Dear Readers,

The New Year began with promise for senior citizens. Close on the heels of Varistha Mediclaim for Senior Citizens, launched by National Insurance Company, a first of its kind medical cover for the elderly, the Senior Citizens (Maintenance, Protection and Welfare) Bill got the Cabinet nod. The Finance Minister announced the provision of Reverse Mortgage, launched recently by Punjab National Bank. In Delhi, the Chief Minister announced free bus travel for the aged.

All this goes to show that the concerns of seniors are in the public eye, which is what HelpAge has been striving for all these years.

In rural India, our widespread rights & entitlements awareness drive too is gaining momentum. Mounted essentially to help the elderly be aware of their rights, and to facilitate access, it is beginning to show results.

In March, Mr. Sanjay David, a development worker by profession, was travelling through a village in Betul, MP, when he saw something that compelled him to stop. It was a group of poor older people making serious plans to meet the Collector with something that compelled him to stop. It was a group of poor older people making serious plans to meet the Collector with their demands. They were members of a Vridh Sangh formed by HelpAge India under this very programme.

Many such older people's groups are gaining strength and the confidence to confront local authorities and ask for their rights. A number of older people have finally received long-overdue ration cards, and others have got homes under the Indira Awas Yojana.

Times are changing and with them so are the needs of the elderly. We have our finger on the pulse and are alert that these must be brought to the attention of the government and civil society.

Nidhi Raj Kapoor
Work in Valley winds to a close, MMU to carry it forward

HelpAge India’s post-earthquake programme in J&K formally wound to a close in March 2007. It included providing medical care to 5000 people, and dry rations, warm clothes and bedding to 700 families in 7 villages of Uri. Temporary shelters were erected for 860 families in 15 villages.

With an eye on the future, HelpAge has launched a Mobile Medicare Unit to carry on its work in the Valley. The Unit was inaugurated by the Governor of J&K, Lt. Gen (Retd.) S.K. Sinha.

Spreading warmth on a chilly night

On the night of January 4, when the world was huddled in blankets and razais, a HelpAge team was scouring the streets of Faridabad (Haryana) for old people with no protection against the cold. Dr. H.S. Bakshi, HelpAge’s northern region director, Major V. K. Choudhary of the Indian Army & Mr. Satish K Dua of Sai Trust, Faridabad, chose the night to give away a van-load of sleeping bags donated by Osisan’s Connoisseurs of Art Private Limited. They went from hospitals to railways platforms to street corners, identifying destitute elderly. The look in their eyes was their best reward, said team-members, and that kept them going till the wee hours.

Some sleeping bags were also distributed at Shaheed Bhagat Singh PG Institute of Management, NIT, Faridabad to the destitute residents of Jawahar Colony.

Elders group fights for their due

HelpAge India’s PACS programme is about raising older people’s awareness of their rights and going a step further by providing access. The programme has been witnessing significant achievements. One such instance is of Mokha village, in Madhya Pradesh’s Betul District. Older people in various villages have been organised into groups known as Vridha Sanghs.

Under the HelpAge initiative, 80 members of Sanghs got together and traveled to the office of the District Magistrate to demand ration cards for themselves, in order to access benefits of the government’s food security scheme. Under this scheme, each family / card holder receives 35 kg food grain per month.

Under the virtual onslaught, the DM’s office issued a directive to all Panchayats and city corporation officers. As a result, 70 older people in Mokha have received their ration cards. Mr. M.P. Singh, CEO of Nainpur Block in Mandla District, MP, has issued a directive to the Gram Panchayat to ensure older peoples participation in its Gram Sabha meetings.

HelpAge-NHRC organise health week

HelpAge India, Ahmedabad, conducted a seminar titled “Health Awareness Week” supported by the National Human Rights Commission. 1060 elderly participants were imparted knowledge on various subjects covering diabetes and its management, alternative medicine, pain management, and prevention of accidents. The week culminated in a health check up camp and a talk on breast cancer.

SHARING THE GRIEF

The first anniversary of the earthquake was observed in Bela migrant camp, where 260 displaced families from Uri live, in collaboration with Life Help Chennai & Global Green Peace, a local organization. The event began by the recitation of Quran (Holy Book of Muslims). Mr. Taj Mohi-ud-Din, Minister for Consumer Affairs, J&K, chaired the event & distributed solar lights to 20 older people.

MEDIA SENSITIZATION

As part of the project, a media sensitizing workshop was organised in collaboration with the Press Institute of India. It was chaired by Mr. B.G. Varghese, former editor of the Indian Express. Thirty media professional participated, representing national, regional and vernacular print and electronic media. Other participants included senior state government officials, and representatives of the armed forces, UNDP/Home Ministry, (Disaster Management Unit) and other NGOs. Participants visited project villages in Uri and interacted with beneficiaries and relief officials.

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We thank Mr. Amar Lulla (left), JMD, and Dr. Hamied, MD, the two driving forces behind CIPLA’s continuous support to HelpAge’s nationwide MMU program. CIPLA contributes a bulk of the medicines, for the programme that dispenses nearly 10 lakh treatments every year. In 2006-07 this support was worth more than Rs. 50 lakh.

Thanks to Microsoft India, HelpAge has gained access to software beyond its financial reach. In a demonstration of its support to the cause of the aged, Microsoft has donated software worth US$ 86,497 (Rs. 40 lakh).

Thank You!

- HI Tech Arai Limited, Madurai, for donating Rs.9.64 lakh (approx.) for a year’s running cost of MMU Madurai.
- ARR Charitable trust, Chennai, for Rs. 8.27 lakh (approx.) to support a new MMU in Madurai.
- GAIL, Surat, for supporting 150 cataract surgeries.
- State Bank of Mysore, Bangalore, for facilitating 100 cataract surgeries worth Rs. 1 lakh.
- ONGC, Surat for supporting 100 surgeries at Navsari.
- DSP MERILL LYNCH employees and management for a donation of Rs. 3.31 lakh.
- Standard Chartered & GIVE INDIA MARATHON for passing on the amount raised by employees of Pfizer, Total Cargo, WNS and DSP, who ran for HelpAge and raised more than Rs.10 lakh.
- Volkart Foundation (VOLTAS), for funding 500 cataract surgeries.
- MINERAL FOUNDATION OF GOA for supporting the capital and 5-years running cost of the Goa MMU. The grant is valued at Rs.56 lakh.
- Citibank for sending 3 lakh HelpAge mailers to their Premium Credit Card holders with their card statements.
- TCIL for supporting an integrated grandparent-grandchildren initiative under the Tsunami programme.
- GE India for supporting 100 cataract surgeries worth Rs. 1 lakh.
- Vizag Steel Plant, Vizag, for providing steel worth Rs. 5 lakh for an old age home in Cuddalore.
- Asian Paints, Hyderabad, for giving Rs. 1.2 lakh towards medical care.
- A special thanks to Indo-Asian Fusegear Ltd. and it’s Chairman & MD, Mr. V.P. Mahendru for donating an MMU vehicle for Delhi, which was recently launched. This is the third time Indo-Asian Fusegear has donated an MMU to HelpAge propelling its mobile healthcare programme forward.

Intas Pharmaceuticals, Ahmedabad, for Rs. 97,000 under the ongoing cause-related marketing initiative. The total so far is Rs. 4.05 lakh.

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Students shoulder responsibility

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We thank the following schools for their contribution towards the cause:

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- Bentiok Girls Hr. Sec. School, Chennai (TN)
- Bharati Vidyabhavans, Sulochana Natu Vidyalaya, Pune (Mh)
- Delhi Public School, Bhopal (MP)
- Delhi Public School, Jalandhar (Pb)
- DAV Public School, Palamur (HP)
- Happy School, Daryaganj, Delhi
- Kendriya Vidyalaya School, Chennai (TN)
- Kendriya Vidyalaya School, Adoor, Kerala
- Kendriya Vidyalaya School NTPC, Kayampalam, Kerala
- DPS Panipat (Hry) & Mr. Amit Rana it’s Pro - Vice Chairman
- Modern Sr. Sec. School, Patiala (Pb)
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- Ryan International School, (Chd)
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- Ramjas School, Anand Parbat, Delhi
- Satya Matriculation School, Chennai (TN)
- Somervile School, Greater Noida (UP)
- St. Antony’s School, Trichy, (TN)
- Springdale Sr. Sec. School, Amritsar (Pb)
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HelpAge member honored

HELPAGE MEMBER HONORED

Standard Chartered, Scope International, Chennai, honoured seven ‘Women Exemplar 2006’ in a special function. HelpAge’s Director for the southern region, Mrs. Indrani Rajadurai, was among those honoured.

In Memorium

The HelpAge family pays homage to Shri Babar Singh, nephew of Shaheed-A-Azam Bhagat Singh, and a strong supporter of HelpAge programmes in Faridabad. He passed away at the age of 53 on February 21, 2007. Shri Babar Singh was always supportive to the work of HelpAge and on several occasions offered the use of the grounds of the Shaheed Bhagat Singh Post Graduate College of Management, NIT, Faridabad, to the organization.

Comic twist to aged concerns

Highlighting the concerns of the aged, HelpAge staged a rib tickling comedy directed by well known theatre personality Ms. Sarita Vohra titled “mallaika.sherraffat@oldagehome.com” in Delhi. The play brought out issues such as the increasing trend of senior citizens moving into old age homes, loneliness, being disregarded by one’s own kin and many more to the forefront.

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