

JULY 1988 Rs 6

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THE ISLAMISATION OF INDIA'S NEIGHBOURS

K F RUSTAMJI ON INDIA'S
DEFENCE POLICY

ARUN SHOURIE: CONVERTING
CLAMOUR INTO DISCOURSE

ECONOMIC FORECAST BY
PAUL ERDMAN



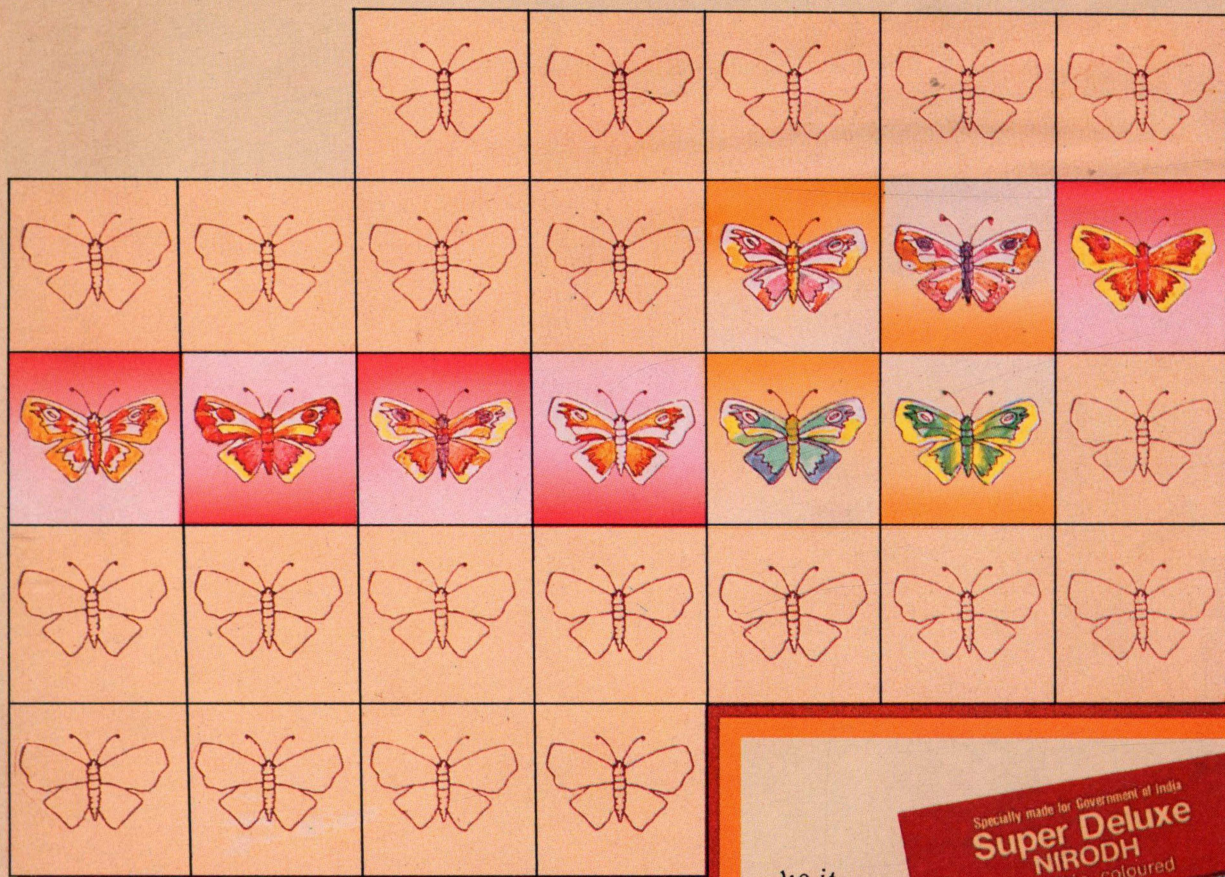
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THE DANGEROUS GULF

WE HAVE ALL COME TO ACCEPT that in India power is centralised in the hands of the Prime Minister and consequently the prime recipient of exceptional privilege and attention is only the Prime Minister. The President of India too, receives attention and is a recipient of many privileges, but, after Mrs Indira Gandhi, this has come to depend, largely, on the state of the Prime Minister's relationship with the President. In such a set-up, the cronies of the Prime Minister matter; they receive exceptional attention and privileges. We may have a problem communicating official decisions of the government to bureaucrats down the ladder, but the system we have fashioned is exceptionally alert and sensitive to Prime Ministerial whims, likes and dislikes. And what he likes and wants, and more important, what he does not like is speedily communicated down the line. Yet, the general impression in the country, even among people who should know better, is that members of the Central Cabinet and Ministers of State too, are recipients of many privileges and much attention. In reality, they matter very little; the system is totally distorted, totally oriented towards the top man. An incident to which I was a witness is worth recounting.

I was, recently, a passenger on the Indian Airlines 6.20 am flight from Bombay to New Delhi. While boarding the aircraft some ten minutes before the scheduled time of departure, I saw Mr Vasant Sathe, the Minister of Energy, arrive at the ramp of the aircraft, by the regular Indian Airlines bus, and board the aircraft, almost without anybody noticing his arrival. He took a window seat in the first row of the Executive class, and began reading.

The 6.20 am flight was delayed, and delayed, but even until 7.20 am there was no announcement from the cockpit about the delay; no member of the crew or any airline staff cared to tell Mr Sathe (or the Airbus load of passengers) what the delay was about. He fretted, silently, just like other passengers. After more than an hour's delay, a reluctant purser told an irritated passenger who demanded to be told the cause of the delay: the co-pilot had not arrived. The reason: the transport arrangements had broken down and the airline had not picked him up. Mr Sathe did not ask any questions or make any inquiries. Upon landing at Palam, New Delhi, he came out of the aircraft, boarded the bus, alighted at the Terminal Building Arrival Gate like other passengers, and walked on to his car.

So what is wrong with his behaviour, you may ask. Nothing wrong really. Nothing. In fact, Mr Vasant Sathe suffered the delay like most other passengers, in silence, without the benefit of knowing why he was grounded. The point I am making is, we have, over the years, built a system, where, really, only one man matters; the Prime Minister. As against this incident I have related, I have also seen Mr Romi Chopra, who is often seen with the Prime Minister, travel. And then, a mere few minutes' delay was explained to him by a functionary of Indian Airlines as well as by several members of the crew. And you should have seen their flushed faces over that very short delay. Because we do not say anything about the distance the Prime Minister and his chosen men create between him and his cabinet colleagues, the country suffers. A prime ministerial decision in the government, howsoever inexperienced the Prime Minister, and howsoever ill-advised the order, gets carried out. Pronto. And in toto. And the country suffers. This happens because we do not say anything when we see signs of efforts towards one-upmanship, towards concentration of power in one man's hands. By our neglect, we have allowed the whole cabinet form of governance we ought to be following to be drastically devalued.

Mr Sathe, and his likes too, deserve to be reprimanded for their acquiescence. Over the delay of the Airbus flight, he should have asked the Commander of the aircraft if he, the Commander, was dumb; he should have ere now written to Rahul Bajaj to get the co-pilot sacked (for not taking a cab, when the transport did not pick him up, and for not arriving at the airport on his own). No wonder, in the Cabinet they get mostly ignored. Only the Prime Minister matters. A system where only the Prime Minister matters is not democracy. A system where a wide gulf divides the place of the Prime Minister and that of his Cabinet colleagues is not a Cabinet form of government. A situation where Ministers in the Cabinet accept this kind of nonsense are not his Ministers but his toadies. Not unexpectedly, therefore, all that they most of the time do is whine: "The Prime Minister is doing this, and the Prime Minister is doing that", and that the fellow is ruining the country.

If Mr Rajiv Gandhi and his Ministers care to read recent history — what has happened in Burma, and in many countries of Africa — they will effortlessly realise that one-man-rule with toadies in tow eventually comes to a no good end. But, do they read? Do they ever learn? And the Indian people, do they want them to learn, or to teach them? Already, the gulf that divides *him* and *them* is hurting the country. And the gulf that divides *them* and *us* is something our system will not be able to withstand for much longer. But who cares? ♦

Publisher
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Managing Editor
SHAILA SHAH
Associate Editor
MINNIE VAID
Editorial Staff
SHEKHAR GHOSH
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Advertising Manager
NILOUFER SHROFF
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Advertising Sales Offices:
AHMEDABAD: K M Narayanan
Business Press Private Limited,
3, Sadhana Colony, Stadium Road,
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LETTERS

Eliminating Terrorism



Apropos R V Pandit's "Punjab: A Way Out", there is definitely a solution for the Punjab tangle (*Imprint*, June '88). All that is needed is political will, visionary thinking and a broad outlook. Our politicians think about the next five years, but visionaries think ahead to subsequent generations. Politicians and the public are worried about political 'prospects' and the outcome of the next election. Everyone condemns Rajiv and his men, but no opposition party has yet come up with a solution. Rajiv Gandhi is not willing to punish the culprits of the 1984 riots against the Sikhs; the keenness he showed at the time of signing the Punjab Accord is not to be seen in its implementation. All the states should look upon terrorism as our 'national' problem and not as the concern of Punjab alone. Let us join together to eliminate terrorism, fundamentalism and the forces of disintegration.

S A Srinivasa Sarma
Bombay

The rate of killings in the Punjab has now increased substantially and the Punjab problem is far from being solved by Operation Black Thunder. On May 2, 1988, the Home Minister, Shri Buta Singh, said that "any person who thought he might contribute to solving the Punjab problem is welcome." We have therefore analysed the various solutions being tried out for maintaining law and order and find that some of the following could be effective:

a) The setting up of Special Police Outposts (SPOs) in 700 terrorist-prone villages, consisting of a few policemen, home guards and ex-service men, which would be capable of engaging the terrorists for half-an-hour (this being the time required for reinforcements to reach the site) — this could cover more and more villages once found successful.

b) Preventing the smuggling of arms from Pakistan: barbed-wire fencing is now being constructed, but the proposal of establishing a 5-km security belt is yet to be implemented — these must be speeded up.

c) Taking away unlicensed arms: if the IPKF can do so in Sri Lanka, why can the same not be done in Punjab through a house-to-house search?

The answer to terrorism is the organisation of groups of people who would take the responsibility of protecting the people in their locality/village. These groups would know if and when terrorist activities were being organised from within. If licensed arms are also provided to them, possibly after the requisite training, they could also engage the terrorists. Hence, the real solution to the Punjab problem is to provide licensed arms for self-defence purposes and to keep an inventory check upon the ammunition.

It is only when the rate of killings drops substantially that elections can be held and the Longowal Accord implemented.

All India Voters' Panchayat
Bombay

The special report, "Literacy Campaigns, A Write Off?" (**Imprint**, June '88) by P Sainath, exhibits a very gloomy picture of illiteracy in our country even after 41 years of Independence.

[illegible]

J V Naik
Bombay

them is a pittance of Rs 10 per illiterate per year (**Imprint**, June '88).

K P Rajan
Bombay

In commenting on the National Literacy Mission in my article on literacy campaigns (**Imprint**, June '88), I had specifically noted that the so-called Mission has been overworked as a news item — in one case appearing as often as three times in the same newspaper on different dates! In the first week of July 1988, the announcement was made once again by the government, and again the newspapers ran it as a *new* item, thinking it to be a fresh project with fresh funds.

On November 4 the same year, the same newspapers ran it as a fresh story (without any reference to their earlier stories in August), following

P Sainath
Bombay

A black and white portrait of a middle-aged man with dark hair and a mustache. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. He is wearing a light-colored, collared shirt. The background is dark and out of focus.

*Mohammed Ariff
Vijayawada*

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*Cover transparency:
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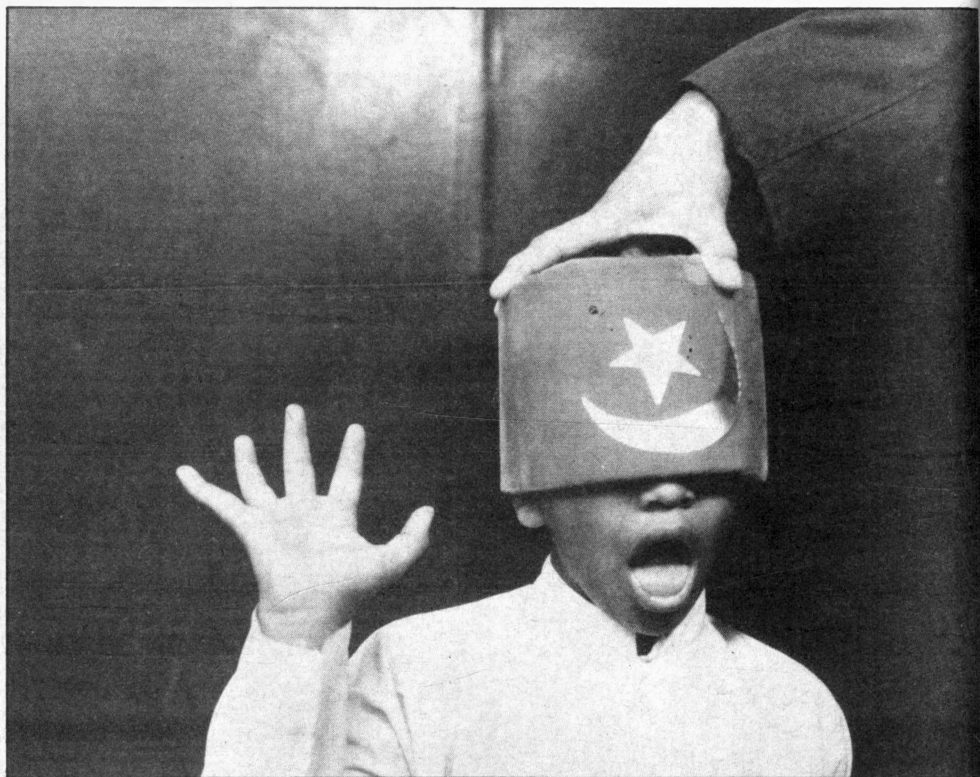
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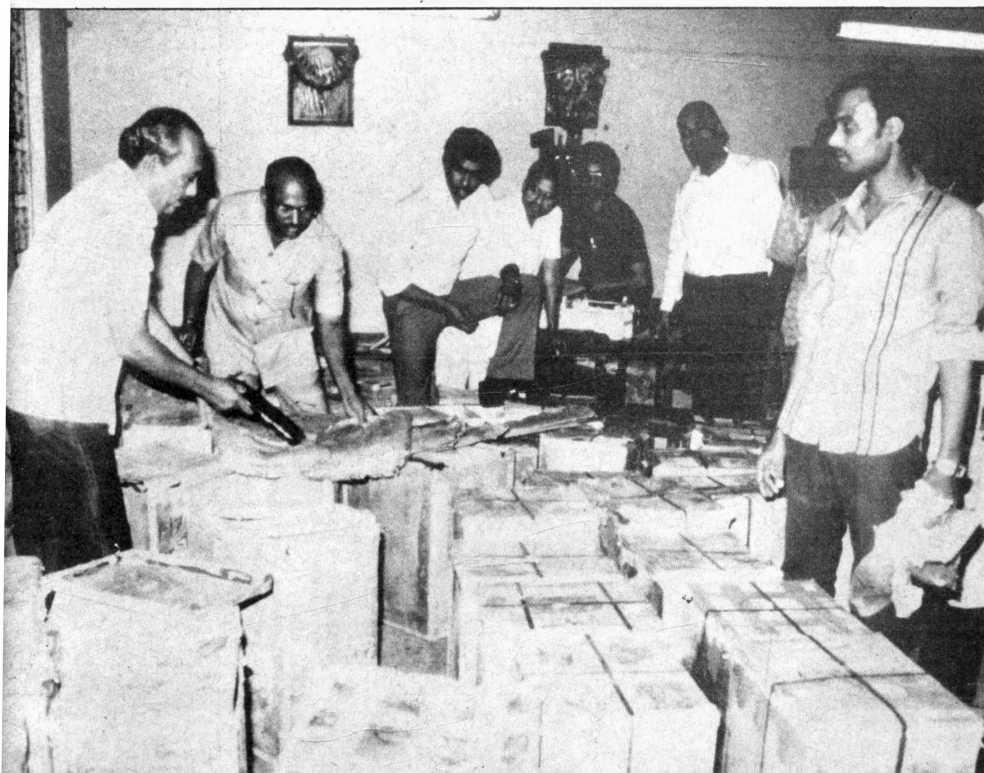
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THE ISLAMISATION GAMBIT

The recent announcements, made almost simultaneously, by Presidents Zia-ul-Haq and H M Ershad, of measures aimed at the 'Islamisation' of their respective countries, have provoked a veritable storm of protest and ill-informed criticism in India. The Indian response seems both exaggerated and discriminatory, Pakistan being singled out for censure despite Bangladesh's sharp break from its 'secular' record. Will the advent of fundamentalist regimes in our neighbourhood, have any security implications for India? Distinguished writer K S VENKATESWARAN analyses the motives and implications of the Islamisation plan.

ONLY THE incredibly naive would have been surprised by the reaction that the announcements made — almost simultaneously — by Presidents Zia-ul-Haq and H M Ershad, of measures aimed at "Islamisation" of their respective countries, provoked in India. Barring the odd exception, the entire body of comment on the issue has been a predictable mixture of feigned outrage and ill-informed criticism, couched in the near-hysterical tone that has become routine on such occasions.

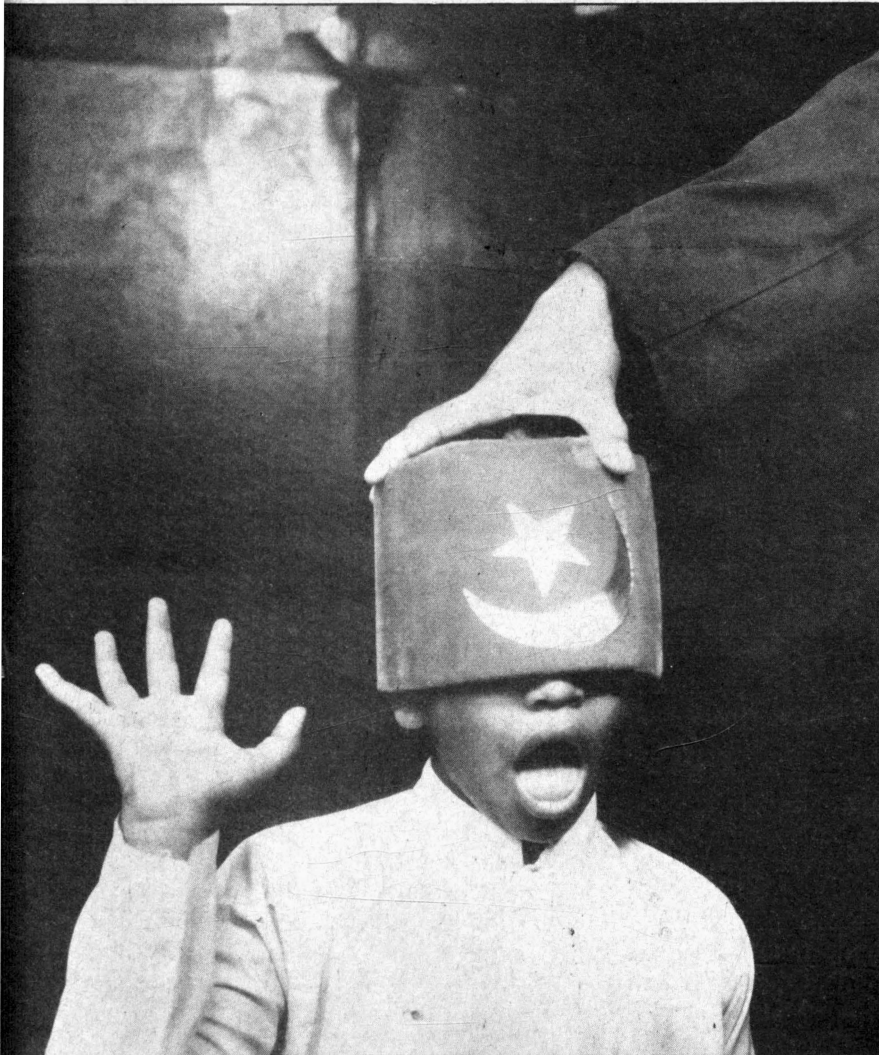
It hardly needs stating, of course, that there is little to commend, either in the measures themselves or in the timing and manner of their introduc-

tion by Zia and Ershad. From whatever specifics both those military strongmen have unfolded their respective plans, it is clear that the measures represent, in the words of *The Times* (London), "a force for social and economic backwardness." No less clear is the fact that considerations other than those officially proffered by the two men — not least of which is a growing concern for their own political survival — weighed with them in taking the actions they did.

Some of the measures are singularly outrageous indeed, and have the effect, if strictly enforced, of putting the clock back by a few centuries. These — the re-introduction of poly-

gamy and savage Islamic punishments like the amputation of limbs or stoning to death, to mention but a few — have deservedly come in for sharp criticism from all but the absurdly fanatical fringe of public opinion. (Even so, it needs to be remembered that, at least in the case of Pakistan, most, if not all these controversial features of Islamic faith, have been in theoretical existence for years although they have rarely been enforced — a point we shall return to later on in this discussion.)

The Islamisation plan can also be faulted, as it has rightly been, for its potential to serve as a collateral — and not a very honourable — purpose per-



sonally for both Zia and Ershad, vis-à-vis of excluding, in one fell swoop, their main rivals (Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan and Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh) from the political process in accordance with the Islamic injunction against the participation of women in politics. Indeed, the Islamic Council in Pakistan which drafted the Sharia Bill now sought to be enforced by Zia, has already recommended that no woman could lawfully become head of state in that country — a recommendation which, if it receives the *imprimatur* of approval from a Sharia court, could effectively dash any hope that Benazir Bhutto may entertain of becoming President

of Pakistan.

ODDLY ENOUGH, these aspects of the controversial proposals have hardly engaged the attention of their Indian critics; very little comment, in fact, has emerged on such specifics of the Islamisation plan as, for example, its effect on the status of women, or its impact on basic human rights. Little wonder, then, that the Indian criticism has a hollow ring to it and generally appears suspect.

For one thing, the Indian response is clearly discriminatory in that much of the ire that the issue of Islamisation has generated has been directed against Pakistan and its President.

This is, of course, all of a piece with our national obsession with that country, but it has the effect of grossly distorting our perspective on vital issues of national and global significance — a failing which could lead to consequences far more calamitous than is generally realised. Bangladesh and President Ershad, by contrast, have received far less critical notice, despite the fact that that country's sudden flirtation with Islamisation represents a sharp break from its relatively "secular" record.

The discriminatory approach is, of course, fuelled by another of our irrational obsessions: US-baiting. As on other issues concerning Pakistan, much critical comment has emerged in recent weeks suggesting American complicity in the Pakistani decision to go ahead with Islamisation. Even as sensible and otherwise level-headed a commentator as K R Malkani has opined, in a recent article in *The Indian Post*, that President Zia's recent moves draw their inspiration from Washington; Malkani goes so far as to assert that "the suppression of what little democracy Pakistan has, is due to the congruence of Pakistani and American military interests."

While there can be no denying the close relationship that exists between the US and Pakistan, it boggles the imagination to see, in every Pakistani move, the shadow of an American conspiracy. And, while countries — including the US — have been known on occasion to act irrationally, one wonders if Washington would have mooted, or even encouraged, the idea of Pakistan embracing "pure" Koranic Islam, given recent American experience with Islamic fundamentalism. (This theory, of course, falls by the wayside when applied to Bangladesh, though the ingenuity of our US-baiters can still be expected to come up with some hypothesis to suggest the contrary!)

NOR DOES THE discriminatory approach of the Indian critics end there. It reveals itself more starkly if a com-

COVER STORY

parison is made with our attitudes towards those other states where Islamic fundamentalism is an accepted fact of life, and where the most regressive social and economic policies are consequently followed. How often, for example, has one come across so much as a whimper of protest in the Indian media regarding Islamic excesses in any of the Arab countries? Can one even remember an instance when the Indian government has forcefully complained against the infliction of barbaric Islamic punishments for crimes allegedly committed by its own nationals living in those countries? With Pakistan, of course, it is a different matter altogether.

The Indian response also suffers from the vice of hypocrisy. In the first place, it is pertinent to ask, unpalatable though the question might be, as to how justified the Indian criticism — and the accompanying sermonising — on Islamisation in Pakistan and Bangladesh is, considering the fact that, despite the passage of 40 years since Independence, we ourselves have not been able to effectively come to grips with our dominant domestic communal problem. Our sensitivity to criticism on this score needs no elaboration: one has only to recall the stridency with which even a stray remark from, say, Pakistan on Indian Muslims is invariably greeted.

Secondly, while it is all very well to accuse Presidents Zia and Ershad of using Islamisation as a ploy to achieve their selfish political ends — and goodness knows, those worthy gentlemen are far from blameless on this score — such an accusation sounds hollow when it emanates from the Indian establishment and its supporters. Can anyone seriously deny that our own politicians have, times without number, in season and out, played the communal card in the most cynical fashion, with a view merely to gaining electoral or other petty political advantages? Witness the disgraceful manner in which the Rajiv Gandhi administration handled the situation arising out of the Supreme Court



President Zia-ul-Haq: return to fundamentalism.

judgement in the Shah Bano case. How many of those in the vanguard today — of the breast-beating over the Islamisation of Pakistan and Bangladesh — came out forcefully and unequivocally enough against the government's genuflection on the issue? Or take the more recent example of the tactics that even as "principled" a politician as V P Singh adopted to woo Muslim voters in Allahabad. Aren't these just as reprehensible as the stratagems employed by Zia and Ershad to stay in power?

A SIMILAR HYPOCRISY pervades the Indian reaction to President Zia's related decision to dismiss his Prime Minister and dissolve the provincial assemblies. Commenting on this development, one writer in *The Indian Post* thundered that Zia's "contempt for democracy could not have been more evident." Maybe. But what about the innumerable occasions when Mrs Indira Gandhi or her son have, no less cynically, gone about toppling duly-elected governments in

the states and imposing Central rule merely because it suited them politically to do so? And not always have they done it even half as openly as President Zia did recently. (Witness the sordid drama in Andhra Pradesh not so long ago, which led to the dismissal, under bizarre circumstances, of the government headed by N T Rama Rao — an action whose complete lack of justification was matched only by its contemptuous disregard of basic constitutional norms.)

It is, of course, all of a piece with such hypocrisy that Rajiv Gandhi is reported to have expressed his grave concern over Islamic fundamentalism in the context of the happenings in neighbouring Afghanistan — a concern that he is bound to use with dramatic effect while reacting to the Islamisation moves in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In his recent interview to the *New York Times*, Mr Gandhi is quoted as saying that if the Mujahideens succeed in forming a government in Kabul after the Soviet withdrawal, it would fuel Islamic fundamentalism

"that", in turn, "would destabilise the region." Leaving aside for the moment the motives that impelled Mr Gandhi to make that statement (he was echoing Moscow's line on the need to prop up the infamous Najibullah regime), one cannot but be struck by his sudden and touching concern over the dangers of Islamic fundamentalism. Could it be a mere coincidence that he has expressed no such concern so far with regard to the happenings in Iran, for example?

Not surprisingly, fears about Islamic fundamentalism and its effects on the political situation in the sub-continent have been raised repeatedly by non-partisan commentators as well. While it would be idle to pretend that the advent of fundamentalist regimes in our neighbourhood cannot have any security implications for India, it would at the same time be unduly alarmist to imagine that Pakistan would become another Iran overnight. As *The Times* pertinently points out, the recent Islamisation measures are "unlikely to herald the rapid move of Pakistan towards something like Iran or Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani population is far less homogenous. Apart from a Shia minority of some 20 per cent, it is predominantly Sunni — and divided into numerous schools and sects. Many popular religious practices are far removed from "pure" Koranic Islam. Most Pakistanis take their religion fairly lightly. Turn-out for the President's 1984 referendum on Islamisation was low."

Even so, one can be certain that the happenings in Pakistan and Bangladesh will not go unexploited domestically by those self-serving politicians who masquerade as leaders of the Muslim community in this country. If their past behaviour is anything to go by, these "leaders" can be relied upon to play up the developments in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and to redouble their efforts at whipping up fundamentalist sentiments amongst their gullible followers. Their success over the years in blocking any attempts at reform of Muslim personal

law is all too familiar.

The singularly sad aspect of the situation is the ease with which such self-seeking careerists have been able continuously to sway the Muslim masses. Forty years of a morally bankrupt leadership which has done little either to improve his lot or to facilitate his integration into the national mainstream should, one would have thought, have sufficed to make the average Muslim realise the enormity of the fraud that has been played on him. No such luck. It is this propensity to be taken in by the transparently sophistical rabble rousing of a time-serving leadership that should alert all right-thinking Indians to the dangers that recent developments in our neighbourhood pose to the domestic communal situation.

WHAT ARE THE possible effects that the Islamisation moves in Pakistan and Bangladesh might have on the Muslim community in India? While it would be premature to speculate on the long-term effects, there can be little doubt that the months to come will witness a new vigour, at least on the part of the more vocal sections of the community, in their periodic attempts at airing their grievances, both real and imagined. As Girilal Jain observes in a recent commentary on the subject, "The tendency to look backwards, already well-entrenched (among the Indian Muslims), is sure to be reinforced."

This can lead to some worrisome problems, given the present state of communal relations. There will be a queering of the pitch, for example, in any discussion on the Babri Masjid — Ram Janmabhoomi issue or on the more recent controversy relating to contraception, to take but two examples. The activities of the Students Islamic Movement of India (confined at present largely to Bombay) and similar fundamentalist groups can be expected to acquire a new stridency, with consequences that can only be disastrous.

At the same time, given the fact



Bangladesh President H M Ershad.

that the entire minorities' question has been caught inextricably in the vortex of Indo-Pak relations, the developments in Pakistan (and, to a lesser extent, Bangladesh) would, as likely as not, lead to a sense of insecurity amongst the local Muslim community. For years on end the Hindu fundamentalists have, rightly or wrongly, accused Indian Muslims of harbouring extra-territorial loyalties, and this tendency cannot but be accentuated by the Islamisation moves. The result will be an inevitable escalation of tension between the two communities — a process that can be expected to be catalysed by the irresponsible "leaders" on both sides.

And yet, the developments, especially in Pakistan, offer as good an opportunity as any for a significant and lasting solution to our minorities' problem, or at any rate, for a marked improvement in Hindu-Muslim relations in this country. If only an enlightened, non-partisan leadership emerges to bring home to the Indian Muslim the strangulating effect that the obscurantist policies pursued by Zia (and Ershad) are bound, sooner or later, to have on his brethren across the border, the Indian Muslim could be made to realise how fortunate he is in enjoying the freedom that he

DISCRIMINATING AGAINST WOMEN

PAKISTAN'S FLIRTATION with Islamisation began, in a real sense, in 1978 when President Zia-ul-Haq established Shariat benches in the country's civil courts to determine whether laws were repugnant to the injunctions of Islam. This was followed in 1979 by the introduction of four *Haddood* Ordinances which redefined the country's criminal laws to bring them in accordance with Islamic prescriptions. The President also, for good measure, introduced an Order in 1984 which sought to amend the law of evidence in a significant way. Though this "limited" experiment in Islamisation was hardly accompanied by the harshness noticeable in some of the other Islamic regimes, it did, nevertheless, have a telling effect on freedom and the rule of law in that country, as a recent report of the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists points out.

Conceived initially as adjuncts to each of the four High Courts and to the Supreme Court of Pakistan, the Shariat benches set up by Zia soon underwent radical changes in constitution and function, with the result that by 1980 "a separate and distinct court structure was established to operate in a parallel way to the existing judicial system." The practical effect of this development has been that "a court structure has been created during martial law times, with far-reaching jurisdiction, by a President who has retained the power to appoint or modify the term of all its members who must be Muslim; who has introduced legally unqualified religious leaders to sit as judges; has placed restrictions on legal practitioners who may appear before the court; has permitted legally unqualified persons to represent parties; and who has imbued the decisions of the court with a status greater than that of the High Courts and all subordinate courts, which in turn are bound by



those decisions."

A typical example of the manner in which the government has interfered with the independence of even the Shariat courts is provided by the case of *Hazoor Bakhsh vs Federation of Pakistan* decided in 1981. In this case, the Federal Shariat Court ruled that the imposition of *rajm* (sentence of death by stoning) was against the injunctions of Islam and that the infliction of 100 stripes alone constitute *hadd* (the punishment prescribed in the Quran). "The government lodged an appeal with the Shariat Bench of the Supreme Court. Before the appeal was heard, an amendment was passed to the Constitution allowing the Federal Shariat Court to review its own decision. The bench of the Federal Shariat Court was reconstituted; the Chairman of the (court), a former

judge, was removed, a new Chief Justice was appointed and two *ulema* sat on the bench. On review, the sentence of death by stoning was upheld."

The experience with the *Haddood* Ordinances has not been any happier. Both the harshness of the punishments prescribed under them and their patently discriminatory character have come in for sharp criticism. Unlike in conventional Islamic systems, both types of punishment for Islamic crimes, viz *hadd* (a punishment, the measure of which has been definitely fixed in the Quran and Sunnah) and *tazir* (a punishment other than *hadd*, the measure and form of which, under general Islamic jurisprudence, is left to the discretion of the court), have been so rigidly defined under the Ordinances as to leave no room for judicial discretion.

The Offences Against Property (Enforcement of *Haddood*) Ordinance, 1979, makes theft of property valued at 4.75 grammes of gold or more, punishable with amputation of the right hand, in the case of a first offence; amputation of the left foot, in the case of a second offence; and imprisonment for life, in the case of a third offence.

The Prohibition (Enforcement of *Haddood*) Order, 1979, which makes it an Islamic offence for Muslims to drink or possess liquor, prescribes a *hadd* punishment of whipping of 80 stripes and a *tazir* punishment of imprisonment upto three years and whipping not exceeding 30 stripes, or both.

THE OFFENCE OF ZINA (Enforcement of *Hadd*) Ordinance, 1979, deals with sexual offences. It defines *zina* as willful sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not validly married to each other (thus making adultery and fornication by single and married adults alike, as also rape, Islamic offences), and prescribes a *hadd* punishment of death by stoning (now reduced in practice to whipping of 100 stripes) for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

The Offence of Qazf (Enforcement of *Haddood*) Ordinance, 1979, makes it an offence to falsely accuse a virtuous man or woman of *zina*, and prescribes a *hadd* punishment of whipping of 80 stripes and a *tazir* punishment of imprisonment upto two years and whipping of upto 40 stripes, coupled with a fine. This Ordinance contains a patently discriminatory element as well: When a wife is accused of adultery by her husband she must deny the accusation on oath. If she denies the accusation, the marriage is dissolved by the court and no appeal lies from the court's order. If the wife refuses to deny the accusation on oath, she is imprisoned until she agrees to follow the statutory procedure of denial or until she accepts the husband's accusation as true. If she accepts the accusation

as true, she is liable to the *hadd* punishment for adultery. Curiously enough, there is no corresponding provision for a wife to accuse her husband of adultery and obtain a divorce or to have the *hadd* punishment for adultery imposed on the husband under this Ordinance.

The discriminatory character of these laws, especially on women, has been exacerbated by the evidentiary requirements prescribed under the Shariat. Accordingly, before the liability for *hadd* is incurred for the offences of theft, *qazf* or drinking, two Muslim adult *male* witnesses who are "truthful persons and abstain from major sins" must give eyewitness evidence, or the accused must make a confession. For the offences of adultery, fornication or rape, *four* similar adult Muslim *male* witnesses must give evidence as eyewitnesses to the act of penetration necessary for the offence. For all the offences (except drinking), if the accused is a non-Muslim, the eyewitnesses may be non-Muslim. All these exclude the possibility of the evidence of any number of women who witness the commission of any of the above offences being taken by the court, at least for the purposes of awarding *hadd* punishments.

AS IF THE discriminatory effect of these provisions were not enough, President Zia in 1984 introduced yet another law, the *Qanun-e-Shahadat* (Law of Evidence) Order which provided *inter alia* that "in matters pertaining to financial or future obligations, if reduced to writing, the instrument shall be attested by two men, or one man and two women, so that one may remind the other, if necessary, and evidence shall be led accordingly." Based ostensibly on a controversial Quranic verse which takes a rather dim view of a woman's memory power, this provision has been roundly condemned, especially by women's organisations. Rashida Patel, a leading lawyer, has demonstrated the absurd effect it has on women professionals: "By psuedo-

Islamisation, under the *Qanun-e-Shahadat* Order 1984, a woman lawyer preparing a document, cannot attest it as a full human-being, she has to call the illiterate peon to thumb impress the attestation. Women lawyers as well as forward-looking and enlightened men and women are fighting against the orthodox stance of pushing the women of Pakistan backwards."

The inequity and arbitrariness of these measures is best brought out in a number of decided cases. In *Jehan Mina vs The State*, for instance, an orphaned 13-year old girl was doing domestic work for her aunt when she was raped by her uncle and his son. She became pregnant, and some months after the offence told her relatives. She was beaten by them and they threatened to kill her, but one of the uncles protected her and filed a complaint of rape. The trial court disbelieved the girl and acquitted the two accused on the grounds that the statement of the complainant was not enough to justify a conviction and that the complainant did not disclose the offence at the time of commission. The girl was, however, convicted of *zina* (fornication) and received the *hadd* punishment of whipping of 100 stripes. On appeal, the Federal Shariat Court changed the sentence to three years rigorous imprisonment plus 10 stripes, "in view of her tender age and also on account of the fact that her father was dead and her mother had contracted another marriage and she was, therefore, a girl who lacked the benefit of parental affection. . ."

In the face of such a record, the justification proffered by apologists of the government that Islamic punishments serve a deterrent purpose, sounds hollow. As Rashida Patel explains: "The so-called Islamisation of criminal laws in Pakistan has not resulted in deterring crime nor has it led to an increase in the respect for, and safety of, women. Its contribution to human rights and dignity has been negative."

COVER STORY

does as a citizen of this country, the occasional "discrimination" notwithstanding. This could, in turn, lead to a better appreciation on his part, of the need to shed both his inhibitions and his passivity, and to make a genuine effort at integrating with the national mainstream. One looks in vain, alas, for such a leadership to emerge.

BESIDES, one would do well to remember, as was noted, that many of the measures announced by Zia recently have been part of Pakistani law for years (though seldom enforced) and that Islamisation, in any case, is not a new phenomenon. Apart from the constitutional injunction — contained in Article 31 of the 1973 Constitution — ordaining that the State shall take steps to enable the Muslims of Pakistan to order their lives in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam, the Shariat Court structure (which has been the most prominent feature of Zia's recent Ordinance) has been in existence, too, for a long time. Indeed, the much-publicised move conferring powers on the high courts to declare any law incompatible with the Sharia, is a mere re-introduction (in a modified form) of the provisions of an earlier (1978) Order which provided for the establishment of a Shariat Bench in each of the high courts and a Shariat Appellate Bench in the Supreme Court. These benches were empowered, on a simple petition by any citizen, "to examine and decide whether any law was repugnant to the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Quran and Sunnah" — a power which was subsequently transferred to the Federal Shariat Court created by a 1980 constitutional amendment. More pertinently, the entire body of measures contained in Zia's latest Ordinance itself, has been on public view, as it were, for a good two years now, being part of the Constitution (9th Amendment) Bill which had been pending before the National Assembly since 1986.



Benazir Bhutto: ousted from politics?

The situation in Bangladesh is, of course, slightly different. For a country with a relatively "secular" record, the Islamisation move has come in as a bit of a surprise. There was nothing either in the background to the 1971 revolution that gave birth to the country or in its immediate aftermath which supported the idea of Islamisation. Quite the contrary. As Samar Guha, former MP, points out, "the fundamental lesson of the Bangladesh revolution is how the *Bangla bhasa andolan* evolved into the concept of a homogenous cultural nationalism of the Bengali-speaking people of East Pakistan and how naturally and spontaneously an Islamic state was discarded to enshrine the ideal of secular nationalism in the heart (or hearts) of the people of independent Bangladesh."

What is more, the draftsmen of Bangladesh's first Constitution categorically rejected the idea of Islam as state religion and expressly wrote in secularism as one of the four fundamental principles on which the emerging polity was to be based (the other three being nationalism, democracy and socialism). It was not until 1977 that a change (albeit one not considered particularly significant at the time) was brought about by General

Zia-ur-Rehman — who had seized power in 1975 and installed himself as President — which, for the first time, introduced an Islamic element into the Constitution. Zia-ur-Rehman's amendment did away with the word 'secularism' and stated instead that "the high ideals of absolute trust and faith would remain in the Almighty Allah." For good measure, it also added the customary Islamic incantation — *Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* ("in the name of Allah, the Merciful") — in the preambular part of the document. (It is ironic, incidentally, that Zia-ur-Rehman's widow, Begum Khaleda Zia — presently one of the two leading Opposition spokespersons in the country — should be in the forefront of the attack against the Islamisation move whose seeds, in a sense, were sown by her own husband a decade ago.)

President Ershad's action has, therefore, rightly been seen as a betrayal of the *raison d'être* for the Bangladesh revolution — something which must, alas, mean little to Ershad personally, since far from being an active participant in the revolution, he was at the time serving as an officer in (West) Pakistan under General Yahya Khan.

However that may be, what is of greater relevance to us is the effect that Ershad's measures are likely to have on India. Few will deny that, unlike in the case of Pakistan, these effects will go beyond merely causing some flutter among Indian Muslims. Given the longstanding problem of illegal migration of large numbers of Bangladeshis into border states like Assam, Meghalaya, etc (a phenomenon not confined to periods of strife), it is very unlikely that the Islamisation measures will not exacerbate it. As Mohan Ram explains in an article in *The Indian Post*, "A theocratic state means religious conflict and a second-class status for non-Muslims. The problem will translate itself into a new influx of the Hindu Bengalis into Assam, Tripura, West Bengal and Meghalaya which have

borders with Bangladesh." The impact this will have on the communal situation in those states hardly needs elaboration.

The only redeeming feature about the situation in Bangladesh is the widespread opposition that Ershad's measures have evoked from diverse quarters. Most of the professional bodies have condemned the move, arguing, curiously enough, that in a country which has a Muslim population of over 100 million (the second largest in the world after Indonesia), there was no need to formally declare Islam the state religion. Even the fundamentalist *Jamaat-e-Islami* has come out publicly against the move, terming it a hoax and "a blatant attempt to make Islam controversial." If in spite of this Ershad has been able to go ahead with his plans, it is largely due to the lack of any effective resistance from the political Opposition (notably Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia) who have, for all their platform rhetoric, shown little inclination or ability to sink their differences and put up a united front.

Ironically enough, even as governments in countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh feel the necessity of resorting to measures of the kind proposed by Presidents Zia and Ershad, some of their counterparts in the Arab world find themselves engaged in actually combating the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. Here, of course, there is a reversal of roles. Accustomed to years of relative affluence, the rulers of these countries have been subjected to strong Westernising influences which have gradually distanced them from the more obscurantist aspects of Islamic society, while a section of the population, imbued with strong religious fervour, seeks to reassert fundamentalist values. Turkey provides a classic example. As J F Khergamwala of *The Hindu* points out in a recent despatch, "Kemal Ataturk's dream of separating religion from politics and Westernising dressing habits is under serious challenge in Ankara, resulting in a



Sheikh Hasina Wajid: vocal protest.

conflict between the State and its subjects. Recently, a 19-year old woman student was turned out of class at Izmir University because she had her head and face covered by a form of turban. The Supreme Court in Ankara ruled that the disciplinary committee of the University was right, but women students throughout the nation's 24 universities are insisting on their right to wear the traditional scarf." (Contrast the situation with that in Iran, for example, where women who are seen in public without their head scarves on are sent to "correctional institutions.")

Such popular movements have, naturally, given the concerned regimes cause for worry. In the face of increasing fundamentalist militancy, these regimes have, each in their own way, sought to neutralise the effect of such militancy. Explains Khergamwala: "Saudi Arabia, for example, has tripled the number of mosques in one decade and has more on board. Both Saudi Arabia and Libya spend vast amounts in aid to countries to build mosques, sometimes as a precondition for other forms of economic assistance. Kuwait experimented with limited forms of parliamen-

tary democracy. . ." No less important, Riyadh has encouraged an increase in the annual inflow of *hajis* to Mecca, one of the most popular ways of demonstrating its allegiance to the Islamic ideal.

Given these widely-differing situations, it would be safe to say that fears about a tidal wave of Islamic fundamentalism engulfing our part of the world are grossly exaggerated. For one thing, the Islamic world is not a homogenous entity. Apart from the differences in the political complexion of constituent countries — some of them so sharp as to be virtually irreconcilable with one another — the adherents of Islam are divided into so many schools and sects, that agreement between them on a common body of Islamic laws and practices is almost impossible. For another, the internal contradictions within the Islamic world itself are too glaring to be ignored. Khergamwala cites a telling example: "Shia-majority Bahrain, claimed by Shia-controlled Tehran as an Iranian province, and located barely 20 minutes' drive from Saudi Arabia's Shia-majority eastern province, as yet has no law against women jogging in shorts — in sharp contrast to Saudi Arabia where they are not allowed to drive or venture out unaccompanied by a close relative defined by law."

RETURNING to the developments in our neighbourhood, whatever the merits of the measures initiated by Presidents Zia and Ershad, there are sound reasons why the outside world cannot remain indifferent to happenings in those two countries. If for no other reason, the impact those measures are likely to have on the already none-too-happy human rights situation there makes critical comment from outside imperative. It needs to be remembered, though, that if such comment has to have any legitimacy, it must emanate from sources that have established a sturdy reputation for being unbiased and free from the vice of hypocrisy. ♦

DEFENCE

THE TIME SEEMS TO have come for us to re-design all our arrangements for civilian support to the armed forces; this includes policing the borders, because our defence strategy seems to have undergone a slow and imperceptible change. Our defence strategy was originally devised for, and conditioned by, the fighting in Kashmir in 1947, the Chinese episode in 1962, the infiltration into Kashmir followed by hostilities in 1965, and lastly, the fighting in the Bangladesh War of 1971 (for

which we deemed Pakistan an aggressor when it was India who supported the Bengalis and provoked Yahya Khan into attacking us). Basically our strategy has been defensive, so defensive, in fact, that for years we subscribed to the theory that not an inch of our territory must be lost because it may be difficult to recapture it. In a vague sort of way this policy changed in the Bangladesh War due to changed conditions in Pakistan, more specifically, Pakistan's aggressive stance on East Pakistan. Today, ac-

ceptance of the old doctrine would probably be found only among senior officers giving standard lectures at training institutions.

Our defence strategy has so far been concentrated on defending Jammu & Kashmir, and the road leading to it; by sitting on hill tops and protecting every inch of our land. We have now transferred the same thinking to the Northern and Eastern borders. It is an expensive arrangement which deprives us of the option of the hard blow, which can only be

ON GUARD



From Kabalis invading Kashmir, to our drive into East Pakistan and the liberation of Dhaka, to dealing with insurgency in Sri Lanka, the Indian armed forces have come a long way, particularly in the realm of strategic defence concepts. But, it is now time for us to re-design our defence strategy, says noted writer K F RUSTAMJI, advocating a good working relationship between the army, police and paramilitary forces, and the redefining of our borders.



delivered if we climb down, take up concentrated positions, and plan on driving into any area with the maximum strength possible. Pakistan does not seem to have committed as much strength to the border as we have. They have always relied more on Robert Solow's doctrine of technical change being the determining factor, in war as in economics. The main reason that has made this possible in Pakistan is the easy availability of new weapons and instruments of war from the USA. (We have tried the same

method from other sources.)

Experts say that our strategy has already undergone a change. In a sense, the thinking of younger officers of all the services is different today. But there has been no change in our deployment. The army is still scattered in penny packets, sitting on the mountains, awaiting an attack, protecting every inch of the ground; which is not even a sound defensive policy, let alone an aggressive, ambitious one. One retired officer whom I spoke to seemed to attribute our

strategy not only to being conditioned by previous wars, but by the fact that most of our senior officers are wary of change: "They distrust politicians who they feel would not understand the concept of an offensive withdrawal. The loss of territory to us, living in an over-crowded country, even if it is barren ice mountains, would be unacceptable politically. But more than that, most of our officers think in a small way. They are used to brigade attacks only. It is only now that our strategy seems to be



DEFENCE

changing (for instance, with Operation Brass Tacks), but deployment has not changed yet because we never needed to think of economy. We can just raise more units. No need for concentration."

ANOTHER REASON could be the lack of faith in the paramilitary units and in their ability to hold the posts against regular army attacks. In the 1971 war, the Border Security Force (BSF) not only resisted the attacks of the Pakistani army, but captured some posts held by the army, both in the East and the West. Unless there is an attempt both on the part of the army and the police to improve matters, a good working arrangement and co-operation between the two will always be forced. The army makes scant efforts to build confidence in the police and paramilitary units. Their sole aim appears to be to secure complete control over as many police units as possible. On the police side, they think the army considers them inferior, and wants to give them the worst duties. A lot has to be done to devise a proper working arrangement, and a beginning can be made if a police member is inducted into the Chief of Staff's Committee. Eventually we will have to appoint a Chief of Defence Forces, and he will be accepted as Supremo by all, including the civilian sector of the police, paramilitary and home guards, provided he understands how to exercise control over such units.

If we are to follow new strategic concepts, it will be crucial to redefine arrangements of the border — which are untidy except for the BSF borders — in the proper way. The BSF looks after the Indo-Pakistan border, the Bangladesh border and part of the Burma border. Small sections of the police force are stretched out over the Northern border but there is no well-knit border force in the Northern and Eastern areas. Time and again, successive Chiefs of Army Staff have suggested a rearrangement, but each time a plan has been devised, it has been



BSF jawans man the border picket at Amritsar.

dropped on grounds which reflect personal preferences.

A good border security arrangement would have to be based on the following:

1. The BSF to look after the Pakistan and Bangladesh borders under their own operational command, except in certain exceptional sectors.
2. All the units of the Northern areas to be amalgamated with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and a border force created for the whole of the Northern border under the operational control of the army.
3. All the units on the Burma border to be amalgamated with the Assam Rifles to constitute the third border force under its own operational control.
4. All three border forces to be integrated separately in the Home Ministry.

The fourth Border Force (the Coast Guard) should be transferred from Defence to the Home Ministry and suitably expanded for its protective role.

Any attempt at introducing new arrangements for the border forces, must necessarily take into account, earlier experiences of war operations.

In a sense therefore, our past military strategies — particularly those used in our conflicts with Pakistan — have a direct bearing on future plans for defence arrangements.

PAKISTAN HAS been India's *bête noire* as far as military manoeuvres are concerned, and with good reason. The planning of military operations by the top brass of the Pakistani army has been marked by boldness, the use of the surprise element, and the expectation of a quick result, followed by immediate foreign intervention to separate the adversaries. In every campaign the unexpected has been the hallmark of their planning. An invasion plan was prepared sometime in August/September 1947 by Major General Akbar Khan of the 6/13 Royal Frontier Force Rifles (under the code name TARIQ). It was an extremely good plan — simple, bold and unorthodox. The Kabalis (tribesmen of the hilly border between the Northwest Frontier and Afghanistan) were to be pushed into Kashmir (leavened with some regular troops and the redoubtable Tochi and South Waziristan Scouts) to brush aside the opposition of the state forces, move in lorries to Srinagar, and capture the airfield and the radio station. After

that, presumably, Pakistan planned to eject the tribals and announce the liberation of the state.

The plan was defeated by the courage of a few brave officers of the Maharaja's army who held up the Kabis at Uri and blew up the bridge; by Sheikh Abdullah and the Kashmiris who stood firm even when communal riots raged all over; by the valiant efforts of the army and airforce; and last, but not the least, by the 1,000 Dakotas provided by the civil airlines that made repeated sorties to a small churned-up airfield in Srinagar to ferry troops and supplies. The driving force behind the effort was Pandit Nehru, his cabinet and Parliament. Looking back, we can say without hesitation that it was India's finest hour.

The Chinese debacle (1962) gave the Pakistani generals the idea that the Indian army was not capable of resisting an imaginative assault on Kashmir. We expected an invasion from Pakistan, but were confident that it would be a conventional one. What we failed to see was that Pakistani officers had been trained in intelligence schools all over the world and were imbued with new ideas. We were so sure we under-

stood their strategy that we built hill-top fortresses on the Jammu and Kashmir border, presuming that an attempt on Kashmir would be made in the form of frontal attacks.

In 1965, Pakistan conceived another daring and imaginative plan, code-named Operation Gibraltar. The central idea was to avoid a direct attack on the army posts encircling Jammu and Kashmir, and to filter through into the interior, leaving the army behind. About 3,000 or so infiltrators were sent into Kashmir. It was presumed that there would be an uprising in the state, and Pakistan would be able to capture the radio station on Id day, and announce annexation.

Once again, the foremost credit for defeating the plan must be given to the people of Kashmir, and to the leadership of the state under Sadiq and D P Dhar, who rose to the occasion with courage and resourcefulness. The infiltrators had reached Srinagar by August 6, and there was a need to immediately increase the availability of forces in Srinagar, since it was difficult to leave any border post undefended (in order to transfer those troops to relieve Srinagar). L P Singh in the Home Ministry organised hun-

dreds of sorties by aircraft, to bring police units from all over India into the besieged capital of Kashmir. The police units and the army then beat back the infiltrators. It was in the testing-time of the 1965 war, which followed the infiltration, that the BSF, as conceived by L P Singh and General Chaudhary after the invasion of Kutch in 1964, was knocked into a visible shape.

ALONG WITH THE two wars with Pakistan, India had to face the totally unnecessary Chinese episode. Historians will probably blame both sides for what was a futile conflict. And perhaps the greater blame could be laid on us, on our intelligence, on our complete lack of information of the Chinese and their methods, and on our own faulty generalship and provocative actions.

However, in any assessment of defence strategy, one must give the defence forces credit for a high degree of study, discussion and learning of lessons. We have probably inherited that from the British officers. All training institutions of the defence forces specialise in a high degree of study of all operations, both on our borders and outside. These lessons of conflict are not in vain. The search for new weapons and new strategies continues every minute. For instance, in the 1965 war, the Navy emerged as a formidable assault weapon. The manner in which our boats raided Karachi and pounded the place for hours, will remain an object lesson of offensive tactics for years to come.

PERHAPS IT WAS the overwhelming lesson we learnt in the Kashmir war — the help and co-operation from the people — that was unconsciously translated into our defence plans when we went to the assistance of the Bengalis in 1971. The grounds for war were prepared months ahead by the Mukti Bahini and the BSF, Generals Osmany and Zia-ul-Rehman and others. Finally, when Yahya Khan's airforce bombed Pathankot in December, it gave us the vital excuse we were



Constant surveillance: border patrolling in the Punjab.

looking for. Field Marshal Manekshaw, General Arora and other generals played their part well and richly deserved the credit they got. One general however — Lt Gen Sagat Singh — who made the breakthrough for us at Fenny and who opened the gates to Dhaka, was never given his due. It was *his* strategy that prevented the Pakistanis from holding out on the river line. They could have done this for months if we had not broken in, and this would have enabled external pressure to be exercised on us.

From Kabalis invading India in Kashmir to our drive into East Pakistan and the liberation of Dhaka, to the experience of dealing with hostile groups in Sri Lanka, the Indian armed forces have come a long way, particularly in the realm of strategic defence concepts. Their sophistication and scientific inputs have been notable. Defence on all sides has improved so much that to venture into even one kilometre on either side of the Indo-Pak border, except in the desert, is, today, hardly an easy task.

THE FIRST LESSON, and probably the most important one, that can be learnt from all our previous hostilities, is that we have to guard against not only what has happened, but against the unexpected, the sudden, and the unfamiliar. This means uncommitted reserves, and the best way of utilising the large reservoir of manpower in the police, paramilitary and home guards is to make sure that, from the beginning, the bond between the armed forces and these units is well-established. At present there have been no attempts to familiarise one with the other.

The second lesson, which is clear to any civilian who studies the conduct of our military operations — a lesson which is, however, not readily accepted by military officers — is the vital role that civilian support plays. Whenever the people (of the besieged state) helped, as in Kashmir or Bangladesh, the going was easy, even triumphant. This is the real asset of a de-

mocratic army and must never be lost. And it is due to this will and purpose of millions of people, that the Indian army can accomplish far more than any other army can, irrespective of strength or resources.

The third lesson is that despite all the publicity and the fear that exists in our country regarding the Pakistani army, it is the mistakes of the Pakistani generals that have helped us the most. We have only to look at their misadventures and failures in Kashmir, in Khemkaran, in Bangladesh and several other places, to conclude that the leadership of the Pakistani army is rather over-rated: probably blunted by years of ruling a difficult country. Perhaps *our* leadership also, seems weakened by the fact of being controlled by civilians. But what has been consistently overlooked is the enormous superiority in resources that we possess. And finally, perhaps India's obsession with Pakistan and vice versa, adds to the vitality and vigour of both the armed forces.

The police, the paramilitary forces and the home guards will, I am sure, be included from the start, in any future plan of preparedness. True, the police and paramilitary forces were not part of India's defence of the infiltration of Kashmir in 1965, but became part of it when Srinagar was in danger. In Rajasthan, during the same conflict, the police helped to eject Pakistani forces that had entered the desert on our side. They were again not part of the Chinese episode in 1962, but they held the fort in Nagaland for 90 days. The BSF was very much in the forefront in 1971, both in the East and West — in fact, the largest captures of virtually undefended territory in Sind, were made by the BSF under army command.

BORDER SECURITY, thus, does not mean only the positioning of men on the border. Although the ability to hold the border firmly has to be built up against all forces, even in the case of an armoured attack. The notion that border forces can be moved away

and the army put into these positions in the possibility of an attack, is an illusory and impractical one, and has never been put into operation. The border force must be prepared to face the attacks of any enemy formation. But preparedness does not mean only preparing good border defences. It means preparing for para drops which will be done more often in future, it means helping forces to hold less defended areas, the ability to move inside in clandestine operation, the ability to organise peoples' resistance when required, and, above all, to provide the reserves that are required for guards, escorts and for any unforeseen occasion.

If the police and paramilitary units are included in the plan of operations in a rational way, the strength of the Indian armed forces would be truly formidable. But so would their responsibilities, which include a larger border, difficult areas on sea and land, oil platforms, distant islands and areas which are totally inaccessible. If the cause is just, and the orchestration of the war effort good, the defence forces of the country could be welded into a remarkable instrument of war.

We have built up a defence apparatus that will keep the nation safe from outside attack for a hundred years. We *had* to give it priority. But have we, in the process of building up our defences, weakened the interior? It is clear that the money spent on defence has been cut from the wages of the poor, from their food, their houses, their factories. It is *they* who have contributed to the building up of the armed forces. A dictatorship may need massive forces, but democracy needs people whose basic needs have been met. I hope that all the armed forces — police, paramilitary and the home guards — will remember that they were given the first priority, and their aim, therefore, should be to see how economies can be achieved, and the quality of life steadily improved for those who have made the biggest sacrifices, and are consequently, their masters. ♦

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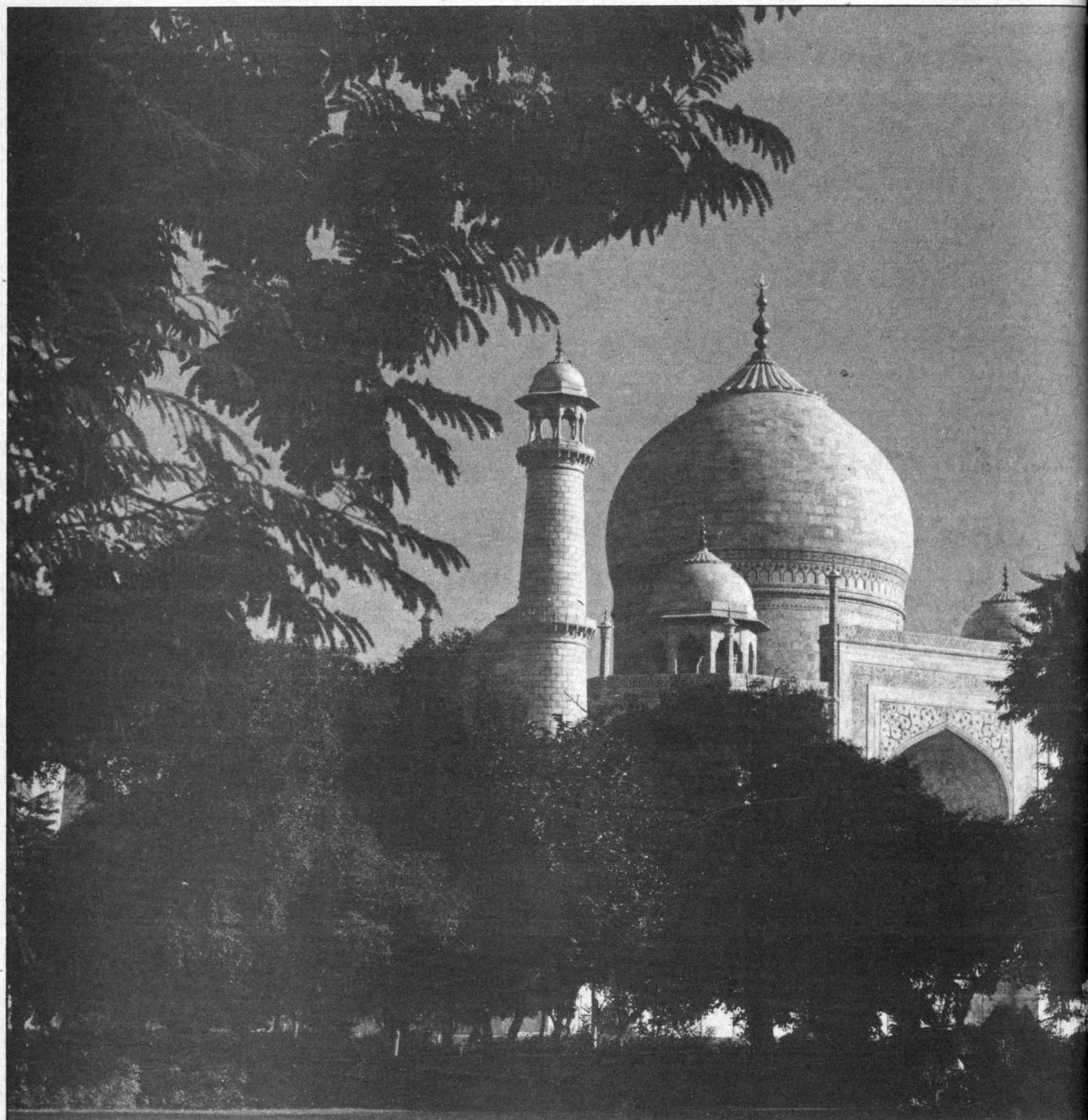
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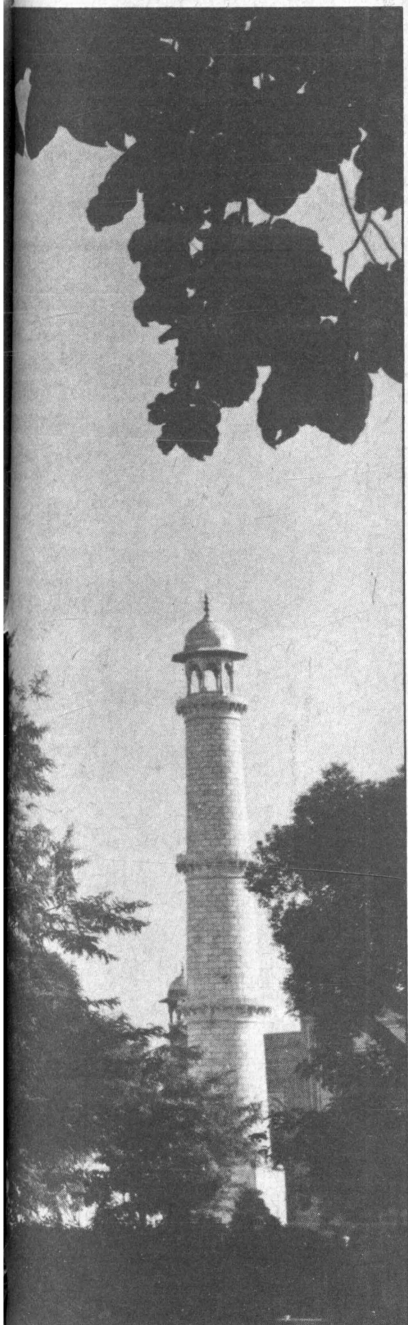


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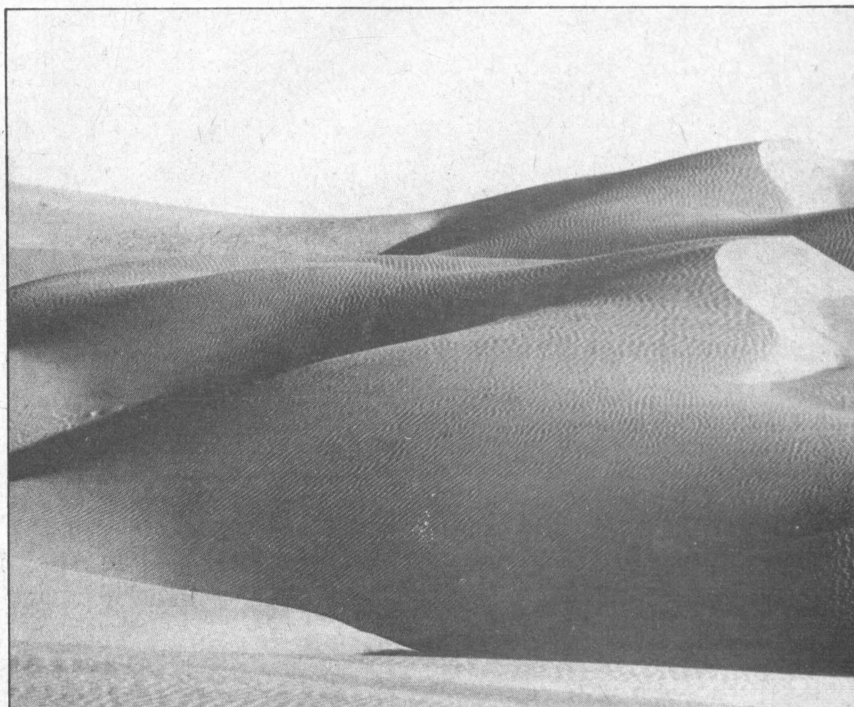


THE JOY OF INDIA



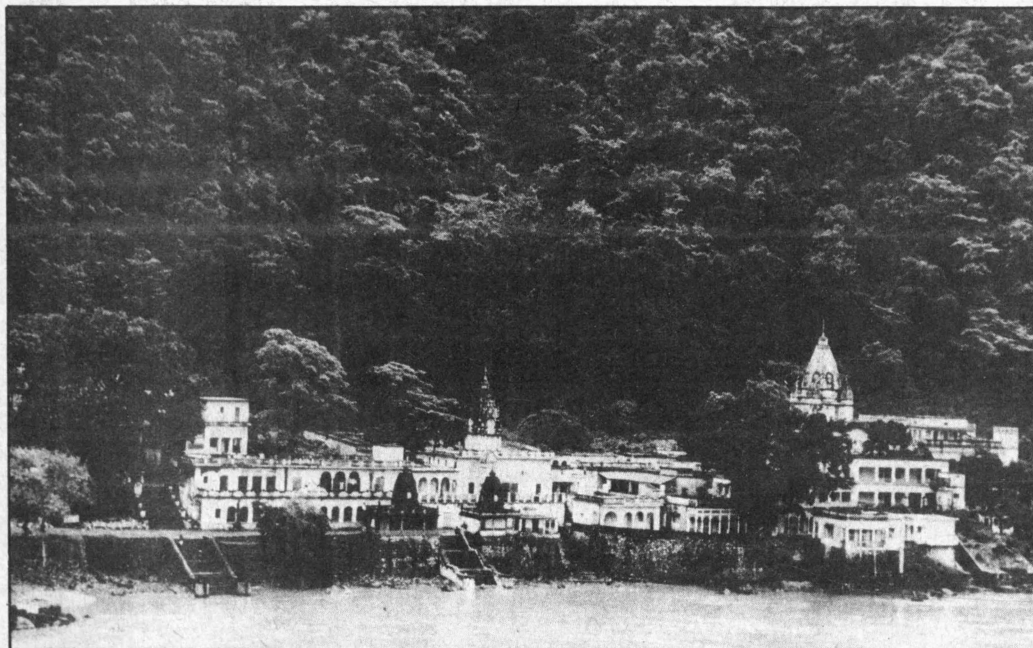
A peep at the marble poem that
made Agra a must on every
traveler's map.

When eminent photographer Jagdish Agarwal exhibited his work in the USA, he was especially keen to eschew the oft-repeated and hackneyed portrayals traditionally associated with India. And so he elected to portray aspects of India that were different, unusual... images that were at once enigmatic and aesthetic, portrayals that would invite curiosity as well as constitute works of art that people would be proud to hang on their walls. And all the photographs were chosen with a view to evoking 'joy', a joy that would emanate from a desire kindled in the viewer to actually be there, to share in the moment, to participate in the experience. **Imprint** presents a selection of these, some of them individual award-winners, all of them stunning reflections of Jagdish Agarwal's India.

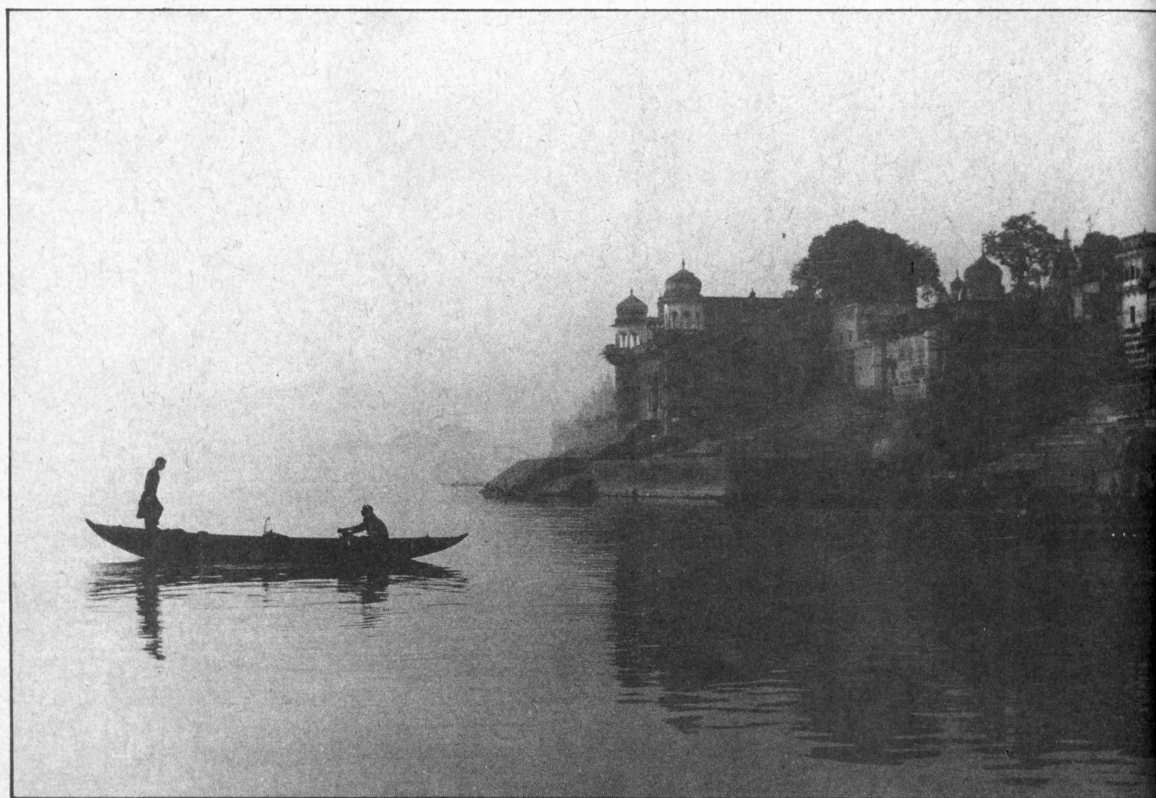


Wind-prints on the sands of Thar, India's only desert region.

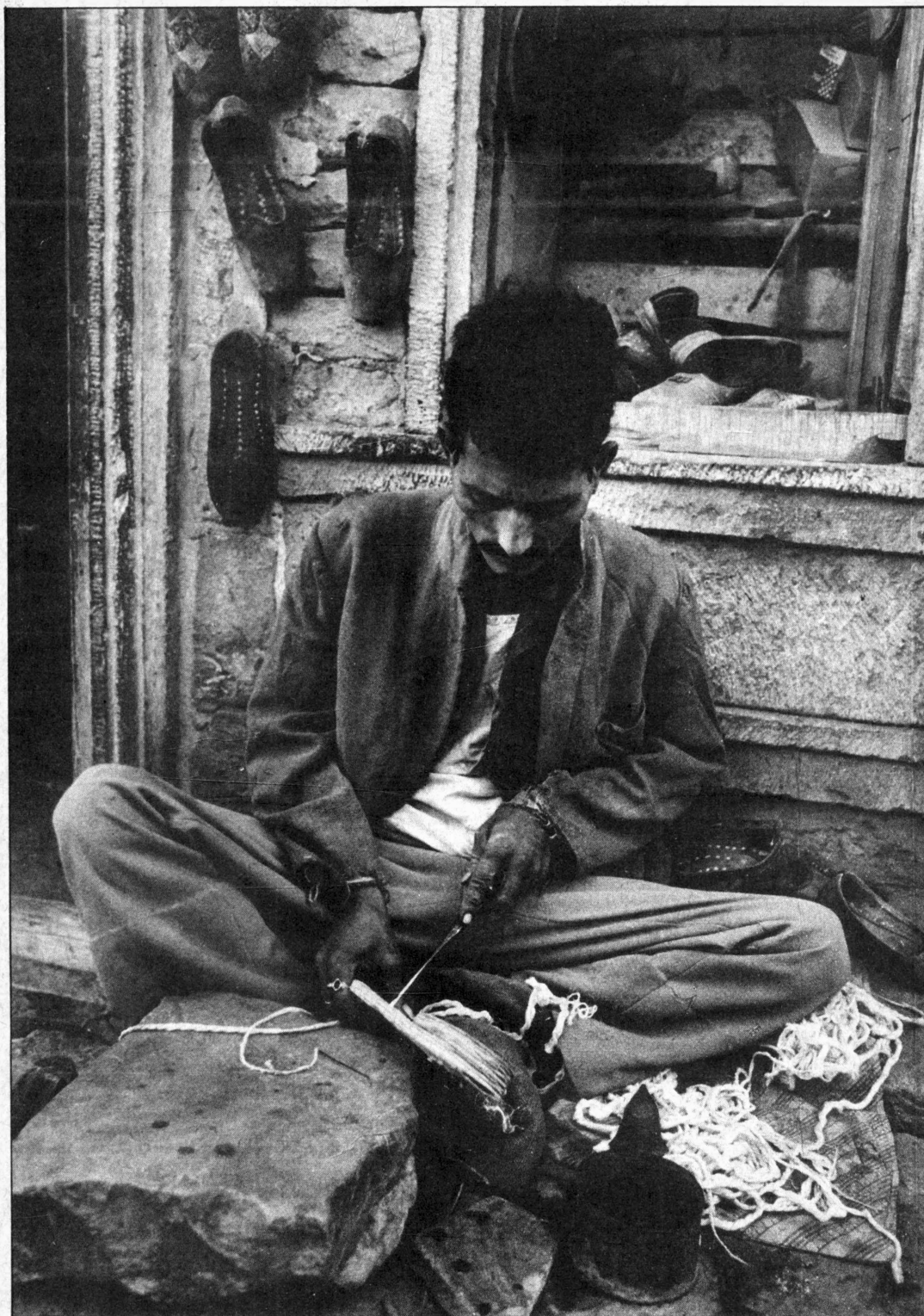
PHOTO FEATURE



Base camp, Rishikesh, where pilgrims converge for their onward climb to the abode of the gods.

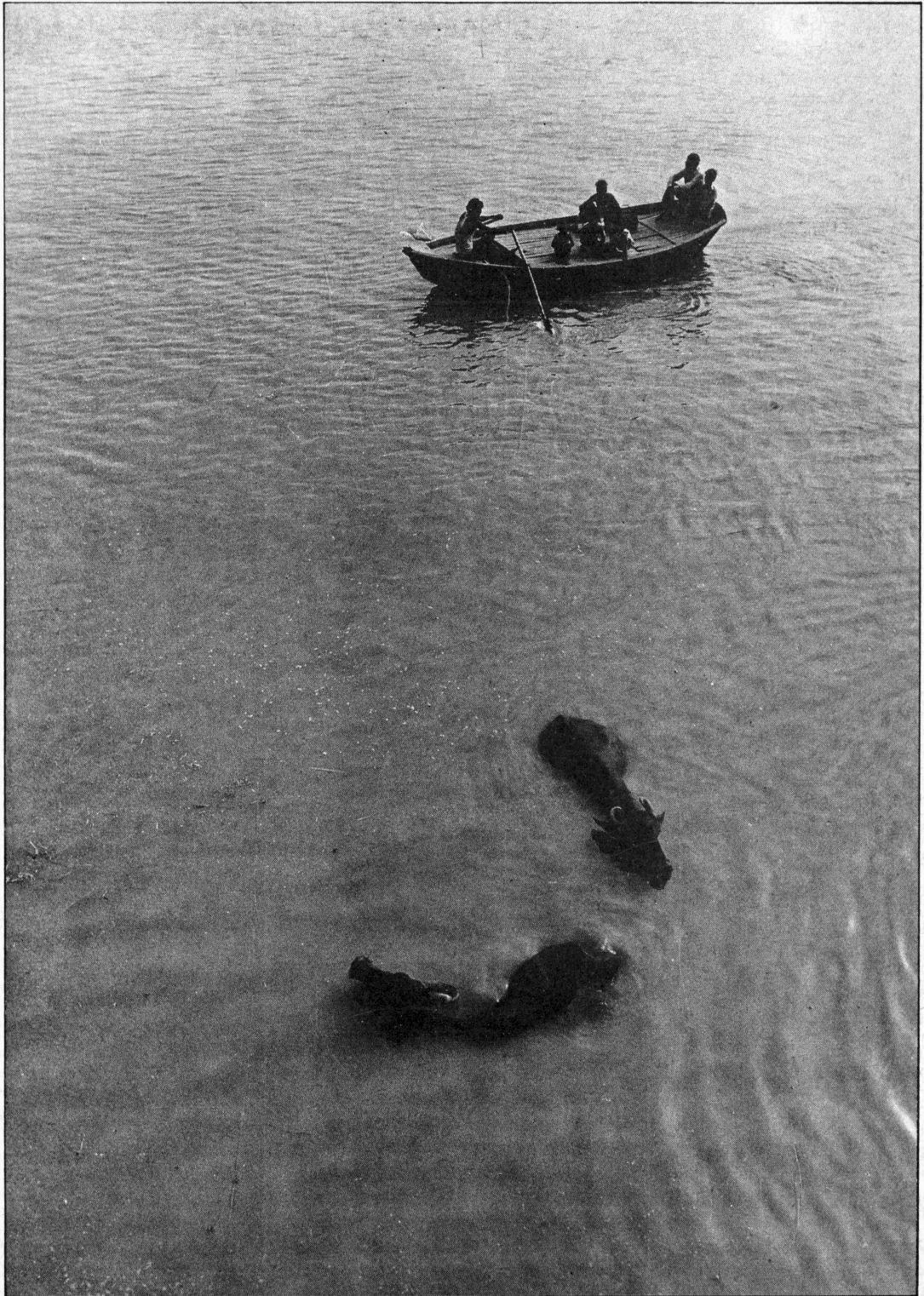


A boat punctuates a misty morning on the banks of the Ganga.



Thick sole and thick skin, both fashioned to endure the vagaries of life.

PHOTO FEATURE



Equal in the eyes of God, man and beast together cross the holy Ganga.

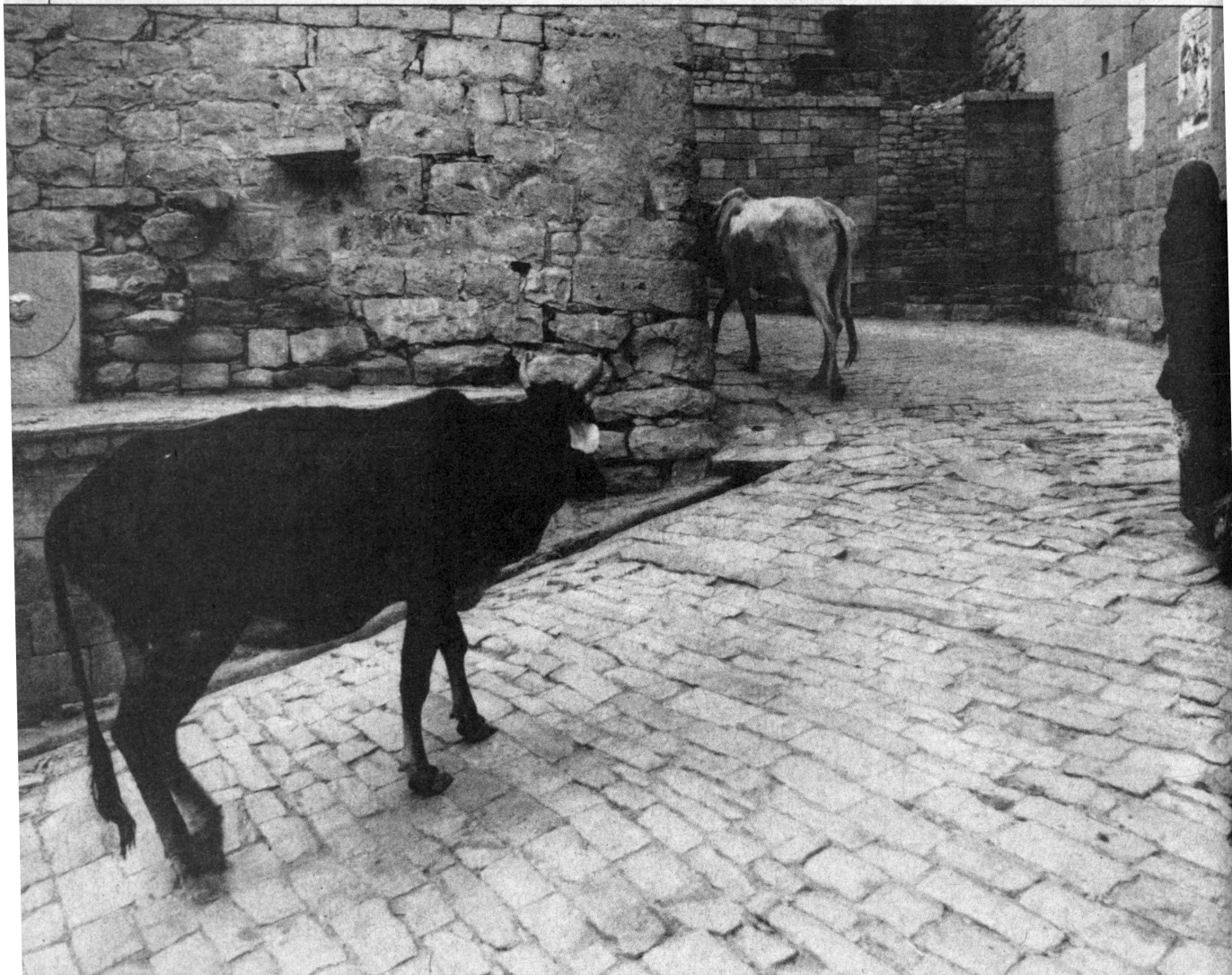


Once a year, mountain gods descend in winding processions to the Kulu valley, making their obeisance to the main deity below.



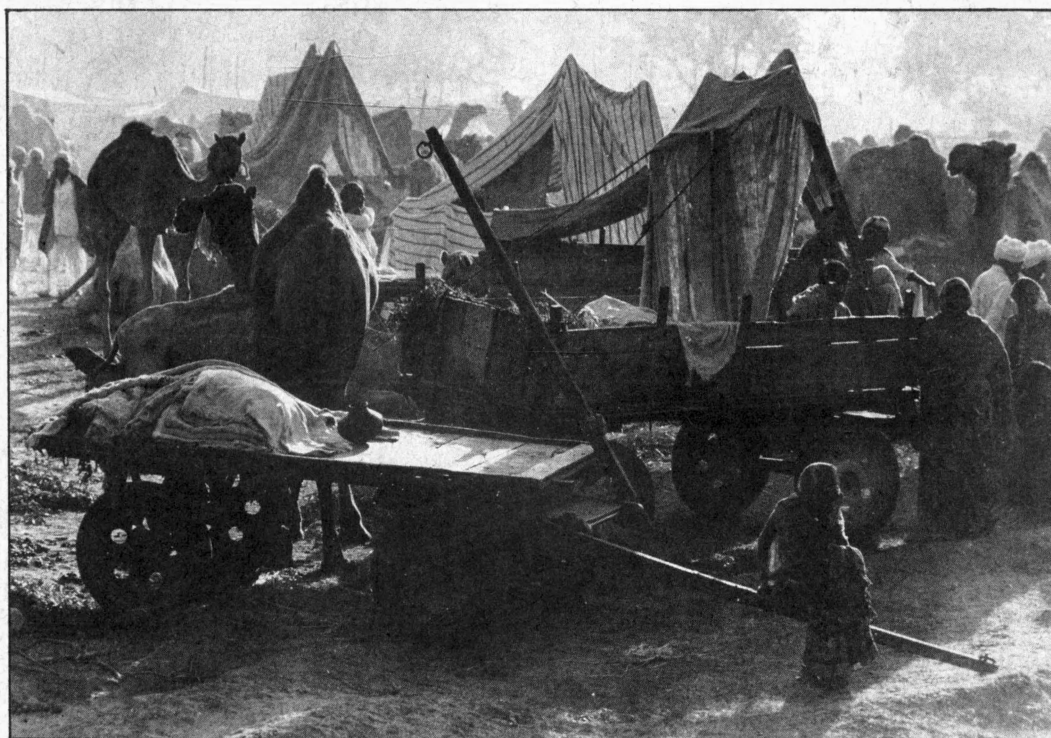
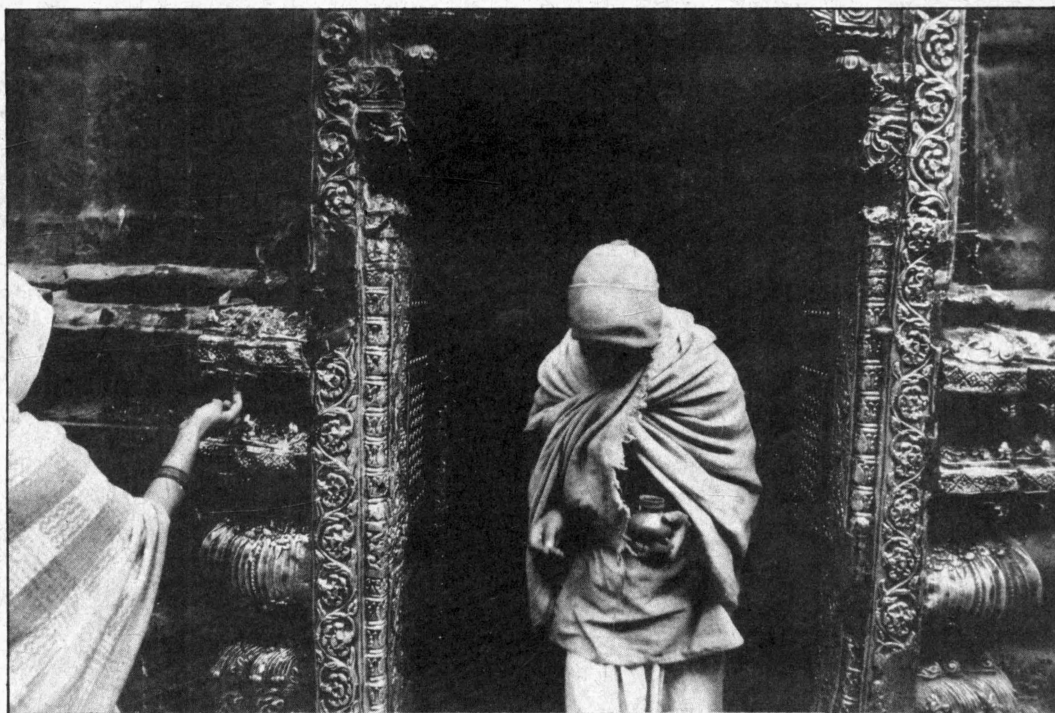
Abandoned and still, yet a living record of past glory – a palace in Mathura.

PHOTO FEATURE



Anyone leads the way – a scene of happy co-existence in Jaisalmer.

Almost enshrined in magnificent carved detail, a sadhu pauses at the entrance of a Benaras temple.



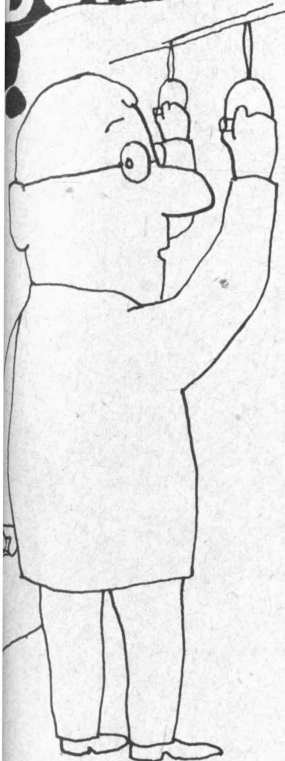
Early morning at Voutha Fair, Gujarat – carts serve as a make-shift home for tired travellers.

CONVERTING CLAMOUR INTO DISCOURSE

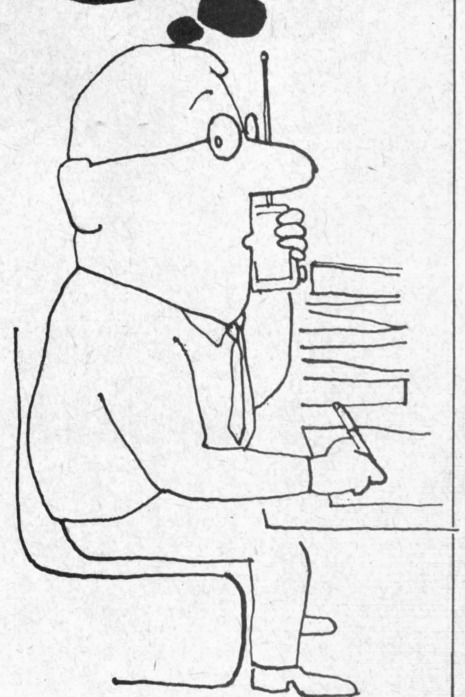


The eighties in India have witnessed the sad death of national discourse. We have little time, or even inclination, for the kind of reasoned debate our national leaders once engaged in. Instead, the focus is inevitably on the ephemeral, the momentary, the trivial. What emerges are facile, ill-informed but catchy clichés, on the one hand and prophecies of despair and doom, on the other. Noted journalist **ARUN SHOURIE** analyses the causes which underlie the lack of reasoned national debate today, and outlines the possible processes through which dialogue can be restored, and public life, politics and governance can be improved and redeemed.

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EVEN TILL THE 1950s we had a national discourse in India. It was 'national' in that people, at least the articulate, the thoughtful among them, most certainly the leaders, although in different parts of the country, were discussing issues that were perceived in all parts to be vital for our survival and growth. And it was 'discourse'. Facts, reasons, logic, learning, ideas mattered. And the mode was a civil exchange.

Today different groups, different localities, are in ferment. But they are agitated about different things. Contrast the intensity with which the AASU agitation was followed inside Assam with the relative indifference with which it was looked at by the rest of the country. The killings in Punjab evoke little concern in Tamil Nadu, just as the situation in Sri Lanka arouses few in Punjab.

Perceptions thus are fragmented. And this at a time when the means of learning what is going on in parts of the country other than our own — ie, the press, radio, television — have grown astronomically.

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

And no word can be more inappropriate today than 'discourse'. There is clamour, shrieking, denunciation, pushing, shoving — all that and more, but no discourse.

Dramatis personae

THIS CLAMOUR IS dominated by three sorts of groups.

The first, of course, are the politicians. Among them, politicians who happen to be in office at the moment are specially dominant, indeed they are domineering. Radio and TV are, of course, full of them — their statements, their travels, their inaugural

The politician in office looks upon the State as his private property. He has no time for truth, for values, for institutions. His interest, his convenience of the moment is his sole concern.

speeches. But radio and TV are not the only ones. The press too gives overwhelming importance to ministerial pronouncements — the typical report of parliamentary proceedings, for instance, will lead with, it will devote the largest amount of space to, the latest inanity of the minister, "Buta Singh for Peace in Punjab", than to what the Opposition MPs had to say, even if it happened to have been well-reasoned, well-documented.

The effect is immediate, and disastrous. No other leader but Rajiv Gandhi is projected on TV. Incessantly, day after day. For three years. A nobody becomes the only-body. And the people ask, "What you say about him is true. But what is the alternative?"

How can anyone else even register on the public mind, to say nothing of

the public coming to perceive him as an alternative, if it sees and reads about no one but Rajiv Gandhi?

In these circumstances, the alternative can emerge, can congeal only *after* the incumbent of the moment goes. Three years later the people will say again, "What you say about him is true. But what is the alternative?" — but then they will be saying this about the next man.

The second group consists, of course, of the professional journalists.

The third set consists of groups who have abandoned argument altogether, who have concluded that muscle-power, guns, are the way to settle the issue at hand. More and more groups are abandoning argument — in the last months in and around Delhi we have had not just professional politicians but industrial workers, farmers, even lawyers attempting to get their way by stepping outside the fora of discourse, in fact by stepping outside the law. And among these more and more are adopting more and more violent substitutes for argument. The "trade union leaders" of Dhanbad, the terrorists in Punjab are but the cutting edge, they are but the extreme examples of a very pervasive tendency.

But even among the first two groups — the politicians and the pressmen — who are still within the arena of argument, ideas, reason, data are at a discount. Sri Aurobindo, the Lokmanya, Gandhiji, Rajaji, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, the Maulana, CR Das, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Ambedkar — all of these were men and women of great learning. They valued ideas. They read extensively. They thought long and hard and to great depth. Exceptions apart, and there are of course several, the politician of today scarcely reads — Indira Gandhi and Rajiv are typical in this regard, to say nothing of the louts of course. He doesn't listen. He hears — sometimes, but even then on the run.

And it isn't just incapacity. He does not think it worth his while. The country yearns to know what should be done. And yet with the singular

exception of Ramakrishna Hegde no politician has thought it worth his while to set out his ideas, or even to have some ideas set out in his name. Contrast this with Gandhiji writing down proposal after proposal — from how to improve third class travel to nature cure to constitutional arrangements to religious beliefs.

THE PRESSMAN could if he would. But he doesn't. Again, it isn't just incapacity. He does not see the point of it. He will churn out reams reporting how 'X' says that the Shah Bano judgement is an assault on Islam, and how 'Y' says it conforms to its teachings; but he will not look up, he won't see the point of looking up, he certainly won't feel the need to look up the Quran and reproduce the one-and-a-half lines in it that deal with the subject. And it isn't just an "esoteric text" like the Quran. He will churn out reams reporting that according to Sharad Pawar, Kannada has been made compulsory in Belgaum, and reams reporting that according to Ramakrishna Hegde, it hasn't. But weeks and weeks will pass before someone thinks it necessary to reproduce the original and very brief announcement in the Karnataka government gazette which settles the matter.

This combination of unscrupulous, unthinking politicians and available, easy-going journalists has had near lethal consequences in the last two years.

The politician in office looks upon the State as his private property. He has no time for truth, for values, for institutions. His interest, his convenience of the moment is his sole concern. That we know. But in addition, over the last two years, even those in power at the Centre have been baffled by disclosures, by facts.

Unprincipled, uncaring as they are, they have resorted to every stratagem, they have thought nothing of using every available institution — from judges like Thakkar and Natarajan to the Parliament, to its committees — to mislead the people. The result has been an unprecedented avalanche of

disinformation, of outright lies. These have been propagated through the officially controlled media — through Doordarshan and AIR — of course. But the government has proceeded on the premise, and it has turned out to be a sound one, that the lies and evasion, the smears would be more credible when put out by the press. It

has accordingly relied more on the press to do the work. And it has found energetic megaphones. A veritable industry has grown up in the press to impede the search for facts, and an even larger one to tarnish and smear those who have been trying to ferret these out. The politicians in power, of course, do not care two hoots for the

harm that such use will do to the press — an institution that our free society needs as much as it needs any other institution. But it is clear that vast sections in the press do not care either.

And the injury is at four levels at least.

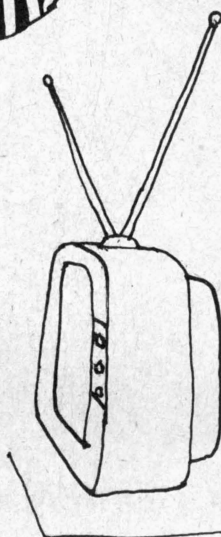
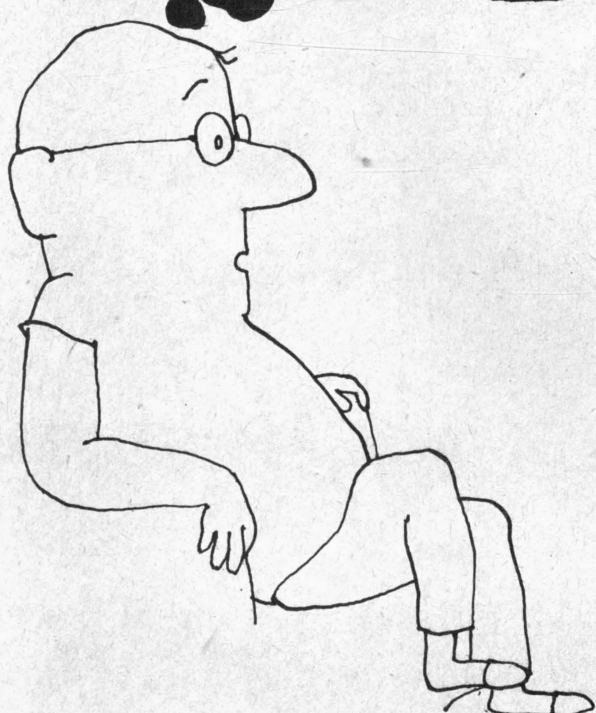
THE QUEST FOR the truth, for the facts, becomes that much more difficult when a large proportion of the press is itself kicking up dust at the behest of the government. Contrast the way Indian newspapers have handled the Bofors and submarine affairs in the last year with the way papers in the US pursued the Watergate burglary and the Pentagon Papers. Once the Watergate burglary came to be known, papers in the US — the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* in particular — spared no efforts to out-do each other in excavating the facts. Similarly, each time the courts restrained one paper from publishing anything further on the Pentagon Papers, another jumped in and carried the account further. By contrast, here most papers just ignored the Bofors matter making out as if the whole affair was just the “campaign” of one or two papers. Others — like the *Times of India* — took to publishing not just distorted but perverted “news” items: in a typical instance, the lies of the Indian government were vindicated by presenting the assertions of Bofors to Sweden’s National Audit Bureau, which the Bureau debunked in its report, as the findings of the Bureau!

The search of the truth is thus impeded, and with it the task of improving our public life.

Second, the press itself is injured. The conduct of papers that lend themselves to rulers harms the credibility of the press as a whole. And the rulers are enabled to pick on the papers one by one.

THE GOVERNMENT BEGAN its full scale assault on the *Express* group in September last year. The edition in Delhi was forcibly closed. The build-

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ing in which it is housed and from which it is edited and printed has been taken over. The rental income from that building which constitutes the subsidy that keeps the Delhi and Chandigarh editions of the paper alive has been frozen. *One hundred and fifty-seven* prosecutions have been launched against the Group. Advertisements from the government and all public sector bodies have been cut. Circuits which were given to the group for producing facsimile editions of *Dinamani*, *Andhra Prabha* and *Financial Express* from Bangalore have been suddenly switched-off.

The assault is as determined as it was during the Emergency. It is more comprehensive. And it is obvious that all this has been visited upon the group because of its effort to uncover facts which the rulers want to hide.

The quest for the truth, for the facts, becomes that much more difficult when a large proportion of the press is itself kicking up dust at the behest of the government.

And yet, a few exceptions apart, the press is silent.

The silence emboldens the rulers to press harder against this group. And to extend the assault to others who are inconvenient — measures against the *Eenadu* group have already begun. And the silence immunises the lay public to the assaults.

At yet another level, by making itself available, the press has become the instrument for injuring persons whom the government has chosen to

harm. Consider the ease with which the government has been able, through the newspapers, to slander those it has chosen to “raid” — without the slightest effort at verification, the press has branded individuals as spies, as being guilty of smuggling and other offences; it has routinely, without a thought, broadcast the smear, “several incriminating documents were found in the searches. . .”

Mental habits

THAT THE CLAMOUR is ill-informed is just one of the distressing features about it. That it has been made worse, to the point of perversion by the use that the politician-in-need has sought to make of the press and the use for which editors and others in the press have made it available, this too is but one of the impediments to discourse today. The discourse is marred, in addition, by several mental habits which the middle class has got into over these decades, habits that transcend the pressures of the last year or two.

We have become what Mao once called ‘The Awful-mess School’ — persons for whom *this* is an awful-mess, *that* is an awful-mess, *everything* is an awful-mess. It is as if we were *looking* for events, issues which would enable us to continue to feel angry and dejected and fed up.

But that is about the limit. We moan, we groan, we curse. But we do not transform that groaning and moaning into deeds, into organised, sustained action that would actually remove the thing that caused us to moan and groan. It is as if we have become comfortable in this melancholy, in this ‘everything-is-going-to-the-dogs-anyhow’ frame of mind.

So, if the government devalues the Rupee our mind rivets onto ‘the-government-has-capitulated-to-the-World-Bank’ assertion; if it continues with an over-valued exchange rate our mind fixes on ‘the-government-is-not-devaluing-so-as-to-protect-its-patrons’; the inefficient-domestic-industrialists’ charge. If it perpetuates controls, we insist it does so to garner the

spoils of the socialist octroi; if it liberalises we insist it has done so to pander to the industrialists. If it moves in to ‘protect’ sick units, we insist it is wasting public money; if it does not, we insist that it is abandoning workers to the jaws of starvation.

Now, anger can be a spur to re-creation. But mere groaning only de-legitimises the whole, it makes everyone suspect, it drains enthusiasm not just for whatever is but whatever might be done. The existing is robbed, the new is kept from coming into being.

ANALYSIS, ARGUMENT have thus become not devices to decide what to do; they have become devices to avoid doing anything. Thus, when someone comes up with a suggestion to alter the structure, to alter attitudes, we dismiss him, “I can’t get the local policeman to put in an honest day’s work in my office and you are talking about altering structures, attitudes.” And if he comes up with a suggestion to get the policeman to work better, we dismiss him, “The whole country is breaking up, and you are worried about getting one lousy policeman in one lousy *thana* to work more.” As a result, neither suggestion is pursued. And if pursued, the discussion is either at too detailed a level — the dearness allowance of the policeman — or at too general a level — the attitudes of the Indian as evident from the days of the Upanishads. The talk has little about that vital, intermediate level — about the organisation, the tactics by which the suggestion is to be translated into action, about identifying and then mobilising the individuals who will do the deed. And so seminars follow seminars, resolutions follow resolutions, often the same resolution follows itself.

We dodge action in other ways too. By exaggerating the difficulties of others, for one. Someone points to the great technical advances of the Japanese, to the fact that they have created a system which ensures self-generating, accelerating inventions. Our mind jumps onto the high suicide rate among Japanese students. Some-

one talks about the creativity in American literature, in American music. Our mind recalls, "But there is poverty in the USA too." Someone talks of the wonderful photographs of Saturn that a spacecraft is beaming back. Our mind recalls, "But science does not spell happiness." The switch exempts us from action as the results of action are shown to be not worthwhile, to be even not unambiguous in the end.

And then, instead of doing what can be done in the here and now, we lose ourselves in debating the relative merits of imagined utopias, often in identifying ourselves with, to the

point of immersing ourselves in the imagined utopias. Few talked as much in India or at as high a pitch from the thirties to the seventies as the leftist intellectuals. They did little here. But they lost themselves in adoring states — far away, and imagined. First it was Stalin's Russia, then Mao's China, then Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam, then Pol Pot's Cambodia, and in the end, I am told, Hoxha's Albania. The adoration, the immersion was catharsis. It was the substitute for doing anything here and now.

AS OUR CONCERN is not action, but talk, not talk but denunciation,

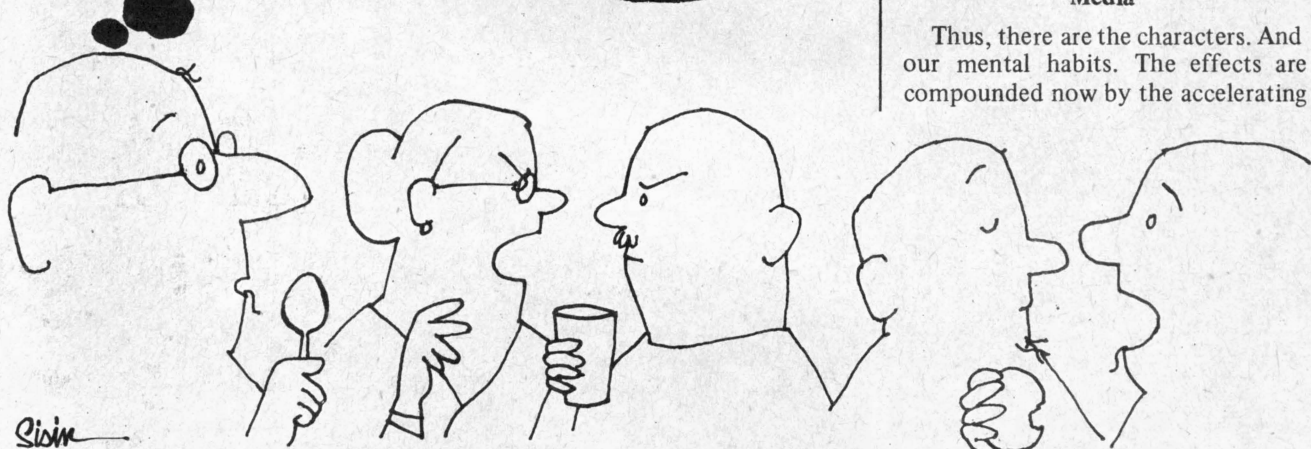
we do not talk about the function we want performed and how an idea will or will not help us perform it. Instead of experimenting with the idea, developing it, altering it, playing with it, we perceive it as a position. As a position taken by the other person. And we lock ourselves into a position that is the opposite of that one. And sticking to our position, demolishing that of the other person becomes a matter of prestige, of pride. From functions to ideas, to positions, to persons, to passing judgement on persons, to invariably passing an adverse judgement on persons. For the last alone exempts us fully.

If someone else is doing something, if he is putting himself out for the public weal, if he is taking risks, we exempt ourselves from following his example by pasting a motive on him — 'CIA', 'RSS', 'a publicity seeker', 'wants to be a martyr', 'an obsessed fellow'. The motive pasted, he has a 'reason' for putting himself out, for taking risks. As we are not CIA, RSS, publicity seekers, as we don't want to be martyrs, we don't have to put ourselves out, we don't have to take risks.

Pasting a motive, a label on the person exempts us from thinking itself. Having convinced ourselves that the proposition originates from that 'RSS man', from that 'Naxalite', we dismiss it with the shrug, 'What else can you expect from that type of a fellow?'

Media

Thus, there are the characters. And our mental habits. The effects are compounded now by the accelerating



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changes in the media — by the spread of TV and radio, by the numerous changes in the press.

In the twenties and thirties, at the time of Champaran, of Bardoli, of Kheda, information travelled slowly. There was time for it to sink in, for an idea, an event to be discussed, digested, acted on. Today the reader, and the viewer even more, is bombarded with one image after another, with news about one event after another.

THE PRESS OF LIFE has shortened his horizon. Getting through the day is all that he can manage. That at the present rate of denudation we will run out of forests fifteen years from now, *that* catastrophe is too far in the future to be even a minor worry today. Privation, the tumble of modernisation has narrowed his concerns. When he reads that twenty more have been killed today in Punjab, his mind

Anger can be a spur to re-creation. But mere groaning only de-legitimises the whole, it drains enthusiasm not just for whatever is but whatever might be done.

does not reach out in empathy to *identify* with them. Instead, it *differentiates* them, distances them from him — 'O, that is in Punjab, not here', 'O, they were regarded as informers', 'O, he was from the CPI (or the Congress-I) (or the BJP)'. Today the reader, the viewer has switched off. "Fifteen killed in Punjab... Thirty-two in Sri Lanka..." — the reader just turns the page. Far from his reading the text of the item, even the headline does not so much as register in his

mind. He exclaims instead, "I say, why is there nothing in the newspapers these days?" But the morning paper is full of terrors that have struck far and wide. Why then does he still exclaim, "*Yaar*, why is there nothing in the paper these days?" What he means is that the paper does not have the *chat-pataa* something which would titillate him, some new, salacious scandal. Is it any wonder that barely a few months after, on the government's own account, 2,700 Sikhs were murdered in Delhi, in the capital of the country itself, a Rajiv Gandhi can say, 'But that is not a live issue now.' He doesn't hear the sigh of the people, of course. But we too have turned deaf.

In these circumstances, a *discourse*?

Thus, life itself has shortened our horizon to the momentary. It has narrowed our concerns to our immediate circle, most often to just our nuclear family.

But that is just the context. The spread of modern media, its pace, its very nature, rub out the concern altogether.

The most important characteristic of modern media is that it focuses on the momentary, on the ephemeral. In writing 20,000 words in a book an author will not just pick 'on ideas or events that have a lasting significance, he will pick on *those aspects of those events or ideas* that have a lasting significance. But 20,000 words in the morning's newspaper will focus on what is happening at the moment, on *whatever* is happening at the moment, whether it is of lasting significance or not. And in reporting even these events or ideas the paper will focus on the turn of the moment.

Radio and TV are even more evanescent, as Marshal McLuhan, Christopher Lasch and Neil Postman have noted. Image follows image — it is estimated that even in news programmes, on an average, an image lasts on the screen for just 3.5 seconds, that on an average an event is dealt with in only 45 seconds.

Ideas are less important for news-

papers than for books, and lesser still for TV than for newspapers. Editors in newspapers are forever asking their reporters and columnists to write shorter and shorter stories. The TV hasn't the time to report more than two or three sentences of what you have to say: "Well, Mr Jaswant Singh, you have ten seconds: what in your opinion should be done on Punjab?"

DISCOURSE IS REDUCED to cliché; doubt, tentativeness, nuance, exploration to a bland, rapidly-delivered certainty. The effect is as manifest as it is destructive. In the twenties few had seen the Lokmanya or Gandhiji or even their photographs. And yet millions were affected by their ideas, by their example, by the values they lived. Today millions are influenced by the image of an MGR, an NTR on the screen, of a Rajiv Gandhi on TV even though no one will associate an idea with them, or infer any exemplary value from their lives.

It isn't just that modern media deal with the ephemeral, that they do so in an ephemeral way. They deal with them, they present them in a jumble. Again, contrast a chapter in a book with a page in a newspaper or a news bulletin on TV. The former will deal with one topic, in some depth, with some sustained effort. But the page in the morning paper, those 15 minutes in the bulletin, will be a jumble — Punjab, Dhaka, Sri Lanka, buses falling into *khuds*, a human interest story, the *hulla* in Parliament, an exposé... you will have one thing tumbling after another.

Nor can there be much continuity from day to day. The importance that an event will get in tomorrow's newspaper will depend not just on — in fact, not even primarily on — its intrinsic importance but on what else has happened by 11 pm tonight. Thus, one day the six killed in Punjab will be announced in a three column heading on page one. The nine killed the next day will get a single column on the turn page the next.

By its very nature, therefore, media does not just project images,

words. It obliterates them. One day's newspaper obliterates the news of the previous day. One image on TV erases — not just from the screen but from our minds — the preceding image.

And because the geographical area it covers is much greater now because of the advances in communications

technology, the cascade of events and images is ever faster, the erasure is more and more rapid. This bombardment cannot but disable. We are able to focus on the task at hand because our senses, our minds, shut out irrelevant information. The eye, for instance, is estimated to send to the processing parts of the brain only

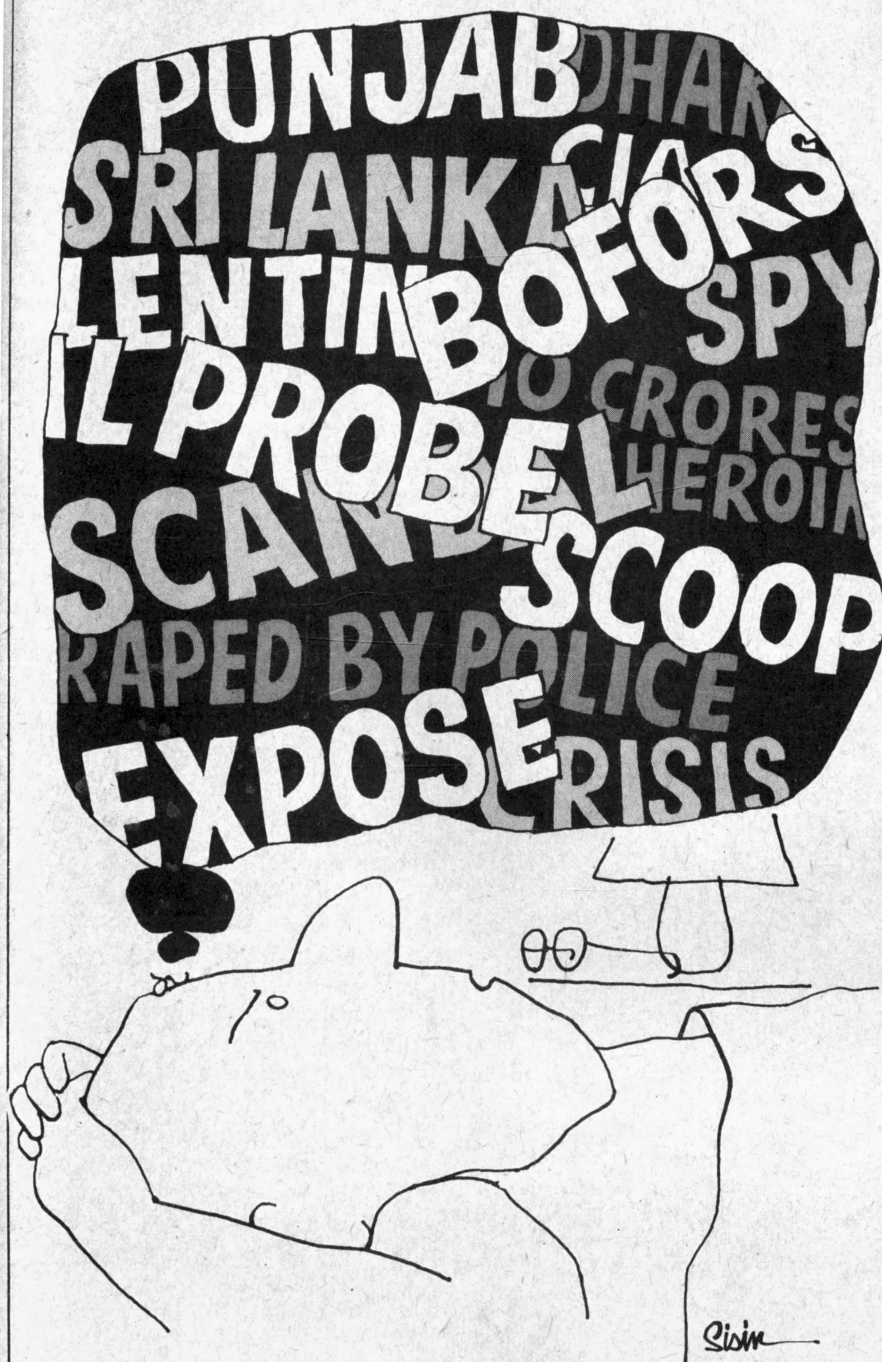
one-trillionth of the information it registers. Being bombarded with more and more information about things that we are *not* going to do anything about cannot but distract us from the task at hand. And we fall for the irrelevant so readily because it provides *the distraction we want*. The task at hand demands that we change our conduct, that we put ourselves out. Being 'busy' taking in all that information, all that amusement, we are exempted.

We are exempted, but we are also disheartened, frustrated. For what we are receiving isn't just more and more information. It is more and more information about places, events, persons we can do little about. Thus issues that are distant, out of reach, distract us from the things that are still within our power to do, within our immediate environment.

Data overlaying data, image obliterating image — everything seems equally ephemeral, equally trivial. And that the data, the images are more and more about things, events which we can do little about, reinforces the feeling of helplessness. Thus riveted we switch off.

And then there is the harried reader or viewer to reckon with. He will read the paper for 15 or 20 minutes in the morning, between tea, getting ready, attending to domestic chores, rushing to catch the bus. To grab his interest, therefore, newspapers, magazines, TV, are perpetually, compulsively on a hunt for the novel. Americans are seized as hostages in Teheran. It is an enormously important event for the US. *Time* and *Newsweek* both devote their covers to the hostages' 'story'. The hostages continue to be held. Both magazines devote their covers for a second week to the hostages. The hostages still continue to be held. But neither magazine can afford to devote its cover for a third week in a row to the same 'story'. One chooses a rock group. The other some other exotica.

You can see the effect. Imagine a man stricken by cancer. That is the most important thing for him. Ima-



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gine producing a magazine or a newspaper for and about him. The tenth cover story in a row on the progress of the disease? And yet that cancer is a matter of life and death for that person. As is Punjab for our country. But the tenth cover story in a row on Punjab?

The focus on the moment. On the jumble of the moment. The compulsion to look for the novel. The pace, spread, nature of modern media therefore makes it not easier but almost impossible to keep the attention of the reader, the listener, on the important.

And there is more. It isn't just that in India too the media are becoming

faster. It is that in addition, like everything else, they are being swamped by consumerism. Commercials, *Chitrahaar* — these typify TV, and for no fault of the TV fellows. And we have correspondingly, the cascade of magazines, each magazine more and more colourful and exotic, newspapers becoming more and more magazinish by the day.

Once again you can see the effect that all this has for discourse. Punjab is a matter of life and death, the growing unease among tribals is too. But how will you impart the sense of urgency that the country must have to set itself to these matters when news

about the killings in Punjab is at once followed by exotic commercials? By *Chitra-haar*?

In the end, the media themselves become the issue. What happens on them and in them rather than the things in life that they reflect become the issue.

No public meeting, in fact no event engages as many millions simultaneously in the whole of North India and for so long as, say, a segment of *Buniyaad*. And so, whether that segment was good or not, whether a few more episodes of the series should be telecast or not — these become the great issues of public debate.

A discourse on electoral reform in these circumstances?

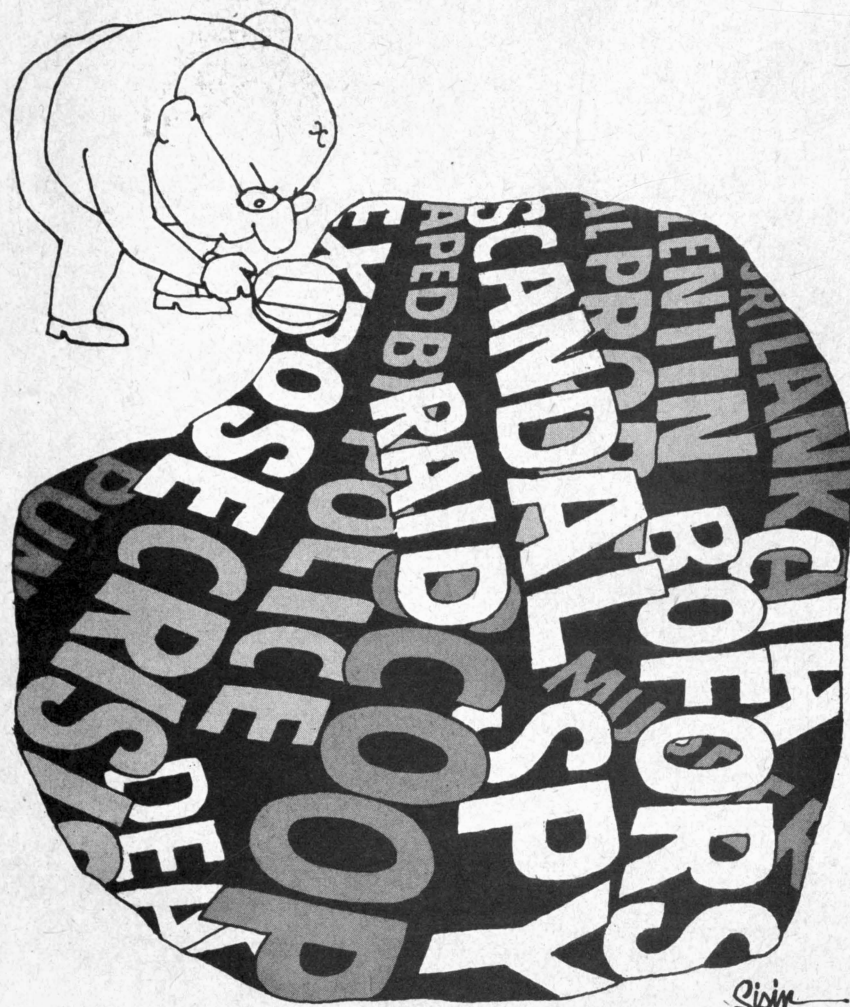
A FORMIDABLE combination. The character of the *dramatis personae*. Our mental habits. The whirl of events. The nature of modern media. What should be done to convert the clamour back into discourse?

The main thing, of course, is to get the institutions, in which interests can compete, in which they can be harmonised. going again. And to do that the main thing is to get a better type into public life, in fact into electoral politics.

But all this will take us far afield. For the moment the question is: short of these fundamentals what should one do in the arena of discourse *per se*?

Every meditator knows that the first step towards calming the mind, towards discerning the real is to look into the mind, to get to know it. Similarly, the first step towards restoring discourse is to observe the clamour, to understand it, to see in particular that today for the sorts of reasons mentioned above we have to focus the attention of the people on what is important, we have to divert them back from these diversions as much *in spite* of the media as with their aid.

And it is necessary to make readers and viewers continually alert to the nature, content, consequences of what is being fed to them. In a word, it is necessary to sow scepticism in their minds about what they read and



hear, to urge them to ask questions of it, to examine it, to compare it with what they know from their own, direct experience, to assess it in the light of the record of the writer or the medium, to assess what he is saying now in the light of the way in which he has switched with every change in the political wind. We must urge readers of newspapers, for instance, to cut and keep what the popes, and the pretenders to the papacy, say on an important issue, to compare it with what they said three months ago and to remember it three months hence when with equal confidence they lay down yet another line. We must urge readers to discuss the results of such monitoring with friends, to bombard the popes and their papers with letters when these switch, when they mask the facts.

Most of all, we must urge readers and viewers to *choose* — to switch papers, to turn the TV off. I remember so many friends saying during the Emergency how suffocated they felt by the lies which Doordarshan and AIR were dinning into their ears. They would listen to the 'news' morning and evening. And start fuming. But why not switch the damned thing off? Similarly, if you are going to buy a newspaper because of its value as *raddi*, well, *raddi* is what you will get.

Next, those who are taking up issues of public importance through the media must repeatedly explain the real meaning of what they are doing. Exposures of corruption, for instance, too can become a spectator-sport, the equivalent of the latest gossip from film-land. We must therefore use every opportunity to explain, "But this isn't a 'scandal', it is cancer. Smuggling of gold becomes smuggling of arms. . . A police force that has become accustomed to accepting money for letting gold through will not, it *cannot* suddenly become virtuous, block the traffic in arms and track down the terrorists."

As for the issues themselves, I would urge "fewer, but better." A scandal a day immunises the reader. "Everything is a bloody mess!" he

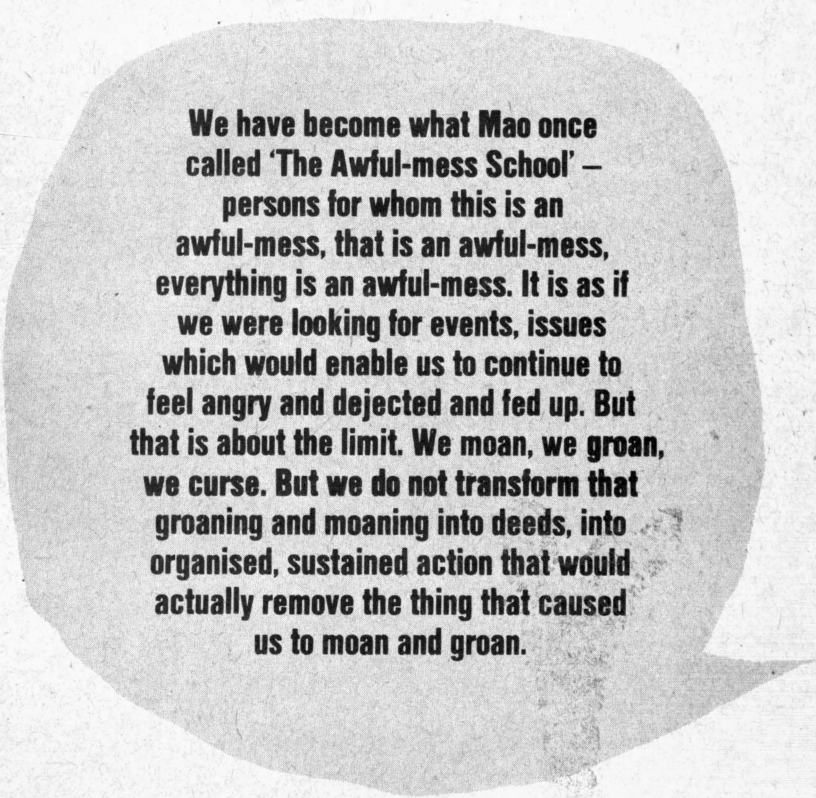
concludes and thinks no more.

THE FEW ISSUES that we take up, we must pursue relentlessly, to the end. For mere whining induces only cynicism. It merely de-legitimises the whole without helping put anything in its place. Worse, taking up an issue only to dash away to the next trivialises the work as such — the reader comes to look upon each issue as but the latest segment of yet another TV serial, as but an amusement, morbid at times but amusement nonetheless.

By contrast an issue pursued seriously, imaginatively, to a conclusion cannot but make a contribution. If, say, the politician goes, the people see that change can still be wrought, that it can be wrought by just a few provided they put themselves out. If, using his majority in the legislature, misusing the processes of the courts, using our colleagues in the media he survives, people are taught how much harder all of us have to work if we are to turn things around.

But this latter result can be realised only if our work is thorough, if it is accurate, and if we show up each device the moment the politician deploys it. Facts, denials, points of law, reports of commissions, lengthy judgements, party resolutions, *every* device must be examined threadbare, so that neither the politician nor the reader is left with any alibi whatsoever. If after all this is done, the politician prevails by brute strength — be this a majority in the legislature, or the power to suborn judges, or to deploy muscle, so be it. For then *he* makes the point for us.

BUT EVEN AS WE pursue issues, even as we do all we possibly can to bring the supercilious, the corrupt, the arbitrary to book, we must repeatedly stress the value of the whole, the value of an open, plural democracy. And we must show how what we are doing is an instrument — it is one of the few instruments — by which the whole can be made more responsive



We have become what Mao once called 'The Awful-mess School' — persons for whom this is an awful-mess, that is an awful-mess, everything is an awful-mess. It is as if we were looking for events, issues which would enable us to continue to feel angry and dejected and fed up. But that is about the limit. We moan, we groan, we curse. But we do not transform that groaning and moaning into deeds, into organised, sustained action that would actually remove the thing that caused us to moan and groan.

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to the needs of our people. We must show that these are the precise processes by which public life, by which politics and governance have been improved in the last fifty or hundred years in the democracies. We must stress repeatedly that we are pursuing this issue or that, this ruler or that, not because we have given up on the system, but because we believe that the open, plural system is the best of

thing that is wrong can leave the reader feeling, "O, what is the use? Everything is rotten. Everything is a mess. Things will never improve" — the precise mood which legitimises 'grab as grab can', which induces everyone to cut corners, which thereby compounds the problem. It is also the precise mood which makes large masses lunge for the simple answer, for the man on the white horse.

Discourse is reduced to cliché; doubt, tentativeness, nuance, exploration to a bland, rapidly-delivered certainty. The effect is as manifest as it is destructive.

In the twenties, few had seen the Lokmanya or Gandhiji or even their photographs. And yet millions were affected by their ideas, by their example, by the values they lived. Today millions are influenced by the image of an MGR, an NTR on the screen, of a Rajiv Gandhi on TV, even though no one will associate an idea with them, or infer any exemplary value from their lives.

all possible arrangements for our society — for one thing, and unlike, say, the messianic dictatorships whether of Stalin or of Franco or of Khomeini, it leaves the door open for reform — and that it still is remediable.

We should return to the value of the whole from time to time because given the state of affairs our work is mostly critical. We focus by and large on what is wrong. The wrongs and injustices are unpardonable, they are unnecessary and we focus on them to banish them. But merely rushing from one thing that is wrong to another

REVEALING THE value of the whole, we must urge the people to observe the norms that are necessary for the whole to function. We must do more than we have been doing to make our fellow citizens realise that all ends — though equally desirable — are not compatible at every juncture, that individuals and groups *have* to give up or at least postpone some of the ends to attain others; that an open, plural society cannot survive if each of us insists on winning all the time — that it is of the essence of such an arrangement, that we will win

sometimes and lose at others; that such a society can survive only if all of us obey *some* rules, only if we confine ourselves to using peaceful means, to means permitted by the Constitution and the laws; that when those means do not deliver, the solution lies not in everyone 'taking the law into his hands' but in all getting together to replace those whose conduct is making those means, those institutions impotent.

And our scrutiny must not be limited to politicians. Thus, for instance, when labour leaders make a trade of their unions, when they resort to violence, when lawyers snatch ballot boxes and prevent their colleagues from voting, we must speak up just as unambiguously as we do when rulers step out of line. Today we neglect this task — as if everyone who for the moment is leading a 'strike', 'movement' is *ex officio* right, and that too on all counts. But by remaining selectively silent we harm both our credibility and the general cause of democracy.

Counsel for the good

THERE IS NEED NOT just to alter the focus of discourse but also to diversify and enlarge the circle of participants. As we noted earlier, what passes for discourse today is dominated by the talkers — the politicians, the professionals in the media. Now, there are times — like the Emergency — when words are deeds. But ever so often words are just verbiage. As they are today.

And so we need to induct into the arena of discourse persons who are not just wordsmiths. In particular, we need to hear from and to broadcast the views of those who have been serving our people, the Baba Amtes on Punjab.

"But he went there. You chaps in the press gave him all that coverage. What difference did it make?"

But that is so in part at least because only one Baba Amte went. A hundred Amtes going there a thousand times will, I have little doubt, make a difference.

"They are good men, true. I am even prepared to say they are saints. But what do they know about law, about administration, about policing? An expert outside his own field is an amateur."

Does the professional politician or journalist know any more? Second, experts get into ruts too, perhaps sooner. Persons whose perspective has been honed by decades and decades of service may well provide the creative, unconventional proposal that would make a difference. Their empathy will raise us above the legalisms that obsess the specialist, and are today acting as blinkers.

I would therefore urge these good men and women to take time off their saintly work, to think of the problems that beset our country today, and speak out on them. And I would urge

the press to broadcast their views — howsoever unconventional they seem at first — to the country.

THE GOOD MUST not just speak up. They must speak up for each other. The work the good do strikes at the very base of the powerful — from the money lender, the forest contractor, the liquor merchant in the locality to the ones at the top who are propped up by the aggregations of these structures. The latter move against the constructive workers. But each of these dedicated souls is so busy doing his good work that he does not raise his voice against what is being done to his equally dedicated neighbour. Unaided, each is picked up one by one. As a result, not just the work being done by the person — and that work itself is precious and must be rescued,

the individual himself is a 'living national treasure' who must be protected — but the whole tradition of selfless service of this kind is set back.

To speak up, and to speak up for each other must therefore be regarded as a part of the good work that needs to be done in India today.

So that they may be heard better I would urge that a group should be formed of, say, fifty such men and women to deliberate on national issues. The success of the group would depend on four things: the initial selection of the members must be done very carefully; the group must be assisted by an excellent secretariat which will do the research that would be necessary for its members to form an informed opinion on the question at hand; the members must spare the time for the deliber-



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ations of the group; there must be considerable funds to man the secretariat and to pay for the travel and stay of the fifty. This is quite the kind of project in which far-seeing philanthropists, a public-spirited media organisation and these good men and women would do well to collaborate.

Thus, we must alter the focus of discourse, emphasising the value of the whole, emphasising in particular what each of us needs to do to enable the whole to function.

Having ensured the enabling services, the sponsors — much like the Tatas have done with institutions like the TIFR — would have to leave the group alone. The members in turn would have to accept the discipline of regular, frequent meetings, diligently prepared for, and diligently followed up.

When they are compared to the past record of such efforts, even these modest pre-conditions seem too much to expect. And yet were they to be met I have little doubt that the group would mark an excellent beginning towards restoring discourse. The country yearns for a conscience today. A group such as this can provide the reasoned, national proposal or position on issues of contention, the proposal around which people could begin to talk.

The new charkha

BRINGING THE VIEWS of these good men and women — these doers — more into the focus of public attention would be the first step towards endowing content to public

debate. It should be followed up by collective deeds. Nothing will dispel the pall of cynicism and helplessness as actually doing something, in association with others if possible, alone if necessary.

Gandhiji started with the premise that everyone would not sacrifice his all for the public weal. He demanded total immersion in national work from his associates, of course. But he provided a spectrum of activities. A person could undertake any one of these depending on the extent to which he was prepared to put himself out, and yet he would come to feel a part of the national movement.

Spinning, for instance, had many things to commend it. Gandhiji saw it as a device to accomplish all of several things — from self-reliance for the country to a calmer mind for the individual. But one of its virtues was that even a person who could not come out on the streets to defy the British, who could not give up everything and go to prison, could spin the *charkha* in the privacy of his home and yet tune in to the national movement.

Once the group gets going, once the good have devoted the time they must to what the Americans call 'networking', I hope that they would lead us into some activity of this kind.

My candidate would be public sanitation work. Gandhiji would have at once listed the numerous advantages it has in the present context:

- It requires little or no capital;
- It will associate us with the least in our society;
- It is something that needs to be done;
- It is appropriately symbolic — as we need to clean up our environment in general, little can be better than to begin with the immediate, physical environment around us;
- It is something that does not entail a conflict with any one;
- It is something that gets at one of our most thoughtless habits — we bathe twice a day but think nothing of spitting in a corridor, we clean our houses meticulously only to dump the refuse in the street;

● Its results are immediate and manifest;

● It is something that has to be repeated every day — exactly what we need to learn for reforming our public life;

● It is best done in association with others, and is thus an activity that will help restore the feeling of community, of neighbourliness, but it is also something that one can do or at least begin, alone;

● It is not made obsolescent by improvements in technology;

● The waste that is collected can be put to good use — from fertilising crops to building houses.

In conclusion

THUS, WE MUST ALTER the focus of discourse, emphasising in particular the value of the whole, emphasising in particular what each of us needs to do to enable the whole to function. And we must enable those who are serving our people to come to the centre of public discourse in the country.

In view of the features of the public clamour today which I had listed at the outset, in view of the mental habits we have got into, in view also of what so often mars discourse among the good themselves, I would in conclusion urge tentativeness.

Service, struggle often require Nelson's eye. They often require that we shut our ears to the cacophony of doubt, of reason itself. It is this shutting out which enables us to take the plunge, and then — in the face of all reason and calculation — to persevere. But unless we are watchful that very earnestness, that very conviction, so essential to action, can become dogmatism, the curse of action.

In fact, those who are devoting their all to a cause are specially prone to certainty. After all, it is this ability to convince themselves, to almost hypnotise themselves into believing that what they are doing is not just right but is the worthiest cause, that enables them to persevere. Certainty is almost an occupational requirement. With certainty comes the pro-

ness to think less of the person who is devoting himself to some issue other than the issue one has chosen, a proneness also to all too readily suspect a motive in the person who takes up some issue other than one's own, who differs with one on how our particular issue should be advanced.

The good are therefore specially in need of tentativeness. We have only to look at the consequences of passionate certainty to see that this is so.

HOW OFTEN HAVE we broken with friends and comrades arguing about imagined utopias. . . All those divisions, all that bitterness in the Left, for instance, over Stalin, over Mao, over Lin Piao, over the virtues of collectivisation in the Soviet Union and of communes in China, over the new man that Stalin's Stakhanovites were going to mould, over the new man Mao's Cultural Revolution was going to inspire. . . And what was the truth in each instance when the facts ultimately came out? Were friends and

comrades right to pounce on each other, to suspect each other, to pilory each other, to hound each other over any of these things?

And there is a practical way to begin: do not shut out an argument by pasting a motive, a label on the person urging it. Motives are important, of course. But the argument must first be disposed of on merits. After all, many motives can fit the facts; worthy motives do not guarantee a sound position, they certainly do not guarantee that the argument or the action they lead to will consummate in a worthy end being attained; correspondingly, the argument urged by an evil person may be just the warning we need.

It isn't just that the facts are not always known, specially about distant utopias, about motives. But that great decisions involve great imponderables. Was Gandhiji right in going on a campaign to recruit soldiers for the British Army during the First World War? Was he right in taking up the cause of

the Khilafat? Should the Congress ministries have resigned in 1939 and have thus left the field to Jinnah? Could something have been salvaged through the Cabinet Mission plan? . . . What should be done in Punjab today?

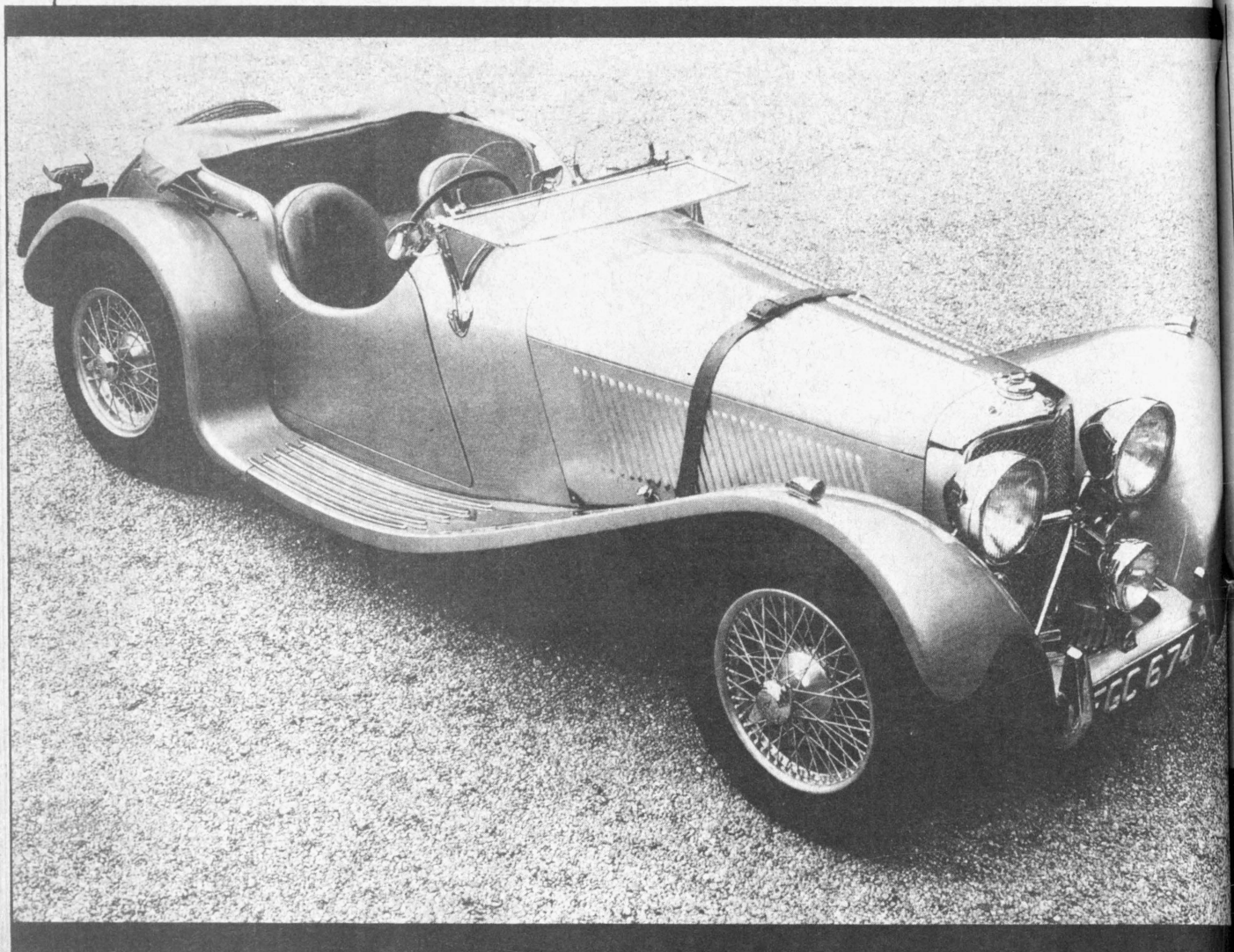
There is room in all these great decisions for genuine differences among reasonable men. We should urge what seems the right course to us. We should urge it with vigour and ingenuity. But we are not right to drown the other view, even less to smear the man espousing it. How often it is that as we look back on our rages of yesterday we are reminded of the words of the poet. . .

"All we have gained then by our unbelief

*Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt.
We called the chess-board white, we
call it black."* ♦

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ONCE UPON A TIME, we worshipped two pantheons of super-beings: our gods and our maharajahs. We idolised them, sanctified and praised them, and suffered all kinds of privations to propitiate their desires. No extravagance was too good or too great where they were concerned; they deserved our best offerings, and so we grudged them nothing.

While we normally associate divinity with celestial chariots, our maharajahs had their own earthly carriages: they were drawn for aeons by men,

** Autoscribe (Gautam Sen, Hormazd Sorabjee and Suresh Gupta) is a team dedicated to quality automotive photojournalism.*

THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR

cattle, elephants or horses. But the advent of the white man changed all that — animals became *passé*. Horses were no longer found satisfactory — they whinnied and neighed, but could not spit fire and smoke. And using them for one-upmanship against the monarchy across the border became impossible. Kings discovered they could aggrandise their armies, their jewellery collections, and even their harems, whereas their horse-drawn carriages were at a dead end. They thus ceased to have their old snob appeal. What every emperor, maharani and *yuvaraj* now began to hanker for, was embodied in the white man's wondermachine from across the seas — the motorcar.

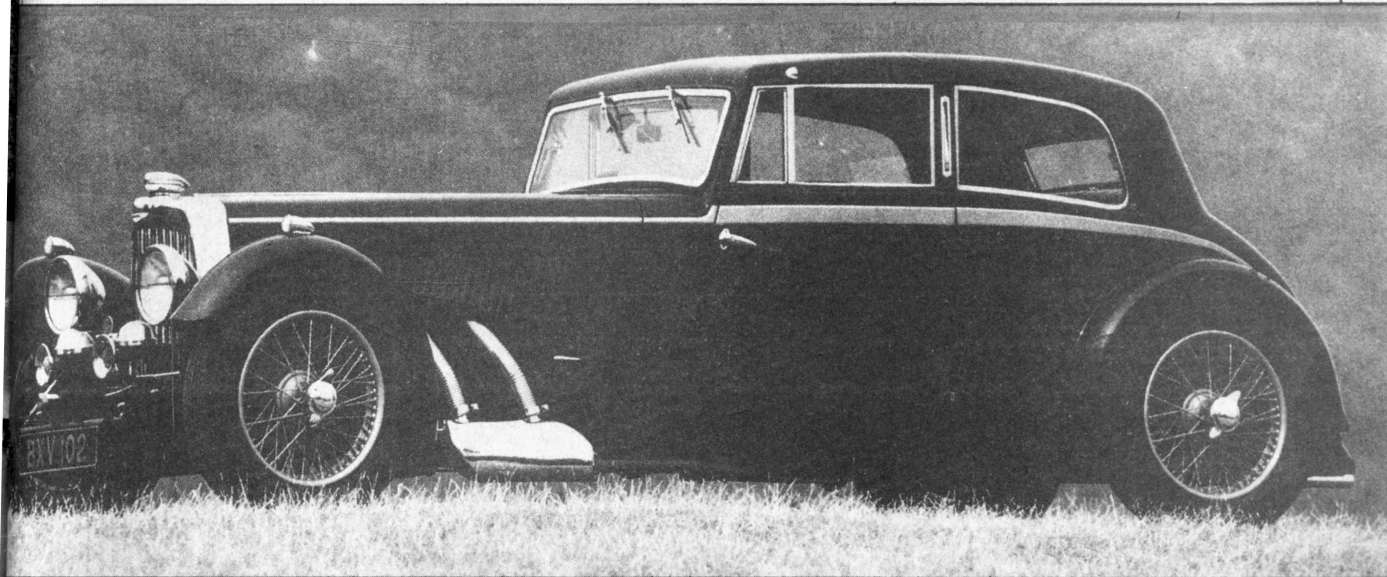
Towards the late 1800s, Indian maharajahs went on a stupendous buying spree that lasted nearly 40 years: they scoured showrooms and exhibition halls all over Europe and the USA for the biggest, shiniest and costliest set of wheels they could find. And when they could not get what they wanted, they had them custom-made. The world's best

A Rolls Royce as part of a dowry? A Kellner Delage D-100 in exchange for Cartier cuff-links? Converting Silver Ghost limousines into garbage vans in a fit of pique?

Those were the days indeed, when Indian maharajahs flaunted the biggest, shiniest and costliest set of wheels they could find in showrooms abroad. Where are those marvellous cars today? IMPRINT presents a fascinating journey into a glamorous era of rajas, rubies and Rolls Royces.

coach-builders were given the most flashy and grandiose specifications imaginable, and while manufacturers and purists may have sniggered, they never did so to their faces. For, how could they? These bejewelled turbaned customers from over 700 princely Indian states could throw cash around in a way that shocked every blasé Croesus in the West.

NOT FOR THEM the mundane marques like the Vauxhalls, Rileys, Austins and Morris and their continental equivalents. Instead, they zeroed in on the behemoths and hand-crafted exotica; Isotta-Fraschini from Italy, Hispano-Suizas, Delahayes and Panhard & Levassors of France, and Duesenbergs, Cords and Cadillacs from the USA were what they wanted. The more discerning sought the stiff upper-lip grandiloquence of British Bentleys, Daimlers, Lagondas, and the ultimate refined snootiness of a Rolls Royce (RR) limousine. The last was the most coveted; its title of "The Best Car in the World" was already entrenched in the psyche of



WONDERMACHINES!

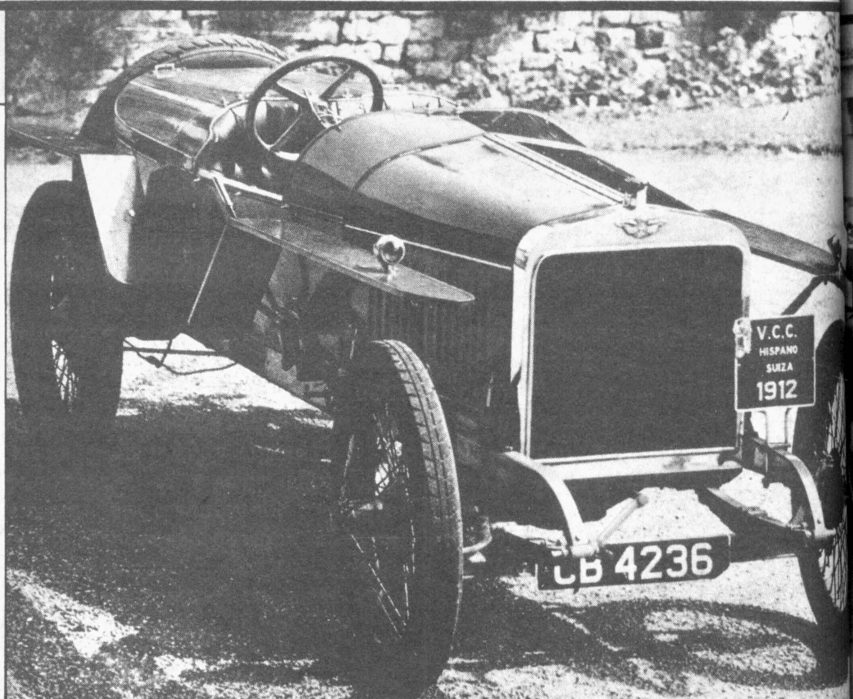
NOSTALGIA

potentates and millionaires the world over.

The first RR to land in India was a 1908 portable-top limousine for the Scindias of Gwalior, sentimentally christened "the Pearl of the East". Though about only 700 of the pre-War production of 23,000 limousines came our way, they included some of the most spectacular ones ever made: Grand Tourers, Shooting Brakes, Alpine Eagles, Ceremonial Carriages and experimental "sporting" Phantoms.

The coachwork and interiors of these cars often matched the opulence of their owners' palaces; even petit-point French tapestries and crystal fittings were not rare. The state car built for the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1913, was a Barker-bodied Silver Ghost with a raised throne, a rich yellow finish and solid gold mountings; a blinding contrast to the bland sobriety and conservative black and sombre hues preferred by the British elite. Then a special Phantom I was engineered by Hooper with duplicate controls operable from the rear seat, so that the *Begum-in-purdah* could learn to drive without the defiling proximity of the chauffeur! A certain Western Indian maharajah was another enterprising back-seat driver. His James Young PIII limousine had five distinctively lettered lamps that lit up on the fascia in front of the chauffeur. When his royal finger pressed the proper buttons from behind an amber partition, he could turn his car 'R' for right or 'L' for left. Or even head it towards 'C' for Club, 'H' for Home and — ooh la la — to a tryst with his 'M' for... .

YES, INDEED, many were the games that the Indian royalty played with their cars. A most memorable example is that of the religious Rajasthani prince who was a staunch vegetarian: he could not stomach even a trace of leather in any of his perennially blue-painted machines. Nevertheless, he had his elegant Hispano-Suiza done up with seats that swivelled a full 180 degrees to plug away at lions and



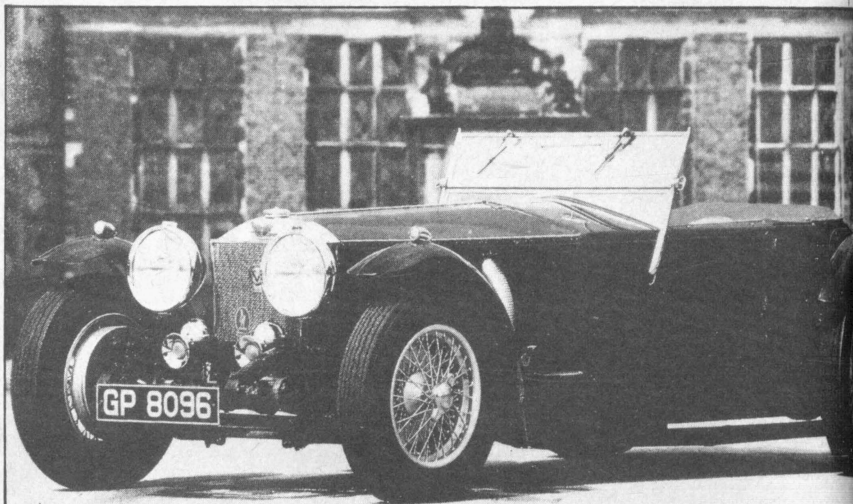
An Edwardian gem: a 1912 Hispano-Suiza Alphonso.

tigers and other assorted beasts. And when he tired of his cars, he sped them to their eternal automotive Valhalla with a full ceremonial burial! Many others didn't bother to do so: they gifted them as part of dowries or just gave them away as royal largesse to favoured sycophants. Some cars were even bartefed — like the straight eight Kellner Delage D-100 which the Rajkumar of Narajal traded for a pair of diamond-studded Cartier cuff-links with Maharajkumar Pritindra of Santosh.

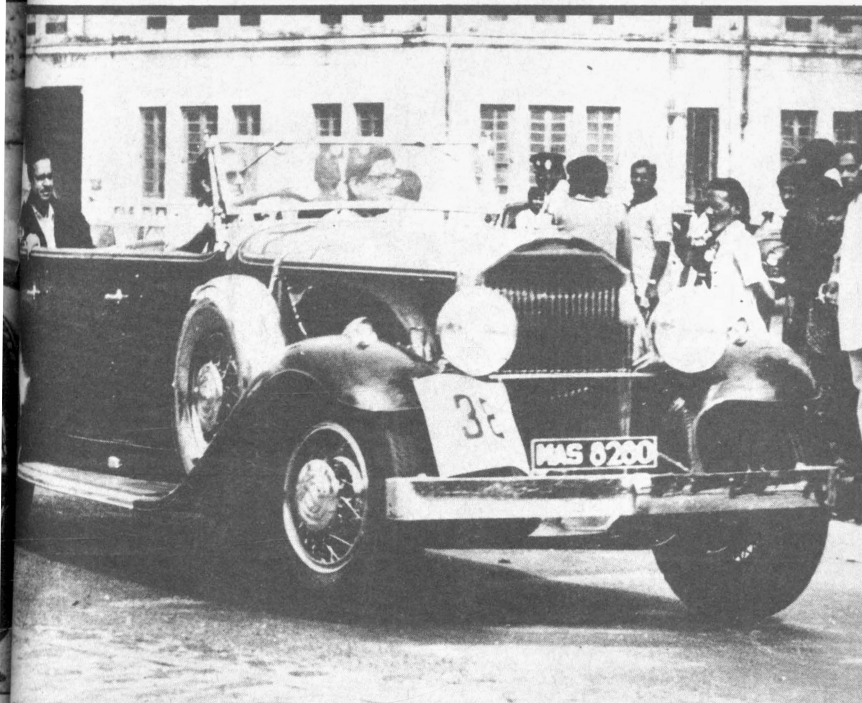
Yet life was not all rubies and roses in the days of the Raj; some of our crowned heads, like the Maharajah

of Patiala, *did* have a hard time. The Maharajah of Patiala went to Europe and fell in love with a Fiat Corsa similar to the 805-405 models meant for Grand Prix racing. He immediately requested for one to be shipped home, but when his car reached India, he was furious — the wheels were the wrong sort. Wire spokes were not what he had ordered! So he did exactly what any self-respecting king would do — he promptly sent the entire car back to Italy for a wheel change.

Another bruised soul was that of the blue-blooded Bengali who arrived, his dhoti flying in the snobbish,



Custom-made: a Type 8 Isotta Fraschini for actor Rudolph Valentino.



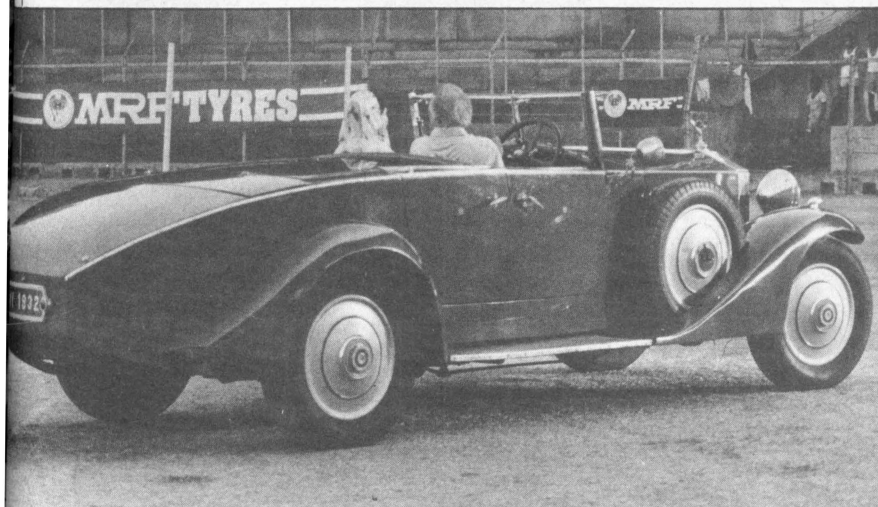
Mallya's award-winning Pierce Arrow.

supercilious drafts, at a Rolls Royce showroom in London. When he was politely shooed off, he swore to get even, and back he went to Calcutta to place an order for a fleet of Silver Ghosts through agents Stewart & Co. When they arrived, he had them converted into garbage vans and donated them to the Municipal Corporation. Those were the days, indeed! Days when even a smear campaign was executed with royal *élan*; days when frustration just could not be vented through dull acts like scratching off paint and smashing windscreens.

BUT THAT GLAMOROUS ERA is

now long gone; the maharajahs are no more and their fantastic cars are nowhere to be seen. With the death of the Raj, thousands of venerable, historic automobiles were immobilised; they stood derelict in garages, and even out in the open. Like Cinderella's pumpkin carriage, they were practically transformed overnight into base metal and fabric and leather. Post-War sentiments were all against them: they were far too expensive to maintain. Many, many majestic motorcars just rotted away where they were parked if they were not already consigned to scrap heaps.

Fortunately, when the economy



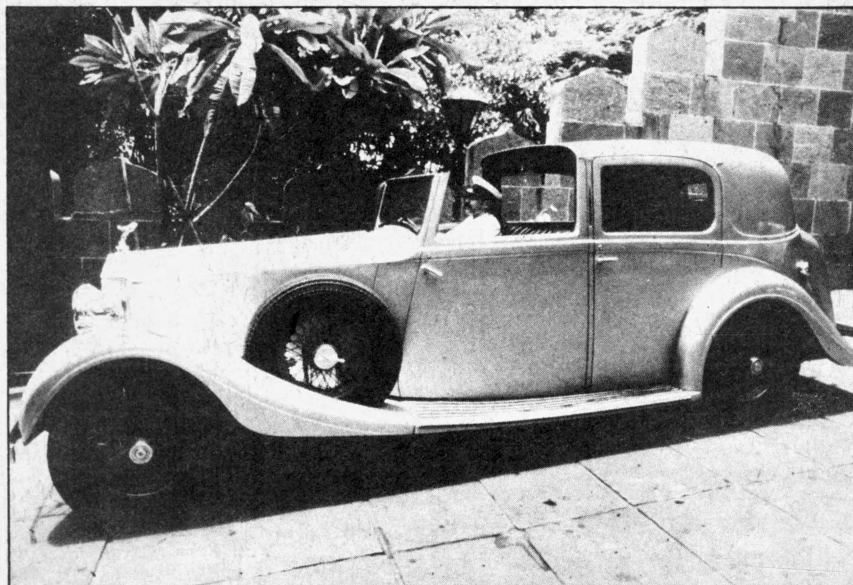
Another Bhogilal jewel: a 1932 Rolls Royce.

of the West recovered, the old ties with manufacturers and coach-builders resurrected memories and interest in these automobiles. Many of them had now become valuable collectors' items, whispered about in legends and rumours across the UK and Europe. Pretty soon, a vast horde of bargain-hunters descended on India to ferret them out. Pliable old members of the once-famous royal families welcomed them; they were only too glad to be rid of their old beauties for whatever spot offers they received in ready cash. For instance, a Duesenberg was sold, albeit 20 years ago, for a paltry sum of Rs 17,000! In the world market today, a Duesenberg in its pristine and original condition could fetch a staggering US\$2 million, ie, Rs 2.50 crore! It was a form of civilised plunder from which we will never recover, while the wheeler-dealers who manipulated it all, made fortunes by trading off their acquisitions to museums and wealthy car connoisseurs the world over.

By 1972 – when a belated government ban on their export took effect – several hundreds of our best vintage cars had already slipped away. And no one will ever know the exact number. Yet the tragedy continues. Even today, no one is sure of the size of the fleet that remains, as many valuable cars were smuggled out of the country. A popular *modus operandi* was to put the car on a *dhow*, cross the 12-mile nautical boundary of India, and then transfer the car onto a ship bound for Western markets. Another was to dismantle the car and then export it as 'machinery' to ready markets abroad! Forged papers, showing the cars to be post-1940, was yet another method to sneak them out. Cars have also been driven across the border to the airfields of 'friendly' neighbouring countries and then flown to the West.

THUS, IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE that only a mere dozen Indian collectors today own about 90 per cent of all the vintage cars in India that are

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Bhogilal's Rolls-Royce Phantom III Sedan de Ville.

worth preserving; the rest are owned by private owners who are still hanging on to their family heirlooms, while a few are with enthusiasts who relish the effort and satisfaction of maintaining one or two ancient automobiles in working order in their own garages. There are also some descendants of royal families who have tucked away the odd Rolls-Royces, Delages or Darracqs in their ancestral homes. But, they have only a vague notion of their appreciating value, and keep them with the sole hope of finding a buyer and making a fabulous kill. There are, today, only a handful of princely rulers who possess vintage cars, and though the states of Nabha and Darbhanga still have their royalty's old cars, they are pitifully neglected. Protap Roy and Gajjar from Ahmedabad are enthusiasts who have some remnants of a collection, while the Kanorias of Calcutta, Sharad Sanghi of Indore and Ramchandran of Delhi have a sizeable fleet each.

And while many metropolitan cities like Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Coimbatore have Vintage Car Clubs, the sad part of their history is that they are ridden with intrigue. Their officials often work at cross purposes, nursing egos that match

those of the monarchs of old. None of them have the vision or foresight to sink their petty differences in order to create a true National Register of Vintage Cars, without which the cars will probably continue to be lost, either to clandestine exporters or to the ravages of time and disuse. Even the relatively better-maintained cars, like the ones in the Vijay Mallya (50 cars) and Pranalal Bhogilal (over 200) collections, may well fall apart or get dispersed, if their inheritors are not blessed with the same enthusiasm.

Purists even have misgivings about Mr Bhogilal's fabulous collection; they point out that though all the cars are in running order, many of them are in less than perfect condition. They would not approve of things like the pea-green paint job on a low-strung, beautiful Invista, or the pink hue on one of his Cadillacs, or his unconventional taste in body designs for such thoroughbreds like his eight-litre Bentley. Mr Bhogilal's attitude (according to his friends) is: "I am only their keeper. I am not going to alter my cars for competitions. I will only keep them in running order."

In direct contrast, Mr Vijay Mallya and his consultant, Mohinder (Chubi) Lalwani, believe in restoring their

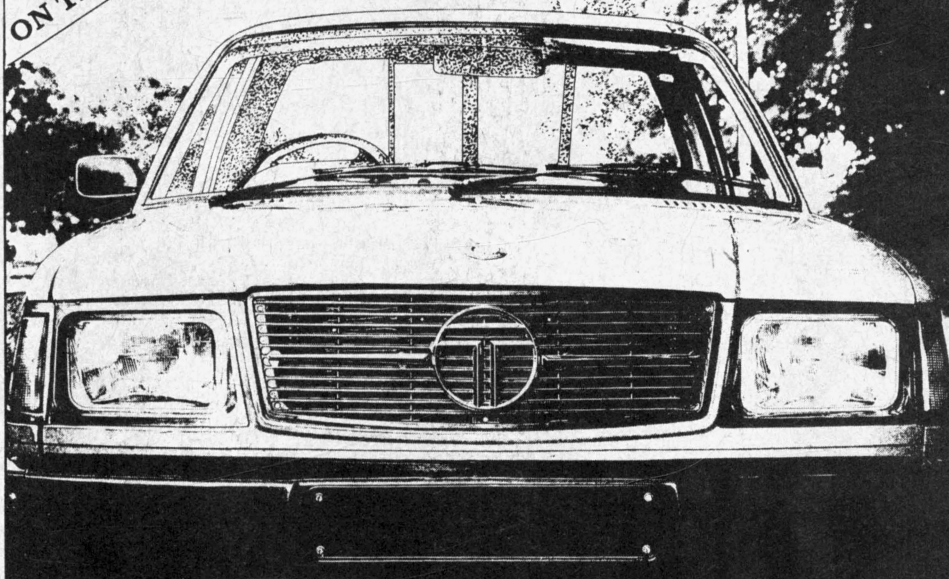
cars to "as original a condition as is practically possible in our country." They are invariably assisted in their quest by Classic Cars of Indore, arguably the best Indian outfit specialising in vintage-car restoration. (Incidentally, the guiding genius behind Classic Cars is provided by two young men who are part of royalty themselves — Manvender Singh, the son of His Highness the Maharajah Devi Singh of Barwani, and Tripureswar Singh, a true blue from the neighbouring state of Kachibaroda.) The result is that when cars from the Mallya collection take to the road, they are visual and audible treats to both laymen and enthusiasts alike.

NEVERTHELESS, insiders agree that the future of the Indian vintage car movement lies in the hands of this bunch of men and their close friends. Their responsibilities are clear: as there is not much time left, if they encourage the spread of the pastime of vintage-car restoration amongst the public, they will also revive and boost the art and skills of coach-building; if they institutionalise their holdings of vintage vehicles, and ensure their perpetuity by arranging to display them aesthetically and permanently before the public, they will earn the nation's gratitude. But perhaps their biggest challenge is the most subtle one: the need to create a central National Association of Vintage Car Clubs. If this happens, there are sure chances of attracting both governmental attention and private sponsorship. A beginning could be made by tempting business houses like the Tatas, the Birlas and the Ambanis to finance the preservation and housing of our automotive legacy, or the little that is left of it.

For, if we can create national centres for the performing arts, galleries for painting and sculpture, museums for anthropology and archaeology, and displays for fighter planes and railway-engines, do not our evocative vintage automobiles deserve just as much?

THE INDIAN AUTO JOURNAL

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INTERVIEW

CORRUPTION, lawlessness, feudalism, mafia rule. Singly and collectively, these words have, traditionally, almost been synonymous with Bihar, the poorest and most backward state in the country; a land where perpetual turbulence reigns, where criminals have wielded as much clout as the government, and where the state administration has almost always been riddled with corruption and chaos.

So, when Bhagwat Jha Azad was appointed to take over the chief ministership of the state on February 14, 1988, it was clear that an unenviable task lay ahead of him. His predecessor, Bindeshwari Dubey, who had held office for three years, had evidently not been able to check the breakdown of the law-and-order situation. During his tenure, the administration was reduced to a total mess, criminal activities and corruption were rampant, and the power wielded by the nefarious Dhanbad coal mafia had reached an alarming proportion. Mr Dubey, obviously found unsuitable by the high command to lead the state, was, in a surprising and disturbing move, appointed to head the Law and Justice Ministry instead. And Bhagwat Jha Azad, an MP with fairly lacklustre credentials, was, with astonishing speed, and in the dark hours preceding dawn, appointed to replace Dubey, as the eighteenth Chief Minister of Bihar.

Why? Had Azad's reputation for honesty, uprightness, and in his own words "getting things done", stood him in good stead? Was his abhorrence of sycophancy and nepotism in a state administration which thrived on both, viewed as a welcome change? Was the Congress-I keen to ensconce him into office before Jagannath Mishra, an ex-Chief Minister, had the opportunity to force a vote in the Congress Legislative Party? Whatever the reasons, it was clear that Dubey's government had repeatedly proved itself weak, vulnerable, and incompetent in dealing with the complex problems that had engulfed it, and a change had to be effected.



FROM THE OUTSET it was evident that Azad viewed what lay ahead of him with clarity: "The state administration is in a total mess. . . I have been told that the sons of some influential persons are involved in all sorts of criminal activities. . ." Equally clear was his determination to tackle these problems: "I will try to bring back a work culture in the Secretariat and the government offices. . . Corruption is on the increase. . . I want to warn the mafia that they are not bigger than the government. . ."

there are many — grudgingly concede that he has already infused the government machinery with a new dynamism. A Janata MLA remarks, "Whether it is temporary or permanent, good or bad, we have to admit that the government has finally woken up after the 3-year tenure of the lacklustre Dubey regime. . ."

But not everybody is convinced that Azad is the right man for the job. Says Mr Balbir Dutt, editor of *Ranchi Express*: "He has had absolutely no grounding in state politics; his entire

BHAGWAT JHA AZAD:

TESTING TIMES

"I know there are many things in the state that were, and still are, in bad shape..." admits Bhagwat Jha Azad, the eighteenth Chief Minister of Bihar who assumed office on February 14, 1988. In an interview with SHEKHAR GHOSH, the new Chief Minister who believes that no one understands the problems of Bihar better than he does, discusses both the problems facing the turbulent state as well as his agenda for change.

And his first few decisions, which included that all files be disposed of within 84 hours, and that all officers obey transfer orders or face suspension, rattled those officers and bureaucrats who had been used to executing their duties at a snail's pace. The 64-year old sprightly Brahmin who had declared that "time-tested administrative norms have been murdered and people have lost faith in the system," had decided to tackle the problems in administration head on, and ruthlessly. Even his detractors — of whom

political career has been shaped in Delhi. How can he be the Chief Minister of Bihar when he doesn't even know the problems of the state?" But Azad maintains the contrary and even boasts that, "No one knows the problems of Bihar better than I do." How far this extraordinary claim is true remains to be seen, but already, four months into his tenure, he *has* made a few significant inroads in tackling some of the problems that have beset the state. Issues that have been almost taboo in the past.

ONE OF THE FIRST proclamations made by the new Chief Minister was that no stone would be left unturned to combat the steadily growing menace of the coal mafia in the state. And recently, on June 9, Azad made an impressive dent in the seemingly impregnable empire of the coal contractors-cum-union leaders — several of the most notorious mafia dons were raided by the income tax, excise and revenue departments in a skillfully executed operation, and about Rs 15 crore worth of property seized. The CM is proud of his first achievement: "I have struck them where it hurts the most. . ." But, of course, the lasting effects of his actions will be evident only in the long term.

Although the Dhanbad coal mafia, which has been running a parallel government in several districts of the state, has been one of the most problematic and troublesome, there are others too. Agitations for a separate Jharkhand state in south Bihar have become stronger and more militant. Despite Azad's insistence that the demand for a Jharkhand state is voiced by only a few, and in any case, substantial cash inputs are being invested in tribal districts, the Jharkhand movement is clearly gaining momentum. Nor has Azad been able to contain the class-war — the massacre in Jehanabad occurred only a day after the interview was conducted.

But hasty judgements would be premature. And Azad's supporters believe that what he needs is time. And a degree of tact. His public rebukes, brusqueness and no-nonsense attitude have alienated many, but have also forced those around him to toe the line.

How long will he be allowed to survive? And how long will his enthusiasm and determination last? The articulate and energetic Chief Minister has a long agenda ahead of him, and strong views on how to deal with the formidable coal mafia, the Jharkhand movement, a lethargic administration, and initiatives for development, details of which he shared with SHEKHAR GHOSH.

INTERVIEW

IMPRINT: Foremost among the criticisms levelled against you, Mr Azad, is that you have always lived outside Bihar and your entire political career has been developed in Delhi. Consequently, you have been accused of not understanding the complexities of Bihar politics adequately. How do you respond to this charge?

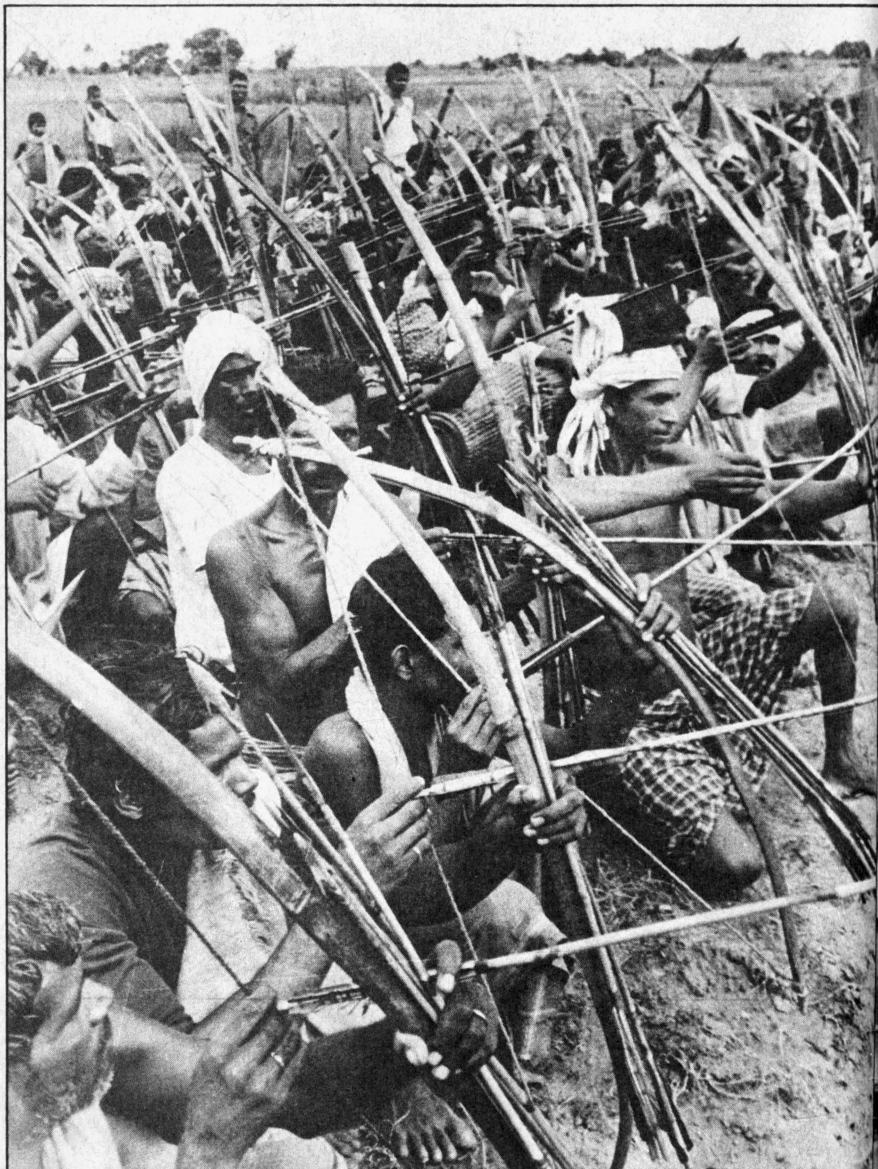
BHAGWAT JHA AZAD: The charge is entirely baseless. During my short tenure, I have already disproved the theory that I do not understand Bihar politics properly. Do you think it would have been possible for me to win my Lok Sabha seat for the last 35 years — except for a gap of four years during the Janata regime — if I wasn't familiar with the state and my constituency? Besides, Parliament is in session for only five months in a year. I have spent the rest of the time in Bihar. If you go to Bhagalpur, my constituency, every villager in that district will tell you that I have been there five to six times. . . No one knows the problems of Bihar better than I do.

Has your distance from the state, in fact, worked in your favour?

Yes, in as much as I have formed no group, and unlike several politicians groomed in the state, I have refrained from being polarised towards any particular faction. Thus, no group of leaders or members from the business community can come to me asking for undue favours.

On assuming the chief ministership of Bihar you vowed that you would "destroy the power of the coal mafia," even as your predecessor Bindeshwari Dubey admitted helplessness in the face of the formidable clout of the Dhanbad mafia. Do you think you have been successful in even beginning to achieve this end?

I have delivered a crippling blow to the activities of the coal mafia, by conducting nation-wide tax raids on them. Assets estimated to be worth Rs 15 crore were seized on June 9; arms and ammunition were also confiscated.



"This state needs Development Raj, not Jharkhand Raj."

You see, much of the power of these coal contractors stems from their immense and ill-gotten wealth. Weakening their financial strength was the best way to diminish their power. That is why I decided to attack the roots — their financial empire. The confiscated assets and properties will take years to be released. I've struck them where it hurts the most. For the first time Naurang Singh, Suryadeo Singh, and a few other mafia dons are in jail; they are not even being

granted bail. Naurang Singh has already been sentenced to two years' imprisonment. No other regime dared to bare its fangs against them.

Moreover, trials conducted against these criminals by the previous ministry were a total farce: witnesses were not forthcoming, judges were terrorised. But I have definitely rocked the empire of the coal mafia at Dhanbad.

But in doing so, haven't you willfully written off what has previously been

a significant vote-bank for the ruling party?

I am not bothered about any repercussions. In any case, most of the votes attributed to supporters or victims of the coal mafia were not voluntary; they were terror-induced. In fact, the masses were quite fed up with the feudal atrocities committed by the mafia. With their fall from power, the strength of their vote-banks will also diminish.

You had also confidently asserted in February that no separate statehood

spent Rs 960 per capita in Chhotanagpur alone, whereas the average investment for the whole of Bihar was only Rs 560. So how can anyone say that this part of the state is being discriminated against? I am going to further increase this investment and ensure that development works are carried out efficiently. Tell me, how does it help them to have a separate state? In South Bihar, moreover, even the population is not dominated by tribals.

But leaders of this movement say that Jharkhand does not necessitate a dis-

being prompted by secessionist elements from abroad.

Mr Suraj Singh Besra, General Secretary of the All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU) has said that if Jharkhand is not a reality by the end of 1988, his Union will start a non-co-operation movement. Will your government use force to destroy such a movement?

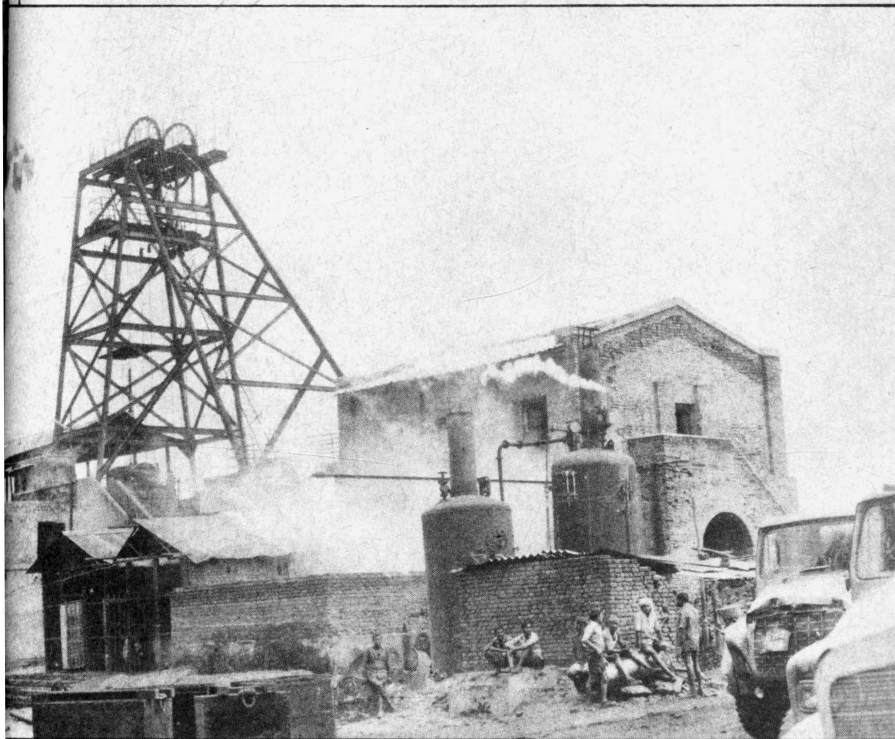
There will be no need to resort to force because Mr Besra's claim is a false one. The common people are not behind him, as has been proved enough number of times in the past.

But the Jharkhandists also claim that a division of the state will automatically simplify its management.

A division of the state at this stage will not only make the management of the state worse, it will make it unmanageable. Besides, the people of north Bihar have also put forth their claims for a separate Mithilanchal. Where does one draw the line? Soon almost every district, possibly each caste, will start clamouring for a separate state.

For people outside the state, Bihar has become synonymous with corruption, lawlessness and disorder — a place where nothing seems to work. Can anything be done to alter this image of Bihar?

I don't agree with this. I can name district after district which does not fall under this category. There have been problems in some districts of central Bihar, but they are mainly agrarian problems, to do with the distribution of land and payment of minimum wages. This image of Bihar is akin to the old proverb, "*Laskar mein oonth badnaam*" (the camels are to be blamed for any delay in the journey of the caravan). This is what has happened to Bihar. And the press is mainly responsible for such an image, because it keeps harping on lawlessness, corruption and killings in the state instead of also highlighting development activities in Bihar. I do not agree that lawlessness is ram-



Bero colliery, Dhanbad: "I've struck them where it hurts the most."

will be provided to the Jharkhandists. But some of the reasons for such a demand seem quite justified.

I stand by what I said. What the people in this part of the state need is Development Raj, not Jharkhand Raj. I am all for the former. What I want to do is to accelerate the pace of economic development in the region. Land laws like the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act will, moreover, be strictly implemented. Over the first three years of the Seventh Five Year Plan, we have

tion between tribals and non-tribals. In fact, they accuse the government of false propaganda to alienate one from the other.

Most of the population does not want Jharkhand. Even the tribals only want development and the preservation of their culture, their ethnicity. I will see that their customary laws are protected, and backward areas are developed. The separatist demand is an empty one, and it is voiced only by a few misguided individuals who are

INTERVIEW



Jharkhand: gaining momentum?

pant here. There are crises like anywhere else, but the press has given undue prominence to this problem in Bihar. Why don't you compare the incidence of lawlessness in Bihar with that in other parts of the country?

Statistically, too, it has been reported that in 1987, more people were killed violently in Bihar than even in Punjab.

Absolutely false. Totally wrong. There is absolutely no truth in this report.

But it was reported in many journals, including some prestigious national magazines. . .

They must have distorted the figures. How can anyone compare the crime-linked deaths in these two states? I do not agree with this at all.

Corruption seems to have reached legendary proportions in Bihar. . .

It is the same story again. Why pick on Bihar for all evils? Corruption is not just an exchange of bribes. Corruption is borne out of delays — in disposing of files, in taking prompt action. I have to attack the roots of this problem. I have made it mandatory for both my ministers and myself, to take decisions within a specified time, say 72 hours, to avoid delays. You also mentioned that Bihar does not function. Why don't you see for yourself if the Patna secretariat starts work promptly at 10.30 am or not. I am confident of minimising

corruption in the state, in the near future.

Was the recent reshuffle in the bureaucracy aimed at achieving this?

Yes. I have put the right person in the right post. I do not consider the caste of any bureaucrat. The only caste of a bureaucrat is merit. I am not casting aspersions on any individual bureaucrat, the changes in the bureaucracy are solely merit-based. I am going to apply the principle of accountability to everyone in the administration and the government, including myself. I have instructed everyone, right from a minister to a supervising officer, to record the progress of the project he is working on. I am convinced that with the right kind of leadership, the state's administration will be able to rid itself of the stigma attached to it.

Corruption and crime have always received due patronage from politicians. This seems especially true of Bihar. How do you propose to break this nexus?

First of all, I would request you — by you, I mean members of the press — to initiate a powerful propaganda towards introducing amendments in the People's Representation Act, so that known criminals are not allowed to contest an election. Let there be a powerful public opinion on this in the country. A criminal under section 302, whether convicted, or in jail, or involved in litigation, should not be nominated as a candidate for election. While it may be possible for criminals to get political support in certain cases, I can only assure you that no corner will be given to any such alliance in Bihar.

What about corruption in rural Bihar? Block Development Officers (BDOs) along with panchayat pramukhs in the state, are known to cheat the farmers; grants are not distributed and fertilisers are sold in the black market. This is why, when I tour the villages, I ask the local people to come forward and participate in the projects meant for them. I have taken serious action against corrupt or inefficient officers, engineers, BDOs, etc. It is very im-

portant that public opinion should be aroused to judge good officers and condemn bad ones.

I know there are many things in the state that were, and still are, in bad shape. The per capita income and the per capita food production in Bihar are extremely low. My first priority is to redress economic grievances in the state. Bihar has the potential of being the richest state in the country, yet we are economically backward. In south Bihar, in particular, the Central government has invested thousands of crores of rupees, yet people could not benefit from these investments because there is no agricultural surplus — of the kind Punjab has — which could be channelled to small and ancillary industries. But I will first try to introduce land reforms: the *gairmazoorwa* (owned by the state) land has to be properly utilised. Then there are ceiling lands which are still privatised under different pretexts, and some *Bhoodan* lands that are lying barren — I will get all of them distributed.

What are the constraints in establishing farm co-operatives in Bihar, as has been done in Gujarat and Maharashtra, to minimise the exploitation of smaller farmers?

I agree that farm co-operatives are the answer to several drawbacks that rural Bihar faces today. We would, indeed, derive the maximum benefit from minimum resources, if we introduced co-operative farming. I am thinking along those lines.

How do you see the future of your party in the general elections in 1989?

I have every confidence in myself and my voters in Bihar. In fact, I wouldn't mind going to the polls even now. I have the blessings of the high command and though my detractors may be disgruntled by my straightforward actions, I stand by everything I have done for Bihar.

How long will you continue as Bihar's Chief Minister?

Definitely till the next elections. Unless, of course, my services are required elsewhere. ♦



ON THE FACE OF IT, it would seem that the Indian law-enforcement agencies are doing a commendable job in stemming the flow of narcotics from India. Enormous hauls, valued at several lakhs, even crores of rupees, are regularly reported by the media, and the amount of recent seizures has indeed been impressive. In Bombay alone, officials of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), whose jurisdiction covers Bombay, Goa and Cochin, have already, in the first four months of

1988, made hauls totalling 4,264 kg of narcotics, valued at Rs 6.71 crore in the Indian market — an amount far in excess of the entire haul in 1987, which amounted to Rs 4.19 crore.

There have been sizeable hauls in other parts of the country too. And in March 1988, when the Interpol Inter-Regional Meeting of Heads of Narcotic Drugs Services from Europe and the Indian subcontinent was in progress, the Delhi police confiscated heroin worth Rs 12 crore — a well-timed move which elicited much

praise, and contributed to assuaging the fears of concerned authorities worldwide that India was not doing enough to curb narcotics trafficking.

That there has been a marked increase in the seizure of narcotics by governmental agencies is beyond doubt. According to the Narcotics Control Board (NCB), heroin seizures suddenly shot up from 139 kg in 1983 and 208 kg in 1984 to 761 kg in 1985, 2,864 kg in 1986 and 2,716 kg in 1987. Confiscation of hashish increased from 4,370 kg in 1984 to a stagger-

ON THE DRUGS TRAIL

Narcotics trafficking. Dangerous, illegal and highly lucrative. A business that cannot thrive without patronage from the highest levels. Can Indian law-enforcement agencies be relied upon to halt a business that generates billions? Is there a collusion between the drug-traders and the drug-busters? What happens to narcotics after confiscation? Disturbing questions that throw up disturbing answers. . .

SPECIAL REPORT

ing 18,900 kg in 1986. *Ganja* hauls reveal a similar pattern.

However, this increase in hauls during the past three years has, strangely enough, done little, in real terms, to check either the consumption of narcotics or its movement within the country and abroad. Annabhai, a retail pusher from Bombay whose clientele includes tourists, students, professionals, street urchins and beggars, says: "Nothing has made any difference to smoking (hashish and brown sugar) habits. Neither has the quality of my stuff nor sales figures declined. Distribution outlets may have become more difficult, but narcotics production and consumption has, if anything, increased." Why?

INDIA IS IDEALLY SITUATED between the major opium producing countries of the Golden Triangle (Laos, Cambodia and Burma) and the Golden Crescent (Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan), the two largest opium producing regions in the world. Inevitably, then, India is a major transit point for the transportation of narcotics to the ever-hungry markets of Europe, North America and Africa. There is a constant and vast flow of contraband narcotics from across both the Western and Eastern borders: huge quantities of hashish and brown sugar (strongly adulterated heroin) from Pakistan and other Western neighbours, cheap hashish from Nepal and the finest white heroin from across the Burmese border. These constitute the bulk of the drugs flow for the export market.

And Bombay and Delhi are India's two prime transit centres. In 1985-86, 6.45 tonnes of heroin, with a retail value of US\$10 billion was imported into the US; according to a US government report, more than three-quarters of this amount was transited through Bombay. Officials who have been observing and analysing changing trends in the narcotics trade, claim that an even greater amount of heroin and hashish is transited through Bombay to Western Europe.

Besides being a major transit point,

India is also a fairly large producer of both legal and illegal narcotic drugs, a fact that the media tend to ignore: our own dream valley of Kashmir as well as the mountain slopes of Himachal Pradesh reportedly produce approximately 80-150 tonnes of high-grade *charas* annually, although the very illegality of its production makes it hard to quantify accurately. And in Kerala, the sweet-smelling *ganja* that grows abundantly on the hillside is easily the state's fastest-growing cultivated cash crop, following spices and rubber. Last but not least, the poppy farmers of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan make their contribution — 800 tonnes of opium are officially produced annually, and this is bought by the government and supposedly destined for government pharmaceutical works where morphine, codeine and other legal drugs are manufactured. Sources claim, however, that real production figures are double that amount, and that a further 800 tonnes or so are produced clandestinely each year. This cultivation actually provides a plentiful supply of illicit opium to unscrupulous traders who use it to

produce that most lethal drug — heroin. Moreover, great progress has been made from the days of the crude laboratories that once proliferated around the tourist haven of Benares; today, modern well-equipped laboratories in urban centres like Bombay and Delhi are geared to refine high-grade white heroin from the crude base easily obtained directly from UP and MP. And these labs are manned by skilled chemists, thus fulfilling all the requirements for a quality heroin production operation.

THE INCREASE in production as well as trafficking, coupled with a corresponding rise of local narcotics abuse, has caused considerable alarm. And the onus of halting this snowballing menace has fallen on the law-enforcement agencies of the Indian government. Broadly speaking, eight agencies, some with overlapping powers and jurisdiction, are expected to effect this control, both on local use as well as the export trade. They include the Customs, Central Excise, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the State Excise and Prohibition Board, the State Police, the Cen-



One-kg plastic bags full of high-quality, highly addictive heroin.

tral Bureau of Intelligence (CBI), the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB). The sheer magnitude of their tasks can be gauged by the realisation that their job involves bringing to a halt a business that generates countless billions of dollars, in hard cash. In a country where poverty is rife and corruption the order of the day, this is indeed an unenviable job if it is to be tackled with any degree of sincerity.

These various agencies act independently of each other. They have their own sources of intelligence and their own investigating officers; they conduct their own inquiries and have their own powers of arrest. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act 1985 has not only increased the autonomy of the different agencies, but has also increased the powers of the drug-enforcement agencies.

MR L D ARORA, Assistant Collector (Preventive Wing), Bombay Customs, welcomes the change: "Before the Act came into force, the Customs were only allowed to deal with those drugs leaving or coming into the country. Now we have powers over all drugs in transit, whether interstate or even inside a city. Previously, only an official of the rank of Assistant Collector was allowed to make an arrest, and that too, after obtaining permission from the court; today, even an Inspector is empowered to make preventive arrests without the permission of the court." He adds, "The amount of narcotics seized since the passage of the Act speaks for the success of the Act." The NDPS Act has also extended concurrent jurisdiction to many more agencies like the DRI, Central Excise, NCB, CBI and BSF; the success rate is indeed impressive. But experience world-wide demonstrates that seizures are always only the tip of the iceberg, and a close examination of contributory factors confirms this.

Although, more recently, Delhi has assumed the dubious distinction of being the prime transit centre for nar-

cotics trafficking, Bombay, with its access to a sprawling coastline and its traditional ties with traders in illicit gold, textiles and consumer durables, is the natural base for massive drug-smuggling operations. The large international airport, combined with the huge influx of tourists, traders, and businessmen of every kind, has contributed handsomely. And Bombay's role as the nerve centre of the diamond trade, which allows large-scale laundering of illegal drug profits abroad, repatriated as precious dollar earnings, has helped. The rest is quite simple: the setting up of export companies, be it for garments or perishable foodstuffs, offers a perfect cover for clandestine narcotics export, while the frenzied construction activity within the city allows for a profitable investment of illegal drug-related profits.

IN MORE RECENT TIMES, Bombay has hosted thousands of Arab and African tourists, whose sole purpose in visiting the metropolis is to avail of the plentiful supply of drugs, and women, that the city offers. Frequent reports of the large number of Nigerian, and other African and Middle-Eastern nationals, apprehended at the airport while attempting to smuggle out drugs in various ingenious ways, bear testimony to this fact. The induction of canine help by the Intelligence Unit of the Airport Customs has resulted in numerous arrests and many cases of detection of concealed narcotics. However, unidentified sources among those caught for trafficking mention that a payment of an irregular cash fee has almost always enabled them to continue their journey. But obviously this is a charge that cannot easily be substantiated. Moreover, anonymous sources dealing only with African buyers, reveal that any goods apprehended after a sale has been effected can be easily bought back from the concerned authorities in return for cash and information leading to more seizures.

The seizures from passengers at airports and from cheap hotel rooms

occupied by tourists and foreign students, are among the most minor. Screaming newspaper headlines and television and media reports highlight ever-increasing "record" seizures of various drugs from all parts of India. Delhi, Bombay, Rajasthan, Kerala, Madras and Calcutta have all played their part in providing government agencies with record hauls. In Delhi and the Punjab, extremist Sikh terrorists — working in collusion with their brethren within the government and with our neighbours in Pakistan — also do their bit to enhance the traffic. After all, drugs mean money, and money can buy arms. And everywhere, the trail of misery that the drug trade leaves in its wake is quite alarming — Pakistan, with half the population of the USA, has double the number of addicts. The effects of widespread drug abuse mainly among the urban youth of India, too, is frightening, to say the least, and hundreds of thousands of addicts litter the streets of our towns and cities.

IN SPITE OF the supposedly immense quantities of drugs seized in raids all over the country, the stable prices

The onus of halting this snowballing menace has fallen on the law-enforcement agencies of the Indian government. The sheer magnitude of their task can be gauged by the realisation that their job involves bringing to a halt a business that generates countless billions of dollars.

SPECIAL REPORT

of narcotics as well as their consistent availability raise a barrage of disturbing questions: What percentage of the narcotics trafficked through India are seized? What correlation, if any, exists between large seizures and prevailing market prices? Are the seizure figures provided by enforcement agencies accurate? What levels of corruption exist within the law-enforcement agencies? And what are its repercussions? Why do agencies always calculate figures on the basis of exaggerated street values abroad rather than prevailing market prices in India? Example: 10 kilos of brown sugar worth a maximum of Rs 5 to 6 lakhs is quoted as being worth over half a crore on the international market. Why, then, these ineffectual steps to boost the image of agencies making these relatively innocuous and minor hauls, while tonnes of contraband leave the country — sometimes even by the containerful in sea or air cargo — and concerned authorities turn a Nelson's eye?

Unfortunately, no answers are forthcoming. Any inquiries are met with a wall of silence and further probing is pointedly discouraged. 'Privileged information' is the excuse by which information that should be public knowledge is withheld. Inquiries about the location of storage facilities for confiscated drugs, or harmless queries about the location of incinerators or testing laboratories are not satisfactorily answered. Indeed, Assistant Collector L D Arora does not believe that an interest in what happens to confiscated drugs is warranted and adds, "It is not in the public interest." Is this really so? Or could this obvious desire to keep information under wraps be cloaking other, possibly dreadful, possibilities?

Underworld sources who prefer to remain anonymous refer to the quiet understanding and undoubted collusion of the authorities with the big-time syndicate bosses, especially when it comes to 'disposing of' confiscated drugs. They claim that this co-operation is an open secret, with *hafta*, *baksheesh* and pay-offs in varying

forms being a normal operational mode. Only the pay-offs in this big-money, high-risk world are considerably larger — percolating down from powerful politicians with a large stake in the business to the lowly *havaladar* who collects his miserable *hafta*.

But, of course, no one is willing to go on record and point fingers at those politicians, big businessmen, and law officials who are involved, directly or not, in the narcotics trade. Doing so would invite severe, and even dangerous reprisals. And it is in their collective interest to maintain silence. However, the fact that such an industry could not thrive but for patronage from the highest levels, is plain.

The nexus between the drug traders and the drug-busters has occasionally come to light. The Air Intelligence Unit (AIU) of Bombay Customs has uncovered numerous instances in which packages supposedly checked and cleared by the Customs have been substituted with those containing drugs. So many people have security clearance within the airport that numerous irregularities are bound to occur, agrees A K Raha, Assistant

Collector of the AIU.

An ex-dealer who went legitimate after a few successful ventures remarks that anything and everything in India has a price — and this makes it a relatively simple procedure to buy back confiscated narcotics. According to him, after the formalities of registering a case are completed, and in some cases even *before*, all the concerned parties have to do is to arrive at an understanding over the price. The confiscated *maal* is then substituted with inferior low-grade narcotics while the export-quality goods are made available so that they can be re-routed to their original destinations.

EXAMINE THE PROCEDURE after a haul is made. First, a "qualitative test" — generally performed on the spot — is undertaken, mainly to ascertain whether the seized substances are, in fact, narcotics. These substances are then deposited in Customs strongrooms — the locations of which are a closely-guarded secret. Next, a sample from the haul is sent to Delhi for quantitative and qualitative analy-



Heroin, the purer stuff.

sis — an exercise which assists in estimating the 'value' of the seized goods. Now backed with this evidence, persons arrested during the haul are prosecuted. Offenders are prosecuted twice: in a court of law under the Narcotics Drug & Psychotropic Substance Act 1985, while the Additional Collector of Customs, who enjoys quasi-judicial powers, also prosecutes the offenders for violation of the Customs Act & Import and Export Control laws. The Additional Collector can only confiscate goods and levy monetary penalties.

Once in court, the cases can drag on for many years. But, in the course of long drawn-out legal wrangles, what happens to the seized narcotics? Your guess is as good as mine. Mr L D Arora, who also heads the Rummaging & Investigation Wing, refused to divulge the quantity, or value, of the narcotics stored in the Customs strongrooms. He also declined to provide details of hauls over the last few years, categorically denying the charge that pilferage from the Customs strongrooms is common: "We do maintain checks and double checks periodically. So far, I've not come across any cases of pilferage." But no elaboration is forthcoming about how, and at what intervals, these checks are carried out, or indeed what they involve, and the non-committal answers of the Additional Collector do nothing to dispel suspicions. Considering the profit-generating nature of the substances, combined with the excessively long periods of storage (reportedly 21 tonnes of deadly drugs have been in storage over the last three years), the possibility of pilferage is all too real.

QUANTITIES OF OPIATES sent to the laboratories are graded according to purity; useful quantities of seized heroin and morphine are transported under bond to government factories at Ghaziapur in Uttar Pradesh and Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh. These factories reconvert the alkaloids extracted into life-saving drugs like morphine, pethedine, codeine, etc. The

remainder, unsuitable for pharmaceutical purposes, is supposed to be destroyed.

This is where the fun begins. Inquiries about the destruction of narcotics meet with evasive replies. They are supposedly destroyed in specially-built incinerators. "We have our own means of disposing of narcotics and they are followed stringently," says Arora, but the 'means' are not divulged, and 21 tonnes of deadly narcotics languishing in strongrooms do not testify to "stringent" procedures being followed.

The state police are more forthcoming. They maintain that after a haul is made, the onus of safeguarding it is on the local police station. Samples of the consignment are sent to the forensic laboratory at Kalina, Bombay, and to the NCB laboratory at Delhi for tests, while the entire haul is placed inside cupboards which are sealed — these seals are broken only after proper authorisation. Sources that have seen these cupboards that are supposed to double as high-security storage units, claim that most of these are wooden, with plywood backs that can easily be removed and re-fixed in place. And this has indeed been known to happen. Inside sources also aver that the goods that are sealed are not the same as the originally confiscated substances. Often, heroin is substituted with lactose, *gard* (brown sugar) with innumerable similar-looking substances, and *charas* with inferior, adulterated qualities.

SPEEDY EFFORTS ARE MADE to re-sell the narcotics — mainly to the parties they were confiscated from, but also to other dealers who want to make an urgent purchase. Again, precise names, dates and instances are hard to come by for obvious reasons, but some dealers, careful not to make any obviously incriminating statements, are prepared to talk about it.

One such dealer, a big-timer who allegedly still retains his old contacts with customs officials, makes a damning indictment: "They (Customs and police officials) never want to meet

us. Word is sent through 'contacts' that stuff is available. Then the negotiations for the rates begin. You will be surprised at the bargaining that goes on. There have been times when I've been able to bring the rates demanded by them down to half the original ones. It's always *they* who are desperate to 'dispose' of the drugs.

"Once the rates are fixed, one of the 'contacts' is then shown the package in which the particular consignment is kept. The 'contact' is then supposed to prepare a similar-looking package filled with any spurious stuff that weighs exactly the same as the original pack. If the stuff that is being sold to us is white heroin (also called 'snow' in junkie parlance), we generally fill the fake package with chalk powder or lactose. If it is brown sugar, the substituted packet will contain brick-powder mixed with chalk-powder in the proportions needed to get just the right shade of the original smack (brown sugar). Once the switch takes place, payments are swiftly expedited, and *always* in hard cash."

He concludes with a telling statement: "The system works beautifully and makes both parties happy. The

It is a relatively simple procedure to buy back confiscated narcotics. According to an ex-dealer, after the formalities of registering a case are completed, and in some cases even before, all the concerned parties have to do is to arrive at an understanding over the price.

SPECIAL REPORT

government guys make money that they would never make, while we get some export-quality stuff at a very cheap rate, and we also develop a 'friend' in the concerned department who will tip us off if some calamity were to befall us."

ANOTHER OLD-TIMER who claims to have retired from the profession the day brown sugar hit the markets of Bombay, corroborates this: "If it weren't for the patronage of the authorities, the drug racket would not survive for a day. Sometimes, it is in custody that alliances between the drug dealers and police are established. When one is a long-term 'guest' of the government, a certain amount of friendship and camaraderie is bound to develop. Once released, these contacts are tapped, from either side, for mutual benefit. Everyday the newspapers claim that lakhs and crores of narcotics are seized. Yet the drugs are available everywhere. Even the prices of the drugs do not increase. The loss of drugs in seizures does not hamper the dealers a great deal; they know that sooner or later the confiscated stuff is going to come back to us. In fact, there are instances when we have approached the authorities to 'lend' us some stuff if our own supply is delayed! And I don't know of one case where we were not obliged." Several other dealers have similar stories to tell, and their overall contentment with things as they stand is evident from the fact that many continue to lead undisturbed lives and conduct flourishing businesses.

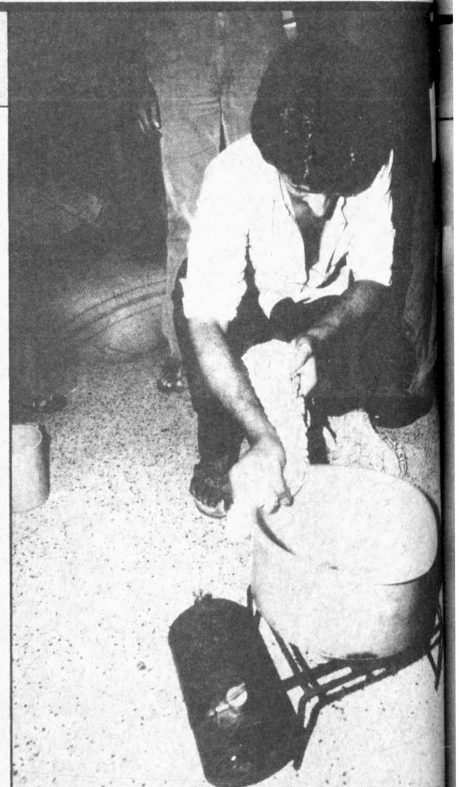
Police officials and Customs officers, of course, do not corroborate the stories. But then one can hardly expect them to. One high-ranking police official in Bombay *does* accept the possibility of there being a corruptible few in the police department, but claims that, "to the best of my knowledge, no such case of recycling the drug back into the market has come to my notice." And insists, "By and large our police would not dare do such a thing. Especially with opium products. They know what the drug

does to a human being." This particular official is sincere and straight. But the incorruptibility of a handful of officers poses no real threat to the many, many more for whom making a fast, easy and big buck is an obvious temptation.

THAT THERE ARE COMPETENT and committed officers is also beyond doubt. Mr Iyengar (Assistant Commissioner of Police, Narcotics Division, Bombay) has done commendable work in curbing the drug-trafficking menace, but admits that the laws regarding the disposal of confiscated drugs are vague. He himself has burnt some quantity of narcotics but "the amounts were small." Agreeing that the litigation for drug cases is too long drawn-out a procedure, the ACP claims that, "Pre-trial disposal of drugs is possible, but the permission of the court is required. And it is not possible in each case to obtain this permission. The courts themselves are so overloaded with work and the complexities of a case often deters the courts from permitting pre-trial disposal of narcotics."

There have, however, been precedents of immediate disposal in special cases. In January 1986, the DRI had made a record haul of 602 kg of heroin, 4,650 kg of hashish and a small quantity of Mandrax from Talashpuri, a district in Maharashtra. Directorate of Revenue Intelligence sleuths sought, and obtained, prior permission from the court to destroy the 602 kg of heroin, and duly destroyed the consignment. Following such a procedure is not only efficient, it also almost eliminates the possibility of pilferage and substitution. Why this procedure is not followed regularly is open to conjecture.

It is unfortunate that the methods used for storage of these dangerous substances are so lax. While there are obvious and genuine difficulties involved in the immediate disposal of seized narcotics, some more foolproof method *has* to be evolved that will not be open to question and that will go some way towards ensuring that



Conducting a qualitative test of a haul.

confiscated drugs do not re-enter the market. Allegations of misuse of official powers will otherwise continue as long as corruptible forces within the preventive agencies are willing to sell their integrity for filthy lucre. And it is not only while in storage that the narcotics are subject to being pilfered, removed or substituted. In the course of transportation to the laboratories, also a closely-guarded secret, the narcotics can easily be tampered with. So, too, while at the laboratories.

THE EVIDENT LAXITY in procedures following drug hauls inevitably leads to grave suspicions, and some rather pointed questions: Why are the drugs stored for such long and dangerous periods? Why are moves not made to dispose of them soon after confiscation? Indeed, why is pre-trial permission to destroy heroin not sought from the courts? And finally, why is legislation facilitating the speedy destruction of narcotics not written into our statute books?

Common sense dictates that only a multi-pronged approach which would include drug-awareness and educational campaigns, an eradication of sources of narcotics supply, and

changes in legislation in punishment meted out to offenders will go some way towards ridding society of this escalating menace. And without this, there is little hope of making a dent in a system that is guaranteed to work, given the unholy alliance of corrupt politicians, crooked law-enforcement officials and willing and able crime syndicates — all lured by the big bucks that this burgeoning industry guarantees.

Already, entire countries in Latin America are being run not by duly elected governments but by drug barons and narcotics syndicates. Not that long ago, a Bolivian druglord paid back his country's entire foreign debt to the USA to enable a plea bargain with US officials who had indicted his son on a drugs charge in Miami! This, incredible as it may seem, is not really that surprising. There is big money in the business; today, narcodollars are second only to petrodollars, and it is obvious that men at the top are closely involved. Closer to home, curious reports about the Air India Boeing that was impounded at Lagos Airport have been doing the rounds. The story appears not to have been as simple as it seemed, and sources report that the aircraft was impounded by Nigerian authorities to gain for themselves some bargaining power to enable the release of Nigerian nationals, including highly-placed officials, who were in custody following drugs charges in India.

Narcotics is the third largest industry in the world today, following arms and petroleum. Many hold the view that already the industry is too large, too profitable, and enjoys the patronage of too many powerful men for any effective changes to be carried out. But there are many, too, who believe that unless efforts *are* made, and promptly, the toll of human lives that hard drugs will inevitably extract, will be far in excess of anything imagined. And one of the chief areas in which efforts can be made, and a measure of success guaranteed, is in ensuring the working of the law and law-enforcement agencies. ♦

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MR INDIA...

Anxious that the Mr Clean image is no longer appropriate, and certainly not functioning, the Congress Party is looking for a new image to market the Prime Minister with. And a new slogan that will, once again, endear him to the masses. On these pages, four well-known cartoonists present **their** vision of the new image, while humorist TRISHANKU recapitulates minutes of the high-level meeting convened to launch the Prime Minister's new image.

Presenting Mr India...

Place: New Delhi, The Prime Minister's Secretariat. A special high-level meeting is convened to discuss a major issue. Those present are Mr Gopi Arora, Mr Suman Dubey, Mr G Parthasarathy, Mr Mani Shankar Iyer and junior officials. Also present, as a special invitee, is Mr Sharda Prasad.

Gopi Arora: This is one of the most important meetings to be held since I took over and the decisions taken here could change the future of the nation.

Mani Shankar: It's nice to be participating in such an epoch-making meeting.

Suman Dubey: Do we have to brief the press after the meeting? Or at least issue a press note?

Gopi Arora: Well, I don't think that would be necessary. The subject matter of the meeting is, well rather confidential...

Sharda Prasad: Then I'm sure it'll be leaked out to the press. I expect it to be the lead story in at least two of the national papers.

Arora: Anyway, this is a free country and leaks are part of

a democratic process. Why we have assembled here today, is to discuss the strategy and finalise a 'new image' for the Prime Minister. Elections are round the corner, and there is an urgent need for refurbishing the old image.

Mani Shankar: That's what I've been telling the PM over the months. Images, however good they are, get dull after some time.

Parthasarathy: And in a fast-changing, vibrant, Third World country like ours, there have to be constant changes including those of images.

Arora: I'm glad we are agreed on this point. Now, where do we go from here. I'm all for individual suggestions.

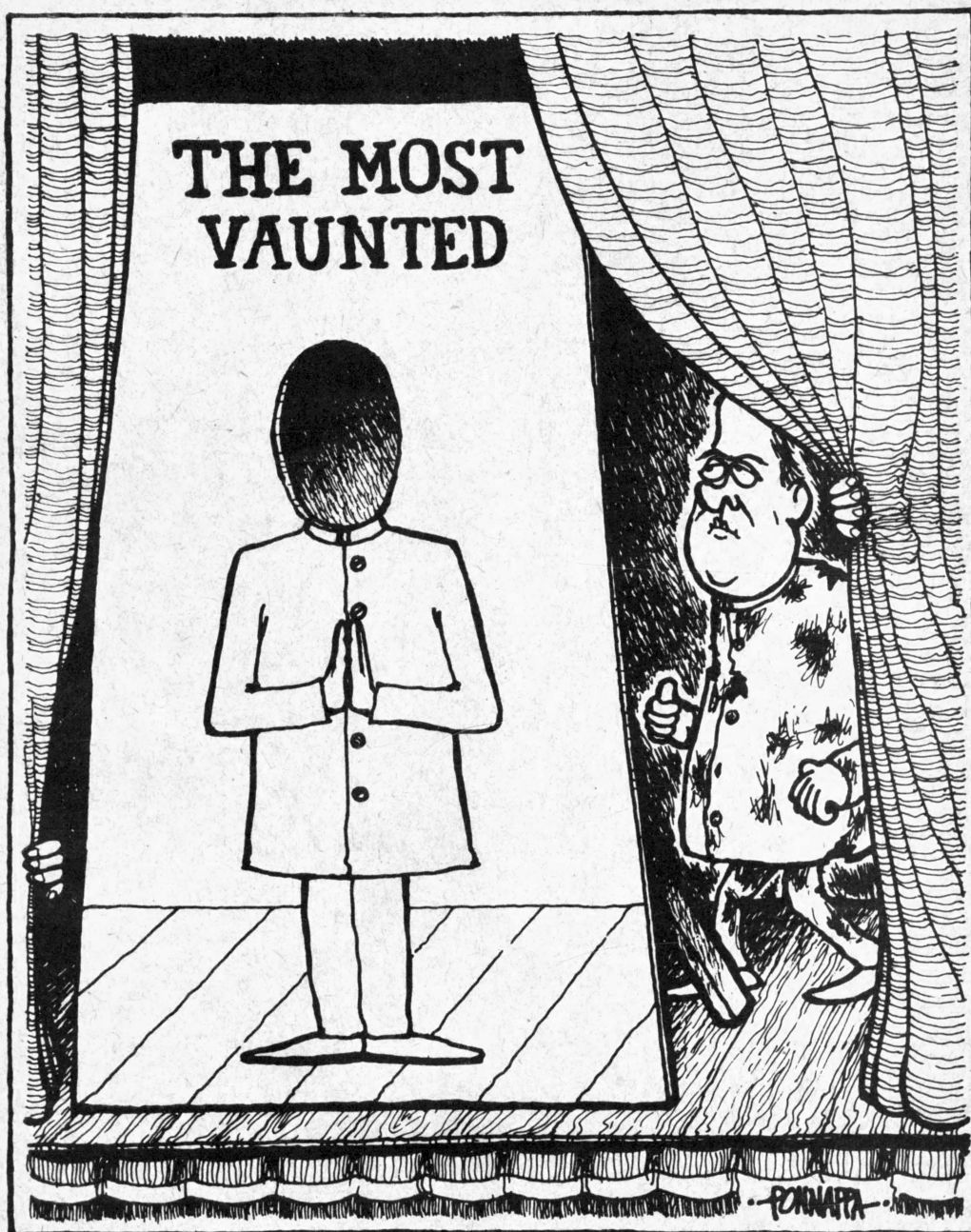
Dubey: We can take up areas from the PM's image which need altering, analyse them and suggest changes. There is no need for an overall change of image.

Mani Shankar: We have to project the PM as dynamic, result-oriented, modern yet with a touch of the ancient...

Dubey: Clean, honest, the upholder of national traditions...

A Return to Ramarajya!





Arora: Fine. Let's take up specific areas of criticism directed against the PM and try to find out if we can blunt these.

Prasad: The foreign trips, for instance. A lot of criticism is directed against them. I mean, the hiring of two Air India planes, the so-called five-star arrangements made in these, and so on. I think we should do something about it.

Arora: Yes, that's correct. The press always discusses how much was *spent* on each trip rather than what was achieved.

Parthasarthy: I have certain specific suggestions. For the next foreign trip, let's not charter AI planes but let's use the normal flights. Of course, let's make sure it's a short

flight. We can manage the security and all that. And mind you, no special arrangements for the PM's party. They will have the same food as the other first-class passengers, the same facilities.

Arora: What are you getting at?

Dubey: And no special facilities for the press too. Let them also experience the typical Air India service — punctuality. Mind you, we should take care that their luggage is also checked in at Customs and duties levied on all purchases. I bet, there will be editorials then on how not to 'expose' the PM and how the special flights must be brought back.

Arora: A very good idea! And one which can be implemented easily. So, for the next *short* foreign trip, the PM flies Air India. Fine, anything else?

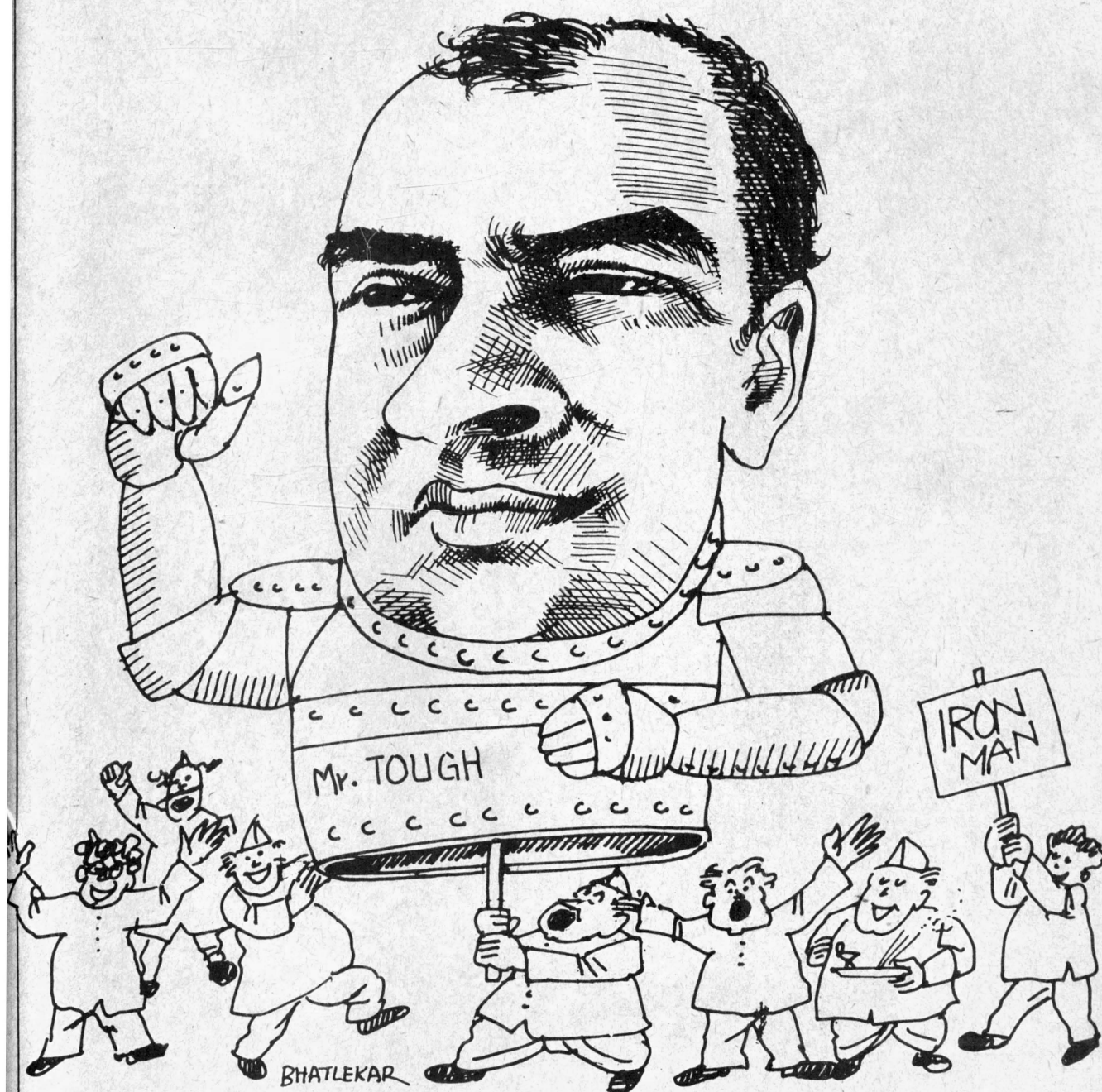
Mani Shankar: Talking of image, there is a lot of rubbish written about the varieties of headgear that the PM wears during his domestic travels. I think some changes are needed here, some kind of uniformity.

Prasad: But the headgear identifies him with the masses, that's what Mrs Gandhi used to say. If you remember, she

too used to wear all kinds of headgear.

Arora: We did a computer study. I mean, Pitroda did, and the results are revealing. They say that for a better image, the PM has to wear a 'successful' headgear, not just any gaudy one.

Parthasarathy: What about cricket county caps? Our people are crazy about the game, and we have not done badly in it. I mean, the once-in-a-while World Champions and all that. And we could have some variety in the mater-





ial used, colour, and so on.

Arora: What is that?

Dubey: On Gandhi Jayanti and other important days, the PM could wear a cricket cap made from *khadi*, a nylon one while addressing FICCI or ASSOCHAM. . . I think it will be a very popular move.

Arora: Okay, we will take care of that.

Mani Shankar: Another step towards a new image would be to feed the Prime Minister bananas every day.

Prasad: Why?

Mani Shankar: He will be sick at the sight of bananas and, hopefully, develop an allergy to them. If that happens, he won't be using the expressions, '*Humko ye banana hai*', '*woh banana hai*', and so on. Mind you, the press is having a good laugh over this.

Arora: Excellent. We'll serve him banana split, banana pudding, raw banana curry and banana wafers for lunch, and note the progress. Gentlemen, we have made considerable progress on the issue of the new image and the meeting is adjourned. ♦

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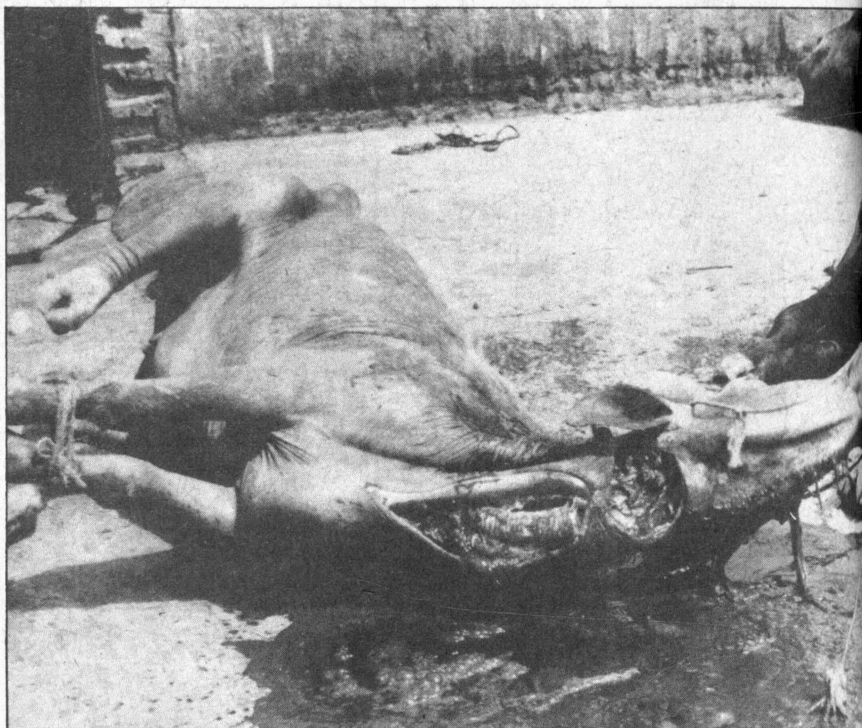
REPORT

FRESH BLOOD SPATTERS the walls of the huge room whose floor is littered with an amalgam of urine, dung, blood and the viscera of dead animals. The screams of animals in agony rent the air, while a stench of fear, death and blood is all-pervasive. The decapitated heads of a few buffaloes are strewn around as are parts of carcasses. And, all the while, broken animals, their legs chopped off, bleed painfully to death.

This scene is typical of the interior of most of the 8,000 abattoirs that exist in our country. About 10 crore animals, both large and small, are killed for food each year. And almost all of them are subjected to unspeakable torture and unnecessary cruelty before they ultimately die; the agony they endure going against the tenets of every code of humanity, and of most religions too.

Furthermore, the unhygienic conditions that prevail in most abattoirs in the country ensure that the meat is unfit for consumption. Primitive methods of slaughter that cause haemorrhaging and clotting before the animals die, rusty knives, filthy interiors which are, if at all, seldom sanitised, improper ventilation and deep-freezing facilities, and a profusion of flies, maggots and roaches, spoil a lot of meat. It is an appalling waste of livestock.

A skeletal description of the methods of immobilising these animals and slaughtering them, is sufficient to illustrate the magnitude of pain that these helpless victims of the butcher's knife endure. Animals are usually cast on the floor one by one; the terrified animals naturally do not lie down voluntarily, so their legs are either brutally hacked off with huge knives or smashed with clubs, thereby forcing them to automatically buckle down. Their necks are then twisted in a half circle by pulling the rope that is threaded through their nostrils to facilitate casting. These broken animals are further held down and subjugated by beating and clubbing until they are unable to thrash around; grown men



In Cold Blood

and small children participate in this process which takes a few hours. And the still-breathing carcasses are left in that condition until the early hours of the next morning, when their throats are slit. They then bleed to death, the blood from their veins caking the floor. Frequently, the animals are conscious and aware of their pain, but obviously too battered to either move or struggle.

"Gruesome scenes like these are even worse than the conventional pictures of hell," shudders Professor N S Ramaswamy who recently chaired an expert committee on the development of the meat industry. "The methods of slaughter in vogue now, can at best be described as crude and barbaric. Wanton violence is inflicted on these animals from the moment they are marked for slaughter until the second they actually die."

PROF RAMASWAMY IS the President of a voluntary organisation called CARTMAN (Centre for Action, Research and Technology for Man, Animal and Nature) that attempts to raise awareness amongst people of the need to modernise slaughter houses as well as use draught-animal power more effectively. A former director of the Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, Prof Ramaswamy has chosen to champion the cause of animals for several years now and has compiled a fairly exhaustive body of research on the obsolete techniques still favoured in our abattoirs.

India reportedly has the largest livestock population in the world: according to the 1972 census, our animal resources included 192 million cattle, 102 million buffaloes, 43 million sheep, 73 million goats, and more than six million pigs, but *Diary*



st of India's 8,000 abattoirs can, quite justifiably, be termed
embers of Horror. M D RITI describes the incredibly cruel and
itive proceedings that form the daily routine of
laughter house.

India 1987 records the total live-stock population of the country at 410 million.

Hundreds of these suffer an agonised death daily, at the hands of callous butchers who follow primitive methods of slaughter. Three main methods of slaughter are used at present to kill large animals like cattle for their meat, the most humanitarian from the point of view of the animal being the *jutka*, in which the head of the animal is severed from its body in one fell stroke. As the animal is almost always conscious when it faces the butcher's knife, this system causes it the least amount of pain as the blood does not flow freely out, but instead, clots inside its blood vessels, causing the meat to become stale faster or putrefy more quickly in hot weather. Consequently, this method is not popular.

In the *halal* and *kosher* methods, the jugular vein of the animal is incised: the animal then bleeds to a quick death, and the quality of meat thus obtained is supposedly better. Yet, the conditions under which these two methods of slaughter are carried out, are abominable.

THE UNMITIGATED SUFFERING of animals bound for abattoirs begins right at the start of their journey to the slaughter houses. Usually, smaller animals like sheep, goats and pigs are transported in congested, motorised trucks or ill-ventilated railway wagons. Strings drawn through the nostrils of these hapless animals are often tied to the roof of the truck or wagon to prevent the beasts from sitting down, while the space at their feet is used to pack smaller animals.

Once at their destination, there

are no ramps to bring them down from the trucks; they are simply thrown down from that height, frequently breaking their bones in the process. Nobody really cares what happens to animals slated for slaughter; instead the prevalent attitude seems to be that, since these animals are going to die in any case, it does not matter how painfully they do so.

The larger animals, like cows, bullocks and buffaloes on the other hand, are sent several hundred miles on foot to the various abattoirs, with no food, water or rest *en route*. Moreover, young animals are often tied to the old ones, animals that walk slowly, like buffaloes, to faster ones like cows and bulls — those beasts that lag behind are beaten mercilessly. It is not surprising then, that many of them die in transit, or that the survivors lose a lot of weight during their forced march to death.

Professor Ramaswamy points out that this system of transporting animals is not only cruel, it is ultimately detrimental to the quality and quantity of meat that the animals provide: "In this country of Buddha and Mahavira, why is the transport of these animals not subsidised by the government when the transport of food grains is?" he asks indignantly. "If 10 per cent of the subsidies that are given to food-grain producers were given towards animal slaughter, farmers who are the primary breeders and users of animals, would benefit greatly. If the government cannot do this, let it throw animal slaughter open to the private sector instead of making it a government monopoly." Alternatively, he suggests that animals could be slaughtered and bled in animal dense areas and then transported as carcasses to retail areas. Not only would this be more humanitarian, it would also be simpler, as fresh meat can be preserved without refrigeration for a few hours.

A scene that Prof Ramaswamy witnessed at an abattoir he visited recently, continues to give him nightmares: a mixed group of large and small animals was brought in a truck

REPORT



Twisting a bull's head so that it is paralysed during the kill.

and thrown down one by one. The smaller animals, in this case, pigs, followed the cattle in a typical manifestation of the herd instinct. The butchers decided to kill the larger ones first as they fetch a better price. So, in order to hold back the squealing pigs, they broke the forelegs of the little animals and draped the twisted limbs around their necks!

Pigs are truly killed in the cruelest possible ways: they are either buried alive or clubbed to death. Sometimes, their heads are even buried in earth to suffocate them while the singeing operations to remove their skin are begun.

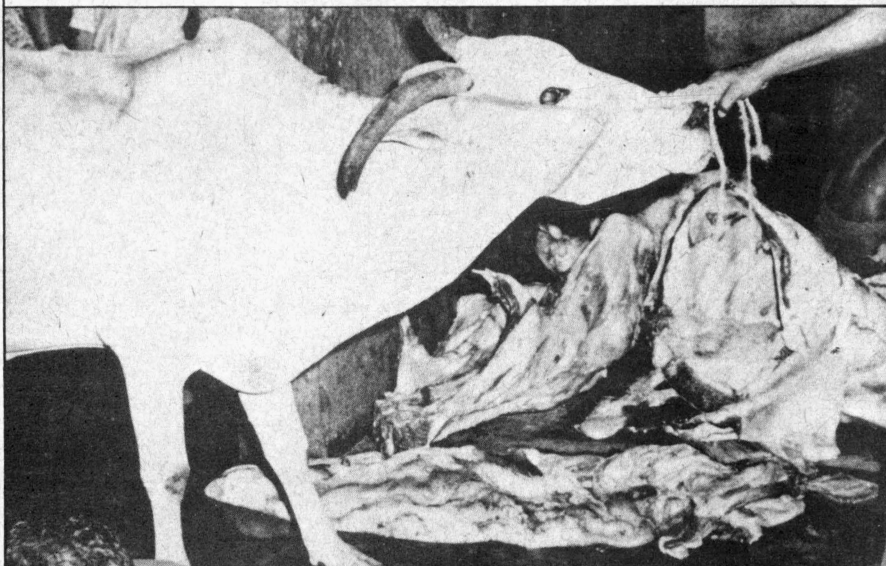
And worse still, as described already, animals are herded together in a room to consequently watch the slaughter of their own kind while they await their turn. They hear the cries of pain that the animals who are being cast on the floor emit and see the victims being pinned down by their human tormentors and butchered brutally. Naturally, the animals awaiting their turn panic and try to break loose, to no avail. They are doomed to wallow for hours in blood and urine, suffocated by the stench of death, until it is their turn to die.

AND THIS AGONY could be avoided

quite simply: the animals can be *stunned* and rendered unconscious before they are slaughtered. However, only a few bacon factories in India and a handful of abattoirs at places like Goa, Deonar, Durgapur and Aurangabad use this technique. There are two popular methods of stunning animals: the *captive bolt pistol method* and *electric stunning*. While the equipment necessary for either kind is not manufactured in India, it can be imported easily. Cost-

ings reveal that it would cost less than a rupee to stun an animal. The cartridges are already available in India, manufactured by a local ordnance factory. Manufacture of these pistols could also be indigenised, and attempts are already being made to facilitate this by the Blue Cross in Madras. The second method, electric stunning — more suitable for smaller animals — involves an electric current of a specific voltage being administered to the victim. This method is also as inexpensive as the former.

Unfortunately, a certain section of the Muslim community believes that stunning does not satisfy requirements laid down in their scriptures. But Prof Ramaswamy contests this view: "All the injunctions laid down in the Quran can be achieved with the assistance of stunning. Many of the injunctions, like those stating that animals should not suffer, witness others being slaughtered, be killed with a blunt knife (sharp knives are less painful) or be dragged by the legs, are now being violated. Many Muslim butchers object to stunning on the grounds that the detailed procedure given in the Quran does not include stunning. This method was not known during the Prophet's time, and so does not find a place in the Quran. . ."



Though banned, cow slaughter is still practised. . .

In any case, the objections raised against stunning are groundless, since old, blunt vegetable knives are still used by butchers in slaughter houses despite their being banned by the Quran. These knives are not only far more painful than sharp knives, but sometimes cut deeper than they are intended to. Furthermore, the knives are periodically sharpened right in front of the terrified animals awaiting death.

As Prof Ramaswamy rightly notes, most slaughter is done in contravention of the legal system in any case. Cow slaughter, although legally banned in India, still exists all over the country. Also, there is little difference between the conditions in our legal and illegal slaughter houses; most of our existing abattoirs, originally built by the British in the last century, remain largely unchanged.

THE UNHYGIENIC conditions in slaughter houses make them health hazards for the localities they are situated in. The stench of an abattoir is discernible for miles around; vultures hover over the open areas and pose a bird-hit menace for aircraft. And the animals dressed on the floor amidst all the offal, blood and viscera, provide meat which, although meant for human consumption, is contaminated



Practising "the most humanitarian method" of slaughter: the "jutka".

right from the outset. Ante-and post-mortem inspection of these animals, which is legally mandatory, is cursory at best; diseased animals are often passed without adequate examination. Again, municipalities have done little to improve abattoirs even though they collect funds from them. It is only in the more recently constructed abattoirs that one can witness a welcome change — modern equipment facilitating a more humanitarian approach to this extreme-

ly sordid business.

Apart from reducing the cruelty towards animals, modernised techniques of slaughter could facilitate the recovery of valuable by-products too. Dead animals provide not only meat, but also skin, blood, bone, horns, hooves and hormones. Only the meat is, however, utilised fully; hides, bones, blood, hooves and glands are only partially salvaged, if at all.

Prof Ramaswamy has been campaigning, both personally and through CARTMAN, to reduce the suffering of animals in abattoirs and improve the hygiene of meat products ever since he noted how neglected it was. On a personal level, he interacts with extension workers in government departments related to this field, municipal commissioners and the governors of abattoirs, as well as individual veterinarians, with the hope that changes will be effected.

CARTMAN has been given some money by the animal welfare board to fund certain educational projects, pamphlets and booklets. Apart from this aid, Prof Ramaswamy delivers lectures and holds talks on the subject as often as he can: "We are really trying to graft our ideas onto the existing framework," he explains.



Surrounded by blood and carcasses, an animal awaits its turn.

REPORT

IT IS EVIDENT that existing slaughter house facilities for the production of wholesome meat and meat products are archaic and inadequate. The process by which thousands of animals are killed by human beings, everyday, is both brutal and barbaric. Expert groups have studied this issue several times over the years and offered viable solutions, but no action has been taken so far. Instead, half-hearted attempts have been made to implement some of the recommendations of the Task Force Report of the Government of India some years ago, advocating the modernisation of abattoirs, but again, with little efficacy. The response is one of utmost callousness and lethargy.

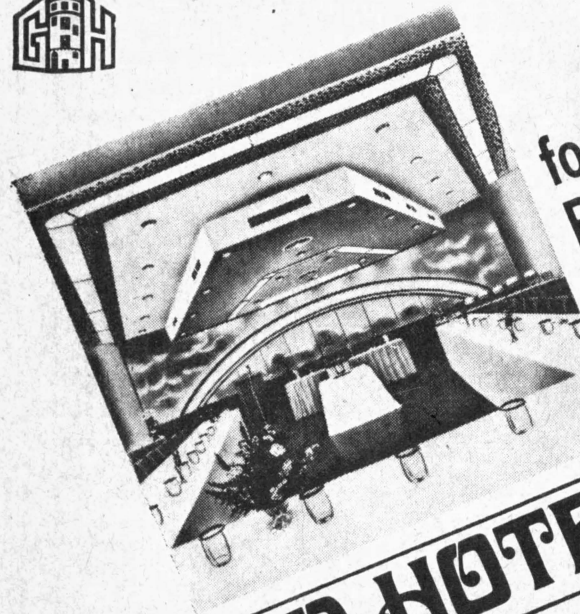
State governments *do* seem to be aware of the need to make animal slaughter more hygienic and less vicious; a combination of apathy and paucity of funds is probably the reason why no effective steps have been

taken in this direction to date. According to the Bangalore Animal Food Corporation's (BAFCO) Managing Director, Dr H Ramananda Shetty, 57 acres of land have been sanctioned to them at Kacherkanahalli, Karnataka, for the building of a modern abattoir. Dr Shetty claims that this abattoir will be the third of its kind in the country, and will be ready for use in three years.

However, while legal slaughter houses in and around Bangalore will be closed down and their operations shifted to this place, the hundreds of abattoirs in other parts of the state will be left untouched and unimproved: "We do not have the funds to do anything about them," says Dr Shetty. In any case, building one modern abattoir in a state, is really no kind of solution when faced by a problem of such magnitude; an issue that should be one of national concern. I, myself, have visited only one abattoir, yet it is

a visit I would not care to repeat; the screams of animals in the throes of agony, the rivulets of blood, the stench of death, the plague of flies and maggots. . . are the stuff that nightmares are made of. Obviously, there is a crucial need to clean-up and modernise *all* existing abattoirs, on a war-footing.

The report of the Ramaswamy committee, now under consideration by the Department of Agriculture, recommends the improvement of conditions in existing slaughter houses, the establishment of new abattoirs in rural areas to avoid the transport of live animals from those regions, and the introduction of stunning in every abattoir. It also suggests that autonomous meat corporations could be set up to handle abattoir management and maintenance. And one hopes that the government will soon act positively to make animal slaughter a less cruel and savage process. ♦



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THE ENERGY SYNDROME

In the urgent scramble for quick or magic solutions to the crippling energy crisis that confronts us today, alternative technologies or the tapping of non-conventional sources of energy is invariably suggested. In particular, for developing countries facing this problem, these renewable sources of energy – wood, wind, sun, biomass and biogas – can be effectively tapped only with the active support of the people. DARRYL D'MONTE on the energy syndrome.



QUITE UNCONSCIOUSLY, we imbibe many of the preconceived ideas of the Western world, even when it comes to something that concerns development. There is no better example than the use of the word “non-conventional” for new sources of energy, which advanced industrial countries have become aware of only after the oil price hikes since 1973. They rely entirely on fossil fuels and thus refer to renewable sources, such as wood and biomass, wind and solar power, as “non-conventional”.

India, like other Third World countries, has adopted the same word. Indeed, the government created a full-fledged Department of Non-Conventional Energy Sources (DNES) in 1982. However, this nomenclature ignores the fact that, in developing countries, fossil fuels are used by a minority: it is the so-called non-conventional sources which are in fact “conventional”! In India, roughly half the total population in both rural and urban areas can be said to be living below the poverty line, but as many as eight

out of every ten people rely on traditional sources, like firewood, charcoal, crop residues and cattle dung. Four out of every ten people in Delhi cook with wood.

Western energy analysts also resort to the use of the term “non-commercial” or “free” to describe these forms of energy. In other words, unlike oil or gas or electricity, many of these sources are not priced – they have to be collected and are hence “free”. This overlooks the harsh truth that a great amount of human energy and time is

expended on collecting wood and wastes from forests and fields. What is more, this effort is almost entirely made by women and children. Given the tremendous pace of deforestation and the degradation of the environment, the actual "costs" of collecting this energy are rising far steeper than those of commercial energy (in any case, oil prices are stabilising at the moment). The Centre for Science and Environment calculates that in an average drought-prone village, a woman walks 1,400 km a year, or the distance between Delhi and Calcutta, in search of fuelwood.

What may be the better expression, therefore, is "renewable" sources of energy. All concepts of sustainable development revolve around the objective of deriving from the environment, resources which can be reused, rather than exhausted. E F Schumacher borrowed the notion from economics that fossil fuels are like nature's capital, which must be used only in emergencies; this is why they are buried deep in nature's "vault" and not easily accessible. Renewable sources, on the other hand, should be treated like the "income" of an entrepreneur: no one would dip into his capital for everyday needs, which ought to be taken care of by the revenue. These renewables are already the prime sources in our society and have to be given much greater emphasis than has been done so far.

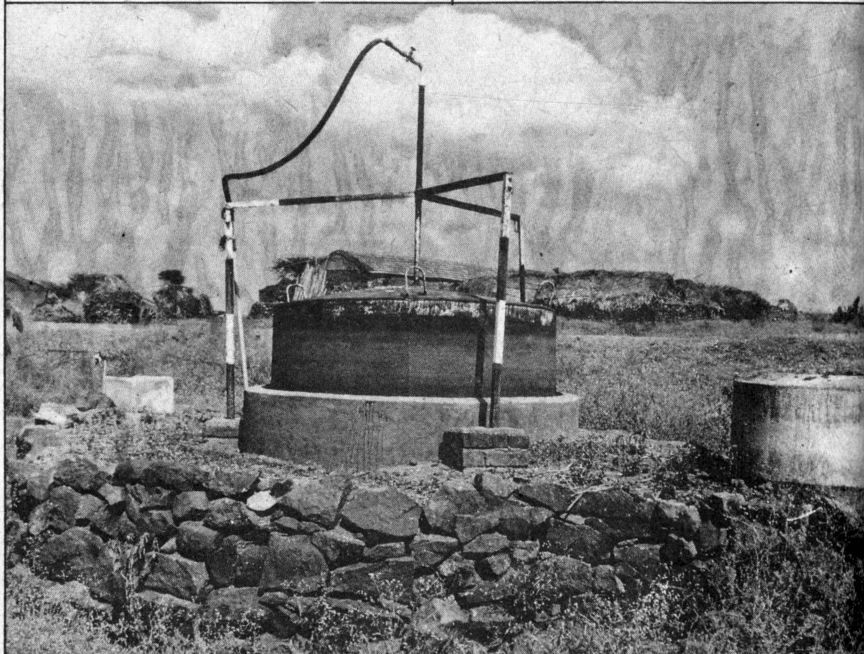
Some idea of their neglect can be gauged from the fact that only 6 per cent of commercial energy is used in the entire agricultural sector, according to the Working Group on Fuel Policy, which reported to the Planning Commission in 1979: this omits all human and animal energy spent in this sector. If one takes electric power by itself, very nearly one-fifth of the entire outlay on the Sixth Plan (1980-85) was on this single form of energy, the largest expenditure on *any* one sector; the proportion is about the same in the Seventh Plan. Investment in modern energy sources here, in fact, accounts for a third of the total.

No wonder, then, that renewables have a pretty tough time against such heavy odds, not only of resource allocation but also psychological resistance. But there is no doubt that these are, in the memorable words of the Worldwatch Institute in Washington, "the power to choose."

WOOD IS BY FAR the most important source, along with biomass or organic material in general. According to the Seventh Plan document, from a total forest cover of 75 million hectares — 22 per cent of the total geo-

resources, not harvesting them" — the implication being that felling trees, instead of only lopping off branches, was a recipe for disaster. According to Mr T L Sankar, who was Secretary of the Working Group on Fuel Policy, a village of 500 families would require 200-250 hectares of community forest around it to meet all their uses. Of course, there is no easy way of making such land available, given the pressure of population and the fragmentation of holdings.

In 1984, the first convention of the Bio-Energy Society of India, of which



Biogas: a cheap and decentralised form of energy.

graphical area, which is almost twice as much as actually exists — the availability of fuelwood is 50 million tonnes, or half the current requirement. This is why the Planning Commission echoes, a trifle belatedly, the warning first issued by environmentalists, that more than the shortage of food itself, it is the shortage of wood that is going to be plaguing poor countries.

Even eight years ago, Maheshwar Dayal, who now heads the DNES, complained: "We are not using renewable sources in a scientific or planned manner. We are mining our firewood

Mr Dayal was the Vice President, advocated the cultivation of energy plantations on one-fifth of the nearly 100 million hectares of barren and waste land in the country, which would create the equivalent power generation capacity of 50,000 MW, more than the installed capacity of the country. Whether energy plantations should be grown to produce electricity as a priority, however, is a moot point: it would make more sense to meet people's fuel and fodder needs first. Indeed, the unreality of back-of-the-envelope calculations, such as those

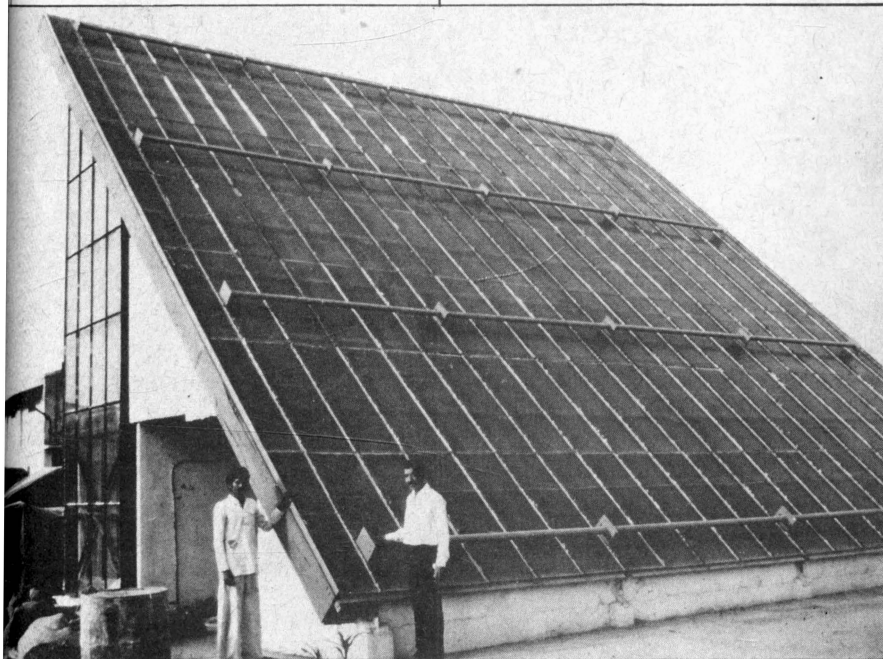
made by the Bio-Energy Society, is that these do not envelop the crucial role played by people's involvement in such programmes. Unless the poor are given a stake in the scheme, it is futile to expect that these will work: who will maintain plantations on a mass scale? A "tree patta" scheme, proposed by the National Wastelands Development Board, under which landless peasants were given the title to some land on which they had the right to plant and harvest trees, appears to be the kind of solution we should be looking for.

Yet another possibility is liquid fuel obtained from biomass, like ethanol. Brazil has made tremendous strides with "gasohol": motor-car fuel from sugar cane; but here, at least, it would compete directly with land for food crops. One suggestion that has been made is the use of a variety of jowar, known in the West as sweet sorghum. The coarse grain would be yielded from the plant as well as a sugary juice from the stalk, which can be converted into alcohol. Yet another benefit is that the residue can prove an excellent source of fodder.

to the new sweet varieties, the same area can reportedly yield twice as much food as well as 35 million litres of alcohol, equivalent to 18 million tonnes of kerosene. The Advisory Board on Energy estimates that this will be the demand for kerosene by 2000 AD. Apart from other considerations, there will be a considerable saving of foreign exchange. The excess alcohol could be used as fuel for two-wheelers. One must remember that power vehicles consume more than half the oil in the country.

BY FAR THE VERY BEST renewable technology for the nation, without doubt, is biogas. With the largest cattle population in the world, and some 5,70,000 villages, the real need for a cheap and decentralised form of energy is obvious. Slowly but surely, the biogas programme is picking up. Indeed, in recent years, the government has been exceeding the targets it has laid down for itself. In 1983-84, for example, the National Project on Biogas Development was responsible for 92,500 plants being built, as against a target of 75,000. In all, some 2.76 lakh family-sized plants had been installed by then, using the dung from three or four heads of cattle. Unfortunately, these are less economical than the community biogas plants, but then the latter face social dilemmas: how is a common resource like gas for cooking going to be shared between people who have several heads of cattle and those who own none? Inevitably, therefore, individual plants have been more popular, though this means that only the richest families in a village enjoy the benefits of this clean, domestically produced fuel.

Maharashtra has been the number one state in promoting this technology. Between 1980 and 1985, it installed nearly 90,000 biogas plants, thanks to the subsidies given by the Central and state government and the campaign launched by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC). However, the nationwide



Harnessing the sun: a solar grain drier.

CLOSELY RELATED to wood is biomass. Estimates of crop waste put the availability at 200 million tonnes a year. The advantage of this renewable source is that it is available right where it is needed — in the village. However, it is not as if any of these residues are actually "wasted": for instance, stalks are used everywhere as fodder for cattle. Theoretically, residues such as rice husk, crop stubble, groundnut shells, bagasse, arecanut husk, and so on, can be burnt to produce power on a small scale or gas for cooking fuel.

According to Dr Anil Rajvanshi, Director of the Energy Division of the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute in Phaltan, Maharashtra, "No other crop known to man yields all these three things together." Jowar also has "great tolerance to a wide range of climatic and soil conditions" and matures in 100 to 140 days as against 12 to 18 months for sugar cane. Finally, it is cheaper to grow and requires less water.

At present, some 18 million hectares in the country are under jowar for food and fodder. If farmers switch

programme has not been without its critics. Two years ago, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) alleged that out of the 3.55 lakh plants said to have been completed, as many as 30,000 were not actually constructed. This confuses those built under the National Project with other agencies: the former only began in 1981 and was then taken over by the DNES in 1982.

Studies conducted in half the states of the union three years ago by authoritative consultancy organisations like the National Council of Applied Economic Research, the Operations Research Group and Kirloskar Consultants, show that 85 per cent of the plants are in working order. Quite apart from the technical and economic benefits — a 4 cubic metre-a-day plant saves 4.16 tonnes of firewood (744 litres of kerosene) a year — there are substantial health benefits. Women using conventional *chulhas*, according to a study conducted jointly in Gujarat and the East-West Centre in Honolulu, inhale carcinogenic substances equivalent to 200 cigarettes in three hours' cooking, since it is in small, congested and poorly ventilated spaces.

The holistic nature of technologies such as biogas should not be ignored. They rely on indigenous know-how (contrary to Rajiv Gandhi's ideas on 21st-century leapfrogging), employ a number of people in maintenance and yield a valuable organic source of fertiliser in the slurry (destroyed when dung is burnt for fuel). What is more, the pressure on vegetation as a fuel source is lessened, and as the fodder for cattle increases, so does the availability of dung — and biogas.

Finally, the drudgery of rural life is reduced, and women's health — damage to the lungs and eyes — drastically improved. Incidentally, it is worth noting that despite the avalanche of criticism against the antithesis of renewable energy — nuclear power — the CAG and other agencies have not conducted a similar audit of its working. Biogas has urban application as

well: the Sulabh Shauchalaya organisation has ably demonstrated this in Patna, where community latrines (pay toilets, no less!) feed a large plant which generates power. Health organisations are trying to do the same thing in small rural towns, by building toilets at cattle auction yards.

IN THE POPULAR MIND, the really "non-conventional" technologies are the wind and sun. Both seem available in massive proportions over the Indian landscape and ought to be harnessed. However, they both have limited applications. Wind, unfortunately, isn't strong enough in the interior and only so at coastal locations. Rajiv Gandhi inaugurated the country's first wind farm at Mandvi, Kutch, in 1986. Built at a cost of Rs 170 crore, the farm has an installed capacity of 1.1MW and employs Danish know-how. Maharashtra is also interested in putting up a windmill at Sindhudurg, on the Konkan coast. However, the problem seems to be in using such technologies for conventional use, like producing incremental power for industries. With typical Gujarati pragmatism, for instance, the promoters of the Mandvi wind farm want to set up "electricity banking", whereby industries would be encouraged to put up their own windmills. Whatever they feed into the grid, they can take back when there are power cuts.

Such a marriage does not seem to be feasible for a number of socioeconomic factors. The cost of generation from windmills is very much higher than from thermal or hydel stations. In a country like India, alternative technologies offer the most scope in remote areas, off the electricity grid; at the very least, they can be used for low-energy applications. Pumps for irrigating fields, for example, could be powered by wind. The Californian experience, with rows of energy converters producing 1 per cent of the state's electricity (California has 80 per cent of the world's wind-powered installed capacity), is just not possible here because of the



Popular fuels: firewood and hay.

high cost of materials. With the tapering-off of oil prices, California, too, is losing interest in wind: from a peak of 5,000 turbines installed in 1985, only 1,400 have so far been put up this year. From some accounts, the Mandvi farm has been facing teething troubles too.

THE SUN IS the other source of renewable energy. This source has been sporadically harnessed here: in Delhi, for instance, the city's Energy Development Agency is to put up a 20,000-litre solar water heating system at the Shahdara mental hospital, to be followed by similar systems at the Tihar central jail and state govern-

ment guest houses. Bhopal has one of the largest heating systems of this kind, delivering 54,000 litres of hot water daily to the local dairy. For the country as a whole, as Energy Minister Vasant Sathe announced three years ago, a hundred integrated rural community energy centres are to be developed by the end of the decade, which appears yet another exercise in tokenism, along with the "Suryaputra" award of Rs 5 lakh for anyone who develops a breakthrough in solar power.

The basic problem is the high cost

employ photo-voltaic cells for low loads. In any case, in the foreseeable future, since the control of solar technology is in the hands of US and West German firms, their mass application can be ruled out.

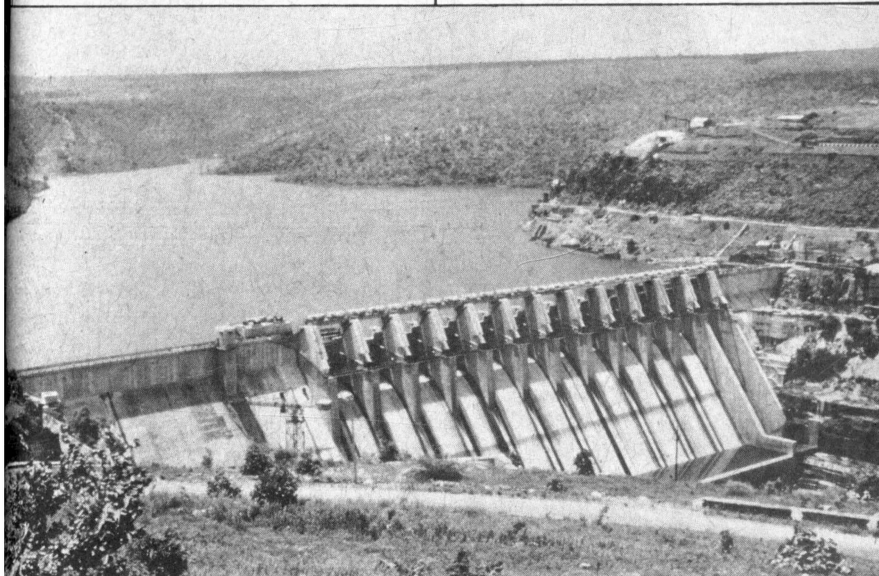
The final power to consider is derived from the sea: Ocean Thermal Energy Conservation or OTEC. The Gujarat Electricity Board is setting up the country's first plant in the Gulf of Kutch, although the pilot plant at Kulasekharapattanam, a small port in Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli district, predates it. The OTEC poten-

the saying, "An alternative technology is only possible in an alternative society."

TAKE BIOGAS. Whatever its advantages, the fact remains that a household plant needs three or more buffaloes to function and the ownership of cattle in India is even more skewed than the possession of land. In fact, if the biogas programme really picks up, it may actually deprive the poorest, who now collect dung as a "free" source of fuel, of the last remaining fuel as well. The Centre for Science & Environment shows slides of villagers placing stones on a dung cake on barren land to indicate "ownership".

Furthermore, instead of brand new technologies, improving the efficiency of existing sources may work wonders too. There is no better example than the *chulhas*. In 1984-85, the DNES installed over 8 lakh improved *chulhas*, as against a target of 5 lakh. Nevertheless, as Madhu Sarin, who has worked with voluntary organisations in spreading the design known as the Nada (Haryana) *chulha*, points out, it is extremely painstaking and "labour-intensive" work, which needs to be adapted to local cuisine, environmental conditions and, by no means least, the preferences of individual women. Otherwise, as Sarin observes, not only will the technology grind to a halt, but these stoves may actually increase wood consumption instead of decreasing it!

The answer to energy problems, therefore, lies in working with people, and not in imposing solutions on them. Only those technologies where they are involved — growing trees, looking after biogas plants, building better *chulhas* — offer some hope. The sooner we get rid of the idea that a windmill or solar energy converter can become as ubiquitous as a TV aerial, the better. Very often, the solutions rely not on new technologies as much as in reorganising village as well as urban societies, so that the benefits of renewable energy sources can be reaped by many more. ♦



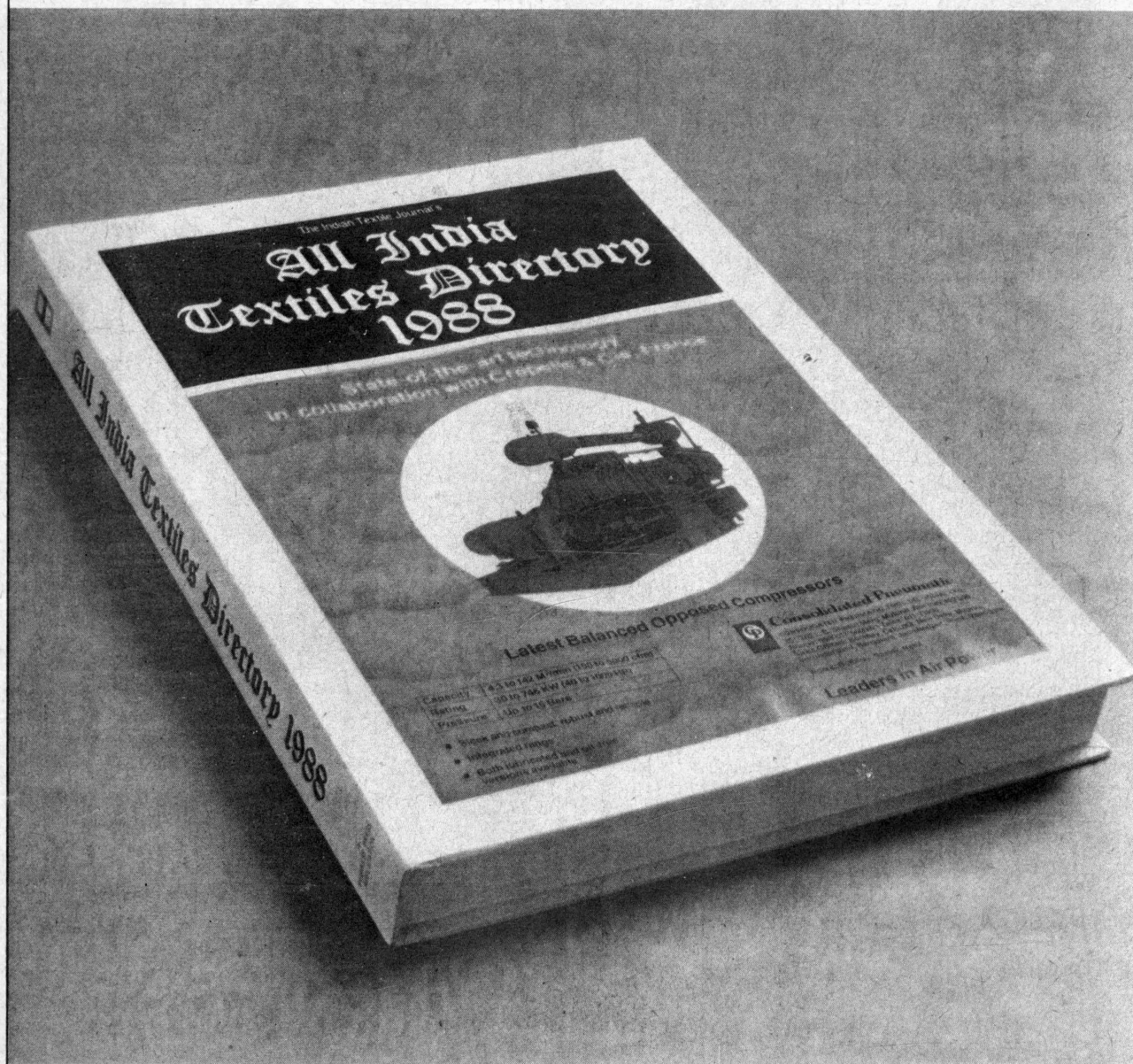
Hydroelectricity: a possible solution to the energy crisis?

of silicon cells, which are required to transform sunlight into electricity. The DNES has decided to set up a pilot plant production facility for their manufacture — a 500 KW per year capacity — at its solar energy centre at Gwalapahari near Delhi. By contrast, China has been making much progress in tapping solar energy and other renewables. Once again, the use of this technology should be clearly understood. It can be very helpful in rural situations: according to the DNES and Rural Electrification Corporation, there are some 10,000 villages not connected to the grid which cannot expect to enjoy access to electricity even within a decade; these should

tial of Tamil Nadu is particularly high — 10,000 MW — and the east coast looks more promising than the west because deep water is further away. Many technical problems dog this technology, not least the transmission of power from the ocean to land.

It should be apparent, therefore, that there are no magic solutions to solving the crippling energy crisis — what some experts term the "second energy crisis", which bedevils developing countries, unlike the first affecting mainly the First World in 1973. There are no devices which can tap wood, wind or sun instantly and substitute oil and electricity. The essence of the situation can be summed up in

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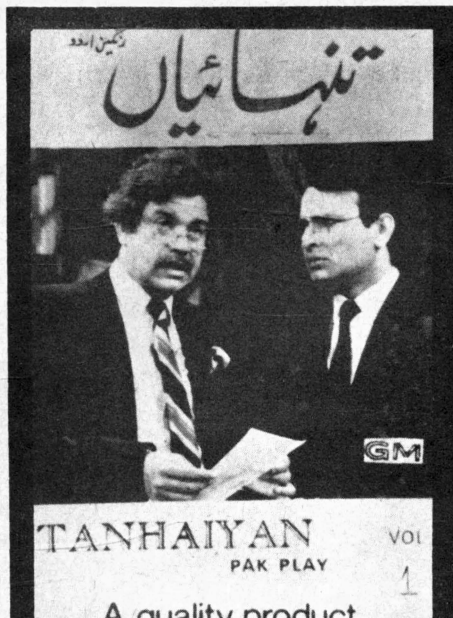
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IF THE MAJORITY of their television series are to be believed, Pakistanis are: a) very rich, with sprawling mansions, a retinue of faithful servants, expensive jewellery and clothes, flashy (foreign) cars, etc; b) idle, with no visible means of employment or income; c) blissfully ignorant of, and untroubled by, the harsher realities of life. This idyllic picture is, quite obviously, distorted and untrue. Yet, fantasies notwithstanding, it is a remarkably attractive world, one that you almost want to enter. In fact, you don't just watch a particular serial, you settle down in the world according to Pakistani television, or more specifically, their captivating serials; a world where the only tension is that between the lead pair as they run through the predictable gamut of emotions — disdain, annoyance, capitulation, attraction, and ultimately, happiness ever after. Where trusted servants smooth out all the humdrum and mundane problems of survival — they cook, clean, chide, advise and pamper their charges. And a world where goals are invariably attained, disappointment is temporary and success guaranteed.

Not surprisingly therefore, video buffs here prefer to watch *Tanhaiyaan*, *Dhoop Kinaray*, *Raat*, *Ankahi*, *Amavas*, *Ahsaas*, *Faslay*, rather than *Shakti*, *Kashmakash*, *Isi Bahane*, *Kala Jal*, *Poornima*, *Subah*, *Adalat*, or more recently, *Zindagi*, *Hakke Bakke*, *Intezaar*, *Amir Khusrau*, *Adha Sach Adha Jhoot*. The choice is clear: indeed, it is wisely superior. Pakistani serials have excellent production values (a painstaking eye for detail), interesting camera work (though mainly indoor), extremely competent and consistent performances from almost the entire cast, and a high degree of maturity, strikingly evident in script, dialogue and direction.



PAKISTANI SERIALS:

A TOUCH OF CLASS

Pakistani serials are in a class apart — and immensely popular, even in India. MINNIE VAID profiles the taut direction, exemplary performances and unusual scripts that work towards making Pak serials absorbing entertainment.

MOREOVER, THEY PROVIDE clean, wholesome entertainment; in stark contrast to the vulgar and violence-ridden formula films foisted onto hapless victims here, under the pretext of catering to popular demands. A Pakistani serial therefore, does not sacrifice quality to pander to the salacious tastes of indiscriminate audiences. Neither does it curry favour by blatantly exploiting religious sentiments — a fairly commonly used ploy after the staggering success of Ramanand Sagar's *Ramayan*. And most important, Pakistani plays do not pretend to be what they are patently not, unlike our 'comic' serials that evoke only disgust, 'human dramas' that leave you cold and 'educative value-based' episodes that cater to an average mental age of three. Barring a few popular productions that redeemed Doordarshan — *Buniyaad*, *Khandaan*, *Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi*, *Nukkad*, *Kabir* and *Malgudi Days* — television serials or plays in India rank a very poor second to their counterparts on the other side of the Indo-Pak border.

"Pakistani serials have everything . . ." says an enthusiast and magazine publisher, "... all the elements of a first-rate soap opera, fantastic performances and a total lack of vulgarity. They satisfy our emotional requirements and are much more honest and mature than our own silly serials." He concedes, however, that their appeal is probably restricted to metropolitan cities or viewers in the North, who can identify with the predominantly Punjabi culture and atmosphere that characterises most Pakistani serials. "Of course, video cassettes of every Indian serial are also exported to Pakistan (and the Gulf countries), the release coinciding with their very first telecast back home, but what an unfair exchange it is!" he exclaims.

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Most video libraries in major cities in India stock at least 15-20 Pakistani serials at any given point of time. *Tanhaiyaan*, *Dhoop Kinaray*, *Ankahi*, *Raat*, *Dastak* and a few others seem to be all-time favourites, as are TV celebrities like Marina Khan, Shahnaz Sheikh, Rahat Kazmi, Badar Khalil, Sajid Hasan, Qazi Wajid, Asif Raja Mir, etc.

THE FOCUS OF a considerable majority of these serials is invariably on love, happiness, caring, truth, laughter and the other niceties of a dream world. Perhaps the only concession to reality is the underlying thread of ambition, present in at least *one* character in most serials, and fulfilled, of course, in the concluding episodes of the serial. Other recurring motifs include: a) an inexplicable obsession of owning houses — ancestral or otherwise; b) illness — accidental or hereditary; c) at least *one* court jester, providing comic relief in between emotionally charged scenes; d) the skillful use of music to accompany or emphasise a mood, a relationship, an interlude.

As Haseena Moin — among the best

RECOMMENDED VIEWING

Tanhaiyaan
Dhoop Kinaray
Ankahi
Uncle Urfi
Raat
Amavas
Ahsaas
Dastak
Hazaaron Raste
Shikast-e-Arzo
Naqsh-e-sahi
Samundar
Nehle pe Dehla
Parchaiyan
Faslaay
Kawish
Ye Kahan ki Dosti hai
Karwaan
Angan Tehra
Aasman



Marina Khan: a vivacious and gifted performer.

scriptwriters and directors on Pakistan television and author of *Tanhaiyaan*, *Ankahi*, *Dhoop Kinaray*, *Parchaiyan*, etc — admits candidly in *TV Times* (a Pakistani magazine), the story line isn't all that important, characterisation is! And Haseena's characters have a uniformly endearing quality about them. Whether it is Saniya (Marina Khan), Zara (Shahnaz Sheikh), Farhan (Qazi Wajid), Ani (Badar Khalil)

in *Tanhaiyaan*, or Dr Ahmer (Rahat Kazmi), Dr Irfan (Sajid Hasan), Zoya (Marina Khan again), Anji (Kehkashan Awan) in *Dhoop Kinaray*, or the protagonists of her earlier serials (she has written over ten for Pak TV) — there is an instant rapport with the audience. After watching just *one* cassette (most Pakistani serials are available as 4-cassette bonanzas), you're hooked! Saniya and Zara, Zain and Vida,



Haseena Moin of blockbuster serials: talented.

Kabacha and Farhan become familiar members of your household, as you share in their trials and tribulations, their fantasies and romances.

THE ELEMENT OF SUSPENSE and drama — prerequisites for all successful soap operas — is very finely honed. Take *Tanhaiyaan*, and later, *Dhoop Kinaray* as case studies. The sense of participation in the audiences is so marked that you start agonising over Zara's ambitious projects; over Zain's stupid obstinacy that prevents him from realising that he loves Zara and not his fiancée Vida; over Saat Salmaan's callous behaviour, and you go

on... predicting, marvelling, laughing with enjoyment as *Tanhaiyaan* becomes more and more absorbing. Funnily enough, *Tanhaiyaan* (loneliness) is a deceptive title, for the serial — meandering along at a comfortable pace albeit with sudden twists and turns in the plot — is actually full of good-humoured fun.

The plot revolves around Zara, and to a lesser extent, Saniya — orphaned daughters of a famous filmstar — who begin life afresh with their easy-going aunt, Ani, and two devoted servants, Bibi and Baba. Zara (played with great sensitivity by Shahnaz Sheikh) is a pretty young woman with

a mission — to acquire enough wealth to buy back the family's mortgaged house from her father's erstwhile (and traitorous) friends. Her younger sister Saniya (another scintillating performance by Marina Khan) is an irrepressibly buoyant and fun-loving person whose sole aim in life seems to be to provide endless amusement to everyone — she teases people unmercifully, adores her sister, bullies the servants, torments the unfortunate Kabacha (a neighbouring estate manager whose boss, Farhan, marries Ani) and breezes along, without worrying about studies, exams, work, etc. The contrast between the two sisters is obvious: Zara — dignified, ambitious, hard-working; Saniya — gregarious, gay and outspoken.

Tanhaiyaan is thus, mainly a sparkling narrative of the life and times of the two sisters — ably supported, of course, by the rest of the cast. A childhood friend (Zain), his perceptive fiancée (Vida), Zara's handsome young business partner (Saat Salmaan), the hapless Kabacha, feuding servants — all of whom turn in remarkably competent performances. For Indian viewers especially, bred on loud and lacklustre performances, the unquestionably high standard of acting (in most Pakistani serials) provides a welcome reprieve.

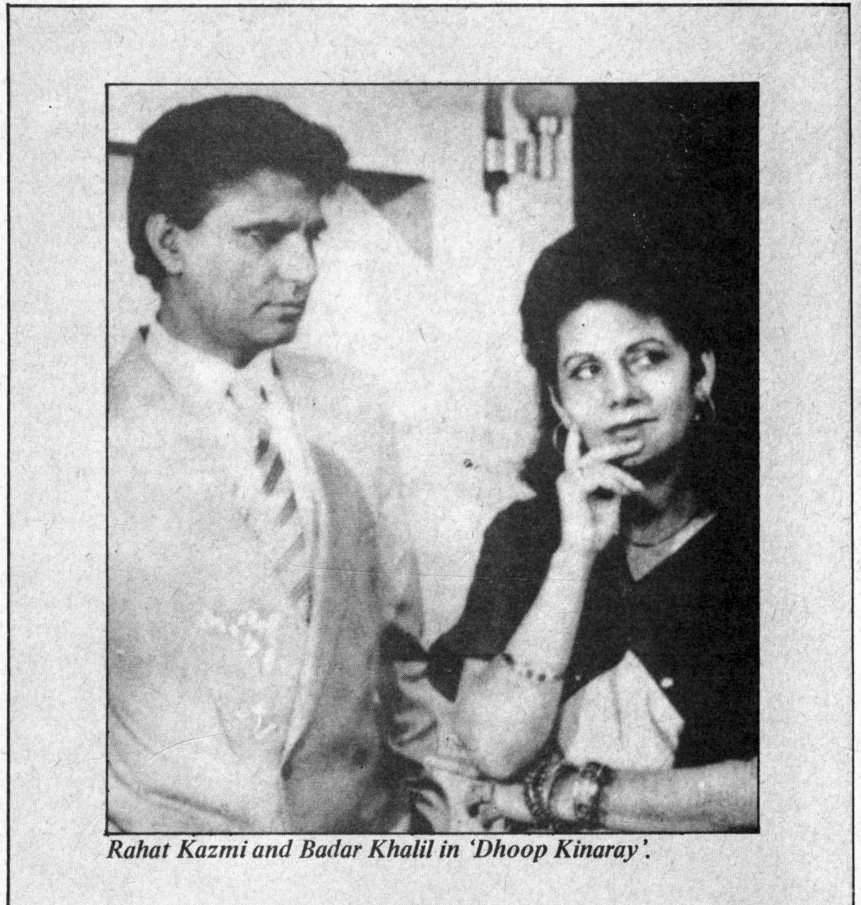
Dhoop Kinaray, another Haseena Moin blockbuster, focuses on the medical profession. The medical milieu, however, takes a backseat to the intricate web of personal resentments, jealousies, heartaches and frivolities that are rife among the chief players. The hospital's activities are dismissively portrayed in *one* outdoor long shot of the building, *one* ward which is the scene of all the action, and *one* common room where the doctors congregate with remarkable regularity. It is, once again, an idealised situation where authenticity is cheerfully disregarded to appease the pleasure seeking tastes of the audiences. Thus what is presented is really a Bowdlerised version of a hospital and its functioning — with a marked absence of

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the urgency, trauma and tragedy that form an inevitable part of any medical establishment. Incredulity apart, *Dhoop Kinaray* is, as a Pakistani magazine fancifully declares, "a steroid for ailing nerves." The escapist nature of the serial does not, however, detract from its considerable appeal, especially in the subtle nuances of the delicate romance between the chief protagonists — the attractive young Dr Zoya (Marina Khan) and the much older and formidably stern Dr Ahmer. The gradual intimacy between the two is portrayed so effectively — both a directorial and acting triumph indeed — that the screen bristles with the sparks of the strange chemistry between Zoya and Dr Ahmer. This predilection for alliances between middle-aged yet eminently eligible bachelors and their vivacious, young protégés — à la Mills and Boon stereotypes — is evident in almost all of Haseena Moin's works: *Ankahi*, *Uncle Urfi*, etc. . .

REBELLIOUS WOMEN constitute the other (and major) *leitmotif* of most serials, their characterisation often acquiring undertones of feminism. Taking on a second wife, for example — a traditionally approved practice under Muslim law — is openly criticised, even condemned. Whether this is a telling comment on the status or aspirations of women in Pakistan is, however, open to question.

Dialogue is another *tour de force*, enhanced by the natural mellifluousness and cadence of a truly beautiful language — Urdu. Apart from occasional phrases or philosophical utterances which are incomprehensible to an audience unfamiliar with Urdu, most of the dialogues are a powerful blend of wit, humour and seriousness. And stray sentences in English notwithstanding, the language adopted remains unsullied and gracious. Indeed, some words have a magical intonation, a lilting quality that conjures up an exciting and novel ethos. For example, words like *tafree* (holiday)



Rahat Kazmi and Badar Khalil in 'Dhoop Kinaray'.

khauf (fear), *na-kabile aitbar* (untrustworthy), *khafa* (angry), *shaks* (person), *ahem* (important) and, of course, the warm and oddly formal greeting — *Salaam aleikum* and the response — *Waleikum-us-salaam*.

Powerful dialogues, flawless diction, innovative direction, impressive performances, a strong story line. . . Pakistani serials have a lot going for them. And this, despite facing greater odds — far more stringent terms of censorship — than those faced by Indian serial-makers. Moreover, in what seems to be an obvious contradistinction to their Pakistani counterparts, Indian television serials (and programmes) are enmeshed in a Catch-22 situation; boring and incredibly amateurish serials are continually foisted on what then becomes a captive audience — powerless to either object or simply switch off! Once serial-makers

are thus assured of a sizeable though colourless audience, quality is hardly going to be their watchword or criterion. In any case, Door-darshan's track record — since the advent of sponsored programmes and serials — mirrors an amazing indifference to merit-oriented methods of selection. When ministerial approval is granted arbitrarily, and where primitive laws of survival are the order of day, isn't sheer merit or excellence a futile commodity? Can *anyone* be spurred onto greater heights in an atmosphere of placid mediocrity? Yet, just a random viewing of Pakistani serials is convincing proof that someone, somewhere, in the official portals of the showbiz world in Pakistan, indeed knows what entertainment is all about. And it seems a great pity that this knowledge is not shared.

PAUL ERDMAN WHAT'S NEXT?

HOW TO PREPARE YOURSELF
FOR THE CRASH OF '89 AND
PROFIT IN THE 1990's



ECONOMIC FORECAST: WHAT'S NEXT?

What is the financial forecast for the year 1989? Is the global stock market going to reel unarmed under the impact of another Black Monday? Or will the coming decade witness low inflation, steady growth and a balanced budget? Economic expert PAUL ERDMAN presents his Convergence Theory – a remarkably convincing prediction of another cataclysmic crash.

LOOKING AT the economic and political factors that face us in 1988 and early 1989, in particular the overleveraging of corporations and nations, I have arrived at what I call the Convergence Theory. To put it simply, I see six events that will converge, one reinforcing the effect of the other, culminating in a financial crisis of unprecedented proportions in the post-war world.

Event #1

While unspectacular in itself, the end of the marvelous Reagan recovery will be the first step towards recession. This event will surprise no one, since the leading economic indicators issued by the Commerce Department will have moved down three months in a row in the fall of 1988, warning that recession is imminent. The 1988 Christmas retail sales, when toted up in early January of 1989, will be off appreciably, confirming

that consumer spending has finally turned down. The recession of 1989 is about to begin.

Event #2

THE SECOND EVENT in this Convergence Theory is the inauguration of the new President of the United States. Is he a Democrat or a Republican? And will it matter?

Where the onset and initial severity of the '89 recession is concerned, the party affiliation of the next President won't matter a whit. The events that will take place in the first half of 1989 will have been pre-destined before he took office. In fact, the shape of things to come in 1989 is, for the most part, already determined today, well before the November 1988 election. For it is the cumulative effect of the first seven-and-a-half years of the Reagan presidency, not the last few months, that will determine our immediate future and those conditions which the next President will inherit when he assumes office on January 20 of next year.

But as I size up the candidates for both political parties, I believe that the public will decide that a change of

guard is necessary and elect a Democrat.

Where the party affiliation of our next President *will* make a difference, is in regard to the nature of his response to the '89 recession, especially when it starts to get nasty. And his policy response will, to a very substantial degree, determine our investment response. Rather than remaining completely ambivalent on this very important factor in our financial future, let us assume that the next President of the United States will be a Democrat, one somewhat left of centre.

Event #3

A SUDDEN WORSENING of the nation's economic outlook will start as the cascade of domestic bankruptcies *à la* Seidman begins. By March, it is becoming increasingly obvious that this will not be "recession as usual", but something definitely worse.

The consumer, sensing this, now *really* begins to pull in his horns. A lot of economists had expected him to do so much earlier, ie, after the Panic of '87 on Wall Street. But he didn't,

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because, for the vast majority of Americans, Black Monday had no *immediacy*. Most of his holdings of stocks were indirect, via mutual funds, or even more indirect, via his participation in a company pension fund. Where the latter is concerned, most Americans don't even have a clue about how and where their pension money is invested, and since 65 is still some way off for most of them, they don't care that much about what happens on Wall Street on a month-to-month or even year-to-year basis. As long as everything looks as if it is going to turn out all right in the long run, when he will need his pension money, his attitude and buying habits stay more or less the same. Which, contrary to almost all predictions, is exactly what happened on Main Street following the October 19 Panic on Wall Street.

The American consumer's attitude might have changed dramatically in 1987 had the stock-market crash not been totally contained to the market participants; had it spread through the investment banking community to the commercial banks, affecting their ability to extend credit to him, the story might have been quite different. But it stayed contained, and the consumer remained confident.

In early 1989 it will be different — because now employment and paychecks throughout America will be on the line. When somebody in San Jose read that a Yuppie lost his job on Wall Street in 1987, that was one thing; when his next-door neighbour gets laid off by Safeway or United Airlines or Macy's in March 1989, that will be another.

The response will come in the form of a sudden acceleration in the contraction of consumer spending as unemployment starts to spread from the weak companies, which got into trouble first because of their overleveraged financial positions, to solid companies such as General Motors and Apple Computer and their suppliers, causing consumer confidence to weaken still further as fear begins to spread throughout the land.



Event #4

AS THE UNITED STATES sinks abruptly into recession, within a remarkably short time it starts to pull Europe and Hong Kong and Japan down with it. We saw what happened to the stock markets of the world in the week following Black Monday. New York, which plunged 22.6 per cent that day, ended the month of October down only 10.6 per cent from its pre-Panic level. Now look what happened around the world:

COUNTRY	% DECLINE OF STOCK MARKET October 19-30, 1987
Australia	43.0
Hong Kong	41.3
Singapore	39.1
Mexico	34.7
Norway	28.8
Spain	23.1
Britain	21.0
Sweden	19.8
Switzerland	18.6
West Germany	16.2
Canada	15.9
Italy	15.7
Japan	12.0

In every single case, the declines around the world exceeded those in New York, and often by a whopping

margin. Why this "knee-jerk" reaction? As *The Economist* pointed out, "Information now flows almost instantaneously between markets which makes movements more rapid and often more extreme. Global markets mean global euphoria and global panics." Barton Biggs, chairman of Morgan Stanley Asset Management, agreed: "It was global panic. The degree of linkage around the world has been devastating."

Linkage. And because that same linkage extends to almost every facet of global economic activity, what happened globally following the Panic of the American stock-market will, in the highest probability, be repeated following the crash of the American economy. The economies of Europe and much of Asia will quickly follow us into recession.

And just as the declines in foreign stock-markets precipitated by the Panic of Wall Street were extra-proportional to the decline in stock prices in the United States, so also the effects of American recession in 1989 could end up being more devastating abroad than they will be at home. And again it is because of linkage, and the fact that the *strategic link* in the global system of economics and

finance is the United States.

DURING THE PAST four years the United States of America has been the *sole* engine of growth for the entire developed world. In the previous two decades it had been a three-engine world, with Germany through its economic growth pulling all of Europe behind it, and with Japan doing the same for much of Asia. Since 1984, however, over 50 per cent of all economic growth has, directly or indirectly, come from the United States: directly in the form of the vast economic expansion under the Reagan administration, which created over 12 million new jobs in this country, while employment in both Europe and Japan was stagnating; indirectly in the form of the economic stimulus that our country provided to the rest of the world as a result of our enormous trade deficit. The \$170 billion (Rs 2,32,900 crore) trade deficit, a product of excess demand in the United States spilling across our borders, meant that this huge amount of American purchasing power was stimulating output in Germany and Japan, instead of in Detroit or Pittsburgh. We have been supporting the whole bloody world!

And we simply can no longer afford to do so. The recession of 1989 is going to signal our forced retreat from being the world's economic benefactor — not a few would say the world's economic patsy. As unemployment rises from 6 to 7 to 8 per cent, incomes in the United States recede proportionately, and so also will our imports of Swiss watches and Hong Kong textiles and German machine-tools and British scotch. When you lay American recession on top of the massive dollar devaluation that has already occurred, what has already happened to Porsche's exports to the Yuppies will now happen to Mercedes' exports to the American rich and Honda's exports to the American middle-class. This, combined with the depressing effect of consumers around the world brought on by the spread of global uncertainty

"... The US wants growth to offset the crash, and seems willing to accept some inflation in the process as well as a declining dollar. Bonn wants stable prices and is prepared to sacrifice growth. Tokyo wants low prices, growth and a stable dollar-yen relationship. Something has to give."

about the economic future, will mean that Europe's economy will turn downward almost immediately, and Japan's slide back to zero growth will follow within a matter of months.

Theoretically, the global spread of the next American recession could have perhaps not been avoided, but it certainly could have been mitigated, had West Germany and Japan responded to repeated pleas by the United States Treasury in 1987 and 1988 to spur growth in their economies through more expansive fiscal and monetary policies, increasing domestic consumption and thus reducing the risk of over reliance on the huge American market for their products. Had they done this, in 1989 their economies would have been on the rise, and the global shock of a sudden American downturn could have been considerably lessened.

But they chose not to go this route. For, as Jeffrey Garten, a New York investment banker and former deputy director of the State Department's policy planning staff, pointed out in a post-Panic article in the *New York Times*, "The objectives of the three nations are incompatible. The United States wants growth to offset the crash, and seems willing to accept some inflation in the process as well as a declining dollar. Bonn wants, above all, stable prices and is prepared to sacrifice growth. Tokyo wants low prices, growth and, with an eye on its exports to the United States, a stable dollar-yen relationship. Something has to give."

Well, what will give in 1989 is first the American economy, and then theirs. Net result: global recession

throughout the industrial world.

Event #5

NOW WE PHASE IN the sudden financial collapse of the Third World. And we will focus upon two nations, Brazil and Mexico, not merely because they are the largest debtors, both owing over \$100 billion (Rs 1,37,000 crore), but also because they represent the two classes of Third World debtor nations: those *without* oil, like Brazil, and those with oil, like Mexico.

But before we look at these two key nations in particular, let us go back to the origins of the problem to see how they — and now we — got into this mess in the first place: a mess that we managed to live with for well over a decade, but one that has now become acutely threatening in March/April of 1989.

As with so many recent economic woes in the modern world, it started with oil. In 1973, when the price of oil went from \$2 to \$10 a barrel, a lot of poor countries that happened to have oil got rich overnight — like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Venezuela — while a lot of other lesser-developed countries (LDCs) like Argentina, or Zaire, or Brazil — those without oil — got poor or at least poorer. The former group was piling up oil income much faster than it could spend it, while the latter countries were suddenly paying energy import bills five times the size they had been used to, draining even further their limited foreign-exchange resources.

The obvious solution would have been for the *rich* LDCs with oil to lend some of their surplus dollars to

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the poor LDCs. But that would have been too logical. Plus the fact that the Arabs are not dumb. Why risk lending money to potential basket cases?

ENTER CREATIVE FINANCING, masterminded by the hotshots from Chase Manhattan, Bank of America, Citibank, and Manufacturers Hanover. Lend the money to us, they told the fellows in Riyadh, and we will lend to the potential basket cases.

Sovereign loans are what they called them. And their reasoning was this: people go broke; companies go broke; even banks, God help us, sometimes go broke — but countries *never* do. Right? How safe can you get? And who else can borrow billions at one crack and thus save you the enormous amount of paperwork that comes

while expending only a limited amount of time and effort. In the next decade it was the New York investment bankers who did exactly the same by charging obscene front-end fees for arranging LBO financing through the issue of junk bonds. What a better world it might have been without so much help from these guys!

In any case, the pinstripes found their customers quick enough: Costa Rica took a billion; then Peru took two; Argentina escalated to 10. Then the bankers figured: Hell, if Argentina was good for \$10 billion, Brazil should be able to handle at least \$20 billion.

And so it went between 1973 and 1978. By the end of that period, bank loans from the developed world to the LDCs had gone from almost

years, the banks doubled their lendings to the LDCs — bringing the grand total to over half a trillion dollars.

THEN CAME A NEW WRINKLE. Heretofore the oil-producing LDCs had been the *suppliers* of funds to the banks and the non oil-producing LDCs had been the *borrowers* of the same funds from the same banks. Beginning in 1979, that changed: Nigeria, Venezuela, and Mexico — oil-rich nations if ever there were such — suddenly decided that if the price of oil was inevitably headed towards \$100 a barrel, then they might as well lie back and enjoy it. Emulate the Yankee formula for success: buy now, pay later.

So they embarked upon massive development programmes financed by 50-50 cash/debt — one half still coming from their current oil income, the other half now financed by the external borrowing of dollars from the banks of the developed world. Mexico borrowed \$91 billion; Venezuela borrowed \$36 billion; Indonesia got \$22 billion; Nigeria \$10 billion. As a result Mexico became the fastest growing nation on earth; Venezuela was second.

And as new loans continued to pour into Brazil, heading towards a grand total of \$110 billion, that country became number three in the world's growth sweepstakes, as it too prospered as never before. The Brazilians began building state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities, based to a large degree on very expensive imported German technology, and started exporting steel; then shoes; then automobiles; then even aircraft, both civilian and military. When you added such exports to Brazil's traditional exports of coffee and sugar and oranges, there could be no question — none whatsoever — that Brazil was finally on a roll that would allow it to earn more than enough dollars not only to fully service its debt, but to pay it all back on schedule by the year 2000. Ditto for Mexico, on the basis of its oil exports alone.

The New York bankers were jubilant: they had pulled off the finan-

New York commercial bankers had found a new way to rake in huge profits. . . charging obscene front-end fees for arranging LBO financing through the issue of junk bonds. What a better world it might have been without so much help from these guys!

when all you are lending is millions? Only countries, that's who. So let's borrow from the Saudis and lend to the potential basket cases and make a few points in between — make a few millions, or 10 million, in profit — on the transaction.

The immense supply of surplus petrodollars created its own demand in the form of sovereign loans. Oil money poured into the banks from OPEC countries and the men in their pinstriped suits got onto Pan Am and headed for darkest Africa and remotest Latin America, searching for sovereign nations who would take some of those billions off their hands — at a few percentage points over the rate they were paying the Arabs, plus enormous front-end fees. The New York commercial bankers had found a new way to rake in huge profits

zero to over \$250 billion.

Then came the second oil "shock" of 1979. The price of crude, which had seemingly stabilised in the \$10 range, suddenly zoomed to \$20 a barrel, then \$30, then \$40. The OPEC surpluses quadrupled. There was not an energy expert on earth, including myself, who was not firmly, indisputably, irrevocably forecasting that \$60 and then \$80 and then \$100 a barrel were inevitable, probably by as early as the mid-1980's. Which meant that there would be money galore gushing out of the Arabian peninsula into the hands of the world's bankers *ad infinitum*. So the bankers scrambled around the world even faster, lining up takers willing to pledge their countries, maybe now for the tenth time, as collateral for yet another sovereign loan. As a result, during the next two

cial coup of the century.

AND THEN CAME the first oil glut at the beginning of the 1980's. The oil price, instead of soaring from \$40 a barrel to \$60 a barrel, as everybody said it would, went back down to \$35, then \$32, then \$29. The projected oil income of the oil-producing LDCs collapsed along with the price. The resulting problem was compounded by the fact that those countries had borrowed short-term even though the development projects they were financing were, by definition, of a long-term nature. Thus in 1982 alone, Mexico was committed to repay the banks of the developed world \$29.2 billion. In August of 1982 the Mexicans had to come to New York and tell the bankers who had been assembled there by the Federal Reserve that they could not pay. They were going to have to go into default. Mexico had suddenly run out of money.

As we know, Paul Volcker and the Fed saved the day by reliquifying Mexico, the United States, and the world. But now a new age had dawned: the age of rescheduling. Since there was no way that Mexico could even begin to pay off any of the principal on due dates, the banks simply "rescheduled" them, postponing repayments due in 1982 to 1985, then, when 1985 arrived, postponing them yet again to 1987. When it appeared that Mexico might not even be able to pay the interest on these loans (which would have forced the American banks to write down their value and admit to huge losses), new loans to Mexico were arranged, the new money being used to meet the interest payments on the old loans on time. The last loan of this type was necessary not that many months ago, one of \$14.4 billion, provided to Mexico just last Fall by a consortium of lenders including the IMF, the World Bank, and all the large commercial banks in the United States.

BUT THAT STILL SHOULD HAVE left Brazil in good shape, shouldn't it? After all, that country did not rely

to such a degree on a single export — oil — and on one subject to wild price fluctuations. It now had a broadly diversified export base, ranging from basic commodities and food stuffs to jet aircraft, meaning that as long as the export markets for these products remained prosperous — especially the markets in the United States, which takes over half of Brazil's exports — then at a bare minimum, it could at least always pay the interest.

Wrong. Despite the high prosperity reigning not only in the United States, but also in Europe and Japan, ie, in all of Brazil's principal export markets, in February of 1987 Brazil ran out of dollars and was forced to declare a moratorium on all interest payments. Only after the American banks granted it a new loan of \$4.5 billion

that point in our scenario. In early 1989 the music is stopping. The merry-go-round is grinding to a halt. The circular flow of dollars is beginning to dry up. As the American consumer pulls back, he consumes less and less Brazilian coffee and sugar and shoes, causing Brazil's dollar earnings to rapidly decline. But Brazil must still continue to buy oil abroad, and to pay for it in dollars. Ditto for machine tools and grain and copper. So it must now begin to deplete its meagre dollar reserves in order to keep the domestic economy going. Sensing that a new crisis is brewing (as it has so often in the past), the rich Brazilians once again start to yank their money out of Brazil and put it in a safe-haven bank in Miami or Geneva, depleting Brazil's dollar re-

As bail-out followed bail-out, the question was increasingly asked: if Brazil — and Peru and Argentina and the Philippines — needed such bail-outs during good times in the United States, what in the world was going to happen when the music stopped and bad times set in north of the Rio Grande?

in November 1987, was it able to resume interest payments on its \$110 billion debt. The first transfer of funds from Brazil to an American bank occurred in the final days of December of last year. The world's bankers had once again dodged the bullet. However, in January of 1988, Brazil declared it would not resume full interest payments until new loans were guaranteed by the banks.

But now, as bail-out followed bail-out, the question was increasingly asked: if Brazil — and Peru and Argentina and the Philippines — needed such bail-outs during good times in the United States, what in the world was going to happen when the music stopped and bad times set in north of the Rio Grande?

WELL, NOW WE ARE AT precisely

serves even further. So now, in April of 1989, just 16 months after it resumed its interest payments to the American banks, Brazil must again go into default.

Unfortunately, it is at precisely this juncture that Mexico is also going to come back to haunt us, *really* haunt us this time — and Mexico ranks right up there with the Soviet Union and Japan as one of *the* nations that have over-riding importance where the future strategic interests of the United States are concerned — since it is once again headed towards international bankruptcy. As in August of 1982, so now also in April of 1989, Mexico had suddenly run out of money, and it has no choice but to follow Brazil into default. And the reason for this new financial crisis in Latin America is again oil.

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As we have seen, it was the unprecedented rise in the price of oil in 1979 that enticed our banks to lend Mexico so much money in the first place. It was a reversal in that price trend, from \$40 a barrel back to \$28, that triggered the *first* Mexican debt crisis in August 1982. It will be the collapse of the oil price in 1989 that will precipitate the *second* Mexican debt crisis and, because of the convergence of other events, which we have been tracking one by one, will lead to an unprecedented *global* financial crisis.

Event # 6

THIS INVOLVES the price of oil dropping to \$10 a barrel in early 1989 and staying there for at least a year. How probable is this? I'd say the

price has always come from the supply side: overproduction. OPEC was originally set up to take care of that "problem." It is nothing other than a cartel designed to limit the output of oil by its member countries to levels that will allow for high prices. Each OPEC member was given an output quota, and if all the members had stuck to it, the price would probably have remained at around \$28 a barrel for many years. The problem is that OPEC includes a couple of somewhat looney, renegade members — such as Libya and Iraq — as well as a few rather impoverished nations, like Nigeria and Indonesia. Driven by greed or need, occasionally these members would begin to pump oil in amounts greatly exceeding their quotas.

The nation that always stepped in

In early 1989 the music is stopping. The merry-go-round is grinding to a halt. The circular flow of dollars is beginning to dry up. As the American consumer pulls back, he consumes less Brazilian coffee and sugar and shoes, causing Brazil's dollar earnings to rapidly decline.

chances are 3 out of 4. The reasons can be found on both the demand and supply side of the global oil equation.

Energy demand had been more or less flat between 1980 and 1988, because of the energy conservation brought on by the oil shock of 1979. This meant that OPEC could sell into a predictable and reasonably firm market during most of the 1980's. No more. For in 1989, for the first time in the decade, the demand for energy will be seriously sinking as a result of the onset of global recession. There is a direct correlation between overall economic activity and consumption activity and the consumption of energy, especially oil and oil products. When one sinks, so does the other.

But the real "problem" for the oil

to correct such situations when they arose was Saudi Arabia. It became what was known as the "swing producer". This meant that when a few OPEC members began overproducing, the Saudis would cut back their output to compensate. Soon the threat of a glut would be overcome, the renegade producers could be talked into cooling it for a while, and the price remained stable.

THE SAUDIS COULD easily afford to do this, since at peak times they were producing as much as 11 million barrels a day. This meant that Saudi Arabia was taking in enough money to buy the equivalent of all the equities listed on the London exchange *every nine months*, according to a calculation made at the time by *The Economist*.

But as the Saudis cut their production back to 9 million barrels a day, then 7 million, then ultimately to 2 million barrels a day, to maintain market equilibrium, their oil income sank drastically. Yet they had to continue to pay for the huge development projects they had underway, ranging from superhighways to airports to hospitals to petrochemical plants. Soon there was a gap between expenditures and income, and to fill it the Saudis were forced to begin drawing upon the enormous cash hoard they had built up in the good years. As a result, at the end of 1985 it was estimated that they were down to their last \$75 billion. Life, you see, is not easy *anywhere*.

This convinced Sheik Zaki-al-Yamani, then oil minister of Saudi Arabia, that enough was enough. He would now teach the rest of OPEC a lesson. This time *he* would flood the market. He did, and the oil price collapsed back to \$9 a barrel in early 1986. But this episode was very short-lived. King Fahd fired Yamani and brought in a new man who immediately cut back Saudi production. This country had once again assumed the mantle of swing producer.

The result was that the price moved back up to the \$20-to-\$22-a-barrel range, and it would probably be there to this day had not a new development occurred, one that will have much more deadly consequences for the future price of oil than Yamani's little fling. I refer here to the sudden heightening of the rivalry between the Saudis and the Iranians, a rivalry involving not just the leadership of OPEC, but that of the politics and religion of the Middle East.

SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN have always been the co-leaders of OPEC, owing to the simple fact that they both have the largest potential output capability: Iran can theoretically produce at a rate of 6 million barrels a day; Saudi Arabia, at 12 million, or even much higher. To put this in perspective, all of OPEC today produces 18 million barrels a day. Following

the Yamani-created fiasco, both nations agreed that the price should once again be stabilised, under their co-leadership, and they did just that.

But then the leaders of Iran, in their madness, sent 500 of their citizens to Mecca during last year's annual pilgrimage to that holy city of Islam, with the mission of starting demonstrations and riots aimed at de-stabilising the Saudi regime, opening the way for a spread of their Shi'ite fundamentalist brand of Islam to the Arabian peninsula. Not only did the Saudi leadership gun down the Iranians in front of Mecca's main mosque, but soon their King publicly announced that a permanent wedge had been created between the two nations. Co-operation on price was now obviously impossible.

To be sure, despite the irreparable break between these two nations, neither immediately sought to undermine the quota system of OPEC to "teach a lesson" to the other one, to show who was boss, who had more staying power. The reason Iran continued to go the price rather than the volume route — all through 1987 and well into 1988 — was that it had no alternative. Given the tanker war in the Persian Gulf, and the constant Iraqi attacks on Iran's principal export terminal on Kharg Island, it was impossible for Iran to increase its exports. Therefore, to ensure the highest possible income, which it desperately needed to finance the war, Iran had to go the price route. But imagine what would — no, *will* — happen when the Iran-Iraq war ends. All such constraints on output will no longer exist, and Iran will begin to pump oil to the absolute limit of its capacity, seeking to replenish its war-devastated national treasury.

BUT WHY SHOULD that war end? The answer is sheer attrition on the battlefield and pure national exhaustion. The battles along the Shatt-al-Arab waterway have thus far resulted in more than a million casualties. In terms of blood spilt, of men killed, the last time we were forced to wit-

ness such carnage was during the trench battles of World War I. The Iranians are down to 13- and 14-year old boys, whom they send in ahead of their more weathered troops, to blow up the minefields, to draw the enemy's initial fire, to be sacrificed in the name of Allah.

The Iraqis are not a hell of a lot better, that's for sure. When all else fails, they resort to gas warfare. As a result, slowly the entire world, even including the Soviet Union, is saying, "A plague o' both your houses." Weapons procurement is getting increasingly difficult for both warring nations. Conditions for the populations in both Baghdad and Teheran are getting worse and worse. All it needs is one last straw — perhaps the natural death of Ayatollah Kho-

million or even 22 million, when Iran and Iraq both go the volume route in spades? It will drop like a stone. Unless... unless Saudi Arabia once again reassumes the role of swing producer.

Will it? After what happened in Mecca?

No way.

The result will be \$10 oil. One further remark: some of the best oil experts in the world believe that the price of that commodity will sink to that level in 1989 even *without* a total winding down of the Iran-Iraq war. And their reasoning is this: OPEC has a sustainable output capacity of at least 28 million barrels a day. Today it utilises 60 per cent of that capacity. Should the current OPEC quota system continue to breakdown even further, which is almost

What will happen to the price of oil when output surges to 20 million or even 22, when Iran and Iraq both go the volume route? It will drop like a stone. Unless Saudi Arabia again reassumes the role of swing producer. Will it? After Mecca? No way. The result will be \$10 oil.

meini, or the assassination of Iraq's President Saddam — and that will finally be it. The way will have been opened for both sides to declare victory, and to retreat to their original borders on both sides of the Shatt-al-Arab channel, after which a new contest will begin: to see which nation, Iran or Iraq, can export the most oil the soonest.

How much can they export? Iran, 6 million barrels a day; Iraq, 4 million, maybe 4.5 million. How much do they produce and export today? Jointly, maybe half of that. How much does all of OPEC sell today in the world market? Between 16 and 18 million barrels a day — not even OPEC knows exactly, since its members rarely tell the truth to one another. What will happen to the price of oil when that output surges to 20

a sure bet given the disarray within OPEC's ranks, and should that utilisation level rise to 70 or even 75 per cent, \$10 a barrel would result even were the Iranians and Iraqis to continue slaughtering each other.

THAT WOULD MEAN that the situation of Mexico could get very nasty very quickly. For the oil price collapse will come on top of a situation that is already desperate.

For a while, between 1985 and October of 1987, it had looked as if Mexico was well on the way to an impressive economic turn-around. The resurgence had begun when Mexico's government scrapped its policy of sheltering Mexican industry in a protected domestic market and began a successful push for economic growth by exporting manufactured goods.

EXTRACT

But this comeback came to a screeching halt on October 19, when the panic on Wall Street triggered fears that if the crash was a precursor of recession in the United States — a market that absorbs two-thirds of Mexican exports — it would mean that Mexican industry would be caught in a squeeze between a shrinking export market and a still depressed domestic market, and the whole country could go into the tank.

These fears hit the Mexican stock market like a bomb: overnight, following October 19, that market went from being the world's fastest rising to its fastest falling one. During the first nine months of 1987, the Mexican stock index, their equivalent of our Dow Jones, went up 330 per cent. Following Black Monday, it

exchange crisis, Mexico's central bank stopped supporting the value of the peso. The next day it plunged 34 per cent, and in the months that followed, continued to erode in a seemingly never-ending process. Now inflation set in with a vengeance, with prices rising on most basic goods and services almost immediately by 80 per cent. By the end of 1987, the annual rate of inflation was up to 143 per cent. Yet the government refused to allow wages to increase at nearly the same rate.

The judgement of Mexican novelist Rafael Ramirez Heredia on the situation that existed at Christmas-time: "Mexicans have passed from poverty to misery."

BUT THEN, RIGHT AFTER Christ-

With oil falling to \$10 a barrel, Mexico's earnings from petroleum exports will be cut in half. With recession in the US seriously impairing America's ability to absorb Mexico's non-oil exports, Mexico's cash flow will shrink even further. The US will now be faced with a double whammy originating in the Third World.

plunged 75 per cent.

What ensued next was a massive flight of capital, as Mexico's rich interpreted what was happening on their stock exchange to mean that suddenly their country's economic prospects had once again turned bleak. So they began fleeing from the peso, moving into dollars and Swiss francs, transferring their assets from Mexico City to banks in Texas, New York, and Geneva. The Mexican central bank saw its foreign exchange reserves, which had peaked at \$15 billion (owing, one must now admit, chiefly to two one-time-only events: the \$14 billion bail-out we had just given them, and the temporary revival of the price of oil to \$22 a barrel), suddenly begin to melt down. When they had dropped to \$11 billion, rather than risk an immediate foreign-

mas 1987, all of a sudden there was a new ray of hope. It took the form of a deal which the Mexican government proposed to the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, and which Morgan passed on to the other American banks that were part of the Morgan-led syndicate which had lent Mexico huge sums of money over the years. The proposal was for a bond issue/debt forgiveness exchange. It was designed to alleviate, at least partially, the staggering carrying costs Mexico faced arising out of its \$101 billion external debt, reducing its annual interest payments by \$800 million a year. Perhaps this was a modest start, but, it was suggested, it might be just the beginning of much bigger things to come.

For, on the surface at least, the banks would profit equally. It was a

win-win proposition.

The basic elements of the proposal were this: if the American banks were willing to forgive approximately \$10 billion of the debt owed them, Mexico was willing to replace a second \$10 billion of debt with newly-issued Mexican bonds, which would be backed by US government bonds that Mexico would purchase from the US Treasury and which would be held *outside* Mexico, stored in the vaults of no less than the Federal Reserve Bank in New York. Furthermore, these new Mexican bonds would carry a very good interest rate, 4.625 per cent over Libor, the London interbank lending rate, which would make them highly attractive to outside investors, should the banks ever want to sell them. In other words, the American banks were to get \$10 billion of highly liquid AAA bonds in lieu of a \$20 billion debt that was highly illiquid, uncollectable, and *maybe* saleable to another bank, or outside investors, for, at most, 50 cents on the dollar.

BUT HOLD ON. How could Mexico afford to buy those \$10 billion worth of bonds from the US Treasury if it had only a grand total of \$11 billion in foreign exchange left in the bank back home after the post-October 19 run on the peso?

Here, then, was the catch. Actually, Mexico was buying *zero-coupon* US Treasury bonds, bonds that would *eventually* be worth \$10 billion, but only after 20 years. Their present-day value? Just what Mexico was going to pay for them: \$2 billion.

Which meant that, in reality, Mexico was:

1. Getting the United States and its banks to agree to Mexico's forfeiting of the \$10 billion which it owed them and which the banks will now have to write off entirely, eating into their capital and reserves;
2. Getting the American banks to accept, in *lieu* of another \$10 billion debt, \$10 billion worth of new Mexican bonds, backed by American bonds with a current market value of

\$2 billion — yes, \$2 billion, not \$10 billion.

This was the big breakthrough? The panacea? Are you kidding? The only major paper in the United States that saw through it was *The Wall Street Journal*. The other papers, from the *New York Times* to *The Washington Post*, fell for it like a ton of bricks. "The risk," the *Journal* wrote, "is that Mexico would not be able to meet the semi-annual interest payments on its bonds." According to the fine print, the guarantee of the zero-coupon bond will apply only to principal, not to interest. As the Mexico analyst at Goldman Sachs pointed out, "It doesn't solve Mexico's cash-flow problem."

Exactly.

WHEN YOU ARE overleveraged, your entire future depends on cash flow. Mexico's cash flow depends, primarily, on the oil price, and, secondarily, on prosperity in the market that absorbs two-thirds of all Mexican exports, the United States.

With oil falling to \$10 a barrel as it does in our scenario, Mexico's earnings from petroleum exports will be cut in half. With recession in the United States seriously impairing America's ability to absorb Mexico's non-oil exports, Mexico's cash flow will shrink even further. You need only a cheap calculator to figure out now that Mexico is going to run out of money very quickly in 1989. And the first thing to go will be its interest payments to our banks, and most probably also the interest on their fancy newly-issued US zero-coupon Mexican bonds.

The United States will now be faced with a double whammy originating in the Third World: both the leader of the LDCs without oil, Brazil, and the leader of the LDCs with oil, Mexico, have gone into the financial tank simultaneously. Can Venezuela, Latin America's fourth-largest debtor, in hock to the tune of \$34 billion, be far behind? After all, it is much more dependent than even Mexico on oil exports. And what

about Argentina?

JUST THE QUICKEST of looks at that country. Argentina is Latin America's third-largest debtor, owing \$52 billion, of which \$35 billion is owed chiefly to American commercial banks. *The Wall Street Journal* describes the current situation there with these words: "With inflation running at about 20 per cent a month and few signs that the country is coming to grips with its economic problems, there is an increasing likelihood that creditors will cut off new funding and that the country will be forced into declaring a moratorium on its foreign debts." Because without new loans, when recession hits its chief markets in the United States and then Europe, Argentina will become a fin-

tens of billions of new dollars south of the border to bail out Mexico and Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, when the rising number of unemployed in Kansas City and Houston and New Orleans obviously has first call on our government's resources?

Hardly.

THE CONVERGENCE and linkage of these six events represents the cause of the Crash of 1989. Before going on to study the impact of these events, let's summarise this Convergence Theory:

- Retail sales slow, confirming the turn downward in consumer spending,
- as the new President of the United States takes office,
- at the onset of recession in the United States in 1989, which leads to

When all four of Latin America's leading nations go under, the rest of that continent will not be far behind. Unless Latin America got an immense new infusion of cash. But in 1989, with financial conditions at home rapidly worsening, will Uncle Sam be willing and able to ship tons of billions of new dollars south of the border? Hardly.

ancial basket case almost immediately, since its cash cushion is only a fraction of Mexico's or even Brazil's: Argentina is down to its last billion dollars in foreign-exchange reserves. On any given day, Gordon Getty or Donald Trump probably has more cash on hand than that.

When all four of Latin America's leading nations go under, the rest of that continent will not be far behind. In my opinion, the organisation of a Latin debtor's cartel would only be a matter of months.

Unless Latin America got an immense new infusion of cash. Not \$4.5 billion such as Brazil got just half a year ago, or \$14.4 billion such as Mexico got at about the same time. No, this time we are talking *real* money.

But in 1989, with financial conditions at home rapidly worsening, will Uncle Sam be willing and able to ship


a cascade of bankruptcies at home, resulting in a precipitous dive in our overall economic activity,

- which immediately leads to recession in Europe and Japan,
- which results in a sudden reduction of imports from the LDCs,
- which leads to renewed debt default by Brazil (now joined by Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, etc),
- all this coinciding with an "exogenous" event, the end of the Iran-Iraq war, which results in a sudden new surge in the supply of oil coming down the Persian Gulf, just when global energy demand is falling because of global recession,
- which leads to a collapse in the price of oil to \$10 a barrel.
- which forces Mexico to default on its debt (and Venezuela, and Nigeria, and Indonesia, etc).

FICTION



THE INDIAN ROOM



NOTHING ABOUT THE CITY pleases them. They complain incessantly about the cold, the high cost of living in Paris, the meagre apartments they are allotted, and, especially, the complexities of the French language. They are horrified by the loose behaviour of the French in the streets ("so bad for children to see"), and gripe about how hard it is to be separated from their sons and daughters left behind in expensive public schools in India.

Fat little Chiranji Lal, who has just come out as Accounts Assistant to the Visa Section, is derisive about French monuments in general: "*Bas*, they have that FL Tower; what else is there to see in Paris?" And Raunaq Singh in the Commercial Wing asks me confidentially, *knowing* that I am a student of French Literature, "Tell me, who is this Mr Proust?" He makes it sound like a rude word. "They tell me our Embassy used to be his house." I explain, and he says admiringly, "He must have made a lot of money with his books. Such a big house!"

In the beginning, I used to be able to laugh at the way my countrymen's foibles and angularities became so exaggerated when abroad. Not lately, though. Now, I begin to fear that my own vision will somehow get distorted, that my love for the city will become infected. I have found something very like happiness here. I love the wit and the liveliness of the French, the camaraderie of the streets, the air potent as love. But then, being with Paul-Alain helps.

TARA DID WARN ME: "Don't get involved with the Indian community, whatever you do. There's a deep, gratuitous malice which they cannot help displaying at every turn. And the fact that you are living with a French boy ... God help you if they find out!" I could not help laughing as I told her, "My family seemed more horrified by the fact that I clean people's toilets and make their beds and look after their children like an *ayah*, than by Paul-Alain's existence!"

By inheriting Tara's job at the Embassy, I seem to have inherited her worm's-eye view of the place: become a jaundiced worm if that is possible. *All* these people can think about are their meagre allowances and perks: "Even the damn Paks get more," they tell me bitterly. They do not allow themselves to be touched in any degree by the life of the place, and pursue their little feuds and intrigues with deep rancour and wiliness.

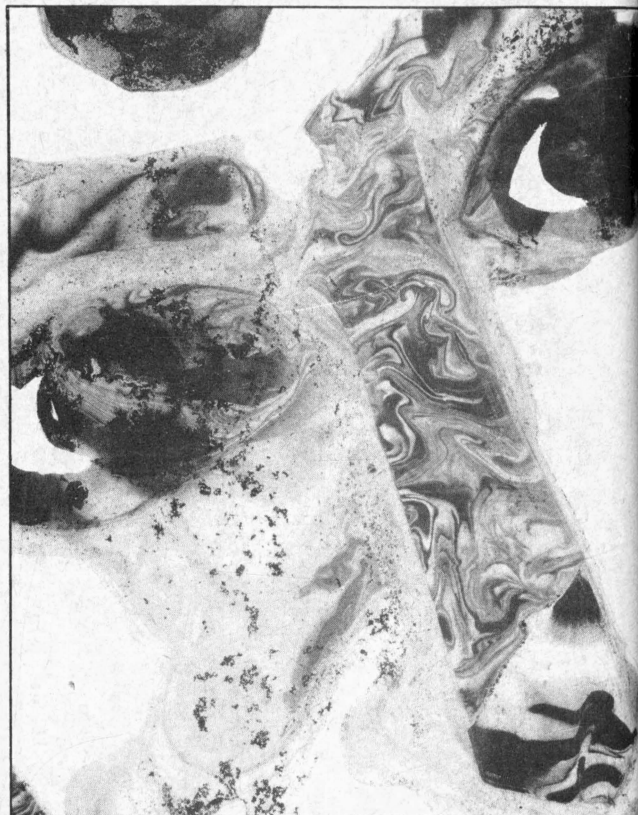
Shantam.

Tara left to marry a Frenchman. While she was giving me the low-down on the staff, she confided, "My dear, working at the Embassy made me see I could never go back to India. I'd be a complete misfit there now." Looking affectionately at her, her outrageously bleached hair, the heavy make-up, the tight, tight sweaters, I couldn't help but agree. Some of the staff seemed to take Tara's marriage as a personal affront; with her lush good looks and cheerful humour, she had been very popular with the men. Sadanand Sharma and Padmanabhan of the Air Wing seemed especially bereft. They informed me, "She couldn't find a nice Indian boy, I suppose. *Arre*, you girls just get carried away. . ."

And Prem Kumar, the Counsellor who interviewed me for Tara's job, said only half-jokingly, "No French followers, I hope, m'm'selle. We can't have all our bright, personable young women being carried away by foreigners!" his eyes cold and probing. "That's none of your business," I felt like telling him, but I needed the job. I smiled blandly at him, giving away nothing.

PK, as he is known, is a bachelor and has come recently to the post. "He sits like an old crocodile, up there in his office," Tara had said about the 'gentleman'. "Grim, smiling, murderous. He knows everything that goes on in the building. People spy for him and even innocent conversations are reported back to him." But PK speaks with the sophisticated accent that reminds me of my father and brothers. I am inclined to trust him. He has a soft, pouchy face and gives off an air of great well-being. Besides, he's the only decently dressed man in the Embassy. Even the Ambassador manages to look like an old *clochard* in his shabby grey overcoat, though he gives me a courtly little bow every time he enters the building. As for the others, their clothes must have been picked up second or third-hand in some Delhi bazaar. More economies. No wonder the smart young women recruited locally to work as secretaries and translators don't have a glance to spare for them.

YESTERDAY, I MET LUDMILA. She brought me a cup of coffee and a friendly smile. Both were welcome. It had been a wretchedly cold morning, and I sat huddled in my overcoat, as near the grudging heat of the *chauffage* as I could get. She asked about Tara whom she had known well and liked very much. "Such a pity I could not meet her to say goodbye," she said in a low, glottal voice. "She'll be back, don't worry," I consoled. "Nothing can keep her away from Paris for too long. She's lucky Brussels is so near, and that her husband doesn't have to live in Samoa or somewhere like that!" We laughed together and I liked what I saw of her. She wore a long-sleeved, red woollen dress which clung to her skinny model's figure. She looks gentle and sensitive, with a high, bony forehead and intelligent, withdrawn, anchorite's eyes. Here, she translates technical material in the Economics Section and has been with the Embassy for two years. She asked me eagerly,



with the air of giving me a gift: "Did you know this used to be Proust's house?" I burst out laughing. "Everyone's been falling over themselves to inform me about it, and half of them haven't a clue as to who he was!" "Oh well," she said with a smile, "I always thought he was quite unreadable anyway." "Ssh, someone might hear you." We laughed again. I felt I had made a friend.

The sound of our laughter must have disturbed generations of the stale bureaucratic air that clog these once noble rooms. At any rate, it disturbed Mrs Jacob, the Librarian, who came out and glared at us. Ludmila got up, gave me an apologetic smile, collected the coffee cups and went back to her desk upstairs. I stared Mrs Jacob down, forcing her to retreat into the library.

The Embassy teems with life on most mornings. Lost-looking tourists, eager to hear the accents of home, wander in, and desperate women who have lost their passports or travellers cheques, and French travellers longing to get away to the sun, and who find that visas promised on that day are not yet ready. Often, I am forced to act as a buffer between these people and the indifferent, perfunctory treatment the Embassy officials mete out.

Then there are those not-so-rare specimens — genus: politician — who come abroad ostensibly on goodwill tours but adore throwing their weight around. Chiranji Lal tells me with much relish that the most recent Big Noise had

complained to the Ambassador that he had found me 'rude and ungracious'. "There will be consequences for sure," he says cheerfully. "Well, I'll have no option but to inform Mr Roy of the suggestion the gentleman made. Horrible little lout!" I say loudly. Mrs Jacob, hovering nearby, looks suitably shocked.

LUDMILA AND I have begun to walk across to the OECD restaurant at lunch-time. I find myself actually looking forward to coming to work, just to see Ludmila's wide, generous smile, and to hear the soft gutturals in her French accent. We must be roughly the same age, yet how disparate our backgrounds must be! She tells me very little about her personal life, except that her father had been Polish and that she lives alone. She seems a little lost, vulnerable to affection.

Often, absorbed in conversation, we fail to notice that the restaurant has emptied, and we are late getting back. Ludmila listens sympathetically when I speak of my traumatic first year in Paris, the nearly unbearable loneliness, the mugging one night in a lonely corridor of the Metro, the bombing of a train I was on, going to Vichy. Coming too soon, one after the other, I nearly turned tail and ran back home to mother. "It was Tara who helped me through that time, she was never too busy to talk to me. She introduced me to her friends, showed me parts of Paris I would never have known otherwise. When I saw how well she had adapted, I knew I could do it too. . ."

She speaks of her longing to visit India. "I have read so much about your country. I find myself drawn to it in all kinds of ways. I'm saving up to spend at least a year there." I tell her that she must stay with my people and her face lights up.

On other days, when all we can afford to have is a cup of coffee, we walk in the Bois; a weak, watery sun and bare, black trees encourage my fancy that we are figures in a painting. . . Impressionist, definitely.

OUR FRIENDSHIP HAS ATTRACTED NOTICE at the Embassy. PK calls me up to his room, ostensibly to chat, but manages to slip in a question — had I known Ludmila before? — while asking when I planned to complete my thesis on Stendhal.

And one evening, two clerks walking ahead of us to the Metro, strike smitten poses; one clutches his heart and sings loudly and tunelessly, "*Do gori ne mere dil ko. . .*" and the other says, turning back to look at us, "Oh come on, *yaar*, she only runs after *goray log*!" And they walk on, sniggering.

Another evening, on an impulse, I ask Ludmila to come home with me. It is a Friday evening, the weekend stretches blissfully ahead. After a little hesitation she agrees.

Home for me, at this time, is a small studio I share with Paul-Alain. The Gobelins quarter where we live is peculiarly, theatrically, FRENCH; the busy square around which

beautiful eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings loom gracefully, the grocer's gaily-striped awning under which I shop for leeks and tomatoes and grapefruit, the cafe where, last summer, Paul-Alain and I used to spend hours over a single drink, a couple of cats wandering around for atmosphere. It is an area where many young professionals live and I have made many friends here. . . The evening is cold and wet, there are not many people about, and Ludmila and I, stopping only to buy bread, gratefully run up the stairs to the beckoning warmth of the studio.

THE DOOR IS AJAR, Paul-Alain's usual signal that he's home and — there he sits at his desk, working. As usual, my heart gives a lurch when I see him. He rises, smiling when he sees Ludmila who stands shyly at the threshold. He shakes hands with great friendliness, saying, "This one never stops talking of you," gesturing towards me. Then we kiss, and the wonderful evening begins.

One should never take the good times for granted; the occasions when one's senses have the right degree of awareness, when the right people have come together at the right place, happen only by *chance*. Everything contributes to that evening's perfection: the sound of the rain outside, the colours of the room, the wine, the conversation. And yes, the beauty of my companions! How I stare at Ludmila, transformed by the blush on her fine cheekbones accentuating the hollows underneath! How I gaze at Paul-Alain's gentle, medieval face framed by his long brown hair. Indeed, I see them both as figures in a tapestry, eleventh or early twelfth century perhaps: Ludmila as the Lady with the Unicorn, gravely still; Paul-Alain, a courtly page leading his knight's horse, or a Galahad in quest of the Grail. I laugh at my fancies and rise to bring another bottle of wine.

Later, Paul-Alain puts on some music: baroque sounds which we both love, bassoon and horns. We eat an impromptu meal — a good hot lentil soup with a green salad and cheese.

The talk turns to Paul-Alain's studies. He is a medical student hoping to be a neurologist one day. We speak of the nature of the consciousness, the untapped potentialities of the brain. Ludmila tells us that she practices yoga and that she would like to study meditation at an ashram in India.

Night closes around the room and Ludmila reluctantly says that she must go. Paul-Alain suggests that she stay the night; Paris is not as safe as it used to be. "Yes, Ludmila, do stay," I urge, and she accepts gladly. Paul-Alain gives her a sleeping-bag which he uses on camping trips. I give her a nightie, and kiss her goodnight, already making plans that will include Ludmila in our lives.

DURING THE WHOLE of the following week, I hardly see Ludmila; the staff is kept busy with a general spring-cleaning. I have been evicted from my receptionist's desk and packed off to a small corner in the Intelligence Wing, to address invitations to eminent Parisians and the diploma-

tic corps; Republic Day is round the corner, and a cocktail party followed by a cultural evening is scheduled.

How I should love to drop out of such routine genuflections to Flag and Anthem and Country, but PK has made it quite clear that the entire staff is expected to attend.

The Ambassador's wife comes into her own. She has dragged most of the wives and the few children who are around, driving them to rehearse song and dance to perfection. The Embassy takes on a carnival air, people sit around in groups, gossiping over cigarettes and tea; the Punjabi group takes over the second-floor landing to practice the *bhangra*; children run up and down the stairs, laughing, and nobody bothers to check them; strains of the *shehnai* and *sitar* waft upstairs and stir people to nostalgia. . .

I have been in a dark mood all week. The sky has been a dull, metallic colour and icy winds blow from the North. I do not warm to the gush of sentiment that has washed away the usual surliness of the Embassy staff; neither do I find much joy at home — Paul-Alain is away on a skiing holiday with his family. The force with which I miss him should not surprise me. We have been drifting towards some acknowledgement that we have a common future. It is the implications of that decision which frighten me.

So I push away all thoughts and trudge to work every morning with a streaming nose and leaden feet. Even Mrs Jacob who has always seemed so unsympathetic tells me that I look unwell: "It's this wretched weather, of course. I shall never get used to it even if I live here for a hundred years. . ."

LUDMILA RUNS TO ME ONE MORNING, looking more animated than I have ever seen her: "Will you help me wear a sari on the 26th?" She had acquired a red silk one from India last year and has all the necessary accessories. "You will have to practice wearing it, and walking in it, Ludmila. Even *I've* got out of the habit. Why don't you bring it with you tomorrow and see how to manage the whole business. . ."

The days rush past. By the 24th, the stately hallway and library begin to look as they must have, once upon a time; the chandeliers have been cleaned, the air in the rooms smells of flowers and polish, and the floors gleam.

On the actual evening, Ludmila manages her sari with ease. I put a *tikka* on her forehead, entwine some flowers in her top knot: she looks positively bridal. The men look at her with interest. Even PK turns to look at her as she glides down the stairs.

PK and most of the staff have donned the traditional Nehru coat, and they manage to look more distinguished and relaxed than I have ever seen them. Mr Roy, the Ambassador, looks entirely different: elegant, in a long, black *sherwani*, his gleaming white head stands out like a beacon as he leads the receiving line with his Lady.

How I wish I could feel more a part of this national brotherhood. These are my people after all — we share the



same history and geography, and the cultural differences which separate us, hold us together as well. There should be such a surge of pride today.

BUT ALL I FEEL IS ILL. I stand in a small group with Chiranji Lal and Swaminathan, their faces and voices swelling and receding as does the hubbub in the background. I see Ludmila's red-clad figure move easily among the guests; many eyes follow her, and once she turns her face towards me and smiles. I can barely respond. Other people join our group with glasses in their hands. "*Arre*, how do these foreigners manage without liquor, *yaar*?" The scent of flowers and incense is overpowering: my eyes blur and I feel faint. Soon people begin moving towards the library; I slide into a seat at the back of the room, longing for oblivion, but the sound of drums and the thud of dancing feet add to my discomfort.

I hear a loud whisper, "Are you alright?" and see Ludmila there besides me. I hold onto her hand tightly, afraid she will vanish. She draws in a sharp breath, "How hot you are!" The person next to me gives up his seat to her and I lean my head against her shoulder, thankfully. I have no idea how the evening ends, but I feel myself being supported, half-carried to a car, and PK's voice taking charge, giving orders. My coat is wrapped around me and within moments, or so it seems to me, I'm home. Ludmila and PK

carry me upstairs, she asks me urgently for the key which should be in my coat pocket, but, before they can look, Paul-Alain comes to the door, calling out my name. My heart gives a great leap and I decide to faint amidst solicitous murmurs and questions.

PAUL-ALAIN AND LUDMILA must have tucked me into bed. As I slowly come to, I see Ludmila and PK sitting beside me. He has his arm around her, and they both look very content. "Paul-Alain has gone for a doctor," she informs me. "You must rest now."

David, a friend, is the resident doctor. He works at Hospital Cochin in the psychiatric ward and has often recounted lurid case histories to us. But now he has a professional look and talks of hot-water bottles and antibiotics.

Ludmila bends down to kiss me: "I'll come tomorrow or the day-after to see you. Rest now." She looks beautiful to me through my haze of fever.

Paul-Alain sees her and PK off and returns to my side: "I *had* to come back. I was wretched in Chamonix without you. I was ruining everyone else's holiday." He had returned a week early.

The fever takes its course. Paul-Alain makes a wonderful nurse. He gives me my pills, washes my body, changes the sheets, feeds me hot broth — all with great competence and tenderness.

But Ludmila does not come. I idly comment on it to Paul-Alain, three or four days later. I am beginning to have a little more interest in the outside world. "It must be the weather," he says. "If you could look outside the window, you'd see the snow. I'm sure she'll come soon."

"It's been a busman's holiday for you, hasn't it?" I ask him. "Well, we could have spent the time a little more pleasantly..." he begins, bending down to kiss me. "Hurry and get well."

But I am filled with a great lethargy, an unwillingness to get out of bed and face the world again. The thought of going back to work, especially, dismays me. And, before I can sort out these feelings, the bad news comes.

PAUL-ALAIN OPENS THE DOOR to a loud peal one morning, around eleven. I hear voices, heavy-sounding, authoritative, Paul-Alain's rising in shock, and then, lowered tones. My heart beats very fast. Bad news, but from where, about whom? The randomness of fate horrifies me.

In a little while, Paul-Alain comes into the bedroom; he looks white and tired. "What is it, Paul-Alain? Tell me! Someone is dead, isn't it?" my voice rises in hysteria. He is silent, unable to speak for a few long moments. Then he bends, holds me close, and whispers, "Ludmila." I gasp as a sharp pain lodges itself in my heart. He says softly, "Be brave for a little while. The *gendarmes* want to ask you a few questions."

They are very polite, beg my pardon for disturbing me when I'm obviously so ill, but could I please tell them some-

thing about Ludmila Ostrowski. They had been informed at the Embassy that she had been a good friend of mine. "I have known her about two months; she can't be dead," I explain, every little detail of her face vividly clear as I speak: the shadowed, austere eyes, the wide, generous smile. . . "What happened, was it an accident?"

"She seems to have gassed herself, m'm'selle," the older man answers, his voice deep, sympathetic. "It must have happened nearly four days ago. A neighbour complained about the strong smell, and, yesterday, we were called. Tell us, was she inclined to depression?"

"I don't know. I realise I know nothing about her. She let me talk, but she told me nothing about herself. The evening of the party, she looked so lovely, everyone noticed her. She and the Counsellor, Mr Prem Kumar, brought me here. She was happy that day, I know it. . ."

"The Counsellor tells us he left her at her door at about one in the morning. She did not report to work at the Embassy on Monday. She left no note, nothing. But the room where she died. . ."

"Yes, what about it, monsieur? I never visited her, I'm not even sure where she lived!"

He hesitates. "Well, m'm'selle, we can only describe it as an Indian room. It was like a Hindu temple. . . (His voice was questioning, "*un temple Hindou?*") "There was incense and Indian paintings on the wall, and the curtains were of some silken material. There was even a small idol, of a god with an elephant head. Her body," he cleared his throat, "was on a mattress on the floor, bent forward as if in prayer."

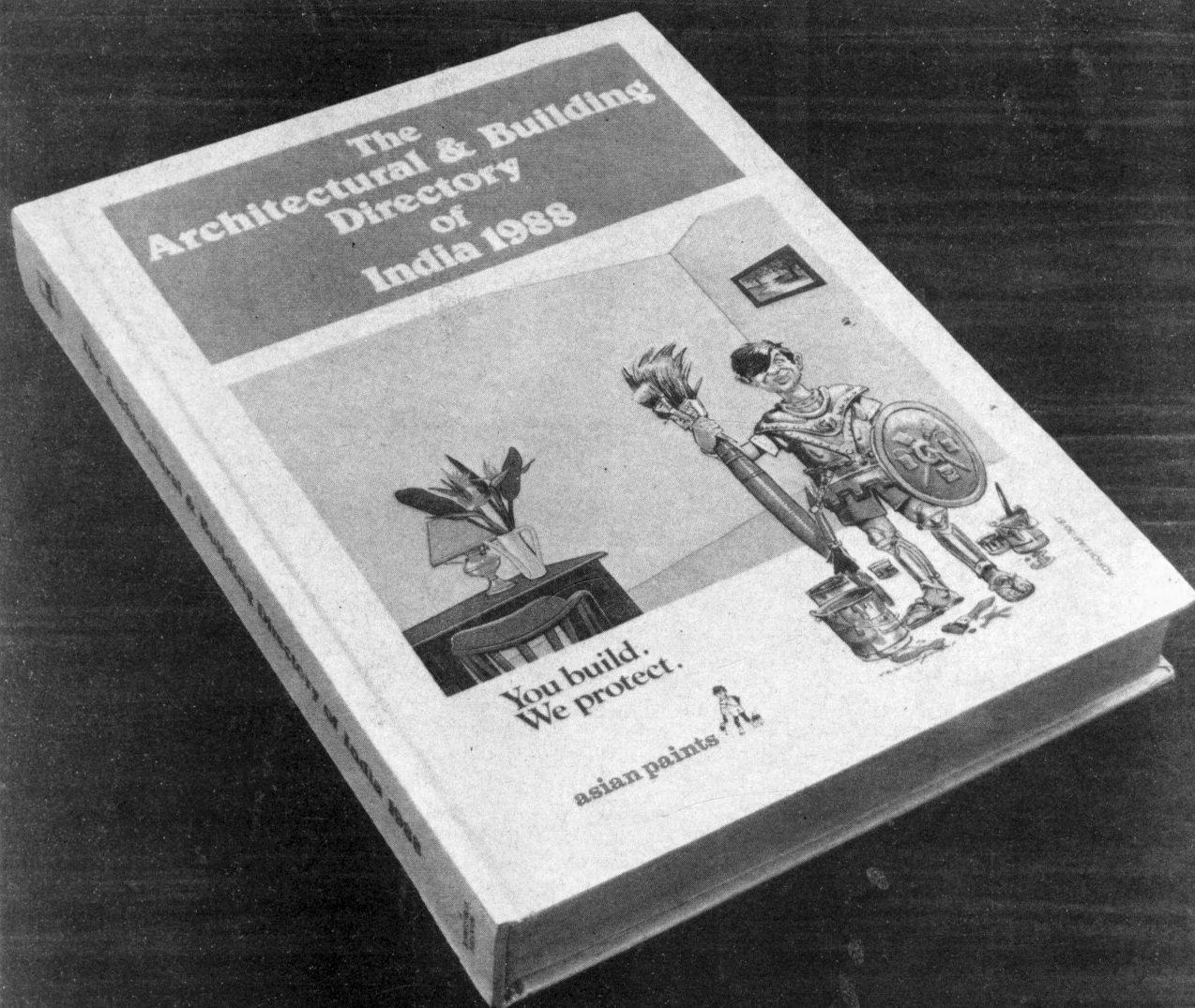
I burst into tears and Paul-Alain held me while the *gendarmes* tiptoed out of the room. "Why, why did she do it?" I sobbed. "Listen, chérie, it could have been an accident after all. She may have left the gas on and gone into meditation, not realising it even when the smell grew strong. . . ." Paul-Alain comforted me. "I'm sure she wasn't the type. . ."

"**WE'LL NEVER KNOW**, will we, Paul-Alain?" I couldn't stop crying. I blamed myself, my lack of curiosity about her, my lack of perception of her loneliness. I desperately wanted to put the blame, the responsibility on someone. "Could PK have hurt her? That night, who knows what happened? We only have *his* word that he left her at her door. . ."

"Hush, chérie. It's useless to speculate. Maybe, when you go back to work, things will be clearer. . ."

"I'll never go back! I never want to see the place again!" In spite of my weakness, or perhaps because of it, certainty flooded me that we had all, in various little ways, been responsible for her death. India, itself, perhaps — distant, uncaring. Maybe, at some point in my life, Ludmila will become a dim part of the past, a person in an anecdote told to strangers. But for that to happen, I must first become a stranger to myself. ♦

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