

# Janadesh News

May 2008

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## **Ekta Parishad President Discusses Nonviolence and People's Struggles in Canada and Europe**

Ekta Parishad president PV Rajagopal returned to India recently after a 3 month visit to Canada and Europe. During his stay he met with politicians, community groups, social organizations and individuals working to apply the principles of nonviolence to issues of social, economic and political development for the people. He shared his experiences working in India using the power of nonviolent action as a tool for inspiring social justice and had the opportunity to learn about nonviolent initiatives taking place all over Canada and Europe.

In Canada he met with Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of Canada's First Nations communities, to discuss the struggle of Canada's indigenous people as they work towards the creation of legislation that will give them an equal voice in the political decisions that affect their lives and rights. Both leaders are working towards the same goal; the creation of policies and attitudes that respect indigenous rights and needs and that give these communities the right to access and manage the use of the land and natural resources they have traditionally protected and honored. Their meeting offered them both the opportunity to discuss how the nonviolent direct action of the people is the best way for them to see their goals realized.

In England Rajagopalji met with long time friends from Action Village India (AVI) and Quakers groups to discuss the global food crisis and ways in which the power of nonviolent direct action can be harnessed to bring an end to the suffering of developing nations across the globe. AVI has been working to support rural communities in India in their struggle to create village self-sufficiency and to reduce migration to urban areas for many years. They will continue to help build a network of organizations within England and work to develop a greater level of awareness about Ekta Parishad and the struggle for land in India. The Quakers groups share Ekta Parishad's belief that peace, equality, and truth can be used to alleviate suffering and create positive social changes. They will focus on helping to strengthen peace groups in South Asia so that the principles of nonviolence can be applied more readily throughout the region.

Rajagopalji's meetings in France allowed him to meet with farmer's groups struggling to survive the impact of multi national companies and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) on agricultural production. A confederation of farmers under the leadership of Jose Bove has significant public support for their struggle against GMOs, with approximately 7500 people willing to destroy GMO crops and face criminal charges. Many small farmers in India face the same struggle as corporate agriculture and the introduction of genetically modified seeds threaten India's biodiversity the delicate balance of its agro-ecosystems. As farmers move from growing a variety of crops to producing crop monocultures, high production costs and the drop in global produce market prices make it almost impossible for them to compete with the low prices of imported produce. Ekta Parishad is now working to develop ways in which they can link the struggles in both countries and show solidarity for the French farmer's movement.

Rajagopalji's meetings in Canada and Europe brought struggles of India's landless communities to the international arena. Long time friendships were strengthened and new links forged that Ekta Parishad and its international partners will continue to foster. As non-violent direct action is increasingly being seen as a viable alternative to current methods of inciting equitable change, Ekta Parishad will continue to play an active role in the promotion of non-violence as a tool for social justice.

## Canada's Assembly of First Nations Calls for Support for the Second National Day of Action

Ekta Parishad friends and Janadesh supporters from the Assembly of First Nations called for the support of all Canadians this May 29<sup>th</sup> for the second National Day of Action. A peaceful march and rally in Canada's capital, Ottawa, called for the Government of Canada to address several issues vital to the equal representation of Canada's indigenous communities in the country's political and social systems. The following challenges were presented to the government:

***Reform the System by working with First Nations to set aside the legislation that controls their lives – the Indian Act – and replace it with First Nations involvement in local-decision making power and responsibility;***

***Ensure Results by implementing the recommendations of the Auditor General of Canada on accountability;***

***Establish Fair Funding by ending the discrimination against First Nations children. This means providing fair funding in core programs like education and child and family services;***

***Commit to Equality of Outcomes by closing the gap in the quality of life between First Nations and other Canadians within ten years, as agreed to by the leaders of federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments;***

***Focus on the Future by setting as priorities education and revenue sharing from resource development to help First Nations build their economies and take their place in Canada's economy;***

***Respect First Nations Rights and the Rule of Law by honoring the legal obligations set out in the Treaties, the Constitution, international law and the Supreme Court of Canada;***

***Recognize the Rights of First Nations Governments in Canada - Support the rights, roles and responsibilities of First Nations as an order of government in Canada.***

For generations the indigenous communities of Canada faced institutionalized discrimination and abuse that left their people demoralized and voiceless. West Coast Regional Chief Shawn Atleo came to India last year to walk with Janadesh satyagrahis and share stories of the long struggle against oppression faced by his people. While the face of the struggle may have changed over time, the issues remain the same. Today Canada's indigenous people are still denied proper representation in Canadian policy. Their needs and rights still fall short of being met with many people being denied even the basic right to clean drinking water and proper education. The Assembly of First Nations is taking the demands of Canada's indigenous people to parliament by organizing a peaceful padyatra (foot-march.) As India's Janadesh satyagrahis did on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007, the First Nations people of Canada are trusting that the force of nonviolence will inspire the nation's leaders to ensure that the needs of all of Canada's citizens are addressed.

### **"Surakshya" – Securing the Right to Housing and Dignity in Kalahandi**

*Right now in one of Orissa's poorest regions, Ekta Parishad and Gandhi International 2008 have joined hands with a local community organization, Jana Sahajya, to help bring secure housing and the chance to live with the dignity that independence offers to the villagers of Sukunabhata in the Kalahandi district.*

*Of the 52 families living in Sukunabhata, almost all are landless bonded labourers who have only recently been given homestead land by the state government. Project Surakshya was developed in collaboration with the community and aims to help them build safe and sanitary homes, improve their access to quality education, ensure their food security, develop income generating activities and establish an open community dialogue that will allow full and equal community participation in the decisions affecting their development.*

*Using the principles advocated by Gandhi, project Surakshya will attempt to strengthen community-based governance (gram swaraj) and local self-reliance (gram swawlamban) so that the largely tribal and Dalit people of Sukunabhata can begin to gain control over their livelihoods and break free from the bonded labor they have known for so long.*

## La Via Campesina Joins Biodiversity Day Celebrations

On May 22<sup>nd</sup> activists from all over the world hung a banner, banged on teacups and handed out messages from La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement, during the official celebrations of International Biodiversity Day at the 9th Conference of Parties (COP) of the UN Convention on Biodiversity. This was meant to be a celebration of agricultural biodiversity – yet, not one farmer, pastoralist, fisher or Indigenous Peoples' representative was invited to participate. La Via Campesina's offer to participate in the formal agenda was refused despite promises from the Secretariat of the CBD.

La Via Campesina's action was just after the message from the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, to the delegates of the Convention. The banners read "No Agro-Diversity" Without Farmers" and "No Food for Fuels".

Members of La Via Campesina were applauded by delegates when they chanted "nature for people, not for business". After a few minutes the banners were removed by security and the people holding them were escorted out of the Maritim Hotel, and their accreditation to the COP was cancelled.

Prior to the banner hanging action, members of Via Campesina and their supporters disrupted an industry lunch with a play which depicted agro-industrialists congratulating each other for their excellent work at monopolizing the farm seeds and destroying agricultural biodiversity.

For the full story visit [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org)

## Globalize the Struggle, Globalize the Hope

*La Via Campesina demands for the Human Right Commission and governments all over the world:*

*The liberalization of the peasants who are arrested for fighting for their rights. We demand to release the ten peasants arrested at Pandeglang, Banten, Indonesia, the 40 indigenous leaders in Chile, to cancel the legal process against Jose Bove and the other French farmers that struggle against GMO, as well as in the situation of other countries in which peasants are detained because of land conflicts such as currently Colombia, Panama and others.*

*Stop the criminalization of the peasant struggle to have access to land in order to fulfill the right to food for their family and the community.*

*Get the WTO, World Bank and the IMF out of the agriculture.*

*Demand the WTO, WB and the IMF to stop all human rights violations resulting from their current projects and programs. Create an international legal mechanism to ensure their accountability to the international human rights standards.*

*Prosecute the Transnational Cooperation (TNC) that is responsible for the violation of human rights. Create also for private actors such as TNCs an international legal mechanism to ensure their human rights accountability.*

*Insist that all countries that have not yet ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights must do it and that all State Parties implement the covenant in their national and international policies and that they protect the peasants rights.*

*Encourage the Human Right Commission to develop an "International Convention on the Rights of Peasants". This convention is of urgent need for the protection of the rights of peasants.*

*Give peasant organizations ample participation rights in all the processes at the United Nation Human Rights Commission.*

# National Land Reforms Committee Continues to Investigate the Impact of India's Special Economic Zones

In a continued effort to address the issues of communities affected by special economic zones (SEZs), the National Land Reforms Committee recently held several people's consultations and field visits in states across the country. As members collect information and input from local farmers and resistance groups, the Committee will take the needs of SEZ affected farmers and implement them into the design of a National Land Reforms policy that will incorporate measures to prevent or minimize the use of agricultural lands for non-agricultural purposes.

One of the richest onion and grape growing regions of India lies in the Nashik district of Maharashtra. The state government has issued a notice for the acquisition of approximately 1800 hectares of land for SEZs, leaving farmers with little recourse for action against the loss of their lands and livelihoods. The state government has plans to make the Igatpuri, Nashik and Sinner districts essentially an industrial corridor for new SEZs and has already signed agreements with the Japanese government for the development of these areas. In Kerala, one of the biggest losses of agricultural land has taken place in the eastern regions of the state. The Wayanad, Idaki, Palkkad, and Kollam districts have seen approximately 7500 acres of fertile agricultural land privatized and taken over by the Plantation Corporation of Kerala, destroying the livelihoods of thousands of farmers and agricultural labourers.

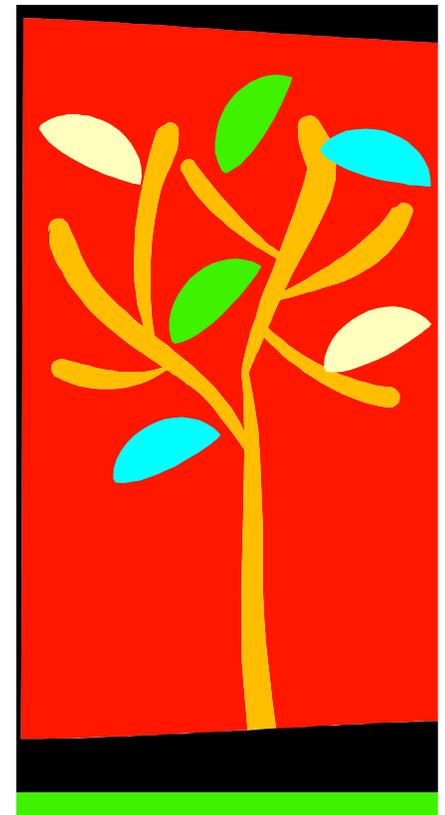
Compounding the struggle of poor farmers across India facing losses due to SEZs is the fact that thousands of these farmers depend on lands that have yet to be regularized. Without regularization, people are unable to gain official recognition of their rights to the land they depend on for their livelihoods. Without ownership, farmers have few options when state governments declare farmlands SEZs. In Karnataka alone an estimated 700,000 acres of lands are improperly classified (double entry lands; registered as both forest and revenue land) making the implementation of the Forest Rights Act and the granting of tribal communities rights to the forest, impossible. As the Committee works to develop a new National Land Reforms policy for the people, the regularization and proper classification of lands is imperative for there to be justice for the small farmers and landless people of India.

Ekta Parishad presented the Government of India with their vision for land reform in India several years ago and today the Committee is working to realize that vision. The regularization of lands requires lands to be properly surveyed, fairly distributed and should allow for the unimpeded physical possession of lands by landless people. As long as the regularization of land remains an issue, state governments will continue to create SEZs and land grabbing will increase at the cost of hundreds of thousands of India's fertile agriculture lands.

## "We Exist Because Forests Exist"

A people's account of what forests mean to them - published in the District Report of Dakshin Bastar, Dantewada, Chhattisgarh

*"The forest is the very basis of our lives. We exist because the forest exists. Thus, we strive to protect the forest, at any cost. Our traditions and rituals are closely linked to our forests and trees. We believe that our forests are sacred because our gods and goddesses reside there. The saja, the saja mahua, the mahua semal, the mango, the semal karanji, the banyan, the banyan pipal, the pipal salfi trees are symbols of good fortune and prosperity. The number of salfi trees in a house is an indicator of the wealth and prosperity of the household. The drink that is made from its fruit is an integral part of our culture. If the drinks of salfi, chind and mahua are not offered in ceremonies of birth, death and marriage, the ceremonies are considered incomplete. People revere trees just as they revere their parents and their deities."*



# *EXPLOITING THE MINERAL WEALTH OF CHHATTISGARH*

## **THE TRUTH ABOUT THE STATE'S MINING PRACTICES**

Chhattisgarh's mineral wealth has made it a prime target for mining companies looking to exploit the state government's greed and its complete disregard for the welfare of its tribal communities. Chhattisgarh produces 28 major minerals, holding 16% of India's coal, 10% of its iron ore, 5% of its limestone, 5% of its bauxite and 88 % of its tin. Almost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of India's diamond reserves are found in Chhattisgarh and the state is eager to establish itself as a leader in mineral production.

Chhattisgarh's bio-diverse forests are home to thousands of India's tribal people; people that depend on the rivers, trees and soil of the forests they have occupied for centuries. Unfortunately, these forests are also the areas richest in minerals and as a consequence they have become the grounds of mass exploitation that has led to the displacement thousands of tribal people and the destruction of delicate ecosystems. There is a long-held respect for the forests whose abundance has allowed tribal communities to thrive for generations. Tribal communities who occupied the forests hundreds of years ago did not see themselves as the "owners" of forest lands but rather as participants in the delicate balance of giving and taking required to live in harmony with the forests they called home. Over time, outside influences that did not recognize the traditional tribal rights over forest resources began to see the forests as a means of gaining personal wealth. Today, as many tribal people do not hold official documents giving them the rights to the lands they live on, the state is easily able to exploit their powerlessness to satisfy their own lust for money.

Right now approximately 90,000 ha of land in Chhattisgarh are being mined for major minerals and coal. The top five most mined districts in the state are Korba, Koriya, Surguja, Raigarh and Durg, which account for 90% of the total land being mined. There are 344 mining leases in the state, and the number is quickly growing. The impact on the environment and communities living close to the mining areas is disastrous. While tribal communities are being displaced, thousands of small farmers are suffering enormous financial losses due to the poisoning of water and soil. Villagers claim that coal dust from coal handling plants covers their fields and destroys their crops. The mining industry pollutes waters that drain into reservoirs and rivers that communities rely on for drinking water and irrigation. The health of communities living the closest to mining industries is aversely affected with high reports of sickness related to respiratory problems and decreasing immunity. Many times entire communities have been forced to migrate due to the impact of mining pollution on their health.

Only 36% of Chhattisgarh's total land area is under cultivation or private ownership; the rest of the land, despite being occupied by tribal and landless communities, is essentially free for the state and mining companies to exploit. Most of the state's citizens are tribal communities or small and landless farmers without the official documents they need to have any legal say in what happens to their land. If the state continues in the direction it seems determined to follow, it will be the poorest people of Chhattisgarh that pay the price with their lands, their livelihoods, and perhaps even with their lives.

## The Cost of Hydro Power Generation in Uttarakhand

Right now the state government of Uttarakhand is busily acquiring land to build or expand hydro power projects throughout the state. Its goal is to become a leader in hydro power generation, not only meeting the needs of the state, but also producing a surplus of power that can be sold to boost the state economy. Water from rivers like the Alaknanda, the Bhagirathi, the Yamuna and the Ganga, as well as dozens of smaller rivers, are being channeled into tunnels that create sharp drops capable of turning turbines to generate power. These tunnels are built by drilling through the mountain side, often in "sinking zone areas" that are vulnerable to shifting. When power companies conduct test blasting in the mountains and build tunnels and canals, the land shifts, cracks and many times collapses inwards. Land is being acquired to build dams where rivers can be diverted into tunnels and to build the roads necessary for projects to continue.

*(Photo: one of several holes in the earth that have appeared since tunnel drilling began near Pala village)*



***Recently Ekta Parishad and National Campaign for Land and Livelihood (NCLL) activists visited several areas affected by hydro power production sites to see first hand the affects that dam and tunnel construction have on local communities.***

Pala Village in Uttarkhashi District on the Bhagirathi River is a community of 82 households made up of mostly small farmers. They rely on forest product collection and agricultural cultivation of forest lands. They raise cattle and grow enough food for themselves with a small surplus that allows them to sell their goods in the local market. Their lands are able to produce three cycles of crops each year, allowing them to be almost entirely self-sufficient, growing enough food to consume and only buying things like salt, sugar and soap from the market.

Unfortunately, Pala village is located between two tunnel schemes for hydro power, the Lohari-Nagpala and the Nagpala-Maneri. A hydro power generation company has been conducting blasting to test the compaction and hardness of hills. The blasting is taking place right under the village and the affects are immediately visible to anyone who enters the area. Buildings and pathways are cracked and several large holes have appeared in field and forest areas that are hollow and deep. These holes emit steam and cause water from springs to shift into cracks and away from natural pathway that villagers use to irrigate their fields. Of the three natural springs used for irrigation, two have dried since the blasting began. Fields that were once level are now sloped and hilly. Villagers claim that road and tunnel construction produces dust that covers their fields and homes, destroying crops and killing cattle. One farmer reported waking up one morning to find a hole in the middle of his field approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  meter wide. The power company offered no explanation or compensation saying that it must be result of an earthquake that happened in 1991.

Since November 2007, 60-70 women from the village have been united in protest against the project and have been holding a dharna (sit in) at the tunnel and road construction sites. Today the work has been stopped as a result of their action, but police and project officials continue to pressure the women to end their protest. Locals report that officials have approached males from the village to try and convince the women to end their protest. Local leaders have also been approached to speak to the women on behalf of the project. Ekta Parishad and NCLL are working with a local organization, Himalayi Paryavaran Shiksha Santhan (HPSS,) to identify ways in which they can work to help the people of Pala village as well as other communities affected by the state government's drive to increase power production in Uttarakhand.