

Helping Net the shell of autism

By A Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI: It is the first ever world-wide cyber conference which seeks to enlighten people on autism. The cyber conference called Autism99 is a joint project between the National Autistic Society, Shirley Foundation and RMR Design along with other international hosts.

The conference is currently on, having started on November 2 and will continue till November 19. It can be visited at "www.autism99.org".

Since there are several complex issues associated with autism, the conference will aim at actively combating these issues and breaking down information barriers across the globe. This will also give people from all walks of life a chance to learn what the disorder is all about.

Conference delegates will be able to read practical and academic papers on therapies and treatments, access online question and answer sessions and participate in live chat and self-help groups.

Autism is said to be one of the most common development disorder known to affect close to two million Indians. Yet, very few people know how to help those who are afflicted by it.

It is a neurological disorder which a child is born with. Around 80 per cent of the those struck by it in India are males. But there are hardly any specialised treatment or rehabilitation centres for the patients.

Autistic children are by far the worst affected, as they are most commonly misunderstood and forced to do things against their wishes.

Executive director, AFA, Merry Barua said, "Mentally challenged children are different from autistic children.

While the former's methods of learning are the same as that of normal children, although slower, autistic children require different methods altogether."

Explaining the initial symptoms, Ms Barua said, "When a child is 18 months old, he or she is expected to show interest in things and point

out whatever is attractive. Children at this age also begin to learn to imitate."

An autistic child will not have any of these usual signs of growing up. There will be an obvious speech delay and the child will not be able to mix with other children.

Some children may also become very talkative and talk about subjects which interest them without realising that the listener may not want to hear about it.

Although fairly widespread, most parents are late in realising that their child is autistic. "In the first few years, the child is simply called shy. Only when the child begins to go to school and displays difficulty in learning and communication, do parents sit up and take note," said Ms Barua.

While there is no cure for autism, professional world wide agree that significant improvement can be made with appropriate intervention. The cyber conference was preceded by a three-day workshop for parent of autistic children held in the Capital in the last week of October this year.