

The Weekly

OBSERVER

Nandigram violence continues

Nandigram is hitting headlines with a new set of violence which killed four CPM supporters. It started when a vehicle carrying Trinamool Congress Chief Mamta Banerjee was fired at Gokulnagar while she was travelling to Nandigram. The attack prompted her party workers to block rail and road traffic across the state. The Trinamool backed Bhumi Uchhed Pratorodh Committee says the four deceased are CPM workers and they were making bombs to attack Mamta Banerjee. But, CMP alleged that they were hacked to death by BUPC members. The death of four CPM workers has once again tensed the situation in the area. In another incident nine persons were killed in Nandigram and adjoining areas. The casualties were because of the clashes between the activists of the Krishi Bachao Committee and the CPM. On last Saturday, a fresh round of violence claimed two lives in Nandigram. Following the incident, Mamta Banerjee announced her resignation and called for a state-wide stir. She was

joined by Mahasweta Devi. Even on Monday, the strike called by the opposition had paralysed the state. On another front, activist Medha Patkar on Saturday began a two-day fast in Kolkata. In order to restore peace in the region, six battalions of Central Reserve Police Force have already arrived at Nandigram. However, a peace process has been initiated and Bhumi Uchhed Pratorodh Committee (BUPC) is holding talks with local authorities and people are coming back to their villages. Former Chief minister Jyoti Basu seems to be quite happy with people coming back to their villages. He also said that nearly 6000 people are still living outside and they should come as soon as possible. In 2007, the West Bengal government announced that there will be no chemical hub established in Nandigram. Surprisingly that announcement brought no respite and violence in the region was on its high. Rather the withdrawal of police force from some parts enabled Maoist groups to set up armed presence.

Alienated in my own homeland

ITIKA SHARMA

While the conflict over Kashmir seems to be an unending one, every Indian has a personal opinion for the problem. There is a strange and wild obsession associated with this issue.

So as a fanatic Indian, when I planned to visit Srinagar (capital of Kashmir), there was a strange enthusiasm. The day I started packing, I remember the feeling I had within me... like a true patriot going to her motherland!

I landed at the Srinagar airport. There is something in the air that made me feel this place is India and it 'should belong to us'. Walking towards the trail of taxis in the stand, they all seemed to be waiting just for me. I was getting ready to get mobbed by the drivers who would want to chariot me around the city and show me this 'heaven on earth', 'MY Kashmir'. But none of them seemed to be in the mood to mob me at all. Ah! I believe they were trained not to behave like that; after all they handle so many international visitors. But there was something strange there. Anyways, I took a taxi and went to check into a houseboat.

Dal Lake houses over 100

house boats in a row. So beautifully decorated that you wouldn't want to take your eyes off it. All awed, I picked the one that I wanted to stay in and enjoy the serenity and beauty of this 'Switzerland of India'. All excited when I went to the houseboat owner, he looked up from his floating-office and asked me in an emotionless voice "India?" In all excitement I replied "Oh

All tired when I returned to my taxi, the driver looked at me in grief and asked, "Madam, should I take you to an Indian hotel?"

yes!" I was so glad that these people are "our people" and they take in only us (Indians). When unexpectedly the guy replied, "sorry we don't have any free boat". I could read the helplessness in his voice about not being able to help a fellow-countryman.

But as I walked from one houseboat to the other, the same question was asked over and over, "Indian?" and the same sad reply "sorry no boats".

All tired when I returned to my

taxi, the driver looked at me in grief and asked, "Madam, should I take you to an Indian hotel?" Was I amazed? Was I flabbergasted? Was I shocked? Did I hear the right thing? "Indian hotel" did he say? All tired I asked him to take me to any comfortable hotel for now.

On the way to an "Indian hotel" the driver explained to me how the houseboat owners, mostly Muslims, did not entertain any Indians. It was the same with the shikara(boat)rowers, tourist guides and souvenir sellers. The first few moments in that hotel room were tough to pass. The only word that echoed in my mind was "India".

The next 4 days were an experience I shall always remember. I felt like I was in a foreign country. I felt like I was treated second-class. It was nothing like I wanted it to be. Amongst many other things, something that I will never forget is what an Indian couple getting off a boat at Dal Lake told me... "Tell them you are a NRI, they will treat you very well". Do I want to hide my nationality in my own country...for a boat ride?

Oil spills: a potential threat to marine ecosystems

Tonnes of oil in the sea means constant deaths of marine creatures, and more

Our environment is constantly under threat, be it global warming or pollution. The latest tension to surface is that oil tanker spills. Two Russian freighters carrying sulphur and an oil tanker sank near the Black Sea due to stormy conditions. The oil tanker, the Volganef-139, spilled at least half its 1.3 million gallons of fuel oil cargo. Freighters were carrying about 7,150 tons of sulphur, which also spilled into the waters. The weather was too harsh to carry out rescue operations for the crew or to collect the spilt oil. The spills may take several years to clean up and the repercussions to the sea ecosystem could be dangerous. In total, ten ships sank in the storms at the Black Sea.

Tragedies like this are not new. An estimated 58,000 gallons of heavy-duty bunker oil leaked into San Francisco Bay, sickening sea birds and sending oil onto beaches, when a cargo ship hit the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge on November 07, 2007. Scientists say that this could threaten wildlife for years to come. These spills are a

constant cause of worry for the environmentalists. Severe habitat damage was caused to beaches in Spain, France and Portugal when a tanker leaked 64,000 tons of fuel oil in November 2002. During the Gulf war, oil was released into the Persian Gulf by Iraq to prevent US Marine forces from entering. This resulted in huge damages to the Persian Gulf around Kuwait and Iraq. The volume of spill was estimated to be around 42 to 462 million gallons, regarded to be one of the worst oil spills in the history of mankind.

Then there was the Exxon Valdez oil spill of March 1989, regarded by experts as one of the most devastating man-made environmental disasters ever. It occurred at Prince William Sound, a habitat for salmon, sea otters, seals and sea birds. Almost 11 million gallons of oil was released into the sea in the accident where the Exxon Valdez oil tanker hit the Bligh Reef. There were instant deaths of thousands of native animals. In the long term, reductions in population have been

seen in various ocean animals, including stunted growth in pink salmon populations. Almost 15 years after the spill, a team of scientists at the University of North Carolina found that the Exxon Valdez oil spill effects are far more long-lasting than first estimated.

In the Exxon Valdez disaster, about 153 bald eagles were killed when they scavenged the carcasses of oiled seabirds.

According to the team, some shoreline habitats may take up to 30 years to recover.

There were many other major sea oil disasters that seriously threaten ecology. The Ixtoc-I exploratory oil well blowout south of Texas in 1979 discharged around 4.6 lakh tonnes of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. There was a spill of 15,000 tonnes into the Eastern Mediterranean when the Isreali

military attacked and set ablaze five oil tanks near Beirut in Lebanon. In July 1979, the Atlantic Empress, a Greek oil tanker collided with the Aegean Captain near Trinidad and Tobago in the Atlantic ocean, and the accident caused in a spill of 287, 000 metric tons of crude oil. But the remnants of this spill never reached the shores; seeping into the depths of the sea. There were many other oil spills constantly polluting the sea and causing harm to sea creatures.

There are not only immediate damages like deaths of birds and sea creatures, but other long term effects that are often not looked at. The toxic waste left behind by the oil spill as well as the cleaning-up methods that use dispersants are very harmful. Deaths also occur when birds of prey and sea animals consume the poisoned creatures. For example, in the Exxon Valdez disaster, about 153 bald eagles were killed when they scavenged the carcasses of oiled seabirds. The oil waste can disturb the entire food cycle of the marine ecosystem on which their reproductive success is

based. This may result in huge changes in the species too. Commercial fishing enterprises may be affected permanently.

But there is also a group of people who believe that the marine creatures would get used to the oil content; their body mechanisms adapt to the changes in the sea, and hence there is not much to fear.

The United Nations (UN) has a special Oil Spills Protocol for combating oil spills in the Caribbean region. The protocol aims at strengthening national and regional preparedness in case of spills. It works in collaboration with the Assessment and Management of Environmental Pollution Sub- Programme of the Caribbean Environment Programme of the UN as well as the International Maritime Organisation (IMO). Such protocols should be adopted by all coastal nations of the world to tackle problems generated by oil spills. These spills should be taken seriously lest our marine ecosystems succumb to man-made disasters.

Editor:

Anil Das D

Photo Editor:

Gayatri Vaidyanathan

Page Designers :

Pooja Gautam
Shubhi Mehrotra
Karen Solomon
Itika Sharma
Snigdha Poonam
Akansha Pradeep
Chitra Phalguni
Namitha Viswanathan

Proof Readers:

Richy D Alexander
Sameer Ranjan Bakshi
Debi Prasad Sarangi

Contact details:

Telephone: 28237907
28437903

Email: editor@ijnm.org



Address:
Opp. BGS Int'l Residential School,
Nityanandanagar, Kumbalgudu,
Kengeri Hobli, Bangalore- 560060

For private circulation only

