

**SANDEEP SILAS**

# The unlikely peacenik

**I**t is highly unlikely combination — a dyed-in-the-wool Government of India (GoI) bureaucrat who doubles up as peace activist. Meet Sandeep Silas, currently private secretary to Union minister of labour and employment Mallikarjun Kharge at Delhi.

How does a ‘babu’ promote peace in the sub-continent? Savour this: on a cool November evening, poetry and music create quite a heady cocktail at the India Habitat Centre’s Ibadat-E-Aman. Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Sandeep Silas from India, recited his beautiful poems in unison with soulful music from Pakistan’s classical and Sufi maestro, Ustaad Shafqat Ali Khan.

Pretty unbelievable in the world of stuff shirted bureaucrats, not known to particularly smile except in the presence of the minister.

Silas, a 1984 batch officer who has served in various capacities in seven Union ministries including railways, statistics and programme implementation and tourism and culture, has floated the idea of a ‘Garland of Peace’.

How did it come about? “In January, 2004, I was traveling in Thailand on a train which took me over the bridge on River Kwai Noi. I saw the wooden bridge of logs constructed by 2,000 POWs in 17 days and I told myself ‘this should be designated as a war heritage site.’ On another train journey between Kalka to Shimla on March 20, 2004, I thought why not join similar sites all over the world and a peace heritage site idea, or ‘Garland of Peace’ was born,” Silas says.

Some recognition has come. The International Peace Bureau has termed it as “... A very powerful idea”.

“Initially, I was looking at government support but then decided to place it in the public domain as only those ideas which get public acceptance make



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it,” Silas shares. The concept can be appreciated in detail at [www.garlandofpeace.com](http://www.garlandofpeace.com).

In this, he has support of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, New York, where he graduated in 2008 and holds a Masters of Public Administration with distinction and honour. As a British Chevening Scholar he has studied “Strategic Management” at the Manchester Business School, UK. “We must keep War Heritage Sites in constant view so that we do not traverse that path again and our children understand the value of peace. We must not allow the memories of mass destruction, rape and genocide to fade away from the radars of world leaders, opinion makers and the people. This could go a long way in promoting peace,” Silas avers.

Silas took to writing surprisingly late. “I wrote my first article in the Railway magazine in 1993”. Since then he has been a regular contributor in national and international magazines.

In addition, he has authored books in both English and Hindi. Discover India by Rail (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.- Paperback, 2001),Morrow’s Face (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.- Paperback, 2005), Borough in the Mist (Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.- 2007), Sada Khayal (Vani Prakashan - 2009; a book of Nazams & Ghazals), Rainbows Don’t Last Forever (Silas, 2010; a book of lyrics in English), Ranai-e-Khayal (Vani Prakashan – 2011; a book of ghazals) are some of his contributions. How does he find time to juggle? “Civil Service is my profession and poetry is my passion. I always say, it is the lazy person who does not find time; the busy one does.” Like mixing up government and peace? [Gw](#)

**(Shivani Pandey)**