

Wounds are yet to heal

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BANGALORE: It's Deepavali time. When Harshith listens to the stray sound of crackers on the streets, he hides behind his mother Vanamala. So does Gajendra, who prefers homework to fireworks.

Both these five-year-olds have been undergoing treatment for over a year for the eye injuries they received last Deepavali. They were onlookers and not bursting crackers. While Gajendra was returning from school in Yelahanka, Harshith had gone outside his house in Mathikere to answer nature's call. In both incidents, an *aane pataki*, thrown by another child got into right eye causing cataract and in the



Five-year-olds Gajendra (left) and Harshith are still undergoing treatment for the eye injuries they received a year ago.

latter case, glaucoma. Dr Arnu Samprathi, pediatric ophthalmologist at Narayana Nethralaya, points out to, "a small percentage of permanent damage in the vision of these children who have been psychologically marred." While Gajendra has undergone a

surgery last Wednesday, Harshith might need a second surgery to correct the pressure inside his eye which is very high. Parents of the children are also worried over their poor performance in studies on account of the damage to the eye. Not just these chil-

dren, even their siblings and parents fear the sound and thrill associated with crackers. "I do not want to buy crackers this year. We will close the doors and stay inside," says Harshith's 10-year-old brother Nishanth, who accompanies his brother for treatment once a month.

Of the 40 eye injury cases received at Narayana Nethralaya last year, one 18-year-old patient lost her vision completely, while three others are doing fine after surgery. 28 of these are boys, while 12 are girls. Harshith's mother Vanamala complains that the Nethralaya's helpline was not operational on September 21 last year when her son's eyeball was ripped with fire and he immediately started rubbing his eyes.