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Hindu
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Don't cloud the issue

THE country may have had its share of the monsoons, but it still is a good time to look at that great panacea — water harvesting.

Is it happening? Remember the hue and cry about water harvesting two years ago when the Prime Minister inaugurated a conference on the issue? May be the tremendous energy of that period has not been fully channelised. But a beginning has been made and there are enough success stories from the heart of India to spur those on who have been lagging behind.

Of course there are a lot of people who still prefer to pay for a tanker of water when in dire straits rather than make a long term investment in a more lasting solution. These are the people who have to be convinced about the tremendous benefits of rain water harvesting. With ground water levels falling steeply all over the country, the kind of crisis that could loom ahead is brought out by this little story from Jharodakalan in South West Delhi. What is heartening is its solution.

At Jharodakalan, water is brought by tankers. Last year, the acute scarcity of water almost led to water department officials being beaten up by the villagers. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) stepped in and took on the responsibility of recharging and sustaining ground water in at least a dry tube well through water harvesting. The results are there for all to see, says Mr. Manu Bhatnagar of IN-

USHA RAI looks at some success stories in rainwater harvesting that should convince those of us who are still sceptical.

TACH.

Yamuna Apartments in Alaknanda, South Delhi, are concrete blocks with pretty green spaces. But there is a major difference between Yamuna Apartments and other residential buildings. The 195 members of the Residents Welfare Association are environment friendly and conscious of their responsibility in not only conserving water but also in boosting the pathetically low, 30 metre deep ground water level in the region. So in November 2001, when the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) advertised its services for residents interested in water harvesting, the RWA — Yamuna Apartments, sought its help.

The CGWA has prepared 688 designs for water harvesting to suit almost every need. Currently 70 residents' welfare associations, largely group housing societies, are implementing water harvesting schemes designed by the CGWA.

Fortunately Yamuna Apartments has its own storm water drain and the water from here could be diverted to the two large pits (10 m deep and 10.5 m by 2.5 m) that were constructed near the two main gates.

There are pipes that divert the water from the storm water drain into the pits. When one pit gets filled, water flows into the second one. The cost worked out to be Rs. 3 lakhs and each resident contributed Rs. 3,000. The water for the use of the residents is stored in RCC tanks in the basement. Every day it is pumped up into overhead tanks for three to four hours. There is monitoring of the daily use of water. Since the inception of water harvesting, the association has been able to increase water supply to houses to six hours a day. The capacity of the tube wells, which have been recharged, has gone up from 10,000 litres a day to 15,000 litres.

Thanks to water harvesting structures, on May 27, the day it rained heavily this summer, both the pits were filled.

According to the Officer In-charge, Delhi, CGWA, Dr. S.B. Singh, every day, 650 million gallons of water flow into the sewers and is wasted. Yet, the average ground water level is receding every day. In the Chattarpur basin area for instance, it has dropped from five metres below the ground to 40/45 m now in a span of a few years. In fact, water below 40 m is saline. To prevent people from sapping the earth dry, tube well sinking has been stopped in South West and South Delhi. The Jal Board of Delhi thought there were 1,600 tube wells in Delhi. When people were asked to register their tube wells, one lakh were registered. But Mr. Singh

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feels there may be three-lakh such wells. With public cooperation, the CGWA is confident that all the precipitation during the rains can reach the aquifer.

The effort to harvest rainwater has been started on a macro level by INTACH and other organisations, and at the micro level by residents of welfare associations. In fact it is now mandatory for all group housing societies to have a water harvesting structure as a part of their building plan.

The sprawling, upmarket Vasant Vihar area in Delhi too has got into water harvesting in a big way, though, initially, residents could not visualise the benefits. They expected to see water gushing out. They did not understand the concept of recharging the groundwater. But with 1,350 plots, most of them with tube wells, the exploitation of groundwater was enormous. The CGWA notification making it mandatory for those with bore wells to undertake water harvesting on their premises or face having their tube wells being sealed spurred residents into action. Work soon began on public lands and structures owned by the Delhi Jal Board, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD).

The president of the V.V. Residents Welfare Association, says the joint venture projects on *bagiadari* (sharing) basis have helped recharge abandoned tube wells and keep seven parks of Vasant Vihar green. Eleven projects have been completed on public land and 30 more are currently on.

Water harvesting projects have begun in A1 street, the MCD horticulture nursery, the DDA woodlands, adjacent to C6 Steet, the DDA District Park in addition to a recycling project of non-sewage water *nallah*, running parallel to "A" block. The last project is yielding about 200 litres of irrigation water per minute to several parks of "A" block. A private telecom operator and a multinational bank have contributed money for the water harvesting on public land. The technique was simple — just laying speed breakers around a park to direct water into abandoned wells or digging a hole (which is covered with a *jali*) and making a channel two feet wide and a foot deep and connecting it to a tube well in the park. There are about 55 parks in Vasant Vihar.

INTACH has been doing macro water harvesting since 1995-1996 and can boast of creating a

bird sanctuary on a 11-km stretch of water body that formed the Najafgarh *Nallah*. The 51 km-long Najafgarh *nallah* starts at Dhansa and joins the Yamuna near Wazirabad. Thirty kilometres of the drain is in rural Delhi. With the help of the Irrigation and Flood Control Department of the Delhi Government, the drain was desilted to increase its storage capacity and then using regulators at Kakraula and Dhansa to retain the water. In fact the brackish water is improving with dilution, says Manu Bhatnagar.

By retaining the water in the drain, the aquifers have been recharged. There is more water now for irrigation. Farmers, six kilometres away from the drain, are now growing crops. Tube wells in the area have been discharging water copiously and in two years the water table is up by a metre.

Water harvesting has also been taken up on a three kilometre stretch of the Central Ridge near Ashok Hotel. The Barapullah drain near Defence Colony is to be converted into a water harvesting channel. The recharging of ponds — 500 small water bodies — has also been taken up. Thirty ponds have been converted into storage structures. Three hundred abandoned stone quarries in South Delhi are also seen as having potential for water harvesting. The Asola and Bhatti mines are being afforested by the Government.

INTACH is also trying to increase the capacity of a horseshoe lake near Wazirabad that dries up by the end of the summer. This will be connected to the Yamuna.

In all, some 700 government organisations are putting up water harvesting facilities — these include school buildings, hospitals and even the flyover near Dhaula Kuan. From the flyover, vertical pipes will channel the water into pits in the ground.

Through water harvesting, water can be made available at a fourth of the cost it would be available from big dams, says Mr. Bhatnagar. One Bhatti mine will provide more water for Delhi than several group housing societies, says Suresh Rohilla, a water harvesting expert from the National Capital Region Planning Board. Bhatnagar echoes these sentiments — "one marco job on water harvesting can do more than one lakh households tapping water." Yet it is important to involve as many people as possible in water harvesting so that it becomes a people's movement. ●

HINDUSTAN TIMES

Dump the baggage

THE ATMOSPHERE in the subcontinent does not seem to have changed either for the better or for the worse as a result of Colin Powell's visit. Even then, the US secretary of state must have felt assured that at least the war clouds which caused so much concern all over the world have disappeared to a considerable extent. All that now needs to be done, in his perception, is for 'further action' by Pakistan before a dialogue can begin. But herein lies the rub. For instance, as a first step towards a further easing of tension, Mr Powell would like a toning down of the rhetoric. Besides, he seems to want Pakistan to respond more favourably to India's demand for the extradition of the 20 terrorists which New Delhi has identified for various crimes. Since 14 of them are Indian nationals, there should not be too much of a loss of face for Islamabad to hand over some of them.

However, some of Pervez Musharraf's comments on the very day Mr Powell was feeling "very encouraged" by his visit to India might not be regarded as all that friendly by India. His observation to a group of clerics that Pakistan does not have to prove its credentials to India in the context of the crackdown on religious extremists suggests that the Pakistani dictator has not yet come to terms with what the western world regards as a

'courageous' step. He is obviously guarding himself against the charge that his actions have been the result of the pressure applied by both India (by moving troops to the border) and the US. He also seems to have been offended by India's stand that it will wait for some time to see whether General Musharraf is genuinely repentant about his past follies. Though understandable, it is an attitude of this nature, bristling with resentment, which can be an impediment to a return to normalcy.

Similar obstacles can also be identified by the setting of various preconditions by General Musharraf, including the refusal to recognise the Line of Control as the border between the two countries, a suggestion which has often been voiced in India. Along with the reiteration of the need to ascertain the 'wishes' of the people of Kashmir, what these bargaining ploys do is to stiffen the attitudes on both sides. Clearly, such postures cannot precede the opening of a dialogue. Perhaps, as a military man, the Pakistani leader wants to follow certain set guidelines. But, as the Agra summit showed, such an attitude can undermine the diplomatic efforts. In this context, General Musharraf should re-read that part of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech, calling for the dumping of historical baggage, which he had quoted with approval in his January 12 speech.

Emotional about water

WITH ELECTIONEERING in full swing, the issue of the sharing of river waters between Punjab and Haryana has again become controversial. Surely, the contentious issue can be resolved by an effective water management strategy. There is enough water in the Ravi-Beas system for it to be diverted to the Yamuna through the Sutlej to benefit Haryana. Indeed, this is the basis on which allocations were made to Haryana from time to time after it was carved out from Punjab in 1966. The construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal (SYL) was progressing quite satisfactorily until the late Seventies when the issue became embroiled in politics.

The matter gained an emotional edge when the Akali Dal — in its fight against the Centre — sought to make out that the Sikh peasantry was being done out of its inherent rights. The rest is history. But the SYL got a fresh lease of life flowing out of the recommendations of the Eradi Tribunal in the wake of the Punjab Accord signed in 1985 between the Rajiv Gandhi government and the Akali Dal, led at the time by late Sant Harcharan Singh Longowal. Nevertheless, the construction of the SYL could not be resumed even after ter-

rorist violence ceased in Punjab, possibly because of the relative instability of the Centre and its dependence on coalition politics since the late Eighties.

The Supreme Court's directive to Punjab to complete the section of the SYL falling within its territory within a year has now caused a huge row. Water is a highly emotive issue, and the Akalis and the Congress seem to share the opinion that Punjab can't spare water. The Akalis seem to be more vociferous, probably because of their declining political stock in Punjab. Akali politicians of all hues, including Parkash Singh Badal, have begun to strike aggressive postures, the more irresponsible among them even speaking of "rivers of blood". This does their credentials no good at all. The chief minister, in particular, should have observed restraint.

While the apex court is right in its assessment, in view of the sensitivity of the issue, the broader questions need to be discussed at an appropriate forum, considering the right of a riparian state to its river waters. The Centre needs to watch out for the hot heads and not allow the situation to spiral out of control.

Put the music on

WITH EYE-CATCHING models — both motor cars and their female 'promoters' — on display at the current Auto Expo in New Delhi, India has come a long way from the times when there were only three or four types of cars in the market and imported cars were few and far between. Today, attractive products of well-known auto manufacturers can be seen in showrooms. Moreover, despite the recession, many medium-sized cars have been launched recently which are affordable only to that segment of buyers who already possess a car. There must be an increase in demand in sight to motivate car manufacturers to come out with these launches, suggesting the arrival of spring and a big revival of the market.

While it is true that car sales declined between April and November 2001, the rate of decline was less than what it was in 2000. Maruti, which has a 57 per cent share of the market, has also seen a decline in profits. But, on the whole, car sales are picking up as compared to last year. However, keeping in tune

with a decline in demand over the last couple of years, car production in November 2001 fell by 18 per cent after recording a year-on-year growth in the preceding five months. People demand cars when their incomes grow. It is a barometer of the general health of the economy, especially in the US which also has the largest number of cars in the world.

In India, a revival of car sales shows that the middle class is growing and people have enough disposable income to be able to afford cars and run them. With a dip in the interest rate, the purchase of cars through loans has become easier and, recently, the price of petrol has also been brought down, making the running of the big cars cheaper. All these positive factors can rev up the demand for not only small cars but even the luxury cars. The prospect of a booming economy in the not too distant future will bring more luxury cars to India. Toyota may bring Lexus and Daimler-Chrysler could manufacture more Mercs. That is why the automobile industry seems so happy. Yes, put the music on!

THINK IT OVER...

All that matters is love and work

SIGMUND FREUD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grab China's offer

THE CHINESE prime minister's visit has not received the attention it deserves from the media. One hopes this has happened not because commerce is his main agenda and the Left here does not like to associate China with such a subject. But such considerations have not lessened Zhu Rongji's enthusiasm for doing business with India. Conceding our supremacy in software, he has mooted partnership with us to grab the number one IT slot in the world.

An India-China partnership in any field would mean Asian supremacy in that field. We hope our government will utilise the opportunities offered.

R. SAJAN
Always

Judging the judges

THE ARTICLE *Vicious and vindictive* by Prem Shankar Jha (January 18) is commendable. We are living in a democracy but the fundamental rights of the people are being crushed by the State in the name of law. When the ques-

tion of the State, forgetting their constitutional and social responsibilities. We are undergoing a phase where we need a complete transformation of our judicial and law enforcement system.

SHIBLI
via e-mail

II

THIS REFERS to the editorial *Judging the judges* (December 26). Judges are the trustees of the people. However, at a National Legal Workshop in Kollam, Chief Justice S.P. Bharucha said that while the majority of judges are honest and upright, there is a minority who are corrupt.

The people should put pressure on the CJ through the press to go into complaints against judges who deliver illegal, unjustified and erroneous verdicts.

B.S. MAKOL
Chandigarh

On the right note

DURING HIS recent visit to the United States, L.K. Advani got a response from the US administration and President Bush which defied all apprehensions

and was arguing against India taking a tough stand. This has proved again that if we want to get noticed on any international platform, we must learn to respect ourselves.

ASHUTOSH AGARWAL
via e-mail

II

ADVANI RIGHTLY discouraged a university, where he delivered the convocation address, from conferring an honorary doctorate on him. He justly felt that *Honoris Causa* degrees should be reserved for academicians.

A.B. KOHLI
Delhi

Misquoted

IN THE report *Wanted: Designers to style an Indian statement at Monte Carlo (HT City, January 14)* by Shikha Mishra, I have been misquoted in the matter regarding Ritu Beri. I am not here to run down Ritu Beri but to promote Charity Balls. I was given to understand that the report would be about Charity Balls and not Ritu Beri.

ANU BHANDARI

Rape is also used as a means of punishing a woman or putting her in her place

Crime without punishment

BY USHA RAI



THE BODY AND THE MIND: The Scream, by Edward Munch, 1895

IN A widely reported case in the media, eight years ago, Hamida, a 10-year-old Bangladeshi girl, was reportedly raped by eight men, including five policemen, in Delhi. Two men were arrested, one is still facing trial, while all the policemen were acquitted. Eight years later, she was summoned by a sessions court in Delhi, to testify against the alleged rapists. Hamida came from Bangladesh, now an 18-year-old stoic girl, compelled to relive the trauma of her childhood once again.

Twenty-two-year-old Rubina of Karachi woke up when she heard knocking on her bedroom door in the night. As her husband was out of town, she unbolted the door only when she heard the voice of her father-in-law. He put a pistol to her head and said he would kill her and tell her husband a different story. She was raped.

When her husband returned, Rubina told him everything. He refused to believe her. He accused her of 'immorality' and beat her within an inch of her life. Rubina ran away, sought shelter in a friend's house and contacted an NGO through whose help she filed a police complaint.

Over three years later her case is still pending in the courts.

There are hundreds of similar cases of rape by family members, close friends and neighbours all across the subcontinent. A study by Saathi, an NGO based in Kathmandu, shows that in Nepal, 89 per cent of the rapists were known to their victims. In India, researcher Sudhir Kakkar estimated that in 1996, 600,000 to 700,000 children were sexually abused by relatives and known persons.

Despite the strong women's movement and revision of rape laws in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India, most perpetrators of rape go unpunished. This is despite the established fact that sex offenders have the highest rate for repeating an offence.

A study in Nepal shows that 44 per cent of the rapists are leading normal lives. Only eight per cent had been jailed and two per cent had run away from the area where they were living to avoid arrest. In India, where 15,000 cases of rape are reported in a year, the conviction rate is less than 4 per cent.

In Bangladesh, nearly 1,000 women, many of them as young as six years, suffer the violence of rape. Most cases go unreported out of fear of social stigma, discriminatory laws and the negative attitude of law enforcement officials. Across the subcontinent, there is genuine

fear that if a case of rape is reported "it would ruin the life of the girl or woman."

Ameena Hussein of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka says only 50 per cent of the victims of rape and sexual abuse lodge a police complaint and only 25 per cent of the cases lodged go to trial. Those who seek justice are often disillusioned.

There were two rape cases in Sri Lanka which dragged on in the courts for 12 and 8 years. It took 16 long years for the courts in India to award a 10-year sentence for the rape of a five-year-old by her neighbour in Hyderabad. Though the trial court awarded 10 years imprisonment, the high court reduced it to five. The State appealed before the Supreme Court and the high court was castigated for reducing the sentence. The girl, now 21 years, has not been given an opportunity to forget the trauma for so many years.

A high court judge of Karnataka remembers the case of a 26-year-old, accused of raping an eight-year-old, who was let off with a sentence of one year (that too was commuted because he had spent a year as an undertrial prisoner) instead of the seven years rigorous imprisonment. The judgment said the rapist was newly married and his married life would suffer so he should be given a second chance. Obviously, the judge did not have the same sympathy for the eight-year-old child.

Another common thread that runs through the subcontinent is the astonishingly young age of the victims, many of them just five and six years old. In India, nearly 25 per cent of the rape victims are

10 to 16 years. Mehra and Chattraj in their 1994 study reported that two of every three persons raped are children. In Bangladesh, Johan and Islam reported in 1997 that of the 5,738 victims of rape, over 16 per cent were minors. In Nepal, rape victims were of all ages but 39 per cent were below 19 years. Paralysed with fear, these young people are unable to resist, shout, hit or struggle.

Rape is not always committed in lust. It is also used as a means of punishing a woman or putting her in her place. Bhanwari Devi, a village woman working as a grassroots development worker with Rajasthan's Women's Development Programme, was gang-raped by five men of the dominant caste because she dared to stop the illegal marriage of a one-year-old girl. Enraged by the humiliation of having a complaint filed against a member of their community, five Gujjars waylaid Bhanwari and her husband Mohan in the fields. While two men held her husband down, the others took turns raping her.

Hussaini Bi of Hyderabad was gang-raped by 11 policemen as punishment for belonging to a Naxalite group. When the state government offered her compensation, she refused to take it to make the point that no money can make amends for the trauma of a rape victim.

Rape victims suffer 'double victimisation' — first by those committing the crime and then by the criminal justice system. The victim's morality is put under scrutiny as well as her attempts to resist or repel the attackers. Defence lawyers, speaking on behalf of the accused, portray the women as "bold, motivated by revenge, apt

to exaggerate or hysterical". Victims often leave the courtroom with their dignity and reputation shattered.

Despite various amendments to rape laws, in some countries they are still not gender-sensitive. The Nepali law demands proof of penetration and victims find it difficult to make statements to male police officers to that effect.

Rape has always been considered a major crime in the Islamic society of Pakistan but there has hardly been any punishment of the culprits. According to the Zina and Huddood Ordinance, the rapist gets 40 whiplashes if convicted. Human rights activists point out that as per the ordinance there have to be four married adult Muslim witnesses to the crime.

Shakira Tariq, a lawyer and activist of War Against Rape (WAR), says if the girl is unable to prove her rape, the case is automatically converted into adultery and instead of the rapist, the girl could be tried for adultery and, if punished, imprisoned for 25 years. She says dozens of women are languishing in jail after their rape cases were converted to adultery.

In Bangladesh, under a special law enacted in 2000, provision has been made for speedy trial and a death sentence or life imprisonment of the convicted rapist. A child born out of the rape is entitled to inheritance rights from the convicted family until 21 years in the case of a boy and until marriage in the case of a girl. Since the punishment is severe, judges are reluctant to pass life term or death sentence unless fully convinced.

But the definition of rape, even under the special law, is antiquated. If the torture is by a foreign object, or other means, it is not considered rape.

In Nepal, the very nature of rape law — which stipulates reporting within 24 hours, a medical check-up and finding traces of semen as necessary proof — often prevents justice given the rural setting and poor medical services in most parts. In the subcontinent, most victims report rape after many days. The law must allow a longer gap for reporting of these incidents. Quicker, closed court hearings must also be adopted to make it easier for women to report rape.

The Mahila Dakshata Samiti in India has suggested that rape cases should be tried only by women judges and prosecuted by women lawyers. "A man, however learned, can never get into the psyche of a woman and think, react like a woman," says a senior woman lawyer.

Courtesy: Women's Feature Service



WITH MALICE TOWARDS ONE AND ALL... | Khushwant Singh

Why are the Gauffins in Tihar?

A GOOD indicator of the uglier side of our national character is the way ambitious people behave just before elections are due. Count the number of men and women who throng offices of political parties to seek tickets. Many go from one office to another because they have no political commitments to any party. They exert as much pressure as they can through money and kinship. Panels of selectors are familiar with these tactics because many have been party hoppers themselves.

If they fail to get a nomination, they become the detractors of those who succeed in getting the party ticket. It is a personal ambition to grow from nobody to somebody. Not only do they not have any political commitments, they have none to serve the people. It is shameless avarice wearing a mask of social service.

I happen to know quite a few of this tribe: oily, smooth and self-righteous. One thing they have in common is the ability to use people, giving them empty promises in exchange for their support. That is the hallmark of all successful politicians. The more they can fob off the gullible for what they will do for them, the community and the country at some future unspecified date, the more successful they are.

This disease called *Chaudharyitis* runs in families. When one becomes a *Chaudhary*, his kinsmen catch the infection. So we see political families in every state and in every political party, except the communists. The virus spread to wives, brothers, sisters, sons, sons-in-law, nephews and nieces. At times, mistresses also get infected and flaunt their political clout. Unfortunately, the disease is not fatal.

Why do I have so much malice against politicians? Probably because once upon a time I too harboured political ambitions. Then I fell by the roadside. I did not have what it takes to become a successful *meta*.

Gem of a couple

I SHOULD have written about them soon after they had been arrested at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as they were about to board a flight for Hong Kong. The official version is that they were carrying a large sum of foreign currency on them. At the time of writing, they are still in Tihar Jail. Since he is a Swede and his wife French, perhaps the Swedish and the French embassies are looking into the matter. I feel helpless because I do not know what I can do to get them out of Tihar and bring them to my home.

I had not heard of the Gauffins till November 1, 1984. A day earlier Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by her Sikh security guards. Angry mobs were on the rampage thirsting for Sikh blood. The administration was either paralysed or unwilling to restore law and order. I was a marked man because I had criticised Operation Blue Star in Parliament and returned Mr Padma Bhushan in protest. I was warned to get out of my apartment before a mob gets me.

Suddenly, a large car pulled up outside my door. Rolf Gauffin introduced himself and ordered "Get into my car at once. Take whatever you want for two or three days." My wife and I followed with our tooth-brushes, toothpaste and night clothes. We were driven to the Swedish embassy compound where the Rolfs lived. We spent two nights with them till violence subsided.

This was by no means the first time that Rolf had overlooked diplomatic niceties and gone to the rescue of people in danger of losing their lives. In Iran, he rescued Iranians on run from the police and drove them to safety across the border. There are not

fin. I for one will never, never believe that they were sailing away money. They could be on yet another mission to help out someone in dire peril.

Bhisham Sahni & Gillian Wright

BEING CONNECTED with a few publishers, mainly Penguin-Viking, I am often approached by Hindi and Urdu novelists to help them have their works published in English. Some bring their own translations or rendered by professors of English literature. I scan over a few pages and without comment pass them on to Penguin-Viking. Till a few years ago, all were rejected because the English was flawed. Shrilal Shukla's modern classic *Raag Darbari*, first translated into English by himself (he was in the IAS), then by some friend, would have met the same fate till Penguin asked Gillian Wright to take a look at it. Her translation was accepted and the novel went into many editions.

It was the same with Rishi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* with a lot of Shia Muslim terminology very difficult to put into English. Her English version *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* also went into several editions. Thereafter, whenever Hindi or Urdu novelists approach me, I give them a standard reply: "If Gillian Wright agrees to translate it, we will publish it." We rely on her judgment on the merits of the original and have implicit faith in her ability to put it in good English.

Gillian Wright's latest offering is *Middle India: Selected Short Stories of Bhisham Sahni* (Penguin). Here is one man I have known over 70 years. We are the same age and were in the same class in Government College, Lahore. I heard about his achievements: Sahitya Akademi Awards for his novel *Tamas*, Soviet-Land Nehru Award, Padma Bhushan, Shikha Award, the highest given by the Delhi government, honorary doctorates, seven novels, nine collections of short stories, six plays and a biography of his brother Balraj Sahni. He wrote in Hindi; I read Hindi with some difficulty. I did not realise how great a writer he was. Thanks to Gillian Wright, now I do.

All the stories are about the middle class Indian; hence the title *Middle India*. Some are on the partition of the country (another experience I share with him), some about the tragedy of anglicised Indians, some of minor episodes which he has turned into gripping tales with satire and sardonic humour. I am proud he lives in an apartment just behind my back garden.

Namastay

I WELCOME foreign tourists with open arms To the land of lagoons and swaying palms "God's own country", a verdant fantasy Is the slogan coined by me. With my freshly constructed resorts, Of the luxurious super deluxe sort Thrilled by dollars pouring in, Sri Lanka's loss is my gain. (They got on the watch list you see, Of human rights and amnesty. Protests got very inflammatory So I had to ban child prostitution legally) We're simply catering to human need Of the pedophilic breed Offering children as main course or Begging might be their only recourse. At least they're 'gainfully' employed Loss of innocence, we can't avoid. Besides they grow fast on the streets Sexual experimentation is their creed I assuage my conscience with such thoughts, Approving plans for more resorts.

OFF TRACK | Bhai Mahavir

Laughing at oneself

WHEN I received a letter from the only army commander in the country who had secured a doctorate in defence science while commanding an active army. I did not catch the significance of his book. The book had been described by the highest decorated army officer, "who had taught him soldiering" as a "textbook on military leadership in India". He had offered to send a copy to me but hard-pressed by the heavy weight of books presented to me by my well-wishers, I had hesitated to respond.

What I was missing was brought home to me in a curious manner. The occasion was the inauguration of Mohyal Ashram — a glittering structure consisting of 32 single rooms and eight suites, and a meditation hall with a 24 ft high dome. The impressive gathering was in an upbeat mood having got a place on the banks of the Ganga.

It was a 3 crore job very well done and in a record two years. Credit was due to B.D. Ball, president, General Mohyal Sabha, who was being profusely praised. One of the two distinguished generals on the stage — B.K.N. Chibber — left little for anyone else to laud. Acclaim was at such a peak that I started worrying if anything would remain for me to add.

It was he — the second general to take the mike next — Lt. Gen. M.L. Chibber, who solved my problem by giving a glimpse of literary acumen submerged behind the glittering medals of gallantry. He has written a book on 'Leadership' which has been translated into nine foreign languages, has served as a textbook for the Indian army and has been adapted by IGNU for teaching 'Strategy and Leadership'. He also has a Ph.D. in his kitty.

"I am often asked," he said, "what quality it is in the small Mohyal community which equips its members with a virility that impresses the recruiting officers as much as it enables them to succeed in farming and other forms of self-employment. I often say in reply: It is the capacity to laugh at ourselves. We have it in our blood and it gives us the strength to face challenges. I belong to Bhera (north western Punjab, now in Pakistan). My wife, who hails from Pind Dadan Khan, describes me as a *Jhalla* (Punjabi for nincompoop or 'nut case')."

This self-compliment was greeted with loud laughter. The general went on, "When I jokingly complained about it to someone — another Mohyal — from the Pind, he asked: 'Have you not heard the quip 'Bhera has 70 *mohallas* and 72 *Jhallas*'?" A louder guffaw followed.

Did the Punjabi idiom about one in his early '70s going partially looney (*sattreya bahattreya*) have its roots in the joke about the north western town? My course had thus been chartered. I could bank on the sportiveness of the gathering.

"Mohyals are known for another characteristic too," — except martial classes — were debarred from buying farming land. Mohyals were agitating to be recognised as an 'agricultural' community. There was a conference in which the British governor was present and a resolution was being moved by Dr G.L. Dutt who later became the first V-C of Vikram University. He said, "We are a small community consisting of seven sub-castes viz. Chibbers, Balis, Dutts, etc." A man who had a small wooden rod in his hand, swung it towards the speaker shouting: "What? Chibbers, Balis and Dutts are important and the other sub-castes like us are just ecceteras?"

"The rod fell near the stage stunning everyone. Dutt continued his speech, unfazed. Turning to the governor he said, 'If your excellency had any doubt about our being a martial class, you have just now seen a proof thereof.'"

That is just Mohyal like: sensitive, even fussy about their self-respect, but simple, straightforward and almost reckless if challenged. How often a ready wit comes to the rescue in odd situations remains an open question.

Abraham Lincoln was once called a double-faced person. "Would I keep this face," he asked, "if I had another?" I wonder if someone will help me in discovering by what logic this quote from Lincoln came to my mind.

The writer is Governor of Madhya Pradesh

Dump the baggage

THE ATMOSPHERE in the subcontinent does not seem to have changed either for the better or for the worse as a result of Colin Powell's visit. Even then, the US secretary of state must have felt assured that at least the war clouds which caused so much concern all over the world have disappeared to a considerable extent. All that now needs to be done, in his perception, is for 'further action' by Pakistan before a dialogue can begin. But herein lies the rub. For instance, as a first step towards a further easing of tension, Mr Powell would like a toning down of the rhetoric. Besides, he seems to want Pakistan to respond more favourably to India's demand for the extradition of the 20 terrorists which New Delhi has identified for various crimes. Since 14 of them are Indian nationals, there should not be too much of a loss of face for Islamabad to hand over some of them.

However, some of Pervez Musharraf's comments on the very day Mr Powell was feeling "very encouraged" by his visit to India might not be regarded as all that friendly by India. His observation to a group of clerics that Pakistan does not have to prove its credentials to India in the context of the crackdown on religious extremists suggests that the Pakistani dictator has not yet come to terms with what the western world regards as a

'courageous' step. He is obviously guarding himself against the charge that his actions have been the result of the pressure applied by both India (by moving troops to the border) and the US. He also seems to have been offended by India's stand that it will wait for some time to see whether General Musharraf is genuinely repentant about his past follies. Though understandable, it is an attitude of this nature, bristling with resentment, which can be an impediment to a return to normality.

Similar obstacles can also be identified by the setting of various preconditions by General Musharraf, including the refusal to recognise the Line of Control as the border between the two countries, a suggestion which has often been voiced in India. Along with the reiteration of the need to ascertain the 'wishes' of the people of Kashmir, what these bargaining ploys do is to stiffen the attitudes on both sides. Clearly, such postures cannot precede the opening of a dialogue. Perhaps, as a military man, the Pakistani leader wants to follow certain set guidelines. But, as the Agra summit showed, such an attitude can undermine the diplomatic efforts. In this context, General Musharraf should re-read that part of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's speech, calling for the dumping of historical baggage, which he had quoted with approval in his January 12 speech.

Emotional about water

WITH ELECTIONEERING in full swing, the issue of the sharing of river waters between Punjab and Haryana has again become controversial. Surely, the contentious issue can be resolved by an effective water management strategy. There is enough water in the Ravi-Beas system for it to be diverted to the Yamuna through the Sutlej to benefit Haryana. Indeed, this is the basis on which allocations were made to Haryana from time to time after it was carved out from Punjab in 1966. The construction of the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal (SYL) was progressing quite satisfactorily until the late Seventies when the issue became embroiled in politics.

The matter gained an emotional edge when the Akali Dal — in its fight against the Centre — sought to make out that the Sikh peasantry was being done out of its inherent rights. The rest is history. But the SYL got a fresh lease of life flowing out of the recommendations of the Eradi Tribunal in the wake of the Punjab Accord signed in 1985 between the Rajiv Gandhi government and the Akali Dal, led at the time by late Sant Harcharan Singh Longowal. Nevertheless, the construction of the SYL could not be resumed even after ter-

rorist violence ceased in Punjab, possibly because of the relative instability of the Centre and its dependence on coalition politics since the late Eighties.

The Supreme Court's directive to Punjab to complete the section of the SYL falling within its territory within a year has now caused a huge row. Water is a highly emotive issue, and the Akalis and the Congress seem to share the opinion that Punjab can't spare water. The Akalis seem to be more vociferous, probably because of their declining political stock in Punjab. Akali politicians of all hues, including Parkash Singh Badal, have begun to strike aggressive postures, the more irresponsible among them even speaking of "rivers of blood". This does their credentials no good at all. The chief minister, in particular, should have observed restraint.

While the apex court is right in its assessment, in view of the sensitivity of the issue, the broader questions need to be discussed at an appropriate forum, considering the right of a riparian state to its river waters. The Centre needs to watch out for the hot heads and not allow the situation to spiral out of control.

Put the music on

WITH EYE-CATCHING models — both motor cars and their female 'promoters' — on display at the current Auto Expo in New Delhi, India has come a long way from the times when there were only three or four types of cars in the market and imported cars were few and far between. Today, attractive products of well-known auto manufacturers can be seen in showrooms. Moreover, despite the recession, many medium-sized cars have been launched recently which are affordable only to that segment of buyers who already possess a car. There must be an increase in demand in sight to motivate car manufacturers to come out with these launches, suggesting the arrival of spring and a big revival of the market.

While it is true that car sales declined between April and November 2001, the rate of decline was less than what it was in 2000. Maruti, which has a 57 per cent share of the market, has also seen a decline in profits. But, on the whole, car sales are picking up as compared to last year. However, keeping in tune

with a decline in demand over the last couple of years, car production in November 2001 fell by 18 per cent after recording a year-on-year growth in the preceding five months. People demand cars when their incomes grow. It is a barometer of the general health of the economy, especially in the US which also has the largest number of cars in the world.

In India, a revival of car sales shows that the middle class is growing and people have enough disposable income to be able to afford cars and run them. With a dip in the interest rate, the purchase of cars through loans has become easier and, recently, the price of petrol has also been brought down, making the running of the big cars cheaper. All these positive factors can rev up the demand for not only small cars but even the luxury cars. The prospect of a booming economy in the not too distant future will bring more luxury cars to India. Toyota may bring Lexus and Daimler-Chrysler could manufacture more Mercs. That is why the automobile industry seems so happy. Yes, put the music on!

THINK IT OVER...

All that matters is love and work
SIGMUND FREUD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grab China's offer

THE CHINESE prime minister's visit has not received the attention it deserves from the media. One hopes this has happened not because commerce is his main agenda and the Left here does not like to associate China with such a subject. But such considerations have not lessened Zhu Rongji's enthusiasm for doing business with India. Conceding our supremacy in software, he has mooted partnership with us to grab the number one IT slot in the world.

An India-China partnership in any field would mean Asian supremacy in that field. We hope our government will utilise the opportunities offered.

R. SAJAN
Alwaye

Judging the judges

THE ARTICLE *Vicious and vindictive* by Prem Shankar Jha (January 18) is commendable. We are living in a democracy but the fundamental rights of the people are being crushed by the State in the name of law. When the question is 'State versus the common man', our judges work as the ser-

vant of the State, forgetting their constitutional and social responsibilities. We are undergoing a phase where we need a complete transformation of our judicial and law enforcement system.

SHIBLI
via e-mail

II

THIS REFERS to the editorial *Judging the judges* (December 26). Judges are the trustees of the people. However, at a National Legal Workshop in Kollam, Chief Justice S.P. Bharucha said that while the majority of judges are honest and upright, there is a minority who are corrupt.

The people should put pressure on the CJ through the press to go into complaints against judges who deliver illegal, unjustified and erroneous verdicts.

B.S. MAKOL
Chandigarh

On the right note

DURING HIS recent visit to the United States, L.K. Advani got a response from the US administration and President Bush which defied all apprehensions of our intellectuals. The intellec-

tuals were arguing against India taking a tough stand. This has proved again that if we want to get noticed on any international platform, we must learn to respect ourselves.

ASHUTOSH AGARWAL
via e-mail

II

ADVANI RIGHTLY discouraged a university, where he delivered the convocation address, from conferring an honorary doctorate on him. He justly felt that *Honoris Causa* degrees should be reserved for academicians.

A.B. KOHLI
Delhi

Misquoted

IN THE report *Wanted: Designers to style an Indian statement at Monte Carlo* (HT City, January 14) by Shikha Mishra, I have been misquoted in the matter regarding Ritu Beri. I am not here to run down Ritu Beri but to promote Charity Balls. I was given to understand that the report would be about Charity Balls and not Ritu Beri.

ANU BHANDARI
Delhi

Crime without punishment

BY USHA RAI



THE BODY AND THE MIND: The Scream, by Edvard Munch, 1895

IN A widely reported case in the media, eight years ago, Hamida, a 10-year-old Bangladeshi girl, was reportedly raped by eight men, including five policemen, in Delhi. Two men were arrested, one is still facing trial, while all the policemen were acquitted. Eight years later, she was summoned by a sessions court in Delhi, to testify against the alleged rapists. Hamida came from Bangladesh, now an 18-year-old stoic girl, compelled to relive the trauma of her childhood once again.

Twenty-two-year-old Rubina of Karachi woke up when she heard knocking on her bedroom door in the night. As her husband was out of town, she unbolted the door only when she heard the voice of her father-in-law. He put a pistol to her head and said he would kill her and tell her husband a different story. She was raped.

When her husband returned, Rubina told him everything. He refused to believe her. He accused her of 'immorality' and beat her within an inch of her life. Rubina ran away, sought shelter in a friend's house and contacted an NGO through whose help she filed a police complaint.

Over three years later her case is still pending in the courts.

There are hundreds of similar cases of rape by family members, close friends and neighbours all across the subcontinent. A study by Saathi, an NGO based in Kathmandu, shows that in Nepal, 89 per cent of the rapists were known to their victims. In India, researcher Sudhir Kakkar estimated that in 1996, 600,000 to 700,000 children were sexually abused by relatives and known persons.

Despite the strong women's movement and revision of rape laws in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and India, most perpetrators of rape go unpunished. This is despite the established fact that sex offenders have the highest rate for repeating an offence.

A study in Nepal shows that 44 per cent of the rapists are leading normal lives. Only eight per cent had been jailed and two per cent had run away from the area where they were living to avoid arrest. In India, where 15,000 cases of rape are reported in a year, the conviction rate is less than 4 per cent.

In Bangladesh, nearly 1,000 women, many of them as young as six years, suffer the violence of rape. Most cases go unreported out of fear of social stigma, discriminatory laws and the negative attitude of law enforcement officials. Across the subcontinent, there is genuine

fear that if a case of rape is reported "it would ruin the life of the girl or woman."

Ameena Hussein of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Sri Lanka says only 50 per cent of the victims of rape and sexual abuse lodge a police complaint and only 25 per cent of the cases lodged go to trial. Those who seek justice are often disillusioned.

There were two rape cases in Sri Lanka which dragged on in the courts for 12 and 8 years. It took 16 long years for the courts in India to award a 10-year sentence for the rape of a five-year-old by her neighbour in Hyderabad. Though the trial court awarded 10 years imprisonment, the high court reduced it to five. The State appealed before the Supreme Court and the high court was castigated for reducing the sentence. The girl, now 21 years, has not been given an opportunity to forget the trauma for so many years.

A high court judge of Karnataka remembers the case of a 26-year-old, accused of raping an eight-year old, who was let off with a sentence of one year (that too was commuted because he had spent a year as an undertrial prisoner) instead of the seven years rigorous imprisonment. The judgment said the rapist was newly married and his married life would suffer so he should be given a second chance. Obviously, the judge did not have the same sympathy for the eight-year old child.

Another common thread that runs through the subcontinent is the astonishingly young age of the victims, many of them just five and six years old. In India, nearly 25 per cent of the rape victims are

10 to 16 years. Mehra and Chattraj in their 1994 study reported that two of every three persons raped are children. In Bangladesh, Johan and Islam reported in 1997 that of the 5,738 victims of rape, over 16 per cent were minors. In Nepal, rape victims were of all ages but 39 per cent were below 19 years. Paralysed with fear, these young people are unable to resist, shout, hit or struggle.

Rape is not always committed in lust. It is also used as a means of punishing a woman or putting her in her place. Bhanwari Devi, a village woman working as a grassroots development worker with Rajasthan's Women's Development Programme, was gang-raped by five men of the dominant caste because she dared to stop the illegal marriage of a one-year-old girl. Enraged by the humiliation of having a complaint filed against a member of their community, five Gujjars waylaid Bhanwari and her husband Mohan in the fields. While two men held her husband down, the others took turns raping her.

Hussaini Bi of Hyderabad was gang-raped by 11 policemen as punishment for belonging to a Naxalite group. When the state government offered her compensation, she refused to take it to make the point that no money can make amends for the trauma of a rape victim.

Rape victims suffer 'double victimisation' — first by those committing the crime and then by the criminal justice system. The victim's morality is put under scrutiny as well as her attempts to resist or repel the attackers. Defence lawyers, speaking on behalf of the accused, portray the women as "bold, motivated by revenge, apt

to exaggerate or hysterical". Victims often leave the courtroom with their dignity and reputation shattered.

Despite various amendments to rape laws, in some countries they are still not gender-sensitive. The Nepali law demands proof of penetration and victims find it difficult to make statements to male police officers to that effect.

Rape has always been considered a major crime in the Islamic society of Pakistan but there has hardly been any punishment of the culprits. According to the Zina and Hudood Ordinance, the rapist gets 40 whiplashes if convicted. Human rights activists point out that as per the ordinance there have to be four married adult Muslim witnesses to the crime.

Shakira Tariq, a lawyer and activist of War Against Rape (WAR), says if the girl is unable to prove her rape, the case is automatically converted into adultery and instead of the rapist, the girl could be tried for adultery and, if punished, imprisoned for 25 years. She says dozens of women are languishing in jail after their rape cases were converted to adultery.

In Bangladesh, under a special law enacted in 2000, provision has been made for speedy trial and a death sentence or life imprisonment of the convicted rapist. A child born out of the rape is entitled to inheritance rights from the convicted family until 21 years in the case of a boy and until marriage in the case of a girl. Since the punishment is 5 years, judges are reluctant to pass life term or death sentence unless fully convinced.

But the definition of rape, even under the special law, is antiquated. If the torture is by a foreign object, or other means, it is not considered rape.

In Nepal, the very nature of rape law — which stipulates reporting within 24 hours, a medical check-up and finding traces of semen as necessary proof — often prevents justice given the rural setting and poor medical services in most parts. In the subcontinent, most victims report rape after many days. The law must allow a longer gap for reporting of these incidents. Quicker, closed court hearings must also be adopted to make it easier for women to report rape.

The Mahila Dakshata Samiti in India has suggested that rape cases should be tried only by women judges and prosecuted by women lawyers. "A man, however learned, can never get into the psyche of a woman and think, react like a woman," says a senior woman lawyer.

Courtesy: Women's Feature Service



WITH MALICE TOWARDS ONE AND ALL... | Khushwant Singh

Why are the Gauffins in Tihar?

A GOOD indicator of the uglier side of our national character is the way ambitious people behave just before elections are due. Count the number of men and women who throng offices of political parties to seek tickets. Many go from one office to another because they have no political commitments to any party. They exert as much pressure as they can through money and kinship. Panels of selectors are familiar with these tactics because many have been party hoppers themselves.

If they fail to get a nomination, they become the detractors of those who succeed in getting the party ticket. It is a personal ambition to grow from nobody to somebody. Not only do they not have any political commitments, they have none to serve the people. It is shameless avarice wearing a mask of social service.

I happen to know quite a few of this tribe: oily, smooth and self-righteous. One thing they have in common is the ability to use people, giving them empty promises in exchange for their support. That is the hallmark of all successful politicians. The more they can fob off the gullible for what they will do for them, the community and the country at some future unspecified date, the more successful they are.

This disease called *Chaudharyitis* runs in families. When one becomes a *Chaudhary*, his kinsmen catch the infection. So we see political families in every state and in every political party, except the communists. The virus spread to wives, brothers, sisters, sons, sons-in-law, nephews and nieces. At times, mistresses also get infected and flaunt their political clout. Unfortunately, the disease is not fatal.

Why do I have so much malice against politicians? Probably because once upon a time I too harboured political ambitions. Then I fell by the roadside. I did not have what it takes to become a successful *neta*.

Gem of a couple

I SHOULD have written about them soon after they had been arrested at the Indira Gandhi International Airport as they were about to board a flight for Hong Kong. The official version is that they were carrying a large sum of foreign currency on them. At the time of writing, they are still in Tihar Jail. Since he is a Swede and his wife French, perhaps the Swedish and the French embassies are looking into the matter. I feel helpless because I do not know what I can do to get them out of Tihar and bring them to my home.

I had not heard of the Gauffins till November 1, 1984. A day earlier Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by her Sikh security guards. Angry mobs were on the rampage thirsting for Sikh blood. The administration was either paralysed or unwilling to restore law and order. I was a marked man because I had criticised Operation Blue Star in Parliament and returned m/ Padma Bhushan in protest. I was warned to get out of my apartment before a mob gets me.

Suddenly, a large car pulled up outside my door. Rolf Gauffin introduced himself and ordered "Get into my car at once. Take whatever you want for two or three days." My wife and I followed with our tooth-brushes, toothpaste and night clothes. We were driven to the Swedish embassy compound where the Rolfs lived. We spent two nights with them till violence subsided.

This was by no means the first time that Rolf had overlooked diplomatic niceties and gone to the rescue of people in danger of losing their lives. In Iran, he rescued Iranians on rft from the police and drove them to safety across the border. There are not many people in the world like Rolf and Jeanne Gauf-

fin. I for one will never, never believe that they were salting away money. They could be on yet another mission to help out someone in dire peril.

Bhisham Sahni & Gillian Wright

BEING CONNECTED with a few publishers, mainly Penguin-Viking, I am often approached by Hindi and Urdu novelists to help them have their works published in English. Some bring their own translations or rendered by professors of English literature. I scan over a few pages and without comment pass them on to Penguin-Viking. Till a few years ago, all were rejected because the English was flawed. Shrilal Shukla's modern classic *Raag Darbari*, first translated into English by himself (he was in the IAS), then by some friend, would have met the same fate till Penguin asked Gillian Wright to take a look at it. Her translation was accepted and the novel went into many editions.

It was the same with Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* with a lot of Shia Muslim terminology very difficult to put into English. Her English version *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* also went into several editions. Thereafter, whenever Hindi or Urdu novelists approach me, I give them a standard reply: "If Gillian Wright agrees to translate it, we will publish it." We rely on her judgment on the merits of the original and have implicit faith in her ability to put it in good English.

Gillian Wright's latest offering is *Middle India: Selected Short Stories of Bhisham Sahni* (Penguin). Here is one man I have known over 70 years. We are the same age and were in the same class in Government College, Lahore. I heard about his achievements: Sahitya Akademi Awards for his novel *Tamas*, Soviet-Land Nehru Award, Padma Bhushan, Shikha Award, the highest given by the Delhi government, honorary doctorates, seven novels, nine collections of short stories, six plays and a biography of his brother Balraj Sahni. He wrote in Hindi; I read Hindi with some difficulty; I did not realise how great a writer he was. Thanks to Gillian Wright, now I do.

All the stories are about the middle class Indian; hence the title *Middle India*. Some are on the partition of the country (another experience I share with him), some about the tragedy of anglicised Indians, some of minor episodes which he has turned into gripping tales with satire and sardonic humour. I am proud he lives in an apartment just behind my back garden.

Namastay

I WELCOME foreign tourists with open arms. To the land of lagoons and swaying palms "God's own country", a verdant fantasy is the slogan coined by me. With my freshly constructed resorts. Of the luxurious super deluxe sort. Thrilled by dollars pouring in, Sri Lanka's loss is my gain. (They got on the watch list you see, Of human rights and amnesty. Protests got very inflammatory So I had to ban child prostitution legally) We're simply catering to human need Of the pedophilic breed Offering children as main course or Begging might be their only recourse. At least they're gainfully employed Loss of innocence, we can't avoid. Besides they grow fast on the streets Sexual experimentation is their creed I assuage my conscience with such thoughts, Approving plans for more resorts.

(Courtesy: Ritu Jain, New Delhi)

OFF TRACK | Bhai Mahavir Laughing at oneself

WHEN I received a letter from the only army commander in the country who had secured a doctorate in defence science while commanding an active army, I did not catch the significance of his book. The book had been described by the highest decorated army officer, who had taught him soldiering, as a "textbook on military leadership in India". He had offered to send a copy to me but hard-pressed by the heavy weight of books presented to me by my well-wishers, I had hesitated to respond.

What I was missing was brought home to me in a curious manner. The occasion was the inauguration of Mohyal Ashram — a glittering structure consisting of 32 single rooms and eight suites, and a meditation hall with a 24 ft high dome. The impressive gathering was in an upbeat mood having got a place on the banks of the Ganga.

It was a 3 crore job very well done and in a record two years. Credit was due to B.D. Ball, president, General Mohyal Sabha, who was being profusely praised. One of the two distinguished generals on the stage — B.K.N. Chibber — left little for anyone else to laud. Acclaim was at such a peak that I started worrying if anything would remain for me to add.

It was he — the second general to take the mike next — Lt. Gen. M.L. Chibber, who solved my problem by giving a glimpse of literary acumen submerged behind the glittering medals of gallantry. He has written a book on 'Leadership' which has been translated into nine foreign languages, has served as a textbook for the Indian army and has been adapted by IGNU for teaching 'Strategy and Leadership'. He also has a Ph.D. in his kitty.

"I am often asked," he said, "what quality it is in the small Mohyal community which equips its members with a virility that impresses the recruiting officers as much as it enables them to succeed in farming and other forms of self-employment. I often say in reply: It is the capacity to laugh at ourselves. We have it in our blood and it gives us the strength to face challenges... I belong to Bhera (north western Punjab, now in Pakistan). My wife, who hails from Pind Dadan Khan, describes me as a *Jhalla* (Punjabi for nincompoop or 'nut case')."

This self-compliment was greeted with loud laughter. The general went on, "When I jokingly complained about it to someone — another Mohyal — from the Pind, he asked: 'Have you not heard the quip 'Bhera has 70 *mohallas* and 72 *Jhallas*?' A louder guffaw followed.

Did the Punjabi idiom about one in his early '70s going partially looney (*sattreya bahattreya*) have its roots in the joke about the north western town? My course had thus been chartered. I could bank on the sportiveness of the gathering.

"Mohyals are known for another characteristic too," I said. "There have been reports of a handful meeting to form an association, but before even making a beginning, getting into heated arguments on some insignificant point and dispersing. If everything passed off peacefully, people may start wondering what had happened to the Mohyal spirit." There were nods and smiles. I continued with an old story of the early Thirties of the last century.

"Those were the days when 'non-agriculturists' — except martial classes — were debarred from buying farming land. Mohyals were agitating to be recognised as an 'agricultural' community. There was a conference in which the British governor was present and a resolution was being moved by Dr G.L. Dutt who later became the first V-C of Vikram University. He said, 'We are a small community consisting of seven sub-castes viz. Chibbers, Balis, Duttis, etc.' A man who had a small wooden rod in his hand, swung it towards the speaker shouting: 'What? Chibbers, Balis and Duttis are important and the other sub-castes like us are just ecceteras?'"

"The rod fell near the stage stunning everyone. Dutt continued his speech, unfazed. Turning to the governor he said, 'If your excellency had any doubt about our being a martial class, you have just now seen a proof thereof.'"

That is just Mohyal like: sensitive, even fussy about their self-respect, but simple, straightforward and almost reckless if challenged. How often a ready wit comes to the rescue in odd situations remains an open question.

Abraham Lincoln was once called a double-faced person. "Would I keep this face," he asked, "if I had another?" I wonder if someone will help me in discovering by what logic this quote from Lincoln came to my mind.

The writer is Governor of Madhya Pradesh

HEALTHWATCH

Avoiding pain at any cost

While the West is looking at ways to drastically reduce caesarean births, Kerala, a state which has WHO-acclaimed infant mortality rate and the highest gender ratio in the country, seems to be doing the opposite, says SHWETHA E. GEORGE.



says Dr. Stephen, who has taken an insurance policy of Rs.15 lakhs against professional indemnity, just like her counterparts in other private hospitals. "There are not enough doctors or trained nurses for each patient who can monitor her as labour progresses. There are no such things as foetal monitors either," says Dr. Achamma Thomas, former gynaecologist with the Government Medical College, Kottayam.

"In a private hospital, the doctor works using limited facilities. It would be suicidal for him to wait for the patient to show signs of normal labour. A caesarean is the safer option," she says.

A caesarean has other benefits too. A gynaecology department can plan the number of surgeries per day — it ensures more money in the hospital's kitty. And although the medical fraternity insists that gynaecologists do not get a "cut from the patients bill towards hospital expenses", sources in the State Health Department beg to differ.

New pacemakers

• A NEW class of pacemakers will likely debut this year in the United States offering millions new hope for a disease that is the most common cause for elderly hospitalisation. If approved, doctors will see advances in bi-ventricular pacemakers, a new kind of therapy that electrically stimulates the heart to beat more efficiently. These pacemakers may also revive a patient whose heart had stopped functioning. The new stop-watch sized devices have wires leading to the heart's ventricles and are implanted in the chest to deliver a mild shock to help bring a patient's heartbeat back into normal rhythm.

Avoid raw sprouts

• PEOPLE, particularly children, the elderly and those with weak immune systems, should avoid eating raw sprouts because the crunchy protein-packed foods could cause salmonella and other possibly fatal infections, U.S. Federal Health experts have said. They have said bacteria can hide in tiny cracks and survive processing, and recommend that consumers cook the sprouts. Once perceived as perfect foods, clover, alfalfa and radish sprouts have gained a dodgy reputation as scientists link them to food-borne illnesses.

BRITAIN's volunteer Territorial Army has launched a new fitness programme, and it's not just for recruits. Called Get FitTA, it is a 12-week programme based on the training that all TA members go through. It covers flexibility and strength, as well as aerobic and muscles endurance. It is available free if you register online at www.getfitta.co.uk or call 0845 602 5000.

REUTERS
Training with the troops

• BRITAIN's volunteer Territorial Army has launched a new fitness programme, and it's not just for recruits. Called Get FitTA, it is a 12-week programme based on the training that all TA members go through. It covers flexibility and strength, as well as aerobic and muscles endurance. It is available free if you register online at www.getfitta.co.uk or call 0845 602 5000.

D.R.X is a gynaecologist in a private hospital in Thiruvananthapuram. The hospital does not pay him a salary. His "fee" comes from the caesarean surgeries (CS) he conducts between 1 p.m. and 5 p.m.. At the end of day, he gets approximately Rs. 40,000 — the cut deducted from patients' bills.

In a super-specialty hospital on the outskirts of Kottayam, a semi-urban town in Kerala, most mothers-to-be come asking for a "painless labour" or a CS. These women, from upper-class Syrian Christian families, are willing to take any risk as long as they can avoid pain.

Doctors, especially obstetricians, throughout Kerala are insuring themselves against professional indemnity. This is because incidences of litigation on the grounds of negligence inside the maternity ward are on the rise and Kerala, doctors claim, could soon become the State with the highest rate of litigation against them.

The reproductive health of the Malayali woman is considered far better than that of her counterparts in other parts of India but Kerala, in recent years, has been showing an appalling rate of caesareans done in super-specialty private hospitals.

While hospitals in the West are looking at drastically reducing caesarean births, the State which has a World Health Organisation (WHO)-acclaimed infant mortality rate (13 per 1,000) and the highest female to male ratio in India (1,067 females to 1,000 males according to the 2001 census), seems to be doing the opposite.

In a survey undertaken at the Achutha Menon Centre for Health Science Studies (AMC), Thiruvananthapuram, the medical records of 360 mothers admitted to various private hospitals in Kozhikode, Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram have shown that the rate of caesareans conducted is around 50 per cent and normal deliveries between 20 to 25 per cent.

According to WHO norms, under appropriate technologies for birth, the rate of caesareans anywhere in the world should not be more than 15

per cent. In fact, hospitals that used to have a high rate of caesarean births in the West, like the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and others in United Kingdom and Sweden are addressing the issue by looking at only referred cases and auditing the number of caesareans done by each gynaecologist.

A caesarean is the primary cause of maternal mortality and morbidity rates. A wound infection, haemorrhage or inappropriate blood transfusion during the surgery can lead to the death of the mother. Incidence of morbidity ("state of sickness") is also high with surgery. She has to avoid strenuous work and rest for about three months. (In the case of normal labour, a mother can resume her chores after 15 days. The negligible rate of vaginal birth after caesarean in Kerala also accounts for maternal morbidity. Only one in less than 50 mothers interviewed in the survey had a vaginal birth after a caesarean, and only if it was a premature delivery.

In fact, of the 360 mothers interviewed in the three cities, 90 per cent

said they did not discuss the mode of delivery with their gynaecologists. Only 15 per cent said they would have had a caesarian had they been asked their choice. Then why are caesareans rampant?

"No doctor wants to take the risk of waiting for normal labour," says Dr. Vijaya Stephen, gynaecologist who runs her own clinic in Ernakulam. First, she says, the doctor doesn't have the time for individual attention. Second, given the quality-treatment in private hospitals, the mother's and child's safety is ensured. And most important, a caesarean is ideal considering the doctor's own interest.

"Because the system has become very litigious. In the event of a problem, the family members and the public, at large, can get very nasty," "The public have always had a mis-

trust towards private doctors," says Churbin Ben, deputy director (retired), State Health Department, mainly because of the money involved. Other than government and private hospitals, Kerala has a number of mission hospitals generously backed by religious denominations. The ostentatious display each time a new wing is inaugurated or equipment imported works against the favour of the non-governmental medical fraternity.

In fact, the medical fraternity, especially those in obstetrics and gynaecology, take all steps needed for a delivery free of complications. One of these is to make caesareans the order of the day.

"Even if there is a 90 per cent chance of normal delivery, we would still do a caesarean taking into account the remaining 10 per cent,"

A penny for your thoughts?

WE'VE all dreamt of owning our own business someday, and often when people have faced adversity, such as a diagnosis of cancer, that dream becomes even stronger.

Our limitations stem from the fact that most of us have a "real job" — one that pays our bills, puts food on the table, clothes on our back, and allows us the freedom to pursue on the side our dream of running our own company.

But since most of us are not financially independent — wealthy, nor did we get chosen to play "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire", we often get caught in the middle: we can't afford to quit our "real jobs", yet we can't afford not to if we seriously mean business.

That's where the phrase "Penny for your Thoughts?" comes to mind. If people are willing to pay a penny for our thoughts, would they be willing to pay \$1, \$10, \$100 or more? Most of us have probably never stopped ask.

I decided to take this thought process to task five months after I started The Cancer Club. I had done the "basics" to at least outwardly appear as if I had a viable company. I had purchased business cards, stationery, set up my phone fax and e-mail, registered my company's name, etc. But I just didn't have the nest egg or time I needed to quit my "real job" as a senior executive at an international marketing company, and focus on my dream on a full-time basis. So I sat down and wrote "the" letter.

In "the" letter, I outlined what the mission statement of my company was, why I was starting it, what I hoped to achieve, who I hoped to reach, and how I hoped to get there. And then I asked the question: would you

be willing to consider a gift to help me get my business off the ground?

I addressed the letter to 500 people: friends, family, business associates, neighbours and acquaintances. The day I dropped the letter in the mailbox I went crawling back on hands and knees to the Postmaster General begging him to let me take them back — what had I done, I despaired, "I can't believe I did this!"

Until the very next day when the

"AND SO, MY CANCER TREATMENT WILL PROBABLY HAVE ME OUT OF THE OFFICE FOR ABOUT 6 MONTHS..."

first cheque for \$10 was in my mailbox from a neighbour that I didn't even know very well, with a note that said, "Go for it, Christine!" Then the next day was another, and the next day another until in two months time, I received over \$20,000 in gifts and words of encouragement.

For those who didn't want to give me cash (after all, my company was a for-profit organisation), I received offers of free services: printing, secretarial help, computer expertise,

photography, to name a few. I, in turn, tried to come up with a unique way to give recognition for each of the services rendered.

For example, in the quarterly newsletter I publish, the printing, illustrations, and photography are all donations from individuals I originally contacted with "the" letter. In turn, I highlight their gift and publish their phone numbers and business as free advertising for them for their services.

It's been six years since I wrote "the letter", and my company is now thriving and expanding on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis thanks to hard work, determination, and a lot of help from my friends.

It was a risk that I took, but in the long run, well worth the effort.

Many months later, I was sitting on my deck with my very best friend who owns 11 stores in a national franchise here in the U.S. She is one of the few people who never made a contribution of time, money or services to my company, and she broached the subject by saying sarcastically, "You know, Christine, I wish people would have given me money when I first started up my own business 11 years ago." My response was, "Nancy, did you ever ask anyone?"

Penny for your thoughts ...

Make this be your year to live your dream. And don't forget to laugh!

CHRISTINE K. CLIFFORD
The writer is founder/CEO/president of The Cancer Club and the author of Not Now... I'm Having A No Hair Day! and Our Family Has Cancer. Too! Visit her at www.cancerclub.com and e-mail her at Christine@cancerclub.com

GREEN TALK

Refugees in their own land

Displaced in the name of 'public purpose', tribals have been at the receiving end for a long time. Monetary compensation has not helped in any way and there are no specific rehabilitation packages.



A protest against the Sardar Sarovar ... displaced tribals are being compensated with cash instead of land.

FOR those displaced by development projects, it is always a long and bitter struggle to get land that the Government offers for resettlement. But in the case of the Sardar Sarovar dam, there is a move to revert to cash compensation for those being displaced, as land is scarce in Madhya Pradesh.

There are several examples of what can go wrong when people are compensated with money.

In Chhoti Kasaravad, Madhya Pradesh, land was needed for a bridge on the Narmada. The villagers opposed the project while the Government was desperate to start work. In 1996, officials of the Narmada Valley Development Authority and local Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders pressured the late Jaswant Singh Tomar, popularly known as Master saab, to sell his land and be compensated with money. Tomar opposed the deal, but his sons, Ranjit, Bharat, Karan and Manohar, were lured into accepting Rs. 30,000. The village has not yet been submerged and they are still there living off their six acres of farmland.

Before it was submerged, 20 families in Kadmal village, Dhar district, received compensation varying from Rs. 2.5 lakhs to Rs. 27 lakhs.

Rich villagers like Budhabhai Patidar, who had a home in addition to land, received Rs. 27 lakhs; Mangal Diva got Rs. 7 lakhs. On the other hand, the amount the very poor received has been meagre — for instance, Mangal Jogi got Rs. 3 lakhs and Kisan Harijan Rs. 2.5 lakhs. They bought a tempo and a truck respectively but soon had to sell them after finding themselves in debt. Now they have no land to fall back on.

Seetarambhai Patidar, over 60 years old, a committed leader in the struggle against displacement, recalls how people became rich overnight. They spent all their money on a flashy lifestyle. Soon the villagers realised they would not get any land.

Now they are trying to join the Narmada Bachao Andolan to protest their displacement.

There is a move to amend the Narmada Water Dispute Tribunal (NWD) award so that as compensation for land acquired, the affected would get only land. Instead, the 43,000 families that have been ousted may have to settle for cash compensation.

Ironically, this move comes at a time when the National Human Rights Commission has taken the stand that "resettlement and rehabilitation of persons displaced by land acquisition should form a part of the Land Acquisition Act".

Estimates of the people displaced in India since Independence vary from 15 million to 56 million; 45 per cent are tribals. According to figures of the Ministry of Rural Development, tribals have been alienated from over 8.5 lakhs acres till November 1999. The percentage of those rehabilitated is insignificant. Monetary compensation is a sure way of pauperising the already marginalised, who have traditionally lived off the land.

According to Sanjay Sangvai of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra Governments have been trying to dispose of the "problem" of resettlement by awarding cash compensation. Now there is a move to amend the Tribunal's award.

The *adivasis* in the Satpuda ranges who have been affected by the Sardar Sarovar Project are in a precarious state. Between 1994 and 1996, the Maharashtra Government had distributed between Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 to some of the oustees in the Akalkua and Akrani *tehsil* if they migrated to the resettlement sites. Never had the *adivasis* so much money and they spent most of it on liquor. In a few months they had lost all that money and were looking for work.

In the case of other dams in Maharashtra too — the Ukai on the Tapi in Gujarat, the Mahi-Kadana on the Mahi, the Gandhi Sagar on the Chambal in Madhya Pradesh or the Koyna and the Jayakwadi — it is the same story. Displaced in the name of "public purpose", the original inhabitants are compelled to accept whatever compensation is announced.

But then, even where land was promised, few have got land, says Sanjay Sangvai. Maharashtra's Resettlement Act of 1973 provides for cultivable land in the command area of the canals. To date there has not been a single case where the oustee has got land in the command area, he maintains.

The Tawa dam, completed in the 1970s, was the first in the Narmada Valley development plan. The 25,000 *adivasis* who were displaced have still not been resettled. They had to leave the place where they were relocated

area, there was very little pasture land. The NTPC has expressed its inability to give land for land compensation or permanent jobs though its action plan says a maximum of five acres will be given as compensation.

The compensation package included a 40 feet by 60 feet developed plot, an allowance of Rs. 20,000 for shifting and a loan of Rs. 15,000 for a livelihood. Those displaced were assigned job contracts and bank loans for self-employment projects. But the traditional farmers of Mithihni and Khairi were not willing to try out new ventures. They were bargaining for a better compensation for their land and payment in a lump sum so that they could buy land elsewhere.

"They chopped down our mango trees and offered compensation of Rs. 600, which is a fifth of the money earned from the fruits of the tree every year," Ram Narayan lamented. Though the World Bank had insisted that for each unit of power generated, a person could be employed, very few villagers could be accommodated in the 1,100 permanent jobs since they did not have the required skills.

Since 1986, there has been a lot of talk but very little action on formulating and pushing through a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy, says Mr. S.R. Hiremath, convener of the Jan Vikas Andolan and president of the National Committee for Protection of Natural Resources (NCPNR). For some time now, the NCPNR and 13 other voluntary organisations have been campaigning actively for combining the Land Acquisition Act and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy into one bill called the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2000. This is to ensure that even while the Government takes away land, it gives a well thought out rehabilitation package.

Pushing through land acquisition without combining key features of rehabilitation, as suggested by voluntary agencies, will mean grave injustice to the tribals and rural poor.

The NCPNR also filed a petition before the National Human Rights Commission. In February last year, the commission said it was desirable to incorporate the rehabilitation and resettlement package into the Land Acquisition Act as India is a party to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention that provides for the protection of rights of indigenous and tribal people.

"Incorporation of the package in the law will ensure the rehabilitation and resettlement of those affected in a systematic manner." The commission also noted that in a number of cases, land was acquired in excess of that which was required, adversely affecting the land holders and wasting the resources of the State.

What constitutes "public purposes" has always been a matter of dispute. In the draft of the voluntary organisations, this concept has been clearly stated.

Acquisition of land for private companies, which work for profit, is not permitted or recognised as public purpose.

GARDENING

Fascinating ornamental

SPATHIPHYLLUM is an ornamental house plant, botanically known as *Spathiphyllum wallisii*. A native of Mexico, Peru and Brazil, the plant grows at the foothills of mountains, moist shady places and along the edges of rivers and ponds.

It is a herbaceous perennial plant, where the leaves are glossy and flower heads are arum shaped. The flower head consists of a spathe and spadix. The spathe are larger and white. The spadix is either green, white and cream. When the flower head is cut and placed in a vase, it keeps fresh for a while and retains its colour for about a week. The spathe gradually changes from white to light green.

The *Spathiphyllum* has short under-



systemic insecticide and acaricide for mites along with neem oil.

**P. THIRUVELAVAN
L. JEEVA JOTHI
R. MURUGESAN**

Reprivee for the tiger?

The Hunter 31/3/02

“PROJECT Tiger” has a new director — young and soft-spoken Rajesh Gopal who was earlier looking after Kanha

National Park.

With a doctorate in wildlife management, he now plans to use his expertise and experience in evaluating tiger habitat in the country on a regular, scientific basis. His ambitious plans include ecological auditing using satellite data in the Geographical Information Systems (GIS)

Sys- do-

Protecting the tiger is not going to be easy, but the new director of 'Project Tiger' is an optimist.

— 114 and 46 respectively. Corbett in North India and Melghat in Maharashtra too have reached the optimum level (138 and 73 respectively) and in the battle for terrain, younger/weaker tigers are being driven out. Dr. Gopal is quite clear that no more tiger reserves will be set up. There are 27 in the country and if they are well looked after, a great job can be done in the conservation of

accurate estimate of the number of tigers. Dr. Gopal's optimism stems from the big cat's innate ability to recoup from various vicissitudes. The gestation period for tigers is just 90 to 100 days and in a life span of eight to 10 years, a healthy tigress can have three litters. Even if half the litter is poached, there is still a strong base.

In some of the better-monitored parks, tigers and their progeny have been watched and studied over the years. Tiger lovers have watched every stage in their lives. The tigress, Sita, in Badhavgarh, who disappeared mysteriously over a year ago, had three or four litters. Badhi Madha in Kanha was seen for about 12 years and had her share of young ones. Choori, also in Kanha, is about eight years

ones. Choori, also in Kanha, is about eight years



Nurturing the tiger ... not an easy task.

flora and fauna, he says.

A tiger census has already begun, an arduous task. In the last few years there has been a lot of acrimony about the methods used in tiger enumeration. Two years ago the Tiger Conservation Programme of WWF-India came out

with a neat, well-documented manual on enumeration

using the traditional method of pugmark counting. This manual, circulated to all the parks and tiger reserves, is still the bible for tiger enumeration. It is a simple method, which the forest personnel can execute with a little guidance from their seniors. Photo trapping and other modern methods may be used in site-specific areas to crosscheck and validate information collected. So far, no tiger reserve has expressed interest in using the expensive photo trapping technique.

Before the start of the census operations, Dr. Gopal called for a meeting where experts shared ideas. WWF's Tiger Conservation Programme, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Ulhas Karanth made presentations. The census operation is extremely difficult in reserves like the Manas National Park (where there is a law and order problem), Namdapha (where the vegetation is so thick that even light does not penetrate through the canopy) and the Sunderbans (where tigers spend a lot of time in the water). The results should be out by the end of April, if not earlier.

With the use of the latest technology, Dr. Gopal is confident of getting a more

old. In fact about eight or nine tigers can be seen almost every day in Kanha adding to the tiger population of the park as well as its attraction.

In the Tenth Plan, priority is being given to mitigate human/wildlife conflict by settlement of rights, relocation of villages and eco-development. Habitat improvement, control of poaching and research and training are other areas of focus. The Ministry of Environment and Forests has asked for Rs. 227 crores — Rs. 100 crores for development of national parks and sanctuaries, another Rs. 100 crores for "Project Tiger" and Rs. 27 crores for the control of poaching and illegal trade. Financial assistance is needed for deployment of a strike force in all reserves. A well equipped and armed contingent is proposed for every 500 sq.km. In the Tenth Plan 70 strike forces are to be established and 400 anti-poaching camps set up, 50 sq.km. apart. Each camp is to be manned by a staff of six. Even if all the money and support envisioned is given and people living around parks and sanctuaries do their bit for conservation, nurturing the tiger is not going to be an easy task. But Dr. Gopal is an optimist. ●

main and preparing a tiger atlas of India. New initiatives include refining the estimation techniques with cross-checks for the tiger, co-predators like the leopard and prey animals. The emphasis would be on area or region-specific refinement and the use of digital photography to capture pugmarks. With poaching on the rise, he plans to use information technology for crime detection too.

Of the 4,000 or so tigers in the country, 60 per cent are outside protected areas, which Dr. Gopal hopes to protect as they are more at risk from poaching and habitat destruction. Quite obviously, the prey base outside protected areas is sufficient. In addition to deer, chital and wild boar, domestic cattle are now an important item on the tiger's menu in several areas. So compensation for cattle killed will be extended to these areas and eco-development and anti-poaching work enhanced in all areas where the presence of tiger and other big cats has been registered.

Reserves in Central India like Kanha and Bandhavgarh have the optimum number of tigers they can accommodate