsK (FOE Philippines)
- * Monitoring Sustainability of Globalisation (MSN), Malaysia
- * National Forum or Forest People and Forest Workers, India
- * National Hawker Federation
- * National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE), Malaysia
- * NGO Forum on the ADB
- * Oilwatch International
- * Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, Pakistan
- * Pan-African Climate Justice Alliance - West Africa
- * PATTAK Philippines
- * Rede Brasil sobre Instituições Financeiras Multilaterais, Brazil
- * River Basin Friends, India's North East
- * Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN), Nepal
- * SEAFISH for Justice Network
- * Sobrevivencia, Paraguay
- * Solidaritas Perempuan (SP), Indonesia
- * South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
- * Sustainable Energy and Economy Network, USA
- * Unidad Ecologica Salvadorena (UNES), El Salvador
- * Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (VOICE), Bangladesh
- * Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia/ Indonesian Forum for Environment (WALHI), Indonesia.

Monday, 28 September 2009, Bangkok

Regional

Towards a New South Asia

(By Shiv Visvanathan)

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh might be a reluctant politician but he could be a willing statesman. At a recent leadership summit, he said that within the next two decades he hoped for peace in India. But an Indian peace, he added, can only be a South Asia peace and a South Asian peace can only be a democratic one.

The Prime Minister's statement should have had a magical effect. As a statement, it was a perfect answer to the carnivores of peace — United States and Taliban — which have destroyed a wonderful territory. It is a new dream of democracy which a Manto and Gandhi would have approved of.

The Prime Minister did not go beyond the initial statements except for talking about growth and inclusive development. But Prime Minister's do not need elaborate text, they nearly have to inspire, trigger a vision which a nation and community can thicken. South Asia is a truncated entity destroyed by the maggots of violence. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have suffered from the genocide of double partitions. The Partition of 1947 and the genocide of Bangladesh in 1971 destroyed not just our countries but emasculated an imagination. Sri Lanka lies in tatters today claiming a homogeneous stability.

Burma is a refuge to every terrorist and smuggler and few realise it could be the home of a new Buddhist imagination. In fact, between the Dalai Lama and Aung Sang Su Kyi, South Asia hosts some of the great Buddhist imaginations.

We need to be clear. South Asia can transcend the dullness of a geography text. It is civilisational, in fact multi-civilisational imagination. In a deep way, it is the home of Buddhists, Jain, Muslim and Hindu imaginations. It is also the home of a Christianity that nest-led in long before Christianity went West. This sum of five civilisational metaphors makes South Asia potent, with the availability of metaphors the West cannot dream of. They provide dialects, metaphors that spread like rhizomes across the subcontinent creating an alter-native dream of peace and justice. What one needs is a new South

Asian university.

The new South Asia University is a commons of South Asian knowledge and practices. It understands the power of waste and the creativity of the informal. It realises that modern science is but one form of beautiful but parochial knowledge which needs to cohabit with the defeated and subsistence ideas and also with civilisational knowledge. A South Asian university must invoke memories in a new way, seek to relate the tribal, oral, peasant and nomadic livelihoods in new forms. As a theory of knowledge, it needs theoretical barriers against obsolescence that allows subsistence a new respect and dignity.

Once we lift the barriers between forms of knowledge, South Asia should be confident enough to lift boundaries of the political. For tribes, nomads, children, for livelihoods near the border, identity is stifled by boundaries. Let us make Nandan Nilekani's identity project a South Asia one, recognising ways of life that have seen the border as an osmotic possibility. Open up the barriers between India and Pakistan for trade and culture, wrap up the barb wire between Bangladesh and India so students can travel freely in search of jobs and education. These are not romantic steps but it opens up possibilities people have always thought of. Look at the way language revives and diversity thickens once the border becomes a partial filter.

What haunts South Asia is the trauma of a common memory written by official historians. Let Pakistanis understand what happened in Bangladesh. A newspaper like Dawn with its enlightened leadership could become the new university of memory for them. Let the recent projects on Partition be read as the beginnings of a new Truth Commission which tells the Partition story as a cornucopia of recollections.

Stories are one legacy every South Asians have and why not honour them. We need a new commons of memory, of hospitality, of syncretism that can provide the basis of a South Asian imagination.

We need to translate and recycle democracy. The standard notions of citizenship, rights and governance while valuable somehow destroy the entitlements of an informal economy. We need new notions of sustainability, livelihood, locality, memory, the civilisational sustainability of keywords that creates inclusive worlds.

We need ideas of hospitality which extend from food to friendship, ideas of knowledge which see the limits and possibility of science. Let the new 20-30 odd universities the government is planning to open up be twined with other South Asian imaginations. Allow the thinktanks we are planning to inaugurate become South Asian institutions where the games and scenarios of peace are worked out. Let them dream big in a language that the West may not speak, dreams beyond the Silicon Valleys of the mind. Can we think of projects where rivers emphasise the riverine mind of South Asia, where Himalayas evoke new ideas of biodiversity, and citizenship begins with the homeless and the nomad creating dreams of livelihood we need to consider.

Begin with simple gestures that allow for cooperation and reciprocity. Let us make health for all and education for all, South Asian goals

implemented through a South Asian imagination. We do need the dullness of the millennium mind announcing targets and percentages, when we should be describing embedded communities.

The Indian Institute of Advanced Study at Shimla could create the continuities of South Asian mind by linking climate change, livelihoods and the possibility of a democratic science.

Our plurality need not build an arid secularism but could create new dialects of the political where our democracy goes beyond Rawls and the ideas of liberalism. Himal, a magazine edited from Nepal is doing this already. Add Seminar, and a few Malayali and Bengali journals and the agonal battle for a new imagination has begun.

I do not see this as romanticism. South Asia is the one place where only the impossible is possible. It demands the memory of communities revoking the state as a mental uniform.

What Dr Singh has begun cannot remain there. A flood tied of ideas must sweep our sub-continent in celebratory response. We do need peace prizes as affirmative actions to trigger the process.

Source: The Asian Age, November 2nd, 2009.



Let's face the truth

A year into its transition from monarchy to democracy, and Bhutan is excitedly gearing up to host the 16th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) meet in its tiny capital of Thimpu early next year. Clearly, the Bhutanese optimism stems more from its famed gross national happiness quotient than any real chance that the Saarc meet will bring good tidings to all men. When the Thimpu meet takes place, Saarc will have been around for 25 years and as the popular sitcom character George Costanza says in Seinfeld, it has been about nothing.

The only positive thing that has happened in the South Asian region is that we are all, at least in name, now democracies. But has that meant that we see more eye-to-eye these days? Not at all. In fact, the biggest drag on Saarc ever getting

off the ground, Indo-Pak relations could not be worse, and deteriorating by the day. With the ghost of 26/11 yet to be laid to rest, no Saarc meet will go beyond the blame game. For a Pakistan which is steadily going down the tube, India can do no right. So we have its interior minister, Rehman Malik, coming up with conspiracy theories that India is funding the Taliban, which is about as probable as Subhas Chandra Bose turning up in Connaught Place for the New Year celebrations.

Of all the regional groupings in the world, Saarc's track record has been the most dismal. Intra-regional trade in South Asia is a mere 2 per cent of GDP as opposed to 20 per cent for Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) and 55 per cent for the European Union.

The problem is very simple; Pakistan will just not give in an inch on any issue regarding India, especially trade. It will buy Indian goods at much higher prices from Dubai than directly from India. Each Saarc meet ends up with Pakistan bringing up some footling issue and linking it to Kashmir much to the frustration of the other smaller nations. South Asia has come out of the global recession in a much better shape than many of the big boys. A Saarc meet at this time could work to build up this advantage. Could, but won't.

It has always been argued that it is in India's interest to bind the region, thanks to our giant market. But it is equally in the self-interest of the smaller entities to make Saarc work by entering into collaborative projects with India. As Ajay Chibber, undersecretary-general of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) puts it, "If Asean, which has greater potential for conflict among its member-States than Saarc can get its act together, surely there is nothing to stop us." Saarc, he feels, has tremendous potential but is an empty box today.

There are increasing signs that the other South Asian countries have less hopes of Saarc today than they did a decade ago. We have common problems of poverty, food security, human trafficking and terrorism. But so far, no real effort has been made at intelligence sharing or finding a common platform to address these issues. Of these, one of the most potentially explosive is that of illegal migrants.

The demographic patterns of India's volatile North-east are already changing, thanks to unchecked migration from Bangladesh. Now many might argue that there has been a similar influx of Nepalese across an open border. But the problems of militancy and radicalism that Bangladeshi migrants bring with them, as intelligence sources point out, are not associated with the Nepalese.

The problem that India and Nepal face is the trafficking of women and labour. Saarc has long been speaking of a viable mechanism to tackle both migration and trafficking but, predictably, nothing has come of that. So, the

question then arises about whether we need to prolong the life of this ineffectual albatross round our neck. Should we keep propping up a Saarc secretariat with its attendant costs when 25 years down the line, we can't get past the usual Indo-Pak slugfest? The Indo-Pak problem is not going to go away. In fact, Pakistan would be most offended if, for a moment, good sense were to prevail and these tensions would be put on the backburner for the progress of Saarc.

The only way Saarc can go ahead and do something constructive is for all the other countries to collectively assert that bilateral issues cannot be discussed and pass strictures against those who do so. There are many in India who now feel that we have left Saarc behind. Perhaps there is merit in this argument when looked at from the economic point of view. But there is no getting away from the fact that India is prospering in varying degrees in a region of immense poverty. We can never ensure our geographical security unless we pull our neighbours out of the morass. Pakistan will just have to be bypassed and greater efforts made by India to engage the others.

It does India no credit to be the big kid on the block of countries derisively described as the poor man's club. Waiting for Pakistan to see sense is akin to hanging around in the bus stop for the bus that never comes. We just have to start walking and get on with whatever business we can transact with the others in the hope that Pakistan will see sense.

But at the moment, given Pakistan's Norman Bates-like delusions, it seems unlikely that the Thimpu meet will set the Yamuna on fire. Perhaps a viable answer would be to disband Saarc as it stands and regroup with a new charter that allows for less elbow room for the naysayers to derail matters. It would be better to admit the failure of the present grouping than hang on to something that is long past its sell-by date.

Source; Hindustan Times, November 01, 2009

Need for coastal integration in South Asia

(Mukul Sharma & Charu Gupta)

Bangladesh's recent decision to take to the U.N. long-time maritime boundary disputes with India, and to issue a compulsory arbitration notification under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), marks a new chapter in coastal conflicts among South Asian countries (*The Hindu*, October 10, 2009). The region has been unable to amicably resolve a large number of issues regarding sea laws, maritime boundaries and coastal resources, leading to increasing conflicts. International sea laws, foreign policies and domestic interests have often cross-cut each other in this process. South Asian coasts need de-bordering and any such process entails a re-bordering from the perspective of coastal fisherfolk and sustainable fisheries. More possibilities, therefore, need to be explored for greater coastal, bilateral and regional integration.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh share the resources of the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. Whereas India's maritime boundaries necessitate delimitation with seven states on adjacent and opposite coasts — Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Bangladesh — it shares land borders with six states. Since the 1970s, India's maritime boundaries have been demarcated with many countries, but these remain seriously unresolved with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has comparatively much less of a coastline. It has no agreed sea boundary with its neighbours. It has special reasons to be interested in the evolution of the law of the sea. Its people have historically been seafarers. The limited land-based food and fuel resources available to them, and the disparity between resources and subsistence needs of a large population make it imperative for Bangladesh to recognise the potential of oceans as a tangible promise for the future. Thus the government enacted the Territorial Waters and Maritimes Zones Act, 1974. This Act, however, did not specify the breadth of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Bangladesh in the Bay of Bengal in clear-cut terms.

The delimitation of maritime boundaries has created a conflict between Bangladesh and its

neighbours. Disagreement arose mainly with India when Dhaka signed in 1974 contracts to share production with six international oil companies, granting them oil and natural gas exploration rights in its territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal. The Bangladesh line moved towards the south from the edge of the country's land boundary, while the Indian line took a south-easterly direction, thus creating an angle within which lie thousands of square miles of the Bay, claimed by each country as its economic zone. This overlapping claim has become a critical problem between the two neighbours. For example, the territorial sea, the EEZ, and the continental shelf will depend on how this dispute is resolved.

Harekrishna Debnath of the National Fishworker Forum said in an interview with the authors: "Since the mid 1970s, after the International Conference on the Law of the Sea, a sense of EEZ and maritime boundary has deeply got involved with questions of sovereignty of a nation. All nations, particularly those with coastal lines, are therefore engaged in demarcating their maritime boundaries. However, while theoretically this has been realised, unlike land, it is not easy to demarcate sea boundaries. The process is also tied closely to the lives of millions of fisherfolk across the globe. India and Bangladesh are no exception to this. Between them, there is a less than 400-km area in the sea. Thus there is an absence of the 200-km EEZ on both sides, though it theoretically exists. This has led to a great amount of confusion. In this situation it is not only difficult but near impossible to maintain the LOS decision."

Although negotiations have been going on since 1974, Dhaka and New Delhi are not able to settle the delimitation problem, mainly because of the concave nature of the Bangladesh coast. Bangladesh's position is that no right principle can be applied in the present case and that the basic guideline should be equity. India, on the other hand, applies the equidistance principle in delimiting the boundary, ignoring the physical features of the coast. It is imperative that an amicable solution be found, even if it is based on the equitable principle.

De-bordering coasts

It is by now a truism in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka that coastal borders, EEZs and laws of the seas have radically changed the coastal areas. The term “coastal conflicts” has become a menacing qualifier among us. It is clear how and why borders have affected the fisherfolk who have lived within their cartographic confines. It is equally agonising to find how they have also deeply affected those thinkers and policymakers who live elsewhere, but who mostly see the solution within the confines of the existing borders. Thus, they are much more concerned with cross-border policing and managing cross-border infiltration than with coastal cross-border relationships and cross-border coastal conservation. More important, there is no effort to un-map and re-map the coastal borders, because the changes that have taken place are not only in the physical space but also in ways of comprehending the region.

The imaginary of the coastal borders in South Asia is conceived primarily with reference to nation-building, relationships of nation-states within the region, and natural resource management for a broader common good internationally. Coasts are places where the ‘geographic’ and the ‘management’ could be superimposed on each other to create powerful and secure nations, with perceptions of their rights to harness their coastal production. However, given the history of the region and community relationships among the coastal fisherfolk, the coastlines have been neither natural nor practical. Not allowing neighbouring coastal territories of individual countries even an informal freedom to interact has rendered the coastal borders inimical not only to livelihoods but also to shared histories, religions, festivals, sensibilities, languages and habits.

It is true that the function of the modern South Asian coastal states has been to codify and territorialise the decoded, de-territorialised flows of the coasts so as to prevent them from breaking loose at all the edges and hems of national, environmental and coastal balances. But this has fatally failed the coastal people. As certain sense-making machines become obsolete, new ones need to be constructed. The

South Asian states must rework on their coastal borders, bilaterally and regionally, in such a manner that a collective coastal community comes into being.

Coastal integration is ideal. Any project of greater coastal bilateral and regional integration involves what are called “sovereignty tradeoffs.” Integration often requires the establishment and maintenance of structures of authority and institutions that surpass national boundaries. One important condition that will make coastal integration possible in South Asia is a new understanding of ‘sovereignty’ itself, in which the coasts do not symbolise control or power but become spaces for interdependence, even though this may at first seem to compromise autonomy. The other important condition would be an acceptance by the states of a simultaneous dialectic of greater bilateral/regional integration and sub-regional power. In such a scenario, Sindh of Pakistan would likely develop extensive links with Gujarat in India. The coasts of Tamil Nadu will resonate vibrantly with the coasts of Sri Lanka, as might those of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

On the ground, regional or bilateral coastal cooperation will gather momentum only when it is based on organic links among different coastal sub-regions of the subcontinents. Thus, it is not the centre of each country but coastlines and surrounding areas that would be the driving force behind policies and law-making. By rediscovering and re-establishing cultural affiliations and working and living ties, nations can actually emerge safer and more secure. This kind of coastal integration can also lead to an emergence of new kinds of conflict management machinery and, for that to happen, there can be devolution of power locally. As the coastal regions of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka come together, the coastal laws of all these countries will also begin to look more or less alike and work in an integrated fashion.

(Charu Gupta and Mukul Sharma are the authors of the book *Contested Coastlines: Fisherfolk, Nations and Borders in South Asia*, Routledge, 2008.)

Source: The Hindu, October 22, 2009

SAARC on negotiation to relax service market

Services market within the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) territory could become more liberal. Trade ministers from SAARC countries are in the move to negotiate on liberalizing the services market within the region.

This will lead to freedom for people within the region and give a boost to investments in areas like tourism, financial services and telecom. SAARC includes India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Maldives.

SAARC Secretary General Sheel Kant Sharma pointed out that an expert group had been constituted to draft the agreement on services. The group is giving effort to complete the draft agreement before the next SAARC summit in April 2010.

The move will improve trades among the SAARC countries in respect of services for more than half their GDP. He mentioned that in the first six months of 2009, the value of intra SAARC trade was \$377 million.

Intra-regional trade share in 2008 in the case of South Asia was 4.31% as against 27.06% in case of Asean. SAARC countries have decided to reduce the negative items that are not covered

under South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), in order to increase the trade volume,. The seven SAARC countries completed the SAFTA on January 6, 2004 as an effort to follow greater economic integration in the region. To provide stimulus to SAFTA, India unilaterally cut back its negative list for least developed countries (LDCs) from 744 items to 500 items. Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Maldives are in LDC in SAFTA.

In order give further boost to the intra SAARC trade, Sheel Kant Sharma pointed out that further eliminating of the negative list should take place before the next SAARC summit. In order to develop the trade in the region, SAARC introduced a trade information portal. The portal was launched by Nepalese commerce minister Rajendra Mahto will serve as a single point access for all current SAARC -related business and trade information.

The biggest barrier for flourishing the trade in the region is the lack of information and transport facility The Commerce Minister also underlined the needs for developing such infrastructure to give a boost to the trade in the region.

Source: The Economic Times

Afghanistan

Afghanistan: Extremist Threat to Women Increasing, Government Failing to Protect

Afghanistan: Keep Promises to Afghan Women

Extremist Threat to Women Increasing, Government Failing to Protect

The situation for Afghan women and girls is dire and could deteriorate. While the world focuses on the Obama administration's new security strategy, it's critical to make sure that women's and girls' rights don't just get lip service while being pushed to the bottom of the list by the government and donors. Rachel Reid, Afghanistan researcher

(New York) - Eight years after the fall of the Taliban, women and girls suffer high levels of violence and discrimination and have poor access to justice and education, Human Rights Watch said in a new report released today. The Afghan government has also failed to bring killers of prominent women in public life to justice, creating an environment of impunity for those who target women.

The 96-page report, "We Have the Promises of the World: Women's Rights in Afghanistan," details emblematic cases of ongoing rights violations in five areas: attacks on women in public life; violence against women; child and forced marriage; access to justice; and girls' access to secondary education.

"The situation for Afghan women and girls is dire and could deteriorate," said Rachel Reid, Afghanistan researcher at Human Rights Watch. "While the world focuses on the Obama administration's new security strategy, it's critical to make sure that women's and girls' rights don't just get lip service while being pushed to the bottom of the list by the government and donors."

While the plight of women and girls under the Taliban was used to help justify the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, women's rights have

not been a consistent priority of the government or its international backers. With fundamentalist factions in government gathering strength, the insurgency gaining ground, and some form of reconciliation with Taliban factions firmly on the horizon, the gains made by Afghan women and girls since 2001 in areas such as education, work, and freedom of movement are under serious threat.

"Women are not a priority for our own government or the international community," Shinkai Karokhail, a member of Parliament, told Human Rights Watch. "We've been forgotten."

Women in public life are subject to routine threats and intimidation. Several high profile women have been assassinated, but their killers have not been brought to justice. When Sitara Achakzai, an outspoken and courageous human rights defender and politician, was murdered in April 2009, her death was another warning to all women who are active in public life.

High profile women interviewed for this report say that they feel they are not taken seriously when they report threats. One member of parliament who, like some others, spoke anonymously because of the danger they face, told Human Rights Watch:

"I've had so many threats. I report them sometimes, but the authorities tell me not to make enemies, to keep quiet. But how can I stop talking about women's rights and human rights?"

A woman police officer who has received death threats said:

"They told me that they will kill my daughters. Every minute I'm afraid. I can never go home -

the government cannot protect me there. My old life is over.”

One nationwide survey of levels of violence against Afghan women found that 52 percent of respondents experienced physical violence, and 17 percent reported sexual violence. Yet because of social and legal obstacles to accessing justice, few women and girls report violence to the authorities. These barriers are particularly formidable in rape cases. Although women activists and members of parliament pushed hard and succeeded in putting rape on the statute books this year for the first time, the government has shown little willingness to treat each case as a serious crime or to engage in a public education campaign to change attitudes.

The lack of justice compounds women’s vulnerability. One woman who was gang raped by a well connected local commander found that after a long fight to bring her rapists to justice, they were freed by a presidential decree. Soon after in 2009, her husband was assassinated. The woman told Human Rights Watch that he was killed because he had battled for her rights:

“I have lost my son, my honor, and now my husband,” she said. “But I am just a poor woman, so who will listen to me?”

Surveys suggest that in more than half of all marriages, the wives are under age 16, and 70 to 80 percent of marriages take place without the consent of the woman or girl. These practices underlie many of the problems faced by women and girls, as there is a strong correlation between domestic violence and early and forced marriage.

A 13-year-old girl who was forced into marriage explained to Human Rights Watch that after she dared to escape she was hunted by her husband’s family: “They came and asked for me to come back. I said no; they kept coming. I always say no... I can’t go back. They want to kill me.” Women activists who gave the girl shelter were denounced in parliament. Years later, the young woman is still fighting for a legal separation from her illegal marriage.

This case is just one in the report that illustrates the fundamental problem faced by women and girls of lack of access to justice. Studies suggest that more than half the women and girls in detention are being held for “moral crimes,” such as adultery or running away from home, despite

the fact that running away from home is not a crime in Afghan law or Sharia. But whether it is a high-profile woman under threat, a young woman who wants to escape a child marriage, or a victim of rape who wants to see the perpetrator punished, the response from the police or courts is often hostile.

“Police and judges see violence against women as legitimate so they do not prosecute cases,” Dr. Soraya Sobhrang of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission told Human Rights Watch.

Law reforms that protect women’s rights are important, but leadership is also required to help shift attitudes and prevent abuses, Human Rights Watch said.

“The government needs to take its responsibility to protect women and girls seriously,” Reid said. “President Hamid Karzai has a lot of work to do to restore his reputation as a moderate on women’s rights.”

After the destruction of many girls’ schools by the Taliban, education for girls became the most symbolic element of the international donor effort in Afghanistan. Despite significant gains, stark gender disparities remain. The majority of girls still do not attend primary school. A dismal 11 percent of secondary-school-age girls are enrolled in grades seven through nine. Only 4 percent of girls make it to grades 10 through 12. While the number of both boys and girls attending school drops dramatically at the secondary school level, the decline is much more pronounced for girls.

The diminishing status of women’s rights in Afghanistan was forced back onto the agenda in March when the discriminatory Shia Personal Status law was passed by parliament and signed by Karzai. Faced with national and international protests, Karzai allowed the law to be amended, but many egregious articles remain that impose drastic restrictions upon Shia women, including the requirement that wives seek their husbands’ permission before leaving home except for unspecified “reasonable legal reasons,” and granting child custody rights solely to fathers and grandfathers.

“We welcomed the international community’s words on the Shia law - really - they said many beautiful things, as they did in 2001” said Wazhma

Frogh, women's rights activist. "We have the promises of the world. But still we wait to see what more they will do."

Karzai should revise the law to protect women's rights fully and appoint women who have been active defenders of women's rights to positions of power, Human Rights Watch said.

"The Shia law provided a timely reminder of how vulnerable Afghan women are to political deals and broken promises," Reid said. "Karzai should begin his new presidency with a clear signal to women that his will be a government that wants to advance equality."

Key Recommendations of "We Have the Promises of the World: Women's rights in Afghanistan"

* The government and donors should make the promotion and protection of women's rights a main priority of the country's reconstruction and a central pillar of their political, economic, and security strategies.

* The government, with the support of donors, should embark on a large-scale awareness campaign to ensure that rape is understood to be a crime by law enforcement agencies, judges,

parliament, civil servants, and the Afghan public. The campaign should also aim to reduce the stigmatization of victims of rape.

* The government should make marriage registration more widely available and compulsory.

* The president should order the release of, and offer an apology and compensation to, all women and girls wrongfully detained on the charge of "running away from home."

* The government, with the support of donors, should increase the number and geographic coverage of girls' secondary classes by building more girls' secondary schools, and ensure the recruitment and training of female teachers is accelerated.

* The government, with the support of the UN and other donors, should prioritize security for women candidates and voters in planning for the 2010 parliamentary elections.

* International donors and the United Nations, in conjunction with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, should conduct a full gender audit of all spending in Afghanistan.

Monday 7 December 2009, by Human Rights Watch



Afghanistan is world's worst place to be born: U.N.

Source: Fri Nov 20, 2009, Free Press Journal

Geneva: Afghanistan is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born, the UN has said.

It is especially dangerous for girls, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said in launching its annual flagship report, *The State of the World's Children*.

Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world — 257 deaths per 1,000 live births, and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water, the agency said.

As Taliban insurgents increase their presence across the country, growing insecurity is also making it hard to carry out vital vaccination campaigns against polio, a crippling disease still

endemic in the country, and measles that can kill children.

"Afghanistan today is without a doubt the most dangerous place to be born," Daniel Toole, UNICEF regional director for South Asia, told a news briefing in Geneva.

A Taliban-led insurgency and militant attack on an international guest-house in Kabul that killed five U.N. foreign staff last month prompted the world body to evacuate hundreds of international staff from Afghanistan for several weeks.

Some 43 percent of the country is now virtually off-limits to aid agencies due to insecurity, according to Toole.

The Taliban have been building their forces in their traditional southern and eastern Afghanistan strongholds and are increasing attacks in the north and west. Teaching girls is one of the practices they forbid.

Some 317 schools in Afghanistan were attacked in the past year, killing 124 and wounding another 290, Toole said.

“We have seen a drop in the number of children who are attending schools and particularly young girls,” he added.

School enrolment in Afghanistan had risen to give million, including two million girls, against one million with virtually no girls in 2001 when the Taliban were ousted from power, he said. “In Afghanistan and Pakistan we’ve made some progress but we’re starting to worry about backtracking on that progress given the high rates of insecurity and the ongoing conflict.” Toole said.

Meanwhile, the Unicef has urged the world to help the one billion children still deprived of food, shelter, clean water or health care – and the hundreds of millions more threatened by violence.



Afghanistan: women’s plight may worsen

(Jon Boone)

The already dire plight of women in Afghanistan risks deteriorating further as the U.S. and its allies take steps to turn around the war against the Taliban, according to a report by Human Rights Watch.

Eight years after the Taliban were ousted from power, rapists are often protected from prosecution, women can still be arrested for running away from home, and girls have far less access to schools than boys, the report says.

Gains eroded

With the insurgency strengthening in the south and making inroads into the north, the few gains made for women’s rights since the U.S.-led invasion of 2001 could be further eroded if Hamid Karzai’s government and the international community push for peace talks with factions of the fundamentalist movement.

Among the examples of abuses against women collected by the organisation was the case of a woman who was gang raped by a group that included a powerful local militia commander.

Although she fought to have her rapists prosecuted, they were subsequently pardoned by Mr. Karzai. Later, her husband was assassinated.

Rape was put on the statute book as a criminal

offence this year but it is still not widely regarded by the police or the courts as a serious crime, with the attackers often receiving greater legal protection than the victims. One survey found that 52 per cent of women had experience physical violence, while 17 per cent reported sexual violence.

“Police and judges see violence against women as legitimate, so they do not prosecute cases,” said Soraya Sobhrang, a commissioner at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

Human Rights Watch said that more than half the women and girls in Afghan prisons were held for “moral crimes”, such as adultery or running away from home — although the latter is not a crime under Afghan or Islamic law.

“Whether it is a high-profile woman under threat, a young woman who wants to escape a child marriage, or a victim of rape who wants to see the perpetrator punished, the response from the police or courts is often hostile,” the group said.

Rachel Reid, of Human Rights Watch, said the situation “could deteriorate.”

She added: “While the world focuses on the Obama administration’s new security strategy, it’s critical to make sure that women’s and girls’

rights don't just get lip service while being pushed to the bottom of the list by the government and donors."

The report also warns that wives in half of all marriages are younger than 16, and up to 80 per cent take place without consent.

A 13-year-old girl said that after she escaped marriage she was pursued by her husband's family. Years later she still has not succeeded in getting a legal separation from her illegal marriage and women's activists have been denounced in parliament for giving her shelter.

Campaigners have also been angered by the murders of high-profile women, including Sitara Achakzai, an activist and member of Kandahar's provincial council, who was shot dead in April.

A female member of parliament, who cannot be named, said: "I've had so many threats. I report them sometimes, but the authorities tell me not to make enemies, to keep quiet. But how can I stop talking about women's rights and human rights?"

In August, Afghanistan quietly passed a law permitting Shia men to deny their wives food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands' sexual demands, despite international outrage following a report in the London-based Guardian newspaper about an earlier version of the legislation, which Mr. Karzai had promised to review.

Although western and Afghan politicians like to hail the increase in school building since 2001 as a major success story, the Human Rights Watch report says the participation of girls remains very low, with just 11 per cent of secondary school-aged children in education.

Mr. Karzai, who was reappointed as president after a fraud-marred election regarded by most legal experts as unconstitutional, is due to announce his new cabinet in the coming days.

Human Rights Watch called on Mr. Karzai to release all women detained for running away from home and offer them compensation.

Source: The Hindu, Tuesday, Dec 08, 2009



The challenge in Afghanistan isn't about resources but principles

Wednesday 23 September 2009, by Wazhma Frogh

Afghans can't trust anyone

The challenge in Afghanistan is to hold a serious and consistent political stance on the Taliban. Inconsistency is creating chaos

by Wazhma Frogh

Not a day passes without representatives of the international community trying to save Afghanistan without bothering to step out of their fully secured buildings to actually meet ordinary Afghans, the people they are supposed to help. Phrases like "success", "our war", "winning hearts and minds" are used to describe the current chaotic situation. But the international community has contributed to this situation as much as "Taliban insurgents".

The self-styled experts on Afghanistan write books without ever stepping out of the comforts

of their segregated neighbourhood. They formulate foreign policy, draft proposals and carry out experiments as if Afghanistan were an experimental laboratory for international diplomacy. But the country's deteriorating situation is also their legacy and the legacy of world leaders who failed to understand Afghanistan.

Needless to say, the experiments are futile and bound to fail. Here is why. The experts don't understand the country because they are separated from its people through security walls, multiple guards and the fact that they only converse with their fellow, self-styled experts, but not with Afghans.

This analysis is based on real-life experience and the realities that I, an Afghan woman, have encountered on the ground for many years. We

have a proverb that says, “We learn how to be courteous when we meet those who are rude and disrespectful.” The easiest way to learn from mistakes is to reverse them, but the world is taking longer than needed to reverse its mistakes in Afghanistan.

Although the list of mistakes is long and continues to grow, let’s start with the recent dilemma: the “AfPak” drama. The US government and its allies need to understand, and here I mean understand fully, that they are dealing with two different governments, two separate states and nations so different that they cannot be equated in a single mission. The differences are too pronounced to legitimise a one-size-fits-both solution.

This is not to speak of the fact that such an equation overrides the legitimacy and sovereignty of both nations, especially since sovereignty and legitimacy are critical to their survival at this point in history. It is true that the Taliban are a regional threat, but they need to be tackled through a cohesive but contextualised struggle by each country. The Taliban ruled Afghanistan for five years but it is an established fact that in part they were a Pakistani creation, organised and funded by the Pakistani army and government. But today, both governments are put on the same scale when it comes to fighting against the former “rulers” and “puppets”.

For the Pakistani government the Taliban represent only a backlash against what used to be their own creation. But in Afghanistan, the Taliban are far more than a backlash. They are a serious threat to the people and the government. This threat might be somewhat curbed by drone attacks in the border areas, but as recent incidents reveal, the Taliban cannot be prevented from blowing themselves up right outside the headquarters in Kabul where the international troops are based.

Millions of dollars have been poured into this “AfPak mission”, paying the salaries of self-styled experts who are hardly able to set foot outside the safety and comfort of their castles. Ironically, the Afghanistan mission has hardly any Afghans in it, at least not the kind of Afghans who have lived through the critical times in this country and hence, by virtue of their experience and knowledge, are capable of formulating strategies within a chance of success.

This is everyone else’s war, not the Afghans’ war. Any other country in the world claims that this is their conflict, but not Afghans. That’s the heart of our misery. Afghans are being fought in their homes and expected not to lose their “hearts and minds”. One of the reasons why the Taliban are making progress in Afghanistan is their ability to fight a successful propaganda war. But both local and international media outlets indirectly encourage the Taliban by publishing stories of Taliban success. For the Taliban, this is free, international publicity. Neither the international forces nor the Afghan government have come up with a media campaign to encourage the public to help them fight terrorism. In fact, neither the government nor the international community has ever held a clear stance regarding the Taliban. In 2001, Kabul was full of posters of Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader. He was wanted dead or alive and a bounty of \$25m was placed on his head. Today, the same international community is calling Omar a “moderate” and is trying to persuade him to negotiate peace with Kabul.

The challenge in Afghanistan isn’t about resources but principles. It’s about holding a serious and consistent political stance regarding the Taliban. For example, the Afghan army’s lack of success in the fight against the Taliban is not so much the result of their inadequate salary or the number of troops but the lack of patriotic sentiment that is needed if the army is to win. The fact that the Afghan leadership itself is hesitant to clarify the exact nature of its relationship with the Taliban leaves the army unsettled: is the government against the Taliban or ready to negotiate with them? The recent elections were another example of how national security has become a mere political game for wannabe Afghan leaders. For example, one candidate said the Taliban were like her own brothers, her own sons. And yet, we have thousands of troops fighting the same sons and brothers. This inconsistent approach continues as Afghanistan’s elections are declared “fraudulent” and unacceptable even though the critics are also the ones who set the election day and called it “an achievement towards success in Afghanistan”.

Afghans on the ground are confused; they no longer know who they are supposed to fight

against. They fear that if they stop the Taliban from blowing up their village, the same Taliban might come back to power, installed as governors or ministers. Under such circumstances, standing up against the Taliban is just too risky.

But there's nothing new in this inconsistent approach. In late 2001, during the Bonn agreement, Afghans were promised justice and that people accused of war crimes would be held to account. But those accused of war

crimes are now leaders, openly and publicly supported by the very same international community that promised to take them to court. No wonder, then, that Afghans no longer know who is supposed to be their enemy, and who their friend.

(Wazhma Frogh is a gender and development specialist and human rights activist and recipient of the 2009 International Woman of Courage Award Afghanistan).

Wednesday 23 September 2009, by Wazhma Frogh



Bangladesh

Seizing the moment

For most of the past four decades, India and Bangladesh have been distant neighbours, separated by distrust and suspicion despite their visceral connections of geography and ecology, language and culture, economics and politics. There have been periods of acute stasis and also moments of hope, when a basic transformation in the relationship seemed possible. But never before has the overall situation been quite as propitious as it is now. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is in his second tenure as the head of the United Progressive Alliance government and the position of India as a growth pillar in South Asia and the world means the logic of regional integration is more compelling than ever before. In Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina Wajed is once again Prime Minister, this time with a majority so convincing that she need not keep looking over her shoulder to second guess what the Bangladesh National Party of Khaleda Zia might say or do in response to the improvement in bilateral ties with India. Notwithstanding the benign domestic political situation the Congress and the Awami League find themselves in, the governments have a two-year window to bring about a fundamental shift in the structure and content of the bilateral relationship before electoral compulsions kick in once again. And judging by the success of Sheikh Hasina's recent visit to Delhi, a fine start has been made.

India has promised a \$1 billion line of credit to Bangladesh and a pruning of the negative list of Bangladeshi products that are denied preferential access to Indian markets. It has also agreed to push for better border connectivity so that bilateral trade can increase, and Teesta water sharing has been flagged for discussion. On its part, Bangladesh has dropped its opposition to granting India transit rights. The Agartala-Akhaura rail link will now be developed, creating the potential for railway freight to be sent from Kolkata to Tripura and thence to the rest of the North-East via Bangladesh. On the security front, Dhaka demonstrated its willingness to accommodate Indian concerns by facilitating the handover of ULFA leader Paresh Barua. All this suggests that both countries are serious about opening a new chapter. But one ought not to minimise the challenges that lie ahead. One test will be whether India is prepared to allow Bangladeshi garment manufacturers preferential market access. Another will be its willingness to craft agreements on the equitable sharing of all river waters. As the bigger economy, India needs to go the extra mile in giving a boost to its neighbour's economic potential, especially considering that Sheikh Hasina has moved so far in addressing longstanding Indian requests on transit.

Source: **The Hindu, January 14, 2010**



Can Copenhagen deliver 'hope' for Bangladesh?

The Prime Minister of Denmark Mr. Lars Løkke Rasmussen said on December 07, at the beginning of the climate change conference (COP 15), "Copenhagen will be 'a city of hope' for the next two weeks (December 07-18) because of climate change conference". Dr. R.K. Pachauri, IPCC Chairman, urged the world to stand by Bangladesh. He has been able to show the world that Bangladesh is going to be a most-suffered victim of climate change. The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown wrote in the Guardian: "Copenhagen must be a turning point. Our children won't forgive us if we fail. We need to build a low carbon economy across the world, with a deal that helps developing nations and ensures trust". Germanwatch conclude its Global Climate Risk Index 2010 ahead of the Copenhagen climate change conference, highlighting, "In countries like Bangladesh, extreme events have become a constant danger. Just last May, millions were displaced when Cyclone Aila hit the low-lying country. Globally since 1990, more than 600,000 people have died as a direct result of extreme weather events, the sort that are expected to become increasingly common as the planet warms. Lack of substantial progress on the way to low-carbon economies is a key factor why many poor countries face a bleak future in face of more severe climate change". It calls for an increase in financial support from wealthier countries. So, the fact of Bangladesh as a most sufferer and vulnerable country due to climate change has, hopefully, been realised worldwide.

In his annual speech, US Vice President Nobel laureate Al Gore told delegates to the most recent climate negotiating session: "We must now 'toughen our goal' to 350ppm". Carbon dioxide threatens total Human health in many ways. The hard fact is: though Bangladesh is not guilty any way of creating any problem of climate change, but this country and its people have to suffer the most in the world. So, such illogical sufferings must stop at any cost with the help of the developed countries, who are mostly responsible for the cause of these sufferings.

Media's role

Media can play a crucial role in communicating

climate information to the public. The media in the developing world was at the forefront of reporting and bringing the issue of global climate change and its impact on the local economy into sharp focus. Nobel laureate Dr. Amartya Sen wrote: "Independent media are essential to social development and economic growth". President of the World Bank James D. Wolfensohn wrote an encouraging foreword in the book 'Write to tell: the role of mass media in economic development': "Over 1.2 billion people (including Bangladesh) live on less than a dollar a day. And many of those poor people not only suffer from physical and human deprivation but also lack voice in decisions that affect their lives. A key ingredient of an effective development strategy is knowledge transmission and enhanced transparency. To reduce poverty, we must liberate access to information and improve the quality of information. People with more information are empowered to make better choices". Nobel prize winner journalist Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his write-up titled: Journalism is the best profession of the world wrote "All that time, journalism fell into three broad categories: news, feature and editorials. All journalists, must, by definition, be research oriented; and building awareness that ethical standards cannot be a product of happenstance; like the drone of a bee, they must be the constant companion of every journalist". Internews Network President David Hoffman wrote: "Open media translate into transparency and government accountability, less corruption, participatory democracy, civil society and, yes, greater income". Obviously we must look into the global media to recognise our stakeholders and partners of development. And to work through partnership with proper integration. Above all, media is an inseparable medium to get and disseminate information, update ourselves and save our valuable lives. Bridging the gap and creating network of journalists of the world could be very helpful for sharing information on climate change and other issues.

There is also a need to build bridges between scientists and journalists. Scientists are often unwilling to simplify their research findings for a lay audience, so journalists may sharpen their

skills to simplify jargon-heavy scientific content and make the matter easier to understand. We also need to build bridges between North, East, West and South (NEWS) environmental and science journalists so that we can exchange ideas and information on global climate change. A draft 'climate change agreement' leaked to the media in Copenhagen gives "more power to rich countries and sidelines the United Nations' role in all future climate change agreements," The Guardian reported. This must not be the case. The conference is already fraught with many misgivings and differences. It may not conclude as envisaged at the beginning. Yet the participating parties must be hoping against hope for a conclusion that matters most to the vulnerable.

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 'The Copenhagen Agreement: A Shared Vision for Long-Term Cooperative Action' mentions: "...The Parties underline that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and commit to a vigorous response through immediate ambitious national action and strengthened international cooperation with a view to limiting global average temperature rise to a maximum of 2 degrees above pre-industrial levels. The Parties are convinced of the need to address climate change bearing in mind that social and economic development and poverty eradication are the first and overriding priorities in developing countries..." . Let it be so. We in Bangladesh look forward to the logical requirement we deserve.



Bhutan

Climatic cracks of doom surface in green Bhutan

(Alistair Scrutton)

For centuries this monastic fortress in Bhutan's Himalayas has sheltered ancient Buddhist relics and scriptures from earthquakes, fires and Tibetan invasions. Now the lamas here may have met their match — global warming. At least 53 million cubic meters of glacier melt is threatening to break the banks of a lake upstream in the Himalayan peaks and spark a "mountain tsunami" in Punakha valley.

The government is pressing the lamas, so far unsuccessfully, to transport relics to a nearby hilltop for safekeeping. Massive flooding could inundate these valleys, which hold about a tenth of Bhutan's population, by 2015. "Pollution has disturbed our deities," Leki Dorji, a red-robed lama, said in a courtyard as monks chanted mantras. "It's for that the rains have not come on time, that we have not had snow for five years."

Bhutan, one of the earth's greenest and most

isolated countries and one of the few states that absorbs more carbon than it emits, faces the impact of a rise in global temperatures despite environmental polices lauded the world over.

It is not just about holy relics, but the livelihood of a nation dependent on Himalayan glacier-fed rivers which are also the life-blood for hundreds of millions of people downstream in the plains of South Asia. "It has not been easy to conserve our ecological balance," Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley told Reuters in an interview. "It has come at a cost. We could have been much richer." "Now we are as vulnerable and exposed as other countries." For the monks it may be angry deities. But science says the threat to Punakha is due to rising global temperatures melting the world's "third pole" of Himalayan glaciers.

The government has identified 26 glacier lakes in Bhutan at risk of what is called Glacier Lake

Outburst Floods, when accumulated melt breaks its moraine banks. Scientists say that glaciers in Bhutan are retreating by around 30 meters a year. Many lamas in Punakha Dzong — both a monastery and a fortress, and once Bhutan's capital — believe deities will ultimately protect relics from whatever extreme weather can throw at them. The monastery was damaged by a similar glacier outburst in 1994. Then monks gathered to pray for their treasures' safety, especially Bhutan's most precious relic — the Rangjung Kharsapani, the self-created image of the deity of compassion.

At least 20 people in the valley were killed then. The next torrent of water would be three times greater. "We hope to convince the monks to move the relics. If the next lake bursts, you can imagine what it would trigger," Thinley said. "Our valley, settlements, or farms would be swept away." Bhutan, with under 700,000 people in a country roughly the size of Switzerland, has a constitution that guarantees 60 percent of its land must be forested. Air pollution hardly exists. There are only 33,000 vehicles.

THREATS TO AN ENVIRONMENTAL SHANGRI-LA

But there are other cracks in this environmental Shangri-la. The government says global warming will soon not just impact its glaciers, but threaten its efforts to develop hydroelectric power and also damage crops with erratic weather. After an initial increase, melting will eventually lead to reduced river flows, threatening plans to increase hydroelectric power from 1,500 megawatts to 10,000 megawatts within a decade. "Hydroelectric power is the backbone of our economy," said Sonam Yangle, director general of the National Environment Commission.

Global warming is already blamed for increasing erratic monsoons and snows, making it hard for crops. Warming has led some farmers to grow oranges in Himalayan valleys. Pests like rodents

are appearing higher up in the Himalayas. Cases of lowland diseases like malaria and dengue are increasing. "For agriculture, erratic weather is the biggest challenge," said Agricultural Minister Pema Gyamtsho. "Rainfall doesn't come to May, then there is a torrent for three days and causes a lot of damage. Then we have a spell of drought." Bhutan plans to mitigate these risks. But that can be expensive for a nation with a \$1 billion economy. The country already depends on official aid for nearly half its budget. Just take the Thorthormi glacier threatening the monastery. Some 300 workers hiked with yaks for 10 days to drain the lake. Two lakes are separated by a thinning 30-meter moraine. If they join, the combined force will spill down the valley.

Working at more than 4,000 meters above sea level, workers drained around 0.86 centimeters, half what they aimed. The project cost \$7 million, and that is just one glacier among hundreds. Many Bhutanese feel hard done by. Their government has made more efforts to lead the ways with environment policies, but its very success has often made its own problems ignored. "We hope to get due compensation for increasing forest cover," said Gyamtsho, referring to the spread in forests from more than 60 percent to 72 percent of the country within a decade. Bhutan says it will commit at Copenhagen to being carbon neutral. But unless money is spent on mitigation, the economic sacrifices that Bhutan has made to stay green may be in vain. "Seven million dollars is quite a lot of money for Bhutan," said Claire Van der Vaeren, representative of the United Nations Development Programme, partly funding efforts to drain the lake.

"But certain funding windows are not available to Bhutan because it is doing well with emissions and forest cover. In a way, it is a victim of its own success." In Punakha, the monks still refuse to move their relics, hopeful their faith means they will survive any "tsunami." "They say the dzong survived because of the relic," said Thinley. "We'll see if they will stay put."

Source: Business Line, December 17, 2009

25 yrs on, Bhopal lives in minds & lungs

(Praveen S Thampi)

Source: *The Economy Times*, 3rd December, 2009

In saner societies, the 82-acre compound at Kali Parade, Berasia Road, in Bhopal would have been a public monument where you would be compelled to bow down, probably stand a moment in silence, praying for the more than 10,000 men, women and children who fell prey to the toxic fumes that billowed out from here on a midnight 25 years ago. Instead, stray dogs, grazing goats and a police contingent greet you at the Union Carbide factory, amid clumsily drawn chalk lines on the ground meant to keep permitted visitors away from touching the rusting carcass of the plant, which was set up in 1969 to produce Sevin, a pesticide key to India's green revolution.

If nothing else, the mess captures what Bhopal's balancesheet looks like after quarter of a century. Victims taken for a ride by their own governments, a criminal justice system that has failed to deliver, and the continuing contamination at the plant site abandoned by the polluter — Union Carbide, now part of Dow Chemicals — as well as the regulator, the state and central governments. That's three Cs — compensation, contamination and criminal justice — that keep the 25-year-old catastrophe alive, posing questions on the moral fibre of the Indian society and the sensitivity of its successive governments. Then there are the mysteries.

On February 15, 1989, the government of India reached a settlement with Union Carbide for \$470 million climbing down from its demand of \$3.3 billion. Incidentally, just a day before, after a long-drawn out process, the administration in West Virginia, US, had given its permission to Indian investigators to inspect the 'sister' Union Carbide plant at South Charleston to assess the disparity in safety standards followed at the two units. The plant has since changed hands to Bayer CropScience, but continues to be America's biggest storage

site for the lethal methyl isocyanate.

While the official figures still stand at 1,05,000 victims (including 3,000 dead), the government records show compensation was paid for 5,74,367 (5,207 dead) people. If the number of victims were five times higher than the original estimates, why did the administration slice the paltry sums even thinner instead of adding to the corpus?

Going by the rupee-dollar exchange rate of 1989 — on which the compensations were meted out even as late as in 2004 — the sum that Union Carbide deposited with the government amounts to Rs 713 crore. That's an average of Rs 12,410 per victim doled out after almost a decade of the disaster, an abysmally low sum for the affected families, most of them rendered too debilitated to earn a livelihood on their own.

Stack it up against the Uphar tragedy in 1997 where a movie theatre went up in flames killing 59 and injuring 104 in the heart of New Delhi. Each of the victims was paid between Rs 15 lakh and Rs 18 lakh, and the injured Rs 1 lakh. And since the cheques were given out in 2003 — still a year before the last Bhopal compensation was paid — the Uphar victims were awarded a 9% interest on their compensations from the date of filing the claims.

Union Carbide's \$470 million would be worth some Rs 2,847 crore, assuming a dollar interest rate of 2% per annum for 15 years and conversion at the 2004 exchange rate of Rs 45 to the dollar. So where is the rest of the money that should still be left in the account since only the Rs 713 crore had been distributed any way? Madhya Pradesh's minister for gas rehabilitation and relief says there is not a single paisa left in the kitty to give out to anyone. "We have done our job," says Babulal Gaur, a former chief minister of the state.

In fact, the first in the Bhopal coffin was struck by the state government itself. Three days after the tragedy, it set up the Bhopal Poisonous Gas Leakage Inquiry Commission headed by Justice N K Singh, then sitting judge of the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The commission was wound up a year later without any explanation.

The ICMR, the country's apex body for formulation, co-ordination and promotion of biomedical research, started its study on the medical effects of Bhopal in 1985. It commissioned 24 projects, but when it closed the Bhopal chapter in 1994, only two of the studies had seen the light of the day.

Dr N R Bhandari was the resident medical officer in the Hamidia Hospital in Bhopal when thousands poured into its emergency wards on the midnight of December 3, 1984. Later, he was drafted into the ICMR team that had started its research on the long-term effects of Bhopal.

A pediatrician, Dr Bhandari says that 2,500 pregnant women had suffered serious exposure to MIC on December 3. His team had followed even the last one of them to deliver, on October 1, 1985.

"The gas didn't seem to affect new-borns to any alarming levels," he says, adding that these kids should have been tracked till the pre-puberty stage to make any concrete observations. Till date, ICMR hasn't given any explanation what happened to those 22 reports, which, according to Dr Bhandari, could have helped the victims get custom-made care since they would have triggered a

wider debate within the global medical community.

From where the ICMR left, Dr N Banerjee has taken over, with his underpaid, under-staffed team. He is the chief research officer at the Centre for Rehabilitation Studies, the only body conducting studies on the long-term impacts of Bhopal. A part of the state's ministry of gas relief & rehabilitation, Dr Banerjee and his 46-member team — 25 of them go out to the field to collect data — live a hand-to-mouth existence.

The entire CRS, an organisation that even the most critical NGOs operating in Bhopal admit is doing a commendable job given its constraints, continues to be on the temporary payroll of the state government 15 years after it was set up. A process to automate the set-up and convert the data currently stored in paper folders in dozens of steel almirahs is underway.

The ministry has a network of hospitals that give free care to anyone who has received compensation as a gas victim, but both Dr Bhandari and Dr Banerjee say a gas-victim and a non-gas victim diagnosed with, say, pulmonary tuberculosis, cannot be treated in the same way. "The normal person doesn't carry the burden of history, but the gas-victim's lungs would have already been damaged before he contracted TB. So the cure just can't be the same," Dr Banerjee says. Today, Bhopal is a city ridden with quacks offering steroid injections to those with breathing problems. The low oxygen levels in blood, a fallout of the gas impact, makes the patient constantly fatigued, and quacks often rush in with instant gratification.



Climate change: India to sign treaty with SAARC nations

(NEHA SINHA)

Marking a shift from its earlier position of staying within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Changes, India now appears ready to collaborate with various countries on climate change. On top of the list

are the US, China and Japan.

In a bid to present itself as a leader on climate change issues in the SAARC region, India is set to sign a treaty on environment with SAARC countries, the draft text of which is ready, The

Indian Express has learnt.

India has also discussed the possibility of a bilateral co-operation with Japan on thermal technology which cuts down on greenhouse gases.

Minister of Environment and Forests Jairam Ramesh met Japanese Environment Minister Sakihito Ozawa on Monday on the issue.

SAARC Environment Ministers are at present in New Delhi. On Tuesday, the SAARC delegates are expected to release a joint environmental statement.

Ministry officials said the cooperation will chiefly be in the regions of forestry, biodiversity and wildlife and coastal management. Ramesh, speaking to The Indian Express, indicated that India needed to look beyond the Kyoto Protocol. "India has multiple messages to give on climate change, and India cannot be Doctor No," he said. "We are engaging with China, Japan and the US on climate change."

This includes, he said, "being open to the discussion of a bilateral with Japan on climate change technologies." The focus is on reducing greenhouse gases through better coal-based

thermal power technologies. "We are discussing with Japan coal-based power generation with less greenhouse gases. Japan is helping us with that."

In yet another shift, India seems set to be a donor in the issue of tackling climate change. It will give one-time grants for forestry and coastal management, Ramesh said. "We are looking at assuming a prominent role for climate change and environment in South Asia. The draft for a new environment agreement is also ready from India's side. The crux will be technology and financial transfer. Climate change is becoming a very important issue for SAARC, the theme of the April 2010 SAARC meet at Thimpu will be climate change. We are making one time grants of one million dollars to the SAARC forestry Centre, Thimpu, and one million dollars to SAARC Coastal Management Zone, Maldives.," he said.

On a bilateral agreement with the US, Ramesh said: "We are open to it. The PM will discuss this with US President Barack Obama next month. The discussions are likely to be on energy security."

Source: The Indian Express, 20th October 2009



The growing threats to human rights

(Ramesh Thakur)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed on December 10, 1948, transformed an aspiration into legally binding standards and spawned a raft of institutions to scrutinise government conformity and condemn noncompliance. It remains the central organising principle of global human rights and a source of power and authority on behalf of victims.

A human right, owed to every person simply as a human being, is inherently universal. Human rights are held only by human beings,

but equally by all; they do not flow from office, rank, or relationship. Universalising the human rights norm was one of the great achievements of the twentieth century. Numerous U.N. conventions, declarations and protocols produced this progressive result. They are our "firewalls against barbarism" (Michael Ignatieff).

Human rights establish boundaries between individuals, society and the state. The assertion of a human right is a claim on protection from threats from people, groups

or public authorities. Human rights are endangered in conditions of anarchy when there is no functioning law enforcement and judicial machinery to defend them. In most cases, however, the gravest threats to the human rights of citizens emanate from states.

Over the past decade state-based threats to human rights have taken several forms. Many civil liberties have been curtailed in recent years through law or by administrative decisions and infringements on freedoms that would have been challenged in the pre-9/11 environment. Western governments have sometimes abandoned nationals overseas if their detention or abuse is carried out in the name of anti-terrorism. Their troops in Afghanistan may have colluded in handing over suspects to local interrogators skilled at breaking more than toothpicks. Their law enforcement officers have transferred the burden of risk of death and injury to innocent people, for example through lax protocols governing the use of tasers.

Border agents everywhere seem to be drifting into a make-my-day machismo as their default mode of dealing with the traveling public. Banning the gadfly British MP George Galloway from visiting Canada in March 2009 was especially egregious and counterproductive in giving him dollops of extra oxygen for free publicity. The banning of minarets by the good citizens of Switzerland is illiberal democracy at its worst, fanned by the flames of group hysteria against the backdrop of post-9/11 Islamophobia. The ceremony of innocence will be truly drowned if the western centre of civilisation cannot hold.

The problem was aggravated with the former chief champion of human rights becoming a leading delinquent. U.S. abuses in Guantánamo and Iraq significantly weakened the world's ability to protect human rights. When a dominant country like the U.S. openly defies the law, others mimic its policy and its leverage over them is reduced: Washington cannot call on others to uphold principles it itself violates.

In a landmark case involving the CIA's extraordinary rendition programme as part of the war on terror, on November 24, an Italian judge convicted 23 Americans of kidnapping

an Egyptian cleric on a Milan street in 2003. They were tried in absentia and may never see jail time. But they are in effect fugitives in the 25 EU countries and subject to arrest and extradition to Italy. The case thus is another nail in the coffin of impunity and sends a warning shot across Washington's bow that if the U.S. fails to hold its officials accountable for breaking foreign laws, other countries will.

Once, torture was acknowledged to be so abhorrent that no one publicly approved the practice. The post-9/11 climate of fear encouraged debate on whether torture is justified if it prevents mass terrorist attacks.

A posture of moral relativism can be profoundly racist, proclaiming in effect that "the other" is not worthy of the dignity that belongs inalienably to one. Those of us who live in zones of safety, activating "the moral imagination to feel the pain of others" (Ignatieff) as our own, have a duty of care to those living in zones of danger.

A second set of threats is posed by the creation of human rights machinery that has become a monster mocking the meat it feeds on. Human rights seek to protect individuals from oppression by political, social and religious authorities.

The responsibility for enacting laws and constructing the bureaucratic, police, and judicial machinery to monitor and enforce human rights lies with the state. Social and religious groups can capture the political agenda and subvert the process to "protect" group human rights by penalizing individuals who dissent and depart from community sanctioned views and behaviour.

Criminalising hate speech is a case in point, especially when offence is established not by the intent of the doer but the hurt sensibilities of a complainant.

University campuses, which should be among the frontline defenders of free speech — a defence that has no meaning if it does not include the freedom to offend — have been among the first to succumb to political correctness or lobby group pressure. Yale University Press sunk to a new depth in low farce recently in publishing a book on the Danish cartoons controversy but pre-

emptively censoring itself and not reprinting the cartoons.

In some jurisdictions, in hearings before quasi-judicial bodies like human rights commissions (with members appointed by governments), complainants suffer no financial or other penalty even if their case is found to be frivolous and wholly without merit. Defendants can have their lives ruined financially, professionally and socially.

Eventual vindication is inadequate solace or compensation. Thus has machinery meant to defend human rights become politically motivated attack organs, using taxpayers' money to chip away at their freedoms. They are paradigms of a bureaucratic solution: well-intentioned, labour intensive and expensive. The value of an end — promoting human rights — is used to set in motion a self-defeating means to achieve it.

The final source of state-based threats to human rights is from intergovernmental organizations. International norm shifts in human rights include outlawing genocide, delegitimising institutionalized racial discrimination (especially apartheid), moving from sovereign impunity to international criminal accountability, improving the status of women, and developing the concepts of dignity and the protection of minorities and vulnerable groups.

Here too there has been a distressing reversal, for example a Canadian citizen being put on a secret U.N. blacklist with no judicial oversight on the basis of unknown and therefore unchallengeable evidence — some of which can turn out to be flimsy. Abousfian Abdelrazik spent almost six years in detention in Sudan and may have been tortured before being returned to Canada in 2009. No national or U.N. official has been held to account.

Somewhere along the line, the U.N. human rights machinery got captured and subverted

by its enemies. Its actual performance was scandalous and a travesty of the noble vision and ideals animating the global movement. The protection of internationally recognised human rights will remain fraught in the years to come.

The U.N.'s main collective body on human rights affairs is made up of states. Claims by citizen against governments are unavoidably political. States are less eager to create enforceable police and judicial machinery than to endorse human rights in the abstract, and less open to effective U.N. enforcement of rights than to weak supervision of policies.

Even liberal democratic states often sacrifice human rights on the altar of national security and commercial profit. Western governments have not been notably anxious to use the U.N. machinery to criticise China or Saudi Arabia. Changing the nomenclature of the Commission on Human Rights to the Human Rights Council will not change the reality of double standards based on national interest calculations.

States can band together at the U.N. to proscribe injuries to religious sensibilities, for example by publishing cartoons that some spokesmen of some religion find offensive. In March 2009, the U.N. Human Rights Council passed a Pakistan-sponsored and Organisation of Islamic Conference supported resolution calling on all countries to pass laws banning criticism of religion. The resolution was dressed up in the language of human rights (freedom of religion).

This is why, even as advocates seek desirable advances in the global governance of human rights, they must constantly hold fast to the critical kernel of truth that human rights is about protecting individual beliefs and actions from group-sanctioned morality at local, national and global levels of governance.

Source: The Hindu, 5th December, 2009

‘There is scientific evidence to prove that GM crops have harmful effects’

(Renitha Raveendran)

Amid arguments for and against introducing genetically modified (GM) crops in India, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), the apex regulatory committee for transgenic crops under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, on October 14 granted in-principle approval to Bt Brinjal, the country’s first edible GM item to be cleared for cultivation. Dr Pushpa M Bhargava, the Supreme Court-appointed special invitee to the 30-member GEAC, has on various platforms objected to introducing GM products in the country, citing health and bio-security issues.

•Dr Bhargava is a well-known scientist and the founder of the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology, Hyderabad. Excerpts of an interview with Dr Bhargava:

GEAC has described the Bt Brinjal developed by Mahyco, partnered with Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, University of Agricultural Sciences and the Indian Institute of Vegetable Research, as bio-safe material. It claims that before the approval, it was put through large-scale field trials at various locations across the country. Then what is your objection?

Biosafety cannot be guaranteed in a short span of time. It’s a long process. There are a whole lot of protocols to be carried out, which were not done in the case of Bt Brinjal. As far as a GM crop is concerned, there are nearly 30 tests to be done before giving it clearance. But only six-seven tests were done for Bt Brinjal so far, which is unacceptable. Brinjal is not our staple food. An increase in production will bring down the price, adding to farmers’ woes. No socio-economic studies have been done in this regard. No proper toxicity and allergenic tests have been done.

Those who argue for the introduction of it say that GM variety improves the pest resistance of crops leading to a 50 per cent reduction in yield losses.

Some time back, The Indian Council of Agricultural Research had developed a bio-pesticide technology which had proved to be equally effective and prevented yield losses. There are scores of other eco-friendly and safe practices that are possible for sustainable pest management in crops like brinjal. My problem is when you have options why go for something that has been rejected by many countries.

•It is learnt that only very few in the 30-member GEAC are opposing the introduction of GM crops. If it is really a serious threat, why is the majority for it? It has been reported that one of the dissenters in the panel opined the vector used in making Bt Brinjal was wrong and this alone disqualified the crop.

There are three people who are openly opposing the move on different grounds. All the others have vested interests. Some may have links with bio-tech companies or have affiliations to bodies that support the move. It’s absolutely true that the vector used was wrong. The sample for testing has been provided by the seed company itself. How do we know the sample is of normal brinjal or Bt Brinjal? I had sent a proposal to GEAC on the need to set up a centre to conduct such studies.

You had said GEAC did not give enough time to study the report before going public about the in-principle approval to Bt Brinjal. You had alleged in the past that GEAC wasn’t transparent.

The report was sent to us on the afternoon of October 9, which was a Friday. As my office is closed on Saturday and Sunday, I got the report in hand on Monday, October 12, and the very next day we had meeting in Delhi. Hurriedly after that they went public before we could properly go through it and raise any objection. I stand by my statement that GEAC wasn’t transparent, which is evident from the heedless haste with which it carried out the entire procedure in favour of the multi-national companies involved.

•Some states like Orissa and Kerala have said no to GM crops. There are others who support it. But majority do not know what a GM crop is. Isn't in a mess now?

The major issue is that the prime stakeholders — farmers — have not been taken into confidence. There have been no discussions held with them. In Kerala, where people are well-informed, there wouldn't be much problem and that's why they oppose it. But what about other states where majority of the farmers are illiterates? One can't differentiate between a normal brinjal and a Bt Brinjal. So if you don't want to go for GM food still you have no option as there is no labeling law in the country now.

The major contention of those who oppose

GM food is about the health hazards. But countries like the US and Canada have been consuming GM food for years now.

There is scientific evidence to prove that GM crops have harmful effects. The increasing number of GM food and increasing health problems in the US should be seen as a serious issue. In India, after the introduction of Bt Cotton, cases of allergy were reported. In Warangal, several cows had died after eating Bt Cotton plants. After scientists found it causes health hazards, many countries said no to GM crops.

Source: Indian Express, October 23, 2009



Child under-nutrition in India is a human rights issue

(Karin Hulshof)

A MATTER OF NATIONAL SHAME': According to India's third National Family Health Survey of 2005-06, 70 per cent of children between six months and 59 months are anaemic.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." So begins the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established 60 years ago and celebrated today around the globe. This year's theme is non-discrimination. When it comes to nutrition, all of India's children are not equal. According to India's third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-3) of 2005-06, 20 per cent of Indian children under five-years-old are wasted due to acute undernutrition and 48 per cent are stunted due to chronic undernutrition. Seventy per cent of children between six months and 59 months are anaemic. Despite a booming economy, nutrition deprivation among India's children remains widespread.

In absolute numbers, an average 25 million

children are wasted and 61 million are stunted. The state of child under nutrition in India is — first and foremost — a major threat to the survival, growth, and development and of great importance for India as a global player. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has referred to undernutrition as 'a matter of national shame.'

Children who are undernourished have substantially lower chances of survival than children who are well-nourished. Undernourished children are much more likely to suffer from serious infections and to die from common childhood illnesses such as diarrhea, pneumonia, and measles. More than a third of all deaths in children aged five years or younger can be attributable to under nutrition. Children who survive under nutrition do not perform as well in school as their well-nourished peers and as adults they are less productive.

Good nutrition early in life is a key input for human capital formation, a fundamental

factor for sustainable and equitable economic growth. Widespread under nutrition impedes socio-economic development and poverty reduction. With persistently high levels of child undernutrition, vital opportunities to save millions of lives are being lost, and many more children are not growing to their full potential.

There is a critical window of opportunity to intervene when mothers are pregnant and during children's first two years of life. After that age, the window closes and the opportunity for the child is lost forever. We know what works — ten proven, high-impact interventions can dramatically reduce undernutrition in young children if delivered nationally:

- Timely initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth
- Exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months of life
- Timely introduction of complementary foods at six months
- Age-appropriate foods for children six months to two years
- Hygienic complementary feeding practices
- Immunization and bi-annual Vitamin A supplementation with deworming
- Appropriate feeding for children during and after illness
- Therapeutic feeding for children with severe acute malnutrition
- Adequate nutrition and support for adolescent girls to prevent anemia
- Adequate nutrition and support for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers

These 10 essential interventions could halve the proportion of undernourished children over the next 10 years.

A number of emerging economies have encountered nutrition challenges similar to those currently facing India. For example,

China reduced child undernutrition by more than half (from 25 per cent to 8 per cent) between 1990 and 2002; Brazil reduced child undernutrition by 60 per cent (from 18 per cent to 7 per cent) from 1975 to 1989; Thailand reduced child undernutrition by half (from 50 per cent to 25 per cent) in less than a decade (1982-1986); and Viet Nam reduced child undernutrition by 40 per cent (from 45 per cent to 27 per cent) between 1990 and 2006.

Four lessons can be learned from these countries' experiences: 1) Leadership at the highest level to ensure that priority is given to child nutrition outcomes across sectors and states, with large investments in nutrition interventions and successful poverty alleviation strategies. 2) Targeted nutrition interventions to prevent mild and moderate under nutrition and treat severe under nutrition as part of a continuum of care for children, particularly among the most vulnerable children: the youngest, the poorest, and the socially-excluded; 3) Reliance on community-based primary health care to ensure high coverage through community-based frontline workers; 4) Strong supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management to provide the evidence base for timely and effective policy, programme and budgetary action.

The universal delivery of this package of ten evidence-based, high impact essential nutrition interventions will lead to an unprecedented reduction in child under nutrition. India has the resources — financial and human — to address, once and for all, the challenge of child under nutrition. The prevention and treatment of child under nutrition in the first two years of life needs to be a national development priority.

India's leadership is recognised globally and its economy is growing at an enviable rate. That strength and leadership can be channeled to ensure survival of India's most precious asset — its children — to thrive and survive. The nutrition targets set forth by the government in its Eleventh Five-Year Plan are ambitious, more ambitious than the international commitments set forth in the Millennium Development Goals. In the

government's own words, "it is better to aim high, than to fail low."

Now is the time to combine the existing technical knowledge with the political will to change the lives of millions to guarantee the human rights, dignity and rights of all of India's children. Now is the time to combine the existing technical knowledge with the political will to change the lives of millions to guarantee the human rights and dignity of all of India's children.

This is a 'make or break' time to emerge as global leader in the fight against under nutrition... 61 million children are waiting.

(Dr. Karin Hulshof is UNICEF India Representative.)

— Courtesy: U.N. Information Centre for India and Bhutan

Source: Asian Age, December 10th 2009



New norms for redrawing urban, rural poverty lines

G. Srinivasan

New Delhi, Dec. 11

The Tendulkar Committee report on poverty estimate is yet another bid by the aam aadmi government to pin down the level of rural and urban poverty in the country so that the various poor-friendly programmes the UPA government has been undertaking could be scaled up, even as the urban-rural divide in terms of per capita income continues to widen, as revealed by the Committee.

The latest Committee report presented to the Plan panel on December 8 and subsequently put on the official Web site on Thursday, has suggested a new methodology to arrive at State-wise and all-India rural and urban poverty lines for 2004-05, the latest available major National Sample Survey (NSS) round on household consumer expenditure that provides the data base for the calculation of poverty estimates by the Plan panel.

Whereas the 61st round of NSS estimates state that 27.5 per cent people in the country were living below the poverty line (BPL) with the rural area poverty at 28.3 per cent and urban areas at 25.7 per cent, the new methodology has raised the all-India poverty headcount ratio to 37.2 per cent of the population — with the rural area poverty at a sharper 41.8 per cent and urban area poverty at 25.7 per cent.

Worrying factors

The point to ponder upon is that while the all-India poverty ratio has edged up from a level 27.5 per cent to 37.2 per cent for the year 2004-05, the urban area poverty stays put at 25.7 per cent in both the estimates. The worrisome feature is, however, the rural area poverty, which has shot up sharply from a level of 28.3 per cent to 41.8 per cent, reflecting the inescapable point that even the UPA's gradualist economic reforms have bypassed the vast swathe of rural India.

Bimaru distresses

The distressing aspect to the rural scenario continues to be the parlous state of affairs in the so-called Bimaru State comprising Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where rural poverty is at its worst at 55.7 per cent, 53.6 per cent, 35.8 per cent and 42.7 per cent respectively, with some modicum of relief only in Rajasthan. For Bihar, the urban poverty is 43.7 per cent while its aggregate poverty level is at 54.4 per cent, the second in the list of home to maximum percentage of poor people. The worst hit State remains Orissa, whose rural poverty is 60.8 per cent, urban poverty is 37.6 per cent and aggregate percentage of poverty is 57.2 per cent, earning the dismal distinction of being the number one

State at an all-India level for being home to the highest percentage of people below the poverty line.

Education, health

It is also interesting to note that even as the new methodology has moved away from the calorie intake norms, the new poverty lines have been arrived at after assessing the adequacy of private household expenditure on education and health — the two crucial aspects of well-being — that the earlier calorie-anchored poverty lines did not explicitly account for.

This is also the reason why as the Chairman of the Expert Group, Dr Suresh Tendulkar, told Business Line that the new estimates could not be compared to the earlier announced official headcount using the earlier official poverty lines and out-dated price indices.

Be that as it may, any assessment of the extent of poverty beyond the latest period of 2004-

05 needs to reckon the subsequent measures the UPA government took, including National Rural Health Mission, Bharat Nirman and National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, in its earlier dispensation, which are being continued and scaled up.

At the same time, it cannot be gainsaid that despite the accent being on rural development, inclusive growth and raft benign welfare schemes specifically tailed to address the rural areas, the percentage of people continuing to eke out their lives on the edges of existence, with health and education concerns not duly factored in, show the vast ground that remains to be covered.

Policy analysts contend the fact that close to 42 per cent of the rural population in the country is trapped in poverty needs to be reckoned so that effective intervention measures are mooted and implemented on a war footing, even as India is striving to become a developed country from its emerging economy status before long.



The poverty estimates debate

(Biraj Patnaik)

The report of the Suresh Tendulkar committee on the estimation of poverty in India is bound to engage academics and activists from all sides of the ideological divide in the days to come. Much of the debate, one suspects, will be around the poverty figure that Tendulkar and his colleagues have come up with. The estimate of poverty put forth by the committee is 37.2% for all of India (with 41.8% for rural areas and 25.7% for urban areas).

This figure is significantly higher than the current estimate of poverty of 28.3% (2004-05 estimates) used by the Planning Commission. It is also higher than the figure of 36% that has been mandated by the Supreme Court in the ongoing right to food case. An easy, albeit erroneous, conclusion from this would be that poverty in India has gone up in the interim years since the last estimate.

What is likely to complicate the debate even further is the fact that this interim period

comprised the years of India's shift to a high-growth, neo-liberal model of development. These were also the years of the greatest advance in inequity that has been seen since Independence. Even if these figures are dismissed as being an underestimation of poverty, critics of liberalization will still seize the opportunity to see the new poverty figures as a indication of their stance that the poor have become poorer in the last 15 years.

While that may well hold true, it would be wrong to draw that conclusion from this report: The Tendulkar committee has fundamentally changed the way poverty has been measured so far in the country and, therefore, the current poverty estimate is not comparable with earlier estimates. In fact, if these estimates are applied to the earlier data, then the all-India poverty line would have been 45.3%. Therefore, even when the new standards are applied, poverty—by these estimates—has seen a marginal decline.

So what are these fundamental changes in the way poverty is measured that the Tendulkar committee has made?

First, and perhaps most controversially, the Tendulkar committee has abandoned the calorie-anchored estimates of poverty. All previous estimates of poverty in India had used the calorie consumption norm of 2,400 calories per day per capita for rural areas and 2,100 calories for urban areas. Data collected by the National Sample Survey (NSS) on actual consumption would then be used, among other things, to correlate the monthly per capita expenditure that was required to meet these calorie norms. However, there were problems with this approach.

One, many nutritionists and economists have been wanting to give this form of poverty estimation a decent burial for a long time now, since there were far too many contradictions in using this norm.

Consider that the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization had revised the calorie intake to close to 1,800 calories per day per capita. The Indian Council of Medical Research has only now set into motion a process to revise the calorie norms for India, which is still likely to be quite contentious since, as a Left-wing nutritionist friend put it to me, none of the people who undertake these revisions has ever done a day's worth of manual labour.

Two, when these norms were applied across the country, the calorie consumption in the southern states was found to be much lower than the poverty belt states of northern India. This is despite the fact that states such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala have had far better nutritional indicators. For instance, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have child malnutrition rates of 22.9% and 29.8%, respectively. Yet, average calorie consumption in both states is lower than, say, in Bihar, which has a child malnutrition rate of 55.9%.

Three, calorie intake has been going down in India even for better off households and many economists and nutritionists feel that there seems to be little correlation between an increase in calorie intake and household income.

The reason why dropping the calorie norm for poverty estimation is bound to be controversial is this last point—the fact that there exists a rich debate on the subject of declining calorie consumption among the poorer households, especially in the post-liberalization period. Economists who have been at the forefront of this

debate would view the Tendulkar committee's departure on using calorie norms to estimate poverty as yet another attempt to window dress the stark reality of poverty in India. Since these estimates continue to show a decline in poverty, even if it is not as rapid as in other emerging economies such as Brazil and China, it is bound to be treated with scepticism by activists working on the right to food campaign across the country. The timing of the Tendulkar report—in the midst of a global food crisis and spiralling food prices in India—is also likely to ensure that it is treated with even greater scepticism than it deserves.

The figure of poverty that is most widely regarded as the gospel truth by most activists and civil society groups in India is the one put forth by the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector (NCEUS). NCEUS had argued in its final report in 2009 that social sector benefits for unorganized labour should be extended to 77% of the population, based on a per capita per day expenditure of Rs20 or less. However, there was never consensus in academic circles whether this could be used as the basis of determining the poverty line. Moreover, this figure is unlikely to be accepted by the government to decide subsidies.

Second, the Tendulkar committee has rationalized the basket of goods and services that are consumed by households at the poverty line. This had been unchanged in poverty calculations since 1973-74. The poverty line basket has now been updated to reflect the expenditures on health and education that are incurred by the poor, rather than assume that these are largely services that are provided free by the State, as was done in 1973-74.

At one level, this is a much needed correction since it factors in expenditures that focus on capabilities. But whether this should come at the expense of completely delinking it from calorie consumption is what is likely to be the point of departure in most of the debates that will follow this report.

Third, the methodology used for the determination of the poverty line is now much more amenable to updating using changing prices over time, than the previous estimation surveys were.

The primary reason the poverty line is so contested is that many state benefits, including subsidized rations in the public distribution system (PDS), health insurance, education scholarships, subsidized housing, and so on, are

available only for those people who fall below the poverty line (BPL). Consequently, funding from the Union government to state governments is based on this “quota” that flows out of the poverty estimation. Since state governments face the brunt of the exclusion errors in BPL identification—an all-too-common phenomenon—many of them have simply done away with the Planning Commission numbers and have used state budgetary support to supplement the Central quota and extend the benefits to a larger section of the population. These state subsidies could be as high as Rs1,800 crore for a small state such as Chhattisgarh to more than Rs3,000 crore for Tamil Nadu. Any increase in the poverty numbers, therefore, increases the Central food subsidy burden and reduces the fiscal burden on the states.

While the jury is still out on this report, what is clear is that even though this exercise remedies some of the maladies with previous estimates, it does not push the envelope far enough. The estimation of poverty by the Tendulkar committee does not factor in the multidimensional nature of poverty. The over-dependence on money metrics, which rely only on private household consumption expenditure, does not capture the political dimensions of being poor in India. This report, like all such preceding reports, does not take into account significant variables such as caste, gender and disability. In that sense, the government has squandered away yet another opportunity to take a multidisciplinary approach to the poverty question in India.

The bottom line from the current poverty estimate is that it pegs poverty at a per capita rural expenditure level of Rs15 per day and Rs19 for urban areas. While this is an improvement

from the previous estimate of roughly Rs12 and Rs17 in the previous estimates, it still falls short of a minimum standard of consumption required for a life with dignity. Many would, therefore, argue that the Tendulkar committee poverty line still remains a “starvation line” rather than a poverty line.

The most immediate policy implication of this report is likely to be on the proposed national food security Act (NFSA); the government is most likely to use these estimates for determining food subsidies under the Act.

If the government does so, it would be yet another historic blunder, since NFSA is perhaps the best opportunity for India to replicate nationwide the Tamil Nadu model of a universal PDS that can replace the failed targeted PDS the Centre currently employs. A universal PDS would give every citizen access to subsidized foodgrains—and most people who do not need them would not take them from PDS shops. But what it also requires is very far-reaching governance changes to prevent leakages from the system, for which the political will just does not exist.

And that brings us to whether the poverty estimates should be used at all for targeting basic necessities such as food. For the second fastest growing economy in the world, India continues to have one of the worst track records in social indicators, especially child malnutrition and hunger. It is ranked 66th out of 88 countries in the Global Hunger Index drawn up by the International Food Policy Research Institute, and nearly half of the country’s children are malnourished—a track record worse than sub-Saharan Africa.

Yet, as the annual billionaire count in India has been relentlessly on the rise, the growing inequity,



To be a Muslim in India today

(Harsh Mander)

To be a member of the largest religious minority in India is to live with a mounting disillusionment and a sense of fear that never goes away...

“In so many ways, I feel reduced to a second class citizen in my own country, only because of my Muslim identity. I fear we are losing every day the India we love.”

These words, with small variations, echoed in

many diverse voices from far corners of the country. In a national meet on the status of Muslims in India today, organised by Anhad in Delhi from October 3 to 5, 2009, many individuals and representatives of organisations gathered from several parts of India. They spoke of negotiating life, relationships, work and the State as members of the largest religious minority in India. The predominant mood in these intense

deliberations, which continued late into the evenings, was of sadness and disappointment, and of growing despair. Muslim citizens shared their mounting disillusionment with all institutions of governance, and more so with the police and judiciary, as well as with political parties and to some extent the media, and of a sense of fear that never goes away.

There is, on the one hand, the constant dread of being profiled as a terrorist, or of a loved one being so profiled, with the attendant fears of illegal and prolonged detention, denial of bail, torture, unfair and biased investigation and trial, and extra-judicial killings. There is, on the other hand, the lived experience of day-to-day discrimination, in education, employment, housing and public services, which entrap the community in hopeless conditions of poverty and want. This is fostered in situations of pervasive communal prejudice in all institutions of the State, especially the police, civil administration and judiciary; and also the political leadership of almost all parties; large segments of the print and visual media; and the middle classes, and the systematic manufacture of hate and divide by communal organisations.

The pervasive sense of insecurity, reported from various corners of the country, derive greatly from the prejudice, illegality and impunity with which police forces across the country deal with the challenges of terror. This is a regular pattern that recurs after every terror attack, and sometimes even when there have been no actual terror episodes but the State authorities claim that there was a conspiracy which they detected and prevented.

Chilling pattern

Testimonies from many States in the country — including Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Rajasthan — delineate this chilling pattern of brazen police illegality. Muslim, mostly male, youth, usually with no criminal records, are illegally picked up by policemen in plain clothes, and taken blind-folded in unmarked vehicles to locations like farm houses which are not police stations. There they are tortured to coerce them to confess to terror crimes. Many men testified to brutal and terrifying forms of torture. A few are killed in extra-judicial killings or 'encounters'. The rest are ultimately produced after several days of illegal detention before magistrates, who deliberately

ignore injuries that suggest torture. They are then officially remanded to extended police custody, and ultimately accused of a range of crimes of terror and treason. Many are charged with multiple crimes of terror, sometimes 20 or even 50, allegedly committed in many States, making it impossible for the youth charged with these grave crimes to defend themselves. Even if the legal justice system worked efficiently, it would take many years, sometimes decades, for these cases to be heard and concluded against each of the individuals. For all these years, the youth would continue to be held in detention. Nothing could possibly compensate for their lost years, and for the suffering of those who love them.

Almost none who bears a Muslim identity is exempt from the fear that they, or members of their families, can be subjected to the same allegations of terror links, and to similar processes of detention, torture, encounter killings or prolonged, multiple and biased trials. No class, no profession, no part of the country, is safe, as long as you are Muslim. Completely different standards are applied in the cases of the Hindutva terror organisations which have come to light. It is almost as if being Muslim and (usually) male makes you an automatic suspect of terrorism, and it is not the burden of the State to prove your guilt but your own responsibility to prove your innocence.

Denied aspirations

But the anguish of Muslim citizens was not restricted to targeting in the name of terror. People underlined also the many unmet aspirations of men and women of the community to participate as equal partners in India's development. Many spoke of the importance to them of modern and high quality schooling and higher education, for both boys and girls, and sought much higher levels of public investment in their education, in modern mainstream schools and institutions of higher education.

There was careful and thoughtful analysis of the design flaws in the schemes of the central UPA government to address the low social and economic indicators documented by the Sachar Committee. It was pointed out that the per capita levels of investment for the community are still abysmally low. The new scheme for investment in districts with high minority population, at best cover 30 per cent of the total population. These programmes, which represent the UPA government's major initiative to address the

socio-economic backwardness of the community, are for development of districts with higher minority populations rather than programmes focussed actually on the minorities; therefore they prove blunt instruments, as much of the expenditure is on general infrastructure and little to directly benefit deprived people of the community. The scholarship programme for girls and boys from minorities was welcomed, but this scheme also suffers from infirmities of procedure and targets which limit its impact. Financial institutions including nationalised banks are still reluctant to extend credit to Muslims.

There were many testimonies about open prejudice and bias of public institutions towards Muslims. There were also reports of profiling against Muslims by the criminal justice system even beyond terror crimes, reflected in disproportionately high Muslim populations in jails. Many sensitive and senior positions in both central and state government departments, including in the home, education, social welfare and information departments, continue to be held by officials with sympathies with communal ideologies and organisations, and the UPA government has done little to identify and replace them.

Widely prevalent

But it was confirmed that these prejudices are equally evident outside government as well. In particular, sections of the media actively reinforce communal stereotypes, as well as

uncritically broadcast the police version in terror-related arrests and encounter killings. Textbooks often show similar bias, and this is particularly dangerous because for millions of poor and especially rural children, the textbook is the only source of the printed word which they can access. People also reported bias in private recruitment.

Muslim men and women from many parts of India confirmed difficulties in getting homes on rent or on sale in non-Muslim localities, or admissions in schools and higher education. People spoke of systematic efforts in many corners of the country to destroy and boycott the livelihoods of Muslims. Sustained decentralised hate campaigns are organised which portray Muslim men as predators against Hindu girls, and people who slaughter the cow which is sacred to the Hindu community, and vigilante groups supported tacitly by the police target Muslims violently for these alleged social violations.

These voices are not simply of victimhood or of injustice to a particular community. They testify to the massive and varied challenges that have been mounted against the basic values of the Indian Constitution, including democracy, secularism, fraternity and the rule of law. What is threatened is not just the future and well-being of a community. What is under grave assault is the idea of India itself.

Source: The Hindu, October 24, 2009



Maldives

Maldives Cabinet meets under water to seek action on climate change

Colombo: Maldives, facing a grave threat of being swamped by the rising sea levels appealed for concerted action on climate change when its Cabinet held the world's first underwater meeting to highlight the danger posed to low-lying nations by global warming.

The Maldivian Cabinet met at the bottom of the sea

on Saturday to frame an SOS to global leaders to save their atoll nation from being submerged by the rising seas.

A declaration approved at the end of a 25-minute meeting, presided by President Mohammad Nasheed, called for global action to combat climate change. It will be presented at the Copenhagen

climate summit in December.

“We should come out of Copenhagen with a deal that will ensure that everyone will survive,” said Mr. Nasheed. “Maldives is a frontline state and what happens to us today will happen to others tomorrow.”

The declaration said global warming was sending the ice caps crashing into the sea, leading to sharp rise in water levels, the Presidential spokesperson said over phone from Male.

The 42-year-old President of this picturesque group of coral islands and his Cabinet colleagues, wearing face masks, scuba-dived to their underwater rendezvous held six metres below the surface of a lagoon off Girifushi island, about 35 nautical miles from capital Male. They spent 45 minutes sitting

across tables immersed to the sea bottom.

Mr. Nasheed and his colleagues used white boards and hand signals to communicate their decisions. While the Ministers had undergone diving courses for the past two months to keep their underwater date, Mr. Nasheed was an experienced diver, the spokesperson said.

The Maldivian Ministers went to these extraordinary lengths as a United Nations panel on climate change had warned that even a rise in sea levels between 18 and 60 cm would submerge the islands by 2100.

Maldives comprises more than 100 islands scattered over 800 km across the equator, and 90 per cent of them are just a metre above sea level. — PTI

Source: The Hindu, October 19, 2009.



Nepal

3 years on, stability still eludes Nepal

(Utpal Parashar)

Kathmandu: The historic peace pact that ended 10 years of Maoist-led civil war in Nepal turned three on Saturday. But the changes it promised are yet to be witnessed.

Now, with the Maoists announcing month-long agitation from Sunday seeking restoration of ‘civilian supremacy’, the country is on the brink of another crisis in the coming days. The silver lining in the political impasse is that the Maoists are willing to let parliament function for three days to pass the annual budget tabled in July.

“The agitation will end with a three-day general strike beginning December 20 and will intensify further if the government fails to address our demands,” said Chairman of Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’ on Saturday.

It was on November 21, 2006 when Maoists led by ‘Prachanda’ signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with then Prime Minister G.P. Koirala to end the violent war that had claimed more than 10,000 lives since 1996, and join the political

mainstream.

Drafting of a new constitution and general elections were part of the agreement. The pact also ended 240-year-old rule of the Shah dynasty and Nepal transformed from a Hindu nation to one with secular credentials.

After last year’s elections, Maoists formed a coalition government. But in May 2009, the government fell after President Ram Baran Yafav overruled an order to sack the Army chief.

Since then, Prachanda and his cadres have been agitating across Nepal seeking to restore ‘civilian supremacy’ and an apology from the President for his ‘unconstitutional act’. All this has affected drafting of the new constitution, which has a deadline of May 2010. The schedule for this has been revised seven times.

Rehabilitation of Maoist guerillas staying in barracks after giving up arms is yet to take place and successive governments have failed to constitute the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission meant to investigate violation of human rights during the civil war.

The turmoil has led to worries outside the country as well. Last month UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon expressed concern at non-implementation of several key issues of the pact.

Earlier this week, heads of 14 diplomatic missions to Nepal issued a joint statement urging parties to abide by the tenets of the CPA in letter and spirit.

Source: *Hindustan Times*, 23rd November, 2009



Balkanisation of Nepal

The Maoists are playing up ethnic and regional divides

Tika Bista, a 22-year journalist was brutally attacked and left for dead in Nepal's remote western district Rukum on December 8. They first inflicted deep wounds in her hands saying "these are the hands she writes with". Her laptop was damaged and some of her pieces that appeared in the local papers thrown around, confirming that it was her write-ups that landed her in trouble. Besides, it was also a "be careful message" to other journalists in the future.

Tika had recently written a piece in a local newspaper Jantidhara "Why did Maoists need Tirtha's Sindoor (vermillion)?", basically holding Maoists accountable for the death of "many husbands" during the ten years of insurgency that the Maoists had spearheaded. At least 27 journalists were killed during the period, mostly by the Maoists and the state. As the culture of impunity continues to grow and flourish, even identified suspects have not been arrested or brought to justice. Maoists have recently promoted two of those "wanted" in connection with the murder of journalist Birendra Saha in Southern Nepal's Bara district two years ago, and assigned them the responsibility of the party's district secretariat.

Today's politics in Nepal is more based on hatred, intolerance and weapons. Political parties are getting more and more militant after the Maoists' entry into mainstream politics and their control of Nepal's political agenda. With the monarchy gone, Maoists could successfully arm-twist pro-democracy parties either to follow their agenda blindly without any public or political debate, or face the fate of Gyanendra. Major parties complied on crucial issues like federalism, secularism and republicanism without any debate. Now with Maoists and the government

literally calling each other untrustworthy, they are inching towards confrontation more aggressively.

The Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) has raised Youth Force — like a paramilitary body — that works like the Maoist-affiliated Young Communist League (YCL). A senior leader of the Nepali Congress and three time Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka announced recently that even his party should be raising armed squads if that is what decides the country's politics. Khadka was sore over the Maoists' refusal to return the private property that they had confiscated, mostly from his party supporters during the years of conflict, despite the CPA making it mandatory for the Maoists to do so. Instead, Maoists have gone on a capturing spree afresh.

Apart from major parties, there are nearly 109 armed outfits of varied size, mostly operating from Terai, Nepal's plain areas adjoining India. And most of them demand autonomy to their areas, on the basis of ethnicity, caste, language or region with the right to self-determination. The Maoists, who are the biggest party in the Constituent Assembly, have given legitimacy to such demands by unilaterally announcing the two "autonomous provinces", stalling any possibility of a political consensus on the issue of federalism and state formation. Like in the past, Maoists are perhaps leaving other parties with a fait accompli. But it is not just a dispute over carving out provinces within a federal Nepal. Declaration of states on ethnic lines and without a consensus often become emotive issues. In fact, such an act in the past would have been taken as an act of rebellion against the nation and its integrity. But

with parties divided over castes and ethnicity, and with dissenting voices including from the media being attacked, Maoists and the likes are getting encouraged to do what they have been doing, and are getting away with it.

In fact, political parties including the Maoists own and control the media in the country. The assault on Tika Bista sends across a message that journalism in Nepal should be more about servility and less about objectivity and professionalism. For the sake of short-term survival, even reputed media houses are aligning with the powerful side of politics, toeing their lines blindly.

Inside Nepal, people who supported the 2006 movement appear more frustrated with the latest round of debate: whether this country will remain one or fragmented into small caste and ethnicity based units? The collapse of central authority and inability of political institutions to fill up the vacuum that the monarchy's exit left, has only made the situation scarier. Declaration of Limbuwan and Kochila provinces unilaterally by the Maoists, many fear, could bring Nepal's disintegration, like what happened in Bosnia.

Source: Indian Express, December 16, 2009



NEPAL: Widows Break Tradition - Wear Red

By Mallika Aryal

KATHMANDU, Dec 16 (IPS) - Bhagwati Adhikari was a teenager when she was married off to a village boy of the same caste. Just a few years later when she was in her early 20s, she became a widow. Her husband, who worked as a security guard in Kathmandu, was murdered. Adhikari was left alone to support her family.

When Bhagwati got married, she was just starting eighth grade but had to quit school when she moved to her husband's family. Her in-laws would not let her study. When her husband passed away, she had to find a way to support herself, so Adhikari looked for jobs but soon realised she had no skills.

She also understood that with her husband's death the way society viewed her had also changed. Hindu customs in Nepal forbids widows from wearing shades of red. "I had to wear only white and it was pretty obvious that I was recently widowed," recalls Adhikari.

"Neighbours and friends stopped talking to me, men made indecent advances, I wasn't allowed to be around during religious ceremonies because widows are considered bad luck - it is not easy to be a widow in Nepal," she says.

She knew she had to fight the battles alone and she couldn't do that without education. She ignored her parents and in-laws' objections, and went back to school in her native Kabhre district,

west of Kathmandu valley. Adhikari flourished in high-school and as soon as she finished she found a job with Women for Human Rights, an organisation that works with widows to empower and fight for their rights.

Widow's Voice

"My story is not very different from the ones you have already heard," says Lily Thapa, founder of Women for Human Rights. She sits surrounded by other widows who work with her at WHR as each tell their story of struggle.

Thapa's husband, a doctor in a peacekeeping mission in Iraq during the Gulf War, died of a heart attack. Widowed at 32 with small children, Thapa found herself suddenly alone. "I really had no support, no one to even talk," she recalls.

Desperate to talk about the pain inside her, in 1994 she got together with other widows in the neighbourhood and started a support group, which would later become WHR. "We would meet, talk and then cry, sometimes for hours," says Thapa.

A few years later she got the opportunity to go to the U.K. for training, and Thapa says it exposed her to the world of different possibilities. She came back and made WHR more active - she started providing skills training to widows, and started credit and saving schemes for those who wanted to start small businesses. In early 2000,

the Red Campaign was launched where widows in Nepal's villages were encouraged to wear red. She says, "Why should a widow wear white for the rest of her life -making her vulnerable to ostracism, violence and sexual advances from men."

The campaign spread from one village to another. "We had a case of an 80-year-old father-in-law coming out in public, in front of the entire village, to give a red shawl to his widowed daughter-in-law." What started out in a small room in Thapa's neighbourhood has expanded to 52 of the 75 districts in Nepal with 225 groups and 44,000 members. WHR is also the secretariat of the South Asian Network for Widows Empowerment in Development, which is a network of organisations working with widows in South Asian countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. WHR has also recently established an international chapter in Australia.

Thapa is looking to establish training centres in all five development regions of Nepal in the next two years so rural widows don't have to come to Kathmandu if they need help. WHR is also in the process of putting up a bigger hospice in Kathmandu and other areas where widows, especially those rejected by their families, can feel safe.

Thapa and other rights activists are also pushing the government to include data on Nepali widows in the 2011 census.

Says Thapa, "What needs relentless work is the one we have to do in our society - break the barriers so that widows can come out and live freely - this will take time to change, but I have nowhere to go, no other battle to fight, I am in this until the end."

The job, and her meeting with other widows who were now trying to rebuild their lives, empowered her to move to Kathmandu and live by herself. She defied her parents, in-laws and conservative Hindu customs and stopped wearing white. All she wanted was to live a respectful life and plan for a better future for her children. She expected nothing from the state or the society.

In the recent Nepali budget, the government announced its plan to provide 50,000 rupees (666 dollars) to the couple when a man marries a widow.

Widows like Adhikari are humiliated; organisations who have been working with single

women are shocked and women rights activists are outraged.

"We have worked so hard to end discrimination against widows, and have had small successes," says Lily Thapa, founder and president of WHR, "but when the government makes a decision like this, it takes us many steps back and proves how insensitive policymakers can be."

For many years WHR has been pushing the government to provide pension to all Nepali widows.

Rekha Subedi, 31, was widowed when her husband was killed during the 'People's War' by the Maoists. Subedi is outraged, "Now I feel like there's a price attached to me, how can the government think this step will empower widows like us?" she asks.

Representatives of rights groups say that this latest decision puts pressure on widows to marry. "Marriage is a deeply personal decision, it is a choice an individual makes. Why is the government interfering by allocating money for remarriage?" asks Thapa. Activists lobbying for the elimination of the dowry system fear that attaching monetary value to marriage may propagate a different kind of dowry system.

"Policymakers seem to think that the women can only feel secure if she is married to a man - this is downright humiliating for us widows who have been living alone and supporting our families," says Nisha Swar whose husband was abducted and later killed by the Maoists in 2002.

Advocate Kabita Pandey of the human rights group Pro Public says that the government's decision will create dependency of widows on men and will make them more vulnerable to violence. According to WHR, the number of widows with children is far more than those without. A decision like this not only makes the women but also their children vulnerable to abuse and sexual violence.

"This is a country where fathers, brothers and close family members sell their sister, daughter, wife, to traffickers because of poverty - we have had cases of women being trafficked for less than 100 dollars. Traffickers can easily marry widows, collect their 666 dollars and sell the women off for more money," says Pandey.

The government has no figures on the number of widows in the country. WHR has 44,000 members in 225 villages of Nepal - its work area.

But there is no data on how many widows there are in the remaining 3,688 villages.

WHR, which has filed a writ against the government, prime minister, minister and ministry of finance in October, is now in consultation with Nepal's planning commission, ministry of finance and other ministries and activists say that the meetings so far have been positive.

"We are working so that the provisions are removed from the budget altogether, that's what the widows want," says Thapa. Women's rights activist say that if the government tries to push through with the decision they will intensify their pressure and protest from the streets.

"This issue is not going to go by pushing it under the rug, we are united, and we'll fight until this humiliating policy goes away," says Swar. (END/2009)



Restorative justice

Laxman Tharu, Gopal Dahit & Shakun Sherchand Leslie

The constitution drafters should understand that Nepal is a sum total of its castes and ethnic groups

Agradhikar literally translates as "pro-original rights" and prescribes not "preferential rights" but "restorative justice" for citizens who have been oppressed and subjugated with forced nationalism causing the destruction of the original practices of communities and leading to discriminatory and unlawful human rights practices. Agradhikar as restorative justice has been the touch word in the language radar of the Adivasi Janajati expression of self-determination. Agradhikar can be defined as reclaiming the inheritance of wasted social, symbolic, cultural and economic values.

The Adivasi Janajatis are evaluating through dialogue and expressing by story-telling their experiences of discrimination, marginalisation and exploitation and how they can be partners in the state building process as equal citizens. They reminisce about the sequential and structural discrimination of Adivasi Janajatis, Dalits and other marginalised groups demanding social, political, economic and educational opportunities. Such rights as these marginalised identities have been demanding are specified in the declaration of UNDRIP, ILO Convention 169, CERD and CBD Convention 1992.

Exclusion and humiliation

Some may like to believe that agradhikar interpreted as 'extra-preferential rights' demanded by the Adivasi Janajatis will lead to 'reverse discrimination' and thereby attends to the fear of Brahminbadis. The Adivasi Janajatis, Dalits, Madhesis and other marginalised groups find the relevance of their demand for restorative justice in the same way that Indian constitutionalist Dr. Ambedkar was for applying necessary unequal rights to bring society to a conclusive equilibrium. Preferential rights are not bonus rights but justified and reasonable compensations to right the historical wrongs perpetuated through defining and classifying of the citizenry according to a dominant caste's prerogative.

As Galileo was right to question the church and the state which held that the earth was flat, the Adivasi Janajatis have a right to question their enforced inclusion as discriminatory and unjustified.

Conquest and subjugation

The origin of Nepali state nationalism is the enforced aggregation of Brahmin discipline and methodology. Before the conquest of the 22 and 24 fiefdoms and principalities, Prithvi Narayan Shah was a warrior king of the Gorkha, whose divinity was protected by his Magar priests. But he sanctified Brahmins as the priests who could dictate his spiritual life and

anesthetise him about the plight of his people and place. From 1768, the Brahmins who had been vested with priesthood fast levitated to advisors, gathered momentum as administrators and established their rule under the garb of kingship and democracy. Their monopoly to translate the Hindu religious texts helped them establish their hegemony over the king and citizens. They gave technical accounts in ornamental language and established authority by exposing themselves to hypothetical peer review and judgment. This was all new to the Adivasi Janajatis, for whom identity was equivalent to oxygen to keep an individual in a community spiritually active.

The principle of unification had been conquest (adhikaran) through brute force (in 1768), followed by manipulation of a series of subjugating laws codified supposedly to build a nation-state. The nationalities of the territories did not come together as the EU or Indian states built on consensus. The Nepali nation-state was a borrowed knowledge of British colonialism with unfettered access to laws, implementation and resources. If the Newars were conquered by brute force during Indra Jatra, Limbuwan was subjugated by manipulation as they enjoyed the kipat system (autonomous land) of land holding till King Mahendra's regime.

Deciphering language

In the anatomy of language, the literal expression always identifies conventional explanations that have limited factual basis and confirm the pre-established set of rules. It denies a new basis of establishing cause and effect. Hazoor, a Mughal derivative of poetic eloquence, when applied in Nepali caste-ism, becomes a crude expression of extracting respect through domination. Thus language might literally mean one thing, but taken in a different context, it can completely lose its original meaning. Agradhikar for the Adivasi Janajatis means pro-original rights for the protection of their culture, territory and natural resources. It is also their right to sustainable development, which at the present, is being denied by the centralized state.

We do not see the current struggles as a failure of nationalism, but as a sign of ethnic groups reasserting themselves in the national context. When the Muslims in Britain who make

up 13 percent of the population want their representation guaranteed in the British Parliament, they are not demanding for a Muslim Britain. Likewise, if it was J.F. Kennedy who had given the "I have a dream" speech instead of M.L. King, it would not have morphed the black issue into a civil rights movement which today has established President Obama as the rightful president of the US by the Dedilomeni Principle. Thus it is important that the media, while airing the views on social inclusion and inclusive democracy by the Brahmins, also give the same space to Janajatis. But that is not the case.

Brahmin leaders like Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhav Kumar Nepal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal thus talk about solutions to the Janajati issues, not because they would like to solve them, but because they want to misuse them for their vested interests, much like how they settled on the double ballot system to confuse the uneducated majority.

Constitutional conclusion

If Nepali Congress, the CPN-UML and the UCPN (Maoist) deny people the right to self-determination, impose ethnicity-based federalism by cunning and refuse to activate fully proportional representation at all levels of Nepali public life, it is likely to derail the peace process. Why are the Brahmin legislators and those executing governance resisting equitable sharing? Are the marginalised identities any less capable?

To look at the Adivasi Janajati issues with facts and figures and in relationship to all the castes is to bring balance to the national polity. No leader ever invested in the nationalism of Nepal. All past leaders concentrated more on gathering power rather than on empowering the people. We sang Shri Man Gambhira Nepali till our throats were sore, and see where we are today. Can't we even recognise our own failings?

Establishing democracy in Nepal is liberating Nepalis from the physical conquest of one-caste rule (akikaran) and psychological subjugation (adhikaran) of the laws of Manu. If those who draft the constitution once again fail to understand that Nepal constitutes the sum total of its castes and ethnic groups and there is plenty of space for national consolidation, we will end up with sand in our mouths.

To be able to discuss matters of such deep

consequences, which have a direct bearing on our history and nationalism with sincerity, respect and concern is to appreciate the concerns of all people. Without aggregating the political, social, educational, cultural and economic pro-original rights of all the marginalised communities in the drafting of the constitution, the territorial expression of identities will only intensify.

Heralding Federal Democratic Republic of

Nepal poses harsh challenges in terms of legislating as well as executing decisions. Restructuring the federal state and system cannot alone empower the Adivasi Janajatis, Dalits and other marginalised communities and boost the nation-building process. For that, it is imperative to address the provisions of agradhikar in the new constitution.

Source: *The Kathmandu Post*, January 31, 2010.



Climate: Nepal is a victim

(Felicity Carus)

Himalayan mountaineers were at sea-level in Copenhagen on Friday to bring the dire effects of climate change in Nepal to the world's attention at the U.N. climate summit.

Nepali ministers, who earlier this month held a Cabinet in the shadow of Everest at 5,252m, joined the Sherpas including Apa Sherpa who has climbed the world's highest mountain a record-breaking 19 times, and the WWF climate ambassador Dawa Steven Sherpa.

The march through the streets of Copenhagen was organised to coincide with International Mountain Day and a side event at the Bella Centre conference hall looking at the potential problems and solutions to glacial melt in the Himalayas, including changing crop patterns and innovative pest control. Some 1.3 billion people in Asia depend on water from glaciers in the Himalayas and as temperatures rise the supply of water could be seriously threatened.

In an interview with the Guardian en route to Copenhagen, Dawa Steven Sherpa said that he had seen great changes in Nepal.

"Nepal is one of the earliest victims of climate change and whatever is going to happen in the rest of the world is already happening in Nepal, for example forest fires, droughts,

floods. They are all happening in Nepal already and this because of Nepal's extreme geographical circumstances. The average temperature rise in Nepal is twice that of the global average so we're already seeing everything that is going to happen in the world. But Nepal has a carbon emission contribution of 0.02% which is practically nothing. We are not to blame, yet we are the first victims," he said.

Glaciers have started to melt more rapidly in recent years, he said, which has made climbing more dangerous and threatened his own village, Khumjung, with the icy waters gathering at the base of the rapidly melting Imja glacier.

"The Imja lake is one of the most talked about at the moment. It is the fastest receding glaciers in the Himalayas. Some studies show it is receding by up to 74 metres a year and it is directly upstream from the homeland of the Sherpas, the Khumbu, if that glacial lake bursts and comes down, it's going to wash out everything in its path. It's said to be about 1.6km in length, and 92 metres at its deepest point. So that's a lot of water. And when it comes down it's going to wash away everything."

He said was travelling to Copenhagen to call on world leaders to commit to a strong deal. "The west should come in and help us with

our problems. Not because it's charity or aid, but because it's justice," he said.

Source: The Hindu, 12th December, 2009



Nepal formally assumes the Chair of the LDC Group ! Nepal to lead least developed countries (LDCs) group

Tuesday, 15 December 2009 12:11

The chair of the 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Group within United Nations System in Geneva, Switzerland, was formally transferred to Nepal on Monday amidst a ceremony organized by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Pursuant to the decision taken at the Ministerial level in New York in September, Ambassador/ Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations and Other International Organizations Dinesh Bhattarai formally took charge of the chair of the group from Ambassador/Permanent Representative of Bangladesh Abdul Hannan in Geneva.

Geneva is the headquarters of several UN Agencies including United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Labour Organisation (ILO), World Health Organisation (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and other important multilateral agencies such as World Trade Organisation (WTO). Geneva is also the seat of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Speaking on the occasion, Ambassador Dr Bhattarai said that as the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) were the weakest and poorest members of the international community, they need to work in close coordination and cooperation in collectively advocating and advancing the LDCs agenda and projecting common positions in international forums.

He also underlined the need for enhanced level of support for LDCs for capacity building, institution building, and productive capacity enhancement in the context of the ongoing economic and financial crises and shocks of

climate change that have hit them hard and compounded their vulnerabilities. He assured the group that Nepal in its capacity as the chair will work proactively in all meetings and conferences in close coordination and cooperation with fellow LDCs to advance common agenda, project common positions, and push for the early implementation of the commitments made.

Ambassador Bhattarai underlined the need for a thorough preparation for the successful conclusion of the 4th UN LDCs Conference to be held in Turkey in 2011. He sought the active engagement of the UN agencies in the preparation, development partners and all stakeholders in the process, including the G 77 and China to advance the cause of LDCs.

He also informed the LDCs ambassadors and UN officials present on the occasion about the initiatives Nepal has taken to highlight the disproportionate impact of climate change on the LDCs. He said that whether it is the melting of Himalayan glaciers or rising of sea levels, shrinking forests, droughts or flash floods, climate change is adversely impacting on human life, social and economic development, biodiversity, and tourism development.

He also drew the attention of the group to the cabinet meeting held on December 4, 2009 at an altitude of 5,542 meters above the sea level at the Mount Everest Base Camp, and the release of the 10 point Mount Everest Declaration by the Prime Minister of Nepal to draw the adverse impact of climate change in the Himalayan region. Some 1.3 billion people in Asia depend on water from glaciers in the Himalayas.

Pakistan

80% Pakistanis fear stepping out of their homes

Islamabad, Dec. 9: Eighty per cent of Pakistanis fear stepping out of their homes or visit public places like markets and hotels, according to findings of a poll released on Wednesday.

Asked to what extent the increasing security threat had affected their visits to places such as markets and hotels, 36 per cent said recent incidents of terrorism had affected them “a lot” while 44 per cent said they had been affected “somewhat.”

Nineteen per cent said the terrorist incidents had not affected their visits to markets, hotels or other places while remaining one per cent gave no response.

The survey was carried out by Gallup Pakistan for Gilani Research Foundation.

While the daily hustle and bustle in Pakistani neighborhoods continues as feeling of insecurity at a perceptual level, the survey said. The findings of the survey revealed no significant difference in opinion of people from across various demographics except that incidents of terrorism

seemed to have affected movements of rural dwellers the most.

Eighty-three per cent of people in rural areas said they had been affected to a great extent or somewhat by incidents of terrorism, compared to 75 per cent of urbanites. The survey covered nearly 3,000 men and women in rural and urban areas of all four provinces of Pakistan during November.

Cities across Pakistan have been hit by a deadly wave of bombings and suicide attacks since the Army launched an operation against the Taliban in South Waziristan in October. Most of the attacks have targeted security forces. A suicide attack on an office of the Inter-Services Intelligence agency in Multan on Tuesday killed a dozen people while 54 people died when two suicide bombers struck a crowded market in Lahore on Monday. Militants have also targeted the Army’s fortified General Headquarters and a mosque frequented by military personnel in Rawalpindi, ISI offices in Peshawar and Multan and police stations across the northwest.

Source: Asian Age, 10th December 2009



Pak youth place faith in religion

(Sabrina Tavernise)

Pakistan — Pakistan will face a “demographic disaster” if it does not address the needs of its young generation, the largest in the country’s history, whose views reflect a deep disillusionment with government and democracy, according to a report released here on Saturday.

The [report](#), commissioned by the British Council and conducted by the Nielsen research company, drew a picture of a deeply frustrated young generation that feels abandoned by its government and despondent about its future.

An overwhelming majority of young Pakistanis say their country is headed in the wrong direction, the report said, and only 1 in 10 has confidence in the government. Most see themselves as Muslim first and Pakistani second, and they are now entering a work force in which the lion’s share cannot find jobs, a potentially volatile situation if the government cannot address its concerns.

“This is a real wake-up call for the international community,” said David Steven, a fellow at the Center for International Cooperation at [New York](#)

[University](#), who was an adviser on the report. “You could get rapid social and economic change. But the other route will lead to a nightmare that would unfold over 20 to 30 years.”

The report provides an unsettling portrait of a difficult time for Pakistan, a 62-year-old nuclear-armed country that is fighting an insurgency in its western mountains and struggling to provide for its rapidly expanding population. The population has risen by almost half in just 20 years, a pace that is double the world average, according to the report.

The despair among the young generation is rooted in the condition of their lives, the report found. Only a fifth of those interviewed had permanent full-time jobs. Half said they did not have sufficient skills to enter the workplace. And one in four could not read or write, a legacy of the country’s abysmal public education system, in which less than 40 percent of children are enrolled in school, far below the South Asian average of 58 percent.

While most do not trust their government, they attach their loyalty to religion. Three-quarters identified themselves primarily as Muslim, with just one in seven identifying themselves as Pakistani.

The demographic power of this generation represents a turning point for Pakistan. Its energy, if properly harnessed, could power an economic rise, as was the case in many East Asian countries in the 1990s, Mr. Steven said in a telephone interview.

But if the opportunity is squandered by insufficient investment in areas like education and health care, the country will face a demographic disaster, the report said. To avoid that, the authors of the report calculated that Pakistan’s economy would need to grow by 36 million jobs in the next decade — about a quarter the size of the United States economy — an enormous challenge in an economy that is growing by about a million jobs a year.

Pakistan has a long way to go. The study interviewed 1,226 Pakistanis ages 18 to 29, from different backgrounds across the country, in March and April. More than 70 percent said they were worse off financially than they were last year. This year’s budget earmarks just 2 percent

of the economy for education, about half the percentage spent in India and Turkey. Life in rural areas is rudimentary. The report cites data showing that 40 percent of households have no electricity, and that animal dung and leftover waste from crops account for more than 80 percent of the country’s energy use.

Young people’s biggest concern — far above terrorism — was inflation, which rose to 23 percent in 2009, pushing 7 percent of Pakistanis back into poverty, the report said. More than 90 percent agreed better quality education was a priority.

There were bright spots. The young people were civic-minded, with a third saying the purpose of education was to create good citizens. They were also more interested in collective action and volunteer activities than their parents. But they were deeply disillusioned with politics, which they saw as corrupt and based on a system in which personal connections mattered more than merit. That sentiment is borne out by the global competitiveness index of 133 countries produced by the [World Economic Forum](#), which in 2009 put Pakistan in slot 101, two notches below Nigeria. “Here a student struggles day and night but the son of a rich man by giving money gets higher marks than him,” the report quoted a young man in Lahore as saying.

That led to one of the report’s most surprising findings: Only a third of those polled thought democracy was the best system for Pakistan, equal to the fraction preferring Islamic law, in what David Martin, director of the British Council in Pakistan, called “an indictment of the failures of democracy over many years.”

Only 1 in 10 said they were “very interested” in political events in Pakistan, while more than a third said they were not interested at all. The highest-ranking institution was Pakistan’s military. Sixty percent of those interviewed said that they trusted it. Second highest was religious educational institutions, trusted by about 50 percent of respondents. The national government came last at 10 percent.

If the government has failed to channel the energy of Pakistan’s youth, militant groups have succeeded, drawing educated and uneducated young people with slogans of jihad and, in some cases, of social justice.

The findings were sobering for Pakistani officials. Faisal Subzwari, minister of youth affairs for Sindh Province, who attended the presentation of the report in Lahore, said: "These are the facts. They might be cruel, but we have to admit them." But young Pakistanis have demonstrated their appetite for collective action, with thousands of

people taking to the streets last spring as part of a movement of lawyers, who were demanding the reinstatement of the chief justice, and Mr. Steven argued that the country's future would depend on how that energy was channeled. "Can Pakistan harness this energy, or will it continue to fight against it?" he said.

Source: Times of India, 23rd November, 2009



Ethno-nationalism in Pakistan: beyond economics and politics

Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

Hollow slogans don't cut it

Ethno-nationalism in Pakistan extends beyond simply a modernist urge to secure economic and political resources

by Aasim Sajjad Akhtar

One year ago, the son of long-time Baloch radical Nawab Khair Bakhsh Marri, Nawabzada Balach Marri, was finally hunted down by Pakistani security forces and killed, somewhere in eastern Afghanistan. It was alleged that Balach Marri was leading the insurgency that has gripped Balochistan for the past four years. Balach's demise was hailed as a major success for the Pakistani state, while Balochistan mourned the loss of yet another of its sons.

On the first anniversary of his death, the entire province of Balochistan shut down. In late August, on the second anniversary of Nawab Akbar Bugti's murder, protests were even more charged. Many Pakistanis — and particularly Punjabis — who have been brought up believing that Baloch nationalists, and Sindhis, Pakhtuns, Seraikis, etc for that matter, are funded by the Indian intelligence and are committed to undermining the integrity of the Pakistani state, saw the 'disorder' caused by the protestors as yet more evidence of the insidious designs of the ethno-nationalists.

It is not surprising that there would be such a gulf of understanding between those located in the heartland of power and those in the periphery. But there is, and if this multi-national

state is to graduate from its current state of dysfunction, it is time to recognise this banal truth. When Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, Sindh was wracked by the slogan "Pakistan na khappe" and President Zardari has now made himself almost synonymous with the response "Pakistan khappe". But nobody is fooled.

It is no longer possible for our political leadership to convince those who have since long given up hope that Pakistan can mean anything more than cultural, political and economic imperialism of the most perverse kind by employing hollow slogans like "Pakistan khappe". The fact of the matter is that there is an urgent need to redefine Pakistan, and then apply this redefinition to the real economic and political structures that exist here.

For a long time it was believed that the key to tempering the radicalism of ethno-nationalist dissenters was to co-opt them into power. The argument was that so long as a significant enough segment of the educated and hereditary elite of Sindh, Balochistan and the NWFP were given positions within the administrative institutions of the state, quotas in educational institutions and some autonomy over resource use, the fire of ethno-nationalism was extinguishable. To a certain extent, the hypothesis was borne out in the case of the Pakhtuns.

Of course, the state policy was always applied selectively. Before 1971, when Bengalis were a demographic majority, quotas and resource allocation on the basis of population were an

anathema to the powers-that-be. In the truncated state, ideologues of the state make it a point to note that Punjab is the majority province and, therefore, it is perfectly reasonable that Punjabis enjoy as large a share of resources and jobs as they do.

As it turned out, the Bengalis decided enough was enough, though the state machinery made sure that most Pakistanis continue to look at the secession of East Pakistan as the grandest of Indian conspiracies. The co-option hypothesis remained popular, however, and with the coming to power of the ethno-nationalist National Awami Party (NAP) in the NWFP and Balochistan in January 1972, there was renewed hope that Pakistan's identity crisis could be resolved. The consensus constitution that the first elected parliament put together in 1973 increased the optimism.

But then Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's populism took a nasty turn; the NAP governments were dissolved and a four-year military operation was launched in Balochistan. And it has been pretty much downhill ever since. With the start of yet another military operation in late 2004, things have spiralled further; and even if an almighty exercise in co-option was attempted now, it is quite possible that things do not improve.

What I want to suggest is that offering jobs and educational quotas to Balochs, Sindhis, Pakhtuns, Seraikis and others is necessary, but not sufficient to deal with the identity crisis that Pakistan currently faces; something much more substantial is necessary. A short digression into academic garb might help make my point clearer.

Scholars of nationalism have long distinguished between two major explanations for nationalist upsurges. The modernist view implies that nationalism is a function of material interests, and that people come together as 'imagined communities' to secure these material interests. On the other hand are the perennialists who insist that nationalism is rooted in some long-shared conception of shared identity that transcends short-term material changes. Language, shared territory, customs, etc are some among many

markers of this shared identity.

In short, I want to suggest that ethno-nationalism in Pakistan extends beyond simply a modernist urge to secure economic and political resources. It is about something much bigger than this; it is high time to recognise that Sindhis, Balochs, Pakhtuns, Seraikis, etc have a distinct culture that cannot simply be subsumed into some mythical notion of 'Pakistaniat', whatever that may mean.

Among other things, it is simply ahistorical to conceive that we should all be 'Pakistanis' and not 'Sindhis', 'Balochs', 'Pakhtuns' or even 'Punjabis'. After all, Pakistan is only 62 years old and the nations that constitute it have existed for centuries, and arguably even millennia. The problem is that 'Pakistaniat', as conceived by those who fashioned it, has been exclusive and threatened by 'Sindhi', 'Baloch' and 'Pakhtun' cultures; accordingly, the former has tried to suppress the latter on the pretext that Islam and Urdu should be enough to keep us united.

1971 should have been enough proof that this artificial notion of 'Pakistaniat' was not enough to keep us together, but unfortunately we did not learn our lessons. Perhaps our ruling class has understood how tenuous the official representation of culture has been all along and has, therefore, kept the 'Indian threat' alive and well within the Punjabi heartland. Sindhis, Balochs, Pakhtuns, Seraikis and, before they left, Bengalis never took this threat seriously anyway, and do not want to do so now either. There is some hope to be found in the fact that things have changed somewhat in Punjab too, but not enough for real change just yet.

And real change is what we need. It should be such a change that the heroes of Balochistan are viewed as heroes not just by Balochs and other oppressed nations, but also by the oppressed classes in the Punjabi heartland. It is, of course, also important that the chauvinism that has crept into the politics of ethno-nationalists is arrested, because both sides of the divide must speak to each other if there is to be a brighter future. There is much to be done and slogans like "Pakistan khappe" do not even touch the tip of the iceberg.

Sunday 23 November 2008,

Poor Pak children are being sold to JIHADIS

Pakistani peace activist Karamat Ali disses terrorism-fomenting mullahs, pseudo-nationalism and ugly politicians
Mohammed Wajihuddin | TNN

Karamat Ali doesn't want more wars between India and Pakistan. And it's not just because he's a committed peacenik. There's also a personal reason.

"My wife, Amrita Chachi, is an Indian and lives in Delhi. If I happen to be in India and a war breaks out, I will be imprisoned," he deadpans, triggering loud laughter in the audience that's gathered at the Mumbai Press Club to hear him speak.

A senior trade unionist and founding member of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy, the Karachi-based Ali was in the city this week to give away prizes to the winners of an essay-writing competition organised by Peace Mumbai and Mumbai University. On the sidelines of the award ceremony and a subsequent seminar on Indo-Pak relations, the fearlessly outspoken activist took potshots at multiple targets, not just in Pakistan but the whole South Asian region: the Taliban, marauding mullahs in cahoots with "the Washingtonbacked Pakistani army" and contemporary rulers who had "colonised" their own masses.

His Marxist ideology and bullin-a-China-shop demeanour colour the 64-year-old's every statement. "I am not a practising Muslim. I do hold a Pakistani passport, but I don't believe in nationalism. Call me a South Asian," he declares, adding, "Over 22% of the world's population lives in South Asia, and 60% of this population is poor. The poor will have to unite and fight." Ali, who's known to maul politicians and babus at debates, has been jailed several times but not deported yet ("Well, they may not like me, but they can't throw me out just because I question them constantly," he reasons). He has a clear definition for them: "Don't call them people's representatives. They are rulers. And rulers have a common interest in keeping subjects hungry and desperate."

Rulers everywhere find sanctuary in a skewed interpretation of religion, is Ali's firm belief. So have the rulers of Pakistan, who misuse Islam

when they are caught in a quandary. Ali remembers the time when Asif Ali Zardari was attacked in the media for breaching the pre-poll pact he had signed with Nawaz Sharif, and had famously and shamelessly shot back: "The terms of the pact are not Quranic that one cannot breach them."

The activist is also uncomfortable with the spirit of Pakistan's Constitution which mandates that it is the inviolable duty of every citizen to be loyal to the state. "Nothing could be more foolish. Why should citizens be loyal to the state? It should be the other way round. It is the duty of the state to protect me, and I am free to be loyal to my conscience," he declares. He also pooh-poohs the ludicrous condition the Constitution lays down for the President's job: 'at least 45 years old, a male and a Muslim'. "They want a male as the President because the army will feel humiliated to salute a woman President," he laughs.

Bring up the topic of terrorism, and Ali gets agitated about the sense of helplessness induced in both the people and the State by suicide bombers who strike suddenly and at targets ranging from marketplaces to army and government headquarters. "A minister recently said that people were selling their children to be trained as suicide bombers at Rs 5 lakh per child," he says. "As the situation worsens and desperation deepens, they'll become available at cheaper rates." This dire prognosis is self-explanatory: the suicide bomber comes not from the Pakistani elite but the dispossessed. Ajmal Kasab, a landless farmer's son and school dropout, went to a big city in search of livelihood but ended up in a jihadi camp. "Why is it that the children of religious leaders are not becoming suicide bombers?" Ali asks rhetorically, going on to denounce fundamentalist mullahs who tell jihadis that they will enjoy divine comforts in jannat even if they get blown up.

But what is Pakistan's civil society doing to check the onslaught of the suicide bombers? "We are not silent spectators. We have protested and are protesting. Soon over 100 activists will march to Peshawar to sympathise with the terror-affected families," Ali says.

And as an antidote to all sorts of terrorism,

including state-sponsored, the veteran activist prescribes cooperation between South Asian countries where hassle-free visas and intelligence-sharing will be part of the practice, not just holy homilies delivered at SAARC summits. Then, in Ali's dream, at present a bit of

a Utopian chimera, a day will come when Ajmal Kasab and his Pakistani masters, including the incendiary Hafiz Saeed, will be tried not in India or Pakistan, but by a South Asian People's Tribunal, in a neutral place. Maybe Kathmandu—no longer capital of the Hindu Himalayan kingdom but of the People's Republic of Nepal.



Sri Lanka

Lankan army bartered food for sex

Tamil women interned after escaping the horrors of the civil war in Sri Lanka were sexually abused by their guards who traded sex for food, a British medic has revealed to "The Observer". British medic Vany Kumar – who was locked up in a refugee camp for months – also claims prisoners were punished by being made to kneel for hours in the hot sun and those suspected of links to the defeated Tamil Tigers were taken away and not seen again.

"It was a concentration camp behind barbed wires, where people were not even allowed to talk, not allowed to go anywhere near the fences. Sexual abuse was a common thing. In the visitor area relatives would be on the other side of the fence and we would be in the camp.

"Girls came to wait for their relatives and military officers would come and touch them, and that's something I saw. The girls usually didn't talk back to them, as they knew that in the camp if they talked anything could happen to them.

"It was quite open, everyone could see the military officers touching the girls. Tamil girls usually don't talk about sexual abuse, they won't open their mouths about it but I heard the officers were giving the women money or food in return for sex. These people were desperate for anything". Kumar said.

"You had to bathe in an open area in front of others, which I found very uneasy. I stayed next to the police station, so every day I had a

bath with the police officers looking at me – men and women. Everyone can see you when you are having a bath. So I would get up early in the morning about 3.30 am, when it was dark," She added.

Kumar, from ESSEX, was released from internment in September, but she has waited until now to reveal the full scale of her ordeal in the hope of avoiding reprisals against friends and family held with her. They have now been released.

Incidentally, Kumar was held in the best-equipped part of the camp, but even there the conditions were dire. "It was not a standard a human being can live in. The basic needs like water and food (were) always a problem. Most of the time you were queuing for water.

"The toilets were terrible, and there was not enough water, so we could not clean them. There were insects and flies everywhere. After two or three days of continuous rain, the sewage was floating on the water and going into the tents and everyone (was) walking through it, up to knee height".

She was finally released into the custody of the British High Commission in early September. The Sri Lankan government has confirmed to the British newspaper that it had received reports from the UN agencies of physical and sexual abuse within the refugee camps but said it had not been possible to substantiate the allegations. Rajiva Wijesinha, the Permanent Secretary to the

Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights, said “there was a lot of sex going on” inside the camps, but he claimed that most reports involved abuse by fellow detainees. “I can’t tell you nothing happened, because I was not there.

Individual aberrations could have happened, but our position is ‘Please tell us and they will be looked into’”, he told the newspaper.

**Source: The Free Press Journal,
December 21, 2009**



Huge fisherfolk mobilization demand release of Indian and Pakistani fishermen

A week- long celebration by Pakistan Fisher folk Forum (PFF) to commemorate World Fisheries day culminated at a huge mobilization in Ibrahim Hyderi. More than 50,000 fisher folk (at least 40% women) gathered at a public meeting in Ibrahim Hyderi, a coastal village in Karachi to commemorate World Fisheries day (21st November).

PFF had announced a week long celebrations throughout country which included 42 events including public meeting, seminars, rallies, press conference, demonstration and finally a huge mobilization. I think PFF deserve appreciation and applause for public mobilization at very difficult times in Pakistan’s history.

Among speakers were key government personalities included Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Speaker provincial assembly of Sindh, Zahid Bhurgari, minister fisheries and Muzafar Ali Shujra, minister for prisons. Senior Pakistan People’s Party leaders Taj Hyder also were among guests.

PFF specially raised the issue of detained fishermen in India and Pakistan and Pakistan government was urged to release all Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails as good will gesture.

Other key demands were:

- A pro fishermen fisheries policy;

- Complete abolition of contract system on fishing through legislation in Sindh Assembly;
- Acceptance of fishermen’s first right on waters;
- Uplift schemes for fishing communities;
- Recognition of fishermen as workers and social protection schemes for them.

Ministers made promises as usual and we have to see when they will be materialized. Taj Hyder promised to bring a bill in Sindh Assembly after Eid to protect rights of fishermen. There was no word on release of fishermen and I don’t know how many years we have to work to convince both the governments that these poor fishermen are caught for no fault of their as there is no demarcation of border and they should be released after simple warning.

A number of families of those Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails participated in the public meeting. An old woman told that her son is in Indian jail for 14 years now. She did not utter more but her gestures spoke a lot of her agony and grief.

Currently, there are more than 600 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails and 300 Pakistanis in Indian jails.



Sri Lanka: 'Covering Up'- Creeping Talibanization?

Cat's Eye

Cat's Eye has noticed an increasing emphasis on a particular form of morality in the guise of a post-war resurgence of society. This is evident on the part of all sectors of society – not only by those in power but religious leaders, key officials in the police force and leaders of educational institutions as well as the media. At times, the rhetoric is transformed into action. Take for example, the continuing censorship of adult-only films (obviously there are some adults/ censors who are more adult than others who have the dubious honor of taking these decisions); images of alcohol consumption, affection and human sexuality in TV programmes; and the archaic prohibition on women purchasing alcohol (Why discriminate? Why not prohibit men too?).

A dress code is also imposed on women, especially in educational institutions. Apparently mothers have to wear sari to enter the premises of their children's schools and mothers who wear even long skirt and blouse are kept out of bounds. Thus the country's 'return to normalcy' after the war is reliant on a discourse of blaming and shaming; advocacy of self-restraint and responsibility; as well as moral authoritarianism in imposing codes of conformity and so called respectability.

Back to the Kitchen

This 'moral' turn, we are told, is towards building a new, post-war Sri Lanka. It has been a common experience of many communities at war that once the armed struggle is over, there is a scramble to return its women, in particular, to traditional roles. The current peace-time emphasis in the south of the country on the morality and respectability of women is not far in spirit from the diktats of the LTTE. In 2002, during the peace process, the LTTE issued a leaflet proclaiming its 'ten commandments' on Tamil women in the East. In the leaflet the LTTE declared that Tamil women should not 'spoil the dignity of Tamil culture' by 'behaving in an anti-Tamil manner'. They were ordered not to wear housecoats when coming out of their houses onto the roads. Married women were asked to wear national dress (presumably sari.) Amongst the 'anti-Tamil' behaviour proscribed was the consumption of alcohol. Women were warned against 'mixing with men on beaches after losing their senses with alcohol and drugs.' The leaflet ended with a veiled threat: 'Freedom of women is in the hands of women, and they should think realistically rather than falling

into the hands of anti-Tamil movements, which indeed will bring an end to their life and community as well.'

At the time (in 2002) Cat's Eye wrote strongly condemning the LTTE for its threatening moral edicts selectively directed at women. Cat's Eye stated that these diktats 'send a critical message to all those who are concerned about the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement with respect for human rights and human dignity.' Cat's Eye demanded that 'All attempts to control dissent and individuality, all attempts to impose rules and regulations that deny people the right to choose, all attempts to once more oppress and discriminate against members of marginalized communities, whether they be women, children, religious or ethnic minorities...must be fought against rigorously.'

Thus in the aftermath of war and political upheaval, diehard traditionalists of all countries use the occasion to whip up cultural frenzy to advocate a return to the past. Local society has always had its share of such old (and young) fogs with their bamunu matha – namely, 'brahmin' or obscurantist patriarchal views as reflected in Sinhala and Tamil proverbs against women ('a woman's brain cannot think beyond the handle of a spoon'). Even our women Ministers often speak of a nisi thana (appropriate place) for women which is not far from Hitler's prescription for women – children, kitchen and church (Kinder, Küche, Kirche). In every era and in every country there has been resistance to such attempts to undercut the political, economic and social gains that women have made over the years.

Defining Tamil Culture

In the past few months, following the end of the armed conflict between the government and the LTTE, concern has been voiced about the 'deterioration' of Tamil culture during the conflict, mainly due to the actions of the LTTE. Most often this 'degradation' of Tamil culture is illustrated by examples of the behavior of women who have acted in ways construed to be contrary to accepted norms. These statements however are not made by members of the Tamil community but by state actors of the majority community. For instance, an official of the Sri Lankan army is quoted as saying that lessons on the traditions and culture of the Tamil community will be part of the curriculum of the rehabilitation process of ex-LTTE cadres. Does this mean that these lessons will represent

Tamil culture and tradition as understood by members of the majority community? What will be incorporated in these lessons? Will it be only Bharatha Natyam, cookery, and veena lessons? Who then has the power to define culture?

Defining Buddhist Culture

A Sinhala newspaper recently carried an interview with a Buddhist monk who, supposedly, was speaking on Buddhist values and material ones. Curiously, the article headline read, 'Even 60 year old women come to temple dressed like sixteen year olds' ('Hata pannath, dahasaye kello vage pansalata enava'). The article further quoted the priest as noting disapprovingly of a new breed of women devotees (upasaka palenthiya) who come to temple with hairstyles (hair piled on top of the head), with painted lips, looking very 'mod'. Not surprisingly, given the current thinking on culture and morality as being the sole responsibility of women, there is no mention of a dress code for men, in fact, no mention of men at all. It seems that whether it is in the field of religion, politics or education, women's dress and personal relationships take centre stage for vilification. Take the sexual nature of the debates and circulating internet images around the recent entry of a young actress into the political field in the South in order to denigrate her. They point to a society reluctant to acknowledge women as persons who can engage with any section of society in their own right, and permit only women who conform to the notion of the respectable 'Sinhala kula kanthava' as fit to be in positions of responsibility and the public realm.

Covering Up

While the moral rhetoric about discipline and respectability which women are singled out to embody

has risen to a high pitch, the reality is that in every sphere violence, authoritarianism and sexism are condoned. The recent comments of a senior government Minister who observed that there are now laws that restrain men especially with regard to domestic violence is a case in point. The politician told/ comforted the men around him by saying, 'you can hit your wife, but don't hit to hurt'. The inter/ intra political violence by candidates at elections – the nasty 'boy's fights' in the south in which the offices of political opponents have been smashed and looted – is another example. So far, we have not heard public condemnation of this sort of behaviour from political, religious or educational leaders.

In a country where the rule of law is under stress, where violence, corruption, crime and sexual harassment of women appears to be at an all-time-high, focusing on women's dress and behaviour is absurd and hypocritical. So what is the real function of this moral address to women? Is it a literal and metaphorical cover-up of what is actually happening in society? If we want to build a true democracy in the aftermath of war, public officials, community and religious leaders as well we citizens should be focusing on what is really wrong with our society. The denial of freedom of speech/ expression – of which access to art, film, forms of dress are a part – goes against the basis of any democratic society. Intolerance of any kind, abuse of the rule of law, use of violence and corruption to get ahead, and archaic attitudes to women must be highlighted and condemned. Should women lose the civil and political rights that acknowledge their capabilities as professionals/workers (won through hard struggle) to some outmoded medieval attitudes? Are we on the road to cultural Talibanization?



Rajapaksa brother ordered to kill even surrendering

LTTE leaders: Fonseka

(T V Sriram)

Sri Lankan forces eliminated surrendering Tamil Tiger leaders on the orders of Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa who had instructed that "all LTTE leaders must be killed", former army chief Gen Sarath Fonseka has claimed, prompting the government to describe it as a "great betrayal".

In an explosive interview to Lankan daily The Sunday Leader, Gen Fonseka, opposition presidential candidate, said no information was communicated to him in the final days of the war that three key LTTE leaders – Nadesan, Pulidevan and Ramesh – had opted to surrender. Fonseka said that communications were instead confined

to the LTTE leaders, Norway, various foreign parties, Basil Rajapaksa, MP and the powerful senior adviser to the President, and such information was never conveyed to him as he supervised the final stages of the war.

“Later, I learnt that Basil had conveyed this information to Defence Secretary Gothabaya Rajapaksa who in turn spoke with Brigadier Shavendra Silva, Commander of the Army’s 58th Division, giving orders not to accommodate any LTTE leaders attempting surrender and that ‘they must all be killed’,” he said.

Both Gothabaya and Basil are brothers of President Mahinda Rajapaksa, against whom Fonseka will be fighting the polls next year. Fonseka’s remark drew sharp reaction from the government. Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe, who addressed an urgently called media briefing on Sunday, said Fonseka owes an explanation on his charges as it would tantamount to speaking against the Army which had a clean record.

Samarasinghe, who along with two other ministers attended the media briefing, said this contradicted Fonseka’s own statement on July 10 where, among other things, he said he was being restrained from taking action against the LTTE.

Fonseka, who resigned last month accusing the government of sidelining him, said it was

President’s adviser Basil Rajapaksa together with Gothabaya Rajapaksa who through foreign intermediaries conveyed a message to the LTTE leaders who wished to surrender to walk out carrying a piece of white cloth. “It was their idea,” he said, adding between midnight on May 17 and the early hours of the next morning, the three men and their family members were shot dead.

The government later claimed that troops found bodies of three key LTTE leaders identified as Balasingham Nadesan, the rebels’ political head, Seevaratnam Pulidevan, head of the peace secretariat, and senior commander Ramesh during the mop-up operations on the morning of May 18, the paper said.

Presidential Adviser Basil refuted the charge. “The Norwegians never got in touch with me over this particular incident. I have been in touch with the Norwegians over various issues pertaining to the conflict but never once on this particular issue.”

When asked whether the government would consider taking legal action against Fonseka, Information Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said, “We cannot answer that question. We will have to study the legal aspects and consult the legal books.”

Source: The Indian Express, 14th December, 2009



State Power, State Patronage and Election in Sri Lanka

Ahilan Kadirgamar

Elections in Sri Lanka have always been moments of dynamism. Incumbent regimes are shaken if not thrown out and new, unlikely political coalitions emerge; politicians cash in on their patronage networks and the people voice their opposition and dissent. Despite the limitations of electoral democracy, national elections in Sri Lanka – a country which has never had a successful military coup – provide a moment for the political expression of the masses. The upcoming presidential elections are no different, as the Mahinda Rajapaksa regime’s fear of the candidacy of general Sarath Fonseka indicates. But it is also important to note that the election dynamic more than another form of pressure, international or

local, has led to major changes over the last month. The 3,00,000 interned internally displaced persons (IDP) have finally been given freedom of movement, curfew in Jaffna has been lifted after years, the A9 road to Jaffna has been opened for civilian traffic and the press is writing critically about the government. The opening of political space which would have been welcome soon after the end of the war has now arrived as a consequence of the election dynamic and the current political conjuncture.

Poverty of Analyses

Before addressing the implications of the upcoming elections and the current political moment, one

must first address why so many local and international political analyses have failed to grasp the current conjuncture as an iteration of the more general theme of post-war political possibility. Some went so far as to claim that the Sinhala people had accepted president Rajapaksa as king and his heirs as a new family dynasty. Such analyses typically exhibit contempt for subaltern classes and, with their fixation on the personal duel between the president and the general, fall some way short of even attempting to understand the current conjuncture. This, in turn, reflects the qualitative deterioration of journalism, political analysis and research, a trend that has paralleled the period of the war and its long cycles of authoritarianism and militarisation as well as the decades of donor-funded western-oriented research and scholarship. Intellectual work on state and society has lost the political edge of the 1970s and 1980s, and superficial election analyses and debates instance this incapacity, in their failure to foresee the opening of political space and analyse its implications. Contemporary liberal political commentaries lack a sense of historical context and rarely extend beyond a rudimentary theorisation of state and crisis, and are geared instead towards the immediate end of mobilising the "international community" with repeated and a historical invocations of human rights crises requiring intervention.

To take a cue from historical scholarship, Newton Gunasinghe, one of Sri Lanka's finest social scientists, wrote in the 1980s about the legacy of Prime Minister S W R D Bandaranaike's emergence on the platform of "Sinhala only". That essay titled "A Sociological Comment on the Political Transformations in Sri Lanka in 1956 and the Resultant Socio-Political Processes" continues to be of relevance today.

In a social structure which generates an ideology that religion does not relate to one's personal beliefs but to one's family antecedents, this article benefited from discussions with Thushara Hewage and B Skanthakumar. Ahilan Kadirgamar (ahilan.kadirgamar@gmail.com) is an activist with the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum and is based in New York, USA. State Power, State Patronage and Elections in Sri Lanka Ahilan Kadirgamarmain strength. The urban literati should not grudge it, because who is to lead and guide the movement, what form that movement would take is to be decided by the sons of the soil themselves, and not by those who keep a safe distance from it. Many of us still do not know who to look forward to for

guidance and leadership but what many of us do feel is that how we live today is far removed from how we ought to live, that the present system has already outlived its utility, has been failing to deliver and that some fundamental change is necessary in the interests of the majority of the people. Is Lalgargh showing the way? It is high time that we raise our collective voice against this unjust war waged by the central and state governments against our own people, demand complete demobilisation of the paramilitary forces and reallocation of resources from the means of destruction to the tasks of creating a new society fit for human living. Commentary January 9, 2010 vol xlv no 2 EPW Economic & Political Weekly 22 SWRD's move to become a Buddhist and what is more, his vocal advocacy of Sinhala-Buddhist interests, testifies to his ability of political man oeuvre. SWRD, through these able political tactics, was able to establish his personal hegemony, distancing himself away from his extended family group, while going against the old-established bourgeois strata, simultaneously cultivating solid political relations with newly emergent bourgeois and petty bourgeois strata emanating from diverse social backgrounds. But his ideology of populist Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, while creating the social base for his assumption of power, also alienated the Tamils in the northern, eastern and central provinces. ...this laid the political foundations for the terrible ethnic conflict, destabilisation and violence which we are obliged to undergo today.

Gunasinghe through such writings was central to the revival of Marxist scholarship that debated such matters as the distinction between state and regime, as well as theories of intermediate regimes – that is regimes that capture state power with the support of intermediate classes where a bourgeoisie is weak. With the end of the war, the Rajapaksa regime, 50 years after Bandaranaike, is attempting to further consolidate itself around Sinhala Buddhist nationalism but with complete reliance on the Rajapaksa family and its local affiliates. One is reminded of Marx's opening in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*: "Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce." While neither Sri Lanka's leaders nor its events can be put in the realm of "great" or "world-historic", the historical repetition of tragedy and farce seem equally applicable to the mediocre and the parochial. Indeed the analysis of Bonapartism that Marx initiated might also be of relevance at

the current conjuncture, dealing as it does with the possibilities for a military role in governance with class rule on shaky ground.

Competing Strands

Here, one must be aware of the complexity of the political articulation of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, which cannot be reduced to a monolith, but has had competing strands and competing bases. The protracted mobilisation by nationalist forces – both Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and Tamil nationalism – have exposed their hollowness, evident from the unerring ability to perform volte-face when challenged by power and atonement. This is evident from Fonseka's embrace of the United National Party (UNP) whom he abhorred during the years of war, while on the Tamil side, Vinayaga moorthy Muralitharan aka "Colonel Karuna", previously the battled hardened hero of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and is now the eastern henchman for the Rajapaksa regime. The Rajapaksa regime's great strength was the war coalition it assembled soon after the last presidential election, constituted on a political basis of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism of the most virulent kind and massive scale of militarisation. In fact, both general Fonseka and defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa went the extra mile, spewing out anti-minority statements during the war, politicising the military in an unprecedented manner. In the postwar months, the Rajapaksa regime attempted to perpetuate its politics of war to entrench its oligarchic ambitions. The nakedness of the oligarchic farce fragmented and split the war coalition, culminating in the alienation of Fonseka. However, the unraveling of the war coalition in the context of the upcoming election is pregnant with dangers; different configurations of consolidation for Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and the military may work to further extend militarisation and authoritarian populism. The race between different groupings of Sinhala chauvinists could be a race to the bottom from the point of view of minorities and democratisation.

With the war coalition split and the war victory becoming less important in the elections, the two major issues addressing the public in the election campaigns have become "corruption" and "cost of living". Corruption here has become a catch word for a broader disaffection with politicians and a euphemism for the nepotism and oligarchic aspirations of the Rajapaks as who are promoting their extended family even to the detriment of the party interests of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party

(SLFP). The increasing cost of living is synonymous with mounting economic pressures, lack of economic opportunities and rising inequalities attendant on decades of war and neoliberal policies and further aggravated by the ongoing global economic crisis. The Fonseka candidacy then could be analysed as an expression of the disenchantment of the populace that was waiting to find a figure that could challenge the Rajapaksa regime particularly given the political bankruptcy of the opposition UNP and its leadership.

The significance of this national election is that war is no longer an issue and even the war victory to some extent has been neutralised. During the month of December accusations, denials and counter-denials became the game following an interview with Fonseka, where the alleged massacre of surrendering LTTE leaders came to the fore. The issue of contention in Colombo was not whether war crimes were committed but rather that war crimes charges might be used against the military leadership. For the constituencies that supported the war, their position seems to be war crimes or not the LTTE leaders deserved to die, and as such Fonseka took a hit in support following the media fray around the war crimes issue. For the Tamil community inside Sri Lanka, war crimes related to surrendering LTTE leaders, is an issue most do not wish to discuss, partly because of the commentary Economic & Political Weekly EPW January 9, 2010 vol xlv no 223 towards the LTTE leadership and partly out of fear of any identification with the LTTE. As such, the war crimes debate at the moment revolves around the concerns of international actors and not in relation to domestic processes; it has implications for the top military brass who may face travel restrictions, including general Fonseka, a permanent resident in the US and defence secretary Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, a US citizen. Any serious consideration of past human rights abuses including war crimes may have to wait for a change in the political climate in the country with a national process of reconciliation and justice to address not just the last month's of the war but the decades of war and abuses by all actors.

Besides opposing the Rajapaksas the only significant election issue that Fonseka has projected is abolishing the powerful executive presidency. However, most past presidential candidates including Rajapaksa have claimed the same only to later betray their promise. Many who supports Fonseka are quietly sceptical about his pledge, but they support him on the assumption that any change of regime at this point is good.

Need for a Third Force

Despite the two major candidates providing limited choices on a range of political and economic issues; the upcoming elections have provided some room for the different social classes and the minority communities to express their disenchantment and dissent. The current political landscape begs the need for a third force representing the minorities and progressive forces in the Sinhala community, but that has not coalesced given the fragmentation and opportunism prevalent among the political parties including the traditional left. However, the presidential elections will become the testing ground for the political concerns and alignments that will be important in the parliamentary elections to follow by April 2010. Parliamentary elections are important for the representational politics of the minorities. Further-more, the political constitution of the parliament has some impact on the relative strength of the president.

The Tamil community in particular has been traumatised by the decades of war. For the 3,00,000 displaced interned in camps following the war, they continued to suffer from their physical and emotional wounds. They suffered for years under the brutality of the LTTE. During the final months of war; they were taken hostage and mercilessly shot by the LTTE when attempting to flee, and indiscriminately shelled by the security forces. Never the-less, the end of the war was a significant opportunity for the state to win them over. The arrogance of power and the cynical politics of regime consolidation extended the suffering of these hapless people through many more months of repression. The bitterness the Vanni civilians felt for the LTTE's brutal rule has been transforming over the post-war months into a bitterness against the state.

The most important issue for the Tamil communities in the North continues to be resettlement of the displaced in their original villages. Access to lands, including those large swathes taken over by the state as High Security Zones, and access to all waters for fishing continue to be priority issues.

The Tamil political parties, despite attempts to bring them together are fragmented, and for the most part lack popular bases among the people. The LTTE's fascist political culture did the work of either creating proxies or isolating those parties that opposed it, and much of the second rung leadership of all the political parties were decimated. Tamil political leadership now consists of token

individual representatives with marginal political bases for mobilisation. Thus prior to the emergence of any serious Tamil democratic politics, social institutions and social movements have to go through the painful work of rebuilding and producing a democratically minded younger generation. And here the lack of self-criticism and reflection within the Tamil community is going to make this social and political transformation difficult; the Tamil media for years was shaped by the LTTE's politics, narrow nationalist opinion-makers continue to dominate public space in Jaffna and the hegemonic caste dimension of Jaffna Tamil Vellal as continues. The war mentality, climate of fear and the absence of a serious message of political reconciliation with constitutional reform on the part of the Rajapaksa regime is the other factor extending the melancholic state of the Tamils. Given this debilitated state of Tamil politics and the problematic majoritarian character of both the Rajapaksa and Fonseka candidacies, the Tamil community is unlikely to go to the polls in large numbers. However, those who vote are likely to tilt towards Fonseka.

The mobilised sections of the Tamil Diaspora which had in the past been the LTTE's base continue their politics in isolation with little connection to the political concerns of the Tamil community inside the country. While former LTTE fund-raisers and propagandists in the Diaspora are continuing various gimmicks such as referendums in the diasporas to ensure their own positions, the destructive role and impact of the Tamil Diaspora is likely to decrease over the next few years and there are already signs of infighting and fragmentation.

Sri Lanka's minorities as a whole, constituting the Lankan Tamils, Muslims and upcountry Tamils make up about 25% of the population. In presidential elections, the minorities become a significant electoral factor with the Sinhala vote distributed between the two historically major parties, the UNP and the SLFP, and more recently, the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP). The Rajapaksa regime has relied more on patronage than other regimes in distributing ministries to Muslim and up-country Tamil politicians. However, the anti-minority and overtly Sinhala Buddhist nationalist stance of the Rajapaksaregime - including the centre stage given to chauvinist actors like Champika Ranawaka of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and JVP break away leader Wimal Weerawansa - could swing Muslim and up-country Tamil politicians to support the opposition,

particularly if the risk of losing their constituencies or a Fonseka victory becomes a possibility.

State Patronage

The urban voters among the Sinhala population are likely to be mobilised by the party machines. However, the party apparatuses have also been weakened due to the fragmentation and frequent crossovers of politicians, a factor which has worked to the advantage and consolidation of the Rajapaksa regime. Those employed in the commentary January 9, 2010 vol xlv no 2 EPW Economic & Political Weekly state sector – where patronage is prevalent – are likely to vote for the incumbent. Again, an exception here could be with the security forces, which may tilt to-wards Fonseka. The rural constituencies depend heavily on state patronage; given risks of disruption to patronage with regime change, they may support the incumbent regime. As with many other moments of change and consolidation in past elections, the Sinhala rural constituencies are likely to be the determining factor in this election.

Amidst the promises of increasing pay for state employees after the election and the pre-election reduction in the price of petrol and gas, economic concerns are increasingly gaining momentum. Indeed, one important reason for calling presidential elections two years ahead of schedule are fears of rising economic disenchantment in the post-war years. If one is to look at the major income earning sectors – migrant workers, garments, tea and tourism – none of them will provide the forms of capital accumulation for the emergence of a strong bourgeoisie or for that matter the forms of capital accumulation and investment that could reshape the economy. Migrant workers to west Asia are the largest foreign exchange earner for the country, but this sector is subject to the global economic pressures and the oil fortunes of the west Asian countries. The garment industry centred on the free trade zones is mainly important in providing cheap employment; the factories low in capital intensity in the free trade zone can be easily dismantled at short notice by the foreign investors. The imminent end of European Union trade concessions (called Generalised System of Preferences-GSP+) due to human rights a concern is likely to adversely impact employment in this exploited sector. Tea, while an important export product, is dependent on the cheap estate labour of the exploited up-country Tamil community. The estates which have been structurally embedded into Sri Lanka's political economy from colonial times are unlikely to strengthen capital; however,

there is some potential for labour mobilisation given increasing labour shortages. These three sectors that are in great part dependent on women's labour are both highly exploitative and do not lead to capital accumulation. Tourism, on the other hand, has not recovered from the decades of war and now again is impacted by the global economic crisis. Finally, successive regimes since 1977 have embraced neoliberalism and donor aid towards building out infra-structure, but here again such investment has been very much part of the politics of patronage.

Weak Bourgeoisie

The characteristic features of Sri Lanka's political economy – the absence of a strong bourgeoisie and uneven development – have two important implications. First, national problems facing the country such as the question of minorities will not be solved by the bourgeoisie in the long-term interest of capital. Indeed, the ethnic conflict had a devastating impact on both economic growth and capital accumulation. And now despite the end of the war, the bourgeoisie does not have the strength to rein in the political actors towards addressing governance much less the historical problems of the minorities and rural marginalised that trouble the country. Second, composite-class intermediate regimes are likely to continue provided state patronage can minimally incorporate the large rural population where economic opportunities are limited.

The upcoming elections then will become a test of the uses of state patronage in a naked contest for state power. If state patronage has reached its limits in these times of mounting economic woes, then it could create a crisis for any regime including its hold on state power. That is the disenchantment of the rural and urban lower classes could undermine the condensation of class forces posing a legitimisation crisis for rule by intermediate regimes. Such a crisis could provide room for a third for mobilising around the minorities and the economically marginalised, or in turn it could lead to a repressive Bonapartist regime. The Rajapaksa regime started process of militarisation and the politicisation of the military, including the appointment of former military officers as governors and secretaries to ministries. After the elections such dangers of militarisation increase; while the Rajapaksa regime's repressive politics is a known factor, the unlikely event of a Fonseka victory is pregnant with unknown dangers. If Fonseka decides to retain the immense powers of

the executive presidency, he is likely to give the military an even larger role and fill important positions with his military colleagues. Fonseka's uncomfortable coalition with the UNP and JVP and the absence of his own party base points to the dangers of the military becoming his political base. However, the Sri Lankan military is not a solid bloc and has its own fissures along party, class and religious lines providing serious challenges to any Bonapartist project.

It is in this context that the important issues not being discussed in the election campaign so far are critical in the remaining weeks leading up to the presidential elections and the months that follow into the parliamentary elections. Progressive voices within Sri Lanka must take up this challenge. Demilitarisation is perhaps the most important immediate issue the country faces; the rising clout of the military and its increasing influence in national political life is a potential danger regardless of which candidate wins. The related repressive legal infrastructure of the state and the climate of impunity have to be addressed; the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the lifting of the state of Emergency should be priorities. While such measures can loosen the authoritarian hold and

begin the process of democratisation, the ideological and political forces set in motion by the Rajapaksa regime's promotion of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism can only be checked by a vibrant dialogue and political process that addresses the political problem of minorities. That is, far-reaching constitutional reform including devolution of power to the regions and power-sharing at the centre with due representation for minorities. Such a political process should challenge and work towards ending the centralisation of state power in the executive presidency and the unitary structure of the Sri Lankan state. These will be steps towards preserving the political space that has opened with the upcoming elections; they will also be measures towards checking the emergence of a Bonapartism centred on the capture of centralised state power.

This article benefited from discussions with Thushara Hewage and B Skanthakumar.

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Reflections on Demilitarising the Sri Lankan Society

26 December 2009, by Jude Fernando

(Complete version of a two part article from Groundviews.org), December 9, 2009

The Battle of the 'Commons' and (De) militarizing the Sri Lankan Society

"Those who would give up Essential Liberty to purchase a little Temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." Benjamin Franklin

"Common candidate" Gen. Fonseka and "common man" Mahinda Rajapaksa must both face, in the upcoming Presidential elections, the problems caused by Sri Lanka's long and ongoing process of militarization and the increasing politicization of "national security." Mangala Samaraweera alleges that President Rajapaksa bears primarily responsible for militarizing Sri Lankan society. In

his endorsement of Fonseka as the common candidate of the Democratic Alliance, Samaraweera compares the General to Charles de Gaulle, who ended the political chaos and violence that preceded his presidency. But Fonseka was a key player in the Rajapaksa regime and cannot be absolved of blame as if he were merely a soldier following orders. Though Fonseka and the government now blame each other for wartime excesses, during the war they both denied and excused those excesses, and also prevented investigations into them. Voters are now asked to trust Fonseka to lead the way out of militarization, but he has no experience in civilian administration and his reputation is damaged by controversies surrounding his conduct in the war. To understand

what is at stake at this election, we must wrestle with three important questions: What is militarization, and what are its specific manifestations in the Sri Lankan society? Which Presidential candidate is likely to enact best policies to reverse the process of militarization? And, finally; who will get my vote?

Militarization is a multifaceted and multilayered process that produces and institutionalizes aggression, hostility and violence at all levels of society. It does not begin or stop with the end of war. In fact, in the aftermath of the war, complexity of militarization and its consequences become more visible, at the same time that ideas and technologies developed during the war are put to use in civil society. Unchecked, military ideology expands beyond the borders of military organizations and personnel until it begins to seem natural and reasonable to impose military order on civilian society. Militarization is dangerous because it progressively replaces democracy as the ideology shaping political, legal, economic, social, moral and ethical relations between state and society. It reduces our capacity to be human.

Peace and militarism are not always opposites. Peace without justice is a cause of militarization. The institutionalized militarism Sri Lankans have experienced under Tamil militants, the JVP, and the State is incidental to the extent that it is a culmination of the way we as individuals and collectives think and act under 'normal' circumstances. Demilitarization does not end with the military withdrawal, rather entails fundamental changes in society's governance at all levels. The narrow focus on the 'terrorists' 'military' 'politicians' 'and 'ethno nationalists' as the culprits of militarization overlooks and depoliticize society's experiences of dispossession and disempowerment, and the aggression and violence evident in the education, religion, memory, media, clothing, sports, entertainment etc, which are the root causes of militarization.

The way out of militarization is to expand the space for democracy. Democracy is based on the constitutional separation of powers, which provides checks and balances to ensure that different branches of the government function according to their specific objectives. Those entrusted with authority in these institutions are expected to abide by the relevant standards. Militarized societies rapidly retreat from these civilian principles: nothing to limit the exercise of powers by the rulers and hold them accountable. Since 1977 safeguards to ensure the separation of

powers in Sri Lanka have rapidly eroded. The executive president, as the member of a political party, has unrestricted power to advance his political interests by suspending any safeguards.

The Sri Lankan constitution is neither secular nor inclusive; it does not separate religion from the state, but is biased towards the religious interests of the majority community. Although the 1978 Constitution rejected many of the authoritarian and exclusive features of the 1971 Constitution and accommodated many minority interests, the interpretations of the constitution may become increasingly subservient to the demands of neoliberal economic policies and ethnoreligious nationalism. Both ethnoreligious bias and economic pressure feed upon each other and corrupt the judicial branch, expanding the space for further authoritarian practices by all institutions.

The constitution allows the executive to use power with impunity. Every social institution (e.g. memory, media, education, religion, and security apparatus) is brought under the control of the executive, who directs them to shape our thoughts, feelings and attitudes and the executive disciplines their actions in accordance with his interests. The political programs presented to the public under the rubric of "Darmishta Nivahal Samajaya," "Democratic Socialist Republic," "Mahinda Chinthanaya" "national security," and "war against terrorism" not only lack substance, but are morally bankrupt, incoherent and inconsistent in application. They provide the executive with the flexibility to negotiate in his own interest with friends and foes alike, including and excluding them at will while he mobilizes the popular legitimacy of the regime and justifies authoritarian rule.

Militarized authoritarianism is sustained by blatant and unapologetic use of nepotism, favoritism, and politicization of the judiciary, civil and foreign services. The sophistication and complexity of the redistribution of powers and responsibilities since 1977 makes improving democratic governance an extremely difficult task. All stake holders (politicians, media, religious leaders, intellectuals, diplomats, businesses) join in the work of coercing and sustaining the public consensus that ensures the stability of the regime. Because responsibility is diffuse, no one person or group can be held directly responsible for human rights violations and the blame is passed from one person to another. In moments of crisis the President becomes the peace maker, appealing to our common values and aspirations. For example, during the current

regime Sri Lanka has suffered its worst period of suppression of freedom of expression. Journalists are abducted, intimidated, and murdered when they describe the regime's corruption and mismanagement. At the same time, the President has held a record number of banquets and conferences for journalists, and has appointed commissions to investigate these crimes. Corruption and violence are simultaneously condemned and rewarded while the regime maintains stability by continuously reproducing the division of powers and responsibilities of governance according political expediency.

The regime uses the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to maintain the illusion of its commitment to democratic institutions, while it subordinates the entire justice system in the name of national security. The PTA act has been invoked to penalize all types of political dissent, and its application has not been consistent even according to its own stipulations. Under PTA the distinction between guilt and innocence has blurred, and punishments are not commensurate with crimes. Those responsible for of hundreds of civilian murders are rewarded with ministerial portfolios, while a dissenting journalist was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The PTA reduces the courts' ability to decide guilt and innocence, and enhances the arbitrary use powers of the police, military and defense establishment. Intimidation of, and attacks on lawyers, in which they are publicly denounced as traitors in the media, has greatly reduced their ability to defend their clients.

The national security state promotes civilian insecurity and terror in a calculated fashion, and it invents "paradigms of freedom, independence and autonomy," which lead to more militarization. Mass media images and stories in combination with public opinion polling and surveys contribute to the militarization of the civilian population, inculcating terror through manipulating the fragile boundaries between real and the imagined threats. In the process, the psychological (re)organization of civil society produces and legitimizes violence and becomes an administrative imperative of the state. The objective of "national security" becomes confused with the desire to safeguard the neoliberal economic interests and "primordial subjectivity" of the constitution. The national security paradigm that encourages fear of foreign/NGO/Western conspiracies against Sri Lanka has only made the country more vulnerable to manipulation by outsiders (particularly to the emerging nuclear and economic powers such as India and China) and has

provided cover for concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a minority.

During the war, widespread culture of fear and militarized mindset of the population legitimated the shifting of authority from the civilian institutions to the executive. During peace times, the civilians have become cynical and distrustful, which further undermines the stability of the regime. The executive himself has grown to fear his own military, and is busy using any means to consolidate his power. End of the war does not automatically lead to demilitarization because the former is sustained by myriad of civilian institutions and its consequences are born by women, children, displaced population and the environment.

All religious institutions in Sri Lanka have either been complicit with or endorsed militarization. Some have even militantly suppressed non-violent approaches to conflict resolution. In the process, religion itself has been militarized further normalizing militarism in public consciousness, while the existing criticisms of this process are disproportionately applied to minority religions (the soft targets), resulting in organized violence against them. Depoliticization and demilitarization of all religions is an essential prerequisite for demilitarizing state and social relations. Media outfits also fail in their responsibility: they experience direct suppression of freedom of expression by the state, but also voluntarily self-censor when they closely associate with the forces of militarization.

Militarization is a product and integral part of the neoliberal economy. The contribution of well meaning liberal constitutionalists and peace activists to demilitarization is limited because they ignore (even legitimate) how militarism is intertwined with the acquisition of power and wealth by a minority at the expense of the majority, therein the complicity of neoliberal institutions i.e. the UN, World Bank, IMF, and WTO. Global efforts towards demilitarization is always undermined by powerful geopolitical interest of Western and non-western countries. Even after the end of the war, the sanctity of defense spending is taken for granted. Neoliberal institutions tolerate increases in military expenditure as long as the money is used to prevent terrorism and promote political stability, even if those actions undermine democratic rule. The government slashes investments in the public sector, privatizes military procurement and aspects of military operations, while the private military contractors enjoys tax benefits and state

patronage. MIC thrives on the manufactured sense of insecurity caused by real and invented terrorist threats and fears of foreign conspiracies against the sovereignty of the country. The country is deeply entrenched in the global military industrial complex (MIC) and vulnerable to manipulation by MIC stake holders.

The root cause of militarization in many countries is conflicts over natural resources. Historical development of capitalism according to David Harvey is a process of “accumulation by dispossession” which continues to be sustained through increasing militarization. The interpretation and management the crises arising in this process in terms of ethnicity, territory, religion, culture, NGOization, westernization, war against terrorism etc., often deflect the dissent against militarization away from capitalism. During the war, foreign companies made lucrative deals with the government to extract natural resources that would not have been possible under normal circumstances. In militarized zones the boundary between illegal mining and demining is blurred and both are patronized by the state and the rebels. Illegal logging, treasure hunts, and destruction of archeological sites are common. We still do not have accurate estimates of destruction of forests and wildlife, release of chemical pollutants into ground and water resources, and their consequences. The environmental impacts of war are still unknown.

Under militarism, equality and reason are no longer the basis for relations between institutions. Truth and justice cease to be ideal social norms, and facts are no longer established through reason and evidence. The distance between the imaginary and the real in the adjudication of justice is decreased. Power and force replace reason and equality, and force and violence become ends as well as means. Life is devalued and safeguards for its preservation are progressively removed. Violence enters into all spheres of life, and interpersonal and domestic violence reflects the violence at the public level. Corruption and nepotism become part of daily life, and are legitimated as means to achieve wealth and power at all levels of society. As freedom of expression is violently suppressed, distrust replaces solidarity. Vulnerability and powerlessness becomes the excuse for compromise, no matter how morally unacceptable.

Feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe points out that in patriarchal societies, women and children are the main victims of militarization, but the

extent of their victimization and their struggles against militarism remain invisible. Militarism creates a new kind of masculinity, in which hardness, violence, and contempt for women reach previously unscaled heights. This process, called masculinization, causes an increase of sexualized violence, and women are its chief victims — a problem we saw too much during the war and in its aftermath. Mothers raise children to be soldiers and suffer when they are injured or killed. The burden of sustaining the family falls on the wife, while her husband is at war, and a wife continues to bear these responsibilities if her husband is disabled or killed. During and after the war, women’s freedom of expression, mobility and sexuality are subject close scrutiny and judgment by their families and society. Women, throughout the world, are in the forefront of struggles against militarization, because they bear the larger share of the burdens imposed by it: “Just as there is a military industrial complex that depends on war for profit and growth, war making depends on a military-sexual complex to recruit, motivate and retain military personnel.” (Lindsey Fitz and Joane Nagel).

Militarism also displaces populations. I have not visited any IDP camps. But I know from many countries in Africa that IDPs are vulnerable to being recruited for violent activities, torture, rape, and extrajudicial executions. Demographic structuring of displacement and resettlement are part of larger political and economic agenda, often those led to displacement in the first place. IDPs have lost the protective presence of their homes, families and communities and lack access to life-saving assistance and services, including food, shelter and basic health-care. They are subject to greater risk of violence and their individual and collective ability to recover from violence is limited. The closed environment of camps, coupled with anxiety and desperation stemming from trauma, marginalization and lack of hope, undermine the coping mechanisms of individuals and communities as well as their ability to protect themselves. But there is no economic incentive to disperse IDPs, because as long as people are confined to camps, foreign aid can be kept under the complete control of the government and its contractors.

Demilitarization of IDPs should go beyond granting them freedom of movement; it should honor the government’s promise that the defeat of the LTTE was a precondition for a lasting political solution to the crisis. We must not make the mistake of assuming that Tamil and Sinhalese perspectives and

experiences are similar. Even for Tamils, whose lives were militarized under the LTTE's Eelam project and now feels sense of freedom, "peace" means not only an absence of war, but political equality. The war against terrorism and post-war competing narratives of celebrating the heroics of the by the two communities, the government's development, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects and other symbolic gestures to create building national unity and progress seem to have the effect of ghettoizing the urgency of political solution specific to the conflict. Comrade Prof. Tissa Vitharana and the proposals of his All Party (should I say Party All) Conference will not get any attention of the government until the election is over.

At the moment voters are understandably skeptical and uncertain about both Wicramasinghe and Fonseka because neither provides a coherent and unambiguous agenda. Neither has rejected the forces opposed to a political solution to the conflict. Fonseka, endorsed by Mano Ganasen, denies that an ethnic conflict exists and has claimed that Sinhalese should rule the country. Rajapaksha has publicly praised ultranationalists opposed to devolution, but is able to mobilize the support of many minority political parties. JVP has endorsed Fonseka, while opposing UNP's economic policies and broad base sharing power with Tamils. With the exception of Comrade Wickramabahu, all others are in bed with neoliberal institutions. Citizens who wish to choose the right leader for Sri Lanka are faced with a daunting task.

We might argue that the candidate with no direct affiliations to any political parties could prove to be an efficient leader. Such autonomy, if it really exists, could enable Fonseka to exert a higher degree of control over the parties and interest groups of the Democratic Alliance than President Rajapaksha can muster to control the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) coalition. Those frustrated with the current administration will even find new hope in Fonseka. We know from history that Although De Gaulle initially supported French rule over Algeria, he later decided to grant Algeria independence, ending an expensive and unpopular war but leaving France divided. Under his leadership France achieved rapid economic progress and also became the fourth atomic and nuclear power of the world, while he denounced the French government's decision to seek peace with the Nazis. De Gaulle resigned after losing the referendum.

We have little evidence to convince us Fonseka is

another De Gaulle, hence is the likely hood of him reversing the excesses of the Rajapaksha administration. At the moment, what binds Fonseka and Wicramasinghe together is only their desire to defeat Rajapaksha. The lack of clarity in their political and economic agenda raises questions about political stability and vulnerability to manipulation by the members of their own coalition and the undemocratic forces, in many ways similar to that of Rajapaksha regime. We have no guarantees that Rajapaksha will provide same leadership to end militarization as did to defeat the LTTE. I believe that the success of UNF or UPFA coalitions could bring about demilitarization only if they are accountable to democratic civilian institutions.

Finally, I do not wish to undervalue the significance of Comrade Wickramabahu in the upcoming election. He is perhaps the only Left-wing politician who has been consistently true to Marxist principles and who demands political and economic equality for all ethnic groups. In his campaign for the Presidency, comrade provides the best description of militarization as a product of economic and political inequalities under capitalism, as they figure in post colonial nationalist states like Sri Lanka, and also offers concrete policies for demilitarization. However, the comrade's agenda is unlikely to gain popularity and become "common sense" for the majority of voters for the same reason that U.S. progressive Ralf Nadar failed in his bid for the Presidency. Although the majority may demand to overthrow the oppressors, this does not necessarily mean that they are actually willing to change the social and economic conditions that led to oppression. Both rulers and majority of the citizens share similar ideas about progress/prosperity and the distribution of political power among different ethnic groups. Neither embraces broad based and inclusive ideals of economic and political inequality in a Marxist sense. The JVP has also systematically and militantly appropriated the title of "the Marxist party" in Sri Lanka, and has racialized left-leaning political consciousness. The politics of redistribution pursued by traditional left parties has effectively aligned them with the pro-capitalist political parties that control state power. These "leftists" (e.g. Dr. Colvin R. De Silva of the LSSP) contributed to the ethno-nationalist constitutional reforms, and have failed (due to their political opportunism) to develop interethnic class consciousness in the labor movement.

Since the beginning of 1990s, many left leaning intellectuals and diplomats have spouted

neocolonial, anti-capitalist and anti-Western rhetoric, made alliances with the capitalist government of Premadasa and Rajapaksha, and confined theoretical disposition to a narrow form of political realism. They have spoken in defense of non-Western capitalist countries such as China and India, further broadening the popular legitimacy of neoliberal ethno-nationalist political consciousness. In a Gramscian sense, the JVP, traditional left, and left intellectual-turned-diplomats all enforce state hegemony, since they help build popular consensus for the highly militarized and racialized capitalist projects of the state. Additionally, the ethno-nationalism of the LTTE and elite Tamil political parties brutally suppressed the possibility of raising class consciousness among Tamils, and prevented those in the North from making alliance with those in the South. Today even in the radical political discourse xenophobic nationalism and militarism have taken the place of class based political consciousness. These kinds of problems are not unique to Sri Lanka. Communist China, and 'non-aligned' India and 'theocratic' oil rich countries (I mean Sri Lanka's non-Western allies) provide much needed ideological and material resources for the militarization of global capitalist state and for continuing colonization the non-western countries, and the suppression of class based dissent in them.

In recent times, NGOs and so-called new social movements have done a great deal to move class consciousness from the center of politics. Programs to expand the freedoms of civil society wind up

displacing class consciousness and diffusing direct resistance against the capitalist state. Parochial NGO projects concerned with 'empowerment' 'good governance' 'conflict resolution' have fragmented and confused political consciousness, which is now most heavily influenced by ideologies of ethno-religious nationalism, patriotism, and national security. In the end, they have helped the state to create the political stability demanded by neoliberal institutions. Under these circumstances voters feel they have no option but to choose between Rajapaksha and Fonseka. Though some progressive Sri Lankans may wish to vote for Comrade, Wickramabahu, this will siphon off their votes from the two candidates most likely to win, and they may not be pleased with the result. (Some argue that similar votes for Ralph Nader cast in the 2000 U.S. Presidential election contributed to Al Gore's loss in the election.) At this election we have to settle for the minimum.

I will vote for the one who, over the next two months, convinces me he is the most promising person to begin an incremental demilitarization by abolishing the executive presidency, revoking the PTA, offering a tangible political settlement to the ethnic conflict, depoliticizing the civil service foreign services, immediately releasing the IDPs, and taking measures to remove negative elements of ethnic exclusivity from national symbols, institutions and education. If Fonseka and Rajapaksha can pride themselves on standing against the many forces opposed to the war, they could also do the same regarding these policies.



A resounding but fractured verdict

D.B.S. Jeyaraj

The Hindu January 29th, 2010

President Mahinda Rajapaksa has scored a stunning victory in Sri Lanka's presidential election. While the winning margin of 17.73 per cent is remarkable, the opposition candidate, retired Army Commander General Sarath Fonseka, has asked for an annulment of the election, alleging intimidatory violence, misuse of the government machinery, especially the state-owned media, and 'vote rigging.' These

accusations have been strongly denied by government circles. Had the result been close, these allegations may have been treated more seriously, but the huge majority garnered by President Rajapaksa has deprived them of potency.

Elected executive President on November 17, 2005, Mr. Rajapaksa had two more years to

complete his first six-year term. The decision to cut short the first term and advance the next presidential contest by two years — which the Sri Lankan Constitution allows — was a shrewd political move. The idea was to cash in on the popularity gained from the total military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in May 2009.

Bringing forward the election seemed a very bright idea until the emergence of the Fonseka factor. The former Army chief, who was widely regarded as a brilliant commander, began nursing ambitions of becoming President on the strength of the military triumph, for which he claimed sole credit.

His entry electrified the 2010 presidential campaign. What was seen as a one-horse race turned into a real contest. With a cross-section of opposition parties ranging from the right-of-centre United National Party (UNP) to the ultra-left Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) and minority community parties like the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) and the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) backing the general, the race was perceived as being neck-and-neck.

Initially, the electoral battle was all about who deserved the greater share of laurels for the magnificent military victory. With the backing of opposition parties, General Fonseka then repositioned himself as a candidate for 'believable change.' His campaign aimed at exploiting subterranean resentment against the Rajapaksa regime on account of alleged corruption, nepotism, and abuse of power. With unprecedented crowds flocking to see and hear the challenger, his camp was optimistic about edging out the incumbent.

The Rajapaksa campaign countered this by reiterating the need for continuity and stability and spotlighting the incumbent's political experience and accomplishments. The landslide for the President has shocked the pro-Fonseka forces and shattered illusions of an achievable regime change. The election was certainly not perfect. But not even the opposition parties have so far challenged the legitimacy of the outcome or suggested that the several flaws the process suffered from sufficed to negate the people's verdict.

What should not be lost sight of, however, in the euphoric aftermath of Mahinda's magnificent triumph is the mixed nature of the result. Quantitatively, the mandate seems

overwhelming but qualitatively it appears fractured. The ethnic divide in the voting is impossible to overlook. Both candidates received support from the three main ethnic groups — the Sinhalese, the Tamils, and the Muslims. But there was ethnic polarisation, with the Sinhala majority preponderantly voting for the incumbent and the Tamils and Muslims for the challenger.

The five electoral districts of Jaffna, Wannai, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Amparai (Digamadulla) in the Northern and Eastern Provinces polled in favour of General Fonseka. Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims comprise more than 95 per cent of the North and 75 per cent of the East. In the hill country, Nuwara-Eliya district, with its large population of Tamils of recent Indian origin, was also taken by the general. In addition, several electoral divisions in the highlands and Colombo with substantial concentrations of Tamils and Muslims recorded majorities for him.

The President's electoral district-wise successes were in the 16 districts with a Sinhala majority. In a sense, it was a replay of 2005 when Mahinda Rajapaksa's victory was enabled by greater support from the Sinhala majority while the minority ethnicities backed opposition leader Ranil Wickramasinghe. It was estimated that in that close contest, roughly 60 per cent of the Sinhala votes went to Mr. Rajapaksa and the rest to Mr. Wickramasinghe. This time the preliminary assessment is that about 70 per cent of Sinhala votes were cast in favour of Mr. Rajapaksa.

Such a sharp ethnic divide in the pattern of voting does raise anxiety about the country's future. It is imperative that President Rajapaksa address the legitimate aspirations and redress the real grievances of the Tamil and Muslim people. The total military defeat inflicted on the LTTE and the re-capture of territory retained by it does not automatically or even necessarily mean the extinction of ethnic estrangement. A political settlement rather than a military solution would help conquer hearts and minds.

Another facet of the fractured verdict is the urban-rural divide. It will take some time before a detailed analysis is available. But preliminary assessments indicate overwhelming support for President Rajapaksa in Sinhala rural regions while General Fonseka performed better in urban and semi-urban areas. There is little doubt that Mr. Rajapaksa, with his strong rural roots and an aura

of rustic simplicity, exercises far greater appeal in the villages.

But there is also the class dimension. A hallmark of the upper and upper-middle classes, as opposed to those drawn from the less privileged strata, is the usage of the English language. Although a comprehensive demarcation cannot be made on these lines, there has been a tendency to categorise class through this linguistic definition. The election campaign revealed a hiatus between the Sinhala- and English-speaking sections of the electorate. It can at least be surmised that the English-speaking classes rooted heavily for the general while the astute politician projected himself successfully as a man of the Sinhala-speaking masses.

Against such a backdrop, some observers feel that the election outcome revealed a difference in support along class lines too. The sharp urban-rural divide adds credence to this belief.

All this demonstrates that the electoral verdict, although conclusive on the whole, has some cracks in parts. As the President of the whole country, Mahinda Rajapaksa must take the initiative and reach out to those sections of the people who have been alienated in terms of ethnicity, class, and the urban-rural divide.

Aside from these issues, the country is afflicted with a deep-seated malaise, the symptom of which was unambiguously revealed by the Sarath Fonseka phenomenon. It is extraordinarily rare for an erstwhile Army chief to challenge his Commander-in-Chief in an electoral contest held in the aftermath of an impressive military victory. It is as improbable as Bernard Montgomery taking on Winston Churchill immediately after the Second World War ended or Sam Manekshaw contesting against Indira Gandhi in the wake of the Bangladesh triumph. But this extraordinary development, however controversial it may be, cannot and should not be viewed in isolation. Rather it has to be seen as the logical culmination of a long process.

There have been two processes under way in Sri Lanka during the past few decades. On the one hand, there has been a politicisation of the military and, on the other, a militarisation of politics and society (albeit to a lesser extent). Both processes have been complementary; they were not mutually exclusive. Although these processes began in the 1950s, the prolonged savage conflict with the LTTE enlarged and hastened them.

Both processes gathered tremendous momentum under the current dispensation because of its all-encompassing, total commitment to the goal of eradicating terrorism by annihilating the Tigers. Despite the military success gained through this single-minded pursuit, an undesirable consequence has been the acceleration and expansion of the process of the military being politicised. This process reached new heights in the shape of ex-Army chief Sarath Fonseka aiming at the presidency.

By throwing his beret in the arena of the contest for the presidency, the general caused tremors in both the political and military establishments. In consequence, the Army was embroiled in politics in a way never seen before. A vivid example of this was the spectacle of troops surrounding the hotel where the general was staying after the presidential poll. Earlier, the country witnessed distasteful scenes of serving military officers participating in election propaganda. In this context, the political defeat of General Fonseka could usher in an end to the process of politicisation of the military. Reversing this process and restoring highly professional, apolitical standards should be taken up as an urgent institutional task.

Several unfinished tasks and imperatives are on the table of the newly re-elected executive President. The great hope is that Mahinda Rajapaksa, the amiable leader with a kurakkan-coloured shawl, will face up to those tasks with political skill, responsibility, and sincerity.

Climate Change & Vulnerability

Worst possible outcome at Copenhagen

From the CSE team at Copenhagen, December 19, 2009: The Copenhagen Accord that India plans to sign here will instantly forgive industrialised countries' historical responsibility for climate change, eliminate the distinction between developed and developing countries, prevent effective action to curb global warming, and fatally undermine efforts to renew the Kyoto Protocol. This will be disastrous for the climate, and for India's most vulnerable communities, says Centre for Science and Environment (CSE).

- India buckles under pressure in Copenhagen
 - The Copenhagen Accord (which has not been adopted by the Conference of Parties) agrees to weak and non-legally commitments from developed world. The agreement will be disastrous for the world, particularly the poor and the most vulnerable, as it will allow emissions to increase in the rich world.
 - The Copenhagen Accord agrees to a process, which will ultimately kill the Kyoto Protocol and undermine the legitimacy of the UNFCCC. It changes the framework based on equity and historical emissions
 - It agrees that developing country action, which are not supported through international finance and technology also be open "international consultation and analysis", which could become a backhand way of bringing in international commitments on these countries. This is euphemistic language for international monitoring, reporting and verification
 - "The Accord will not only be disastrous for the climate, it will freeze the inequity in the world for perpetuity," said Sunita Narain, director, CSE.

The Copenhagen Accord will not curb global greenhouse gas emissions fast enough to avoid a climate catastrophe; the world's and India's most vulnerable populations will pay the price.

The accord uses weak and inconsequential language on the matter of cutting emissions from industrialized countries. In fact, it sets up a framework for cutting future emissions, which is bound to take the world to climate catastrophe. It must be noted that as yet, there has been an agreement that industrialized countries must cut emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2020. The Copenhagen Accord destroys this agreement through the following provisions.

It does not set time-bound targets for emission reduction from industrialized countries. Instead it simply says that these countries commit to

implement individually or jointly the emission reduction targets that they will themselves submit to the secretariat.

In other words, these countries will be allowed to set their own domestic targets, whatever these may be. The targets will not be based on internationally agreed burden sharing arrangements – how much industrialized countries must cut to keep the world within the 2°C temperature increase (which itself is too high) by when. In the climate agreements, the targets are currently set based on the historical and current emissions of countries. This provision will be disastrous for the world and set up a framework based on inequity and unfair burden sharing. It must be rejected. This virtually guarantees that the world will not be able to prevent runaway global warming. An analysis by the UNFCCC, leaked yesterday, shows that current pledges by industrialised countries will put the planet on track to an average temperature increase of 3°C.

The Accord does not set a firm peaking year for Annex 1 countries. It is well known that these countries should have already peaked in their emissions. The Accord in fact gives them a cop-out as it will allow them to use their domestic pledges to actually increase and not decrease emissions fast. The US pledge in fact allows it to increase its emissions for the next 10 years or more. This will be disastrous for all.

The Accord proposes a pledge-and-review model for emissions reduction, which means that developed countries are only asked to take voluntary, domestic actions. This is a step backwards from the current Kyoto Protocol, which legally requires industrialised countries to make modest emissions cuts between 2008 and 2012.

In May 2009, India, China and 35 other developing nations had submitted an ambitious proposal to the UNFCCC to strengthen Kyoto by requiring nations to cut their emissions by 45 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. This is what scientists say is needed in order to avoid dangerous temperature rises of 2°C or more.

By agreeing to a pledge-and-review deal today, India has done an extraordinary about-face. The UN has estimated that current pledges by developing countries would sentence the world to temperature increases of at least 3°C. There is nothing in the Copenhagen Accord that can compel industrialised countries to take stronger near-term targets in order to avoid dangerous global warming.

System change — not climate change

A people's declaration from Klimaforum 09,

Statement issued by Klimaform09 in Copenhagen, December 10, 2009

Summary

There are solutions to the climate crisis. What people and the planet need is a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure the rights of life and dignity of all peoples and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to future generations.

We, participating peoples, communities and all organisations at the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, call upon every person, organisation, government and institutions, including the United Nations (UN), to contribute to this necessary transition. It will be a challenging task. The crisis of today has economic, social, environmental, geopolitical and ideological aspects interacting with and enforcing each other as well as the climate crisis. For this reason, we call for urgent climate action:

A complete abandoning of fossil fuels within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG of industrialised countries of at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

Recognition, payment and compensation of climate debt for the overconsumption of atmospheric space and adverse effects of climate change on all affected groups and people.

Rejection of purely market-oriented and technology-centred false and dangerous solutions such as nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically "climate-readied" crops, geo-engineering and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), which deepens social and environmental conflicts.

Real solutions to climate crisis based on safe, clean, renewable and sustainable use of natural resources, as well as transitions to food, energy, land and water sovereignty.

Therefore, we demand COP15 reach an agreement that will initiate the restoration of the

environmental, social and economic balance of planet Earth by means that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and equitable, and finally come up with a legally binding treaty. The adverse impacts of human-induced climate change cause gross violations of human rights. The nations have an obligation to cooperate internationally to ensure respect for human rights everywhere in the world according to the Charter of the United Nations. Any specific agreement on climate change must be seen in the broader context of achieving a sustainable transition of our societies.

We, participating people and organisations at Klimaforum09, commit to continue our full and active engagement in promoting such a transition, which will require a fundamental change in social, political and economic structures and a rectification of gender, class, race, generation, ethnic inequalities and injustices.

This requires restoration of democratic sovereignty of our local communities as a basic social, political and economic unit. Local and democratic ownership and control over and access to natural resources will be the basis for meaningful and sustainable development of communities, and simultaneously reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is also the need for stronger regional and international cooperative arrangements to manage common and shared resources, and a stronger and democratic UN. We call upon every concerned person, social movement, cultural, political or economic organisation to join us in building a strong global movement of movements, which can bring forward peoples' visions and demands on every level of society. Together, we can make global transitions to sustainable futures.

System change — not climate change

A people's declaration from Klimaforum 09,

1. Preamble

There are solutions to the climate crisis. What people and the planet need is a just and sustainable transition of our societies to a form that will ensure

the rights of life and dignity of all people and deliver a more fertile planet and more fulfilling lives to present and future generations. A transition based on democratic principles of solidarity, especially for the most vulnerable, non-discrimination, gender equality, equity and sustainability, acknowledging that we are part of nature, which we love and respect. To address the climate crisis, however, awareness creation and determined actions adhering to a rights-based framework are required. The nations have an obligation to cooperate internationally to ensure respect for human rights everywhere in the world according to the Charter of the United Nations.

We, participating peoples, communities and all organisations at the Klimaforum09 in Copenhagen, call upon every person, organisation, government and institution, including the United Nations (UN), to contribute to this necessary transition. It will be a challenging task. The crisis of today has economic, social, environmental, geopolitical and ideological aspects interacting with and enforcing each other as well as the climate crisis. This very moment of conjunction of crises — climate, energy, financial, food and water crises, among others — urges us to unite and transform the dominant social and economic system as well as global governance, which blocks necessary solutions to the climate crisis. For this reason, a movement from below is called upon to act now.

Environmental and climate debts must be paid. No false, dangerous and short-term solutions should be promoted and adopted, such as nuclear power, agro-fuels, offsetting, carbon capture and storage (CCS), biochar, geo-engineering and carbon trading. Instead we should implement a truly sustainable transition built on clean, safe and renewable resources and energy conservation. We welcome alliances across social movements and sectors, representing all ages, genders, ethnicities, faiths, communities and nationalities.

We want to take the future into our own hands by building a strong and popular movement of youth, women, men, workers, peasants, fisher folks, indigenous peoples, people of colour, urban, and rural social groups which is able to act on all levels of society to deal with environmental degradation and climate change. We call for a new international economic order and support a strong and democratic UN as opposed to G8, G20 or other closed groups of powerful countries.

2. The challenge, as we see it

The concentration of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) in the atmosphere is already so high, that the climate system has been brought out of balance. The CO₂ concentration and global temperatures have increased more rapidly in the last 50 years and will rise even faster in the coming decades. This adds to a multitude of other serious ecological imbalances, the impacts of which threatens the lives and livelihoods of the people of the world, most acutely, the impoverished people and other vulnerable groups.

The imbalance of the climate system leads to greater and more frequent extremes of heat and rainfall patterns, tropical cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons, extreme flooding and droughts, loss of biodiversity, landslides, rising sea levels, shortage of drinking water, shorter growing seasons, lower yields, lost or deteriorated agricultural land, decreased agricultural production, losses of livestock, extinction of ecosystems, diminished fish stocks, among others.

These phenomena are resulting in food crisis, famine, illness, death, displacement and the extinction of sustainable ways of life. Interacting with this is the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), monoculture farming and industrialised agriculture strongly promoted by corporations that seriously threaten the stability and diversity of ecosystems. This also marginalises and impoverishes small-scale farmers and undermines food sovereignty. Corporate-controlled agriculture is geared to meet global demand for overconsumption especially in the global North rather than for local basic needs. The same can be said about modern industrial fisheries, intensive forestry and mining which destroys ecosystems, diminishes biodiversity and destroys the life and livelihoods of local communities. These effects of climate change together with growing social inequalities and severe impacts on our common environment are already devastating the lives of millions of people as well as their local communities. However, we — the people — are not prepared to accept this fact as our fate. That is why there are fast-growing popular movements determined to defend their livelihoods and stand up against those forces and causes, which have led us on to this ultimately suicidal route of environmental destruction.

In Asia, Africa, Middle East, Oceania and South and Central America, as well as the periphery of North America and Europe, popular movements are rising to confront the exploitation of their land by foreign

interests and to regain control over their own resources. A new type of activism has revitalised the environmental movements, leading to a wide variety of protests and actions against mining, big dams, deforestation, coal-fired plants, air travel and the building of new roads among others. There is a growing awareness about the need to change the present economic paradigm in a very fundamental way. Among various movements, alternative ways of life are proliferating. At the same time it is becoming evident to the public that the present holders of power are unwilling to face and deal with the threats of climate change and environmental degradation. The so-called strategy of “green growth” or “sustainable growth” has turned out to be an excuse for pursuing the same basic model of economic development, that is one of the root causes of environmental destruction and the climate crisis.

3. The causes, as we see them

The immediate and primary cause of human-induced climate change is an unprecedented emission of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) into the atmosphere originating from the increasing burning of fossil fuels from industry, commerce, transport and military purposes, to mention a few but significant sources. Other important drivers of climate change are deforestation, extractive industries, forest degradation — excluding Indigenous people’s sustainable practice of shifting cultivations — disturbance of water cycle, expanding areas through land grabbing for industrial agriculture, increased industrial meat-production and other types of unsustainable use of natural resources.

Uneven control and ownership over resources

These immediate causes are the results of an unsustainable global economic system built on unequal access to and control over the planet’s limited resources and the benefits that accrue from their use. This system is premised on the appropriation of local, national and planetary commons by local and global elites. What has been praised as great strides in technology, production and human progress has in fact precipitated global ecological and development disasters. Still, a privileged global elite engages in reckless profit-driven production and grossly excessive consumption while a very large proportion of humanity is mired in poverty with merely survival and subsistence consumption, or even less. This

is the situation not only in countries of the global South but also in the global North. The world’s largest transnational corporations (TNCs) based mainly in the Northern countries and tax havens, but with expanding operations, have long been at the forefront of these excesses.

The competition among global corporations and rich nations for resources and greater market shares, as well as trade agreements and treaties, have led to a neo-colonial suppression of Southern peoples, denying them rightful ownership and control of their resources. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and international financial institutions, as well as the European Union (EU) and United States (US) using bilateral trade agreements, are increasing the privatisation and commoditisation of public resources, intensifying the plunder of natural resources of underdeveloped countries and imposing conditions that increase their dependence.

Prevailing patterns of thought and alternatives

The development model promoted by these institutions is not only a question of “economics’.” The prevailing economic paradigm is strongly related to the system of thought, which is based on an imagination of the human being as “economic man”. This ideology is reinforced by corporate media and marketing firms which promote egoism, competition, material consumption and boundless accumulation of private wealth in utter disregard of the social and ecological consequences of such behaviour. This system of thought is intimately intertwined with patterns of patriarchy and paternalism.

If we really want to address this crisis, we need to recognise that the human species is part of both nature and society and cannot exist without either. Therefore if humanity is to survive, we need to respect the integrity of Mother Earth and strive for harmony with nature and for peace within and between cultures.

We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world. The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live according to the principle of “One among many.”`

4. A just and sustainable transition

It is clear that solving the climate crisis requires far-reaching transformations, which are currently excluded from the agenda of policy makers in governments and multilateral institutions. People are calling for system change, not “business-as-usual” and the uncritical use of technology and market fixes along which powerful interests have set and confined the climate agenda.

Peoples’ movements are not lacking alternative visions for society and concrete steps that must be taken in order to move towards a sustainable future while addressing the climate, water, food and economic crises at the same time. Such a sustainable transition will begin by many different initiatives. Some of these steps towards sustainable transition are:

Food sovereignty and ecological agriculture: Uphold the rights of people, communities, and countries to determine their own systems of production including farming, fishing, food, forestry and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to the circumstances. Peoples’, especially women’s access to and control over productive resources such as land, seeds and water must be respected and guaranteed. Agricultural production must rely principally on local knowledge, appropriate technology and ecologically sustainable techniques that bind CO2 in the diverse and native plant systems, bind water and return more nutrients to the soil, than was taken out. Food and agricultural production must be primarily geared towards meeting local needs, encourage self-sufficiency, promote local employment, and minimise resource use, waste and GHG emissions in the process.

Democratic ownership and control of economy: The reorganisation of society’s productive units around more democratic forms of ownership and management, in order to meet people’s basic needs such as employment creation, access to water, housing, land, health care and education, food sovereignty and ecological sustainability. Public policy must make sure that the financial system serves public interests and channel resources for the sustainable transformation of industry, agriculture and services. Energy sovereignty: A dramatic reduction of energy consumption especially in the unjustly enriched countries combined with a blend of renewable and public energy sources such as

solar, wind, geothermal, mini-hydro, wave and the development of off-the-grid electricity distribution to secure energy supplies to communities, and public ownership for the grid.

Ecological planning of urban and rural zones: The aim is a radical reduction in the inputs of energy and resources and the outputs of waste and pollution while encouraging locally based supply of basic needs of the citizens. An urban and rural planning built on social justice and equal service to all reducing the need for transport. Promoting public transport systems such as light and high-speed rail systems and bicycles reducing the need for private motor vehicles thus decongesting the roads, improving health and reducing energy consumption.

Education, science and cultural institutions: Re-orientate public research and education to meet the needs of people and the environment, rather than the present bias for developing commercially profitable and proprietary technologies. Research and development should be primarily an open and collaborative endeavour in the common interest of humankind, and eliminate patents on ideas and technology. Fair and just exchange of appropriate technologies, traditional knowledge and indigenous innovative practices, and ideas between countries should be encouraged.

End to militarism and wars: The present fossil fuel-based development model leads to violence, war and military conflict over control of energy, land, water and other natural resources. This is demonstrated by the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, militarisation in across in the globe in regions rich on fossil fuels and other natural resources. Peasants and Indigenous communities are also being violently displaced from their lands to make way for agro-fuel plantations. Trillions of dollars are spent on the military-industrial complex, wasting enormous material and human resources, which should instead be devoted to implementing a sustainable transition.

By taking steps forward we can learn by doing. These steps will help us to convince the broad majority of people that a sustainable transition entails the promise of a more fulfilling and good life. The social, political, economic and environmental fields are closely interrelated. A coherent strategy must therefore address them all, which indeed is the central idea behind the concept

of sustainable transition.

One aspect of this concept is the restoration of local communities rather than the global market as a basic social, political and economic unit. Social cohesion, democratic participation, economic accountability and ecological responsibility can only be accomplished by restoring decision making at the lowest appropriate level. This is a basic lesson we have learned from ethnic cultures and local communities.

A community-based approach does not however contradict the need for extensive international cooperation. On the contrary, it will need stronger alliances within and across all borders between direct producers in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and industry. Alliances also built on the strength of gender equality and on recognising and overcoming unjust power relations at all levels. It also includes the need for stronger regional and international cooperative arrangements to manage common and shared resources such as cross boarder water resources. Furthermore, international cooperation will promote the full mutual exchange of ideas, technologies and expertise across all boundaries as well as engage in an open-minded dialogue between different cultures based on mutual respect.

5. Paths to transition

Many people are involved in the practical creation of more sustainable industry, agriculture, forestry and fisheries as well as in the renewable energy sector. These initiatives within the system have furthermore created alliances with other sectors of society, trade unions, consumers, city dwellers, teachers, researchers all of whom are striving towards sustainable ways of life.

United Nations (UN) and Conference of Parties (COP)

We need to address the UN negotiations on climate change and the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) on the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The lessons from previous rounds of negotiations are not very promising. Despite the high-profile schemes for concerted action launched first in the 1992 Framework Convention on Climate Change of Rio de Janeiro and later in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, results are meagre and the problems have not been solved. Indeed, it has worsened as the principles, targets and the timelines of both the convention and the

protocol have made little headway.

The same big corporate interests that are largely responsible for causing the climate crisis appear to have immense influence on climate policies at the national and global level. We strongly oppose this undemocratic influence of corporate lobbyism in the current COP negotiations. Contrary to this, we call on states to put in place an appraisal mechanism for all policies and policy instruments under the UNFCCC, to ensure inclusive and deliberative multi-stakeholder processes that repair existing inequalities whether based on gender, colour, age, disability or other forms of discrimination in the COP negotiations.

We demand that COP15 reach an agreement that will initiate the restoration of the environmental, social and economic balance of planet Earth by means that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable and equitable, and finally come up with a legally binding treaty.

Our demands

We are raising our voices to the leaders in the UNFCCC to put forward the people's demands and alternatives.

Phasing out fossil fuel: We call for a clear strategy for dismantling the fossil fuel era within the next 30 years, which must include specific milestones for every five-year period. We demand an immediate cut in GHG emissions of industrialised countries of at least 40% compared to 1990 levels by 2020.

Reparations and compensation for climate debt and crimes: We demand full reparations for Southern countries and those impoverished by Northern states, TNCs and tax-haven institutions. By this, we partly address historical injustices associated to inequitable industrialisation and climate change, originating in the genocide of Indigenous nations, the transatlantic slave trade, the colonial era and invasions. This must be accompanied by an equally clear strategy for compensating impoverished people for the climate and broader ecological debt owed by the enriched. A global and democratic fund should be established to give direct support to the victims of climate change. Developed countries must provide new, mandatory, adequate and reliable financing and patent-free technologies to better adapt to adverse climate impacts and undertake emission reductions. This would allow developing countries

to play their part in curbing climate change, while still meeting the needs and aspirations of their people. International financial institutions, donor agencies and trade mechanisms should have no part in reparations.

An immediate global ban on deforestation of primary forests and the parallel initiation of an ambitious global tree-planting program based on native and diverse species in partnership with Indigenous peoples and forest-dependent communities. Similarly a ban on large-scale industrialised fishing methods and a return to primarily local and sustainable fishing practices. Finally, a ban on land grabbing by foreign interests and the full acceptance of people's sovereignty over natural resources.

We express strong opposition to purely market-oriented and technology-centred false and dangerous solutions put forward by many corporations, governments and international financial institutions. These include nuclear energy, agro-fuels, carbon capture and storage, Clean Development Mechanisms, biochar, genetically "climate-readied" crops, geoengineering and reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation as it is the UNFCCC definition (REDD), which only produce new environmental threats, without really solving the climate crisis. Carbon trading and offsetting are also false and unjust instruments because they treat a common planetary resource — the atmosphere — as a commodity that can be owned and traded. So far the system has not proven its merits, and by allowing rich countries to offset their reduction obligations, it has maintained this unjust and unsustainable system.

Equitable tax on carbon emissions: Instead of the regime of tradable emission quotas we demand an equitable tax on carbon emissions. Revenues from this carbon tax should be returned equitably to the people, and a portion should be used to compensate and contribute to finance adaptation and mitigation. This is, however, not a substitute for repayment of already accumulated climate debt. This compensation and funding should be unconditional and free of market mechanisms and financial institutions. Reduction

of emissions must be strongly encouraged by a briskly increasing, transparent carbon tax, in addition to direct regulations to drive the phase-out of fossil fuels, while enabling safe, clean and renewable energy. Multilateral institutions and TNCs: Unjust, unsustainable and unaccountable global economic and financial institutions like the WTO, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional development banks, donor institutions and trade agreements should be replaced by democratic and equitable institutions functioning in accordance with the United Nations Charter, that respect peoples' sovereignty over resources and promote solidarity between peoples and nations. A mechanism for strict surveillance and control of the operations of TNCs should be created as well. Finally, we commit ourselves to a full and active involvement in carrying our sustainable transitions of our societies along the lines put forward in this declaration.

6. A global movement for sustainable transition

Irrespective of the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change there is an urgent need to build a global movement of movements dedicated to the long-term task of promoting a sustainable transition of our societies. Contrary to the prevailing power structures, this movement must grow from the bottom and up. What is needed is a broad alliance of environmental movements, social movements, trade unions, farmers and other aligned parties that can work together in everyday political struggle on the local as well as national and international level. Such an alliance entails at the same time the creation of a new mindset and new types of social activism, and must be capable not only of reacting to unsustainable practices, but also showing by example how a new sustainable economy can indeed function. We, participating peoples, communities and social organisations at Klimaforum09 are all committed to build on the results achieved at this event in the further development of a global movement of movements. This declaration aims to inspire the further development of such a movement by pointing to the general direction in which we choose to move. Together, we can make global transitions to sustainable future. Join us.

Climate: Grim signs of deadly change

(John Vidal in Jomsom, Nepal)

On a 1,000-mile journey from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, we find clear evidence of the terrible threat global warming now poses to the millions who rely on water from the roof of the world.

Way above us in the Himalayan cloud are jagged, snowbound peaks - Annapurna, Damodar, Gangapurna, Dhaulagiri. Below us is the Thulagi glacier, a river of ancient ice snaking steeply down the Marshyangdi valley from near the top of Mount Manasulu.

The small plane banks and skims a lonely pass and we find what we have been looking for: at Thulagi's snout is a milk-blue lake marked on few maps. It has doubled in size in just a few years and is held back only by a low wall of dead ice and earth. If Thulagi carries on melting at the present rate, nothing will stop billions of litres of water bursting through this natural dam and devastating villages, farmland and everything below.

Thulagi is one of 20 steadily growing glacial lakes in Nepal which mountain communities and scientists fear will inevitably rupture if the growth in greenhouse gas emissions is not stemmed by world leaders at the Copenhagen climate summit. Average temperatures across Nepal have risen 1.6C in 50 years - twice the global average. But here on the roof of the world, in what is called the "third pole", they are already nearly 4C above normal and on track to rise by as much as 8C by 2050.

Temperature rises like this in the Himalayas would be a catastrophe. It is not just the future of a few mountain communities at stake but the lives of nearly one in four people in the world, all of whom rely on the Himalayas for water. Nepalese rivers alone provide water for 700 million people in India and Bangladesh. "If there is less snow in the Himalayas, or the monsoon rains weaken, or the glaciers melt with climate change, then all south Asian farming, industry, water supplies and cities will suffer," said Nepalese climate specialist Ngamindra Dahal.

On a 1,000-mile journey from the world's greatest water source in the Himalayas, down rivers and then by train through Nepal, India and Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal, we saw evidence of profound changes in weather patterns right across south Asia. Wherever we went we were told of significant temperature increases, and found governments slowly waking up to the threat of climate change and communities having to respond in any way they could to erratic rains and more serious droughts, floods and storms.

The starting point was Jomsom, a small town in the Kali Gandaki valley, 2,300 metres high and at the heart of the Annapurna range. This remote town, which saw its first ever car last year, has experienced no snowfall this winter. The temperature soared way above normal to 27C, and only fell to 13C, against a usual -4C, while the snowline has risen above 5,000 metres. The Gandaki river, fed by 1,200 glaciers, flows to the Ganges and on to Bangladesh.

"The temperature is higher, so there's less snow, and less meltwater in spring to plant crops. People have no need to come down from the mountains in winter. They can grow chillies and peppers now," said Sunil Pant, a Nepalese MP. "But now they cannot grow wheat or staple foods."

It's the same story even in the Everest valley region, 400 miles to the east of Jomsom, where the snowfall is becoming increasingly unpredictable.

Already, some communities believe they are a living under a death sentence, according to Lucky Sherpa, the MP for the region. "They say they are not sure there will be a tomorrow," she said. "The snow used to come up to your waist in winter. Now children do not know what snow is. We have more flies and mosquitoes, more skin diseases. Communities are adapting by switching crops, but diseases are moving up the mountains, the tea and apple crops are being hurt and wells are drying up."

Two hundred miles away in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, Simon Lucas, a climate change officer at the UK Department for International Development, confirmed that river flows in winter have seriously declined. "The trends are clearer in Nepal than in other countries," he said. "People cannot plant their crops in the spring because the winter snows are not so heavy. They have always relied on snow and glacier melt".

Britain last week earmarked GBP50mn for Nepal to adapt to climate change, mainly through investing in its forests, but climate scientists say it faces ever more erratic, intense and unpredictable rainfall. We found the evidence for that when we headed south towards Nepal's border with Bihar state in India. Here the problem is not too little water but far too much; last year, following torrential monsoon rains, Nepal's greatest river, the Khosi, broke through two kilometres of embankment and flooded hundreds of square kilometres of farmland. Nearly 1,500 people died and 3 million people were displaced. Fifty thousand people in Nepal and many more in India lost their homes, and the river changed its course by more than 150km.

The Khosi is known as "the river of sorrow" because it often floods, but the scale of what happened last August shocked both Indian and Nepalese governments. When the waters finally receded, people found vast areas of farmland covered by a 6ft-deep sea of sand brought down in suspension from the mountains. Seven months on, the embankment has been repaired but people are devastated and everyone is frightened that this kind of flood will become more common.

"It's impossible to cultivate anything", said Ashma Khatoum, a farmer. "There are no toilets, or clean drinking water. I don't believe we will ever get back to normal again."

We crossed the Indian border and went straight from severe flood to deep drought. Bihar, one of India's poorest states, is experiencing one of its worst droughts in a generation. This year it has had only 15-30% of its usual rains. Most of the state has been declared a drought zone and 63 million people are expected go hungry next year.

"Climate change is definitely happening," said Vyas Ji, principal secretary in the department of disaster management in the Bihar state capital, Patna. "We used to have droughts every four or five years and floods every two to three years.

Now it's very erratic. Even the flood-prone districts are facing drought. Rainfall used to be predictable, limited and beneficial to farmers. Now it is unpredictable, heavier and harmful. Now there is no winter. Farmers are confused. This was a rice cultivating state but the seedlings get destroyed."

We headed south again, to Kolkata, one of India's great cities, which last week was warned again by international scientists that it was acutely vulnerable to sea level rises. Here temperatures have risen significantly and there are more cases of dengue fever and malaria, said the city mayor, Bikash Bhattacharya. "Copenhagen is the last chance that the poor have. If we do not succeed and we go on with business as usual, then the world's poor people will have a very hard time."

"Climate change is not the future. It is now. Tens of thousands of Indians are already in a critical situation," said Sugata Hazra, director of Jadavpur University's school of oceanography in Kolkata. His researchers have recorded sea levels in the Bay of Bengal rising far faster than the global average, and more cyclones hammering the coast. The result is the inundation of islands from higher tides and surges.

"The rate of relative sea level rise in the Sagar Islands [in the Indian Sundarbans] is 3.14mm per year, which is substantially more than the global average of 1-2mm per year. It is up to 5.2mm in some places. By 2020 at least 70,000 people will have been made homeless."

Anurag Danda, head of WWF's Sundarbans delta programme, appealed to politicians in Copenhagen for help. "For the people of the Sundarbans, climate change has arrived. The Maldives gets the attention, but there are many other people facing disaster."

From Kolkata we headed to the Bangladeshi border. There, India is building a 15ft fence to keep its neighbours out. For the moment those wanting to leave are mainly young men seeking work in the booming Indian economy, but in future, say analysts, it could be climate refugees.

Bangladesh is by far the most densely populated large country in the world and, being entirely on a low-lying delta, it is one of the most vulnerable. It stands to lose 20% of its land to sea level rise in the next 80 years and is already experiencing more frequent and more intense cyclones. In the

last seven years, four of the most powerful storms ever recorded have slammed its coasts.

Climate change, on top of all its other problems, means Bangladesh faces even deeper problems, said Kim Streatfield, director of the Centre for health and population research at ICDDR, an international research institution in Dhaka. He fears the combination of climate change and an expected 50m-100m population rise in the next 50 years will devastate the country unless action is taken. "Increasing salinity in the water will have a major effect on food production," he said. "In addition, the water table is dropping two to three metres a year, and one in four wells can be dry in the dry season."

Our south Asian climate odyssey from source to sea ended south of Chittagong, on the Bay of Bengal. There, where the waters of the Kali Gandaki, the Ganges and Nepal's many other rivers reach the ocean, communities are experiencing higher tides and more flooding, as well as the loss of farmland and fishing.

"The sea water now comes right into our houses. We would all like to move, but there is nowhere to go," said Geeta Das, a teacher in Bolihut village, near Chittagong. Her home has been partly

washed away and her bed is now just a foot from where the waters reached a few weeks ago. "We panic when it is cloudy and it is about to rain. We fear we will lose our children."

A neighbour, Madhuri Das, said: "We do not need scientists or anyone to tell us things are changing. We know the sea level is rising. We have always lived here. The floods are more frequent and we now fear the sea. Ten years ago, the sea water never came to the village. We cannot afford to raise our houses except on mud, which gets washed away. We can't use the toilets, and diseases are now more common. Our water is no longer sweet."

Nurun Nahar, a Bolihut fisherman, gave up his trade when catches declined precipitously three years ago. His experiences speak for the 700m people who depend on Nepal and the Himalayas for their lives: "We are poor so we cannot do much to adapt on our own to what we can see is taking place. But we do not want to depend on nature any more. We see so many changes happening. All we want is a secure life. We are resilient but we must look to the rich to help us make this world a better place."

Source: The Hindu, December 7, 2009



Copenhagen summit 2009: The predictable failure

Copenhagen 2009: The Predictable failure

(Michael Löwy)

We – I mean the Marxists, the ecosocialists, the radical climate justice activists – were quite pessimistic about the so-called United Nations Conference on Climate Change: we predicted that Copenhagen would end in a failure. We argued that the capitalist system doesn't know any criteria other than more accumulation, greater expansion and higher profits, and therefore is unable to take the minimal measures necessary to prevent catastrophic climate change. And since we knew that the vast majority of the "world leaders" present in Copenhagen are nothing but faithful servants of capitalist interests, we thought

that the conference would limit itself to vague promises about a 50% reduction of CO2 emissions by 2050. In a word, we believed that the Copenhagen mountain would give birth to a mouse.

Well, I must admit that we were wrong. We were not pessimistic enough. The Copenhagen conference gave birth not to a mouse but to a cockroach. Kyoto was already a big failure, since its aims were ridiculously low – a reduction of 5% by 2012 – and the methods proposed to get there, such as the "market in pollution rights",

absolutely unable to achieve any significant progress. But Copenhagenis much, much less than Kyoto, which at least acknowledged the need for internationally agreed commitments.

What happened? China accused the US of not committing itself to any meaningful measures to reduce emissions; the US accused China of not accepting any international commitment to reduce emissions. Both insisted that they couldn't do anything if the other didn't move. Europe explained that they couldn't take any initiatives without the US and China. The only thing they all agreed, and happily, was on the urgent need to do nothing.

So all we have got is an ugly cockroach, called "The Copenhagen Agreement", concocted by the "world leaders" before hurriedly leaving the conference by the back door. It is a completely vacuous document saying that, as everybody knows, temperatures should be stopped from rising more than 2°C. Not a word about limits on gas emissions, no mention of percentage of reductions, not even as a wish expressed for the remote future. Nothing. Nix. Zero content.

So, what hope is there? The only hope is in the 100,000 people who demonstrated in the streets of Copenhagen, coming from Denmark and elsewhere in Scandinavia, Germany, Europe and the whole world, demanding radical measures, denouncing the irresponsibility of the "responsible leaders", claiming climate justice, and proposing to "change the system, not the climate". And in the thousands, who peacefully marched up to the doors of the conference, trying to open a dialogue with the "official"

representatives, only to be met by teargas and police clubs, and to see their spokespeople – like Tadzo Müller – arrested for "incitement to violence". And in the thousands who took part in the discussions of the alternative KlimaForum, which adopted a resolution denouncing the pseudo-solutions of the system ("carbon trade", etc.). There is also hope in political leaders like the Bolivian President Evo Morales – among the very few exceptions – who showed solidarity with the Climate Justice movement, and denounced capitalism as the system responsible for disastrous global warming.

To conclude: many years ago, the poet and singer Joe Hill, of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in the USA, said, just before he was shot by the authorities on trumped up charges: "Don't mourn, organize." We must return to our countries, and organize people, in the fields, in the factories, in the schools, in the streets, to build a large international movement fighting against the system, to impose radical change, to save, not "the planet" – it is not in danger, but life on this planet from destruction.

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Sundarbans water warming faster than global average

By: IANS Date: 2009-12-01 Place: New Delhi

In the Sundarbans, surface water temperature has been rising at the rate of 0.5 degree Celsius per decade over the past three decades, eight times the rate of global warming, says a new study.

That makes the Sundarbans one of the worst climate change hotspots on the globe.

The study, carried out over 27 years from 1980 by scientists from India and the US, found a change of 1.5 degrees Celsius, a clear challenge to

the survival of flora and fauna in the world's largest mangrove forest.

A Unesco World Heritage site, the Sundarbans covers 9,630 sq km in India and Bangladesh. It is home to a number of endangered species.

"Surface water temperature in the deltaic complex of the Indian Sundarbans experienced a gradual increase of 0.5 degree Celsius per decade in last three decades. This rate is much

higher than the global warming rate of 0.06 degree Celsius per decade and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)-documented rate of 0.2 degree Celsius per decade in the Indian Ocean during 1970-99," Abhijit Mitra, professor in the Department of Marine Sciences, Calcutta University, told IANS.

The study published in the latest issue of scientific journal *Current Science* found that faster melting of Himalayan glaciers have decreased the salinity at the western end of the Indian Sundarbans while salinity has increased on the eastern end due to clogging of connections of the estuaries with fresh water on account of heavy siltation and solid waste disposal from Kolkata.

The scientists also studied variations in dissolved oxygen, pH level (a measure of acidity), transparency and water quality to know the impact of global warming on the ecosystem.

"The surface water pH over the past 30 years has reduced in the region, thus increasing acidification. The variations in salinity and increased temperature could be reasons for observed variation in pH and dissolved oxygen," said Mitra.

The concentration of dissolved oxygen (DO) in the western sector of the Sundarbans showed an increasing trend in contrast to the eastern part where it is decreasing significantly.

"Depletion in dissolved oxygen can cause major shifts in the ecological habitation in the region. Rising temperature could also be one of the reasons for decreasing dissolved oxygen in the Sundarbans," he said.

Global warming accelerates the process of erosion in coastal and estuarine zones either through increased summer flow from the glaciers or by increased tidal amplitude due to sea level rise.

Erosion and sedimentation processes, along with subsequent churning action, increase the saturation of suspended solids, thus decreasing the transparency.

"The reduced transparency affects the growth and survival of phytoplankton, the small microscopic plants in the oceans that produce three-fourths of the earth's oxygen supply. Damage to this community may adversely affect the food chain in this mangrove-dominated deltaic complex, which is the nursery and breeding ground of 150-250 species of fish and other organisms," said Mitra.

The study concluded that although the observed changes could result from a combination of climate change and human interventions and related phenomena, the changes are real and their impact will be felt in the ecosystem in the coming years.



This (climate) change is worse for women

(Vineeta Pandey)

Women and the poor will bear the most brunt of climate change and the problems arising out of it, says a United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA) report.

Quoting various researches, the report, *State of World Population*, says natural disasters, including those related to extreme weather, kill more women than men.

The poor are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change - an alarming find for women, considering that a majority of the 1.5 billion

Indians living on \$1 a day or less belong to the fair sex.

Since the poor are mostly dependent on agriculture, they risk losing their livelihood when droughts strike and rains become unpredictable.

Global warming is likely to alter the summer monsoon pattern, causing widespread drought. The impact can be disastrous, since 490 million people of the country (60% of rural or 42% of total population) are dependent on marginal or small farm holdings. Any change in the summer

monsoon will immediately threaten their livelihood.

In India, 51% of land sown (68 of 133 million hectares) is rain-fed. As such, the effect of climate change in the form of drought will be devastating for the country.

The report draws attention to populations in low-lying coastal areas that are at a greater risk and calls on governments to plan ahead to strengthen risk-reduction, preparedness and management of disasters and address potential displacement of people. Low-elevated coastal zones that are less than 10 metres above sea level are home to 13% of the world's urban population. Among the world's largest cities at risk due to increase in sea level are Mumbai, Dhaka, Jakarta, New York, Shanghai and Tokyo.

The report says extreme weather conditions are met with poor demands, causing further damage. "In many cases, failures in environmental management increased the impact of climate hazards. In India, the 2008 rains caused serious flooding, not because they were heavy, but because of the failure of poorly-maintained dams and river banks. A breach in the Kosi river embankment in August 2008 led to one of the worst floods in the history of Bihar, the poorest state in India."

Investments that empower women and girls — particularly education and health — bolster economic development and reduce poverty and have a beneficial impact on climate. For example, girls with more education tend to have smaller and healthier families as adults. Women with access to reproductive health services, including family planning, have lower fertility rates that contribute to slower growth in greenhouse gas emissions in the long run.

Expect more action at home than in Copenhagen:
Ramesh

Just days before India takes a formal stand at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Copenhagen, environment and forests minister

Jairam Ramesh categorically said there should not be high expectations from the conference. India was not going to be part of any binding cuts or global agreements on carbon emissions. But India would still adopt ruthless, aggressive and proactive measures to curb emissions.

Being aggressive and ruthless, he clarified, doesn't mean being bound by international commitments. "It means shifting towards cleaner technology for cooking, transport and towards renewable energy," he said.

"We are going for a long haul before we reach any international commitment. Climate change is more a domestic than international issue for us. We must be aggressive internationally... But the position we take internationally will be conditioned by global reality. What we do domestically is realistic. India is very vulnerable on the climate front. Nobody is more vulnerable than us, hence, it is really a domestic issue for us," Ramesh said at the release of the State of World Population 2009 report by the United Nations Population Fund.

"There is abundance of evidence to show that climate change is not related in any way to population growth... though China was recording negative population growth during the 1990s, its emissions kept on increasing. Emissions are caused by consumption patterns.

"It has been seen that developed countries which eat beef have the maximum amount of emissions. They can cut down on emissions, if they stop eating beef. We haven't reached that level mainly because India is not a beef-eating country," the minister said.

"There is no iron law to say that India with its growing population has chances of increasing emissions. We are a developing country and we need to grow 23% by 2020. We don't need to be defensive at the international level. We will be a high-developing low-emitting country," he said.

The minister indicated that low carbon growth will be a part of the new five-year plan.

Source: DNA India, November 20, 2009

Controversy over Himalayan glaciers hot up

(N. GOPAL RAJ)

Water scarcity, which could affect more than a billion people, is the most serious threat that Asia faces from climate change

An official discussion paper on the status of Himalayan glaciers is coming under fire. The paper, issued recently by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, argued that the glaciers, which nourish several great rivers such as the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra, have not retreated abnormally. It also questioned the link between climate change and the glaciers' decline.

Releasing the paper, the Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Mr. Jairam Ramesh, remarked that there was no conclusive evidence to show that global warming was responsible for the glacial retreat.

Contradictory views

Such views completely contradict the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Nobel-Prize-winning international body of scientists that weighs up the scientific evidence. Two years back, the IPCC released its comprehensive Fourth Assessment Report on Climate Change.

The report pointed out that glaciers and ice caps provided the most visible indications of the effects of climate change. The Himalayan glaciers were receding faster than in any other part of the world.

If these glaciers continued to recede at the present rate, there was a very high risk of their disappearing by the year 2035, perhaps sooner, if the earth kept warming at the current rate.

Biggest threat

It warned that water scarcity, which could affect more than a billion people, was the most serious threat that Asia faced from climate change.

The Ministry's riposte has been prepared by V.K. Raina, a retired Deputy Director-General of the Geological Survey of India. In the discussion paper, he agreed that glaciers in the Himalayas, barring a few exceptions, have been in constant retreat since observations started in the mid-Nineteenth Century. Moreover, studies showed all glaciers under observation to have lost mass

during the last three decades of the last century.

However, "Himalayan glaciers, although shrinking in volume and constantly showing a retreating front, have not in any way exhibited, especially in recent years, an abnormal annual retreat of the order that some glaciers in Alaska and Greenland are reported [to have shown]." It would be premature to state that these glaciers were retreating abnormally because of global warming.

Glacier movements are primarily due to climate and snowfall. But then Mr. Raina goes on to state that movements of the 'snout', the visible end of a glacier, "appear to be peculiar to each particular glacier." The Gangotri glacier, which fed the Ganges River, was practically at a standstill for the last two years.

Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the IPCC, has criticized both the discussion paper and the Minister. He did not understand why the Minister was supporting such unsubstantiated research, he told the Guardian newspaper.

The discussion paper was unscientific and biased, said Syed Iqbal Hasnain, a leading glaciologist who is currently with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in New Delhi. It had ignored scientific papers published in peer-reviewed journals after the 1980s when the impact of long-lived greenhouse gases became more visible. These papers clearly showed that warming of the climate was leading to the Himalayan glaciers melting at an exceptionally high rate, he said in an email.

The discussion paper had been sent to him a month back by the Minister's office for review and he had responded with detailed comments. He had also provided the Minister with all recent papers published by Indians in peer-reviewed journals on the subject. But the paper had been unfortunately been released without any change.

Short-lived pollutants

Himalayan glaciers were not only affected by long-lived greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide but also by short-lived pollutants like black carbon, methane and atmospheric ozone, according to Prof. Hasnain.

In the eastern part of the Himalayas, the excessive melting of glaciers had led to lakes being formed in Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan, remarked Shresth Tayal, another glaciologist at TERI.

Just recently, the prestigious science journal Nature carried a report on how the mountain kingdom of Bhutan was trying to drain such glacial lakes. Otherwise these lakes might burst their embankment and flood neighbouring areas.

In a paper that appeared in the journal Current Science in 2001, geologists from the HNB Garhwal University in Uttarakhand pointed out that the Gangotri glacier had retreated by two kilometres in the past 200 years. Over 40 per cent of that retreat had occurred in just the last 25 years.

Satellite images

A group led by scientists at the Indian space

agency's Space Applications Centre in Ahmedabad used satellite images to study 466 glaciers in the Chenab, Parbati and Baspa basins.

They found that the glaciers had shrunk by 21 per cent since 1962. The glaciers had also become more fragmented, which was likely to profoundly influence their sustainability, said Anil Kulkarni and others in a 2007 paper.

In recently published research, the space scientists used a model to study how loss of glaciers could affect water flow in a tributary of the Sutlej River.

They estimated that a one degree Celsius rise in temperature by 2040 would more than halve the area occupied by the glaciers that fed the tributary. The runoff in the tributary could therefore come down by between eight per cent and 28 per cent, depending on the season.

Source: The Hindu, Thursday, Nov 19, 2009.



Growing CO₂ could cause 6 m rise in sea level

London: If the world fails to get the growing carbon emission under control, sea levels could rise by up to six meters, said a new study.

According to the study by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), temperatures in the Antarctica were increased by 6 degrees Celsius during the past periods when the volume of high carbon dioxide (CO₂) was high in the atmosphere.

This could cause a sea level rise of up six meters, threatening coastal cities like London, New York and San Francisco, it said.

Louise Sime, who led the BAS study, looked at ice cores to see how temperatures changed during periods of high carbon dioxide.

During the last period of high CO₂ 125, 000 years ago, she found temperatures were up to 6 degrees Celsius higher than present day levels.

Such a hike in temperature could lead to rise in

sea levels of between 4 to 6 meters over hundreds of years as the ice sheets melt, the Telegraph reported.

"We didn't expect to see such warm temperatures, and we don't yet know in detail what caused them. but they indicate that Antarctica's climate may have undergone rapid shifts during past periods of high CO₂".

Dr Sime said the study suggests that current high levels of CO₂ could also cause a rise in temperature. She said further research could predict the affect on sea level rise.

"If we can pin down how much warmer temperatures were in Antarctica and Greenland at this time, then we can lest predictions of how melting of the large ice sheets may contribute to sea level rise."

Source: Asian Age, November 20th, 2009



The climate denial industry seeks to dupe the public. It's working

(George Monbiot)

When you survey the trail of wreckage left by the climate emails crisis, three things become clear. The first is the tendency of those who claim to be the champions of climate science to minimise their importance. Those who have most to lose if the science is wrong have perversely sought to justify the secretive and chummy ethos that some of the emails reveal. If science is not transparent and accountable, it's not science.

I believe that all supporting data, codes and programmes should be made available as soon as an article is published in a peer-reviewed journal. That anyone should have to lodge a freedom of information request to obtain them is wrong. That the request should be turned down is worse. That a scientist suggests deleting material that might be covered by that request is unjustifiable. Everyone who values the scientific process should demand complete transparency, across all branches of science.

The second observation is the tendency of those who don't give a fig about science to maximize their importance. The denial industry, which has no interest in establishing the truth about global warming, insists that these emails, which concern three or four scientists and just one or two lines of evidence, destroy the entire canon of climate science.

Even if you were to exclude every line of evidence that could possibly be disputed — the proxy records, the computer models, the complex science of clouds and ocean currents — the evidence for man-made global warming would still be unequivocal. You can see it in the measured temperature record, which goes back to 1850; in the shrinkage of glaciers and the thinning of sea ice; in the responses of wild animals and plants and the rapidly changing crop zones.

No other explanation for these shifts makes sense. Solar cycles have been out of synch with the temperature record for 40 years. The Milankovic cycle, which describes variations in the Earth's orbit, doesn't explain it either. But the warming trend is closely correlated with the accumulation of heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere. The impact of these gases can be demonstrated in the laboratory. To assert that they do not have the same effect in the atmosphere, a novel and radical theory would be required. No such theory exists. The science is not

fixed - no science ever is - but it is as firm as science can be. The evidence for man-made global warming remains as strong as the evidence linking smoking to lung cancer or HIV to AIDS.

The third observation is the contrast between the global scandal these emails have provoked and the muted response to 20 years of revelations about the propaganda planted by fossil fuel companies. I have placed on the Guardian's website four case studies, each of which provides a shocking example of how the denial industry works.

Two of them are drawn from *Climate Cover-Up*, the fascinating, funny and beautifully written new book by James Hoggan and Richard Little more. If every allegation it contained could not be traced back to leaked documents (I have checked all the sources, their findings would be unbelievable. Nothing exposed by the hacking of the Climatic Research Unit's server is one tenth as bad as the least of these revelations.

Planted by PR companies

When I use the term denial industry, I'm referring to those who are paid to say that man-made global warming isn't happening. The great majority of people who believe this have not been paid: they have been duped. Reading *Climate Cover-Up*, you keep stumbling across familiar phrases and concepts which you can see every day on the comment threads. The book shows that these memes were planted by PR companies and hired experts.

The first case study I've posted reveals how a coalition of U.S. coal companies sought to persuade people that the science is uncertain. It listed the two social groups it was trying to reach — "Target 1: Older, less educated males"; "Target 2: Younger, lower income women" — and the methods by which it would reach them. One of its findings was that "members of the public feel more confident expressing opinions on others' motivations and tactics than they do expressing opinions on scientific issues."

Remember this the next time you hear people claiming that climate scientists are only in it for the money, or that environmentalists are trying to create a communist world government: these ideas were

devised and broadcast by energy companies. The people who inform me, apparently without irony, that “your article is an ad hominem attack, you four-eyed, big-nosed, commie sack of shit,” or “you scaremongers will destroy the entire world economy and take us back to the Stone Age,” are the unwitting recruits of campaigns they have never heard of.

The second case study reveals how Dr. Patrick Michaels, one of a handful of climate change deniers with a qualification in climate science, has been lavishly paid by companies seeking to protect their profits from burning coal. As far as I can discover, none of the media outlets who use him as a commentator - including the Guardian — has disclosed this interest at the time of his appearance. Michaels is one of many people commenting on climate change who presents himself as an independent expert while being secretly paid for his services by fossil fuel companies.

The third example shows how a list published by the Heartland Institute (which has been sponsored by oil company Exxon) of 500 scientists “whose research contradicts man-made global warming scares” turns out to be nothing of the kind: as soon as these scientists found out what the institute was saying about them, many angrily demanded that their names be removed. Twenty months later, they are still on the list. The fourth example shows how, during the Bush

presidency, White House officials worked with oil companies to remove regulators they didn’t like and to doctor official documents about climate change.

In *Climate Cover-Up*, in Ross Gelbspan’s books *The Heat is On* and *Boiling Point*, in my book *Heat*, and on the websites *DeSmogBlog.com* and *exxonsecrets.org*, you can find dozens of such examples. Together they expose a systematic, well-funded campaign to con the public. To judge by the comments you can read on the Guardian’s website, it has worked.

But people behind these campaigns know that their claims are untrue. One of the biggest was run by the Global Climate Coalition, which represented ExxonMobil, Shell, BP, the American Petroleum Institute and several big motor manufacturers. In 1995 the coalition’s own scientists reported that “the scientific basis for the greenhouse effect and the potential impact of human emissions of greenhouse gases such as CO₂ on climate is well-established and cannot be denied”. The coalition hid this finding from the public, and spent millions of dollars seeking to persuade people that the opposite was true. These people haven’t fooled themselves, but they might have fooled you. Who, among those of you who claim that climate scientists are liars and environmentalists are stooges, has thought it through for yourself?

Source: The Hindu, Wednesday, December 9, 2009



The Copenhagen failure: next debut to Mass Protest till Mexico

Keshab Khadka

The showdown of highly acclaimed Copenhagen Climate Change Convention has finished but not finalized. The issues are in ‘as-it-is, where-it-is’ conditions and policy response at scary dead end at least for next one year. People across the globe alarmed and the scientific truth to total collapse of our civilization within our own generation put ablaze! It means the present rate of carbon concentration in the atmosphere (currently estimated at 389 ppm), which seems left uncared, is bound to bring a rise of 5 to 11 degree C, enough to raise the sea level up to 6

feet and the world’s top mountains including the Everest without snow within fifty years or so. And the catastrophe thereof, the result of sheer anthropogenic, shameful behaviours! Can anyone, however humble, go to bed relaxing and soporific? Yes, political masters can go soporific, Copenhagen witnessed. No, never can people be relaxing at such peril, Copenhagen witnessed. The blood stained streets of Copenhagen witnessed the peaceful march of people from Scandinavia to Latina and across the globe at large, at thousands and thousands towards the doors of conference for

plain dialogue on climate justice with jaundiced political “officials” who only saw this pious plea as an act of ‘*incitement to violence*’ and ordered to crush by brutal police clubs and tear gas and arrests in the white name of ‘*civilized behaviors*’. O! Chinggis Khans of Civilization! Can arrest of people demanding climate justice, arrest Global Warming? Obama, you failed and so do your few *nouveau riche* guests: South Africa’s Jacob Zuma, China’s Jiabao Wen, Brazil’s Lula Inacio da Silva and India’s Manmohan Singh and so on and so forth. You and your cult failed to read the bright truth largely written on the face of people at large marching on the streets of Copenhagen that every civilized member of human society is ready to grant voluntary arrest to quest your animal thirst for power and fill all your jails anywhere and everywhere including Guantanamo to save Mother Earth! Therefore, Civil Society witnessed in Copenhagen that without mass parades in every ‘Capitol Hill’ across the globe throughout 2010, there is every chance of another failure in postponed Mexico Meet, with what commitment culprits of Copenhagen failure drunken with power in that latenight Friday party have stumbled back to their respective capitals.

The stage set

The stage was set in Bali Meet, 2007, directing Ministerial-level process both on long-term cooperative action plan in view of the emission goal limit required to pull back the present rate down to 1990 level receding back to 350 ppm and the further commitment of developed countries to strengthen Kyoto Protocol. The Danish Climate Minister Ms. Connie Hedegaard headed this Ministerial-level process that was working under two-track interface. They are: the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term

Cooperative Action under the Framework Convention on Climate Change (AWG-LCA) led by Michael Z Cutajar and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments for Annex 1 Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP) headed by John Ashe. To facilitate the process, five consultation groups were formed to discuss long-term emission goal, mitigation by developed countries, developing countries’ mitigation action, long financing, trade issues, and bunker fuels. Two Ministers were facilitating each subject matter – one from a

developed and another from a developing country.

The hot discussions prevailed over two years of intense negotiations by 194 countries, but the enormous divide between the rich and poor countries put it all in vain. Obviously, poor countries want deep cuts in emissions by the industrially advanced countries, and the developed countries continue to resist significant cuts and legally binding targets. The major contention is whether to uphold the Kyoto Protocol which is the only legal binding international document and slide back from the obligation put forth by Kyoto Understanding and waver thereby US\$400 billion annual climate debt owed to Third World victims by 2020, which US wants to see. The struggle was (is) on high pitch that resulted in postponement of final deals at Copenhagen to Mexico meet late in 2010.

The Drama

Copenhagen saw the vague exercise of best minds from across the world for two weeks of Dec 2009. The heavy exercise meant to put some garbage before the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). There were plenary and drafting groups busy to continue their negotiations. There were hard talks regarding the issues, proper wording and preparing negotiating texts. The negotiations lasted till late into night and the plenary providing guidance mode. As the time pressed towards closure and the discussions deepening confusions arose regarding the role of plenary groups itself as to who was to finalise the text. Ms Hedegaard, the Chairperson of COP 15 advised some of the drafting groups that the key topics would not be negotiated at plenary, as the Ministerial consultations would deal them. Actually, this was not only a protocol shift but also serious challenge on the process of decision by experts to decision at political level. It was on this pretext that issues of long-term goal for emission reduction and trade protection in the context of climate change were transferred to the Ministerial process which is *prima facie* undertaking of scientists and experts.

The process was so hazy that AWG-LCA Chair Mr. Cutajar presented two official texts to the

Parties at final moment (Tuesday morning, 15th December): “Draft Text on the AGW-LCA outcome under the Convention “ and “Draft Conclusions” proposed by the Chair. He also informed that there were other texts from various drafting groups as complements to the main draft. He further informed that some paras in these texts were still “placeholders” as these were the subjects of ministerial consultations, which Ms Hedegaard was largely handling, and these were the case in relation to mitigation commitments of developed countries.

The most annoying issue had been whether the United States (not a Party at Kyoto Protocol) should be treated in a special way under the Convention while the developed countries in the Kyoto Protocol should commit to quantified emission reduction targets in the second commitment period under the Protocol and be subject to the Protocol’s rules and compliance system. Developed countries who are Kyoto Protocol Parties argued that a new legally binding treaty was needed that would replace the Protocol to deal with all developed country Parties in the same way. Indirectly, collaborating with this unwanted antithesis, Brazil, latter supported by China, strongly demanded that the mitigation ‘actions’ of developing countries should be balanced with the mitigation ‘commitments’ of developed countries. But the absolute majority of developing countries hold that Kyoto Protocol must continue and all developed countries including US must submit to international legally binding emission reductions. They also agree that developing countries should also reduce emissions but subject to the support in technology transformation and finance from developed countries to required level.

As the debate heightened tough, US appeared boldly on the stage only to meet the wrath of delegates and representatives for something meaningful outcomes of the conference. Then what happened on the final scene of the lingering drama in Copenhagen is best put by Michael Lowy, “China accused the US of not committing itself to any meaningful measures to reduce emissions; the US accused China of not accepting any international commitment to reduce emissions. Both insisted that they couldn’t do anything if the other didn’t move. Europe explained that they couldn’t take any initiatives without the US and China. The only

thing they all agreed, and happily, was on the urgent need to do nothing.”

The epilogue

The sincere efforts of 194 countries in these two precious years in the hard process of intense negotiations could not be so easily diluted to nothing. Three factors stood like mountains to demolish *locus standi* of Copenhagen Conference: Firstly, there was mounting popular pressure of civil society activities of which British Prime Minister Gordon Brown said: “What you’re doing through the internet around the world is absolutely crucial to setting the agenda. In the next 48 hours, don’t underestimate your effect on the leaders here in Copenhagen” The second reason lies with the scientific facts and solidarity. In May 2009, India, China and 35 other developing nations had submitted an ambitious proposal to the UNFCCC to strengthen Kyoto by requiring nations to cut their emissions by 45 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020. This is what scientists say is needed in order to avoid dangerous temperature rises of 2°C or more.

The third reason lies on the fact that out of the 192 countries whose officials had spent a long two weeks in Copenhagen, most delegates were visibly upset as they’d not been involved anyway and the meetings continued all night. The last minute debut by 128 heads of state and government was formidable enough to ignore. Now the prodigy was vague agreement of some sort called “Copenhagen Accord”. The definition by birth of this accord has been postponement of imminent new climate treaty due in Copenhagen for at least a year. It’s clear that the accord is “insincere, inconsistent, and unconvincing”, as Prof Jaffrey Sachs, the mastermind behind Millennium Development Goals, calls “Obama’s decision to declare a phony negotiating victory undermines the UN process by signaling that rich countries will do what they want and must no longer listen to the ‘pesky’ concerns of many smaller and poorer countries.”

N. Bassey, Chair of Friends of Earth International, calls Copenhagen an ‘utter disaster’, a ‘total failure’ that “condemned millions of the world’s poorest people to hunger, suffering and loss of life”. Kumi Naidoo, head of Greenpeace International, said

Copenhagen was a “crime scene” and James Hansen, the great climate scientist whose team established the crucial 350ppm as safe limit for human habitation, refused to recognize Copenhagen calling it a charade. Bill Mc Kibben, one of the founder of 350.org, writes the unavoidable conclusion of Copenhagen Conference as “...we simply won't take significant action to prevent it” (global warming).

The way ahead

Now the Copenhagen Accord has triggered two lines of thinking: firstly, the accord is an achievement or sabotage?. It can be an achievement for saboteurs but not for people at large as they lose their rightful cause. Not a single soul in social movement has enough courage to pardon the “crime scene”. Besides, the confusion remains even over the EU headquarters on accord's legal status and half a dozen nations, including Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Bolivia, explicitly declined to support it. At best the accord recorded the “unveiling of Pretoria, Delhi, Beijing and Brasilia as willing criminal accomplices to the Washington/Brussel/Tokyo/Melbourne/Ottatwa axis”(Lowy). Already there is mushroom growth of mass actions against the Accord right from Verginea to Canada, Africa and worldwide. But the chaining of these events and expanding them into spontaneous rings of local events sounds very much necessary to educate people at large and form strong public opinion on this ugly outcome.

Secondly, the more importantly, the focus of the movement be centered to raise the issues ensuing after this awesome Accord appeared from nowhere and familiarise them at national and local levels so that climate change turns into everybody's concern and the crime above board. Four important aspects, inter alia, are vital:

1) The greatest danger at Mexico Meet is that the Kyoto Protocol (KP) will be terminated and replaced because the emission cut pledges for 2020 made in Copenhagen are in the context of “new, universal, comprehensive and effective international agreement on climate change,” and not in the context of KP. And this is the major plot behind the Accord.

2)The pledges are treacherously so framed that there is no clearance on domestic measures because the offset measures (buying carbon credits from developing countries) do not help to mitigation in real terms.

Besides, the emission cut pledges are far below the requirement ascertained by science to stay within 2 degree of temperature(UNFCCC calculates the range of pledges made in Copenhagen comes between 16 and 23% of the 1990 levels by 2020 against the proposed emission cut of 45%)

3) Another danger of the Accord is that, if it is widely endorsed by Feb 1, 2010, it will activate notorious Clean Development Mechanism in the name of cost effective mitigation actions, a project cleverly concocted to appropriate promised funding by TNCs

4) The damage done to carbon trade is unpardonable. The cap and trade is so ignored that any further investment in renewable energy is unthinkable as carbon market is continuously falling

Besides, the growing numbers of masses across the globe are in favour of concrete results now against hedonistic super power behaving to procrastination. The hour is already late for waking up to the reality of climate change. Recent scientific studies suggest that climate feedbacks hardly make the two-degree C target met without “going negative”. It means not only does the world have to go carbon-free in the coming decades; carbon will need to be removed from the atmosphere to lower concentrations to perhaps 350 ppm from today's 389 ppm. The getups in Copenhagen amply exposed that the so loud pledges fall too short to meet these minimum goals.

On the same parlance, UN says, “Copenhagen was the first time leaders were using the climate vocabulary.” But the bottom line of majority developing countries is that developed countries lack ‘willingness and political intent’ to uphold their obligations responsibly. However unpleasant it sounds, on the otherhand, it is pretty clear by now that the US and China, the giant polluters, is no longer observers in the international climate debate but leaders committed to shape the new climate diplomacy. The growing triangle is that more

advanced economies among developing countries are using affluent economies as scapegoats to safe guard their own intent. It is against this backdrop that any movement designed for climate justice needs to be shaped out.

The clear message of social movement in days to come should start with the hollowness of Copenhagen Accord as it is voluntary and postpones setting hard numbers against industrialised countries to reduce emissions and the binding nature of Kyoto Protocol. There is no safe room for super powers to walk on climate arena on the support of regional axes whether it is Beijing or Brazil. Therefore, Mexico must be the parade ramp to convince the scapegoats that their very survival thrives in upholding climate justice (i.e., being with less developed countries) and make synergetic effort upon highly industrialized economies at international plane to bear their historical responsibility.

The need of the hour, therefore, is to rally mass actions across the globe to pressurise the culprits of Copenhagen to be in presence in the fair trail of Mexico in the sense that they can't commit further crime against Climate Change and Humanity. The major concerns of our movements reflect following common parlance:

- ◆ Uphold the Kyoto Protocol beyond 2012. Long live Kyoto spirit of binding justice. Down with any effort to undermine Kyoto Principles
- ◆ The voluntary pledges must confirm to minimum requirements set by science to achieve 2 to 1.5 degree C temperature increase.
- ◆ Assert 350 ppm as stabilization goal.

- ◆ Down with any deviation whatsoever
- ◆ The base year stands at 1990 firmly. Down with any move to replace it by 2005.
- ◆ No one has right to trample Cap and Trade. Strengthen climate justice through emission trade.
- ◆ Uphold the rules of forestry and land use. Full commitment on Land Use Change
- ◆ Organise protests, unite people and mobilize masses to march over Mexico Meet.

Equity, justice and science are the fundamental grounds to arrest climate change catastrophe. Let's march together and success bound to follow us. Only criticizing the Copenhagen Accord will not serve our purpose. Bold actions, resolute movements, mass mobilizations designed to making Climate Change as common man's concern are absolutely necessary to face the challenge. We failed in Copenhagen and failed in last several millennia. But our ideal has remained always forwarding ahead, - driving the civilization smoother ahead. Roaring mass movements across the globe creates an environment which will force climate justice now in Mexico for which our all out efforts with commitment awaits throughout 2010 as in the past.

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Of receding glaciers and lack of benchmark data

(Meena Menon)

From Leh, the 40-km drive to Khardungla, the highest motorable pass in the world at 18,380 feet, winds gently through mountains coated with thick snow. To the left of the pass the Ladakhis swear is the Khardung glacier which has retreated, though there is no study to confirm it. In fact, Prof. Syed Iqbal Hasnain, a leading glaciologist and a senior fellow at The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) who visited Khardungla along with a group of journalists recently, did not know of its existence. Local wisdom differs. Small glaciers in Ladakh have receded over the years and some of them could well be the subject of history.

There is an acute lack of benchmark data on small glaciers, which is why Prof. Hasnain has undertaken this task, not without some difficulty. Trained mountaineers have been requisitioned to help study some smaller glaciers in different Himalayan regions, some of them steep and inaccessible. "In the last 60 years, we don't have any benchmark glacier studies. Gangotri is too large to be a benchmark glacier," he points out.

Inspired by Prof. V. Ramanathan's study on the Atmospheric Brown Clouds and the role of black carbon, Prof. Hasnain is now measuring black carbon on glaciers with the help of aethalometers. At a recent presentation before journalists in Leh, he spoke of the disappearing "Himalayan Ice Climate and Black Carbon Aerosol Impacts on Water resources." Leh was perhaps an apt place for this presentation, where Prof. Hasnain admitted there is very little data on what is the regional rate of glacier melt or the role of black carbon forcing and deposition.

For future climate scenarios, he says you have to develop benchmarks as also data on what is the contribution of snow glacier melt to the water flow in rivers.

Four small glaciers have been selected for this benchmark study, one each in the Zaskar, Kashmir Valley, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim based on advice from the World Glacier Monitoring station in Zurich to study comparable glaciers which were less than 15 sq km. Already for the Kolahoi glacier in Kashmir, Prof. Hasnain found photographs dating back to 1942 which show a healthy accumulation zone where the snow collects in the glacier. "The measurements have started on black carbon, we know it is present but how much

impact is there in the melting process will take a while to assess," he points out.

An aethalometer has been installed at East Rathong glacier at 4,700 metres to measure the black carbon there which is high in the Western Himalayas and this is directly related to the transport sector. The adulteration of diesel with kerosene poses a major threat to fragile environments. Some of the initial results on black carbon depositions were shown to Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh who has asked Prof. Hasnain to submit a project to measure yearly carbon emissions. Black carbon is an important pollutant in global warming and some policy commitment is needed before COP 15 in Copenhagen, he feels.

The impact on small glaciers has been borne out in a new study "Witnessing change: Glaciers in the Indian Himalayas," by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Birla Institute of Technology (BIT) Extension Centre, Jaipur. The initial results from this field study indicate that smaller glaciers like Kafni in the Kumaon region are retreating at a faster rate, and are not only losing more glaciated portion but also their tributary glaciers — a trend which has been observed across the Himalayas for many other smaller glaciers.

Larger glaciers like Gangotri which is the second glacier in this study shows a continuous recessionary trend in recent years through this and other studies (Singh, et al., 2006). Dr. Rajesh Kumar, scientific officer of the BIT, extension centre, Jaipur, part of the WWF study notes that despite the fluctuations over the years, there is a sharp retreating trend and the latest figure of retreat for the Gangotri glacier is 17.19 metres per year. Glaciers are more vulnerable to changes in temperatures and Gangotri has already retreated by 20 metres so far. However, the 29.5-km-long glacier still has breathing time.

The study concludes that regional climate variations could threaten the fragile nature of these glaciers which are likely to disappear at a much faster rate or be considerably reduced in length as compared to the larger ice bodies. Emerging trends are not a good omen for glaciers in Uttarakhand and elsewhere and need a detailed study based on more satellite imageries and ground research.

Source: The Hindu, November 12, 2009

The glacier melt

(Meena Menon)

Seventy-four-year-old Chewang Norphel strides briskly across a mass of boulders in the steep and rough terrain below what was once the Stakmo glacier, explaining his latest project. The man who pioneered the artificial glacier in Ladakh does not let age deter his enthusiasm to bring water to the people of his region. Funded by the Indian Army's Sadbhavna project Mr. Norphel plans to build three artificial glaciers, a kilometre away from Stakmo village near Leh, which will store two million cubic feet of ice which will start forming mid-November. The snow melt in the upper reaches of the mountains in the distance trickles down to the three-tiered series of stone embankments that have been built to arrest the water flow in the shady side of the hillside.

This ice will melt by mid April, in time for the sowing of crops. With 700-odd residents, Stakmo is one of the eleven villages in Ladakh district to have this artificial glacier, which is a simple water harvesting and conservation system. Mr. Norphel, a retired government civil engineer, recalls that there was a natural glacier here till about 30 years ago. While drinking water is piped to the village, it is for summer crops that water is needed. Stakmo has three hamlets with 120 hectares of land, split into small holdings. People grow wheat, potatoes, peas, barley and vegetables.

The enormity of climate change and its impact is on everyone's lips in this cold desert where over 80 per cent of the farmers depend on the snow melt for their needs. Water is almost a luxury now. There is no authoritative study done so far to estimate the impact of receding glaciers in Ladakh, points out Ms Nisa Khatoon, project officer, of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Leh. Scarcity of water has led to people digging bore wells in Leh, which is likely to have an impact on the underwater springs. Ms Khatoon also notes a reduction in pasture lands affecting the migration routes of the Changpas, a nomadic tribe that lives near the lakes in the upper reaches of Ladakh.

Like Mr. Norphel, 92-year-old Phuntchok Namgyal from Stakmo does not need scientists to tell him about global warming. The lack of studies on Ladakh's retreating glaciers is no dampener. I am the scientific data, quips Norphel. Namgyal's village faced a serious water crisis due to the poor

snow melt. Outside a large house in the village, 78-year-old Yamjor Tashi uses the traditional loom to weave woollen cloth. His younger brother Phuntchok recalls the glacier which used to provide them with plenty of water. In the last five years, the problem has become acute, he says. Most people grow their food and weave wool here. Their self sufficiency is one of the casualties of global warming. For years, Ladakhis have used everything that was locally made, all that is changing now.

The artificial glacier was pioneered by Ice Man Mr. Norphel in 1987 in Phuktse Phu village. Citing the benefits of water conservation, he says it increases production and income. Sometimes people can harvest two crops and use the water for tree plantation. It increases ground water recharge and rejuvenates spring water. Due to the high altitudes at which these embankments have to be built, the costs go upto Rs. 11 lakhs. The idea is easy to replicate and the Leh Nutrition Project (LNCP) formed by Mr. Norphel has used this technique in other states too.

Worry for the next generation

Since 1993 farmers have observed a decline in plant biodiversity and Ladakh has over the years, witnessed warmer temperatures, less snow on the mountain tops, unusual heavy spells of rain and reducing natural streams. A baseline survey conducted by GERES India, an NGO in Ladakh, indicates a rising trend of mean temperatures by 1{+0}C degree for winter and 5{+0}C for summer between 1973 and 2008. Ms Tundup Angmo of GERES says, for the same period, rainfall and snowfall show a clear declining trend with the exception of January 2008. The glaciers in Khardung and Stok Kangri have retreated and new pests, for instance the coddling moth, are appearing in all parts of Ladakh. As a result of the retreating glaciers, the water discharge into the Indus, the river which flows in Ladakh, is reduced. Apple cultivation is moved to the upper reaches of the region at heights of 12,000 feet.

As Kunzes Dolma, vice-president of the Women's Alliance of Ladakh puts it, the worry is for the next generation. While Ladakhis fight their own battles, the world squabbles over emission cuts.

Source: 7th November, 2009, The Hindu

Food Security

World Summit on Food Security

Rome 16-18 November 2009

Renewed commitment to end hunger

World leaders convened at FAO Headquarters for the World Summit on Food Security unanimously adopted a declaration pledging renewed commitment to eradicate hunger from the face of the earth sustainably and at the earliest date.

Countries also agreed to work to reverse the decline in domestic and international funding for agriculture and promote new investment in the sector, to improve governance of global food issues in partnership with relevant stakeholders from the public and private sector, and to proactively face the challenges of climate change to food security.

“Tragic achievement”

Calling the over one billion hungry people in the world “our tragic achievement in these modern

days”, FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf stressed the need to produce food where the poor and hungry live and to boost agricultural investment in these regions.

An agenda for action

Poor countries need the development, economic and policy tools required to boost their agricultural production and productivity. Investment in agriculture must be increased because for the majority of poor countries a healthy agricultural sector is essential to overcome hunger and poverty and is a prerequisite for overall economic growth.

The gravity of the current food crisis is the result of 20 years of under-investment in agriculture and neglect of the sector. Directly or indirectly, agriculture provides the livelihood for 70 percent of the world’s poor.



Food is a Human Right

(Gavin Wall)

Hunger is not only due to a lack of production; it is also a result of human-made policy choices. Efforts to reduce hunger will require a review of the way society is organised, its economic and social policies, the functioning of institutions and the allocation of resources.

WITH MORE THAN 1.02 billion persons suffering from hunger across the world and with 250 million of these in India, we do not have much to celebrate.

Human Rights Day 2009 should serve to reflect on the structural causes of hunger, to draw lessons from past failure and to firmly put human rights on the political agenda in order to achieve food security for all.

The rapid escalation of food prices in 2007-08

and the subsequent economic crisis disproportionately affected the most vulnerable.

The impact on small children was particularly dramatic; the FAO publication *The State of Food Insecurity in the World* reveals that a decline of four per cent in per capita GDP increases infant mortality by two per cent. The risk of death in the first year of life is five times higher for baby girls than baby boys in times of an economic crisis and the lack of adequate food associated with it. Discrimination is one of the most pressing human rights challenges.

The alarming statistic of over a billion hungry people of whom roughly one quarter are in India, is not evidence of a new crisis in the world. It is

the sudden worsening of a structural crisis which has left millions of human beings hungry and malnourished for far too long. Therefore, the response should not only focus on short-term measures to mitigate hunger and to increase production; but, it must also tackle the root causes of hunger. This means including a focus on governance and human rights, on the questions of who produces what, for whom, how, under which conditions, and with which social and environmental impacts.

Hunger is not only due to a lack of production; it is also a result of human-made policy choices. Efforts to reduce hunger will require a review of the way society is organised, its economic and social policies, the functioning of institutions and the allocation of resources.

Models of production and consumption must be revisited and the well-being and the human rights of every human being put at the centre of political decision making. In these efforts, the right to food provides both an overarching goal that orients policy-making to reduce hunger and a tool to achieve food security for all.

What is the right to food?

The right to food is a basic human right enshrined in international law. It is the right of every person to have continuous access to the resources that are necessary to produce, earn or purchase enough food not only to prevent hunger, but also ensure health and well-being. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Political Rights contains the main provision of international law on the right to adequate food and the fundamental right to be free from hunger.

By ratifying the covenant, 160 countries have accepted to be bound by its provisions, including the obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the right to adequate food.

The right to food is also a political commitment at the highest level. At the 1996 World Food Summit, world leaders reaffirmed “the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger”. An important milestone was reached in the practical implementation of the right to food when members of FAO, after two years of inter-governmental negotiations, in 2004 unanimously adopted the voluntary

guidelines to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. The guidelines contain valuable orientation on WHAT needs to be done in about 19 different policy areas to promote the right to adequate food and are thus an important tool for coordination and policy coherence.

While few people, if any, would disagree that every woman, man and child should have access to the food they need, many might wonder if placing emphasis on food as a fundamental human right would make a difference. Among the countries that have implemented the right to food, Brazil plays a leading role. Lessons learned have been analysed and reported in the FAO publication *Right to Food -Lessons Learned in Brazil*.

Three issues deserve particular attention as they could inspire similar processes in other countries.

Brazil’s Framework Law on Food and Nutritional Security adopted in 2006 is unique: it has as a stated objective the realisation of the right to adequate food; provides a definition of the right to food in line with international standards; defines the obligations of the State to respect, protect and fulfil this human right; and it calls for the establishment of claims mechanisms.

The law also codifies the role of the Food and Nutrition Security Council (CONSEA). The right to food is part of the mandate of CONSEA, which provides advice directly to the President and contains representatives from civil society organisations.

The right to food has been integrated into social programmes. A school feeding law passed in 2009 recognises school meals as a right for every child attending public schools. It requires a certain percentage of local procurement, takes into account the cultural adequacy of the food provided and establishes school councils to increase accountability.

The results speak for themselves. The country now has disaggregated data on the nutritional status of the most affected groups, especially indigenous, small holder farmers and women, and so it can better target its efforts.

Poverty and food insecurity have been significantly reduced (18.5 million less food

insecure persons from 2003 to 2007). Inequalities have been reduced significantly for the first time in decades. Finally, 3.8 million Brazilians lifted themselves out of poverty in 2008, despite high food and energy prices.

This example shows how the right to food should be at the centre of our efforts to improve food security. It means targeting the most vulnerable and fighting against discrimination; ensuring full and meaningful participation of the hungry in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies that affect them; promoting transparency and accountability; and providing mechanisms to claim rights and redress violations.

Hunger is not inevitable: the world has the means, the knowledge, and the tools to make it history.

A number of other countries, including India, are in the process of integrating the right to food into their legislation, strategies, policies and programmes; many of them with the technical support of FAO. Experience gained in the areas of advocacy and training, legislation and access to justice, assessment and monitoring, as well as strategies and coordination have been brought together in the Right to Food Methodological Toolbox. This consists of a series of analytical, educational and normative tools that offer guidance and hands-on advice on the practical aspects of the right to food. It shows HOW the right to food can be implemented and is available at www.fao.org/righttofood.

Gavin Wall is the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's representative in India and Bhutan

Source: The Hindu, December 9, 2009



More Than 1 Billion People Hungry Worldwide: FAO

More than one billion people go to bed hungry everyday as the deadly combination of a severe food shortage and one of the worst global financial crises in living memory has shrunk food aid to an all-time low, a UN body said today.

"The combination of food and economic crises has pushed the number of hungry people worldwide to historic levels—more than one billion people are undernourished," Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimated in its annual hunger report-2009, produced in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP).

Bulk of the starving population belong to the developing world, with Asia and the Pacific region estimated to have about 642 million hungry people in 2009, Sub-Saharan Africa 265 million, Latin America and the Caribbean 53 million while the Near East and North Africa 42 million, the report said.

On the other hand, the world's rich countries have 15 million people who are suffering from chronic hunger, the report released on the eve of World Food Day on October 16 said.

"World leaders have reacted forcefully to the financial and economic crisis and succeeded in mobilising billions of dollars in a short time period. The same strong action is needed now to combat hunger and poverty," FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf said.

"The rising number of hungry people is intolerable. We have the economic and technical means to make hunger disappear, what is missing is a stronger political will to eradicate hunger forever," he noted.

The report pointed out that several factors have conspired to make the current crisis particularly devastating for poor households in developing countries.

The financial crisis affected a large part of the world at the same time, reducing the scope for traditional coping mechanisms such as currency devaluation, borrowing or increased use of official development assistance, it said.

In addition, the economic crisis came on top of a food crisis that had already strained the coping strategies of the poor, hitting those most

vulnerable to food insecurity when they were down, it said.

Another factor that differentiates this crisis from those in the past is that developing countries have become more integrated, both financially and commercially, into the world economy than they were 20 years ago, making them more vulnerable to changes in international markets, the report added.

WFP Executive Director Josette Sheeran said, "We applaud the new commitment to tackle food

security, but we must act quickly. It is unacceptable in the 21st century that almost one in six of the world's population is now going hungry."

"At a time when there are more hungry people in the world than ever before, there is less food aid than we have seen in living memory. We know what is needed to meet urgent hunger needs — we just need the resources and the international commitment to do the job."

Source: Free Press Journal, October 15, 2009



Food prices up again - Grain stocks buffer against 2008 crisis replay

Rome, 9 December 2009 - Global food prices are on the ascent again with the FAO Food Price Index – a food basket composed of cereals, oilseeds, dairy, meat and sugar – registering four straight monthly rises.

However market conditions are different from those that triggered the food price crisis that started two years ago, FAO said in its December Food Outlook report published today.

The index averaged 168 points in November, the highest since September 2008. That was still 21 percent below its peak in June 2008. Prior to the price spike of 2007/08, the index never exceeded 120 points and, for most of the time, was below 100points.

"At the onset of the price surge in 2007, FAO identified a number of possible causes contributing to the price rise: low levels of world cereal stocks; crop failures in major exporting countries; rapidly growing demand for agricultural commodities for biofuels and rising oil prices," the FAO report said.

"As the price strengthening accelerated, several other factors emerged to reinforce the upheaval; most importantly, government export restrictions, a weakening United States dollar and a growing appetite by speculators and index funds for wider commodity portfolio investments on the back of enormous global excess liquidity. What made the

2007/08 price spike exceptional was the concurrence of so many factors culminating in an unprecedented price rally and the fuelling of volatility."

Cereal stocks healthy

Today, world cereal stocks are at more comfortable levels, although some markets are facing tight conditions. In general supplies held by exporters are more adequate to respond to rising demand than they were during the price surge period. For example, the wheat stocks-to-use ratio in major exporting countries has risen from 12 percent to 20 percent this season. Biofuels are still a leading driver but the sector has slowed in terms of year-on-year growth.

Macro-economic factors, such as exchange rates, volatile oil prices and low interest rates are also causing investors to put their cash in commodity markets. "Although supply and demand fundamentals will continue to shape commodity markets, the now entrenched susceptibility of the global food system to external non-food economy events requires continuous vigilance," FAO said.

Production rising

"A healthy stock situation and good production prospects reduce the risk of a major price surge over the next six months, but FAO will be keeping

a very close eye on developments,” said Hafez Ghanem, FAO Assistant Director-General for Social and Economic Development.

Although the preliminary outlook for cereals points to a decline in world output compared to 2008, mostly on account of lower price expectations which depressed plantings, production in 2009 is still expected to be about four percent higher than in 2007.

Global cassava production is expected to reach new highs in 2009, largely due to initiatives to sustain food security and demand from the ethanol sector where cassava has emerged as a key feedstock. However prices of internationally traded cassava are still less than they were two years ago but should remain firm in 2010.

In the oil seeds market, a weakening in prices for meals and cakes is possible later in the season because of expected large South America crop but the market is expected to be tighter in oils and fats. World sugar prices are likely to remain

firm but at lower levels than the current highs.

Meat down, dairy and fish up According to the FAO meat price index, world meat prices were an average 8 percent lower in the first ten months of 2009 than the same period last year. Lower global imports are expected to depress world trade in all various meat categories in 2009 but a modest recovery is expected in 2010.

Dairy prices are on the rise again, gaining by 80 percent since reaching a low in February 2009, with traded milk powders the fastest rising product. Future prices will depend on whether the European Union offloads its large stocks of butter and skimmed milk onto the international market.

2009 was a challenging year for fish and fishery products because of the global downturn that hit demand. There have been moderate price increases for several months now.

Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Date: 09 Dec 2009



News and Views - General

'5,000 kids under 5 die everyday'

New Delhi: Despite a decrease in child mortality figures 5,000 children under the age of five die in India everyday due to preventable causes, according to a latest UNICEF report.

Within the under five mortality rate, the maximum 96 per cent of children who die belong to the Scheduled Tribes, 88 per cent to Scheduled Castes and 59 to general population.

"It is early marriage and inadequate health care of women which adversely affects the survival of their children," said Karen Hulshoff, Country Representative of UNICEF in India said.

The report says malnutrition rates in India continue to be very high. Though the percentage of malnourished children below the age of three has decreased from 52 per cent to 46 per cent, it is still way below the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Forty seven per cent of women had deliveries with skilled health provider, it said.

A majority 56 per cent women use contraceptives. Condom use was high at 61 per cent for women and 52 per cent for men, it said.

Knowledge about HIV/AIDS has also increased. While 34 per cent of men are aware of AIDS, in women the corresponding figure was 24 per cent.

Between 1990 and 2006, the use of improved sanitation in India has doubled. Reaching the MDG

target remains a great challenge and requires accelerated efforts to outpace population growth, Hulshoff said.

The report "State of the World's Children", says that the mother's level of education is one of the key factors in reducing child mortality.

As far as under-five mortality rate was concerned, 95 per cent of the dead children were born to mothers who had no education.

The child mortality rate decreased from 80 per cent to 53 per cent in 2008. The target to achieve the MDG was 40 per cent.

School attendance rates are still dropping at secondary education levels, especially among girls. The school attendance rates were high in the age group of 6-10 years at 85 per cent for boys and 81 per cent for girls.

While the school attendance rate for the general population is high at 84 per cent, it is 74 per cent for Scheduled Castes and 68 per cent for Scheduled tribes.

Birth registration in India improved significantly from 58 per cent in 2001 to 69 per cent in 2008.

There has also been a decline in the incidence of child marriage in India over the years. The proportion of women marrying before reaching the age of 18 in India though is still very high.

Source: Free Press Journal, November 21, 2009



Growing CO₂ could cause 6 m rise in sea level

London: If the world fails to get the growing carbon emission under control, sea levels could rise by up to six meters, said a new study.

According to the study by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), temperatures in the Antarctica were increased by 6 degrees Celsius during the past periods when the volume of high carbon

dioxide (CO₂) was high in the atmosphere.

This could cause a sea level rise of up six meters, threatening coastal cities like London, New York and San Francisco, it said.

Louise Sime, who led the BAS study, looked at ice cores to see how temperatures changed during periods of high carbon dioxide.

During the last period of high CO₂ 125, 000 years ago, she found temperatures were up to 6 degrees Celsius higher than present day levels.

Such a hike in temperature could lead to rise in sea levels of between 4 to 6 meters over hundreds of years as the ice sheets melt, the Telegraph reported.

"We didn't expect to see such warm temperatures, and we don't yet know in detail what caused them. but they indicate that Antarctica's climate may have undergone rapid shifts during past periods of high CO₂".

Dr Sime said the study suggests that current high levels of CO₂ could also cause a rise in temperature. She said further research could predict the affect on sea level rise.

"If we can pin down how much warmer temperatures were in Antarctica and Greenland at this time, then we can lest predictions of how melting of the large ice sheets may contribute to sea level rise."

Source: Asian Age, November 20th, 2009



LDCs urged not to be divided in Copenhagen talks

Kathmandu, Dec. 16

Civil society organizations from more than 25 least developed countries (LDC) in Copenhagen urged the LDC governments not to be divided in the issues of climate change at COP15 negotiations so that they can arrive at concrete solutions.

In a seminar jointly organised by LDC Watch, South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), JS-APMDD, Equity BD, Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) and MS Action Aid Denmark at Klimaforum (people's alternative summit to COP15, UNFCCC), they argued that LDCs must act together to urge effective mitigation measures and claim adequate funds for reparation adaptation of climate damage from developed countries.

Civil society leaders including Netra Timilsina from Nepal, Demba Moussa Dembele of Senegal, Camille Chalmers of Haiti, Azeb Girmai of Ethiopia, Aloys of Rwanda, Kong Sung of Cambodia, Elisa Pinto of Timor Leste and Saheen Anam of Bangladesh had presented testimonies on the impacts on the livelihoods due to climate change in their countries. Dr. Arjun Karki, International Coordinator of LDC Watch, had moderated the seminar, a press statement issued by the LDC Watch said.

Milo N. Tanchuling of Jubilee South-Asia Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (JS-APMDD) and Trine Pertou Mach of MS Action Aid Denmark expressed their strong solidarity to the LDC civil society movements on the issues of

climate change. Trine mentioned that if COP15 was not able to come up with a reaffirmed commitment on Kyoto Protocol, then it would be an indication of an inherent crisis in total UN system. She mentioned that the North (developed countries) must have to take responsibility and be ready to compensate the damages caused in the South.

Timsina from Nepal mentioned how the monsoon pattern Nepal was changing slowly, affecting the planting, growing and harvesting seasons of food and vegetable crops.

He further mentioned that if the Himalayan Glaciers melted completely by the year 2035, which is estimated to happen if the present rate of climate change and global warming continues, then there will be a huge crisis of fresh water in the whole region of Asia, particularly in South Asia, not only affecting lives and livelihoods of the people but the entire ecosystem of the region and the world.

Kong Sung of Cambodia narrated the stories of increasing food insecurity. Elsa Pinto from Timor Leste recounted how her young country was forced to gradually face the climate crisis, where people had to walk for four to five km to fetch drinking water, forget about the water for irrigation. Azeb Girmai of Ethiopia mentioned unexpected extension of the drought situation in her country. While concluding as the chair of the session, Dr. Arjun Karki highlighted that the

LDCs were the ones that were least responsible for causing anthropogenic climate change but most affected.

“They are at the forefront of bearing the brunt in terms of lost livelihoods, increased food insecurity and hunger, health complications and the loss of biodiversity on which the livelihoods

of the majority of LDC people is based.”

He, on behalf of LDCs’ civil society, demanded for climate justice for the people living in the LDCs and urged the COP15 of UNFCCC to yield robust commitments in this regard.

Source: [The Rising Nepal](#) (16 December 2009)



Are we meeting the Millennium Development Goals?

Since the Millennium Development Goals have unfortunately become the framework for international development discussion, it is worth noting how far they are being met. C. P. Chandrasekhar and Jayati Ghosh examine the progress with respect to the first goal, that of reducing extreme hunger and poverty.

For some time now, Chart 1

the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been the organising framework for the activities of international organisations and donor agencies. It is probably not very useful any more to quarrel about their relative lack of ambition, their limited aims and absence of recognition of the structural causes of poverty and inequality. All that is well known; even so, simply because of their wide acceptance, the MDGs have become the goal posts for judging at least some development experience around the world. So, even if these are very limited goals, it is worth examining how far they are actually being met.

Specific targets

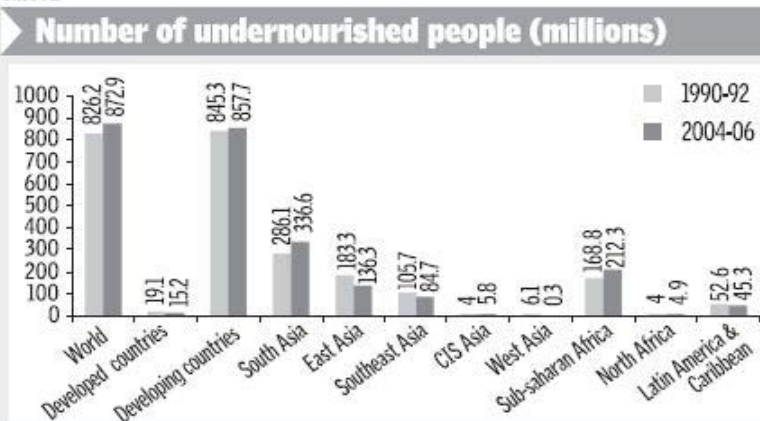
The most important of all the goals is probably the first one, which makes the grand claim of eradicating extreme hunger and poverty, with the following specific targets:

Halve the proportion of people whose income is

less than \$1 a day.

Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people.



In terms of the first target of halving the proportion of poor, prior to the global economic crisis there were indications that the target would be met in a significant number of countries, including the most populous nations in Asia. (It should be noted that the definitions and

associated measurement of the poor have changed very recently and this led to an increase in the estimated number of poor people in the world but also to the suggestion that the rate of poverty reduction had been faster than previously assumed.)

However, very recent trends have indicated some setback, related to the impact of the global economic crisis on employment, livelihood and wages, which is discussed in more detail in the next section. The recent evidence on the incidence of poverty is therefore disheartening and suggests that progress towards meeting this particular target has been adversely affected, and if this trend continues it would derail the process and not allow the target to be achieved in several regions.

It is evident from Table 1 that the incidence of poverty among the working population increased (significantly in some regions) in 2008 compared to the previous year, reversing the pattern of decline that was evident over the previous decade. In extreme cases, this has even meant an absolute increase in poverty rates among the employed population over the period 1997 to 2008, such as in Oceania, or no change as in Sub-Saharan Africa.

What is particularly worrying is that regions with already high poverty incidence seem to have been particularly badly affected in the most recent period, including South Asia. East Asia (and within China) obviously has the most remarkable success in poverty reduction over the past decade, but even here the crisis seems to have led to a reversal, although less marked than elsewhere. Since unemployment rates have also been rising through the current crisis, the actual impact on poverty is likely to be even greater.

More hungry people

Part of the reason why the recent performance on the poverty front has been so disappointing relates to the inability to meet the second target, of reducing hunger. Perversely, the experience with respect to this target has been worse after it was explicitly formulated than before!

In the period after the global food crisis of the 1970s, increased investment in agriculture and various other measures implemented across the developing world to ensure greater self-sufficiency in food led to some progress in reducing chronic hunger by the early 1990s.

But according to the FAO, between 1995-97 and 2004-06, the number of hungry people increased in all developing regions except Latin America and the Caribbean, and even here it has reversed in the most recent period. The reasons for this relate not only to the general reduction in ODA that affected a number of poor developing countries, but also changes in policy stance across the developing world that led to a relative neglect of agriculture and domestic food distribution.

This is why performance on the nutritional outcome indicators has been relatively poor. In some developing regions, the proportion of underweight children under 5 years has remained relatively high and shown very little decline over nearly two decades.

Overall, this is one target that showed very little

improvement even before the global economic crisis adversely hit incomes and food consumption in the developing world. Chart 1 shows that the number of hungry people actually increased for the world as a whole, and particularly for certain developing regions. Far from halving, or even decreasing, the number of malnourished people globally increased by more than 50 million between the early 1990s and mid-2000s.

This was entirely because of increasing hunger in the developing world, as the numbers declined in developed countries. East and Southeast Asia also showed good performance in terms of falling numbers of malnourished people, but such numbers increased quite sharply in South Asia (by 50 million) and Sub-Saharan Africa (by 44 million).

The surprise is that the growing prevalence of hunger and food insecurity was associated with relatively high GDP growth in several regions, such as India and countries in Latin America. The contrast with East and Southeast Asia is a stark one, and points to the role of public policy in ensuring that aggregate income growth translates into better provision of basic needs such as food for the general population.

Food security system

While this was the state before the global economic crisis, the crisis obviously made matters much worse. But, as the FAO has noted, the continued increase in the number of undernourished people during both periods of low prices and economic prosperity and the very sharp rises in periods of price spikes and economic downturns show the weakness of the global food security governance system.

The period just before the crisis was marked by major and extreme increases in global food prices, which rose by nearly 300 per cent for the important foodgrains in the 18 months between January 2007 and June 2008. Subsequently, global trade prices of major foodgrains fell again up to March 2009, and then started rising again.

Increasing world prices were passed through to a substantial extent in developing countries, where food prices rose significantly even if not by as much as the spike in global prices. In many developing countries, the prices of food have not come down thereafter even when global prices started falling.

According to the FAO (2009), in July 2009 the most recent prices of major foodgrain groups were

higher than they were 24 months previously in almost all developing countries for which it collects data. The prices of rice, millet and sorghum were more than 25 per cent higher in 80 per cent of developing countries; while the price of wheat was more than 25 per cent higher in more than 70 per cent of countries and that of maize in more than 60 per cent of countries.

At the same time, money incomes of the working poor who would be most affected by such price rise do not seem to have increased much if at all, largely because of the impact of the crisis on employment conditions.

The recent combination of higher domestic food prices, lower incomes and unemployment because of the global economic crisis has substantially increased food insecurity, except in East and Southeast Asia. As a consequence, the FAO now estimates that around 1.02 billion people in the world are hungry in 2009, which is the highest number since 1970. It presents a clear movement in the opposite direction from the target set by MDG1.

Employment conditions

Of course both poverty and hunger are critically affected by employment conditions, which is why the target of providing decent work for all is such an important one. This target too has been relatively underachieved, and the recent crisis has exacerbated this unfortunate trend. Globally, unemployment rates fell only marginally during the economic boom of the past decade, from 6.3 per cent in 1998 to an estimated 6 per cent in 2007 (ILO May 2009).

In South Asia, Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, open unemployment rates actually increased over this period, despite reasonably rapid GDP growth. The crisis has had sharp effects upon employment and already caused very substantial increases in unemployment. Within the broad figures, the rates of open unemployment for women, and especially young women, have been a growing cause for concern.

It is not only the absolute level of unemployment and the high and rising rates of unemployment that are causes for concern in terms of not meeting the target set in MDG1, but also the quality of work, since the purpose is to provide universal access to decent productive work.

It is difficult to measure conditions of work, but typically own-account workers and contributing family workers have been seen as more vulnerable because they tend to be concentrated in informal activities without any formal or legal worker protection. Therefore, bringing down the proportion of such workers, and increasing the proportion of those in regular paid employment in formal activities, has also been seen as a useful target.

Women workers

For obvious reasons, the proportion of women workers in such employment tends to be significantly higher than men, especially in the developing world. However, there are wide variations across regions. In the developed countries, including Europe, there tends to be little difference and, if anything, the involvement of women in such work is slightly lower than men, and the overall proportion of such workers is also lower.

But in countries where the position of women is already circumscribed by rigid patriarchal norms that prevent or constrain outside employment, such as in the Middle East and North Africa, the differences tend to be very high, sometimes as much as 15 percentage points.

The proportion of vulnerable workers to total workers was coming down, albeit very slowly and marginally, before the crisis. But once again the crisis is likely to have thrown this tendency off course, with some increases projected in the proportion of such employment especially among women workers. This may well result in very high incidence of vulnerable employment of women especially in some regions, similar to those prevalent a decade ago.

It is evident that the main regions of success in achieving this MDG in any meaningful way have been East and Southeast Asia. China alone is the chief contributor to the improvement, especially with respect to poverty reduction and nutrition and to a lesser extent reduction of vulnerable employment. This is not the result of GDP growth alone, but reflects the impact of domestic social policy as well, and this provides some important clues for other countries.

Source: *The Hindu*, November 3, 2009

Hunger pangs: 1bn starving across globe

(Neil Macfarquhar)

Scientists and development experts across the globe are racing to increase food production by 50% over the next two decades to feed the world's growing population, yet many doubt their chances despite a broad consensus that enough land, water and expertise exist.

The number of hungry people in the world rose to 1.02 billion this year, or nearly one in seven people, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, despite a 12 year concentrated effort to cut the number.

The global financial recession added at least 100 million people by depriving them of the means to buy enough food, but the numbers were inching up even before the crisis, the United Nations noted in a report last week.

"The way we manage the global agriculture and food security system doesn't work," said Kostas Stamoulis, a senior economist at FAO. "There is this paradox of increasing global food production, even in developing countries, yet there is hunger."

Agronomists and development experts who gathered in Rome last week agreed that the resources and technical knowledge are available to increase food production by 50% in 2030 and by 70% in 2050—the amounts needed to feed a population expected to grow to 9.1 billion residents in 40 years.

But the conundrum is whether the food can be grown in the developing world where the hungry can actually get it, at prices they can afford. Poverty and difficult growing conditions plague the places that need new production most, namely sub-saharan Africa and South Asia.

A straw poll of the experts in Rome on whether the world will be able feed its population in 40 years underscored the uncertainty surrounding that question: 73 said yes, 49 said no and 15 abstained.

The track record of failing to feed the hungry haunts the effort. But other important uncertainties also give pause. The effect climate change will have on weather and crops remains an open question. The so-called green revolution of the 1960 and 70s ended the spectre of mass famines then, but the environmental cost of chemical fertilizers and heavy irrigation has spurred a bitter divide over the right ingredients for a second one.

In addition, the demand for biofuels may use up crop land. And as scores of food riots in 2008 showed, oil prices and other income shocks can quickly drive millions more people into hunger.

A summit meeting of world leaders in Rome on Nov. 16 is expected to address the future food demands. Since July, the richest countries have committed more than \$ billion to the effort over the next three years.

Source: DNA World, October 23, 2009



Société Générale tells clients how to prepare for potential 'global collapse'

Société Générale tells clients how to prepare for potential 'global collapse' Société Générale has advised clients to be ready for a possible "global economic collapse" over the next two years, mapping a strategy of defensive investments to avoid wealth destruction. By Ambrose Evans-Pritchard

18 Nov 2009, The Telegraph UK. In a report entitled "Worst-case debt scenario", the bank's

asset team said state rescue packages over the last year have merely transferred private liabilities onto sagging sovereign shoulders, creating a fresh set of problems.

Overall debt is still far too high in almost all rich economies as a share of GDP (350pc in the US), whether public or private. It must be reduced by the hard slog of "deleveraging", for years.

“As yet, nobody can say with any certainty whether we have in fact escaped the prospect of a global economic collapse,” said the 68-page report, headed by asset chief Daniel Fermon. It is an exploration of the dangers, not a forecast. Under the French bank’s “Bear Case” scenario (the gloomiest of three possible outcomes), the dollar would slide further and global equities would retest the March lows. Property prices would tumble again. Oil would fall back to \$50 in 2010.

Governments have already shot their fiscal bolts. Even without fresh spending, public debt would explode within two years to 105pc of GDP in the UK, 125pc in the US and the eurozone, and 270pc in Japan. Worldwide state debt would reach \$45 trillion, up two-and-a-half times in a decade. (UK figures look low because debt started from a low base. Mr Ferman said the UK would converge with Europe at 130pc of GDP by 2015 under the bear case). The underlying debt burden is greater than it was after the Second World War, when nominal levels looked similar. Ageing populations will make it harder to erode debt through growth. “High public debt looks entirely unsustainable in the long run. We have almost reached a point of no return for government debt,” it said. Inflating debt away might be seen by some governments as a lesser of evils. If so, gold would go “up, and up, and up” as the only safe haven from fiat paper money. Private debt is also crippling. Even if the US savings rate stabilises at 7pc, and all of it is used to pay down debt, it will still take nine years

for households to reduce debt/income ratios to the safe levels of the 1980s. The bank said the current crisis displays “compelling similarities” with Japan during its Lost Decade (or two), with a big difference: Japan was able to stay afloat by exporting into a robust global economy and by letting the yen fall. It is not possible for half the world to pursue this strategy at the same time.

SocGen advises bears to sell the dollar and to “short” cyclical equities such as technology, auto, and travel to avoid being caught in the “inherent deflationary spiral”. Emerging markets would not be spared. Paradoxically, they are more leveraged to the US growth than Wall Street itself. Farm commodities would hold up well, led by sugar. Mr Fermon said junk bonds would lose 31pc of their value in 2010 alone. However, sovereign bonds would “generate turbo-charged returns” mimicking the secular slide in yields seen in Japan as the slump ground on. At one point Japan’s 10-year yield dropped to 0.40pc. The Fed would hold down yields by purchasing more bonds. The European Central Bank would do less, for political reasons.

SocGen’s case for buying sovereign bonds is controversial. A number of funds doubt whether the Japan scenario will be repeated, not least because Tokyo itself may be on the cusp of a debt compound crisis. Mr Fermon said his report had electrified clients on both sides of the Atlantic. “Everybody wants to know what the impact will be. A lot of hedge funds and bankers are worried,” he said.



Bt brinjal can awaken a sleeping poison

(Suman Sahai)

What, you may ask, is common between potatoes, tomatoes, brinjal, chilli, datura, tobacco and the deadly nightshade (belladonna)? They all belong to a plant family called Solanaceae. The Solanaceae family contains a number of important agricultural plants as well as many psychoactive and toxic plants. Solanaceae species are rich in complex chemicals called alkaloids and contain some of the most poisonous plants known to mankind. They produce alkaloids in their roots, leaves and flowers. These alkaloids can be hallucinogens,

stimulants or outright toxic. For example, when potatoes are exposed to light, a chemical called solanin is produced which appears as a green tinge. Green potatoes can be toxic, damage an unborn fetus and cause abortions. Other plants of this family known for their toxic qualities are belladonna, datura and tobacco.

Farmers have been working for thousands of years to domesticate wild plants like those of the Solanaceae family, to make them safe for eating. Much of this exercise involved breeding out the toxins contained in the wild plants. Scientists too

have used careful, selective breeding to “clean up” crop varieties which had good qualities but contained toxins. Now brinjal, a member of this family, has been genetically engineered (GE) to produce a toxin to protect itself against a particular pest. This seems to be a process working to reverse several thousand years of efforts to detoxify natural plants to make them fit for human consumption!

Genetic engineering in plants has not been mastered enough to rule out the creation of dangerous new products in the cells when genes are muddled during the insertion of new, usually foreign genes. Several cases are known when new proteins and toxins were produced in plants which were genetically engineered. For example, when genetically modified (GM) peas were being developed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in Australia to protect peas from the pest pea weevil, it was found that newly-formed proteins in the GM peas repeatedly caused immunity problems and lung inflammation when fed to mice. The experiments had to be abandoned. In another case, when mice were fed the genetically engineered Flavr Savr tomato, seven out of 40 experimental animals died within 14 days and the others suffered stomach lesions.

Genetic engineering in plants of the Solanaceae family could be dangerous since disturbing their genetic material through the process of inserting new gene constructs containing a battery of genes — including the toxin producing Bt gene — may trigger off metabolic processes that have been lying dormant. There are apprehensions that not only could new toxins develop but that old toxins that were removed by selective breeding may reappear. Disturbing the cell metabolism (by genetic engineering) of species that are naturally genetically hardwired to produce toxins, is likely to call up old plant toxins in these species.

Testing for food safety is key in genetically engineered plants; it becomes more so with the Solanaceae family. At present biotechnology companies rely on the concept of “substantial equivalence” to demonstrate the safety of genetically engineered foods. In this method, the overall chemical composition of the genetically engineered food is compared to an equivalent conventional food. If there is no significant difference between the two, the GE plant is considered to be safe.

The Mahyco seed company has also tested its Bt

brinjal in the same way. However, substantial equivalence is a highly contested paradigm, favored by the biotech industry but rejected by most countries. This is because there is no mechanism in such an approach to detect unexpected or unintended changes like new toxic compounds in the cell.

Apart from the critical safety issues, there are other questions that arise with the impending release of India’s first genetically engineered food crop. There is no system in place for labeling these foods. Indeed, how can one in the Indian situation label a vegetable that will be sold from farmers’ fields, laden into trucks and taken to wholesale mandis. How will the vegetables on the vendor’s cart or the corner shop be labeled as GM? The Government of India recognises the need to label GE food, and its position in the meetings of the Codex Alimentarius has been consistently in favor of mandatory labeling.

Accordingly, the ministry of health has drafted rules under the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act to include labeling of GE food and food ingredients. But there is as yet no mechanism in place to label GE food, nor have any awareness programs been conducted to explain the nature of GE foods and the need for labeling them. For most consumers, especially rural consumers, GE foods are a black box and unless they are made aware of the nature of GE foods, labeling would be meaningless. Despite these big gaps in preparedness, the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) has approved Mahyco’s Bt brinjal for commercial production.

Does this mean that the consumer’s right to informed choice about their food is about to be trashed? This right is enshrined in India’s Consumer Protection Act and the GEAC approval will violate the provisions of this Act. Further, labeling is not just about pasting a colored sticker on a brinjal, it involves a rigorous process of segregation and identity preservation (IP) to keep Bt and non-Bt food segregated. IP is a complex and expensive process requiring separation of a GM food from non-GM food, starting from farmers’ fields, all the way to vegetable shops. Without going through this process, labeling cannot be done. Or has the GEAC planned that all brinjals cultivated in this country henceforth will be genetically engineered?

And what about fixing liability for damage? There is no liability law in India. In the event of contamination of organic brinjal with Bt brinjal,

what will be the process of recall? Who will be liable to the producers of organic brinjal? There are no provisions for monitoring the long-term impact of GE foods on the health of consumers. In case adverse health impacts are reported from eating Bt brinjal, who would be liable to pay compensation? How would the liability be fixed and what would be the quantum? In the absence

of any kind of preparedness or safeguards, what would be the liability of the government for approving such food crops? And in the event of damage caused by Bt brinjal, will Mahyco be put in the dock?

Source: Asian Age, November 5th, 2009.



IMF: back from the dead

(Jayati Ghosh)

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has definitely had a very good crisis. Just over a year ago, it was an institution on life support: ignored by most developing countries; derided for its failure to predict most crises in emerging markets and its often counterproductive responses to such crises; even called to book by its auditors for poor management of its own funds!

Its policy prescriptions were widely perceived to be rigid and unimaginative, applying a uniform approach to very different economies and contexts. They were also completely outdated even in theoretical terms, based on economic models and principles that have been refuted not only by more sophisticated heterodox analyses but also by further developments within neoclassical theory.

The 1990s and early 2000s were particularly bad for the organization: Its economists and policy advisers got practically everything wrong in all the emerging market crises they were called upon to deal with, from Thailand and South Korea to Turkey to Argentina. In situations in which the crisis had been caused by private profligacy, they called for larger fiscal surpluses; faced with crisis-induced asset deflation, they emphasized high interest rates and tight money policies; to address downward economic spirals, they demanded fiscal contraction through reductions in public spending.

The countries that recovered clearly did so *despite* IMF's advice or, in several cases, because they actively pursued different policies. IMF loans were seen as "too expensive" because of

the terrible policy conditions that came with them. So returning IMF loans early became something of a fashion, led by some Latin American countries.

More recently, an even more terrible fate has befallen IMF: that of increasing irrelevance. From 2002 onwards, IMF, along with the World Bank, became a net recipient of funds from developing countries, as repayments far exceeded fresh loans. The developing world turned its attention to dealing with private debt and bond markets, which is where the action was. Less developed countries found new sources of aid, finance and private investment, as China, South-East Asia and even India to a limited extent began investing in other developing countries.

In this sorry situation, the global financial and economic crisis has come as real manna from heaven for IMF. Suddenly, its own pathetic record at predicting, assessing and intervening in crises was forgotten in the general financial pandemonium that was unleashed after the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008.

Subsequently, the G-20 (which set itself up as the guardian of the global economy, by passing more potentially democratic structures such as the United Nations) decided to give IMF an extraordinary tonic in the form of additional pledges of funds, with the mandate to provide funds to developing and emerging markets that had been hit by an international crisis not of their own making. This gift of additional resources and power did not even require any democratization of the fund's governance structure, which is still

controlled by the US (and to a lesser extent, Europe) to a degree unwarranted by the current composition of world trade, or any change in its policy conditionalities.

So IMF is now back in business, with a slew of supposedly new schemes to deal with countries in crisis. It is amazing that the multiple failures of IMF are being thus rewarded. This is, after all, the organization that failed to predict the collapse of the US subprime market, announced that the medium-term financial outlook for Iceland was exceptionally healthy just months before the country was declared effectively bankrupt, and succeeded in making things much worse in most of the countries where it forced its austerity measures in return for paltry loans.

What is even more disastrous is that IMF seems to have learnt only partially from the current crisis— and what it has learnt is applied only through blatant double standards. There is one rule for industrial countries in crisis, no matter how irresponsible the run-up to the crisis; and another rule for developing countries, even the most prudent and fiscally “disciplined” of them.

Thus, IMF, in its flagship publication *World Economic Outlook*, argues for countercyclical macroeconomic policies to counter the recession in the US and Western Europe. Developing countries and transition economies in distress, however, apparently cannot afford such luxury.

They must follow the standard prescriptions of monetary tightening and fiscal contraction to deal with a crisis created by the fall in exports and flight of capital caused by the crisis in the US.

So the countries that have been unfortunate enough to require IMF support in the current crisis have found that they have to cut public spending and generate negative multiplier effects in economies in which output and employment have already been ravaged. Ukraine, Pakistan and Latvia, for example, have all been told to cut government spending and raise interest rates and user charges for government services in the middle of the downswing, in return for IMF loans.

Even when IMF accepts that this is a heavily procyclical policy that causes a financial crisis to spread to the real economy and create a sharp downswing, that is seen as just too bad; this is, after all, the “right” medicine for such countries and the necessary pain must be gone through for eventual recovery.

The problem is that this argument was wrong before and is still wrong. These IMF conditionalities do more than inflict major pain on the people of the countries they are applied in; they also do not result in economic recovery. If only a little bit of IMF's restructuring medicine could be applied to the institution itself.

Source: *Mint*, November 24, 2009



The fight against discrimination

(Navi Pillay)

Old and new forms of discrimination and intolerance continue to divide communities all over the world. Sentiments of xenophobia are on the rise. They are often manipulated for demagogic purposes or even for sinister political agendas. Day after day, their corrosive effects undermine the rights of countless victims. This is why on Human Rights Day, December 10, the United Nations is urging everyone everywhere in the world to embrace diversity and end

discrimination.

Discrimination can take many forms: covert or blatant, public or private. It may appear as institutionalized racism, or ethnic strife, or manifest itself in episodes of intolerance and rejection that escape scrutiny. Its victims are individuals or groups that are most vulnerable to attacks — all those that, due to their race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, status,

disabilities, and sexual orientation are perceived as different.

Discrimination is often multilayered. Groups that are marginalized on the basis of their origin or status encounter further exclusion and a curtailment of their rights when they attempt to have the access that international law entitles them to housing, food, health care and education. Persons with disabilities make up the world's largest and most disadvantaged minority. For example, 98% of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend school. Indigenous peoples represent 5% of the world's population, but 15% of its poorest people. Women account for two-thirds of the world's working hours and produce half of the world's food. Yet, due to discrimination and stereotypical gender roles, they earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property.

History has proved time and again that when discrimination, inequality and intolerance are allowed to take root, they may shatter the very foundations of societies and damage them for generations. Left unchecked, they may spill across borders and poison relations among nations.

History has also proved that these abhorrent practices have no beneficial aspects whatsoever. Discrimination undermines the social and economic cohesion of societies. It saps their resources. It squanders talent. It marginalizes productive individuals and groups, and depresses their creativity and initiative.

We must counter the bigotry and narrow interests that engender discrimination, and we have done so. The vision of human rights advocates, their sheer determination and energy have paid off by raising awareness among the public and by producing a number of human rights treaties that give effect to anti-discrimination and equality provisions. These treaties create a protective web of obligations that States must fulfill. They restore the dignity previously denied to millions of women, men and children.

Building on this body of norms, in 2001 the World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in Durban, and its review conference in Geneva last April, were convened to address some of the most insidious aspects of discrimination. The latter wrapped up with wide agreement in which 182 States undertook to prevent, prohibit and address all manifestations of racism and intolerance. It re-energized the determination and purpose expressed in Durban to erase the age-old shame of racism and provided a platform for a new beginning in fighting discrimination writ large.

It is undeniable that progress has been remarkable, but we should not pause. Discrimination does not go away by itself. It must be challenged at every turn. We must move forward and move quickly.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the enjoyment of human rights enriches us all. Conversely, when human dignity is undercut or denied by human rights violations, then such abuses affect all of us. This is particularly true in our increasingly multi-ethnic and multicultural societies. It is particularly urgent to counter discrimination in times of crisis, such as the current economic downturn, which have a disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of the most vulnerable and already marginalized groups of society, as competition over dwindling resources exposes minorities to suspicions and attacks.

On December 10, 1948, the world adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states unequivocally that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights. More than sixty years later, these words resonate with unaltered poignancy. Let us make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' principles of equality, freedom and dignity for all a reality everywhere. Universal tolerance and respect for diversity is our goal.

Source: Asian Age, December 9, 2009

Statement of the Platform for Freedom on post election repression

The manner in which the common candidate of the opposition General Sarath Fonseka was arrested and the events leading to his arrest clearly shows that the country is fast moving towards a totalitarian state, where not only human rights but even human decencies are not respected. Such actions are not tolerated in a civilised society. When this is the way in which Retired Commander of the Army and a Presidential candidate who polled 40% of the vote is treated we could imagine what is in store for ordinary citizens. We call upon citizens irrespective of political leanings to stand resolutely against this repression and to voice its opposition.

These incidents has to be viewed in the background of the serious incidents of attack on supporters of opposition parties by goons as well as by state agencies itself. The sealing of the printing press and the arrest and detention of Mr. Chandana Sirimalwatte, the editor of the pro- opposition newspaper 'LANKA', that was exposing acts of corruption by persons close to the government, the disappearance of Mr. Prageeth Ekneligoda, the feature editor of lanka e news website is alarming and we condemn these illegal actions. We call upon the masses to join hands and act unitedly to save democracy, rule of law and human rights.

Sudarshana Gunawardana

Attorney-at-Law

On behalf of the Conveners

Issued in Colombo on 10th February, 2010

☪☪☪ ☪☪☪ ☪☪☪

Peace song

Feels odd to see those two words side by side doesn't it?

Terror, hatred and fanaticism somehow sit more comfortably in our minds when we think of the other side of the border.

Words that we've been fed in daily doses over the last six decades. And in greater doses over the last one year.

Shutting our minds to the undeniable truth that people across the border are, above all, people. Like us.

So here's the question. Is there any chance at all, that we could still raise a hand, not in anger but in greeting?

Depends on who raises his hand first, some of us would say. Also how, whisper a few others. But mostly, it all boils down to one simple question.

Why? Why must we do it? Why do we need them? Why don't they first say sorry for what they've done? And the answer is simple.

It's easier to say Hi than to say Sorry. It's shorter too.

Besides, there is no rule that says a book has to be closed before a new one is opened. Not even if it's a history book.

So on the first day of this new year, we're going to make a start. Again.

With Aman Ki Asha. A brave, new people-to-people initiative by the Times of India and Pakistan's Jang Group to bring the people of two fine nations closer together. Culturally, emotionally and peacefully.

Starting with a series of cross-border cultural interactions, business seminars, music & literary festivals and citizens meet that will give the bonds of humanity a chance to survive outside the battlefields of politics, terrorism and fundamentalism.

In the hope that one day, words like Pakistan, India and Love will not seem impossible in the same impossible in the same sentence.



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