

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Members of the Barela tribe in Pati of Madhya Pradesh often work as labourers for less than rupees fifty a day. What was once a lush forest, Pati has been reduced to a mountainous desert by drought and logging of trees. Many members of the Barela community have moved away to survive. Obtaining drinking water involves a walk of several kilometres. Health clinics are a day's walk. Jobs are scarce. Peanuts grown in the region, are one of the few crops. Some Barela worked just eight days a year, before the passage of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005), which guarantees a minimum of 100 days of labour, per household for the rural poor. Aware of their basic rights the residents of Pati have formed a "people's union", known as the Jagurt Adivasi Dalit Sangathan, to seek remedies to issues of local importance. With the help of medical volunteers from non-governmental organizations, the union has administered polio vaccines. Women have been trained in first aid. The union has started schools, replacing an inadequate government one. Union members led by women have marched to the Pati district headquarters, demanding rightful wages under the NREG Act.

ISLAMIC SECTS IN KASHMIR

Over nearly a year, the Barelvi Sect of Islam in Kashmir Valley has emerged as an aggressive group, rallying a large following in Jammu and Kashmir. Barelvis who visit shrines constitute about 70% of J and K's Muslims, which is an overwhelming majority in the valley. In the last twenty years, the vast inflow of foreign funds from Saudi Arabia, has strengthened the more puritanical Wahabis like Ahle Hadith. Easy resources have ensured vast availability of Wahabi literature. Evening sermons at Wahabi mosques are followed by tea and snacks. The spread of Wahabi organizations is being countered by the Barelvis with righteous slogans of "custodians of Kashmiriyat" and "Inclusive Islam". About 60% of young people in Kashmir Valley spend a large amount of time listening to religious discourses on the internet or compact disks. Government agencies ensure that the numerous Barelvi functions are given a wide coverage by "sympathetic" newspapers. Many religious shrines are being renovated across J and K, to accommodate larger number of devotees. Around 130 new mosques have sprung up in J and K, at places like Pulwara, Budgam and Urs. The army has constructed a few roads to the shrines. Gun shots on Pirs (holy men), attacks on policemen around Hazratbal and shootings at Dastgeer Sahib shrine are part of the growing sectarian strife.

DEVELOPMENT AND GUNS

Abujh-Maadh ("unknown hills") is an unchartered 500 sq kms of terrain, in the Narayanpur district of Bastar, in the Indian state of Chattisgarh. For the past two decades, it has been a forbidden forest for the government. Topography sheets date back to the 1970s, and display

three roads, ending halfway into a green patch. There is no state presence, and health services are scarce. The Ramakrishna Mission runs a few residential schools on the fringes. The Abujh-Maadias, a primitive tribal group, with a population ranging between 10,000 and 30,000 are semi-nomadic farmers, practising shifting cultivation. The terrain is India's largest Maoist "liberated zone". Before the rebels made it their stronghold, only sociologists and anthropologists, studying primitive tribes and their art forms, and doctors monitoring cerebral malaria have trekked on foot, across the Maadh.

Since March 2012, the Central Reserve Police Cobra units, the police of Chattisgarh and adjoining Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra, armed with Swedish Carl Gustav Rocket Launchers and C-90 rifles, and aided by unmanned aerial vehicles, have entered Abujh-Maadh. The 3000 flanking para military forces are guided by GPS devices and topography sheets. "Operation Haka-drive them away" is a mission to hit Maoist bases. Minor skirmishes and hour long gunfights, along with arrests of village militia members are occurring daily. Trunk loads of books, notes and Maoist cadres' diaries have been seized. The airforce is on alert. The UAV sorties have identified eight plateaus on the Maadh, where choppers could land in an emergency. Rebel statements allege torture by the security forces. Under the primitive tribal group, more than Rs 2 crores is sanctioned annually for the Abujh-Maadhias to a local development authority, but the money never trickles to the terrain. Very few hill tribal students attend schools around Narayanpur town. On the foothills of Abujh-Maadh, the army is setting up a training facility.

SIACHEN GLACIER DISPUTE

Competitiveness between India and Pakistan is scaling the heights around the Siachen glacier, triggered the Siachen dispute in April 1984. Skirmishes and big battles have hardened the temporary summer operations at 22,000 feet height. In spite of a truce signed in 2003, the deployment of troops by both countries at high altitude, is a drain on both countries' resources for almost three decades, soldiers have felt frostbite, or suffered loss of mental stability after months spent staring at the endless vista of snow. Himalayan altitudes have caused heart attacks. Many soldiers have vanished in crevasses, or been swallowed in blizzards. On 7 April 2012, an avalanche buried a Pakistan outpost, at the foot of the Siachen glacier. About 140 Pakistani soldiers are entombed, under seven storeys of rock and house sized boulders. The earth surface convulsions have reverberated beyond the valley. The disaster has spurred calls on the two nuclear armed rivals to make peace, and end the 28-year old stand off at Siachen glacier. □