

***Bhukh ke viruddha – Bharat ke liye...  
Jantar Mantar par Jung!***

Report on dharna cum relay fast to expose  
the government's draft National Food  
Security Act\*

(Delhi, 15-19 April 2010)

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## Introduction



The dharna from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> April gave new life to the Right to Food Campaign. It was unique because it had the participation of groups who never before were seen in the Right to Food campaign meetings. Every day the organisations that we had never heard or known off arrived. This brought in a great deal of energy and enthusiasm for all of us, which is not to say that those who have been committed on the issue from long were any less enthusiastic. But the feeling that the campaign is vigorously growing in numbers was tremendous.

It also communicated that the situation on the ground is deteriorating for the poor. More hunger, more distress for survival. With increasing prices and no support of the Government, people were seeking newer platforms to share this distress.

The demands were that food and nutritional security be provided to all citizens of the country. Issues relating to agriculture and Food production be integral to the National Food Security Act and that a comprehensive Food entitlements Act be enacted with universal entitlements rather than restricting benefits to a few by targeting

The five day dharna consisted of several creative ways in which the demands were brought into the public domain for discussion and collective action. Apart from speeches, songs and plays, participants wore on their bodies overalls with demands painted on them, participants burnt the effigy of the Prime Minister which was followed by Courting Arrest. There was also a, protest outside the Planning Commission, forming a Human Chain and stopping traffic for a while, meetings with some EGOM members and members of all political parties and then finally on the last day, the dharna culminated with a panel discussion at the constitution club with leaders from various political parties, including MPs and a member of the planning commission.

## People came from Far and Wide

State	Number of Participants
AP	5
Asaam	20
Bihar	60
Chattisgarh	5
Delhi	1097
Gujarat	68
Haryana	5
HP	21
Jharkhand	4
Karnataka	4
Maharashtra	3
MP	814
Orissa	13
Punjab	81
Rajasthan	202
Tamilnadu	4
UP	129
Uttarakhand	5
Meghalaya	2
West Bangal	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>2552</b>

Total of over 2500 people attended the dharna (spanning from 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> April) from 19 states of India.

**Day one** brought in hundreds of the poor from the streets and periphery of Delhi. Delhi does not want to know, see or listen to this lot neither do most of the Parliamentarians. Increasingly these people are becoming invisible in Government policies and the Delhi police's job is to drive them out. So much so that the symbol of democratic dissent that Jantar Mantar has been representing, has also been snatched away. In the name of beautification of the city and security of the players in the common wealth games (which is six months away), that permission for twenty four hour dharnas is not given any more. We were not allowed to sit for beyond 5pm. No tents were allowed. It was later we discovered that the permission was from 8am to 8pm but since the change in duty happened at 5pm, they forced us to leave the place by 5pm.

More than 700 people homeless and katchi basti women thronged the dharna. The plight of the homeless, their right to food and shelter, the risk of living on the street was presented through songs, plays and speeches. At the same time what had upset the hundreds of women who had come from the various Kachi Basti was the fact that the APL and BPL had divided the poor. Very few got the right to subsidised food. But what was really bothering them and which they clearly articulated was the shift from grain to cash in the PDS. The Government of Delhi had taken a decision just a few days earlier that out of 9 the nine districts in the State of Delhi in two cash would be provided per household. Their slogans " Sheila tere shashan mein, Bartan Bik gaye Ration mein and "ration mein anaaj chahiye, Nakad nahi" showed their vocalisation of their protest. The women also spoke of how even aganwadis were not being opened in Bastis despite families going and making their demands. Gulabi Devi, resident of JJ Colony, Bhawana said "Only the head of the household will get the cash. If it is in the name of the male then the cash will be used for drinking and gambling. The family will not

benefit. We need ration not cash.” Rupeshji, who's state advisor to Commissioner for Bihar, helped with coordination activities for the first two days. He also shared similar experiences from Bihar and encouraged people to come up and voice their opinions. Karooji from Bodh Gaya also sang a lot of songs on hunger and starvation.

The finest surprise on day one was the arrival of the group from the North East. More than 11 members from the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh participated. They spoke about the large scale corruption that prevented any goods of the PDS or ICDS from reaching the people. Many of them had been using the RTI and had exposed the corruption, but the Government fully protected the errant officials. They also said that many a time's corruption was covered up in the name of militancy.

Eminent leaders, social activists and academicians including, former chief justice of the Delhi High Court, Justice Rajender Sachar, Senior Socialist leader Sh. Surendra Mohan, **Magasaysay awardee** Sandeep Pandey, Special Commissioner of the SC in the Right to Food Case, Shri Harsh Mander and Prof. of International studies, JNU Anuradha Chenoy addressed the dharna along with several other speakers from the States.

Lending wholehearted support to the protest, eminent jurist, Justice Rajendra Sachar that pointed out, “On the one hand, the government has waived Rs. 125,000 crores loan for the industrialists and is keen to provide fresh loans to them. On the other hand, by global standards, although 90% of the people come under the BPL category, the government is only willing to consider 37% of the population as BPL household category. To make matters worse, they are planning to reduce further the supply of ration for them.”



Shri Harsh Mander, Special Commissioner on Right to Food, Supreme Court of India said: “There is no shortage of food and resources in the country, but it is the government’s responsibility to ensure that no one suffers from hunger and no child suffers from malnutrition. This obligation will not be fulfilled if the government supplies 25 kg ration to a limited few. Today some people have excess food and money while others go to be bed hungry. It is time to change this situation.”

Shri Surendra Mohan, Former Member of Parliament emphasized that within the government there is no consensus on the number of BPL households. “While Suresh Tendulkar, Financial Advisor has estimated in his report that more than 37% of the people belonging to the BPL category government continues to project the figure of 28%,” he said.

Extending support to the Dharna, Prof Anuradha Chenoy, International studies, JNU said “All the people of the country are with you. This is your right. India’s economy is growing every year by 8%. The government cannot say that there are no budgets to guarantee the delivery of basic entitlements of the people. The nutritional rights of people must be secured at any cost.”

The speakers also opposed the proposed recommendation by Smt. Sheila Dixit, Chief Minister of Delhi to provide cash to the ration cardholders in lieu of monthly ration supplies.

**Day two and three** saw hundreds of people from all over the country raise their voice for comprehensive Food Entitlements Act. Several primitive tribes and communities who perennially live in hunger were also represented by few members. We had the Sahariyas from Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the Korkus from Khandwa, the Korbas/ Baigas from MP and also the Musahar community from Eastern UP. Representatives of the Korkus from MP stated that the dip in populations between the census of 1991 and 2001 was 19% which would show a further dip in 2011 census. This dip in numbers was nothing but a very high death rate due to increasing hunger and malnutrition of these communities. Sugandhi, who works at Khandwa, actually did a commendable job at helping with co-ordination of dharna.

On the second day of the five-day dharna cum fast, the activists decided to intensify their struggle -



**300 of them marched from Jantar Mantar to Parliament House and burnt an effigy of the proposed National Food Security Act and over 200 protestors court arrested.** Even inside the police station, people did not lose their enthusiasm and kept their slogans, songs and speeches going. We also distributed our *parchas* to police staff.

*For more photographs, please check this [here](#):*

Later in the afternoon Comrade Raja, MP (CPI) who visited the dharna site to express his solidarity emphasized the fact that Right to Food is a fundamental right and this Campaign is the most significant Campaign in our country. He made it clear whenever the Bill in its present form is placed in the Parliament the Left Front parties will oppose it. He lamented that the “government is still not clear about how to define poverty and set poverty criteria. On one hand the government is talking about Right to Food Legislation and on the other hand the food subsidy has been reduced to 424 crores.”

The senior economists Dr. Jayanti Ghosh and Dr. C.P. Chandrashekhar from JNU, made it clear that “Universalisation of PDS at Rs 35 kg per household will only cost 1.2% of the GDP.” Hence, they rubbished the arguments being put forward by the government that the burden of increased expenditure on the exchequer and non-availability of food grains has made it impossible to implement a universal public distribution system. Speaking to the protesters Professor of Health Community Medicine, JNU, Dr. Ritu Priya said that it was shameful that the fate of India's poor was worse than that of Africa and that the situation in India was of hunger amidst plenty. Godowns were overflowing and wheat also rotting but still the poor were being denied. We also had very insightful sharing by our members from Orissa as to how the government tries to hide the starvation death happening in the state.

Later in the day, the Sahariyas presented a story of how court monitoring of the hunger situation in Baran, Rajasthan had resulted in reduction in deaths of children due to malnutrition; however, child mortality was still very high. In spite of NREGA people in several parts of the district of Baran were going for private agriculture work. This was due to the fact the payments were delayed by more than three months and even the bank discriminated against them. The free 35 kgs entitlement in the PDS by the state government was a saviour. It was only for the Sahariyas. A community with less than fifty years history of sedentary agriculture also talked of how their land had been snatched by dominant communities and they wanted to also grow their own food. Health services and Education facilities was a dream.



**On day two**, people also heard the story of the Bhopal Gas victims who were sitting with their demands in the dharna next to ours that got tears in people's eyes. While everybody agreed that all the families must be immediately made beneficiaries of the AAY. Total support was also extended to them for their struggle.

For more photographs, please check [here](#):

***The Right to Food Campaign unanimously rejected the decision taken on 17<sup>th</sup> April by the Planning Commission to accept the poverty figure recommended by the Tendulkar Committee.***

Day 3 again began with strong reactions to the decision of Smt. Sheila Dikshit's to shift to cash coupons and close down PDS shops in two districts, Colin Gonsalves, Executive Director, Human Rights Legal Network (HRLN) said that the "Right to Food Campaign condemns Smt. Sheila Dikshit's decision" and pointed out that "since the decision has been taken at a time when Justice Wadhwa Report is being considered by the Supreme Court, we view it as an attempt to sabotage the Supreme Court case."

**Soon after Colin finished his speech at the dharna**, more than 35 persons escaped the tight security of the police and reached the Planning Commission at 12 p.m. to present their memorandum demanding that there be universal access to ration. Given the fact that heavy police *bandobast* that had been deployed to prevent the protesters from meeting anyone in the Planning Commission and to keep them cordoned off at Jantar Mantar, the protesters with difficulty found ways of breaking free. "It is ironical that communities who are most impacted by the decisions of the Planning Commission are not consulted and instead kept out, denied entry and prevented from interacting with the members of the Planning Commission," stated Kavita Srivastava from the Right to Food Campaign. When the 35 members reached Yojana Bhawan, they found themselves stopped at the gate.

Anuradha Talwar made it clear that the estimates of poverty put forth by the Tendulkar Committee, which stands at 37% cannot be applied to food entitlements. "We insist that access to food should be universal and de-linked from the poverty estimation." She pointed out that with the present coverage of PDS amounting to 36%, what "the government is seeking to do is maintain status quo and at a time when large sections of people are experiencing acute hunger and malnutrition."

Madhuri from Jagruth Adivasi Dalit Samiti said: "Our demand is every adult should be entitled to 14 kg food grains (as per ICMR recommendations). Along with wheat and rice, the PDS should also provide ragi, jowar, and bajra. If the government says there is no food in the country they need to promote agriculture. We have the capacity to produce enough food. It is not that we have to import food from outside."

The protesters wanted to meet Shri Montek Singh Alhuwalia, Deputy Chairperson of the Planning Commission as he had organized a special meeting to decide on the poverty estimation line for the country. "For the Right to Food Campaign as far as food, health, work, education and social security are concerned the right has to be a universal one" stated Kavita Srivastava. Hence, it became essential to meet members of the Commission and convey our point of view" she added. After protesting for an

hour, the Deputy Chairperson of the Commission relented and sent two members, Dr. Abhijit Sen and Dr. Syeda Hameed to meet the 35 strong protestors. The members were informed about the decision of the Campaign to reject the Planning Commission's decision to accept the poverty estimation arrived at by the Tendulkar Committee.

While the 30 odd protestors were at the Planning Commission, the rest of the group which had been prevented from reaching the Commission decided to march up to the Parliament Police Station and register their protest against the decision of the Tendulkar committee estimates as the new BPL line.

Speaking about the number of BPL families, Sandeep Pandey, Activist and Magsaysay award winner said "The government has not been able to prepare a correct BPL list and has caused immense hardship to people. That is why we want the BPL list be made like Employment Guarantee Scheme where people themselves go and register their names and that can only happen if there is a notional agreement on the principle of universal.

Towards the end of day 3, a huge contingent of people descended at the dharnasthal. They were from Satna, MP. This group was an extremely spirited lot which showed that despite stark poverty and hunger of the farming community, the spirit to fight could not be snatched away. Six hundred of them of the BKU led by Tripathiji, stated that despite being a drought affected district the Government of MP had not given the farming community any compensation. NREGA was run in a very feudal manner. They said that their food security was dependent on farming which was not being at all supported by the Government. They also wanted cheap rations and felt that the Government had failed to select the real poor in the BPL. This group also decided that they would do an all night protest. so they fought tooth and nail with the police when it tried to throw them out of Jantar Mantar. Finally, the police and the group reached a settlement with the mediation of the RTF people that they were kept in Ambedkar Bhawan for the night.



Day four of the Dharna saw mini India. Almost all the States seemed to be present. The groups from Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand spoke on the various struggles that were being waged by them to prevent being displaced although the Government in order to suppress their struggles was calling them Maoists. The operation Green Hunt of the GOI was also criticised openly by communities who came from these areas.

Rajasthan was represented in large numbers all through the five days. People came from the villages on India Pakistan border on one end and also from the borders of Gujarat and MP in large numbers. They spoke of how the ICDS centres were not working though they were aware of the importance of nutrition for their little children. also that the BPL lists were ten years old and new people were not being added. There was a clear demand for Universalisation of the PDS.

Representatives from Tamil Nadu said that NFSA with Rs.3 per kg grain would be a loss for the resident of the State as they obtained PDS rations for Rs. 1 per kg. They also spoke of the transparency model that was central to their system and felt that the rate of grain should be further lowered. Members from AP felt that while the battle for subsidised food may have been won to some extent in AP in terms of universality, however, the entitlement was very little just 20 kgs. They endorsed the demand of the campaign of getting at least 50 kgs grain per family from the PDS.

Women were represented in large numbers from Gujarat who spoke of how their struggles got the PDS shops to be accountable. However, they were very critical of flour that was being distributed through the PDS it was bad quality mostly. They also pushed for nutritious grains like Bajra and Maize in the PDS.

In the same evening, after a lot of resistance from the police, protesters made a human chain on the Jantar Mantar road. It was a pledge to make the Government realise that a comprehensive food entitlements Act was what they would take. The group from UP also came in large numbers from different parts of the State. Mostly, from central UP they shared their concerns about the limited rights that the Government was planning to enact through the NFSA.

Some of the slogans that were frequently raised at the dharna were:

- Abhi to li angdai hai aage aur ladai hai...
- Rastriya khadya asuraksha kanun ... band karo... band karo...
- Manmohan tere sashan, ghar-bar bik gaye ration main...
- Bhukhi janta kare guhar, kam kholo Bharat Sarkar....
- Sarkar hamse darti hai, police ko aage karti hai.....
- Jan-Jan ka yahi hai nara, Bhojan ka adhikar kanun bane hamara....
- Bhojan ka adhikar kanun banao, desh bachao desh bachao.....
- Bhuk se janta marega, sarkar ka vote katega....
- Gaon Gaon me rahat kary kholo, nahi to apni kursi chodo...





**On the final day**, more than a hundred men and women from Punjab reached the dharna. Evreybody was delighted as this state had never been represented earlier in the dharna. What was even more shocking was that the people spoke of wage rates as low as Rs.15and 16 in agriculture work in some parts of the Punjab. They also said that despite the Punjab being the granary of the country there were atleast 10 percent of the children's population that suffered from malnutrition and anaemia. Friends from Sahari

Adhikar Manch helped us a lot with the final day coordination activities.

In the evening, the dharna concluded with a **Panel discussion**, which attracted audience of more than 200 at Constitution Club. The discussion was chaired by Mr. Vinod Raina of Bharat Gyan Vigyan Samiti (BGVS). This panel discussion was planned as it was imperative that Political Parties state their position and also take up the issue in the ongoing session of Parliament.

Five parties were represented. They included Ms. Brinda Karat (CPI-M), Mr. Ali Anwar (JDU), Mr. Bardhan and Mr. D. Raja (CPI), Mr. Prakash Javdekar (BJP), (CPI) and Mr. Dharendra Jha (CPI-ML). Mr. Abhijit Sen (member, Planning Commission) was also one of the panelists. The right to food campaign was very pleased to have Mr. Renato Maluf (President, Brazilian National council for food and nutrition, a constitutional body) share his views on the occasion.The discussion ended with closing note by Mr. Harsh Mander (Special commissioner appointed by Supreme Court for RTF Case). The overall voice from the entire panelist was in favour of the campaign demands.

Annie Raja of the NFIW welcomed all the participants. The meeting and the campaign was introduced by Dr. Vandana Prasad of the Jan swasthay Abhiyan. She spoke about the campaign's commitments of working towards a hunger free India and the realisation of the Right to food for all. She briefly shared information about the Structure, the ten month old campaign for a comprehensive food entitlements act. She also gave an account of the last five days of protest at the Jantar Mantar.

### **Presentation on the National food security Act by Right to food Campaign**

Anuradha Talwar and Madhuri Krishnaswamy presented the major points of the campaign concerning the proposed food security act and proved the feasibility of universalization with specific calculations on the food grains and budgetary allocations for PDS. The presentation also emphasized that food security must ensure nutritional security and no food consumption and food production cannot be separated and hence NFSA should address both together. In fact providing universal PDS under NFSA, can work towards reviving agriculture and food production. The presentation also suggested the inclusion of millets and pulses in the PDS, preference to local procurement and distribution of grains. Madhuri also added that the tax foregone (waived) by the Central Govt on Corporate Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Excise and Customs was Rs.5,02,299 crores in 2009-10 (79.54% of the aggregate tax collection), and it was Rs.4,14,099 crores (68.59% of aggregate tax collection) in 2008-9.(the budget documents caution that this might be an underestimation). *This is about 11times the current food subsidy bill. Please refer to Annex I for the details of the presentation in brief.*

The entire presentation can be accessed at:

[http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/food\\_security\\_what\\_the\\_government\\_says\\_and\\_what\\_we\\_want.pdf](http://www.righttofoodindia.org/data/food_security_what_the_government_says_and_what_we_want.pdf)

Major demands highlighted during the presentation were:

- Remove APL BPL and the provision of subsidised food for all
- Nutritional security with per head monthly entitlements of 14 kgs of cereals, 1.5 kgs of pulses and 800 gms of oil
- Use the PDS to revitalise agriculture, by incentivising food production.
- Make procurement and distribution local and decentralised
- Children's right to food to be ensured.
- Social Security through the Old age pension, Maternity Entitlements and Family Pension be the only cash component.
- The Act should not reduce any of the entitlements of the Supreme Court orders in the Right to Food Case but go beyond them.
- Special rights for vulnerable and excluded
- Food cannot be replaced by cash transfers for food schemes like PDS, ICDS, and MDMS.
- Food entitlement cards in the name of women
- Effective grievance redressal mechanisms, with punishments, penalties and compensation
- Affirmative action for Dalits, Adivasis and other socially discriminated groups

**Ms. Brinda Karat (CPI - M)**

Brinda Karat thanked the RTFC for bringing forward the issue of food security. She further went on to discuss the present condition of the bill as one that takes advantage of people's vulnerability and that which would unleash food insecurity if passed. She criticized the bill for not discussing the Antyodaya, for excluding the needs of 'APL' families. She commented that 4000 crores would be saved by cutting the subsidy from Rs.35 to Rs. 25. Ascertaining the number of BPL families and clamping down on a number has become like a bargaining game, being levered against the poor. The government needs to recognize that a large number of people in this country have no permanent source of employment and focus on concrete demands. These should be a part of our preamble. She expressed her solidarity against price and the inclusion of salt, oil etc to ensure nutritional security. Our aim she said should be to introduce the bill at the earliest so that it is sent to the standing committee where our demands can be presented.

She called for a broad based alliance of all groups working on similar issues and also appealed to the Right to Food campaign to join the campaign initiated by left and other secular parties against prices and food security.

**Mr. Ali Anwar (JDU)**

He pledged his party's support for the cause, saying that the issue should be a priority on the agenda of political parties. The state's refusal to recognize the issue of malnutrition and starvation deaths in various states was a cause of deep concern. He also commented on the IPL and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.

### Mr. Bardhan (CPI)

He expressed that it was heartening to see so many people attracted to the campaign, including economists, member of planning commission etc all gathered together. Similarly on march 5<sup>th</sup>, trade unions from across the country came together to demonstrate for common demands of food and social security. The government has turned away from addressing this universal question. In a country with fast escalating population, one cannot talk of food security without speaking of food production. One needs to keep in mind the key player - the farmer. He mentioned about the declining land under food production and added that we do need commercial crops but no place for ethanol. Cooperation between India, china and Brazil needs to increase. How much land to be given for industry, roadways etc needs to be discussed as a key issue. He commented on the rise in prices of commodities tied with agriculture such as fuel, fertilizers. He defined food security as providing sufficient, nutritious food to all at affordable prices. "Poverty line is an imaginary line" Arbitrary ways of identifying the poor, he added.

He however, advised the Right to food Campaign to transform itself into a movement and go beyond being a campaign as the issue of providing food for all was a fight which would not be accepted easily by the Government. Agitations which would force them to bow down to the demands of the people were needed.

**Dr. Sunilam (Samajwadi Party)** Dr. Sunilam, expressed solidarity for the campaigns demands individual food security, doing away with APL/BPL categorization for food subsidies and food security. He said that the socialists were always of the opinion that without the Right to Food and Work becoming fundamental Rights the freedom real of an individual could never be realised. He said his party agreed completely with the demands that were being made by the campaign and when it would come into the Parliament they would put their weight behind a Universal PDS.

### Mr. Prakash Javdekar (BJP)



Mr. Javedkar mentioned about the post independence scenario saying it is such that basic rights such as food, water need to be fought for. Complete failure of a model of development. We will fight these battles, as your lawyers, inside and outside parliament. He affirmed his opposition to food coupons and cash transfers that don't take into account price rise. The mission is to eliminate malnutrition nationwide. He also spoke in favour of a universal PDS.

*For more photographs, please click [here](#) .*

### Mr. D Raja (CPI)

Mr. D. Raja, who also visited the protesters at the dharna, supported the campaigners in their struggle. He mentioned about his double responsibility of representing the party, both inside and outside the parliament. There have been developments- a growing awareness and recognition among people of their rights, he added.

The govt that claims to work for the Aam admi, is going against their interest. The claim that there is mis match between supply and demand is no justification for the proposed bill. We have seen buffer

stock, bumper crops; new grain arriving and old grain rotting because of the lack of storage facilities. This is a failure on the part of the government to manage the grain economy.

He expressed his support for universalisation of the PDS, calling APL/BPL as deceptive. He also reiterated his party's commitment to take up the issue inside Parliament once the bill would be presented.

**Mr. Dharendra Jha (CPIML)**

He expressed his solidarity with the campaign. The debate on 'who is poor' and the post-mortems being conducted on starvation deaths to prove them otherwise, is against the dignity of the poor.

**Abhijit Sen (Planning commission)**

(He said he was speaking not as a member of the planning commission but in his personal capacity)

He agreed with the campaign in so far that no right can be restrictive, and must be universal. In 2002, the BJP lead government, appointed a committee to study grain management, for which he was the chairman. The committee's clear recommendation was to universalize the PDS. However he cautioned against "making unreasonable demands" as this would elicit unreasonable responses. He added that the extremely poor should receive some benefits over others when asked about APL/BPL. To achieve real food security, it is important that the Supreme Court orders be converted in to rights and any non compliance be treated as a punishable offence.

**Mr. Renato Maluf- President, Brazilian National council for food and nutrition**

He spoke of the council of which he was a constitutional head. According to him it consisted of 38 members from civil society and 19 ministers. As food and nutritional security is multi dimensional, these ministers are from diverse sectors and governments such as health, agriculture, labour etc. The secretary gen. is elected from this body of ministers while the President is from the group of 38. The Council acts as an advisory body to the President of Brazil. Although Brazil was one of the few countries, where through a constitutional amendment, the right to food was a constitutional mandate. But there was still a long way to go in realising the access of food for all, he said. He spoke of the challenges of implementation and making the system more effective, in giving society the consciousness of this right. He stressed on the importance of nutritional security and food sovereignty as being essential to food security and complimented the Right to Food Campaign for connecting the issue of nutrition, food production and distribution in its proposed Act.

He also spoke of strengthening the relationship between the two campaigns. So he stated that a representative of the Right to Food Campaign from India had attended the last conference in Brazil on Food Security. He also stated that it was good to see the Governments of Brazil and India growing closer. However it was important that the Right to food campaign in India and the movements in Brazil have a close relationship and support each other in their countries and on Global platforms.

**Closing**

The panel discussion came to a close with Harsh Mander summarizing the demands of the campaign and discussing areas that had been left out due to paucity of time.

According to him the motivating factor behind the dharna was a vision of society to ensure that no human being should sleep hungry or be malnourished. He highlighted the issues of food production,

land improvement and the special needs of children- breastfeeding, crèches etc and the need to focus on vulnerable sections of society who have found no place in existing schemes and programmes.

## Post Dharna

A decision was taken to meet the Prime Minister and the Food and Agriculture Minister, all members of the Empowered group of Ministers (EGOM) for the NFSA and all leaders of Political Parties.

Before Dharna Happened, on 12<sup>th</sup> April, our delegation met with AK Anthony who agreed that NFSA in its present form of 25kgs for BPL families at Rs. 3 was very limited in its scope and that it needed to be broadened. He also agreed that Court order was for 35 kgs per family and that the Act could definitely not give less than this. Also said that he knew from his experience as a Chief Minister that BPL quotas from the Centre caused real problems for the State Governments and therefore the BPL issue needed to be looked at properly. Felt that universalization was problematic because they did not have enough food grains.

During the dharna, on 16<sup>th</sup> April, another campaign delegation met Mr. Dayanidhi Maran (Textile Minister and an EGoM member), where it was observed that the Minister was interested in concrete figures and not general policy approach. He said he would brief Minister on universalisation demand.

On the 20th Mr. Sharad Pawar met us and heard the Campaign representatives. He promised to share this with the other EGOM members. He stated that he himself was opposed to cash transfers and State's were not keen to pick up nutritious grains like Bajra, Jowar and Maize. However, about the demand for a Universal PDS he was silent.

Another delegation also met Mr. Murlidhar Rao (ex convenor of Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and BJP leader) who told us that no stand had yet been taken within the BJP on universalisation. This was something that had to still be discussed and internalised within the party. He was personally supportive of universal coverage and linking revival of agriculture with the PDS. Wanted to know from us if we saw any role for traditional community bodies like temples, maths etc in food security. Discussed such a probable role with him in terms of Government providing grain etc. to such bodies to do relief work after disasters or to run community kitchens for the hungry, but we said that even in such arrangements the State must still be accountable to the people, and such organisations must also be accountable to the state.

Rajnath Singh (MP and BJP leader) seemed very concerned about the rotting grain and inefficiency in PDS. He accepted the idea of universalisation and increased procurement to improve situation of farmers. Felt general Government attitude was anti farmer and anti poor. Supportive of inclusion of children's right to food.

On the same day, campaign delegation met with Arun Jaitley (MP and BJP leader) and put forward main recommendations of Wadhwa commission. On universalisation/expansion of PDS beyond present BPL quotas, he was appreciative of the need for this. He promised to get back to us when debate on NFSA came up

## Acknowledgement

The dharna would not have been possible without the hard work of CFAR and other friends and ensure its coverage in the media. The Delhi groups Shahari Adhikar Manch for their support in looking after stay arrangements, NCDHR that took the task of photocopying materials, and Sanjha Manch, Ashray Adhikar Abhiyan the Delhi Forces, Delhi Sramik Sangathan, jagori, IGSSS, AIKSM, Action AID network, NFIW women (all Delhi groups) and the Rozi Roti Adhikar Abhiyan group from Phagi in Jaipur District Rajasthan for their fantastic contribution through songs, plays and keeping the spirits of the dharna high. Had it not been for the NFIW's constant interventions with the police the daily dharna would not have gone off smoothly, especially like the provision of several tanks of water for the entire day, Delhi Forces and Mobile Creches for taking care of the arrangements for the meeting at the Constitutional Club and all the groups who participated and made this possible. .

## Campaign in media

- **All the newspaper cuttings of the media can be accessed here:**

<http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/MediaCoverageOfDharna15thTo19thApril#>

- Right to Food Campaign opposes proposed Food Security Bill - By: Anand Verma

[http://www.mynews.in/News/Right\\_to\\_Food\\_Campaign\\_opposes\\_proposed\\_Food\\_Security\\_Bill\\_N41529.html](http://www.mynews.in/News/Right_to_Food_Campaign_opposes_proposed_Food_Security_Bill_N41529.html)

- Public protest against proposed Food Insecurity Act from today

HINDUSTAN TIMES%20<http://www.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/Protest-over-food-security-bill-tomorrow/531440/H1-Article1-531249.aspx%20>

- [Protest over food security bill Thursday | Inditop,](#)

- <http://www.newkerala.com/news/fullnews-89710.html>

- [http://www.twocircles.net/2010apr14/protest\\_over\\_food\\_security\\_bill\\_thursday.html](http://www.twocircles.net/2010apr14/protest_over_food_security_bill_thursday.html)

- <http://mizoramexpress.com/index.php/2010/04/public-protest-to-expose-the-proposed-food-insecurity-act-from-today/>

- <http://www.dailyindia.com/show/370150.php>

- <http://zolengthe.net/2010/04/15/public-protest-in-delhi-to-expose-the-proposed-food-insecurity-act/>

- <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2010/04/16/protest-alert-food-debate-simmers-in-delhi/>

- **Protests over bills mark parliament opening day -**

[http://www.khabarexpress.com/print\\_story.asp?newsID=150800](http://www.khabarexpress.com/print_story.asp?newsID=150800)

- **Protest Alert: Food Debate Simmers in Delhi**

**Wall Street Journal,** <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2010/04/16/protest-alert-food-debate-simmers-in-delhi/>

- <http://blog.taragana.com/law/2010/04/17/activists-seek-changes-in-food-security-bill-21529/>
- <http://in.news.yahoo.com/43/20100417/812/tnl-activists-seek-changes-in-food-secur.html>
- <http://www.prokerala.com/news/articles/a129190.html>
- [http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/food-security-bill-distressing-ngo-tells-pm\\_100339328.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/uncategorized/food-security-bill-distressing-ngo-tells-pm_100339328.html)
- <http://www.newkerala.com/news/fullnews-91443.html>
- <http://www.mynews.in/News/Activists seek changes in food security bill N47533.html>
- <http://yahindnews.com/uncategorized/activists-seek-changes-in-food-security-bill.html>
- **NGOs protest proposed National Food Security Act**  
**<http://news.oneindia.in/2010/04/17/ngosprotest-proposed-national-food-securityact.html>**
- **People's protests: Feed the poor :** <http://www.ndtv.com/news/india/peoples-protests-feed-the-poor-20261.php>
- **Down to Earth -**  
[http://www.downtoearth.org.in/full6.asp?foldername=20100430&filename=news&sec\\_id=4&sid=3](http://www.downtoearth.org.in/full6.asp?foldername=20100430&filename=news&sec_id=4&sid=3)
- <http://www.hindustantimes.com/special-news-report/rssfeed/New-figure-for-poor-372-million/Article1-532722.aspx>
- <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/100-million-more-Indians-now-living-in-poverty/articleshow/5829267.cms>
- <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/37.2-per-cent-of-population-bpl-10-crore-families-to-get-food-security/607963/2>
- <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sonia-effect-Plan-panel-raises-BPL-bar/articleshow/5826309.cms>
- [http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report\\_planning-commission-accepts-suresh-tendulkar-s-estimates-on-number-of-poor\\_1372625](http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_planning-commission-accepts-suresh-tendulkar-s-estimates-on-number-of-poor_1372625)
- <http://www.business-standard.com/india/news/egom-to-decidepoverty-estimate/392494/>
- <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/BPL-math-may-hold-up-food-security-efforts/articleshow/5834160.cms>
- <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Line-dancing/608140>

- Photographs of this event can be accessed at <http://picasaweb.google.com/114077709589737293548/DharnaAgainstDraftFoodSecurityAct201015thAprilTo19thApril>

## Annex I: Note on food grains and budgetary requirements

### Requirement of Food

Using ICMR norms for moderately active male (2700 calories required)

- Cereals (including millets)- 14 kgs per month or 50 kgs per family
- Edible Oil 800 grams per month or 2.8 kgs per family
- Pulses 1.5 kgs per head per month or 5.25 kgs per month

### Quantity of Foodgrains required

(In million tonnes)

	<b>Cereals</b>	<b>Pulses</b>	<b>Edible Oils</b>
Entitlement per month / household (in kgs)	<b>50 kgs</b>	<b>5.25 kgs</b>	<b>2.8 kgs</b>
Universal Public Distribution System (20 crore* families assuming 100% off take)	<b>120.0</b>	12.6	6.7
Universal (assuming 80% off take)	96.0	10.1	5.4
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	92.4	9.7	5.2
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	60.0	6.3	3.4
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	44.4	4.7	2.5

- Assuming a population of about 100 crores i.e. 20 crore families (average family size of 5)

(in percentage)	families	Cereals	Pulses	Edible Oils
Universal Public Distribution System (20 crore families)	200	65.8	88.1	82.0
Universal (assuming 80% offtake)	160	52.7	70.5	65.6
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	154	50.7	67.8	63.1
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	100	32.9	44.1	41.0
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	74	24.4	32.6	30.3

### Production of Food:

Production (in million tonnes)	Total cereals (minus 12.5% for seed, feed, wastage)*	Total Pulses*	Net availability of edible oils from all domestic sources**
2005-06	170.8	13.39	8.31
2006-07	177.7	14.2	7.37
2007-08	189.0	14.76	8.65
2008-09	191.8	14.66	8.60
Average of four years production	182.3	14.3	8.2

\* Source: "Agricultural Statistics at a Glance, 2009", Ministry of Agriculture

\*\* Source: Annual Report, 2009, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Economic Survey, 2009, Government of India

### Cost of cereals

	For 50 kgs/ family/month
Economic weighted average of wheat and rice cost per kg (in Rs.)	16
Proposed per kg price in NFSA (in kgs)	3
Net subsidy per kg (in kgs)	13
Number of kgs per month (in kgs)	50
Subsidy per month per family (in Rs.)	650

Annual subsidy per family (in Rs.)	7800
For universal PDS for 20 crore families (rupees crores)	<b>1,56,000</b>
Assuming 70% off take	109200
Assuming 80% off take	124800
Arjun Sen Gupta Committee (15.4 crore families)	120120
Saxena Committee (10 crore families)	78000
Tendulkar Committee (7.4 crore families)	57720

### Availability of funds

Compared to many wealthy nations including USA, Sweden etc. India has very a low tax GDP ratio (around 18% compared to 28% for USA and around 45-50% for Scandinavian countries).

Even this very low rate is not realized. The tax foregone (waived) by the Central Govt on Corporate Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Excise and Customs was **Rs.5,02,299 crores** in 2009-10 (79.54% of the aggregate tax collection), and it was **Rs.4,14,099 crores** (68.59% of aggregate tax collection) in 2008-9 (the budget documents caution that this might be an underestimation).

*This is about 11 times the current food subsidy bill.*

Corporate income tax foregone is **Rs 79,554**, almost Rs 13,000 more than last year. Every year, the effective tax rate is a merely around 22% compared to the statutory tax rate of 33.99%. The largest companies, those with more than Rs 500 crores, get the most exemptions. Public sector companies pay much higher taxes than private sector companies.

In Excise duties, instead of the tariff rate of 16%, only 8% excise duties were levied.

In Customs duties foregone, the exemptions for diamonds, gold and jewelry were as high as Rs 39,769 crores.

(Source: Statement of Revenues Forgone, Budget 2010, available at [indiabudget.nic.in](http://indiabudget.nic.in))

*This is almost the same as the entire budget allocation for NREGA.*