



news

**Ekta Parishad – Newsletter**

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## **Ekta Parishad handed over memorandum to The Governor of Orissa**

11<sup>th</sup> March, 05. Bhubneshwar (Orissa)

A delegation from Ekta Parishad Orissa, headed by the state convener Mr. Bharat Bhushan Thakur, went to the Rajbawan and handed over a memorandum to the governor demanding effective functioning of the Task Force. As this was submitted, the vision and mission and the activists at national level and state level were also presented to him.

The Governor, Mr. Rameswar Thakur, advised that he would work on the land issue for the tribals and dalits in the state, as they comprise 39% of the population, which is the highest level in any state in the country. He also said that he would arrange for MLAs to put forward questions on the follow up of the Task Force. He assured the delegation that he would help Ekta Parishad in its work as and when required.

*By Rahul*

## **Update on Tsunami**

28<sup>th</sup> March to April 2005, Kerala

During this visit I was concentrating mostly on the Tsunami affected district of Alapuzha in Kerala. Though there were NGO's working in Kollam area, not many of them come to Alapuzha for rehabilitation. The issues that are emerging in Alapuzha are as follows:

1. The new settlement built by the government is too small for each family and the cabins in which the families are living are too hot during the summer. The most striking problem was the absence of enough toilets and also the absence of proper arrangements to clean the surroundings. I have taken up this matter with the Disaster Management Department of Kerala. In case they don't take immediate steps to provide enough toilets for the 150 families



living there, we will have to provide the same in order to prevent a breakout of diseases caused by an unhygienic and unsanitary environment.

2. There are many girls and boys who are already enrolled for higher studies in Bangalore and Chennai and others are awaiting admission. After the Tsunami, the parents are not in a position to support their children during higher studies and they will be forced to discontinue or dropout. The agencies that are active in the field of relief are not looking into this particular issue. During my trip two of them came to meet me. One wanted to go for computer training and another for nursing. I am told that there are many more who need immediate support to continue their education.
3. There are many cases of Tsunami affected people not receiving compensation because they do not have proper entitlement deeds (*pattas*) for the homestead plots they had settled on years ago. Such families will need our attention. I have taken up this matter with the Kerala State Government and I hope they will initiate some steps to support them. In any case we should be ready to support these families to regain their house and employment.
4. Children are facing problems everywhere. In the village of Tarayil Kadavu, Ward No.6 there are about 700 children. They have no play ground and there are no special activities to help them recover from the trauma and shock of Tsunami. The team that was visiting the places with me felt the urgent need to engage the children in creative activities, so that they can come back to normal life in course of time. What is proposed is a Tsunami victim camp for 30 days involving 300 children from wards no. 5, 6 & 7 in this village? This summer camp will be organized in such a way that the children can develop their personality in different dimensions and the parents can also participate in the entire process. An amount of Rs. 1.5 lakh was set a side for this programme.
5. One particular reason why so many children died in tsunami was that they didn't know how to swim. This is really strange that children who were living near the sea and lake were not able to swim. The coordination committee of Ekta Parishad is planning to organize swimming classes for the children during the next month.
6. One complaint with local people made was about the absence of doctors in that area. There is a hospital run by the fisheries dept. but there are no doctors on a regular basis. The govt. of Kerala has agreed to take steps in this direction and also provide them with an ambulance.
7. The major problem still remains. The problem of employment. We have formed a local committee of 11 men and women and there are also sub-committees formed to look into various aspects of the work. A group of 30 girls are going to start a tailoring-cum-computer centre to train young people in tailoring and computer operation. Local people have agreed to give land for constructing a training centre.

After the visit to Alapuzha, I met some workers in Cochin who are working with children in tsunami-affected areas of Cochin. They need support for 30 children to provide education materials like textbooks, carry bags etc.



On 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of March, about 30 workers and volunteers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu assembled in Trivandrum. During the two day training programme various aspects of tsunami rehabilitation issues were discussed and a detailed strategy planning was made. Involving young people from different parts of the state in the tsunami work was an important decision. 500 young people from both Kerala and Tamil Nadu should be involved and trained during the next year so that the young people can contribute to the tsunami work and continue their involvement in their own areas when they get back.

Members of PFRR are active in different parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The land development process in Nagapattinam has begun under the leadership of Ekta Parishad team. Ms. Usuala is working with women in some areas to generate employment. Through GPF we were able to raise about Rs. 14 Lakhs from Govt. of India, for our work and work among children.

The advocacy centre in Trivandrum and Chennai will be operational within the next 15 days. The first youth campaign of Nagapatinam will begin on 21<sup>st</sup> of April and the Tsunami camp for children will begin on 10<sup>th</sup> of April in Kerala.

I want to take this opportunity to thank friends in different parts of the world who have shown their concern and have made some small and big contributions to begin the work of rehabilitation. We continue to focus on three major areas: firstly working with the children, secondly creating employment for women and thirdly developing the land and irrigation systems of the small and marginal farmers.

*By Rajagopal P.V*

### **An update on People's Verdict 2007**

19<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> April 05. Bihar & M.P

I was surprised to see an active group of young people at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, shouting Ekta Parishad slogans. I was on my way to Bihar and was in Gorakhpur to change train. This group in Gorakhpur, have many interesting programs under the banner of Ekta Parishad and they are doing it with the expectation that one day Ekta Parishad will recognize their existence. I was deeply moved by their enthusiasm and commitment, especially in working in the area where poor dalit communities have lost their kucha (temporary) housing. These young people stood against the vested interests and are helping the dalit community. Ekta Parishad has therefore now agreed to provide two scholarships to this group and link them to the national network.

Nearly four hours drive from Gorakhpur took me to west Champaran where we were organising a youth training program. There was the added benefit of having 26 activists from Nepal, 16 from Uttar Pradesh, 4 from Jharkhand and about 150 from Bihar itself. The camp atmosphere was charged with discussion, debate, songs and theatre for 4 days. How to pressurize the Government of Nepal and India for land reform was the main agenda of discussion. The campers were able to identify 46 problems related to new implementation land reform. Towards the end of the camp we are able to come out with strategies to deal with problems.



While I was busy concluding the youth training program, Mr. Ransingh Parmar, National Convener of Ekta Parishad, was conducting a training program for Ekta Parishad workers in an adjacent tent. He was helping them to rearticulate the concept of "rebuilding Bihar" and also developing a calendar of action for 2005. This was a good opportunity to get the workers and the young participants of the training program to interact and interface each other.

The youth training program included one and half hours of manual labor to complete a small road project and on the last day there was a rally to raise the issues related to land, forest and water. Champaran is one of the places where Gandhi-ji did organize the farmers against the British government to stop their exploitation. The local intellectuals who were in and out of the camp came together on last day to ask me to spend more time in Champaran. They seriously think that this can be the sparking point for change in India. Of course I get similar offers from many places and it is difficult to decide in which place more time should be spent in order to create a catalytic effect. Anyway I agreed to spend some time to travel through Champaran in the month of June. I understand that there are criminal gangs operating in Champaran, and kidnapping is a big industry. The flood situation in Champaran has gone beyond any kind of control and the criminal gangs are operating between the border of India and Nepal.

Traveling to Champaran and Patna is about 300kms and it took more than 10 hours. We started from Champaran at 3:00pm in the afternoon and we reached Patna at 3:00am in the morning the next day. You can imagine the condition of roads!. Bihar is poorly connected and the agenda of Ekta Parishad to 'rebuild Bihar' means a lot of in terms of time and energy. We had a long interaction with the highest officers in Bihar on how to implement land reform as an important step towards the eradication of poverty and violence. The Chief Secretary has understood the point and I am sure that he will do something to improve the situation. Before I left his office he stood up and said "I will not disappoint you this time". I hope he will set up a committee to look into the various problems related to poverty and land reform.

In Katni, Madhya Pradesh the Youth Training Program began on 25th May 2005 and involved about 100 men and women. The first two days were used to understand various non violent struggles in relation to poor people in different parts of the state and the methods used by them. About 50 non-violent methods were identified. The last two days were used to help the participants to plan for the big struggle in 2007 of marching to Delhi. Some of the things being planned include collecting funds, organizing the post card campaign and taking out protest rallies. From this camp we were able to select 20 promising men and women who can be promoted as full time activists.

After the youth camp I was again on the road to Umariya. Umariya is historic place for Ekta Parishad, This is where the Ekta Parishad workers were badly beaten up twice by the forest mafias. The first incident was back in 1985 and second one was about three years ago. This is a feudal area and the poor people have no safety in matters related to their life. I was taken to Andi village where a group of adivasis and media people had already assembled under the shade of the tree. The public hearing session went on for about 2 hours and most of the stories related to land grabbing, and the powerful sitting in the town grabbing the land of the poor people. Some thing needs to be done urgently to wake up the government. A decision was taken to sit in front of the government office on 2nd of October (Gandhi-ji's Birth



day) and continue the pressure until problems are solved. The 2nd October 2005 action will be in Umariya, a district capital. The 2nd October 2006 action in Patna, the state capital of Bihar. And then 2nd October 2007 will be in Delhi, the national capital.

P.V

By: Rajagopal

### **The Government has accepted all the demands of Sit-In**

5<sup>th</sup> April, 2005. Morena (Madhya Pradesh)

The Madhya Pradesh Government has accepted all the demands of the Sit-In which was underway in the district headquarters, Morena, to protest about the atrocities against indigenous people (tribals) & dalits.

Ekta Parishad district unit Morena had organized a three day Sit-In (a tool of the non-violence movement) in front of the District Collector's Office in Morena to protest about the atrocities committed by upper class families against tribal and dalits families in Shahapurkala village of tehsil Sablagarh.

The upper class people had taken away the crops produced by the tribals & dalits. The victims informed the Revenue department and the Police but no action was taken. The victims have no other resources or employment so they cannot feed themselves and they were facing the starvation. The victims' families had submitted a memorandum for immediate action to the District Collector on 30th of March. They started the Sit-In in front of the District Collector's Office in Morena on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April. It lasted until the 5th of April and whole families, including men, women and children, participated and called for immediate action.

There were three meetings with the District Collector, where the delegates were invited to meet him and finally he accepted all the demands of Ekta Parishad in the last meeting, which was held on 5th of April at 8.30 pm. He came to the Sit-In at 8.30 pm and told everyone about the acceptance of the demands. He promised to take legal action against the alleged people. He mentioned: that all the victims families will get one quintal of wheat; a committee will be constituted to ensure the demarcation & physical possession of allotted land; Rs.35000 will be provided to seven girls for their marriage; widow's pensions would be released; the food for work programme would be started; an elementary education center would be opened; free electricity schemes from the Government would be implemented for tribal and dalit families. Under the National Family Aid Scheme, he also provided economic support to a recent widow of Rs.3000 and Rs.10000 to another widow.

*By: Anil Kumar Gupta*



## Ex dacoits offer help to bring peace to chambal

14th April, 05. Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh)

Over 100 ex-dacoits met under one roof recently but no terror or bloodshed ensued. The once-dreaded dacoits now plan to storm the Chambal valley but this time armed with the message of peace.

Under the banner of Ekta Parishad MP, the ex-dacoits have sent a proposal to three state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. Let the governments take a little responsibility and we will go ask the present day gangs to surrender. We can be the mediators," said Lakku Pandit, now 87 years old but still holding considerable clout.

Madhya Pradesh is presently the most affected since the Gadariya gang massacred 13 members of the Gujjar community in October last year. Though two members of the gang have been killed in encounters, the big fish have not been traced.

The Gandariyas the most dreaded gang today, have extorted more than Rs. 5 Crore as ransom from their victims through kidnappings. Earlier this week, three persons were kidnapped by the gang including an engineer. Mukesh Jain, while the police continue to watch helplessly. District inspector general (DIG) and IGs of police don't go into the chambals to negotiate with dacoits. The police top brass have never gone that far. But we can do so," asserted Lakku Pandit.

*By: Times of India*

## Report on Tsunami works in Tamil Nadu

April 2005, Tamil Nadu

As a first step, 28 energetic youths were identified to run the centres for children in Pondicherry, Cuddalore and Kanniyakumari districts.

In Nagapattinam district, Ekta Parishad decided to work in twelve villages belonging to five panchayats of Keelaiyur block. Other than Viravankadu and Thandavan Moorthikadu, all the other villages were highly affected by the tsunami in terms of salination of ponds and horticultural land. In Seruthur and Kameswaram, fishermen and farmers are living together, but the issues of the farmers are not focused on as much as fishing people were. Therefore only a few NGOs (like DHAN Foundation, LEISA network) initiated activities allied to land reclamation like cleaning canals, etc., but they didn't continue their work in land reclamation. In this context, Ekta Parishad Tamil Nadu, decided to do land reclamation through people's participation.

As a first step of that a 'Youth Camp' is organized from 16<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2005 at Kandiyankadu village. In this youth camp about 40 youth will come from Dindigul, Trichy and Vilupuram districts and 10 youth will represent local communities to do land reclamation as well as social analysis.



By Rajagopal P.V

## Organization pressurized the Government to negotiate with deprived community

2nd May, 2005. Dindori (Madhya Pradesh)

Ekta Parishad organized a public hearing and fasting on the 1st of May to protest about the atrocities committed by the forest department against indigenous people, such as the destruction of crops and repression of tribes.

A total of 850 indigenous people from 30 villages participated in the public hearing. The people presented their cases of repression and atrocities. Mr. Charu Baiga from Munagakhera village told that employees of the Forest Department in Dindori attacked him on 12th April and beat him up brutally because he addressed a complaint against the Forest Department in a public meeting on 17th March in Dindori. Mrs. Ramiya Bai from Dadartola of Chada forest village told that her plough had been seized by the Forest Department, when she was cultivating her ancestral land. Mr. Ram Singh Baiga from Jhankhi village said, "Last year my crops were destroyed by the Forest Department. The Revenue Department had allotted the land and we were cultivating the land. The Range Officer of the Forest Department took the paper and prohibited us from cultivating the land because the land is disputed between the Forest and Revenue Departments." Mr. Sarad Chandra Behar (Rtd.IAS) member of the People's Commission on Land, famous Gandhian Awadhesh Kumar and Vice Chairman of Gandhi Peace Roundation and President of Ekta Parishad, Mr.Rajagopal P V, all attended this public hearing as panellists.

The indigenous people presented so many cases of problems with the Forest Department at the public hearing. They decided to submit a memorandum of demands to the District Collector and if the Government will not take any action then they will start an indefinite sit-in at Dindori. On 2nd of May, a demonstration was held at Dindori district headquarters. A group of 400 indigenous people marched to the Collectrate Office from the bus stand. The District Collector invited the delegation to talk to try and find a solution. One delegation of 14 members of Ekta Parishad, led by Mr. Rajagopal P.V., met with the Collector. After a two hour long meeting many decisions were taken by the District Collector, Mr. Ashok Kumar Ray, and the District Forest Officer, Mr. Uttam Sharma.

The Government accepted the demands and promised to implement them within one month. The District Collector promised to constitute a committee headed by SDO Dindori to inquire into the destruction of crops. Ekta Parishad activists will also be members of the committee and the district administration will inform members before the committee organizes hearings in the 18 villages. The Government will issue the Anyoday Anna Yojana card to each Baiga family. The Government will regularize the possession of landless indigenous families on revenue land in a legal procedure. Leaseholders of revenue land which is disputed under the demarcation between forest and revenue department will not be evicted. The SDO will be directed to lodge the cases of repression of tribals. The district forest officer said that a committee has been constituted to examine the pre 1980 ineligible encroachment on forest land. He promised to release the plough and seed which were seized by the department.



After the meeting with the administration, Community leader of Mahakoushal Mr. Nanhu Baiga warned that if the Governemnt does not fullfill its promises then Ekta Parishad will start an indefinite people's movement at Dindori on 10th of June.

*By: Anil Kumar Gupta*

### Sea wall construction in tsunami affected areas

May, 2005. Kerala

About 25% of the population of Kerala live in the coastal belt and the economy of Kerala depends to a considerable extend on the coastal belt. The coastal line of Kerala is facing the problem of erosion, which needs to be checked urgently, as well as on a long-term basis. The coastal line is subjected to severe erosion during monsoon periods i.e. from May to September, when the sea becomes rough due to the consistent attack of the waves. It is estimated that there an average 1.5m of the coast is lost due to erosion. Furthermore, lakhs of rupees are spent after natural calamities on rehabilitation, crop and property loss due to erosion taking place.

The Alappuzha district coastal stretch has a total length of about 72km. (Out of this 54.95km comes under the jurisdiction control of Irrigation Division, Alappuzha and the rest under Irrigation Division, Kollam.) The vulnerable stretch to be urgently protected (and already promised by the Govt.) is 3.5km i.e. from Valiazheekal to Arattupuzha. Geographically, this narrow coastal stretch has a unique feature; it is sandwiched by the Arabian Sea on the west and the Kayamkulam Kayal on the east. In some areas this land is so thin and without a sea wall it will vanish in no time.

Constructing a seawall to ensure the safety of the people of Arattupuzha Panchayat has become inevitable after the Tsunami. The State Government has also promised a seawall. The loss of life and property were comparatively higher in places, which are exposed to the sea without a sea wall. The construction of a seawall should not be delayed.

By: Ekta Parishad, Kerala

### Save Chattisgarh Foot march

Probably you are aware that the north and south of Chhattisgarh are already in the grip of those that believe in violence. In the central part of Chhattisgarh there is growing unrest because of the industrial policy of the Chhattisgarh government, which means considerable area of tribal and agriculture land is being transferred to the industrial houses in the name of industrialisation and mining. Poor landless people are forced to migrate in the absence of a progressive land reform policy. Chhattisgarh, which was known for peace, is now becoming infamous for its violence. The newspapers are full of stories about village and state level land agitations organised by groups of villages against the land transfer to the industrial houses.

Even people living in cities are unhappy, as pollution has become unbearable. Heads of Panchayats and the members are unhappy because their voices are not taken into account. Farmers are agitated because the government takes their land by using force. The situation is very grim and I am afraid that the situation may spiral



out of control if people's non-violent and democratic efforts are not initiated and sustained.

Ekta Parishad is going to support a People's March beginning from Raigarh on the 20th of May and concluding in Raipur on 5th of June (International Environment Day). This Padyatra will cover a distance of 350 km within a period of 15 days. I am writing this to request you to spare time to join us for a day or two during this period.

*By Rajagopal P.V*

### Four days in a furnace

Rajagopal P.V. accompanied by around 90 Yatris from UP, MP, Orissa, Bihar and Kerala started the Chhattisgarh Bachao Padyatra (Save Chhattisgarh Foot March) on May 20<sup>th</sup> at Rabo Dam in Raigarh district. I met the Yatris on the morning of the fourth day of their march in Junvani village and marched with them for the next four days.

What makes these people walk at temperatures well above 40°C from early morning till late at night up to 30 km a day, listening to the grievances of the villagers in every hamlet they pass? Not only temperatures are high at this time of year when the sun is in the zenith, hot is also the political situation. The state was formed to give a better situation for the mainly Adivasi population but the government is now engaged in industrialization completely neglecting the people's interest. Factories are built in protected forest areas billowing out black soot and polluting soil and water around. Groundwater level has gone down and watercourses have been deviated into the factories. Drinking water situation is pitiful and the yield of field products has gone dramatically down. The value of the crop has further gone down by the black stains of soot on vegetable, which nobody wants to buy. To look at the factories shows without special knowledge, that such infernal polluters can be built in the 21<sup>st</sup> century only disregarding all laws and regulations of good manufacturing practice, of ecologic responsible care. Without corruption this is not possible today.

Marching from village to village we listen to the complaints: land is taken away even by the government and given the companies without proper compensation. Even if the whole panchayat agrees on not selling land, they are threatened by the government to be disowned for the sake of some industrial enterprise. The atrocities committed by the factories is hardly believable for a European: when I saw the legs of a boy, who by chasing a buffalo had stepped into hot ashes discarded by a steel factory I could not believe my eyes. There is no fence, no wall, no precaution to save kettle and children to just step in the burning, poisonous ashes and remain with lifelong scars if not worse. The factories will tell, the boys (or the buffalos) came for steeling (- what?). The factories import cheap labour from neighbouring countries increasing the social tensions. The reason for this measure is by no means humanitarian. It is easier to handle accidents if the relatives of the injured are far away and the rate of accidents is high. The list of complaints is long and it takes a good amount of time to get an unambiguous and detailed picture of the situation. It is evident that many of the accusations will have to be verified by some independent observer.

On day six of the Yatra – the beginning of 'Nautapas' – it becomes clear: not only the sun is in the zenith but also the people's situation has reached a culmination point: either there is a true change of policy or there will be a disaster. With



enthusiasm the villagers agree that a non-violent action should bring this change about. Pramod Kumar, sarpanch of Sakarbhoga stated: "If you stick to non-violence we are with you." The people are fed up with all forms of violence. But they know the situation has come to a point, where increase of violence is unavoidable if the state does not step in to make the industrialists behave properly. Why should some, mainly foreign investors take away the money and the wealth of the country and leave the indigenous people deprived and doomed?

During the next day the dharna, the Satyagraha sit-in in front of the gate of Ind Agro Synergy Steel and Energy Ltd is planned. People in the villages around the factory enthusiastically agree to come and join the dharna. On the 25<sup>th</sup> May a delegation of two villagers and two EP members went with a warning and a list of demands to the factory but were not admitted to any member of the management. In the opening of the Dharna on 26<sup>th</sup> May the list with 14 demands is read out. Peacefully the yatris are sitting there as long, as it takes to make the Management and the politicians to agree to negotiations. Neither heat nor rain will chase them away. The Yatra will be continued after tangible results are obtained up to June, 4<sup>th</sup>.

While I walked and stayed with the yatris I was impressed by their energy and decision. Again, as in earlier actions of Ekta Parishad I could feel: Satyagraha is the strongest weapon which makes the Satyagrahi happy and proud and puts his opponent to shame. This is the only way out of modern problems: to force all parties related in a problematic situation together and to design strategies out of the disastrous situation together to the benefit of all.

By: Julius Reubke

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