

# Give peace a chance

Senior civil servant Sandeep Silas believes that promoting Peace Heritage Sites would help discourage conflict among all

It was his travel to Thailand, and particularly his visit to the famous bridge on the River Kwai, that set Sandeep Silas thinking about the pros of such a visit on human consciousness. "Travel is quite intrinsic to a peaceful existence. It is only when we move out of our territorial boundaries and see the world that our myths about people, their culture and our stereotypes get shattered," he says. Little surprise then he pushes travelling as an important way of promoting peace.

To him, it is a cause for which he so ardently works. "There is a lesson to learn at each of these heritage sites — one that tells us what war and destruction can do to civilisations. The aftermath is never pleasant. Then why do we choose to play obstinate and continue to work up conflicts?" he asks. And therefore, he suggests that we all make a trip to sites that tell us what hatred

can do to people. "I plan to make a plea to the world organisations (like the UN) and world leaders to convert war sites of the past into Peace Heritage Sites, so they tell their own story and effectively," he says. By these sites, he means Auschwitz camps, Waterloo site, Menin Gate and Berlin Wall among others. "One visit to such a destination and people would automatically become conscious about the perils of war," he adds.

He shares, "When the train ran over that bridge, my heart sank. I felt I was walking on the death bed of many crushed dreams, of those prisoners of wars who died while building it." He expects similar emotions to swamp the human conscience and turn them into advocates of peace instead.

The response to his proposal so far has been very encouraging. He shares a list of war ruins under the

"Peace Heritage Sites" project. These include:

- The Battle of Waterloo Sites
- Menin Gate, Town of Ypres, Belgium
- Auschwitz Concentration Camps, Auschwitz Proper, Birkenau and Monowitz
- Anzac Cove, Gallipoli Hills, Turkey
- Pearl Harbour, Island Of O'ahu Hawaii
- Fort Siloso, Sentosa Island, Singapore
- Atomic Bomb Dome At Hiroshima Peace Park, Hiroshima, Japan
- Bridge On River Kwai, Kanchanaburi, Thailand
- St. Paul's Church, Ambala, India
- Berlin Wall, Germany
- Bamiyan Buddhas, Bamiyan, Afghanistan

This is not his only passion. Writing poetry is the other. Few know that Silas is about to cut a Ghazal album with Pakistani singer Shafqat Ali Khan. "Like this project, the album promotes harmony. Khan has come all the way from Pakistan to lend his voice to my words," he says. "There is honesty in his voice and goes beautifully with the poetry that I write." The two worked together for making *Ibadat-e-Aman* a success. Silas, who has never been to Pakistan himself, rues: "While getting Khan from Pakistan, I had to arrange for a city specific visa. Though I adhere to the laws of the land that I am committed to, I feel it somewhere defeats my mission. As by doing so, we are weakening the process of trust building," he says. So while the laws prevail for now, we can only hope that in time we will get to travel with trust within both countries.

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(Clockwise) Auschwitz Concentration Camps during World War II, Sandeep Silas reciting poetry and sufiana *kalaam* by Shafqat Ali Khan during *Ibadat-e-Aman*; (Facing page) The bridge on the River Kwai

