**SKILLS FOR FREEDOM**

**Newsletter from India**

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This electronic newsletter from **PEACE TRUST, INDIA** is addressed to NGO's, Social Activists, Media, Opinion makers, Leaders and Bureaucrats for improving their understanding on skilling the youth for gainful employment and addressing social issues like modern slavery, child labour, migrant labour, un-employability of youth. We also send this to people who we believe are involved in improving the migrant worker's conditions. You are welcome to unsubscribe yourself, if you so choose.

**-EDITOR**

Peace Trust is a Non Government Organization working on Child Labour and Bonded Labour issues since 1984. It has also focused on Migrant workers rights issue since 1999.

* Peace Trust’s Skills for Freedom is the only solution to end Modern Slavery in Tamil Nadu. It is a joint effort for enhancing the employment opportunities of rural youth in Dindigul, Karur, Tiruppur Districts.
* Reduce the risk for young workers - Beginning of this month Peace Trust has launched a new Initiative to "Support School Education, Health Protection, Livelihood Development and Skill Training for Gainful Employment among Vulnerable Young Population in Dindigul District" Geneva Global/ Freedom Fund are supporting this initiative
* SPSC Vocational Education & Employment Facilitation Centre provides access to vocational education and employment facilitation for rural poor youth in Nagapattinam, Thiruvarur District Tamil Nadu and Karaikal District, Puducherry.
* Peace Trust also provides training for Quality Teacher Education and gainful employment to young women from resource poor families in Dindigul and Karur District.

The views expressed are not of the donors but a compilation of field realities for the purpose of sharing and action.

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**BONDED LABOUR**

**GOVT ANNOUNCES END OF NORI CERTIFICATE TO DOCS, MAKES WORKING ABROAD DIFFICULT**

If the government proceeds to implement the recent decision by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) to stop issuing No Obligation to Return to India (NORI) certificate to doctors, several medical students and medical practitioners’ aspirations to work and settle abroad may be stemmed.

Health Minister J P Nadda, in a reply to the Rajya Sabha, stated that the NORI certificate “will not be issued in any circumstance, except for those who are above 65 years of age”. The decision, the ministry said, was taken to prevent ‘brain drain’ from India.

A doctor wishing to live abroad for work or higher education has to compulsorily apply for NORI certificate from the MoHFW which allows them to settle abroad and continue working there. Now, while medical students or MBBS graduates can study abroad, the no NORI certificate will force them to return and serve patients in India.

“It is a good move only if it is extended to other professionals like engineers, accountants, etc. Why are IITians not forced to work under bond service? We will write a letter to the Prime Minister and Health Minister voicing our opposition,” said Dr Sagar Mundada, president, Medical Association of Resident Doctors (MARD), Maharashtra. According to Dr Jayesh Lele, President elect of Maharashtra-branch of Indian Medical Association (IMA), the low salary and poor working conditions of doctors in public sector are major reasons for their wish to work abroad where a better pay is assured. “These are educated people who will be forced to work in India against their will. It is like bonded labour,” Lele claimed. According to MoHFW, from 2010 to 2014 a total of 3,947 Statement of Need (SON) certificates and Exceptional Need Certificates (ENC) were issued to Indian doctors to permit them to pursue higher education in the United States of America. The count is expected to dwindle down with the latest decision. Terming it as an “impractical solution”, Maharashtra Medical Council’s executive member Dr Shivkumar Utture said the government needs to sanction more government medical colleges and improve its management to ensure students study in the country itself. “If the medical education management is not proper, students will look for alternative solutions. Private colleges, with high fees structure, are booming,” he said. Doctors claimed the government needs to improve the salary and posting structure to attract service in public health. In his response to the Rajya Sabha, Nadda stated that a number of steps have been taken to improve doctors’ working conditions. Some include increase in retirement age among teaching staff to 70 and enhancement of certain allowances such as non-practicing, conveyance and learning resource allowance.

**LABOUR ISSUES**

A spontaneous agitation by a collective of women labourers has thrown Kerala’s plantation sector into disarray, caught its male-dominated trade unions off guard, and focused public attention on the growing inequalities and gender-related disparities in the sector.

By R. KRISHNAKUMAR in Thiruvananthapuram

An agitation demanding higher wages by a spontaneous collective of women labourers of the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations (KDHP) company in Munnar has generated a lot of interest in Kerala for its novelty, the political strength it seemed to muster in quick time and the jolt it has given to the jaded trade union movement in the State.

Even as political parties were bracing for the upcoming elections to the local bodies on November 2 and 5, women workers from the tea gardens of Kerala claimed prime-time spots on television screens, catching everyone by surprise.

Their agitation has thrown Kerala’s plantation sector into disarray, caught its male-dominated trade unions off guard and, refreshingly, focussed public attention on the growing inequalities and gender-related disparities in the sector.

Within a week, the struggle spread, with trade unions that were found wanting initially and held at bay by the women too embracing their cause. Nearly three lakh plantation workers across the State, the majority of them women, then struck work demanding a revision in their daily wages to Rs.500 and a 20 per cent bonus. Even by October 7, despite several meetings of the Plantation Labour Committee (PLC) convened by the government, the managements refused to budge, claiming that such a hike would kill the already unviable plantation companies.

The women, under the banner “Pengal Otrumai” (Women’s Unity), soon gained the empathy of the entire State as they launched an indefinite satyagraha at Munnar and chose not to be part of the joint agitation of trade unions which commenced at the same time literally across the street, on the Kochi-Dhanushkodi National Highway 49.

The last wage-revision agreement in the plantation sector in Kerala had come into effect in May 2011. According to its provisions, a labourer who gathered the minimum quantity of 21 kilogram of leaves a day would get Rs.232 as her wage. The validity of that agreement came to an end on December 31, 2014. The workers have been demanding a wage revision ever since. In the 10 months that followed, eight PLC meetings were held, but the plantation managements were unwilling to raise the wages without a concurrent increase in the “output” of the workers. The government remained complacent; unrest grew among the workers.

August 22, however, while the workers were all eagerly expecting a hike, the Kanan Devan management announced that a general body meeting of the shareholders of the company (which supposedly includes the workers too) had decided to cut the yearly bonus to 8.33 per cent. In 2013-2014, the company had declared a bonus of 19 per cent. This year, the management claimed, its profit had come down sharply.

This was the immediate trigger for the agitation. While the main trade unions sought to pursue routine measures for a solution, for the first time in history, frustrated women workers, increasingly suspicious of the motives of the union leaders, launched a go-slow agitation on their own.

It is an indication of how the units of the three main unions at the company—the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU)—misjudged the situation that they sought to chastise the workers jointly for the go-slow in the estates during the peak harvest month of September, limiting individual production to the minimum level of 21 kg. The women were in no mood to listen. According to some of them, the last straw was the officious notice issued jointly by the three unions reprimanding the workers for their actions.

**NEED-BASED UNITY**

There are a total of 84 administrative divisions in the seven estates under the KDHP company and eight divisions in the two other estates directly under the control of the Tatas, the sole owners of all these estates from 1983, when the United Kingdom-based James Finlay and Company sold their shares in the Tata Finlay joint venture to them.

Women workers from all the 92 divisions chucked their daily routine and marched to the hill station of Munnar—a need-based unity of Dalit women labourers who shared the same history and language, belonged to the same class and caste, and spent their hard daily lives suffering together in picturesque tea gardens from daybreak until nightfall and then in the decrepit “labour lines” (residential quarters provided by the company). A leadership emerged from among them—Lissy Sunny, Gomathy, Rajeswari, Jayalaksmi and so on—names that meant nothing to mainstream Kerala until a day earlier but were suddenly on its face, seeking empathy and attention, with their decision to represent themselves before the managements and the government and seek solutions to their festering problems.

On the face of it, the demands of the women workers may seem mundane, no different from the routine salary negotiations that the trade unions engage in on their behalf before the managements every year. But the simple demand has many facets to it when it is raised by a so-far silent, marginalized community of Dalit women workers, bound together by the common thread of everyday misery, harsh working and living conditions, vexed labour relations and a long history of class, caste and gender discrimination. They shocked the State with the spontaneity of their outburst, broke free from the constraints of the male-dominated unions, and took to the streets and imposed themselves on the meeting venues at the Secretariat in Thiruvananthapuram.

It was evident that their protest was really against the unchanging everyday circumstances that were imposed on them not just by immediate circumstances but, historically too, as inheritors of a tradition of over a century or more of bondage, servitude and suffering. Their lot has worsened in the past two decades, with the price of tea and its exports plummeting and a crisis engulfing the industry. Since 1998, several hill district estates in Kerala have closed down and hundreds of workers have lost their jobs.

**PARTICIPATORY MANAGEMENT SCHEME**

The Kanan Devan Hill Plantations Company Ltd itself was born as an offshoot of the decision by Tata Tea to withdraw from its plantation operations in Munnar (an association which began in 1964 through its alliance with the tea giant and then owner of the plantations, James Finlay and Company) about a decade earlier. In 2005, Tata Tea (now Tata Global Beverages, the world’s second largest tea company) announced it was selling its Munnar plantations to the employees through an employee buyout and participatory management scheme.

Nearly 13,000 employees supposedly became (minor) “shareholders” of the new company, with a semblance of representation on the director board. The Tatas still owned 28.52 per cent of the shares (nearly 9 per cent more was jointly owned by the Tatas Welfare Trust and the KDHPCL) and retained the right to buy a share of the tea produced by the company at reduced rates. It also had the clout to decide the price of tea at the local auction market. Thus, as it released itself from the responsibility of running the plantations after decades of ownership, promising “long-term economic sustainability and better living conditions for its workers”, it had protected its own interests well. But what the so-called “employee buyout and participatory management scheme” did for the workers has become painfully evident within a decade, with the women workers launching their agitation.

According to several accounts, a large section of the estate workers are descendants of the slave labourers brought by the British (right from the mid-19th century when the first British owner, John Daniel Manro, acquired 588 acres (an acre is 0.4 hectare) in Munnar with permission from the maharajah of Poonjar) from Tamil Nadu to work in the early plantations at Munnar. Most of them belong to the Scheduled Castes such as Pallar, Parayar and Chakkiliar. (Local workers from Kerala have always been only a small percentage of the estate workforce.)

From very early days, management policies had been tuned to keep these labourers tethered to the estates and the labour lines. Laws to prevent them from going in search of other jobs or from shifting from one estate to the other were all a means to this end. Even after the abolishing of slavery, their conditions more or less remained unchanged; or soon they succumbed to new forms of “slavery”.

**CHANGED LIVING CONDITIONS**

However, a dramatic transformation in their employment and living conditions and the lot of legal rights that these plantation workers enjoy today happened, no doubt, because of the involvement of trade unions in the plantation sector in Kerala. But complacency has set in, there are often allegations against individual union leaders of corruption and being hand in glove with the management, and a growing sense that the unions are losing their zeal and are, increasingly, a mere cog in the wheel.

Plucking tea leaves is a labour-intensive, time-consuming affair, but women (who constitute 70 per cent of the workers in the tea estates) have been traditionally engaged in it partly because they are more dexterous in the handling of the leaves, while the men are assigned other jobs such as removing weeds, spraying pesticides and applying fertilizers.

Work is supposed to start at eight in the morning and end by five, but invariably longer hours are the norm, especially during the harvesting season, because a graded incentive system offers these women a pittance more for every kg that they collect above the minimum of 21 kg a day. It is a tedious affair and they have to climb up and down the steep slopes with baskets that weigh them down, braving the cold and heat, wild insects and animals.

Most of them have health issues as a result. They leave behind their children and worry constantly about their safety, education and well-being.

In the past few decades, with the plantation industry facing one crisis after another, a large number of men have sought more paying jobs outside the estates, as taxi drivers or sundry workers in the tourism sector. Resorts and hotels have been sprouting at every corner in Munnar. But the women are forced to stay in their estate jobs so as to retain the right for the family to live in the old, two-room shacks that the company had set apart for those on its rolls. The decrepit residential quarters are often too crowded with many micro families sharing them. Most of them have no land or home of their own, or any other avenue to make an extra income.

Munnar’s estate workers maintain close ties with their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu through marriages and participation in festivals and so on, but those links too are nowadays becoming tenuous. While a few decades earlier a job in the tea gardens in Kerala was a sign of prestige, today it is a sign of hardship. From the perspective of many of these workers, while life in the estates and the residential lines has remained more or less the same, the rest of the world has moved forward. Physical, cultural and social landscapes all around them are changing fast, even in their own villages, offering opportunities for the rich and the educated.

Evidently, no agency, be it the male-dominated unions, the government or the company management, had thus far bothered to look closely at the precarious daily universe of these women workers as they struggle to keep pace. That is why, before it could blink, Kerala witnessed the birth of a new women’s movement and the emergence of a group of unsophisticated but extremely focussed leaders from among them—women from the margins who stand boldly before television cameras and say: “Enough is enough. We will speak for ourselves. We have lost faith in the trade unions. We will form our own union. We want to represent ourselves in the Plantation Labour Committee meetings. We would rather die than go back on our demands.”

At least initially, their common grievances have kept them together and their fledgling movement holds great promise as a gender-sensitive catalytic agent in the plantation sector. Respect for them has grown as they mark their friends and foes from among the State’s politicians, keep the trade unions at a safe distance, interact directly with the Ministers, and openly rebuke mischievous elements from across the State’s borders who try to portray them as a movement of a disgruntled linguistic minority.

On October 7, at yet another meeting of the PLC in Thiruvananthapuram, as the managements once again rejected their demands and the conciliatory suggestions of the government, the women workers and the trade unions announced their resolve to intensify their struggle. But a long-pending government “package” offering medical insurance premiums, better facilities at the residential lines, including extension of buildings, and upgradation of schools, health and transport facilities has reportedly been approved by the Cabinet to be implemented after the local body elections.

What does the future hold for “Pengal Otrumai”? Will they be able to go the whole hog now that they have stirred well-entrenched interests that were pulling their lot down? Will their historic women-only struggle have a lasting impact on the trade union movement in Kerala? Many questions remain unanswered as they resolve yet again to stay together and seek a better life.

**CENTRE CALLS MEET TO WARD OFF LABOUR TROUBLE AFTER KERALA STIR**

The Centre plans to hold a meeting shortly with the Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu governments following information about the likelihood of a recent plantation workers’ wage agitation in Kerala spreading to other States.

Talks are also expected to be held subsequently with State governments in the northeast as there are several plantations in the region, sources in the commerce ministry told The Hindu. The ministry is the nodal department at the Centre for commodity boards and the plantation sector.

The plantation industry employs about 33 lakh workers and accounts for almost a tenth of India’s total agricultural exports valued at $42 billion. With broad-based labour reforms being a key element of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s economic reform agenda, a widespread agitation among plantation workers at the current juncture could potentially serve to galvanise labour across sectors threatening the government’s plans and pose one more hurdle to the nation’s becalmed export sector. After a strike that lasted over a fortnight, plantation workers in Munnar had last month negotiated an in-principle wage increase. However, the details — including whether the wage hike would be linked to a specified increase in productivity per worker, as well as the effective period of the agreement — are yet to be worked out. The agitation, which began late September, gained national interest as it was led by a group of women workers (of the Kanan Devan Hills Plantations at Munnar in Kerala). They had demanded an increase in daily wages from Rs. 232 to Rs.500, in addition to a 20 per cent bonus, and went on a strike.

In mid-October, following talks facilitated by the State government, an agreement was reached between the management and the trade unions. As per the pact, the tea plantation workers are expected to receive a basic daily wage of Rs.301 besides other fringe daily benefits of about Rs.135. Similarly, there would be increases in wages of workers in rubber and cardamom plantations. What is worrying the Centre is the wage disparity that this agreement will create.

The basic daily wages in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are still in the Rs.220-230 region, while in the northeast they are much lower at about Rs.100-130.

Commerce ministry sources said the Centre has credible information that “trouble (labour unrest) will soon be spreading to Karnataka and Tamil Nadu initially and then to the northeast as the movement seems to have succeeded in Kerala.”

The United Planters’ Association of Southern India (UPASI), the apex body of planters in the region, in a representation to the commerce ministry had claimed that the burden of higher wages could make their business, which are already struggling from the global fall in commodity prices, unsustainable and lead to the closure of many plantations.

Wages account for about 75-80 per cent of the production cost, they said, adding that an increase in this component would make their products uncompetitive.

Following this representation, the commerce ministry got in touch with the labour ministry. The Centre is also considering setting up an expert committee comprising representatives from all stakeholders to look into the possible ramifications of the issue, the sources said. Though the Centre has no direct role in issues relating to land and labour (as these come under the State governments’ purview), the union labour ministry looks into labour-related representations sent to the Centre.

Vijayan Rajes, a former President of UPASI, warned that if the Centre and the concerned State governments do not address the problems of the sector, India — which is currently a net exporter of tea, coffee and spices — could soon become a net importer of these commodities, like it happened with rubber.

**MIGRANT LABOURERS**

**HUNG UPSIDE DOWN, MIGRANT LABOURER MERCILESSLY BEATEN TO DEATH**

AMRITSAR: A shocking video of a migrant laborer being mercilessly thrashed, even as some people smile at him and hurl abuses in Pujnabi, has surfaced . The man identified as Ram Singh apparently died of unbearable pain and injuries caused by the beating.

The 34 minutes video of Ram Singh being given thrashing with iron pipes shows him hanging from a pulley, apparently in the same factory where he worked. The incident was openly recorded by someone present at the spot and later parts of it were leaked. The main accused in the case has been identified as Jaspreet Singh.

Wife of deceased Raji said that her husband Ram worked in a foundry at Focal Point. She said that few days back there was a theft in the factory for which her husband was being blamed. "Some people even came to our house and threatened my husband," she said. "On Thursday, a few people came to our house in Khankot village in a car and forcibly took away my husband. They beat him mercilessly and threw him on road. Later his body was recovered from T Point at Mehta Road," she added.

One of the resident of Khankot, Navpreet Singh said that they saw some men coming into village and forcibly bundling Ram Singh into car and later they received information that his body was recovered. "We are horrified by the incident and want strict action against those responsible for his death," said Singh.

SHO, police station Mohkampura Narinder Kaur said that they had booked a case under section 302, 365 and 34 IPC against Jaspreet Singh and two unidentified persons. She said all the accused were absconding.

**MIGRANTS DESPONDENT OVER LEADERS**

November 3, 2015At 8.45 a.m. every day, the Jan Sewa Express (no:15209) leaves platform no. 2 of the Saharsa station for Amritsar, Punjab. It is locally known as Palayan Express or Majdoor Express (a train of migration or labourers); for it carries thousands of migrant youth and their families in 22 general compartments. It is a lifeline for the youth of Kosi, devastated by floods almost every year. During the festival season and later, the train’s rickety bogies are packed with passengers. “People have even suffocated to death,” said the weary train guard, who did not wish to be identified.

According to the BJP advertisement, 45 lakh youths migrate from Bihar every year and one in three families is forced to leave the State to make a living. Sushashan ka dambh bharne wale mukhyamantriji, jata bataiye…kab tak Bihar ke yuvaon ko ghar chodne par vivash karte rahenge [Dear Chief Minister who claims good governance, please tell us…for how long will the youth of Bihar be forced to leave their homes], asked the front-page advertisement titled Bihari ko Bahari banana kya shusashan hai [Is it good governance of making a Bihari an outsider?].”

Mr. Nitish Kumar has also made a catchline on the theme. Bihar mein bahari raj karega, ya Bihari [Will someone from Bihar rule the State or an outsider]. But for the hapless passengers of Palayan Express, the migrant workers, all this is mere politics.

“What’s the use of voting for them when nothing has changed in our lives for the past 31 years. Nitish Kumar, Lalu Prasad and Narendra Modi are co-passengers of the same class and compartment,” said Chandrashekhar Sardar alias Sahni, 49.

**REFUGEES, THE CHILDREN OF MODERNITY**

Displacement is a by-product of development. Due to factors like global inequalities, war and nature’s fury, an ever-greater number of people are fleeing their place of habitual residence and will continue to do so. Nation-states cannot continue to live in denial of this reality for long.

Something changed when three-year-old Alan Kurdi’s body washed up on a Turkish beach on September 2, 2015. Until then, life had gone on as usual in the European Union (EU), even as more than 2,500 refugees perished crossing the Mediterranean on flimsy dinghies.

But the iconic photograph of Kurdi’s face, half-buried in the sand, was a hammer blow that cracked Europe’s frozen conscience. It could no longer pretend that the thousands landing on its beaches were ‘only migrants’. So long as the discourse was about ‘migrants’ — that is, people who were only seeking a better life in Europe and not fleeing war back home — Europe was under no obligation to give them even temporary sanctuary.

But the desperate, avoidable death of a child was too powerful an image of truth, and the convenient fiction crumbled. Overnight, the world was forced to acknowledge three things: that these people were to be treated as refugees even if they were actually migrants; that it is inhuman to turn them away; and that they were the entire world’s responsibility.

**Anti-refugee sentiments in Europe**

Two months later, the wave of solidarity evoked by Kurdi’s death has ebbed. Xenophobic violence is on the rise across Germany and Europe. A pro-refugee German politician, Henriette Reker, was wounded in a knife attack in Cologne. A refugee shelter was burned down in an east German town, Meissen. Germany’s anti-immigrant group, PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) has been drawing thousands of supporters to its rallies.

Beyond Germany, Hungary’s right-wing government is building a wall to keep out refugees. Serbia and Croatia are having an ugly spat. France and the United Kingdom, both of whom are supposed to take in 650,000 refugees each, are unwilling to do so. While the EU received 626,000 refugees in all of 2014, Germany alone is bracing for an influx of 800,000 this year.

Media reports suggest that Chancellor Angela Merkel is already in talks with Turkey, which currently hosts nearly two million refugees, to work out an agreement that has a provision for ‘taking back’ of refugees — which would be illegal as per the UN Convention on Refugees.

There are three big lessons to be learnt from Europe’s refugee problem: one, an effective solution is no longer possible at the national-level. The bulldozing by Germany that has so far worked on the economic front may not work here.

Two, the world needs to rethink the way it looks at refugees and migrants, if for no other reason than that their numbers are only set to grow. Not just Europe but every country in the world will soon have to — if it’s not already doing so — reckon with large influxes of refugees/migrants. Forced migration due to war and persecution is one thing. But the very structure of the global economy — premised on free movement of capital and goods but not of people — is a contradiction geared to produce economic refugees.

One sign of things to come is the rising global inequality. Today, the richest one per cent owns 50 per cent of the world’s wealth. As this inequality sharpens, ever greater numbers of those who’ve lost the economic lottery will migrate in search of livelihoods. This phenomenon is encouraged within national borders — we call it urban migration — and is considered essential for economic growth. But it is strictly regulated between national borders.

At present, economic migration is the privilege of those who can afford it. But this is set to change, and this is the final lesson of Europe’s refugee muddle: the new refugee is the economic migrant who cannot afford the legal route — and his claims for refuge and a decent life are as valid as those fleeing war and persecution. In a world of structural economic violence, the distinction between refugee and migrant is breaking down.

Human beings have been nomads for much longer than they have been agriculturists, labourers, or passport-holders. To be able to move freely from place to place was not a right — it was a part of nature, like sunlight or river water. It was fundamental for survival. It is even embedded in our biological constitution — the mechanism we call ‘fight or flight’.

**National identity and exoduses**

Significantly, Nature did not equip us with a ‘stay and die’ instinct. That had to come from culture. It came with the invention, first, of private property, and subsequently, of the nation-state, which was essentially a club of landlords coming together to protect their property interests.

This club manufactured for itself a symbolic cache, a veneer of cultural homogeneity, – better known as ‘national identity’. This was necessary to get a buy-in from the landless masses, who would become cannon fodder for wars with other such landlord clubs. It is not just a quirk of sub-continental history that the birth of two nation-states was accompanied by the bloody irruption of 14 million refugees, in what became the largest mass migration in human history.

Thus, the original refugee is the person displaced from his land — his refuge and source of his sustenance. The enclosure of the commons in England unleashed a mega flow of refugees. Luckily there were continents waiting to absorb them — Australia and North America — not to mention colonies in other continents.

What this also means is that if there are no nation-states, there can be no refugees. There may be slaves, as in ancient Greece, and orphans, but not refugees.

Today’s refugee, therefore, is a child of modernity, a gift of human progress. The first ever global document on the treatment of refugees, the United Nations’ 1951 Refugee Convention, was basically meant to protect the Europeans who became refugees due to World War-II. Today it is the operative framework for treatment of refugees anywhere in the world.

**Three basic protections**

The Convention offers the refugee three basic protections — non-discrimination, non-penalisation, and non-refoulement. Of these, the most critical is the principle of non-refoulement, which mandates that no one can ‘return’ or expel a refugee against his will back “to a territory where he or she fears threats to life of freedom”.

The Convention also states that a refugee is entitled to basic rights such as access to the courts, primary education, work, and travel documents. These are excellent principles. Over 140 nations are signatories to it. But the sad reality is that these statutes are observed mostly in the breach.

According to figures put out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are 13 million refugees in the world. And these are just the ‘refugee’ refugees. The UNHCR also documents other categories of people who are, existentially speaking, no different from refugees but are classified differently.

These include, for instance, internally displaced persons (IDPs) — people forcibly displaced by, say, the violence of ‘development’ (by a dam, a mine, a nuclear plant); by communal violence; or even a Salwa Judum. The UNHCR estimates that as of end-2014, “a record-breaking 38 million people were forcibly displaced within their own country by violence.” Then there are the stateless: people with no nationality. There were 10 million of these at last count. These are people who cannot open a bank account or go to college or board a flight because they have no identity papers.

Finally there is the asylum-seeker: a person who, as per UNHCR’s definition, “says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated.” There are about 1.2 million of these as well. And none of these include the 5 million Palestinian refugees — a whole population victimised because somebody wanted a new nation and snatched away their land.

Add up the numbers and we get about 67 million — more than five times the official number of 13 million — who are living like refugees. These numbers include only those registered by some official agency or the other. There are thousands more who have not been counted, not to mention those displaced periodically by an earthquake or a flood. Already, the spectre of global warming has led to furious debates about ‘climate refugees’.

The bottom line is that, for one reason or another, due to human persecution or nature’s fury or the way our wonderful global economy’s been rigged, an ever greater number of people are fleeing their place of habitual residence and will continue to do so. As Europe is discovering — though for now it enjoys the luxury of being in denial — the present system of national borders and passport control cannot control this migrant tide for long.

**THIRTEEN REFUGEES DROWN OFF GREECE**

At least 13 migrants, six of them children, drowned as two boats making the hazardous crossing from Turkey capsized in the Aegean Sea off Greece on Sunday, the coastguard said.

The first tragedy occurred off the island of Samos when a boat overturned just 20 metres from shore. Ten bodies — including six children, four of them babies — were found in the vessel's cabin while that of a girl was washed up on the island. Two others were still missing with coastguards saying 15 were plucked from the water.

A boat from the European border agency Frontex also recovered two bodies near the island of Farmakonnisi, near Samos, the coastguard said. Frontex also rescued three others. — AFP

**REFUGEES TAKING ARCTIC PATH TO NORWAY STRANDED**

Lure of this route, through Russia, is that it bypasses unfriendly border guards and barbed-wire fences in Central Europe.

More than 500 refugees from Syria and other countries have been stranded recently in the tiny town of Nikel on Russia’s far northern edge, where they have encountered problems trying to cross into Norway, local media reported.

Most of the migrants had tried to enter Europe by flying to Moscow on tourist or other visas. They then travelled above the Arctic Circle, where Russia borders Norway. The lure of this unlikely route is that it bypasses unfriendly border guards, barbed-wire fences and cluttered refugee camps that migrants bound for Germany and Scandinavia often encounter in Central Europe.

The migrants who make their way through Russia travel to the regional capital, Murmansk, and then to the border at Nikel, an industrial town of nearly 13,000 people. There, they usually take a taxi to the border and then cover the short distance between the Russian and Norwegian border posts on bicycles — crossing on foot is not allowed.

Norway, while not a member of the European Union, is part of the Schengen Area, which gives people who enter unfettered access to most other European countries.

About 1,200 refugees seeking asylum have made this journey in 2015, compared with just a dozen in 2014, Norway’s government said in a report this month, according to Reuters.

As this alternative route gained attention in the media, Nikel’s only hotel began to overflow with migrants waiting for processing. Local stores ran out of bicycles.

On Wednesday, around 100 migrants sent a letter to President Vladimir Putin of Russia, demanding passage to Norway with or without a bicycle. Several people tried to cross the border on foot but were stopped by Russian officers.

“We have no space to shelter them, but we cannot leave them on the streets, either,” Alexander Morozov, head of the municipality, told the local state-run television station, Murman.

The weather has posed a challenge, with temperatures Friday hovering around freezing. The authorities parked an ambulance in front of the hotel to provide timely help if it was needed. Many of the migrants stuck in Nikel are women and children.

In Norway, the situation has set off a debate about whether the border crossing should be closed. Some politicians have said the flow of migrants should be blocked, while other officials said they were concerned that shutting the border could damage the local economy.

Norway has also raised concerns that some Syrians who have been in Russia for a while are trying to take advantage of the current crisis to gain refugee status in Europe.

In Russia, regional courts have begun to order the deportation of foreigners who try to cross the border by pretending they are Syrians. The first three Afghan nationals will be deported next week, a local news website reported.

Russian and Norwegian diplomats are expected to discuss the situation soon, news reports said.

“This is a challenge both for us and for Russia, but together we must overcome it,” Ole Andreas Lindeman, the Norwegian consul general in Murmansk, said on the local television report.

**NHRC TO MAP MIGRANT ISSUES**

Close on the heels of its intervention to ensure compensation to the family of four migrant workers who were killed in an accident at a plywood factory near Perumbavur, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is now set to address the socio-economic problems faced by the migrant labour community in Kerala.

To begin with, the Commission will initiate a survey at the various migrant labour camps in and around Perumbavur municipality, regarded as the hub of inter-State migrants in Kerala. The commission will also conduct a meeting and workshop of the stakeholders in the sector and devise long-term solutions to address the key problems identified in the survey.

“The move follows a finding that these inter-State labourers are leading a miserable and unhygienic life in their settlements while most of them are working in unsafe working conditions and are exploited to the core,” Cyriac Joseph, Acting Chairperson of NHRC, told The Hindu .

A report in The Hindu on September 21 had revealed how factory units keep the migrant workers out of their official records as it helps them violate labour laws at will. In reality, the workers or their relatives are eligible for benefits under the Factories Act and the Inter State Migrant Workers Welfare Scheme apart from insurance claim in the event of a fatal accident. The survey, to be carried out in association with the Social Work Department of the Sree sankaracharya Sanskrit University in Kalady, is expected to begin by the November-end.

**21 DIE AS BOATS CARRYING MIGRANTS SINK IN AEGEAN SEA**

Greek authorities say 21 people have died after two boats carrying migrants and refugees from Turkey to Greece sank overnight, in the latest deadly incidents in the eastern Aegean Sea.

The Merchant Marine Ministry said 18 people were killed and 138 people were rescued near the island of Kalymnos, while another three died and six were rescued in a separate incident early Friday off the island of Rhodes.

The deaths occurred amid a surge of crossings to Greek islands involving migrants and refugees from Syria, Afghanistan and other countries ahead of winter and as European governments weight taking tougher measures to try and limit the number of arrivals in Europe.

Eight people were killed early Thursday after a boat capsized off the island of Lesbos.

**YOUNG WORKERS PROJECT: PARTNER’S MEETING**

Geneva Global and Freedom Fund have conducted the Partner’s Meeting for the Young Workers Project. 13 partners NGO’s Director and the Project Manager have participated in the meeting conducted in Clarian Hotel, Coimbatore on 31st October, 2015. It was conducted from Morning 10.00 AM to 5.30 PM. The representatives from C&A Foundation, Freedom Fund and Geneva Global were present and they represented on slavery issues.

If the partners work cooperatively in the field, we can improve the conditions of young textile workers. The components of the Young Workers Project are creating awareness at villages level, Government schemes, Problems faced in the work place, solution to resolve the problems, legal interventions, migrant labour, Advocacy, Community issue, Health and Safety trainings for adolescent and adult textile workers.

The NGOs have to work along with officials to check whether the mills have proper hostel facilities and whether they have registered properly. Geneva Global visit the area frequently periodically.

**MAGIC MATHS PROGRAMME IN PEACE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Peace College of Education –Maths Department have conducted “Magic Maths” Programme on 09th October, 2015 in Peace College of Education. It is a programme conducted to learn mathematics easily. Professor. Thiruthuva Doss was the special guest for the programme. Ms. Aruna, Student of Peace College has delivered the welcome address. Dr. J. Paul Baskar, Correspondent / Principal of Peace College of Education have delivered his Presidential address. Prof. Doss has made students to learn the shortcut of the mathematics. He made the solutions for the mathematics problems in a simple way. Students from Peace Industrial School has also learned eagerly. Ms. Jenita, Mathematics student has delivered a vote of thanks.

**SPECIAL DEBATE CONDUCTED BY PEACE MEDIA CENTER**

A special debate was organized by Peace Media Center and conducted in Peace College of Education on 30th October, 2015. The title for the debate was “The Modern Technology: Improving the youth / Spoiling the youth.

Mr. Kathiravan, Chief Information Coordinator of Pasumai Community Radio has facilitated the debate. Mr. Mano, Ms. Thangamalar, Mr. Ayyappan from students of Peace College of Education has participated in the side that, the modern technology improves the youth. Ms. Geethanjali, Ms. Revathi and Ms. Malathi from Peace College has participated in the side of the modern technology spoils the youth. The debate started at 11.30 AM in Peace College of Education. Students from Peace College of Education and Peace Industrial School have participated in the debate. The judge of the debate Mr. Kathiravan has given a result that the modern technology spoils the youth.

**SPSC – VEEF VOCATIONAL CENTRE GOT APPROVAL FOR SCVT COURSE**

SPSC – Vocational Education for Employment Facilitation Center (VEEF) has got approval from the State Council for Vocational Training (SCVT) under Industrial school by Department of Employment & Training, Govt of TamilNadu. They have approved for the courses such as,

* Two wheeler / Four wheeler Mechanic
* Food Production
* Cutting and Tailoring
* Automobile Heavy Machinery Operation and Maintenance
* Desktop Publishing Operator

Admissions is in full swing and so far 128 trainees were enrolled. SPSC-VEEF expect some there to join.

**SPSC – VEEF WEBSITE UPGRADATION**

The website of SPSC – VEEF has been launched already. The content of the website is now been upgraded by project team on 2nd November, 2015 in a meeting held at Peace Trust, Dindigul. The website [www.veef.in](http://www.veef.in) and [www.spsc-veef.in](http://www.spsc-veef.in) has been upgraded as a dynamic website in which the employees and the trainees also can update the news and can suggest ideas for the website. Earlier the site was a static site and contents were uploaded before the Vocational Education Programmes were formally inaugurated.

**COMMUNITY RADIO PROGRAMME ON HAND WASHING AND SANITATION**

Community Radio Programme on **“Hand Washing and Sanitation”** was held in Anna University, Chennai on 12th and 13th October, 2015. Pasumai Community Radio has taken part in the training. Mr. P. Ruba Balan, Assistant Station Director, Pasumai CR and Mr. X Stalin Antony, Technician, Pasumai CR have participated in the training. The training was about the hand wash, sanitation. They trained about how to maintain a hygienic environment around us and how to make this to reach children. World Hand Wash Day is celebrated on November 19th, 2015 and this training was given in order to celebrate the day.

**PEACE TRUST HONOURED WITH JUSTICE V.R. KRISHNA IYER AWARD 2015**

Dr. J. Paul Baskar, Chairman, Peace Trust has been conferred with Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer Centenary Award for 2015 for his combined contribution through Peace Trust to eliminate Child Labour, improve condition of Young Workers, Protect environment, and Provide Skill Training to Youth.

This has been announced by Mr. Lakshmi Narayanan Chairperson of Jury of Justice Krishna Iyer Award Committee and Former Director General of Police, TamilNadu State.

SOCO Trust Human Rights Organization has established the Award to honour outstanding Human Rights Activists, Environmentalist, Women Activist, Peace Workers, Journalist, Academicians, Lawyers, Writers and Civil Liberties Activist. This year the panel has selected hundred eminent and dedicated activists and champions of human rights from all over India for the conferment of the award.

Some of the Earlier Prominent Winners of this Award since 1982 are Mr. Justice P.B. Sawant, Chairperson, Indian Press Council, Mr. Justice Ranganath Misra, the then Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission and Mr. Justice K.T. Thomas, the then Judge of Supreme Court of India and Dr. Justice Shivaraj V. Patil, Member of the National Human Rights Commission, Dr. Sundarlal Bahuguna, the environmentalist, Dr. B.D. Sharma, Former Chairman of the SC/ST Commission, Mr. M. Raja, Secretary, TamilNadu Legal Services Authority, Prof. Eachara Variar, father of the late Mr. Rajan, final year student of Kozhikode Regional Engineering College, who has tortured and murdered in police custody during Emergency.

Dr. J. Paul Baskar will receive the Award in a function to be held in Cochin in December 2015.