

mostly to work in brick kilns in Rajasthan and elsewhere. Many others will go soon for construction work in Delhi.

No grain or pulse from the farmers' own fields are now left in their storage and they have to depend entirely on buying food from the market. This in turn depends on their ability to get local employment which is very scarce. No work is available under the MGNREGA (rural employment guarantee law) at present and payments were delayed for a long time earlier when the work was available for a short duration. So people have no option but to accept advance payments from labour contractors who send them to the brick kilns. Many farmers and workers were recently crammed into a bus and left for Rajasthan. Several of them sent their wife and children, leaving behind old parents. Some were even seen clutching their poultry and goats in the bus.

Among the villagers who remain, people say that only about 10 per cent are able to fill their stomachs. Pulses are out of question. A cheap vegetable like potato may be available once in a while but mostly people subsist on chutney made from chilly and salt mixed with small quantity of coriander leaves and tomato, if available. Many of these people are also now planning to leave the village soon as migrant workers. They have to go, as due to lack of work, their debts keep on mounting.

Amazingly, in the midst of all this an old farmer, Chiddi, brings us a present of water chestnuts which he insists we must eat. A very small farmer of two bighas of land, he says this year for the first time in his life he could not get water in the tank and he had to use a pump-set to ensure partial survival of his *singharas* (water chestnuts). An affectionate man with a sad smile, when questioned in greater detail about his family, he could not recollect the name of his wife despite trying hard to do so.

Thurhat—This village, located in Jaitpur block suffered almost 70 per cent destruction of the previous rabi crop and nearly 80 per cent destruction of the kharif crop. Some farmers did not get any kharif yield at all. There was little rain before this rabi's sowing and farmers, who have to live on hope, borrowed money to sow seeds in many fields. However, after this there has been no rain (till the date of our visit) and the prospects of getting any yield now are very low.

Villagers here say that a lot of protection

from drought could have come if a project, promised by a former MLA from this area (Mahoba), had been completed. This project involves digging a channel from the Urmil river to Barkhera. They say that this small project will not harm anyone but will protect about 10 villages like theirs from the worst ravages of drought by providing protective irrigation. They say that most of the work has already been done on this project and only the balance of about 25 per cent is to be completed. The villagers say that the MLA, who promised this project (Uma Bharati), is now the Union Water Resources Minister and they have passed a resolution for speedy completion of this project.

At present only about 10 per cent households in the village are able to meet the nutrition norms. The rest subsist on meagre supplies of *roti*, *chutney* and some small supplies of diluted *chaach* obtained from a few better-placed families in the village. Pulses have almost disappeared from this village following the failures of two crops. Milk is not available either for children or for making tea. Very few families have BPL cards. For all others, wheat flour is selling at Rs 21 per kg. A six-member family needs 5 kg in a day to keep away hunger. Hence at a time when almost all families in the village have become dependent on market-purchased food, a family has to spend Rs 105 on buying wheat flour needed for one day (Rs 150 would be needed for rice, so wheat is a much cheaper option). Keeping the same amount for meagre supplies of vegetables, spices and oil, over Rs 200 would be needed for one day's food which is adequate to provide certain minimum nutrition norms. This does not include milk, pulses, fruits, tea leaves etc. But the total daily wage of a worker is only Rs 200 or even less and work is available at this wage only on few days. In addition, sudden emergency expenses have to be provided for treatment of illness and this means becoming more dependent on private services. Even if one gets treatment in a government hospital, medicines have to be purchased. Again, loans have to be taken for marriages in the family. Hence there is a state of perpetual deficit and debt driving farmers and workers towards migrant labour without which there would be even more hunger. However, migrant workers also face increasing problems and exploitation and what people like most of all is to get employment near their