

TOP STORIES
A soldier's healing touch



By IANS
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Behrola (Haryana), Oct 12 (IANS) This one's a very different kind of war for Prem Khullar. Here you don't shed blood - you donate some. You bomb bacteria, not civilian populations. And the retired air force squadron leader has been doing this consistently for the past 13 years.

What began in 1993 as a one-room clinic is today the Association for Blindness and Leprosy Eradication (ABLE). Made possible through generous NRI funding and local land donations, it has till date treated some 30,000 patients and performed 500 surgeries. 'The government didn't help,' Khullar told a visiting IANS correspondent.

The hospital has cardiology, gynaecology, paediatrics, radiology, dermatology, dentistry, physiotherapy, orthopaedics and surgical departments. The cost of surgeries ranges between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 8,500 - depending on how complicated they are.

A woman is charged 50 paise a day, and supported with Rs. 1.50. 'We are also now working out a medical insurance plan for 2,000 poor widows and their children,' says Khullar. ABLE already pays for the education of 27 children and seven orphans.

Khullar laments the lack of blood donors in the area and the rising number of deaths due to birth complications. He is now considering launching a mobile delivery lifeline.

Lahore-born Khullar, who completed his masters in economics in 1958 and joined the Indian Air Force in 1960, retired in 1987.

Normal retired life was not for him. It was the poverty and illness plaguing the region that set the pattern for the rest of his life.

Khullar believes the death of the Indian joint family has hit impoverished widows and their children the hardest. 'Now they can bank on us,' he assures.