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INDIA WEST

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THIS WEEK

Kalam Concerned Over Google Earth

President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has expressed concern about Google Earth, a free mapping program from Google Inc., warning it could help terrorists by providing satellite photos of potential targets.



A10

Navy Wife Runs For Virginia Senate



A former anchorwoman, army officer, and journalist, Supriya Christopher is seeking to become the first Asian American and Indian American to

serve in the Virginia House of Delegates.

A26

Mela Recreates Diwali Ambiance

Foot-tapping music blaring from speakers, teenagers dressed in stylish attire, the aroma of freshly cooked mithai and tandoori treats wafting in the air, and giggling children enjoying the wobbly merry-go-round all helped create the ambiance of a good old Diwali mela right here in Mountain View, Calif., Oct. 17



B1

NRI Global Pageant Held



Mehru Khan from Pakistan bested 20 other contestants to be crowned the winner of the Miss NRI Global Pageant 2005 Oct. 16. The pageant, which also recognized married women, named Botswana contestant Mikki as winner of the Mrs. NRI Global Pageant.

C1

Kashmir Quake Raises Peace Hopes

Terrible toll across border could further peace process, experts say

By TIM SULLIVAN
Associated Press

MUZAFFARABAD, Pakistan — In the byzantine, violent politics of Kashmir, it has always been about perspective.

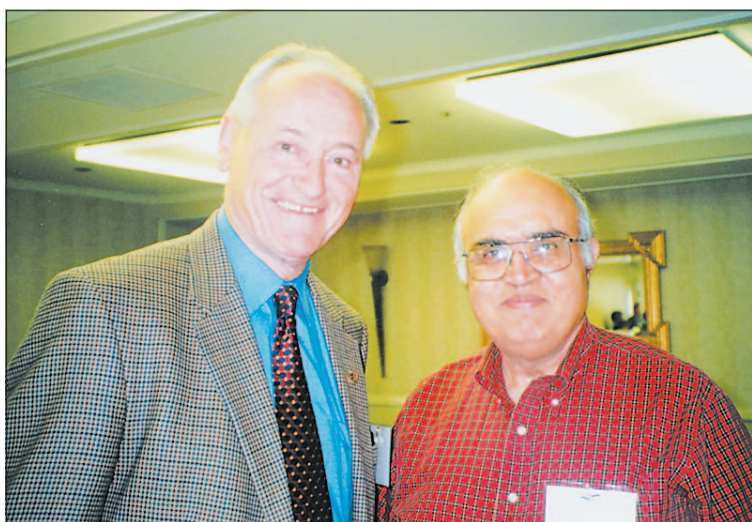
To India, this quake-savaged city is in "Pakistani-Occupied Kashmir," an area it insists was stolen from it in 1947. To Pakistan, it's the capital of "Independent" Kashmir. But when the Oct. 8 earthquake struck, the destruction crossed the divided region. While Pakistan suffered far worse—the death toll there has risen to over 53,000, most in Kashmir—at least 1,350 people

[Cont. on page A14]



Pakistani laborers unload relief goods from India for the survivors of the Oct. 8 earthquake at the Wagah border, some 35 km from Lahore, Oct. 17. There are signs that the terrible disaster has brought the neighbors closer. (AFP/Getty Images)

Celeste Backs 'India Society'



Former U.S. Ambassador to India Richard F. Celeste greets entrepreneur Kanwal Rekhi, who was a member of the bilateral task force convened by the Pacific Council on International Policy and the Observer Foundation in New Delhi. (Richard Springer photo)

Society should promote cultural understanding, ex-US envoy says

By RICHARD SPRINGER
India-West Staff Reporter

MENLO PARK, Calif. — Former U.S. Ambassador to India Richard F. Celeste believes the Indian American community should launch an organization similar to the Japan Society to "promote cultural understanding" between India and the United States and press forward on improved relations between the two countries.

[Cont. on page A35]



Turmeric (bottom left), a key ingredient in Indian cuisine, can help patients with breast cancer, researchers say.

Turmeric May Help In Breast Cancer

By VIJI SUNDARAM
India-West Staff Reporter

In what researchers are calling possible "good news for people in advanced stages of breast cancer," curcumin, the main ingredient of turmeric, the spice found in most Indian kitchens, has been found to effectively stop the spread of cancerous cells to other organs of the body.



Researcher Dr. Bharat Aggarwal

Researchers at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center have found that curcumin, which gives turmeric its yellow color, inhibits metastasis to the lungs of mice afflicted with

[Cont. on page A23]

AIDS on the Rise: Husbands Push Wives into Flesh Trade

By VIJI SUNDARAM
India-West Staff Reporter

GURGAON, Haryana — In Prem Nagar, a wisp of a village some 20 kilometers from the booming city of Gurgaon, where scores of high rises house



multi-national companies and call centers are providing the 20-somethings plenty of spending money, nearly 70 percent of the women between the

[Cont. on page A32]



Commercial sex worker Geeta (right, in background) with two of her children and an SNS staffer outside her Prem Nagar home. (Viji Sundaram photo)

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AIDS on the Rise:**Husbands Propel Wives into Flesh Trade***[Cont. from page A1]*

ages of 18 and 40 sell their bodies every day so their husbands and children can survive.

Small brick-walled houses interspersed with thatched huts dot the parched landscape of this village where pockmarked dirt roads crisscross haphazardly, trees are a rare sight and the only businesses are a couple of tiny soda-and-snack shops.

Outside many of the homes, men sit on charpoys smoking beedies and shooting the breeze, while their wives are turning tricks on the roadside just a few miles away.

Condoms in hand and dressed as if for a party, every day the women of Prem Nagar line a stretch of National Highway 8 and Old Rewadi Pataudi Road, waiting for their clients. Truckers pull up, pick the woman they want, engage in sex on the roadside in full view of the other women, pay up and leave.

At the entrance to the village, a posse of police constables, looking bored, sit in their van. They can have sex on demand from any of the nearly 250 commercial sex workers of Prem Nagar, in exchange for letting them solicit in public places, a crime under India's Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

"They have nothing to worry about because the police, too, are their clients," said Vijay Tanwar, who works for the Gurgaon-based non-governmental organization, SNS Foundation. The foundation has welfare centers nationwide that aim to uplift the status of girls and women. The foundation also helps the NGOs in Prem Nagar to organize health care camps and outreach programs for both the general population and commercial sex

Kapur, who works for Suhana Savera, a three-year-old NGO that operates out of the village, told **India-West**. And all the village children know why their mothers leave home for a few hours every day, dressed in their Sunday best.



and commercial sex workers. "It is only because the men don't earn anything, or don't earn enough, that originally forced the women in this community to take up the (flesh) trade. Now, it has become a norm."

In fact, "often, the men pimp

the table has largely become the women's responsibility.

Geeta said she seldom does more than five clients a day, pulling in anywhere between Rs. 20 and Rs. 50 for every trick turned. Some of the other women work longer hours and earn as much as Rs.300 a day. She said like all the other women in the village, she imposes a strict code of conduct on her clients: No condom, no sex.

"If they don't agree, I don't have sex with them," she said through an interpreter, speaking in a dialect that borrows heavily from Marwari, Gujarati and Hindi. "I tell them to leave."

But Kapur said he knows for a fact that the women don't always engage in protected sex. "On slow days, they put the condoms away," he said.

Sometimes, it's hard for a woman to insist on protected sex because then the men begin to suspect that something may be wrong with her, said one AIDS activist.

"Some men wonder if the commercial sex worker he is planning to have sex with is carrying some contagious disease because she insists that he wear a condom," Rochelle D'Souza Yephthomi, information officer at the Chennai-based Y.R. Gaitonde Center for AIDS Research and Education, told **India-West**.

In the case of childless married women, Yephthomi said, fear of being viewed as barren forces them to engage in unprotected sex with their husbands, even if they know their husbands have been fooling around.

Protected sex, AIDS rights activists say, is one of the best methods of reducing the incidence of HIV. To bolster their assertion, they cite an intervention program introduced in the 1990s in Sonagachi, one of Kolkata's oldest and largest red-light areas, by the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health. In that program, sex workers themselves were recruited to promote the use of condoms among their colleagues. Soon all the workers in the flesh trade there began to demand a 100 percent condom use. The result? The spread of HIV was arrested.

The residents of Prem Nagar belong to the Perno Ki Basti community. Most of them migrated here from Rajasthan about a decade ago, after trying unsuccessfully to scratch a living out of the parched earth there. A few, like Geeta and her husband, came from neighboring Gurgaon, said Kapur.

Suhana, in conjunction with another NGO called Model Rural Youth Development Organi-



Commercial sex worker Anil, who says she returns money from clients who demand unprotected sex. (Viji Sundaram photos)

It's around 2 p.m., and Geeta, a buxom, 30-year-old housewife, is just back from a day shift along National Highway 8, where she has serviced five passing truckers. She looks a trifle tired in her low-cut blue Punjabi suit, with cut embroidery on the

in a clinical tone, like she were discussing a recipe, standing outside her small brick home, while her two young daughters and son, all under nine years, hover around her. The youngsters stare with unconcealed curiosity at the visitors she's talking to. Geeta shows no embarrassment in disclosing details of her profession in front of her children, or the other children who have by now gathered about her. When a visitor suggested that perhaps she should send them away, Geeta wanted to know why.

"The men folk do not have any issues about their wives doing sex work," said Damyanti Bhowmik, program coordinator-education of the SNS Foundation, which organizes health care camps and outreach programs for both the general population

for their wives," asserted Anjali Gopalan, founder and executive director of the Delhi-based Naz Foundation (India) Trust, an NGO that does AIDS prevention work. "Husbands bring prospective clients into the village so their wives can have home-based (commercial) sex."

About one-and-a-half years ago, Suhana Savera began offering tailoring classes for the women of the village, hoping that would wean them away from the flesh trade. A few women signed up, but a lack of funding forced the project to end within a few months, Bhowmik said.

Geeta's husband is a shepherd, but doesn't make much money. Some of the other men in the village also work in animal husbandry-related jobs, which don't pay much. Putting bread on

If the husband is not in, the wife places a slipper outside the front door to alert him that she has a customer and should not be disturbed.

workers.

The women of Prem Nagar, who all go by only one name, practice their trade with the full blessings of their husbands. In fact, some of the women are forced into the profession by their husbands themselves "because it's easy money," Raj

sleeves — a sign, in this village, of prosperity — and electric pink lipstick. Her dark brown eyes are lined with kohl. The sindhur in the parting of her well-oiled hair reveals her marital status.

She got into the flesh trade only after her marriage some 10 years ago, she tells **India-West**

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Activists say that promiscuity of the kind practiced in Prem Nagar is why AIDS has hit hard in Andhra Pradesh.

zation, provides AIDS awareness education to the women and runs a school for their children. It also hands out more than 40,000 free condoms each month to the women, courtesy of the Delhi AIDS Control Society, Kapur said.

Anil is slender and sassy and has three children, 13, 10 and six. The gold chain around her neck and her nose ring somewhat relieve the severity of her

[Cont. on page A33]

AIDS on the Rise:**Husbands Propel Wives into Flesh Trade***[Cont. from page A32]*

features. She told **India-West** that in Prem Nagar, a woman is welcomed into the sorority of commercial sex workers only after she gets married. Asked why, she said that's the way it goes.

She said she became a sex worker even before her husband died of a "throat problem" a few years ago. Could it have been AIDS related? She shrugged her shoulders, as if she didn't care.

At 35, Anil is perhaps one of the more senior sex workers in the village. She is often seen sitting with the men on a charpoy. Like them, she lights up whenever and wherever she wants.

She said that more than once she has returned the money paid up front to her by clients because they demanded unprotected sex.

"The women (of this village) rarely come forward to discuss such health problems," Bhowmik said, noting that just a handful of women volunteered to have their blood tested in the two camps held by the Delhi AIDS Control Society last year. So determining just how many of them are HIV-positive is difficult, she said.

Activists say that promiscuity of the kind practiced in Prem Nagar is why AIDS has hit hard in Andhra Pradesh, which has a 2.24 percent HIV prevalence rate, as against the national rate of 0.9 percent, according to the federal health ministry's annual HIV/AIDS estimate. Nearly 10 percent of the 5.134 million cases nationwide can be found in this state.

For most women, a money crunch is what propels them into commercial sex work in the first place; the good things money can buy keep them in it.

"Because we insist on men wearing condoms, we have no fear of contracting AIDS," she said. Then, after a pause, she added: "Sometimes, if business is bad, some women just cave in." She herself has always stood firm, though, she said.

Bhowmik said that in recent years, only one man died of an AIDS-related illness in the village, and one man is suspected of being HIV-positive. But sadly, "no sustained efforts have been made to facilitate health ser-

The sexual route accounts for 88 percent of all cases, while blood transfusions and infected syringes account for two percent, according to the government.

"Undoubtedly, Andhra Pradesh has seen a very high increase," Health Minister Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss acknowledged, in a private interview with **India-West**, during a visit to California three months ago.

A good percentage of the patients who cram the AIDS wards at the Tambaram Sanatorium in



Commercial sex workers in Chennai gather for a meeting convened by the Community Health Education Society where the importance of protected sex is drummed into them.

their homes, said M.L. Prabakar, deputy director (projects) of the 13-year-old South India AIDS Action Program, a Chennai-based NGO that primarily focuses on sex workers and their clients in Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

When the trucker walks into a home, the husband quietly walks out, no questions asked, and waits outside while his wife goes about her business.

If the husband is not in, the wife places a slipper outside the

front door to alert him that she has a customer and should not be disturbed, according to Prabakar. When the trucker is done, he'll pay the woman her fee, as well as "tip" the waiting husband as he walks back to his truck.

times as much as her live-in partner," SIAAP's deputy director Indumathy Ravishankar told **India-West**.

That's why "it's impossible to rehabilitate a full-time sex worker," noted Dr. P. Krishnamurthy, project director



Former sex workers Baby (left) and Saroja, who now work as field officers with the Chennai-based South India AIDS Action Program.

vices" to the villagers to determine who is, and who is not, carrying the deadly virus that causes AIDS, she said.

Until about nine months ago, Suhana ran a primary health care center, but a financial crunch forced it to shut down. Prem Nagar residents now go to neighboring cities such as Gurgaon, Najafgarh or

the outskirts of Chennai are from the coastal belt of Andhra Pradesh, said Dr. S. Rajasekaran, deputy superintendent of the facility.

"Not less than 1,000 of our patients each year are from Guntur district," where the combination of promiscuity and a poor health care system has fanned the rapid spread of AIDS,

Sadly, "no sustained efforts have been made to facilitate health services" to the villagers to determine who is, and who is not, carrying the deadly virus that causes AIDS.

Bahadurgarh for medical help.

One of the doctors who worked the Prem Nagar health care center told her, Bhowmik said, that there had been a 75 percent prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases among the few women who visited the clinic. Women with STDs are more prone to contracting the human immuno-deficiency virus.

he said.

In many districts in Andhra Pradesh, commercial sex work is a home-based industry, with husbands playing the role of willing abettors. In Chilukalurpet, a small town near Guntur, which is known for its thriving granite industry, for example, it is a common practice for female sex workers to lure truckers into

In Ulundurpet in Tamilnadu, truckers know just what a female sex worker means when she approaches them with the query: "Can I prepare you some chicken curry?" That is a code for "would you like to have sex with me?" Prabakar said.

For most women, a money crunch is what propels them into commercial sex work in the first place; the good things money can buy keep them in it.

"Our studies show that a woman in sex work can earn four

of the Chennai-based AIDS Prevention and Control Project of the Voluntary Health Services. "She has tasted the good life."

He said there are an estimated 85,000 sex workers in Tamil Nadu, one-fifth of them part-time. In Chennai, there are an estimated 3,000 home-based brothels, according to SIAAP.

At a recent gathering of some 10 commercial sex workers at the Community Health Education Society in Chennai, a project

[Cont. on page A34]



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AIDS on the Rise:**Husbands Propel Wives into Flesh Trade**

[Cont. from page A33]

run by Dr. Manorama Pinagapani, program coordinator P. Muthupandian holds a condom up in the air with the showmanship of a magician, then skillfully rolls it down on a plastic penis model. A couple of the women in the room giggle and squirm in their seats. It is the first such meeting they are attending.

"There's no need to feel shy about this," Muthupandian tells the newcomers, who keep their eyes steadily lowered. "Talking about sex and condoms should be like talking about the common cold."

The women of Prem Nagar, who all go by only one name, practice their trade with the full blessings of their husbands.

The women are given an incentive to attend these bi-monthly two-hour meetings where the importance of safe sex is drummed into them over and over again. As a reward for their attendance, they are given Rs. 50 each for every visit, the amount they might have earned in that period turning tricks.

Once in a while, CHES ar-

ranges for a beautician to give the women beauty tips and a makeover, so they'll "improve their self-perception and feel empowered enough to demand the use of a condom," Pinagapani told **India-West**. Pinagapani has been working with sex workers since 1996.

At this meeting, Muthupandian encourages the women to tell a visitor why they got into the sex trade. They agree, but only on condition of anonymity because they don't want their young children to find out. The children think their mothers are out working as ayahs, flower sellers or corpora-

tion sweepers.

Reasons ranged from desertion by their husbands to having to support a sick husband and children to husbands working in poorly paid jobs.

"Ever since I got leukoderma, my husband didn't think I was attractive enough for him," said a woman in her late 30s, who wanted to be identified as "Kala."



Kala had her peers laughing with her biting sarcasm and free use of expletives. "He rarely comes home, but when he does, he offers to pay me to have sex with him. I have no problems with that."

Throughout the meeting, the woman kept getting calls on her cell phone from people she identified as her clients — company executives, government officials and college students. Tomorrow would be a busy day for her, she tells a visitor, looking pleased. In fact, she has lined up clients for the next several days, she said in her native Tamil.

Most of the men she services are married, she said, asserting that she never has unprotected sex. Her reason?

"Who will want me if I get AIDS," she said. "Besides, I have a 17-year-old and a 13-year-old daughter to educate and get married. I need to stay alive."

In the group was 27-year-old Radha, not her real name. There was a sadness to her. She told **India-West** she entered the flesh trade only recently because her husband couldn't hold down a job, and her two children, aged nine and five years, needed to be educated.



Sex worker "Kala" lines up her clients on her cell phone. (Viji Sundaram photos)

"I hate what I am doing," Radha asserted. "I don't know what I'll do if my parents or my children ever found out."

She said she dreams of the day when she becomes the owner of a hatchery and can hold her head up and walk.

"People will give me respect if I sell eggs," she said with a sigh. "They will spit on me if they

know I am selling sex."

(This is the third in the series on "Women and AIDS" by **India-West** staff reporter Viji Sundaram, who visited India for two months earlier this year on a fellowship from the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation in Menlo Park, Calif.)

Next week: The story of two AIDS victims in Tamilnadu.)

Oxford Researchers Find BCG Vaccine Can Stop Tuberculosis

HOUSTON (PTI) — The BCG vaccination can protect children from the TB bacterium in addition to fighting the disease, scientists have found.

Japneet Kaur Named to Human Rights Panel



By a Staff Reporter

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Japneet Kaur, commissioner of the Consumer Affairs Advisory Commission in Santa Clara County, has been named to the Human Relations Commission in Santa Clara County. A resident of the Evergreen area and a market analyst at HSBC Bank, Kaur graduated in 2004 from the University of California at Berkeley, where she served on the board of directors for the Telegraph Area Association, a community-development group. She also founded and directed a safety task force, where she lobbied for more than \$50,000 in safety services.

The BCG—Bacillus Calmette-Guerin—vaccination has traditionally been used only to fight active tuberculosis infection.

The study, published in the medical journal *Lancet*, furthers researchers' understanding of the biology of TB transmission and has important implications for the development of new vaccines.

"Contrary to prevailing theory that BCG vaccination protects only against tuberculosis disease, our results suggest that the vaccine also protects against tuberculosis infection," said Ajit Lalvani, leader of the University of Oxford team that made the discovery.

"Our findings show that children can be protected against

TB infection by vaccination and this opens a new door for the development of new, improved vaccines," said Lalvani, a Wellcome Trust Senior Clinical Research Fellow.

The effect of BCG vaccine has been difficult to ascertain because, until recently, the century-old Tuberculin Skin-prick Test was the only method for detecting the infection. But TST cannot reliably distinguish between TB infection and BCG vaccination. The Oxford researchers used the more accurate T-cell-based blood test called the ELISpot and TST to assess the infection.

The researchers say there are about 10 million cases of TB globally each year and 1-in-3 people are infected with the TB bacterium.

India, Pak Urged to Respect Human Rights in Aid Effort

By a Staff Reporter

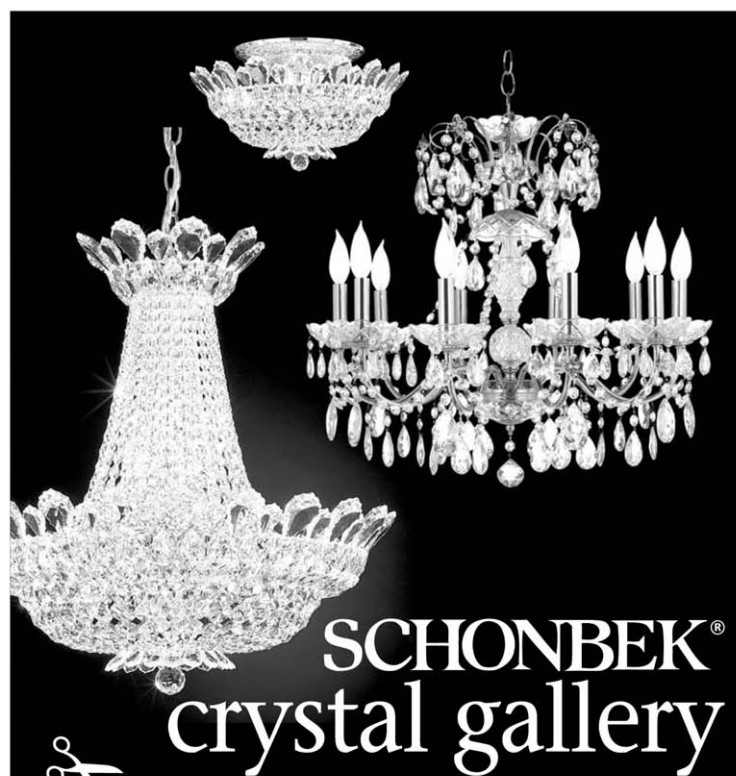
Human Rights Watch has urged India and Pakistan to respect human rights in the delivery of aid and relief to victims of the devastating earthquake in Kashmir.

Expressed deep sorrow at the massive devastation and loss of life caused by the Oct. 8, the New York group said, "The greatest threat to human rights often arises in crisis situations." Urging non-discriminative humanitarian assistance, the group said the South Asian countries must protect the rights to freedom of movement, family unity and

freedom from arbitrary detention, and ensure that the needs of women, children and the disabled are adequately met.

The rights group also called upon the governments of India and Pakistan to suspend traditional distrust at this time of crisis and allow free and unfettered movement of humanitarian relief supplies and personnel, even if this requires access across the Line of Control.

Nearly 40,000 people are believed to have died and about 2.5 million people displaced by the 7.7-magnitude earthquake.



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