

Janadesh News

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Included in This Issue

National Land Reforms
Commission Members Visit
new areas

Madhya Pradesh: Government
is giving lands

An extent of our network in
Australia?

Youth Camps: Towards new
Ekta Parishad's activities

Ekta Parishad Orissa's Shows
us What Women's
Empowerment is All About

Policy Makers & Rights
Groups Call for Joint Action to
uphold the Forest Rights Act

Food crisis or why it is urgent
to struggle for

Gandhi said... an adage for the
month



QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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National Land Reforms Commission Members Visit new areas

A new meeting has been held on July 7th with the members of the National Land Reforms Commission, in New Delhi.

Nowadays, the members of the N.L.R.C have already visited 17 States in India in order to interact with villagers and institutions on the problems and issues emerging in these areas, and to locate the lands which could be given to landless according to the Land Acts and to the requirements made after Janadesh. That means, for example, such a land:

- Bhudan lands which have not yet been distributed
- Lands registered in the name of a religious trust or in a fake name, which has been done to get around the Land Ceiling Act.
- Unused lands for factories, companies or any other institution having lands and keeping them out of use, including government lands which are kept as wastelands.
- Lands which are disputed between Forest and Revenue Departments
- Common properties and newly irrigated lands

All of these lands could be given to landless people through land redistribution.

After these visits and surveys, the National Land Reforms Commission plans to prepare a National Land Reform Policy by the mid of September 2008. After submitting the draft policy, the Central Government of India may call for a meeting of National Land Reform Council to take significant action plans on recommendation.

From July 20th, the Commission is planning to visit the areas of Orissa and Chhattisgarh severely affected by industrialisation and mining, especially in the areas of Sundargarh (Orissa) and Raigarh (Chhattisgarh). **Raigarh** is among one of the major, fastest growing industrial city in the Chhattisgarh state which threatens tribals and forest dwellers.



Madhya Pradesh: Government is giving lands

The State Government of Madhya Pradesh has announced for a big housing land distribution to poor urbans. This process has started on July, 14th.

MP's Government is planning to distribute about 71,000 land entitlements. They also announced that the state would make amendments in Land Laws and propose titles for all homeless people who occupied the land prior to 31st December 2007.

MP's Government plans to build about 50,000 houses for slum dwellers in Bhopal.

An extent of our network in Australia?

On 15th of July, early morning, Ramesh Sharma showed a film on Janadesh and gave a lecture of Ekta Parishad's activities to 15 Australian youths. All of these 15 members are young leaders from an organisation called "Oaktree Foundation" whose goal is to empower developing communities through education in a sustainable way. This organisation is entirely run by young people under the age of 26. These 15 young leaders are working towards the achievements of the United Nations' Millenium Development Goals, under the programme "Our Generation's Challenge" which led them in India. After the exposure, they had a one-hour discussion on land rights and strategies of non-violence. They asked many questions about Janadesh. They declared they would be interested in spreading information about land rights and non violence while they return to their country. Except few previous informal contacts, meeting this organisation is the first Ekta Parishad's contact in Australia, where agriculture is also an important economic sector.

Youth Camps: Towards new Ekta Parishad's activities

During Janadesh, many village people came to know more and more about Ekta Parishad's activities. This amazing won EP's bet led people to come and meet EP activists. After the march, there was a great pressure on Ekta Parishad. Villagers from many places asked for an expansion of grassroots mobilisation to new areas. After meeting and listening to villagers, Ekta Parishad decided to start new activities in several states of India. Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Uttarakhand will benefit from new project such as leadership trainings, farmers training, trainings on non violence, etc. We will let you know once the projects will be put in place.

In the same connection, Ekta Parishad has planned series of Youth Camps in these new areas and others.

Many Youth Camps are planned to be held with 100 youths each:

- From 10th to 13th of August, a Youth Camp will be held in Kota, Rajasthan
- From 22nd to 25th of August, in Wardha, Maharashtra
- From 28th to 31st of August, in Orchha, Uttar Pradesh
- From 14th to 17th of September, in Tilda, Chhattisgarh
- From 18th to 21st of September, in Katni, Madhya Pradesh
- From 26th to 29th of September, in Kausani, Uttarakhand

In each of these youth camps, youths will be trained on non violence and leadership, mainly through discussions on village issues but also through dramas, songs, action plans, etc.

Orissa: What Women's Empowerment is All About

Exciting new changes are taking place within the Ekta Parishad Orissa team with a group of 4 women activists taking on the leadership role of the state's activities. Snehalata Mohanty, Sita Devi, Bisnupriya Swain, and Manju Das have officially begun their work as the Orissa leadership team this month. A meeting in Bhubaneswar with 50 field activists and the new women-led team was held earlier this month to discuss upcoming activities and project planning. The team will place emphasis on implementing projects to ensure effective functioning of Panchayat Raj institutions, increasing local access to government social welfare schemes, strengthening the people's economy and improving their market access and negotiating capabilities.

Social welfare schemes and policies meant to benefit the poorest people in Orissa, specifically tribal, Dalit and landless communities, are currently not being properly implemented. Information about these schemes and policies is limited by a lack of dissemination and an unsympathetic and corrupt local government. This lack of awareness is compounded by the State Government's focus on improving the agricultural production of large land holders and increasing the level of foreign investment in the state by exploiting its natural resources and withholding access to water and forest resources from the communities that depend on them for their livelihoods.

The new leadership team and Ekta Parishad activists will focus on facilitating the flow of information to village level stakeholders so that they are in a better position to demand the proper and equitable implementation of social welfare schemes and policies aimed to strengthen the local economy and ensure that forest and water resources are accessible. Activist will work directly with state and local government representatives and villagers to facilitate a strategy for implementation and land distribution (as per the state's commitment to allocate land to the landless.)

Ekta Parishad Orissa will also work with communities to develop their advocacy skills and confidence so that they are in a better position to interact with local government representatives to improve their access to social welfare schemes and policies. Part of this process will be the design of jointly managed monitoring team to ensure the accountability of Panchayat Raj Institutions responsible for the implementation of these social welfare schemes and policies. At the same time, Ekta Parishad Orissa will work with local communities to install mechanisms to improve local economies and bargaining power.

The 4 women leading the Ekta Parishad Orissa team are all dedicated activists from Orissa with years of field experience and established

relationships of trust and respect with local communities. For years Bisnupriya Swain has been working in Puri district with the fisher communities of Chilka Lake to help them secure their livelihood rights and protect the biodiversity of the lake. Sita Devi is part of the team working to secure housing rights for bonded labourers in Sukunabhatta village in Kalahandi who have recently been given land through the Mo Jami Mo Ghardiha program that guarantees landless people 0.04 acres of homestead land. Snehalata Mohanty's work in the Khorda district has been focused on securing tribal access to forest resources and Manju Das has been active for more than 7 years in the Ganjam district working with local tribal communities to improve their access to forest lands and resources. She has also been very involved in advocating for the prevention of tribal land grabbing by non-tribal people. The experience each of these 4 women has working with local communities has given them a deep understanding of the land and natural resource issues faced by so many throughout the state. Their dynamism and dedication to the land struggle is sure to bring fresh energy to the Ekta Parishad Orissa team and everyone is looking forward to seeing what the next few months will bring.

Policy Makers & Rights Groups Call for Joint Action to uphold the Forest Rights Act

(based on report received from Wada Na Todo)



On July 4th, 2008, the Livelihood Thematic Action Group of Wada Todo Abhiyan Policy Makers has gathered experts and civil society representatives in a meeting held in the India Habitat Centre in Delhi, to evaluate the implementation of the Forest Rights Act, which is one of the most laudable promises made by the UPA, in his National Common Minimum Programme.

Arun Kumar, from Ekta Parishad – Chhattisgarh, has participated in this meeting and shared Ekta Parishad's concerns.

This Act aims to reverse the historical injustice met for years by the people living in the Forest Areas. This Act must to concern not only the land rights but also the rights on forest resources, as Shri MD Mistry, Member of Parliament, said. But many states are reticent to implement this act. While the Zamindari system (collection of taxes from peasants) has been officially abolished in the post-independence India, it remains

entrenched in the forest areas what is a break for a real democracy in which the people's rights could be truly recognised. In this areas, the government continues to control everything and forest dwellers have nothing to say about land and livelihood they depend on. Mr. Kishore Chandradev, the chairperson of the Joint Parliament Committee on Forest Rights Act has called for civil society groups to provide concrete recommendations to the Central Government based on their experiences with the FRA's implementation across states.

During this meeting, many gaps in the Forest Rights Act implementation have been evoked. Among these:

- The process of implementation is being frustrated by vested interests which not allow a democratic management of forest resources.
- For long the traditional Forest Management System has focused on the extraction of natural resources for profit and private interest, and nowadays, this past leads some major institutions to act against the Act.
- Here and there, in states like Orissa, Bihar or Gujarat, for example, the Act is ruthlessly violated by the government itself to acquire land from forest dwellers, which comes in addition to many other conflicts.
- The lack of people's awareness about the provisions of the Act is also an important problem for the right implementation of the Act.
- As well as the lack of political will and awareness and lack of clarity in role between different ministries or departments.

A call for special attention to be given to the involvement of women in implementing the FRA as well as receiving their due benefit from the provisions of the Act has been launched.

Out of these discussions, a series of recommendations and strategy was drawn up. The government needs to be pressurized to allocate resources to reach the areas which are currently inaccessible and create awareness on the Act. The time limit for the submission of claims should be removed. The number of years defining 'one generation' should be reduced from 25 to 15 years. Information on the genuine implementation of Forest Rights Act should be increased and case studies should be done. Public hearings should be organised and Members of Parliaments should take their role seriously to create political pressure for the implementation of the Act, particularly on the Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Food crisis or why it is urgent to struggle for

On early month of June 2008, 44 national leaders of the United Nations have attended the Summit on Food Crisis, in Rome, Italy. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), there are currently about 850 millions people suffering from hunger in the World. A majority of them, i.e. about 820 millions, live in developing countries. It is estimated that this number could soon be increased by 100 millions people, because of a global shortage in world food production which makes the prices go up.

"Food is become increasingly scarce and expensive, and it is already unaffordable for many people. The world's 200 wealthiest people have as much money as about 40 percent of the global population, and yet 850 million people have to go to bed hungry every night. This calamity is "one of the worst violations of human dignity," says former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan." In some countries as Haiti, a bowl of rice is unaffordable. How people can survive?

One important issue of this summit was about climate change as the major reason for this food crisis. But it is also well known that it is not the only reason and food crisis and the improper distribution of resources is another critical problem. And this subject of proper distribution of land and resources seems to be almost forgotten in such a meeting on Food Crisis which is considered by the specialist on Food rights, Jean Ziegler, as a total failure. It seems that during this Summit, nobody raised the question on small and marginal farmers who have simply been excluded from the debate for the benefits of multinational companies which are poisoning their land they depend on.

India is the most hunger-suffering country where about 2 Indians out of 10 do not eat enough every day. Contradictorily, there is enough food in India to feed everybody. That is why the agrarian reform claimed by landless people through Ekta Parishad is so important. Dear leaders of the World, can you imagine, if anybody could get a small piece of land to cultivate rice and vegetables for his own, how many people could be saved from the food crisis?

Gandhi said... an adage for the month

There is not a single moment in life when

man cannot serve.

