

M.P. Veerendra Kumar
President



SOCIALIST JANATA (Democratic)
6/924-B1, Calicut House Construction Society Building
Y.M.C.A. Cross Road, Calicut, Kerala-673 001
Tel-Fax No. 0495 – 2766606

(Registered with Election Commission of India under Section 29 A of RP Act 1951- Order F.No.56/9/2010/ PPS-1/734)

November 4, 2010

Dear Sharadji,

I write this letter on the eve of Diwali, the festival of lights. But unfortunately there is no such joy in eleven villages of Kasaragod, in North Kerala, where life itself has been blighted. Welcome to the benighted land of endosulfan, where the Plantation Corporation of Kerala, formed in 1962 has around 4,696 hectares of cashew plantations distributed in three sectors spread over twenty villages. In early eighties, doom rained on innocent and unsuspecting life, including nature, through aerial spraying of this pesticide in an area now referred to in environmental circles as "The Second Bhopal." Trial spraying was started in 1977-78, and later from 1981 on a regular basis of two to three times a year, purportedly to counter the tea mosquito pest. Thus for twenty four infernal years this demonic visitation spread congenital anomalies, mental retardation, endocrine disruption, physical deformities, cancer and infertility in the region, sparing neither man nor beast. By the time the last drops of poisoned rain fell from the skies on December 26, 2000, little did those fated people know, that in its wake, in excess of 500 lives would be excruciatingly lost, and more than 2,000 fall prey to abominable genetic disorders. Not to mention the social exclusion these families face, especially in the case of alliances and interaction with the outside world.

Can you imagine, dear Sharadji, human beings more misshapen than the grotesqueries wrought by the fevered imaginations of Bosch or Brueghel? Or, then again, can you imagine a mother fainting every time she set her tender maternal gaze on a firstborn – because the child had no eyes, or when her swollen nipples would encounter only a tear below the nose, where a mouth should have been? Today, twenty-five years on, he still lives, a perpetual childish burden on an ageing mother! Or imagine a twenty-three year old, congenitally blind and a victim of progeria, who can't even walk. Or a sprightly four year-old lass, withering after being drenched in this wretched spray, like a tender plant eaten before its time by canker. Or how about when girls attain premature puberty, periods sometimes occurring twice or thrice in a month? Or inversely, how about delayed puberty among boys? Or the plight of families teetering on the brink of homelessness, due to default on loans against houses pledged to meet medical expenses? Come, visit the hamlets of Perala, Enmakaje, Mulleria, Muliya, Periya, Pulloor, Periyar, Ajanur, Kallar, Panathur, Panathady, Kayyur and Cheemeni and see for yourself in the streets how a generation of mothers still carries their children, well into their twenties, and having to assist them in even primary bodily functions.

In such a scenario, the statement of Union Minister of State for Agriculture K.V. Thomas on October 25, 2010 in Kasaragod that an expert enquiry committee had not attributed any death from mysterious illnesses here to the aerial spraying of endosulfan is quite unfortunate. He should not have said this for studies have proved otherwise.

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Let us now turn to science. Exposure to low levels of endosulfan has shown effects on the kidneys, foetus, and liver, from studies conducted on animals. It harms aquatic systems and is highly toxic to fish, birds, bees and wildlife. Sir, in this context would like to submit corroborative data and evidence. The first is from a study conducted by Regional Remote Sensing Service Centre, Bengaluru, which did satellite mapping of Padre village. It has 12 streams originating from the plantations in the hills above. Any aerially sprayed toxicant would reach the soil-water-plant continuum in a short span of time. The **surangams**, from which the local people draw water, are cut deep into the hills forming the plantations. These are also prone to contamination by chemicals applied in the estates. **RRSSC** concluded that: “The pollutants brought down through runoff or seepage tend to get accumulated in the soils. The crops cultivated on these soils may act as stores through which the toxicant gets entry into the target organisms (including humans).”

Sir, you will appreciate that all life forms have equal right over the bounty of nature. Along with human suffering spare a thought for those dumb creatures, which too met their doom. Frogs, hens and chicken were found dead and fish bellied up in ponds at the time of spraying. The possibility of bioaccumulation in fishes that will gravitate up the food chain cannot be ruled out. Here, the letter dated January 2, 2009 of the Managing Director of PCK addressed the Principal Secretary, Dept of Forests, which unwittingly bears out the detrimental nature of endosulfan on living creatures gains relevance. In passing, it mentions that after the cessation of aerial spraying ‘the trouble from wild animals has increased’ - in other words, a candid lament over loss of a means of collateral animal extermination! Also pertinent is the reply to this letter by The Chief Conservator of Forests (Forest conservation) dated November 16, 2009, wherein it says that the lease of Rajapuram estate to the PCK should be revoked, and that the land be vested with the Forest department. The reasons cited are environmental degradation and the harmful impact on the health of local community, which it goes on to add, persists to this day.

The latest committee set up with Dr M S Swaminathan at its head is the fifteenth such. Bear with me when I reveal to you the local sentiment and facts. The families of those afflicted have expressed their resolve not to co-operate in any more studies, since none so far have done them any tangible good. For them, their precious ones, despite being infirm and deformed, cannot be made a scientific exhibit once more to satisfy some bureaucratic doubt. Also, there is a genuine apprehension that considering that the maximum half-life of endosulfan doesn't extend beyond eight hundred days any traces might be detected now. Their demands are simple. Any team that would enumerate the afflicted, diagnose each case separately, prescribe a course of treatment according to various systems of medicine, and cover all costs of the treatment, would be welcomed. This in effect means that they will have time only for a team of multi-disciplinary doctors, not the usual mix of agronomists, activists, environmentalists and NGOs.

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The one study to end all studies was the epidemiological one conducted on exposed and controlled groups in 2001 in Vani Nagar, Padre by the prestigious Ahmedabad-based National Institute of Occupational Health team, headed by Habibullah N Saiyed. The scientifically rigorous and robust medical exercise concluded that “endosulfan was a causative factor” for the health problems and deducted residues of endosulfan in soil, water as well as human blood samples. The O P Dubey committee, set up by the Registration Committee of the Central Insecticides Board in April 2002, rubbished this damning indictment, which sabotage was exposed in 2004. Could it only be a coincidence that this same Dubey in his earlier avatar as the Director of the Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod had himself recommended the aerial spraying of endosulfan?

I appeal to your sense of compassion to take the right decision and ban forever the use of endosulfan in India, in tune with the sixty odd nations, which have voluntarily enforced it. I know that this may sound like a pious wish given the shameful stand our country took in the recently concluded United Nations meeting in Geneva, where scientists voted to draw up a risk management evaluation for endosulfan, before effecting a global ban under the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) treaty. Our civil servants are on record as saying there was not enough evidence to prove the health and environmental impacts of the insecticide, obviously putting the interests of manufacturers – major ones being the state-owned Hindustan Insecticide Ltd., & Excel Crop Care Limited. This, when Australia, which banned the killer chemical days before the meet, was influenced by the **Australia's 60 Minutes** feature, which had horrific footage from Enmakaje and Muliyar. The producers of the programme had interacted with the doctor who was the first to warn about the baneful effects of endosulfan - Dr Y S Mohankumar. Even Bayer CropScience ceased production of endosulfan in 2007 and will stop its sale globally this year after the phase-out period ends. But our babus are immune to such humanitarian gestures and remain unmoved by the hellish agony of those afflicted. Little wonder then as to presence of the nearly ₹10,000 crore pesticide industry representatives as influential presences on our national delegations to these meetings. An observer at the recent Geneva meeting has written on this nexus, which left him shamefaced as an Indian before the international community. In comparison, José Solla Vázquez Jr., the Brazilian delegate, barely literate in English still passionately put forth their resolve to enforce the ban within three years, thus emerging as the voice of his people.

I would like to conclude by mentioning about Smt. Leela Kumari Amma, a retired assistant in the agriculture department. She approached the Munsiff Court in Hosdurg in 2001 and secured a temporary stay on aerial spraying. In 2003, the High Court of Kerala upheld the order and put a permanent stop to spraying. This forced the Government of Kerala to impose a ban on the use of endosulfan in 2004. In one of her very rare appearances in public, at a book release function jointly hosted by **Mathrubhumi** and **Penguin books** in Kozhikode recently, she invoked the name of Gandhi, ruing that all

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these iniquities are still stalking his land. But probably his spirit has touched the afflicted too, though not our bureaucracy. For only their remarkable faith in peaceful democratic process influenced by such an exemplar, can explain their turning out in large numbers to cast their votes in the recently concluded elections to the local self government bodies. Elsewhere others have boycotted the polls on unresolved issues. It indeed is noble of the afflicted not to feel bitterness at the hands of such callousness. The **Mahabharata** tells us that out of maternal grief at having lost all her sons in war, the corrosive curse of Gandhari charred a toenail of even an avatar like Krishna. I leave you to conjecture what would be the fate of mere mortals before these long-suffering mothers! We have to respect the dignity of these souls in the face of tragedy and repay them by providing expedient relief, both medical and monetary.

May I also take this opportunity to consider empowering States to ban any pesticide that is deemed harmful in the proposed Pesticide Management bill?

Let this then be the last winter of discontent for the hapless endosulfan-afflicted, letting the light bless their lives too!

Thanking you with personal regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M.P. Veerendra Kumar', written in a cursive style.

M P Veerendra Kumar

Mr. Sharad Pawar
Hon'ble Minister of Agriculture, Food & Consumer Affairs
Government of India
New Delhi

- cc:
1. Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad
Hon'ble Minister of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India
NewDelhi
 2. Prof. K.V. Thomas
Hon'ble Minister of State for Agriculture
Government of India
New Delhi
 3. Mr. Jairam Ramesh
Hon'ble Minister of State for Environment and Forests
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