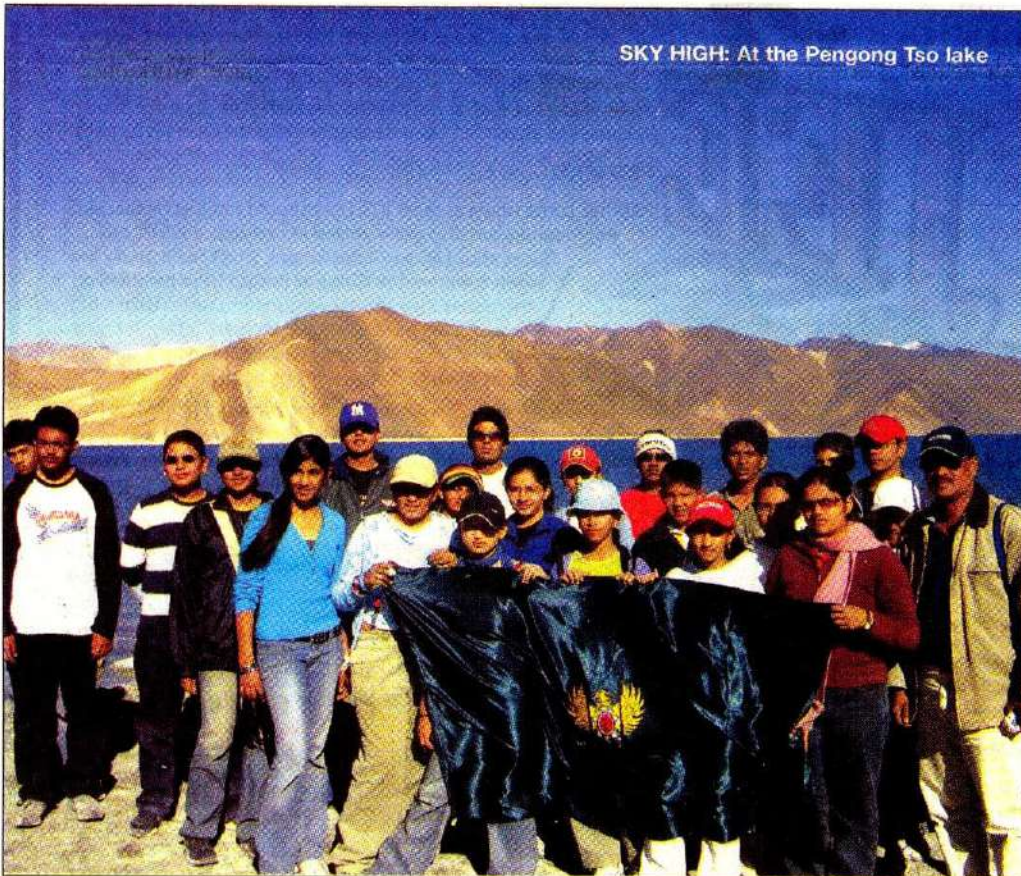


SKY HIGH: At the Pengong Tso lake



By Mathang Seshagiri/TNN

ASK ANY Coke-sipping, Lay's-munching GenX kid tuned into an iPod what it takes to be on top of the world and he, in all probability, will suggest 'become a Miss Universe.'

Apoorva Sidhu, a Class 8 student at Indus International School, a new-age international residential institute in Bangalore, is too young for beauty pageants, but has already been through a top-of-the-world-experience. "It comes at 18,380 feet above sea level after a nerve-racking drive down the highest motorable road in the world. It's a great feeling," she says, of the Khardungla Pass she just visited.

Twenty-one students from the school shared an exhilarating we-have-conquered-the-Everest experience over nine days and as many chilly nights in Ladakh.

At a time when preferred destinations for school excursions and B-school trips are Singapore and Kuala Lumpur—Ladakh, at some 12,000 ft above sea level with deficit oxygen, seems pretty adventurous for stu-

on top of the world

Indus International School took learning out of the classroom with a nine-day experiential trip to Ladakh

dents who're yet to cross Class 11. "But what is the point in taking students to a place where you only have multiplexes and air-conditioned shopping malls? We have plenty of those in Bangalore now. I told my

students that by reading geography textbooks, you can't even envision the vastness of the Himalayas. Reading about Himalayas is one thing and trekking in them is quite another. Yes, it is risky, but risk management is not something that needs to be taught only in a two-year MBA programme," says T P Vasanth, trustee, Indus School, who mooted the idea of annual trips to Ladakh.

It was indeed an awesome feeling. After a three-hour, 25 km river-rafting on a sunny forenoon, students felt they had completely tamed the Indus river. They tested waters at the Pengong Tso lake, crossing Changla Pass—third highest pass in India—which is so huge that it generously spills over to neighbouring China and so cold during winters that the Indian Army camping here can't help but play ice hockey on the lake!

The young ones visited the Alchi and Thiksey monasteries learning more about Dalai Lama and Buddhism, enlightened beyond any schooling. Their shopping spree for yak cheese, charm wheels and ripe apricots in the Leh market turned out to be a lesson in financial management.

Such trips, says Vasanth, are fun, but also help a great deal to metamorphose his students into global citizens. "By and large, as a nation we are not risk-takers. When the proposal was first mooted, many of the students froze, literally. It did take a little bit of convincing. But those who've been there have all sworn to go back sometime!" he adds.

Nikita Bahirwani is one among them. "Though I went for the trip last year, I enrolled again this time because Ladakh is a great place to be with friends. There's so much to see, learn and experience, you can't soak it all in just one go," she says.

After returning from the trip, students are to make presentation before their classmates, cut a video and submit reports to their subject teachers, which will

give them precious marks in the CAS (creativity, action, service) paper—and perhaps an edge over others in the history and geography exams.

But there are many instances during the trip of learning really going beyond the four walls of the classroom. A star-lit sky one night led to an instant lecture on astronomy. On the way to Saspol, they experienced a hill with magnetic powers that dragged the bus even when the engine was switched off—teaching a lesson or two in physics. Students also got a peek into the lives of Army jawans, who guard India's boundaries from angry neighbours—and free battle tank rides, too.

"The best part of the trip was the shopping. My friends told me that I really bargain well—may be that comes from my mother. It was a practical lesson in cash management," said one student.

Lt Col (Retd) V.N.Sathya Rao, director, sports and adventure at the school, who led the team on this trip says he noticed several visible changes among students. "Boys who never opened their mouth in the school were narrating ghost stories at the hotel. The trip was a great opportunity for them to hone their interpersonal communication skills as well," he said.

(This correspondent was in Ladakh at the invitation of the Indus International School)

GREAT GUNS: At the Indian Army artillery unit

