

NEWS WRAP

AGD

THERE HAS BEEN OVER two lac suicides among farmers in India, over the past decade. The government's neglect of agriculture, lending practices of micro-finance institutions, debt burden, loss in non-agricultural activities and failure of borewells have increased pressures on households with suicides. While every farming family is in debt, there is a 3% probability that debt burden was the main cause of suicide. 17% of the suicides were precipitated by crop failure. Alcoholism, gambling and spendthrift caused 20% of the suicides. Chronic illness accounts for a probable 10% of the deaths. Social problems like burden of dowry and unhappy marriages contribute to suicides. External factors like liberalization and globalization trigger extreme reactions. Suicides force immediate government policy action, and politicians are exploiting suicide by farmers, for political gains. Due to untimely rains, recently entire crops have been lost in Andhra Pradesh. While the estimated loss per acre has been about Rs 15000/- the Andhra Pradesh state government has announced a paltry compensation of Rs 2500 per acre. There are huge instances where the monetary compensation is not received by the tenant farmers, who are the biggest losers of crop failures. Big landlords, on whose lands the tenants till, are swallowing the relief amounts. Packaged compensations for crop failures are not reaching the share croppers. Loan waivers distort the rural banking environment. Landlords and big farmers appropriate free power and electricity to farmers, who are selling electricity to small farmers, at commercial rates. There are no financial institutions to hedge the risks of crop failures, in the era of globalization.

Low farm productivity leads to food shortages. There is a total absence of farm co-operatives and rural enterprises, for using new inputs and techniques, with an aim to increase yields. Frameworks do not exist for guaranteeing a larger share of the ultimate price paid by the consumer, to the farmer. The food price inflation can be checked by increasing farm productivity. Consumers in India's growing economy have diversified their demand for food.

GARO AND RABHA

Rabhas, Bodos, Kochs, Hajongs, Mechs and Kacharis are of Mongoloid, Tibetan and Myanmaris stock. Strong cultural and linguistic similarities can be found between the Garos and Rabhas. Similar to Khasis and Garos, the Rabhas are a matrilineal society. They are the fifth largest tribe among the 21 ethnic communities in Assam, and comprise about 1.05% of Assam's population. Over a number of years, the Rabhas of Goalpara district (Assam) have been demanding sixth schedule status in their inhabited areas, or an autonomous council (*Rabha Hasong*). Around 30,000 Rabhas live in eastern Meghalaya, which extends to the Meghalaya-Assam border, covering Bajengdoba and Tikrilla. The Garo tribals had thrown a grenade at the Durga Temple in Williamnagar (Meghalaya) on 30 October 2010. The Rabhas have been projecting their demands through numerous bandhs and protests. Bandhs called by the Rabhas along National Highway 37, linking NH 40 for Shillong affects the Garos, as they have to cross Paikan, enroute to Garo Hills. On 22 December 2010, some Rabha youth attacked a Garo Pastor and his family, since he was travelling to Kharkutta in the Garo Hills, despite a Rabha Hasong bandh. Since the last Christmas eve, there have been a series of clashes and flare-ups between the Garo and Rabha tribal communities living along the Assam-Meghalaya border. Besides about fifteen dead from violence and police firings, over 2500 Rabha families are displaced, following the setting on fire of about 250 houses, allegedly by Garos, in retaliation for attacks by Rabha youth. Posters are visible in Tura, asking Rabhas to quit Garo Hills. The Rabhas do not have a

written script, and only half the Rabha population, can speak the Rabha language. An animistic faith blended with Hindu rituals is followed by Rabhas in forests. The Rabhas in settled areas have adopted the Hindu religion. Ethnic turmoils can flare up easily, amongst the 238 different ethnic groups, residing contiguously in ethnic homelands along the Assam-Meghalaya Border. □□□