THE RIGHT TO KNOW

In the last few decades, India has witnessed an increase in developmental activities like big dams, industries, nuclear power projects, mining, etc. Of late however, the country is witnessing a growing debate between social activists, environmentalists and citizens on one hand and planners and scientists on the other hand on the impact and longterm viability of these projects. Unfortunately, the critics of these projects have by and large failed to convince the supporters of these projects that such projects are not socially just, economically viable and ecologically sustainable. A part of this failure can be attributed to the fact that the critics have no access to documents and relevant information related to the projects to prove their arguments.

The question of the right to know and the right to have access to information has received considerable attention in the recent past in the country, especially after the Bhopal gas tragedy and the imposition of the Official Secrets Act at the site of Sardar Sarovar dam in Gujarat. In the country at present, there is no right to have access to information related to public projects independently of legal proceedings based on an independent inquiry. In the case of nuclear power plants, all information is kept secret under the pretext of the Atomic Energy Act, 1962. This Act empowers the Atomic Energy Commission, the highest decision-making authority, to withhold information related to design, health and safety and other aspects of nuclear power projects.

The Article 19 of Indian constitution grants to every citizen a right described as freedom of speech and expression. The past experience shows that the right to expression is meaningless without the right to information. The people cannot express themselves fully unless they are furnished with authentic information.

The people can build opinion, criticize or support policies as expected from them in a participative democracy, only when there is a right to information as a necessary ingredient to the freedom of expression.

A historic judgement related to this aspect was delivered by a division bench of the Bombay High Court in a writ petition filed by the Bombay Environmental Action Group (See the Judgement on Page 2 and 3). The court pointed out that it was high time that authorities started taking the assistance of the social action groups instead of looking at them with askance and distrusting them. The help of such groups, it was observed, might check sabotage of development plans by unscrupulous persons and corruption at all levels. Otherwise, secrecy tends to promote oppression, corruption and abuse of authority.

The time has come to review the current status of the people's right to know and strengthen that right by setting up healthy norms and procedures. As James Madison has pointed out, "Knowledge will forever govern ignorance and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives".
Following are the excerpts from the judgement given by the Bombay High Court on October 7, 1986 in a writ petition filed by the Bombay Environmental Action Group. The petitioners were—Bombay Environmental Action Group, Shyam H.K. Chainani, Honorary Secretary of Bombay Environmental Action Group and Save Pune Citizen’s Committee. The respondent was Pune Cantonment Board, Pune.

"The Bombay Environmental Action Group is a society registered under the Societies Registration Act, whose main object is to look after the environment in all its aspects and to ensure that the citizens in India enjoy an enhanced quality of life and have maximum civil amenities. Shyam H.K. Chainani is the Honorary Secretary of the same. Save Pune Citizens Committee is a voluntary organisation set up by the citizens of Pune, whose aims and objects are to look after the environment of Pune City (including the cantonment) and its neighbourhood. To carry on the object the petitioners addressed letters to the respondents the Pune Cantonment Board in connection with the construction carried out within its limits. The Petitioners wanted that they should be granted either inspection or copies of applications made for building permissions, plans accompany such applications and all official proceedings relating to such permissions, including renewal thereof. Since this request of the petitioners was not granted, the petitioners have filed the Writ Petition for declaration that it was incumbent upon the Cantonment Board to disclose to the petitioners and other citizens and or grant to the petitioners of other citizens inspection of all these documents and materials."

"In this Writ Petition we are not dealing with any Tom, Dick and Harry, but we are dealing with an Action Group which is interested in protecting the environmental and ecological balance of the city. People’s participation in the movement for the protection of the environment cannot be over-emphasized. It is wrong to think that by trying to protect the environment, they are opposing the various development projects. It is not disputed before us that in view of the provisions of sections 41 and 42 of the Cantonments Act, at least Save Pune Citizen’s Committee, which includes its members the inhabitants of the Cantonment also will have a right to inspect the minutes of the Board meeting or to attend the meeting. Admittedly, no bye-laws have been framed which deals with the regulation of supply of copies of official document

"The Petitioners contended that under Art. 19(1)(a) of the Constitution of India, a citizen has a right to get such information. Even under the relevant provisions of the Act, a public body like the respondent Cantonment Board cannot refuse to give inspection of these public documents. This is more so when the petitioners, which is an Action Group want to help the Cantonment Board in maintaining the environmental balance within its territorial jurisdiction and the documents asked for cannot be termed as secret or confidential."

"On the other hand, it is contended by the respondent that under the relevant provisions of the Act viz. the Cantonments Act, 1924, which is a self contained code in itself, the Cantonment Board is not bound to give inspection of supply copies of any of these documents."

"In this Writ Petition we are not dealing with any Tom, Dick and Harry, but we are dealing with an Action Group which is interested in protecting the environmental and ecological balance of the city. People’s participation in the movement for the protection of the environment cannot be over-emphasized. It is wrong to think that by trying to protect the environment, they are opposing the various development projects. It is not disputed before us that in view of the provisions of sections 41 and 42 of the Cantonments Act, at least Save Pune Citizen’s Committee, which includes its members the inhabitants of the Cantonment also will have a right to inspect the minutes of the Board meeting or to attend the meeting. Admittedly, no bye-laws have been framed which deals with the regulation of supply of copies of official document
and prescribing the fee payable in respect thereof. Before us, the respondents have produced a Resolution of the Finance Committee, prescribing the fees. This Resolution deal with the searching fees, copying fees and fees for supply of certified copy of site plan. It places no restriction, nor lays down as to whom inspection could be given or copies could be supplied. In these circumstances, it can safely be held that one who is prepared to pay the requisite fees and is asking for inspection or copies of the site plan is entitled to inspection or the copies of the documents. In the present case, it is nobody's case nor could it be assumed that a responsible body like the petitioners will be acting malafide in asking for inspection of the relevant documents."

"Section 181 deals with the powers of the Board to sanction or refuse the building plans etc. In this case we are concerned with the civil area of the cantonment. Therefore, if the powers in that behalf could be exercised by the Executive Officer of the Cantonment Board, then the decision taken in that behalf may not be reflected in the minutes of the Board meetings. Even otherwise, the copies of the resolutions produced before us do not give sufficient details about the sanctioned plans. In these circumstances, in our view, only from the mere inspection of the minutes of the Board, the purpose for which the Action Group is formed may not be achieved."

"The apprehension expressed by respondent that if such right is given to a citizen, then the working of the Cantonment Board will not only be affected but will come to a standstill is also without any substance. To say the least, in this Writ Petition we are not dealing with the right of each and every citizen generally. We would like to confine ourselves to the rights of recognised Social Action Groups whose activities deserve to be appreciated."

"Therefore it cannot be said that action groups are trying to meddle in the affairs of Cantonment Board or are claiming any extra-legal authority......it is high time that the Cantonment Board should start taking their assistance instead of looking at them askance and distrusting them. The vested interests will undoubtedly be against such social action groups. However, their help might check sabotage of development plans by unscrupulous persons and corruption at all levels. It may be noted at this stage that the petitioners are only claiming a right of inspection of the documents referred to above and nothing more."

"Apart from our expectation that the Action Group will behave in a more responsible manner, we feel that such a right of inspection should be sparingly used and should be restricted to the Honorary Secretary of the Save Pune Citizens Committee or a person specifically authorised by him. Inspection will be subject to the convenience of both the parties and at such time and place as may be fixed by the Board and on payment of requisite fees."

"....It is high time that the Cantonment Board should start taking their assistance instead of looking at them askance and distrusting them."

In the result, the Rule is made partly absolute in this Writ Petition. The respondents are directed to give inspection of the documents viz. application for building permissions, plans accompanying such applications and the final proceedings relating to the sanction of the permission, including renewals to the sanction of the permission, including renewals to the sanction to the permission....."
THAILAND

Logging Banned

On January 11, 1989, the Government of Thailand announced a nationwide ban on logging. The ban on logging has been enforced in the wake of severe flash floods that ravaged the Thailand, especially the southern provinces and claimed many lives. In November 1988, 14 provinces in South Thailand were devastated. Mountains of logs, tree bark, branches and mud swept down on numerous villages, leaving more than 430 dead, 500 missing and more than 70,000 injured. In Surat Thani, about 90,000 families were affected by severe floods.

The farmers who faced water shortages and drought were engaged in a long campaign to stop logging. They were intimidated and even arrested. But rallies, marches, petitions to the government and support from environmental and other groups in the country brought the ban on logging. For further details, contact: Project for Ecological Recovery, 1705 Ram IV Road, Bangkok 105000, Thailand.

CHINA

Three Gorges Dam Shelved

Bowing to public opposition to the Three Gorges Dam proposal, the Chinese authorities announced on April 3, 1989, that the world’s largest hydroelectric project has been shelved for at least five years.

On construction, the dam would have damaged Yangtze river ecosystem upon which millions of people depend, relocating over 1.3 million people, flooded over 100,000 acres of cultivated farm land, destroyed 80 species of freshwater fish and drowned towns, harbours, and scores of ancient archaeological and historical sites. Furthermore, the dam would have threatened wetlands and flood plain habitat of hundreds of Asian birds, black cranes and Siberian cranes.

Strongly opposing the project, many environmentalists and activists join hands with the local population and carried out a number of demonstrations and campaigns in the China and abroad. Finally, this led to the reconsideration of the project by the Chinese authorities. However, there is a strong possibility that the dam may come up again after five years. For further details, contact: Project for Ecological Recovery, 1705 Ram IV Road, Bangkok 105000, Thailand.

INDONESIA

Towards Environmental Destruction

In an attempt to construct a number of developmental projects in Indonesia, the Indonesian authorities are ignoring the issues related to social and environmental impacts of these projects. The examples include the World Bank Financed Kendung Ombo dam and irrigation project in Central Java, the Indrayan purp and rayon plant in North Sumatra, and the proposed Astra-Scott Cellosa wood chip and pulp mill in Irian Jaya.

Compared to Namrud and Tehri dams in India, most of the Indonesian dams are small yet they have created traumas for the displaced. For instance, nearly 25,000 people displaced from the 30 mw Kendung Ombo dam are still wandering un-rehabilitated.

Similarly, the American Scott Paper Company has started a massive pulp and wood chip project in Irian Jaya without conducting an environmental impact assessment. This project will wipe out 800,000 hectares of native rainforest and could pollute the river systems with toxic waste. Besides, the lives of nearly 36,000 people belonging to various tribal groups will be threatened by destroying their hunting, gathering and rubber tapping grounds.

For further details, contact: Indonesian Environmental Forum, (WALHI), Jalan Panjermanian I, Komplek Keuangian No. 15, Pejompongan Jakarta Pusat 10210, Indonesia.

HUNGARY

Nagyamaros Dam Suspended

A strong public opposition to the Nagyamaros Dam on the Danube River has forced the Hungarian government to suspend all construction on this gigantic hydro-power project. The project involves the construction of two dams: one in Czechoslovakia that will stop the natural flow of the river Danube by diverting it via a 16 km. long canal to a second dam, the Nagyamaros, in Hungary. The project will leave major parts of the river Danube without enough water to flush away heavy river—dumped wastes and will flood unique forests, small islands, the habitat of 200 species of protected flora and fauna and many historic sites. Most of the Czechoslovakia portion of the project is completed while work in Hungary is in initial stage.

The suspension began on May 13, 1989, after 150,000 petitions from Hungary and 50,000 from abroad were submitted to the government declaring that the dam is expensive and environmentally disastrous.

For further details, contact: The Foundation to Protect the Hungarian Environment, 84 Old North Stamford Road, Stamford, CT 06905 U.S.A.
ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Many of us are becoming increasingly concerned with the ever increasing pace of liquidation of the country’s heritage of natural resources, a process that is going hand in hand with the widening social and economic gulf between different segments of our society. Big dams are only one symptom of this process, which needs to be viewed in the wider perspective of the model of development being pursued by us. Sri Babasaheb Amte had mooted the idea in this context of holding a meeting of environmental activists, scientists and others to work out such a perspective as a follow-up of the Advaani Mein held at Ellipakasa, Maharashtra in April 22-23, 1989. Such a meeting was held at Nagpur on July 8-9, 1989. At this meeting an attempt was made to pinpoint the main issues of relevance in the whole environment development debate, and to indicate the direction in which an environmentally sound, sustainable and socially just development policy should take.

Such a statement needs to be widely debated among environmental activists, scientists and other concerned citizens so that a consensus on a broader perspective may be arrived at.

For further details, contact
Dr. Vakas Amte, Anandwan, Vih Wantra, Dist. Chandrapur, Maharashtra - 442 914

The major problems facing our country include: (a) Environmental degradation in its many forms such as overuse of renewable resources like groundwater and forests, destruction of biological diversity and pollution to depletion of ozone layer in the earth’s atmosphere (b) Growing social and economic disparities, (c) Large scale unemployment and underemployment, especially in the rural areas and consequent large-scale migration of the poor to the cities.

(2) These problems are inter-connected in many ways and relate to: (a) The culture of highly inefficient, wasteful resource use, both by the poor and rich each in their different ways (b) Cornering of the benefits of development by a narrow segment of the society, and (c) Progressive alienation of masses of people from access to natural resources on which they have been intimately dependent for many generations.

(3) All these are ultimately linked to one all pervasive process: the organisation of highly subsidised flows of resources under sponsorship of the state apparatus to the few islands of prosperity in the cities, industry and intensive agriculture. This is complemented by a countercflow of waste and pollutants into the oceans of poverty from these islands of prosperity.

(4) Beneficiaries of subsidies, be they paper mills receiving bamboo at one thousandth market price, city dwellers receiving water at one fiftieth of the actual cost, or farmers receiving electricity for their pumpsets at one twentieth of the production cost end up using these resources in a highly inefficient fashion. With the users thus indifferent, the resource use is also administered in a highly wasteful fashion, e.g. with large transmission losses of electric power and poor maintenance of irrigation systems. The high margins of profit that the subsidies make possible promote corruption, with the beneficiaries of subsidies, the bureaucracy and politicians constituting an iron triangle of vested interest that push for resource mismanagement.

(5) The pockets of prosperity that this system of subsidies has generated are increasingly indulging in an ostentatious
lifestyle. Such a consumerist culture simply cannot bring our large population within its orbit; but its attraction is forcing further resource flows out of the rural hinterland by people looking desperately for cash. The resultant impoverishment of large tracts of our countryside is hardly compensated for by the money being pumped in through the rural employment programmes, since these are never effectively used to generate long-term productive assets for the poor.

(6) It is evident that we must take a firm stand against all state-sponsored subsidies, except for the purpose of generation of productive, environmentally sound employment for the masses. When all consumers begin to pay the proper price for all resources used, be they water, electric power, or pulpwood etc., for more efficient systems of resource use would naturally develop. This costing should not only include straightforward economic considerations, but also long-term consequences of depletion of nonrenewable resources like oil or top soil.

(7) In particular, we must take a firm stand that all States Interventions should leave everybody at least as well off, if not a little better off, than before the Intervention. This implies that nobody should be displaced by a development project without his or her consent, and the project should include a full-fledged component of total rehabilitation of displaced persons in the manner that Tibetan refugees have been looked after.

(8) Such a reorientation of the manner in which development projects are assessed and implemented would force a welcome change in their composition. Today gigantic projects tend to be favoured because they provide gigantic scope for wasteful resource use and large-scale corruption. With premium on very careful resource use, a different mix of environmentally sound, socially just development programmes is bound to emerge. These would for instance go in for energy conservation, rather than Nuclear power generation, careful execution of irrigation water delivery, rather than building up large dams.

(9) Today the beneficiaries of wasteful resource use live far away from where resource degradation is having its immediate impact and are well shielded from the negative consequences. They have therefore no motivation for prudent resource use. It is the rural poor dependent on the health of the local resource base for their well being, who suffer the consequences. It is this segment of the population that is likely to be most highly motivated for sustainable resource use. But they are totally deprived of all powers to control their resource base, and in fact are daily being further and further alienated from access to it. In their attempts to eke out a living, they are instead further destroying the environment.

(10) It is this situation that needs to be turned around. This calls for empowering local communities to take good care of the resource base of their environment. Here the local community has to mean a group of people who can all come together, interact and decide on resource use, and not for instance the elected Panchayat members from a heterogeneous cluster of villages. This system of involving them in good resource management, therefore, needs to be worked out with great care, ensuring that it would not be subverted to serve the interests of a small village elite.

(11) A major challenge before us is the development of a decentralised system of integrated planning, execution and monitoring of natural resource use. Such a system implies complete access to information to all citizens, this right to know is an important ingredient of genuine democracy. The system would put to full use indigenous knowledge and on the spot monitoring of actual performance of development programmes by the local people. This would go a long way in restoring a meas-
ure of dignity and self-confidence among the people.

(12) A system of community land and water sources would have to be set up to provide for the basic needs such as food, fuel, fodder and housing materials and other needs which the local people need to lead a decent life. This will ensure the integration of past and present methods of resource management. The system would promote the health of gross national product shared equitably by all, rather than the gross national product cornered by a few.

(13) Educational institutions should come to serve as repositories of information about the natural resources of their locality and work with the local people in planning, implementation and monitoring of resource use. Such an alternative should enable us to prune down the presently bloated bureaucracy, which along with the military is swallowing all the resources of the country.

(14) Gainful employment must be recognized as a constitutional right of all citizens. State investment should, therefore, focus on rural employment generation for the purpose of eco-restoration. Special efforts would have to be made to wean the people away from environmentally destructive occupations such as steep hills for cultivation into which they are now being forced. Instead the bulk of our forest land should be enriched with a variety of non-timber yielding species such as mahua, myrobolan, soapnut and nux vomica etc and these produce be used for effectively supporting the rural economy.

(15) It is undoubtedly true that the ever increasing numbers of poor in our country are imposing demands that play a significant role in degradation of the environment. But while they are engaged in a scramble for resources, and see no hope for improvement in the quality of life, they would never be motivated to invest more in each child and limit their number. Only when we could transform the current system to confer dignity and assure supply of basic needs would they be motivated to do so.

(16) We must realize that we are witnessing the development of a hierarchy of resource flows out of the Indian countryside into cities of India to Japan, USA, each impoverishing an already poor region. By indulging in dependence on foreign loans to execute gigantic development projects managed wastefully to provide resources at highly subsidised rates to those already well off, we are sinking deeper and deeper into a morass of financial and environmental bankruptcy.

(17) We must now recognize that we share this world with millions of other species of living organisms who too have a right to exist on this earth, and hold its resources in trust for generations to come. We must, therefore, cease treating it with contempt as a warehouse of commodities to satisfy the consumerism of a narrow elite, and treat it with respect so that it can be preserved as a habitat for humanity and all other life forms for generations to come.
WORLD RAINFOREST MOVEMENT

Following is the statement drafted by participants of the World Rainforest Movement meeting in Penang, Malaysia on April 14-17, 1989.

In this meeting, various environmental groups from all over the world took part. For further details, contact World Rainforest Movement, 87, Cartonment Road, 10250 Penang, Malaysia.

1. Forests, both temperate and tropical, are an integral part of the life support systems of the planet, performing numerous ecological and social functions that are essential for the continuation of life as we know it on earth. Those functions include:
   - Regulating climate at both the regional and global level;
   - Providing a habitat for the majority of species on earth;
   - Providing a homeland and spiritual basis for millions of forest peoples;
   - Maintaining and conserving soils;
   - Regulating hydrological cycles and ensuring water supplies.

2. The continuing loss of the world’s forests now constitutes a global emergency.
   - In temperate areas, the bulk of primary forests have been destroyed. What remains is being lost to logging and acid rain and other pollutants;
   - In tropical areas, forests are disappearing at the rate of 100 acres or more a minute. Moreover, the rates of destruction are increasing and, on current trends, little will be left within a few decades.

3. The immediate and long-term consequences of global deforestation threaten the very survival of life as we know it on earth. Indeed, the scale of deforestation and its impact now represents one of the gravest emergencies ever to face the human race. Such consequences include:
   - The disruption of climatic equilibrium and the acceleration of global warming;
   - A loss of biological diversity on an unprecedented scale;
   - The destruction of forest-based societies;
   - Increasing droughts, floods, soil erosion and desertification;
   - The dispossession and displacement of peasants and forest peoples through floods and the other ecological impacts of deforestation.

4. The current social and economic policies and practices that lead to deforestation throughout the world in the name of “development” are directly responsible for the annihilation of the earth’s forests, bringing poverty and misery to millions and threatening global ecosystems with collapse. Such policies and practices include:
   - Plantations, both for industrial forestry and for export crops;
   - Ranching schemes;
   - Dam projects;
   - Commercial logging;
   - Colonisation schemes;
   - Mining and industry;
   - The dispossession of peasants and indigenous peoples;
   - Roads;
   - Pollution;
   - Tourism.

5. Official solutions to the problem of deforestation have ignored or played down the fundamental causes of deforestation and have instead adopted policies that blame the victims of deforestation for their plight, while simultaneously pursuing “solutions” that can only result in the further degradation of forests and croplands through the promotion of industrialised forestry. Specifically such policies include:
   - The Tropical Forest Action Plan, as promoted by the World Bank, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, the UN Development Programme and others;
   - “Sustained yield” commercial logging, as promoted by the International Timber Trade Agreement;
• Policies to zone the forests;
• The commercialisation and privatisation of biological diversity, as promoted through the International Biodiversity Programme;
• Pollution control programmes that are directed towards "managing" specific pollutants rather than reducing the source of pollution.

6. Throughout the world, the victims of these policies are taking action to arrest deforestation and reverse the process of destruction. In Sarawak, Amazonia, the Himalayas, Thailand, the Philippines and elsewhere, people are standing up to protect the forests and their societies. Such peoples have proved that they are able to use the forests in the only way that is compatible with their preservation. It is not corporations, aid agencies and banks, which should be entrusted with the design and implementation of the protection and regeneration of the forest wealth of the planet.

7. The victims of the development process, along with those concerned with their fate and the fate of the earth, therefore call upon the United Nations and national governments to take urgent steps:

• To restore ecological justice and integrity to humanity by returning to the millions of people both who live in the forest and who depend upon it, their right to sustainable livelihood;
• To restore ecological justice and integrity to life on earth through ceasing further forest destruction and regenerating damaged forest lands through the guidance of indigenous peoples, peasants and local communities, planting only their choice of trees and plants, with the aim of restoring ecological diversity and the survival of indigenous societies;
• To restrain the overconsumption and wastage of resources by the world's privileged groups through making the necessary changes in lifestyle and consumption patterns consistent with the development of sustainable livelihood throughout the globe, in order to satisfy the ecological, spiritual, social and aesthetic needs of people everywhere.

8. Specifically we call upon the United Nations and national governments:

(i) To empower forest peoples and those who depend upon the forests for their livelihood with the responsibility for safeguarding the forests and ensuring their regeneration by:
(a) achieving land security for rural peoples, both through revising land tenure legislation and through land reform, as recommended in the Brundtland report;
(b) empowering local people with the right to a decisive voice in formulating policies for their areas;
(c) rejecting social and economic policies based on the assumed cultural superiority of non-forest peoples.

(ii) To halt all those practices and projects which would contribute either directly or indirectly to further forest loss. Such projects would include: plantation schemes, dams, ranching schemes, mining and industrial projects, commercial logging, the Tropical Forest Action Plan, the UN Biodiversity Programme, etc.

(iii) To revise radically the policies of those agencies that currently finance the projects and practices causing deforestation. Funding for such projects should be ceased and instead directed towards projects that promote the protection and regeneration of forests. The agencies involved include: the multilateral aid agencies and banks, such as the World Bank, the Inter-America Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank; the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the United Nations Development Programme; the overseas aid agencies of the developed countries; and major international corporations.

(iv) To implement, through the agency of forest peoples and under their direction, a programme for regenerating degraded forest lands and reinvigorating local cultures:

(v) To take immediate steps to curb the wastage, misuse and over-consumption of timber products.

(vi) To ban all imports of tropical timber from natural forests and tropical wood products.

(vii) To take immediate steps to cut down the consumption of imported beef from tropical forest areas.
(iv) To restructure the present unequal world economic system which is dominated by institutions and practices that favour the developed countries at the expense of the poor of the Third World. This global system at present enables the developed countries to control and use an overwhelming and disproportionately high share of the world's natural resources. A fairer and more equitable economic system is therefore fundamental to any strategy for saving and regenerating the world's forests.

(ix) To initiate a global shift towards developing sustainable livelihoods. The basic goals of such a shift would be developing systems of production that are ecologically and socially sustainable. This will require:

(a) reducing the scale which production is carried out and adopting practices which minimise the impact of production on the environment;

(b) maximising local self-sufficiency;

(c) and assuring the economic activities are subordinated to social and ecological ends.

...Contd from Page 3

Supreme Court Order

“Special Leave Petition is rejected on the facts and circumstances of the present case .....We would also direct that any person residing within the area of a local authority or any social action group or interest group or pressure group shall be entitled to take inspection of any sanction, granted or plan approved by such local authority in construction of buildings along with the related papers and documents if such individual or social action group of interest group or pressure group wishes to take such inspection.....”
MADHYA PRADESH

National Rally Against Destructive Development

A National Rally Against Destructive Development was organised by a wide coalition of environmental and social action groups from all parts of the country at Harsud, Madhya Pradesh on September 28, 1989. The rally was attended by members from Baliapal movement in Orissa, the Pooyamkutti Dam in Kerala, Ukat Dam (Gujarat), the Subarnarekha Dam (Bihar), Singrauli Thermal Power Station (Madhya Pradesh) and others. Besides, thousand of 'oustees' who will be displaced from the Narmada Sagar Project in Madhya Pradesh and Sardar Sarovar Project in Gujarat took part in the rally and took pledge to stop destructive developmental projects in the country. A detailed action plan was also announced in the rally.

For further details, contact: Narmada Ghati Navnirman Samiti, 58, Mahatma Gandhi Road, Badwani - 451 551, Madhya Pradesh and Narmada Sagar Sangharsh Samiti, C/o L.N. Khandelwal, Harsud - 450116, Dist: Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh. (Details of the rally will be carried out in the next issue)

GUJARAT

Was It a Disaster?

Newspapers in Baroda ran headlines on 25th June: Mercury bazar at Nandesarai: A big boom, etc. No, Nandesari is not a business place nor is a mining area from where mercury is found. From where did the mercury come? Who were the sellers? Who were the buyers?

Those who were selling the mercury were hundreds of poor, residing nearby and the buyers were the affluent, who would sit on their parked scooters on the roadside with cash in the pockets.

But the question—from where did it come? It was Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd., which manufactured Sodium Hydroxide and Chlorine by Mercury cell technology. Gujarat Pollution Control Board had permitted them to dump their solid waste at this site. The site is owned by Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation. Last year company decided to discard mercury cell technology and go for membrane cell technology.

The plant was shut down in June 1989 for technology transfer. In the process huge quantity of solid waste was dumped at Nandesari, 3 kms. from the factory. Some plastic picker-boys noticed something glittering in the mud. Curiosity took them there to find mercury. It was easy for them to separate mercury from other materials. Only water and a small utensil was re-
required. Then they would collect mercury in a bottle. Slowly others came to know and within a day or two there were hundreds of people searching for mercury in the mud amidst unbearable foul smell. Most of them were staying in surrounding villages and working in some industry at night. Day by day they were getting higher and higher rates for mercury.

There were no fencing nor any precaution boards. The show went on for at least one week. Then came the police, vacated the area and CAACL arranged its security guards to see that no one collected mercury! Nobody knows how much mercury was dumped there, how much was collected and how much is still left behind. Mercury affects body in many ways. Main targets are brain, kidney and liver. Minamata methyl mercury poisoning case is well known and need not be described at length.

In days to come mercury, left behind will spread to reach water sources in the soil, contamination and through crops and cattle will reach human bodies.

For further details, contact: J.B. Patel, Vyasyaik Swasthya Suraksha Mandal, 401, Shiv Apartments, Shastripur Kothi, Vadodara - 390 001.

BIHAR

Landless Struggle for Land

The Palamau district of Bihar is witnessing a growing struggle by the landless and bonded labourers to get back their lands from the hands of big landlords. Unlike elsewhere, Palamau district is distinct as far the issue of land ownership is concerned. Here, thousands of acres of cultivable land is owned by big landlords under the name of fake 'trusts' and 'temples'. Although under the various Land Reforms moves and bhoojan movement, these lands were allotted to landless labourers. But, these measures have remained only on papers. These lands are totally under the possession of landlords who usually own land ranging from 3000 to 8000 acres.

In order to free lands from the landlords, activists belonging to Chotanagpur Samaj Vikas Sansthan has organised a number of dharnas, protest marches and events like forcefully cultivating the land by the landless. For instance, in the Patam block, the activists have been able to free 82 acres of Galir Majurwa land. Another 52 acres of land under the name of fake trust and 44 acres of Galir-Majurwa land have been freed in the Chalipur block. The activists have also been able to increase minimum wages in atleast 200 villages. Although the response to such moves has been quite repressive. At times, the activists are beaten up and sent to jail under false cases.

For further details, contact: Shatruighan Kumar, Chotanagpur Samaj Vikas Sansthan, Village & P.O. Sudana, Daltonganj, Bihar - 822 101

ORISSA

Tribals Oppose Subarnarekha Dam

Tribals of Mayurbhanj district in Orissa are protesting against the Subarnarekha Multipurpose Project (SMP) which they feel is meant to benefit the non-tribals and people of industrial towns by displacing a large number of tribals from their ancestral lands. They argue that the project would benefit industrial towns in Bihar and non-tribal areas in Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa in many ways by displacing thousands of tribal families and inundating thousand acres of forest lands.

Costing at Rs. 1200 crores, the project consists of two major dams. one at Chandil and other at Kuju, two barrages and 342 kms. of canal in Bihar and three reservoirs across the border in Orissa.

In Orissa, the SMP will inundate vast tracts of tribal lands and would displace 3995 families of 64 tribal villages of Suliapada, Kuilana and Baripada blocks of Mayurbhanj district.

The work on the project in Bihar is in full swing while the work in Orissa has virtually
work in Orissa has virtually come to a stand still.

The tribals have rejected the rehabilitation scheme offered by the state government. They have vowed to fight till the last against any attempt of displacement and decided not to associate themselves in any manner with the project work. Recently, they participated in a protest march in front of the project office.

Similarly, a strong public protest against this project is also growing up in Bihar.

For details, contact: Shanti Ranjan Behera, Society for Developmental Action, Kuli-ana 757030, Mayurbhanj, Orissa and Chanshiram, Lok Jagriti Kendra, Machhpur, District Deoghar, Bihar.

**BRIEFINGS**

- During July 5-7, 1999, PRIA organised a three-day legal education programme for the activists of Chhotanagpur Sonajhri Vikas Sangathan, Palamau, Bihar. A number of land related acts including Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act, Bishnupur Act were dealt in this programme.
- On July 17, 1999, nearly 60 activists belonging to the Namadu Bachao Andolan demonstrated in front of the World Bank Office in New Delhi. They gimmicked bank officials demanding that the Bank withdraw altogether from the ecologically and socially destructive Namadu project.
- On August 19, 1999, a national convention against the construction of Balaghat Missile Testing Range, Orissa was organised by a number of environmental and social action groups in New Delhi.
- On August 15-22, a seminar on the theme, 'Big Dams: Temple or Tragedy' was organised in Palamu, Bihar. In this seminar, various aspects including social and environmental problems arising from big dam projects like Narmada, Sabarmati were discussed. The seminar was attended by nearly 150 participants, including scientists, environmentists, journalists and social activists. A detailed action plan was also prepared in the seminar. For further details, contact: Aadi Prakash, National Hall, Red light area, Patna- 800008, Bihar.
- PRIA and Lok Jagriti Kendra, Bihar, organised a three-day training programme for the activists working in the Chhotanagpur area of Bihar. The programme focused on legal issues related to land acquisition, displacement and other land-related laws in the Chhotanagpur area.
- Vikas Mahiti, a voluntary organisation working in the Chhotanagpur area of Bihar, organised a three-day training programme on "Promoting sustainable Organic Methods of Farming" during September 26-29, 1999 at Ranchi. In this training programme, various methods of farming without using pesticides, irrigation and high-yielding varieties of seeds were discussed and demonstrated. For further details, contact: D. Banj, Vikas Mahiti, Post Box 182, Ranchi - 834 001, Bihar.
- Agriculture Man Ecology is a programme conducted thrice a year by Ecological Agriculture for Development. This programme aims at stimulating the self-reliance of farmers through a transfer of knowledge concerning ecologically sustainable agriculture. The programme is meant for farmers, extension workers, policy makers and researchers. For further details, contact: Agriculture Man Ecology, Post Box No. 11, Pondicherry - 605002.

Vijay Parmar has just completed his independent cost-benefit assessment of the Sardar Sarovar and Namadu Sagar projects. Commissioned by ENRACH, the study gives a number of startling facts and figures which justify the fears expressed by environmentalists and social activists that these projects are ill-
1. **ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION FORUM**

**ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION FORUM** is distributing a number of films on the issues related to environment and development. Following video films are available with them.

- **LIVING IN FEAR:** A film on radiation hazards created by Indian Rare Earths Ltd. Alwaye, Kerala.

- **WE WHO MAKE HISTORY:** A film on the ecological destruction of marine resources, and the subsequent struggle of the fisher people in Kerala.

- **IN THE NAME OF MEDICINE:** A film on irrationalities in the pharmaceutical industry and the problem of distribution of medicines banned abroad, in the Indian market.

- **THE ROPE:** A film on the need for collective action.

- **SCIENCE THROUGH ART:** A film on mass communication methods developed by the Kerala Sahitya Parishad through the use of theatre and folk forms.

- **A CAMPAIGN BEGINS:** A film on issues raised by the Kanyakumari March organised by the National Fishermen’s Forum with the slogan, “Protect Water, Protect Life”.

- **NARMADA:** Under production. Ready by November. These films are available at the rate of Rs. 1000/- each. For further details, Contact: K.P. Sast. Alternative Communication Forum, A-11, Green Park Extension, New Delhi - 110 016.

2. **THE DEATH OF HOPE:** This is a 19 minute video film on the results of development model thrust imposed on rural people. It deals with the migration of people as a consequence of their displacement due to the construction of Utkal dam in Gujarat. This is the first part of the films made under the series—Evidence against major dams. The second part on the Narmada dams is under preparation. The price of each film is Rs. 1,100. For further details, contact: Angles Audio Visual Studio, 20 SFS Hauz Khas, New Delhi - 110 016.

3. **QUEST FOR JUSTICE AND THE KUSNUR SATYAGRAHA** are the two films available in one video cassette on the Kusnur struggle to save village common lands from being handed over to industries for plantations. The suggested donation for the cassette is Rs. 200/-. For further details, contact: Action Committee for Protection of Common Lands, Dr. Pawar’s Clinic, Near Post Office, Ranebennur. Dharwad district, Karnataka.

4. **JANGAL AUR ADIVASI**

Jangal Aur Adivasi (Forests and Tribals) is a booklet in Hindi written by Mathew Arrepampil. In this booklet, the author has tried to present a historical perspective on the relationship between the forests and tribals with reference to Singhbhum district of Bihar. The booklet is priced at Rs. 10 and can be obtained from: Mathew Arrepampil, Tribal Research and Training Centre, Chaibasa - 833 201, Bihar.

5. **CANE NEWS**

This is a quarterly newsletter of the Citizens for Alternatives to Nuclear Energy focusing on the popular movement against the proposed nuclear plant at Kaliga in the heart of the rainforests in the Western ghats in Karnataka.

For further details, contact: CANE, 809 17th E Main, 5th Block, Rajajinagar, Bangalore - 560 010

6. **ON NARMADA DAMS**

- **NARMADA:** This newsletter, four issues in a year, is brought out on behalf of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) jointly by Kalkuprikash and Lokayan. The newsletter pri-
marily focusses on the news and issues related to Narmada dams. The suggested contributory amount is Rs. 30 per annum.

For further details, contact: Narmada Bachao Andolan, C-17/A, Munirka, New Delhi - 110 067

**THE NARMADA VALLEY PROJECT:** This brief brochure highlights the various arguments raised against the Narmada dams. Published by Kalpavriksh, it is meant for free distribution. Write to NBA.

**THE NARMADA VALLEY PROJECT: A CRITIQUE**
This booklet attempts to critique the Narmada dams on various grounds. Priced at Rs. 10. It is available from NBA.

* Eklavya has produced a colour poster in Hindi depicting adverse effects of large dams. Priced at Rs. 10, copies are available with Vinod Raina, Eklavya, E-1/206, Arera Colony, Bhopal.

* Another colour poster in Hindi highlighting the adverse effects of big dams is produced by Angles Audio Visual Studio. It is priced at Rs. 10.

**CRY, THE BELOVED NARMADA:** Written by Baba Amte, this booklet gives arguments against the Sardar Sarovar dam. Available from: Maharagi Seva Samiti, Anandwan - 442914, Via Warora, Chandrapur district, Maharashtra.

**WHAT DO THEY KNOW? (5):** This report, fifth in the series of studies conducted by Multiple Action Research Group (MARG) to assess the extent of information communicated to the oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project by the government of Madhya Pradesh. Priced at Rs. 21, it is available from MARG, 113-A, Shahpur Jat, New Delhi - 110 016.

7. **MAHILA PARYAVARAN VA VIKAS**
This is an educational kit on the theme: Women's Environment and Development—produced by Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group. Written in a very simple Hindi language, the kit consists of charts and posters depicting the close relationship between womenfolk and environment. The kit is produced with the aim of highlighting the causes of environmental destruction and its adverse effects on rural women.

For further details, contact: Gorakhpur Environmental Action Group, Post Box - 60, Gorakhpur - 273 001, Uttar Pradesh.

8. **RAVAGED FORESTS AND SOILED SEAS**
Published by Kalpavriksh, this booklet deals with ecological issues in the tropics with special reference to Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The booklet consists of two sections, a general section with base papers providing background information on ecology, the various kinds of ecosystem and natural resources and a specific section on India with papers on India's environment and that of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in particular. Priced at Rs. 20, it is available with Kalpavriksh, C-17/A, Munirka, New Delhi-110067.

9. **DESH KA PARYAVARAN**
This is the Hindi version with new additions of the second citizens report on the State of India's Environment 1984-85. Published by Gandhi Peace Foundation, this report will be very helpful to activists, environmentalists and citizens working in Hindi speaking areas of the country. Written in a simple language, the hard cover edition is priced at Rs. 200. Concessional rates are also available.

For further details, contact: Anupam Mishra, Gandhi Peace Foundation, 221, Deendayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi - 110 002.
* WHITHER BIG DAMS?  
BADE BANDH KIS AUR? *
This brief brochure presents the arguments generated during the meeting of environmentalists and social activists called by Baba Amte at Anandwan and provides description of those big dams which have become the focus of debate and controversy in recent years.

* BANDHON SE BANDHE SAWAL *
This is a report of the workshop on the Koel-Karo dam, Bihar, organised jointly by Indian Social Institute Centre For Science and Environment, Xaviers Institute of Social Service and us at Ranchi, during February 1985.

* PEOPLE AND DAMS *
This volume is a compilation of case studies, with a few additions, presented at the regional workshop on 'People and Dams' organised by us during September 14-18, 1987. It includes case studies from India, Thailand, Philippines, and Malaysia.