

Hope for a new dawn in the Valley

Healing touch and economic revival will help

by Usha Rai, who was lately in Kashmir

PEACE is returning to the Kashmir Valley slowly but surely. After 12 years there were Israelis, Japanese and Germans in the Valley and the intrepid Kashmiri had not lost the art of extracting money out of tourists while maintaining that inscrutable smile and lamenting over the years of penury sans tourists. The shrouds were lifted off the chinar and teak sofas and beds. But the houseboats creaked because of disuse and a musty smell emanated from the moth-eaten carpets. The small shikaras were skimming across the Nagin and Dal lakes, laden with flowers, fruits, vegetables, papier mache souvenirs and gifts galore.

At Marco Polo, the large houseboat on Nagin Lake, the visitors' book had been dusted and given the pride of place. The last entry in the book was dated 1989. Aziz had postponed for another year the maintenance work on the tug that had been with the family for over half a century. The carvings on the ceiling and doors of the houseboat were intricate and elegant. Almost every evening an amazing assortment of hand crafted carpets and durrees were displayed as the tourists on the boat were regaled with the story of Kashmiri craftsmanship, the knots per square inch and the history of the patterns and designs in an effort to lure them to take home a treasure.

Close to Nagin Lake was

Kashmir University buzzing with life and activity. Despite strong political affiliations all across the Valley, on the campus there are no student unions and political bonding is strictly taboo. There were a large number of women students as smartly turned out as their counterparts in Delhi or Mumbai. While some wore a burqa, others did not even have their heads covered. Of course, you could not see a skirt or jeans on the campus. Salwar kameez was the order of the day.

In another part of the

that order is being restored and young girls, who could not set out of their homes because of militancy, are being equipped with entrepreneurial skills.

As Zaboora Akhtar, one of the young girls, pointed out, "my life has moved from pessimism to optimism. I hope I can transfer my positive vibes to others in my village." This note of hope coming from a 28-year-old who has lost her elder brother in an encounter augurs well for the Valley for psychiatric disorders and cases of depression have been on the increase. This year over 36,000 cases of psychiatric

Bihari labour to manage their land because the rough work of tilling could make their hands unfit for the finer work of weaving and embroidery.

All the bright young Kashmiri boys have left the Valley for higher education and jobs abroad. After 12 years of violence and uncertainty in the Valley there is hope of a new dawn. Everyone wants to forget the past and get on with his life. Noor-ul-Sama, a young girl training to be a teacher, voices the fears of many in the Valley when she asks "do you think all Muslims are militants?"

The peace that reigns over the Valley is fragile. The militants are not willing to give in that easily. Every second day you hear of militants killing people and being shot down. Outside Kashmir University, close to the Hazratbal, two militants got off a bus and in broad daylight gun down two policemen without any provocation. While many of these sporadic incidents are reported in newspapers, those happening in villages and the deep interiors of the Valley are not even reported.

This June 30-year-old Dilshada Abanu, who was working with the Association for Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), was shot dead in her home in Handwara in Kupwara district, close to the border by unidentified persons. Her husband, a surrendered militant, called Ikwani, disappeared in June, 1997. She had just delivered a baby and was returning home with the newborn and her husband

Three Prime Ministers have laid the foundation stone for a railway line from Kazipur to Baramula since 1973 but not an inch of the track has been laid as yet

sprawling campus, with chinar trees reaching to the sky, 33 handpicked young women from the poorest and most backward districts were undergoing a nine months special course that will enable them to go back to their villages and start primary schools in their homes. At the end of the course, Kashmir University as well as the Human Resource Development Ministry at the Centre will be giving each of them a little over a lakh of rupees (in cash as well as kind) to set up schools. This again is a sign

disorder have been registered and between April and July this year there were 312 cases of attempted suicide.

Land prices are booming and those whose businesses are suffering are now investing in land. When the Kashmiri Pandits left the Valley bolting their homes, sympathetic Muslims held these in trust. Now some of the Kashmiri Pandits are coming back to sell their homes at much higher prices. Another sign of the return to normalcy is the large number of Bihari labour to be found in the Valley. Even shawl and carpet weavers hire



The peace that reigns over Kashmir is fragile

when the bus in which they were travelling was stopped and a gunman asked her husband to get off. That was the last she saw of her husband. Dilshada approached the State Human Rights Commission and filed a complaint with the support of the APDP. Later she began working for them. Dilshada's father and brother-in-law died of a heart failure soon after, and Dilshada was left fending for a family of 10 with no means of a livelihood. She was constantly troubled by militants. This June she was killed inside her home while ironing some clothes. Her six-year-old son was injured. It was a two-line news item, tucked away in a corner of a small newspaper. Some 8,000 people have disappeared in the Valley in the last 14 years.

The number of "half widows" (women who don't know if their husbands are

dead or alive) is on the rise. These women don't know if they should remarry or stay single. By religion they have to wait for four years to remarry if their husbands disappear. Some have been waiting for eight years, going through a great trauma.

It will not be easy to wipe out the years of travail and sorrow and these sporadic shootouts do not assuage the traumatised. The healing touch has to be synchronised with economic revival in the Valley. The state has the capacity to generate 18,000 mega wats of hydel power of which just 0.75 per cent is being harnessed. There is so much fruit in the Valley but jams are all from Bhutan. Three Prime Ministers have laid the foundation stone for a railway line from Kazipur to Baramula since 1973 but not an inch of the railway track has been laid as yet.

Consumer rights

Short weighing ornaments

by Pushpa Girimaji

WITH the festive season round the corner, the union ministry of Consumer Affairs has advised the enforcement officials of legal metrology in all the states and Union Territories to ensure that consumers are not cheated on quantity and price. It has, therefore, suggested that the enforcement officials conduct, during September, intensive inspections of jewelers, super markets, restaurants and hotels and of course sweet shops to ensure compliance of all relevant laws.

The ministry has also advised enforcement agencies to associate representatives of voluntary consumer organisations in this work so that the process is transparent. In addition, consumers in those areas would get to know who are dishonest businessmen.

Referring to the increased sale of gold jewellery during the festive season, the ministry points out that given the high cost of gold, even a small error in measurement could cause a considerable loss to the consumer. And there are reports of jewellers cheating consumers by short weighing gold ornaments. It is therefore important to make certain that jewellers are not using unverified balances or balances that are not prescribed or approved.

The ministry has also referred to complaints against hotels, restaurants, cinema halls, airports, railway and bus stations for charging more than the maximum retail price (MRP) on packed foods such as soft drinks and bottled water and suggested more checks in this area too. In the last several years, consumer groups have reported instances of packed goods, including tea, oil, ghee, bis-

cuts, toilet soaps, rice and wheat flour weighing much less than claimed on the pack. While these are goods packed at the manufacturers' level, the ministry has also received a large number of complaints from consumers about food-grains and other essential household items packed by large department stores. Such packages not only do not carry all the label information such as the date of packing and expiry required under the Packaged Commodities Rules as well as the Prevention of Food Adulteration Rules, but have also been found to weigh much less than claimed on the label. So the ministry has suggested verifications in this area too. Under the Weights and Measures (Enforcement) Act, short filling could invite a maximum fine of Rs 5000 in the first instance and for the second offense committed within three years, the imprisonment could be as long as five years.

Consumer groups should make use of this opportunity to the fullest. Participating in these inspections would give them an insight into various unfair trade practices indulged in by traders and help them educate consumers about it. For example, jewellers should use only class 1 and 2 weighing machines for weighing gold or jewellery and the weighing machines should be inside a glass case and at the time of weighing, the door of the glass case must be shut so that external factors such as a strong wind blowing from a fan or a cooler does not affect the accuracy of the weight.

The presence of consumer representatives during inspections would ensure transparency and prevent corrupt practices.

NEWSHOUND



by RAP

PUNJAB INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Moves ahead on upgradation of Road Infrastructure in the State



OPENING OF HIGH LEVEL BRIDGE ACROSS RIVER SUTLEJ

At Sidhwan Bet on Jagraon-Nakodar Road

by

Capt. Amarinder Singh

Hon'ble Chief Minister, Punjab

on 15th September, 2003 at 10.30 A.M.

in the august presence of



Sardar Lal Singh
Vice Chairman, PIDB
& Finance Minister, Punjab



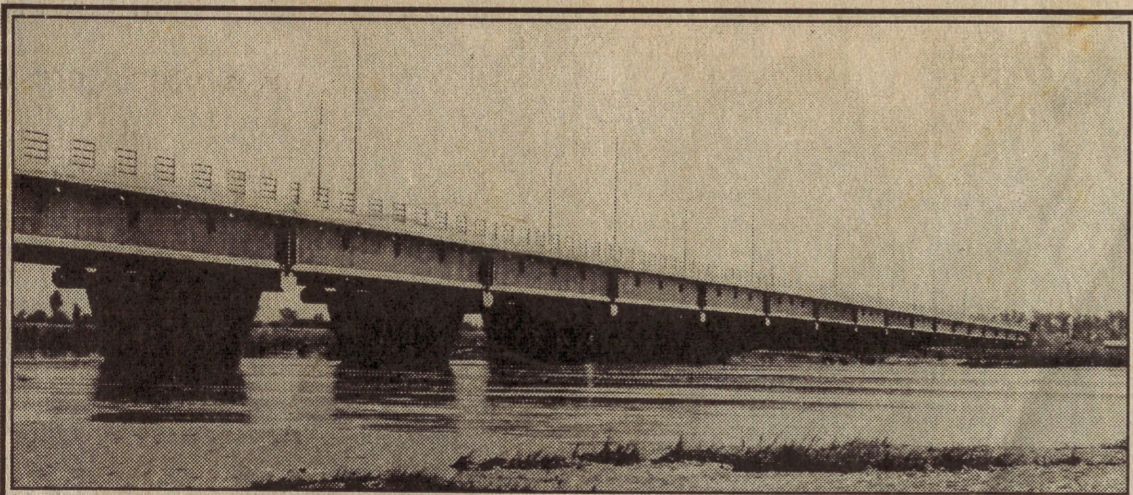
S. Partap Singh Bajwa
Public Works Minister,
Punjab



S. Amarjit Singh Samra
Revenue and Rehabilitation
Minister, Punjab



S. Gurbinder Singh Atwal
Parliamentary Secretary,
Industries, Punjab



- 3rd High Level Bridge completed by PIDB.
- Bridge with superstructure in precast pretensioned I-beam girders of 35.30 metre span with cycle track on either side separated by crash barrier.
- Length of Bridge : 810.00 metre.
- Total project cost : Rs. 39.80 crore (guide bunds under progress).
- Connecting road to Jagraon and Nakodar side under upgradation at cost of Rs. 12.74 crore.

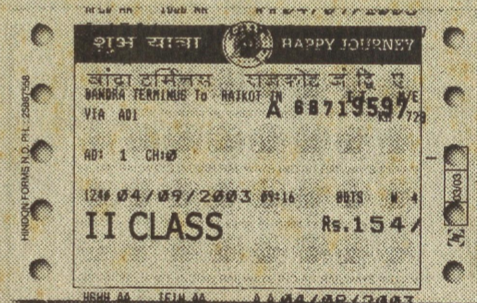
ALL ARE CORDIALLY INVITED

J.S. Gill, IAS
Chief Secretary-cum-Chairman,
Executive Committee, PIDB

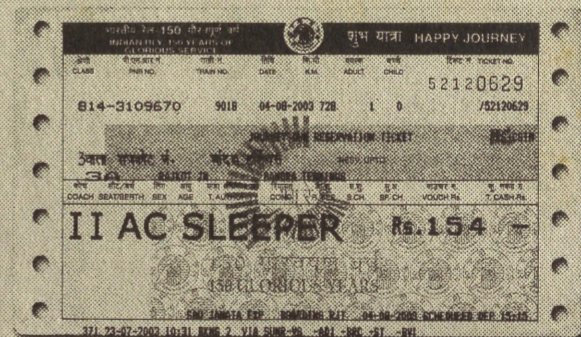
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Saying it with a bit of blood

No special motivation for Suresh Kamdar's obsession

by Usha Rai

YOU will not glance a second time at Suresh Kamdar, 70, if you see him in a bus or on the mean streets of the Capital. With his receding hairline, his modest build and mundane pant and shirt outfit, he looks just another gracefully aging Indian. But Suresh is different. He is the doyen of voluntary blood donors. In a span of 38 years from October 1962 to November 2000 he has donated the most precious gift a human being can give, blood, 151 times. It is a record, he maintains.

Finally, at 67 years of age he has stopped his life's mission not because he could not or would not give the sap of life but the blood banks felt it was no longer medically ethical to accept blood from such a senior citizen. Now he is busy roping in young donors to the cause of humanity. Kamdar has donated his eyes and his body for research after his death.

He first met Suresh Kamdar in 1989 when he was donating blood for the 100th time at the LNJP Hospital in Delhi. There was applause all around as he climbed off the table to have a steaming cup of coffee and the eight chappatis that would see him through the day till he reached home in the evening. Not even the AIDS scare diminished his enthusiasm for donating blood. He would commute by bus visiting clients and trying to get business for his printing press. Once in three months he would stop by a hospital and donate blood. There is hardly any recognised hospital or blood bank that has not been enriched by his blood.

If he has been feted as a hero, it is only by the blood banks, the Lions Club of Delhi, the

West Bengal government, the Delhi government and the Indian Red Cross Society that gave him membership for life. He has also been awarded gold and silver medals and has figured once in the Limca Book of Records. But the bigger recognition like an Ashoka Chakra or a Padma Shree has eluded him. Though there is a terrible shortage of blood all over the country and the AIDS scare has further aggravated the scarcity, no man or woman, who voluntarily gives blood at regular intervals, has been considered for the highest civilian honours.

There was no special motivation for Suresh Kamdar's blood donation obsession. It started in 1962 when he was just 29. He was accompanying a Gujarati lady undergoing treatment at Calcutta Medical College, when he saw an elderly Bengali lady desperately in need of blood. The four relatives who accompanied the old lady were reluctant to give blood. Something triggered off in young Kamdar's mind. The old lady reminded him of his mother and to the surprise of everyone he offered his blood.

After giving blood he felt so good that he decided to make it a habit. The blood bank doctor, M N Manmatha Roy, encouraged him and advised him to stay vegetarian, avoid liquor and food that may have been cooked in an unsanitary manner. Suresh has abided by those golden rules and remains healthy to this day. Just 5'2" tall, Suresh's weight has been constant at 62 kg. He has never felt weak or giddy.

Suresh has been pursuing his mission so quietly and diligently that even his wife and family did not know about it till he



Suresh Kamdar (left) being honoured on donating blood for the 120th time.

For the Kargil war victims, Kamdar organised a camp and collected 400 units of blood. From donating blood, Suresh is now equally determined to get people to donate their eyes and other organs before death. He goes to grieving relatives outside the post-mortem units of hospitals gently persuading them to donate the dead relative's eyes and other organs for medical research

gave blood for the 20th time. The family was not too happy about his obsession but they did not stop him or, more like-

ly, could not stop him.

In 1989 when Suresh was being bled for the hundredth time, his ambition was to surpass a record of 150 donations set in Mumbai. Suresh cannot recall the name of the donor, but he read about his record in the Gujarati media. While he was still a junior in the voluntary blood donation scene, he met in Mumbai's St George's hospital Dilip Udeshi, a cloth merchant, who had donated blood over 100 times. It was wonderful meeting, Suresh recalls. When Udeshi gave blood for the 100th time, the hospital presented him with a diamond ring. Udeshi would sit in the hospital from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. encouraging peo-

ple to give blood and discouraging others from going to professional donors.

There are other voluntary blood donors like Suresh who have donated blood 50, 60 and 80 times. There was a doctor who came to J.P. Hospital regularly twice a year from Mt Abu to give blood on his parents' birthdays. He felt there could not be a better way of honouring them. Inspired by Suresh Kamdar, in April 1991 Zaveri jewellers decided to celebrate their 21st year in the Capital by 150 employees donating blood along with family members.

Even if he is no longer donating blood, Suresh Kamdar continues to motivate and inspire others to do so. For the Kargil war victims, Kamdar organised a camp and collected 400 units of blood. From donating blood, Suresh is now equally determined to get people to donate their eyes and other organs before death. He goes to grieving relatives outside the post-mortem units of hospitals gently persuading them to donate the dead relative's eyes and other organs for medical research. He has himself donated his eyes after death so that someone else can see and his body for medical research. Wish there were more people like Suresh Kamdar.

Torch-bearers of hope in Kashmir

Young women being trained for pre-primary schooling

by Usha Rai

THEY are the brightest faces to be seen in the Kashmir valley. Faces scrubbed clean, there is hope in their eyes — the hope that they can now rebuild their lives seen all across the Valley. Some were wearing the burqa, some had covered their heads discreetly with the chaddar. But most of them wore their salwar kameez like any other college youngster in a metropolis, their heads bared to the world. Handpicked, these 33 young women are the torch-bearers, who hope to bring to villages in the Valley for the first time pre-primary education.

For young girls, who had done their schooling, and some even their graduation, there were no opportunities for employment

There were just no educational opportunities for children below six in the villages of Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. Pre-primary schooling was the preserve of the elite. For young girls who had done their schooling, and some even their graduation, there was no opportunity for employment or entrepreneurship. With over a decade of mil-

itancy in the Valley parents were too frightened to send their girls out to work and there was no work in their villages.

But Noor-ul-Sama, Safia Jan, Zaboora Akhtar, Bushra Khalid, Fouzia Zahoor and Rubeena Bano are eager to contribute to the family kitty. Many of the 33 girls, undergoing a nine months' intensive course to start a pre-primary school in their homes in the villages, have lost a brother or a father and need to work to keep the family fires burning.

Thanks to Vice-Chancellor J.A.K. Tareen, this June Kashmir University began a major initiative to select educated girls languishing in villages in the poorest and most backward districts of the Valley and train them to be educational entrepreneurs. The girls have been brought to the Home Science Department of the university and are being put through their paces. After completing their course, they will go back to their homes and set up schools with Rs 55,000 provided by the university for teaching aids. The Human Resource Development Ministry at the Centre has agreed to contribute another Rs 50,000 for each pre-primary school.

Prof Tareen has been concerned about the dropout rate in schools. Education for those aged three to seven and 18 to 20, he feels, is vital for human development, particularly in the rural areas. For Zaboora (28) and a science grad-



Parents are too frightened to send their girls out to work. Photo Reuters

uate from YK Pura, Kazigund, Anantnag district, life came to a standstill last year when her elder brother, Mohammed Yunus, who she was very close to and who was constantly motivating her to study and make something of her life, was killed. He had three children and Zaboora feels the mantle has now fallen on her shoulders to ensure their education and care. But the atmosphere in her village is repressive. Girls are not encouraged to go out or talk to boys. They have to stay at home. There are thick jungles adjoining her village and when the Army or militants are in the vicinity, the vigilance over young women in the villages is stricter.

In fact, Zaboora inaugurated the Press Institute of India's workshop on media and regional

development at Srinagar University because she symbolises the aspirations and dreams of a people suppressed by over a decade of militancy awakening to a new world of hope, of seeking to rebuild their lives.

Though many of these girls have learnt to cope with death and trauma, suddenly an incident shatters the carefully nurtured confidence. After the Press Institute function, when she went home for the weekend, the entire village turned out to felicitate her for they had all seen her on TV. Zaboora was on top of the world. But soon after she heard that the fiancé of her best friend had been killed in an encounter the very day she was on the podium of Kashmir University. As Zaboora recounted her story, there were sobs and moist eyes in the classroom because all these girls empathised with her. Some of them were hearing Zaboora's story for the first time.

Noor-ul-Sama from Kulgam, Anantnag, has given up her B.Sc course to join the scheme for popularising pre-primary education in the rural areas because she has always dreamed of becoming a school teacher. There were only 12 girls in a class of 50 at the secondary stage. Because her parents are educated and her mother works

for the government, she was encouraged to go to Anantnag to do her senior secondary schooling. She was the only girl in her class. This bright, alert youngster penned down a poem about her past, which like Zaboora's seems to have been troubled:

*"Whenever I remember my past,
I weep and keep a fast.
The days, the nights and the time
Which I have lost."*

After a long, heart-warming chat with the class of 33 when barriers of reticence and shyness were crossed, it was Noor who plucked up courage to ask: "Ma'am, do you think all Muslims are militants?" This was a question that troubled her and her colleagues greatly. While one quick, light-hearted response was: "But what a pretty militant you would make." It took some time to convince the young girls that such sentiments were not shared by the general public.

Questioned about their dress code and whether there was any compulsion for them to wear the burqa or keep their heads covered, the response varied from "We want to keep with the times while maintaining our dignity. This is a highly competitive world", to "depending on the culture of our village, we choose our dress code."

—Grassroots Feature Network

Consumer rights

'Lucky draws' no longer lure buyers

by Pushpa Girimaji

LIKE the previous years, this year too manufacturers of white goods went all out to woo consumers during Diwali. Of course, their advertisements spoke less about the quality of products and more about the 'lucky draws' and the prizes that a lucky consumer would win. If you noticed, there was a slight shift in the marketing strategy this year. While in the earlier years, the accent was on free gifts that accompanied every purchase (such as a music system with a television set), this year, the manufacturers relied on 'lucky draws' to entice consumers.

If you ask me, a flat reduction in the price of the product that helps all consumers would be far more preferable to lucky draws that benefit only a few. In fact a consumer would probably get a better deal post-Divali when dealers are anxious to offload unsold stocks and are willing to cut prices in order to sell. Depending on your persuasive and bargaining skills you can get the price reduced (on the MRP) by as much as 20 per cent. And with reduced crowds, the retailer gives you better attention too.

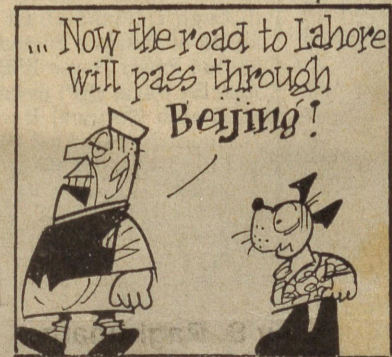
For several years now, manufacturers have used gifts and lotteries to influence consumer choice and have succeeded too. But I do feel that it's time manufacturers re-examined their marketing strategies because I don't think these gifts and lotteries excite Indian consumers the way they did some years ago. First of all, the novelty has worn off and with it, the excitement of getting something free. Second, consumers are slowly becoming quality conscious and so these allurements mean very little if the products' quality is not good. Third, they are quite skeptical about the gifts being really and totally free as made out. In fact for several years, the

MRTPC investigated into these schemes to find out whether the consumer was being made to pay more for these schemes and whether the 'free gifts' were really free or whether the price of the gift was recovered either fully or partially from the consumer by increasing the price of the product prior to the announcement of such gift schemes. And the Commission did haul up several manufacturers following such investigations.

Fourth, certain unpleasant experiences with gift schemes have made the consumer wary of them. For example, there have been cases where the accompanying gift took several months and reminders to arrive. In some cases, the gifts were of substandard quality and without any warranty or guarantee. There were also complaints that consumers did not want the model that came as a free gift and the dealer was unwilling to exchange it for a better model, despite the consumer offering to pay the difference in price. Fifth, once upon a time, a middle class household did not have these products and if some of them came by way of gifts, they were more than welcome. But today, most homes have these and therefore are not so interested in them.

Today the preference is for quality goods that come at a reasonable price and a promise of prompt and good after sales service. As for gifts and prizes, I think the consumer would prefer a cut in the price of the product than an unwanted gift! Interest-free loans can also be an added incentive, provided they are really interest-free, with no hidden costs and the down payment at the time of purchase is not heavy. (Most of them expect you to pay 25 per cent of the cost of the product at the time of purchase).

NEWSHOUND



by RAP

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Where development spells disease Andaman tribals' struggle for survival

by Usha Rai

THE Andaman and Nicobar islands are so far away from the mainland that no one seems to bother about what is happening to the indigenous people of the island, particularly the aboriginal tribal communities that have lived on the islands for centuries. These people who have not ventured out of the forests till quite recently are falling prey to modern development and diseases.

With a third of the 340-km-long Andaman Trunk Road cutting through the Jarawa territory, heavy logging of timber from forest reserves that were their exclusive home, increasing encroachment on forest lands and the deluge of people from the mainland on the tiny islands, it's a doomsday scenario for the indigenous people. They number less than 40,000 in a total population of 5,00,000. While the population of the Andamanese is down to 28 (1991) from 625 in 1901, the Onges are down to 100 (2001) from 672 in 1901, the Jarawas to 250 (2001) from 468 in 1901. The population of the fourth tribe of Negrito origin, the Sentinelese, is also spiraling downwards. Only the population of the Nicobarese (of Mongoloid origin) has been increasing — from 5,962 in 1901 to 21,172 in 1991.

Efforts by NGOs like Kalpavris and SANE (Society for Andaman and Nicobar Ecology) to protect the local indigenous

people have failed and even the rulings of the Supreme Court seem to have got the short shrift.

The story of the Troubled Islands (a collection of articles that have appeared in newspapers and magazines) has been compiled in the form of a small, extremely well illustrated booklet by Pankaj Sekhsaria, an activist who has spent a lot of time researching and documenting developments on the islands. The

People who have not ventured out of the forests till quite recently are falling prey to development and diseases

Andaman Trunk Road (ATR), that connects Port Blair in South Andamans to Diglipur in the North, was once flaunted as the road that would bring development to the island. Instead it has brought disease and death. A third of the road cuts through Jarawa territory. The protests against the road from environmentalists, anthropologists and the Jarawas themselves were ignored and the situation escalated into violence. Large tracts of the virgin, ever-

green forests were destroyed.

The immunity that the Jarawas enjoyed living in isolation has gone. There was a devastating measles epidemic in 2000 resulting in several deaths. It is estimated that 34 to 40 per cent of the tribals have contracted hepatitis or malaria.

Huge amounts of money (over Rs 15 crore) and timber are used annually to maintain the road. The SANE estimates that some 12,000 cu. m. of timber from the evergreen forests is used for maintenance of the road. Combine this with the 80,000 cu. m. of timber officially logged from these islands every year and you can get an idea of the destruction caused to the forests. The ATR, says Pankaj, "is a perfect example of shortsighted planning, as it is not even the best way to travel in the islands. The traditional inhabitants of these islands have always used the sea route because all the towns in the Andamans are located on the coast."

With the plying of vehicles on the ATR a Jarawa boy injured an arm and another suffered a fracture on the foot. It was one of the injured boys, Enmei, who was hospitalized at Port Blair and enjoyed local hospitality, who is probably responsible for the coming out of the Jarawas. Though the older tribals are shunning the road and the ills it brings their sheltered lives, the younger ones, more curious, are often seen on the road. At any given time 25 to 30 of them of 14 to 21 years are always on the road. Pankaj has a series of photographs of a young tribal woman running



A Jarawa woman receiving food from a bus passenger

beside a bus stretching her hand and collecting a packet of biscuits from the bus driver. Since there are a number of buses that ply on the ATR, there is no knowing what is handed to the Jarawas. Pankaj says there are confirmed reports that vices like tobacco, gutkha and alcohol have been introduced and the Jarawas are getting addicted to them. Additionally, there are also reports of sexual exploitation of the Jarawa women.

Among the many recommendations of the Supreme Court appointed Shekhar Singh Commission is a ban on the felling of trees and collection of non-timber forest products from the Little Andaman Island; a complete ban on any wood based units for 10 years; relocating small scale wood based units (saw mills) within industrial areas or next to forest offices where they can be monitored; no further regularisation of encroachments on forest land and the closure of ATR to vehicular

traffic from Miletalak in South Andamans to the northern boundary of S. Andaman Island. It should also be closed to all traffic from Kadamtala in Middle Andamans to Kaushalya Nagar. This, it said, should be done in three months. Further, no person except for the Jarawas living in the reserve should be allowed to enter the reserve unless he/she is permitted by the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests or select senior officials of the local administration.

In May 2002, the Supreme Court accepted the Shekhar Singh report with some modifications. "The Supreme Court proposes, the local administration disposes," says Pankaj. Deadlines set have gone but some of the key orders continue to remain unimplemented.

Attempts to mainstream the tribals will only finish them. "It is not a question of choice but one of survival," say all those on the islands seeking to protect them and their culture.

Delhi Durbar

Omar Abdullah as Envoy to US?

The US remains the most sought after diplomatic assignment in New Delhi. A little bird discovered this week that a high-profile candidate has joined the race for the post of Indian Ambassador in Washington. The post is due to fall vacant in March next when Mr Lalit Mansingh completes his tenure.

Till now, former Foreign Secretary Kanwar Sibal and Cabinet Secretary Kamal Pande were said to be in the race for the hot seat. The latest doing the rounds in knowledgeable circles here is that of Omar Abdullah, President of the National Conference and former Minister of State for External Affairs. Abdullah's advocates are convinced that he would be able to win over the Americans.

No to Sonia photo

Congress president Sonia Gandhi's birthday earlier this month did not remain untouched by the party's factional politics in Punjab. The groups led by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh and Agriculture Minister Rajinder Kaur Bhattal greeted Sonia Gandhi separately at her 10 Janpath residence. Sonia went inside her house after accepting the greetings of the gathering. Soon the "Bhattal group" demanded a photograph with her. Sonia's photograph with any Congress group now could have led to speculation which her access managers were in no mood to oblige. They politely told the "Bhattal group" that Madam would not return.

Andhra polls on March 5?

The just-concluded assembly elections in five states were perhaps not the semi-finals for the India Cup due in 2004. The real

semi-final may well be on March 5 when Andhra Pradesh is slated to have assembly elections. Political circles say the Election Commission, which has informally indicated this date to the powers that be, is going to make a formal announcement to this effect in the second week of January. Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu was here early this week and had closed-door discussions with Vajpayee and Advani. Political grapevine has it that during this visit the BJP and TDP decided that they would contest the assembly polls together.

Amar Singh's offer to Benazir

Samajwadi Party leader Amar Singh, known for celebrating New Year eves in style, invited Benazir Bhutto to join in the party in Dubai where he would be accompanied by Bachchans, among others. Singh first asked her phone number and then said "I will take it from Karan". Singh was not referring to Karan Johar, the celebrated Bollywood director, but to journalist Karan Thapar, a classmate of Bhutto in UK decades ago.

Laloo as SAARC leader

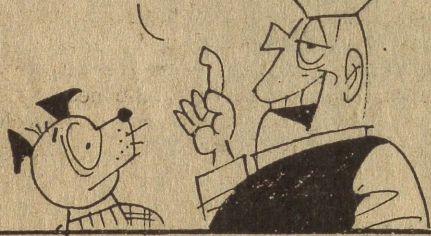
Laloo Prasad Yadav won the hearts of millions of Pakistanis when he bowled them over with his wit, humour and Lalooisms during his visit to Pakistan earlier this year. And the RJD supremo is well aware of this. He confided into one of the organisers of SAFMA (South Asian Free Media Association) that now he wanted to visit Bangladesh. As a wag put it: India is proving to be a pond to the whale called Laloo; now he wants to become a SAARC leader. Watch this space.

Contributed by Satish Misra, Anita Katyal, S. Satyanarayanan, Prashant Sood and Rajeev Sharma

NEWSHOUND

by RAP

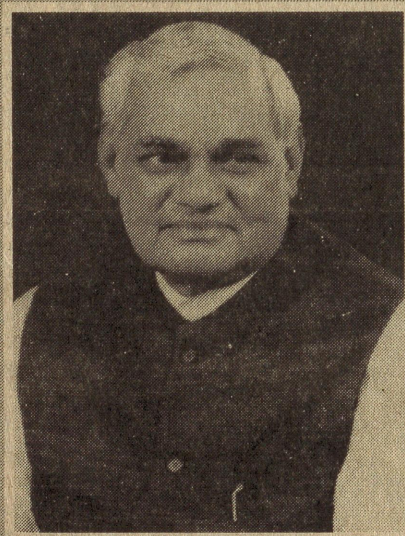
We left it to Congress President to choose Delhi CM!



Shouldn't Delhi CM have chosen Congress President?

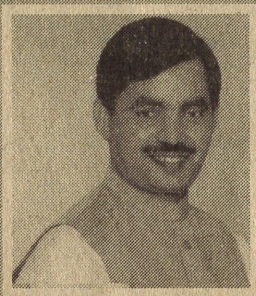
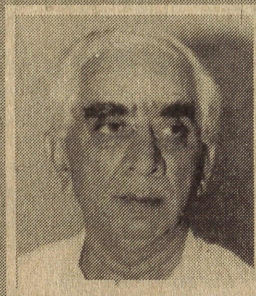


A Promise Fulfilled...



Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri A.B. Vajpayee today launches a historic **Credit Card Scheme**

for the artisans and weavers of India through video conference with Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh in the presence of



Hon'ble Finance Minister **Shri Jaswant Singh** and Hon'ble Minister of Textiles **Shri Shahnawaz Hussain** at 5 p.m. from Panchvati, RCR, New Delhi.

A joint initiative of Ministry of Textiles Ministry of Finance and Indian Banks' Association Supported by RBI/NABARD through Commercial and Cooperative Banks

"Based on the success of Kisan Credit Cards, we have decided to provide credit cards facility to all eligible artisans, weavers and fishermen. The rate of interest on loans given to them will be reduced to 9% a year."

- Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee
(Address to the Nation, Independence Day, 2003)



Today, that promise translates into a reality through **Credit Card**. A new scheme launched to meet credit needs of this important sector of Indian Economy. Credit limits of upto Rs. 2 lakh without collaterals on the basis of Identity Cards issued by Development Commissioner (Handlooms) and Development Commissioner (Handicrafts).

Strengthening the hands that CREATE

Forging a bond in a government hospital Patients do their own sharing and caring

by Usha Rai

BEING in a government hospital, even if it is one of the top ones in the country, can be a nightmarish experience. Nurses are never around to help you when you need them, though they have no compunctions about waking you up at the crack of dawn to take the temperature even though there is no symptom of fever. It is a job that has to be done. So irrespective of whether you slept at night or not, the light is switched on and the thermometer shoved under the tongue or under the armpit.

Even in the post-operative recovery room, where most patients are groaning and moaning as they surface from their anaesthesia and painkillers, nurses are scarce. Your family or the

friends - my guardian angels when I was in distress. They would get me that much-needed cup of tea from the dhabhawala outside AIIMS; allow me to jump the queue (ahead of them) for the x-ray when they saw I was in too much pain to stand waiting indeterminately, or even pick my blood reports.

After the operation all of us were in the same post-operative recovery room. As we resurfaced from the surgery our attention was on the fourth bed in our unit and the young schoolgirl Rashme from Patna, who had undergone a major spinal surgery and was in agonising pain. She would neither eat nor drink. She seemed almost lifeless. All of us coaxed her to eat, assured her she would recov-

er and would keep calling out encouragements to her from our respective beds. The mother, who had been staying in an ashram for two months with her daughter waiting for private room at AIIMS, seemed to be leaning to us for moral support and we gave it happily.

Back in our respective rooms in the new private ward, the bonding, the encouragement continued. Walking with the support of a walker I would call on Mr Sahni morning and evening to find out why he was not up and about. The man had been bedridden so long that he was almost scared to try his repaired limbs. Seeing me he somehow got courage to get on his feet. Soon we were exchanging notes on who was doing how many rounds of walking. Since there was a shortage of wheel chairs, we also worked out an arrangement to share the wheel chair that would take us for physiotherapy.

The lady from Orissa took a long time to recover. Her husband was longing to get home to his two young school going children who he had left in the care

of a maid. His job, his children had all been kept on hold as he nursed his wife day and night through her second operation on the same knee. Rashme was in the old private ward of AIIMS and we did not get a chance to see her progress.

Fifteen days after surgery when I went to get the neat row of stainless steel staplers, that served as stitches, removed, who should I see but Rashme and her mother. The young girl's spine was straight again and she was a happy teenager waiting to get back to school in Patna. I met Mr Sahni again on a visit to AIIMS. He was no longer in his wheel chair. The lady from Orissa I am sure is back, happily ensconced in the warmth of her young ones.

The lack of infrastructure in the hospital, the poor nursing care did not bother us too much because we had shared the ups and downs of a major surgery in a big city hospital. It was a unique bonding.



Patients stretch themselves on the All India Institute of Medical Sciences campus. Photo: Kamal Singh

Lack of infrastructure and poor nursing care did not bother us too much because we had shared the ups and downs of a major surgery in a big city hospital. It was a unique bonding

one personal attendant that is permitted into the ward has to do everything, from providing bedpans to catching your vomit. The sole nurse on duty in the recovery room is busy dispensing medicines, giving injections and fixing the drip.

But this lack of professional care and even basic infrastructure is more than compensated by the unique bonding that occurs among patients and the ones attending on them. It was at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences that I underwent this deeply psychic experience. I first met Mr Sahni, the 74-year-old, who was to undergo a knee replacement surgery, and the young Oriya lady, who had come all the way from Bhubaneswar to have a recurrent tumour removed from her knee joint, a day before surgery.

The three of us were being operated on the same day and were herded together for x-rays, ECG, blood tests and the works. As we exchanged notes and empathised with one another we became caring people. Their relatives and attendants became my

NEWSHOUD



AIIMS: a look back

AMONG the temples of modern India which Jawaharlal Nehru designed was a centre of excellence in the medical sciences. Nehru's dream was that such a centre would set the pace for medical education and research in South-East Asia, and in this he had the whole-hearted support of his Health Minister, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

The health survey and development committee chaired by Sir Joseph Bore, an Indian Civil Servant officer, had in 1946 already recommended the establishment of a national medical centre which would concentrate on meeting the need for highly qualified manpower to look after the nation's expanding health care activities.

The dreams of Nehru and Amrit Kaur and the recommendations of the Bore Committee converged to create a proposal which found favour with the government of New Zealand. A generous grant from New Zealand under the Colombo Plan made it possible to lay the foundation stone of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in 1952. The AIIMS was finally created in 1956 as an autonomous institution through an Act of Parliament to serve as a nucleus for nurturing excellence in all aspect of health care.

The All-India Institute of Medical Sciences was established to develop patterns of teaching in undergraduate and postgraduate medical

education in all its branches so as to demonstrate a high standard of medical education in India; to bring together in one place educational facilities of the highest order for the training of personnel in all important branches of health activity; and to attain self-sufficiency in postgraduate medical education.

The Institute has comprehensive facilities for teaching, research and patient care. As provided in the Act, the AIIMS conducts teaching programmes in medical and paramedical courses both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and awards its own degrees. Teaching and research are conducted in 42 disciplines. In the field of medical research the AIIMS leads, having more than 600 research publications by its faculty and researchers in a year. The AIIMS also runs a College of Nursing and trains students for B.Sc. (Hons.).

Twentyfive clinical departments, including four super specialty centres, manage practically all types of disease conditions with support from pre-and para-clinical departments. However, burn cases, dog-bite cases and patients suffering from infectious diseases are not entertained in the AIIMS. It also manages a 60-bedded hospital in the Comprehensive Rural Health Centre at Ballabgarh in Haryana and provides health cover to about 2.5 lakh people through the Centre for Community Medicine.

Rule book flouted

Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal, who retired last month, was known to be a stickler to rules till the last but when the news of posting of his Director Renu Pal to Washington as Minister Press became public, eyebrows were raised.

Ms Renu Pal, who had been brought to the Foreign Secretary Office from Paris where she had worked along with Mr Sibal, was rewarded for her work by her boss who went out of the way to award her an A plus station by an unprecedented executive order which has to be mandatorily signed by all the Secretaries.

What has ruffled the feathers in the imposing South Block is that Mr Sibal circumvented the well-defined rules that an officer would be posted to a B or C station after he or she has served in an A station.

From Paris to Washington via Delhi means from A to A plus.

Lobbying for Washington

With a few months left for the return of Indian Ambassador Lalit Mansingh from Washington, lobbying for the key posting has intensified in the Capital. Leading the race are former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal and Cabinet Secretary Kamal Pande.

Mr Pande, who is related to Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi and has an excellent rapport with Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani, with whom he had worked in tandem as the Home Secretary, seems to have the upper hand but then Mr Sibal is no pushover as a little bird tells us that his case is being lobbied by a top official. Mr Sibal, who was on the verge of getting an extension as Foreign Secretary, lost out only at the last minute.

Punjab Govt outwitted

The Punjab Government was clearly outwitted by former Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal's lawyers in securing bail for him and his son within a week of his being remanded in judicial custody by the Special Court at Ropar. Badal's counsel Harish Salve had drawn a two-pronged strategy to take up

the matter simultaneously at the trial court and the Supreme Court, raising a question over the legality of the Special Judge's order refusing interim bail to the Shiromani Akali Dal leader.

On the other hand, the Punjab Government, represented by a battery of senior advocates, including P Chidambaram, Udai Lalit and Rajiv Dutta, seems to have failed to judge the moves of the opposite party. Withdrawal of their petition from the apex court for transfer of their case outside Punjab after getting the bail gives an indication that its filing was also a well calculated move.

Wine and cheese parties

Come December, the party scene assumes a frenetic pace. But what is new this year is that wine and cheese parties are becoming increasingly popular and sought after if the attendance at such dos is any indication. Many seek invitations, but others gate-crash to such parties as the hosts can't afford to send them packing as they invariably describe themselves as members of the the Fourth Estate.

NRI minister in Canada

Ontario in Canada boasts of having the largest South Asian community. Indians there are on cloud nine as one of their community has been made transportation minister. Harinder Takhar's appointment as transportation minister was announced by Prime Minister Dalton McGuinty last month.

A jobless Takhar, 52, went to Canada in 1974. He is the first South Asian in the legislature of the province and will oversee an \$ 800 million budget. Takhar is known for his public service and business acumen. He was an associate director of education and chief financial officer of the Peel District School Board, one of the biggest in Canada, for the last nine years. Takhar's minister-ship is the culmination of his experience of studying through night school to get a Canadian degree even as his day jobs, included selling shoes and working in factories. Takhar is married to Balwinder and the couple have two daughters.

Contributed by Satish Misra, Rajeev Sharma and S.S. Negi

B.S.H. ARYA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL SOHANA (ROPAR)
The Formation of OLD STUDENTS ASSOCIATION is going to be held on 21.12.2003 (Sunday) at 10.30 a.m. in the school premises. All concerned who passed matric and +2 from this school are cordially invited on this **Golden Jubilee Year**
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