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PAKISTAN:

OUR
DESTRUCTIVE
OBSESSION



THE 1988 CBS GRAMMY NOMINEES..

MICHAEL JACKSON
BAD (4CX 10351)

- Album Of The Year
- Best Male Pop Vocal Performance
- Best Male R&B Vocal Performance
- Producer Of The Year
- Best Engineered Recording



BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
TUNNEL OF LOVE
(4CX 10339)

- Best Male Pop Vocal Performance
- Best Male Rock Vocal Performance
- PLUS
- Best Rock Instrumental Performance

GLORIA ESTEFAN & MIAMI SOUND MACHINE
LET IT LOOSE
(4CX 10349)

- Producer Of The Year



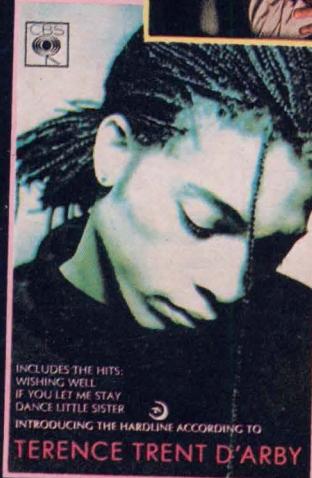
BARBRA STREISAND
ONE VOICE
(4CX 10333)

- Best Female Pop Vocal Performance



JULIO IGLESIAS
UN HOMBRE SOLO
(4CX 10331)

- Best Latin Pop Performance



TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY
INTRODUCING THE HARDLINE ACCORDING
TO TERENCE TRENT D'ARBY
(MDX 20015)

- Best New Artist



We've Got The Hits!

...AND A FATAL ATTRACTION!

I AM NOT UNAWARE OF THE THREAT PAKISTAN POSES to this country. Indeed, I am fully aware that that small but well-armed neighbour possesses the capacity to take us unawares with a sudden attack, and that we need to be vigilant. We accept this. The way in which Pakistan has relentlessly armed itself over the past 40 years cannot be ignored. I am also convinced that it will prove difficult for any civilian or military regime in that country to survive for long without the administration exacerbating the reigning 'big neighbour' fears.

Sadly, the situation is no different on our side of the border. New Delhi's stance towards Pakistan has not changed since 1947; the perception of that country that we formulated in New Delhi at the time, while we were burdened and troubled by millions of refugees and confronted by marauders in Kashmir, remains. Pakistani machinations in Hyderabad and Junagarh, and their participation in various regional security pacts in which India did not, further strengthened our perception of a belligerent Pakistan. The wars we fought, the claims Pakistan makes of being the champion of Muslims even in India, and their subsequent embrace of Islamic fundamentalism made a lasting impact on New Delhi, one which we have consistently been unable to shed even though we have evolved to become a nation of substance, while Pakistan has split into two countries.

The postures Pakistan adopted in its early years must have upset and confounded Jawaharlal Nehru. The communal problem had not vanished with the division of India: instead, it was internationalised. So Pakistan was slotted at the receiving end of most Indian rhetoric: no domestic or international issue of substance came to be debated without invoking the Pakistan card. From Nehru to the South Block and the Congress Party, and from where it was a case of 'Cry Wolf' all the way! Elections and insoluble domestic problems bring out the worst in politicians — the rest has just followed. Today you only have to open any newspaper or journal to see what deep inroads this obsession with Pakistan has made on our concerns and fears. Headlines scream each day of Pakistan financing, training and arming Sikh terrorists; of dumping drugs; of incursions on our borders; of US arms and Chinese arms; of intrigue in Colombo; of nuclear capability; of the bomb, the bomb, the bomb, and dwarf us into some kind of mental and physical freaks, at least in the eyes of the sensitive and the knowledgeable.

We have paid a heavy price for this obsession with Pakistan. It has distorted our perceptions when formulating our foreign policy: we have become an industrial nation of some consequence but have simultaneously created an environment around us where no Indian products are welcome! It has adversely affected our economic priorities. It has made us appear a frightened, third class power, when, in reality, we are a powerful nation by any standards.

The obsession with Pakistan has coloured our thinking about the problem of secularism in our country. Over the years, several of our acts appear designed to show us off as better champions of the Muslim and Arab cause than Pakistan, in the process alienating the mass of our majority community.

The obsession with Pakistan also provides an effective scapegoat with which to distract attention away from our immediate problems. Today we can spend thousands of crores of rupees on long-range guns but we cannot make adequate provisions at one go to provide drinking water to the villages, or the setting up of primary health centres or adequate numbers of schools. The priority is arms, the concern is Pakistan. We have distorted our perceptions to such an extent that whenever the problem of political survival of the rulers and the ruling party escalates, the people automatically begin to speculate as to when the next war with Pakistan will occur!

Today, India is a leading industrial nation. This is the fruit of 40 years of hard work and unending sacrifices on the part of our people. Yet, when we talk of war with Pakistan, nobody seems to bother about its consequences on the edifice we have built, especially in this age of technological warfare, which can lead to not just large-scale destruction but a devastation and annihilation that is difficult to contemplate. Of course we can annihilate Pakistan, something our own conscience as well as the international reality will not permit us to do, but any fighting between the two countries, on any scale whatsoever, will expose us to the gravest risks this republic has faced, an eventuality which can set us back by several years. We have oil platforms dotting our western coasts, we have petrochemical complexes of international class in Baroda and Patalganga, we have colossal dams in the North, we have giant industries everywhere: nothing is safe in war today as the Iraqi bombing of the world's largest tanker off Larak Island recently demonstrated. The fact of ours being a more developed nation than Pakistan would mean that in the event of a conflict, we would emerge the greater losers.

This does not mean that we should suffer the continuing intransigence of Pakistan. We ought to sit across the table with them, and talk. Seriously. The antagonists of yesteryears — the Japanese, the Germans, the Americans, and the British — have all found that there is national sustenance in economic and industrial co-operation. In India, too, we need to think along these lines and develop a spirit of co-operation with Pakistan and our other neighbours for our mutual benefit. But in order to do that, we first have to move away from the fatal attraction with Pakistan which this obsession has lured us into.

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LETTERS



The Failure to Restore Peace

Tavleen Singh's story on the Punjab, "Where Are We Heading?", (**Imprint**, April) is informative. It has been made crystal-clear by the writer that in spite of imposing President's Rule on the Punjab since May 1987, the Central government has utterly failed to restore peace and tranquillity. This is evident from the large number of killings — over 900 between May 1987 and February 1988 — a number which has crossed 1,300 to date. I fully agree with the writer's suggestion, of "utilising the strength of the United Akali Dal (UAD), the only representative of moderate Sikh opinion left in the state."

However, I differ with the writer as regards the representation of Sikhs in the Army & Allied Forces, which is now around 12 per cent and is still the largest when compared with that of other communities. The obvious reason for not appointing Sikhs to the highest ranks in the army is the possibility of their insurrection in collaboration with Pakistan and this has to be avoided under any circumstances.

J V Naik
Bombay

Negotiations Needed

Apropos your cover story, "A Dangerous Gamble", (**Imprint**, April) the situation in Punjab today is pre-

cariously balanced; terrorist activities have not ceased despite the imposition of President's Rule last year. The cry for Khalistan has also become louder now and it seems that the various Akali factions will never settle for anything less.

It is very disturbing that the Golden Temple has once again become the headquarters of the militants; the Centre ought to chalk out a feasible plan to control the law-and-order situation. The basic need of the hour is the unification of all the Akali factions. There should be a unified Dal with an able representative to voice the feelings of the Sikhs. World War II was negotiated across the table. Can't the Punjab imbroglio be solved in a similar manner?

K Chidanand Kumar
Bangalore

The Secret of Old Age

Apropos Maharaj Koul's article on ageing, (**Imprint**, April) I would like to inform you that we at Ajmer have a saint, Baba Gobind Das Sahib, Mahant of Halani Darbar, who is 109-years old. He is still very active, does all his work himself and sleeps only for a few hours. The secret of his old age is his recitation of God's name. He is the Head of the Sindhi Udasain Cult and has tens of thousands of followers throughout the country as well as abroad. His philosophy is that he who recites God's name continuously, day and night, even while performing worldly duties, leads a simple life, is free from evils and can live as long as he desires!

Gobind Balchandani
Ajmer

Boring Last Words

The cartoon feature by Ravi Shankar, 'Famous Last Words', (**Imprint**, April) was uninspired and almost boring. One expected better stuff from a cartoonist of Shankar's calibre. It was a lacklustre and indifferent interpretation of a fairly interesting theme. Where is Shankar's 'famous' incisive wit and devastating hu-

mour? Or does he reserve his best for the *Indian Express* alone? Hardly a professional attitude, Mr Shankar.

Vijay Chopra
New Delhi

'Foreign' Complex

You seem to be suffering from an excessive 'Indians abroad' complex. Leena Dhingra's short story (*Imprint*, April) was peurile and lopsided.

Anil Chitre
Nagpur

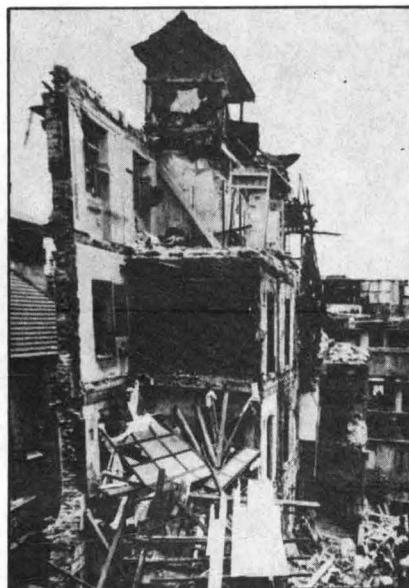
An Avoidable Tragedy

M D Riti's article, 'Blind Negligence', (*Imprint*, April) made interesting reading. As the author rightly points out, this is hardly the first instance of mass blinding or infection caused by eye-camp surgery. In their enthusiasm to achieve impractical targets, doctors seem to ignore vital



issues of safety or hygiene standards that are essential for delicate operations such as eye surgery, when practised on a mass basis. Pinpointing culpability now will not compensate those 65 victims for the loss of eyesight and trauma experienced.

Neelam Gulati
Pune



Guarantees are Imperative

This has reference to your Special Report, "Living Dangerously", (*Imprint*, April) on the dilapidated condition of old residential buildings in Bombay. When we purchase an electrical/electronic item or an automobile, the manufacturers assure you of the product worthiness of the item by way of a warranty. The manufacturer is also obliged to service the product sold for a particular number of years. But a builder never gives any such guarantee to the buyer as to the quality and the life-span of his product (the building). To protect the interests of prospective house buyers, it should be obligatory on the part of the builders to give an unconditional guarantee, while executing the purchase/sale agreement, that the building and/or the flat will not collapse in the next 25 years (minimum) due to constructional defects, and that in the event of a collapse, the builder is liable to pay damages and provide alternative accommodation to the buyer. It should also be obligatory on his part to service his 'product' for a minimum period of, say five years, for problems arising out of construction defects, such as leaks, cracks, peeling plaster, etc. Until such time as these clauses are incorporated in the agreement, buyers are bound to get cheat-

ed. A legislation to this effect can only save the many hapless buyers of flats.

You have reported that Embee Apartments at Borivli crashed in 1985. This apartment block has not crashed, it has only tilted.

K P Rajan
Bombay

Low Priority for Health?

P Sainath's article, "Health for All", (*Imprint*, March) was very informative and thought-provoking. It is a pity that such vital issues as public health figure so low in the government's list of priorities.

Dasmeet Singh
Calcutta

Mistaken Impressions

The writer of the cover story on the Hindujas, (*Imprint*, February) states that: "They belong to the traditionally secretive Sindhi community, where the byword is: trust only fellow Sindhis." It is obvious that he has absolutely no idea about Sindhis.

Especially as the Sindhis are open-hearted and very generous. Living in a politically strategic province, they faced successive invasions and synthesised Islam and Hinduism into Sufism. After Partition, too, they tried to assimilate the customs of the locals, and now, spread all over the world, they are successful precisely because of this open-mindedness. They are neither 'superficial' nor 'show-offs' but, instead, very spiritual, full of reverence for elders and giving the compulsory tithe to charity.

Of course, there will always be black sheep; no community has a monopoly over honesty and integrity.

Aruna Jethwani
Pune

Correction:

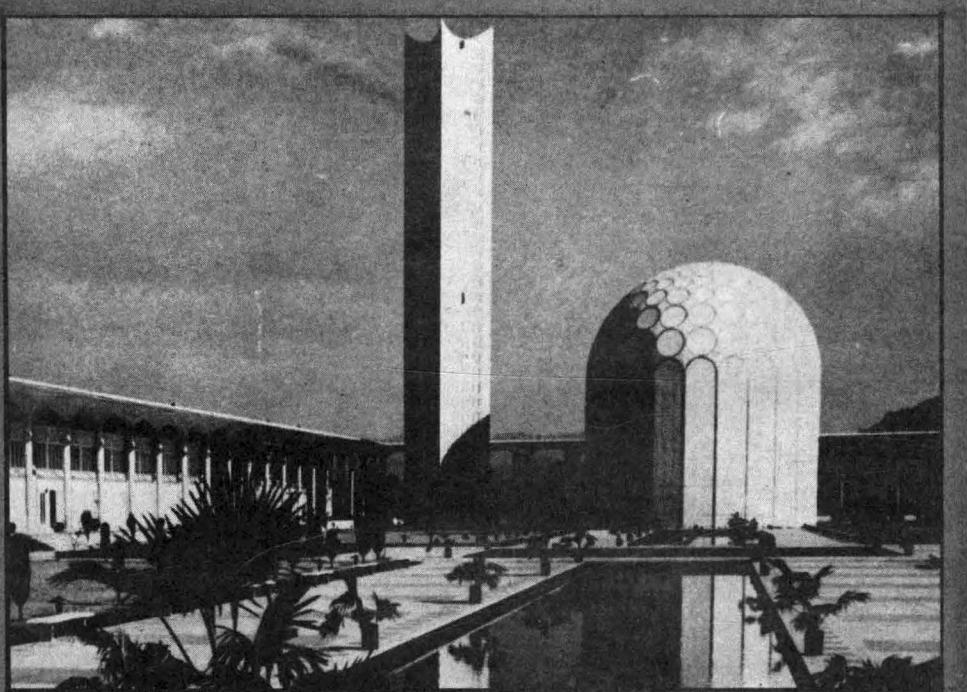
In the article titled "A Blueprint for Disaster" (*Imprint*, April) by Sunderlal Bahuguna, Mr V D Saklani was wrongly described as an MLA and Chipko activist.

CONTENTS

6

COVER STORY: Will India's obsession with Pakistan ever end? Can we not liberate ourselves from the acrimonious legacy of a traumatic past? Distinguished journalist S NIHAL SINGH examines the Indo-Pak equation.

*Cover Illustration:
Sisir Datta*



15

A NEW POWER BLOC?: Is the possibility of a Sino-Soviet alliance on the cards? asks GRAHAM HALL, pointing to several reasons for why such an alliance could prove advantageous and indeed, change the face of Asia.

22

CUTTING BOTH WAYS:



Noted film critic MAITHILI RAO examines the parameters, implementation and inconsistencies of film censorship in India.

29

THE SMOKE SIGNALS: How best to eradicate tobacco consumption? A ban on

smoking and cigarette advertisements? Effective propaganda? VIJAY PENDHARKAR finds out.

33

CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD: South Africa has declared war against black children; an unprecedented number have been arrested, detained, tortured and even killed by South African defence forces. SHAILA SHAH reports on this chilling aspect of the government's strategy to crush the growing resistance against the regime.

40

ELECTION GAMBITS?: INDIRA SRIKRISHNA assesses current political alliances and hostilities in Tamil Nadu vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan Tamil militants.

44

PARADISE LOST?: In the beginning, all was well... AVIJIT BAKSHI evocatively traces the changing panorama of Goa from the idyllic charm of yesteryears to the rampant commercialism of today.



50

BURNING QUESTIONS:

The recent spate of fires in Bombay city slums have had devastating effects. Were they 'accidents'? Or arson? Victims speak to SHEKHAR GHOSH.

58

FROM RAJ TO REALITY:

Incisive and politically relevant programmes on Asians and Asian countries have replaced the earlier obsession with exotica on British television. RAHILA GUPTA

examines the welcome trend and discusses the issues with well-known author Tariq Ali.

64

BEWARE THE 'QUICK-FIX'!: Decision-makers are increasingly resorting to quick bandaging solutions, oblivious of long-term implications and potential hazards. A D MODDIE issues a sharp warning.

67

THE CROCODILE AND THE BOY: An unusual chil-

dren's film is nearing completion at the world-famous Crocodile Bank, directed by its founder Romulus Whitaker. M D RITI visits and meets the cast and crew.

73

THE MAGIC TOUCH: He



transformed *India Today* and has just re-designed *The Economist*. BERNARD BARNETT presents Aurobind Patel, the business analyst who fell in love with type.

76

BEYOND THE FRAGMENTS: Riveting excerpts from CLARK BLAISE AND BHARATI MUKHERJEE'S "The Sorrow and the Terror", which traces the sequence of events that led to the aircrash of Emperor Kanishka in June 1985, the "worst act of terrorism in the past decade."

85

FICTION: 'Kankeshwar' — a disquieting short story by Shama Futehally.

WHY IS INDIA OBSESSED

For India or more precisely Rajiv Gandhi, Pakistan is a convenient 'whipping boy' – Pakistan's nuclear ambitions are a direct threat to India, Pakistan provides covert and overt support to Sikh terrorists in Punjab, Pakistan receives millions of dollars from the US for its arms programme. The allegations are endless. In fact, Pakistan is a convenient bogey to justify increased expenditure on arms and divert public opinion on the Government's failure to contain the Punjab problem. Will this obsession ever end? Can we not liberate ourselves from the acrimonious legacy of a traumatic past? Distinguished journalist, S NIHAL SINGH, examines the Indo-Pak equation, in the light of recent political developments.

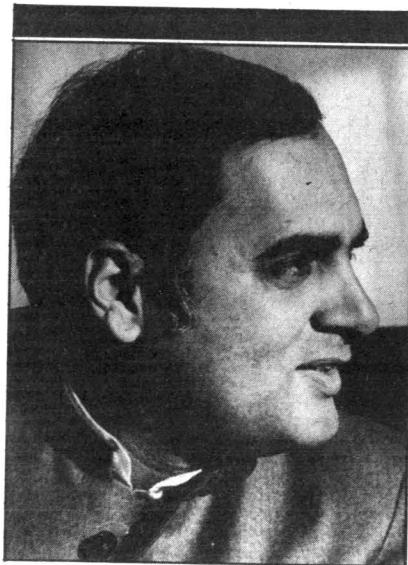
HOW IS IT THAT, 40 years after Independence, a country of 800 million with its industrial and military power and potential, with the legitimate ambition of playing the major role in the region, if not further afield, is so obsessed with a smaller and often troublesome neighbour?

There is greater reason for Pakistan, as the smaller country and one saddled at birth with the absurdity of

an eastern wing separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory — the “moth-eaten Pakistan” of Jinnah’s description — to be obsessed with India. And, after all, Pakistan lost its eastern wing, thanks to its own foolishness and Indira Gandhi playing the *deus ex machina*.

What accounts for the acres of space devoted to Pakistan day after day in our newspapers? The recurrent theme of these reports is not Pakistan's development, but the new sophisticated evidence about Pakistan's march to becoming a nuclear power, the money Pakistan is spending on arms. Day after day we torture ourselves with what we are building up as a little superpower. To what end? Why?

The partition of the subcontinent – let us admit it – represented a failure of the Congress leadership. But that was more than 40 years ago, and even the first Kashmir war and the subsequent wars mercifully took place some time ago. The first phase of the arming of Pakistan by the United States of America brought a super-power to our doorstep, in Jawaharlal Nehru's, and our, concept. The 1971 war pitted us against the US, China and Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi steered



Rajiv Gandhi

WITH PAKISTAN?

ed the country through the military and diplomatic battles with consummate skill. But even the 1971 war and the humbling of Pakistan did not cure us of our obsession with Pakistan. First, we talked of American perfidy in arming Pakistan to do a non-aligned India down. Then, with our growing problems with China leading to the debacle of the border war, we espoused the theory of the Pakistan-China-US axis. Later, with our efforts to seek a *rapprochement* with China and the US, and against the backdrop of growing Soviet interest in befriending China, we have zeroed in on Pakis-

tan's nuclear ambitions.

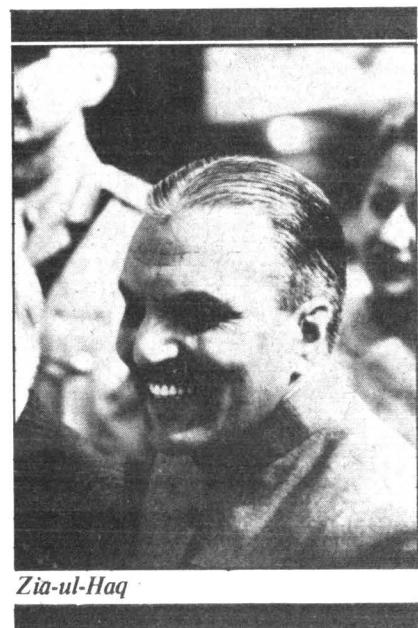
IT IS AS IF WE ARE perennially indulging in self-flagellation. We do not see the contradiction between the picture of Pakistan we paint and our oft-repeated confidence in giving Pakistan "a fitting reply." Nor do we fight shy of broadcasting to the world *ad nauseum* to help us take care of Pakistan — to save poor India. In one breath we talk about our natural regional status, in another the dire threat Pakistan poses us.

And let the world take note. There are many factors responsible for the

absurdity of our obsession with Pakistan. Subconsciously, we can never forgive the Indian national leadership for failing to prevent the subcontinent's partition. For Pakistan not merely took away territory, but successfully challenged our secular credentials, even though it later came to grief for failing to prevent its co-religionists in East Pakistan from going their different way.

Apart from a small fringe, India does not want to undo Pakistan, despite Pakistani fears. The problem lies deeper. Rather, the Pakistanis seem to be acting in ways diametrically opposed to India's self-image. They have been ruled for the most part by military regimes. In place of Jinnah's tolerant brand of Islam, they have progressively reiterated their Islamic faith. And even when they paid India the greatest compliment by embracing the creed of non-alignment, New Delhi viewed it as a trick.

There is, of course, the Hindu-Muslim equation, which brought about the subcontinent's partition in the first place and which has kept the communal pot simmering in India. This equation has a natural bearing on Indo-Pakistan relations. But the real cause of the Indian sense of insecurity in relation to Pakistan is its



COVER STORY

refusal to accept India's natural status as the major regional power, viewed in Islamabad as Indian hegemony.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE that Pakistan's leadership still feels that India remains unreconciled to the creation of Pakistan. But a constant and major aim of Pakistan's foreign policy has been diplomatically to neutralise India and militarily to be able to take it on in limited wars. Pakistan's decades-long equation with China, its alignment with the United States, and its cultivation of special relations with the countries of West Asia flow from the central objective of Pakistan's foreign policy.

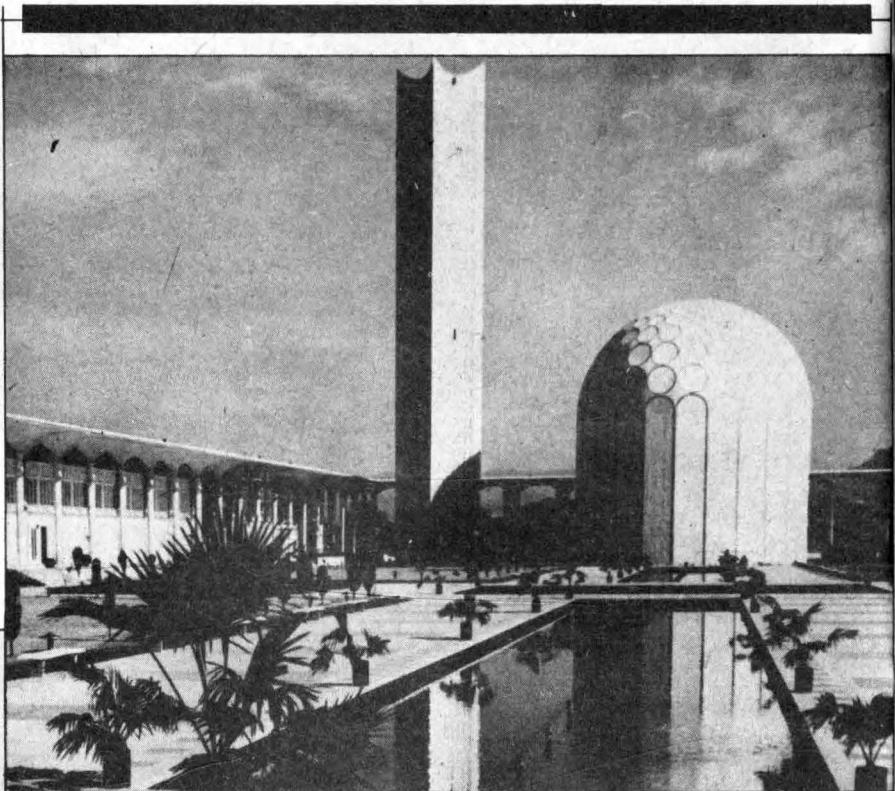
Pakistan has had failures as well as successes in pursuing this policy. It

Nowhere is the central Pakistani objective of check-mating India more clearly discernible than in developing the nuclear sector. This is one legacy of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto that his successor military regime has espoused most enthusiastically. For nuclear arms are the ideal answer to a weaker country's inability to take on a stronger neighbour.

was, in any event, Islamabad's realisation of the limitations of being a mere camp-follower of the United States that induced it to adopt the creed of non-alignment, which has become sufficiently flexible to encompass almost any policy. But the Pakistani-Chinese relationship has held, despite the strong earlier reservations of the Americans, and, in terms of 'gifted' arms, Pakistan has done rather well out of the Afghanistan war. The Americans have had their own strategic reasons for siding with the weaker side on the subcon-

tinent, the general theory being most eloquently expressed by Henry Kissinger. On the debit side, Pakistan will face the unwelcome problem created by the war in Afghanistan.

Nowhere is the central Pakistani objective of check-mating India more clearly discernible than in developing the nuclear sector. This is one legacy of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto that his successor military regime has espoused most enthusiastically. For nuclear arms are the ideal answer to a weaker country's inability to take on a stronger neighbour. From the Pakis-



Pakistan's Institute of Nuclear Science & Technology near Islamabad.

tani point of view, its nuclear policy also has the great merit of embarrassing India no end.

INDIA HAS NEVER GIVEN UP its nuclear option, despite its elaboration of its peaceful intentions. Now, at one stroke, Pakistan is demanding parity with India. And since both the superpowers are equally committed to the non-proliferation regime, Pakistani arguments seeking to bring India into any restriction it agrees to, seem reasonable.

In essence, India has been left holding the baby. It has, from the start, opposed the discriminatory Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and any bilateral agreement with Pakistan would negate the country's regional status and ambitions without taking into account Indian compulsions vis-a-vis the Chinese nuclear capability.

The logical answer for India would be to go nuclear, but this is an option not without its risks and requires the leadership's resolve to brave the consequences. For the present, India has adopted the posture of broadcasting far and wide, and pleading with all who would care to listen, about Pakistan's dangerous ambitions. Even assuming that they are dangerous, the argument of a peaceful Indian bomb and a warlike Pakistani bomb does not wash.

It is, indeed, ironical that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi should have taken the Indian press to task for its obsession with Pakistan. For months on end, in successive interviews he has given to the world's press, we have heard little from the Prime Minister

t is indeed ironical that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi should have taken the Indian press to task for its obsession with Pakistan. For months on end, in successive interviews he has given to the world's press, we have heard little from the Prime Minister other than the dangers posed by Pakistan's nuclear ambitions.

other than the dangers posed by Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. This obsession with Pakistan has received a fillip in recent times by that country's apparent decision to raise the level of Pakistani help to the Sikh extremists. Instead of purposefully acting on the ground, the official Indian reaction has been to plead with the world, particularly the United States, to persuade Pakistan to desist.

It is, of course, also true that for the Indian public, having been conditioned as it is, Pakistan serves the purpose of an accepted bogey to justify



Who will break the ice? Zia-ul-Huq with Rajiv Gandhi.

big increases in arms expenditure as also the failure of the government's policy in Punjab. For if Pakistan is as dangerous as it is painted to be, poor India can only take adequate steps to safeguard its security.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY, the Indian obsession with Pakistan represents a triumph for Islamabad because it shows up the fact that, New Delhi's claims notwithstanding, it is not ready to assume the leadership role in the region. India's aversion to talking about conventional force levels with

Pakistan ("Will China talk about force levels with Vietnam?" was one Indian reaction some time ago) is one expression of its self-image. But India's constant international pleadings to restrain Pakistan do little to uphold this image.

Pakistan has greater reason to be obsessed with India because initially it feared New Delhi's designs, allegedly, to dismember it. And the Kashmir question came to occupy a larger-than-life image because Pakistan did not quite succeed in wresting it away, and since Islamabad tended to equate it with its own basis as a state, it continued to feed the Pakistani image of a perfidious India.

There has been, besides, an envy of India in Pakistan. India has had its quota of problems, but the vigorous, if chaotic, practice of democracy — but for the brief Emergency phase —

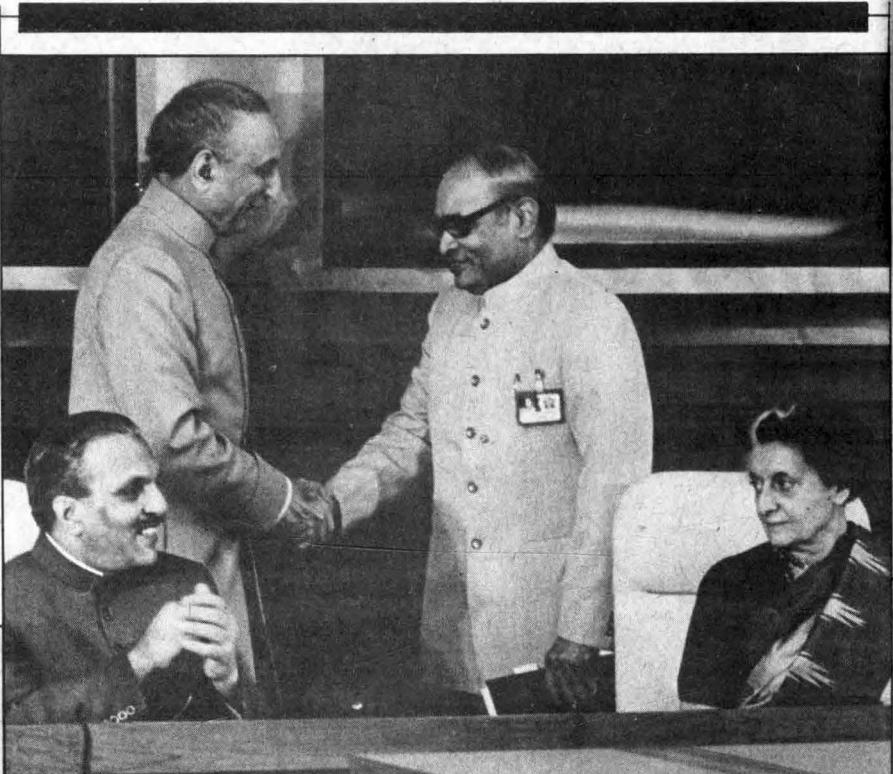
COVER STORY

could not but have brought home to the Pakistanis their tutelage under a succession of military regimes, except for fleeting experiments with democracy. In the heyday of Nehru's policy of non-alignment, Pakistanis deeply felt their own lowly international status as the camp-followers of the United States.

IF PAKISTAN SERVES as a convenient whipping-boy in India, the reverse is even more true in Pakistan. What is worse, the Pakistani image of India and the leadership's sedulous cultivation of this image have been used to deny the people the fruits of a democratic set-up. President Zia-ul-Haq's cautious beginning in this direction promises to be a long journey.

f Pakistan serves as a convenient whipping-boy in India, the reverse is even more true in Pakistan. What is worse, the Pakistani image of India and the leadership's sedulous cultivation of this image have been used to deny the people the fruits of a democratic set-up.

Contrary to all evidence, it is a deeply-held Indian belief that good relations with Pakistan are predicated upon the emergence of a democratic dispensation in that country. Democracy will undoubtedly be beneficial for the people of Pakistan, but Bhutto's tempestuous term in office would belie fond Indian hopes that relations between the two countries would take a turn for the better merely because the army takes a back seat. In any event, the army seems destined to be at least a back-seat driver in Pakistan in the foreseeable



A history of strained Indo-Pak relations: Zia with Mrs Gandhi.

future.

It is, of course, true that the images that the two countries have, feed on each other. Since Pakistan needs the Indian bogey more than the other way around, it is up to India to get out of a vicious circle which does neither country any good. If India wants to be the major regional power, it should act as such by displaying the confidence and maturity of being able to do without the prop of Pakistan in conducting its domestic and foreign policies.

It stands to reason that the govern-

ment must protect the country's interests in more than matching Pakistan's strength. But it must realise that merely blaming Pakistan, whether in relation to arming terrorists in the Punjab or the nuclear issue, will not solve the country's problem or enhance its prestige in the counsels of the world. If the government is as convinced about Pakistan's complicity in aiding the extremists in Punjab as it seems to be, there are more effective methods of making its point. Besides, the continuing condemnation of Pakistan's nuclear programme will merely buttress the suspicion abroad of India's own nuclear ambitions. It is part of international diplomacy for countries to prevaricate, but such prevarication can become counter-productive.

PERHAPS THE GREATEST HARM

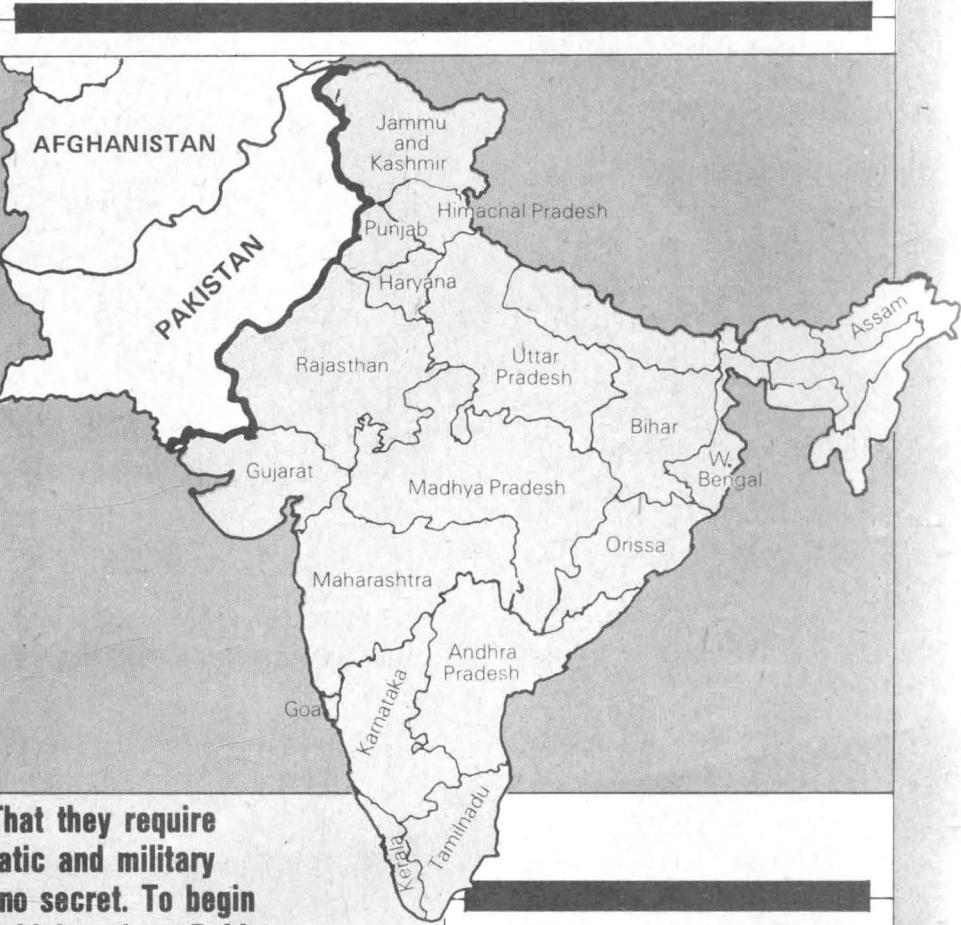
to a clear understanding of each other is done by what I call the emotionalists. There are any number of Indians and Pakistanis who will tell you that we are one people. Get a singer or filmstar from either country, and you have a full-house. Individual Indians and Pakistanis abroad get on like a house on fire.

But that does not take us very far because on one plane, the people of the two countries have great affinity, on another plane, they are nationals of their respective countries and are conditioned by the legacy of the past. It is a past of Partition and of butchery, of Jinnah's remarkable success in achieving Pakistan, of centuries of Mughal rule and its consequences. This past cannot be wished away by

The kinds of problems Pakistan presents are well-known. That they require a range of diplomatic and military ripostes is again no secret. To begin with, let us stop whining about Pakistan. It does not become us as a nation and gives the Pakistanis greater opportunity to needle us.

the emotional outpourings of an evening's *mehfil*. Nor does it serve any purpose to blame the British for the divide-and-rule policy; they might have exacerbated the problem, but they did not create it.

How then can we liberate ourselves from the hold of the past, which is pushing us further into a vicious circle and negating our legitimate desire to play our role in the region and the world? For one thing, the people can show greater scepticism the next time the government uses the Pakistan card to achieve a propaganda, or



another, objective. For another, let us try to look beyond Pakistan, at our other neighbours and countries further afield. The kinds of problems Pakistan presents are well-known. That they require a range of diplomatic and military ripostes is again no secret. To begin with, let us stop whining about Pakistan. It does not become us as a nation and gives the Pakistanis greater opportunity to needle us.

THE BIGGEST DILEMMA the government faces is in relation to the

nuclear issue. We have demonstrated our capacity to explode a nuclear device, and the great flurry of activity, particularly in the Western world, to deny the non-nuclear powers the technology or assistance to produce a bomb followed by the Indian explosion. And both the West and the Soviet Union redoubled their efforts to get all non-nuclear powers to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Whatever the reasons, India has refrained from exploding another bomb. But Pakistan has been demonstrating, over the years, that given determination, there are ways of getting the technology and equipment to put together a military nuclear programme. Besides, Pakistan has shown great diplomatic finesse in deflecting American pressure.

Logically, both India and Pakistan should have the bomb. The effort of

COVER STORY

the nuclear weapon powers, the Soviet Union and China included, is to restrict the club. If the NPT is discriminatory, which it is, there is only one way to make it less so, and that is, by joining the club. If India does not want to be in the junior league, it has to stand up and be a nuclear weapon power. It is inevitable that once India becomes a nuclear weapon power, Pakistan will follow suit.

WE DO NOT HAVE TO LOOK AT apocalyptic scenarios, should both India and Pakistan have the bomb. The bomb will bring its own compulsions and, as we have seen in the rest of the world, will impose its own accommodation. And the rest of the world, the superpowers included, will adjust to the fact of two more members joining the nuclear club.

And the bomb could resolve a major Pakistani problem which has been gnawing at its vitals ever since its birth: the tremendous feeling of insecurity vis-a-vis India. Pakistani policies have been distorted from the beginning because of the fear of India, and Pakistanis have had to pay a price. The initial Pakistani alienation from West Asia, as a consequence of the compulsions flowing from the military alignment with the United States, remains a scar on the Pakistani psyche. For the Pakistani aim has been to try to balance Indian power through military and diplomatic alliances at almost any cost. Nor was Bhutto's answer, after the military rulers had lost half the country, to project what was left to Pakistan as a West Asian nation, of much help. True, Pakistanis benefitted from Arab largesse, particularly in the days of the oil boom. But no ruler can change the fact of a country's geography, and Pakistan cannot wish away the problems rooted in the subcontinent.

President Zia later sought another answer: a new military alignment with the United States in the face of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan. Pakistan has benefitted from a continuing supply of sophisti-



Pernicious spread of the Kalashnikov culture via Afghanistan.

cated weapons, in addition to economic assistance, but is now having to tot up the costs: millions of Afghan refugees, many of whom will not return home, the consequences of the drug and Kalashnikov culture, and the likelihood of a long civil war on its borders.

IN IMMEDIATE TERMS, the prospects are that both India and Pakistan will remain obsessed with each other. To break away from the pattern of the past needs great leadership qualities, and it seems unlikely that Rajiv Gandhi has the mettle in him to chart a radical new course and follow it up. It is so much easier to conjure up Pakistan to justify whopping increases in government spending. And the political factors determined by the great Hindu-Muslim divide have become embedded in Indian politics and influence the outcome of

elections.

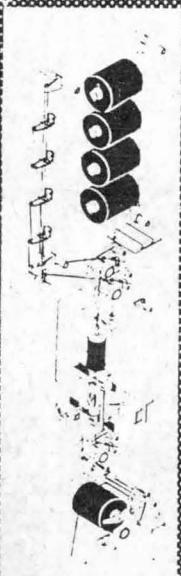
President Zia has proved to be the shrewdest ruler Pakistan has ever had. Indeed, diplomatically, he has played his cards brilliantly. But Zia is burdened with the need to perpetuate army rule in one form or another and he has to ensure that the limited version of democracy he has unveiled so far does not sweep him away with it. Historically, even the shrewdest military ruler has discovered that a little democracy is a dangerous thing and is inclined to upset the most carefully laid plans. The India card, therefore, is simply too valuable for Zia to give up.

India has less need to be obsessed with Pakistan and must take the initiative to break out of the vicious circle. Perhaps we shall have to wait for a new leader who has the courage and vision to liberate us from the past. ♦

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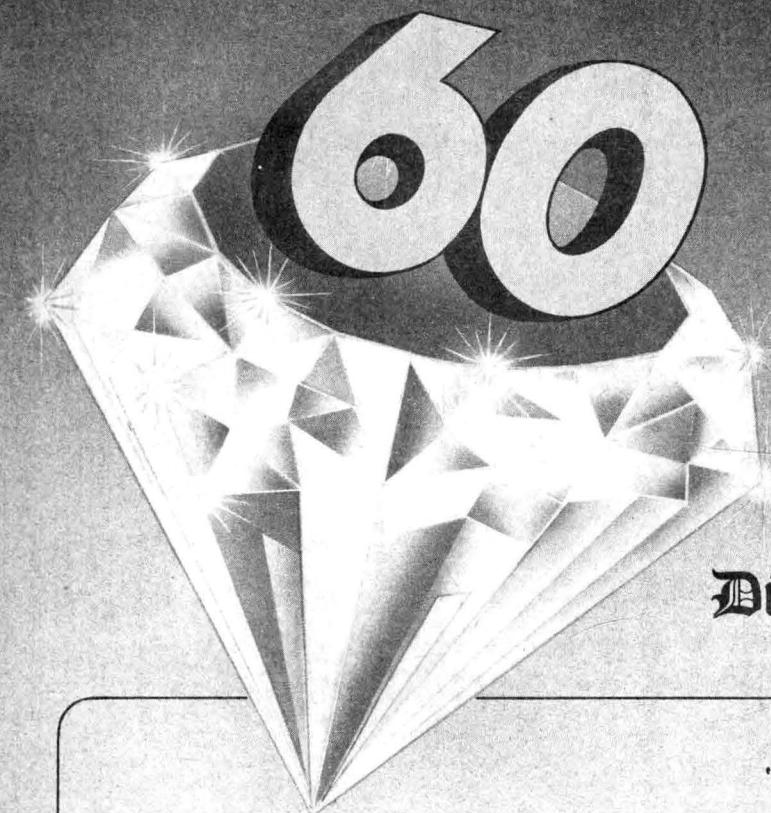
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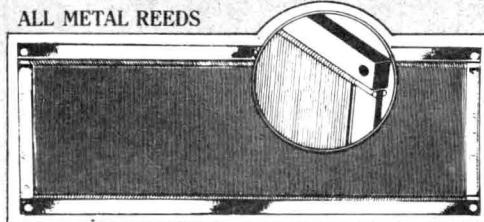
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MOSCOW AND PEKING broke off relations in 1964 and have remained cool to each other ever since. For some time the Chinese had been edgy: the Soviets seemed to regard them as a little brother, and expected them to do as they were told. The Soviets, for their part, were becoming increasingly impatient with Chairman Mao's intransigence.

One month after the fall of Khrushchev, a Chinese delegation, led by Prime Minister Chou En Lai, was in Moscow. At a party in their honour, the Soviet Defence Minister, Rodion Malinovsky, approached Chou En Lai. "We have already ousted Khrushchev," he said expansively, "You should follow our example and topple Mao."

Brezhnev, the new Soviet leader, tried to soothe Chinese feelings by assuring them that Malinovsky had been drunk at the time, but Chou En Lai replied with a proverb, as the Chinese are apt to do. "Wine brings out truth," he said, and since then the two countries have eyed each other with utmost suspicion.

BUT THAT IS CHANGING now. Twenty-five years have passed: Brezhnev, Malinovsky, Mao and Chou En Lai are all dead, and the present Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, is attempting to repair the breach and make friends once more with his Communist neighbour.

He recognises China as a vast coun-



Khrushchev: before the fall.

try which is on the brink of becoming a massive world power: the countries who will dominate in the twenty-first century will be economic rather than militaristic powers. Indeed, he is right: China, that huge country with over a billion citizens, is slowly, carefully, opening up to Western economic ideas.

It has none of the brashness of Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) or *perestroika* (reconstruction). In 1982, almost unnoticed outside China, the People's Republic introduced a new constitution, one which defined "socialist modernisation" as its basic task. There was no shouting from the rooftops about it: when the Party Chairman, Hu Yaobang, referred to his country's policy as "democratisation", he was ignominiously deposed.

Nevertheless, China is evolving a new style of socialism, a socialism which contains incentives for the people on an almost Western scale. It is manufacturing its own television sets, refrigerators and motorcars; it is attracting foreign investment and multinational companies are setting

RUSSIA AND CHINA: A NEW POWER BLOC?

Times have changed since Moscow and Peking broke off relations in 1964, and today, the Soviet Union has several reasons for desiring a friendship with China.

In this thought-provoking essay, GRAHAM HALL discusses the inevitable obstacles that present themselves and assesses the possibilities and implications of a future alliance.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



Brezhnev: he tried to soothe Chinese feelings.

up factories there. In 1997, Hong Kong reverts to China and Beijing has assured the British and the world that they will not change the political or economic structure of Hong Kong for at least 50 years. It would be foolish for them to do so: with Hong Kong as a foreign currency earner, as a window to the world of international business and finance, Socialist China will become unbeatable. They are all set to take over as Asia's leading economic power.

IT IS INEVITABLE, therefore, that it should have attracted the eye of Mikhail Gorbachev. Several times over the past two years, he has suggested a summit meeting with Beijing leaders to iron out their differences and sign friendship pacts. Recent events have made Gorbachev optimistic and he has again expressed his desire for a summit.

Following Chou En Lai's return from Moscow in 1964, China remained isolated until 1972 when US President Nixon visited the country. Jeans and transistor radios were rushed to the peasants wherever he

went, and when Nixon saw them, he believed the peasants were contented. He signed a friendship pact and immediately started supplying much-needed aid.

Unfortunately, in the recent Arms-to-Iran scandal which shook the Reagan administration, China was named as Iran's principal arms supplier. Washington showed its disapproval by cooling towards Beijing — and Gorbachev promptly renewed his offers of friendship.

The Soviets have several reasons for desiring friendship with China. One of the main reasons is that they share a common border that is more than 4,500 miles long, and while they distrust each other, it has to be guarded by hundreds of thousands of troops, an expense which would become unnecessary. Further, the Soviet Union has masses of natural resources and China has an almost unlimited workforce: together they would make a formidable partnership.

THERE ARE MANY PROBLEMS in the way. The Russians had accused the Chinese of betraying Marxist

principles by encouraging an agrarian rather than proletarian revolution. But the new Party Chairman, Zhao Ziyang, is attempting to revise the labour force from the bottom up. China has 750 million peasants working the land; but they work it with primitive methods and cannot produce enough for them to eat, let alone the rest of the population. Zhao is reforming farming methods, introducing tractors and irrigation pumps. The massive and unpopular communal farms have been turned into small family plots. Farmers are given quotas of produce they must supply to the State. Anything left over after these quotas are met can be sold on the free market, to the small farmer's profit. To encourage him, believe it or not, the official slogan of the Communist Party in this area is 'To Get Rich is Glorious'. This has released many unnecessary workers for the factories.

Both the Soviet Union and China are plagued by their factory workers. In Russia the worker is inefficient and often drunk; his work is shoddy and can be sold only to other Communist countries whose consumers have no choice. In China the factory



The deposed Yaobang and the charismatic

worker cannot be sacked. If he works badly, or even if he does not turn up to work at all, he still gets his wage coupons, and when he retires or dies, his son can inherit the job.

GORBACHEV IS ATTEMPTING to improve matters by restricting the amount of alcohol available to the worker; Zhao has a more practical idea. The peasants released from the fields are given contracts to work in factories. If they work well, they are paid well and after three years their contracts are renewed. If they work badly, they are not re-hired. It is an extraordinary scheme for a Communist country and, provided the contract worker does not become an elitist, Zhao is to be commended for his originality. Single-handedly he will have changed Mao's revolution from agrarian to proletarian — which should please the Soviet Union — and he has instigated incentives to efficiency in his workforce. Gorbachev has noticed this: he said recently that Communist governments should be free to practise their own forms of socialism — a remark ostensibly aimed at the Yugoslavians whom he was visiting, but in fact aimed at his neigb-



Is China all set to take over as Asia's leading economic power?

ours across the southern border.

UNTIL VERY RECENTLY there were two obstacles to Sino-Soviet friendship: Afghanistan and Kampuchea. The first obstacle is on the point of being resolved. As part of the Geneva peace talks, Gorbachev has offered to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan in May 1988. Further, when Pakistan objected to the political instability they would leave behind, Gorbachev said they would stick to their schedule, whatever Pakistan wanted.

The problem in Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia) is more complicated. Basically, the Soviet Union supports the Vietnamese who invaded Kampuchea 10 years ago and are still there to this day, and China supports the ousted Cambodian leader, Prince Sihanouk; they support Sihanouk not so much for his politics, but because he is opposed to the Vietnamese. Possibly all this will be resolved soon; talks between the various parties are progressing now towards an eventual solution.

There is another reason why the

Soviets would like to improve their relations with China, and that is an organisation called GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade). There are many such organisations of lesser or greater importance, but GATT is essential for countries emerging into international economics, such as the Soviet Union and China. GATT has been criticised as ineffectual by some, but as one observer commented, "You can't get far in it, but you can't get anywhere out of it." GATT merely balances tariffs and agreements between member countries; it sees to fair play and regulates trade. The Soviet Union wants to join, and so does China. America, the strong man behind any international body of this sort, would accept China as a member, but not, until recently, the Soviet Union. GATT, on the other hand, does not want to upset its international balance by taking one Communist power and not the other. If they can settle their differences, they will almost certainly both be asked to join, and this time the Americans will probably accept them. The American view of the Soviet



INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



Gorbachev: an international statesman.

Union is changing dramatically, and it is all due to one man: Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV has triumphed among the American people. For the first time Americans saw a Soviet leader who was an international statesman, who was as concerned as they about global peace and the horrors of nuclear warfare.

But popular as he is in the West, at home his position is entirely different. He is surrounded by hardline Communists who see his reforms as threats to socialism. They are older than he, more numerous and more narrow-minded; many would willingly depose him and would care not a

jot for his international admirers. Further, Gorbachev fears his own supporters within the Kremlin. Some are so enthusiastic in carrying out his ideas — whether through genuine beliefs or in order to curry favour is hard to say — that they go too fast and give Gorbachev's politburo enemies useful ammunition. Recently he had to demote and humiliate one of his staunchest supporters, much to that man's surprise. His latest request was for a Beijing Summit in May, which seems to suggest he is under pressure, since May is also the date for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and his Moscow meeting with President Reagan.

While Gorbachev is ahead, he is re-

forming the Soviet economy. He admits that implementing his reforms has proved more difficult than he expected. However, slowly things are changing in the Soviet Union; those changes might be hard to spot — the issuing of credit cards, the emergence of co-operatives — but they are there. Gorbachev's reforms will continue until he is deposed — unless he can gain real strength by succeeding, not internationally, but at home. If he can supply the Soviet Union with a healthy economy, that will count much more with the hardliners than the document-signing on the White House lawn.

Those problems he has to solve at home have been festering since the Revolution of 1917 — and they were already problems then. Inequality, shortages, corruption, inefficiency and poverty have been Russian problems since the days of the Tartars.

And yet, when Gorbachev looks over the frontier at China, he sees them coping without all the hoo-ha



Zhao Ziyang: a powerful force.

he has created, and he wants to know how they are doing it.

ZHAO ZIYANG IS a dynamic man. He is in fact 69 years old, but he gives the impression of being much younger, a refreshing change in the previ-

surprised at Zhao's reply to Gorbachev's Yugoslavian statement. Some twenty-four hours after Gorbachev declared in Belgrade that Communist governments can follow their own forms of socialism, Zhao went on Chinese television and announced

leased soldiers to retake Taiwan, and the Soviet Union, freed of the expense, could invest in more arms or a larger space programme. Foreign aid to countries favourable to either country could be increased and, if they were fully confident of their alliance, they could unite and threaten to finish once and for all Japan's wars against them in the early part of the century. Japan itself would have to compete with this new economic giant, and would probably find its market drastically reduced.

But the smaller countries of Asia owe their security mainly to the fact that the Soviet Union and China are too busy growling at each other to bother about them. This would change. Just as a cat is safe when two dogs are fighting, the wise cat knows it will be in danger once the dogs have made up.

America fears the friendship of the two Asian powers. Nixon hurried to Beijing (or Peking as it was called then) in 1972 to persuade China to act as a counterweight to Soviet expansion in Asia. Possibly, after the fiasco in Afghanistan, the Soviet Union no longer wishes to expand in Asia; if that is the case, then will the Soviet Union's small neighbours still be secure once China is removed as a counterweight?

As far as the economic aspect of such an alliance goes, it would be a positive action. With the Soviet Union's natural resources and China's developing industry, together with Hong Kong as the shop-window of the world, Asian economy would boom. Quite probably, as America and the West become ever more expensive for the consumer, Asia will in time become more affluent than the West. Already most of Europe's mass-produced clothes come from Asia; Russian-made motorcars are bought by Europeans because they are cheap; and the Chinese have a virtual monopoly in the less sophisticated end of the arms market.

Rajiv Gandhi is visiting China soon, and no doubt other Asian leaders will follow him. Add all this toge-



Deng is giving Zhao his full support.

ous gerontocracy of Chinese politics. Until October 1987, he was the Prime Minister; but now, as General Secretary of the Communist Party, he is retaining some of the responsibilities of the premiership. If he is not deposed, as have been two of his three predecessors, he will be a very powerful force. Like Gorbachev, he has the skill to handle the media; unlike Gorbachev, he knows when to step back and let his high-level profile cool down a little.

He has a tremendous advantage over his Soviet counterpart. He has at his side, ever ready to advise, Deng Xiaoping, the charismatic Party leader who retired in his favour. Deng introduced many of the reforms which Zhao has taken over; Deng initiated the opening up to Western ideas; Deng agrees he and his generation are too old to rule China and is giving Zhao his full support.

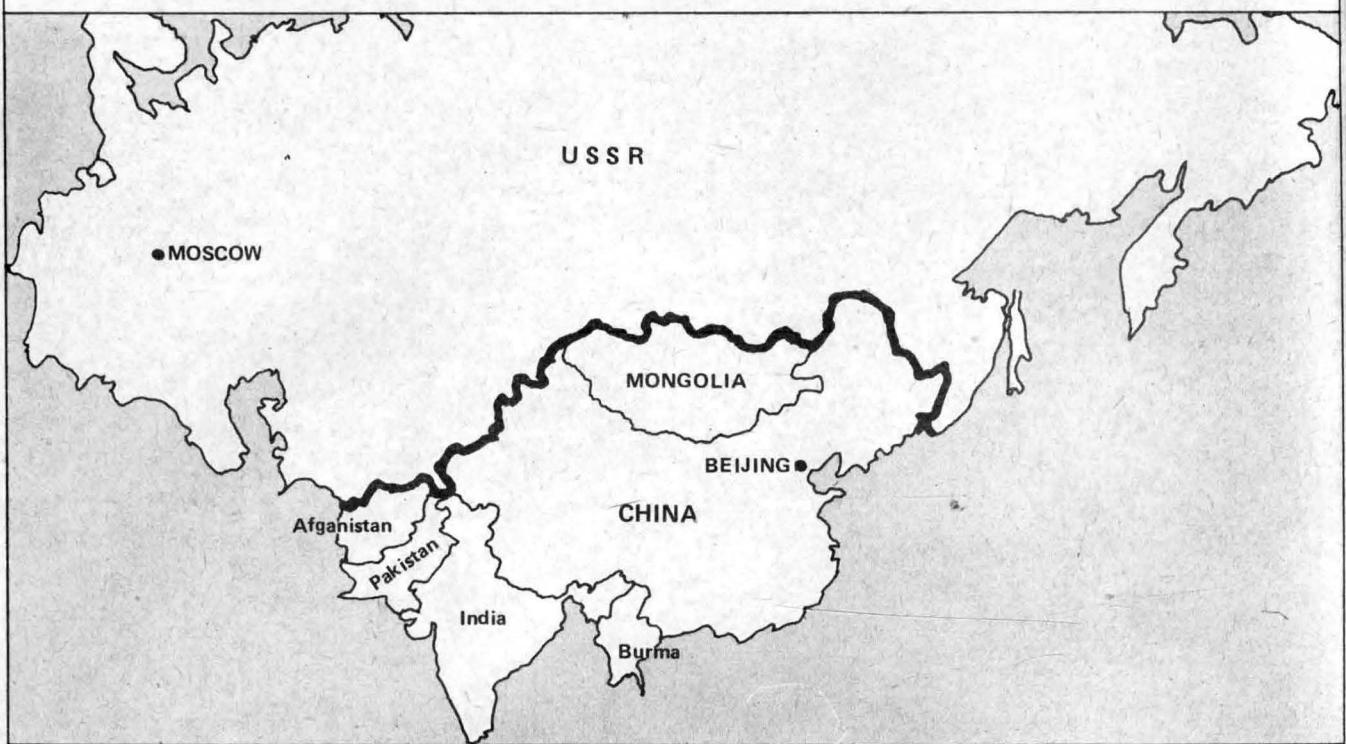
But even Deng must have been

what his form of socialism would be. He said that the opinions of the people should be consulted before major reforms, and if that is not the "democratisation" for which Hu Yaobang was sacked, I don't know what is.

Gorbachev and Zhao have a lot in common. Both recognise their country's faults and the need for reform. Both have visions of limited free enterprise, and both are toying with concepts of state-controlled capitalism. Both are capable of adapting Western ideas to suit their conditions, and both are good communicators. If the break between their two countries was caused by tactlessness, both men have ample tact.

THE FACE OF ASIA would change dramatically should the two men resolve their differences and link up. The troops massed on their 4,500-mile border could be released for other duties: China could use its re-

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



Sharing a common 4,500-mile border.

ther, taking into account the end of manpower and economic wastage caused by mutual mistrust, and the picture is awe-inspiring. Americans, who accept that their "century", brief though it was, is now over, have dubbed the coming one hundred years 'The Century of Asia'. According to *The Economist*, East Asia produces over US\$2 trillion (Rs 26,00,000 crore) worth of goods per year, and "if the energies of China's one billion people are unleashed by free-market economics, (East Asia) has a truly awesome potential."

THERE IS ANOTHER ASPECT of this proposed friendship that is rarely commented upon. It is a minor consideration because it is human rather than economic or military, but often human considerations override others.

The elite of China, knowing their own limits, are inclined to send their sons abroad for their education so that, on their return, they will enjoy an advantage over their contemporaries. Since Nixon's visit in 1972, the sons of the elite have been educated

at some of the best universities the United States can offer. Undoubtedly the boys return well-informed and with business and managerial skills rare in China. Unfortunately, they also return with modern Western ideas. They are no longer willing to worship their elders as omnipotent gods, or to accept their views and ideas as law. They no longer wish for the traditional Chinese wife and family, and many think more of themselves than of their ancestors. A few even return with the revolutionary idea that they themselves might have clearer political views than their fathers. How much better if they could go to Moscow instead, where they would get educated without inculcating upsetting Western ideas?

Perhaps this is in Zhao Ziyang's mind. It is not clear which way he will jump. Relations with America could be improved without effort: no one is really concerned about their supply of arms to Iran, which wouldn't have been commented upon were it not for the "Irangate" scandal. Equally, he has only to re-

ach out and take the Soviet Union's hand of friendship. In fact, in November 1987, a small Chinese delegation attended the 70th anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution in Moscow. But each time Gorbachev asks for a Moscow-Beijing Summit, Zhao says, "The time is not right."

THERE IS MUCH IN FAVOUR of siding with Moscow. But China has always played a game of pitching barbarian against barbarian, and any non-Chinese is a barbarian to them. They already know how overbearing Soviet friendship can be; and with America they can be inscrutable Orientals. America will supply them with modern technology, will not be concerned if they lean too far towards democracy, and will provide a ready market for their goods.

On the other hand, Zhao has to consider his own career. For far less than he has done in a few short months, Hu Yaobang was ousted. How long could he survive if he not so much "democratises" China, but "Westernises" it? ♦

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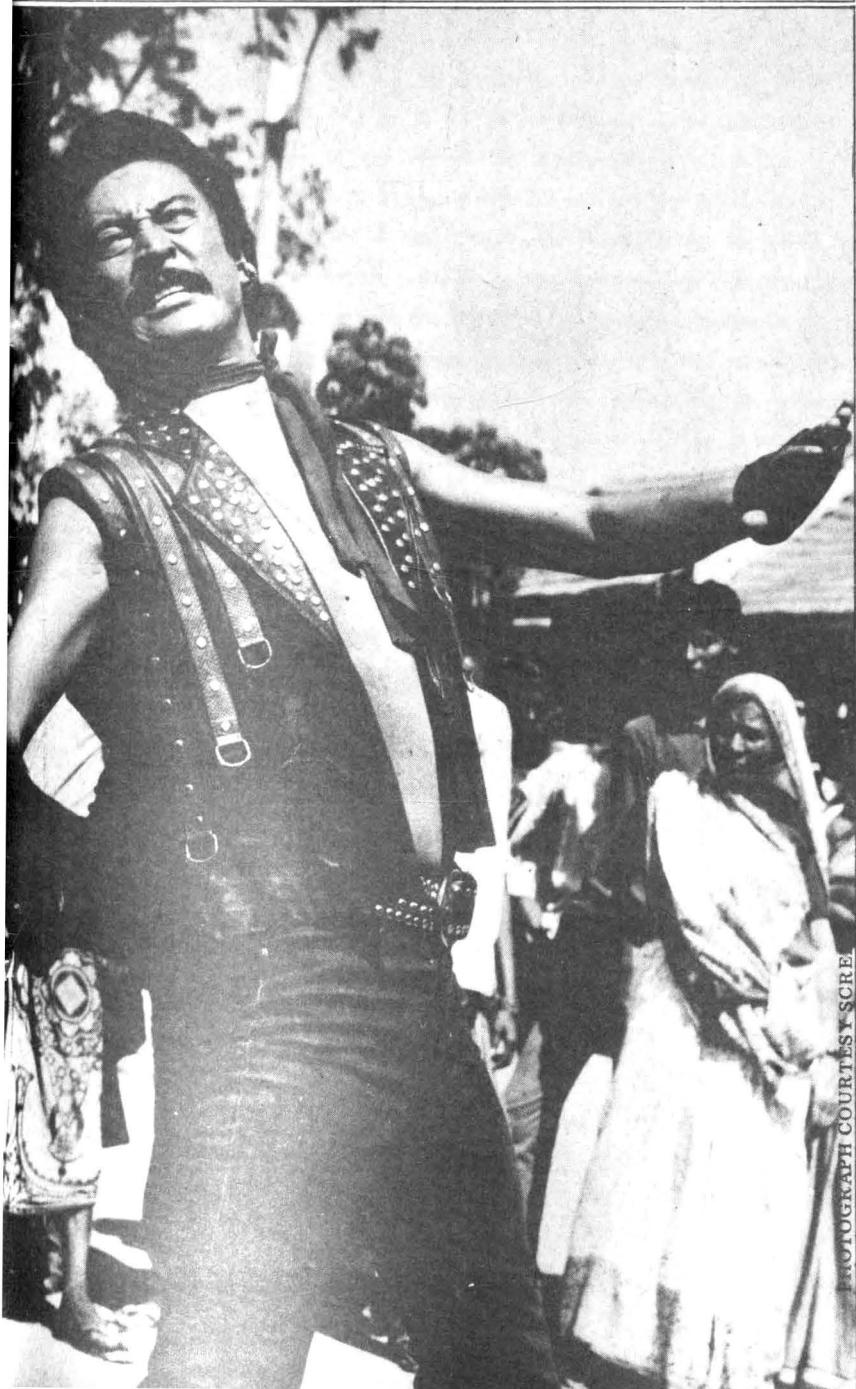
SOME WARS HAVE NO clear-cut rules. Or outright victories. When the battleground is censorship, the ancient on-going war between liberals and puritans generates more heat than light. There is also much floor-crossing. Battle-lines get fudged as opposing voices grow shriller. If there is self-righteousness, there is also honest ambivalence; or cynical disillusionment with the way censorship works in practice. All human institutions are fallible but Censor Boards, the world over, are more fallible than most. Confusion seems to be the keyword when the issue at hand is the censorship of cinema and television. Our evaluation of films, both their effects and the responses their messages — overt and covert — elicit, shows such a wide and wildly fluctuating range of subjectivity, that consensus seems almost impossible.

Most of us like to think we are liberals. Or at least pretend to be so in intellectual company. Naturally; censorship is a word that sets off the most negative of connotations. Perhaps, in recognition of this, the old Censor Board is now called the Board for Film Certification. But to the ordinary, concerned viewer, the word remains negative. The image is one of the vigilante, scissors in hand, ready to cut anything that offends his or her prudish morality; violating the viewer's sense of self-respect — someone 'superior' deciding what he can see. This inbuilt elitism is also seen as undemocratic, because what we get to see is based on double standards: most Censor Board members are educated liberals who might personally approve many things they forbid others to see. In this way, it becomes an 'us' versus 'them' issue: we are mature enough not to be influenced by the graphic violence and titillating sex shown on the screen, but *they* might be immature enough to go straight from the theatre and imitate the anti-social actions they have just viewed. This is putting the anti-censorship attitude crudely and simplistically, but a lot of ordinary, law-abiding and intelligent viewers see

THE CENSOR BOARD: CUTTING BOTH WAYS



The Indian Censor Board: scissor-happy custodians of public morality, self-righteous puritans or 'enlightened' liberals? The image is largely negative. Ironically, however, cinema audiences continue to be fed a steady diet of blood, gore and sex. MAITHILI RAO examines the parameters, implementation and inconsistencies of film censorship in India.



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY SCRIBE

censorship in these terms.

MANY MEMBERS OF the Censor Board see themselves as custodians of public morality, performing a demanding and thankless task that takes up so much of their valuable time. If some of them are extremely self-righteous and want a more stringent application of the guidelines, they are often the newer members. Or a more articulate section of the moral majority. This earnest self-righteousness and almost missionary zeal was apparent at the National Conference on Film Certification which was held in the first week of January 1988, at Bombay, under the aegis of the Human Resources Ministry; there was enough unintended black comedy, farcical melodrama and rhetoric to give an enterprising scriptwriter material for a rollicking comedy. The ministers delighted in quoting *Bharatamuni* and *Natyasattra*, the aesthetics of the *Navarasas*, as if time had stood still since those hoary days of classical rectitude. You also had the bewildering sight of a Shyam Benegal and Adoor Gopalakrishnan, on the one hand, sharing a common platform with Sanjay Khan and G P Sippy, with both sides pleading for self-regulation by the industry, and an elegant Censor Board member, on the other, asking for the prescription of minimum qualifications for film-makers. For all the dramatic deliberations at the august and, at times, cacophonous gathering, the cynics had the last word, pronouncing it as yet another exercise in futility.

The cynicism, however, is not borne of fashionable ennui or a liberal conscience. Sarayu Doshi, an eminent member of the panel, for one, confessed to a deep-seated ambivalence about the effectiveness of censorship, at a seminar organised by the Women and Media Group in early March. Her reasons had to do with the lack of enforcement outside metropolitan cities: films given an 'Adult' ('A') certificate, in which sensitive scenes are not cut because they will presumably be seen by responsible

adults, are freely seen by under-18-year olds in places as close to Bombay as Thane. There is also the perennial problem of interpolations — of excised scenes being shown to a mixed audience of children and adults, or even incorporated into totally harmless films — a problem endemic to district towns and certain Southern cities. If censorship is to continue in its present form, these are issues that could be resolved through strict policing, and deterrent penalising of erring exhibitors. But Sarayu Doshi, and others of similar persuasion, express a growing doubt regarding the very basis of censorship.

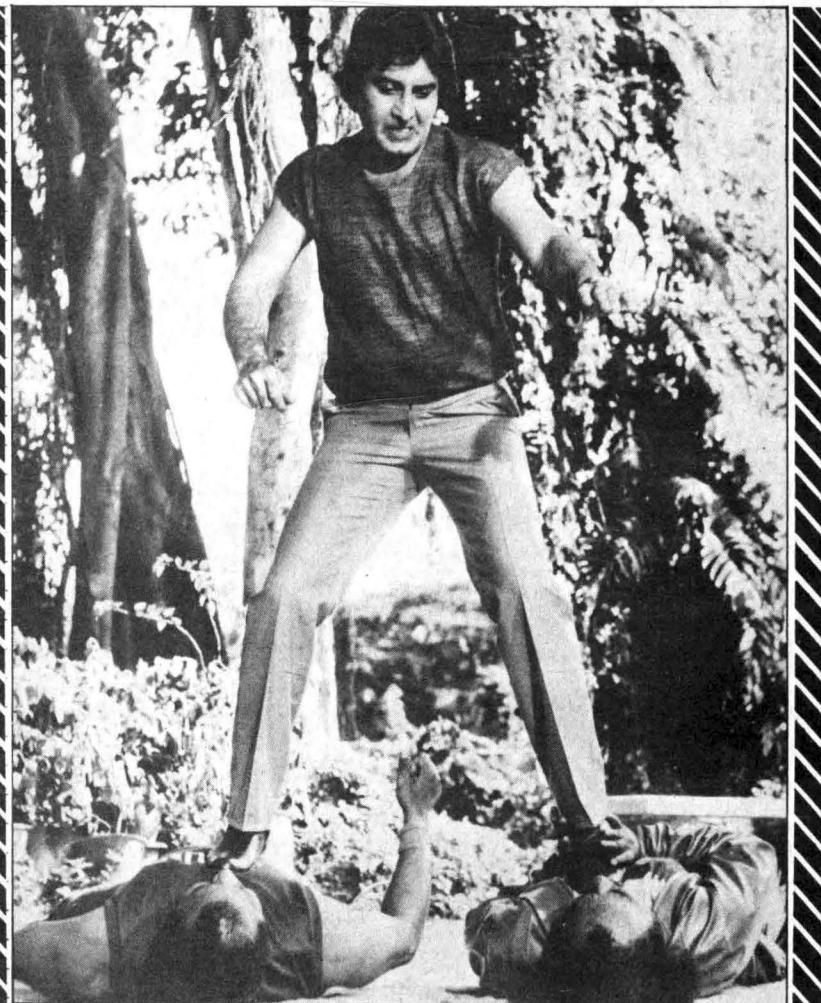
HOW MORALLY ETHICAL is it to judge a work, which often may not be refined 'art' but has much blood and sweat and tears poured into it, on the strength of personal evaluation, which itself is a product of education and inherited and acquired values? That confusion is confounded by subjectivity is apparent in the revisions and re-revisions of the verdict of the first examining committee by the higher revising committee or tribunal. Doshi, herself, has finally voiced the view that perhaps the Censor Board should limit its work to only certification, ie indicating the 'type' of film: add the absent 'X'-rating to the existing 'U', 'UA' and 'A' and let the viewer decide what he or she wants to see. This attitude had yet another unexpected supporter at the National Conference — the avant-garde film-maker from Kerala, Adoor. But then, his films would never run into the usual censorship hassles that those of commercial filmmakers encounter.

Yet, what is surprising is that the majority of commercial film-makers, despite all their loud-mouthed complaints and digs about censors, *want* certain limits set for the kind of films they may produce; so the Censor Board has discovered. The Board also reveals that their audience-response research, never well-publicised and limited in its scope, has found that the majority of the audience want cen-

sorship to continue. The film-makers also demand clear guidelines about the range within which they may work, the boundaries they cannot cross; their complaint is based on the inconsistency and arbitrariness of censorship — the fact that the big-time producer and an Amitabh Bachchan-starrer can get away with blue murder and excessive violence whereas the small producer is given the endless runaround, followed by not-so-veiled charges of corruption and political clout. But, that is an another story, for an investigative journalist with access to the secrets of the industry, outside the scope of this writer who is basically a film critic.

The whole issue of censorship and its effective implementation revolves

around the assumption that films have a profound socio-psychological impact on the viewer. Unfortunately, in India, no effective research has been undertaken to discover how, why, and when films affect the viewer (besides the obvious effects of the mass adulation of stars and the mindless imitations of fashions set by them). In *Sex, Violence and the Media*, H J Eyesenck and D K B Nias take a critical look at the surveys and field research undertaken in the US and UK through the '60s and '70s, and come up with quite the unsurprising conclusion that censorship of some sort is essential to promoting civilised behaviour. They quote the US Commissions on Media Violence and Pornography — neither academically



Vinod Khanna terrorising his opponents in 'Garajna'.



Pawn or victim?: Sonam in 'Na-Insaafi'.

nor experimentally sound according to their stringent standards — which pronounced that TV violence (in our case, we may substitute it with that of films) was probably harmful and should be substantially reduced, while pornography was not harmful and all restrictions, except those protecting children, should be lifted.

SOCIOLOGISTS IN THE WEST have also linked the increasing violence in society and sexual permissiveness to the influence of all media, including films and TV. Eyesenck further cites the 'copycat' syndrome that was the basis of two judgements in the US. The US Supreme Court had allowed plaintiff Mrs Niemi of California to sue the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), on the grounds that the network had been "negligent in portraying violence which might be imitated in real life." Mrs Niemi's 9-year old daughter was sexually assaulted by four older girls four days after NBC had telecast a film, *Born Innocent*, in which a female convict was raped by four other female inmates of a prison. Within 24 hours of the

Supreme Court decision, a Tacoma (Washington state) probation officer reported that three inmates of a home for juvenile girls had assaulted a fourth. In spite of this, the authors of *Sex, Violence and the Media* find that such incidents only indicate a probable effect and do not show a causal link between the telecast and the 'copycat' imitation. But, closer home, the suicide pact of a 'real' pair of star-crossed lovers was ascribed to the effect of the runaway hit *Ek Duje Ke Liye*. And the discerning lay-person sees a causal link, or a subliminal effect, between the potent medium of cinema and imitative action, especially in the case of impressionable adolescents and young adults.

There is, however, a contrary school of thinking that sees screen violence as cathartic and hence, therapeutic. Some psychologists report that even adults tend to 'believe' what they see in films and on TV, thus finding an outlet for their inherent aggressive instincts by identifying with screen violence, and so, feeling no necessity to act out their aggressive impulses. On the contrary, they

feel relaxed after watching a violent film; many of the James Bond thrillers and aggressive comedies are claimed as outlets for aggression. However, like most theories, this is also fraught with contradictions despite the germ of truth contained therein.

What is more acceptable is the theory that repeated exposure to violence, after the initial shock or relaxation through identification with the 'good hero', leads to gradual desensitisation. Especially so in children. What is more dangerous in the long run? The long-term effects of desensitisation are horrific to contemplate, but that is exactly what is happening in our country; under the flimsy excuse of the violence of the society we live in, a gratuitous violence has been visible over the years. Six years ago, a film called *Badle Ki Aag* ran into censorship trouble because it depicted the slitting of children's throats and professed a free flow of gore — enough of bloody footage had survived the cutting and the film merely had an 'A'-tag. But if you consider the hits of 1987, except for *Mr India* (which had violence but in the guise of a fun fantasy) and the tear-jerking family drama *Sindoor*, the rest were of the ilk of *Hukumat*, *Insaniyat Ka Dushman*, *Kudrat Ka Kanoon* and *Pratighat*. *Hukumat* jumped on the anti-terrorist bandwagon and sacrificed the young son of the hero, a modern-day warrior called Arjun, in the guise of a modern *Mahabharatha*. What is most objectionable in these facile anti-terrorist sagas, is the inbuilt fascism of the theses, although the additional guidelines issued to the Censor Board in 1978 say:

1. Anti-social activities such as violence are not to be glorified or justified.
2. Pointless or avoidable scenes of violence, cruelty and horror are not to be shown.

BUT WHAT IS THE LIMIT to be set on violence? Are five minutes acceptable and not fifteen? At what point does it become 'pointless'? Aware of the scissor-happy snipers, film-makers bank on a simple ruse: shoot elabor-

CINEMA

ate sequences of two or three times more than the required length and the censors will be bound to retain at least half or quarter. This, however, not only leads to waste, but also the degeneration of the actual techniques. Perhaps this is one reason why some of the violence in our films has been getting so excessively crude or laughable. This is also the reason why choreographers of fight sequences think up new gimmicks in the name of 'thrills'. This might also explain why our desensitised audience suddenly wakes up and reacts viscerally to the genuine, psychologically-credible violence of films like *Ardh Satya*, *Ankush*, and now, *Kaalchakra*. Sometimes one feels that our underrated audience *can* indeed distinguish between rhetoric and reality.

It might also explain the lack of fallout to the strictures of the Gujarat High Court on April 1, 1988, regarding the screening of *Shahenshah* in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Goa. The judge wanted the exhibitors to insert a 'clarification' that the "film does not intend to insult the judiciary or police", and passed strictures on the Censor Board that it "should think twice before passing objectionable scenes in future." The learned judge apparently does not see many Hindi films; in his innocence, he picks on *Shahenshah* — a dilution of the magic Bachchan formula — when, earlier, *Andha Kanoon*, and many of its imitations, proceeded to make a farce of the judicial process with a one-man avenging angel taking the blind, hobbled law into his own hands.

The Censor guidelines not only prohibit "visuals or words involving defamation or contempt of court", but add a whole string of ancillary prohibitions which will effectively strangle, at birth, any intelligent form of political cinema. To protect the many, all-too-easily provoked susceptibilities of our multi-ethnic society, the guidelines say:

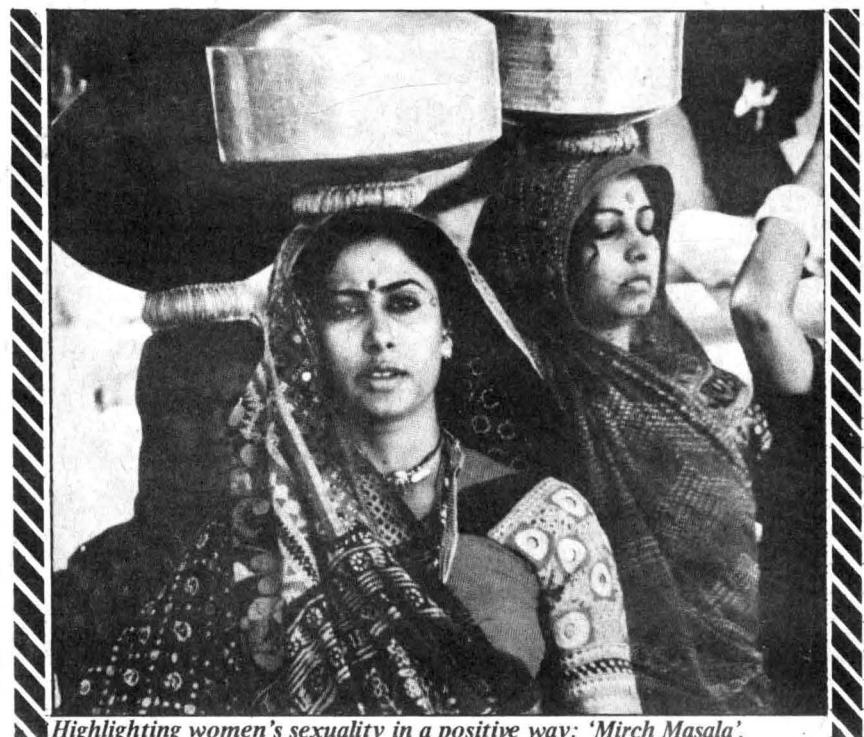
2 v. Visuals or words contemptuous of racial, religious or other groups are not to be presented;
vi. the sovereignty and integrity of

India is not to be called in question;
vii. the security of the state is not to be jeopardised or endangered;
viii. friendly relationships with foreign states are not to be strained;
ix. public order is not to be endangered.

All seemingly unexceptional, but they can be invoked to prevent any serious examination of political subjects. It is another matter altogether, that our film-makers have preferred to play safe as far as political subjects are concerned. It is, of course, a self-evident truth to say that all films, like all forms of artistic expression, make a political statement of one sort or the other; equally circumspect has been the treatment of Muslim sensibilities or stories concerning their minority aspirations while Hollywood has only recently started making films about the Black experience, other than using them as front-office tokens of lip-service to racial equality.

EKAN, MADE ON THE EVE of Partition, was the first film that rebelled against the nawabi nostalgia cliché to

voice the urgent need of a proud race to educate themselves to find a rightful place in a modern world. Of course, it was initially banned. And one had to wait until the mid-70s, for *Garam Hawa* and an honest portrayal of the punishing dilemma of an uprooted people. Now that *Tamas* has been screened and discussed to death without any alarming outbreak of communal hatred or violence, the time has apparently come for filmmakers to take up themes hitherto considered sensitive. And box-office poison. Benegal's *Arohan*, a host of Mrinal Sen's films and Sathyu's *Bara* (the more effective Kannada version of *Sookha*) and Adoor's *Mukhamukham* are the honourable exceptions to this evasion of political themes. Regional cinema, too, especially in Telugu and Tamil, has seen lampoons of political figures and their ideologies. However, given the constraints of the Censor guidelines, and the alacrity with which they are stringently applied, it is too optimistic to expect that any film about the Punjab problem (one which shows both sides of the argument), or questioning our in-



Highlighting women's sexuality in a positive way: 'Mirch Masala'.



Highlighting only the lurid and the sexy...

vement in Sri Lanka, will be made in the near future.

Patriotism is too sacred a shibboleth (the brainwashing with Manoj Kumar's *Bharat* series may be partly responsible) to question. Instead, it is more lucrative to make the villain a foreign-based terrorist. The smuggler-baron with his chamber of torture is almost an extinct species in popular Hindi films — the terrorist has taken over. Hollywood is still avidly imitated, but not in the manner it has of making the CIA the comical villain in so many thriller-comedies. You can be sure that no film like *Missing* will be made in India, nor the series of late '70s and early '80s films, starting with *Deer Hunter* and the famous documentary, *Hearts and Minds*, and delving into the trauma of Vietnam. Perhaps we are not yet sure of our fragile national identity or political stability to take a hard, probing look at our history — ancient and recent. Consequently, an alarmed retreat into the womb of ancient glory, or an ostrich-like evasion of contemporary contradictions and fissures, has been the classic response of film-

makers. The alarmist and knee-jerk application of censorship to films which ultimately proved to be damp squibs — *Kissa Kursi Ka* and *Naxalites* — reinforces this Pavlovian reaction to anything controversial or political.

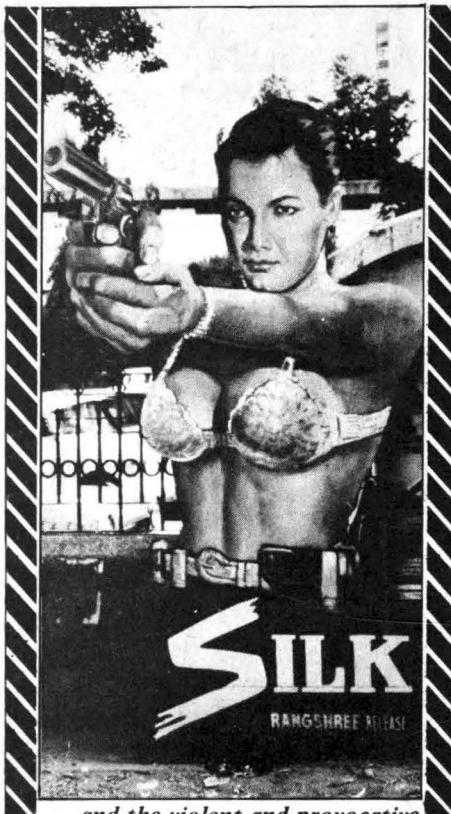
With respect to the ubiquitous film hoardings and press advertisements — probably the worst manifestations of commercial cinema — that seize and highlight only the lurid, violent and sexy. Bikram Singh, Chairman, Censor Board, points out that posters often zoom in on what is merely a fleeting shot in the film, but guaranteed to titillate, thereby attracting a maximum audience. He cites a recent instance when John Boorman's art film, *Emerald Forest*, about the Amazonian South Americans, was passed with a 'U/A' certificate and brief scenes of nudity, of tribals gambolling in a river, were left intact since they were integral to the film. Yet, predictably, the posters focused on these same shots; and the NRI release ran 'House Full' for weeks with a predominantly male audience. Earlier, another acclaimed art film, *The Lace-*

maker, had a similar fate, running in theatres (not normally screening English films) to salivating audiences who reportedly walked out after viewing the nude scenes. The tragic irony here is that little can be done to censor such advertisements and posters as they are exempt from the Cinematographic Act, and the Indecent Portrayal of Women Act lacks uniform guidelines and stringent punitive prescriptions. Thus, the torrent of "hot and vivid prose" let loose in these vulgar advertisements is difficult to still, and sporadic campaigns against obscene posters by vigilante groups, most noticeably in Delhi, are hardly likely to get the posters torn down for good. Especially as the police, who are meant to remove these, have other duties to fulfill like *bandobast* arrangements for VIPs. And so, the hoardings and evening papers — the worst offenders — continue to display and publish salacious advertisements highlighting the very scenes the censors have taken pains to clip.

ABOVE ALL, THE MOST vexing guideline to film-makers — and the most controversial with feminist organisations — is the injunction to avoid "visuals or words depicting women in ignoble servility to man or glorifying such servility as a praiseworthy quality in women." Banning *Pati Parmeshwar* — blatantly regressive by all accounts — is an indication that this long-overdue guideline has been taken seriously at last, but it still does not condone the years of titillation that have reduced women to being merely viewed as sex objects. There is no overt or hardcore pornography in India (except for what is available in video parlours), but erotic titillation and glorification of female subservience have been the gambling game of film-makers too numerous to mention. Despite the fact that psychologists have proved that erotic suggestion which activates the fantasies of the id is more effective than repeated nudity and graphic sex. Instead, eroticism that is pro-women, celebrating their life-enhancing sen-

suousness and making them equal participants, is extremely rare in Indian cinema. Here again, one has to turn to our New Cinema film-makers for highlighting women's sexuality in a positive way — *Mirch Masala* being the most outstanding — or using women's sexual exploitation as a metaphor for feudal oppression, as so many films, notably Shyam Benegal's and Prakash Jha's, have done. The most dangerous tendency of commercial cinema is not so much the focusing on Sridevi's pelvic undulations or the cabaret dancer's cavorings, with an addiction to zoomitis, but the invoking of religious sanctions to glorify the subservience of women, who often, with a voluntary zeal, are made to offer themselves up as human sacrifices at the altar of familial duty.

Besides *Pati Parmeshwar* another film was recently rejected by the examining committee — Haresh Totlani's *Pratima* — a far-fetched and amateurishly made film which decries dowry. In the film, the heroine (Dipti Naval) plays the elder sister who takes to prostitution in order to amass dowry for her beloved younger sister who loves a rich boy with dowry-hungry parents. Earlier, many films like *Aina*, *Chetna* and the B-grade *Beabroo* had been passed even though the women in the film took to prostitution for a variety of reasons. Additionally, earlier, the censors had passed reprehensible films, like *Naseeb Apna Apna*, where not only was bigamy sympathetically portrayed, but the 'Black is Ugly' racist message was also projected. In *Sindoor*, the wronged heroine, a victim of an Othello-type jealousy, is told by the repentant husband that the time has come for Ram to pass an *agnipariksha*, following which the hitherto docile heroine quickly claims: "Ye adhikar Sitaon ke pass he rahne deejeye." *Sindoor* obtained a 'U'-certificate. With such blind and dangerous contradictions does censorship work! Surely woman, as a helpless victim of circumstances — as in *Pratima* — is preferable to the reli-



... and the violent and provocative.

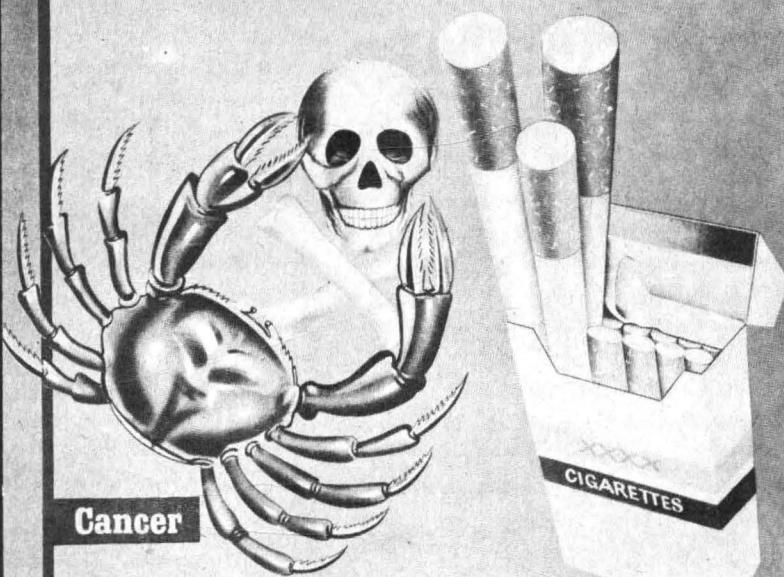
gious sanction of voluntary martyrdom or *sati*.

THE CONTRADICTIONS are tragically philistine when it comes to foreign films. Most film buffs who had seen the uncensored version of *Mephisto* — one of the best films of the '80s — were appalled when Julliette's (a black dancer who has a complex relationship with the protagonist, an actor who sacrifices his integrity and betrays his friends and ideals to court the favour of his Nazi masters) nude dance was cut. The dance was not only a piece of masterly erotica but had an even more fundamental purpose — it gave an insight into her alternately mocking and ferociously sensual bond with the hero who shows his most vulnerable side only to her. *Mephisto* was truly mutilated, as many had feared. Even though censorship is expected to take the artistic integrity of the film into consideration; a vital prerequisite rudely violated in cases

where the films are masterpieces, but not with exploitative B-grades! One cannot but help feel this when confronted with one infamous example of these NRI horrors — *Blind Date*, which was a big hit last year. This Greek concoction purported to be a thriller and had repeated scenes of a psychopathic killer all set to cut out the breasts of his victims. In the first incidence, the bare breasts of a drugged woman have the incision lines marked round her breasts, followed by a close-up of an array of surgical instruments laid out for the gruesome operation on a live woman. Later on, the film has close-ups of the gloved hand drawing the lines of incision, and the earlier suggestion is invoked once again when a sharp knife appears in the frame. Equally repulsive, and yet another instance of the double standards of the censors will round off this litany of woes: *Gymkata*, released two months ago, took a gruesome delight in the perils of a death game where the participants are eliminated in a medievally sadistic way in some imaginary Asian country.

Confronted with this inconsistency and blindness to artistic merit, what is the solution? Abolish censorship altogether and let loose an orgy of violence and perverse sex? Or give the much-abused film industry a chance at self-regulation and see how the onus of responsibility works? In practice, of course, there is no absolute freedom; if not government regulations which are subject to the evils of politicking, we will let loose the calculations of market forces which impose their own tyranny of glamorous or homespun conformism. But, in the long run, no discipline works as well as that of the self. Is the film industry capable of such discipline? There seems no harm in testing it for a short period. At the most, if the probationary experiment does not work, it will be back to the big government *Danda*, as Madhu Kishwar, the fiery editor of *Manushi*, said at the National Conference. But the debate must continue. ♦

Made for each other



Public Health Department

Reading The Smoke Signals

There can be no divergent opinions on the subject — cigarettes are injurious to health. So how best to minimise consumption levels? The prohibition of cigarette advertisements? Effective counter-propaganda? A ban on smoking itself? VIJAY PENDHARKAR finds out.

HERE CAN HARDLY be anything more ridiculous than printing a tiny statutory warning on cigarette packs. We could just as well have a warning pasted on the guns of extremists declaring that "Shooting is harmful to life." If at all the warnings are to be printed, some interesting ones like "You pay for cigarettes twice — when you get them and when they get you," would at least make

the caveats livelier, rather than having the usual dull and unimaginative ones peeping at you nonchalantly. And it would be a fallacy to presume that such cautions would ever deter a person firmly chained to the habit of smoking, for smoking is an addiction perhaps stronger than even drugs: "Heroin addicts say it is easier to give up dope than it is to give up smoking," says Dr Sharon Hall, a psychology

professor researching drug abuse at the San Francisco Medical School Centre, University of California.

There can be no divergent opinions on the harmful effects of smoking. An estimated 0.6 to 1 million deaths every year are attributed to smoking and tobacco products, of which around 6,30,000 are in India alone. According to Dr L B Sanghvi from the National Cancer Registry Project,

REPORT

Tata Memorial Centre, almost one-third of all new cancer cases, approximately 1,90,000 cases, are related to tobacco habits. But a likelihood of developing cancer is only one of the several harmful effects of smoking, the others being heart trouble, lung problems, and the decline of sexual prowess amongst men.

AT A RECENT SEMINAR, 'Cancer Update-1988', the Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, Dr M R Srinivasan, mooted the idea of banning cigarette advertisements. He was probably speaking on behalf of the

skyline everywhere are proof enough that the task is stupendous. Aggressive advertisements, suggestive of an association between cigarette smoking and virile manhood, act on the impressionable minds of youngsters, encouraging them to pick up the habit at an early age.

It is well established that a legislative ban cannot be easily implemented and prohibition, however well-intentioned, usually becomes a fountainhead for illegal activities and corrupt practises. When Norway, an advanced country, passed a law prohibiting tobacco advertising several years

lashed a report which suggests that strict bans on advertising cigarettes had little effect while loose restrictions appeared to work. In 1976, France passed laws limiting the number of advertisements for tobacco, but per capita consumption went up. The experience was repeated in Italy. And Norway has the highest percentage (36%) of 15-year olds who smoke, although a ban on tobacco advertising has been in force for 12 years. On the other hand, voluntary restrictions in the UK and Sweden resulted in a steep decline in consumption.

RATHER THAN A BLANKET BAN on advertisements, counter-propaganda is perhaps more useful and this also appears to be the view of the Government of Maharashtra. An interesting hoarding war has ensued in Bombay between the tobacco companies and the Health department, which has come up with a number of cleverly-worded hoardings in different parts of the city, to counter the slick advertising campaigns being run by major cigarette manufacturers. A cigarette company's "Made for each other" campaign is now greeted with another, more sinister one: "Made for each other — smoking and cancer." Another hoarding proclaiming, "I get what I want" is countered with "I also get what I do not want — cancer." But in all these ad wars, *bidis* seem to have been let off the hook, probably because they are manufactured in the small sector. Or is it that *bidi* smoke is considered to be less harmful? No warning whatsoever is printed on *bidi* packets whose sales must far outstrip cigarette sales. Content-wise, *bidis* may be safer than cigarettes since an average *bidi* has only one-third the quantity of tobacco contained in a cigarette. However, according to Mrs Perin N Motani of the Cancer Research Institute, *bidis* are as harmful as cigarettes and evidence exists to show that *bidi* smoke would have an equally deleterious effect on human beings as cigarette smoke.



Countering the slick advertisements of major cigarette manufacturers.

scores of responsible men and women who want to fight the menace and have demanded a total ban on cigarette advertisements, at least in government-controlled media. The Consumer Guidance Society of India has also adopted a position opposing these advertisements. Even the World Health Assembly deplores all direct and indirect practises to promote the use of tobacco. Obviously, the best course seems to be to go in for a preventive strategy rather than a curative one. But the alluring, huge hoardings of cigarette advertising that dot the

ago, a leading tobacco company started advertising shoes under the same brandname and emblem that was earlier used for a cigarette. The anti-tobacco council had to fight a protracted legal battle before the company relented and abandoned its questionable campaign.

A study undertaken by the International Advertising Agency, "Why do juveniles start smoking?", concludes that cigarette advertisements do not actually influence the youth, and family and peer influences are more dominant. *Advertising Age* pub-

THERE IS MOUNTING EVIDENCE to prove that even involuntary exposure to tobacco smoke is harmful to the health of non-smokers, and the workplace is recognised by health authorities as usually being the place where the most substantial exposure to passive smoking occurs. The World Health Organisation has therefore prohibited smoking in all its offices and allotted a room in each office especially for smokers. The anti-smoking campaign has also shifted gear and is now addressing itself to non-smokers, encouraging them to vocalise their protests. Thus, the catch line of the Maharashtra government's anti-smoking campaign is, "Your smoking is injurious to our health."

Several leading nations have imposed strict bans on smoking in public places. The anti-smoking legislation passed by the state of New York, USA, and which became effective as of May 7, 1987, prohibits smoking in all enclosed public places except a few designated smoking areas. "No smoking" signs are going up all over Europe and various anti-smoking measures are being tested. Denmark imposes the heaviest taxes on cigarette sales, claiming 87% of the purchase price of a pack of cigarettes. Under a law imposed in September 1987, Belgians can be fined up to 18,000 francs (Rs 6,695) for smoking in state-owned buildings including hospitals, schools, post offices and toilets. In Britain and France, advertisers are forbidden to extol their products in any way or link them with women and fast cars. Smoking is prohibited in all public places in Finland and aboard domestic flights in Sweden and Iceland. Japan Airlines has banned smoking on all its three much-frequented flights from April 1, 1988, and will impose the ban on all its flights depending on passenger reactions. Tobacco advertisements are to be banned in Canada from January 1, 1989. Canada has also evolved a comprehensive federal policy on smoking which includes a New Tobacco Products Control Act, with penalties up to

\$1,00,000 (Rs 9,50,000) and jail imprisonment for six months for such major offences as violating an advertisement ban or labelling requirements.

FROM THE RED SQUARE to Times Square, from the commuter trains of Tokyo to the Australian outback, the world's smokers are on the defensive. The warnings are everywhere and if smokers don't get the message, there are laws to prevent them from lighting up. Moscow's Red Square is perhaps the only outdoor smokeless zone in the world where smoking is banned to show respect to Lenin, whose embalmed body lies in a mausoleum thereat. But in the USA, despite curbs on smoking, exports of American brand cigarettes have never been higher. About 100 billion US cigarettes were sold abroad last year, to a US \$2 billion-market across the globe. The cachet of a cigarette is a powerful influence in China where 340 million smokers puff their way through 1.3 thousand billion cigarettes each year. Chinese film heroes and heroines are often shown brandishing cigarettes and the offer of a smoke is almost as popular a greeting as a handshake, despite a tentative government plan to discourage the habit. However, a novel attempt at providing incentives has been tried out in Soviet Latvia, where non-smokers in the Ministry of Communication's Computer Centre will receive a monthly bonus in a move designed to encourage smokers to give up the habit.

Nearer home, the Government of India plans to launch a multimedia publicity blitz against smoking throughout the country. Special attention will be paid to publicity in places like railway stations, government dispensaries, cinema halls and airports. The Maharashtra government has already banned smoking in government offices and proposes to extend the ban to cover hospitals, railway stations, airports and other public places.

BUT WILL SUCH BANS and campaigns have any appreciable effect in our country? Liquor advertisements are rarely seen these days but has liquor consumption decreased? More than anything else, does the government have the necessary will to curb smoking in view of its enormous revenue-earning capacity? With a large annual turnover realising a tax revenue in the order of Rs 1,500 crore for the Exchequer, the tobacco industry would be in a bargaining position not only to resist the imposition of restrictions on publicity, but

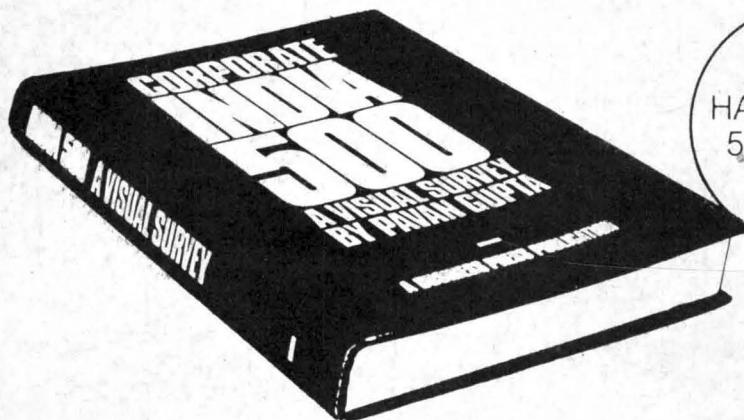


Will such bans and campaigns have any appreciable effect in our country? Has liquor consumption decreased? Does the government have the necessary will to curb smoking in view of its enormous revenue-earning capacity?

also to defy them by overt or covert means. The production of cigarettes in the country has declined from 80,681 million cigarettes in 1985 to 72,675 million in 1986. Whether this decline can be attributed to greater health consciousness or an increase in the cost of production, or even to the success of anti-smoking campaigns, is a moot point. But even presuming the campaigns are showing signs of success, will the government be able to find jobs for the thousands of workers engaged in cigarette manufacturing companies who will be rendered jobless as a result? ♦

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CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

In recent years, a hitherto unprecedented and alarming number of black children in South Africa have found themselves the victims of the regime's vicious "security policies". Today the prisons are full of children who should be in school, and massive graveyards dot the countryside. SHAILA SHAH reports on the chilling repression that has increasingly characterised the regime's strategy to "protect the process of peaceful reform."

WHEN A REGIME refuses to release an 11-year old on bail for fear that he constitutes a threat to the security of the state, there is something very wrong. With the regime, that is. When evidence of the arrests and detention of children as young as seven years old, of incarceration in dank overcrowded cells clearly designed for adult inmates, and of all manner of torture inflicted on bodies that are yet to grow is made public, it confirms it.

Only a few months ago, Sicelo Godfrey Dhlomo, an 18-year old and one of a dozen young South Africans who featured in a CBS documentary, 'Children of Apartheid', in which he

had angrily, though calmly, testified to his own imprisonment, the torture he was subjected to while in detention and the subsequent harassment he faced when acquitted, had declared: "I might be arrested or eliminated at any time." His statement had proved prophetic. Early this year, South African security forces detained him to question him about his role in the film, which Pretoria had denounced as "underhanded" and "distorted", and to persuade him, in the words of the Minister of Law and Order, "to tell the world how he was misused to spread lies about South Africa." Five days later he was found dead in an open field. For his public

condemnation of the brutality unleashed by the South African regime to silence its critics, he had paid, with a bullet in his head.

RECENT YEARS have witnessed an escalating war between the regime and black children in South Africa. It can be described as little else; hundreds of children have testified to the virtual seige they find themselves under, at the hands of the security forces. And the facts, pieced together from individual testimonies, reports from monitoring organisations and civil rights groups, and some admissions from the authorities themselves, are grim.



CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD

In recent years, a hitherto unprecedented and alarming number of black children in South Africa have found themselves the victims of the regime's vicious "security policies". Today the prisons are full of children who should be in school, and massive graveyards dot the countryside. SHAILA SHAH reports on the chilling repression that has increasingly characterised the regime's strategy to "protect the process of peaceful reform."

WHEN A REGIME refuses to release an 11-year old on bail for fear that he constitutes a threat to the security of the state, there is something very wrong. With the regime, that is. When evidence of the arrests and detention of children as young as seven years old, of incarceration in dank overcrowded cells clearly designed for adult inmates, and of all manner of torture inflicted on bodies that are yet to grow is made public, it confirms it.

Only a few months ago, Sicelo Godfrey Dhlomo, an 18-year old and one of a dozen young South Africans who featured in a CBS documentary, 'Children of Apartheid', in which he

had angrily, though calmly, testified to his own imprisonment, the torture he was subjected to while in detention and the subsequent harassment he faced when acquitted, had declared: "I might be arrested or eliminated at any time." His statement had proved prophetic. Early this year, South African security forces detained him to question him about his role in the film, which Pretoria had denounced as "underhanded" and "distorted", and to persuade him, in the words of the Minister of Law and Order, "to tell the world how he was misused to spread lies about South Africa." Five days later he was found dead in an open field. For his public

condemnation of the brutality unleashed by the South African regime to silence its critics, he had paid, with a bullet in his head.

RECENT YEARS have witnessed an escalating war between the regime and black children in South Africa. It can be described as little else; hundreds of children have testified to the virtual seige they find themselves under, at the hands of the security forces. And the facts, pieced together from individual testimonies, reports from monitoring organisations and civil rights groups, and some admissions from the authorities themselves, are grim.

SPECIAL FEATURE

An official police statement released in early 1987 had admitted that in the first six months of the latest and still ongoing state of emergency imposed in June 1986, among those detained were several children, including an unspecified number of 11 and 12-year olds, 21 aged 13, 88 aged 14, and 140 aged 15. Government figures had claimed that out of 7,710 people brought to court in 1986 on charges relating to 'causing unrest', 1,114 were under 16, and 2,076 between the ages of 16 and 18. More recently, figures calculated by independent monitoring bodies claimed that at least a total of 11,000 children had been detained by security forces over the past two years. The statistics differ wildly, but the fact is that in the past three years, a hitherto unprecedented number of black children have been the victims of official "security action."

Earlier this year, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize-winner and internationally-acclaimed opponent of apartheid made an impassioned statement: "Black South Africans have exercised the most remarkable patience in pressing for their rights. We have used many non-violent ways of trying to bring about change, such as strikes, rent strikes and consumer boycotts. The authorities have responded by

FANIE GODUKI:

Eleven-year old Fanie, a resident of Alexandra township, near Johannesburg, was incarcerated and tortured in 1986: "The police wanted me to say I was throwing stones in the township . . . I told them I did nothing and they said they would hit me until I told the truth. They hit me with pipes and with their fists. They kicked me all over with their big boots. They only stopped when my tooth came out. I was bleeding a lot and very sore. My mother came to visit me three times a week. I spoke to her through the bars. They let her stay for only five minutes. I used to cry when she left . . ."

declaring states of emergency and tightening emergency regulations. They ban peaceful protests, they detain our children, and they ban our leaders. Step by step, since 1985, President Botha's government has closed off avenue after avenue of peaceful political change."

A GLANCE AT THE STATE'S response to uprisings in recent decades would seem to confirm Desmond Tutu's contention that the authorities have deliberately obstructed peaceful negotiations and encouraged violence amongst the people in order to justify a military option: The '50s had seen the crushing of a non-violent defiance campaign; the protests of the '60s had resulted in the Sharpeville massacre and the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC); the uprisings against Bantu education, which began peacefully in 1976, turned violent following acute police repression. In the '80s, the pattern has continued, and with the emergence of mass resistance organisations, repression has intensified, especially since 1984, when troops were stationed in the black townships to crush popular resistance.

The utterance of every grievance, the mouthing of every plea for justice, the staging of any organised protest, has been interpreted as the breakdown of law and order. And, armed with the vast arsenal at their disposal, the many and varied law-enforcing agencies – the S A Defence Forces, the S A Police, the Municipal Police, armed vigilante groups, and soldiers – have patrolled the black townships, invaded schools, raided homes, prowled the squalid ghetto streets in mobile vans equipped with torture-inflicting machinery, and taken potshots at the black population.

And children have been especially targeted. Says Reverend Frank Chikane, Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches, "This is not surprising because since (the Soweto uprisings of) June 1976, the



Child victims of an SADF massacre.

most militant, energetic and courageous fighters against apartheid have been the youth and children."

EMPOWERED WITH A BELIEF in the inevitability of an end to white rule, the youth have defied Africa's largest and most sophisticated machinery of repression: they have marched against Bantu education; boycotted schools in protest against the presence of security forces; organised rent strikes; formed community organisations and defence units against the state-sponsored vigilante groups stationed to monitor activities and instill fear into the local population. And the truncheons, tear-gas, plastic bullets, birdshot and sjamboks (leather quirks) of the law-and-order machinery have been quick to greet them.



and added, "I believe the state is trying to intimidate children. In fact, it's not working. These children are growing up to believe that they will even die, now, in order to bring an end to apartheid."

AND INDEED, some of them have. A macabre pattern of mysterious murders and disappearances — reminiscent of Argentina — has been discernible; corpses, sometimes unidentifiable, have been retrieved from the roadsides, fields, and ditches of the sprawling bantustans (townships).

The uncle of 15-year old Leonard vividly recalls the night that 15 men came to his home after midnight and took away the boy; he was found the following day in the local mortuary. The government's own figures reveal that 209 juveniles were killed as a result of police action by South African Police in 1985-86; civil rights organisations claim that the figures are substantially higher, and have increased in subsequent years. These organisations have identified two distinct patterns in the pursuance of the regime's 'security' policy: the deliberate shootings of activists and student leaders, and the apparently random potshots taken at others. The latter has included the killings of children attending funeral vigils, the shooting of a 9-year old playing in his yard as well as that of a 14-month old baby who, fortunately, survived.

Nowhere is really safe: children have found themselves picked up from their homes, the streets, or while running errands to the shops, and one 11-year old was snatched and bundled into a waiting police van on his way to class from assembly. During protests and demonstrations, they have found themselves whipped with sjamboks, hit with batons, and the targets of tear gas, bullets, and rifle butts.

Linda Zana, an attorney, tells of the 12-year old — a TB sufferer — who was kicked in the chest, of another whose traumatic experiences reduced him to being a psychiatric case, of a third whose genitals received

electric shocks. And Audrey Coleman of the Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) reports: "I saw two little boys recently who were charged with public violence. One was 11, the other 12. The 11-year old had shocks applied to his genitals. The 12-year old actually had scars on his neck from the electric shock and his little fingers were burnt. He said he had been thrown up to the ceiling and dropped on a concrete floor, and alleges that he was made to kiss a corpse."

A SCHOOL BOY who had received 80 lashes from head to foot on his tiny, undernourished body during interrogation in a South African police station said, "A five-litre can of petrol was poured over me and one of the white policemen urinated on me. A tyre was put round my neck. But the police then decided not to set me alight as it seemed I did not know anything about the person they wanted." A 16-year old girl described her ordeal: "When I denied any knowledge of the burning of the policeman's house, the CID policeman beat me

MZIMKULU NGAMLANA:

Mzimkulu is 18 and was a member of the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress. He was arrested in a pre-dawn raid while asleep with his mother, sister and her young children. He says: "Soldiers came; they kicked me with their boots and punched me on the legs and chest. In the police station, two soldiers connected an electric tube to my leg and switched it on. It was bad. . . They were asking me questions about my friends. My mother brought me food but the soldiers ate it. In the prison, I was in solitary confinement. After three weeks I was released. My ears were bleeding and my head hurt." Mzimkulu explained that following his release, "I could not stand it. Every night I would hear gun shots. You cannot learn or do anything." Mzimkulu left South Africa in late 1986 and now lives in Tanzania.

Enough reports have been compiled of apparently random assaults, harassment and the indiscriminate shooting of youth in the streets, at school, on the way to shops, at funerals and vigils. The emergent pattern suggests that the attacks are not simply the actions of over-zealous security forces, but part of a deliberate policy of intimidating the youth, particularly school children. To this effect, the authorities have introduced curfews, door-to-door raids, and shows of force at funerals and meetings. Reverend Chikane recently disclosed that at one stage in the emergency, "schools were occupied by the security forces. School children reported that they were terrorised by the security forces. Soldiers and police interfered in the classes, attacked and shot children in the school grounds and whipped them into classes,"

SPECIAL FEATURE

again. They also put their hands on my throat and blindfolded me. Then I felt shocks at the top of my spine . . . for 10 minutes. I was sitting on the floor. While the shock treatment continued, one of the policemen put his feet on my knees."

There are hundreds of children who have similar anguished tales to tell. When confronted with reports of the repressive action of the security forces, the government has refused to comment. Sometimes it has denied their veracity. But the consistency and frequency of the number of reported incidents have made the case an overwhelming one. The DPSC recently published a dossier containing testimonies from 65 children about the assaults against them, in which it concludes: "At first, hearing these kinds of reports it would seem that the police and other security forces are involved in random acts of violence. However, when these reports are all taken together, what is most clear is the way in which such incidents add up to form a systematic campaign of terror against children, and indeed, against all township residents. It would seem that this campaign is intended to strike fear . . ."

THE SCALE OF DETENTIONS has

been without parallel. Although some reports claim that hundreds of children were released in 1987, it is estimated that more than 2,000 still remain in detention, most of them awaiting trial, many of whom will never be brought before the courts. Only an estimated five per cent of the 25 per cent charged, are convicted; charges against those detained are frequently dropped, but only after they have endured a protracted period in prison with little hope of redress. It is this process — the harrowing experience of arrest and indefinite detention — that is deemed to be punishment in itself.

Testimonies from the children suggest a fairly routine procedure: the child is arrested, most commonly on breach of security regulations, and escorted to a police cell. There, he or she is assaulted and then ensconced in a detention cell. During the assault — euphemistically termed 'interrogation' — children are required to answer questions or make statements about political activities that they or others known to them have been involved in. Sometimes they are tortured until they confess to crimes they have not committed. Vast numbers have thus been convicted on false evidence; vast numbers have also had charges against them drop-

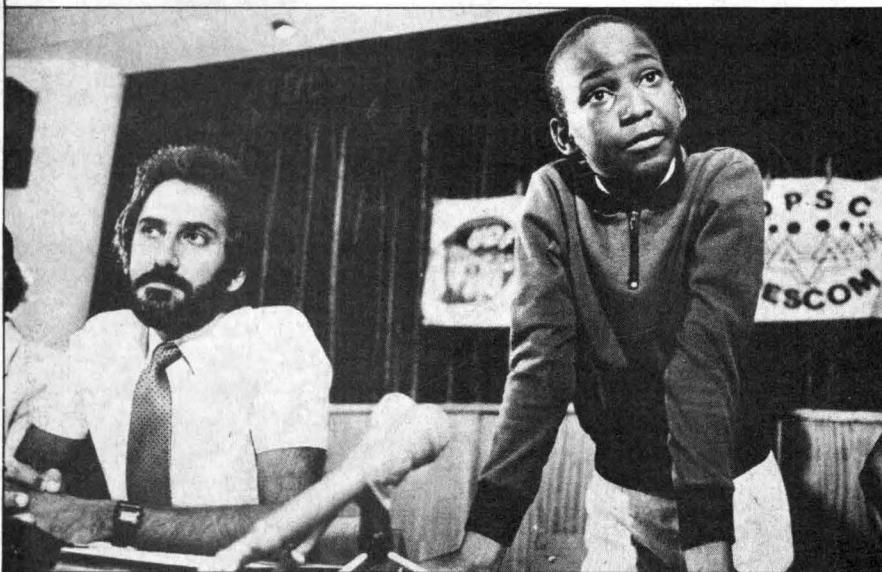


A seven-year old victim of South Africa's "security action".

ped for lack of evidence. But then it hasn't always been necessary to arrive at a conviction except when it is imperative that particular activists are put out of action. It is enough that while in detention itself, the children are taught a lesson they will never forget.

When six concerned doctors recently formed a team to examine some of the ex-detainees, the sheer workload forced them to rapidly expand their group to 30. Approximately 40 per cent of their referrals were children and adolescents, and in nearly 90 per cent of those, there was evidence to support allegations of mistreatment. Amongst the evidence cited by the medical team were broken limbs, renal failure, haemorrhage, severe bruising, post-traumatic stress, panic attacks and prolonged bouts of insomnia.

This apparently inhuman treatment, simultaneously a clear violation of children's rights, has been the state's strategy to contain the growing crisis. Political observers have commented that the Afrikaaner monolith is crumbling under the weight of its own contradictions: moderate political parties are in disarray, there is widespread political insurrection, the ultra-right Conservative Party is rapidly gaining increased support. President Botha's policy of "formative action" (reforms) to dissipate black anger, has been coupled with violent repression. And the President has sought to justify his strategy thus: "Official security action protects the



An 11-year old testifies to his 59-days in solitary confinement.



process of peaceful reform and ensures the necessary stability without which reform will be undermined by violence and revolution."

THE REGIME HAS attempted to cloak its violence in a thin veneer of legality, and during periods of emergency, the legal process has been bypassed altogether. An expanding array of laws and emergency regulations has sought to restrict dissent. The Internal Security Act 1982 and the Criminal Procedure Act, both of which permit detention in custody without trial, from anything from 48 hours to an indefinite period, have armed the forces with legal indemnity for the consequences of their actions. Both Acts allow for people to be held incommunicado and no one may publish names or details without official permission.

Other draconian pieces of legislation have barred organisations and/or their activities, outright. The Committee of South African Students (COSAS) was banned in 1985, and in 1987, a new set of rules barred university students from supporting outlawed organisations or from engaging in any form of civil disobedience — the maintenance of law and order on university campuses has now been designated to be the responsibility of the campus administration, who are forced to perform the duties of adjunct policemen.

MOST RECENTLY, in late January this year, in a move indicative of the ruling National Party's anxiety about its performance at the polls in two

important by-elections in pro-apartheid constituencies, 17 key anti-apartheid organisations were barred. "What we are facing now is a situation in which every single action we can take has been criminalised," said an activist. The new ruling has come in the wake of what Pretoria cites as the continuing "revolutionary climate." And it has reduced all existing security laws and emergency regulations to one single sweeping ban on "any activities or acts whatsoever." The banned organisations include the United Democratic Front (UDF) — a coalition of anti-apartheid political, religious and labour groups broadly aligned with the ANC — the DPSC and the Committee of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) amongst others.

The cumulative effect of the bans has been disastrous: groups have been forced to operate underground and political activity has been stifled. And avenues of communication have been blocked — the media is no longer legally available to alert the international community to the violence of the regime.

BURAS NHLABATHI:

Buras Nhlabathi is 17 and was President of the Thembisa Student Congress. To avoid police harassment, he was living away from home. He reports: "On October 8, 1986, I was arrested at 3.30 am by force, and beaten with fists, kicked and hit with the butts of guns for about 45 minutes. I was taken into an interrogation room (at Kenbasi police station) and questioned about posters and leaflets of banned organisations. When I refused to answer, I was beaten. For about 5 hours, they hit me with keys and pipes and sjamboks. I was also given electric shocks from handcuffs. I did not answer the questions, preferring to die. On the second day I was stripped and put in a rubber suit. A dummy was placed in my mouth so I couldn't scream. There was no air. They switched the electricity on. My muscles were pumping hard. I

There *are* pieces of legislation that are designed to offer protection to and guarantee the welfare and rights of children. For instance, the Child Care Act prohibits ill-treatment or neglect of children and declares it obligatory to provide food, clothing, medical care, and general support. The Internal Security Act, however, overrides these provisions, as do emergency regulations. The Criminal Procedure Act requires that trials of those between 7 and 18 years of age be heard in juvenile courts; in reality, these are little different from ordinary criminal courts, except that trials are held *in camera* (a fact which can further eclipse the sordid reality of what takes place behind closed doors), defendants may be assisted by parents, and sentencing can be somewhat milder than that meted out to adults. Moreover, the courts are obliged to inform parents/guardians that children are arrested only if they live in the same magisterial districts. So, more often than not, a child of 7 can be held, arrested, detained, tried, convicted, sentenced and imprisoned without his/her parents' knowledge.

couldn't see anything. When they switched off, they took the dummy out and said I should speak. When I refused, they put the dummy back and switched on again . . . I was stripped and put naked into a fridge. Then brought out again and put into the electric-shock suit. Then I was taken into an interrogation room. My hands, feet and head were tied to a pole and bright searchlights turned on. I felt my mind go dead. I couldn't see. I was dizzy. I was beaten again. I have scars on my right hip. I was then taken to Madupo prison . . . but no medical treatment. I was in prison for three months; two weeks in solitary confinement. I was not charged or tried or convicted of any offence. After my release I was told to report at 7.00 am and 7.00 pm every day. But I didn't. I spent five months in hiding before my escape." Buras now lives in exile.

SPECIAL FEATURE

No one has the right to information about a detainee or conditions of detention or even their release – unless authorised officially. If detainees submit evidence to court, the press may not publish the same till the court case is completed; often an out-of-court settlement is reached and consequently, evidence of maltreatment is never made public.

BLACK CHILDREN in South Africa have been robbed of their childhood by a regime that has reneged on its fundamental obligations to them. Those in the townships have been wrenched from any semblance of normal development and propelled into adulthood through pain, suffering and assault. Many adolescents in today's South Africa are forced to take decisions that only adults should; forced to accept employment in the face of abject poverty, before their strength and capabilities permit; forced to fight battles, participate in a civil war, almost, which they should not be fighting. Innocence has been rudely ousted to make way for experiences that have caused lasting damage, permanent trauma, and fuelled a growing anger.

Playgrounds in the townships now double as battlegrounds where stones and grenades are lobbed instead of balls; games of hide-and-seek have taken on real and menacing overtones; a trip to the shops or even to school is a dangerous prospect. And those, who to date have escaped the whiplashings, the electric-shock treatment, and the detention in overcrowded prisons, know only too well that with the intensification of 'security action', they could be next.

It must be remembered, however, that apartheid is not just about police shooting kids; it is not just the rule of the gun. The violence and repression that the black population faces at the receiving end of gun-toting police and army personnel are only a manifestation of the extreme measures that the regime is prepared to adopt to defend itself. Police bullets are meant to maim and kill their tar-



Defiance in the face of Africa's most powerful machinery of repression.

gets, but only if poverty hasn't claimed them first. There is another, more subtle, violence at work.

APARTHEID, LITERALLY "separate development" and described in one South African textbook as "founded upon Christian principles of rights and justice," is a system of legislative and bureaucratic controls that permits not only racial segregation but the exploitation of a majority of people. It involves the denial of social, economic, political and human rights, simply on the basis of colour. It is a system which is based on the systematic containment of 87 per cent of its population. It is this reality that shapes and defines the role of black youth. It tells them what they can become, and more importantly, what they can't. It ensures deprivation and exploitation through the application of laws devised to prop up the system; it ensures that hunger, malnutrition, high infant mortality, chronic disease, and illiteracy will repress the black population from birth.

Black children have been defined as the 'internal refugees' of apartheid, confined and contained in congested, squalid townships – among the largest ghettos of the world – where they eke out a miserable existence.

Labour and influx control laws ensure that the movement of migrant workers is controlled and carefully monitored. Where both parents seek to earn their living in the mines, farms or kitchens of their rulers, children often find themselves left behind in the care of elderly grandparents, confronted with poverty and disease at every turn.

In the early phases of the development of apartheid, the regime considered it inappropriate for black children to be educated beyond the level of unskilled workers. With economic development and the need to develop a large, semi-skilled working class, greater investments were made in Bantu education, locally referred to as "gutter education". A distinctly inferior system of education to that which the whites enjoy, black people have perceived its *raison d'être* to be their continuing subjugation, to inform them that they are fit only for labouring jobs or petty services, to teach them that they can never be the equal of whites, and that they can never hope for better. This education cannot prepare them for the highly competitive socio-economic environment around them; black people are merely being grounded to take their place in an economy and

NTHABISAN MABUSA:

Nthabisan, '13, lives in Harare. On June 14, 1986, she was visiting her aunt in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, when the Defence Forces attacked the city. "I went into the bedroom to get something and I heard a bang. I went out and saw a masked man. I turned to run and was shot; I continued to run away but another man stood in front of me and knocked me down. I was shot in the back. . ." Nthabisan is now paralysed from the waist down and learning to walk with crutches; she still has nightmares and is frightened even by the bang of a door.

WILLIAM MODIBEDI:

In October 1986, 11-year old William was detained for two months and two days in a mortuary, a dark room, and a cell in the vicinity of Krugersdorp. William, in a very brief testimony, said: "They (the police) said I burned cars and shops." They also knocked all his teeth out during his detention. He is still dazed and confused by all that he has been through.

society where racial discrimination is the prime determinant of an individual's position in the system.

It is this grim reality, which has worsened in recent years as the black population has found itself in the grip of escalating unemployment and an economic squeeze, that has given rise to anger, and rebellion.

THE REGIME HAS TAKEN effective precautions to ensure that the already considerable international outrage against the apartheid system is not accelerated. In the wake of the latest state of emergency, an official proclamation declared that the only information on the security situation available to journalists is that disclosed, announced, released or otherwise authorised by the government,

revealed in Parliament, or emanating from judicial proceedings. Reports on 'unrest', 'resistance', and 'actions by security forces', for dissemination at home or abroad, must be cleared by the Bureau of Information. And 'unrest' and 'resistance' have been defined to cover a wide spectrum of activities including school boycotts, rent-strikes, rallies addressed at funerals, 'street committees' established in the townships, the formation of 'people's courts' and much else besides. The regime clearly means business: a violation of censorship rules can invite a fine the equivalent of Rs 60,000 and imprisonment for a period upto 10 years.

Evidently, the media ban has had the desired results. A shroud of silence envelops the most recent initiatives adopted by Pretoria to consolidate its grip over the sizzling situation and quash any hint of rebellion. And although some courageous journalists, photographers and film-makers have managed to smuggle out damning reports of apartheid's latest atrocities and document, powerfully, the attempts by the black population to organise against them, more remains hidden from public scrutiny than not. And that is the way that President P W Botha would want it. After all, it offers the ruling party carte blanche to implement its stringent legislations, emergency regulations, and sweeping bans to diffuse the rising resistance and facilitate the "process of peaceful reform," safe from public gaze.

AMONG THE MORE ingenious attempts to circumvent the ban and alert the international community to South African history in the making, was a conference held in Harare, Zimbabwe, in late 1987. Representatives of about 150 organisations from all over the world attended the meet to listen to the 300-odd South Africans, including the many children present, on what Oliver Tambo, President of the ANC, described as "the unspeakable plight of the black children of South Africa." The assembled doc-

tors, lawyers, social workers, community activists, politicians and students paid close attention to what a number of the victims — the most significant witnesses of the unprecedented brutality of the South African regime — had to say. Obviously and visibly traumatised by the events that had so drastically and irrevocably reshaped their destinies, several of the children, armed with courage and assurances of safe passage to and from South Africa, reportedly delivered shocking and heart-rending testimonies about their experiences — of the raids, arrests, detention in inhuman conditions, beatings and torture — sometimes in barely audible whispers.

A boy's mother told the audience of her seemingly never-ending and futile search to find her two daughters and one son — all scattered in prisons across the country. Another spoke of her relief at locating her children, a relief rapidly replaced by horror on hearing distressing tales of what they had endured at the hands of the security forces. Still others described the travails of a life underground, the permanent separation from near and dear ones, the anxiety involved in trying to pursue a semblance of normal living, always afraid of the knock on the door.

A priest who had assisted the passage of an 11-year old delegate and was interpreting his statements, probably echoed the fears of many of those present when he told the conference, "This comrade here is afraid because he is going back." Where the 11-year old is today, is anybody's guess. He just may be endeavouring to catch up with an interrupted education and recovering from his ordeal in prison. Or perhaps he resides in another country, safe from the tentacles of South Africa's law-and-order machinery. Then again, he may well have hurled a stone at a passing police van, in a gesture of his unbridled anger against what he clearly perceives to be his enemy, and been incarcerated. And of course, he could always have succumbed to a bullet. ♦

Election Gambits?



The escalation of pro-LTTE agitations in Tamil Nadu, instigated mainly by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Dravida Kazhagam and the Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress, and an alarming upsurge of criminal activity by militants in the state, point irrefutably to the importance of the Sri Lankan issue in the forthcoming assembly elections. INDRANI SRIKRISHNA provides an update.

TWOULD APPEAR that the Lankan Tamil issue will be a prime consideration when Tamil Nadu goes to the polls to elect the new Assembly following the dismissal of the Mrs Janaki MGR Government by the President earlier this year. Even though



public anger is no longer as strong or evident as it was during the anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka, way back in the months of July and August, 1983, the fact remains that the Tigers of Jaffna still command a following and have pockets of influence across the Palk Strait.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and the Tamil Nadu Kamaraj Congress (TNKC) have been in the forefront of pro-LTTE agitations in the state in the past few months, and despite the criticism that they are backing the Tigers only to gain personal political advantage, the truth is that their programmes have caused a fair amount of embarrassment to the Congress (I) and the Union Government.

The Congress (I) is yet to find the appropriate strategy with which to counter the pro-Tiger campaigns of the regional outfits in Tamil Nadu. But in the meantime, there has been tremendous assistance from Doordarshan, whose news editors risk life and limb every other day to hop over to Tigerland in the vehicles of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to collect evidence of LTTE excesses and the consequent public revulsion, and beam the clips all over the state.

A senior Doordarshan official, who, for obvious reasons, did not want to be named, said: "I have been on the LTTE hit-list since November last year. The IPKF had picked up intelligence over the Tigers' communication system to the effect that I should be caught dead or alive, because I broadcast the truth that the LTTE is trying to hide. I have shown clips of interviews conducted in the public bazaar that show that the IPKF is really popular, as the ordinary person desired peace quickly and held the LTTE responsible for delaying it. The Doordarshan features on Lanka have been well-received in Tamil Nadu and that has brought upon us not only the wrath of the Tigers but also that of political parties like the DMK, DK and the TNKC. I have been receiving threatening calls at my residence for several weeks now."

AFTER A SERIES OF protest meetings, marches and bandhs on the Eelam issue, voicing demands for the withdrawal of the IPKF and a cessation of the 'hunt' for the Tiger sup-

remo, Velupillai Pirabhakaran, the DMK-led front has now quietened down to some extent, amidst speculations that Delhi is negotiating a peace settlement with the LTTE.

The wily politician that he is, Muthuvel Karunanidhi, the DMK President, appears to already be preparing a seemingly honourable retraction in the event of the Tigers making peace with India. "It is wrong to say that we are compromising on the Eelam issue only for our own political gains. When we revolted in support of the LTTE, it was only with a genuine concern for the welfare of the Tamils in Eelam and it was certainly not to provide for ourselves a political platform here. And if, finally, the Tigers make peace with Delhi, one must be gracious enough to admit that the fierce pro-LTTE campaigns undertaken by us in Tamil Nadu did go a long way in paving the way for an honourable settlement," says Nanchil K Manoharan, the Deputy General Secretary of the DMK.

On April 25, at a public meeting in Colombo, Sri Lankan President Junius Jayewardene told those assembled that "the LTTE are on their last legs; very soon they will be defeated and we can live peacefully."

But the big question is: when will that peace with the Tigers come about? Already, the official IPKF death toll has crossed 400 during their seven-month offensive, ironically christened 'Operation Pawan', but the Tiger estimates, freely circulated among the media in Madras, easily suggest a figure twice the amount. The LTTE, too, have suffered large-scale reverses on the field and are said to be virtually on the run in most areas.

In Madras, media speculations predicting an announcement of peace by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the recent session of the AICC (I) conference held at nearby Maraimalai-nagar, were rife. But he merely reiterated the Indian position that "the doors for negotiations with the LTTE are open, provided they lay

down their arms and declare acceptance of the Indo-Lanka Accord." Obviously, the meetings with the Tiger representatives, which were reported to have been taking place in Delhi over the last couple of months, have not yet yielded results to facilitate the progress of the ever-evasive settlement.

FROM THE UNREASONABLY high position that he previously occupied, the Tiger leader, Pirabhakaran, has now climbed several steps down in an effort to preserve his decimated outfit. He had earlier been demanding the return of the IPKF to pre-offensive positions in addition to a total ban on other groups fighting for Eelam. Both these demands have now been withdrawn even while acceding, in principle, to the surrender of all firearms, except those "required for the personal safety of the LTTE leadership."

Under the peace settlement currently under negotiation, it is said that India would ensure a pre-eminent place for the Tigers on any interim administration established, pending elections in a unified Northeastern Sri Lanka, and that the LTTE, in return, would surrender to the IPKF approximately two-thirds of their estimated 1,500 arms. Moreover, it is required that the Tigers not obstruct the 'political' functioning of other Tamil outfits in Lanka — a much-needed stipulation to ensure the moderate 'Tamil United Liberation Front' (TULF) Secretary General, Appapillai Amirthalingam's return to the island from his safe refuge in the Government Guest House at Madras, for the man has been declared a traitor by the Tigers and 'sentenced' to death.

Although the Tigers have suffered reverses on the field, they have succeeded in isolating rival militant groups both from the Tamil Nadu political parties as well as the people. Delhi appears content to recognise the LTTE as the principal factor in a consideration of its Lankan strategy,

while neglecting the other groups as either 'irrelevant' or 'taken for granted'. And the major opposition parties in Tamil Nadu, too, are pursuing this line of thinking. "As a result, we are being treated rather shabbily," laments Douglas Devananda, leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). "My boys here are virtually starving because funds have dried up and the government of Tamil Nadu which had, during MGR's time, announced cash awards for our sustenance until our return home, has since stayed aloof."

THE STARVING CADRES of defunct militant outfits and the fugitives from prominent Eelam groups such as the PLOTE (People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam), TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation) and EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front) have been prime suspects in several incidents of armed robberies in Tamil Nadu. Earlier, these 'boys' had indulged in thefts only from Lankan Tamil families living as refugees in different parts of the state. But they have now spread their nets wider and are targeting the Indian nationalised banks, local families and petrol stations.

"We have been alerted to the thefts of over ten motorcycles in this locality in the last couple of months," said an officer at K K Nagar Police Station, located in the Southwestern edge of Madras city. "And the suspects are mostly the Eelam militants."

The bomb attack on the TV relay station at the hill resort of Kodaikanal on April 11, a gelatine blast on the previous day at the Nehru statue near Madras airport, the recent looting of a branch of the Indian Bank at Mamangalam in South Arcot District, a bank robbery attempt in Madurai, and the arrest of a top leader of a local naxalite-type extremist outfit on April 10, who was caught carrying about 100 country-made bombs — all these incidents have succeeded in neutralising, to some extent, the anti-IPKF propaganda by the DMK front.

It is this upsurge of criminal activity by the militants that, to a large extent, has blunted local pro-Eelam enthusiasm in Tamil Nadu. And the Congress (I) has been quick to capitalise on prevailing sentiments and vilify the DMK campaigners for their anti-nationalism due to their encouragement of violent extremists.

While the Congress (I) has been attacking the DMK for instigating militancy in Tamil Nadu only to destabilise the existing political system and turn the tide in its favour, the DMK has maintained that the LTTE is a very disciplined outfit whose cadres would never indulge in any illegal activities in the host territory, nor



A pro-Eelam "human-chain" de

would they aid local extremist outfits in such activities. The DMK has also maintained that it is only some breakaway groups from other Eelam organisations which have been indulging in such violence and criminal activities, and that the blame was being laid at the door of the LTTE only to embarrass DMK efforts to garner public support for the organisation which is threatened with extinction by the IPKF.

BUT CONGRESS (I) LEADERS are not impressed, and among them, the Union Minister of State for Home, P Chidambaram, is in the forefront of the battle against the DMK President,

Karunanidhi, often describing him as anti-national for his alleged support for the LTTE. Chidambaram has been quick to cash in on Karunanidhi's threat that unless the IPKF halts its offensive against the Tigers, Tamil Nadu will become "another Punjab" where "rivers of blood would then flow," and has tried to use this to his advantage by posing rhetorical questions at recent public meetings: "Does not this talk of turning this state into another Punjab betray the secessionist tendencies of Karunanidhi's party? And what is he going to do to turn Tamil Nadu into another Punjab — force the temple priests here to join separatist politics? Or will he turn the temples into dens of extremists? Or will Karunanidhi grow a beard (like a Sikh)?"

The newly-appointed PCC (I) President, G K Moopanar, too, has not minced words when delivering a public warning to Karunanidhi that he indeed needs to amend his stand on Eelam and ponder over its relevance to his duty to the people of Tamil Nadu: "Should he not be a bit more responsible than supporting the intransigent LTTE with all its links with the local Naxalite organisations indulging in violent activities in Tamil Nadu?"

But the DMK leader is not one who can be checkmated without a fight. "They are linking us to these bomb blasts and bank robberies only to brand the DMK as anti-national and impose a ban on the party contesting elections. Unable to meet us at the polls, the Congress(I) leadership is indulging in this conspiracy," avers Karunanidhi.

HOWEVER, IT DOES NOT APPEAR that the man and his party are all that innocent for some of the suspects arrested by the state Intelligence Wing for complicity in violent crimes have turned out to be either DMK party-men or sympathisers. Besides, the main suspect organisation, 'Tamilar Viduthalai Padai' (translated into English, 'Tamil Liberation Army'),

identified as being a Naxalite-type group based in the three northern districts of the state — South Arcot, North Arcot and Tiruchy — has left behind posters at blast sites with demands which echo those of the DMK, including the withdrawal of the IPKF and the stopping of the imposition of Hindi in Tamil Nadu.

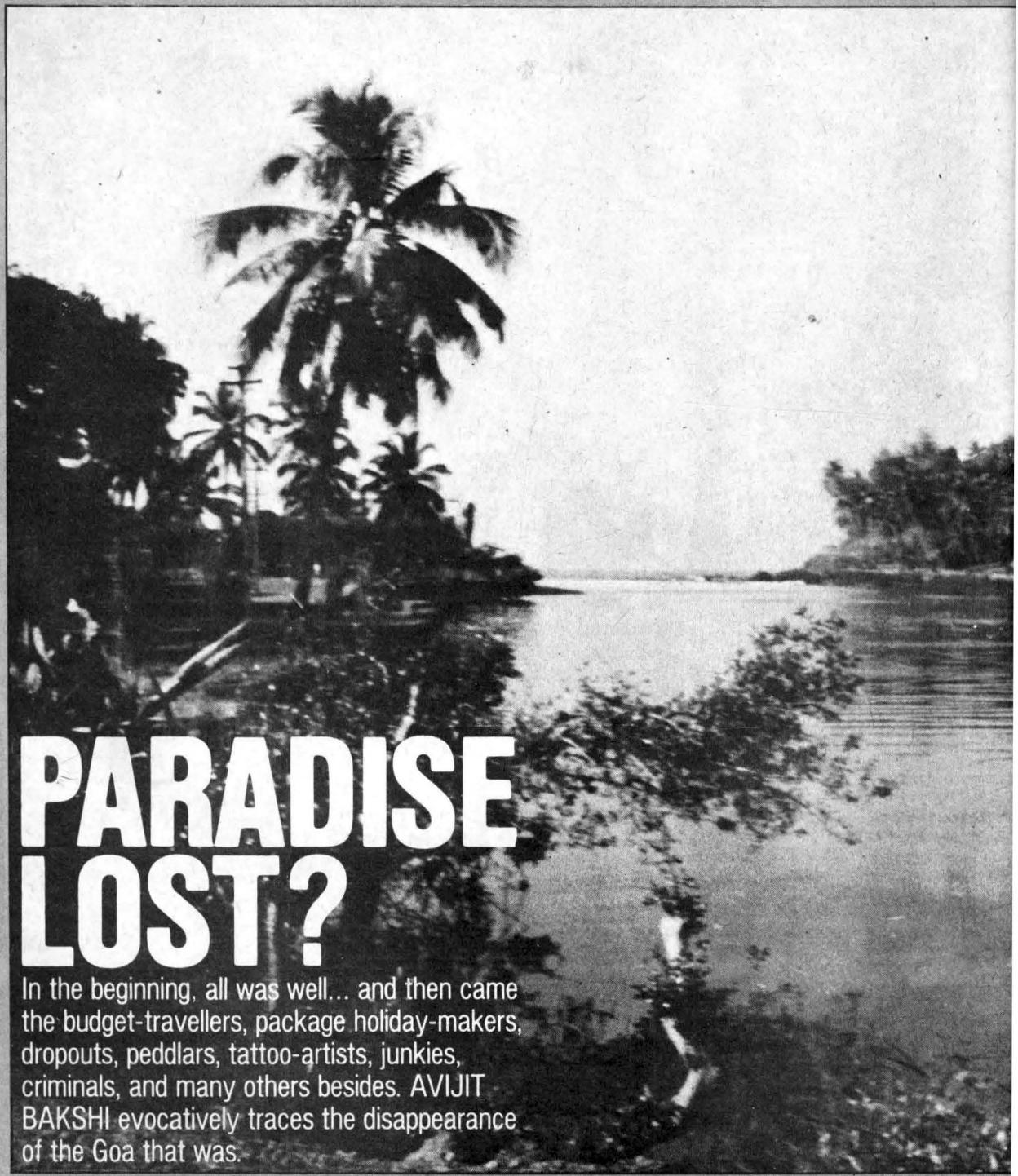
"We have also got some evidence to link up certain DMK members with bomb blasts that took place in the state during that party's anti-Hindi agitation last year," claims a senior police officer. It appears they have also received some kind of training in handling explosives and firearms from some Lankan Tamil militant drop-outs. The news is enough to make the prospects of what could occur at the next general election in Tamil Nadu appear grim, as previously, pre-election violence was confined to sticks and swords, soda-water bottles and cycle-chains.

The Communists have remained firm in their condemnation of the LTTE and the organisation's local ally, the DMK. "Is it not of significance that Karunanidhi has not yet issued even a formal statement to condemn these bomb explosions and bank robberies in Tamil Nadu?" asked septuagenarian CPI leader M Kalyanasundaram.

The fierce pro-LTTE/anti-IPKF campaigns conducted by the DMK-led front late last year gave way to the excitement caused by the string of political upheavals following the sudden death of the AIADMK's charismatic leader, MGR, on December 24, 1987. And now, for the last couple of months, the DMK agitation on this issue has been rather subdued, as much time has been spent hunting for suitable epithets with which to fence the new contender for leadership in the state, Ms Jayalalitha. Besides, there is the strong possibility of a peace package emerging from Delhi's talks with LTTE emissaries and Karunanidhi would not want to have his position suddenly eroded by a ceasefire in Sri Lanka. ♦

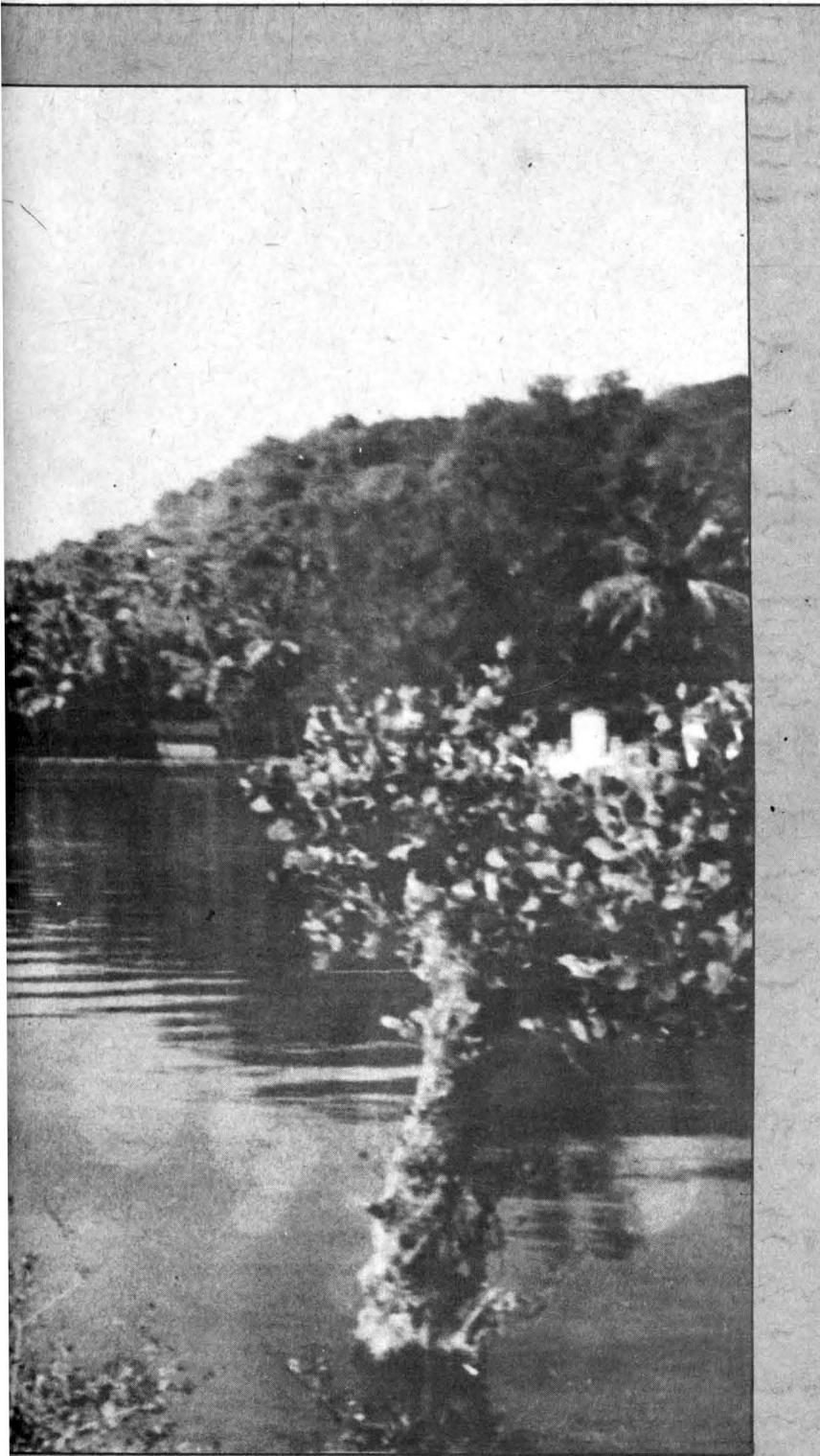


withdrawal of the IPKF forces.



PARADISE LOST?

In the beginning, all was well... and then came the budget-travellers, package holiday-makers, dropouts, peddlars, tattoo-artists, junkies, criminals, and many others besides. AVIJIT BAKSHI evocatively traces the disappearance of the Goa that was.



REMINISCENT OF AN emerald hung between the azure sky and cyan sea, Goa lies tucked into the West coast of India. It is a land of low hills and shallow valleys, webbed by a system of rivers and rivulets down which sailboats and cargo-laden barges can be seen as the steamer from Bombay approaches Panaji in the early hours of the morning. Panaji, the capital, is a growing township on the banks of the Mandovi river, but has retained its quaintness — modern high-rises have not yet blotted out the old architecture. Visitors walking along the promenade cannot fail to notice the broken bridge over the Mandovi, a section of which toppled into the river last year. So those heading for the palm-fringed golden beaches of North Goa must now take the ferry service across the Mandovi to where the buses depart from.

The local buses are fairly colourful, with names laying claim either to jet propulsion or Gothic romance. Chocolate-skinned drivers sporting tinted glasses switch on the radio, only to blast passengers with the cricket score or thumping music, while pretty young local girls are ushered solicitously into the best seats by cocky young conductors. Soon, packed to capacity and trailing a cloud of red dust, the bus thunders away through not-so-sleepy villages. Each village is a reflection of the one before: chapel on hilltop, church in the square, dogs, and dark-skinned inhabitants whose names — Bartolomeo Da Costa or Tertuliano Tomas De Souza — evoke another; bygone, era. Beach-lovers are now confronted with a string of beaches, from Aguada to Baga, over the river and hills to Anjuna, over the hills again to Little Vagator, Vagator, and so on, up the West coast.

AT LITTLE VAGATOR, there is a hill at the south end. The hill is conspicuous because of its dense vegetative cover in a relatively bare area. Like other Goan seaside hills, it turns a corner into rocky cliffs, whose bot-

ESSAY



tom the sea has carved into large irregular niches where idling tourists sit, fishing, at low tide. Approached from the beach, a slim path vanishes into the dense greenery of the hill; a little shack lies to the side of the path. But the hill is not what it seems to be; a commune has carved terraced dwellings into the entire hill area, dwellings whose roof and perimeter are provided by abundant foliage. Sitting on the mud-packed floor of one of these dwellings, a visitor might glimpse an expanse of open beach and blue sea; behind him, ranged along the hillside wall, a bundle of firewood, tents, sleeping bags, a Gillette shaving set and other personal belongings; beside him, a small dug-in brick fireplace, tongs, and a pair of wooden *padukas* studded with sparkling blue precious stones set in a circle inscribed with astronomical signs. On full-moon nights, members of this commune, in collaboration with local Indian *sadhus*, seek to draw power from the moon. Any unwary or curious tourist is told in no uncertain terms to 'fuck off' by a group of resident *chillum*-inspired god-men. An old way of life struggles to preserve itself, fashioned by the hippies who first discovered Goa in the '60s and are responsible for what it became.

The hippies found in Goa a pristine place of calm and unshattered ecology — vast silent stretches of sparkling beach, swaying green palms and a blue-oh-so-blue water enveloped in the rhythm of waves and wind. A place without multitudes in whose wide interspaces the solitary could grasp the full impact of an otherwise unreal cosmic grandeur, transformed by the keen poetry of a thin slice of moon stapled obliquely onto a starry night sky, into whose depths a mighty shout might vanish, breaking against nothing, distorting nothing, sucked, as it were, into the elements. A land of elemental elements, yet capable of a soothing gentility, like its people, tolerant and imbued with an unhurried, easy sense of life. The hippies found themselves welcomed with the hospitality extended to a guest; they were content with the space made for them, their material needs and wants were few. Their desire for harmony, non-interference and space was fulfilled. In Goa they discovered an ideal retreat. And the Goans shared their land, food and time, and in the beginning, all was well...

SOON, NEWS OF THIS new-found haven began to spread, drawing in its

wake a smattering of the budget travellers, holiday-seekers and dropouts of the world. Criminals soon followed, either to seek sanctuary, hibernate, or supply drugs. Many young Goans, evincing more than a cursory interest in the free ways of this floating community, soon became integral to it. People who had run out of money or simply wanted to dump their material belongings, would display their wares — used jeans, sleeping bags, tents, cameras, cassettes, books and pornography (much in demand) — to eager Indian buyers on top of a cliff at Anjuna, precursor to the now-famous flea market.

As this floating community grew in size, so did its attendant needs. Besides the hippies and nature-lovers who lived in fended rooms for six months, cooked their own food, and shared the village toilets (cleaned by pigs) with the locals, holiday-seekers started to arrive. They needed clean rooms, WCs, and some kind of a restaurant, and the Goan who was hitherto content with renting out a room, now found it profitable to venture into other aspects of the tou-

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rist business.

Traders from around the country arrived to take advantage of this blossoming market and supply what the foreigners were known to love. Rajasthani *banjaras* with their exquisite jewellery and handicrafts, oily young Kashmiris proudly displaying intricately woven carpets and precious stones, friendly Tibetans touting religious bric-à-brac, and other peddlars of sundry exotica all set up shop along the beachfront or hawked their wares. Tattoo-artists, ear-cleaners, masseurs, fruit and cake-sellers began to work the beaches. Shops selling paraphernalia like G-strings, T-shirts, colourful cotton jackets, *lungis*, and oil, mushroomed. Shacks boasting names like 'Two Sisters', 'Electric Bats' and 'Trip Inn Place' offered food, drink and Jimi Hendrix. Concurrently, there sprouted too, subtle stirrings of unease among the Goans, as is now happening in the minds of the Ladhakhs of Northeastern India. Mobility and the material goods of a visiting people must derive from wealth and comfort, the display of which inevit-

ably arouses in the visited a desire for betterment! This desire was not acute, as unlike the rest of India, Goans have not known wretched poverty. But in their simple, traditional, warm values and manners, a materialism began to creep in, accompanied by a sliver of competitiveness against the immigrant Indian traders.

YET, THROUGH ALL THIS, the tranquillity of Goa — its courteous people, languid afternoons, and serene twilights — remained intact enough to absorb its visitors into its pace of life. No one — as they say — 'hassled you, man!' Goa was still a gift to its visitors, to be savoured, experienced, enjoyed.

At dawn, the fishermen could be seen far out at sea in their dugouts, whilst eager family members, dogs and visitors waited on the shore to help each boat up the beach, inspect and discuss the catch, take their share, some making on-the-spot buys, others enjoying the general bustle and nip in the air. As it got warmer, bathers would stake out claims to the beach by spreading colourful *lungis*, and swim, dream or read as the day

crept over them. During the hot afternoon, sitting in a shack, sipping banana shake, puffing at the ubiquitous joint, listening to reggae, time would pass as if in a dream, unhurried, unlamented. At night, the sparkling phosphorescence in the water almost always occasioned an impromptu party.

News of this lifestyle, coupled with rumours of wanton pleasure, spread and stirred the hedonist fancies of hitherto uninterested Indians, and the tourists themselves became a tourist attraction. Many young Indians arrived to emulate their lifestyle, imbibe their values and join them. Others less impressionable, less adventurous, or otherwise disinclined, discovered for themselves the charms of rural Goa, resulting in a traffic of honeymooners and families desirous of getting away from it all. Still others came to watch, just to watch.

SO GOA'S RENOWN as a dream holiday grew, and yet more tourists poured in. Among them were tourists who now wanted something specific out of Goa, be it salvation, sex or paradise; they demanded their mo-



ESSAY



ney's worth, or there was hell to pay. Unlike the hippies, these tourists did not care to make friends, just to make deals, buys and bargains. What had been an irregular sale of personal belongings at Anjuna, grew into the flea market, famous for its charming, tempting, Hollywood atmosphere. People from all over the world congregated here in a riot of colours to buy and sell the odd item from unheard-of corners of the globe. Captivated by the medieval fair-like atmosphere and the sheer range of items, visitors usually left having bought something. At sunset, after the market had packed up and most of the crowd had left, preparations for the customary party began. As the music sounded, part-time beatniks from the surrounding areas filtered in: to dance, hang out, and do their own thing.

Each year, as richer tourists arrived, the Goans had to adapt to their demands and the hippies, horrified, left in quest of solitude for the remoter, more northern beaches or to the riparian interiors, hoping to regain their lost paradise until the inexorable tide of tourists caught up with them again. These new tourists were not content with the old slow service, basic amenities and laid-back ambience. They wanted more than just

'sun, sand 'n' sea'. They had bought a package back home comprising locals, service, food, comfort, shopping, exotic atmosphere, etc, and they were out to get it.

THE GOAN NOW PERCEIVED the tourist as a source of profit, as a statistic, and although he was still courteous and polite by nature, the warmth had vanished. Prosperity became directly proportional to tourist inflow. Sleepy family businesses now had all the trappings of a conventional restaurant: cook, waiters, napkins, tableware, cutlery, decor, et al. Rented rooms were provided with attached toilets, a change of bedsheets, and even flowers on a low table. Like many others, Calangute, a once idyllic beachfront town, had its palm tree-shaded somnolence ruptured by the cacophony of myriad tourist conveyances. Regular disco music punctuated the tranquillity, and ugly, unharmonious, concrete hotel structures scarred the semi-rural landscape. Unlike the hippies of yore, the latter-day tourists did not care much for the environment; the beaches began to get littered and the water polluted with the increased trade. Whores arrived to soothe the longings of those for whom the projected Goan

dream of paradise had not come true.

Along with this new-found prosperity, Goans found the price of land, food and materials rising, found money and the video canonized, found the values of the modern 'civilised' world catching up. Crime and drug addiction soared, forcing the government to crack down on drug-runners. But to no avail; drugs were as freely available as ever, and the people of Goa, faced with the changing values of its youth, and the passing of a former lifestyle, turned cynical, rude and insular. The beachfront no longer provided an uninhibited solace, people had to be careful. A general friendliness now existed only in pockets, and was slowly becoming eroded. And so its face kept changing, till we have the Goa of today.

WHERE EVERYDAY AT NOON

and a few hours before dusk, groups of buses from Belgaum and Panaji arrive at the beaches, to vomit hordes of oglers avidly searching for nude female flesh. They have been promised nude beaches by the operators and have paid good money. They disperse

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onto the beach in groups, hovering indiscreetly around single women. Some, imbued with the boldness of alcohol and numbers, may peer closer for a better look. No one is exempt from their comments or inspection. And their numbers increase each season.

Today, when one is approaching the excitement of a full-moon party at Anjuna, the area is swamped by motorcycles, mopeds, jeeps, etc. Food and drink stalls have been set up and although it is twilight, the crowd is already a thousand strong. The first of the whores have begun to show up and a few stray drunks have already passed out or begun to howl. The psychedelic music lights up, junk and drunks circulate, looking for easy pickups, the moon hangs in the sky lending the atmosphere an eerie edge. This, from what started out as a fortnightly gathering where everybody was invited, and still is, to let their hair down, luxuriate in the beauty of the night and have fun in sylvan surroundings. The irony is bitter.

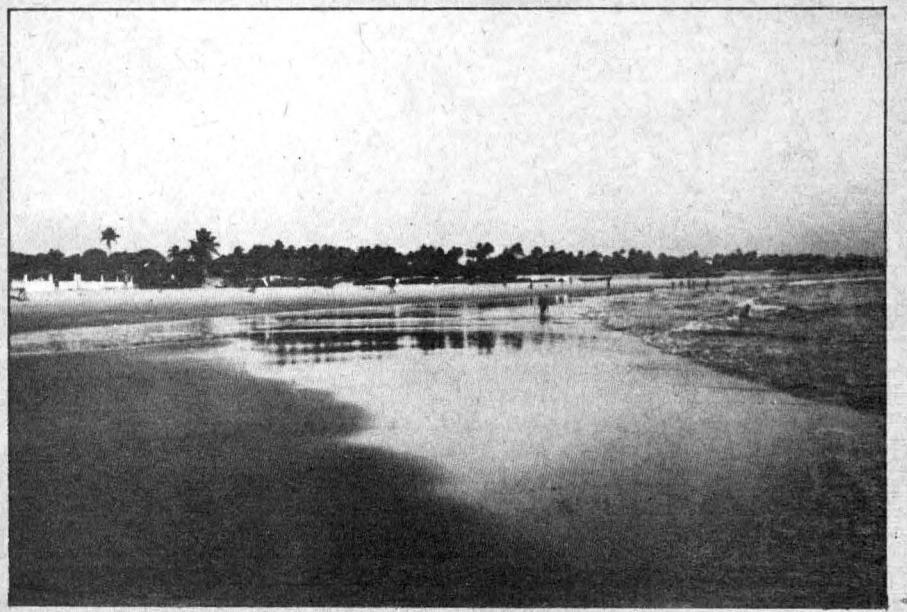
So, like that hill at little Vagator, Goa, today, has retained its outer

form, inwardly pitted with the aberrant confluence of diverse cultures. Like its dwellings under the veneer of foliage, Goa has created its own fantasy land of material and spiritual exotica where each looks to their own special desires. Like its inhabitants who have stripped the adjacent areas bare for firewood, and can now only strip the surrounding foliage; increased tourism has drained Goa's resources to the utmost. Should the dwellers now strip their own homes, do without firewood and heat, or find another way? This seems to be the dilemma of the Goan people, and yet more tourists pour in.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS expressed a wish to demolish the present beachfront structures, thus uprooting the lifestyle and environment of its people, in order to construct a chain of 5-star hotels, 5-star hotels which cordon off areas of beach for the exclusive use of their guests; native fisherfolk may not use the beach, thereby shattering their economy. Like the proverbial last straw, the pockets of *licensed* hedonism of the rich will appropriate the elemental wind and waves for higher profits.

Traditional owners of beachfront property have been warned of the impending takeover and are fearful of developing their present properties further. Licences for shacks are harder to procure each year. They are being shifted further back as they don't 'look nice.' Development is inevitable, says the government. Development for whom and for what, questions the beachfront populace.

Goans are an educated lot, asserts an article in *Goa Today*, and will not be content working as bell-boys or captains. Goan youth is being morally corrupted by the tourist: many have joined nudist communes, or been wasted by drugs, alleges a women's organisation, and promiscuity is rampant. But then, Goa is being projected as a sexual paradise by the government in its advertisements abroad, lending credence to fears that Goa may soon resemble Bangkok. Already, groups of aggressive tourists have misbehaved with local girls. Operation 'Dress Up' for nudists and 'Cold Turkey' for drug abusers have been started by members of a vigilante organisation. They greeted the first charterload of tourists with a shower of cowdung. ♦



APRIL 3, 1988. The sun had set over Dharavi, Asia's largest slum, and the shadows of twilight had already lengthened into night. The familiar bustle that usually prefaces the settling down to domestic chores had barely begun when the air was rent with cries of 'Fire!'. Within seconds, all that was visible were tongues of flame leaping sky-high, greedily devouring everything in sight, wantonly throwing eerie shadows on the grim landscape. There was utter pandemonium as residents scurried away in panic, clutching whatever they could salvage from their burning homes. Initial attempts to control the fire proved futile and, helped by a strong breeze, the fire spread over Prem Nagar in no time. And it continued, defiantly, relentlessly, despite the efforts of the Fire Brigade's 40 fire-tenders, poorly assisted by six water tankers that remained handicapped for lack of water supply. In other parts of the city, people experienced fluctuations in the electricity supply — the Tata Power Supply Station cables that passed overhead had been damaged — and several neighbourhoods were plunged into darkness. The havoc wreaked by the fire was colossal: 1,100 dwellings that had provided shelter, of sorts, to thousands of poor people — semi-skilled workers, domestics, the unemployed — had been razed to the ground.

The fire at Dharavi is the latest in a spate of fires that have devastated Bombay's slums over the past eight months. The first occurred on October 10, 1987, when 170 huts at Mariamma Nagar, Worli, were destroyed, setting what was to become an alarming precedent. Within a fortnight of the tragedy, 100 huts were consigned to the flames that raged through a slum colony in Kandivili, and hardly had the embers died down when, on October 30, a fire at Ambedkar Nagar, Cuffe Parade, killed two and razed nearly 400 huts to the ground. Barely a fortnight had elapsed when newspaper headlines screamed of another, far more devastating inferno — a staggering total of 2,000 huts from eight



Burning Questions

In recent months, several slum colonies scattered across Bombay have been ravaged by outbreaks of fire. With devastating results: 3,000 homes have been gutted, property worth Rs 45 crore has been destroyed and more than 17,000 people rendered homeless. Accidents? Bizarre coincidences? Arson? The victims talk to SHEKHAR GHOSH.

slum colonies in Mahalaxmi were burnt to cinders around midnight on November 14. The pattern seemed to repeat itself the following month — three slum fires took their toll in Matunga Labour Camp, Goregaon East and Vile Parle. And after a brief respite, the fire that consumed large sections of Dharavi in early April.

PREDICTABLY, THE LOSS, in toto, was colossal — a staggering number of 3,265 huts, the makeshift homes of

almost 17,000 people, were destroyed. And with them, what little they owned — money, clothes, utensils, tools and perhaps some ornaments. The loss in property exceeded Rs 45 crore, a loss that those affected could ill-afford. Despite frantic salvage operations to rescue anything they could lay hands on, most of the residents found themselves left with nothing but the clothes on their backs as they surveyed the charred remains of what were once their homes — the rickety

By Shekhar Ghosh



bamboo structures draped with sack-cloth that provided shelter for their families and storage for belongings.

Each family, each resident, had a tragic tale to tell. Rajendra Sawant, a resident of Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, Goregaon, had borrowed Rs 12,000 for his daughter's wedding only the day before the fire robbed him and the 2,500 others of their worldly possessions; Sharatchandra Rao, an auto-rickshaw driver, had only just obtained a bank loan of Rs 14,000 to buy

a new vehicle when the fire that ravaged the slum in Kandivili claimed all his belongings; a timber-dealer in Goregaon lost assets worth Rs 25,000, and in the panic that engulfed the colony at the time of the fire, also dropped the Rs 400 that he had grabbed; Ahmed Khan found his 150 chickens burnt in their coop; Nisar Mehmood, recently returned from a profitable spell in the Gulf, and a guest at Adarshnagar, Mahalaxmi, was grief-stricken as he reported the loss

of his newly-acquired consumer goods that he had invested a major portion of his earnings in. Perhaps most tragic was the story of Kumudini Devi who, unable to confront the thought of the impending marriages of her three daughters following the loss of ornaments painstakingly acquired over the years, swallowed rat poison and died.

IT IS NOT ONLY in the devastating effects of the fires that commonalities are discernible. What emerges after inquiries is a series of curious facts that provide the backdrop for almost every one of the incidents. And the inevitable questions: were they merely bizarre coincidences? Premeditated crimes of arson? Or, with both urban development and decay occurring at such an accelerated pace, were they inevitable?

All the slums where fires broke out exist on land owned by the government and its autonomous bodies — the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC), the Collectorate and the state government. Most of the huts were illegal and unauthorised. All of them were demolished at least once before the fire occurred; Mariamma Nagar at Worli was demolished twice and the slums of Kandivili and Cuffe Parade were each destroyed three times. There have been longstanding and ongoing disputes between the authorities and the residents of at least four of the slums — Ambedkar Nagar at Cuffe Parade, Ganesh Nagar C & D at Mahalaxmi, Rajiv Gandhi Nagar at Goregaon and Kamraj Nagar at Vile Parle.

There are other similarities. All the fires broke out in slums in the western suburbs where the value of real estate is much higher than in the central or eastern suburbs. In each case, the fire was aggravated to uncontrollable limits in no time at all. Rescue operations proved largely futile, and the water supply for fire-fighting was never sufficient: residents aver that the BMC delayed the supply of water to the affected areas and a spokesperson from the Fire Brigade concurred with this view. That was not all.

FEATURE

In the months following the fires, many of the slum-dwellers, still in the process of rebuilding their homes, received eviction notices from the BMC.

HOW DID THE FIRES START? In each case, the cause of the fire remains 'unknown' to this day; the officials have categorised them as 'accidents'. V V Vaidya, ex-Chief Fire Officer (CFO) of the Bombay Fire Brigade, offers an explanation: "The slums are extremely vulnerable to fires. They are constructed mainly of timber, sackcloth and plastic, each of them being highly combustible. The crude stoves and other means of cook-

ing proffers the widening of streets, the use of non-inflammable construction materials, and the provision of electricity as possible deterrents that would minimise the fire-risk.

The slum-dwellers are not entirely satisfied by what they deem to be a cursory explanation. Although they concede the CFO's points and acknowledge the fire-risk inherent in their colonies, they do not accept that all the recent fires have been 'accidental' and a result of environmental causes. "We ourselves are easily able to extinguish the small fires that break out. In a few cases, when the fire goes out of control, we demolish the huts surrounding the affected one to con-

the 400 huts of Ambedkar Nagar in Cuffe Parade were burnt in less than an hour. And in all eight cases, there was just no time for the residents to even begin rescue operations. "It was as if you were suddenly transported to hell. Before you could blink, there was fire all around us, and we were petrified. The flames were leaping towards the huts from all sides. The only option left for us was to run for our lives. We knew that if we remained there any longer, even our lives would be at risk," says Samrithi Devi of Kohina Basaat Nagar, Goregaon East. "It was as if fire-blowing dragons had suddenly descended on the colony," added another. "Let alone humans, even pigeons got charred in the infernal blitz."

Hardly surprisingly, residents suspect foul play. And perhaps they have reason to. To start with, they point to the lackadaisical manner in which investigations to establish the causes of the fire have been carried out. Apparently, this responsibility is borne by the local police station which then submits a report to the Fire Brigade. "Why do all investigations invariably end up determining the cause to be accidental?" ask the residents, "And why do all these investigations take less than a week to complete?" In all eight cases, the local police stations of the area have reportedly interrogated a few people and persisted till a confession of an accident has been extracted. Once the causes are established by the police, and accepted by the Fire Brigade, the report is then passed on to the Collectorate which doles out relief — Rs 110 per person in the affected families — but only if the fire was accidental.



The April 3 inferno at Dharavi, which gutted 1,100 huts.

ing that the dwellers use are the main cause. A leaking stove, a cinder flying off from the oven, a spilled kerosene lamp... anything can start a fire in these gunnybag houses. In a hutment, all activities are restricted to only one room, thereby increasing the risk of accidents. The popular notion that fire spreads only if the flames touch some other combustible object is, in fact, not true. Cinders and the radiation and convection currents of heat also excite the fire. It is a chain reaction — and the fire engulfs anything and everything that is combustible." In the identification of the problems lie the solutions, and Mr Vai-

tain its spread. And more often than not, it works; otherwise, how come previously there were no fires of such proportions in our slums?" asks Sitaram Patel of Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, Goregaon East. He makes a valid point indeed, as it is not the occurrence of fires that is a new phenomenon; it is the scale of these fires that is unprecedented.

WHAT HAS BAFFLED most of the residents is the incredible speed with which the fires escalated: the Goregaon fire destroyed 500 huts in 25 minutes; the 2,000 huts at Mahalaxmi were gutted in less than two hours;

THE RELIEF THAT THE STATE government allocates per person — once it has satisfied itself that the fire is accidental — is hardly sufficient: "It doesn't even pay for the basic framework of a hut, let alone compensating for the lost goods," complains a victim. And so, most of them find they have few options other than allowing themselves to be ensnared in

the vice-like grip of unscrupulous moneylenders. "Rebuilding a hut is an expensive proposition for us," says Suleiman from Dharavi. "At the very least it costs Rs 5,000 to build a new 6 x 4 square foot hut made out of bamboo and sackcloth. The bamboo alone is available at the rate of Rs 12 per foot. And a tin hut of the same size costs double that amount."

Only very cursory investigations into the causes of the fires have been instituted by the concerned authorities. Residents are dissatisfied and almost unanimously hint at arson. Those who have received eviction notices before and after the fire, point to these as being evidence, and suggest that the big builders' lobby is making concerted efforts to acquire the land that their homes are sited on — as that land could be better utilised for real estate development — possibly with the assistance of the authorities. However, they are slightly cautious about making sweeping generalisations or, indeed, about pointing an accusatory finger at BMC officials or others who may profess to have vested interests in the matter. It is for fear of retaliation from the authorities — after all, large numbers of their dwellings are unauthorised. But some of them are prepared to talk, armed, as it were, with promises of anonymity as well as the moral support they have gained from civil rights organisations who have assisted them in resisting demolition. Consider the events that have befallen the slumdwellers of the three colonies at Goregaon that were gutted on December 8, 1987.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN the four acres of land at the foot of a hill at Goregaon, where the slum colonies of Kohina Basaat Rahwasi Nagar, Rajiv Gandhi Nagar and Bhim Nagar are today situated, belonged to one Govind Ram Seksaria. His failure to expedite his tax arrears caused a portion of the land to be reverted back to the BMC, and the slumdwellers settled there in the early eighties. Elsewhere, Seksaria's real estate business clearly flourished under the ban-

"Not even one shirt survived..."

THE SCREAMS that erupted from the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Dalit Nagar echoed through the plush confines of neighbouring areas and the frontiers of the military zone, Upper Colaba, on October 30, 1987. And all the while — from 10.30 am to 1.00 pm — the shantytown burnt like a funeral pyre, cheered on by a merciless wind. The flames devoured each of the 330 hutments, and claimed two lives.

They might have been saved had the Colaba Fire Brigade come immediately; but it came to the rescue at 11.00 am as its crew had "gone to another place." No one knows where, and in any case, no one cares, now that the devastation is done. But, perhaps odds and ends could have been salvaged if the station had acted as promptly as it should have, especially since the army came in almost immediately. "Nothing great in that, however," says Athivra, whose scrap shop had become an ash heap within minutes, "for why should the army not have helped? After all, they had to save their land." Chotubhai, who owns a cycle shop, is however, grateful to the army for moving in and breaking down his shop so that its contents were preserved: "At least they came and did things," he acknowledges, "unlike the ambulances which came without any medicine."

The apathy the victims have confronted has had a more disastrous effect than the actual fire: it has dampened their zeal to seek justice. "Are you all aware how the fire started?" I ask the congregation of victims. "Who cares? *Jo hua, so hua...*" shrugs one. "A *chula* or crackers," offers another. "Our energy and enthusiasm are drained," confirms a third.

It was only on November 11 that the Collector finally visited and asked for a statement of losses suffered. And it was a fortnight after the fire that the victims received relief — Rs 110 per individual affected — after wait-

ing in a labyrinthine queue for four hours. Sattar and Sameer, a painter and an electrician respectively, did not stake their claims, neither did several others: "What's the point of standing around for so long for so little?" They have a valid point: a mere *chattai ka jhopda* costs Rs 15,000.

The expense they have had to shoulder is enormous. Chotubhai had to borrow Rs 7,000 from his kitty and friends to rebuild his shop. "He was lucky," Rajpal, a jaripuranawallah, moans. "I lost Rs 10,000 in the fire, and my provident fund and pension from my former occupation. Most people lost all their clothes and silver. Not even one shirt survived, not one naya paisa. . . Only charred notes could be found. . ." Their tale of trauma and tragedy does not stop there: "We have had to clean the whole place, rebuild the entire complex — it took two months — without any outside help whatsoever."

"Sure Shabana Azmi took out a morcha for us," admits Sheikh Ismail Sheikh Ahmed, President of the area's Dalit Party, "but the police ruined it. Suresh Narvekar (a Congress-I MLA) also came, and gave us *pao aur kela* once a day for 10 days. . ." "Who wants *sabji* anyway" queries Ahmed indignantly. "When we asked for the left-overs from building collapses and construction work that lie waste in the godowns, we didn't get any."

Their thinking is logical, their common-sense is down-to-earth, their attitudes conditioned by the environments they live in and the government they live under. "Foul play?" the residents respond to my suspicions. "What use is it to say we suspect foul play? We have been served eviction notices thrice before the fire, we are aware that they want us gone. . ." Asked who 'they' are, they reply, "Can we throw stones at someone whom we can't see?"

— M. Pinto

FEATURE

ner of a few companies, amongst them Estate Investment Company, and the thrust of Seksaria's operations lay in land holdings, which a family member testifies to: "We hold titles to land all over Bombay and its suburbs. Of late, we have also been extending our operations to include property development and construction."

Residents claim that members of the Seksaria family are the friends of a local Congress (I) BMC Councillor from Ward (P) South, a Mr M I Patel. Since 1985, the Seksarias have been coveting the land occupied by the aforementioned slums and which adjoins their own. Residents refer to an incident on December 6, 1987, when

officially declared to be 'accident during cooking'. The owner of the hut, however, has consistently maintained that it could not be so: "In fact, I wasn't even here. I came when the fire had already started."

The residents of both the slum as well as neighbouring areas believe that the actual operation was probably carried out by Shiv Sena hoodlums with a grudge against the slum-dwellers for having put a stop to their extortion racket in the slums. Beni Chand Sahu, a small trader residing in the colony, also believes that "these Shiv Sainiks are very thick with the builder and the Councillor, who have, time and again, helped the Sena."

was the sheer speed with which they arrived that alerted the residents. How did security guards hired by the owner of the adjacent land arrive so quickly? Did they, as some residents aver, have a premonition that a fire would break out? No one has a satisfactory answer. While the guards maintain that they came because they were asked to, the Seksarias categorically deny any prior knowledge of the fire: "The guards were placed there to prevent encroachment onto our land. After any fire, when huts are being rebuilt, many structures that were not there previously also come up. There have been precedents of encroachments into the neighbouring land after a fire. If preventive measures against such encroachments are not taken, the litigation involved in removing the slums often takes 10 to 12 years," claims one of the Seksarias. But for the residents, the explanation rings hollow.

The story continues. Following the fire, the colonies were rebuilt. The residents, who were then living on the neighbouring footpaths, had no possessions at all. They needed help and relief. None came from the government except the customary Rs 110 per person from the office of the Collectorate. It was left to the voluntary organisations and some political parties to provide assistance. Organisations like the Nivara Hak Suraksha Samiti, the local wing of the Communist Party of India, and individual philanthropists helped them with food and clothing in the immediate aftermath. And residents were then faced with the task of rebuilding their homes, at the cost of Rs 5,000 per hut, an expense that inevitably saw them in the clutches of local money lenders.

THREE MONTHS LATER, the residents of Rajiv Gandhi Nagar and Kohina Basaat Rahwasi Mandal received an eviction notice from the BMC asking them to vacate the land within 15 days. The residents filed a writ petition against the eviction notice in the Bombay High Court; the Court, in its



A lone fireman battles against a stubborn blaze.

Municipal Commissioner S S Tinaikar had visited the area to lay the foundation stone of a flyover being built nearby. On being told that the land across belonged to the BMC and was designated to site a garden and a cemetery, Tinaikar is reported to have exclaimed, "But all I can see are the slums!" According to witnesses who overheard the entire conversation, the Councillor retorted: "That is no problem. They will be evicted."

Two days later, fire suddenly broke out from a hut at a remote corner of the colony. The cause of the fire was

WHAT APPEARS TO LEND credence to the residents' suspicions are the incidents that followed soon after. The Fire Brigade arrived at the site one-and-a-half hours after they were summoned, and after the entire colonies of Kohina Basaat Nagar and Rajiv Gandhi Nagar, and parts of Bhim Nagar, had been gutted. But even before the Fire Brigade had arrived, some 25 guards from an outfit called the Royal Security Force had arrived on the scene. The guards had reportedly been hired by the Seksarias "to keep a vigil over the adjoining land." It

turn, passed an injunction order against eviction, especially since alternative accommodation had not been offered. The harassed inhabitants of the slums had barely heaved a sigh of relief when squads of the BMC demolition team arrived one morning. The BMC officials accompanying the team refused to accept the validity of a photocopy of the High Court injunction order, and insisted on examining the original document, which, at the time, was with Colin Gonsalves, a civil rights lawyer. Before the original document could be procured, the BMC, in defiance of the High Court injunction order, had already demolished 25 huts.

In the scuffle that ensued between residents and the BMC, the RSF guards, who had been stationed there all along, intervened; a woman was injured and her husband arrested with two others. The RSF guards, who had reportedly caused the injury, went scot free. Today, the RSF guards remain there, under a makeshift shelter, guarding the property of the Estate Investment Company — which has plans to develop the area — barely three feet away from the peripheral row of the slum colony. A permanent structure to house the RSF guards has been built on top of the hill overlooking the slums. One resident claims: "They are here to oust us. We are living under the constant threat of eviction. This security agency is notorious for using strong-arm tactics to evict the slumdwellers."

The BMC, which holds the title deeds to the land, also has plans to develop the land and proposes to build a cemetery, a garden and, ironically enough, housing for the dishoused. Lalmani Gupta bitterly asks, "Are they going to kill and bury us in the cemetery that they propose to build?" The plans for development also lead to another, more general, question: Is there any nexus between the BMC and the builders or estate agents? In recent years, increased migration to the city and the consequent demand for housing have caused the price of land to rocket. In South Bombay,

property rates are as high as Rs 4,000 per square foot; the western suburbs of Bombay are not far behind with rates ranging from between Rs 1,500 to Rs 3,000 per square foot.

As far as the Goregaon slums are concerned, proposals to construct a cemetery, garden, and housing for the dishoused, will inevitably cause the price of the adjoining land, Seksaria's, to escalate, thereby increasing possible profitability of development on surrounding areas. An astute slumdweller hints at a possibility: "What they (the Seksarias) have in mind is to let the BMC raze our huts to the ground so that they can grab the contract for whatever the BMC plans to construct

spread, clearly indicates that some fuel like petrol, diesel or kerosene was sprinkled all around the colony." Strong words indeed. The fact that 2,000 huts were ravaged in less than a couple of hours and that the fire started from different corners also belies the generally-accepted 'strong breeze' theory. Most of the eye-witnesses firmly assert that if the fire had started at any one corner, it could have been contained. Once again, events that preceded and followed the outbreak of the fire suggest the possibility of foul play.

As in the previous case, here, too, the BMC has been anxious to demolish a part of Sane Guruji Nagar in order

"The fire was definitely pre-planned... In fact, the speed with which the fire spread, clearly indicates that some fuel like petrol, diesel or kerosene was sprinkled all around the colony."



on this site. The contract will certainly be lucrative enough; the development will also enhance the real estate value of the remaining land owned by the (Estate Investment) Company."

LIKE THE SLUM-DWELLERS in Goregaon, residents of other colonies devastated by fires have a similar story to tell. The Mahalaxmi fire engulfed eight slum colonies. Says Naseer Ahmed Khan, the secretary of one of the colony-committees. "The fire that destroyed our homes was definitely preplanned. No normal fire can spread so quickly and so vigorously. We have had frequent cases of fires in these slums, but mostly they have been contained within the immediate vicinity. But this fire was devastating. In fact, the speed with which the fire

to construct a road connecting the Mahalakshmi flyover to the BMC garbage disposal terminal; a part of the land has also been earmarked for housing for Fire Brigade employees and a garden. The committee formed to resist the demolition has been assisted in its endeavours by V L Solanki, a local Congress (I) councillor. Committee member Bharat Gaikar eloquently sings his praises: "If it weren't for Mr Solanki, we would have long since been displaced. He has been fighting against the demolition tooth and nail. When the BMC asked us to vacate, it was Mr Solanki who helped us file a writ petition and obtain a stay order from the Court."

HOWEVER, IT WOULD APPEAR

FEATURE

that Mr Solanki's motives are not entirely altruistic. The Congress (I) councillor is himself a builder. And although he has refrained from displaying a blatant interest in the land, unlike some other corporators, he has been floating the idea of building a co-operative housing society on the same site for almost a year. He has collected between Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 each from the residents, to that effect, and has assured them that a loan for the proposed buildings would be made available by the Meghbal Co-operative Credit Housing Society. The residents are impressed: "Mr Solanki is working for our welfare; he is going to provide us with proper accommodation." That the land is far in excess of the requirement of the dwellers themselves if multi-storeyed buildings were to be constructed, obviously does not concern them. That the land is of prime value, and therefore much sought-after, is obvious from the sudden interest displayed by some builders soon after the fire. A film-world personality, Joginder, whose younger brother is a builder, offered to build houses for the dwellers on the same land and help them obtain relief by holding a charity show. He had ambitious plans for the area: not only would all the slum-dwellers be accommodated, but the rest of the site would also be available to him to develop. On realising that Solanki, who wields considerable clout with the residents, was also a builder, he withdrew his plans. And with them, his previous offers of charity to assist the victims of the fire. The cause of the fire has not yet been ascertained but speculations amongst the residents are rife that the fire was deliberately started to clear them off the land.

WHAT ADDS WEIGHT to allegations of foul play by residents of *all* the eight areas destroyed by fire, is that all eight pieces of land have been earmarked for specific development. The Goregaon plot has been earmarked for a cemetery, garden and housing for the dishoused; the Mahalaxmi plot

has been reserved for housing for employees of the Fire Brigade, a road, and a garden. The plot at Cuffe Parade, where Ambedkar Nagar was gutted, is also earmarked for the ubiquitous garden, a retired scientists' home and to assist in the widening of the road. Interestingly, a portion of Ambedkar Nagar had already been demolished for the construction of a helipad; the plot is still lying vacant, and is protected from encroachments by barbed wire. Plans for the other areas also include gardens, according to the residents; BMC officials were not available to confirm the same.

In the case of the Dharavi slum fire, where the slum-dwellers had to

the fires have been the result of accidents. But victims refuse to be convinced and have deemed the explanation to be an easy way out. Although no hard evidence has been forthcoming to confirm the existence of foul play, the frequency and scale of the tragedies, escalating prices, the interest evinced by both builders and the municipal authorities in the land, and bits of circumstantial evidence have resulted in speculations that all is not as the police and municipality would have the slum-dwellers believe. Indeed, feelings are running so high as to cause people to wonder whether, in the absence of other ways to ensure the eviction of the slum-dwellers,

With rampant development throughout the city, which invariably renders any piece of land very valuable, it is likely that the authorities do not wish to encourage the proliferation of slums.



face the onslaught of the demolition squads even before the embers had cooled down, the risk to the high-tension electricity cables overhead was offered by way of explanation. That the dwellers had been on the site for a decade without the BMC having done anything about it, was conveniently ignored. What residents are particularly wary of is the fact that the eviction notices are not accompanied by allocations of alternative accommodation which is the usual procedure. Does this hint at concerted plans to forever evict the slum-dwellers? With rampant development throughout the city, which invariably renders any piece of land very valuable, it is likely that the authorities do not wish to encourage the proliferation of slums in the city.

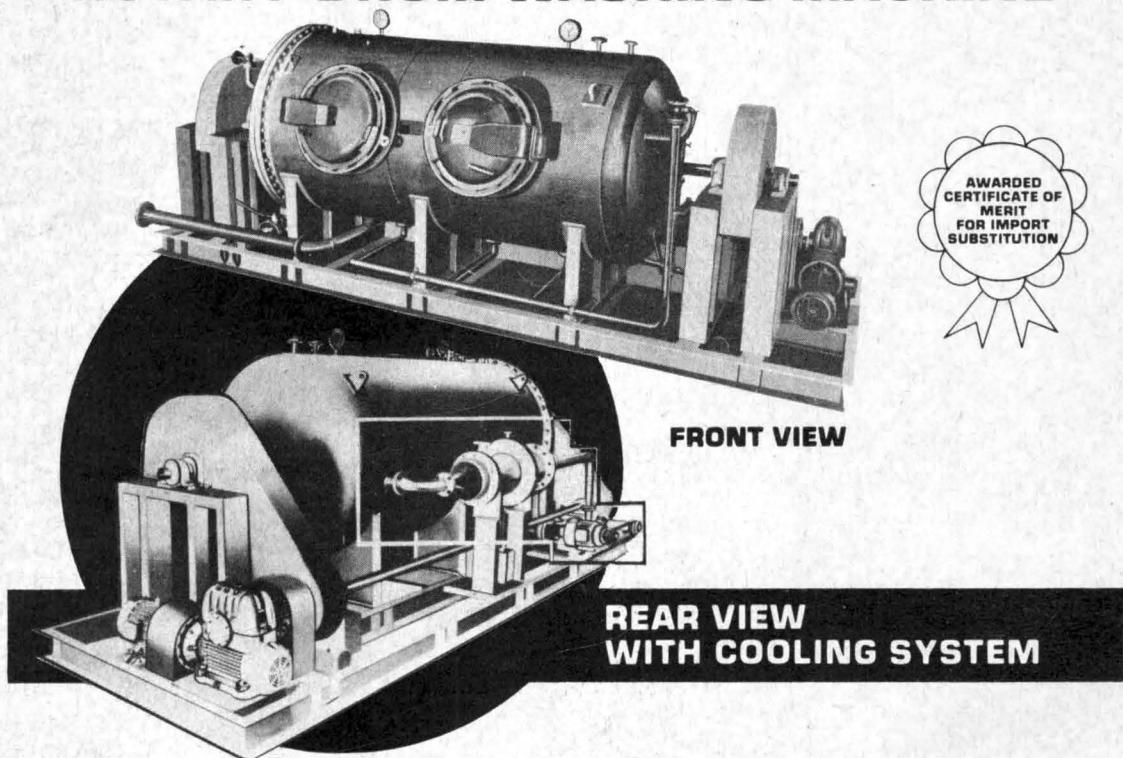
Police reports have claimed that

fire is the best bet.

An official committee comprising the state Energy Secretary, the Housing Secretary, the Bombay Municipal Commissioner and the Bombay Police Commissioner, has been formed to suggest ways and means to prevent fires recurring in the city. The residents of the slums who are today imbued with evident cynicism about whether anyone really cares about their well-being, however, are not entirely convinced that this committee will yield concrete results. A white-collar worker from one of the gutted slums echoes collective sentiments when he says: "It (the committee) is only a placebo to quell the outcries being raised about the fires. Nothing short of a judicial inquiry will be able to expose the sordid truth behind them." ♦

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THE RECENT SHOWING of Salman Rushdie's documentary, *The Riddle of Midnight* and the film, *A Passage to India*, on two consecutive Sundays on British TV reflects the ongoing preoccupation with Britain's former glories. Interestingly, these two programmes epitomise what is available to British audiences in search of India at both ends of the spectrum: there are those programmes made by white producers/directors which usually resurrect Britain's past in a haze of romantic nostalgia or, somewhat more critically, present individual instances of racism or cruelty in a generally fairminded British rule; at the other end stand programmes made by Asians in Britain which have much more to do with their position in British society today, and which attempt to present the countries of their origin without the imperialist bias of their colleagues — *The Riddle of Midnight* quite clearly belongs to the latter category.

It is not quite as simple as that, of course. Progressive attitudes are not a matter of colour and many Asian-made programmes do nothing to counteract the dominant myths in British TV, very often reinforcing these, like the BBC's Asian magazine programme, now superceded by Network East and the LWT (London Weekend TV) offering, *Eastern Eye*.

Partly with the advent of Channel 4 in 1982 and partly as a result of pressure by black campaigns against racism in the media, we are no longer subjected, thankfully, to the blatant racism of light entertainment programmes like *Mind Your Language*, *It Ain't Half Hot, Mum* and *Curry and Chips* from the sixties and the seventies. Repeat viewings of these make one squirm and wonder how anyone could have ever sat through them.

The bias is far more subtle today. Documentaries on the Indian elite (like those on the Maharajahs or the Taj hotel, broadcast in 1987), usually devoid of analysis, satisfy the British appetite for exotica, and at the same time imply that Indians have worse-

ned the inequalities that might have existed under British rule. In short, did India need to become independent? What did she gain? This is the sort of question I might ask legitimately as an Indian assessing the last 40 years, but when posed by our ex-rulers, it has insidious overtones. There is also the ability among white audiences to consume foreign culture in search of the exotic without making any attempt to relate it to the

tain's loss of world leadership, its economic and cultural domination. The representation of natives with the IQ of monkeys becomes part of a continuum with the stereotyping of Asians in Britain as an idiotic, inferior race. A people that you can laugh at are not people who need sympathetic handling when it comes to immigration rules or housing and welfare needs; the crucial connection between the presence of the British in

FROM RAJ TO REALITY

Positive feedback has probably accounted for the ongoing preoccupation with the 'Raj' era on British television. Catering to the demand for exotica, several programmes made by Asians in Britain seem riddled with stereotypes and myths. Fortunately, says RAJ GUPTA, recent offerings on Channel 4 including Rushdie's 'The Riddle of Midnight' and Tariq Ali's 'Partition' and 'The Bandung Conference' reflect contemporary realities of Asian countries, without the earlier imperialist bias.

settlers from those countries in their midst — it's a bit like relishing a curry after the pubs close while at the same time treating the waiter with contempt and racist abuse.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN reality and the media representation of it is always a complex one. Media preoccupation with India could be seen to stand in direct correlation to Bri-

India and Indians in Britain which would rationalise immigration, is deliberately not emphasised. This stereotype has turned into the myth of the hardworking Indian shopkeeper or exploitative small-time employer whose presence is robbing the locals of jobs during a period of high unemployment. By differentiating Asians from Afro-Caribbeans, who are portrayed as unemployed and a

drain on the economy, it becomes possible also to destroy any nascent links bonding the two communities in their fight against racism.

In that sense, television reinforces the values of popular culture — racism, yearning for a glorious past,

that India is the largest single beneficiary of British aid and that Britain is the largest single donor, and that there are at least 1,800 joint industrial ventures and several profitable armament deals. That sort of information can usually be excavated from the print

sisted by the British government for certain reasons, would have dangerous ramifications for Asian settlers and their immigration rights. This sort of contradiction has never been examined by any of the several documentaries or news items on the Khalistan issue.

When there are attempts to intervene and change the equation, like in *The Bandung File* (see interview with Tariq Ali), which was broadcast at peak viewing time, some good programmes were produced and telecast while others were subverted by the dominant ideology. Many 'cultural' pieces like the Caribbean carnival or the marathon French dramatisation of the Indian Independence struggle had no political analysis or orientation. More popular interventions like *Tandoori Nights* (conceived by Farrukh Dhondy) set up new stereotypes and proved to be totally unsatisfactory as a challenge to current assumptions. *The Jewel in the Crown*, which was hugely popular, was an advance on its precursors for presenting villainous British individuals and intelligent Indians but did little by way of analysis of the institution of British imperialism.

There is much to be said for the view that once a popular form, for example a sitcom (situation comedy), is subverted by progressive values, the form loses its popular appeal. We are then left with something like *Partition*, scripted and produced by Tariq Ali and broadcast by Channel 4 in the 40th year of Indian independence. It is a stylised, somewhat surrealistic analysis of British imperialism and appeals very much to minority tastes. It is based on a short story by Manto, *Toba Tek Singh*, which presents the pain of Partition through the metaphor of a mental asylum and its inmates. The British position is stated in the following sophisticated terms: "Power without property can never last . . . so (we're) transferring our power to those with property." This is offered by way of explanation for why an independent India became a gift for its bourgeoisie.



finding scapegoats for the present economic decline, etc. However, why does it choose to highlight only certain aspects of that reality? What about the economic reality of Indo-British relations? What about the fact

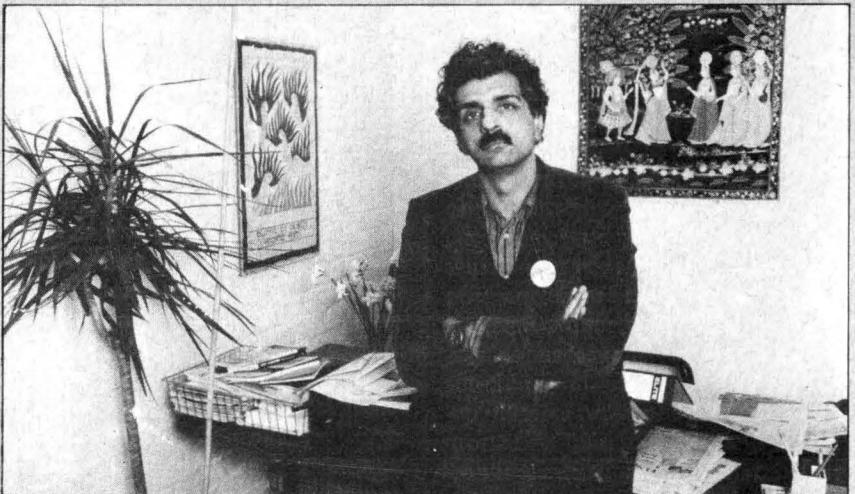
media as it has far too many contradictions and complexities for the simplicity of TV. For example, the Indian government's demand that Sikh extremists be repatriated from Britain, a demand which is being re-

"I Believe In Showing Reality, Good And Bad..."

The author of several books and the darling of the British Left, Tariq Ali is fast gaining a formidable reputation for his contributions to British television. His documentary series, 'The Bandung File', has received much acclaim for its thoughtful coverage and sometimes provocative commentary on pertinent issues relating to Asia and Africa. RAHILA GUPTA talked to him about his latest venture - 'Partition' - that was telecast recently and canvassed his opinions on the representation of the subcontinent on British television. Excerpts from the interview:

Imprint: Do you see any contradiction between the reality of Indo-British relations and the way in which India is portrayed on British television, both through fiction and documentaries?

Tariq Ali: I think the film that was most successful was the much-talked-about *The Jewel in the Crown* and that was really about the British in India. One can argue about whether it was accurate or not - I'm not so interested in that debate any longer. As far as presenting India from an Indian vantage point is concerned, I think there is very little done on British TV. Barring some of the documentaries shown on Channel 4, by and large, the representation of India on the mainstream programmes is exotica. For the 40th anniversary of Indian Independence and Partition, the BBC telecast a documentary on the Maharajahs, which is grotesque. That was never India for 200 years. At least in the past one could pretend it was, the British liked to pretend it was; now these people are totally and utterly irrelevant. I don't understand why they show this sort of thing - what it reveals is a reactionary nostalgia. On the other hand, we have seen on Channel 4 some very good documentaries on Bhopal, and *Divided Hearts*, about the people



who crossed frontiers on Partition; we too produced a film on Partition.

On *Bandung File* we constantly try and present an India which people never see on other screens; we have televised programmes about the states of Kerala and West Bengal. People here are amazed that Communists are elected to office in India, as if this was something weird, whereas in India it is something that is totally accepted and not even regarded as all that radical, if I may say so. The other film we made, *Burnt to Death*, about dowry deaths in Delhi, shook a lot of people because no one believed that this sort of thing went on. I am not a believer in "positive images." I believe in showing the reality, good and bad. So on the one hand, you have an India which is very pluralistic, lots of political parties, opposition parties in power in many of the states, different magazines, newspapers and books. In that sense, India is a very unique country in the Third World. It has a very rich cultural tradition. We also show the warts. What is horrifying is that we seem to be the only people doing so in a regular and consistent way.

India is the biggest receiver of aid from Britain; it is very crucial to British overseas sales of arms and other

goods. Do you see any connection between that reality and the way in which India is portrayed on the news, for example, the Khalistan issue or Indira Gandhi's assassination?

It's an odd question. I've never really thought about it like that. I don't think there's a one-to-one relationship between actual relations and what the media portrays.

What I have in mind is the pressure applied on British TV by the Foreign Office to withdraw the drama-documentary, *Death of a Princess*, which showed the royal family of Saudi Arabia in a bad light.

I don't think that Indo-British relations affect British media coverage of India. The criticism is that they tend to concentrate on catastrophes and exotica, so that the real India, the everyday lives lived by Indian people of all social classes, never really gets a hearing. The exception is Mark Tully, but he reports mainly on radio.

To move on to your dramatisation of *Toba Tek Singh*, Manto's story about Partition, I thought it was one of the best analyses of the British imperial presence in India that I have seen, but it was extremely stylised - long, slow camera shots, extremely repeti-

tive, with some symbolism in the constant switching from colour to black and white, which escaped me. A lot of people found it extremely boring and that made them non-receptive to the analysis.

I know that the film has created controversy. Some people found it boring, but large numbers also didn't. It's been extremely well received at film festivals. It's a film for cinema-lovers; it's not a film for people who like populist cinema. It's a film that makes you think and demands your attention and large numbers of film students who have seen it have liked it a lot. In an unlikely place like Lahore, pirate videos of it are in great demand. I don't accept your criticism — that particular form and the stylised way in which the film was shot was determined by where we filmed it, which was a set constructed in the east end of London, in the Royal Docks. We had both our sets in one place and we had to do it partially with stage movements, and everything was very carefully choreographed. The other thing I would say is that to really appreciate the richness of the film, you have to see it on the big screen.

People were also critical about the way in which you pegged your analysis on the Manto story. This led to debates around the use or abuse of Manto which diverted attention from your analysis. Why did you particularly choose to take off from Manto? The abuse of Manto — this argument is a load of nonsense. Manto's story gave us the idea for the film and we acknowledge it. Making a film doesn't mean you do it literally. I used Manto's story knowing what his politics were, as far as Partition was concerned, and made it into something that could be understood and appreciated by cinema-lovers, as a statement on the partition of the subcontinent, which was a horrific event. This doesn't mean that people who feel Manto is being abused haven't a right to make their own film. Why haven't

they done so until now? Why didn't they regard it as a priority? That argument doesn't hold water at all. It's not an easy film. Ken McMullen, the director, makes films which tend to concentrate on the interplay between power and politics and history.

Throughout the last decade or so we have had pressure groups trying to change the kind of programming we have on TV. Do you actually think that the kind of structure Channel 4 has, ie, contracting out to independent companies, has given Asian and Afro-Caribbean people a better chance to enter the media? Also, do you think that having black people in the media is by itself enough to obtain a qualitative change in the programming?

No, not as long as society is organised in the way it is. Look at it this way. Britain is going through one of its most reactionary ideological periods since the Second World War and it is amazing that Channel 4 exists in Thatcherite Britain. I think that I can be and am very critical of the channel because I think they could do a lot more, but I also think they have done quite a lot. For instance, our own programme, *Bandung File*, is pretty uncompromising. It enables voices from below both in Britain's black community as well as the sub-continent and the Afro-Caribbean islands to be heard most of the time, and that would not have happened, to be very blunt, if Farrukh Dhondy had not been made Commissioning Editor at Channel 4. He wanted a programme which broke with the easy stereotypes of *Eastern Eye* or *Black on Black* and he wanted programmes which were not ghettoised but which could be watched by anyone. Obviously he is one Commissioning Editor amongst many and he can't do too much. Some of the stuff which is being commissioned and produced does mark a qualitative break in how the Third World and blacks in Britain were treated. In 1986, I was in Los Angeles at the Inter-

national Video Festival where they showed some *Bandung File* films, and black American film-makers came up to me and said, 'this is amazing stuff. Is this actually shown on British TV?' They said, 'look at us, we've been going for 200 years in the US and all we're good for is sports and music and singing!' Dhondy has, by and large, done a good job. He commissions a lot of work; where you have to draw a dividing line is between tokenism and quality stuff.

The driving thrust of the earlier campaigns was the assumption that with the entry of Asian and Afro-Caribbean people into the media will also come a different kind of analysis. It hasn't always proved to be so. Everybody's been jumping on the bandwagon, whatever their politics, and some of them have come out with rubbish. However, that thrust was initially necessary and positive. Is it not conceivable that such pressure politics are indirectly responsible for even the appointment of Farrukh Dhondy as Commissioning Editor?

Look, to be perfectly blunt with you, I think it had very little to do with any of these lobbies. Plans to create a new channel had been afoot for ages. And one of its remits, established by Parliament, was that it had to cater for the minorities in British society. That remit meant that they had to have a black Commissioning Editor. The scandal is that he is the only one. The real breakthrough will come when someone who happens to be black is Commissioning Editor for films or current affairs. In that sense, the BBC has gone further. They have appointed Samir Shah Deputy Head of Current Affairs. Now do I regard that as a big breakthrough? The answer is no. He may be a Gujarati, and the colour of his skin may be brown, but he has essentially been taken on because he is very loyal, hardworking and conformist and will do what his boss tells him to do. So it is not simply a question of colour, but also a question of whose interests you serve.

sie and did little to free the masses. It is full of fascinating discussion and comment but hardly likely to shake the easily-arrived-at assumptions of the person next door. That is not to be critical of Partition but of the entire culture of television.

AS A DOCUMENTARY ON INDIA,



Saeed Jaffrey and Roshan Seth in 'Partition'.

The Riddle of Midnight is not very revealing or dramatically different in its analysis or conclusions about the issue of communalism which lies at the heart of it. It attempts to be about many things: the urban versus the rural, the North versus the South, the inequalities of capitalism, the

dangers of Balkanisation — ambitious in its aim to define the riddle of India which is existentially, rather than politically, framed. It is in the narrative, which has a strong literary quality, that you see the footprints of Salman Rushdie and these exercise their own fascination, rather like those of the Yeti.

The framework for the documentary has been provided by his book, *Midnight's Children*, and were it not for the success of the book, I wonder whether the literary device of going in search of the 'real' midnight's children would have jelled the documentary together. After all, without the book, it is a fairly arbitrary quest to interview a number of 40-year olds from different social classes and communities, in the 40th year of Indian independence and from those interviews, weave a picture of India in all its diversity.

Salman Rushdie is present in his own narrative in the third person in an attempt to universalise his personal need to understand India. "As it (the crowd) engulfed him, he felt the edges of his self begin to dissolve and he understood that the crowd was not a greeting but a riddle. Explain us, it demanded. Explain us and survive." But the explanation that comes by the end falls short of the philosophical expectations set up by the initial question — that we are Indian because we were born here and our parents were born here. Quite mundane really.

Using a literary artifice as the recurrent motif of the documentary also undermines a political understanding of the situation. Sarambi Sheikh, the 40-year old pavement-dweller, is dubbed the 'ghost'. Because she is not included in the census figures, she is seen as "not existing on its (Bombay's) pavements," an ironic comment made against scenes of dirty, poverty-stricken, crowded footpaths. To carry the metaphor further, Rushdie says, "to give civic rights to mirages would be absurd." While this metaphor does have a literary consistency, it eclipses a political analysis — that pave-



Sarambi Sheikh: the 'ghost' of 'The Riddle of Midnight'.

ment-dwellers have no power because they are surplus to the needs of the economy, they are a political embarrassment, a visible sign of the failure of the Indian economy, and as they service the needs of the black economy, they have no official status and therefore, no way of negotiating their way into the census figures. It is precisely because they are not mirages that they are constantly bulldozed out of middle-class areas and minds, a potent thorn in the side of municipal administrators. As Rushdi



himself acknowledges at an earlier point in the film, "When Indian politicians speak of beauty, the poor know it is time to watch out."

At another point, Rushdie tentatively questions the validity of the capitalist trickle-down theory in which Homi Mulla, the business consultant, puts his faith: "Does wealth really trickle down from high-rise to hovel? Where does it go?" Surely a thinker of Rushdie's stature does not need to give such a theory even a second glance, discredited as it is, when juxtaposed against the massive inequalities in India.

Where the documentary's insight

and perception is absolutely valid is in its presentation of communalist tensions and in its damning testimony of Hindu fundamentalism. This needs to be repeated, especially inside India, and especially by someone of Rushdie's stature. He is absolutely right in his insistence that the creation of militant Hindu fundamentalism is a new phenomenon and that its attempt to identify Indianness with Hinduism leaves no breathing space for any other religious denomination. The documentary ends with a succession of black and white pictures of Sikh women accompanied by moving descriptions of the Hindu terror unleashed against Sikhs. Again, what was sorely lacking was an economic and political analysis of communalism. However, what it *did* achieve for me, as someone who was born a Hindu, was a sense of shame in being identified with that community. And if this documentary could achieve that with sectarian Hindus, it would be a success despite its limitations.

ALTHOUGH SOME OF THE BEST alternative viewing has been provided by Channel 4 (C4), its financial structure militates against its requirement to cater to minorities and to be experimental and innovative. C4 is a subsidiary company of the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Association); it is funded by the IBA which imposes a levy on the net advertising revenue of the ITV (Independent TV) companies. The return on this money is the potential revenue from advertising sold by the ITV companies on the fourth channel. To attract advertising, audience viewing figures are crucial and programmes designed to attract minorities are not likely to produce the kind of figures which advertisers find attractive. Of course, to compensate, advertising rates are lower on C4 and moreover, advertising strategy in Britain has changed so that it no longer goes for the mass market but targets every product to a particular section of society. In that sense, C4's well-defined audiences

prove quite useful to advertisers. However, commercial pressures have ensured that C4 has gone for the popular amongst minorities; serving minority taste among minorities would probably be suicidal.

Certainly, the situation has improved since the sixties both in terms of quality and quantity of programmes for the minorities as well as their



Rushdie in 'The Riddle of Midnight'.

representation in mainstream viewing. But this is due more to the interaction between the Asian community and white society than international relations with India, which follow their own political and economic logic and do not make the kind of impact on the media or popular imagination to affect programming. ♦

ENVIRONMENT

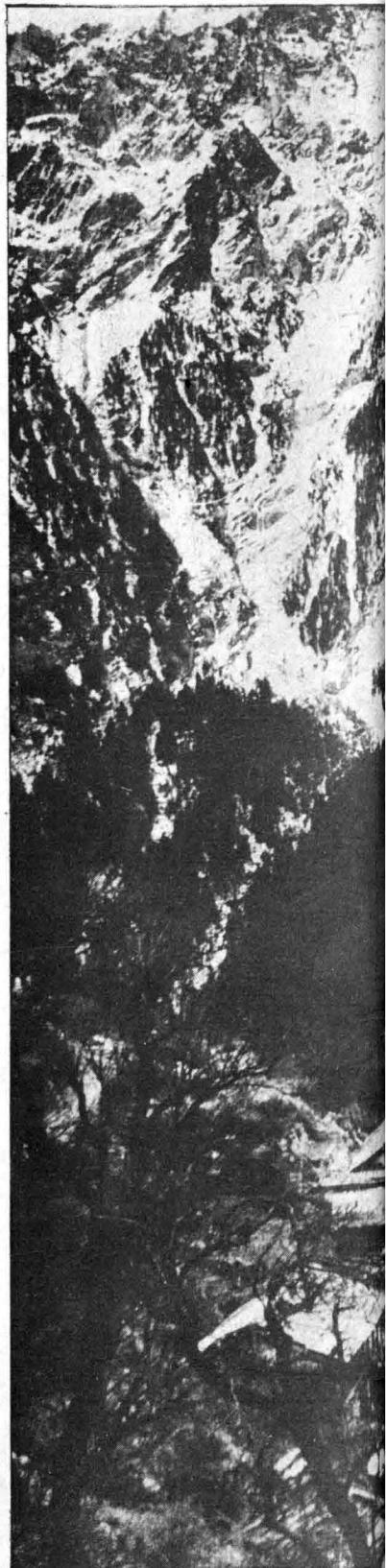
THIS IS A 'QUICK-FIX' age: as the world grows more complex, political leaders and their vast armies of officials, scientists, and technocrats are tempted to offer 'quick-fix' solutions to several human and ecological problems, for various reasons. Partly because this is an age of rapid change and ambitious expectations; partly because they themselves, with their limited perceptions, tend to believe that they can win over the public with big money, pop-science, and ill-prepared technological solutions to problems, despite the fact that such solutions fail time and again. But the public has a short memory and these political, technocratic powers-that-be think they can wave their magic wands and fool the public in the short-term without having to later answer for the consequences.

These 'quick-fix' solutions are mainly applied to the socio-technical and environmental fields, with inevitable failures. The latest such 'quick-fix' solution, to extensive and prolonged drought, is the proposal of the Defence Ministry's Snow and Avalanche Study Establishment (SASE), Manali, Himachal Pradesh, to spray selected snow slopes at altitudes between 2,500m and 4,500m with coal dust and ash, between March and May. The firm snow and glacier ice will thus melt by August and September, when temperatures are higher. The head of the institute does not think this will be "catastrophic". What is catastrophic and what is just short of catastrophe, but harmful nevertheless, this good scientist has not yet disclosed. Nor, I believe, is he in a position to do so, because the project requires a multi-disciplinary approach that lies far beyond the narrow scope

and competence of this one establishment. But, this is only one 'quick-fix' solution in a long chain of similar proposals from the establishment.

ONE OF THE MAJOR 'quick-fixes' of the past 30 years, and largely responsible for the very drought which SASE is now proposing to address in its own limited way, was the prolonged and extensive deforestation of centuries-old mixed forests, and the quick, bandaging solution of monoculture forestry with pine, eucalyptus and sal. The purpose of both the deforestation of Nature's bounteous gifts as well as monoculture reforestation is the same — revenue, quick money from quick answers. The fact that this causes long-term disruption to the eco-systems of forests with incalculable and hitherto uncalculated regional and national losses owing to soil erosion, reduces the capacity of deforested slopes to absorb water, leads to the drying up of aquifers, springs and all ground-water sources, as well as the silting of high-cost dams, and destroys the habitat of millions of tribals and hillmen and other living creatures in the region, does not seem to broaden the limited calculus of monoculture forestry. The minds of those in government are as fractured as their ministries and departments, and no one has the time, inclination or courage to look into the holistic calculus for the nation: the quick buck from the 'quick-fix' offers a much simpler solution. And when some environmentalists raise these issues, instead of assisting them in a joint pragmatic study of long-term cost-benefits in the national interest, they are dismissed as nuisances and impeders of planned progress.

**BEWARE 'QUICK-FIX'
DEVELOPMENT!**





TAKE THE CASE OF yet another massive technological 'quick-fix'. In the last 30 years, we have witnessed the construction of more than 30 dams, but have failed to consider their upper catchment areas. These dams have now silted up and their lifespans and investment values have been reduced to between 50 and 90 per cent of the original estimates; once a dam is built, it becomes a point of no return. Yet the 'quick-fixers' knowingly rush into such projects. And in the case of the massive and expensive Narbada Project, the Chairman even went on record on Doordarshan, to say: "What is done is done!" Two and more decades after the trumpeting of the promised haven, the huge Nagarjun Sagar project, too, has fallen far short of its irrigation results, and threats of seismic hazards now hang over the Tehri dam. But 'quick-fixers' hack on regardless of enormous expenditures. Engineers follow laws beyond the biological and the geological, and it suits the pockets of politicians, engineers and contractors. If not a single resettlement of displaced populations has been good in humane terms, it is but a minor fallout on the road to progress.

In 1976, the Rs 100-crore Jamrani dam on a minor river in Kumaon was heralded with great fanfare by two senior ministers, despite cautions that the catchment area was largely denuded, and that siltation and a repetition of past mistakes would result. Twelve years later, the dam is still far from complete; enormous expenditures have been incurred, no attempt has been made to rehabilitate its upper catchment areas, which did not even appear on the engineer's original blueprints, and both rainfall and run-off

at the dam-site have dwindled by 38 per cent in this decade. So what will this high-cost dam harness in the next ten years — if it is completed by then — water, or silt and stones?

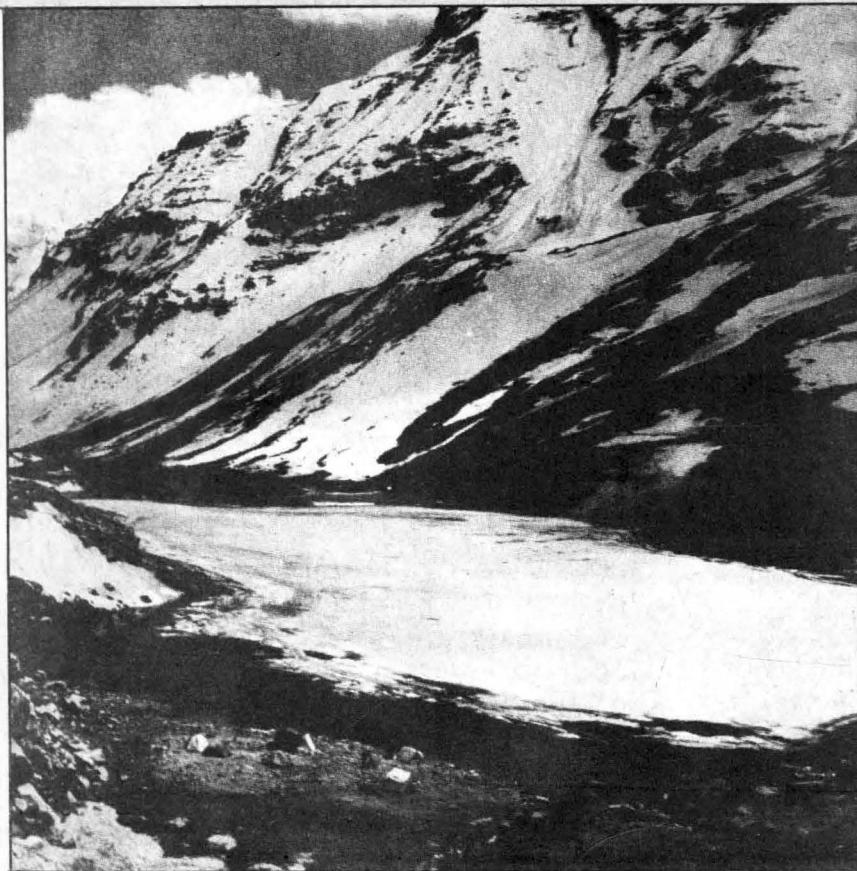
THE HISTORY OF APPROPRIATE

Technology is one largely beset by similar 'quick-fixes', followed by disillusionment. For example, take the *gobar* gas plants. Till 1977, official reports claimed to have installed over 70,000 of them all over the country, at a relative Rolls-Royce cost of Rs 3,000 per plant (about equal to the national per capita income) to less than 1 per cent of the country's richest farmers; half of them were acknowledged to be out of order, due to the various technical defects which inevitably arise from 'quick-fix' solutions. A decade later, the position is now only marginally better with a model borrowed from China called *Janta*, at half the cost. Yet the same non-functional consequences still occur due to poor technology and poor back-up maintenance services. This was also the case with the smokeless *chula*. Earlier, there were claims that it would save wood consumption by 50 per cent; the claims were later lowered to 30. And visits to most sample areas where these have been installed will reveal that the beneficiaries of this 'quick-fix' have abandoned them! The Department of Non-Conventional Energy needs to conduct a substantial realistic evaluation apart from practising how to spend the vast resources at its disposal. Big money, without the responsibility for returns on capital, promotes 'quick-fixes', especially in the engineering world.

A CLASSIC CASE of blowing money

It's the age of the 'quick-fix' solutions and politicians and decision-makers are increasingly resorting to these, seemingly oblivious of their adverse effects and dangerous implications. A D MOODIE issues a sharp warning.

ENVIRONMENT



comes to light when the complex issues which emerge from the aerial spraying of the Himalayan snow slopes with coal dust and ash are considered. (Let those living in the capital give evidence as to what happens to their homes with the coal-dust fallout from the power plant adjacent to the World Health Organisation Centre!) These issues may be objectively summarised as follows:

— The necessity of distinguishing between temporary and permanent snow slopes in order to ensure that permanent snow slopes and glaciers are not affected by the wind action involved in aerial spraying. This is especially important in drought years like 1987-88 when snowlessness has been observed to be extensive in the Central Himalayas.

— The melting of additional waters, say per sq km of snow slope, and a study of how the additional benefits would compare in terms of flow into irrigation systems, and not just runoff and additional flooding, with their possible dysfunctional effects.

— The impact of coal dust and ash spraying on the downstream melt and ground residues; its effect on the health of all living beings in both the Himalayan and downstream regions of the plains; its impact on the aquifers below the snowline, especially in the light of the well-observed and dangerous phenomenon of dead or drying hill-springs (which once constituted approximately 90 per cent of the perennial water sources of the hill people); its effect on the vegetation, forests and pastures in and around the regions so sprayed and the possible changes in micro-climates, probably arising from extensive deforestation, leading to the phenomenon of "the warming of valleys" observed in the Central Himalayas and Nepal in the last 20-30 years.

THESE ISSUES LIE BEYOND the competence and sphere of an establishment like SASE. They involve multi-disciplinary studies which need to be organised at the highest levels of competence, before 'quick-fix' res-

ponses like the one suggested by SASE can become acceptable in the larger ecological and public interest. National scientific, technical, and financial resources should be devoted, on a long-term basis, to the fundamental need for higher moisture and soil conservation in the Himalayan region which will also reduce the increasing high-cost incidence of floods, alleged to cost the country over Rs 1,000 crore per year. This would involve a massive programme in biomass production for men and livestock, the preservation of hill-springs, the reduction of demographic and livestock impact on eco-systems well past their carrying capacities, and the general ecological protection of the Himalayan region. The problem with the plausible and tempting 'quick-fix' answers, derived from only one branch of science, is that unforeseeable consequences in other branches go unresearched and ignored, thereby leading to non-scientific and dysfunctional results in Nature's interdependent scheme of things.

If we are to be on our guard, it is worth remembering that the 'fathers' of 'quick-fix' are: the political 'quick-fix', big budgets and annual expenditure obligations, private gain through plausible public means and institutions, poor science, weak technology, and the lack of multi-disciplinary approaches to problems where the solutions do not lie in any one discipline.

The irony is that if the private sector (where industrial policy has not induced monopoly or oligopoly) attempts such 'quick-fixes', it faces losses, bankruptcy and their consequences, in foreseeable time-spans. There is also the market's inescapable accountability system. The state sector escapes such accountability, and an indifferent public has allowed it to get away with it time and again, at tremendous cost to the nation's resources and their own lives. We must be better educated and cautious, or be forever dumb victims of larger outlays on 'quick-fix' scientific and technological answers, executed in the name of progress and development. ♦

The Crocodile And The Boy

It promises to be an unusual film, an exciting blend of wild-life footage injected into an enchanting story about a boy befriending a crocodile. 'Modhalai' is being shot at the world-famous Crocodile Bank, and directed by its founder, Romulus Whitaker. M D RITI visited the location, witnessed much excitement, and met the cast and crew, including Meti the crocodile and real hero of the film!

THE TRIBAL BOY dives cleanly into the waters of the jungle pond while the camera poised behind him zooms from him to the huge crocodile that stands on the bank, a few feet away. Suddenly, the nine-foot long creature slides menacingly into the water and barrels his 200-kg body in the direction of the boy. Pandemonium breaks out. The boy swims desperately towards the bank, the film-crew panics, and the crocodile calmly turns aside and swims away . . .

This is just one of the many close encounters that have occurred in the course of the shooting of the Tamil feature film, *Modhalai*. If it had been a regular commercial production, there would have been little anxiety as the crocodile would have either been doped, had its mouth sewn up, or been rendered harmless in some other way. Or, if it had been a documentary, the boy would never have dived into the water so close to the crocodile. But then, *Modhalai* is a film



with a difference. And it is these real and authentic moments of drama that distinguish it from other films about animals and render it a laudable attempt to present a good, clean children's film that is natural, accurate and interesting.

The hot sandy grounds of the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust campus, near Madras city, are the locale for this unusual film. Literally homespun, it is directed by the Bank founder and snake man of Tamil Nadu, Romulus Whitaker, and scripted by his wife Zai. The main protagonists in the film are Ezhumalai, a tribal teenager, and Meti Junior, a massive marsh maggar, while the supporting cast is largely comprised of those that work alongside Whitaker and his army of crocodiles.

"Meti is the real hero of the film," avers Rom. "The demoralising thing for him here, though, is that he has to play the role of a female! But he is a nice chap, so I don't think he minds too much. I know him very well indeed — I hatched him from an egg with my own hands, 18 years ago," Rom explains, with a touch of pride, while the subject of the conversation blinks at him from the water.

WHAT MADE THIS AMERICAN conservationist decide to attempt a full-length feature film in an Indian language, with an entirely non-professional cast? "I live in Tamil Nadu now," he says simply. "I know this area and these people better than any others in the world. So I chose the cast of players from around here. They knew only Tamil, so it had to be a Tamil film. As I would rather make an impression here than anywhere else, this suited me fine."

The film was conceptualised entirely by Rom, who sent an outline of the story to the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI) in mid-1986. The Society requested a copy of the screenplay. And, backed by the experience gained while co-writing a book on snakes with Rom, Zai adapted Rom's storyline into a screenplay which was subsequently approved by

the CFSI.

They reached an agreement with the Society about the budget, and the time-frame within which the film should be completed, with the Society making just one major stipulation — as Rom had never made a feature film before, they insisted that he permit an associate director to work alongside him and help him develop the dramatic components of the film. And that was how K Hariharan, who is a film-maker in his own right with award-winning films like *Yezhavadu Manithan* to his credit, became the associate director of *Modhalai*. "We wanted someone who would work with me and not try to take over the film, dilute it, or take it in the wrong direction," explains Rom, adding that Hariharan and he have a "harmonious working relationship."

It is the mix of documentary and



Ezhumalai, Bhoopathy and a baby croc.

human drama that brought the film's two cameramen together as well. Well-known cameraman Madhu Ambat, who has worked in national award-winning films like Kasaravalli's *Tabarana Kathe* (1986) and G V Iyer's *Shankaracharya* (1983), is the cinematographer, while Rom's long-time buddy, Shekar Dattatri, has been designated as the second unit cameraman. "That is because the production crew for this film is far smaller than is usual for a feature film," explains Dattatri. "Most of the time, it's just Rom and me. Two people doing the camera work is quite enough under these circumstances." Ambat has filmed the dramatic parts of the film while Dattatri has shot the wild-life scenes and many of the sequences involving the boy and the crocodile.

THE PLOT OF THE FILM is typical, run-of-the-mill children's film-stuff, but *Modhalai* reveals a depth that is usually missing in other films of this genre. The only film that I can recall which portrays a child's relationship with nature with such sensitivity, is N Lakshminarayan's Kannada film *Bettada Hoovu*, which won its child actor, Puneet, the national Award for the Best Child Actor in 1985.

Modhalai examines the relationship of a boy with a specific segment of nature, as symbolised by a crocodile. The storyline is simple enough. The main protagonist is a tribal boy called Ramu, played by Ezhumalai, and the action unfolds in a coastal village in Tamil Nadu. Ramu frequently plays truant from school to fish in his favourite pond just outside the village; he also makes persistent efforts to prevent a group of nasty village children from harassing small animals.

Other characters in the story who play an influential role in Ramu's life include his elder sister Radha and a local *swami*; the villain of the plot is a comic character called Gajendran, who, apart from providing a few laughs, is the first person to spot the crocodile emerging from the sea and disappearing into the nearby bushes.

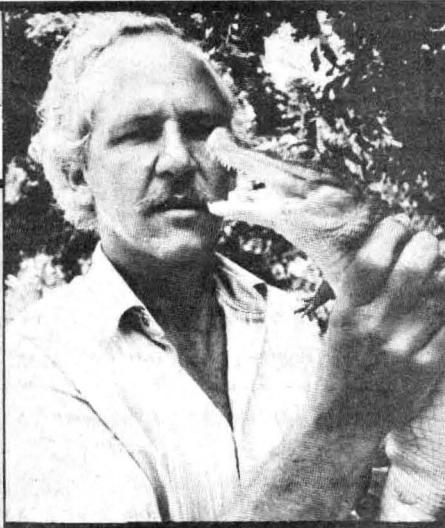
The Snake Charmer

HE SPEAKS COLLOQUIAL Tamil like the natives. But he looks like the New Yorker that he originally was. Romulus Whitaker was born in New York in 1943, but has spent most of his life in India, having moved to Bombay when he was barely eight years old. Following his schooling, he spent a year working for an organisation of taxidermists at Mysore: "I used to hang out at a forest near Guntapuram and indulge in a lot of nasty, anti-conservationist activities like hunting," he recalls with a chuckle.

He enrolled for an undergraduate degree programme in wild-life management at the University of Wyoming, USA, in 1961, but dropped out a year later, and the next few years saw Rom in a variety of jobs ranging from travelling salesman to floor-cleaner. He even worked for a merchant seaman for a while and then spent two years at the Miami Serpentarium. This last stint was probably the one he enjoyed the most as he had always displayed a penchant for snakes, right from his days at the Kodaikanal school when he used to sleep with a python under his bed!

Like many other reluctant young Americans, Rom was drafted into the army to fight in Vietnam in 1965. "I did not want to spend three years in prison; that was the only reason I agreed to join the army," he says grimly. For the next two years, he was part of a blood-bank team that supplied blood to the injured on the frontlines in Japan. As soon as he was released from his duties, Rom rushed back to India, the country that he really considered his home.

His next job was once again connected with snakes; extracting venom for some organisation at Boribunder Road in Bombay. That came to an end in 1969 when the Government of India passed an order banning venom export from India. Harry Miller, an



old friend in Madras, then introduced Rom to the Irula tribe — professional snake hunters. "I found that I had a lot more in common with the Irulas than with my so-called peers," says Rom. "I had never cultivated any urban interests — like playing tennis after work. The difference in culture hardly mattered."

The concept of a snake park at Madras was born out of this newfound association. K Bhoja Shetty, who was then the Chief Conservator of Forests, allotted the park an acre of land in Guindy, and a World Wild Life Fund grant of Rs 5,000 provided the mandatory initial investment. It was at an exhibition of snakes that Rom organised in Bombay in 1972 that he met his future wife, Zai Futehully, whose father, Zafar Futehully, is also a conservationist and environmentalist. "It was not unusual for a guy like me to be attracted to a nice Indian girl who was interested in wild life," laughs Rom. They got married in 1974. . . and spent their honeymoon hunting snakes!

However, all was not hunky dory at the snake park. Rom had a disagreement with some of the trustees and decided to opt out of the venture. Zai and he had accumulated a fair amount of money at the time of their wedding, and decided to invest it in eight acres of land on the Vadanamelli-Perur Road outside Madras city, and start a crocodile bank there. "The World Wild Life Fund chipped in," says Rom. "So did the snake park. And we got a lot of co-operation from the crocodiles, who kept breeding! The villagers were helpful too, as

the place was certainly beneficial to them."

The Whitakers discovered a mutual interest in and an aptitude for film-making. Film-makers Stan Breeden and Belinda Wright, renowned for their spectacular wild-life films, wanted to make a film on snakes. Zai and Rom helped them. Soon, they were working with film-makers from West Germany and Austria on similar themes. Their own first venture, titled 'Snake Bite', was a seven-minute film made with a small grant from the Serum Institute of India. John and Louise Riber helped them, and Shekar Dattatri was the cameraman for what became a carefully-made docudrama. The film picked up two awards in the US — a Golden Eagle from an American film institute and another award at a wild-life film festival.

By the time they made their next film, the foursome had assigned roles: Zai was the scriptwriter, Rom the director, Shekar the cameraman, and Revathi Mukherjee their fourth partner. Their second documentary focussed on a snake catchers' co-operative that they had established for the Irulas, while their third depicted the rat-catching techniques of the same tribe. Their most recent production was a Tamil documentary on how to grow a forest nursery. The Whitaker couple have also jointly written a book called *The Snakes Around Us*, which was published by the National Book Trust.

Rom now lives alone for most of the year at the bank as both his sons, Nikhil and Samir, are boarders at the international school in Kodaikanal where Zai also teaches. "It is hard having to live away from my family," he sighs. But his average day at the Croc Bank, with which he is inextricably intertwined, is full enough to keep him very busy. Besides, he is also the convenor of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage of the Andamans, and an executive committee member of the Pali Hills Conservation Council.

The audience is led to believe that this creature, which has not yet been shown on screen, has moved into Ramu's favourite pond, although Ramu himself remains unaware of this.

RAMU'S FIRST ON-SCREEN encounter with the crocodile takes place when he catches a big fish with his line; only to have two huge rows of teeth emerge from the surface of the water and snap up his prize-catch. The boy gets pulled into the water too, much to his indignation. And thus begins a strange friendship between the boy and the crocodile, which culminates in the creature literally eating out of the child's hand.

Predictably enough, Ramu ultimately has to rescue the crocodile from the frightened and ignorant villagers who try to kill it. This situation gives the director the opportunity to include a sequence in which the boy rides the crocodile bare-back, a feat which would have looked extremely gimmicky in any other context. But throughout the film, Rom has attempted to bring in a few of the mandatory components of a feature-film, like songs, in a manner that make them relevant to the storyline.

The boy establishes a strange rapport with the *swami* played by internationally-known *ghatam* player, Vickoo Vinayakam, who once belonged to the fusion music group, Shakti. A jolly sort of chap and an evident globe-trotter, the *swami* punctuates his speech by playing the *ghatam*, thereby giving Rom the opportunity to introduce a lot of delightful music into the film.

"We decided to use catchy music, a couple of song sequences and wild-life action to make up for the lack of dances in the film!" says Rom. "Witnessing the reaction of those people who cannot even understand English to films like *Beautiful People* and *The Gods Must be Crazy*, made me realise that it is possible to hold audience attention by doing something different. I am not talking about wild-life action with elephants and tigers, but essentially small stuff that any kid in a village in Tamil Nadu would be familiar with — frogs, snakes, fish, water-paddy birds, chameleons, mongooses and crocodiles."

OF COURSE, THE GATHERING of wild-life footage was far more difficult and time-consuming than filming the pieces of human drama, the former

necessarily being conducted on a hit-or-miss basis. "Most of it is improvisation," explains Dattatri. "We just go out into the scrub jungle not knowing what we are going to find there. Sometimes I get a good shot, and we then see how it can be woven into the script." He insists that the element of risk is not particularly grave for the cameraman, in spite of the fact that he moves quite close to his subjects.

Dattatri also feels that his input into this film is quite different from the documentary style of filming that he has been accustomed to so far. "In this film, the contents are not as important as the mood," he elaborates. "An element of emotion that is altogether missing in a documentary creeps in here; that changes the whole style of camerawork. A documentary attempts to present facts clearly to the audience, while a feature film tells a story. This calls for subtle changes in lighting. For example, there is this nesting sequence that I have captured on film. If it had been a documentary, I would have used frontal lighting and captured the picture clearly. But in this case, it is important to establish the fact that the scene takes place at night, and so, I had to use side-lights. This difference in style is really quite challenging."

The film is being shot in 16 millimetres, and will be blown up to 35 millimetres before it is screened. "It is more economical to do it this way, and easier for wild-life shooting too, as we can take our own old rough-and-tumble camera into the forest," explains Rom. "No camera hiring agency would ever permit us to take their cameras into the kind of places that we are going to!" A tremendous amount of wastage is also being incurred because of the hit-and-miss element; about 100 rolls of film will be shot, out of which only 12 rolls will be finally used. Many of the sequences are also shot in slow motion which again uses more frames of film.

Scouting around for talent turned out to be another interesting experience. Rom's sister-in-law, Arundhati



Ezhumalai fishes at his favourite pond.

Reptilian Repository

BABY CROCODILES squirm around in a small water-tank, looking deceptively harmless; almost like mechanical toys in the hands of the big man who holds them. A few hundred metres away, a gigantic companion thrashes around in an enclosed mud pond, his teeth snapping menacingly at a huge chunk of buffalo meat, conjuring up disquieting visions of just what those steely jaws could do to a slender human body...

The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust at Vadanammele village in Chingleput District houses 23,000 such crocodiles on eight acres of land. Ten of the 21 known species of crocodiles can be found here, including the West African dwarf crocodile, the Malayan gharial, the South American kaiman, the American alligator, the Siamese crocodile, Morelet's crocodile, the Nile crocodile, as well as three Indian species — the maggar, the salt-water crocodile and the gharial. A stream of 50,000 visitors, half of whom are children, flood the park annually; the bank is entirely dependent on them for its finances and for achieving its twin objectives of conservation and education.

Research also forms an important thrust of the bank's activities, and some of the research findings of its founder, Whitaker, and his crew, have been quite astounding. For instance, they have found that the sex of baby crocodiles can be predetermined by the temperature at which the eggs are kept — lower temperatures result in female crocodiles while higher temperatures produce males! "We can now get any male-female ratio that we desire by turning the thermostat," says Whitaker triumphantly. This amazing discovery is certainly a milestone in the evolution of genetic science.

According to Whitaker, his bank also has the only species of crocodiles in the world that lays two nests



every mating season; all the others lay just one. This semi-field situation that the bank offers has attracted many research students, including Jeffrey Lang, an American scholar, whose research is being sponsored by renowned institutions like the Smithsonian and National Geographic.

A major project based at the Crocodile Bank is the Irula Tribal Women's Welfare Society. Having discovered that most of the Irula wives were snake-catchers themselves, Zai, Whitaker's wife, has organised them into a welfare society, which attempts to get barren village *panchayat* land signed over to it for afforestation purposes. An unusual *modus operandi* no doubt, but the group has already been granted Rs 9 lakh to plant 300 acres of wasteland with multispecies trees. And following the terms of the agreement, the profit is to be divided three ways — a third each to the village, the society, and the project itself, which is managed by a land manager, four supervisors and has 150 women members.

A large number of turtles are also maintained by the bank, so are crabs, rats, bandicoots and some old buffaloes since these form the staple diet of the crocodiles. Most of the crocodiles are housed in enormous tanks that simulate the mud ponds that are

their natural habitat; and huge signs remind the careless visitor that inserting a hand through the protective mesh is inadvisable!

Undoubtedly the crocodile nursery is one of the most charming places to visit on the campus. Park employees, some of whom form the supporting cast of the film being produced by the bank, slip their hands easily into the shallow water-tanks and fish out creatures that look like giant lizards, while an iguana that looks like a cross between a mammoth chameleon and a dopey-eyed frog blinks blearily at the gawking humans who pass by. Grey crocodiles huddle together in their enclosures, almost overcrowded.

The biggest crocodile on the premises, a salt-water crocodile, looks rather terrifying, and appears more so when Whitaker describes how he has witnessed the creature snap a stray dog, and even a hapless fellow croc, in two. The same visitors eye Whitaker with a mixture of amusement and alarm as he issues instructions to his employees in Tamil and answers their queries.

While Indian crocodiles are the fastest breeders here, the bank has unwittingly begun to breed more crocs than it really needs. Whitaker offers two different solutions to this population problem. The obvious one, of course, is that they could supply other banks and zoos with as many crocodiles as they need. However, this could probably be, at best, a temporary solution as the demand for these creatures alive has already been outstripped by their supply. The other alternative, and one that conservationists will find difficult to accept, is that those surplus crocodiles which no longer belong to the category of protected species, could be used for the same purpose that they were once used by the Irulas — ie, killed for their skins. But the rather endearing sight of the defenceless baby crocs in their tank, makes the latter alternative seem quite inhumane.

FILM

Chattopadhyaya, who ultimately became the art director of the film, assisted, and they held workshops for tribals living in nearby villages and made them enact skits. "We were looking for faces and expressions," says Rom. And they finally decided upon half-a-dozen principal characters with several others for the crowd scenes.

The decision to cast non-professionals was quite deliberate: "I have known many of these people for upto 20 years," says Rom, "I knew who had the talent to act, and who would be right for which role. It has been far easier to work with locals who have an aptitude for drama than to have highly-strung, prima donna professionals around." Needless to say, these players were not paid on the same scale as professional actors, but Rom insists that the main characters have been remunerated adequately.

THE UNIT RECEIVED the first instalment of the CFSI grant in April last year and went to work on building its sets immediately since the village in which the dramatic action takes place had to be made to look like a fishing village, although it is not one. A tea-shop, the scene of some important sequences, was also built, and the hut which was to be Ramu's home had to be refurnished.

But the most important part of the sets to be built from scratch was the all-important jungle pond. Nobody who sees the pond would ever imagine that it is entirely man-made; there was not even a natural mud pool at that spot, which is a few feet away from Rom's own house at the Crocodile Bank. The area had to be dug up, the bottom hardened with cement concrete, and water filled in manually. Appropriate foliage, clumps of rock and slender trees that lean artistically into the water, were transplanted all around. Both the pond and rocks were designed with strategic locations for the camera and crew in mind. This pond has now been enclosed by a mesh fence and is Meti Junior's home; his favourite hiding



Meti Junior smiles for the camera.

place in it is some thick scrub at one end which dips into the water.

The sets were completed by July 1987, and the rigorous shooting began in right earnest in August. Three schedules of 10-days duration each have been completed so far; the fourth schedule was on when I visited.

ANOTHER PROBLEM they encounter is synchronising the music with the wild-life shots: "Getting music into the film without becoming corny was quite tough," admits Rom. "We are trying to build some in, using the same principles as Western music videos."

The intermingling of the actors with the animals, however, does not pose as much of a problem. Some of the cast had faced Rom's own cameras before, as they have worked with him at the Croc Bank for years. Others, however, like Ezhumalai, had not. "I just do whatever he tells me to do," shrugs the boy self-consciously. "No, I never felt embarrassed or conscious of the camera," he says. Dattatri adds enthusiastically that, "the boy is a natural, a really fantastic actor!"

Another interesting feature of the film, and one that sets it apart from others of its kind, is that it presents not just the boy's perception of the crocodile, but also the crocodile's perception of the boy. This calls for some complicated camera work that juxtaposes shots of the surface of the pond, as viewed by the boy from above, with underwater footage, in which the lens allows the viewer to break the water-surface with the crocodile, and to see the foliage outside from the angle at which the creature

sees it.

DID THE PROXIMITY of the crocodile ever frighten these players? "No," swears Bhooopathy, who plays the role of the villain Gajendran, and looks the part with his huge moustache. "I have worked with these creatures for years now, so it was just like a part of my daily routine." Rom's idea of casting real tribal villagers certainly seems like a good one, and one wonders whether this film will open new avenues in the film world to these people. Rom is already in the process of preparing a portfolio for Ezhumalai, while Lakshmi has already landed a few small roles in regular Tamil feature films.

But what success will they share in *Modhalai*? Especially since stories of friendship between children and wild animals are far from uncommon? Indeed Annie Socksdror has even made a film about the relationship between a boy and a crocodile shot at Bastar. Rom laughingly defends his film saying, "This film is not as glamorous as *The Black Stallion*. A crocodile cannot gallop romantically into the sunset! It is more a family sort of film that presents a light-hearted story with no complicated moral to weigh it down."

However, the unusual treatment of an ordinary storyline, the carefully planned juxtaposition of authentic wild-life footage with human drama, and the freshness of the cast of players, should certainly make this film a refreshing one. Rom hopes to have *Modhalai* ready for release by October this year and it will be interesting to see just how this fascinating film fares. ♦

AUROBIND PATEL pores over papers on his art director's desk at *The Economist*, ignoring the spectacular view of London's skyline. "Look," he invites confidingly, "see how the extra space makes this page better."

You peer over his shoulder at before-and-after versions of *The Economist* page; one of them does seem much more elegant but you're at a loss to tell why until he points out the smidgeon of white space he has added between the headline and the text. "Is it really as simple as that?" you ask. He nods delightedly.

Subtlety and refinement are Patel's passions. He is highly critical, though

regretful too, of the over-dressed, trendy appearance of many British magazines. "Here design is all about fashion," he says dismissively. "If you want to see design that's firmly rooted in tradition, you have to go to the States."

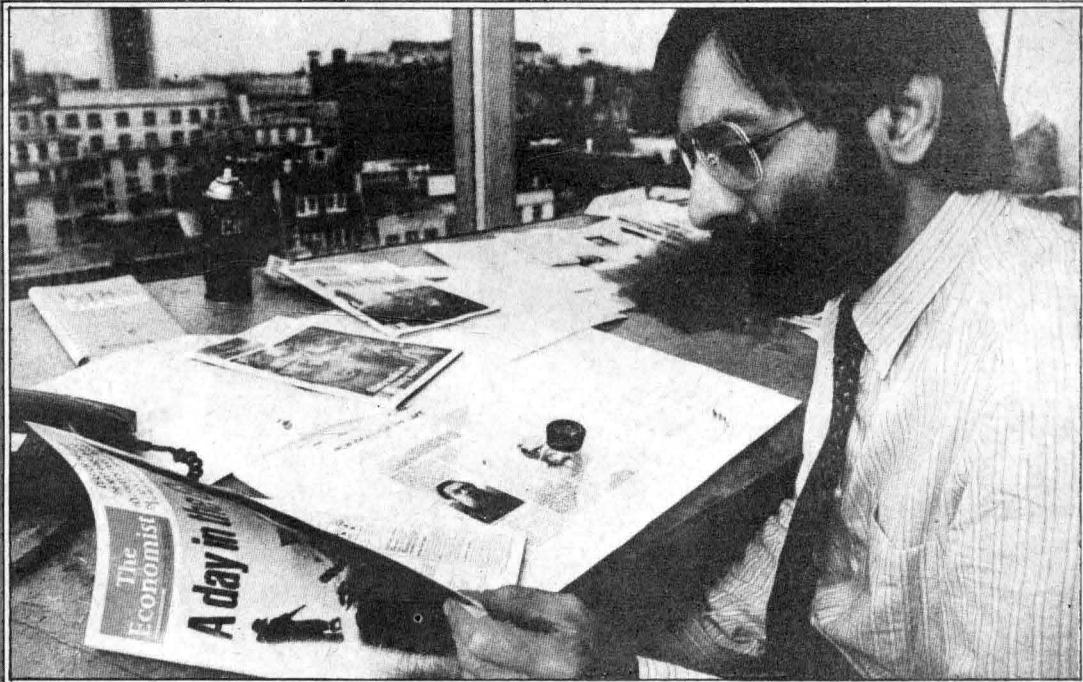
Patel's views make him the ideal choice to handle *The Economist* redesign, a task he finished recently. "These things have a habit of taking longer than you expect," the paper's Managing Director, David Gordon, says drily.

Delicacy of touch is vital because readers are notoriously easy to alienate, and *The Economist* has a brilliant record to protect: it has doubled its

circulation in 10 years (its July-December ABC was 300,800 worldwide). Even so, there was a feeling that something had to be done because research indicated that readers were having difficulty finding their way around the paper, and there was business pressure as well.

"We are in good shape, it's true," Gordon concedes, "but we can't afford to be complacent. It's a very tough, competitive battle for readers, and we have to keep improving what we do. We can't just sit back and say *The Economist* is terrific."

THE PROBLEM WAS SOLVED last year when Patel was discovered in



THE MAGIC TOUCH

Trained in India as a business analyst, but attracted to type, his refined eye is responsible for the recent redesign of the international weekly, 'The Economist'. BERNARD BARNETT presents Aurobind Patel.

DESIGN

Delhi – by *The Economist*'s previous editor, Andrew Knight (now at *The Daily Telegraph*) – working on *India Today*.

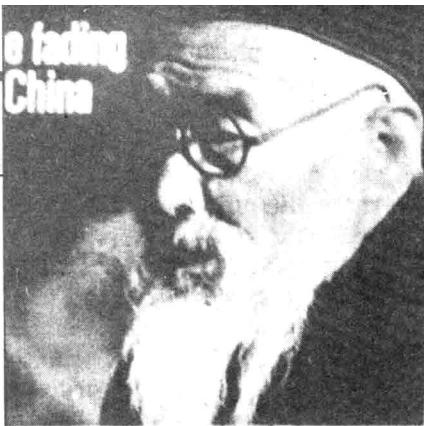
For an art director, Patel has a peculiar – even outlandish – background, though it suits *The Economist* to a 'T': he trained in India as a business analyst, and then went to Harvard Business School, dropping out because he suddenly fell in love with type. Somehow he'd got a summer assignment to produce a jobsearch guide for Harvard MBAs, and didn't have the slightest idea how to go about it.

"I remember I called somebody and asked them to teach me all about design in an afternoon." ("When you go to Harvard," he adds, musing, "you get the feeling you can tackle anything – until you start.")

Once hooked, there was no looking back. He went off to study design in Massachusetts and then moved to New York where he lived, he says with engaging candour, in "abject poverty as a freelance designer." Eventually he got what he calls his lucky break and went to *Esquire* to work with Milton Glaser. A great deal of freelance work followed, but his career changed direction again though not quite as abruptly as the first time, when in 1981, he returned to India to art-direct *India Today*.

Patel brought in the latest technology and helped to work a transformation so complete that by last year he felt he'd made himself redundant. It was at this time that he came to the notice of Andrew Knight, who had watched the progress of *India Today*. "Andrew had met my editor and said he'd like to meet the person responsible for the design. We met when I stopped off in London after I'd been in the States looking at some of the new technology."

Knight, who was working on *The Economist*'s own preparations for new technology, which would result in in-house setting and video-composition (a change that was fully implemented only at the start of May), asked Patel to stay on. Knight also showed



BRITAIN'S FOREIGN POLICY
THE VOLKSWAGEN ACT
GOLF'S GOLDEN AGE
FACTORY OF THE FUTURE
...and more



The
summit
ould make
a splash



ARMS AND THE BOFFIN
COUNTRY COUSIN BANKING
PERU PLAYS WITH FIRE
CONCENTRATED TALENT
A Survey of New England



BRITAIN'S FOREIGN POLICY
THE VOLKSWAGEN ACT
GOLF'S GOLDEN AGE
FACTORY OF THE FUTURE
...and more



The
Economist

Bringing to the job a synthesis of western typography and Eastern refinement.

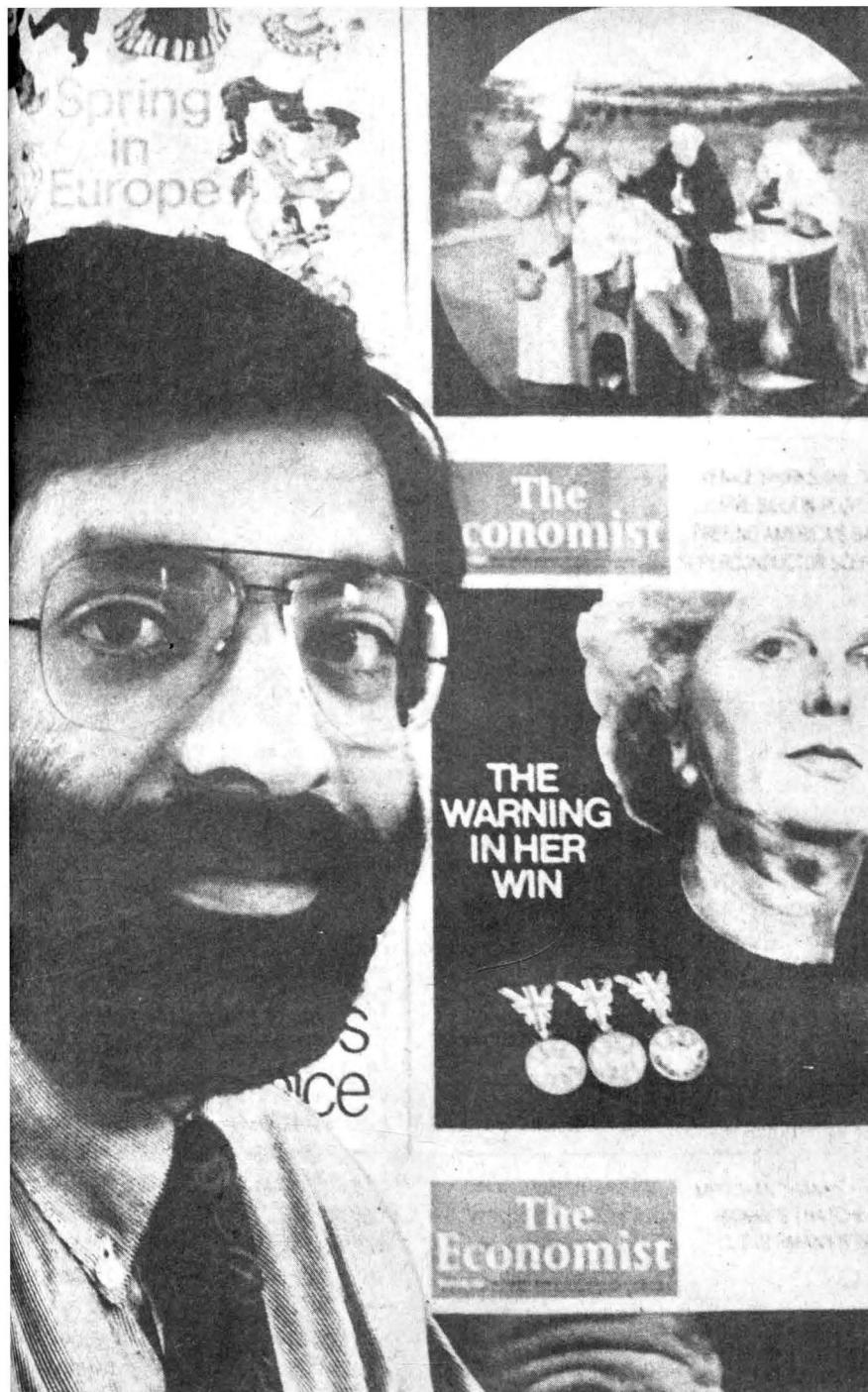
ed him an *Economist* redesign that had already been prepared.

PATEL WAS NOT IMPRESSED. "I didn't think it was appropriate," he says. "It was too radical and showed scant respect for possible reactions from readers. It's very important to remember that changes should not put off the readers. I said to Andrew I would work on a design solution, and went off to the States to start on it."

At length he produced the results,

then decided to travel for a few months. During this time, the editorship of *The Economist* changed, and the new editor, Rupert Pennant-Rea, offered Patel the art director's seat. He joined in October 1986, and set about the restyling exercise with renewed vigour.

What he is trying to bring to the job, he says, is a synthesis of Western typography and Eastern refinement. "People in the East have a capacity for subtle decoration and embellishment. I'm trying to introduce a little



of that here, in the sense of looking at the details very carefully. You know the saying 'God is in the details'? That is a good saying."

Certainly some of his work is detailed to the point of self-effacement. To begin with, the Atex technology *The Economist* has opted for has produced the chance to tidy things up; it's possible, for instance, to specify rulework to hair-breadth accuracy and to have boxed rules that meet perfectly at the corners – without the thickening or blobs that are inevitable

with the hand-drawn variety by paste-up artists.

The change most likely to be noticed by readers is the forthcoming use of Goudy instead of Times Roman as the main text face. "Times was designed for poor reproduction in newspapers," Patel says, "and to do its best to cope with that. When you look at it decently reproduced, though, it is spotty and uneven. Goudy is much more elegant, don't you think?" He produces more before-and-after specimens. By itself, the Goudy version

looks rather as you imagine *The Economist* already does. When it's put alongside the Times page, however, the difference is striking. Goudy is obviously more elegant, as Patel says, and much more readable.

The headline face may also be changed, but not as dramatically. Patel thinks he may decide to introduce Frutiger instead of the current and fairly similar Helvetica, but he hasn't made up his mind yet. "Helvetica looks beautiful in type catalogues," he explains, "but I am not certain it's so good on the page."

The discreet use of extra white space is an indispensable element of the Patel style. So is the relationship between the size of straplines and headlines. He has made changes that seem incredibly subtle when he discusses them but obvious when you look at them. No part of the paper has escaped his vigilance; he has even made minuscule alterations in the type sizes used in tables. "Look at this table," he says, pointing at a mass of figures only the most dedicated businessman would plough through. "I wondered what these figures in brackets were. Then I saw they all referred to footnotes. So they didn't have to be the same size as the main figures." Sure enough, he produces the identical table in which the changes have been made; it is now, if still not exactly inviting, much more palatable.

Gordon professes himself "delighted" not only by Patel's work but by the way he goes about it. "Aurobind is terrific," he says. "He seems to be the ideal art director. He's got very strong views, but a very soft manner which helps people to reach a design consensus. And I do think design is important – it's crucial. *The Economist* can't look as if it's just thrown together."

"Not that I get involved at all, you understand. The editorial and management departments are separate units. The editor is the designer-in-chief here." ♦

Reprinted from *Creative Review*, UK.

EXTRACT

THE KILLERS MADE one major mistake. In a general sense, they overreached, going for two planes instead of one, overcommitting their manpower and overextending their technical capacity. But the crucial, forensic mistake was in miscalculating the moment of detonation, or in underinsulating the circuitry of the Narita bomb against rough handling or tampering or extreme weather conditions in the baggage hold.

Premature detonation in the confined space of the baggage-transfer area permitted the Japanese police to reconstruct the bomb in its minutest detail. Over two thousand pieces of evidence were gathered, many of them lifted from the bodies of the two murdered handlers. When they were reassembled, police knew of "L Singh," they knew the size and nature of the bomb and, most important, they knew the serial number of the AM-FM stereo tuner that had contained it. Sanyo Model FMT 611K. It was one of two thousand FMT 611Ks that had been shipped to Canada for distribution during its three-year production run from 1979 to 1982. Furthermore, fragments of cardboard packaging and adhesive tape discovered in the blast indicated it had been recently purchased.

Eventually, the evidence developed by the Japanese police, when added to the parallel efforts of the RCMP and other police agencies in Canada, would lead investigators to the doors of the chief suspects.

By reconstructing the scene in their own laboratories, using suitcases, tuners and Duralumin containers, and by duplicating the scale and pattern of damage, police in Canada were able to calculate the probable nature and size of the explosive charge. Then they had to track down the store that had sold the tuner — a matter of dogged police work, under

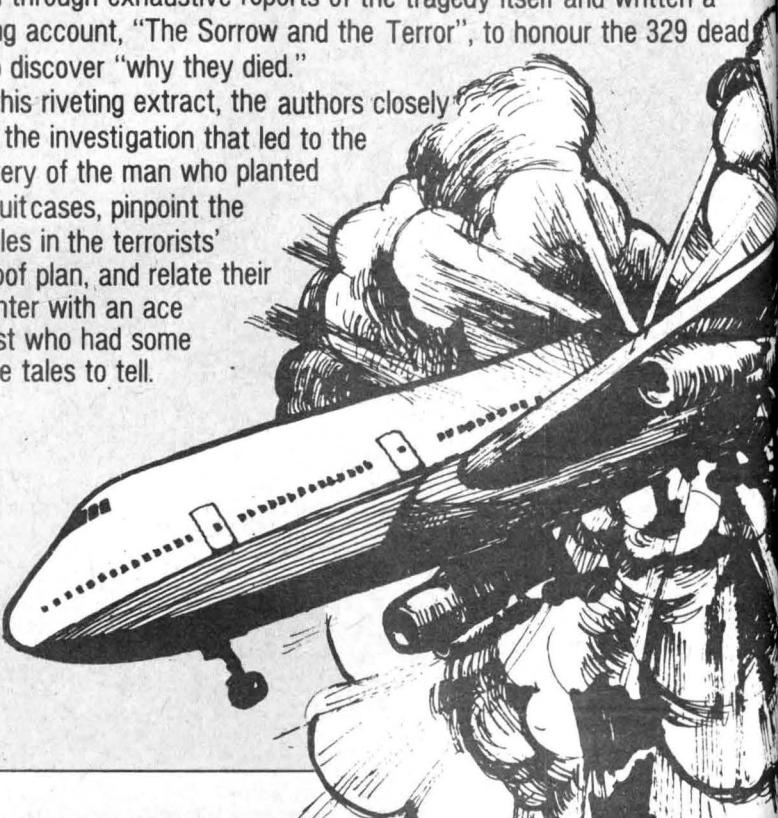
BEYOND THE FRAGMENTS

On June 23, 1985, while Emperor Kanishka, Air India's Flight 182 and the only direct flight out of Canada, was flying high over the blue Atlantic with a planeload of eager travellers, a suitcase belonging to a Mr 'L' Singh exploded at Tokyo's Narita airport at 2.19 am (EDT). The suitcase had travelled on Canadian Pacific Flight 003, also from Canada. Two baggage handlers died in the blast, another four were injured. The owner of the suitcase did not come forward to claim it.

Barely 55 minutes later, at a point 110 miles off the Southwest coast of Ireland, Emperor Kanishka disappeared from the Shannon radar. Shattered by an explosion in its forward cargo hold, and having lost its wing support, the crippled plane dived into the waters at 900 mph. Three hundred and seven passengers and 22 crew were killed at the hands of terrorists in this "worst at-sea" air crash of the decade.

There followed months of investigation including undersea wreckage retrieval, forensic interpretation, decoding of the black-box tape, and vigilante surveillance by the Royal Canadian Mounty Police. But the case, today, is legally far from resolved. In an attempt to throw new light on the events, acclaimed authors CLARK BLAISE and BHARATI MUKHERJEE have done much painstaking research into the events that preceded and followed the crash. They have interviewed friends and relatives of the deceased, talked to pathologists and the rescue team, waded through exhaustive reports of the tragedy itself and written a gripping account, "The Sorrow and the Terror", to honour the 329 dead and to discover "why they died."

In this riveting extract, the authors closely follow the investigation that led to the discovery of the man who planted both suitcases, pinpoint the loopholes in the terrorists' foolproof plan, and relate their encounter with an ace terrorist who had some strange tales to tell.



Excerpted from 'The Sorrow and The Terror' by C Blaise and B Mukherjee. Published by Penguin Books Ltd and distributed by India Book House. Special Indian Price: Rs 38.

By Clark Blaise & Bharati Mukherjee



Salvaging operations in full swing.



the direction of RCMP Inspector John Hoadley. By trial and error, by process of elimination, two thousand units up to six years old had to be accounted for, but the pool was finite and getting smaller by the day.

The RCMP were operating with a significant advantage: the bomb makers had not anticipated leaving any evidence behind. They probably had not exercised the normal caution of making a "double-blind" purchase using surrogates with fake names. Sooner or later, the RCMP would find what they were looking for: a recently purchased unit without a matching warranty card. As hundreds of dormant receipts were checked in Sanyo's Toronto headquarters and each unit painstakingly accounted for, the police were drawing closer to the one sale and the one customer that held the answer. And finally it happened. A unit matching the description was traced to the Woolworth's outlet in Duncan, British Columbia, and the clerk who had sold the appliance remembered the two Sikhs who'd purchased it and even produ-

ced the bill. The name on the bill was "Inderjit Reyat."

THE TERRORIST CELL HAD made several other careless mistakes. They had violated a simple rule of self-preservation: divide responsibilities, separate each step into component parts, assign each duty to a different individual. If everyone is kept ignorant of the overall plan, conspiracy is impossible to prove.

If the suitcase of "L Singh" had been loaded onto Air India 301 in Narita as planned and if its contents had exploded somewhere over the seas or jungles of Southeast Asia, the worst terrorist act of modern times would likely have gone unpunished. No one would have known about "L Singh" or about the Sanyo FMT 611K stereo tuner, and no one would have been able to trace its purchase to Inderjit Singh Reyat and the straggly-bearded young Sikh who had accompanied him. His bomb demonstration off Hillcrest Road on June 4, 1985, with Talvinder Singh Parmar and the same young Sikh in attendance would

EXTRACT

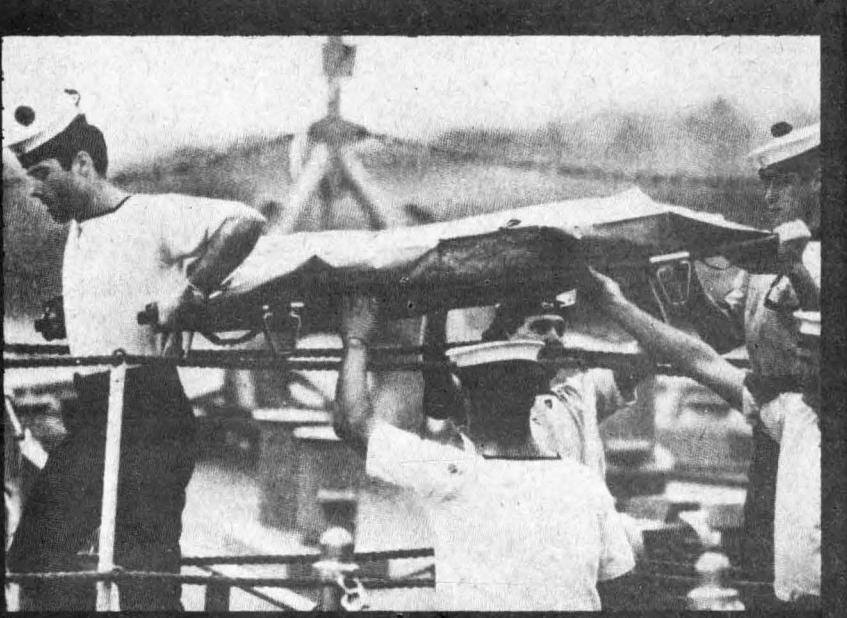
have been viewed as an isolated act, one entry among hundreds in the surveillance logs of the CSIS.

Parmar and his Vancouver cell of the Khalistani Babbar Khalsa would not have been implicated. The existence of other Babbar Khalsa cells and other conspiracies, including the Montreal cell's attempt to bring down a later Air India flight out of New York, might not have been detected. Pressure would not have been applied to the weakest link in the terrorist chain. The informer would not have come forward.

Even without the solid clue from Japan, however, the CP (Canadian Pacific) Air computer contained strong hints of a conspiracy to bring down two Air India planes. Consecutively numbered tickets had been issued to L and M Singh to Japan and Toronto, respectively. L Singh's suitcase had contained a bomb; M Singh's plane had held a bomb which exploded in the air. Neither man had taken his seat. *By paying for both tickets at the same time, the gentleman in the saffron turban with the salt-and-pepper beard gathered in a fine black mesh had linked two otherwise discrete, but obviously suspicious, events.* From that certainty flowed further recollections of CP Air clerks at Vancouver Airport (Jeannie Adams remembered the "jerk" who had demanded the interlining of his bag to Air India in Toronto) and the uncovering of the series of glitches and blunders in Toronto that permitted a lethal bag to get aboard.

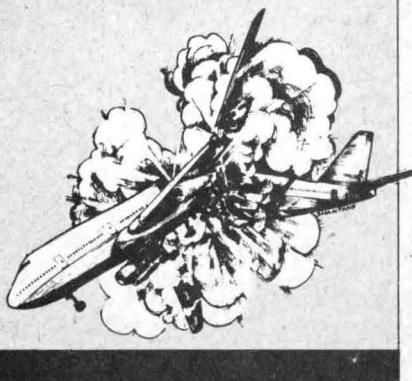
The ticket purchasing in Vancouver stretched the cell's manpower beyond its capacity. The cell had been forced to "borrow" sympathetic outsiders, and one of those outsiders would later turn informer.

There is even suspicion about the saffron-turbaned ticket purchaser and his decision to change the names of the two reserved ticket-holders from Jaswant and Mohinderbell to "M" and "L" Singh. Why would he do such a thing? Perhaps he did it out of a sense of bravado, tying what



Carrying a crash victim ashore.

The CP Air computer contained strong hints of a conspiracy to bring down two AI planes. Consecutively numbered tickets had been issued to L and M Singh to Japan and Toronto, respectively. L Singh's suitcase contained a bomb; M Singh's plane held a bomb which exploded in the air.



were planned to be spectacular acts of vengeance to the names of the only known fugitives, the failed assassins of Rajiv Gandhi, Lal and Ammand Singh. Secondly, it might have been to throw off the police pursuers: the RCMP had been combing Vancouver for weeks, acting on tips that Lal and Ammand were in the city. The RCMP and FBI should have been watching Vancouver Airport for any sign of their attempted escape. Perhaps they were watching the ticket lines that day. Perhaps they took a good long look at "M" and "L" Singh and decided they were innocent tourists with unfortunately common names.

In the world of conspiracy and counterconspiracy, every clue has a possible double meaning, every actor a possible secret identity. At least that is the interpretation of Toronto *Globe and Mail* reporter Zuhair Kashmeri, whose provocative thesis is that the Air India crash was either an Indian government operation undertaken to discredit Sikhs or a Sikh operation they were fully aware of and permitted to happen. He claims the ticket purchaser was an Indian government agent (or acting under Indian government control). He claims un-

named police backing for the theory, but offers only one piece of evidence. After the explosions, the suspicious names on the passenger list were announced first by Indian authorities, not by CP Air, Air India or the investigating police. How would they know such a thing unless they had placed them there precisely for this purpose in the first place?

The RCMP has strongly refuted any suggestion of Indian government involvement.

THE POLICE CASE TURNS on three major breaks. The first is the Japanese contribution, particularly the discovery of the serial number on the Sanyo tuner. The second is the RCMP's tracking down of the purchaser of that same unit, Inderjit Reyat. The third is the contribution of an informer, himself a deeply implicated member of the original planning session, who has named the money-source behind it all.

As it stands now, at least four members of the Vancouver-based terrorist cell are known. The straggly-bearded young Sikh is also known. Very little, in fact, is not known: the problem lies in proving it in court, ir-

As it stands now, at least four members of the Vancouver terrorist cell are known. The straggly-bearded young Sikh is also known. Very little in fact, is not known: the problem lies in proving it in court, irrefutably. At \$60 million, the investigation has turned out to be the largest in Canada.



refutably. At \$60 million and still counting, the investigation has turned out to be the largest in Canadian history. To lose the case on any kind of technicality would be a political nightmare.

The casual reader of this book or of accounts in the popular press can hardly be blamed for feeling the case is virtually closed. As early as February 1986, the Vancouver journalist, Salim Jiwa, enraged police forces across Canada by suggesting in his book, *The Death of Air India 182*, that arrests were imminent. He had jumped the gun.

On August 26, 1986, RCMP Commissioner Robert Simmonda stated that charges against "three conspirators" were very close to being laid. He was then on his way to India to "interview" some prisoners — illegal border-crossers from Pakistan — recently taken into custody by Indian police. Presumably, these would be the foot-soldiers, the couriers who had carried the fatal suitcases.

On December 4, 1986, James Kelleher, Solicitor General for Canada, stated to a Parliamentary committee that new evidence would "likely" lead to the filing of criminal charges against those responsible for the bombing. However, he, too, stressed the need for absolute certainty.

But consider the same case from a defendant's perspective.

Making a bomb is a very small crime in stump-blasting British Columbia. For his indiscretion off Hillcrest Road and a gun possession charge, Reyat has already been convicted and has paid a fine of \$2,000. Making a connection between that bomb test of June 4 and the explosion that ripped through Air India 182 on June 23 could easily be made to appear, in this era of terror phobia, an act of contemporary Sacco-Vanzettism.

Witnessing a detonation is no crime.

Driving people to the ferry or picking them up at the other end is perfectly innocent.

Purchasing a stereo tuner is no cri-



Narita Airport: luckily the bomb went off during unloading.

EXTRACT



Wanted: Ammand and Lal Singh.

me, nor is giving it as a gift. Having it explode in Japan three weeks later is a bizarre twist of fate. Not knowing the name of a house guest for whom you have bought such a present seems evasive, perhaps, but it is not illegal.

Picking up tickets and paying for them in cash is rare but no crime. Changing the names of the ticket holders in the process is odd, indeed, but not unheard of.

Requesting that a suitcase be interlined is done all the time. Acceding to such a request is fairly common. Not claiming one's seat after making such a fuss is suspicious, at most. Even if the lowly courier is finally tracked down in Pakistan or India or Europe (if he's not already dead), he will argue that he had no idea what was in the suitcase.

What is more, there is no hard evidence that "M Singh's" suitcase (or one that looked like it) on the plane that exploded even contained a bomb. Or — to stretch a legalism — that the bomb in his suitcase was the one that brought down the plane.

Consider a mild deviation from the scenario reconstructed so far: What if there were *two* bombs on Flight 182? How could a cell of single-minded terrorists trust their mission to the blind chance of collective breakdowns of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal security. The bag should never have been interlined, the X-ray machine should not have broken down, the PD-4 Sniffer should have detected the bomb and the bag should never have been loaded without a matching passenger coupon.

A "SECOND BOMB" THEORY finds support from a reliable witness. A baggage loader in Toronto who witnessed the "beeping" of the Sniffer caused by the burgundy bag remembers its being stowed in the *rear* bulk cargo hold under the last rows of seats. The full report, as carried on a Canadian Press wire, reads as follows:

"There was one bag that was big and heavy and burgundy in colour," remembers an Air Canada loader who was watching Burns International Security Services' guards check luggage, including interlined bags, for Air India.

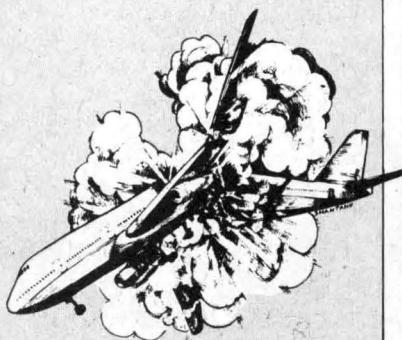
The X-ray machine normally used had broken down and a male guard was using a hand-held PD-4 Sniffer to check the bags.

"He was scanning this bag and the alarm went off near the handle," the loader told police. "He did this a couple of times and the al-



Mourning the loss.

Consider a mild deviation: What if there were two bombs on Flight 182? How could a cell of singleminded terrorists trust their mission to the blind chance of collective breakdowns of Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal security?



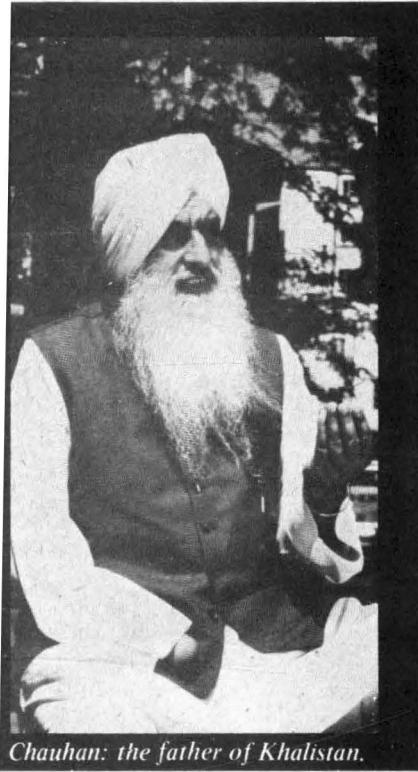
arm went off each time . . . He did it again and again and the alarm went off."

Apparently he did not think much of this as it was only a slight beep and passed the bag through.

The loader told police the bag did not go in a container, the aluminium boxes loaded with baggage and cargo and put in the belly of jumbo jets. Much of Flight 182's cargo compartment was filled with parts from a non-functioning fifth engine being returned to India for repair.

Instead, the burgundy bag was loaded into the small, sloping bulk cargo hold, under the last few rows of seats, at the back of the jetliner.

Pathological evidence taken from the bodies, and engineering reports from the wreckage indicate intense vertical loading (upward, explosive force) under the final rows of seats. Wing Commander Dr Ian R Hill, the British expert on aviation accident pathology, testified to the Kirpal



Chauhan: the father of Khalistan.

Commission that the largest percentage of most severely injured victims had been seated in Zone E (at the back of the plane). Dr Hill also indicated to the Kirpal Commission that the pattern of injuries had led him to conclude that if a bomb had downed the aircraft, that bomb was more likely to have exploded in the *rear* than in the front cargo compartment.

What, then, do we make of the detailed forensic evidence, considered conclusive, of an "initiating event," a bomb, in the *forward* baggage hold?

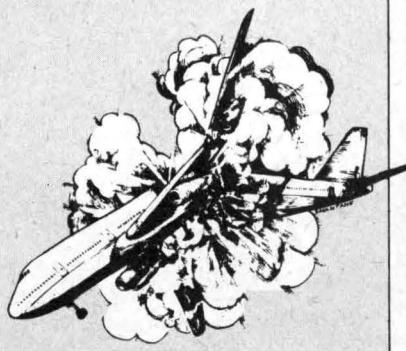
One explanation is that there might have been two bombs, one planted on the ground in Toronto while the plane was being loaded with the spare engine parts, and the other one in the burgundy bag, a decoy intended for detection. Indeed, if the handler is correct in his recollection, if investigators are correct in their conclusions, there *had* to have been two bombs. One in the rear, and one in the forward baggage compartment.

As always in this case, it is possi-

ble to overendow the cell with subtlety. They made mistakes of such magnitude that one immediately suspects outside manipulation, not sheer incompetence. There is always the journalistic temptation (and historic justification) to inflate the story with counter-theories, spies and *agents-provocateurs* until a straightforward tale of amateurish bungling becomes a tangled tale of epic complexity.

WE CAN EXTEND the speculation a further notch. Most apologists for Khalistan assume that the CP Air and Air India explosions were conscientiously timed for on-ground, relatively "safe" detonation. Passengers should have been off the planes. But is that really supportable? Doesn't that suggest that the cell had more scruples, less sheer hate, than their planning indicates? The Narita blast occurred thirty-three minutes after CP 003

Most apologists for Khalistan assume that the CP Air and AI explosions were conscientiously timed for on-ground, relatively "safe" detonation. Passengers should have been off the planes. But is that really supportable?



landed (fourteen minutes early). Air India 182 went down off the coast of Ireland with the plane still an hour from London. It had left Montreal an hour and thirty-eight minutes late; it "should" have been in London, but not by a comfortable margin.

The choice of a civilian target eliminates the excuse of bad timing, bad luck or unforeseen delays. Absolute guilt is implicit in the decision. It may be assumed that a commitment was made to inflict maximum pain and grief, and to provoke an Indian government response that would cause popular uprisings in Punjab.

In any event, it is known that the perpetrators had "spotters" on the ground in Toronto. When the plane left Toronto late they had an opportunity to notify the tower in Montreal that a bomb was aboard, and to force the plane's safe return. They could have gained a propaganda victory by demonstrating their ability to blow up a plane and taking the apparently compassionate decision not to go through with it.

Instead, it is known that some principals in the case were celebrating with pizza in the Sikh temple in Malton early in the morning of June 23.

As critics from within the Sikh community have put it, it seems the terrorists were incapable of rational thought, or of weighing right against wrong, or of distinguishing comparative advantage from absolute carnage. They live in a world where violence is confused with righteousness and where past crimes of "Hindus" (meaning Mrs Gandhi's Indian government) are used to justify any kind of retribution. Living 12,000 miles from the scene has only deepened their resolve further.

Only the mastermind knows everything, and nothing ties him, physically, to the scene. Even if he takes the stand, he may argue, as Birk's lawyer, William Kunstler, did in New York, that he may well have harboured murderous thoughts, that if handed a gun he might well have assassi-

EXTRACT

nated Rajiv Gandhi or his mother or Giani Zail Singh — but that those were only mad passions of the moment. You can't go to jail for what you're thinking, or if you do, you have a strong case for appeal.

Where, then, is the case? Legally, it is a long way from resolution.

* * *

WE ARE CALLED AT the home of a friend with whom we are staying in Vancouver. Yes, one of the major players in the Sikh drama of the past five years wants to meet with us. But he needs time to think about where. He calls us again. There is a book he wants us to read before we meet, a book he has written on the Khalistan cause. And, mysteriously, within hours, a paperback, more pamphlet than book, appears in our mailbox.

We read the material, and note with interest that the name of the publisher has been whited out. We scratch away the white-out, and the name "Babbar Khalsa" re-emerges.

He calls us again. There is an Indian restaurant on Main Street where he expects to be that morning. There is something theatrical, or perhaps melodramatic, in the arrangements. We take a cab to the restaurant.

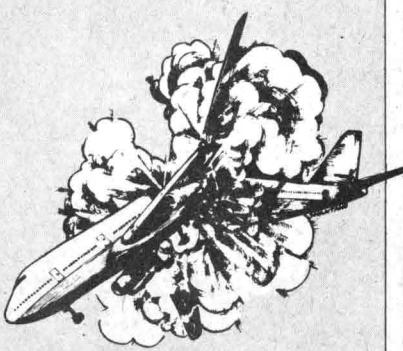
The restaurant can seat at least 50 diners, but that morning it is empty except for a handsome Sikh in a special black dress-up *damallah* turban and a full, greying beard, sitting at a table in the back, and a short, heavy man behind the cash register. The man in the black turban welcomes us. His English is fluent, his accent very slight. He had spent 10 years in Britain, working as a machinist, before immigrating to Vancouver in 1969.

"No tape recorders, please," he says as we settle across from him at the table in the empty restaurant. He takes a large red datebook out of a manila envelope and places it between us. He doesn't open up the datebook; he merely moves it around on the tabletop. It becomes obvious to us that the datebook cannot be opened up, that its pages cannot be flip-



Dhillon: discredited in the Khalistan cause.

One of the major players in the Sikh drama of the past five years wants to meet with us. But he needs time to think about where. There is a book he wants us to read before we meet, a book he has written on the Khalistan cause.



ped through, that it is a tape recorder clumsily disguised to look like an appointment book.

He describes himself as a farmer who grows vegetables just outside Vancouver. He had to be the most elegant Sikh farmer in the province.

The farmer acknowledges that he has worked long and hard to establish a Sikh homeland. This interest in a Sikh homeland led him to support Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan in early 1981, and to his association with Ganga Singh Dhillon, the man who headed the US chapter of the World Sikh Organisation (WSO) in those days, with Talvinder Singh Parmar of British Columbia and with Tara Singh Hayer, the editor of a pro-Khalistani Punjabi-language paper, the *Indo-Canadian Times*.

Parmar, Hayer and this man, we had learned from other sources, had been so close that this man worked out of Hayer's offices and used Hayer's phone to recruit adherents to the Khalistan movement. Hayer had published the pamphlet he had lent us, he said.

THE FARMER SAYS that in 1981 Hayer picked the name "Babbar Kha-

Isa" for a small-circulation Punjabi-language paper that lasted through two or three issues before going out of business. Then, suddenly, the name Babbar Khalsa came to be associated with a group in India. He denies any connection between the newspaper's name and the Khalistani terrorist organisation.

When Dhillon came to Vancouver and organised a pilgrimage trip to Pakistan, the farmer signed up. Along with some other men, he went on the ostensible pilgrimage with Dhillon and Jasbir Singh, the bright and religious young nephew of the slain Khalistani leader, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. In Lahore, he says with a smile, the "pilgrims" were entertained by high-level Pakistani police and Defence Ministry officials. The pro-Khalistan "pilgrims" were treated as VIPs.

On this trip, the farmer had been impressed by young Jasbir — he guessed Jasbir to have been 28 in 1985 — who proved his capacity for leadership and his *khalsa* nature. Jasbir was a simple man who believed truly in the Khalistan cause. He and his brother, Lakhbir Singh, had been working as labourers in Dubai when Chau-

We ask the farmer why Dhillon's pilgrims were entertained by high military and police personnel. The farmer smiles a cagey smile. He hints that until mid-1985, Chauhan's Khalistan movement enjoyed the tolerance and support of the US government, as well as Pakistan's.



han's group brought them to Britain. The brothers lived in *gurdwaras*, and kept the cause alive.

Dhillon, the tour organiser, the millionaire Washington-based man of the world, had shocked the farmer by his non-*khalsa* conduct. Dhillon is, by now, discredited in the Khalistan cause, though he had initially been one of its top leaders. The farmer believes a good Sikh must never cut his hair, eat *halal* meat, cast lustful glances at another man's wife or touch cocaine, tobacco or liquor. The farmer had liked Jasbir, who, like him, had restricted himself to a vegetarian diet.

In Britain in 1985, Jasbir worked out a plan that would put all expatriate pro-Khalistan leaders on one platform. But the poor young Khalistani had been betrayed. He was arrested and extradited to India, and stuck in a horrible jail cell where he still was.

About Dr Chauhan himself, the putative father of Khalistan, he feels unsure. It disturbs him that Dr Chauhan, after leaving India, had made anti-Indian broadcasts on Pakistan Radio in 1972. That had been a tactical error. But he supports the Khalistan movement that Dr Chauhan started.

We ask the farmer why Dhillon's pilgrims were entertained by high military and police personnel. The farmer smiles a cagey smile. Like other Khalistani leaders we've talked to in Vancouver, Toronto and New York, he hints that until mid-1985 Chauhan's Khalistan movement enjoyed the tolerance and support of the US government, as well as Pakistan's.

The farmer continues his tale of disillusionment and factionalism. He fell out with Hayer over money in 1983, as had Parmar. He doesn't want to talk about that enraging episode. Hayer printed derogatory statements about Parmar and many others in his paper. Parmar, and others, are suing Hayer.

THROUGH AUGUST 1985, two months after the Air India crash, the



Bhindranwale: hiding out in the Persian Gulf?

EXTRACT

farmer remained close to Parmar. Then the CSIS and the RCMP investigating the bombing started to ask worrisome questions. Alliances shifted. The farmer is no longer an ally of the Babbar Khalsa. There are too many factions in Vancouver. Parmar and his Babbar Khalsa moved close to the International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF), whose spokesman is the burly restaurateur, Manmohan Singh. It is the ISYF, the farmer says, who shot the visiting Punjab cabinet minister Malkiat Singh Sidhu, on a lonely logging road in rural British Columbia during the week of our meeting. The Babbar Khalsa and the toughs from the ISYF are beating up members of the Khalistan Youth Organisation (KYO). His sympathies seem to be closer to the KYO and the World Sikh Organisation. He has stayed close to the KYO.

"Sikhs never lose in battle," he says. "They only lose at the table." He looks and sounds bitter, harassed.

We press him about his relationship with Parmar. He says he had hired two German lawyers for Parmar when Parmar was detained for a year in the West German jail. He asked the lawyers to send him a copy of the conditions under which Parmar was eventually released to Canada, but the lawyers ignored his request. Parmar had been given a one-day permit to travel from Düsseldorf to Frankfurt, and back to Canada. The court decision on Parmar's case was never made public.

Parmar's year in the German jail and the failure of India to obtain his extradition is one of the deeply puzzling mysteries to everyone who has studied the case. Who paid for it, what evidence was presented, what conditions were attached to his release, if any, by India, Canada and Germany? We know that Canadian surveillance of Parmar began upon his return. We know that his militant organising never abated.

We press the farmer for more details. Had he, for instance, driven the car that took Parmar and the straggly-

bearded young man to the ferry on the morning of June 4, 1985, on their way to the meeting with Inderjit Singh Reyat?

The farmer panics.

"My wife told me not to talk to you," he says. He slips his red date-book back into the manila envelope. "I shouldn't have agreed to see you." Then he says, avoiding our gaze, "My lawyer has told me not to say anything more."

We rise to go.

"In Canada, today, we're leaderless," the man says. He looks very sorrowful.

We pick up a sweetmeat at the counter. The short, silent cashier rings up fifty cents.

"I GOT A TIP FOR YOU," the farmer whispers, his voice low and conspiratorial. "It's a tip that comes straight from Jasbir."

We stop. "Bhindranwale didn't die in the Golden Temple. He got out. He's hiding out somewhere in the area of the Persian Gulf."

**"I got a tip for you,"
the farmer whispers, his
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Bhindranwale didn't die
in the Golden Temple.
He got out. He's
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the area of the
Persian Gulf."**



"Did you see him?"

The farmer looks embarrassed. "No. That is what Jasbir Singh told me. It is up to you whether to believe me or not."

We move towards the exit.

"You didn't ask to see the Khalistan passport!" he shouts, accusingly. "Everybody wants to see passports and currency and maps!"

We leave him holding the manila envelope in one hand, and a passport and colourful bills in the other. The passport and currency are impressive, professional-looking documents. The "Khalistan One" passport is made out to Jarnail Bhindranwale, and his picture is a lurid icon executed in the Indian devotional manner.

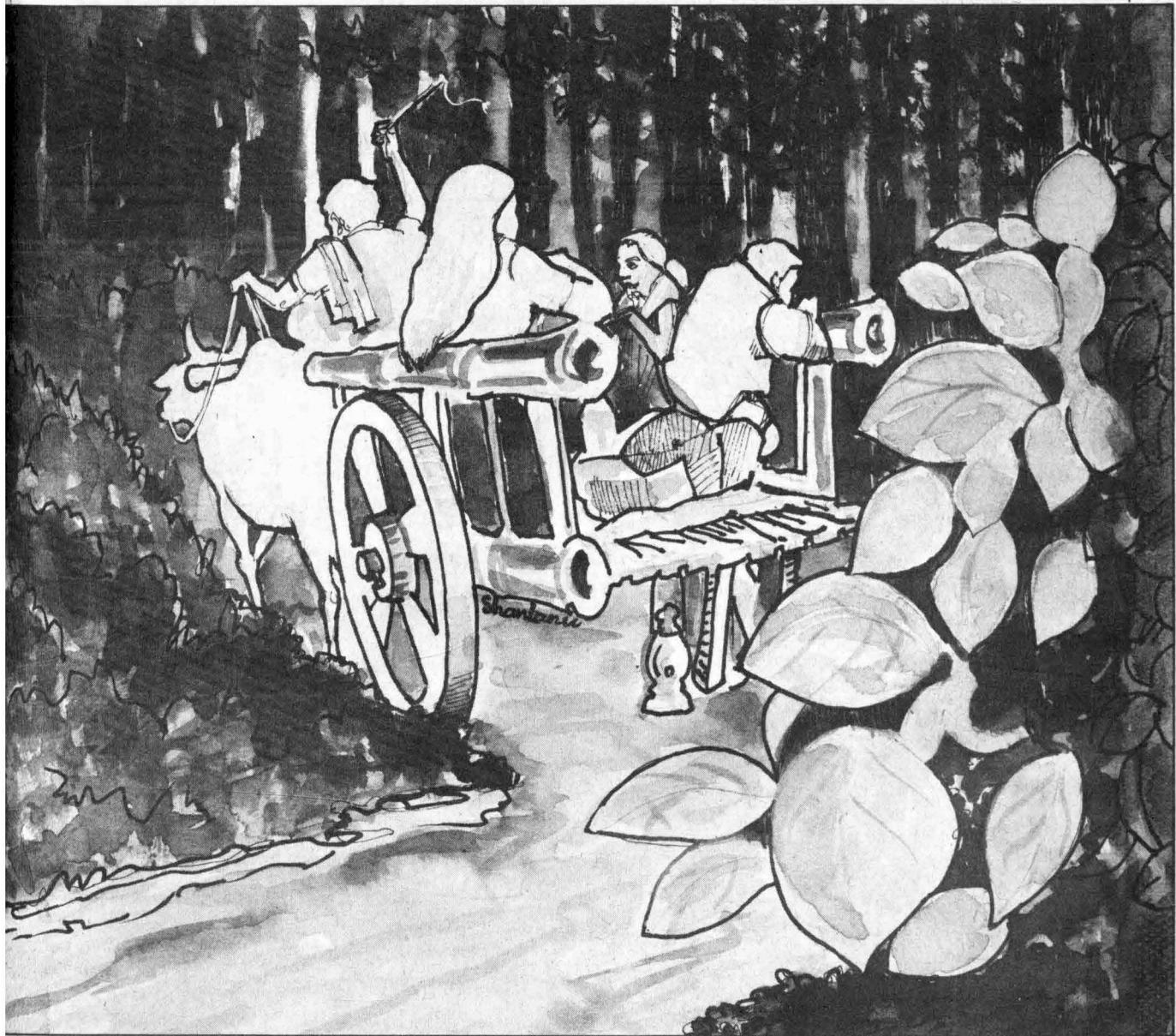
We walk outdoors. It is a warm, golden June day, the second anniversary of the Golden Temple invasion, nearly the first anniversary of the Air India crash. The sidewalks are jammed with busy shoppers, nearly all of them Sikh, old folks in full white, mothers in Western clothes, pushing baby strollers.

It is a sight not without its history, even its comedy.

It is a vision out of the "brown tide/yellow hordes" nightmare that the entire North American West coast shared at the turn of the century, and that white British Columbians had fought against with every political and religious and propagandistic device available to them. For fifty years they had prevailed.

In the summer of 1914, white Vancouverites had turned out by the thousands to cheer as the Canadian navy surrounded an old Japanese chartered tub named the *Komagata Maru*, and escorted it out to sea and back to Asia, preventing the landing of 376 would-be immigrants from India's Punjab.

It is a tangled story we'd touched on in today's Vancouver. A peaceful and prosperous Sikh community, one of Canada's oldest ethnic communities, being torn apart by events in a country many of them had never seen. ♦



KANKESHWAR

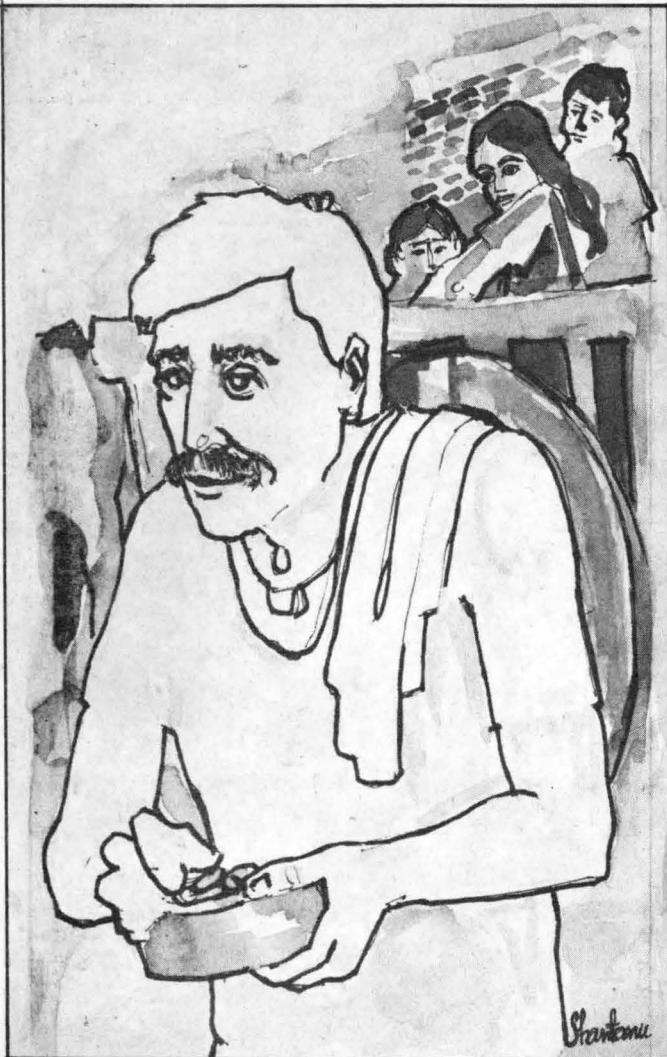
RAMESH WAS ABOUT TO drive a car.

First he grasped one of the spokes of the huge wooden wheel. Vandana's face was pressed to the other side of the wheel. Then, his little elbow gaunt with effort, he hauled himself onto the cart. He sat in the driver's seat and the car was off. Zhoom, zhoo-zhoo-zhoom! The engine sounded like thunder; the steering-wheel moved very fast, first this way then that. Sometimes Ramesh swayed his whole body to one side, with a highly romantic slow-

ness, as you have to do when the car is making an enormous turn. And Vandana watched, wanting to do everything too, wanting to suddenly jump and run.

It was just after sunrise and the sun was still a huge red ball very near the ground. The air smelled fresh. The bullocks were tethered to the *banyan* tree, gently flicking their tails against the flies which had begun to arrive. Ramesh's father appeared, flinging away his *bidi* as he moved towards the bullocks. He was going to take the memsaab

FICTION



and the children to the forest in the bullock-cart. Ramesh could never understand why they went in a bullock-cart when they could go in a car, the way they had come from Bombay. His father didn't know either. "What do they do in the forest?" Ramesh's mother had once asked.

"They eat," Ramesh's father had answered.

The memsaab now came out of the bungalow with the children, carrying a basket. "Everything ready, Prakash?"

"Yes, memsaab."

Ramesh's father was folding a rough black blanket onto the floor of the cart while Ramesh and Vandana watched with their souls in their eyes. They were deliciously scared of the memsaab. Vandana had with her the necklace of blue beads which her father had brought her from Bombay and stood nearby, twisting her beads, ready to die of shyness if spoken to.

"What pretty beads," said memsaab. Vandana looked at the ground, covered her face, then ran and hid behind

the *banyan* tree. Everyone laughed.

"She just pretends," her father said with pride. "Go now, go to your mother, both of you."

Ramesh and Vandana naturally stayed where they were. Their mother was watching shyly from the door of the hut. Tinu and Bubbli climbed into the bullock-cart. Tinu waited for the cart to creak and slope to one side when he climbed in, as it had done last year. But this time, it did nothing of the sort and there was no long, satisfying creak – as happens, Tinu knew, so many times in this world.

SUGUNA TUCKED THE BASKET behind the children and climbed in. "Ta-ta," she smiled at Ramesh and Vandana. Tinu and Bubbli became animated all at once. "Ta-ta, ta-ta," they shouted as the cart moved off.

Up, jerk. Down. Up, jerk, down . . . as bone grinds against bone. At least, thought Tinu, the bumping is still the same. The humble familiar smell of the bullocks mingled with the smell of the blanket. As the wooden wheels moved through the soft dust, it fell finely away to form two little ridges.

On one side of the road there was a sparse forest. Soon it would be shot with gold. Tiny birds now darted between the still silhouetted trees, and the air was as dark and cold as a wet stone.

They would have to go through part of the village, past the old moist brick houses and the village well. Then through some fields, and finally to the Kankeshwar hill which, mercifully, was still covered with teak forests. How long the forests would last, nobody knew. And then they would climb up to the cave.

As they came to the first of the brick houses, Prakash pulled at the ropes of the bullock's harness. The cart rolled more slowly and finally halted.

"Just a minute, memsaab. I have to take something back for my children. Before we return, this specimen will have closed his shop and gone to sleep."

"Certainly, Prakash."

THE CART SANK FORWARD as Prakash jumped off. He moved to where two thick wooden windows were set in the brick, and banged. A scraping and a shuffling were heard. Then one of the wooden windows was slowly pushed outwards, and a dour, spectacled head appeared. It had a muffler wrapped around it several times over, as if in protection against an untrustworthy world.

The head growled and Prakash said something. The other window opened, as slowly as possible, and an array of dusty bottles came into view. Sweets were reluctantly handed over. The spectacles stared balefully at the bullock-cart and Prakash returned grinning.

"That chap's supposed to be a sweet-seller! He needs some sweets himself!"

"Do you always take back sweets for the children, Prakash?"

"Whenever I can, memsaab. They chew my head off otherwise." He placed the two remaining coins inside a small piece of cloth which he then knotted up. Then he carefully tucked the cloth out of sight under the blanket. "My wife goes on: 'Don't spoil them, don't spoil them.' Never minds her own business," he grumbled, gathering the ropes and thrusting two vigorous feet against the bullocks' rumps. "Get on, you. So what if we spend a few annas on sweets? Are we going to starve? But she doesn't listen."

"Women are all the same, Prakash."

He laughed.

After a while Suguna commented, "The crops have been good this year, haven't they?"

"Very good, memsaab. I, myself, have never had such a crop."

"And last year too."

"Yes, two years running. I thank God for it every day, memsaab. It is not something one must take lightly."

"So . . . er . . . will you be free of your debts, Prakash?"

"No question of it," said Prakash briskly. "The debt will take 10, maybe 11 years. This benighted moneylender takes 50 per cent."

There was a silence. Then Suguna said, "But your wife is well again."

"Perfectly well, memsaab," he grinned. "Talking even more than before. That's why I borrowed the money and took her to Bombay. No use saving money if you end up with a dead wife, is it?"

"But it's a shame. If it weren't for the operation you would have been well-off."

"Oh, before the operation, I was even thinking of buying a motor-cycle. I couldn't believe that I was going to have a motor-cycle at long last! I had saved for five years. But now — never." Prakash thumped the bullocks with his feet once more.

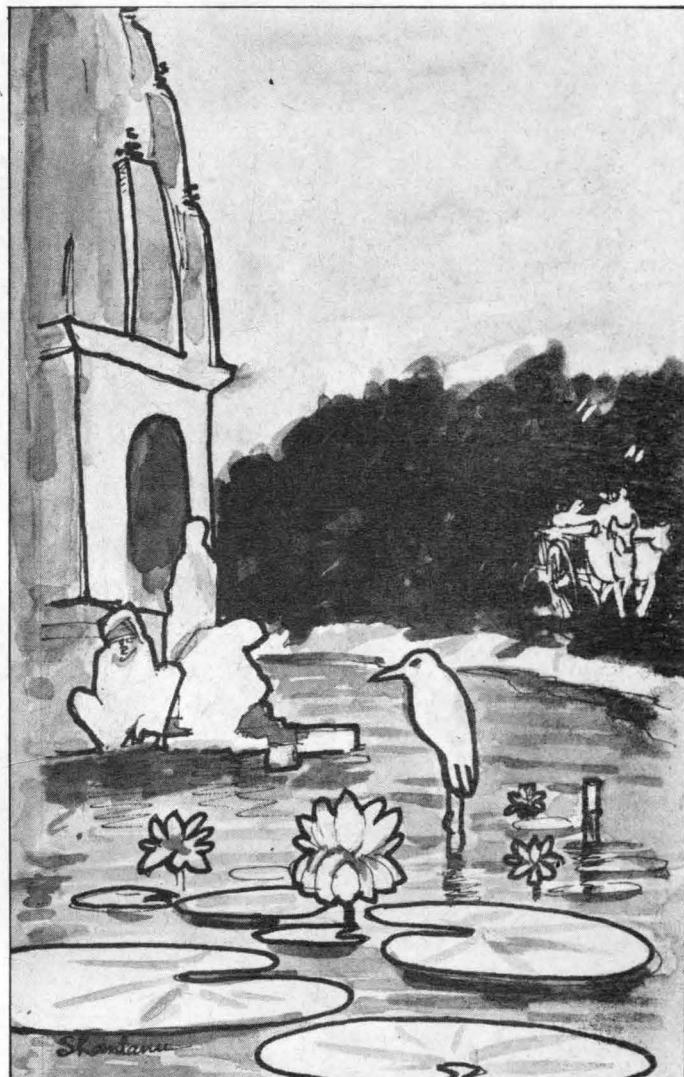
Suguna stared at him, amazed. "But that is terrible," she said. "Just imagine! Coming so close to it . . ."

"It was not my fate, memsaab."

HOW CAN THEY BE SO CALM, Suguna wondered. She pondered over it every year. She had forgotten how calm she felt, when talking to Prakash. She always felt she could ask him *anything* she wanted, each time they went to Kankeshwar in the bullock-cart. She fell silent.

They were skirting the village pond. In the first rays of the sun, it was a glinting sheet, with the weeds and water-lilies on its surface, receding silhouettes against the sun. On the far side, the little temple at the water's edge was a fresh white; by its steps, three women in bright saris washed clothes, reflected jewel-like in the shimmering water.

On the near side, large, flat water-lily leaves were clearly visible near the water's muddy edges, jacanas and wagtails picking their way coquettishly among the leaves. Beyond them, a kingfisher sat lifeless on a pole. Without an



interval it would become a dart and swoop downwards like an arrow, wings closed.

They turned off into the stubble. At this time of day, the stubble, too, glowed in the damp air. Tinu peered down to see what would happen if one of the wheels went over the stubby stalks; Suguna leaned back, allowing herself to sway, loose-limbed, with the bullock-cart. She felt so calm, dazed with calm. The cart jerked, then stilled, like the smoke that rose from the stationary hut in the distance.

The stubble passed. Scrub passed. A hillock passed. Now there was only sparse teak everywhere . . . then here they were. The cart rolled to a halt once more. It was a shock to come to a stop; to have to perform the act of standing up and climbing down. She did it as vacantly as possible, not wanting anything to disturb her mood.

"We'll be back at noon, Prakash." She was extremely friendly so as to end the possibility of conversation. She did not want Prakash to talk, but at that moment she felt

FICTION



she could quietly put her arms around him and kiss him. She smiled to herself at the absurdity of the thought. Which was real, the inner rightness or the outer absurdity...

ONE DAY, WHEN SUGUNA was about Tinu's age, she had been taken all the way up to the top of the Kankeshwar hill. To her surprise, she could see the sea from there, appallingly vast and shiny. But most appalling of all were the islands. Because, from the bungalow, when you looked out at the sea, you saw the two long, narrow islands pasted onto the horizon; and so it was day after day. But,

from the top of the Kankeshwar hill, they were suddenly two fat little blobs in the middle of the sea, with water on all sides. Without knowing why, she had felt that something important had happened, and she was reminded of it now.

"Go straight to the cave, children." She started to climb, without effort and without hurry, not wanting discord of any kind. Around them, the sunlight was beginning to filter through the semi-naked trees. Huge curled leaves, in all colours, from yellow to crimson, lay on the ground, waiting to crackle. Everywhere, rocks rose out of the ground; small black mounds or flat grey surfaces. She knew now that a remarkably small part of each rock showed above the ground.

At this moment, their path appeared to be completely enclosed by the forest. But, in another minute, the forest would open up and the hill drop away like cloth. She knew the place like the back of her hand. You then stood at the edge of a dry ravine, looking at the sides of the hill forming a deep 'V' around it. Here, it was always hard to believe how high you had climbed in such a short time. In the deep recess of the 'V', the forest looked denser, the uppermost layer standing out spikily against the sky. You could look down then, down into the ravine till its emptiness drummed inside your head. One small dry branch overhung the rock, eternally the same; right now, a sunbird perched briefly on it, its round flaming breast a microcosm of the sun behind it.

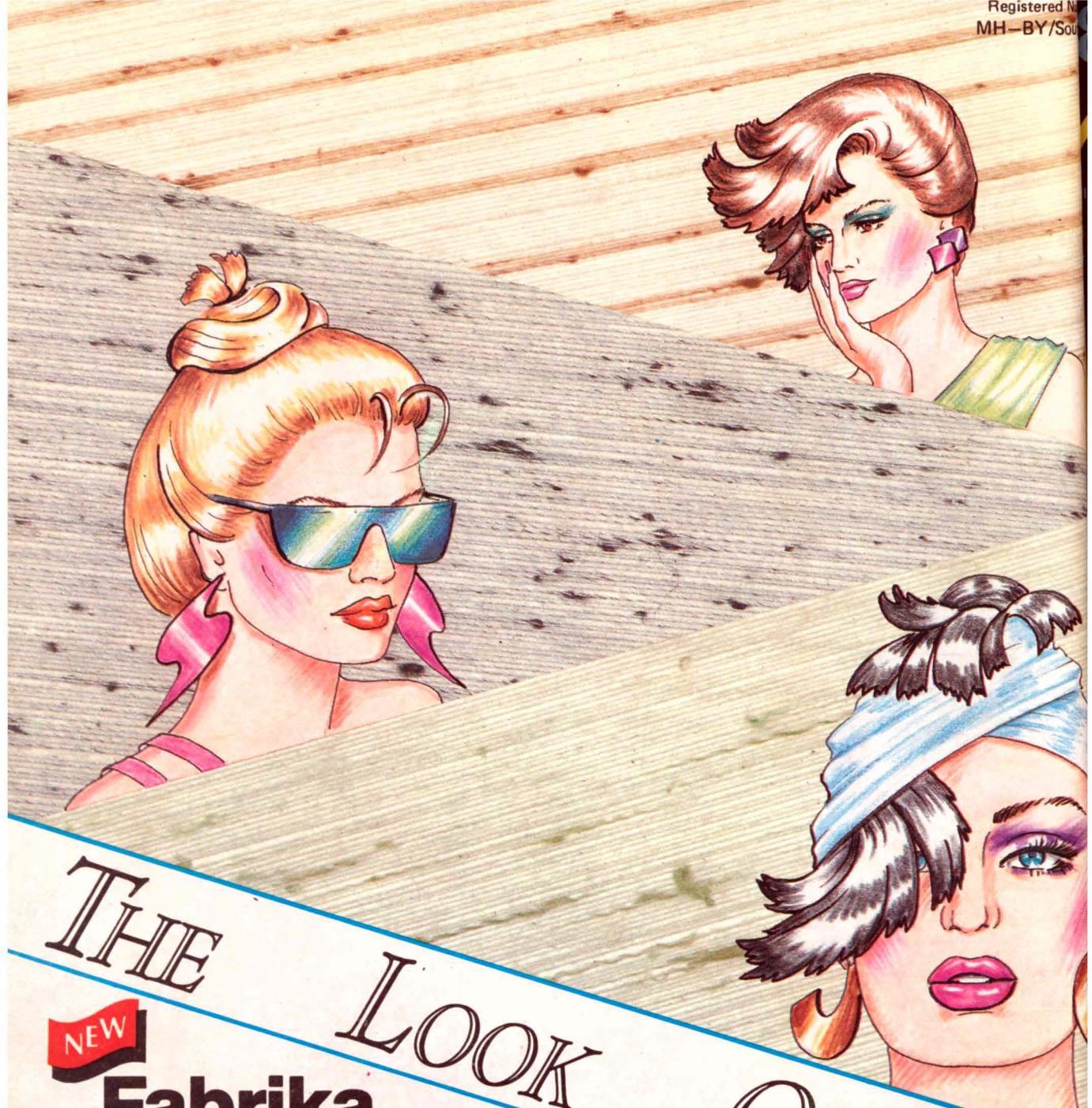
She climbed on, holding her body like a container from which water must not spill. The forest thinned with the approach to the cave — around the rough black entrance all was bare, except for the round weight of the earth shrouding the cave. Water dripped from the black glistening wall, as always. She sat down on the cave floor as though she were doing nothing at all. Why did she feel so weightless? She was surrounded by something, something round and dark, lying clear and cold around her. She had to live through it. She had to close her eyes and live through it. It was dark but weightless and joyful. There was no need to move. She had to live out this strange light darkness. The dark flood moved inside her, up and down, in perfect harmony; she knew there was no need to move.

LET IT STAY. Please let it stay. After hours? Minutes? The flood was inching away and leaving her alone. A thought formed — the thought, let it stay. She felt a pain like that of a frozen finger coming to life. More thoughts flooded her mind, against her will. Where were the children? Was Prakash still waiting? For no reason she recalled herself, wondering how he could be so calm. And it seemed to her the wonder of a different person. What was there to wonder about? Beside her, the water dripped into a tiny black pool, as it had done for years. Was a new drop about to form? Yes. . . there it was, for the first time, the magic of a new drop of water. ♦

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