

recovered persons recounted their experiences. A book of these accounts will be published this year.

Following the conference, on March 20 I visited a well-maintained colony on the outskirts of Pune. Four women were waiting at the entrance to greet me. Each of them held a silver tray containing a small silver dish. The woman nearest me opened my mouth, and filled it with sugar. My mouth was so full I didn't know what to do. At the sight, they all burst out laughing. It was a very strange greeting!

Government Bandorawalla Leprosy Hospital, Kondhawa, is a five-minute walk from the colony. It consists of a men's ward, women's ward, workshops and a surgery. All together, 150 leprosy-affected people live there, including those who require surgery or ulcer care, and others who have nowhere else to go.

Sad to relate, they include a 13-year-old girl. She exhibits no deformity but had to come to the hospital because there was no MDT available at the health post near her village. It pained me to think that because she had spent time in this facility, she was going to suffer discrimination even after she was cured.

I was heartened to meet Mr. Anjan Dey. Although he lost the use of his right hand to leprosy, after treatment he began working at the hospital as a physiotherapy attendant and later received certification from Christian Medical



Anjan Dey: from patient to therapist

College in Vellore. Once he was a patient who slept on the hospital floor. Now he is in charge of the physiotherapy department, and is well respected beyond the hospital for his knowledge and experience. He has also raised a family.

Nearby the colony is a factory employing 106 people, including 90 recovered persons. It makes engines parts and bumpers under contract to India's largest motor manufacturer, Tata Motors. Until the factory began receiving orders from the car maker, it went through some difficult times and even faced bankruptcy. But the employees all returned their salaries to raise capital, and were able to turn the factory into a going concern.

Running a commercial operation in a competitive market is no easy matter, and the factory still faces various challenges. But for now the wages it pays are overtaking those of the average Indian worker. I told the employees that as news of this success spreads, it will give encouragement to recovered persons everywhere.

On this visit to India, I also had the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Health Minister Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss. The prime minister gave his unequivocal commitment to eliminating leprosy and redressing the human rights issue (see page 1). The health minister told me, "We have almost achieved elimination. I believe we will be able to make an announcement to the world by the end of this year. We are also doing our utmost on the issue of human rights, because this was a movement begun by Mahatma Gandhi."



India's health minister, Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss

CAMBODIA (MARCH 23-25)

After India, I went to Cambodia, where I visited a leprosy colony in the village of Treung in Kampong Cham Province. The journey from the capital Phnom Penh was along an excellent asphalt road, and the colony was set in beautiful green surroundings. The village is said to have a population of 1,107, of whom seven are leprosy patients and 95 are recovered persons.

When we arrived, about 50 leprosy-affected persons and 50 villagers gathered to greet us.

I was shocked to see that a young boy who had contracted leprosy from his mother was missing part of his toes. Nowadays, when drugs are widely available, it is extremely rare to see a young patient with such severe deformity.

Apparently, it is still customary in some areas to conceal leprosy, making case detection difficult. Not knowing that drugs are available and a complete cure is possible, there are patients who wait until the symptoms become pronounced and deformity occurs. This situation is extremely unfortunate, and needs to be corrected. ■