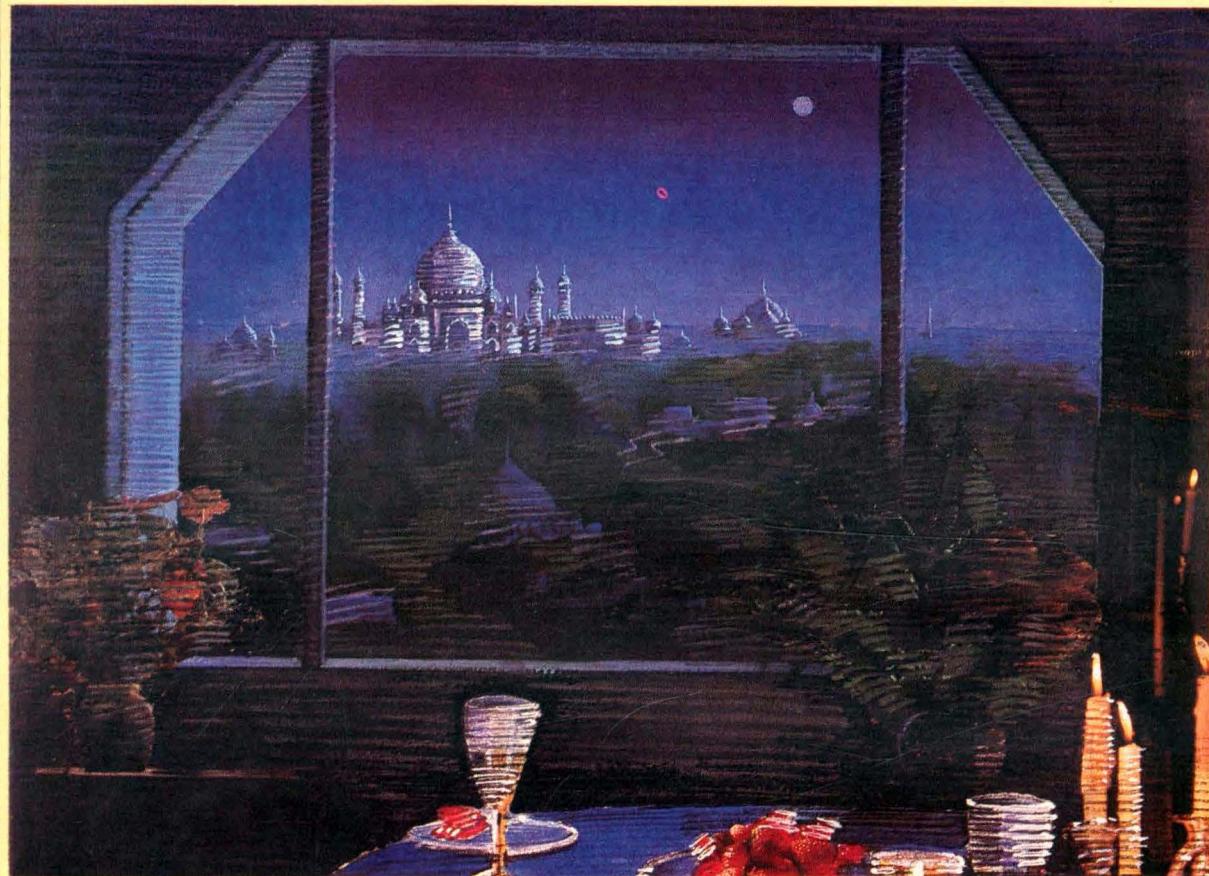


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HAS SOME KIND OF MADNESS TOUCHED US ALL?

AT THE SANTACRUZ AIRPORT IN BOMBAY, airbus passengers for trunk route flights, after they have checked in, go in for the security check, and are frisked; the luggage carried by hand is put through the X-ray scan. *After that*, you are required to open the same bag for a physical check, by an impressive-looking array of police officers.

Is the X-ray machine not working today?

“Sir, it is working.”

Is it being competently manned?

“Yes sir, it is.”

Then why are you repeating this re-checking exercise?

Silence.

You know, you fellows only invite contempt by subjecting passengers to this kind of harassment. Why do you all do this?

“Orders, sir.”

Who the hell issues such stupid orders?

“Delhi, sir.”

Hundreds of passengers are packed like sardines, in front of a row of tables specially placed in the congested, security check area, awaiting their turn for this needless second check. A passenger tells the officer I have spoken to: “I agree with this gentleman,” nodding approvingly in my direction. And the rest? Taking it all in their stride, I am sure, without even wondering what all this stupidity does to intelligence norms of the serious business of security enforcement.

*

ON AUGUST 1, 1987, Mr Nusli Wadia, Chairman of Bombay Dyeing & Manufacturing Co Ltd, is arrested. There have been numerous stories in the press suggesting some kind of connection between Wadia and Fairfax Group Ltd. There have been allegations that the DMT plant that Bombay Dyeing has imported and installed at Patalganga, is “junk”. Company Law Board officers, Customs officials, Reserve Bank inspectors, and Income-tax Department inspectors, have been investigating Mr Wadia and his Bombay Dyeing Group of Companies, for months. Mr Wadia is declared a suspect-person by the Justice Thakkar-Natarajan Commission of Inquiry. As a friend of Mr Nusli Wadia and his family, for almost two decades, I am aware of all this, and the arrest disturbs me. I rush to the CBI headquarters in Bombay.

Why has he been arrested? I ask a senior officer who appears to be in charge of the operation.

“Do not worry, there is nothing.”

I learn, and everybody who reads newspapers has since learnt, that Mr Wadia was arrested for entering “Indian” in answer to a question about his nationality, on the

Guest Registration Card for a stay at the Oberoi Hotel in New Delhi, in November 1986, while Mr Wadia is, in fact, a British national. Well-known business travellers frequenting good hotels are never required to fill in their own registration cards; the hotel fills these in for them prior to their arrival; the guest is only required to append his signature on it.

But this is ridiculous. How can you do a thing like this? I ask the officer angrily.

“I am sorry, sir. But we have orders. From Delhi.”

Persons like Mr Wadia, who are prominent businessmen, deserve the severest punishment for any real wrongdoing, if any. But, to be arrested for an incorrect entry on a hotel guest registration card? I do not know if I should be angry, or cry. I go home and cry. For my friend. And my country.

* * *

MR WADIA'S BRITISH PASSPORT is taken away by the CBI; he is told he is not to leave India; his application for the renewal of a visa to permit him to stay in the country of his birth, India, is already unduly delayed by the Home Department. Now he cannot travel — no passport to leave with, and no visa to return to India with, that is, if he can leave. So, Mr Wadia moves a petition before the Supreme Court for permission to travel abroad, and for a visa to be granted, to enable him to return.

The Additional Attorney General of India, Mr G Ramaswamy, opposes Mr Wadia's application on the Government's behalf. On September 1, Mr Ramaswamy tells the Supreme Court, that Mr Wadia's wife and children have *already* left the country; that Mr Wadia's presence is required in the country by the CBI for investigations; that Mr Wadia is unlikely to return if allowed to go abroad.

At the very moment that the Additional Attorney General is making this disposition before the Supreme Court, Mr Wadia's wife and children are, in fact, in Bombay; his wife, also, without a visa. The Supreme Court allows Mr Wadia's petition.

I learn that Mr Ramaswamy had based his disposition on information provided by the Central Bureau of Investigation and other intelligence agencies. Should we cry? Or laugh? Is our country safe in the hands of such morons in New Delhi?

In the meantime, what is the Intelligence on how China views us; why is drug trafficking on the increase here; how are the militant Tamil separatist groups ever going to reconcile with each other and with Sri Lanka; what is the source of the terrorists' determination in the Punjab? And, who took the Bofors bribes? ♦

9

**AVOIDABLE RISKS,
MOUNTING ANXIETY:**

Is Indian Airlines guilty of violating safety norms?

ABHAY MOKASHI exposes the negligence and mismanagement that seem to have become an integral part of the company's image.

Meanwhile, who will take responsibility for jeopardising the lives of those who fly Indian Airlines?

*Cover Photograph:
Vivek Anand*



POISED FOR POLITICAL UPHEAVAL? As the political grip of the Congress (I) weakens, movements left and right of the Centre are clearly discernible. K F RUSTAMJI reports on the schisms, analyses various trends and presents a panoramic view of the shape of politics in India today.

21

"I WILL RETURN": Nelson Mandela is South Africa's longest serving and most famous political prisoner, first incarcerated by the Pretoria regime 25 years ago. We present extracts from his historic speeches that describe the struggle against apartheid, and continue to inspire those who still hail him as their undisputed political leader.

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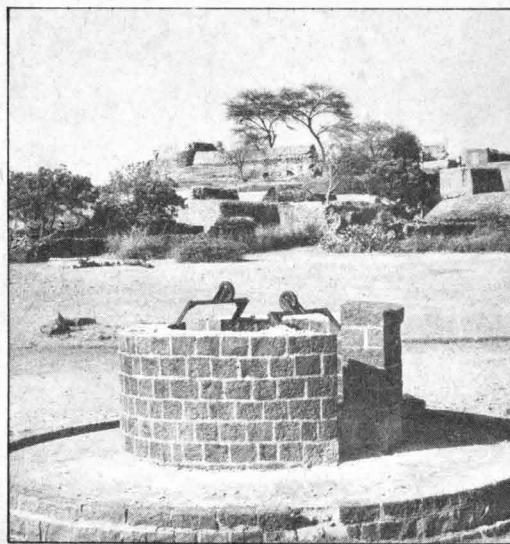


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MANAGING OUR WATER RESOURCES:

As the country finds itself in the clutches of a severe drought, the government is once again confronted with problems of how to manage the country's water resources. Eminent environmentalist B B

VOHRA examines various possibilities and concludes that the future of irrigation will belong increasingly to ground water.



25 A MINISTER COLLECTS DEGREES: Is Dr Shrikant Jichkar a shrewd politician, or a scholarly genius? SHIRIN MEHTA profiles this enigmatic collector of degrees.

36 AGAINST ALL ODDS: The prolonged university and college teachers' strike has highlighted the problems faced by members of this 'noble profession'. SUCHITRA BAJPAI reports.

46 ON COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRY: SHEKHAR GHOSH presents an overview of the fate of several commissions of inquiry and concludes that they are increasingly becoming an exercise in futility.

56 POINTERS TO SUCCESS: A report on a project aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in water-management in a village in Beed district.

58 THE MONARCH OF THE GREEN BAIZE: SHIRISH NADKARNI profiles Geet Sethi, the youngest champion of world amateur billiards, who looks all set to win more titles.

63 THE DEPUTY FUEHRER: Hess died last month after spending almost half a century in Spandau Prison. M PINTO traces the rise and fall of Hitler's third-in-command.

66 EXTRACT: 'INDIAN WILDLIFE', on conserving our wildlife, thereby maintaining a balance between man and nature.

74 STAR-CROSSED: A humorous short story by D B VOHRA.

LETTERS

Democracy At Work



On September 2, 1987, perhaps, the worst ever concerted assault on the freedom of our country's fourth estate since the British left our land in 1947, took place. The Central government raid, executed high-handedly, ruthlessly and in a fascist fashion, on every single office of *The Indian Express*, made it a black day in the 40 years of our existence as a democratic polity (except for the two dark years of the infamous Emergency). It was condemned as such, in the strongest terms, by leaders of every major political party in the country (except, of course, the skeletal Congress (I)).

And it so happened that our copy of **Imprint** arrived that very day, containing the famous interview with Rajiv Gandhi which had appeared in *Penthouse*, using a quote from the interview as a headline, "Basically, we need more democratic thinking."

We did not know whether to laugh. Or weep.

Norma & C Antony Louis
Bombay

Controversial Statement

The special report featuring the RSS, 'The Hindu Citadel' (**Imprint**, August, 1987) gives a comprehensive account of the organisation.

Despite some differences in the outlook of the RSS's late chief M S Golwalkar and the present Chief Balasaheb Deoras, the organisation is most

dedicated and disciplined, and seen as a repository of the cultural heritage of the Hindus.

The article talks of the tolerance of Hindus vis-a-vis Muslim religious processions. Also, there has been no recorded incidence of Hindu-Muslim riots in Nagpur, the RSS headquarters. Then why the controversial statement which describes this militant organisation as fascist and communal?

J V Naik
Bombay

Tax Evaders?

Film stars live in a princely way on and off the screen. But they are the first to raise funds for national causes.

Of course, there are a few who fleece not only the industry but also the nation, but such black sheep thrive everywhere. So, to parade socially-conscious film stars as criminals and tax evaders and publicly sing their so-called misdeeds, does not benefit our government.

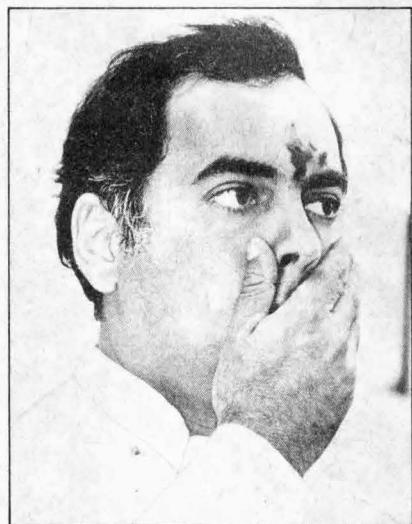
Unquestionably, the contribution made to our nation by our film stars is so great that the appropriate action to be taken by the Government would be to exempt them from the clutches of income tax, or to let the tax be a nominal sum.

Janki Dass
Bombay

Frankness Needed

Mr A D Moddie analyses John Mander's Encounter article on India in 1962 and finds it relevant to today's politics in the country (Pointers From The Past: **Imprint** July '87). The comparison of the two do not hold.

India, under the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi, is very different from that under Jawaharlal Nehru who was a democrat to the very core. During Nehru's time, party elections were invariably held. He did not ever think of holding the two reigns: prime ministership and the Congress presidentship. Nehru encouraged discussion and debate, both at the party level and in the government.



Although Rajiv Gandhi is basically democratic, events seem to have forced him to take an undemocratic posture both in the Government and in the party. But then Mrs Gandhi was the genesis of that trend. She was clever, and powerful enough, both within the country and without, so that her process of making the power centripetal was not felt, and if felt, not questioned.

But what clearly distinguishes one period from the other is the elements of frankness, both in the running of the government as well as the party. Rajiv Gandhi has been unable to regain Nehru's frankness. Bofors is a glaring example of that.

Naresh Umrigar
Bardoli

Improvement Expected?

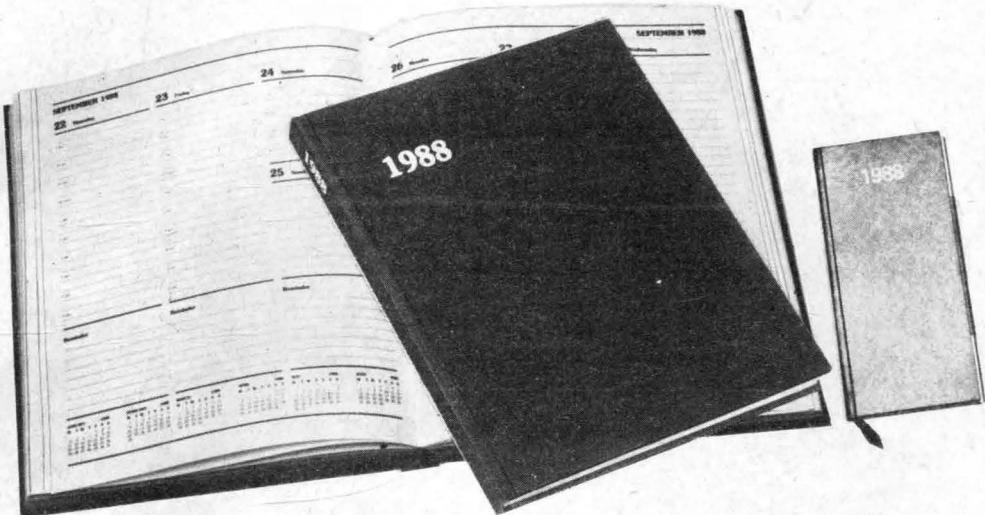
I have been an age-old subscriber of **Imprint**. And I feel it is an insult to my patience to receive the August issue in the first week of September! That too, with an astrology column for the previous month — can anything be more farcical?

Can I expect any improvement?

Dr S K Mehta
Baroda

Many apologies. Recent changes in the editorial staff are responsible for the delays, but every attempt is being made to catch up with deadlines.

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flying times, Domestic air distances, Domestic road distances, International entry and exit/requirements/regulations, Domestic airports, telephones, distance from towns, International airports, distance from cities, Airlines offices in major cities, Indian airlines domestic fares and excess baggage rates, Indian airlines route map, Vayudoot rate chart and map, and spare pages for Notes. The Diary will make an excellent gift for the New Year.

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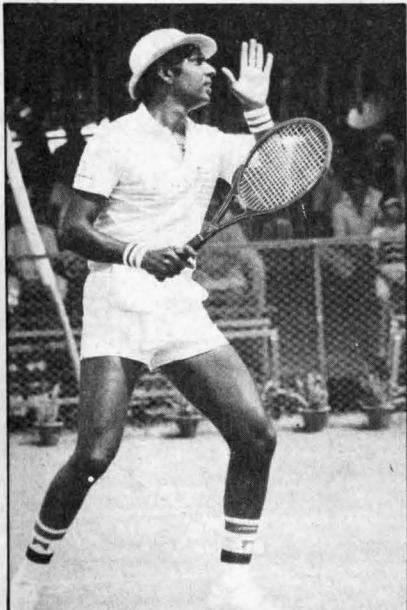
LETTERS

Why the Fuss?

Thank you for reprinting the *Penthouse* interview with Rajiv Gandhi. However, I can see little that is controversial about it, barring the fact that it appeared in *Penthouse*, a magazine renowned more for its pornographic content than for thought-provoking copy. In the interview, Rajiv Gandhi has successfully managed to circumvent most of the important issues that confront his government today, including terrorism in the Punjab, the many dissenters from his cabinet, and the scandals connected with Fairfax and Bofors. Instead, he carries on at length about foreign policy and industrial progress. But then, we cannot really expect the Prime Minister of a government that largely operates behind closed doors, to reveal much.

Kirti Marathe
Nagpur

Tennis, and more Tennis!



The report on the Davis Cup competition (*Imprint*, August) made lively reading, and the author has successfully managed to recapture the thrills and excitement connected with the game. Also, it is heartening to note

that our sportsmen are faring well in a game that India has seldom excelled at.

However, there is one point I would wish to make. The previous issue (*Imprint*, July) contained an article on Wimbledon; once again, the subject was tennis. And in the earlier issues, there was nothing on sports at all! Should I conclude that *Imprint* is interested only in tennis? Aren't there any other games that our sportsmen play?

Mohandas Sharma
Jabalpur

A Fond Farewell

An association dating back to the Ruskin Bond era does not end just because I will not be contributing any more forecasts to *Imprint*! Gracious Ganesa, no!

Nobody is wiser than Destiny, and *Imprint* and Bejan Daruwalla may yet have a second innings, more glorious and lasting than the first one!

Bejan Daruwalla
Goa

'Star Trek' Error

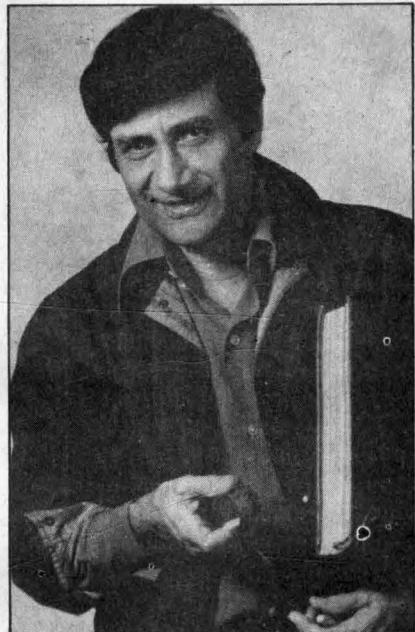
There is a minor error in the article 'Star Trek' (*Imprint*, August). In the beginning, the author tells us that Supernova 1987 A exploded in our galaxy. This is incorrect. The said explosion took place in the Large Magellanic Cloud (LMC), which is one of the three galaxies visible to the naked eye. The other two are the Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC) and the Andromeda galaxy. The Magellanic Clouds are in the Southern hemisphere, and are named after the Portuguese explorer, Ferdinand Magellan, who was the first to observe them. The LMC lies in the constellations Dorado and Mensa, and consists mainly of population I stars. The SMC lies in the constellation Tucana and contains relatively more Population II stars than the LMC.

This aside, the information presented about Indian efforts to observe this historical event is interest-

ing, and *Imprint* is perhaps the first magazine to have covered this.

Rohit Parihar
Rohtak

Forever Young

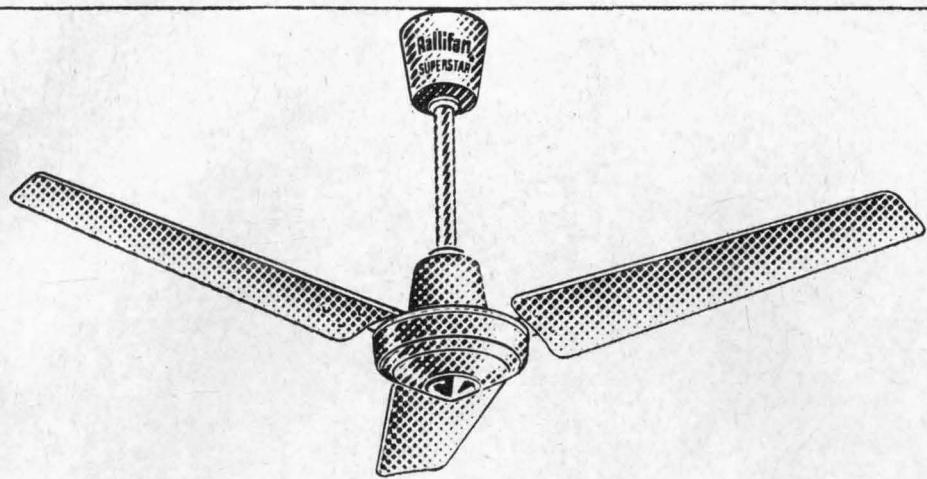


Dev Anand (*Imprint*, August) is indeed a phenomenon. When most men his age are content to dandle their grandchildren on their knees, he continues to play Romeo to 20-year-old Juliets. His energy and talent seem boundless. More power to him and good luck to his 'creations'.

Vijay Chopra
New Delhi

The profile of "evergreen hero" Dev Anand clearly reflected the writer's unabashed hero-worship of an actor who is obviously past his prime, and a director who has failed to grasp the pulse of today's cinema audiences. Anand's flops in the recent past have been cheerily glossed over, in preference to his 'charm' and 'style'. A little less gushing and a little more objectivity would have been infinitely preferable.

Deepika Girdhar
Thane



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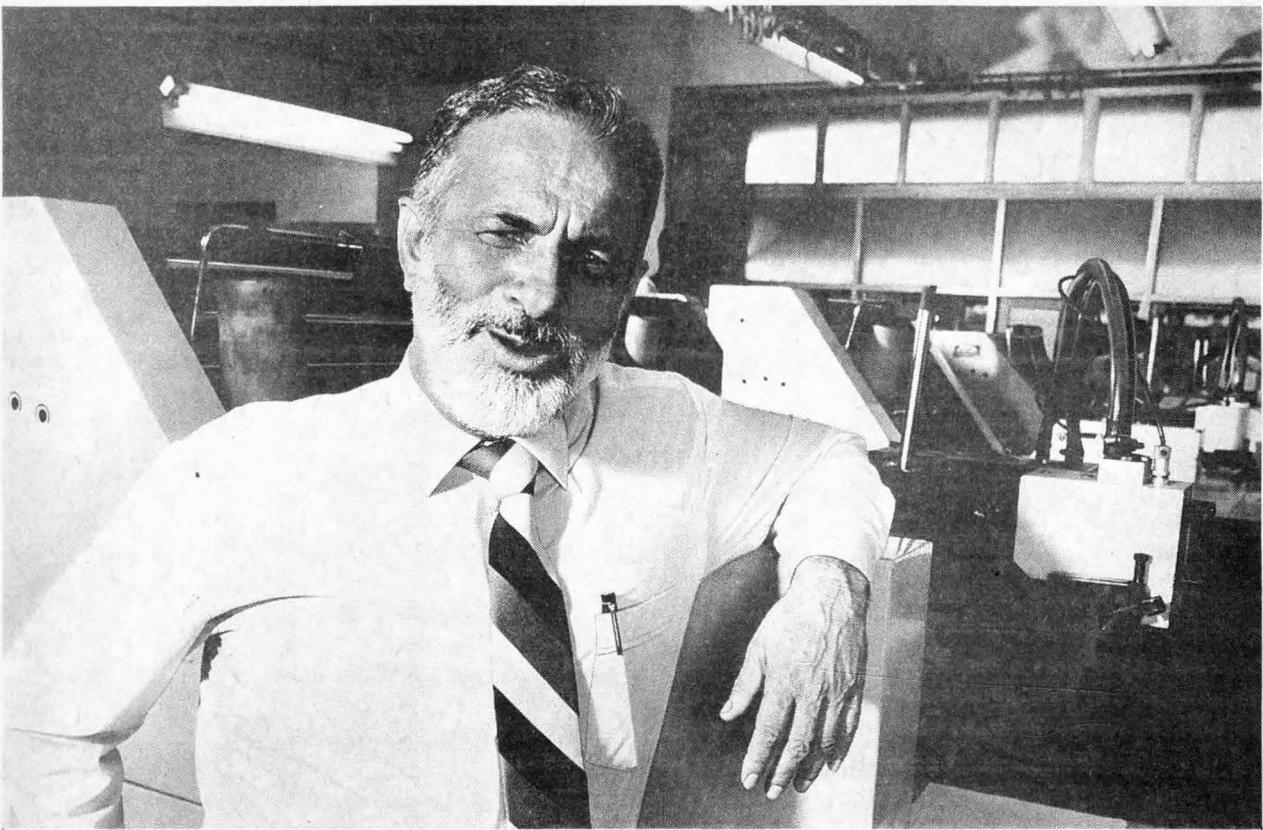
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CONTOUR ADS-NIA-833 E/85 R

INDIAN AIRLINES: AVOIDABLE RISKS, MOUNTING ANXIETY



If statistical data are the criteria, Indian Airlines, the country's major domestic airline, is guilty of violating safety norms. ABHAY MOKASHI exposes the criminal negligence and mismanagement that seem to have become an integral part of the company's corporate image. In such a situation, while the official authorities, including the Civil Aviation Ministry, calculate the financial losses incurred by repeated 'incidents', who will assume moral responsibility for jeopardising the lives of thousands of passengers who fly Indian Airlines every day?

FOLLOWING A TECHNICAL snag, a Vishakapatnam bound IA Boeing carrying 123 passengers including the State's Chief Minister, N T Ramarao, returned to the airport here (Hyderabad) on Sunday, after being air-borne for 30 minutes." This report, which the *Indian Express* in Bombay published on its front page on September 7, continued, "According to airport officials, the Boeing had to be brought back as its flaps had jammed. Engineers, with spares, rushed from Delhi to repair the grounded Boeing. Arrangements were being made to transport the stranded passengers through a special aircraft."

The technical snag report is hardly newsworthy, and, in fact, is a routine matter for Indian Airlines; nei-

ther is the fact that alternate transport arrangements were made — after all, a VIP was amongst the passengers. But the publication of the report can only cause further anxiety to the public, with regard to Indian Airlines' increasingly risky safety records. Indeed, if the frequent technical snags and repeated shutdowns of engines are any indication, Indian Airlines is gambling with the lives of its passengers and crew. The catalogue of snags, near-accidents and major 'incidents' give cause for alarm. In July 1987 alone, at least ten technical snags were recorded, ranging from the complete burning out of an engine to the falling-off of a wheel, which either led to the grounding of the aircraft or seriously affected its safety.

Furthermore, a careful scrutiny of the functioning of Indian Airlines'

engineering department has revealed that it has been flouting various safety norms for at least the past three years, if not more. Faults, both minor and major, are commonly allowed to be 'carried forward', either to prevent delays or because spare parts are not readily available. Fortunately, there is always an airport within a radius of 300 km so that even if there is an engine shutdown, the aircraft can cruise on one engine to the nearest runway.

N-FLIGHT ENGINE SHUTDOWNS are common occurrences. Although airline officials claim that the aeroplanes are designed for single-engine landings, a shutdown inevitably results in greater pressure on the other engine, and also adversely affects the balance of the aircraft.

Indian Airlines has succeeded in

*Adapted from The Indian Post.

keeping the knowledge of these 'incidents' secret by not holding any public enquiries into them. On the few occasions that a probe has been held, the report has been kept 'confidential'.

Several rules and recommendations formulated by both internal and external bodies have been frequently ignored or flouted.

In its 75th report, the Parliamentary Estimates Committee states that it is 'averse to the system of flying aircraft with defects which are of repetitive nature. The fact that flights are being authorised with such defects reflects inadequacies in the system of repair and maintenance of aircraft'. However, rarely does a snag which requires either immediate landing or engine shutdown develop during a flight. Sources claim that, in fact, in-flight snags occur chiefly as a result of the system of 'carrying forward' defects detected on the ground. There have been instances when defects are entered in the record books simply as 'noted'.

The mandatory provisions of the Aircraft Safety Rules and Regulations, laid down by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA),

dictate that any fault in the aircraft shall be rectified at the night halts or the aircraft shall be brought back to base. This procedure is not followed, and faults are, again, frequently 'carried forward'. The DGCA's recent amendment has deleted the provision whereby faults under the Minimum Equipment List (MEL — see box) were allowed to be 'carried forward' up to 72 hours. Indian Airlines is now supposed to immediately re-route the aircraft and fly it straight back to base. This is mandatory, but not adhered to by the Airline.

A circular issued last year by the DGCA stated that Indian Airlines was releasing aircraft with multiple items inoperative, thereby taking advantage of the provisions of MEL. A warning was issued which claimed that the practice would lead to untoward incidents if allowed to continue.

AT LEAST ONE EXAMPLE of a gross violation of these stipulations can be cited. On May 23, 1986, the pilot of IC 171, flying aircraft VT EDX, had reported that the thrust reverser took too long to operate. (The thrust reverser gives ad-

ditional braking power by making the air thrust perpendicular to the direction of motion, and is most effective at high speeds and on wet runways. Proper use of the thrust reverser reduces the use of manual brakes, decreases the stopping distance, and lessens the wear and tear of brakes and tyres.) This fault was 'carried forward', and at Madras, with the concurrence of the Assistant Engineering Manager on night shift, the thrust reverser was de-activated. On the following day, the main landing wheel-well panel of the aircraft fell off during take-off from Madras for Hyderabad (IC 539). The panel was replaced at Bombay on May 25, but only after the aircraft had flown from Hyderabad to Bombay via Delhi without the panel. Further complications emerged on the way to Bombay. The aircraft developed brake snags. On May 26, it overshot the runway at Delhi, while operating as Flight IC 183. The reason was simple and alarming. The pilot was unaware that the thrust reverser had been de-activated at Madras three days earlier. According to regulations, prior to a flight, the commander of an aircraft must be informed about the defects 'carried forward' under MEL. In this instance, no entry had been made in the flight log-book to that effect.

Another frequent phenomenon that requires investigation is the number of 'emergency landings' that Indian Airlines frequently passes off as 'precautionary landings'. One such 'precautionary' landing took place on February 10, 1986. The aircraft, once again a VT EDX, was on a regular flight, IC 403 from Delhi to Bangalore, but had to be diverted to Hyderabad due to 'heavy vibrations at 30,000 feet'. The engine started stalling, some of the fan blades broke, damaging the air intake cowling; the rear portion of the engine, known as a 'bullet', was thrown out due to the heavy vibration. Consequently, one of the two engines had to be shut down, and the aircraft with 112 passengers and ten crew landed on a sin-

The Minimum Equipment List (MEL)

The MEL is a document approved by the Airworthiness Authority, containing details of aircraft components and systems which can remain inoperative on the aircraft without "adversely reducing the airworthiness or reducing operation of the aircraft." The purpose of the list is to reduce delays at transit and terminal stations, so that the aircraft can continue its flight till it reaches the base station, where both equipment and workshop facilities are available. The inoperative item concerned can then be repaired or replaced.

The base station for Airbus is Bombay; for Boeing, New Delhi; for HS 748 (Avro), Hyderabad; for F27 (Fokker), Calcutta.

An MEL is prepared for each type of aircraft on the basis of the manufacturer's recommendations, duly approved by the type certification authority of that country.

But the MEL is not intended to provide for the continued operation of the aircraft for an indefinite period, with items inoperative. The defects which are 'carried forward' are meant to be rectified, or the inoperative items replaced, at the first available opportunity. However, there have been several instances when faults or deficiencies have not been attended to even at base stations, or have been 'carried forward' for months together, thus violating the provisions of the MEL.

gle engine. On landing at Hyderabad, the Airbus ground to a halt in the middle of the runway as its hydraulic system had failed. The runway was declared temporarily inoperative, thus affecting several incoming and outgoing flights. A day later, an investigation was conducted, but without an officer of the Airworthiness Wing of the Department of Civil Aviation being present. The committee discovered that all the fan blades of the starboard (right-hand) engine were damaged at the leading edge, which itself was missing. Several other parts were also found to be missing. The

Sources in Indian Airlines claim that the technical staff are provided with obsolete tool boxes, normally used for Dakotas. While the international trend is to use apex screwdrivers and multi-mini socket spanners, Indian Airlines technicians have to make do with ordinary screwdrivers and adjustable spanners.

The lack of sufficient personnel has meant that established procedures cannot be routinely carried out in the allocated time span. The Director

neers had to sometimes check 50 items in 10 minutes. The shortage of manpower explains the 'lack of time'. For instance, the Indian Airline's Airbus base at Bombay currently has a strength of 140 general and cabin technicians (as against the required strength of 230), excluding the outstation staff. The 140 personnel include those posted outstation, as well as those handling aircraft of other airlines, thereby further reducing the technicians available.

At outstations, the 200 per cent increase in air-traffic has not been matched by a corresponding increase in technical personnel. Similar shortages are experienced in major maintenance sections and ancillary shops. Consequently, there is neither any provision for reserve staff, nor is the staff allowed any leave. In many cases, even the stipulated day off in the week is not granted to technical personnel. In fact, there have been cases where staff members have been issued warnings following their refusal to work overtime. After a shift of almost 10 hours, the line-maintenance staff is sometimes then required to work overtime. Complaints of fatigue due to such overwork are common.

Other international airlines lay great emphasis on safety and reliability, as they should. An advertisement by the German firm, MTU, in the June 1987 issue of *Air Transport World*, clearly states: 'Safety and reliability are any airline's greatest capital asset. But even the tiniest flaw, the smallest bit of carelessness, can destroy this capital in no time, and endanger many people's lives. This is why responsible airline companies insist on the highest standards in maintenance and repair'. Indian Airlines' track record, unfortunately, forces us to conclude that as far as they are concerned, such matters are of little consequence to them.

The Indian Commercial Pilots' Association (ICPA) has written to the regional offices of the Aeronautical Inspection Department, expressing its fear that often a snag is recorded as

Mounting anxiety has been expressed over the number of engine shutdowns. An engine is considered the heart of the aircraft and an in-flight engine shutdown can adversely affect its safety.



commander of the aircraft had to use manual systems to extend the flaps for the reduction of speed, and for lowering the landing gear. The report further claimed that both the green and the yellow systems of the aircraft had failed, and hence steering was not possible after landing. (The green system operates most of the functions of the aircraft; the yellow system, which handles only the important functions, takes over when the green one fails.) The green hydraulic fluid was further lost because of a cut in the case drain pipe of the green hydraulic pump on the right engine.

TWO CHIEF REASONS for poor maintenance of Indian Airlines' aircraft are the lack of modern tools and insufficient personnel.

of Engineering, Mr L S Mathur, has admitted on record that: "As an approved organisation we have laid down systems and procedures for performing various tasks, which include scrutiny of records during the night stopover of the aircraft, to ensure its unrestricted flying for the next day's operation. However, the scrutiny of all flight records during a transit stopover of 50 minutes is not possible."

Records show that defects have been 'carried forward' during night stopovers, and at base, due to 'lack of time', thus violating the rules, a fact which did not escape the notice of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, himself an ex-pilot of Indian Airlines. Inaugurating a seminar on 'Flight Safety' in Bombay, on May 11, 1984, he pointed out that maintenance engi-

'rectified' on the ground and an entry is made to that effect; however, the following morning, despite the reappearance of the same snag during the pre-flight check, the aircraft is allowed to fly from the base station. "No one can guarantee that this process will not continue," says the letter. If the instances cited below are any indication, it is quite clear that Indian Airlines is unscrupulously flouting norms.

The ICPA has recently mentioned the case of Airbus VT EHD, in which the aircraft was cleared for five consecutive days with its No 2 (RH) engine vibration indicator rendered unserviceable. The Association has also pointed out that aircraft have flown with expired hours certificates and expired component hours. There have been instances of engines not being overhauled despite exceeding the stipulated number of landings, for example, the starboard engine (F.SW 455-975) of VT EDX should have been replaced on February 19, 1985, as it had exceeded the inspection time limit by 123 cycles. The inspector in charge of the Jet Engine Hospital, Mr R R Rao, who had certified the log, was held responsible for the lapse. However, in a letter to the Director, Airworthiness (DAW), the then Chief Engineer, Mr G T Pais suggested taking a lenient view on the grounds of Mr Rao's 'good past record'. Mr Rao is presently an assistant engineering manager.

THE LANDING GEAR has also been overrun. The landing gear which carries the aircraft on the ground along with the wheel, consists of a main detachable structure with hydraulic shock absorbers, wheels and brakes. An aircraft has a set of two main landing gear and a nose landing gear. The stipulation that the landing gears be overhauled every eight years, or after 2,000 landings, whichever is first, was not followed in the case of the landing gears of VT EDX. Instead, the airline officials requested the Director of the Air Inspection

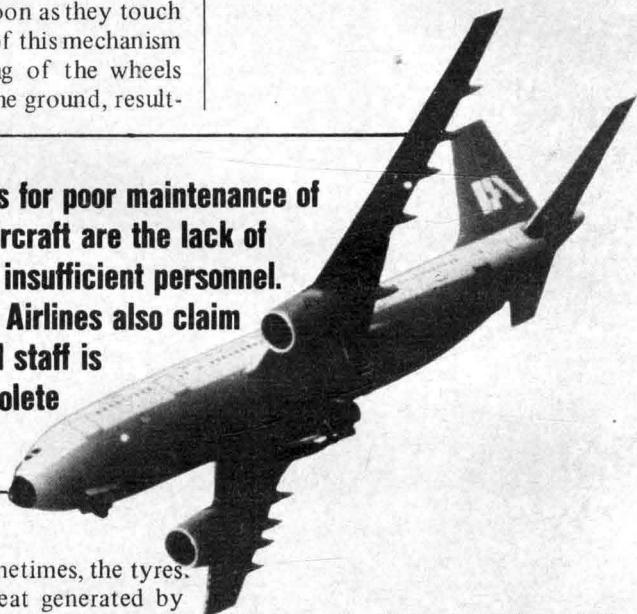
Department for an extension of 600 landings and six months, but not before the aircraft had exceeded the stipulated limit. Even after this, the quality control department of Indian Airlines wrote to the Directorate that the 'nose landing gear was operating satisfactorily without any observed or reported defect'.

It is essential that tyres of the landing gear be in excellent condition. The landing gear has an anti-skid mechanism which causes the wheels to start rotating as soon as they touch the ground. Failure of this mechanism results in a jamming of the wheels which then scrape the ground, result-

ing fire and the passengers and crew had to be evacuated with the help of the escape slide.

In 1985, 42 tyres of VT EDY were scrapped in a span of just one-and-a-half months due to intensive damage caused by scraping. Investigations revealed that the nose wheel sensor connections to the wheels were cross connected, resulting in repeated scuffing of tyres whenever there was harsh braking. At least two senior officials, Mr L S Mathur, then Engineering

Two chief reasons for poor maintenance of Indian Airlines' aircraft are the lack of modern tools and insufficient personnel. Sources in Indian Airlines also claim that the technical staff is provided with obsolete tool boxes.



ing in 'scuffing'. Sometimes, the tyres burst due to the heat generated by the friction. Sources claim that scuffing of tyres can be as dangerous as bursting, as the pieces of tyre which fly off during scuffing can be sucked in by the engine, or may hit the aircraft controls and damage them.

On May 4, 1984, the No 3 main wheel tyres of VT EDX failed after logging 165 landings and damaged the right engine. Twenty days later, the No 3 main wheel tyres of VT EDV failed after logging 60 landings and damaged the right engine's fan blades.

Last December, an Air-India Airbus VT EHQ, which was on its first flight after being checked by Indian Airlines, developed brake snags at Dubai, resulting in the changing of the brakes. Subsequently, while landing at Trivandrum, the tyre of the No 4 wheel of the aircraft burst and cau-

Manager (Quality Control) and Mr K K Jagia, then Engineering Manager (Maintenance), were warned in this connection by the Directorate of Civil Aviation, for their 'failure to exercise proper supervision of the defect rectification system'.

AND WHAT OF THE STAFF directly in charge? Recently, Shiv Sena legislator, Sudhir Joshi, disclosed in the Maharashtra Legislative Council that Indian Airlines was recruiting car mechanics, to be later appointed as 'aircraft technicians', and further, that these technicians were being trained in aeronautical engineering at a Bangalore-based institute that is not recognised by any government or University. Indian Airlines has not contradicted this serious allegation.

A 1987 Calendar of Snags

January 10, 1987: VT ECP (Bombay-Baroda) Boeing landed at Harmi airport minus one wheel. This was noticed by a passenger, who alerted the authorities. The wheel was later found at Santacruz airport. Under the circumstances a wrong landing would have been dangerous.

January 19, 1987: IC 264 D (Delhi- Calcutta). Returned to the terminal after taxiing, as one of the engines failed to draw power. A substitute Airbus for the passengers also developed technical snags and could not take-off.

February 15, 1987: VT ECP Boeing 737 IC 561 (Hyderabad-Vishakhapatnam). The left-side outer wheel fell off while the aircraft was taking off from Begumpet airport. This was noticed by a motor cyclist, who alerted the authorities. The commander of the aircraft was informed of the incident by the control tower, and he was asked to make two low runs. When it was confirmed that one of the wheels was indeed missing, the aircraft landed in full emergency preparedness.

March 1, 1987: Airbus VT EDX IC 110. Flight delayed due to overflow of water through the overflow valve. Noticed during pre-flight check.

May 2, 1987: IC-404. (Bangalore-Delhi). Windscreen shattered due to hail-storm. Diverted to Lucknow and flown to Delhi the same night and to Bombay the next morning with passengers aboard and the windscreen unrepainted.

May 20, 1987: Airbus, (Calcutta-Hyderabad-Bangalore). Part of the undercarriage caught fire and one of the main wheel bogies of the Airbus started emanating smoke when the aircraft was about to land. On landing, the main wheel was removed and the fire extinguished. The fire was attributed to brake assembly failure and overheating of tyres.

June 2, 1987: Boeing 737, (Bombay-Rajkot). Grounded at Bombay, even as the passengers were embark-

ing, the olio of the aircraft collapsed. The olio is a kind of shock absorber from which the wheel is suspended.

June 30, 1987: IC 185 (Bombay-Delhi). Aircraft carrying Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the then Governor of Maharashtra, Mr S D Sharma, and the State's Finance Minister, Mr Sushilkumar Shinde, returned to Bombay for 'a precautionary landing' after one hour and five minutes, due to smoke warning. On landing, it was found that the oil quantity in the APU had dropped as there was an oil leak and oil was found in the air intake.

July 2, 1987: Boeing 737 grounded at Mangalore.

July 2, 1987: Boeing 737 grounded at Bombay.

July 4, 1987: Airbus, (Madras-Bombay). Suspected tyre burst. Emergency landing at Bombay. Pieces of tyre cappings found at Madras.

July 7, 1987: IC-264. (Delhi-Calcutta). FDAO (Flight Data Acquisition Unit) snag at Calcutta. Repaired three days later at Bombay.

July 11, 1987: Boeing 737. Grounding of aircraft due to engineering snag in APU. Among the passengers were some Indian Airlines officials.

July 11, 1987: Boeing 737 (Varanasi-Delhi). The plane screeched to a halt on the runway and later taxied to the terminal. One of the engines was completely burnt. The fault in the right engine was caused due to some loose parts inside. There was an explosion as the plane gathered speed and the pilot applied brakes.

July 13, 1987: Boeing 737 grounded at Mangalore following a hydraulic leak.

July 13, 1987: Another Boeing 737 grounded at Mangalore due to a technical snag.

July 13, 1987: Boeing 737 grounded at Cochin due to a technical snag.

July 15, 1987: (Delhi-Madras). A sick man, a Mr Inderchand, who was

on a stretcher needed oxygen but there was no oxygen cylinder available on board.

July 17, 1987: Boeing 737 grounded at Bombay.

July 19, 1987: A wheel fell off a Boeing 737 while the aircraft was on a training flight from Madras airport.

August 5, 1987: IC-437, (Delhi-Srinagar). 'Precautionary' landing at Delhi after flying for 90 minutes, due to tyre decapping during take-off.

August 7, 1987: Forced landing of Lucknow-Delhi flight at Amausi airport due to a technical snag.

August 13, 1987: Boeing 737 Bombay-Cochin flight delayed due to a technical snag.

August 21, 1987: IC-437. (Delhi-Srinagar). 'Precautionary' landing at Delhi after flying 25 minutes. The aircraft was grounded as a slat did not retract.

August 28, 1987: (Ahmedabad-Bombay). 'Precautionary' landing at Ahmedabad due to in-flight engine shutdown. Oil temperature gauge was found unserviceable. The flight was delayed by 24 hours and 20 minutes. This snag had been reported on earlier flights.

September 2, 1987: IC-119. (Bombay-Hyderabad). Emergency landing at Hyderabad as the landing gear extended due to gravity during descent. This was probably caused due to a leak in the air-vent valve.

September 6, 1987: As mentioned in the opening paragraph of the Cover Story.

September 9, 1987: IC-161. (Cochin-Bombay). Aircraft grounded at Cochin due to tyre deflation. Spare tyre had to be flown from Delhi.

September 12, 1987: IC-446. (Bombay-Jaipur-Agra). Returned to Santacruz airport 30 minutes after take-off as the left hand landing gear did not retract.

Indian Airlines: Its fleet and personnel

Indian Airlines currently has a fleet of 50 aircraft, according to its own sources. The break-up of the fleet is as follows:

Airbus A-300: A total of 11 Airbuses, of which one aircraft is on lease from the manufacturers. The first was acquired in 1976.

Boeing B-737: A total of 27 Boeing of which two are on lease. The first was acquired in 1970.

Avro HS-748: A total of seven Avros. The first was acquired in 1967.

Fokker F-27: A total of five of which two have been leased to the Coastguards. The first was acquired in 1981.

Clearly the present fleet of 50 planes is insufficient to cope with the increasing air traffic, passenger loads, or to provide standby planes in case of delays caused by the grounding of aircraft.

Although dates of manufacture for most of Indian Airlines' aircraft are unavailable, it is clear that, barring the

Airbus, many of the aircraft are old and require phasing out.

A quick assessment would suggest that at least 70 aircraft are needed to meet the present requirements.

Indian Airlines has a total staff of 21,000.

Details of the division of personnel in the commercial and technical sectors on the Western and Northern Region are given below.

Is the Indian Airlines short-staffed? Or is the allocation of personnel in the commercial and technical divisions, inappropriate? Whatever the problem, what emerges clearly is that Indian Airlines is not following its own norms which dictate the correct allocation of technicians, that were decided upon in 1982 in consultation with its Union and the manufacturers of the various aircraft.

For instance, the norms dictate that a total of 240 technical staff is required to man the Airbus base at Bombay. The present staff numbers approximately 140 — a shortfall of almost 100 technicians.

Classification	Western Region	Northern Region
Engineering Executive	38	39
Officers	34	37
Aircraft Engineers	175	204
Technicians	598	691
Foremen & Chargehands	134	161
Inspectors	22	22
Helpers/Operators	321	354
Sweepers	55	45
Non-Technical Staff	198	167
Plant Technicians	—	24
Total Staff:	1575	Total Staff: 1744

A large number of technicians, flight engineers and aircraft maintenance engineers (AMEs), moreover, are not trained to handle various types of aircraft; for example, a general technician trained on a Boeing, must be trained on Avro, Airbus and Fokker, before he is assigned the task of handling these. This practice is apparently not being followed. Only very recently has a batch been trained on

the Avros at Hyderabad, despite the fact that Avros are to be phased out soon. That training in the handling of different aircraft is essential is borne out by the following example.

The flight engineer of VT EDX IC 181, which left Bombay for Delhi on March 14, 1985, was not conversant with the cowling arrangement and had not seen the attachment of the latches of the core cowl during the

Captain PS Tasker, Acting Regional Director of Indian Airlines, Western Region, remains unfazed despite the battery of charges levelled against the airline. In an informal conversation with SUCHITRA BAJPAI and PADMINI MENON, he valiantly defends numerous allegations of malpractice, corruption, mismanagement and flagrant violations of safety norms in the giant public sector undertaking, and insists that safety is the Airlines' prime concern.

Excerpts from the interview:

Imprint: Do you agree with the recent allegations levelled against Indian Airlines in *The Indian Post*?

Captain Tasker: Not at all. Our HQ has issued a rejoinder to the concerned newspaper. Aviation is a very technical subject, and if the writer is not qualified technically, we do not take cognizance of what is said. For instance, any technical man would know that there is no such thing as 'emergency' brakes.

Indian Airlines is making a profit. So why are you trying to save on staff and maintenance?

Who says so? For a fleet of 50 aircraft we have a 21,000 strong staff. I do not think that even major international airlines employ such large numbers.

Then why is it that major and minor faults are 'carried forward' and that too, mainly because of 'lack of time'? Some faults are 'carried forward' mainly because most modern aircraft have a duplicity of mechanisms, and in many aircraft, a lot of the parts are just a sales gimmick. For instance, an auto pilot, a flight director and a thrust reverser are not essential for a flight. In fact, a thrust reverser is only a bonus for the pilot. One can do without them, without compromising on safety.

How safe is it to land an aircraft if the landing wheel well-panel falls off? You can 'officially' fly the aircraft

"OUR FIRST TARGET IS SAFETY..."

Captain Tasker defends Indian Airlines

without a panel. It does not affect safety.

What about running an aircraft on a single engine? Does this compromise on safety?

There is just a one in a million chance of an engine failure, and our pilots are prepared for such an eventuality. Our pilots are trained and tested every six months, and only then is their licence renewed. The major cause of engine failures are bird hits, not lack of maintenance.

In case these occur, is Indian Airlines equipped with spare engines?

Yes. For instance, at Bombay, which is the Airbus base, spare engines are available. For 11 Airbuses we have 34 engines.

Are standby aircraft available?

We don't have provision for standby aircraft. The idea is not economically viable. If we were to do so, fares would have to be doubled. In the event of an unforeseen grounding of an aircraft, we have to juggle with the time-table, re-schedule and combine flights.

Who takes the responsibility for the grounding of an aircraft – the Quality Control Department, the Chief Engineer, Quality Control or the Maintenance Engineer?

The Permanent Investigation Board calls all those who were in any way concerned with the flight, and if a person is found guilty, he is punished in accordance with the seriousness of the lapse. He may be warned, charge-sheeted or fined.

Have you suspended any licences in this connection?

I do not know. The DGCA is in charge of suspending licences.

A Shiv Sena legislator recently alleged that car mechanics, who were later appointed as aircraft technicians, were



being trained at an Aeronautical Institute that is not even recognised. How would you justify this?

This statement is incorrect, but we don't have the time to contradict him. Most of our technicians are trained at the Mohitra Institute, Calcutta, or at the Bombay Flying Club, both of which are recognised. Moreover, technicians have to have a minimum of five years' experience on a live aircraft before they work at Indian Airlines.

Can you categorically state that every technician is trained in the trade in which he is employed?

Yes, I can categorically say so. I am 101 per cent sure that only trained technicians equipped to deal with the specific aircraft, handle it.

Why are technicians still being trained on Avros even though Avros are to be phased out shortly? Why weren't they trained earlier?

Avros will be phased out, but they are still in operation. Training is a continuous process. So there is no question of why they have not been trained earlier. They must have been on a lower grade.

How many technicians do you require at an out-station base?

I don't really have the right figures, but generally one engineer and two or three technicians, who are then trained on the aircraft that flies in that sector.

What about the constant complaint from technicians about forced overtime?

This is a blatant lie. It's part of union politics.

Why have technicians been given obsolete tool boxes?

When a modern aircraft is purchased, we have to buy its spares too. The tool boxes and spare parts come as complimentary equipment and these are used.

Hasn't Indian Airlines violated the Civil Airworthiness Requirements rule which stipulates that every aircraft flying over water should be provided with approved life-jackets?

Life-jackets are provided for each and every passenger on IA flights over water. However, we do not provide life-jackets on land-bound flights.

What about technical reliability? In an interview published by the *Indian Express*, the Managing Director, Capt G T Pais declares that Indian Airlines has a technical reliability of just 2.5 per cent.

He was misquoted. We have a technical reliability of 98.5 per cent. The IAAI has given us a very high rating on safety and maintenance.

Is Indian Airlines taking advantage of its monopoly position?

No, and it's untrue that passengers have no other option. Vayudoot and Air India both take domestic passengers. The truth is people prefer travelling by Indian Airlines because they have implicit faith in us. Our first target is not profit, but the safe transportation of our passengers.

"THERE ARE NOT ENOUGH TECHNICIANS..."

ACEU spokesmen complain about lack of manpower.

Four senior technicians, who have been working at Indian Airlines for over 20 years, charge the airline's management with culpability over several serious shortcomings. Preferring to remain anonymous, they vociferously criticise the management practice of employing a smaller number of technicians than required.

The Air Corporations Employees' Union (ACEU) office, at Santacruz airport, Bombay, in sharp contrast to Captain Tasker's office, is remarkably austere.

Excerpts from the interview:

Can the present number of technicians meet maintenance requirements?

No. Various aircraft fly on different sectors and there is rarely a gap of 45 minutes between one flight and another. With the limited number of technicians, it becomes really difficult to conduct a thorough routine transit check of the aircraft. In those 45 minutes, passengers disembark, luggage is lifted, new passengers embark. It is not possible to check everything and so snags are 'carried forward'.

Could you illustrate this?

On an average, we have 14 aircraft halting at Bombay in the night, for a transit check. In addition, we have to attend to at least one foreign aircraft. Twenty-six technicians man the night shift, and this figure includes absentees and those undergoing training. In case of a technical snag, 20% of the 26 technicians are reserved to attend to it. A routine check requires at least half-an-hour. In the case of a foreign aircraft, it should ideally last four to five hours. In actual terms, it means that even if technicians are on their feet throughout the night, a

thorough routine check is impossible.

Are you compelled to do overtime?

We are not only compelled to do overtime, but are served with warning letters demanding explanations when we refuse. One such warning letter is enough to throw an employee into panic, because these letters are taken into account when an employee is due for promotion. As a result, for years together, technicians have been working overtime without a day off.

Doesn't this affect the efficiency of the technician?

Of course it does. A night shift lasts for ten hours, and after this, the technician is frequently asked to continue on overtime into the next shift. How is it humanly possible to continue working like this? He is then expected to report for duty on the next night shift. Naturally, he doesn't report for work, and this adds to the rate of absenteeism. Our contention is that the existing manpower on the shift is not enough, and unrestricted overtime affects efficiency and the quality of work.

Is there a shortage of manpower at out-stations as well?

According to the Standard Force Committee and the management's own recommendations, a minimum of three technicians at each out-station is absolutely necessary. As per mandatory provisions, one man is required at the departure point, one at the fire-extinguisher, and one to attend to the engine. Most out-stations have only one technician.

Have you been provided with up-to-date tool boxes?

No. My personal tool kit contains tools given to me 20 years ago, and meant for the Dakota. Of course, tools for particular aircraft are available at the stores, but we need written permission prior to using them, and sometimes they are unavailable if being used elsewhere.

As an aircraft technician, have you always worked on the aircraft on which you have been trained?

I have worked as a general technician for 23 years, and was trained only to work on the Airbus. But I am currently working on the Boeing, although I am not trained to do so. There are several others in the same position.

Would you agree with Capt. Tasker's statement that emergency brakes do not exist, and that a thrust reverser is not a safety requirement, but just an 'added bonus' to the pilot?

No aircraft can operate without an emergency system which comes into force in case of failure in the normal system. As for the thrust reverser, I think it is most essential in making the aircraft come to a halt. In Delhi, the de-activation of the thrust reverser led to the aircraft overshooting the runway. This could have had serious consequences, as the friction could have led to an explosion.

Isn't Indian Airlines taking advantage of its monopoly position?

Of course, it does. They defend themselves by saying that passengers have alternatives, but in actuality, Vayudoot and Air-India provide transportation only on few sectors. If a real alternative was available, not even 20% of the passengers would fly Indian Airlines.

pre-flight check. (The core cowl is towards the rear portion of the engine.) As a result, the cowling of the starboard engine of the aircraft came off and broke into pieces when the plane

took off. These were later found on the runway by an officer of the International Airports Authority of India (IAAI), during a routine check. The aircraft landed in Delhi with the en-

gine badly damaged.

It was only after this incident that the flight engineer underwent the practical training stipulated by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation

(DGCA). In a letter to the Ministry, the Director of Engineering, Mr L S Mathur, pointed out that the Engineering Manager (Quality Control) could not be blamed in matters where errors are committed by individuals. The DGCA disagreed. "The Engineering Manager (Quality Control) cannot absolve himself of the responsibility vested in him."

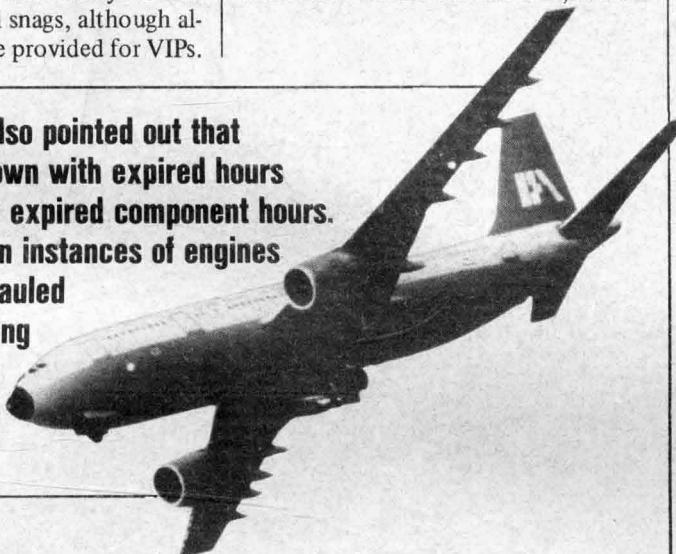
Technical snags on Indian Airlines are not confined to flights carrying ordinary passengers. Even VIPs and officials of the DGCA and Indian Airlines are not spared the delays resulting from technical snags, although alternative flights are provided for VIPs.

The ICPA has also pointed out that aircraft have flown with expired hours certificates and expired component hours. There have been instances of engines not being overhauled despite exceeding the stipulated number of landings.

On June 30 this year, IC 185, carrying the Frontier Gandhi Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the then Maharashtra Governor S D Sharma, the State's Finance Minister, Mr S K Shinde, and Chairman of the Trade Fair Authority of India, Mohammed Yunus, had to return to Bombay after an hour and five minutes of flying for a 'precautionary landing', as there was a smoke warning. On landing, it was found that the oil level in the Auxiliary Power Unit (APU) had dropped, due to an oil leak. Oil was also found in the air intake.

BARELY IS ANY punitive action taken against staff in Indian Airlines, a practice that differs from Air India, where staff members are demoted, suspended, and even dismissed

when lapses and snags are detected on VIP flights. But in the above mentioned case, an AME was made a scapegoat and his licence suspended, thanks to the personal interest taken by the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, who was at Palam airport to receive the Frontier Gandhi and was annoyed at the delay. This case was exceptional. Often, however, officials do not even report mistakes for fear of being blamed. A flight engineer discovered that the oil level in an engine was falling. He brought this to the notice of the commander, as also



the Operations Manager of the airline, who has since retired. He refused to make the necessary entry in the journey log book. The flight engineer reported the matter to the commander again at the next halt, yet no entry was made. When 'falsely implicated' in another case, the flight engineer brought this incident to the notice of the authorities. In his complaint, the flight engineer said that he did not report the matter immediately to the higher authorities of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation, fearing victimisation by the commander.

Mounting anxiety has been expressed over the number of engine shutdowns. An engine is considered the heart of the aircraft, and an in-flight engine shutdown can adversely affect the safety of the aircraft. Dur-

ing a flight, there are four forces acting on an aircraft: The aircraft moves forward due to the thrust; the force acting in the opposite direction is called the drag; the lift makes the plane go up; this is opposed by the pull. In an engine shutdown, the thrust is reduced, thus relatively increasing the drag. The other engine, thus, has to be given full thrust.

In case problems develop simultaneously in both the engines, it can spell disaster. One such disaster almost took place on January 2, 1986. The revolutions per minute (RPM) of both engines of VT EDZ, on IC Flight 182 (Delhi-Bombay), started decreasing just before take-off. The aircraft was consequently grounded. However, the Airbus had been serviced in Bombay on the previous night and had left Bombay as IC 181.

On July 1, 1986, in yet another instance in which both engines failed, it was found that the fuel had been contaminated with water.

Now, in case all engines stall either during take-off or in-flight, and refuse to start again, the only option left for the pilot, if the plane is flying over or near water, is to ditch the aircraft into the sea. The aircraft can float on the water for a while due to its buoyancy, giving enough time for the passengers to put on their life-jackets.

But, incredibly enough, most Indian Airlines' aircraft do not carry any life-jackets. Thus they violate the Civil Airworthiness Requirements (CAR) series 1, part II, issue III, Section 4.2 that says: 'All aeroplanes on flights over water shall be provided with approved life-jackets for all passengers on board.'

ONE OF THE MAJOR EFFECTS of the snags and technical failures are the delays and flight cancellations that have become an everyday affair, especially on Indian Airlines' domestic sector. No standby aircraft are available, thus further increasing the delays. Particularly hit are those passengers flying on the smaller sectors, as flights are often cancelled to

make the aircraft available for the major sectors. Delays and cancellations are so much a part of the service offered by Indian Airlines, that not only do officials rarely apologise for the inconvenience caused, but fail to inform passengers of them. Passengers are also frequently the victims of 'off-loading' due to technical snags. On January 19, 1987, passengers on a Calcutta bound flight were stranded at Palam Airport in Delhi for almost 20 hours, the victims of three off-loadings from two different aircraft. As in other delays, causes were not divulged, and neither were any indications offered about possible departure times, which officials themselves often remain ignorant of.

Another common feature with Indian Airlines is the overloading of aircraft. Unaccompanied baggage is often marked underweight, so as to help the passengers save on excess baggage surcharge. There have been cases where even extra passengers have been taken on board a scheduled Indian Airlines flight.

On board the aircraft, conditions are no better, and passengers have to be content with what is on offer, including the dirty toilets, the occasional cockroach and the unappetising menu — two months ago, a passenger found his meal garnished with a nail.

The quality of service has not gone unchallenged — some have taken issue with the management and others have even moved the courts. Mr Pai, a consumer activist, has complained repeatedly. He is currently challenging the imposition of a Rs 10 surcharge that Indian Airlines has levied since April, on the basis that it is not backed by legislation and passengers have not been issued with the required amount of notice.

Passengers have been rewarded not just with a deterioration in service, but with frequent fare increases. Fares have risen by more than 65 per cent in all Indian Airlines' sectors in the last decade, although the last increase has been challenged in the Gujarat High Court.

IS INDIAN AIRLINES exploiting its monopoly position? A report on Traffic Forecasts, submitted by the working committee of the Planning Group on Civil Aviation at the Turn of the Century, makes the following comments about the working of the airlines. "Indian Airlines operates in a non-competitive environment and some of its operating policies and working methods are largely influenced by these factors," it notes. These factors include the endosral of a ticket to some other airline, a question which does not arise on domestic runs; postponement of journeys once a ticket is purchased (journeys can

only be advanced) is not allowed; 'non-show' or late cancellation entails a heavy financial loss to the passenger; and finally, Indian Airlines has withdrawn point-to-point fares and stop-over facilities since November 1979.

All said and done, the public remains at the mercy of this monopoly airline — victims of a service that does not maintain schedules, cancels flights which are not full to capacity, and frequently flouts basic safety standards. Indian Airlines is repeatedly boasting of making profits. Certainly Indian Airlines is flying high, but where its passengers and crew are heading to is anybody's guess.

Author's postscript:

Capt P S Tasker's dismissive statement that articles written by those not technically qualified to do so are not heeded, would seem to be contradicted by events. On September 11, after The Indian Post articles appeared, IA invited a team of journalists to accompany them on a conducted tour of their new engineering complex in Bombay. That efforts were made to conceal facts was evident from the way that journalists were prevented from visiting the line maintenance, major maintenance and ancillary workshops, where most of the maintenance work is carried out. Further, a team of executives from Indian Airlines proudly displayed monthly reports issued by Airbus Industries but refused to do the same with the fortnightly, monthly and quarterly reports published by Indian Airlines, all of which detail snags carried forward, engine shutdowns and the like. If officials were really sincere about allowing journalists to obtain a closer look at maintenance work, they should not have interfered when some of us tried to gain access to the technical staff to discuss matters.

Indian Airlines has attempted to stifle any probe following the allegations levelled against it in what this writer has stated, but has instead

countered them with articles testifying to the Airlines' various successes.

With regards to Capt Tasker's statement that there are no such things as emergency brakes, I must ask him to refer to the Airbus manual which details normal, standby and emergency braking systems. Either he is more knowledgeable than the manufacturers themselves, or it would appear that the Airbus Industries has cheated Indian Airlines of a vital piece of machinery! Meanwhile, Capt Tasker continues to make alarming statements to the press.

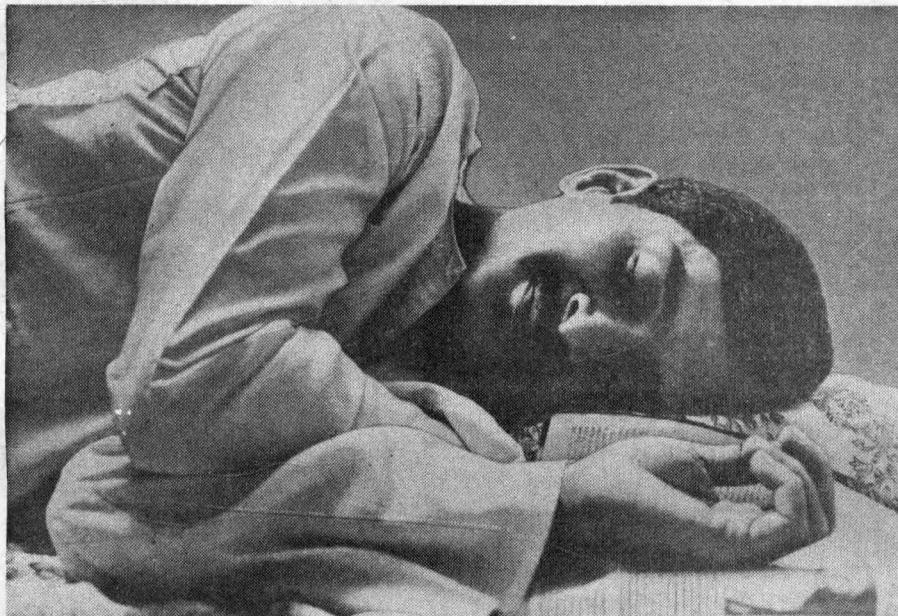
Finally, an official of Capt Tasker's standing (he is the acting Regional Director of the Western Region of Indian Airlines) should be aware that Indian Airlines is indeed a monopoly airline as far as domestic travel is concerned, as Vayudoot merely provides a feeder service and Air India operates only on select routes.

In what can only be described as empty rhetoric, Captain Tasker announces, "The truth is that people prefer travelling by Indian Airlines because they have implicit faith in us". Perhaps a more accurate pronouncement would have been, "The truth is that people prefer travelling by Indian Airlines because they have no other choice". — AM. ♦

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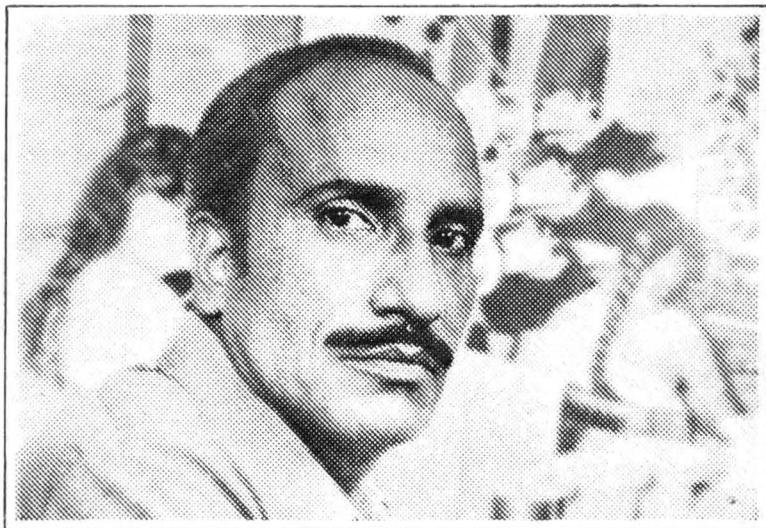
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And earned for his company, a pride of place among the "Fortune International 500".

Who is he?

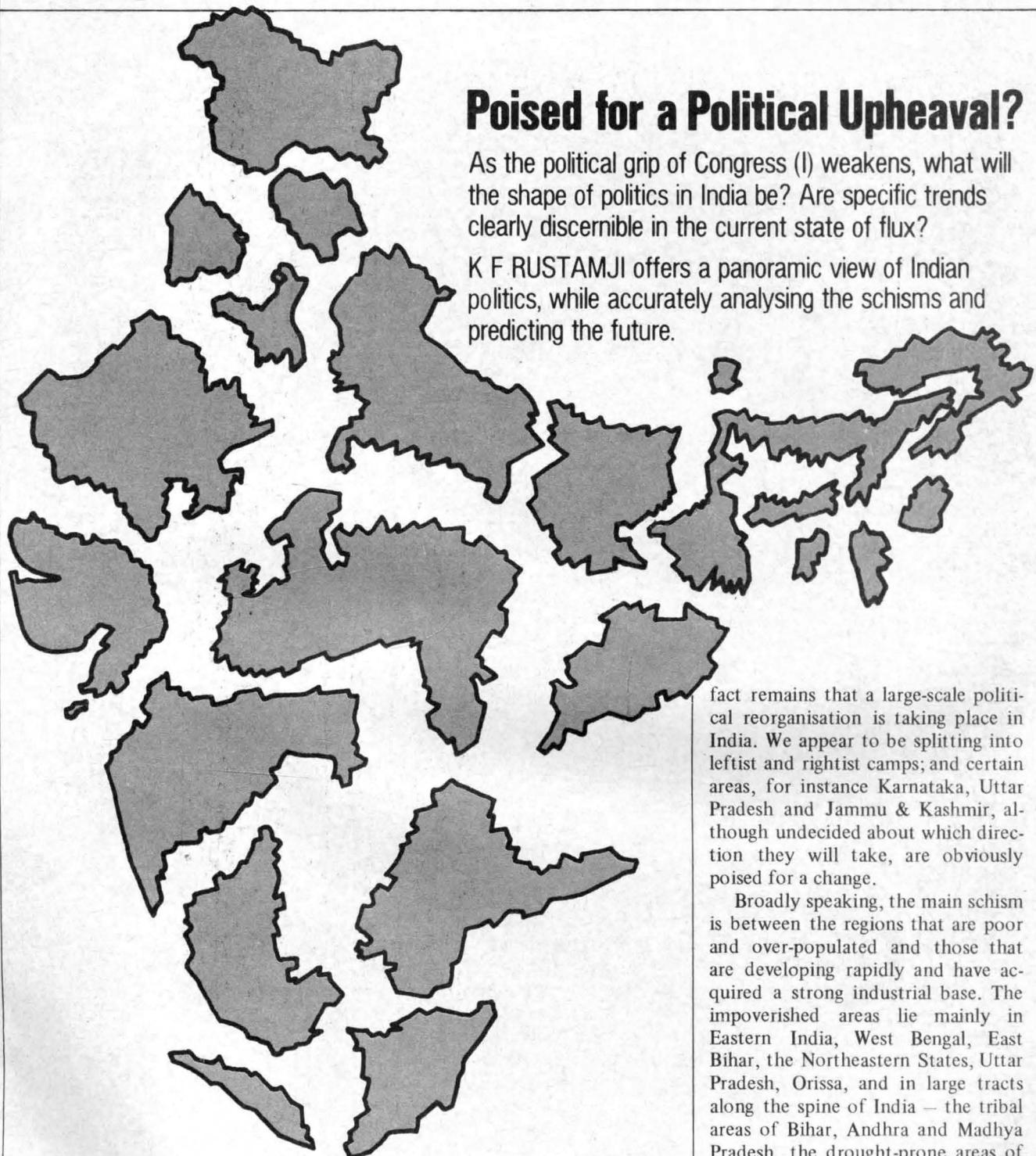
Who else, but the BHEL man.



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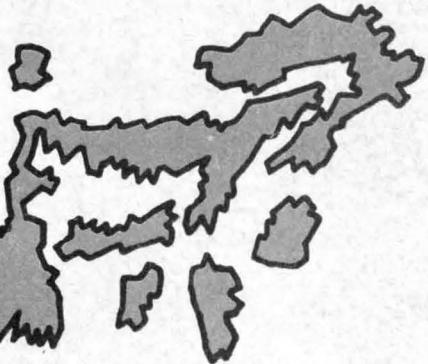
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Poised for a Political Upheaval?

As the political grip of Congress (I) weakens, what will the shape of politics in India be? Are specific trends clearly discernible in the current state of flux?

K F RUSTAMJI offers a panoramic view of Indian politics, while accurately analysing the schisms and predicting the future.



fact remains that a large-scale political reorganisation is taking place in India. We appear to be splitting into leftist and rightist camps; and certain areas, for instance Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, although undecided about which direction they will take, are obviously poised for a change.

Broadly speaking, the main schism is between the regions that are poor and over-populated and those that are developing rapidly and have acquired a strong industrial base. The impoverished areas lie mainly in Eastern India, West Bengal, East Bihar, the Northeastern States, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and in large tracts along the spine of India — the tribal areas of Bihar, Andhra and Madhya Pradesh, the drought-prone areas of the Southern States and over-populated Kerala. These regions seem to be moving towards the left. The chief dispute is that between the haves and the have-nots, and is clearly manifested, for example, in the conflicts between tenants and landlords in Bihar, and elsewhere, in the friction between

IMPERCEPTIBLY, THE VACUUM left by the Congress owing to its neglect of grass-root activities in rural areas, is being filled by other parties and organisations. A drowsy numbness seems to have gripped the party; some interpret it as the Decline of the Congress. Others say that

the Congress, moribund between elections, revives to win them on borrowed slogans. Current political tremors could be synonymous with the process of modernisation — the autonomy and success of regional parties with an irresistible move towards a truly federal structure. The

tribals and non-tribals, or the revolts against authority, as in the tribal areas of Andhra and Madhya Pradesh. An awakening from the servitude of centuries is clearly discernible, and along with it, the striving for a new order and a new way of life.

China has a distant sort of appeal for these areas, particularly in West Bengal, Bihar and the Northeastern States; if there is a detente between the Soviet Union and China, the appeal will increase as conflicting loyalties will be resolved.

On the other hand, those areas of Western India, rich in natural resources and largely composed of rich industrial belts, or those that have received a boost in the form of scientific inputs to increase their agricultural production, are moving to the right.

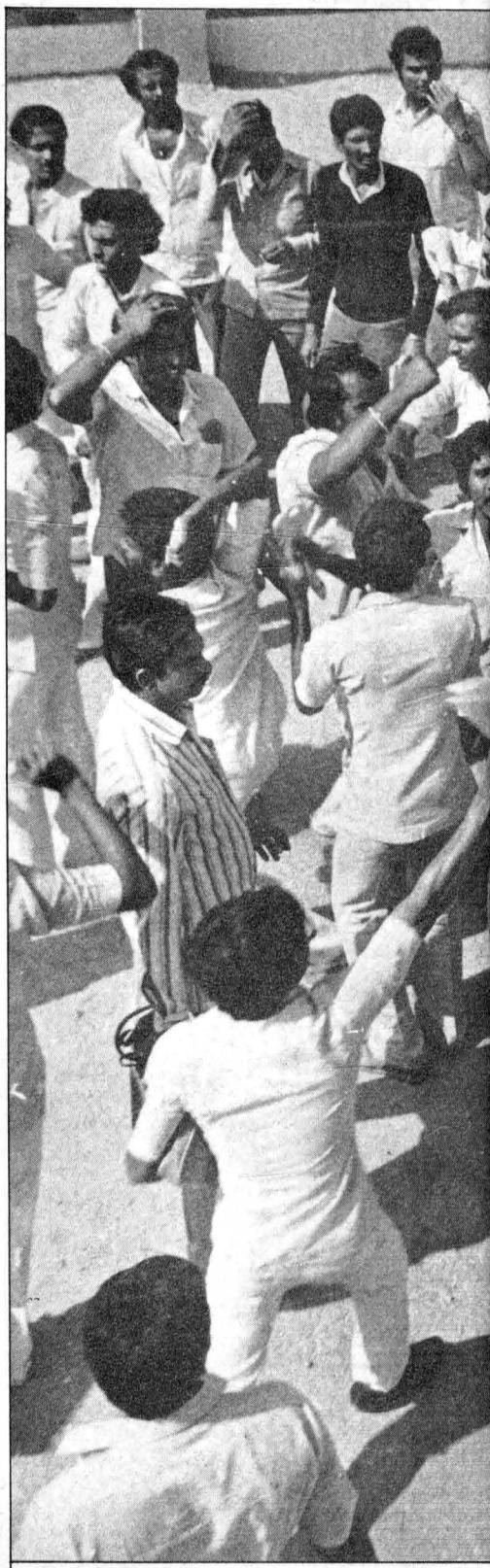
IT IS INEVITABLE that the unequal distribution of wealth will cause those at the lower rungs of the economic ladder to aspire higher. It is an error to believe that development benefits a community across the board. Rather, it can create serious dissatisfaction in those who cannot find a route to improve their lot, without displacing somebody already well ensconced. It can encourage a competitive urge to cordon off the area, single out the outsider, and develop tactics which facilitate upward mobility. Therefore, while in the poorer areas of Eastern India, the targets of displacement are the money lenders, the land-holders and petty government officials, in Western areas, the focus of attack are those who have secured some measure of government protection by means of reservation, and those vulnerable minorities that have made good in economic and industrial spheres. Consequently, we have the rise of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and other areas, and the mushrooming of countless Hindu parties in Gujarat. Meanwhile, in Punjab, a movement that began as a Sikh assertion for economic benefits, has been hijacked by the extremists and turned into a bloody vendetta, a process which

has given an impetus to communal parties all over India.

A glance at a map suggests that the lines are clearly drawn, and yet some places remain undecided, for various reasons. Uttar Pradesh, one of the poorer states, remains neutral because of the influence of the Congress. But, slowly the Congress is losing ground. The expulsions of V P Singh et al have caused cracks in the party, and the popular opinion is that the Centre has failed to develop the state. Bahujan Samaj has become a force to reckon with. The prevalent atmosphere of cynicism has been further fanned by the Babri Masjid — Ram Janmabhoomi controversy, which has exacerbated communal tensions. If the Congress influence declines further and a charismatic leader does not appear, Uttar Pradesh will become a battleground with communal parties wresting power from the Congress, and perhaps succeeding. In the long run, however, the poverty of the state may shift it leftwards — either within the Congress or outside it.

The Congress will stand a fair chance to regain its former stature in Uttar Pradesh only if the Prime Minister and Mr V P Singh bury their differences. It would be wise to do so, since the Prime Minister is seriously handicapped without the Raja, who, in turn, may fade away without Rajiv's support.

An area which demands immediate attention is the backward Bhojpuri belt on the borders of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. An over-populated agricultural region, it suffers from floods, waterlogging, deforestation, and fragmentation of landholdings. The Independence Movement largely originated in this area, and it is probable that the area will give birth to a revolutionary leftist movement, linking all the extremist parties in the country. A seriously weak Centre will compel several remote regions to declare their independence on the grounds of regionalism, and the Bhojpuri belt could well be the first to do so, which will not be surprising, as creeds, castes and clans from times



Restless and frustrated, will the youth resort



violence?

immortal have dreamt of having a Raj of their own.

IT IS A REMARKABLE FACT, and one which ought to shame everybody in this country, that the only truly secular people are the Muslims of Jammu & Kashmir. From the time of the first Kashmir war when Sheikh Abdullah gave laudable support to the Indian armed forces in beating back the invading Kabalis from Pakistan, the state's Muslims have fostered secularism, despite all the ill-informed propaganda against them. It is a most unfortunate fact that Mrs Indira Gandhi severely upset Kashmir's inter-communal harmony by forming electoral alliances in order to gain short-term political benefits, and later deposed Farookh Abdullah without justification. The results? In the last assembly elections, the Muslim United Front which was non-existent in 1983, emerged as a Muslim communal party, securing 20.2% of the total vote. The National Conference and Congress alliance, showing a steady decline from 47.3% in 1983, obtained only 34.7% of the vote. Is Kashmir becoming fundamentalist? If so, the blame for it rests squarely on the Congress. It seems likely that Kashmir probably will turn neither to the right nor the left. It will remain the Kashmir of today, even if the MUF adopts power, although the MUF will want to play a pivotal role in Muslim politics here and abroad. This is the role which ought to be entrusted to Farookh Abdullah: a role which his great father was undeservedly deterred from by Mrs Gandhi.

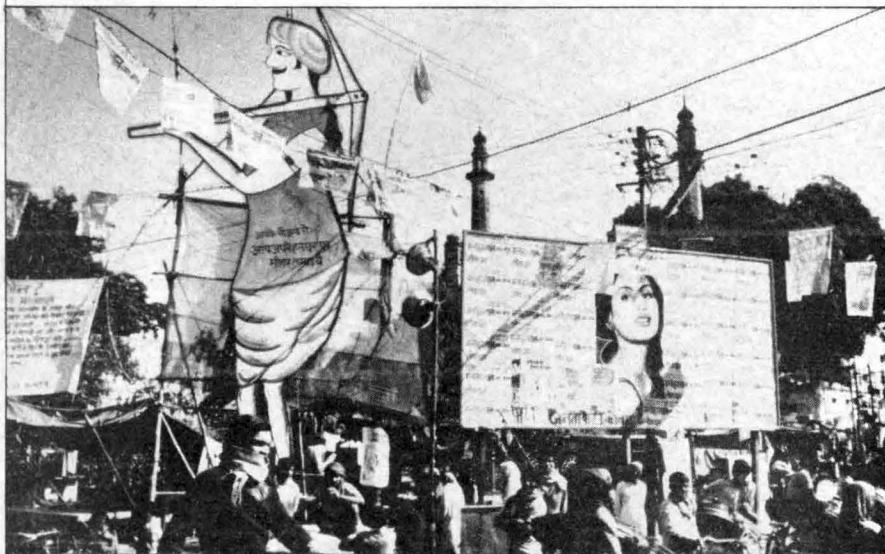
N T RAMARAO and the Telugu Desam rule the roost in Andhra. However, after him, the leftist influence in Telangana and the tribal areas may well gain dominance. While the eastern areas of Madhya Pradesh are moving leftward, and its western commercial areas, like Indore and Gwalior, are moving closer to the politics of Maharashtra, the state continues to be Centre-oriented and will probably continue to be a Congress strong-

hold for sometime.

The only party in India which is committed to non-violence is the Congress. But the time seems to be approaching when the Congress may lose out because of this commitment, and because it is the ruling party. The rise of the Shiv Sena and the inability of the Congress to fight it successfully in corporation and municipal elections is an indication that muscle-power can succeed. A non-violent approach cannot, because our system of justice has collapsed. Today, we are unable to take action against those who espouse and propagate violence. The organisations, (some of which have not yet formed into parties), which incite communal rioting are well-known. What is alarming is that they are making electoral gains. It would seem that the electorate is accepting violence as part of the rightist strategy of gaining regional supremacy, as in the penetration of Gujarat villages by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. This is the way in which Fascism advances.

IN PUNJAB, IT IS DIFFICULT to gauge the amount of support the extremists receive from the villages. However, it is apparent that the appeal of Sikh fundamentalism has succeeded where Congress moderation did not. Darshan Singh's and the United Akali Dal's withdrawal from the scene indicates that the extremists are bent on perpetuating violence, irrespective of the wishes of the rest of the community. Although, disowning the extremists has meant some progress, increased community pressure is necessary to re-establish peace.

The Haryana poll has been variously interpreted. Still, there is no denying that it capitalised on regional feelings — a popular electoral strategy. Devi Lal incited discrimination between the Haryanvis and the Punjabis and introduced a subtle communal element in his campaign, in the guise of anti-terrorist emotions. In which direction will Haryana go? Probably the opposite of Punjab, unless state leaders reach an understanding, which



Will other parties succeed where the Congress has now failed?

will be a significant victory for integration.

In the South, Karnataka, a state ably led by Ramakrishna Hegde, is developing at a phenomenal rate. Today, Bangalore is one of the most flourishing cities in India. The present drought may cause rifts in the party. However, it is too soon to predict political changes.

In recent years, the North-South divide has not been prominent. The reinstatement of Mr N T Ramarao has been instrumental in preventing the four states, i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, from uniting to form a belt of violent opposition to the Centre. However, the impression that the North is obsessed with its own politics of Punjab and Pakistan, and is apt to forget issues like drought and the providing of drinking water which have plagued many areas in the South, is deeply imbedded in the southern consciousness.

However, there is no doubt that the growth of the various non-Congress parties is primarily due to the Congress' weak appeal at the grass-roots, its poor organisational structure, and an absence of charismatic leaders in different states. The posting of subservient Chief Ministers from the Centre, ministers who are often

away from their constituencies, has unwittingly helped the opposition. In the past 16 years, since the post-Bangladesh-war elections, the Congress has only operated as an election-oriented party, a party which attempts to win votes merely through development grants and loan melas. While other parties pose a formidable threat to the future of the Congress, the Congress remains unaware of its precarious position, which is further damaged because of accusations of corruption.

PERHAPS THE REVITALISATION of the Congress will occur if the party is out of office for sometime. The national alternative that some leaders (perhaps, even Mr V P Singh) are considering, might be a solution, although it will take years for them to unite on a common platform. Meanwhile, rapid changes are taking place, and the drought may be so devastating that Bofors and other current concerns will be forgotten. If the Congress is not able to revive itself, power will be wielded by strong communal parties in the West, and communist parties in the East. Areas like Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh will remain Centrist, because of the traditional appeal of the Congress, and of course, there remain many

cities, many pockets of affluence and poverty, which defy easy generalisation.

It is quite conceivable that the Congress may stage a recovery. Dynamic leaders may enter its stagnant ranks and revitalise them. At the moment, however, there is more innovation, and desire for innovation, in non-Congress states, particularly in Karnataka, Andhra and West Bengal. An often ignored factor in the analysis of trends is the enormous strength of the female vote. Rajiv Gandhi won it in a big way, partly because of his mother's sad demise. It is difficult to predict whether he will retain his appeal as the effects of inflation are of greater immediate importance to women, than the principles of doctrinaire socialism.

The youth also need to be reckoned with, as the current restlessness fostered by unemployment and corruption, may give rise to agitations which could lead to violence.

IN THEIR FIGHT FOR POWER, both the parties of the left and the right are likely to resort to violence. Some may even attempt to seize power through terrorism. Whichever way we look at the political scene, there is no denying that we are entering a period of violent political upheavals. Peace in an over-populated, impoverished country will only be sustained through the firmness and justice that the administration metes out. The former has not been implemented, and justice has been reduced to nothing, out of sheer neglect of police efficiency and judicial punctuality. As a last resort, to safeguard the vestiges of democracy that remain, we will have to turn to the police.

As the checks and balances of democracy increasingly fail to operate, will we find ourselves on the road to a dictatorship? To avert this, we must, as of now, insist on the establishment of harmony and understanding between all branches of the armed forces, the judiciary and the administration, for the sustenance of the democratic process. ♦



DR SHRIKANT JICHKAR has a very unusual hobby: he collects degrees. More unusually, he is also a Minister in the Maharashtra Government and has, upto now, collected 17 of those precious bits of paper.

As a student of the medical college in Nagpur, he gave no indication that he had aspirations to be anything other than a doctor of medicine. After completing his MBBS and MD degrees, he then took up law – adding an LLB and an LLM to his credentials. But this was, apparently, not enough, and so Dr Jichkar did his Diploma in Business Management, followed by an MBA. A Bachelor's degree in a subject he has now forgotten, was then followed by a Bachelor of Journalism. Qualifying as an officer from the IPS and the IAS posed no problems at all. And by the time Dr Jichkar had settled down to the paltry business of acquiring a string of MAs – Public Administration, Sociology, Economics, History, Sanskrit, English Literature and Philosophy – his reputation had been confirmed.

The moment you confront this baby-faced wonder, you enter another world. A personal computer sits conspicuously by his left elbow, and Dr Jichkar interrupts his own, long litany of activities to mention that he is learning how to operate it, in order to study Computer Science some day.

A Minister Collects Degrees

Who is Shrikant Jichkar? A shrewd politician, or a scholarly genius? His political rise reads like a fairy tale, and his ability to ingratiate himself with the higher-ups seems inexhaustible. Will he graduate from S B Chavan's cabinet to the corridors of power? **SHIRIN MEHTA** profiles this enigmatic collector of degrees.

PROFILE



Jichkar: a shrewd, conniving politician?

His conversation is casually marked with the erudite quotations of the well-read: a Sanskrit *shloka* will most likely be followed by a puzzling gush of statistics on the electricity output of Maharashtra.

He is proud of his capacity to imbibe increasing amounts of knowledge. At the age of 33, he still studies every night from 9 pm to midnight with the eager curiosity of a novitiate, and does not intend to bring his studenthood to an end just yet. Future plans include the obtaining of a post-graduate degree in Political Science in December 1987 and in 1988, Jichkar will appear for his MA exams in Urdu.

Before you have time to recover, Dr Jichkar reels off his credentials in yet another area. In 1980, when he contested the elections from Katol and won, he became the youngest MLA in the country. Two years later, when Babasaheb Bhosale came to power and gave him charge of 14 portfolios, he became the youngest Minister of State ever, at the age of 28. And now, Dr Jichkar informs you proudly, he has become the youngest MLC (Member of the Legislative Council) in India.

By now you feel you've heard all there is to hear — the scholastic accomplishments, the power and the glory. But there's more . . . Dr Jichkar points out that he has several extra-curricular activities. "I am not a

bookworm," he chuckles, "but have many interests. For instance, I am a high-flier." What does that mean, you wonder? And Jichkar explains, "I am a member of the Nagpur Flying Club." He also shoots, rides horses, is an amateur astronomer, and a dabbler in and believer of astrology. He is also profoundly religious and has studied the scriptures.

As the monologue continues, you wonder, what makes Dr Jichkar tick? Why this fascination for degrees? Is he *really* clever?

You soon find out.

RAMCHANDRA T JICHKAR, father of this prodigy, is a large man, yet soft-spoken. He recalls that Shrikant was an unexceptional child with a 'liking for beautiful and costly things'. There was, at that time, no evidence that the child would turn out to be a professional degree buff. Ramchandra Jichkar recalls that although he liked going to school, and came first, second, or third, in each class, he was never really great. But Shrikant himself seemed to feel that he had the beginnings of greatness in him. Ramchandra Jichkar reminisces: "Once, in his *almirah*, I found marklists of all his exams since Kindergarten and asked him why he was preserving them." Shrikant's answer took even his father by surprise. "Maybe I will have to write my biography and will need them some day."

Sharad Bobade, an eminent lawyer in Nagpur, and a close school friend, remembers Jichkar as always being a 'bundle of mischief'. And yet, always studying. Whether waiting for friends or riding pillion, Jichkar always studied. But in spite of his bookish appearance, Bobade is convinced that he has a photographic memory.

His father is not so sure. "He has developed this memory over the years." He recounts that while appearing for his MBBS exams, Shrikant used to study 16-18 hours at a stretch. "He would sit with a potful of milk and solve 10 years' of question papers, nine times, in writing. People now feel that he has performed a miracle, but I would say it was sheer perseverance.

"Everything he has done has been planned," Jichkar's father continues, "planned by me, and done by him. I always felt that there should be a motive for doing things. And Shrikant always listened."

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE LINE, though, Ramchandra Tukaram's dream became strangely distorted. Perhaps because of having grown up in this background, with a father whose ambition was to make him a doctor, Shrikant Jichkar rebelled. Quietly, but firmly. The first indications came when Jichkar decided to study law. And then, he embarked on his spectacular paper chase.

Later, in what should have been a quiet, scholarly pursuit of medicine, Shrikant Jichkar developed a taste for politics. And the first taste of victory came when he became the General Secretary of the Medical College Students Union (1974-75). Then followed a quick succession of posts — President of the Business Management Students Union (1976-77); Chairman, Nagpur University Students Council (1977-78); General Secretary, Maharashtra State Youth Congress (I) (1981-83). However, the post he coveted most and got, was that of President, Maharashtra State National Students Union of India from 1980-1982.

Jichkar, himself, then changed. Shedding his previous quietness, he began to court students in an obvious bid for popularity. His partner at medical college, Raju Kalvid, recalls that Shrikant was always trying to solve student problems. He'd laugh, joke, talk with the student crowds, devote his time to their problems, and organise morthas and protests at the slightest excuse.

But, apparently, students are not the only ones that Jichkar charmed on his way to power. College teachers are also warm in their praise of him.

Dr Madhukar Bokare, Jichkar's Economics professor, is visibly excited when talking about his ex-pupil. "I cannot say exactly how intelligent he is, because I don't rate abstract intelligence," he claims, while chewing *paan*. "But he has one good characteristic — he keeps meeting professors and discussing various subjects with them. This kind of approach, to pick up pebbles, so to say, is phenomenal. Whenever there was a significant political event, we would discuss it. And he could grasp any situation perfectly."

But implicit in this dewy-eyed praise, is the unspoken acknowledgement that Jichkar is content to remain the humble student, despite his political success. Jal Gimi, ex-Vice Chancellor of Nagpur University, and the head of the MBA department, who prevented Jichkar from appearing for his MBA exams because of poor attendance in class (that was the year he fought his first election), recollects how Shrikant never held a grudge against him. "He rode over to this house, sirens blaring, lights flashing", Gimi says, trying unsuccessfully to hide his pride, "and garlanded me. Then he touched my feet and said that he owed his success to me. His humility is extraordinary."

Such humility, obviously, has its rewards. Very few of Jichkar's professors say anything which is even faintly damning of him. Instead, all of them praise his meritorious performance, his perfect ability to defer



Sharing more than a love for flying high with the PM?

to his elders, even when he so often has the edge over them in an argument, and his inexhaustible curiosity. Small wonder, then, that Bokare thinks that "he will rise higher and higher in the field of politics."

Gimi is even more emphatic. "I feel that the boy shouldn't try to progress too fast. For if he takes it slow and easy, the man can become the Prime Minister of this country — he has that capability in him."

But, as it turns out, when success came, it was only with perseverance and a good bit of luck.

JICHKAR'S POLITICAL RISE reads like a fairy tale. Except for his concerted efforts in student activities, the thought that he could actually dabble in real politics never struck him till he was 25 years old. And now, Shrikant Jichkar is unwilling to admit to the real urge that led him to it. "I had an elitist view of politics, and I used to criticise the system. Then I realised, that the only way to change it, was to live it the way you want it to be lived. After all, politics is an aspect that permeates the whole country, and offers the widest scope for helping people out." This is all that he is prepared to say.

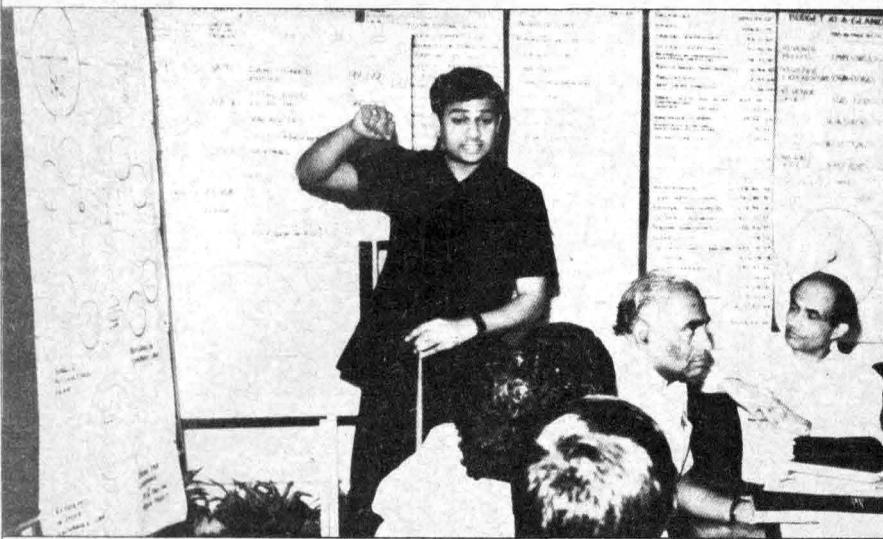
These noble words disguise the fact that his father's aversion to the civil services probably influenced his decision. Or, that Professor Bokare had advised him long ago to enter the

political arena, for that was where real power lay. There is no doubt that Shrikant's shrewd mind had already assessed the edge that his degrees would give him over other competitors. Accordingly, armed with his biodata, he set out for Delhi to secure a ticket for the 1980 elections.

Jichkar, himself, is tight-lipped about how he got the ticket. But Shivaji Solao, a distant relative and the brother of Madhav, Shrikant's right-hand man today, recalls what happened with pride. Apparently, once in Delhi, things had not proved to be that simple. Only 26 at the time, with no distinctions or political experience (except his student activities), Jichkar seemed to be an unlikely choice for a Congress (I) candidate. Nothing much happened until Gundu Rao (then Chief Minister of Karnataka) heard the young boy give an impassioned speech on his own behalf, waving his biodata as proof. Vasantdada Patil had, apparently, put in a good word for the young Jichkar with Mrs Gandhi, but Sanjay's dislike of Patil would not allow him to take anyone on Patil's recommendations.

So, Gundu Rao, in the unfamiliar role of *deus-ex-machina*, took him to Narasimha Rao, who, in turn, took him to Sanjay Gandhi, then in charge of disbursing tickets. "Where would you like to stand from?" Sanjay is supposed to have asked brusquely.

PROFILE



Delivering a lecture to IAS officers, Pune.

The young Jichkar, almost tongue-tied, blurted out that people had advised him to contest from Nagpur West. But Sanjay had no time for what others thought. "Where would you like to stand from?" he asked Jichkar impatiently. "Katal, sir," Jichkar stammered.

"Fine, put him in for Katal," Sanjay replied. When it was pointed out to him that there was already a contestant from Katal, Sanjay Gandhi was dismissive: "Drop him."

That was how Ranjit Deshmukh, who already had his ticket, found himself dropped from the roll of contestants. Jichkar had entered the big bad world of politics.

CRITICS NOW WHISPER that it was Jichkar's ability to genuflect and fawn that got him the ticket. Jichkar himself says that Katal is an Opposition-dominated constituency and he would surely have lost, had it not been a four-cornered fight. While the BJP, Congress (S) and PWP candidates fought amongst themselves, Jichkar won by a margin of 14,000 votes.

Thus, at 26, he was an MLA. By 1982, Babasaheb Bhosale was sworn in as Chief Minister and chose Jichkar, inexplicably, to be his right-hand man. Jichkar's supporters say that his immense knowledge of statistics and his ability to recall little-known names and faces, along with accompany-

ing details, were of immense help to him. Critics snigger that Bhosale only gave him the power because he hoped to marry him off to one of his daughters.

Whatever the reason, from 1982-1983, Jichkar was given charge of 14 portfolios — including Home, General Administration, Finance, Planning, Information and Public Relations — and ruled, virtually, as the *de facto* Chief Minister. Bhosale relied on him totally and took him along wherever he went, so as to be able to draw upon the reserve of statistics and the fund of knowledge at Jichkar's fingertips.

But the power and the glory lasted only a year. When Bhosale was dismissed in 1983, Jichkar went with him. For a short time he hung around Bombay trying to get back into favour with the powers-that-be.

And when that didn't work, he made, what his printed biodata described as, "a village to village tour, known as the 20-point Programme Public Awakening Pilgrimage, for four months from August 1983." He covered 473 towns and villages and addressed 307 public meetings in the nine districts of Vidarbha.

But this last-ditch effort to capture the imagination of the people didn't work. In 1984, when the country was swept by one of the biggest tidal waves of sympathy for a young and politically immature Mr Clean,

when Congress (I) candidates everywhere were capitalising on Rajiv Gandhi's little-boy-lost looks and handsome face — the unthinkable happened.

Dr Shrikant Jichkar lost the elections.

EVEN THE RAPIDLY FIRED, confused explanation that Jichkar offers, cannot account for the catastrophe. To lose the Congress (I) seat in 1984 to a Congress (S) candidate was the ultimate admission of defeat. What went so disastrously wrong?

Others explain it quite simply. According to Nana Gavande, Sunil Shinde, Jichkar's man-on-the-job in Katal, had been 'steadily eroding Jichkar's base' by seemingly dispensing favours and taking the credit. When loans were given, (naturally with Dr Jichkar's sanction,) it was Sunil Shinde who was seen to be the instrument of charity. As a result, when Sunil Shinde then contested the elections as the Congress (S) candidate in 1984, he was voted to power. The tale, as it is told, is a simple fable of treachery and deceit, in which a man unexpectedly stabs a good friend in the back.

Dr R N Kalvid, a doctor from Katal, whose son Raju had been inseparable from Shrikant all through medical college, provides another explanation for Shrikant's defeat. "You see, he is very popular among the people who understand what he is all about," he says loftily. "Jichkar is not a man who will do anybody a personal favour. Most politicians do petty things for their constituency to catch votes because of personal obligations. Jichkar is meant for higher things. He is capable of changing the economy of the nation — I am firmly of this opinion. He wishes to be the Finance Minister of India. He will do things for the people when he is in power."

But this is not borne out by the facts. Narkhed and Katal offer precious little evidence of what Dr Jichkar has managed to achieve for his

constituency. The licence that he procured for the orange processing plant was useless, as Jichkar never managed to acquire the land.

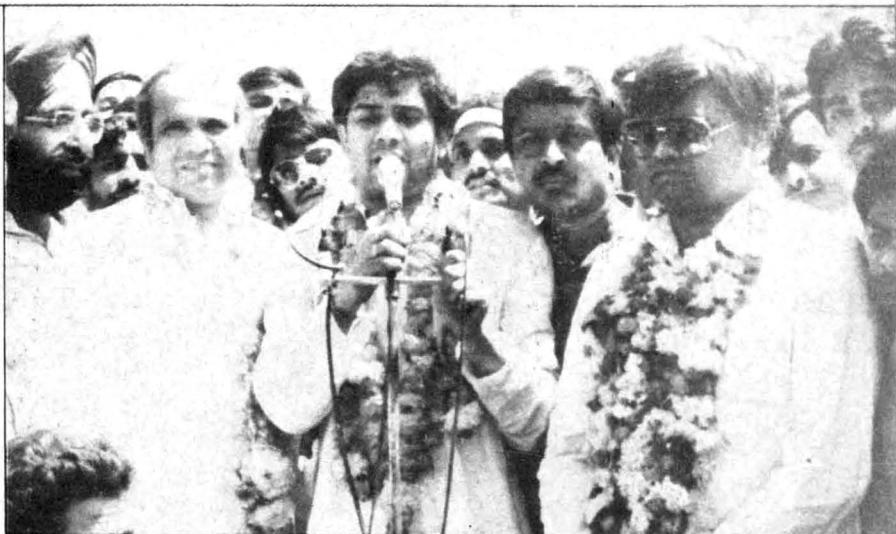
Sitting cross-legged in his rather flashy mansion, KK Chandak, ex-President of the Municipal Council and President of the Education Society, is quietly forceful in his criticism of Jichkar's political prowess. "Dr Jichkar has little contact with the masses. He is a very nice man, but he has only visited Katol once or twice for the forthcoming election. People do not know him here, and those who do, think he's too big to actually talk to them."

The absence of this vital link that a politician must have with his constituency, and the fact that he has not done much for them, have also contributed to Jichkar's downfall. Dr A R Kazi, another of Jichkar's assistants in Narkhed, has to admit that his public profile is very low. "Perhaps what has gone against him the most, is the fact that although he had the power in 1982-1983, he never did anything for us. The people wonder why he has not acquired more benefits for them, despite his apparent concern for their welfare."

"He also never acknowledges what he does for his constituents," continues Dr Kazi. "Repeatedly, before he makes a speech, we have asked him to do so, so that they will be aware of it. But he hates talking about himself and his accomplishments."

But nobody can keep a man down when luck is on his side. Although defeated in the 1984 elections, with no mass base worth mentioning, Dr Shrikant Jichkar found himself reinstated as a Minister, once Shankarrao Chavan became the Chief Minister.

JICHKAR'S ABILITY to ingratiate himself with the higher-ups, seems inexhaustible. In 1985, he went to Delhi to plead that one of his students, Avinash Pande, be made a minister. Nobody will relate what exactly happened there. We only know that Jichkar came back to Bombay, a



Promising more to the people as Minister?

Minister himself. And orders from the High Command clearly stated that Chavan had to include him in his Council of Ministers.

Local MLAs are chary of this kind of popularity. But all they are willing to say on record is that Jichkar does not behave as a politician should. "This fellow is not interested in doing anything," Ranjit Deshmukh, an MLA from Saoner, says disparagingly. "He doesn't even know the major roads of his constituency. Besides, he's got the wrong people with him. Those people are not interested in social work, and the favours he grants them have created enmity among the people. After all, people feel that an MLA should listen to what they have to say."

Jichkar's team of 450 'boys' — students he has picked up and personally trained — strongly deny this charge. They feel that Jichkar is slowly building a base of his own, a base among the educated class who will then go out and spread Jichkar's message. Ultimately, this educated class of 'aware boys' will change the structure of politics from within to give rise to cleaner, better ways of living and giving.

Yet rumours are already afoot that Jichkar has made himself a country liquor brewery, after granting a licence in his brother, Shekhar Jichkar's, name. And given the scandal attached to awarding liquor licences

everywhere, his reputation cannot be that clean.

In addition, critics charge that Ramchandra Jichkar has a *tadi* shop in Katol where country liquor is illegally sold, and that the police and excise departments turn a blind eye to it, as Dr Jichkar exerts his own political pressure to keep it going. Also, cases against him or his family have always been mysteriously dropped following his direct intervention.

All in all, can Dr Shrikant Jichkar really be described as 'clean'?

THE ENIGMA CONTINUES. Exactly what kind of a man is Jichkar? A shrewd, conniving politician who keeps himself in power by insinuating himself into everybody's good books? Or is he aloof and uppity, not really interested in the filthy lucre of politics but genuinely eager to change the country, as his friends will have us believe? Is he the scientific, objective doctor with a sharp grasp of all that governs his life? Or a dreamer, a man who would willingly step down from the world of politics to become a yogi, as close friends and professors claim? Will he make it to the Centre in bigger and even higher circles of power, or is he fated to plunge downhill before he really takes off?

Nobody really knows for sure. Or if they do, they are not telling. But, perhaps, that MA in Political Science at the end of this year will help... ♦

He is the country's longest-serving political prisoner, and its most famous. Last month marked 25 years since Nelson Mandela was incarcerated by the Pretoria regime for establishing the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

But prison walls have not been able to cage the spirit of this acclaimed South African leader, who continues to inspire his people to fight against the severe injustices of apartheid.

The notorious system of 'separate development,' propped up by laws and restrictions designed to curtail the freedom of the governed — the black majority — has been met with resistance through the decades.

The ANC has played a significant part in the fightback. Founded in 1912 and outlawed in 1961, it continues to operate underground and in exile. Its earlier embracing of non-violence has been abandoned, following the decision to take up arms against a State that has never hesitated to train its guns on the people. The massacres at Sharpeville, Langa and Soweto were mourned with anger, and the outcry against them reverberated throughout the world.

The government continues to cling to its fragile power-base, resorting to clampdowns, severe repression, and the imposition of media censorship. While the government remains seemingly oblivious to the demand for an end to apartheid that has come from diverse quarters throughout the world, the Resistance increases in strength, with Nelson Mandela as its undisputed leader. 'Mandela is still with us' proclaims a slogan painted on a wall in the black township of Soweto, a testimony to the power that he continues to wield over black South Africans.

We publish excerpts from Mandela's speeches, at the historic Rivonia trial of 1964, as well as his most recent statement from prison in response to the regime's 'offer' of release. Speeches and statements that are passionate proclamations of his exemplary courage and unshakeable beliefs.

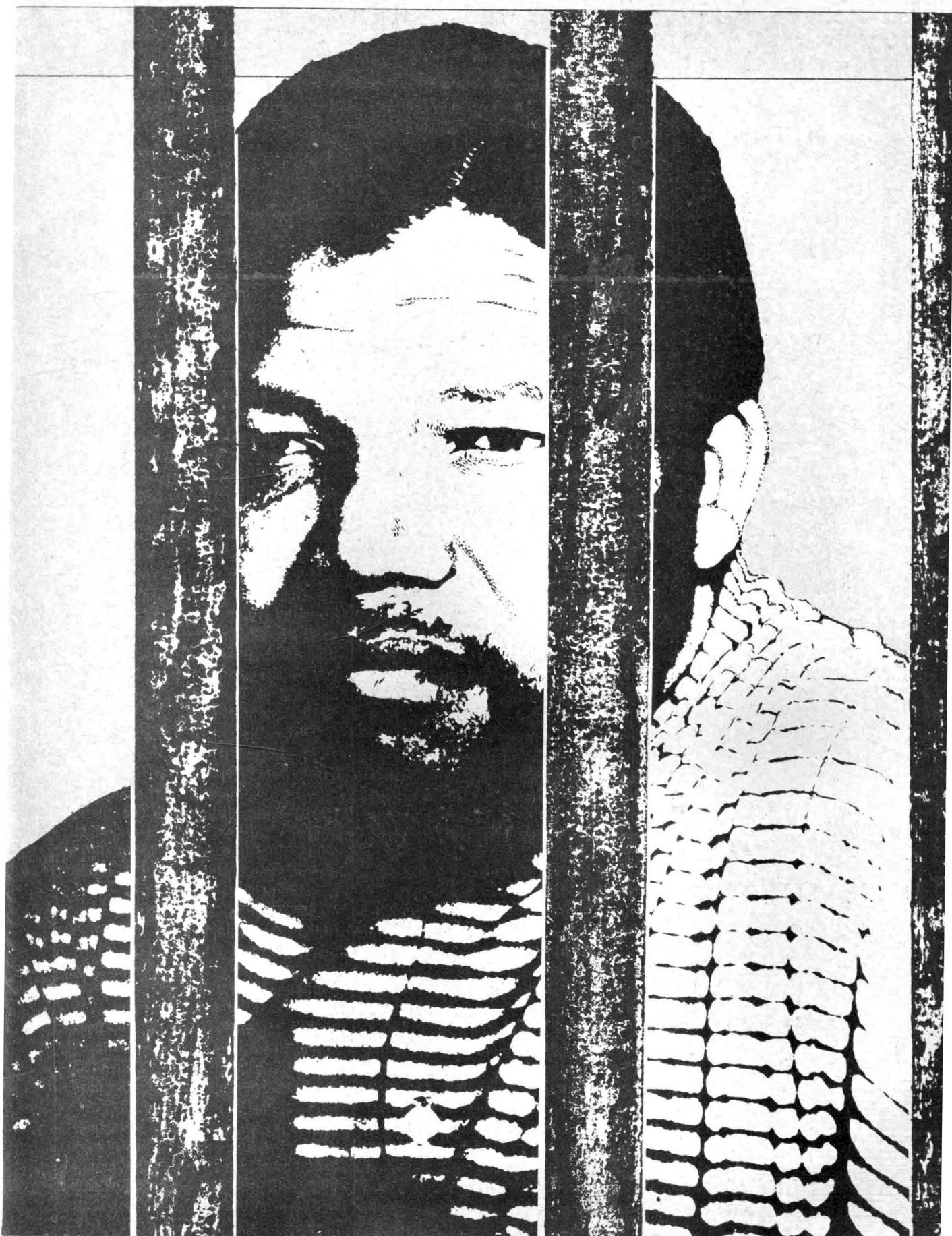
NELSON MANDELA: "I WILL RETURN"

"WHITE SUPREMACY IMPLIES BLACK INFERIORITY"

OUR FIGHT IS AGAINST REAL, and not imaginary hardships . . . Basically we fight against two features which are the hallmarks of African life in South Africa and which are entrenched by legislation which we seek to have repealed. These features are poverty and lack of human dignity, and we do not need communists or so-called 'agitators' to teach us about these things.

South Africa is the richest country in Africa, and could be one of the richest countries in the world. But it is a land of extremes and remarkable contrasts. The whites enjoy what may well be the highest standard of living in the world, whilst Africans live in poverty and misery. Forty per cent of the Africans live in hopelessly overcrowded and, in some cases, drought-stricken reserves . . . Thirty per cent are labourers, labour tenants and squatters on white farms, and work and live under conditions similar to those of the serfs in the Middle Ages. The other 30 per cent live in towns where they have developed economic and social habits which bring them closer in many respects to white standards. Yet many Africans, even in this group, are impoverished by low incomes and a high cost of living.

The lack of human dignity experienced by Africans is the direct result of the policy of white supremacy. White supremacy implies black inferiority. . . Whites tend to regard Africans as a separate breed. They do not look upon them as people with families of their own; they do not realize that they have emotions — that they fall in love like white people do; that they want to be with their wives and children like white people want to be with theirs; that they want to earn enough money to support their families properly, to feed and clothe them and send them to school. And what 'house boy' or 'garden-boy' or labourer can ever hope to do this?



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA

Imprint, September 1987 : 31

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

"A STRUGGLE FOR THE RIGHT TO LIVE"

AFRICANS WANT TO BE PAID a living wage. Africans want to perform work which they are capable of doing, and not work which the government declares them to be capable of. Africans want to live where they obtain work, and not to be chased out of an area because they were not born there. Africans want to own land in places where they work, and not be obliged to live in rented houses which they can never call their own. We want to be part of the general population, and not confined to living in ghettos. African men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work, and not be forced into an unnatural existence in men's hostels. African women want to be with their menfolk and not be left permanently widowed in the reserves. We want to travel in our own country and to seek work where we want to and not where the Labour Bureau tells us to. We want a just share in the whole of South Africa; we want security and a stake in society.

Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent. I know this sounds revolutionary to the whites in this country, because the majority of voters will be Africans. This makes the white man fear democracy. But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that the enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. Political division, based on colour, is entirely artificial, and when it disappears, so will the domination of one colour group by another. The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racism. When it triumphs, it will not change that policy.

This then, is what the ANC is fighting for. Their struggle is a truly national one. It is a struggle of the African people, inspired by their own suffering and their own experience. It is a struggle for the right to live.

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if need be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.

"FREEDOM AND FULFILMENT FOR THE AFRICAN PEOPLE"

THE IDEOLOGICAL CREED OF THE ANC is, and always has been, the creed of African nationalism. It is not the concept of African nationalism expressed in the cry: 'Drive the white men into the sea.' The African nationalism for which the ANC stands, is the concept of freedom and fulfilment for the African people in their own land.

The most important political document ever adopted by the ANC is the Freedom Charter. It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. It calls for redistribution, but not nationalization, of land; it provides for nationalization of mines, banks and monopoly industry, because big monopolies are owned by one race only, and without such nationalization, racial domination would be perpetuated despite the spread of political power. . . Under the Freedom Charter, nationalization would take place in an economy based on private enterprise. The realization of the Freedom Charter would open up fresh fields for a prosperous African population of all classes, including the middle class. The ANC, has never at any period of its history, advocated a revolutionary change in the economic



Black vs. White: Negotiations during the recent miners' strike.

structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.

The ANC, unlike the Communist Party, admitted Africans only as members. Its chief goal was, and is, for the African people to win unity and full political rights. The Communist Party's main aim, on the other hand, was to remove the capitalists and to replace them with a working-class government. The Communist Party sought to emphasize class distinctions whilst the ANC seeks to harmonize them. This is a vital distinction.

"LIKE THE ALL-INDIA CONGRESS"

HOWEVER, WITH EXPERIENCE, coupled with the unfurling of events at home and abroad, we acquired new perspectives and, as the horizon broadened, we began to appreciate the inadequacy of some youthful ideas. Time

was to teach us, as Pandit Nehru says, that: 'Nationalism is good in its place but is an unreliable friend and an unsafe historian. It blinds us to many happenings and sometimes distorts the truth, especially when it concerns us and our country.'

In a world in which breathtaking advances in technology and communication have shortened the space between the erstwhile prohibitively distant lands; where outdated beliefs and imaginary differences among the people were being rapidly eradicated; where exclusiveness was giving way to co-operation and interdependence, we, too, found ourselves obliged to shed our narrow outlook and adjust to fresh realities.

Like the All-India Congress, one of the premier national liberation movements of the colonial world, we too began to assess our situation in a global context. We quickly learned the admonition of a great political thinker and teacher – that no people in one part of the world could really be free while their brothers in other parts were still under foreign rule...

"ONLY FREE MEN CAN NEGOTIATE"

ON 31 JANUARY, 1985, President Botha made the following announcement to the South African House of Assembly:

'The government is willing to consider Mr Mandela's release in the Republic of South Africa on condition that Mr Mandela gives a commitment that he will not make himself guilty of planning, instigating or committing acts of violence for the furtherance of political objectives, but will conduct himself in such a way that he will not again have to be arrested. . . It is therefore not the South African government which now stands in the way of Mr Mandela's freedom. It is he himself. The choice is his. All that is required of him now is that he should unconditionally reject violence as a political instrument. This is, after all, a norm which is respected in all civilized countries of the world.'

On 8 February, Winnie Mandela, accompanied by the family's attorney, visited her husband in prison, to obtain his reply to the President's 'offer'. In recent years, Winnie, herself the victim of a series of banning orders, has emerged as a leader of the people in her own right.

Two days later, defying restrictions, she witnessed the crowd's jubilant response as her daughter, Zindzi, read her father's statement 'to the people'. A statement that was prefaced with the announcement that Nelson Mandela spoke not only for himself, but on behalf of all those incarcerated, banished and/or exiled by the government, and for all those oppressed and exploited by apartheid:

I AM A MEMBER of the African National Congress. I have always been a member of the African National Con-

We want to be part of the general population, and not confined to living in ghettos. African men want to have their wives and children to live with them where they work, and not be forced into an unnatural existence in men's hostels. African women want to be with their menfolk and not be left permanently



widowed in the reserves. We want to travel in our own country and to seek work where we want to and not where the Labour Bureau tells us to. We want a just share in the whole of South Africa; we want security and a stake in society. Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them, our disabilities will be permanent.

I am in prison as the representative of the people and of your organization, the African National Congress, which was banned. What freedom am I being offered while the organization of the people remains banned? What freedom am I being offered when I may be arrested on a pass offence? What freedom am I being offered to



live my life as a family with my dear wife who remains in banishment in Brandfort? What freedom am I being offered when I must ask for permission to live in an urban area? What freedom am I being offered when I need a stamp on my pass to seek work? What freedom am I being offered when my very South African citizenship is not respected?

gress and I will remain a member of the African National Congress until the day I die. Oliver Tambo (president of the ANC) is much more than a brother to me. He is my greatest friend and comrade for nearly fifty years. If there is any one among you who cherishes my freedom, Oliver Tambo cherishes it more, and I know that he would give his life to see me free. There is no difference between his views and mine.

I am surprised at the conditions that the government wants to impose on me. I am not a violent man. My colleagues and I wrote in 1952 to Malan asking for a round table conference to find a solution to the problems of our country but that was ignored.

When Strijdom was in power, we made the same offer. Again it was ignored.

When Verwoerd was in power, we asked for a National Convention for all the people in South Africa to decide on their future. This, too, was in vain.

It was only then, when all other forms of resistance were no longer open to us, that we turned to armed struggle.

Let Botha show that he is different to Malan, Strijdom and Verwoerd. Let him renounce violence. Let him say that he will dismantle apartheid.

Let him unban the people's organization, the African National Congress. Let him free all who have been imprisoned, banished or exiled for their opposition to apartheid. Let him guarantee free political activity so that the people may decide who will govern them.

I cherish my own freedom dearly but I care even more for your freedom. Too many have died since I went to prison. Too many have suffered for the love of freedom. I owe it to their widows, to their orphans, to their mothers and to their fathers who have grieved and wept for them. Not only I have suffered during these long, lonely, wasted years. I am not less life-loving than you are. But I cannot sell my birthright nor am I prepared to sell the birthright of the people to be free.

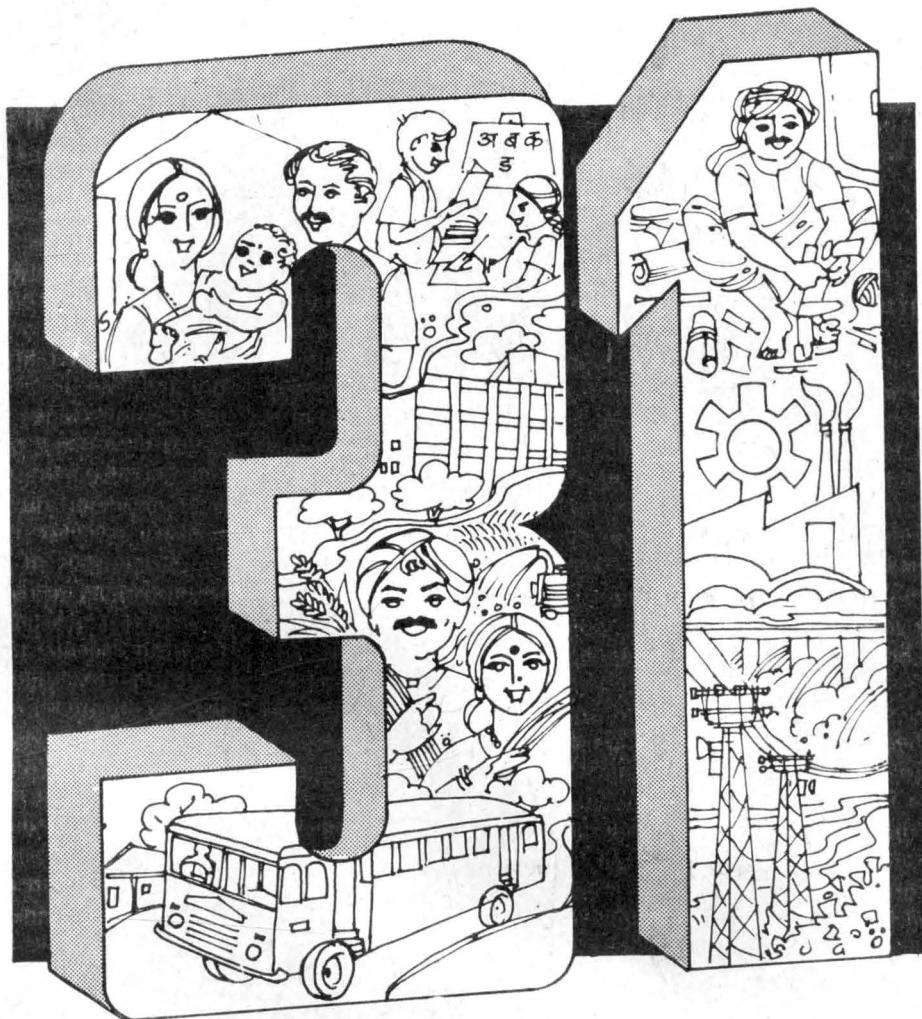
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Only free men can negotiate. Prisoners cannot enter into contracts. Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, when freed, never gave any undertaking, nor was he called upon to do so.

I cannot and will not give any undertaking at a time when I and you, the people, are not free. Your freedom and mine cannot be separated. I will return. ♦

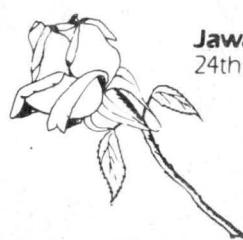
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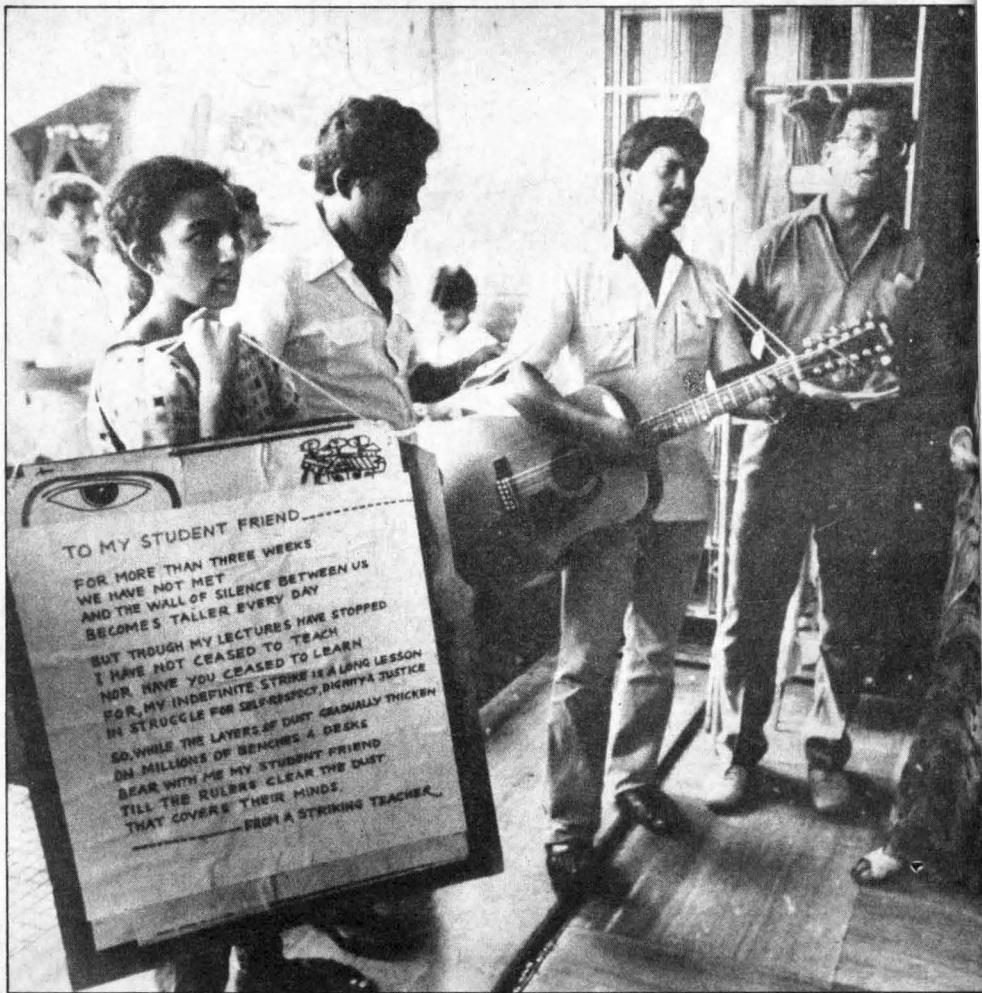
Life Insurance Corporation of India

TEACHING: AGAINST ALL ODDS

Irrespective of its success or failure, the prolonged University and College Teachers' strike has performed an important function — it has highlighted the abject circumstances under which members of this 'noble profession' are expected to fulfil their duties. The long hours of preparation, the pathetically inadequate working facilities, the total absence of any 'executive perks', the discriminatory gradation, and most importantly, the deplorable pay-scales — all bear testimony to the callous treatment meted out to the teaching profession by the government. SUCHITRA BAJPAI outlines a long history of neglect.

ON THE EVE OF TEACHER'S Day this year, newspaper headlines heralded the end of the five week-long, nation-wide college and university teachers' strike. The government, which had upto then, stubbornly refused to enter into negotiations with leaders of the teachers' union, had apparently suddenly relented. Demands for the re-structuring of the gradation system, allowing for speedy promotion prospects as well as a much-deserved hike in salary levels, seemed to have been met, with the signing of the Accord. But, it was not to be so easy. While the nation, and especially its student population, rejoiced at the news of an imminent restoration of normalcy in the country's various colleges and educational institutions, which had been brought to a standstill by the strike, teachers themselves felt differently. Confused at the turn of events that had suddenly concluded the militant action they had taken, a feeling of betrayal swiftly swept over most of them. Terming the Accord a 'sell-out', many were puzzled at the All India Federation of University and College Teachers' Organisation's (AIFUCTO) acceptance of an agreement which offered cosmetic changes at best.

The main issue of the strike had



By Suchitra Bajpai



been the reduction in the seven-graded hierarchical structure, introduced on June 17, this year, by the new pay revision scheme. Although the Accord seemed to have achieved the reduction of grades from seven to four, in actuality, it had been worded to accommodate and introduce the 'junior reader' and 'professor of eminence' grades through the back door. The Accord also retained most of the original provisions of the scheme, as it was guided by the tenets enshrined in the New Education Policy, which had been a vital reason for discord among the teaching fraternity.

Refusing to be bound by the union's acceptance of such compromising terms, teachers in several states, pledged to resume the stir, and an outright rejection of the Accord was issued by the Delhi University Teachers' Association (DUTA), the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Jamia Millia, and several universities in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra.

As students now waver between the temptation of succumbing to the pleasures of an unprecedented holiday and the fear of approaching exams, the stir threatens to intensify. Clearly, the teachers' fraternity is determined to hold out until its demands are met, whatever the consequences. Says Professor K K Theckedath, AIFUCTO President, "If the State Government fails to respond, we will perhaps have to postpone or boycott exams next year. For after all, teachers can give only as many extra classes as the students can take." Further disruption seems almost inevitable.

As accusing fingers point to the teachers as being directly instrumental in the disruption of the educational progress of their students, few have paused to consider the crisis, not only within the teaching profession but within the education system itself. The strike has served to highlight only the most glaring injustices that teachers themselves are victims of. How can a profession, supposedly entrusted with the monumental res-

"WE ARE COMMITTED"

Renowned academician, Professor Nissim Ezekiel, on the 'occupational hazards' of a teacher's life.

A PROFESSOR'S MERIT cannot be judged according to the hours of work that he puts in or his productivity. A lot of work, both visible and invisible, is carried out simultaneously. The visible work is obvious — taking lectures, setting and examining papers and so on. But at the university, if for instance, I agree to be a guide to a PhD student preparing a thesis on Robert Frost, how can I guide the research candidate, if I know little or nothing about the poet myself? So, a certain amount of work behind-the-scenes is essential, but just how much, cannot really be measured. Suffice it to say, that the academician must remain constantly alert to the developments in his discipline. It is these academicians, who have pursued their study with diligence, energy, enthusiasm and dedication, who have earned a well-deserved reputation for themselves.

Today, standards in Indian universities are what they are, partly because of a false perspective which evaluates the contribution of the teaching profession in terms of quantity and production. This is not so elsewhere.

For instance, when I went to Leeds, in England, as a visiting professor, I was asked to deliver two lectures and one seminar — not 26 lectures a week or the correction of 1,200 papers each month, as I did at Bombay University. Obviously, we cannot compare our circumstances to those at Oxford or Cambridge, but at least we can attempt to change a few basic attitudes even if the framework of the entire education system remains intact. There is a limit beyond which mechanical functioning ceases to produce good results.

ponsibility of educating future citizens of the country, attract candidates of merit, if its pay levels continue to be so appallingly low? How can teachers be expected to find fulfillment in a system that is riddled

The student population at our colleges is large, approximately 150 students attend each lecture. I am not complaining about that. What irks me is the attitude that says, 'Ah, you've delivered only three lectures, which means that you have done nothing for the rest of the day'.

Since Independence, the authorities concerned have assessed teachers exclusively in terms of the number of teaching hours. Previously, it used to be about 12 lectures per week. Today, mounting pressure has resulted in most lecturers having to deliver upto 26 lectures per week.

The idea of determining pay structures and grades in terms of the number of hours of work put in, is a wrong one. Perhaps the closest we can get is comparing it with that of a novelist. Can the novelist be ordered to write for ten hours a day? Can the creativity of the writer be judged and remunerated in terms of the number of hours he has worked every day? I think that this business of calculating the number of days we work annually, is most ridiculous. What upsets and annoys me, as it does other teachers, is that any assessment of our output, should be a continuous process but it is not. Fixed interview-based judgements of our performances, which affect our grades and pay scales, are appalling. Personally, I would go to the extent of saying, "Damn your money and your grade, I will continue teaching to satisfy my students and find some other way of supplementing my income." Not that I am an idealist but such attitudes provoke defiance.

I have observed that those in the administrative sector, are very hostile

to our community. Compared to their rigid nine-to-five schedule, our timings suggest a glorious holiday to them, and they resent this.

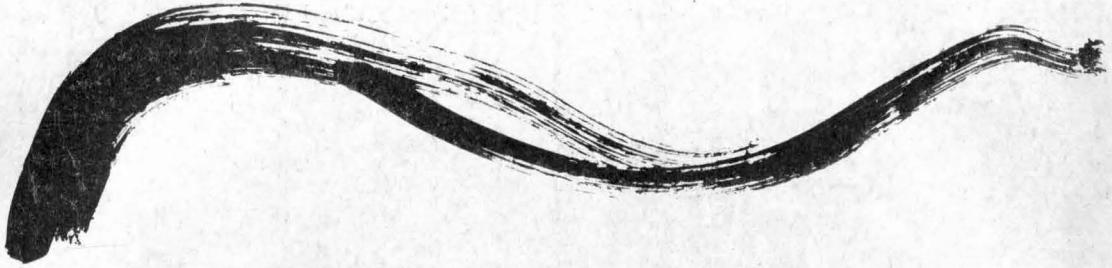
It is a difficult task to assess teachers, using the same yardstick. One may be a renowned scholar, but a bad teacher, while another may be an excellent teacher but not particularly scholastic. It is just not possible to have a uniform set of standards.

In the Government's recently announced scheme, it was made compulsory for teachers to acquire an MPhil or PhD degree as pre-requisites for promotion. In our times, if we had ten teachers, out of which five were excellent, three indifferent and one perhaps, bad, probably only one would have had a PhD. Yet, the teachers who excelled at their jobs were not required to acquire a PhD. My colleagues, after 20-25 years of service, considered working for their PhDs only after acquiring a fair degree of maturity which would enable them to write a thesis. Today we have youngsters of 20 or 23, working to collect PhDs. To what end? Doctorates now seem to be a conglomeration of quotations and second-hand material, rather like a tossed salad. This attitude should be changed if at all there is to be any improvement in the system, in the years to come.

As for those who question our commitment, I have only this to say: we *are* committed. But nobody has the right to demand this commitment or to take it for granted, regardless of how well or not we are remunerated. After all, it is not as if teachers remain unaffected by economic realities. We have to grapple with them as much as anyone else.

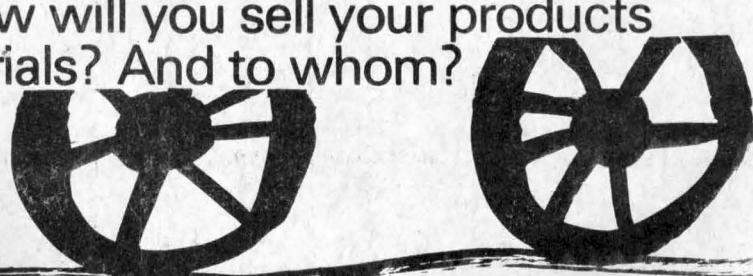
with corruption and falling standards? How are those in that 'noble profession', currently a misnomer, expected to salvage even a degree of self-esteem when working conditions are poor and tools of the trade so antiquated?

It is this that probably results in the universally believed notion, that only the 'dregs', 'leftovers' and the frustrated, join the ranks of the teaching profession. As G B Shaw succinctly proclaimed, "One who can, does;



In the developed, and the developing countries of the world, the building/construction industry is the locomotive which pulls the economy. In India also, this is bound to happen, perhaps, it is almost happening, the apathy of the government to the building construction industry notwithstanding.

But, dear building/construction materials manufacturer and building/construction materials dealer, how will you sell your products and materials? And to whom?



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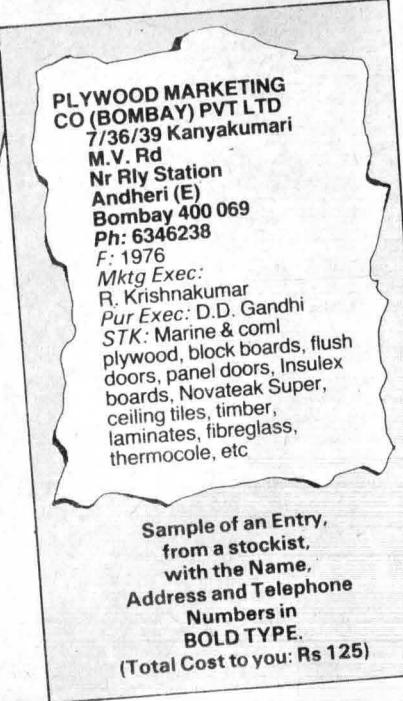
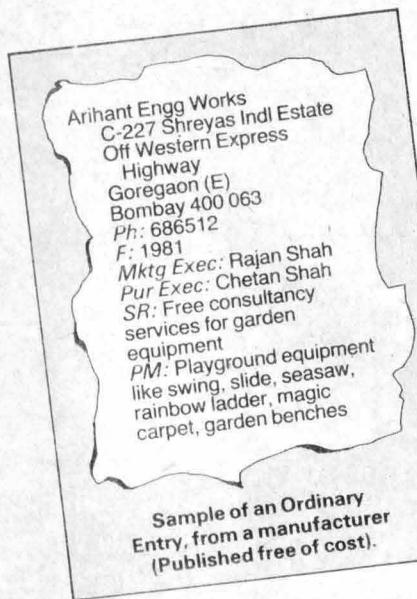
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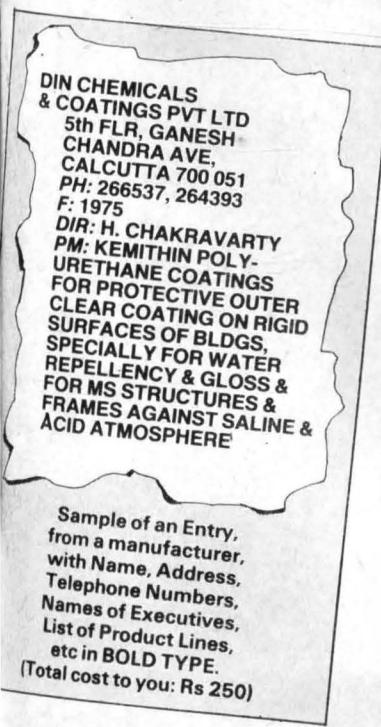
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EDUCATION

one who cannot, teaches." As a result of teachers having chosen the fourth best or only available option, they end up teaching subjects that they are not familiar with or have ever studied. Teaching is bound to then become monotonous. Outdated methods of both teaching, and then assessing the intellectual capacities and knowledge of students, leave much to be desired. There hasn't been a single commission that has not found fault with the existing systems of examination, with its unnatural and wrongly-placed emphasis on final exams and its erroneous practice of promoting a ridiculous culture of 'rote learning'. In our haste to graduate successfully we seem to have forgotten

that the main purpose of education is not the acquisition of a wealth of degrees, but a spirit of inquiry and an overall development of healthy attitudes. Ironically enough, although supposedly poised to enter the 21st century, our methods of dispensing and acquiring knowledge remain primitive and regressive. Obviously only the 'chalk and talk' method will be adopted, monotonously and repetitively. But can the blame lie with the teaching profession alone? Can they realistically be expected to perform miracles, introduce innovations, and effect changes in teaching methods within the limitations of the existing system, especially one that seems impervious to change?

EDUCATION WOULD SEEM to be the neglected step-child of the nation, with both the Centre and State playing an equal role in diminishing its significance. Poor incentives and unattractive working conditions within the teaching profession can hardly foster 'the sincere commitment' the profession demands.

The malaise strikes deep down, at the very core of a system that holds both its consumers as well as its producers, to ransom. For instance, in the universities of Bihar, it has become customary for all exams to be 'postponed', sometimes indefinitely. Consequently, academic sessions in all the six non-technical universities of Bihar are behind schedule, some-

AN ODIOUS COMPARISON

The comparative pay scales of Class I government officials and their 'equals'—the teaching fraternity.

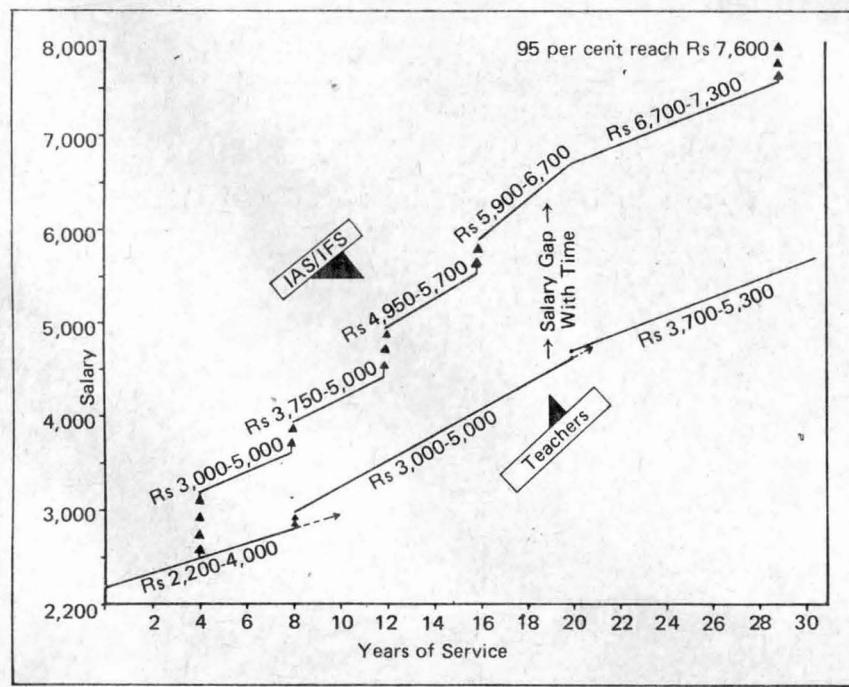
IN 1973, the Sen Committee stated that since the universities were all-India institutions, the pay scales of university teachers should be comparable to those of other all-India services, so that a reasonably good proportion of talented students would be attracted to the teaching profes-

sion. The Mehrotra Committee in 1986 reiterated these laudable sentiments.

There is however, a deplorable gap between expectation and reality. While a Central Services A grade officer can get promoted to the Super Time Scale (Rs 5,900-6,700), a teach-

er cannot be promoted to the professor's scale of Rs 4,500-7,300. He can only be upgraded to Selection Grade lecturer, Rs 3,700-5,300. In the university departments, if a teacher wants to be promoted to the post of professor he has to accept a lower scale of Rs 4,500-5,700. (This is the Government's offer to those wanting to avail of Ordinance XI and XII). In effect, parity at the top of these two professions seems highly improbable.

Significantly too, IAS officers get four promotional salary hikes of Rs 700, Rs 250, Rs 300 and Rs 600 and four increments totalling Rs 1,850 or 16 increments in all, through promotion alone. As a result, the IAS officer's pay increases very rapidly (see graph). Though starting from the same level as the teacher, an IAS officer, by his 17th year, will draw Rs 1,900 more than a teacher, in his basic pay alone. In addition to this, the IAS officer earns Rs 500 as special pay which makes the disparity even wider (Rs 2,400 per month). In fact, this disparity would be even more pronounced if the perks available to all Class I officers were also to be taken into consideration.



ON THE WARPATH

Rajeshwari Sunderrajan, a lecturer from Delhi University, lists the grievances of the profession.

TEACHING, TEACHERS OFTEN get told, is the 'soft' option: no decisions to take regarding human life, or the spending of millions; three months' annual vacation and only 18 hours of weekly teaching; ivory tower seclusion, to coin a metaphor, within the grooves of academia — and, in addition to all these, Class I civil service officers' pay.

So why are teachers disgruntled, demoralised, and on strike?

Not for better material conditions such as higher pay or work facilities — though these would be legitimate demands too — but to protest against the introduction of service conditions that humiliate teachers and repress their academic freedom. These new service conditions have been described and discussed elsewhere. My purpose here is to outline that actual conditions under which a teacher functions and to clarify the idyllic description of the 'soft' life that is supposedly a compensation — perhaps even the reason — for the new 'regulations' that are meant to bring teachers into line.

First, those vacations and minimal working hours. The 18 hours of lectures and tutorials that a teacher has on her time-table, indicate only her 'performance' hours (the analogy here is to an actor, whose two-hour stage performance comes after a hundred hours of rehearsal and preparation). The hours of preparation (roughly an hour for every hour of actual teaching), the time spent on evaluating students' written work, the supervision of extra-curricular activities in the college, the informal counselling, the administrative work, the M.A. Co-operative teaching and occasional PhD supervision — these have been successfully invisibilised in the popular accounting of a teacher's working hours. These 'invisible' activities, added to actual teaching hours amount to — when they don't exceed — a 'normal' 35-hour week. In the teacher's 'free' hours — those much-

envied vacations — she is required to bring herself up-to-date with research in her field, write papers for seminars, so that her evaluators will consider her 'fit' for promotion.

Third World austerity no doubt accounts for and legitimises the lack of all civilising amenities in the teachers' workplace. But since Oxford and Harvard have been included in the discourse through the pronouncements of the UGC chairman, Prof. Yashpal, who justifies the grades on the grounds that they have been modelled on British Universities, one may be permitted to air a few grievances. At Oxford and Harvard as well as in hundreds of other less prestigious universities in the West — teachers have rooms of their own in which to keep their books and papers, meet students, work at a desk, or just think. In sharp contradistinction, the undergraduate teacher here is lucky to have a locker in which to keep her attendance registers. Library facilities — the availability of the latest books, subscription to relevant specialist journals, a carrell of one's own — are basic to academic functioning. Here in India, we have to scrounge for them. Are comparative analyses justified under such circumstances?

Let us abandon the Western world as a point of reference and examine instead, the much-vaunted comparison with Class I officers of the Indian government services. The promotion avenues open to teachers (as one of the chief demands of the strike makes clear), are not even remotely similar to the normal careers of the least-privileged government officers. Similarly, college teachers can almost never enjoy the privilege of housing aid, so frequently granted to Class-I government officials. No college teacher is given a car for personal or official use, neither is she given any transport allowance. So your average college teacher lives extremely modestly, commuting to and from work for

several hours a day, in crowded trains or buses. Yet minor 'perks' that can give substance and reality to the life of research and study that is envisaged for the academic, such as an allowance for books, journals, xeroxing papers etc. have been totally ignored in the new scheme of priorities.

The real academic freedom that is derived from designing courses, has never belonged to Indian undergraduate teachers: their co-operation in framing syllabi has been kept minimal. Consequently, undergraduate syllabi remain outdated, irrelevant and reactionary. The proposed autonomous colleges (if the experience of the existing few autonomous colleges in some parts of the country is representative), will not lead to the exercise of this kind of freedom. It could even adversely affect the existing privileges. The new service conditions will also introduce a complicated system of hierarchy as well as provide the management with sufficient powers under the guise of 'teacher evaluation'.

In conclusion, our criteria for taking up teaching had little to do with long vacations, and a lot instead with having a measure of freedom to think and teach. This ambition has survived in spite of the ignominy of an unparable working environment. As we stand engaged in conflict now, the romantic despair of a young lecturer seems poignant! "The university will continue to draw what shuddering life it can from its farmers, monks and madmen — hunger-artists all — who are accountable to no one but themselves and the unknown workings of their desire for the God and the people they serve" — Amrit Srinivasan, *Times of India*, September 10, 1987. It is all too easy to see ourselves thus in reaction to the image we are offered: left-over third-raters, irrelevant humanists or malcontents. But it is imperative to return to a reality in which we see ourselves as performing a responsible social function.

times by two to three years. Post-graduate examinations of the Ranchi University for 1983 were finally held in mid-May last year. The results of the 1986 degree examinations held in May 1987 are not expected till April 1988. Shocking though it may seem, in Bihar, on an average, a student spends 11 years attempting to attain a post-graduate degree instead of the normal seven for he/she seems to spend more time awaiting results of examinations rather than studying for them.

In UP for example, examination upon examination is completed almost in a trance, only so that students can join the increasing backlog of the educated unemployed. Of course, only if they have had the good fortune to get that far in the first place, for, although mass enrolment begins in the primary school classroom, there is an almost 45 per cent drop-out rate by the IIIrd or IVth standard. In K K College in Unnao district, it was discovered that the total annual number of teaching days amounted to 70! Small wonder then, to discover that UP has a literacy level of 17.38 per cent, well below the national average of 36.2 per cent. The culprits here, are not striking teachers, but an education system that is guilty of mass negligence and corruption at all levels. Answer books are frequently lost, mark sheets are falsified, dishonest examiners abound and degrees are sold by the dozen. This has become a routine pattern, almost being taken for granted as part of what the system offers.

Practically all the universities in the country have been rocked by some scandal or another at some point of time. Maharashtra itself has been enmeshed in the Bombay University marks scandal, the BEd scandal at the Marathwada University, and the financial one at Pune varsity within a span of just two to three years!

SINCE SEVERAL MISCREANTS of such scandals are often found within the Government itself, it is hardly surprising that the same style of func-

tioning has percolated down to our educational institutions. Beginning with primary education, it is evident that the entire system is so parochial, unimaginative and non-creative in outlook, that the entire process of acquiring knowledge is reduced to merely a silly ritual of acquiring degrees. Today, degrees mean little, and in some cases, can be seen merely as evidence of literacy.

Students graduate from the hallowed precincts of our dilapidated educational institutions, clutching pieces of paper that signify little, least of all the attainment of wisdom or technical expertise. "The youth go in for higher education, without any aim or objective. They finally end up in frustration and become only degree-crazy", remarked Mehroo Bengalee, Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University, recently. But who is expected to foster that aim or objective? What system of vocational guidance, if any, is available to the student population? Surely the teacher, (who is probably busy supplementing his or her income with private tuitions), is barely equipped to deal with this vital lacunae in our educational system.

Furthermore, curricula are barely tailored to meet current needs, let alone fast-changing ones. And it should not come as a surprise to find that textbooks prescribed a decade ago, are still current today. Many of them are badly written and poorly illustrated and often guaranteed to suppress any interest that a student may have displayed in the subject. Changing values and realities are rarely reflected — communalist and sexist images and biases continue to abound, especially at primary levels.

Even the allocation of subjects under a particular faculty is haphazard and remains baffling. Students still wonder why the 'solar system' is a part of science, and the 'phases of the moon' a part of geography. By the time a child passes through primary and secondary education to higher education, his perspective is warped and his imagination and creativity totally stifled under the weight

of unintelligible books and courses. He programmes himself to acquire degrees, and put an end to the tedious chore that we call education.

A large portion of the blame can be justifiably attributed to the relatively low position education commands in the Government's list of priorities.

If teachers were performing superfluous or superficially important tasks, instead of generating skilled man-power, the Government's negligence or indifference might have, quite conceivably, been excusable. But to ignore the conditions of a community that educates and moulds entire generations, under some misapprehension that 'nobility of service' and commensurate emoluments are incompatible, is absolutely unpardonable, to say the least. If education is not an economically viable proposition for the Government, the system has to be overhauled drastically in order to make it so. Indeed what we need today, through a gradual process, is a total metamorphosis. Or else, the validity of carrying on with this farce is questionable.

September 5, Teachers' Day, is the only red letter day for the vast multitudes of underpaid and over-worked teachers of this country, and it follows a predictable pattern each year. Lengthy tributes are paid to the teaching community, to their dedication and 'great service'; platitudes are doled out conscientiously, eulogising the nobility of the profession; and the rusting teachers' image is polished and venerated for those 24 hours. After which, the education ministry and all its departments, parents, Parent Teacher Associations and society in general, let the *gurus* slide back into their customary anonymity.

Unless education is given the importance it deserves and recognised as such, in terms of its responsibility in creating utility, the words of the Kothari Commission Report (India's *Bible* or Constitution for Education) . . . 'the destiny of India is being shaped in her classrooms' . . . will ring even hollower year after year. ♦

Commissions of Inquiry: An Exercise in Futility?

AN EXAMINATION of many of the commissions of inquiry appointed by successive governments in the country, reveals that few have been successful in achieving their stated purpose. Currently, the proceedings of the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission of Inquiry seem to reinforce the view that commissions of inquiry have increasingly become an exercise in futility, and those concerned about the judicial process in the country, are already considerably alarmed by reports of its proceedings.

Constituted to conduct an investigation into the hiring of the US-based economic intelligence agency, Fairfax Group Ltd, the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission of Inquiry had its terms of reference set out in a notification issued by the Government on April 6, 1987. These include inquiries into the events and circumstances leading to the arrangements entered into with the Fairfax Group Ltd — the nature of the engagement of the agency, its purpose, and the terms and conditions governing these. The Commission was also directed to ascertain Fairfax Group Ltd's competence in carrying out the tasks assigned to it; whether payment had been made to the agency, and by whom; and what information had hitherto been received from the agency by the government. Finally, the Commission was also to establish whether national security was, in any way, jeopardised by any information furnished to Fairfax Group Ltd by the Government of India. It was to complete its inquiry and submit its report within a period of three months, and restrictions under various sections of the Commissions of In-

quiry Act applied to its workings. Today, five months and two extensions later, the functioning of the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission has come under scrutiny and invited much criticism from the public and press alike.

The Commission, described by the Government as a "definite matter of public importance", commenced proceedings on August 13, 1987, four months after it was first constituted. Immediate outrage ensued when it was discovered that the hearings were held *in camera*, and that too, in the home of one of the judges, Justice Thakkar. Fali Nariman, Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court, echoed the concern voiced by many in the legal profession: "The report that two Justices of the Supreme Court, in their capacity as members of a Commission of Inquiry, have initiated its proceedings by recording the testimony of a witness *in camera* without his lawyer, at the residence of one of the Justices, is a matter of concern to lawyers and the legal profession in the country. Secrecy breeds suspicion, and suspicion (however ill-founded) ultimately breeds contempt. The Fairfax Commission, constituted as it is, has commenced its proceedings *in camera*. This procedure is contrary to weighty precedent, both in this country and abroad. And it does little for the credit of the Justices themselves."

The appointment of a judicial commission, rather than a parliamentary committee, has also prompted criticism, as it reeks of vested interest on the part of the Government. Whereas a parliamentary committee

is empowered to summon witnesses and demand records, and anyone refusing to testify or disclose information is liable for punishment, the proceedings of a commission of inquiry, can be repeatedly restricted, with the Government claiming executive privileges to withhold document after document. Even witnesses are not obliged to testify, a fact amply demonstrated by Mrs Indira Gandhi during the Shah Commission.

The Thakkar-Natarajan Commission of Inquiry has already run into considerable trouble. Soon after the proceedings were moved to the Supreme Court, a serious argument ensued between Mr Ram Jethmalani (counsel for Mr Nusli Wadia, Chairman of Bombay Dyeing and Manufacturing Co Ltd), and the Justices, over the appropriate procedures to be followed. In the meantime, the arrest of Mr Wadia, on a transparently flimsy charge of having made a false entry on a hotel registration form, further confounded the already beleaguered proceedings. Hot on its heels, came the furore generated by an article published in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, which criticised the appointment of sitting judges to head the Commission, and the workings of the Commission itself. As matters were still *sub-judice*, all operations were suspended while the Commission attempted to decide whether the article constituted contempt or not. Already, at least Rs 15 lakh have been spent on a Commission whose value is questionable, terms of reference vague, and which has made a complete mockery of its own proceedings.

But, not all commissions of inquiry

A legacy from the British, commissions of inquiry and fact-finding committees have an important role to play in a functioning democracy. But in view of the fact that their recommendations are seldom followed, these "watchdogs of democracy" rarely achieve any degree of success. SHEKHAR GHOSH examines the dismal track record of recent commissions of inquiry, notably the on-going Thakkar-Natarajan one, investigating the infamous "Fairfax Affair".



Justice Thakkar.



Justice Natarajan.

are doomed from the outset. Indeed, the role they can play in a democracy is a vital one. And the fact, that commissions are an invaluable institution, whereby crucial information can be ascertained and important facts gleaned, is undeniable.

THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION is what forms the basis of commissions. A commission is a governmental agency created to conduct a special investigation, or to resolve governmental crises. It can be appointed for matters pertaining to the welfare of the state or its citizens, for improving the efficiency of an administration, or for financial matters. While arriving at decisions in the form of recommendations, a commission should ensure that such decisions are representative of a cross-section of the population, and that they are a safeguard

against the abuse of power.

The first public inquiry was probably held in Britain, around 1066 AD, during the Norman period. In those days, the appointment of such investigative bodies was the prerogative of the Crown; today, it is that of Parliament and the Government. By the end of the 16th century, procedures for establishing select committees were properly established. During the last few decades of the 19th century, as many as 20 Royal Commissions were appointed in Britain, during each session of Parliament. Simultaneously, as the affairs of the East India Company caught the attention of Parliament, several committees from the House of Commons, were appointed to investigate the Company's affairs from 1772 to 1783. Following the gradual establishment of British rule, many

commissions of inquiry for India were established, including the Indian Commission on Education, the Statutory Commission, the Calcutta University Commission, the Royal Commission on Labour, and several committees for the "improvement of the condition of Indian people", dealing with agriculture, railways, weights and measures, taxation, finance, industrial development, and the production of salt. In conclusion, the commissions of inquiry were a colonial legacy.

In independent India, we have parliamentary commissions appointed by the House, and accountable to the Speaker of the House. The Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952 (No IX of 1952), empowers the Central or State Government to appoint a commission of inquiry into any definite matter of public importance. A commission of inquiry can summon any person, examine him/her on oath, command the production of any document, or requisition any public record or document from any court or office. In 1971, the 1952 Act was amended in order to make publication of commission reports obligatory.

Commissions of inquiry have the powers of a civil court, and the right to deny any kind of interference, public or private. Justice J C Vimadalal comments: 'It is entirely the Chairman's prerogative to set up the procedures of inquiry. The Chairman is generally appointed on the recommendation of the Chief Justices. Personally, I think that only retired judges should be asked to man the commissions. Given the dearth of judges in our regular courts, the ap-

SPECIAL REPORT

pointment of a sitting judge to head a commission of inquiry leads to further delays in our courts and adds to the backlog of work."

Justice Vimadalal is a retired judge of the Bombay High Court, and has chaired two one-man commissions. He is currently heading the Taloja Crash Probe Committee, set up by the Government of Maharashtra, to inquire into the collapse of a factory building near Panvel, which caused 18 deaths and 32 injuries. Both Justice Vimadalal and Justice Madon stress that the success of a commission is dependent on the individuals who constitute it and conduct the inquiries. Mr Vimadalal himself does not believe in holding inquiries *in camera*, which he thinks is "against our democratic principles", but qualifies it by excepting inquiries concerning the Official Secrets Act, foreign relations and communal tensions. He adds, "Inquiries held *in camera* are not only unfair, but they also compromise the integrity of a commission." Justice Madon is even more vociferous in his criticism. "They serve no purpose, and are nothing short of a farce and a waste of public funds. Only in exceptional cases of national security or in cases of rape, where public hearings may socially ostracise a victim, can such inquiries be justified."

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS worldwide, have come to rely on public inquiries not only to decrease management tensions, but often to quell allegations of misrule. Barring a few commissions which have succeeded in their task, commissions instituted in recent times have proved unnecessary, retrogressive, or futile. More commonly, they have been used by the government as a placebo to public outrage.

Under the Chairmanship of L S Vaidyanathan, the 1947 Insurance Advisory Committee had advised the Imperial Council of Agricultural Research, now the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), to collect suitable statistics about cattle



The Shah Commission: a forerunner to futile commissions of inquiry.

and crops in the country, so that an insurance scheme could be implemented "to ensure progressive economical improvement to the utmost limit possible." It also recommended the introduction of compulsory insurance schemes for factory workers. Forty years later, the recommendations remain unimplemented. The majority of cattle remain uninsured, and insurance of crops continues to be an alien concept for most farmers. In view of the frequent drought in some areas of the country, the premiums received from productive regions could have been economically expedient in assisting others.

Almost three generations of students have graduated since Independence, but mass education still remains our Achilles' heel. As long ago as 1948, a report by the Kher Committee on the means of financing educational development in India, recommended the introduction of Universal Compulsory Education in the provinces, for children in the age group of 6 to 11, within a period of ten years. Today, millions of children are still illiterate, although some have even gone through the charade of primary schools. In 1954, the Ministry of Education appointed a Committee on Higher Education under K L Shrimali, who urged the establishment to

set up a new division in the Central Ministry of Education, to take immediate steps to promote the development of rural institutes. The Committee had also prepared guidelines for the functioning of such institutes. Another report prepared in 1954, by the Advisory Committee on Social and Moral Hygiene, advised the Government to provide courses on "sex education of a progressive nature" in all educational institutions. It also recommended the establishment of child-guidance clinics, marriage counselling, and good parent-teacher associations. Needless to say, all three reports are gathering dust.

So is a report on the rehabilitation of slum dwellers, a burning issue in Bombay. According to the report, prepared by the High Power Steering Group for Slums and Dilapidated Houses, and chaired by Ajit Kerkar, where the economics, planning, execution and the practicability of the venture have been detailed, all slum dwellers can be rehabilitated.

More recently, the J B D'Souza Committee's recommendations, on the Bombay Municipal Corporation's draft Development Plan for Greater Bombay, for the 1981-2001 period, was submitted to the Maharashtra Government in August 1987. Negating the idea of decongesting the city,

it takes an offensive stance against many of the concerns voiced by environmental groups in the city. Inevitably, the controversy generated by the D'Souza report means that it will surely be shelved, along with those that are considerably less contentious, all of which will probably never see the light of day.

WHAT EXACTLY HAPPENS to these recommendations? Justice Vimadalal says, "Once we've submitted the reports, our job is finished. We are not supposed to concern ourselves with their acceptance or implementation; that is the responsibility solely of the Government." One of the main reasons for the non-acceptance of recommendations is probably that they may cause embarrassment to the Government. There are several instances of this during Mrs Gandhi's reign, and now, Rajiv Gandhi too, seems to be following in her footsteps. During the nine-and-a-half years that he was a High Court Judge in Bombay, some of Justice Vimadalal's judgements were clearly not welcomed by Mrs Gandhi. The judge chaired a one-man Central Government Committee set up to inquire into the various misdeeds of the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr Vengal Rao. Out of the 24 charges levelled against him, he was exonerated from all but three. Justice Vimadalal explains, "The charges I found the state guilty of, included an expenditure of several lakhs on Sanjay Gandhi's visit to the Singaneri colliery. On submission of the report, the Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi, refused to file the due affidavits despite several reminders. The reasons were obvious. Well, that was the end of it. Although, in all fairness to the Government, I must say that not all reports are rejected."

This was corroborated by Justice D P Madon, who conducted the one-man Commission of Inquiry into the communal disturbances at Jalgaon, Bhiwandi and Mahad in May 1970. Following this report, an inquiry was launched against some officers accu-

sed of negligence of duty, and due punishment was consequently meted out to them. But what became of the several recommendations and the preventive measures mentioned in his seven-volume report? "Even if half my recommendations had been complied with, the 1984 riots at Bhiwandi could have been contained," explained Justice Madon. He added, "I had dealt with the delicate communal situation in Bhiwandi in full detail, devoting 35 paragraphs to the *Shiva Jayanti* celebrations in Bhiwandi, the very incident that sparked off the '84 riots."

Frequently, the workings of a commission are such that it often fails to reach the standards it should. Firstly, as eminent lawyer Atul Setalvad complains: "They take too damn long." The Takru Commission of the 1960s, set up to investigate the pipeline scandal, took more than seven years to conclude its findings. Recently, the Kudal Commission lasted four-and-a-half years, only to then be scrapped. A fact-finding Committee on regional imbalance in Maharashtra, headed by Dr V M Dandekar, was appointed on August 3, 1983, and was asked to submit its report by December 31, that year. Two extensions followed, and the Committee finally submitted its 356-page report on April 30, 1984. In fact, rarely has a commission of inquiry not required an extension of time.

Often, the commissions work at such a leisurely pace, that the public outcry, which first prompted the Government to take action, has already died down by the time the report is submitted. A weak Parliament, the apathy of our elected representatives, and a press which seems to suffer from bouts of amnesia, prevent appropriate action and follow-up of commission recommendations. Atul Setalvad adds: "The lack of proper expertise on the part of the panel, very often means that the recommendations proposed are impractical, uneconomical, unpalatable, and at times, even passé." In contrast to this, Mr Setalvad describes the Royal Commissions of Inquiry in Britain, where, depend-

ing on the nature of the inquiry, reputed professors and intellectuals are invited to lead the commissions, surely a practice to be emulated.

THE FUTILITY of commission reports emerges even more strongly in the case concerning the Civil Aviation Department. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is the sole controlling authority of civil pilots, all of whom must be vetted by the DGCA staff, prior to flying an aircraft. The DGCA, however, consists of very senior pilots who are familiar only with Dakotas, Fokkers, and other aircraft that are outdated. They are not only unfamiliar with the modern aircraft used today, including first and second generation Boeings, but in addition, they do not have the required number of flying hours on these planes. "How then can one expect them to adequately vet a pilot who is supposed to fly a Boeing?" asks Mr Setalvad, who has a Doctorate in International Flight Law. "They just do not have the expertise. Consequently, the pilots who fly our modern planes are most negligently vetted and are unsafe, to a certain degree." The pilot community is small and closely-knit, and consequently reluctant to sully the reputation of their fraternity. Despite the recommendations of umpteen committees to bring in experts to vet pilots, the Government has failed to do anything, for reasons best known to it.

In other instances, committees are known to have become a tool for the Government, in conducting a vendetta against certain individuals or organisations. A prime example of this has been the Kudal Commission, set up in 1982, to inquire into the alleged misdeeds of several Gandhian and other voluntary organisations with which Jayaprakash Narayan was associated. The Commission, a hang-over of that particular, painful period of the Emergency, reeked of viciousness from its very inception, and was conducted in a spirit reminiscent of the McCarthy era. After more than four years of what can only be de-

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scribed as a witch-hunt, the Commission came up with results that merited neither the time it had spent and the enormous staff it had employed, nor the Rs 1.2 crore that had financed it. Although not typical of most commissions of inquiry, it is still necessary to quote it as an example, simply because it points to the potential of colossal misuse of power.

On July 30, 1986, the Commission of Inquiry (Amendment) Bill, dubbed as the Probe Secrecy Bill, was passed in the Lok Sabha. The Bill was described by Madhu Dandavate as "... the tradition of midnight rule, of decision by darkness." In essence, the Bill released the Government from any obligation whatsoever of presenting the reports of inquiry commissions to the House, let alone making them public, and thereby avoiding possible embarrassment. *The Times of India* commented: "Imagine, for instance, the Thaker Commission concluding that a foreign agency was indeed involved in the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, or the Ranganathan-Mishra Commission holding that the anti-Sikh riots in the first week of November 1984, were, in fact, engineered." The Bill is typical of the workings of the present Government and its obsession to operate behind closed doors, and succeeds in divesting commissions of inquiry of any possible value.

ARE THESE COMMISSIONS economically viable? Or are they a drain on the Exchequer? Every year, an average of 15 to 20 commissions and committees are set up by the Central and State Governments. Most of them take a year or more to conclude their operations, although some have been known to continue indefinitely. A normal inquiry commission — excluding permanent and standing committees whose expenditure runs into crores — costs the public exchequer anywhere from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 3 lakh, for each month of its duration. A total of Rs 15 lakh was withdrawn from the Treasury for the initial three-month period of the Thakkar-

Natarajan Commission of Inquiry. A minimum sum of Rs 2 crore is spent each year on commissions whose futility is predictable from the outset. The fact that many commissions are scrapped half-way through, only adds to the list of expenses, the latest example being the Janaki-Amma Commission that was set up in the pre-Nayanar government, to investigate the pre-degree examination muddle in Kerala, and scrapped in June 1987. To crown it all, reports resulting from commissions that have served their term, and which have been financed by tax-payers, are made public only at the whim of the Government. Commissions of inquiry do play a very important role in any democracy. But, whether a commission is appointed, or a report withheld, is the prerogative of the Government, and should be exercised on the basis of safeguarding national interest. However, it is the abuse of the commissions, in order to secure political gains, that must be exposed. A complete revamping of the procedures of our commissions of inquiry is urgently needed.

That commissions of inquiry are a must for every democracy, is self-evident. But the reason for its appointment should be amply justified. Inquiry commissions are also appointed in the West, but only when situations merit them, or when crises are imminent. The Watergate scandal in the US led to the impeachment of the President; and the Denning Commission in England, which investigated the leaking of state secrets to Christine Keeler, led to the sacking of E Profumo, the MP concerned. The recent Tower Commission Report, in the wake of the Iran-Contra scandal, has already led to the dismissal of the National Security Advisor, Robert McFarlane. It is interesting to study the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), a US government agency, which appears to be ideally structured. Its nationwide branches permit easy access to consumers to settle all matters of litigation. Hence, a commission need not be especially established to look into public interest

matters, as the FTC is able to competently deal with all cases that come before it.

In India too, we do not need as many commissions of inquiry as we seem to be plagued with. A lot of the work assigned to the commissions can be expedited by investigative agencies, in a shorter period of time. Secondly, once a commission is established, it should be accountable to 'no one but the citizens of this country, which means that its recommendations are not the private property of the ruling party, and should be made public if it does not endanger national security. The members of the commission should be chosen carefully by both Houses, on the basis of their neutrality, integrity, and the interests of the nation. Finally, it should be made obligatory for the Government to implement most, if not all, of the recommendations, subject to their viability which is again to be decided by the Houses.

There can be little doubt that judges are the most suitable candidates to head commissions. The electorate has lost confidence in nearly every public office in the country, including the bureaucrats, the technocrats and the politicians. Judges belong to that rare breed which still carries a degree of credibility in the eyes of the public. Neutrality must be preserved at all costs. Further, the financial, social and political manipulations that always present obstructions to the implementation of recommendations, must be removed. So must the bureaucracy that our governmental machinery is riddled with.

Let a commission of inquiry be held when a crisis in the country *really* warrants it. And then, let the report be made public, and the recommendations implemented. Only then, will a degree of what V P Singh described as "the principle of moral and constructive responsibility (which is) the essence of accountability in high offices", be restored in an institution currently unable to serve the purpose for which it was originally designed. ♦

Managing Our Water Resources

As the country finds itself in the clutches of the severest drought to date, the Government is confronted with the recurrent problem of how best to manage the country's water resources. Examining various possibilities, B B VOHRA, Chairperson of the Advisory Board of Energy, concludes that the future of irrigation in this country will belong increasingly to ground water.

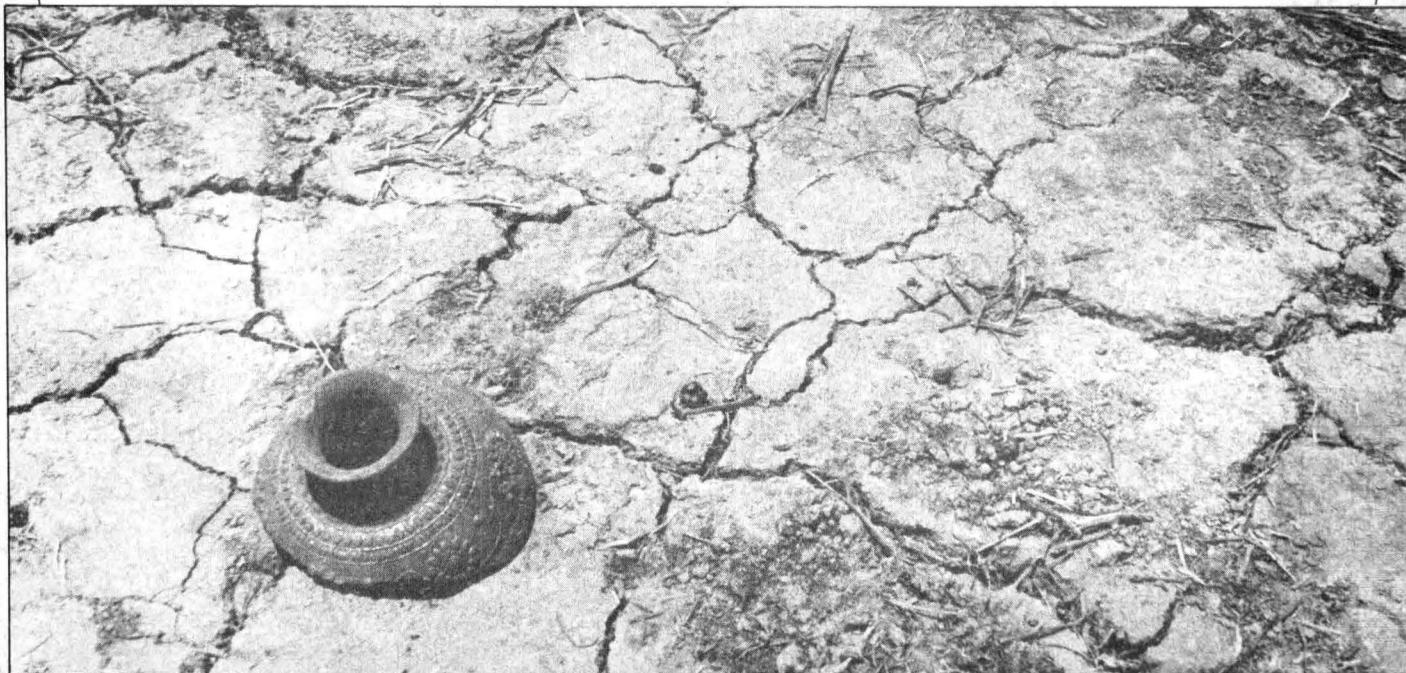
IT IS NOW ALMOST TWO YEARS since the Union Ministry of Irrigation was renamed the Ministry of Water Resources, and the post of Secretary to the Ministry was filled, for the first time in over a decade, by a person who was not a professional civil engineer. The simultaneous setting up of a National Water Resources Council, and the announcement that this new body would prepare a National Water Policy, served to raise hopes that many aspects of water management, which had hitherto been neglected, would now receive attention, and that the new Ministry would no longer remain obsessed

only with problems of irrigation — and only surface irrigation at that.

Although these hopes are yet to be realised, and the responsibilities entrusted to the renamed Ministry are, surprisingly, exactly the same as those of its predecessor, the inner significance of these developments must not be overlooked. This is so because, taken together, they amount to an implicit admission that the overall management of the country's water resources is in need of improvement. The inexorable logic of circumstances also points in the same direction. For, thanks to our extremely sobering experience with the current drou-

ght, it is inconceivable that matters can be permitted to remain as they are. Indeed, it does not require any special intelligence to appreciate the fact that a country with a population of nearly 800 million (which, incidentally, is still growing at around 2.2 per cent per annum and threatens to double itself before it achieves a zero rate of growth), and which is plagued with seemingly intractable problems of poverty, has no future worth speaking of, unless it can make better use of its water resources — and therefore, also its land and other related resources.

The most pressing problems of



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water management, namely the abatement of drought and floods, can be tackled only by carrying out far-reaching reforms in the entire field of land management, afforestation and rural development.

The storage and distribution of surface water, through the construction of big dams and canal networks, are our biggest achievements in the field of water management so far. We have spent approximately Rs 20,000 crore during the last 40 years, to serve a net area of about 20 million hectares (mh) in this manner. While the country can rightly take pride in some of the engineering feats associated with these ventures, there is no denying the fact that we have, in the process, failed to ensure that investments were properly planned, and that the impounded waters were utilised to full advantage. The pathetic state in which big irrigation projects find themselves today is best described in the words of the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, while addressing the State Irrigation Ministers' Conference, in July 1986:

"The situation today is that since 1951, 246 big surface irrigation projects have been initiated. Only 65 of these have been completed. 181 are still under construction. This is not a happy state of affairs. We need some definite thrusts from the projects that we started after 1970. Perhaps we can safely say that almost no benefit has come to the people from these projects. For 16 years we have poured money out. The people have got nothing back, no irrigation, no water, no increase in production, no help in their daily life. By pouring money out to a few contractors, or a few *theke-dars* and labourers, to build canals, and maybe to the Public Works Department to construct the dam, we are not really doing our people a favour. The favour comes when the project is completed, when the benefits of the project start flowing."

This is a very serious indictment

indeed, and one which needs to be taken to heart by all those interested in better water management. New solutions must be found to end the serious financial losses incurred by irrigation projects, losses which have reached the level of Rs 800 crore per annum.

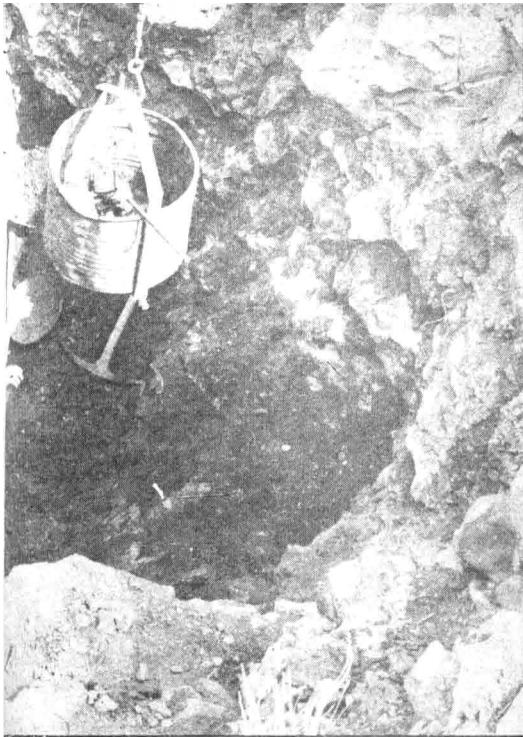
URGENT ACTION needs to be taken to close the large gap between the gross irrigation potential of 20.8 mh, which was created between 1951 and 1985, and the potential of 15.6 mh, which, was actually 'utilised' by the end of that period. The creation of an additional capacity of 5.2 mh — which represents the size of the gap, and is equivalent to 25 per cent of the total potential created during the 34 years in question — would today require an investment of over Rs 15,000 crore. It would obviously make better economic sense to make use of available idle capacity, than to create additional capacity, at a time when we are desperately short of resources.

High priority must also be given to the task of making fuller use of the post-1951 potential of 15.6 mh, which although 'utilised' in the parlance of irrigation departments, is, in fact, grossly underutilised. This is evident from the fact that the productivity of these lands is no more than around one-third of what can be achieved through improved arrangements for the distribution and application of water. This means that command area development programmes must receive a much higher priority than is being accorded to them. To illustrate, in the Seventh Plan, out of a total provision of Rs 13,227 crore for big irrigation projects, as much as Rs 11,556 crore, or over 87 per cent, stands earmarked for the creation of an additional potential (of 4.3 mh), and only Rs 1,671 crore for command area development programmes. Irrigation departments must overcome their fascination for new projects until such time as the existing installed capacity has been put to proper use.



The menace of waterlogging (and consequent salinisation of the soil), which has already affected at least 7 mh of good agricultural land, and threatens many more, must no longer be ignored, but tackled in right earnest. Lands which require drainage to maintain their productivity must be provided with it, however high the cost — on an average over Rs 10,000 per hectare — which may have to be incurred for this purpose. It must be clearly understood that we cannot, under any circumstances, permit the blessings of canal irrigation to be turned into a curse, and allow our renewable resources of water to damage our non-renewable resources of land. It is, however, surprising that no separate provision has been made in the Seventh Plan for drainage and anti-waterlogging activities. Apparently, these are meant to be financed, if at all, as part of command area development programmes.

Our costly and irreplaceable reservoirs, which represent not only valuable irrigation potential, but very often hydel and flood control potential too, must be saved from the threat of premature siltation. This, however, is a task which demands effective afforestation and soil conservation measures in the catchment areas of reservoirs, and is therefore beyond the capacity of irrigation departments to handle.



The biggest single reform that is required in our irrigation departments is their re-orientation with regard to ground water, which is still looked upon as a source of 'minor' irrigation. There is a historical reason for this. While 'major and medium' irrigation projects have been undertaken by state irrigation departments for well over a century, and have acquired the prestige and glamour which is traditionally associated with large and expensive public works and big bureaucracies, ground water is not only a late arrival in the field of irrigation, but is also a resource that is guilty — in the eyes of the PWD — of the unpardonable crime of not requiring any state investments for its storage, transport and distribution. This is why, till very recently, ground water irrigation was the concern of agriculture departments in the states, and irrigation departments showed no interest in it. It is pertinent to note in this connection, that when the Central Ground Water Board was set up in 1970, it was located in the Ministry of Agriculture, and continued to remain there till as late as 1980, when it was shifted to the Ministry of Irrigation. No wonder that this resource is still treated as somewhat of an interloper and an upstart, by the Ministry.

UNLIKE SURFACE WATER, which

lies at the mercy of irrigation departments for its development, and is even then, available only to lands lucky enough to be situated in the command areas of projects, ground water is available, to a greater or lesser extent, in most parts of the country at fairly accessible depths. It can be easily tapped by the farmer with the assistance, where necessary, of nothing more than a short-term loan. The installation of a tubewell can be completed within weeks, if not days, and since it begins to yield returns within a single season, it represents a most attractive investment. Above all, ground water represents a source of irrigation which is completely under the farmer's own control, and permits him to supply water to the land exactly when, and to the extent that it is required by the crop. It is this last circumstance which explains why ground water irrigation, according to a recent study, is about twice as productive as canal irrigation.

Thanks to the Government's enlightened policies in agricultural credit and rural electrification, and the easy availability of pumpsets and prime movers, there are today, over 10 million electric or diesel-driven pumpsets in the country. At the end of the Sixth Plan, ground water already served a gross area of 26.1 mh, as against 25.3 mh irrigated by 'major and medium' projects. However, if the higher productivity of ground water is taken into account, the area served by it, in 1985, was equivalent to around 52 mh of canal-irrigated lands. There is, thus, no longer any room for doubt that ground water is not a 'minor' but the 'major' and the most productive source of irrigation in the country. It may be mentioned in this connection, that while the total storage created by big projects upto the end of the Sixth Plan was around 17 million hectare metres (mh), the country's ground water resources have an annual utilisable potential of nearly 42 mh, of which only 10 mh have been presently utilised.

Major projects require huge public investments, take years and often de-

cades to complete, and demand large areas of valuable land for submergence, as well as for distribution systems. Big projects also suffer from serious losses of water by evaporation and seepage during storage and transport; on an average, less than 50 per cent of the impounded waters reach farmers' fields. Such projects also create grave problems of waterlogging in areas which are not naturally well-drained. Further, they are not easy to operate efficiently, and require large additional investments by way of command area development programmes, in order to ensure that water is put to good use. Finally, they are weighed down by large bureaucracies which have become notorious for their corruption and inefficiency.

The cost of creating irrigation potential per hectare of land, through the 'major and medium' route, has shot up from about Rs 1,200 in the First Plan period to nearly Rs 30,000 in the current Plan. However, if the costs of command area development and drainage are also taken into account, the cost of creating 'utilisable' irrigation potential in one hectare of land will, on an average, be found to be well above Rs 40,000 per hectare. This is an exorbitant figure by any standards, and indicates why the future of irrigation in this country will belong increasingly to ground water. It is, however, necessary to note that, for reasons which are too obvious to mention, the 'big dam' lobby is still extremely powerful and well-entrenched. This is apparent from the manner in which it has been able to obtain clearance for the 25-year Narmada Project, costing Rs 25,000 crore, in the teeth of opposition by environmentalists throughout the country. According to an editorial in *The Statesman*, June 15, 1987, the cost of this project is bound to escalate to around Rs 80,000 crore by the time it is completed. The report goes on to mention that the final cost of irrigating the 2 million hectare land in its command, will be an unbelievable Rs 4,00,000 per hectare!

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IT IS CLEAR THAT the country's ground water resources should not be taken for granted just because they represent a gift of Nature, and should be given much greater attention than they have received so far. The neglect which ground water has suffered is apparent from the fact that the Seven-vent Plan document contains no separate section on this subject, nor any discussion of the problems it faces — problems which have arisen as a result of the insatiable demand for this resource. It is time that serious notice is taken of the steep falls in water-tables, which have occurred in many parts of the country, as a result of over-pumping on the one hand, and on the other, decreasing rates of replenishment caused by increasing deforestation and denudation in our water-sheds. In certain areas, such as the coast of Saurashtra, excessive pumping has led to the intrusion of sea-water into sweet water aquifers, and has turned the once blooming agricultural and fruit-growing areas into wastelands.

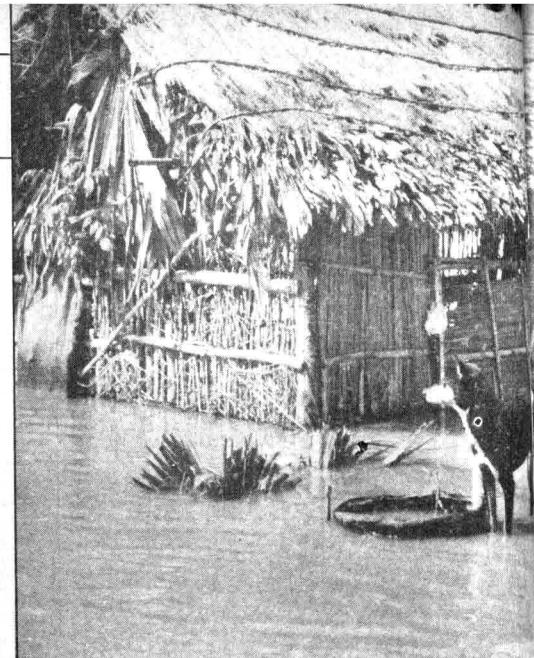
State ground water organisations should be suitably strengthened and equipped, and made capable of carrying out scientific investigations into the extent and nature of aquifers and their recharge capacities, so that they may be able to monitor their behaviour and sound warning bells in time. They should also be equipped to give competent technical advice to farmers regarding the kind of tubewells and pump-sets they should install in their holdings, so that there is no wastage of either scarce materials or even scarcer energy resources.

Wherever necessary, state governments must empower themselves to impose restrictions on pumping by individual farmers, in the larger interests of agricultural production and the farming community as a whole. They should ensure that installed pumping capacities are not underutilised for lack of either electricity or diesel. Systematic programmes for the consolidation of holdings should be undertaken, because this is one of the surest ways of encouraging ground

water development on sound lines.

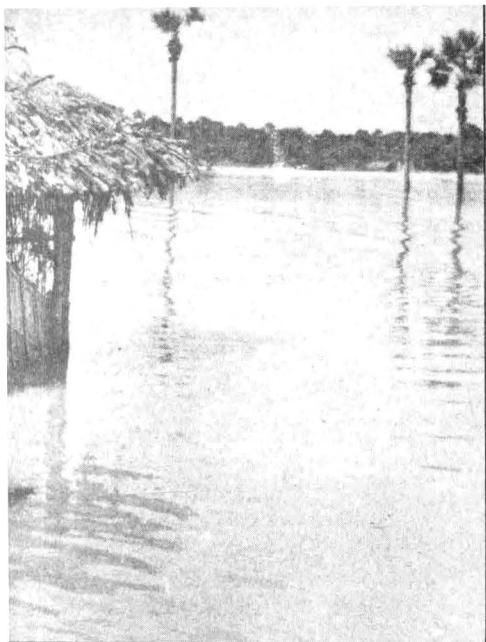
THE TWO TASKS in water management, the prevention of premature siltation of reservoirs and the maximising of ground water recharge, have been identified as beyond the capacity of irrigation departments. The former task demands that soil erosion in the catchment areas of reservoirs should be effectively controlled, so that storages, which have been created at such great cost for the conservation of water, do not turn into repositories for silt, and the useful life of irrigation projects is not reduced. The latter task demands that the excessive run-off of water should be prevented, so that a larger proportion of the precipitation received may be held back in the soil and enabled to percolate into ground water aquifers, instead of being lost to the sea, often in the form of disastrous floods. These two tasks are, however, identical for all purposes, because soil erosion in the catchments is caused by exactly the same factors as are responsible for the excessive run-off of rain-water. These factors relate mainly to the deforestation and denudation of forests, and other non-agricultural lands, which expose the top-soil, and leave it defenceless against the onslaught of heavy precipitation. The soil that is so loosened, is easily carried away by fast-flowing waters which encounter no resistance from natural vegetation in their downward flow. However, they also relate to the improvident cultivation of lands on slopes, which are not equipped for the conservation of either soil or water by such measures as contour-terracing and bunding. The solution to both problems lies in the restoration of permanent vegetal cover — whether of trees or grasses — on non-agricultural lands, and the treatment of all vulnerable agricultural lands for soil and water conservation.

The reduction of run-off and soil losses, through a greater emphasis on afforestation and better land management, must be taken up on a nation-



wide scale. Such a strategy also constitutes our best insurance against the recurring drought and floods which take such a heavy toll of our economy. Fully recharged ground water aquifers will not only result in the revival of natural springs in the hills, which have dried up as a result of excessive run-off, even in such rain-rich areas as the Northeastern states, but also in the raising of ground water tables in the plains. What is equally important is that seepage from such aquifers into river-channels will increase river-flows in the dry season. The reduction of run-off losses is particularly necessary in arid areas, where heavy rains, which may occur only once in three or four years, are largely wasted on account of denudation and the absence of adequate soil and water conservation works. If every drop of the precipitation which occurs in such areas could be conserved locally — preferably as soil moisture and ground water, to avoid heavy evaporation losses — the failure of rains during some years would lose much of its sting.

The control of run-off and soil losses has a very significant moderating effect on floods as well, because there is not only a reduction in the amount of water which reaches the river, but also in the amount of silt it contains. It is the excessive silt load in waters, from denuded water-sheds, that results in the sedimentation of river-beds and reduces their capacity to carry water, particularly during



times of heavy precipitation.

The control of run-off and soil losses is also necessary in the interests of preserving the productivity of rain-fed agricultural lands. Not only is top-soil the most fertile part of the soil, representing a virtually non-renewable resource — it takes nature hundreds of years to build an inch of it — but the retention of water as soil moisture is also a matter of vital importance to such lands.

It is pertinent to note in this connection, that the prevention of neither drought nor floods, figures in the charter of responsibilities of the Ministry of Water Resources. This is a most surprising circumstance indeed, because drought and floods are, without doubt, the most pressing problems in the field of water management today. Flood control does feature among the responsibilities of the Ministry, but it only involves the protection of certain specified and limited urban areas against floods, through the construction of engineering works such as bunds and dykes. Such measures, naturally, have no effect on either the incidence or the severity of floods, and it is highly misleading to describe them as 'flood control' measures. 'Flood protection' would be a better description for these activities.

The Centre has hardly any choice but to tackle the problems of drought and floods in right earnest if the country is not to continue to be bled white. The extreme seriousness of

the situation is reflected in the scale of demands being made for financial assistance for drought and flood relief. These demands added up to around Rs 8,000 crore in 1985-1986 — what they will be this year, can be easily imagined.

HOW SHOULD THE CHALLENGE of excessive run-off and soil losses be met? The technical answers are well-known, thanks to the work done by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, as well as agencies outside the country. Briefly, non-agricultural lands must be protected against all biotic interference by human beings and animals, so that they may regenerate themselves and develop a natural cover of local grasses and trees. This is, however, a task which involves effective control over grazing, which, in turn, can be achieved only with the willing co-operation of village communities. Natural regeneration may of course be supplemented and assisted, wherever necessary and feasible, by man-made plantations, and such simple measures for conserving water and soil as contour-trenching and bunding. Rain-fed agricultural lands must be contour-terraced and contour-bunded to reduce both run-off and soil losses. Small storages must be built, ideally one in each mini-watershed, to conserve all local resources of water to the maximum possible extent. Theoretically, there is enough surplus labour in our village to be converted, à la Mao's China, into permanent productive assets.

If we mean business, everything that comes in the way of better resource management must be swept away ruthlessly. We must think and act big if we are to get out of the ecological nose-dive in which we find ourselves today. There is, for instance, no reason why the requirements of the present crisis should not lead us to carry out a drastic revamping of district administration.

If we are really serious about tackling these tasks, there is no alternative except to set up, as early as may be possible, a Ministry of Natural

Resources which would place under one administrative umbrella, all the various disciplines, agencies and programmes relating to the management of our inextricably interlinked resources of land, water and vegetation. However, it is necessary to stress that one of the foremost tasks of the proposed Ministry would be to consider how the total financial resources which are placed at its disposal should be deployed, to serve new priorities, and to redress the glaring imbalances which exist in this field of water, and therefore also land management, today. Nothing can illustrate the lopsidedness of our existing policies better than the fact that a total investment of only Rs 2,723 crore was made upto the end of the Sixth Plan, in forestry, soil and water conservation programmes, to serve the interests of some 90 mh of denuded non-agricultural and 85 mh of erosion-prone agricultural lands. However, during the same period, large irrigation projects claimed an investment of Rs 15,206 crore to serve a net area of around 20 mh only. It is this kind of bias which must be immediately corrected if we are to save ourselves from certain ecological disaster.

All said and done, the better management of our water, soil and forest resources is too serious a matter to be left to the tender mercies of Government organisations alone. The public in general, and local communities in particular, must take a much greater interest in a matter which concerns their future — and the future of their children and their children's children — than they have done in the past. Voluntary organisations and political parties have a great role to play in educating the people — or for that matter, even the Government — in managing these basic resources to the best possible advantage. Hope lies in the expectation that they will play this role energetically and fearlessly, and help to dispel the 'resource illiteracy' which, to a large extent, has been responsible for creating the tragic situation in which we find ourselves today. ♦

BEED: POINTERS TO SUCCESS



WHEN NANAJI DESHMUKH claimed, four months ago: "In five years, I can turn this area (Domri village, in Beed district) into a California, if we can involve the people in all our undertakings," it seemed an almost impossible claim (*Imprint*, June, 1987). Acres upon acres of parched land stretched out as far as the eye could see, in what is a perennially drought-stricken area of Maharashtra.

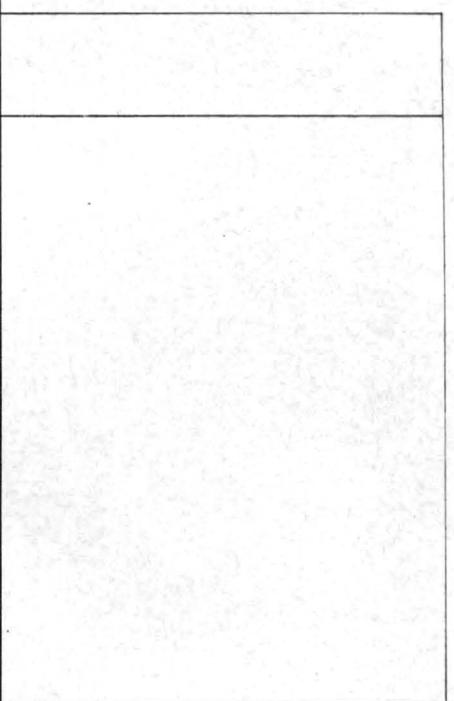
Already, however, results of the project undertaken in Domri, from May 1987 onwards, appear to vindicate Mr Deshmukh's claim. Mr Deshmukh and his band of workers — volunteers from the village itself — have succeeded in altering the face of the terrain. Hitherto, bare trees have sprouted leaves, fields are full of tall stalks of bajra and jowar, and even nodding sunflowers. Encouraged by

the advent of the monsoon, albeit scanty in the area, can the villagers be assured of a good harvest?

The progress, so far, points to success. Following the recent desiltation of the Sondara tank (one of the many tanks lying empty in the area), in a remarkable venture involving local villagers and sponsored by the Deendayal Research Institute, Delhi, the tank is already half-full. The water collected will ensure supplemental irrigation to crops in the dry seasons, and will additionally serve to recharge wells.

While the country finds itself in the clutches of drought, and the age-old problem of water management confronts us again, the project in Beed is evidence of what can be achieved at community level. A combination of several factors has made this possible, and all at a low cost — the use





of small-scale technology, the resurrection of an ancient and effective method of water storage, and the utilisation of a resource whose potential has not been tapped to the full — manpower. But most importantly, it

is the spirit of self-sufficiency engendered in the community, that has produced results in a scheme that deserves to be emulated elsewhere.

The greening of Beed has surely begun. ♦



Monarch Of The Green Baize

Geet Sethi, the youngest champion of world amateur billiards, is all set to storm the snooker world as well. No victory seems impossible for this talented perfectionist. **SHIRISH NADKARNI** profiles the star of the green baize table.

ARAGE FOR PERFECTION. That was the title of John McEnroe's biography, which traced the celebrated New Yorker's rise to pre-eminence in the highly competitive world of professional tennis.

If the reigning World Amateur Billiards Champion Geet Sethi's mother, Usha, is to be believed, the title of the McEnroe book aptly describes the attitude of her second son towards everything he has attempted. "He was good at everything he set his mind to", she says. "The problem was that he wouldn't rest, nor let anyone else in the house rest, until he was better at it than everybody else!"

"He was the champion kite-flier in our locality. He was a whiz with tops. He was very good at badminton and table tennis. He bagged several

By Shirish Nadkarni

medals in cycling. He was Gujarat state's No. 1 in swimming; in fact, at the age of ten, he competed in a higher age-group, and more than managed to hold his own. When he finally quit swimming to concentrate on billiards, he claimed that he would be a world champion one day. And he has made good his boast — not once, but twice."

The first time was at New Delhi in August 1985, when India, as the host, was permitted to have three contestants in the tussle for the Arthur Walker Trophy, for the first time in the history of the World Amateur Tournament. Playing in the world tournament for the first time in his career, Geet made a memorable debut when he emerged from an unseeded spot in the draw, to beat not just Indian top-notchers like Michael Ferreira and Subhash Agrawal, but he also won the finals, beating 75-year-old Australian Bob Marshall, four times former

world champion and three times his age.

Many compared his victory with that of Boris Becker's, who had won Wimbledon only a month earlier, at the age of 17. There were numerous parallels in the wins of both players — both were the youngest-ever champions in their respective sports, and both were the first to win from unseeded spots in the draws. But Geet went a step further, for he won on debut, whereas Becker had previously played once at Wimbledon. Still, both were to proceed to defending their crowns successfully, the next time round!

GEET'S WIN IN 1985 was important for billiards in India. The fact that a fresh young face had ascended the throne ahead of the old, proven veterans of the table, gave the sport the much-needed revitalising shot in the arm. Geet became a celebrity in his

own right — perhaps not like a Sunil Gavaskar or Kapil Dev, but a celebrity, nevertheless. And all that happened at the young age of 24.

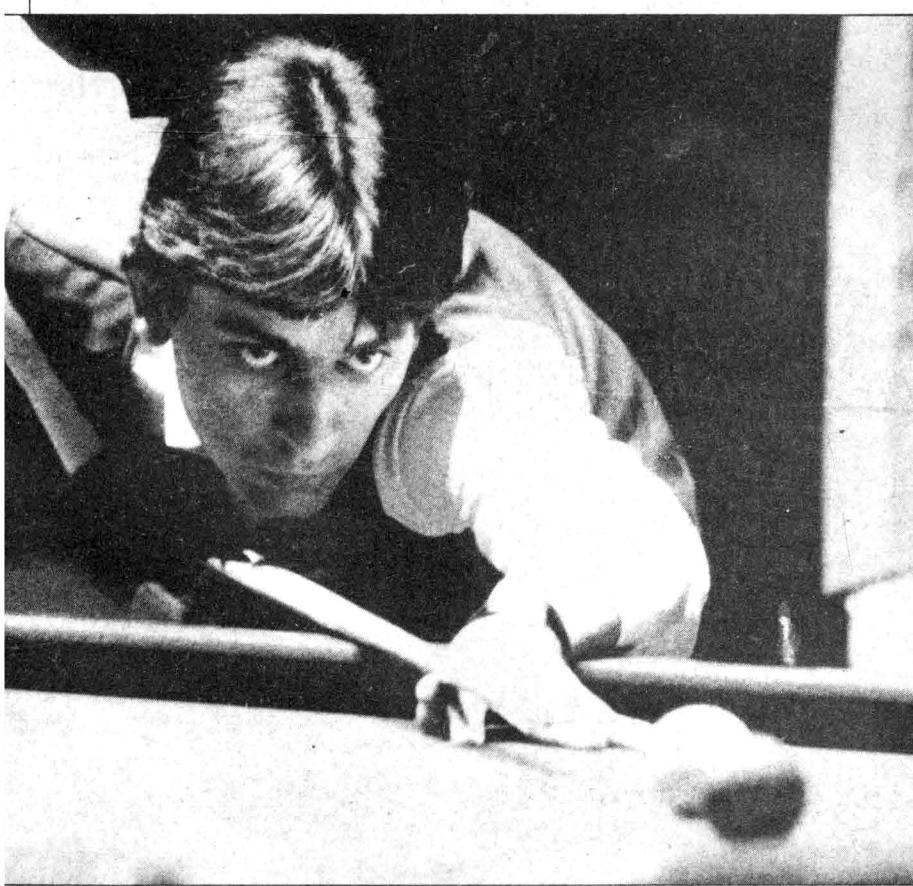
Geet's chances of defending the title looked bleak when it seemed that the biennial world championship would be cancelled due to the lack of a host. Fortunately, at the eleventh hour, Belfast offered to host the tournament. Geet, who is just 26 today, capitalised on this golden opportunity to defend his title with aplomb, despite the fact that he started somewhat shakily, and the standard of competition was higher than it had been two years ago.

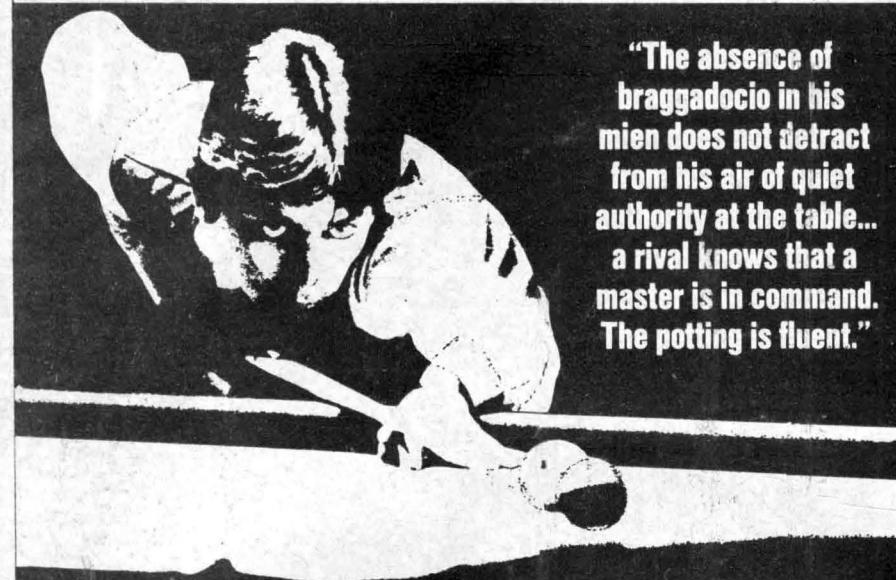
"The pressure on me was much greater than it had been at Delhi, because I was the defending champion and everyone was gunning for me," says Geet. "It didn't do my confidence much good to see players notching up century breaks in a routine manner. Several 200-plus breaks were recorded, which is a measure of the high standard of competition. Initially, I was not playing well, but my game had improved since my last league match."

The problems that the Indians faced were compounded by the fact that they were unaware of the change in the rules that were to decide the group winner, in case of a tie at the top of the league. The change had not been conveyed to them as a result of a lapse on the part of the President of the Indian Billiards Federation, who had received the letter from the world body, well in time.

"WE BECAME AWARE of the change in rules, barely an hour before the start of our final league matches," says Geet. "The organisers were, of course, not to blame for it. But it ruined Subhash's and my plans, for we were very keen to see two Indians reach the finals, as had happened in the 1983 championships. Had we known the rules beforehand, we would have adopted different strategies in our group encounters."

The change in the rules pitted





"The absence of braggadocio in his mien does not detract from his air of quiet authority at the table... a rival knows that a master is in command. The potting is fluent."

Agrawal against Geet in the penultimate round, allowing Joe Grech of Malta to take on a much weaker contestant in the other semi-final. "I played exceptionally well against Agrawal; in fact, I had to, or else I would have found it very hard to win," declares Geet. "I think my game reached its peak in the finals against Grech. I feel I played far better than when I wore down Bob Marshall in my first world win."

This dispassionate self-assessment is an endearing trait of Geet Sethi. Apart from this, he is a shy, somewhat awkward and soft-spoken young man who, in his earlier days, had to be drawn out with pointed questions to talk about himself. True, he is no longer as self-conscious as he was when he first grabbed the limelight on the national scene, in February 1982, by winning the country's Senior National Billiards title at the expense of Ferreira, who had just been crowned Amateur World Champion for the second time.

Marriage, in late 1986, caused Geet to drop a lot of the innate shyness in his demeanour. For a long time, he had been one of the most eligible bachelors on the Indian sports scene, but few knew that he had chosen his life-partner in September 1985 itself.

"I met Kiran Bir — I can still remember the exact date — on September 2, 1985, less than a month after the conclusion of the World Billiards Championship in New Delhi.

"She is originally from Bangalore, but was studying at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, my home town. Her subject was graphics and advertisement design. She came to film me for a project she was involved in. Well, one thing led to another . . . I proposed to her and she accepted, but on the condition that she could continue her studies at the N I D. I was quite happy to agree, and we decided on a long engagement."

THE LIAISON WITH the lovely woman greatly increased his off-the-table self-confidence. His new self-possession was evident in the fact that, shortly after the two were married, Kiran and he entered the 1986-1987 'Made for each other' contest, and reached the finals at Calcutta, after winning the zonal competition.

The finals were judged by an impressive panel of judges like Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, Kishan Khanna, Maya Alagh, Victor Banerjee and Sudhir Dar. Geet and Kiran eventually ended up with the second prize of a gorgeous Kashmiri carpet, narrowly

missing the first prize — a Standard 2000 Rover car. The second prize was a "big comedown from the first", yet it was nevertheless praiseworthy to be acknowledged as the second most handsome couple in the country.

The absence of braggadocio in his mien does not detract from his air of quiet authority at the table. The serious dark brown eyes squint along the cue, tucked tightly into the body in a manner calculated to offend the purist. "I know", says Geet, "it is an unorthodox stance, but I was told not to bother about it too much, as long as I kept obtaining results from it!" But, a rival knows that a master is in command. The potting is fluent, the ball travelling to its intended pocket in as straight a line as the mathematically precise central-parting in the hair, brushed neatly on either side of the small forehead. The lanky, weedy frame uncoils itself from its reclining posture, only to swiftly take up another position, as the balls click away on the green baize, and the points pile up. Steadily, safely, surely.

IT WAS BY SHEER CHANCE that the billiards bug bit Geet. His elder brother, Gagan, five years his senior, used to play billiards at the Ahmedabad Gymkhana. One day, when Geet, not yet 13, had gone to watch his idol play, he had an irresistible urge to try his own hand. He went on to rapidly master the game.

Concluding quite rightly, that he stood a better chance at billiards than at swimming (where the competition at the national level was much more intense), Geet began concentrating exclusively on the three-ball game. In 1976, two years after he had taken up what everyone referred to disparagingly as 'an old man's game', he won the Junior National Billiards Crown, beating Kerala's Mohan George with over 200 points in the two-hour final. He was to win the title thrice as a junior — from 1979-1981, also adding the Junior Snooker Crown to his collection in 1980 and 1981.

1981, incidentally, was the year in

which he won three national titles, including the Senior Billiards Crown. It was strongly reminiscent of the feat of badminton maestro, Prakash Padukone, at the 1971-1972 Madras Nationals, when he won the junior and senior singles title, at the age of 16. It had never been done before, and has not been repeated.

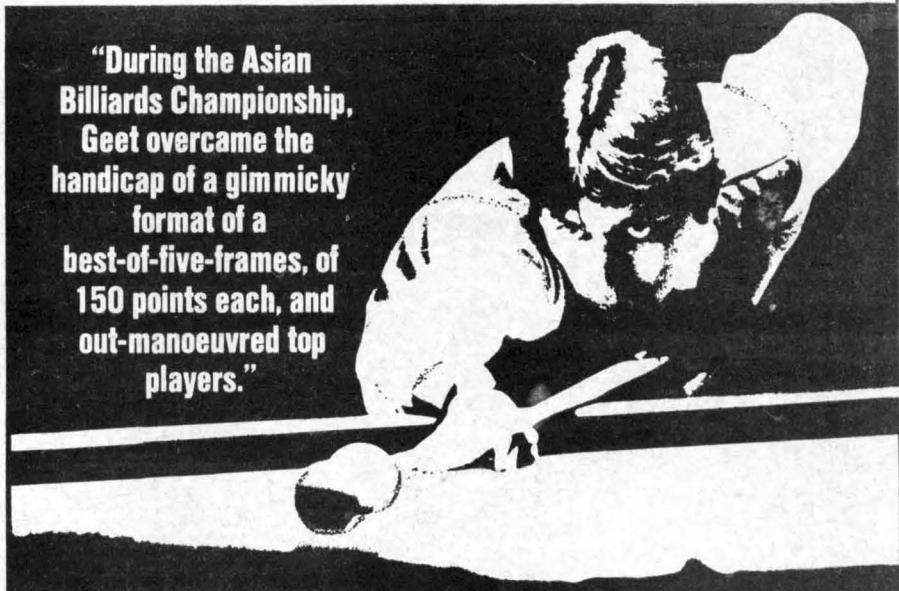
IT REMAINED GEET'S greatest achievement until he won both the billiards and the snooker titles at the same Nationals in 1984-1985, and retained both titles twice in succession. It was on the eve of the Asian Billiards Championship in Bombay, in January 1987, that he completed a unique hat-trick of 'double crown' victories — a feat that will be very hard to match as snooker requires a totally different technique from billiards, and it is hard to find a player who excels at both.

During the Asian Billiards Championship at the Bombay Gymkhana, Geet overcame the handicap of a gimmicky format of a best-of-five-frames, of 150 points each (which Ferreira referred to disparagingly as a 'Mickey Mouse format'), and outmanoeuvred top players, including Pakistan's cueist Latif Amir Baksh with his silken touch, to win by a huge margin against compatriot Subhash Agrawal in the finals.

"Frankly, for a pure billiards enthusiast, the format was not very enjoyable", says Geet in retrospect. He adds, revealing his deep knowledge of the game, "You know, we are used to playing for four or five hours at a stretch, and here, the games lasted barely two hours, each frame lasting less than half an hour! It doesn't give one a sense of satisfaction to have to stop at 150!"

"But, it is true that it gives the underdog a chance, because it is not that hard to run up breaks of 70 and 80, and you don't give the other player a runaway lead. If you lose one frame, you can always start afresh from scratch in the second. To that extent, I suppose it makes matches

"During the Asian Billiards Championship, Geet overcame the handicap of a gimmicky format of a best-of-five-frames, of 150 points each, and out-manoeuvred top players."



more competitive and spectator-worthy. It is basically a format devised for television. Instead of watching one player tot up a break of 300 or 400, the TV audience gets a chance of seeing both players in action at the table more frequently.

"The inherent danger is that this kind of format encourages safety play, rather than the running up of big breaks; because, if you leave your opponent on, he can easily run up 150 points and win the frame. It did put a lot of pressure on the better players for this very reason. But if this format had not been adopted, the other Asian countries' representatives wouldn't have come to the tournament, because they would have felt the Indians would win in a canter!"

It is not, however, all play and no work, for Geet is an Assistant Sales Manager with the Tata Oil Mills Co. (TOMCO), which also employs the redoubtable Ferreira.

Geet joined the company in July 1983, after completing his post-graduation in marketing management. He still recalls the words of V K Bali, the then President of the company, "Welcome to TOMCO. Your job is to play billiards. If I find you in the office, I'll sack you!" (One recalls the advertisement they put out to cheer

Geet's first world triumph: "From TOMCO, the producers of soaps, detergents; and, it would seem, world billiards champions!")

UNLIKE MICHAEL FERREIRA, his predecessor on the world billiards' throne, who has finally succumbed to the lure of lucre and turned professional, Geet has decided to remain an amateur, so that he can have a chance of completing a 'hat-trick' of victories in the World Amateur Billiards Championship. However, at the moment he is preoccupied with the fast-approaching world Amateur Snooker Championship, which is to be played in his wife's home-town, Bangalore, this November.

There is only one player in the history of the green baize sport who has held the world amateur titles at both billiards and snooker — Paul Mifsud of Malta. Geet is hell-bent to match the Maltese Falcon's proud record, and is at the moment, concentrating all his energies on potting the balls rather than nursing them around the table.

With the resilience of youth on his side, and with his remarkable table skills and concentration, a thumping victory for him seems to be very much on the cards. ♦

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The Rise and Fall of the Deputy Fuehrer

*"Here lies one of delicate mind
Who stepped aside for his needs
Disdaining the common office, He was
seen and jailed...
How is this matter for mirth?
Let each man be judged by his deeds
He has paid the price to live with
himself
On the terms that he willed."*

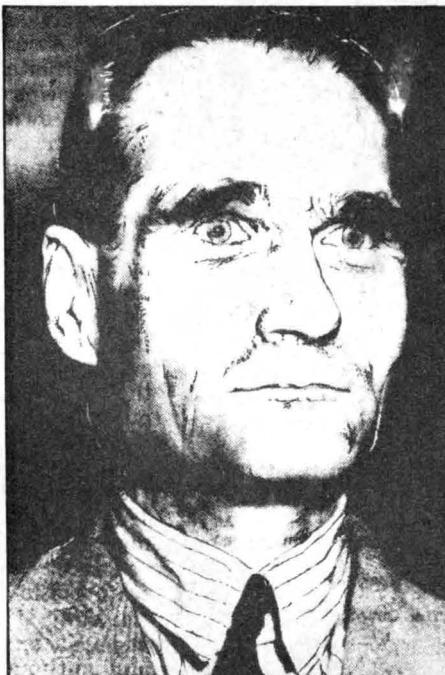
— Rudyard Kipling

HE WAS THIRD in the line of succession to Hitler. He was also one of the earliest and staunchest adherents of Nazism, having been mesmerised by Hitler and the National Socialist Party as early as 1920, and was always proud of the fact that his membership number was 16. He was one of Hitler's most trusted lieutenants, and the one Hitler called 'Mein Rudi, mein Hessl'. Rudolf Walter Leonhard Hess was always proud to be a Nazi.

And he excelled at it. Wounded in a bar-brawl with the Reds at the Munich Hofbräu Hall in November 1921, he was rewarded by being elected Leader of the Nazi Student Company of Hundred. He enlarged it into a battalion; his military manoeuvres were hailed as masterstrokes.

Many conquests and crimes later, Hess and the Nazis attacked Bavaria in 1923. The abortive beer-hall Putsch landed Hess and Hitler in Landsberg Fortress Prison. Cooped up for 15 months, Hess, acting as a glorified stenographer, helped compose the main spine of *Mein Kampf*. After all, he shared Hitler's ideology.

Their keen friendship and fiery fanaticism promoted Hess to the post of Hitler's political adjutant in 1931. Simultaneously, he became Chairman of the Political Central Commission.



Hess: The fanatical Deputy Fuehrer.
26.4.1894 — 17.8.1987

On April 28, 1933, Hitler, now Chancellor of Germany, named Hess as his Deputy Fuehrer. He bestowed on him "plenary powers to act... and decide 'in the name of Hitler' all questions relating to the conduct of the party." Hess was responsible for at least 19 departments, including racial hygiene and Nazified art. He was also responsible for consigning vicious decrees against the Jews and rebels. As his Deputy, Hess also had a share in Hitler's sins.

In 1934, Hitler asked him to coordinate a new legislation which would secure "further unification of the party and the State at any cost". Hess obediently complied. "Hitler is Germany" and "Germany is Hitler," he said, proud to serve "the greatest man who ever lived under the sun". He also contributed to the Nazi claim that Germany needed to expand its territories so as to provide all Ger-

man Aryans with *lebensraum*, space. During his search for it, Hess was responsible for the confinement of innumerable captives to concentration camps.

In Nazi lingo, he was a hero. But his meteoric rise in the Nazi hierarchy was only partly backed by his dedication to the corrupt cause. In addition, he was a scholar. While Himmler was Hitler's blood-bank, Hess was Hitler's think-tank.

HE HELD an extremely impressive academic record, later overshadowed by his criminal one. He started his schooling in the German Academy in Alexandria, where he was born, and finished from the German High School, Godesberg. He next attended a Swiss business school, and then a college in Hamburg.

World War I interrupted his studies and caused him to join the First Bavarian Infantry Regiment in its fight for the Kaiser. Hess always needed a hero and a heroic cause to live for.

Severely injured in the trenches, he shifted to the airforce, and served Germany as a fighter-pilot in Squadron 35. This training helped him in his later attempt to plan a bigger, better and brutal war.

After World War I died down, he enrolled at the University of Munich. It was here that he met Hitler and became a Nazi, "and was transformed", said his wife, Ilse.

While Hess's economics expertise admitted him into the inner circle, the power that the intelligentsia and purists wielded, began to wane in 1935. Hess's position weakened further with Hitler following Rosenberg's theories, and with the rising power of the military — namely the SS. Hitler bit the hand that 'heiled' and supported him, appointing Hermann Goering

OBITUARY

over him as *heir-head* of the Nazi Empire and his first-in-command. It was a blasting blow to Hess who thought he 'was second to none, save only He'. A blow from which he never recovered.

Insecure, isolated and impotent, in a world where muscle-power crushed intellect, Hess became a mystic and a 'biodynamic' vegetarian. Tarot and 'terrestrial radiations' were food for his twisted thought. He turned to Nostradamus and reading that "those long time besieged in the Isles will act against their enemies", fled like a man obsessed, to make peace with Britain.

ON MAY 5, 1941, and weeks before Hitler's napoleonic move, Operation Barbarossa, Hess startled the world, and Hitler in particular, by flying an Me 110 from Augsburg to parachute into Scotland in weather that was as troubled as his mind. His flight was not so much a running away from Hitler but a crazed yet courageous attempt to win hostile Britain as an ally in the Nazi attack on the "real enemy" — Bolshevik Russia. He was doomed before he took-off.

Flying against all odds, Hess's wings were clipped in his quixotic flight to attain the impossible. Low fuel forced his landing in the tiny village of Eaglesham, where he was 'arrested' by a farmer! He asked to be led to the Duke of Hamilton, believing that the royal RAF pilot would help him negotiate the peace pact, since they had met at the 1936 Berlin Olympics.

Hamilton, however, rudely pretended that he had never met him, while Churchill could not believe that England had the Deputy Fuehrer of Germany in her hands. No handshakes took place. Instead, Hess was handcuffed and moved to 'total security' at Mytchett Place, Aldershot, where every breath he took, each word he uttered, all the snores and sighs he emitted, were carefully recorded by bugs. A year later, he was parcelled-off to Maidiff Court where he was guarded by 30 troops until the end of the war.



Hitler: Hess's accomplice in crime.

His peace mission sentenced him. Ironically, at Nuremberg, where he had enjoyed his greatest triumph as Hitler's right-hand man. The Nuremberg Tribunal condemned him on October 8, 1946, for 'plotting against world peace', for participating in, if not masterminding, German aggression in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. He was also tried for 'planning an aggressive war'. Blind Justice, however, cleared him of 'crimes against humanity' — concentration camp crimes.

THE WESTERN ALLIES sentenced Hess to 15 years of imprisonment. The USSR demanded his execution — Nazism is the worst enemy of communism. A compromise was struck and the unique 4-power collaboration with communist USSR as a legitimate partner of the chief capitalist countries in a long-term security project, began. Hess was dumped with seven other high-ranking Nazis in Spandau War Crimes Prison. For life.

Hess was held at Spandau for almost half a century. He spent the last two decades alone, in the rotting red-brick prison built to accommodate

600 prisoners. He was the sole inmate of a costly cell.

The imprisonment of a now harmless wretch cost the Allies 1.5 million dollars annually. His 'maximum security' confinement involved 100 men from the four nations he had hoped to conquer. It was a waste of time, energy and money which could have been better utilised.

His imprisonment would have been laughable, if it had not been appalling. Hess was only a pathetic prisoner who had no ambitions of escaping prison, only life. "He talked of little else except wanting to let go", in his monthly meetings with his son, Wolf Rüdiger, his sole contact with his family, and the external, living world.

Imprisoned for life, 'his life was a dying'. Alone, he chased the shadows of his mind and stared at the writing on the damp prison walls. He attempted suicide thrice while he oscillated between guilt and retribution. He was severely neurotic.

HESS WAS SAID TO BE slightly deranged as early as 1941, when Hitler called him 'a mad man'. And he went irrevocably insane as he paid the price for one mad gesture. He grew increasingly depressed as he debated about taking 'arms against a sea of troubles and thus ending them.' His intense, brooding stare hinted at the dark secrets he sought to hide and which he carried to his grave. This crumbling Colossus of Nazism was 'a strange sight' in an old German army cap and long military coat flapping around his ankles, as he stalked his little patch of a world that had stopped for him in 1941. The last few years saw him nearly blind, and plagued by lung, heart and stomach ailments. He was taken regularly to the British Military Hospital with an armed escort, but little could be done to save him.

Entrapped with no release, Hess finally strangled himself with an electric cord left by a workman, when briefly unattended in a summer house at Spandau. No one had listened to Winston Churchill, who as early as 1950, was filled with uncharacteristic

unease about Hess's treatment: "His was a medical and not a criminal case and should be so regarded."

Lord Elwyn-Jones, who had served as a prosecuting counsel at the Nuremberg Trial, delivered yet another judgement on Hess's death: "Hess was right in the thick of the Nazi Movement . . . It was he who signed the Nuremberg persecution decree against the Jewish people. History will condemn him, as it closes his chapter, for having had a major part in the vilest crime in modern history — namely the Holocaust."

Now that Spandau has given up its ghost, Jews and the Allies are eager to close the chapter on Hess. The demolition of Spandau has already begun. Plans are underway to replace that symbol of Nazism with a sane symbol of consumerist capitalism — a shopping complex.

However, his colleagues, Funter and Fischer, who have languished in Breda Prison, Netherlands, since 1949, and Klaus Barbie in France, face a similar futile future in prison.

THE HUNT IS ON for Nazi war criminals. The Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which tracks them down all over the world, reveals that no fewer than 17 currently live in Britain. The Soviet Union claims that the amount is three times as high. As many as 65 Nazis are suspected of living under cover in Australia. South America too, is notorious as a hiding place for fascist war criminals. While many continue to live in secret with borrowed identities, others have been exposed by those for whom the Holocaust remains a living nightmare.

Today, the spotlight is focused on Kurt Waldheim, ex-Secretary General of the UN, who is branded as being a part and parcel of the Nazi war machine. He was allegedly involved in the deportation of Greek Jews to German death camps, and the murders of Yugoslav partisans and Allied POWs.

While Waldheim's past is being investigated, John Dejanjuk, accused of being Ivan the Terrible, is fighting



Nazis hailing the "blood flag".

to defend himself during his trial in Israel. Five survivors of the Treblinka Death Camp, Poland, where 8,50,000 Jews were annihilated, have identified him as the sadistic guard who tended the gas chambers.

Meanwhile, Antanas Gecas, currently residing in Britain, does not bother to conceal his identity. He admits that he served diligently in the 12th Lithuanian Police Battalion, a notoriously brutal unit which executed Jews as well as Russian partisans. Gecas, however, feigns amnesia, like Hess did, to clear himself of his crime. But testimony reveals that he is guilty of even more atrocities than Barbie the Butcher. Nazi hunters, hoping for a domino effect, want Gecas to be tried as diligently as he served, not only because of alleged misdeeds, but as a clear signal that war criminals have no place left to hide.

AS THE NAZIS of a bygone era continue to be unearthed and punished for their crimes against humanity, the fascist ideology continues to be perpetuated by Neo-Fascist organisations in Western Europe. Today, the targets of their hatred are immigrant

workers — the Asians in Britain, the Turkish in W Germany and the Algerians in France — and they are gaining a dangerous foothold all over Europe, especially in local politics.

Thus, the Allies have not given Hess a decent burial, and have undergone days of strain and tension to hide him. The dangers of having his grave turned into a Neo-Nazi shrine, or Spandau prison into a pilgrimage spot, are real and ominous. The spirit of Hess — of Nazism, Fanaticism and Dictatorship — will be difficult to exorcise.

Marching angrily outside Spandau, Neo-Nazis accuse Western Allies of having murdered their hero. They want "Foreigners out", and demand the expulsion of the Allies, whose delay in winding-up the red tape is seen, under the cloudy circumstances surrounding Hess's death, as an awkward attempt to clear traces of blood. Along with the National Democratic Party, one of W Germany's largest right-wing extremist groups, they express 'deep inner shock' at Hess's death, and a desire for vengeance. That they are gaining strength, support and sympathisers, is clearly visible from the candle-lit vigils held by erstwhile politically lukewarm Germans for their former leader, in an attempt to canonize him.

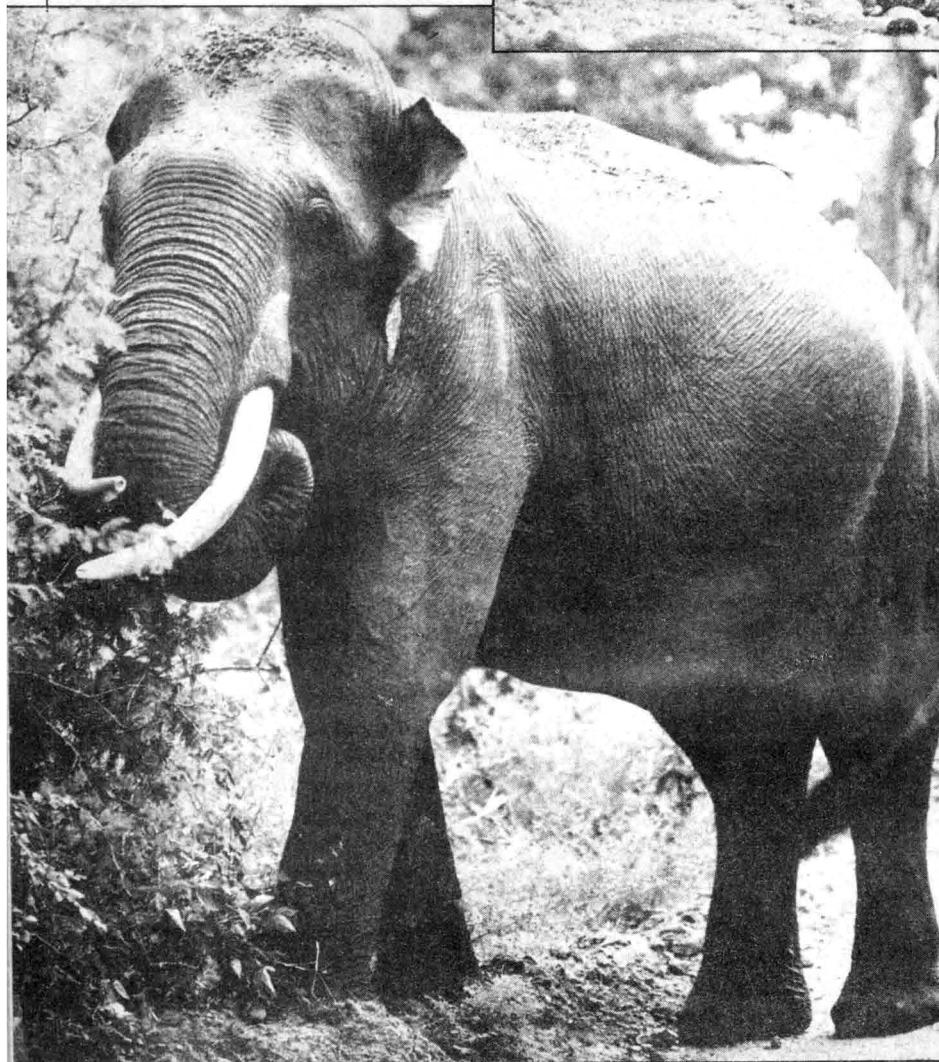
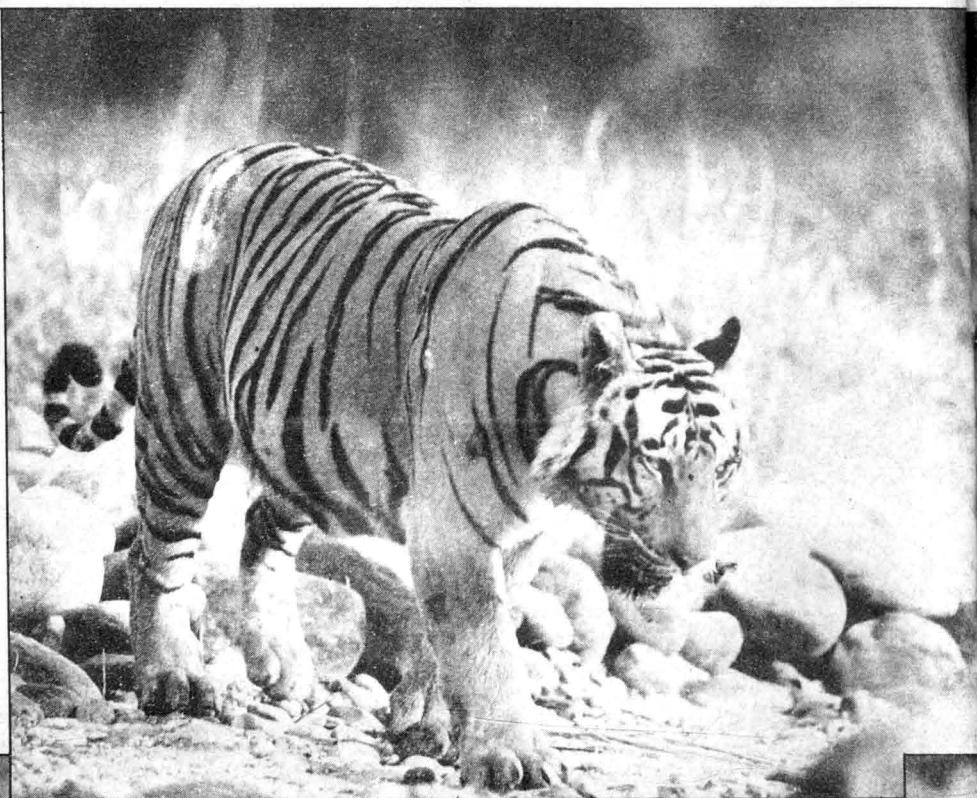
While the Hess who died imprisoned was a ghost of his former self, a 'harmless old man', an unrepentant sinner who according to *Tass* 'never displayed penitence but always said he'd do the same again.'

"Like wolves they threw themselves on the enemy again and again . . . swarming with blood. Then I realised what kind of men they were, above all, my brave Maurice, Hess . . . who though severely wounded, attacked again and again, as long as they could stand on their feet." So said Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, praising his Storm Troops, and Hess.

Yes, we have to remember "what kind of men they were". Nazism and its allies will always threaten to resurrect. Hess's death does not close the chapter. ♦

EXTRACT

DEEP IN THE JUNGLE GLOOM, a striped predator lurks. Programmed by instincts genetically implanted millions of years ago, the cat waits patiently for a herd of spotted deer to make their way through tall grass towards a water-hole nearby. Barely one in ten attempts to kill will be successful, but because of sheer persistence, such odds work in favour of the hunter. Contrary to popular belief, success depends less on speed and power, more on stealth and ambush. In all probability, a young, weak or careless deer will fall prey to the tiger. The fascinating drama between predator and prey has gone on uninterrupted for years, and has been responsible for the per-



THE INDIAN SAFARI

The Indian subcontinent is an Eden on earth. Rare and elusive creatures such as snow leopards, musk deer and pheasants inhabit the snow-capped Himalayan ranges. The lion reigns the king of the Indian jungle, wherein the Asian elephant and the one-horned rhino reside. But their survival depends on man who is a guardian of their habitat. This educative extract from "Indian Wildlife" explores the precarious balance between man and nature.

*Excerpted from Insight Guide, "Indian Wildlife".
Published by APA Productions (Pte) Ltd, and distributed by India Book Distributors. Price Rs 150.00.*

fection in nature which so moves and inspires us.

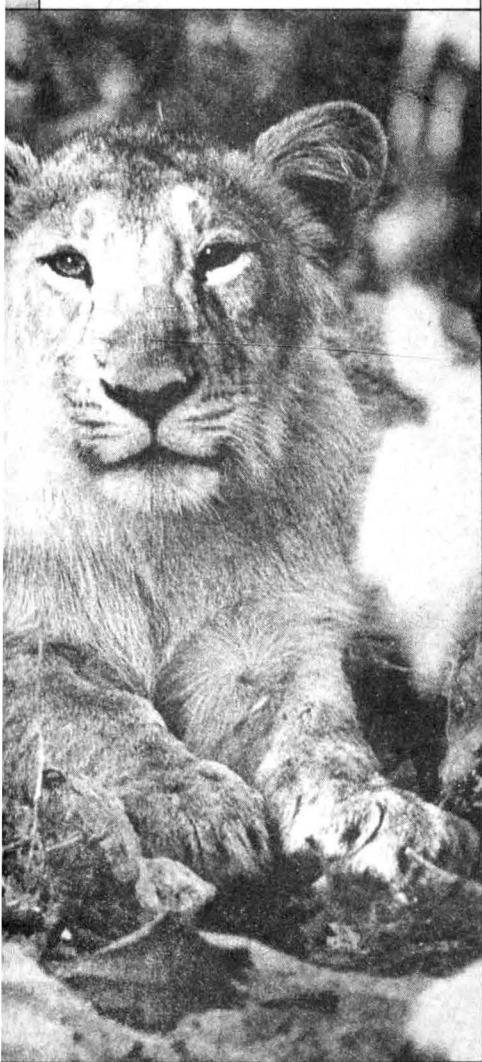
RICH DIVERSITY: Unique, and unstudied, still mysterious, and forever fascinating, the natural history of the Indian subcontinent remains largely unstudied and its natural wealth little appreciated. Geological events that took place millions of years ago created an incomparable diversity of ecosystems. In the north, the legendary snow-capped Himalayan ranges house rare and elusive creatures such as snow leopards, musk deer, ibex, and pheasants of all descriptions. The Thar, also called the Great Indian Desert, sprawls between India and Pakistan in the northwest, and supports a

surprising variety of hardy plants and animals, several of which are found nowhere else on earth. Towards the east, bordering Bhutan, Bangladesh and Burma, cloud forests and swamps shelter life-forms ranging from tigers, elephants, rhinos and gibbons to the largest moth and some of the rarest orchids in the world. The lower slopes and foothills of the Himalayas, clothed in verdant coniferous forests and grasslands, are the last refuge of several endangered plant and animal species.

EDEN BESIEGED: For long, Africa has been regarded as the Mecca of Wildlife. Justifiably so, but in recent years the natural wealth of the Indian subcontinent has begun to offer naturalists, tourists and researchers a fascinating alternative to the once dark continent. Tropical Asia, after all, probably houses the richest diversity of life-forms on the face of the earth. And the Indian peninsula might

credit is due to the inborn resilience of plants and animals which have evolved near perfect survival techniques after living for millions of years in a hostile environment. To understand how blessed the region once was, one merely needs to travel to reserves such as Kanha or Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh, Ranthambore in Rajasthan, Manas in Assam, Chitwan in Nepal, Wilpattu in Sri Lanka, and the Sunderbans in West Bengal. At one time, the entire subcontinent was as rich and productive as these oases of restraint and tolerance.

STRIPES AND IVORY: There is a fundamental difference between the wildlife experience of the Indian jungle and that found in Africa. To begin with, tropical jungles are dense, and most often visibility is fairly restricted. All too often visitors, lured to India by tourist brochures which promise exciting "tiger safaris," are therefore, disappointed to see fewer



well be considered the cornerstone of this Eden – an Eden, unfortunately, under siege from one-fifth of humanity.

The fact that representative pockets of wild habitats survive on the subcontinent today, has very little to do with man's realisation of the worth of his natural heritage. Rather,

animals than they expected. It is not that the surviving jungles are thinly populated, but that most creatures, which have mastered the art of camouflage and deception over millennia, are virtually impossible to spot. With the help of an experienced guide, however, a moving twig becomes a praying mantis, part of a

EXTRACT

tree-stump takes wing to reveal itself as a roosting nightjar, or, with some luck, an imperceptible movement in the grass turns out to be none other than that of the tiger.

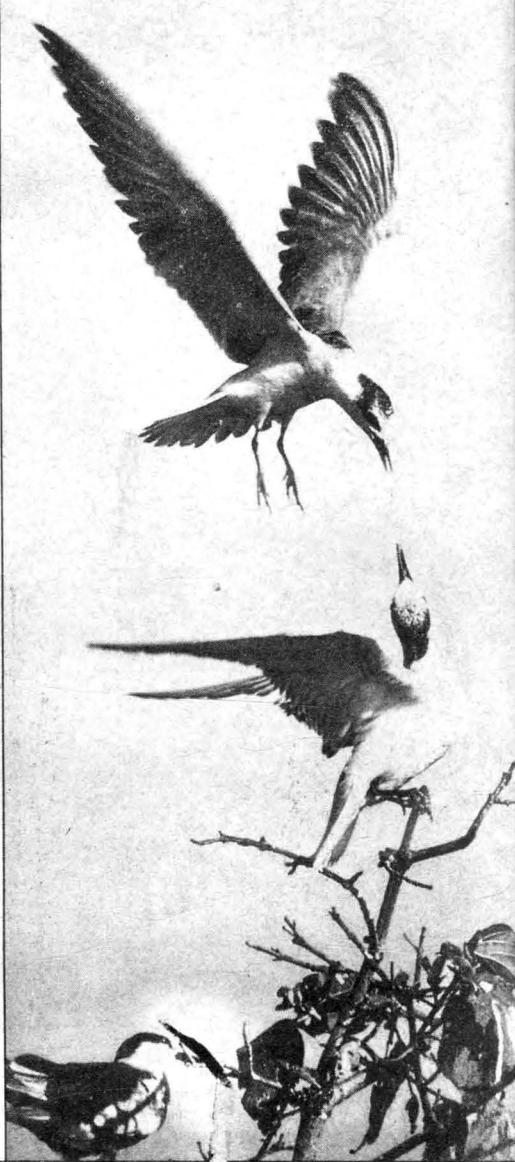
At one time "tigerland" comprised virtually the whole Indian subcontinent. Fearing no animal, the great cats colonised every imaginable habitat, from the lower slopes of high mountains, to desert scrub lands, rain forests and swamps. Positioned at the apex of the food chain, tigers managed to carve a secure niche for themselves while still allowing adaptable predators, such as the leopard and several lesser cats, to co-exist. With the arrival of *Homo sapiens* all this changed. Having learned to alter the environment to suit his own convenience, man began to make inroads into virgin jungles, slashing and burning in his frantic haste to convert hostile habitats into hospitable havens. Over a period of time, having established his dominion over the natural world, he began to hunt for pleasure. Persecuted for their skin, and for the illusion of bravery surrounding *shikars*, tigers reacted by altering their life-style. The once proud predators which hunted by day, turned to the security of nocturnal life to avoid humans. And, as the number of people began to swell, the tiger retreated deeper into the jungle. A similar fate befell most of the other animals that shared the tiger's domain.

Elephants, perhaps more than any other animals, typify the man-animal conflict in India. The large beasts require vast ranges in order to survive. Their daily requirement of green fodder can exceed 450 lb (200 kg) per day. Plantations, hydel projects and jungle clearances have so totally fragmented their habitats that elephants, which once roamed virtually contiguous forests, must now contend with existence in small pockets. When they do try to migrate to distant pastures they come into conflict with man, most often with disastrous results for both. The problem of habitat degradation is compounded by man's ancient yearning for ivory.

Even today, despite stringent laws, elephants regularly fall victim to poachers who often use poison and pit traps to bring down their quarry, wiping out entire families.

CONSERVATION: Fortunately, in recent years, the Indian Government has taken a more progressive attitude towards the protection of wild animals. There is no doubt that execution still lags far behind intention. However, as a policy, the authorities have come down hard on known traders, poachers and exploiters. Consequently, India is probably the last hope of survival for the one-horned rhino, the great Indian bustard, the gharial (a fish-eating crocodile), and a host of other highly endangered species. Recognising that knowledge is the first step towards protection, sterling organisations, such as the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), are being partially funded by the government to carry out field natural-history projects.

Through such pioneering efforts, the strands of relationship between life-forms and the habitats they live in are slowly being pieced together. Avifauna and hydrobiological studies are helping us to understand the critical needs of birds which migrate to



the subcontinent from distant nesting grounds in Siberia, Afghanistan, Tibet and China. The thriving wintering grounds of such birds, like Rajasthan's famous Keoladeo Ghana National Park (Bharatpur) and Tamil Nadu's Point Calimere Sanctuary, where the BNHS has permanent research stations are fine testimonials of well-executed conservation. In the ethereal atmosphere of these wilderness areas, it is easy to forget the ecological problems that beset the subcontinent as a whole.

CONFICTING POLICIES: Examples of environmental bankruptcy are even more rampant outside the corridors of tourism. In Kerala, the state government spends around Rs 400 crore a year to prevent shore erosion.



Yet mangrove trees and coral reefs, nature's erosion barriers, continue to be brutalised in the name of industrial development. In Rajasthan, the animal husbandry department busily distributes goats and sheep in villages where the social forestry department distributes saplings. The result? No saplings, and eventually, no goats and sheep either! The animals consume all available fodder in sight, and are soon sold for their meat when they start damaging croplands.

As the list of such absurdities grows, the effects take on more sinister dimensions. In Madhya Pradesh for instance, the Bhopalapatnam and Inchampalli dam projects threaten to inundate 420,000 acres (170,000 hectares) of land, including prime forests within the Kutru National

Park — the only wild buffalo habitat in the country other than the northeast. In the process of siphoning power for distant industries, more than 70,000 tribals will be displaced. They will then have to be "resettled" in camps, and will become a permanent drain on the exchequer.

SAVING THE LAND: With so many different languages it is almost impossible to communicate conservation's universal message without distortion. "In a land where people are dying", say some naive (and some not so naive) politicians, social workers and businessmen, "they want to save forests and animals!" But the people of the subcontinent are as directly dependent on the health of the land as are the birds and animals of the forest. Saving the land is saving the people. And we cannot save wild habitats without saving the gardeners of our Eden. Once this reality is accepted, everything else will follow.

This, then, is the region — bountiful lands occupied by hard-pressed people. Fortunately, however, signs of renewed awareness are emerging. Slowly, very slowly, opposition to environmentally ill-advised plans is mounting — two outstanding exam-

ples being the saving of Silent Valley's rain forest in Kerala from the jaws of a hydel project, and the famous "Chipko movement", where women in the Garhwal Himalaya prevented contractors from exploiting already degraded forestlands. Other successes, such as the protection of nests of the rare black-necked crane, the declaration of Pirotan as India's first marine national park and the increased sightings of the great Indian bustard, speak volumes for the resolve of forest officers and their staff, who often place their lives at risk in the course of their work. With increasing frequency, enlightened public figures have also begun making known their views on the degradation of the environment. At the behest of the Prime Minister of India, an ambitious wasteland development programme has been instituted, and plans to cleanse the Ganga of its chemical and organic pollutants are under way. The race to restore sanity and save the land is on.

PROJECT TIGER: In retrospect, the turning point for Indian conservation was probably the forced acceptance in the late 1960s that the tiger was destined for extinction. Following an international appeal to save one of the world's most magnificent beasts, Project Tiger was launched in 1972. The first step was to abolish tiger *shikars*. The second was to save its vanishing home.

Choosing habitats as far removed from each other as the Sunderbans in Bengal, Corbett in UP and Periyar in Kerala, the authorities decided that the only long-term method to save the tiger was to save its forest. In the process, innumerable other animals received protection, including the Asian elephant and the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros. Since 50 per cent of the Project's funds were met by the Central Government, the states were able to protect tiger reserves better than ever before, and the results are there for all to see, more than a decade later.

The presence of the tiger in its



EXTRACT

chosen habitat indicates that the ecosystem is vibrant, and the number of tigers in Indian jungles has increased from less than 2,000 in the early 1970s to 4,005 in the 1986 survey. Dry deciduous habitats such as Ranthambore and Sariska have received a new lease of life. The hard-ground barasingha of Kanha have recouped their dwindling numbers. In Manas, Assam, a score and more endangered animals, such as the hispid hare and the pygmy hog, have been retrieved from the brink of extinction. No one can accurately count the number of plants and invertebrates that have been saved within the 15 tiger reserves.

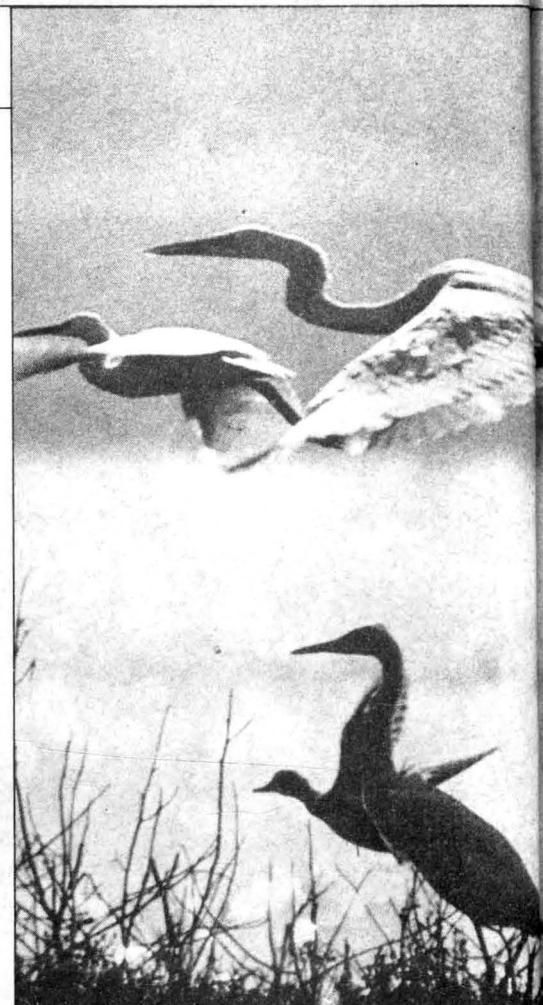
By any measure, Project Tiger must be seen as one of Asia's most successful conservation sagas, and the tiger — a symbol of the health of the Indian jungle.

LOCAL PRESSURES: Though the situation is considerably better than it might have been, the trials and tribulations of India's wilderness are far from over. Despite increased awareness, the rate at which the overall forest acreage is dwindling is nothing short of alarming. Domestic and industrial wood consumption far exceeds the regeneration capacity of existing forests. At the turn of the

century, 40 per cent of the subcontinent was under natural cover. Satellite pictures indicate we are now down to around seven or eight percent. Developers seem unable to answer the straightforward question conservationists ask: "If we cannot look after and protect even eight percent of our land, what chance of survival can there be for the remaining 92 percent?"

Having reduced their once verdant lands to scrubs, villagers now turn to forests to meet their daily requirement of fuel and fodder. To win elections, politicians often make unrealistic promises to their electorate, thus creating friction between park managers and locals. Another major problem, of course, is that of man-animal conflicts. Cattle-lifting, crop destruction and occasional man-eating incidents are genuine and very serious problems. But incidents are often blown totally out of proportion, and a frenzy is whipped up to pressure the authorities to give in to the demands of the local people.

In Dachigam, Kashmir, nomadic graziers, called bakarwals, ask vociferously whether the hangul, a highly endangered deer, is more useful to the people than their wool and meat-bearing livestock. In Dudhwa,



UP, farmers cry themselves hoarse for the blood of tigers. In Bharatpur, Rajasthan, villagers cannot understand why water is diverted for wild birds which raid their crops when their own fields are parched. In Orissa, fishermen are dumbfounded by laws which protect turtles, only to let them return in their millions to the open sea. In Assam, tea estate owners still occasionally shoot elephants to protect their cash crops. In Gir, the remaining 200 lions are constantly under threat from Maldharis who poison them in retaliation for cattle-lifting.

Conservationists have come to the conclusion that the only way of reducing such hostility on the periphery of protected places is to improve the socio-economic standards of people who fringe forests. This, however, is easier said than done. Attempts to introduce stall-feeding of cattle or to improve their bloodstock have failed, because there is simply no spare cash available for even the smallest invest-





ment. Plans for the large-scale introduction of smokeless *chulas* (ovens), which can reduce a household's fuel consumption by over 30 per cent did not work, because villagers were unable to pay the modest cost of approximately Rs 30 per *chula*. Mean while, rural women are forced to walk more than a thousand miles (1,600 km) each year, in search of headloads of wood; after over 40 years of independence, India has still not hammered out a national fuel wood policy. Consequently, 50 percent of the domestic fires in some of the country's largest cities are fed by wood! Even as sporadic, social forestry efforts meet with success, natural forests are literally being transported to the cities to vanish in smoke.

HOPEFUL SIGNS: The Indian subcontinent's wildlife and its fledgling conservation movement are nevertheless poised on the verge of a tremendous renewal, and inspite of several setbacks and hurdles, there is every

reason to be optimistic of the future. A major contributive factor has been the credibility of the press, which has pitched its considerable might behind the efforts of rational conservationists, in the past few years. The government-controlled television network has responded admirably as well, and promises to deliver conservation education to millions of people in the coming years.

Meanwhile, the forests of the subcontinent offer unique opportunities of escape from the pressures of urban living to adventure-seekers from all over the world. The gun has been replaced by the camera, and this is as it should be, for while there is nothing wrong with hunting *per se*, there is no way that wildlife can survive the crossfire between habitat destruction and *shikars*. In view of the sentimentality that often clouds rationality when it comes to the subject of hunting, it would be wise to remember that several existing parks and sanctuaries have survived the plow and axe only because they were once protected as hunting preserves by influential hunters, including maharajas and viceroys.

Today, for the benefit of tourists, orientation centres manned by qualified, experienced staff, have been set

up in more prominent parks such as Chitwan, Dachigam, Kanha, Corbett and Bharatpur. Here, proper orientation with the help of audio-visual aids, ensures that visitors have meaningful experiences of nature, while simultaneously promoting compatibility between the objectives of conservation and tourism. With such a wide variety of habitats to choose from in the subcontinent, tourists can tailor their experiences to suit individual needs. They can also pack diverse experiences into relatively short trips if they are so inclined. Where else in the world, after all, can a person travel from a snow leopard and ibex country (Ladakh), to a hot desert (Thar), to a coral paradise (Pirotan), to savannah grasslands (the terai), to deciduous forests (Bandhavgarh), to mangrove swamps (Sunderbans), to a primeval rain forest (Silent Valley) — without crossing a single international boundary?

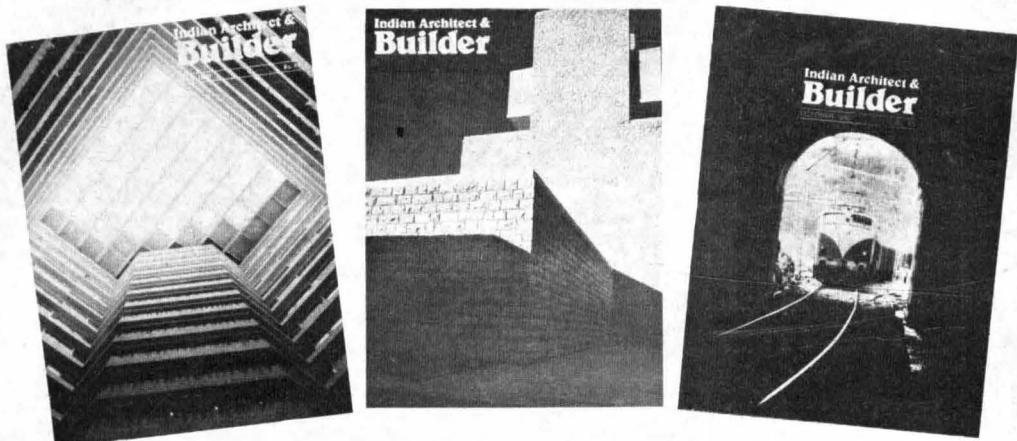
As the deer and the tiger play out their destinies in the forests of the night, an onerous burden falls on man, the newest animal of all. A simple twist of fate has led us to assume the responsibility of guarding nature's domain. Whether the earth and its bounty will survive our inexperienced stewardship, only time will tell. ♦



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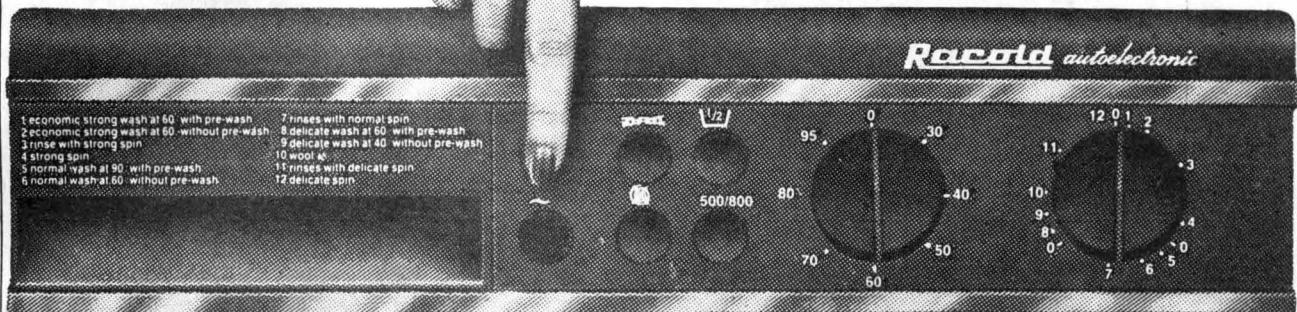
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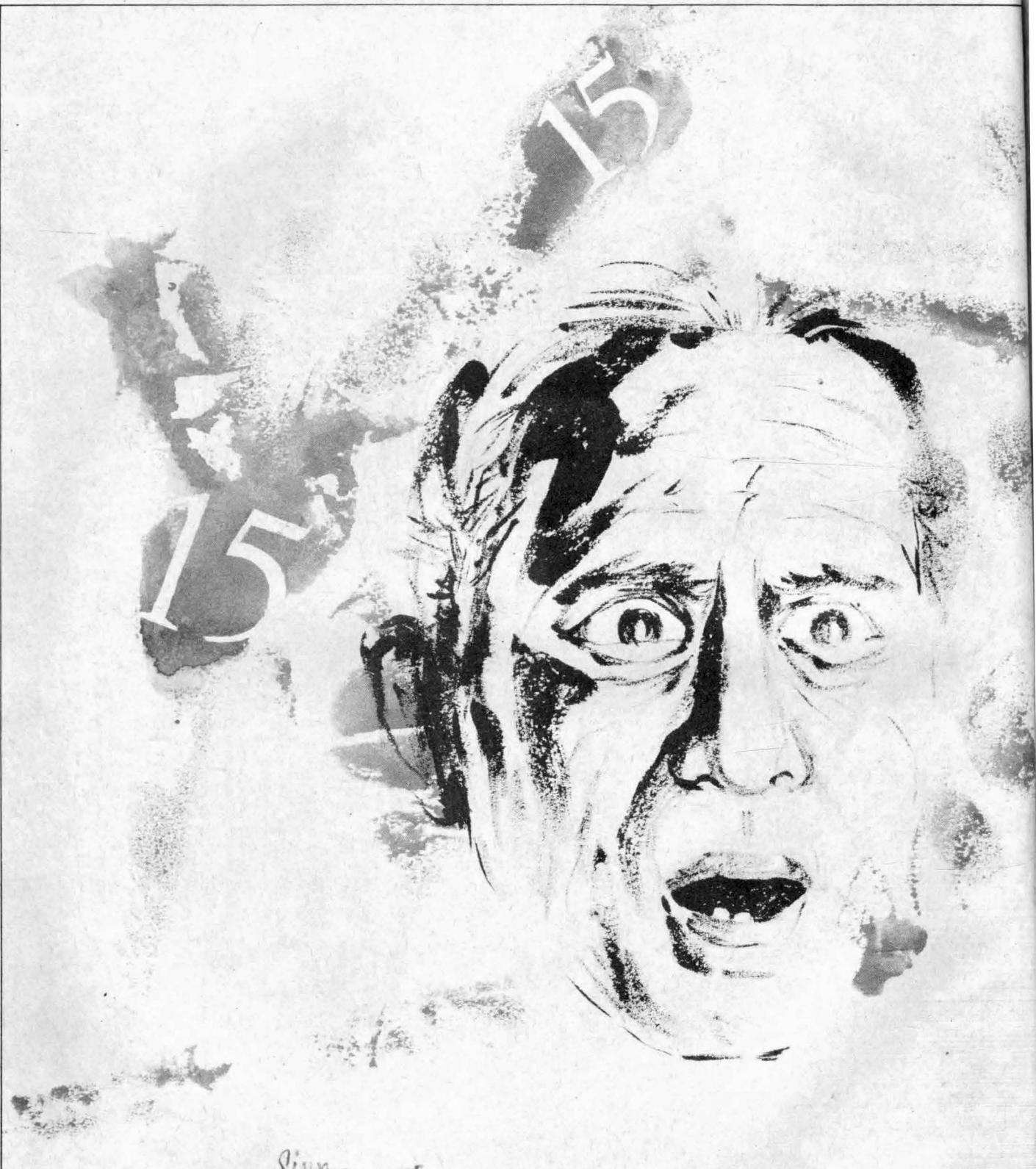
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STAR-CROSSED

I FOUND IT HIGHLY AMUSING, and even comical, that in the autumn of my life, I should be knocking at the door of an astrologer for the very first time. But, I think I wore a seemly look of seriousness and humility while entering the musty chambers of Pandit Chaturbhuj Shastri on that fateful Monday, early in December 1985.

The appointment was the outcome of a running debate on the merits of astrology which I had engaged in with my old friend, Shankaran, for the best part of ten years. We had retired from the Military Engineer Services and settled down in the provincial city of A, known for its salubrious climate, where we had both rendered our last spell of service. Shankaran was a great believer in astrology and freely invoked its aid in all types of situations. He had dealt with dozens of astrologers all over India to arrive at the firm conclusion that the best of the bunch of star-gazers was Pandit Chaturbhuj Shastri, whom he had come

to regard as an invaluable friend, philosopher and guide. On the other hand, I not only had no use for astrology but had not even allowed any astrologer to hold my hand.

Not unnaturally, although Shankaran and I saw eye to eye on most subjects, we were poles apart when it came to astrology. And yet, he was eternally hopeful of winning me over to the astrological fold. He would constantly reel off the innumerable crises he had survived, through the good offices of various astrologers. For instance, he would have forever despaired of being able to marry off his younger daughter but for Panditji's repeated assurances that her single state would end before she was twenty-nine, which was exactly what happened, even though she had to be content with a non-Brahmin spouse. Again, had it not been for Panditji's supreme confidence in his wife's longevity, Shankaran would have gone crazy when she lay critically ill, with viral hepatitis, in 1981. Yet again, it was nothing but Panditji's timely intervention that had saved him from applying for permanent retirement, back in 1973. Had I not ever heard, he would ask with some asperity, of the ancient Brighu Samhita and its amazingly accurate horoscopes for lakhs of individuals born centuries later?

On my part, I never tired of expounding the fallacy of his rationale. The main issue, I would argue, was whether there existed such a thing as 'predestination'. If predestination controlled our lives, none of the charms and talismans prescribed by astrologers could possibly avert or mitigate misfortunes woven on the Loom of Fate. If not, it made no sense whatever to consult an astrologer. This is why, astrologers themselves adopt the stance that the stars exercise only limited influence on us, which if pernicious, they can help counteract. And this is clearly nothing but a myth, invented to appeal to weak-minded people, who desperately need some sort of psychological prop to withstand the ups and downs of life.

One fine day, Shankaran decided to call a halt to this interminable argument. Would it not be better, he inquired, for me to put my polemics aside, and instead, subject astrology to a straightforward empirical test? Did I have the courage to get my fortune read for a duration of 12 months, and therein discover for myself whether astrology had anything to offer? If so, he would fix an appointment for me with Panditji. Reacting sharply to his dig at my courage, I accepted the challenge promptly and, not thinking all too clearly, I leapt into Panditji's world.

PANDITJI CUT AN IMPRESSIVE FIGURE as he relaxed on a bolster-littered divan, amidst a collection of well-thumbed volumes carelessly loaded on rickety shelves. While the voluminous white turban and silver-grey shawl he sported lent him an air of dignity befitting his 55 years, his twinkling eyes and cherubic countenance inspired total trust. I also discovered, that he had a remarkably soothing and mellifluous voice. After I had been introduced by

Shankaran, he asked for the place, date and time of my birth, spent several minutes peering at my right palm, and jotted down some notes. He then volunteered a resume of my past, inviting me, as he went along, to let him know whenever he was off the mark. I must confess that I had little occasion to correct him. His descriptions of my family background and that of my wife's were sketchy but undeniable; his pronouncements on the age and sex of my children were accurate; his review of my career read like a biodata, and he gave me quite a surprise by mentioning that I had had a serious health problem — which, in fact, was a bad case of typhoid around 1962.

The thought did cross my mind that Shankaran might have been his source but this, of course, was highly improbable. The only other probable explanation was that the past, being a determined fact, was perhaps an open book to an experienced astrologer. By this token, of course, divining the future was a different proposition. Regardless of the source or secret, I hoped that Panditji would either fail to discover anything notable in the next twelve months, or have the good sense to present his prognostications in such a manner as not to disturb my peace of mind.

It was, therefore, with trepidation that I called on Panditji the following day to collect his 12-month reading. He greeted me cordially and told me that although he had written out the reading, he would like to explain it to me and answer any queries which might arise. A benign smile played on his lips as his golden voice proceeded to speak of the *rashis* that would control my destiny during the period. He dilated on the dispositions of my *rashis*, Rahu and Ketu, both of which it appeared, would become progressively inimical to me from the middle of April to the middle of November.

IN JANUARY, THE STARS AFFIRMED I would receive good news from my elder son, who worked in Bombay. In May, my second daughter would cause me considerable concern, while September was likely to see me financially strained. But, worse trouble awaited me in November, particularly on the 15th of that month, when Rahu and Ketu would assume their most malignant aspects. Ill-health would hound me then, and needless to say, I should take every possible precaution against it. Panditji, for his part, would prescribe two extremely potent weapons to fight the looming menace: a special *mantra* to be recited a 1,000 times daily, at dawn, for a period of forty days prior to 15th November; and two worthy Brahmins to be fed each of those forty nights.

I was more than a little nonplussed as I wordlessly took leave of Panditji. Although he had spoken about an inauspicious conjunction of the stars, his manner suggested that such conjunctions were a routine occurrence which he could counter with consummate ease. Yet, I think his beaming face betrayed a touch of sympathy and concern. I did not know what to make of his predictions; did not

know whether I could leave my fate in his hands. However, I did come away with the feeling that the man was not only not an outright hoax, but was a decent human being. It occurred to me, in fact, that it would be worth my while to get to know him a little better.

Well, there was no news, either good or bad, from my elder son in January. And my younger daughter caused me no concern whatsoever in May; instead, she gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. September, though, turned out to be financially a bad month, just as Panditji had predicted it would. First, I found that my pension had not been credited to my bank account because the so-called triennial sanction for its renewal had not come through, as yet. Next, the monsoon made a big hole in my pocket by opening up a number of cracks in my house.



And finally, I was obliged to buy a new radiator to keep my old jalopy going.

Of course, this did not necessarily mean that worse was yet to come. Still, I could not help brooding about the possibility of a nasty November. And I realised, with quite a shock, that for good or ill, November had always figured rather prominently in my life. It was in November that I had joined the M E S, married, and earned two of my three promotions. It was also in November that I had lost my father, a younger brother, and an infant son. And yet again, it was in November that a burglar had swept our house clean and a motor-cycle accident had caused me a grievous injury.

MY BROODING LED ME to another unpleasant discovery: the digits of the dreaded date, the 15th, added up to 6, while November was the 11th month of the year,

and in November, I would be just a few months over 66, which was 6 times 11. The more I thought about it, the more ominous this coincidence appeared. I had never taken any interest in numerology, but it now seemed to bode the direst evil for me. I no longer felt like laughing at Panditji's prescription for propitiating the stars. The rituals he had enjoined were due to commence on 6th October, and by the 3rd, I found myself unnerved enough to decide that I could ill-afford not to go ahead with them.

Being a perfect stranger, both to the recitation of *mantras* and the feeding of worthy Brahmins, I had no option but to seek the help of my friend Shankaran. His bony face broke into the broadest of grins while he told me that he would be delighted to take care of everything. As long as I carried out Panditji's instructions to the letter, he added, I had nothing to fear. His gracious wife soon appeared with a tray of her special brand of filter coffee, which I had learnt to appreciate much, and I sat down with them, talking of this and that for half-an-hour. I left them with my mind cleared of fears, and my step was almost jaunty as I trotted back home.

The very next evening, Shankaran came over and taught me exactly how to recite my *mantra*. He then took me to a nearby temple and introduced me to the two saffron-clad Brahmins he had hand-picked to be my dinner guests for forty days. With due obeisance, I formally extended my invitation to them, which they accepted with benign courtesy, but not without making it clear that they expected to be both picked up and dropped back at the temple each time they honoured me with a visit. One appeared to be a raw eighteen-year-old and the other a ripe fifty, but both were burly of build and bold of visage.

Their appetites, as I had feared, proved to be gargantuan. And they had the charming habit of belching explosively at the end of each meal, supposedly in appreciation. Nevertheless, I hoped that their sated stomachs would add potency to the prayers I assumed they would send to the starry heavens on my behalf. For my part, I made sure from the 6th onwards, of awakening well before the lark, seating myself in the lotus pose in a nearby park, and chanting my *mantra* for a solemn thirty-five minutes.

October passed by uneventfully, but the advent of November found me getting progressively more jittery with every passing day. By the 5th, I was eating very little and sleeping even less. By the 8th, I was so irritable that I would shout at my wife and our servant at the slightest provocation. On the 10th, I nearly ran over a cyclist whilst driving to the market, and had to pay him twenty rupees to prevent him from creating a scene. And, on the 11th, I had an attack of violent palpitations which necessitated calling the neighbourhood doctor; he brought it under control within a few minutes by massaging some veins in my neck and told me that it was nothing but 'nerves', for which he prescribed a sedative to be taken thrice daily.

ON 13TH NOVEMBER, a chandelier of ancient vintage crashed to the floor, a fraction of a second after I had passed underneath. Thoroughly shaken, I decided to confine myself strictly to the house thereafter, and to move about within it as little as possible. I would not even venture into the bathroom without getting the floor swept clean of every trace of moisture. And, of course, there was no question of going through my exercise in devotional recitation, except in the security of my own bedroom.

The 14th found me gripped by most frightful forebodings. The first thing I did on awakening, therefore, was to send for a lawyer to assist me in drawing up my will, which was signed and sealed in minutes. In the evening, I retired to bed, convinced that the time was fast approaching when I would meet my Maker. Shankaran dropped by as usual, and tried valiantly to cheer me up, but failed to shake me out of my stony silence. I did, however, press his hand long and hard enough to show him how much our friendship had meant to me.

That night, I felt the cold hand of Death pushing me deeper and deeper into a bottomless pit of utter blackness. I vaguely remember tossing and turning deliriously, for what seemed an age. And just as that ghastly pit was about to swallow me up, I managed with superhuman effort, to sit up and let out a plaintive howl. Instantly, my

wife put on the light and dashed off to a telephone to alert the doctor. Finding me bathed in sweat, she threw a couple of blankets around me, and held me in a tight 'until death do us part' embrace until the doctor arrived. Minutes later, a needle pierced my forearm and I lapsed into unconsciousness.

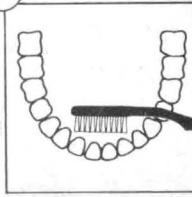
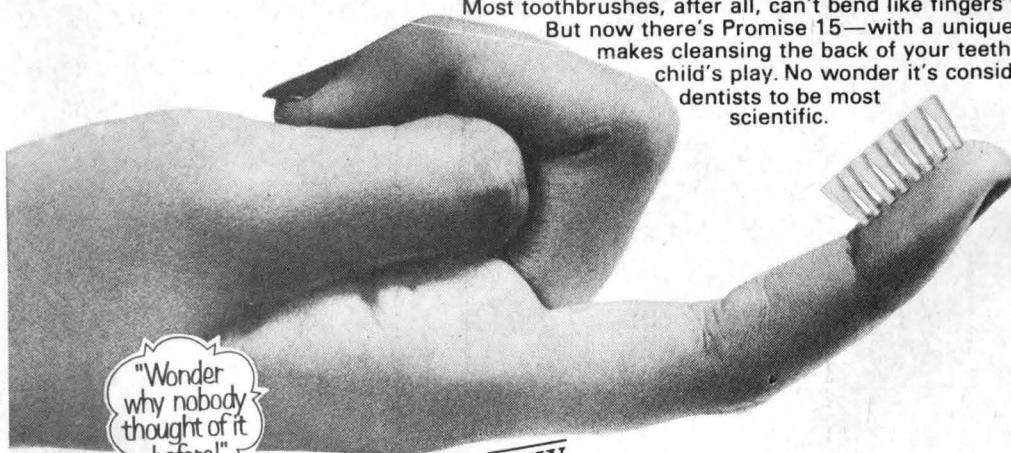
WHEN I NEXT OPENED MY EYES, I found myself looking up at the beaming faces of Shankaran and my wife. They told me that I had been under heavy intravenous sedation for nearly thirty hours, and that the 16th was well under way. I could swear that I believed I was witnessing a miracle.

Now that I had been given a new lease of life, I thought I must see Panditji as soon as possible and invite him to a thanksgiving celebration. Shankaran and my wife heartily endorsed the idea. Moreover, Shankaran agreed to accompany me to Panditji's house in the afternoon.

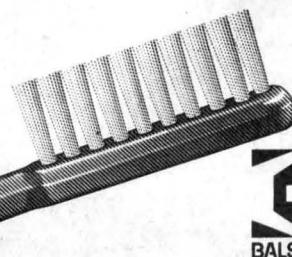
While entering the short alley which led to his house, our high spirits were squelched by an eerie silence. On stepping through the open door, we were stunned to see a hushed gathering of mourners in the courtyard. Had Panditji been preparing for my demise? No. Panditji, we learnt, had expired suddenly, while retiring for the night, and his body had already been cremated. ♦

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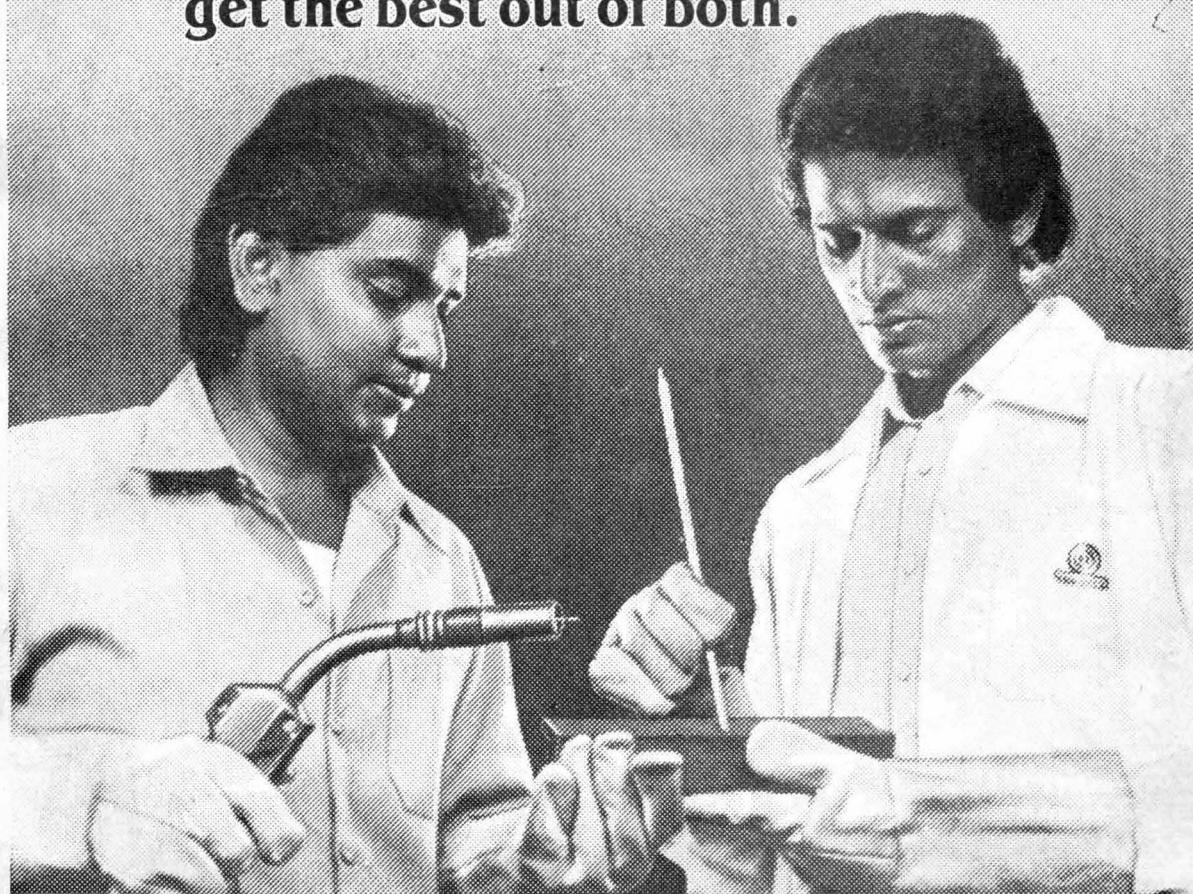
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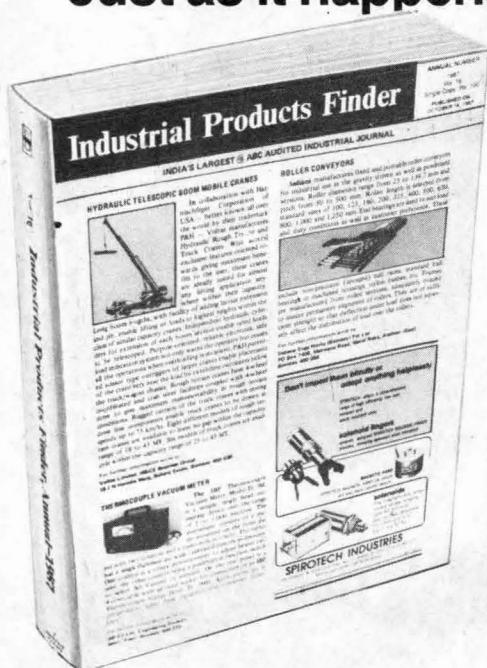
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