

ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

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Naga village sets ecology benchmark; seeks tourists

THE PIONEER, FRIDAY, APRIL 1, 2005

TWO YEARS ago Angulia ate anything on four legs except tables and devoured everything with wings except aeroplanes. Today he is the kind of vegetarian that the PETA poster boys would have been proud of. He has now stopped killing birds and hunting deer for a meal. What brought about this transformation? "One day our elders realized that not a single bird was left in the village for us to hunt. We had eaten all of them. They considered this an omen, it seemed our village had suddenly become lifeless and colourless. It took us two years to get the birds back to our village. It seems as though its soul has come back." Coupled with the fact that caring for birds has brought in tourists. And money.

Khonoma, a small hamlet tucked in the mountains of Nagaland, is a good example of how tourism can be a catalyst for preserving natural areas and wildlife. Angami tribesman here are working round the clock to save the dwindling population of deer, tragopans, green pigeons and other rare birds.

Having been declared a "green village" in 2003 by both the Central and State Government, it has got a grant of Rs 2 crore for achieving requisite standards of biodiversity. About Rs 20

lakhs have been allocated for various NGOs like BCIL and Equations for imparting their expertise towards this end. With all this support, village heads met and formed the Khonoma Nature Conservation Trust (KNCT) and Tragopan National Park as the first step to conserve the wildlife by promoting eco tourism.

Sixty years ago elephants roamed the Dzouku valley of which Khonoma is a small part. The elephants have strayed as have the tigers last sighted in 1980. But, the valley still boasts of wildlife and some great virgin treks, a welcome alternative to the well-trodden trails of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal.

Villagers are adopting more eco-friendly measures to maintain their greens and luring the adventure tourist. They are planting alder trees, which produce nitrogen and control soil erosion. Volunteers have placed waste disposal baskets in front of each house; they burn plastic in incinerators, are constructing septic tanks and harvesting rainwater. Houses are being equipped with smokeless *chillums*; each family is allowed only a truckload of wood each year.

NAC Sees greater role for panchayati raj institutions

THE HINDU, Monday, April 4, 2005

Anxious to usher in a regime of fiscal and administrative decentralization at par with the political decentralization realized through the Panchayati Raj

Institutions (PRIs), the National Advisory Council (NAC) has decided to evolve a strategy that will facilitate a

greater role for PRIs in the development process.

A decision to this effect was taken at the 12th meeting of the NAC here on Saturday. Chaired by the chairperson of the United Progressive Alliance, Sonia Gandhi, the NAC made out a case for greater involvement of PRIs in the implementation of various development-oriented programmes-be it in rural employment, public health, elementary education or women and child development.

Pleased with the increased allocations in all these areas, the NAC noted that the battle for allocation had been largely won in this budget. While conceding that such allocations had to be sustained in future also, the members said greater attention should now be paid to implementation, as resource crunch could no longer be cited as a reason for poor results.

For redesign

The NAC made out a case for completely redesigning the way the

existing programmes were administered and members said PRIs ought to be mainstreamed in the implementation process.

Acknowledging the role played by the 73rd and 74th Amendments in facilitating political decentralization, the NAC noted with concern that PRIs had not attained fiscal empowerment even after a decade of the act. Neither could they generate their own resources nor do they get adequate allocations from the Centre or the states, it was observed.

Given the paradoxical situation wherein the States while clamouring for greater decentralization were unwilling to loosen purse strings at their end, the NAC decided to explore avenues where panchayats could collect their own taxes. Also, further devolution of resources through the State structure would be advocated.

Focus on role of panchayat bodies in rural development

THE HINDU, Wednesday, April 6, 2005

People's high expectations from the Panchayati Raj Institutions after the 73rd amendment to the constitution and the role of panchayat bodies in bringing about development of villages were highlighted during an ongoing conference of newly elected Zila Pramukhs and Chief Executive Officers here today. A call was made to the elected representatives to own responsibility for quality of works undertaken by panchayats.

The Minister for Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Kalulal Gujjar, inaugurating the three-

day conference at the Indira Gandhi Panchayati Raj Evam Grameen Vikas Sansthan here, underlined the need for better coordination between the Panchayati Raj Institutions and bureaucracy for speedy development of rural areas and said the elected representatives should widen their vision of progress and improve their capabilities.

“Awareness is needed not just among the rural populace but also among the panchayat representatives. Their strength will help implement development schemes at the ground

level,” Mr. Gujjar said. He said a Cabinet committee, headed by the Home Minister, Gulab Chand Kataria, was currently examining various aspects of empowering panchayats as influential institutions.

Mr. Gujjar pointed out that Rajashan was selected as the venue for the last round-table national meet on the devolution of powers in various spheres to panchayats in December 2004. The Union Minister for Panchayati Raj, Mani Shankar Aiyar, had released a compendium of resolutions of seven round tables, making 150 recommendations, here after the meet.

The State Government is considering all the recommendations for strengthening the Panchayati Raj system, while the Cabinet committee visited Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala in this connection last month. Mr. Gujjar said the committee would shortly submit its report to the State Government.

The Minister affirmed that the Gram Sabhas were the “fundamental

units” on which the Panchayati Raj system rested and said a greater participation of the local villagers in their functioning would help identify the priorities for rural development.

While the Secretary, Panchayati Raj, R.P. Jain, said an improvement in the individual capacity of elected representatives would lead to prompt achievement of targets, the Panchayati Raj Commissioner, O.P. Saini, said efforts should be made to augment the income of panchayat bodies making them financially self-sufficient.

A presentation regarding the powers transferred to panchayats was made in one of the technical sessions in the conference, while the scope for implementation of schemes for poverty alleviation, watershed development and social security was discussed in another session.

Rural Health Mission launch next week

THE HINDU, Friday, April 8, 2005

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) that aims to provide effective health care to the entire rural population will be launched on April 12.

The Mission focuses on 18 States having weak public health indicators. Announcing this here today at the release of the World Health Report 2005, the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister, A. Ramadoss, said the Mission document had been evolved under the guidance of the Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, and the

National Advisory Council chairperson, Sonia Gandhi.

The Mission will cover all the villages in these 18 States through approximately 2.5 lakh village-based “Accredited Social Health Activists” who would act as a link between the health centers and the villagers. A village health plan would be prepared by a local team with the involvement of Panchayats, Dr. Ramadoss said. According to the Minister, public partnership was a specific strategy under the NRHM. “We envisage an India

where mothers and children would enjoy the highest possible level of health and where the highest priority would be accorded to their health and well-being. The United Progressive Alliance [Government] has undertaken to increase the spending on public health from [the] present 0.9 per cent of Gross Domestic

Product to 2 per cent over the next five years," he added. The Minister said the Government was in the process of launching the second phase of the "Reproductive and Child Health Programme".

Coke to hold talks with panchayat

THE HINDU, Saturday, April 9, 2005

Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Private Limited will hold discussions with the panchayat and local community before taking a decision on reopening the company in the wake of the Kerala High Court order allowing it to draw five lakh litres of ground water daily.

The company spokesman, Vikas Kochar, told *The Hindu* that the company would take the next step only after holding discussions with the people of the area and studying the High Court judgment in detail.

To move apex court

The president of the Perumatty grama panchayat, A. Krishnan, said that the panchayat would move the Supreme Court against the High Court order. He said that fighting a case was a big financial burden for the panchayat, which has only meagre resources. The panchayat would, therefore, seek the help of other organizations to move the Supreme Court.

The Janta Dal secretary general, K. Krishnakutty, said that his party would help the tribals and the local community, who are spearheading the agitation.

He said that the High Court order had taken away the right of panchayat to issue licence.

This right of the local self-government was conferred through the 73rd Amendment of the constitution.

So both the Central and State Governments should go in for appeal against the High Court order to restore the right given to the panchayats under the Panchayati Raj system. The panchayats were given the right over their natural resources like groundwater. But the High Court order has nullified this right of the panchayat. Hence in the interest of protecting the rights of the panchayats, the Governments should challenge the verdict, he said.

Scientists to help farmers field experiments

The Indian EXPRESS, Monday, April 11, 2005

FOR farmers, it is all about scientific expertise coming to their door. For scientists, it's all about using the farmer's fields to put their academic research to test. In an innovative farmer-oriented drive, the Mahatma Phule Agricultural University, Rahuri, is setting up scientist-farmer clubs across 10 districts.

With one of them having opened in Kolhapur last week, three more are slated to come up in Pune, Rahuri and Dhule. In fact, by April-end, 1,200 farmers will have a one-to-one interaction with agricultural scientists of 27 research extension centers and at departments, right from the sowing season this June up to the harvesting season between October and May, depending on the crop.

What the club members will do

- Scientists to check physical, chemical and biological properties of the farmer's soil
- Advise on crop pattern and seed selection
- Guide farmers on fertilizers and water management
- 100 farmers to form core group and interact with central campus at Rahuri
- Scientists to help in marketing farm produce
- Club activities to carry on till harvest season between October and May depending on crop

Dr Rajaram Deshmukh, who took over as Vice-Chancellor of the university recently and launched the initiative, says, "It will break the cocoon of scientists who, instead of confining their technology to academics, will be an integral part of its application on field.

"As for the farmers who is wary of new technology, he will have a guide who will also help in encountering any adversity that may take place in the process. Thus, it will be a viable example of industry (agro)-academic interaction."

The Mahatma Phule University has been interacting with farmers, but, says Deshmukh, "it was only restricted to elite farmers who could take risks. Now we want to reach out to the common farmer and show we can convert our knowledge into a viable commercial mode by demonstrating it to him on his own field".

Each club will be in charge of 25 to 100 farmers depending on the strength of scientists. They are required to spend all seven days of the week, all the year round, to monitor and train the farmer. The scientist will analyse the land and soil of the farmer to find out how fertile it is. This will help the scientist to advise the farmer on the crops he should grow. "We will educate him on the different varieties of seeds we have developed for one particular crop."

Thereafter, day-to-day interaction will include advice on inter-cropping; sequence cropping and multiple-cropping. The farmers will be

educated on the amount of fertilizers to be used, amount of water required, weed control, plant protection and how to market the crop too.

In order to assess practical problems, 100 farmers will be chosen

from the 10 districts who will interact with scientists at the central campus at Rahuri.

Whiff of forex in aroma herbs

The Indian EXPRESS, Friday, April 15, 2005

SOON after setting up his LPG agency, Kalyan Saikia of Biswanath Chairali, a small highway town in northern Assam, realized that the profit margins were low in comparison to the investment. Just as he was despairing of success, a chance meeting with an official of the North East Development Finance Corporation (NEDFi) changed his entire approach towards business.

Under his guidance, Saikia turned to growing patchouli, an aromatic herb. Its oil sells for anywhere between Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,500/litre in the domestic market and fetches even higher prices abroad.

Saikia, while one of the leading growers of the herb in Assam, is not the only educated youth to be initiated into cultivating medicinal and aromatic plants in the state. With NEDFi setting up an R & D centre at Khetri, about 40 km east of Guwahati, therapeutic herbs are the new rural rage.

“At least 1,000 families have taken up commercial cultivation of medicinal herbs across Assam, usually in addition to the regular crops they may have been growing for generations,” says Moniruddin Ahmed, director of the R & D center. “Each acre could yield produce worth Rs 30,000 annually.”

Hundreds of households in areas like Kaliabor, Sonapur, Morigaon, Kokrajhar and Biswanath Chairali have been growing patchouli (*Pogostemon cablin*), with NEDFi providing full technical as well as financial support, apart from a complete buy back guarantee for the crop produced.

With NEDFi's support, several youths like Saikia of Biswanath Chairali and Ranjit Bora of Kaliabor have already set up their own distilleries for extraction of oil from patchouli. One plant has been also set up at Kokrajhar with the All Bodo Farmers' Association organising medicinal herb-growing training camps for tribal farmers.

The oil distilled from the leaves of the patchouli plant has an intense, earthy aroma, which relieves stress, induces tranquility and fights depression. In Japan and Malaysia, the herb is used to treat colds, headaches and nausea as well as an antidote for snake bites.

In the Far East, including Japan, the oil is also used to scent linen and clothing; it is also anti-septic, fungicidal and insecticidal. Some communities believe it is an aphrodisiac, though that claim is yet to be scientifically proved.

“Patchouli oil production could be a village-based, labour-intensive, low cost agro-based cottage industry, which

will give large-scale employment in rural and hilly areas. Being a shade-loving plant, patchouli can be easily intercropped with fruits, arecanut and coconut. It also grows easily in flood-free fallow land or wasteland,” says Ahmed.

NEDFi picks up both dry patchouli from farmers as also the oil distilled by individuals. Over the past four years, say its officials, they have sold 7,500 kg of oil, including 200 kg to buyers in the US, Europe and South-East Asia. The bulk consumers are perfume and mouthwash manufacturers, cosmetic plants and some food processors.

Patchouli is not the only medicinal or aromatic herb being promoted by NEDFi’s R & D centre. The centre has, in its own complex, over 100 species of medicinal plants, including geranium, *aswagandha*, *kasturi bhendi*, *kalmegh*, lemon grass, *jatropha curcas*, *phylanthus* and so on.

Realising the potential of medicinal herbs in the region-Assam alone has over 300 species growing naturally-several other agencies like Assam Science Society, Guwahati University and the North Eastern Council (NEC) have also taken up projects to popularise cultivation of various medicinal herbs that have a large demand in the pharmaceutical industry outside the region.

Only recently, NEC secretary Kamal Taori organised a workshop in Shillong to bring together under one umbrella all the agencies working independently for the propagation of medicinal and aromatic herbs in the region. “With ayurvedic and other traditional medicines becoming popular, this sector can contribute immensely to the region’s rural economy,” Taori said.

Less Pesticides in fruits, Veggies: Survey

... thanks to ban on spraying of DDT, HFC

THE PIONEER, TUESDAY APRIL 19, 2005

WATER, AND probably soft drinks, could still be laced with pesticides, but fruits and vegetables are safer now. Ban on DDT, better farm practices and use of 'softer' chemical molecules are making food safer.

The All India Network Project on Pesticides Residues, under the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) which has been monitoring pesticides left behind in fruits and vegetables since 1984, reported a decline in number of samples exceeding maximum residual limit (MRL).

In 1999, six per cent of fruits tested had residue limit above acceptable limits. The level of contamination has reduced and in the past four years not even one per cent samples exceeded the acceptable limit.

Vegetables are another source of pesticides consumption. In 2000, 11 per cent of the samples showed unacceptable levels of pesticides which have reduced to 5.3 per cent in 2003. "We still detect pesticides in fruits and vegetables, but their contamination levels have significantly reduced," said ICAR assistant director general OP Dubey.

There is reduction in consumption of chemicals from 75,033 tonnes in 1990-91 to 48,350 tonnes during 2002-03. Pesticides consumption in India is less than half a kilo per hectare (kg/ha), and significantly lower compared with the US (1.5 kg/ha), Germany (3 kg/ha), Japan (10.8 kg/ha) and Taiwan (17 kg/ha).

The change has come about mainly thanks to the ban on spraying of DDT and HFC, which are highly toxic and persist in soil and water for a long time. They move up the food chain from water to milch animals in fat and milk. When consumed, these toxic molecules lodge themselves in human fat tissues. Earlier studies have shown high levels of pesticides in breast milk.

Samples now show residues of endosulfan, malathion, dicofol, chlorpyrifos and carbamate fungicides unlike earlier detection of DDT and HFC. Fruits exported from India were routinely rejected earlier because of high contamination. A new generation of chemicals have replaced DDT and HFC. "The newer molecules used today require dosage of only a few milligrams, so farmers do not spray huge quantities of pesticides. These are more eco-friendly since they disintegrate faster," said Dr Dubey.

Now, the Agriculture Ministry has taken responsibility for pesticide left behind in soil and water from over-use in fields and has embarked on national monitoring exercise starting this year. The exercise will cost the Government Rs 24 crore in the Tenth Plan. It hopes to nab areas of pesticide abuse and enforce the PFA rules and Insecticides Act, besides firming up detection network.

But authorities admit that there is still indiscriminate use of pesticides. Extension workers of state agricultural departments have failed to reach out to

the farmers and raise awareness about the ill-effects of pesticides abuse, they admit. The problem is further compounded by a large spurious pesticides market, estimated at Rs 800 crore. The Agriculture Ministry has been

talking about integrated pest management, which reduced dependence on pesticides, but it has so far covered only 10 per cent of cultivated land.

Crop bio-diversity needed to reduce hunger, says M.S. Swaminathan

“Growing vegetables at home will help”

THE HINDU, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20, 2005

“Agricultural biodiversity is essential to reduce poverty and hunger, which will also promote better health for women and children, besides improving the lives of rural people in a sustained manner,” said M.S. Swaminathan of MSSR Foundation here on Tuesday.

Explaining the draft resolutions adopted at the conclusion of a two-day consultation of the “role of biodiversity in achieving the millennium development goals (MDG)”, Prof. Swaminathan said the resolutions would be redefined in the next week to be presented at the United Nations special meet to be held in September this year.

He said the two-day meet had reached broad agreement that the use of agricultural biodiversity was essential to achieve many of the MDG.

It could boost incomes of farmers and reduce poverty. It was the asset of poor people through which their lives should be improved.

Prof. Swaminathan said the challenges of the MDG was not simply to reduce the hunger percentage but to attack the hidden hunger. For women and children in the poorest rural areas, the single most effective solution for

their hidden hunger was to increase the dietary diversity. This, he said, was possible through fruits and vegetables being grown in home gardens as they would complement the dietary diversification and fortification.

Emile A. Frison, Director General of the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI), which is the cosponsor of the meet, said agriculture biodiversity would help improve crop productivity, help farmers in marginal areas to minimize crop failure and avoid micro nutrient deficiency, especially among children.

The draft resolutions among other things stressed the need for promoting dietary diversity and nutritional literacy in school curricula and rehabilitating traditional food stuff; promoting the value of agricultural biodiversity and dietary diversity to farmers through agricultural extension workers and health and nutrition professionals; ensuring that local food supplies were based on appropriate indigenous crops; making available products of agricultural biodiversity in all markets; recognizing agricultural biodiversity in national plans for

development; incorporating it in existing policy tools and adjusting research priorities to give more emphasis to the agricultural biodiversity.

About 100 representatives from 21 countries participated in the meet jointly sponsored by the MSSRF, IPGRI, Rome, and the Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilised Species, Rome.

J-K clears Panchayati Raj Bill, Oppn angry

The Indian EXPRESS, SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2005

DESPITE a walkout by members of the National Conference, the controversial Panchayati Raj Bill, empowering the Mufti Mohammed Sayeed Government to hold elections in six months by dissolving the 'defunct' elected panchayats, was passed in the Upper House on Thursday. The Bill also seeks 33 percent reservation for women, SGs and STs in an attempt to strengthen democracy at the grassroots level.

Opposing the Bill, Panthers Party Chief Bhim Singh sought suspension of House proceedings soon after the newly-elected legislators were administered oath of office. But unlike last Sunday, when the ruling coalition did not have enough numbers to seek voting on the Bill due to the absence of two members, the government was comfortably placed on Thursday, legislators said.

While the Opposition maintains that democracy is being throttled by

holding elections even for those panchayats whose term is yet to expire, newly-elected MLC A G Vakil said elections for panchayats during the tenure of the National Conference government were "incomplete". The government, he said, has the power to hold fresh elections if it is satisfied that the Panchayats have turned defunct.

The Opposition also questioned as to how the government will hold the polls when the security scenario in the state has not improved. NC member N A Mir said the government should first take note of the fallout of the Srinagar-Muzaffarbad bus service before holding elections. "A councilor has been kidnapped while the others are hiding inside police stations," said Sakina Ittoo of National Conference.

A new lesson on Scarce Water use

THE HINDU, SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2005

Political leaders shared the concern of academicians and activists here on Friday over the water situation in the desert State of Rajasthan.

Water, especially ground water, has been getting scarcer in the State. A series of steps, including introduction of a regulatory mechanism to monitor water mining and imposing user charges

to meet the cost incurred on procurement and supply of water, could be considered, they said.

The invitation sent out by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) here to all 200 members of the Rajasthan Assembly did not evoke the expected response on the day after the adjournment of the Budget session as less than half a dozen turned up. However, those who took the trouble said they were willing to forget the differences among themselves to evolve a consensus in areas related to water.

“The political parties should develop a consensus on basic issues like population and water. It is not that people are averse to firm decisions. If they find logic in water charges they will pay. This has been my experience as Chief Minister in the State,” Shiv Charan Mathur, former Chief Minister observed.

Mr. Mathur stressed on the need for focus on various related areas like population, agriculture, mining, dams and employment generation for the proper conservation of the scarce natural resource.

The Rajasthan Minister for Public Works Department, Rajendra Singh Rathore, said the political parties should forget their differences and rivalries so that laws could be enacted for monitoring the ground water use.

There could be a more realistic approach to fixing water charges if the parties cooperated he said.

Mr. Rathore suggested a White Paper on water which could be debated.

A legislation on ground water use, including on digging of wells in districts was first mooted during the Government headed by Bhairon Singh Shekhawat but it was not well received, he noted.

“Making available clean and safe drinking water is the responsibility of the State,” he confessed while accepting the travails of people of hundreds of villages in Rajasthan, suffering from fluorosis in water.

Both Mr. Rathore and the Congress MLA, Chandra Shekhar said, citing the “Apni Yagna” in Churu district said that the people were willing to pay water charges. “Apni Yagna”, the drinking water project carried out in Churu district with the help of German agency KFW, had taught new lessons to the villagers on the value of water, they said. None of the political parties ever opposed the scheme.

“KFW terms are very strict. If water charges are not paid, then within a month the connections are discontinued. It is new experience for the people,” Dr. Baid pointed out. Dr. Baid also expressed concern over the quality of water available in the State and called for short term as well as long term planning and legislation.

Thoughts from a fledgling town

Hindustan Times, MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2005

AROUND 4,000 people in Rajasthan have decided that they don't want their villages to mold into an ugly, dirty, parched township.

They know this requires desilting their lake, cleaning their drains and getting a system in place for waste handling. If they do this, they reason, not only will their quality of life improve but their village will offer improved livelihoods, particularly for women.

Seva Mandir and the National Foundation for India-organizations working with communities and helping them identify solutions to priority problems-link the community with technical specialists happy to volunteer and help set up systems.

But this can't be done without harnessing the village's human resource and energies. It takes a year-and-a-half for a vibrant Nagrik Vikas Manch to get set and take on these renewal projects. Along with the panchayat and some help from the techies, the Manch hopes to propel change.

Does this sound more like a project proposal and less like reality? Well then, this is a true story-the story of Delwara near Udaipur. Just a week ago, the Nagrik Vikas Manch took a giant

leap forward. It accrued a small fund for its corpus. Now, it has the interest to work on small activities.

This isn't a feel-good capsule but points to two important issues: First, local environmental issues have to be revolved by those impacted by it, perhaps with some outside help. Second, as more areas veer towards becoming semi-urban, a new terrain of concerns will emerge.

Do away with incinerators

DO YOU remember the egg and the incinerator story, the one where eggs in Lucknow near an incinerator were contaminated by dioxins released by the incinerator?

Now, reports from the same global study say eggs near incinerators in Egypt and Bulgaria are worse off. In fact, they are close to breaking records for toxicity. The lesson is significant: phase out incineration fast. It is poisoning us globally as it releases dioxins.

Workshop to frame ground water policy for U.P.

THE HINDU, MONDAY, APRIL 25, 2005

Some ray of hope for the farmers of Uttar Pradesh facing serious water problems. The Janhit Foundation will organize a workshop next month to draw up a draft for people's friendly ground water policy for the State.

The workshop enjoying full support of the Uttar Pradesh Minister for Minor Irrigation and Ground Water, Shakir Ali, aims at an interactive session between water experts from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan and concerned officials and village

representatives to suggest methods to recharge the aquifers that have been badly depleted by increased agriculture, industrial and population pressures and check the increasing pollution of the aquifers.

According to a study of the Central Ground Water Board, there has been a serious depletion of ground water in 29 districts of Uttar Pradesh over the past two decades. A World Bank study has declared Baghpat, not far from Delhi, as a black district meaning thereby that any further indiscriminate exploitation of water may spark off a desertification process in this rich agricultural belt. Another study states that ground water in 24 districts have been found contaminated with dangerous chemicals including nitrates, chlorides and heavy metals-the worst being Kanpur, Gajraula and NOIDA industrial areas and places near them.

‘If Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Gujarat can succeed in putting back part of the exploited water through simple rain water harvesting and other techniques why can’t Uttar Pradesh having good rains and rivers do better’,

asks Anil Rana, director of the Janhit Foundation.

“The need to have a strong and people friendly water policy is all the more urgent as a number of multinational companies are planning to set up shop in areas of Uttar Pradesh near Delhi. These companies are bound to use a lot of water and also contaminate it unless a clear law is there to protect the community’, Mr. Rana said.

The big industries and even hospitals and others generating a lot of wastewater have to be stopped from injecting their wastes into the aquifers through boring systems as that poisons the very water source, he said. The Janhit Foundation has been actively working for the rejuvenation of lost traditional water harvesting systems like ponds and ‘johads’ in Meerut and Baghpat districts over the past few years and results are beginning to show in the ponds of villages Mohammadpur Dhumi, Kalyanpur and Alamgirpur.

UNICEF’s experience in rural water supply

An account of UNICEF’s involvement in India’s rural water supply and sanitation programmes. Though sponsored by UNICEF, it is an independent study by the authors.

THE HINDU, TUESDAY, APRIL 26, 2005

This book is an account of UNICEF’s long and close involvement in India’s rural water supply and sanitation programmes. Though sponsored by UNICEF, it is an

independent study by the authors, and is an exceptionally honest and objective one.

There is an indeed pride in the UNICEF’s involvement in “the largest rural water supply programme in the world,” but there is also a clear-eyed

recognition of deficiencies, failures and problems.

Starting from UNICEF's entry into the area of rural water supply in 1969 with the import of 125 state-of-the-art drilling rigs, the book tells the story of the hand-pump revolution (the initial satisfaction at the transformation it brought about, the subsequent discomfiture at the emerging problems, and the lessons learnt from that experience) lucidly and in great detail. Similarly, the story of how UNICEF got involved in sanitation, the success that its initiatives had in some areas, for instance in West Bengal, and the difficulties that it encountered in other areas, is told in a gripping manner.

Tackling scourges

A chapter is devoted to the tackling of two scourges, namely, guinea worm and diarrhoea. The problem of extensive occurrence of fluoride in ground water in some areas, and that of arsenic in others, is also discussed. That is only a sketchy indication of what the book is about; the density and richness of the exposition, analysis and commentary in the book cannot be brought out in this review.

The authors point out that in the earlier years UNICEF's prime organizational concern was with women's and children's health, with a (needed) technical focus on its programmes; and that it was only over time that it learnt to appreciate adequately the complexities relating to water and its roles in rural lives, and the social, the cultural and other aspects (apart from the provision of hardware and technology) involved in bringing about changes in customs and practices relating to water-management, hygiene and sanitation.

A lesson that emerges clearly is that no programme, whatever its technical excellence, will succeed unless the people are convinced of its necessity, participate in it willingly, and assume responsibilities (including the partial sharing of costs).

Proceeding to a much wider canvas, the book places its account of India's rural water supply and sanitation programmes and UNICEF's role in them against the background of a broader picture of the country's water needs, plans and policies.

It provides a panoramic overview-one of the best that this reviewer has seen-of the evolving thinking about water in India and the world.

Water scarcity

While pointing out that at least some of the increasing pressure on this finite resource arises from bad resource-management, it recognizes that water scarcity is a present reality in some areas and a future prospect in others.

It takes note of the multiple and divergent responses to the projected scarcity: the large, centralizing, capital-intensive, technology-driven projects favoured by the government, the contribution that this approach has made in the past to agricultural production and food security, and the serious problems that it has created; the explosive take-off of groundwater-exploitation by farmers and the emergence of several millions of tube wells and bore wells, the role that groundwater has come to play in agriculture as well as in the provision of drinking water, and the crisis that has arisen because of the rapid depletion of aquifers; the growing movement for local, community-led rainwater-harvesting and micro-watershed

development, the striking successes it has had in some places, and the potential that it holds for playing a larger role in the future.

Lessons from experience

The book notes with some sadness the sharp division between the supporters of such local initiatives and the proponents of large projects. The UNICEF as an international organisation would of course like to stay aloof from that controversy, and the authors make this clear.

However, their own predilections towards local, decentralized, community-led participatory programmes of resource-conservation and management, and their relative lack of enthusiasm for large projects such as “river-linking” seem evident.

As a chronicle of UNICEF’s role in water supply and sanitation programmes in India, and as a thoughtful account of changing and divergent approaches to water-resource policy and planning, this is an important book that offers the reader both knowledge and wisdom.

It is also a well-written, highly readable book, marked by a depth of feeling (reflected occasionally in heightened language) for the places, the people, and the ways of living that are being written about.

The book is likely to have a profound influence on the thinking of those who read it with reasonably open minds; but how common are open minds, particularly in government circles?