

Spectrum



Wait for Mummyji
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Why widows go to VRINDAVAN

The poverty and neglect faced by widows in West Bengal is driving them to seek refuge in Vrindavan's charity. **Usha Rai** looks at the studies that show why, despite welfare measures initiated by the West Bengal Government, widows from the state and other regions, too, are flocking this temple town

VRINDAVAN is known for its exquisite temples. In and around Vrindavan or the Brajghoomi is where the Krishna Leela or the birth and romance of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha was enacted. Round the year there is an unending stream of tourists, Indian and foreign, who wish to savour the enchantment of the holy city and seek the blessings of the resident deities in the temples. Vrindavan is also famous for its *lathmaar* holi celebrations, where women pick up sticks and hit men. It is also famous for its piping hot *kachori* and exquisite, creamy milk served in earthen pots.

The other reason why Vrindavan is known is for

uncooked rice and lentils. Most of them are from Bengal though now one sees a lot of widows from Madhya Pradesh, UP, the Northern-Eastern states and Orissa. There are even some tribal widows! There are no proper estimates of the number of widows in Brajdhama that includes Vrindavan and the adjoining areas of Radha Kund, Goverdhan, Barsana, Nandgaon and Mathura. But their numbers seem to be on the increase. The Vrindavan Municipal Corporation survey of 2006 put the number of Bengali widows in Vrindavan at 3105. If the adjoining areas are included it could be double that number. The recent study titled *Poverty, Charity Brings Widows to Vrindavan* done by the

Radha Kund, Goverdhan and Barsana. The study also looked at the situation in West Bengal, particularly in Burdwan and Nadia, from where a large number of widows come, to understand the situation in their homes and villages. There was also a visit to Nawadweep, the birthplace of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who is supposed to have been a reincarnation of Lord Krishna and started the Vaishnavite movement. This explains the emotional link between Bengal and Vrindavan and the stream of Vaishnavite widows from Bengal. At Nawadweep too, known as Gupt Vrindavan, there is a bhajan ashram similar to the ones in Vrindavan. It was started in 1919 by Hanuman Prasad Poddar and Jai Dayal

provided. Another home, Ma Dham, to house 500 widows will be opened by the Guild later this year. The UP government as well as the Brij Seva Trust have been giving pension of Rs 150 a month to the widows. The Brij Seva Trust pension comes from a corpus of Rs 1 crore given by Kalyan Singh when he was Chief Minister of UP. Some 460 widows get pension from this fund. Just how many receive the pension from UP government is not known.

Pension woes

According to the study, just a little over 25 per cent of the widows are getting pension. Only those staying in a home have somebody who will run around to procure pension forms and push them through the UP administration. The money goes directly into bank accounts so all those getting pension have bank accounts and most of them operate their accounts. Several widows with bank accounts have died, so their accounts need to be opened and the money used for the welfare of the living, struggling for existence.

So why the concern? The study states "it seems a shame that despite our emancipation and all our trumpeting of gender equality, widows continue to come to Vrindavan to beg and eke out their last years without dignity, a proper shelter and medical facilities." While spirituality, ill-treatment and poverty in their homes in West Bengal may have compelled many of the older widows to come to Vrindavan, today many come because of the charity available in the holy city. "We cannot beg in our villages but we have no shame in seeking alms in the holy city," a widow stated.

The term used for the distributions that take place in Vrindavan is "*batta batti*." The religious tourists to the city distribute blankets, shawls, saris, buckets and even cash through the bhajan ashrams. Around festival time, the charity increases. A widow revealed that one winter she received five blankets and three shawls. She did not need so many, so she sold them to shops that buy back goods from the widows. Bengali women are used to parboiled rice, so the finer



Steps to improve their lot

Though there is greater awareness about the sorry state of Vrindavan widows and much more sympathy for them, recommendations made by earlier studies have not been implemented. Many of the recommendations here are a reiteration of the earlier ones. West Bengal needs to give greater publicity to the pension available to the widows and old people. NGOs and panchayats need to intervene and help widows in Bengal to access this pension. Bhajan ashrams in Vrindavan need to play a more proactive role in restoring the dignity of widows by providing skill training, if they are young enough, and establishing schools providing free educational facilities for the children of young widows. This would check the aims seeking culture that is becoming a dominant feature of the Vrindavan widows. More rehabilitation homes in Vrindavan and West Bengal with food, medical care and other facilities. Information on availability of widow's pension, amount of pension and how to access it in West Bengal should be better advertised, displayed through posters

- and hoardings in rural Bengal and at railway stations and bus stops.
- Photo identity cards should be issued to all widows in Vrindavan and Brajdhama.
- Below poverty line ration cards, health cards and pension should be provided to all widows.
- Government should dialogue with trustees of bhajan ashrams, who have enormous wealth and clout, to run schools/ support education of widows' children and provide health care.
- Rehabilitate all widows living on streets and at the ghats. Provide night shelters.
- Religious leaders should encourage and support widow remarriage.
- Special health care facilities in Vrindavan and Brajdhama for widows and destitute women. They should not be turned away from hospitals and medical centres.
- Skill training for young widows in West Bengal to make them independent.
- Registration of marriage should be made compulsory to check child marriages in Bengal

quality rice, distributed by bhajan ashrams, is also collected and sold and in its place they buy the cheaper rice that they are used to.

Married women too

The other interesting feature highlighted by the study is the growing number of married women that can be seen at the bhajan ashrams. In Barsana and Goverdhan there were more married women than widows at the Ashrams. They are called *sudwas* as against *vidwas* and flaunt the sindoor in their hair and ivory bangles on their wrists, symbols of their married status.

"I am poor, my husband is disabled and I have left my two daughters with my mother in Bengal so that I can earn and save for their marriage," Hemlata retorted. Just because I have a husband, I should not be denied the charity available to the poor and underprivileged in this city," Hemlata works as a domestic help in two homes before coming to the bhajan ashrams for chanting. Once in a year or once in two years she goes back home with the goodies collected through the ashrams.

No check

At the West Bengal end, the study found that despite widow's pension being increased from Rs 500 to Rs 750 a month from April this year, the government has not been able to check the widows and destitute women leaving for Vrindavan. Most widows have not heard of the fairly generous pension scheme in Bengal nor do they know how to access it. Every dis-

trict has a widow's pension quota. Some 500 to 700 widows may be entitled to the pension in a district but it is not large enough to accommodate all who are widowed.

The district magistrate and officials were not even aware of widows leaving West Bengal for Vrindavan. The study established a steady stream of widows to Vrindavan. Most of them come with their spiritual gurus from Nawadweep etc. Forty per cent of those interviewed had come in the last four years, 18 per cent had been in the city for five to 9 years. Earlier older widows may have come to Vrindavan but now even young widows are coming because the city provides opportunities for survival and livelihood. The youngest widow inter-

viewed is 25 years old Maya and has been in the city for a year and six months. Married at 14 to a man 11 years older, she became a widow at 23 and has to support a son and two daughters of 10, 8 and 4. She works in two homes and chants at the bhajan ashram. None of her children go to school. The son works in a tea shop and the two girls stay at home and neighbours keep an eye on them.

Forced to leave her home in Murshidabad by her in-laws, she admits it was poverty and lack of support at home, and not religion, that compelled her to come to Vrindavan.

Of the widows interviewed, two were below 12 when their husbands died and 31 per cent (68) between 12 and 24 years.

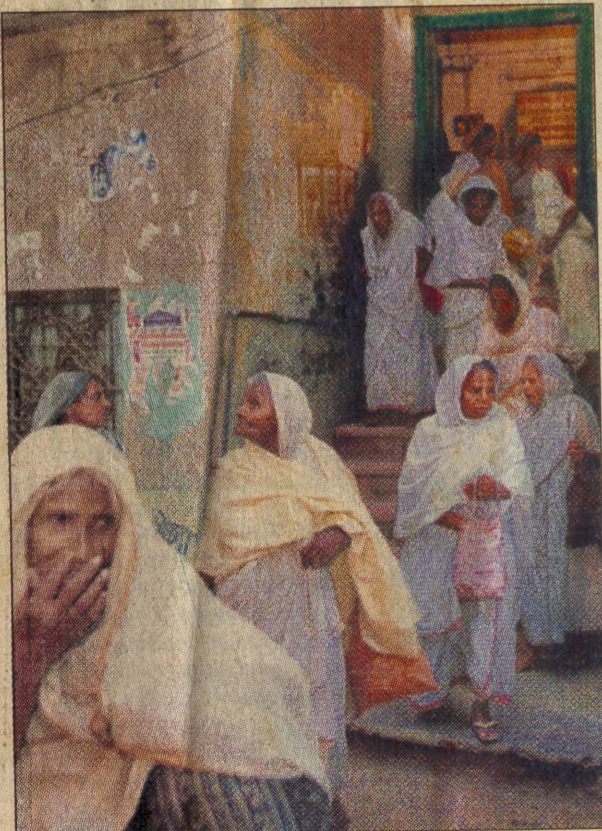
Another nine per cent (21) were between 25 and 29 years.

Majali, 35 years, of Gopalpur village, Nadia district, was just 28 years when her husband died. She has a son and daughter of 10 and 8 years. She lives in a rented accommodation and earns Rs 1200 a month working in different homes. Like Maya, she chants at the bhajan ashram and gets additional rice, dal and money and the *batta batti* that is good at the ashram. Like Maya she has no ration card and gets no pension.

Child marriages

A government official interviewed in West Bengal admitted that the State has not been able to check child marriages. The chances of

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Widows coming out of a bhajan ashram in Vrindavan

its widows. In fact, it is known as the City of Widows. It is not just their numbers but their presence and their pathetic dependence on charity that makes them such a dominant feature of this city of spirituality and charity. Wearing white saris, many of them bent with age and using a stick for support, they can be seen shuffling around the city, especially around the bhajan ashrams where they chant prayers in huge halls and receive in charity Rs 2.50 to Rs 3, (if they come twice in a day they may receive Rs 6) and some

Guild of Service with support from UNIFEM, however, does not look at numbers. It seeks to find out why they continue to come to Vrindavan, particularly from West Bengal, despite over a decade of concerted work by the Central government, the UP government and NGOs. In 2000, the West Bengal government also did a study and tried to make interventions.

Detailed study

For the Guild's study, detailed questionnaires were administered to 255 widows in Vrindavan,

Goenka, industrialists from Kolkata. But the bhajan ashrams in Vrindavan are a greater attraction than the one in Nawadweep.

The study found that the picture was not as dismal as it was 15 years ago. There are many more shelters run by the UP government where widows can stay though they still have to earn their money by singing/ chanting or begging. They also cook their own meals. The Guild and the All India Women's Conference run homes for 124 and 24 widows respectively where everything is

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No ifs and butts

The risk of dying due to lung cancer is 20 times higher among women who smoke than among those who don't, writes **Kavita Devgan**

SO you've been told umpteen times that cigarette smoking is injurious to health. After all, tobacco affects the lungs, causes various types of cancer, brings on heart ailments, triggers tuberculosis and causes osteoporosis to set in. But if you are a woman, then it is time you paid heed to the statutory warning on your cigarette pack. The reason being that more women die of lung cancer than breast cancer. And having said that, the risk of dying of lung cancer is 20 times higher among women who smoke than among women who don't, say some reports.

Of course, making matters worse is the gender bias that tobacco has for women's hearts. Says Dr Vivek Gupta, senior cardiologist at Delhi's Indraprastha Apollo Hospitals: "Smokers have higher LDL (bad) cholesterol levels and lower HDL (good) levels. In developing heart disease, smoking seems to have a more powerful effect in women than men." Smoking is also closely associated with newly-born underweight babies.

Ready to stub out your last cigarette? Easier said than done, cry many smokers. Sadly, women smokers are worse off here as well as they often have a tougher time quitting than do men. Scientists are beginning to understand why. According to a study in nicotine & tobacco research, published in the

US, men draw more physical satisfaction from nicotine, whereas most women smoke for psychological succour, which is why it becomes tougher for them to get off the addiction. But the rewards of quitting are lifelong. "When you quit your blood pressure decreases, chances of a heart attack go down, and blood circulation begins to improve within two to 12 weeks. In

Men draw more physical satisfaction from nicotine, whereas most women smoke for psychological succour, which is why it becomes tougher for them to get off the addiction

fact, in as little as six months to a year, your heart health can return to normal," explains Dr Gupta. While it is never too late to quit, the earlier you do the better—or so suggests a study published by Health Services Research. It shows that former smokers can expect to live as long and as healthy as non-smokers, if they manage to stay off smoking for at least 15 years before they turn 50. So here are



some tips to pack away the habit for good:

For women, the menstrual cycle plays a role in withdrawal symptoms. According to a report in the Journal

of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, women who quit smoking during the second half of their menstrual cycle tend to experience more anxiety, depression and irritability than

those who quit during the first half.

Advises Dr Shikha Sharma, a New Delhi-based obesity consultant: "Eat sunflower seeds or walk it off on the treadmill to take your mind off cigarettes. You might actually lose a few pounds, too, in the process. Don't diet while you are quitting. The double dose of deprivation is a one-way ticket to failure. Instead, focus on eating three healthy meals a day and snacking healthy. Drink lots of water. It will help flush the nicotine and other chemicals out of your body and help reduce cravings," she says.

A study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine suggests that regular workouts can make an important contribution. Brown University (US) researchers took 281 health but sedentary female smokers and divided them at random into two groups. Half the women received three supervised exercise sessions and the other half received three health education lectures each week. At the end of 12 weeks, the group that had exercised had a significantly higher percentage of successful quitters than the other group. The score was: 19 per cent versus 10 per cent.

Women in the exercising group had gained an average of 6.6 pounds only, 80 per cent less than their counterparts who had put on an average of 11.9 pounds.

The *asanas* (yogic postures) enhance lung capacity, oxygenate the

cells and increase circulation, thereby energising the entire body. Smoking does the opposite. Plus, the discipline one gets from practising yoga and meditation helps smokers find the strength to kick the nicotine habit," says New Delhi-based yoga teacher Abhinav Sagar.

Studies show that women do benefit if they have a shoulder to lean on. "Women seem to rely more heavily on informal social ties for all things than men," explains Dr Avdesh Sharma, a consultant psychiatrist at Parivartan Centre for Mental Health, New Delhi. And support isn't limited to a spouse, partner, or friend. Some successful quitters take comfort in chat rooms for ex-smokers. Some turn to hypnotic therapy with success. In fact, the American Cancer Society promotes hypnosis as one of many techniques for quitting.

"I have realised that I am unable to quit smoking as almost everyone at my workplace smokes. In fact, whenever I try, it's in vain," rues Amrita Kishore (27). A study supported by the California Wellness Foundation and published in the American Journal of Public Health has found that smokers who work in communities with strong smoking ordinances are 38 per cent more likely to quit than those who work in communities with no such restrictions. So encourage a non-smoking work environment.

—WFS

Teej with a difference

MOUSHUMI SEN

RAJASTHAN'S tradition can be captured at its festive best at fairs and festivals which are dazzlingly theatrical and lively. The celebration of Kajli Teej in Bundi, the queen of Hadoti, in Rajasthan, is different from the many other Teej festivals celebrated elsewhere in the state and outside. Here it is a more than a week-long celebration of gaiety and funfair. Goddess Uma is worshipped by the seekers of conjugal bliss and love.

The Teej festival is celebrated throughout the rainy season in Rajasthan, with each region having its own style of celebrations. Such events are manifested by wearing colorful traditional costumes, new set of bangles, decorations with the decorative *mehendi* and the like. It is dedicated to the eternal love of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati and it echoes of the time when women pray for a happy and long married life. As the raindrops fall on the parched land and the nostalgic aroma of the wet soil rises into the air, swings are hung from trees and decorated with flowers. Young girls dress up in colorful attires and sing to celebrate the rainy season. Teej, essentially a ladies festival, is dedicated to Gauri, commemorating her union with Shiva. Kajli Teej is thus a religious and cultural manifestation of the same. Besides Shrivani and Bhadon ki Teej, Kajli Teej is a special

attraction for foreign tourists. The festival is particularly vibrant with the traditional procession of the goddess in a decorated palanquin which passes through the main bazaars and streets. A sight of the idol Teej on two days is considered auspicious and people from all walks of life attend the fiesta. The procession has decorated elephants, camels, horses, bands, performing artistes and folk performers. The Teej statue is covered with a canopy whereas the Gangaur idol is open.

Exhibition of handicraft items like the traditional *kataar*, paintings and bangles and fancy eatables attract many. Artisans from far-flung places participate in big numbers selling their products. The first two days are dedicated to the folk instrument Algoza recital competition and it renders a melodious take-off to the fair. Though the main function lasts two days, the deliberations continue beyond Janmashmi (the birthday of Lord Krishna). The *mela* venue—the Kumbha Stadium—comes alive every evening bustling with fun and frolic. The other popular festivals in Rajasthan are the Dobra Nath fair, Tejaji ka mela, Ghaas Bheru ki sawari (Barodia), Kartik Poomima mela, Dahelwal ji ka mela and Bhia ka hadooda. But Teej has its own charm and flavour.

An exuberant procession culminates at the heart of Jaipur. Organised jointly by the municipality and the district administration, cultural performances with special



Kajli Teej is celebrated with gaiety in Rajasthan

qawwali evenings, kavi sammelans and devotional songs and musical nights by well-known artistes form part of the celebrations. The curious tourists also get a feel of the local culture and enjoy the traditional festivity.

Ban on forced recoveries

PUSHPA GIRIMAJI

BANKS and other financial institutions that flout the law or the land have to pay for the consequences. This is the unambiguous message that comes from the apex consumer court in its order condemning forcible recovery of financed goods, including vehicles.

In a 51-page order that looks at the issue in detail, the apex court has made it clear that financial institutions that re-possess goods by force and without notice have to pay "reasonable damages" to consumers, depending on the facts of the case. In this case, it has asked the financial company to pay the consumer Rs 1,50,000 along with interest at the rate of 9 per cent calculated from the date of filing the complaint till the date of payment, forcibly taking away the consumer's car. In addition, it awarded Rs 5,000 as consolation and Rs 10,000 as costs.

The order has its origin in a complaint filed by Ms S. Vijayalaxmi, a resident of Delhi, against Citicorp Maruti Finance Ltd. According to her, she bought Maruti Omni after taking a loan of Rs 1,82,396.

As repayment, she was to pay a sum of Rs 2,71,636 in 60 monthly instalments of Rs 4,527.60 each. From May, 2000, to July, 2003, she paid the instalment without fail, but in January, her husband met with an accident and she was unable to pay subsequent instalments. Following this, she requested the officials of the company for a one-time settlement and bank agreed to settle for Rs 60,000.

However, on May 29, two persons went to her house, forcibly took possession of the car and asked Vijayalaxmi and her husband to accompany them to the final company. They were apparently followed by five people in a van and when they reached R.K. Puram, they asked Vijayalaxmi to get down and said they would take the van along with her husband and would send him back after he deposited the money. It's not clear what happened after that, except

that the van was forcibly taken away.

Despite the couple's visits to the company, requesting it to accept Rs 60,000 and release the car, the finance company sold the vehicle for Rs 70,000 and informed Ms Vijayalaxmi that she had to pay the remaining amount of Rs 51,000 due from her.

The couple then filed a complaint before the court at the district level, seeking return of the car or its current market value, estimated at Rs 1.5 lakh, and Rs 1 lakh towards compensation for mental harassment and agony.

The district forum awarded Rs 1.5 lakh with 9 per cent interest

and Rs 5,000 towards compensation. The State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, before which the finance company filed an appeal, not only dismissed it but came down

heavily on the finance company for trying to "settle civil disputes through criminal force on the street." It also imposed punitive damages of Rs 50,000.

In its revision petition filed before the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, the finance company argued that the financier had legal rights to re-possess the hypothecated goods without the intervention of the court. It was by virtue of the agreement signed between the parties.

Dismissing these arguments, the court said the agreement may give the financier the right to re-possess goods but it did not give him the right to use force or unlawful means to possess it. Such unlawful and unethical procedure would be against public policy and public interest, the court said, and added that lawlessness could not be encouraged on the alleged ground that recovery of money through litigation was a slow process or in some cases, ineffective.

In the end, it upheld the order of the district forum but set aside that of the state commission imposing punitive damages, on the ground that it was not necessary. However, it made it clear that the finance company would not be entitled to recover any amount from the complainant on the ground that some amount remained unpaid on their books of accounts.

CONSUMER RIGHTS

Though the financier has the legal right to re-possess hypothecated goods he cannot use force or unlawful means to recover the same

Why widows go to Vrindavan

Continued from page 1

widows going back to West Bengal are dim. Seventy five per cent of the widows interviewed said they were better off in Vrindavan than in their own villages.

Asked if Vrindavan was better, 68 per cent said it was a religious place and they found it peaceful; 28 per cent said they were independent and free in the holy city; 14 per cent said there were more opportunities/facilities for widows and seven per cent said there was

camaraderie/fellow feeling among the widows.

A haven

Though the commercialisation of Vrindavan—the availability of money more easily than in the villages of West Bengal—is undoubtedly a major attraction, in the course of the interviews 41 per cent said they came to the city because it was a place of God, there were a large number of ashrams and many of them had gurus there or family to support them initially. Twenty per cent said they were alone in the village and had no one to

help them. Fourteen per cent said they had problems with people at home and 7.6 per cent said they were in Vrindavan because of their low economic status and poverty. Just one woman said she had come to Vrindavan to escape poverty as well as sexual abuse.

In fact most of them have nothing to go back to. Eighty two per cent said their husbands had left no savings and 65 per cent said they did not even have property. Only 50 per cent of those who had property, which in most cases was a hut, were able to access it. The majority of those who did have property gave it to their children or it was grabbed by their children. Fourteen per cent said the property had been taken by their in-laws. Whatever jewellery they had was either given away, grabbed or sold. Most of them came to Vrindavan as paupers. In fact, 30 per cent travelled to Vrindavan without a ticket.

Ninety per cent of the widows (229) said they did not wish to go back to their villages in Bengal. Fifteen per cent did not want to be a burden on their families in the village. Four per cent said they go home once in a while but prefer to live in Vrindavan. Asked if widows would continue to come to Vrindavan if there were proper facilities in their villages in Bengal, 41 per cent (105) said "No." However, 33 per cent (88) said they came because it was a religious place and because such facilities could not be provided in West Bengal. "It is just not possible to create another Vrindavan in West Bengal" was the categorical statement of one widow.

The government's effort to check child marriages is limping along. A whopping 39 per cent of the widows interviewed had married below 12 years and 47 per cent between the ages of 12 and 17. Thirty per cent of them had become widows by the age of 24.

Yet widow remarriage was opposed by 90 per cent of the widows. For many of them even

thinking of remarriage was a sacrilege. Seventy per cent said there were social and religious taboos to a widow remarrying, 13 per cent said they did not believe in remarriage and five per cent said those with children could not even think of it as an option.

No caste or class

One of the most heartening features of Vrindavan is the disappearance of caste and class. Though the widows were of all castes, Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra and even tribals, widowhood and poverty had brought them to a level playing field. At the homes they eat together, at the bhajan ashrams they sit together and sing and there is a lot of bonhomie and sharing of experiences and sorrow.

The situation of widows in Radhakund, Goverdhan and Barsana is worse than that of those in Vrindavan. They have no pension, no ration card and even if they have one, get only kerosene, and no health care. Most of them have become beggars. The donations, the NGO efforts as well as the bhajan ashrams are concentrated in Vrindavan. In Radhakund there were widows from Bangladesh who had fled during riots, partition of the country and even at the time of Bangladesh's independence. Ten per cent of the widows interviewed (24) were from Bangladesh.



A majority of the widows, whatever their caste or class, find Vrindavan peaceful

Delhi Durbar

Face of the party

While the BJP has declared its Chief Ministerial candidate in Himachal Pradesh, the Congress is unlikely to change its official stance of not projecting a leader before the polls. The BJP finally deemed it proper to end speculation and ambiguity.

Though there is no obvious alternative to Chief Minister Virbhadr Singh for the Congress, those having differences with him are likely to decide their course of action only after the poll results. Not the one to surrender, Virbhadr Singh has deftly handled earlier challenges to his supremacy within the party. He was apparently not happy over remarks by some senior leaders about not projecting a Chief Ministerial candidate. Those close to him felt that not projecting a chief ministerial candidate was the norm in the party but frequently reiterating the position can impact morale of party workers.

Bush's 'advice'

As CPI(M) is under unprecedented attack from all quarters on the Nandigram issue, a joke is doing the rounds in political circles these days, equating the party action there with those of its ideological enemy number one, US President George Bush, in Iraq. The essence of the joke is that beleaguered West Bengal CM Buddhadev Bhattacharjee had received a secret tip from Bush as to how to tackle the Nandigram problem by asking him to go all out with the propaganda on non-existent 'axalites' presence in the village and getting them attacked by his cadres. Bush is said to have done something similar in Iraq with the worldwide campaign about Saddam Hussain's WMDs.

Denying advantage

Miffed over the BJP's attempts to seek a moral high ground on the Taslima Nasreen issue, the Congress launched a counter-attack that sought to deny the saffron party any credit for its supposedly liberal stand. The Congress said that it was the UPA-led government which had extended her a visa and the BJP government in Rajasthan had not kept her in the state after she left Kolkata following threats. While party spokesman Abhishek Singhvi dismissed as hypocrisy Gujarat CM Narendra Modi's offer to host her in the state, Parliamentary Affairs Minister P.R. Dasgupta said that the party had no objections if Modi wanted to atone for his sins.

Defence brains

With defence research facing trouble due to defence scientists opting for the private sector rather than the public sector, the Government has been forced to commission a study and suggest certain incentives to retain talent. While various monetary and non-monetary benefits are being proposed for the scientists in addition to the recommendation for a better pay package to the sixth Central Pay Commission, it was also considered appropriate to have an in-depth study commissioned through an independent agency. The study was assigned to the Administrative Staff College of India (ASCI), Hyderabad which has now submitted its report and the same is under the active consideration of the Government.

Contributed by Prashant Sood, S.S. Negi and Girja Shankar Kaur

by Kuldip Nayar

ONE is horrified over the Punjab government's decision to provide members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), a religious body, with gunmen and red beacon lights on their vehicles. These symbols of authority are said to be a reward to the SGPC members for their "loyalty" to chief minister Parkash Singh Badal. The loyalty demand never gets satiated and they would demand more and more as the days go by.

What is worrying is the extent to which the Akali Dal-led government can go even when the treasury is empty. Even otherwise this kind of burden on the public exchequer is neither permissible nor justified. Similar concessions must be in the pipeline for Hindu organisations in the state because the BJP is the coalition partner in the government.

The manner in which the BJP stalled the withdrawal of subsidy to electricity in cities has indicated the clout it has. If gurdwara functionaries can get gunmen and beacon lights on their vehicles, why not the Hindu mahants and the few maulvis since a substantial number of Muslims have come to live in the state?

I shudder to imagine the repercussions if chief ministers of other

states were to follow the Punjab example. Congress chief minister N.D. Tewari reportedly lost at the polls in Uttarakhand, the state seceded from UP, because he would give beacon light vehicle to every loud opponent. The voters took their revenge at the time of election since they had suffered the nuisance of beacon light vehicles. Badal does not face that probability yet. But a few such mistakes can cost him dear.

The worst trait of the Akalis is that they mix religion with politics. After reducing the state to less than half of its original size by unthinkingly pursuing the demand for Punjab Suba to get a Sikh majority, the Akalis should have been chastened and shed their obsession with religion. They should have concentrated on more important things like the development of Punjab, which is languishing because of neglect.

Forward-looking Punjabis have little scope in the small area to which the state has been reduced. Can Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh think of a sub-federation retaining their identity and legislature but having common subjects like water, road and planning? Both Haryana and Himachal Pradesh are so close to the Punjabi language and Punjabi culture.

Coming to the state, Punjab once enjoyed the highest standard of living in the country. Today it is way down. Not finding enough openings in their own state, the people are

going abroad, whatever the cost. Depressed as they are, they have taken to drugs. The youth wonder how it should fashion the future, something which the state government should be worried about.

The SGPC members can take care of themselves since the gurdwaras in Punjab earn millions. Punjab in Pakistan, despite the pressure of fundamentalists, has not mixed religion with politics. Religious parties on their own did not get more than four to five seats in the National Assembly although General Zia-ul Haq did everything to help them. It was General Pervez

Bigotry is raising its ugly head

Musharraf who rigged the elections in such a way that he reduced the space for liberal members and brought in religious parties, which were once his main support.

In fact, mixing religion with politics has been the bane of India. The country has suffered because of this malady. Still, some political parties like the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Akali Dal have not changed their course because they have found that by plugging the religious line they have gained at the polls.

What they have not realised is the harm they have done to the polity. Every religion has noble

teachings and lofty moral goals. Yet, in each religion these high standards are often far removed from what that religion seems to be in its actual thought and practices of most of its followers.

Take the case of Taslima Nasreen. She is a courageous writer from Bangladesh. Her fault is not that she is less Muslim but that she wants Muslims to remember the teachings of Islam — of equality, tolerance and submissiveness. Still she was hounded from her country because she said those who raped women of the minority community vilified Islam.

It is sad to see that the Muslims of fundamental leanings in India are following their counterparts in Bangladesh. They too cannot tolerate dissent although they swear by the freedom of expression. What it means to them is their own freedom to say or write in their bigoted way.

The question that Taslima's case has raised in India is whether its democratic, secular society has a place for a political refugee or whether the fanatic forces would dictate their terms. Even a person like former chief minister Farooq Abdullah has said that Taslima must apologise. What for? Her fault is that she dared the mullahs and maulvis in Bangladesh.

It pains me when West Bengal chief minister Buddhadev Bhattacharjee refuses to answer the question whether Taslima can return to Kolkata where she has been liv-

ing. True, a visa is issued by the centre. But when it does so, it has the authority on behalf of all the states. Our country's federal structure does not give a state any right to stall the working of subjects which the constitution has given to the centre. Visa issuance is one of them. West Bengal cannot say that Taslima must not stay in the state.

There is something fishy about the faceless Muslim organisation which raised the question of her visa along with the protest against the Marxist mayhem in Nandigram. Maybe, she has come in handy to divert the attention from Nandigram. The CPM could not have imagined anything better.

While the country is debating the case of Taslima, it should also discuss M.F. Hussain, India's topmost painter, whom Hindu zealots are not allowing to return. How he paints is his prerogative, as is that of Taslima about what she writes. This is the freedom of expression which our Constitution guarantees.

Yet, the way in which Hussain has been treated indicates that the pro-Hindu elements are there to destroy the Constitutional right. The propaganda by the parties which have made religion as their tool is contaminating the nation. There is only a thin dividing line between right and wrong, moral and immoral. That line is getting erased rapidly. Bigotry is raising its ugly head. It is a pity.

Maharashtra's young mothers

by Usha Rai

REKHA, from a village of Yavatmal District of Maharashtra, was just 15 years when she got married. She was an extremely bright student and excellent in athletics before marriage. However, life changed dramatically after the wedding nuptials and the tying of the mangalsutra.

Marriage was no joy. By the age of 19 she had two children and lived in a joint family. Pressured with household work, the responsibility of two children and subjected to domestic violence, she has become anaemic and malnourished. Both her children are low birth weight babies.

But Rekha's story is not unique. There are thousands of young girls like her in Maharashtra where 49 per cent of rural and 29 per cent of urban girls are married by the age of 18. A study by the Institute of Health Management (IHM), Pachod, showed that over 58 per cent of the girls had their first conception when they were adolescents, just 15 to 19 years. Instead of going to school or junior college and preparing for life, these adolescents had been trapped in the cycle of procreation and responsibility.

They suffered further trauma when their babies died within days and months of their birth. Neonatal mortality was 54 per cent when the mother was an adolescent and infant mortality was 76 per cent. The study also revealed that 26 per cent of the babies were of low birth weight.

When the alarm bells about the

neonatal and infant deaths began ringing, with support from MacArthur Foundation an intervention was made by the IHM between 2003 and 2006 in 50 villages and 29 slums across the 10 high risk districts of the State. The objective of the pilot project was to improve the sexual and reproductive health of the married adolescent girls and develop a model for married adolescents of rural Maharashtra.

IHM's strategy was to win the confidence of the couple and devel-

Neonatal mortality was 54 per cent and infant mortality 76 per cent, when the mother was an adolescent

op in them a positive approach to reproductive health. Some 2000 pregnant, married adolescents were covered in the programme. A surveillance in which the community was involved led to early detection of pregnant girls. The couple was encouraged to avail of health care services and nutrition programmes. Peer educators like Sunita and Pramod went from village to village, home after home offering advice as well as support.

When Rattan mausi, 56, a member of the village health committee, learnt that a young couple had approached a doctor for sex selection,

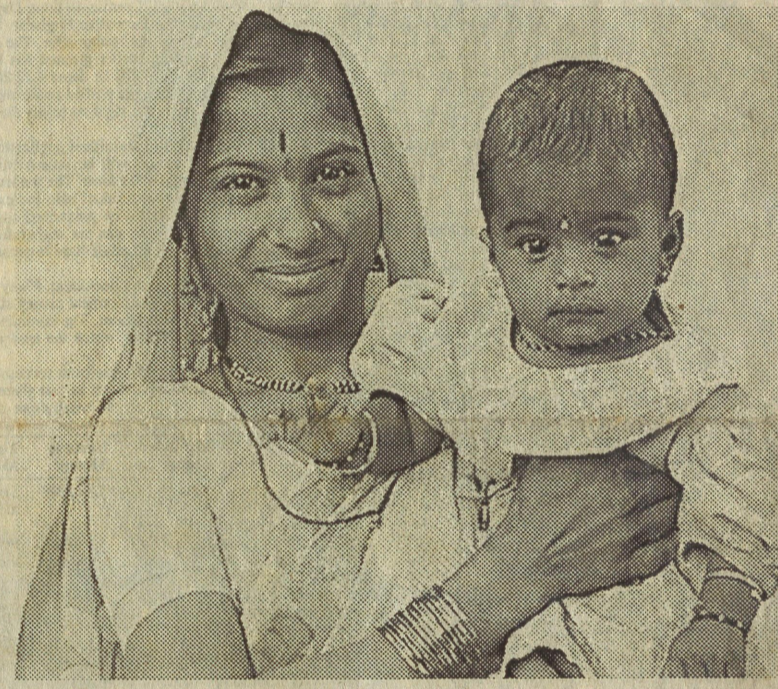
she went to the doctor and threatened to report him. She told the young father to be that she would keep his wife with her unless he signed on official stamp paper that he would not try to terminate the seven months pregnancy of his wife. She even volunteered to adopt the little girl. Now the parents have happily accepted their baby girl.

Probably the most heartening story is of Anjana who was pressured into marriage when just 16. In 2003 she joined the IHM's programme for married adolescent girls and learnt of the dangers of early conception. She convinced her in-laws and husband that her first pregnancy should be delayed. She persuaded her husband to use the condom till she could start on the oral pill. For two years she was on the pill and had a healthy child in 2006 when she was 19.

The IHM programme was also able to treat those suffering from reproductive tract infections (RTIs). In the study area in rural Maharashtra in 2003 over 36 per cent of the women had RTIs. By 2006 this dropped to 27 per cent.

Take the case of Rupali, 17, and married for eight months. She had a white discharge for several months but never got it treated. On a routine visit, a community health worker learnt of her problem and after taking her husband into confidence, she referred her to a hospital for treatment. Rupali has been cured and for the first time after her marriage feels well.

At the end of three years of intervention the percentage of institutional deliveries went up from 61 to 64 per cent in the rural areas and 81 to



85 per cent in urban areas; there was greater involvement of ANMs in post-natal care and a significant reduction in post natal complications like excessive bleeding, high fever and pain in the lower abdomen; the prevalence of low birth weight babies dropped from 35 per cent to 25 per cent in rural areas in three years and from 27 per cent to 18 per cent in urban areas.

Dr Ashok Dayalchand, the director of IHM, says the key outcomes of the pilot model are a 30 per cent reduction in birth of low weight babies; three fold increase in the use of contraceptives; delay in the median age of conception by a year; reduction in

post-natal complications, significant reduction in RTIs.

The most significant gain is the reduction in the number of low weight babies because it means an improvement in maternal nutrition which in turn leads to reduction in maternal morbidity and mortality and reduction in neonatal mortality.

Based on the success of the model pilot intervention, the Maharashtra government is already replicating it in 10 high risk districts. Dr Prakash Dake, Director, Health Services, says the challenge is to make the pilot intervention a part of the government health system and integrate it into the RCH programme.

MILITARY ENGINEER SERVICES
Chief Engineer, R&D Probyn Road Delhi-54 on behalf of President of India invites applications from eligible enlisted contractors of MES and enlisted/unenlisted contractors working with other Govt. Departments meeting eligibility criteria for selection of contractors for issue of tender of undementioned work:-

Name of work	Construction of Key personnel Accn at Chandigarh
Estimated cost of work	Rs 75.00 lacs
Completion period	08 (Eight), months
Amount of Earnest Money for contractors not enlisted with MES	Rs 140625/- in the shape of Cash Deposit Receipt from any Scheduled Bank, BGB not acceptable
Cost of tender	Rs 1000/- in the shape of DD/Bankers Cheque from any Nationalised Bank in favour of GE (I) R&D Chandigarh
Last date of receipt of applications	11 Dec 2007
Eligibility Criteria:-	Class 'B' Category 'a'
(a) For MES Enlisted Contractors	(i) Meeting enlistment criteria of MES with regard to having satisfactorily completed requisite value works, Annual turnover, working Capital, Fixed Assets etc (ii) No Recovery outstanding in Govt Deptt.
(b) For other Contractors	(i) Meeting enlistment criteria of MES with regard to having satisfactorily completed requisite value works, Annual turnover, working Capital, Fixed Assets etc (ii) No Recovery outstanding in Govt Deptt.
Date of issue of tender	On or after 12 Dec, 2007
Date of receipt of Tender	12 Jan. 2008

Notes:-
1. Application not accompanied by requisite value DD/Bankers cheque towards cost of Tender shall not be considered for issue of tender.
2. Contractors not enlisted with MES will be required to enclose necessary documents to prove their eligibility as given above including Affidavit for no recovery outstanding.
3. In case of rejection of application for issue of tender, the applicant shall be refunded the cost of tender. However, contractor may appeal to next higher Engineer Authority i.e. ADG (OF & DRDO) Secunderabad for rejection of his application for issue of tender whose decision shall be final and binding and contractor shall not be entitled to any compensation whatsoever for non-issue of tender.
4. The above details are also available on MES website: www.mes.gov.in and Indian Trade Journal. Full notice of Tender IAFW-2162 and Enlistment Criteria is available in all Offices of MES and also on MES website.
Sd/- (SP Singh) Asstt Dir (Contracts) For Chief Engineer

davp/10102/11/708/0708

ਦੀ ਪਟਿਆਲਾ ਕੋਚਰੀ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਬੈਂਕ ਲਿਮ. ਪਟਿਆਲਾ
ਟੈਂਡਰ ਨੋਟਿਸ
ਬੈਂਕ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰੋਜੈਕਟ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਵਲੋਂ ਮਨਜ਼ੂਰ ਕੀਤੇ ਅਨੁਸਾਰ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਅਲਾਕਾ ਲਈ ਪੰਜਾਬ ਸਰਕਾਰ ਤੋਂ ਮਾਲਕਾ ਪਾਪਤ ਕਰਮ/ਰੋਕੋਦਾਰ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਸਰਕਾਰੀ ਅਲਾਕਾ ਸਿਸਟਮ ਦੀਆਂ ਮੋਰਗੇਜ ਕੋਟੇਜ਼ ਸਮੇਤ ਸੋਮੇ/ਚਿਕੋਕੋਜ਼ਾਂ (ਅਲਾਕਾ ਵਿਚ ਲਗੇ ਸਮਾਨ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਰਿਪੋਰਟ) ਮਿਤੀ 06.12.07 ਤੱਕ ਬਾਅਦ 5.00 ਵਜੇ ਤੱਕ ਚਾਰਵਾਨ ਪਾਰਟੀਆਂ ਬੈਂਕ ਦੇ ਸਿਲਾ ਮੈਨੇਜਰ ਦੇ ਦਫਤਰ ਵਿੱਚ ਦੇ ਸਕਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ।
ਇਹ ਕੋਟੇਜ਼ ਮਿੱਟੀ ਵਿਚ ਖੋਲੀਆਂ ਜਾਣਗੀਆਂ। ਇਸ ਸਬੰਧੀ ਕੋਈ ਵੀ ਬੈਂਕਲਾ ਲੋਟ ਦਾ ਅਧਿਕਾਰ ਬੈਂਕ ਦੀ ਪ੍ਰੋਜੈਕਟ ਕਮੇਟੀ ਵਲੋਂ ਰਾਖਵਾਂ ਹੋਵੇਗਾ। ਇਹ ਕੋਟੇਜ਼ ਬਿਨਾਂ ਕਾਰਨ ਲਈ ਕੱਚ ਕੀਤੀਆਂ ਜਾ ਸਕਦੀਆਂ ਹਨ।
ਸਿਲਾ ਮੈਨੇਜਰ

HEADQUARTERS SOUTHERN COMMAND, PUNE-411 001
OPEN TENDER NOTICE
1. Headquarters Southern Command is interested in purchase of "Chipper Weed Cutter" during the financial year 2007-08 out of Army Cdr's Special Financial Powers.
2. Details of Items, Qualitative requirement, specifications and terms/ conditions are available in the Tender forms.
3. The interested firms/dealers can obtain tender forms by depositing Rs. 100/- (non refundable) by way of demand draft from Nationalised Bank in favour of Pr CDA, Southern Command payable at Pune, from Secretary, Tender Purchase Committee (Ordnance Branch), HQ Southern Command, Pune-411 001 between 0930 hrs to 1330 hrs on any working day at the earliest but within 14 days from the date of publication.
4. In case the tender documents is required by Registered Post, firms/dealers must forward a self address envelope size of 12x6 inches duly affixed with Rs. 60/- (Rupees Sixty only) Postal Stamps.
Chairman
Tender Purchase Committee
HQ Southern Command
Pune-411 001

davp/10607/11/0024/0708

TENDER NOTICE
Sealed item rate tenders are invited from the contractors/firms for the following work by 3.00 p.m. on 23.12.2007, on the prescribed form which can be obtained from the office of undersigned on the cash payment of Rs 400/-. The tender shall be opened on the same day at 3.15 p.m. in the presence of the tenderers or their representatives, who may like to be present.

S. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money	Time Limit
1	Hiring of Three No. tractor-trolleys (including cost of One No. driver, 4 number labourers, diesel etc. for each tractor-trolley) for collection and removal of refuse and garbage from U.T. villages to the approved dumping site in Chandigarh.	Rs 30,000/-	12 Months
2	Trolley size 7'x14'		

CONDITIONS:-
1. Tender shall be accompanied by earnest money in the shape of Bank Draft in favour of the Executive Officer, Panchayat Samiti, U.T., Chandigarh (by designation only) drawn on any scheduled Bank at Chandigarh.
2. The conditional tender or tenders without earnest money will be rejected without assigning any reasons.
3. Terms and conditions can be seen/obtained during the office hours in this office on any working day.
4. No tender form will be issued after 2.00 p.m. on the due date.
5. If the date of opening the tenders is declared holiday, the tenders will be opened on the next working day at 3.15 p.m.
6. The competent authority reserves the right to reject any or all tenders without assigning any reasons.
Sd/- Executive Officer,
Panchayat Samiti, U.T., Chandigarh,
Old Architect Building, Sector 19-B, Chandigarh.

BHAKRA BEAS MANAGEMENT BOARD (IRRIGATION WING) NANGAL TOWNSHIP NOTICE INVITING TENDER
NIT No. 11
The Sr. Executive Engineer, Reservoir Management and Spillway Repair Division, BBMB, Nangal Township, Distt. Roopnagar-140124 (Pb.) invites sealed item rate tenders on through rate on agreement basis from the registered contractors for the following works. The tenders shall be received up to 3.00 p.m. on dated 13.12.2007 and opened at 3.30 p.m. on the same day in the presence of the interested Tenderers or their authorised representatives, if they desire so. In case of holiday(s) tenders will be entertained/opened on the next working day at the same time, respectively.
Completion period: 8 Months
Cost of tender documents: Rs 1000.00

No.	Name of work	Estimated Cost	Earnest Money
1.	Construction of Guest House Building, Pump House, Back side Boundary Wall, Main Gate and View point of Hydro Power Training Institute (H.P.T.I.) at Nangal Township.	Rs 67.00 Lacs	Rs 134000/-

NOTES:-
1. The reputed and financially sound contractors duly registered with the State/Central PWD, MES and other such public sector enterprises, who have the experience and capacity of handling the work of such magnitude need only to give tenders.
2. Tender documents can be downloaded from BBMB website www.bbmb.gov.in The tender documents can also obtained up to 1.30 p.m. by the date of opening of tenders from the Sr. Executive Engineer, R.M. & S.R. Division, BBMB, Nangal Township at the cost of Rs 1000.00 (non-refundable) against written request along with requisite eligibility criteria documents. Tender shall be submitted in sealed cover as per procedure laid down in Clause 'L' of invitation to tenderers.
3. Earnest Money of the requisite amount in the shape of Bank Draft drawn on scheduled bank payable at Nangal Township or Naya Nangal in favour of Accounts Officer, BBMB, Nangal (Pb.) be attached. Tenders without Earnest Money will not be entertained.
4. Conditional tenders or tenders received late or tender received late or tenders received telegraphically or incomplete tenders are liable to be rejected outrightly by the tender opening Committee.
5. BBMB reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the received without assigning any reason.
Sd/- Sr. Executive Engineer,
Reservoir Management and Spillway Repair Division,
BBMB, Nangal Township,
Phone: 01887-223092 davp 34115/11/30/0708

Back to school – from abusive marriages

by Usha Rai

THE MV Foundation's work in pulling children out of the work force and into schools in Andhra Pradesh is impressive. Since 1991, it has withdrawn 400,000 children from the work force and mainstreamed them into schools. With the help of the gram panchayats and the local community 1500 villages have been freed of child labourers.

However, what is not that well known is the number of little girls that they have saved from being pushed into marriage. They have also helped young girls of 12 to 15 years, who ran away from abusive husbands and in-laws to rebuild their lives by getting back into school.

At the Alur Bridge Camp, Rangareddy District, where girls and boys who have been rescued from child labour are put through a bridge course to upgrade their reading and writing skills before being mainstreamed into regular school, we met a few of these young married girls. Most of these girls are below the legal age of marriage but have been pushed into it because of the convenience of parents. They feel their responsibility is over once the daughter is married even if she is just 12 or 13 years.

Four years ago one of the girls, who was 14, ran away from her husband's home and found her way to the Alur bridge camp. The camp in charge informed the sarpanch of the village and the girl's parents. The parents were worried they would be harassed by

their daughter's in-laws but the girl was determined not to go back.

Finally with the help of the sarpanch, the case was resolved and the young girl was allowed to stay on. "We have supporters as well as those who oppose our programme of rescuing child labourers and putting them back into education. The opposition in case of married girls is more vehement," says Raju of MV Foundation.

Quiet, simple child marriages were taking place in Shahbad mandal, Vikarabad, Paragi, Tandu and Kulkachala blocks of Ranga Reddy district. Now the girls who do not wish to get married

Each girl, seeking shelter, has a horrendous story to tell of physical and mental abuse. Shahnaz, 14, is from Dachapalli village of Guntur district and has worked in chillie and cotton farms. When she was 12, she was married to a 45-year-old man. Her mother had died and her father married again.

Her step mother did not like her since she had two of her own children. Though the *nikha* was done when she was 12, she had to move into the husband's house when she was 14 in January last year. Her husband was a silversmith earning Rs 60 to Rs 100 a day. He would leave the house at 4

Susheela begged her parents not to marry her off. She knew it would be the end of her freedom, her education

know they can turn to the MV Foundation for support.

Lakshmi, 15, married to widower of 45, ran away within a month of her marriage because her mother-in-law and others were beating her. She has spent 10 months at the Alur camp doing the bridge course. She hopes to get into class 7 in a government school. In her village, 'Bandeliki Charla, she was working in the cotton fields.

"I have suffered too much in my husband's house. I want to study and become a lawyer, I will never go back to my in-laws house. Even if I marry, it will be to someone else," she says. Since the marriage was not registered and she was a minor, there is hope that it will be annulled.

a.m. and return at 7 p.m.

Shahnaz first completed all the housework in her own home, then went to her in-laws house and do all the housework there. There was neither joy nor understanding in the marriage. She had become a slave and was often beaten. In desperation she drank kerosene and tried to kill herself. After a period of hospitalization she went back and found in addition to her other travails, she was now being accused to infidelity.

With the Rs 800 she had saved from her days as a cotton field worker, she went to the railway station and bought a ticket to Secundrabad. She was sitting hear the door of the compartment, crying her heart out when two policemen

saw her and tried to help. A college student in the compartment offered to help get her to a place where she could study. She put her in a bus that took her to Chevellam and from there she took an auto rickshaw to the bridge school.

The bridge school sent a message to her parents but they had migrated and the information was passed on to her husband. He called her up at the school and threatened her of dire consequences if she did not return. MV Foundation with the support of the community is trying to solve the case.

Susheela Chenugapalli, forced into marriage when 12, won the bravery award for revolting against child marriage in 2005. Susheela says no one should suffer like she did for two years. With the support of MV Foundation, the marriage was finally annulled. She recalls that one day she came from school to be told by her parents that her marriage had been fixed with Narsimhulu and she would have to live with his family in a village, 30 miles from her maternal home in Alur.

Susheela begged her parents not to marry her. She knew it would be the end of her freedom, her education. But her parents who were extremely poor pointed out that the dowry was not too much because she was young. As she got older they would have to pay a bigger dowry. They were also worried about her security since she had reached puberty and any physical attack or molestation would bring dishonour to the family.

Her young married friends who had been abused by husbands 20 and 30 years older than they were, asked her to resist the marriage but they could do nothing

to help her. So she was pressured into marriage. Her only consolation was the husband was 22 and not 40 or 45 years.

She had to do the field work as well as all the work at home like a slave with no one to even talk to. Within a few weeks of the marriage, Narsimhulu began abusing her. He would come home drunk and scream at her demanding more dowry. Then he would beat her. When this happened a couple of times she ran away to her parents but they sent her back.

One evening Narasimhulu punched her because he did not like the dinner she had cooked for him. She decided she could not take any more violence. Having heard of MV Foundation she contacted them and they assured her support in leaving Narasimhulu. Her parents were horrified. How would they face their community but Susheela was adamant not to live with Narasimhulu. MV Foundation helped her to get the marriage annulled and she is back in school and in control of her life.

The atmosphere at the bridge camp at Alur was joyous. There were 120 students and 12 teachers who not only taught them how to read, write and prepare for regular school but motivated them to education so that they do not drop out even when they join the government schools. In fact, the Foundation follows up with them in government schools and even helps them get into college and the work force. Some of the kids rescued from child labour and groomed at the Foundation's bridge course camps are today doctors, engineers and even in the police force as constables.

Left will be briefed: Pranab

BANGALORE, DECEMBER 27

The UPA government at the Centre will brief the Left parties about the outcome of India's talks with the International Agency for Atomic Energy (IAEA) on India-specific nuclear agreement, before arriving at a final decision, external affairs Minister

IAEA Talks

Pranab Mukherjee said today. "As decided earlier, we will meet the Left again and come out with the agreed text once we finalise the India-specific nuclear arrangements with the IAEA," he added. — UNI

Campaigning ends for Ballia byelection

BALLIA, DECEMBER 27

The high profile campaigning for the December 29 Ballia Lok Sabha bypoll, where the Samajwadi Party candidate - son of former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar - was pitted against the son of mafia don-turned-politician Hari Shankar Tiwari, ended at 1700 hrs this evening.

Ballia parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh, which had long stood witness to 'personality versus development' showdown over the past decades, is witnessing election following the death of former Prime Minister and sitting MP Chandra Shekhar.

The so-called 'social engineering' of the ruling BSP is also on test at the hustings. While the entire Opposition, except for the Congress, the BJP and the BSP, is supporting SP candidate Neeraj Shekhar, the youngest son of the former PM in the byelection, BSP's Vinay Shanker Tiwari along with the BJP and the Congress candi-

dates had turned this bypoll as a run up to the Lok Sabha election in the state.

A total of over 1.5 million electorate would exercise their franchise at 716 polling stations and seal the fate of 16 candidates in the electronic voting machines (EVMs).

The polling would start at 0700 hrs and end at 1700 hrs on Saturday. The counting of votes would take place on January 2.

About 249 and 221 polling centres have been declared as hyper sensitive and sensitive respectively, in the constituency.

The Election Commission had banned the entry of outsiders, including ministers, in the constituency from today till the voting process is over on Saturday.

Police Superintendent L.B.O Antony Kumar said about 55 companies of the Central Reserve Police (CRP), Border Security Force (BSF), Shashtra Seema Bal (SSB) and Provincial Armed Constab-

ulary (PAC) would be deployed for security. Besides, about 3,000 state police personnel would be deployed in the constituency on election duty.

While, para military would be deployed at hyper sensitive and sensitive polling centres, PAC would be deployed at other centres, Kumar said.

Motorboats manned by policemen would be pressed into service in Ghagra and Ganga rivers to keep a vigil along the UP-Bihar border in the district.

A look into the past three decades of election politics would indicate that the successive polls were fought amidst the twin axis of development and personality of the Young Turk. However, the picture is somewhat different this time round.

While Neeraj Shekhar is banking on his illustrious father's personality and the sympathy wave to romp home, the Opposition parties had made the development of Ballia an agenda for the byelection. — UNI

PUBLIC NOTICE

EXCISE AND TAXATION DEPARTMENT HARYANA

It is brought to the notice of the general public that the process of formulation of Excise Policy in respect of State of Haryana for the year 2008-2009 is under progress.

Therefore, feedback, views and suggestions are solicited from members of public to enrich the process of formulation of the Excise Policy.

The interested person(s) may send his views/suggestions in writing or by email to the office of Excise & Taxation Commissioner, Haryana at the address noted below. He/She may also forward/volunteer his/her suggestions by personally meeting the undersigned between 11.00 a.m. to 12.00 noon on any working day upto 9.1.2008.

ARUN KUMAR, IAS
EXCISE & TAXATION COMMISSIONER, HARYANA
SCO 71-75, Sector 17-C, Chandigarh
EMAIL: HARYANATAX.COM
Fax No: 0172-2702896
TEL No: 0172-2702979, 0172-2703955

PRDH-2369F

HUDA URBAN DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY NOTICE INVITING TENDER

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, HUDA ELECT. DIVISION, HISAR
 For and on behalf of HUDA sealed percentage rate tenders are hereby invited by the undersigned from the approved Contractor of appropriate class/category enlisted with HUDA, and possessing EPF code No. from the competent authority. The tender form can be obtained 24 hours before the date of opening of tenders from the office of undersigned against the cash payment of tender fee amount mentioned against each as under. The tender form will be issued on submitting the proof of Bank Draft/Deposit at Call of earnest money in favour of Executive Engineer, HUDA Elect. Division, Hisar payable at Hisar.

The tender will be received and opened on the date mentioned below at 15.00 hours in the office of the Administrator, HUDA in the presence of tenderer or their authorised representative who would like to be present at that time. The detail of work is as under:-

Sr. No.	Name of work	Earnest Money	Time limit	Tender fees/ Date of opening	Category
1. 115	Providing & fixing HPSV fitting on T-junction in Sector-14 at Hisar A/Cost Rs 4.00 lacs	8000/-	Two months	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
2. 116	Providing & fixing of HPSV fitting on T-junction in Sector 23 at Bhiwani A/Cost Rs 4.00 lacs	8000/-	Two months	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
3. 117	Providing illumination in various courts and other allied job in Sports Complex at Sirsa "Providing illumination in newly constructed courts". A/Cost Rs 4.00 lacs	8000/-	Two months	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
4. 118	Providing electrification and streetlight in Sector 9 & 11 at Hisar. "Providing HT line (Balance work) A/Cost Rs 3.00 lacs	6000/-	One month	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
5. 119	Providing & fixing of HPSV fitting on T-junction in Sector 13 at Bhiwani A/Cost Rs 3.00 lacs	6000/-	Two months	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
6. 120	Providing illumination in Model Park in Urban Estate-11 at Hisar A/Cost Rs 2.00 lacs	4000/-	One month	Rs 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
7. 121	Providing illumination in park in Sector 16&17 at Hisar. A/Cost Rs. 2.00 Lacs	4000	One Month	Rs. 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
8. 122	Providing Elect. and streetlight in Shopping centre M.T. Dabwali. "Providing L.T. line and streetlight". A/Cost Rs. 1.00 Lac	2000/-	One Month	Rs. 250/- 11.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
9. 123	Construction of Gymkhana Club building at Rohtak. "Providing & fixing of luminaire". A/Cost Rs. 5.00 Lacs	10200/-	One Month	Rs. 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
10. 124	Special repair of existing street light system, painting of existing pole, Providing floodlight in Shahidi Park and providing illumination of existing Archaeology building situated adjoining to Shahidi Park at Jhajjar (Deposit work of M.C. Jhajjar). A/Cost Rs. 4.85 Lacs	9600/-	One Month	Rs. 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
11. 125	Providing and fixing of floodlight on Sheela bye pass chowk, Sukhpura chowk and T-junction of 45m wide road near Bus stand and dismantling of existing S.T. pole from Sheela bye pass chowk and Delhi bye pass chowk and re-erection of the same at entry of 45 mtr. wide road on Gohana and Sonapat road at Rohtak (EDC works). A/Cost Rs. 4.30 lacs	8600/-	Two Months	Rs. 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
12. 126	Providing electrification and streetlight in shopping centre Sec. 7 at Sonapat. "Erection of H.T. line including supply & erection of ACSR conductor and all other works contingent thereto". A/Cost Rs 3.00 lacs	6000/-	Two Months	Rs. 250/- 18.1.2008	HT Licence Holder
13. 127	Providing Sodium light on 30mtr wide road of Sector-15 Sonapat (between Sec 15 & 16). "Providing floodlight". A/Cost Rs 2.60 lacs	5200/-	One month	Rs 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
14. 128	Providing Sodium light on dividing road between Sector 7-29, 6-29 and 5-4 at Sonapat "Providing floodlight". A/Cost Rs 2.75 lacs	3500/-	One month	Rs 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
15. 129	Providing Sodium light on HBC Sec 12 and Sector 15 at Sonapat. "Providing illumination". A/Cost Rs 1.00 lac	2000/-	One month	Rs 250/- 18.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder
16. 130	Providing and fixing LED based traffic signal with UPS on junction of 45mtr wide road on Rohtak Sonapat Road, Sukhpura Chowk, Sheela bye pass chowk Delhi bye pass chowk and T-junction of 45 mtr wide road near Bus Stand at Rohtak (EDC work) A/Cost Rs 24.90 lacs	49800/-	3 months	Rs 1000/- 18.1.2008	Only for manufacturer
17. 131	Providing illumination in Lawn Tennis courts in Club Building at Rohtak A/Cost Rs 9.60lacs	19200/-	2 month	Rs 500/- 25.1.2008	HT/LT Licence Holder

Terms & Conditions:-
 1. The detailed terms and conditions as per approved DNIT can be seen on working day in the office of undersigned if the date of opening of tender is declared as Govt. holiday the tender will be received and opened on the next working day at the same time.
 The tender will be given to only those contractor who have obtained EPF code or NOC from R.P.E.C Case will be deducted as such rate not exceeding 2% but not less than 1% of the cost of construction of incurred by HUDA, as the Government may notify in the official Gazettee from time to time specially.
 Tender for Sr. No. 16 (Job No. 130) will be issued only to manufacturers of traffic signal who have successfully carried out at least three works of Rs. 25.00 Lacs each of similar nature in last three years in the Govt./Semi Govt. and submit the proof at the time of issue of tender form.
For & on Behalf of HUDA
Sd/- Executive Engineer

PRDH-4644

Assam wants ban on Adivasi militants

TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, DECEMBER 27

Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi today informed that the state government was very concerned over the growing number of violent incidents committed by the Adivasi militant group, All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA) militants and was keeping a close watch on it through its security apparatus.

He said a detailed dossier of the activities of the AANLA and its links, cadre strength etc., was being prepared for presentation before the Central government tribunal empowered to impose a ban on any armed militant group.

Gogoi said insurgency had been hampering the development of the state and the emergence of more insurgent groups and growing activities of jihadi elements was not auguring well for the economic growth of the state.

INDIAN RAILWAYS

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR)
 MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA)
 (RAILWAY BOARD)

NO. RS(POL)/58/0506/1/2008 New Delhi, Dated : 17.12.2007

TENDER NOTICE

Government of India, Ministry of Railways, Railway Board and on behalf of the President of India propose to purchase the following items from the RDSO approved suppliers against the Tender mentioned below:

Description of Material	Tender No.	Date of closing	Date of opening	Tender documents available from
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
AAR approved Grease for cartridge Taper Roller Bearings of freight stock conforming to RDSO specification No. WD-24-misc. 2003 (Rev. 1)	RS(POL)/58/0506/1/2008	15.1.2008 (14.30 hrs.)	15.1.2008 (15.00 hrs.)	Ministry of Railways, (Railway Board), Railway Stores (POL), Room No. 156/15, RAIL BHAVAN, New Delhi
Approx. Qty: 123,222 MTs				

NB :
 i. Brands which are approved by RDSO are only eligible for consideration.
 ii. The tendering firms should be manufacturers of RDSO approved brand or their authorised agents in India.
 iii. Supplies required in packed condition (180/182 Kg) drums as per clause 11 of RDSO specifications.
 iv. The price per set of tender document is fixed at Rs. 2000/- only to be deposited with the nearest FA & CAO of any of the Zonal Railways/Production Units, Cheques and postal orders will not be acceptable. The tender-documents are obtainable from Room No. 156/15, RAIL BHAVAN, Railway Board, New Delhi-110 001, on furnishing original cash receipt in token of having deposited the requisite amount towards cost of the tender i.e. Rs. 2000/- only per set. Tender documents may be collected on any of the working days between 10.00 hrs to 13.00 hrs and 14.30 hrs. to 17.00 hrs. Parties requiring tender-documents by post, should remit Rs. 50/- extra as postal charges along with the tender cost.
 v. Quoting firms who have downloaded the tender documents from internet are required to deposit an amount of Rs. 2000/- in cash or demand draft in favour of FA&CAO Northern Railway, Baroda House, New Delhi and attach the cash receipt with their offer failing which their offer will not be considered.
 Director, Railway Stores (POL) Railway Board
 4133/07 Website : www.indianrailways.gov.in/stores
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

HARYANA POLICE HOUSING CORPORATION LIMITED C-10, SECTOR-6, PANCHKULA SHORT TERM TENDER NOTICE

Tender Notice No. HPHHC/2007/ Dated:

1) Sealed tenders on percentage/term rate (as specified in tender documents) contracts are hereby invited for the following works on date mentioned against each work by 5.00 p.m. from the contractors/societies enlisted with the any Government Department, Board or Corporation on the prescribed form obtainable either from the office of the Executive Engineer (HQ), Haryana Police Housing Corpn. Ltd., Panchkula or the concerned EEs. Completed tenders may be submitted at either place. The cost of each tender form (Non-refundable) is Rs 250/- for the work at Sr. 1, 2, 4, 11, Rs 500/- for the works at Sr. No. 3, 5, 6, Rs 2000/- for the works at Sr. No. 9, 10, Rs 3000/- for the works at Sr. No. 7, 8.
 The date of receipt of tenders and opening of tender have been given against each work.

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated Amount (Rs in lacs)	Earnest Money (In Rs)	Time Limit	Date of receipt of tender	Date of opening of tender	Concerned EEs
1.	Providing and fixing automatic sliding door operation with a pair of microwave sensors for an opening of various sizes in the office building of Excise & Taxation Deptt. Sector 5, Panchkula.	3.10	6200/-	1 month	09.01.08	10.01.08	EE (V&Q), Panchkula
2.	Providing and fixing close circuit cameras in the office building of Excise & Taxation Deptt., Sector 5, Panchkula.	2.67	5300/-	1 month	09.01.08	10.01.08	EE (V&Q), Panchkula
3.	Providing and fixing fibre glass 4 mm sheet in the office building of HPHC, Sector 5, Panchkula.	11.53	23000/-	4 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Panchkula
4.	Special repair of Govt. residential building quarters of CID quota at Hisar.	2.30	4600/-	1 month	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Hisar
5.	Development of newly constructed Police Lines at Fatehabad	24.65	25000/-	6 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Hisar
6.	Construction of Primary Health Centre at Commando Complex, Newal (Karnal)	11.45	22900/-	4 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Madhuban
7.	Construction of multipurpose hall for Hand Ball & Volley Ball in Police Complex at Madhuban	200.00	200000/-	12 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Madhuban
8.	Construction of Wrestling Judo & Boxing hall in Police Complex at Bhandisi	120.70	120700/-	10 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Gurgaon
9.	Construction of Boundary wall at RTC Bhandisi	84.99	84990/-	9 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Gurgaon
10.	Construction of Primary health centre at RTC Bhandisi	55.00	55000/-	9 months	23.01.08	24.01.08	EE (P), Gurgaon
11.	Carriage of cement i/c loading, unloading and stacking from HPHC store, Bhandisi to different stations i.e. Rewari, Namau, Gurgaon	2.00	5000/-	1 month	09.01.08	10.01.08	EE (P), Gurgaon

2) Earnest money shall be paid in the shape of deposit of call/demand draft in the name of Managing Director, Haryana Police Housing Corporation Ltd., Panchkula payable at Panchkula to be submitted at the time of purchase of tender form.
 3) The tender form duly filled and the condition should be in the separate envelope.
 4) The detailed notice inviting tender alongwith terms & conditions can be seen/visited in the office of EE(H.Q.), HPHC, Panchkula or the concerned XEN's. The same is also available on our web site www.mdhphc.googlepages.com.
 5) The tender document in case of work at Sr. No. 7 is available on website & can be used as a downloaded document from the internet. If downloaded, the cost of tender document be paid alongwith the bid submission.
 6) A pre-bid meeting shall be held on 08.01.2008 at 11.00 a.m. in the office of Chief Engineer, HPHC Panchkula for works at Sr. No. 7.
 7) The technical bid for work at Sr. No. 7 will be opened on 14.01.08 at 11.00 a.m. in the presence of the bidders who wish to attend & the Financial Bids will be opened at 3.00 p.m. on the same day.
 8) If the date of opening of tenders happens to be holiday, then the same shall be received & opened on next working day at the same time.
 9) Telephonic/telegraphic tender & those not attached with prescribed proforma shall not be entertained.
 10) Only priced conditions will be accepted i.e. conditions, should be associated with withdrawal value.
 11) Tender forms will be issued till two days before the receipt of tender. Tender except at Sr. No. 7 will be opened at 11.00 a.m. on dates mentioned against each work in the office of EE (HQ), Panchkula. The tenders will not be accepted by hand, only registered/speed post through courier tenders shall be accepted. The Corporation shall not be responsible for any postal delay, if any.
FOR & ON BEHALF OF HPHC
SD/- EXECUTIVE ENGINEER (H.Q)

PRDH-4651

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT TRANSPORT OFFICER, MOGA

Auction Notice for left over Fancy Registration Nos.

No. 12060/DTO/Moga Dated: 26.12.08

The applications are invited from the interested persons for allotment of left over fancy Registration marks mentioned in the sixth schedule for Rule 42-A of the Punjab Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989, the details of which can be obtained from this office on any working day, so as to reach this office up to 5.00 p.m. on 07.01.08 accompanied by a Demand Draft equal to fifty per cent of the Reserve price in favour of District Transport Officer, Moga payable at Moga. In case there is only one applicant, the number will be allotted as per the Reserve fees fixed for that number. In case of more than one applicant for the number the allotment will be made by open auction. The reserve fee for conducting auction shall be Rs. 3,000/- for registration marks 0010 to 0100 and Rs. 1,000/- for other fancy Registration marks. Open auction will be conducted on 08.01.08 at 11.00 a.m. in the office of the undersigned in the presence of the applicants who may wish to attend the auction. At the time of auction, the highest successful bidder shall be allotted registration mark and the next two highest bidders shall be kept in the reserve list. The successful bidder should get his vehicle registered within seven days. In case, the successful bidder fails to pay the full bid amount and get the vehicle registered within seven days, the amount deposited with the application shall be forfeited and the number shall be allotted to the next highest bidder. The procedure will be repeated in case the second bidder also fails to get his vehicle registered within the stipulated period. All bids shall be valid for a period of 30 days from the date of auction. The undersigned reserves the right to cancel any auction without assigning any reason.

DPR/Pb.-2463-D Sd/- District Transport Officer, Moga.

PUNJAB HEALTH SYSTEMS CORPORATION MUKTSAR

INVITATION OF TENDERS FOR SANITATION SERVICES

Sealed tenders are invited for sanitation service of Civil Hospital, Muktsar from reputed contractors having experience in house keeping and maintenance of proper sanitation facilities.

- Tender documents containing the general terms and conditions, description of the assignment and particulars elaborating the areas and other details of the hospitals can be collected on any working day from 31.12.2007 to 15.1.2008 upto 5.00 p.m. by paying Rs 500/- in the shape of D.D. in favour of Deputy Medical Commissioner, Muktsar/cash from office of D.M.C., Muktsar. The tender document can be called by post also by sending D.D. of Rs 550/- in favour of Deputy Medical Commissioner, Muktsar. However, in case of postal delay the corporation will not be responsible.
- The bid should be clearly superscribed as 'Tender for sanitation of Hospital premises' and should reach the O/o Deputy Medical Commissioner, Muktsar by 16.1.2008 on or before 5.00 p.m. and it shall be opened in presence of contractors/their authorised representatives on 17.1.2008 at 11.30 a.m.
- It should be written on the envelope 'NOT BE OPENED EXCEPT BEFORE THE COMMITTEE'.
- The bidder must have its own EPF No. allotted by RPF or applied for Provident fund no., However, the award will be subject to allotment of EPF no. only.
- The bidder shall have to furnish earnest money equivalent to 2% of the amount tendered in the shape of Demand draft only in favour of Deputy Medical Commissioner, Muktsar payable at Muktsar which will be refunded cost after finalisation of the tender, bids not accompanied by earnest money or with inadequate earnest money will be rejected.
- The contractor, on intimation of the acceptance from this office regarding contract will have to furnish performance security in favour of Senior Medical Officer/In-Charge of the concerned hospital, and the agreement for the services will also be made between the bidder & Senior Medical Officer, i/c Civil Hospital, Muktsar.
- DMC, Muktsar reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders without assigning any reason.
- If the offer happens to be closed on date of receipt/opening of bids as specified, the bid will be received and opened on the next working day at the same time and venue.

Sd/- Deputy Medical Commissioner PHCS, Muktsar.

DPR/Pb.-1033-C

PUBLIC NOTICE GOVERNMENT OF PUNJAB DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

- Punjab Government has decided to grant compensatory earned leave to the teachers of the School Education Department who are required to attend the Seminars/Teacher Training Programmes under the mandatory teacher programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The State Government has also decided to re-schedule the training programmes under the SSA with effect from next year in a manner that it does not affect the study hours of the students. New innovations shall be made in the training programmes so as to make the training more useful, inter-active and interesting.
- TADA is being paid to the teachers who participate in the Seminars.
- The State Government in the Education Department is left with no option except to hold these training programmes during the winter break as it will not otherwise be possible to conduct these programmes during current academic session. If the training programmes are postponed it is likely to affect the study of the students during the lag end of the academic session.
- Withdrawing Training Programmes at this stage will result in non-accomplishment of the current plan approved by Government of India under SSA and may deprive the State Government from taking the benefits of the scheme of the SSA for the next year.
- The decision to organize seminars during the holidays was taken on the request of various Associations/Unions of the Education Department as the seminars conducted during the regular academic session during previous years had been affecting the study of the students.
- Even the Punjab School Education Board (PSEB) has decided to hold the Seminars and Orientation Courses for the officers and employees of the Board to upgrade the skill and to make aware with the modern techniques. The PSEB Employee Union and PSEB Officers' Association appreciated this decision of the Board.
- Appointments against various vacant posts of teachers are being made by the State Government within a period of three months i.e. latest by 31.3.2008. All the vacancies (approximately 10,000 in Primary and 4000 in Secondary) shall be filled up by recruiting teacher fellows on contract basis for a period of three and half years. The services of the teachers so recruited shall be considered for regularization by the State Government after a period of three and half years after verifying their work and conduct.
- The Government has taken a decision not to deploy the teachers for any non-teaching job. However, the directions are being reiterated once again to Deputy Commissioners.
- Handing over of some educational institutions to the Panchayati Raj Organization and the Local Bodies has been effected in compliance with the provisions made in the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Constitution. However, the State Government is committed to impart quality education in all the schools.
- All affiliated and recognized educational institutions are being regulated by the State Government so as to watch the interest of the employees engaged by such institutions as well as to ensure that such institutions impart quality education and other similar issues related with these institutions. A bill in this regard was passed by the Punjab Vidhan Sabha in the last session.
- One Adarsh School is being opened in every constituency at a cost of Rs. 4 crores each to impart quality education to intelligent students from economically backward families, free of cost, and to create the areas of excellence in the education sector.
- Three existing Senior Secondary Schools in every constituency (351 Schools overall) shall be upgraded and provided with all the facilities including Library, adequate laboratories for the students and filling all the vacant posts of staff in all four streams i.e. Arts, Medical, Non-Medical and Commerce. The project outlay is 142 crore rupees.
- Salary of all the employees which was withheld due to some administrative reasons is being released.
- The State Government has also decided to strengthen the Monitoring and Inspection system to improve the quality of education in the schools.
- The State Government has issued 15 appointment letters to Mistresses and 452 appointment letters to Classical and Vocational Teachers (Art & Craft, Home Science, Agriculture, Sewing etc.) teachers. Also 25 appointments as Teachers and 82 appointments as Clerks on compassionate grounds have been made. In addition, promotions of 272 Masters to Headmasters, 624 E.Ts, Classical and Vocational Teachers and Non-teaching staff i.e. Clerks to Masters, have also taken place during the current year. The process of promotion of Masters to Lecturers is under way and it shall be completed expeditiously.
- The process of promotion of BPEOs is under way and it shall be completed expeditiously. Promotional J.B.T. as Head Teachers (819) and Promotions from Head Teachers to Centre Head Teachers (133) had already been made. By 31.3.2008 more 829 Head Teachers and 139 Centre Head Teachers will be promoted.
- The State Government has cleared all pending grant in aid to the Government Aided Schools.

Let us all co-operate to make education in our schools efficient and effective.

Issued by:
 DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
 AND
 PUNJAB SCHOOL EDUCATION BOARD

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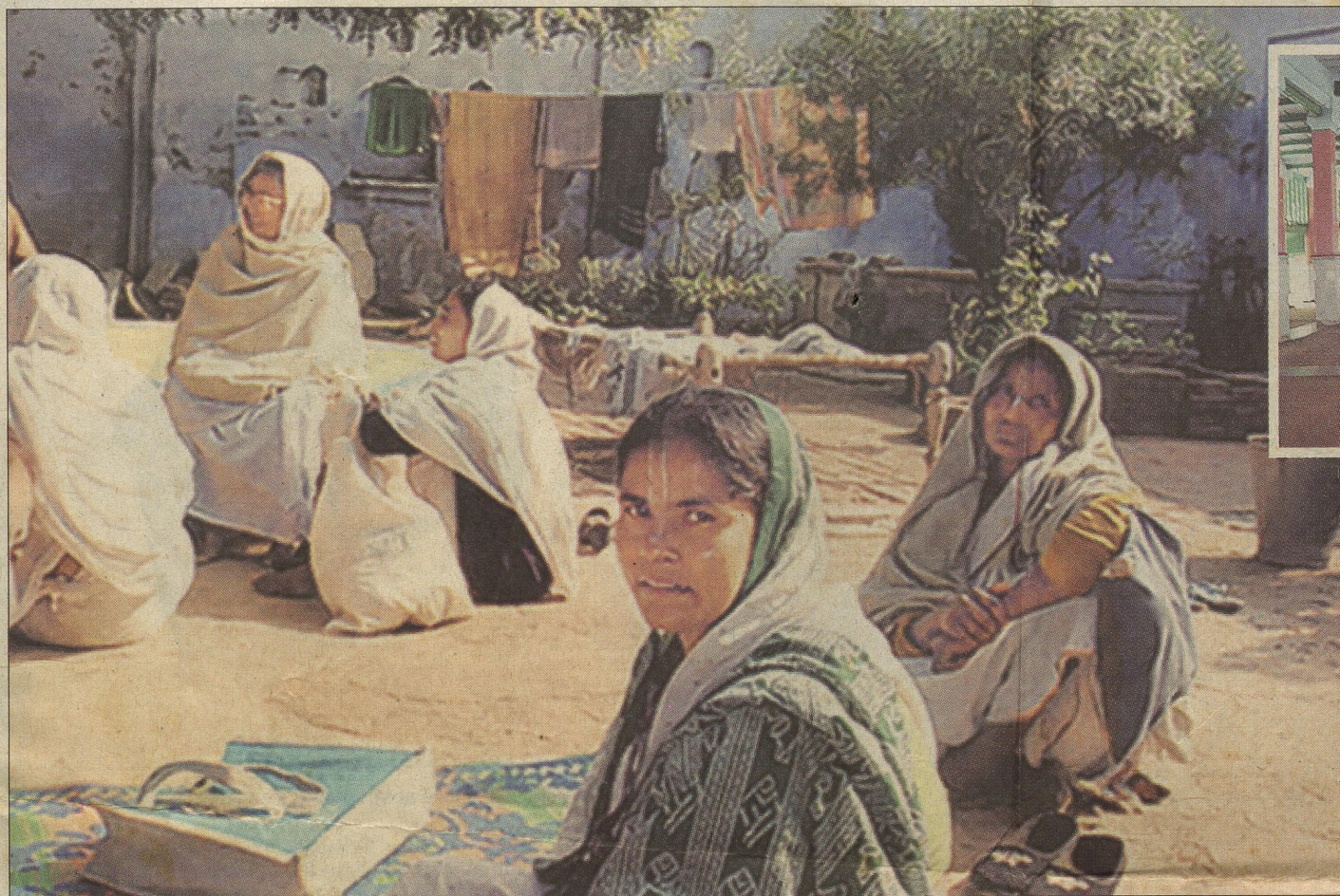
THE FOURTH K. C. Mammen Mappillai Memorial Lecture on Thursday evening at the Imperial Hotel, New Delhi, was one of the most moving experiences I've had recently. Just to remind you, Mr Mappillai was the founder of the *Malayala Manorama*, the historic 118-year-old newspaper that ranks up there in the world. In pre-Independence days, Mr Mappillai was jailed for two years in his home state, Travancore, for his progressive views and his property confiscated, but it all came together and bloomed again after 1947. This year's talk in his memory was by Sir Harold Evans, former editor of *The Sunday Times* (London), on 'Freedom of the press in the age of violence'. But in fact, it was about why any one of us does anything with correctness, conviction, courage and clarity (the Four Cs, like for a diamond?). It was as good as listening to a fine sermon or *pravachan*, so I thought you might like to hear about some of the people he spoke of.

Evans himself presided over the breaking of several famous news stories in his country, like the exposure of Kim Philby as a Soviet spy and the tragedy of the thalidomide babies, crusading for and winning them compensation a decade later. Incidentally, Evans addressed three generations of Indian journalists in the Imperial ballroom, including some of the seniormost editors: they were there as much out of respect for Mr Mappillai's memory as for this famous editor.

I found it particularly good, because we in the Indian press, as indeed across our society, frequently squander our dignity and credibility for a mess of sensationalism, for short-term gains. We often do *dhoka* with goods and services and in the press, we fake stings, sneak shots of people crying in jail and conduct trials by media in the most appallingly improper way. And most unforgivably, we 'dumb it down', insulting our readers.

When you iron things out flat, when you close situations out as 'boring' you fail to see patterns, you miss connections. Mehmet Ali Agca, long wanting parole from a Turkish jail, belongs to an ultra-nationalist group, the Grey Wolves. He's been in jail since 1981 for trying to kill the late John Paul II, the pope Indians remember for telling them on Dipavali day, 1999, that he hoped the third millennium would be Christianity's era of Indian conversions, just as the second had been American and the first, European. Agca had been jailed earlier, said Evans, but soon escaped with the help of security forces, for gunning down, in 1979, moderate Abdi Ipecki, editor of *Milleyet*, the most influential paper. "Yet in recent media outlet mentioning the prospect release in 2006 failed to mention the murderer of Ipecki," mourned

At the Imperial ballroom, Sir Harold addressed three generations of journalists, including some of the seniormost editors. They were there as much out of respect for Mr Mappillai's memory as for this famous editor.



Usha Rai

MA DHAM, the biggest home for widows in the country, providing shelter to 500 women and children was opened yesterday right at the entrance to Vrindavan. Last evening, Pandit Jasraj sang there to invoke the gods to bless the new home and its inmates. This was followed by a *Bhajan Sandhya* by Venugopal Goswami of the Radha Raman Mandir. Earlier too, Pandit Jasraj, a devotee of Lord Krishna, held a concert in Delhi to raise funds for the construction of Ma Dham.

Contemporary culture has just begun to address the issue of an estimated 33 million widows in India. As per the 1991 census, widows account for 9 per cent of our female population. Every fourth house has a widow and 40 per cent of them are over 50 years old. Vrindavan,



WOMEN we don't want

The widows of Vrindavan are a national shame. A new home for them opened yesterday to begin healing the wounds of religion

place of our holiest love idylls, is, as everyone knows, the dumping ground for such unwanted women. According to the Vrindavan Municipal Corporation study of 2006, there are over 3105 widows in Vrindavan town itself. And across Braj bhumi - Radhakund, Goverdhan, Barsana, Mathura - there are estimated to be another 2000 to 2500 widows.

The plight of Bengali widows in particular has been pathetic. Their lives ended with that of their husbands as many of them were burnt alive as *satis* on the funeral pyre of the dead men. Between 1815 and 1828, some 8135 widows were burnt alive as *satis* in Bengal. Those who escaped the pyre were banished to the holy cities. Across India,

widows were considered inauspicious, and many of them from upper castes were forced to leave their homes and spend their lives in prayer and meditation in Varanasi and Vrindavan.

Their heads shaven, they were compelled to wear coarse white saris, ate frugally, were debarred from weddings and other religious functions and lived almost like outcastes in their own homes until they were shunted out on pilgrimage. They could not inherit a share in the husband's property and had to be dependent on father or son for life thereafter.

Many such Bengali widows still journey to Vrindavan and are now joined by widows from MP, Rajasthan, Orissa, UP,



IN KRISHNA COUNTRY: Ma Dham is a good place for our guilt money.

Manipur and other places.

But several studies done over the last two years show that these widows do not want to go back home. They have nothing to go back to and are happy in Vrindavan even if it means living on the streets, begging for alms or depending on doles from the *bhajan ashrams* that provide 100 to 200 grams of rice, lentils and a few rupees for chanting at the ashrams for a couple of hours every morning and evening.

To enable them to live and die with dignity, and to wean them from begging, the Guild of Service has been running Aamar Bari, a home for 120 older widows in Vrindavan, since the mid-90s. Now Ma Dham will shelter more, spread over two and half acres, with residential quarters, a skill training zone, a medical centre, an area for meditation and an administrative block. To provide the atmosphere of a family, widows will be given the responsibility of caring for orphan children from the adjoining areas. These efforts are spearheaded by Mohini Giri and the Guild of Service.

Remarriage, especially of the younger widows, would be one sure way of rehabilitating them, feels Giri. But a recent survey shows that 90 per cent of the 255 widows interviewed are against remarriage. Seventy per cent said there were social and religious taboos to a widow remarrying, 13 per cent said they did not believe in remarriage and five per cent said those with children could not think of it as an option. Yet 30 per cent of them had become widows by the age of 24!

Religious leaders, meanwhile, send out conflicting signals. The Shankaracharya of Joshimath says widow remarriage has been forbidden in the shastras and as ascetics they are supposed to wear white and not attend marriages.

Acharya Giriraj Kishore says remarriage is sanctioned by the shastras and that as the patriarchal system gained strength, women became subordinate to men and their right to equality got diluted.

Manoj Mohan, a respected preacher of the Bhagvat Pura who runs a Sanskrit and Bhagvt school in Vrindavan says the shastras of modern society support widow remarriage. So if a widow is young and wants to remarry, she has the right to forget her past and rebuild her life with a new partner, despite pockets of social taboo: "Widow remarriage is needed for reform in society."

[CREED & DEED]