

## Visit to the 'Vidja Ratna Scholarship Programme' 12 December 2013

NGO SADRAG, run by Dr Mala Bhandari and noon.ch, have found a different approach with the 'Vidja Ratna Scholarship Programme'. In SADRAG's learning centres a group of children were prepared for entering the regular school and Mala has chosen those of them who have the potential to attend a good school successfully. This step is a challenge for the children since not only do they need a good intellectual grasp, but also quite a lot of resilience. The 'Noida Public Secondary School' is attended by both SADRAG's children - who have migration backgrounds - and the children of the local middle class. Nowadays, the latter tend to be strongly supported by their parents from an early age. Noon.ch has undertaken to sponsor the scholarship students for at least five years. The aim of the programme is to enable all of the children to complete their school-leaving qualification after the 12th form, if possible

Mala explained once again that all the children had passed an entrance test before the beginning of term and had been classified into an appropriate class according to their level of school knowledge. This might mean that, for example, a ten-year-old girl will attend the first form because - except for the learning centre - she has never been at school before.

*Vidja Ratna group with Klaus and the coordinator of SADRAG*



Coming from our visit to the learning centre in Nagla, we arrived at the meeting point near the 'Noida Public Secondary School' an hour late. The meeting point was a roofed room without walls, opening to a street on which preparations for a wedding were in full swing. The children and young people of the Vidja Ratna programme that noon.ch has been supporting since 2013 were waiting for us there. Due to our delay, some of them had to go back to class, so we could only speak to 13 out of 16 students. All of them could already

understand English, and the older students were also able to speak well. However, they were not familiar with our accent, which caused them some difficulties.

We had brought along pencils and pencil cases for everyone. The young coordinator responsible for this project at SADRAG, gave us the students' first school examination results. Some of the younger students were very shy at first, and it was hard to get talking to them. But the three older boys, who have been in the Vidja Ratna programme for a longer time, exuded confidence. Each of them had very clear ideas of what profession he wished to choose, namely accountant, engineer and dealer.

All the children expressed their satisfaction with their situation at school and mentioned that they would be able to succeed. A brief glance at their examination results showed that some of them had excellent marks. But of course you can also see their weaknesses. The Indian school marks go from 'A to D', which corresponds with our 'very good to satisfactory'. Obviously, it makes all the difference whether the children come from English-speaking middle class families or from the one-year preparation course of the learning centres of SADRAG. Many Indian middle-class children have a computer at home, whereas the children we sponsor are dependent on their ability to learn during lessons. However, this school provides support classes for children who have weaknesses. Private schools in general are ambitious to bring all their students' knowledge and ability to a high level, if possible, since it helps raise the school's reputation.

After the short question time, the children lined up under the canopy so that I could take some pictures. By then, most of them had relaxed quite a bit so that we could even crack some jokes. The children in their obligatory school uniforms impressed us very positively. We felt that with this new project for gifted children we are on the right track.

*All three of them are in form 1*

On the way back we stopped at the office of SADRAG for a cup of tea. We had read about a new Indian law in the newspaper decreeing that private schools have to admit 20% of the children without or with reduced school fees. We asked Mala about this new law and she told us she had been endeavouring to profit by it but so far had only been partially successful. We understand that this law is currently legally challenged and has not been implemented so far. Noida Public Secondary School is a private school financially supported by the state.



Mala emphasised, that the project coordinator visits the children regularly, but they can also come to the office at SADRAG when they need help.



Visitors' report by Doris Eckstein, noon.ch,  
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