

# Editorial

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## For the environment - together we can make it

Development is a multi dimensional concept covering political, economic, social, cultural, spatial, scientific, technological, moral, spiritual, ecological and environment development.

Everybody is aware of the ecological deterioration and environment degradation, but none acted to do something to save it. Every pedestrians see plastic bottle, and other waste scattered in our footpath. But, 'blame' to those who threw it or perhaps to the government authority is the reaction. He or she will not pick it up to throw it to the right place. There are many who talks saving our environment, rivers and forest. But everyday the thousand people dump their waste at the roadsides, threw garbage at the river smuggled woods using any unfair means. Some waited for camera to take a shot while planting a sapling to show their love for the mother nature but will never look back to see whether the sapling he or she planted is grown.

It is we human being, which is responsible for the crime committee towards the nature. The recent flood across the country including Manipur is fall out of what we human being had committed for hundreds of years. Deterioration of nature is more seen to less develop and developing countries. City based intellectuals who visited only once or twice to complete their thesis keep blaming the ignorance of the common people who have less knowledge of saving the environment as survival is more important for them. Schemes and projects always turn a flop show as they were prepared on table without studying the need of the people residing in interior forest land. And the money which are meant for the environment are gold mine for those working on the table.

The state of Manipur had witness five times devastating flood since N. Biren Singh took charge of Chief Minister. Again the people of the state now witness scanty rainfall, which flooded most part of Imphal city but keep the cultivable field dry. Almost all cultivable land of the state still remains dry. Farmers in the state now fear that they would not be able to start their cultivation work. If the paddy field remains dry the way it is, we don't need any fortune teller or scientist to predict that Manipur may face famine.

Discussions over the issues only put the blame to common people of both Hill and Valley area who never had any knowledge of how much money has been sanctioned for the preservation of the forest land in their respective land.

Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's new initiative - Green Manipur Mission is perhaps an appreciating initiative. However, it is skeptical to most people as the Mission to make Manipur Green seems rather a publicity matter. A proper planning to make sure that such an initiative continues to make Manipur a real green state.

It may be mention that for the first time in the history of Manipur, a village called Ringu in Ukhrul district donated around 600 acres of land to an NGO to make the area green. Though the village is far from Imphal with limited access of Education, they have showed their enthusiasm in protecting the environment and rebuilding a forest. Forest and Environment Minister, Th Shyamkumar had assured to make the piece of land as a forest zone but the promised he made is still yet to see into action. The good service of the villagers of Ringu will not only make their village famous but will help in reducing the global warming, even though it might effect only .00001%.

If more villages in the state of Manipur started donating land for plantation of trees than Manipur will set another example in the protection of the environment in the whole country. What remains skeptical is the sincerity of the forest department authority.

Well the challenges before the country particularly in the state of Manipur is to preserve and protect the natural environment or revive it where it has been degraded. It must be remembered that the problem of environmental degradation is social problem which has to be solved by the people themselves with some sort of policy and programme from the government

A short term course in Ecology and Environment awareness should be arranged for the benefit of the elected representatives starting from PRI, Municipalities, corporation, MLAs, MPs, Development planners and administrators which would give them a proper understanding of nature, the important of flora and fauna and other natural resources especially forest wealth and their management.

The recent series of activities taken up by the state government however showed some enthusiasm to save the environment. At the same time making people aware about the issue is also important to protect the environment.

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# Sugarcane Farmers Caught in a Complex Web of Negligence in Eastern UP

Courtesy The Wire  
By : Manoj Singh

Despite raising the plight of sugarcane farmers before the 2014 Lok Sabha and 2017 assembly elections, the BJP has failed to address them adequately while being in power in the state as well as the central government.

Sugarcane farmers in Uttar Pradesh are still owed Rs 10,626 crore in dues. In many areas, the crop is yet to be harvested.

In Gorakhpur district, sugar mills are being run under the risk of poor recovery. In Kushinagar, one lakh quintals of sugarcane still stand in the fields.

There is considerable visible anger amongst sugarcane farmers due to these circumstances. Nine Lok Sabha seats in the Gorakhpur area went to polls on May 19. On that day, sugarcane farmers, disappointed over the closure of sugar mills and the lack of demand for sugarcane, took trucks full of produce to polling booths to stage a protest.

Despite attempts by officers to assuage them, the farmers refused to be placated, and in the end, eight were arrested. There has hardly been another incident like that in any election.

These farmers belonged to Nauka Chhapra village of the Kasaya assembly constituency in the Kushinagar parliamentary constituency. Their sugarcane falls under the reserve area of the Ramkola Punjab sugar mill, but the mill was unable to purchase their sugarcane.

At the end of April, officers allocated two lakh quintals of sugarcane from the Ramkola Punjab sugar mill area to the New India sugar mill. When the farmers of Nauka Chhapra reached the sugar mill on May 16 and 17, they were greeted by a closed doors and a sign that said "No Cane".

The farmers were told that the mill would only be restarted when 20,000 quintals of sugarcane would become available. In the extreme heat of May, the farmers, angry at having their yield refused, went along with a hundred trucks of sugarcane directly to the polling booths on the night of May 18. Polling was delayed by two hours due to the protesting farmers. In the end, eight farmers were arrested and then polling began.

The farmers - Jagdish Singh, Parshuram Singh, Rudra Pratap Singh, Ravindra Yadav, and Ram Vinod Singh - said that they had been taking their yield to the sugar mills for three days without any success. They were told that the sugar mills have been closed. When the farmers demanded that mills be reopened, they alleged they were misbehaved with.

For that reason, the farmers decided to demonstrate their dissatisfaction via democratic means.

A day after this incident, farmers, angry at the fraud in the distribution of sugarcane procurement slips, threw stones at the Sissa sugarcane union office in Maharajganj.

Farmers Lal Bahadur, Indrasan, Jalaluddin, Shankar, Kamalavati, Nikkam, and Santosh Mall claimed that they have not been able to receive the sugarcane procurement slips even as their sugarcane dries in the fields.

A fortnight after these two incidents, the Sissa sugar mill of Maharajganj shut shop. Except for the Ramkola Punjab sugar mill in Kushinagar, all other remaining sugar mills have been shut. The farmers, meanwhile, complain that their crops are still languishing in the fields.

The district sugarcane officer in Kushinagar, Ved Prakash Singh, said that one lakh quintals of sugarcane still remains in the fields in Kushinagar. The government has issued a directive that mills cannot be restarted until all the sugarcane has been collected. He conceded that sugar extraction has been poor, only 7-8%, due to the June weather.

The sugarcane procurer at the Dhadha sugar mill, D.D. Singh, said that they closed the mill on May 17 due to not having any sugarcane, but once the

Ramkola Punjab area sugarcane was allocated to them, they had to run the mill until the end of May.

Of the 10 mills in Kushinagar, five, Chhitauni, Kathkuiyan, Padrauna, Ramkola, and Lakshminagar, are closed. Of the five mills in the Devariya district, four, Devariya, Gauribazar, Baitalpur and Bhatani, are closed.

In the Gorakhpur district, the mills of Dhuriapar and Sardarnagar are also closed. The UP government replaced the closed Pipraich sugar mill with a new sugar mill in Gorakhpur, thanks to which sugarcane processing has started again.

The two sugar mills of Maharajganj, Farend and Ghughli, were already closed. This year the private sector JHV Garuda sugar mill also shut down and there is no mill in the Siddharthnagar district. In the Itava assembly area in 2003, a plan was formulated to construct a mill in Bhitauri, but nothing has happened since.

In the Santkabr Nagar district, there was only one mill, the private sector Khalilabad sugar mill, which is closed now. There are five mills in the Basti district, of which the Basti and Watterganj mills are closed. A new mill has become operational at the site of the old, now closed, mill in Munderva.

The private sector mills Babhanan and Rudhauri are in operation. In this way, in the Gorakhpur-Basti region, 17 of the 28 sugar mills are closed.

In May 2008, the Mayawati government sold 27 sugar mills of the Uttar Pradesh State Sugar Corporation. Of those, there were 11 sugar mills from six districts in the Gorakhpur-Basti area. Out of all the sugar mills that were sold, only two - Sissa and Khadda - are still operational. The rest have been shut down closed. In Gorakhpur, the Farmer Cooperative Sugar Mills Limited of Dhuriapar has been closed since 2007.

For an entire year, there was an agitation that demanded that the closed sugar mills of Kushinagar and Deoria be reopened. The Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) Bhanu protested for 63 days demanding the reopening of the Lakshminagar sugar mill of Kushinagar.

The former president of the union, Brajendra Mani Tripathi, held a year-long protest to reopen the Baitalpur sugar mill of Deoria and even contested elections from Deoria as an independent candidate to highlight this issue.

A farmer carries cut sugarcane on his motorcycle through a field outside Gove village in Satara district of Maharashtra. Photo: Reuters

### BJP's promises vs reality

While campaigning for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, Narendra Modi had, during an election rally in Padrauna, had raised the issue of the closed sugar mills and promised that the mill would be reopened within 100 days of him being elected.

The BJP won the 2014 elections and Narendra Modi was elected prime minister. Then, in the 2017 assembly elections, the BJP raised the issue of the closed sugar mills again.

The party also raised the issue of the compensation given to sugarcane farmers and promised that farmers would receive their payments within 14 days of offloading their sugarcane to the mills.

But despite being in power in Delhi and in Lucknow, the BJP forgot about its promises. While Yogi Adityanath had allocated money for



the construction of two sugar mills in his district, and the mills were subsequently constructed, it did not help the sugarcane farmers much because the construction was finished by the end of the sugarcane season. Both mills were made operational for a few days for the sake of election campaigning, but afterwards, they were shut with "No Cane" boards hung at the entrances.

One of the promises the BJP had made in the 2017 assembly elections was that sugarcane farmers would receive their payments within 14 days of offloading their sugarcane. The party promised that sugarcane would be purchased on time and that farmers would receive good prices for their crop.

But the Modi-Yogi government has completely failed to live up to these promises. For that reason, in all the campaign meetings and rallies, both Modi and Adityanath evaded questions regarding the issues of sugarcane farmers.

Adityanath has spoken about the two mills opened in Pipraich and Munderva, but has remained silent regarding the issue of purchasing sugarcane and paying farmers their outstanding dues on time.

The prime minister held meetings on May 12 in Kaptanganj of Kushinagar and Rudrapur of Deoria but did not say a word about the promises he had made in 2014.

In 2017, both Amit Shah and Adityanath had criticised the Akhilesh Yadav government about the money owed to sugarcane farmers on several occasions. At that time, Rs 5,000 crore was outstanding. And now, as of June 6, sugarcane farmers of the state are owed Rs 10,626 crore and BJP's ministers and spokespersons are doing their best to evade questions on the issue.

In the district of Kushinagar, where farmers protested, 25% of the payments, on the part of five sugar mills, are still due. The sugarcane incharge of the district Ved Prakash Singh said that the five mills of the district have only processed 390 lakh quintals of sugarcane this season.

### One lakh quintals sugarcane drying in the fields

The sugarcane processing season lasts only until mid-April, but because of poor government policies, mills have been forced to run until now. The government was afraid that the farmers' anger would negatively affect the election outcomes.

Sugarcane surveys have not been conducted properly in eastern UP, which is why there is no accurate data about the total area in which the crop is grown. More sugarcane was planted this year, and the yield was also good. Just as in Kushinagar, the planting area for sugarcane went up by 20,000 hectares.

Sugarcane was planted on a total of 94,000 hectares in the district. Despite knowing that the planting area has increased and the yield is good, the government did not purchase sugarcane on time or arrange for its processing and instead shut down the private sector JHV sugar mill in Maharajganj. Representative image of a sugarcane farmer. Photo: Reuters

This mill owes farmers Rs 46 crore for two seasons and its employees another Rs 16 crores. Farmers and workers protested against this. As a result of the protests, it was decided that the mill would restart on December 27 and slowly repay its debts.

The farmers wanted the mill to remain operational so that their crops could be sold. According to the agreement, the

mill began preparations for processing the sugarcane, but suddenly a command came from Lucknow that the mill be closed and the 60 lakh quintal sugarcane in its possession be allocated to six other sugar mills. The farmers believe that the mill was shut because of some personal animosity between the chief minister and the management of the sugar mill.

Because of the sudden closure, the pressure on other mills increased. This is why, despite the processing period being extended by a month and a half, not all the sugarcane has been processed.

The purchasing of sugarcane in May and June, as opposed to earlier, has caused great loss to both farmers and sugar mills. The weight of the yield has fallen by nearly 30% due to the heat, which has been a source of distress for farmers as their payments have fallen.

On the other hand, the efficiency of sugarcane processing has fallen. An employee at a sugar mill said that efficiency was greater than 10% in March and April but now has fallen to 8%.

If mills do not buy the sugarcane on time, farmers are forced to sell their produce to the crusher at lower prices. The government had set Rs 325 per quintal as the support price for sugarcane. But farmers are dissatisfied with that amount. They say that as the cost of sowing and harvesting has increased, they should be given at least Rs 450 per quintal for their sugarcane.

The farmers who were forced to sell their sugarcane at the crusher only received Rs 150-200 per quintal. Sugarcane middlemen have used the plight of the farmers for their own benefit. They would visit farms, purchase sugarcane at low rates and then sell it to the mills at a higher rate.

The sugarcane of Maharajganj was sent to Bihar, while sugarcane from Bihar was sold to mills in Kushinagar. The sugarcane farmers in the JHV mill area suffered especially. In order to clear their fields, they were forced to sell their sugarcane crop to middlemen at Rs. 70-100 per quintal.

The middlemen sold the sugarcane at the Kushinagar crusher for Rs. 150-180 per quintal. Had the crushers not purchased the sugarcane, the farmers would be even worse-off and would be forced to burn their crop to clear the fields.

Premchand had said in an essay in 1933, "Mill owners are few in number. They can, whenever they want, get together and collectively decide the price at which sugarcane will be purchased. And that indeed happens. It is impossible for farmers to join together like that. That is why they live at the mercy of the mill owners."

In another essay, Premchand praised the efforts of the sugarcane farmers of Gorakhpur and Basti to join forces.

"The mill owner's need to purchase sugarcane is far more pressing than the farmer's need to sell it. If farmers join together, they can force mill owners to come to their farms and fields to buy sugarcane, because although sugarcane can stand in the field for 10-15 days, a mill cannot be closed for even 1-2 hours."

It has been 86 years since Premchand wrote this. The situation of sugarcane farmers is even worse than what it was then. Sugarcane stands in the fields and mills are shut. When the farmer protests, the police arrests him and throws him in jail.

Translated from the [Hindi original](#) by Karan Dhingra. [Manoj Singh](#) is a senior journalist based in Gorakhpur.