

A Report on

**LOCKED-OUT FACTORIES,
PLIGHT OF WORKERS AND URBAN SPACE**

In partial fulfilment of the

Short Term Independent Research Fellowship

Under the

Independent Fellowship Programme, SARAI
Centre for Study of Developing Societies
Delhi, India

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January-August 2005

I

Foreword

Behind the sounds of the drums and trumpets being played about the phenomenal economic growth evident in our country, those who care to listen can hear a faint but persistent noise in the background. Voices from below, though drowned, have a lot to say about the manner in which their lives are being affected.

Ground level reality is not what is happening in the corridors of the shopping malls alone. Unfortunately a lot more is happening in the dreary shelters of the urban poor and the dilapidated hutments of the impoverished village folks. It is for every person to see unless one prefers to put on blinkers so that one doesn't get distracted.

To be able to hear the voices, which call out, and to see the faces and feel for the state of being of the suffering multitude is not so easy. But for concerned citizens it is not enough to say that the under privileged suffer because of their own misdeeds in the past or that the purchasing power of the poor in our country is improving or that in one of the fastest growing economies in the developing world, to complain about impoverishment is to jam the wheels of progress.

We are aware that for social activists to keep a reality check is a matter of utmost importance. Hence like so many times in the past we went back to the locked out industries, met the jobless, hunger-stricken and unprotected workers again, tried to look around in order to note the changes in the urban environment and tried to see what has happened to the skills they had acquired while their factories were running. We wanted to see with our own eyes and hear with our own ears as to what they are doing with their lives and livelihoods and in what manner the urban space was changing around them.

We saw the workers in dire straits. It was appalling to observe workers, most of them skilled and if not, experienced, doing a whole array of odd jobs, more than one at the same time, trying their level best to survive. The vast majority of these workers of locked out industries were deprived of their legitimate dues. That they were not getting their legitimate dues is just a part of the whole story – the worst part is that such deprivation went on and on for decades. The cruelty of the situation was dehumanising! A worker without work and wages struggling for a morsel of food denied access to the accumulated dues, which legitimately belonged to them. Unbelievable is the amount of indifference shown towards lakhs of workers in thousands of industries by the trade unions, factory owners, bureaucracy, political parties and the government. All this in West Bengal, which is said to be the citadel of the left and democratic forces!

The urban space of Kolkata and its fringes is changing, too rapidly as a matter of fact. Multifarious modern concrete structures for use by the affluent; demolition of slums and squatter habitats; ruthless eviction of hawkers; real estate activities on industrial land of locked out industries. It was a learning experience to observe how the workers became vendors and ramshackle stall owners thereby affecting the urban space; how neighbours came forward to rehabilitate the hapless workers thereby creating a new set of relations within the urban space; how urban industrial land becomes 'fallow' devoid of plant-machinery-sheds and remains empty, unused and unproductive for decades; how the living space of the urban poor gets degraded with loss of secured livelihood.

Given below is a brief sketch of the various sections in which this study has been organised.

In section II titled ‘Short Stories: Voices from Below’ we have placed some real-life stories collected during our field observations. We have tried as much as possible to keep the flavour of the interviews intact and also to be as objective as possible trying not to read too much between the lines.

In section III titled ‘Sickness Profiles’, the state of affairs in 14 industrial units that have been closed down has been discussed in brief.

In section IV titled ‘Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts’ we have dealt with 6 Industrial belts and have described the present conditions along with an attempt to relate as an overview the maladies affecting each geographical region.

In section V titled ‘Fact Sheets’ we have prepared and presented 4 fact sheets, which have relevance to the present policies governing urbanisation and industrialisation.

In section VI titled ‘Documents’ we have placed 4 relevant documents prepared during the period of our study in connection with raising awareness of the members of the civil society about the plight of workers in locked out industries.

In section VII we place some facts and figures alongside a discussion on urbanisation and industrialisation based on our findings.

II

In this section we have placed some real-life stories collected during our study. We have tried as much as possible to keep the flavour of the interviews intact and also to be as objective as possible trying not to read too much between the lines.

Short Stories: Voices from Below

1. Located opposite the 8B bus terminus, the first shop on the right as one proceeds towards Jadavpur Coffee House, **Kanti-da**'s 'Mithu Tea Stall' on the pavement is a popular rendezvous specially for the medical representatives who throng to it throughout the day. Pranab Roy officially, Kanti-da recounted the events of the day, 16 years back, when **Bengal Lamp** closed down. "It was the day after pay-day! When we arrived at the gate we found that our factory was closed. That was way back in early January 1989. There were at least 700 workers at the gate. It was all over. Within a month I started this tea stall here. There was no looking back." Kanti-da did his LME from Jadavpur Poly-Technique after pursuing studies at the City College. He got for himself a job in Calcutta State Transport Corporation but moved to Bengal Lamp later. He was skilled and worked for years at the glass lamp plant. Being in his mid-fifties, he did not make any career moves during the early years of closure since he, like hundreds of others, expected the reputed 'Bengal Lamp' to open its gates to the workers once again. "Some say that the gates are going to open soon and residential apartments are going to come up. Maybe we will then get our arrears including PF dues", he said rather matter-of-factly. The only time his feathers got ruffled was when he said, "Whom would I protest to? Who would care to listen?" in response to a query asking for his reactions about not getting his legitimate dues even after 16 years. He had been compelled to move into one of the dilapidated Bengal Lamp 'quarters' at Ganguly Bagan, about ten years back. "There was no electricity and water. But there was no rent either! I must bow my head to the total support we received from the local citizenry. A tap has been conveniently set up from which we share water, and a makeshift arrangement for the electricity connection would not have been possible without the initiative of the local youth." He proudly declared that despite his meagre earnings, his children are graduates today. "When I came to Jadavpur from Mymensingh after partition in 1952 I was 14 years old. This entire place has changed in front of my eyes", he said with his eyes going misty. He looked up with a hint of a smile and said nothing when one of us asked him about how he felt at the loss of his skill. His looks said it all and we knew when to stop! □

2. There was this solitary figure walking towards us down the lane that leads to the gates of **Bengal Lamp**. Once within earshot distance we asked him which the main gate was. He measured us nonchalantly, turned around and pointing to a clump of trees at a distance said, “That is the gate through which I entered when I was a worker there”. He was **Jugal Prasad**, originally from Siwan, Bihar. He was a blower, who would blow into the bulbs to give them their shape. Sixteen years back when Bengal Lamp closed down, he earned monthly wages of Rs 1800 besides a minimum of Rs 400 by way of production bonus. Now, sixteen years later, as “security” of one of the apartment buildings, which shares the common boundary wall of the factory, he earns Rs 1200 per month for providing round the clock vigil. Buoyed by virtue of his immense experience and skill he reached Mumbai after Bengal Lamp was locked out. Unfortunately his newfound contractual job there was short lived since the furnace blew up. “Then I went to Chennai to work for the makers of Borosil, but the food did not suit me, more since I was getting old. I came back to the city where I had grown up expecting the company to reopen. It didn’t, and all my money is still locked up”, said Jugal even as a huge sigh escaped shattering the calmness of his seemingly composed exterior. “My son has found himself a job of a driver and does look after his family. I just have a few years left – hundreds of workers are no more”, he said with a distinct sign of resignation. □

3. **Narayan Das** came from his ancestral home in Orissa way back in 1955. For 26 years he toiled it out at **Sulekha Works**, a household name in West Bengal, manufacturing ink for fountain pens. When Sulekha was locked out, he was nearing the age of superannuation. Instead of going back to his village with a substantial amount that had accrued from his life’s savings, he had to sit on the pavement frying *pakor*s and sundry to make two ends meet. “Mine was the only shop in the vicinity – now there are a dozen of them”, Narayan said with a wry smile! He is too old now to go through the rigours of frying *pakor*s. He sits in a ramshackle wayside tea-stall with some jars of biscuits with his aging wife to help him out. “Two meals a day is all that we desire,” he said responding to the query as to how much income his vocation generates. His skeletal physique and laboured breathing indicates that he is not only old but could be sick too. But there was fire in his eyes when he spewed venom while speaking about the later day trade union ‘leaders’! “If only we were given our PF dues!” he said with a body language indicative of exasperation. “Even educated persons like Lalu of Bengal Lamp or Naren Kar of Sulekha are selling potatoes sitting on the pavements for over a decade now! Who cares for them?” he said looking straight at us through his high-powered glasses. When we told him that we would come back to him on some other day for some photographs, he gave us a toothless smile and said, “ Who knows whether you will be able to find me or not! Every morning my body and soul is getting increasingly demotivated. I don’t feel like getting up. Maybe very soon the end is going to come.” □

4. “I can tell, that you very well know how it is for us!” said **Kalidas Bhattacharya**, who was a worker at the **Sulekha Works** before it closed down in January 1989. “Since lockout was declared I earn a modest living by performing *puja* for families who have been the clients of my father, also a ‘*purut thakur*’ (a Brahmin performing various religious rites)”. On being asked as to whether he could earn enough to support his family, he pointed at his dress and said, “I am just back

from Gariahat where I supplied the lunch ‘dubba’ to a shop-owning family after collecting it from their home at Subhashgram. They give me Rs 500 per month and the cost of a railway monthly between Ballygunj and Subhashgram stations. You have to do such odd jobs to survive, you see!” He had worked at Sulekha for 27 years and just the other day was shocked to see that there were no longer any machines inside his erstwhile workplace. “Yes, with a lot of fanfare the factory is said to be reopening, but what about us? Will we get our dues? Someone said that a part of the factory premise will be handed over to promoters who have plans to build a residential high rise and instead of ink Sulekha will produce ballpoint refills and phenyl. But what about our unpaid dues?” he asked looking straight into our eyes. □

5. A large portrait of Lenin hung from the discoloured and damp wall. There was a polythene sheet draped over the bed. The patter of drain drops on the polythene sheet conveyed a loud and clear story! Perhaps to save us further embarrassment **Manu Sen**, an assembly line worker at the erstwhile **Beni Engineering** said, “It has been difficult to pay even the monthly rent of Rs 75 for quiet a few months – how can I dream of repairing the leaking roof spending thousands in the process?” His home was pretty near his workplace but now it is rather dilapidated in a state of utter disrepair with even the bared bricks on the wall outside showing signs of weathering. “You see that sewing machine? That is what feeds us these days”, Manu said. He had somehow married off his elder daughter but the younger, suffering from a nerve disease is like a walking skeleton – symptoms of malnutrition clearly evident in this 16-year-old. “See how she suffers? Who will believe that my father was a medical practitioner respected by each and every worker of Beni Engineering”, Manu said pointing at his father picture hanging beside the one of Lenin. “They have disconnected our electric meter. I could not pay the bills”, he said when he saw one of us glancing, perhaps by reflex action, towards the ceiling fan and tube light in this dark, hot and humid room. The rain outside and the gloom inside were mentally suffocating for even the brave-hearted. □

6. The framed but faded certificate which hung on the wall from which plasters were peeling off was just not a piece of paper. It was a symbol of pride for this skilled worker who is fighting, even if, a losing battle to arrange for a square meal a day. **Sisir Sarkar** was a viceman-fitter at the **Beni Engineering**, a skilled worker of great value to any engineering enterprise. “I took my diploma from ITI, Gariahat and faced a tough interview to get employed”, said Sisir rueing the fact that in spite of his acquired skills he could not get suitable re-employment to sustain his family when Beni locked out its gates. “I went to another state but there too the factory was closed down. When I returned, a neighbour gave me contacts and I worked as a male attendant at a Hospital for a few years. Since I lost that job, I am dependant on my son’s income for surviving”, Sisir said with misty eyes. He is better off than some of his ex-colleagues since he has an eight by eight room, which he can call his own home. Sitting in his home this experienced but now virtually de-skilled worker did not look up when he said, “I will never forget the day when I sent my elder daughter to her final Class X examination after offering her two biscuits and a glass of water!” □

7. Sitting on some folded gunny bags under a tree, just in front of Prabartak Jute Mill on BT Road, **Birjan Prasad** sells *khaini* (tobacco for chewing). He has been

doing this for the last 18 years now – since the day **Beni Engineering** dropped its shutters way back in 1987. He lives with a relative from and hence does not have to spend for his accommodation. “I earn at least Rs 500 per month these days, but previously it often crossed Rs 1000. I need at least three to four hundred rupees per month for my food and the rest I can send back home,” he said while talking about his family staying at his ancestral village home in Bihar. □

8. A brand of second-hand bricks is available for building construction in and around the Belgharia-Birati-Agarpara area. The brick is referred openly, like any brand name, as ‘**Mohini**’ bricks. Lakhs of such bricks have been pilfered from the Mohini Mills (No. 2) Ltd. Brick by brick the walls of the sheds, buildings and boundary have been dismantled and then heaped by the side of Belgharia Station on the Sealdah Main line. It was established way back in 1908 and when it was locked out it was a Central Government Undertaking managed by the National Textile Corporation Ltd. A household name for its dhotis, long cloth, saris, mosquito nets, bed sheets and shirting, Mohini Mills now is ‘supplying’ clandestine bricks, while its 2079 workers or their legal heirs wait for 8.5 crores dues. Interestingly, the West Bengal Government has recently notified that it has resumed the land on which Mohini Mills stands. 90 bighas of prime land within stones throwing distance from Belgharia station, which would in the near future be linked by the Kolkata Metro railway, is ideal for a huge residential enclave. Time will tell as to how the State Government will be using this resumed land and what responsibility it will take about the unpaid legal dues of the workers. □

9. **Sudheer Chandra Das** is waiting for his twenty six thousand rupees for more than 18 years now! He used to work in a factory whose foundation stone incidentally was laid by no less a person than Rabindra Nath Thakur, way back in 1934. **Basanti Cotton Mills**, set up by the Mitras, conjures up the spirit of the ‘swadeshi’-era. “The Goenkas took over from the Poddars in 1967, who had taken over from the Mitras sometime in the early 60’s. Basanti Cotton Mills later became one of the famous Swan Group of Mills”, said Das with a far away look. “I had been working in this Mill from 1955 and when it finally closed down in May ’87 I was earning about Rs 2100 per month. And now I am a hawker selling *gamchas* (hand woven cotton towels)” he said, sitting in his Ranibag labour-line room. He had earned enough to buy a piece of land and construct a small little house in his village in Nadia district where his wife and two sons live. He had married off his only daughter by selling off a portion of the land. “Things have changed so much. Believe me we were so happy when the factory was open. Besides our wages we had so many other benefits. Look at those shops! They had a steady stream of customers. Now, like the workers, they are struggling too,” said Das with a hint of empathy. Responding to what had been done about their legal dues he sounded angry when he said, “All the unions are the same. You would see them collecting subscriptions and special donations when we earned. They have done absolutely nothing about our legitimate demands or arrears. I had filed a case and in October 2003 the District Magistrate (Collector) was instructed to make arrangements for payment of my gratuity. I have run out of steam! Nothing has happened till then. There is no one to follow it up.” He spoke about the long drawn battle between the State Government and the Punjab National Bank regarding the land of Basanti Cotton Mill. He said he was not sure whether he would get anything before his death, which he thought, was

not too far away. He stared us in our eye and shot off a series of questions, “Why have most of the looms in West Bengal closed down? What is the use of sharing our experience? We remain in the margins of the society – for eighteen long years – what has anyone done for us?” We just had to look away. □

10. A leading wire manufacturing company had been locked out for almost 8 years. Some of the workers from this unit had regrouped and the well-attended meeting they had organised, with support from local citizens, was underway. The venue was right by the side of the busy BT Road – the ‘Barrackpur Trunk’ Road – passing through one of the most thriving industrial hubs of yester years. As if adding colour to the proceedings there stood a man selling his gas-filled balloons tied by strings to his machine on a cart. Just to engage him into a conversation I asked about how many balloons he lost everyday by accident. Like a natural philosopher he tugged at the taut strings to which the balloons were straining against and said, “These are there!” What he said next came as a sucker punch! “What can we do? We do not have any strings anymore. So the balloons have scattered in all directions.” He was from the same locked out factory and since he wanted to attend the meeting he had parked his cart nearby and did not take the usual route as on other days. “I have read the handbill and I am sure we will be able to do something,” he said sounding optimistic. □

11. “The nature of this intersection has changed beyond recognition. Previously there were hundreds of stalls and makeshift shops. From sunrise till late night, eating houses, vegetable producers-turned vendors and shops selling everything that the working population needed, made this Sukchar Morh a hubbub of activity. Now eight large and many more small units have closed down in the vicinity and the working population are in dire economic straits. So the problem of closed units is not for us – the directly affected workers – alone. What about the auto rickshaw operators? We now walk three kilometres instead of jumping on to a shuttling auto since even Rs. 3 is hard to come by!” said Gulab while imploring the locals to realise that the demands of workers from closed out units were not only just but also beneficial to the rest of the society. **Gulab Goyala**, from a local locked out industry, **Hindwire**, had around Rs.40, 000 of unpaid dues when his factory was locked out in 1998. He said, “Don’t be surprised! Sarkar-da, who was old and sick and unable to walk the streets for work died just last Sunday. The neighbours would feed this jobless hungry man. His legal dues amounted to Rs. 85,000. And he died without food or medicine!” How we hoped that the heart wrenching economics rendered by this ordinary worker could cut ice! “Bhaaion, where do you want to go? Back to Bihar/UP from where you had to run away as a child?” were his words as he ended his ‘speech’ at one of the preparatory meetings to the run up to the proposed ‘May Day Bhukha Michhil’. We learnt a lot and we spoke with many of Gulab’s co-workers telling them that we would come back to learn more from them. □

12. The huge Thermal Power Station had been shut down at Shyamnagar, North 24 Parganas. We were keen to take some photographs since we were sure that a closed down unit today could be a residential apartment tomorrow. And this was big! We skirted the boundary and approached it from the riverside. Local activists told us that there were security personnel galore and half a dozen Doberman guarded the huge area inside. We had to have a suitable escape route since we were not stealing any

property, we were told! Theft, in connivance with those in charge – earth to boiler parts – was rampant, it was alleged. This was ideally suitable for an exceptionally located riverside residential complex! Before we could complete shooting we were given the charge and the escape route, chosen with care, engulfed us in a maze of lanes through one of those clusters of riverside ‘jhopris’ beyond the control of the private security personnel. Later we heard from various sources that perhaps the Sahara Group was in the run to create a residential township in this industrial ‘fallow’ land! It was really big! We also came to know that in another nearby Cotton Mill, located similarly beside the river, negotiation was on to evict the workers from their quarters and to sell off the quarters to proper ‘promoters’ who would then get some lovely riverside apartments in place. It would help the ‘company’ financially and would also be a bane to those who would not be able to afford the expensive Sahara flats! It is a pity that the State Government too has actually given a green signal to such a proposal. It is ominous when one takes note of the fact that West Bengal Government has identified 1,36,000 bighas of land stuck up in locked and closed industries and naturally it is considering its ‘fair’ use! We sincerely hope that the Government will not embark on a project of ‘unfair’ land speculation in a big way. □

13. **Singheswar Ram** hailed originally from Muzaffarpur, Bihar. He was a highly skilled worker in the hide separating section of **National Tannery**. “Separating one layer of hide from another required good eyesight and high skills”, Singheshwar said with a faint twinkle in his aging eyes. “In 1989, when we used to get our wages, I earned about Rs 1700 a month, and maintaining a six-member family was no big deal”, said Singheshwar whose son now works in another leather factory and earns Rs. 1000 per month. To supplement this poor income Singheshwar does some odd jobs for a pittance. Ram received his provident fund dues in 1989 but he is yet to receive his gratuity sum even after 13 years of the closure. “The Government has purchased this unit but has not opened it for 13 years! Why doesn’t it give us our dues? Just a few months back the Left Front Government has removed all machines and broken down even the sheds from our factory. Is it wrong to hope that they will now give us our dues?” he said clinging perhaps to a hope that he would receive his gratuity from National Tannery and pay off his loans in the near future. “Otherwise I have to sell whatever little land I have in Bihar before I die!” were his parting remarks. □

14. **Nimai Adhikari**, along with his father, was initially a landless labourer tilling some one else’s land as a tenant at Dhapa – Kolkata’s waste dumping area in the eastern periphery – where the organic landfill was and is ideally exploited for supplying almost 30% of fresh vegetables to the city markets. “When I got the job of a helper at the **National Tannery** in 1968, my family members felt that our hard times were over! I worked very hard and in two years I was no longer a helper. Though it sounds like a fairy tale, even in those days I earned almost a thousand rupees per month”, said Nimai almost smiling as he recalled the good times he had been through. In 1982 he was transferred to the shoe division and by 1989 he was earning to the tune of Rs 1800 per month. “We were so proud about National Tannery. Our two own hands were making Bata shoes like ‘North Star’ and ‘Quo Vadis’! We worked hard, we never stopped production, market was strong – but still the company turned sick. How? Who was to blame?” asked Nimai, almost to himself. He hated the months during which the Committee of Management ran the

Company on a co-operative basis. “After the closure I had to go back to my land to try and earn whatever I could. It was so very difficult after so many years. My two daughters had to go to work in a local bulb factory”, he said rather apologetically. He had to sell a portion of their homestead land to marry off two of his three daughters. “Then I got sick. I could no longer work as hard as before. The doctor said I had blood sugar and a nerve disease. I have given our farmland on rent. My son and my daughter help me to run the family. I do not know what will happen when my youngest daughter gets married. How will I manage without the Rs 600 she gives me every month”, said Nimai like one possessed. He had a vacant look in tandem. □

15. **Jatiram Mandal** was an expert moulder at the **Aluminium Manufacturing Company**, popularly referred to as AMCO. AMCO was famed initially for its aluminium utensils for domestic use. Later it acquired a name for producing aeroplane and helicopter parts. “I joined in the year 1963 and remained in employment till 1985 when the factory was locked out. I distinctly remember those few days in mid-1987 when with a lot of fanfare one Anup Dhar, who had bought the company, declared that the factory would reopen. But nothing happened. I had no other option but to take to agriculture”, said Jatiram sitting on the steps of his home in the Rajarhat area to the north-east of Kolkata. For 15 years this skilled worker toiled away on his land by the side of his homestead with help from some hired hands. “Now see for yourself what has happened to my agricultural land! The West Bengal Government has taken it away for a pittance. They are building the New Town, a Mega City, and they will not allow us to sell our land directly to the developers and promoters. I lost my job earlier, and now I am losing my land”, said this worker turned peasant who is now struggling as a helper of a construction worker that too when he does get a chance. “I am being repeatedly deprived of my livelihood. Whom do I blame? Who cares for people like us?” said Jatiram Mandal as he walked away with his hands firmly clasped behind his back. The plans of building multi-storeyed apartments at AMCO made Jatiram jobless. The current paradigm of development catering to the dreams a privileged few who would come to occupy these city extension projects put an end to the aspirations of Jatiram’s, and several others’ peasant self.

16. We were walking along the crowded streets of Belgharia, in the northeastern part Kolkata, once bustling with large and famed industries like Mohini Mills (NTC), Beni Engineering, and others. Our tableau was ahead and a few of us were distributing leaflets as a rearguard. Feeling a light touch on my elbow I turned back to find a frail smiling man who wanted the leaflet. He looked into my eyes and said, “I am a worker of a locked-out unit, too.” Pointing at his meagre wares spread out on the roadside, he said rather shyly, “I sit there!” Embarrassed for having passed him by unintentionally and touched by his interest in what we had to say, I stood a while and asked him about his unit. He was from a composite steel mill at Belur, Howrah, locked out almost ten years back. When I told him that there were quite a few workers from that unit campaigning from the tableau his eyes lit up and without a backward glance he ran towards the tableau. I stood there guarding his ‘shop’, while the warm reunion unfolded in front of my eyes. It was almost five years since they had met! He came back beaming and promptly promised that he would join the Bhukha Michhil on May Day when workers from locked out units would take to the streets of Kolkata. He did keep his promise! □

17. On May Day 2005, they came in twos and threes. They came in dozens. Workers from locked out industries spread far and wide. They were not obliged to go to the May Day meeting at Shahid Minar organised jointly by all the left Central Trade Unions since their issue was not on the day's agenda. No one, these days, ask them to attend, maybe since they are not deemed to be workers any more! They had not heard about *Daabi Mancha* earlier, but they knew that all the 13 demands being pressed for were related to them. So they came. So did a couple of hundred seemingly 'unrelated' members of the civil society to express their solidarity. They probably felt that quite a few of the 13 demands could be pressed home without much 'pressure' on the cash strapped State Government. And they all joined the May Day Bhukha Michhil – with banners, colourful posters and full throated in their response to the 13 demands of the day. The grand total – between eleven and fifteen hundred – was immaterial. It was a hot and humid Sunday afternoon! What was important is that we got in touch with hundreds and hundreds of hitherto 'unknown' workers from scores and scores of locked out industries who were not only suffering but were also trying to come out of the rut they have been pushed into, and fight for their just and legal demands. □

18. **Balai Parui** was a highly skilled worker of **Eastern Paper Mill**. He was a fitter and an expert in the dynamic balancing of paper machines. Dynamic balancing is not a job that any fitter can do. It requires special skill. At the time of closure in 1986, he earned a salary to the tune of Rs. 3000 per month. "My income was enough and everything seemed to be sailing smoothly. After closure, arranging for two square meals a day seemed to be a Herculean task" observed Balai. He lived in a two-roomed accommodation in Pragati Pally on Jessore Road, Dum Dum. After the closure of the factory he rented out one of the rooms to another household and now earns Rs. 600 as rent. "Presently my son is working for a local cable operator and earns Rs. 1500 per month. In 1990 I set up a shop, stocking *lungi*, bath towels, slippers, etc. The average profit doesn't exceed Rs. 500 per month" he said. Balai's health is failing these days. He suffers from diabetes, heart ailment and fading vision. His wife is also not keeping well. "Frankly there is no value of my life any more. When the head of the family can not earn, who is going to pay heed to even his advice?" remarked Balai rather cynically. □

19. While the state of affairs pertaining to employment of women in industries, in and around Kolkata is grim, the 'Park Avenue' girls at **Siddhartha Apparels** did deserve special mention. No more now. After 2002 that too has become history. They were the ones who stitched together the famous 'Park Avenue' shirts, marketed by Raymond, working with zest and involvement. No wonder since they would earn to the tune of Rs. 150 per day besides the usual PF, ESI, Gratuity and 20% bonus! "We were a happy lot and we worked with enthusiasm", said Pushpa Pal when we met a group of about 15 female workers in front of the closed gate of Siddhartha Apparels. At the onset shirts from this modern and mechanised unit were exported to Germany when duty exemption was almost 70%. Later when such exemptions were removed, 'Park Avenue' shirts marketed by Raymond was their staple brand. "The management wants to reopen the factory, but before that they would like to transform us from wage workers to contractual workers. They are saying openly that sooner all of us 'resign' more the chances of reopening early", said Malati Kundu.

There were 169 permanent and 46 casual women working at this unit. “Some of us have to work as hospital attendants and maid servants but most of us are jobless. The economy of our families is in shambles”, said the likes of Manisha Purkait or Dipali Chowdhury who come to inspect the factory once in a while and almost invariably notice signs of some clandestine work being carried out within the premise perhaps with outside contractual workers. “We are determined to fight though our number is shrinking. This closure we are certain is to convert protected workers to bonded labour,” said Sumita Chakraborty with great conviction. □

20. **Ambika Majhi**, now well past 70, sells *khaini* on the roadside very near the gate of the factory in which he was a worker. **Kolay Biscuit** celebrates Silver Jubilee of its closure this year (2005). He had worked for 28 years after having joined the company, fresh from Bihar, at the age of 24. “You must be remembering Lacto Bonbon lozenges? It was one of the most popular brands till mid-70’s? I worked in that department!” said Ambika running his hands through the white flowing beard while his eyes glittered as it does when one traverses a long forgotten path down memory lane. However *khaini* has been sustaining him for 24 years now. “My factory is gone and now they say it is the turn of my home. I have been staying in ‘Batli Sau-er Bagan’ but it seems that we will get evicted since the slum is going to make way for big buildings!” said Ambika and a sigh escaped subjectivising his feelings. Back in 1980 he had an assured earning of more than Rs 900. “I just have about Rs 11000 left from what I got from my Provident Fund. Someone has bought Kolay Biscuit and they are breaking it down. I cannot express how I feel! They will give us more money – 1 crore to be divided among 900 ex-workers – but did they have to break it down?” he asked with a tinge of sadness which weighed down heavily on all those present. □

21. **Bholanath Kundu** used to work in the Packaging Division of **Kolay Biscuit**. He is in his mid-60’s and has some serious problems with his heart. “I cannot go to a chest specialist and so every month I visit the Homoeopathic Hospital at Salt Lake. Rs 150 per month takes care of my medicine bill,” said Bholanath rather shyly for his age. Not looking at us he said, “Our elder son is an alcoholic. The youngest is physically challenged, but he too is an alcoholic and he begs for alms to sustain himself. Our family now is made up of our grand daughter and the two of us. I sell potato on the streets. Selling a gunny bag of potato leaves a profit of Rs30.” They live in a makeshift shelter by the side of the train line and even to repair it he has to spend Rs. 500-1000 at least once a year. He signed off when he looked up and said, “Yes, we are still alive!” □

22. “I had joined **Kolay Biscuit** in 1966. At that time many from Orissa came to work in the bakeries and biscuit factories in West Bengal. I was from Basudebpur in Bhadrak District of Orissa. I was among the large group of Oriya workers who left Britannia Company and came over to Kolay Biscuits,” said **Harekrishna Mishra**. He was one of those workers who were closely associated with the CPI (M). The Belegghata Local Committee of CPI (M), since its inception, and up to mid-80’s, had such workers in its fold. Throughout the 70’s Harekrishna was at the front of all political activities in this area. As a result he along with some of his colleagues had to stay away from the factory and from his Kolkata home between 1972 and 1977 like thousands of other CPI (M) activists during this period. He became a party

member in 1974 and remained so till 1992. Interestingly his membership was not renewed since by then he had started expressing his strongest reservations about the manner in which some of the party leaders and trade unionists were out to please the owners of Kolay Biscuits to remain in their good books. “Now I live at Kailash Bose Street in Central Kolkata and as means of living some of us have teamed up to cook food during marriage ceremonies and also serve the food,” said Harekrishna with a defiant look. “The way they treated us that day was shameful. For 15 months the workers were asked to clean the premise of Kolay Biscuit and help in maintenance and we did so with all seriousness against a daily wage of Rs 40. Finally on 3 September 1997 when the Chief Minister and dignitaries came to start production we were not allowed to enter the factory. Was this the same party for which we were prepared even to give our blood?” asked Harekrishna and one knew that the fire within him was still burning. □

23. **Anando Ganguly** joined **Metal Box** as a fitter in the year 1956 and within 3 years became a permanent worker. “I had been promoted and at the time of closure I was earning to the tune of Rs 6000 per month. Quite a few of us refused to shift to Government jobs since during our time the salary at companies like Metal Box was much better, the benefits in cash and kind were innumerable and one did enjoy a better social status and respect. Can you believe that?” said Anando almost quizzically. After the closure he took three consecutive jobs in small container-manufacturing units. “All of them closed down after one or two years! Can you beat that?” he said almost in triumph! His wife fell down and fractured the head of the femur bone and now Anando has to stay at home to do the needful. “My son works in a automobile company and his ESI coverage saved us from further problems,” he said with a longish sigh. “We could not believe that a factory like Metal Box could close down and remain closed. These days I am a petty salesman distributing whatever comes my way for a commission – be it tea or plastic bags,” Anando said while standing in ‘his’ factory amidst the rusted idle machines many covered by bushes. Pointing at a building, where the private security men stay these days, he told us that it had earlier been their canteen and recalled how they were given a lavish lunch for 31 paise during the heydays of the company. He remembered the costly Rolex watch, with his name and number embossed on it, presented to him when he completed 20 years of service at Metal Box. “How can they boast about industrialisation when they stand as spectators while hundreds of factories like ours get locked out?” Anando said with discernible tinge of exasperation. □

24. Tapan Chakraborty used to work at the garage in **Metal Box**. He was the generator operator at the time of closure. **Anima Chakraborty**, his wife said “My husband used to work with a courier company after the company closed down. At times he would cycle to as far off as Dakshineswar to deliver packets. Those were hard times but nothing compared to what we had in store! The doctors told us that he had cancer. We sold our ornaments and took loans from family members and friends and he was operated upon. But we could not save him. We have nothing left.” She earns a pittance as a tutor and somehow survives with some help from well wishers. As per rules Anima was supposed to get Rs 500 from the State Government as financial assistance being a widow of a worker of a locked out industry. For the first few months she did get it but then it stopped. “They say that my file has been lost. I have gone there repeatedly but to no avail. I think they are doing it on purpose.

Actually feeling harassed I had given a lady officer a piece of my mind and I am sure she did not like it. What do they expect me to do? They have lost my file. Will I have to beg to them?” said a visibly resilient Anima. One cannot be a woman who protests to get things done in a Government office! □

25. In the Swadeshi era the movement for boycotting foreign goods, including foreign textile, was magnificently complemented on the industry front when a number of Cotton Mills were set up and Basanti, Bangodaya, Annapurna, Sri Durga, Mohini were high up on this list. Dozens of such cotton textile mills, which came up in Undivided Bengal, were aimed not only to reap profit. The mill owners, it may sound unsound, had other social aims too. This is where the unemployed youth would work for gain. After partition members of refugee colonies secured employment. Then there was an effort to provide economic independence to women and hence mills like Basanti had crèches even 70 years back. Most of these mills supported setting up of consumer co-operatives to offer workers with fair price shops. Economic support for children’s education was easily available from the management. It was surprising to hear the emotional outbursts of surviving old timers when they recalled the economic and other support offered by the company for meeting the expenses of religious festivals, social gatherings and special celebrations which were organised invariably within the campus of the mills. It was really astounding to hear these senior citizens recount the various humanitarian responsibilities over and above the economic benefits accorded by the various mill owners of bygone eras. What has happened during the last few decades, which has precipitated a crisis in the lives of the lakhs of workers? There has been commonly uttered concepts like ‘social responsibilities of workers and their preparedness to make sacrifices’; ‘assurance by the government to become more human’. The symptoms of destabilisation of the economic equilibrium of the region around the locked out industries have become so tell tale. The State Government with great conviction talks about poverty being a matter of the past and prophetically announces fulfilment along the road ahead. The jobless and hungry workers and their relatives stare blankly and ask weakly – “ Who goes ahead and who falls behind?” □

III

In this section the state of affairs in 14 industrial units have been discussed in brief.

Sickness Profiles – I

National Tannery: A Story Which Stands Out

1. **National Tannery** was set up in 1905. The two doyens of Indian nationalism – Acharya P C Ray, the famous Professor of Chemistry and research scholar who championed the cause of indigenous industries competing bravely with the capital intensive British companies, and Dr. Nil Ratan Sarkar, a legendary physician of the period – took lead roles to establish it.
2. Interestingly, M K Gandhi visited the **National Tannery** in Calcutta and with keen interest saw the process of manufacturing chrome leather. He marked how salted cowhides were limed to take off hair and how dyeing was done.
3. The company flourished in the mid-1950s under the stewardship of Sanjay Sen, a Bengal based industrialist.
4. Later on Sanjay Sen became the owner of the factory.
5. Products of **National Tannery** earned reputation worldwide.
6. Its footwear division was established in 1969. Other than the Bata India Ltd, **National Tannery** was the only factory in Eastern India, which had a footwear division. It used to produce ‘North Star’, ‘Quo Vadis’ and other value-adding products for Bata. Leather and chemicals were supplied by Bata and for each pair of ‘North Star’ shoe, for example, Rs 9.50 was paid to **National Tannery**.
7. The Company started turning sick from early ‘70’s owing to lack of initiative of the management and alleged financial irregularities. There was no ‘proverbial’ labour unrest or dearth of market whatsoever.
8. In 1974 IRCI (later known as IRBI and presently IIBI) made some investments in **National Tannery** on pledging shares to different financial institutions. The Board of Directors included some representatives from those financial institutes but was chaired by Mr. Sanjay Sen, during whose regime in the pre-IRCI period, the Company’s loans rose to a whopping Rs.9 crores. It was a peculiar norm adopted by the IRCI. Working capital, term loans and even cash loans were liberally sanctioned to the erstwhile managements of sick companies, in spite of the fact that the same management was responsible for the economic doldrums. In the first 4 months of 1983 (January to April) workers did not get their wages.
9. In May 1983, IRBI took over the management of **National Tannery**.
10. However in 1985 IRBI dissolved the Board of Management and virtually abandoned the Company. The last full time Chairman, J G Kumarmangalam, formerly Chairman, Coal India, agreed to act as part-time chairman on being requested by the West Bengal Government. During this period, **National Tannery** survived only on job work. Bata was the main customer. The State Government declared **National Tannery** as a ‘relief undertaking’ to insulate the sick company from the creditors who were thus prevented from going into legal action including liquidation suits. Workers did not get even half of their wages during the period. Mr. Kumarmangalam died in 1987.
11. During late ‘80’s, with the Janata Dal-led Government at the centre and Sri Arun Nehru the Union Commerce Minister, the State Trading Corporation proposed to set up a production unit at **National Tannery**. Since the Company already had the basic facilities, the proposal submitted to the West Bengal Government was pretty rational. Strangely the State Finance Minister, for unknown reasons, refused to grant an appointment to SC Sen, Chairman STC. Much later, in the year 1997, West Bengal Government told the Calcutta High Court, that **National Tannery**, which had all the potential to become viable, could not be reopened owing to the lack of a suitable entrepreneur.

12. The NTCL was referred to the Board for Industrial Finance and Reconstruction in 1989. The BIFR, in the absence of any rehabilitation scheme, put it on liquidation. The Reserve Bank of India in more than one study concluded that more than 80 per cent of companies became sick due to 'management deficiency' and seldom due to militant trade unionism. Management deficiency very often was in content financial mismanagement including siphoning of funds.

13. On 10 July 1990 Calcutta High Court ordered the sale of the Company as a going concern. A Committee of Management consisting of 5 workers' representatives was formed under the Official Liquidator to run the Company during the interim period.

14. The Committee of Management was formed without bothering for the opinion of general workers and employees. It consisted of 2 from CITU, 2 from INTUC and 1 from Officers' Association. Union election did not take place for a long time. Self-proclaimed leaders of the union who had seized union leadership incurred wrath of the common workers and employees. There was no proper accounting of job work, month after month. Employees and workers did not get even Rs.300 to Rs. 400 per month. Despite repeated protest and deputation given to the Labour Minister, West Bengal there was no result.

15. Ultimately the workers went to Calcutta High Court against the Official Liquidator and the Committee of Management making various allegations of corruption.

16. The High Court admitted the petition of the workers, appointed a Special Officer and ordered an enquiry. As a matter of revenge, the canteen was closed without any notice and workers' salaries were also stopped. Customers of the company for job work were asked to remove their materials.

17. In May 1991, the Committee of Management closed down the factory. During a 10-month period after formation of the Committee of Management workers did not get their salary for 7 months. During the period regular work had been stopped other than sundry job work. 5 machines of the Footwear Division were also removed. The five-man body pasted a notice at the factory, declaring lockout. This was for first time when two labour unions, belonging to CITU and INTUC, had shut down any establishment in India. Most probably, there is no recurrence of it to date.

18. On 12 September 1991, the Calcutta High Court ordered that the canteen should be reopened, work to be started and salary to be paid from February 1991 to August 1991. The High Court also ordered that all machines removed from the factory should have to be returned and reinstalled. But this order was never obeyed. The account presented by the Special Officer to the Court revealed financial irregularities and a gap of Rs. 8 lakhs during the 10 month period when the Committee of Management ran the factory. The Calcutta High Court ordered that Rs.8 lakhs should be given to the employees as salary arrear. But this order was also disobeyed. The Chairman of the Committee of Management was the General Secretary of CITU-led union.

19. Ultimately, by order of the Court, notice was released in the newspaper for sale of the Company.

20. The State Government offered to acquire the **National Tannery** on liquidation, in response to the said notification for auction by the High Court, on 11 March 1991. The State Government submitted to the Court that the West Bengal Government was prepared to take over the factory at a price of Rs. 50 lakhs. But the High Court was unwilling as the price was exceptionally low.

21. Its advocates in a reply submitted that the Government of West Bengal would purchase **National Tannery** as "a going concern", agreeing to take over the

responsibility of paying workers' dues amounting to nearly Rs 3.5 crores but declined to increase wages. Workers who were present in the High Court appealed to the Court to accept the LF Government's proposal. The Government representative went on record stating that the government would sit with the workers and solve the issue of outstanding dues.

22. By that time **National Tannery Bnachao Committee** (Save National Tannery Committee) was formed comprising of 305 out of 365 workers. The workers severed links with CITU or INTUC.

23. On 18.09.1991 the Hon'ble Justice Ruma Pal passed an order directing sale of **National Tannery** in favour of the Government at a cost of Rs.50 lacks to be deposited by the State of West Bengal and the Hon'ble Justice was, however, pleased to direct the Government that the workers dues shall be settled in consultation with the workers. However till date the Government has not gone into any negotiation with the workers.

24. The government paid Rs 5 lakhs being the first instalment of Rs 50 lakhs and another Rs 10 lakhs thereafter. But then it stopped paying instalments, as assured. The Official Liquidator then moved the High Court for forfeiture of Rs 15 lakhs. It was only then that the advocate-on-record appeared before the High Court, seeking time to pay the remaining Rs 35 lakhs.

25. The State Government took over **National Tannery** in September 1992.

26. Since then, besides the 50 lakhs it had invested initially, the State Government has paid Rs 3500 to each worker incurring another 15 lakhs in the process. This despite the commitment in High Court that it will pay 3.5 crores by way of outstanding dues to workers of **National Tannery**.

27. In March 1994, the State Finance Minister, Dr Ashim Dasgupta, stated in the 'Economic Review' that the State Government had bought National Tannery. However, **National Tannery** has not opened till date.

28. On 10.11.1994 the Government informed the Hon'ble High Court that a sum of Rs.15 lacks i.e. Rs.3500 per head have been paid to the workers and that the factory will be reopened soon.

29. The STC offer apart, Basanta Saha, owner of Amicos Chem (India) offered to take over National Tannery. He made a commitment before Justice Ashim Kumar Banerjee of HC of Calcutta on 4 July 2003 to "pay a sum of Rs 1.76 crores for the assets in addition to Rs 65 lakhs to the workers". The State Advocate General did not show any interest about the proposal. He stated in the High Court that the "tannery unit was located in a congested area. Hence, the said tannery, despite sincere efforts of the state government cannot be reopened at the place where it is situated. The state government has now decided to go for a joint venture". The AG was actually referring to a Supreme Court order (M C Mehta case) for relocation of such factories from residential areas or around. But there was a decade long gap between the purchase of National Tannery by the State Government and the SC verdict.

30. With the operation of tanneries being specifically prohibited in this area beyond February 2002, as per Supreme Court order, State Government proposed before the Hon'ble Court for utilization of the assets of this unit, in an environmental-friendly industrial unit to be established by resourceful entrepreneur/business house duly selected by State Government. It was also submitted that the Government would be agreeable to work in such a joint venture project and also agreeable to compensate those workers who may be found not capable of being absorbed on health ground or otherwise.

31. Industrial Reconstruction Department has since considered that it has no expertise in the promotion of industrial investments in the State.

32. NTCL was transferred to the Commerce & Industries Department of this Government, which wants to set up a Garments Park. NTCL has free-hold land measuring 7 acres plus leasehold lands measuring 4 acres at 19 Canal South Road under Tangra Police Station. The present market value of these is conservatively estimated at Rs 50 crores.

33. December 15, 2004 witnessed an unprecedented scene at Tangra in east Kolkata. Machines and equipment of **National Tannery** were being dismantled or broken into pieces.

34. One of the machines, thus taken away, was sold at over Rs 1.2 crores, according to a very reliable source. This money will go to the state exchequer. This is nearly double that the state government incurred so far towards the **National Tannery** and its staff members. □

Sickness Profiles - II

Kolay Biscuit: 25 Glorious Years Of Closure

1. Even in the 70's the unparalleled superstar of Bengali film world, Uttam Kumar, appeared in the advertisements for **Kolay Biscuit**. Both were household names even if for different reasons.
2. The owner of **Kolay Biscuit** was Jagannath Kolay, a Congressman who once became a Central Minister.
3. The Kolay's were a Zamindar family hailing from the Bankura district of West Bengal. This family took keen interest in industries and one by one set up factories like Nafar Chand Jute Mill, Kolay Steel and **Kolay Biscuit** beside some other lesser-known factories. Kolay Market, next to the Sealdah Station, is the largest wholesale vegetable market in West Bengal.
4. Family squabbles resulting in fragmentation of the property followed by ups and downs in the power corridors at both the Central and the State, resulted in serious trouble for these otherwise viable industries. Inability to withstand increasing competition and the failure to invest for timely modernisation resulted in sickness and closure of all the industries once owned by the mighty Kolays.
5. **Kolay Biscuit** was locked out on 17 October 1980 right in the middle of Durga Puja that year.
6. It was sent to the BIFR, which on 11 August 1991 sent the unit to the High Court for liquidation.
7. The *Shramik Karmachari Sanghati* Committee (meaning Workers and Employees Unity Committee) a non-affiliated body, on behalf of the workers of **Kolay Biscuit** appealed to the High Court for payment of their outstanding dues, and the same was accepted on 21 April 1995.
8. Later, in July 1996, in response to an appeal by the *Sanghati* Committee, the High Court issued a sale notice for **Kolay Biscuit** as a going concern.

9. At the auction in August 1996, Indrani Soft Drinks was the lone bidder who brought the unit for Rs 67 lakhs when the valuation was just ten thousand rupees less.
10. The **Kolay Biscuit** Company (1996) was set up with Nani Gopal Das, Bimal Krishna Kar and Kamal Krishna Kar as its three Directors.
11. United Bank of India's appeal for sale cancellation at the High Court was dismissed in December 1996.
12. The new owners took over possession of the factory in December 1996.
13. Renovation work started in January 1997 while by August in the same year trial production runs were started. Biscuits thus produced were distributed free in the adjoining locality.
14. A memorandum of understanding was signed on 25 July 1997 between the workers and the new management in which it was stated that (a) able bodied workers would be re-employed; (b) when need for more workers would arise at a later point of time, such workers would be employed from the families of retired workers; (c) Rs 1200 would be given to each worker and as a result 300 workers were paid the said amount by October 1997.
15. On 3 September 1997 the then Chief Minister Jyoti Basu formally 'inaugurated' the factory in presence of a galaxy of political bigwigs. The list on that day included Ajit Panja (MP), Santosh Mohan Dev (Central Minister) and Manab Mukherjee, Subhash Chakraborty, Mrinal Banerjee – all State Ministers.
16. Within days of this 'inauguration', Greater Calcutta Gas Supply Authority, a Government of West Bengal undertaking, stopped the supply of gas to **Kolay Biscuit** as a result of which the unit could not start its commercial production.
17. Till date it has not produced another biscuit.
18. West Bengal Industrial Development Bank sanctioned Rs 33 lakhs for purchase of new machines with which to start the factory. The machines were ready for production.
19. On behalf of the workers, *Sanghati* Committee submitted a claim to the Official Liquidator for the arrear salary for the month of October 1980, the bonus for the same year and outstanding gratuity payment.
20. United Bank of India, a secured creditor, appealed and the Supreme Court on 20 August 2000 cancelled the 1996 sale of **Kolay Biscuit** to the Indrani Soft Drinks, further ordering for revaluation of property and fresh sales proceeds.
21. Consequently on 28 November 2003 **Kolay Biscuit** was put to auction and Comsource Data System, Information and Technology paid up Rs 1.01 crore to take possession of the company.
22. In July 2004 the factory sheds, buildings and machines were dismantled. □

Sickness Profiles - III

Eastern Paper Mill: Locked Out But Open

1. **Eastern Paper Mill** is situated on the VIP Road – which takes one to the Kolkata Airport – near Ultadanga at Dakshindnari.
2. Paper machineries were manufactured at this unit.
3. Upwards of 30 leading paper mills are locked out or closed in West Bengal, including the famous Titagarh Paper Mill and the Bengal Paper Mill.

4. The cardinal reason for sickness in the Paper Mills of the State emanates from the paucity of raw materials, bamboo, which stopped coming in from Assam since the AASU movement. Factually the modernisation and appropriate mechanisation of these Paper Mills, which could have utilised locally available alternative raw materials for manufacture of paper, did not come about.
5. Most of the Paper Mills in West Bengal, which almost invariably were sent to the BIFR, were granted approval for huge investments for revival. In many cases Banks and Financial Institutions invested according to revival schemes but nothing worthwhile evolved.
6. **Eastern Paper Mill** was sent to the BIFR in 1989.
7. In mid-1991, the Company sold 42 kathas of prime land adjacent to the premise to one Ganesh Prasad on the plea that they had to mobilise resources for depositing the promoter's contribution related to the Revival Scheme to be submitted to the BIFR. The management also promised to pay two months wages to all the workers, though they coughed up a month's salary later.
8. The Management of **Eastern Paper Mill** appealed for permission to sell its land but in absence of any viable revival package BIFR ordered for winding up on 12 November 1991.
9. **Eastern Paper Mill** appealed against this order of the BIFR at the AAIFR, which on 26 August 1993 ordered for liquidation.
10. The owners of this unit went to the High Court and filed a writ petition against the liquidation order passed by the AAIFR. The Calcutta High Court dismissed the appeal on 3 August 1994.
11. The Company once again moved the High Court against the winding up order passed by the BIFR. The Calcutta High Court dismissed the appeal on 29 July 1997.
12. On behalf of the workers, *Sangrami* Shramik Union (meaning struggling workers union) moved the Company Appeal Court, which consequently, on 9 August 1999, dismissed the appeal of the management for being allowed to sell all property including land.
13. The *Sangrami* Shramik Union appealed to the Kolkata High Court demanding for winding up of **Eastern Paper Mill** as per clause 529A of the Company Act. Interestingly, in connection with the said petition, the High Court has allowed the management to sell the land of this factory in what now is a prime residential area to the north-northeast of the city.
14. As per High Court order dated 1 February 2005, the Company was permitted to sell only the surplus land and the outstanding dues of its secured creditors would have to be paid. However the said order did not mention anything specifically about the outstanding dues of the workers.
15. The Management of **Eastern Paper Mill** had informed the High Court that they would get Rs 24 crores by selling the land while the total workers dues including due wages, bonus, gratuity and Rs 45000 to 200 workers as VRS stood at Rs 4.86 crores.
16. However between 1996 and 2002 every single mou between the Company and the workers it had been mentioned that the total outstanding labour dues stood at Rs 11.63 crores.
17. It was further ordered that the sum of money be deposited with the two Special Officers appointed by the High Court.
18. **Eastern Paper Mill** has 28 bighas of land of which sheds, buildings and machines occupy 11 bighas. Whether it is the Company or the UBI, which is going to dismantle and remove these machines, is sparking off a lot of controversies at present.

19. The Regional Provident Fund Commissioner in connection with PF default has attached a little over 4 bighas of land belonging to the Company.
20. There is a three-storied incomplete construction adjacent to the factory, which in 1979-80 had come up for a tissue paper plant. It was said that **Eastern Paper Mill** had an order for Rs 35 crores worth of tissue paper for which UBI sanctioned a loan of Rs 7 crores. Presently the outstanding dues have gone up to Rs 15 crores and the building remains unfinished.
21. The Company had started a foundry at Narayanpur, which also had been locked out long back.
22. Financial assistance of Rs 500 per month given by the West Bengal Government to workers in locked out industries (FAWLOI Scheme) have not reached the toilers at **Eastern Paper Mill**. This despite the favourable decision of the Scrutiny Committee of the FAWLOI Scheme. The concerned department has opined that Eastern Paper Mill has not been properly locked out as per law. It is held that the company is virtually open. The workers have no work, no wages but were required to give their attendance every day at the main gate between 2001 and 2003.
23. On 12 March 2001 a landmark fiasco was enacted in front of the Main Gate of the **Eastern Paper Mill**. From a dais especially set-up for the purpose, the West Bengal Finance Minister Ashim Dasgupta in presence of other State Ministers including Mrinal Banerjee, Subhash Chakraborty, the owners and trade union leaders said, "Come to the Writers Building tomorrow itself and take Rs 50 lakhs. Give some money to the workers and open the factory right away!"
24. The headlines of leading dailies applauded the 'reopening' of a closed unit after 11 long years. It was stated that with the co-operation of the West Bengal Government, Rs 21 crores would be mobilised by selling land and the owners would contribute Rs 70 lakhs.
25. The factory did not open; the 550 workers did not get back their work or any of their outstanding dues. Moreover caught up in a controversy about its status, the workers were denied the monthly financial assistance of Rs 500.
26. Presently the workers have united again. They are fed up with promises and assurances of revival. They insist that their outstanding dues be paid and they do not care any more whether the sum is made available by selling the land or through other means. □

Sickness Profiles - IV

Dunbar Cotton Mills: Resuming Land – Government Style

Dunbar Cotton Mill had remained locked out for 19 years. Locked out remained the legal dues of the workers too.

On 28 June 2005, Land and Land Reforms Officer, Barrackpur-1, issued a notice, which was pasted at the gates of **Dunbar Cotton Mills**. The notice informed all concerned that all efforts to hand over or take possession of the 56.919 Acres of land, previously belonging to Dunbar Cotton Mills, was illegal since the said land has been resumed by the West Bengal Government as per Rule 6(3) of West Bengal Zamindari Abolition Act vide Order No. 1979 LR/5M-2/05 GE. (M) dated 6.6.2005 of the Land and Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal.

Some time prior to this effort of the Government of West Bengal to resume the land, there was considerable tension following the attempts of one Mahesh Agarwal who on behalf of Emtec Dealers tried to take possession of the land belonging to the **Dunbar Cotton Mills**. The workers were pretty apprehensive about the possibility of eviction from the labour barracks. The local Legislator, Haripat Biswas, stood solidly beside the workers and came out with scathing attack on the role of all the trade unions and his own party. At this point of time the District Superintendent of Police had given commitment that the workers would not be evicted and till all arrears were paid to the workers no one would be allowed to take away anything from the factory premise. To protect the rights of the workers, 'Dunbar Bnachao Committee' (Save Dunbar Committee) was formed which, with full support of the local Legislator, demanded that nothing but industries would be allowed in the premise of **Dunbar Cotton Mills**.

Under such circumstances, this latest move by Government of West Bengal to resume the said land has thrown open the issue into utter confusion.

Workers in the past had been told that a new owner had taken over **Dunbar Cotton Mills** and that all arrears and dues would be cleared within a month. Nothing happened even after three months. Similarly they had witnessed the efforts of one V P Sarkhel who had submitted a counterfeit cheque while taking over the factory and before the fraud was detected, removed materials and machinery worth a crore of rupees and cut down and removed quiet a few trees from within the premise. Later, however, the police arrested him.

Presently the owners of above-mentioned Emtec Dealers have moved Court in connection with taking possession of the land in question.

The workers are, perhaps understandably, apprehensive about getting their legitimate dues.□

Sickness Profiles - V

Metal Box: A Scene from the Assembly

Metal Box located in the Taratala-Hyde Road Industrial Area towards the Southwestern part of the city has left its signature in dozens of items used by millions. The product line included the tube of toothpastes; containers for coconut oil, shoe polish and rasogollas; seal of the batteries; ornament boxes; five litre tins for oils etc. **Metal Box** has not reopened after 28 December 1987.

On 10 May 2005, a letter was despatched by the OSD, Industrial Reconstruction Department, Government of West Bengal to Sri Vinod Krishnan, Chairman & MD, **Metal Box** stating that the Minister Sri Nirupam Sen has directed the Department to communicate that in connection with reopening of **Metal Box**, No. 1 Unit, a meeting has been arranged for at the Minister's Chamber in Writers Building on 17 May 2005. Incidentally such letters have been sent on a number

of occasions in the past but the Chairman & MD, **Metal Box** had not turned up for such meetings.

On 29 June 2005, the Leader of the Opposition Sri Pankaj Banerjee addressing the Minister Sri Nirupam Sen stated on the floor of the Assembly that the Management of **Metal Box**, without informing the State Government or discussing with the Unions had resorted to lock out way back on 28 December 1987. At that point of time there were 2600 workers at **Metal Box**. Since then 10 workers have committed suicide, about 350 workers have died of ill health caused by joblessness, non-payment of dues and hunger while at present there are only 500 odd workers below the age of superannuating. According to their balance sheet their outstanding PF dues stand today at Rs 5 crores. Today they are selling off their property at their erstwhile headquarters at 59C Chowringhee Road and the premises on New Road and Belvedere Road. Neither had the management taken permission of the Minister nor did they hold any discussion in this matter. He asked as to what the IR Minister Sri Nirupam Sen is thinking and what he intends to do about **Metal Box**.

In reply to this the Minister Sri Nirupam Sen said, "It is clear from the letters read out by the Hon'ble MLA Sri Pankaj Banerjee that the State Government has not been sitting idle... The properties you referred to have been sold by the orders of the Court and the State Government has very little power in this regard. Anticipating that they might demolish the property, clear up the land and then try to use the land for any other purpose I have asked the Kolkata Corporation to keep a letter ready... What I want to state is that in respect to the laws of the land and considering the limitations that the State Government has about being capable of reopening **Metal Box**, we have repeatedly tried to arrive at a solution, which is amply clear from the letters you had read out. I am not aware as to what else we could have done given the state of the legal position pertaining to this matter."

Responding to the above statement of the Minister Sri Nirupam Sen, Sri Pankaj Banerjee said, "The Hon'ble Minister has stated that he has not been able to do much owing to the legal framework of our country. May I state for your information that Smt Jayalalitha, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, had confiscated the entire property of the **Metal Box** in Chennai and told the management to seek permission from the State Government before selling the property and pay all the outstanding dues of the workers after selling the same. In this way the management of **Metal Box** had to sign on a written commitment before seeking the permission of the court to sell the said property. Since the same set of laws holds good in all States, the Government of West Bengal could also confiscate the property of **Metal Box**. But no such action was taken! Allow me to inform the Hon'ble Finance Minister that the management of **Metal Box** is so dishonest that they have Rs. 71,35,21,254 as outstanding Sales Tax dues. You did not do anything and when they went to Court the State Government remained un-represented. As a result a one sided arbitrary decision was taken."

→ **Metal Box** management had given cheques to about 200 workers as payment in settlement of their PF accounts. All these cheques bounced. FIR's

were lodged but no action was taken. Sri Nirmal Ghosh, MLA, who is also a member of the All India PF Trustee Board, lodged this complaint.

→ On 29 March 1999, the then Industrial reconstruction Minister Sri Mrinal Banerjee had announced that in order to open the factory the West Bengal Government would give Rs 5 crores as loan to the **Metal Box** management. This decision was communicated to the Delhi High Court where a case pertaining to revival of **Metal Box** was being heard. It was also communicated that the West Bengal Government would allow **Metal Box** to sell off as much of its property as it wished for the sake of rejuvenation. As per the revival package No. 1 Unit of **Metal Box** was supposed to be reopened in 2003 and 1000 out of a total of 1800 workers was to get back their jobs. □

Sickness Profiles - VI

AMCO: Twenty-One Years of Unpaid Dues

1. Aluminium Manufacturing Company, popularly referred to as **AMCO**, was established in the year 1922.
2. Of its products 'Crown' brand was a household name.
3. When it was locked out in 1984, there were 1100 workers in **AMCO**.
4. The secured creditors including IRBI and other banks appealed to the High Court and consequently it was sent for liquidation.
5. On 3 July 1987 the entire property of **AMCO** was handed over to the Oriental Sales Agency against payment of Rs 1.5 crores as orders of Justice Manjula Bose.
6. Justice Bose categorically stated that the bid of the Oriental Sales Agency was upheld in spite of a number of higher bids that day, since the new promoter had "also accepted the Courts view that the sale is for the purpose of running the factory and not for the purpose of dismantling the same."
7. In the order of Justice Bose it was reiterated that "it is made clear that the sale is being confirmed only taking into account that the factory premises being purchased ... for the purpose of running the factory and the interest of the workers, the same will not be dismantled at any point of time."
8. On that day a concern that had prayed for dismantling orders offered to pay Rs. 2 crores and yet this higher bid was disregarded in order to allow **AMCO** to be sold only as a going concern.
9. Another part of the said order of Justice Manjula Bose read "... as the Court considered the interest of the workers to be of paramount importance and a matter to be considered along with the interest of the Company, inasmuch as it was the hard labour of the workers which was created the Company to exist all these years. Now that the Company faced closure, it would not be right to throw them out on the street, when there is an offer for the Company to run, and an offer made to re-employ all the workers who had been on the payroll...factory should be sold in running condition so that the factory workers should not be thrown out of work and / or employment."
10. The humanitarian angle in the said order is truly exemplary. During the last two decades when the juggernaut rolled over thousands of factories a High Court Justice coming out in open support for the right to life, livelihood and work of lakhs of workers in locked out industries is indeed a rare event.

11. A few days prior to take over of **AMCO**, Sri Anup Dhar the owner of Oriental Sales Agency, signed a mou with the Joint Action Committee, which was formed with representatives from all the Unions of the unit. It was stated that the workers would be given Rs 66 lakhs in 3 instalments comprising of wages/salary for 10 months; those who were above 55 years would be removed from service after payment of an additional amount corresponding to 16 months of salary. This was contrary to the letter and spirit of the High Court order.

12. Similarly the Court order was again violated when all the plants and machineries were removed from the factory on the plea that these old machines were to be replaced by new ones in order to restart the factory.

13. Since then what remains of this factory is the skeleton of the shed and the empty land!

14. In the meanwhile in July 1987, the news of the ‘victory’ celebrations appeared in ‘Ganashakti’ and the luminaries who were present included the Labour Minister, Sri Santi Ghatak, Sri Subhash Chakraborty and leading CITU and INTUC leaders of the area.

15. In 1989 the non-affiliated workers organisation – **AMCO** Sanghati Committee (AMCO Unity Committee) – appealed to the High Court.

16. In a order signed by Deputy Secretary, Land and Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal dated 14 June 1994 it was stated “ therefore in exercise of power conferred by sub-section (3) of Section 6 of the said [West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act 1953], the Governor is pleased to declare that 14.7055 acres of land as described in the enclosed schedule stands hereby resumed by the Government as the same is not required by the said Company and as such, the said Company is not entitled to remain in possession of the said 14.7055 acres of land.”

17. It transpired from the statements of the then Deputy Secretary that following an enquiry made by the department the government has come to know about 300 such instances where land of such locked out industries is lying unused or in some cases such land has been handed over without permission or where the nature of land use has changed. The government had decided to resume the said lands like those at Hindustan Textiles, Motor Machinery, Beni Engineering and so on.

18. By reasonable estimate the Government of West Bengal would ‘earn’ Rs 43 crores if it resells the resumed land of **AMCO**.

19. But the workers of **AMCO** are still awaiting payment of unpaid dues.□

Sickness Profiles - VII

Bengal Lamp: Workers in the Dark

1. **Bengal Lamp** was established in the year 1913.
2. The Roy Brothers – Tapan Kumar Roy and Tapas Kumar Roy – were the Joint Managing Directors of the Company.
3. **Bengal Lamp** had two manufacturing Units – one at Jadavpur, Kolkata while the other was at Bangalore.
4. The primary products of **Bengal Lamp** were fluorescent lights, tube lights and filament bulbs.
5. Suspension of work was declared at the Jadavpur unit of **Bengal Lamp** on 7 January 1989.

6. **Bengal Lamp** Management refused to reopen the factory contrary to the suggestion of the State Government. Under such circumstances as per Section 18A of Industrial (Development and Regulation) Act 1941, Government of India initiated action to take over the Company. The Company promptly filed a writ petition against this decision and on 14 May 1990 the High Court of Calcutta ordered that before the take over a date for a hearing be fixed to allow the Management of **Bengal Lamp** to express its viewpoint.
7. Before any decision was taken by the Central Government (in response to the said High Court order) the Company made reference to the BIFR under section 15, registered as Case No. 72/90.
8. In October 1990, the BIFR asked the Company to submit a revival package and the IRBI was appointed as the Operating Agency.
9. Though the Roy Brothers were supposedly ready to reopen the factory but they declared that they were not in a position to deposit Rs 6 crores by way of promoter's contribution essential for the implementation of the revival scheme.
10. At this point of time differences started surfacing regarding the attitude of the two brothers towards the future of **Bengal Lamp**. One of them seemed more eager to allow take over of the Company by Philips India, which in the recent past had shown keen interest to do so.
11. BIFR ordered the management to deposit 50 lakhs by 18 June 1992 and also enter into an MOU with the unions.
12. Within the stipulated time frame, with the active efforts of the State Government, a draft of the MOU was agreed upon and the unions signed on it. However one of the two brothers – Tapas Kumar Roy – declined to sign the same. It was alleged that he by then was more interested to farm out the entire manufacturing activity.
13. Shortly the Management appealed to the State Government for permission to sell some of the factory land.
14. Side by side the Management appealed to the AAIFR challenging the order of the BIFR though ultimately this appellate body upheld the latest order of the BIFR.
15. In October 1993, IRBI, the Operating Agency, was directed by the BIFR to invite proposals for the revival of the Company from any other party.
16. The Company once again moved a writ petition in Calcutta High Court challenging the BIFR's direction. The writ was rejected and the High Court ordered that the direction of the BIFR be implemented.
17. On 9 December 1994 the BIFR ordered that in the absence of any revival scheme on behalf of the **Bengal Lamp** management, non-payment of the stipulated deposit and the lack of faith of the workers union on its management, the OA should insert "advertisements in two national dailies for inviting offers for revival of the Company or take over/lease/merger as provided for under Section 18."
18. In response to the said advertisement, M/s Om Development Ltd. appealed to the High Court for taking over **Bengal Lamp** in January 1995. Simultaneously they appealed to the State Government and the Unions for support. This Company did have experience in glass and engineering industries.
19. Shortly afterwards the Roy Brothers appealed to the Calcutta High Court for a stay order against the BIFR direction. The Unions also filed a petition appealing in order to be heard in the case. At the same point of time Roy Brothers filed a writ at the Bangalore High Court in this matter. In his judgement the Hon'ble Justice of Calcutta High Court mentioned that though there was ample justification of the BIFR to issue prompt directions in order to dispose this long standing case, the Karnataka High Court had restrained the BIFR in this case.

20. For 10 long years nothing happened and presently the draft scheme of BIFR for prima facie conclusion of the winding up process of **Bengal Lamp** is under consideration.

21. Of the 480 workers and employees of **Bengal Lamp** at the time of suspension of work, 237 workers below the age of 58 presently receive Rs 500 per month as financial assistance to workers of locked out industries from the Government of West Bengal. At the Bangalore unit 170 are employed at present. □

Sickness Profiles - VIII

Small Tools Manufacturing Company: Will it Ever be Revived?

1. Ila Pal Chowdhury, the owner of **STM**, was also a sitting MP from Krishnanagar in Nadia District of West Bengal.
2. **STM** is located in Kankurgachi area on CIT Road (in between Phulbagan and Kankurgachi crossings), which is about 13 km of straight drive from the Dum Dum Airport.
3. Suspension of work was declared at **STM** on 11 March 1996.
4. The quality of tools manufactured at **STM** was acclaimed both in India and abroad.
5. As per the BIFR Report dated 31 March 2005 the status of **STM** is as follows: “Revival scheme failed. Winding up stayed and revival scheme approved by the High Court is being implemented.”
6. As per ‘Labour in West Bengal’ – a State Government document – published in 2005, of the 277 workers/employees in **STM**, 87 are getting financial assistance of Rs 500 as per FOWLAI Scheme. Provident fund dues stand at Rs 2.85 crores. There were 275 workers at the Krishnanagar unit of whom 105 are receiving the financial assistance mentioned above.
7. Ground level reality as of date is that machines have been removed from the factory; sheds demolished; and preparations for ‘Orchid Towers’, flaunted as ‘Kankugachi’s tallest luxurious apartment’ building is under way on the very premise where **STM** stood.
8. It is perplexing to note that whereas permission for selling a portion of its land was granted to the Company for ‘revival’ of the factory, the entire factory has been dismantled and the entire premise is being used for real estate purposes with ‘Orchid Towers’ proposed on the premise. Where then is the factory which is to be revived? No one really knows about the future of **STM**.
9. Hundreds of factories exist only in Government reports while multi-storey buildings keep changing the urban space beyond recognition. □

Sickness Profiles - IX

Basanti Cotton Mill: The Bitter Swan Song

1. **Basanti Cotton Mill** was set up in the year 1934 having been inaugurated by Rabindra Nath Thakur. It was symbolically named after Basanti Devi, the wife of Desbandhu Chittaranjan Das.
2. Acharya Praphulla Chandra Roy, a doyen of Indian nationalism, had on innumerable occasions underlined the need for Indians to set up indigenous industries. Charged by this

philosophy, a huge number of his direct students and followers had set up cotton, leather, chemical, pharmaceutical and rubber industries during the 20's and 30's. Most of the industries with 'Bengal' or 'National' as a prefix have a similar history.

3. **Basanti Cotton Mills**, set up by the Mitra family, hence conjures up the spirit of the 'swadeshi'-era.

4. There were 356 looms and 28,640 spindles and the total employment at the time of closure stood at 1025.

5. **Basanti Cotton Mill** is located on the BT Road next to the Panihati Municipality building. This area had a cluster of textile mills, the famous among them being Sodepur Cotton Mill and Bangodaya Cotton Mill. Besides there were upwards of 50 power looms which had sprung up in this area.

6. This area on both the sides of BT Road also had a variety of industries owned by the famous 'Ispahan Group', which owned a number of jute, cotton-textile, tobacco and engineering units. Later on a majority of these factories were taken over by the 'Goenka Group'.

7. Another family – Poddars – had taken over the **Basanti Cotton Mills** from the Mitras sometime around early 60's. However later in 1967 Basanti Cotton Mills passed on to the Goenkas.

8. The Goenkas took over the Swan Mill at Mumbai and later the Kurla Mill too. In 1979, all these mills were amalgamated with the Swan Group of Mills of which thus **Basanti Cotton Mills** became a subsidiary.

9. Right after amalgamation the Swan Group management started closing one department after the other of **Basanti Cotton Mill** on the plea that these were no longer profitable. The 'process house', 'printing', 'hand-dyeing', 'cheese dyeing', 'colour winding', 'wrapping' besides 100 looms and 6000 spindles met with the same fate between 1979 and 1986.

10. In 1977 the management had borrowed heavily from banks and financial institutions for the purpose of modernisation at **Basanti Cotton Mill**. However little really changed on the shop floor level. For example a machine for the process house worth Rs 21 lakhs in those days figured prominently in the list. However after amalgamation the processing jobs were all shifted to the Mumbai mills of the Swan Group and that put paid to the plans of 'modernisation' of **Basanti Cotton Mill**.

11. All through this period 'grey cloth' from the **Basanti Cotton Mill** was 'sold' to its other subsidiaries of the Swan Mills Group. For all practical purposes the Mill was reduced to becoming a captive plant of sorts left with little value adding capability.

12. The Mill was closed down for little over 14 months with effect from 29 February 1984. Finally it was locked out on 30 May 1987 and it is yet to reopen.

13. That there was a great demand for the products of Basanti is evident from the fact that the Power Loom Owners Association based at Khardah, 24 Parganas in a letter dated 29 October 1988 wrote, " We write to inform you that we had been taking cloth from your Basanti Mill before, but the then management could not properly supply our needs. We would be glad to consume the entire products of cotton and sized beam and wastage at market price. Our Association gives you a full guarantee as we know that **Basanti Cotton Mill** has its tradition and is fed with the blessings of people of hallowed memory like Rabindranath Thakur, Acharya Praphulla Chandra Roy and Lokmata Basanti Devi."

14. The workers dues make them by far the 'highest' creditor with gratuity and other dues piling up to Rs 3 crores. □

Bangodaya Cotton Mills: Peerless Illegality

1. **Bangodaya Cotton Mill** was locked out on 21 January 1984.
2. There were 234 looms and 12844 spindles and the total employment at the time of closure stood at about 1200.
3. In some of the yearly reports of the West Bengal Government mention is still being made of the Bangodaya **Cotton Mill**. Factually that is the only place where it still exists!
4. A visit will reveal that **Bangodaya Cotton Mill** is no more and after total dismantling a huge block of apartments called 'Peerless Abasan' occupies this piece of urban space. Peerless Abasan exists now for over a decade!
5. The bidder who had purchased **Bangodaya Cotton Mill** at the auction in the High Court as a 'going concern' has effectively removed the sheds and machines, resold the land and paved the way for the residential blocks to come up. Incidentally **Bangodaya Cotton Mill** has earned the dubious distinction of being the first well-known industrial unit, which has been wiped away from the face of the earth in flagrant violation to the laws of the land. Since nothing happened many more 'entrepreneurs' ventured into this 'business' learning its lessons from Peerless.
6. Needless to mention the land use pattern of this piece of land earmarked for industrial use has been changed without going through any legal process.
7. The entry of Peerless Group into the arena of real estate promoting started inauspiciously in the land of this dismantled factory virtually illegally handed over to them with full knowledge and support of the government-municipal corporation-trade union combine.
8. Last but not the least mention may be made of the unpaid dues of the workers who are still languishing not too far off from their past place of employment expecting that something might happen and the unpaid dues might some day be given to them.□

Sickness Profiles - XI

Sulekha Works: A Blot of Ink?

1. In most parts of the country Sulekha Ink in the age of the fountain pen was a brand name of choice.
2. It was Rabindranath Thakur who formally named this unit '*Sulekha*' when this enterprise came up to produce an alternative to imported fountain pen inks.
3. Besides the main unit at Jadavpur, Kolkata, there were two other units of **Sulekha Works** – one at Sodepur on BT Road and the other at Gaziabad in UP. The total strength of the two West Bengal based units at Jadavpur and Sodepur was around 330.
4. Kalyan Mitra was the owner of **Sulekha Works**, which dropped its shutters for the last time on 1 January 1989.
5. In 1989 the management of **Sulekha Works** as pre-conditions of reopening proposed that they be allowed to build a housing complex on a part of the land of its Works at Jadavpur; only 90 workers would be retained in service and the rest given VRS; if they can organise the necessary amount of Rs 6 crores for diversification they would retain 100 more workers.
6. In the same year in connection with the proposed housing complex to be build on Sulekha land for the middle class the management said that if need be the erstwhile workers of Sulekha could also buy their own flats in the complex.

7. The State Government was not averse to give permission to sell a part of the land at **Sulekha Works**, Jadavpur had it not been for a strong stand taken by the CITU union, which strongly opposed these pre-conditions.
8. Since 1985 the management had repeatedly sat with the workers with various proposals but the management had honoured none of them.
9. There was an effort on the part of the management to sell of 12 bighas of land at the Sodepur Works and 4 bighas at Jadavpur but with the workers appealing to the High Court against the sale of land this effort was stayed.
10. In 1994 Alipur Court appointed a receiver to look after the entire property belonging to **Sulekha Works**.
11. During 1997-98 there was a proposal to sell the land at Sodepur and use the money to reopen the Jadavpur unit. However this too was not implemented.
12. Finally in June 2005, the Sulekha management formally announced their plans to use the 'excess' land at Jadavpur for housing purposes and to reopen the factory after necessary product diversification. The new line of products would include ball pen refills and other stationery products. It was announced that workers able enough to work would be given employment while all the erstwhile workers were given between 20 to 30 thousand rupees.
13. With great fanfare a programme was organised at the **Sulekha Works** where Ministers, leaders and trade unionists were present.
14. It was remarkable that 'pre-conditions' of reopening in 1989 and the present declarations by the management were almost the same: - selling of excess land; employing a quarter of the workers; and announcement of housing complex. The ministers, leaders and trade unionists too are almost the same!
15. Only that, in the meantime, certain factors have changed: the net profit for the **Sulekha Works** from the proposed housing complex will be higher; the land price at Jadavpur during the last 15 years have shown a ten-fold increase; a large proportion of the workers have committed suicide or have died of lack of healthy food and health care or have crossed the age of superannuation; the Rs 20-30000 given to the workers were actually worth maybe Rs 2000 at 1989 price level. □

Sickness Profiles - XII

Beni Limited: Still a Going Concern

1. **Beni Limited** was located within the Panihati Municipality on BT Road.
2. Since being set up in the year 1960 it was closed down for the first time in 1979. **Beni Limited** reopened again in 1983 only to be closed down permanently in 1988.
3. The product line of **Beni Limited** included sophisticated electrical equipments for Railway and Defence including anti aircraft guns with harness; railway AC dynamo; signalling equipments; generators; tramway receivers and a wide range of sophisticated electrical engineering products.
4. The Company was referred to the BIFR in 1987 citing financial crisis.
5. Since the management of **Beni Limited** did not have a revival proposal, winding up orders were passed by the BIFR on 20 September 1990.
6. On 22 July 1994 the Calcutta High Court passed liquidation orders for Beni Limited.
7. When **Beni Limited** was sent below the auction hammer the Official Liquidator had specifically mentioned that the company would have to be purchased as a 'going concern' and all its eligible workers were to be re-employed.

8. Ganesh Singhania of Ratnagiri Engineering accepted all the conditions laid down and bought **Beni Limited** on 15 March 1996.
9. Strangely enough it was mentioned in the Report of the Official Liquidator that the total land holding of **Beni Limited** was 40 bighas while later enquiry revealed that actually there was 66 bighas of land belonging to the company.
10. The Management of Ratnagiri Engineering announced that the company would start two new projects – iron foundry and a fan-manufacturing unit.
11. On 11 August 1996 Ganesh Singhania signed an agreement with the workers in which it was stated that on the basis of need, able-bodied workers would be inducted in phases and within a year of reconnection of electricity the process would be completed. It was also mentioned that the company has decided to bring about thorough change in the production process and product line; to set-up the new unit all scraps, old machines and non-essential assets would be removed from the premise; in order to augment funds the godowns would be demolished and sheds would be hired out/leased/sold to third parties; leaving enough land for the new project the remaining land would be sold or leased out; the company would reserve the right to employ contract labour as and when required; and that the unions would have no right to protest or intervene in any such matter as stated above. It was also agreed upon that those who will be employed will have to accept fresh employment on production of proof of employment at **Beni Limited** and that the wages would be decided once the new company goes into production.
12. On 23 August 1997 Ganesh Singhania wrote a long letter to the State Labour Minister informing him about the response expressed to him by 7 companies who were eager to buy plots of land inside the **Beni Limited** campus. Obviously the Government was well aware about the intention and ulterior motive of this unscrupulous ‘entrepreneur’ who by then had gathered much infamy for being an expert scrap dealer and a land shark in the guise of a highest bidder for buying out closed unit at auctions. Another company which he had virtually reduced to scrap was Calcutta Fan which he had bought from the Calcutta High Court at Rs 1.41 crores back in April 1994.
13. After finding that the company did not reopen even after a year, on 11 November 1997 the workers, already aggrieved with the agreement, formed a non-affiliated initiative called Beni Bnachao Committee.
14. Citing the observations of Justice Rajindar Sachar while chairing the ‘Fact Fining Commission on the Plight of Workers’, held at Calcutta in June 1997 where he observed that “...the undertaking given by the buyer is not being carried out. If the buyer does not carry out the same, the workmen may move the Calcutta High Court for proceeding against the buyer for contempt of Court and for cancellation of the sale in favour of the buyer...”, three lawyers on behalf of the workers of **Beni Limited** moved the High Court against the Ratnagiri Engineering.
15. The Calcutta High Court ordered the Official Liquidator to enquire into the matter and on 21 April 1998 the team of enquiry found substance in the complain of the workers. The Report of the Official Liquidator stated that on enquiry it was revealed that none of the machines or equipments (excepting 2) listed at the time of the sale was found. There was no tangible sign of any effort to restart the factory and on the contrary water pipelines, high-tension wires and even a part of the factory shed was found to be missing.
16. On 27 June 1998 Beni Bnachao Committee moved the Calcutta High Court for payment of dues and compensation to the workers.
17. Ratnagiri Engineering was attracted most to the 66 bighas of land at the disposition of **Beni Limited**. It transpired that 40 of the above mentioned 66 bighas was taken on lease from the Iliyas Free School Trustee Board who now approached the High Court for justice. Later it was also learnt that the remaining 26 bighas also belonged to the same trustee.

18. On 15 April 1999 Sri Lakshmi Chatterjee, a North 24 Parganas District level well known leader and also the president of the CITU unit at **Beni Limited**, along with one Ramen Bhattacharya (a HMS leader) were caught red handed by the Police at a restaurant near the Kolkata High Court while accepting Rs 1 lakh as bribe from the tainted Ganesh Singhanian himself.

19. Though since long stories about such under hand deals between owners and trade union leaders were doing the rounds in this state, this incident sent shock waves all around.

20. Since 1988 about 400 of the 1306 workers at **Beni Limited** have died of suicide, joblessness, hunger and lack of health care.

21. Ultimately during 2002-3 after a protracted and intense legal battle Beni Bnachao Committee have been able to get Rs 1.9 crores by way of PF arrears and another Rs 1.3 crores from Ratnagiri Engineering by way of compensations.

22. Ratnagiri Engineering had bought **Beni Limited** as a 'going concern' but the factory remains closed even after almost 10 years. They might have sold the machines, equipments and scraps worth Rs 8 crores. The land they had at their disposal at the time of buying would be having a market value of Rs 15 crores. □

Sickness Profiles - XIII

Mohini Mills Ltd. No. 2: Abandoned and Deserted

1. **Mohini Mill** Ltd. opened its first mill at Kushtia (now in Bangladesh) in 1908. Later this mill at Belgharia was set up.

2. It was a composite textile mill and its product line included dhotis, long cloth, saris, mosquito nettings, bed sheets, shirting etc.

3. **Mohini Mill** products catered to the needs of the rural poor and the urban middle class downwards.

4. There were 436 looms and 32100 spindles and the total employment at the time of closure stood at about 2079.

5. Since the early 70's **Mohini Mill** started to be dogged by frequent closures. It remained completely closed between 1979 and 1981.

6. **Mohini Mill** was taken over by the Government of India under ID&R Act, 1951 as per Gazette notification dated 23 October 1981.

7. The National Textile Corporation (NTC) was immediately authorised to take over the management of **Mohini Mill**.

8. Since there was no further extension of the period of take over of **Mohini Mill** by the NTC, the said Mill was denotified by default and ceased to be Government of India undertaking with effect from 22 June 1988.

9. After remaining in charge of **Mohini Mill** for almost 7 long years the management of NTC, a Central Public Sector Undertaking, virtually abandoned and deserted the unit without even declaring closure as per ID&R Act, 1951.

10. Petitions at the Calcutta High Court on behalf of the unions praying for extension of takeover remained pending for decades.

11. In April 1990 the BIFR submitted a report stating that **Mohini Mill** was not any more in a position to carry out the much-needed modernisation after taking care of the past liabilities. BIFR opined that Rs 17.17 crores would be necessary to revive **Mohini Mill**.

12. On 11 October 1993 the Calcutta High Court directed for the sale of **Mohini Mill** as a going concern.

13. Approximately 90 bighas of land lie within the boundary of **Mohini Mill** which by current valuation could fetch 30 crores in open market. More so since this land is located within stone throw distance from the Belgharia station and is by any standards prime land.

14. Around 600 workers and their families at present share the 400 labour-quarters within the premise of **Mohini Mill**.

15. Factually the quarters though dilapidated are the only structures which are still standing inside **Mohini Mill**. The machines, equipments, factually everything that can be removed have been taken away. Even the walls are being dismantled brick by brick. The administration was a passive and indifferent onlooker throughout this phase of pilferage in broad daylight.

16. Almost 85% of the workers who were on payroll at the time of closure have crossed the age of superannuation in the meantime.

17. Since 1988, the workers were left to suffer their plight without any intervention from any quarters. When there was nothing left of anything the Banks stepped in to lay claim to the land on the plea that they were 'secured' creditors and **Mohini Mill** owed them a lot.

18. Finally the State Government stepped in with aplomb. On 1 September 2003 the mighty Government of West Bengal hung up notices all around that it had 'resumed' the land of **Mohini Mill**. The logic was that once upon a time, this land was made available to the **Mohini Mill** for constructing the factory. Now that it is closed the West Bengal Government deems it to be fit and proper to take back or resume the land of **Mohini Mill** in its favour.

19. The workers of **Mohini Mill** are still languishing and their outstanding dues from whosoever is in charge amounts to a whopping Rs 12.55 crores, by way of unpaid wages and salaries, gratuity, bonus and closure benefits.

20. It is to be seen whether the step initiated by the Government of West Bengal in resuming the land of a closed industrial unit has any positive effect on the plight of these suffering workers at **Mohini Mill**. □

Sickness Profiles - XIV

Indo-Japan Steels Ltd: Reduced to junk

1. Late Y L Agarwala who was the founder promoter of the Company established **Indo-Japan Steels Ltd.** in 1966.

2. The factory situated at 5/1 G T Road near Belur Math, Howrah was perhaps one of its only kind in the private sector in Eastern India where steel making from ingot stage to cold rolling was done under the same roof.

3. **Indo-Japan Steels** was a heavy engineering industry having its facilities of electric arc furnace for making steel (MS and alloy steel) ingots, hot as well as cold rolling mills for manufacture of different types and sizes of hot/cold rolled products conforming to mild, alloy and other special steels. **Indo-Japan Steels** was also well equipped with all the ancillary equipment and other infrastructural facilities with a dedicated and skilled work force of about 800.

4. The **Indo-Japan Steels** was working satisfactorily since its inception and encouraged by its results and the market, the management went for significant expansions during 1982-3 when they installed two new cold rolling mills one of them imported from France.

5. However around 1984 the management started failing to utilise the enhanced installed capacity of the plant due to inadequate supply of raw materials, spare parts and consumables triggered reportedly by fund crunch. This vicious cycle dipped threateningly and soon production became uneconomical and the company started incurring heavy losses.

6. **Indo-Japan Steels** in 1985 imported a steckel mill taking loan from IOB but was unable to clear it from the godowns of the Calcutta Port Trust. This resulted in a huge blockage of capital in the form of an interest bearing term loan and ever increasing demurrage charges payable to Calcutta Port Trust.
7. In view of the increasing losses **Indo-Japan Steels** was referred to the BIFR in 1990.
8. The BIFR ordered winding up of the company on 12 August 1993 against which the management appealed to the AAIFR.
9. Despite the hard times the company remained in production surviving, but barely so, on conversion jobs. Sensing that all could be lost the management resorted to illegal activities which was hitherto not in practise. The wages and salaries were left unpaid; the full and final settlement of retirement dues withheld; diversion of funds and various such activities were resorted to. When the Indo-Japan Steels Ltd. Employees Union, an independent union not affiliated to any central trade union, demanded the workers dues, **Indo-Japan Steels** was locked out on 13 May 1995.
10. Though the lock out was lifted in little over 3 months following a tripartite agreement also involving the Labour Commissioner, West Bengal, the management repeatedly failing to honour the agreement finally declared lock out on 17 July 1996.
11. The AAIFR too ultimately recommended winding up of **Indo-Japan Steels** on 13 November 1996.
12. Given the skill, technology and infrastructure available at **Indo-Japan Steels**, and the positive demand in the market for the company's products, the Employees Union had submitted revival schemes for running the factory on co-operative basis to both the BIFR and the AAIFR. The West Bengal Government too was approached on several occasion seeking its support and cooperation in this regard. Unfortunately the State Government in spite of everything failed to stand by the side of the motivated workers.□

IV

In this section we have dealt with 6 Industrial belts and have described the present conditions along with an attempt to relate as an overview the maladies affecting each geographical region.

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - I **On The Eastern Fringes**

Starting from South Belehata and running southward along Tangra, Topsia and Tiljala this industrial belt was a hubbub of activity in the past.

It is bounded on the East by what now is an important landmark of Kolkata – the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass beyond which, to the east lie the East Calcutta Wetlands, an International Ramsar site. The western boundary was comprised of the rail line towards South 24 Parganas originating from Sealdah. The residential areas of Picnic Garden lies on the south while the northern boundary comprises of the Belehata Main Road.

This belt was dominated by manufacturing units producing leather, rubber, chemicals and ceramics. Most of the larger units in this area had been nationalised in the past. Let us briefly run down the list of prominent industries and their present status:

1. **Tyre Corporation of India (TCI):** - The Tangra Unit of TCI, a Central Government Undertaking, once upon a time employed 4500 workers. Very recently the 77 workers, who had not accepted VRS earlier, have been heard to give up their resistance. The huge premise is all set to become a residential complex.

2. **Bengal Pottery:** - Situated again in Tangra, this unit was shut down for good in the year 1993 with 4900 workers in its roll. The Central Government had taken over this unit but since it was not nationalised within the stipulated 17 years Bengal Pottery was de-notified. This unit was a household name and its products ranged from cups, dishes and other household pottery to electrical ceramics. The workers have been paid their PF and Gratuity dues and the West Bengal Government bought the land and sheds for Rs 12 crores. Later in early 2005, the State Government has declared its intentions of setting up an Industrial Estate in the premise.

3. **National Tannery:** - This was the first mechanised tannery in India and was set up in the year 1907. In its vicinity came up the Leather Technology College. National Tannery, which was well known for its leather processing, also developed a modern shoe division functional since 1965. Even after it turned 'sick', the infrastructure of this unit and the skill of its workers were utilised by Bata which, through 'job work' got its famous brands like 'North Star' and 'Quo Vadis' made at National Tannery. After BIFR ordered winding up, the State Government purchased the unit as a 'going concern' in 1992 spending a paltry 50 lakhs for the purpose. Despite repeated pledges inside and outside the High Court the West Bengal Government has neither reopened it nor settled the unpaid dues of the workers. The State Government till date had handed over a sum of Rs 3500 to each worker. Since December 2004, the Left Front Government, like any other promoter, has started dismantling the sheds and removing the machineries with hundreds of erstwhile workers silently suffering the pangs of joblessness and abject poverty. It is alleged that after having 'invested' Rs 65 lakhs over the last 12 years, the State Government has already earned Rs 3.5 crores through the process of dismantling and selling the plants and machinery. The land too will be used for setting up a Garments Park and the process too should yield crores in the near future. Till date 107 of the 400 workers have died of suicide, hunger and disease and most of those who still survive are barely alive.

4. **Bharat Brakes and Valves:** - This Central Government Undertaking has been closed for long and only in the year 2003 around 550 workers have been given VRS.

5. **Smith Stanisstreet:** - This Central Government Pharmaceutical unit was located opposite the Entally Police Station and employed 900 workers/employees. It was closed in 2001 and presently effort is on to allow residential apartments to come up on the said piece of prime land.

6. **EMC:** - The Electrical Manufacturing Company popularly referred to as EMC has two units – at Dum Dum and Belegkata – and is owned by Central Minister Sri Kamal Nath. The Belegkata unit has been under closure turning 1800 jobless in the process. The workers, as in hundreds of such units, are yet to get payments while multi-storeyed residential blocks on the factory premise may just be a matter of time.

7. **Sur Enamel:** - There were around 300 workers working in this unit. The owners have gone into a contract with Purnendu Chatterjee, an NRI entrepreneur, and have also obtained permission from the High Court to sell a portion of the land.

8. **Scientific Indian Glass Company:** - Closed for more than 25 years. A huge complex of six multi-storeyed apartment blocks collectively referred to as Brindaban Gardens is already in place.

9. In the Tangra/Topsia/Tiljala area about 550 **tannery and rubber units** faced closure by virtue of Supreme Court order pertaining to environmental pollution. The Supreme Court had also ordered for alternative relocation for all the closed units at the proposed Bantala Leather Complex. Recently on 30 July 2005, the complex has been formally inaugurated and 34 units have been shifted to this new venue. The area in question involves about 100 bighas of land within a short distance of the Eastern Metropolitan Bypass. Some of these old tanneries owned by Chinese families are being transformed into Chinese Restaurants while residential blocks are replacing some tanneries owned by Muslim owners. The much-hyped plans regarding setting up of eco-friendly projects in this area remains mere good empty words till date.

10. Upward of 20,000 skilled workers have been rendered jobless. They should be viewed as the ‘victims of pollution-free development’. Whereas the Supreme Court order has been cited while declaring closure of these 550 industrial units, the other relevant portion of the said SC order pertaining to payments to workers have remained a far cry. So here too development gallops while workers languish. The Supreme Court had stated that during the period of relocation the workers would be deemed to be in active employment with full wages payable and without break of service. A years salary as ‘shifting bonus’ would be payable to workers who opt for resuming duties after the relocation is completed. If a company fails to relocate to Bantala Leather Complex its workers would be treated as retrenched and over and above the compensations and legal dues payable as per Section 25b of ID Act, an additional amount equal to 6 years wages has to be paid to the workers as compensation. Again those workers who choose not to work at the relocated factory will also have to be treated as retrenched and over above the dues as per ID Act a year’s wages have to be paid as compensation. The Supreme Court has also clarified that the amount of gratuity payable will be as per law and will have nothing to do with the compensation packages. A huge majority of these workers have not been given their stipulated compensation as per order of the Supreme Court. □

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - II

Along B T Road

Barrackpur Trunk Road. Not too far back, this north-south trunk road was synonymous to trucks and chimneys – the hallmark of an industrial belt. Factories dotted the municipalities of Kamarhati, Panihati and Khardah. Around 1985, and within a span of about ten years, a huge majority of these factories were locked out – legally and illegally. Soon weeds, bushes and trees overran the premises. Theft of machines became routine since allegedly the local police and administration were hand in glove with the

criminal nexus. Most of the leading factories belonged to the engineering, cotton and pharmaceutical industries. Yet another characteristic of this area was the predominance of local Bengali workers in the above-mentioned industries. Refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan had settled down on either side of the Bangaon-Sealdah railway line during the 50's and 60's. Youth from Belgharia, Kamarhati, Panihati, Sodepur, Agarpara, Khardah got themselves employed for gain at the Basanti Cotton Mill, Mohini Mill, Bangodaya Cotton Mill, Sodepur Cotton Mill, Beni Engineering, Dipti Hurricane Lamp Factory and scores of other such names, which are the part of history now. Those which are still running including **Wimco** safety match factory, **Texmaco** blade factory do not employ even a third of its original strengths. Conversely migrant workers, from Bihar and UP, comprised of the dominant majority in the Jute Mills, Rolling Mills and Paper Mills of this area.

The pattern of ruthless disintegration has been strikingly consistent. First came the takeovers, promising to treat the units as going concerns; the second step was the calculated removal, tantamount to theft, of everything worth removing including machines, sheds, bricks and even the underground wires; third step involved the arrival of the realtors and appearance of the multi-storeyed residential apartments. Recently another variant of the above-mentioned third step is becoming popular – the West Bengal Government for so long a passive and indifferent observer jumps into the fray and starts 'resuming' the land, given way back to industries, as if not any longer to be left out of this real estate bonanza. No one seems to be responsible, or for that matter bothered, about the legitimate dues of the workers of these locked out industries, leave alone their plight!

Locked out industries and changing urban space is no longer just a possibility. 'Peerless Abasan' has come up after dismantling **Bangodaya Cotton Mills** at the intersection of Panihati and BT Road crossing; **Oriental Metal Industries** manufacturers of Dipti hurricane lamps has made way for a residential complex at Agarpara; **Structural Engineering, Sekhar Iron, Beni Engineering** are just a few of the scores of factories of repute in this ten square kilometre area on which multi-storeyed residential blocks have come up or are coming up thereby changing the urban space of Suburban Kolkata.

Between Baranagar and Barrackpur there are six Jute Mills, which remain closed more often than not every year. That these units are not giving way to real estate is owing to the fact that the ownership pattern in these Mills are immensely complicated or rather mind boggling. The two units of **Titagarh Paper Mill** used to employ about 4500 workers only the other day. Now 400 contract workers are employed and this 'Paper Mill' currently produces wagons. The developmental model of urban expansion pursued by the State Government however is soon going to pave the way for residential apartments in industrial land if something 'unforeseen' does not happen. □

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - III **Dum Dum-Lake Town-Patipukur**

This was yet another well-known industrial belt towards the northeast of the city. The tall chimneys; early morning sirens acting as clarion calls for the starting shift; hundreds pedalling in unison on their bicycles along Jessore Road, Dum Dum Road and VIP Road; commuters streaming out in hundreds from Ultadanga and Dum Dum Railway

Stations – this was a common sight. They were workers in the scores of large, medium and small factories in this industrial belt. This entire urban space has changed visibly during the last 15 years.

The workers have in part being transformed into helpers in construction sites maybe at buildings rising on the same premise where their factory stood. Maybe when the construction gets over some of them might find jobs as security guards in these building complexes.

During the last 20 years adjacent to the Dum Dum and Ultadanga Stations on the Sealdah Main railway line, groups of workers are found to gather around 6-7 in the morning. These are referred to as ‘*majoor bazaars*’, meaning labour markets. Workers of closed and locked out industries or their sons, daughters, wives and other relatives gather there in search of daily employment. Labour contractors bargain heavily and minimum wage norms are blown away in the wind. As the hours go by, the rates offered plummet. Sexual harassment and abuse is rampant in case of women workers and as yet they are compelled to come back early next morning.

The list of locked out industries in this area is pretty long. The most prominent among them are:

Apollo Zipper; AMCO; East Anglia Plastics; Ruby Paints (residential apartment constructed); **Hindustan Iron** popularly called ‘*rod call*’ (residential apartment constructed); **ARP Rubber** (residential apartment constructed); **New Luck Rubber** (residential apartment constructed); **Business Firms** (preparation ongoing for residential apartment); **Asila Pharmaceuticals; EMC** (residential apartment to be constructed); **Motor Machinery Manufacturing; Paul Lehman; Airport Hotel; Vegal Engine and Engineering; Siddheshwari Hosiery** (residential apartment under construction); **BMT Mills** (residential apartment under construction); **Eastern Paper Mills**; and many Plywood Factories on R N Guha road have been locked out.□

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - IV **Jadavpur-Tollygunj**

Industries were virtually embedded in this predominantly residential area. The semi-rural somewhat suburban characteristics of this area to the south of Kolkata were radically changed after partition when a huge number of refugee colonies came into being. Gradually the large factories and scores of smaller ones employed the bread earners and urbanisation and industrialisation went well in tandem. With the passage of time the one-time settlers were given the land rights and the character of these refugee colonies gradually changed as small concrete houses started coming up in place of the semi-concrete structures on the self-owned plots. By mid-70’s the refugee colonies were a thing of the past and most of this area was a typical middle class-low middle class residential area. However large apartment blocks were conspicuous by their absence since the predominantly small land holdings did not allow ample space for such constructions.

Before long the South Suburban area was an integral part of the city and almost around this time the factories in the area started closing down. Only the land belonging to the locked out industries were suitable enough for multi-storeyed apartment buildings.

One of such multi-storeyed complexes, Ekta Heights, has come up on **Annapurna Glass Factory** premises, a short distance from the Jadavpur Crossing, a densely built up commercial area adjacent to the Jadavpur University campus. **Dabur** has also gone the real estate way. The West Bengal Government went for a tripartite agreement and as a result reportedly the country's largest residential complex – South City – is coming up on the Anwar Shah Road premise of **Jay Engineering** (brand name Usha). **Sulekha Works** has obtained permission for building residential apartments on its land in Jadavpur. **Bengal Lamp** with its sprawling complex in ruins, opposite the Jadavpur University campus is hot in pursuit for real estate gains and it might well be a matter of time. **Krishna Glass** a Government of West Bengal Undertaking, has created history by paying dues and compensation to its ex-workers, and time will tell what the Government plans to do with the land also well within a kilometre from Jadavpur Crossing. The State Government has decided to close down **Jadavpur TB Hospital** and sell off the land for promoting purposes. **Chopra Motors** and **Chaliha Rolling Mills** in Tollygunj have been closed since long and everything is possible pertaining to its landed property. Yes, tall buildings are perhaps going to change the urban character of this industrial belt once again.□

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - V **Taratala-Hyde Road**

This entire industrial belt since 30's and 40's was considered to be a cut above the other such belts since it had a cluster of factories run by foreign companies. Paradoxically perhaps this industrial belt is virtually devoid of any significant signs of activity since most factories in this area are locked out and closed. Of the 220 major The list is long and some of the well known ones is as follows:

American Refrigerator (ARCO); Machinery Manufacturing Company (MMC); Bengal Ingot; Das Reprographics; Avery; Glaxo; Rolls Mills; Poddar Projects; Shalimar Tar; Rolls Print; Metal Box; Siddhartha Apparels; WEBEL; Air Condition; Kesoram Cotton; Farinni; Angel India (state public sector undertaking); Steel and Allied Products; APJ India; Mahindra and Mahindra; ALCON; universal Autocraft.

The 'real estate' factor, so dominant in other industrial belts of the City, does not have much to do with the lockouts in this area since the land on which the factories were built belongs to the Kolkata Port Trust. Delving deeply into the individual cases and observing on the one hand the phases of sickness and on the other the nature of the degradation of the employer-employee relationship, two distinct reasons seem to be common in most of the units in this Taratala-Hyde Road industrial belt. The per capita value addition and the per capita productivity in the respective types of industries were lower as compared to similar industries in other parts of the country. This should be definitely viewed in conjunction with the protracted and strong labour movement roughly between 1960 and 1985 as a result of which the labour wages were comparatively higher than at other industrial belts. Hence the existing labour overhead component could definitely be 'felt' to be deflating profitability. In the organised sector there was job security, a social security network of sorts and the heavily subsidised canteens, picnics, various cultural and social programmes with aid from the

management, gifts and such other 'perks'. One scratches the surface and all these tumble out though they are things of the past.

Then everything changed! For industrial capital value adding became the order of the day. Competition made the need to add value stronger. Control over the market reversed into market driven profit margins. The wage component had to be slashed. With the market calling shots as never before the product ranges changed. Mechanisation, modernisation and diversification were needed for survival. Workers lost their jobs at which they were skilled. For new skills to develop retraining was a must. That was hardly a shared point of view. Organisational strength and party based trade unionism forced surplus labour to continue as idle labour. With crisis brewing, more often than not, the number of trade unions in an industrial unit increased, some of them with dubious credentials very often with covert patronage and support of the management. Labour relations deteriorated with the multiplicity of trade unions making matters that much more worse, complex and opaque. In a role reversal the management went on rampage. Labour rights were usurped one after the other. Wage cuts, reduction in bonus, non-payment of gratuity after super superannuation, withdrawal of subsidy, PF and ESI defaults... all of these and more now became the order of the day. When such pressure was turned on the productivity was perhaps understandably affected. Then started the 'lockout era'. When terror struck, instances of total surrender increased and the noose tightened that much more.

Then more changes were ushered in. The objectives became simpler – to find out the maximum increase in production and the corresponding quantum of profit; to ascertain the minimum labour cost at which level workers would maintain the 'desired' productivity. The philosophy was simpler – permanent workers with assured social security is tantamount to low production since the sword then does not hang threateningly. The 'sense' of security must go. The industrialists needed all round support. They needed the Government; the legislators; the Labour Department; judges and the judicial system; the trade union leaders and the citizenry. Soon in perfect tandem – a dream come true for any conductor – the orchestra started. It was stated matter of factly but politely that the workers should adjust to the changing scenario after understanding the nature of the changing world. It was iterated that the workers should not get too bothered about whether minimum wages was given or whether job security was being provided – they will have to take up jobs as and when offered.

The fact is there is no need for any skilled workers any more. The need of the hour is a few sincere operators who will be trained during the trial period by the agency supplying the machines. The need of the hour is employees with sufficient sense of insecurity at every moment of their existence which will make them terrorised enough to keep themselves clear of expressing dissatisfaction or create problems by protesting or demonstrating.

Slavery is looked down upon by one and all. We talk highly of those social reformers who fought against this dehumanising practise even though slavery was 'profitable' to those who 'owned' slaves. The path through which slave labour was finally transformed into wage labour was long and tortuous. It took centuries of long and protracted struggle by millions of the downtrodden world over even after 'slavery' was legally banned. Mankind feels proud that it had been able to eradicate the utter dehumanisation of slave labours and had put the labour laws in place.

The time has come now to ‘rewind’ history at a breathtaking pace. The omnipotent dominance of capital, free market economy, unbridled lust for profit has ushered in an inhuman system, which demands nothing less than ‘slave workers’ for our industries. Many are those who are parroting the efficacy of this new paradigm and branding it as inevitable unknowingly paving the way for a return trip to the dark ages. □

Regional Roundup of Industrial Belts - VI **Belehata-Phulbagan-Kankurgachi**

The Belehata Canal towards the north and eastern part of the City is dotted by hundreds of factories. Starting from small ones like the lamp factories, saw mills, board mills and small engineering units right up to heavy weights like **Kolay Biscuit** and **EMC**. 10 December 2003 started with trademark fanfare marking the Human Rights Day. The same day saw thousands of ‘citizens’ being evicted from hundreds of *jhopris* along this Belehata Canal. The image of the City benefited since it got that much more cleaner. This was reminiscent of another such eviction drive a year back when for the sake of extension of Metro Railway thousands of similar ‘citizens’ were evicted along the Tolly’s Canal in the southern part of the City. The Belehata Canal, it has been heard for couple of decades now, will be used as a waterway for mass passenger transport. Historically this waterway was once the mainstay of cheap goods transport but gradually it fell into disuse owing to lack of State attention.

Kolkata is changing rapidly. The areas where the working class resided, the city of factories so essential for their life and livelihood, is changing at a gallop. The suburbs are being sucked into the vortex of an expanding metropolis – a mega city with a ‘future’! This is how Jadavpur, Khidderpur, Metiabruj, Garden Reach and Behala are now an integral part of the expansionist Kolkata Municipal Corporation.

As one moves northwards from Sealdah Station, a prominent Central Kolkata landmark, one reaches Rajabazar, a predominantly Muslim area. The road which stretches eastwards from this intersection travels past Phulbagan as Narkeldanga Main Road and cuts Eastern Metropolitan Bypass at Kadapara, passing into Salt Lake near the Salt Lake Stadium – and the five star Hyatt Regency next to it. Between Phulbagan and Kadapara – less than two kilometres on foot – thousands and thousands of workers worked for gain at hundreds of small and large factories. During the last decade or so the scene was showing signs of slow but steady change but now during the last couple of years an aggressive unfolding of ‘urban’ development is changing this space beyond recognition. The curved belt of industries running north to south along the eastern periphery of Kolkata around the central core is gradually being wiped clean. Maybe this was fate accompli of sorts! The hitherto unplanned growth of this urban conglomerate was a constant source of resentment and frustration among the ‘bhadrolok’ society. With the plague like social malady called ‘industrial closures’ spreading its tentacles, some ex-workers dispersed looking for a livelihood. Those who stayed back as street hawkers bore the brunt of the infamous ‘Operation Sunshine’ in 1996. And now the eviction of slums is on the cards. No more security in the form of twenty or fifty-rupee worth of monthly accommodation.

As one proceeds from the predominantly residential area of Phulbagan towards Kadapara on the Eastern Metropolitan Bye Pass, the walls are what remain of the **Bally Jute Mill** of the Birlas. Inside, away from human gaze, nothing stands, as if in eager anticipation for real estate activities to start at a prime residential location. **Mandal Rubber**, established by Kali Mandal, the ‘rubber-king’, also affectionately referred by the old-timers of Belegkata as the potential ‘Dhirubhai’ of the east, stands closed. The roadside premises of **Surah (Bally) Jute Mill, Gobinda Sheet Metals, Kedar Rubber, Calcutta Jute Mill** – to name some of the prime locations – have become the happy hunting grounds for the promoter-developers. Units like **Orient Fan** are already experiencing the throes of sickness and with the entire two-kilometre stretch showing a recent transformation into an ‘avenue of under-construction multi-storeys’, death of such other sickness prone factories could indeed be imminent. Development projects are on the rise along the EM Bye Pass end also. The first landmark has been ‘Swabhumi’ - the ‘heritage’ cum amusement park, surrounded by lush greenery, on a hillock – which was not too long ago a large mound of urban solid waste. The land – or the hillock – had reportedly come for free for the Neotias, private entrepreneurs responsible for several large scale projects in housing and commercial complexes in and around Kolkata since the nineties. Adjacent to Swabhumi, is ‘89’ a cine-multiplex, with state-of-the-art comfort, ‘matching’ price line and usual concentration of fast food outlets. However, about a hundred yards down the road the scene changes: rickety road side shops; a huge building with a thousand residents, mostly workers and ex-workers, living under the same roof; all the tell tale signs of a working class neighbourhood. But for how long, is the moot point!

Roughly parallel to this road, about a kilometre to the north, is an almost a twin set-up along the road connecting the busy, and somewhat posh, Kankurgachi-CIT Road crossing and the EM Bye Pass. **Tata Oil Mill** and **Santosh Biscuits** are closed; **Bengal Chemical** has sold some of its ‘excess’ land on which a multinational school has come up; scores of wire mesh manufacturing units, dozens of storage lead battery manufacturing units, rubber based units, small scale engineering units and lathe machine workshops a vast majority of which are presently locked out. In between Phulbagan and Kankurgachhi crossings one comes across the Small Tools Manufacturing Limited, which has been dismantled of late paving the way for the proposed ‘Orchid Towers’.

The twin set-ups between Phulbagan-EM Bye Pass and Kankurgachi-EM Bypass have a lot in common. Land is in great demand. Once not so long back, upward of 15,000 families earned their living as workers in these two adjacent localities. Urban expansion has marked an end to their modest livelihood. Those who still live in the vicinity can feel that their days are numbered and soon they would have to move.

V

In this section we have prepared 5 fact sheets, which have relevance to the present policies governing urbanisation and industrialisation.

Fact Sheet - I

Industrial Policy and Sickness: At a Glance

- After independence the first national **Industrial Policy** was formulated in the year 1948. In essence it had included much of what was laid down in the 1941 recommendations of **Sir A. Dalal** and also the '**Bombay Plan**' or 'Tata-Birla plan', which came into circulation in 1944. In the 'Bombay plan' the Indian industrialists had categorically stated that the capital intensive heavy and core industries should be established and run by the state owned 'Public Sector' given the fact that the private capital should not be compelled to invest so heavily in such industries and its associated infrastructure development. However it was envisaged that after 15 years the heavy and core sector would be handed over to the private sector.
- The **Industrial Finance Corporation of India** (IFCI) was established in 1948 with an objective to provide medium and long-term credits to the public sector limited companies in order to facilitate post-war rehabilitation and development.

- The **State Financial Corporations (SFC)** were established at state level in 1951 to supplement the work of IFCI by financing medium and small-scale industrial concerns.
- The **Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951** came into being. Primarily it aimed at categorising and scheduling the various industries thereby working its way towards an industrial licensing policy. However around 1953 this Act provided the Central Government with adequate powers to assume direct management and / or control of some private sector units in certain cases of proven mismanagement or in broader public interest thus paving the way for nationalisation, which emerged as a trend later.
- **Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI)** was established in 1964 as a coordinating body for financial and banking institutions engaged in financing, promoting or developing the Indian industry on the whole.
- In 1970, The **Monopoly & Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP)** Act was enacted with the purpose of enforcing control over large powerful monopoly houses and there related trade practises.
- **Industrial Reconstruction Corporation of India** or IRCI was set up (which was later to be transformed into IRBI) with its head quarters at Calcutta in 1971. The ongoing economic depression, overall mismanagement, labour troubles, shortage of raw materials, lack of market demand, stringency in import restrictions were officially put forward as main reasons of closure and sickness of many industrial units particularly in West Bengal. It was envisaged that IRCI was to revive and revitalise the closed and sick industrial concerns by removing the shortcomings. IRCI was expected to reconstruct and restructure the financial base as well as the management of the assisted units, besides providing financial assistance and technical/managerial guidance. The control measures to be adopted by IRCI included transfer of major shares in the name of IRCI; appointment of IRCI nominees in the Board of Directors of the sick unit; appointment of personnel and nominees in key managerial post and purchase/sales committees; frequent plant and factory inspections and so on.
- **Industries (Development & Regulation) Act, 1951** was further amended in 1971 empowering the Central Government to take over industrial undertakings which special emphasis on sick units.
- By an amendment in the relevant Act the **IFCI** with effect from 1972 was empowered to extend its assistance to private limited companies.
- **Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA)** enacted in 1973 was aimed at limiting the share of foreign companies in any Indian industry to 40 **per cent** of the total capital.
- The **Reserve Bank of India** set up a study group in 1975, which was called the **Tandon Committee**, and a guideline was laid down governing the participation of banks in the management of various sick industries.

- The **Reserve Bank of India** (RBI) in the year 1979 conducted a study to identify the causes of sickness in 378 such large industrial units. Mismanagement accounted for 52% (197 cases); market recession 23% (86 cases); faulty planning and technical drawbacks 14% (52 cases); power cuts, shortage of raw materials etc. 9% (34 cases); followed at the end by labour trouble 2% (9 cases).
- The **Tiwari Committee on Rehabilitation of Sick Units** was constituted in 1981. This committee was formed in view of the mounting industrial sickness in the country and its serious ill effects on the national economy. Shri T. Tiwari, Chairman of IRCI (later IRBI), headed the 11-member committee constituted by the Reserve Bank of India. The committee was to examine the legal and other difficulties faced by banks and financial institutions in the rehabilitation of sick industrial undertakings and to suggest remedial measures, including changes in law. It submitted its report in **1983** along with a model bill.
- On the recommendations of an expert committee that the IRCI should be converted into a statutory corporation with 'powers' to restructure the capital base of assisted industrial unit, freeze past-liabilities and even sell units free from encumbrances the Central Government by the Industrial Reconstruction Bank of India Act, 1984, established a separate statutory body called the **Industrial Reconstruction Bank of India** or IRBI, as a successor to the IRCI.
- Largely based on the model Bill suggested by the Tiwari Committee, the **Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act 1985** (SICA) was enacted. According to Central Government statements, sickness of industries was causing loss of production, employment revenue along with a locking up of a large chunk of bank funds. The alarming rate of increase of sickness was dangerous. So it was felt by the government that viable sick units should be revived, vitalised or rehabilitated as early as possible while non-viable units should be liquidated to salvage reusable bank funds. SICA would play a 'stellar' role in this direction vis-à-vis the existing multiplicity of laws, which created hindrances in dealing effectively with sick industries.
- The SICA paved the way for setting up in 1987 of a board of experts acting also as an appellate authority, called the **Board for Industrial & Financial Reconstruction** or BIFR for reconstruction of sick & potentially sick units. The BIFR armed by SICA hence became the apex body on whose hands rested the future of most sick units.
- 1991 was the year of the legendary '**New Industrial Policy**'. For all practical purposes nationalisation, or take over by way of I (D&R) Act, was scrapped. The Public Sector Units would be sent over to the BIFR if found sick or potentially sick, as per SICA descriptions. Needless to say they would be wound up if found 'non-profitable'. Privatisation was on the cards save 8 heads of industries, which would be 'left' for the Public Sector.
- In 1994 the Government of West Bengal announced the Industrial Policy Statement. □

Fact Sheet - II

Economic Review: Efforts To Combat Sickness

1. The Government has initiated the 'West Bengal Industrial Revival Scheme 2001' to offer support to sick industries.
2. Industrialists have submitted around 175 proposals but since the Financial Institutions have shown stark disinterest in providing working capital, the effectiveness of this scheme is being hampered.
3. Most of the proposals submitted concerns applying for bridge loans in order to pay back outstanding loans at high interest rates.
4. Between 2000-01 and December 2004 Rs 30.89 crores have been doled out as loans to only 14 units. Of these in only one case Rs 22.56 lakhs have been given as a subsidy to capital investment.
5. 7 weak or sick units have been allowed waiver of Rs 94.5 lakhs towards electricity duty.

It has been declared that henceforth the support forthcoming as per the 'West Bengal Industrial Revival Scheme 2001' would remain restricted within the following framework:

1. If an industrialist purchases any other closed unit, a discount of 50% would be allowed on the values of stamp duty and registration fee;
2. The outstanding sales tax of the sick unit will be allowed to be transformed into a loan on easy repayment schedule and low interest;
3. Electricity duty will be waived for five years;
4. In order to revive or rejuvenate the sick industrial unit the industrialist would be permitted to mobilise cash by selling the excess and belonging to the particular sick industry.

Regarding point number 2 mentioned above, the Economic Review states that in 13 industrial units employing 17,160 workers a total of Rs 29.93 crores of outstanding sales tax has been transformed into loans. These loans will be payable within 11 years and during the first 3 years the principal would not be required to be repaid. The rate of interest will be 8.75% and a further rebate of 2% will be up for grabs if the repayment is done within the stipulated period. Most of these units are jute mills.

In industrial units like NTC (WBABO), Tyre Corporation of India (Tangra Unit), Joy Engineering Works, Howrah Mills, Small Tools, Sur Enamel, Stamping Ink Company and Haldia Textiles Ltd., the West Bengal Government has permitted the sale of excess land in order to revive the sick unit in question. In some other units it has been principally agreed to permit such sale of excess land for purposes of revival and the list includes: Kusum Products, Calcutta Silk, Standard Pharmaceuticals, NICCO Corporation, Annapurna Textile Ltd.

Besides pursuing the 'West Bengal Industrial Revival Scheme 2001', the West Bengal Government has declared 33 sick units as a Relief Undertaking between April 2003 and December 2004, so that during prescribed period no creditor can prefer any claim, or

move the court against the unit for recovery of dues and also that winding up will not take place in consequence to liquidation cases filed by creditors. □

Fact Sheet - III

A Survey on 500 closed and sick industries:

WEBCON has carried out a survey for The Department of Industrial Reconstruction, Government of West Bengal among 500 closed and sick industrial units in the State. Of these:

- 402 are sick and weak and the remaining 98 are closed
- 64 are in the public sector and the remaining are private run
- 327 are large or medium employing 3,38,920 workers and the remaining 173 are small units employing 13,343 workers
- Of the 327 large and medium units 226 have been referred to the BIFR

Of the 500 studied some of the important industries are as follows:

Iron and steel (87); Chemicals and pharmaceuticals (62); Engineering (46); Electrical and electronics (38); Jute (37); Textile (29); Plastic and rubber (28); Paper (22); Cement (18); Agro-based (17); other metals (14); Food processing (13).

Regarding the reasons of failure of these units the perception of the Management and the Banks/Financial Institutions have a varying viewpoint:

Whereas the management says failure of planning is to be blamed in 19.95%, production related failures in 44.18% and other factors in 34.61% cases the Banks/Financial Institutions hold that failure of planning is to be blamed in 9.52%, production related failures in 56.19% and other factors in 32.38% cases.

According to the report, leaving aside the casual workers, there are 3,52,223 affected workers in these 500 closed and sick industries.

Touching upon the geographical distribution of the sick industries under survey the report reveals that of the affected workers 1,57,000 are in the district of Bardhaman; 65,492 in North 24 Parganas; 32,576 in Howrah; 31,632 in Kolkata; 30,918 in Hugli; 30,918 in South 24 Parganas and the remaining 16,221 in six remaining districts.

Fact Sheet - IV

Rajarhat Satellite Township:

1. On 1 June 1995 the Government of West Bengal officially announced that adjacent to Bidhan Nagar, popularly referred to as Salt Lake, a New Town will be built on 2750 hectare of land covering 21 moujas in the Rajarhat Police Station area.
2. In a notification published in 1994 it was announced that land falling within the following 21 moujas viz. Tarulia, Gopalpur, Salua, Chandiberia, Hatiara, Aatghara, Kaikhali, Tegharia, Nawpara, Dasadrone, Raigachhi, Mahishgote, Shulongari, Mahishbathan, Rekjoani, Ghuni, Baliguri, Thakurdaari, Chak Pnachuria, Jatragachhi and Kadampukur would be taken by the Government of West Bengal for the Satellite Township Project.
3. A total of 1,31,000 inhabitants would be evicted in the 21 moujas.

4. As per the Census report of the 2750-hectare of land in these 21 moujas 2095 hectares are agricultural land. A large portion of the said land yields two crops of paddy per year. In some areas wheat is grown during the summer. There are number of fisheries in the area. Kadampur and Sikharpur moujas are famous in the state for its flowers. There are about 15 lakhs of trees in the area. 1 lakh 31 thousand inhabitants live in 40 villages. 12,500 of these are involved in agriculture, 4000 with fish farming and 4650 are landless labourers.
5. The Rajarhat Satellite Township Project involves an estimated expenditure of Rs 5000 crores with a projected capacity of 50,000 flats.
6. After the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) 4 more moujas have been added to the original 21 as a result of which the total land acquired increased from 2750 to 3075 hectares. Very soon announcement for acquiring of land falling in 6 more moujas is expected.

Fact Sheet - V

'Excess' Industrial Land:

- Some industrial units have appealed to the Government of West Bengal to allow them to use some of their 'excess' industrial land for the purpose of constructing residential apartments. They have clarified that the profit generated would be suitably utilised for modernisation purposes. The following are some of the leading factories and the amount of land they plan to build residential apartments on:
 1. 7.5 of the 12.5 acres at the Sahagunj Unit of Dunlop;
 2. 4 acres at the Gramophone Company in Dum Dum;
 3. 300 acres at the Hind Motors in Hugli District;
 4. 10 acres at a few Jute mills in and around Kolkata.
- In 2003, the Government of West Bengal had asked WEBCON (a State Government public sector consultancy firm) to carry out a study on the 'excess' land located within various industries. The study revealed that there were about 41,000 acres of 'excess' land in just 500 industrial units in West Bengal.
- It is expected that immediately after the Land Reforms Bill is passed the Government of West Bengal will announce a guideline for 'utilisation' and probably 'fair-use' of the 'excess' industrial land. The guideline supposedly mentions that when on a piece of land a commercial project will be envisaged, the Government will set up the base price and the rest will be decided in an auction.
- Minister of Housing, Sri Gautam Deb, has given his consent to the plan to build residential apartments in the 'excess' land belonging to industrial units. The Government's eagerness stems from a objective that in the next 20 years 90,000 families would have to be provided with proper housing. The first target would be to utilise as soon as possible the land locked up in locked out industries and closed Central Public Sector Undertakings.

VI

In this section we have placed 5 relevant documents, which have been prepared during the period of our study in connection with raising awareness about the plight of workers in locked out industries.

Document-I

A Report On The Plight Of Workers In West Bengal

WORKERS: Shifting Sand

The total working population of the state is rising at a higher rate when compared to the increase in the rate of total population, as per census figures. Whereas the total population of the state increased by 17.84% between 1991 and 2001, the total working population increased during the same period by 34.62%. But this seemingly positive trend is not really positive for the industrial scenario. This will be clear when one observes that during the same period, the workers in the primary sector increased by 12.06% that is a third less than the rate of total population increase (17.84%). This means a huge lot of workers lost their jobs in the organised sector. The picture will be clearer when one finds that the number of marginal workers increased from 13.34 lakhs to 64.39 lakhs in these 10 years, which is a whopping increase of 412.67% [marginal workers are those who get 183 days of work per annum]! In ten fateful years the percentage of marginal workers in the state rose from a modest 1.97% to 8.03% of the total West Bengal population.

It is pretty evident as to what is happening to the lakhs of toilers who are losing their jobs from the organised sector owing to industrial closures, lockouts and retrenchment. The figures will reveal a lot about the plight of workers.

EMPLOYMENT: Job Losses Outstrips Generation

- In the year 2003, there were fresh jobs created for 9,120 workers in 238 factories set up during the year. On the other hand 6,35,000 workers lost their jobs for varying periods owing to lockouts and strikes in 432 factories.
- In the year 1981 for every crore of Rupees invested, 228 workers got fresh employment. During 1999 the same crores created 16 job opportunities. During 1991 and 2001 19,775 crores created 62,404 fresh jobs – at an average rate of little over 3 jobs per crore.

It is obvious that nature of industries being set up in the state is in no way solving our employment related problems. Compounding this is the unabated trend of job losses, which is pushing the workers against the wall. Tall claims apart the reality on ground level is simply appalling.

CLOSED, SICK AND LOCKOUTS: Staggering Reality

- 42.2% of the registered 69,269 factories in West Bengal are closed.
- Only 28% of the factories are registered.
- The number of unregistered factories total up to 1,78,120.
- In the 288 large units alone, which are officially sick, there are 4,27,750 affected workers.
- Of the total number of cases where factories stop production 92% are due to lockouts declared by the management.
- Such lockouts initiated by management accounts for 94% of the annual man-days lost in the State.

It is popularly stated that there are 55,000 closed and sick industries in West Bengal. However this estimate could be rather optimistic, given the fact that 1.78 lakh factories are unregistered and information about the number of closed units are officially unavailable. Similarly there are no official figures of medium and small-scale factories, which are sick. Hence the number of workers affected by industrial sickness could be nearer to the 1 million mark. As regards the spiralling trend of lockouts one can only state that it is a social malady much worse than the much-criticised phenomenon of militant trade unionism, which is a thing of the past. The workers are on the back foot while the management is on the rampage.

FAWLOI SCHEME: Miles To Go

- As per FAWLOI scheme (Financial Assistance to Workers of Locked Out Industries), Rs. 500 is payable to workers below the age of 58 in units under lockout for more than a year.
- In the year 2003-2004, the Government of West Bengal spent Rs. 24.55 crores by way of financial assistance to 42,729 workers in 263 units.

- The budgetary allocation is Rs 50 crore of which not even half was utilised for the scheme whereas 2 lakhs of workers in West Bengal are in locked out medium and large industries of this state.

Whereas the Government of West Bengal deserve to be applauded for this exemplary gesture towards workers of locked out industries it must be stated that this social security net, by now, should have covered more workers deserving assistance.

PROVIDENT FUND: Turning A Blind Eye

- Only 8.7% of the total workers in the state have PF coverage.
- There are 5.69 lakh workers in 654 factories under exempted category and 17.67 lakh of workers in 18,938 un-exempted units.
- In West Bengal the total PF dues have tripled in the span of fifteen years – from Rs 113.89 crore in 1989-90 to Rs.348.11 crore in 2003-2004.
- The Jute Industry alone accounts for about 36% of the total PF dues in West Bengal during 2003-2004.
- The units under the exempted category covers about 25% of the total workers but are responsible for 70% of the PF dues.
- The PF Board of Trustees in the exempted category group comprises of representatives of both the employers and the employees. Despite such huge dues not a single case have been lodged against these Trustee Boards.

Misappropriating the PF has almost become a legitimised business practice in thousands of industrial units. In the absence of any State intervention this malpractice is assuming unmanageable proportions. The workers in the long run bear the brunt of the seemingly inert behaviour of the Government machinery. Their own money remains locked up in these funds for years and decades while they struggle to obtain a square per day.

ESI: A Mockery of Social Security

- Shockingly the number of beneficiaries covered by the Employees State Insurance (ESI) Scheme has taken a nosedive having been reduced to less than one-third of its value in 14 years – from 10.75 lakhs in 1990 to 3.5 lakhs in 2004.
- During the same period the unpaid ESI dues have sky rocketed from 35 crore to 203 crore.
- 62% of this entire arrear is accounted for by default from the Jute industry alone.
- Despite the extent of default the ESI Corporation has accumulated Rs 39 crore as excess of income over expenditure during the last 6 years.
- The small-scale manufacturing sector stays outside the ambit of ESI and hence about 35 lakh prospective beneficiaries remain uncovered.

The defaulters are not punished, but by default, the workers get punished! This paradoxical situation is presently the hallmark of this important arm of the social security network. Whose profit, whose loss, remains an unanswered question!

MINIMUM WAGES: Maximum Chaos

- 57 categories occupation or industry has been included in the schedule of minimum wages while minimum wages have been fixed for 53 occupations or industry, leaving out a multitude of others.
- As per rules the minimum wages are to be revised every 4 years but in 22 occupations there has been no revision for over 20 years now.
- The Government has computed the minimum wage in every occupation at Rs 2700 per month, but has done scanty little to bring those errant employers to book who violates the Government order in letter and spirit.
- There are 341 Minimum Wage Inspectors in 345 blocks of the State and as yet information regarding minimum wages in various parts are as yet unknown to those who matter.
- The number of enquires carried out annually regarding Minimum Wage violation has fallen by 24% in the last five years – from 37971 in 1999 to 28979 in 2003 – while the number of cases in which conviction was made came down to a third of its value in the same period – from 628 in 1999 to 206 in 2003.

All this has culminated from the industry-friendly posture the Government of West Bengal seems to be projecting – all at the cost of unorganised sector labour.

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Document-II

GENESIS OF SICKNESS: PAST AND PRESENT

Today the number of closed and sick units in West Bengal stands at well over 50,000. Together with this, the haunting spectre of more industrial units falling sick and ultimately closing down with thousands of workers pushed to the brink of extinction is spelling doom not only to the workers of the affected units but also to the entire economy.

A HISTORICAL RECAP

Downslide of the industries in West Bengal actually has its root in the post independence industrial scenario of the country after the end of the British Raj. Following are the significant development issues that started in the 50's and deeply influenced the fate of future industrial scenario in West Bengal.

Change of level of industrialization: Over the entire world, the level of industrialization started undergoing a radical change from this period. Previously, the basis of industry was metallurgical and engineering. Later on the focus shifted to chemical industries. The emphasis was to develop new materials like plastics and polymers, polyester, polythene etc. This new level of industrialisation gave a stunning blow to the existing industrial structure of Bengal. Profit motives brought about yet another significant change. As the consumer product for ordinary people did not fetch huge profits, the emphasis shifted to luxury products or high-ended products targeting the wealthier class. Initially, modern technology was meant for better utilisation of labour involved in labour intensive activities. But subsequently it focused on labour

substitution. World wide, technology created its own market. Initially the role of technology was limited to aid production process. Later, for the sake of this technology market, the production process had to change in order to suit the needs of a growing technology market. Apparently it seems that now 'production' is for the sake of 'technology' and not technology for the sake of production. Consequently, labour of Bengal, which was acclaimed world over for excellence and skill, started losing its importance. This is another reason why industries in Bengal started declining.

Change of demand structure: Initially it was thought that demand would develop mainly in three sectors: infrastructure, giving rise to more and new kinds of demand; demands for industrial goods; and demands for consumer goods for ordinary people and those in agricultural sector. But the demand structure suffered a miserable setback. It was expected that demand would be met by the manufacturing sector inside the country. But this was not to be since soon the Central Government shifted from import substitution to export led policies resulting in an increase of import. These were found to be incompatible with indigenous demand. In the agricultural sector instead of improvement, rural poverty became pronounced. As a result the demand from agricultural sector suffered. Add to it the influx of refugees from East Bengal as a consequence of partition of the country, which added great strains on the socio-economic conditions. The emerging industrial geography did not favour West Bengal. After independence the new wealthier class/new upper middle class emerged mostly in the other parts of the country. Since the newly emerged industries catered more to the wealthier class it failed to meet local demands of West Bengal. The impoverished mass of West Bengal with falling purchasing capacity further worsened the fate of local industries based on local demands. Lack of modern communication and logistics and deteriorating infrastructure of Bengal made the plight of the industries in the State acute, particularly when the demand was located elsewhere.

Unfavourable industrial geography: In the British period the industrial geography was tailor-made to suit the interests of the British capital. After Independence the geography was reshaped to suit the interests of various dominant political groups/parties. They dictated their terms: where would the new industries be set up? Where would the new infrastructure be built up? What would be the policy of industrial incentives/dis-incentives? To make this repositioning of industries viable the economic policies were reshaped accordingly. In this context, no West Bengal lobby existed in the national politics for decades. As a result, West Bengal did not get its place in the new policies of industrialization, investment and the reshaping of the industrial geography. The old industrial belts (mostly Port and Railway based) in West Bengal suffered a great deal, as the newly emerged political interests did not back it.

Constraints in the growth of agriculture: Crisis in the agricultural production dealt a severe blow to the old infrastructure in Bengal. Agricultural sector is the source of raw material supply for industries viz. tea, sugar, jute, oil-seeds etc. On the other hand, it also creates demands for consumer and other products to fulfil the needs of people in agricultural sectors. But such kinds of demands suffered due to the crisis in agriculture. The agro-based industries in West Bengal also started suffering.

Infrastructure: On the pretext that old infrastructure created by the British already exists in West Bengal, no effort was given for improving the old infrastructure or

building new infrastructure. As a result the old infrastructure deteriorated due to overuse and obsolescence. This affected the industrial scenario of West Bengal to a great extent.

Absence of regional or local entrepreneurs: It is often said that West Bengal did not have local enterprises – most industries were in British hand. Factually, however, the Bengali capitalists were primarily instrumental in setting up the swadeshi enterprises found in our history. But the original capitalists in West Bengal ultimately got defeated. The local enterprises were based on local demands, local resources and indigenous technology. This concept could not find any place in the post-independence restructuring of our industry. In this new industrial structure there was virtually no place for local enterprises to thrive on local demands and local resources. Moreover, there is the proverbial Bengali mindset that lacks entrepreneurial culture. People without having any root in the state therefore held many of the ancillary industries appended to British capital. Their incentive during the British period was to reap the special local advantages enjoyed by Bengal due to British policy. The local advantage of Bengal during British period was due to the fact that British colonial power had their early roots in Bengal, which had developed an English knowing local bureaucracy and a socio-cultural environment, fast absorbing the fruits of western culture, which was beneficial to British capital. After the British left and the local advantage of Bengal ended, capitalists having roots outside the State did not find any lasting reason to stick to West Bengal. That is why when colonial power left the industries in West Bengal, local entrepreneurs did not step in while in other States local entrepreneurs did step in to take over industries from the British – many of which are still thriving today. On the other hand, the local rich, who had the resources for taking over industries – mostly, landed aristocracy – found it better and safer to invest in real estate, and not in the industries.

Lack of technology upgradation: Combination of all these factors did not provide incentives to the entrepreneurs – most of them having roots outside the State – for technological up gradation or improvement of their enterprises.

Work culture and labour productivity: Declining work culture and poor labour productivity have often been held responsible for the decline of industries although no comprehensive study/ evidence backed by exhaustive facts and figures is available as yet.

OUR EXPERIENCE

In the above backdrop and absence of pro-active policies for counteracting the legacy of industrial disadvantages widespread industrial sickness in West Bengal followed as a natural corollary and became predominant.

Role of BIFR vis-à-vis closed and sick industrial units: It is unfortunate that instead of becoming a forum for industrial revival BIFR had virtually turned out to be an industry dismantling mechanism. The principal emphasis of BIFR, it seems, was to refund the financial stake to the creditors and investors (excepting the workers and employees whose statutory claims are no less than other creditors) with whatever maximum return on capital as possible. That is why workers are barred from participating in the process of formulating the revival scheme although their stake in the enterprise is the strongest being their only means of livelihood. They appear on the

scene as the last resort (that too not as a matter of right) when everybody else has failed. It appears, the priority is not to run a sick unit with the objective of its achieving long-term self-sustenance.

Lack of innovation and accountability: Moreover, there is total lack of innovation about industrial recovery and accountability of the professionals/government nominees who are to be instrumental for reviving the unit. Result: a half-hearted, make shift arrangement to run the unit for sometime till its resources and possibilities for revival get exhausted and the erstwhile/new owners of the unit are able to squeeze out the last drop of blood from the unit. Finally, the unit gets dismantled and the workers always remain on the losing side. Had the government nominees/professionals selected on the board of directors been in the employment of BIFR or the revival agency they would have better accountability and greater responsibility.

Concessions for industrial revival or for the owners? To revive sick units the government has so far given concessions mostly in the three areas: a) *Sales Tax concession*, b) *Permission to use surplus land for real estate project* so that income generated in this regard can be used for revival process, c) *Declaring a sick unit as a Relief Undertaking* so that during prescribed period no creditor can prefer any claim or move the court against the unit for recovery of dues. Unfortunately in all these areas concessions have been reaped by the owners to fatten their own purse instead of using the same for industrial revival.

Disinvestments, Privatisation, VRS, Massive Retrenchment & Re-organisation: Instead of promoting (through competition) excellence in performance and well being for the workers, consumers and other stake holders of a company, liberalisation is ultimately rewarding the inefficient and reckless employers – both in the public and private sectors – by arranging privatisation/disinvestments. As a result, employers can get away with fast buck by selling/gainfully transferring their stake while workers are sacrificed in the form of paltry compensation (like VRS), massive retrenchment and work force rationalisation in the name of corporate re-organisation

Jute, Steel, Cotton, Wagon & Engineering Industries: It is common knowledge that the above industries in West Bengal are on the verge of extinction.. In the Jute industry the modernisation fund remains virtually unutilised. Most of the Jute Factory owners are not real owners but leaseholders having no motivation for modernisation or improvement. Ultimately, the jute growers are also becoming the victim. In all these industries the workers are the worst sufferers while the management have numerous ways to escape after making quick money at the cost of the industry and its workers. Wittingly or unwittingly the government is becoming a party to this game to the detriment of the workers and the industry.

Labour productivity, work culture, quality movement and workers' participation in management: As mentioned earlier, there is no comprehensive study/evidence backed by exhaustive facts and figures available as yet that establishes the fact about poor labour skill and labour productivity in West Bengal and its primary role behind industrial decline. On the other hand, there is sporadic statistical evidence that physical labour productivity in West Bengal is no less than other States. Lack of technological upgradation, on the other hand is a major factor behind the stagnation/decline of total productivity. The history of productivity movement in modern world shows that

productivity & quality achievement (for which today Japan is competing with the most advanced countries of the world, for which the most industrialised countries of the first world have achieved the leadership position today) is not possible without the participation of workers in the management. This is different from participation of Trade Union leaders in the Board of Directors. The process of involvement of workers in the management has to start from the shop floor level as it has been done in Japan and western countries in the form of Quality Circles and should travel upwards right up to the Board level.

Productivity and Social Security: It is often contended that social security measures burdens the enterprises with unmanageable costs affecting cost-competitiveness and also the productivity and performance. At least there is no relation between social security and improvement of performance! Again there is no comprehensive study/evidence backed by exhaustive facts and figures available as yet that establishes this proposition. The history of advanced industrialised countries having strong social security base rather shows a strong positive relation between better social security and better performance.

Involvement of Social Action Groups in promoting the culture of industrial revival: In most cases, workers alone cannot bring in the desired level of revival management. There is the question of meaningful alliance with the professionals. Most important is the involvement of social action groups who can bring social awareness orientation in the industrial revival actions (both at the unit and macro level) by virtue of their experience, expertise as well as information and research power in the relevant fields so that the plans and actions for revival do not get biased by any interest group other than those representing broader social interests of industrial revival.

Document-III

A Pair Of Hands Without Work: An Appeal To The Civil Society

Thousands of factories are locked out. And they remain closed. Lakhs of workers go jobless. Their skill and experience come of no use to the society. They eke out a meagre living just to scrape a meal at the end of the day. It is the end of weekly or monthly wages – end of social security. What starts is a struggle for them to keep alive.

Workers of legal industrial closures lose their jobs but are paid their dues. A locked-out factory implies unpaid legal dues. Workers need to fight for the settlement of their dues. How are they to find time in midst of their struggle for survival? PF, gratuity, outstanding wages, unpaid bonus – and the list goes on. Unheard any more are the ear shattering slogans of workers unity. The padlock on the factory gate symbolises the end of their identity as organised labour. They are the workers of locked out industries – and there are none to even think about them. Two, five, ten years – even after fifteen years their legal dues remain unpaid. They are not covered by health insurance – most lack proper shelter – education for their children is a tough ask – no food support from the State for these genuinely urban-poor.

Factories get locked up but the laws of the land remain active. The fate of the workers comes under the auction hammer. With sworn undertakings to reopen it from the bidders, the unit changes hand as a ‘going’ concern at a throwaway price. Workers view this transiently as a silver lining. However the gates remain shut – the locks gather rust.

Then the next phase starts. At night first, then in broad daylight, the machinery, materials and spares and the finished product are removed. One by one the water pipeline, the electric wiring, even the last nuts and bolts vanish. The skeleton remains, only to be covered by overgrown creepers. The new 'industrialist', the old leader, the police, remains proactive and enterprising. Then the junk dealers, the bulldozers and the realtors step in conveniently. Residential apartment blocks come up in a hurry. The workers still have unpaid legal dues!

It is story-like but not fiction! Hundreds of such apartments come up while lakhs of such workers remain deprived. This and the lack of any strong protest are both realities. There seems to be no breakthrough of this paradigm. At places where the workers throw up a semblance of resistance the factory remains a graveyard for two decades or more. After that only a few workers are expected to survive making things that much more easier. These days the State Government is showing a strange dynamism by 'resuming' the land on which these locked out factories stand. It is to be seen whether the State Government is pro-labour enough to settle the outstanding legal dues of the workers before offering the piece of land to someone else. It is also to be seen whether the State Government would use industrial land for fresh industrial purposes, as per its avowed principles, or would use it differently.

We strongly believe that time has come to address the civil society in order to mobilise support for and built up an opinion in favour of these hapless workers on this issue. Civil Society has never ever accepted such one-way deprivation for long. In the past, issues had been floated, demands formulated and as a consequence of civil society pressure, things have changed for the better. We do not believe that workers/employees have ever been granted any right without any pressure. And here the civil society has a definite role to play. It has indeed done justice to its role in innumerable instances in the past. Today, the workers of locked out industries are all alone in this fast moving world. It is unimaginably difficult for them to reunite and fight on their own for their rights. Stark deprivation exists but we are still optimistic since the Civil Society has always raised its voice against such unfair treatment meted out to a section, which is a constituent of the same society. Optimism makes us active!

We have formulated some demands during our interactions with the workers whom we have seen to suffer. Many of these demands, may we mention, do not need any huge budgetary allocation. Hence we are certain that if the Civil Society puts its weight behind the justified demands of these workers of locked out industries, the Government can, with ease, add value to the lives of these socially challenged. After all these are the ones who genuinely need the Government!

During the last fifteen days the campaign trail has seen intense activism. The last seven days our tableau rolled for 12 hours a day on an average. Two-dozen meetings in industrial and urban hubs have been attended with zest.

Somehow we can feel that you too would come and join the 'Bhukha Michhil' on Sunday, 1 May 2005 at 2pm from College Square. The Rally will pass through Bidhan Sarani, Vivekananda Road, Maniktala, Sealdah, Moulali and end with a meeting at Subodh Mullick Square.

Document-IV

Our Demands

1. Till all outstanding dues of the workers are settled, the monthly financial assistance of Rs. 500 should not be terminated.

The West Bengal Government is the first state in the country where the workers of locked out industries are given Rs. 500 per month as per FAWLOI (Financial Assistance to Workers of Locked Out Industries) Scheme. The value in real terms of this seemingly meagre amount will be evident to those who are in touch with the lives of these workers while they struggle to survive.

However the State Government is stopping the payment to the workers as soon as they cross 58 years of age. This is both inhuman and illegal. Inhuman since it is right then that they need support having lost their strength through old age and semi-starvation. Illegal, since nowhere in the notification concerning FAWLOI has such a clause been mentioned.

We demand that this financial assistance should instead be continued till the workers of the locked out industries get their outstanding dues settled.

It may not be irrelevant to mention that while the State Government has a budgetary provision of Rs 50 crores for the FAWLOI Scheme it has till date never spent more than 50% of its budgetary allocations.

2. If the State Government resumes the land of any locked out industry, the outstanding labour dues has to be settled by the Government.

State Government over the decades have provided land for industrial purpose to the factory owners. Factories had come up – a large number of them had been locked out – most of them have been transformed into industrial graveyards – the workers from these units till date languish with unsettled dues – the factories have changed hands several times – apartments have been built on many of them. The West Bengal Government has remained spectator or has cooperated directly or indirectly.

Off late the State Government, in a rare show of dynamism, is joining the fray and is moving Court to be allowed to resume the land it had, once upon a time, leased to the industrialists.

We demand that the State Government should settle outstanding dues of the workers of those factories whose land it is now resuming. After all the Government have plans for its reuse.

3. The State Government should provide workers of locked out industries / establishments with a minimum of 100 days of work per year.

After all an important clause of the Common Minimum Programme is to provide 100 days of work to the poor as per the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS).

We demand that workers of locked out industries be considered to be urban poor, who they definitely are, and they should be deemed also to be the beneficiaries of this scheme.

4. Workers of locked out industries/establishments have to be provided food as per the orders of the Supreme Court already implemented in some parts of UP and Rajasthan and some tea plantations in West Bengal.

The Supreme Court in a recent landmark verdict has directed the UP Government to provide free food to the workers of a closed factory. The West Bengal

Government too supplied ration to the plantation labours in certain Tea Gardens in North Bengal owing to suitable legal interventions. Our demand, hence, is for the implementation of the Supreme Court order whereby workers of locked out industries should be provided with free food.

5. These demands in favour of workers of locked out industries/ establishments should remain valid not only for those covered by the 'Factory Act' and the 'Plantation Labour Act', but also for those covered by 'Shop and Establishment Act' and there should be no attempt to fragment the workers on any basis.

It is common knowledge that a huge number of cinema halls in different parts of the city and various districts of West Bengal have remained locked out since long. Workers in these establishments suffer joblessness, unpaid dues and stare starvation on its face. It is hence natural that beside the industrial workers and plantation labourers those covered by the 'Shop and Establishment Act' should also be considered in connection with these demands. There should be no effort to fragment the workers on the basis of any number of criteria.

6. The children of workers of locked out industries/establishments should be freed from all direct and indirect charges involved with their education.

Even though education is supposed to be free in the State there are some expenses, which the parents have to bear in an indirect manner, e.g. development fees, etc. For a worker of locked out industry assured of the financial assistance of Rs. 500 per month even such indirect expenses may very well turn out to be a burden. We demand that all such direct or indirect expenses for children of workers from locked out factories should be suitably waived. The West Bengal Government should make arrangements for paying all such charges from the Labour Welfare Fund maintained by the State Government.

7. Just like any worker covered by the ESI Scheme who can avail the Medical Benefits offered by the ESIS after superannuating, as per rule 61 of ESI Scheme, the workers of locked out industries/establishments should be allowed to avail the Medical Benefits of ESIS and the State Government should bear the requisite annual subscription of Rs. 120 on behalf of these workers.

After six months from the date of lockout, as per rules, the workers become automatically debarred from all the benefits offered by the ESI. Needless to mention, it is exactly then that the workers need the maximum support from the social security network of which the ESI is an important plank. Being jobless, these workers are in a tight position then, kept away from unpaid dues and this is when they need a health insurance the most.

We would like to draw the attention of all concerned to Rule 61 of ESI which states that, after superannuating, every worker and his or her spouse, can avail the medical benefits of the ESI by paying Rs 120 per year. We demand that this rule be made applicable for workers of locked out industries and also that the additional amount of Rs. 10 per month be made available by the State Government over and above the Rs 500 paid to them per month as financial assistance. Rs 510 in place of Rs 500, is in no way a big deal!

8. Till such time that the relevant Rules of the 'West Bengal Factory Dismantling Act, 1953' is finally framed, the District Magistrates or Collectors should be empowered to realise all the outstanding dues of workers on their behalf, whenever and wherever a closed factory is caused to be dismantled.

It is a matter of fact that many factories lying closed for years are finally dismantled with orders from the appropriate Courts or otherwise. The land is often used for real estate or other purposes but in thousands of such cases the workers who used to work at these factories before its closure remain deprived of all their legal dues.

In order to protect the rights of these hapless workers 'The West Bengal Factory Dismantling Act' was promulgated way back in 1952. As expected it mentioned categorically that no factory will be caused or allowed to be dismantled till all legal dues of the erstwhile workers are cleared.

Now it is a valid question as to why in spite of this legal armour, the workers are deprived of their legal dues while apartments adorn the land on which their factory stood. The answer, we are afraid is bound to surprise all concerned! Though the Act had been passed the Rules necessary to implement such an Act has not been framed for the last 53 years!

Our first demand is that the State Government should initiate action to frame the Rules pertaining to 'The West Bengal Factory Dismantling Act' at the earliest. It may be pointed out that the Government will not require any additional budgetary allocation for this step. When the Rules become effective those who profit hugely by reusing the land (for say real estate purposes) could easily cough up with the amount outstanding by way of legal dues. It would amount to an insignificant proportion as compared to the resale value of prime land. Surely the Government will not stand to lose anything in such a deal?

Our second demand is that till the said Rules are framed, the DM or Collector should be empowered to withhold permission of dismantling till all outstanding legal dues of the workers are met.

9. As per 'Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972', the workers will have to apply for their gratuity dues within 30 days from the date of the closure of their factories. This 30-day bar has to be suitably removed.

As per the law of the payment due to a person by way of Gratuity cannot be withheld. But a large proportion of workers of closed industries are deprived of their Gratuity dues violating the spirit of the legal pronouncement. This is because of a small clause embedded in the Gratuity Act. It states that a worker must apply in paper for their Gratuity payment within 30 day of the factory closure.

This is a tough ask for a worker. The worker is accustomed to the cyclic closure and reopening of the factory. When it closes down expectations of its reopening remains primary. And most often it reopens after a few weeks or months or even years. Hence the worker can never really guess when the factory is finally closing down for good! By the time this realisation seeps in the 30 day period has long passed. The worker, for this small clause, remains deprived legally from his or her dues. Had the management declared legal closure by following the norms of advanced notice, the workers could then have been said to be at fault.

We demand that this clause governing the 30-day period should be removed and the State Government should do the needful in consultation with the Central Government.

10. Suitable budgetary allocations should be made henceforth for the construction of industrial housing for workers.

During the 50's and 60's the West Bengal Government had constructed housings specifically for the industrial workers. Workers could use this facility at a nominal rent. Since early 70's no such action has been taken by the State Governments. Later even these industrial housings underwent a change of nomenclature and came to be referred to as housing for the Low Income Groups. We agree that citizens considered being in the Low Income Group need housing. But that does not necessarily imply that the workers no longer need housing facilities. If the workers of locked out industries stayed in such industrial housings they would not have suffered owing to lack of proper shelter after their factories were locked out.

We demand that the State Government should henceforth build up industrial housings every year and necessary budgetary allocations should be suitably made for the purpose.

11. The employers who flout their statutory obligations of paying the outstanding dues of the workers including those of PF, ESI, Gratuity and wages, should be punished as per the laws of the land.

The State Government is in a roll to invite investment to this 'investment-friendly' State. It is taking all necessary steps to guarantee that trade unionism of the like of yesteryears does not vitiate this industrial environment. It is a matter fact that during the last two decades or more a section of the employers have misappropriated hundreds of crores of legal dues related each to PF, ESI, Gratuity, wages and deferred wages. The message is simple. The State Government needs to put up an evergreen signal to keep the image of an investment-friendly state untarnished by such trivia. Understandably there has not been a single case when the employee has been punished for such grievous fault of depriving workers from their legal dues.

We demand that the State Government should punish those who are at fault as per the law of the land.

12. The State Government should make necessary arrangements so that all the workers receive the prescribed minimum wage for the job, trade or industry.

It is evident that a huge chunk of workers are continuously shifting from the organised sector to the more chaotic unorganised sector. Irrespective of the minimum wages fixed by the Government, even skilled workers are made to work at Rs 35-50 per day. With a huge army of unemployed but skilled/experienced workers waiting on the wings minimum wage norms are being flouted at will. Moreover there seems to be no effort on the part of Government to include the various other trades/occupations/industries in the schedule of Minimum Wages.

We demand that the State Government should initiate action against the thousands of employers who are flouting the fixation of wages as per Minimum Wages Act openly.

13. The State Government should take suitable steps in matters relating to those benches of Labour Courts and Tribunals, which do not have judges.

The number of labour related Courts/Tribunals in West Bengal is appalling even when compared to states like Bihar and UP. Of the 11 such Benches in West Bengal five are without Judges. We demand that the number of labour related

Courts/Tribunals should be increased in the State and all the benches should be provided with Sitting Judges. □

Document-IV
Tableau Route Chart

<u>Serial no.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Starting from</u>	<u>Travelling to</u>
1	24 April 2005, Sunday	8am	Belur Indo Japan Steel	Salkia Howrah Bally Uttarpara
2	25 April 2005, Monday	10am	College St./Bowba zar crossing, Hawker Sangram Com. office	BBD Bag Central District Press Club: 3pm After Press Conference: Shibpur
3	26 April 2005, Tuesday	8am	Dunlop Morh	Baranagar Rathtala: 9am Belgharia Sukhchar: 11am BT Road Shyamnagar: 4pm
4	27 April 2005, Wednesday	8am	Hyde Road Morh petrol pump	Taratala □ Brace Bridge □ Jhinjira Bazar □ Sampa Mirza Nagar □ Fatehpur Bazar □ Metiabruj □ Ramnagar □ Khidderpur: 4pm
5	28 April 2005, Thursday	8am	Hazra	Jadavpur □ Anwar Shah Road Tollygunj □ New Secretariat: 12noon □ After 4pm : Shyambazar □ Patipukur □ Nagerbazar

6	29 April 2005, Friday	8am	Belur Indo Japan Steel	Hind Motor Konnagar Rishra Serampur Chinsurah
7	30 April 2005, Saturday	8am	Belur Indo Japan Steel	Bauria Chengail Phuleshwar Topsia/Tangra
8	1 May 2005, Sunday	2pm	College Square	College Street Vivekananda Road Maniktala Sealdah Moulali Subodh Mallick Square: 4pm

VII

In this section we intend to place some relevant facts and figures beside a brief discussion on urbanisation and industrialisation.

Facts and Figures

Population And Growth

1. The population in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation area was 45.81 lakhs while that of the urban agglomeration was 132.17 lakhs as per 2001 census.
2. Around 20 lakh people on an average commute to Kolkata every day, it is estimated roughly.
3. Among the million plus cities in India the least growth of 4.1% is seen in Kolkata Municipal Corporation area.

Kolkata Slums And Its Inhabitants

4. The earliest set of slums or 'bustees' in Calcutta developed in close proximity to the British quarters, so that the dwellers could be called upon to offer service to the British families whenever demanded. With a huge flow of British capital being invested in jute and engineering industries and with the railways, postal service, banks and port becoming functional a huge exodus of migrant labourers from various states looking for employment. The second group of bustees resulted from this industrial growth, which produced rapid urbanisation of Calcutta. During the 30's and 40's, somewhat triggered by the Great War, the industrial base around Calcutta spread to over 40 km on both side of the River Hooghly and this attracted further migrants from Calcutta's hinterland to act as cheap labour. Landlords and middlemen offered these migrant labourers with makeshift dwellings in which they found cheap accommodation living as tenants. Most of these still exist in the so-called slums of Kolkata and its urban spread. The third category of bustees was primarily

refugee colonies, which came up to accommodate the huge inflows both in 1947 and again in 1971.

5. Besides the slum-dwellers and people living in squatters' colonies and shacks, there are innumerable pavement-dwellers who do not have any address, live on the pavements or under verandas or bridges, on the railway platforms, abandoned houses, courtyards, religious places or even inside the large pipes that often lie on the roadside.

Urbanisation

6. The process of urbanisation has shown an increasing trend during post independence period being 24.25% in 1961 to 27.39% in 1991 to 28.73% in 2001. The current projection envisages growth up to 30-35% with an urban population of 31.3m (30.24%) in 2011, and 41.5 m (33.44%) in 2021. The pressure on CMA would continue to increase. In 1991, the CMA population was about 64% of urban West Bengal.

7. Housing statistics shows that, although the population in the old town area increased, on the whole, about 50 times in about two centuries, the number of houses increased only 11 times during the same period. It also appears that the increase in the number of houses during the 19th century was only 14 per cent, although the population multiplied not less than 5 times.

8. The population density per sq. km in 1961 was 28,144 and in 1971 and 1981 30,279 and 31,615 respectively. It rose to 42,308 in 1991 and 44,458 in the 2001 census.

Urban Planning

9. Some important recent documents on urban planning for Calcutta/Kolkata are as follows: Perspective Plan for Calcutta 1990-2011 A.D prepared by a team of experts under the State Planning Board (SPB), 1990; Plan for Metropolitan Development 1990-2015 prepared by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), 1990; Urban Land Use Studies of Calcutta prepared by Space Application Centre (ISRO) Ahmedabad and CMDA, 1991; Calcutta Mega City Programme, CMDA, 1994; Vision 2025.

10. In order to delineate the urban spread in and around Calcutta certain terms with varying connotations have been used over the decades with different purposes in mind:

During the 40's Greater Calcutta (GC) was 690 sq. km stretching 65 kilometres along both the banks of Hooghly from Halisahar in the North to Budge Budge in the South; 1951 census gave rise to the concept of Calcutta Industrial Region (CIR) which included 36 towns and covered 420 sq. km; 1961 came up with the concept of Town Group (TG); 1971 Census replaced the notions of CIR and TG with the concept Calcutta Urban Agglomeration (CUA) which included the city of Calcutta and some of the urban centres in the districts of 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Nadia; Calcutta Metropolitan Standard Urban Area (CMSUA), a term adopted in 1991 Census of India covers 1488 sq. km composed of 3 Municipal Corporations (Calcutta, Haora, Chandannagar), 31 Municipalities, 3 Notified Areas, 70 Non-municipal urban areas and 390 rural moujas; and the latest in the list is Calcutta Metropolitan Area (CMA) which is smaller than CMSUA and currently 55 urban centres, out of a total of 125 of the whole state, function within it.

Vacant Or Agricultural Land

11. In the 1961 land use survey of the Calcutta industrial region the carried out by CMPO while drawing up the Basic Development Plan showed that 72.51% of the area covered for

the survey was either vacant or agricultural while only about 27.49 % of the area was built-up or developed. Open vacant land in CMSUA had already decreased from 52.48% in 1981 to 43% by 1990. Further urbanization of land is apt to transform agricultural land and wetland in spite of the fact that there is a general understanding that the agricultural land as well as the wetland and large water bodies should be preserved as such and no change of use of such land should be permitted. Not surprisingly perhaps, it is envisaged that by 2015 only 33% of the CMSUA area would be vacant or agricultural.

Direction Of Urban Expansion

12. The 'Plan for Metropolitan Development 1990-2015' (CMDA), 1990 identified a total of 9 future development zone, of which 4 are located on the northern part of CMSUA and 5 on the west. Kalyani and Gayeshpur on the true left bank and Bansheria on the true right bank of Hooghly towards the north, besides Kona towards the West are some of the areas around which the City could extend northwards and westwards. Both the SPB and CMDA documents of 1990 correctly pointed out the nature of ecological sensitivity of East Calcutta Wetland and advocated against any change in the present land use system.

Some Facts About Industrialisation

- There were over 6 lakhs of workers employed in the organised sector of West Bengal as far back as 1948.
- Between 1991 and 2001 Rs19,775.20 crores were invested in 545 industries creating 62,404 jobs in all.
- In the year 2003, there were fresh jobs created for 9,120 workers in 238 factories set up during the year. On the other hand 6,35,000 workers lost their jobs for varying periods owing to lockouts and strikes in 432 factories.
- In the year 1981 for every crore of Rupees invested, 228 workers got fresh employment. During 1999 the same crores created 16 job opportunities. During 1991 and 2001 19,775 crores created 62,404 fresh jobs – at an average rate of little over 3 jobs per crore.
- 42.2% of the registered 69,269 factories in West Bengal are closed. Only 28% of the factories are registered. The number of unregistered factories total up to 1,78,120. In the 288 large units alone, which are officially sick, there are 4,27,750 affected workers. Of the total number of cases where factories stop production 92% are due to lockouts declared by the management. Such lockouts initiated by management accounts for 94% of the annual man-days lost in the State.

Foreign Direct Investment

13. The National Informatics Centre's data for Ministry of Industry indicate that between 1991-1995, 79 cases of Foreign Direct Investment totalling Rs. 3483.65 crores have been approved for West Bengal; this ranks second amongst all states in India.

Industrial Policy And Future

14. The State Government has in 1994 made a Policy Statement on Industrial Development. The Policy welcomes appropriate foreign technology for mutual benefit, envisages private sector investment in power generation, invites projects for development of industrial and social infrastructure like housing, health, education, water supply, roads, communication, growth centres and tourism etc.

15. The report submitted by international consultant group, Arthur D. Little of USA, on 'Strategic Vision of the Future of the State' is worth mentioning. The report stated that:

- West Bengal is located within India's most competent and rapidly growing industrial region
- The state is the principal gateway of the economies of the Asia-Pacific region
- Calcutta will emerge as the leading industrial, trade and services centre of India
- West Bengal and its hinterland have the richest natural resources
- With ports and waterways, the geographical location of West Bengal makes it the most important centre in Eastern India and thus the gateway for communication with the South East Asian economy

Discussion

The characteristics of the urban space in Kolkata were influenced historically to a great extent by industrialisation. A belt of industries along the periphery of the central urban core gave the city a somewhat semicircular appearance with the bulge towards the East and the River Hooghly as its rough diameter towards the West.

Towards the mid-eighties, with great rapidity, industrial growth and population growth parted ways. While on the one hand the population towards the periphery of the city showed a phenomenal growth, on the other hand factories closed down in hundreds owing to 'lock outs' and 'suspension of works' setting in motion an industrial recession in the region which still continues.

As compared to the urbanscape ten years back Kolkata now is in the midst of experiencing a sea of change the rate of which surpasses anything seen in the past. The multiplex and shopping malls; the 'five-star' hospitals, hotels and schools; really luxurious residential apartment blocks; entertainment parks, trade centres; office complexes; exhibition complexes and such other facilities have been peppered all over the city with telling effect. Huge costs are being incurred for glossy surface treatment of major thoroughfares, roads are being widened at any cost and flyovers have started making their appearance. All this in a city where one out of every three live in slums.

Organisations involved with urban planning of Kolkata goes back to 1820's when the 'Lottery Committee' became instrumental in building proper roads for the City. Projects involving sanitation and health too came under its purview, though the 'white' area of the city benefited most. In 1911 Calcutta Improvement Trust (CIT) was formed. Though, over the decades, CIT had earned great reputation as an urban development agency and had left some indelible imprints on Urban Calcutta, it was too preoccupied with the 'physical' infrastructure of the city to be concerned about the bottom half. In 1961 Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organisation (CMPO) was formed. The 'Basic Development Plan, 1966-1986' by the CMPO was perhaps the only document on urban planning which laid sufficient emphasis on the socio-economic parameters and the

inter-relationship of the various strata in this urban set-up. It stressed on the need of improving the standard of living of all concerned, citizen's initiative and participation in urban planning and such other aspects. Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority or CMDA (later KMDA) was established in 1970 and with the help from international funding agencies slum development became a cardinal zone of its interest.

Factually the attitude of the Government is changing. The change encompasses the sense of responsibility, accountability and obligation to the different layers of this society. As a result the priorities and policies regarding its attitude towards development, industrialisation and urbanisation is also undergoing a change. The Government no longer feels that even to provide and extend basic civic amenities to the vast majority of the populace to be one of its prime responsibilities. For decades, new municipal markets and state run hospitals and housings for low-income groups have not been built. The multitude of common people – not distinguished by rank, office, education or profession – have to bear the brunt of indifference from a popular government once committed to social justice. All this to garner foreign funds for urban 'development'. The development of Kolkata and for that matter the state of West Bengal will have to depend largely on setting up modern technology based industries requiring huge foreign investments. In order to have this flow of investments in tact the city has to be show cased, packaged and given a cosmetic facelift and hence it is a no holds barred contest.

Urban planning is indeed not all about brick and mortar. It has more in it than planning for just making it look good. A comprehensive development plan should be able to allocate sufficient land for economic activities (including manufacturing activities) to be carried out by the different layers of the citizenry so that an average per capita income suitable to sustain a healthy life is attainable correcting for population increases in the future. It is not enough to short list some so called sunrise industries alone which are capable of becoming money churners on their own right while choking out the life line for all other manufacturing activities owing to short sighted planning and lack of initiative on the part of the local government. By not allocating land for a comprehensive set of economic activities the state will not only subjugate the working class to the throes of poverty but despite its attempt to make the city beautiful might in the long run sap the urban area of all its vitality to attain an overall economic development. And at the end of it an enhanced per capita income only can pave the way for a significant physical development of the area in sharp contrast to the ongoing paradigm of 'making' a city beautiful.

It has to be accepted that not all industries are suitable to co-exist within an urban set-up where factories are encircled by residential quarters. It has become relatively easy these days to identify and exclude the hazardous industries right at the onset. However land being the real scarce resource, preference could be provided to such non-hazardous industries which inherently have a pretty high space-output ratio, which is related to the industries value adding capacity vis-à-vis the required amount of land which it occupies. Socio-political influences should not guide the action of allotment of urban land as per the desire or demand of the entrepreneur but instead rationalisation of the amount of the land parcel required should be calculated based on the space-output ratio of that specific type of industry based on the installed capacity.

Traditionally the industrial belts in and adjacent to Kolkata had been found to be capable of absorbing the un-employed in the city and also the under-employed in the adjoining agricultural hinterland. For any future planning to be effective this pattern of allowing industries in the outer ring, away from the central core but well within the hinterland, should be physically persisted with.

Cities are not merely built up urban spaces for the well off, rich and affluent to live in. While planning for the future we cannot wake up one fine morning and wish away the presence of a third of the urban population living in authorised and unauthorised slums. We cannot hope to sustain an urban economy when the State Government starts clamping down on almost all economic activities, which alone can be instrumental in providing succour to its 1.5 million slum dwellers. A singular blunder committed for decades is to view poverty alleviation programmes as a burden only because the planners have not been able to plan well enough to transform it into a source of productivity. It has been a trend among a section of the mighty to denigrate and ridicule every action aimed at addressing the needs of the bottom third by labelling these very questions, rather cruelly, as 'populism'.

The slum development programmes are essential but indeed not an end in itself. Such projects will continue to be looked at as a stopgap arrangement not addressing the real issue. Planning a city well in advance so that the city can sustain the economic needs of its citizens living in the slums is a firm step towards holistic planning.

Out of the total state population of 7.95 crores, only 2.95 crores work for gain. Of the later, about 18 lakhs are employed in government (both state and central) offices, 7 lakhs in private companies and 35 lakhs have regular but unprotected jobs. The remaining 2.35 crores are marginal workers having periodic or seasonal employment of totally uncertain nature. As per the 2001 census reports the sector where employment has shown a remarkable rise is shop and establishments the figures for which has risen from 5 to 12 lakhs in the last 10 years. With the number of auto rickshaws increasing by 50,000 and taxis by 5,000 the transport sector is another area where employment for lakhs of youth have been created. Private nursing homes and educational institutions is the only other area which has created fresh employment of any significant value.

The cash strapped State Government uneasy about not doing much of social welfare activities and convinced as a matter of fact that it is not at all in a position to shoulder the 'burden' of slum development on its own have strongly gone in for joint sector exercises with international funding agencies in this area. Hence the long-term plan titled 'Kolkata Environment Improvement Programme' has evolved with 69% of its expenditure coming as loan from Asian Development Bank. A CMDA project, 'The Kolkata Slum Improvement Programme', advised and aided by DFID is also a case in point. One can be certain that after the money has been spent there could indeed be a definite 'improvement' in the slums and its environment. The moot point is how these inhabitants from a seemingly 'improved' slum will eke out a modest living. Yet another threat is the manner in which agencies like ADB propose to get involved with the aspect of municipal governance reserving the right so to speak in deciding the extent of downsizing the municipal work force.

In spite of a morbid industrial scenario, investment in real estate has skyrocketed in the Kolkata Metropolitan Area. The skyline is changing and the available civic amenities

are progressively facing seemingly insurmountable pressure. Depletion of ground water level, strain on water supply and sanitation, shrinking parking space and open space, increased fire hazards are some of the pressing problems. Since the 80's industrialisation aimed at manufacturing for the society to consume. Off late capital has changed gear and it seeks pastures which offer maximisation of profit. Real Estate is one real 'industry', which does really add value to capital investments.

Question may be raised regarding whether the Government should not do enough to provide shelter to those who can indeed afford to buy well-priced flats in apartment buildings. The New Town singularly is envisaged to offer 50,000 new homes to the middle class upwards. The city is expanding. However study reveals that not more than 40 percent of the flats in apartments and housing estates are physically occupied even years after official possession is taken. As soon as embargo on the transfer of flats are removed making upward of 50 percent profit by reselling the same is pretty commonplace depending on its location. Unfortunately such assets have become means to invest and speculate adding fuel to the zeal of the realtors. Previously an owner of a flat or a house in the Kolkata Urban Area was not even allowed to apply for a flat in a government housing. This clause has been conveniently removed. Huge hoardings have started appearing offering two-bedroom flats against a monthly instalment of only Rs6000 per month, which makes it evident that there is hardly a demand proportionate to the number of flats being completed. Concerned Ministers would however like us to believe that not enough is being built since in a matter of few years the IT industry would engage around 5 lakh professionals and the Government should not fail in its state of preparedness when the boom finally comes.

The land belonging to hundreds of locked out and closed factories have become luscious targets of these hawk-eyed promoter-builder-developers. Unscrupulous factory owners have also found a perfect foil in these realtors. It is beyond doubt that making a company sick is indeed big business specially if selling the land of the locked out factory to a realtor can come as an icing on the cake. Lest one misses the point it needs to be mentioned that these promoter-builders are not only emboldened but also empowered by the tacit support they get from the state machinery. As per a survey of the State Government 136,000 acres of land are locked up in the various closed industries in West Bengal and is obviously under active 'consideration'.

Even a few decades back an urban set-up was considered to be constituted of citizens from the various economic strata. During the phase of the ongoing paradigm of development the urban space is deliberately being designed for the affluent. Eviction drives are being increasingly rationalised. The squalor of poverty as if is becoming unbearable to those in power. The poor is no longer being treated for its poverty – they are being driven out from the city. Resettlement programmes or compensation packages if any are not for once considering the net trauma on the quality of the life of those being displaced. Self-respect, skills, stability and security are being snatched away from the lives of those displaced. Many of them had undergone similar earlier traumas when they had been displaced from their work in factories, which were illegally locked out. Displacement starts from the bottom and they must go so that those higher up feel less cramped in the changing urban space.

The Government of West Bengal is either helpless or indifferent. Either way this paves the way for an absurdly inhuman situation where the workers are on the receiving end.

The factory owners are allowed to declare suspension of work or lockouts illegally thereby resolving the owners of their legal responsibilities of paying the outstanding dues to workers. Legal closures in West Bengal are rare and the West Bengal Government has taken legal steps against the errant management only in negligible number of cases. Militant trade unionism is a thing of the past. Around 90% of the man days lost in the State result from the illegal lockouts thrust upon the workers by the owners. The Reserve Bank of India in more than one study concluded that more than 80 per cent of companies became sick, and consequently closed down, owing to 'management deficiency' and seldom due to militant trade unionism. The State Government does little to force or persuade the factory management to clear all outstanding labour dues even after decades from the date of lock out. Residential apartments spring up on the premises of locked out units but few care to know what has happened to the labour dues or legal compensation. Off late the State Government has 'come to know' about 300 such instances where land of locked out industries is lying unused or in some cases such land has been handed over without permission or where the nature of land-use has changed. The Government had decided to resume the said lands. It remains to be seen whether the erstwhile workers in such factories finally get at least their long-standing legal dues. This Government can hardly boast of a spotless track record since probably taking lessons from the unscrupulous owners it too has 'earned' crores by dismantling a factory, has decided to hand over the land to private operators for a garment park but has showed little interest in paying off the outstanding legal dues of the workers in the factory which it had bought from the High Court 13 long years back.

In 1952, 'The West Bengal Factory Dismantling Act' was framed so that no errant owner could even start dismantling the factory before paying the entire legal dues of the workers. During the tenure of the Congress Government this law was passed at the Legislative Assembly in West Bengal with clear intentions to safeguard the interests of the workers if and when the factory was caused to be dismantled. Hundreds of small, medium and big factories have been dismantled in West Bengal but the workers have in most cases been deprived of their legal dues despite such potent legal armour. Factually no legal steps could be taken against the violators of such a law of the land since Rules necessary to implement such an Act has not been framed during the last 53 years. So much for the pro-worker postures of those in power for the last 28 of these 53 years.

The urban space in Kolkata is changing with telling effect. Manufacturing units are being erased from the map while real estate is booming like never before. Apartment blocks are replacing chimneys. Relatively cheap consumer products are being eased out in favour of high-ended products for the wealthy. Street hawkers attracting the low-income group are being evicted while department stores for the high-income group are mushrooming. Open space where group games for slum and lower middle class children were a routine is shrinking ominously while entertainment and heritage parks are coming up thick and fast. While middle class markets languish in filth and disrepair glittering and huge shopping malls are making even those citizens who limit themselves to window-shopping 'proud'. While traditional cinema halls become shopping plazas gigantic multiplex movie halls are making their appearances. Thousands of trees get felled but the roads get widened again changing the urban space. Change is clearly evident in the form, content and language of the giant hoardings, which are vying with each other while in their turn also changing the urban space they occupy.

The urban middle class is being targeted by a massive corporate manipulation. They are being drawn into a vortex of a dream, which wreaks of consumerism. The design is to make them believe that this make-belief world of urban development is for them to be in. A flat, bank loans, consumer products, credit cards, insurance, gold, automobiles, shopping malls, flyovers, share markets, 'five star' hospitals and schools – initially the catered dream seem to be partially attainable. Various estimates have put the figures of upper and affluent middle class in the Kolkata Urban Area at about 15 lakhs. A portion of this population was 'forced' to leave the city for national and international destinations for 'marketing' having been offered only *Dakshinapan* in the south and *Uttarapan* in the north during the last two decades, which were markets of pathetic standard as per their needs. Now the 15 lakhs have needs looked after by the State Government. Even a 'hawkers' corner' is making way for a shopping mall and almost immediately the types of buyers and also sellers in this same geographical urban space is undergoing a complete change. The development plank is being played forcefully but the question regarding development 'for whom' is gradually surfacing. While it is those at the bottom who really need the Government, yet paradoxically, it is those at the top that are having their needs addressed in the recent brand of urban development. The needs from below include work, food, shelter, health, education and transport while needs from above is all that which is happening around us.

One seldom sees those streams of bicycles plying to and fro from the factory gates while shifts changed. The migrant labourers predominantly from Bihar and UP are going back to their villages while the next generation of workers are choosing to go West unlike several past generations of their ancestors who preferred to come East. The industries, which are being set up with the 'free-flowing' FDI and which are changing the urban space of say, Sector V of Salt Lake is seemingly of and for a different world. With traditional manufacturing-based industrial activities in and around Kolkata on the wane and the need for operators many times more than that for workers in whatever industries which are being set up with foreign direct investments, the percentage of marginal agricultural workers in the state of West Bengal has risen from 2 to a whopping 8 in a matter of 10 years. Indeed this changing brand of industrialisation and urbanisation has started playing havoc with the life and livelihood of the common man in particular and the economy in general.

Things are indeed changing, but for whom is the cardinal question. Packaging of Kolkata is proceeding at cyclonic speed. The whirlwind is sweeping away the redundant. The city of palaces is becoming less human. The workers of sick and closed industries and their factories do no longer fit into the scheme of things of the mighty Left Front Government of West Bengal as it moulds its capital into a modern urban centre of international class. It has to surpass Mumbai and move on since ahead is the 'dream' city of Shanghai. Also ahead, with the next sunrise, the golden glow of foreign investments beckons.

For how long will the voices from below be heard, now that the juggernaut is already rolling? □