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AN AGENDA FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT

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Forget about linking rivers

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Gandhi Peace Foundation



The new government should de-link itself from the interlinking of rivers project. Before the elections neither Congress nor its allies had taken a firm stand on this issue. Instead it should focus on various traditional methods known to the voters.

COMMON PROPERTY: "Shyamlat - Deh" is a term that has been honoured since the Mughal period. But somehow it has lost its significance after independence. It is a combination of "Shamil" and "Dehat" which means common property resources. These comprise pasture land, tanks and village forests. The time has come to shift emphasis from IT to these basic amenities which will enable the country to cope with the drought. Tarun Bharat Sangh and

Gramvikas Navyuvak Mandal, Laporia have shown that by taking care of these small things they could fight with drought for six years. **THINK WATER:** It's high time that the government raised the "water level" of its programmes. The "water table" will take care of itself.

Give communities degraded land

ASHISH KOTHARI

Kalparvriksh



Putting major focus and investments into regeneration of degraded land and water-bodies (which cover more than 60% of India!)...through local species, control by local communities and with a major stress on generating employment...this could in fact be the single biggest source of employment and livelihood in India if properly planned, and would help tremendously in reviving the environment, providing appropriate development to rural areas, and taking the pressure off our cities.

WATER SECURITY: Reorienting 'development' to be centrally sensitive to environmental sustainability and local decision-making, and in particular to issues of water availability and quality, access to productive land and

biodiversity conservation. This means having to assess each of the economic sectors, especially industry, agriculture, infrastructure, energy and trade to see how they are currently destructive of the environment and of local community livelihoods and then changing them to become more sensitive to these concerns. It means ensuring water security for all, through decentralised water harvesting and other means.

CHECK MEGA PROJECTS: Preparing through a nation-wide consultative process, local to national land and water use plans that identify ecologically sensitive areas that should be off-limits to largescale 'development' projects and culturally sensitive areas where special attention can be paid towards 'alternative' development and welfare programmes. Such a plan needs to be long-term, and not easy to mess around with...it would mean for instance that identified protected areas, areas conserved by communities, water sources, coastal systems are simply not allowed for mining, big dams, urban expansion, large industry.

Provide clean drinking water

RAJENDRA SINGH

Tarun Bharat Sangh



It is the moral duty of any government to provide clean drinking water to citizens, free of cost. Selling water to citizens should not be in the reform agenda.

DON'T PRIVATISE WATER: No river should be privatised as it was attempted at some places in the past. The Congress government should pass legislation to ensure the right to water. It is time for a Water Security Act.

RESTORE COMMON PROPERTY RESOURCES: Water bodies, pastures, even forts and palaces, once belonged to the community and are now under the custody of private individuals. These should be restored to the people.

Spend more on agriculture

SUMAN SAHAI

President, Gene Campaign



Devote a substantial part of the national budget to agriculture and rural livelihoods. Create income opportunities for rural and adivasi men and women based on their strengths, which are bio-resources and indigenous knowledge. This is the basis of the multi-billion dollar herbal market, which we must tap for rural development- but from the village up, not top down.

TEACH VILLAGE CHILDREN: Break the bureaucratic mindset and develop a radical and innovative approach to take education to rural India, especially for girls. Let all colleges and technical institutions take a one-year break, fan out to the villages and teach village children. No technology breakthroughs in IT or biotechnology will be agents of

development unless most of India can participate.

SUPPORT ISM: Revive the Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) in mission mode, as the backbone of the health and veterinary care system. These effective, low cost and accessible healing practices can contribute significantly to primary health care at a time when drug prices are becoming unaffordable.

More powers for local bodies

HIMANSHU THAKKAR

South Asian Network of Dams, Rivers and People



Fifty-seven years after independence and 13 years after the passage of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment to give powers to local bodies on local issues and resources, local bodies have little effective power. If the next Union government wants to improve the lot of the Bharat that voted out the outgoing Union government, it must give effective control over resources and powers to local bodies to take decisions on local issues.

TRANSPARENCY: Even after the passage of the Right to Information Bill, there is little by way of transparency in governance. Secrecy remains the central mantra of the culture of governance. To make the RTI effective, there needs to be a credible grievance redressal and regulatory system in place at several levels so that those who do not follow

the norms are punished and citizens know where to go.

FOCUS ON WATER: The outgoing Prime Minister had made large projects, dams and the river linking programme central to the government's agenda of development. He paid the price as he had no idea what to do to provide drinking water or for alleviating and reducing the impact of drought and floods. If the new dispensation does not want to meet the same fate, it should give top priority to local systems like rain water harvesting, groundwater recharge, watershed management, allowing minimum flows in rivers, effective control of pollution and management of existing infrastructure to get optimum outputs and demand side management.

Try Modi, reopen Gujarat cases

SHABNAM HASHMI

Act Now for Harmony and Democracy (ANHAD)



Sack Narendra Modi. Try him for genocide. Reopen all 2000 cases which have been thrown out without a trial.

CLEAN UP

TEXTBOOKS: Immediately secularise all educational, research and cultural institutions. The communal text books introduced by the Sangh Parivar must be scrapped. The syllabus of Shishu Mandirs and Ekal Vidyalaya's should be monitored. The ideology of hatred must be countered on a war footing both for political cadres as well as people at large.

JOBS FOR THE YOUNG: Introduce a pro-poor economic agenda and give priority to schemes that provide employment to the youth.

PMO should monitor AIDS

KALPANA JAIN

Author Positive Lives

The Prime Minister's office should take the lead on the national AIDS control programme. The HIV/AIDS epidemic will continue to be viewed as a health problem till such time as the programme rests solely with the health ministry. To give it the required urgency, it needs to be seen as being implemented by the PM's office.

MORE FACILITIES: Build treatment, care and support facilities. With 4.58 million people living with HIV, we need adequate support systems, which are lacking.

INVEST IN HEALTH: Provide the entire package of treatment of all. If we want to be in the league of developed nations, this is the least that should be done. It's time we invest in people's health. Even with HIV, people can lead long and healthy lives, provided they get the right care.

Scholarships for working children

INDRAANI SINGH

Literacy India



The government has to do something to bring working children below the age of 18 back into school. Some of them may be earning up to Rs 2000 a month and have

lost interest in their studies because of financial pressures. A scholarship equivalent to what they earn may be a good incentive..

LESS RED TAPE: Instead of NGOs having to run around in circles for grants from the government, there should be a cell which should track genuine NGOs and support their work.

REVIVE GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS: The government should take the help of NGOs for improving government schools. Instead people who want to help are treated with suspicion.