

*Why should an attack by one section of the Sikh community on another sections of the same community in far way Vienna provoke such violent protests in Punjab? Is the attacks on Indian students in Australia racist? Are we as racist as the people we brand as racist?*

Clippings on Critical Issues & Concerns for NGOs, Activists and others concerned with Justice & Social Change

**IN FOCUS**

*'Poverty is probably more dangerous than the side effects of GM seeds'*

## To GM or not to GM: That is the Big Question?

On 1 May 2009 a Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice K G Balakrishnan, Justices P Sathasivam and J M Panchal made a startling observation [C.eldoc1/g74a/01may09toi1.html]. The apex court in the matter of PILs seeking stringent regulatory mechanism and advanced testing for the toxicity of the genetically modified organisms (GMOs) said that " GM seeds could possibly be a means to eradicate hunger and poverty. Poverty is probably more dangerous than the side effects of GM seeds".

A little earlier, no less a person then the Chairman of the National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) had said that, "...genetically modified crops are the only answer to increase the production and productivity and to solve malnutrition problem in the country", and that "I am surprised to note that many non-governmental organizations are shouting from rooftops against the introduction of GM crops [C.eldoc1/g74a/28jan09h1.html]. They are either ignorant about the ground realities or have some ulterior motive". This from the head of the very office that has a critical role in conservation of biological diversity and protection of people's resources and knowledge under the Biological Diversity Act of 2002.

What is remarkable about the above two quotes is they are saying what agribusiness giants like Monsanto [C.eldoc1/g74a/06jul06et1.pdf] - who are in the business of marketing GM products- for more that two decades. Does this imply that the supreme judicial institution and the national body charged with the task of monitoring the entry of such organisms are in favour of GMOs?

The principle [C.eldoc1/g74a/PIL\_October27.pdf] concern of the petitioners who filed a PIL before the Supreme Court is that there has been the lack of technical competence, transparency and accountability in the policymaking and regulatory bodies, which could have damaging consequences in a new technology area like GM crops. They were also asking the Court to direct the Union of India not to allow any release of GMOs into the environment by way of import, manufacture, use or any other manner unless the following precautions are taken [C.eldoc1/g74a/01jan09gec1.html]. Thus the issue on GMOs boils down to the fact that until effective mechanisms were in place to assess the harmful effects of GMO, they should not be allowed into the country.



There are two sides to the GM story as it is unfolding today.  takes a look...

### What is a GM crop?

Genetically-modified (GM) plants are created by the process of genetic engineering, which allows scientists to move genetic material between organisms with the aim of changing their characteristics. The actual transfer of genes into selected organisms takes place in a laboratory. This is followed by field trials before the plant is grown commercially.

### Why are GM crops controversial?

Studies establish that these crops carry certain risks like unintended introduction of

allergens into foods, adverse effect on ecological balance, development of resistance in pests against them and likelihood of affecting non-target organisms. They are also not considered safe to eat and associated with toxicity and carcinogenicity Many people have strong ethical, cultural or religious objections to them. For example, vegetarians object to

eating food that contains animal or, even worse, human genes. Studies in Europe and the UK have shown that consumers are disgusted at the thought of food containing human genes, like human growth hormone genes.

### What is the difference between GM and traditional crossbreeding of plants and animals?

In GM, a specific piece of DNA is taken out and transferred directly into another organism, and is not limited to species boundaries. In traditional breeding, mating is done sexually and limited to the same species.

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**Cooshalle Samuel**  
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# Has the 'gene revolution' entered your kitchen?

Ever complained of your greens being insipid or tomatoes not being tasty enough? All of us have heard of retail outlets that proudly declare that their vegetables stay fresh much longer than the "local" ones. Several people, especially those who like their food products fresh and wholesome, complain that fruits and vegetables available in the market are a "modified" lot. However, with the law not having permitted genetically modified (GM) crops in the country, all

speculations can be laid to rest, at least officially.

But that is just one side of the story. It is common knowledge that GM food or food products made of GM crops cannot be imported to India. Now, taste this: recently, a multinational chain released a corn-based snack, which found its way to the shelves of all major retail outlets.

Anti-GM activists got the product tested in a university in the U.K. only to find

that the corn which was used is indeed genetically modified.

"The GEAC, when approached, redirected the complainants to the Director-General of Foreign Trade who washed his hands off the matter saying it doesn't come under his purview," explained environmentalist Ashok Ganguly of Greenpeace. Caught in red tape, the product continues to be consumed: unlabeled and unannounced.

Cases like these draw attention to the need for labelling. The "I Am No Lab Rat" ([www.iamnolabrat.com](http://www.iamnolabrat.com)) campaign, comprising various civil society groups, has been petitioning and speaking to various governments to impose a blanket ban on such products. Also, they have been seeking labelling of products in the market, so there is some level of accountability.

- *The Hindu, Wednesday, Feb 04, 2009, [C.eldoc1/KICS/090204h1B.html]*

## Do We Need Genetically Engineered Foods?

Apart from the scientific debates on the merits of genetically engineered food, there are equally, if not more important, debates on the socioeconomic impacts of the way this science is being used.

1. There is a major question about the motives of corporations and countries who are using the food shortages of the developing world as a marketing strategy to gain acceptance for GE food. In addition, they want to create dependency on it via patents and intellectual property rights. The US opposition to labeling of GE products and to other precautionary steps and measures that states may wish to take, is of paramount concern.

2. Despite the current difficulties and problems with GE crops and products. Why are they still being given the go-ahead? The main reason is that there is a lot of money and profit involved in this. For the biotech industry, it is more profitable, for example to produce crops that can be resistant to their own pesticides (so that you can apply more of them). If you are a chemical company that produces herbicides as well as GE crops, then this is a good way to sell both products, as Monsanto does with their Roundup Ready GE soybeans or RoundupReady GE corn.

- *Genenews, 01 Jan 2007 [C.eldoc1/d70b/01jan07gen1.pdf]*

## Transgenic crops: a questionable option?

To understand the implications of this technology, its numerous facets need to be studied – the situation worldwide, the role of the USA and big transnational companies, the productivity and chemical use of GM crops, food safety issues involved and so on. It cannot be sufficiently stressed that each technology has differential impacts on different communities, differentiated in both a geographical and temporal manner. Agricultural technologies, more than any other technology, leave a large impact for the simple reason that they are likely to be deployed on large areas of land and thus affect millions involved directly in farming.

Besides, as consumers, the safety of food is of general concern. Without a broad and comprehensive impact assessment, no decision-making can be sound with regard to this technology.

Worldwide, more than a decade after the entry of the first GM crop on a commercial basis, only around fourteen countries have intro-

duced GM crop cultivation on any substantial scale, i.e. more than 50,000 hectares. A majority of countries around the world have not allowed GM crops in their territory. Equally, consumers engaged in a debate on GM foods have, more often than not, chosen to reject GM foods, as the experience of Europe shows.

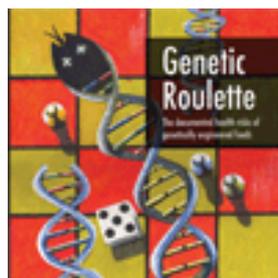
Does the world really need GM crops and foods? There is ample evidence that other options, including organic farming, will address food security and livelihood security imperatives as well, as also be viable options in an era of climate change.

The International Assessment on Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) process has concluded that smallholder ecological farming is the best option for this planet. It is, therefore, obvious that the only conceivable reason for pushing GM crops and foods is the business opportunity it offers to seed corporations and biotech firms.

While it is well-acknowledged in scientific literature that brinjal had originated from this country, an expert committee set up by the GEAC on Bt. brinjal brushed this fact aside and concluded otherwise! No credible evidence was offered for this stand either. It is interesting to note that the Bt. brinjal development was mainly supported by several American agencies in India.

And herein probably lies the crux of the controversy over this technology: a powerful country with the world's largest seed company headquartered there (which to this day sells more than 90% of the GM traits sold in the world), and whose agricultural economy depends on global markets, has rushed in with this technology for reasons of its own, despite evidence of associated hazards. Now, getting the global markets to accept these products is a crucial battleground for countries like the USA.

- *Kavitha Kuruganti, Seminar, March 2009, [C.eldoc1/g74a/01mar09sem1.html]*



SAGE, distributed by The Other India Bookstore, Next to New Mapusa Clinic, Mapusa-403507, Goa. Rs.475.

### GENETIC ROULETTE -

The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods: *Jeffrey M. Smith*

The book provides a good starting point for anyone interested in knowing the darker side of GM food. It shows why GM science is such a contentious issue.

It takes the readers through a journey that will inevitably shock them. Several strategies that companies use to get favourable results are clearly explained. It almost serves as a compendium on the ill-effects of GM food on animals and humans. It very clearly explains how GM food companies resort to surrogate testing of proteins extracted from bacteria instead of testing those taken from GM plants. While it provides a wealth of information, the biggest drawback is that the book is too judgmental.

# 'GM foods can address India's needs'

I think the main challenge facing the crop biotechnology sector today is the lack of awareness and knowledge about the benefits that this wonderful technology can provide the world with. Biotechnology can advance India's agriculture to address the challenge of feeding its increasing population with its limited economic, land and water resources.

Other than offering quantifiable benefits of increased

yields leading to increasing farmer incomes, biotechnology crops are known to offer non-quantifiable benefits like increased management flexibility, reduced health risks due to less use of pesticides, facilitating reduced tillage practices, reduced production risk and improved crop quality.

Research is continuing on developing second-generation products that will directly impact the consumer

in terms of health and nutrition and help them to lead a healthier lifestyle. In India, our focus is on research and development of transgenic crops with resistance to economically important viruses, tolerance to drought, and heat and salinity.

*Felipe Osorio, MD,*  
Monsanto

- *Amitabh Baxi, THE ECONOMIC TIMES, BOMBAY, 06 JUL 2006, [C.eldoc1/g74a/06jul06et1.pdf]*

# Do GM Crops Increase Yield? The Answer Is No

"Do GM crops increase yield?", this is how it begins on Monsanto's web page: "Recently, there have been a number of claims from anti-biotechnology activists that genetically-modified (GM) crops don't increase yields. Some have claimed that GM crops actually have lower yields than non-GM crops. Both claims are simply false."

The increases in crop yields that Monsanto has shown in Mexico, Romania, the Philippines, Hawaii and India are actually not yield increases at all. In scientific terms these are called crop losses, which have been very cleverly masqueraded as yield increases.

Take the case of cotton. We all know that cotton consumes about 50 percent of total pesticides sprayed, and these chemical pesticides are known to reduce crop losses. I am sure that Monsanto would also agree without question that pesticides do not increase crop yields, and I repeat DO NOT increase cotton yields.

Monsanto's Bt cotton, which uses a gene from a soil bacteria to produce a toxin within the plant that kills certain pests, also does the same. It only kills the insect, which means it does the same job that a chemical pesticide is supposed to perform. The crop losses that a farmer minimises after applying chemical pesticide is never (and has never) been measured in terms of yield increases. It has always been computed as savings from crop losses.

If GM crops increase yields, shouldn't we therefore say that chemical pesticides (including herbicides) also increase yields? Will the agricultural scientific community accept that pesticides increases crop yields?

- *Devinder Sharma, Countercurrents.org, 21 Mar 2009, [C.eldoc1/g74a/21mar09cco1.html]*

# Monsanto's Assault on Agriculture

Monsanto is a corporation reviled for its genetic tampering and attempts to seize control of agriculture around the world. While trying to change its public persona into one of benevolence towards the public, the history of Monsanto is littered with continuous efforts to not only seize control of food production, but also supply.

Monsanto's history also includes lives destroyed either financially and/or physically as the result of its activities.

When Monsanto's GM cotton varieties were first introduced in the US, tens of thousands of acres suffered deformed roots and other unexpected problems. Monsanto paid out millions in settlements.

When Bt cotton was tested in Indonesia, widespread pest infestation and drought damage forced withdrawal of the crop, despite the fact that Monsanto had been bribing at least 140 individuals for years, trying to gain approval.

In India, inconsistent performance has resulted in more than \$80 million dollars in losses in each of two states.

Thousands of indebted Bt cotton farmers have committed suicide. In Vidarbha, in northeast Maharashtra, from June through August 2006, farmers committed suicide at a rate of about one every eight hours.

- *Marti Oakley, Opednews.com, March 11, 2009, [C.eldoc1/KICS/090311zzz1B.html]*

# Made by Monsanto: the Corporate Shaping of GM Crops as a Technology for the Poor

Almost every day articles appear in the world's media claiming we must embrace GM foods if we're to feed the world, with the emphasis of late often on solving the food and climate crises via hardier, cheaper, more sustainable and more abundant GM crops.

Yet after two decades of GM research and 13 years of commercialization, what has the GM miracle actually delivered?

Hunger's still increasing and there are no commercialized GM crops that inherently increase yield, resist drought, or do anything else that might be thought critical to feeding the poor and hungry. That's the question that development specialist, Dominic Glover, has set out to answer. His new paper investigates the "simultaneous production of a technology widely recognised as having limited relevance to poverty alleviation alongside a narrative that strongly implied

it was intended and designed to achieve that goal".

One key source of this storyline was Monsanto.

In PR terms this framing of GM crops as a technology for the poor proved a highly alluring one. It also helped Monsanto, once it became clear that European markets were largely closed to GM crops, to target developing-country markets which had been given an unexpected commercial importance for Monsanto. In addition, developing-country farmers became key symbolic stakeholders in debates about GM crops, and in assisting the branding of the technology.

But, as Glover notes, the gap remains between the storyline of GM crops as a pro-poor technology and the types of crops and traits that have actually been commercialized, ie the crops that Monsanto has marketed to developing-world farmers have been those that it developed for its existing cus-

tomers base - large-scale commercial farmers primarily in the industrialised world.

Glover concludes that "although there was and remains a logical disconnection between the types of GM crops that have actually been commercialized by Monsanto, on one hand, and the company's rhetoric surrounding GM crops as a technology for the poor, on the other, the production of both the technology and the rhetoric can be seen to have been produced in tandem, driven and shaped by the mixture of commercial, institutional and technical considerations that were influencing the development of the company's strategy over many years."

This is how the hyping of GM crops as a solution to hunger and poverty was "Made by Monsanto".

- *Dominic Glover, STEP Centre, 01 Jan 2008, [C.eldoc1/KICS/01jan08step\_centre1.pdf]*

# Background to the WTO GM dispute

In a complaint to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 2003, the US, Canada and Argentina are challenging the European Union over its de facto moratorium on the approval of genetically modified (GM) foods and crops (European Communities - Measures Affecting the Approval and Marketing of Biotech Products WT/DS 291, 292 and 293 - see: [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)). The complaining countries are the largest producers of GM crops and argue that the European Union has violated WTO Agreements.

Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Thailand and Uruguay have registered their interest in the disputes as third parties affected by the outcome.

A three person Panel of trade experts has been appointed to adjudicate the three disputes as a single panel (the 'WTO GM dispute'). The parties will

have filed their submissions by the end of May 2004, and the first oral

hearing is expected in early June. A decision is expected in the latter part

of 2004, which may be followed by an appeal on points of law to the Appellate Body of the WTO.

At least two independent groups acting in the public interest are intervening in the dispute settlement process by making submissions to the WTO Panel in the form of amicus curiae (or 'friend of the court') briefs. One is a trans-Atlantic group of expert academics and the other an international coalition of 15 public interest groups spanning Europe, the US, Canada, Argentina, Chile and India.

In different but complementary ways, these groups are arguing that international trade and risk assessment rules should not be interpreted by the WTO so as to thwart the capacity of countries to establish the environmental, social and health standards, and risk assessment processes for GM crops and food, that they judge to be necessary in their particular national circumstances.

## *The case against Europe:*

- The 'suspension' and 'failure' by the EU to consider applications for approval of GM products (the 'de facto moratorium') and the national bans in Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg on some GM products which had already been approved in European Union before October 1998, have adversely affected imports of agricultural and food products from the US, Argentina and Canada.
- The de facto moratorium and national bans violate the WTO rules because they have not been scientifically justified, they were not published and there has been 'undue delay' in assessing applications for release and marketing.
- The European Union delays have hindered development of GM technology, which is of proven safety and brings great benefits, including in reducing hunger and improving health and crop productivity worldwide.

## *The significance of the case*

At a time when GM food continues to cause controversy worldwide, and the legitimacy of the WTO itself has come under question, the WTO GM dispute looks set to be one of the most challenging in the WTO's history. The outcome of the WTO GM dispute will have major ramifications for the development of on the environmental, social and health aspects of trade policy and is likely to have both substantive and symbolic importance worldwide.

## America's plan is to force GM food on the world

The WTO court's latest ruling after years of secret deliberation to rule that Europe had imposed a de facto ban on GM food imports between 1999 and 2003, violating WTO rules. Meanwhile, individual countries who dislike being told what to eat or grow by the EC as much as the WTO say they will resist any attempts to make them accept GM. The court also ruled that Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, and Luxembourg had no legal grounds to impose their own unilateral import bans. It is now clear that the real reason the U.S. took Europe to the WTO court was to make

it easier for its companies to prise open regulatory doors in China, India, south-east Asia, Latin America, and Africa, where most U.S. exports now go. This is where millions of tonnes of U.S. food aid heads, and where U.S. GM companies are desperate to have access. More than two-thirds of exported U.S. corn now goes to Asia and Africa, where once it went to Europe. Like the tobacco industry, GM companies are now focussing almost exclusively on developing countries.

- *John Vidal, The Hindu, 15 Feb 2006*, [[C.eldoc1/d70b/15feb06h1.pdf](#)]

## Beyond trade

The WTO's interim decision in favour of the US-led challenge of the European Union (EU) moratorium on approvals of genetically modified (GM) foods goes beyond the specific case; it marks the first breach in the wall erected by the EU against GM foods and once again brings to the forefront the larger, controversial debate on the use of biotechnology in agriculture, especially in foodgrains.

The WTO ruling, however, does not resolve the basic issue of food security, ethics, control of agri-systems et al, apart from the 'safety' perception. This

goes well beyond the competence of the WTO panel and is something on which the jury is still out. For developing countries where commercial production has been allowed, designing domestic regulation that links local priorities-led safeguards with the wider global proceedings, assumes importance. Especially in the face of public mistrust and the open-ended future of GM crop research, both of which could alter the face of agriculture and of global trade in agriculture.

- *The Financial Express, Feb 2006*, [[C.eldoc1/d70b/18feb06fe1.pdf](#)]

UK-based environmental group Friends of the Earth (FoE), has alleged that a leaked confidential WTO ruling on the recent GM food trade dispute shows that many pro-GM arguments were lost. The 1,000-page report, distributed earlier this month only to the countries involved in the dispute, reveals that despite claims to the latter, the US, Canada and Argentina in fact failed to win most of their arguments.

**The WTO GMO Dispute** [[C.eldoc1/g74a/wto-despute.pdf](#)]

## ***The GMO Case in the Supreme Court***

A New Delhi based non-profit organization (Gene Campaign) filed a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court of India asking that the rules pertaining to genetically modified organisms be radically amended so that the constitutionally guaranteed rights of every citizen to life, health and a safe environment are ensured. Gene Campaign's PIL also asks for setting up a High Power Committee to formulate a National Policy on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) through a multi-stakeholder consultation process.

Dr. Suman Sahai, President, Gene Campaign, says they took this action since all attempts by Gene Campaign to engage in a dialogue with the policy makers failed to produce any response nor was there any move to listen to stakeholder concerns. Gene Campaign has been asking for greater transparency and participation in the decision-making on GM crops. The NGO's principal concern has been the lack of technical competence, transparency and accountability in the policymaking and regulatory bodies, which could have damaging consequences in a new technology area like GM crops.

That many countries involved with GM crops have been going through a review of their GM policies and systems of regulation and oversight in the light of new evidence is now well-known. "India must do the same", says Sahai.

India's current regulations are based on rules developed in 1989. Since then many international instruments such as Agenda 21 (1992), the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), the Biosafety Protocol (2001), the UNEP Technical Guidelines on Biosafety (1995) and UNIDO Code of Conduct for the Release of Organisms into the Environment (1991) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (2001) have been developed, signed or ratified by the international community.

The PIL has asked the Court to direct the government to observe a moratorium on all permissions, approvals and trials concerning GMOs, particularly of crops for which India is a Centre of Origin/ Diversity. The petitioner has also pleaded that until the rules are amended and a regulatory and monitoring system put in place, no commercial cultivation should be allowed.

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/jan/env-gmsyspil.htm>

If ever there was a subject that was more critical to life and living, it is the genetically modified organisms (GMOs). There is a significant degree of opaqueness about what these are and their implications for us, in terms of the food we eat, our health choices, farmers' rights, and our environment. Instead of protecting the national interests, the regulatory authorities comprising the Department of Biotechnology and the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) of the government are brazenly subverting the democratic process and are determined to promote GE technology and the commercial interest of the biotech industry. Exposing the unaware population to serious risks that cannot be undone, the government therefore stands accused of unconscionable offences against the Indian people.

The joint petition before the Supreme Court indicts the Government of India for the declared intentions of the proposed policy which: "Mortgages the public interest, public safety and the environment, to the commercial interests of Biotech Corporations".

India's policy on GE is deeply flawed both in logic and in science. Furthermore, the Government is under an obligation to look at issues that extend far beyond science and technology. Science should not control us: It should be at our service "on tap, not on top". These issues include vitally, India's agriculture, which will be unravelled by GE, affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of farmers, the food security of our country and our biodiversity. In India, we have some of the few surviving ecological hotspots that exist in the world. The American farming experience now, and more poignantly, Argentina clearly demonstrates the unleashing power of the multi-national biotech industry and the stranglehold it is exercising on agriculture. Anyone who believes, that the biotech industry exists for the public good, is living on another planet. This is sheer nonsense. It would seem that many of our Ministers and government servants have taken up residence on some other planet.

*On behalf of the co-petitioners,  
Aruna Rodrigues, Devinder Sharma, PV Satheesh  
Rajeev Baruah  
source: <http://www.grain.org/h/?id=71>*

### ***"GM food most dangerous to the poor than food security"***

*The Nagpur-based NGO Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti, (VJAS), farmers advocacy group opposing the introduction of GM (Genetically Modified) seeds in India after Vidarbha reported more than 5000 cotton farmers' suicides since June 2005 when government allowed commercial trials of Bt. cotton seeds, has been shocked to see media reports about the Supreme Court of India observation that GM seeds could possibly be a means to eradicate hunger and poverty.*

*In a letter to Chief Justice of Supreme Court VJAS president Kishor Tiwari has urged SC to go into details of all aspects of unsafe GM food as any SC observation may lead to major health and ecological problem before the nation.*

*"Eradication of poverty and hunger is a must in India but with introduction of GM food, it should not eradicate all poor", Tiwari added in the letter.*

*Some experts observed that "We will survive without GM food but we will never be able to survive the change unleashed by the tide of modification that is called Genetic Engineering"*

<http://www.twocircles.net/2009may03>

# Who controls agricultural science in India?

Take the case of the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC). It is loaded with scientists who are actually the cheerleaders for the biotechnology industry. And when Dr Pushpa Bhargava, the Supreme Court nominee to the GEAC, began to ask questions that challenged the unscientific cover the GEAC had very conveniently provided to the companies, the GEAC actually wanted him to be removed from the committee!

I thought any apex

committee with good intentions would have drawn from the experience of Dr Pushpa Bhargava and set its own house in order. In fact, Dr Bhargava tells me an interesting story that should tell you for whom is the GEAC actually working for. Although I have been saying for quiet long now that GEAC is basically a rubber stamp for the industry, but still let us listen to what Dr Bhargava says. He only substantiates what I have been saying.

The Bt cotton varieties

approved by the GEAC were all hybrids. The Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI) at Nagpur, has recently developed a non-hybrid Bt cotton which means the gene is now in a variety from which the farmers can save seed and replant the next year. In case of hybrids, farmers have to buy seed for every sowing since the hybrid vigour is lost in the second generation. The CCRI application for approval for this variety had come before the GEAC several times, and yet it was

not taken up.

Dr Bhargava says that he finally asked the GEAC chairman as to why it was not being taken up. The chairman replied that this will invite objections from them. Who is them, Dr Bhargava asked, and replied, you mean Monsanto. The chairman is reported to have said yes.

- Posted by Devinder Sharma, *Ground Reality*, Saturday, May 2, 2009, [\[C.eldoc1/KICS/090502zzz3B.html\]](#)

## Decision-making on GE crops should be democratized"

Genetic engineering in cultivation is permitted by only 21 countries around the world, despite the introduction of the technology on a commercial basis more than a decade ago in the USA.

Around 70% of the area cultivated with GE crops is in just the USA and Argentina. That speaks volumes about the acceptance and adoption of this so-called "frontier technology".

More and more countries, provinces and communities are declaring themselves GE-Free and several such

decisions have been taken after understanding / experiencing the technology and its ramifications.

Unlike other hazardous technologies like chemical pesticides, Genetic Engineering in agriculture is an irreversible process, once released into the open environment, since the technology involves the modification of living organisms which reproduce, contaminate, spread, impact eco-systems and so on.

There is growing evidence of the potential environmental and health hazards associated with this

technology from across the world. There are fundamental questions unanswered on the very science of GE and its unpredictability and imprecision.

This is true in India too, where the only commercially cultivated GM crop is Bt Cotton – here, even official reports now indicate that there are changes being witnessed on a large scale in cotton farm ecology.

- *GM Free India - Farm News - OFAI*, 06 Feb 2007, [\[C.eldoc1/d70b/06feb07gmfreeindianews.html\]](#)

## Sowing a bitter harvest

One outcome of the Indo-US deal on Agriculture appears to be the deregulation of the GM (genetically modified) foods sector. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has through a notification withdrawn the requirement that importers of GM foods must first take permission from the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), India's premier regulatory body in the sector of genetic engineering.

The government notification is a significant departure from the standing Indian policy in this field.

Until now, in view of the known health risks that are associated with GE (genetically engineered) foods, the government guidelines had required that import of GE foods could take place only after intervention by national agencies and any handling of GM foods was to be done only after these were labeled as such.

The arbitrary withdrawal of the regulatory oversight without any scientific reason and without any consultation with a range of stakeholders that are engaged with GE technology

and policies associated with it, is a dangerous development. It will benefit the producers and exporters of GM foods and pose health dangers to the Indian population.

Such a move is inexplicable, especially at a time when scientific evidence is mounting from laboratory tests in various parts of the world, that genetically engineered foods can cause serious damage to health

- *Suman Sahai, DNA, Mumbai*, 07 Dec 2007, [\[C.eldoc1/d70b/07dec07dna1.html\]](#)

## India, the GM-trashbin

Interestingly, while the rest of the world is stopping GM research in the tracks lest it destroy farm trade opportunities due to public rejection of genetically engineered food products, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) merrily continues to sow a seeds of thorns for agricultural exports thereby jeopardising the future of domestic farming. But then, who cares for the farmers as long as GM research ensures the livelihood security for a few thousand agricultural scientists.

Such has been the casual approach to regulate this most controversial technology that it has become practically difficult to keep track of the new GEAC chief. They keep on changing at a pace faster than that expected from musical chairs. At the same time, while the UK has set in place a tough regulatory regime making the companies liable for any environmental mishap, India continues to ignore this aspect. The regulations that the GEAC had announced at the time of according approval to Bt cotton in 2002 were only aimed at pacifying the media. The GEAC has not been held accountable for its deliberate attempts to obfuscate public opinion, and it all seems part of an effort to help the seed industry make a fast buck.

- *Devinder Sharma, Grassroots*, June 01, 2004, [\[C.eldoc/d70b/01jun04GRD2.html\]](#)

## Dr Pushpa Bhargava Warns PM about GM Food Consequences

My dear Prime Minister,

I am writing to bring to your notice the dangers of virtually unchecked approval of genetically modified crops in the country that is largely serving the interest of multinational companies such as Monsanto. This approval is granted, according to the present procedure, by a Committee of the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) followed by a Committee (Genetic Engineering Approval Committee) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

There is a public interest petition pending in the Supreme Court (filed by Aruna Rodrigues) asking for a moratorium of a few years on the sale of genetically modified (GM) seeds and approval of GM crops. In pursuance of this case, the Supreme Court has nominated me to attend the meetings of the GEAC, which has made me acutely aware of our failings in the area.

I have provided to the GEAC a list of tests that must be done before a GM crop is approved. However, only less than 10 percent of these tests are actually being done before approval of GM crops. Not only that, in the absence of a national facility to do these tests or verify the results of tests done by others, the seed companies are either doing the tests themselves or having them done by laboratories in the country (on samples provided by the seed companies). These laboratories do not have a facility to determine whether a seed is a normal seed or a GM seed. Therefore, for all practical purposes, there is no objective way today to ensure safety of a GM crop before it is approved for field trials or commercialization. We already have incontrovertible evidence that a great deal of damage has been done by Bt. cotton (the only GM crop released so far, with many others, including food crops, in the pipeline) to a section of farmers in India, as well as to farm animals.

I, therefore, agree with the contention of Mrs Aruna Rodrigues in the above mentioned petition that is pending in the Supreme Court, that we should have a five to seven year's moratorium on the sale of GM seeds and the planting of any GM crop in the country. During this period, we should set up an appropriate laboratory to carry out all the necessary tests and to verify the results of others that may have been carried out. I have given to the GEAC a blue-print of such a laboratory which would easily take five years to be fully operational. We seek your support to the above proposal.

What is worrying is that as much as 30 percent of our seed production today may be, directly or indirectly, already in the hands of foreign multinational companies. We must prevent this trend. The proposed moratorium would be one important step in that direction.

Yours sincerely,

(P M Bhargava)

[C.eldoc1/KICS/081211zzz3B.html]



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## A Verdict and a Mandate

How do we understand the mandate of the electorate in the 2009 elections to the Lok Sabha? As a green signal for more economic reforms or a verdict in favour of more public spending, anti poverty programmes and strengthening of grass root democracy and governance?

### Making sense of the verdict

The verdict is out, but the mandate is hazy. If the verdict is loud and clear, the weak and hesitant voice of the mandate does not lend itself to simple headlines. It is easier to say what this mandate is not. It is necessary to emphasise this, since there is a real risk that the people's mandate may be misread.

The real significance of this electoral verdict lies in a major shift in the political landscape. The last two de-

acades have witnessed an expansion of the third space in Indian politics. The Left and many regional parties occupied this non-Congress, non-BJP space. The expansion of this third space brought new issues, new leaders, and a fresh energy to politics. Included here are the pro-Mandal movement, the various campaigns against the "new" economic policies and the agitations on questions of jal, jungle and jameen (land, water, for-

ests). Ironically, the expansion of this space has been matched by the shrinking of the Third Front. As a result, this space, almost by default in this election, has come to the Congress.

The real challenge for the Congress now is to inherit this legacy that has fallen into its lap. In the last five years, the Congress failed to address the politics at the grass roots, address those who are at the bottom of the pyramid. Yet, it has secured

their votes. The Congress now has to create policies that respond to the needs of the poor and build a durable political constituency. It has to internalise the impulses that have been articulated by the regional parties. It has to revert to being a grand coalition and accept that the need for such coalitions is inbuilt in our society.

- *Yogendra Yadav, The Hindu, 18 May 2009*

[ [C.eldoc1/r52\\_/18may09h1.html](#)]

### Tentative Emergence of a New and Tentative Coalition?

The recovery of the Congress in the recently concluded 15th Lok Sabha elections is much more visible and less disputable (a gain of over 60 seats and an increase in vote share of more than 2 percentage points).

This Congress recovery can be read either simplistically or by contextualising it against the complexities of contemporary politics. Most early reactions seem to be tilting to the former. The media seems to be in a hurry to

make grand declarations and the commentators and observers from the finance and business sectors are misreading the election outcome so as to suit their expectations from the political system.

Politically this means that in 2009, the Congress may just have forged – very tentatively – a coalition of the middle classes and the poor. A slight shift away from the middle classes brings the party to the middle road once

again. The results are there to see – a recovery of the Congress.

But more than the recovery of the Congress, the tentative coalition of the middle classes and the poor could arrest the onward march of various politics of exclusion

and bring the poor back into the policy consciousness of our polity – to the extent this is possible within a liberal democratic framework.

- *Suhas Palshikar, Economic & Political Weekly, 23 May 2009, [ [C.eldoc1/r52\\_/230509EPW08.pdf](#)]*

### Framing A New Deal

Clearly, this was less a vote for stability than for change in favour of the underprivileged: call it what you will, an emancipatory agenda, emphasis on the "aam aadmi", social democratic orientation or appeal to inclusive egalitarianism. The Congress's success lay in acknowledging that redistributive justice is vitally, centrally, important. People have handsomely rewarded that acknowledgment and want that agenda carried forward.

Nothing could be more appropriate for India than an indigenous New Deal. To design one, the new government should revive the National Advisory Council (NAC), which gave birth to the NREGA, RTI and other innovative policies, but was wound up with the office-of-profit controversy involving Sonia Gandhi. An NAC reinforced by more public-spirited scholars, administrators

and civil society activists can pick up the old threads. The government must address three broad areas. First, it must extend the NREG model to other fields like food security (through a universal public distribution system), education and skill development and a national health programme which revives currently moribund primary health centres. This last will have an electrifying effect on the health of the poorest people who cannot afford private medical care. Second, there must be rapid implementation of the report of the Arjun Sengupta Commission on unorganised sector enterprises, which include credit provision, social security for the poor and affirmative action in many other areas. Equally important is public investment in backward areas

- *Praful Bidwai, The Times of India, 10 June 2009*

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## UPA's challenge: rural governance reform

A serious problem created by facile electoral analyses is that they give rise to even worse prescriptions for the new government. This formula has two dangerous presumptions — one, reforms are identical to disinvestment and privatisation, and two, India's poor deserve condescending dollops of sympathy and money.

Our challenge is to improve the functioning of the public sector in rural development, something that does not figure on the agenda of India's political Right or Left. Perhaps a fundamental reason for this neglect of rural India is what may be termed the "urban telos" implicit in almost all development thinking, across the political spectrum. Ever since the Second Five-Year Plan, it has been

assumed that the salvation of people lies in urbanisation and industrialisation. The short-lived Green Revolution was both unsustainable and confined to a few areas and crops. Those who need government support in rural areas have received only second-rate treatment.

But villages cannot be dynamised until we reform the public sector, which includes health, nutrition, education, banking, watershed, irrigation, NREGA and the Forest Rights Act, embracing almost every element of rural life. Both NREGA and the Forest Rights Act are potentially revolutionary initiatives but have remained transformative only on paper, much like the land reform legislation of the 1950s. They have opened up a space that

demands unprecedented boldness of action, badly lacking on the ground so far. On the Forest Rights Act, which calls for a full democratisation of our forest bureaucracy, and is the key to addressing naxalism, nothing at all has moved. On NREGA, what we expect our gram panchayats to deliver has absolutely no correlation with what we have provided them in terms of human resource. How have we enabled them to dismantle the contractor raj? Where is the comprehensive cadre of functionaries fully accountable to them, which is the alternative implementation mechanism they require?

- Mihir Shah, *The Hindu*, 28 May 2009, [[C.eldoc1/r52\\_/28may09h1.html](#)]

## Hope is back in business

If rural India has absorbed products and afforded producers an alternative market it is thanks to pump-priming of the rural economy since 2004 by the UPA government through various schemes. For instance, it has spent Rs 1,93,715 crore since 2004 just on different schemes under rural development.

The second critical factor has been the restructuring of agriculture. It is not just the farm loan waiver of Rs 65,000 crore. A combination of improved credit, seed availability and ramped up minimum support prices have made agriculture viable, leaving more spending power with farmers. There is a cost to everything and all this was possible because India grew at 9 per cent and delivered revenue growth of over 25 per cent for the UPA to splurge.

Till recently the UPA distributed the surplus generated by high growth in rural India. Very simply, they dumped money to create purchasing power amongst the poorest of the poor whether through the NREGA or through other programmes such as Bharat Nirman. The slowdown has hit this grand scheme. The government's expenditure has gone up substantially, its income has come down and its finances are in a state of shock.

With fiscal deficit at a high of over 10 per cent (for the Centre and states) there is a limit to how much money will be available for what purpose. Interestingly both politics and economics now mandate that growth be made the priority. What's more this verdict leaves the Singh Parivar with no room for excuses. There is no dearth of literature nor any need for debate on what needs to be done. There are many ideas and the moolah mantra is clear: invest in social and physical infrastructure, raise resources through disinvestment and by cutting non-merit subsidies and reform governance to put In-

dia back on the high growth trajectory.

It is true that India is a democracy of the poor but for too long governments have perpetuated the culture of dole and subsidies. India needs to be freed of this crippling mindset. Indians at every level across class and geographies just want to be equipped with the tools and offered the opportunity to take a shot at economic freedom. All India needs to do is meet its challenges to create opportunities for growth.

- Shankkar Aiyar, *India Today*, 08 Jun 2009, [[C.eldoc1/r52\\_/08jun09it1.html](#)]

## Bhaago Re!

But couldn't-care-less Mumbai preferred to enjoy the extended weekend, recording the lowest turnout in the last four General Elections at 44.16 per cent.

South Mumbai, the constituency where everyone expected spirited voting following the terror attacks of 26/11 and where people made the maximum noise about governance - recorded just 43.33 per cent; a turnout that is even less than 2004.

The last time the city saw a turnout of over 50 per cent

was 11 years ago when the Atal Behari Vajpayee government lost the confidence motion by a single vote. It was believed that the decent turnout was due to sympathy for BJP's poet Prime Minister.

The 26/11 tragedy, however, was an even bigger issue and, therefore, was expected to bring out angry voters.

- Ravikiran Deshmukh, *Mumbai Mirror*, 01 May 2009 [[C.eldoc1/r52\\_/01may09mm1.html](#)]

## A Change Of Priorities

After two consecutive defeats which also signal the end of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-L K Advani era, the BJP is confronted with precisely the choices that will prompt shrill charges of revisionism. The 2009 defeat was awesome. The BJP lost the incremental gains it made in the 1990s; its support in a growing middle class fell sharply; and it failed to capture the imagination of the youth. For the BJP, the 2009 loss wasn't just a managerial disaster; it was a resounding political defeat.

What has changed in the 21st century? To begin with, India is far more globalised and cosmopolitan than at any point since independence. There is a greater inclination to look outwards and imbibe lifestyle shifts. These have corresponded to a demographic shift, resulting in a younger India. Secondly, growth of global Islamist terror has made Indians far more appreciative of the need to insulate India from sectarian strife. Finally, unlike the shambolic 1990s, there is a sense of self-confidence among Indians and a belief that their country can face the world on its own terms.

The BJP has been insufficiently sensitive to these developments. Intellectually, it has not moved beyond the formulations of the 1990s.

The BJP must candidly recognise that assertive Hindutva marked by hate speeches and moral policing is seen as ugly mirror images of the Taliban. The spectacle of old and middle-aged men oozing sanctimoniousness and droning on about India's ancient inheritance belongs to a bygone age. It also reeks of hypocrisy because the integrity quotient of the BJP isn't worth showcasing.

- Swapan Dasgupta, *The Times of India*, 04 Jun 2009 [[C.eldoc1/r00\\_/04jun09toi1.html](#)]

# Celeb crusades & the death of politics

Urged by a special song campaign from a well-meaning Bangalore-based rock band to “Shut up and vote,” too many Mumbaikars paid heed to only the first part of that exhortation. (As did voters in Bangalore, too.) In Mumbai, voting was 41.41 per cent this time around as compared to 47.15 per cent in 2004.

Corporate media’s cutest efforts failed to arrest a decline in voting percentage. Nor did corporate-sponsored events and NGO activism fare any better. The Facebook fraternity, and e-activism didn’t come out of it too well either (raising questions about real IT penetration even in this wealthy city). That was so even in the

constituency that received more space and time than any other — south Mumbai, which saw 40.33 per cent polling (2004: 44.22%). Nor did the expected level of “anger over 26/11” materialise much beyond the television studios.

On the whole, slumdogs vote in larger numbers than the white-ribbon, candlelight crowds do. The final figure of a constituency is an average of how its different segments, sections and socio-economic groups voted. Even Malabar Hill has many poor voters. Generally, the poor vote in greater numbers. (The rich capture governments by other means.) The poor usually want to use the vote. It is the one instru-

ment of democracy they get to exercise. But across the country, not just in Mumbai, millions are affected when elections are held in April-May. It is around this time that many regions see their largest exodus of migrant labour. Those workers do not get to vote. We take school and college examination schedules into account while fixing poll dates — and rightly so. But we take no note of the survival schedules of the poor.

In the present round, many well-meaning “awareness-raising” groups brought no politics to their voting drive. “Vote, you must vote! Don’t fail to vote.” For whom? For what? And why? One critic likened this to urg-

ing people to rush to get married without knowing who their partners might be. At points, the campaigns even raised this sense in young people — of voting to feel good about yourself. Not for any political reason. Some of the groups asked voters to focus on the individual candidates. Not his or her political platform. So it’s okay if your “clean” candidate has a genocidal political agenda. This cannot help much with a young generation already depoliticised. And exposed daily to the media scorn of politics and all that goes with it.

- P. Sainath, *The Hindu*,  
04 May 2009  
[ [C.eldoc1/r52 / 04may09h1.html](#)]

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## Climate Change

## Cyclone Aila: A grim reminder ?

Cyclone Aila, that lashed the eastern coast of India with devastating power and rendered more than one lakh people in the Sagar Island and the adjoining Sunderbans delta in West Bengal, has perhaps, given a grim reminder to the lackadaisical administration of an impending environmental disaster waiting to happen.

Experts and NGOs familiar with growing

consequences of the global warming and subsequent climate change have cautioned that the half of the 97-odd islands dotting the Sunderbans delta might meet a watery grave within less than a decade, rendering thousands of people environmental refugees. Already, a stretch of the Sunderbans has been declared 'sinking Island zone,' with two islands having been gobbled up by

the ravaging sea.

Like tsunami that has permanently altered the topography of the Andamans and Nicobar Islands with Trinket having been bifurcated into two and many islands going half under the sea, Aila has already weakened the foundations of these age-old dykes. "The long-term impact of the cyclone will be huge," according to a spokesman of

the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

The Greenpeace said the destruction caused by Aila was in consonance with the predictions made by scientists who have warned that storms would become more frequent and more damaging due to climate change.

- Prasanta Paul, Deccan Herald, 29 May 2009

## Tackling climate change will be tricky business

There is a bag full of green issues that the next environment minister will have to tackle. Some of them are politically tricky while others are keenly watched by the industry and yet more that the entire world will be keeping an eye out for.

The most high-profile issue on the table will be the climate change negotiations

that will peak in December 2009 but have already hit the high pitch.

The industry and development lobby though would be on the lookout for several other files on the minister's table that are controversial as well as pending for a while — implementation of a new coastal environmental regulatory framework which has

been hanging fire for a couple of years now and amendments to the environment clearance procedures which has the project developers' lobby and environment watchdogs pitted in an entrenched battle for a while now.

On the wildlife front, the much-watched tiger story is as usual going to be open for

the minister to dwell into. The recent incidents of tigers straying out of the 'wild' into habitats had got the government thinking of ways of reducing human-tiger conflict while keeping the wild cat population healthy, or well, surviving.

- Nitin Sethi, The Times of India, Mumbai, 20 May 2009

## Human Rights

## A prisoner of paradox

*It took the Supreme Court just sixty seconds to undo a injustice that has been wilfully perpetuated by the state for two long years. On 25 May, 2009 Binayak Sen was released from jail on the orders of the Supreme Court of India.*

His detention raises very uncomfortable questions about the use of the Chhattisgarh Public Security Act 2005 and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967. More importantly, it forces a serious examination of how human rights activists are treated when they directly

criticise or expose state policy or actions that have violated basic rights of citizens.

As long as Sen was serving the people of Chhattisgarh, setting up the Shaheed Hospital, working on TB related problems, establishing Rupantar to provide low cost primary health care and even advising the state government, he was perceived as a do-gooder and a noble soul.

When he linked ill health and survival issues to state development policy, adivasi's marginalisation and social structure, he moved from being a doctor to a health activist and a

"problem" for the state.

Another paradox of double-speak revolves around the Salwa Judum itself.

It is indeed incongruous that while the Supreme Court, the Planning Commission, the Tribal Affairs and Panchayat Raj Ministries have questioned the Salwa Judum and requested withdrawal of the Union government's support, such criticism is met with studied silence.

Yet when someone who has spent a lifetime striving to bring basic health care to some of the world's poorest people raises the very same issues, he is accused of being a threat to national security and shoved into jail.

- Anita Ratnam, Deccan Herald, Bangalore, 15 May 2009

**Employment Generation and the Organised Sector**

A recent report of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS) provides anything but a positive picture. Not only did the organised sector create fewer jobs than the unorganised sector, a large part of the employment generated carried no social security and other benefits that are normally available to regular workers. In fact 97.6 percent of the 59.3 million jobs generated in during the period 1999-2000 to 2004-05 were in the so-called informal sector. The organised sector contributed very little; the employment it generated was largely of informal nature.

[ The report is available with CED, (R.H50.22) ]

## Fire At Vienna Exposes Ugly Realities Of Caste Discrimination In Punjab

Punjab is burning. The Dalits are at the street. The government is seeking peace and every one is amused why the Dalits have taken to the street. Some are amused as why attack on Sant Niranjn Dass, head of Dera Guru Ravidas Sachkhand Balan and death of Sant Ramanand

could spark such violent protest in Punjab.

Unfortunately, they forget to understand the first question itself as why such Deras face attack by the fundamentalist Sikh groups. Is it because these Deras have provided a glimpse of hope and identity to a massive

Dalit population in Punjab? Is it also not true that these Deras are also giving the upper caste Sikhs a run for their money and power?

- Vidya Bhushan Rawat, *Counter Currents*, 28 May 2009, [C.eldoc1/110a/28may09cc1.html]

### Sikhism and Deras

The attack in Vienna was an offshoot of a number of developments such as rising dalit consciousness in Punjab and Haryana, the massive political clout that the different Deras wield in Punjab and the presence of various radical Sikh organisations in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States and parts of Europe.

Another important aspect that sociologists say this violent episode has showcased is the casteist undertones to social interactions among the Indian diaspora. In fact, those disappointed that casteism was not accepted as a form of racism at the recent United Nations conference on racism at Geneva, are hopeful that this incident will help bring international support to their argument.

- *Economic & Political Weekly Magazine*, 06 Jun 2009, [C.eldoc1/140a/060609EPW06.pdf]

## Caste Out, Yet Again

The Indian official delegation blocked 33 out of the 40 non-governmental organisations (mostly dalit bodies and organisations representing smaller nationalities) who wanted to officially participate in the proceedings and kept intact the unremitting opposition of the previous BJP-led government to inclusion of caste references in the documents of the conference.

There is no denying the fact that the Indian Constitution has banned caste discrimination and put in place a slew of measures to help those who face such discrimination.

The charge that the obstinate blocking by the Indian government of all discussions on caste in international fora is merely a symptom of the proclivity of upper caste India to deny the very existence of caste discrimination may, therefore,

have a fair element of accuracy to it. Thus, in the document of the World Conference against Racism, the relative weakness of the dalit movement on the international

stage ensured that the discrimination faced by about 300 million people remained excluded.

- *Economic & Political Weekly Magazine*, 16 May 2009, [C.eldoc1/110\_/160509EPW05.pdf]

## Racial Attacks In Australia: Can We Condemn?

The recent or rather the ongoing attacks on Indian students down under are a chilling reminder on the existence of a farce Australian society, far from the helm of civilization.

What more could have we expected from the discovery of John Cook, whose men had slaughtered the local Aborigines to make the continent livable. The savagery of John Cook's siblings has passed on, in good health, to future generations. But how justified are we as

Indians to raise a hue and cry on these ghastly acts of prejudiced murder? Do we tow the same line when it comes to our equality records? How good are we, the brown men, in treating the brown and blacks amongst us? How fair are we, the citizens of a free and democratic country in giving justice to our own citizens? Do we fulfill the criteria to condemn these attacks? These are difficult questions with equally thorny answers.

With hands across our

hearts, we should ask, are we justified enough to question the barbarism in Australia? Isn't it time to set our own house in order? Can we stand up and be counted so that we can make our case strong against the Australians. Inner strength gives outer courage. India can claim its share of International justice only if its executive, its police, its judiciary and most importantly its

people are willing to propagate and inculcate national justice and social equality.

- Shah Alam Khan, *Counter Current*, 05 June 2009, [C.eldoc1/110\_/05jun09cc1.html]

## Race against Caste

So Indian officialdom is right when it says that racism and casteism can't be equated. They can't. For the simple reason that casteism is far more overtly rampant, more widespread and more accepted (at least in India) and more deeply ingrained in our polity than racism is anywhere in the world.

The coincidental juxtapositioning of the racist attacks on Indian students in Australia, and the riots that flared across north India last month when members of the Dera Sach Khand, a Sikh sect comprised largely of Dalits, went on the rampage following the killing of

one of their community leaders in far-off Austria, once again raises the question: Is racism the same as casteism? To begin with, the constitutionally-guaranteed policy of reservations (which continues in expanded mode till now) is in itself an admission of the need to protect lower castes from upper caste discrimination. Casteism, particularly as practised against Dalits, continues to be one of the ugliest stains on our supposedly secular and democratic social fabric.

- Jug Suraiya, *The Times of India*, 10 June 2009

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