

Annual Report 2000-2001

1. The *Refugee Watch* continues to be a major publication of the Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (MCRG). MCRG has published five issues (10 & 11 as one combined Number, 12, 13, 14, 15) so far. Ever since we renewed our annual contract with SAFHR, we also took some steps in making it attractive to our target audience. All this was in tune with the resolution of the last AGM. Besides some experiments with the cover, getup and style, certain changes were effected in respect of the organization of the features and focal themes. While the combined Number guest-edited by Dr. Paula Banerjee was a special issue on refugee women, Volume 13 revolved around the theme of displacement in northeastern India. Different volumes carried articles on such diverse subjects as the impact of violence on women in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Burma, Afghanistan, Central and South Asia in general, on Palestinian refugees, Tamil asylum seekers, Leo the African, the Mohajirs of Pakistan, Pakistanis and Indians outside South Asia and the plight of refugees on the US-Mexico border etc. We tried to blend them with some theoretical papers as 'Between Myth and Reality', 'Power, Fear and Ethics in Refugee Protection' etc. We have introduced -- albeit on an experimental basis, a column named, 'Mediawatch' to put the media coverage on issues of our direct interest under closer scrutiny. In spite of the rising mailing cost, We took particular care in sending RW to our target audience. One of the Numbers contained excerpts from James D Cockroft's *Mexico's Hope* (1998). You will be happy to know that the work of Number 16, which is expected to come out by the end of this calendar year, is already in progress.
2. Meanwhile in pursuance of its mandate, CRG has involved itself in networking with other like-minded organizations of South Asia in general and India in particular. I am glad to inform you that we have been recognized as the Zonal Focal Point (ZFP) by the South Asia Human Development Forum of South Asia Partnership, Canada in its consultative meeting held in New Delhi on 21-22 May. As a ZFP, we are now able to share and exchange information on conflicts and possible peace strategies in South Asia amongst ourselves on Human Development Forum Net (HDFNET). Two of our colleagues as members of CRG have been nominated as advisors to the Project on 'Minorities of South Asia' by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo.
3. Let me also take the opportunity of informing you that we have entered into a contract with the Brookings Institution, Washington D.C. for carrying out a study on 'Internal Displacement in South Asia in the framework of the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* on 12 September 2001. The work is already in progress and in pursuance of an earlier EC decision, Dr. Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury is coordinating the study. The study is expected to culminate in the publication of a volume sometime in the next year.
4. A prestigious study on 'Indian Best Practices on Asylum and Refugee Treatment' is now under way under the auspices of CRG. We signed the contract with UNHCR -- our collaborator on 7/8 October 2001. The EC in one of its earlier meetings decided that Dr. Paula Banerjee and Dr. Samir Kr. Das would coordinate this. Dr. Ranabir Samaddar has very kindly agreed to act as a consultant. As per the contract, we are under the obligation of publishing the findings of the study in the form of a book.

5. The Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group (CRG) organized a Civil Society Dialogue (CSD) on Peace in the northeast on October 12 and 13, 2001 at the auditorium of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata in collaboration with the Foundation for Universal responsibility and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung of New Delhi. Academics and activists, journalists, lawyers, film personalities and retired government officers both from inside the region as well as outside took part in the dialogue. Mahashweta Devi – the eminent litterateur from West Bengal inaugurated the dialogue. Professor Ashis Nandy of the Centre for Studies in Developing Societies, New Delhi delivered the keynote address. Dr. Samir Das prepared the Concept Paper on behalf of CRG. The dialogue was organized into four different sessions focusing on four different yet inter-connected themes of 'Struggles for Identity', 'Naga Peace Process', 'Displacement and Humanitarian Tasks' and 'Women in Peace Campaigns'. While each session began with the presentation of a session note that was meant to set the tone of deliberations, CRG took particular care in inviting people representing diverse viewpoints. The whole atmosphere was free and informal so much so that much of the discussions also took place outside the scheduled hours and over cups of coffee and snacks. The business sessions were followed by a roundtable discussion of building networks of peace between the East and the Northeast in which the speakers reminded us of the responsibility of the civil society of the East towards the people of the Northeast. Nearly all members of CRG took part in various capacities and it acted as a wonderful team. Many of our invited guests commended our effort and considered it as a grand success. We received rave reviews in such leading dailies as *The Times of India* and *The Telegraph*. The report of the dialogue is already in press.
6. Members of CRG presented papers and participated in seminars, symposia and workshops on the problems of refugees organized in India and abroad.

Our Programmes for 2001-2002

- To continue the projects already under way and to complete them within the time schedule
- This involves organization of several appraisal workshops, consultative meetings etc. both in Kolkata and outside
- To evolve an appropriate administrative infrastructure and culture conducive to the research and other activities of CRG
- To continue the same dialogue process that we have initiated
- To continue to publish RW, our flagship publication and continuously improve it
- To put emphasis on CRG paper series publications

Thank you.

Dr. Samir Kr. Das

Secretary,

Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group