

Dateline UN | October 23, 2012

Quiet weekend before big day

Day Seven: Weekends at the United Nations seem to follow a pattern, especially for diplomats and delegates visiting for a short period. They are spent taking the train to Washington, DC, for consultation with fellow diplomats there or for one or the other social cum professional engagement. More often than not the visit to the General Assembly is combined with a round of meetings at the State Department, with the individual country's (in my case India's) embassy in the American capital, and confabulations with the several think-tanks in the Beltway, as Washington's inner ring is called.

I skipped the trip to DC because there was nothing pressing for me to do there. I'd already gone there earlier and done my share of meetings. Instead, I spent my Saturday at the UN attending that other New York institution: the charity ball.

Organised by Children's Hope India, an NGO run by Indian-origin women and raising money for underprivileged children in India for several years now, the charity ball I went to has long-established its credentials. It is an annual feature on the city calendar, usually coinciding with the General Assembly session. Each year, Children's Hope India raises half a million dollars or thereabouts to assist 250,000 children in India. It has been doing this for the past 20 years, and providing financial support to institutions from Ballygunge to Borivili.

One of the features of the charity ball —hosted at the Chelsea Piers Complex —was an auction to raise money. The highlight item was a cricket bat autographed by the Indian team that went for US\$ 15,000. There was also a painting by Mamata Banerjee, chief minister of West Bengal, which depicted purple flowers and was labelled, appropriately, "Flower Power". It was picked up by a New York art dealer for US\$ 3,000. I tried to talk to him and thank him after the auction, but he left as soon as it was over — and my ungainly sprint was to no avail.

Sunday was spent rather quietly — a short walk around the neighbourhood and then an afternoon of study in my hotel room, going over my speech for the following morning. The thought of addressing the General Assembly on Monday morning, on issues related to the Millennium Development Goals, had me both excited and nervous. I must have rehearsed my speech at least three times, and edited it maybe a dozen times, and even called my office in India for an appropriate quote. This is the Big One!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paul', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

[This article was carried by The Telegraph | Monday, October 30, 2012]