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With Ganeshatru, Satyajit Ray returns to form after five years. Raghuvir Singh captures the making of the masterpiece.

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In this extract from his controversial biography, V.P. Singh: The Quest for Power, Janardan Thakur traces Manda's treacherous and murky past.
The PM’s men

The cover story was interesting (The great survivors, 4—10 June). However, what one fails to understand is why Rajiv Gandhi has such implicit faith in Buta Singh and R.K. Dhawan—especially since the rest of the country does not seem to think they are dependable. While Buta Singh as home minister has failed to maintain peace and harmony in the states, R.K. Dhawan has no credentials to his name, except the sobriquet of ‘Mrs Gandhi’s trusted aide’. The two have yet to prove that the PM’s faith in them was not unwarranted.

Bhupen Bose, Jamshedpur (Bihar)

Rajiv Gandhi has always ended up trusting those who the rest of the nation looked at with suspicion. While newspapers flashed reports that Prime Minister was probably associated with the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the party has ignored.

Buta Singh: no credit

them, secure in the belief that his mother’s trusted loyalist would also serve him in good stead. Buta Singh and R.K. Dhawan may not be the epitome of virtue, but then, Rajiv must have his own reasons for trusting them.

R.K. Gujral, Siliguri (West Bengal)

Health first

This refers to your article on healthcare (The merchants of life, 9—15 April). You have said that neither I nor my company (TTK Pharma) “can claim exclusive membership of the Honesty Drug Manufacturers’ Club for the simple reason that if you are in the business to make money, you will try your best to do so with whatever it takes to do it”. I am proud to say that I belong to a company which may be in the business to make money, but certainly not by any means. The drug formulations maintained at TTK Pharma are aimed at meeting genuine curative needs of the ailing rather than merely filling our coffers.

K.A. Narandranath, Madras (Tamil Nadu)

Politics now

Mud-slinging in politics has risen to dizzy heights (Mister Machiavelli, 23—29 April). In the history of politics, there are innumerable instances of leaders falling out over issues, but there seldom has been the kind of petty fogging that is now the order of the day. However, I disagree with the author when he says that Arun Nehru is a “legendary” figure in politics, simply because the performances of such leaders fall short of the requirements to be great men.

Rajiv Gandhi has undoubtedly erred in trusting Arun Nehru, V.P. Singh and Arif Mohammad Khan. Matters turned for the worse when the PM uncerrmoniously dismissed R.K. Dhawan, Mrs Gandhi’s trusted aide. Now that Dhawan is back in favour, perhaps the tides of fortune will once again swing in Rajiv’s favour.

Raj Charan Banerjee, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Law of the land

The article was interesting (Our laws, their laws, 7—13 May). However, I failed to understand why the people of Sikkim are so resentful about laws that are being followed by the whole country. Section 1 of the Income Tax Act lays down that the Act is applicable to the people of India, and since Sikkim is a part of the country, it follows naturally that the Act applies to the state too. With due respect to the people of Sikkim, I would say that it would be prudent on their part to fall in line with citizens in the rest of the country. It is for the people of India to abide by all laws and regulations in order to enable the nation to move forward.

Pran K. Manon, Bombay (Maharashtra)

In disguise

After reading the article (A new image for the PM, 28 May—3 June), I have come to the conclusion that the Rajiv Gandhi worshipper and V.P. Singh-hater. K.K. Tewari, is now a columnist in your magazine under the pseudonym Udayan Sharma.

Noral Roy, Calcutta (West Bengal)

Party first

Our report on the race for party nomination for the Calcutta North West parliamentary constituency came as a big surprise (Up for grabs, 28 May—3 June). The report is likely to create the impression that anybody and everybody can be an aspirant for a seat that is perhaps the most prestigious in the whole of West Bengal. In fact, I had sent an appeal to the Prime Minister to

Shops closed in Gangtok: protesting against tax laws
The Speaker too!

Balram Jakhar's alleged involvement in the fodder scandal is not just a blow to the ruling party but to the very traditions of Indian democracy and the august post of Speaker that he occupies (Jakhar in the pack, 14—20 May). The heat and dust generated by the scandal have still to settle, and Jakhar would do well to step down till the clouds of suspicion have cleared.

Belittling the army

While talking about the IPKF operations in Sri Lanka, the author does not clearly specify the role assigned to this force, nor the extent to which it has successfully achieved its objectives (Coming Home, 14—20 May). Shortly after the signing of the Indo-Sri Lankan Accord in July 1987, the first batches of the IPKF were sent to the island with the initial objective of assisting that country in curbing the orgy of violence that was then raging in the northern and eastern provinces of the island. Subsequently, the IPKF was required to oversee and ensure fair and peaceful conduct of the provincial elections in those areas. These two objectives of the accord have been largely achieved.

Your correspondent also asserts, and I quote: "It (the Indian army) has told the policy-makers in Delhi's South Block that it wants out. And it is getting its way." Surely, you must be aware of the fact that in a democracy, the duly elected civilian government tells the army what it must do and not vice versa. Your article further states: "Scratch an army officer and the chances are he will turn out to be a virulent opponent of India's Sri Lanka policy." And yet, on a preceding page you have printed the photograph of a young IPKF captain and quoted him as saying: "I have been shot twice... I don't mind getting a third bullet." This hardly echoes the sentiments of an officer "virulently opposed" to India's Sri Lanka policy, and much less of one who "wants out"!

In both tone and content, your report makes dismal reading. And it does a grave injustice to our soldiers who are fighting a deadly war in the jungles of Sri Lanka. These are our countrymen. Surely, the very least we can do is to praise their efforts, extol their courage and assure them that we are with them—all the way.

Brigadier (Retd) H. Chukerbulli, Wellington (Tamil Nadu)

Fuller’s Kantil Ghosh, Calcutta

 Weston's: commendable effort

The IPKF in Sri Lanka: commendable effort

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The IPKF in Sri Lanka: commendable effort

Correction

Your correspondent has made a mistake in the name of our vice-president in Toronto (When East is West, 21—27 May). The name should have read Deepak Saltzman and not Deepak Saltzman. Moreover, Mrs Saltzman has the production rights on behalf of our firm, Sunrise Films Ltd, and not Surrie Films.

S.K. Mehra, Sunrise Films Ltd, New Delhi

Working wonders

Sam Pitroda has proved himself to be the undisputed leader of telecommunications in the country (The comeback man, 28 May—3 June). India will always remain indebted to Pitroda for the masses rod for the 128-line Rural Automatic Exchange. Besides, the telecom czar's association with projects like the adult literacy programme, immunisation drive, and the distribution of water and electricity in rural areas will no doubt work wonders for the uplift of the rural masses in India.

J. V. Nalk, Bombay
(Maharashtra)

Check facts

In haste to denounce Ramakrishna Hegde, Udayan Sharma has made a factual error in his column (Hegde's track record, 21—27 May). Hegde was never defeated in the Assembly polls, whether in 1972 or 1978.

Ramanand Sharma, Bangalore (Karnataka)
While the poor people are suffering because of a total breakdown of law and order in the state, Viswanath is dancing with Menaka.

RAJIV GANDHI, Prime Minister, on N.T. Rama Rao's magnum opus Viswanatha

As long as Rajiv Gandhi remains in power, the bloodshed in Punjab will not come to an end. The flames will rise higher.

RAM JETHMALANI, Janata Dal leader

I think it's a very healthy thing for a politician to want to be Prime Minister. I think any politician who admits that he is a politician and denies that he wants to be a Prime Minister is a hypocrite.

SHARAD JOSHI, Shetkari Sanghatana leader

Mr. Bapra Singh ta hamro lagi devta bharabho (to us Bapra Singh is like God).

SUBASH GHISINGH, GNLF leader

The (Rajiv Gandhi) is so confident of winning the Karnataka elections, why doesn't he hold them in time?

S.R. BOMMMAI, former Karnataka chief minister

I am prepared to take the matter to the streets. Insulting Hindu will have far more serious repercussions than insulting or changing about a dozen Congress(I) chief ministers.

DR RATNAPAR PANDY, member of the parliamentary committee on Hindu, on the decision to cancel the committee members' trip abroad

I think the Post is a very fine newspaper, run very efficiently by Mr. Vinod Mehta and his talented team of journalists. So I felt that instead of any stray journalist picking it up, it was better that we did it.

PRITHVIRAJ NAND, editor of India and publishing director of The Times of India, group, on why he bid for The Indian Post

As for poor V.P. Singh, Arun Nehru is taking him for a piggy ride as he did with Rajiv.

RUSHI KARANJA, journalist

Of course, I am underworked, and I am not being fully utilised. I spend my time reading and writing. After all, they also serve who stand and wait.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, Congress party member

If there's a traffic violation, for instance, they (women) may challenge the culprit immediately, but are less likely to use four-letter words or ill-treat a defaulter.

VIBHAN KARAN SINGH, Delhi's police commissioner, on the women police force

I constantly seek equality. If the man in my life has the power to slap me, then even I should be able to slap him back.

FAZIA, film star
The seeker’s path

Often it is a tragedy that
shakes a person out of his complacent take-life-as-it-comes attitude to ask himself what it is all about. Sudhakar Dikshit, author of The Republic of Ponypapur, turned to religion early in life but largely as a publisher of books on Buddhism and the works of Juddu Krishnamurti. He prospered, opened a bookstore, Cheta, and a vegetarian restaurant. He had a clutch of healthy, good-looking children including the ravishing beauty Chhaya, wife of the photographer, Jitendra Arya. Everything was going well for him till tragedy struck in quick succession. Four years ago his wife and companion of 50 years suddenly died. A year later a 40-year-old son succumbed to a heart attack. “I had known death before, but never before did it hurt me so deeply and never before has it made me stand face to face with the fundamental problems of being, the enigma of birth and death,” writes Dikshit. He asked himself, “These departed dear ones of mine surely existed somewhere before their birth; so also they must be existing somewhere after their death. But where?”

The result of the four-year-old quest is contained in his latest publication, I am all: A cosmic vision of man (Chetana). The book, he maintains, was unplanned; it just happened to get written. “Though written by my hand, they (the words) are not mine.” It is the pilgrim’s path towards detachment and desirelessness. “I have no desire to perpetuate myself in any way, nor do I have any deep attachment for anybody or anything...I have no ambitions, no regrets, no sorrows. I am at a stage of life when desire ceases to be an imprisoning power and one begins to live freely more and more at the centre of one’s existence...”

Dikshit accepts the Hindu view of the origin of the cosmos. It is self-created: “Even as a spider sends forth and withdrawing its thread, even as plants spring out of the earth, and hairs grow from the head and the body of living man— even so does the whole creation arise out of the imperishable.” (Manduka Upanishad)

It is not easy for a sceptic to accept such theorisation or for a rationalist to throw up his hands because the Rig Veda says that the mystery of creation transcends all categories of knowledge. What are we to make of assertions like “Brahman is not the creator but creation itself. Brahman is the causeless cause of all causes”? Or Pascal’s, “It is a circle the centre of which is everywhere and the circumference nowhere?”

We go on to more abstract concepts. Time is God. “Kalapurusha is the prordial incarnation of the Brahman as the manifested cosmos.” There are three basic attributes necessary for carrying out the functions of creation—tapas (ardour), rta (order) and satya (truth). An agnostic is put out of court when told that the mystery of the existence of Kalapurusha is not an empirical fact, but an inner experience.” Dikshit believes in astrology as a science. His thesis is replete with scientific terminology but neither his assumptions nor his conclusions appear scientific.

Soul and atma are not scientific concepts. You may, if you like, dismiss the world as maya—illusion. But to state categorically that death is not dissolution but a stage in an endless continuity is unwarranted.

Dikshit is on stronger ground when he treads the much-trodden path towards conquest of the self to achieve a viable equation with life as it is. Ego is the source of craving for worldly things: “The mind that accumulates, whether knowledge, money or experience is not living,” said Krishnamurti. What then is living? Apparently total detachment, total desirelessness, total imperviousness towards the ups and downs of life, triumphs and failures, joys and sorrows, is the prescribed goal. Then you become godlike and indeed achieve godhood. To wit Adi Sankaracharya:

“I am neither mind, nor intellect, nor ego.
I am neither ears, nor nose, nor eyes,
I am neither space, nor earth, nor fire, nor air,
I am He. I am He.”

Dikshit recommends meditation, pranayam (breath control), satsang (association with saintly persons) and samta (equanimity). These help to create desirelessness, egolessness and the spirit of renunciation. The author has evidently achieved these aims and now leads a wholly fulfilled life. In his own words he says:

“I am at a stage of life when desire ceases to be an imprisoning power and one begins to live freely, more and more at the centre of one’s existence, than at the circumference, when one begins to care less about what may happen to oneself and increasingly has feelings and acts for causes beyond one’s ordinary reach. At this stage one often has the feeling of becoming a cosmic being, even though the earthly individuality continues as one’s physical entity. It is a stage when at certain pivot points human consciousness seems to become one with the universal consciousness.”

I am all is a compendium of the Hindu philosophical view of life and its purpose. There is nothing startlingly new in what Dikshit says but what he says is lucidly and beautifully said with apt quotations from the sacred texts. Equally readable is M. V. Kamath’s foreword. He has a very pertinent quote from William Butler Yeats entitled, What Then?

“All his happier dreams came true A small old house, wife, daughter, son,
Grounds where plum and cabbage grew Poets and wits about him drew. What then? sang Plato’s ghost, “What then?”
One may well ask Dikshit, conceded that wealth, fame, power are ephemeral, what does peace of mind give you besides peace of mind. What then? A
Giving peace a chance

Prosperity returns to the hills as political parties join hands to restore Darjeeling to its former glory

The tourists are back in Darjeeling. The roadside vendors are doing brisk business. Bargain-hunters and memento-collectors are thronging the shops once again. 'Peace' and 'development' are the new buzz-words in this West Bengal town, which till recently was at the centre of the agitation for a separate Gorkhaland. Says Subash Ghisingh, the chairman of the Darjeeling Hill Council and leader of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), "The politics of bargaining and confrontation are over; the politics of development and reconstruction will begin now."

Ghisingh envisages a Rs 260-crore package for the development of the region, which includes grandiose schemes such as the construction of highway flyovers and the setting up of a satellite tourist township near Ghoom. In addition, he feels that greater financial resources should be made available to the departments of health, water supply, education, housing and welfare of the Hill Council.

The GNLF leader's demands have raised a few eyebrows, including that of the Prime Minister, who remarked that the Hill Council's demands exceeded that of certain states. But in support of his stand, Ghisingh has pointed out that the population of Darjeeling (over a million) is larger than that of the state of Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland.

Although the Centre has not been able to accept all of Ghisingh's demands, the Planning Commission has already sanctioned Rs 60 crores for the Council in the current financial year. "Another Rs 5 crores will be granted if the initial sum is utilised properly," says Tarun Dutta, chief secretary of West Bengal. In fact, the government has elaborate plans for Darjeeling—once the queen of hill stations. And if implemented, they may restore it to its pre-agitation glory.

The schemes under consideration are ambitious but feasible—the expansion of Bagdogra airport to accommodate airbuses; a helicopter service between Bagdogra and Lebong; a 50-100-room hotel; and the declaration of Hill Road as a National Highway.

To prove he means business, the Prime Minister has already initiated an action plan. On 13 June, the West Bengal planning secretary, Dr Bikram Sinha, and the Gorkha Hill Council executive, H. Pandey, met B.G. Deshmukh, the principal secretary to the Prime Minister to discuss specific measures for the revival of tourism and the supply of adequate drinking water.

The various political parties have sunk their differences for the moment to work together for the development of the region. The Prime Minister's May visit to Darjeeling was not just a Congress affair; in fact, it was the GNLF leaders who played an important role at the meeting Rajiv Gandhi addressed on 19 May on the grounds of St Joseph's School.

Surprisingly, local Congress leaders did not seem to mind taking a back seat. "We will use every opportunity to make the people of the district listen to us, but we are in no hurry. Our immediate concern is peace and restoration of normal conditions," said Heman Rai.
general secretary of the Darjeeling unit of the Congress. "We have survived the long months of turmoil. On the surface, things seem fine—the tourists are back, the shops are open. But an air of uncertainty still prevails. We will make every effort to bring back normal conditions in the district through democratic means," he added.

This sentiment is shared by the CPI(M) unit of the district. Says Ananda Pathak, the Marxist MP from Darjeeling, "We share the Hill Council's concern for rehabilitation and development programmes. Unless these programmes are implemented, it will be very difficult to usher in an era of peace and restore normal living conditions. Our first priority is to bring back those that have fled their homes and are still in hiding. Unless there is a semblance of normalcy, there is no question of elections or party politics. Restoration of peace is our top priority at the moment."

Peace may be the audible refrain, but it is thoughts of revenge which motivate many local politicians. This has led to continuing violence in the hills. There are old scores to be settled; intra-party quarrels to be patched up or fought till death. On 9 June, the building occupied by the Gorkha Hill Council (the

West Bengal government Tourist Bureau) was ransacked by irate GNLF followers. Their wrath was directed at K.B. Rai, executive councillor in charge of the forest department. Rai's guard had assaulted a driver a few days back after a road accident, and GNLF activists who were friends of the driver had come to take revenge. Rai managed to escape their fury by jumping out of a first-floor window, but the Council house was extensively damaged—windows were broken and furniture smashed.

In Kalimpong, a picturesque hill station across the Teesta river, the tension is palpable. The area is carved up between warring factions of the GNLF and several self-styled leaders. In the fray are C.K. Pradhan (whose status in the GNLF hierarchy is currently ambiguous), the Chhatra Subba-led Gorkhaland Liberation Organisation and several opportunistic criminals. Subba, a former close associate of Ghisingh, had played a major role in making the GNLF's 40-day

Kalimpong bandh a success. As a reward, he was made assistant secretary general of the party. But he fell out with his mentor, Ghisingh, over the Hill Council proposal. Subba refuses to settle for anything less than complete autonomy.

A former school teacher turned militant, C.K. Pradhan, on the other hand, continues to be not only a GNLF member, but also a councillor of the Darjeeling Hill Council, despite his differences with the party leadership. However, he was dismissed as the president of the Kalimpong unit of the party after the Hill Council elections in December last year for having raised anti-Ghisingh slogans. Since then fights between his and other GNLF factions have let loose a reign of terror in Kalimpong. The town has
“The politics of agitation are over”

GNLF supremo Subash Ghisingh now opts for “the politics of reconstruction”

The demands of the GNLF have been met, the accord has been signed, the people have demonstrated their faith in the party in the Hill Council election. But Council chairman Subash Ghisingh’s problems are far from over. There are too many promises to keep, too many lofty expectations to fulfill, too many old scores to be settled. The cry for an independent Gorkhaland has not completely died down; the battle for territorial supremacy still breaks out between opposing party factions; workers of the CP(M) and the GNLF continue to clash in the tea garden unions; 15,000 people await rehabilitation; a few thousand are still fugitives across the border. Ghisingh is, however, going ahead with his development plans. Excerpts from an interview with the GNLF supremo:

SUNDAY: How is the Hill Council functioning?

Subash Ghisingh: We have no money. We have a lot of plans that we want to implement as soon as possible, but we have not received any funds as yet.

What are the areas that you wish to concentrate on? How long will you take to implement the schemes?

I have given a long list of projects to the state government—it can’t be discussed in detail now. For instance, we want to improve roads, decongest Darjeeling by providing a new tourist centre, develop a tourist complex… But my first priority is to rehabilitate the 15,000 displaced.

So Ghisingh the agitator has become Ghisingh the administrator?

No, no, not an administrator, I am a developer. The politics of agitation and confrontation are over. Now is the time for the politics of reconstruction.

What is your relationship with the West Bengal chief minister, Jyoti Basu?

I have no quarrels with him or anyone else in the government. I have extended my full cooperation to the process of transfer of departments and personnel to the Hill Council and I expect them to honour their commitments.

The demand for an independent statehood has been dropped...

Yes dropped, dropped. My dream consisted of two things—identity for the hill people and citizenship. Both these issues have been resolved successfully.

What about Chhotra Subba? He says he is going ahead with the demand for an independent state. Other people are bound to join hands with him.

There are some people who are never happy. They are not happy in this life, they won’t be happy in their next life. As for Subba, he is politically insignificant—sarkar ka admi hai. He doesn’t understand what political aspirations mean.

Kalimpong is still very tense. There is no peace there...

We have worked out a Rs 50-lakh development plan for Kalimpong. This is likely to be implemented soon. The disturbances created are artificial... if we had full control, we could stop everything within a week.

practically no tourists, the shops shut at 6 pm and locals are afraid to venture out after dark. Ghisingh himself has not visited the town after the Council elections. “We have a Rs 50-crore development plan for Kalimpong,” he says to smoothen ruffled feathers. But peace in Kalimpong is still a distant dream.

Not that Ghisingh’s problems elsewhere are over. Ghisingh may have overwhelming support of the people, as the poll results demonstrated, but he also has to live up to an unrealistic level of expectations. But he has no magic wand to transform the shattered economy of the hill region overnight. The transition from agitational politics to the path of peace and development through democratic electoral processes is not an easy one. Hotheads like Subba who will not settle for anything less than complete autonomy make the transition even more difficult. Then, there are the dissidents within the GNLF.

Given these difficulties, will Ghisingh be able to bring back peace and prosperity to the hills? Much will depend on two factors—the GNLF supremo’s ability to carry his colleagues with him and the success of the Centre and the state to create a climate of cooperation and confidence.

Says Tarun Dutta, “According to the clauses of the accord, we have transferred several departments, including personnel, to the Hill Council. We are very keen that a planned rehabilitation programme is implemented as soon as possible. Things can only be called normal when people can come back to their own homes without fear or anxiety.” The state administration’s priorities are clear, says Dutta—to “implement the accord and extend all cooperation to the Hill Council”. It is now up to Ghisingh and his followers to rejuvenate the economy of the hills and restore tranquility to the strife-torn district.

The office of the Darjeeling Hill Council: ambitious plans

Debajani Sinha/Darjeeling
Punjab terrorists strike at New Delhi railway station

It was all over in a matter of seconds. In the morning of 12 June, unsuspecting passengers had queued up before the booking counter for the superfast Shatabdi Express at the crowded New Delhi railway station. Suddenly, a blinding flash of light followed by a loud explosion ripped through as cries of pain and anguish rent the air. Such was the impact of the explosion that a body flew up and hit the high ceiling. After a year’s respite, the Punjab terrorists had again penetrated the capital’s security net and struck.

Pawan Tulsi, who was standing on the first floor aisle overlooking the main reservation hall where the bomb exploded, was momentarily dumbfounded by the commotion but regained his composure and found that he too had been hit by a splinter. People were running all around and many lay in a pool of blood. According to him, most of those who were killed or injured were standing within a radius of 30 feet from the site of the explosion. Nine people succumbed to their injuries and at least 50 others were undergoing treatment.

Three-year-old Sarwari had come with her parents from Pakistan and was on her way to Calcutta to visit her relatives. The family had arrived at the Old Delhi railway station that morning and reached New Delhi a few hours later to catch a train to Calcutta. “But fate intervened and Sarwari was killed by the blast,” moaned Saera Begum, the grief-stricken mother. Sahib Singh, a labourer from Bihar, was strolling on the fateful platform when he was hit by the powerful blast.

More than the tragedy, what has shocked the people is the ease with which the operation was carried out. The blame obviously fell on the Delhi Police. But, argued V.N. Singh, additional commissioner of police (CID), “every day, more than two lakh people stream in and out of New Delhi station. Is it humane possible to know which item belongs to whom and which one of the luggage is potentially dangerous? It is easy to say that the police were lax but can anyone tell me what can be done?” Singh, who was earlier posted in Chandigarh and is familiar with the terrorists’ modus operandi, confessed.

Though the Babbar Khalsa is believed to have planned and carried out the explosion, the police are yet to come up with hard evidence to implicate this terrorist outfit.
The slaying of three bus passengers by terrorists on 6 June near Amritsar would have passed off as another case of cold-blooded killing in troubled Punjab, had it not been for the rare grit of two Sikh youths—Avtar and Rajwant Singh—who challenged the militancy and fell to a burst of gunfire while trying to save their Hindu co-passengers. Both in their twenties they did not, however, die in vain: by putting up a daring resistance, they succeeded in saving the lives of six passengers who were at the mercy of a truculent gang.

There was no hint of the impending catastrophe when the bus left Amritsar at 1.15 pm, recalls Dalbir Singh, Avtar’s cousin. But an hour later two men boarded the vehicle when it stopped at a petrol pump and joined three men, who were travelling from Amritsar and were seated on the bonnet beside the driver. No sooner had the bus pulled out of the petrol pump and began speeding along the Amritsar-Fathankot highway than the men opened their bags and pulled out three AK-47 rifles and two revolvers, and forced the driver at gunpoint to divert the bus to a deserted link road near Talwandi village.

It was at once clear that terrorists had taken over. Avtar Singh sprang from his seat by the window and blocked the terrorists’ path, while two of the Hindu passengers jumped out of the running vehicle and managed to escape. At this, the terrorists ordered the driver to stop the bus and asked all Muslim passengers, if there were any, to identify themselves. But when no one responded, they ordered the Hindus to get down.

“I was made to stand second in a row of seven passengers, facing two rifle-toting boys,” recalls Joginder Pal, who was bodily lifted from his seat by the terrorists and thrown out of the bus. “Just when we went down touching their feet, begging for our lives, we heard someone shout inside the bus, Enaada ki kasur hai? (what crime have they committed)?” It was Rajwant Singh pleading with the terrorists not to kill innocent people, while Avtar grappled with one of them, other passengers later confirmed.

Realising that time was running out, the terrorists opened fire at Rajwant and Avtar and got out of the bus, leaving the two young Sikhs lying in a pool of blood. But before they fled, they emptied their guns on the seven passengers standing outside. The mayhem over, the bus, with all the injured men, sped back to Guru Tegh Bahadur Hospital in Amritsar, where Avtar and Rajwant were declared ‘brought dead,’ while the other seven were admitted and operated upon. One of them, however, died three days later.

Joginder Pal, who is recovering steadily after seven bullets were removed from his body, says he owes his life to the two Sikh youths.

Avtar’s cousin, Dalbir Singh, told SUNDAY at his native village, Hakimpur, about 6 km from the Indo-Pakistani border, that Avtar was an amritdhari Sikh (one who has tasted the holy nectar and who is supposed to be following the path shown by the gurus). “I wish I could tell them that,” he said, “but I dared not. I knew they would kill me if I opened my mouth.”

The people view the incident as a testimony to the age-old bond existing between the Sikhs and the Hindus in Punjab, while the administration interprets it as an indication of their success in trying to isolate the terrorists from the mainstream.

“Such incidents are a part of the renewed confidence of the people,” says DIG, CRPF, S.S. Virk. He adds: “We are also getting more information about the activities and hideouts of the terrorists.” And Sarabjit Singh, deputy commissioner of Amritsar, feels that the people are getting disillusioned about the terrorists.

Governor S.S. Ray has presented two cheques of Rs 1 lakh each to the panchayats of the villages to which Avtar and Rajwant belonged, besides giving Rs 20,000 each to the bereaved families. The two families
have decided to use the money for the betterment of their villages, where they plan to build a school and a hospital in the memory of the two youths.

What is remarkable is that Rajwant decided to stand up for the Hindus despite the fact that his family had suffered much during the anti-Sikh riots in November 1984. The family had to move to Punjab from Dhanbad, in Bihar, after their house was burnt down. Sources close to the family say that Rajwant had some links with the terrorists, but decided to sever them after they defiled the sanctum sanctorum of the temple during the siege of Black Thunder.

(Clockwise from bottom left) The ill-fated bus which was hijacked by terrorists on its way from Amritsar to Pathankot; Avtar Singh’s family; Joginder Pal, one of the injured passengers: a moral victory

Political observers, however, feel that Avtar and Rajwant’s pluckiness had little to do with the government’s claim that the situation in the state was returning to normal. Says Satpal Dang, national council member of the CPI, says that there are dozens of examples of Sikhs saving Hindus in the villages of Punjab. There are, indeed, many cases in which, the two communities have formed joint defence parties and are protecting each other. But a senior civil servant perhaps summed up the Avtar-Rajwant phenomenon best when he said the people were beginning to challenge the power of the gun irrespective of the success or failure of the cops. If that were true, it might mean the light at the end of the tunnel in Punjab.

Vipal Bh杜绝al/Amritsar

that the police are yet to find a clue. The splinters used inside the bomb were unusual in the sense that instead of the customary iron nails and glass pieces, nuts and bolts were used in this case. The Delhi Police have sent a team to Punjab to check out this interesting aspect. “Perhaps this will give us a clue,” Singh added.

A few days later, the police claimed to have made a headway and identified Sukhjinder Singh Brar, the squat-eyed, self-styled ‘lieutenant general’ of the Babbar Khalsa who was killed in an operation days after the explosion, as the mastermind behind the blast. The Delhi Police even published a ‘photo identity kit’ of the suspect.

But why did the Punjab terrorists strike in Delhi after such a long gap? V. N. Singh and many of his colleagues feel that the extremists have suddenly turned vindictive because of the reverses suffered by them at the hands of the security forces in Punjab. Most of the terrorist groups in the troubled state have been wiped out and many of their leaders have been shot dead by the cops. “The security forces in Punjab have the upper hand and the terrorists desperately need to do something to show their supporters, both in India and abroad, that they are still active. A blast in Delhi would attract world attention,” Singh said.

Though the Babbar Khalsa is believed to have planned and carried out the explosion, the police are yet to come up with hard evidence to implicate this dreaded terrorist outfit. Singh admitted that at this stage the police are seriously handicapped by the lack of intelligence reports. The people in Punjab are wary of confessing in the police because of the danger of being killed, they also face the prospect of being socially alienated from their community as the present situation in Punjab has been given a religious colour. “The battle against the terrorists should be fought by both the police and the people,” Singh asserts.

Meanwhile, the Delhi administration has once again decided to review the security of the capital and educate people in the modus operandi of the terrorists. From now on, apart from the passengers, railway porters and sweepers would also be trained to thwart the designs of the extremists. Posters warning the people would also be put up by the police. But will such routine measures, which are taken every time tragedy strikes, instil a sense of security among the capital’s masses?
Tremors of 1975

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s style of functioning reminds us of the dark days of the Emergency

KULDIP NAYAR

What has not changed even 14 years after the imposition of Emergency (26 June, 1975) is the tendency of our rulers to subvert institutions in order to serve personal and party ends. Those in authority—whatever be their post—have no compunction in using power, pressure or whatever else it takes to achieve their purpose.

The decline in standards had begun long ago but during and after the Emergency they were considered irrelevant, having no meaning in “practical” politics and administration. Now there is no distinction between right and wrong.

The Emergency brought in its wake a kind of fear psychosis which the nation had not experienced after the British left. And it was this fear which made even the most conscientious compromise with the excesses committed by the regime. The lifting of Emergency revived the basic freedoms that the Constitution has conferred, but not the values destroyed.

The licence enjoyed during the Emergency had hardened the minds of those who exercised it.

The behaviour of today’s rulers, both ministers and officials, reflects the same style—and conceit. That certain things are not done in a democratic set-up or that certain methods are wrong to use is no more relevant. Although almost a decade and a half have passed since the Emergency was imposed, basically there is very little change. Only the actors are different; otherwise it is the same old drama of deceit and delusion.

DURING THE Emergency, you had V.C. Shukla; now you have K.K. Tewari. The former had the weapon of censorship, now, even without that official sanction, Tewari has been able to snuff out even the little credibility that television, radio, and even news agencies enjoy. There is none to say ‘no’ to any order given over the telephone by anyone in the government’s information set-up or the PM’s secretariat.

No doubt, officially, pressmen have not been asked to bend, but Tewari, by bluff and bluster and twisting the arms of some hapless newspaper proprietors is making sure that he gets a “positive response” from many of them. Flow of information, which has never been a freely available commodity during Rajiv Gandhi’s regime, has been further curbed.

Briefing has once again been restricted to a select group of “committed” journalists; foreign secretary S.K. Singh has made it the “normal” practice, and other secretaries to the Government of India are following suit. The Prime Minister steps in only when the situation demands a more responsible and direct attack on the Opposition.

At least K.K. Tewari is frank about this and the press knows where he stands. The most sinister are persons like Satish Sharma, who, with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s backing, are trying to gag the press and subvert other institutions on which the structure of democracy rests. They are using the system and even distorting it to serve their ends. There is some hope however that when they go out of office, much of the harm can be undone—Mrs Gandhi’s laws and constitutional amendments were withdrawn when she was thrown out of power, and even when she returned in 1980, she did not bring them back. But how about their abettors—the bureaucrats?

THE REAL harm to the system and institutions is done by the bureaucracy because the bureaucrats are insiders, and they know how to twist or go around a rule or precedent without affecting the facade. The harm they cause is difficult to undo; it is like a cancer affecting the whole system. And one must remember that while the government may be voted out of power the bureaucracy remains. The Shah Commission, which was set up to enquire into the Emergency excesses detailed how the ethical considerations inherent in public behaviour waned and in many cases were beyond the mental grasp of many of the public functionaries.

Officials surrounding Rajiv Gandhi, whether Gopi Arora, M.S. Ahluwalia, Suman Dubey, G. Parthasarathy, Mani Shankar Aiyar or Ronen Sen, all of them are intelligent men; so are cabinet secretary T.N. Seshan and the PM’s secretary and information secretary, Murali. But the harm they have done to the system as to “build up” or “perpetrate” Rajiv Gandhi may have been irreparable.

During the Emergency, you had V.C. Shukla; now you have K.K. Tewari. Tewari has been able to snuff out even the little credibility that television, radio and other news agencies enjoy.

True, they and their predecessors, former cabinet secretary P.C. Alexander, former defence secretary S.K. Bhatnagar and former Intelligence Bureau chief Rajeshwar, have been able to cover up cleverly scandals over the the Fairfax contract, the Bofors gun deal, the West German submarine deal or the scores of deals with Indian connections. True, they have woven a fine network of misinformation and disinformation which has suppressed the truth.

But is it what they should have tried to achieve? The truth will catch up with them the day after, if not tomorrow. They may realise then the wrongs they have done.
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The plots to a fall

The dereservation of 285 plots in Bombay by chief minister Pawar and his handing them over to private builders is threatening to blow up into a major scandal which may cost him his seat.

What is uncertain—and the subject of much speculation—is whether Sharad Pawar will—or can—continue as the chief minister of Maharashtra. But what is beyond doubt is that his image has taken such a battering lately over the issue of dereservation of 285 plots of land that were reserved for public utilities in Bombay that it will be almost impossible for him to undo the damage.

Leading city tabloids and eveningers are full of speculation about his possible resignation. Pawar has himself fuelled such speculation by saying that he was going out of town for some time, while actually locking himself up in his old flat on Napean Sea Road where he was said to be cleaning through files. Union energy minister Vasant Sathe, who was in the city for a medical check-up, contributed his bit to the rumour mill by saying that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was himself displeased with Pawar. But Sathe did not make it clear whether the Prime Minister was annoyed with Pawar for the questionable land deals, in which he is said to have collected several crores of rupees, or whether it was for the latter’s stand regarding NABARD (National Bank for Agricultural and Rural Development) loans to co-op banks.

Sources in Delhi say that Pawar was offered a berth in the Union cabinet, but the chief minister is believed to have declined the offer, as he would not like to leave the state. In fact, Pawar has tried to scoff the rumours about his possible resignation as a “matter of amusement to me”.

The immediate cause of Pawar’s troubles was the dereservation of 285 plots earmarked for parks, hospitals and other public utilities under the Bombay Development Plan and handing them over to private builders. While the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG) has challenged the move in court, the followers of the former Maharashtra chief minister, A.R. Antulay, have sought the Governor’s permission to file a criminal prosecution against Pawar. Political observers feel that Antulay has...
an old axe to grind, for he was hounded out of office on the charge of having misused his office for private gain by the state's powerful sugar lobby. Friends of Antulay allege that all chief ministers collect money for their party, but that it was only Antulay who was singled out for punishment.

Antulay's efforts to unseat Pawar are too obvious. He has been camping in Delhi to conduct an orchestrated campaign against Pawar in the higher echelons of the Congress(I) and has dissident leader Shivajirao Patil as his drummer boy. A confidant of Pawar, however, describes Antulay's activities as "election-year drama", and adds that "it will get worse as election approaches, but Mr Pawar will overcome it".

Indeed, Pawar seems ready to face any challenge from the Centre. "Why should I feel threatened?" he told Sunday. "I am not worried. I have ordered an enquiry into the 285 cases under the Commission of Enquiry Act, which means everything will be out in the open. Would I do it if I were afraid?" he asks.

Perhaps. But the constitution of the enquiry commission by Pawar has itself given rise to suspicion about his motivation. Even the former chief secretary of the state, J.B. De Souza, who had set the ball rolling by exposing the changes that had been made in the Bombay Development Plan, was surprised by the move. Pawar and his minister for urban development were looking for a solution to the problem and had approached De Souza to mediate between the government and the BEAG. An agreement had almost been reached and it was decided that a three-member committee would go into the matter, and the BEAG, for its part, decided to withdraw the case it had filed in the Bombay High Court.

But on returning from Delhi recently, Pawar announced the setting up of the enquiry commission and cut off all dialogue with the BEAG. De Souza feels that the chief minister changed his mind because the three-member committee would have given its report within three months, while the enquiry commission would take at least six months to do so. This means, the enquiry report will not be available before the elections.

Is Pawar buying time? Opposition leaders Chhagan Bhujbal, of the Shiv Sena and Mrinal Gore of the Janata Dal think he is. Political analysts are of the opinion that he is buying time to make peace with Delhi. They feel that it is highly improbable that Rajiv Gandhi was unaware of the fact that Pawar was collecting funds. In fact, they allege that one of Rajiv's Doon School friends is also involved in the deals. What Delhi is really in the dark about is the amount of money Pawar has actually raised. It was Murli Deora, a Congress(I) leader, who first raised the issue by telling Ashok Padhi of Samna, a daily newspaper backed by the Shiv Sena, that Pawar had collected money to the tune of Rs 2,000 crores. Rajiv Gandhi is apparently, disturbed at the possibility of Pawar quitting the party, for in that case, he could wreak havoc on the Congress(I) by utilising the immense money power that he has allegedly garnered.

Pawar's detractors have also accused him of maintaining links with a number of Opposition leaders. Much heat and dust was raised when Antulay and dissident leader Nasikrao Tirpude claimed that Pawar had hopped with Janata leaders Chandra Shekhar, S.R. Bommai and Ramakrishna Hegde and ignored Congressmen during S.M. Joshi's funeral.

Pawar's followers, however, vouch-safe that no money changed hands and political observers think it is unlikely that Delhi will disturb Pawar till the Lok Sabha elections are over. But there is a growing disillusionment within the Congress(I) about his ability to contain the Shiv Sena and the Shetkari Sangathan. His opponents are trying to impress upon the party high command that Pawar will prove incapable of leading the Congress(I) to victory in Maharashtra as he has failed to counter the two forces. They also allege that Pawar's pro-farmer decisions such as reducing interest on and writing off of loans and the purchase of onions at a loss are all aimed at bolstering his own image and embarrassing Delhi. Pawar, however, claims that he is only following the guidelines laid down by the party. But whether the party will stand by him has itself become a big question.

Olga Tellis/Bombay
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2 KILOS TOMATOES
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— M A K Pataudi, Editor
The other

_Slowly, effortlessly, the Captain has emerged at the centre of New Delhi’s power equations. He is now India’s second most powerful man after Rajiv Gandhi._

_How they sniggered._

Three years ago, Satish Sharma was referred to by the press and fellow politicians as, among other things, a ‘chapraay’, ‘ADC’, ‘householder’ and ‘butler’. Even after Rajiv Gandhi’s former Indian Airlines colleague was given an office to work out of at the PM’s residence at 7 Race Course Road in 1986, no one had any doubts about what his importance stemmed from. Yes, of course, Sharma was vested with the sensitive job of tending Amethi—the Uttar Pradesh parliamentary seat which Rajiv first won in 1981. But Sharma’s real constituency—the sniggers went—was Rajiv Gandhi’s household.

It was an unkind view, somewhat exaggerated, but not wholly untrue. For Sharma spent a good part of his time supervising the domestic chores at the Race Course Road residence. It was his responsibility, for instance, to ensure that the Gandhi kitchen was adequately stocked with dal or pasta; to see that the children, Priyanka and Rahul, were properly coached by their private tutors; to see that any technical defects in Rajiv’s fleet of cars were promptly attended to.

The former Indian Airlines captain undertook all of this with enthusiasm and
without any apparent embarrassment. It may have given him the kind of access to Rajiv and his family that few enjoyed, but he was treated as something of an 'outsider'. He was not invited to Rajiv's parties, not taken on the Prime Minister's holidays, never made part of his charmed social circle. Sharma, after all, had little in common with Rajiv despite the shared Indian Airlines past. The Prime Minister's real friends were the old boys from Doon School who later went to Oxford and Cambridge.

When Rajiv assumed office, it was this charmed Doon-Oxford circle that acquired the most political power. The taciturn Arun Singh, then parliamentary secretary, was perhaps closest to Rajiv and his de facto political aide. As home minister, Arun Nehru's influence extended far beyond North Block: he managed the Congress party's affairs with an iron hand and arguably also ran the government. Some power remained with older Congressmen. Union minister P. Shiv Shankar, for instance, had Rajiv's ear and was consulted on all legal matters. And Makanhal Potedar, who had an office at Race Course Road by virtue of being Rajiv's political adviser, was a force to contend with.

Sharma, in contrast, enjoyed little political clout. He was dismissed by most of Rajiv's friends as a flunky, a lowly factotum, a man who had found his true level in the menial domestic chores he performed.

In a sense, nothing has changed for Sharma. He still ensures that the cornelli served at the Gandhi table is just right, that the children learn their geography and mathematics well and defective carburettors are repaired swiftly. But in another, everything has. Arun Singh retired to a farm at Ranikhet; Arun Nehru was unceremoniously dumped; Potedar was shifted to the steel and mines ministry and has been partially sidelined; and Shiv Shankar does not enjoy as much importance as he did.

It would be too much to say that the 'butler' did it, but one consequence of the changed power equations has been the ascendancy of Sharma. The smugglers have ceased. Today, few would dismiss Sharma as a mere odd-job man with no political say. No one is as close to Rajiv as Sharma now. No one dares cross his path and Congressmen live in fear of him. He is arguably the most powerful man in the country today after Rajiv.

The transition from 'butler' to political maître de may have come easily and painlessly for Sharma, but power has brought with it scandal and controversy. For a man who claims to be nothing more than a Rajya Sabha MP from Madhya Pradesh, whose only job is to help Rajiv run Amethi, Sharma—who Mehta resigned.

The Post incident followed charges made by C.R. Irani, the managing director of the Calcutta-based The Statesman—the other controversy that Sharma has been embroiled in recently. In a press conference held on 2 May, Irani accused Sharma of instructing the authorities not to clear the newspaper's proposal to construct a multi-storied building on its land in New Delhi's Connaught Place. Charging Sharma with "gross abuse of power", Irani claimed that the Captain had threatened him through an intermediary that the paper would not be allowed to develop its property unless it adopted a less hostile stance.

The suggestion was that Sharma was getting his own back for The Statesman's exposé on the deals between Japan's Sumitomo Corporation and the government-owned Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) and the Gas Au-
Satish Sharma’s interference in the affairs of *The Statesman* and *The Indian Post* has received a fair share of publicity. But investigations conducted by SUNDAY suggest that his first—and perhaps most brazen—operation had to do with *The Hindustan Times* (*HT*). That Sharma was instrumental in getting the newspaper’s former editor, Prem Shankar Jha, removed from his post. The affable Jha, who now edits the Ambani-owned *Commercity*, surprised many by suddenly leaving *The Hindustan Times* on 21 April 1987.

Oddly enough, leads into the story originated from a source close to Sharma himself. The source claimed that Sharma had told him just five days or so before Jha quit that he (Sharma) was “going to see that this man was sacked”. Apparently, Sharma was angry that an article he wanted to plant in *The Hindustan Times* was not carried.

The story (as related by Sharma to the source) goes like this. Sharma had come by a document which established that V.P. Singh (who resigned as defence minister on 12 April) had contravened the law by failing to convert a property he owns at Rajpur Road in Dehradun from ‘residential’ to ‘commercial’. Sharma handed the document over to Jha, who instructed one of his correspondents (Mukul Shukla, who still works for the newspaper) to check out the facts in Dehradun. Shukla—who, according to the Sharma version, is a V.P. Singh fan—handed the document over to the Raja and did not file the story. Sharma, angry with Jha for selecting the ‘wrong’ correspondent to do the story, summoned the HT’s proprietor, K.K. Birla, who was abroad, and pressured him to ask Jha to leave.

It is an amazing story and if it has gone unreported, it is because none of the characters involved is willing to speak forthrightly. When SUNDAY contacted Jha, he acknowledged that he had been approached by someone with the story, but that he “had no knowledge whether he was an intermediary of Sharma’s”. Jha is tight-lipped about the suggestion that Sharma could have had a hand in his ouster, but says “he cannot rule out the possibility”.

Like Jha, the HT’s correspondent, Mukul Shukla, is reluctant to talk “about such a sensitive issue”. Shukla denies that he was given a document relating to V.P. Singh’s property and thus there is no question of him having handed it over to the Raja. All he is willing to say is: “I was asked one day in April ’87 by the editor (Jha) to leave for Dehradun at five minutes’ notice and check out the veracity of the allegation. I did what I was asked to do as a reporter and filed my story.”

So why was the story not carried? Shukla will not say. And did he discover that the allegation against V.P. Singh was true? Shukla repeats himself: “I checked out the facts and I did what I was asked to do as a reporter.”

The other ‘player’ in this drama is just as circumspect. When SUNDAY contacted V.P. Singh, he acknowledged that he was aware that the
Hyderabad and Sharma, who was training there, decided to get in touch with him. Sharma was nervous that Rajiv would not remember him, but he went ahead and telephoned Raj Bhavan, where Mrs Gandhi and her son were staying. Rajiv, by Sharma’s account, was exceedingly courteous and warm, and invited Sharma to come and see him in Delhi.

Later, the two got jobs in Indian Airlines and flew the Delhi-Bhopal route together on a number of occasions. It is believed that they were not that friendly then, but if Jethmalani is right, then Sharma was already very close to the Gandhi family in 1975. For his documents showed that the Captain was helping Sonia’s Maruti Technical Services bag an export order.

When Rajiv entered politics in 1981, Sharma was one of his many friends who was invited to help him. After Rajiv won the Amethi by-election—the seat fell vacant after Sanjay’s death—Sharma began doing odd jobs for him. The Captain’s job mainly involved sorting out the mail, fixing engagements and secretarial duties. Arun Singh was Rajiv’s most trusted aide then and Sharma was perceived as the least important member of Rajiv’s team of political friends.

This continued even after Rajiv was made the Congress general secretary in 1982. It was only the following year that Sharma was given a room at 2A Motilal Nehru Marg, the office that Arun Singh used to work out of. But even so, his duties remained largely secretarial and he worked only part-time. It was only after Arun Singh was elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1984 that Sharma decided to chuck his job with Indian Airlines.

Sharma assumed a more important role after Rajiv became Prime Minister in late 1984, especially when Arun Singh was made parliamentary secretary. The responsibility of looking after Amethi was transferred from Arun Singh to Sharma. A few months after the Prime Minister, V.K. Singh, had a heart attack in December 1984, Arun Singh suggested to Sharma that he might be put in charge of Sharma’s responsibilities.

Henry Tan had been investigating his Rajpur Road property. Did he provide Shukla or Jha with evidence to establish that he had converted the property from ‘residential’ to ‘commercial’ as the law dictated? The Raja won’t say either. “Please refer all such questions on this matter to Prem Shankar.” The HT’s proprietor, K.K. Birla, was not available for comment. However, his daughter, Sobhna Bhartia, who manages the paper’s affairs, denied that Jha’s ouster had anything to do with the V.P. Singh story. “It was a purely administrative decision and had nothing to do with this,” she said.

It is difficult to reconstruct what really happened in the face of such reticence, but it is possible to make a few informed guesses. It is very likely that both Jha and Shukla believed that it was necessary to check out the allegation before committing it to print. And that either or both of them decided that the best way to do this would be by confronting the Raja with it. The fact that V.P. Singh knows (and knew) about the HT story on his property corroborates this.

It is just as possible that Shukla discovered—after making enquiries in Dehradun and of V.P. Singh—that the allegation was completely unfounded. For one, the planned exposure on V.P. Singh was bound to have found its way into print sooner or later if the allegation had been true. Since it hasn’t, it is very likely that the ‘information’ Sharma or whoever else had on Singh was false. Moreover, the story Shukla filed was never carried. Could this have been because its contents embarrassed the accuser more than the accused?

So where does all this leave Sharma? Was he really behind Jha’s ouster? It’s hard to say, but the facts suggest that he may well have been involved in the HT drama in one way or another. For a start, neither Jha, Shukla nor V.P. Singh denies that Sharma tried to plant the story (Jha, of course, has gone further in “not ruling out the possibility” of Sharma’s involvement). Then, Jha left the HT on 21 April, 1987—just four or five days after Sunday’s source was told by Sharma that he was planning to get rid of Jha. Moreover, 21 April was just a fortnight or so after Shukla began investigating his story.

There is another disturbing detail. The HT’s proprietor, K.K. Birla, was abroad just before Jha quit and he didn’t rush back to Delhi suddenly. Was he summoned by Sharma as the source claims he was? Finally, the last column that Jha wrote for his former newspaper railed against political interference in the press and suggested that the HT was not free from it either. It was titled ‘Cutting one’s own throat’. Did Prem Shankar Jha do just this by not carrying Sharma’s story in the manner he wanted?

“Was Sharma really behind Prem Shankar Jha’s ouster? It’s hard to say, but the facts suggest that he was involved in one way or the other.”

SUNDAY 25 June—1 July 1989
Minister shifted residence to 7 Race Course Road. Sharma was given an office there. Barring his personal secretary, the only other person who enjoyed this privilege was Rajiv's political adviser, Makanlal Fotedar.

It was inevitable that the two would clash. To Fotedar, a dab hand at palace politics, Sharma was a threat. Soon after Rajiv assumed office, he and Arun Nehru had ganged up to throw R.K. Dhawan out. But only, it seemed, to see him replaced by someone who had all the makings of a Dhawan.

Nevertheless, Fotedar was well entrenched in the palace and had the backing of the all-powerful Arun Nehru. Moreover, the threat seemed distant as access to Parliament's Central Hall—to partymen, the Opposition and the press. Yet, during much of '86, it was Fotedar who called the shots. Sharma's responsibilities fell into three categories. He was formally in charge of Amethi; oversaw the arrangements for Rajiv's meetings, especially when foreign guests were invited at his house; and tended to the household. In a sense, it was the last duty which has made him what he is today. It meant free access to the Gandhi household and a close relationship with Sonia. Sharma's day followed a set pattern. He would reach the Race Course Road residence at 8 am every morning, spend an hour or so with the family to find out what needed doing, work in his office until two in the afternoon, return to the house to check if everything was OK and leave at about 5.30 in the evening. It wasn't exactly high-powered work, nor was it very taxing. Fotedar, in contrast, used to remain at Race Course Road until very late, often until two in the morning.

By the end of 1986, things had begun to change for Sharma. Arun Nehru had fallen out of favour and quit the party the following year. In 1987, the govern-
ment faced an awful crisis. V.P. Singh had left the party and founded the Jan Morcha. Congress dissidence had reached unprecedented levels. President Zail Singh was contemplating the dismissal of Rajiv’s ministry, and the government was rocked by the Bofors scandal. It was then that Sharma began playing a political role. The Prime Minister needed information about what was happening in the Congress. Partymen, in turn, needed to brief Rajiv about how they felt. Those who couldn’t meet Fotedar—who was a busy man at most times but swamped with work then—began using Sharma as a conduit for passing on messages to the PM.

From then on Sharma was on a roll. When Zail Singh pulled out of the presidential race, the worst of the crisis was over. And Rajiv, who was very unhappy with the way Fotedar handled it, decided it was time that he went. The day after his presidential nominee, R. Venkataraman, was sworn in, Rajiv removed Fotedar out of his house and into the inconsequential steel and mines ministry.

With Fotedar, Arun Singh and Arun Nehru out of the way, Sharma grew more and more powerful. In time, the Prime Minister also began to rely less on his chosen bureaucrats. Gopi Arora—who Sharma dislikes—was one of Rajiv’s principal political advisers when he was a secretary in the PMO; now he is not as important a member of Rajiv’s team as he was. Nor is Rajiv’s old Doon School chum Suman Dubey, who was taken on as an additional secretary in the information and broadcasting ministry a couple of years ago.

For Sharma though, palace politics was not quite over. By the end of 1988, Fotedar had wormed his way back into Rajiv’s favour. He was consulted on the infamous Press Bill, sent to oversee the Tamil Nadu elections and recruited to troubleshoot in Madhya Pradesh. His MP operation won him a lot of praise. Fotedar managed to convince a stubborn Arun Singh to accept Motilal Vora’s nomination as chief minister.

Fearing that Fotedar would come back in a big way, Sharma pulled off a coup a few months ago to check this possibility. He was instrumental in arranging for the return of R.K. Dhawan, a move he thought would effectively counter the growing importance of Fotedar. Dhawan’s re-entry, of course, was under consideration for a long time. Large numbers of Congressmen wanted him back and Rajiv himself was not averse to the idea. But it needed Sharma to clinch the issue. Sonia was deeply suspicious of Dhawan and no one but Sharma could have convinced her.

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WHO’S WHO AT THE PALACE

SHEILA DIXIT

- Her importance can be gauged by the number of briefs. She is the minister of state for parliamentary affairs, minister of state in the Prime Minister’s office (PMO) and chairperson of the Jawaharlal Nehru Centenary Celebration Committee. Dixit coordinates political affairs on behalf of Rajiv and has recently taken on the role of a political adviser. A few months ago, she lobbied strongly and successfully to have Arjun Singh removed from the Madhya Pradesh chief ministership for his involvement in the Churhat lottery scam.

R.K. DHAWAN

- Like Dixit, he also handles political affairs on behalf of Rajiv. Dhawan deals with party affairs in many states, scrutinises all the petitions submitted during Rajiv’s morning darshans and briefs the Prime Minister on what Congressmen think of decisions taken by the party high command. He was appointed officer on special duty (OSD) in the cabinet secretariat at Sharma’s behest and the two have teamed up to form a powerful combine.

BUTA SINGH

- The home minister is consulted on all administrative and political matters of any importance and there is hardly any area—with the exception of foreign affairs—in which he doesn’t have a say. Buta is at his best playing hatchet-man and has been responsible for the removal of a number of chief ministers and curbing party dissidence in states with a heavy hand. The emergence of the Sharma-Dhawan combine has rattled him somewhat. But the wily Sardar—who is busy trying to befriend them—is still a force to reckon with.

GHULAM NABI AZAD

- Despite suggestions that he has fallen out of favour, Azad remains an important member of Rajiv’s political team. He is unarguably the most important AICC(I) general secretary and is consulted on all party decisions. Azad is directly in charge of handling the politics of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal, Punjab and Haryana. Apart from Sharma, he is the only other person who has been given an ‘unofficial’ RAX line (officially made available only to Cabinet ministers, secretaries and the like).

V. GEORGE

- The Prime Minister’s low-profile personal secretary is Rajiv’s link with the rest of the party. No paper addressed to the PM reaches him without George’s scrutiny and no one—with the possible exception of Sharma—can meet Rajiv without going through him. George does not take political decisions, but he passes on Rajiv’s instructions to party members. Congressmen treat him with great respect as they know that the Prime Minister speaks through him.
of where the real power lies in the palace. Today, Sharma rules supreme.
He has the reputation of being the
Congress party's main fund collector and
industrialists flock to his office to seek
favours. And although he is not quite a
political adviser, he is constantly in touch
with partymen, listening to their prob-
lems and passing political messages to
and from the Prime Minister.

Today, he even decides on political
and bureaucratic appointments. For inst-
ance, he had Romesh Bhandari made Lt
Governor of Delhi. The story goes that
Bhandari, who was in charge of the
AICC's foreign cell, approached Sharma
after he was unsuccessful in getting a
Rajya Sabha seat. Sharma got him the Lt
Governor's job without any difficulty. In
the field of civil aviation, hardly anything
happens without Sharma's consent. The
former pilot has got his own men
appointed to key positions. Air-India's
managing director, Rajan Jetley, for
instance, is a Sharma protégé. Jetley
would have almost certainly lost his job
when a virtual war broke out between
the management and the board if it
hadn't been for Sharma's backing.

Sharma was also responsible for hav-
ing R. Prasad, an old friend from his IA
days, made managing director of the
airline. He also secured the extension of
Air Marshal Raje, the chairman of the
National Airports Authority of India
(NAAI), despite the institution of two
courts of enquiry into allegations of
mismanagement. Says a senior airline
official: "The Captain has always stood
by his friends."

Rajiv's attitude to Sharma has been
different from that towards his other
friends in one important respect. The
Prime Minister has stood by him
through all the scandals and at consider-
able personal political risk. Other friends
have fallen by the wayside for apparently
lesser 'crimes'. Amitabh Bachchan re-
signed his parliamentary seat over allega-
tions of corruption levelled at his
brother; Arun Nehru went for being
overbearing and ambitious; and Arun
Singh fell into disfavour for having his
own views on how to handle the Bofors
issue.

Sharma has survived worse. The
power and influence he exercises stem
largely from this. He is perceived as a
survivor, a man who is here to stay,
someone the Prime Minister will back,
whatever the cost, to the end. This is
what makes industrialists cower before
his partymen cringe and bureaucrats
tremble at his sight. Who's afraid of
Satish Sharma? Everybody, from the
looks of it.

Mukund Padmanabhan/ND

No one dares cross
Satish Sharma's path
now. Industrialists
cower before him
and Congressmen
tremble at his sight
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has once again proved that it is the most consistent among the non-Communist Opposition parties. You may disagree with many of the party's policies but you cannot deny that its leadership has clear-cut views and aims. And, the BJP leaders do not take decisions which are opposed to their ideology.

The BJP, for instance, has opted to ally with the Shiv Sena and has decided to rake up the Ram Janamabhoomi issue despite strong protests from the Janata Dal. V.P. Singh and his colleagues, who are only too eager to have the BJP with them during the parliamentary polls, on the other hand, have taken a stand which is confusing to say the least. Since the Dal is opposed to the Shiv Sena and because the BJP will have an alliance with Bal Thackeray's party in Maharashtra, the Janata Dal leadership has decided that the party will have no truck with the BJP in the state. But Singh is in favour of having an alliance with the BJP in most of the states of the Hindi belt. Isn't this a strange political situation? How can the BJP play so many roles at the same time: an untouchable in Maharashtra, a friend in the Hindi belt states and a ruling partner in Haryana?

The BJP, in contrast, has made its intentions very clear. It is not prepared to sacrifice its ideology for political gains. Its leaders make no secret about the fact that their party aspires to create a Hindu Rashtra. But the Janata Dal is neither communal nor secular. The leaders are a confused lot and that is why they have not been able to counter the communal or secessionist forces.

Moreover, the BJP opposes the Congress(I) since it differs with the ruling party's policies and programmes. It would continue to criticise the Congress(I) even if Rajiv Gandhi were to step down. But V.P. Singh and Arun Nehru would readily leave the Dal once they became Rajiv Gandhi's friends again.

Strategically, too, the BJP has scored over the Janata Dal. It has decided to go along with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra only because it is aware that such communal organisations could split the Hindu votes. But the Janata Dal is yet to make up its mind about striking an alliance with the BJP or the left parties. The Dal leaders are aware that ignoring the BJP in the Hindi belt states would be suicidal and that is why the Janata Dal has not branded the BJP as a communal party. But in West Bengal, the Janata Dal leaders proudly proclaim that the left is its natural ally.

The Janata Dal is neither communal nor secular. The leaders are a confused lot and that is why they have not been able to counter the communal or secessionist forces.
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NEWS

The campaign begins

The Congress(I) electioneering gets off to a confident start with Rajiv Gandhi’s tour of the state

The run-up to the Lok Sabha polls has begun in UP. It is the first state where the Congress(I) high command has launched the party’s election campaign with the Prime Minister and Congress(I) president, Rajiv Gandhi, embarking on a whirlwind tour of eight districts on 9 and 10 June. On the first day, he visited Bareli and Kumaon while on 10 June he toured Pratapgarh, Saharanpur, Dehradun and

prepared speech and spoke extempore instead. Accompanied by UP chief minister N.D. Tiwari, the UP Congress(I) chief, Balram Singh Yadav, and AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad, Rajiv Gandhi launched a blistering attack on the Janata Dal, knowing full well that most of the Dal leaders—V.P. Singh, Ajit Singh, Chandra Shekhar, Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammad Khan and Sharad Yadav—belonged to UP. It appears that Gandhi is rather worried about his party’s prospects in eastern UP following the leadership vacuum created by Veer Bahadur Singh’s death. It was probably because of this that the Prime Minister toured places in eastern UP, assuring the Thakurs of the region that the Congress(I) was still very much with them.

Rajiv Gandhi based his campaign on three planks: the Panchayati Raj and Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, the launching of the missile Agni, and, what he called, the attempts of some Opposition leaders to undermine the unity of the country. Speaking at a massive gathering at Singrauli, he said that the Janata Dal leaders opposed the Congress(I)’s proposal on the Panchayati Raj system and the launching of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana because they were not keen on giving villagers real political and economic powers. Regarding the successful lift-off of the Agni, the launching of which was put off on two previous occasions, Gandhi, in a clearly populist vein, accused the Opposition of trying to scuttle the missile programme because, he felt, it was not interested in seeing India emerge as a major power. He alleged that the Opposition had joined hands with certain foreign forces that were against such tests and were conspiring against the nation. In a vituperative outburst, Rajiv Gandhi repeated his earlier accusation that the Opposition was abetting the movement for Khalistan in Punjab by supporting the Anandpur Sahib Resolution and pleading the cases of those who conspired to assassinate Indira Gandhi.

Despite his tight schedule the Prime Minister held long meetings with Tiwari, Yadav and other state leaders in order to assess his party’s political prospects in the state. According to reliable sources, he instructed the state Congress(I) to make the Panchayati Raj and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana the main campaign issues and to select 50 workers for each booth who are to trumpet the advantages of the two schemes. These workers are also to ensure that all Congress(I) supporters cast their vote.

Rajiv Gandhi is determined to keep the pressure on and this tour was only the opening move. In the next month he is expected to visit the state six times. He is also planning to travel to UP by road as to establish a personal contact with people on the way and is going to lay the foundation stone of at least 12 big projects—the most important one being the Shahjahanpur fertiliser project—all on the eve of the elections. With the Prime Minister going great guns, the Congress(I) appears to be clearly in the lead in UP, as far as electioneering is concerned.

Rajiv Shukla/Lucknow
Saikia goes down fighting

The former Assam chief minister loses the Rajya Sabha poll on a recount

The defeat of the Congress(I) candidate and former Assam chief minister, Hiteswar Saikia, and the party's bitter reaction to it, was the culmination of a fortnight-long, bitterly-contested battle for the two Rajya Sabha seats held on 13 June. The seats had fallen vacant after Bahru Islam and Dharanidhar Basumatary, both of the Congress(I), completed their terms.

Fate interceded when the returning officer declared two votes cast in his favour as invalid. Sources in the Congress(I), however, do not ascribe Saikia's defeat to his stars. They argue that some bigwigs of the ruling Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) almost bullied the officer into declaring the ballot papers as invalid, and have even declared that they would go to Guwahati High Court against the results, and file a complaint with the Election Commission.

The drama began right from the selection of the nominees. Betrayed with a fresh spurt of dissidence, the AGP was unable to decide on a common candidate. In a house of 126, the AGP has 72 legislators. In order to win, a candidate required 42 first preference votes. While the victory of one AGP nominee was thus a foregone conclusion, the party required the support of at least 12 Opposition members to bag the second seat as well. The AGP began courting the Opposition parties like the United Minorities Front (UMF), now split into two factions—one led by Golam Osman, the other by Santi Ranjan Dasgupta—the Congress(S) and the CPI(M). However, because of the fundamental differences between the AGP and these Opposition parties on matters such as the Assam Accord, the latter refused to back an AGP nominee. Instead, they suggested putting up a non-party candidate acceptable to both the AGP and them.

A section within the AGP was willing to accept this proposal. But as there were too many aspirants for the seats within the party, a consensus could not be arrived at. On 29 May, after a ballot was held within the legislature party, two names were finalised: those of an Adivasi lawyer, David Ledger, and Biren Baishya, chairman of the State Warehousing Corporation.

Once the Opposition parties fell out with the AGP, the Congress(I), which was still to field a candidate, began to actively woo them. But these parties, notably the Congress(S) and the CPI(M), maintained that they not only had differences with the AGP, but with the Congress(I) as well. They advised the Congress(I) also to find a non-party consensus candidate if it wanted their support. Just as they were considering various names after the Congress(I) accepted their decision, came an unexpected bonanza for the latter. Eleven members of the Dasgupta faction of the UMK agreed to support a Congress(I) candidate unconditionally. On 31 May, after a telephone call from the party high command in Delhi, the Congress(I) announced that Hiteswar Saikia would be put up as its nominee.

This at once led to a change in the AGP's attitude. The party realised that with two of its own nominees and another fielded by the Opposition, the Congress(I)'s chances of winning had brightened, even though it had only 23 legislators. Had any other Congressman been in the fray, the AGP might have taken a gamble. But not with Saikia, their être noire. The AGP promptly accepted the condition of a "consensus" candidate imposed by the non-Congress(I) Opposition parties earlier. The party withdrew its own nominee, Baishya, in favour of Amrital Basumatary, a Congress(S) MLA, whose nomination was also approved by the Osman group of the UMF. Thereafter Saikia was always at a disadvantage. David Ledger's victory was certain because the AGP had decided that 45 of its first preference votes would go in his favour, leaving 27 for Basumatary. With the support of the UMF, the Congress(S), the CPI(M) and one independent candidate, Basumatary was assured at least 40 votes. Saikia was left with only 34 definite votes.

But the Congress(I) camp was confident about Saikia's victory. It was hoping that some of the AGP dissidents would cross-vote to enable Saikia to win. Besides, there were the five still-to-be-decided votes on which the Congress(I) banked: three of the Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), the traditional party of the Bodos, one belonging to the United Tribals Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF), also representing the Bodos, and one independent. The UTNLF, which is actively backing the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) in its ongoing agitation for a separate state, unilaterally supported Saikia. The PTCA, which was the unofficial ally of the AGP in the last Assembly elections, and on whom the AGP had pinned its hopes, declared a day before the elections that the party would not issue any directive to its members but would allow them to "vote according to their conscience". This decision seemed to vindicate earlier speculation that the top PTCA leaders were being "constantly pressured" by the Congress(I) heavyweights.
Ironically, Saitik's entry into the fray proved to be a blessing in disguise for the AGP. The Assamese still have not forgiven him for having come to power through an "illegal" election in 1983, and dissidents were unlikely to vote for him.

Ironically, Saitik's entry into the fray proved to be a blessing in disguise for the AGP. The Assamese still have not forgiven him for having come to power through an "illegal" election in 1983, and dissidents were unlikely to vote for him, lest they incur the wrath of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and the extremist outfit, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), which considers him their enemy number one. Counting the five undecided votes, Saitik could, at the most, poll only 39 votes, provided of course, there was no cross-voting. When the counting ended on 13 June, it was found that Ledger had won with 45 votes. But totally unexpected were the 42 votes Saitik had bagged, leaving Basumatary with only 37. Obviously, three legislators had crossed-voted, but the general belief is that were not from the AGP, but from the other smaller parties.

The AGP did not take Saitik's victory lying down. When it was found that one vote cast in his favour was invalid, reducing Saitik's tally to 41, several senior AGP members including the MP, Dinesh Goswami, insisted on a recount. In the process, another vote polled in Saitik's favour was found to be invalid. Saitik thus lost the election and Basumatary, with Ledger's excess votes being passed on to him, won.

"Free and fair elections cannot be held while the AGP is in power in Assam," alleged the Union minister of state for home Santosh Mohan Dev, who was in Guwahati as an observer, at a press conference held a day after the results were declared. But whatever be the outcome, Rajya Sabha polls have proved the public memory of Saitik is not gone.

Rediff.com, Guwahati

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The most amusing part of the Congress(I) form is the question about the "individual's party affiliation" in 1969, 1977, 1978, 1980 and 1985. Partymen are also required to mention all the posts they hold.

A facsimile of a part of the questionnaire.

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The Congress(I) prepares a questionnaire to assess its members' performance, but it is too complicated for most members. What do a job application, census, school admissions and the Congress(I) have in common? The meticulous task of filling up forms, making declarations and signing on dotted lines. Distributing detailed questionnaires and putting the answers through computers is the best way to get what you want—be it the right student, dates. Each MP is to visit an average of five Lok Sabha constituencies and submit his forms, duly filled up, to the AICC(I) in August. The choice of Rajya Sabha members was obvious: the party believes they are likely to be objective in their judgement of sitting Lok Sabha MPs and prospective candidates because they are not in the electoral race themselves.

The difficulty with the questionnaires is that they are probably beyond the ordinary Congressman's capacity to answer. It's all right for a party worker to write (on page 2/3 of form 1A) what his name, religion, sub caste, date of birth (Youth Congressmen beware), sex qualification and address is. But how exactly does the party plan to make use of his written "comments" (presumably bureaucratic, employee or the winning Congress(I) candidate for the next parliamentary polls.

The elections may be six months away. But the Congress(I) has already stolen the lead over the Opposition—in collecting data and chalking out plans. While V.P. Singh and company grapple with their differences, rub their palms at the sight of newspaper headlines and talk of Rajiv Gandhi's plummetting credibility, the Congress(I) has launched a countrywide drive to find out what it should be talking about, who it should put up from where and how well it can hope to fare.

And how? By despatching 121 of its Rajya Sabha members to the states, armed with copies of a detailed questionnaire that they are to get filled up by party leaders, workers, members of the public and aspiring Lok Sabha candidates on the political situation? Good, simple English was never the local politician's forte. And that is the language the "comments" have to be written in.

The most amusing part of the Congress(I) form is the question about the "individual's party affiliation" in 1969, 1977, 1978, 1980 and 1985. (Imagine what someone like P.R. Das Munshi or Sharad Pawar or Bhajan Lal would have to say here!). Partymen are also required to mention all the posts they hold at present and have held in the past ("give important post only"), the organisations they have worked for, the place and duration.

Partymen also have to list the key issues they believe should be highlighted in the party's election campaign and write an explanatory note running into six lines on each. That, many think, is a tall order, too. Another page of the
questionnaire (form 5A) which aims to elicit information on the Opposition at the district level asks for a list of important Opposition leaders and the "main issues raised by the Opposition". The questionnaire is also meant to be a voters' survey. It seeks to collect detailed information on each parliamentary constituency. This includes the total number of voters, the male-female break-up, percentage of scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward class (OBC) voters, the OBC with the largest number of voters, the OBC with the second largest number of voters and seven other minority communities, with the percentage of voters belonging to each.

The "survey" is only one channel of information for the Congress(I). This is independent of the reports on the party's prospects that AICC(I) observers and general secretaries are already busy with. An AICC(I) seminar and workshop has already filed a report recommending that the party's candidates for the next elections be selected with the help of district committees to ensure that they enjoy the confidence of the rank and file.

Among other things, the AICC(I) workshop recommends:

- active membership of the Congress be conferred on those who are able to recruit 25 primary members;
- all active members, after thorough scrutiny, should be issued with identity cards;
- party elections at the block and district levels be held as early as possible;
- if these organisational elections are not possible, a panel of names be drawn up in consultation with "honest workers" and senior members;
- it is desirable that the Congress be gradually converted into a cadre-cum-mass-based party, subject to the condition that the development of the cadre should be based on mass contact as well as training;

Sometime back Rajiv Gandhi had assured sitting Congress(I) MPs that they would not be denied the right to represent the party in the next polls again. But it is the results of the party survey, the AICC(I) reports, and the government's own intelligence reports that he is waiting for to make the final decision. A subsidiary intelligence bureau (SIB) team is also compiling intelligence on the Congress(I)'s prospects in the next elections. The same SIB team had forewarned the PM about the party's drubbing in Tamil Nadu. This time round, the PM is only too eager to hear them out.

Nirman Mitra/New Delhi

And now, the Sindhis

The community's leaders demand a separate state in Kutch

And now it is the turn of the Sindhis to demand a separate state for themselves. Leaders of the World Sindhi Congress (WSC), headquartered in Bombay, are touring India to establish contact with some 40 lakh Sindhis scattered in different parts of the country in order to garner support for their cause. They have already drawn up a lengthy list of demands and have threatened to launch direct actions such as dharna, hunger-strike, rallies and

raised by the WSC, however, is that it wants the government to declare the border district of Kutch, in Gujarat, as a Sindhi state, because 95 per cent of the population there happen to be Sindhi speaking. The other things the WSC is pressing for are the setting up of a Sindhi development board, a Sindhi university, making Sindhi a compulsory subject for Sindhi students and a special linguistic minority status for the community.

The WSC argues that their forebears had agreed to give up Sindhi for the sake of the country's freedom and that many had gone to jail and some had even been hanged during the freedom struggle. In recognition of their contribution, Jawaharlal Nehru had inducted two Sindhis—Jairamdas Dolatram and R.K. Sidhwa—into his Cabinet. But, since 1979, there

even give a call for boycotting the elections, if their demands are not considered by 15 August. The WSC, however, is confident that its meeting with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, which is scheduled later this month, will be fruitful.

"As part of their nationwide campaign, about 200 leaders of the community met in Ahmedabad recently to take part in a seminar on 'Political Rights of Sindhis', in which they chalked out their plan of action. The WSC has demanded the representation of eminent Sindhis in the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, the state Assemblies and local government bodies as part of their political right, informs WSC president K.T. Rohra, who feels that Sindhis today are a demoralised lot and that their ancient culture is fast perishing.

The most important demand being

have been no Sindhis worth naming in Union and state Cabinets. This has prompted the WSC to demand two Union ministers, two state ministers in each state, two governors, two ambassadors and two trade commissioners from among the Sindhis. "Even tiny Lakshadweep, with just 21,265 voters, has one representative in the Lok Sabha, but 40 lakh Sindhis have none," laments Rohra, who feels that reserved parliamentary and Assembly constituencies should be created for them.

Not all Sindhis, however, are inclined to back the WSC. Says Belraj Jamuni, a prominent Sindhi leader from Ahmedabad, "All we seek is the nomination of Sindhis to government boards and corporations. Sindhis in Gujarat will not support any agitation—violent or otherwise—for a separate state or other sectarian demands."
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Much ado about nothing

The PM quashes speculation about the setting up of an MPs' panel to help the Governor

It had all the trappings of an election campaign. When Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi came to Bangalore on 14 June to participate in the convention on local urban bodies, the city was garishly decked up "like a bride", as one local paper put it. Huge amounts of Congress funds were spent on erecting arches, putting up cut-outs of Rajiv and Indira Gandhi, and preparing elaborate floats, depicting Rajiv's proposals on electoral reforms and the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana. State government buses were withdrawn from their regular routes and were re-deployed to lug in crowds, to the rally at the Kanteerava stadium that paralysed life in downtown Bangalore.

The conclusion was inescapable: the countdown to the elections had begun. Yet, for those seeking clear signals from the Prime Minister, the messages seemed scrambled. Gandhi told party workers: "You have to face both Assembly and parliamentary elections very soon. Perhaps, one after another in a short span of time." Although this was a lot more forthcoming than his stock statement that "the governor will decide", it was far from being explicit. In fact, it has given rise to more speculation than ever before.

The term "soon" lends itself to different interpretations. It could mean that the elections would be held ahead of schedule or at the time when it is actually scheduled, which itself is not very far away. The situation has become all the more confusing due to the Congress(I) and the government's flirtation with a proposal to create an advisory panel of MPs to "help" Governor P. Venkatasubbaiah's administration.

It all started with an orchestrated demand by some factions of the Karnataka Congress(I) to set up a panel of MPs. The flamboyant Congress MP from the state, H.N. Nanjegowda, had written to the Governor in this regard. Even the sedate KPCCh(I) president, Veerendra Patil, had asked the Congress(I) high command to announce the formation of such a committee, obviously under pressure from his restless colleagues in the state. A humiliated Venkatasubbaiah protested that such a move would be unprecedented. But the pressure groups seem to have won. An "official spokesman" of the home ministry told the press on 10 June that the Union government had decided to constitute a parliamentary consultative committee to help in the administration of Karnataka.

The state Congress(I) was jubilant. Of argued that if the elections were to be held by September i.e. within six months of President's Rule, there would be no point in constituting a parliamentary panel to help the Governor run the administration.

But the controversy was defused in an astonishing manner. Rajiv Gandhi told the press in Bangalore, "I have heard of no such committee. I know nothing about it. Nobody else has spoken to me about the committee. I have not cleared any such committee." Who, then, had given the green signal to the official spokesman to come out with such a briefing? And how could Rajiv Gandhi not have known of such a proposal? Congress(I) leaders in the state seem baffled by these questions. When an announcement regarding the MP's panel was made in New Delhi, all newspapers in Karnataka front-paged the story. In the three days between the announcement and Rajiv Gandhi's visit which killed the controversy, the belief had gained ground that Assembly elections will not be held on time, at least not before the Lok Sabha polls.

Prakash Belawadi, Bangalore
Kidnap drama

CM Mazumdar and home minister Barman lock horns over the abduction of a college girl

Congress(I) leaders in Tripura have started a slanging match between themselves, following the kidnapping of a college girl in Agartala by some anti-social elements. The kidnappers are reported to be close to the lieutenants of chief minister Sudhir Ranjan Mazumdar. The girl, Kakoli Ray, was abducted on the evening of 9 June and released the following day.

The 24-hour drama sparked off massive demonstrations in the state capital and intensified the feud between Mazumdar and the state home minister, Samir Ranjan Barman, who is said to be Mazumdar’s main opponent in the state Congress(I).

In a written statement issued to the press after her release, Kakoli Ray alleged that some anti-social elements had stormed into their house and forced her into a waiting jeep at gunpoint, while her father, a government employee and a prominent Congress supporter, was a helpless spectator. She alleged that she had heard her captors mention Mazumdar’s name several times and that Jiban Saha, personal assistant of the chief minister, had come to meet the kidnappers at their hideout. Later that day, Kakoli was put in an auto rickshaw after nightfall and dropped in front of her house.

Meanwhile, on the morning of 10 June, Kakoli’s father met home minister Barman and requested him to trace the missing girl and student leaders Subal Bhauumik and Ashis Saha, known for their anti-Mazumdar stance, organised demonstrations in front of East Agartala police station. Saha complained that the kidnappers were involved in “dastardly crimes before but could get away with them because they were close to the highest circles”.

Though the girl was released on 10 June, tension continued to mount the following day as Bhola Saha and Rimal Rudra Pal, two of Mazumdar’s aides and Pradesh Congress(I) Committee (PCC-I) members, accused Barman of trying to politicise the issue and defame the chief minister. They even hinted that Barman’s son was involved in several crimes.

Sons and fathers

A minister finds himself in trouble over his son’s antics

Sons and daughters can often cause endless embarrassment to politicians as Ramsingh Vishnoi, the recently-inducted cooperative minister in Rajasthan, must have realised by now. Nearly three-and-a-half years ago, Vishnoi had to resign from the cabinet over an incident involving his daughter, Indra. Now, just when his political fortunes seemed to look up the hapless minister has once again found himself in the midst of a controversy. And, this time, the cause of Vishnoi’s worry is his son, Parasram.

It all happened on 8 June, the day the Rajasthan cabinet was expanded and Vishnoi recalled from oblivion. Immediately after the swearing-in ceremony, Parasram and his friends decided to celebrate Vishnoi’s reinstatement. Drowned in liquor the boisterous gang set off for Vidyavay Nagar, the colony of the legislators in Jaipur.

In Vidyavay Nagar, Parasram and his friends climbed the balcony of a house and began chucking empty liquor and beer bottles at random. By now, senior police officials of the capital came to know of the incident. They rushed to the spot, and arrested three boys, but Parasram managed to make a get-away. At the time of going to press, the minister’s son is still at large, though the police have registered a case against him.

In fact, Ramsingh Vishnoi has a knack for running into trouble. His first stint as minister did not last for even a year as he had to resign after press reports accused him of torturing his daughter, Indra. The girl, it was alleged, was married off at the age of seven, and after she grew up, Indra refused to live with her husband and wanted to marry someone else. And, when Indra seemed unrelenting, the minister began to torture her physically and mentally. The exposure created a public furore which ultimately led to Vishnoi’s exit from the state cabinet. It remains to be seen if Ramsingh Vishnoi will manage to wriggle out of the present crisis.

Mitep Chand Dandia/Alipur
Return of a master

Ganashatru is Satyajit Ray's first film in five years and marks an astonishing return to form

What do you do if you are one of the world's greatest filmmakers and then suddenly, your doctors tell you that your heart condition is such that you can only make a film if you do not exert yourself at all? And if their definition of 'exertion' is such that you are not allowed to shoot outdoors; not permitted to handle the camera; and given a bare minimum of 45 days to complete the picture?

Well, if you are Satyajit Ray, 68, then you resist the temptation to rest on your laurels, content that history will judge you as one of the greatest directors ever, and you try your hardest to find a way around the medical restrictions. And, of course—if you are Satyajit Ray—you pull it off and make a film that leaves the critics raving!

Confronted with intimations of his mortality, Ray chose to go back to his youth. During his college days, he was an Ibsen fan and was particularly partial to An Enemy Of The People. Five years ago he rediscovered the play and after listening to the doctors and their lists of conditions, resolved to adapt it for his 28th film. (There is an—admittedly offbeat—precedent for this. Told that he had cancer, Steve McQueen chose to film his own version of Enemy Of The People a few years ago.)

Ganashatru, as Ray finally called it (English title: Public Enemy), sticks to Ibsen in that the action is confined within walls (the doctors had their way on outdoor locations) and the broad structure follows the play's five acts. But Ray has adapted Ibsen so that the note of dark...
pessimism that ends *Enemy Of The People* is muted in *Ganashatru*. Ibsen's protagonist, Dr Stockmann, faces opposition from bigots and ends the play alone. Ray's version of the character, Dr Gupta, faces the same kind of adversity but at the end, a ray of hope filters through, in the form of a few local youths who keep him from being alone.

The change is a significant one and Ray justified it to British critic Derek Malcolm. "The most pessimistic of my films was probably *The Middleman* (*Jana Aranya*), which was also about corruption. Now, I prefer to be more optimistic. There are still honest people in India, though I wish there were more. I still have a feeling that the best of our nation will come to the top." About Ibsen's ending, he was categorical: "I don't feel it is appropriate."

While the debt to Ibsen is unmistakable, Ray has considerably Indianised the theme. At the centre of *Ganashatru* is a temple in a small town near Calcutta. The local deity's charanamrit (holy water) is said to be endowed with supernatural powers and the townspeople queue up to drink it. A hepatitis epidemic results and a Dr Gupta traces it to the charanamrit. His efforts to temper religion with hygiene result in him being transformed from a local hero to a public enemy. In the end, the obscurantists win, but Gupta has found a few supporters.

The theme is strikingly appropriate to India and approximates Ray's own views on the subject. "Pollution," he says, "is on everybody's lips and not just in India. So I am not exactly making an art film. But then, I have never thought of my films as art films—they are just films."

It is futile to pretend that the doctors' restrictions have not had an impact on the film, finally. At Cannes, where it was shown to a respectful reception last month, some critics commented on the "set-piece" quality of its flow. It is unusual for a film to be restricted to the studio and for a director to use a bare minimum of sets. The danger with such an approach is that the finished film can end up resembling a filmed version of a stage play. Nowhere is Ray's mastery of the medium more apparent than in his ability to make *Ganashatru* transcend these limitations. The end result is undeniably cinematic. A skilful use of camera angles breaks the monotony of limited sets and the direction paces the film so that it never gets claustrophobic.

All this was managed in just 28 days! As it turned out, Ray did not even need the 45 days allotted to him by the doctors. Nor did he ever over-extend
Ray has adapted Ibsen so that the note of dark pessimism that ends An Enemy Of The People is muted in Ganashatru.

(Clockwise from top left) The director at rest: finding a way around medical restrictions; Ray directing Soumitra Chatterjee: an old faithful; Satyajit Ray on location: action confined indoors.
his cast or crew, calling “pack-up” by four on most days.

Nevertheless, the doctors took no chances. Throughout the schedule, an ambulance stood outside the studio and Ray was under constant medical supervision. Finally, of course, the magic of the filming got to the doctors too, and when they were not taking Ray’s blood pressure, they got as involved in the shooting as the rest of the crew.

Some of the credit for this must go to the repertory company that Ray has built up over the years. That old faithful, Soumitra Chatterjee plays the doctor. Dhiru Chatterjee (of Pratidwandi fame) is another Ray discovery who returns after a sizeable gap.

Others in the cast include Mamata Shankar who plays the doctor’s daughter, Ruma Guha Thakurta who plays his wife, and Deepankar Dey as a local newsman who first, promises to help the doctor and then, lets him down. Also featured is Rajaram Yagnik, an actor from the Hindi stage, whose first Ray film this is.

Gandheshaw will be released in Paris on 28 June, and Ray and family will fly to France for the gala première, which is being organised by Gerard Depardieu, the French actor.

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RAGHUBIR SINGH ON SATYAJIT RAY

following (as President Mitterand’s trip to Calcutta to present him with the Legion d’honneur demonstrates), and Depardieu has already taped a long interview with him for French television which will be telecast just before the première to whip up interest in the film.

All of this, plus the fact that the film got to Cannes before most Indian critics had seen it, has led to charges that Ray is catering to a foreign audience rather than to those who actually speak the language the film is made in.

It is a familiar criticism—the same charge was levelled when Ghare Baire was first shown abroad—but not one that worries Ray. “I always make my films primarily for my own audience. I’ve never known what kind of film will export well,” he has said. He gives the example of Jalsaghar which he says is “totally Indian in form, content and ethos”, but is now the most popular of his films in France.

Certainly, the demand that Ray should première everything in Calcutta does seem a little parochial: a great artist’s work transcends national boundaries. Nevertheless, Indian audiences will have to wait a few months before they can make up their minds about the film that the critics at Cannes were so impressed by.

Sudeshna Roy/Calcutta

(Above) On the sets of Ganashatran: set-piece quality of the flow; (right) the director with his son Sandeep: a family that works together
The story of a victim

A perfectly healthy blood donor is made out to be an AIDS carrier and harassed

I
t could go down as one of the most shameful foul-ups in Calcutta's medical history. A man who had no trace of the AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome) anti-body in his blood, was declared to be a carrier of the killer virus by experts; a vernacular daily published his photographs along with reports which branded him as a maniac at large, thereby whipping up mass frenzy against the members of his family; and the administration, which should, in the normal course of events, have had the man admitted to a hospital, chose to put him in prison instead.

The unfortunate victim, forty-year-old Swapan Ganguly, moonlighted as a professional blood donor at the Assembly of God Church Hospital & Research Centre (AGCHRC), in central Calcutta. Sometime in the month of March, Ganguly donated blood to the hospital's blood bank, samples of which, along with those of other donors, were sent to the National Institute of Communicable and Enteric Diseases (NICED) for ELISA tests to check for the presence of the AIDS virus in them. On 27 May, the test results revealed that one of the samples was seropositive, i.e., it contained AIDS anti-bodies, proving that the donor was carrying the AIDS virus. The NICED informed AGCHRC of its finding and asked for the name of the donor. According to Dr. S.C. Pal, director of the institute, AGCHRC used to send the blood samples under certain codes, without naming the donors. In this case, however, the NICED insisted on more details to which AGCHRC responded by saying that the donor was a 28-year-old male (when Swapan Ganguly is much older), but withheld the name. The NICED then sent the relevant sample to the National Institute of Virology, Pune, for what is known as the 'Western Blot' test, considered to be a more fool-proof method. The NIV confirmed NICED's finding.

On 17 April, the test reports were officially sent to AGCHRC, and, on the following day, the hospital authorities informed the health department of the government of West Bengal of the matter. They requested the government to trace the man, who was stated to be one Swapan Ganguly, a resident of Sonarpur, a small town to the south of Calcutta, in the South 24-Parganas district. Apparently, the health department bosses knew nothing of the case as the AGCHRC letter lay buried beneath a pile of mail in the Writers' Buildings. It was only after The Statesman reported the case on 27 May, without, however, naming Ganguly or his whereabouts, that the authorities got wind of the matter. The chief medical officer (CHO) of South 24-Parganas was summoned and asked to look for the man, and, was, in a way, sent on a wild goose chase, as AGCHRC had not been able to provide Ganguly's exact address. The CMO managed to trace three men of the same name in the area, but not the right one.

May, Ganguly was held by the police. First, he was locked up in Sonarpur police station, as if he were a criminal. Next, he was taken to AGCHRC, where the authorities referred him to the state health department at Writers' Buildings. From there he was sent to the School of Tropical Medicine (STM), where samples of his blood were taken. And while tests were being carried out, Ganguly was shifted from the police station and put under judicial custody in a solitary cell at the Alipore Central Jail.

A few days later, after carrying out successive tests, the STM came out with a startling revelation: the tests had proved the samples negative; the man was no carrier of the AIDS virus.

But while this behind-the-scenes drama was in progress, the members of Ganguly's family were hounded and humiliated by ignorant neighbours who harboured a ton of misconceptions about the disease and had no knowledge of how it spreads.

It was then that the police was asked to take over. The manhunt, which turned into a witch-hunt, had begun.

Initially, the police was as much in the dark as the health department. But on 30 May, Ganguly was back at the blood bank. Said R.N. Dutta, an AGCHRC haematologist: "Ganguly came in response to a letter we sent him asking him to present himself for some 'special' tests," though Ganguly's wife, Nilima, said that they received no such letter. At the hospital, Ganguly was identified to the reporter of a vernacular daily who, according to the hospital authorities, happened to be present at the spot by chance. That very evening, the scribe, together with a lensman, reached Ganguly's home and persuaded him to be photographed on the ruse that the pictures would be needed for giving him a job which he posed to have on hand. Next morning a report appeared in the daily, along with Ganguly's photographs, making him out to be a social outcast and the most dangerous man at large. On 31

The members of Ganguly's family were hounded and humiliated by ignorant neighbours who harboured a ton of misconceptions about the disease and had no knowledge of how it spreads

Anish Gupta/Calcutta
Indian Airlines is big. Forty-five aircraft flying over ten million passengers a year to 67 destinations. And it is going to get bigger. More planes, more passengers and more routes by the end of this financial year. Nineteen Airbus Industrie A-320 planes—each capable of carrying 168 passengers—will be joining the Indian Airlines (IA) fleet by March 1990, and 12 more by 1993. The number of passengers flown is expected to increase by one lakh this year and 21 new routes will open up. In the Nineties, IA will spend Rs 10,000 crores to modernise and expand.

These impressive figures, however, do not compensate for the airline’s equally unimpressive achievements. Indian Airlines is inefficient, overstaffed and remarkably unprofessional, with senior executives more interested in battling each other than the ills that plague the airline. Net profit has declined in the past year and is likely to slide even lower. Flying IA seems like a nightmare. However, the country’s largest domestic airline has now embarked on an ambitious growth path. But whether it can fly out of the stormy patches and go on to become a true airline of the 1990s is the biggest question which confronts it.

IA’s chances of success hinge on two crucial factors: modern Airbus Industrie A-320 aircraft joining the fleet and a thorough overhaul of its management style.

Four of the A-320s—built by a consortium of four European aerospace companies—are expected to join IA’s stable by the end of this month. They will gradually take the load off overworked Boeing 737s and the much larger Airbus A-300s. By December, the A-320 will link the metros to tourist destinations such as Srinagar. This should help ease the problem of strained capacity.

### INDIAN AIRLINES’ PROFITABILITY

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<th>1987-88 (Actuals)</th>
<th>1988-89 (Revised)</th>
<th>1989-90 (Budget estimates)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total revenue</td>
<td>925.49</td>
<td>943.20</td>
<td>1142.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total expenses</td>
<td>849.89</td>
<td>905.10</td>
<td>1133.45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net profit (After tax)</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td>14.10</td>
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(Profitability is steadily decreasing)
Capacity, which is the result of bird-hits, mechanical defects (these two factors are responsible for the grounding of ten percent or more of the planes at any given time) and the crash of a Boeing 737 last year. The problem is so acute that IA has been forced to lease six 737s, one A-300 and one aircraft each from Aeroflot and Ariana Afghan Airlines. In addition, it operates a Druk Air jet between important cities such as Delhi, Calcutta and Bangalore four days a week. (Aircraft leases will cost IA Rs 76 crores this year.)

However, there are some technical problems with the A-320s, say aviation engineering experts. Aircraft engines start losing power after temperatures go above the International Standard Atmosphere (ISA) of 15°C. That means they can carry fewer passengers and smaller amounts of fuel and cargo. Most aircraft engines are rated for 25°C, as are the International Aero Engine-manufactured V2500 engines that will power the A-320s. The problem in India is that temperatures in most regions exceed 25°C practically round the year. Experts say that high temperatures would adversely affect the functioning of the V2500 engine more than that of other engines. This may mean that the A-320s will be able to carry lesser loads, adding to capacity constraints.

This leads to another question about opting for the A-320s. When IA signed a contract with Airbus Industrie in March 1986, it was for 19 of the aircraft. (The cost of inducting these planes is Rs 1,237 crores.) As part of the contract, IA had the option to buy 12 more, provided the option was exercised by the middle of this year. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi gave the go-ahead at the end of May. The new deal is worth Rs 870 crores. The question being asked is why IA decided to go in for 12 more planes when even the first lot has not taken to Indian skies.

An IA official says that both IA and Airbus Industrie were apprehensive of possible problems, which could lead to the turning down of the option. Then, Boeing—whose offer of new generation 757 planes was rejected in favour of Airbus' A-320s—would have been back in the reckoning. The Boeing 757 runs on proven General Electric engines. The decision to exercise the option signifies two things: one, that Boeing has been kept out, and two, that the government which has been partial to things European, particularly French, over the past few years still feels that way. No one speaks openly of kickbacks. (Aerospatiale, the French aerospace company, is a major executor of the Airbus project. The others are British Aerospace, Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Bohln of West Germany and the Spanish company CASA. Boeing has openly criticised Airbus—which is heavily subsidised by the respective European governments—for using political clout to rake in orders all over the world.)

Another problem with the A-320 contract is the fact that IA will be swamped
with planes: 31 aircraft in three years. While no one in aviation circles—both in the government and private industry—denies that IA requires aircraft desperately, many wonder whether IA will be able to absorb so many aircraft suddenly, and be able to match them with support services like maintenance facilities, trained technicians, hangars, and increase in seats. From a marketing point of view, IA’s demand is so high that any amount of new aircraft can be put to use immediately—and flogged for six flights a day all round the year—and there would still be a demand for more aircraft. But for a while, some of the new aircraft may have to sit idle simply because IA doesn’t have the facilities to handle an expansion. Its maintenance base in New Delhi is expanding to accommodate the A-320s as well as handle other fleet aircraft, and maintenance facilities are being set up in the airports of different metros. But work is slow. And the first A-320 is due any day—even though it experienced problems two weeks ago with its landing gear during test flights at the Airbus plant in Toulouse, France.

But besides problems of capacity, IA has other troubles. Inefficient management is a major one. Currently, headstrong unions—of pilots, engineers, et al.—get their way. For instance, a 33 per cent hike in wages this year, without assuring the management anything in return by way of increased productivity. Some call it a sell-out on the part of the management, others call it buying peace.

Whatever it may be, the fact is that it is the poor management style of the airline that leads to most of its problems. Besides, back stabbing among its staffers and political interference have dragged IA down even further. And all this has been happening for years.

When Captain Chaddha took over as managing director (MD) in 1982, he had with him two professional deputees, Capt. B.K. Bhasin (director of flight safety) and Capt. V.K. Mehta (who oversaw engineering, pilots’ training, traffic, ground support and the commercial department). For five years—till mid-1987—Chaddha and his deputies formed a disciplined team, who maintained a firm grip on the unions and regional departments. Trouble started in 1985 when Jagdish Tytler became minister for civil aviation. Chaddha and Tytler did not get along. Tytler—who takes more than an active interest in anything he does—started interfering in the day-to-day functioning of the airline, and Chaddha was often bypassed.

That is when aviation circles began to hear more and more of R. Prasad, IA’s present managing director. Prasad started lobbying to succeed Chaddha as MD with Motilal Vora’s support. Tytler, on the other hand, backed Gerry Pais, an accounts man. Pais also enjoyed Rajiv and Sonia Gandhi’s confidence. Finally, it was Pais who was appointed MD in 1987. After his induction, Tytler wanted to appoint only one deputy managing director. He recommended P.N. Kumar—an extremely competent engineer—but the pilots’ lobby wanted Capt. N. Ramachandran. Tytler conceded and appointed both of them.

Prasad, not wishing to be left out, took the help of then civil aviation secretary, S.S. Sidhu. He was appointed deputy director, finance. When Tytler questioned Sidhu about the appointment, the latter said the minister had cleared it. Till date, Tytler maintains he never did. All three deputy managing directors were appointed simultaneously in October 1987.

Tytler’s departure in 1987 made things easier for Prasad, especially as his mentor, Motilal Vora, took over as minister. Prasad constantly stalled proposals put forward by the two other deputy directors as he—as head of finance—had a major say in all matters. Pais was shaky right through his tenure, despite his prime ministerial connection, and there were constant rumours that he would be sacked. Always considered an ineffectual manager, he never really took complete charge of

“There is nothing wrong with IA”

The new MD, R. Prasad, seems optimistic about the airline.
the airline. This state of affairs continued even after Vora relinquished his post, and Shivraj Patil took charge of the ministry. By this time, Prasad had found a powerful friend in Capt. Satish Sharma, ex-IA pilot and the PM’s close friend.

1988 was a disastrous year for IA. The crash of the Boeing in Ahmedabad was just one of the many mishaps. Some of the others were: aircraft landing without lowering their wheels, a stationary Airbus’ nose-wheel collapsing, Buta Singh’s flight being delayed, and even Patil being forced to change aircraft because of technical snags. To add to the general state of disrepair, IA’s engineers went on the warpath demanding higher wages. Patil started buying for IA’s blood; he also asked Prasad to settle the wage issue. But Prasad stalled, saying that the airline didn’t have enough money and that profitability was decreasing. (However, Prasad signed all wage agreements last month, almost immediately after becoming MD.) Despite setbacks—and his unimpressive tenure—Pais lobbyed hard for an extension after his term ended at the end of March. The IAS lobby pitched for one of its own candidates. By all accounts, Prasad wasn’t really in the running. But Satish Sharma’s patronage proved to be pivotal. Patil also backed Prasad and asked S.K. Mishra, the present civil aviation secretary, and IA chairman Rahul Bagaj to support his candidate. Prasad assumed office on 1 April this year.

Inefficient management is Indian Airlines’ principal problem. The ailing airline has now pinned all hopes on its new managing director, R. Prasad. Excerpts from an interview:

**On Indian Airlines:** There is nothing wrong with IA. As an organisation, it’s good. The only thing is that a little complacency has crept in.

**On change:** You have to make people understand what’s best for the organisation and then be firm about implementing the idea. In Indian Airlines, there is an inbuilt resistance to ideas. That has to change.

**On IA’s unions:** I told them you have got to work and they said yes. They said they will cooperate. All wage agreements have been signed. I have no words to mince with unions.

**On the discourteous attitude of staffers:** I’m putting a person who will be tailoring a programme to talk to people about why they should be courteous. Physical facilities are different—if we don’t have it, we don’t have it. But yes, we can certainly do something about behaviour. It has to be one-to-one.

**On delays:** Additional capacity (with the induction of A-320 aircraft) should help ease the problem. **On whether the induction of A-320s will lead to oversupply:** You can’t increase the number of passengers unless you provide capacity. The A-320s will be flying an average of five sectors every day and the capacity (of each) is 168. That’s 840 people per aircraft per day. That’s not enough, as we will be pulling out the leased aircraft and also plan to remove four older Boeing 737s from normal service. There is a lot of unmet demand. Earlier, people used to come to me and say put us on 182 or 405 (daily flights from Delhi to Bombay) for the same day. Now they say, “Today would be nice. But if you can get me on a flight tomorrow, it will be all right.” This shows demand.

**On declining profits:** Profits will go on declining. You have to pay interest on aircraft purchases, pay depreciation. Adding new machinery costs a lot of money. We have to pay $760 million for the 19 A-320s. Ten per cent of the amount will go every year as interest. Plus depreciation of Rs 60 crores. Funds will increase, because depreciation stays with the company. Cash will increase, but not profitability.

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**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES**

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(Estimate)

As a result of all this power play, it is the airline that suffers most. Chaddha’s decisions were countered by Tytler. Pais was afraid of Prasad—he clung on to power and never took bold decisions that would benefit the airline. Not many in aviation circles believe Prasad can do much to turn IA around and infuse it with a sense of dynamism and professionalism. He is considered to be an extremely competent finance man, but not much else. Yet, he has the best chance of improving the state of affairs at IA, say civil aviation observers. This—more than anything else—underscores IA’s long-term management malaise.

IA has computerised reservations systems and, last week, computerised check-in was introduced at New Delhi airport. But these are possibly the only good things that have happened to IA in the past ten years. With senior management personnel not knowing what will happen to them the next day—and each more interested in protecting and promoting himself than running the airline—the middle and junior level-managers have "simply stopped innovating or caring," feel IA insiders. The airline is virtually running itself—almost despite itself. IA might trundle along, but unless management is tightened up, matters will not improve.

Sudeep Chakravarti/New Delhi
Oil rig companies get together to demand a better deal from the public sector giant

If units in an emerging industry come together to form an association, can this be called gangsterism? The question apart, that is exactly what a group of little known companies—the Indian owners of oil rigs—is doing. They are forming an association to protect themselves from the tactics of the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC). While there are as few oil rig owners in India as you have fingers on one hand, they are scared stiff to talk about their business with ONGC.

And not without reason. ONGC is their sole employer. If thrown out or their money is blocked, all they can do is to hit the bottom. By forming an association they hope that their combined voice would be more effective in dealing with the public sector behemoth than the piping voices of individual operators.

Essar Shipping, Aban-Lloyd, Great Atwood, Hi-Tech Drilling and BOSS (Bombay Offshore Supplies and Services) are the only Indian companies which own offshore oil rigs and are all working for ONGC. Offshore drilling is an immensely capital-intensive business and the rigs cost a hefty sum. There are different types of rigs depending on the sea depth they operate in. There are jack-ups for shallower waters, while 300-foot cantilever and semi-submersible mat-type rigs work at depths beyond 300 feet. And the costs could vary from $15 million to $26 million.

The Indian companies have invested substantially in purchasing offshore rigs but the daily rates offered by ONGC hardly cover the financial costs after meeting the operating expenses. It is only after about four years of continuous operation that the companies can hope to be in the dividend list.

Apart from the owners of rigs, there are a handful of rig operators who have taken jack-ups on lease. Notable among these are Jagson, Jinal and Amarsip.
Obviously, those who have leased rigs are in a better position since they do not have to spend large sums in acquiring them. Some of these companies have taken rigs on wet lease from overseas operators and are able to quote much lower rates. Even the crew operating these rigs are foreigners employed by the overseas rig-owning companies.

What has made matters even more difficult, the rig owners allege, is that some of these operators of leased jack-ups have been getting favoured treatment from ONGC's steering committee. This is especially true of Jagson International, which reportedly has connections with Union minister Jagdish Tytler. Jagson, which is said to be a front for foreign rig companies, participates in virtually all tenders put out by ONGC—without submitting technical details. Their tender bid is normally in the form of a three-four page letter which makes it a point to say: "We agree to all the terms and conditions of ONGC and will identify the rigs when the tender opens."

In a recent tender, ONGC's chemical committee turned down Jagson's bid on the grounds that it was unable to process it without technical details, and also because the firm had not identified the rig which is an essential norm for tendering. Strangely, the ONGC's commercial department included Jagson in the shortlist of eligible firms in November 1988. Other firms which had not met the tendering norms were rejected. On 21 January, 1989, when the price bids were opened, Jagson said that they would identify the rig within 30 days and give the technical details. It offered '5-Star', a Singaporean rig. Since Abban-Lloyd had offered the same rig in its bid on 18 January, Jagson's offer ought to have been rejected. But the steering committee gave Jagson 30 days to identify another rig. Jagson identified 'Viking Driller', a rig owned by the Norwegian company, Viking Offshore. Since there was no memorandum of understanding (MOU) or lease agreement with the Norwegian firm, Jagson asked for another 30 days' extension. This time it identified 'Danwood Ice', owned by a Danish firm, J. Lauritzen. Again, for lack of an MOU, Jagson has asked for a month's extension till 26 June.

Meanwhile, Essar Shipping which had a drillship of its own, did not get the contract on the grounds that its quotation was high. At the same time, BOSS, which had quoted the second lowest price after Jagson, informed ONGC that it had got government sanction to purchase a drillship in March this year, and that it would be arriving in Indian waters by June (the drilling season begins in September). Not only that, BOSS's drillship is the first of its kind, in that it is dynamically positioned and can drill to a depth of 3,000 feet. While Essar and BOSS have been overlooked despite owning rigs, the tender period has been extended twice to accommodate Jagson which is yet to tie up a rig on lease.

In another instance, ONGC opened a technical bid on 21 February this year for a semi-submersible rig. Once again the Indian rig owners lost out after Jagson gave a letter saying that they could provide a rig and would accept ONGC's terms. BOSS is the only Indian company with which it was working earlier, it should accept the 1985 dollar rate of Rs 12.50 (the earlier joint tender with the foreign company was made). As a result, BOSS has been offered a daily rate of Rs 16,400, which would amount to a loss of Rs 14,000 per day as the dollar rate has gone up steeply since 1985. But, at the same time, Jagson has been offered a daily rate of Rs 24,000, that too, for "work over operation" and not exploratory drilling.

Says a spokesman of an Indian rig company, "If this is the sort of thing that ONGC accepts, then what is the idea of asking for technical bids?" The modus operandi of Jagson, he points out, is unique: Jagson quotes for all ONGC tenders; conforms in a letter that it would conform to all terms and conditions; obtains technical approval; and, during the price bid opening, quotes the lowest price as it is only a front for a foreign firm. He further discloses that Jagson leaves the entire operations to the foreign company. While this involves no financial involvement for Jagson, the company reportedly makes a minimum of $1,000 per day as the differential between the ONGC contract rate and the rate that Jagson has worked out with its foreign partner.

And Jagson, which is at present operating three rigs for ONGC, is ex-
effects to bring in two more rigs on lease. One of them, the 'Apollo I', was not acceptable to the technical committee of ONGC because of its low variable load factor—it could take a load of only 1,500 tonnes against ONGC's specification of 2,000 tonnes. However, the steering committee is learnt to have overruled the objections of the technical committee and approved Jagson. The 'Norbe II', which Jagson leased in November 1987, is capable of drilling to a depth of only 220 feet against ONGC's requirement of 300 feet. Inexplicably, it seems, the steering panel has offered a shallow-water location to Jagson to operate the rig.

What has made matters worse for rig owners is that some operators of leased jack-ups have been getting favoured treatment from ONGC.

International market, along with the price of rigs and components. Indian rig owners who had purchased rigs at higher prices are, however, getting the lower daily rates being offered by the commission now. The commission had increased its daily rates somewhat to about $23,000 from around $17,000 earlier. In contrast, the rates have increased from $17,000 per day to as much as $30,000 now in Indonesia, Australia and Malaysia. Further off, in the North Sea oilfields, the rig owners have touched $32,000 from $16,000 over the last eight months alone. As a result, the rig-owning companies which are not making profits, are wondering why they had at all entered the drilling business. To add to their woes, the sharp devaluation in the rupee (16 per cent) vis-a-vis other currencies has eaten into the incomes of the rig-owning companies. The foreign exchange forward cover, on the other hand, has been made prohibitive by placing the cover premium at 22 per cent.

In desperation, the rig owners have now decided to form the Indian Rig Owners Association to protect their interests. Having invested a whopping Rs 300 crores in a high-tech, risky field, the rig owners feel that for their survival, ONGC has to offer a fairer deal to them besides extending them financial terms which would enable them to earn a surplus over costs. And keen from submerging.

Anjan Roy/ New Delhi and Olga Tellis/ Bombay

INDIA CEMENTS

A spanner in the works

Financial institutions back out of the deal to hand back the company to the original promoters

A week, it is said, is a long time in politics. However, when politics and business mix, even a few hours can be a much longer time. Or so is the experience of N. Srinivasan and N. Sankar, two industrialists who have found that one political 'hand' could undo a deal that was almost clinched. Srinivasan and Sankar had practically regained control of India Cements Limited, one of South India's largest cement companies, from which the former had been ousted nearly a decade ago.

The deal to bring back Srinivasan—whose grandfather and father had founded India Cements more than 40 years ago—and Sankar, who is related to Srinivasan, had been painstakingly worked out over a period of almost 12 months. By February this year, it had been decided that P. V. Rajaraman, an IAS officer from the Tamil Nadu cadre and the current managing director, would step down to make way for Sankar and Srinivasan. While the two industrialists had picked up a 12 per cent holding in the company, they had given a commitment to raise their stake to a maximum of 30 per cent. Thus, when an extraordinary general meeting (EGM) was called on 22 April it appeared to be
The reason for the FIs' volte face emerged quickly. TNCC(I) president Ramamurthy wanted to embarrass Karunanidhi. He managed to do it in a way which some people described as "acting out of pique". Tamil Nadu in January last, when Karunanidhi was still in the political wilderness. It is thus quite clear that when the FIs decided to support Srinivasan and Sanker, there was no political pressure on them. However, new TNCC(I) president Ramamurthy had apparently decided to give as many pinpricks to the DMK government as possible, notwithstanding the fact that they may be insignificant in the political sense. Ramamurthy is understood to have complained to the Congress(I) high command in Delhi and in particular to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that allowing Srinivasan and Sanker into India Cements would be a victory of sorts for Karunanidhi in view of the close friendship between Srinivasan and Maran. Rajiv Gandhi and his advisors in Delhi reportedly fell for this line in spite of the fact that Srinivasan's re-entry into India Cements would not have made any difference to the political fortunes of the Congress(I) in Tamil Nadu. Whatever be it, this led to last-minute instructions from Delhi asking the FIs to back off from the deal. The last word, however, has not been said, for Maran is standing by his old friend. Karunanidhi is understood to have taken a personal interest in the matter. According to well informed sources, the chief minister has got in touch with Rajiv Gandhi and assured him that there is nothing political about handing over India Cements to the original promoters. He has requested the Prime Minister to delink political and business angles in this matter and allow the FIs to go through with their original decision. Rajiv Gandhi, it is learnt, has now agreed to review the issue. Meanwhile, Srinivasan and Sanker are keeping silent. They are making no statements in public or to the press. With Rajiv Gandhi reportedly having agreed to review the issue, they are hoping that, come September, political pettiness will not prevail.

R. Vijayaraghavan/Madras

The kitty keeps growing

Helped by the falling rupee, the export figure doubles in three years

Guess what happens when a foreigner wants to import goods from India? He rushes to the nearest Indian mission and speaks to the Indian trade representative who tells him to come back ten days later, by when, hopefully, his telex message to New Delhi will elicit a reasonable reply. The trade official himself cannot help, sorry, so take it or leave it. In most cases the potential importer leaves it—because the Japanese or South Korean missions are easily more forthcoming.

Yet, amazingly enough, despite the complete absence of a trade information network, Indian exports continue to rise. From Rs 10,895 crores in 1985-86, they jumped to Rs 20,281 crores in 1988-89. Consequently, the trade gap narrowed from Rs 8,763 crores in 1985-86 to Rs 6,624 crores in 1987-88 and rose marginally to Rs 7,412 in 1988-89. This is a landmark, vows a commerce ministry spokesperson, adding, exports have almost doubled since 1985-86. And the fact that the trade deficit did not widen despite the increase in foodgrain imports after the 1987 drought is due almost entirely to this achievement.

Some of this apparent increase, however, is illusory. In 1986, the rupee-dollar rate was Rs 12.36. Today it stands at Rs 16. Obviously the rise in the export value has much to do with the fall in the price of the rupee. But there has, nevertheless, been a substantial increase.
How did this happen? "True, the devaluation of the rupee has helped," the spokesperson explains. "But it is equally correct to say that the increase was also due to the series of policy initiatives taken by the government over the last three years, mainly incentives and liberalisation." The government has made access to inputs required for export production easier, granted 100 per cent exemption of export profits from income-tax and launched various other schemes which are rapidly making exports a profitable venture.

Other steps paid off, too. Accelerated technological upgradation and modernisation of industry, freer access to raw materials, intermediaries and consumables, an export thrust strategy which identified 14 select product groups, the creation of a policy environment conducive to export growth, and the revival of the Board of Trade with big names in business and industry – Aditya Birla, R.P. Goenka, Viren Shah, Ranaug Singh, H.S. Singhania, J.N. Sapru and M.V. Arunachalam. "Of the 14 thrust sectors in exports," the spokesperson says, "most have shown remarkable buoyancy in recent years." Notable among these is electronics which clocked exports of Rs 2,200 crores in 1988-89, after stagnating at Rs 1,400 crores for the last nine years.

The government has reason to be proud. The export target for 1988-89, set at Rs 18,795 crores, has been exceeded by Rs 1,186 crores. The rate of growth of exports over the last two years has not only been sustained but improved upon. Between December 1988 and March 1989, the rate of growth of exports has been 40 per cent above the rate for the corresponding period of the previous year. It was largely exports to the US, Japan, the USSR, Belgium, West Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Singapore and Australia that accounted for the burgeoning exports in 1988.

Fortunately, the rise in exports offset the growth in imports. In 1988-89, imports were up by an alarming Rs 1,929 crores (25.4 per cent) over the previous year. Of this, foodgrains went up by Rs 561 crores, fertilisers by Rs 436 crores, petroleum and petroleum products by Rs 155 crores, metal-intensive ores and metal scrap by Rs 257 crores, iron and steel by Rs 667 crores and precious and semi-precious stones (which form a tenth of our total imports) rose by Rs 843 crores. Of course, imports of foodgrains and fertilisers were necessitated by the 1987 drought.

If there is any reason why exports have continued to rise, it is the enormous potential of Indian goods in the international market. Government claims apart, exports have risen in spite of, and not because of, government policy. While the country has some 20 export promotion councils, only three of these—the Tea Board, the Engineering Export Promotion Council and the Handicrafts Exports Council—have offices abroad. For other sectors, buyers of Indian goods have to rely on scant information available with the commercial officers at Indian missions, which, as the Estimates Committee of Parliament has repeatedly pointed out, are grossly inefficient.

Says Union commerce minister Dinesh Singh, "Although the export growth in recent years has been appreciable, it is still not sufficient. We have to strive for a quantum jump. One basic thing is that you cannot export unless you produce. The aim should be not just to export surpluses but to gear up production in a manner which would meet international demands." The minister believes that since the government has agreed to provide exporters with inputs at international prices, they ought to return the gesture by "thinking of output at international prices and quality, too."

The main issue at stake, in Singh's view, is how to sustain the current level of export growth. One of the ways he plans to do it is by maintaining better interaction between trade and industry. The revival of the Board of Trade—which existed when he was commerce minister under Indira Gandhi between 1968 and 1970—was a major step. Says a commerce ministry official: "One of its first uses is to tackle problems that industrialists face with the bureaucracy, the major complaints being delays in clearing licences and excessive red tape.

After its revival, the board held its first meeting on 29 May. Besides government officials, the board includes representatives of industrialists' bodies like the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Associated Chambers of Commerce (Assocham) and the Confederation of Engineering Industry (CEI).

Nevertheless, the need of the hour is to evolve a system of providing information about Indian goods to businessmen abroad. Commerce ministry officials say the Prime Minister is himself keen on setting up an umbrella export promotion agency with offices abroad—on the lines of the South Korean and Japanese export promotion bodies—to find market outlets for Indian goods. And as a commerce ministry official says: "This in itself would lead to a quantum jump in exports."

Nirmal Mitra/New Delhi
New round in the bike war

Bajaj, Escorts and Hero Honda have been slug-ging it out for months for control of the 100 cc motorcycle market, with no indication of winners or losers. The products—Kawasaki Bajaj, Escorts Yamaha and Hero Honda—have carved out their niches. But come July, and the bike wars will take a new turn. Hero Honda is launching a new 100 cc motorcycle called 'Sleek', and a publicity campaign is currently being planned. Sleek has the same engine as the Hero Honda bikes on the road, but new features include raised mudguards, a longer fuel tank and a snazzy meter board between the handles. The market appears all set for another all-out slug-fest.

Moratorium on Calcutta bank

The country's largest private sector bank, Calcutta-headquartered United Industrial Bank (UIB), with deposits of Rs 300 crores, is in trouble. The Reserve Bank of India last week declared a moratorium on payments by UIB till 10 October. RBI has already drawn up plans for the amalgamation of United Industrial Bank with a nationalised bank but is tightlipped about its identity. RBI has taken this belated step, according to banking industry circles in Calcutta, because UIB was stuck with too many sticky accounts. Mismanagement apart, UIB had a high proportion of disputed accounts. The bank's advance portfolio is reported to be poorly supervised. While industries and depositors have turned somewhat panicky over this development, business circles are busy speculating the identity of the bank that will get UIB.

P&O to return?

P and O Shipping Lines of the UK, one of the oldest in the world and at one time the only means of communication between Great Britain and its biggest colony, is learnt to have decided to return to India. In 1983, P and O sold the last of its 40 per cent shareholding in its Indian company, Mackinnon Mackenzie and only maintained a representative office in Bombay. They are reportedly in the process of severing their connection with their agents, Tata Tea, and are looking for an Indian partner to set up a new company in India. Said a P and O spokesman who is in India, "It's too early to say what form the new company will take." However, Tata Tea seems to be in the dark about P and O's plans.
After the surrender

What became of the Chambal dacoits who gave up a life of crime?

The chat of a girl who turned mass killer at 24, commandeered a gang at 25, and opted out of crime at 26, Phoolan Devi now lives in despair. Having inspired three Hindi films and a book by two Australian authors, the Dasyu Ram (Dacoit Queen) languishes in Gwalior Central Jail, waiting for her cases to come up for hearing, after being transferred from one state to another. But with Arjun Singh, the chief minister who made her surrender possible, ousted, the promises made to her when she turned in may well remain unfulfilled. So Phoolan lives on, sick, cheated and abandoned, and sorry that she ever gave up her olive green uniform and the gun, in exchange for what turned out to be a false hope.

Sometime ago, Phoolan had been given a plot of land measuring ten bighas in the outskirts of Gwalior, so that she could set up her own farm. The man responsible for this grant was Raja Chaturvedi, the former superintendent of police (SP), Bhind, who organised her surrender along with that of Ghanshyam and his gang in late 1982. But Devi’s brother sold it off for about Rs 2 lakhs, pocketed the money and absconded, leaving his sister high and dry. Now the government plans to allot her another ten bighas—in her own name—so that she can live with some financial security in the safety of Gwalior district.

After Arjun Singh stepped down as CM, following the adverse High Court judgement in the Churhat lottery case, Phoolan Devi told a visiting filmmaker from Delhi that, she and another former dacoit, Ramesh Sikarwar, went on fast in protest. She wouldn’t touch food, and all she insisted on doing was her puja. “The only person whose word we value is Arjun Singh,” Devi told the filmmaker. “If it wasn’t for him, we wouldn’t be here.” She added: “I didn’t know Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have so many problems between them. If I knew my cases wouldn’t be transferred and I’d have to rot without trial for so long, I wouldn’t have surrendered at all.”

Phoolan Devi has a total of 48 cases registered against her for crimes committed in Kanpur, Jhansi, Etawah, Jalaun and Hamirpur. The most serious of these is the murder of 20 thakurs in Behmai on 14 January, 1981. Behmai apart, she has two other murder charges against her, the rest being cases of kidnapping for ransom. Malkhan Singh, the other major dacoit in Gwalior Central, has 27 cases registered against him in Uttar Pradesh, three of them for murder and the rest for kidnapping. Both Phoolan Devi and Malkhan Singh are awaiting for their cases to be transferred from UP to Madhya Pradesh.

Apart from trying to settle differences with UP on the issue of transfer of the cases, the Madhya Pradesh administration is also kept busy by attempts to rehabilitate the dacoits. The progress has been slow but sure. Ramesh Sikarwar and his gang of seven—who turned in long after Phoolan Devi, Ghanshyam and Malkhan Singh and their men—were the first to be rehabilitated under the supervision of the collector of Morena, Arvind Joshi, in 1985.

“The only other collector who is serious about rehabilitating dacoits is Sumit Bose of Gwalior,” says a social worker. Bose plans to give Phoolan Devi about ten bighas only because “land is now a scarce commodity in Gwalior.”

The total number of dacoits to be accommodated in Bhind, Morena, Gwalior, Datiya and Shivpuri is 40.

The principle of winning over the dacoit with friendly gestures and assurances has been in vogue for 70 years. Princes, politicians, social workers, policemen and journalists have all tried to draw him out of the ravines. The underlying philosophy is that society has wronged the outlaw and owes him a happier life. It were the Scindias of Gwalior who first thought of inducing dacoits to give up the gun. But what might have been possible in the reign of the Scindias or Indira Gandhi seems impossible today. One: because both politics and decision-making have become very personalised. For instance, a senior police official cannot take decisions on his own; neither can a collector or a chief minister. As a social worker points out: “They all have to seek permission from somebody above.”

To avoid legal complications Jayaprakash Narayan got all the dacoits to confess to one crime. This expedient helped the prosecution.

Lawlessness in the Chambal is probably as old as the ravines. The British met it with a combination of guile and brute force. It took William Sleeman some 15 years to exhaust the thugs in the mid-19th century, have them rounded up and hanged. But assorted gangs started operating in the ravines from 1860 onward. Those were the days of dacoit Sultana. After 1857, the Scindias emerged as the rulers of central India, with their headquarters in Gwalior. They were the first rulers to bear the brunt of the dacoit menace. Jiyairoo Scindia’s cannon-and-fire operation in the jungles of Shivpuri resulted in the first recorded surrender of about two dozen dacoits, in Kerala, in 1919.

The submission of the bandits in Independent India was an acrimonious event. The survivors of Man Singh’s gang laid down their arms before Acharya Vinoba Bhave in 1960. Madhya Pradesh’s inspector general of police K.F. Rustomji, opposed the idea of treating the criminals with kid-gloves and saw Bhave as a “wishy-washy philosopher”, though he made sure he
Says Phoolan Devi: “The only person whose word we value is Arjun Singh.” When Singh had to step down after the adverse court verdict in the Churhat lottery case, she went on a fast in protest


But far from being content at the deal they got, all the dacoits do now is complain. Ever since Ghanshyam escaped from his police escort to reconstitute his gang and was subsequently shot, none of the inmates of Gwalior Central Jail have been allowed to go out on parole. Uttar Pradesh continues to dawdle over the transfer of the dacoits’ cases to Madhya Pradesh. And only a few of the ex-dacoits have got 20 bighas of land as promised.

In a confidential note submitted to the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh on 8 April, 1988, a senior police official complained that progress in the cases of the ex-dacoits “has been extremely slow because of a lack of interest”. He wrote: “The special judge at Gwalior conducts trials 3-4 times a month, which is completely inadequate. The prosecution has led to no convictions except under the Arms Act for their surrendered weapons. That is, Malkhan Singh has been convicted in only one case for four years and has spent over five and a half years in jail.”

As for the transfer of cases registered in UP and Rajasthan to MP, he wrote, it will “require Supreme Court orders under Section 406 of the Criminal Procedure Code”. But this is a matter which has to be decided by the state governments themselves.

The Madhya Pradesh government has even tried to get its way by petitioning the PM’s office in this connection but that hasn’t worked either. Says journalist Kalyan Mukherjee, who helped Malkhan and his gang out of the ravines, “I had an interview with R. Vasudevan who handles these matters at the PMO. All he did was serve me coffee and say ‘We must look into it’. Nothing was done. I say the Rajiv Gandhi government has has destroyed the tradition of the surrender of dacoits that JP set up.”

Nirmal Mitra/Gwalior
Under fire

Terrorists’ guns have not been able to silence the Hind Samachar Group of newspapers in Punjab

News is what somebody somewhere wants to suppress... rest all is advertising.

Going by this quintessential definition of news, Punjab would surely rate as one of the most newsy spots anywhere in the world. Just about every printed news item here — save the routine public relations handouts — evokes formidable reactions from the two centres of power that matter: the terrorists and the cops.

If the police harassment of newspeople, and their occasional arrests, are nothing new, the terrorist attacks on scribes and their family members are also no longer shocking. Reporters in Punjab have learnt to consider these as professional hazards.

Photocopy of the threat letter issued by the KCF to the owners of the Hind Samachar Group: stern warning

But the delicate balance between the devil and the deep sea was upset this month when the terrorists declared a war of attrition against the state’s most powerful—and country’s third largest—newspaper establishment, the Hind Samachar Group. The combined daily circulation of the group’s three dailies—Punjab Kesari (Hindi), Jagabani (Punjabi) and Hind Samachar (Urdu)—is about seven lakh copies.

It all began around mid-May when the parallel Panthic Committee, a breakaway group of terrorist Gurbachan Manochahal’s outlawed outfit, held an underground press conference in Amritsar. Signed by three of its five members, the committee declared a “ban” on the three papers of the group. “These papers are engaged in slandering the great struggle of the Khalsa Panth for quite some time,” their statement read.

The staff members, distributors, agents and hawkers of the group were given a week’s time to wind up business. Similar warnings were issued by other underground organisations like the Khalistan Commando Force (KCF) and the All India Sikh Students Federation (AISF). The KCF’s note was more specific: “If you don’t abide by this order and continue to publish, distribute and sell your newspapers, you will be solely responsible for any kind of disaster...”

That the terrorists meant business this time became clear as soon as the deadline set by the extremists expired. Terrorists struck in broad daylight at Mohali town near Chandigarh on the very next day and gunned down a news agent, Subhash Singh, and a distributor, Thakur Joginder Pal Singh.

Their next target was a 20-year-old hawker named Rajinder Kumar. Two teenaged boys shot at him from point-blank range, hardly 50 metres from the
Most disturbing is the observation of editor Vijay Kumar that the terrorists’ real target is the several lakh-strong Sikh readership of the three papers, especially the Punjabi daily, Jagabani.

Vijay Kumar, chief editor of the Hind Samachar Group, said that the circulation of the group’s newspapers had fallen by 90,000 copies in the first two weeks of June alone. He told Sunday at his heavily-fortified office in Jalandhar that a large number of readers have been coming to collect copies of the papers in the absence of hawkers. Dozens of newspaper hawkers and agents, however, contradicted the figure given by the editor. The daily circulation had fallen by at least two lakh copies, one of them said. Agents too confirmed that the advertisement revenue has drastically declined in a matter of days.

However, it would be unfair to estimate the losses of the group merely in terms of circulation or in the fall of revenue. The paper has lost two of its chief editors in the last five years. Lala Jagat Narain, the founder editor of the group, a freedom fighter and a veteran journalist had been shot dead by the supporters of Bhindranwale in 1981. His elder son and a former legislator, Ramesh Chandra, was gunned down three years later. Two prominent staff members, Bant Singh, the news editor of Jagabani, and Inderjit Sood, the news editor of Hind Samachar, were shot dead by terrorists.

But all three papers of the Hindi Samachar Group have been consistent in their unequivocal opposition to separatism. It surely goes to the credit of its present editor that he refused to change the editorial policy of the paper despite the killings of the earlier two editors (his father and elder brother). The paper also has the distinction of raising from its readers a relief fund of a whopping Rs 1.59 crores to help the victims of terrorist violence—both Hindus and Sikhs. About a thousand families of both the communities have so far received aid from the readers of the group.

Detractors of the group say that the Hind Samachar papers have a Hindu bias in their news coverage. It is also true that all the three papers have a penchant for publishing sensational news, which is often provocative. A careful scrutiny of the papers shows that the provocative aspect is confined strictly to the papers’ news columns. And this is a policy the paper shares with most of its rivals, like Pratap, Ayt. Mlap and Akal Patrika to name a few. Even the worst critics of the paper agree that the editorials of the three papers are balanced and sober.

Surprisingly, the press in Punjab is, by and large, silent about the terrorist attacks on the paper. Laments editor Vijay Kumar, “Even Indian Express is silent, perhaps because its Hindi paper, Jansatta, is gaining circulation at our cost.” Suhel Singh, editor of the Jalandhar-based Lokmat has warned that the press in Punjab has to unite against the terrorists. Or else, he said, they would dictate terms to the press in general. Akal stalwart Jeewan Singh Umrangsal has appealed to the masses to build up public opinion against the terrorists. Among others who have reacted favourably to this suggestion are veteran columnist Kishwanth Singh, Satpal Dang of the CPI and Dr Baldev Prakash of the BJP.

Most disturbing, perhaps, is the observation of Vijay Kumar that the terrorists’ real target is the several lakh-strong Sikh readership of the three papers, especially the Punjabi daily, Jagabani. Unsure of whether or not the media and the police would take up cudgels on his behalf, he sounds confident while saying, “Our readers would continue to subscribe to the paper even at the risk of their lives.”

Vipal Nudgal/Amritsar
A talent to abuse

K.K. Tewari does what he's best at

**Sunday:** The Opposition, especially V.P. Singh, has said that if they come to power, they will make Doordarshan independent. Is your government afraid of doing this?

K.K. Tewari: Look, V.P. Singh is a big political thug. None of what he says has any meaning. I don't even wish to speak about a man who has no character, no ideas, no commitments, who can sell anything from his body to his soul for political office.

What I mean is why don't you evaluate the performance of the Janata Party government? The Indian public conducted this experiment (of electing the Janata Party to power) thinking that this would result in a new and more strengthened nation. They thought that this would result in greater prosperity and happiness all round.

But did any such thing really happen? The same (government) media which is being attacked now, was, in those days, heavily influenced by facism of the Jan Sangh and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) variety. Never before had the media come under such concerted attack by fascist forces.

In fact, these very forces broke up the Janata Party government. When the government was formed, because of the pre-eminence of the Jan Sangh and the RSS elements, Lal Krishna Advani got the broadcasting ministry, and Atal Behari Vajpayee got the external affairs ministry. But it is common knowledge how these people misused their authority.

They used the media to propagate all kinds of stories about Indira. The way Justice Shah (of the Shah Commission) conducted his enquiry was shameful for the entire nation, and a negation of all judicial principles. Unsubstantiated charges and accounts were not only broadcast over microphones, but were even shown on television. Cases that involved the stealing of eggs and hens were registered against Mrs Gandhi. She was charged with having stolen six eggs and two hens.

Somebody was just telling me that V.P. Singh has been saying that we are trying to get the Emergency back through the medium of the TV and radio. What I want to know is, how come the same man who was the hero of the so-called bad days of the Emergency, Vidya Charan Shukla, tells about whom were made much of by the Shah Commission, the details of whose personal life were subject of gossip, has now become the leader of those who wrinkle their noses in distaste at the very name of the Emergency? What can you say about V.P. Singh?

There is another person, too. He used to sell paint for some company before, now he is busy playing the Chanakya of Indian politics. And newspapers are also busy promoting this coloured wolf. This country has had long tradition of projecting a coloured wolf as a lion. So now a man like Arun Nehru is being called a Chanakya. A man who has thigh muscles in his brain is deciding on political strategies. The press has made a media monster out of a man who had no cerebral muscles, only thigh muscles in his brain.

Why do you criticise Arun Nehru and V.P. Singh with such bitterness?

I respect those who belong to the Opposition and are leaders of Opposition parties. I do so because there always has to be an Opposition in a democratic system. One cannot deny its existence. I criticise those leaders among the Opposition who have become weapons of destruction, centres of instability, those who are basically dishonest where policies are concerned, those who are thugs and impostors. I criticise those people. Who can possibly have any respect for Judas?

**But why do you call V.P. Singh, Pamela Bordes?**

See, I just said this by way of an extended metaphor. I said that, "V.P. Singh is the Pamela Bordes of Indian politics." What I am trying to say is that you also use metaphors such as these. Don't you? You say that 'two political parties are strange bedfellows'. If you take such statements literally, they are undoubtedly obscene. You also say that 'the honeymoon between these two political parties will soon be over'. But you don't take such statements literally. When I made that statement about V.P. Singh I was talking about his politically liberated behaviour. Just as Pamela Bordes is willing to go to bed with anyone for some favour, in the same way V.P. Singh is willing to go to bed with anyone to attain political power, and to settles scores with Rajiv Gandhi.

Extending that metaphor, I say that he will sleep with anyone from Hershman, Haji Mastaan, Jyoti Basu and Atal Behari Vajpayee, to achieve his ambitions. He is even willing to sell his soul. This is why I say that he is the Pamela Bordes of Indian politics. He is beyond all feelings of shame or fear. He has destroyed all traditions of decency. He is just like that liberated woman, Pamela Bordes.

**It is ten years since the Janata Party split. How would you compare the Janata Party of 1977 to the Janata Dal of 1989?**

There is no difference, because the characters involved are the same. But actually, we should not compare the Janata Party with the Janata Dal. Because there was a man like Jayaprakash Narayan in the Janata Party.

In comparison the Janata Dal just has the eunuch figure of V.P. Singh. He is neither a man nor a woman. Who are the real people who are using this figurehead? It is actually foreign forces who are behind him. They are based beyond the borders of the nation. These people have chosen him because they know that JP is no more, and Rajiv Gandhi cannot be dislodged by the present lot in the Opposition.
Two in the Bush?

- It was a friendship made, if not in heaven, then certainly in Texas. When George Bush became President of the United States, Rajiv Gandhi was quick to congratulate him, and diplomatic analysts on both sides recalled how as vice-president, Bush had hosted Rajiv at his ranch in Texas, and the two men were close buddies.

Except that it hasn't worked out that way. Not only has the US used Super 301 against India, but last week Bush gave Benazir Bhutto the kind of rapturous reception reserved for very close friends.

Where does that leave India and the US? And Bush and Rajiv? Who knows? The latest is that the two men may meet in Paris next month to smoke the peace pipe.

Resignation blues

- It was the work of a master media manipulator. Had Sharad Pawar, the powerful chief minister of Maharashtra resigned? Mid-day, a Bombay evening newspaper seemed to think so and went so far as to issue a special edition.

Except, of course, that Pawar is still chief minister. Mid-day's editor, Anil Dharker has an explanation. Pawar had sent in a letter of resignation, he says—so Mid-day stands by its story. Except that it was in the nature of a pressure tactic. After the story broke, Pawar got what he wanted out of the Centre, and kept his chief ministership. Small wonder then, that the CM refused to confirm or deny the Mid-day report.

The three musketeers

- They are an interesting trio: Chandra Shekhar, Chandra Swami and Dhirubhai Ambani. And for the last fortnight, the press has been going crazy speculating whether they met in Bombay.

The way the media told it, Shekhar and Ambani met the worldly Swami at Bombay's glitzy Oberoi Hotel, where His Holiness was ensconced. Nonsense, says Shekhar. Well, half nonsense anyway. He did meet the Swami at the Oberoi, but it was at the godman's request.

And Ambani? No, not at all. He was not present. Then what accounts for the reports? Shekhar says that the press got it wrong.

Ambani did meet the Swami that evening but half an hour separated Shekhar's departure and the mega-industrialist's arrival.

Fine, but did Shekhar meet Ambani at another place? No comment. And what was the regime's favourite businessman doing in Chandra Swami's suite? Working out a deal, perhaps.
Viswamitra and friend

For months he kept the country guessing. Who would play opposite N.T. Rama Rao in Viswamitra? Sridevi seemed to be the obvious candidate. But an enigmatic NTR would neither confirm nor deny rumours about the casting. Now it seems that Meenakshi Seshadri has bagged the role, though, of course, NTR is still keeping mum.

Perhaps the mercurial chief minister now wonders why he is bothering with the film. Originally, its box-office receipts were to fund the Telugu Desam's election campaign. But now, as the film will not be released till long after the elections are over, the purpose seems unlikely to be fulfilled.

Like a carbon

Question: When is a bad desi imitation a good desi imitation?

Answer: When it's Alisha Chinai and she's pretending to be a Madonna clone. Don't take our word for it. Ask Madonna. Two months ago, Rolling Stone magazine asked the bosomy singer which of the many Madonna clones came closest to her. Well, she said, 'There's one girl in particular, a girl named Alisha, who's had a couple of songs that ripped off the chord progressions of some of my songs. And her voice sounds so much like mine when I sing in a higher register, I was shocked. She's definitely one who stunned me.'

So now you know. And, at least, it beats the hell out of bleating, 'Log mujhe pyaar se Baby Doll kehte hain.'

To hell and back

The first part of Sanjay Khan's ordeal is over. The actor was admitted to Bombay's Jaslok Hospital on 10 February, suffering from 65 per cent burns and given little hope of survival. While doctors fought to save his life, he was beset by other problems—the Karnataka government filed a suit against him and a callous media sug-
Never mind how many times Beti Deol may threaten, and even at times attempt suicide, husband Shrikant Nahata continues at his philandering, regardless of all such attempts at emotional blackmail.

Neeta Puri, queen of the video screen, continues to be an abiding favourite. While their amorous tryst in a hotel room in Bangalore (where Nahata was discovered in the act by his outraged wife) is now part of history, secret assignations continue even now. At a recent party given by S. Rama Rao, producer of Gangaa Jamuna Saraswathi, to celebrate the birthday of south Indian superstar Amrith, the duo was quite the cynosure of all eyes, as they went into their koothu-koo routine in one dark corner after another.

But Neeta is living in a fool’s paradise if she believes that she may make it as Mrs Shrikant Nahata. She’s far from being the only starlet Nahata romances on the side—another hot favourite is a sexy little-known (Danny’s pet obsession in the pre-Gawa days) whom he takes along on his trips to Tirupati.

Farha wishes to displace Sridevi from the number one throne. Well, what’s new about that. You may ask? Her methods for one. For, the Boy George clone has decided that the only way to upstage the Mr India girl is to put on lots and lots of weight. The argument goes that Sridevi was a success only because of her cherubic looks and the now famous Thunder Thugs. (Indian men, you know, like their women well-built.) And that her fall from grace was due, not to the arrival of Madhuri Dixit, but to her recent weight loss which makes her old, haggard and less appetising.

And who do you think is eminently qualified to take over from Thunder Thugs? None other than the weighty Ms Naaz. Well, going by those shots of her in a pair of knickers, most certainly.

Whether wife Shuvangi’s publicly administered slap will rid Shakti Kapoor of his philandering remains to be seen. But it can be said with certainty that it won’t cure him of his delusions of grandeur. The latest is that Kapoor has decided that he’s only going to play hero and that all producers who land up to sign him up as villain are going to be shown the door, politely but firmly.

The person who stands to benefit most from this misguided policy is Anand Balraj of Ram Lakhan and Kahan Hu Kanoon fame. Quick to realise that he was on to a good thing, Balraj has taken to sticking very close to Shakti in the proper sopophanic manner, in the hope that some of his rejects may well land up in his lap.
The destroyer

Doordarshan cites shortage of cassettes as the reason for wiping out memorable programmes

I

It was just after John Grierson, the Father of the documentary movement died. I got a frantic message from the National Film Board (NFB) of Canada. They had decided to make a documentary on Grierson and since he had visited India too, had appealed desperately to Doordarshan, the Films Division and the Pune Film Institute to provide the necessary information. Not one of them had replied and the NFB with whom I had long standing connections, said that they had decided to make me their (honorary) consultant in India heard of Grierson. And that I had had to practically hold a pistol to his head to persuade him to let Grierson address the young Doordarshan staffers, who being better educated, were eager to hear him. There were no arrangements made for recording the lecture, either

So I pressed my battered Sony tape recorder into service. Later I got the re-broadcast of the TV programme on All India Radio on tape.

So, uttered in the face, I wrote to tell the NFB that I could only let them have the sound track and they were able to use one or two sentences of Grierson's from what was virtually my private tape of his telecast. And when the NFB generously listed my name in the credits, only below that of Paul Rotha, I was just about ready to jump into the Januma.

Over the years, whenever some celebrity died, Doordarshan never ever managed to re-telecast even a still let alone a programme they had done themselves. I decided to be inmodest and question them about this lapse. So, when John Masters, David Niven and Trevor Howard died, I rang up Doordarshan on every occasion to ask "You have my interview with him, why don't you telecast excerpts from what they said?" The reply was always the same "Madam, we are short of cassettes, so we had to erase them." And since I had been sure that the authorities would preserve them forever, I hadn't even kept the transcripts.

I am sorry for going on about my interviews with the greats which Doordarshan wiped out. But this is only because I have first-hand knowledge about this and can document what I say. I had jointly interviewed Marlon Brando and Satyajit Ray in 1968 for Doordarshan and left the floor entirely to them. They used this opportunity to carry on a most delightful professional chat. For many years after that Doordarshan would telecast the recording at least once a year. Last month when I asked for it, as I wished to make a transcript to be on the safe side, I got the stock reply. I shall come back later to what is perhaps, the most criminal erasements in the sorry history of Doordarshan's non-existent archives, which seem to be reserved for politicians, not for cultural greats.

K.K. Tewari: will he remedy matters?

and could I please help out? I said I most certainly would.

I thought then, this would be an easy task. I had done an in depth interview with Grierson for Doordarshan in which he had said some fascinating things—about the moribund Films Division, that India had the most beautiful and intelligent children in the world, how no Indian except Satyajit Ray had done justice to them on film, and much else. I rang up Doordarshan confidently and asked for a cassette so that I could send it to Canada.

"Well-ji", said the director of the Delhi Kendra, "We were short of cassettes-ji, so we wiped it out." I could not believe years, except that I remembered that his predecessor, had obviously never

If K.K. Tewari is not too busy destroying the Opposition on the small screen, he could spare some thought for preserving the priceless national legacy which Doordarshan's archives could provide for posterity

SUNDAY 25 June—1 July 1989
One of Doordarshan’s
criminal acts was the
destruction of the
delightful visual chat
between those two
queens of the thumri,
Rasoolan Bai and
Siddheswari Devi

The other criminal act was the
destruction of the delightful visual chat
between those two queens of the thumri,
Rasoolan Bai and Siddheswari Devi. Speaking in their charming UP dialect,
teaching each other mildly at times,
saying the most fascinating things about
their careers and their musical styles,
their conversation was interspersed
with brief snatches of song in their
famous voices. Every time I think of that
memorable recording, now gone for ever,
I feel like crying. I wonder if any
viewer ever recorded any of these
programmes so that they can be restored
to the national archives where they belong, and to such other interna-
tional cinema archives as would preserve them with more respect, care and
responsibility.

When I asked one of Doordarshan’s
senior staff how such valuable material
could have been erased, lost or destroyed,
I got a classic reply: “When we
changed from low band to high band,
these recordings became obsolete, so
they were lying all over the place and
some got damaged, some disappeared
and that is how it happened. The junior
staff were very irresponsible too, and
did not look after them properly.” Since
my informant was a very senior staffer, I
was tempted to ask him what those
placed higher up were doing. But he
sounded so irresponsible that I decided
to get the matter clarified by Mr Rao,
the chief engineer of Doordarshan. Mr
Rao said that the confusion took place
during the change-over from black and
white to colour during the Asian Games
and also when Doordarshan changed
from two-inch to one-inch tape. The only
comfort he could offer was that some
tapes had been preserved and transfer-
red. I did not wish to embarrass him by
asking whether these were largely of
politicians. Especially since we all know
that to be true.

I would like to end with a challenge to
Mr K.K. Tewari, who, I hope is not too
busy destroying the Opposition on the
small screen to spare some thought for
preserving the priceless national legacy
which Doordarshan’s archives could pro-
vide for posterity. Some of the best
programmes are lost for ever but K.K.,
since you are a professor, what about
devoting some thought to important
matters such as this for a change? The
professors I know, such as J.K.
Galbraith, S.K. Bose (J.C. Chatterji) and my
own father, Prof. P.C. Roy would cer-
tainly have done something about it. So
what about it, K.K.?*
One midsummer night

Saeed Jaffrey’s Oberon earns critical applause

Summertime in London’s Regents Park. The smell of English roses in the air. The mood: heady. The music: just right. And romance: inevitable. It’s as if the weather man had hushed away the clouds for a brief spell of madness.

It’s flower power and the spirit of the laid-back Sixties, as the cries of the swans from the nearby lake spill over into the theatre. And it’s Shakespeare time as well—for being played on stage is the Bard’s own ode to the potent summer months: A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Guy Slater’s production sets the play in the free-loving Sixties. Gossamer fairies are replaced by guitar-strumming hippies and Shakesperian lovers by John Lennon look-alikes.

Oberon, the fairy king, swings in Maharishi Mahesh Yogi garb and plays Cupid without care. And complete with the Mahesh Yogi wig, minus the Mahesh Yogi giggle, is none other than Indian actor Saeed Jaffrey, returning to Shakespeare after 18 years.

As the fairies jive and swirl, drink happy potions and make love among the trees, Oberon plots to win back the love of his wife Titania (Sally Dexter). His chosen emissary is Puck, elf of the forest and drier of the night. Slater’s Puck isn’t all fun and mischief. He’s a cool dude, dressed in a glamorous velvet outfit complete with knee-high boots and dark glasses. Quite the fixer of the night, he is assigned to give love potions to the estranged lovers and make things go right.

Shakespeare’s love potion isn’t hashish or magic mushrooms. It’s the juice of a flower which, when squeezed over the eyes, makes the person fall in love with the first thing he sees. Puck flies through the night on Oberon’s instructions, drugging Titania, and the young lovers who wander through the forest. Titania falls in love with a donkey’s head, the lovers get mixed up, and everything is madness as the flower potion takes over.

As evening fades into night, the lovers weary of fighting, Oberon commands Puck to remedy the damage, and soon all is well again. Titania forgets her brief romance with a donkey and swings out on Oberon’s arm, wildly dancing all the while. By morning sanity returns, the love affairs are sorted out and wedding plans made. The beatles sing All you need is love, and peace prevails.

Jaffrey delights as Oberon. With top billing for his role as the fairy king, Jaffrey’s performance went down very well with the audience and, more importantly, with the critics.

“It was marvellous coming back to Shakespeare,” Jaffrey told SUNDAY. “It’s almost 18 years since I’ve acted in a Shakespeare play.” Saeed’s last Shakespeare sojourns were in the Sixties, when he acted in productions such as Taming Of The Shrew in America.

The return to Shakespeare wasn’t without its difficulties though. Apart from the lack of time—Jaffrey is booked up to the full in Hindi film productions—the business of getting the verse and tone correct in a Shakespearian play wasn’t easy. “You can’t get a comma wrong,” he said. “And the verse is so strict that you feel like kicking yourself if you don’t get it right.” So, it was all-out rehearsal and a lot of hard work before the critics could be satisfied.

Jaffrey is hoping that the return to Shakespeare lasts—if Bollywood allows, that is. “I hope it’s the Royal Shakespeare Company after this,” he said. In fact, A Midsummer Night’s Dream marks Jaffrey’s return to the London stage after a long period, too. His last performance in a West End production was in 1979. “Some of the barriers against Black and Asian actors and actresses are coming down now,” said Jaffrey. “Afro-Carribbeans have been slightly luckier than Asians, but now I think the doors are opening for us as well.”

Guy Slater’s play, for one, had a totally multi-racial cast, with Puck being played by a Black actor and Jaffrey playing Oberon. But it was only Slater’s interpretation of the play that allowed for the casting. Oberon is a Mahesh Yogi-like figure, hence Saeed Jaffrey. Puck a night-time fixer, hence a Black actor. Though Roshan Seth, Ayub Khan Din and Rita Wolff have surfaced in some West End productions, it’s still a long way before Asian actors manage to go beyond the tandoori stereotype and get a major role on the White-dominated stage. Getting their act together isn’t the only answer.

Saeed Jaffrey, complete with Mahesh Yogi wig, though minus the Mahesh Yogi giggle, delights as the fairy king, Oberon

Shrabani Basu/London
The heritage of Manda

In this extract from his controversial biography, V.P. Singh: The Quest For Power, Janardan Thakur traces Manda's treacherous and murky past.

A good point to start is perhaps that dramatic moment on 27 December, 1965, when the 34-year-old Raja of Manda—the fortith in line from Raja Jaichand, as his family tree proudly tells you—drew out his sword, slit his thumb and planted a tilak of blood on the forehead of the then Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. So overwhelmed was Shastri by the young Raja Saab's gesture that he turned to his wife Lalita and said, "This is your fifth son."

"Adoptions", as we shall see, were to play a key role in our hero's career; and this in a way had been another adoption.

Others had preceded, one of which could make another good take-off point. Visualise a younger Vishwanath, in his late twenties, following his elder brother Sant Bux Singh around—"like Lakshman following Rani", quips the latter. Sant Bux had just returned from a seven-year sojourn in England, highly politicised, what with his dabbling in Fabian socialism and the rest of it, and was keenly observing the socio-political milieu in India.

Zamindar abolition was in progress and the large landholders were in jitters. All manner of devious plans were in the offering to beat the provisions of the land-ceilings acts. In Uttar Pradesh, the conflict between the zamindars and the tenants had been one of the acutest, almost a "class struggle" at some points during the 1930s, and numerous appeals had been issued by Mahatma Gandhi to tenants and zamindars, telling the latter to become "trustees and trusted friends of the tenants... the zamindari system to be defensible, must approach the conditions of a joint family..."

But the new rulers of the land had declared the zamindari system indefensible, and by mid-century the propertied classes stood warned of the threat looming ahead.

At such a time Vinoba Bhave had brought them a new ray of hope. Walking from village to village, he had talked of non-violent social revolution and asked large landholders to contribute one-sixth of their holdings as bhoo dan for distribution to the landless. Phrasing his appeals in the saintly idiom which goes down so well in this country, he had spoken of renunciation and sacrifice, and argued that it was the dharma of the rich to protect the poor. In a way he had opened a new escape route for the rich.

Vishwanath had started going to bhoo dan meetings in the neighbourhood of Manda, and even Sant Bux was quite unaware of the thoughts leavening in his brother's mind until the day he had stood up to speak at one of the meetings and made a public pronouncement. "I am giving away all my land to Bhoo dan," he had declared.

Sant Bux Singh was nonplussed, and had later rebuked V. N., as he always called Vishwanath, for his rash pronouncement. But the "damage" had been done.

The "sensational pronouncement" had brought Vinoba Bhave to Allahabad in mid-58, to anoint his "princely disciple".

Sant Bux Singh tells you the words of Vinoba Bhave still ring in his ears: "Rajputra Siddhartha ne tyag kiya to..."
the dark and dismal record of the Manda Estate throughout the freedom movement. V. P. Singh's adoptive father, Capt. Raja Ram Gopal Singh, was a dyed-in-the-wool Anglophile and a British loyalist to the core. A freedom fighter could enter his domain only at his own peril; he was lashed and tortured. According to some, the Raja had got a long shoe (adhai haath ka joota) specially made to beat up the "agents of Gandhi." Vishwanath Pratap Singh's own father, Raja Bahadur Raja Bhagwati Prasad Singh, was never far behind his Manda cousin in displaying his loyalty to the British masters, so much so that the White Sahebs often described them as their "two faithful..."

But perhaps they were only following in the footsteps of their illustrious forebears. Let us then go back briefly to the recorded chronicle of the house for whatever light it might shed on the makings of our own hero.

* * *

After Raja Jachand was sent to his watery grave by the very same man whom he had initially invited, namely, Muhammad Shahab-ud-din Ghor, to vanquish his enemy Prithviraj Chauhan, his wife and some other members of the royal family fled eastwards and settled down at Kera Mangraur, near Mirzapur. There they remained for about 15 generations, and during this period established their authority over a large tract of country which had been the domain of Bhars and other aboriginal tribes.

Come to the sixteenth generation from Jaichand. Bhuraj Singh or Bhuraj Shah, had three sons—Deo Dutt, Kundan Deo and Bharti Chand. The eldest, Deo Dutt, gave in to the lure of office and became a Musalmans. Those were the days of Sher Shah. Kundan Deo and Bharati Chand moved westwards, and the latter made his home in Kohar, a small riyasat.

Kundan Deo is the one who needs...
During the Mutiny, Raja Chhatarpal Singh, the grandfather of Raja Ram Gopal Singh, protected the Government treasury, of which he took charge from the authorities, when they were unable to protect it themselves...

Following. With his family he moved towards Khairegarh, which was then ruled by a Bhar Raja called Lorikaditya. The principalities of Khairegarh, Vijaypur and others were under him. Kundan Deo appeared in the court of Lorikaditya pledging that he had at one time been a Raja and his desire now was to serve under a Raja. The Bhar Raja was impressed and appointed him the Senapati (General) of his army. Some time later, Kundan Deo who was the father of three marriageable daughters, put it before the king that being a Raja by ancestry himself, he could not possibly give away his daughters to lesser mortals. They could be married only to Rajas. Lorikaditya married the eldest daughter, and he got the other two married to the Bhar Rajas of Bhadoi and Dalmau. On the night before the Holi festival, all the three new brides poisoned their husbands, and Kundan Deo declared himself the Raja of all the three estates.

For a long time after this, Bhadoi was called "Bhar-drohi", and in about nine or ten villages around Dalmau (Raie Bareli district), the people do not celebrate the Holi festival until fourteen days after the actual date.

It was Kundan Deo who, perhaps out of a sense of insecurity, went and settled down at Manda. Apart from the three daughters, Kundan Deo had two sons—Bhuraj and Ugrasen. While the former took Manda, the latter obtained Vijaypur.

Six generations later came Puran Mal, who also had two sons, Lakhwan Singh and Chhatarsen. While Lakhwan got Manda, the latter got the taluka of Barokhar as his share. The property remained separate until the end of the 18th century, when the Manda ruler treacherously recovered Barokhar after poisoning the entire Chhatarsen clan to the sword.

Lakhwan Singh, the elder son of Puran Mal, was followed in succession by Bir Singh, Rudra Shah and Mardan Shah, the last of whom had two sons, Prithviraj Singh and Chhatarsal Singh, both born on the same day, presumably from two wives. The two divided the property, Prithviraj holding Manda and Chhatarsal taking taluka Daya—the branch that was to bear our hero.

Six generations after Prithviraj came Israj Singh, who lived to see the cession of Allahabad district to the British. He had joined hands with the British and for services rendered to Lord Wellesley against the Baghel Rajas of Rewa (ancestors of the former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, Arjun Singh), he obtained a grant of 31 villages revenue-free in perpetuity.

Israj Singh died in 1805, and his successor Rudra Pratap Singh spent the greater part of his life translating the Ramayana into Hindi verse, whether as a penance for the sins of his ancestors or because there was little else he could do by way of living it up like a raja, is not quite known. His father, Israj Singh, must have been more than just a toady of the British, for he had mortgaged his entire estate to a banker of Benares, Moti Chand. On his death the estate had been taken over by the Board of Commissioners, the successor being allowed only Rs 2000 a month for maintenance. Rudra Pratap Singh was later permitted to 'engage', but he was unable to manage his property, which was hopelessly encumbered at his death in 1827.

The situation deteriorated further under his successor, Chhatarpal Singh, and in 1838 the settlement of many villages was made with the resident communities, the Raja's rights being reduced to a malkana of ten per cent of the revenue.

But then Chhatarpal Singh beat even Israj Singh and his other forebears in his disloyalty to the land. Allahabad was to prove one of the most perilous grounds for the British during the Sepoy Mutiny or what is now called the First War of Indian Independence. Here the rebellion was led by a faqir, Maulvi Liaqat Ali, who had won for himself a considerable reputation for sanctity and was backed by the zamindars of Chail. The Maulvi had set up his standard in the famous Khurru Bagh and declared himself 'Government of Allahabad' proclaiming the rule of the Badshah in Delhi. For nearly two weeks, the Maulvi and his forces freed the the city from the British who were confined to the fort which was under threat of being stormed any time.

Reaching supplies to the British were the loyalist forces of Chhatarpal Singh. And then word arrived from the camp of the Rani of Jhansi, directing the forces of the Maulvi to proceed towards Kanpur. On the way they bivouacked near Kha-

"I was not allowed to see my natural parents ... It was just that my guardian did not want me to have any connection with my natural family"—V.P. Singh

V.P. Singh (left) grieving by his brother, C.S.P. Singh

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ga, in the principality of one Darnao Singh, where they learnt that British soldiers were camping at some distance with money for the Treasury. The forces of the Mauvi fell upon them and would have gained control, but Chhatarpal Singh came to the rescue of the British. Dariao Singh was killed, the Mauvi was arrested and sent to "Kala Pani" where he died. His captured men were hanged to 52 imli trees around village Khajuri. Some still call it the "Bawan Imliya Gaon" (the village of 52 imli trees).

At last some of Manda's past must have been at the back of Vinoba's mind as he hailed the latter-day "Prince Siddhartha". He was certainly well aware of the estate's more recent record. Whenever a freedom fighter was subjected to humiliation and torture in the Manda estate and the information was brought to Mahatma Gandhi at Swaraj Bhawan, he used to say, "Ulta area chhod do... (leave out that area)."

Manda, to him, was beyond the pale.

In such a soul was Vishwanath transplanted at age five. Why exactly he was the "chosen one"—for Manda was a much bigger estate than Daya any day—is not really known. It seems to be a conundrum even to Sant Bux Singh, the first born to the elder Rani of Daya. It was the second and much younger Rani who had given Raja Bhagwati Prasad Singh of Daya his first son, Chandra Shekhar Prasad Singh, who was later to become a judge of the Allahabad High Court. Then came Sant Bux, sixteen months later to the first wife, followed by Vishwanath Pratap Singh to the younger Rani, a year later. Two more sons, Harbux and Rajendra Singh, were born to the first Rani.

Being the eldest born, C.S.P. Singh was to become the Raja of Daya and it was understandable that when the Raja of Manda wanted to adopt one of the sons, Raja Bhagwati Prasad Singh didn't offer him his first son. But why, instead of offering the eldest son of his first wife, that is Sant Bux Singh, did he offer the second son of his second wife? Was it because the second was his favourite wife? Unlike the first she was from "more common Rajput stock" and so the possibility of her parents having manoeuvred things in favour of their grandchild was considered rather remote.

"If it was looks that mattered," says Sant Bux, "we were both quite handsome, except that V.N. was somewhat fairer than me." All that he can say is that for some reason his father decided to give away V.N. rather than one of the other sons.

Fairness of skin was certainly something that could have weighed with the Raja Bahadur of Manda, who was a puca Sahib, Angophile to his finger tips. All manner of stories are still told in and around Manda about Ram Gopal Singh's western lifestyle and his "recklessly licentious" ways, but for the sake of reliability let us depend on what little glimpses into his life Sant Bux Singh can give us.

When Ram Gopal Singh was around 18, marriage proposals poured in from all over. One of them came from a family in Madhya Pradesh, and it was accompanied by a picture of the girl. Ravishingly beautiful. The young Raja Bahadur sought the approval of elders in the family, which was duly given.

All was set for the wedding but then came the rub. It turned out that the status of the bride's family and its position in the Rajput hierarchy was not at all befitting the honour of the Manda 'gharana, and the elders who had earlier given their assent were now totally opposed to the match. But they were reckoning without the host. By then Raja Ram Gopal Singh was dead set on either marrying the same girl, or not marrying at all. The girl's photograph had charmed him beyond his wits. And so, in the teeth of opposition from all sides, even physical opposition at some points, the Raja Bahadur set out to claim the bride he had set his heart on. His barsis were even waylaid during the journey by those opposed to the wedding, but the Raja Bahadur made it to the bride's place and got married.

In triumph he brought his bride home, to discover that she was not the girl of the photograph at all. No semblance whatever. The photograph was of a dancing girl from Calcutta. The Raja Bahadur had been cheated. He had
totally sea. Soon, Raja Ram Gopal Singh was a confirmed TB patient and he wouldn’t let the boy anywhere near him. A Scottish couple, Mr and Mrs Cooke, were employed to look after the little princeling.

As V.P. Singh was to recount much later in life, “I was not allowed to see my natural parents because I was supposed to grow up a Manda boy. My mother said she wanted to see me but that my adoptive father would not allow. It was just that my guardian did not want me to have any connection with my natural family. I was to forget them.... Even in his will, my adoptive father said that the Daya family should have nothing to do with me.”

When V.P. Singh was barely eleven, his adoptive father died, and his natural family re-entered his life. But without another wrench, though. By then the boy who had come to his new surroundings at five had quite forgotten what he had left behind, and his then guardians, Amar Singh Mathur and his family, had become his “family”. When his father, Raja Bhagwati Prasad Singh fought and regained the custody of his child, he had to be physically lifted and taken away to Daya

A deep sense of loneliness and insecurity was to become a lasting feature of Vishwanath Pratap Singh’s life, a feature which manifested itself in various ways. Loneliness must have made him withdraw into his inner self, and the sense of insecurity that had taken hold of him so early in life precluded him from having trust in anyone. At the time when we were out to retrace some of the missing links of his career in Allahabad and Lucknow, one of the recurrent questions we encountered about V.P. Singh was, “Is there anyone who is closer to him? Does he really trust anyone?” None, they meant to say.

After the death of his adoptive father in 1941, there were collateralists of the family challenging his adoption in court, and the boy had to be kept under constant armed guard, whether it was at school or elsewhere. Recalls V.P. Singh, “I was alone in a bungalow in Varanasi, my life in danger...” After a time in Col. Brown School at Dehra Dun, he had been sent to the Havett Khatriya School in Benares, part of the Uday Pratap College, which had come to be a natural Alma Mater of the “blue-blooded Rajputs” of the region. He lived in a part of the principal’s bungalow, a sequestered life under armed guards.

Right from his school days, V.P. Singh had begun having a special image of himself, as is clear from some of the anecdotes he himself recounted much later—in fact, after his break with the Congress.

With some pride, he (V.P. Singh) remembers being a school prefect in an atmosphere that was laden with “authoritarian discipline”. His schoolmates had regard for him but there was distance between him and them. “I used to be regarded as a strict disciplinarian, there would be pindrop silence when I entered the hall.” Apparently, regard for Singh’s abilities (“They knew I had won all the prizes for the school and enhanced its reputation,” says Singh) overcame the sense of distance when Singh took a stand on elections to the students’ union.

The school principal had nominated the head prefect to contest the union elections. Singh says that the idea that the teachers should take an interest in the elections and set up candidates “came as a real emotional shock”. “In those days,” he recalls, “we held our teachers in high esteem. We thought they were all above us...there is the image of fairness and so on.” Thus he “immediately offered” his resignation as a prefect—the first of a series of resignation offers in his career. Singh’s refusal to toe the principal’s line, he says, brought the other boys to ask him to be their candidate. They had another candidate, he remembers, but admiration for his stand had led them to offer to withdraw the nomination in his favour...

(Emphasis ours).

Those who would seek to understand his mental make-up and his political style would do well to go over the anecdote from his school days, for they tell of a man who not only takes calculated steps but is for ever conscious of the impact he is making.

But let’s move to another anecdote: Once, the conscientious Singh, who never failed to attend a single class, decided to skip his poetry class in order to prepare for an inter-collegiate debate. Afterwards, he won a shield for the college (or rather high school) but his irate principal, instead of being pleased with the trophy, wanted to know why Singh had skipped his poetry class. Says V.P. Singh, “Imagine, I had won the...
of his clan started calling him "paglau" (lunatic). They thought he had gone off his rocker. It may be all right for you to behave like this, he was told, but what about your wife and children? Don't you have any sense of responsibility towards them? In 1955, he had got married to Sita Kumari, daughter of the Raja of Deogarh-Madaria in Rajasthan, and his two sons had been born.

Vishwanath's renunciatory pose was frowned upon by his kith and kin. Maybe he could do with his new lifestyle but Sita Kumari could hardly do without her silk and finery. Someone had pointed this out to him and he had shot back, "If she is in trouble, wouldn't I do the same for her?"

The man's political critics and detractors have often claimed that after V. P. Singh announced the gift of all his land to Bhoothan, his wife filed an affidavit in court that her husband had done it in a "fit of insanity," some have even gone to the extent of saying that V. P. Singh was actually admitted to the Agra mental asylum for a while. No evidence of either is available, but the action certainly created some resistance in the family, and at least Sant Bux Singh would not rule out the possibility that some lawyer or retainer of the family might have given an affidavit in court.

In any case, Vinoba Bhave heard of the grumblings and called V. P. Singh over to Bangalore, where he asked the latter to take back some of the land for the family and the children. "I cannot take back what I have given away," V. P. Singh is said to have maintained, but when pressed further he said whatever land was returned he would give away to the college he had built.

The Raja Saab was at a loose end, trying hard to create an identity for himself. He must have been overtaxed by more mundane problems, such as clearing away the heavy debts that encumbered the Manda estate.

Eighty-year-old Jalaluddin, who had for long years been a personal "account-keeper" of Raja Ram Gopal Singh, said he had left a debt of Rs. 18 Lakhs when he died in 1941—a huge sum in those days. But Sant Bux Singh, who ought to know better, says the debt was not Rs 18 lakhs but Rs 44 lakhs.

Profligacy of the successive Rajas had squeezed the estate dry. C. A. Bayly, a scholar from Cambridge who made a close study of the socio-political conditions of Allahabad during the period 1880-1920, wrote:

The weakness of the local zamindars was a result of their relatively small size or economic difficulties. But the personalities and life-style of individual landholders played their part. In 1878 only nine individuals in the district paid land revenue of more than Rs 25,000 per year. Three of them were among the merchant magnates. Another was the Maharaja of Benares. Then there were the Rajas of Darya and the Raja of Manda (Gaharwar Rajput). But these latter magnates were debt-ridden and plagued with long running.

Most of the huge debts were owed to the Banaas, which might perhaps explain the contempt of former Rajas for the business class.

Weighed under the burden of the past and all too aware of what lay in the future, the calculating mind of Vishwanath Pratap Singh may well have decided that there was not much point in holding on to the rocky wastelands of Manda. There was no way he could stop the decadent old fort from crumbling; no way he could regain the lost power and the glory of his ancestors except perhaps by taking to a completely new course. The dramatic stance of renunciation must have seemed the best bet.

He had to give up, or at least appear to be giving up, in order to reverse the balance of the past...
the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has sent separate show-cause notices to all the players who had romped off to play four exhibition matches in the United States and Canada immediately after the cricket series between India and the West Indies ended. They had done so despite seven telex messages being sent by the BCCI asking the players to return to India immediately after the Caribbean tour ended.

According to the Board rules, the cricketers could face a fine or suspension, or both. Before going on the tour, each of the cricketers had signed individual contracts with the Board and agreed to abide by its provisions. One of the clauses in the contract forbade the players from going anywhere after the tour, without the express permission of the BCCI president. Another clause clearly stated that the players could not play any exhibition matches for a year after this tour.

When the Board’s executive committee met in Bangalore last month, the unity had to be seen to be believed. Hitherto, all meetings, however innocuous, underlined the groupism that is so evident in this body. But, on the issue of the north American tour, the BCCI was unanimous. They heard the report of the secretary, Kanbh Singh, who started by saying that the players had, in fact, asked the Board president’s permission through the tour manager, Venkatraghavan, to play a few matches in the United States and Canada after the completion of the tour.

Initially, there was point-blank refusal. After repeated pleas, the BCCI chief, Biswanath Dutt, said the players would be allowed to spend a holiday in America or elsewhere if they so desired, but on no condition were they to play cricket. The correspondence, which started midway through the tour, continued till the series in the West Indies was almost over but, till the end, Dutt refused permission to play.

The players ignored the Board directive and went ahead with their plans. They had found sponsors in both the United States and Canada and played three limited-overs matches against a Pakistani Eleven and one against a West Indian combination. They were paid up to Rs 35,000 (in dollars) per match and provided free board, lodging and sightseeing jaunts for themselves and their wives.

More than the money the players garnered, it was their attitude towards the Board that rked the executive body. Almost every member wanted severe penalties imposed on the players. But Dutt chose a softer line, suggesting that a committee be formed to decide on the course of action.

Accordingly, a five-member body was constituted, with Dutt, ex-president P.M. Rungta, I.S. Bindra, W. Kannadikar and Madhav Mantri constituting the committee. At the first meeting in Bombay, all members barring Bindra were present. Whether or not Bindra’s absence was tactical or otherwise, the members were unanimous in their opinion that the legal aspects of the move to issue show-cause notices should be covered first.

That is why the meeting carried on for three hours. More important, it was held in Rungta’s residence rather than in the Board’s well-appointed premises. The need for secrecy, members felt, was paramount at that stage.

The players, of course, are treating all this with disdain. They feel they have done no wrong in augmenting their income from cricket. And they have been quick to point an accusing finger at the Board. First on their list of grievances is the sudden hardline approach of the Board. “We had taken it for granted that the authorities would let us play. It’s happened so often in the past that we were sure there could be no objection this time,” said one cricketer.

What most players feel is that the Board’s only grouse was that India had put up a bad show in the Caribbean. “But that is to be expected, isn’t it? How many times has India—or, for that matter—any team done well against the West Indies on their own grounds? If this is the reason, it’s sheer vindictiveness,” the player said.

Former captain Bishan Singh Bedi had come out in open support of the Board. The current players resent this attitude. “Bedi himself had flouted the contract, so how come he’s taking on this holier-than-thou stance?” one player asked. But he had nothing to say about Pataudi and others who have all criticised the attitude of the cricketers.

Actually, the players are now grouping together to evolve a common strategy. They hope to revive the now-defunct Players’ Association so that they could present a united front. Almost all

**SUNDAY SPORTS**

**On a sticky wicket**

Cricketers who played in exhibition matches in North America come under fire from the Board of Control for Cricket in India
THE ONES WHO DIDN'T PLAY

NAVJOT SIDHU  SABAH KARIM  K. SRIKKANTH

of them have been consulting legal experts in an effort to get out of what is expected to be a sticky wicket. The only ones on the tour who are not affected are K. Srikanth, Sidhu, Sabah Karim and W. V. Raman. Srikanth had to come back midway owing to an injury, Sidhu had to report to court over the incident of alleged assault and death, Raman apparently had other commitments and Sabah Karim wasn't given an offer to play in the United States.

So all these players will be fit and ready to represent the country should the Board decide to suspend or ban the "rebels". There are several others, young and old, who could fit into the Indian team. It is not as if the current players are indispensable, though at present some of them do form the cream of Indian talent.

But neither the Board nor the players are thinking about that most drastic step yet—though Dalip Vengsarkar will have to answer for much more than mere dollar-gathering. In an interview to a sports weekly, he lashed out at players like Azharuddin, charging them with being afraid to face fast bowling. In an outburst so typical of a man going downhill, Vengsarkar also said the Board hadn't given him the best available players and that the umpiring was biased. Unfortunately, in his list of excuses, there was no mention of his own form—both as batsman and as captain. Except for a brief flutter, he was woefully out of form. As for his captaincy, almost every member of the team felt that he did not deserve the mantle. Instead of encouraging his colleagues, he castigated them. And there were many players in the squad who could have given him a lesson or two in tactics on the field.

Vengsarkar had faced a six-month suspension last year for violating Board rules. This time, too, he has done so by talking about the attitudes of the players, instead of assessing performances. The rules don't allow it. Whatever the outcome of this wrangle over money-making appearances abroad, it is now certain that Vengsarkar will not be asked to lead India again for quite some time.

But, all said and done, the players do have a genuine grievance. Over the years, Indian cricketers have been paid much less than their foreign counterparts. And this includes Pakistan. The Board should certainly try to remove this anomaly, as our players are certainly not inferior to cricketers from our neighbouring country or, for that matter, from any other country.

Of course, this is not reason enough to flout rules. And the offence is more serious because they played in countries which are associate members of the world cricket body. And no permission was asked or given there. Not only did they play as an Indian XI, they even sported the official sweaters.

Whether or not he feels he is in with a chance to captain the Indian side again, Kapil Dev broke the silence of the players on the issue by saying in an interview that this violation of rules should be seen as a one-time offence, not to be repeated by the players. Following his lead, most "rebel" players have reportedly taken a soft line. While not openly admitting their violation of the rules, they have pledged in their replies to the show-cause notice never to flout BCCI directives again.

Ultimately, the BCCI may not suspend the players. The cricketers could plead guilty and ask forgiveness, thus opening the way for the Board to save its face, too. A fine could be imposed. But here, it is important to make the fine large enough to hurt the players. Otherwise, such a decision could open the floodgates of indiscipline. After all, a note saying sorry and a cheque for a small amount which, again, could be covered by the sponsors of future rebel tours, won't hurt either pride or purse.

So, where do we go from here?

Arijit Sen/Calcutta
On the north-east

B.P. Singh’s account lacks an empirical base

To anyone with a serious interest in north-east India, the book makes compulsive reading—not for its empirical base, but for the conceptual framework adopted. In The Problem Of Change: A Study Of North-East India, Singh displays a clear understanding of the major issues involved in the process of change in this sensitive region. But he often fails to elucidate his contentions with sufficient ground information. So, for a reader with sufficient interest, but without a adequate data base on the north-east, many of Singh’s observations may seem impressionistic, though they are anything but that.

The weak empirical base is revealed in the introductory chapter itself, in which Singh says: “The occupation of Imphal by the Japanese and the battle between the Allied and Axis powers at Kohima during the Second World War stirred the people of the north-east and gave them a new spatial consciousness.” The Japanese never occupied Imphal, they just came close to capturing it. Which is why Geoffrey Evans and Anthony Brett-James titled their account of the Imphal campaign after a Japanese proverb—Imphal: A Flower On The Lofty Heights. That is, a flower highly desired but out of reach.

Also, it is wrong to say that the people of the north-east secured a new spatial consciousness during the Second World War. It would be more appropriate to say that the War had such an effect on the Indo-Burma frontier. Assam and Tripura, or for that matter, the tribals of present-day Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were hardly touched by the War.

Similarly, it is wrong to say that: “The earlier Hinduisation of the tribes (of Tripura) led to the migration of Bengali Hindu peasants from neighbouring East Bengal districts.” The extent of Sanskritisation of the Tripura tribes is debatable, though the Sanskritisation of Tripura’s ruling dynasty has never been in doubt. This perhaps explains the rapid growth of Christianity amongst the fringe tribes of Tripura in the past decade.

Also, the migration of Bengali Hindus from East Bengal was not due to Hinduisation of the tribes, but because of royal efforts in that direction. The Tripura rulers wanted a Hindu population to man the various rungs of monarchical administration. They also encouraged the settlement of Bengali peasants with a view to bring fresh areas under settled wet-rice cultivation so that they could augment their revenues. But the settlement pattern ran into occasional resistance from the tribal formations as early as in the Thirties.

Singh’s chapter on “The Political System” is sketchy and lacks an analytical orientation. Only Assam comes in for detailed study. Even states such as Manipur and Tripura, where electoral politics took root immediately after Independence, and where even insurgent activity is not free from the compulsions of electoral dynamics, are dismissed in only a paragraph and an election data table.

The writer’s perception of the north-east seems to be considerably influenced by his intimate knowledge of Assam, and the lack of it where other parts of the region are concerned. He is particularly ignorant about Tripura and Manipur—both erstwhile princely states with their own history of socio-political growth.

For instance, his analysis of “Land and Tribal Society” in the north-east is almost exclusively concerned with Assam and the states born out of it. Land alienation is a direct cause of tribal unrest in Tripura but, barring a general observation, Singh does not deal with the dynamics of land alienation in the state at all.

The real strength of Singh’s book lies in the chapter on “Administrative Philosophy and Institutional Framework” for the north-east. Given his background in government and his advantage of having witnessed the performance of officialdom at close quarters, Singh is perhaps the right person to throw much-needed light on this aspect. Some of his suggestions, such as the one for a joint intelligence structure at the regional level, merit close examination.

On the whole, it can be said that each chapter of Singh’s book can be developed into a major research work and credit is due to him for having dealt with (if only cursorily, in some instances) nearly all the major aspects of the north-eastern problem in just over 200 pages.

Subir Bhanumik

The book displays a clear understanding of the major issues involved in the process of change in the north-east. But the author often fails to elucidate his contentions with sufficient ground information.

Subir Bhanumik

The Problem Of Change: A Study Of North-East India by Bimalkumar Prasad Singh. Published by Oxford University Press. Price: Rs 110.
ARIES (21 March—20 April)  
This is not a favourable week for you. You may be faced with an unhappy incident at home, and this may cause you a lot of concern. Beware of your enemies, they may hatch fresh conspiracies against you. Moreover, your subordinates may not be very cooperative. The phase, however, is good for romance.
Good dates: 25, 26 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 2, 5 and 6  
Favourable direction: West

LEO (21 July—20 August)  
A week of excellent prospects. Those in service will gain recognition and be praised by their employers. Doctors and scientists will do well. Students will do well in their studies. This is a good week for love affairs. For those who want a partner, be on the lookout and you might find the person of your choice.
Good dates: 26, 27 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 1, 7 and 9  
Favourable direction: South-west

SAGITTARIUS (21 November—20 December)  
Hard times are ahead; so must all the courage that you can and try not to be despondent. Do not look forward to solving your problems this week. You are advised to take extra care in deciding on your moves and actions. A minor mistake may turn out to be extremely expensive.
Good dates: 26, 29 and 30  
Lucky numbers: 4, 7 and 9  
Favourable direction: South

TAURUS (21 April—20 May)  
This will prove to be a fairly good week for you. Those connected with intellectual or artistic pursuits will find this the most suitable time to achieve the desired goal. Exercise tact and patience, otherwise you may have to pay a price. Do not quarrel with anyone, for this will go against your self-interest.
Good dates: 26, 28 and 30  
Lucky numbers: 6, 7 and 9  
Favourable direction: North

CAPRICORN (21 December—20 January)  
A week of brilliant prospects awaits you. So forge right ahead with your plans. The domestic front will provide you with all the support that you need this week. Friendships are in the offing. A word of caution, be wary of new friends of the opposite sex. Keep an eye on your health.
Good dates: 25, 28 and 29  
Lucky numbers: 1, 5 and 8  
Favourable direction: West

VIRGO (21 August—20 September)  
A very bright week lies ahead of you. Some exciting prospects await you on the professional front. Take full advantage of them and forge ahead with your plans. Do not hesitate to follow the advice of female relatives in your family. Socialites will have a busy time.
Good dates: 25, 28 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 4, 5 and 9  
Favourable direction: South-east

AQUARIUS (21 January—20 February)  
This will prove to be a favourable week for you. Luck will continue to smile on you provided you work hard and put in your time. A bright week for sportsmen who will be crowned with success. The domestic front will continue to be a source of joy. A promotion is not unlikely.
Good dates: 27, 29 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 3, 6 and 9  
Favourable direction: South-east

CANCER (21 June—20 July)  
This is a good week for you, you will gain financially. But a word of caution, do not be too extravagant. Exercise tact while dealing with your subordinates. Concentrate on your work and do not mingle business with pleasure. This could lead to problems later on. Keep your temper under control.
Good dates: 27, 28 and 30  
Lucky numbers: 2, 6 and 30  
Favourable direction: East

SCORPION (21 October—20 November)  
This may turn out to be a fairly good week provided you have courage and patience to combat professional and domestic problems. For those in business, this is not the time to undertake any new venture. Exercise tact and circumspection while dealing with those in authority.
Good dates: 28, 29 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 2, 5 and 9  
Favourable direction: East

PISCES (21 February—20 March)  
This is unfortunately not a very good week for you. Your family members will tend to avoid you and your friends will give you some cause for anxiety. However, do not be disheartened for this is only a passing phase. Be courageous and your problems will soon be over.
Good dates: 28, 30 and 1  
Lucky numbers: 2, 3 and 5  
Favourable direction: North-west

Star Partners: Virgo—Taurus

Both the Taurus man and the Virgo woman get along well with each other, but there are some differences too. He is a jealous spouse, and this could cause tension between the two. But because she is patient and forbearing, the crisis may not last long.
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Lost... and not found

It's two months now and Jayalalitha is still not to be seen in public. Her admirers are running scared, sure that some harm has come to the 'balcony baby' of Poes Garden. One among them, Shyam, the editor of a popular Tamil periodical, submitted a habeas corpus petition in the Madras High Court, asking that the court take action against M. Natarajan, a close aide of the AIADMK leader. Natarajan, he said, was holding Jayalalitha in "illegal custody" against her will. A division bench of the court deferred the hearing of the petition, but speculation about the lady's whereabouts continues unabated.

The rumours doing the rounds are many, and each places Jayalalitha in a different location. While some say that the lady is suffering from arthritis and is currently being treated in a naturopathy clinic near Bangalore, others insist that she is recuperating from some mystery illness in a hotel in Goa. Some in the AIADMK hierarchy believe that their leader is stationed in her Poes Garden bungalow itself, but has made herself scarce so as to resist pressures brought upon her by partymen.

But why has Jayalalitha chosen to go underground in this fashion? Insiders maintain that this is part of the grand strategy of keeping a distance from the ho the politii. Operating on the principle that familiarity breeds contempt, the lady has decided to cut down on public appearances.

And like most others, this lesson, too, was taught to her by her late mentor, M.G. Ramachandran.

Rajiv's little lamb

If it's Rajiv Gandhi, there's bound to be Subramaniam Swamy. Political observers in Karnataka are increasingly coming to this conclusion.

Apparently, every time the Prime Minister pays a visit to Bangalore, Swamy too decides to pop by. On 28 April, Rajiv visited the city to attend a convention on Panchayati Raj. On the same day, Swamy addressed a press conference in Bangalore, demanding a probe into the alleged kickbacks received by those involved in the 128-megawatt diesel generator project at Yelahanka.

Gandhi touched down at the Mangalore coast on 26 May for a few hours to address a public meeting. The Janata Party maverick could not match the peripatetic PM this time. Instead, he contented himself with holding a press conference in Delhi, where he announced with great elan that the Janata Party would have no truck with the Janata Dal in the state elections.

On 14 June, Rajiv visited Bangalore yet again, to attend the Nagar Palika Sammelan. Swamy, predictably, was back in the city, this time armed with a nine-point memorandum, which he handed over to Governor Venkatasubbiah, asking him, among other things, to investigate the various corrupt deals of a fellow Brahmin.

No prizes for guessing who Swamy was talking about.

Assessment time

As elections approach near, most members of Parliament are busy assessing the odds on their re-election. And K. Natwar Singh, Union minister of state for external affairs, has decided that he doesn't stand a ghost of a chance from Bharatpur.

The latest is that Natwar Singh intends shifting base to Mathura. In the last elections, Manavendra Singh, an Arun Nehru protegee, had won this seat on a Congress(i) ticket. Only to defect to the Janata Dal. Gossip has it that Singh has employed military intelligence to assess his chances.

How accurate their information will be remains to be seen. After all, isn't it said that military intelligence is a contradiction in terms?

Our fragile biosphere

Environmentalists have always complained that while the ministry of environment goes through the projects of public sector companies with a fine tooth comb to ensure that the biosphere is not ruined, they refuse to uphold the private sector.

But sometimes even the government's actions jeopardise the environment. Like the Maharashtra government's decision to acquire 1,774 hectares of land for setting up a huge complex for producing hazardous chemicals. This had the 109 residents of Jajugadh (in Ratnagiri district) up in arms.

And for once, the public won. The Bombay High Court passed orders restraining the government from taking over the land, or pursuing any course of action relating to the petition "until further orders."