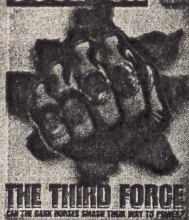


ARCHIVE

24/04/1996

OUTLOOK



THE THIRD FORCE

The false dawn of federalism is nigh. The United Front—a pastiche of regional parties, socialists, the Left—is confident of winning the elections. It projects Jyoti Basu as the PM. But as we all know, a 'historical blunder' is around the corner.

not just numbers

40

crore rupees: the amount the Delhi government spent on an eleven-minute show at the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony in Melbourne. The athlete's allowance was reduced to from \$50 to \$20 per day.

60,000

crore rupees: Mumbaikars pay as taxes per year. Rs 1,000 crore is what the government spends on infrastructure. In South Bombay alone, where the population density is 43,989 people per sq km, about Rs 300 crore is spent.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE Chennamma

HERE COMES THE SUN

Barefoot women power engineers are spreading the light in a rural Andhra engulfed in despair by farmer suicides

by Usha Rai

TILL A FEW YEARS AGO, CHENNAMMA AND Yelamma were stone-crushers. Kalavati and Zayda were house maids working on the campus of the National Institute for Rural Development (NIRD) at Rajendranagar, Hyderabad. Today, they are barefoot solar engineers who not only make and maintain solar lamps but have travelled out to Paderu Mandal of Vishakapatnam to help 124 households in Pusalapalem and Thamingula villages get solar power and establish a one-kilowatt powerhouse for street lighting.

Brightly dressed in colourful cotton saris and reporting for work at the rural energy workshop between 9.30 and 10 am every day—including Sundays when they have to execute an order for solar lamps and panels—these women represent the face of changing India. In a country steeped with reports of farmer and weaver suicides and large-scale unemployment, they present hope. Chennamma and her team have formed the Women Barefoot Solar Engineers Association (WBSEA) and are the harbingers of change. Like Norti Bai of the Social Work Research Centre (SWRC) at Tilonia in Rajasthan, who maps on computers the water available in the villages of Ajmer district, Chennamma, Zayda and the others have shown that they can use the latest technologies for improving village life.

In fact, it was Bunker Roy of SWRC who, on a visit to the NIRD, offered to train



the women and help them set up the rural energy workshop and a five-kilowatt solar power-generating unit. So Chennamma, Yelamma, Kalavati and Zayda made several trips to Tilonia between '02 and '04 and trained to be solar engineers. They learnt to fabricate, wire and set up solar energy systems. The workshop at the Rural Technology Park at NIRD is a production-cum-training and maintenance facility. Each woman has assembled 1,000 solar lamps, costing Rs 3,500 a piece. It takes two days to assemble one lamp, says Chennamma, the president of WBSEA. They also prepare small solar power circuits.

Of the 586,000-odd villages in the country, 140,000 to 150,000 still need to be electrified. In remote villages, it's difficult and expensive to supply them power from the grid.

Impressed by the barefoot women engineers, the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Power Company Ltd commissioned the WBSEA to provide solar energy to the tribal hamlets of Pusalapalem and Thamingula. Chennamma and the others have trained local women in the maintenance of the systems. The solar power generated is enough to provide two lights, one fan and ensure the functioning of one black and white TV set for five hours every day. Each household that has a solar connection pays Rs 1,000 as installation charges and Rs 100 a month for maintenance. The money is entrusted to the village energy and environment committee.

Can tribal households invest Rs 1,000 on a solar facility? Of the 120 households, 80 have paid the full amount. 18 have paid part of the money and the rest are trying to raise loans from local self-help groups.

Chennamma and her team earn anything from Rs 2,400 to Rs 3,000 a month. Life is looking up. □

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A blow for women's rights

Continued from page 1

given to a panchayat member and the marriage register is with the panchayats, the whole process gets easier.

But Ganga Gupta has a word of caution. Since there is social sanction for child marriages, panchayats could register even child marriages without any qualms. But if registration of births and marriages are given to the same organisation, it would deter them from registering a child marriage—there would be proof of age of the child in their own register of births.

Dr George Mathew of the Indian Social Institute maintains that equality of gender cannot be enforced in a patriarchal society without law. Property rights, right to maintenance and other rights in the family including the right over children need a legal base. Mandatory registration of

marriages will restrain wayward men who have multiple relations and are disturbing the harmony in society. The victims are invariably women. Now their rights will be protected. With six state governments enforcing the two-child policy for those seeking elections to local panchayat bodies, there have been umpteen cases of men abandoning their wives when she is expecting her third child. This large scale disowning of wives to stay on in elected bodies has been recorded in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and the other states by Nirmala Buch, former Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh. When expecting her third child, the wife of a panchayat leader was sent off to her parents.

When he did not come to fetch her for several months after the birth of the third child, she rushed home and found he was living with another woman who he pub-

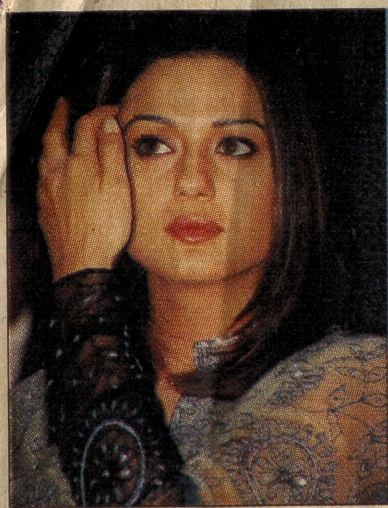
licly claimed was his wife. Many women are compelled to abort the third child so that the man's political ambitions can be met and he stays on in the elected office. Now with mandatory registration of marriages, disowning of wives for political ambitions will also be checked.

The biggest benefactors of the mandatory registration of marriages will be those who marry under the Hindu Marriage Act where there is no legal compulsion. Christian marriages are all registered in the church by the priest. So are Muslim marriages — the *nikhanama* has the signature of the Kazi. Parsi marriages too enter a book of records. However, all these registered marriages should be under the umbrella of a master register. This may well be the first step for working towards a Uniform Civil Code.

However, Shruti Pandey is not all

gung ho about the Supreme Court order. What happens if a woman is not able to register her marriage and is not aware of the law. An unregistered marriage, she warns, becomes zero in law. So before the law comes into force it is important for the public — and women in particular — to have the information, education and empowerment to ask for the registration of their marriage. Does a village woman have the voice to insist on marriage registration? What are the consequences of non-registration? Does the marriage then become 'no marriage' because she has no paper to support her status? In a society where the government system works, marriage registration is fine. But it is not in a society like India where paper work is difficult, says Shruti. "A bad law is worse than no law."

The Tribune 5/3/06 pg. 3



Preity's progress
Page 8

Spectrum

A blow for women's rights

This International Women's Day, March 8, the so-called weaker sex will have something to cheer about. The Supreme Court has asked the Centre and states to frame and notify the rules for mandatory registration of marriages from April 1. **Usha Rai** on how this provision can prevent exploitation



Photo: Kuldip Dhiman

MARRIED at 14 and widowed at 17, Mohra of Krishanar village of Lunkaransar tehsil, Bikaner district of Rajasthan has been reduced to a frail old woman living on the edge of penury. Neither her in-laws nor the maternal side of her family wants to keep her or look after her. Her life would have been infinitely better if her marriage had been registered and there was legal proof of marriage to entitle her to a share in her husband's property.

The recent Supreme Court order on compulsory registration of marriages therefore comes as a beacon of hope to hundreds and thousands of women like Mohra who are illiterate, widowed or abandoned are unable to fight for their rights.

Indian society may traditionally have been caring and nurturing for women, but it is no longer so. Mohra's is a classic case of what could happen to a woman who is not empowered and has no legal sanction for her rights. Mohra's marital home in Luniabas and her maternal home are just 35 km apart in Lunkaransar district. Like thousands of young girls she had no say in her marriage. On attaining puberty, she was left at her *sasural* with *band baja*. Her bright ochre *odhni* and the silver jewellery of a new bride were ceremoniously removed when her husband died and she became a widow. For five or six months her in-laws treated her well then, the discrimination and cruelty began.

Ganga Gupta of the Hunger Project, a resident

of Bikaner working for the empowerment of women through panchayats, says Mohra's in-laws had plenty of land and she was entitled to the 50 *bighas* of land that should have been her husband's share of the property. When she moved to her maternal home unable to cope with the barbs being

Mohra. Frightened to live alone, Mohra went to the tehsildar and wrote off her share of the property to her brothers. Today she is not even with the family. She survives on the 20 kg of wheat she is entitled to as a person living below the poverty line and the small pension she gets as a widow.

istered," says Ganga.

On the obverse side, there is the story of Munnabai (name changed), a Kumawat caste Marwari woman from Bikaner city, who a couple of years ago fell in love and married a young man of her choice. She was a traditional wedding it was registered

transfer petition that has put pressure on the government to make marriage registration mandatory, says Shruti Pandey of the Human Rights Law Network. Seema's husband wanted to divorce her but there was no document to prove the wedlock so the Supreme Court asked the Centre and states

the pulse of the people at the grassroots and are the most legitimate body for registering marriages as well as births and deaths. In fact, all those interviewed were in favour of registration of marriages, births and deaths being left to panchayats instead of creating a new post for this responsibility.

Compulsory registration of marriages, she says, will not only enable women to acquire property but will check bigamy. Across the country there are men who have three and four partners. The women with whom they take the seven *pheras* are abandoned on the slightest pretext and they begin living with the next woman, often leaving the legitimate wife on the verge of penury and with responsibility for the children. Film stars like Dharmendra and Kamal Hassan have indulged in bigamous relationships and, because of their status as public figures, have given a form of sanction to these 'glamorous, love relationships.' There are hardly any cases of prosecution for bigamy in the country. If, however, registration of marriages becomes compulsory, there could be prosecution for bigamy too.

Another very important adjunct of marriage registration will be protection of young girls and boys from child marriages. Though it is not easy to overlook the social sanctions around child marriages, the fact that someone is looking at the age of the couples when they register their marriages, could deter families from solemnising child marriages. Under the new Act that seeks to protect women from violence in their homes, they have the right to stay on in

their marital home. Videographs and photographs are not admissible in a court of law as evidence of marriages, says Ranjana Kumari but the legal marriage certificate could provide protection for women.

A large number of young women in Punjab and Haryana get married through traditional Hindu rites to Non Resident Indians who come into the country flashing their wealth, marry the girl of mama's choice then go abroad and abandon them. A legal document of marriage could deter these NRIs, says Ranjana Kumari of CSR. Even if they forsake them there would be a legal document with which the women can get their rights to property etc. However, the trauma of an abandoned woman is not that easy to tackle. Take the case of Smriti, a journalist who had worked with CSR for a few years. Daughter of a senior army officer, Smriti was married to an NRI 10 years ago. Her family paid for all the marriage and travel expenses of the groom and his family. The groom spent one night with Smriti

then went abroad saying he would send for her. But he never came back and frantic calls to his work place revealed that he never worked there.

The registration of marriage has to be simplified and there should be wide dissemination of information on how and where marriages can be registered, says Ranjana Kumari. The law at present is cumbersome. While Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh have made marriage registration mandatory, Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa and Meghalaya have laws for voluntary registration of Muslim marriages. The Special Marriage Act, the Parsi Marriage Act, the Christian Marriage Act and the Foreign Marriage Act provide for registration but it is voluntary.

The registration of marriages is at present cumbersome. It has to be in a local court in the presence of a gazetted officer who acts as witness. In villages it is difficult to get a gazetted officer who will act as witness to the marriage. If, however, the power to act as witness is

Continued on page 3



Photo: A.J. Philip

In villages it is difficult to get a gazetted officer who will act as witness to the marriage. If, however, the power to act as witness is given to a panchayat member and the marriage register is with the panchayats, the whole process gets easier

heaped on her, her five brothers-in-law grabbed her share of the property.

At her mother's home, Mohra was at the beck and call of the entire family. She was the backbone of the domestic chores. Eight years ago when, through a women's collective, she learnt that she had a right to her share of the land even in her maternal home, she asked her brothers for it. They immediately retorted if she wanted the land, they would not let her stay in the house. This unnerved

The Mahila Samooh (women's collective) took up her case and got her a one-room tenement with kitchen under the Indira Awas Yojana.

Ganga Gupta even offered to help her get back her land. Mohra, however, pointed out that even if she got back her land, her brothers would not allow her to till it. And if by chance she was able to grow a crop, they would release their cattle into her fields and there would be nothing left to harvest.

"Mohra would not have been reduced to this state, if she had not been married as a child and if her marriage had been reg-

istered in the local courts. The young couple had a daughter and was extremely happy for a few years. Then the marriage soured. The young man threw Munnabai and her little one out of the house. Armed with her marriage certificate, Munnabai sought alimony and financial support to raise her child. She also got, through the courts, a share in her in-laws house. Though it was just a room, it did provide her and her child security and shelter.

Though India has been a signatory to international laws, including CEDAW (Convention for Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) and is committed to registration of marriages, it is the recent Supreme Court ruling on a

to frame and notify the rules for mandatory registration of marriages in three months. It said that all marriages, irrespective of religion, would have to be registered. In an April 2005 petition against child marriage too, the Supreme Court had ruled that even for implementation of the Sharda Act that seeks to prevent child marriages, registration of marriages is compulsory.

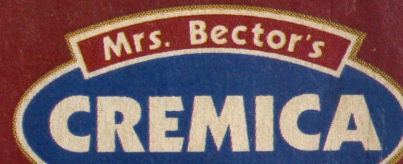
Dr Ranjana Kumari, Director of the Centre for Social Research (CSR), says the women's movement has been demanding for a long time now the compulsory registration of marriages as well as births and deaths. This should be done at the level of panchayats itself because, she says the panchayats have their fingers on



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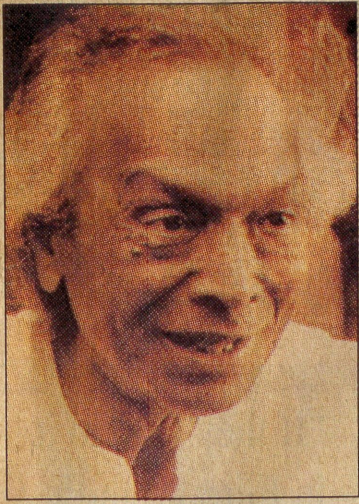
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Naushad, the last mogul
Page 8

Spectrum

The bleak picture of the widows of Vrindavan is changing slowly. **Usha Rai** reports on the economic independence and the life of dignity which is slowly replacing the old attitude of helplessness and living off charity.



Food for independence: The members of the Aamar Bari guild making wadis



Leather pouches and bags being stitched by the women at Vrindavan. Photos by the writer

Wedded to enterprise

APRIL and May are blistering hot months in Vrindavan but the tide of pilgrims to this birthplace of Lord Krishna has not abated. Nor has the population of widows. It ranges from 12,000 to 15,000 and despite all the efforts of the Department of Women at the Centre and the West Bengal government, their numbers continue to grow. While many of them have been abandoned by their families in this city of Gods, others come on their own seeking *moksha* (eternal bliss) after death. Efforts to move the simians, all worthy descendants of Hanuman, have failed and those who have to brave the heat for visiting the temples or for other work, hide their spectacles and packets of food, particularly the *prasad*, as they negotiate the open gutters, the endless flow of garbage and the potted and pitted streets.

As frail widows, many of them walking with the support of sticks, scurry to and from the *Bhajan ashrams*, the monkeys can be seen scampering down temple spires, lurking at the sharp turns of the narrow bylanes

or swinging from tree tops waiting to grab a tasty morsel from unsuspecting victims. Spectacles and dark glasses grabbed are not returned till their grubby hands are greased with a fruit or some food. Despite the congestion and squalor of Vrindavan, more and more temples as well as guest houses and apartment blocks are coming up.

Vrindavan, despite all the charity pouring into the city

Vrindavan, despite all the charity pouring into the city and the endless rhythm of chanting, conch shells and temple bells, seems to be caught in a time warp. Only the discerning will get a whiff of the slow change taking place in the lives of widows and the destitute in the city.

and the endless rhythm of chanting, conch shells and temple bells, seems to be caught in a time warp. Only the discerning will get a whiff of the slow change taking place in the lives of widows and the destitute in the city. Many widows are not wearing the stark white

clothes of widowhood—in fact they have opted for pastel and printed saris—but those living in the Guild of Service's Aamar Bari have stopped going to the *bhajan ashrams* to chant and accept in charity small sums of money and uncooked rice and *dal*.

At the forefront of the movement to give vocational training and economic dignity to widows and other destitute women is Guild of

the home they wash their own clothes, plates, glasses and other utensils after having the meal prepared by the younger inmates.

But the younger ones in their 40s, 50s and even early 60s are eager to supplement their income. From 10.30 a.m. till about 5 pm, with a break for lunch, is work time. Shefali Chakravarty, a skilled craftsperson for leather goods and for tailoring the *poshak* of Lord

excellent *namkeens* are also made by the women but only in season, says Bhagwati, the culinary expert of the home. A Marwari from Calcutta, 60-year-old Bhagwati came to Vrindavan two years ago after the death of her husband and father-in-law. While her father-in-law was a manager of a mill, her husband left after a petrol pump. "I left my son to look after my mother-in-law and came to Vrindavan for peace and solace," she says. Bhagwati is the official *chappati*-maker of the home. The dough is kneaded by someone else but *chappati*-making is her responsibility and she takes pride in the softness of her *chappatis*. Every day a mountain of *chappatis* are made. Bhagwati earns Rs 500 a month for making *chappatis* and for the *namkeens* of the season another couple of hundred rupees. Her son had just sent her four *aris* and she twirled and proudly showed the one she was wearing. Bhagwati's only weakness is tobacco and she makes frequent visits to the shop around the corner for the *paan*. In Kolkata her children could indulge her with a whole box of *paan bahar*, she recalls. But Bhagwati has no complaints. She is happy to be in Aamar Bari.

clean the rice and chop vegetables. They were paid Rs 1,400 to Rs 1,500 a month. When Akshaya Patra went into mechanised *chappati*-making, the work stopped for a lot of the women. Chhabbi, a widow from Bengal, who was with Aamar Bari for seven years, left the ashram two years ago to stay in a rented room and work for Akshaya Patra. She cleans rice and chops vegetables from 9.30 am to 5 pm and earns Rs 1,500 a month. She gets her lunch at her work place and has only to cook one meal a day. Occasionally, she goes to the *Bhajan ashrams* to sing and earn a little extra. She does not find it demeaning. In her mid-50s, Chhabbi has walked out of the shelter of the home

and is an independent member of society. She pays a nominal rent of Rs 400 a month and has a bank account. A lot of widows have bank accounts and their deposits are growing slowly but steadily.

Some 200 widows and young, unemployed women have done a three-month course as nursing aides and most of them are employed in the hospitals and nursing homes of Vrindavan, Mathura and Agra. Chhabbi's daughter, 30 years old Lalitha, came to Vrindavan six years ago not in search of her mother but to improve her own life. Her husband, a house painter, was finding it difficult to get work in Bengal and Vrindavan seemed a good option. So husband in

tow, she landed at Vrindavan and sought the help of Aamar Bari and Guild of Service, where her mother was staying. Lalitha was in one of the first batches to do the nursing aide's course. She works at Aamar Bari and helps look after the old and infirm. She gives injections, drips, bed-pans and sponges and changes the clothes of the bed ridden.

Forty-nine-year-old Usha Dei is her patient at Aamar Bari. When Usha came to Aamar Bari two years ago she could walk and do her work with some difficulty. But a spine injury that occurred after an accident some 15 years ago has resurfaced and today she is confined to her bed and is not

Continued on page 7

Krishna and his companion, Radha, arrives with a few women trained by her. bundles of leather, bolts of brightly coloured cloth for the deities' dresses and the gold piping and ribbons. All those interested in improving their economic status learn to cut and stitch the leather pieces into functional leather pouches, bags to carry loose coins, credit cards etc. While the bags to keep the mobile are Rs 80 a piece, the smaller money bags etc cost Rs 60 to 40 a piece. In a day, a trained woman can make three to five pouches. The older women make cotton wicks for the lamps and the younger ones learn to stitch pretty clothes for the gods and goddesses of Vrindavan. Shefali markets the goods herself to traders in Agra, Jaipur, Mathura and Nainital.

A lot of the bags and *namkeens* come to the Guild of Service office and are marketed by the staff. The wicks for the lamps, the *poshak* of Radha and Krishna, the beads for chanting and the neatly stitched cotton bags to hold the beads are marketed to traders in the vicinity. Some women even make petticoats and blouses. Drying in the sun at Aamar Bari are the *wadis*. When it is not *wadis* the women are busy rolling out *papads*.

The women, sitting in the comfort of the home and working at their own pace, earn anything from Rs 300 to Rs 800 a month. Some

Vocational training

Vocational training is given not only to the widows but to other poor women who want to supplement the family income. Shyama Giri who lives in Durgapura colony of Vrindavan learnt how to make Thakur's dresses at Khorpura six months ago. For making a set of 12 dresses for the Lord she gets Rs 36. She and her 14-year old daughter Uma Giri, who does tailoring, work as a team. She could get a loan and buy the cloth and other trinkets for decorating the Gods, could earn up to Rs 100 a day, she says. Since Shyama's husband is a *mahan* wearing saffron robes a wandering off on a spinturnip when he wishes, the home earned by the two women gets food on the table for the whole family.

In 2001 when the Akshaya Patra (Friday meals) scheme was started by Krishna Heritage (the Bangalore based ISKCON group), a batch of widows from Aamar Bari went there to make *chappatis*.

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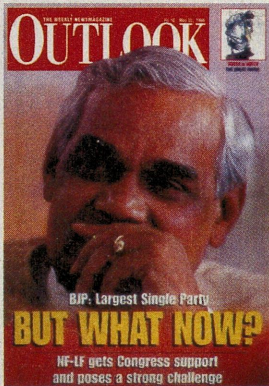
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ARCHIVE



22/05/1996

It's a fractured mandate—just like the pollsters had predicted. The BJP has won 161 seats, well short of the 269 mark. The party is divided over whether to try governing the country. Meanwhile, the NF-LF combine along with the Congress is also trying to cobble together a non-BJP, non-Rao alternative.

not just numbers

988,968

is the number of words in the English language so far, says The Global Language Monitor, a San Diego-based linguistic consultancy firm. At the current rate of additions, the one million mark is just around the corner.

6,000

the number of court-martials in the Indian armed forces since 2000. Armed forces personnel have filed 10,000 cases in civil courts. Of this, 1,800 are 'disruption' and 'vigilance' cases from the army alone.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Sahara

KICKING THE HABIT AND THE DISEASE

With the World Cup tourney round the corner, drug abusers and AIDS victims find therapy in soccer

by Usha Rai

A FOOTBALL TEAM OF EX-SUBSTANCE abusers and HIV-infected? Unbelievable! How could those debilitated by drugs or infected by the HIV virus have the energy for soccer? Not just one team but two teams go out into the grounds every morning with dreams of emulating football's greats. With the soccer World Cup soon to begin, it's a different kind of high every morning. Yes, Sahara, an NGO working with substance abusers and people living with HIV, uses football as therapy. Says Keith, a keen footballer who works with Sahara: "The game makes the player believe he can do it, bringing back the confidence lost due to years of drugs. It also helps combat the stigma and discrimination that he faces everywhere."

Soccer pinpoints traits in individuals that enable counsellors to be more effective. Ruchika, a Sahara volunteer, says you can see the level of participation of ex-addicts, doubling up as players, when it comes to group activity. Some are loners, there are others who may lack the drive and energy needed to come out of a tough situation. The game helps them.

The Sahara teams are from homes at Greater Kailash II and Neb Sarai, Delhi. They have played and won against the Delhi state under-19 youth team. Last year, four players from Sahara signed a one-year

contract to play for the Indian National Football Club, a top club in Delhi. Eight players from Sahara represented the Royal Ranger, another Delhi-based outfit. A Sahara player was even selected to the Delhi team for the Santosh Trophy. It is ranked third in the Delhi Diplomatic International Soccer League. In 2002, Sahara established the Sawmpau Tournament, in memory of a player who died of AIDS.

Football indeed has changed lives. Thirty seven-year-old Mark* was diagnosed HIV-positive eight years ago. He adopted a positive lifestyle to combat the infection and today he is a programme manager at Sahara Michael's Care Home. He is deeply committed to



fighting stigma and discrimination. When asked the secret of his stamina and determination, he says "soccer". Similarly Ranjan*, 31, found he was HIV-positive two years ago but it did not stop him from being one of the top scorers of the Delhi division senior team.

While Sahara is giving young people a new lease of life, its major concern is the disappearance of football fields and open spaces. The DDA grounds near Savitri cinema, where Sahara's teams practised every morning, was sold for commercial use. It costs Rs 4,000 to hire a football field for two hours. Says Keith, "We cannot afford that kind

of money and yet football is our lifeblood." ■

(Some names have been changed.)

CONTACT

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A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

The exploration of space, like the exploration of life, if you will, is a risk. We've got to be willing to take it.

GENE CERNAN, ASTRONAUT

Outer Limits

India comes of space age with multiple high-tech projects

IN consonance with its other global ambitions India is making space too its next area of opportunity and expansion. This month, in particular, could see many missions which seem well on their way to realisation. Some time in the second week of July, for instance, the Indian Space Research Organisation is set to launch the 49-metre tall Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle to inject the INSAT 4C, a 2,000-kilogramme class communications satellite, into geosynchronous transfer orbit. It would be the first GSVL mission to blast off from the second launch pad at Sriharikota, a world-class facility constructed at a cost of Rs 400 crore. Later, the first developmental flight of a heavier lift GSVL, carrying a 4,000-kilogramme class satellite is scheduled to take place in 2008. This type of rocket could in future be the vehicle of choice for launching manned space missions. Meanwhile, ISRO's current thrust is also to build shuttle type reusable launch vehicles that would lift off like rockets in order to insert satellites into orbit and then return by landing on runways like conventional aircraft. While a full-fledged RLV test flight should take place in 2008-09, a prototype version called the SRE or space-capsule recovery experiment will be flown later this year.

There are two important aspects to these exercises. The first is to bring down the cost factor of launches and payload missions to a tenth of what it costs at present — which in any case is a third of what it costs in foreign countries — to become a serious contender in the global satellite launch market. Of course this is dependent on success rate, but to ISRO's credit it had a string of 11 consecutive successes that may end up making India probably the most favoured destination to launch satellites, after French Guiana. Add to that the organisation's recent moves to involve the private sector in outsourcing as much as 50 per cent of the supply of communications satellite platforms to raise the annual production of satellites, and the market for international orders becomes that much bigger. The other significant aspect is that space is the next and obvious long-term investment for countries which have arrived on the world stage. Time was when only two superpowers were the recognised heavyweights in such craft. As India also begins emerging as one of them, that should see the nation itself on an upward trajectory as a high-tech power.

Caribbean Calypso

Team India records rare away series win

A series victory in the Caribbean after 35 years is worthy of celebration. With a bit of luck, Rahul Dravid's team could have finished with a 3-0 scoreline instead of the current lone win. The Test series, played in the shadow of the football fiesta in Germany, has not sprung any surprises but has confirmed a few reputations. Captain Dravid was the difference between the two teams in Sabina Park, where India convincingly defeated Brian Lara's men. Anil Kumble spun a match-winning spell in the last Test, which should put an end to the unfair reading that he is effective only on tailor-made dust tracks. His performance, along with Harbhajan Singh's spells in the two Tests he played, supports the view that spin continues to be India's best weapon to win matches even outside the subcontinent. This is not to diminish the contribution of Sreesanth and Munaf Patel, the two young and inexperienced pacers who bowled incisively throughout the series. Care should be taken to ensure that they don't become one series wonders. India has a history of unearthing good pacers when they tour, only to see them lose form and sting for various reasons. Lakshminath Balaji was the great pace hope after the Pakistan tour in 2003-04. He is still to play a full series since then. Irfan Pathan, touted as a successor to the great Kapil Dev, is struggling to keep his place in the team. Bowlers have to be nurtured with care and persistence.

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The Cult of Nothing

By HARSH KABRA

THE latest in the growing plethora of services ridding themselves of human interface to optimise costs and boost efficiencies is airport check-in. At the Mumbai airport, an airline has replaced its check-in staff with kiosks that allow travellers to establish their identity by furnishing certain information and swiping credit cards, block the preferred seat and print boarding passes. The technology used in these kiosks is fast evolving and, in the near future, it would be possible to photograph passengers and print their pictures on their boarding passes. To sociologist George Ritzer, this would mean yet another step into a world shaped by nothing. In The Globalisation of Nothing, he defines this nothingness as centrally conceived and controlled social forms that are comparatively devoid of distinctive and substantive content. In other words, it marks a reversal on the Zen doctrine of turning nothing into something in that we are now turning real things into things stripped of personalities or lives of their own.

According to Ritzer, nothingness comes in four types: Non-things, non-people, non-services and non-places. Non-things are things that look and cost exactly the same whether you buy them from New York or New Mumbai. Non-people are the likes of counter workers at a pizza chain or telemarketers ruthlessly breaking into your Sunday siesta. These real people become non-people when they enact scripted encounters with customers in ways that don't mandate telling Toronto from Tuticorin. Non-services are services doled out impersonally through such channels as ATMs, websites or check-in kiosks. And examples of non-places come by way of malls, clubs or office so McDonaldised that to speak of them, we could easily borrow Gertrude Stein's famous expression, "There's no there". It doesn't take much to infer that we are turning ourselves into nondescript accessories of global uniformity, which can be intrinsically boring and repressive. To the degree that consumption is increasingly dominated by nothing, Ritzer says that people's lives are similarly involved with nothing. However, the smartest of innovations haven't managed to beat queues, even when they involve non-people at non-places, cloying themselves with non-things and non-services. On second thought then, check-in staff with their plastic smiles, programmed greetings and laboured politeness isn't too bad a deal after all.

BRIEF CASE

Britain wakes up to global warming

By NARAYANI GANESH

Imagine London turning into a Venice. Or London-under-sea. By 2100, a submerged London, and a largely inundated Mumbai, New Orleans, Florida, Tokyo, Netherlands and Bangladesh could be part of sub-oceanic landscape — as the Antarctic ice sheets continue to "crumble into the sea".

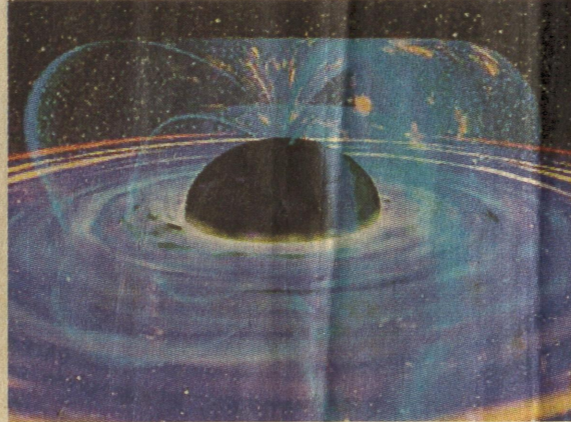
Studying computer models of climate past and present, the US National Center for Atmospheric Research concludes that sea levels could rise by up to 20 feet (six metres) by 2100, if current warming patterns continue. While Washington remains unfazed, the fear factor has spurred Britain into action. Post-Gleneagles — unlike the US that continues to make vague noises about climate change — Britain has gone on an eco-awareness overdrive, promoting privately-funded green projects and encouraging public debate on global warming issues.

The "zero-energy (fossil) development system" (ZED), an energy-sufficient model housing society in London, is relevant because more people around the world now live in urban rather than rural areas. The carbon-neutral urban village — of 82 homes and 200 work-spaces — in the South London Borough of Sutton, in Beddington, BedZED, has evolved a new generation of building that's sustainable and economic. The eco-housing complex is not an idyllic community of eco-warriors or Greenpeace activists: The 300 people living/working here are drawn from different professions and services, leading average middle-class lives. They believe that there is another, better way of life — as opposed to current western consumption and production patterns that exalt volume and ostentation — of simple living and high thinking.

"If everyone on the planet consumed as much as the average person in the UK we would need three planets to support us", declares an inscription at the entrance to the housing complex. BedZED aims to 'consume'

zero fossil energy, do away with central heating, reduce capacity space by 50 per cent, increase recycling of waste, minimise rise in production and get more local food to save on "food miles". A third each of an average UK family's annual carbon emissions are spent on heating and powering their home, private car use, commuting and other land-based travel, and in consuming food miles — with the average UK meal having travelled over 2,000 miles from farm to dinner plate.

Visiting BedZED with a media group hosted by the UK government, I was taken in by the quaint multicoloured mini windmills on the roofs of the apartments. Kendall, a BedZED resident — she's with the bioregional data group, co-promoters of ZED with the Peabody Trust and Bill Dunster architects —



explains that the wind-driven natural ventilation chimney system ejects stale air and pre-heats incoming fresh air.

All apartments enjoy generous sunlight, and have access to a green roof terrace or garden and conservatory. Office accommodation available encourages local economic development to reduce the need for commuting.

Heating requirements are taken care of without recourse to fossil fuels. The ZED system combines heat and power in a unit fuelled by waste diverted from landfills to generate electricity to the entire site with zero net CO₂ emissions. Heat produced as a by-product is captured to supply hot water across the development. A connection to the national

grid allows electricity to be sold when demand is low, and bought back when there is peak demand. The power generated and used — together with energy-efficient living/working space with solar panels, glazed windows and insulation — is a fraction of that used in conventional development solutions.

A Green Transport Plan is shaping up to reduce the dependence of residents and businesses on cars. The homes are designed to be water-efficient and there is provision for on-site water recycling to reduce demand on mains water. Mixed-use development makes sense environmentally, socially and financially. Only one-third of space is up for private sale. Another one-third is key-worker share for those in the service industry like nurses, teachers and firefighters. They pay only 50 per cent of costs, the remaining footed by the Peabody Trust. The rest of the one-third is for social/council housing, so it's a socially inclusive sustainable community.

The UK ZED example is no laboratory experiment; there's a growing demand for more such developments. Phase I of the next ZED coming up in Leicester will be complete by 2007 and all four blocks will be ready by 2011. Steve Harris, architect, says that despite BedZED costing up to 30 per cent more than the going rate for conventional structures in the same locality, there is a huge demand. The Leicester ZED project will be only 5 per cent more costly than going rates. Already, 1,500 people are on the waiting list. More people are getting convinced that a smaller ecological footprint does not mean a lower quality of life.

In India, with our tradition for recycling and conservation, we could do better at probably much lower cost and effort. Gandhi might not have been familiar with the term 'ecological footprint', but he certainly understood then what it was all about when he advocated 'simple living and high thinking'. It's not enough to have energy-efficient buildings — we need to re-examine the way we handle other key factors that determine everyday life and what parameters we use to determine the growth rate. Whether propelled by fear or good sense, it's time to recast lifestyles.

'Quality education is not meant for a few children'

A backward class leader who rose to become the chief minister of Karnataka is heading the committee set up by the prime minister to prepare the roadmap to veer a knowledge society. M Veerappa Moily speaks to Seethalakshmi S and Mathang Seehagiri about the bottlenecks in implementing the proposed 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in institutes of higher education.



Q & A
■ Was the Oversight Committee constituted to silence the anti-reservationists?
 No. The larger aim is to create a knowledge society and to move away from the belief that quantity means sacrificing quality. We have made it clear that there will be no compromise on the brand of the IITs and IIMs. We are not bulldozing them, the quota implementation for OBCs will be backed with capacity building.

■ How will you ensure that the committee's report will not gather dust?

It's a difficult job; I need to sell my idea of creating a knowledge society. Money, faculty, infrastructure — everything should be available. But my goal is to change peoples' mindset. When I proposed the National Law School of India University for Bangalore, everyone laughed at

me. Today, it is the best law school in the country. The Common Entrance Test in Karnataka, which I set up, is a model for several other states today.
■ The first national event to collate data and views of pro- and anti-reservationists planned for July 3 has been cancelled. Why?
 The Oversight Committee is working at breakneck speed. We have only deferred the meet. The five core groups are finalising their report, and we did not want to rush them. The committee will meet on July 13 to finalise the interim report.
■ The IIM/IIT faculty are opposed to reservations. But some directors, who are part of the core group, are suggesting ways to implement the quota. Isn't it ironical?
 The IIMs and IITs have been caged up all these years; they

should be let free. There's a fear psychosis that by expansion, quality will suffer. How are premier universities like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology maintaining quality after admitting over 5,000 students? If they can, why can't we? The mindset must change. Quality education is not meant for a few children. We must create a competitive environment.

■ Some experts are feeling left out in the roadmap preparation. How do you propose to mollify them?

Before the final report is submitted, I will consult all the experts. I want the best advice and want people to critically analyse the issue. I am also writing to all chief ministers so that everyone is involved in the process. We are not here to bulldoze the quota; we will back it up with a comprehensive roadmap.

Can't count the dead

By USHA RAI

The recent UNAIDS report which estimates 4,00,000 AIDS deaths in the country in 2005 is not only shocking, but questionable. All international estimates of infections and deaths are based, or should be based, on nationally available figures of HIV infections gathered from surveillance centres, state AIDS control societies and those under anti-retroviral therapy (ART). Ironically, UNAIDS death estimates for India come just two months after a report published in Lancet that there has been a 33 per cent drop in HIV infection in southern India, which has three of the six high prevalence states in the country. Canadian and Indian researchers studied for after 2000 the HIV infection rate among women in the 15-24 age group. It had dropped from 1.7 per cent to 1.1 per cent.

National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) never puts estimates of AIDS deaths because no one really dies of AIDS. People die of a culmination of various infections with the immune system. Arriving at an estimate of death from AIDS is extremely difficult.

Last year, NACO estimated 5.21 million HIV infected people in India. UNAIDS maintains the figure is 5.7 million because India had not included a large segment of its population when it worked out its estimates based on those in the 15-49 age group. Last year, the then DG of NACO, S Y Quraishi, said there were only 28,000 new infections. This year, NACO has admitted to 72,000 new infections. UNAIDS and NACO should put out more accurate estimates because figures are important to show infection trends. Recent efforts by the National Family Health Survey-III are expected to shed some clarity on the AIDS situation.

What is worrisome is the manner in which the contours of the infection are changing. It has spread from high prevalent states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Manipur and Nagaland) and certain sections of society like commercial sex workers, truck drivers and drug users to the general population.

In several states, there has been a

phenomenal increase in the number of MSMs (men having sex with men) but we continue to treat them as outcasts. Unless there is legal recognition of their sexual preference, the government will find it difficult to cope with this large segment of HIV-infected population who continue to stay underground.

Surveillance data of NACO puts 110 districts at high risk. In states like UP, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the state AIDS control societies are non-existent. There are not enough voluntary counselling and testing centres (VCTCs). Those who know about the infection find it difficult to access VCTCs and get ART. Women and children from poor families in rural India find it tiresome to climb on to a bus and make repeated trips to the big cities for testing and medicine, which is free. Further, because of the stigma and discrimination associated with the infection, people are reluctant to admit they are infected.

ART has enabled people who have access to the medicine to live fruitful lives 15-17 years after contracting the infection. India has been grappling with HIV and AIDS since the early 90s, though ART started only in April 2004. Though Indian pharmaceutical companies are making drugs available to Third World countries at highly discounted rates, in India barely 3.5 per cent of those who need the treatment are able to access it. There were just about 36,500 on ART (government funded and other centres) on February 28 this year. By 2010, the government hopes to provide ART to 1,80,000 — far short of the requirement. Though there is a significant increase in the number of infected children, paediatric drugs are just not available for them.

Meanwhile, the Indian government should have a proper policy on promotion of condoms for safe sex. Condoms have traditionally been promoted in India for family planning. There is a strong political and religious lobby against condom promotion because it is seen as encouraging promiscuity. If the use of condom is not encouraged, the infection will spread.

The writer is a development journalist.

Sacred Space

Find Yourself

God is preparing you to receive the nectar of Ananda. If you get it without the proper preparation to stand it, your mind and body will be shattered to pieces. So He is gradually preparing you and when He knows that you are ready to receive Him, then He comes to you in all His glory.
 Swami Ramdas

Men may rise on stepping stones Of their dead selves to higher things.
 Alfred Tennyson

Withdraw unto yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon him work.
 Plotinus

The way upward from inertia to illumination passes through the sphere of action.
 Swami Prabhavananda

This above all, to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.
 William Shakespeare

Not only are selves conditional but they die. Each day we wake slightly altered, and the person we were yesterday is dead.
 John Updike

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Boggart?

By MARGUERITE THEOPHIL

Long, long ago, Rabbit, known to be a fearless and respected warrior, was a great friend of Eye Walker, a witch with great magical powers. Out climbing a high mountain one hot day, Rabbit declared, "I'm tired and so thirsty". Eye Walker, picking up a leaf, blew on it, turning it to a gourd of water. Rabbit drank it all, saying nothing. Later, when he said "I'm so hungry", Eye Walker picked up a stone, blew on it, handing Rabbit a turnip that he ate with relish, still not saying a word.

They had almost reached the top when Rabbit fell, rolling all the way down to the bottom. Eye Walker used a magic salve which eased his pains and healed his broken bones in minutes. Still, Rabbit didn't say a thing.

Some days later Eye Walker, hoping to go on another long walk, searched high and low for Rabbit, who was nowhere to be found. A week later, she met him quite by accident. "Rabbit, why are you hiding and avoiding me?" she asked.

"Because your magic scares me. Stay away from me."
 "I used my powers to help you, and now you refuse my friendship!" Sadly, she added, "Though I can easily destroy you with my magic, I won't, because we have been such good friends. But, from this day forward I lay a curse on you and your kind. From now on, you will attract what you fear, and your fears will come to you."

A frightened Rabbit now shouts: "Eagle, don't you dare come near me!" If he feels Eagle hasn't heard him, Rabbit yells even louder, "Eagle, stay away from me, do you hear?" Eagle, now hearing Rabbit, can come find him, and kill and eat him.
 An old proverb cautions us: What you most wish for and

what you most fear will both come true! If we believe that we can influence, if not actually create our own 'realities', then it makes sense that by wanting something desperately or not wanting something equally desperately — we give those 'things' a lot of energy to help them manifest in our lives.

Befriending our fears has often been offered as a solution; easier said than done, we hear ourselves say! However, a popular set of children's books shows us another brilliant and often effective way, by introducing us to

The Boggart...
 In Celtic mythology, a boggart was a mischievous household spirit, given to making life miserable for those in whose houses it decided to stay. In the Harry Potter books, a boggart is given an intriguing new twist as a kind of shapeshifter. When anyone looks at it, it changes shape to become whatever that person fears the most.

Due to its tendency to hide in relatively small, dark, enclosed places, such as in closets, under beds, or in tree hollows, it is quite likely that the boggart's natural form is fairly small; only when we give it any importance does it seem HUGE!

Now here comes the best part — to make the boggart disappear, you can use the 'Riddikulus' spell, knowing that boggarts are weakened by laughter. This is achieved by transforming the image of your greatest fear into something else, something amusing or silly — therefore harmless — pointing a wand at the boggart and confidently saying, "Riddikulus".
 What's your boggart? And how will you use the spell?

The writer is a mythologist, storyteller and workshop leader. E-mail: weave@snl.net.

CONVERSATIONS WITH READERS

Misplaced Euphoria

The senate's nod for the India-US nuclear deal is being hailed in certain quarters as a big victory. Gullible Indians are ecstatic. But there's no real reason for the euphoria. They must realise that once the deal is through India will be constrained to stay where it is as far as nuclear capability is concerned, whereas Pakistan will be free to augment its nuclear arsenal. The US is not known to be a reasonable partner. It believes in arm-twisting to extract the best bargain for itself. The deal will limit India's nuclear options. If this is a price for super computers and various other technological benefits that India hopes to get from the US, let's be honest and not make it out to be a win-win situation. India is clearly a junior partner in this deal and will be treated like one.

— Sushila Nair, Delhi

From timesofindia.com

Wronged Mumbai

I don't know how the Reader's Digest came to the conclusion that Mumbai is the rudest city in the world. The parameters used were obviously based on western notions of rudeness and politeness. Such surveys are misleading and serve no purpose. Every city has its share of rude and polite people. The same person can be rude and polite at different times depending on who he is interacting with and in what circumstances. People from diverse cultures and backgrounds live harmoniously in Mumbai and help each other out in time of need. This was borne out during the Mumbai floods, last July. The way Mumbai-baikars came to each other's rescue was exemplary. To call such a people rude is rudeness itself.

Sonali Soumalkar

Heart Check

Apropos of 'Homocysteine can give you a heart attack' (Jun 26) it ought to be pointed out that many studies on Indians, including one carried out in Mumbai (published in the Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis of August 2005), have failed to demonstrate a difference in the circulating levels of homocysteine between groups of patients with coronary heart disease and healthy individuals. Diet habits and genetic make-up of Indians may have a role to play. The cut-off point for the high homocysteine level for westerners may not be appropriate for Indians. The usefulness of this expensive laboratory test to assess risk of heart attack among Indians therefore requires rethinking. Although administration of folic acid and vitamin B12 were shown to reduce homocysteine levels, they had no efficacy in reducing the risk of coronary heart disease itself as demonstrated in recent trials.

— Manjari Mukherjee, Mumbai

Letters to this column should be addressed to Letters c/o Edit Page Editor, The Times of India, 7, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. email:edit@timesgroup.com

A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

The exploration of space, like the exploration of life, if you will, is a risk. We've got to be willing to take it.

GENE CERNAN, ASTRONAUT

Outer Limits

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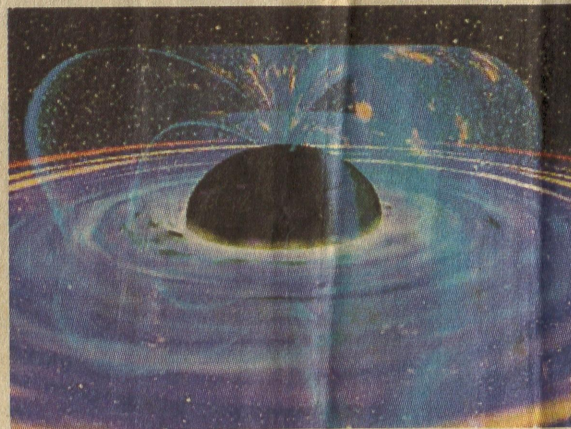
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The "zero-energy (fossil) development system" (ZED), an energy-sufficient model housing society in London, is relevant because more people around the world now live in urban rather than rural areas. The carbon-neutral urban village — of 82 homes and 200 work-spaces — in the South London Borough of Sutton, at Beddington, BedZED, has evolved a new generation of building that's sustainable and economic. The eco-housing complex is not an idyllic community of eco-warriors or Greenpeace activists: The 300 people living/working here are drawn from different professions and services, leading average middle-class lives. They believe that there is another, better way of life — as opposed to current western consumption and production patterns that exalt volume and ostentation — of simple living and high thinking.

"If everyone on the planet consumed as much as the average person in the UK we would need three planets to support us", declares an inscription at the entrance to the housing complex. BedZED aims to 'consume'

zero fossil energy, do away with central heating, reduce capacity space by 50 per cent, increase recycling of waste, minimise rise in production and get more local food to save on "food miles". A third each of an average UK family's annual carbon emissions are spent on heating and powering their home, private car use, commuting and other land-based travel, and in consuming food miles — with the average UK meal having travelled over 2,000 miles from farm to dinner plate.

Visiting BedZED with a media group hosted by the UK government, I was taken in by the quaint multicoloured mini windmills on the roofs of the apartments. Kendall, a BedZED resident — she's with the bioregional data group, co-promoters of ZED with the Peabody Trust and Bill Dunster architects —



explains that the wind-driven natural ventilation chimney system ejects stale air and pre-heats incoming fresh air.

All apartments enjoy generous sunlight, and have access to a green roof terrace or garden and conservatory. Office accommodation available encourages local economic development to reduce the need for commuting.

Heating requirements are taken care of without recourse to fossil fuels. The ZED system combines heat and power in a unit fuelled by waste diverted from landfills to generate electricity to the entire site with zero net CO₂ emissions. Heat produced as a by-product is captured to supply hot water across the development. A connection to the national

grid allows electricity to be sold when demand is low, and bought back when there is peak demand. The power generated and used — together with energy-efficient living/working space with solar panels, glazed windows and insulation — is a fraction of that used in conventional development solutions.

A Green Transport Plan is shaping up to reduce the dependence of residents and businesses on cars. The homes are designed to be water-efficient and there is provision for on-site water recycling to reduce demand on mains water. Mixed-use development makes sense environmentally, socially and financially. Only one-third of space is up for private sale. Another one-third is key-worker share for those in the service industry like nurses, teachers and firefighters. They pay only 50 per cent of costs, the remaining footed by the Peabody Trust. The rest of the one-third is for social/council housing, so it's a socially inclusive sustainable community.

The UK ZED example is no laboratory experiment; there's a growing demand for more such developments. Phase I of the next ZED coming up in Leicester will be complete by 2007 and all four blocks will be ready by 2011. Steve Harris, architect, says that despite BedZED costing up to 30 per cent more than the going rate for conventional structures in the same locality, there is a huge demand. The Leicester ZED project will be only 5 per cent more costly than going rates. Already, 1,500 people are on the waiting list. More people are getting convinced that a smaller ecological footprint does not mean a lower quality of life.

In India, with our tradition for recycling and conservation, we could do better at probably much lower cost and effort. Gandhi might not have been familiar with the term 'ecological footprint', but he certainly understood then what it was all about when he advocated 'simple living and high thinking'. It's not enough to have energy-efficient buildings — we need to re-examine the way we handle other key factors that determine everyday life and what parameters we use to determine the growth rate. Whether propelled by fear or good sense, it's time to recast lifestyles.

'Quality education is not meant for a few children'

A backward class leader who rose to become the chief minister of Karnataka is heading the committee set up by the prime minister to prepare the roadmap to build a knowledge society. M Veerappa Moily speaks to Seethalakshmi S and Mathang Seshagiri about the bottlenecks in implementing the proposed 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in institutes of higher education:

■ Was the Oversight Committee constituted to silence the anti-reservationists?

No. The larger aim is to create a knowledge society and to move away from the belief that quantity means sacrificing quality. We have made it clear that there will be no compromise on the brand of the IITs and IIMs. We are not bulldozing them, the quota implementation for OBCs will be backed with capacity building.

Q&A



■ How will you ensure that the committee's report will not gather dust?

It's a difficult job; I need to sell my idea of creating a knowledge society. Money, faculty, infrastructure — everything should be available. But my goal is to change peoples' mindset. When I proposed the National Law School of India University for Bangalore, everyone laughed at

me. Today, it is the best law school in the country. The Common Entrance Test in Karnataka, which I set up, is a model for several other states today.

■ The first national event to collate data and views of pro- and anti-reservationists planned for July 3 has been cancelled. Why?

The Oversight Committee is working at breakneck speed. We have only deferred the meet. The five core groups are finalising their report, and we did not want to rush them. The committee will meet on July 13 to finalise the interim report.

■ The IIM/IIT faculty are opposed to reservations. But some directors, who are part of the core group, are suggesting ways to implement the quota. Isn't it ironical?

The IIMs and IITs have been caged up all these years; they

should be let free. There's a fear psychosis that by expansion, quality will suffer. How are premier universities like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology maintaining quality after admitting over 5,000 students? If they can, why can't we? The mindset must change. Quality education is not meant for a few children. We must create a competitive environment.

■ Some experts are feeling left out in the roadmap preparation. How do you propose to mollify them?

Before the final report is submitted, I will consult all the experts. I want the best advice and want people to critically analyse the issue. I am also writing to all chief ministers so that everyone is involved in the process. We are not here to bulldoze the quota; we will back it up with a comprehensive roadmap.

Can't count the dead

By USHA RAI

The recent UNAIDS report which estimates 4,00,000 AIDS deaths in the country in 2005 is not only shocking, but questionable. All international estimates of infections and deaths are based, or should be based, on nationally available figures of HIV infections gathered from surveillance centres, state AIDS control societies and those under anti-retroviral therapy (ART). Ironically, UNAIDS death estimates for India come just two months after a report published in Lancet that there has been a 33 per cent drop in HIV infection in southern India, which has three of the six high prevalence states in the country. Canadian and Indian researchers studied for four years

after 2000 the HIV infection rate among women in the 15-24 age group. It had dropped from 1.7 per cent to 1.1 per cent.

National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) never puts estimates of AIDS deaths because no one really dies of AIDS. People die of a culmination of various infections with the immune system. Arriving at an estimate of death from AIDS is extremely difficult.

Last year, NACO estimated 5.21 million HIV infected people in India. UNAIDS maintains the figure is 5.7 million because India had not included a large segment of its population when it worked out its estimates based on those in the 15-49 age group. Last year, the then DG of NACO, S Y Quraishi, said there were only 28,000 new infections. This year, NACO has admitted to 72,000 new infections. UNAIDS and NACO should put out more accurate estimates because figures are important to show infection trends. Recent efforts by the National Family Health Survey-III are expected to shed some clarity on the AIDS situation.

What is worrisome is the manner in which the contours of the infection are changing. It has spread from high prevalent states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Manipur and Nagaland) and certain sections of society like commercial sex workers, truck drivers and drug users to the general population.

In several states, there has been a

phenomenal increase in the number of MSMs (men having sex with men) but we continue to treat them as outcasts. Unless there is legal recognition of their sexual preference, the government will find it difficult to cope with this large segment of HIV-infected population who continue to stay underground.

Surveillance data of NACO puts 110 districts at high risk. In states like UP, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, the state AIDS control societies are non-existent. There are not enough voluntary counselling and testing centres (VCTCs). Those who know about the infection find it difficult to access VCTCs and get ART. Women and children from poor families in rural India find it tiresome to climb on to a bus and make repeated trips to the big cities for testing and medicine, which is free. Further, because of the stigma and discrimination associated with the infection, people are reluctant to admit they are infected.

ART has enabled people who have access to the medicine to live fruitful lives 15-17 years after contracting the infection. India has been grappling with HIV and AIDS since the early 90s, though ART started only in April 2004. Though Indian pharmaceutical companies are making drugs available to Third World countries at highly discounted rates, in India barely 3.5 per cent of those who need the treatment are able to access it. There were just about 36,500 on ART (government funded and other centres) on February 28 this year. By 2010, the government hopes to provide ART to 1,80,000 — far short of the requirement. Though there is a significant increase in the number of infected children, paediatric drugs are just not available for them.

Meanwhile, the Indian government should have a proper policy on promotion of condoms for safe sex. Condoms have traditionally been promoted in India for family planning. There is a strong political and religious lobby against condom promotion because it is seen as encouraging promiscuity. If the use of condom is not encouraged, the infection will spread.

The writer is a development journalist.

Sacred Space

Find Yourself

God is preparing you to receive the nectar of Ananda. If you get it without the proper preparation to stand it, your mind and body will be shattered to pieces.

So He is gradually preparing you and when He knows that you are ready to receive Him, then He comes to you in all His glory.

Swami Ramdas

Men may rise on stepping stones Of their dead selves to higher things.

Alfred Tennyson

Withdraw unto yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon him work.

Plotinus

The way upward from inertia to illumination passes through the sphere of action.

Swami Prabhavananda

This above all, to thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man.

William Shakespeare

Not only are selves conditional but they die. Each day we wake slightly altered, and the person we were yesterday is dead.

John Updike

Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Boggart?

By MARGUERITE THEOPHIL

Long, long ago, Rabbit, known to be a fearless and respected warrior, was a great friend of Eye Walker, a witch with great magical powers. Out climbing a high mountain one hot day, Rabbit declared, "I'm tired and so thirsty". Eye Walker, picking up a leaf, blew on it, turning it to a gourd of water. Rabbit drank it all, saying nothing. Later, when he said "I'm so hungry", Eye Walker picked up a stone, blew on it, handing Rabbit a turnip that he ate with relish, still not saying a word.

They had almost reached the top when Rabbit fell, rolling all the way down to the bottom. Eye Walker used a magic salve which eased his pains and healed his broken bones in minutes. Still, Rabbit didn't say a thing.

Some days later Eye Walker hoping to go on another long walk, searched high and low for Rabbit, who was nowhere to be found. A week later, she met him quite by accident. "Rabbit, why are you hiding and avoiding me?" she asked.

"Because your magic scares me. Stay away from me".

"I used my powers to help you, and now you refuse my friendship!" Sadly, she added, "Though I can easily destroy you with my magic, I won't, because we have been such good friends. But, from this day forward I lay a curse on you and your kind. From now on, you will attract what you fear, and your fears will come to you".

A frightened Rabbit now shouts: "Eagle, don't you dare come near me!" If he feels Eagle hasn't heard him, Rabbit yells even louder, "Eagle, stay away from me, do you hear!" Eagle, now hearing Rabbit, can come find him, and kill and eat him.

An old proverb cautions us: What you most wish for and

what you most fear will both come true! If we believe that we can influence, if not actually create our own 'realities', then it makes sense that by wanting something desperately or not wanting something equally desperately — we give those 'things' a lot of energy to help them manifest in our lives.

Befriending our fears has often been offered as a solution; easier said than done, we hear ourselves say. However, a popular set of children's books shows us another brilliant and often effective way, by introducing us to

The Boggart ... In Celtic mythology, a boggart was a mischievous household spirit, given to making life miserable for those in whose houses it decided to stay. In the Harry Potter books, a boggart is given an intriguing new twist as a kind of shapeshifter. When anyone looks at it, it changes shape to become whatever that person fears the most.

Due to its tendency to hide in relatively small, dark, enclosed places, such as in closets, under beds, or in tree hollows, it is quite likely that the boggart's natural form is fairly small; only when it gives it any importance does it seem HUGE!

Now here comes the best part — to make the boggart disappear, you can use the 'Riddikulus' spell, knowing that boggarts are weakened by laughter. This is achieved by transforming the image of your greatest fear into something else, something amusing or silly — therefore harmless — pointing a wand at the boggart and confidently saying: "Riddikulus".

What's your boggart? And how will you use the spell?

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From timesofindia.com

Wronged Mumbai

I don't know how the Reader's Digest came to the conclusion that Mumbai is the rudest city in the world. The parameters used were obviously based on western notions of rudeness and politeness. Such surveys are misleading and serve no purpose. Every city has its share of rude and polite people. The same person can be rude and polite at different times depending on who he is interacting with and in what circumstances. People from diverse cultures and backgrounds live harmoniously in Mumbai and help each other out in time of need. This was borne out during the Mumbai floods, last July. The way Mumbaiers came to each other's rescue was exemplary. To call such a people rude is rudeness itself.

Sonali Soumalkar

Heart Check

Apropos of 'Homocysteine can give you a heart attack' (Jun 26) it ought to be pointed out that many studies on Indians, including one carried out in Mumbai (published in the Journal of Thrombosis and Haemostasis of August 2005), have failed to demonstrate a difference in the circulating levels of homocysteine between groups of patients with coronary heart disease and healthy individuals. Diet habits and genetic make-up of Indians may have a role to play. The cut-off point for the high homocysteine level for westerners may not be appropriate for Indians. The usefulness of this expensive laboratory test to assess risk of heart attack among Indians therefore requires rethinking. Although administration of folic acid and vitamin B12 were shown to reduce homocysteine levels, they had no efficacy in reducing the risk of coronary heart disease itself as demonstrated in recent trials.

Manjari Mukherjee, Mumbai



Robert Redford:
40 years on
Page 8

Spectrum

In some villages of the Bedia, Nat and Kanjar communities in Rajasthan, there are no women under 25 years. Here families force their girls into prostitution in cities like Delhi and Mumbai. **Usha Rai** visits these areas and recounts the plight of the girls who have to fend for their families while the men idle away the hours

TRAPPED IN THE TRADE

KHATOULI, Bansi Paharpur, Khakranagla and Ludhawai villages, barely 20 to 30 km from the famous Bharatpur bird sanctuary of Rajasthan, are like umpteen other villages of India steeped in poverty and desperately trying to modernise. In the midst of ramshackle houses and narrow gullies with overflowing gutters, a couple of garish double storey buildings stand out like pimples on a scarred and pitted face. They are the homes built on the earnings of young girls of the Bedia, Nat and Kanjar communities, traditionally pushed into prostitution to support an entire family—many of them strapping young men who may have school or college degrees but are not eager to sully their hands working in the adjoining stone quarries. There are no other easily accessible jobs in the vicinity and the few who struggle for employment after doing a course in electronics or motor mechanics are edged out because they belong to “castes that society refuses to accept.”

These are villages where young girl of 10 to 25 years chances of better living for the entire family. Girls are well fed so that they mature early and become bread-winners. Their desire for good clothes, swanky sandals and lipsticks are met quickly because they have to be groomed early in life to look attractive.

Winds of change

There are breezes of change blowing even through these villages. It was in 1988-1989 that Prof K.K. Mukherji, former head of the Department of Social Work, Delhi University, his wife Dr Sutapa, after extensive studies on prostitution and child trafficking in particular, set up the Gram Niyojan Kendra (GNK) and began working in eight villages of Bharatpur to control prostitution, through integrated development. The other prostitution-prone areas that GNK is working in are Naugaon, Uttaranchal and Nautanwa in UP. Harjeet Kaur, a social worker of GNK moved to Roopwas village in Bharatpur and began identifying problems and winning the confidence of the Bedia, Nats, Kanjars and the local community in general

span of 15 to 20 years. Ninety per cent are in the 15 to 35 age group. While older men want young girls, younger men look for mature, older women who can initiate them into the world of sex. Dr Mukherji's studies show that there is growing number of young men who spend time with commercial sex workers just before marriage to ensure they are not impotent. If young grooms are not able to perform within a week of the marriage, they are declared impotent and the marriage could be annulled.

Young virgins are in great demand because of myths that they will cure men of various ailments, including AIDS. It is also believed that having sex with a virgin adds to the man's virility. For “nath uttarna” or the first sexual encounter with a virgin, in Delhi the going rate is Rs 1.50 lakh. In Mumbai it could go up to Rs 2 to Rs 2.50 lakh. As the woman grows older, the demand for her lessens as well as the fee she gets. However, with the increasing craze for group sex, a young woman endures several days of physical assault and takes home a big packet. There is no emotion involved in the sexual act. The young women are totally detached.

hostel and barely get to see their mothers. In addition there are counselling services for the family, eight *balwadis* for the children and seven non-formal education centres. Though the self-help groups are small, they pool in Rs 20 a month and this is their resource bank.

Izzat ke paise mein jeena seekho, is the new slogan in villages. When young girls of the village wear *sindoor* in the parting in their hair and a *mangalsutra* around their necks, they attain respectability and status. Thanks to the efforts of GNK, six girls of these villages have been married and 35 girls stopped from entering the trade. Anarkali (name changed) is 17. She was married last September to a scooter driver in a neighbouring city. Anarkali's three sisters have not been as fortunate—they are in the *dhandha*.

Help at hand

It is Anarkali's 13-year-old nephew Deepak, who studies in a school run by Samridhi, who helped her escape from the traditional trade. Anarkali's mother and brothers wanted to join her sisters in the *dhandha* in Mumbai. She was even sent to Mumbai for the grooming but came back unhappy. On a visit to the school she told representatives of the NGO of her desire to marry and not get into the profession. Deepak supported the idea. He would tell his mother “Get *jijee* married. She will not go anywhere.” Deepak's mother in turn spoke to her father and finally Anarkali was married. Her brother was, however, unhappy. “By marrying her off, you have denied an income for the family,” he said. Now mother and brother are reconciled to the marriage and are basking in the respectability they have earned by their action.

Sunaina's struggle to get out of prostitution is equally laudable. She studied till class 10 and, after seeing the conditions of her sisters in the profession, fought against being pushed into it. Sunaina also refused to marry in her own community because of the disrespect for girls. She was also scared of being pushed into the trade even after marriage. The father said if you marry in another community and they find out you are a Bedia you will be disowned. In her final year of school she met a Brahmin boy, who was interested in marrying her despite her being a Bedia. The two eloped and married. Three years later Sunita returned home with a child.

Both Sunaina and her husband were working and raising their child. Sunaina's defiance changed the family's destiny.

That women are desperate to get out of prostitution is amply evident. Take the case of Kiron (name changed), mother of two daughters and a son. Kiron has four sisters and a brother. The older sister is married. Two sisters are in the trade. When Kiron was just 11, it was her mother who introduced her to the trade. After 14 years in the trade when all her earnings went to support her parents, she met a doctor eager to help her get out. Though married, he began to live with her. When her brother found out that she was leaving the trade, he hit her with a burning log and said “get back into prostitution or our *devtas* will get angry and our children will die. In our community, girls cannot marry

anyone nor can they get support for an independent life.” Despite all the pressures, Kiron took her three children and ran away. Her brother could not find her for four or five years. With the money she had kept, Kiron bought land so that she could grow crops and live comfortably. Her eldest daughter is married, her son is now working and the younger daughter will be completing her graduation this year. She wants to be a lawyer. Kiron continues to live with the man who pulled her out of prostitution and maintains that her children are Sardars and not Bedia.

Breaking free

There has been a reconciliation with the brother who burnt her with a log. He too is refusing to send his daughters into the trade and has moved away from the com-

munity. Kiron's sister who is in the trade is also educating her daughter. Both are associated with Samridhi for the last 10 years.

Not all women are as lucky as Anarkali, Sunaina and Kiron. Though Nandini has escaped the flesh trade and lives in a comfortable brick house in a village adjacent to the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, her husband has TB and is unable to do hard work. There is tremendous pressure on her to send her young daughters to join her *nanads* in Mumbai and get trained for the business. She refused to send them initially, and the two *nanads* stopped sending money to their brother. Faced with starvation, Nandini had no choice but to send her daughters to Mumbai. They immediately responded by sending Nandini a *mangalsutra*.

Wide-eyed and innocent,

the little girls were visiting home and express their reluctance to go into the *dhandha*. One of them said “I want to be a doctor or an engineer.”

Along with education and marriage, young girls and boys of this region need work. The Bedia and others, however, continue to be discriminated. Young Samma was eager to start a beauty parlour. Even the DC of Bharatpur recommended her for a loan but the bank just hid her application and never got back to her. So far Samridhi is working in eight villages. It plans to cover 20 villages by the end of this month. The task undertaken by Mukherji and his team is laudable but unless jobs and education are assured, it will be difficult to pull them out of the trade. The young men will continue to exploit them on the pretext that they are not getting jobs.



Photos: Kuldip Dhiman



Young virgins are in great demand because of the myth that they will cure men of various ailments, including AIDS.

are totally absent. You enter homes where cattle are tethered and *desi* liquor is being brewed surreptitiously in a thatched corner of the courtyard. Young men of all ages pour out to meet you though it is the middle of the day and they should be at work.

Demand for girls

There are no young girls. They have all been pushed into the *dhandha* (prostitution) or sent to Mumbai or Delhi to live with aunts or older sisters and train for the business when barely nine and 10 years.

Ironically, these are villages where there is a demand for daughters. Sex selection, practised in so many semi-urban areas of India, is unheard of here. The more daughters there are, the greater the

under the auspices of another NGO, Samridhi.

The task that GNK and Samridhi have taken on is stupendous. In 2003 when Dr Mukherji did his first major study on commercial sex workers, there were 3 million prostitutes in the country. Today their numbers have swelled to 5 million. Earlier those in the trade were from scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. Poverty drove them or their parents to send girls into the flesh trade. Today while 60 per cent of the commercial sex workers are from the backward castes and classes, 40 per cent are from the upper classes operating as call girls, bar girls and high-class prostitutes. Dr Mukherji has identified 16 categories of prostitutes. Prostitutes have an earning life

“If worms crawl on my body, why should I worry,” a young prostitute said of the hands clawing her during a sexual act.

Despite the glamourisation of sex and the lucrative return from sex trade, Dr Mukherji is confident that prostitution can be prevented through education, assured employment and eradication of poverty. In a small way, Samridhi has started self-help groups in the villages it works in. Through tailoring classes it is providing skills to young girls and a primary and middle school with hostel facilities have been attracting some 80 children. The mothers of 35 children in these schools are in prostitution but they want to protect their daughters from the trade.

Most of these girls live in the

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