

IVCS

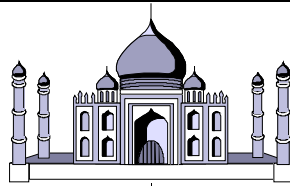
**INDIAN VOLUNTEERS FOR
COMMUNITY SERVICE**



Registered Charity No. 285872

Patron: Robert Evans, Member of the European Parliament

Newsletter



BABY NEWS!

Congratulations to ex-pvs who have recently had babies.

Charlotte and Vince, PVs from September 2005, are proud parents of a beautiful baby girl, Eleanor, born on 26th October 2008.

Fatema, PV from March 2002, and Deepak are proud parents of a beautiful baby girl, Keiyona, born on 17th November, 2008.

WELCOME RETURNS!

We were delighted to welcome a number of ex-pvs to APK in the autumn, as well as two committee members.

On 14th October, 2008, Marijn Leroy, PV from March 2006, paid a fleeting visit, bringing with him some chocolates from his homeland, Belgium. The kitchen staff particularly enjoyed these new delicacies!

On 16th October, Nayan Shukla, PV from 1988, came to APK, renewing the many friendships he has made over the years.

On 17th October, Sarah Voaden, PV from October 2006, and her husband, Manoj Raghav from APK, came to stay in the village with family.

On 18th October, Greg Parker, PV from February 2006, paid another very welcome visit to APK where, as always, he found a number of ways to contribute usefully to the project.

On 19th October, we welcomed Pawan Rawal, IVCS committee member, past resident of APK, now married to Kiran Patel, (PV from October 1999).

On 1st November, Samta Patel, PV from September 2004, paid a return visit.

She was accompanied by her friend, Sushma, on her first visit to a U.P. village, as well as Pushpa Devi, ex-pv co-ordinator, now studying and working in London and a member of the IVCS Executive Committee.

On 2nd November, Bronwen Mason, PV from 1975, paid her first return visit to India and APK after 33 years!! Needless to say, she hardly recognised the village. She was pleasantly surprised to find that there were a number of staff and villagers who remembered her.

NEW PVS

We were also pleased to have four new pvs. Mauro Baldelli from Italy and Liz Doel from the UK came in September. Rebecca Beaumont came in October and Danny Ashton in November.

Finally, in December, Blossom Carrasco, a volunteer who was sent to us courtesy of AFP (Asian Foundation for Philanthropy) came and filmed the pollution that is casting a blight over the lives and livelihoods of villagers from Amarpurkashi and surrounding areas.

AMARPURKASHI NEWS**LINK WORKERS' HIV/AIDS AWARENESS PROGRAMME**

There are now 40 link workers for 100 villages employed under this scheme. Half of them are young women. There are also four supervisors, three of whom are women. There is a clerk, a monitoring and evaluation officer and a district resource person.

This programme is funded by the UNDP through Plan India. It will run for three years.

A 14-day training for the link workers has just finished. Community outreach now begins with the distributions of materials, a school education programme and capacity building for local community bodies.

INTAF SEVENTH WORLD ASSEMBLY

On 8th and 9th November, 2008, the Gramodaya Degree College and Research Institute hosted the seventh world assembly of INTAF (International Task Force for the Rural Poor).

INTAF holds an international conference every three years. We were fortunate enough to have sufficient funds left from the 2005 London conference to enable us to offer second-class return rail fares to all Indian participants coming from more than 200km away. This meant that many more grass-roots development workers were able

to attend than would otherwise have been the case.

Greg Parker, an Australian PV from September 2006, gave an excellent inaugural speech which Mukat Singh translated into Hindi for the benefit of local villagers and students. Participants from Bihar, Rajasthan and Delhi gave inspiring and passionate speeches on the conference theme of "Poverty, Politics and Power."

The second day was devoted to INTAF business. A common declaration was prepared, a new committee appointed and a date fixed for a meeting in February where a three-year action plan will be formulated.

UPDATE ON THE HEALTH CLINIC

Electricity has now been fitted and fans and lights installed.

A laboratory technician and a cleaner have been appointed.

Two blood pressure machines, one stethoscope, two weighing machines, one sugar monitor, a nabiliser and some furniture have been bought.

A homeopathic doctor comes from Moradabad every Tuesday to attend the clinic.

We will now begin approaching qualified, experienced doctors from the nearby towns to ask them to give one day a month to the clinic. If we can get four such doctors to do this, then we can be sure of a qualified doctor one day a week in the clinic.

EYE CAMP

On 7th December, 530 people from Amarpurkashi and the surrounding villages came to the new clinic to have their eyes examined. An eye doctor and his team were sent from the government eye hospital in Moradabad to examine patients. Free medicines were distributed and 39 villagers identified for cataract operations.

29 patients (17 women and 12 men) subsequently turned up for the operation. Because of stringent new regulations, we

could not have the operations done in our health clinic so patients were taken to Bilari Community Hospital where our staff and graduate students looked after them both before and after the operation. The project provided food and transport. The transplantation of new lenses was successful in all cases.

A few months ago, there was a rash of post-operative disasters in some government eye hospitals and as a result, rules and regulations were tightened. This means that free eye camps now cost more than double what they used to. However, we naturally want the best for patients and will continue to offer these eye camps whenever funds are available.

THE FIGHT AGAINST POLLUTION

Recently, we had several visitors to APK who were returning after only a year or two. They were horrified to see the escalation of the pollution. Granular ash frequently falls on face, eyes and clothes in the afternoon and evening while newly washed clothes hung out on the line early in the morning are within seconds speckled with black ash. The offensive stink of chemicals is commonplace now while every day, farmers lose more of their livelihood as their land is polluted further.

But we have not given up the fight. On 20th November, there was a meeting of local, concerned villagers and an action plan was formed. Every Saturday, there is an open day at the local police station where complaints are received. On Tuesdays, a similar open day takes place at the sub-divisional magistrate's office.

The meeting decided to hand in written complaints on both those days. It was also agreed that a party of affected villagers should take some ash and polluted water from the river to the regional office of the State Pollution Control Board in Moradabad and stage a protest outside their offices.

Thus the fight continues despite a discouraging lack of response from government officials.

EDUCATION AT APK

This year has seen a number of changes in the Gramodaya Primary School. The previous year, we provided transport to children from outlying villages but the cost proved prohibitive and we were forced to withdraw that service.

Instead, we decided to focus on local students, particularly those from Amarpurkashi. There are now five primary schools operating within 2km of APK so competition is fierce. Running a small private primary school is seen as a business enterprise, hardly surprising in a land where graduates have such difficulty finding jobs and are often very badly paid.

We decided that our primary school should go for quality rather than quantity. We therefore offered free places (with scholarships given by IVCS) to the first hundred students to enrol. 'Free places' meant their fees were covered but they were expected to buy uniforms and books.

We also changed the school uniform. Previously, this was a typical old-style Victorian-era uniform, very thick and heavy, difficult to wash and totally inappropriate for the Indian climate. The new uniform is a simple pyjama/kurta, easy to clean and cool in the summer.

Finally, we appointed a school co-ordinator/teacher whose job is to liaise with parents, follow up all absences and teach Maths to the older students.

This is all in the nature of an experiment and will be evaluated at the end of the academic year.

The Inter College (a comprehensive with a sixth form) now has 839 students on roll and the percentage of girls continues to rise.

Similarly, in the Degree College, more and more students and more and more girls are enrolling while exam results continue to be excellent. This year, we were also pleased to get new students for the PGRRM course.

A new educational initiative at APK, the Computer Centre, offers courses in basic I.T., a longer more advanced I.T. diploma

and, when there is a demand, conversational English classes.

THE ROCKY ROAD TO SUCCESS

Rameshi, the jeep driver, has been involved in the project since he was a young lad who dropped out of primary school. He is from a very poor family. His father was a labourer who owned less than an acre of land. Rameshi lost his wife to asthma and devoted himself to educating his two sons, taking full advantage of the educational facilities offered by the project.

His younger son, Subhas, was a clever boy and after graduating with a degree, he expected to get a good job earning lots of money. Village boys have no idea of the huge competition they face in the hunt for jobs and he was soon bitterly frustrated when his high hopes were not realised. He turned to drink and when he couldn't fund his drinking, he turned on his wife and beat her.

Since his father would not give him money to buy alcohol, Subhas started stealing. In desperation, Rameshi consulted a doctor in Moradabad who prescribed medicine to help with the drinking. He managed to get a job for Subhas in the local paper factory but because he was still drinking, Subhas could not cope with the work and was seriously injured in an industrial accident. For the first time, Subhas took stock of his life.

Pleased to see a change in attitude in his son, Rameshi decided to take a large loan from the local bank and, on his narrow slip of land by the roadside, he built a small shop and equipped it for digital photography and photocopying.

Now Subhas runs the shop. He took to the business straight away and happily works long hours there. The income is good with potential to increase. For his proud father, a living nightmare has blossomed into a dream come true.

FILM REVIEW

It is always difficult to go and see, let alone review, a film about which there has been so much *hype*. I was therefore very apprehensive when I went to see it.

However, I found it entertaining and well-paced. It was refreshing to see what I would call a *fusion* film and it definitely opens up lots of possibilities for more collaborative films set in India.

The first half is far and away the best. The young child actors are great and the film holds out a lot of promise.

Unfortunately, I don't think that promise is realised in the second half. The riot where the boys' mother is killed is never explored further. The boys' sudden and amazing ability to speak English is a bit hard to swallow and the idea that they would ever have been able to get inside the Taj Mahal and guide tourists around is laughable. It is also a shame to see nothing more adventurous than the typical Indian villain and the usual romantic ending.

But whatever its faults, it is well worth watching. The cinematography is excellent and gives a real feel for the noisy, bustling city of Mumbai and the huge contrasts in lifestyle that make India an endlessly fascinating country.

COMING EVENTS

- The next meeting of the Executive Committee will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 31st May 2009 at 2 pm. (*Please note earlier time.*) All members are welcome, especially those interested in becoming trustees.
- The next orientation for prospective project visitors will be held on Saturday 7th February from 2pm – 5pm.
- The Twenty-Eighth A.G.M. (Annual General Meeting) of IVCS will be held at the IVCS office on Sunday, 13th September at 12 noon. All members are welcome. Lunch will be provided.

