



24/07/1996

Remember Lakhubhai Pathak? The 'Pickle King' who arrived from London as Narasimha Rao's nemesis? He testifies that godman Chandraswami had induced him to part with \$100,000 after introducing him to Rao in 1983, to secure an STC contract. Trouble for the wily fox of Indian politics?

not just numbers

63,784

is the number of teachers who will be hired under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan's effort to reach 22.53 lakh out-of-school Muslim children in the 6-14 age group. 2,596 primary and 4,322 upper primary schools will be set up, says the National Minority Education Committee.

2,700

is the number of Pakistani troops killed in the Kargil war, as per former PM Nawaz Sharif's tell-all autobiography *Nawaz Sharif Ki Kahani*, Unki Zubani.

## True Gifts EVERYONE'S CALLED TO THE BUFFET

*Gift a loved one the joy of feeding poor kids or buying spectacles for someone at a home for the aged*

by Harsh Kabra

"IT WAS EXASPERATING," RECALLS Murali Krishnan, a Chennai-based software engineer. Keen to give his father a meaningful birthday gift, he had scoured numerous stores, but found nothing that reflected his feelings. He then came across True Gifts, a novel gift store where he got something that touched not just his father's heart but others' lives as well.

At True Gifts—part of the Bhoomika Trust formed after the Gujarat earthquake in 2001—the gift money is given to an NGO of your choice and you get a voucher that can be presented as a gift. Bhoomika Trust follows up with that NGO to ensure proper use of your money and updates you about it three weeks later. "Bhoomika's strength lies in linking NGOs, businesses, community-based groups and government," informs programme manager Latha Subramaniam.

Murali's gift helped meet a month's expenses of a resident of Adaikalam, a home for mentally ill women, and provide cots and spectacles to the inmates of a residential centre for the aged destitute. "This is your best-ever birthday gift to me," remarked his father. True Gifts charges a nominal processing fee of Rs 50 for gifts of less than

Rs 1,000 and Rs 100 for gifts of more than Rs 1,000. Bhoomika and its affiliates are run with the help

of donations from the corporate sector.

Like Krishnan, Indira Menon, senior manager at an investment management organisation, was introduced to True Gifts by her sister when she was looking for birthday gifts for her mother. She went on to sponsor a month's medicine for a resident of Sri Arunodayam's home for mentally challenged and spastic children, and twenty days of nutritional supplement for 120 children at a day-care centre run by an NGO which helps the poor. "Every year, my mother would chide me for wasting money on flowers and chocolates," says Indira. "This time around, she was overwhelmed."

The idea of a gift store linking NGO programme needs with donor funds was



mooted by Jayendra Panchapakesan, a Bhoomika trustee, and Geetha Rajagopal, a volunteer. Subsequently, Shalu Umamathy, a service corps fellow of the American India Foundation, organised True Gifts while working with Bhoomika. "Launched this June, it has already sold 25 gifts and raised Rs 50,000 for various NGOs," reveals Shalu. Gift coupons of Rs 500 to Rs 20,000 can be used to sponsor health-related training for slum girls, a meal at an old-age home, a patient's dialysis treatment or an NGO worker's salary. "We want to involve the corporate sector," says Panchapakesan, "where our gifts could be given to celebrate employee birthdays or achievements." ■

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