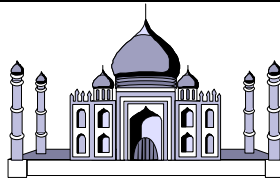




*Patron: Robert Evans, former Member of the European Parliament*

# Newsletter



## **A NEW LOOK for IVCS!**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> June 2010, IVCS will officially become VRI – Volunteers for Rural India.

After years of tossing around the idea of a name change, we finally made the decision to look for a snappier and more appropriate name and VRI is the answer!

We have revamped the web pages too, with new colours, a new layout and a new logo that will become VRI's trademark.

Visitors who key in 'IVCS' will be automatically redirected to the new web pages.

Here's a preview of our new look.



## **CONGRATULATIONS!**

- To Neel Lakhani (PV from October 2001) and Shilpa Pabari on their engagement
- To Tarini (older daughter of Mukat and Jyoti) and her husband Stephen who are expecting their first child in August
- To M Jolly, PV from February 2009, who is expecting her first baby any day now!
- To Pawan Rawal, (IVCS trustee and husband of Kiran, PV from Oct. 1999) who is now a fully qualified and registered gas fitter and able to carry out a wide range of domestic repairs and installations

## **PV UPDATE**

There were twelve PVs in 2009/2010 – eleven women and one man. They came from the U.K., Canada, U.S.A., Norway, Barbados and Spain.

There were no problems and they all seemed to enjoy their experience at APK.

However, the news is not so good for the coming year. For the first time ever, since we welcomed our very first volunteer in 1971, we do not have any applications in hand. It is difficult to discover the reason for this. We can only guess that the economic recession may be partly to blame and perhaps fear of terrorist attacks on Indian soil. One thing we do know is that there are now many more organisations offering volunteering experiences although what our scheme gives is unique and budget-friendly. Many Indian NGOs also now have their own websites and recruit foreign volunteers direct.

Whatever the reasons, it is very disappointing. If you are a returned PV reading this, please spread the word! And if you have any good ideas for publicising our scheme, please let us know!

### **E.C. MEETING**

On Sunday 23rd May, the Executive Committee that runs IVCS convened. It was a lively, well-attended meeting, covering a range of important issues which included:

- Allocation of the key jobs to be completed before and after the changeover to VRI
- Fund-raising ideas such as a cricket match, an online raffle or an auction
- Ways to publicise VRI and our "Experience Rural India" scheme such as visiting universities to talk to students

### **CONFERENCE**

On 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> June, Mukat and Jyoti are attending the Diaspora Volunteering Programme conference in London. Hopefully, this will provide an opportunity to network with other organisations as well as offer an insight into the successes and failures of a range of volunteer-sending agencies.

### **BRICK SCHEME SUCCESS**

The "Buy a Brick" scheme launched last year has been working well. Although most contributions have been small, there have also been several large donations and we have now raised £2,000.

Bricks have been bought and transported to Jafarpur where work on the first new classroom has begun.

### **AMARPURKASHI NEWS**

- We are sorry to report the death of the headmaster of the secondary school. Raj Pal Singh first came to us as a junior teacher in 1974 and slowly rose through the ranks. He was well liked by staff and pupils but in recent years his health had deteriorated and eventually his kidneys failed. The deputy head, Satya Pal Singh, is now acting headmaster.
- Mukat Singh was again elected Chair of PAVAN, a network of voluntary organisations in western U.P.
- International Women's Day took place on 8<sup>th</sup> March. Adil Hussain, who co-ordinates Kopal III, the campaign against female foeticide, organised a rally and meeting in Bilari which we all attended.
- On Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March, Jan Birch, PV from January 2007, paid us a visit. Jan is now working in Delhi for HRLN (Human Rights Legal Network). She is keen to forge links between HRLN and APK. We have asked for help with our pollution campaign and look forward to meeting Colin, the director of HRLN, when he pays a brief visit to the UK later this month.
- On 21<sup>st</sup> March, the Society for Agro-Industrial Education in India, the official governing body that runs the project at APK, held its Annual

General Meeting. It was particularly gratifying to see an unusually large turn-out. 37 members attended, including all 6 members from Jafarpur village. However, only 2 participants were women!

- This year, Holi festival was much earlier than usual and consequently, the board exams began early too.

In previous years, there has been a break of several days in between exams which has enabled us to organised residential training sessions for staff. This year, there was no such break so instead, we arranged a day's outing on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April. We hired a large bus and took staff and their families to Narora, a small town on the banks of the Ganges. After a leisurely lunch in a beautiful park near the river, we visited Hari Baba's ashram on the way back. The whole day went well and gave both old and new staff a rare opportunity to socialise.

- For one month starting on 1<sup>st</sup> April, the Link Workers' HIV/Aids scheme organised an extensive awareness programme in those villages that had been identified as most at risk. A drama group performed a street play for the villagers and the Link Workers invited them onto the bus they had hired for the occasion. There they distributed condoms, counselled people about the dangers of unprotected sex and explained the facts about Aids.

### **INTAF**

INTAF, the International Task Force for the Rural Poor, a networking organisation founded by Mukat Singh in 1991, holds an international conference every three years. In 2005, this was held in London and in 2008, it took place in Amarpurkashi, India. The next one is due in 2011 and it is proposed that it be held in London again, in co-operation with IVCS/VR1 and AFP.

We would like to hear members' and supporters' thoughts and comments on this. At the moment we do not have a specific topic for the conference so suggestions and ideas on a theme would also be very welcome.

### **IJRS**

The IJRS – International Journal of Rural Studies – is sponsored by IVCS and published twice a year from India. It gives those studying, teaching and working in the field of rural development an opportunity to publish their research, programmes and ideas and reach a wider audience.

For those interested in education and in particular, education in India, the last two editorials have focused on the dire state of government primary education in rural India.

### **POLLUTION CAMPAIGN**

In 1995, the campaign against pollution began. The Ram Chandra and Shakumbhari Paper Mills provided much needed employment for local villagers but they also polluted the air, land and water for miles around.

Despite 15 years of peaceful but determined protest and campaigning, the pollution has only got worse and the factory owners continue to pour untreated chemical effluents into the local river, dump huge piles of ash by the roadside and in the fields and send showers of granular ash flying into the air.

Countless letters and reminders have been sent but few have even been acknowledged. Seminars and meetings have been held and complaints regularly handed in at the local council's open days. In February 2008, we organised a sit-in by the roadside near the Shakumbhari factory. In December 2008, a professional film maker shot film of the pollution and interviewed local officers, vets and doctors. In October 2009, two young graduates wrote more than 30 letters to government officers and ministers, giving all the facts and figures of the pollution. In February 2010, local villagers sent over 400 postcards to the relevant authorities requesting action to be taken. All to no avail.

***Mounds of unsightly ash dumped by the factory.***



***(Photo courtesy of Anita Duggal, pv from February 2010)***

Our struggle to stop the paper factories from polluting Amarpurkashi, the River Aril and the surrounding villages continues. We now have the results of two recent tests. In February, the factory asked UPPCB (the State Pollution Control Board) to test the

water for them while in April, we paid a government laboratory in Moradabad to carry out similar tests. The results make for very interesting reading. Below we give the results of two of the tests.

**T.S.S. Total Suspended Solids.**

**Standard prescribed by the U.P. Pollution Control Board - In stream - 100/50/30 mg/lt**

	Ram Chandra	Shakumbhari	Aril River Downstream	Standard
P.S.I., Dehra Dun April 2002	1500	2900	1780	100/50/30 mg/lt
Regional office of U.P. PCB (Moradabad) Feb. 2010	96.0	94.0	Not done	100/50/30 mg/lt
RTC Lab., Moradabad, Govt. of India, April 2010	4750	6150	3420	100/50/30 mg/lt

**BOD – Biochemical Oxygen Demand**

Standard prescribed by U.P. Pollution Control Board In stream – 30 mg/lit

P.S.I., Dehra Dun April 2002	1070	1370	1400	30mg/lit
Regional office of U.P. PCB (Moradabad) Feb. 2010	24.0	28.0	26.0	30mg/lit
RTC Lab. Moradabad, Govt. of India April 2010	2450	3870	2370	30mg/lit

The UPPCB have always sided with and defended the factory and the quite extraordinary results that they have

produced make it clear that something very odd is going on there!

***Chemical effluent flowing from the factory outlet into the River Aril.***



*(Photo courtesy of Anita Duggal, PV from February 2010)*

**Book Review**

***Nine Lives – In Search of the Sacred In Modern India*** by William Dalrymple  
Bloomsbury: London. 284pp £20(HB)  
£8.99(PB) ISBN 978-1-408800614

William Dalrymple is well known as a writer on India. Originally from Scotland, he now lives with his family on a farm outside Delhi. As a result, he writes with the perspective of a curious outsider but also with the sober and realistic view of someone who is a resident. ***Nine Lives*** tells the stories of nine people in the sub-continent, loosely based on the format of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Despite the title of the book, two of the stories are about the lives of people from Tibet and Pakistan.

In telling these stories, Dalrymple's aim is to keep the 'narrator firmly in the shadows' and this enables the reader to engage more directly with them. Dalrymple achieves this while also managing to bring each story alive by explaining its context. The theme that links the stories is religious devotion in the context of the changing nature of India, although what these tales appear to highlight is that, in many ways, the promise of a modern India has failed to change ancient practices, answer age-old questions or make people's lives any more comfortable than they were before.

To its credit, this book certainly does not take a euphemistic view of India's sacred life. The stories are gritty and at times shocking, even for people who are familiar with the challenges faced by people in the region. The stories include the life of a wandering Jain nun, a Dalit prison guard who once a year becomes divine, a Sufi mystic concerned about the survival of her faith and a man who makes idols.

The book is accessible to people who are new to India but also contains enough to interest people who are more familiar with the country. The paperback is due out in June.

Vince Mitchell (PV September 2005)

**COMING EVENTS**

- The Twenty-Ninth A.G.M. (Annual General Meeting) of IVCS will be held at the IVCS office on **Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> August, 2010 at 12 noon.** Please note the change of date.

Lunch will be provided. All members are most welcome.

