

LIGHT AT NIGHT

BELLA JAISINGHANI

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Asif grins shyly as his headmaster at St Xavier's Night School showers him with the kind of praise that is reserved for a favourite student. But a year ago, principal Dagdu Shedje would not have been so effusive. "This ruffian has been locked up by the police and beaten up by rival gangs. He has caused his parents and me the kind of disappointment you cannot imagine," Shedje says, looking at Asif in mock reproach. "Only in the last one year have we been able to drive some sense into him."

A public introduction like this would make most 26-year-olds wilt. But Asif and the other students who attend night school know a compliment when they see one. "It is true, I would be ready to fight to the finish every time a rival gang antagonised me or my friends," says Asif, who is a student of class eight. "I would not have survived my neighbourhood had I not come into the classroom."

Instead of neat rows of uniformed children, the classroom of

MOONLIT ASSEMBLY: Students of Sardar Nagar Municipal Marathi Night School sing the national anthem before going home. The school in Sion was started in 1989 by the Safai Kamgar Parivartan Sangh

