

25in
0000

Rs 10

BUSINESS: THE DOTCOM SHAKE-OUT
SYDNEY OLYMPICS: DEJA VU FOR INDIA



**DEVELOPMENT
PEOPLE POWER**

OCTOBER 9, 2000

INDIA TODAY

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

**“It's going
to be more
than just a
new deal”**

**PRESIDENT PUTIN
ON HIS VISIT TO INDIA**

ON THE SPOT REPORT
RUSSIA: STILL IN THE RED



For the full text of the interview
log on to: www.india-today.com

www.india-today.com

LICENSED TO POST WITHOUT PREPAYMENT
REGISTERED NO. TECH/HR/FBO/5/2000/DL-11021/2000; W/RRP-122; TECH/4/-180/MB/2000; KL/CR/EKM/062/2000;
TN/MS(C)-1570 WPP/TN/MS(C)-176; CP/MIS/KA/BGE-281/2000/WPP-2; U/C/98/2000, (U)-19, KL/CR/EKM/WPP-009/2000

REGISTERED WITH THE REGISTRAR OF NEWSPAPERS
FOR INDIA UNDER NO. 28587/76

FOR SALE IN INDIA AND NEPAL ONLY

0040

THE MISSION

Hundreds of individuals are silently galvanising local communities into improving their

by V. Shankar AIYAR

A GROUP OF WOMEN IS ACCOSTED BY henchmen of the local zamindar. "Wait till your NGO *bai* goes. We will disrobe you publicly and ..." It's a threat that usually works in India. And even executed. Then there's the usual indignation and bleeding heart TV coverage capturing the despair frame by depressing frame.

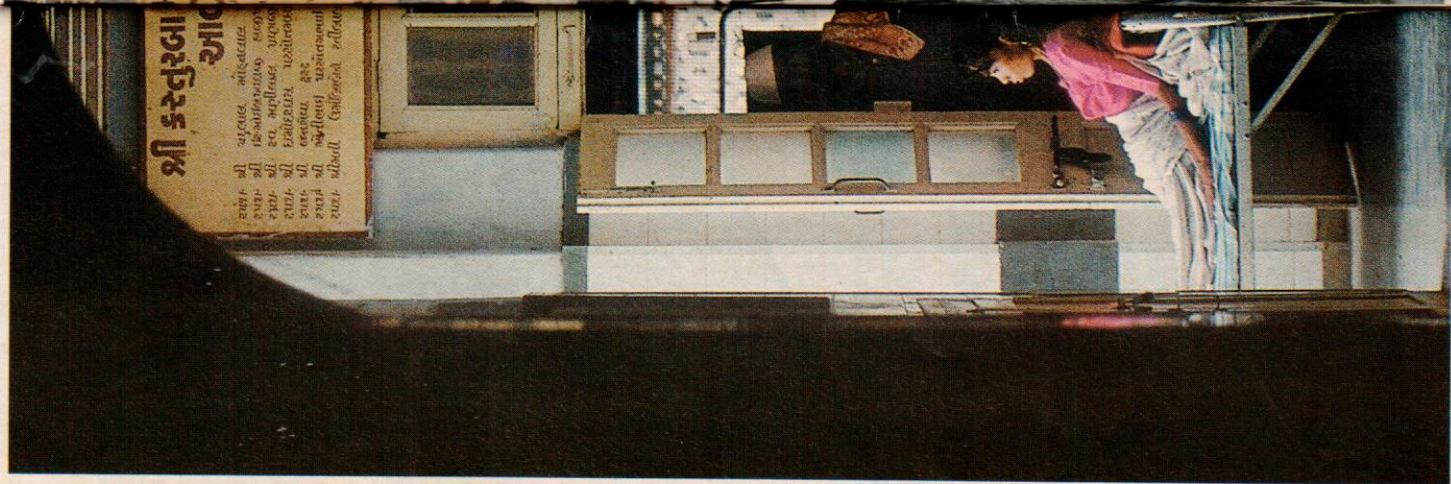
Not at Malshiras on the outskirts of Pune. The women heard the threats, gathered at the village square, hired a public address system and challenged the zamindar's men: "Come, we are here. What will you do that you haven't done to our mothers and sisters?" The women paused, applauded tentatively and waited for the reaction. There was none. The threats ceased.

You couldn't ask for a more powerful symbol of empowerment. How did it come to be? Says Maneesha Gupte of NGO Masum: "The women told me about the threats and I said, 'It could happen. I won't be here all the time. How

you tackle it is your decision'." Masum's strategy was: "Don't solve people's problems, just identify them. The people will solve their problems better than you would."

Sounds simple. It isn't. Which perhaps explains the clichéd image of India—outstretched hands lamenting the lack of *sar-kari* largesse 53 years after Independence. Be it an epidemic, calamity or a man-made disaster, dowry deaths or just taps running dry, we are used to seeing an India buckling under, unable to get up and be counted.

But there is another India, the Other India, found in random pockets. An India where people have shrugged off their sloth and picked up the shovel to make their villages, towns and cities better places, an India that Gandhi would have been proud of. Gupte and partner Ramesh Awasthi are only two of the hundreds of individuals who have taken the Mahatma's message to



SHAILESH RAWAL

POSSIBLE

lives. This is their story, the story of another India within the India as we know it.

Health • ANILBHAI & LATABEN DESAI
Jhagadia, Gujarat

Life as an Offering

NEARLY TWO DECADES BACK, TWO YOUNG DOCTORS, Anilbhai and Lataben Desai, who had been practising in New York for almost five years, decided to return home and pitch their tents in Jhagadia town in Gujarat's Bharuch district. It was in keeping with the vow they had taken as medical students in Ahmedabad that they would serve the poor in their own country. The inspiration came from the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. Living up to the adage "Let Life Be An Offering", Anilbhai, 58, and Lataben, 57, have turned Jhagadia and its surrounding areas into oases of good healthcare through their voluntary body SEWA (Society Education Welfare Action)-Rural. The results are very visible. The 40-odd villages are almost cataract-free when the condition affects 13 of every 1,000 people elsewhere in India. Infant mortality has come down to 42 (national average: 65) from 172 in 1980 when the Desais began work in the region while the birth rate has come down from 38 to 20 per 1,000. Impressed, the state Government handed over the task of running the primary healthcare centre for Jhagadia region to SEWA-Rural in 1989, perhaps the only instance of the government asking an NGO to manage rural healthcare on its behalf. The Desais run the show with a staff of 123, including 13 doctors and 23 nurses besides village-level volunteers. Poor patients, mostly tribals from the 1,000-odd villages in the region, throng to the 75-bed, well-equipped hospital of SEWA-Rural from as far as 300 km away. Skipping government hospitals close to them, they come to Jhagadia simply because they have faith in the Desais. B.B. Swain, district collector of Bharuch, says, "They've also helped the tribals in the region to get rid of their superstitions and belief in witchdoctors." It's been a journey of learning for the duo too. Says Anilbhai: "The poor and illiterate are at times better than the literate in their comprehension. And another lesson is that in India the leadership has failed and not the people." —Uday Mahurkar