

Still searching for another world

By Rahul Kumar

The Reds were there and so were the Greens along with the Amazonian Indians and Indians from the Asian continent. People with masks on their faces, others wearing paint and feathers on their bodies and a lot of the women wearing next to nothing also made their presence felt. The streets of Belem, the capital city of the north Brazilian state of Para, erupted with singing and dancing, shrieking and drumming as the ninth edition of the World Social Forum (WSF) took off in the afternoon rain.

There was much joy and optimism, hugging and kissing. Almost as if everything was alright with the world; as if the Gaza massacre had not taken place; as if the economic crisis and job losses and the resulting trillion dollar bailouts were not staring people in their faces. In front of hundreds of journalists from across the world, tens of thousands of activists, protesters, campaigners and students, with agendas ranging from land rights for tribals to a secure ecological future, and from women equality to the growth of free media, once again expressed their creative desire for a new and improved world order.

Amidst the fanfare, it may not be out of the way to ask how far had the WSF on its ninth birthday marched to the beats of its favourite slogan, "Another World is Possible." Despite the infectious enthusiasm, participants had different ideas regarding the future of the WSF and where next it should move to.

"I don't think changing the world is possible in nine years. The big idea is to toss ideas about building another world," says Kshitij Adhiraj, an independent documentary filmmaker from Nepal. He is screening two films at the WSF, one of which will have its inaugural screening here.

Reaching Belem all the way from the mountains of Maoist-ruled Nepal was not an easy task for Adhiraj as he had to first travel to Delhi and then Paris before touching down at Belem. "In fact I got a scare that I may require a



No just cause is alien in Belem.

transit visa for France. Thankfully it was only a scare. But many Indian friends had to change their airlines and some even had to cancel their tickets," says Adhiraj. In fact the inaugural day went without a large number of campaigners failing to arrive from Africa and Asia due to

delayed flights and visa problems.

But it goes to the credit of the Brazilians and the Latin Americans that the movement has become a success and that it has captured the imagination of people in the development and the human rights sectors. Highlighting the significant

ce of the movement, Rukmini Rao, who works on livelihood issues of the Lambada women, a tribal community in parts of South India, says: "WSF has succeeded in sending a number of messages to its antithesis, the World Economic Forum (WEF). Though no confrontation is taking place again as had happened in Seattle, we are still sending across messages. But I feel that the political message is not as coherent as it should be."

Rao suggests that this is the right moment for the leadership of the movement to step in and suggest alternative models of growth and development in their own countries. "Capitalism is cyclic. A boom is always followed by a bust. The so-called growth is a mirage. In times like these, the rich get bailouts and the poor lose their jobs. Therefore WSF is relevant. I think the WSF should send a strong message on inclusive and alternative growth."

In a world hit hard by the financial crisis, even the countries of the West are looking at South America to take the lead in strengthening the democratic forces in their countries. Speaking at a press conference, representative of the European Social Forum Raffaella Bollini, said: "The movements in Europe now need your help and solidarity. Earlier, Latin America had dictatorships and we helped civil society here. But now, we need your help as we witness the radical right emerging in Europe."

The WSF means different things to different people. To the outside world it may be an annual international carnival in Brazil. To the WEF it is a nuisance because of its ideology but to many others it is probably the only place they can air their grievances and be taken seriously and sympathetically. It was this sense of belonging that spurred a bus-load of Egyptians who arrived in Belem armed with huge banners and black t-shirts, espousing the cause of Palestine, a cause which lies in a near-death state with international politics getting the better of it.

Brij Lal from India, who has worked extensively on land rights

for urban communities, says: "I attach significance to such large scale human interactions-the continental experiences of people. For example most people think it is the US that rules the world. But I don't think so. If you look at countries, you find that these are run by the ruling classes and this is an international phenomena. There is a little bit of the US in everyone and the WSF is a reverse of that."

Lal emphasises on the fact that worldwide communities now understand the processes of exploitation and the background to it. "The educational purpose of the WSF is significant. There are 29 people who are participating from the Indian land rights movement. We know that the Brazilian government has given upto one million acres of land to the landless people here after an enduring struggle. Because similar movements are taking place in different regions in India, it will an excellent opportunity for the various people to understand and learn from the Brazilians."

Lal also defends the WSF on the grounds that as it is not an institution it would be wrong to judge it on the parameters of an organisation. "A continuous process of dialogue and engagement is vital and the WSF fulfills that role ably," the land rights campaigner asserts.

The Brazilians themselves are proud of their immense contribution to the global movement. As Oscar de la Torre Cueva, researching the history of Afro-descendants at the University of Pittsburg, (USA), says: "I think the WSF is generating interesting ideas about projects. We cannot expect big things to happen here. Therefore, I think the WSF will bring in a new world order, but it may take time."

So what brings people to the WSF? Amanda, a geography student who came from the southern city of Florianopolis, says: "I am not here to espouse a specific cause. I came here because I don't believe that our present system of capitalism will change anything. I worry about our future and that is why I am here."