

Bericht von Ram Esteves, Mitarbeiter der Partnerorganisation ADATS, vom 18.05.2020

Dear Everyone:

As they returned at 7:45 pm with smiles on their faces, ADATS Staff declared, "Today was efficient!"

When they reached the border at 6 pm, about 70 Migrants were sitting in groups by the roadside, patiently waiting. Toll Plaza workers had explained the standard procedure and sent them to the pickup point. While we were distributing money, bread, jam and water packets, a huge line of another about 50 youth walked up. After a short gap there was another line with 62 taking today's numbers to 182.



After yesterday's horrible experience, we did not expect such large numbers. Our wad of money got over and an ADATS Staff had to rush to Bagepalli to borrow some more money from shopkeepers. And the Bolero went to scrounge as much bread and jam as they could lay their hands on from local bakeries.

Speaking to the district police yesterday and sending Chickballapur Staff to that halfway checkpoint certainly paid off. Not a single Migrant reported any harassment and that terror was conspicuously absent.



Today's youth encountered good souls as well as the wicked.

A minitruck gave a group of 12-15 Migrants a lift from Devanahalli till a little before the Toll Plaza. Not knowing our arrangements, he stopped his vehicle and asked them all to get down. He showed them a cart track they should take to avoid the checkpoint since he wasn't sure what awaited them there.

Another young boy told Sujaid that a biker on the Highway had picked his top pocket and robbed his mobile – the only way he was able to communicate with his family.

23 smartly dressed youngsters were all from a Canteen in a major IT firm. As soon as the Lockdown was relaxed, they decided to walk all the way to Jharkhand.

A young couple with a 4 year old child were making their way back home to UP because her mother had passed away four days back.



A bus with UP registration had broken down in Bangalore and was stuck at the mechanics for 2 months during Lockdown. The driver was now taking the repaired vehicle back to UP. In order to avoid the Toll Plaza, he took an ingenious route through village roads and cart tracks. AP police outsmarted him and confiscated the bus. They made an offer he could not refuse. They agreed to let the bus through on condition that he took close to 70 Migrants all the way to Lucknow; no fine and no bribe.

Close to 70 youth assured the driver that they would pay a reasonable fare once they reached their villages. ADATS Staff refused to involve ourselves in this part of the bargain which we couldn't guarantee would be kept. The hapless driver, sensing that he had no choice, agreed. Migrants quickly secured their bags and baggage on the roof rack and packed themselves like sardines into the bus.

An older woman with two youngsters in tow hobbled along a little late. She "ordered" us to quickly pay her ₹ 500 and give the food and water, "I have my seat reserved on that bus! It cannot leave without me. It must not leave!" We not only "obeyed" but gave her and a monstrous bundle of all her pots and pans and other belongings a quarter kilometre lift on a motorcycle while the youngsters jogged along.

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As luck would have it, another UP registered empty lorry came along, this time legally through the Toll Plaza. AP police commandeered it and loaded 35 youth. The driver demurred and said he could take them only till a little North of Kurnool since he had a banana load to take.

This time, Mario intervened, "Come on, *yaar!* These are your people from your state. Surely, they are more valuable than the bananas. Negotiate a fare and take half now. They will pay you the other half when they reach Uttar Pradesh." The youth all chipped in and the driver finally agreed, scratching his head.

Another lorry, for his bad luck, came speeding along the Highway. This was exactly what the AP police were waiting for. After threatening dire consequences that were more apt for murder and heinous crimes, he too was given a proposition that he could not refuse. 47 youth were loaded to be ferried, without any fare, to Kurnool (halfway to Hyderabad).

Soon after it rolled out, 2 youths who had got separated from their group of 12 came running. They described their friends to Jimmy who told them that those 10 had jumped into the truck that just left. They waved and screamed but to no avail. Jimmy took them to the AP police who asked them to calm down and get onto the next vehicle, if and when one came.



One more lorry going to Bellary was stopped and about 30 youth were loaded, including the 2 persons who were separated from their group.



In total, 1,018 Migrant workers have been assisted in the past 7 days. These are just groups that arrived late afternoon till a little after sunset. We are sure that some more would have reached after the AP police and we sent out the last lorries and trucks – those who preferred to walk in the night and also stragglers. They would have arrived between the wee hours and about 10 am, before the asphalt roads got too hot to walk. It would be fair to say that we have, in some small measure, assisted a third to one-half of those who crossed the Karnataka-AP border this past one week.

Best wishes,

Ram