

WALK BEYOND CANCER



Patients and survivors release balloons at the Walk Beyond Cancer 2010 on Sunday.

ARUL HORIZON

■ Around 100 cancer patients and survivors, from senior citizens to toddlers, were among the 600 who convened at the COEP grounds after the five-km Walk Beyond Cancer held early on Sunday morning. They had testimonies to offer on their fight against the dreaded disease.

■ The walk was organised by Highways Infinite — an outfit working on empowering people on cancer control and prevention.

■ It saw participation from various citizen groups, schools and organisations. The Prayas group of Armed Forces Medical College cadets put up a short skit on cancer while doctors from the Department of Preventive Medicine, AFMC, joined the walk. The rest included Prerna cancer support group (Command Hospital), Indian Red Cross Society, students from Army Public School, Symbiosis, Bishop's, Modern College, Ashok Vidyalaya High School and Junior College.

■ "Each one of us is playing a strong role in empowering people on cancer control, from prevention to end-of-life care and help dispel myths, stigmas, ignorance. All these efforts are directed to help in early diagnosis, thereby saving lives. We also raise funds for cancer control campaigns, advocacy and supportive care services."

— DR RITU BIYANI, Founder director, Highway Infinite.

Neetu lands in Mumbai on way to film institute

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TWO months after she was picked up from the Film and Television Institute of India and packed off to Kathmandu by the Pune police, Neetu Singh landed in Mumbai on Sunday.

Confirming this, Kiran Moghe, state unit head of All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), said Neetu flew into Mumbai on Sunday and was planning to reach FTII late in the night or early on Monday morning. Moghe, who was at a conference in Mumbai, said she had spoken to Neetu after she arrived in Mumbai and that she was staying there with a friend.

"I have received no information about Neetu's arrival," said DCP (special branch) Ravindra Senaonkar.

Neetu, it is learnt, is keen to keep her return quiet. When the state government had agreed to revoke her deportation orders in mid-January — this time minus the many conditions it had ini-



She wants to keep her return quiet.

FILE

tially sought to impose — so that she could complete her editing course at FTII, the only condition that was retained was that she should refrain from speaking to the media after her return. Neetu could not be contacted.

FTII director Pankaj Rag was out of town and unavailable for comment.

Dean of Academics Kedar Awati said the institute had received intimation last week that Neetu would be arriving in a week's time. "We are ready to restart her course once she arrives."

Chandrashekar Joshi, the institute spokesperson, said he had no official word on her

return. Gloria Koshy, matron of the girls' hostel, also said she had not received any news on Neetu, but admitted that there was a buzz at the institute about her return.

Neetu, a final year editing student at the FTII, had been deported to Nepal by a 'secret' overnight operation conducted by the Pune police on December 5.

The police took her from FTII to Mumbai and put her on a flight to Kathmandu the same night. The reasons cited by them for doing so were that Neetu was indulging in anti-national activities.

The AIDWA that took up Neetu's case, had maintained that the move was at the behest of Neetu's estranged husband Amresh Singh, a powerful politician in Nepal. The *Indian Express* first broke the story on December 30 and following subsequent outrage in the media and society, the government was compelled to revoke the deportation order and state that Neetu would be allowed to return to Pune to complete her editing course.

Amresh and Neetu had filed for divorce at a Kathmandu court last week.

Last Lok Nyayalaya in fiscal; 18 of 53 cases settled



Labour Court in Swargate. FILE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
FEBRUARY 7

IT was the last official effort for out-of-court settlements in the district this fiscal year. The Lok Nyayalaya, held by the district labour and industrial court on Sunday, saw 18 out of 53 cases settled.

"The next Lok Nyayalaya, scheduled for the next quarter, will probably be held by a fresh panel of judges as the three of the four judges have completed their three-year term and are due for a transfer soon," said advocate Rajesh Shaligram, vice-president, Labour Law Practitioners' Association.

It is mandatory for courts to conduct Lok Nyayalayas once every quarter to dispose of matters that can be settled out of court. The motive is to reduce pendency in courts by mutual compromise of the complainant and opponent. The cases are brought before either of the three court panels comprising judges and lawyers. The Labour Commissionerate refers litigations, mostly related to worker's compensation and insurance settlement, to Lok Nyayalaya.

According to SV Phattapure, registrar, Pune District Industrial Court, around 170-175 litigants attended the Lok Nyayalaya on Sunday. "The cases heard were around five-six years old, and involved wage and insurance settlements," Shaligram said. "Only those cases with the potential of being settled in the Lok Nyayalaya are heard, and only 20-25 per cent of these get solved."

Retinopathy common among pre-term babies

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
FEBRUARY 7



It is vital to screen the pre-term babies for retinopathy within the first month of birth.

REENA was ecstatic when the neo-natal intensive care unit of a private hospital saved her premature baby girl recently. But, the young mother's joy was short-lived as her pre-term baby, born at six months and weighed only 600 gm, suffered from loss of vision. They rushed the baby to an ophthalmologist, but she had developed retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) — a retinal defect causing blindness.

Retinopathy of prematurity is an eye ailment that affects premature babies, wherein low birth-weight ones are at risk. Not all babies who are premature will have ROP, as many who are born with ROP will improve spontaneously.

However, since ROP is responsible for more blind-

ness among children, it is vital to conduct screening within the first month of birth, say ophthalmologists.

Around 80 lakh low birth-weight babies are born in the country a year and the survival rates have increased with modern NICU care. However, oxygen toxicity and relative hypoxia can contribute to the development of ROP, which occurs in one among 20 premature babies. Hence the child is at risk of

facing the trauma of being blind if not attended in time, said Dr Parikshit Gogate, paediatric ophthalmologist.

A city-based eye hospital has now embarked on a programme to eliminate ROP-related blindness and train ophthalmologists and neonatologists about the disease. The hospital has acquired a RET-CAM — the first such digital camera in the state that can take a photograph of the retina of babies.

"We have been able to save at least seven pre-term babies who were diagnosed with ROP in the past six months," said a doctor at the hospital.

UK-based based NGO Sight Savers international funded the Rs 60-lakh RET-CAM and as many as 450 babies have been screened in the past six months, 250 of them from the city itself.

Student suicides: College students open helpline, plan workshops, rally

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
FEBRUARY 7

AS the HSC and SSC examinations are scheduled to begin in the last week of February, students from the Department of Psychology at Nowrojee Wadia College have opened a 24-hour toll free helpline for students. They have started conducting workshops and have organised an awareness rally, Walk for life, on February 20.

Clinical psychologist and faculty member at the department in Wadia Dr Natasha D'Cruz said, "A suicide attempt is a cry for help. Those attempted it, did so when they found life intolerable at that moment. Support by way of listening and understanding could help the victims in despair to tide over the temporary crisis."

"Walk for life" is aimed at taking awareness to the streets. The rally will culminate in an open house where students, parents, teachers and healthcare practitioners will address this issue, she said. The focus now is on encouraging more people to devote their time on this critical issue, D'Cruz said.

It was the suicide of a science stream student from their own college early this year, that set the Wadia students think-

What others are up to

1098 Childline: receives more than 10 distress calls every day.

Now: With exams approaching, the agency has activated peer support groups at 43 schools to interact with students and spread awareness

SNEHA: prepares statistics on suicides. Says, in India, every five minutes a person commits suicide while seven make attempts to suicide

ing. Perturbed by the increasing number of suicides, they decided to act. "We had to do something. Either by word-of-mouth or via networking sites, the students community has been reaching out to people," said D'Cruz. So far, 15 schools have been contacted. The students have also conducted workshops at few colleges, she said.

Director of 1098 Childline Anuradha Sahasrabudhe said they receive more than 10 distress calls every day. With exams approaching, the agency has activated peer support groups at 43 schools to interact with students and spread awareness.

According to the statistics prepared by SNEHA, a suicide prevention organisation that started in 1986 in Chennai and

People who committed suicide invariably expressed their intention to medical personnel or to close associates, at least a month before committing the act

DR D K SHIROLE
Psychiatrist

offers emotional support to the depressed, each year, approximately 10 lakh people commit suicide around the world. In India, every five minutes a person commits suicide while seven make attempts to suicide.

"Suicide is an impulsive phenomenon that is preventable. Studies have shown that persons who committed suicide invariably expressed the intention to medical personnel or to close associates, including family members, at least a month before committing the act," said Dr D K Shirole, who, as the member of the Pune Psychiatrists Association, has decided tie up with the Pune Municipal Corporation to conduct counselling workshops at both civic schools and private institutes.

De-stress yourself, with sound-healing tables

ROHAN SWAMY
FEBRUARY 7

THE idea of using music as a therapeutic approach to drive mental stress and tensions may not be new, but the concept of using sound-healing tables to help people deal with their physical stress is something novel. Auroville-based musical research organisation Svaram aims to do just that as it offers this unique therapy to people who lead fast-paced lives and often fall prey to the unhealthy lifestyle that is a corollary.

"The concept of a sound-healing table, also known as the Nidra Anantar, basically

involves using a wooden bed that has 50 strings fixed beneath it and a proportionately sounding resonator to help cure people of their physical stresses," said Aurelio, one of the researchers who developed the table.

"The idea behind the table is that the two-metre-long strings, when plucked, produce a rich harmonic sound; and when a person lies on top of the table, the vibrations produced penetrate deep into the person, thereby generating a therapeutic effect on not only the exterior but on bones, muscles and organs of the person."

Aurelio, who hails from Austria but has been based in

Pondicherry for the past 18 years, said music therapy and sound healing were two different schools of thought that respectively focus on the mental and the physical wellbeing of a person. "It takes a minimum of 7-9 minutes for the brain to block the negative beta waves that are the cause of physical stress and switch over to absorbing the alpha waves wherein the natural balance of the body is restored. The table is usually built to individual requirements and the cost varies accordingly."

The table, which was on display at the three-day Baajaa Gaajaa music festival, is made of wood. According to Aure-

lio, wood helps in releasing unwanted blockages of energy, and also helps to rejuvenate the physical senses. The table has mostly been installed at spas, healing centres and meditation centres now. "We have installed the table at IT firms also in Chennai, wherein the company executives can de-stress themselves. The sound baths (as they are known) can range from 20-60 minutes, depending on the user and the time required for the person's body to react to the process."

Aurelio demonstrates the functioning of a sound-healing table.



ROHAN SWAMY