

# EXPRESS Newsline

EXPRESS Newsline

MUMBAI ■ SATURDAY ■ FEBRUARY 22, 1997

## Residents wage war against mental hospital in Dahisar

KAAJAL WALIA

FEBRUARY 21

**I**RATE residents of New Link Road colony in Dahisar (West) are threatening to force the closure of a newly opened mental hospital in their locality. Displeased with the hospital's location, the residents are agitating to shut down the institution.

The hospital run by a trust 'Shradha rehabilitation Centre' has been in operation since February 10, 1997 from a bungalow here.

Starting with a single patient, the hospital now has nine mental inmates including four women.

Dr Bharat Vatwani, director of the rehabilitation centre, alleges that over 60 residents of the township tried to enter their hospital on February 12 night when his wife, Dr Smita Vatwani, was inspecting the patients.

"They tried to force their way

into the hospital but somehow, were kept in check. On February 16, the residents' association threatened to stage a dharna, after which, we sought protection from the police," he says.

Two police constables from the nearby Dahisar police station are kept on guard at the entrance of the hospital.

However, the New Link Road Residents' Association, which has 800-odd members, denies resorting to violence. "We are all middle-class working people. When would we get time for all this," they ask.

They further alleged being cheated by Dr Vatwani who had earlier promised to shift the hospital premises to a suitable location. "In one of our meetings with Dr Vatwani, it was mutually decided that the hospital premises would be shifted to another location.

He even agreed to look into our suggested alternative sites," a

member of the association informs.

"The construction work of the hospital abruptly stopped after the meeting, which naturally gave the impression that Dr Vatwani had lost interest in the project. However, a flurry of activity was witnessed towards the end of January. A fortnight later, the hospital started functioning after an inaugural ceremony was secretly performed at midnight," he disclosed.

The association is quick to point out that they are neither against the trustees nor the mental hospital. "Dr Vatwani is doing a wonderful job. We simply want the hospital premises to be shifted to a secluded place, away from our residential area since we are worried about the safety of our members," informs N J Save, general secretary of the association.

Dr Vatwani says, mental destitutes without a violent streak are admitted to their rehabilitation in-

stitute, which should calm the residents' fears. He further denied having ever agreed to shift the hospital premises to another location.

"We have been running a similar rehabilitation centre at Borivli for the last six years and none of our neighbours there have faced any problems. In fact, I have extended an open invitation to the association to visit my Borivli premises and speak to the residents anytime to clear their doubts," when contacted, Dr Vatwani told *Express Newsline*.

Shankar Pawar, senior police inspector at Dahisar Police station talking about the issue said, "We have received complaints from the residents as well as the hospital's trustees.

We have provided police protection to the hospital after the residents' threat to stage a demonstration. However, now everything is under control."