

NEWSLETTER FROM JAGRITI VIHARA

Dear friends, Namaste!

Through the media, you are likely aware that students in certain parts of India are currently protesting against the government's education department. Their protest is justified. Over the past few years – particularly in Jharkhand, Delhi, and a few other states – competitive exams papers have been leaked in exchange for money before the exams took place, preventing truly talented candidates from getting selected. It is this revelation that has sparked the protests. A major protest in Delhi some time ago forced the union education minister to resign and compelled the government to initiate an investigation.

Students have now launched a similar – and indeed, even larger – movement in Jharkhand. This protest has been ongoing for the past three weeks, with thousands of students taking to the streets. On November 10, protesters laid siege to the Jharkhand Legislative Assembly to demonstrate just how important this issue is to students and to the whole society; thousands of students gathered at the Legislative Assembly gates. At that time, all the ministers and members of the Legislative Assembly of Jharkhand were inside the Assembly building. However, none of them made any attempt to come out and meet the students, even though the students' protest was entirely non-violent. All the leaders exited through the back gate of the Assembly. Students describe the situation in Jharkhand as truly bizarre. They allege that, even before competitive exams take place, answer sheets are sold to favoured individuals or to wealthy and influential people in exchange for money. Students have levelled these accusations against the government in the presence of the media and are demanding an investigation by central agencies—a demand the government is unwilling to meet. They are also demanding the cancellation of recent exams, and the government is not even ready for this. The protest continues.

During the peaceful protest, the police used tear gas and lathi charges (use of force) to disperse the students (both boys and girls), yet they stood their ground. Some students were injured and have been hospitalised. Their protest is also garnering support from the general public. A 'Jharkhand Bandh' had been called to protest against the use of force by the police to suppress the peaceful demonstration, and it also received massive support from the civil society. It is heard that after considerable effort, the government has agreed to speak with the students. This is a welcome initiative; hopefully, a solution to the problem will be found soon, and the students currently staging a protest will call it off and focus on their studies.

Meanwhile, there is good news: the monsoon is pouring with full force across Jharkhand and other states. This is beneficial for agriculture. We anticipate good rainfall, which should lead to a bountiful harvest. At the same time, as happens every year, parts of India are facing the havoc of floods, resulting in loss of life and property; this is truly unfortunate.

The education and health projects run by Jagriti Vihara are progressing well. The school renovation work has almost been completed. We, along with the children, are delighted with the outcome and extend our heartfelt thanks to you. We look forward to your continued support in the future.

In our last meeting, we decided to request your support for a library renovation project, similar to the school renovation initiative. We have prepared a budget for this, which we are sharing with you in the hope of receiving your assistance.

As you know, we experience heavy rainfall here, which often uproots trees and plants on the campus and causes damage to the buildings. We are planning a project to trim the trees adjacent to the buildings after the monsoon season and would appreciate your support in this endeavour. This initiative aims to protect the buildings.

As you are all aware, we have been grappling with a severe financial crisis for some time now. Due to this crisis, we are facing a shortage of manpower needed to accelerate our operations, and we are unable to provide them with financial support. Under these circumstances, we earnestly request you to

support us—if possible—by contributing towards our organizational running costs to maintain the expenses incurred on travel, transportation and maintenance of staffs daily needs. The lack of funds is also hindering our ability to coordinate effectively and in a timely manner with various government departments. We will be thankful to you for your kind attention to this matter.

We clean the campus every year before our Swedish friends arrive. We will begin this process in early October this year as well. This year, we also need to whitewash the three hostel rooms where our friends stay, as the paint has been damaged by dampness during the monsoon. We hope that, just like every year, our Swedish friends will lend us a hand with this task.

We have once again set out to coordinate with various government departments. As part of this effort, we have established coordination with Central Coal Mines. The Mukhiya of our area has also supported us in this initiative; they have facilitated the construction of a new toilet for the children at our school. Although the project is not yet fully complete, it will soon be handed over to us. We are pleased with this positive initiative.

Jagriti Vihara looks forward to welcoming its esteemed friends, Inger Deijke, Anders Deijke and Sara Isman to Jagriti Vihara this November.

Regards,
Rajesh
For Jagriti Vihara