



Patialala Peg

VIKAS KAHOL

PM's visit exposed ugly face of cops

THE POLICE in Chandigarh appear determined to absolve their men from blame for refusing a young patient entry into the hospital which the prime minister had been visiting a fortnight ago. The patient died before he could get medical assistance. The police smugly concluded that the driver of the car ferrying the patient was not familiar with the route and this was behind the incident.

Whatever be the findings of the police inquiry, the common man cannot digest the assertion that cops wouldn't have stopped the private vehicle from entering the hospital at that hour.

This reporter has had the experience of the police being completely apathetic to the concerns of common people. In an incident that took place about a decade ago, this

reporter's former colleague, a photojournalist, actually captured some policemen on a "looting spree" after they had lathi-charged agitating teachers in Chandigarh. The policemen on duty ran away with fruits from a juice cart after they had forced the vendor to abandon it.

The attitudes remain similar even ten years later. A roadside icecream vendor — who was found overcharging customers — was probably justified when he said he did not have any other option. He earned about Rs 150 as commission over the total sales. The policemen would come on motorbikes and take away icecream cones without paying for them. "I would not survive if I do not overcharge customers," he explained.

The issues concerning the high-handed behaviour of policemen may appear trivial to those at the helm of affairs, but, they often cost poor people a large chunk of their earnings and sometimes more.

The policemen devise many ways to harass citizens. An environmental-



File photo of a cop going on the rampage in Bhatinda recently

□ HOW can a village benefit from the wedding of one of the most eligible bachelors in Punjab? With the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal MLA Bikram Singh Majithia scheduled to wed a Delhi girl on November 25, a village cluster in the Seonk-Perch belt on Chandigarh's periphery witnesses an unprecedented development. The roads are being re-laid and PWD workers are busy filling earth on roadsides. "A bureaucrat's farmhouse will host the wedding reception. Since VVIPs will be coming, roads should be better, arrangements proper," said an official. Majithia is the brother-in-law of Punjab Deputy CM, Sukhbir Singh Badal.

ist launching an NGO required members' verification by the police. One of the members — who initially refused to oblige the police officer verifying his antecedents — found that the cops had mentioned a criminal case against his name. He finally had to "bribe" the policeman to report the truth that the case was withdrawn by the complainant.

Then there is the story about a dead man walking and five persons being punished for his "murder" in Punjab. The five served a life term in jail for killing a man who was living elsewhere with a new identity.

The Punjab Police had proved the case in the trial court 10 years ago. They did not care to listen to the families of those found guilty, who claimed that the "victim" was alive.

And what would you say about a Haryana cop who "connived" at an honour killing? He was assigned to provide protection to Manoj and Babli, the Kaithal couple who had married against the wishes of the girl's family. He allegedly provided information about the couple's whereabouts to the girl's family. The couple was eventually murdered.

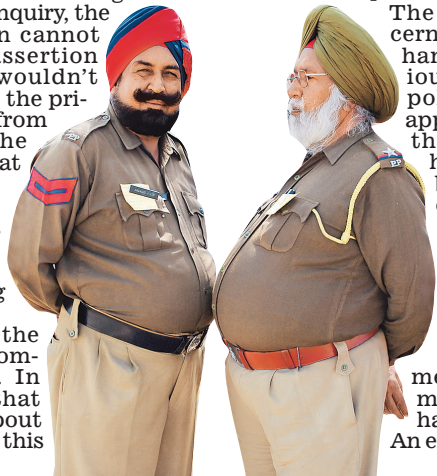
Migratory birds flock to the city

WINGED visitors are flocking to Chandigarh. The Sukhna Lake and about 200 adjoining wetlands have started buzzing with their presence. Forest officials estimate that nearly 3,000 migratory birds have already arrived and their number is expected to go up to 15,000 by January.

The Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden Ishwar Singh says that the birds come from Siberia, China, Afghanistan and the Himalayan region to escape the biting cold there. The species visiting the city include brahmi ducks, common pochards, red-crested pochards, grebes, geese, shell ducks, marsh ducks, diving ducks, rails, coots, stilts, hill kingfisher, mallard, pintail, cormorants, Siberian ducks, cranes, storks and sandpipers.

The birds have made the city water bodies their winter home for over two decades now. The pleasant climate and sufficient fish and reptile population attract the winged beauties to Chandigarh. The birds start reaching this marvel of urban planning in early November and stay back till March or April.

The nearby Mahendra Chaudhary Zoological Park, commonly known as Chhatbir zoo, is also a host to several migratory creatures. There is a complete ban on poaching and playing loud music or bursting crackers in the vicinity of the areas where these birds build their nests. The forest officials have also been removing weeds and checking against any symptoms of infection or mortality among the birds.



Campaign for road safety

LIFE is precious and must not end in fatal road crashes — that is the message being sent out to the youth through a road safety campaign in Chandigarh. The kin of road accident victims — in addition to people from all walks of life — got together for making roads safe.

Remembering their kin lost to bloody road crashes on the World Day of Remembrance of Road Traffic Victims, on November 15, they pledged that they would continue the campaign to save lives.

Ramneek Kaur Sekhon, who lost her son Karam about three years ago, broke down as she recalled that she could never convince her son to follow road safety norms. Parents should ensure their children adopt responsible driving habits, she said.



Participants at the rally

A London based writer, artist and cartoonist Woodrow Phoenix — who authored Rumble Strip, an illustrative book on road safety — explained that persons behind the wheel can also help save lives on roads. The campaign was launched by Arrive Safe — an NGO in Chandigarh managed by a road accident victim, Harman Singh Sidhu, who is paralysed following a spinal injury.

School girl on a mission

A 12-year-old girl from Haryana — Ishita Uppal — is set to travel across India for sensitising people against female foeticide and infanticide. Ishita would set out on her mission on November 19 — the birth anniversary of the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Her journey would culminate in Mumbai on December 9.

A student of seventh standard at Panchkula's Little Flower Convent School, Ishita Uppal believes that girls must take upon themselves the challenge of creating awareness about the skewed sex ratio. She plans to meet President Pratibha Patil, UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Lok Sabha Speaker Meira Kumar for enacting tougher provisions to curb the violation of PNDA Act. During her tour she will also hold lectures in schools and interact with students on the issue.



Ishita Uppal: Mature concerns