

Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology to breed vultures for Parsis

Anon.

Hyderabad – Parsis worried about the growing pile of bodies in their ‘Towers of Silence’ can take heart. The Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) has decided to take up, on an express basis, the job of breeding vultures, which can later be transported to various parts of the country. Though the problem of undisposed bodies in the ‘Towers of Silence’ has been known, the matter came to limelight last fortnight after a community member clandestinely took photographs of the pile up in the Mumbai’s ‘Tower of Silence.’ “Vultures are supposed to eat away the bodies. But they have become virtually extinct because they consume diclofenic while feeding on cattle carcasses and disappearance of their habitat,” said an analyst. Sources in the Parsi community say that not only in Mumbai but even in Hyderabad there could be a pile up of bodies in the two ‘Towers of Silence’ (or dakhmas) located in Bhoiguda and Parsigutta. Vultures were last seen in Hyderabad two decades ago. “In the absence of vultures, we have to depend on the rays of the sun to decompose the bodies. This could take weeks in summers and longer in monsoons,” says Awad Vadia of the Zoroastrian Club. “If there

are vultures, it will take minutes for the large birds to eat the bodies,” he adds. As per the CCMB plan - which got kicked off a few months ago – White-backed Vultures would reproduce through artificial insemination. “To this end, the Central Zoo Authority is about to transfer a flock of vultures from Gujarat to the Nehru Zoological Park in Hyderabad,” say S Shivaji, deputy director of CCMB. Captive breeding will take place in the centre that will be established at the zoo. Parsis are obviously overjoyed at the prospects of more vultures around. “We might be a progressive community, but we cannot disown our rituals. A majority of us would still like to be left at the ‘Towers of Silence’ after death,” says Gulbanu Yadgar Chenoy, president, Parsi Anjuman. However, a small proportion of Parsis have begun resorting to burials. “Why not? When there are not enough vultures to eat the bodies, it is an insult to the dead to let their bodies rot for months,” says Farida Tampal, a Parsi and an environmentalist. But the priest at the Fire Temple at MG Road, Keki Dastoor, will not have any of this. “Cremation desecrates the sacred element of fire, burying defiles the earth and drowning pollutes the water,” he says.

From: ***The Times of India***

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1996448.cms>

16 September 2006

