

A hospital where common man is VIP

From Avinash Singh

BEAS (Amritsar District)—'A VIP hospital for a common man'. That is what the 300-bed Maharaj Sawan Singh Charitable Hospital here has come to be. How can one otherwise explain three-channel music through earphones, bed-side monitors, neo-ventilators, central oxygen, air and suction system in each of the general wards of a hospital that does not charge even a single penny for any service rendered.

The town, half way through Jalandhar and Amritsar on the Sber Shah Suri Marg, got its name long ago from the river Beas, on whose banks it developed from a forlorn village into a bustling wayside market. Of late the town has come to be known for the arc-shaped majestic building of the country's biggest charitable medical centre in the rural area.

If the first view from outside the 35-acre complex points to a historical building built with the grandeur of Mughal architecture, the interior could easily be mistaken as the lounge of an international airport. Long rows of exquisite plastic chairs in the OPD, sign boards, open well-lit corridors all

indicate anything but a hospital.

Any Government-run hospital is the last place one would like to visit. But this hospital leaves one with quite a pleasant experience. The administrative body Sardar Bahadur Jagat Singh Medical Relief Society, a wing of the Radha Swami Satsang must feel quite proud of the way the hospital has shaped up.

Satsang, set up at Beas by Maharaj Maimal Singh, is one of the very few institutions that has not come under the affect of the surge of violence in the State. Its present spiritual head Maharaj Charan Singh, who is known to have launched a number of other welfare projects, aimed at providing the best medical facility, free of cost, to the people of the area who had no other hospital of repute in the region.

In the first two years of its existence it has successfully treated about four lakh outdoor patients for various ailments of chest, cardiology, ear, nose, throat, deformities, fracture and dermatology without any distinction of caste, colour, creed, race and religion. An independent dental clinic and a most modern ophthalmology wing are prized possessions.

An average of Rs 6 per patient, per

day is being spent on medicines of the outdoor patients, according to Dr P. R. Sodhi, the hospital director. The average expenditure on an indoor patient for whom three meals besides tea and snacks are provided is Rs 30.

Nursing sisters have access to all the doctors, in the event of emergency, through the centre control room's beep system. All the senior doctors carry transistor-like objects on which they talk to the control room.

With all the facilities available in the general wards, the private wards, completed last season has started attracting patients. When commissioned this would be the only wing where a flat rate of Rs 100 per day would be charged.

Apart from the clinical, microbiology and biochemistry labs, hygienic operation theatres, the hospital has also a well-organised blood transfusion department. No shortage of blood has ever been felt, and no patient has ever died for want of blood here claims Mr K. S. Narang, IAS, the Chief Adminis-

trator, and a former Chief Secretary with the Punjab Government "since blood donation is a voluntary and regular feature here."

Thanks to the devotion of the scwadars, not even a single case of paid doonor has been entertained so far and thanks to the devotion of the followers of the sect and the scwadars, the sprawling complex, which would have cost any other organisation a minimum of Rs 25 crore was built for half the amount in less than six years time.

Behind the hospital, a small township has sprung up within the complex where the 800-strong staff doctors, nurses and voluntary servants are putting up. The landscaping of the area has been done by Dr Sodhi himself.

A very neat and hygienic canteen has been provided where one can have a wholesome meal for Rs 4 only. Besides there are shops of general needs.

A voluntary worker Dwarka Nath sums up the whole operation here as "gurbani in practice."