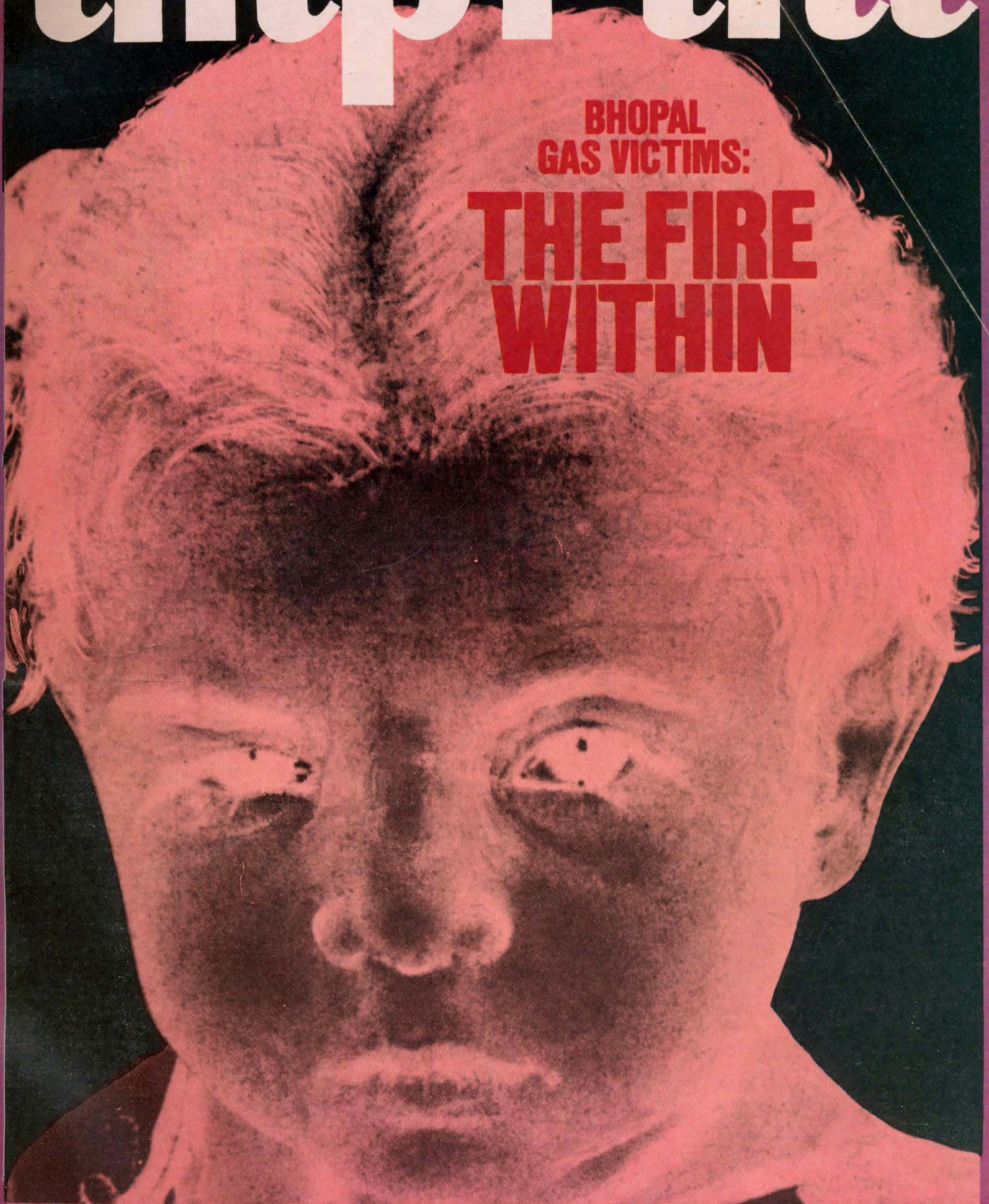


JANUARY 1988 Rs 6

# imprint

**BHOPAL  
GAS VICTIMS:**

## **THE FIRE WITHIN**



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# CALLOUS



**T**HERE ARE MANY STORIES in the annals of Indian history, particularly since Independence, of the brutal treatment of political detainees. Morarji Desai, Jayaprakash Narayan, the Maharani of Jaipur, and the Rajamata of Gwalior were, in post-independent India, all treated in a manner which seriously questions our claims to being civilised. Yet, the way in which Prakash Singh Badal has been treated in the course of a year-long detention, appears supremely callous. Even the stupidest person in the present administration must know that Mr Badal is one of the two or three persons, if not the only person, they will have to negotiate with, in the event of the government deciding to find ways and means to resolve the Punjab imbroglio. Yet Mr Badal was detained in solitary confinement where, in his own words, pigeons and cats were his only companions. Only two persons, his younger brother and wife, were permitted to see him — each of them only once — during his year-long incarceration, and that too in the overwhelming presence of security men. He was made to subsist on a daily allowance of Rs 7.10 with which he was supposed to buy all his food as well as the fuel with which to cook it.

If this is the manner in which we are treating Mr Badal, who has twice been the Chief Minister of Punjab, I leave it to you to cast a thought to the treatment being meted out to the several thousand other political detainees incarcerated since the troubles in the Punjab began. Will somebody spare a moment to imagine what the attitude of these detainees will be once they are released?

\*

Rs 30 Crore  
Loan Mela



At a time when most financial institutions in the country have devalued themselves as a result of indiscipline or malpractice, and the leadership of the country mourns their diminished status, it is surprising that Mr Janardhan Poojari, the Union Minister of State for Finance, gets away with holding bigger and bigger loan *melas*. As it is, the Indian banks are

groaning under the weight of bad debts; but this situation is frequently confounded by Chief Ministers of this or that state writing off agricultural loans.

The Rs 30 crore loan *mela* recently held in Bangalore, makes a mockery of the very term 'banking'. The way in which the applications were collected, the manner in which the applicants were brought to the Parade Ground in Bangalore, and the words with which Mr Janardhan Poojari, who is also the President of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, KPCC (I), addressed the loan *mela* participants, is a disgrace and a disaster for the banking industry, for the government, and for the Congress party.

Mr Poojari has already done immense damage, and if the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, wishes to be taken seriously, he must act immediately and do something about this joker in his Cabinet.

\* \*

**N**EWSPAPERS HAVE reported that the strong-room of the Customs Collectorate at Bombay holds 21 tons of assorted narcotics. This vast quantity of deadly drugs has piled up in the Customs' warehouse simply because the government has been unable to decide what to do with it.



The people and the Government of India have, by now, become aware of the threat that narcotics pose to our people. We are all equally aware of how goods disappear from even the most elaborately guarded places. There is a grave danger that some quantities of these drugs — the pile is the result of confiscation — may re-enter the market, and an urgent decision by the government to destroy these drugs is therefore imperative.

One excuse being offered by the Customs for not having disposed of the drugs is that we do not have incinerators to ensure total destruction; the other reason being advanced is that mass burning will adversely affect the environment. These are untenable excuses. In the event that we really cannot destroy this vast quantity of lethal intoxicants, perhaps we should get in touch with the American government which may suggest suitable and feasible ways of destroying the narcotics. But the stockpile needs to be destroyed with the same concern and urgency one would give to diffusing a time-bomb.

♦



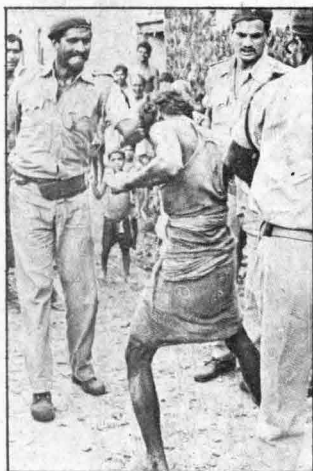
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*Cover photograph:*  
**R C Sahu.**

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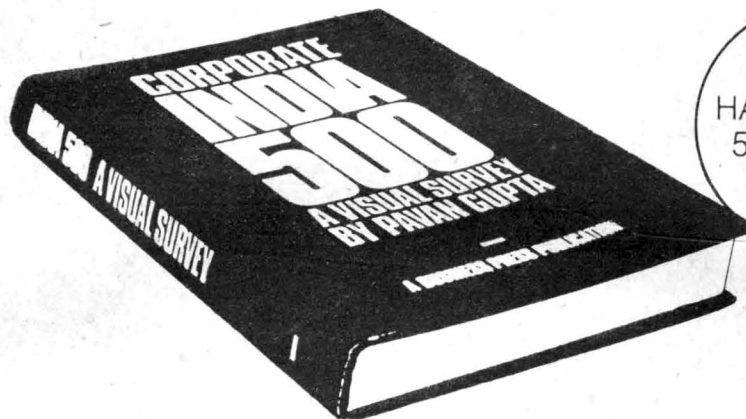
**THE COMMUNITY:** A disquieting short story by DR J P DAS.





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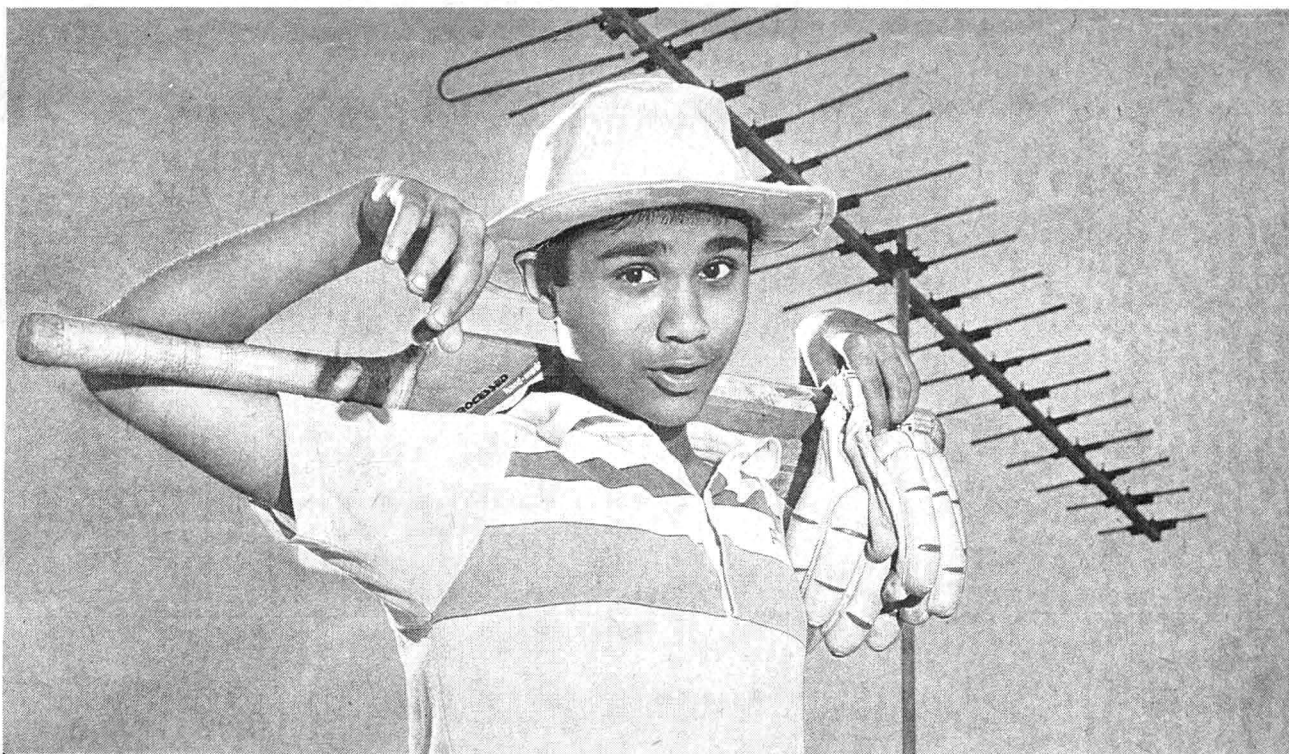
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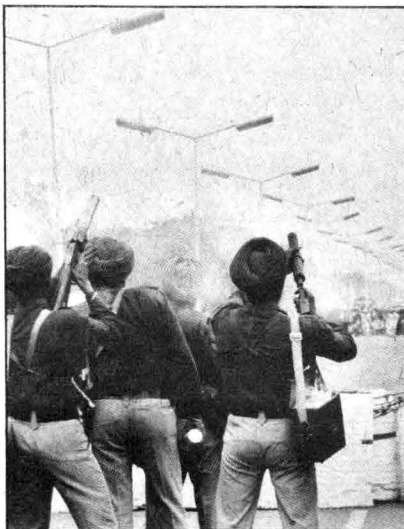
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## LETTERS

### Balance and Compassion



In the plethora of articles written on the Punjab, the cover story 'Land of the Gun' (*Imprint*, November) by Rahul Singh will stand out as a piece of objectivity, balance, and above all, compassion. The fact that the story has been written by a Sikh makes me feel that there is still hope for the country and its values of secularism.

The other article on CRY, the child welfare organisation, makes great claims about the organisation's fund-raising and other welfare programmes. Although I would not like to contest that, I must say that my own experience as a donor of funds to it, has not been a very happy or satisfactory one.

C Anthony Louis  
Bombay

### Safety Violations

Your campaign to expose the frequent violation of safety norms in Indian Airlines is laudable. However, there have also been numerous instances of accidents occurring on Indian railways, many of which do not receive sufficient attention. Further, the violation of road safety which affects both motorists and pedestrians, and which has resulted in a considerable loss of lives, should also be exposed. Perhaps *Imprint* should present a detailed analysis of

why these occur and what remedial action, if any, has been taken to ensure the safety of citizens.

Anuradha Joshi  
Jabalpur

### Refreshingly Different

Kishore Kumar's death elicited the most unimaginative and made-to-order tributes from magazines all over the country. But the tribute by Ashok Kumar (*Imprint*, November) although a little late, was refreshingly different

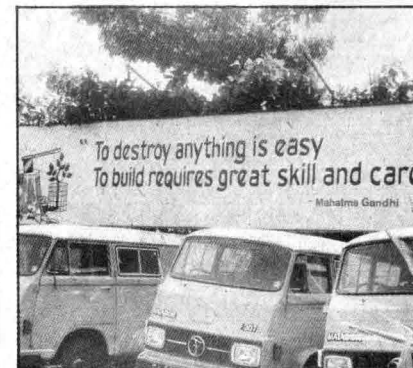


by the very virtue of the fact that it was written by one of the Kumar brothers! Your efforts in making this possible are indeed commendable.

Savithri Ramani  
Nagpur

### Educating the Public

It is heartening to know that public service advertising (*Imprint*, November) has come of age in our coun-





try. But it is evident that a major chunk is the work of Lintas Advertising, while the contribution of other advertising agencies is far from satisfactory. How much longer will we have to wait before the commercial world of advertising really applies itself to raising the consciousness of the public?

*N Parthasarthy  
Bangalore*

### Avoidable Expenditure

Rajiv Gandhi's recent, highly luxurious flight to Vancouver has cost the national Exchequer a sum of Rs 15 crore! The country is in the grips of the worst-ever drought of the century and the government has been issuing directives for the curtailment of avoidable expenditure. In such circumstances, is such an expensive jaunt by the Prime Minister justified?

*Rahul Chaudhari  
Bombay*

### Reliance Fever

'Reliance Fever' was not an endemic affliction restricted to Bombay alone (*Imprint*, November). This strange fever had attacked Keralites as well. I was perplexed to see my 73-year old father glued to a cane chair in front of the TV, pad in hand, jotting down runs, overs, and wickets during the Reliance Cup. He, along with the neighbourhood's children, would remain cut off from their surroundings from 8:50 am till the match was over.

Sunder Srinivasan in his letter to *Imprint* (November) says that in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, people do not watch *Ramayana* at all. Since next to cricket, *Ramayana* is the most popular programme amongst Keralites, I cannot subscribe to Srinivasan's views as far as Kerala is concerned.

*K P Rajan  
Bombay*

### A Petty Contention

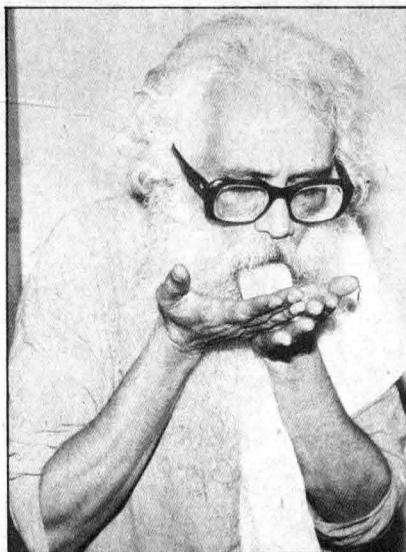
The entire tone of LAC Mulangunnathukavu's letter about J Krishna-

murti (*Imprint*, November) is that of ridicule, and I take serious offence to it. J Krishnamurti certainly cannot be assessed through Pupul Jayakar's biography or a conversation with Achyut Patwardhan. The letter-writer describes J Krishnamurti's well-combed hair: surely Mr LAC Mulangunnathukavu should know that hairstyles have nothing to do with a man whose philosophy has the potential to liberate the human mind! I think his criticism is uncalled for and it would have been much more appreciated had he kept such views to himself.

*Narayan Naik  
Bangalore*

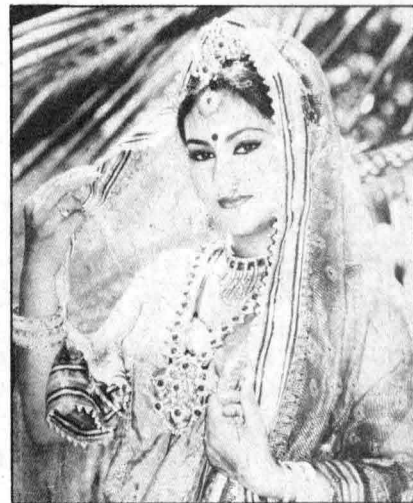
### An Empty Challenge

B Premanand's offer of Rs 1 lakh to Sri Sathya Sai Baba (*Imprint*, October) for a miracle that is proved 'beyond a shadow of doubt', only shows his ignorance. He has no idea of the sacrifices that one has to undergo to become a Godman. I personally



feel that these self-styled rationalists should not be allowed to project their lower middle-class mentality of greed, as miracles are not performed for personal gains but to restore the faith and confidence of people.

*Puneet Kumar  
New Delhi*



### Hare Rama! Hare Sagar!

Your cover story on *Ramayana* was interesting and revealing. I agree that the success of Ramanand Sagar chiefly rests on the strong base of the legend which manages to arrest popular attention despite the gaudy costumes and melodramatic actors. . .

*Dhiraj Chibbar  
Chandigarh*

The views of a few people on *Ramayana* in the column 'Bouquets and Brickbats' do not really represent the sentiments of the common man. You have presented a distorted picture of the viewers' views. . .

*N M Bhasin  
Bombay*

The values and ideas enshrined in *Ramayana* have stood the test of time and those who denounce this great culture under the influence of foreign ideologies will never succeed. .

*Geetika Sachdeva  
New Delhi*

The serial, *Ramayana*, is immensely salutary to the illiterates and non-Hindus, especially Muslims. The people who are flaying the serial should be ashamed of themselves because they are blaming their own Gods. . .

*Mohammed Arif  
Vijayawada*

Waiting for her husband to come back home ...  
a hundred years ago.



A picture one hundred years old. From the collection of Lala Deen Dayal, Hyderabad.

The memory still lives on vividly.  
Thanks to B & W photography.

Thumb through your family photo album.  
There are those glorious old photographs  
that bring fond memories.  
In black and white. Sharp and clear even  
after sixty, seventy or eighty years and more.

The choice is quite clear.  
When you shoot pictures for keeps,  
shoot them on Black and White film.  
You'd be glad you did.



Memories may fade with time.  
Not Black & White pictures.



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# BHOPAL GAS VICTIMS: THE FIRE WITHIN

The Bhopal gas tragedy has today become a non-event — anniversary and compensation issues notwithstanding — because no one wants to remember the gas victims anymore. Three years after the event, public sympathy has worn thin as have relief and rehabilitation schemes, quacks flourish as do myriad other scams and thousands of gas victims are left to fight a lonely and hopeless battle. MINNIE VAID-FERA talks to them and profiles their continuing nightmare.

*"The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting."* — Milan Kundera

**T**HE RESURRECTION is over. Bhopal's dead have been commemorated but, more importantly, the living have also been buried. For no one wants to remember Bhopal's gas victims any more. The third anniversary of the Bhopal gas tragedy — December 3, 1987 — has followed the same, almost ritualistic pattern of the two preceding years. Demonstrations, protest processions, burning of effigies, impassioned speeches, token condolences, and newspaper headlines have once again spotlighted one of the world's most gruesome industrial disasters — but for just one day.

The very real problems that most of these victims grapple with today can hardly be highlighted for the all-too brief period of 24 hours, immediately preceded and followed by total indifference. Faced with bureaucratic apathy and a cavalier, almost abrasive approach to their recurring ailments, threatened with destitution for want of adequate relief measures and weakened bodies which cannot work, and ignored by the media, many



victims today prefer death to their present existence. Three years later, public sympathy has worn thin, relief and rehabilitation schemes are often misused, the voluntary groups have pulled out, and quacks flourish as do myriad other scams — the Bhopal gas tragedy has become, for the most part, a non-event.

For the victims, however, the nightmare continues, assuming even greater and more menacing proportions,

# COVER STORY

as they struggle to keep afloat in the absence of any substantial external assistance. It is a battle which they have lost, almost before they could begin. Their handicaps are easily discernible: a majority of the afflicted persons do not believe that their health will ever improve since their com-

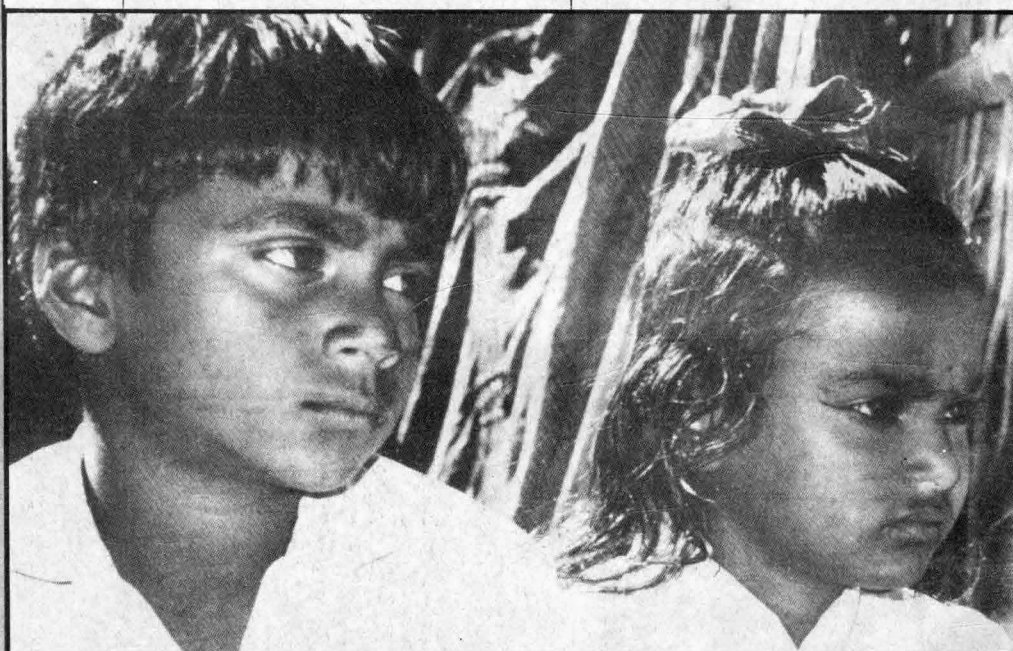
viously have a debilitating effect on and are directly related to the working capacity of an averagely afflicted person. The less fortunate ones are either blind, crippled, or bed-ridden; and in the case of many children — orphaned.

Significantly, however, their despair takes second place to the universally overwhelming feeling of anger. Towards Union Carbide, the Indian government, government hospitals, uncaring doctors, insensitive journalists, greedy petty officials, unscrupulous moneylenders and finally, towards their own destiny.

the ceaseless questioning they have been subjected to for three long years.

Krishnabai, a 45-year old member of the *Gas Pidit Mahila Udyog Sans-tha*, supports her sick husband, two sons, a daughter, and an orphaned grand-daughter, by doing odd jobs and working at one of the centres for destitute women. She bitterly rues the fact that she has not received any compensation so far, not even the initial Rs 1,500 paid to all the gas-affected families whose monthly income was less than Rs 500. She had filed a claim for *ex-gratia* relief on the death of her eldest son and daugh-

**"We now know there is no cure for our illness — we must have each taken over 150 injections, without experiencing any relief. But the sarkari doctors refuse to even mention the gas — they tell us we've got TB. Most of them speak in English and since we don't understand them, we are pushed around from one queue to another. We pay private doctors Rs 60 for a month's quota of medicines."**  
— Krishnabai.



*Bablu and Mamta: battling great odds.*

plaints are identical to those at the time of the poisoning — breathlessness, chest and stomach pains, loss of appetite, discomfort in the eyes, fever, cough with expectoration, and most commonly, loss of strength.

**THESE MEDICAL PROBLEMS** ob-

Jaiprakash Nagar, the most severely gas-affected area in Bhopal, and situated opposite the Union Carbide plant, comprises a long row of semi-solid structures or shanties with tin-roofs. An imposing statue depicting a woman fleeing with her child, attempts to immortalise the terror of the night of December 2, 1984. Residents of the *basti* proudly lead you to the statue, sculpted and erected by Ruth Waterman and Sanjay Mitra. Most of the *basti* dwellers are quick to offer both hospitality and information. Some are belligerent, tired of

ter-in-law. Three years later, she is still waiting for the money. Indebted to the ubiquitous money-lenders to, the tune of Rs 13,000-14,000, Krishnabai says, "*Hum nirash ho gaye hain. Kiske paas jayen?*" "It's not just my loss," she emphasises, "lots of people whose houses were destroyed did not receive any compensation."

Thirty-two year old Pratap, a manual labourer at Union Carbide, has lost his eyesight, his means of earning a livelihood, and a child (stillborn) due to the gas leak. The money that he received initially, Rs 1,500, has



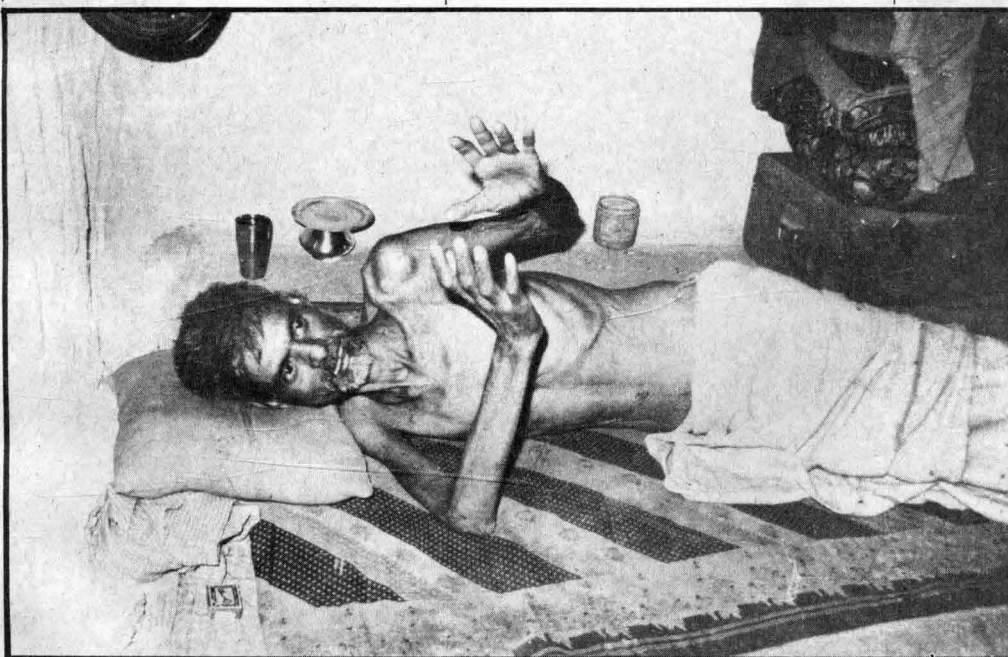
long since been expended on medical bills; doctors, however, hold out little hope of his recovering his eyesight. "I have spent so much money going to hospitals and government officials that I had to mortgage my house (a one-room tenement) and even sell my utensils to pay the money-lenders. What is the use of even talking about our misfortunes? It's our fate," he says quietly. His wife, Sarju, supplements the pitiful aid that he gets — Rs 60 each month — by doing *majuri* (manual work).

**"YOU WILL HEAR** the same story

Today, he is unable to even feed himself. His wife, Shanti, who has to work to support the family, in addition to coping with her invalid husband, is totally distraught with her lot. "We have gone to so many hospitals and doctors — all they ask us to do is to buy costly medicines that don't seem to help at all. This month, his medical bills have cost us Rs 700. He keeps vomiting all day; I am tired of looking after him and managing the whole household. We received Rs 1,500 after two-and-a-half years, by which time we had mortgaged our house and sold everything we could.

concede) the hapless victims — the supposed beneficiaries — do not believe that they will *ever* receive any of the compensation amount finally decided upon.

In JP Nagar, the anger of the *basti-wallahs* on the issue of compensation is almost palpable in its intensity.



*The once-robust porter, Laxman, now bed-ridden and destitute.*

in every house here," says Balraam Mukadam passionately. Weekly visits to Hamidia Hospital, where he has been given pain-killers over the past three years, take up most of his depleted strength. Unable to work on a regular basis, Mukadam and his family members also live off borrowed money and a mortgaged house.

Laxman's story is even more tragic. A robust 30-year old porter accustomed to handling heavy loads, he has been bed-ridden since the tragedy; his body seems to have literally wasted away, leaving a skeletal frame.

Tell me, what will we do with the compensation money if it comes to us when we are crippled, perhaps even dead? That is, assuming we receive any compensation at all," says Shanti bitterly.

It is pertinent to note that while the authorities — the Indian government and Union Carbide — wrangle over compensation figures of US\$3 billion (the Indian government's initial demand), US\$1 billion, US\$650 million (the present demand by the Indian government) and US\$500 million (that Carbide is today willing to

**"We have gone to so many hospitals and doctors — all they ask us to do is to buy costly medicines that don't seem to help at all. We received Rs 1,500 after 2 1/2 years, by which time we had mortgaged our house and sold everything we could. What will we do with the compensation money if it comes to us when we are crippled, or even dead?"**

— Laxman's wife, Shanti.

Compensation and punishment of Carbide, "the killer multinational", are, for these victims, inseparable components in their quest for justice. "I don't expect any money as compensation. But Carbide should be punished so severely that it should be wiped off the face of the earth. *Mujhe*

## "TODAY, PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER DISHEARTENED"

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Motilal Vora, talks to Minnie Vaid-Fera.

**MOTILAL VORA IS AN ALMOST** excessively genial chief minister – smiling, courteous, affable. The affability is unaffected even as he discusses an extremely serious issue – the fate of Bhopal's ill-fated gas victims. His imperturbability takes on shades of a protective armour as every question is dismissed either cursorily or grandiloquently. His sympathy (for the gas victims), like his empty rhetoric, remains surface-level throughout the half-hour interview, conducted at his spacious residence in Bhopal.

**Imprint:** Today, more than three years after the Bhopal gas leak, how do you view the tragedy – as an act of God, an act of criminal negligence by Union Carbide, or merely as an unfortunate accident?

**Vora:** Well, the matter is in court. (*sic*). There's no doubt that it was a great calamity in which 2,800 people died and lakhs were affected. There is also no doubt that it was entirely a man-made disaster; the culpability, and therefore the entire responsibility for the tragedy lies with Union Carbide.

**How much compensation will you settle for? Is it going to depend on how much each victim needs or on how much Union Carbide is willing to offer?**

We will do our best to alleviate the suffering of the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy. Of course, the dead cannot be compensated, but it is our duty to ensure that the survivors are given adequate compensation. The Government of India and the state government are working jointly towards this end.

**How would you react to an expeditious out-of-court settlement with Carbide?**

We will not be satisfied unless we receive the amount we have asked for as adequate compensation. If this

amount can be granted in an out-of-court settlement, fine. Such a settlement will obviously expedite matters. But the amount should be commensurate with our expectations.

**What amount do you term 'adequate compensation'?**

The figure we have asked for in court.

**The initial figure of US\$3 billion?**

Yes, yes, what we asked for in court. We will stick to that figure.

**What about the possibility of criminal cases filed against Carbide being withdrawn with such a settlement?**

Unless we get adequate compensation, why should we withdraw the cases? The Government of India, in consultation with the state government, will decide these matters once we reach a settlement.

**Since you emphasise 'adequate compensation', how would you compensate victims who have suffered incurable lung damage, other kinds of long-term damage, or genetic damage? What amount would you consider adequate in such cases?**

Yes, damage is there – genetic damage. (*Nods knowingly.*)

**But how will such families be compensated?**

The compensation will be provided by the courts. From our side, better jobs can be provided for the families of victims. Under our Urban Poor Scheme, 17,000 out of 25,000 cases have been cleared, and work has been provided to family members of victims so that they may earn as much as, or more than, what they used to earn earlier. This way, we can help affected families. Also, widows of the gas-leak victims are being provided a monthly pension of Rs 200.

**When can the gas victims actually hope to receive their rightful share of**



**the compensation? And how do you propose to distribute the amount – through trusts, organisations, or some other means?**

We will try to give compensation as early as possible. Our courts are quite in touch with the happenings – I do not think there is any unnecessary delay. As far as distribution is concerned, we are making adequate preparations. As soon as the case is resolved, we will distribute the money through a number of courts specially appointed for the purpose. No trusts will be formed; the courts will be more than adequate. We have already started gathering documents to classify or prove the seriousness or extent of damage wrought by the gas leak. There are over 5 lakh claimants for compensation.

**Do you feel that, by and large, accurate records of the victims and the deceased have been maintained over the last three years, and especially immediately after the leak in December 1984? There was total chaos and confusion at that time – many victims do not even possess any document that could serve as a proof of their ill-health and suffering. Can you be certain that compensation will be provided to almost all the victims of the gas tragedy?**



We have maintained records that will suffice the needs of the courts. Initially, of course, there may have been some difficulty in maintaining records, but since the effects of MIC are continuous, we have been very particular in maintaining records over the last two-and-a-half years. We have records of the 14,000 persons who were most severely afflicted.

I agree that there were mass burials in 1984, but after that, we have been very scrupulous in filing the information we receive from various sources, and I am sure that we will plead our case properly.

**Do you agree that the amount of compensation that you settle for will, unquestionably, set a precedent insofar as acceptance of a lesser amount will perpetuate the foisting of faulty and unsafe technologies on Third World countries?**

We are quite sure that the technology (Union Carbide's) was faulty — as I said, it was a man-made disaster. But we are also taking care that this is not repeated elsewhere — our environment and pollution control board has been in touch with other factories as a precautionary measure.

**One of the most distressing effects of the tragedy is that even three years after the disaster, the victims do not feel that they are recovering — they complain of the same symptoms of ill-health. The world of medicine seems to have no significant cure for their ailments, other than immediate and temporary relief through symptomatic treatment. How has your government helped such people?**

We have been very particular about giving medical aid to the afflicted persons in the last three years. We provide the best medical facilities; there is no dearth of money. The Prime Minister visited Bhopal on December 4, 1984, and realised the extent of the calamity. The government has spent Rs 55 crore for medical rehabilitation. We have opened a number of hospitals — the 125-bed Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital is the most re-

cent one. I have personally visited these hospitals many times and seen the state of affairs of the poor victims — they do have recurring symptoms, and many of them are not in a position to do hard labour due to lung damage. But it is wrong to say people have not been cured — a good number have been cured.

**What about the all-important issue of medical research? Has there been any kind of epidemiological study to record and analyse the symptoms of patients, as well as to provide proof of the damage done to their bodies?**

At the time of the calamity there was no time for such a study. But over the last two years, studies are being conducted, and people will be able to prove their claims even in the absence of such studies because their symptoms are self-explanatory.

**What relief can the victims expect until the compensation issue is settled in or out-of-court?**

As you must be aware, we have distributed Rs 10,000 as *ex-gratia* relief to relatives of the deceased, and a further Rs 1,500 to those gas-affected victims whose monthly income is less than Rs 500.

We are going to establish an industrial estate at Govindpura, at a cost of Rs 100 crore, in order to help victims earn an honourable livelihood.

**But, in spite of all these measures, how do you account for the despair that victims experience with respect to their economic and medical rehabilitation? Why do they still feel so abandoned as far as the government's help and succour is concerned?**

Yes, people were depressed in the beginning because of the confusion created earlier by certain factions. Today, however, since the court proceedings are fairly rapid, that impression, that despair, is fading away. Today, the victims have faith in the government, they know we will do our best to obtain the right compensation for them. Today, people are no longer disheartened.

*toh Carbide 'kaal' jaisi dikhti hai* (I see Carbide as an incarnation of death)!" declares Balraam Mukadam.

**"CARBIDE HAS DESTROYED** lakhs of homes. Can they compensate me for the loss of my eyes?" queries blind Pratap with fervour. He grips

**"Didn't the state government know how dangerous the Carbide plant was? Why couldn't they have warned us? If any of us were to**



**kill a man, we would be hanged or imprisoned for life. Isn't there any law for these Carbide killers?"**  
— Bal Mukund.

his walking-stick strongly and elucidates, "We can only punish Carbide if we are all united — the government and the people — just like these five fingers that can only support my weight, together." Krishnabai is equally vociferous. "Carbide will give us very little money. We will survive, some-

## CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

Minnie Vaid-Fera profiles "Children against Carbide".

**THEY ARE A BAND OF 40** children — a Little League — young, outspoken and gutsy. Living exactly opposite the Union Carbide plant, in J P Nagar, the most severely affected area of the gas leak that took place three years ago, these children call themselves 'Carbide ke khilaf bachche'. The name of their organisation, formed nearly a year ago, is self-explanatory. Their aims are childishly simple — to lend weight to any kind of procession, morcha or demonstration against Union Carbide, the perpetrators of a heinous crime on the night of December 2, 1984.

It was a night that was to change the entire structure of their lives, leaving several children orphaned, and crippling others with devastating physical injuries and almost intolerable mental trauma. Today, three years after the tragedy, the scars — of both physical and mental stress — threaten to become almost permanent features of their young lives. While the more unfortunate of these children have had to abandon school, either due to their inability to concentrate on their studies in the aftermath of the gas inhaled that black night or due to severe financial strain in their changed households, others wage a constant battle to sustain their diminishing physical strength. It is a battle that is being fought against formidable odds — almost every child in the afflicted *bastis* complains of fatigue, breathlessness, and chest-pain throughout the day; school work assumes Herculean proportions and even a game of cricket requires a stamina that these kids simply do not possess after the toxic gas entered their systems three years ago. The resultant listlessness is perhaps the most debilitating effect the tragedy has had on these afflicted children.

Yet somewhere, somehow, a small spark of enthusiasm, of anger, remains and is crystallised into a fledgling forum of protest. It does not matter

that the awareness of the injustice done to them is probably induced by external factors, or that the arguments they propound appear pompous, echoing adult sentiments. What is far more important is that the awareness *exists*, and although the activities of 'Carbide ke khilaf bachche' are restricted to participation in demonstrations or meetings, their solidarity to the cause is remarkable.

Most of them, clustering around their chief spokesman and unofficial leader, Sunil Kumar, are eager to talk about themselves. Almost all appear malnourished with stick-like limbs; a few have red, watery eyes which cause acute discomfort.

Sixteen-year old Sunil Kumar, a lanky Standard X student of Nutan Mahavidyalaya Mandir, begins talking in measured tones, occasionally sounding adult and mature. Having lost his parents and siblings in the gas tragedy, Sunil supports a younger brother and sister with the interest he gets from the Rs 10,000 granted to him as ex-gratia relief by the government. His monthly income of Rs 500 (from his relief money) is spent on food, studies, and most importantly, on medicines for his younger brother, Sanjay, who has been under the treatment of private doctors for the past three years. He has no faith in government hospitals.

Nevertheless, he admits that most of the private doctors are quacks, and grins as he gives an example of such chicanery. "There is a doctor nearby who now owns a Maruti and land worth Rs 2 lakh. Tell me, how can he earn Rs 2 lakh in two years?"

"Our normal life today, is half of what it was before the gas leak," Sunil says matter-of-factly. "We can't even run properly. . . we get tired so fast. Our chests hurt, our stomachs hurt. . ."

How do Sunil and his loyal gang contribute their mite towards the redressal of grievances of the gas vic-

tims? Several children proffer enthusiastic explanations, their high-pitched voices rising to a crescendo. "We hold meetings, we have discussions, we participate in morchas, shout slogans," answers Sunil after the clamour dies down. These meetings, obviously organised by their elders, serve to enlighten all the gas victims on issues like compensation, provision of relief, etc. "We work for *Satyubhai* (Satinath Sarangi of the Bhopal Group of Information and Action)," says 12-year old Mahesh. "We don't get scared — we pick up stones and hit bad men. Last year, we stoned Carbide — we broke their gate and the police chowki stationed outside," boasts Mahesh proudly.

Sunil reassumes his role as spokesman, outlining the problems that beset their organisation. "In our morchas, if *one* child is hit by policemen, *ten* children get scared and refuse to join us. The police help the government. Why doesn't the government open centres for children, like they have for women?" he asks. He is openly scornful of the government's efforts to provide relief and rehabilitation. "Take the sewing centres or workshops for gas-affected women. Hardly 4-5 women from J P Nagar benefit from such activities. Others are quick to take advantage. The government distributed free goods in so many places where there were no gas victims at all," he comments bitterly. "They (the government officials) keep saying they gave Rs 1,500 to the poor in J P Nagar. Hardly anyone got any aid. This new Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital is all rubbish! The doctors can't cure us properly. The government should get a large enough compensation for us so that we can cure ourselves," Sunil adds earnestly.

He goes on to elaborate his views on compensation, while most of the others listen intently. "The case (against Carbide) should go on till the guilty are punished. If there is a compromise settlement, there won't be any justice. The government is leaving Carbide free; this is the third year of *samjhauta* (discussion); there



are so many claimants, I'm sure the government will also take its share," says Sunil. According to his calculations, each afflicted family should receive Rs 1.5 lakh as compensation. What relief have voluntary organisations offered them in the last three years? Says Sunil indignantly, "Some people, like the Canadian television crew that visited us recently, ask us to do stupid things, like making *rotis* etc. I got very irritated by that. If you are ready to help solve our problems, we're willing to talk. Not if we're used as showcases!"

As Sunil pauses to take a breath, other children pipe in eagerly. Thirteen-year old Ramesh, studying in Standard VI, explains why he cannot play cricket like he used to, since he has been taking medicines for his eyes for three years. "I attend school from 12-5 pm, the rest of the time I play with Ramesh, Mahesh, Santosh, Hari, Jagdish and Karnal. But Sunil is our captain," he concludes. Mahesh nods his agreement. "I take tuitions from Sunil every day," he says proudly. Does he not go to school as well? "No, I used to study in school but my mind doesn't work well and since I failed last year, my father won't let me study any more. But what's the point in studying anyway? I work as a mechanic and I'm quite happy. Sometimes I work till midnight; I can open up gear-boxes," he says.

His bright eyes and confident manner belie Sunil's explanation that the disorientation of his (Mahesh's) mind resulted in his having to leave school. Today, the lively and obviously intelligent Mahesh works long hours in a garage and is paid only his expenses. "That is because I'm still learning," he explains carefully. "You simply must come and see us leading a procession on December 3," he pleads with twinkling eyes. "We are going to burn Anderson's effigy that day," he says, smiling in anticipation. Sunil concludes vehemently, "Why just the effigy? We want to destroy Union Carbide. They have destroyed our houses, killed our people . . . Why should we not want revenge?"

how, but there should be a strong punishment for Carbide. Let them suffer as we have suffered."

Bal Mukund, a 40-year old ex-waiter of a hotel, now suffering from breathlessness, chest pain, and total loss of strength, blames the Arjun Singh (state) government for the calamity. "Didn't they (the government) know how dangerous the Carbide plant was? Why couldn't they have warned us? If any of us were to kill a man, we would be hanged or imprisoned for life; isn't there any law for these Carbide killers?" he queries fiercely.

Erstwhile workers of the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal are only

"Government *chor hai*. They promised us alternative work but I know that I will have to sell my house to clear my debts."

**DID THE MULTINATIONAL** offer any sustenance to the retrenched workers? "We workers went on *morchas* to protest against our loss of ser-



*Sunil and 'Carbide ke khilaf bachche.'*

slightly better off than the other victims. Habib Ali, 40, a former watchman and later table-operator, had put in 10 years of service at Union Carbide. Today he works at the Hamidia Hospital on daily wages and earns approximately Rs 15 per day to support his wife, two children, and a younger brother. He claims that the government hospitals do not stock the requisite medicines, and the long queues at such hospitals deter him from availing of their dubious benefits. Strangely, however, Habib Ali feels that only Union Carbide can provide and distribute adequate compensation to Bhopal's gas victims. Openly contemptuous of the state government, he says,

**"We want to destroy Union Carbide. They have destroyed our houses, killed our people. Why should we not want revenge? The case (against Carbide) should go on till the guilty are punished. Our normal life today is half of what it was before the gas leak. We can't even run properly ... we get tired so fast. Our chests hurt, our stomachs hurt."**  
— Sunil.

vice at Carbide, but to no avail. We could only claim gratuity and some money from the workers' fund, which came to approximately Rs 10,000 in all. Do you think that this amount can compensate us for the loss of the 20 years of service that we could have put in? Does it compensate us for our illness?" asks Ali in disgust. The feelings are indeed the same in almost

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every house in JP Nagar — anger and bitterness about the past, and abject pessimism regarding the inevitable bleak future.

The dejection is not restricted to J P Nagar alone. In fact, inhabitants of Bhopal's railway colony — another severely affected locality — are extre-

**"Government chor hai. They promised us alternative work but I know I will have to sell my house to clear my debts. We could only claim gratuity**



**and some money from the workers' fund. Does this compensate us for the loss of the 20 years of service we could have put in?"**

— Habib Ali,  
ex-Carbide worker.

mely bitter about the "preferential treatment" meted out by the state government, to residents of J P Nagar. Says Bhushan Sharma, spokesman for the gas-affected railway workers, "The government has concentrated mainly on J P Nagar. Out of the 4-5 major gas-affected localities, ours

## FOR THE RECORD

The state government's relief and rehabilitation measures in Bhopal.

### Relief

- a) Ex-gratia relief of Rs 10,000 given to the next of kin of the deceased.  
Confirmed number of cases of death that can be attributed to exposure of gas: 2,850  
Number of relatives of the deceased who have been given ex-gratia relief of Rs 10,000: 2,477  
Total amount paid: Rs 2.48 crore
- b) Ex-gratia payment of Rs 1,500.  
Number of families residing in 36 wards of Bhopal whose monthly income was Rs 500 or less, which were paid ex-gratia relief at the rate of Rs 1,500 per family: 78,566  
Total amount paid: Rs 11.78 crore
- c) Free distribution of ration.  
Period of distribution: December 1984 to December 1985.  
Rate of distribution (to families whose income was Rs 1,000 pm or less): 12 kg per unit upto September 1985, 6 kg thereafter.  
Quantity of sugar distributed: 4,700 quintals  
Quantity of edible oil distributed: 4,00,000 litres.  
Total amount spent: Rs 19.02 crore.
- d) Free distribution of milk.  
From December 1984 to May 1985, free milk was distributed to infants, pregnant women and lactating mothers at the rate of 200 ml per person.  
Total amount spent: Rs 1.09 crore.

### Rehabilitation

- a) Number of medical institutions run by the Gas Relief Department.  
Hospitals: 4  
Polyclinics: 1  
Investigation Centres: 2  
Dispensaries: 5  
Number of Specialists appointed: 35  
Number of Assistant Surgeons appointed: 75  
Provision in the budget of 1987-1988 for medical facilities: Rs 6.40 crore
- b) Economic rehabilitation.  
Number of worksheds for production and training: 38  
Number of persons trained so far: 2,449  
Number of persons under training: 956

Step-up	Number	Amount in lakhs
Cases sponsored by the banks:	26,795	Rs 1,573
Cases sanctioned:	16,131	Rs 925
Cases in which assets or loans were disbursed:	14,055	Rs 777



## New Schemes

Development of special industrial area for gas victims.

Area:	53 acres
Approximate cost:	Rs 5 crore
Budget provision for this purpose in 1987-1988:	Rs 1 crore
Number of sheds:	322

### c) Social Rehabilitation.

Number of widows after the gas tragedy who are being paid a pension of Rs 200 pm:

437

Approximate amount paid annually:

Rs 10.5 lakh

Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS).

Number of projects:

5

Number of Anganwadis:

792

Number of beneficiaries as per survey:

88,141

Number of beneficiaries covered by nutrition programme:

62,046

Environmental improvement work in the gas-affected areas involving an expenditure of Rs 4.5 crore, has been cleared and will soon be underway.

## Registration of claims

The Directorate of Registration has registered the following claims.

Type of claims	Number registered
1) Persons injured or affected:	5,25,062
2) Claims due to loss of livestock:	414
3) Loss in business, profession or calling:	4,698
4) Claims by heirs of deceased:	3,086
5) Claims made by central government, state government, semi-government bodies, private organisations etc, that suffered losses or incurred expenditure while coping with the disaster or providing relief and rehabilitation:	80

## Progress of documentation work

Number of centres where documentation work is in progress:	14
Number of doctors engaged in the work:	287
Number of claimants served with notice:	1,88,201
Number of persons medically examined:	62,228
Records completed:	52,882

Among the state government's future rehabilitation schemes is what S Satyam, commissioner, gas relief, calls an "action plan", (1986-1993) for medical, economic and social rehabilitation. This will further include a special training complex (to be constructed at an approximate cost of Rs 2.5 crore) for gas victims, a vocational guidance centre, a follow-up unit, a special employment exchange and a service centre. "We will try to

provide a human touch," says Satyam earnestly, in answer to public cynicism over the effectiveness of such measures, "and ensure as much relief as soon as possible."

For the multitudes of embittered victims, these ambitious proposals — principally geared for *their* sustenance — remain illusory. Past experience of relief and rehabilitation programmes, launched by both the governmental and voluntary sector,

being their only yardstick for assessment, the victims openly condemn new projects.

The failure of the voluntary sector, usually the most competent, in terms of providing immediate relief and rehabilitation in the aftermath of any disaster, is peculiar to the special nature of the Bhopal disaster according to an activist. The token presence of voluntary groups, in fact, the virtual pulling out (of Bhopal) of all such groups today is probably related to the man-made nature of the tragedy, he says introspectively. The subsequent politicisation of the issues involved, the shared responsibility of liability between Union Carbide Corporation and the Government of India as well as the perceived enormity of the task of rehabilitation, influenced the performance or rather non-performance of voluntary agencies in Bhopal. This is a probable explanation for the restricted (and chiefly initial) response of the voluntary sector. Otherwise, says the activist, it seems inexplicable that organisations like Seva, for example, one of the most consistent voluntary groups working in Kazi camp (the immensely successful clinic run by them has since been discontinued), with tremendous resources, should not have expanded their activities.

On a wider matrix, the lacklustre response to meeting the peoples' needs in Bhopal was probably because, by the very nature of the calamity, these needs were long-term, perhaps even indefinite. Relief and rehabilitation efforts in Bhopal could not be planned, executed and completed either satisfactorily or expeditiously within the normal timespan given to other catastrophes — four to six months. Much more was and still is, needed, given the very real problems that the Bhopal gas victims face, three years after the tragedy. In a sense therefore, the failure of such a response to a tragedy of such proportions, has been universal, and cannot be attributed to government or voluntary agencies alone.

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(the railway colony) has been given totally unwarranted step-motherly treatment. This has led to acute dissatisfaction among our workers." Despite fervent and continual petitions to the state government, the 5,000 inhabitants of the railway colony do not have access to even one *rahat kendra* (rehabilitation centre), or dispensary, alleges Sharma angrily. In

just lying idle." Moreover, despite a survey conducted by the railways, several afflicted workers are yet to receive interim or ex-gratia relief. "Most of them no longer expect any (relief)," he says simply. A substantial majority of workers have been dealt an almost crippling blow as far as their work is concerned — a large percentage is yet to recoup after the tragedy. Sharma provides the statistics — 149 workers cannot work at all today and have been constantly agitating for alternative jobs. Among the Class III officers 35 are partially ill while 184 residents of the railway colony fought a losing battle against

based on a logic peculiar to their circumstances and experience. In the event of so many of them not having benefited from the much-publicised relief measures adopted by the government, and when so many have yet to receive the Rs 1,500 interim relief, how can they even hope to actually obtain the compensation money due to them?

They unanimously debunk the state government's lengthy lists itemising the relief given to the gas victims — free milk, wheat, bread, etc (see box). "Yes, we were given free milk," says Balraam Mukadam, "but only for the first three months. The lists are only meant to impress you journalists," he mocks. "Government officials only help 'suited-booted' people — we are shooed away unceremoniously. No one listens to our complaints. All we can do is to curse these officials," says Pratap. Mukadam describes government officials as the sort that will "eat the flesh of the dead". "They tell us openly that they will hand over our rightful share if we pay them a substantial part of it. The 'big people' take all the money. There is no hope for us," he says sadly.

**BUREAUCRATIC BUNGLING** or delay notwithstanding, what is the explanation for the glaring discrepancy between aid allocated and distributed, and aid received? S Satyam, commissioner gas relief, analyses it thus, "I am aware that hostility is building up among the victims towards the government. This is because there's big money flowing in; people can only think in terms of compensation-figures. The dissatisfaction arises out of tremendously high expectations. But people *are* convinced of the government's concern for, and help provided to, the gas victims."

Senior civil servants, residents, and even journalists in Bhopal vouch for the 'extremely mercenary' attitudes adopted by the gas victims, alleging that victims either exaggerate or tell blatant lies about their health or bereavement. "The situation in Bho-

**"Carbide has destroyed lakhs of homes. Can they compensate me for the loss of my eyes? We can only punish Carbide if we are all united. What is the use of even talking about our misfortunes? No one listens to our complaints. Government officials only help 'suited-booted' people — we are shooed away."**  
— Pratap.



*The J P Nagar basti: justice denied.*

the MIC poisoning, finally succumbing to it. "We keep raising demands, but nothing is done for our rehabilitation," says Sharma despairingly.

One of the major reasons for this level of despair and despondency is the wide chasm between the public, or rather, the official perception of the relief and rehabilitation measures provided for the gas victims by the government and voluntary agencies, and the victims' conviction that they have been abandoned by a callous government, and on a wider matrix, a callous society. The reasoning in the *bastis* is simple and straightforward,

the absence of governmental help, the railways run a social centre of their own, with eight sewing machines for women.

In an obvious attempt to look after their own, the railways have also provided for a zonal fund for gas-affected workers. But according to Sharma, "The Rs 2 lakhs deposited therein is not being disposed off; the funds are



pal for the last three years has been particularly conducive to any number of scams being perpetrated by ruthless and unscrupulous con men and middlemen," reports a bureaucrat wryly.

According to a senior doctor at Hamidia Hospital, "People spoke the truth for perhaps a week after the tragedy." While this is a rather drastic and sweeping explanation for the accountability of public money or relief, the gas victims themselves rail against frauds and impostors. "So many people pretend to have been affected by MIC and have set up homes here (in J P Nagar)," says Krishnabai angrily. Genuine gas victims cannot fully avail themselves of the government's rehabilitation schemes, such as workshops for destitute women and *anganwadis* for children, allege J P Nagar's *bastiwallahs*, since these are monopolised by "crooks and pretenders". Moreover, according to surveys conducted by the Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA), a number of rehabilitation workshops continue to remain unused and some even serve as garbage dumps; mismanagement, corruption, inadequate work and wages are significant drawbacks in several centres. For a vast majority of women, these centres are virtually their mainline to survival since many of them are either widows or their husbands are too ill to go to work.

**AS FOR THE MUCH-TOUTED 633** *anganwadis* (child centres) operational from April 1985, BGIA surveys revealed that the selection of malnourished children attending these centres was arbitrary, the environment unhygienic, and the supplies — food, medicines, toys etc — pitifully meagre. Says Mamta, a seven-year old orphan who attended a neighbouring *anganwadi*: "There were 20 children in our centre. We got bread for one month, but no milk. Then my name was cut off from the list (she had crossed the age-limit of six years). The school that I now go to gives us nothing."

The school that Mamta attends consists of a small, dark, ill-ventilated room in the J P Nagar *basti*, packed with 22-25 little children, huddled together on the floor. A crude black-board made of cloth, is prominently placed in one corner of the room; a 'teacher' sits at a sewing-machine at the other end, 'supervising' the children's education in between furious bursts of sewing. Her name is Rahibia Bee and she is the wife of an ex-Carbide worker who roams the streets for work, earning around Rs 15 daily. She supplements this income by sewing clothes and 'teaching'. They have, however, been more for-



*The new generation: born after the leak.*

tunate than others — Carbide has given them Rs 24,000 which they invested in a house. Today, they rent out rooms, the 'school' being one of them.

Those who *did* receive either the *ex-gratia* relief, interim relief, or pensions given by the state government, say so quite frankly, and are openly envied by their neighbours. In many cases the money is insufficient or has come too late. Kasturibai, 65 and partially blind, has lost seven members of her family, including her husband and children. She sits at her 'shop' — a small, almost bare shack

containing a few cheap sweets. All she can remember is that they brought the corpses to her in a cart and she could not see them clearly because her eyes were burning. She now receives Rs 200 each month (granted to widows by the government), but refuses to acknowledge it. "Yes, I get money," she says with a vacant stare, "but I don't feel well." A few *basti-*

**"We were given free milk only for the first three months. The lists are meant to impress you journalists. Government officials are the sort that will eat the flesh of the dead. They tell us openly that they will hand over our rightful share if we pay them a part of it. The 'big people' take all the money. There's no hope for us." — Balram Mukadam.**

*wallahs* feel equally listless and refuse to talk about their problems. "What will happen after our stories are printed? Will we feel better? Will we get our money?" scoffs an old man angrily. Others almost push you into their one-room houses — sparsely furnished, some of them bare of even utensils — and explain agitatedly, "if we *had* got our compensation or relief

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money, would we ever live like this?"

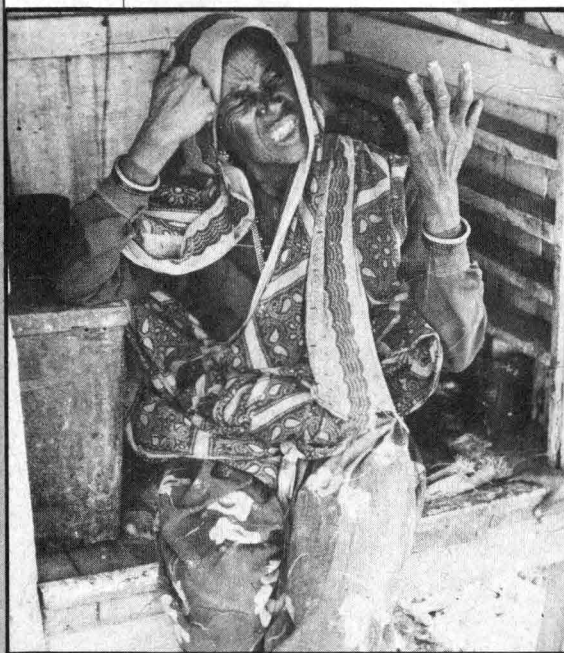
**THE STARK POVERTY** of these *bastis*, the obvious physical ill-health and discomfort of their inhabitants, their inability to work, and most of all, the deep-rooted and universal feel-

**Faced with bureaucratic apathy and a cavalier approach to their ailments, threatened with destitution for want of adequate relief measures and weakened bodies which cannot work, and ignored by the media, many victims today prefer death to their present existence. Public sympathy has worn thin, relief and rehabilitation schemes are often misused, voluntary groups have pulled out and quacks flourish — the Bhopal gas tragedy is now a non-event.**

ing of bitterness at being abandoned, belies the popular argument of cynical observers — that Bhopal's gas victims have become money-grabbing opportunists.

Krishnabai continues wearily, "Let alone frauds, every single person that we are forced to meet to

claim relief or obtain medical attention, asks for his 'cut'. Even *chaprasis* ask for large sums like Rs 500 to put up papers for scrutiny." One visit to the Secretariat or government hospital costs a patient approximately Rs 15-20, takes up an entire day and ends, very often, in a peremptory order to "come again tomorrow". Disheartened by serpentine queues, indifferent petty officials, and the ever-present and baffling rigmarole of submitting papers, photocopies, and original documents, tired *bastiwallahs* often steer clear of official proce-



*Krishnabai: indignantly vocal.*

dures. Unfortunately, this aversion leads to people refusing to attend the 'claim camps' established by the state government, early this year, to provide corroborative medical and documentary evidence for claimants, against Carbide. "Claim camps serve a dual purpose," says S Satyam, commissioner gas relief. "Patients are given a free health check-up and the documentation helps further their case for compensation."

**CLAIM CAMPS** are crucially important given the sketchy records main-

tained in the aftermath of the gas leak. Doctors at Hamidia Hospital, where thousands of panic-stricken gas victims converged on December 3, 1984, frankly admit that it was impossible to maintain records for those two traumatic days when patients were collapsing by the minute. But later, as one doctor avers, an open register should have been maintained. In the absence of any emphasis on documentation, several patients were dismissed with OPD slips that did not even mention the gas as the causative agent of their suffering. Today, helpless due to the lack of consistent medical records, many victims fear being cheated out of their rights. In fact, most patients of J P Nagar have done the rounds of every government hospital and private clinic operating in Bhopal, in a desperate bid to supplement the '*parchis*' or documents in their possession.

Satyam argues that, contrary to the popular notion that records were poorly maintained, there is, in fact, a duplication of records. "Patients feel that their claims will be strengthened if they have certificates from three or four dispensaries," he says. He also believes that since almost 5 lakh victims have filed claims in court, the majority of victims have made full use of the governmental facilities offered over the past three years. "Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency," he emphasises. "We have launched a massive documentation drive to ensure a comprehensive medical check-up, to analyse the information through a computer and to divide people into mild, moderate, or extreme categories to facilitate follow-up action," he elaborates.

Unfortunately, these laudable intentions have scarcely achieved the expected results — by Satyam's own admission, the public response to this drive has been an unimpressive 35 per cent, despite publicity and awareness campaigns. "Maybe people don't believe us," shrugs Satyam. It seems a classic understatement till he elaborates: "The gas victims who have re-



cently recovered, fear that they will be gypped of their share if they visit our claim camps. But this is absolutely untrue. We will give equal weightage to earlier illnesses and ongoing ones. We are trying to reassure people so that they can make full use of this new facility." Where fraudulent claims are concerned, Satyam is not unduly worried, "First, it will be difficult to hoodwink the claims commissioner when there are several categories of claims. Moreover, let a hundred undeserving claimants benefit so long as one genuine claimant is not overlooked," he adds.

**THE 'GENUINE CLAIMANTS'** of J P Nagar do not, however, share Satyam's optimism with respect to medical records. The reason is unbelievably simple — they do not go to government hospitals any more. Every patient that this correspondent spoke to in J P Nagar, prefers to pay exorbitant fees that he/she can ill-afford, to private doctors, after having faced indifferent and callous treatment at government hospitals. "Sarkari doctors don't give good medicines," says Krishnabai categorically. "All of us take medicines for coughs and breathlessness and we pay private doctors Rs 60 for a month's quota. Though we have had to sell our goods to be able to afford this, at least we get some comfort," she says heatedly. "We now know there is no cure for our illness — we must have each taken over 150 injections, without experiencing any relief. But the government doctors refuse to even mention the gas — they tell us we've got TB. Most of them speak in English and since we don't understand them, we are pushed around from one queue to another." Her indignance is amply justified.

Balraam Mukadam is equally vocal in his indictment of government hospitals. "The government doctors keep changing our medicines but everything they give helps us only temporarily — perhaps for a few hours. What is worse is that they

don't even examine us carefully. The Hamidia hospital van comes here once a week and picks up 7-8 patients for a free check-up. They select people according to their lists. Very few of us benefit from the treatment given by government doctors," he says disparagingly. Mukadam has spent two months in the Hamidia hospital camp, for treatment for his eyes. "They said they would cure me," he says "but till today, nothing has helped." He is convinced, like several of his friends and neighbours in J P Nagar, that only private doctors

cases, the basic MBBS degree is conspicuously absent. According to BGIA reports, eight out of every ten private doctors have received no formal training. Many doctors, or rather quacks, simultaneously take correspondence courses in different systems



*Kasturibai: bereaved and lonely.*

can alleviate their suffering.

They do not care, or in fact are unaware, that a large number of Bhopal's much-sought-after "private doctors" are unabashed quacks, dispensing 'miracle' drugs, usually corticosteroids, expensive tonics and useless vitamins. The ultimate panacea is, of course, an injection. Berasia Road, which leads to J P Nagar, boasts at least eight wonder clinics presided over by doctors with weird and wonderful medical qualifications — MIAMS, DOPS, VVP etc. In most

of medicine — allopathy, homeopathy, ayurveda, unani, etc. Their basic aim is to provide some kind of temporary relief, irrespective of the side-effects or efficacy of the drugs prescribed.

The BGIA surveys confirm that over the last 18 months, an average

**Those who did receive relief or pensions given by the state government, say so quite frankly. In many cases, the money is insufficient or has come too late. Kasturibai, 65 and partially blind, has lost seven members of her family, including her husband and children. All she can remember is that they brought the corpses to her in a cart and she could not see them clearly because her eyes were burning. "Yes, I get money", she says, "but I don't feel well."**

## A CASE FOR COMPENSATION

**A MAJOR OBSTACLE** to settling the Bhopal compensation claims without recourse to litigation has been, from the very first days of the disaster, the virtual impossibility of accurately determining the nature of injuries resulting from exposure to the gas and therefore, the size of the victim population. The problem being that even today, three years after the accident, there is little certainty about the composition of the gas cloud and its dispersal over the city. What is beyond doubt, however, is the absurdity of Union Carbide's claim that the gas would be completely neutralised by the moisture in the lungs, thereby precluding its entry into the bloodstream and, by implication, any possibility of long-term effects. The persistence of marked symptoms even today in the victim population, the higher incidence of miscarriages and foetal abnormalities and most significant,

household in a gas-affected area would have spent at least Rs 2,000 on consultation fees and the costly medicines prescribed by these private doctors. Doctors at Hamidia openly admit that patients approach them when every other form of therapy has failed. "Psychological therapy helps," admits a government doctor frankly. "That's where private doctors score. But, broncho-dilators and B-complex tablets are not the answer. Doctors here (in government hospitals) are on a publication 'trip'. Hardly any of them can provide anything but symptomatic treatment, yet they rush around, writing papers on MIC poisoning," he says matter-of-factly.

**SURPRISINGLY ENOUGH**, there are no medical research institutions in Bhopal which focus on MIC poisoning and its after-effects — the task is the sole domain of the Indian Council for Medical Research. Moreover, the prestigious 125-bed Jawaharlal Nehru Hospital, inaugurated last year

the discovery of MIC antibodies in the blood of those exposed to the gas, tend to suggest that the true magnitude of the disaster will only be known in the years to come.

This is borne out by reports of a possible settlement of the Bhopal case for a figure somewhere between US\$ 500 and 650 million. Union Carbide has reportedly offered US \$ 350 million as a down payment and the balance over the next 10 years. According to *The New York Times*, the government and Union Carbide have arrived at a tentative agreement on the basic structure of the compensation package including the different classes of claimants: the heirs of the 2,600 killed are to receive US\$ 166 a month; the "approximately 20,000 who are likely to suffer lifelong health problems", will receive US\$1,000 per annum each; and the 177,000 "who suffered minor injuries lasting one or

(see box) for the exclusive use of gas victims has now been turned into a general hospital, according to a senior doctor working there. "MIC cases comprise 20-30 per cent of our patients," he says calmly. Is the hospital not meant principally for the gas victims? "Yes, but the number of such cases has reduced considerably. We do get patients complaining of gastric and other problems but only a small percentage have suffered long-term damage. We have had no cases of genetic damage or extensive lung damage. And, of course, we are never absolutely certain that the problems the gas-patients face are due to exposure to MIC," he adds nonchalantly. The roseate picture he paints of a reduced number of gas-affected patients, most of them free from recurring or long-term damage, is in stark contrast to the harrowing problems encountered by victims of a disease that has no cure.

A senior doctor at Hamidia Hospital expresses his disgust at the cynicism or deliberate myopia exhibited

two weeks" will receive US\$500 a year.

In November 1986, the government had, for the first time, attempted to quantify its claim against Union Carbide. Apprehensive that the corporation was depleting its assets in order to defeat the claims of the Bhopal victims, the government secured an undertaking from the corporation that it would retain "unencumbered assets" of US\$ 3.1 billion to satisfy any decree rendered against it.

As we go to press, in the absence of any clear indication that a settlement between Union Carbide and the Government of India is in the offing, the case has been posted for hearing on the quantum of interim relief and the framing of issues. Significantly, however, by being party to a settlement based on a 10-year payment cycle, the government has indicated, by implication, its willingness to accept all financial responsibility or liability for the Bhopal victims thereafter (that is, after the 10 year period).

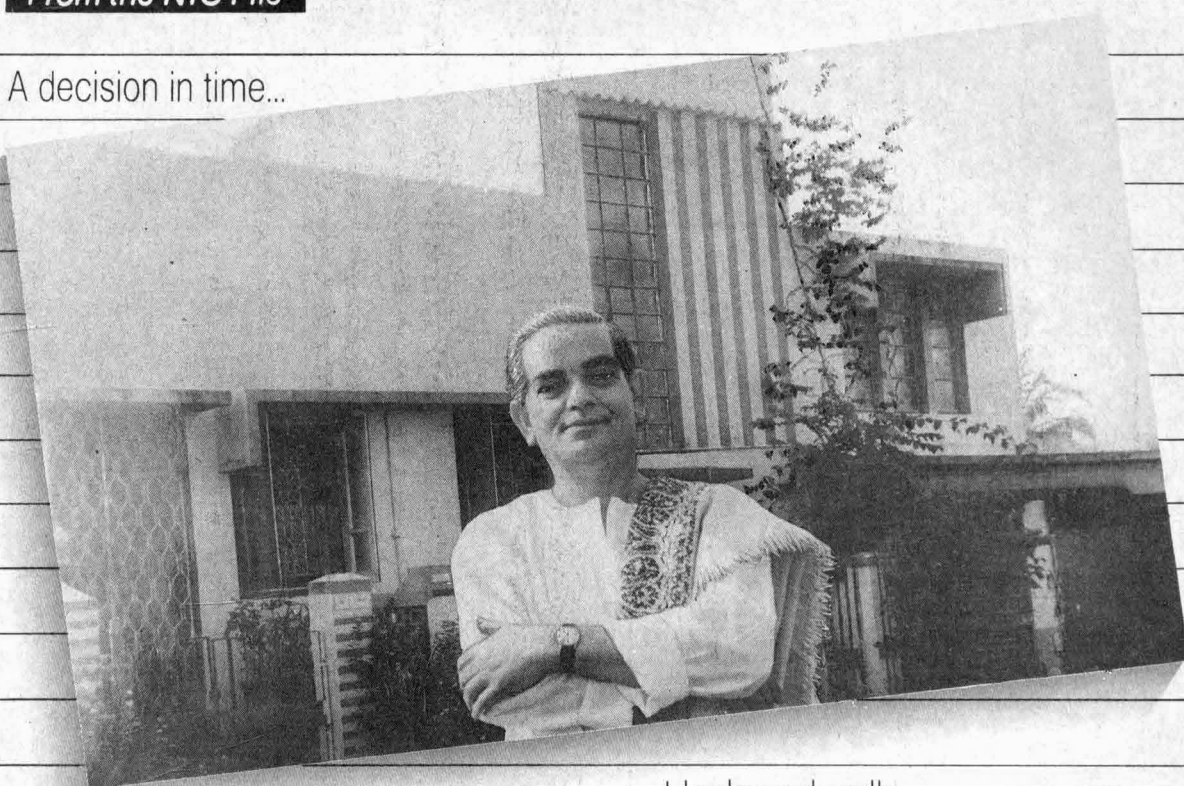
by government doctors in Bhopal. "Our own doctors claim that people are not suffering any more, despite the overwhelming evidence (to the contrary) that they encounter daily," he says irritably. "No one can help the gas victims. Those who profess to be great sympathisers are usually the ones with ulterior motives. Take the voluntary groups that landed in Bhopal soon after the leak — most of them were publicity-seekers. Where are they today?" his voice drips sarcasm. "Why just the voluntary groups — everyone has had his/her share of the pickings. Doctors, lawyers, journalists, documentary film-makers, petty officials — they all swooped down like vultures to feed on the carcass of the Bhopal gas tragedy. And this will go on and on."

His words echo the hopelessness of thousands of Bhopal's gas victims who were doomed the minute they inhaled methyl isocyanate that fateful night of December 2, 1984. For them, the real tragedy of Bhopal is to have survived it. ♦



**From the NIC File**

A decision in time...



Provash C. Basu. Age : 62.

Understanding husband.

Father of two adorable daughters.

Both recently married.

Proud owner of a small one-storied house,  
built with his entire life's savings.

Last week his cooking stove burst.

No major damage, except

blackened walls

and broken glasspanes.

This week he made an important  
decision in his life. He had a meeting  
with National Insurance.

Provash C. Basu had realised  
the need to protect his precious  
house through a National Insurance  
Householders' Policy.\*

\* Our new Householders' Insurance Policy covers loss or damage of household goods due to fire and other allied perils including riot, strike or malicious act, storm, tempest, flood and inundation, including Burglary, Housebreaking, Larceny or Theft. In addition, cover can be selected under ten other sections as per the choice of the Insured on payment of additional premium. These covers are: All Risks, Plate Glass, Breakdown of Domestic Appliances, T V sets, Pedal Cycles, Hospitalisation and Public Liability and also Burglary, Housebreaking, Larceny or Theft.

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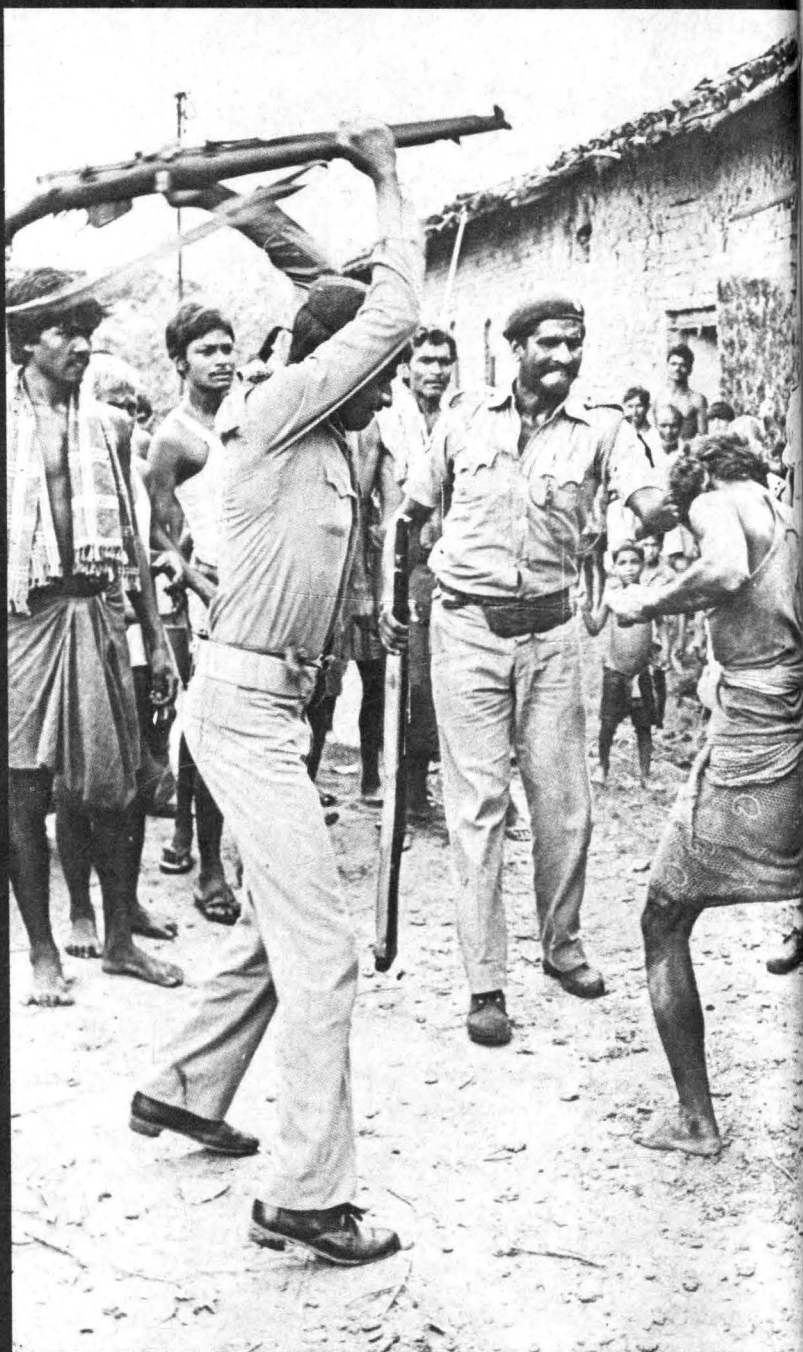
## REPORT

**I**N A SENSE, Amnesty International has updated its own report for 1987 — as far as India is concerned, at any rate — by publishing, in November, a long indictment of the role of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) in the communal riots in Uttar Pradesh. This triggered off a walkout by the opposition in the Lok Sabha when the government failed to take cognisance of the charges. Basically, Amnesty was highlighting the fact that the PAC has become a law unto itself, for instance, when asked to intervene in conflagrations like the Meerut riots in May 1987.

According to the London-based human rights organisation, members of the PAC deliberately killed unarmed civilians and disposed of some bodies by throwing them into rivers and canals. Needless to add, all the victims were Muslims. In an appendix, it lists 32 persons who were allegedly taken away from a particular locality in Meerut by the PAC on May 22, and have since “disappeared”. With the typical thoroughness that is the hallmark of such organisations in the West — in sharp contrast, one may say, to the usually slipshod documentation by activists in this country — the Amnesty report not only names names but also records ages, occupations, and addresses.

Another list of 29 refers to persons reportedly killed by the PAC in the village of Maliana, 10 km away, the following day. Reports Amnesty: “The PAC allegedly went on a rampage, setting fire to houses and shooting apparently unarmed civilians, killing men, women, and children. Sixteen charred bodies were found in the village and several others were found in a well, although the official number of dead is 15. Amnesty International believes that at least 30 people have died in Maliana, and has 29 names.”

**LIKE MANY ANTI-PEOPLE** organisations which still exist in the country today, the PAC is modelled on the Military Police, a brainchild of the



# OF RIGHTS AND WRONGS

PHOTOGRAPH BY KRISHNA MURARI KISHAN





DARRYL D'MONTE discusses the recent report by Amnesty International which condemns human rights abuses in India, including atrocities committed by the PAC, and the suppression of mass movements.

British. The Military Police was established to deal with civil disturbances during the struggle for independence – to “assist” the police when it was unwilling or unable to quell trouble. It should be obvious that its role was critical in communal riots. If members of the community which happened to be in a majority in a particular area felt that the police would not come to their rescue, so the theory went, the PAC would step in.

Unfortunately, its role, if anything, has been one of taking sides, blatantly, in a communal confrontation, rather than waging peace. Today, it has some 32,000 members in UP, where it functions as an arm of the state government in quelling riots. One simple fact tells the real story: in a state which not only happens to be the most populous in India, as much as 15 per cent of the population is Muslim, and only 2 per cent of the PAC can claim the same religion. In general, the National Police Commission, in its sixth report, in March 1981, alleged as much: “Police officers and men appear to have an unmistakable bias against a particular community while dealing with communal situations . . .” adding that the composition of the police is “heavily weighted in favour of the majority community.”

Amnesty refers to the discrimination that the PAC has been accused of since 1972. In 1978, members of the PAC allegedly deliberately shot down seven young men, without provocation, in Aligarh. The Minorities Commission during the Janata regime blamed the PAC for its involvement in the riot. A couple of years later, the PAC was back in the news with Moradabad, where reportedly, over 130 people died. There, once again, it was accused by the press and others of taking part in looting, arson, and killing civilians.

“There were similar allegations against the PAC during rioting in Meerut in late 1982,” points out Amnesty, “when they reportedly killed 30 civilians hiding in a building. In

February 1983, the late Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, after visiting victims of the 1982 riots in Meerut, stated that the government condemned wrong actions taken by members of the PAC and that, if any members of the force were found guilty, action would be taken against them.”

**MRS GANDHI, IT IS TRUE**, had a reputation – deservedly or not, it is difficult to say – for being more sensitive to the needs of minorities. It is a reputation that her son has also inherited. It is unlikely that she would have countenanced the private member’s bill, during the Janata period, which sought to place a ban on conversions from one religion to another. Her actions, however, sometimes spoke louder than her words. In the specific case of Meerut in 1982, a retired High Court Judge was entrusted with leading a judicial inquiry into the incidents, but the findings have not yet been published. For that matter, neither has the report of the earlier judicial inquiry into the happenings at Moradabad! Press reports say that inquiries into allegations against the PAC have either been prematurely stopped or the reports have not been made public. Concludes Amnesty, rather sombrely: “No convictions of PAC personnel are known to have resulted from any of these investigations.”

✓ The pattern is all too familiar: witness the report on the anti-Sikh riots, following Mrs Gandhi’s assassination, which has only now been acted upon, after persistent pressure from civil liberties groups – in particular, the Delhi-based People’s Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) and the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). The government of the day, irrespective of whether it belongs to the ruling party at the Centre or an opposition party, seeks to mollify public opinion after a communal outrage by appointing a committee to inquire into it. Memories are short, and by sheer attrition, the findings of official reports often vanish into oblivion. Even when

# REPORT

the reports are earnestly documented, like the Madon Commission which investigated the Bhiwandi riots some 17 years ago, the very period they sometimes take to complete their report — four years in Madon's case — renders them largely academic.

**AMNESTY HAS APPEALED** to the Indian government to take another look at the functioning of the PAC, and in particular, the use of firearms, during riots. One can, however, go one step further and question the very reliance on such paramilitary forces in dealing with *civilian* disturbances. It is a dangerous situation indeed if the army, or any such force, is looked upon as the last recourse in communal clashes; they are not equipped — socially, politically or in any other way — to tackle situations which call for the utmost tact and sensitivity. The very fact that the PAC itself went on a violent rampage over its pay and work conditions in 1973 — and prompted the resignation of Chief Minister Kamlapati Tripathi — speaks for itself.

The 1987 Amnesty report also expresses concern about the detention of hundreds of political detainees without charges or their being brought to trial under special "anti-terrorist" laws or preventive detention legislation. It will be all too easy to dismiss these charges, as they have been in the past — for instance, in the 1970s, over allegations of the torture of Naxalite prisoners — as the well-intentioned remarks of Western liberals who are out of touch with the realities of the political situation in a state like Punjab.

Admittedly, combating terrorism is easier said than done, but two points need to be made. One is that there is no excuse whatsoever for torture, staging "encounters", and resorting to any other illegal means for dealing with agitators. While Amnesty admits that it was not able to investigate reports that some killings of Sikh activists were the result of fake encounters staged by the police or paramilitary

forces, it cites how an official four-member committee, headed by a former judge, studied 35 encounters in the state, and reported in February 1986 that nearly all such cases were fake. In June 1986, a magistrate's inquiry found that the Border Security Force had been guilty of deliberate killings, and recommended that charges of murder be brought against those held responsible, but few inquiries have been held.

**ONE CONSEQUENCE** of such official lawlessness is that it breeds a climate of hate, suspicion, and mistrust, and makes a settlement that much more difficult to arrive at. Whether we like it or not, peace in Punjab cannot be achieved by the gun; it has to be won by winning over the hearts and minds of the people, and isolating the terrorists as being anti-people in their acts. Each terrorist gunned down in a fake encounter, needless to point out, becomes a martyr, and serves as an inspiration to a handful of otherwise peace-loving young men to take to the gun themselves.

Amnesty reports how some 379 Sikh detainees are still being held under the National Security Act in Jodhpur jail: "They were among some 1,500 people arrested when the Indian army attacked and entered the Golden Temple in June 1984. Amnesty International (in a letter to the authorities a year ago) expressed concern that the detainees had apparently been held beyond the two-year legal maximum, and that there could be some among them who had been arrested simply for having been present in the Golden Temple." It should not be beyond the collective capacities of our intelligence forces to separate those who are seasoned terrorists among these detainees, free the rest, and try those that remain behind bars.

Rajiv Gandhi should realise that the longer we incarcerate key Akali leaders, with or without trial, the longer we delay a settlement of the Punjab imbroglio. It is time that the realisation dawned that Punjab is es-

entially a *political* and not a religious or social problem; and it has to be solved politically. Politics is a war by other means, cynically; at best, however, it means sitting around a table and negotiating. There are specific demands, and these can be dealt with one by one, and in a process of give and take, it should be possible to work out a lasting peace.

Make no mistake that, as a recent cover story of the *Express Magazine* makes amply clear, the people of Punjab, whatever others may feel and



*M Kishko: raped by police in Beldhia.*

say, are for peace. The persistence with the police and army, however, is not conducive to a settlement; at best, it should be viewed as a temporary phase, not a permanent or long-lasting one. If there is still some doubt on this score, take a look at the peace waged in Mizoram and other North-eastern states. Some years ago, the army would have considered the restitution of self-rule an impossibility, in view of the guerilla warfare being fought there. Today, there has been a



sea-change, achieved through negotiations and the withdrawal of the armed forces.

**AMNESTY PROCEEDS** to cite the brutal suppression of movements of the landless in Bihar. Admittedly, some of these movements were led by Naxalites, and wherever violence has been used, the offenders must be tried and punished accordingly. But, as Amnesty observes, often the police collude with local landowners in putting down such resistance, with the

**Amnesty has appealed to the Indian government to take another look at the functioning of the PAC, and in particular, the use of firearms, during riots. One can, however, go one step further and question the very reliance on such paramilitary forces in dealing with civilian disturbances. It is a dangerous situation indeed if the army, or any such force, is looked upon as the last recourse in communal clashes.**

help of criminals and politicians.

It is worth recounting what happened at Arwal, in Gaya district — as mentioned earlier, public memory, including that of journalists, is proverbially short! A dispute developed over a plot of land, which was used by villagers until it was appropriated by a local landlord. "In league with police and local authorities," says Amnesty, "the landowner had the peasants' huts on the plot demolished. On April 19, (1986), the police

surrounded the Gandhi Library where a protest meeting organised by the left-wing group, Mazdoor Kisan Sangharsh Samiti (MKSS), was attended by over 500 people.

"Police opened fire and killed 23 men, women, and children. The police claimed they fired at MKSS workers who were trying to attack the nearby police station with lethal weapons, but local witnesses, journalists, and representatives of civil liberties bodies found no evidence of this. The Gaya District Magistrate, visiting the spot an hour later, reportedly described the police firing as 'unwarranted, unorganised and uncontrolled'.

"There were widespread demands for a judicial investigation, and in August, 25,000 people were reportedly arrested in order to prevent demonstrations before the state assembly. The Bihar government did not order an independent investigation but asked a member of the Board of Revenue to carry out an official inquiry. On October 6, he was reported to have found that the firing was not fully justified, and that the police used 'excessive force'. The Supreme Court was reported to have ordered the state government to grant compensation to the victims. By the end of 1986, it had not been paid, and no action was known to have been taken by those responsible."

**I HAVE QUOTED THIS** passage from the Amnesty report at length, for two reasons. Unlike Punjab, Bihar does not figure all that often in the press, although civil liberties activists have, for several years, been pointing to excesses committed by the state's machinery. Furthermore, the real danger is that repression in states like Bihar has come to be almost a permanent feature of life — again, irrespective of the party in power. (Remember the massacre at Belcchi, which Indira Gandhi made a big show of when she was out of office, by visiting the area to demonstrate her sympathy?) Indeed, Bihar can be seen as a microcosm of "Bharat", as distinct from,

and opposed to, modern-day "India". It harbours 40 per cent of the country's mineral wealth but is utterly dispossessed, even of its land. As a slogan of the Jharkhand Party (a utopian, land and forest-based "repossession" movement) puts it, "*Chhotanagpur, Santhal Pargana — Purey Bihar Ka Hai Khazana*." The entire wealth of Bihar itself is located in these two districts, which are also adivasi areas, and destitute. The movement, incidentally, has very recently witnessed the murder of one of its strongest leaders.

In case this Amnesty report, and the others that will doubtless follow, does not receive the attention it deserves, it may be just as well to dwell briefly on how Amnesty deals with its home situation in Britain. Our chauvinists will be consoled to learn that it does not mince words in condemning the inadequacy of investigations into fatal shootings by security forces in Northern Ireland. Indeed, Amnesty has written to the British government, expressing its concern at the government's failure in addressing reports of incidents in which unarmed individuals were shot dead by security forces, as documented in detail in its previous year's report. This should establish, beyond a shadow of doubt, Amnesty's *bona fides* and its willingness to take on its host country.

The point is surely not whether Amnesty or the PUDR or the PUCL or the press have the right to make allegations of this kind. It is surely an utter indictment of the society that we live in, that 40 years after Independence, we can still be collectively guilty — actively or by conspiracy of silence and apathy, which is often more malignant — of colluding with these atrocities against innocent people or turning a blind eye to them. There is no point berating the police and army alone for their excesses. Truly, as the Bible says, we will have to cast out the beam in our own eyes, instead of referring to the mote in those of others. ♦



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SN-1





# ENTER THE ENDORSER

A new phenomenon has emerged. As consumerism hits new highs, the career prospects of the Endorser promise fame, fortune, and fun. Even prominent sportsmen have been enticed by its limitless attractions. C Y GOPINATH offers an invaluable guide to this viable career option that no potential aspirant can be without.

**E**VEN AS RECENTLY as ten years ago, the career now known as Endorsing, was not recognised. But today, thanks to unprecedented advances like colour TV and the advent of one-day cricket, Endorsing is here to stay. It is an honourable and viable profession, there is pots of money to be had, and it requires next to no brains — an irresistible combination of qualifications that

will surely attract droves of young Indians. Below, in a simple, easy-to-follow format, I have attempted to highlight the main features of this up-and-coming career, and to answer any questions that the aspiring Endorser may have.

## WHO AND WHAT IS AN ENDORSER?

Simply put, an Endorser is a fellow

who is reasonably good at playing some game or the other, but, in addition, is a great fan of *things* such as toothpastes, suitings, condoms, bottled spices, hi-fi equipment, mosquito coils, rat poison, cars, engine oils, hair cream, shampoos, instant food mixes, airlines, two-track razors, package holidays. . . to mention but a few. In general, it may be said that *an Endorser is a sportsman who is*

*predisposed to deeply love anything which may be proved to have been made in a factory.*

The second exclusive trait of a 'natural' Endorser is that he experiences no embarrassment whatsoever in admitting that he likes all these things, either one at a time or all at once. He is able to say so with a broad and convincing grin on his face, and is willing to go to great lengths to establish that he is on the level, and is not just doing it for the cash. However, as there is a great deal of money in Endorsing, it is taken for granted that that is indeed what the blighter is in it for. A professional Endorser will do almost anything for the mo-

ney — from shaving in public, to dressing up in revolting clothes, or drinking ghastly tea — to name but a few.

It is no longer true that you have to be a very great sportsman, or a 'natural' Endorser, to succeed in this profession. A dynamic economy has a wide range of products and services, and with a little planning, hard work, discipline, and a large measure of sycophancy, you, too, can milk corporate budgets and grow rich and famous.

## WHY BE AN ENDORSER?

My answer to this is 'Why not?' Here at last is a profession that does not require a graduate degree or a lengthy job interview. In addition, there is no need to wear a tie all the time, no 9-to-5 timings, and no boss whatsoever. You only have to step in front of a camera and utter words to the effect of "Yeah, I like it a lot!" A moron could do that — and usually does. So, why not *you*? You will be amazed at the result, and once you get moving on the right track, you will realise how easy it is, and how

much money you *can* make. So, let us get down to brass tacks, and examine what is really in it for you.

## WHAT ARE YOUR PROSPECTS?

Even the sky is not the limit for a successful Endorser. Once your credibility has been established beyond doubt, you will be asked to 'like' things you never dreamed you would like. Experience teaches you how to speed up the process of liking things, and a very seasoned Endorser will not require more than half-a-minute alone in a quiet room with the object to be 'liked', to develop a deep affection and warmth for it.

In the long run, what separates the expert Endorser from the rank amateur are the little tricks he uses to bring himself to spontaneously 'like' the things that are placed before him. It goes without saying that the better he is at this, the better his prospects are. We will now examine the steps by which a beginner may carve a profession for himself in this line.

## WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

It is assumed that the candidate is reasonably good in some sport or the other. A word of caution here: leave cricket and tennis alone for far, far better Endorsers than you are ever likely to become, already rule the roost — namely, Sumeet Gavaskar, Kapil Dev Burman, and the inimitable Vijay Amritpur of James Bond fame. It would be foolishness itself to try and compete with these titans, whose abilities to like all sorts of small, insignificant, highly-priced, and socially irrelevant bric-a-brac are, by now, legendary. Be wise. Pick another sport.

But which one? Remember, what is important is not *which* sport you pick, but how good you appear to be at it. For these who are not athletically inclined and yet seek careers as Endorsers, there is a relatively simple game played in North India called *kho*, and which is primarily concerned with chasing a handkerchief around a lawn. It is easy to excel at





this, and the competition is not stiff. Others may consider badminton, quoits, lawn-tennis, croquet, and even — why not? — *kabaddi*.

Once you become reasonably familiar with the rules of the game, send out spurious press-releases to the populace at large, introducing yourself as the new name the world is going to be hearing a lot of in forthcoming years. Initially, some small vernacular newspapers, such as the *Prem Ladi* of Hoshiarpur district, will be the only ones to pick up the item. After which, Reuters or AP will immediately pick it up, and you will receive a small mention in the international press. Once this happens, the local newspapers will wake up with a start. And, before you know it, you will be the talk of the town. However, this process may take a few years, so you will have to find something to do in the meantime. Maybe your Dad could help.

#### TRAINING FOR THE JOB — HOW?

The only training you really need is in the art of liking a range of things at short notice. This is, surprisingly, not as easy as it sounds. To discover this for yourself, try sitting alone in a room with a bowl full of Maggi noodles and try liking it. You will experience a turbulent range of emotions, and may even barf.

So, set aside approximately an hour every morning and evening, and practise hard before a mirror, using a range of distasteful things that you would normally steer clear of: instant idlis, Prudent toothpaste, Jai khus soap, Double Cola, Leela Lace, Aqua Velva after-shave lotion, Vimal suitings, Parle-G biscuits, and so on. Fight the initial revulsion. Then, in a measured but firm tone repeat, "I am a professional Endorser. And I like it. I like it, I like it, I like it. The world is full of beautiful products on which crores of rupees are being spent. Why can't I get a piece of the action? I can, and I will. My Mercedes depends on it. I like khus soap, I like Monkey Brand toothpowder, I like Babubhai



Jagjivandas, I like Jiyajee suitings, I like them all. And most of all, I like the *moolah!*"

Admittedly, it is a rather long statement to go on reciting to yourself, but, I am afraid I do not know of anything shorter which actually works. So, do try it: it is the formula that has made innumerable sportsmen millionaires.

#### PREPARING A PORTFOLIO — HOW?

When you approach manufacturers — and do not kid yourself, kiddo, it will be a while before manufacturers approach you — it is extremely important to make them realise how good an Endorser you could be if *only* given a chance. It is a good idea to show some proof of your hidden potential — nothing persuades one like a demonstration. But, what would such a portfolio consist of? I reproduce below a verbatim report of one such portfolio, in fact, presented by a student of mine. He was a provincial lad who spoke English in a distinct Burdwan accent. Yet, today, he is a major Endorser of village-level

dental products in Class 'C' towns.

The candidate, let us call him 'M', enters the client's office, dressed simply in a checked shirt, Reebok shoes, and photochromatic sunglasses, and chews *paan* to put the client at ease. With the client's permission, he gives the following demonstration:

"I am lahving toothpastes, specially Cloj-Ap. Cloj-Ap geeves me Cloj-Ap confidence. Nowadays, I am seemply going to girls and saying all sorts of theengs to them, and they are beehing bhery impressed.

"I am also haveeng one soft spot for Dinner Club curd..."

"Curd?" queried the client.

"Yais, sar!" answered the candidate. "I am hawing identity-curd, ration-curd, post-curd, and library-curd, bhat, heet ees a tragedy that I am not hawing Dinner Club curd..."

"How would you endorse a lathe-machine?" interrupted the client.

M thinks hard, but only for a second, "Before I purchased a lathe-machine, my wife, she was all thee time complaining I am not making har happy. Now we have lathe-machi-

# HUMOUR

ne, and she is fulfilled. Thanks to lathe-machine, my marriage is saved. Long levee lathe-machine!"

You will be surprised how many clients actually need someone with M's credibility: one who talks to the people, in their voice, with their inflections, and their lack of coherence.

## HOW SHOULD YOU FIX YOUR RATES?

Do please bear in mind that it will be a long while before anyone will consider asking you what your normal rates are. No one is interested. In most cases, they will *tell* you what you will be paid. However, as you will be making a full-time profession out of Endorsing, it is worth knowing the basis on which rates are finalised. Essentially, rates are directly proportional to the *degree of endorsement*, which is now enshrined as CY Gopinath's First Law of Endorsement. In brief, it says, "The professional fees that an Endorser charges will rise in direct relation with the number and quality of the adjectives that he brings to bear upon the product."

Similarly, CYG's Second Law states, "The more the area of an Endorser's body required to participate in the endorsement, the higher will be the professional fees charged. An Endorser's body is to be treated as real estate."

CYG's Third Law runs thus: "An Endorser may not say the same or similar things about two products in the same or similar category without causing a serious dip in his income-profile."

I give below a sample of statements about, say, Prudent Toothpaste, and how much a professional Endorser would charge for reciting each.

"Eet is not a bad toothpaste." (Rs 1,000)

"I tail you, eet is a bhery good toothpaste." (Rs 2,000)

"God ees good. He has maide Prudaint Toothpaste far thee comman man. He is wanderfool!" (Rs 4,000)

"Thees ees a bhairy, bhairy good

toothpaste. I am evary day forcing my missas to use it. She is also geeving cheeldran Prudaint." (Family rates: Rs 10,000)

For a small consideration, you could also offer to smear Prudent Toothpaste all over yourself to demonstrate that it has unexpected therapeutic benefits for the skin, and thus push your fees up to Rs 20,000. This would be in accordance with CYG's Second Law.

## THE FUTURE: CREATIVE ENDORSEMENT?

In the long run, as more and more Endorsers enter the field, and the competition hots up, you will find markets becoming segmented. Whole tribes of sportsmen-Endorsers specialising in saying nice things about highly specific product categories, such as mixed spices or Vee-line Underwear, will emerge. Do not rule out the possibility that you will have to try hard in order to survive in such a market. What should your strategy

be? As one who has successfully advised thousands of youngsters on sound career choices, here is my suggestion: pioneer a move away from *things* to *thoughts*. Just think: a virgin area where you can endorse an infinite range of thoughts for fun and profit.

You are obviously wondering what sort of thoughts I am referring to, and how there could be any money in it. Here are some examples:

I sense that there is money to be made in Gujarat.

There is nothing like fresh fruit-juice for health.

Have a coconut every day.

I really think there should be a law about burping.

These are some examples of thoughts that can earn money for large corporations like the Gujarat investment corporations, the fruit-juice vendors of Bombay, the coconut wholesalers, and the pharmaceutical companies dealing with anti-flatulents and cures for dyspepsia.

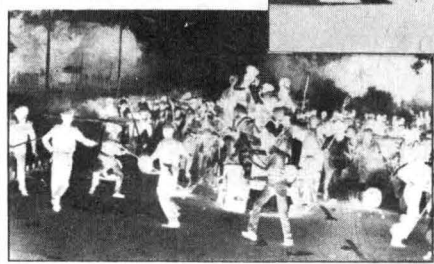
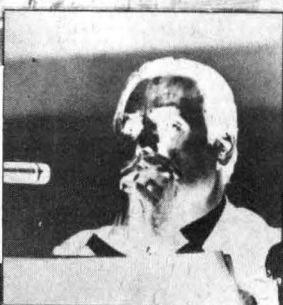
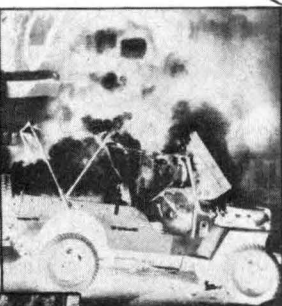
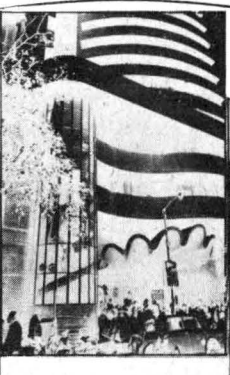
Provided that you are sufficiently canny about it, you could find a way to have all your utterances sponsored by one company or the other. During the course of the day, you could end up speaking very little, but whenever you *do* say something, you will receive a cheque on the spot from the small bloke who follows you around. If you become really good at it, corporations would conceivably be willing to spend large sums on the off-chance that you may say something nice about one of their products in passing.

For the moment, however, for beginners, these examples of Endorsing are no more than the pots of gold at the end of the various rainbows they are beginning to chase. Endorsing can be fun provided you are ready to put in the sort of hard work it needs – and if you are ready to do that, then, like Sumeet Gavaskar, you can be a very rich man indeed. If you want more details and constructive advice, please feel free to write to me, although the chances that I will reply are about even. ♦





**imprint**  
**PRESENTS**



scandal subsided when another exploded in its face. And the ruling party found itself increasingly pushed into a corner, unable to counter the relentless onslaught of criticism levelled against it by sections of the press, and a motivated opposition which extracted the maximum political mileage out of the volatile situation. On the following pages, **Imprint** presents an exciting special feature which evaluates the economic trends in 1987, the nation's performance on the sports field and on the cultural scene, and focuses on some of the most significant events — both national and regional — that contributed to 1987 being one of the most turbulent years in the annals of recent history. A year which will undoubtedly have lasting repercussions.



**Rajiv Gandhi: "We are not suppressing the truth."**

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him the severe censure of his colleagues in the ruling party. And what followed is well-known — V P Singh, the old Congress stalwart, resigned.

However, the fate of the internal inquiry that the then Defence Minister had precipitated into the kickbacks, remains shrouded in mystery, and to date, despite demands from the Opposition, the government has remained tight-lipped about the issue, leaving both the public and Parliament in the dark about the identity of the middlemen or agents who had received the kickbacks.

If the HDW deal introduced 'kickbacks' into the vocabulary, Bofors made it a household word. On April 16, 1987, Swedish National Radio's report, that approximately Rs 6.6 crore had been paid to Indian intermediaries as kickbacks in the Rs 1,500 crore contract for the purchase of 400 mm howitzers, caused immediate outrage, and gave the Opposition another round of ammunition to use against the government.

Immediate denials were made. The Vice-President of A B Bofors in Sweden declared that "no such bribes or commissions have been paid". Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi hastily attempted to take refuge in the statement and echoed, "Sweden has confirmed that there were no middlemen and no money was paid into Swiss banks."

**BUT ON JUNE 4**, when the Swedish Audit Bureau Report confirmed the revelations, in fact, hiking up the previous figure to Rs 50 crore, adding that sums had been paid into a Swiss bank account code-named 'Lotus', Parliament was compelled to react quickly in the face of this incontrovertible evidence. Rajiv Gandhi declared that "nobody would be spared". But, contradictory statements and prevarications succeeded in clouding over the issues, and despite the government's ostensible eagerness to arrive at the truth, no immediate probe was initiated, and no official requests made either to the Swedish government to launch an inquiry into the alleged payments, or to the Swiss government to instruct the bank to release information.

An official inquiry was finally launched on July 28, 1987. Unofficially, the government launched another inquiry which had all the trappings of a covert operation — raids, interrogations, bugging, and even the shadowing of defence agents and arms dealers, caused speculation that the ruling party was anxious to seize documents that could prove embarrassing.

Meanwhile, conjectures about who could have played the role of middlemen were rife in the Capital. The name

of Win Chaddha — an agent clearly associated with the company — figured prominently, and a search for him revealed that he was in the US and beyond the purview of Indian law. To date, the government has still not set in motion the extradition process although orders for his presence in India have been issued. Other names that were bandied about included those of Ajitabh Bachchan and the Hinduja brothers, as being possible conduits in the deal. Indeed, the news that Ajitabh Bachchan was the owner of property in Switzerland, coupled with his close connections with the Gandhi family, strengthened reigning suspicions.

**AS THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUED** to evade the issues, it sank deeper into a morass — seemingly of its own making. A press campaign led by *Indian Express* consistently hounded the government to divulge names, own up to its own culpability in the affair, unearth facts about the deal, and take punitive action.

The Indian government surprised the Opposition by producing copies of correspondence between itself and Bofors — a correspondence that showed that the government had not remained idle, but also one which raised more questions than it supplied answers.

It was with great expectations, then, that Bofors President Mosberg was welcomed to India in September, but any hopes that the names of the middlemen would be forthcoming were quickly dashed — the names were not made known even to the Joint Parliamentary Committee investigating the affair.

The entire affair gave rise to several subsidiary debates, including one on the suitability of the guns — the Bofors gun deal has been the largest export order to be signed by the Company, and is indeed the largest defence contract signed by the Indian government.

As the web surrounding the issue becomes more intricate, the barrage of questions hurled at the government has become more vociferous. The extent of involvement of key government personnel in the Bofors affair is far from being determined. The progress of the parliamentary inquiry, appointed by the government, remains slow, and it will be months before concrete evidence is unearthed and satisfactory answers given.

**EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE** of the major controversies served to eclipse those that involved both the ruling party and others, including the Opposition, at a regional level, but these, too, made considerable impact, and called into question the frequent abuse of power by those in leadership positions.

In Andhra Pradesh, N T Rama Rao is currently facing as many as four writ petitions on a variety of charges including the granting of an exemption under the Urban Land Ceilings Act vis-à-vis film studios and property be-



# FOUL PLAY

**December 31:** S Gurumurthy's house is raided in search of documents pertaining to Fairfax.

**January 24, 1987:** V P Singh is transferred to the Defence Ministry.

**February 25:** V P Singh receives a telex from the Indian Embassy in Bonn disclosing that Rs 30 crore have been given to unknown Indian intermediaries in the Rs 425 crore West German Submarine Deal.

**March 11:** Bhurelal Sharma and Vinod Pande (Revenue Secretary) are transferred.

**March 13:** Another raid on Gurumurthy's house: two letters, purportedly written by Gordon McKay of Fairfax Group Ltd, referring to investigations into Ajitabh Bachchan's property in Switzerland and the probe into the financial dealings of Reliance Industries Ltd, are seized. The letters also mention the name of Bombay Dyeing Chairman, Nusli Wadia, as paying half a million dollars by way of a fee to Fairfax.

**March 14:** Gurumurthy is arrested and interrogated chiefly regarding his information about Ajitabh Bachchan.

**April 6:** The Fairfax contract is terminated by the government and the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission appointed for inquiry into the terms of the contract.

**April 9:** V P Singh issues a press note on the kickbacks in the West German Submarine deal and orders an inquiry.

**April 12:** V P Singh resigns.

**April 16:** An announcement on Swedish National Radio discloses that approximately Rs 6.6 crore have been paid as 'kickbacks' to Indian agents in the Rs 1,500 crore Bofors Gun deal with India.

**April 29:** The Swedish Government refers the matter to the National Audit Bureau.

**June 4:** India receives a censored version of the Audit Bureau report which states that 'winding-up' charges to the tune of Rs 50 crore have been given to Indian agents.

**July 13:** The Fairfax Commission issues a notice to Nusli Wadia to appear before it.

**July 19:** The Prime Minister expels V P Singh from the Congress (I).

**July 28:** The government moves a motion in the Lok Sabha seeking to set up a 30-member Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe into the Bofors scandal.

**August 14:** The Fairfax Commission begins its hearings, *in camera*.

**August 20:** Sweden's senior Public Prosecutor, Lars Rinsberg, launches an investigation into the charges against Bofors.

**September 18:** Bofors President Pere Ove Mosberg and Chief Jurist of Nobel Industries, Gotlin, appear before the Joint Parliamentary Committee, but do not divulge names.

**November 5:** The Joint Parliamentary Committee investigating the Bofors deal gets an extension upto the first week of the next budget session.

**November 30:** After two extensions, the Thakkar-Natarajan Commission submits its report to Finance Secretary S Venkitaraman.

**December 9:** The Thakkar-Natarajan Commission report is presented in both Houses of Parliament.

longing to his family, and helping his sons-in-law to procure industrial licenses. In Karnataka, Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde's son was accused of accepting bribes to the tune of Rs 2.5 lakh; his nephew, Ganesh Hegde, was accused of smuggling rice. Charges of nepotism were also levelled at Congress (I) Chief Minister of Bihar, Bindeshwari Dubey, and the expose' of the nexus between the government and the local mafia dons of the coal belt also invited censure. In West Bengal, the Special Audit Report submitted to the government in December 1986 indicates the direct involvement of Chief Minister Jyoti Basu's personal secretary, Ashok Bose, in swindling Rs 24.55 lakh and fraudulently withdrawing Rs 7.55 lakh from the Treasury at Alipore, over a period of five years.

And in its latest supplementary report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) revealed gross abuse of drought and flood-relief funds (given in 1985-1986) by several state governments: a total of Rs 102.03 crore ear-

marked for relief has remained unutilised, Rs 83.29 crore has been diverted for other purposes, and a further Rs 101.47 crore has been utilised for liquidating the liabilities of earlier years.

The list is by no means exhaustive. Still, although these and other scandals elicited considerable criticism, it was kickbacks and Fairfax that consistently occupied centre-stage; the political fall-out has been grave for the ruling party and its reputation has been irrevocably tarnished. The end of the year presents an opportune moment in which to recall a promise made by the Prime Minister: "We are not suppressing the truth, we are not hiding anything, we are not shirking or running away, we are going into the greatest details." Juxtaposed against the volley of questions that still remain unanswered in the wake of the web of intrigues and scandals that have dominated 1987, the statement is clearly at best well-intentioned, and at worst, an outright lie. ♦

# PARCHED

1987  
HIGHLIGHTS

**THE STERILE FINGERS OF DROUGHT** once again gripped the country in 1987. Rivalling the drought of 1965-1966, it stalked 262 districts and 21 states, and for 200 million people, the summer of 1987 was a nightmare. Termed the worst drought of the century, the ravages were borne largely by Rajasthan, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, parts of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Orissa. In states where the merciless sun did not scorch the earth dry, the rivers in spate spoke the language of destruction — Bihar, West Bengal, and the Northeastern states reeled under devastating floods. The country reaped the infructuous harvest of a planning policy that lacked perspective — the burden of which will be carried into the new year.

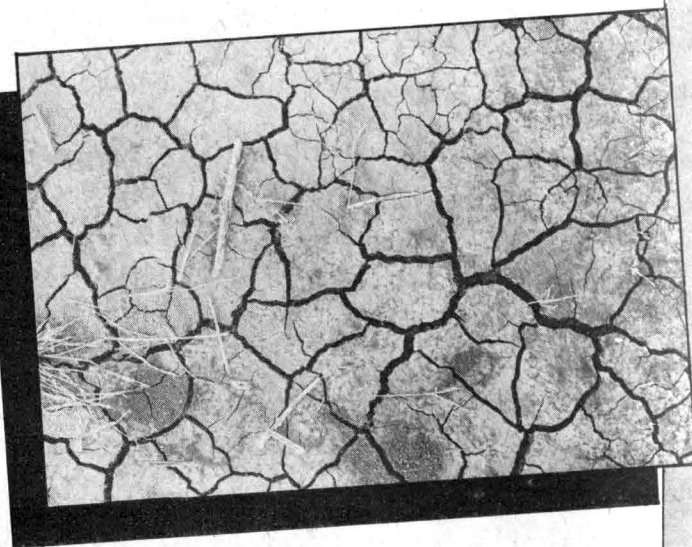
By early July it was confirmed that the monsoon had failed. Acres of land were rendered fallow. Acute drinking water shortages were faced by the country. Irrigational facilities were found to be totally inadequate to meet the contingency. Crops and property losses ran as high as Rs 11,400 crore in Himachal Pradesh; crop losses of upto Rs 130 crore were reported in Jammu & Kashmir, Rs 653.94 crore in Andhra Pradesh, Rs 2,750 crore in Gujarat, Rs 598 crore in Punjab, and Rs 13 crore in Karnataka. In three of the worst hit states, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Orissa, between 50 to 90 per cent of the crops were damaged. The damage caused by floods in Bihar was estimated at Rs 13 crore by mid-September.

In the Deccan, where during a normal year, water is struck at a depth of a 100 feet, the water-table fell as low as 300 feet. The scarcity of water resulted in the drastic reduction of area under crop cultivation. For instance, in Gurgaon district, only 10,000 hectares of the 1.5 lakh hectares sown last year were cultivated. In Madhya Pradesh, about 14 lakh hectares were damaged due to the lack of adequate rains. In Rajasthan, crops in about 37 lakh hectares withered away.

Inevitably, the total amount of available cattle-fodder declined sharply and was sufficient for only 30 per cent of the country's 40 crore cattle. In Haryana, fodder to the value of Rs 202 crore was lost, and in Punjab, where 10 lakh of the 84 lakh heads of cattle were affected, the loss was an estimated Rs 159 crore. But a mere listing of figures does precious little to trace the magnitude of suffering and impoverishment.

**THE HUMAN FACE OF DROUGHT** is one drawn by hunger and despair: it is the story of the struggle for survival, in which hunger forces girls into prostitution, thousands die of starvation, epidemics and mass migrations occur daily, and in which Kanna Gamethi, a Bhil tribal of Suraj-gadh village, hacked his five children to death and hanged himself because he had no means of earning a livelihood.

A glance at the distribution of natural resources — land, water, forests, and minor minerals — reveals that these re-



sources are made available for the benefit of a select few. In times of drought, when some of these resources are scarce, there is no doubt as to whose needs are prioritised. In Kheda district of Gujarat, instances of well-grabbing by higher castes leading to the denial of water to Harijans were reported. Emaciated men and cattle have been replaced by tractors — tractor sales were reported to have increased. The brunt has undoubtedly been borne by the poor. Of the 200 million people affected by drought, 50 per cent are the landless poor and marginal farmers. For most of them there has been no employment, and even when work is available, they have been compelled to work for a pittance. In fact, in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, a rise in the number of bonded labourers was noted. A few more families have been added to the swelling numbers of landless peasants who have been forced to sell their possessions and migrate.

The benefits of drought relief will largely accrue to the rich farmer. Complaints about relief measures have come from all over the country. As one voluntary relief worker put it: "These measures are designed to subsidise the rich — the big farmers, businessmen, and government officials. In most states, labour contracts for drought-relief works have been awarded to big contractors who are not even paying statutory minimum wages to their workers."

Such reports have done little for the image of the ruling party, which has already suffered a decline in its popularity ratings. But the government has not remained silent in the face of the present calamity. It has followed the established practice of meeting every crisis with a new slogan. "We will not let any one starve!" proclaimed Rajiv Gandhi while addressing the Chief Ministers' conference on drought relief at New Delhi. "It is the poorest and the weakest who are the hardest hit. Their needs are most urgent. Meeting these needs is our highest priority. Their minimum needs



will be met." He clarified that "the primary responsibility for drought management rests with the states. . ."

**AFTER MOUTHING PIOUS PLATITUDES**, the government busied itself with international and cultural affairs: at the SAARC summit, it vociferously supported the setting up of a 200,000 tonne food reserve to be used in times of emergency by SAARC countries; it stationed its troops in Sri Lanka allowing defence expenditure to overrun plan outlay, at a cost of Rs 1,500 crore to the Exchequer. Further, the administration did not hesitate to incur expenditure running into several crores on the Prime Minister's visit to Vancouver. In keeping with tradition, the drought was used to gain political mileage as well as to swing attention away from the various allegations of corruption that the government was buckling under at the time, and television coverage focussed almost entirely on the government, in its role as benefactor, doling out aid and relief to the needy.

The government also came to the rescue of those affected by drought by appointing committees, causing V P Singh to declare: "There is a flood of committees but a drought of action." A plethora of government bodies already exist to deal with problems thrown up by drought: the Central Board of Irrigation and Power was established as long ago as 1927 to co-ordinate large-scale irrigation flood control and power generation; the Central Water Commission was set up in 1945; the National Water Development Agency came into being immediately thereafter; the Water and Power Development Consulting Service was started in 1969; and the Brahmaputra Board, established in 1980 for surveys and drawing a master water plan for controlling floods. And yet India's record in water management is dismal — only 24 per cent of the arable hectareage is under irrigation, falling much lower than that in China, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

Its record in land management is also appalling. Eminent environmentalists have traced the recurring cycle of drought and floods to the denudation of forests and the reduction in vegetal cover due to over-grazing. A minimal forest cover of 33 per cent of the country's total landmass is required for maintaining the ecological and environmental balance: India's forest cover in relation to its total landmass is only 19.52 per cent — much below what is required for preserving the ecological balance. In fact, official estimates reveal that 53 per cent of India's total landmass, approximately about 175 million hectares, has been turned into wasteland.

**DEFICIENT RAINFALL MAY**, to some extent, explain the drought situation today, but in no way can it explain why the government has failed, repeatedly, to find an effective solution to a recurrent phenomenon. In mid-September, a cabinet committee formed to tackle drought announced emergency measures, including schemes for fodder cultivation, subsidies to farmers, special rigs for ground-water exploitation, the banning of some food exports, and a decision to import approximately two million tonnes of oil seeds and maize. But measures taken in fits and starts are merely political, and not scientific. The Centre cannot assume that its responsibility ends with the distribution of

grants on an ad hoc basis — the present demand of the states adds up to Rs 6,800 crore. And the mobilisation of resources to meet the present contingency is going to be an uphill task. The World Bank has come to the Indian government's aid with US\$350 million (Rs 455 crore), a loan to help the economy tide over the near-crisis situation triggered off by the unprecedented drought. However timely the gesture, one would hold their motives suspect — the PM's commitment to purchase defence equipment from the US on his recent visit to that country, only confirms reigning suspicions.

Instead of appointing committees, it is time that the administration sprung into action. Even if the schemes drawn up by it so far are properly implemented, it can go a long way in alleviating the suffering of the poor farmers. Unfortunately, instances of corruption have been all too common and defeat the very purpose of most of these schemes. The Employment Guarantee Scheme is a typical example. In fact, the Prime Minister was to discover for himself that against the statutorily guaranteed daily wage of Rs 11 promised to workers at a particular site in Gujarat, the workers were being paid only Rs 2.

**ECONOMISTS POINT OUT** that the highest priority must be given to ensuring food security. It is imperative that food grains be imported and buffer stocks be released through the public distribution system with every care being taken to prevent hoarding. Labour intensive schemes for the creation of permanent assets and drought proofing would also be a wise investment. A permanent solution would necessitate a revamping of the present economic policy, the rooting out of corrupt and inefficient officials, paying greater attention to traditional irrigation systems, and the protection of the environment. If the government drags its feet now, the threat of famine looms large.

In fact, the Union Agriculture Minister Dhillon's optimism that: "The country would be able to meet the situation created by the abnormal monsoon behaviour this year," seems to be misplaced. The portents are bad, and the Seventh Plan's targets have been thrown into total disarray. The kharif foodgrains output has declined by 37 per cent. It remains to be seen whether the rabi crop will meet plan targets as the fallen water-tables and insufficient moisture content in the soil, will impede extensive sowing in unirrigated areas.

The fall in agricultural incomes will probably be around 24 per cent, thus setting off a chain reaction in the industrial sector due to demand recession. (The growth rate being predicted for the industrial sector is not more than 4 per cent.) The gap between demand and supply of foodgrains will force the government to fall back on imports to meet consumption requirements. At least 12 million tonnes, costing the Exchequer US\$2 million (Rs 2.6 crore), will need to be imported along with edible oil and petroleum products, thus adversely affecting the balance of payments position. Budgetary resources will be severely strained and sharp cuts in plan outlay are predicted. A double-digit inflation also threatens to push up prices and the cost of living index.

The ailing polity will inevitably face a situation of growing economic emergency. ♦

# A LACKLUSTRE YEAR

1987  
HIGHLIGHTS

**THE IDEA THAT LIBERALISATION** was somehow magically going to cure the ills of the Indian economy and propel it into an era of effortless growth was challenged by events in 1987. The dependence of agriculture on the monsoons was emphasised by a sharp fall in production after the monsoons failed for the fourth time in succession. Industry, which has sharply increased its production capacity over the last few years, faced demand stagnation and the possibility of a recession. Government revenues were unable to keep up with the growth in non-development spending, and the resulting fiscal crisis threatened to lead to a reduction in plan expenditure. Finally, in spite of a healthy growth in exports, the country may face a balance of payments problem caused by the decline in concessional finance and a bunching of repayments on foreign debts.

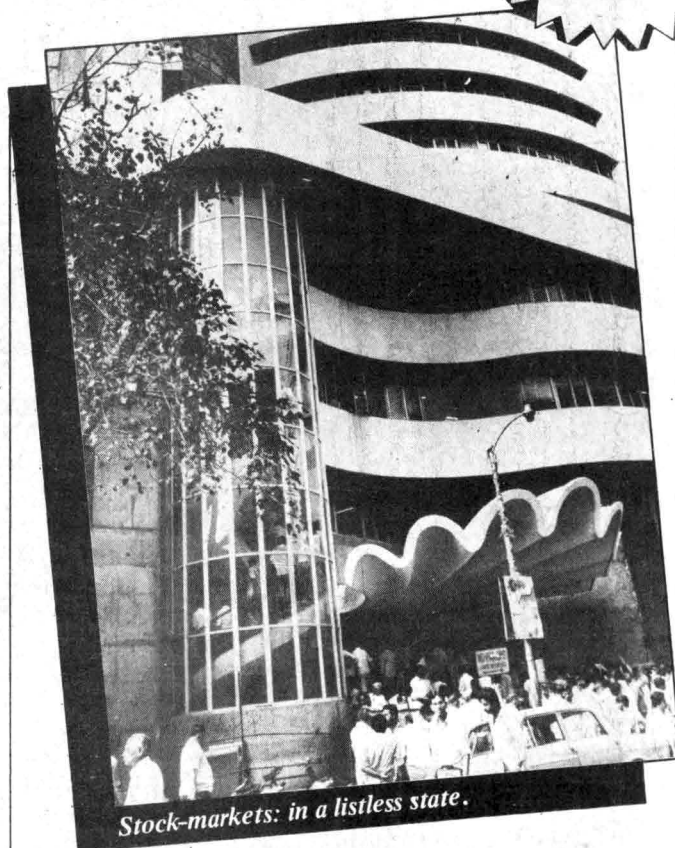
The tenuous state of the Indian economy was symbolised by the listless state of the stock-market. Though the Indian stock-markets were not affected by the crash in Wall Street, the All India Index of stock prices fell sharply down from the heady levels it had reached in 1985. The markets now have to recover the confidence of the host of new investors who caused stock prices to soar. The wariness of investors is, in part, a response to the sharp practices which invariably lead to many investors losing a bundle.

In an attempt to assuage such fears, a centralised body — the Securities Industries Board — will be established in January, 1988, and will regulate both the securities and the capital market. While the establishment of the board may check malpractices in the markets and generate a degree of investor confidence, the government has been less successful in persuading investors about the fundamental soundness of the Indian economy. In spite of efforts by financial institutions like the Unit Trust of India and the Life Insurance Company to buoy prices by making huge purchases, stock prices continued to decline.

The bearish sentiment was so strong that stock-markets were forced to put curbs on speculative sales, as the activities of bear operators threatened to lead to another precipitous slump in stock prices. What is driving prices down is the perception that the major sectors of the economy, agriculture and industry, face severe problems.

Agriculture was hit by the worst drought in over a decade. The distribution of rainfall during the last monsoon was worse than it was a year ago — an analysis conducted during the period June 1, 1987 to September 23, 1987, by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, revealed that only 37 per cent of the grass-cropped area received adequate rainfall compared to 57 per cent during the same period a year ago.

**THE CENTRE HAS ESTIMATED** that the total production of food grains (both kharif and rabi) is expected to be 137 million tonnes in 1986-1987, against last year's figure of 150 million tonnes, and a peak production of 152.4 million tonnes in 1983-1984. The fall in production will have an impact on poverty, prices, and the demand for



*Stock-markets: in a listless state.*

industrial goods, but most immediately, it will have an impact on the 40 per cent of the population — approximately 300 million — who live below the poverty line. A fall in production will also have an impact on prices — the wholesale price index has been rising steadily since April and further price increases are expected.

Poor harvests will affect the traditional agro-based industries directly — both cotton textiles and sugar fared poorly. Sugarcane production is dependent on irrigation, and as a result of the drought, cane production has been falling sharply in most states. Soaring cotton prices have hit the textile industry — production as well as despatch of the mill sector declined by 5.3 per cent and 5.1 per cent during January to September 1987, compared to the same period a year ago.

The slump in agricultural production will also lead to a decline in demand for industrial products; the agricultural sector has earned less this year and so its ability to consume industrial products will decline. The decline in demand takes place as industry is still in the process of adjusting to a more liberal policy environment.

**ONE OF THE FEATURES** of the new order is the greater freedom to enter into industrial production, as licensing has been relaxed. The government's attempt to reduce the amount of direct state control over the economy and allow a freer play to market forces has had other consequences. In certain sectors of the economy, investment and output



# NURSING SICK INDUSTRIES

ON JANUARY 12, 1987, the union government appointed the seven-member Board for Industrial and Finance Reconstruction (BIFR) under the chairmanship of Mr R Ganapati, former Union Secretary, Expenditure), to regulate the revival, rehabilitation, and profitable functioning of non-government industrial undertakings. The Board was established to carry out the dictates stipulated by the Sick Industrial Companies (Special Provisions) Act 1985, whose provisions *in toto* were spelt out by the government only on May 15, 1987.

The Act was passed to enable a timely detection of sick and potentially endangered companies, to facilitate the speedy determination of the preventive, ameliorative, remedial, and other necessary measures by a board of experts; and for an expeditious enforcement of those measures. The need for such a body has existed for a long time, given the unprecedented rise in the number of sick units at the turn of the decade. The latest annual report of the RBI, published in September 1987, estimates that a sum of Rs 4,665 crore of outstanding loans is blocked in sick units all over the country: the figure shows a 236.4 per cent hike over the data submitted for 1981, a trend which has continued.

The alarming RBI estimate may be better understood if one examines the performance of an industry like the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) at Ranchi, Bihar. Independent India's first and largest public sector industry, begun with Soviet collaboration and much fanfare, HEC is, today, close to a lockout.

Like HEC, other industries that have incurred a loss for three consecutive years, and have an imbalanced financial structure, are defined as 'sick'. Sickness is equally evident in public sectors and private industries, mainly of the entrepreneurial kind. More than 70 per cent of small-scale industries are sick, and many have been rendered non-viable. Yet, most of the outstanding credit lies with the medium and large-scale industries.

Lack of proper planning and its

implementation, production, marketing, and managerial shortcomings are responsible for this malaise. Various studies in the past have unanimously held mismanagement chiefly responsible for the sickness of an industry. However, besides infrastructural and financial bottlenecks, government policies and other factors are also responsible. The existing tax structure of the government has contributed substantially to the sickness in a large number of industries: wealth tax, consignment tax, octroi — whose abolition is being persistently demanded — and many other levies interfere with industrial growth and encourage an evasion of duties.

Industrial sickness is a nation-wide phenomenon, but the western and the eastern regions, the most industrialised, account for the bulk of sick units — 35.5 and 26 per cent respectively. The outstanding credit for the western region is 40.5 per cent of the total sum, while in Eastern India, it is 23.6 per cent. Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have tied up more than 75 per cent of the outstanding bank credit while Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, and Karnataka have the largest number of sick small-scale industries.

The textile industry is the largest single group reporting sickness, followed closely by engineering and electrical industries. According to the RBI, the number of sick units in the different categories are currently as follows: 36 per cent in textiles, 23.7 per cent in engineering and electricals, 7.4 per cent in iron and steel, 5.7 per cent in jute, 5.6 per cent in sugar, 4.8 per cent in rubber, and 4.3 per cent in chemicals.

Several past attempts by various financial institutions to revive sick units have failed, primarily because of the erroneous fiscal policies that govern the majority of industries. Institutional malpractices in the dealings between financial bodies and industrial units have often made it profitable and even lucrative for an industry to be declared sick. However, the government's insistence on writing off non-viable industries was criticised

on account of the unemployment that would result.

Established to nurse sick industries back to health, the BIFR has been given wide-ranging powers — the approval of rehabilitation packages for sick industries; their reconstruction and revival; the introduction of changes in management; the possible amalgamation with another company; the sale or lease of a part or whole of the industry, and even the winding-up of a company if necessary. Furthermore, since the 1985 Act, the provisions of the Monopoly and Restrictive Trade Practices (MRTP) Act do not apply in relation to the modernisation or expansion of a sick industry. The Act leaves a few lacunae — principally, it excludes ancillary and small-scale units which form the bulk of the country's sick units.

The Act has been viewed with scepticism as to whether it is just another act in the plethora of ineffective laws and agencies that already exist. The considerable powers bestowed on the BIFR have also been condemned. Said leading economist K Venkatraman: "The present proposal to transfer the responsibility for the rehabilitation of sick units to BIFR . . . becomes infructuous because it will hardly be in a position to offer an independent assessment."

However, the recent government move to make private entrepreneurs and managements more accountable to their loaning bodies, has been applauded by economists. At the same time, the rehabilitation of workers has been emphasised, for, as the editorial of an economic daily says, "increased unemployment of workers can only snowball on the nation's economy". An attractive option being mooted for sick industries is to hand them over to labour-co-operatives. Several such schemes, like that operating in Kamani Tubes Ltd, Bombay, have been formulated. It is still too early to evaluate the value of the Act. But the task that lies ahead for the BIFR — to offer a panacea to a staggering number of 1,47,740 sick industries — is a mammoth one. ♦

have outstripped demand. In part, this discrepancy can be explained by the inevitable lag between demand, which grows incrementally and production, which makes a quantum jump from one level to another.

The short-term impact has been to increase competition and also to threaten the survival of less successful companies. In the case of light commercial vehicles, for example, there were only three companies in the market — now there are eight. Four of the companies have Japanese collaboration and the fifth is an Indian Company, TELCO. Taking both light and heavy commercial vehicles together, there are today 13 companies in the market with an annual production capacity of 3.2 lakh vehicles. Demand has been so stagnant that it is unlikely that even by 1989-1990 demand will rise to the 1.95 lakh vehicles per annum projected by the Planning Commission.

The situation in the two-wheeler market is similar. Against a total installed capacity of 2.3 million vehicles, actual production in 1986-1987 totalled only 1.4 million vehicles, and capacity utilisation in most firms was only 50 to 60 per cent. Certain producers, like Chamundi Mopeds, have been forced to suspend production — others are nationalising their production. In the case of TVS Suzuki and Sundaram Clayton this meant amalgamating the two companies. Other industries which have been hit by over supply and a decline in demand are cement, fertilisers and engineering products.

The government has attempted to ameliorate the problems of industry by granting duty and excise concessions. For example, in the case of light commercial vehicles, duties on the import of components were reduced to compensate for the sharp rise in the Japanese yen vis-à-vis the Indian rupee. But the government's ability to give across-the-board concessions is limited by the increasing fiscal crisis that it faces, as it is forced to meet ever-increasing demands for expenditure.

Surprisingly, the government tax revenues are buoyant, having risen from 10.9 per cent in 1984-1985 to 12 per cent in 1986-1987. But the contribution of the public sector, on whose improved performance the entire Seventh Plan is based, was dismal. Of 228 public sector enterprises, 128 made a marginal profit or broke even in the last financial year, while 90 made losses. Though public sector earnings were up during the year, 78 per cent of pre-tax profits were accounted for by only 10 companies. The Oil and Natural Gas Commission accounted for half the earnings — with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Air India, Indian Airlines, and the three oil companies — Bharat Petroleum, Hindustan Petroleum, and Indian Oil — being the other major contributors.

**WHILE GOVERNMENT REVENUES** have been increasing only sluggishly, non-plan (non-development) expenditure has been increasing sharply. Non-plan expenditure consumes 78 per cent of all revenue receipts — with defence expenditure consuming 34 per cent, and interest and subsidies consuming the rest. Defence expenditure is likely to go up sharply with increased expenditure on the peace-keeping force in Sri Lanka. Non-plan expenditure is likely to rise

further with increased spending on drought relief. The government has imposed additional taxes of Rs 575 crore to meet drought-relief expenditure, while it has Rs 680 crore for natural calamities already in the budget.

With non-plan expenditure rising sharply, the government has been resorting heavily to deficit financing. The overall deficit for 1986-1987 has been put at Rs 8,285 crore (total revenue receipts were in the region of Rs 30,000 crore) and it would certainly be higher this year.

To meet its need for investible resources, India has been tapping the international capital markets. As the amount of concessional aid has shrunk, India has been forced to borrow increasingly from commercial markets. Borrowing from private creditors which was only 1 per cent in 1978-1979 had increased to 22 per cent in 1986-1987.

India's debt service ration (the amount of the country's exports of goods and services which would be required to repay loans as well as interest on them), was estimated at only 21 per cent during the year. This was significantly less than the 30 per cent, beyond which it would be difficult to meet scheduled repayments. In June 1987, India's repayment on its borrowings from the International Monetary Fund was due, and its impact on debt-service ratios is still to be seen.

**EXPORTS HAVE GROWN VIGOROUSLY** during the year — provisional figures on exports upto September 1987 suggest that exports increased in April-September, 1987, by Rs 1,554 crore or 26.5 per cent over the same period a year ago — imports grew by only 12.6 per cent. Exports have grown in large part due to a flexible exchange rate policy which has devalued the Indian rupee significantly against most European currencies. While the resulting cheapness of Indian goods has made them attractive to foreign buyers, what is disappointing is that exports which grew vigorously during the year were low tech items like diamonds, garments, and leather. Engineering and other industrial products languished. With the increasing protectiveness of their internal economics, characteristic of developed countries, there is at least the question of whether the growth of Indian traditional exports will be allowed to develop unhindered.

Again, the slow growth of imports has also been a result of a largely fortuitous fall in the price of petroleum and fertilisers, India's largest imports. But while cheap oil is welcome while it lasts, it cannot be relied upon. An upturn in the Gulf war could send oil prices sky-rocketing.

Looking to the future, whether the government will be able to continue policies of liberalisation will depend in large part on next year's monsoon. Another poor monsoon would place pressure on the government to raise additional resources, and that in itself would slow down the government's efforts to increase competitiveness within India's economy. ♦



# THE KILLING FIELDS

**AS THE YEAR ENDS**, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) seems to have won the battle for Jaffna, but lost the peace. Each day brings news of a fresh ambush of Indian troops by the Tamil militants, with no end to the fighting in sight. The fifth military operation that India has engaged in since Independence bears the clear profile of a new regional hegemony, although at what cost and with what success still remains to be determined. Officially, the Indian army admits to 214 dead, 36 missing, and over 700 wounded but privately, military sources concede to casualties twice these figures. On the other hand, the IPKF claims to have killed over 700 LTTE men, amidst press reports of the Tigers drawing fresh recruits from the Tamil youth as the battle rages on.

For the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the year ends as bloodily as it began. Already it seems difficult to recall that 1987 actually marks the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord, which, ironically enough, was designed to save the Tigers and the people of Jaffna from genocide at the hands of the Sri Lankan army, but has instead resulted in an all-out attempt by Indian troops to wipe out the LTTE.

On January 4, 1987, the Tigers announced their takeover of civil administration in Jaffna, and announced plans to establish a Tamil Eelam secretariat. V Prabhakaran, the LTTE chief who had been camping in Tamil Nadu, crossed over to Jaffna to take charge of operations against the Sri Lankan army. The Jayewardene government retaliated with aerial strafing and an economic blockade, and by January 7, Jaffna was virtually under siege, and Sri Lankan troops succeeded in breaking through the Tigers' defences.

**INDIA CAUTIONED SRI LANKA** against a military solution. However, initial attempts to negotiate came to naught, and the Tigers appealed to the Indian government to mediate for the resumption of talks. But peace initiatives failed. The economic blockade and aerial strafing continued unabated until April 10, when the government unilaterally announced a cease-fire, and offered to negotiate with the militants, and to sign an accord of understanding with Rajiv Gandhi if the cease-fire was not violated for 10 days.

However, on April 22, the Jayewardene government launched a war-to-the-finish to wipe out the militants' camps and supply-bases. For three days, Jaffna was subjected to heavy aerial bombardment and more than a hundred civilians lost their lives. The raids stopped on April 27 in response to a call from the Indian government to that effect.

The Tamil Nadu government then announced a Rs 4 crore aid package to the Tamils of Sri Lanka, which caused the LTTE to believe that India might be on the verge of recognising Eelam. The offer provoked strong protests from Jayewardene, who declared, "The Tamils are our people, it is we who will feed them."

On May 2, Jayewardene announced that the aerial bombardment of Jaffna would shortly be resumed. According to him, it was imperative that Sri Lankan troops recapture Jaffna; civilian casualties "could not be helped". By May

20, the offensive, launched in the midst of a fresh initiative by the Indian government towards a negotiated settlement, was thoroughly underway. Thousands of heavily armed troops in armoured vehicles backed by bombers and helicopter gunships moved against LTTE positions, and heavy civilian casualties were reported.

**ON JUNE 1, INDIA ANNOUNCED** its intention to send relief supplies to the Tamils. Two days later, a fleet of 19 fishing vessels carrying 29 tonnes of food was turned back by Sri Lankan naval vessels. On June 4, five Soviet-made AN 32 transport aircraft, escorted by four Mirage 2000 fighters, airdropped 25 tonnes of food over Jaffna. The violation of Sri Lankan airspace provoked vehement protests from the Jayewardene government. The airdrop signalled a decisive shift in Indo-Sri Lankan relations: India's role had changed from mediation to active intervention, indicating that India would not stand by and watch the Tamils being massacred.

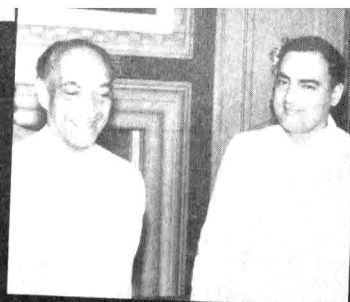
By July 16, India put forward a fresh set of proposals to the Sri Lankan government for a negotiated settlement. The basic proposal was that an autonomous state be created, comprising the northern and eastern provinces. By the following week, hopes of a breakthrough had begun to emerge, as Jayewardene, in his initial talks with J N Dixit, the Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka, gave in to the major Tamil demands, including the conferring of official status on the Tamil language, and the recognition that the Tamils comprised a distinct nationality. Jayewardene also agreed to comprise the northern and eastern provinces into a single administrative unit.

These developments occurred in the wake of a fresh wave of aerial bombardment and troop movements, described as the second invasion of Jaffna. In late July, LTTE leaders were invited to New Delhi for further talks, and interpreted the invitation as recognition, by India, of the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people. On July 27, the LTTE leaders declared that they "had walked into a trap", without knowing anything of the proposals. They totally rejected the proposed Accord, and told the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister that they feared an attack by the Indian army. Their fears were soon to prove prophetic. V Prabhakaran, the LTTE leader, was held in New Delhi *incommunicado*. Following talks with Rajiv Gandhi in the early hours of July 29, Prabhakaran announced that their differences had narrowed down. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed later that day between Jayewardene and Rajiv Gandhi, even as fires raged in Colombo and mobs went on the rampage in protest against the surrender of Sri Lanka's sovereignty. The riots were provoked by Jayewardene's having agreed that Sri Lanka would not allow any facilities to foreign powers on its shores if these went against India's interests: this effectively foreclosed the use of Trincomalee harbour as an American base.

**ON JULY 31, WHILE SURVEYING** a guard of honour,



The LTTE guerillas.



The Creators of the Accord.

Rajiv Gandhi escaped an attempt on his life by a Sri Lankan naval rating. As riots raged, fears of a coup against Jayewardene mounted. What equally provoked the reaction that he had bartered away Sri Lankan sovereignty was the presence of Indian troops in Jaffna.

The first step towards the implementation of the Accord, particularly the setting up of an interim administration and of provincial councils, was the laying down of arms by Tamil militants. At a brief ceremony at the Palaly airfield on August 5, 50 assorted weapons, including 4.5 calibre anti-aircraft guns and mortar launchers, were surrendered. But it soon became evident that this and a subsequent ceremony were to remain purely symbolic exercises. The actual process of disarming the militants was disrupted by cease-fire violations, and assaults on Tamils by Sri Lankan troops. Despite assurance from the Indian government that the IPKF was there to protect them, it was clear that the militants were holding back their arms.

It was in the wake of these developments that Thileepan, one of the top ranking LTTE leaders, began a fast unto death. The LTTE were greatly agitated by two developments in particular: the continuing colonisation of the eastern districts by Sinhala settlers, and the opening up of several new police stations in the northern and eastern provinces, neither of which the IPKF was able to prevent.

The delay in forming the interim administration seemed to worsen the situation. The Tigers demanded majority representation in the interim government — 6 out of 10 seats — and were subsequently assured of this; Jayewardene accepted C V K Sivagranam as the administrator to the council from among three LTTE nominees. When the LTTE asked for Sivagranam to be replaced by N Padmanaban, Jayewardene refused. On October 4, Jayewardene summoned Gen Depinder Singh of the IPKF and ordered the Indian troops to either "bring peace to Trincomalee or get out".

On October 9, 17 Tamil fishermen were apprehended by Sri Lankan patrol boats. There was a proposal that they be taken to Colombo, perhaps to be held as hostages in exchange for eight Sri Lankan army men held captive by the LTTE. The proposal aroused anger but the IPKF was unable to stem the move: 12 of the 17 fishermen swallowed cyanide pills and succumbed.

**IN THE WAKE OF THEIR DEATHS**, the LTTE slaughtered 160 Sinhalese in revenge, and executed the eight Sri Lankan army men held in captivity. The IPKF immediately rounded up 200 militants, in keeping with their assurance that they would act firmly to maintain peace. By October

11, indefinite curfew was clamped on Jaffna and shoot-at-sight orders issued. As the LTTE and the IPKF were locked in fierce combat in the northern and eastern districts, Indian commandos were paradropped into militant strongholds in Jaffna. On October 14, V Prabhakaran appealed to Rajiv Gandhi to call off the offensive and resume negotiations, but it was dismissed as a ploy. The LTTE and the IPKF were now engaged in a fight to the finish.

The battle raged for just over a fortnight, and Jaffna fell on October 26. The IPKF had to fight every inch of the way against the LTTE cadres — highly motivated young men and women, a large number of whom were teenagers. Indian journalists who succeeded in getting close to the fighting said that the Tamil youth fought with a total disregard for their lives. The casualties on the Indian side are now believed to be close to 400. The IPKF claims to have killed 700 Tigers, and excepting the wounded and those taken prisoner, an estimated 1,500 are believed to be still at large. As the year ends, the fighting continues, with at least 10 deaths reported on either side every other day.

**IN RETROSPECT**, the all-out confrontation between the IPKF and the LTTE seemed to underlie the manner in which the Accord was implemented. The LTTE had no part in it. It is now clear that the Accord was engineered between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayewardene who was persuaded by the US to recognise India as the most powerful nation in the Indian Ocean and the guardian of democracy in the region.

As far as Jayewardene was concerned, the deal was that India would no longer aid or train the Tamil militants on its shores and, if required, Indian troops could be used to subjugate the Tamils to enforce the Accord. In return, India was assured that no foreign power would be allowed any facilities in Sri Lanka if it contravened India's foreign policy. Its regional hegemony was now a recognised fact. The plain fact of the matter is that the LTTE had no choice but to go along, simply because the Accord was now being enforced by the very country that trained and nurtured its cadres. In the face of fundamental differences with the LTTE over the implementation of the Accord and the setting up of an interim administration, India had the choice of threatening to withdraw, thereby leaving the LTTE to the mercy of the Sri Lankan army. It opted instead to destroy the LTTE. In other words, Rajiv Gandhi has now embarked on the same course of action that Jayewardene had opted for in June — a military solution — the very option that the Accord had been signed to pre-empt.

As the war drags on, its objectives lie mired in the lagoons of Jaffna. With the army flushing out the militants, and the prospects of a political solution wearing thin, will Jaffna turn into another Punjab? Will the LTTE cadres be fed with fresh recruits from the Tamil youth? Will Tamil Nadu erupt?



# POT-POURRI

**1987 WAS UNQUESTIONABLY THE YEAR** of *Pratighaat*, Sridevi, Ramanand Sagar, and the Festivals of India; although not necessarily in that order. While the much-publicised Festivals of India were launched with excessive fanfare and self-congratulation, television viewers were hooked onto Sagar's sub-standard serialisation of the Ramayana epic, and moviegoers were alternately seduced by Sridevi in *Mr India*, and satiated with the violence-ridden, number one box-office hit, *Pratighaat*. The rest of the year marked the advent of routine box-office block-busters, insipid television serials, a lacklustre film festival, a few noteworthy art films, the usual glut of *ghazal* and *bhajan* cassettes, and the lamentable deaths of veteran composer Jaidev and the legendary singer Kishore Kumar.

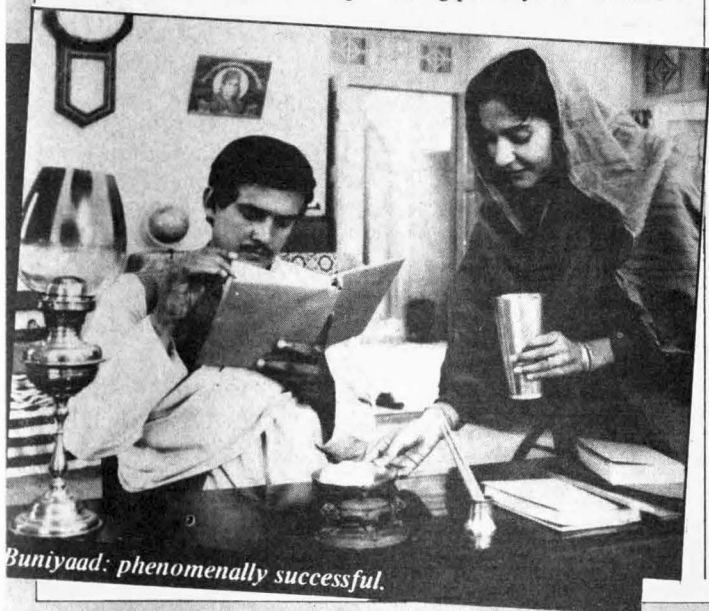
The 11th International Film Festival of India (New Delhi, January 10-24) followed what has now become an almost routine pattern of high expectations and low achievements. The quality of films in the competition were incredibly poor, barring a few like Australian director Bill Bennett's *Backlash*, *The Outcast* (China), and the Cuban entry *Le jania*; the entries for documentaries were equally poor while only two directors of international repute (Humberto Solas and Zanussi) graced the Festival. The saving grace, however, was the information category, with films like *Rosa Luxembourg* (FDR), *Oh, My Little Village* (Czechoslovakia), *Thérèse* (France), *The Fringe Dwellers* (Australia) and, of course, the much-awaited *Sacrifice* by Andrei Tarkovsky. The Indian Panorama highlighted the best of India's art films — G Aravindan's *Oridath*, Mani Kaul's *Mati Manas*, Pradip Krishen's *Massey Sahib*, Utpalendu Chakraborty's *Debshishu*, Vijaya Mehta's *Rao Saheb*, Kalpana Lajmi's *Ek Pal*, and *Amma Ariyan* whose director, John Abraham, died a few months later. Sudhir Mishra's *Yeh Woh Manzil To Nahin* deservedly won the Best First Film (of a director) at the Festival, with its absorbing and fiercely uncompromising portrayal of a crusade

against eroding values. Collectively, however, the Festival was almost a wash-out, an eminently forgettable affair.

**UNFORTUNATELY, WHAT ONE CANNOT IGNORE** quite so easily are the ubiquitous Festivals of India — each of them cornering a lion's share of media coverage, inundating a captive public with detailed programmes, weeks before, during, and after the event. These cultural jamborees or rather colossal extravaganzas, were primarily aimed at "showing off this country's best to nations abroad". Often this 'best' included clowns and conjurors, snake charmers, and tamers with their beleaguered performing animals, projecting an image which could at best be termed exotica and at worst, undiluted *kitsch*. Launched in 1982, the Festival of India has already wooed England in 1985 and the US in 1985-1986 (with 700 events held in 42 states), France in 1986 and Switzerland, Sweden, and the USSR this year. Japan is next on the agenda. The Festivals have all been conducted at enormous (and the taxpayers') expense. While 'India in Switzerland' (May-October 1987) was budgeted at just Rs 38 lakh, the estimated costs for the rest were Rs 2 crore in UK, a combined Rs 11 crore in USA and France, Rs 15 crore in Russia, and a further Rs 25 crore for the year-long Festival of USSR in India which began on November 21 this year. The significance of the role and participation of the Soviet Union in this cultural diplomacy is obvious by the importance — both financial and political — devoted to the Festival of India in USSR in July this year, and the ongoing reciprocal Festival of the USSR in India.

Approximately 1.25 lakh Muscovites watched the inaugural *utsav* at the Lenin Stadium on July 3 — 800 folk artistes performed simultaneously on 12 stages within the Kremlin, and the show was almost reminiscent of a Russian fair. The Volga-Ganga water ceremony further cemented ties between the two countries. The Festival, comprising almost 2,000 classical and folk artistes selected by the ICCR, then toured 22 cities in the Soviet Union. The selections provoked unseemly and fractious bickering between older established artistes like Bharatnatyam dancers Yamini Krishnamurty and Sonal Mansingh, and Kathak dancer Uma Sharma, who were sidelined in favour of younger, little-known talent. Renowned artistes like Bismillah Khan, M S Subbalakshmi and Birju Maharaj however, participated in the Festival and performed with their customary excellence. Five hundred valuable *objets d'art* and 90 bronze and stone artefacts were sent to the Soviet Union. The Didarganj Yakshi, however, was excluded because of the damages it had sustained earlier, along with seven other valuable paintings and sculptures, in the Festivals of India in the USA and France.

**THE FESTIVAL OF RUSSIA IN INDIA**, inaugurated on November 21, at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, invested the hitherto staid and stolid Soviet image with colour, variety and beauty, enveloping India in a cultural bear-



*Buniyaad: phenomenally successful.*



Sridevi, heroine of the box-office hit: *Mr India*.

hug. For a whole year, 2,500 of the Soviet Union's finest stars will tour 60 cities in India. The more fortunate metropolitan cities will be treated to the Bolshoi and Kirov ballets, Moiseev's folk dances and the Great Russian Circus. One of the most attractive features of the Festival will be the biggest exhibition of West European art from the Hermitage collection — this will include 71 paintings, 40 sculptures and 40 drawings by Titian, Botticelli, Rubens, Rembrandt, Cellini, Rodin, and others. *This Festival*, at least, promises to enliven the cultural scenario in the country in the months to come.

As far as indigenous entertainment is concerned, the fare has been consistently unexciting and humdrum, restricted to the routine parameters of escapist entertainment. *Pratighaat*, *Insaniyat ke dushman*, *Hukumat*, *Aag hi aag*, *Sindoor*, *Khudgarz* and *Mr India* were among the top block-busters of the year. Of the lot, *Mr India* was, perhaps, the only commercial Hindi film (apart from *Jalwa*, an adaptation of *Beverly Hills Cop*) that broke fresh ground, with an innovative mixture of racy thrills, 'adorable' kids, provocative songs, an outrageously bizarre villain (the famous Mogambo), gimmicky gadgetry and, of course, Sridevi, who looked as if she could carry the film alone. Sridevi also retained her number one position effortlessly, in contrast to the tug-of-war between heroes — other than the Bachchan — Vinod Khanna, Mithun Chakraborty, Anil Kapoor, Jackie Shroff, Jeetendra, et al. *Pratighaat*, produced by Ramoji Rao and directed by N Chandra, proved a surprise and a smash hit, in fact, climbing the charts to number one, with a 25-week run at five centres and a 100-days run at 17 others. The film, starred Sujata Mehta as the protagonist — the victimised lecturer-wife whose successful revenge celebrates the age-old revenge formula, the triumph of good over evil, and as such, proved immensely popular with the masses, despite a shoddy treatment of a hackneyed theme.

**HACKNEYED THEMES** were also a recurring motif in

the year's television serials. The phenomenally popular *Buniyaad* bowed out finally in May — the grand finale was shrouded in absolute confusion, with sketchily-etched profiles of the fate of characters who had captivated viewers for more than a year. The *Buniyaad* slot was occupied by *Kala Jal*, a mediocre serial on Muslims, and *Chunauti*, dealing with campus problems, including drug addiction. Mediocrity seemed to be the order of the day with serials such as *Poornima*, *Kashmakash*, *Subah*, *Khoj* and *Adalat* trying desperately and unsuccessfully to match *Karamchand*'s popularity; the Sunday morning specials were particularly noxious — *Singhasan Battisi*, *Pratham Pratishruti*, and the ongoing *Apne Paraye*. Sunil Gavaskar Presents and *Kuchchi Dhoop* (a refreshing portrayal of children, although the story was adapted from *Little Women*) were the only silver linings on Sunday mornings. More recently, *Bahadurshah Zafar*, *Hum Hindustani*, *Satyajit Ray Presents (Kissa Kathmandu ka*, which could have been compressed into two instead of eight episodes), and *Nai Dishayen* to mention just a few, outdid each other in insipidity.

It is probably easier to focus on the palatable serials of the year since they were so few and far between — *Malgudi Days*, *Bodyline*, *The World of Survival*, *Kabir* . . . the list is woefully short. As the year ends, *Manoranjan* threatens to drown itself in its own artificial sorrows, *Stree* continues to proffer sanctimonious portrayals of stereotyped 'rebel' women, *Zindagi* and *Shakti* have yet to capture the audience's interest, and only *Isi Bahane*, an ambitious attempt to adapt Wodehouse's *Leave it to Smith* to the Indian context, shows promise.

For most television audiences, however, one serial makes up for the alleged shortcomings of all the others — Ramanand Sagar's magnum opus, *Ramayana*. Having been granted a further extension of 26 episodes, the much-revered serial will continue to enthrall and disgust (the latter emotion relevant to only about one per cent of television viewers) for many months to come. ♦



# THE REBEL WITH A CAUSE

IT WAS A TURBULENT YEAR for V P Singh, the suave Congress (I) stalwart, who stormed into 1987 leaving a trail of devastation behind him. The raids that he had masterminded during his two-year tenure as Finance Minister, had earned him considerable unpopularity with the industrialists' lobby as well as certain parliamentarians from his own party. And much admiration from the common man.

But his reign was short-lived. Although the Rajah had survived half a dozen cabinet reshuffles in the past, his time had now come. His sudden transfer on January 24, 1987, from the Finance Ministry to the Defence Ministry, was attributable to the embarrassment caused to the government as a result of the Finance Minister's relentless campaign against economic offenders, which had gradually revealed the nexus between powerful business houses and the government. In his two-year stint, the maverick Minister of Finance had almost single-handedly overhauled the entire fiscal policy of the nation — an unprecedented effort in the long history of 20 finance ministers since Independence.

V P Singh's 1986 Union budget, which he had made public prior to its release to invite criticism, was revolutionary in its concept. Compared to the lacklustre budget of the present year, the 1986 budget offered liberalised policies, encouraged entrepreneurial ventures, and introduced stricter measures to check economic corruption. The Finance Ministry had raided innumerable premises across the country and detected evasion of duties and taxes to the tune of Rs 500 crore.

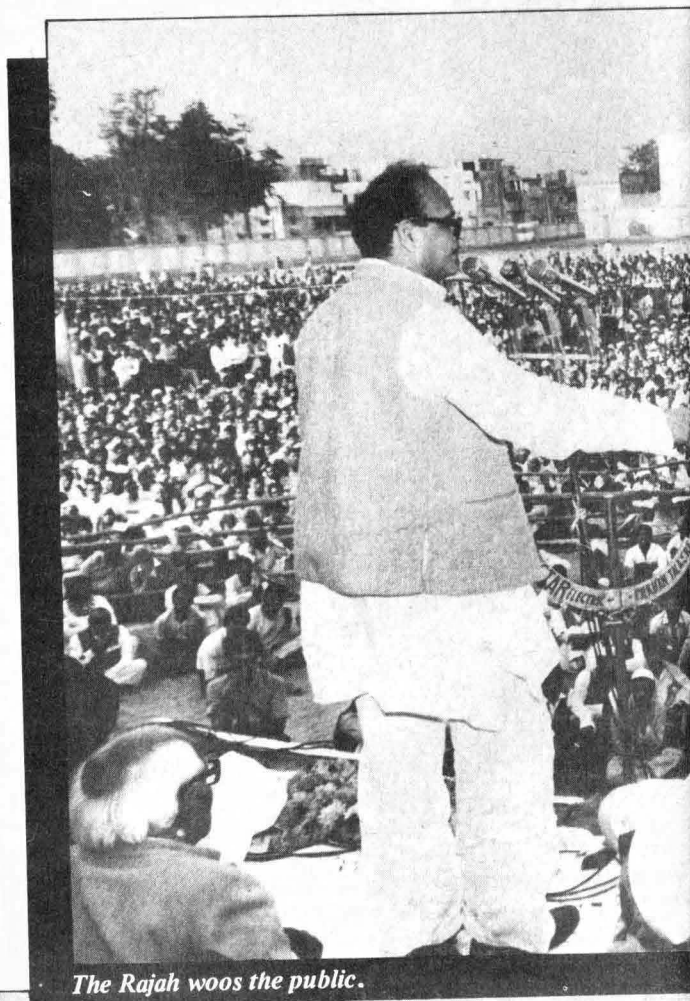
By transferring V P Singh to the Defence Ministry the ruling party had effectively silenced him. Or so they thought. But controversy seemed to doggedly pursue V P Singh wherever he went. And despite the transfer, events that he had set in motion while Finance Minister, snowballed into what became the Fairfax Affair. The Defence Minister announced in the Lok Sabha his own role in the hiring of the American agency to inquire into the illegal foreign holdings of Reliance Industries Ltd. A scandal ensued. The Thakkar-Natarajan Commission of Inquiry, appointed to investigate the hiring of the agency, has only recently concluded its inquiry and submitted its report which has caused considerable uproar.

Once in the Defence Ministry, it was not long before V P Singh grabbed the headlines once again. Inquiries into some of the defence deals made by his predecessors were initiated. His discovery that a seven per cent commission was paid to an Indian agent by the manufacturers of HDW submarines, in a Rs 425 crore deal with West Germany, was divulged to the press: the West German submarine deal scandal had been announced. And V P Singh thus opened a veritable Pandora's box of kickback rackets. Disillusioned with the government's role in keeping its promises of 'clean' government, in a sudden and unexplained move, Mr Singh quit the Defence Ministry on April 12, 1987, with a vow not to "hold any government office in my life". It was the end of what industrialist J P Goenka

had called 'the raid raj'.

**THE DEPARTURE OF V P SINGH** from the cabinet gave cause for speculations as to his next move. His sudden resignation raised the question of accountability to public office, and initiated a debate in the press as to whether public servants should resign following the dictates of one's conscience or persevere for the greater good of the nation. V P Singh himself declared: "It was not a loyalty question. It was a question of political faith."

Although still in the Congress (I), Singh's criticisms of the government gradually became sharper. On a personal front, however, he carried on the crusade for 'clean' politics. At each of the rallies he was to subsequently address, his call for cleanliness in the political machinery became louder and more incisive. His growing popularity shook the very foundations of the ruling party, and his leanings towards anti-Congress (I) leaders like Sharad Joshi and Datta Samant were labelled by many as anti-party activities. Rajiv Gandhi could no longer stave off the increasing demands for V P Singh's expulsion. The Prime Minister cate-



*The Rajah woos the public.*

gorised the Rajah to be of the ilk of Mir Jaffar and Jaichand — a direct allusion to Singh's treachery. V P Singh's response was characteristic: "The real Mir Jaffars are those who are siphoning money out of the country, bleeding it of its resources, and stashing it in foreign banks and strengthening the economy of other countries at the cost of ours."

It was not long before the former Defence Minister openly joined hands with Arun Nehru, the one-time *eminence-grise* of Rajiv Gandhi, Arif Mohammed Khan, and V C Shukla — all dissident Congress (I) MPs — to launch a populist movement highlighting the political and economic corruption in the country. "People are becoming aware of corruption at the highest level. But this awareness has to be translated into some kind of action," said Mr Singh, who continued wooing the farmers and the economically-backward classes with the benefits that would accrue to them if the illegal assets being held abroad were to be brought into the country.

**MATTERS CAME TO A HEAD** when a letter by the former Finance Minister to the Prime Minister asking the latter to take measures to prevent the flight of capital from the country, overhaul the election financing system, and take action against Ajitabh Bachchan was immediately followed by another, severely criticising the July 15 expulsion

of three Congress (I) members — Arif Mohammed Khan, Arun Nehru, and V C Shukla. On July 19, Rajiv Gandhi, in his capacity as President of the Congress Working Committee, expelled V P Singh from the Congress (I).

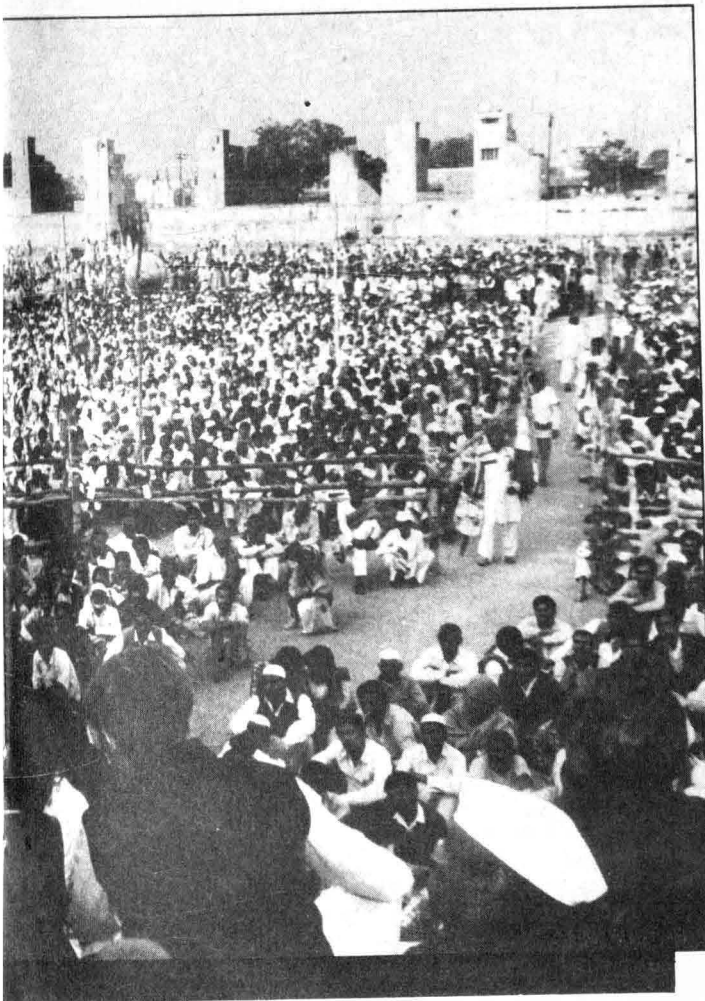
Obviously prepared for such a move, V P Singh had been busy preparing the ground for months, thereby giving rise to speculations that an alternative was round the corner. But this was not to be so. The delay in taking any *concrete* step led many to suspend faith in his political acumen. Mr Singh continued to address rallies and talk to the press about a movement whose parameters he had outlined previously in his letter to the Prime Minister: increased labour participation; greater attention to the poorer sections, the scheduled castes and tribes; the need to meet the farmers' demands; and electoral reforms within the party.

What was new was his sudden, *vocal* onslaught which one newspaper called the 'baring of fangs by V P Singh'. Highly critical of the corruption in the industry-government nexus, Mr Singh now continued to exert pressure on the government by mobilising popular opinion. His popularity with the masses, disillusioned with Rajiv's Super-computer world, made Singh a prize catch for the opposition parties. V P Singh once again demonstrated his shrewd political insight as he set about courting a variety of opposition groups across the spectrum, including the BJP, the RSS, the Lok Dal, and the Communists — and called on them to join his cause.

**THIS HINT OF A CONCRETE STRATEGY** to come was followed by an active participation in various opposition conclaves, and meetings with their leaders. While displaying solidarity with the Left parties of the country, he also demonstrated a definite bias towards the BJP and RSS. In an attempt to bring the Left and Right opposition parties under one banner of 'issues', Mr Singh tried to overlook the dichotomy inherent in the basic concepts of the two factions, and his apparently split allegiance to the secular CPI on the one hand and the communal BJP and RSS on the other, raised doubts as to his intentions. The confusion led many to criticise his moves as being born out of political ambition and frustration at not being able to oust Rajiv Gandhi, rather than his previously professed desires to establish a clean government.

After successive and successful meetings with leaders of the BJP, RSS, Lok Dal, Telugu Desam and CPI(M), V P Singh, along with his band of expelled Congress (I) MPs, called the masses to awaken to the existing evils in the present government. This call for 'Jan Jagran' finally culminated in the birth of the Jan Morcha on October 2, 1987. "The morcha," V P Singh said, "has evolved after a three-month-long interaction of the rebel Congressmen and the public."

The amorphous morcha was characterised as a people's front, a non-political forum. Shrewdly constituted to avoid



PHOTOGRAPH BY HARI OM GULATI



the stringent laws of the anti-defection Bill, and falling short of being classified as a political party, it was at once able to invite members from all parties to join the forum, as well as avoid any legal controversies. The Morcha pledge contains strong socialist overtones and calls for national unity, vows to root out communalism, social and economic exploitation, poverty, and unemployment. Emphasising the upliftment of the farmers, the working classes and the poor, the Morcha seeks to "arrest the growing influence of businessmen in politics, to fight economic offenders, corruption, and see that power reaches the last man." Mr Singh has also openly ascribed to the leftist orientation of the Morcha, and its progress to date has caused some to liken it to the JP Movement of the Jan Mukti Andolan of 1974.

According to the Morcha leaders, in the first few days of its formation, it had already enrolled 60,000 volunteers and expected the figures to rise to a crore by the year end. Within three months of its launch, the Jan Morcha proved highly successful in recruiting followers in UP and Bihar despite predictions, such as those of Gulam Nabi Azad, Congress (I) MP, that "This Morcha, instead of sticking to the left or right, will fall down."

**THE SUCCESS OF THE JAN MORCHA** in the Hindi belt of the country has alerted several politicians to its potential. While the Congress (I) is doing its best to negate the growing influence of the Morcha, the call for an allied front of the Opposition as a viable alternative to the ruling party has had a healthy response. On November 28, 1987,

after weeks of negotiations, the Janata Party, the Lok Dal (A), the Congress (S), and the Jan Morcha announced the formation of a joint front in the Hindi heartland.

One of the priorities of the new front, called the Rashtriya Morcha, is to broaden its scope to include the Telugu Desam and the Lok Dal (B), among others. Existing political rivalries between the opposition parties, however, do not bode well for the future prospects of a proposed national coalition. The presence of Ajit Singh, from the Lok Dal (A), will always prevent Devi Lal, his staunch enemy, from joining the front. The left parties of the nation have already shown their aversion to join hands with the BJP. Other regional parties, with their separatist demands, are also unlikely to form a lasting relationship with the front despite its anti-Congress bias. Plans for the formation of *Bharat Desam*, forwarded by N T Ramarao, and supported whole-heartedly by Devi Lal, could be a further deterrent to uniting all the opposition parties under one banner. Mr H N Bahuguna, the eponymous leader of Lok Dal (B), has already criticised the coalition for its "quantum jump" from the decision arrived at the Opposition conclave at Surajkund in September this year, that any coalition remain on the level of a loose network and not constitute itself formally.

The as yet nascent opposition front has been seen by many as a compromise between Singh's idealism and the hard-core realities of politics. The coming mid-term polls are likely to be crucial in defining the role, parameters, and future of the front as well as that of the Rajah, Vishwanath Pratap Singh. ♦

## THE POLITICS OF VIOLENCE

**THE MOST STRIKING CHARACTERISTIC** of the communal and caste riots in 1987 has been the absence of spontaneity. The riots cannot be categorised as the so-called expressions of a 'divided Indian society' or 'sudden outbursts' of the 'latent fundamentalism' of the Indian psyche. An analysis of the holocaust which erupted across the country, in an almost sequential manner, shows that there was a definite design, obvious to anyone studying the underlying pattern.

The pattern is discernible in its kaleidoscopic variety. The militant Sikhs on the rampage, the aggressive Muslims and the belligerent Hindus fanning murder and mayhem in Uttar Pradesh, the rural-rich Marathas threatening the Dalits, the feudal middle-caste warlords in the North invading the poor Harijan agricultural labourers, the organised upper-caste Hindu gangs engaged in a medieval-style war with the reorganised Muslim-thugs in Ahmedabad, and dozens of other bloody conflicts were bound by one common factor: the behind-the-scenes machinations of politicians of almost every hue and colour. The riots also defined an emerging axis between the mafia and the politicians and the real-estate marauders, all of whom had a stake in killing and arson, in loot and murder — a very material stake

with political dividends.

The pattern began to unfold last year. The home ministries of various states as well as the Union Home Department have yet to take "quantitative stock" of the holocaust, but that is a mere formality now. The number of those killed or injured, of those arrested and released, and of houses, shops and factories burnt, is unlikely to steer anyone onto a humanist path. Apathy and insensitivity are so deep-rooted in the Indian psyche today that the ever-increasing statistics of communal frenzy evoke only indifference or at best, temporary empathy.

Since one cannot set aside even a week that was free of communal tension in the whole year, in which there was no bloody manifestation of communal frenzy, it would be jarring and also pointless to merely list a chronology of events. The intensity of communal tension can be felt instead by highlighting some of the worst communal carnages of the year.

From January 1, 1986 to May 31, 1987, that is, within a span of 17 months, as many as 257 persons lost their lives in 14 violent incidents spread over 14 cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh. Hundreds of persons were injured and property worth crores of rupees was destroyed. The govern-



*The ravages of communalism.*

ment had to promulgate orders banning rallies and public meetings in as many as 22 of the 57 districts of the state until June 30.

**THE MOST STUNNING AND DEVASTATING** riots of the year took place in Meerut. For more than two months — April and May — the city was the scene of brutal mayhem and devastation. This was the fourth such explosion in the last seven years, which clearly establishes that the virus of communalism has certainly not been eliminated, nor are the police authorities sure that it will not surface again.

Meerut has an almost equal number of Hindus and Muslims, both factions possessing a large number of unlicensed arms, in equal numbers. And although the city has a long history of riots, they have, in the past, remained localised to the older areas. This time, however, communal fury spread like a prairie fire to newer areas like Shastri Nagar, the Meerut Development Authority, and Maliana on the western outskirts of the city, where an entire block of ten families — all Muslims — was attacked by members of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), proving that it was not merely a communal riot. The poison seeping into the administration surfaced once again, in all its ugliness.

The Maliana massacre is one of the goriest in the recent past, illustrating an amazing level of depravity. Maliana is a small village ten kilometres west of Meerut. When tension began to build up in Meerut, the PAC is believed to have started house-to-house searches for hidden arms and lethal weapons — apparently only the minority community was subjected to such intensive searches. The result was resistance compounded by the communal bias of the PAC. The constabulary opened fire, and within a few minutes, 50 villagers including women and children, lay

dead. There was more to come. In a bid to destroy evidence of the killings, the constabulary threw the corpses into the nearby canals and wells, some were burnt and others mutilated in an orgy that continued until much later. All this and more is now known and documented. But what is less known is the acute trade rivalry in the town, a rivalry perpetuated by the politicians.

There is increasing (and substantial) evidence — both official and unofficial — of a growing nexus between various communal organisations such as the Viswa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal on the one hand, and police personnel on the other. Financed by trade activities, their political support emanates from the entrenched parties.

There is yet another factor which is responsible for these conflicts — the growth in the unproductive sectors of the economy. Real-estate speculations, the acquisitive rural and urban rich, the self-perpetuating bureaucracy, and, of course, the politicians who want to and tend to thrive on this nexus, because it is a major source of their funds. This sinister axis can be defeated only by patiently building liberal institutions with values of tolerance, and equality of religions.

**IN RECENT YEARS**, the pattern (of communal violence) is being repeated with almost stylised regularity. The Ahmedabad-Meerut-Delhi syndrome now threatens to be an integral element of this nation's socio-cultural ethos. For a few days, grisly and horrific accounts of bloody encounters make newspaper headlines, the powers-that-be pledge the sternest of measures against the culprits, the army troops in, curfew is declared, often interminably, after the cycle of arson and murders, and then a kind of weary quiet descends. But it is more a kind of cease-fire than peace.

As Dr Ashok Mitra observes, "Some segments of the nation feel ashamed. To expiate the sin and crimes for which they, altogether sincerely, hold themselves equally responsible, they float proposals so that the nation's soul can be purged of its devilish propensities. Soon, these too turn into a ritual. And we wait, unbreathlessly, for the next outbreak of insensate emotion inducing this or that communal group to convince itself that life is not worth living if life is not gouged out of this or that other communal group. The latter reciprocates with an equal and identically violent passion."

1987 has undoubtedly been among the worst years of communal violence, with no end in sight. The intra-Hindu conflicts are also at the heart of the turbulence we have been witnessing in the land. Clearly there can be no social peace in a country where the so-called majority community is so greatly at odds with itself, like the Hindus are. Such a community cannot constitute the mainstream which it expects others to join; it cannot serve as the nucleus around which a nation may be built. ♦



# THE TRACK RECORD



*Ramesh Krishnan brings glory to the Indian team.*

**IT HAS BEEN A YEAR** when Indian sportsfolk have shown considerable international achievement in numerous arenas. There have been several 'highs' in 1987 for the Indian sports fans to rejoice over, although, as in the years immediately preceding the one under review, there have been several abysmal 'lows' to moan about!

Topping the list of remarkable results for the year has been the Indian Davis Cup squad's superb achievement of reaching the finals for the third time in its history. Equally laudable, if not as unexpected, has been billiards maestro Geet Sethi's retention of the Arthur Walker Trophy, the symbol of international supremacy in amateur billiards; as was his successful endeavour to become the first man in history to win the world amateur billiards and snooker titles in the same year.

When the competition for the Davis Cup began, India had seemed one of the weakest nations amongst the sixteen in the premier category. The two singles exponents, Vijay Amritraj and Ramesh Krishnan, were hardly feared by any topnotcher in the international arena, while the doubles combination of the Amritraj brothers, Anand and Vijay, was not expected to provide the sort of spectacular performance they had been capable of in their heyday.

And yet, the Indians have edged out stronger sides like Argentina (3-2), Israel (5-0), and defending champions Australia (3-2), on their way to the finals. It is the second time that the Amritraj brothers are playing a Cup final, their first being in 1974, when they were not permitted by our politicians to prove their worth against South Africa. For Ramesh, it will be his maiden appearance in a Davis Cup final, while his father Ramanathan had the distinction of taking the country to the finals in 1966, and to an ho-

nourable 1-4 loss to the then-powerful Australians.

Even as this sees the light of print, the Amritraj brothers and Ramesh will have been strenuously preparing for the finals against mighty Sweden on the latter's stamping-grounds at Gothenberg. The tie is to be played between December 18-20, on slow clay, a surface that will definitely favour the Europeans. The Swedes, with four men in the top 20 on the list of the Association of Team Professionals (ATP), are slated to win.

**GEET SETHI BOASTS A PLETHORA** of records in billiards. Geet's biggest achievement in 1987 was retaining the world amateur billiards crown he had won on his debut at New Delhi two years ago, in Belfast. This marks the seventh time that the Arthur Walker Trophy will remain in India, with Wilson Jones having brought it home twice in the sixties, and Michael Ferreira, in 1977, 1981 and 1983.

But Sethi has also set another record in the annals of the game in India — a record that other cueists will find very hard to equal, far less beat. He has won both billiards and snooker titles at the same Nationals for the last three years. An amazing feat, when one considers the different techniques that go into the two table sports.

Even as this is being written, Sethi is busy attempting to become the second man in the history of the green-baize sports to wear both the world amateur billiards and snooker crowns. Malta's Paul Mifsud, the defending champion at the world snooker event in Bangalore, is the only man to have held the two titles, but he did so in different years. Sethi will be one up on him if he can add the snooker crown to the billiards title he won just four months ago at Belfast.

Another major feat was Anita Sood's — the national free style women's champion — swim across the English Channel. Anita accomplished the crossing in eight hours and 15 minutes, the fastest ever clocked by an Indian, and among the ten fastest timings ever recorded for the Channel swim.

Kerala's sprint queen, P T Usha, has consistently proved to be the mainstay of Indian athletics over the last five years. It is solely due to her that the Indian track-and-field fan looks for encomiums in the international sporting arena. Usha, terribly overworked at having to run in as many as six events at a recent meet, nevertheless did not disappoint her fans. She scooped three Golds and two Silvers in the Asian Athletics Meet at Singapore, and once again led the Indian gold rush against rather poor opposition in the recently-concluded South Asian Federation Games at the newly-constructed Salt Lake City Stadium in Calcutta.

**THESE CREDITABLE ACHIEVEMENTS** by Indian sports stars have been punctuated by numerous failures, the worst being the inability of the much-vaunted Indian cricket team to win the Reliance Cup tournament, held on the Indian subcontinent for the first time. The Indians

had won the quadrennial World Cup on the last occasion it was played — in England in 1983, and were the defending champions.

However, in keeping with their recent record of performing better overseas than at home, they could not sustain their performance on home-soil. In the Reliance Cup, they crashed out at the semi-final stage, being outmanoeuvred by England; and leaving the field clear for unfancied Australia to take the trophy Down Under. In the Test series played at home this year, Kapil's Dev-ils easily outmanoeuvred the weak Sri Lankans, but were edged out 1-0 by Imran Khan's Pakistan.

The failure in the Reliance Cup, particularly, cost Kapil the captaincy, but the results have not improved after Dilip Vengsarkar has taken over. Without the steady influence of Sunil Gavaskar (the diminutive opening batsman retired after the World Cup), the Indians went down 0-1 in the ongoing Test series against a none-too-formidable West Indies side.

It must be said however, that, despite considerable doubts about the ability of India and Pakistan to host the month-long, eight-nation World Cup, the event went off without a hitch, and all the teams were left marvelling at the superb hospitality they had experienced on the sub-continent. Organisationally speaking, it was as big a feather in the Indian cap as had been the Ninth Asian Games, conducted smoothly in New Delhi five years ago.

**SIMILAR ACCOLADES** were heaped upon the Indians for the manner in which the 39th World Table Tennis Championships were conducted at the Indian Capital. The Chinese, once again, walked away with everything in sight. The Indian men, led by national champion Kamlesh Mehta, did reasonably well to remain in the premier category of sixteen teams, although the women slid down to the second category. The women were obviously handicapped by the absence of their mainstay for so many years, Indu Puri, who had retired last year.

There was nothing to write home about on the badminton scene. With Prakash Padukone turning 32 this year, his international results declined even further; and he participated in fewer tournaments held outside the country. Consequently, there was no Indian representation in the latter rounds of important world-level competitions for the first time in a decade. Prakash's successor, Syed Modi, who has won the national singles crown for the last six years, remained unbeatable at home, but performed poorly at the international level. Among the women, Ami Ghia is past her 30th year, and not surprisingly, seems past her best as well, while the reigning queen, Madhumita Bisht, suffers from the same malady as Modi — an inability to make an international splash.

The juniors in badminton, tennis, and table tennis have proved to be a sore disappointment. In the shuttle sport, no exceptionally talented player has emerged in the junior ranks, apart from the fast and fit Assamese powerhouse, Deepankar Bhattacharya, who can be considered a good prospect for the future. Zeeshan Ali, son of national tennis coach Akhtar, has graduated into the senior tennis

ranks without leaving the sort of impress upon Wimbledon and the French Open that Ramesh Krishnan did in 1979.

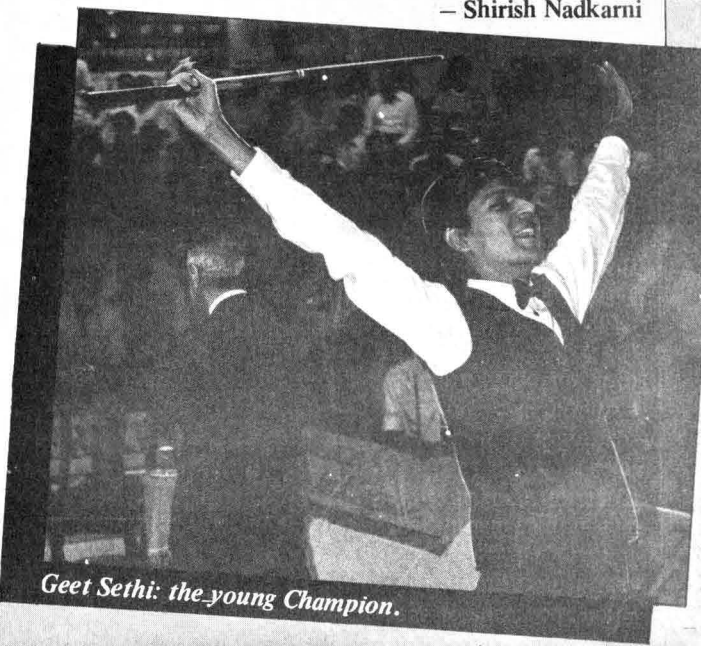
Also disappointing has been our performance in hockey. For the first time in living memory, the Indian hockey squad had to sit it out on the sidelines of the Champions Trophy. The Indians, by virtue of their ranking last amongst the twelve participating teams in the 1986 World Cup at Willesden, London, were forced out of the competition. Thus, they were unable to win a berth at the Champions Trophy automatically.

**SIMILARLY, INDIANS** have been unable to make any impression at international levels in cycling, soccer, boxing, wrestling, volleyball, or basketball. The state of these games in the country is as unhappy as the state of affairs in most of the country's sports-controlling associations, especially within the Indian Olympic Association (IOA).

With that august body being involved in an unseemly public brawl between two factions, and washing its dirty linen in public day after day, it is not surprising that faced with the official apathy, sportsmen of great potential like Premchand Dogra have decided to quit their respective sports. And he will not be the only one to opt for premature retirement if prompt corrective action is not taken.

At one end of the scale we have the officials and the freeloaders who try every trick in the book to join an Indian squad bound for an overseas meet — a team that returns empty-handed from its foreign jaunt — and at the other end, we have Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi imposing a blanket-ban on any Indian participation at meets abroad, even if it is an all-expenses-paid invitation (as happened in the case of Prakash Padukone, on the eve of the Japan Open in January 1987)! Somewhere between the two extremes, lies the answer to the ills assailing Indian sport.

— Shirish Nadkarni



*Geet Sethi: the young Champion.*



# MURDER BY DECREE

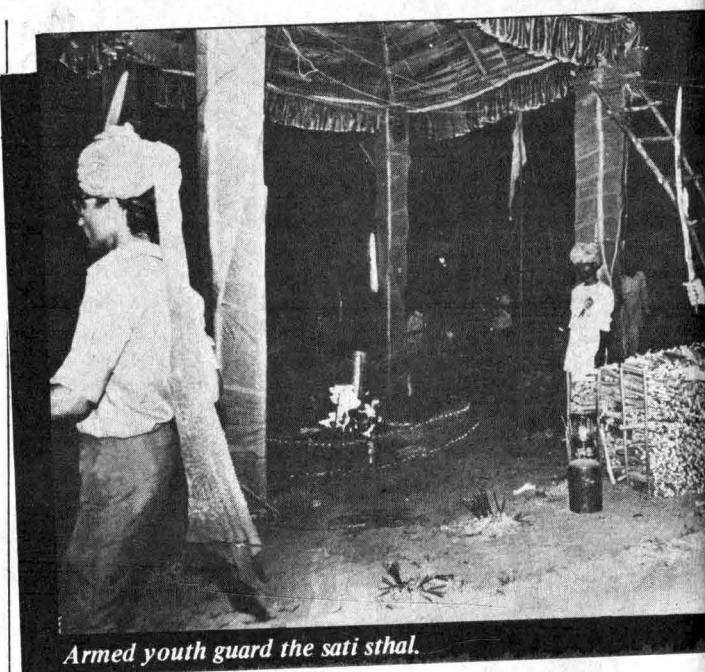
1987 HAD THE DUBIOUS DISTINCTION of putting Deorala on the map. On September 4, the previously little-known village in Sikar district, Rajasthan, was witness to the gruesome spectacle of the burning alive of 18-year old Roop Kanwar on her husband's funeral pyre. Hundreds of awe-struck villagers had gathered to watch, but what they saw was not a young woman being consigned to the flames, but the vision of a 'sati' who had attained divinity, blessing them in the process: a myth had successfully been created. And the expendability of a woman's life and her lack of an independent right to exist had once again been reaffirmed in modern India.

If not for the immediate and vociferous protests voiced by women's groups in Rajasthan, few would have learnt of Roop Kanwar's 'sacrifice', and the event would have probably been relegated to the annals of the history of rural Rajasthan, along with the 37 other incidents of sati (since 1947) that commanded little attention from press or public.

As news of the sati trickled through, the country's scribes vigorously addressed themselves to the incident, variously describing it as sati, self-destruction, murder, self-immolation, a pagan sacrifice, suicide, and death. But even as all eyes were focused on the *sati sthal*, members of the administration looked the other way, clearly demonstrating their inability — and reluctance — to take any immediate action. An FIR filed on September 4 named six persons as accused, and charges under Section 302 (murder) and 306 (abetment to suicide) under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) were levelled against them. However, no immediate investigations were launched, and the single and token arrest, when it was made, on September 9, was that of the teenaged brother of Roop Kanwar's husband, who had apparently lit the funeral pyre.

An inevitable and sharp polarisation of forces had meanwhile occurred, and the Rajput lobby was galvanized into action, in staunch defence of what they saw as an inalienable right to a religious practice — a ritual which sacrificed women at the altar of Hindu fundamentalism. A report published by the Women and Media Committee describes it thus: "... the issue had become something of a cause célèbre for the Rajput community, a touchstone for strengthening their communal identity and extending their political influence. And this development cut across political affiliations..."

**THE INDIFFERENCE AND APATHY** of the state and central governments in the face of an increasingly strident Rajput lobby was evident. And sharply censured. It was 11 days before Chief Minister Harideo Joshi publicly condemned the event, and it was Union Minister of State for Home, P Chidambaram's visit and his denunciation of the incident, that motivated the state government into taking action against the offenders. Other political leaders, however, notably from Janata Party, BJP, Lok Dal, and from the Congress (I) spoke glowingly in favour of the tradition of sati, and even pledged to build a temple to commemor-



Armed youth guard the *sati sthal*.

ate Roop Kanwar.

The government's inertia in the face of the crime was magnified when confronted with the *chunri mahotsav* ceremony on September 16. Despite the hitherto unprecedented High Court ban that women's organisations had obtained to prevent the ceremony, roads to the village were jammed with the thousands who flocked to witness the miracle of Roop Kanwar's *chunri* floating up to the heavens.

As the devotees and the curious converged on the sati shrine — at once a shrine to the nation's ignominy — the Rajasthan Home Minister defended his government's action by invoking the Constitution: "The right to worship is a fundamental right." The government, clearly hesitant to interfere in what many saw as "a family rite", also took refuge in the pretext that any preventive action would have meant "a mass loss of lives", an unbelievable statement considering that the authorities have not hesitated to forcibly disperse crowds on many occasions, including in a previous attempt to commit sati which the law enforcers had successfully prevented.

As police and district officials vacillated and prevaricated about the appropriate course of action to adopt, Roop Kanwar's relatives, village priests, and other entrepreneurs made brisk business. In the fortnight following her death, Rs 50 lakh flowed into the coffers of the committee that had appointed itself to erect a temple in her honour. Grotesque cards depicting a serene Roop Kanwar smiling beatifically as the flames engulfed her, sold for as much as Rs 20 each. The room in which she had spent the few months of her marital life was peeped into with wondrous awe by hordes of visitors. The commercial potential of the horrific crime had been quickly exploited, and almost overnight,

substantial amounts of money had changed hands, and Deorala found itself on the tourist itinerary

If Roop Kanwar's own parents — who had not been notified of the sati prior to its taking place — felt even the tiniest spark of anguish at the swift succession of events, it was quickly extinguished as they found themselves sharing platforms with local bigwigs defending the right to widow-immolation in the name of Hinduism.

**PIECING TOGETHER THE ACTUAL FACTS** of the case have proved near impossible — the villagers who had hungrily feasted on every sordid detail were curiously tight-lipped when quizzed about actual events. When a delegation of journalists from the Bombay Women and Media Group visited Deorala on a fact-finding mission, they returned with evidence that Roop Kanwar had been forcibly dragged to her death, and possibly drugged beforehand to facilitate proceedings. A Congress Party worker reported that Roop Kanwar was found cowering in a barn, and was forcibly escorted to the pyre, all the while surrounded by Rajput youth. Once on the pyre, her struggle to escape was hampered by the heavy logs she was buried under. It was as late as September 19, a fortnight after the incident had been exploited to fan communal feelings and fuel a dangerous religious fundamentalism, that the aiders and abettors to Roop Kanwar's murder were arrested.

In swift reaction, pro-sati rallies — in turn countered by demonstrations called by women's organisations — were organised. The Sati Dharma Raksha Samiti, with the blessings of the Janata Party chief, Kalyan Singh Kalvi, organised a function at Jaipur's Ramlila grounds to consecrate Roop Kanwar as a *devi*. The law enforcers merely looked on helplessly as a 70,000-strong crowd filled the grounds; the reactionary forces swore to hold larger rallies and threatened: "If you try to stop us, Rajiv Gandhi, you will be destroyed as Narsingha (Narsimha) destroyed Hiranya-Kashyap."

On October 31, the Rajasthan Sati (Prevention) Ordinance — which noted lawyer Indira Jaisingh described as nothing more than "a decorative addition to the statute book, typical of the tokenism of the Gandhi regime" — the tenets of which were later enshrined in a national law, was promulgated. By the first week of November, a total of 18 persons were arrested under the new ordinance.

**WHY THE DELAY?** And did the state authorities require to arm themselves with a new piece of legislation before swift, punitive action could be taken? It is obvious that if the law enforcers wished to prosecute the aiders and abettors of Roop Kanwar's murder, they could have done so under the IPC and the CrPC, sections of which have previously been used in similar incidents. Further, if the nation's leaders could invoke Article 25 of the Constitution with regard to the right to practise any religion, why did they not invoke Article 21 which guarantees the right to life, or Article 51 A which includes, amongst others, the duty to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women? And as Justice V K Krishna Iyer asked, "Is not equality of sexes guaranteed by the Constitution? Will men consent to burn themselves alive on the funeral pyres of their wives?"

It is evident that existing legislation could have been ef-

fectively enforced if the authorities had displayed any willingness on their part to do so. Instead, in an exercise that has probably assuaged the conscience of a government that dragged its feet in the aftermath of Roop Kanwar's murder and faced an onslaught of criticism for its cavalier unconcern, a new law has been entered in the statute books — the Commission of Sati (Prevention) Bill, 1987.

Its main features include clauses that define the glorification of sati and the aiding and abetting of the crime as offences that will attract imprisonment, and even life sentences. But as Radha Kumar and Lotika Sarkar point out, the Bill fails to "distinguish between sati as an act, an ideology, and a source of political or financial profit." Further, the law fails to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary sati, and treats widow-immolation as suicide — for which the victim is liable to be prosecuted along with the murderers! There are other loopholes too: there is no provision for the ideological propagators of sati to be punished unless with reference to a particular incidence of sati; the law does not punish those who donate land and money to perpetuate the glorification of sati; and those who extract commercial profit by the sale of any artefacts in connection with the event, are outside the purview of the new Bill. Calls to tighten the new law have already been issued.

**CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SENTIMENT** has been mobilised against the misogynist practice that seeks to 'glorify' and deify women by the commission of sati. But the incident has also fuelled a Hindu revivalism, evidence of which has littered the pages of the media; a debate about the sanctioning of sati in the Hindu scriptures still continues. "It is imperative to de-link the issue of sati from religion so that women are not sacrificed at the altar of communalism," declares the recently-published report by the Women and Media Group, "and it is necessary to ask why women must pay — often with their lives — for their communities' search for identities."

It would be well to remember that Roop Kanwar's murder — which has been likened to the all-too-common dowry murders — with the distinction that the former was committed publicly and with religious sanction — is only part of a continuum of violence against women. (Indeed, the immediate economic benefits accruing to Roop Kanwar's conjugal family on her death have not been entirely ruled out as a possible motive for her murder.)

A host of laws already exists to punish offenders in instances of crimes against women, for example, in cases of dowry murders. The reality, however, is that the laws are seldom enforced; at the root of this lies the continuing low status accorded to women in the country. At the end of the year, the question being asked is, in the event of another barbaric crime akin to Roop Kanwar's murder, will the government, armed as it is with the provisions of a new law, take action? ♦



# HARVESTING THE DISCONTENT

**1987 WAS MARKED BY AN UNPRECEDENTED** militancy in farmers' agitations in many parts of the country — principally in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat — and the increasingly powerful farmers' lobby, despite its factions and varying political allegiances, made an indelible mark on the political scenario.

Perhaps the most significant event was the meteoric rise to fame of Chaudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait, a hitherto little-known Jat farmer who hails from a small village in Uttar Pradesh, and who led a mammoth farmers' agitation, under the auspices of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), in March 1987.

The agitation in UP had its beginnings early in the year when the heads of several Jat clans, representing lakhs of Jat farmers from Western UP, met in Tikait's village on January 14, 1987, and resolved to fight for their rights. The non-availability of power supply, especially in peak irrigation and threshing periods, was the chief grouse. A hike in power tariffs from Rs 22.50 per horsepower (hp) to Rs 30, further incurred their wrath. On March 1, 1987, a *dharna* at Shamli attracted thousands of farmers. Events took an ugly turn when demonstrators hurled bombs at the police, who, unable to contain the angry mob, responded by firing, killing two youths. Undeterred, the militant Jat farmers, who by then had crowned Tikait the king of their cause, *gheraoed* the Shamli sub-station on April 1, where Tikait addressed a mammoth rally, clearly prepared to do battle for their rights. The power tariff was reduced

to Rs 25 per hp at considerable cost to the government, but did little to quell the angry farmers.

Offers of political support from Lok Dal leaders were rejected as were offers of monetary support. "We will not allow the people sitting in Lucknow or Delhi to decide our fate. We will do it ourselves," declared Tikait, to resounding applause.

However, as the agitation gained momentum, its previously cherished autonomy was shed in favour of forging links with Sharad Joshi, the undisputed doyen of the farmers' cause, and later, with V P Singh — perhaps an inevitable move considering the mushrooming of agitations elsewhere in the country.

**THE MILITANCY IN UP FOUND ITS ECHO** in Gujarat. Under the leadership of the Bharatiya Kisan Sangh (BKS), an organisation of upper caste farmers which enjoys the patronage of the BJP, a statewide agitation had begun in October 1986. The demands included more remunerative support prices for commercial crops, a decrease in power tariffs, cheaper fertilisers, and changes in land revenue rules. The Congress (I) state government, under the leadership of Amarsinh Chaudhary, had kept some of its promises made at the polls, including a subsidy in power tariffs and crop insurance benefits. However, overall, the budget allocated for agriculture had fallen from Rs 54.19 crore in 1984-1985 to Rs 49.31 crore two years later.

Although the Gujarat agitation was initially launched



*Sharad Joshi: gaining national stature.*

to air the demands of the small farmers — many of which were met by the government — those demands which blatantly favoured the big farmers (and included some which exploited the small farmers) were rejected. To maintain the pressure on the government, the big farmers, with the active collusion of some opposition politicians, prolonged the agitation.

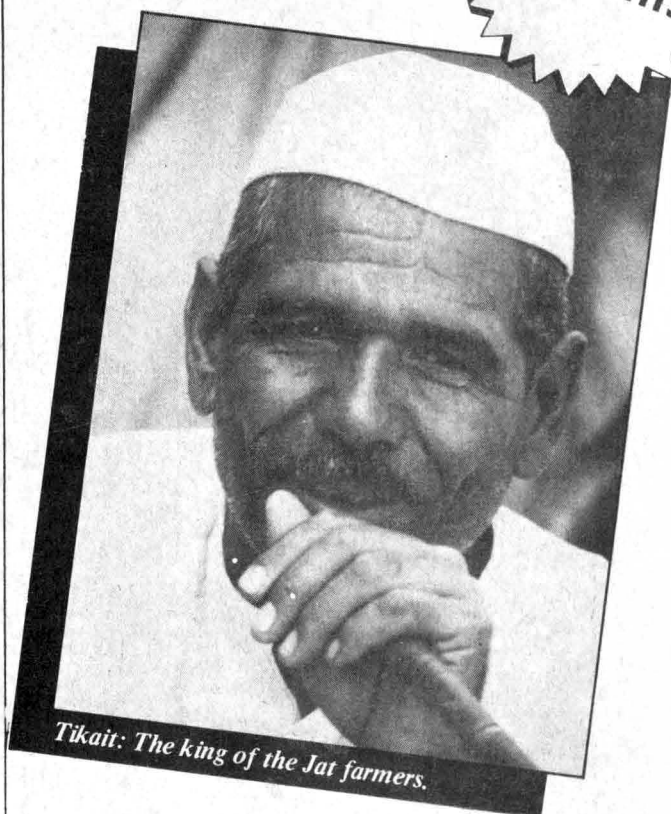
The agitation took a violent turn on March 18, 1987, when a *gherao* of the Vidhan Sabha was met by police blockades, and an unexpected show of force in the shape of the paramilitary. But the government had clearly underestimated the wrath of the farmers, and their plans backfired. The resultant mob violence — which included the lynching of a policeman — led to hundreds of arrests, and ten dead in the police firing. The farmers retaliated by cutting off supplies of vegetables and milk to urban areas, resulting in steep price hikes overnight.

The Amarsinh Chaudhary government succumbed to pressure, gave in to some of the demands, and provided a Rs 11.50 crore concession in power tariffs at the end of October 1987. Those observing the emergent situation have commented that the granting of some concessions, rather than placating the militant farmers, will inevitably encourage other demands.

Indeed, in amongst the just demands of the farmers, are some that have been characterised as sweeping, untenable, and even absurd. In any case, the agitators showed that they could hold the government to ransom, and it was only the intervention of Sharad Joshi that served to subdue the angry farmers. Successive agitations and *rasta rokos* in the course of the year passed off peacefully.

**IN MAHARASHTRA, SHARAD JOSHI'S** home ground, the agitations sparked off by him at the turn of the decade, were reactivated last December and throughout 1987. Joshi's contribution to the cause is legendary — the *rasta roko* agitations, now popular, were originally launched by Joshi who led the Shetkari Sanghatana and organised a spate of rallies and agitations in the state.

The central demand, then and now, has been that of remunerative prices. The government's economic policies, inadequate support prices for agricultural produce, the dumping of imports on the local market, and the canalisation of export through notoriously inefficient and corrupt state or quasi-state corporations, had made the farmers increasingly poor. And when the government, on the surface of things, *did* succumb and assure minimum support prices, statistical jugglery and manipulation of cost data ensured that the prices remained outrageously low. Both the sugarcane and cotton prices are illustrative: the bulk of the sugarcane crop is bought by the government at prices lower than the universally accepted cost of production; the same is the case for cotton, second only to wheat in export figures. The state government's monopoly procurement of cotton (which resulted in acceptable prices being fixed years ago), the new Textile Policy introduced by the central government in 1985, and the textile industry's demands to go slow on the export of cotton have succeeded in keeping rates down, and have discouraged consumption of cotton cloth.



*Tikait: The king of the Jat farmers.*

The severe drought of 1987 has also taken its toll, but despite the poor harvest, farmers in Maharashtra are demanding an extra Rs 72 per bale of cotton over the government's fixed price, a demand that Chavan's government has found unreasonable.

But it was the inroads that Joshi made both in UP and Gujarat that guaranteed his supremacy as the undisputed king of the Indian farmers' cause. More than anyone else, Joshi has sought to form a strong coalition of the various agitational forces, on the basis of common demands.

Where previously the farmers have been content to be backed, albeit weakly, by the Congress (I), the party's grip has clearly slackened, and the farmers' lobby, an immense vote bank, has been up for grabs. And various politicians have begun the bidding. Sharad Joshi's recently forged alliance with V P Singh invited much controversy: in September, the leader of the Jan Morcha addressed a huge rally in Nasik district endorsing the farmers' demands, and was hailed as their political spokesman. The announcement on December 2 by Vasantrao Patil and Sharad Pawar of the launch of the Rashtriya Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmers' organisation established to support and strengthen the Congress party, was an obvious bid to woo the farmers' community away from Sharad Joshi's Shetkari Sanghatana to the Congress (I).

**THE DEMAND FOR A BETTER DEAL** for the nation's farmers and the consolidation of the various state-wide agitations promise to make a significant impact on Indian politics. At the end of the year, the farmers are clearly

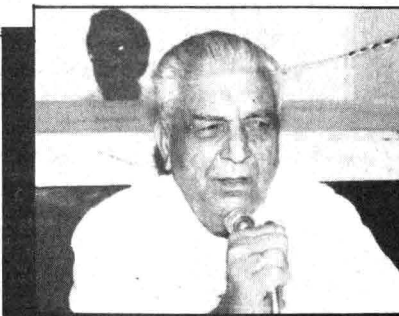


# BAD DEBTS

**AT THE END OF THE YEAR**, a staggering amount of the loans distributed to the country's farmers to promote economic growth, still remained outstanding. The amounts reached alarming proportions in some states: 95 per cent remained outstanding in Manipur, 77 per cent in Meghalaya, 73 per cent in Assam, 65 per cent in Tripura, and 55-60 per cent in several other states. The National Agricultural Bank for Rural Development (NABARD), the authority which replaced the RBI in 1982, supervises the distribution of funds to both commercial and co-operative banks, and has an annual credit disbursement of an estimated Rs 7,070 crore over the Seventh Plan period. NABARD has distributed more than Rs 15,000 crore to the agricultural sector, of which more than 60 per cent remains outstanding.

The reasons for the non-recovery of these loans are many. Prime among them is the lack of any infrastructure that oversees and ensures development as well as a profit-generating utilisation of the loans. In addition, a feeling of bravado vis-à-vis the non-payment of loans seems to have developed in the farmers' community, thanks to the frequent writing-off of loans by some state governments. Although special circumstances like a severe famine or other natural calamities can and have justified the waiving of loans, more often than not, agricultural debts have been written off in order to make electoral and political gains, and have consequently played havoc with the country's economy.

The most controversial case in point involved the Lok Dal (B) in Haryana. Its election manifesto for the June 17 Assembly elections promised to write off all outstanding



*Devi Lal.*

loans to the peasantry. It was this promise, more than anything else, that awarded Devi Lal his outstanding majority at the polls. A three-member cabinet committee, under the chairmanship of Mr B D Gupta, the state Finance Minister, was established soon after the victory to report on how best to waive the loans, but failed to explain the financial implications of this move. The committee report left the small farmers disgruntled with the conditions they were required to fulfil in order to qualify for the waiver. Many of the conditions seemed to benefit the wealthy farmers whose clout with the government is considerable: the ceiling on loans to be waived was halved from the promised Rs 20,000 to Rs 10,000; so also was the period for which the waiver would stand.

The Governor of the RBI, Mr R N Malhotra, repeatedly opposed this move. He reminded the Devi Lal administration of the policies which govern loans given by commercial banks, and added that the RBI would henceforth advance cheap credit only to those co-operative banks which showed a recovery rate of over 50 per cent. According to him, deviations from the prescribed norms by either the commercial or co-operative banks,

have already destabilised the credit structure in the rural areas and will continue to do so.

Further, the Haryana government has neither made any budgetary provision to compensate the financial institutions that had advanced the loans, nor has any target date been set to expedite the cases of those 4.2 lakh farmers whose debts to the commercial banks remain outstanding. Also, the government has not yet devised a strategy with which to replenish the state treasury after remitting the outstanding loans to the various banks concerned.

The writing-off of loans is considered by many to be anti-developmental. It spreads what one editor described as "the ethos of parasitism". The total outstanding debt identified in Haryana is a staggering Rs 227.51 crore of which Rs 146 crore has been borrowed from commercial banks. The state Exchequer's own liability in the entire venture is to the extent of Rs 65.65 crore. The trend set by Haryana — the second richest state in the country — is a dangerous one. It is not unlikely that a repetition of events could occur in other states where colossal debts remain outstanding, a situation which political parties could well exploit to their advantage.

Meanwhile, the national farmers' rally scheduled to be held in Delhi, in March 1988, promises to vociferously reiterate the farmers' refusal to repay any and all loans received; a move possibly based on the 'success' witnessed in Haryana. Any further writing-off of loans would constitute a severe loss to the Exchequer: already a total of Rs 9,000 crore remains outstanding, a sum that the nation can ill-afford.

poised to intensify their agitations in the next. There are plans afoot to stage a mammoth rally in March 1988. About 50 lakh farmers, backed by organisations from 13 states, will converge on the Capital, and demands previously voiced at a state-wide level will be reiterated: freedom from indebtedness for loans to pay for crop and land development and poverty alleviation; a higher minimum wage for labourers; and higher prices for produce.

Despite regional differences and the rifts between their leaders, a hitherto unprecedented unity has been forged, and the formation of a strong coalition, united by shared demands, is a clear signal to the ruling party that the political map is likely to be redrawn. As Chaudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait recently declared, "No political party, no government has the time for us. We will show them what we are worth."

# NIGHT WITHOUT END

1987  
HIGHLIGHTS

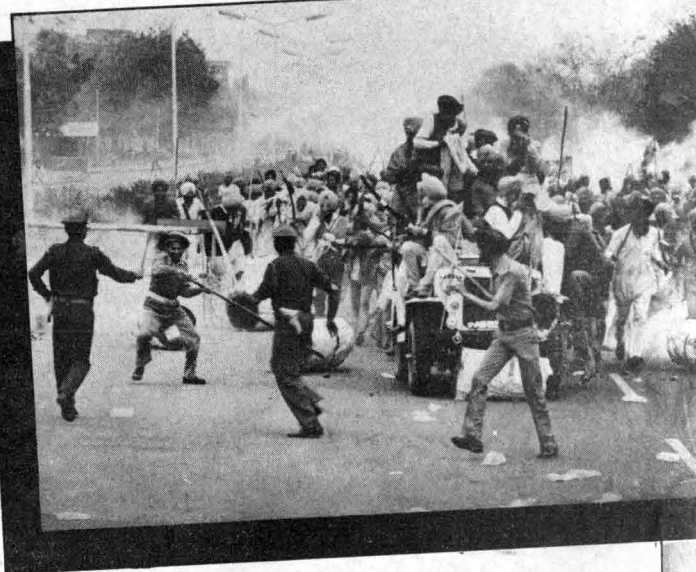
1987. . . AND VIOLENCE AND ACRIMONY in the troubled state of Punjab continued unabated.

In January, the Barnala government in Punjab was 16 months old. And already under severe criticism, due to its dismal failure to contain terrorism. Worse, the Akali Dal had been divided and the Chief Minister found himself in an impasse, with the Akal Takht — the most revered and political religious organisation of Sikhism — on the one hand, and the extremists on the other. The affable singer of devotional songs, Professor Darshan Singh Ragi, suddenly surfaced as a strong spokesman for the extremists and a distinct threat to S S Barnala. Seven days after Ragi's appointment (on January 26 this year) as the new Jathedar of the Takht, the first *hukumnama* (edict) was issued by the newly-appointed priests to all Akali Dal factions, including the ruling Akali Dal (Longowal), asking them to resign from all posts and form a "reorganised Shiromani Akali Dal". On Barnala's refusal to obey the edict, the Takht declared him a *tankhaiya* — a person guilty of religious misconduct — and excommunicated him from the Sikh order.

The tug-of-war between moderate and extremist Sikhs continued on February 16, when Akali Dal (L) held their *sarbat khalsa* at Anandpur Saheb while the militants held their *kar seva* at Amritsar. Unhappily for the extremists, the *sarbat khalsa* drew more crowds and that too, from all over the state. Again, on February 20, defying the Akal Takht, 2.5 lakh moderate Sikhs, in an exceptional instance of moderate political assertion, assembled at the site of Sant Longowal's *bhog* ceremony, to give ear and support to Chief Minister S S Barnala. It was a historic occasion — Punjab's first, much-awaited peaceful *jatha*! The moderates had won the round.

**THE DECLARATION OF KHALISTAN** on April 29, 1987, by the five-member Panthic Committee was not so much a militant move towards securing the Sikh dream as a petty act of revenge. The subsequent increase in terrorist activities was clearly a retaliation to the unexpected popularity accruing to the moderates. Meanwhile, Barnala, in order to win popularity among the masses, convinced the Centre to review the Jodhpur detenus leniently and release the innocent among the 376 persons detained after Operation Bluestar. The aggressiveness with which Prem Singh Chandumajra, Punjab's Minister for Co-operation, expressed the need to restrain police activities under DGP Julio Ribeiro, was further seen as an attempt to woo the extremists to the Akali Dal (L).

Meanwhile, the terrorists, under the hegemony of Prof Ragi and the Panthic Committee of the Akal Takht, had started gathering at the Golden Temple once again. In a pre-dawn swoop by black-suited commandos of the National Security Guard (NSG) on April 30, no substantial incriminating evidence — apart from five revolvers — was found. Terrorist activities continued unabated: 65 persons were killed in March, while the killings rose to 85 in April.



To counter the rise in terrorism, or so it claimed, the Centre dismissed Barnala and imposed President's Rule on May 12, ignoring the generous encomiums delivered to Barnala by Home Minister Buta Singh only a short while earlier. The imposition of President's Rule in Punjab marked yet another watershed in Sikh politics: the burial of the Punjab Accord of 1985. The Akalis termed it the second murder of Longowal. Yet it was apparent that Barnala seemed to be fast losing ground: the militants in the Temple had declared him a *tankhaiya*, the Badal faction of the Akali Dal resented him fiercely, and within the Akali Dal (L) itself, ministers were openly flouting his orders.

**DESPITE SEVERAL PROMISES**, the Centre, too, had given him a raw deal, vis-à-vis the Jodhpur detenus, Chandigarh, and the demand for a fair share of the Ravi-Beas waters. Instead, by "sacrificing Punjab's interests at the altar of Haryana," as Barnala aptly put it, and with Haryana's predominately Hindu voters due to go to the polls five weeks later, the Centre destroyed any hope of a viable, political, and expeditious solution to the Punjab problem. With Barnala's precipitate dismissal, the field was left open for all manner of groups — militants, moderates, and overt terrorists — to establish lines of negotiation directly with the Centre.

The Punjab police supremo's reaction to President's rule in the state was typical: Julio Ribeiro proclaimed that "it's much better to deal with a situation of this type on your own," because "police officers get politicised under a popularly elected government". He then confidently predicted immediate and impressive results, as far as his force was concerned. The optimism was premature. Despite an unrestrained use of his much-criticised bullet-for-a-bullet strategy, Ribeiro was unable to produce spectacular or even



# THE DEATH TOLL

A SHARP INCREASE in terrorist attacks in Punjab as compared with previous years' figures, was clearly discernible in 1987. Despite Ribeiro's bullet-for-a-bullet strategy, and the imposition of President's Rule, the spree of terrorist attacks reached alarming proportions and sent shock-waves through the country. Indeed, there was more than a 130 per cent increase in the death toll this year, as against figures for 1986 — while 20 civilians fell victim to the terrorists in July 1986, 136 lives were claimed in July 1987.

Below we list the most gruesome terrorist attacks of the year.

Date	Scene of Attack	No of victims
January 9	Tarn Tarn	10 killed
March 17	Patiala	12 killed
June 13	At a birthday party in Greater Kailash I and environs, in New Delhi.	14 killed 21 injured
July 6	A Rishikesh-bound	40 killed
July 6	Haryana Roadways bus on the Chandigarh-Ambala Highway.	33 injured
July 7	A Delhi-bound Haryana Roadways bus near Daryapur.	32 killed
Split seconds later	A Sirsa-bound Haryana Roadways bus near Daryapur.	36 killed
October 20	Chittaranjan Park residential colony, New Delhi.	11 killed

satisfactory results in curbing terrorism and lawlessness in a state where they had become a byword.

ON AUGUST 24, ON THE RECOMMENDATION of the Punjab police, the Terrorist and Disruptive Act 1987 was passed by the Lok Sabha, and received the President's assent on September 13. Successively alienated by President's rule and perceiving the Act as a threat, four high priests of the Sikh Panthic Committee — Jaswant Singh, Sawinder Singh, Pooran Singh, and Kashmir Singh — announced on September 9, that 16 major militant groups and factions had united to make the "struggle for freedom" more effective. Gurbachan Singh Manochahal (Chief of the newly-formed Bhindranwale Tiger Force of Khalistan), Sukhdev Singh (Babbar Khalsa Chief), Labh Singh (Khalistan Commando Force Chief), and the Manjit Singh faction of the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISSF) were among those present. Together they issued an open challenge to the Centre, charged the police with indulging in 'fake encounters', and elevated terrorists to the status of martyrs. They made plans to capture the SGPC, spend its vast resources, and use its *gurudwaras* as sanctuaries; to replace Ragi who had since lost the support of hardcore terrorists,

due to his insistence on non-violence, by a more amenable priest; and to hold another *sarbat khalsa* on Diwali day. In short, it was a doomsday meeting, appealing openly to the Sikh community to support the militants.

The SGPC's reprimand of the Panth's call went unheeded. Instead, it had to retract its stand under pressure from the increasing force of militancy in the Takht. The terrorist-ridden Panthic Committee, openly defying the reluctant Jathedar, Darshan Singh Ragi, and the moderates of the UAD, announced on October 7, the constitution of an 11-member National Council of Khalistan to "guide the destiny of the entire Sikh Panth". The government, in a decisive move, arrested three Sikh priests of the Panthic Committee under the provisions of the NSA to prevent their proposed *sarbat khalsa* on Diwali day. In the pre-Diwali swoop on the state, 400 persons were taken into custody.

THE PANTHIC COMMITTEE, now being openly run by the terrorists, excommunicated Prakash Singh Badal of the UAD and G S Tohra of the SGPC. The SGPC itself had weakened. In the elections at Anandpur Saheb on October 16, the major 'voice' of the Prabandhak Committee — the Barnala-dominated UAD — lost by a narrow margin to the rival G S Tohra faction, creating a definite split in the SGPC. With the UAD and the SGPC being harshly critical of the Panthic Committee's militancy, the resultant infighting threw Sikh politics into total disarray. The UAD itself was battling between the Barnala and Badal factions of the Akali Dal. In fact, the recent actions of "the United Akali Dal, the Akali Dal (L) and the Panthic Committee, which is the largest umbrella organisation of the militants, resulted in two sets of SGPC, two sets of high priests and overall radically altered alignment," claimed a newspaper report.

Finally, the acting chief of the Akal Takht, Prof Ragi, who had retreated to voluntary exile following the dissension by the Gurjit Singh faction of the AISSF, announced his resignation from the post on November 17, with a call for a peaceful protest march to Delhi on December 4.

As the year ends, the various political forces, including the terrorists, are set in a gameplan of restructuring the future of the state. The Akali Dal (L) convention on December 8 at Jalandhar, presided over by ex-Chief Minister S S Barnala, adopted a resolution demanding the removal of Governor S S Ray, the restoration of the Punjab assembly and bold steps to implement the Punjab Accord.

As we go to the press, Punjab has undergone seven months of President's rule. Governor Ray, DGP Ribeiro, and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi have been unable to find a lasting resolution to the Punjab imbroglio. Terrorists continue playing their inhuman power games, and according to political pundits the number of killings claimed by each terrorist group is used as a leverage to bargain for status within the hierarchy of the Panthic Committee. Further, the extent of brutality has become a *sine qua non* for dialogues with the Centre. Consequently, the increased violence is being seen as a bid to enhance the terrorists' negotiating powers with the government. The mass support for the terrorists is definitely dwindling, and financial support from abroad has lessened, but the militant approach of the Panthic Committee and the Akal Takht threatens to sustain itself, thus bearing few tidings of immediate peace. ♦



# REGIONAL ROUNDUP

1987  
HIGHLIGHTS

## JAMMU & KASHMIR

In the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly elections on March 23 this year, the Congress (I) and National Conference (F) alliance, formed last year, thrashed the fundamentalist Muslim United Front (MUF), thereby giving the state some political stability. While Farookh Abdullah cracked down on fundamentalists, beginning by closing all schools run by fundamentalist organisations, the MUF continued its secessionism without much success as its many rallies were poorly attended. Facing a revolt in his party, the People's National Conference (PNC), Jammu & Kashmir's erstwhile Chief Minister, G M Shah, decided to quit politics, but later joined the MUF.

Meanwhile, rumbles grew louder within the joint alliance camp, and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's resignation from the Union Cabinet, and his subsequent dismissal from Congress (I), split loyalties within it. Furthermore, Farookh Abdullah's decision in October to end the "darbar move" — approximately a century-old practice of transfer of the Secretariat from Srinagar to Jammu in winter — provoked furious protests in Jammu. Meant to maintain the power-balance between Jammu and Kashmir, the abolition of the tradition was seen as a discrimination against the former region. Farookh Abdullah thus had to withdraw his decision in November, but by pacifying Jammu, he has enraged Kashmir.

## RAJASTHAN

The state awoke to an alarming financial crisis in January: a hasty review revealed that it was steeped in debt which would rise to a staggering Rs 4,000 crore at the year's end. And, in spite of additional taxes of Rs 40 crore levied in March by Harideo Joshi's government, an uncovered deficit of over Rs 115 crore remained.

The Deorala sati drew the entire nation's attention to Rajasthan. Because of the extreme socio-religious beliefs involved, there was a considerable polarisation of views, and human reactions were muzzled by political concerns. Joshi's government suffered another jolt during the Assembly's November session when fellow party member, Narendar Singh Bhati, accusing him of conspiring with pro-sati elements, demanded his resignation.

The state also saw an unprecedented drought. Despite calls for austere measures, the state government came under heavy fire for the uncalled-for expenses incurred in renovation works undertaken in connection with the proposed Union Cabinet meeting at Sariska on December 18. The government's insistence that the expenditure was a routine affair did not hold good.

## GUJARAT

1987 began interestingly for Gujarat with the old Congress (I) war-horse, Jinabhai Darji, dissolving his strong, five-year old dissident group.

The Congress (I) fared well in local elections including the district and *taluka panchayat* polls (winning 16 out of 17 seats, and 2,494 out of 4,178 respectively), but suffered badly in the municipal elections in Baroda, Rajkot, Surat, and Ahmedabad, where NSA detinue, Abdul Latif, won four seats.

Political upsets were accompanied by agitations: the junior doctors' strike ended after 93 days with the introduction of a massive pay hike of 35 per cent. Then the lawyers agitated, demanding the appointment of their nominees as judges in the Ahmedabad High Court. Next, a rally of over one lakh farmers in Baroda demanded debt-relief and lower electricity tariffs. Soon, teachers agitated for higher pay, 1,000 of whom were arrested, and a *morcha* of 2,000 women demanded more water, when faced by the severe drought which affected Saurashtra and Kutch the worst.

Gujarat was also shaken by unprecedented terrorism. Almost coinciding with the Prime Minister's visit to Saurashtra, a bomb blast occurred in Morvi on June 2, followed by another on September 24, which killed eight and injured 30. A dozen similar explosions throughout 1987 are ominous of a future of terrorism in the state, fired by an arms-flow across the Pakistan-Kutch border.

However, the public remains loyal to its administrators. A most spectacular show of public sympathy was witnessed in large-scale rioting and arson which destroyed property worth Rs 10 crore, following Municipal Commissioner S Jagdeeshan's transfer on October 2.

## MAHARASHTRA

Two education scandals exploded in Chief Minister S B Chavan's face early this year. The first was the Marathwada B Ed colleges imbroglio in which the 5,611 "excess" students were not allowed to appear for their examinations. In fact, one of the societies to which the colleges were affiliated had the CM as its president. The issue was resolved after the court directed the colleges to allow the "excess" students to appear for their exams. Close on the heels of this another donation scandal came to light. A 1987 survey revealed that most of the government-approved unaided engineering colleges did not have even bare infrastructural facilities to conduct their prescribed courses and charged massive donations for admission.

However, the March Assembly and Lok Sabha by-elections in which the CM's son, Ashok Chavan, and ex-Chief



Minister Nilangekar emerged triumphant, proved that the Congress (I) was still firmly entrenched in the state.

The Dada-Pawar-Chavan triangle continued its strategies and counter-strategies. Sharad Pawar, who had rejoined the Congress (I) late last year, attempted to consolidate his position in the party and remain the only contestant for the CM's post once Chavan was ousted. Vasantdada Patil, on the other hand, resigned from his post as Governor of Rajasthan and decided to re-enter active politics. Chief Minister S B Chavan was barely able to hang on to his post against the combined strength of these two formidable opponents, especially when Dada declared Pawar to be his political successor. The Dada-Pawar alliance announced the launching of a national farmers' organisation to offer a forum to farmers to speak from, and to undermine the growing influence of Sharad Joshi and his Shetkari Sanghatna.

Further, the most celebrated judicial crusade against the corrupt nexus between the drug industry and government — the Lentin Commission — investigating the deaths of 14 patients due to the administration of adulterated glycerol in Bombay's state-run J J Hospital came to an end. The report submitted on November 30 is yet to be made public.

## GOA

Goa rung in the new year battered and bruised from the bloody language riots that shook it in late December last year. While Goa did get its statehood, the conflicts of cultures within the state — between the Konkani and the Marathi speaking populations — continued. The language bill, passed on February 4, declared Konkani in the Devnagiri script to be the sole official language, and accepted the usage of Marathi for Goa, and Gujarati for Daman and Diu for any or all official purposes.

On May 11, the Lok Sabha unanimously passed two bills to make Goa India's 25th state, but the present government will remain in office until its term expires in 1989. Daman and Diu were given autonomous status, with their own Pradesh Council to govern them.

The Government of Goa's master-plan for 2001 AD, for the development of tourism in the new state, was presented in June. The newly-formed Jagrut Goenkaranchi Fauz intensified its agitation to prevent five-star tourism from turning Goa into another Hawaii.

## KARNATAKA

After assuming office in 1983, the Janata Government introduced the Panchayat Raj in the state in a bid to decentralise administration. In the Zilla Parishad elections held in January this year, in a total of 887 seats contested, the Janata captured a majority (447) while the Congress (I) was surprisingly close (395).

The Desai Commission came up with a startling report vis-à-vis the notorious conversation in which Congress (I) leader Veerappa Moily was supposed to have offered Rs 2 lakh to Janata Minister Byre Gowda to defect to the Congress (I). The Commission exonerated Moily.

In April, there was a dramatic expansion of the state

cabinet to include 24 new ministers, a move by the Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde to pacify disgruntled elements, but this did not help much, as dissent continued. Even civil servants took up cudgels against Hegde as a result of his letter to civil secretaries accusing the administration of corruption and inefficiency. Ironically, Hegde himself became the target of corruption charges in September, with the Congress (I) in Karnataka seeking the Governor's permission to prosecute him.

The language debate reared its head a couple of times. While the Kannadiga militants feel that Kannada is not sufficiently used in the state, Hegde is keen to assure the Marathi speaking population that no state language will be imposed on them.

On the economic front, with an escalation in the power crisis, the government was forced to impose a 10 per cent across-the-board hike in power-cuts, on account of which the industry is estimated to be incurring a daily loss of Rs 2 crore.

## KERALA

For the fifth time in 30 years, Kerala voted in a communist-led government in March 1987. It is the first time since the advent of coalition politics in 1960 that Kerala's electorate voted in a government that does not lean towards or live with communal or regional parties. And with its defeat in Kerala, the Congress found itself totally out of the power-frame in Southern India.

Even as K R Gouri's name was being whispered for the post of CM, E K Nayanar was installed as the new Chief Minister. But the going did not prove smooth for the CPI (M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF). It inherited an economy that was in shambles: the previous government seemed to have lived far beyond its means. The illusion of buoyance was shattered as the Gulf boom, which had pumped in an annual Rs 800 crore, tapered off alarmingly. Kerala now seems to be heading for an economic crisis.

However, the most staggering blow to the new government came with the deluge of protests that followed Revenue Minister strongwoman Gouri's decision to lift the embargo on selling alcohol near educational institutions and places of worship. Badly shaken by this adverse reaction, the CPI (M) government hastily withdrew the order.

## TAMIL NADU

On January 30, Karunanidhi was arrested and sentenced to 10 weeks of rigorous imprisonment following the month-long agitation over the public burning of Part 17 of the Constitution that deals with the official language, and violent protests by the DMK all over the state followed. However, a compromise was temporarily effected with Karunanidhi's release three days later, and the two month-long anti-Hindi stir came to an end.

Meanwhile, the MGR government continued its hostile relationship with the media. The well-known editor of *Ananda Vikatan*, Balasubramanian, was arrested in March for publishing a cartoon that equated an MLA and a minis-

ter with a pickpocket and a dacoit respectively. His arrest had the press up in arms. But while the AIADMK relented and released the editor, it continued with its belief that media freedom was harmful to government interests. Consequently in May, it introduced and passed a bill in the Assembly which sought to ban films containing material "derogatory to the conduct of MLAs".

MGR completed 10 years in office on June 30. The question of succession became crucial as MGR was again hospitalised in June. With Verappan, the once natural choice after MGR, falling out of grace and then bouncing back when MGR fell ill, the battle lines were clearly drawn between him and Panrutti Ramachandran who, reportedly, was being groomed as heir before Verappan's return. Meanwhile, the colourful Jayalalitha, at one time projected by MGR as his successor, was waiting in the wings, sidelined temporarily.

The issue of the Sri Lankan Tamils continued to dog Tamil Nadu periodically and the state witnessed a series of violent incidents. The TN police seemed curiously unable to effect any control over the Tamil militants' activities, on the pretext that the moment an arrest warrant was issued, the militants would escape by boat to Jaffna.

## ANDHRA PRADESH

The results of the elections to the 1,058 Mandala Praja Parishads (MPP) and 22 Zilla Praja Parishads (ZPP) indicated a significant dampening of the NTR charisma with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) bagging 652 MPP and 21 ZPP seats, while the Congress (I) netted 339 MPP and 18 ZPP seats.

Meanwhile, NTR had stepped into another controversy with characteristic aplomb. At a press conference on March 12, he declared that his youngest son and film actor, N Balkrishna, would be his political heir. The allegations and counter-allegations against a dynastic takeover of the state cabinet and favouritism towards NTR's family members, continued throughout the year. The state also continued to be rife with Naxalite activities. There are reportedly 10,000 hard-core Naxalites in the state today, with over 100,000 sympathisers.

In October, NTR called an emergency cabinet meeting to propose radical electoral reforms recommending state funding of elections, and proposing that no candidate receive any assistance whatsoever from any agency, and that all publicity material be approved by an election authority.

Politically, the NTR government continued to be needed by the Congress (I) opposition, as a consequence of several allegations of corruption against NTR. On November 2, the APCC (I) Secretary, Shri Satyanarayan, filed a writ petition in the AP High Court seeking an inquiry into serious corruption charges against the CM, alleging that NTR had bent government rules to enable members of his family to amass wealth.

But NTR's biggest crisis of the year came when he fell out with his trusted lieutenant, Revenue Minister Srinivasulu Reddy. Following an acrimonious exchange, Reddy was dismissed from the Cabinet and the party. Needless to say, Reddy remains NTR's most bitter critic with the

advantage of having been his close ally.

## ORISSA

In Orissa, Congress (I) dissidence and Kalahandi continued to occupy centre-stage. Chief Minister J B Patnaik's fate seemed to hang forever in the balance, threatened as it was by signature campaigns by Congress (I) MLAs, anti-Patnaik rallies, delegations to Delhi seeking his ouster, and disrupted public meetings which the CM was addressing. However, support for the CM, or the lack of it, in the Assembly, remained uncertain.

Affairs of the state continued to suffer as a result of this political tug-of-war. Even as official reports claimed that the starvation deaths in Kalahandi and Koraput were rising, for the opposition and the Congress (I) dissidents, these were merely a sledgehammer to hit the CM with. The death-toll was over 1,500. Rajiv Gandhi, who toured the state in September, did little to propose any new steps to alleviate the situation, but his trip did seem to have some political success, as it effectively dampened dissident activity.

Meanwhile, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India released a report in May which claimed that there was serious misuse of funds meant for the relief of victims of natural calamities, by the state government, between 1980-1985: nearly Rs 18 crore had been spent on programmes that had nothing to do with natural calamities.

## WEST BENGAL

The agitation for Gorkhaland, Centre-State tensions, and elections were of central importance in the State.

The Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led by the fickle-minded Subhash Gheising, continued to call for a separate homeland. Electioneering further ensured that the Gorkhaland issue remained alive, as both the Congress (I) as well as the CPI (M) were using it to ridicule each other.

In a bid to recapture his dwindling influence, Gheising declared a 13-day *bandh* in the hills of Darjeeling. The incidents of violence caused a worried Buta Singh to arrange a meeting between GNLF activists and the Prime Minister in July; the invitation seemed to restore Gheising's status as leader of the Gorkhas.

At a much publicised meeting, Rajiv Gandhi unequivocally ruled out separate statehood for the Gorkhas, but promised to send a team to look into the matter and suggest a solution. There was a predictable backlash from the GNLF militants; some broke away to form a rival faction. Perhaps realising its untenability, the GNLF dropped the demand for a separate state, and soon it was proposed that an autonomous hill council be set up, outside the jurisdiction of the West Bengal administration. While the GNLF



accepted this compromise, Gheising introduced more stipulations regarding the powers of the hill council, threatening to renew his demand for a separate state each time there was an obstacle; the situation remains deadlocked.

The anxiously-awaited elections were declared, and both the rival parties, the CPI (M)-led Left Front and the Congress (I) got off to a flying start. The battle was fierce, but against all calculations, the Left Front made a virtual clean sweep, bagging an astounding 251 seats out of a total of 294, and leaving the Congress (I) with an embarrassing 40 seats. Predictably, Ashoke Sen resigned from the Union Cabinet claiming moral responsibility for the Congress (I) humiliation.

## MEGHALAYA

In Meghalaya, the Khasi Students Union (KSU) appointed itself to rid the state of "foreigners" and were incensed by the establishment of a GNLF unit at Shillong in May – GNLF cadres and local youths clashed. Since then, the state has been tense although prominent Nepalese have openly criticised the GNLF. In early July, KSU activists once again ran amok, launching a violent drive to expel the Nepalese, and 14,000 Nepalese fled Shillong. Thereafter, the violence spread to the hill-towns by September, and the panic among the non-tribals continues while the assembly polls are being planned for February 1988.

## TRIPURA

Throughout 1987, Tripura was under attack from the insurgent Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) which, in spite of being banned in February, continued terrorising the non-tribals. Nripen Chakravorty's CPM-led government could not contain the TNV's increasing strength. Meanwhile, the Chakma tribal influx from Bangladesh continued. Polls to the state Assembly were reslated to be held in the last week of December.

## MIZORAM

On February 23, 1987, Mizoram was granted statehood and March saw the installation of a jubilant Mizo National Front (MNF) as the ruling party in Mizoram. Laldenga became not just Mizoram's fourth Chief Minister, 15 years after its separation from Assam, but also its first Mizo CM, after years of insurgency.

The ministry seemed to tackle the problems of the state earnestly. Unlike the fate of the Punjab and Assam Accords, it has been smooth sailing upto now, and the MNF celebrated the Accord's first anniversary in June and reiterated its sincerity to implement it.

Used to a constant insurgency in the past, the state seemed unable to forget it, and the Mizo Liberation Army (MLA) reared its head. But this time, former insurgent Laldenga briskly co-ordinated efforts to monitor their activities which led to the arrest of the MLA president, Laldinliana.

## MANIPUR

Manipur had its hands full with insurgency throughout 1987. Not a month passed without insurgents ambushing a BSF or an army unit. In mid-May, over a 100 Zomi Revolutionary activists travelled 260 km on foot, demanding a separate state for Zomi tribals.

CM Rishang Keishing's popularity declined further with accusations of corruption, favouritism, and links with the outlawed National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), levelled against him by the opposition and his own party. Yet he survived and retained his post.

The army's 21st battalion of the Assam Rifles was also at war; on July 9, NSCN guerrillas attacked it, looted ammunition, and escaped with the help of locals. Thereafter, the battalion launched a massive vendetta against the Manipuris, destroying nearly 20 villages, and terrorising the entire area.

## NAGALAND

Nagaland seemed to be at peace in the first half of the year after Hokishe Sema became Chief Minister in late 1986. In April 1987, Mr Sema was re-elected to the Assembly in a routine by-election, by a sound margin. Elections to the state Assembly were held on November 18 and Congress (I) romped home again with an absolute majority.

## ASSAM

The Assam Gana Parishad government (AGP), voted to power on the strength of its fanatical commitment to rid Assam of "foreigners", went a step further in its determination to do so by seeking an amendment of the 1983 Illegal Migrants Act. The original Act laid the onus of proving a person a foreigner on the complainant, whereas the amendment sought to shift the burden of proof on to the accused. Sensibly, the Centre turned it down.

Assamese tribals launched a movement for "Udayachal" or "Tribal Land" in January. Clashes between immigrant Muslims and Assamese youth also took place throughout the year. The United Liberation Front for Assam (ULFA), an underground militant organisation, turned more active and dangerous. Students and youth of Assam's Bodo tribe formed the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), demanding a separate Union Territory for tribals settled on the northern plains of the Brahmaputra valley. The students' wing of the AGP, the All Assam Students Union (AASU), also launched an agitation demanding the strict implementation of the Assam Accord and called for a statewide *bandh* on June 5, which was well-observed.

Another problem beset Assam, when the bordering state of Nagaland, in defiance of the Election Commission's directive, attempted to conduct a poll in the disputed forest areas between the two states. The deadlock thus arising between the two states was in time resolved and followed by a peaceful election.

## SIKKIM

Sikkim remained a politically quiet state especially after Nar Bahadur Bhandari (dismissed by the Governor in May 1984) romped back to power in April 1985. However, the CM has been pursuing the cause of the "stateless" Nepalese — numbering almost 54,000 — in the state. The main issue at the anniversary celebrations of Bhandari's Praja Parishad in May concerned the citizenship rights of the Nepalese, deprived of this status following the Sikkim Citizenship Order of 1975. Bhandari organised his own loan *melas* (heretofore a prerogative only of the Centre) in May, with allegations by the opposition that the largesse was distributed only to the Nepali minority.

## BIHAR

Politics continued to be a tug-of-war between Chief Minister Bindeshwari Dubey and the dissidents within the Congress (I), mostly led by ex-Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra. In March, the state government promulgated an ordinance for the reservation of certain *panchayat* posts for SCs and STs. Laudable as this move may be, it boomeranged badly, as in the absence of any definite rules for such reservation, the ordinance gave arbitrary powers to the magistrates. The state was poised to launch into another caste crisis which fortunately blew over with the postponement of the elections.

However, on May 29, the countryside witnessed a gruesome carnage when a 500-strong mob of suspected extremists killed 41 upper-caste people in Aurangabad, described as a retaliatory killing by a Maoist group to avenge the murder of seven of the group's members by some upper-caste people in Choti Chechari.

In yet another episode of violence, in August, Mahato, the leader of the Jharkand Mukti Morcha, was gunned down. This ironically gave a fresh lease of life to the Jharkand movement, and the call for a separate state for Jharkand was revived in a massive rally organised at Jamshedpur by the All Jharkand Students' Union (AJSU) on November 17.

## UTTAR PRADESH

UP politics have always occupied centre-stage in the Indian political arena, and there was enough action to absorb the audience throughout the stormy year. In the eye of the storm was, of course, the wavering V P Singh, one moment set to usurp the throne in Delhi, the next moment caught in embarrassing ambivalence. After his resignation from the post of Defence Minister in the early part of the year, V P Singh began moving stealthily towards felling the first Congress (I) stronghold: UP. The state Congress (I)'s view of him was quite ambiguous at first: CM Vir Bahadur Singh denounced him openly, while other stalwarts rallied around him. The inevitable confrontation came when he started his tour of the state in May. The UPCC (I) made the first move on May 21, and expelled him for six years.

1987  
HIGHLIGHTS

Thereafter, events snowballed. The CM declared a ban on the holding of any public meetings upto June 30, but V P Singh defied the ban order, making considerable political mileage out of the incident.

On August 22, a prominent Rajiv supporter, UP Transport Minister Sanjay Singh, quit the UP Cabinet and came out against the PM. However, it soon became quite evident that the mass exodus expected from the Congress (I) into Singh's camp was not going to happen. For a month after that, the UP government was unstable.

The nation witnessed its most horrifying phenomenon of the year in Meerut when communal riots broke out first in April, and then in June, the most criminal of all episodes being the PAC's carnage on the Muslims of Maliana. The state machinery seemed curiously ineffectual in preventing them in spite of early warning signs.

## HARYANA

Haryana continued to be a hotbed of politics. Devi Lal's Lok Dal (B) and the BJP jointly launched a furious election campaign for the long-awaited Assembly poll on June 17. Congress (I) propaganda failed as voters resented both the Punjab Accord and the corrupt Bhajan Lal government, and, as forecast, the opposition alliance had a landslide victory, capturing 77 of the 90 seats, while Congress (I) seized a measly five.

Barely had Devi Lal taken the oath when he rushed headlong into the midst of a sticky situation created by a dubious election promise. He began to initiate the writing-off of debts — worth Rs 227 crore — owned by some 7.48 lakh farmers, workers, and petty traders, to banks. However, persisting in his efforts, despite RBI disapproval, and all the while criticising Congress nepotism and inducting his kin into his party, Devi Lal got the scheme sanctioned.

## MADHYA PRADESH

For Motilal Vora, the year began with a no-confidence motion against him in the state Assembly. Predictably, it was rejected by the huge majority that the Congress (I) commands.

The state also had its share of scandal, with reports revealing that the Minister of State for Higher Education Chitrakant Jaiswal's daughter, Jaya Jaiswal, had been securing first divisions in her BA and MA examinations on the strength of revaluations. The minister, who till then had commanded respect from the student community, had to face humiliating demonstrations by large crowds of students outside his residence.

Meanwhile, the people of Bhopal despairingly observed the third anniversary of the Carbide gas tragedy without any concrete hopes of relief or rehabilitation in the near future. ♦





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# TURMOIL IN PARADISE

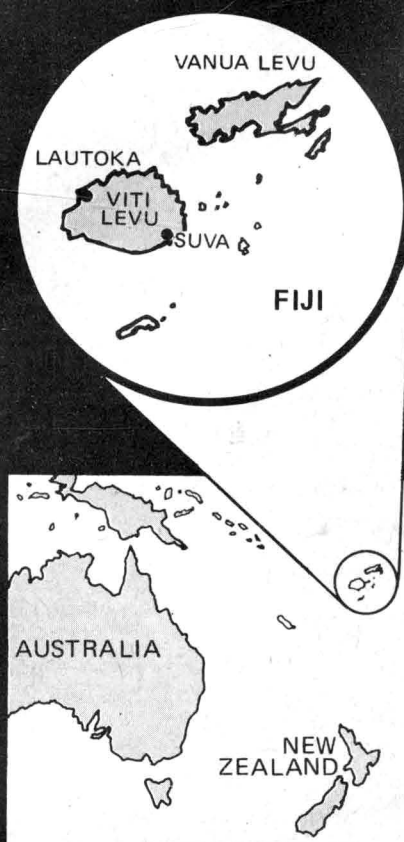
**O**NE OF THE CENTRAL problems of our times is the vexed question of ethnic rivalries and sub-nationalisms. If Sri Lanka is one obvious example, the other is the Fijis, an archipelago of around 320 islands in the South Pacific some 2,000 kilometres north of New Zealand. The Fijis are a part of the larger Melanesian chain and group of islands which are separate from the better-known Polynesian chain.

In both cases the sub-nationality or ethnic group under seige is of Indian origin. This is where the similarity ends. The problems each face are different, the levels of conflict not the same, and the Indian reaction to both cases can by no means be equated. In Sri Lanka, the degree of repression by the government (representing the majority ethnic group, the Sinhalese) has for some years been very acute, and has reached the level of sustained physical assault as well as institutionalised discrimination; some of the besieged group have been no less fierce and militarised in their response. The Indian State's reaction has been to organise a direct intervention, first in the form of an imposed peace accord, followed up by the stationing of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to oversee the implementation of the Accord.

Geographical factors alone make it impossible for India to conceive of playing a similar interventionist role in Fiji, although for Indians, it is clear that the writing is on the wall. The Fijian Indians today are in the same position that the Sri Lankan Tamils were in, before 1983. That is to say the tensions between them and those who are called the Fijians (this term is never used to describe Fijians of Indian origin) are still not at the level of armed hostility. Nor is there yet direct state repression of the former although some Fijian gangs have at-

The aftermath of the recent coup in Fiji has witnessed grave consequences for the native Indian population.

Suddenly bereft of political power, and even of jobs, they have also found themselves the victims of persecution and repression. ACHIN VANAİK traces recent developments in the troubled island-nation.



tacked and terrorised Fijian Indian families. But the tensions could reach that level, and certainly, the exodus has already begun.

Thousands of Fijian Indians are emigrating, seeking access mainly to New Zealand and Australia where hopefully the governments will treat their cases with the sympathy they deserve. It is the least they can do. After all, the two Prime Ministers, Mr David Lange of New Zealand and Mr Bob Hawke of Australia, have already voiced their anger and indignation at the two military coups which took place in May and September 1987, and which have overthrown what was long considered a model democracy in the region.

ON APRIL 13, 1987, for the first time ever, a coalition seen to represent Indian interests obtained a majority at the polls. This was unacceptable to the military, small though it is, which sees itself as the guardian of Fijian, that is non-Indian interests. It staged a coup on May 14, 1987, overthrowing the duly elected, constitutional government. This caused a national and international uproar within the Commonwealth, since Fiji was, till October 7, one of its dominions, with the Queen of Britain, the titular head, ruling through the then Governor-general, Sir Penaia Ganilau. With strong pressure coming from the rest of the world, especially the Commonwealth and the three most affected countries, India, New Zealand and Australia, the leader of the coup, Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka, a Fijian, agreed to withdraw, leaving the main political parties to find an acceptable solution.

However, when the two main political blocs — seen to represent Fijians and non-Fijians respectively — did agree on a compromise, Col Rabuka staged another coup on September 25, 1987, and set up a pup-



# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

pet interim government pending a "final" political resolution of the problem. In order to get over the problem posed by the Queen's status as titular head, Col Rabuka declared Fiji a republic, and the recent Commonwealth meeting in Vancouver voted to expel the Fijis from membership of the body.

Where did this leave the Fijian Indians? To understand their political position in that country we must place the present turmoil in its historical context.

The Fijian archipelago was historically a meeting-place of Melanesian and Polynesian sea-faring tribes and peoples. Although Melanesian culture and origin has been dominant, Polynesian influence has not been insignificant. Most Fijians have Polynesian blood, and such pre-colonial political institutions as Chiefs (or Ratus), with control or suzerainty beyond local or "home" boundaries, were originally Polynesian precepts and practices. The supreme authority was a Council of Chiefs, and its head was the most powerful leader of all.

Favoured by a salubrious climate and an abundance of nature's wealth in the form of fertile soil, edible plants and fruits, the Fijis quickly became, in the European seaman's folklore, something of a paradise on earth. It was not long before white adventurers and "discoverers" set up residence and engaged in trading activities, with Christian missionaries following in their wake. What distinguished Fiji's history of colonisation from others was that it represented a rare example of political colonisation through invitation rather than seizure. As the power of European settlers grew, and as they resorted to illegal importation of slaves and bonded labourers, they represented a growing social, economic, and political challenge to the authority of the Fijian Chiefs, a challenge they were increasingly unable to cope with. The Head of the Fijian Council of Chiefs, King Kakobau, himself substantially anglicised and christianised, ceded to Bri-



*Down with the Queen! Fiji was declared a Republic in October 1987.*

tain in the name of obtaining a settled government which would respect Fijian rights, above all, their relationship to land, ownership of which should be inalienable. Although an earlier offer of cession had been turned down by the Crown years ago, in 1874 a formal cession took place, and Sir Arthur Gordon was made the first Governor-general.

This was a significant appointment because Sir Arthur Gordon had earlier been Governor-general of Mauritius, and had promoted the scheme of indentured labourers from India to help in the colonisation and settlement of Mauritius. It is hardly surprising, then, that in 1879 he should have resorted to the same scheme of indentured labour from India as a way of resolving the problem of labour-shortage. It was only in 1916 that this system was brought to a halt by an official Crown ban, after a report detailing its abuses was published. (One of the authors of that report was, in fact, C F Andrews.)

**TODAY'S FIJIAN INDIANS** are the descendants of those indentured labourers and almost all are native to the Islands. Roughly one-sixth of the Fijian Indians are Muslims. Brought in to work on the sugarcane plantations, many Indians were able to branch out into other spheres such as trading, skilled occupations, and so on. Upto now, however, Fijian Indian cultivators cannot own land. This has not been a real issue although, as their population grew, the Fijian Indians have demanded favourable land distribution (within the framework of respecting land inalienability), as well as increased political representation, and greater educational and cultural rights.

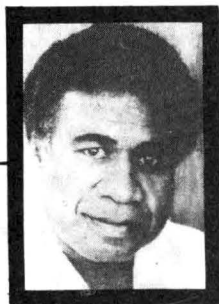
There is, in fact, a strong element of exaggeration in Fijian fears about the Indians, which have been effectively whipped up by chauvinist elements. First of all, there has never been any serious danger of Fijians losing their lands: this is written into the Constitution of 1970, framed

when Fiji gained independence. Secondly, in earlier decades, the rate of population growth among Indians was greater than that of the Fijians, which explains how the former constitute about 49 per cent of the country's total population, the Fijians about 48 per cent, and smaller groups of various origins, including Chinese, constitute the remainder. But over time, as the Indian community became more prosperous, the birthrate of Fijian Indians dropped and that of the Fijians increased. By the mid-1990s, the Fijian Indians could well be outnumbered by the latter.

None of this, of course, justifies the discrimination that has been meted out to them. Under the 1970 Constitution, Fiji is a dominion with the British Sovereign as the official Head of State. There is a bi-cameral legislature — the House of Representatives (the lower body) and the Senate. The former has 52 seats of which 12 are reserved for Fijians, 12 for Indians and three for the others including part-Europeans, Chinese, "mixed" groups, etc, that is, these are elected on communal rolls. On the national rolls there are 25 seats with a distribution as follows: ten for Fijians, ten for Indians and five for "general" members. Thus Indian legislators can never number more than 22 — a permanent minority.

In the Senate, comprising 22 members, eight are nominated by the Great Council of (Fijian) Chiefs, seven are nominated by the Leader of the Opposition (the Indian Opposition), and one by the Rotuman Council which represents the smaller ethnic minority groups.

**WHAT NO ONE IN FIJI EXPECTED** was a Fijian-Indian alliance of sorts which might propel a political bloc with strong Indian backing into power. This is in effect what happened and was one of the most positive developments in that country, marking as it did, a significant break with the narrowly communal configuration



**The coalition led by Dr Bavadra had already made dramatic commitments in an otherwise slow-changing, if not stagnant, political scenario. But the coalition did not remain in power for very long. The coup that followed unseated the elected government.**

that has dominated the country's political scene since independence. The coalition that came to power in the April 13 elections comprised the National Federation Party which represents Indian interests and the Fiji Labour Party led by a Fijian, Dr Timoci Bavadra, who in fact headed the coalition and became the officially elected Prime Minister, albeit briefly. This party was born only in 1984 and is the result of the growth of a Fijian labour movement which increasingly puts class issues before ethnic ones.

Along with economic progress and modernisation in Fiji, an even stronger working-class comprising cane workers, sugar-mill workers, transport and mine workers (gold and manganese are important minerals), white-collar workers such as teachers, civil servants, and so on, has emerged. The Fiji Trade Union Congress

(FTUC) was a federation of various unions which has grown in strength and clashed with the government over the distribution of increased income and wealth which periodic booms have brought about. It is from the FTUC that the inspiration for the formation of a labour party came.

Hitherto, the Fijian Alliance Party, headed by Sir Kamisese Mara, had dominated the country's politics by getting en bloc Fijian support plus some support from Indian Muslims. The newly-formed Labour Party effectively broke the Alliance Party's monopoly hold over Fijian loyalty. Together with the National Federation Party, it rode to power in the elections held on April 13, winning 28 seats out of the total of 52 seats in the Lower House.

It was not just the traditional Fijian Chiefs who were perturbed by the turn of events. At one stroke, a party representing Indian interests was in government for the first time, and another party with a more radical programme than either of the two traditional parties was in the driver's seat. The coalition led by Dr Bavadra had already signalled its intentions to nationalise key industries, to lift the ban on Soviet merchant ships visiting Fijian ports, to endorse more strongly the anti-nuclear posture of the other South Pacific nations led by New Zealand, and in general adopt a non-aligned foreign policy. These were dramatic commitments in an otherwise slow-changing if not stagnant political scenario. But the coalition did not remain in power for long. The coup that followed unseated the elected government.

**THERE WAS A STRONG** suspicion that the CIA had a hand in engineering the coup. The US had long wooed Sir Kamisese Mara of the Alliance Party to concede a base to the Americans, especially since New Zealand had put new curbs on US nuclear warships docking there, and the Island Republics of Vanuatu and Kiribati had granted Soviet vessels fishing



# INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

rights. Washington, clearly, could not have been happy with Dr Bavadra's election victory and it is this fact that promoted the rumours of the CIA involvement. Certainly Dr Bavadra has said as much. It is possible, perhaps likely, that the CIA has at the very least encouraged the Fijian military leadership dominated by Lt Col Rabuka, to take matters into hand. The military leadership would almost certainly have done so even if CIA support had not been forthcoming, therefore it would be an exaggeration to assign primary responsibility for the coup to Washington. (The US has, after all, cut off trade with the Fijis following the second coup. But doubts linger. Washington cannot be unhappy at the fall of Dr Bavadra, and its close ally, Mrs Thatcher's Britain, has been markedly more reluctant to pursue sanctions against the Fijis than the other affected Commonwealth members.)

One month after Dr Bavadra's election, he was deposed by a military coup — the first — led by Lt Col Sitiveni Rabuka and which was in turn backed by the militant, Christian fundamentalist, pro-Fijian movement called Taukei. The new military ruler made no attempt to hide his intentions. He was going to reorganise the political-constitutional framework so that no representative body of Fijian Indians could ever share in governmental power; a new interim council would rule until fresh elections were held according to the principles of a new Constitution.

Initially, Sir Penaia Ganilau, the Governor-general, asserted his right to rule in the Queen's name by refusing to lend any legitimacy whatsoever to the coup. A Fijian himself, neither he nor the Leader of the Alliance Party, Sir Kamisese Mara, have any fundamental principle of institutionalising the political dominance of ethnic Fijians. After a brief interlude, the Governor-general accepted the interim council arrangement. The behind-the-scenes dealings between the different standards of the Fijian

leadership also helped to persuade Col Rabuka to withdraw and entrust political matters in the hands of Sir Penaia Ganilau.

**A SERIOUS CRISIS SEEMED** to have been averted and the process for restoring legitimate civilian rule recommenced. In actual fact, Col Rabuka's coup marked a decisive turning point. From then on the unspoken assumption was that there would be no return to the pre-May 14 political arrangements. Some method of institutionalising permanent Fijian dominance had to be found. This still left much room for disagreement and dispute over the precise nature of the arrangements, and differences over these would prove to be of considerable importance. But the terms of political debate had been decisively altered. The very fact that the other Commonwealth countries were prepared to accept new elections in the name of "realism" was itself an indication of the political victory achieved by Col Rabuka.

The roles played by Sir Ganilau and Sir Mara need to be clarified. The Governor-general agreed to the move to amend the Constitution. Sir Mara, Leader of the Alliance Party, may well have had foreknowledge of the coup and probably colluded with Rabuka at some level or the other. Sir Mara and Sir Ganilau have only sought to distance themselves from the *illegality* of Col Rabuka's actions as a way of preserving their own reputations, especially internationally; they have not distanced themselves from his broad aims and intentions.

In July, Dr Bavadra, recognising that there was no scope for his government to be resurrected, decided at first to be a part of the committee which was to review the Constitution, along with Col Rabuka. At the last moment, Bavadra boycotted the committee, arguing that it should change its terms of reference as well as its composition. Obviously, Bavadra was seeking the best possible bargain for himself and the coalition he led,



*Colonel Rabuka watches the military parade.*

even if he had to implicitly accept that the results of the April 13 elections were, in effect, nullified.

The second coup on September 25, was the direct outcome of the agreement arrived at between Dr Bavadra and Sir Mara. Sir Mara must have had his own reservations about Col Rabuka's growing prominence, and the extent to which the powerful Taukei Movement might outflank him and the Alliance Party. He arrived at a power-sharing agreement with Dr Bavadra to form a bi-partisan caretaker government. It is this accord that disturbed Col Rabuka for it would set a political precedent unacceptable to him and the more intransigent Fijian elements. In the third week of September this year, Col Rabuka set up a 19-member interim government with a place for only one Indian representative and that too, a defector from the National Federation Party.

This time Col Rabuka's follow-up



measures were more decisive and aggressive. He scrapped the Constitution and called on Sir Ganilau to resign. This was not indicative of any personal animosity.

On October 7, after many threats to do so, the new military leader of the Fijis declared the country a Republic. Earlier in the month he had demanded a new legislative set-up, with 37 out of 67 seats reserved for Fijians as well as the posts of prime minister, foreign minister, and interior minister. Christianity was to be the state religion.

**THE PLIGHT OF THE FIJIAN** Indians can be easily imagined. They have been told that they have nothing to fear but political power is forever ruled out for them; that is to say, their political protection and security is on sufferance. At the same time there have been physical attacks on them, and the rise of Taukei bodes ill for them in the future. The devil of

communalism will follow its own logic. The political subordination, once institutionalised in this manner, not only reverses the general trend of the rising political power of the Fijian Indians since independence (despite ups and downs), but can only be the prelude to the institutionalisation of further discrimination and oppression in economic and social spheres. There are now too many such examples of the dynamics of ethnic oppressions, usually against minorities.

The external response has been feeble. India has suspended trade with the Fijis; the Commonwealth has expelled this island nation. But there are no collective sanctions. The U K has opposed direct action against Fiji and a country like China, following its own interests, has recently chosen to forge new trade links with the Rabuka regime.

The future of the Fijian Indians, then, is bleak. While those with large investments in the country are making preparations to leave and move their assets out, they are still awaiting the outcome of events.

Fiji does not have a history of bloody repression and warfare, but all does not augur well for its Indian population. Although Col Rabuka acknowledges the role played by the Indians in the economy, his solution to the crisis, with its obvious racist overtones, is hardly likely to win their approval. Extremist groups backing the military ruler have only exacerbated the situation. Although events in Fiji no longer command world headlines, and the eruptions of violence have died down, a simmering unrest is still detectable under the surface calm.

India is keeping a close watch on the emerging situation. On November 16, Mr K Natwar Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs, announced in Parliament the government's disapproval of the May 14 coup and its condemnation of its racism, which some have even described as "apartheid". He also explained that there was no question of severing diplo-

matic ties with Fiji, as the government is keen to safeguard the welfare of the Fijian Indians. The Minister also warned that permitting the present situation to drift indefinitely would be tantamount to giving a "sleeping recognition" to the military rule.

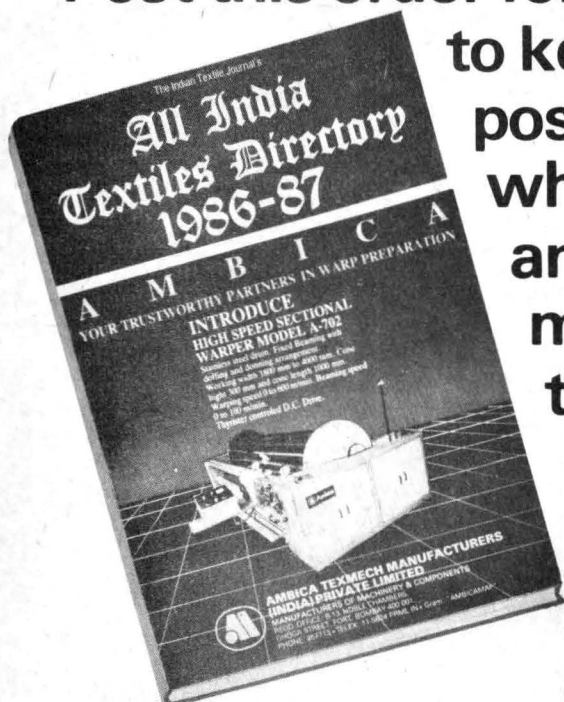
Col Rabuka's offer of the Presidentship of the newly-proclaimed republic to Sir Penaia Ganilau has also not come as a surprise. Sir Ganilau's previous distancing from Col Rabuka's illegal actions and his desire to institutionalise ethnic Fijian superiority through constitutional changes, had led many Fijian Indians to repose a degree of trust in him. However, Sir Ganilau's acceptance of the Presidentship has changed all that. The balance of forces is now completely weighted against the Fijian Indians, and those who remain will be virtually forced to accept second-class citizenship, and a place in the economy. Already 4,000 Indians have reportedly fled the trouble-spot since the May 14 coup. Many Indians occupying prestigious positions, especially those in the civil service, have been dismissed or have been forced to resign. Economically, disaster looms ahead: inflation is high and promises to escalate, the Fijian dollar has been considerably devalued, the island's main revenue earners — tourism and sugarcane — have been badly hit, and the country is clearly heading for a slump.

There is little likelihood that the situation will ever revert to what it was. The months to come will probably see a further exodus of Fijian Indians as the ruling power consolidates its position. Mr Natwar Singh's promise to "take further measures in the light of future developments" clearly needs to be enacted as a matter of urgency. Only time will tell how much and how fast the situation will deteriorate, and only the strongest pressure from concerned Commonwealth countries will be able to halt this dangerous progression of events. ♦



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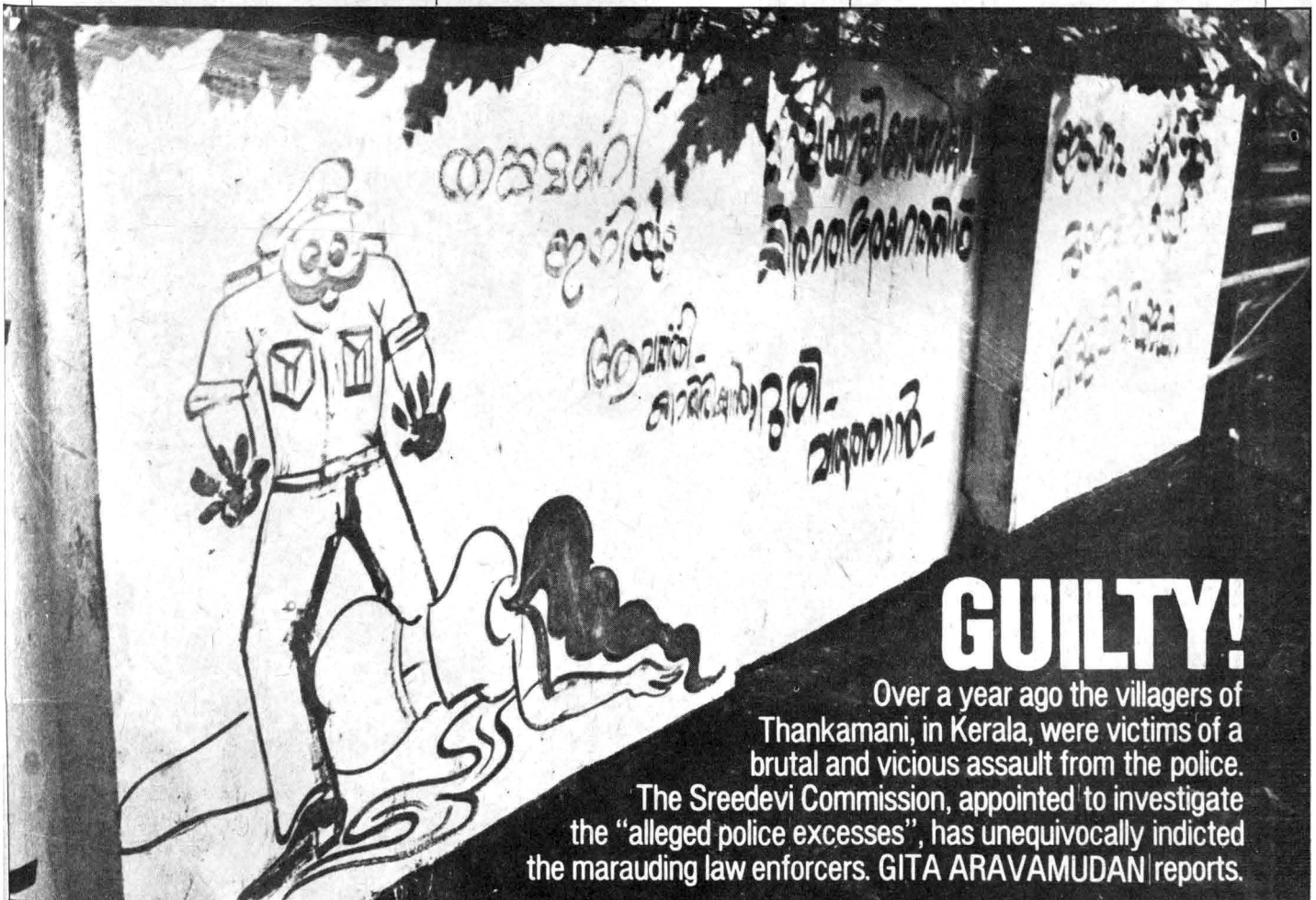
**I T HAPPENED JUST** over a year ago. On the night of October 22, 1986, the police raided the tiny, unelectrified village of Thankamani situated in the high ranges of Central Kerala. The "raid", which took place in the dead of night, was, according to the police, merely a "combing operation" to flush out miscreants who had thrown stones and defied the police earlier that day. However, it turned out to be a bloody rampage, and the lathi-wielding policemen left behind them a devastating trail of havoc—homes had been destroyed, men had been badly beaten, and women and children raped.

Thankamani is situated in a remote part of Idukki district, and it took a little while for the news to trickle down. But as the horror stories began to pour in, and journalists, social workers, political activists, and others

rushed to the village, the then ruling coalition government in Kerala—the United Democratic Front (UDF)—found itself in a tight spot. Karunakaran, the veteran Congress (I) leader who was the then Chief Minister of Kerala, had denied that there had been any incidence of rape. Finally, succumbing to mounting public and political pressure, he appointed a commission of inquiry on November 19, 1986, to investigate the allegations. Since the victims had mostly been women, Karunakaran acceded to the popular demand that a woman be selected to head the commission. And so it was that District Judge Sreedevi was appointed to inquire into "the alleged police excesses in Thankamani in Idukki district subsequent to the use of force and firing by police on October 22, 1986, in that place."

Meanwhile, the elections were looming up ahead. The opposition camp, the Marxist-led Left Democratic Front, made maximum capital out of the tragedy in Thankamani. The Marxist mouthpiece, *Deshabhimani*, published a series of articles on the atrocities which had taken place; this was followed by a very vigorous campaign hinged on the UDF government's "inability to keep a control over the police." The elections came and went. A Marxist-led coalition, headed by E K Nayanar, came into power, and soon, almost everyone, barring the traumatised villagers of Thankamani, forgot about the horrific events of that fateful night.

Meanwhile, Dist Judge Sreedevi had been working hard. Undeterred by the amoebic dysentery which plagued her after her first visit across the rocky, inaccessible terrain to the





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remote village, she continued to visit Thankamani several times, visiting the victims and talking to anyone who desired to talk to her. The witnesses — aggrieved victims, police officials, and members of the public — gradually began to come forward to give evidence before the commission. But not one of the state's political leaders were amongst them: not the present Chief Minister, or the ex-Chief Minister, or the Congress (I) MLA who had visited Thankamani on behalf of the ruling coalition, or the local Congress MP who had been seen by many on the night of the raid, in

the guilty be suitably punished. In conclusion, she says: "It is common knowledge that under the guise of the discharge of duties, some policemen exceed their powers and unleash force on the citizens, creating a sense of antagonism towards them. What happened at Thankamani is a concrete example of this."

What exactly *did* happen at Thankamani? Why had the police embarked on the horrific rampage? Why had several policemen manhandled and molested so many women and girls? What prompted the women to subsequently come forward to give

of the events which led to police firing on the morning of October 22, 1986, in which one man was killed, is given by KK Mathew, Secretary of the *Paura Samithi* (Citizens' Committee) of Thankamani. On October 20, 1986, students from a local high school boarded a bus owned by Elite Transport, travelling from Kattapana to Thankamani. When the bus crew arbitrarily decided to stop 800 metres away from Thankamani because of the bad road, the students were incensed. There followed an altercation and most of the students were made to get off the bus; the two who refused were taken to the police station at Kattapana. The secretary and president of the Kattapana Students Union, Shaji and James respectively, then approached some Congress leaders to secure the release of their friends; Cong (S) leader M J John escorted the two boys to the police station. The police, however, reacted unsympathetically and took Shaji and James into custody. M J John waited until midnight for Dy SP Viswanatha Pillai to return to his quarters and managed to secure the release of the four boys, promising to return them for interrogation in the morning.

On the following day, students of the local St Thomas School hijacked an Elite Transport bus and brought it to Thankamani, where it was parked in front of the village office. The owner of the bus (a Kerala Congress sympathiser) was told that his vehicle would be released only on condition that the bus crew or owner made a public apology. The owner left, promising that he would do so at the school assembly.

On the very same day, however, the Idukki Zilla Bus Owners' Association held a general body meeting where it was agreed that tendering a public apology would set a bad precedent. Instead, a complaint was made to the police. According to KK Mathew, a meeting took place in a hotel bar and a circle inspector as well as some other policemen were invited and plied with drinks.

At four o'clock, a head constable



*K Karunakaran: the ex-Chief Minister.*

**Almost a year after the sordid events, the commission's report was ready in the first week of October 1987. And what devastating reading it makes! Dist Judge Sreedevi has found irrefutable evidence of rape, torture, wanton damage to private property, and looting by members of the police force.**

a car parked beside the police vehicles, or the women MLAs from the opposition who had visited the village to extract political mileage out of the situation.

**ALMOST A YEAR** after the sordid events, the commission's report was ready in the first week of October 1987. And what devastating reading it makes! Dist Judge Sreedevi has found irrefutable evidence of rape, torture, wanton damage to private property, and looting by members of the police force — custodians of the law. Carefully knitting together the evidence presented to her, the 48-year old District Judge has proposed that a CBI inquiry be conducted, and that

evidence of the humiliating atrocities committed against them? And, finally, why is it that the shocking and damning findings of the commission report have not been made public by the Marxist-led coalition government or been discussed in the Kerala Assembly currently in session? Is there a conspiracy of silence which will bring to naught the courage of the women who, despite the inevitable social stigma with which they will henceforth be branded, explicitly spoke of the ignominy they had suffered and told the commission that they had been raped and their daughters molested?

**A VERY GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION**

arrived in Thankamani with a small party of his men and tried to secure the release of the bus; the students and local people turned him back. The next morning, another police party attempted to forcibly remove the bus; this attempt too, was repulsed. Meanwhile, tension was mounting: posters appeared on the walls, and shopkeepers downed their shutters in protest against the manhandling of the students. Father Kottur, the local priest, along with the *Panchayat* Executive Officer, an ex-*Panchayat* President, some local political leaders, and others were discussing the inauguration of the new *panchayat* building, when Circle Inspector Thampan strode in demanding that they settle the matter of the impounded bus once and for all.

ACCORDING TO K K MATHEW'S statement, the police had arrived in a van and a jeep; some private jeeps carrying employees of the transport company had also arrived. The meeting at the *panchayat* office was suspended and everyone went to the police-outpost near the market square. Thampan loudly declared that he would talk only to Father Kottur. Any interventions by others were rudely rebuffed: a crowd of about 200 people gathered; the students maintained their demand that an apology be made. Thampan met some of the other political leaders, albeit very briefly. They all felt there was a strong smell of alcohol emanating from him. Mathew declares that he begged Thampan for five minutes of his time, but was instead beaten with a lathi by the CI. Meanwhile, Father Kottur was trying to get the crowd to disperse peacefully; many refused. Incensed, the CI ordered that some rifles be loaded, and within a minute, also ordered a lathi-charge. Neither the lathi-charge nor the firing was announced, and K K Mathew suggests that the firing might have been aggravated when the CI mistook the cane of an 80-year old lame man for a country rifle.

The man in question, one Odam-

bikil Mathew, was shot in his feet. Another man, Avrachen, was killed and yet another, Vakkachen, had his right hand broken by the police. The crowd then dispersed, leaving behind a burnt police-outpost. The police returned to Kattapana. Mathew feels that the crowd might have dispersed peacefully had the Circle Inspector not responded with such a tough and arrogant attitude.

When CI Thampan testified before the commission, he said that 24 police personnel had been injured. The medical certificates which the police produced showed that they had sustained

The commission has concluded that the policemen were not as seriously injured as averred, and that the doctor who had given them medical certificates testifying to their 'wounds' was part of the conspiracy to exaggerate the morning's incident so that it would provide the police with a justification for the infamous deeds that were to follow.

The commission report also says: "CI Thampan has stated that a crime case has been registered in the Kattapana police station as Crime No 271 of 1986 against 10 persons, on the basis of the information given by him

**The report goes on to prove that the registration of the crime was a fabrication, for if it were true, the head constable who registered the crime would have proceeded to Thankamani to investigate. Instead, a massive police contingent descended on the village and indiscriminately arrested several people.**



*District Judge D Sreedevi.*

only minor injuries and contusions. CI Thampan, however, declared that he had been admitted to the government hospital at Kattapana, but when the SP had summoned him to ask for a detailed account of the morning's incident, he had discharged himself and gone to Thankamani. Of this the report says: "If Thampan was seriously wounded and had to admit himself to hospital (which, according to the wound certificates, is not true) the SP would not have insisted on him going all the way, through difficult terrain, just to brief him about the day's incidents when the other officers who were quite competent to give first-hand information of the incident were available at Thankamani."

at 8.30 pm. If this is true, the SP would have been aware of the names of the 10 accused persons. The SP admits that though he was in Thankamani till 5.45 am (the next day), he was not aware of the names of the accused persons." The report goes on to prove that the registration of the crime was a fabrication, for if it were true, the head constable who registered the crime would have proceeded to Thankamani to investigate. Instead, a massive police contingent descended on the village and indiscriminately arrested several people. During his deposition, the SP admitted that 31 persons had been taken into custody, and that on the night of October 22, neither had he been investigating any



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crime nor had he issued summons to anybody. The commission has concluded that the taking into custody of 31 persons amounted to illegal restraint and unlawful detention, and has rebuked the custodians of the law for "stooping to bizarre acts of lawlessness."

**WHAT HAPPENED ON** the night of October 22, 1986? K K Mathew had left for Trivandrum along with some other political leaders to appraise the Chief Minister of the morning's events; he therefore quotes from other eye-witness accounts. There was apparently plenty of activity in Kattapana, and local people saw torches being collected by employees of the bus company. Others say that they saw crates of brandy being loaded into police vehicles, perhaps also financed by the bus-owners. By 8 pm, all roads to Thankamani were blocked.

Meanwhile, in the village itself, local residents were in a state of shock. Statements filed before the commission by the local MLA, other political leaders, and the vicar Father Francis Kottur, indicate that "after the police firing, almost all the male inhabitants had fled to distant places, leaving behind the women and children. Thankamani was calm and quiet," and that "there was no possibility of any uprising necessitating the restoration of law and order."

The police, however, thought otherwise. By 10 pm, a convoy of police vehicles had assembled and was seen proceeding to Thankamani. According to SP Pulikesi, once at 7th Mile, outside Thankamani, he was informed that more than 200 people armed with acid bulbs were waiting for the police. He consequently collected enough reinforcements and torches and went prepared to counter the resistance in a convoy of "eight jeeps and two vans". There were 74 policemen on duty who between themselves carried 20 to 25 torches and petromax lamps. He felt that as there had been an open defiance of the law, "immediate action had to be taken," and wanted "to comb the

area for evidence".

Thankachan, a resident of Thankamani, was returning from Kottayam that night. On reaching Kattapana, he learnt of the police firing and decided to walk home. At 7th Mile, he saw the police convoy. Another witness, Simon, said that he saw 10 to 13 jeeps and two vans going towards Thankamani. However, the most damning evidence comes from Father Kottur.

The vicar had counted 49 vehicles entering the village, and around 10 pm, the SP, the Additional District Magistrate, and Assistant Collector

**The priest informed them that since the womenfolk were on their own, the police should refrain from entering anyone's homes that night. They promised they would not. But, within minutes, he heard loud screams emanating from the houses.**

had knocked on his church door and told him that they were expecting a riot following the police firing, and as a precautionary measure, wanted to take some persons into custody; they would therefore be camping in the village that night. The priest informed them that most of the men had fled, and since the womenfolk were on their own, the police should refrain from entering anyone's homes that night. They promised they would not. But, within minutes, he heard loud screams emanating from the houses: "Don't kill me!" "Don't hit him!" "Don't ruin me!"

**ACCORDING TO WITNESSES,** about 400 policemen were in the village. While this may be an exaggeration, the police version of the events — that there had been only 74 per-

sons on duty, and that Thampan, a recognisably hefty man who had been identified by many, even in the dark, was actually recuperating in hospital — have been proved false.

In the counter-affidavit submitted by the government, the Home Secretary states: "The allegations that the police outraged the modesty of the women are under investigation . . . the police have not committed any atrocities, but there have been instances of the use of force by certain personnel of the police party while taking various suspects into custody for interrogation. Subsequent to this, there were allegations. . . there had been no cases of rape reported by anyone other than vague newspaper reports." Obviously this was the only official stand the government could take as the Chief Minister had already caused a furore in the Assembly by declaring that the women of Thankamani should provide medical certificates as evidence of rape.

By the SP's own admission Thankamani was "calm and peaceful" Why then were the police compelled to use force, especially against unarmed and helpless women and children? The SP claims that the police had been asked only to comb the area, and that while he himself had remained in the van, seven police parties had raided the houses of 'suspects'. He admits that he had no idea of the names of the persons they were looking for. He also denies that the policemen had forcibly entered the villagers' homes. Although he was in his van, close to Father Kottur's house, from 10.45 pm to 5.45 am, he does not mention having heard the screams that so many independent witnesses heard. The commission concludes that "he might definitely have heard such screams but was not concerned. That is why he has not made any inquiries about the *modus operandi* of the raid."

What was the *modus operandi*? Circle Inspector Ahmed Kunju who had led one of the raids says: "Some of the houses had to be forcibly opened. They opened the doors

when threatened. We flashed the torches through the windows to see if anyone was hiding inside."

**DIST JUDGE SREEDEVI** has observed that given the atmosphere prevailing in the village, it is unlikely that the women and children sleeping alone in their houses would have left their windows open. When the Judge made her first visit to Thankamani, she also found first-hand evidence of the use of what police personnel termed 'a little force'. Front doors had been smashed, there were gaping holes where windows should have been, glass-panes were shattered, and round holes said to be made by rifle-butts could be seen in the wooden window-shutters; inside there was evidence of smashed almirahs, broken utensils, and household articles could be seen floating in the wells outside. "Wherever we went, we noticed that the womenfolk who related the incidents were bursting into tears. Some of them were trying to suppress their feelings; they were not able to resist. A melancholic atmosphere pervaded the whole area. It seems that time has not healed their wounds. (The inspection took place over a period of three months after the horrific night of October 22). They had only one request. This should not happen to any of their sisters in future."

Philip M Prasad, the advocate representing the victims of the police atrocities, says that at first, the women were not willing to come forward and admit that they had been raped. They talked of manhandling, of physical molestation, of being dragged by the hair and beaten, but would not confess to actually being raped. However, Dist Judge Sreedevi was able to win their confidence, and witnessing her genuine horror as she went from house to house, accompanied by her women assistants, the women came forward to talk.

The first woman to have filed a detailed statement was the 52-year old wife of an *ayurvedic* physician and a mother of three. Perhaps it was

because her son had been in the forefront of the anti-police agitation that her family was one of those singled out for some of the worst treatment. After her husband had been dragged away by several policemen (he had later been seen stripped naked and badly beaten at the police station), she was raped. Her two young daughters were in the house, but she does not wish to talk about them. Understandably enough.

**ONCE THE STATEMENT** had been filed by the courageous woman who



*The courageous Sally Varghese.*

had the support of her husband, others came forward. Tragic stories emerged. In one house, a woman had been dragged by the hair, hit on the back with lathis and raped when she tried to stop the police from forcibly taking away her husband, brother-in-law, and son. Two policemen had then entered the room in which her teenaged-daughters were asleep and bolted the door. Several policemen held her down and sexually attacked her when she tried to follow; fifteen minutes later, the others emerged from the room. She does not know what took place behind the closed door as her daughters do not speak about it, but on the following day, she discovered the policemen's underclothes which she subsequently burnt. When the DIG then visited her house, he removed some shoes that the po-

licemen had left behind.

Eye-witnesses testified to several women having been beaten, stamped on with booted feet, dragged by the hair and breasts, punched, slapped and in at least 14-15 houses, raped.

Sally Varghese, a bright, attractive teenager, had stopped the police party led by Ahmed Kunju at the door, saying, "Bring the Vanitha police!" "What use do you have for women police?" asked the police as they pushed past her into the house demanding, "are there any men here?" Sally replied in the negative. Then, catching sight of her sister's child lying on the floor, a policeman asked, "If there are no men in this house, how did this child come into being? Did your sister go and get herself injected at the veterinary hospital?" Ahmed Kunju then tried to grab her hand, at which point Sally picked up a big chopper and swung it at him. He left in a hurry.

A male victim, a former student of P J Kurien, the local MP, claims to have spotted the MP while he was being dragged by the police, and begged him for help. When Venu Menon reported this in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Kurien questioned the veracity of the report. Although he had been seen by a large number of independent witnesses in Thankamani on the night of October 22, and had been spotted by Father Kottur during the peak of the atrocities, Kurien steadfastly maintained that he knew nothing of what had transpired.

Although only a few women did come forward to give statements, there were many, many more who did not because family circumstances prevented them from doing so. Many of the older women concealed the fact that their daughters had been raped; none of the residents of the ladies' hostel came forward to testify although others had seen women being carried out by policemen - in fact, some young teachers from the hostel left the village the very next day and were never heard of again. Advocate Philip M Prasad, an ex-Naxalite who spent seven years in jail,



## SPECIAL REPORT

is himself no stranger to police brutality, and says that never in Kerala has he come across an incident in which women had been raped by the police in a premeditated manner and on such a large scale.

To date, members of the erstwhile ruling party continue to claim that the women were not raped. . . man-handled perhaps, molested maybe, but not raped!

**FATHER KOTTUR**, resuming his testimony, says that although he could hear the cries for help coming from the houses, he felt helpless and sat at home, praying. At 2.30 am, when P J Kurien (MP) and some others knocked at his door, the priest told them that he feared something terrible was happening. The MP left and the cries continued. At dawn, about 15 women and girls came running to the church. They were grief-stricken. "Father! What should we do? We have lost everything!" they cried, "We are going to commit suicide!" The Father consoled them as they unburdened to him the secrets which they could not reveal even to their own husbands. Since Father Kottur had lived in Thankamani for only ten months, he could clearly identify only four of the women who had come to him.

By early morning, the battered and bruised women and the few men who had been spared began to put the pieces together. Their homes had been destroyed, their utensils damaged, their valuables looted. The men who had been dragged away slowly trickled back, badly bruised, bearing with them small identification slips issued by the Kattapana police station. The Home Secretary's affidavit states that these slips were issued to those personnel who were released from the station, at their own request, on the grounds that if they did not have some documentary proof in their possession regarding their being freed, it might result in their being apprehended by other police personnel while they returned home. These slips were later referred to as "*idi passes*"

— *idi* means beating.

As for the SP, Pulikesi, the commission report says: "Even though the SP states that he does not know what happened between 10.45 pm and 5.45 am, he admits that during the entire raid the vehicle in which he was sitting was the centre from which all the activities of the policemen were co-ordinated!" At 5.45 am he met C I Ahmed Kunju, but states: "I did not get much time to talk to the CI that night." CI Ahmed Kunju admits that 30 or 31 persons had been taken into custody by the raiding party and that they had been taken to the spot where the SP was standing. Yet he claimed not to know the exact number of persons arrested. Dist Judge Sreedevi concludes that this is totally irresponsible behaviour on the part of the police officials. Further, the criminal procedure code lays down certain very specific rules that must be followed when an investigating officer wants a specific person to be brought in for questioning — these were obviously flouted.

**ON THE SUBJECT** of sexual harassment by the police, the report says: "Four ladies have given oral evidence to the effect that they were raped," and rejects the police counsel's submission that since the victims had not had a medical check up, their case should be discarded. The report also says, "None of the rape victims could identify the policemen who had committed the offence." One rape victim described how she had been taken to an identification parade and humiliated by police personnel. Another, the mother of three teen-aged girls, said that several policemen hit the defenceless women with lathis to stop them from crying, shone torches in their eyes, and threatened to come back every few months if they made any complaints. "During the night hours," the report continues, "nobody could identify any policemen." But, their khaki uniforms, their caps, the shoes they left behind,

and the unmistakable lathi identified them clearly enough as policemen and not as employees of the transport company, as the counsel for the police had tried to imply. The commission had also discarded the allegation that the entire story was fabricated by the villagers, who were *ganja* cultivators, and therefore had an axe to grind with the police. The commission has concluded that over a dozen police officers are responsible for the rampage and atrocities; and a few, like the dreaded CI Thampan and SI Alex Mathew (whom witnesses claim to have seen leading the raid on the women's hostel), are already under suspension.

The concluding paragraph of the Sreedevi Commission Report says: "All possible steps should be taken to ensure that such vandalism by the police personnel under the guise of administration of law and order should not occur in future."

Will the damning evidence against the perpetrators of the atrocities be made public? Will the culprits be brought to book? It remains to be seen what action, if any, will follow the findings and recommendations of the Sreedevi Commission. At the time of writing, the Marxist-led coalition government headed by E K Nayanar is strangely silent, and has repeatedly countered efforts to have the report discussed in the Kerala Assembly, currently in session. Indeed, when M V Raghavan, a rebel Left leader from the CPM, managed to push a copy of the report on the table of the House in mid-November, the Speaker ruled that the report could not be tabled unless the ruling party did so formally.

It is with a bitter irony that the people of Thankamani recall that it was the very same Marxists, then in the opposition, who rode to victory on the basis of promises of action against the marauding law enforcers. Today, are they, too, turning their backs on the traumatised people of Thankamani, just as their predecessors, the Congress (I) did, until they were pressurised into taking action? ♦

# STRIKING THE RIGHT CHORD

Can a piece of music address the musical components inherent in the body to rid it of distress? A tall claim, even for those ardent believers in the power of music to soothe and salve. But nuclear scientist turned musicologist, Vemu Mukunda, has established an institute that does just this. M D RITI describes this unique music therapy.

**I T LOOKED LIKE A SEANCE.** Dim light filled the room as the gentle notes of a *sitar* rose in the air. The large eyes of the girl who sat in the middle of the room revealed the anguish in her mind. A session of music therapy was in progress.

The therapeutic value of music has been discussed for centuries. Pre-biblical societies used music therapy to treat mental and physical disorders. Aristotle, more than 20 centuries ago, had stated that music was an important component of the mind. The therapeutic powers of music are once again under the spotlight in India and the West.

"We are not psychiatrists — we use the musical components of the human mind and body to help people overcome their distress," explains musicologist Vemu Mukunda who has established an experimental institute of musicology at Bangalore called *Pavani*. The institute researches into the medical aspects of music, but has yet to start operating on a large scale.

Mukunda is part of an informal network of musicologists spread all over Europe. Another member, Dr Trina Purohit Roy, founder of the Tagore Institute in Bonn, administers music therapy to mentally-disturbed children. According to her, music therapy succeeds by co-ordinating dislocated senses and is particularly effective when supplemented with neurological treatment. Stien Novack, yet another musicologist, does similar work at the Yoga Centre in Arnhem, Netherlands.

Exactly how does music therapy work? Mukunda explains that there

are three distinct musical octaves in the human body: the first extends from the *sahasra* to the *kundali* (from between the eyes to the back of the head); the second stretches from between the eyes to the *naabhi* (navel); and the third from the *naabhi* to the toes. Holding emotions responsible for most physical and mental states, Mukunda uses the Indian Carnatic classical music scale to control them. Each individual emotion is directly linked with a particular note on this scale. While the order of the notes in the octave are always the same, the location of the octaves varies for each individual.

**THE MUSIC THERAPIST** first identifies the emotion responsible for the physical or mental distress the patient suffers from. The exact location of the musical note corresponding with that emotion is then traced after which the therapist makes a decision as to what emotional energy should be tapped to benefit the patient. In essence, this form of therapy transfers energy from a negative, distressing emotion to a positive and pleasant one.

"Psychiatrists try to get into the minds of people and probe them," says Mukunda, "and hence, they often absorb distressing mental en-



*A music therapy session in progress at 'Pavani'.*

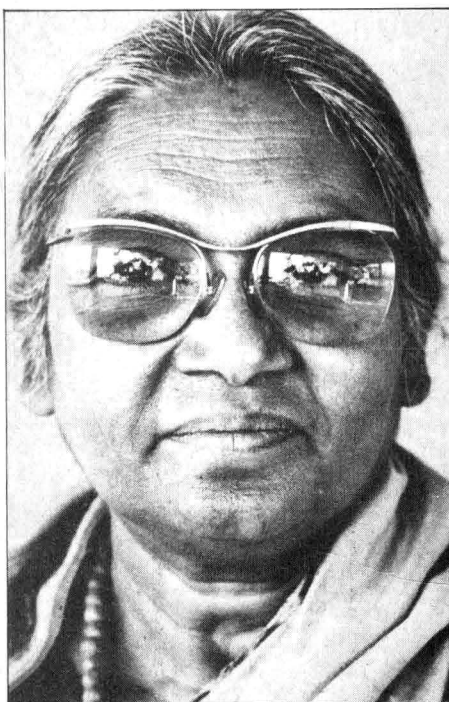


ergy from their patients and become disturbed themselves. We do not probe into the minds of people or get emotionally involved with our patients. Instead, we transfer energy from one part of them to another."

The music therapist also ascertains whether the emotional energy to be rooted out is in a primary, secondary, or tertiary condition as only then will he be certain as to which of the three octaves he should address himself to. Next, he arouses that emotion in the patient by playing suitable music or a particular note. When the patient reacts favourably to the music by experiencing the emotion aroused by it, the therapist moves away from that note on the music scale towards the note which is linked to the emotion he wishes to channelise. It requires skill and speed as it must be done before the emotional energy from the negative emotion is dispersed. When the emotion identified as suitable is reached, the music lingers, allowing the pent-up emotional energy of the patient to be released.

The entire procedure requires between three to six sittings, perhaps even more. Finding the right music for an individual can be difficult and time-consuming, since the pitch most suitable for the patient has to be identified. Stien Novack uses a digital tuner. She gets her patients to talk, and traces their tonal qualities on various levels. Plotting graphs of these tones helps her to find the person's *aadhaara shadaja* (the base pitch) and thereby locate the whole octave.

Mukunda has found that Indian classical music, whether Carnatic or Hindustani, is most suitable for music therapy. This is because its notes are linked and merge with one another whereas Western music has distinct, straight notes. "Besides, Western music is full of harmonies," he adds. "These arouse too many emotions simultaneously. On the other hand, Indian music has only one sound at a time." Still, the music that *appeals* to the patient is, of course, the most effective, irrespective of its origin or pattern of notes.



Dr Trina Roy: a music therapist.

## INDIAN MYTHOLOGY ABOUNDS

with tales of the specific therapeutic values of particular *ragas*. Dr Shamantakamani Narendran of Bangalore reveals that the *Chaarukeshi raga* was believed to cure leprosy, if sung non-stop for 41 days. She avers that music can affect a person at four levels — the emotional, the physical, the mental, and the intellectual. It works almost like hypnosis.

Music therapy, however, has been far more useful in helping the emotionally distressed and the physically ill. "We have made a tangible breakthrough in physical ailments only in the past two years," boasts Mukunda. "We can now help people with muscular problems. I am even working on a polio patient in Bangalore. He now has some feeling in his affected leg. My system works on the principle that music makes the mind soar and the body move spontaneously. Rhythmic music is best for the treatment of physical disabilities. It pushes the mind into manifesting itself in body movement."

Dr Trina Roy has a success story to report that cannot be disputed. Her

own son, Parjnan, became deaf, blind, dumb, *and* paralysed in an accident when he was just a year old. His musicologist mother used music therapy to reactivate his senses. Now, at 25, the young man can both see and hear, and even communicate in five languages. True, some physiotherapy was also necessary as a supplementary aid.

Clinical disorders can also be cured through music therapy. According to musicologist Shamantakamani, alcoholics with neurological disorders, schizophrenics, and those suffering from aggression, depression, and suicidal tendencies can all be treated. Psychosomatic illnesses like asthma, gastric ulcers, abdominal pain, hysteria, eczema, and migraine can also be helped. A basic knowledge of psychology, the fundamentals of psychiatry, and an understanding of the *rasabhava* are what she considers essential for successful music therapy. "Music therapy is not something that can be provided by just any musician," she clarifies. "Experiments conducted with trained music therapists and inexperienced volunteer musicians prove that patients respond much better to trained therapists."

**JOHN BLACKING**, Professor of Social Anthropology at Queens University, Belfast, has researched the effect of music upon human beings, and disagrees with the whole concept of music therapy. "I do not see how just listening to music can do anyone much good," he argues. "The performance of music can only be therapeutic because of what it does to the brain. It is the *act* of playing an instrument or singing that is important, and not the listening."

John Blacking's criticism is partly right as it is an acknowledged fact that vocal classical music improves a person's respiratory hygiene. Singing can help reduce bronchitis, tonsillitis, sinusitis, and even defects in hearing and the vocal chords. Dr Shamantakamani says that even cervical spondilosis, wherein the neck muscles become stiff and painful, can be relieved by singing. When Mukunda was in-

# The Man with the Healing Touch

Vemu Mukunda speaks to M D Riti.

**TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO**, he built gas-cooled nuclear reactors. Today, he jets around the world, healing people through music. From nuclear scientist to music-healer is a big step. A close encounter of a bizarre kind with death makes the story of Vemu Mukunda even more weird.

This wiry, energetic man grew up in Bangalore. He graduated in refinery engineering from what was then known as the Bangalore Engineering College, and went on to acquire another degree in engineering from Glasgow University, after which he returned to India, and joined the Atomic Energy Commission in 1960. Somewhere along the way he developed an interest in music.

The mid-sixties saw him return to England, and work for various organisations in quick succession as a nuclear scientist. He led a hectic social life and traversed the cocktail-party circuit of London regularly. Suddenly, everything changed. Mukunda abandoned nuclear science and became a Flower Child — a hippie.

Mukunda attributes this cataclysmic metamorphosis to the sudden death of his brother and sister. "Perhaps I had a nervous breakdown," he



confesses thoughtfully. "Death began to fascinate me and I became obsessed with it." He frequently attended seances in an attempt to talk to his dead brother and sister.

When a person dies, what happens to all the psychic energy that leaves his or her body? This is the question that Mukunda sought to answer. Does the mind really cease to exist when one's living-clock stops? The only way Mukunda could find out was by experiencing the situation himself.

So, he began his macabre experiments with death. He set a time and date upon which he would actually experience death without succumbing to it so that he could record his adventure. Before the big day, however, his purpose was deflected as he became the devotee of an Indian god-man.

He became part of the Flower People scene and spent his days playing the *veena*, completely immersed in his music. Hippies drifted in and out of his house while he played his instrument in the kitchen. Gradually, his music became more important than his need to know more about death.

He was already a trained Carnatic classical instrumentalist, having learnt music from A S Chandrashekariah and Chittoor Subramanya Pillai. Mukunda also acquired some knowledge of Western classical music and joined the Jeunesse Musicale, an international French organisation. It was then that he realised that music could have a therapeutic value.

Today, Mukunda travels all over Europe and India, playing at concerts and studying the psycho-chemical changes brought about in the mind and body by music. He specialises in fusion music and features in the best-selling album, 'Flight into Fantasy', with American jazz trumpeteer Maynard Fergusson. He also hopes to intensify research into the healing powers of music at *Pavani*, the institute of musicology that he has set up at Bangalore.

vited to address the British Medical Association in June 1987 on the therapeutic value of music, he considered it a major breakthrough towards its acceptance by the world of allopathic medicine. "It is not meant only for those who have been clinically diagnosed as mentally disturbed," he elucidates earnestly. "Each one of us collects a lot of emotional contamination daily because we absorb so many negative emotions that we cannot release or get rid of." At present, unfortunately, there is no laboratory anywhere in the world which is devoted exclusively to monitoring bio-rhythms and studying the exact impact of music

on the mind and body. *Pavani* was established at Bangalore last year to research this unexplored arena exhaustively. C N Mangala, the institute's secretary, says that they named the institute after the 41st *melakarta raga*, *Pavani*, because that *raga* is supposed to make a person feel purified, elated and comforted. We now hope to establish a music library for our patients.

The main problem that *Pavani* faces is a lack of infrastructural backing. They have a tiny office with minimal facilities to monitor the effects of their therapy. "I can begin curative therapy in Bangalore only if I get help from the West," says Mukunda.

"The kind of institute I envisage will have resident psychologists, doctors and musicians. I hope to get some funding for this project from an organisation in Munich."

At present, Mukunda continues to jet around the world performing and curing, while the members of *Pavani* visit local hospitals in Bangalore to practise their music therapy on willing patients. Dr Trina Purohit Roy also hopes to soon establish a similar institute at Bangalore. If the optimistic plans of these musicologists materialise, then traditional psychiatrists and allopathic specialists may well find themselves going out of business. ♦



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**REVOLUTION ON THE RAILS — CASH IN!**

## EXTRACT

June 20th

**I HAD AN ABSOLUTELY** sensational Prime Minister's Question Time in the House this afternoon. Members were attacking me from all sides about my controlling expenditure on defence, but I really made mincemeat of them all.

So after I finished work I hurried upstairs to the flat to see the TV News. Annie was watching it, it had started already. I asked her if it was the lead story, but they hadn't mentioned it.

"Typical BBC," I said.

"It's not the BBC."

"Typical ITV," I said.

"It's Channel Four," she said.

"Oh well," I said, "what do you expect?"

I watched what was left of the news, which was entirely devoted to the fate of Benjy, an old English Sheepdog who has somehow got under the wire and on to a Ministry of Defence artillery range on Salisbury Plain. According to Channel Four News, Benjy belongs to an eight-year-old orphan called Linda Fletcher. Linda lost her parents in a car crash last year, a crash that only she and Benjy survived.

The artillery range where Benjy is lost is full of unexploded shells and is highly dangerous except for one fixed road through it. Benjy is a long way from the road. The News showed shots of *Danger* signs, telephoto shots of the dog running around and sitting down, and a tearful little orphan girl looking through the wire fence and being comforted by relatives. The story finished with the Army expressing their regrets but saying that there is nothing they can do unless the dog comes to the wire of his own accord. It seems inevitable that Benjy will either starve to death or be blown up.

That was the end of the news. I couldn't believe it — there was nothing about me at all! I asked Annie if she could have missed it.

"I watched the whole news," she

*Reproduced from "Yes Prime Minister" by Jonathan Lynn and Anthony Jay with the permission of BBC Enterprises Ltd.*

## ONE OF US

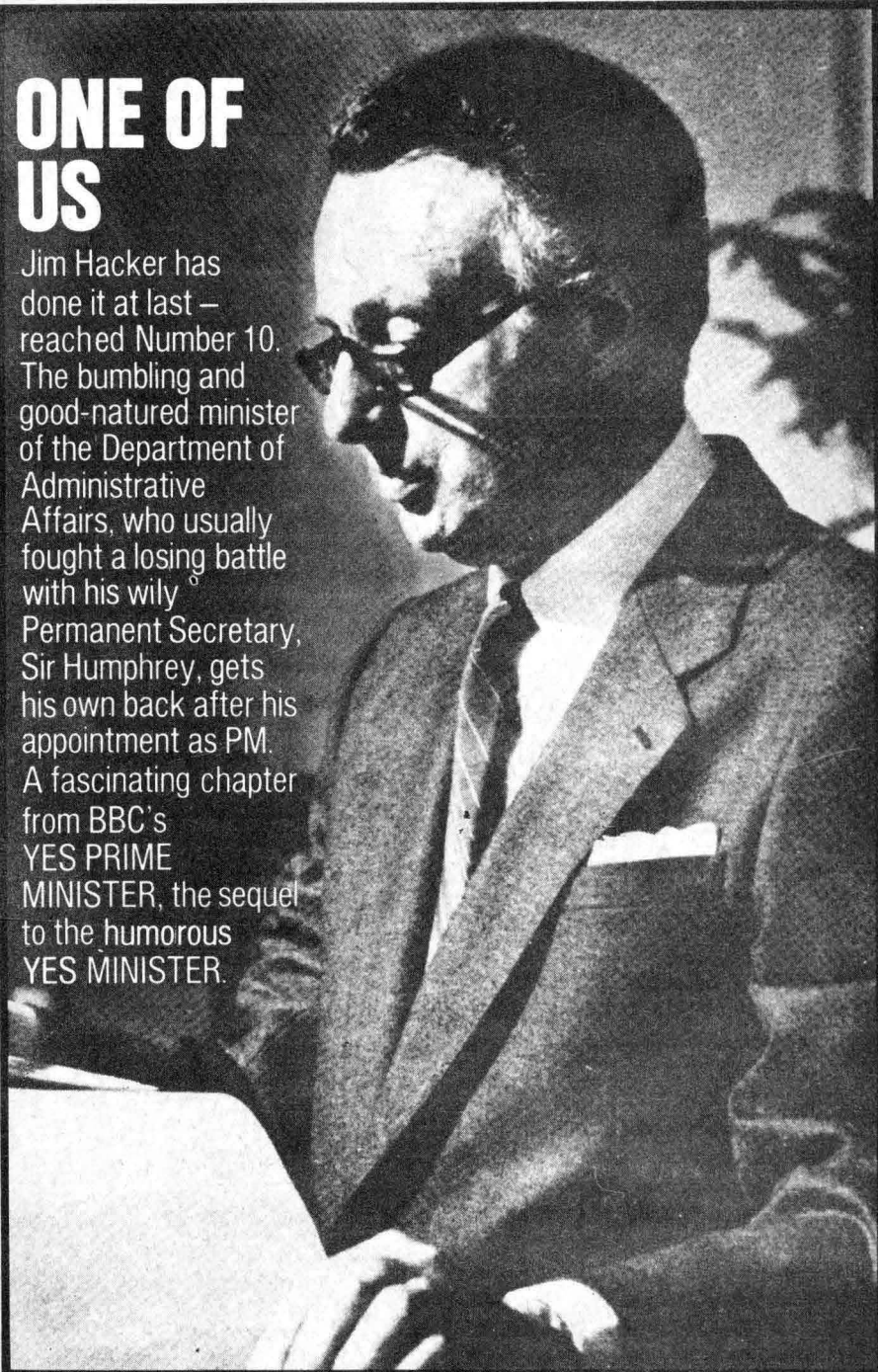
Jim Hacker has done it at last — reached Number 10. The bumbling and good-natured minister of the Department of Administrative Affairs, who usually fought a losing battle with his wily Permanent Secretary, Sir Humphrey, gets his own back after his appointment as PM. A fascinating chapter from BBC's **YES PRIME MINISTER**, the sequel to the humorous **YES MINISTER**.

said, en route to the kitchen to dish up dinner, "but you know how it is when one watches it — one sort of mentally tunes out the boring bits."

"Thanks," I said, and got myself a Scotch.

**SHE WAS INSTANTLY** apologetic.

"No, not you, darling. You're not boring, not to me, even if you are to the rest of the country." She doesn't mean me *personally*, of course, she just means that some people are bored by politicians. I was a bit fed up, though. Instead of showing the viewers a significant triumph in





# EXTRACT

the House of Commons they give them a pathetic story about a kid and a dog.

*(Although Hacker regarded the debate in the House as a significant triumph, it is possible that Channel Four News took the view that the debate merely consisted of some juvenile rowdies bickering with each other – Ed.)*

"I thought that the story about the dog was interesting," said Annie, slicing tomatoes for the salad.

"But it's totally unimportant," I explained, as I struggled with the tray of ice cubes.

"Why is the story about Parliamentary Question Time more important?" she wanted to know.

"Quite simply," I said, with all due modesty, "because it was about me. I am Prime Minister, after all. Doesn't that impress anyone in the media?"

"You seem to be quite impressed enough for all of us," said Annie. I couldn't understand why she was taking this attitude.

"Annie," I remonstrated with her, "the future of Britain's defence was being thrashed out in the great forum of the nation and what do the viewers get offered? Lassie Come Home."

"But what was decided in the great forum of the nation?"

Annie sometimes asks the stupidest questions. Obviously nothing was decided. You can't leave decisions to MPs. She was just being silly. The real importance of the debate is that *I won it!* And I think that the media should let my people know. *(Hacker was apparently developing a Moses complex after five months in Number Ten – Ed.)* I told her that the media people don't live in the real world, and that I'd like to drop the subject.

But Annie wouldn't let it go. "I think that a kid losing a dog is much more real than a lot of overgrown schoolboys shouting insults at each other. I think the army ought to rescue that dog."

Bloody stupid idea! Spend thousands and thousands of pounds in a dog rescue operation when you could



**"Annie," I remonstrated, "the future of Britain's defence was being thrashed out in the great forum of the nation and what do viewers get offered? Lassie Come Home." "But what was decided in the great forum of the nation?" Annie sometimes asks the stupidest questions. Obviously nothing was decided.**

replace it for nothing from the Battersea Dog's Home? Kids lose dogs every day. Should the army mount rescue operations for all of them? It's just a television sob story.

Annie told me I don't understand how ordinary people feel.

"I happen to be an ordinary person myself," I replied loftily.

"Surely not!"

I tried to explain to her that I am in charge of the responsible control of public money. "It's not for me to spend taxpayers' money to buy a bit of easy popularity."

"If popularity's so easy," said Annie, hitting straight below the belt, "how come you're so low in the opinion polls?" She argued that to save the dog would cost a fraction of a penny per taxpayer, they'd all like it done, and that sometimes you have to do things that aren't economic if you live in a civilised humane society.

I told her to write a paper on that and submit it to the Treasury. We don't get a lot of laughs in the Cabinet

Economic Committee.

June 23rd

**I'VE HAD SOME SHOCKS** and surprises during my time in politics, but today I think I had the greatest surprise ever.

The Director-General of MI5 came to see me. Sir Geoffrey Hastings, by name. A tall, shambling St Bernard dog of a man, with mournful brown tired eyes and wobbly droopy jowls.

Bernard showed him in to my study, and I invited them to sit down. Hastings looked pointedly at Bernard. I told him that I always have Bernard present at my meetings.

"Not this time, Prime Minister," he said gently but firmly.

On reflection, I realise that I don't always have Bernard present at my meetings, and I let him go. After he'd gone I realised that I hadn't been given any papers for the meeting. But Hastings indicated that this was on his instructions. Apparently the meeting was too serious for papers. In other words, there should be no record of it at all. This is almost unheard of in Whitehall, where absolutely *everything* is minuted.

I was agog. And my agogness was soon to be rewarded.

"We've just received some information," murmured Hastings.

I was somewhat perplexed. "Isn't that what you're supposed to do?"

He nodded. "You know Sir John Halstead?" I nodded. I never *knew* Halstead personally, but everyone knows he was Head of MI5 in the sixties. And he died last month. "He left a whole lot of his personal papers to us. We've started to go through them. It's very clear he was passing government secrets to Moscow for several years in the fifties and sixties."

I found it hard to believe what I was being told. The Head of MI5 a Russian agent? Incredible. Geoffrey Hastings seemed a little embarrassed to be telling me this at all. I'm not surprised. I asked him why Halstead left the papers to MI5.

"His Will says it's a final act of conscience. But I think he just wanted

to do a bit of posthumous gloating. Show us he got away with it. But it's a shattering blow." And Geoffrey certainly looked shattered. The bags under his eyes extended halfway down his cheeks. "How much did he tell the Russians?" I asked. "That hardly matters," said Geoffrey. "I mean, what with Burgess and Maclean and Philby and Blake and Fuchs and the Krogers, so many people were telling them things that one more didn't really make much difference." "So what is the point?" If it didn't matter about the secrets, I couldn't see any reason why it should matter.

How wrong I was! Geoffrey Hastings gazed gloomily at me, his salt and pepper moustache flapping in the breeze. I've hardly ever seen a more lugubrious figure. "The point is," said Geoffrey in a voice of profound melancholy, "he was one of us."

"One of us?"

He could see that I didn't quite get the full significance. "He joined MI5 straight from Oxford. Been in the Civil Service all his life. If this ever gets out, all of us who were recruited by him will be suspects forever."

**SUDDENLY I SAW** the seriousness of it all. "I see," I said, and eyed him speculatively. "And you're not a Russian agent, are you?" Geoffrey stared at me coldly, so I hastened to reassure him. "Only joking," I said, "but you're not, are you?" He remained silent. I realised that if I ever got an answer out of him I wouldn't know if it were true or not anyway. "No, of course you're not," I said, and then told him that, embarrassing or not, in my opinion I ought to make this information public.

He begged me not to. He said there were tremendous security implications. I couldn't see why, if the information itself was unimportant. But Hastings said that it's absolutely vital to keep it secret from our enemy that we can't keep secrets.

"I shouldn't have thought that was much of a secret," I said with unanswerable logic. After all, it must



*Hacker leaves the Prime Ministerial abode.*

have been mentioned by Burgess and Maclean and Philby and Blake and the Krogers. But it turned out that the Russians weren't the enemy he had in mind. He was talking about our real enemy — the press.

"We had an internal security investigation into John Halstead in the seventies. There was a lot of media speculation. You remember?"

"Vaguely," I told him.

"It was all terribly irresponsible and ill-informed," Geoffrey reminded me bitterly.

"You mean," I asked, "the press hinted that Halstead was a spy?"

"Yes."

"But he *was* a spy."

**GEOFFREY SIGHED** impatiently. "Yes, but they didn't know that! They were being typically ignorant and irresponsible. They just happened to be accurate, that's all. Anyway, the enquiry cleared him. Completely. Clean bill of health. But they missed some rather obvious questions and checks. So obviously that, well . . . one *wonders*."

This was uttered with tons of significance. He really ladled it on. What

does one wonder? I wondered. I couldn't guess, so I had to ask him.

"One wonders about the chaps who cleared him, whether they were . . . you know . . ."

"Stupid, you mean," I said, then suddenly realised what he was driving at. "My God . . . you mean, *they could be spies too?*" He nodded, and shrugged helplessly. "Who headed the enquiry?" I asked.

"Old Lord MacIver. But he was ill most of the time."

"Ill?" I wanted clarification.

"Well . . . ga-ga, really. So effectively it was the Secretary who had conducted it."

"Who was the Secretary?" I asked.

Geoffrey Hastings gave me a woe-begone stare, looked around nervously, and apologetically mumbled, "Sir Humphrey Appleby, I'm afraid."

I wasn't sure I'd heard him correctly. "Humphrey?"

"Yes, Prime Minister."

"You think he may have been spying for the Russians too?"

"It's a remote possibility, but very unlikely. After all, he's one of us." "So was John Halstead," I pointed out. He couldn't deny it. "Well . . . yes."



# EXTRACT

But there's no other evidence at all, not against Humphrey."

I tried to collect my thoughts. "Might he have been covering up for one of us. . ." I corrected myself. "One of *them* . . . er, one of *you*?"

Geoffrey thought that this was a very remote possibility. He actually believes that Humphrey is completely loyal, and that all that Humphrey is guilty of is hideous incompetence.

That's bad enough. After all, it's a matter of the highest national security. I asked Hastings what he recommended that I should do about Humphrey.

"It's up to you, Prime Minister. We still haven't got through all the papers. You could set up an enquiry into Sir Humphrey."

This is rather an enjoyable prospect, I must say. But when I questioned Geoffrey closely it turned out that he didn't really recommend it. "Not at this stage. Things might get out. We don't want any more irresponsible ill-informed press speculation."

"Even if it's accurate," I commented. "*Especially* if it's accurate," agreed Geoffrey. "There's nothing worse than *accurate*, irresponsible, ill-informed press speculation. But you could send Humphrey off on gardening leave while we examine the rest of the Halstead papers."

**THIS WAS ALSO** an appealing thought. But Humphrey is fairly useful, in spite of his many faults. And he is the Cabinet Secretary. I felt that I should keep him on unless his loyalty were really in question. Geoffrey Hastings sees no problem in that. He handed me a file marked TOPSECRET: FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S EYES ONLY and told me that I could confront Humphrey with all the substantive evidence it contains. But I didn't really want to interrogate Humphrey. "If you don't seriously suspect him, shouldn't we just forget it?" I asked. He looked very doubtful indeed. "Obviously it's your decision," he rumbled in a sepulchral tone. "On the other hand, if you did nothing



**A simple way has emerged of saving three million pounds. The Service Chiefs say it can't be done. The suggestion being made by the Chiefs is to close a hundred miles of coastal Radar Stations. But I'm suggesting they start eating their 43 years' supply of strawberry jam instead of buying more.**

and it emerged later that Sir Humphrey . . . that he was . . . one of *them* . . . well, it might not look too good. Not to mention the fact that as Cabinet Secretary he co-ordinates all of our security services. There are no secrets from him."

I was forced to agree. Geoffrey rose from his chair, and straightened his baggy pinstripe suit. "Personally," he concluded, "I find it hard enough to believe that *one* of us was one of them. But if *two* of us were one of them . . ." he realised that this was a logical impossibility and tried to correct himself. "*Two* of them, then all of us could be . . . could be . . ."

He had painted himself into a corner. "All of them?" I suggested helpfully as I escorted him to the door. "Thank you, Geoffrey, I've heard enough."

June 26th

**I COULDN'T TALK** to Humphrey about Sir John Halstead on Friday. I had appointments all day and so

had he. But this morning we had a meeting already pencilled in.

It was to be about the defence cuts that I'm looking for. I decided to have the meeting as planned, and then have a private word with Humphrey afterwards.

I've been trying to find as many small savings in the defence budgets as I can. Defence expenditure in this country is completely out of hand. By the mid-1990's we shall only be able to afford half a frigate. This, I surmise, will be inadequate for our naval defences. The Secretary of State for Defence is getting nowhere so I have decided to take a look myself.

A simple way has emerged of saving three million pounds, for instance, and the Service Chiefs say it can't be done. Humphrey is backing them, of course, with the argument that *any* defence savings can be dangerous.

Ironically, the suggestion being made by the Service Chiefs is to close a hundred miles of coastal Radar Stations. And I know *why* they're suggesting that particular economy: because it *is* dangerous, and therefore they know that I won't agree to it! But *I'm* suggesting that they start eating some of their 43 years' supply of strawberry jam instead of buying more.

Humphrey couldn't — or wouldn't — see how that would help. "As I understand it, Prime Minister, the Army haven't got any strawberry jam. It's the Navy that's got it."

He's right. But the Army have seventy-one years' supply of tinned meat. And the RAF, which has no strawberry jam lake and no tinned meat mountain, has fifty-six years' supply of baked beans. So I am trying to get across to Humphrey and the MOD that the Army and the RAF should eat the Navy's strawberry jam, and the Navy and the RAF should eat the Army's tinned meat, and the Army and the Navy should eat the RAF's baked beans. And if they did that with all the other surpluses too we'd save £3 million a year for four years. And I do not believe that the

defence of the realm is imperilled by soldiers eating sailors' jam!

Bernard had an objection. "The RAF's baked beans are in East Anglia and the Army's tinned meat is in Aldershot and the Navy's jam is in Rosyth. So it would mean moving the beans from . . ."

I stopped him there. "Bernard," I asked, "if your armed forces can't move a few tins of baked beans around Britain, how can they intercept guided missiles?"

Bernard seemed perplexed by the question. "But you don't intercept missiles with baked beans, you have long pointy things which go . . ." I told him to shut his mouth. At which point Humphrey reluctantly agreed that it *could* be done, but added that it would be extremely complicated. "The administrative costs would outweigh the savings." But no one's even worked out the administrative costs. And why? Because there's no need — they *know* that they can make the administrative costs outweigh the savings, if they put their minds to it.

**AS THE MEETING DREW** uneventfully to a close, a messenger arrived with the latest opinion polls. They contained bad news. I'm down another three points. Not the government — just my personal rating.

I wonder what I'm doing wrong. Humphrey believes it proves that I'm doing things right — politically popular actions, in his view, are usually administrative disasters. I wonder if it's caused by my failure to get the defence cuts through. Maybe. Though in all honesty I'm not sure that defence cuts are the principal topic of conversation in the supermarkets of Britain. No, the lead story in the newspapers is that bloody lost dog on Salisbury Plain. Perhaps I should forget about my defence policy for the moment and instead think up a lost dog policy.

Anyway, the meeting was over. And there was nothing for it, I could postpone it no longer: I had to have my private word with Humphrey. I

told Bernard that I had to discuss a top secret security matter with Humphrey, and nodded to the door. "Would you mind, Bernard?"

He went to the door and, suddenly, threw it open! Then he looked up and down the landing to see if anyone was eavesdropping. I realised he had misunderstood me. So I explained that I wished him to leave us alone. He seemed a little crestfallen. I can see why. That's two meetings in two days that he's been asked to leave. But Geoffrey had no choice, and nor do I — I can hardly let Bernard know that Humphrey, of *all* people, is a security risk at the moment.

**AFTER BERNARD LEFT US**, probably wondering if *he* was considered a security risk all of a sudden, Humphrey and I were left alone. I didn't quite know how to begin, so it was a minute or so before I spoke. Humphrey waited patiently.

"Humphrey," I began eventually, "there's something I want to talk about. Something very secret."

**A messenger arrived with the latest opinion polls. I'm down three points. Not the government — just my personal rating. I wonder what I'm doing wrong. Humphrey believes it proves that I'm doing things right — politically popular actions, in his view, are usually administrative disasters.**



I was stuck. Humphrey leaned forward helpfully. "Would it be easier if I wasn't here?" he asked.

"It's something very serious," I replied.

He assumed an appropriately serious expression. "Very serious and very secret?"

I nodded. "Humphrey, does the name Sir John Halstead ring a bell?"

"Of course, Prime Minister. He died only three weeks ago. And he was the subject of a security enquiry ten years ago. I had to conduct it myself, virtually. Old MacIver was ga-ga."

So far so good. I asked Humphrey if he'd found evidence of anything incriminating.

"Of course not." He smiled confidently.

"Why of course not?" I asked.

"Well, in the first place John Halstead was one of us. We'd been friends for years. In the second place the whole story was got up by the press. And in the third place, the whole object of internal security enquiries is to find no evidence."

"Even if the security of the realm is at risk?"

He laughed. "Prime Minister, if you really believe the security of the realm is at risk you call in the Special Branch. Government security enquiries are only used for killing press stories. Their sole purpose is to enable the Prime Minister to stand up in the House and say, "We have held a full enquiry and there is no evidence to substantiate these charges."

"But suppose you find something suspicious?"

"Prime Minister, practically everything that happens in government is suspicious. The fact that you asked Bernard to leave us alone together for a secret conversation could be construed as suspicious."

**THIS SURPRISED ME.** But it shouldn't have, he's obviously right. Anyway, Humphrey went on to say that the whole story was nonsense, typical Fleet Street sensationalism.

He was so confident that it was in-



## EXTRACT

evitable that he would feel really stupid when I revealed what I knew. I was beginning to thoroughly enjoy myself.

"There is *no* possibility," I asked carefully, "that Sir John Halstead ever passed any information to Moscow?"

"Impossible," he asserted. "Out of the question."

"You'd stake your reputation on that?"

"Without hesitation."

I went for the kill. "Well, Humphrey, I'm afraid I have to tell you that he was spying for Russia for a considerable part of his career."

Humphrey was silenced. But only for a moment. "I don't believe it," he said defiantly. "Who says so?"

I gave him an apologetic smile. "He says so himself. He left all his papers to the government with a detailed confession. MI5 says it's absolutely true. It checks out all along the line."

Humphrey was speechless. This is a sight that I've never seen before, and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed it. He spluttered a bit, and tried to put together a sentence. Finally he said: "But, good Lord, I mean, well, he was..."

"One of us?" I put in helpfully.

"Well... yes." He began to pull himself together. "Well, that certainly leaves a lot of questions to be asked."

"Yes," I agreed, "and I'm asking you the first one. *Why* didn't you ask him a lot of questions?" Humphrey didn't see what I was getting at. "Why, Humphrey, did your enquiry exonerate him so quickly?"

He suddenly realised how my questions affected *him*. "You don't mean... surely nobody is suggesting..." He went very pale.

So I pointed out to Humphrey that it was all very suspicious. I asked why he hadn't held a proper enquiry. After all, according to the TOP SECRET file, Humphrey had been given evidence of Halstead's surprisingly long stay in Yugoslavia. And shortly after Halstead left Yugoslavia several of our MI5 agents behind the Iron Curtain were rounded up and never seen again.



**Humphrey was speechless – a sight I've never seen before, and I must say I thoroughly enjoyed it. He spluttered a bit, and tried to put together a sentence. Finally he said: "But, good Lord, I mean, well, he was..." "One of us?" I put in helpfully.**

And there was one specific interpreter with whom Halstead spent a lot of time. I asked Humphrey what he'd found out about this interpreter. "She turned out to be a Russian agent. We knew that. Most Yugoslav interpreters are Russian agents. Those who aren't in the CIA, that is."

"But you never followed her up."

"I had better things to do with my time," he said defensively. I stared at him accusingly. "Three months later she moved to England and settled in Oxford, a hundred and fifty yards from Sir John Halstead's house. They were neighbours for the next eleven years."

Humphrey was completely demoralised. He tried to defend himself. "You can't check up on everything. You don't know what you might find out. I mean, if you've got that sort of suspicious mind you ought to..." "Conduct security enquiries." I finished his sentence for him.

**HUMPHREY'S DEFENCE**, in a nut-

shell, was that Halstead gave him his word. The word of a gentleman. And you don't go checking up on the word of a gentleman, especially when you were at Oxford together.

I asked him if he'd have checked up on Anthony Blunt. Humphrey said that was totally different. Blunt was at Cambridge.

I listened patiently. Then I was forced to tell him that I had a problem with him. He was horrified. "But you don't think... you *can't* think... I mean, I mean, I don't speak a word of Russian."

"But you must admit," I said, "that it looks as if it must have been incompetence or collusion. Either way..." I left the sentence unfinished. The implications were clear enough. Humphrey was dreadfully upset. "Collusion? Prime Minister I give you my word there was no collusion."

"Is that the word of a gentleman?" I asked ironically.

"Yes. An Oxford gentleman," he added hastily.

I wasn't really satisfied. "How's the garden?" I asked.

He relaxed and began to tell me about his roses when he realised the full force of my question. "No, no, I beseech you, Prime Minister, not gardening leave!"

"Why not?"

"I have my reputation to think of."

"I thought you'd already staked that on John Halstead's innocence."

I told Humphrey that I would have to think long and hard about what to do. I indicated that I would talk to Sir Arnold Robinson, his predecessor as Cabinet Secretary, for advice on handling a security enquiry into a Cabinet Secretary. And I cautioned him against speaking to Arnold until after I've spoken to him.

He assured me that he wouldn't dream of it.

*(What possessed Hacker to warn Sir Humphrey that he would be discussing the matter with Sir Arnold? And why did he believe Sir Humphrey's assurance that he would not speak to Sir Arnold himself? These*

are questions over which historians will ponder for ever. Suffice to say that Sir Humphrey met Sir Arnold for a drink that very evening, at the Athenaeum Club. Sir Arnold's diary relates what happened in full detail – Ed.)

Met a flustered and anxious Appleby at the club. After one brandy he revealed the cause of his panic. Apparently the Prime Minister and Geoffrey Hastings of M15 both think he might be a spy, because he had cleared Halstead and Halstead has now confessed all.

Humphrey asked me what he should do. I told him that depends on whether he actually was spying or not. He seemed shocked that I could entertain the suspicion, but I explained that one must keep an open mind.

Humphrey advanced several compelling arguments in his own favour.

1. He was not at Cambridge.
2. He is a married man.
3. He is one of us.
4. He has been in the Civil Service all his life.
5. Unlike John Halstead, he has never believed in things like causes. Humphrey argues correctly that he has never believed in anything in his life.
6. He, unlike Halstead, has never had ideas – especially original ideas.

These arguments are all persuasive – but not conclusive.

However, it seemed to me that whether Humphrey Appleby is a spy is immaterial in the short term. I agree with him that, whether he is or isn't, we have to see that it doesn't get out.

Of course, now that I am President of the Campaign for Freedom of Information I am in a very good position to prevent sensitive information from reaching the press. Giving information to Moscow is serious – but giving information to anyone is serious. In fact, giving information to the Cabinet could be more serious than giving it to Moscow.

The key point is that a scandal of

this nature could gravely weaken the authority of the Service. This could result in letting the politicians in – as in America, they might decide to make their party hacks into Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Secretaries. Even Under Secretaries. The top jobs in the Civil Service would be filled with people who would just do what they were asked by the politicians. This would be unthinkable! There are no secrets that anyone could pass to Moscow that would cause one-tenth of the damage that Britain would suffer if it were governed the way the Cabinet wanted. Therefore Humphrey certainly must not confess, even if he is guilty, and I told him so.

He reiterated that he has nothing to confess. Be that as it may, there is still the other possibility. Nevertheless, I asked him to assume, for the sake of argument, that he is innocent.

He thanked me profusely. I repeated that I was making that assumption for the sake of argument only,

**Clearly Humphrey must not allow this to happen. It must be stopped. The Prime Minister might tell the Cabinet. They must decide to suspend Humphrey. They might remove him to the Chairmanship of the War Graves Commission! Humphrey had not considered any of these dire possibilities.**



without prejudice. Unfortunately, however, if he is innocent of espionage, he is guilty of incompetence.

He denied incompetence. He reminded me that I had appointed him Secretary of the Halstead enquiry. And he suggested that I had hinted to him that he was expected to find no evidence against Halstead.

Naturally I denied this. He has no written evidence – I made sure of that at the time. And of course I sent him the memorandum that I always sent, the one instructing him to leave no stone unturned, to be no respecter of persons, and to pursue the truth however unpalatable. In fact, I left a copy of his memorandum in the Cabinet Office files, so there can be no credence given to Humphrey's claim.

Nonetheless, I asked him to assure me that we shall hear no more about my alleged complicity. He gave me that assurance, and we returned to the question of his incompetence. I told him that although we might both know that he did the job that he was required to do, it would be hard to explain that to the politicians.

He asked me if the politicians have to know. We agreed that it should be avoided, if possible. But the main danger is the Prime Minister: he may want to go around telling people about it all.

Clearly Humphrey must not allow this to happen. It must be stopped. The Prime Minister might tell the Cabinet. They might decide to suspend Humphrey. They might remove him to the Chairmanship of the War Graves Commission! Humphrey had not considered any of these dire possibilities. He should have. Frankly, I do not mind what happens to Humphrey. He is expendable, and I told him so. He denied it emotionally, but it is true nonetheless. But even though Humphrey personally is expendable, we dare not allow politicians to establish the principle that senior Civil Servants can be removed for incompetence. That would be the thin end of the wedge. We could lose dozens



of our chaps. Hundreds, maybe. Even thousands!

Therefore I advised Humphrey that he should make himself so valuable to the Prime Minister in the next few days that he cannot be let go. We discussed what the PM is really dead set on at the moment: popularity, of course, which is what all politicians are dead set on all the time.

The biggest current news story is about a lost dog on Salisbury Plain. I advised him to find an angle on this.

(Sir Humphrey's diary makes only a brief reference to the above conversation with Sir Arnold. Perhaps he wished there to be no record of the fact that Sir Arnold considered him expendable, which may have hurt him even more than the suggestion that he might have been a spy. However, Sir Humphrey notes a meeting with Sir Norman Block (Permanent Secretary of the MOD) the following day, at which he made a proposal clearly based on Sir Arnold Robinson's advice – Ed).

Met Arnold at the club yesterday. He made one or two valuable suggestions, chiefly that I find some way to help the PM increase his ratings in the opinion polls before the end of the week.

The only answer seems to be for Hacker to help the lost dog on Salisbury Plain. Arnold seemed to be suggesting that I should get the Prime Minister to crawl all over Salisbury Plain with a mine detector in one hand and a packet of Winalot in the other. At least it would probably do Britain less harm than anything else he would be likely to be doing.

Today Norman popped in to see me. He was curious as to how his Secretary of State acquitted himself in Cabinet. (Sir Humphrey Appleby, as Cabinet Secretary, was present at all Cabinet meetings. Other Permanent Secretaries were generally not present unless specially invited, a rare occurrence – Ed.)

I told Norman that even though the Cabinet are being resentful, his Secretary of State refused to agree to



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defence cuts. Norman was very encouraged.

I told him that I needed a favour, on a very sensitive issue. He assumed that I would be referring to Cruise Missiles or chemical warfare, and was surprised when I revealed that I was concerned about the lost dog on Salisbury Plain.

Norman was confident that there were no problems, and that everything was under control. The dog, he predicted, will have starved to death by the weekend. Then the army will recover the body and give it a touching little funeral and bury it just outside the gates. He has made plans for pictures of the guards resting on reversed arms, and to set up a photo session of the Commanding Officer comforting the weeping orphan girl. He says the telly would love it, and there would be pictures in all the Sundays.

I listened carefully, and then proposed that we rescue the dog.

Norman's reaction was explosive. He said it would be highly dangerous. It would take:

- (a) A squadron of Royal Engineers with mine detectors.
- (b) A detachment of the Veterinary Corps with stun darts.
- (c) A helicopter (possibly two helicopters) with winching equipment.
- (d) A bill for hundreds of thousands of pounds.

All for a dog that could be replaced for a fiver in the local petshop.

I know all this anyway, and I persisted. I asked Norman if the dog could be rescued, technically. Norman didn't think twice. He told me that anything can be done technically, if you've got the money. But he argued that it would be madness: he is under great pressure from the PM to cut spending, why on earth should he waste hundreds of thousands in full view of the world's press just to save a dog?

Norman was only seeing the problem. I flipped it over, and showed him the opportunity: if the Prime Minister authorised the rescue, if it were Hacker's initiative, it would make it much harder for him to insist on defence cuts subsequently.

Norman was silenced. Then he smiled a beatific smile. It is clear to me that I have regained my touch. I told Norman the conditions:

- 1) The real cost of the rescue must not be known to Hacker until after the rescue.
  - 2) The rescue operation should be put on immediate standby, in strict confidence.
  - 3) The PM must get the credit – a Number Ten job.
- He agreed instantly.  
(Appleby Papers 28/13/GFBH)  
(Hacker's diary continues – Ed.)

June 27th

**SIR ARNOLD ROBINSON** returned to Number Ten today for the first time since his retirement, for a confi-

dential meeting with me about Humphrey. He had been briefed by M15. He thinks that it was a bad business, an unfortunate business. I went further, and said it was disastrous. Sir Arnold seemed to feel that I was overstating it.

"Not disastrous, surely, Prime Minister. It will never come out."

"You mean," I asked, "things are only disastrous if people find out?"

"Of course."

Perhaps he's right. If nobody finds out I suppose it's merely an embarrassment rather than a disaster. (*If the Cabinet Secretary were a spy it would be a grave political embarrassment — Ed.*)

But happily it turned out that it was not a disaster because new evidence has emerged. Sir Arnold brought with him proof that Sir Humphrey was not a spy. "M15 have just come across this document in the Halstead papers. From his private diary."

He handed it to me, and I read it with a mixture of feelings that I cannot quite describe: relief, joy and glee, perhaps. Nothing I have ever read has ever given me so much pleasure.

Arnold assumed that my delight was due to the fact that Humphrey was now exonerated: He wanted to take the Halstead diary back, but I insisted on keeping it. Arnold then suggested that the matter was closed as there was nothing further to investigate. But I pointed out that the question of incompetence remains. "We all make mistakes," said Arnold feebly. "Not on this scale," I replied severely. "Do you think I should sack him?"

Arnold didn't seem to think that this suggestion was even worthy of discussion. Dismissively he replied, "I hardly think so." "Why not?" I asked. "Do you think Civil Servants should never be sacked?"

Arnold replied with care. "If they deserve it, of course they should. In principle. But not in practice."

At first I was sceptical. But he explained that before Humphrey could be sacked there would have to be an

enquiry. And all enquiries into incompetence of Civil Servants somehow seemed to lead back to mistakes by ministers. However, he offered to chair an impartial enquiry.

**I HAD SECOND THOUGHTS.** Since I have been Humphrey's minister for some years I decided that discretion is the better part of valour. I thanked Arnold for his contribution, let him go, and sent for Humphrey.

I put Humphrey out of his misery as soon as he arrived, I told him he had been cleared of spying. Naturally he was extremely relieved, and asked how. "Something Sir John Halstead wrote," I told him. "That's very gratifying," he said. I was enjoying myself. "Isn't it?" I said. "I knew you'd be pleased." "May one see the document?" he asked. "Indeed one may, Humphrey. Better still, one can have it read to one." And one read it aloud to him.

"October 28th. Another session with that prize goof Appleby. Fooled

**Humphrey was cornered. He realised he had no choice but to admit the truth. Very reluctantly he agreed that Halstead's account was true, but he insisted that Halstead wasn't bright enough to understand Humphrey's subtle questioning.**

October 28th.

Another session with that prize goof Appleby.

Fooled him completely. He never asked any of the

difficult questions. Didn't seem to have read the M15

report. So much wool in his

head, it's child's play to pull it over his eyes.

him completely," Humphrey went very pink. "I see. Thank you, Prime Minister." And he reached for the diary.

"No, Humphrey, it goes on," I said. "Clears you even more. 'He never asked any of the difficult questions. Didn't seem to have read the M15 report. So much wool in his head, it's child's play to pull it over his eyes.'" I looked up at Humphrey and beamed at him. "Isn't that wonderful? You must be *very* happy."

He pursed his lips. He was visibly seething with indignation. "I always said John Halstead was a hopeless judge of character," he snarled. I pretended to be worried. "You mean . . . we can't believe it? He's lying?"

Humphrey was cornered. He realised he had no choice but to admit the truth. Very reluctantly he agreed that Halstead's account was absolutely true, but he insisted that Halstead wasn't bright enough to understand Humphrey's subtle questioning techniques. The non-confrontational approach.

I nodded understandingly. "You were lulling him into a true sense of security," I remarked. "Yes," said Humphrey. "No," said Humphrey, as he realised what I meant. "Anyway," he added, "I take it that it's all over now." "The collusion charge? Of course," I said. Humphrey relaxed.

"But we're left with the incompetence."

He licked his lips nervously. "Prime Minister, I do urge you . . ."

"Humphrey," I said. "Would you condone this sort of incompetence in someone working for you?" "It was a long time ago," he pleaded. "A period of great strain. I had many other onerous duties." "You have many other onerous duties now," I said, threateningly.

**BUT THEN HE REDEEMED** himself. Humphrey with his back to the wall is a valuable man. "Prime Minister," he began, "I have been giving some thought to how you might increase your popularity rating."



Naturally I was immediately interested and I waited for him to continue.

"A strong government needs a popular Prime Minister." How true! I waited for more.

"I think you should do something really popular."

I was getting impatient. "Of course I should," I said. "But what?"

His suggestion was not what I expected. "I was going to suggest that you intervene personally to save that poor little doggy on Salisbury Plain."

At first I didn't think he was serious. "It would certainly be popular, but surely it would also be rather expensive?"

"Surely not?" replied Humphrey. *(Civil Service watchers will note this skilful reply – not a lie, but hardly revealing the truth – Ed.)*

He told me that time was running out. "The decision has to be taken right away, this morning, before poor little Benjy starves to death." I was undecided. Then Humphrey appealed to my emotions. "There are times when you have to act from the heart. Even as Prime Minister."

He was right! I gave him the go-ahead. He phoned Sir Norman right away. He told me that he had already put the army on a three-hour standby, and that he was merely waiting for my clearance.

I was delighted. I had just one worry. "Humphrey, it's not a question of buying cheap popularity, is it?"

"By no means, Prime Minister," he replied emphatically, and then was put through to Sir Norman at the MOD. "Norman? Walkies."

Apparently this was the codeword to begin Operation Lassie Come Home.

June 28th

**THEY SAVED BENJY TODAY.** And I expect to be *very* popular tomorrow.

I watched it all on the Six O'Clock News. It was rather thrilling, feeling like the Commander-in-Chief of a major military operation. I felt like Mrs Thatcher during the Falklands, only



**They saved Benjy today. I expect to be very popular tomorrow. I watched it all on the Six O'Clock News.**

**It was rather thrilling, feeling like the Commander-in-Chief of a major military operation. I felt like Mrs Thatcher during the Falklands, only more so – almost Churchillian really.**

more so – almost Churchillian really. The country needs a strong, decisive, tough leader like me.

The operation began on 'B' range early this morning. Four detachments of the Royal Engineers with mine detectors set off from different parts to close in on the area where Benjy was last sighted. It took over an hour to locate him. Then the Royal Veterinary Corps fired a stun dart. And we saw him keel over, temporarily unconscious.

The troops couldn't enter the area without detonating shells, which might have injured the dog. So an RAF helicopter was flown in, and an air rescue team lowered a man to pick Benjy up without crossing dangerous ground. He was flown to safety and reunited with his little orphan Linda, who was overjoyed to see him. I think she'd given up hope of ever seeing him again. I was so profoundly moved by my own wisdom and kindness that I cried a little. I'm not ashamed to admit it.

Annie was delighted. I hadn't told her that I'd arranged for them to rescue a dog. When we last spoke about it I'd told her it would be a waste of money. Her little face was glowing with pleasure and happiness for that child. I told her that I had thought again. "I thought about what you said. And I thought 'government is about caring'."

"Caring for votes?" she asked.

I was a bit put out. "That's not very kind, Annie. I thought about that little girl and what the dog must mean to her. Individuals do count – even in a world of budgets and balance sheets. Some people may criticise me for using the army that way, but I don't care and sometimes, doing the right thing means risking unpopularity."

I was pleased with the sound of that. I shall use it at Question Time in the House tomorrow – it's bound to come up.

Annie was totally taken by it. *(It is possible that Hacker said taken 'in' by it, but his words are unclear on the cassette, due to what sounds like an emotional and excitable state of mind – Ed.)*

She gave me a kiss and told me that she *certainly* wouldn't criticise me for it. "For the first time since we moved into Number Ten, I can see the point of being Prime Minister." She is weird.

June 29th

**THE PRESS COVERAGE** was wonderful this morning. Even better than I'd hoped.

I showed them to Humphrey. He was delighted as well. Even the leading articles were favourable. "Today Britain discovered that a real human heart beats inside Number 10 Downing Street." I showed it to Bernard. His response was a typical quibble. "Actually, 74 human hearts beat inside Number Ten." But he was smiling.

I made a slight tactical error with Humphrey. I told him I'd been right and that I have an instinct for what

the people want. That's perfectly true, of course — but in this instance it was actually Humphrey who had suggested the rescue, and when he reminded me I graciously gave him full credit. Although, in fact, he mostly has crummy ideas and the credit is *really* due to me for spotting that, for once, his idea was a good one. Still, I let him feel he was responsible for it, as that's always good for morale.

As he had been so helpful on this matter I readily granted the favour that he asked of me. He wanted the question of his incompetence in the Halstead enquiry to be dropped. I agreed at once. Why not? No harm had been done.

Then we moved on to Cabinet Agenda, after we gloated over a few more of the newspaper stories. Wonderful quotes. Linda said: "My vote goes to Mr Hacker." The BBC and ITV reported a flood of phone calls approving my decision to rescue Benjy. And, according to *The Times*, the Leader of the Opposition was not available for comment. I bet he wasn't! He has to choose between supporting me or being in favour of leaving dogs to starve to death! I really got him there!

When we finally turned to the Agenda, Humphrey suggested that we postpone item 3 — the defence cuts. He wanted to refer them to OPD (the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee). I couldn't see the sense of this — I wanted a decision at Cabinet, not a sixty-page submission nine months from now.

But then the bombshell hit me. Humphrey revealed that saving Benjy had cost £310,000. It seemed impossible! And yet these were the MOD figures, on a true-cost basis.

My breath was taken away. "Humphrey," I said, aghast, "we must do something!"

"Put the dog back?" suggested Bernard.

On balance, shocked though I was, I still felt it was the right decision — it may have cost £310,000 but I'd won a lot of public support. (*It might*

*have been more accurate for Hacker to say that he had bought a lot of public support. With public money — Ed.)*

**BUT THEN THE FULL HORROR** dawned on me. At least, it didn't exactly dawn — Humphrey explained it. "You do not have to postpone the defence cuts, but that would be a very courageous decision."

My heart sank. "Courageous? Why?"

"If there are defence cuts, the cost of rescuing the dog is bound to be leaked to the press."

"Surely not," I said feebly, but I knew he was right.

He shook his head and smiled a rueful smile. "Of course, Prime Minister, if you have complete faith in defence staff's confidentiality and loyalty..."

What a ridiculous idea! How could I have? They leak like sieves.

Humphrey rubbed salt into the wound. "I can see the headlines now. **PRIME MINISTER SAVES DOG AT**

**Then the bombshell hit me. Humphrey revealed that saving Benjy had cost £310,000. It seemed impossible! "Humphrey," I said, aghast, "we must do something!" "Put the dog back?" suggested Bernard. On balance, I still felt it was the right decision — it may have cost £310,000 but I'd won a lot of public support.**



**THE EXPENSE OF BRITAIN'S AIR DEFENCES.** It would be quite a story."

"A shaggy dog story," added Bernard facetiously. Sometimes I'd like to kill Bernard.

I contemplated the situation miserably. For months I've been struggling to make these defence cuts. And now, because of one impulsive, good-hearted decision, I was screwed.

"Of course," murmured Humphrey, "it would only come out if..." And he gazed at me.

I suddenly wondered if this had been a plot, if Humphrey could have persuaded me to rescue the dog to secure postponement of the defence cuts. But I quickly realised that this was sheer paranoia. Humphrey is not clever enough for that, nor would he do that to me. He was simply telling me that somebody in the MOD would inevitably leak the story unless I dropped the defence cuts. He was right. Someone would be sure to see the opportunity to blackmail me.

"I'm not going to be blackmailed," I told Humphrey firmly.

"I should hope not," he said. And waited.

And as I thought it all through, I realised I have no choice. So I put the best face on it that I could.

"On the other hand," I began carefully, "one can't cut defence too far back. Defence of the Realm, the first duty of government. And there are always unexpected emergencies: Korea, the Falklands, Benjy."

"Benjy!" echoed Bernard and Humphrey with approval.

"Yes," I concluded, "perhaps I have been a bit hasty." So I told Humphrey that in my considered opinion Item 3 — the Defence Cuts — possibly needs a little more thought. I instructed Humphrey to refer it to the committee.

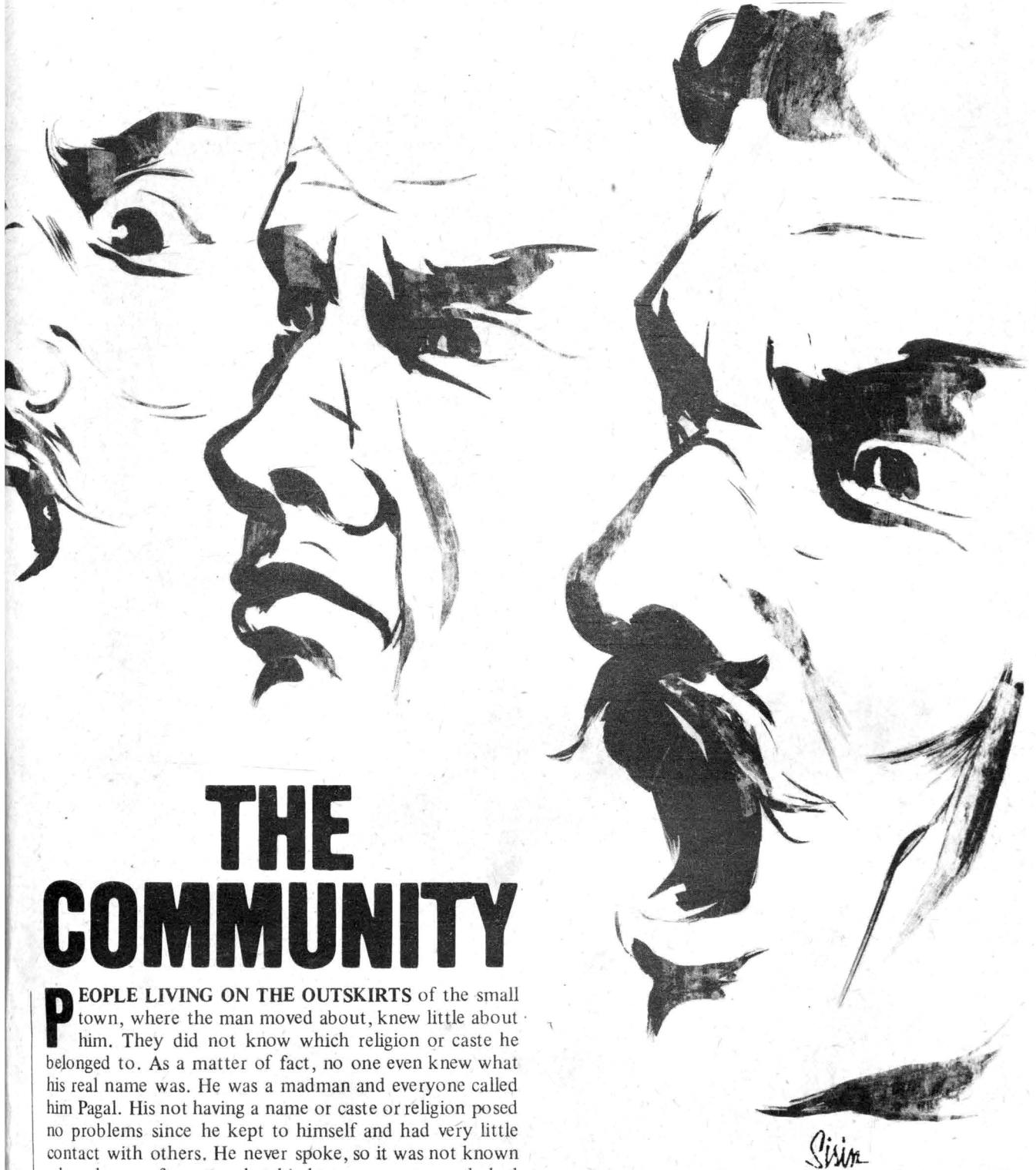
I could see from Humphrey's respectful expression that he thought that I had made a right decision.

"And tell them there's no particular hurry, would you?"

"Yes Prime Minister."







# THE COMMUNITY

**P**EOPLE LIVING ON THE OUTSKIRTS of the small town, where the man moved about, knew little about him. They did not know which religion or caste he belonged to. As a matter of fact, no one even knew what his real name was. He was a madman and everyone called him Pagal. His not having a name or caste or religion posed no problems since he kept to himself and had very little contact with others. He never spoke, so it was not known where he was from or what his language was; people had given up bothering about it long since. There were even doubts as to whether he was really dumb or had simply decided not to speak. Be that as it may, Pagal was now a well-known, mobile institution of this suburb.

*Translated from the Oriya original, by the author.*



Pagal had no fixed place of residence nor any regular arrangement for his meals. He ate whatever was available, and slept wherever he found a place. He never begged, nor did he refuse anything given to him. All day long, and sometimes through the nights, he would pace up and down the street, and people were familiar with the special sound of his heavy boots. They wondered about him when he was not to be seen in the street for a day or two, and it was always reassuring to listen to his footfall in the quiet streets of winter nights.

There was, however, a problem concerning Pagal, whenever there was a communal riot. Every couple of years, for various reasons, political parties would decide to stage a riot. Although in the city the riots were grim and bloody affairs, resulting in murder and plunder and rape and refugee camps, they took on a different form in the suburb. Here, communal disharmony never went beyond mutual abuse, fisticuffs, and the breaking of furniture in the shops.

Pagal posed a problem on such occasions because of his unkempt beard. At a casual glance he looked like a Muslim, because of his beard. However, if one gave him a second more serious glance, he also resembled a puritanical Hindu, like the *Jagadguru*. During Hindu-Muslim riots, the Hindus found in Pagal an easy victim and belaboured him. For them, Pagal was then a Muslim fanatic. At the height of the riots, the Muslims, because of their inferior numbers, kept a low profile, but as soon as the situation normalised slightly, they retaliated. They too got hold of Pagal, called him a Hindu fanatic and a *sadhu maharaj* and gave him a beating. Thus, Pagal got it from both sides, but even on the worst days of the riots, he never stopped patrolling the streets.

**THE COMMUNAL RIOTS** had their own unwritten rules and conventions. The people in this suburb knew exactly when the trouble would start. Leaders from the town would descend on the suburb the previous night, conspire with their henchmen over cups of tea, and leave very early in the morning. The disturbance would then be formally launched from the tea-shops under the old banyan tree.

There were two tea-shops next to each other: one was called the Hindu Tea-Stall, the other was named after Gandhiji, but since it was owned by a Muslim, everyone called it the Muslim Tea-Stall. The Muslim owner was an old man whom everybody called Mahatma. Although the police and other government officials would be completely unaware of plans for a communal disturbance, and would arrive at the trouble spots after everything was over, the news of imminent trouble reached the people well in time. On the day of a riot, old Mahatma would quietly go to the shop before day-break and put the cash box and any fragile items away in a safe place and lock the shop. The scenario of events which then followed had a standard pattern.

Pagal would finish his nightly patrol of the streets and sit under the banyan tree at about nine in the morning. He

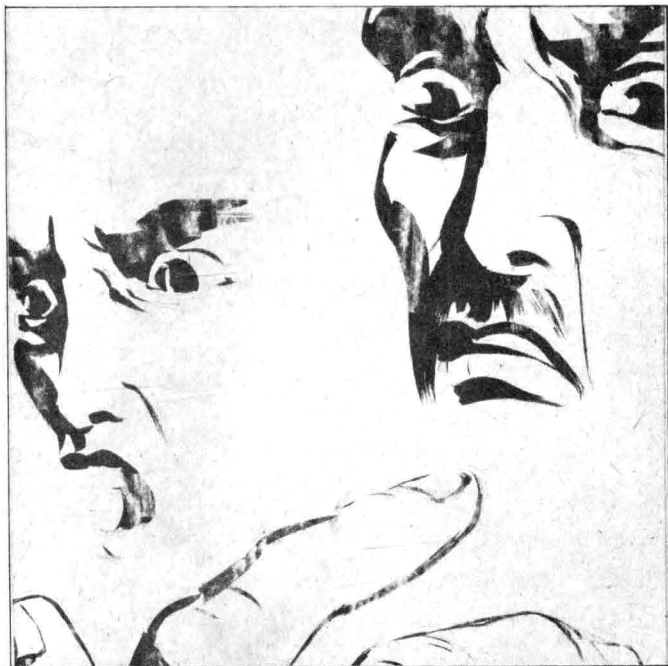
knew that he would be invited over for a cup of tea at one or the other of the two tea-shops. He would feign unconcern and keep waiting, not knowing that it was Riot Day. No one would offer him any tea. A little later, groups of young men would gather under the tree, and start shouting slogans about Mahatma Gandhi, Bharat Mata, Hindu Unity, and so on. As the heat from the sun's rays intensified, the slogans would change to Down with Muslims! Blood for Blood! Traitors Quit! and so on. Pagal, a bit disconsolate without his morning cup of tea, would also join the crowd and behave as if he, too, would shout slogans with them were he not dumb.

**ONE DAY, THE CROWD MARCHED** towards the Muslim shop. Mahatma, who knew all the young men and was familiar with the drill, took the kettle off the stove and came outside. The boys wrenched the signboard from the shop, threw it on the ground, and two of them started jumping on it. They broke the glass-panes and helped themselves to biscuits and cookies which they distributed amongst the crowd. The Hindu shopkeeper also considered it a fit occasion to distribute eats from his own shop. As a matter of fact, he locked his cash box and came out to join in the slogan-shouting. His attendant used the Mahatma's stove to prepare cups of tea for the crowd. Soon it was noon, the shouting was faint and feeble, and it was time to call it a day. However, someone reminded the others that they had not yet manhandled a Muslim, an activity without which no communal disturbance would be complete. They all looked at Pagal now, and four of them rushed at him, calling him a bloody Muslim. Someone pushed him and he fell down. They kicked him around for a while and then dispersed, shouting slogans about Mahatma Gandhi.

In the afternoon, the Hindu shopkeeper and his servant returned to their shop. Mahatma returned from wherever he had hidden himself and started rearranging his things. Pagal got up and looked around as if nothing had happened. Mahatma offered him a cup of tea. Lest the Muslim appeared to be more generous than him, the Hindu, too, gave the madman buns to eat and forced him to take a second cup of tea. By the time the police arrived an hour later, Mahatma had straightened out the signboard and hung it up. The whole incident was forgotten by the evening, and people gathered under the tree as usual.

Communal disturbances in the suburb were a tame affair since they had rather strict rules and conventions. The locale of action had to be outside in the street, near the tree, which was a public place. There was a limit to the damage that could be done. The strictest rule was that no one could even raise his little finger against Mahatma, or even speak to him harshly or impolitely. The rule had been broken only once, when a youngster, new to the game, had called the Mahatma a Muslim. The others had taken the youngster to task and had sent him home crying.

**IN DUE COURSE, HOWEVER,** there were changes in



these rules. Younger people took over the leadership from the elders. The young leaders in the suburb started collecting money from the shops. When leaders from the city came to the suburb to organise a riot, the discussions were now somewhat different.

"What happened here during the last riot?" the leader once asked.

His young followers were a little embarrassed to answer, since nothing much had really happened during the previous riot. A clever one amongst them, however, saved the situation by making a slightly exaggerated claim: "We ransacked all the Muslim shops."

"How many were killed?" the leader inquired.

The question put them all to shame. There were quite a few deaths in the city, but in this suburb, the only physical action was the beating given to the madman. The clever one alluded to this incident and said, "We broke the legs of a Muslim."

The leader did not appear at all happy about this and declared: You people seem to be an effeminate lot. A communal riot is a serious matter, but you are treating it like child's play. I thought that I would only need to spend fifteen minutes with you to brief you about plans for tomorrow. I now see that I have to spend more time with you. Can you arrange for some drinks or are you going to tell me that all the liquor shops are closed?"

The leader and his men spent the better part of the evening with the youngsters charting out detailed plans for the commotion ahead. However, word had passed around in the morning amongst the minority community that they should leave their homes. They all did, for times were different now, but Mahatma said, "One does not leave one's home in times of trouble."

**DURING THE RIOT THAT ENSUED**, the hooligans set fire to Mahatma's shop and did, in fact, break Pagal's leg. But it must be admitted that no one displayed any disrespect to Mahatma. Days after the riot, Pagal limped back from the hospital, and Mahatma put his shop in order. The election came and the leaders started pontificating about communal harmony. Mahatma said, "Didn't I say that everything would return to normal?"

Everything was normal, but not for long. Besides Hindu-Muslim riots, one now witnessed Hindu-Sikh riots. 'Hindu-Sikh Bhai Bhai' slogans gave way to 'Hindu-Muslim Bhai Bhai' slogans. To Pagal's misfortune, he was now deemed to be an Akali, and the young hooligans would run after him, calling him a *langda sardar*.

That there was soon going to be another communal riot was known to all, except the police. It was also known that this time, it was going to be a severe one. The Muslims left the city and its suburbs and went away to villages which were expected to be safe. Even the Hindu tea-shop owner locked his shop and went to his village. Elderly residents of the neighbourhood went to Mahatma and asked him to leave the city for a few days, but he did not agree. "Last time too, you gave me the same advice," he said, "but as you know, nothing happened."

The next morning saw the hooligans chasing Pagal. This time, however, they had knives in their hands. Even Mahatma failed to recognise them — theirs were indeed strange faces. When Pagal limped his way to the tea-shop, Mahatma ran out of the shop, straight into the crowds, to protect the madman.

"Kill the bloody Muslim!" someone shouted. A knife flashed and Mahatma fell down, bleeding. There was pandemonium thereafter, and in a minute, everyone started running away; the place was cleared but for Mahatma's body. Pagal came over, knelt before Mahatma and tried to pull him up, but by then, Mahatma was dead.

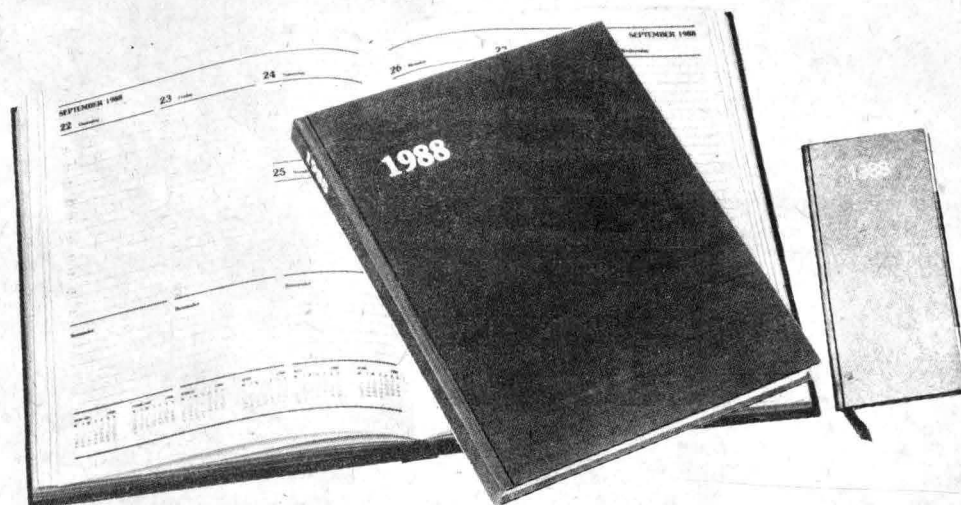
**A JEEP DREW UP.** For the first time, Pagal spoke, and shouted for the police. However, the people who emerged from the jeep were not policemen, but respected political leaders. They were not effeminate and chicken-hearted like the young men of the suburb and were not frightened by a dead body. Pagal looked up at them and asked for a doctor, but the visitors only laughed with derision. Two of them caught hold of the madman as a third filled a canister with petrol from the jeep. They tied Pagal to the banyan tree and poured petrol on him.

One of them said, "This man looks like a lunatic. Is he a Hindu or a Muslim?" The leader went to Pagal and asked him, "What community are you from?" Pagal did not reply. As suddenly as he had broken his silence, he, once again, became mute.

They laughed again. The leader took out a cigarette, lit it, and took a few puffs. He smoked for a while and threw away the stub. Then, he handed the matchbox to the fellow standing beside him. ♦



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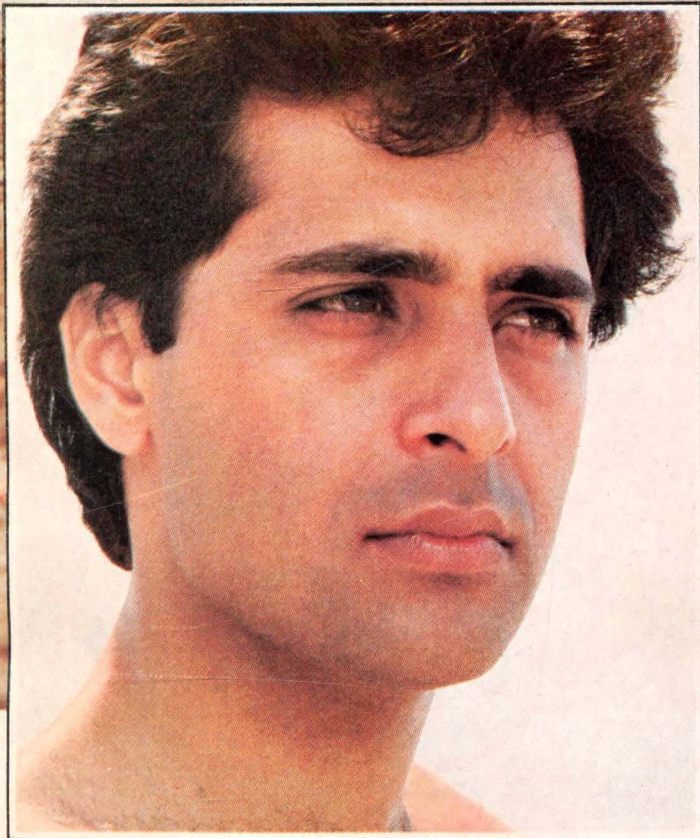
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