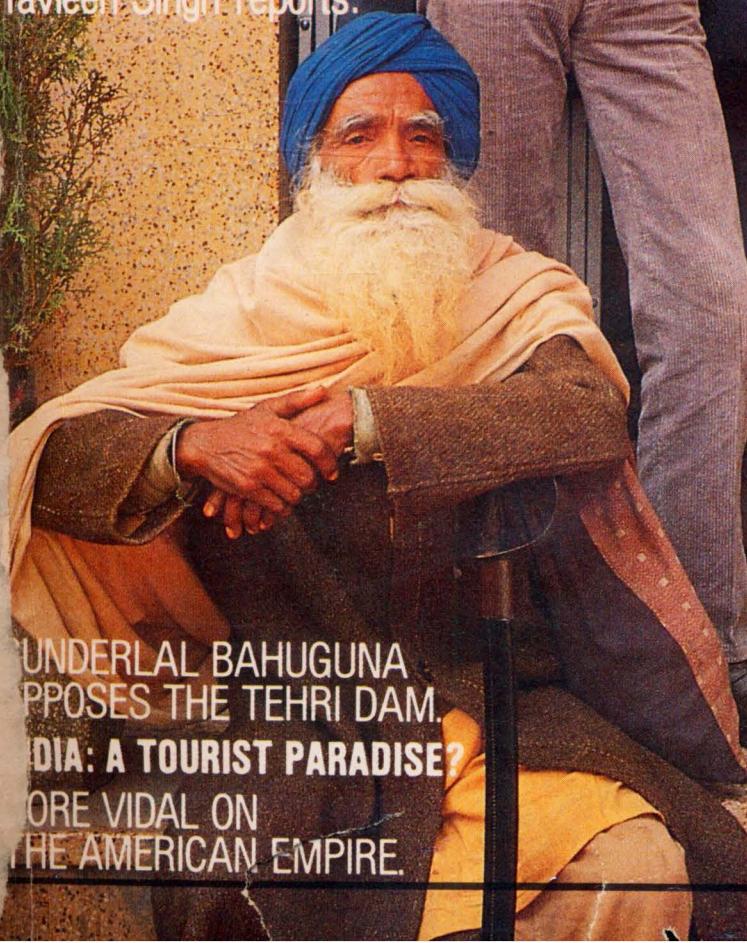


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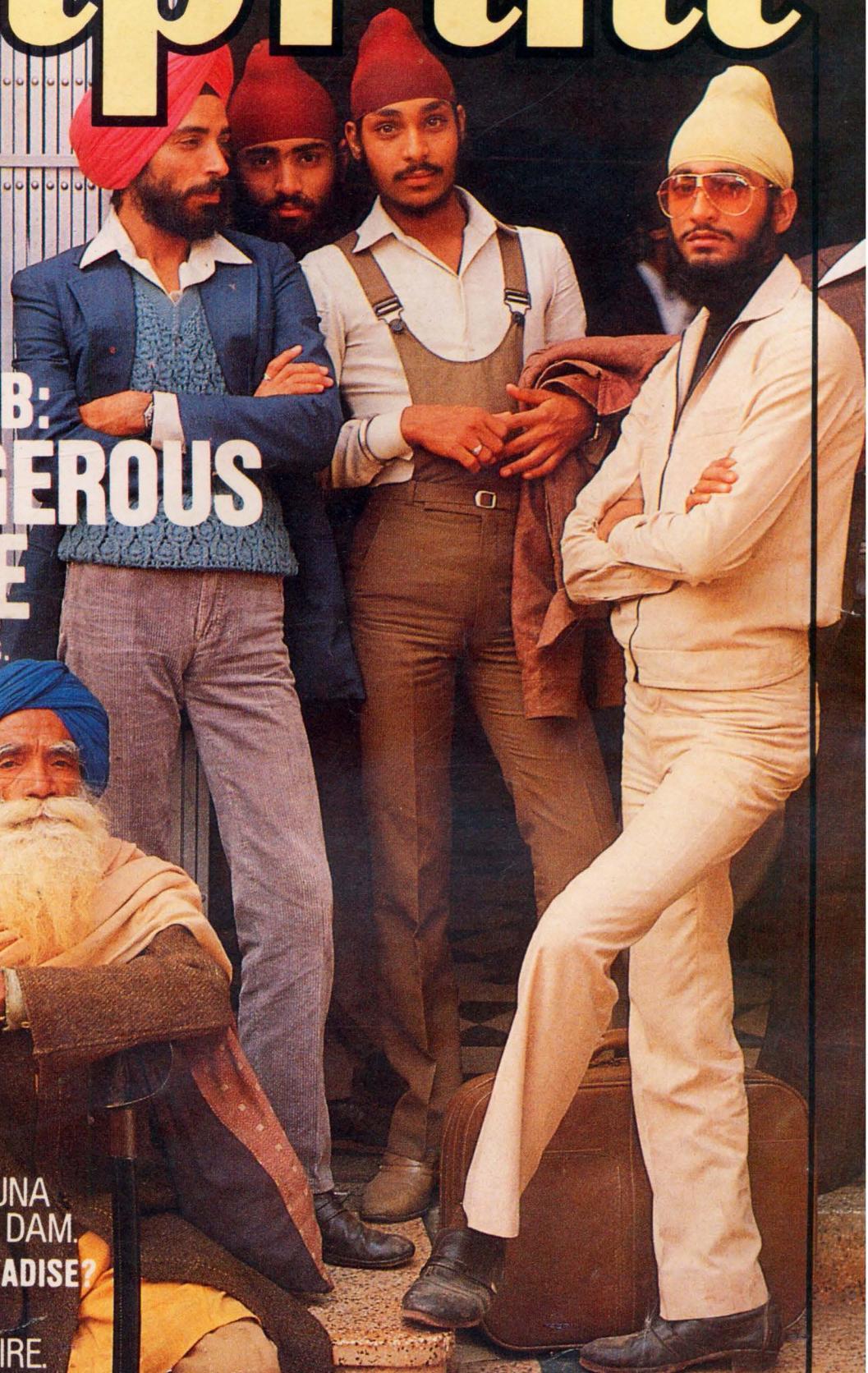
## THE PUNJAB: A DANGEROUS GAMBLE

Tavleen Singh reports.



UNDERLAL BAHUGUNA  
OPPOSES THE TEHRI DAM.

DIA: A TOURIST PARADISE?  
ORE VIDAL ON  
THE AMERICAN EMPIRE.



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# CONSPIRACY?

**IN THE WAKE OF THE DROUGHT**, the hunger today, it seems, is for Conspiracy. The Zail Singh-Rajiv Gandhi controversy recently aired in the press has sufficiently whetted the appetite. The moment for Conspiracy is at hand. "A Day By Day Account (of) The Conspiracy That Shook Rajiv Gandhi," brags the current issue of *India Today*. A blurb prefacing the story declares: "Senior Editor Prabhu Chawla covered the controversy, and was an eyewitness to much of the backstage drama of that time," and adds, "He filed this definitive blow-by-blow account after delving into his old notes and talking afresh to key players in the drama that nearly ended in an unprecedented constitutional crisis."

In the 'blow-by-blow account' witness this gem, in part recording the events of June 20, 1987: ". . . As part of the strategy (for Giani Zail Singh to dismiss Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, and for the Giani to seek re-election as President, I suppose – RVP), it is also decided to dig out Venkataraman's record during his defence ministership when the German submarine deal was signed. It is agreed that the plan will be published in the media. Three senior journalists – Arun Shourie and S Mulgaonkar of the *Indian Express*, and R V Pandit of **Imprint** are selected for the task." No Prabhu Chawla has ever spoken to me or contacted me. ". . . It is also decided . . ." and ". . . it is agreed . . ." By whom?

There is more. June 22: "That evening, Pandit and Mulgaonkar show up at Rashtrapati Bhavan to try and persuade the President to contest. They assure him that they are in a position to rope in V P Singh." Rope in V P Singh? Has Giani Zail Singh said so to *India Today*? Have Mulgaonkar or Pandit said that to Prabhu Chawla?

And still more. "Pandit and Mulgaonkar arrive at V P Singh's house just as he is leaving to catch a flight for Calcutta. They argue with him for 30 minutes, standing up to prevent him from leaving for the airport."

I repeat, no Prabhu Chawla has ever spoken to me or checked any part of his story with me.

But then, this is how we write contemporary history.

\*

In another magazine, *Onlooker*, an even more imaginative and bizarre tale was published in July 1987. In a story titled "The Red Pawn!" the magazine went on to claim that the Kremlin was plotting to install Krishna Iyer in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, with the help of V P Singh; I was given a role as V P Singh's friend. The magazine quoted selectively from an Open Letter I had published in the June 1987 issue of **Imprint** and, commented: "The message in the letter is loud and clear. Curiously, what is most interesting is that the Kremlin managed a known rightist like Pandit to give voice to the Russian thoughts."

The *Onlooker* theory of conspiracy talked of V P Singh playing the Russian card, and my being an accessory to it. I shudder to think how we will write our history!

Was I involved in what was happening in Delhi in the summer of 1987? I was. First and foremost, I did not want V P Singh and Rajiv Gandhi to part company. Neither Mr Gandhi nor Mr Singh wanted to, then. I knew that Zail Singh was hurt, but he had affection for Rajiv Gandhi. I wanted Mr Gandhi to rebuild the relationship on the basis of this. Mr Gandhi was surrounded by Yes men and awed colleagues. (I am not referring to bureaucrats); Giani Zail Singh was not a Yes man in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He was good for the country in view of what was then in store for us, and still is.

As a concerned citizen, I am also an involved citizen. In the summer of 1987 I worked for what I believed and still believe. There was no plot, no conspiracy.

For the record, I wish to state that I had openly opposed Mr R Venkataraman's candidature and pleaded for a second term for Giani Zail Singh. I had also opposed the proposition that an elected Prime Minister be dismissed. These three premises were part of an open letter addressed to MPs and MLAs and which was published in the June 1987 issue of **Imprint**. The relevant sections are being reproduced here. I believe today, as I believed and so wrote in June 1987, that the President, Giani Zail Singh, was not going to sack Mr Gandhi. And today, I believe with

# ON THE MARQUEE

even stronger conviction than I did in June 1987, that he would have served us well in the second term. His being in office, would have operated as a brake on our involvement in the Sri Lanka imbroglio and there would have been no need for the 59th Amendment to the Constitution in its present form — both follies for which we will needlessly suffer for a long time to come.

## EXCERPTS FROM THE OPEN LETTER

You are being called upon to elect a new President for the Republic of India when the office of the President is beleaguered. In the two-and-a-half years that Mr Rajiv Gandhi has been the Prime Minister of India, he has done more than all his predecessors in office put together to devalue the highest institution created under the Constitution. He has shown disrespect to the office and to the person of the President to an extent where his minions openly hurl abuses at the President and even question the very relevance to the country of this high office. The government has, by a cabinet resolution recently, questioned the authority of the President to receive information on vital matters of State, making it appear that the high Constitutional office is no more than a rubber stamp. And all this has happened at a time when the kindest words one can say about the present Prime Minister are that he is innocent, that he is immature and that he is grossly inexperienced. And that the kindest description that one can tag on most of his colleagues is that they are Yes Men. The state of the nation, as you have seen it emerge, is the result of this self-serving, and neglect of the public good.

In normal circumstances, Giani Zail Singh, the present incumbent in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, should have been the ruling party's candidate for a second term. But the government of Mr Rajiv Gandhi does not want him for a second term. Again, normally, the Congress (I) — the party in power — has the unquestioned right and privilege to nominate any member of their government or their party for the succession. And a person so nominated should have been straightaway elected. But these are not normal times, and this is not an ordinary Presidential election. But let me proceed.

The man you — the members of Parliament and the members of the Legislative Assemblies in the states of the Union of India as well as members of the Rajya Sabha and members of the Upper Houses in the states of the Indian Union — will elect as the next President will have an extraordinary and urgent task awaiting him at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. He will have to immediately begin restoring the lost dignity to his office. He will have to bring moral and constitutional authority back to the highest office in the land. He will have to deal with a Prime Minister who heads a Congress (I) government which enjoys an absolute majority in the Parliament but very little support in the country, as recent elections in some states have demonstrated. The new President will have to deal with a Prime Minister who appears unfamiliar with the political ethos of the country. Lacking political background and experience of administration normally essential for becoming the Chief Executive of a nation, this Prime Minister, who stormed into power riding the wave of sympathy generated upon the assassination of his mother, has, in turn, induced unnatural awe and silence in most members of his party who were elected with him. Thus, Mr Gandhi is the government. Only he. Almost as a natural corollary, the government has been making all the mistakes it can possibly make with grave and, in many cases, lasting consequences for the country. The Prime Minister appears to be doing what he likes, his likes and dislikes dominating what decision-making process such a style of functioning permits. In the event, national interest is equated with personal interest and is made subservient to personal whims, to survival. The President of the Republic you all will now elect will have to have a strong and a sane mind of his own and a moral stature to match, to deal with the grave consequences which now inevitably flow from these departures from the elementary procedures of a responsible cabinet government.

## ON MR VENKATARAMAN

The Congress (I) has nominated Mr R Venkataraman, the Vice-President, for the highest post. Despite the charade of consultations that Mr Rajiv Gandhi recently made by meeting many leaders of the Opposition and leaders from the states of the Indian Union, it is clear that he wanted Mr Venkataraman to succeed Giani Zail Singh. In normal times, this would have been the best thing to do. It would have been the normal thing to do: we have the good precedents of Vice-President Dr S Radhakrishnan following Dr Rajendra Prasad, and Vice-President Dr Zakir Hussain following Dr Radhakrishnan to the office of the President.

But, as earlier stressed, these are not normal times. Mr Gandhi's preference for Mr R Venkataraman — a pre-

ference that the Congress (I) party has now endorsed — is largely because Mr Gandhi wants a pliable person in the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Mr Venkataraman is a distinguished pliable person. He has survived in the court of Mrs Indira Gandhi, and later in Mr Gandhi's circle, by always striving to do the pleasing things. His membership of the cabinet of Mrs Gandhi is remembered for referring every decision he had to make, every action he was entitled to take, to the higher authority. "What does the Madam say?" and "What does the Madam want?" were his obliging refrains as a senior member of Mrs Gandhi's government. As Vice-President he has accepted considerations at the hands of Mr Gandhi to which he is not, by custom, entitled. He travels, for example, by special planes when all Vice-Presidents hitherto have travelled by commercial airliners.

Mr Venkataraman is 77 and reports said that he had indicated that he would resign the office of the Vice-President on health grounds, because of age, if he was not nominated the Congress party's candidate in the forthcoming Presidential poll. Be that as it may, 77 is not an age to venture onto what surely is the most difficult and delicate job in India today. There is another disturbing aspect. As Vice-President of the Republic of India and as the Presiding Officer of the Rajya Sabha, Mr Venkataraman knows of the diminution the office of the President has suffered at the hands of the present government and its leader. Yet, he is anxious to get himself installed into that deliberately denigrated office. He is aspiring to this office without having in any way publicly indicated what he will do to restore the dignity and the stature which are the hallmarks of that office but which have been devalued by a delinquent government. Expectedly, soon after Mr Venkataraman was told that the Congress (I) party had chosen him as its presidential candidate, Mr Venkataraman told newsmen that he was more than happy that the party had reposed faith in him, according to *The Times Of India*. "I shall always endeavour to justify this confidence," he told newsmen (*The Times Of India*, June 15, 1987). As you can see, India, this country, his country, your country, my country, our country, does not feature in Mr Venkataraman's response to the nomination. So how will the nation fare at Mr Venkataraman's hands if there is a conflict of interest between his Congress (I) party and the Union of India? There is this conflict already — search your hearts for an answer.

Of all the crises confronting the government of Mr Rajiv Gandhi, the acknowledged fact of astronomical sums being paid out as commissions on one pretext or the other in defence purchases to one or the other person is the gravest. Mr Venkataraman was a Defence Minister of India during the years 1980-84. He could not have been totally unaware of what was happening. And if he was unaware, then as a matter of abundant caution, you must consider him unfit to be our next President.

Our cup of corruption and chicanery is full, overflowing. Much dirt will be on public display in time to come — as the unfolding tragedy in the Bofors affair shockingly demonstrates — and there will be much gossip and many rumours. And many reputations will be sullied. In that event, it will be a very difficult time for a former Defence Minister who, though not personally corrupt, was at all times subservient to the needs and greed of his party bosses. Should we not take care now to spare possible embarrassment to a future President by ensuring now that we do not cause this to happen? You can do this, I am afraid, only by not voting for Mr Venkataraman.

## ON A SECOND TERM FOR GIANI ZAIL SINGH

There is, of course, Giani Zail Singh, the President, who, reluctantly, is not a candidate for a second term and who Mr Rajiv Gandhi wants out. Yet, in the circumstances in which we have trapped ourselves, a second term for the Giani could be in the best interests of the nation.

"If my leader had said I should pick up a broom and be a sweeper, I would have done that. She chose me to be President," Giani Zail Singh had said on being elected President. Having at that instant devalued the office and his own stature as the then newly elected President by his words of pathetic subservience, Giani Zail Singh has grown to be wiser and more responsible while in office. With the earthy wisdom of a craftsman that the Sikhs from the villages of the Punjab are known for, he has developed an appreciation for the politics and the nationhood of India that is deep and wide in scope. He has emerged as a person with his own mind, who listens to a very large number of visitors from many walks of life, and increasingly questions the wisdom of many actions of the government when he finds them to be at variance with the national interest.

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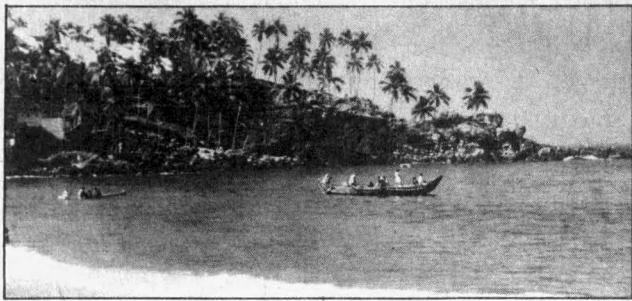
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*Cover transparency:  
SONDEEP SHANKAR.*

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## LETTERS



Miss(ed) India!

By covering 'Miss India' (**Imprint**, March) you have sidelined many problems and missed the real India. Is it necessary to waste 11 precious pages of your esteemed monthly by writing about Sridevi when we are facing drought in many parts of the country, terrorism in the Punjab, and much else besides? There are many magazines that write about Sridevi, Bachchan and the movies. It is unfortunate that film heroes and actresses are today's leaders. The Mahatmas, Nehrus, and Patels are no longer a source of inspiration for our nation. There is a wide gap between the world of celluloid and reality.

S A Srinivasa Sarma  
Bombay

Being an admirer of Sridevi, I relished reading **Imprint**'s tête-à-tête with the reigning queen of Indian cinema (**Imprint**, March). Sridevi has achieved the impossible by sheer talent and dedication. And now she commands a fan following that is second only to Amitabh Bachchan's.

What is very disheartening is that in spite of possessing oodles of talent in histrionics, Sridevi has never had an authentic chance to display her gift. She's been typecast. She's

known only as a glamour puss. Hindi film-makers, unlike those from the South, are yet to exploit her talent. Very few know that Sridevi had the sort of plasticity which can be moulded to fit any role. She did consummate justice to her roles in 'Nagina' and 'Mr India'. She should relinquish signing films that require her to only dance and play second fiddle to the likes of Jeetendra. It's high time she proved her mettle to the larger Indian audience.

K Chidanand Kumar  
Bangalore



A Timely Message

I have not read Bisham Sahni's *Tamas*, but it was just about the best serial Doordarshan has ever telecast. *Tamas* has no parallel in its class; an artistic and outstanding piece of cinema indeed.

The controversy and criticism which *Tamas* has met with only proves that communalism is deeply rooted in us. In fact, the controversies were baseless. How could one say that the serial lacked a secular perspective (which it did have) only after viewing the first two episodes? Can one tell what the moral of a story is after reading only a fraction of it? Instead, critics could have spent their valuable time discussing

vital issues such as water shortages, political scandals, the increasing poverty . . . and spared Tamas which only portrays fact and truth. The lessons of the Partition ought to be learnt and it is time we recognise the follies which are plunging our nation into darkness. *Tamas* (*Imprint*, March) comes with a timely message. Hats off to Bhisham Sahni and Govind Nihalani's bold attempt.

Arjinder Singh Sangotra  
Bombay

### The Hindujas Should Be Welcomed

I was shocked that a reputable magazine like *Imprint* has reprinted an article by one Pranay Gupte without checking the facts about the Hindujas (*Imprint*, February).

There is no mystery about the Hinduja brothers. They are easily accessible, genial persons who developed the family business started by their father in 1919. Apart from never dealing in arms and ammunition, they have not even dealt in meat products, alcohol and tobacco, merely on grounds of morals and religion. They have amassed their wealth in trading, investment banking and asset management, promotion and finance of projects, and joint ventures. But the core of their success lies in hard work, honesty, flexibility in operations, and innovative concepts.

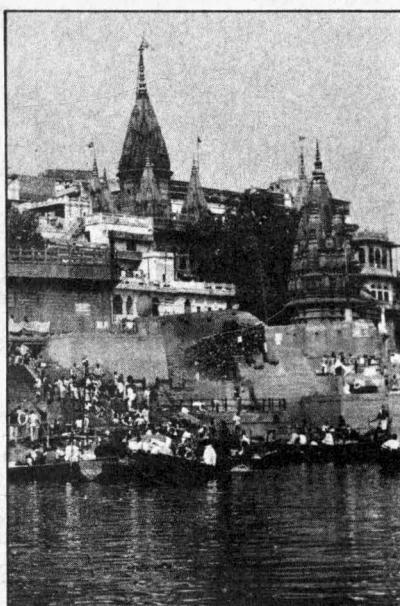
They have endowed about US\$100 million to various charities of which almost 80 per cent are in India. They have also earmarked over US\$200 million to help the developmental effort in India. Yet, instead of welcoming the Hindujas with open arms, our countrymen are only trying to sully their reputation.

No wonder then that overseas Indians are usually compared to crabs in a wicker basket. Any time one of them tries to crawl out of the basket, the rest of them pull it down jointly. If the Hindujas were British citizens, they would have been knighted by the Queen!

K L Samant  
London

### City Of Corpses

In the article 'Instant Karma' (*Imprint*, March) Minnie Vaid-Fera correctly depicted the awesome atmosphere of the Benaras Ghats. Hundreds of bodies are brought to the city from different places and consigned to the flames on the bank of the Ganga. The partly burnt and unburnt bodies are thrown into the waters of the holy river after rituals are performed for the salvation of the dead. How much truth lies behind the belief that 'cremation at Kashi

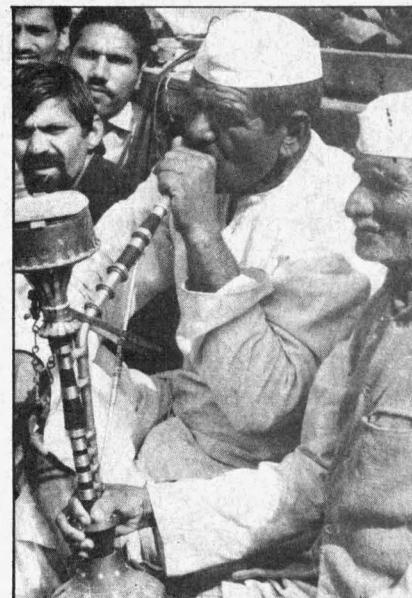


gives moksha to the dead' one cannot say, but it certainly supplements the pollution of the 'holy waters' which are already polluted by sewage, chemicals and human waste by the inhabitants residing on the banks of this sacred city.

J V Naik  
Bombay

### Raising Consciousness

This refers to your report 'Sowing the Seeds of Revolution' (*Imprint*, March). Mr Tikait was wise in withdrawing the agitation from Meerut when he did, since he knew that the farmers, like the businessmen, cannot be united. The farmers are hard-working, they earn a respectable liv-



ing, and rarely leave their fields to cast their vote. Mr Tikait has raised their consciousness and this has brought results, as their agitation has forced the government to think of villages rather than only cities and large industries. I hope that Mr Tikait will continue educating the farmers and small traders of their rights and how to get them.

Pannalall Mundhra  
Calcutta

### Vulnerable Targets

Sheela Barse's report on 'Police: The Human Factor' (*Imprint*, March) deserves appreciation for highlighting the sorry state of affairs in the police force, despite its obvious bias in favour of the constabulary cadre.

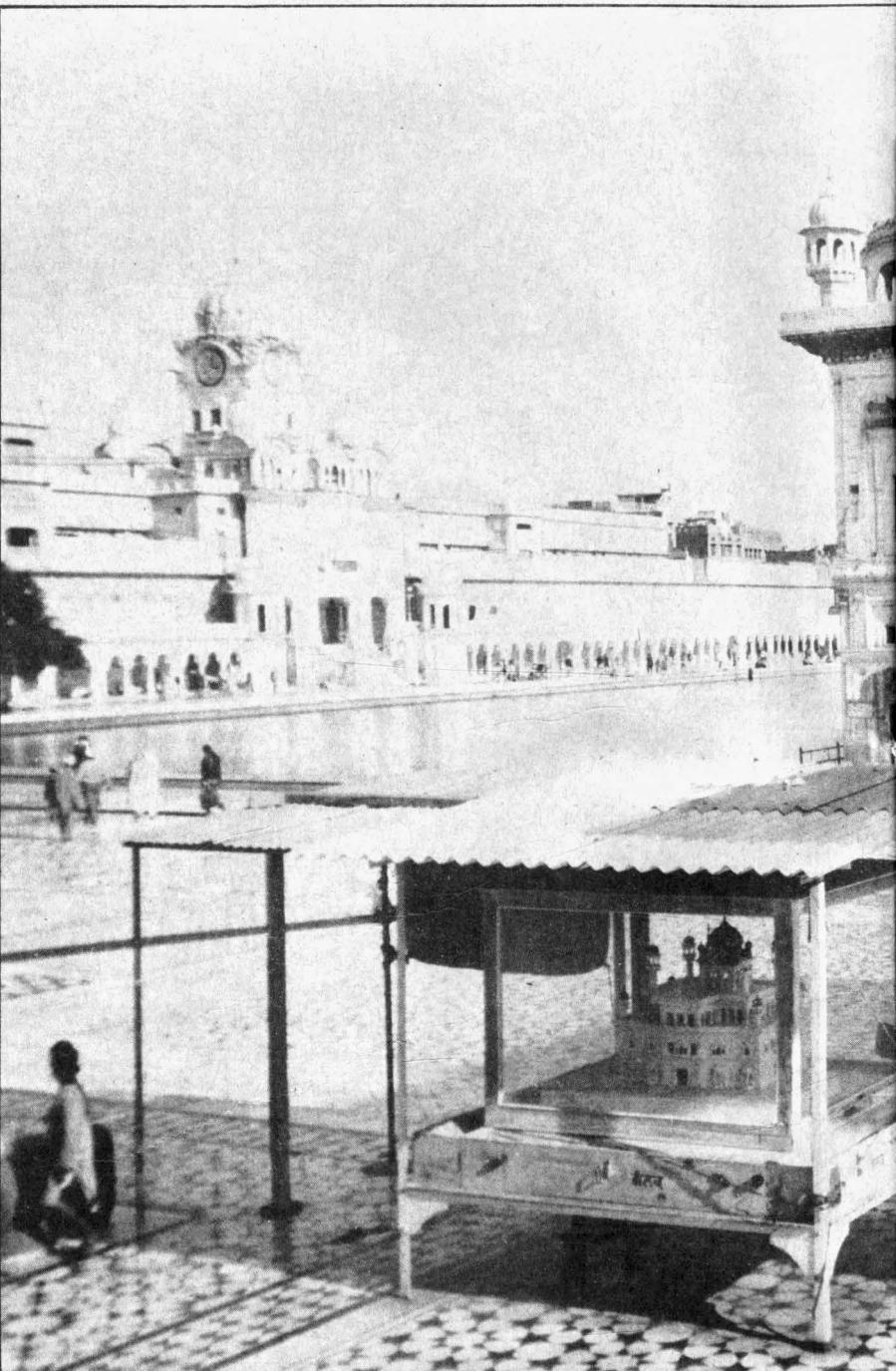
Invariably the police are one of the most vulnerable targets of public criticism — because of their corruption, inefficiency, procrastinations . . . Yet, time and again, as the writer points out, it has been demonstrated that the police are not adequately motivated, and therefore have a low morale and rampant corruption in their ranks. And, unless their jobs are made more lucrative, it will remain the same.

Rahul B Chaudhary  
Bombay

## COVER STORY

**A SENIOR POLICE** officer from Amritsar whose name is at the top of the terrorists' hit list for his zeal in fighting the government's war, was in Delhi shortly after the new political initiative in Punjab was announced. When asked to comment on it, he said in tones of infinite weariness, "The trouble with our politicians is that they want to make policies sitting in Chandigarh and Delhi. Nobody wants to cross the Beas and see what life is really like in Punjab."

The police officer has only the faintest awareness of the political aspects of the Punjab problem and yet, purely from his experience of



Photograph by Central Newsphoto Agency

# The Punjab: Where Are We Heading

By Tavleen Singh



Photograph by Tavleen Singh

What has never been understood by Mr Rajiv Gandhi's government is that there is a Punjab problem that lies beyond the terrorism and the political manouevres . . ."

observes reputed columnist TAVLEEN SINGH who, in this incisive report, deprecates the perceptions of those who fashion Punjab policy, and discusses the government's dangerous new gamble in the land where peace is still a dream.

the situation on the ground, managed to put his finger on what is going wrong, in a way that some of our best political pundits in Delhi have been unable to do. Realities look very different when seen from air-conditioned offices in Delhi and Chandigarh and this really is the kindest thing anyone can say about the government's dangerous new gamble in Punjab.

Those who are not in the mood for kindness are already looking for sinister motives that they believe lie hidden behind the hand of friendship that Delhi has extended towards the very people whom it has spent a



**WE WANT  
JUSTICE**

## COVER STORY

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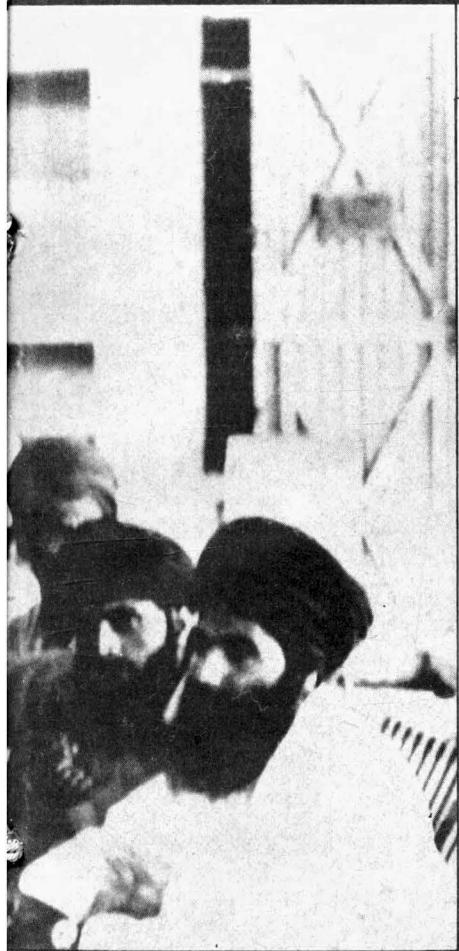
*Not even the bravest refuse those armed with AK 47s.*



*Governor Ray addressing the first*

year trying to wipe out physically. Before looking at future worst-case scenarios, however, it is important to look back to May last year when Punjab was put under central rule on the grounds that the Akali government had been completely unable to stem the tide of violence and religious fundamentalism that was threatening to sweep through the state.

Only recently, Governor Siddhartha Shankar Ray pointed it out to reporters that President's rule had become necessary for two reasons, the first of which was terrorism and the second was the fundamentalist movement launched from the Golden Temple which resulted in the forcible closure of meat and liquor shops. The Governor admitted that although his rule had not helped much where terrorism was concerned, it had succeeded in controlling the fundamentalist movement. So the single achievement of a year's direct rule from Delhi is that Punjab remains non-vegetarian



*Amritsar detainees on their release.*

Photograph by PTI

and it is still possible to stop at a restaurant on the Grand Trunk Road and drink a glass of chilled beer.

**THE GOVERNOR IS**, in fact, the right person to begin with when talking about the unreal perceptions of those who have made Punjab policy in the past year. My own most memorable meeting with him was the day after President's rule was declared. He had only just moved into the Chief Minister's plush, sprawling office in the Chandigarh secretariat but already had the air of a man who knew that destiny had meant him to perform a historic task. The impression lasted only till the interview began. I asked him how he viewed his role and the tasks that lay ahead and he answered that some of his best friends were Sikhs and that he had gone out of his way to know their history and to love them. "I have played tennis in every district in the Punjab," he said, much in the tones

Photograph by Central Newsphoto Agency



*Who calls the shots?*

## COVER STORY

that a British Governor may have used to describe his relationship with the natives.

He then went on to talk at some length about how popular he was and how much fan-mail he received and how he had been moved to tears by a letter from a young schoolgirl who told him how grateful Punjab was for all that he had done. Of the tasks that lay ahead and how they were going to be tackled, I found out almost nothing because when I tried to steer the conversation towards more serious, political matters, I was told only that "Rajiv Gandhi understands every nuance of the Punjab problem. He understands it better than anyone else."

**UNLIKE HIS MORE SUCCESSFUL** predecessor, Mr Arjun Singh, Siddhartha Shankar Ray has remained a foreigner in Punjab who has never really understood the complexities of

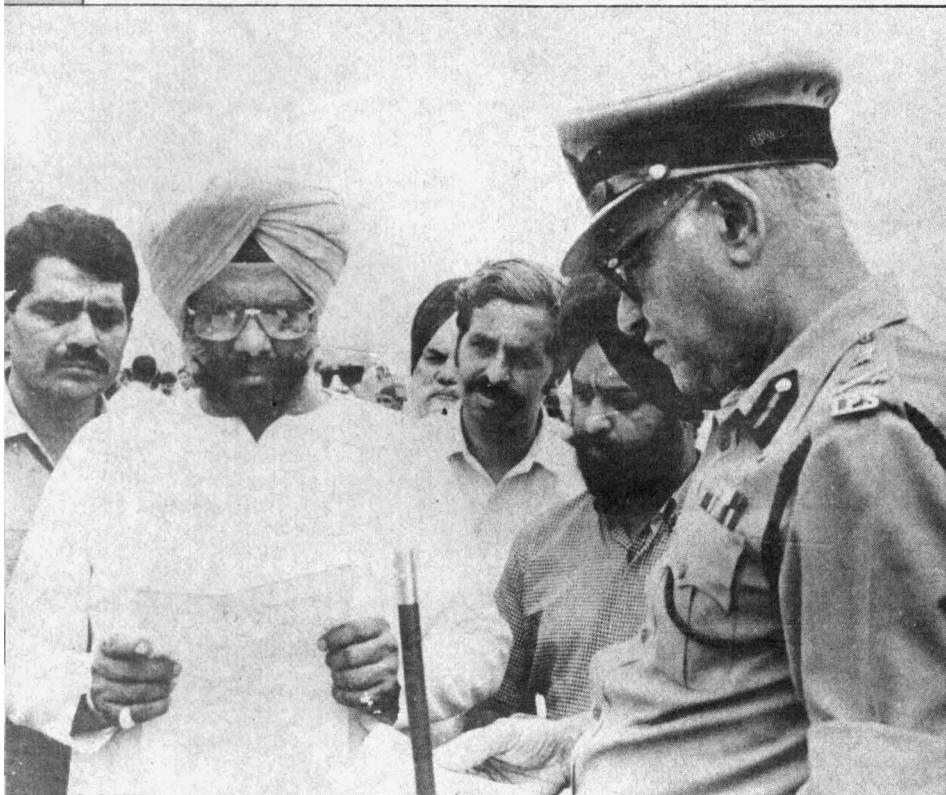
the problem he is dealing with. He tried, in his fashion, to learn but his attitude was so closed when it came to understanding some of the more extreme political opinions in the state that he virtually managed to block off all channels of information. He even managed to alienate several important leaders of the Unified Akali Dal (UAD) by treating them as if they were all extremists.

Since he was meant to be Delhi's man in the field, it would be safe to assume that it must have been on his advice that the Central government decided to deal with law and order as if it were entirely separate from the state's political problem.

In any case, he went along with the strategy despite even moderate Sikh leaders, including Surjit Singh Barnala, pleading with him that state terrorism was not the answer. When talking about what has gone wrong with Punjab policy in the past year,



*The recently released fr*



*Buta Singh and Ribeiro read a communique' from a terrorist group.*

Photograph courtesy The Sunday Observer

this can be counted as major mistake number one. When viewed from Delhi and Chandigarh, it may have seemed possible to saturate the state with armed para-military troops and wipe out the terrorists in a full-scale war, but anyone who had bothered to travel through the villages of the Punjab could have seen that they were impossible to police effectively. When the two brutal bus massacres in July 1987 and the continued violence proved that the policy was not working, the administration in Chandigarh complained that it was only because the terrorists continued to find safe



Photograph by Central Newsphoto Agency

*the Golden Temple.*

houses in the villages. The comments came from heavily-guarded officials and policemen who clearly did not comprehend that even the bravest man does not refuse shelter to those who come armed with AK 47s. Besides, even moderate Sikhs would find it hard to support a strategy which made fake encounters its only policy.

**WHAT HAS NEVER BEEN** understood by Mr Rajiv Gandhi's government is that there is a Punjab problem that lies beyond the terrorism and the political manouevres, and this is the very deep sense of alien-

ation and uncertainty that the entire Sikh community has felt ever since the pogroms of November 1984. Bureaucrats who have been close to Punjab policy in Delhi often argue that there was very little the government could do about this, since no government in its right mind could risk punishing those who were responsible for the total breakdown of administrative and security structures in the wake of Mrs Gandhi's assassination. The numbers involved would simply be too large and could result in large-scale demoralisation of the bureaucracy and perhaps even of the ruling party, since any number of victims have identified Congress (I) workers among the killer mobs that roamed the streets of Delhi.

While the government has shown so much concern over demoralisation of the bureaucracy and the party, however, it appears to have completely ignored the possibilities of de-

moralisation among Sikh troops and officers in the army. This is a pretty heavy price to pay for people who should have been punished under the ordinary laws of any civilised society.

Delhi is not unaware of the murmurings of disaffection in the army. In fact, the Army Chief, General K Sundarji, and former Defence Minister of State, Arun Singh, tried very hard to smooth things out by undoing some of the injustices that had been done by passing over for promotion certain senior Sikh officers. Nevertheless, after Lt General Depinder Singh retires there will be no Sikh army commander in the Indian army for the first time in several years. Sikhs constitute a very high proportion of the officer corps (around 30 per cent) and although the army is disciplined enough to keep its secrets, there are signs that all is not well.

Several senior Sikh officers I have



Photograph by Central Newsphoto Agency

*President's rule has seen the largest number of killings.*

## COVER STORY

talked to admit that they believe their future in the army is bleak. "We are aware, for the first time, that there is a point beyond which we will not be allowed to go," said a Colonel who did not wish to be identified. Another officer talked of how troops were not unaffected either, and were being made aware of the difference between them and Hindu troops often on account of stupid, unthinking gestures. As an example he mentioned an incident that occurred when the President was arriving to visit a particular regiment. "There was a *bhangra* due to be performed and the men were rehearsing with the traditional sticks in their hands; then, at the last moment, I was asked to inform them that they would have to perform without the sticks. They didn't say anything then, but one of them asked me afterwards why it was alright for Gurkhas to be participating in the ceremony armed with their *khukris*."

**THE TERRORIST GROUPS** have been quick to realise that they have potential supporters among the ranks



*Barnala: Delhi's favourite moderate.*



*The government has strengthened the extremists and weakened the moderates.*

of the Indian army and Sikh soldiers have started receiving letters asking them to put the 'panth' (the Sikh religion) over the country. The problem is compounded by the fact that many of those killed in the so-called 'encounters' in Punjab have brothers who are soldiers. Although the problem has only just begun, Sikh officers admit that if things continue to deteriorate, a time could come in a few years when the percentage of Sikhs in the army, which is now around twelve, could come down drastically as that of the Muslims did after Independence.

The Sikh sense of alienation is not going to be easy to end but if terrorist violence in the Punjab could be stopped, it would go a long way towards doing so. This past year of Pre-

sident's rule has seen the largest number of killings ever — over 900 between last May and February — and this is the real indicator of the government's failed policy.

If the war on terrorism had been combined with a coherent, consistent political initiative, things would never have come to this impasse. In effecting a political initiative, the government should have attempted to strengthen the hands of those moderate Sikh leaders who were still relevant in the Punjab context. Instead, virtually with every step it has taken since the Barnala government came to power, it has strengthened the extremists and weakened the moderates. Barnala, Delhi's own favourite moderate, was beginning to tread on shaky ground from the day that Chandigarh



Photograph courtesy The Sunday Observer

was not transferred and the Central government insisted on conducting its futile and highly disruptive census to decide whether the village of Kandukhera was Hindi-speaking or not. The exercise revived the worst memories of the Hindu-Sikh fight over Punjabi and could have been avoided had the territorial dispute between Punjab and Haryana been handled by the rules laid down in the Punjab Accord.

**WHEN, ON JANUARY 26, 1986,** Chandigarh failed to be transferred, the extremists resurfaced in the Golden Temple and began their demolition of the government-built Akal Takht. Within three months, they had organised themselves into a proper fighting force and by April, they declared that they were fighting for Khalistan. The Central government fell straight into the trap by forcing

poor Barnala to send his security forces into the Golden Temple. Within days his government collapsed and his friends in the Congress (I) were forced to show their hand by openly coming to the rescue.

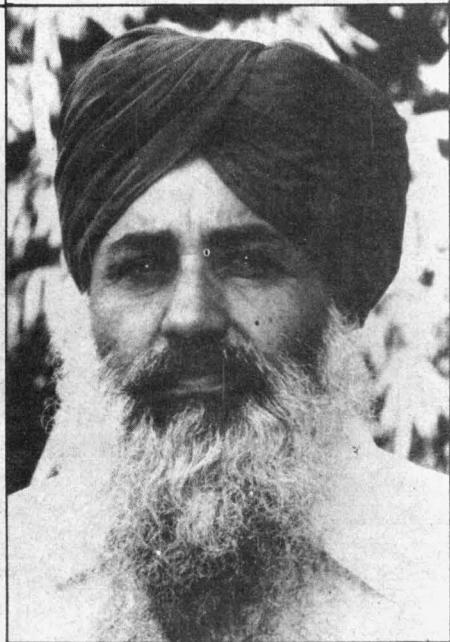
At this point, if Delhi's perceptions had been slightly more accurate, it should have been realised that the real Akali Dal was the one that had unified before it, but even if realisation did not dawn then, it should have done so in November that year when the Badal group managed to get Gurcharan Singh Tohra elected as the SGPC (Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee) President instead of Mr Barnala's candidate. Delhi reacted instead by encouraging Barnala to arrest Badal and Tohra. Even then a dialogue could have been maintained with the UAD but instead the party was dubbed as extremist and

ignored.

Again, the lack of a coherent policy is evident in the fact that if all this was being done to prop up Mr Barnala's shaky government, then he should at least have been allowed a few achievements. He had been begging for the release of the three hundred people who had been detained in Jodhpur jail since Operation Blue-star, and for some generosity in the matter of the distribution of Punjab's waters, but when it came to these things the Centre refused to co-operate. In the meantime, the violence continued to escalate to the point that it became impossible for the Congress (I) to prop up Mr Barnala's government any longer.

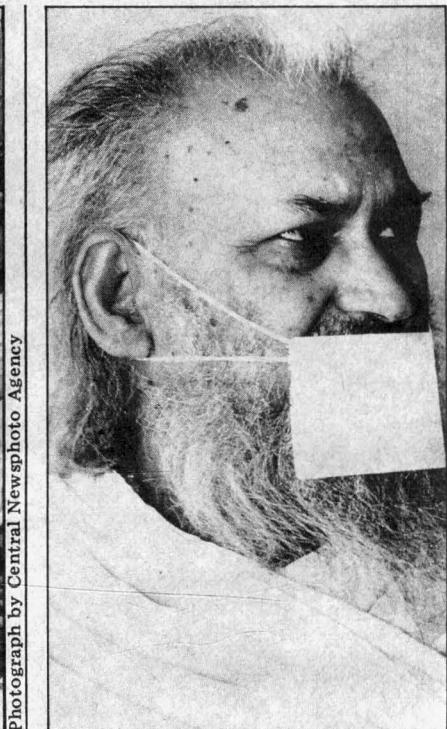
**THIS COULD HAVE TURNED** into an act of wisdom if the resultant spell of President's rule had been utilised to strengthen the UAD which, by now, was clearly the only representative of moderate Sikh opinion left in the state. But this was not done either despite the best efforts of the leaders of the UAD.

Many of them took to making re-



**Badal: President, United Akali Dal.**

# COVER STORY



Photograph by Central Newsphoto Agency

*The ubiquitous Jain Muni.*

Photograph courtesy The Sunday Observer

*For Punjab peace is still a dream.*

gular trips to Delhi to convince the Centre that the best course of action would be to give them a chance to form the government and then order SGPC elections which they were sure would prove that the grass-roots base of the Akali Dal was still intact.

Instead, Delhi chose to continue dithering for several months before finally deciding that the moderates were now completely irrelevant and that if the escalating violence was to be stopped, then the only people to talk to were the extremists themselves. The ubiquitous Jain Muni, who had been wandering palely in the background ever since the decline of Darshan Singh Ragi (another moderate who was wrongly dubbed an extremist), was brought back into the centre of things and packed off to Tihar jail to have a few words with Jasbir Singh Rode.

Out of these conversations in Tihar has emerged the new political initiative which could perhaps be described as the biggest reversal of policy in Punjab's tangled political history.

Rode is now the new Jathedar of the Akal Takht; the moderates have been reduced to sitting obediently at his feet and the extremists have showed him with their noisy welcome (four hundred rounds fired in the air) that it is they who call the shots. So desperate have we become for signs of sanity that even the press chose to describe his first speech as moderate because he decided to ask for *puran azaadi* (complete freedom) and not Khalistan.

**SO WHERE DO WE GO FROM here?** If the gamble pays off, Rode may succeed in getting the various powerful terrorist groups to give up the Khalistan demand and settle for ruling a new kind of Punjab in which the Sikhs will be given some of the special rights that they have been demanding. The danger of this is that the Bal Thackerays of the world will become even more vociferous in their condemnation of the Sikh community.

If, however, Rode is unable to persuade militant leaders like Gurbachan

Singh Manochahal, Gurjit Singh and 'General' Labh Singh to give up their violent struggle for secession, he is either likely to disappear into obscurity like Darshan Singh Ragi or, since his heart is with the militants, turn the Akal Takht into the symbol of the fight for Khalistan. If this happens we could find ourselves heading towards yet another Operation Bluestar. This, of course, could have its advantages for the ruling party since it might bring in the landslide election victory that cynics say is the real objective of the Central government's new Punjab policy.

For Punjab, however, peace is still a dream. The real irony of the Centre's latest move is that if Jasbir Singh Rode's uncle, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, had been made Jathedar of the Akal Takht in early 1984, as he wanted so much to be, we could have perhaps all been spared the terrible tragedy of the past four years. The only consistent characteristic of Delhi's Punjab policy is that it always gives too little too late. ♦

# Tithal. More than just a beach. Sheer poetry.



Cool blue sky. With gentle clouds watching the world go by. Cool blue sea. With sunlight sprinkled on it like diamonds.

And for as far as the eye can see, a long stretch of golden sand with unseen footprints of time and a million visitors over the years. And a gentle refreshing breeze whispering sweet nothings to birds.

Tithal. It's ready for you, whenever you are.

#### Places of nearby interest:

- Amdavad-355 Kms. • Hajira-112 Kms. • Ubharat-80 Kms.
- Pavagadh-301 Kms. • Saputara-130 Kms.
- Shukaltirth-87 Kms. • Bombay-202 Kms.
- Valsad-5 Kms.

#### Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited

Amdavad : H. K. House, Off Ashram Road, Amdavad 380 009. Phones : 449683, 449172. Telex : 012-549 TCGL IN

Bombay : Dhanraj Mahal, Apollo Bunder, Bombay 400 039. Phone : 2024925 Telex : 011-2434 GUJ IN

Delhi : A/6, State Emporia Bldg., Baba Kharaksingh Marg, New Delhi 110 001. Phone : 322107.

Junagadh : Hotel Girnar, Majewadi Gate, Junagadh 362 001. Phone : 21201 21203

Surat : 1/847, Athugar Street, Nanpura, Surat 395 001. Phone : 26586.

Vadodara : Narmada Bhavan, C-Block, Indira Avenue Vadodara 390 001. Phone : 540797

Rajkot : Near Collector Office, Rajkot-360 001. Phone : 49800. International Travels, Phone : 22689

Bhavnagar : Parag Travels, Phones : 26333, 23752

Jamnagar : Royal Travels, Phone : 78208

**GUJARAT  
TOURISM**

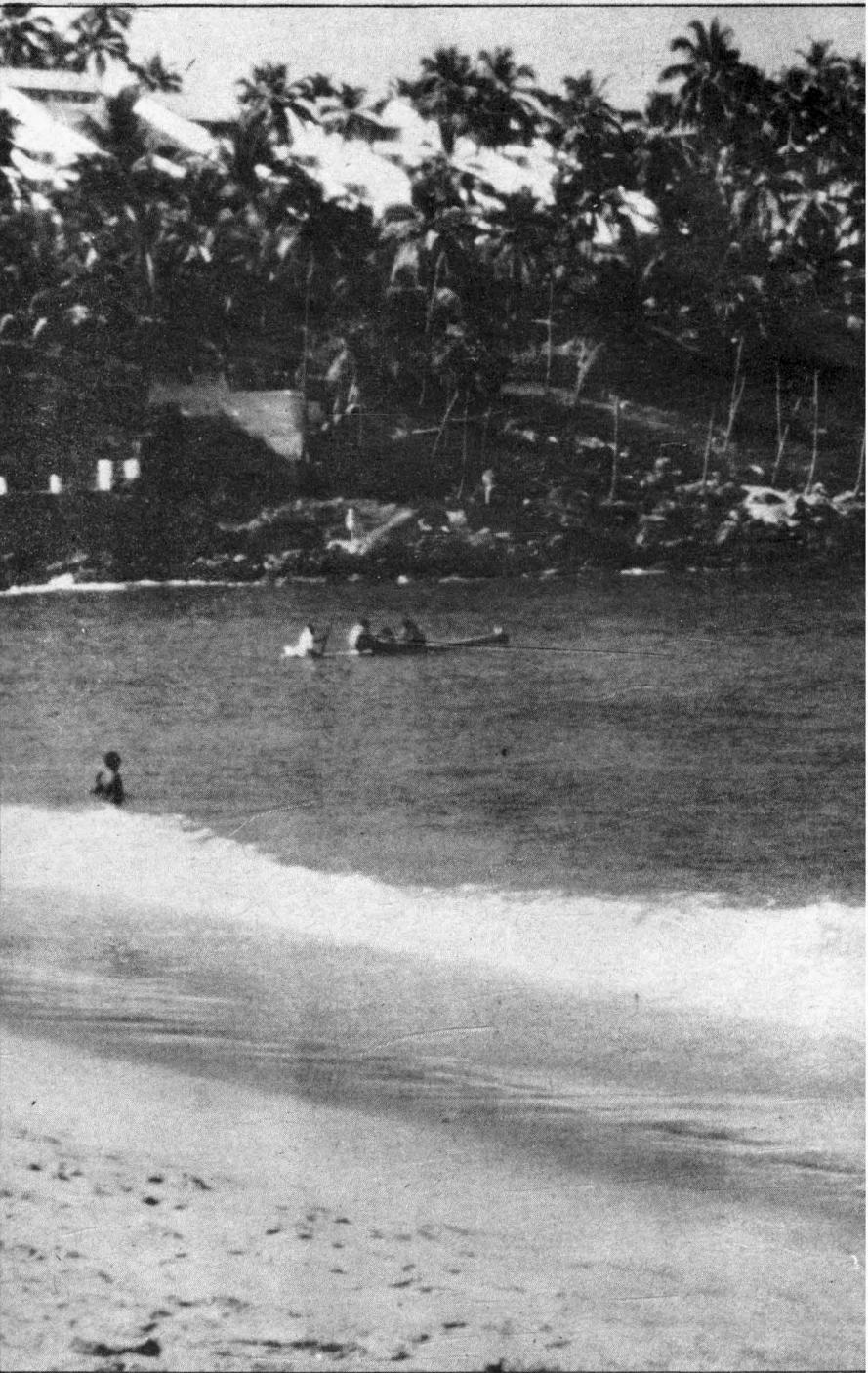
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## SPECIAL FEATURE

**T**HE MP ON THE Parliamentary Consultative Committee for the Tourism Ministry had a very clear idea of what tourism was all about when he said: "Tourism *kya hai? Mitti-witti, murthy-wurthy!*" ("What is tourism? Mud and idols and so on!") Admittedly, that was some years ago. But this was the traditional view of tourism, and one still held by many who have been conditioned by an ethos which views overseas travel as a degrading experience. Much of India and the rest of the world has come a long way since then. India, which was once marketed as an exotic cultural experience for people fleeing an inclement western winter, is now sought to be projected as a year-round, multiple choice, fantasy experience. Indeed, tourism is essentially a pursuit of fantasy: The Mystic East, The Most Fabulous Beach, Incredible Old Monuments, The Honeymooners' Paradise, Fairy-tale Castles, The Adventure that Beats Them All, Throw-away Prices, Festivals as Old as Time . . . In a castle near the Painted Halls of Shekawati, an Italian tour operator told us: "Without fantasy we do not leave home. This is fantasy!"

Thus, many tourists still come to interact with an ancient, exotic, colourful culture. Some come to search for their roots; this includes those in quest of the legendary worlds of the Raj. A few are excited by the thought of encountering a nation which spans the industrial spectrum from bullock-carts to satellites, cowdung cakes to atomic power, wayside cobblers to hi-tech corporate giants. But most international tourists come to seek their annual fortnight's relaxation after 50 weeks of high-pressure grind at home. These people want a tourism product-mix that offers 75 per cent unwinding and 25 per cent cultural stimulation.

Today, thanks to a fresh breeze blowing through the Indian tourism industry, the product is improving rapidly. It is still patchy, standards of service vary widely, and our red-tape



is daunting. But there is a new sense of dynamism infusing the industry, and our tourism administrators now have open minds about what the tourists want and what they should be given.

**SAYS TOURISM SECRETARY S K Misra:** "Statistics are the lifeline of

the tourism industry. Nowhere else do personal preferences come into as much focus as in this sector, for the tourist is buying not a product but an experience. And experiences are intangible. But at least some of these are manifest in the facilities available. When a destination has been chosen, it is necessary to know what kind of



## TOURISM: A GATEWAY TO INDIA

India, which was once marketed as an exotic cultural experience for people fleeing an inclement western winter, is now sought to be projected as a year-round, multiple choice, fantasy experience," say travel gurus HUGH & COLLEEN GANTZER. Does the reality live upto the projected image? Has the infrastructure of the tourist industry been sufficiently developed? Can and does India offer the fantasy experience that tourists hanker after? The writers, themselves tireless travellers, assess recent developments in the industry and offer suggestions for change.

accommodation a tourist wants, in what range, and at what price. It is important to know the nature of transport he uses, his food habits, purchasing power for souvenirs, interests in sightseeing and leisure activity, and the number of days he wishes to spend there.

"All these are helpful in formulat-

ing a masterplan for the development of a tourist facility that offers the most advantageous product-mix for catering to different categories of holiday makers.

"The Department of Tourism, accordingly, has taken up a number of surveys that will provide an essential link in the future planning pro-

cess . . . These studies, in years to come, could well become the milestones of the Indian travel trade."

Such a pragmatic, professional approach to tourism is encouraging. Primarily, however, India is its own compulsive magnet, as our tourism growth-rate figures show. From 16,829 arrivals in 1951 we have now,

## SPECIAL FEATURE

apparently, recorded the arrival of 11,63,744 international tourists in 1987. We say 'apparently' because the Department of Tourism was accused of fudging their figures, at the last moment, by including arriving aircrew in order to break the challenging tourism sound-barrier of one million arrivals in 1986. The Department has not denied this accusation and if, indeed, aircrew were included without admitting why the government had decided to include them, it shows up government statistics in a bad light. Nevertheless, if we must play the numbers game, here are some interesting figures for 1985 before the alleged aircrew jump. In 1985, the number of tourists who travelled worldwide was 333 million, India recorded 334,325 foreign tourist arrivals or 0.1 per cent of the total (and not 0.5 per cent as claimed) and an earning of US\$10.8 billion at Rs 12 to the dollar; Hong Kong had 3.5 million visitors and earnings of US\$1.83 billion; Egypt had 1.5 million visitors who brought in US\$251 million; and Ecuador, which is primarily an agricultural country, slightly larger than Britain and with a population of 10 million and only two major tourist destinations, hosted 238,105 tourists and earned US\$260 million.

But comparisons are odious, and as all these figures have been taken from statistics published by the National Tourist Organisations, we are fairly certain that the basis of calculation varies from country to country. Far more valid is a consideration of the nodal factors that contribute to the success or failure of our tourism product. One of these is the state of our airlines.

**WELL OVER 90 PER CENT** of our international tourists fly into India and use the domestic airlines to get around the country between major destinations. What do travellers think of our air services? The Geneva-based International Foundation of Airline Passengers Association (IFAPA) re-



*Purchasing that little bit of India to take home.*

putedly polls 30,000 travellers in more than 100 countries; these are frequent flyers who take an average of 14 round trips annually. In 1987, they rated Air India (AI) as one of the ten most disappointing airlines in the world. AI has protested, and asked them to reconsider their damaging classification, but even if they do upgrade our flag-carrier, the damage has already been done.

Indian Airlines (IA), which significantly removed all mention of its 'on-time performance' from its annual report to Parliament some years ago, without any protest from our legislators, was criticised in the winter session of the Lok Sabha last year for its 'regularly irregular' services. The Helicopter Corporation, Pawan Hans, makes only sporadic attempts to serve tourists. The air-taxi service has been a non-starter. Only that unwanted child, Vayudoot, has made the most remarkable progress as a far-seeing, tourist-oriented airline, expanding from 14 stations to 89 in just four years. According to its young Managing Director, Harsh Var-dhan, Vayudoot's long-term plans are to air-link every one of the District Headquarters in India. If this is done, India will be almost as air-accessible

as Europe and tourism development will boom.

But Vayudoot can only move tourists around once they reach India; it cannot bring them in or take them out. It is because of the inability of our international carriers, AI and IA, to meet tourist demands and standards, that the government has overridden our airlines' dog-in-the-manger policies to permit air charters to enter the tourism scene. This year, no less than six charter companies, including one using AI aircraft, will fly to Delhi, Srinagar, Gaya and Bhubaneshwar, the growth of charters being a world-wide phenomenon accounting for 60 per cent of all intra-European flights. And if we cannot privatisate AI and IA, as Margaret Thatcher has done with British airlines, then the least we can do is subject their featherbedded practices to the cutting edge of private international charter competition.

**IN A MANNER OF SPEAKING**, India's four international airports — Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Madras — are virtually privatised. Ever since psychologist and management don Prof N K Singh took over the International Airports Authority of India

**India is tailor-made for tourism. The Anthropological Survey of India has identified 5,190 lesser-known communities in our land, but even the better-known are unrivalled in their unique folkways, festivals and foods. This heritage tourism will demand coach, rail and waterway tours: unhurried, people-interacting ways of travel in preference to the destination-to-destination hops.**

(IAAI), it has been given a self-reliance-and-customer-service orientation. Today the IAAI takes no money from the government, is slated to make a profit of Rs 70 crore, and its taxes alone could make up the reported deficit of the National Airports Authority of India (NAAI) which is charged with the task of running the other airports in our country.

As a result of the IAAI's financial independence, customer services have improved remarkably. Business centres, message-display panels, plane-mates, art galleries, underground parking, airport hotels, a Stolport in Bombay for short-take-off-and-landing aircraft, and a magnetic levitation rail system are planned for the immediate future. Given the competing needs of national development, we certainly cannot afford a Changi (the Singapore airport) or a Frankfurt International, but our four international airports are the best that we can afford (they are certainly better than quite a few international airports we have visited abroad) and they improve as their finances increase.

Having said that, we must admit that both our international and domestic airports are plagued by a multiplicity of authorities all pulling in

different directions, a prevalence of police straight from the *thana* handling everything from Immigration to Security to city-side Traffic Control, and decrepit air-traffic control systems and navigational aids. All these contribute to the irritants felt by airport users, including bad 'on-time' performance. These irritants become all the more annoying because of India's position on the world aviation map — we are halfway from everywhere. Consequently, the airline passengers in our country have to embark and disembark in the wee, small hours when blood sugar levels are low and so are tolerance thresholds. But, in spite of all this, if the government decides to give the IAAI and the NAAI complete authority over their airports, including luggage handling, policing and security, things should improve dramatically.

**INDIAN AIRPORTS** are also afflicted by a taxi-police nexus that no one has been able to break. In fact, N K Singh's excellent IAAI airport luxury coach scheme is still, at the time of writing, a victim of this unholy marriage. It has been held up by the Delhi Administration, and knowledgeable travel trade sources say that powerful taxi owners and their political patrons are behind this delay: they will lose their incomes based on a lucrative overcharging of travellers if N K Singh's coach service is introduced.

Better coach services and better roads will take pressures off our overstrained airlines and tap the growing potential of highway tourism. After Haryana's lead, other states are trying to develop their highway tourism potential but our roads need to be improved. Very many years ago we suggested the construction of government-owned but privately financed super-express and limited access toll highways. This is now seeing the light of day with Calcutta industrialist R P Goenka offering to widen the highway between Delhi and Kanpur, and the proposal to set up an Indian Na-

tional Highway Finance Corporation. An estimated Rs 5,000 crore is required to upgrade the national highway system but this will result in a saving of Rs 650 crore a year in fuel and wear and tear, and will open our doors to a new segment of the international tourism market.

This major emerging market will consist of the increasing number of people who have opted for early marriage, early retirement, financial security, and a long and active post-retirement life. They will have time and money to spend on tourism as a leisure activity. Analysing their needs, an International Labour Organisation (ILO) report says: "Rather than the whirlwind package tour, there will be increasing demand for the experience of different cultures and for destinations off the beaten track."

**INDIA IS TAILOR-MADE** for such future tourism. The Anthropological Survey of India has identified 5,190 lesser-known communities in our land, but even the better-known communities are unrivalled in their unique folkways, festivals and foods. This heritage tourism will demand coach, rail and waterway tours: unhurried, people-interacting ways of travel in preference to the destination-to-destination hops preferred by younger people in a hurry. But although we have the expertise to manufacture excellent, custom-built tourist motor-coaches, our attempts at luxury rail-tourism have been abject failures. Upto March 1987, the much-trumpeted Palace on Wheels had run 124 commercial tours without breaking even. According to the Public Accounts Committee, the 951 foreign tourists who had travelled on this train had been subsidised to the extent of Rs 5,000 per passenger as against a per capita subsidy of Rs 2.50 per passenger on other trains in the same year. The clear solution is to privatise luxury tourist trains, or rather, to give them out on charter, and to build hotels and coach terminals above and behind railway stations

## SPECIAL FEATURE

as has been done just outside Paris' Charles de Gaulle Airport. This multi-level approach will serve both affluent foreign tourists and the train-travelling domestic tourist.

As for our waterways, we have not even touched the surface of river and canal tourist cruises. We have 10,241 km of navigable rivers and 4,303 km of navigable canals, many of them ideal for self-hire boat tours. And yet, against the sanctioned Rs 9.09 crore for waterways development in 1987-88, less than two-thirds has been made available to the Inland Waterways Authority of India.

Our waterways can also be used to augment our tourist accommodation during the peak season by moored floating hotels. This might become necessary very soon, if the government's figures are to be believed. According to *Travel News*, the official journal of the Travel Agents' Association of India (TAAI), by 1991, an additional 15,000 approved hotel rooms are likely to be added to the existing 32,000 rooms, but this would still leave a gap of 12,000 rooms. However, though incentives are being given to build hotels, the government never loses an opportunity to tax them. Effective from November 1, 1987, the government levied an Expenditure Tax of 10 per cent on room tariffs of Rs 400 or more as well as on food, drink and other services, provided the bills are paid in rupees. But as all foreigners have to pay their bills in foreign currency, hotels which have been claiming that most of their clients are foreigners suddenly find themselves forced to admit that, in fact, most of their guests are high-living, expense-account Indians. But, very adroitly, such hotels have applied to the government for permission to hike their tariffs using the coy but very attractive argument that the more the government allows them to charge, the more the government rakes in by way of tax.

**THIS HAS UPSET** the travel agents who make hotel bookings well in ad-



*The Khajuraho Dance Festival: a tourism-and-culture success story.*

vance and quote their rates to their clients based on existing hotel tariffs. Strict laws in many tourist-generating countries protect clients from the impact of such sudden charges and so, according to the agents, the loss has to be borne by them. In point of fact, the line between travel agents and hoteliers is being blurred as hotel chains have their own captive agencies, and travel agents enter the hotel business. Besides, these government-approved rates are largely for the record; there is plenty of room for hard-headed bargaining. Large hotel chains promise rooms in their popular hotels provided that the agent also books rooms in their low-occupancy properties. Large travel agents promise large groups if they get substantial reductions on the tariffs.

In the bargain, it is generally the tourist who scores.

But not all travel agents are tour operators, a fact which caused a group of them to form their independent Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) quite distinct from TAAI. Many of TAAI's members are really ticketing agents, depending for an increasingly precarious livelihood on the sale of tickets: a profession endangered by the increasing undercutting by airlines, direct sales to passengers bypassing agents, and the appointment of General Sales Agents (GSAs) who are generally powerful agents entitled to control an entire area for considerable concessions from the airlines.

Ticketing agents, driven to the wall, might now have to seek other areas of activity such as domestic tour

**Such greatly feared areas – as far as India's high-profile tourism entrepreneurs are concerned – are those patronised by middle-level domestic tourists. These tourists are thus serviced largely by small private organisations and state tourism development corporations. Haryana pioneered highway tourism. Tamil Nadu made a great success of its coach tours. And Rajasthan cashed in on its very colourful folkways.**

organisers, ground handlers for major agents and airlines, cargo and courier services, coach operators, specialised guiding, even the virtually untouched souvenir-and-convention-services field. Their entry into these areas will bring professionalism into those branches of the tourism industry which are still largely dominated by *thekedars*, the so-called 'contractors', and well-meaning amateurs.

**ONE ORGANISATION WHICH HAS** already entered most of these fields is the giant India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). It runs hotels, tours, a travel agency, duty-free shops, conventions and conferences, and a travel publishing organisation. It pioneered Indian decor in up-market hotels, opened up Kovalam, set new standards for hotels in Bangalore, and its Yatri Nivas is certainly the best-value budget hotel in Delhi. It has also entered into joint hotel ventures with state tourism departments. Although some high-achievers in tourism cut their professional teeth in the ITDC, it cannot always attract and hold the best talent because it cannot offer the best salaries and under-the-counter perks. And it is a victim of many of the featherbedded political disabilities that most

government organisations are heir to. But it has made, and continues to make, a signal contribution to the development of tourism in India. To adapt an old saying: the ITDC rushes in where privateers fear to tread!

Such greatly feared areas – as far as India's high-profile tourism entrepreneurs are concerned – are those patronised by middle-level domestic tourists. These tourists are thus serviced largely by small private organisations and state tourism development corporations. Haryana pioneered highway tourism. Tamil Nadu made a great success of its coach tours. Rajasthan cashed in on its very colourful folkways. Madhya Pradesh has emphasised its 'Heart of India' image. The ripple effect of these success stories has inspired other states to emulate them. Much of this activity has been spurred on by the realisation that even if 50 per cent of the government and public sector employees and their dependants avail themselves of their Leave Travel Concessions (LTCs), they pour in a conservatively-estimated Rs 30 crore into tourism every year.

**SUCH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**, spurred by the LTC phenomenon, is also used by foreign budget tourists. We recently met a German Land Customs Officer, Toni Wurmer, on his third trip to India. He buys a bicycle when he arrives in India, pedals from destination to destination for a month, and never spends more than Rs 100 a day on food, accommodation and sight-seeing. In Kathmandu, a young Indian organises bicycle tours for Indian students and makes a good living doing so. In India, however, we have not got around to exploiting the budget youth-activity market in spite of our chain of Youth Hostels, and now our planned Yatri Nivases and Yatrikas – both government-financed budget accommodation.

Of late, state tourism organisations tend to view tourism's increased Planning Commission allocations – upped from Rs 30 crore in 1987-88 to Rs 47

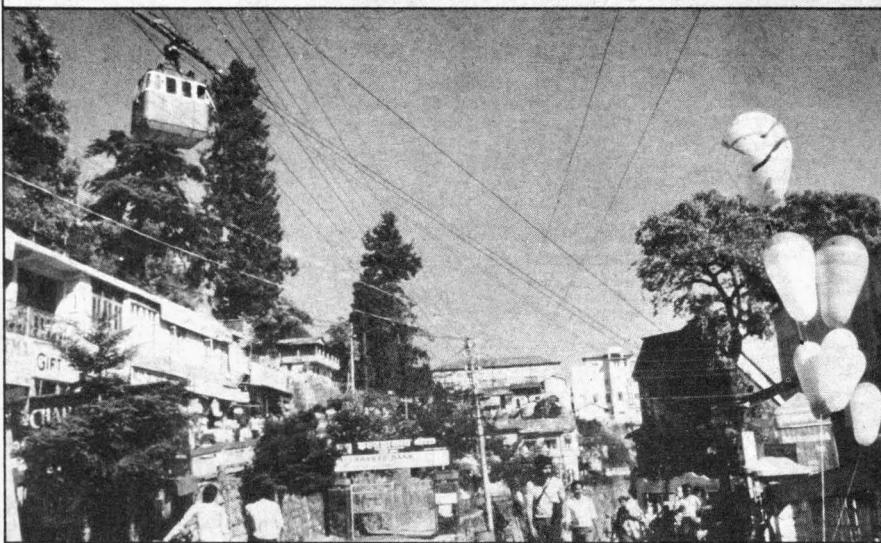
crore in 1988-89 – as a bonanza for fund siphoning. One state wants to build a velodrome in a place which has no cycle-racing background and the velodrome is on a riverine island where a scorching summer and a drenching monsoon will not allow it to be used for six months in the year. Another state organisation wants to set up an 'Appu Ghar', with imported equipment, on reserve forest land which is impregnated with sewage water. A third is keen to use NRI money and 'expertise' when the funds, equipment and know-how are all available in India.

Also worrying is the impact of tourism on our culture, heritage and environment. The tourism versus culture debate peaked with Jagdish Tytler's reiteration of Santosh Mohan Dev's assertion that the government was thinking of permitting casinos to be opened in India. Many of the anti-casino outbursts revealed considerable ignorance. Casinos have been depicted in our films as smoke-and-booze-filled dens of vice where slinky sirens endanger our Ancient Cultural Heritage. In fact, up-market casinos, like the famed Crockfords of London, are exclusive clubs in which drinking is strictly forbidden in the gaming rooms. And there is no logical reason to enforce an apartheid on these casinos. Why shouldn't Indians be permitted to do, supervised and taxed, what they do in virtually every home during Diwali, and in every club every day, unsupervised and untaxed?

Rajasthan has created its very successful Desert Festival to use tourism to preserve the culture of its desert people. Khajuraho's Dance Festival is another tourism-and-culture success story. Suraj Kund's Crafts Mela in Haryana is a third. Clearly the intelligent interaction of tourism and culture can considerably benefit both.

**HERITAGE IS ANOTHER AREA** which can be protected by tourism. We recently attended a workshop in the magnificent medieval ruins of Champaner organised by the Heritage

## SPECIAL FEATURE



**Mussoorie: threatened by uncontrolled tourism.**

Trust of Baroda, a citizens' awareness group. After heated discussions, it was decided that Champaner can be made to support its own preservation and restoration if it can be opened up to a controlled flow of tourists. This is what the self-financed stately homes of England and the monuments of Europe do.

Uncontrolled mass tourism can destroy. So can uncontrolled rivers, armies and road builders. But we do not, fearing this, dry up our rivers, disband our armies, and dynamite our roads. Uncontrolled tourism has blighted the Dal Lake, ravaged Ladakh, overbuilt Shimla and Ooty, and is threatening Mussoorie. But the rapacious developers who are responsible for such degradation, have merely used tourism as a vehicle for their exploitation. They would, with as little compunction, have used life-saving drugs, charitable establishments or patriotism.

Neither the civil service nor the Ministry of Tourism can ward off such all-pervasive marauders. It requires an alert citizenry banded together. Organisations like the Jagrit Goenkaranchi Fouj which protested against the over-exploitation of Goa, and the Save Mussoorie Society which raised its voice against overbuilding in that hill-station, are the best insurance against the despoiling of the environment by tourism or any other 'development'. Indeed, according to the

ILO, tourists will tend to avoid despoiled areas characterised as places where tourism has destroyed tourism.

We also have to fight against the negative image of terrorism. It has virtually destroyed Sri Lanka's once-booming tourism industry. But Britain, a much smaller country than India with a much older legacy of terrorism, has overcome the negative image posed by Irish terrorists by a well-planned information campaign. Unhappily, though we have a reported US\$2 million for publicity abroad, our enormous overseas tourist office network is remarkably infirm. Thus, a person who does not speak a single word of French is sent to market India in Paris! And a person who produced grossly inaccurate tourism brochures about sensitive Northeastern states is sent to give tourist information to the Thais.

**THE GOVERNMENT, HOWEVER,** is aware of these problems and is increasingly using professional agencies to handle their tourism promotional work, and could well shut down unproductive, foreign-exchange-draining offices abroad. The Ministry of Tourism has also got down to the nitty-gritty of formulating a pragmatic tourism policy.

The highlights of this policy are:  
\* Domestic tourism will be the bedrock of our tourism development plans: other infrastructure will be

built on this solid, reliable base.

\* International tourism's high potential to earn foreign exchange will be tapped by encouraging quality tourism: hence the emphasis on golf courses and heli-skiing in Kashmir.

\* Foreign tourists will not be allowed to swamp our culture because tourism will be used as a catalyst to promote our crafts and valued traditions.

\* Tourism will be used as an effective soldier to safeguard our outdoors and our monuments, our environment.

Secretary S K Misra also assures the tourism industry that "the economic ministries of the government of India are now much more aware than ever before of the economic potential of tourism."

**AND ABOUT TIME TOO.** An analysis of future trends in global tourism prepared by the hotel and tourism branch of the ILO forecasts that tourism and related activities will surpass all economic sectors in business volume by the year 2,000. And by the end of this decade, by 1990, world tourism will register between 400 and 600 million arrivals. Speaking in Dubai, our Director General of Tourism, B K Goswami, reportedly said that 2.5 million tourists are expected to visit India by the end of the decade, netting about Rs 40 billion in foreign exchange.

Goswami is being expansively optimistic: 1.75 million would be a more likely figure. But if the tourism surveys are conducted efficiently, and if the conclusions from them are drawn intelligently and if these conclusions are put to work with flair, imagination and creativity, we might be able to give the tourists of the world the fantasy experience they seek. For transportation is the business of movement. Travel is the business of the movement of people. Tourism is the business of the movement of people in pursuit of fantasy.

And with flair, imagination and creativity, one can weave fantasy out of anything — even *mitti-witty, murthy-wurthy*. ♦

**N**ESTLING AT THE foot of the majestic Himalayas is the abode of the Gods — Devbhumi or Garhwal. Visited by Pilgrims for its holy Hindu and Sikh shrines — Badrinath, Kedarnath and Hemkund Sahib — and graced by the most venerated rivers in India's cultural history, the Ganga and the Jamuna. The lower slopes of these mountains boast the beautiful hill-stations of Lansdowne and Mussoorie, dotted with the exotic *brahmakal* — the rainbow-hued rhododendron — and the breathtaking blue poppy, and where the elegant *kastura* or musk deer and the elusive snow leopard run wild in the fertile pastures and forests.

Bespoiling the rich and bountiful

## Tehri Dam: A Blueprint For Disaster

Once complete, the Tehri Dam will be the highest in India, a proud symbol of prosperity. But at what cost? The site is seismically active, the potential dangers grave, and the dam will displace thousands from their homes.

Internationally-acclaimed environmentalist and alternative Nobel Prize-winner SUNDERLAL BAHUGUNA makes an impassioned plea for why the Tehri Dam must not be built.

landscape are the tokens of development run amok since the 50s when the expansionist Chinese presence on Garhwal's borders brought about dramatic changes in the state. In 1974, when the restrictions on entry into the forbidden zone were relaxed, development went berserk. Large-scale road building placed the fragile Himalayan eco-system under stress, and reactivated ancient landslip belts.

There is a legend that the waters of the Bhagirathi can be contained only within the matted locks of Lord Shiva. The locks are the natural forests of the Himalayas which help contain the water in the soil and protect the land from floods. The villagers believe that if there is any



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*Thousands will be displaced from their ancestral lands.*

attempt to interfere with the flow of this sacred water, the Bhagirathi will exact a terrible vengeance. Gunand, a resident of Pipola village, which will lose half its land to the reservoir, pointed out that already the reckless exploitation of the forest — the matted locks — had denuded the hills. Some forest pockets have been preserved near the village by the villagers themselves but the rest only have a superficial grass cover.

Indeed, the catchment area of the Bhagirathi has been the worst victim of deforestation because the commercial exploitation of the Himalayan forests began way back in the middle of the last century when an Englishman, Fredrick Wilson, felled local trees and floated timber to Hardwar. Few efforts had been made to reforest the belt, and instead, agricultural cultivation was extended to the top of the hills, thus accelerating the rate of erosion.

**BUT THESE DANGERS** are insignificant when compared to those of building a dam at Tehri; a dam that disregards the *poetic* but grim utterances of the *Devistrotta* (a Hindu text in praise of the supreme goddess): "So long as this land will have moun-

tains, forests and pastures, so long will the earth survive." With the construction of the Tehri dam this no longer seems possible.

The small town of Tehri, situated at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Bhilangana rivers and well-known for being the seat of Garhwali culture, has today received acclaim for different reasons: it will soon boast the highest dam in India. The rock-fill dam — the first among a series of dams over the Ganga and its tributaries in the Central Himalayas — will be constructed on a turn-key basis by the USSR (see box). Besides generating 3,000 million kilowatts of electricity, it will irrigate 2.7 lakh hectares of land in the western districts of Uttar Pradesh and has been described as the symbol of progress and prosperity by the Tehri Dam Project authorities. For the benefit of passersby, they have painted slogans reiterating this on the backs of their vehicles.

For visitors to the area, the writings on the wall, the slogans painted by the villagers, are plainly visible: "Tehri dam is the symbol of total destruction. Give up the construction of Tehri dam in the interests of the country and for the protection of the

environment." Some of these slogans are written, in Hindi, on the walls of a small Shiva and Hanuman temple situated at the entrance of the right-bank diversion tunnels of Tehri dam, where sits Kadambari Devi, the heroine of the successful anti-liquor movement launched by hill women in 1971 and wife of Mr Virendra Datta Saklani, local MLA, veteran freedom-fighter and President of the Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti. Kadambari Devi is confident that the Tehri dam will never be erected, and on the strength of this conviction, she sits and offers daily prayers at the temple.

**TWO DECADES AGO**, plans to construct a dam in the Bhagirathi valley raised hopes in Tehri that the poverty of the people would be submerged along with the valley. The hopes were short-lived. It was not long before a copy of the report fell into the hands of a local resident and road contractor, Prem Singh, who was quick to realise the grave dangers that the construction of the dam would pose to local residents and the ecological balance: "For the first time we realised the dangers facing us. Everything in India is a 'secret in the national interest'. Had we not got hold of the report, we would never have known of the faults, tears, etc in the region, and the disaster facing us. We immediately formed the Tehri Bandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti to oppose it."

When officers of the UP government and engineers arrived to inaugurate the construction of the first diversion tunnel of the dam in early 1978, they were confronted not with the drums of welcome but the drums of war. Thousands of men, women and children blocked their way; many, including Virendra Datta Saklani, were arrested and the town of Tehri was converted into a police cantonment. The construction of the 'temple to prosperity' was marked with the outburst of the people's rage: "You love electricity, we love our soil . . ."

## The Project

**ONCE COMPLETED**, it will enjoy pride of place as the highest dam in India, rank sixth highest in the world, and will undoubtedly play a crucial part in meeting the country's growing energy demands. The Tehri Dam, sited at the confluence of the Bhagirathi and Bhilangana rivers in the foothills of the Himalayas in Tehri, Garhwal district, and due to be completed by 1998, will tap a substantial percentage of the vast power potential contained in the waters that rush down the mountain slopes. The 260.5 metre rock-fill dam is expected to generate 3,500 million kilowatts of electricity, and will also serve to irrigate 2.7 lakh hectares of arid land in the regions between the Ganga and Jamuna rivers.

Conceived as early as 1969, with the construction sanctioned by the Planning Commission only in 1972, a blueprint for the Tehri Hydropower Complex was finally drawn up in 1978. Originally scheduled to be a 1,000 megawatts hydro-power station as well as a 260-metre tall earth and rock-fill dam, the project was subsequently expanded to include a 400-megawatt hydro-electric plant about 20 kms downstream from the site, and a power-storage plant of 1,000-megawatts capacity to cope with demand in peak load periods.

Since 1978, much time has been spent in efforts to raise funds and study offers made by foreign companies. In 1987, an agreement was



*Virtually barren hill-slopes could further threaten the security of the dam.*

finally drawn up with the USSR in which it was agreed that the USSR would partly finance and execute the project on a contract or turn-key basis. Construction work has already commenced and the Soviets plan to build the 1,000 MW hydro-power station at Tehri by 1996, the 400 MW hydroelectric plant downstream at Koteshwar by December 1997, and the final stage of the 1,000 MW power storage plant at Tehri by December 1998.

The dam itself will impound a body of water approximately weighing 3,200 million tonnes. This will create a gigantic reservoir over an area measuring 42 sq km and will feed an underground power-house with a racing torrent that will generate enough electricity for the state of Uttar Pradesh. This lake will submerge Tehri town and nearby satellite villages, thus displacing about 70,000 people from their ancestral lands. It will also flood 1,000 hectares of cultivated land, 1,000 hectares of forest, and 2,000 hectares of pasture.

When the project was first conceiv-

ed in 1969 and submitted to the Planning Commission, an estimated cost of Rs 193 crore was calculated. But by 1986, the cost had risen to a staggering Rs 2,035 crore, an inevitable result of inflation and revisions in design. Further, in 1969, the estimated cost of generating a single unit of power was 3.8 paise, and the irrigation potential of the plant, 6,68,000 hectares; today the cost of power generation is estimated at 48 paise per unit, and the irrigation benefit will accrue to only 2,70,000 hectares. After a consideration of these factors, economists have calculated the current cost-benefit ratio as 1.27:1. According to the Planning Commission, only projects with a cost-benefit ratio of 1.5:1 or more should be cleared, as otherwise they would not be economically viable. Nevertheless, construction has already begun and it will not be long before Soviet personnel arrive and move into the palace in this former royal state to supervise the project through to completion in 1998.

— Imprint

Virendra Datta Saklani, the Chipko activist, took upon himself the painstaking task of acquiring reports pertaining to the dam construction, made a thorough study of every aspect of the project, inviting acknowledged experts from relevant disciplines to visit the project site and offer their objective, scientific opinion. With meticulous care, he compiled volu-

minous documents and petitions for submission to Parliament and to the Supreme Court, mobilising people to educate and alert them to the enormous risks and dangers of the dam project.

**IN 1978, THE COMMITTEE** suspended its agitation after collecting 10,000 signatures for a petition sub-

mitted to the Parliament's Petition Committee. The writ petition filed in the Supreme Court of India, which branded the construction as a 'criminal act and an unpardonable ecological sin', was filed only in 1987 by Samiti President Virendra Datta Saklani, Vaidya Sagar (Secretary of the district), the CPI, and myself.

The Indian National Trust for Art

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*The town of Tehri will be submerged by the reservoir.*

and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), which is also committed to the cause of indigenous, under-privileged people, decided to intervene on behalf of the people in support of the writ petition against the dam. Another conservation organisation, the World Wildlife Foundation - India (WWF), also joined in. And two of the country's most eminent lawyers, Soli Sorabji and Fali Nariman, agreed to appear on behalf of INTACH and WWF-India respectively.

The construction of the Tehri dam was challenged on a number of grounds, chiefly that it would pose a grave threat to the lives and property of the inhabitants of towns like Munikireti, Rishikesh, Hardwar, and others situated on the banks of the Ganga downstream. The dam is to be located in a seismically active, tectonically unsuitable, arid area, with a high probability of failure due to natural and reservoir-triggered earthquakes (see box). The dam will also pose a hazard to the security and safety of those heavily-populated areas in the flood-plains of the Ganges in case of man-made flash floods following emergency releases from

the reservoir at the time of peak floods.

High siltation will, in all probability, further shorten the life of the Tehri dam and although the dam authorities claim that they have allotted sufficient money for afforestation, there is little hope of re-greening the almost bare Himalayan vallies, even in the next hundred years.

The reservoir rim slopes are also ringed by human settlements. The hills here are very steep, unstable, fragile, erodable, and fissured. The study on slope stability undertaken by the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology states that "by virtue of its composition and structure, the rocks are generally weak and fragile. Top exposures are invariably highly cleared and weathered. A combination of these factors makes the area vulnerable to slope failure when impounded water comes into contact with it, and insecurity to the settlements in the periphery of the reservoir is inevitable."

**IN ADDITION TO** these factors, the fact that the dam is to be located barely 172 km from the Chinese bor-

der, cannot be overlooked. In the petition, Mr Saklani had stressed that the project would constitute a security risk and the presence of Russians would create problems for the locals.

Saklani has also pointed to the very real dangers of constructing large dams: "The International Commission Report on Large Dams (1973) reveals that out of 10,000 dams constructed in various parts of the world, at least 466 suffered accidents, and of these, 140 were total failures.

"In India, distress has occurred in as many as 41 dams and more than 14 have failed totally. The Kadam dam failed in 1958, Nanaksagar in 1967, Chikahole in 1972, Dantwala in 1973, Aran in 1978. The Panchet dam, which failed in 1961, is said to be the biggest dam disaster in this country. The Hinglow dam failed in August 1978, which led to the destruction of hundreds of villages in Birbhum, Bardwan and Murshidabad in West Bengal, and took a heavy toll of human lives and cattle. The Morvi dam disaster of August 1979 is still fresh in our memories."

Several hearings of the case have already taken place, inevitably result-

## The Soviet Connection

IN JUNE 1987, an Agreement for the construction of the Tehri Hydro-power complex which invited Soviet collaboration in the project, was signed in Moscow. Under its provisions, the Soviet Union has promised to render technical assistance in the erection of the 260-m high Tehri dam, the constituent hydro-electric and storage plants, and a transmission line, on a contract or turn-key basis.

This Agreement comes hot on the heels of an earlier agreement signed in November 1986 in India, under whose terms, concessional credit to the tune of 1.5 billion roubles (Rs 3,000 crore) has been earmarked for the execution of four large, long-gestating projects by the Soviet Union on a turn-key basis. The credit will carry a low rate of interest, reportedly only 2.5 per cent, and will be repayable over a longer period — 17 years — than Soviet credits offered to India in the past. Of the total credit, 300 million roubles (Rs 600 crore) which will carry an even lower rate of interest, will be allocated for financing local costs of projects. Of the four projects due to be financed by the Agreement, the Tehri Hydropower complex is the biggest, and will utilise a major part of the Soviet credit. The credit is tied to supplies of goods and services from the Soviet Union, thereby resembling export-promotion credits which can impair the bargaining power of the recipient where the determination of prices, quality of goods, and services supplied against these credits is concerned. These sup-

plies can also compete with similar supplies from domestic sources.

Indeed there are many who believe that Indian organisations are quite capable of undertaking the construction of the complex; Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) and other Indian firms are also able to provide the necessary machinery and equipment. An article in the *Deccan Herald* commented, "Here is a glaring case of preference for foreign aid and turn-key construction of a project by foreign agencies against optimal utilisation of domestic productive capacity and engineering capabilities." And, "If India is in need of technical services or machinery and equipment which the Soviet Union can supply on competitive terms, price-wise and quality-wise, it does not have to import its requirements against credits, but can finance its imports by the rouble reserves it has accumulated through its exports to the USSR."

Although Soviet collaboration in the project has generated controversy, it is perhaps because the Soviet Union has vast experience in the successful construction and operation of high-mountain hydro-electric plants, many of which are in highly seismic zones similar to the Tehri area, that their assistance has been enlisted. The USSR operates the 2,700-megawatt

Nurek station in Tajikistan with the world's tallest rock-fill dam of 300 metres, and is currently building the 3,600-megawatt Rogun plant with a 330-metre dam. Operational experience of the Nurek station also reveals that it has successfully withstood underground tremors.

Designs for the dam have already been submitted to Soviet specialists for comment. Alexander Fink, the Chief Soviet Engineer for the project, assesses it thus: "The design has been done on a good engineering level. It clearly shows the traces of the Canadian school of design. However, the high seismicity of the Tehri area fails to be adequately considered." According to Soviet experts, the design insufficiently ensures the reliability and safety of structures, especially considering the height of the dam and the fact that a densely populated area lies behind it. Soviet personnel have recommended that the design be revised because it does not meet the safety standards applied to similar projects in the Soviet Union.

The groups of Soviet experts who will base themselves at Tehri include ecologists who will prepare forecasts of possible ecological changes as a result of the construction of the hydro-power complex. There are many who today believe that the construction of large hydro-electric plants cause ruinous ecological changes. Fink believes the construction of the project will, of course, affect the environment, but not so tragically as some believe.

— Imprint

ing in postponements. However, if we succeed in winning the case, it will set an important precedent, for never before have environmentalists been able to successfully thwart the construction of large-scale projects like these.

IN THE ENTIRE PROJECT, stress has been laid on the technological aspect of the construction of the

hydro-power complex, the positive aspects of development, and the benefits that will accrue to the state. Extensive studies have been conducted, plans designed and re-designed; yet no such studies have been made on the humanitarian aspects of its construction. And the report submitted by the Working Committee, which does point to these problems, has been ignored. When such colos-

sal projects are launched without due consideration to the havoc they will wreak on the local populace, the decisions taken become cruel and unthinking and are detrimental to the national interest in the long run. After all, when development is being undertaken in the name of the people, and for the eventual welfare of the people, it must reflect it.

The psychological impact of such

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projects on the local population is the fostering of a feeling of subjugation. We, in Garhwal, feel we are being sacrificed for the benefit of the big cities, industries, and socially and economically advanced groups. In India, big dams are being constructed in hilly and tribal areas which, due to the negligence of colonialism and subsequently, that of our governments, have remained isolated and neglected. We feel that such dams pose a grave threat to civilisation, and we have made appeals to international funding agencies not to finance such dangerous ventures. Our people are being made permanent oustees; we must safeguard theirs and our interests. The oustees of Bhakra have not yet been fully resettled, those from Pong have been driven away from Rajasthan, and those residents of Bodhghat, whose lands were taken away for buildings, are still wandering in search of land, and destroying local forests in the process.

Sunil K Roy, Chairman of the Working Group that appraised the project, quoted the Energy Minister, Vasant Sathe, who had said, "all project costs have been considered but not the human factor." In his letter to T N Sheshan, Secretary to the Department of Environment, S K Roy echoed this: "this is conspicuously so in the case of the Tehri Dam project . . . no particular effort was required, just a modicum of humanity beyond the application of colonial bureaucratic norms, and some slight understanding of the socio-cultural and economic pattern in hill villages. Apart from the dislocation of local lifestyle, which is considerable, the oustees are uprooted, and almost literally, scattered on a dust heap."

**S K ROY MADE SOME OTHER**  
damning observations: "I regret having to record my considered view that virtually no importance has been given to the many varied and significant aspects of the complex relationship between the construction of a high dam on one of the world's most

**WHEN V D SAKLANI**, President of the Tehri Bandh Virodhak Samiti, posed the question, "Can we take the risk of building the Tehri dam in the Himalayas and let the sword of Damocles hang over the Ganga basin for all time to come?" he was echoing the concerns not only of local villagers opposed to the construction of the dam but also those of an august body of opinion. The risks involved in both the siting and construction of the hydro-power complex are, indeed, grave, and have been testified to by the Working Committee appointed to investigate the construction, as well as the Environment Ministry.

Primarily, the selection of the site for the dam has invited severe censure. The site falls in a seismically active zone of the middle Himalayas and a large number of major and minor earthquake faults have been detected in the vicinity of the dam. Eleven large reservoirs of the Himalayan foothills are part of the Alpide belt which is one of the two major belts where devastating earthquakes have occurred in the past. Four major rock faults beneath the construction site of the Tehri Dam could destroy it, as well as the lives of thousands of people. The Working Committee report states: "The most significant line of faults is located at a distance of 3-3.5 kms, which probably lies in the foundation of the dam, approximately at a depth of 5-6 kms." Between 1897-1916, fifteen earthquakes of a magnitude exceeding 7.5 on the Richter scale occurred; 1917-1933, by contrast, was an inactive period, but the following years, upto 1952, witnessed 14 earthquakes of a magnitude exceeding 7.2 (8 amounting to a major catastrophe).

important rivers, and either the human or natural environment upstream and downstream of the Tehri Dam.

"This is the first detailed environmental assessment of a major water resource project which could have made an important contribution.

## The Risks

What makes this a seismic zone? According to Dr H Teideman, a seismologist of international renown, India lies on a slab of crust called the Indian Plate, which moves northeastwards at a rate of 5 cms a year. In doing so, the plate encounters adjacent plates – in the Burma-Andaman-Sumatra region in the East, the Himalayan foothills in the North and the Suleman ranges of Pakistan in the West. The resultant forces push the Himalayas upwards, thus causing earthquakes. According to Dr H Teideman, slight earth movements which are potential precursors of earthquakes are beginning to increase near the Northeastern boundary of the Indian Plate: "As little seismic activity has occurred since 1951, it only means that strains are gradually building up in the faults." Says Professor Harsh K Gupta, an internationally-acknowledged authority on seismic studies, "The non-occurrence of a major earthquake in the vicinity of the Himalayas has given us a false sense of security." A related danger is that the sheer weight of the water in the reservoir could cause ground tremors or trigger off an earthquake. What the enormous weight will do to the already unstable geology of the region is also open to speculation.

The structure of the dam is further potentially threatened by seepage. Hills abutting the dam have been found to contain open joints and cleavages. The reservoir water that will invariably seep into the hills is likely to erode them at an accelerated rate, and could result in the collapse of the dam itself.

The high rate of siltation is an-

other factor. Here also, an opportunity has been lost to consider the larger, long-term national interest in harnessing the water resources potential of the Himalayas, ensuring the economic well-being of the impoverished hill peoples, and, simultaneously, conserving

ther source of controversy. The snow-fed rivers, the Bhagirathi and Bhilangana, have their source in glaciers and run down denuded hillsides, transporting large quantities of fine silt and boulders. In the last ten years, the river bed of the Bhagirathi in Tehri has risen by six metres and a huge island of sand has been formed at the confluence of the Bhilangana and Bhagirathi. Dr K S Vaidya, an authority on Himalayan geology, has cautioned against siltation hazards: "The reservoirs formed behind the dams are being filled with sediment at rates three to five times faster than was estimated at the time of their designing. Their effective life thus stands reduced to half or even quarter of what was originally estimated."

Another major point of contention has been the submergence area and the threat it poses to the people living downstream. When the natural flow of a major river is blocked by constructing a dam over it, the river bed upstream of the reservoir begins to rise. The natural phenomenon of sediment deposition causes the formation of delta deposits in the headwater areas of the reservoir. The National Geophysical Research Institute, Hyderabad, has outlined the havoc that flooding may cause: ". . . the creation of a large reservoir in the region which may already be critically stressed might induce rock failure, and if dislocation occurs near the dam, the 260.5 metre-thick sheet of water supported by it at an elevation of 550 metres above sea-level would turn into a veritable agent of widespread devastation downstream."

In March 1980, the government appointed a Working Group to assess and report on the environmental im-

pact of the construction of the Tehri dam. In its interim report submitted in May 1980, the Working Group had recommended urgent remedial action as there was a glaring deficiency of essential data. Six years later, when the final report was submitted, the Group was strongly critical of the lack of attention paid to environmental considerations, the arbitrary ousting and dislocation of local people, and the lack of adequate data to enable a thorough and comprehensive analysis. Mr S K Roy, Chairman of the Group, outlined his concerns to the Secretary of the Department of Forests and Environment in a long letter in which he made a damning statement: "I have from the outset held the view that work should be halted on the Tehri Dam but lacked an adequate data base. Now I consider this essential as it is clear that the extensive environmental recommendations will be largely ignored."

Following the recommendations of the government-appointed Working Group, the then Union Environment Minister, Mr Bhajan Lal, admitted in March 1987 that the Tehri dam could create problems for people in Hardwar and Rishikesh, but "the risks were not enough to outweigh the country's demand for electricity." It is indeed remarkable that the government is pressing ahead with its plans despite recommendations to the contrary by its own agencies. And S K Roy's question is pertinent: "Who will be ready to respond to future generations for the most appalling consequences of any possible error in planning, or miscalculation, or the incalculable disasters following a major earthquake in the area?"

— Imprint

the environment for sustainable development and the future agricultural potential of the rich soils of the Gangetic plain. All of which is threatened by the unidimensional drive for development without environmental considerations. I have, from the outset,

held the view that work should be halted on the Tehri Dam but lacked an adequate data base. Now I consider this is essential as it is clear that the extensive environmental recommendations will be largely ignored — as they were in the case of those in

the Interim Report. . . ."

It is indeed a matter of grave concern that despite the recommendations made by the Working Committee, the government has insisted on ploughing ahead. Construction has already begun although temporarily halted owing to the Soviets' insistence on a re-design, and villagers are already being relocated in the New Tehri township. But they are reluctant to leave their homes, their ancestral lands. According to the Roy Committee figures, a total of 8,680 families (about 70,000 people) will be affected by the construction of the dam; of these, 3,968 families will be entirely displaced because over 50 per cent of their land is being acquired. The authorities require 9,000 acres of land for rehabilitation purposes of which 4,000 acres have already been acquired. When I met a few families in Pathari in Saharanpur district and some in Bhaniwala, Dehra Dun, the women had tears in their eyes when they spoke of how they had lost the freedom with which they had roamed the hillsides and local forests: "We are here in a cage. There are no hills around us, no Ganga."

And conditions leave much to be desired. Let alone the free irrigation promised by the government, the people, once used to an assured supply of drinking water from the streams that cascaded down the hills, do not have an adequate supply of drinking water in Bhaniwala; two of the available four tube-wells have also failed.

**THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE** dissatisfaction with the amount of compensation offered by the project authorities: 2 acres of land per family. Lokendra Datta Saklani made a valid point when he declared that since the cost of construction of the dam has escalated from Rs 197 crore to nearly Rs 2,500 crore, there was little justification for the amount of compensation remaining stagnant as per original 1978 figures.

## ENVIRONMENT



*Silt deposits can clog rivers.*

There is another grievance. Upto now, the displaced families have not been given ownership rights to the land that they have been rehoused on, whereas they used to own the land that they lived and worked on in Tehri. They were merely installed on the land physically and their names entered in a register. Villagers are also unhappy with the selection of the site of the New Tehri township, as cracks are already evident in some of the buildings.

Tehri Garhwal has been the cradle of an ancient Garhwali culture and has given birth to eminent poets, scholars and artists. The Vedantic Saint, Swami Ram Tirtha, took 'sanyas' here and lived near Tehri, which thus achieved international significance as a place of deep spiritual value and inspiration. Freedom lovers have been inspired by the historic martyrdom of Sridev Suman follow-



*Bhagirathi: under threat.*

ing an 84-day fast in Tehri jail in defence of civil liberties; adventure seekers have drawn inspiration from this ancestral home of the two brothers, Major Harsh and Jai Bahuguna, who sacrificed their lives for the country on Mount Everest.

The dam will wipe out this rich heritage. Tehri dam, if constructed, will stand as a monument to the greatest folly of the twentieth century.

Today, construction work on the dam has been temporarily suspended as the Soviets have a new design for the dam which, they insist, the government must approve and accept. V D Saklani echoes all our concerns when he says: "We are not sure what will happen tomorrow. . . the lives of people are being played with, like a game. No good will come of this. I am praying that the dam will be turned down by the courts, and if it goes ahead, I pray it will stay firm."♦

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Editorial Sl 9554

## FAIRY TALE

Inimitable cartoonist RAVI SHANKAR offers a sneak preview of what the famous last words of a selection of our eminent politicians would be!

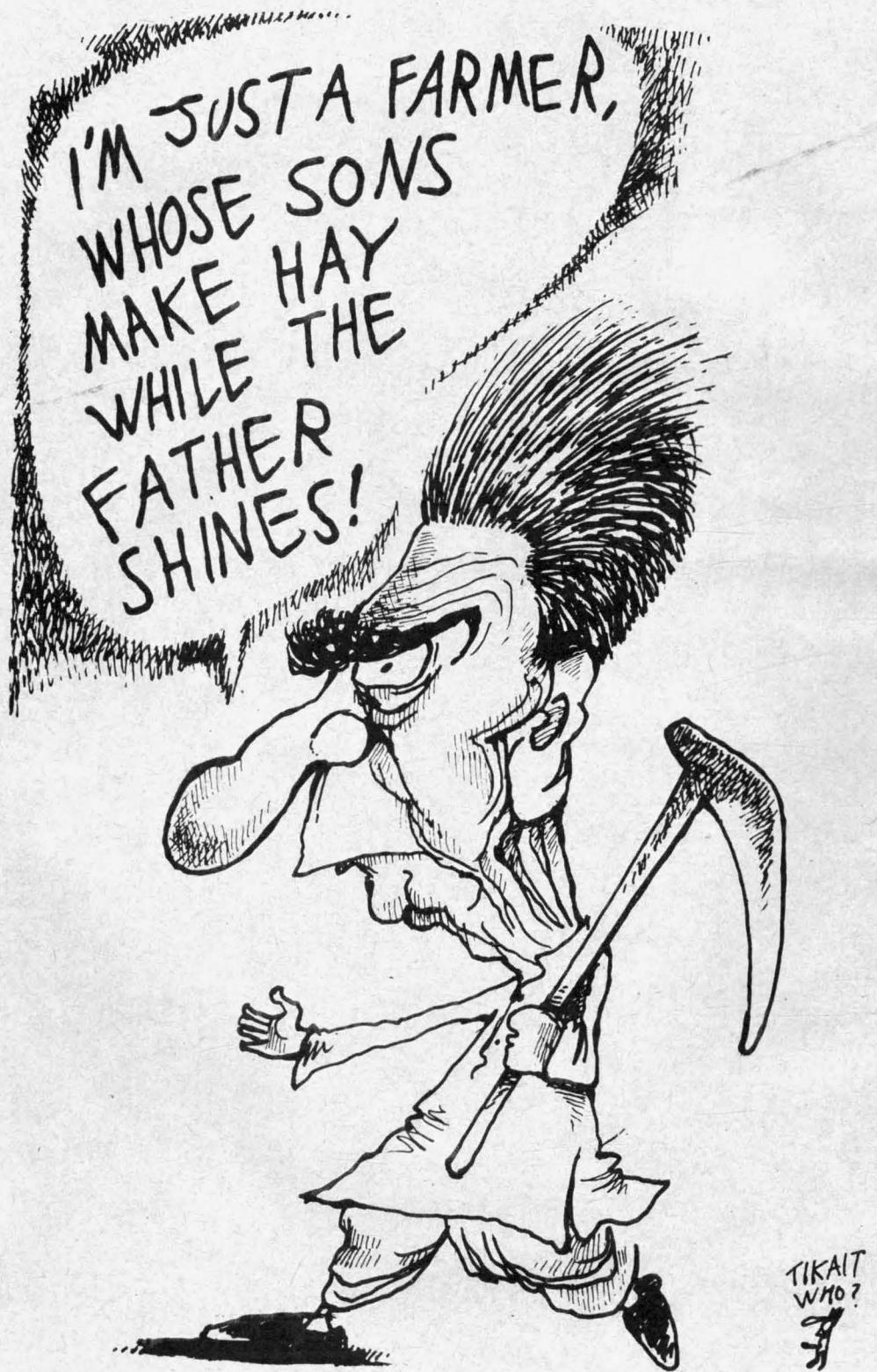


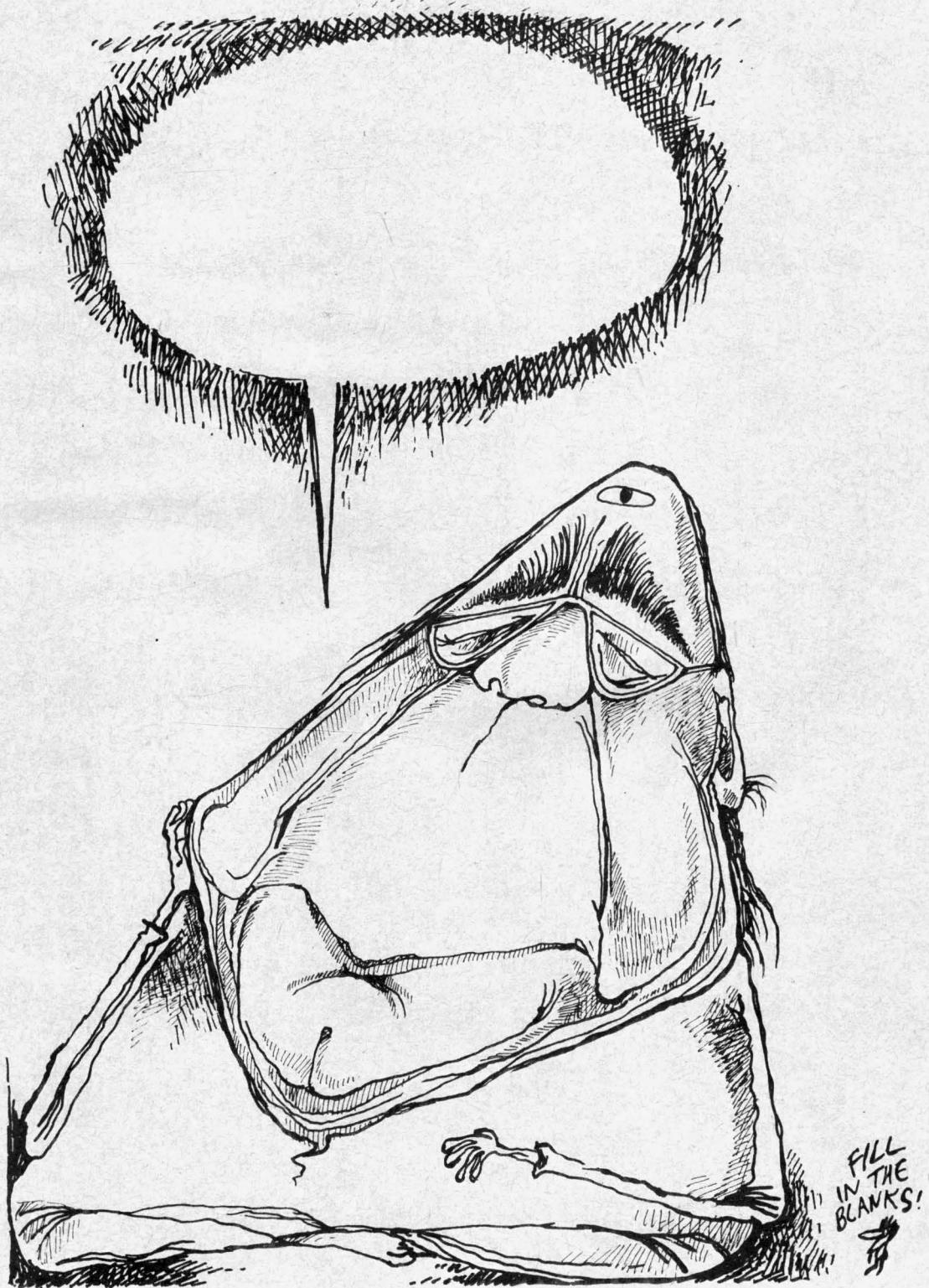
By Ravi Shankar

I'M NOT NEHRU -  
I'M REALLY GANDHI!

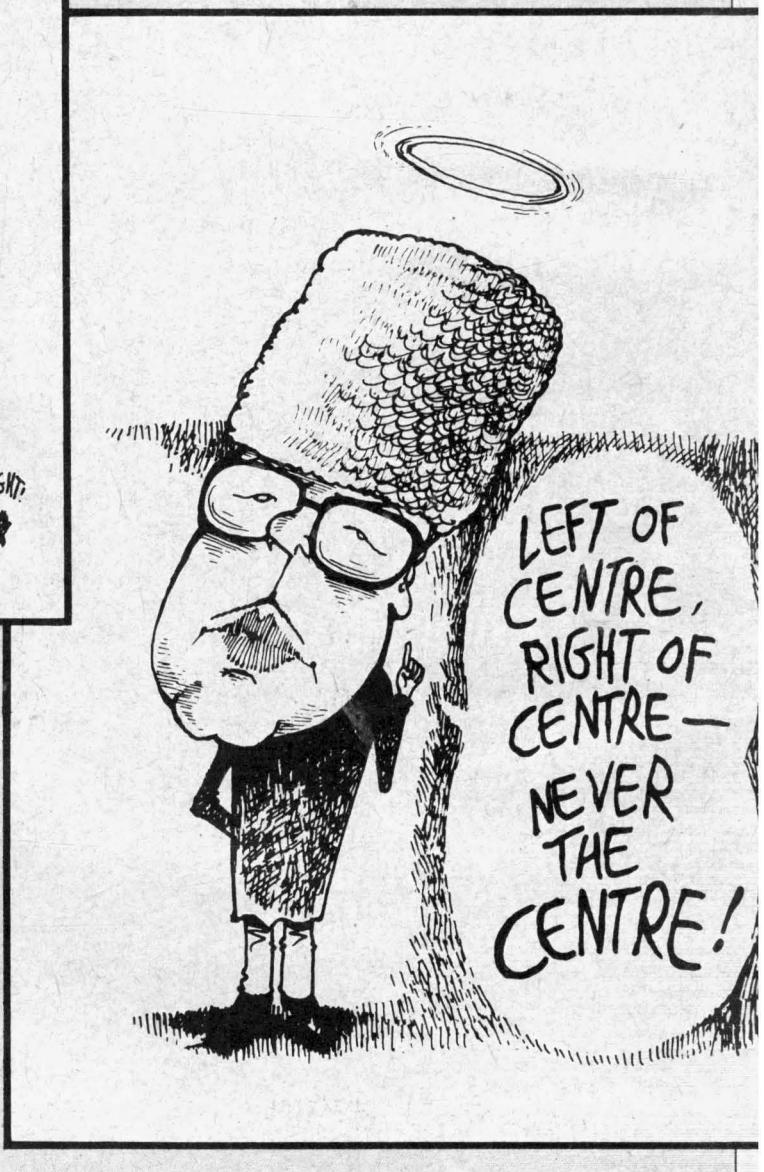
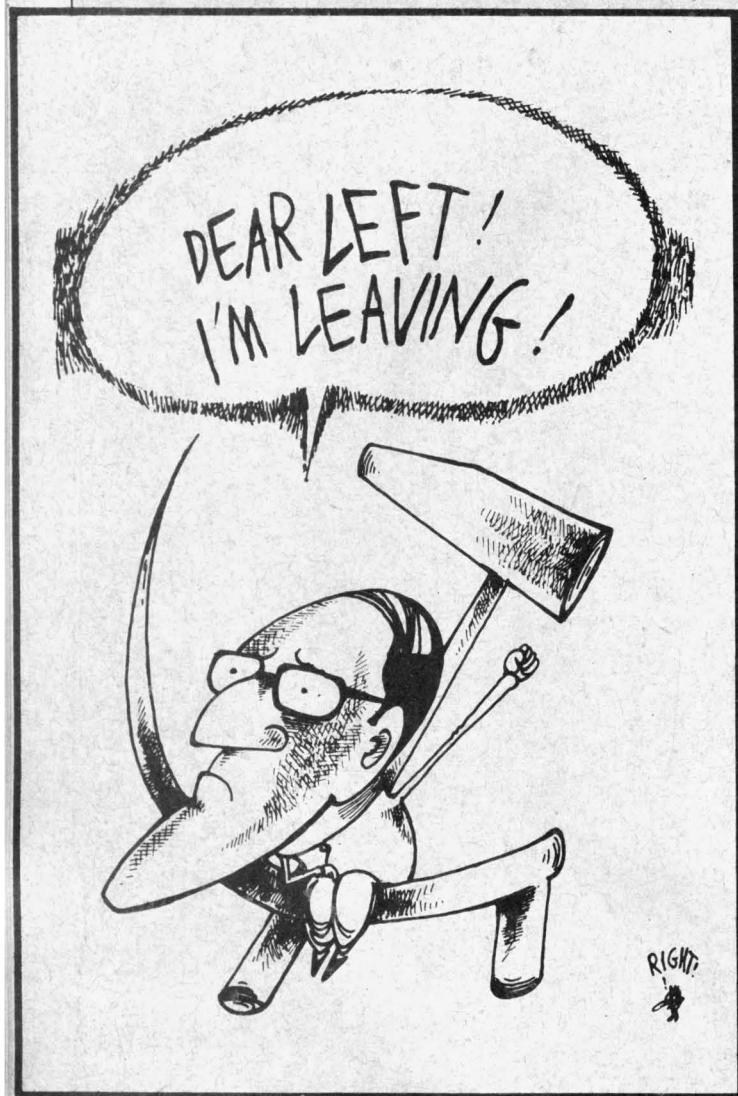


## CARTOON FEATURE





## CARTOON FEATURE



# 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

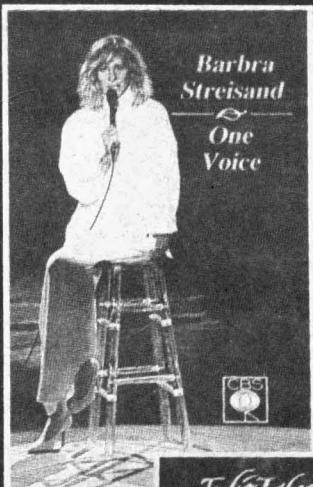


**BRUCE  
SPRINGSTEEN**  
TUNNEL OF LOVE  
(4CX 10339)

- 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



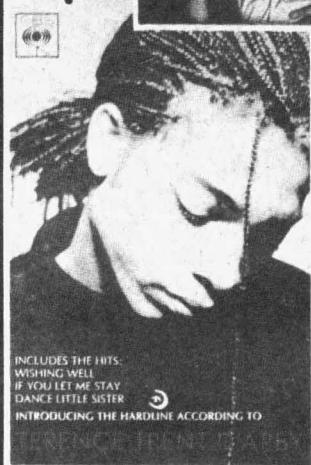
**BARBRA  
STREISAND**  
ONE VOICE  
(4CX 10333)

- Best Female Pop Vocal Performance



**JULIO IGLESIAS**  
UN HOMBRE SOLO  
(4CX 10331)

- Best Latin Pop Performance



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

- Best New Artist



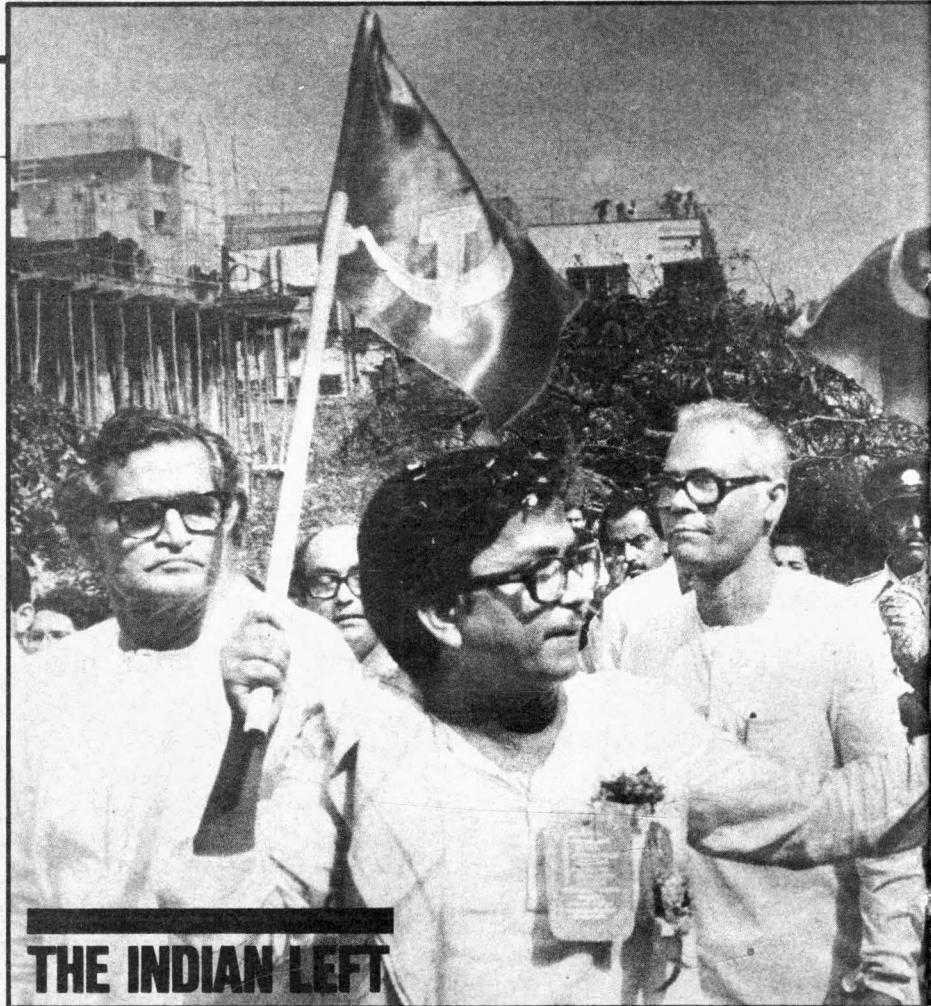
## We've Got The Hits!

## ANALYSIS

**I**T WOULD NOT BE alarmist to say that Indian society today is undergoing a crisis of historic proportions. Mounting unemployment, inflation, communalisation and social conflict, all point to the increasing need for structural and institutional reforms if the slide towards barbarisation is to be prevented. The number of landless peasants has increased from 27 million in 1961 to 55 million in 1981; on a typical day, about 15 million persons in the villages hang in the limbo of 'disguised unemployment', and even the most conservative estimates place about 275 million below the so-called poverty line. And all this despite the tremendous potential of the Indian economy, the tripling of foodgrain production in the last 30 years (during which the population doubled), and a considerable growth in the economic infrastructure.

Such a situation would lead one to expect a powerful Left movement which would focus social discontent in the direction of basic institutional change. But despite the apparent manoeuvrability of the mainstream Left in national politics, the fact remains that as a movement, it lacks cohesion and commonness of purpose, is organisationally fragmented, and has of late, suffered setbacks in those areas where it exists as an electoral force. Its internal contradictions have led to violent eruptions such as the CPI (M)-Naxalite conflict in Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, even as all factions of communists face the onslaught of Khalistani terrorism, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to do so unitedly.

Why is the Left still a relatively marginal force in Indian politics — in stark contrast to our two giant neighbours, the USSR and China? Where is it going now? A brief survey of its roots is necessary to consider even a tentative answer to these questions. 'Leftism', historically, was a product of the great divide which burst upon Europe with the coming of the French Revolution of 1789 and the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century.



### THE INDIAN LEFT IN THE RED?

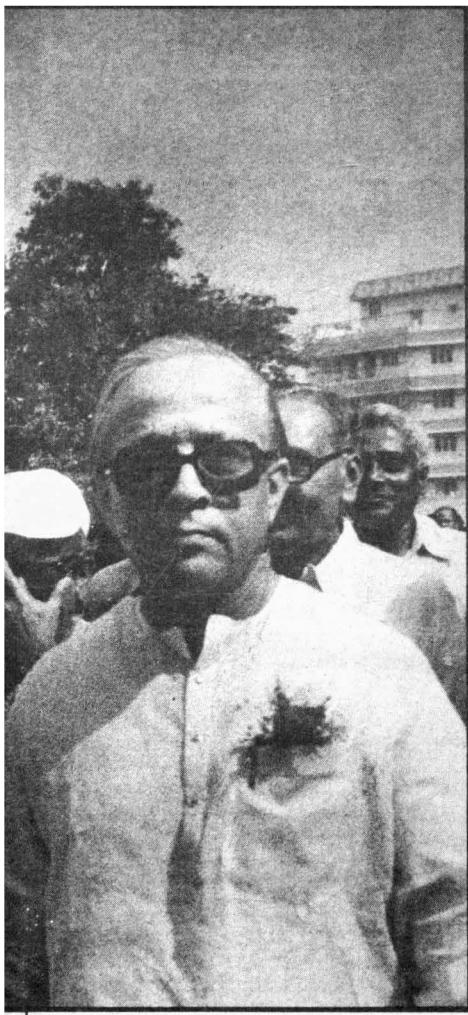
Despite the manoeuvrability of the mainstream Left in national politics, as a movement it is organisationally fragmented, lacks cohesion and has of late suffered setbacks in its strongholds, argue DILIP SIMEON and SANDEEP BHUSHAN in this overview.

With the growth and spread of capitalism across the globe, (mainly through the mechanism of empire), there grew simultaneously a "social-democratic" current within democratic politics in the capitalist nations, and a nationalist concomitant in various colonies across Asia and Africa. The Russian Revolution of 1917 exercised an influence in the 20th century comparable only to that of 1789. Under its moral and political impetus, a great schism took place within the social-democratic movement and gave rise to the current known as Marxism-Leninism. Between 1919 and 1943, the main force of this cur-

rent was concentrated organisationally in the Third International or 'Comintern'. It has tended to be forgotten, in the aftermath of the Stalinist period, that socialism was an outgrowth of democracy, and that the Russian Revolution in its pristine phase expressed the utopian and ultra-democratic aspirations of the most downtrodden part of humanity.

The Indian Communist Party was born in these historical circumstances in 1920, a good 35 years after the Indian National Congress had emerged. Its first conference was held in 1925, and, after passing through phases of severe repression, owing to

## By Dilip Simeon & Sandeep Bhushan



extreme paranoia with which the British viewed 'Bolshevism', they remained a tiny sect of about 150 members in 1934. By that time, the social-democratic current within the Congress had also grown and given itself the name of the Congress Socialist Party, whose Kerala unit, in later years, became the base of the CPI. After 1934, the CPI, which functioned as a branch of the monolithic Comintern, began to follow a more moderate line towards the Congress and grew rapidly in the 1940s. In 1942 it made the disastrous blunder of offending even Left-nationalist sentiment by the methods chosen to support the Allied war effort. Its opposition to the Quit India movement and its overt support to the politics of the Muslim League by dubbing Muslims a 'nationality', were stances for which it is still paying a heavy historical price.

In the first three years of Independence, the CPI was involved in an armed peasant struggle on Maoist lines in Telangana. This strategy was

based on the view that Independence was a hollow and fraudulent compromise with imperialism. Severe repression led to a massive decline in membership by 1950. But by the mid-fifties the party had decided to work through the 'system', and had won a majority in Kerala in 1957 – this ministry was overthrown by Nehru in 1959. In the 1960s the tensions between the revolutionary and reformist trends were exacerbated by the Sino-Soviet split and the Indo-China war. The final break came in 1964, when the pro-Maoist elements formed the CPI (M). In the late 1960s, the more committed Maoists went a step further. Inspired by the upsurge of poor peasant and tribal unrest in West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, they broke away from the CPI (M), and decided to form a new party. The CPI (ML) was born in 1970. Meanwhile the parent CP (Communist Party) shared power in government coalitions in West Bengal and Kerala, and fratricidal conflict became common in the period 1969-72. The government crack-down on the Maoists was followed by intense repression of the CPI (M); the climax came during the Emergency which was directed against the entire Opposition. After the collapse of the Indira regime in 1977, the CPI (M) came to power in a coalition with three other Left parties in Bengal and has now been in government for over a decade.

**THE VICTORY OF THE CPI (M)** – dominated Left Front in Kerala last year, was considered to be a vindication of E M S Namboodiripad and B T Rändive's 'line' that the party needed to break with its older electoral strategy of allying with the Muslim League and other communal parties. Both in Kerala and West Bengal, its strategic policy has been to safeguard tenants' rights and to institutionalise forms of tenancy which had been advocated by earlier Congress regimes. Ironically, the very success of the Kerala Agrarian Relations Bill may have led to a decline in Communist voting strength among sections of

petty proprietors who have gained from it. In West Bengal, 'Operation Barga' met with limited success and was held up because of opposition among those of the party's middle-class supporters who held rentier interests in land. Higher and stabler wage rates for agrarian workers; an industrial peace much appreciated by big business; and an administration committed to communal harmony are the other achievements of the Front. Recent setbacks in the Kerala municipality and Tripura assembly elections, however, indicate that the CPM's vote base in terms of regional sentiment, is by no means completely hegemonic. The stagnation of public health and education, the open invitations to multinational corporations, and the nexus between big business and government, however, have caused consternation in the ranks, and if ever the much-talked about unification of the CPI and CPM were to come about, it is quite likely that many of the more radical cadre of the latter would deflect to the Maoist organisations.

Speaking of the latter, an interesting aspect of the political scene today is that so-called communist extremism is rapidly becoming a mass movement in certain parts of the country. This is because vast numbers of oppressed citizens among the landless poor and tribal groups have tended to be ignored by the major Left parties. These sections are also subject to the most brutal forms of extra-economic coercion. Rural Bihar especially has been sunk in a mire of arson, rape, and mass murder directed at the rural poor by informal landlord armies, aided and abetted by the police. Andhra Pradesh had a Maoist tradition dating back to 1948-51, and Srikakulam district was the 'base area' of Charu Muzumdar's style of Naxalism in 1968-72. Here, militant struggles of Girijan tribals finally led to the emergence of a conciliatory wing within the state bureaucracy, which argued that Naxalism was at least, in part, a product of governmental neglect.

The Andhra movement is today

## ANALYSIS

spearheaded by the People's War Group, which is distinguished by conspiratorial, rather than open, democratic methods of work, and a commitment to the 'annihilation line'. In Bihar, the Indian People's Front (IPF) is the main organisational form of poor and landless peasant resistance to the landlord armies and a corrupt state machinery. What is remarkable about the IPF is its federal structure — it is an umbrella organisation incorporating scores of former groups and sects, and believes in open, mass democratic work. While refusing to make a fetish of elections, marked as they are by institutionalised booth-capturing and intimidation, the IPF has participated in them on an experimental basis in the 1985 Assembly elections. Its greatest success has been in the reduction of electoral malpractices, the enforcement of minimum wages, and the decline of landlord-inspired crime in the areas of its influence — due to which, oppressed sections are able to cast their votes properly for the first time in decades. Ironically, thus, the so-called extremists are making democracy slightly less disreputable in Bihar.

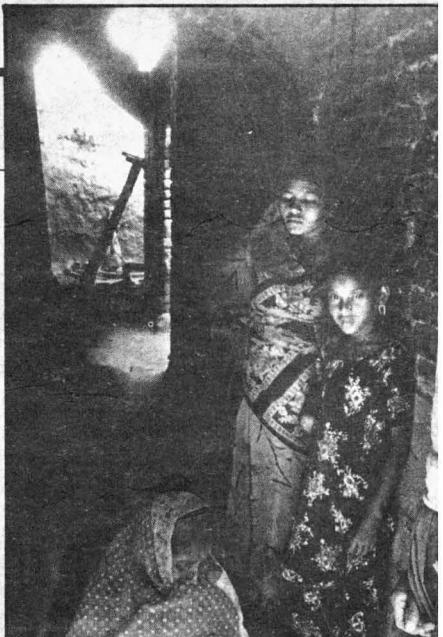
In 1982, the government estimated that 14 districts were affected by communist extremism, and more recently, a little over 10 per cent of the state's villages were estimated to fall into this category. Most of this political influence operates within the area of south-central Bihar, south of the Ganga and north of the Chota Nagpur plateau. It is worth noting that after the infamous Arwal massacre in April 1986, all the Maoist mass organisations joined together in a massive *morcha* in Patna, to *gherao* the Assembly. The government had to resort to over 25,000 arrests to prevent the *gherao* taking place.

Of late, another mass movement, out of direct Left influence, but supported by the IPF and other Left parties in Bihar, is the movement demanding statehood for Jharkhand, a demand that dates back to the 1930s. In the last 18 months this has developed into a giant wave of student-

inspired protest. Jharkhand, as the (mainly) tribal people of the Chota Nagpur plateau like to call their homeland, has suffered greatly, following the discovery that it was a rich source of forest and mineral wealth. Its people have been systematically deprived of land and forced to work as a coolie proletariat in mines and quarries. The ruling elite of Northern Bihar have looted Jharkhand through mechanisms such as the notorious Dhanbad mafia. Since the orthodox communists have always looked askance at the Jharkhand movement due to the over-susceptibility of Bengali regional sentiment to demands for parts of Purulia district, the major Left interventions in the movement have been from Maoist and post-Maoist groups, although there are signs that the CPs may also support it.

**WITHIN THE WORKING-CLASS** movement, trade unions tend to be split between various parties. To begin with, about half the factory workers are not unionised at all. They belong to small-scale, ancillary units, dispersed, badly paid, and subject to insecure service conditions. In the older and infrastructural industries in the railways, dockyards, mines, textiles, etc., unions dating back to the early days of Independence are faced with modernisation programmes which lead to reductions and a decline in bargaining power. Newer industries like chemicals, synthetics, vehicle production and electronics have workers who are better organised and paid, and whose unions show 'autonomous' trends. Professional sections like teachers, doctors and the petty bureaucracy are also unionised and have, of late, faced severe and unsympathetic government action. In all these spheres, the Left cannot be said to be the dominant force.

The two Communist unions had less than 7 lakh members in the mid-1980s, while the RSS-controlled Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) had 12 lakh on its 1980-rolls. The pro-government Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), too, was far



*The aftermath of the Arwal massacre.*

ahead with 22 lakhs. The other major (Left) union was the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), with a membership as large as that of the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and AITUC combined. Smaller Left-wing unions are confined to certain pockets, such as the Chhattisgarh mine workers union run by Shankar Guha Niyogi, and A K Roy's coal miners union in Dhanbad, both known for successes in combating the local mafia of contractors, liquor-still owners and politicians that infest mining belts. By and large, after the decline of working-class activity following the collapse of the historic textile worker's strike in Bombay, Left influence in its supposedly natural base has given way to a growing Right-wing. The Shiv Sena's forays into working-class movements in Bombay bear similarities to Nazi tactics, and both the rise and fall of Datta Samant have paved the way for this alarming phenomenon.

The area where the Left has certainly covered itself with glory has been in the movement to counter communal terrorism in the Punjab. Cadres of both the CPs as well as a united front of Maoist parties have fought a valiant struggle for secular and democratic values, often giving up their lives in the process. The names of Comrades Satyapal Dang and Gursharan Singh have become bywords in North India, and deservedly so. Communists are being gunned down every day for defying communal propaganda and terrorism. The



Jharkhand: covert Left support.

saddest part of this bloody saga is that the Left cannot bring itself to unite despite this vicious campaign against it. Nor has it been able, after decades of theoretical ruminations, to give an adequate characterisation of communalism, surely the most deadly phenomenon confronting modern Indian society. Today, the main Left parties show an awareness of the fact that there is no such thing as a 'mainstream opposition', and that fascist opposition is more dangerous than the opportunist and Right-wing social democracy of the Congress. Despite this, the leaders of the West Bengal unit of the CPI (M) are known to be 'softer' in their stance towards the RSS-backed BJP than their comrades elsewhere. One faction of the Maoists has explored united political action with the BJP, another considers India a mere "geographical expression" and is willing to make compromises with Muslim Leaguers. It is noteworthy that many leftist groups still prefer allying with such elements than with those nearest themselves. The failure to comprehend communalism as a single entity (the CPs still speak of 'Hindu' communalism and 'minority' communalism), ie, as the Indian variant of Fascism, obstructs the possibility of a powerful secular mass movement for social change. Significantly, the Left resistance to communalism in the Punjab has not found adequate reflection in its work in Delhi, where the perpetrators of the carnage of 1984 still roam free.

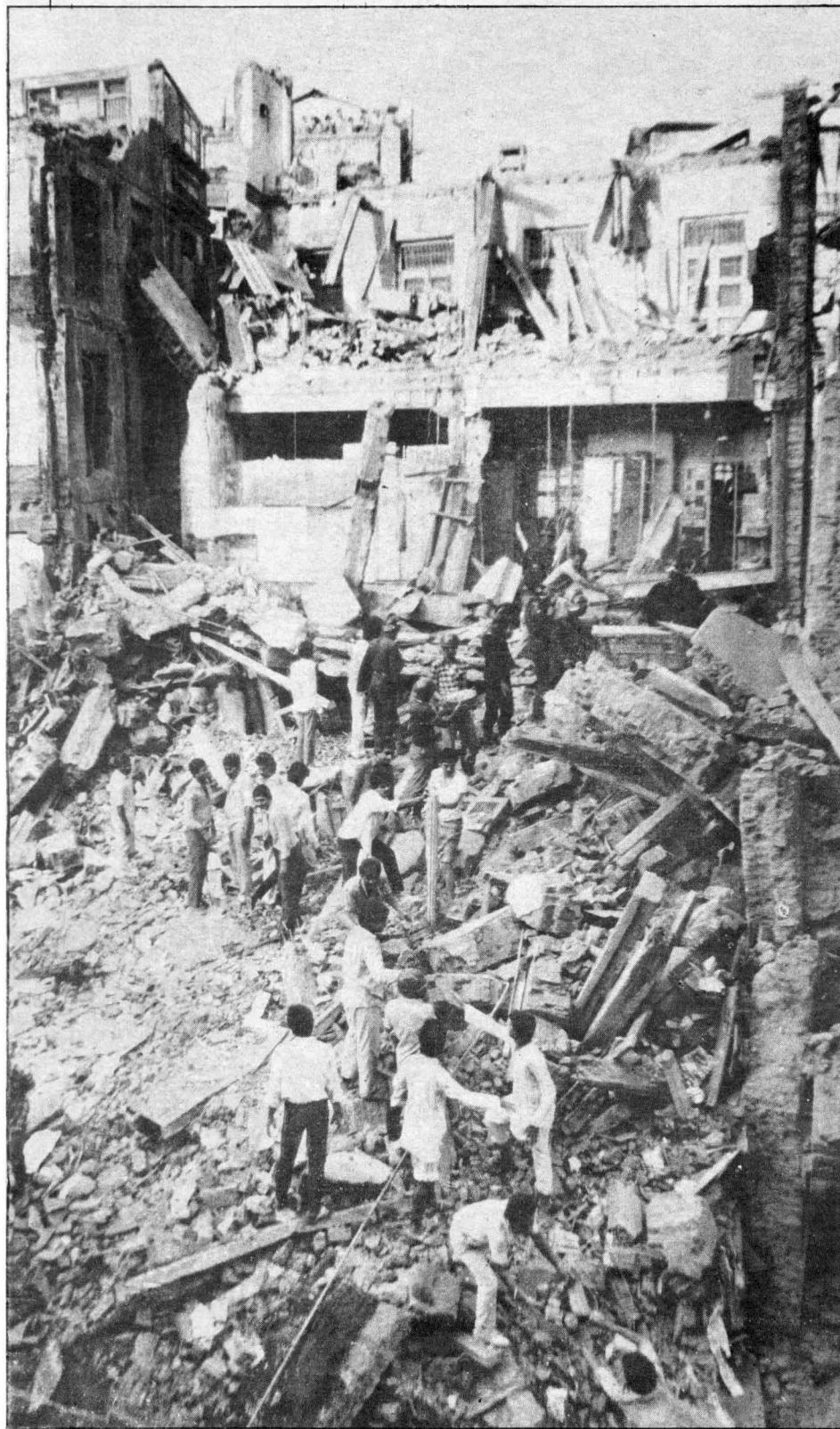
**NOT ALL OF THE SOCIAL** opposition to the existing order of things is encompassed within the political Left. Movements for women's emancipation, popularisation of literature, environmental protection, health care, progressive science, and democratic rights have grown in the past decade, and despite strenuous efforts by the Left to bring all of these into the ambit of this or that 'vanguard', remain largely independent, and effective. The Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (which came into conflict with the CPM government over the Silent Valley project), the Granthali literary movement in Maharashtra, democratic rights groups in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Delhi and Punjab, numerous street theatre groups, anti-communal campaigns, have all made a considerable impact within the confines of their specific activism. The CPs have also been active in recent government-sponsored science popularisation programmes.

All this brings us back to where we began — why is the Left splintered and marginalised? How far will it succeed in its efforts to emerge as a major opposition force? The Indian Left was nurtured in the dogmas and doctrines of monolithic communism in the 1930s, and it is the interaction between their simple formulae and a highly complex social structure which has given rise to vacillations and confusion over the decades. In Russia and China, the Left was confronted with autocratic systems whose collapse was an inevitable consequence of historical processes which predated the emergence of militant CPs. In India, the CP grew to maturity a full half-century after the Congress was founded. Was the Congress just another party or was it a movement of much broader dimensions? The CPI could never really make up its mind on this issue. Was (and is) communalism just a divisive ploy of the ruling classes, or was (and is) it the expression of a deep-rooted autocratic tradition in Indian society which came to function as a vehicle for fascist social interests? Is caste just an expression

of a backward looking culture or is social oppression inexplicable without a fuller comprehension of caste? Is it not significant that the mass marches of 'Dalits' have never been led by the Left, even though they express the pent-up despair of the most oppressed of Indian citizens? Is it possible to separate 'democracy' from 'leftism' any longer? Is 'revolution' an event or a process, and can an obsession with electoral politics generate sufficient and sustained social energies for institutional change? If the Left strategy today is to gain breathing space by holding off the communal parties of the Right, does its own future not depend on what it exactly does *and* how it functions during the space it has gained? These are questions of grievous and vital importance to the future both of the Left and of the Indian society.

In 1922, in his declining years, Lenin, that colossus of 20th century Leftism, remarked at his last appearance in the Comintern (in its Fourth Congress) . . . "At the Third Congress, in 1921, we adopted a resolution on the organisational structure of the Communist parties and on the methods and contents of their activities. The resolution is an excellent one, but it is almost entirely Russian, that is to say, everything in it is based on Russian conditions. That is its good point, but also its failing. . . I have the impression that we made a big mistake with this resolution. . . It is quite unintelligible to foreigners and they cannot be content with hanging it in a corner like an icon and praying to it. . ." Just last year, Lenin's political descendant, Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev said that ". . . the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) does not possess a monopoly of the truth". Who indeed, but Popes, Ayatollahs and Sarsanghchalaks could have claimed to possess the Absolute Truth? The Indian Left would do well to reflect upon the profound philosophical implications of Lenin's last and Gorbachev's latest realisations. ♦

## SPECIAL REPORT



**I**T IS AN ALARMING FIGURE, but nevertheless, based on sound calculations: more than 1.5 lakh of Bombay's ever-burgeoning population is living in the shadow of death. They are the residents of the 1,563 dilapidated buildings declared 'dangerous' by the Bombay Housing and Area Development Board (BHADB), residents forced to live in tottering



structures on the verge of collapse.

Indeed, building collapses have become a common feature in Bombay and have taken a serious toll of human lives. Figures reveal that during the period 1970 to 1980, the sprawling metropolis witnessed 1,298 building collapses which claimed 284 lives and injured a further 700, disabling some of them for life.

Sticking out like sore, festering thumbs in the city's architectural landscape, 'dangerous' buildings are instantly recognisable by the forests of bamboo that prop them up (see box). The fact that these same props are often responsible for exacerbating their dangerous condition, is often ignored. But it is certain that indiscriminate propping — contrac-

cases and shifting panels. And, if the old building is largely made of timber, in its ancient wiring — a sure fire-hazard. The absence of zoning, the building not being set-back (there should be a  $60^{\circ}$  angle between the height of a building and the centre-line of the road), a substantial increase in the number of residents, poor foundations (particularly in reclaim-

Development Act, 1976, these buildings are beyond economically viable repair and have either to be demolished or reconstructed. Yet, approximately 31,200 families continue to live in these edifices at permanent risk to their lives and limbs.

**MOST OF THE CONDEMNED** structures are chawls — single tenements



tors are paid per prop — induces stresses in structural elements, as it shifts the equilibrium of beams, columns and slabs by reversing the positions of tension and compression, thereby causing a collapse. Before the final collapse, when the poles can no longer carry their burden, the warning signs can be seen or heard in the crumbling walls, the creaking stair-

ed lands) that can cause the floor to sink, and cheap construction materials that can easily disintegrate, are other factors that have contributed to the increasing number of building collapses.

Can anything be done to salvage them and protect their residents? Under the provisions of Section 88(3) of the Maharashtra Housing and Area

linked by a common verandah — that mushroomed in the city in the early part of the century to meet the needs of the then booming textile industry which attracted hordes of migrants. These chawls were first located in and around Girgaum and Gamdevi, and later, at Parel, Mumbadevi, Nagdevi and Worli. The BDD and BIT chawls at Worli and Chinchbunder re-

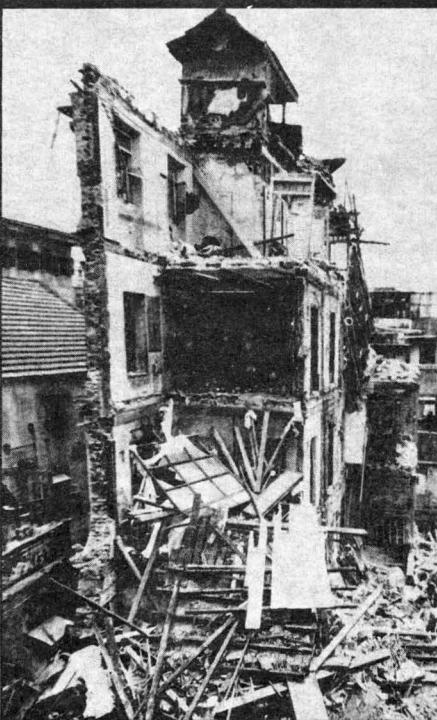
## SPECIAL REPORT

spectively, were constructed by the British government to meet the related demands of development and a population swell.

Triggered off by necessity, this construction boom later became a profitable source of investment. The owners of these early nineteenth century buildings had enough money, by way of rent payments, to maintain them well. The end of the Second World War reversed the situation: the gap between supply and demand widened alarmingly, as a result of which the Bombay Rent Control Act, 1944, was enforced. The Act froze rent at pre-War levels, offered security to tenants by confirming upon them the status of 'immoveability' and thus dealt a crippling blow to their landlords. And, with the scarcity and rising cost of building materials, landlords gradually lost all interest in maintaining properties that had lost their profit potential.

However, the construction and purchase of buildings were not stalled by the new Act. Rather, construction continued unabated, and the exigencies of space resulted in taller buildings. The houses, often six-storeyed, were built on relatively fragile timber frames as reinforced concrete cement (RCC) was not yet in vogue. The high salinity and humidity of the island city's atmosphere, coupled with the absence of repairs or vigilant maintenance, had inevitable repercussions: house collapses, almost unknown in the pre-War days, began to occur increasingly often till the figure reached an alarming average of 125 a year.

Until a few years ago, it was only the 'old' buildings — those 40-years old and older — that fell prey to gravitational forces, but of late, newer buildings, too, have collapsed. Embee Apartments at Borivli crashed in 1985, only a year after it was occupied. Even some of the recently reconstructed buildings are already in poor shape. Reay Chambers at Dockyard Road was repaired in 1972-73, and once again in 1982-83, by the BHADB. In 1985, the Board re-



*An increasingly common occurrence.*

commenced work on the same building yet again, and has still not finished. Sun Beam Building in Girgaum was also reconstructed by the Board not so long ago. And collapsed in 1985, claiming seven lives.

**WHAT CAUSES** these buildings to collapse? A major fault lies in the use of cheap and sub-standard building materials. For instance, instead of using the required amount of cement in the concrete-mix, the building contractors, in cahoots with the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC) engineers, are known to use a greater proportion of sand and aggregate (fine pieces of stone). As a result, the grade of the concrete-mix is weak, and is further weakened by Bombay's corrosive saline and humid climate over the years; the amount of cement saved is sold in the black-market for a lucrative profit. Professor Madhu Deolekar, MLC and General Secretary of the Bhartiya Janata Party's Bombay unit, blames the absence of any regulatory body: "In the absence of any statutory body to check the quality of building materials, builders tend to use sub-standard materials so as to make a fast buck. This results in the crashes we have witnessed in recent times."

And there have been a few. Mohan

Terrace, an apartment block which had just been constructed but fortunately not occupied, crashed in 1986, as did Embee Apartments. And in June 1986, yet another six-storeyed building, still under construction, crashed to the ground. One safeguard would perhaps be, as Professor Deolekar suggests, the establishment of a permanent commission to decide the resultant disputes regarding the quality of construction: "What is required under the circumstances is a tribunal for the summary settlement of disputes between the buyers of flats and their builders or developers."

Can tenants be completely absolved of the responsibility of maintaining their buildings and preventing possible collapse? Indeed, in some cases, tenants are largely responsible for causing collapses. Enterprising tenants often carry out repairs without obtaining permission from the BHADB, and at the same time, increase the floor space index (FSI); the increased space is then sold in order to recover expenses incurred in the repairs. Shrewd business, but an increase in the FSI endangers the structure which is forced to accept a greater weight than originally allowed for: Krishna Kunj building at Pydhonie, for instance, collapsed on December 30, 1987, under its two unauthorised floors. Twenty-six lives were lost.

**CURRENT LEGISLATION** is not stringent enough to prevent such illegal construction on existing structures. Instead, the BMC offers 'regularisation' of violated FSI against payment of a nominal penalty. A telling instance is the construction of an extra storey on Talimwala Building near Chor Bazaar. The construction of this extra floor had been legalised by the BMC by imposing a penalty of Rs 7,944 — the building crashed on October 31, 1987, claiming 10 lives. Moreover, immediately prior to the collapse, the building was being overloaded with yet another floor.

Equally illegal and fatal is the use of residential premises by tenants for

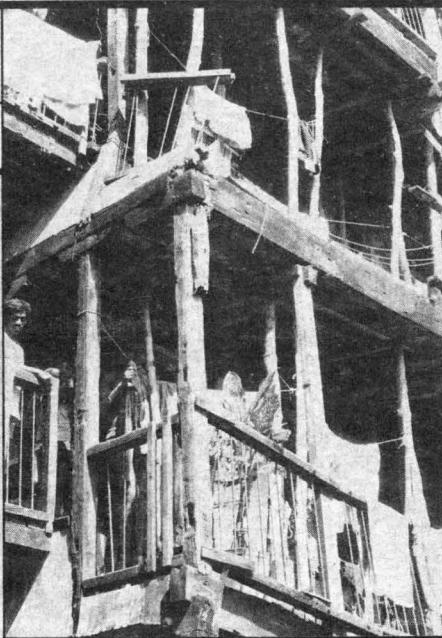
## On Its Last Legs

BUILT AT THE TURN of the century, and now 110-years old, the Mukesh Mills Residential Chawl No 3 squats on its last legs between the naval quarters and the splendid Sarssoon Docks in Bombay and should be seen to be believed. If it does not come crashing down in the meantime.

Owned by Mukesh Textile Mills, whose adjacent factory was illegally closed in December 1983 following a workers' strike on January 18, 1982, the residential quarters have been neglected aeons before that. Repairs, mere bandaging of minor faults, were last carried out in 1967.

Nor have time, the salty sea air, the acrid smoke from the factory's once puffing but now silent chimney, and the harsh rain that lashes this southern coast of Bombay, been kind to this crumbling ruin. Curiously resembling a matchbox house, with 42 rooms crammed into three storeys, the Mukesh Mills' chawl is fast disintegrating. While the water-pump was switched off by the owners in 1983 and a hand-pump was installed by the residents, the pipelines have rusted and eroded, with water leaking and seeping into rotted wood. The decomposed lavatories are forsaken for an open-air square, and safety is perforce thrown to the winds as one tip-toes up a hollow staircase, skirts around a verandah with no wall and clings to a wall with no floor.

For four years, a 100-odd perilously thin bamboos have supported the 300 residents: ever since the building's cement structural columns relinquished their hold. The poles themselves have warped with water and wood-



worm; some have fallen, as the building soon will, with wasted time.

Shivaji Gunjal, one of the many jobless residents, is fatalistic: "Well, if it falls, it falls." And so, the many residents — workmen, servants, the unemployed, and the children who continue to play cricket in the shadow of a threat, using broken bamboo for wickets in the absence of any alternatives — cling to their holes-in-the-walls and rubble. After all, as Jayant Sawant, a 24-year old man who works for a clearing and forwarding agency, and whose father and grandfather and great-grandfather have served the Mill, says: "Without any other place, where can we go?"

The obvious step to take would be to occupy the one-room chawls in the same compound. However, these are owned by Mukesh Mills and, although empty, are sealed by a stay order. K F Daruwalla, Director, Mukesh Mills, has frankly stated that he "does not care if anyone dies." After all, they participated in the strike and stopped paying their Rs 7 rent four years ago, didn't they?

As Kashinath Lad, a mill worker

turned plumber, notes in his building's committee file, the fact that four generations of families have lived and worked for the mill and lost their jobs overnight, is no great matter. Neither is the fact that the company promised them alternative accommodation in 1982. The only recent overtures made on behalf of the company have been those from the police who have repeatedly attempted to harass the tenants.

No one comes to check the bamboos, or the building. Apart from Suresh Narvekar, a Congress (I) MLA and a sympathiser of 'homeless' residents, and Datta Samant who, or so Lad insists, has filed a case in court at his own expense, and Murli Deora, who frequently visits, gives '*ashirvad*' and protests that V P Agarwal, the mills' owner and Chairman, TCI, is "a bad man who will not listen," no one is willing to support the residents. The BMC and the BHADB cannot trespass on private property; additionally, they are nursing a grudge since they were not paid the repair cess. To give them their due, the BMC's 'A' ward promptly erected the props when approached by the tenants in 1984, but they also promised that the matter would be pursued with the company's higher authorities on a priority basis. In 1985-86, the press championed the cause but soon lost interest. The residents, however, continue to maintain their file on appeals made to a number of ministers.

Meanwhile, the fate of the building that defies gravity remains in limbo, teetering between a total collapse and a slow crumble. And the fate of the residents hangs on the bamboos, a few sympathetic ears, and official neglect...

— M Pinto

commercial activities without prior permission or licence. Massive crashes in the city during the past few years have included buildings, for instance, Akashdeep and Mani Bhavan, used for the storage of heavy industrial goods and inflammable materials like

chemicals and illegal 'raw' film, although designated solely for residential purposes. When faced with such situations, BMC officials have often taken refuge under the shortcomings of existing laws for their failure to prevent the change of use, and take

pains to point out that the onus of providing consent to authorise the change from residential to commercial use does not fall on the BMC. And, as they explain it, in the absence of records, the task of detecting the flouting of laws is near impossible.

## SPECIAL REPORT

What is apparent, however, is that the responsibility for the collapses is diligently shirked. A report on the development plan of Bombay — one of many — was submitted to the state government in 1964, recommending extensive repairs of 18,000 of the 70,000 chawls in the city. Subsequently, the Bedekar Committee was appointed to take fresh stock of old buildings. Its report was ominous: out of the 36,000 buildings surveyed by the BMC, all except 1,991 would be on the danger list by 1980. 1980 has come and gone; we are now fast approaching the end of the decade, and the numbers have no doubt augmented.

**FOLLOWING THE REPORT**, however, the Bombay Building Repair and Reconstruction Act, 1969, was passed whereby the Bombay Housing and Area Development Board was constituted to survey the condition of old buildings. It aimed to undertake repairs and reconstruction work on dilapidated houses but only if a repair cess was levied and paid up. In 1970, the BHADB further proceeded only to categorise the buildings as: those built prior to September 1, 1940 — category A; those constructed between September 1, 1940 to December 31, 1950 — category B; and constructions thereafter — category C.

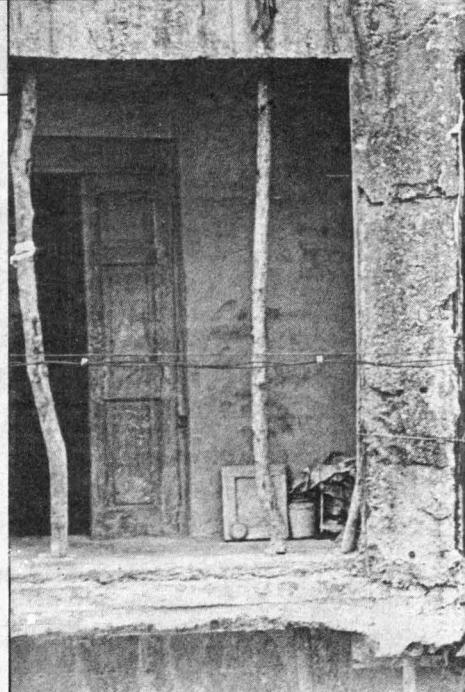
In the eighteen years since, the BHADB has surveyed and identified about 18,000 buildings in need of repair and reconstruction. A slow pace of work and a severe lack of funds — often due to corruption — have greatly marred its efficiency. While there are more than 19,000 cessed buildings in the city today, the Board has only reconstructed 210 buildings so far. Among its 'current' projects is Dhobyachi Wadi, the two-storeyed building located opposite Kotachi Wadi in Girgaum; but eight years have passed since it was earmarked for reconstruction and the actual work is yet to commence. The repair work on Nane building at Raja Ram Mohan Roy Marg, Girgaum, started

years ago, is as yet unfinished.

The lackadaisical functioning of the BHADB and other supporting bodies has encountered severe criticism. So has a stipulation that if the costs exceed the Board's offer of Rs 500 per sq metre for reconstruction — as they invariably do — the tenants have to bear the burden. But, as most residents of a chawl are barely above the poverty line, it is virtually impossible for them to meet the required cost.

**THE BOARDS**, on the other hand, bemoan the fact that the tenants do not co-operate with them in their repair or reconstruction work. In the absence of any initiative or participation from the tenants, so they insist, the buildings remain in a perilous condition; the tenants facing a virtually self-imposed death at any moment. The Ismail Dongre Building near Chor Bazaar, situated just a few yards from the rubble of the collapsed Taliwala Building, is a case in point. A BHADB official describes the treacherous condition of the building thus: "It is in such a shape that it has over 600 props and three beams are badly damaged. The residents know that the building is in a dangerous condition and have been provided with accommodation at transit camps, yet refuse to leave." According to him, one of the building's residents — an old lady — showed him the letter of allotment she had received that entitled her to move into a transit camp tenement: "She keeps the papers elsewhere so as not to lose them in the event of a crash."

A 'vacation notice' was served to this lady and other tenants on November 11, 1987, five months after a portion of the fourth-floor gallery had crumbled. Now, five months later, the remaining residents explain that they have not vacated the premises due to no alternate accommodation having been provided. Says Khalid Ismail, a tenant who is clearly enraged, "Initially, there was some talk of being shifted to Joglewari; even that was acceptable despite the



*How long before the props give way?*

uprooting from Chor Bazaar to Joglewari, but the authorities did not keep their word. I am now tired of making the rounds of the Housing Board offices at Bandra . . . for, alas, officers ensconced in solid, luxurious, three-storeyed buildings have no time for us."

No one comes to his rescue, he proceeds to complain, but then, a hot debate ensues as to who is to be blamed for the pathetic state of affairs. It is later revealed, that for the last ten years, no repair cess has been paid by the landlord, in spite of his having collected rent regularly from his tenants. Not surprisingly, the Repair Board refuses to grant a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to carry out repairs until the arrears are paid. Additionally, as Rs 6 lakh are required to reconstruct the building, each tenant will have to cough up at least Rs 10,000. Even if one takes into account the Rs 2.50 lakh sanctioned by the Board, finances still fall drastically short. All the while, the building stands on its last legs.

There are many other structures like the Ismail Dongre Building. All too often, it is the landlords who are to blame for not having paid an overdue repair cess. They are also known to deliberately stop collecting the



legal dues from their tenants, since they can then get them legally evicted. The eviction of age-old tenants is profitable: the landlords can then command astronomical sums by way of *pagdi* from their new tenants, as well as higher rents.

**THE TRANSIT CAMPS** for building evacuees and victims, when and if provided, are a further deterrent to those who wish to escape: often these camps are situated miles away from the residents' place of work and their children's schools. Further, facilities provided at these camps are at a bare minimum, and residents must do without basic amenities like electricity and running water. And with the BHADB's penchant for working at a snail's pace, one never knows how long the stay at the *transit* camp is going to be!

Take the transit camps at Cuffe Parade. They house tenants from various buildings all over Bombay — from Colaba to Dombivili — which have collapsed or are undergoing repairs. Most of the camps' residents have been fortunate enough to be able to pay up the required down payment for their buildings' repairs: victims of the Haazi-Mooza Building crash have each paid the initial instalment of Rs 3,500 and assured the BHADB that they will pay the rest over a period of time. Two years

have since elapsed; the reconstruction of their homes is yet to begin.

The plight of those in the transit camps does not end there. There are some families who have resided at the Cuffe Parade camp for over five years. Vilas Hegde, who came to this site after the 1982 monsoon that claimed his house at Umberkhadi, protests, "For one-and-a-half months after occupying the rooms we had to do without toilet facilities, water and electricity. Even now, after five years, there is no school, no ration-shop, no hospital closeby. We have had to change our children's school and incur higher expenditure in commuting to work."

The problems faced by Hegde and thousands of others have only dampened the enthusiasm of others, and the risky option of staying in potentially dangerous buildings becomes much more preferable. Tenants are, however, not always left to make their own decisions. Sources in the BHADB inform us that enterprising officials have, in the past, been known to forcibly evict residents of a doomed building with the help of the police and the fire brigade. But their success was often short-lived as the residents invariably returned home as soon as the police and the fire brigade left.

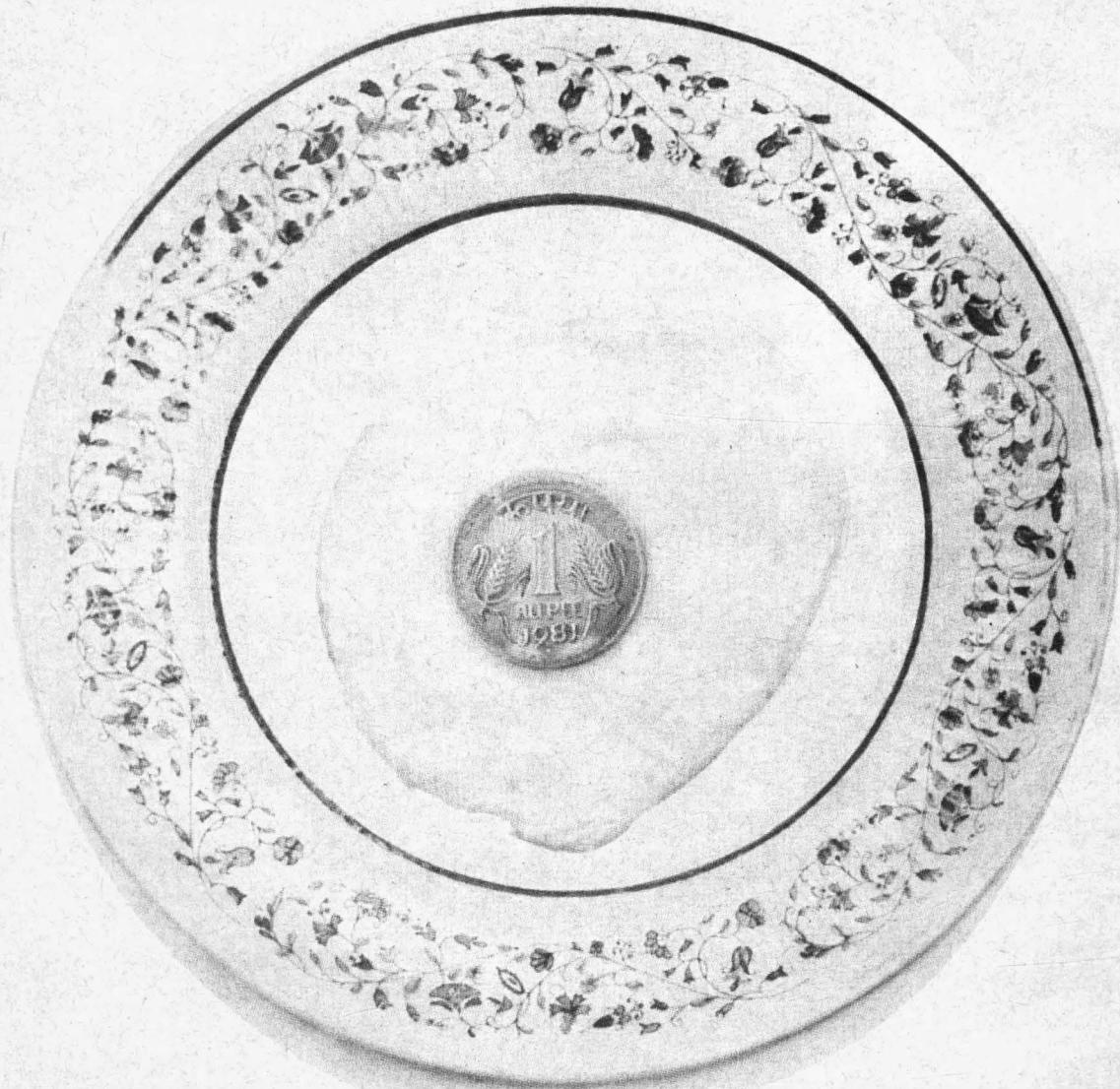
**WHILE THE STRATEGY** of the BHADB in confronting these problems leaves much to be desired, the recently passed Tenants Ownership of Buildings Ordinance (and the first of 1986) makes a provision allowing the repair of all dilapidated structures to be the tenant co-operative societies' responsibility. Under this law, tenants of an old building are allowed to form a co-operative society and buy the building, provided that the building is at least 40-years old and that no less than 70 per cent of the tenants are members of the co-operative. The tenants are further required to pay 100 times the rent rate to the landlord in order to assume ownership of the building. But despite the attraction of the scheme, not many have come forward to take ad-

vantage of the new law. In fact, as Professor Madhu Deolekar reveals, "only five or ten such buildings have been taken on an ownership basis by the tenants. This is because the other laws go against the tenants' interest." Also, they often cannot afford the cost of being burdened with the enormous task of reconstructing a building that has suffered years of neglect at their landlord's hands.

If the tenants of old buildings live in such perennial and immobilising fear, with no means of escape from their crumbling homes, the circumstances and conditions of the thousands looking for 'decent' accommodation is little better. Thousands of Bombayites have been and are the victims of a strong lobby comprising unscrupulous builders, contractors, promoters and developers who fleece prospective buyers by delaying the construction of flats, hiking prices, and using sub-standard materials for construction. These land-sharks have never been brought to book due to the absence of a comprehensive legislation to curb such activities, and a dearth of stringent and punitive measures in whatever laws do exist. And so tenants, whether they reside in new apartments or ancient quarters, are offered, at best, an uncertain safety within their four walls.

The recent increase in building collapses bodes ill for the city: "The problems of house collapses have reached gigantic proportions... out of the 20,000 old buildings in the city, 13,000 are now potential collapse cases," says DK Afzalpurkar, Housing Secretary, Government of Maharashtra. These are all-too-familiar facts and figures, yet little is being done to prevent them from rising and from claiming more lives. The housing and repair boards obviously need to reconstruct *themselves* and their methods, and to carry out regular and strict inspections. If urgent remedial action is not taken, the cityscape will be increasingly dotted with props and littered with debris, and it will not be long before large sections of the megapolis collapse to the ground.♦

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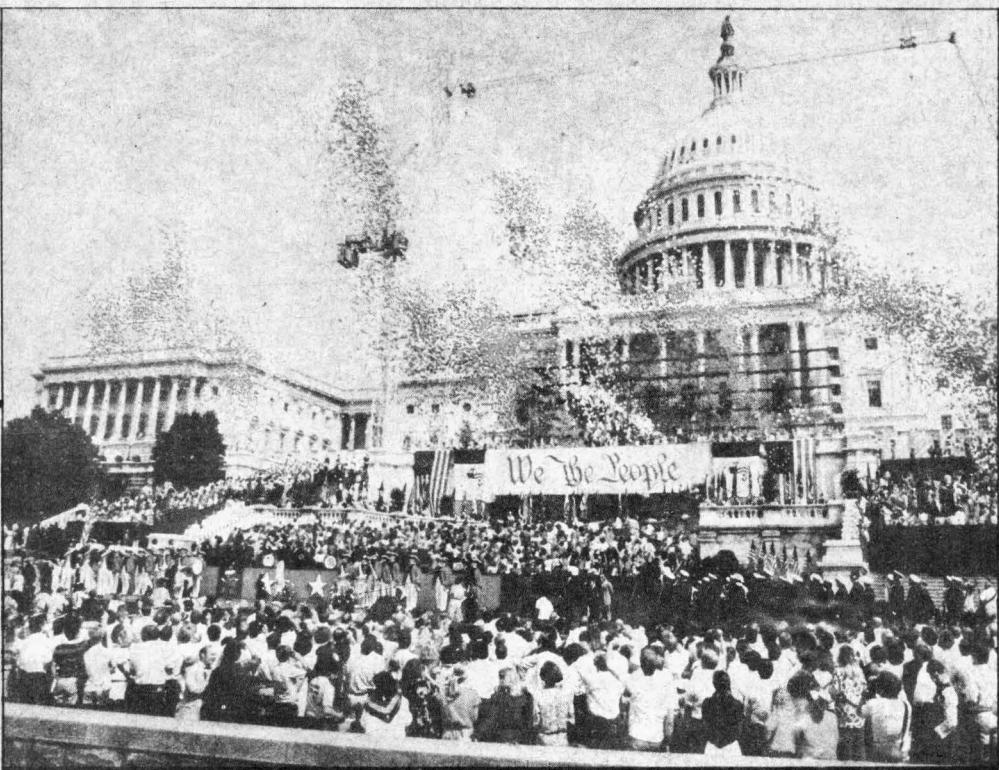


BREAKFAST BONANZAS  
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# THE DAY THE AMERICAN EMPIRE RAN OUT OF GAS

"From the beginning of our republic, we have had imperial longings," writes internationally-acclaimed novelist and essayist, GORE VIDAL, in this provocative and entertaining essay, as he analyses the rise and fall of the American empire.

**O**N SEPTEMBER 16, 1985, when the Commerce Department announced that the United States had become a debtor nation, the American Empire died. The empire was 71-years old and had been in ill health since 1968. Like most modern empires, ours rested not so much on military prowess as on economic primacy.

After the French Revolution, the world money power shifted from Paris to London. For three generations, the British maintained an old-fashioned colonial empire, as well as a modern empire based on London's primacy in the money markets. Then, in 1914, New York replaced London

as the world's financial capital. Before 1914, the United States had been a developing country, dependent on outside investment. But with the shift of the money power from Old World to New, what had been a debtor nation became a creditor nation and central motor to the world's economy. All in all, the English were well-pleased to have us take their place. They were too few in number for so big a task. As early as the turn of the century, they were eager for us not only to help them out financially but to continue, on their behalf, the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race: to bear with courage the white man's burden, as Rudyard Kipling not so

tactfully put it. Were we not — English and Americans — all Anglo-Saxons, united by common blood, laws, language? Well, no, we were not. But our differences were not so apparent then. In any case, we took on the job. We would supervise and civilise the lesser breeds. We would make money.

By the end of World War II, we were the most powerful and least damaged of the great nations. We also had most of the money. America's hegemony lasted exactly five years. Then the cold and hot wars began. Our masters would have us believe that all our problems are the fault of the Evil Empire of the East, with its Satanic and atheistic religion, ever

# ESSAY

ready to destroy us in the night. This nonsense began at a time when we had atomic weapons and the Russians did not. They had lost 20 million of their people in the War, and 8 million of them before the War, thanks to their neo-conservative Mongolian political system. Most important, there was never any chance, then or now, of the money power (all that matters) shifting from New York to Moscow. What was — and is — the reason for the big scare? Well, World War II made prosperous the United States, which had been undergoing a depression for a dozen years; and made very rich those magnates and their managers who govern the republic, with many a wink, in the people's name. In order to maintain a general prosperity (and

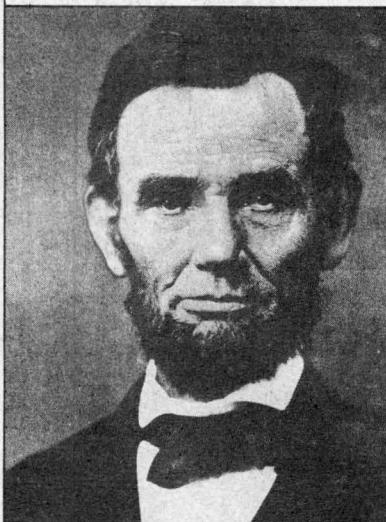
government's revenues are constantly being siphoned off to pay for what is euphemistically called defence.

**AS EARLY AS 1950,** Albert Einstein understood the nature of the rip-off. He said, "The men who possess real power in this country have no intention of ending the cold war." Thirty-five years later, they are still at it, making money while the nation itself declines to eleventh place in world per capita income, to forty-sixth in literacy and so on, until last summer (not suddenly, I fear) we found ourselves close to US\$2 trillion in debt. Then, in the fall, the money power shifted from New York to Tokyo, and that was the end of our empire. Now the long-feared

come full circle. Europe began as the relatively empty uncivilised Wild West of Asia; then the Western Hemisphere became the Wild West of Europe. Now the sun has set in our West and risen once more in the East.

The British used to say that their empire was obtained in a fit of absent-mindedness. They exaggerate, of course. On the other hand, our modern empire was carefully thought out by four men. In 1890 a US Navy captain, Alfred Thayer Mahan, wrote the blueprint for the American imperium, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783*. Then Mahan's friend, the historian-geopolitician Brooks Adams, younger brother of Henry, came up with the following formula: "All civilisation is centralisation. All centralisation is economy." He applied the formula in the following syllogism: "Under economical centralisation, Asia is cheaper than Europe. The world tends to economic centralisation. Therefore, Asia tends to survive and Europe to perish." Ultimately, *that* is why we were in Vietnam. The amateur historian and professional politician Theodore Roosevelt was much under the influence of Adams and Mahan; he was also their political instrument, most active not so much during his presidency as during the crucial war with Spain, where he can take a good deal of credit for our seizure of the Philippines, which made us a world empire. Finally, Senator Henry Lodge, Roosevelt's closest friend, kept in line a Congress that had a tendency to forget our holy mission — our manifest destiny — and ask, rather wistfully, for internal improvements.

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*Lincoln: anti-Polk and slavery.*

enormous wealth for the few) they decided that we would become the world's policeman, a perennial shield against the Mongol hordes. We shall have an arms race, said one of the high priests, John Foster Dulles, and we shall win it because the Russians will go broke first. We were then put on a permanent wartime economy, which is why close to two-thirds\* of the

Asiatic colossus takes its turn as world leader, and we — the white race — have become the yellow man's burden. Let us hope that he will treat us more kindly than we treated him.\* In any case, if the foreseeable future is not nuclear, it will be Asiatic, some combination of Japan's advanced technology with China's resourceful landmass. Europe and the United States will then be, simply, irrelevant to the world that matters, and so we

\* Believe it or not, this plain observation was interpreted as a racist invocation of The Yellow Peril!

\* Once Social Security is factored out of the budget, defence and defence-related expenditures (e.g., interest on the debt) account for more than 60 per cent of the money wasted.

**FROM THE BEGINNING** of our republic we have had imperial longings. We took care — as we continue to take care — of the indigenous population. We maintained slavery a bit too long even by a cynical world's tolerant standards. Then, in 1846, we produced our first conquistador, President James K Polk. After acquiring Texas, Polk deliberately started a war with Mexico because, as he later told

the historian George Bancroft, we had to acquire California. Thanks to Polk, we did. And that is why, to this day, the Mexicans refer to our South-western states as 'the occupied lands', which Hispanics are now, quite sensibly, filling up.

The case against empire began as early as 1847. Representative Abraham Lincoln did not think much of Polk's war, while Lt Ulysses S Grant, who fought at Vera Cruz, said in his memoirs, "The war was an instance of a republic following the bad example of European monarchies, in not considering justice in their desire to acquire additional territory." He went on to make a casual link, something not usual in our politics then, and completely unknown now: "The Southern rebellion was largely the outgrowth of the Mexican War. Nations, like individuals, are punished for their transgressions. We got our punishment in the most sanguinary and expensive war of modern times."

But the empire has always had more supporters than opponents. By 1895 we had filled up our section of North America. We had tried twice – and failed – to conquer Canada. We had taken everything that we wanted from Mexico. Where next? Well, there was the Caribbean at our front door and the vast Pacific at our back. Enter the Four Horsemen – Mahan, Adams, Roosevelt and Lodge.

The original republic was thought out carefully, and openly, in *The Federalist Papers*: we were not going to have a monarchy and we were not going to have a democracy. And to this day we have had neither. For two hundred years we have had an oligarchical system in which men of property can do well and the others are on their own. Or, as Brooks Adams put it, the sole problem of our ruling class is whether to coerce or to bribe the powerless majority. The so-called Great Society bribed; today coercion is very much in the air. Happily, our neo-conservative Mongoloids favour only authoritarian and never totalitarian means of coercion.

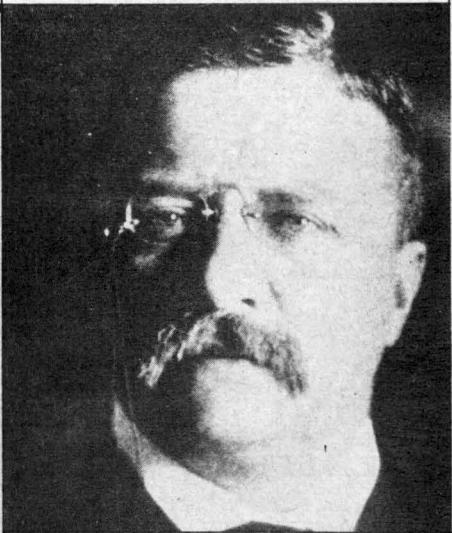
Unlike the republic, the empire was worked out largely in secret. Captain Mahan, in a series of lectures delivered at the Naval War College, compared the United States with England. Each was essentially an island state that could prevail in the world only through sea power. England had already proved his thesis. Now the United States must do the same. We must build a great navy in order to acquire overseas possessions. Since great navies are expensive, the wealth of new colonies must be used to pay for our fleets. In fact, the more colonies acquired, the more ships; the more ships, the more empire. Mahan's thesis is agreeably circular. He showed how small England had ended up with most of Africa

gan to manoeuvre his way towards the heart of power, sea power. With Lodge's help, he got himself appointed Assistant Secretary of the Navy, under a weak Secretary and a mild President. Now he was in place to modernise the fleet and to acquire colonies. Hawaii was annexed. Then a part of Samoa. Finally, colonial Cuba, somehow, had to be liberated from Spain's tyranny. At the Naval War College, Roosevelt declared, "To prepare for war is the most effectual means to promote peace." How familiar that sounds! But since the United States had no enemies as of June 1897, a contemporary might have remarked that since we were already at peace with everyone, why prepare for war? Today, of course, we are

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and all of Southern Asia, thanks to sea power. He thought that we should do the same. The Caribbean was our first and easiest target. Then on to the Pacific Ocean, with all its islands. And, finally, to China, which was breaking up as a political entity.

Theodore Roosevelt and Brooks Adams were tremendously excited by this prospect. At the time, Roosevelt was a mere police commissioner in New York City, but he had dreams of imperial glory. "He wants to be," snarled Henry Adams, "our Dutch-American Napoleon." Roosevelt be-



*Roosevelt: dreams of imperial glory.*

what he dreamt we would be, a nation armed to the teeth and hostile to everyone. But what with Roosevelt was a design to acquire an empire is, for us, a means to transfer money from the Treasury to the various defence industries, which in turn pay for the elections of Congress and President.

**OUR TURN-OFF-THE-CENTURY** imperialists may have been wrong, and I think they were. But they were intelligent men with a plan, and the plan worked. Aided by Lodge in the

## ESSAY

Senate, Brooks Adams in the press, Admiral Mahan at the Naval War College, the young Assistant Secretary of the Navy began to build up the fleet and look for enemies. After all, as Brooks Adams proclaimed, "war is the solvent." But war with whom? And for what? And where? At one point England seemed a likely enemy. There was a boundary dispute over Venezuela, which meant that we could invoke the all-purpose Monroe Doctrine (the invention of John Quincy Adams, Brooks' grandfather). But as we might have lost such a war, nothing happened. Nevertheless, Roosevelt kept on beating his drum: "No triumph of peace," he shouted, "can equal the armed triumph of war." Also: "We must take Hawaii in the interests of the white race." Even Henry Adams, who found T R tiresome and Brooks, his own brother, brilliant but mad, suddenly declared, "In another fifty years... the white race will have to reconquer the Tropics by war and nomadic invasion, or be shut up north of the 50th parallel." And so at century's end, our most distinguished ancestral voices were not prophesying but praying for war.

An American warship, the *Maine*, blew up in Havana harbour. We held Spain responsible; thus, we got what John Hay called "a splendid little war." We would liberate Cuba, drive Spain from the Caribbean. As for the Pacific, even before the *Maine* was sunk, Roosevelt had ordered Commodore Dewey and his fleet to the Spanish Philippines — just in case. Spain promptly collapsed, and we inherited its Pacific and Caribbean colonies. Admiral Mahan's plan was working triumphantly.

In time we allowed Cuba the appearance of freedom while holding on to Puerto Rico. Then President William McKinley, after an in-depth talk with God, decided that we should also keep the Philippines, in order, he said, to Christianise them. When reminded that the Filipinos were Roman Catholics, the President said,

exactly. We must Christianise them. Although Philippine nationalists had been our allies against Spain, we promptly betrayed them and their leader, Aguinaldo. As a result it took us years to conquer the Philippines, and tens of thousands of Filipinos died that our empire might grow.

The war was the making of Theodore Roosevelt. Surrounded by the flower of the American press, he led a group of so-called Rough Riders up a very small hill in Cuba. As a result of this proto-photo opportunity he became a national hero, Governor of New York, McKinley's running mate and, when McKinley was killed in 1901, President.



*Reagan: the Fifth Horseman?*

Not everyone liked the new empire. After Manila, Mark Twain thought that the stars and bars of the American flag should be replaced by a skull and crossbones. He also said, "We cannot maintain an empire in the Orient and maintain a republic in America." He was right, of course. But as he was only a writer who said funny things, he was ignored. The compulsively vigorous Roosevelt defended our war against the Philippine population, and he attacked the likes of Twain. "Every argument that can be made for the Filipinos could be made for the Apaches," he ex-

plained, with his lovely gift for analogy. "And very word that can be said for Aguinaldo could be said for Sitting Bull. As peace, order and prosperity followed our expansion over the land of the Indians, so they will follow us in the Philippines."

Despite the criticism of the few, the Four Horsemen had pulled it off. The United States was a world empire. And one of the horsemen not only got to be President, but for his pious meddling in the Russo-Japanese conflict, our greatest apostle of war was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. One must never underestimate Scandinavian wit.

**EMPIRES ARE RESTLESS** organisms. They must constantly renew themselves; should an empire start leaking energy, it will die. Not for nothing were the Adams brothers fascinated by entropy. By energy. By force. Brooks Adams, as usual, said the unsayable. "Laws are a necessity," he declared. "Laws are made by the strongest, and they must and shall be obeyed." Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr thought this a wonderful observation, while the philosopher William James came to a similar conclusion, which can also be detected, like an invisible dynamo, at the heart of the novels of his brother Henry.

According to Brooks Adams, "The most difficult problem of modern times is unquestionably how to protect property under popular governments." The Four Horsemen fretted a lot about this. They need not have. We have never had a popular government in the sense that they feared, nor are we in any danger now. Our only political party has two right wings, one called Republican, the other, Democratic. But Henry Adams figured all that out back in the 1890s. "We have a single system," he wrote, and "in that system the only question is the price at which the proletariat is to be bought and sold, the bread and circuses." But none of this was for public consumption. Publicly, the Four Horsemen and their outrid-

ders spoke of the American mission to bring to all the world freedom and peace, through slavery and war if necessary. Privately, their constant fear was that the weak masses might combine one day against the strong few, their natural leaders, and take away their money. As early as the election of 1876, socialism had been targeted as a vast evil that must never be allowed to corrupt simple American persons. When Christianity was invoked as the natural enemy of those who might limit the rich and their gains, the combination of cross and dollar sign proved — and proves — irresistible.

During the first decade of our disagreeable century, the great world fact was the internal collapse of China. Who could pick up the pieces? Britain grabbed Kowloon; Russia was busy in the North; the Kaiser's fleet prowled the China coast; Japan was modernising itself, and biding its time. Although Theodore Roosevelt lived and died a dedicated racist, the Japanese puzzled him. After they sank the Russian fleet, Roosevelt decided that they were to be respected and feared even though they were our racial inferiors. For those Americans who served in World War II, it was an article of faith — as of 1941, anyway — that the Japanese could never win a modern war. Because of their slant eyes, they would not be able to master aircraft. Then they sank our fleet at Pearl Harbour.

Jingoism aside, Brooks Adams was a good analyst. In the 1890s he wrote: "Russia, to survive, must undergo a social revolution internally and/or expand externally. She will try to move into Shansi Province, richest prize in the world. Should Russia and Germany combine. . ." That was the nightmare of the Four Horsemen. At a time when simpler folk feared the rise of Germany alone, Brooks Adams saw the world ultimately polarised between Russia and the United States, with China as the common prize. American maritime power versus Russia's landmass. That

is why, quite seriously, he wanted to extend the Monroe Doctrine to the Pacific Ocean. For him, "war (was) the ultimate form of economic competition."

**WE ARE NOW AT THE END** of the twentieth century. England, France and Germany have all disappeared from the imperial stage. China is now reassembling itself, and Confucius, the greatest of political thinkers, is again at the centre of the Middle Kingdom. Japan has the world money power and wants a landmass; China now seems ready to go into business with its ancient enemy. Wars that the Four Horsemen enjoyed are,

**The time has come for the United States to make common cause with the Soviet Union. The bringing together of the Soviet landmass (with all its natural resources) and our island empire (with all its technological resources) would be of great benefit to each society, not to mention the world.**

if no longer possible, no longer practical. Today's conquests are shifts of currency by computer, and the manufacture of those things that people everywhere are willing to buy.

I have said very little about writers because writers have figured very little in our imperial story. The founders of both republic and empire wrote well: Jefferson and Hamilton, Lincoln and Grant, T R and the Adamses. Today public figures can no longer write their own speeches or books; and there is some evidence that they can't read them either.

Yet at the dawn of the empire, for a brief instant, our *professional* writers

tried to make a difference. Upton Sinclair and company attacked the excesses of the ruling class. Theodore Roosevelt coined the word 'muckraking' to describe what they were doing. He did not mean the word as praise. Since then, a few of our writers have written on public themes, but as they were not taken seriously, they have ended by not taking themselves seriously, at least as citizens of a republic. After all, most writers are paid by universities, and it is not wise to be thought critical of a garrison state which spends so much money on so many campuses.

When Confucius was asked what would be the first thing that he would do if he were to lead the state — his never-to-be-fulfilled dream — he said *rectify the language*. This is wise. This is subtle. As societies grow decadent, the language grows decadent, too. Words are used to disguise, not to illuminate, action: you liberate a city by destroying it. Words are used to confuse, so that at election time people will solemnly vote against their own interests. Finally, words must be so twisted as to justify an empire that has now ceased to exist, much less make sense. Is rectification of our system possible for us? Henry Adams thought not. In 1910 he wrote: "The whole fabric of society will go to wrack if we really lay hands of reform on our rotten institutions." Then he added, "From top to bottom the whole system is a fraud, all of us know it, labourers and capitalists alike, and all of us are consenting parties to it." Since then, consent has frayed; and we have become poor, and our people sullen.

To maintain a thirty-five-year arms race it is necessary to have a fearsome enemy. Not since the invention of the Wizard of Oz have American publicists created anything quite so demented as the idea that the Soviet Union is a monolithic, omnipotent empire with tentacles everywhere on earth, intent on our destruction, which will surely take place unless we constantly imitate it with our war

## ESSAY

machine and its secret services.

**IN ACTUAL FACT**, the Soviet Union is a Second World country with a First World military capacity. Frighten the Russians sufficiently and they might blow us up. By the same token, as our republic now begins to crack under the vast expense of maintaining a mindless imperial force, we might try to blow them up. Particularly if we had a President who really was a twice-born Christian, and believed that the good folks would all go to heaven (where they were headed anyway) and the bad folks would go where *they* belong. Fortunately, to date, we have had only hypocrites in the White House. But you never can tell . . .\*

\* I had not yet read Halsell's Prophecy and Politics.

Even worse than the not-very-likely prospect of a nuclear war — deliberate or by accident — is the economic collapse of our society because too many of our resources have been wasted on the military. The Pentagon is like a black hole; what goes in is forever lost to us, and no new wealth is created. Hence, our cities, whose centres are unlivable; our crime rate, the highest in the Western world; a public education system that has given up . . . you know the litany.

There is now only one way out. The time has come for the United States to make common cause with the Soviet Union. The bringing together of the Soviet landmass (with all its natural resources) and our island empire (with all its technological resources) would be of great benefit to each society, not to mention

the world. Also, to recall the wisdom of the Four Horsemen who gave us our empire, the Soviet Union and our section of North America combined would be a match, industrially and technologically, for the Sino-Japanese axis that will dominate the future just as Japan dominates world trade today. But where the Horsemen thought of war as the supreme solvent, we now know that war is worse than useless. Therefore, the alliance of the two great powers of the Northern Hemisphere will double the strength of each and give us, working together, an opportunity to survive, economically, in a highly centralised Asiatic world.\*

\* The suggestion that the USA and the USSR join forces set alarm-bells ringing in Freedom's Land. The Israel Lobby, in particular, attacked me with such ferocity that I felt obliged to respond, cheerily.

Excerpted from "Armageddon? Essays 1983-1987" by Gore Vidal. Published by Andre' Deutsche Ltd. Distributed by Rupa & Co.

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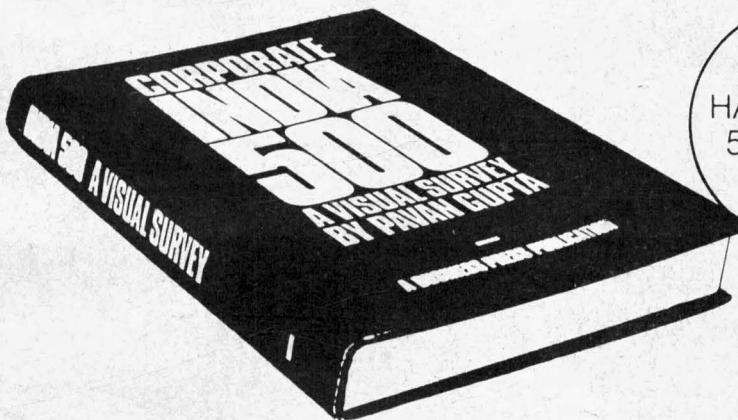
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## BLIND NEGLIGENCE

Who was responsible for the tragedy that befell 65 of the 151 patients who were operated upon at a recent eye camp in Karnataka? M D RITI traces the events of those fateful days.

**C**HILDISH CURIOSITY lights up one eye of 10-year old Krishna as he looks about him eagerly. His other eye is swathed in huge bandages and has no vision at all. "Stop jumping around!" admonishes his father, Venkatappa, from the adjacent bed, thick bandages covering half his face and his grizzled hair. Krishna

and Venkatappa are two of the 65 victims of a severe eye infection admitted to Minto Eye Hospital, Bangalore, after they were operated upon at an eye camp organised by the Lion's Club at Chintamani, Karnataka, between January 27 to February 5. These unfortunate men, women and children will each lose an eye

as a direct result of this operation.

The toll does not end here; the eye camp has already claimed one life. G K C Reddy, president of the committee for the rehabilitation of eye camp victims that has since been formed, reveals that a 55-year old man called Nagappa, who was operated upon despite having severe dy-



sentry, died two days after surgery.

Why? Organisations like the Lion's Club regularly conduct health camps, offering outpatient and minor surgical services all over the country, and referring cases requiring regular surgery to Primary Health Centres. But eye camps are different. Surgery is the key component of these camps,

and operations like cataract surgery are carried out in large numbers. And this is exactly what was performed at the eye camp conducted by the Mobile Ophthalmic Unit of Minto Eye Hospital, Bangalore, under the aegis of the Lion's Club of Chintamani. One hundred and fifty-five people were operated upon by Dr H N Thimme Shetty, surgeon-in-charge of the unit, assistant surgeon Dr H A Narayani, two postgraduate students — Dr Chandrika and Dr Chandra Prabha — and Dr Jagannatha Shetty of Chintamani, who used the rooms of the Vasavi *choultry* (an enclosed quadrangle) in Chintamani as their operation theatres.

**THE CAMP BEGAN** typically with outpatient diagnosis and treatment, during which 151 cataract cases were identified, separated from the rest, and the affected eyes were treated with antibiotic drops or ointment for the rest of the day. At 4 pm that same evening, the same hall was converted into a ward of sorts for these patients.

From 9.30 am on January 28 to 7 pm that night, 97 patients had already been operated upon. The remaining 54 cataract cases were operated upon within a matter of hours the next day, between 11.30 am and 5 pm. And all eyes were subsequently dressed and medicated. Yet, the sequence of events that followed read like a Robin Cook thriller. Dr Thimme Gowda reports that on the morning of January 30, he noticed that 27 of the patients had contracted a severe infection in their operated eyes. He isolated them immediately and began administering intense treatment to combat the infection, although he did not know at that stage exactly what the infection was.

Groping for a cure without locating the cause, nobody has been able to pinpoint the source of the infection as yet. Specialists at Minto have haltingly diagnosed it as *pseudomonas* bacteria which is usually carried by dust particles in the wind. They are equally vague as to exactly how it was contracted: "Maybe it came into

the *choultry* during the outpatient department activities," suggests one. "Thousands of people went in and out of the *choultry* after the operations were conducted," he adds.

**THIS STRANGE INFECTION** spread like wild-fire, with an evident incubation period of less than 48 hours. As the camp doctors noticed an increasing number of the operated displaying symptoms of the same infection, they rushed an SOS across to Medical Superintendent, Dr A Venkataraman, of Minto Hospital. Dr Venkataraman and two other doctors from the hospital — Dr Chandrashekara Shetty and Dr TK Ramesh — promptly drove down to Chintamani in an ambulance belonging to another government hospital, reaching the camp at around 1 am, and remaining there in frenzied activity until 4 am on January 31.

However, they could not work any miracles. "Four or five of the infected cases looked really bad," explains Venkataraman. "Pus poured from the infected eyes while the patients complained of complete loss of vision. They could not even perceive light!" The trio from Bangalore soon left upon collecting pus samples for diagnosis at the city.

Meanwhile, more patients were noticed to have developed the infection on January 31 and February 1, although Dr Shetty claims that they "discharged the clean cases on the afternoon of February 1 so that they would not contract the infection." By then, 59 of the operated cases were already infected.

As the Vasavi *choultry* had been booked for a wedding on February 2, the infected patients were then shifted to another *choultry*, where they remained until February 5. Meanwhile, various bigwig ophthalmologists, like the Divisional Director of Ophthalmology, the Joint Director of Ophthalmology and several doctors from Minto, were summoned to advise the mobile-unit surgeons. They had little time to carry out meticulous diagnoses for, as this *choultry* was also booked from February 6 onwards,

# REPORT

the camp was closed on February 5 with all but five patients discharged. "We brought these five cases, who needed more care, back with us to Minto," says Dr Shetty. "The others were all at various stages of recovery. We just advised those who needed further dressings to go to the general hospital at Chintamani." And with that they absolved themselves of further responsibility.

**THE PATIENTS THEMSELVES** have a slightly different tale to tell: "They told me that my eye was alright and that I could go home," laments septuagenarian K N Rama Reddy, bitterly. "In fact, they said that they would give me corrective spectacles in a month's time. But, the pain in my eye was unbearable. I could not eat or sleep after I went home. The tablets that they gave me did not seem to help at all. It was agony all the way..."

News of the eye camp tragedy soon hit the media in Bangalore. Health Minister B Rachaih issued public statements regretting the entire sequence of events and promised an inquiry into the possibility of negligence on the part of the surgeons which could have led to the catastrophe. When this news reached victims in and around Chintamani, many, although in great pain, decided to go to Bangalore.

"My son and I just got into a regular public bus and came here," says Venkatappa innocently. He was ignorant of the fact that cataract surgery cases are normally prescribed a rigid list of rules and restrictions, do's and don'ts. And that bumpy motor vehicles are definitely taboo. But Venkatappa, Rama Reddy and others do not seem to have been issued any such directives by their erstwhile doctors, much to their detriment.

**THE CALLOUSNESS** continued: the first few patients who arrived uninvited, complain that the reception they were accorded at Minto was far from cordial. In fact, a few victims

escaped to Victoria Hospital, another government hospital in the city, while those who were reeling from the experience they had just had, had already got themselves admitted to hospitals at Mulbagal, Kolar and other places near Chintamani. All this despite the fact that the Department of Health and the Lion's Club had sent vans and ambulances to locate infected cases in all the 53 villages in Kolar district, and bring them back to Bangalore.

One is, instead, apalled at the evasion of responsibility for the tragedy, which was initially passed from person to person while the victims suffered. The Minto administration hastens to point out that this mobile unit is attached to the Directorate of Health Services and is virtually an autonomous body now; it does not come under the aegis of Minto Hospital and thus they are not to blame. Lion's Club District Governor, P R Narendra, says that the club was only in charge of publicising the camp and providing accommodation and food for the people who underwent surgery and, therefore, they are not responsible. Yet, they will give the victims Rs 500 each as compensation and give them free food for as long as they have to remain hospitalised.

Who is to be held responsible? Dr Shetty defends himself: "I have organised 227 eye camps since November 1982. I have also personally operated upon 29,000 patients so far at such camps. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. We always take the necessary precautions in selecting patients and hold follow-up camps afterwards as well." He boasts, "Our unit has stood first in India for the highest number of operations performed in 1984, 1985 and 1986, and we have had a patient recovery rate of 98 per cent."

**MEANWHILE**, the victims suffer the fact that, regardless of who is to blame, they won't recover their eyesight and that, for them, is the end. Most of the victims are above the age

**The tragedy of this camp should focus attention upon a vital question: should operations as delicate as eye surgery be carried out on a mass basis like this, outside hospital or health centre premises?**

of 50 years and are close to retirement. Further, a majority of them are either agriculturalists or labourers: "My wife and I both work in the fields," says Chinnappa. "I have five young children. How will my wife be able to support them and me if I lose my eyes?" Another septuagenarian, P Vishwanatha Rao, ekes out a livelihood as a roadside vendor. His children are adults and he does not know whether they would be willing to support him or his wife.

In the meantime, while they face a possibly bleak future, the eye camp victims have been lodged in a separate wing of the Minto hospital, occupying four whole wards "to prevent cross infection, which is what occurred in the *choultry* in the first place," as Dr Shetty explains. "Other post-surgery cases in the hospital might pick up this infection if these patients are kept near them," he adds. Unfortunately, one learns too late. The infection seems to be particularly virulent and resistant to most medication. In fact, ophthalmologists ascertain that it responds to just one antibiotic, a drug called Omnatax, which costs Rs 50 per vial. Neither do all the patients seem to be responding to this expensive remedy.

And so, the possibility of the patients recovering vision in their affected eyes remains remote. "The likelihood of their losing sight in that eye is great," admits Dr Shetty, cautiously. "They will not get their eyesight



**Krishna: one of the 65 victims.**

back," contradicts Dr Venkataraman, adding hastily that, "Dr Shetty is the best judge of their condition, though." And both assure that the eye that has not undergone surgery will not be affected.

Yet, most of the patients firmly state that they will not permit their infected eyes to be removed, although Venkatappa reveals that after signing a form saying that he knew there would be no vision in his eye following the operation in Bangalore, they removed his eye. Dr Shetty, however, firmly contradicts this: "Nobody's eye has been removed yet. We took pus out of some patients' eyes and they have wrongly assumed that we removed the whole eye itself." He explains that they will assess the condition of the patients at the time they are discharged, and then decide upon the next course of action.

Financially, too, the victims are being aided, for the little its worth. Chief Minister Ramakrishna Hegde has sanctioned a compensation of Rs 1,000 per victim. Lion's Club has already set aside Rs 500 per patient, while the Janata Party and the city corporation will probably give them a handout as well. But, even if the victims walk out with about Rs 2,000 in hand, could it ever compensate them adequately for the loss of an eye? Or will it provide them with financial security for the rest of their lives, if they are unable to resume their

old occupations?

**NATURALLY ENOUGH**, these patients are not willing to give up without a fight; the battle-lines have already been drawn. The patients at Minto Hospital have formed themselves into a group called the Eye Cure Patients Struggle Committee of Chintamani. The Committee has four clear-cut objectives: They want a proper investigation into whether the operating ophthalmologists are responsible for this mishap or not, the declaration adding that "the guilty must be punished." They also demand that the government, either central or state, must ensure that the 63 affected people have both proper treatment and adequate compensation. Further, they attempt to seek assistance of any kind from philanthropists and social service institutions, and justice at the courts of law. The samithi is already in touch with Legislative Council opposition leader, T N Narasimha Murthy, while the Congress (I) and other opposition parties in the state have jumped into the fray with gusto and are all set to capitalise on and politicise this issue. The victims are thus in danger of becoming pawns in a long drawn-out battle. And important issues are in danger of being side-stepped.

The tragedy of this camp should instead focus attention upon a vital question: should operations as delicate as eye surgery be carried out on a mass basis like this, outside hospital or health centre premises? "Surgery is a must for eye camps," Dr Shetty counters, insisting that, "This is the only way of getting eyesight for India. About 15 lakh operations are carried out per annum in eye camps in our country."

While this is true, this is also far from being the first time that mass blinding has occurred as a consequence of eye camp surgery. An eye camp organised by the Lion's Club of Khurja, Uttar Pradesh, in April 1986, resulted in an even bigger casualty: 84 of the 88 patients who underwent sur-

gery reportedly lost sight in the eye that had been operated upon. Yet another camp conducted by the surgeon of the Khurja camp, and organised this time by the Adarsh Saraf Club, Moradabad, resulted in 337 casualties out of a total of 450 operated cases.

**AND STILL**, most camp operators have not learnt that sterilisation is of utmost importance in eye surgery. Almost all eye camps continue to be conducted in marriage *choultries* or government school classrooms. Can such open places be sterilised adequately? Ophthalmologists point out that it is quite impossible.

Another stumbling block to safe and successful surgery is, perhaps, the obsession with achieving statistical records instead of administering proper and cautious treatment. The media reports such feats frequently, without looking too closely into their repercussions, and unwittingly furthers the ambitions of those surgeons who want to have a record number of operations to their credit. Dr M C Modi of Bangalore, for example, has gained a Guinness book entry for having performed 833 cataract operations in a single day, and a total of 5,64,834 operations upto January 1987. No one has investigated the exact success rate of his noteworthy endeavours. Dr Shetty of Minto, however, hastens to add that such statistics are incidental and that no surgery targets are set before eye camps.

In the wake of these issues, the precise cause of the infection that invaded and ravaged this camp seems less important than the questions that it raised. Yet, the tragedy and trauma undergone by those affected by such disasters is undeniable, and, although often not highlighted, disturbing. One cannot forget the brave smile of 10-year old Lakshmi from Kaivara, who lies in a corner of Ward 19 of Minto Hospital, or the intense pain she stoically endures through the day in her now sightless right eye.

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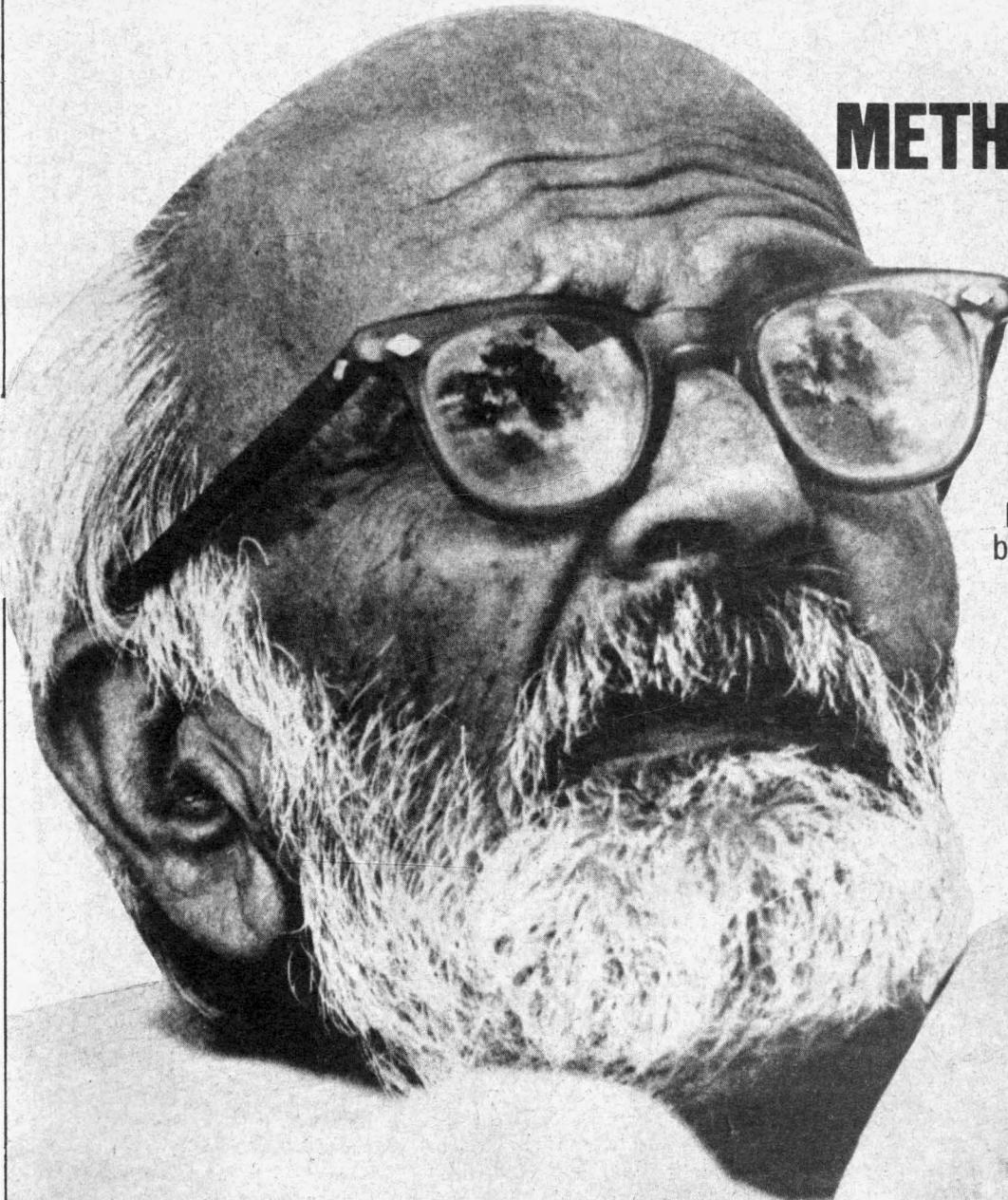
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## THE METHUSELAH FACTOR

It is a natural phenomenon, an inevitable and inexorable process. But, can ageing be controlled? Or postponed? Can life be prolonged? In this fascinating report, MAHARAJ K KOUL discusses the scientific research that promises to make longevity a reality.

**T**HE FRENCH REFER TO IT as "la troisième age", the Japanese "ronen", and the British simply as "old age". Undoubtedly, humanity has aged — there are more than 300 million old people in the world today. Yet humanity has also become younger, with an average lifespan of 70 years, and the "venerable elder" of the last century is referred to as "middle-aged" today. The ratio of old people to young has increased

tremendously the world over, and continues to do so at a tremendous rate.

According to a UN publication, *Demographic Indications of Countries: Estimates and Projections*, the total population of the world in 1980 was 4,432.1 million people with that of people 60-years old and above, 375.8 million. In 2000 AD, the total world population is projected to be 6,118.9 million with 590.4

# RESEARCH

million people aged 60 and above. North America, Japan, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the Soviet Union will have 230.3 million 'old' people; Africa, Latin America, China and the rest of Asia, and other under-developed countries will boast 360 million.

According to Dr David Macfadyen, Director of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Programme of Health, the world today has more than 380 million people over the age of 60. And World Bank researchers indicate that the average life expectancy in industrialised market economies is 76 years, while the level in low-income economies averages 60.

**IS THERE AN 'IDEAL' lifespan?** Charles Darwin's predecessor, the French natural scientist Georges de Buffon believed that a man should live approximately five times longer than the period of his growth, ie, no less than a hundred years. Others, like Christopher Hufeland, a scholar of medicine and biology, wrote that the maximum human lifespan was 200 years.

An original but fantastic theory has been proffered by Anatoly Zhirmunsky, Director of the Vladivostok Institute of Marine Biology and a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, and Victor Kuzmin, a Moscow professor of mathematics. Analysing available data on various transition periods in the history of the planet, and having considered the spiral theory of evolution, Zhirmunsky and Kuzmin came to the conclusion that in any natural phenomenon, be it the rotation of a planet in the solar system or the development process in fish, birds or mammals, there exists a single mathematical relationship between the stages of one significant change with another; this is a number close to 15.15. This "magic number" was then applied to the study of human development, choosing the moment of birth as the starting point. Multiplying the human pregnancy period of 226 days



*Inseparable twins: May and Marjorie Chavasse, born in 1886 and still together.*

by 15.15, they obtained a figure of 11 years. This being precisely the transitional age when the adolescent is most likely, according to statistics, to be ill. Continuing along these lines, the duration of pregnancy was also divided by the magic number, and the figure derived at pointed to that period of a pregnancy which is most complex and difficult. Spurred by their discoveries, they decided to multiply the critical age of 11 by 15.15 and arrived at 167. This figure, they aver, is the theoretical human age limit given to us by nature herself.

Bizarre theories aside, it is apparent that longevity will be the norm, not the exception. A world with people living upto a 100 years and more and constituting about 25 to 30 per cent of the population is no longer only in the realms of science fiction, but a distinct possibility.

**THE INESCAPABLE TRUTH** is that ageing is a natural phenomenon, a biological process. Gerontologists (scientists who study the process of ageing) are of the opinion that while

it is possible to retard this process, it cannot be arrested. It is inevitable.

Seeking clues about what makes the body age, gerontologists are now examining its tiniest particles, focusing their research on genes and the garbage-disposal system that cleans out cells. But their findings are still inconclusive. "We are only now beginning to explore the fundamental biology of ageing," said Dr Leonard Hayflick of the University of Florida, USA, who recently discussed theories of ageing at a New York symposium. "We are now at the position of gathering data and formulating ideas."

Some research focuses on genes, the chemical blueprints within cells. Genes guide the development of an animal from a fertilised egg to adulthood, turning on and off at different points in time to carry out the genetic "programme" for development. And some scientists now wonder if genes later guide the body through the process of ageing. Dr Richard Russell of the University of Pittsburgh, USA, revealed that studies of a tiny worm showed sizeable changes

## The Centurians

**ALTHOUGH STORIES OF PEOPLE** a hundred years old and older regularly make the news all over the globe, the Soviet Union claims to have the largest number of centurians than any other country in the world. The Institute of Gerontology at Kiev quotes a figure of 20,000, or 8 per 100,000 as compared to 1.5 per 100,000 in the United States.

The highest concentration of claims to long life come from what the Soviets call the "epicentre" of world longevity, the Caucasus region in Ngorny Karabakh, where 100 people from a population of 100,000 claim to be at least a hundred years old. The villages in the region are situated high in the mountains, around 1,000 metres above sea level, and their inhabitants are hard-working farmers, shepherds and mulberry growers.

In the 1930s, the Soviet Union routinely reported finding peasants of 130 years of age and above. Tass once reported on a 161-year old, while the oldest of the old Soviet men was said to be Shirali Mislimov,



*"I feel the same inside as when I was young," says 110-year old John Evans.*

who died in 1972 at the distinguished age of 167. Shortly before his death, Mislimov revealed his secret — clean air, clear water and fresh fruit.

Britain, too, has lodged claims in the longevity stakes. The Guinness Book of Records cites former miner, John Evans, at the comparatively younger age of 110, as being the world's oldest man. And the teeto-

taller Englishman is still going strong, with a little bit of help from a pacemaker fitted in 1986 when he was 108. Although partially deaf now, he still recites poetry and takes walks in his garden in which he worked till he was 95. Born in 1877, Evans declares, "I feel the same inside as when I was young; only the old joints remind me of reality."

in enzyme levels after its reproductive period was largely over, suggesting that a dormant gene may be turned on during ageing. Several human diseases that accelerate some processes seen in normal ageing also show some genetic involvement according to Russell. But the case for a genetic programme that controls ageing has not been proved as yet.

Dr Hayflick doubts that such a programme exists. He asserts that people are genetically programmed to grow old enough to reproduce, and "what happens after that is of absolutely no importance to the species." He maintains that after the age of 30, people essentially coast on built-in physical reserves which earlier served to assure that they reached

the reproductive age. "Humans have spent perhaps 99.9 per cent of their time on earth with a life expectancy of 18 years," says Dr Hayflick, and ageing, which came as a result of medical advances, can be considered simply as "an aberration of civilisation."

**SOME RESEARCHERS** are adopting another angle on the influence of genes, and are asking if ageing involves a loss of ability to repair the body's deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) — the thread-like molecules along which genes lie. Studies have suggested, for example, an age-related decrease in the ability of human skin cells to repair DNA, as Dr Richard Setlow of Brookhaven National Laboratory, USA, revealed. Studies have

also found that animal species which tend to live longer have more active repair mechanisms. On the other hand, however, Dr Setlow says that studies of humans with diseases that include elements of premature ageing have not located consistent defects in DNA repair mechanisms.

Dr Alfred Dice, associate professor of physiology at the Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, USA, suggests yet another possibility for ageing — the garbage-disposal system of body cells. Studies of human skin cells cultured in a laboratory have found age-related declines in the activity of tiny structures called lysosomes, which help in the cells' routine maintenance programme of destroying and replacing key substances.

## RESEARCH

It is not known, however, whether the decline is a cause or effect of ageing. And other scientists warn that results from laboratory-grown cells may not pertain to what takes place in the human body. But Dr Dice suggests that when lysosomes become less active, a cell accumulates abnormal proteins which may trigger off heightened activity by a second cellular system that attacks abnormal proteins. In the process, normal proteins which the cell does not need any more are destroyed, and key operations of the cell may be harmed. The most exciting thing about this hypothesis, or so Dr Dice contends, is that it is specific enough for us to ascertain its validity in two years' time. By then, Dr Dice adds, scientists should be able to repair defective lysosomes and see whether it makes any difference.

Dice's theory is just one of the more than 300 hypotheses about the causes of ageing advanced by medical and other sciences. As ageing is a complex process involving biochemical, physiological and structural cell changes, attributing ageing to a single course or factor is understandably difficult. Nonetheless, scientists are optimistic about the possibility of arriving at a valid theory owing to the success achieved in experiments on animals; they are sure that man's productive life can be increased by 20 per cent in the next few years.

**SOVIET SCIENTISTS BELIEVE** that the fight against ageing should be approached differently: more attention should be paid to combating disease and that over and under-eating and an imbalanced routine of work and recreation should be avoided.

Gerontologists have found that malnutrition may be responsible for much of the decline in the immune systems of old people. As nutritional factors play a specific causative role in diseases, it is unlikely that dietary modifications late in life will be able to halt diseases; they may, however, stabilise them. Nutrition is likely to

play its most significant role during youth and middle age, and the prevention of diseases which are regarded as geriatric problems may well be a pediatric concern.

Inadequate nutrition may be a result of poverty, disease, a loss of taste and a subsequent loss of appetite, the side-effects of drugs, depression, and several other related factors. Dr Jeffrey Blumber, Associate Director of the Human Nutrition Centre on Ageing at Tufts University, asserts that 50 per cent of the elderly in America consume insufficient calories or micronutrients, including calcium, iron, Vitamin B and C. Dr Ranjit Chandra of the Memorial University of Newfoundland, Canada, says that those with chronic diseases, those who have lost their spouses, and those who are poor, are at a greater risk of being malnourished, and consequently more susceptible to illness and premature ageing.

Experiments have shown that balanced diets or special diets (when required) can improve the elderly's resistance to disease, particularly to influenza, tetanus and pneumonia. In fact, if well-fed, an 80 or 90-year old can have as efficient an immune (defence) system as a 40-year old. According to Dr David Lipschitz of the John McColl Memorial Veterans Hospital at Little Rock, USA, elderly patients sometimes suffer from dehydration, infections or mental disorders on account of protein or calcium deficiencies, which may occur as high-protein items like meat are expensive and difficult to chew.

**A STUDY IN LONGEVITY** has also determined that almost all the 40,000 old people interviewed had continued working at an advanced age. The results of the study, published in *Pravda* sometime ago, concluded that "work is an invaluable remedy against premature old age." Soviet gerontologists also recommend getting married, having children, drinking well-water, living at high altitudes, eating moderately and talking a lot! No less

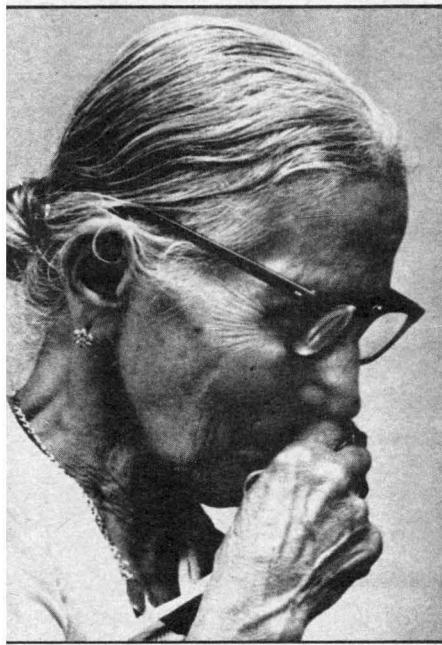


*Anna Williams: born 1873 – died 1988.*

important are moderate drinking and smoking. In short, while there is, as yet, no elixir of life that can guarantee eternal youth, there are many good habits that can prolong life.

Scientists at the N Petrov Research Institute on Oncology (the study of tumours) and the Institute of Experimental Medicine in the Soviet Union, however, have come to the conclusion that the hypothalamus (an organ situated below the brain) plays an important role in controlling the ageing process, involved as it is in regulating the activity of the endocrine glands – maintaining body temperature, the necessary amount of blood sugar, acidity, etc – and as such, ageing is governed internally.

Gerontologists throughout the world are now taking steps to find substances called "geroprotectors" to retard the process of ageing, and some have proposed chemotherapeutic means to do so. Soviet scientists believe that the intensive application of geroprotectors at an advanced age would be most effective and that, apart from purely aesthetic considerations, this method would reduce the risk of



*Unwanted: there is no national scheme for the aged in India.*

possible genetic consequences for the subjects' offspring.

This, however, is no new discovery — research into geroprotectors was initiated by Dr Mikhail Emanuel of the USSR Academy of Sciences as far back as the fifties. What is new is that its chemistry has been determined by a scientist of the Radcliffe Infirmary at Oxford, England — when the methyl ( $\text{CH}_3-$ ) group present in all genes is erroneously positioned, it fails to manufacture proteins, thus leading to ageing.

**BIOLOGISTS ARE NOW SURE** about the key-role the methyl group plays within genes and that any alteration in the group's link in the DNA sequence can alter the expression of genes in an individual. About 4-5 per cent of DNA have links of methyl groups near their cytosine portion — observed as an inherited feature in all mammals — and it is this position of the methyl group near the cytosine which plays a significant role in ageing, according to Dr Samuel Fairbrother. At a meeting of the International Association of Gerontology,

Dr Fairbrother reported that nucleic acids without methyl groups result in ageing, and that as long as the nucleic acid remains methylated near the cytosine residue, the genetic character of ageing remains unexpressed.

A comparison of the time spans of existence of the methyl groups showed that human cells lose them slowly while the loss is fast in animals that are short-lived, for instance, hamsters. Interestingly, cells infected by certain viruses become 'immortal' and exhibit a constant presence of methylation in their DNA. Probably the virus enzyme aids in methylating the nucleic acid chain while the presence of 5-azacytidine, a cytosine analogue, retards methylation. And how exactly does methylation relate to ageing? As cells age, methyl groups are no longer visible in the cytosine region. The activity of the enzyme methylase, as a result, is slowed down and the genes begin to express themselves differently. The proteins synthesised by such unmethylated genes, or so it has been observed, can be quite harmful.

When Soviet gerontologists met at Kiev two years ago to discuss the problems of ageing, Dr Victor Frolkis, corresponding member of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, suggested that ageing could be forestalled by cleaning the blood of residues and wastes — not by special filters but in a more natural way. His research showed that when sorbent particles (active carbon) were coated with a special compound, they were effective in doing so. Furthermore, when the sorbent was added to food, it absorbed toxins in the large intestine.

Dr Vladimir Dilman from the Leningrad Institute of Oncology added that life would be impossible without continuous changes of equilibrium in the organism, including those in its metabolism. For instance, rapidly-growing children are known to have more cholesterol in their blood than adults, without which their bodies would have nothing to build cells from. As time passes, such

metabolic disturbances consolidate and cause illnesses that are associated with ageing.

Perhaps most fascinating is the discovery of the mysterious 'Factor X'. Scientists at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, have located a "Dorian Gray" compound (labelled after Oscar Wilde's fictitious character who, hankering after eternal youth, found himself 'immortal' while his portrait aged) which is supposed to delay the ageing of human skin cells. The research team, led by Dr Brian Clark, a professor of biostructural chemistry and also an expert in the molecular biology of ageing, have called the isolated compound 'Factor X', but have kept its nature and origin under wraps, although it is known to be extracted from a natural substance. They aver that Factor X reverses the ageing process within a few days with old cells recovering their youthful appearance and functions. Factor X, however, does not alter the rate of cellular division; it only delays the onset of ageing. The treated cells die in exactly the same way as normal cells do, except they look like young cells until the last.

Yet another way to combat old age has been mastered in China. According to a *Xinhua* report, a new anti-ageing drug has been manufactured by the Shanghai College of Traditional Chinese Medicine for the Aged. The drug, called "huanjing jian", is said to effectively slow down the process of ageing, and Dr Li Baoqi, a former manager of the Beijing Medicinal Corporation, claimed in a recent interview that his white hair had turned black after taking the drug over a period of time. The drug is also claimed to be effective in curing insomnia, lack of appetite and energy, and other ailments of the aged.

**THE GRAYING OF THE** population is a problem the world has not yet fully begun to face, but which it must tackle in the very near future. The ratio of old people to young people is now increasing tremen-

## RESEARCH

ously the world over, coupled with a general increase in population.

How do sociologists respond to the news that life can be prolonged, and that too, in the foreseeable future? Obviously, prolonged life will have many social consequences on the present pattern of society and throws up all kinds of questions. Will men continue to work for a longer period or will they have to retire as usual, at around 60, in order to make place for the younger generation? And if so, what will a retired man do for the rest of his life?

Prolonging human existence and retarding the process of ageing is all very well, but what of the treatment the aged receive? In a world increasingly orientated towards youth and all that it signifies and promises, it would be easy to consign senior citizens onto the scrap-heap of society. 1982 was declared the International Year of the Aged. It has come and gone, and nothing significant has been achieved. In 1983, the United Nations World Assembly on Ageing resolved that people over 60 should not be considered a burden on society but should be encouraged to play a productive role. "Since then, virtually nothing has been done to consider the plight of the elderly," bemoaned Dr Robert Andrews of the Australian Health Commission at a UN conference in Geneva in 1986.

As the world grows grayer, developed nations around the world have begun to examine and fine-tune guardianship systems to serve and protect elderly people who are unable to care for themselves. Faced with projections that the ranks of senior citizens will swell to more than 1.1 billion by the year 2025, some countries are now also taking steps to improve guardianship systems and allow an individual to handle the personal and financial affairs of an elderly person judged incompetent or incapacitated.

In Canada, government officials in Ontario are studying possible reforms because of the growing concern



*"People over 60 should not be considered a burden on society..."*

about the abuse and exploitation of the aged. In Sweden, lawmakers are considering the abolition of legal, national government guardianship in favour of less restrictive arrangements. In Britain, authorities responded to pressure from groups for the aged by introducing a system in 1986 called the "enduring power of attorney"; under this, a person who is still competent chooses someone else to look after his affairs in the event of senility. In Norway, the comprehensive general national insurance scheme guarantees all nationals adequate old age pension, full sickness insurance and other social welfare benefits. Yugoslavian social security assures pensions pegged to income rises at 60 years for men and 55 for women. In the Netherlands, old people are provided for with suitable accommodation and are well-looked after either in old peoples' homes or in individual houses. In Switzerland, the state pension scheme guarantees a basic income for

old people. In the USSR, the official policy has been to draw as many pensioners as possible into socially useful activities.

**THE STRAINS OF URBANISATION** combined with the disintegration of the joint family system place a question mark on the future of an increasing proportion of elderly people, forced to fend for themselves in an uncertain world. Deprived of the security they enjoyed under the old set-up and denied a place in the emerging one, they become more of a liability on governments in tradition-bound countries like India where the impact of social change is felt the most.

At present, there is no national scheme for the aged in India. The old age pension given by the states and the Union Territories is just a fraction of the uniform rate of Rs 150 recommended by the Lok Sabha's Committee of Petitions. In the absence of any reliable survey, only a rough idea of the economic dimensions of the problem can be gauged by taking the number of people above 60 years of age as 48 million, based on the 1986 population figure of 760 million. Since approximately half of them have no source of income of their own, even a pension rate of Rs 150 a month will entail an annual government expenditure of Rs 4,320 crore. Considering the difficulties of the states in increasing their budget allocations, currently stated to be Rs 1.5 crore, the Centre has to step in with substantial grants to make the pension scheme meaningful.

So while prolonged life may be a boon in countries with low birth rates, for instance, Sweden, how can it be desirable in countries with enormous population pressures? There is another question. A long time ago, a scientist said that "not a single lazy person has ever lived to an advanced age, whereas all those who lived long led a very active life." The problem, then, is not whether Methuselahs are possible, but how best to keep them active and useful to society. ♦

FESTIVAL OF THE USSR



INDIA 1987-88

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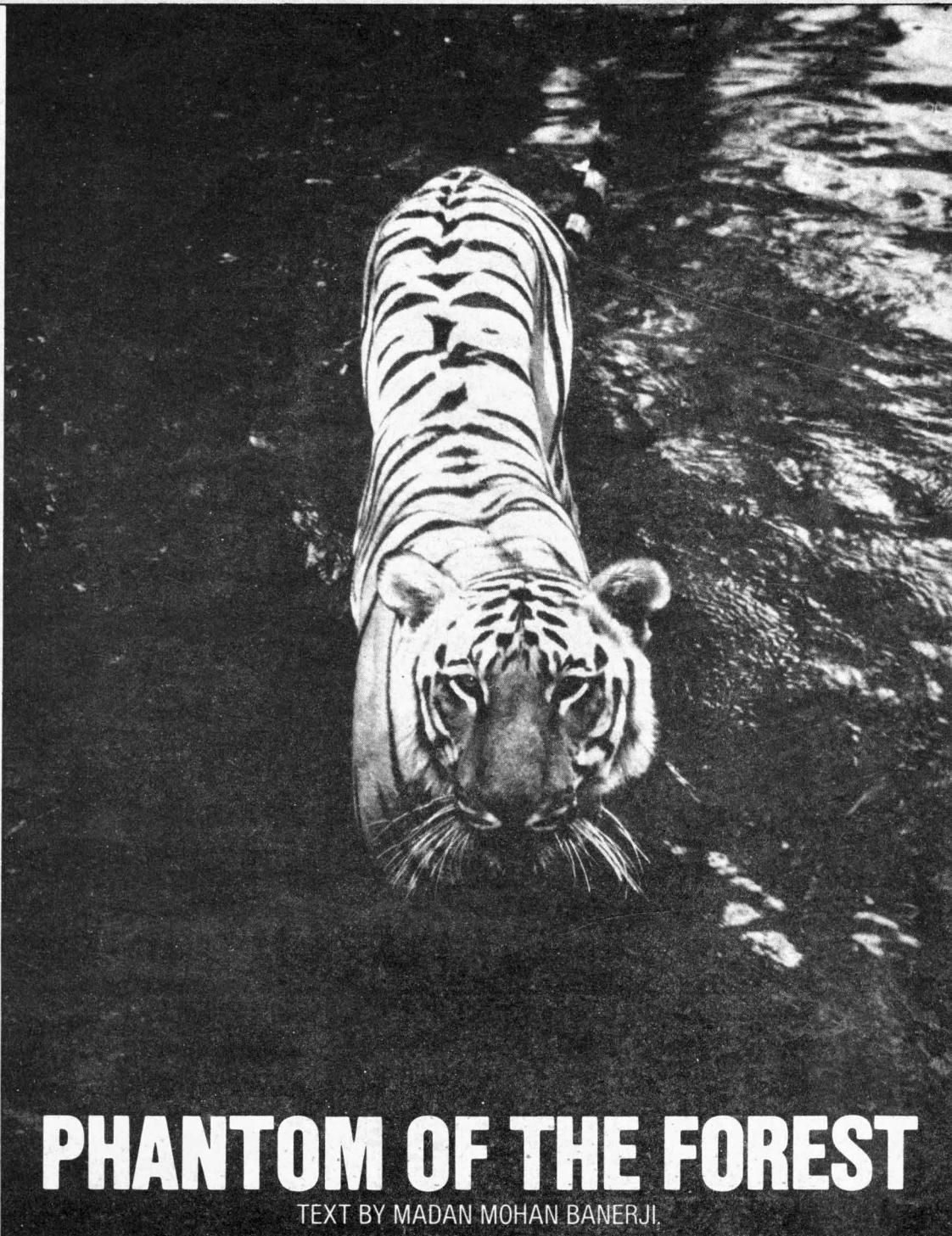
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# PHANTOM OF THE FOREST

TEXT BY MADAN MOHAN BANERJI

**A** LOW ASTHMATIC COUGH resounds from the shifting shadows of the Sunderbans. The cowherd awakens as his grazing cattle scatter, his senses alerted. Only a tiger could emit such a sound. Yet, for the few tense seconds that follow, there

is only a still silence. And then suddenly, a thump and the rattle of stones. . . the unrhythmic sway of grass announces the tiger's presence, its eyes glinting a brilliant emerald green in the new dawn. The brute proceeds, a huge and hungry hunter

intent on chasing a nearby sambar.

He is a proud predator — the *Panthera Tigris* or Royal Bengal Tiger — the most powerful cat to stalk the earth at 400-500 lbs and a length of 15 feet or more, the dense undergrowth camouflaging his motley coat of gold and black successfully. Supremely strong, he continues to reign as King of the Sunderbans. And he springs, usually from behind, swift and precise, killing his prey within seconds.

He grabs his quarry's neck in his sharp canines, often trapping the forelimb with his forearm, and pulling it down. As his victim falls, the predator jerks its neck upwards; it only requires a clean twist with the front paws to crush the spinal cord. Or else, the brute may continue to press his prey, holding fast its trachea with a murderous intensity and asphyxiating it, with a little help from sharp retractile claws and one swipe of a forearm which often serves as a death blow.

**ONCE HE EFFECTIVELY** silences his prey, the tiger proceeds to feed himself on the flesh, small bones, and



*The Royal Bengal Tiger yields a savage power.*

the hair (a digestive) with impeccable manners, taking care to remove the stomach sac intact and often hiding the leftovers with leaves.

His staple diet is pork: wild hogs and pigs contribute 60 per cent of his food; deer account for 20 per cent, and water monitors, crabs and other aquatic animals, the rest. And, as the high salinity of the waters of the Sunderbans irritates the liver and kidney of the tiger, Project Tiger, the central government organisation that has ensured the preservation of the beasts in their natural habitats since 1973, offers the tiger a number of fresh-water tanks to dip into.

In his *Statistical Account of Bengal, 1875*, W W Hunter describes the Sunderbans thus: "drowned land, choked with wilderness, smitten by malaria, infested with wild beasts, broken up by swamps, and intersected by maritime backwaters. And in dense tunnels in *hental* clumps, lurk tigers . . ."

Some 100 years later, the scenario is identical, only the malaria has been eradicated. The Sunderbans, 4,300 sq km of untamed wilderness, half the size of Tripura, harbour one of the greatest aggregations of wild life in the country. Among its varied flora and



*Quenching his thirst after a kill.*

## PHOTO ESSAY



*On the prowl for water monitors.*

fauna, within the confines of its 2,660 sq km tiger reserve (and often without), roam 264 tigers at last count. And, contrary to the reigning belief that the tigers are as wild and hostile as their jungle sanctuary, the beasts have no great appetite for man. More often than not, it is the other way round, with blood-thirsty *shikaris* in pursuit of their hides. Despite fines and warnings, poaching in the Sunderbans continues unabated, and Calcutta's black-market in tiger skins (which are still in vogue as decoration pieces for drawing-rooms) thrives, raking in approximately Rs 6,000 — Rs 12,000 per piece.

**TIGERS HAVE** an inherent, archetypal fear of man. But they can, if provoked, turn on a tiger-hunter — the destroyer of his environs — and thus become man-eaters. A man-eater, however, does not only gorge on humans, but will eat other animals if he can catch them. It is only when the man-eater is too old, has a crippl-

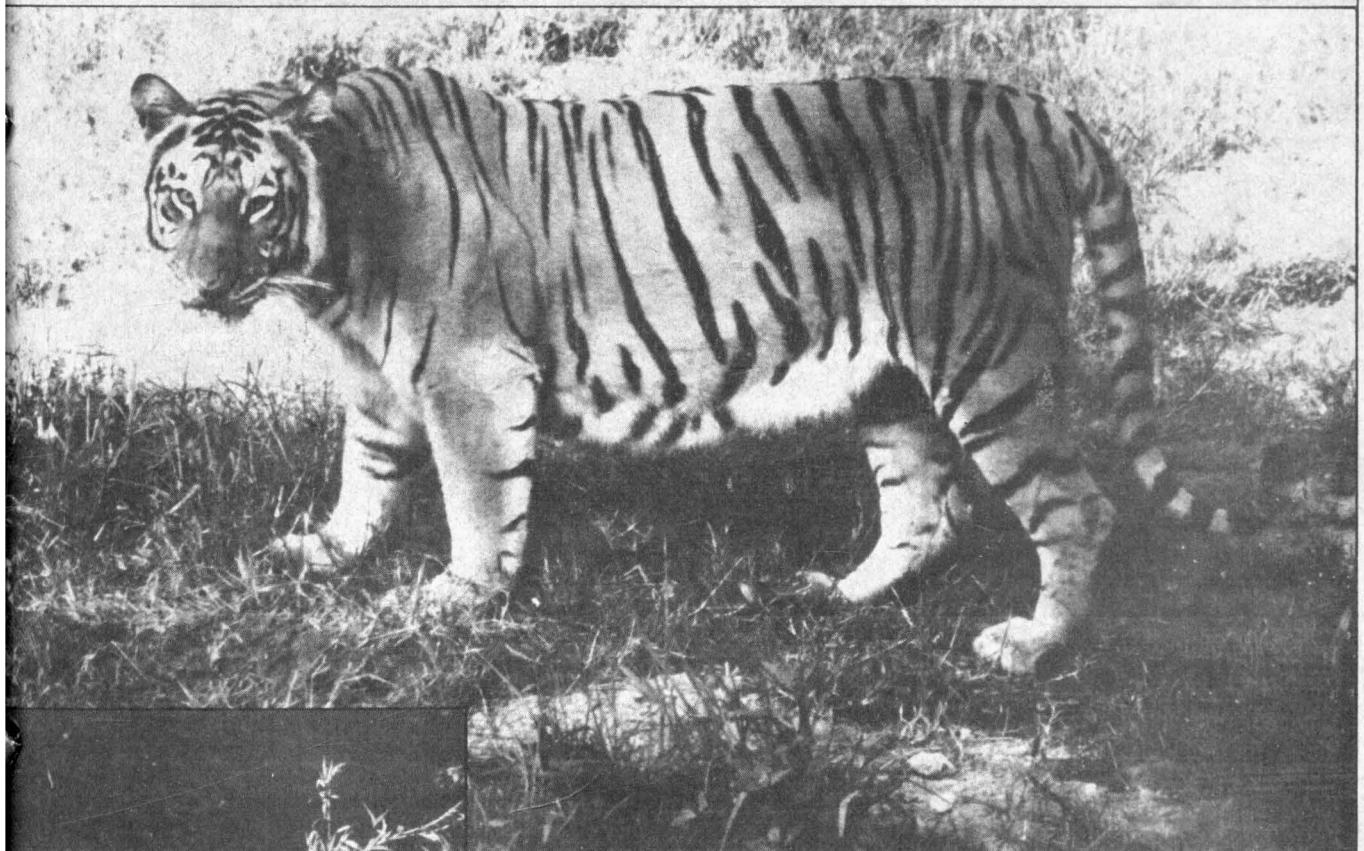
ing disability or has no other prey, that he restricts his diet to man.

Yet another variety of man-eaters haunts the depths of the Sunderbans and the nightmares of its inhabitants — these are the 'circumstantial man-eaters' who metamorphose from tame tigresses to angry and ferocious beasts in the honey-collecting season of April-May when the cubs conceived during the mating season are now three months old. The tigress attacks the honey-collector who, she thinks, is after her cubs, and leaves the body to rot, untouched. The next time the tigress spies a honey-collector or a wood-cutter, she attacks deliberately, and kills to eat. She now becomes a man-eater whose cubs will follow suit unless she teaches them to hunt animals other than man.

Always alert to the imminent dangers, the natives of the Sunderbans proceed to co-exist, as they have done for aeons, with the tigers; it is an uneasy relationship. The average number of casualties caused by the phantoms



*Resting in the shadows of the Sunderbans.*



*The most powerful cat at 400-500 lbs and a length of 15 feet.*

of the Sunderbans over the past 25 years is reported to be 35 humans per year. An additional and equal number are killed annually but are not included in official statistics; the deaths of those who enter the forests of the Sunderbans without permits, at their own risk, do not make the records. The death toll in the three villages in the Gosaba area of the Sunderbans has been considerable. With at least 650 inhabitants having fallen victim to the brutes, and many hundreds maimed and mauled, 80 per cent of the married women today are widows — 'tiger widows' in local parlance. By way of compensation, these women and their families are paid a paltry sum of Rs 5,000 by Project Tiger.

**A NOVEL EXPERIMENT** is being conducted to afford greater protection to the inhabitants. In addition to protective electric-fencing, and the application of electric-shock therapy to deter the man-eaters, life-size dum-



mies of wood-cutters, honey-collectors and fishermen that emit an electric shock when touched are being erected at select places. Devout villagers seek to protect themselves in other ways too, and invoke the jungle gods, Banabibi, Sahajan Gajee and Gaji Saheb, to come to their succour and protect them from Dakshin Roy, the ogre who periodically transforms himself into a tiger to terrorise the villagers.

As the last rays of the setting sun fade and the forest sounds are stilled with the night, you can hear the barking call of the beast . . . the mighty roar reverberates through the jungle. And there he stands . . . his coat the colour of flame in the tall grass, black and gold against the backdrop of shifting shadows. The proud ruler of all he surveys. Here, in the realms of the Sunderbans, you discover the Royal Bengal Tiger in the flesh. Neither caged nor confined, he wields his savage power over man and beast, without fear. ♦

FROM JUNE 1988

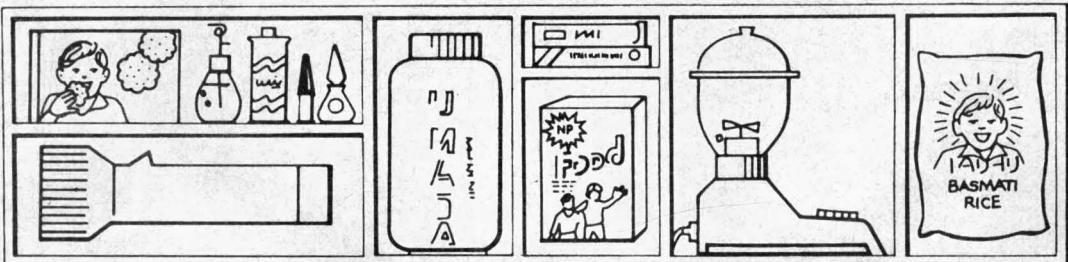
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*'There is a certain freedom from all constraints in Hong Kong. It is what makes Hong Kong go. It also means a lot of corners are cut.'*

Lee Kuan Yew, PM, Singapore.

*'Come the next bull market and investors will forget that Hong Kong ever closed the exchange. Investors*

the Hong Kong Financial Secretary, Piers Jacobs, to say the markets were facing a tremendous crisis and they would have to be shut down for a while. Jacobs, rubbing sleep from his eyes, agreed. It was only later that he realised Li was planning to shut the markets down for four days. William Purves of Hong Kong & Shanghai



## THE GAMBLER'S DEN

In many ways Hong Kong, the world's ultimate free market island, was the worst loser of the Crash of 1987. But within days, the optimism had returned. . . Renowned financial journalist MIHIR BOSE presents a riveting account.

*'have very short memories.'*

Paul Mathews, Managing Director of GT Management (Asia) Ltd.

**J**UST BEFORE DAWN on the morning of Tuesday, October 20, 1987, Ronald Li, Chairman of the Hong Kong stock exchange, rang

Bank would later say that he wished Jacobs had said, "I'll have breakfast and then ring you back with my decision." But he didn't; the markets closed for four days and it was only in the second week of the Crash that the world began to rub its eyes about the crisis in Hong Kong.

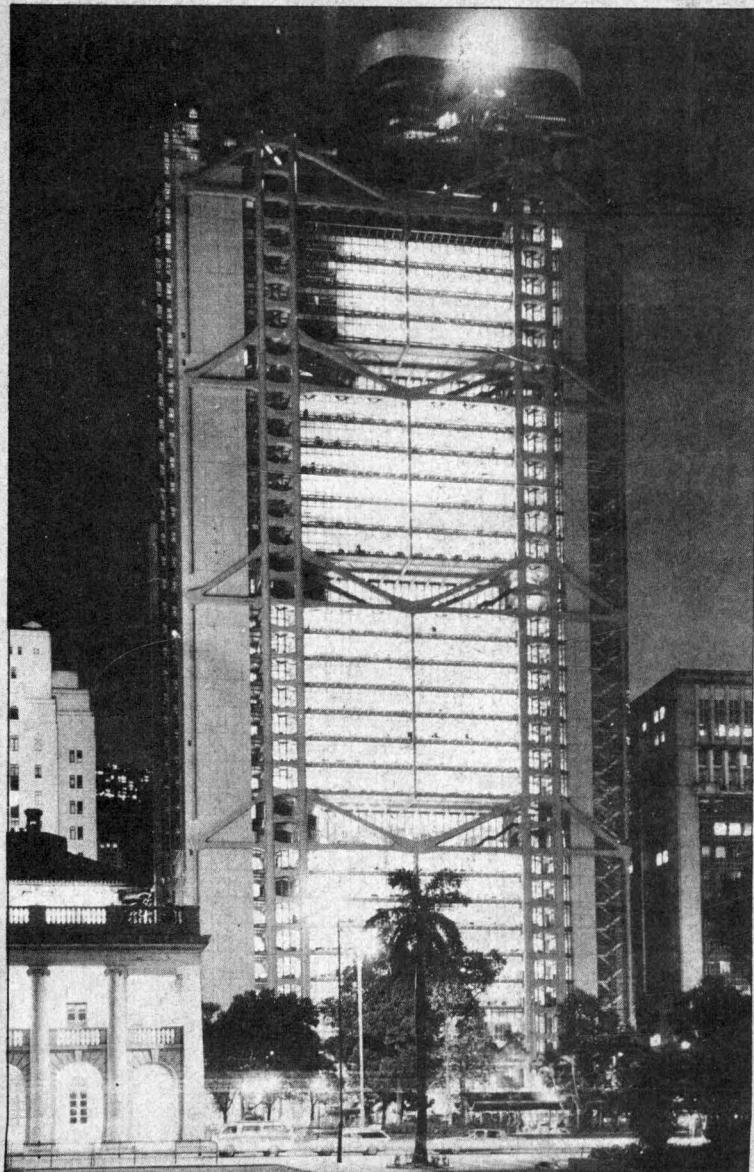
When the markets opened on Mon-

*Excerpted from "The Crash" by Mihir Bose. Published by Bloomsbury Publishing and distributed in India by UBS Publishers Distributors Ltd. Price: Rs 250.*

## EXTRACT

day, October 26, in almost manic trading, HK\$2 billion (Rs 328 crore) was wiped off share values, with the Hang Seng Index, an average of 33 main companies, dropping 1270.70 to 2241.69. The October Hang Seng Index futures contracts plummeted 1544 points to 1975. The lifeboat that had been put together painfully over the previous four days was immediately proved inadequate and Hong Kong's fall had repercussions round the Pacific and the rest of the world markets. Jacobs, presumably speaking on a full stomach, blamed the fall in Hong Kong on the fall in Tokyo earlier that day, but Tokyo brokers felt their market was weak because of Hong Kong. Later that week, as prices fell in Sydney and Auckland, the Australian Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, blamed the foreigners for importing the crisis into his country. In words that echoed what Nigel Lawson had told Britons, Hawke said, "All the Australian government can do is make sure it's got the fundamentals right, and we've done that. No one is insulated in this world." The 24-hour market had brought 24-hour headaches and now everyone blamed everyone else for the problem. The global share-bazaar heralded with such ballyhoo was now proving neither very global nor very welcome. And it was the oddest member of the global share-bazaar that was causing the most difficult problems.

In many ways, Hong Kong was the worst loser during the Crash. In 29 days its market declined by 47 per cent. What made it worse was that it occupied such a strategic position in the 24-hour market. In terms of size, it hardly deserves such a billing. The market is about the size of the Netherlands and, on a world scale, nobody much bothers about what happens to the Netherlands market. But what made Hong Kong unique was its geographic position in the 24-hour clock and the characteristics of its market. The market opens soon after Sydney and Tokyo and closes after those two markets, and provides



*The headquarters of the Honkong & Shanghai Bank.*

Europe and America with a guide to trading in the Asian and Pacific exchanges.

**MOREOVER, HONG KONG** provides opportunities for sudden riches, often very speculative growth that makes it very attractive to a great many investors. On the doorstep of the biggest

Communist country in the world, it is the world's ultimate freemarket island. It does not even have a central bank, with the Honkong & Shanghai Bank, which now owns 14 per cent of Midland, both the colony's leading commercial bank and effectively the banker of last resort, issuing 75 per cent of the currency notes (the pri-

vately-owned Chartered Bank issues the rest). The colony did not even have any controls on banks till the Panic of 1965 when a collapse of a major trust company and a run on the banks brought some very limited controls.

But then that is what made and still makes Hong Kong special. It had been acquired by the British in 1839 as a result of the First Opium War. The war had started following the Chinese government's attempts to stop the drug-trafficking being carried on by British traders, most prominently, William Jardine. When Jardine's illegal opium stocks were seized by the Chinese, the British eagerly waged war and emerged as victors with money and Hong Kong. The colony became a permanent trading and smuggling base, Jardine became the new colony's landlord and the business was soon transformed into Jardine-Matheson, the great *hong* which effec-

and sometimes lost easily — had, if anything, strengthened. The colony had a long history of boom and bust.

In 1972, the stock-market crash had been even worse than the 1987 Crash, a fall of 92 per cent, when many fortunes had been wiped out. Between 1978 and 1981 there had been a spectacular speculative bubble, pushing up property prices and attracting money from all parts of the world. Some of it was legitimate, a good deal of it was hot money seeking to find a safe haven and secure laundering facilities. The property boom brought to prominence one George Tan of the Carrian Group which consisted of almost 500 companies.

Hong Kong's property dealers have always indulged in the practice of selling floors rather than buildings. Carrian improved on this by selling floors to its own subsidiaries. Sometimes two separate property companies sold assets back and forth to each other. This boosted profits and could be used to borrow more money. At the height of the boom, properties were being mortgaged for more than their purchase price and false paper profits helped companies to float equity on the Hong Kong markets. This, in turn, provided more capital to buy properties. In 1981, 40 per cent of Carrian's profits were fictitious, based on sales for which no payments had been received.

But that boom collapsed in the autumn of 1982, in the wake of a world recession and the problems created by the Falklands war, leaving a trail of devastated property companies, absconding financiers, and eventually a murder and suicide. Tan, who had fled bankruptcy proceedings in Singapore to start again in Hong Kong, was tried in a trial that proved to be the costliest in Hong Kong's legal history, and the most useless. The judge threw out the charges. When Tan walked away a free man in the autumn of 1987, yet another Hong Kong boom was reaching its height.

**IN MANY WAYS**, nothing had chang-

ed since the Chase Manhattan Bank had described Hong Kong in 1966 as "the flight money-centre for Southeast Asia and the Far East." Hong Kong had always been a flight centre but it was the Vietnam war and the flow of foreign currency and dollars that made it even more prominent. There was increasing arms smuggling, narcotics trafficking and other black-market activity. Hong Kong banks rapidly expanded their international operations to meet the needs of this situation and the inflow boosted the property market. By the end of 1965 a Chase Manhattan estimate suggested that the percentage of Hong Kong bank deposits resulting from flight money was between 30 per cent to 50 per cent; one of the highest such ratios outside the Swiss banking system. It was not a perfect flight centre, but outside Switzerland there was none better.

Ideally located, not too far from Sydney and Tokyo, on China's doorstep, it grew as the hub of the expanding Pacific-basin economy. Its trade with China brought in nearly US\$34 billion (Rs 44,200 crore) per annum and provided China with nearly 90 per cent of the capital invested in the New Economic Zones and 40 per cent of its foreign exchange. There was no form of economic activity that Hong Kong could not cater for. A sixth of the gold produced outside the Communist countries ended up in Hong Kong, which had one of the world's largest gold markets and an active diamond exchange.

What international investors liked was a free-wheeling financial system that allowed you to do much as you pleased yet required you to disclose very little. Hong Kong, which originally had four stock exchanges (they have since been merged into one), had some of the laxest regulatory laws in the world. Names of company shareholders do not have to be disclosed, the most blatant insider deals are legal and 'shell' companies, which do not have any assets but are used to make deals, are quite common. Publicly-

**Hong Kong provides opportunities for sudden riches, often very speculative growth that makes it very attractive to a great many investors. On the doorstep of the biggest Communist country in the world, it is the world's ultimate freemarket isle.**

tively ran the colony. Hong Kong was well and truly launched.

By the early 1980s much had changed. The British were preparing to return the colony to China, Jardine-Matheson were shifting their international headquarters to Bermuda, but Hong Kong's reputation as a place where fortunes were made easily —

## EXTRACT

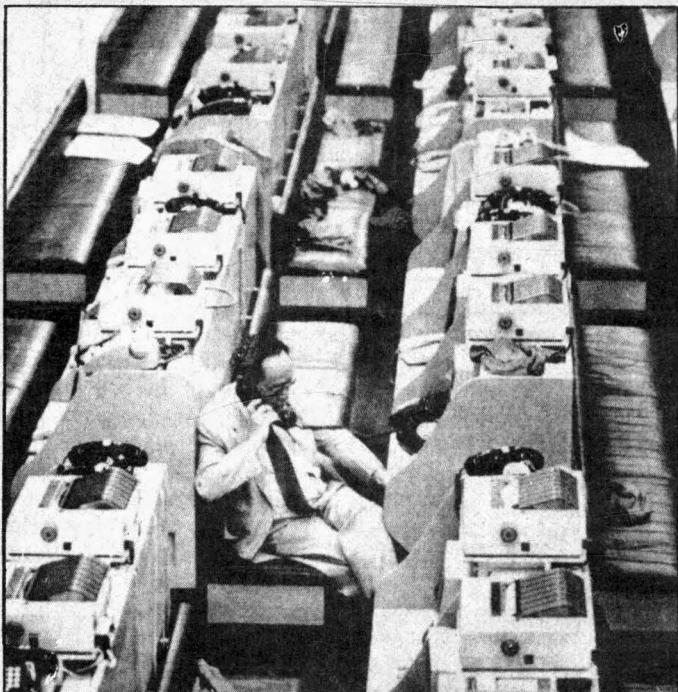
quoted companies are controlled so secretly and tightly by unknown major shareholders that they are more private than most private companies. Investors find it difficult to know who their owners are. It all made for a climate where share dealing was more a game of chance than almost anywhere else.

**IT BECAME EVEN MORE SO** when, in May 1986, the futures exchange opened. Hong Kong was already the third most important financial centre in the world after London and New York. Now it had acquired the ultimate machine to fuel gamblers' dreams. Futures, as we have seen, are bets on the rise and fall of stock markets and attract stock-market gamblers like bees to a honey pot. In Hong Kong the native Chinese love of gambling combined with the foreigners' love of quick profits to make it the most explosive futures market in the world. Every day more than HK\$600 million (Rs 98.4 crore) was bet on whether the Hang Seng Index would rise or fall, and this made it the largest futures market outside the United States. Investors from Japan, Britain, the US, Taiwan and mainland China already owned a third of the shares quoted on the Hong Kong exchange. Futures increased their appetite and more and more punters joined in the trading bonanza. Before futures trading had been allowed, the daily turnover on the exchange was about HK\$300 million (Rs 49.2 crore). In 1987 the daily turnover was HK\$3 billion (Rs 492 crore) with some days seeing as much as HK\$5.4 billion (Rs 886 crore) worth of shares traded. This was hardly surprising. Buying and selling shares on the exchange is a cumbersome procedure and settlements have to be made the next day. The futures markets could be played on generous credit terms, often as long as three months. The futures exchange was, as Lydia Dunn, a director of the conglomerate Swire Pacific and a member of the colony's legislative body, would call it, 'little

more than a licensed casino.' Hong Kong had done everything to make the gamblers feel at home. They virtually played with shares. But what did it matter as long as the unstoppable money-machine carried on spewing out money.

Experts could see no reason why it should stop. Indeed, even after the Crash their views have not changed. Hong Kong brokers continue to be extremely optimistic about the market. To them, the fact that Hong Kong was a market waiting to crash did not seem to matter.

that something like that was going on. Margin requirements on future contracts were already very low: US\$2,000 (Rs 26,000) down payment on contracts worth US\$23,000 (Rs 2.99 lakh). But after the Crash traders admitted that even these were not kept and many were allowed to trade with half that margin. In some cases post-dated cheques were accepted and clients were allowed to use that most dangerous of stock market devices: pyramids, buying contracts using as down payments the paper profits they had made on existing



*A deserted office during the 4-day closure.*

Indeed the regulatory system, as Lydia Dunn would admit, meant that 'poachers and gamekeepers were the same persons.' Thus nothing was ever done about insider dealing — that most insidious and destructive of market vices — even when it was clear that sharp changes in prices and volumes ahead of important deals must mean

contracts. The Hong Kong government has always said — and repeated this after the Crash — that it favours self-regulation. But one financial expert was to liken that to treating the securities industry as if it were a Sunday afternoon game of football: the first 11 people on the field get a game, irrespective of experience.

**THERE WAS AN OFFICE** of the Securities Commissioner, but its budget of HK\$15 million (Rs 24.6 lakh) a year was less than what the stock exchange earned from its transaction levy on five solid days of trading. The exchange itself indicated what it thought of self-regulation by having 30 people working in the public relations department and only one official in the surveillance department.

This was perhaps an appropriate reflection of the priorities of Ronald Li, Chairman of the stock exchange and the Deputy Chairman of the futures exchange. An accountant and a stockbroker, he had got an honorary degree from Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, and was proud of the fact that in 1986 he had successfully brought the four Hong Kong exchanges together. This was meant to draw both local Chinese and international brokers together,

And in any case Li does not seem to be a man to bother about such things as distinguishing between the personal interests of the directors and the needs of the exchange. Despite all the modern gadgets the colony produces, Hong Kong's settlement system for share transactions was terribly antiquated. The Hongkong & Shanghai Bank proposed a central automatic clearing system. The hardware and software was available but the committee of the exchange blocked it when the bank rejected proposals that some brokers receive personal stakes in the clearing company.

**LI HIMSELF HAD GOT** the exchange to approve a new stock issue by a company called Volvo. It had nothing to do with the Swedish car company of that name but was a night-club whose most obvious assets were 1,000 hostesses, and one of whose owners was Ronald Li. Li had justified it by saying, "We're living in the latter part of the twentieth century, not the Victorian age." However, when the Crash came, Volvo decided that it had better stick to the show it knew best, and cancelled its flotation plan.

By then, of course, much of the mess that was the Hong Kong market was becoming visible to the world. For weeks before the Crash the futures market contracts were running well ahead of the prices of the underlying stocks on the main exchange. There is always a theoretical difference between futures contracts and the index based on interest rates but this should be a few points. Before the Crash there was a near 150-point difference between futures contracts and the Hang Seng Index, and this opened up splendid possibilities for arbitrage opportunities. With the generous margin facilities available for playing the futures market, this was almost like a sure opportunity to take advantage of the price differentials — one that attracted not only local gamblers but investors from around the world.

The problem arose when the markets collapsed on Monday, October 19. Now the gamblers who had borrowed heavily were suddenly facing enormous losses. Generally these were the local gamblers while the international arbitrageurs found themselves to be the winners. Li's own futures firm was to default on £1.3 million (Rs 30.615 lakh) futures contracts though he came up with the money from one of his other companies. One of the most significant losers was Robert Ng, the Singaporean head of Sino-Land, one of Hong Kong's most aggressive property developers. He was holding 15,000 long contracts in the Hang Seng Index futures market through a nominally capitalised company registered in Liberia. He is said to have lost HK\$900 million (Rs 147.6 crore).

**ON BLACK MONDAY** evening there were 37,707 outstanding futures contracts worth nearly US\$2 billion (Rs 26,000 crore) and the local brokers wanted something done. Their plan was simple. Close the exchange. Without an exchange there could be no futures dealing. This would then be *force majeure* and they would close the futures position as it stood on Monday evening. In theory the losses on futures contracts should have been met by the Hong Kong Commodities Guarantee Corporation (CGC). It is owned by a clutch of banks — 20 per cent the Hongkong bank, 15 per cent each by Stanchart and Chase Manhattan, and 10 per cent each by Barclays, Crédit Lyonnais and Wing On Bank, a subsidiary of Hongkong Bank. The remaining 20 per cent is owned by the International Commodities Clearing House (ICCH), which in turn is owned by British banks.

But despite such prestigious backing, its total of capital and reserves was only US\$3 million (HK\$30 million ie Rs 3.9 crore). Some of those who financed CGC were actively involved in the setting up of the futures contracts and benefited from the tre-

**On Black Monday evening there were 37,707 outstanding futures contracts worth nearly US\$2 billion (Rs 26,000 crore) and the local brokers wanted something done. Their plan was simple. Close the exchange. Without an exchange there could be no futures dealing.**

but all it succeeded in doing was to convert it into something like Li's private family store, as *Fortune* described it. Though much of the business came from English and American brokers, they were excluded from the 21-member board and, even when the membership committee met, Li effectively kept control by conducting the meeting in Cantonese.

## EXTRACT

mendous increase in volumes but they had done nothing to increase the money available to the CGC. Now they were willing to agree to the proposals of the local brokers that, instead of guaranteeing the contracts, measures should be taken that would effectively, and illegally, rewrite the terms.

There was almost an unreal feel about Hong Kong at this time. Money '87, an exhibition meant to promote the virtues of Hong Kong as a financial centre, was taking place at an exhibition centre near the colony's central business district. Local television had been promoting the exhibition with a series of advertisements which showed speculators screaming 'money, money, money.' The colony's leading paper, the *South China Morning Post*, had planned an extensive supplement on Banking and Finance '87 to mark the occasion. Pre-printed copies of the supplement featured headlines like:

### STOCKMARKET

Hang Seng: up, up, up and away.

The front cover carried a blurb which read: "Hong Kong's booming stock markets have set a cracking pace this year and show little signs of let-up as records continue to tumble . . . the pundits say the end is not in sight." The publication date was October 23 and, with the supplement already printed, the paper decided to put on a bold face and carry on. At the exhibition, investment advisers tried to interest the public in unit trusts and other such wonderful products of a bull market without quite being able to explain why some of those trusts had stopped redemptions.

To make matters worse, the Hong Kong Governor, Sir David Wilson, was touring America trying to get the Americans to take more refugees. As one wit put it, the way Hong Kong markets were going, nearly everybody would be a refugee.

**MEANWHILE, SOME** of the big international investors and portfolio managers, alarmed that plans to close

the futures positions would mean that their winnings would be sacrificed to make good some local brokers' losses, threatened to file lawsuits. Whether this would have worked was not tested, for a rescue package was now being put together. The Hong-kong Bank was aware that two of its own subsidiaries, James Capel and Wardley-Thompson, which accounted for more than 50 per cent of the

kets but all of whom were given Star Chamber treatment at the Hong Kong offices of Hambros Bank. The package was finally put together on Sunday night just 12 hours before the markets were due to open after the four-day Li-enforced holiday. Initially, a rescue package of HK\$2 billion (Rs 328 crore) was announced, but after the horrendous fall on Monday, October 26, the rescue pack-



Ronald Li: ex-Chairman of the stock exchange.

short positions, were very exposed and supported the rescue package. Wardley-Thompson which is a joint venture between Wardley, a Hong-kong Bank subsidiary, and a US firm eventually lost US\$11.6 million (Rs 15.08 crore) on its futures trading during the Crash. The package still penalised brokers, some of whom had no dealings on the futures mar-

age was doubled to HK\$4 billion (Rs 656 crore). There were also two very curious, very Hong Kong interventions.

In the go-go days, traders from China's provincial government who never thought markets could go down had bet millions of HK dollars of state funds on futures. Now Li Ka-shing and various Peking-backed

companies bought blue chip stocks to shore up the exchange. The Bank of China also joined the increased rescue package following high level discussions between the Deputy Governor, David Ford, and Xi Jiatun, Head of the Xinhua News Agency, China's *de facto* embassy in Hong Kong. This seemed to steady nerves with the Hang Seng Index finally, on Tuesday, climbing up again.

The most interesting was the intervention of the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club. This is the only franchised operator of gambling establishments in Hong Kong which earns enormous revenues from horse racing at the city's two courses, Happy Valley and Sha Tin, and from a popular lottery, the Mark Six. The Jockey Club had a shopping list of shares, buying nearly HK\$500 million (Rs 82 crore) worth — appropriate that the official gambling organisation

Davison, former head of Lloyds and one of Britain's best-known accountants, was asked to head an inquiry into the workings of the exchange. All this could not stop some 34 brokers defaulting on contracts totalling HK\$ 230 million (Rs 37.72 crore). The Hong Kong Commodities Guarantee Corporation subsequently filed writs against 39 members, representing 38 per cent of its total membership. On the stock exchange, three brokers were suspended, with one firm facing claims from James Capel, Hoare Govett and SBCI, the broking arm of the Swiss Banking Corporation.

In the first few days after the Crash, gloom and doom were evident. One expert feared that Exchange Square, the waterfront building housing the stock exchange, would soon be deserted. People who had lost money would not return. Already the credit system was being changed from cash-after-24-hours to cash-on-delivery. But within a few weeks the optimism that had fired the bull market had returned. The pre-Crash bulls were confident that things would soon be all right. They rely on investors' short memories — and the experience of Singapore. There, in 1985, as a result of problems with the debt-ridden Pan-Electric Industries Ltd, the exchange was closed for three days. But, only three years later, the memory of that shambles had dimmed. Paul Mathews of GT Management (Asia) Ltd, said, "Everyone said Singapore was through after Pan-Electric, but people came back when they saw chances for profit. They'll do the same in Hong Kong."

If that is to be the case, then Hong Kong must hope that it will once again expose the problems of markets — their lack of memory and their obsession, not with fundamentals, as the experts say, but with profits. In 1985, when Singapore closed, I wrote in a December issue of *Financial Weekly*:

'Global markets may mean global opportunities for investment, but

they also mean global risks. This week's suspension of the Singapore and Malaysian stock markets indicates that while all the hype about electronic markets enabling us to buy shares in Hong Kong at breakfast time, sell shares in London at lunchtime and then buy some again at supper-time as the Pacific exchanges open may sound exciting, they can cause a lot of problems as well... The lesson of Singapore is awareness of the way the market is run. Warning investors of a downturn is one thing: knowing fully how the market operates is another. As fund managers struggled this week to cope with the crisis, many of them were realising how inadequate was their knowledge of the way the Singapore market is regulated — or rather not regulated. Singapore's brokers, for instance, did not have a compensation fund... Forward purchases and sales of shares, creating a pyramid of equity, which is in reality debt, was not fully appreciated by everybody. The system is not new. This is what American investment trusts did before the great Crash of 1929 and was also the basis of Bernie Cornfield's IOS scandal. That such old tricks could be employed while fund managers were busy advising thousands of investors to put their money there reflects poorly on global information. It is this we need to strengthen if Singapore-style crises are to be averted. Technology may bring global markets nearer, but only adequate information and proper regulation will preserve it.'

It is interesting that Singapore has come out of this Crash in relatively good shape. While it lost 44 per cent in the first few weeks, the exchange did not close and its futures market, which is now more tightly controlled, did not prove quite so disastrous as Hong Kong. It may be Singapore will benefit from Hong Kong's fall and become the main Asian financial centre. If so, it will prove that regulation is necessary and that just depending on market forces does not work.♦

**In the first few days after the Crash, gloom and doom were evident. One expert feared that Exchange Square, the waterfront building housing the stock exchange, would soon be deserted. People who had lost money would not return...**

should bail out the unofficial one.

**OTHER CHANGES WERE** also announced. Li was forced to resign from the futures exchange and Robert Fell, a retired civil servant and a former chief executive of the London stock exchange, was brought in as Chief Executive. Hambros Bank was appointed as adviser and Ian Hay

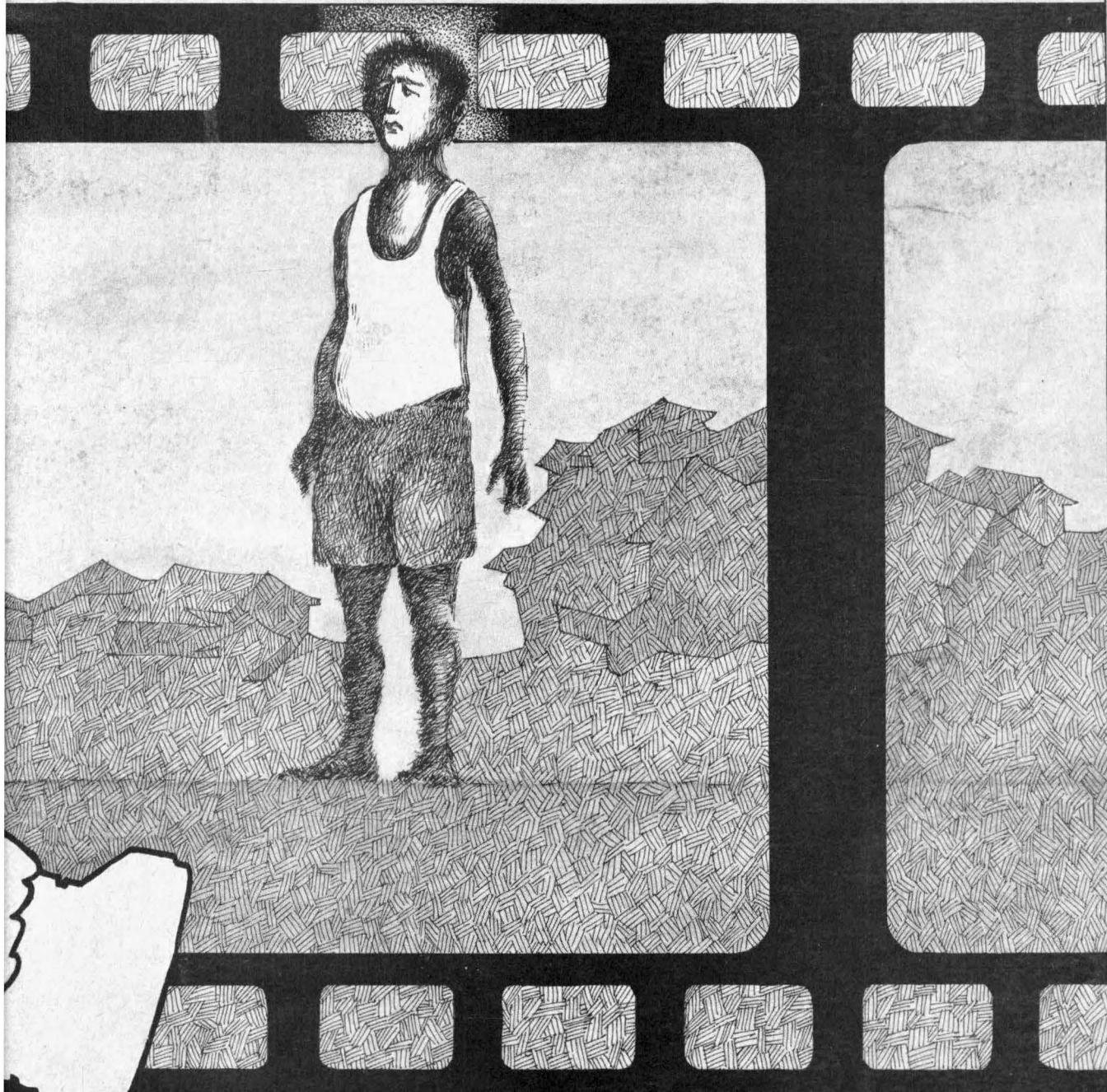
## FICTION



**T**HE PLANE WAS PREPARING TO land. The captain's voice was muffled, but clear enough to ignite a rush of activity up and down the plane as everyone set about locating bits of hand-luggage, retrieving seatbelts from under sleeping travelling companions, searching out lost shoes, or making a quick run for the loo. Freshen-up

pads doubled as wake-up pads, and finally, all the plane's babies started to cry simultaneously, obliterating the last pieces of the captain's information and making sure that those who had not quite awokened now did so.

The young woman at the window-seat in row 'P' appeared to be the only one not participating in the bustle



around her. Instead, she sat packed and prepared, still and silent, gazing out of the small window. So still, in fact, that one could have imagined her to be asleep if it were not for her alert posture and intent gaze as she peered out at the plane staircasing down through the clouds. When the plane leap-plunged, she held her chest and smiled — and stayed in that posture until it finally landed and stopped, whereupon she pulled out a camera from the bag in her lap and snapped a series of quick shots. Then, leaning back in her chair, she let out a deep, long sigh.

Anjali Datta, aged twenty, was arriving in India as she had done many times before, but this was a special arrival

— for the first time she was arriving on her own. Arriving as a grown-up, as an independent, autonomous professional — well, nearly professional — at any rate, a person in her own right. It was all really a bit of a dream-come-true, and everything, but everything, matched and mirrored her feelings — the plane's leaps were like the leaps of her own heart, the pressure in the ears only served to heighten the already intense drone in her head which blocked out the world, and finally, the dreamlike quality of the heat rising and quivering tenuously in the piercing sunlight encapsulated it all — she reached for her camera and quickly snapped.

When the doors opened and the heat poured in, she felt

## FICTION

quite overwhelmed and imagined herself to be rising, floating, enveloped in warmth . . .

'When we arrived, I felt light-headed and dazed in a haze of heat . . .' She made a mental note to remember the formulation 'haze of heat' as she squeezed into the line filing its way out of the plane, much too slowly . . . 'I really can't describe the feelings of the arrival. I was quite calm until we landed, and then I could hardly contain my excitement and restlessness to rush — out, out, out — and into the sun . . . of INDIA!'

Anjali had long developed this way of voicing in her head simultaneous running commentaries of events and feelings. They took different forms and served different functions — they could be in the form of letters, a part of a story, in the first or third person, and ever since she had gone to film school, they had developed into different kinds of voice-over styles. They served as a sort of emotional safety-valve, a way of distancing, sharing, releasing intensities of emotion.

Once outside, the haze of heat was in actuality a glare blast. She groped her way down, squinting and hanging on to the handrail. But when her feet touched the ground, "Ooohh!" she let out an involuntary squeal of delight, and automatically coughed to cover it up. 'Ah, but no!' she thought, 'I don't need to hide things any more. This is India, where I don't need to hide, for it's where I belong!' She bent down to scrape up a pinch of dust, and would have liked to lift it to her forehead in a gesture of reverence — but felt too shy. Instead, she gripped it between her fingers and quickly flowed back into the stream of travellers. Of course, the old freedom fighters wouldn't have felt shy, she thought, and she tried to discover what they would have felt — elation? joy? sacrifice? duty? destiny? — and which of these found an echo within her.

Anjali felt close to the freedom fighters and sometimes even imagined herself to be one. For though, of course, India was now free from the colonialist yoke, she had been taught that this was only the beginning and that much was needed to be done before the first fruits of that freedom could be reaped by all, for then, and only then, would India be healed and restored to her former glory! Brought up most of her life in the West, she had been fed on the diet of expatriates — of dreams and longing, of stories and legends and the whole larger-than-life dimension created by distance and desire. Her parents' feelings had transposed and she had grown up with the idea that she had a kind of duty, a mission — almost a debt to India. This return held so much promise. She tripped along happily, adding a purposefulness to her gait and watching her reflection in the smoked glass of the airport building.

### "MISS ANJALI DATTA FROM THE UK?"

Anjali nodded energetically.

"I am V P Sharma. I have come from Dr Malhotra to take you there. *Namaste.*"



"Oh, thank you. *Namaste.*" replied Anjali, and as she hastily brought her palms together in the appropriate gesture, the dust from her clenched fingers fell . . .

Mr Sharma took over, managing the luggage, and Anjali happily followed without even stopping to wonder how she had been located in the crowded terminal building. As far as she was concerned, it was just part of the magic of India! Yes, like the wonderful web of family, family friends, and friends of family friends. The magic that had enabled her to come, unchaperoned, to an unknown city — for Bombay was virtually unknown — with a purpose of her very own, and an actual job to go to. She squealed involuntarily.

"*Han ji?* Yes? Did you say something?"

"No, no, I'm just happy to be here."

"*Achcha.* That is good," smiled Mr V P Sharma.

The car drove along, and Anjali looked around at the 'here' which appeared to be sea, sky, skyscrapers, and slums. 'When you grow up you will go back to work in India.' She remembered her mother's words. 'There is so much that needs to be done . . . so many people that need to be helped . . .' She was moved by the memory and the realisation that she was here at last, all ready and raring to go — to fulfil her own 'tryst with destiny'!

Anjali pulled out her camera and kept it ready in her lap, just in case, for any memo snaps. She then placed her imaginary camera in the front seat, angled so that it framed her side-profile looking out of the window. It was a documentary with her own voice-over: 'I decided to study film and media, basically because of the tremendous power of the visual image to communicate, educate, enlighten — to change. I always intended to come back and work in India, to make my contribution, to do something that would be of relevance, a benefit to the Indian masses. If my science grades had been any good I would have chosen medicine, or agriculture . . .'

'Cut,' she decided, as she smiled at the lie, recalling her squeamishness about blood and needles.

'But now, at last, I am here!' And she settled back into

her seat to feel the sea-breeze and to savour once again the set of circumstances that had combined and conspired to make this arrival possible. Pure magic!

**IT HAD ALL HAPPENED** because Uncle Raj, an old family friend who had come to stay for a few days, had fallen ill, and so had had to stay a few weeks instead. Being house-bound, he had to be visited, and so there came on the scene his network of family friends and friends of family friends. Amongst whom there was someone who, in turn, had a family friend of his own who knew a man in Bombay making educational films for rural development. Combined with that, Anjali, now in her final year at the film school, was looking for a professional placement for work experience. So letters were exchanged, and calls made. It was learned that a new project was starting in which Anjali could participate; the director of the film school thought it was an excellent idea, and they were all smiles as everything was finalised. Uncle Raj stopped over in Bombay on his return to tie up the details of Anjali's stay which was to be with old Dr Malhotra, a doctor from Old Lahore, who was a family friend to them all.

"It really is a most amazing example of the right people, the right place, and the right time," Anjali had squealed delightedly on the telephone to a friend.

"Good luck and Karma," corrected her mother. "Whatever happens is God's will, and never forget to say thank you . . ."

Anjali smiled as she remembered, and opened her eyes to blink a thank you to the sky. "Aha. You have awakened," said V P Sharma. "That is good, because we are nearly arriving now."

Anjali pulled herself up to look. The car inched its way along the congested street straight into and through the lives of people whose homes — hardly homes, refugee camps more likely — were along the pavements. Whole families huddled around bundles containing their meagre possessions, covered in dust and treated like dust, attempting to get on with the business of survival between the feet of pedestrians, the fumes of vehicles, and competing for space and scraps with the stray dogs and cats.

Anjali let out a cry of dismay.

"Yes, they come from the countryside to Bombay," explained Mr Sharma.

"From where? And why?"

"Yes, and they keep coming," returned Mr Sharma.

The car stopped at the traffic-lights. Next to a flashy food stall disgorging satisfied customers, sat a bewildered group of a mother and three children. The juxtaposition of images was such that Anjali automatically reached for her camera, but as she started to lift it, her eyes caught a look . . . a stare? . . . a glare? It pierced through her — she froze, her camera held halfway to her chest. As the car jolted forward, she relaxed it back into her lap and tried to decipher the look . . . its meaning . . . her feelings . . .

**AT DR MALHOTRA'S, ANJALI WAS MET** by Elizabeth, who took over from V P Sharma. A brisk, bright-eyed old woman, she immediately poured forth a stream of information as she led Anjali through the apartment towards the sitting-room. The Doctor Sahib, it turned out, had been called to another town with his return delayed until tomorrow. But Anjali's room was ready, her bath-water hot, and she could have a bath first and then tea, or tea first and then a bath. Uncle Raj had called a few times and would be doing so again, later, as indeed would Dr Malhotra, and the party she had come to visit would be sending a car for her the next day at four. She then went on to explain to Anjali, her tone conspiratorial, that she had been called down especially to be with *Abjakum*; that normally she lived in Poona with Dr Malhotra's daughter, whom she had looked after for the last 30 years, ever since the child was two, and hence was regarded as one of the family.

" . . . so when you are coming the Doctor Sahib said, come to me. 'Elizabeth,' he say, 'I have a young girl from England and only manservant without English.' I tell him no problem, I come." She looked at Anjali knowingly. "You come for meeting with party here? Yes?" and stopped talking for the first time.

"Yes," replied Anjali. "And I do speak Hindi," she added firmly, to set the record straight; she recalled the sweat and tears with which she had scraped through her Hindi 'O' level, reminding herself of the freedom fighters, their courage and . . . her debt.

"That is very good," replied Elizabeth, bustling off to attend to something.

Anjali strolled out onto the terrace, trying to get a sense of everything. The image of the little street-boy appeared before her, and the look in his eyes, which she was beginning to regard as a sign — trying to say something — to her . . . it was the stare, so expressionless, yet so eloquent. Like her mother said, there really was so much to be done in India. Her eyes misted over; she wiped them on the sleeve of her shirt as Elizabeth returned.

"Oh ho, Anjaliji, Babyji, what is there to cry about? You should not cry." Elizabeth spoke in Hindi, gently, with empathy, and brushing aside Anjali's attempt to explain, she continued with a touch of indignation in her tone, "I will come with you to meet the party tomorrow, or better still, call the party here when the Doctor Sahib gets back." To Anjali's bewildered look she replied, "Come, come now. You go and have a bath while I bring you tea. Don't worry about anything."

The combination of the hot bath, sea-air, jet lag and tea made Anjali dozy — she floated away into a timeless space of simultaneous dreaming, waking, sleeping — not knowing which was which. But during which she imagined herself to be making quantum leaps of awareness and understanding — with the 'look in the eyes' guiding, teaching, transforming, and sometimes merging with those of Elizabeth who always appeared at hand, solicitous, tending,

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concerned.

**ANJALI AWOKE FROM HER 14-HOUR SLEEP**, feeling fresh and alert, though still locked in the night's feeling of timelessness.

'A rather wonderful feeling of great stillness.' She started her imaginary letter. 'As I drank my tea on the verandah on my first full day in India, I understood for the first time why time is deified. Why it is called 'Great Time'. There definitely is something . . .'

Elizabeth interrupted her with her own commentary about who'd called when, and why she had ordered English lunch . . .

The mention of lunch brought Anjali back to clock time, she had three-and-a-half hours before her meeting with Mr Mathur of Apex Films. Just about enough time to get ready at leisure. She relaxed back into her thoughts.

'*Maha Kala*,' she murmured softly to herself, pleased that she had retrieved the word from her memory store.

"What did you say?" Elizabeth looked puzzled.

"I said, *Maha Kala*, Great Time. You know, it's one of the names of the Great God Shiva, and I had been trying to remember it."

Looking increasingly puzzled, Elizabeth replied by offering once again to accompany Anjali to the afternoon's meeting — an idea which Anjali firmly dismissed with some irritation.

The car arrived on time. The driver came up and rang the doorbell. Anjali was ready to leave. Elizabeth looked anxious as she watched her go.

"I'll be back soon!" said Anjali cheerily. "You'll see. Before anyone calls again or Doctor Sahib arrives."

Elizabeth nodded, unconvinced.

Zipping along in the car, Anjali again thought about Time, about the Great Goddess Kali, who was all powerful because she was the Goddess of Time, about the little street-boy with his large, silent, staring eyes, about her destination, about what sort of a man Mr Mathur would be and what she should call him: Mr Mathur? Uncle? Mathurji? She decided the last one best suited someone engaged in rural development. 'Rural development,' she asked the sky, 'means the development of the countryside, doesn't it?' She conjured up the image of the boy with the silent eyes, and felt so moved that she spoke out aloud, "If the countryside were developed, you wouldn't have to come here like a beggar to grovel in the filth." The driver threw a backward glance, but Anjali was lost in her thoughts. Rural development! Clean drinking water! Land to till! Irrigation canals! The eyes assumed a look of gratitude. Her sense of purpose grew. She felt aglow with good-will! She felt a 'Chosen One'! Yes, like Joan of Arc must have felt when she heard the voices!

'Driving along in the car to my destination, I felt almost as though I was driving towards my own destiny. Ready to meet it, ready to learn, ready to grow . . .'



**THE CAR STOPPED.** The engine was turned off.

"Gosh!" she exclaimed, "Are we already there?"

The lift took her to the top floor and opened straight into the plush offices of Apex Films. Anjali let out a little gasp of surprise, but before there was time to recover, she was thrown into another.

"Anjali!" A dashing young man, around thirty, strode towards her. "So good to meet you at last."

This wasn't quite what Anjali had expected. "Are you . . . Mr Mathur . . . I mean Mathurji?" she stammered slightly.

He laughed. "That's right, but there's no need for that formality. Just call me Matty, everyone else does."

As he waltzed Anjali through to the inner office, he explained the history of his name. How, when he was studying in America, it used to be pronounced to sound like Matthew . . . how he had stopped correcting it, got used to it, and it had just stuck, and then even got shortened to Matty. Anjali noted the American twang in his voice but quickly arrested the thought, blaming it on her prejudiced English education. She herself was determined to be open-minded . . . and open-hearted.

"Will you have tea, lemon juice or coconut water?" he offered. His smile was disarming.

Anjali sunk into the sofa to wait for the coconut water, delighting in the attention, her host's engaging ways, the comfortable elegance of her surroundings, and the wonderful sea-view. She closed her eyes and threw another thank you to the sky.

"So you want to come back and work in India?" Matty sat down in the swivel chair.

Anjali nodded.

"Good, good. There's a lot that needs to be done and a lot of scope. I liked your work . . . very promising."

He really was so eminently huggable, thought Anjali, as

she tried to contain her childish squeals.

"Gosh! Thank you," she managed.

"Well, here at Apex we do a combination of things. We do some advertising films, and we also take on contracts from the government. So the work is therefore both varied and interesting. In India, you see, film really works. The people are very open . . . almost gullible . . . and it is a very powerful and persuasive medium."

Anjali nodded. "I am particularly interested in rural development," she threw in.

"Quite right, quite right. That is a most important factor and one you will be working on. The team you will be with are away in the field and will be back in two days. When you meet them, you will have to plunge straight into work."

"Oh, good."

**"YOU SEE, IN INDIA WE HAVE EVERYTHING.** We have the technology, we have the know-how, we have the personnel and we have the manpower. We are the eighth biggest industrial nation and we need to project ourselves into the next century and take our rightful place in the world. What has been holding us back is centuries of tradition and ignorance — and these need to be rooted out."

"Tradition?"

"What's that?"

"I said, tradition?"

"Yes, that's right, and ignorance." He swivelled his chair. "Now, we have been given a large contract by the government. They are planning to build a large reactor in the interior around which, eventually, an industrial complex will grow. We have been commissioned to make a series of educative films to help pave the way. These will then be disseminated by satellite to the countryside around." He offered Anjali a cigarette. "No? You don't mind if I do?" Anjali shook her head. "You see, these lands have traditionally been held by certain tribal groups and small farmers and these people will now have to move."

"Does that mean they will be dispossessed?" interrupted Anjali.

"They will be . . . resettled."

"Where?"

"The whole project will develop over a considerable period of time and many things will change by then. The point of the film is to help that change and to help the people adjust to the change. You get me?"

Anjali nodded unsurely.

"What you must understand is that *this* is progress — and *that* is what must be communicated through the films. They must be persuasive and reassuring." He assumed a reassuring tone. "It will provide work for the area because the labour of the local people will be required to build it, and in this way, they will be involved in participating in the change."

"And when it's all built, what will happen to the people

then?"

"Ah, that will be a long time yet. Many will be absorbed in the new complex and the others will be . . . resettled."

"I see," murmured Anjali.

"Progress has a price. Sometimes a heavy price, a very heavy price indeed!" He smiled his disarming smile. Anjali now saw it as smarmy. A price which you will never have to pay, she thought as she surveyed the room.

"We cannot afford to be sentimental," he cautioned. "I think you will enjoy the challenge, because one of the things we have to do is to teach . . . to impart some of the most basic concepts of progress, concepts which you and I take for granted, but which for these simple rural people are quite new and will transform their whole reality." He reached out for a file. "Like this — you'll probably be working on this one so you can take it to look through — it's about Time."

"Time?"

"Yes, about teaching the concept of Time. The idea that Time is money!"

Anjali jumped.

"Surprised, huh? Well, you see how a simple idea like that, which we take for granted, has to be clearly put over. That Time is money is one of the basic concepts necessary for progress, and you have to . . ."

Anjali's head reeled. 'Time is money' . . . confusion . . . incomprehension. She heard no more.

**DRIVING IN THE CAR,** she had no memory of when she'd got in. The file in her lap she lifted and placed upon the seat beside her, then looked absently through the sky and saw 'the eyes' looking at her, trying to say something. She did not want to hear, and dispelled the image by consciously taking note of the passing people, shops, cars, buildings, hoardings . . . until she finally arrived at Dr Malhotra's house.

Elizabeth was at the door; her face turned grave as she saw Anjali.

"Go sit," she ordered. "I will bring tea."

Anjali sat, feeling heavy and dulled. Even the commentaries in her head were silent. She could make no sense of her feelings. The image of the eyes reappeared, 'the look' asserted itself and said, 'Traitor!'

"No, no, no!" she called out. "No! No! And go away!"

Elizabeth rushed into the room exclaiming, "Anjali! Baby! Are you all right?"

Anjali composed herself. "I'm all right. It's just . . ."

"You're not all right." Elizabeth was indignant. "You should never have gone on your own. I told you not to! It's not proper anyway! I heard you say no, and you *must* say no! You must not marry a man you don't like."

Anjali was transfixed. Her chin quivered as she was just about to burst — into laughter, she thought — until Elizabeth gently gathered her into her arms, and she found herself dissolving into uncontrollable sobs. ♦

# ON THE MARQUEE

*(Continued from page 3)*

The new courage that Giani Zail Singh has demonstrated in the face of South Block bullying has served, and will serve, the nation well. His refusal now to sign the Postal Amendment Bill 1986, even though he was involved in proposing a similar legislation while being a member of Mrs Gandhi's government, is a welcome sign reflecting the cognisance of the public mood. Reports one has heard of his conversations with visiting foreign Heads of State indicate a shrewd understanding of the world situation and India's position and role in it. His understanding of what is attainable in many spheres for this country is realistic, down-to-earth. Shorn of a political future, the Giani is different from what he was as a politician in the Punjab and as Mrs Gandhi's faithful Home Minister. There is a saying, 'Better to deal with the devil you know' and I urge you to consider the wisdom of this age-old saying in resolving the dilemma I am attempting to raise through this open letter. If you grasp that wisdom, then, perhaps, you would want the Giani to be a candidate for re-election as President.

Some of you would like Mr Gandhi to continue in office undisturbed for the next 30 months. I do too. In fact, if he can survive with honour, I would like him to return in 1990 for another term — he is young and he has a modern outlook. He is also capable of hard work and goodness. But Mr Gandhi needs an education in politics and in administration to better conduct the affairs of this nation. Experience of his governance for the last two-and-a-half years shows that he is not a fast learner, nor a good listener. And given the character of the Congress (I) party and, I am afraid, the sycophantic inclination of us Indians, you are not going to teach him much. Often, you all do not open your mouths even when consulted or asked to speak up on controversial subjects by your political masters. In the event, a President in the Rashtrapati Bhavan who can keep a stern eye on this government is a President the nation needs at this time. And do not for a moment believe the malicious reports about the President wanting to sack Mr Gandhi. Anybody with a discerning eye could have seen that the President was hurt over how Mr Gandhi has behaved as Prime Minister, but also had concern and affection for the grandson of Jawaharlal Nehru. There is estrangement between the head of the State and the head of the Government, but Mr Gandhi is largely responsible for the distance created. "I have departed from conventions in hundreds of things," you will recall Mr Gandhi telling the Press on June 18, 1985, when he was asked why he did not call on the President before or after his foreign tours, as was the settled convention and the practice of all earlier Prime Ministers. Some of you applauded Mr Gandhi then: *Wah! Wah!!* The rest has just followed — as was inevitable. So please do not blame only the Giani.

## AN ELECTED PRIME MINISTER CANNOT BE DISMISSED

In a democracy, the choice of the people must prevail. Allegations of bribe-taking and corruption or even irresponsible acts — of the kind the Prime Minister, Mr Rajiv Gandhi, has committed on several occasions recently — are not reasons enough to dislodge an elected government until the next General Election. The survival of this sacred principle of democracy is more important than any number of weighty options the current agony of the nation throws up. In the event, it is the imperative, nay, the sacred responsibility of the privileged electorate, as represented by you, to elect a President who will control the damage the present Prime Minister and his government are likely to cause in the next two-and-a-half years of their tenure. You can contribute towards making these remaining years of the present government less tortuous for the Indian Republic by electing as President someone who, as Head of State, can function as per the responsibilities the Constitution has conferred upon the occupant of the highest office in the country.

On circumstantial evidence which Mr Gandhi has himself publicly chronicled, there is sufficient ground for any upright citizen of India to have no consideration at all for him: he has lied, he has misbehaved, he has used — as head of the ruling party and while being the head of the government — language, at a public address, which dishonours us as a people and as a nation and puts a question mark on our claim to be a civilised member of the comity of nations. He has got himself involved in spending colossal sums of money, the source of which can only be corruption and for the spending of which he accepts no accountability.

In the event, normally, the rational thing for the concerned citizen to do would be to work towards getting such a man out of power, but as I have stressed repeatedly here, these are not normal times. Mr Gandhi is young and appears to be capable of decency and goodness. Maybe he is a Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. And because he has a clear mandate, let us hope and let us pray that the better side of him triumphs and rules. ♦

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