The Pager Pujari

4/5/00

...and a Break Dance Cook are part of India.com

THE times are changing, and how! Even the traditional pandits, pujaris and Brahmin cooks are getting market savvy. They realise that if they do not adopt modern technology for their traditional professions they are likely to get left behind in the race for big — why, even small — money.

Even as my heart grieved for a mother who had been a friend, a companion, a pillar of strength, I could not help but notice the way technology had made inroads into crematoriums and the rituals that govern life and death. In keeping with today's ecological concerns, her body draped in a new, daintily printed sari, was taken to a tidy electric crematorium in the heart of Mumbai with two or three electric furnaces. With quiet dignity and efficiency, the priest performed the last rites. Chairs had been provided so that relatives and friends could comfortably partake in the ceremonies.

Tucked away in the dhoti at the priest's waist was a pager that kept him posted about his daily appointments. In his smart Fila bag, he carried some of the more rare ingredients required for the rituals. The ceremonies were conducted with clockwork precision. In half an hour it was all over. The flowers, wreaths, ashes from the incense sticks, broken shards of earthen pitchers were swept away, and the place was ready for the next cremation.

At Banganga, a world heritage site where the ashes were immersed, there was the same decorum, dignity and peace. There were no greedy priests trying to fleece heartbroken relatives, no beggars and no plastic bags bobbing around. Just a couple of days earlier, Chelsea Clinton had visited the site. Hundreds of rituals are performed here every day, but the small, efficient work force keeps the place clean. In keeping with the times, women were performing rituals that were once the exclusive prerogative of the males.

But it was Master Shiva, the 25 year old who came all the way to cook at Churchgate from the Jagadamba Kalabhairva temple of Jogeshwari, who best symbolised the changing era. He was able to combine the grace and tradition of the old world with the demands of the new age. Like the priest, he was punctual and efficient. The traditional cook, who could turn out a sumptuous meal for Brahmins, was also a teacher of Bharatnatyam and, believe it or not, break dancing. He had learnt his many skills in Vishakapatnam and had come to big, bustling Mumbai to reap the reward.

Getting up at 4 am, he would bathe, do his prayers at the temple, smear a little sandalwood and vibhuti on his forehead, and catch the fast train to Churchgate. He came in smart cotton jeans at 6 am sharp. In his shoulder bag were his dhoti and *angavastra*. At the Churchgate flat he changed into his dhoti and within minutes steaming coffee would be prepared for those who were up at that hour.



TIME OUT

USHA RAI

As ordained in the book of rituals, he would cook about a dozen dishes — chutneys, vada, sambar, vegetables and at least two deserts — for about 40 to 50 people. His hands moved with lightning speed as he chopped vegetables and ground the spices fresh every morning. By noon the meal was ready. It would be served on banana leaves and Shiva knew the exact sequence of dishes to be served. He also knew how to keep piling up the Brahmins till they burped and the soul for whom all this was being done was happy. By 4 pm the kitchen was spotlessly clean and Shiva would change back into his nifty trousers and dash off to catch the fast train back to the Jogeshwari temple.

There, three to four days a week he would teach classical dance or, depending on the demand, break dance to young aspirants from Mumbai's world of culture. He distributed advertising pamphlets of his dancing accomplishments and, with the happy blend of traditional and modern skills, this whiz kid earned a five-figure salary.

It is not just IT professionals who are doing India proud. Shiva and the priest are part of the changing new India.com!

WORLDLY WISE: *Art disturbs, science reassures.* —GEORGES BRAQUE.

From zamindari to penury

HT. 3/7/2000

Can Chandrababu Naidu use his computer network to zero in on those parts of the State where people find it so difficult to pull out of life's quicksands, asks USHA RAI

PLATFORM

SHE IS just 62 years, not old by the standards of the reasonably well off middle class of Delhi, but she looks about 75. She has the telltale limp of the arthritic. Her hair is flaxen white and she has no teeth. She could not afford to get herself fixed with dentures because there are no *sarkari* dentists in Gooty and she could not afford to go to a private doctor. Gooty with its ancient fort is literally a lost and forgotten little town in the heart of drought-prone Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

The story of S. Indiramma is probably the story of thousands of women who live in drought-prone areas of the country, struggling to raise a family on a pittance as the agricultural lands decimated by drought year after year refuse to yield a crop. In the cyber city of Hyderabad, driven by the missionary zeal of a technology savvy Chief Minister, people nurture dreams of a better life, but in Gooty life has come to a standstill.

Yet Indiramma had seen better days. She was married into a *zamindar* family which was on the decline but at one stage owned 1,000 acres of land and had at least a sackful of gold and silver. Her mother-in-law Balamma, who ruled like a queen, would give a *dhoti* and *angavastra* to every bridegroom and a *sari* and the *tali* (the gold symbol of marriage) to the new bride of the town. That was her way of blessing the young couple.

Though Balamma was a Brahmin, she ruled like a secular queen. The Muslim pilgrims that went past her house in droves would stop by to fortify themselves with a glass of milk. For this annual feature there was never a shortage of milk because Balamma in her hey days had plenty of cows and buffaloes.

Whenever drought or illness affected Gooty, there were special prayers at the temple of Yelamma. The *sari,* the blouse, the *haldi* and *kumkum* for the Lord, came from Balamma's house. Even devotees to the temple would stop by to collect *haldi, kumkum* and some glass bangles. The special offering of a mountain of rice, curds and milk to appease Yelamma was also given by the first family of Gooty.

But 16 successive years of drought in the Forties and early Fifties led to the land and the gold being sold off in bits and pieces to support the family. In those days no one talked about watershed development or rainwater harvesting. Even today there is not much awareness of such things.



Indiramma's husband was educated and was selected for a job in the police, but his mother would not allow the son to work like a plebian. Without money coming in, the decline was faster. First the agricultural land, then the cattle and the sundry landed property disappeared slowly but surely.

Balamma died and with her the glory of an era that was. Towards her last days she could not even get two square meals a day. But there was too much pride to beg for assistance or allow the educated daughter-in-law to work.

The pilgrims who still went past the house were initially given diluted buttermilk in place of milk, then were reduced to having water. As Indiramma's arthritis worsened it became difficult to even provide water, for the tap was located outside the house and water had to be fetched in earthen pitchers.

Then the husband too died and Indiramma was left with the sole responsibility of tending to her flock of four children — the eldest girl, the brightest of the lot, had run off, got married and died at the young age of 31 last year. The eldest son runs two or three scooters to drop children to school. The second son works as an attendant in a petrol station and her other daughter is a private school teacher. Between them the children bring in barely Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 a month because most of the money earned by the eldest son goes in paying back bank loans for the scooters.

The daughter, working for 10 years continuously, gets Rs 800 a month. There is no wage for the long summer holidays. She tries to supplement her earnings with tuitions and gets paid Rs 10 a month for an hour of tuition every day. In fact, the parents are constantly trying to beat down the tuition fee to Rs 5.

To get a job in a government school and a decent wage, a B.Ed degree is mandatory. To get the degree Indiramma's daughter would have to go to Bangalore and pay Rs 40,000 for admission to a recognised B.Ed course. It's the kind of money that Indiramma cannot even dream of at this stage of her life. So the children struggle on at an abysmal low level with no prospects for improvement. The ancient house leaks but there is no money to repair it.

This is the new India! There are pockets of affluence: cyber cities. But in several parts of the country time has come to a standstill. Can Chandrababu Naidu use his computer network to zero in on these parts of the State and people who find it so difficult to pull out of life's quicksands?

...ecture at the ... Gakkai
...trialisa- Symposium in Delhi

OFF TRACK | *Usha Rai*

Losing paradise

FOR SEVERAL years I have written extensively about the Tehri dam and what a disaster it would be for the environment. Built on an earthquake-prone fault in the Himalayas, there would be a catastrophe if the dam should burst. Rishikesh and Hardwar would be washed away and the floodwaters would be knocking on the doors of Delhi. But the power-crazy UP government was determined to push through the project, whatever the human costs.

Living in the verdant splendour of the pine and *sal* forests and inhaling pure mountain air, frail old Sunderlal Bahuguna was determined not to let this happen. An entire township of some 12,000 people and a history dating back to 190 years was to be submerged to generate 2,500 MW of power and provide water to Delhi and the big cities of UP. Bahuguna's long fasts would end in promises of review and various assurances but the dam continued to grow like a concrete monster swallowing up the lush green hillside. The old man's heart was broken, but not his spirit, not even when his little hut near the dam site was washed away.

Recently, I was in Tehri, *asli* as well as *nakli* — the real Tehri with a glorious history and the new, ugly Tehri township of concrete blocks cemented on hill slopes — and my heart wept for the people of Tehri, for Bahuguna and a lost cause. From the guest house of the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation, you could see the old township hemmed in by swirling waters of the Bhagirathi and the Bhilangana, gasping for breath as it awaited submergence.

Neither I nor my colleagues will forget what we called 'the last supper in the ghost town'

There was an ominous silence in *asli* Tehri. It was almost like a ghost town though some 7,000 people have still not moved out. Several buildings had the sign 'sealed' emblazoned across their front doors. By mid-June, almost half the old town would be under water, but the red banners of protest could still be seen. Aggrieved residents told us how they had been denied a fair settlement. A young man showed us the photocopy of a cheque for Rs 46, all the compensation he had received for moving out of his home. A woman activist claimed that 35 widows had not received any compensation because there was no one to help them. The rehabilitation process was nowhere near completion.

But despite all the despair, the people of old Tehri had not lost their tradition of hospitality. Kartar Singh, who had settled in Tehri after he moved out of Pakistan in 1947, was the picture of courtesy. At Metro Mehfil, the tiny restaurant owned by his son, he offered to feed the 15 hungry Delhi*wala*s though it was way after lunch hour. Neither I nor my colleagues will forget what we called "the last supper in the ghost town". Kartar Singh personally went into the kitchen to chop up vegetables and produce a fine hot meal. For him, moving to new Tehri was like going through Partition all over again.

As we drove to the security of our homes, we carried within us Uttaranchal's dam of sorrow and the madness of 36 more dams proposed for the hill state.



Merging land acquisition with rehabilitation

USHA RAI

THERE could not be a more appropriate time for pressing for a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy for the thousands of people displaced by construction of dams and other big development projects than now. The Supreme Court has gone ahead and given the green signal for the construction of a 90 metres high Sardar Sarovar dam that would only enhance the number of poor people who will be forced to leave their traditional homes to eke out life in unknown, new surroundings. The higher the dam the larger the displacement.

Since 1986 there has been a lot of talk but very little action on formulating and pushing through a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy. According to Mr S R Hiremath, convenor of the Jan Vikas Andolan and President of the National Committee for Protection of Natural Resources (NCPNR), 2.13 crore people have been displaced since Independence. Mr Rabi Ray, former Lok Sabha speaker, however, puts the number at 1.5 crore. Whatever the correct figure, the numbers are colossal. Seventyfive per cent of those dispossesed/ displaced were not rehabilitated in the true sense of the word. Land was only given to those who owned land. The landless were given some monetary compensation which, for lack of knowledge on how to invest it, they blew up. Most of these people have settled in urban slums and have become destitute.

In some areas of UP and Orissa where the Singrauli power plant and the Hirakud dam have come up people have been displaced three and four times. All this has been documented by voluntary groups. But strangely enough we still don't have a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy. Now voluntary groups working on people's rights and displacement issues have found out that there was a move to sneak through a Land Acquisition (amendment) Bill without the complementary R&R policy.

The NCPNR has been campaigning actively for combining the Land Acquisition Act and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy of the government into one bill — called the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill 2000. This to ensure that even while the government takes away precious land of the people with one hand it gives a well thought out rehabilitation package with the other.

It was quite by accident that the NCPNR got to know that the group of ministers, headed by Mr K C Pant were quietly trying to push through only the Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill without incorporating the rehabilitation aspects. This meant the government was reneging on its promise to voluntary organisations to merge the two issues of acquisition and rehabilitation after the national consultation in January 1999.

Sending a copy of the voluntary organisations draft bill to the Prime Minister, Mr Rabi Ray, the former Speaker of the Lok Sabha, has pointed out it is matter of concern that 50 years after Independence there is no policy or law to give legal protection to those displaced from their home/habitat in the name of national development and progress. Pushing through land acquisition without combining key features of rehabilitation, as suggested by voluntary agencies, will be grave injustice to the tribals and rural poor.

What constitutes public purposes has always been a matter of dispute. In the draft of the voluntary organizations, the concept of public purpose has been clearly stated. Acquisition of land for private companies, which work for profit, is not permitted or recognized as public purpose.

There is a fundamental difference in the voluntary organizations and the official approach to land acquisition. The 1894 Land Acquisition Act and later amendments are based on the doctrine of Eminent Domain where the State has absolute right to its property and that of the subject is only paramount. The citizen holds his property subject always to the right to take it for public purpose. The draft bill pleads that the doctrine of Eminent Domain should be replaced by the Principle of Trusteeship, practiced by American court. Under the doctrine of trusteeship the government is a trustee of the property and it has a clear moral and legal responsibility to justify that the acquisition is for the welfare of the people. So far this doctrine has been applied to natural resources and common property. The voluntary organizations point out it can now be extended to land acquisition.

The NCPNR has been campaigning actively for combining the Land Acquisition Act and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy of the government into one bill — called the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill 2000. This to ensure that even while the government takes away precious land of the people with one hand it gives a well thought out rehabilitation package with the other.

The right to property is no longer a fundamental right. It is only a constitutional right. There is at present no constitutional bar to the central or state government to enact a law to acquire property for a purpose not defined as public purpose. However, by keeping out profit making companies from land acquisition, the draft bill seeks to reduce the extent of displacement.

The Act of 1894 did not define the term project affected persons. This has been included in the present draft to include displaced persons, partially displaced persons and other affected persons who have been deprived of their sources of livelihood as a result of acquisition. These include rural artisans, traders and persons deriving income from collection of non-wood forest produce.

According to the 1894 Act notices for the intention to acquire and actual acquisition are to be published. It was assumed that every concerned individual was aware of the notice when it was issued or published in the gazette. However, in a country where there is such high level of illiteracy and the right to information a basic right of the people, the draft bill ensures information is given to the people at every stage of acquisition. The nature of the project, the cost-benefit analysis, extent of acquisition and displacement have to be spelt out. The government can approve the project only after obtaining the consent of the gram sabhas in the affected zone.

The anti-women provisions of the 1894 Act have been dropped. Fifty per cent of those attending a public hearing have to be women. Lands allotted in lieu of acquired land has to be allotted in the joint names of the man and his wife.

The draft bill also clarifies that an affected person who does not want alternate land in the benefited zone be paid the market value of the land offered to him or her. The landless, men and women, or those partially displaced are to be compensated with minimum wages for 365 days.

While the State laws provide only for rehabilitation of those affected by projects notified by the government, the draft bill provides for rehabilitation in all projects which have benefit zones.

So far solatium is payable only to the extent of 30 per cent of the market value of the acquired land. The draft bill provides for 100 per cent solatium. Payment is not limited to landlords but to all project affected persons.

If a person is displaced for the second time within 30 years of the first displacement, he or she would be entitled to an additional amount of solatium, equivalent to the amunt paid earlier.

A State Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Commission has been proposed in the draft bill. It would have adequate power to monitor the implementation of the Act and ensure rehabilitation and resettlement of the project affected. Provision has also been made for a National Land Acquisition and R&R Commission to deal with project displacement in two or more states and to assist the state commissions.

The draft bill reduces the period of land acquisition and rehabilitation from the existing three years to 18 months of the notification being issued to acquire the land. The draft also spells out that if the land is not acquired within a year of the notification being issued, the notification will be deemed invalid and those residing in the area will continue to enjoy all the benfits of occupancy. Land acquired for a specific purpose cannot be used for any other purpose. And the process of acquisition cannot be deemed to be over unless compensation in the form of alternate land or cash is paid.

With eminent pro-the-poor MPs like Mr Kuldip Nayar and Shabana Azim, taking up cudgels for the draft bill, good sense should prevail at least now when the future of so many displaced by Sardar Sarovar dam is at stake. ■

Grassroots Feature Network

M

Park at the mercy of militants

The Palamau Tiger Reserve, Bihar, is in dire straits, starved of funds allotted to it. The damage caused by incompetent administration is compounded by militants. Villagers, cattle grazers and poachers are all over the park, says USHA RAI. Beginning an occasional column.

THE Central Government as well as the officials running the prestigious Project Tiger in Palamau, Bihar, may very well have to write off the 1,026 sq km Palamau Tiger Reserve which, starved of funds allotted to it, is in dire straits. Water holes have dried up, frequent fires have caused untold damage and smugglers, poachers and traders continue to plunder the Reserve's commercially valuable *khair* or *accacia catechu* from which *katha* used in *paan* is extracted.

To add to the sorrows of Palamau, it is one of the five tiger reserves of the country which has been commandeered by militants. The others being Manas in Assam, Indravati in Madhya Pradesh, Nagarjunasagar in Andhra Pradesh and Valmiki also in Bihar. The damage caused by the incompetent administration is compounded by the militants. Brig Ranjit Talwar who works with World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF-N) Tiger Conservation Programme and has just returned from Palamau maintains "the park is at the mercy of God and militants".

While it is true that the park does not have the stature of Corbett, Kanha or Ranthambhore, it is vital to protect this exquisite area that was one of the first nine parks of the country to be brought under "Project Tiger" in 1974. Known as the land of the *Palas* and the *mahua*, Palamau Tiger Reserve is on the western part of Chotanagpur Plateau and has been home to varied wildlife ranging from cheetal to the gaur, wild dog, a host of beautiful birds and of course leopards and tigers. In fact the 1997 census put the number of tigers at 44 but there are serious doubts about so many tigers in this reserve.

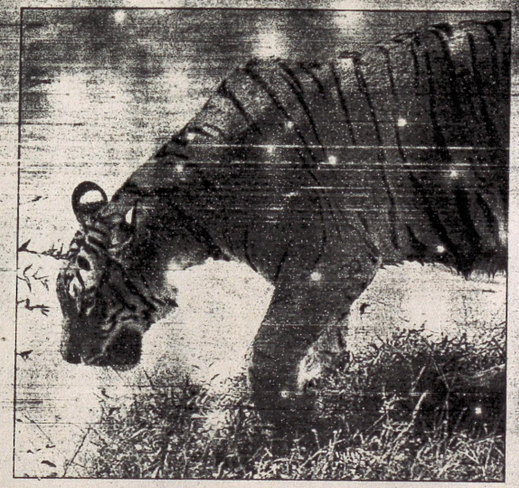
Talwar who went to assess the state of Palamau on behalf of the Environment and Forest Ministry in 1997 and again now says "the forests are getting thinner and hardly any wildlife is visible".

The impact of militancy on wildlife is not as severe as on the forests. Militants encourage the local people and are themselves involved in the removal of *katha*. Some amount of poaching too takes place. Villagers, poachers and cattle grazers are all over the park. Militants support their easy access to the protected area as well as movement within. In the last few months seven elephants have been electrocuted and two or three elephants are limping around with gun shot wounds.

GREEN TALK

But the park's biggest problem is lack of funds. On paper, however, funds are provided. The total annual budget for the park is about Rs. 80 lakhs. In the whole year barely Rs. 5 lakhs are released. Funds released under "Project Elephant" in this area also suffer the same fate. The money goes from the Centre into the State exchequer and the State just does not disburse the funds. It takes five months or more to get the funds revalidated and released. This has been happening for the last two years. In 1997 not a paise of the Rs. 80 lakhs budget had been released till March 23. In a week's time the budget would have lapsed. In any case it is not easy to use such a large amount in a week or 10 days time.

In Bihar, as in most States, the fire season starts with the onset of summer and preventive measures have to begin in February/March. But without funds this work cannot be started. Last year, 90 per cent of Palamau suffered damage from fire. The situation is no better today.



Palamau is a drought prone area, as it falls within the receding zone of the south-west monsoon. The 300 odd waterholes, most of them created artificially, have to be kept alive for wildlife. But because of poor maintenance, waterholes have got silted. Wallowing buffaloes tend to flatten out holes allowing flow-out of water. Buffaloes are today a common sight in the park and the problem of water scarcity often becomes acute. The problem of militancy has been persisting since the mid-Nineties and it is beyond the capability of the forest department to tackle it. The forest guards are neither trained nor equipped to tackle militancy. Due to the presence of insurgents, police personnel even advised forest staff not to enter the park without police escort. In 1997, it was recommended that a dedicated armed force (police or para-military) be placed under the command of the field director to regain control of the area and save it from further depredation. In fact the government sanctioned the appointment of a commander of the Bihar Military Police and 89 others to guard the forests last year. But not a single person has been appointed so far.

In fact 98 or a third of the 292 sanctioned posts of forest personnel are still lying vacant. Most of vacant posts are of forest guards. The average age of the existing forest guard is also on the high side. Apart from shortage of field personnel there is a major shortage of equipment – vehicles, tranquilizer guns, binoculars and radio sets for communication. Those working in the park never know when or where death awaits them. In February last year two daily wage workers, Aziz and Sukhdeo, were killed when the jeep in which they were travelling was blown up. Since they were not on Government rolls, their families were not entitled to pension or any compensation. NGOs got together and raised money to assist the bereaved families. Sometimes the field staff of the tiger reserve work for six to eight months without salary. Telephones to the reserve very often do not work because bills have not been paid.

Because of the shortage of regular forest staff, daily wagers are employed to carry out various activities of the park. WWF Tiger Conservation Programme, which has been providing direct support to this beleaguered reserve, has worked out a group insurance scheme for the daily wagers so that in case of injury or death while on duty, immediate financial help is available for families. Mr. Suresh Prabhu, the former Environment and Forest Minister, was seriously considering sending the money directly to the park authorities. The issue was taken up with the Planning Commission. But unfortunately he has been moved to another Ministry. ■

The death of tigers in the wild is more ominous than their death in a zoo

Surviving, but for how long?

BY USHA RAI

THE DEATH of a dozen tigers — eight of them rare white tigers — at Nandankanan zoo has shocked the nation. The tiger is the king of the jungle and on his survival depends the survival of a myriad other creatures and the eco-system itself.

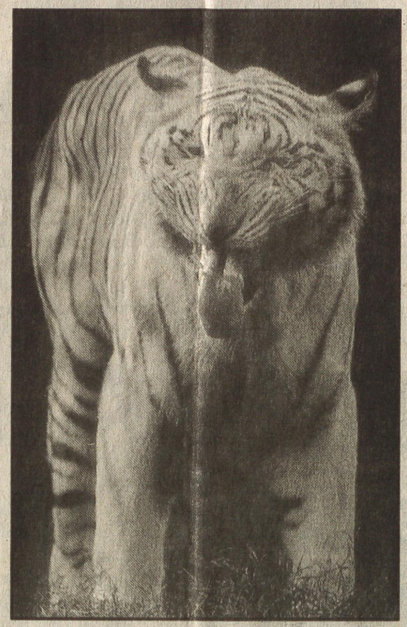
No one wants to see this magnificent animal confined to a cage or in the limited open spaces of a zoo unless it has turned a man-eater or is injured and unable to fend for itself. But zoos, though they curtail the freedom of the tigers, offer protection that the jungles cannot provide. Zoo tigers live longer than their brethren in the wild and are supposed to have a vet to nurture them back to health when they fall ill. However, not having to hunt for their meals, tigers in captivity become lazy and even fat.

But zoos with their limited resources do not want to keep too many big cats whether it is the tiger or the lion. Feeding them is an expensive proposition. But Nandankanan was an exception. Its tigers, particularly the white ones, were its pride and it had the biggest collection of white tigers in the country.

If so many tigers can die like flies in the sheltered environs of a zoo, what is the future of the tigers in the wild? Bleak, bleak, bleak reiterate the prophets of doom who actually believe that a tiger a day is being killed in India. The British Environment Audit Report as well as the director of Project Tiger, P.K. Sen, have supported this theory. But I am not a pessimist and do believe that the tiger will be around for the next 30 to 50 years or even more. There is a strong movement to protect the tiger in India and internationally and if given half a chance, the tiger has tremendous recuperative powers.

Anyone who has seen a tiger in the wild is enchanted by its feline power and beauty and becomes its champion. However, the pace at which wildlife habitats are being eroded with mining, construction of dams and other projects, in the years ahead the tiger may be confined to a few of the better managed protected areas of the country.

The pressures on the tiger in the wild are enormous. Over the years their numbers have decimated to an alarming low level and their prey base — the *barasingha*, the *chital*, *neel gai* and wild boar too has shrunk to an abysmal low. Despite the best efforts of park officials, poaching continues on a large scale. Between 1994 and 1999, TRAFFIC India reported that 328 tigers were killed in the country. Of these, 138 were poisoned. Leopard mortality figures are even higher — 455. Those caught somehow manage to escape unpunished. Only a constant vigil will ensure the survival of the tiger in the wild.



Think of this — tigers could be found all over India — in all its forest tracts and even in the neighbouring states of Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. There were never any tigers in Sri Lanka because the landmass was segregated from the Indian mainland. In India, there were no tigers in Kashmir, the higher hill ranges, Saurashtra and Kutch. But there were tigers in south Gujarat, along the Narmada and even at the site of the Sardar Sarovar dam. Babur and other Mughal rulers have recorded the presence of lions, tigers and *cheetah*s (now extinct) in their regime.

The Mughals hunted lions all over north India. Officers of the East India Company emulated them and William Frazer, who became Resident at Delhi's Mughal Court, hunted seven lions in Haryana. Up to the time of the 1857 Mutiny, lions were found and shot in central India. Akbar is believed to have had 1,000 *cheetah*s in his court. Now they are extinct and the 300 Asiatic lions are found only in the Gir forests.

At the beginning of this century, there were 40,000 tigers in the country. Hunting was a popular sport. Tigers were shot in large numbers and photographs taken of the dead animals at the feet of a triumphant hunter. As recently as 1961, Queen Elizabeth hunted a tiger in Sawai Madhopur. Subsequently her husband, Prince Phillip, turned conservationist and shot only with a camera. Hunting was stopped in 1972 when the number of tigers in the country were down to a little over 2,000. Project Tiger was launched the following year.

R.G. Soni, the chief wildlife warden of Rajasthan, points out that despite the dry, hot weather of Rajasthan, tigers flourished well in all districts of the State except Jaisalmer, Barmer, Bikaner, Churu, Sriganganagar, Hanumangarh and Nagaur in Rajasthan until the Forties. Rajasthan was famous for its tiger hunts. Due to the rapid increase in human and cattle population, the pressures on forests and wildlife kept increasing. The tiger habitats got degraded, were diverted for agriculture and industry, got fragmented and became devoid of prey forcing tigers to stray out in search of food. In the process they got killed.

Slowly, tigers were eliminated from district after district. Today they can be found only in the Project Tiger areas of Ranthambhore and Sariska, with only a few in the adjoining Ramgarh-Vishdhari and Jamua-Ramgarh sanctuaries.

What happened to the tiger in Rajasthan happened in the rest of the country too. With forests shrinking and human and animal pressure increasing, man/animal conflicts have been on the increase. There has been retaliatory poisoning of tigers by cattle owners who have lost cows and buffaloes to the tiger.

Just how serious this problem is can be borne out by the 400 to 500 cattle kills reported from around Corbett National Park annually in the late Nineties. After nine or 10 cases of retaliatory tiger poisoning in which a tigress and three cubs were killed, the WWF Tiger Conservation Programme intervened offering speedy and realistic compensation for cattle kills. The scheme implemented with the support of Corbett Foundation, a local NGO, was so successful that poisoning of tigers was arrested in the region. Though the Government too provides compensation, it took its own time to do so and the money was too little.

With realistic compensation in their pockets, villagers have accepted the regular loss of cattle as a 'jungle tax' in return for the free fodder from the forests, says G.D. Sarin of the Corbett Foundation. But it is difficult to tell how long this truce will last. Cattle compensation cannot be stopped. Long term conservation demands measures like reducing the number of cattle by substituting high yielding varieties and creating more avenues for income generation in the villages surrounding tiger reserves.

White tigers are an aberration. They are albinos. When the first one, Mohan, was discovered in the jungles of Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, he was brought to the Rewa palace in 1951 and nurtured with tender care. It is Mohan who sired a large number of the white tigers and their progeny that can now be found in the zoos all over the country and even abroad. In fact, there are probably more white tigers abroad than in India. Because of inbreeding, some white ones have been born with deformities and others are highly susceptible to infections.

The death of the tigers in Nandankanan is a warning to conservationists. There are about 3,700 tigers left in the wild. If we do not give them space and their natural prey, if we cannot stop the poachers, the tiger will go the way of the *cheetah*. The death of tigers in the wild is more ominous than their death in a zoo.

Fighting pollution

EACH winter, North India reels under cold, fog and pollution. Driving after sunset in the bigger cities, choc-a-bloc with trucks, buses, a never-ending line of cars and two wheelers, is fast becoming a nightmare. Despite claims made by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) that pollution in Delhi has reduced because of various preventive measures, it is difficult to accept these claims.

Acrid diesel and petrol fumes assault your senses and make your eyes smart. In the thick smog it is difficult to see more than a few feet ahead. Meanwhile there is a long line of patients with respiratory ailments waiting outside clinics.

GREEN TALK

Everyone is concerned about the high levels of pollution and an increasing number of asthma patients. The roads are choking with traffic and there is no space for expansion. But the government continues to encourage car manufacturers. A dozen new models are to hit our already overcrowded streets. In fact a market driven economy, blindly promoting car manufacture militates against the needs of conservation and the growth of cities in a manner that enables people to breathe freely and safely. Pedestrians, those driving two-wheelers and even policemen can be seen wearing masks.

Though a package of measures for improving air quality is being discussed, no one is questioning the policy that enables so many new models of cars. There are 3.3 million vehicles on Delhi's roads which is more than the number of vehicles in Mumbai, Calcutta and Chennai put together. Nearly 800 vehicles a day were registered in Delhi in 1999. However, the number of cycles in Delhi and other big towns has been steadily declining. This is because it is no longer safe to cycle to work.

Even talk of a mass transport system – a metro for the capital – has low priority. It may take a decade for a mass transport system to be operational by which time Delhi's population and traffic will have increased phenomenally. In any case there is not as much money to be made on a public transport system as there is on a new line of sleek automobiles. So why should bureaucrats and politicians bother?

The chairman, CPCB, Dr. Dilip Biswas, as a government servant, cannot be critical of the ham-handed policy on automobile production. But he does say that if pollution control has to be tackled it has to be this way: "improve public transport and discourage private transport".

Here are his answers to questions on pollution control/smog.

How many of the metros are affected by smog? How does vehicular pollution escalate the problem?

Fog occurs all over North India – not just the big cities but in all open spaces including rural areas. It occurs when the atmosphere is calm and air and all its constituents mix at a comparatively low level. Fog is not caused by pollution. But it does increase pollution, for pollution-laden air hangs low unable to escape.

Some scientists maintain that fog in northern India is primarily because of intensive agriculture (rabi crop) in the winter months. However, this has not yet been confirmed. The second theory is that if there is moisture in the air, it mixes with dust particles making it more difficult for moisture to be released into the upper strata of the atmosphere.

A few months ago, there were reports that pollution in Delhi had reduced. Is it true? Has pollution increased this winter?

Some of the major sources of pollution have been reduced. This includes the *phatphaties* (World War Two vintage heavy motor bikes on which a carriage is mounted) and all 15-year-old vehicles; the quality of petrol has improved with lead being removed and the introduction of pre-mixed 2T oil for two-stroke scooter engines. There has been a 97 per cent reduction in lead in the air. The sulphur content in diesel supplied to Delhi has also been going down steadily from 1996. However, to attain the Euro-2 norms, it will have to be reduced further.

Though there has been a marginal improvement in terms of air quality, on certain days due to "inversion", pollution does increase. But in Delhi it is less than it was last winter. Pollens that cause allergies are more common in spring than in winter.

Is Delhi still the world's fourth most polluted city?

This is no longer true. The World Health Organisation ranking of 1985 was of cities with high particulate matter in the air. There is high dust level in all our cities, especially in Delhi.

What is the biggest cause of pollution? Is it still due to vehicular pollution?

In our cities it is vehicular pollution. But water quality is also poor and that is due to the high level of municipal waste in the water. Even in the big cities where treated, piped water is supplied, the excessive use of bore wells, booster pumps and sewage lines running close to rusted and broken water pipes is causing water contamination. Enteric diseases are on the rise.



M. Lakshmana

Shrinking road space is no deterrent for car manufacturers.

What about pollution caused by diesel vehicles? What is more serious – diesel or petrol pollution.

I do not distinguish between diesel and petrol pollution. All long chain hydrocarbons, whether diesel or petrol, pollute. Diesel pollution is more visible than petrol pollution. If hydrocarbon fuels have to be used, it is better to use short chain hydrocarbons like compressed natural gas, propane, butane and methane. In diesel vehicles a high degree of sulphur and carbon soot is released. Both diesel and petrol vehicles have to observe Euro standards set for April 2000, where a multi-point fuel injection system is mandatory.

Is there a strategy to fight pollution in the country?

A national programme is on the cards. Mr. J. K. Nair heads a committee to manage the pollution levels. It has met seven or eight times and a time-bound plan is being worked out.

However, pollution control is possible only if we take care of basic amenities like air and water. Cars have to be standardised. Our roadsides and alleys are full of litter and dirt that does not seem to bother anyone. So our people need to be disciplined – to have basic civic sense. While it is true that there is the tremendous pressure of population on our cities, it is a population that has to be aware of its civic responsibilities. There are no easy solutions to controlling pollution. ■

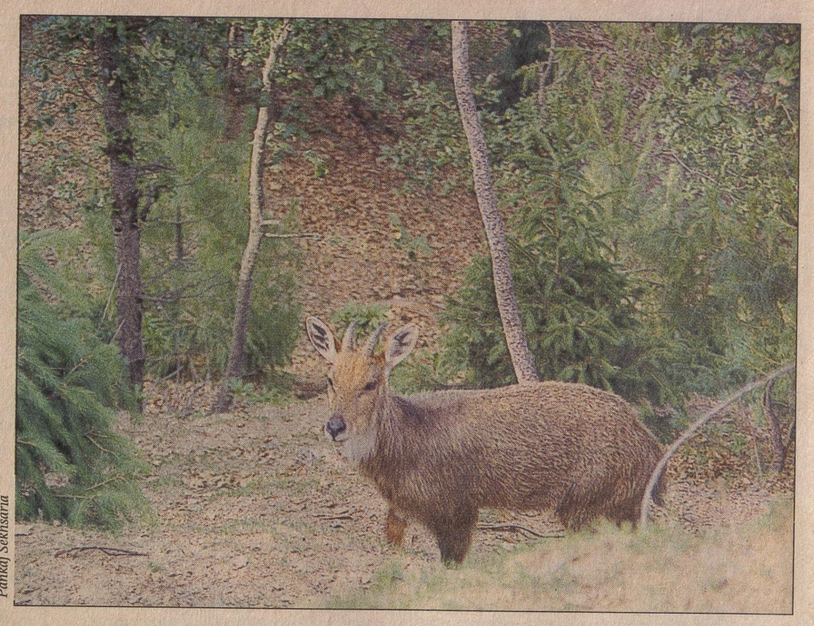
USHA RAI

M

Damning eco- reserves

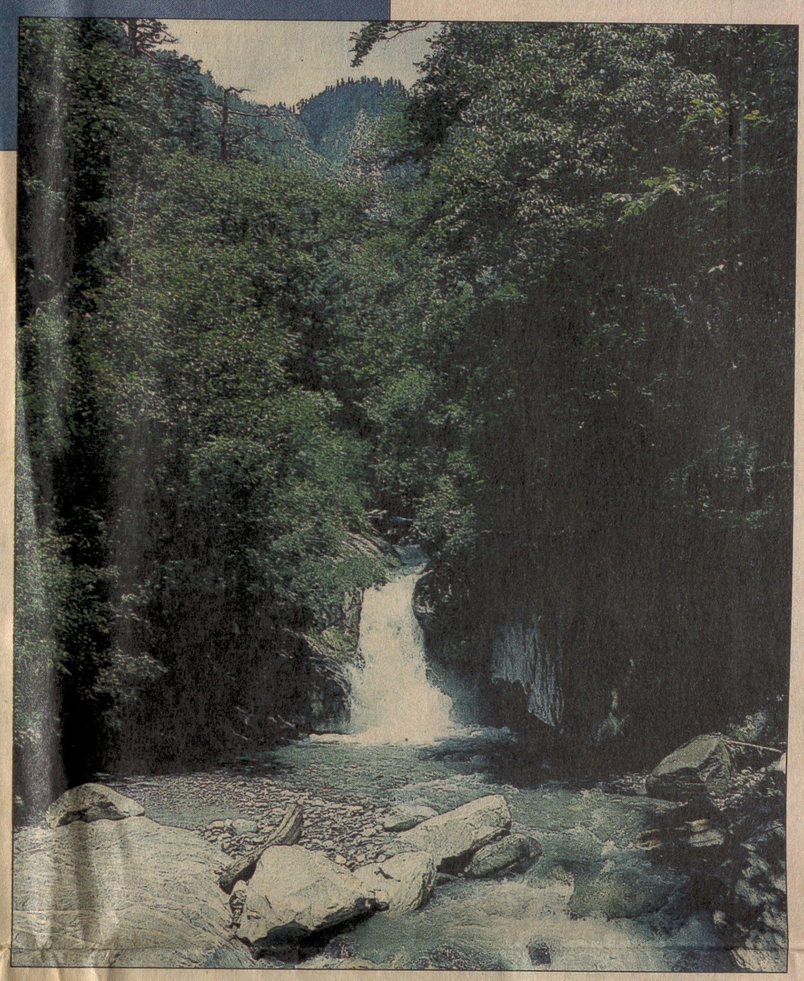
One of the most shocking cases of denotification is that of 10 sq. km. of the Great Himalayan National Park on May 28 last year for a hydro-electric project. The park is home to a host of endangered plants and animals. With the Government's turnaround, the core area of the park will be disturbed by extensive movement of men and material for the project.

USHA RAI makes out a case for protecting existing reserves.



Pankaj Sekhsaria

Endemic species ... Goral, a wild goat.



Ashish Kothari

Treasure-trove of rare medicinal plants.

THE threat to the country's national parks and sanctuaries continues unabated. But the worst kind of desecration of a protected area is its denotification. It takes years of planning and preparation before an area is declared protected because it is home to various endangered species of wildlife and is rich in biodiversity. But denotification takes much less time and effort once a powerful business house or the State itself sets its eyes on a sanctuary or national park for so called "development". This could be for mining or even setting up an irrigation project or a dam.

Human greed backed by an unabated pressure of human population is taking its toll on the green reserves of the country at an astonishing pace. According to information available with Ashish Kothari who brings out a

GREEN TALK

comprehensive Protected Areas Update, there are currently 18 protected areas that have been denotified/ deleted or proposed for denotification and under the process of settlement of rights for protected areas. These include the Pabho Sanctuary and the Bordoibarm Bilmukh Bird Sanctuary (*Assam*), Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary, Balaram Ambajee Wildlife Sanctuary, Dharangadra Wild Ass Sanctuary, Kutch Desert Sanctuary and the Marine National Park (*Gujarat*), the Great Himalayan National Park, the Sangla Wildlife Sanctuary, the Lippa Asrang Wildlife Sanctuary and the Rupo Bhabha Sanctuary (*Himachal Pradesh*), the Madhav National Park, Sanjay National Park, Bhagwan Mahavir Sanctuary and Son Charial Sanctuary (*Madhya Pradesh*) and Tadobha Andhari Tiger Reserve, Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary and Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary (*Maharashtra*).

One of the most shocking cases of denotification is that of 10 sq. km of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) on May 28 last year for construction of the 2051 mega watts Parbati hydro electric in Kulu District. In fact the Park was notified just a couple of years ago and in his letter of March 7, 1994 declaring his intention to constitute the National Park, the then Governor of Himachal Pradesh had stated that the area is of great ecological, faunal, flora, geomorphological and geological importance. The turn around is therefore more shocking. All of a sudden the important area of the Jiwa Valley seems to have lost its ecological value and is being excluded from the National Park.

Half a dozen environment and conservation related organisations like INTACH Regional Chapter, Himachal Pradesh, Dhauladhar Public Education Society of Kangra district, the Chipko Soochana Kendra, Chamba, the Shimla Initiative for Nature, Environment and Wildlife, Kalpavriksh Environment Action Group, Pune and the Himalayan Nature and Environment Preservation Society have written to the Prime Minister, the Environment and Forest Minister and the Himachal Chief Minister complaining that this change of heart is "incomprehensible" and "unacceptable".

Though the stated reason for the denotification of the Jiwa Valley from the National Park is the settlement of rights of the people of Kundar and Manjhan villages, the main intention seems to be to facilitate the Parbati hydel project.

The GHNP is home to a host of critically endangered plants and animals like the Serow, the Himalayan Tahr, the Chir Pheasant, the Musk Deer and the Western Tragopan which has been listed in the Red Data Book of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In fact the Western Tragopan is limited to the Western Himalayas and the GHNP is one of the two National Parks in the world that supports the bird. The Park falls within one of the globally important endemic bird areas. One hundred and eighty-three bird species have been recorded in the park. This is one of the few national parks that was established after detailed scientific and ecological investigations by a team of internationally reputed scientists and experts.

The Ibex and snow leopard can also be found in this 755 sq.km park situated between 2,000 m and 5,500 m above sea level. In addition the park has a dozen rare medicinal plants with tremendous export potential and at least one variety of incense. In this park can also be found Yew trees (*Taxus baccata*) which has tremendous commercial value. According to research done by Shukla and others, a 20-year-old yew tree from the park can yield upto 30 kg of leaves and 5 kg of bark to produce four grams of taxol worth $10,000 in the American market. New finds in the pharmaceutical industry have encouraged the commercialisation of medicinal herbs and animal products, providing fresh impetus for harvesting of these plants by the local people.

The northern and eastern boundaries of the park are under permanent snow, while the southern boundary is along a high ridge and almost impassable. There are no roads to the park and the western boundary is approachable only along bridle paths through rugged terrain along the Parbati, Jiwa, Sainj and Tirthan rivers.

It was the GHNP's relative inaccessibility that made it easier to protect than some other areas of comparable ecology. Now, however, all this may be compromised. While the part of the national park that has been denotified will be directly and adversely affected by the activities of the Parbati river valley project, the core area of the park will also be disturbed by the extensive movement of men and material for the project work.

In addition there will be the pressure of local people who use the park for grazing their livestock and collecting herbs and mushrooms. About 35,000 sheep and goats graze in the park in the summer months and about 2,500 people collect herbs from August to October and mushrooms from April to June. Most villagers using the park have agreed to give up herb collection and livestock grazing in the park if other means of income generation are available. A large number of trees continue to be cut in the area, mainly to satisfy the demand for timber for house construction and repair by those who have traditionally held this right to a forest resource.

Various environment groups, concerned about development of the State, do not want biodiversity or ecological security of the State sacrificed at the altar of development.

There are reports coming in from other parts of Himachal Pradesh of moves to denotify other sanctuaries and areas of ecological value. In fact ever since the denotification of the Darlaghat wildlife sanctuary in 1991 for the setting up of the Ambuja cement plant. Himachal Pradesh has acquired notoriety for its treatment of protected areas.

In fact, Himachal Pradesh is the ideal place for tapping power through small, micro hydel, run of the mill projects that will cause minimum damage of any kind. ■

BAYER ON CARDIOVASCULAR PROPHYLAXIS



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INTERACT VISION BIL/55

The poachers are winning

STATISTICS available with the wildlife wing of the Environment and Forests Ministry show a phenomenal increase in tiger poaching across the country, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra. In fact the situation is as alarming as it was in 1993 when the second tiger crisis was declared, says Mr. Ashok Kumar of the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI).

"A demand for tiger skins is growing. The upsurge is unprecedented. We suspect that they may be going to West Asia – Dubai, Kuwait – where sheikhs want to embellish their drawing rooms with the skins. The number of leopard skins seized indicates that in the West it is once again becoming fashionable to sport such skins. Western fashion magazines indicate that leopard skins are the industrial raw material of the fashion industry."

While tiger skin is too thick to be used by the garment industry, leopard skin drapes well. There was a time when anyone seen wearing a skin was ridiculed. That kind of campaign has to be started again to dissuade people from wearing animal furs and skins.

Even the Additional Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), Environment and Forest Ministry, Mr. S. C. Sharma, acknowledges that the situation is alarming. "In the 1990s, when non-government organisations, national and international, maintained that one tiger was being killed everyday we did not believe them. Now there is enough evidence to indicate that this is true. It is a 'wake up call' for those in the business of wildlife conservation."

Going by Ashok Kumar's and Sharma's statements it seems India, which has 60 per cent of the world's population of tigers, is heading for a third tiger crisis.

Between February 1998 to February this year, 54 tiger skins were seized by forest departments and the police, some of them from protected areas and towns and villages close to national parks and sanctuaries. Fifty-four may not seem an alarming number but one has to remember that the figure represents the tip of the iceberg. Many of those arrested have confessed to having killed five and six tigers in the past six months to a year. It may be difficult to get proof for the skins and bones would probably have been disposed of. But at the same time it would be foolish to dismiss them as idle boasts. Why should a trader or a poacher talk about his misdeeds, particularly when he is facing a jail term?

On January 12, near Arha, Fatehpur district of Uttar Pradesh, sleuths of the Trade Regulating Authority for Flora and Fauna in Conservation Worldwide Fund For Nature (TRAFFIC – WWF-N) seized 70 leopard skins, four tiger skins, 18,000 leopard claws and 132 tiger claws from a house. The raid was conducted at dawn with the assistance of the local police and it took hours to count, says Mr. Manoj Mishra of TRAFFIC. All seven members of the family were arrested and confessed that trade in wildlife products was their only means of livelihood.

Some of the skins had come from places as far the Sunderbans, West Bengal, home to the largest number of tigers in a single protected area. Four cases of tiger poaching have been officially reported from the Sunderbans last year. There were other cases of dead tigers. In March, 16 kg of tiger bone was seized from two different places – Katni Umaria (eight kilograms) and Bandhavgarh (nine kilograms), in Madhya Pradesh. In February 1999, 12 kg of tiger bone was seized from Bhawali, near Nainital, Uttar Pradesh.

In April, 140 kg of tiger bones was seized from Nautenwa on the Indo-Nepal border. The same month in Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh, three tiger skins, six skeletons and 56 kg of bones were seized.



Gamma

Spots and stripes ... leopard and tiger skins are in demand.

GREEN TALK

The South does not fare too badly. In Bellary, Karnataka, five skins were seized. It is feared that poachers may have struck at Nagarhole National Park (Karnataka) or the Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (Tamil Nadu). In Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, in March 1999, five pairs of tiger claws were seized.

Leopard and tiger claws are used to make lockets and other items of adornment. Despite all the hue and cry about the use of tiger bones in Chinese medicines, the demand continues unabated. The most popular route for exporting the powdered bone, neatly parcelled like heroin, is via Nepal.

A wildlife enthusiast and frequent visitor to Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh, Mr. S. P. Mathur, fears that there may be no male tigers left in the park. There are only two or three sub-adults who will be ready to breed only after two years, he says. From Last October to this January six tigers have been killed. The unofficial figure is nine. Information from the WWF-N – Tiger Conservation Programme indicates that about eight tigers have been poached in this park, which, as in the 1997 census is said to have 46 tigers.

What is interesting is that the incident came to light quite accidently. A businessman travelling from Tala to Manpur by taxi, on the periphery of Bandhavgarh, reported to the police that he had been robbed of Rs. 35,000 in December. Mr. Chauhan, who was in charge of the Manpur police station, arrested Jhilu Singh in this connection. The money was recovered and when he was asked about what he did for a living, he said he was in the skin trade along with Millu Singh. He claimed to have killed a tiger just eight days earlier.

The police went to the spot where the skin was buried and managed to exhume it. The bones were recovered from another spot. The skin was of a large tigress and there was intense speculation that it was Sita, one of the Bandhavgarh's most famous tigresses, who had been missing over a year ago. Sita was quite old but had raised several cubs in the park and had been captured on film by some of the world's leading wildlife film makers. In fact there was a demonstration outside the police station by the local people who respected and loved Sita. However, according to Mr. Sharma, the WPSI says it is not Sita. However, the point is that a tigress was killed – it is immaterial whether it was Sita or some other animal. After being trapped in a wire loop trap it had been clubbed to death so that there were no holes or scars to reduce the value of skin.

Jhilu Singh confessed to having killed six tigers in the last six months. (In fact there is a saying in Bandhavgarh that when a son is born in a Thakurs home, a male tiger is killed. No one wants to say if it is true).

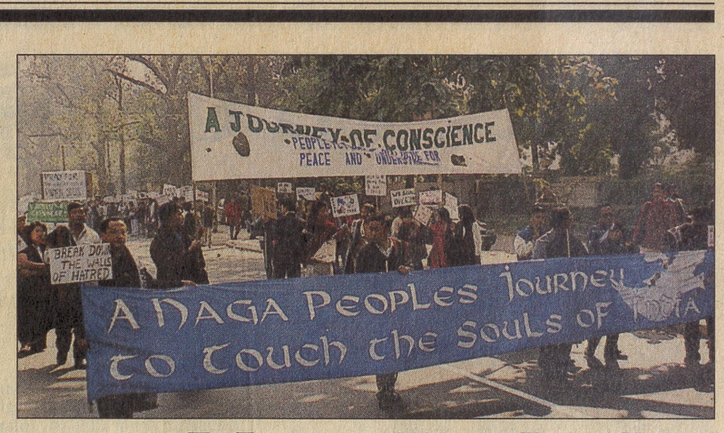
WPSI has been to Andhra Pradesh to investigate two instances of tiger poaching reported two months ago. A suspect is alleged to have confessed killing six tigers.

Mr. S. C. Sharma said prosecutions had been launched in most of the 54 cases of poaching reported in last two years. However, in the absence of environmental courts or tribunals and the lack of conclusive evidence, most poachers manage to walk away.

Take the case of Shabir Ali who was arrested two years ago with a number of leopard skins near Satna in U.P. According to the WPSI, even though the man is involved in a couple of hundred cases of poaching he is free as the case was not properly handled by the police.

In the last seven/eight years only one poacher has been sentenced three years ago by the Calcutta court. He was caught having the skin of a Sundarbans tiger. He was sentenced by the lower courts to five years but when the WPSI moved the case to the sessions courts hoping for a longer sentence, it was in fact reduced to three years. A six year sentence can be given for poaching tiger skins. But to date this has not happened. ■

USHA RAI



Lead kindly light

THE media often misses out on important processes because it is looking out for an event to report. As a result, a significant event which represents the beginning of an important process was almost completely ignored. On January 30, Gandhiji's death anniversary, a group of 60 Naga men and women gathered at his *samadhi*. They observed silence in remembrance of Nagas and Indians who had died in the decades long struggle for self-determination that has refused to be resolved in Nagaland. And although they had hoped they would be ready to sing Gandhiji's favourite hymn, "Vaishnava Jana To", they finally sang "Lead Kindly Light", another hymn that he liked.

What these Nagas represent is an important search for peace in a troubled land. They come from a number of human rights and civil society groups including the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), the Naga Students' Federation, the Naga Mothers' Association, the Naga Hoho and the United Naga Council of Manipur. The Naga Church bodies are also involved. Together they have launched out on a "Journey of Conscience" to talk to the rest of India. This, they say, is essential as their link to India has been mainly through the Home Ministry and the Planning Commission. They have not tried to talk directly to the country. Their journey to New Delhi on January 30 was the first step in an exploration which, they hope, will take them to other cities like Bangalore and Chennai.



Mr. Niketu Iralu at the Rajghat.

One of the people on this journey was Mr. Niketu Iralu, a non-partisan Naga who has been involved in peace-making efforts and also in helping to tackle the growing addiction to alcohol and drugs among young Nagas. On a private visit to Mumbai, Mr. Iralu explained the context within which this "Journey of Conscience" by today's Nagas is being undertaken and explained its significance. "Things are going from bad to worse in Nagaland. Too many have already been killed. People are caught in the crossfire between different warring groups. We are shouting to ourselves and ending up destroying one another. A small community like ours must know ourselves and be extra wise and realistic to survive today. We certainly have no chance if we are to recklessly play with the doctrine of ends and means."

Mr. Iralu said he was "disturbed" that the leader of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), Mr. T. Muivah, with whom the Government had initiated peace talks in August 1997 following a ceasefire, had been arrested by the Thai police on his way from Karachi. He said whatever the tactical compulsions maybe for going there, "speaking strictly as a concerned individual", and although not knowing the season for the trip, it did not augur well for the peace process.

"Pakistan seems obsessed with revenge to wound India for understandable reasons. But if Nagas will exploit this for our own immediate advantage it will do irreparable harm to Nagas, India and Pakistan in the long run. This danger is so serious it must be expressed. This strong temptation must be resisted. To yield to it would be against the way of the Cross and Nagas must not treat it lightly".

Yet, unlike other people from his tribe, many of whom have been killed by the NSCN, he fully condemns these as terrible wrongs which must be righted.

Mr. Iralu has backed the roles of Mr. Muivah and his Chairman, Mr.Isak Swu as the representatives of the Nagas at the peace talks. "They achieved it and it must be recognised," he said. Also, despite his close links with and his recognition of Mr. Phizo as the undoubted father of the Naga struggle, Mr. Iralu has openly gone on record to state that Mr. Phizo was wrong in not making his "official position" clear on the Shillong Accord, signed in 1975 between some members of the Naga underground and the Government of India. People waited in vain for Mr. Phizo's official response. Mr. Phizo's complete rejection of the accord was clearly communicated in writing to those closest to him. But it was not enough. If he had made his disagreement apparent, "loud and clear", the course of Naga politics, Mr. Iralu believed, could have been different. The division in the Naga underground took place on the question of the legitimacy of the accord. Tribal rivalries also had become too strong, he added.

Although the official talks between the Government and the Naga underground have been postponed, Mr. Iralu said it was imperative that a solution be worked out before the current cease-fire ends in August. At the same time, he said it was important to build an unquestionable consensus among all the warring Naga groups before the negotiations began with the Government. This had been conveyed by all non government organisations on behalf of Nagas at a widely-attended meeting in Dimapur last May convened by the NSCN(I-M).

Naga society is deeply divided among the different factions and there is no consensus about the terms of a final settlement. Mr. Iralu said that he was personally committed to helping the creation of a process so that such a consensus emerged.

Working closely with the Naga Mothers' Association and Kripa Foundation of Mumbai, Mr. Iralu has been involved in tackling the problem of drugs and alcohol addiction. He said the worrying factor in Nagaland today is the presence of weapons. "Those who have AK-47s, run the show. These are the freelance extortionists who collect money for any group and for themselves." Addiction was also a major problem which had touched almost every family.

The problems within Nagaland were immense, he said. At the same time, it was important for Nagas to talk among themselves and directly to Indians and for the Government to listen to what they said. Gandhiji was respected and loved by the Nagas because he listened to them and understood what they were trying to convey.

Regardless of what had happened in the past, Mr. Iralu believes that Nagas "have to move on" and do what he terms "spiritual breathing". At first, he says, "only toxic poisons will come out. But only then will fresh air come in." ■

KALPANA SHARMA

Putting teeth into wildlife laws

Frightening as it may sound, Jim Corbett's 'Gentleman of the Jungle' is facing virtual extinction. With rampant poaching, depleting forest cover and conflict with man, the tiger finds itself not a predator but helpless prey. Despite a plethora of laws, conviction remains a farce. What is needed is the will to turn things around, says DEVAKI PANINI.



Vivek R. Sinha/Wildlerfile

Indifference will spell the end of the mascot of our natural heritage.

THE most recent tiger census in the country has set off alarm bells ringing once again with the estimated tiger population (in the wild) put at a mere 3,000. This census (although controversial) has proved one fact – that man continues to haunt and threaten the tiger, considered to be the most fearfed and magnificent wild animal in the sub-continent.

The exercise has filled conservationists with a sense of unease, as the plight of the big cat also indicates the state and health of wildlife in the country. Conservationists are worried as the tiger is at apex of the food chain and ruthless hunting of tigers spells doom for other species. Despite all the media attention, the tiger is now as vulnerable and helpless as the obscure pink headed duck and the cheetah, (now both extinct in India) once were. And yet India has enough laws that ostensibly address conservation. Ironically, even our most stringent conservation laws seem completely ineffective against arresting growing threats to the tiger and other endangered species.

A common perception among experts is that despite concerted efforts by government and non-government organisations for protecting wildlife and habitats, even a highly protected species like the tiger is on the verge of extinction. Increasing human pressure on forests and the loss of natural habitat threaten the very existence of this endangered cat. Despite additional support from conservation, NGOs and funding agencies (like the World Bank) and a marginally better infrastructure than ever before in tiger reserves, poaching is still a widespread problem.

Hardly a month ago, an alarming instance of a seizure of a tiger skin was made near a well-protected tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh. A number of seizures of tiger skins and body parts are made and cases of poaching are routinely being reported from across the country. A number of factors can be attributed to the failure to stem poaching. Growing demand for tiger parts and derivatives in other eastern countries (mainly for use in traditional medicine) fuels and sustains trade in India. In fact illegal wildlife trade flourishes here because of the extremely porous border between India and Nepal. The problem is compounded by the low profile of the organised mafia of poachers who recruit impoverished local people to commit wildlife crimes for petty sums of money.

Although our Legislature has enacted specific statutes, like the National Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, that unequivocally protect wildlife, regular incidences of wildlife crime is common. Matters are made worse because conviction in such cases is rare.

Wildlife cases are particularly tricky to handle as the crime occurs in remote forest areas where there is hardly any evidence to conclusively establish the link between the offender and the offence. Witnesses are also extremely hard to find as these cases occur in isolated forest areas (where human habitation is restricted by law). As cases often drag on, key witnesses turn hostile either because of political pressure of or because they just cannot afford to travel to district courts. To make matters worse, the preliminary offence report (or the 112 diaries as they are called) are often improperly prepared as there is inadequate trainning and fragmented understanding of wildlife law amongfield personnel. Thus, most cases are inherently weak and are routinely dismissed by the Judiciary on grounds of "insubstantial" or "inconclusive" evidence. Even in cases with overwhelming evidence, a lenient view is taken, often giving the benefit of the doubt to the offender.

Conviction rare

Despite stringent provisions in the National Wildlife (Protection) Act, which strictly prohibits hunting and any trade in wildlife or wildlife parts or articles, conviction is rare. The now famous Salman Khan black buck shooting case (where despite intense media attention the accused was let off the hook) amply demonstrates this fact. The abysmally low rate of conviction further demoralises forest staff who work in remote areas and in dangerous conditions, sometimes even risking their lives to go counter organised wildlife crime.

In 1998, in an incident in the Simlipal tiger reserve, Orissa, a forest guard suffered multiple fractures fighting an organised band of timber smugglers. In another incident in Balasore, a forester sustained serious injuries after being trampled by a elephant. Forest personnel in Dudhwa, Uttar Pradesh, recounted how they had lost two colleagues in a gruesome encounter with a man-eating tiger. The growing sense of frustration among forest staff regarding the enforcement of wildlife laws is understandable as after unimaginable risks, the poachers they manage to apprehend are quickly acquitted. In fact, easy acquittal encourages offenders to brazenly commit wildlife offences, making a mockery of our wildlife laws.

In visits to five tiger reserves, namely Tadoba, Bandhavgarh, Sariska, Dudhwa and Corbett Tiger reserves (in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), one observed first-hand the obstacles in wildlife cases.

Cases in protected areas are handled by forest personnel, i.e. the forest guard, forester and the range forest officer of the wildlife wing. Field personnel who are responsible for the detection of wildlife crime, collection of evidence and apprehension of the offender, are at a distinct disadvantage when compared to the police. Unlike the police, they are hardly equipped or trained to deal with wildlife crime. Most often they patrol vast stretches of forest on foot. Even the basic wireless set is a luxury and only a few reserves can boast of having guards with wireless sets. Fighting crime means not just facing hardships in the field, but the innumerable snags even after cases are heard in court. To top it all, forest departments have a miniscule budget for wildlife management, out of which there is hardly any money allocated for litigation for crime. In many cases, field staff in tiger reserves have often personally borne expenses of litigation for carrying out their official duties in nabbing poachers. To add insult to injury, field staff (who are on non-family postings) are hardly entitled to any benefits apart from their wages. In some reserves, forest departments cannot even afford staff uniforms.

Complicated provisions

Clearly, forest staff face formidable difficulties in enforcing wildlife law. Not the least among them is the interpretation of complicated legal provisions. As with most of our laws, the language in the Wildlife (Protection) Act is difficult and incomprehensible to the layman. And as if the legal parlance was not difficult enough and all wildlife cases being criminal cases, the field staff struggle with the complex criminal procedure code. The application of criminal law in wildlife cases is daunting for forest staff given the archaic legal language and widespread apprehension among front-line staff about court procedures. In order to ensure success in wildlife cases, it is crucial to simplify the law. A complete understanding of wildlife law would only be possible when legal infirmities in wildlife cases are carefully examined.

In most cases, direct evidence is absent. Therefore forensic and medical reports are crucial. Similarly, circumstantial evidence may be adduced to establish the nexus between the offence and the organised mafia of poachers. Field personnel must be acquainted with what can legally constitute "evidence" in a case especially as they are responsible for the detection of an offence and the gathering of evidence. Similarly, personnel have to be conversant with the steps to be followed in an investigation. It is necessary to examine the errors and inaccuracies commonly made by field forest personnel in their preliminary offence report (which is the equivalent of a first information report (FIR) in a wildlife case).

Although wildlife conservation has innumerable problems, on the brighter side there has been an enhanced awareness about the need to protect wildlife. A pro-active Judiciary has also created better conditions for conservation. In wildlife cases too, like in other environmental cases, there have been a few instances of exceptional judicial activism. Most notably in the last decade, courts have delivered progressive judgments upholding the sanctity of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and championing the virtually unknown cause of wildlife. In these cases, courts have also referred to the constitutional mandate for wildlife protection and reiterated the importance of Articles 18-A and 51-G of the Constitution, which place a constitutional duty on the State and every citizen to preserve wildlife.

Ironically, despite heightened judicial concern for wildlife, wildlife crime is still not viewed as seriously as crimes against human beings such as murder and grievous hurt. However, in some cases the Judiciary has upheld the true spirit and intent of the WPA, 1972 and interpreted its provisions in order to facilitate forest departments in carrying out their duties.

Way back in 1990, in a landmark decision, in the Forest Range Officer versus Aboobucker case, the Kerala High Court made an exception in poaching cases and held that the rule of corroboration of evidence by two independent witnesses would not be rigidly followed in wildlife cases. The court felt that this rule could be waived in these cases. It recognised that difficult conditions would make it virtually impossible for forest officers to produce two independent witnesses to corroborate evidence of crime. Consequently, the court held that confessions made by offenders to the officers could be relied upon as evidence and would not need further corroboration.

Similarly, the Madhya Pradesh High Court exhibited exemplary judicial activism in the recent the State of Madhya Pradesh versus Sayed Yahya Ali case. It ruled that all animals, animal parts and instruments used in commission of the offence were government property and, therefore, could not be released by forest officers on the payment of surety. In this case, it held that the power to release vehicles used in the wildlife offence would stand suspended as vehicles used in committing wildlife offences would be government property. Thus officers could not release jeeps used in a wildlife offence even on furnishing security. The court noted that Section 50 (2) of the WPA, 1972 that had provided for release of vehicles on payment of surety, had been expressly omitted in the latest amendment in 1991 to the act. Consequently, the power given to officers to release vehicles and other instruments used in the offence was withheld. The court strictly construed the provisions of the act and held that its intent would be defeated if vehicles and other instruments used in an offence could be returned to the offender on the payment of money.

Judicial activism notwithstanding, it is apparent that much needs to be done in order to improve the face of conservation.

In several tiger reserves, forest staff have articulated the need for the appointment of an independent environmental lawyer in assisting the department in wildlife cases. As the public prosecutor (who routinely handles wildlife cases) is overburdened with other cases (i.e. of cases of narcotic smuggling), hiring such a lawyer would be imperative in fighting crime. Since wildlife crime frequently occurs inside the boundaries of protected areas, the territorial wing of the department would also need to be alerted and trained. The creation of a special bench at the district courts for the hearing of wildlife cases has also been suggested in many tiger reserves to expedite decisions in such cases. Suggestions to have mobile courts in protected areas have also been made.

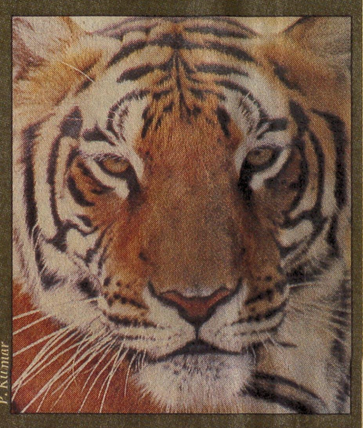
Most protected areas and tiger reserves have an unfortunate history of people-park conflicts. NGOs can play a role in diffusing these conflicts by creating a greater awareness of conservation laws among forest staff as well as local inhabitants. Innovative and humane compensation programmes (like the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-N) Tiger Conservation programme's cattle compensation scheme for villagers who lose cattle to wild animals) would be a positive step in this direction. There is also an urgent need to provide technical support and adequate legal training to forest staff so that wildlife cases have a better chance of success in court. Above all, if the Government is serious about protecting the tiger and other endangered species, it should tighten security on the virtually unmanned border between India and Nepal.

One fact is certain. Unless field forest staff are better equipped, informed and trained to counter wildlife poaching, the tiger might not survive in the wild this millennium. Recent suggestions from certain political circles to look for a more "appropriate" national animal might not then be as ridiculous as they sound today. ■

The author, an environmental lawyer based in New Delhi, works as a legal consultant to the Tiger Conservation Programme, World Wide Fund for Nature-India. She has been involved in conducting legal workshops for field personnel of tiger reserves supported by the programme.

CONSERVATION

Success story?



P. Kumar

LAUNCHED on April 1, 1973, Project Tiger, a large-scale conservation programme, was thought of as a necessity to save the tiger and its dwindling habitats in India. It was founded on the sound scientific base of conservation, not in isolation, but on the concept of the preservation of the species in natural balance with the ecosystem. This was in the early 1970s. No one raised doubts or asked questions, but reposed full confidence in the proposal. Considering its conservation credentials and the leadership of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Karan Singh, Project Tiger received the support of the world. The World Wide Fund For Nature donated $1 million.

Credibility and goodwill, which boosted the morale of personnel, helped the programme. And displaying strong political will, Indira Gandhi guided the project personally. It was soon judged one of the most successful conservations in the world with Indira Gandhi being awarded the Commander of the Golden Ark by H.R.H. Prince Bernard of the Netherlands.

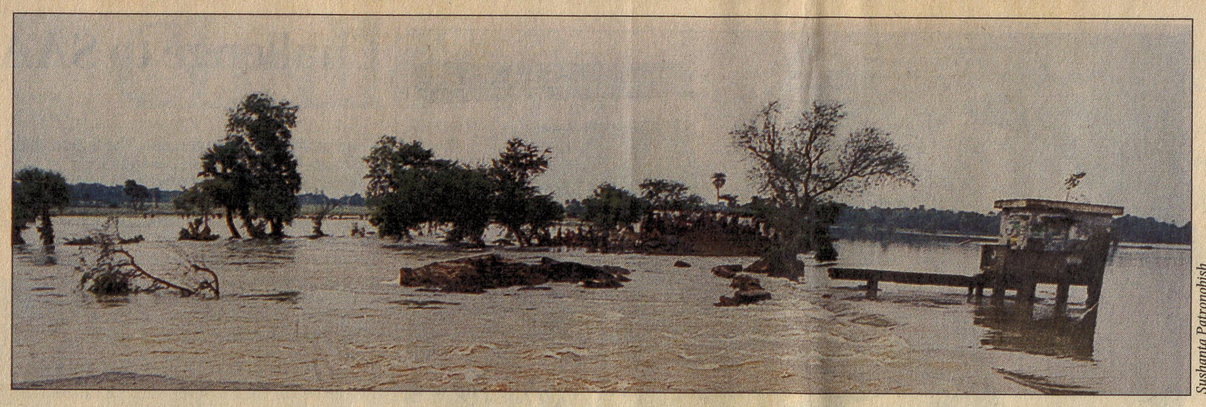
Initially nine reserves were created. Now there are 23 tiger reserves spread over 14 States and covering an area of about 33,000 sq.km..

They are Bandhavgarh, Bandipur, Buxa, Corbett, Dampa, Dudhwa, Indravati, Kanha, Manas, Melghat, Kalakad- Mundanthurai, Nagarjuna Sagar, Namdapha, Palamau, Panna, Pench, Periyar, Ranthambore, Sariska, Simlipal, Sundarbans, Tadoba A and Valmiki.

What is the situation like now?

"All tiger reserves," says Project Tiger's website (*http://envfor.nic.in/pt/tcroom/tcroom.html*) "face biotic pressure and threats from poachers and smugglers ... Seven tiger reserves have armed activists who have not only taken refuge but have made management exceedingly difficult ...."

Indeed there is a grave crisis at hand. The will to save the species has to exist. For if we lose, the majestic cat and a number of other species will not be around ... certainly not in the wild. ■



Sushanta Patronobish

Spinning out of control



Prasant Mitra

GREEN TALK

The gravity of natural disasters has been compounded by man's greed and his systematic interference with Nature. In the recent Orissa cyclone, the coastal areas were the worst hit, says USHA RAI.

RELEASING the Oxfam project's India Disaster Report to which nearly hundred people have contributed ideas and articles, Mrs. Maneka Gandhi, India's Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, pointed out that man-made disasters were being fobbed off as natural disasters. The gravity of these "natural disasters" has been compounded by man's greed and his systematic, sustained interference with nature.

In the recent Orissa cyclone, the maximum damage was caused in coastal areas where the mangroves had been uprooted for starting prawn and shrimp farms. In fact, the Orissa government has been repeatedly warned of the ecological hazards of removing the protective covering of the mangroves for the prawn farms. The Bhitarkanika stretch of the Orissa coastline was saved because the mangroves were still intact. In fact about 10 per cent of the mangroves forests are being cut every year. Paradip Port, and the areas surrounding it, were once rich mangrove forests.

In the chapter on "The Science Of Disasters", the author, Y. S. Gill, points out that "disasters have literally been spinning out of control lately. The ferocity of the 1998 Gujarat cyclone would have been tempered had coastal mangrove forests been intact. This is merely one instance where a devastated natural environ struck back."

With thousands of trees destroyed in the Orissa cycle, summer this year is likely to be scorching. For the last two or three years, a large number of heat stroke deaths has been reported from Orissa. In the midst of such a crisis, it seems criminal that the Orissa Government should even consider construction of the 480 kms long coastal highway from West Bengal to Andhra Pradesh via Orissa. With World Bank assistance, the Orissa government is hoping to exploit the potential of the coastal area. However, nature has sounded its warning and it would be foolish to go ahead with such an ecologically destructive project.

The Disaster Report brought out by Oxford University Press, and edited by S. Parasuraman and P. V. Unnikrishnan, dwells on the ecological damage caused by large scale deforestation, construction of big dams and the damage caused by erosion of community control over natural resources.

Large scale deforestation has aggravated flooding. Displaced people are invariably settled in forests and this further denudes the encroached forestlands. Rocks are being pulled out of riverbeds and fragile hills without a thought to what the consequences would be. The proposed Indian and foreign mining projects in western Orissa are expected to pollute 700 streams and threaten the survival of the local tribal people. We are laying the foundation for an erosion – a devastation that could be 20 times more serious, Mrs. Gandhi has warned.

While there is a great deal of attention at the time of the disaster, very little work is done between the disasters – though they come in regular cycles. Between one drought and the next, we do not work on systems of water harvesting. Mining leaves the forested areas ravaged and scarred but these wounds of nature are not treated or filled up.

Annually 24 million people are affected by disasters in India, 5,116 people die and the economic loss has been computed at $1,883.9 million. Natural disasters like floods affect 11.2 per cent of the land; drought affects 28 per cent of the land; cyclones – a 7,516 km long vulnerable coastline and earthquakes 57 per cent of the land.

Sohini Sengupta, a contributor to the *Report*, says the modern history of drought in India charts a course of demolition, exacerbated by irresponsible human interference. Areas in non-arid zones, with moderate to good rainfall, are becoming vulnerable to drought. In the Himalayan foothills, three decades of limestone quarrying have destroyed the forests and the perennial mountain streams.

In Saurashtra, the mining of natural aquifers of limestone for the cement industries has resulted in the ingress of saline desertification into the fertile ecosystem. In the Western Ghat watershed of Tungabhadra, iron ore mining has created drought by reducing base flows and increasing silt load on rivers. In Cherrapunji, once the wettest place on earth, the mixed natural forests in the upper catchment have been destroyed. Most of the 1,200 cm of annual rainfall runs off causing floods in Bangladesh. After the monsoon, the springs and rivers dry up – and there is drought.

Nineteen per cent of India's total area, with 12 per cent of its total population is considered drought-prone. Sengupta says critical changes in agricultural practices have ushered in intensive irrigation and promoted water hungry crops. This has phased out traditional crop mixes with inherent drought-proofing mechanisms to survive fluctuations in rainfall.

In fact environmental degradation impoverishes the people it touches and forces migration, frequently sparking off conflict between the displaced people and the host communities. The impoverished poor and the landless also put more pressure on natural resources for their survival.

"Pollution and its disastrous impact are closely linked with equity." Most people who suffer the impact of vehicular pollution do not own motor vehicles and those who are forced to use untreated foul swelling water do not have access to the sewers that pollute the rivers, says Max Martin in his arcicle on environmental disasters.

A World Bank sponsored study, estimated environmental damage in India in 1992 at $10 billion or Rs. 34,000 crores (4.5 per cent of the GDP). This figure is also an underestimation since it does not include many types of damages – biodiversity loss, health problems created by industrial waste, increased costs in providing clean water due to rising water pollution, says Martin.

Urban air pollution alone costs India $1.3 billion a year. Water degradation leads to health cost amounting to $5.7 million every year. In fact the report presents a grim picture of the state of India's environment. Soil erosion affects 83 to 163 million hectares of land every year. Land degradation leads to productivity loss equal to $2.4 billion or four to 6.3 per cent of agriculture productivity every year.

Between 1981 and 1990, forests of India vanished at the average annual rate of 0.6 per cent, costing the economy $214 million. Dams have ruined vital forests in catchment areas. Between 1951 and 1976, according to one estimate, Himanshu Thakkar says 4,90,000 hectares was denuded for dams. Large forest tracts in the Himalayan hills and the Western Ghats have been razed.

According to the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission, some 82,000 habitations of 44 million people suffer from a water quality problem.

In fact the emphasis has to be on environment protection even if this means re-looking at our sustainable development policies. This is our only hope for reducing the impact of droughts, floods and cyclones. The silver lining to what seems a bleak scenario is that hundreds of communities, from Orissa to Gujarat, have got together to protect their environment. If Anna Hazare has shown how people can regenerate aquifers in the once drought-prone area of Ralegaon Siddhi in Maharashtra, in the Alwar district of Rajasthan, Rajinder Singh has spearheaded a people's movement for rejuvenating water sources. ■

Tragedy on the grasslands

Every year, the pollution at Sabarimala caused by pilgrims poses a serious threat to wildlife in the area. This year, an elephant fell victim. B. PRATHAPAN writes.

LET us call her "Anamika", the nameless one.

None of her family was in sight when we reached her. The eerie silence of the vast and rolling grasslands was occasionally punctuated by the early February wind, as she lay motionless.

"Anamika" was a cow elephant in the prime of her reproductive life, and had refused to surrender till the very end. Life had ebbed away slowly, but not before she had fought the losing battle with death, trudging down the slopes in the direction of a waterhole. Her shapely ear was now motionless, the beautiful rounded forehead still. A ray of hope that the wind-fed ripples on that hairy forehead would unleash a heave that would see her up on her feet once again taunted me for a moment. Her eyes were half closed, as if expecting a gentle nudge from a curled trunk. A couple of faint folds around her small neck and her cute chin, tucked up a little bit, made her look cuddly, but that much more sad.

"Anamika" was found beside the dirt track from Uppupara to Sathram near Sabarimala in Kerala's Periyar Tiger Reserve, on the morning of February 6 by the watchers of the Kerala Forest Department. They had been asked to follow her, which they had been doing for sometime. H. Vibhu, the photographer, and I, from *The Hindu*, were with them.

A team of experts had watched her the previous evening for an hour or so on a hill slope a few kilometres away. Her herd was not in sight and she had been roaming the sholas and the grassland aimlessly. The watchers said she had stopped eating, a sign that something was gravely amiss.

The Forest Department's veterinary surgeon, Dr. E. K. Easwaran, was visibly concerned that there were no fresh droppings in the area where she had been. He frowned deeply when the watchers came back. The dried up ball of dung they had had a plastic carry bag sticking out of it. Did this explain the slight bulge to the left of her stomach?

Dr. P. S. Easa, wildlife biologist, Kerala Forest Research Institute, Peechi, also felt her solitary wanderings did not augur well.

"Anamika's" herd was not far away either. It had retreated, keeping a safe distance from the humans who had got too close. But once dusk set, its 13members, including four calves, came back to claim her. They pushed and shoved at her and took her along with them.

They had travelled four kilometres away along the slopes, perhaps hoping to find her a place where she could recover undisturbed. But she was not destined to make it. There was some tell-tale evidence in the grass of her last moments. It was all trampled on. The death must have been slow and painful. Had she thrashed about as spasms of pain spawned across her body? Had she been impervious to the pain?

It took several hours the next morning for the forest staff to reach the spot where she lay. The disturbed trumpeting of the bereaved herd could be heard from across a hill even as the humans stood around "Anamika" wondering what to do.

The scientists said the herd would remain traumatised for long. Elephant herds, they said, are matriarchal, formed by close-knit family groups. Every adult member has a vital role to play.

The sudden void left behind by "Anamika's" loss would confuse the herd for several weeks on end. Did she have a calf? The postmortem would show that she had been pregnant before. How old would the calf now be? Was it one of the four calves seen in the herd? Among elephants, the bond between mother and calf is deep and strong. In the case of death from natural causes, the animal would have been inactive for some time and another adult would have taken over its duties. But "Anamika" was healthy and had died suddenly, leaving the herd confused.

There was a sudden rumble and those of us standing nearby moved away quickly. For a fleeting moment there was hope. Was she reviving? But it turned out to be the noise of gases escaping from the bloated stomach. The men quickly went about the task of disposing of the body, cutting up the mass of flesh.

As the knives revealed the innards, the answers to most of our questions became clear. The intestines contained huge quantities of semi-digested material. There were tell-tale signs of infection and bloody lesions in the small intestine. Dr. Easwaran said the animal, around 40 years old, had most probably died after eating or drinking food or water contaminated with faecal bacteria – "Anamika" was an unfortunate victim of the threat posed by the hordes of pilgrims to the Dharmasastha temple in Sabarimala.

Ayyappa pilgrims drive up from Vandiperiyar on the Kumily-Kottayam road to reach Uppupara. From here it is a four-kilometre trek to the *sannidhanam*. But this track becomes a death trail for wildlife as plastic bags and food are strewn around. The hills on either side soon choke over with human excreta and waterholes become cesspools, polluted by faecal matter and putrefying foodstuff.

Wild animals are known to like salty and sweet foodstuffs and plastics and eagerly consume what is found, ingesting even the plastic covering in the process. While the deaths of large animals like elephants attract attention, mortality among the smaller animals like the majestic gaur and sambar goes unnoticed. Animal deaths after the pilgrim season are common, a figure that is rising every year.

This year, there was a ban on plastics at the *sannidhanam*, but many pilgrims who had brought their food wrapped in plastic carry bags were seen to be throwing it away. Clearly, authority had failed.

Fires started off by the visitors are another hazard wildlife in the area has to encounter during the season every year.

According to the Kerala Forest Department, about 50 lakh pilgrims visit the shrine every season. The Travancore Devaswom Board which manages the hill shrine, pegs the figure several times higher.

While the elephant, gaur, sambar, wild boar, Nilgiri langur and the bonnet macaque are the most visible animals of PTR, it has a healthy population of the tiger and the leopard and numerous bird species.

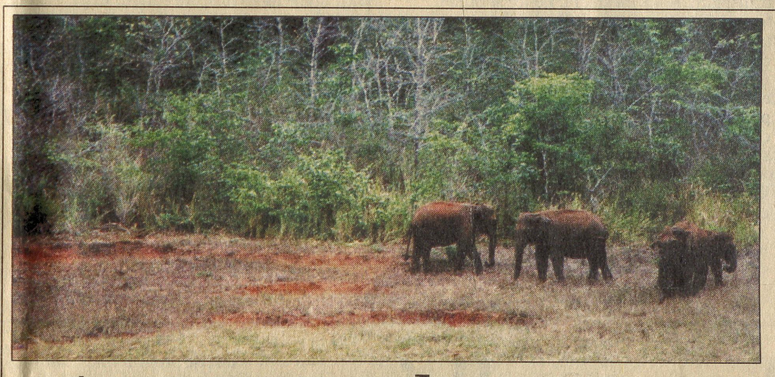
The PTR is now facing serious management problems, according to its Field Director, Dr. V. K. Uniyal. He says that apart from the influx of the tourists and the annual pilgrimage to the Sabarimala shrine, the porous boundary with Tamil Nadu poses protection problems. The absence of a buffer zone across the inter-State boundary is a major drawback from the protection point of view, he says.

There are numerous private hotels in Kumily which is the gateway to PTR. The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) runs three hotels within the reserve.

The tourist inflow has been increasing every year, presenting the Kerala Forest Department with new problems. The numbers leapt from 204,712 in 1986-87 to 456,279 in 1998-99. The number of visitors till December 1999 has been 246,822.

The hill shrine of Sabarimala inside the PTR area receives about five million pilgrims for the *Mandalam* and *Makara Vilakku* festivals, according to the estimates of the Kerala Forest Department.The nearest rail head is Kottayam and the airport is Cochin Airport. The township of Kumily is accessible by bus from Kottayam and Kochi in Kerala and Madurai and Theni in Tamil Nadu. ■

B.P.



A reserve under pressure

THE Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR) is best known for its breath-taking verdant forests that skirt the lake. The water-body formed by the century-old Mullaperiyar dam provides a risk-free view of wildlife up close and also keeps the impact of tourists on the forest to a minimum.

The 777-sq. km. PTR is on the western slope of the Western Ghats in Idukki district of Kerala, bordering Tamil Nadu's Tirunelveli and Madurai districts. It is the only Project Tiger Reserve in the State. An extent of 305 sq. km. has been earmarked as the core area. The PTR has a buffer of 427 sq. km. which is struggling to cushion the pincer grip of a burgeoning wildlife tourism and ever-increasing pilgrim flow to the hill shrine of Sabarimala.

The history of the forests in the area dates back to 1100 A.D.. The conservation history of the area begins when the Travancore State declared it a reserve forest in 1933. The Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary was notified in 1950. It was converted into a Project Tiger Reserve in 1978.



H. Vibhu

A fight to the last ... "Anamika" probably died after eating or drinking contaminated food and water. (Inset): Non-biodegradable material, like plastic, clearly visible in the dropping of an elephant.

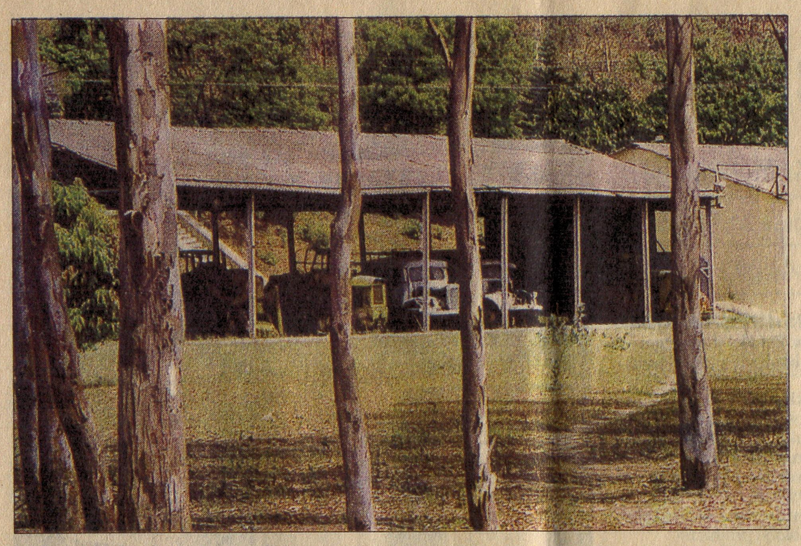
Kerala's Chief Wildlife Warden, V. K. Sinha, says he is concerned about the way the influx of people is disturbing the animals. There have to be joint efforts by the Forest Department, the Travancore Devaswom Board and voluntary organisations that work among the devotees, to make them aware of the danger they pose to the environment.

Technical Assistant to the Field Director, Periyar Tiger Reserve S. Sivadas, says attempts are being made to get the support of all concerned. A language that the devotees would understand more easily is that of devotion, he argues. The devotees are conscious of the fact that the forests and wildlife around the shrine, which is the garden of Lord Ayyappa (*poonkavanam*), are sacred. But what they do not know is that many of their activities are detrimental to this garden, he continues. And it would be the task of those involved in the campaign to point out those specific activities that violate the sanctity of the *poonkavanam*. The campaign would be most effective if started at the villages at the entry points from where the pilgrims start. But, he believes, a joint effort should be made to reach out to the devotees even in their home States – Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka – well before they start to congregate at the shrine.

The sky was darkening fast when the post-mortem was finally over. The casual labourers would do the rest of the work, cutting up the carcass into pieces and burning them. The thick fat layers would facilitate easy burning.

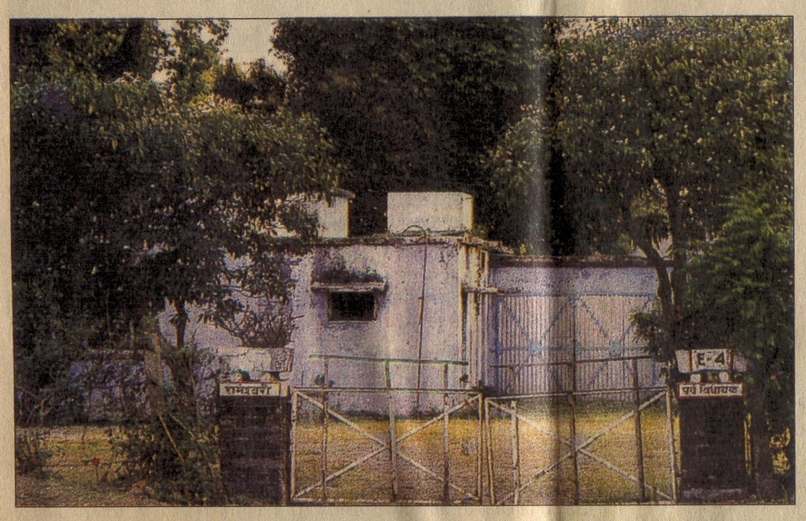
Even as our jeep turned round, the herd's trumpeting waned in the wind. It would return once we had left. But what would it find – a mother, a sister, a daughter, a cousin gone without a trace? Her scent would still linger for the sensitive nostrils to pick up. But she would not be found anywhere for she has needlessly been erased from the face of the earth, from the very area which is a designated Project Elephant reserve. ■





The challenge lies in....

Restoring forest corridors



Illegal constructions on forestland of Kalaghar division, Corbett National Park.

IN a unique case, the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI) successfully moved the Judiciary for returning forest land to the Corbett National Park. The land was temporarily given 38 years ago to the Uttar Pradesh irrigation department for construction of the Kalaghar dam on the Ramganga.

When the forest land was transferred, the provision was that when the dam was completed, the land area used for were *kutcha* or built of mud so that they could be demolished easily when the land had to be restored to the Corbett Park. But for 19 years after the dam was completed, the Irrigation Department clung to the land and even leased it out to traders and businessmen for quick money. Every 15 days a new shop was coming up, says Mr. Ashok Kumar of the WPSI.

Repeated requests of the Forest Department to return the land went unheeded. Rajiv Gandhi who loved nature reserves and wildlife, visited Kalaghar and saw the encroachments. As Prime Minister, he then wrote to the U.P. Chief Minister, Veer Bahadur, to have the encroachments removed and return the land to Corbett National Park. Even his request went unheeded.

As more encroachments came up on those precious 800 odd hectares of forest land and wild elephants found their migratory route blocked, the WPSI decided to take up the issue with a public interest litigation at the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court. Investigations by the WPSI showed there was elephant dung up to the colony. In fact there is a five km area next to the spillway that could serve as a corridor to the Kalaghar Forest Division if there were no shops and houses.

Apart from poaching for ivory, a major problem for elephants is the blockage of their migratory routes by construction of dams and other structures. This has turned them into violent creatures – destroying crops and trampling people to death.

Last July, the WPSI moved the courts. The Irrigation Department, by continuing to hold on to the forest land after completion of the dam, was violating the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 and the December 12, 1996 interim order of the Supreme Court which states that non-forestry activities should not take place on forest land.

The judges had pointed out in July that the "State government failed to settle the dispute between its two departments. It is surprising that the State government has filed a counter affidavit, admitting the controversy, yet taking no steps to settle the dispute. Had the Government had acted, there would not have been any need for an NGO to go to court, the judges said.

Asking the State to ensure that no more encroachments took place or land sold to third parties, the Court asked the Irrigation Secretary and the Forest Secretary to be present in the court for the next hearing. At this second meeting in August, both said they would work out the area which had to be returned to the forest department, keeping only land required for running of the dam establishment within the forests. This, the Irrigation Secretary assured, would be done by November 15, 1999.

However, providing for delays, the Court gave time till December 15. On January 15 this year, the two departments had to report to the Court.

Some of the land has since been handed to the Forest Department, but encroachments have not been removed. In fact, encroachers have been agitating for continuing on forest land. Less than 10,000 people may have to move out. But encroachers are fighters and so the battle continues in the U.P. forest tracts. The silver lining is that no further encroachments are taking place in this forest segment.

Encroachments on forest land are a major problem for many parks and sanctuaries. Often, the encroachments are by another department of the same government or the encroachers have the backing of politicians. In the case of the Corbett Park, it is the WPSI that is fighting for restoration of forest land. In Maharashtra, the Bombay Environment Action Group has successfully moved the court for moving some thousands of people encroaching on the Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Borivli. Only those who were living in the Park area prior to the notification of the Park have been allowed to stay on.

In Kaziranga National Park, Assam, the biggest home of the one horned rhino, Bangladeshi refugees have an extended area of the park.

A State Minister stopped the clearance of the encroachments and now the Park authorities have gone to court for removal of encroachments. But not many have the courage of B. S. Bonal, the Kaziranga Park Director, for fighting poachers and other encroachers.

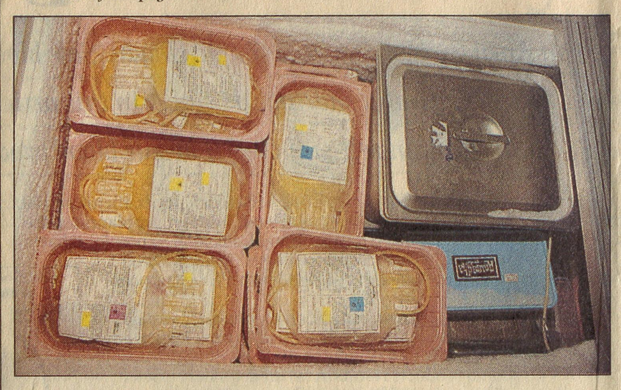
In the Melghat Tiger Reserve of Maharashtra too, the Irrigation Department has created problems like those in Corbett, U.P.. As population increases, ensuring the inviolability of the protected areas will be an uphill task. So the recovery of even a few hectares of forest land in U.P. is cause for celebration. But the challenge will be in re-greening the area and restoring forest corridors so that the elephants can move freely again. ■

USHA RAI

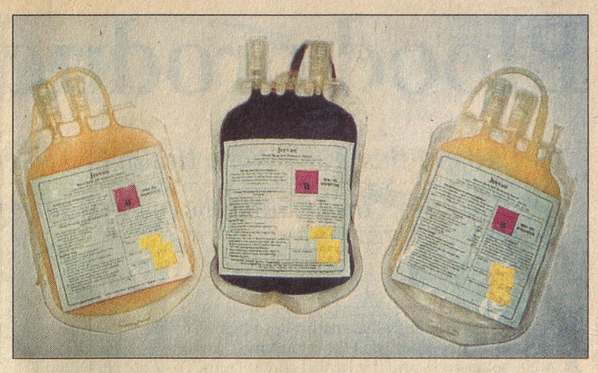
GREEN TALK

Blood products...

Continued from page VII



Fresh frozen plasma at -30° Centigrade.



Single donor unit split into three components (from left to right) plasma, red cells and platelets.

Donor recruitment is considered to be successful if at least three per cent of the total population are donors.

Where donor recruitment is especially successful, as many as 10 per cent of the population may be donors and 60 to 70 per cent of these, repeat donors. Even if we assume that the two to three million donations that are collected in India annually come from an individual donor (they do not), this represents, at most, 0.3 per cent of the population. With regard to retaining donors, the experience at this centre shows that nearly 75 per cent of donations each year come from one-time donors (most of whom are donating for a family member or friend in hospital). Only 25 per cent are from voluntary, regular donors. For nutritional, health and other reasons, the average number of donations per donor per year in our country is lower than that in the more developed countries, where it is probably between 1.5 to 2.0 donations per donor per year.

The other problem is the waste incurred due to donations that need to be discarded on account of testing positive for infectious disease markers. More and better donor education would allow donor self-exclusion. Rigorous pre-donation screening would exclude, as far as possible, donors with potential problems. These methods, by excluding the "non-productive donor", would result in savings apart from ensuring safety.

Educating doctors and changing transfusion practice: As far as transfusion medicine is concerned, the average doctor is in need of nearly as much instruction as the educated layman.

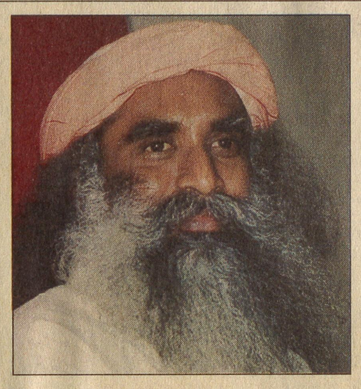
The lack of up-to-date information, logical ways of thinking about transfusion and the stubborn resistance to change causes a great deal of wastage and more than a little harm. At medical school, training in transfusion medicine should start during the undergraduate years and continue during post-graduate courses.

New technology: There already exist several applications of bio-technology in transfusion medicine. It is now possible to manufacture many coagulation proteins and growth factors using recombinant DNA technology. These can replace blood-derived products and cells in some instances.

Government-private sector cooperation: With all the demands on its time, energy and resources, the government will not be able to single-handedly create and maintain the infrastructure required for a national transfusion service, as outlined. The private sector cannot be expected to, nor will provide this service unless there is a reasonable expectation of commercial gain. Government-private sector cooperation is the only answer. What Government can do is to provide direction and establish laws.

Self-sufficiency in blood products in not merely desirable but has practical benefits, including saving money.

Currently, there is a gap between supply and demand. However, India has the human and material resources to become self-sufficient in transfusion within a relatively short time. ■



The inner experience

JAGGI VASUDEV, founder and head of the ISHA Foundation, Coimbatore, was the chief guest of honour at the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, West London, on March 9. He gave a lecture on "Yoga, meditation and spiritual healing".

His teachings, both at home and overseas, and his guidance have helped many relieve their physical and mental suffering. The special programmes have cured chronic diseases like asthma, hypertension, diabetes, rheumatism, sinus, and obesity.

These programmes have been tried on prisoners serving life-terms at the Coimbatore Central Jail and the results have been creditable.

Vasudev has termed his search and findings as "the art of effortless living", which the West calls "positive thinking". They have been practised at various centres in the United States, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and Canada.

On March 8, Vasudev, gave a lecture at the Gita Bhavan in Manchester. Dr. Padmaja Saraswathy Swaminathan, a medical practitioner and convener from Chennai was in charge.

★ ★ ★

THE Bhavan celebrated Mahashivaratri pooja, on March 4, with Dr. M. N. Nandakumara, executive director of the Bhavan, presiding over the function.

Anitha Ratnam gave a Bharatanatyam performance. The traditional *rudra mantra* recitation in Sanskrit was rendered by Sathyanarayana Shastri and the staff of the Bhavan.

★ ★ ★

M. BALAMURALI KRISHNA gave a Carnatic vocal recital at the Bhavan on March 18 and 19.

Starting with "On Kara Shruthilaya" (*varnam*) in Shanmugha Priya *raagam*, the singer, with perfect *aalapana*, went on to deliver "Nannu Palimpa, Nadachi Vachitivo".

Balu Raghuraman (violin), M. Balachander (mridangam) and Bangalore Prakash (ghatam), provided the *pakka vadyam*.

Dr. John Marr, honorary general secretary of the Bhavan, spoke. ■

P. SUBRAMANYAM



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IT'S MORE THAN A PAPER: IT'S A HOMECOMING.



The Hindustan Times

The game is up

NOW THAT Hansie Cronje has admitted his dishonesty, the Delhi police and the cricket boards of India and South Africa should waste no time in pursuing the culprits with the utmost vigour and punishing them as soon as further proof is available. The need for urgency is all the greater because this is the first time that the authorities have been able to detect something tangible in the murky world of betting. So far, it has mostly been allegations, suspicions and denials. Even where inquiries were held, as in India and Pakistan, nothing conclusive was revealed with the result that players like Wasim Akram have continued to enjoy a high reputation. Even where admissions were made, as by Mark Waugh and Shane Warne, and punishments meted out, the matter was quickly forgotten.

All this could not but have encouraged the shadowy figures who run the betting rackets. The success of the Delhi police, therefore, in unearthing the conspiracy represents a major breakthrough, whose advantage should not be lost through procrastination because the trail can lead to the others who are engaged in this sordid game. Once the plot starts unravelling, the chances that most of the guilty will be traced are quite high. Although it is a worldwide racket, the number of people who are directly involved cannot be too large.

After the disclosures were first made, Cronje's denials were understandable. It is the first reaction of all those who are caught with their hand in the till. But the initial response of the South African Government and media was rather surprising, for they seemed to think that the tapping of phones by Indians was the main offence and not the crime that was committed. Moreover, the belief, articulated with considerable outrage, that the South Africans were simply incapable of any underhand deal, was naive, to say the least. The latest revelation, therefore, is bound to cause quite a shock to those who had such a high opinion of Cronje and the South African team. At the same time, notwithstanding the relief that will be felt at the vindication of the charges that were made, there cannot but be a sense of sadness at the turn of events because it will no longer be possible to watch a dropped catch or a botched run without suspecting that something is wrong.

Ban on dictators

IT IS a measure of the changing times that India's proposal to the conference of the foreign ministers of the non-aligned group to expel those countries which do not have a representative form of government was accepted without much ado at Cartagena. With the concept of democracy so much in vogue today, no other course was possible, especially after the example of a similar decision taken by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was cited. Pakistan, of course, will feel particularly embarrassed by this turn of events, although a formal decision in this respect can only be taken next year when the NAM summit is held in Dhaka. However, with the Commonwealth already having expelled Pakistan, and with all the countries which General Pervez Musharraf is visiting urging him to restore democratic rule, Islamabad's status as a pariah is being increasingly confirmed.

All this is a far cry from the days when two of the three founding members of the movement — Yugoslavia under Tito and Egypt under Nasser — did not quite answer to the description of a democracy. And when the Soviet Union was hailed as a "natural ally" of NAM some years ago, it would have been fatuous to claim that the "people's democracy" practised by Moscow was an ideal form of representative government. But that was also a time when the other super power, the US, encouraged coups against established governments, as against Iran's Mohammed Mossadeq in 1953, South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem (who was an American protege to start with) in 1963 and Chile's Salvador Allende in 1973.

It has to be remembered that even today, a number of countries in NAM are virtual one-party states where democratic norms are more often flouted than upheld. Two others, Myanmar and Ivory Coast, are currently under army rule and are presumably waiting to be expelled. Despite such a flawed record, it is commendable that a decision has been taken against providing any legitimacy to military rulers. It goes without saying that all such developments do undermine the authority of the usurpers of power and help the cause of freedom. India, of course, will have reasons to be particularly pleased with the Cartagena decision because of Pakistan's discomfiture. If the latest diplomatic setback persuades Islamabad to behave more responsibly, it will help in defusing tension in the sub-continent.

Tremors in Lucknow

THE BJP top brass is unlikely to be amused by the recent events in Lucknow. The defeat on the floor of the Legislature on even a minor issue is a serious embarrassment for any government. For a coalition arrangement which houses opportunistic partners, the message is not really wrapped in an enigma. Unless it is managed competently, the current churning in Uttar Pradesh politics could well make life extremely difficult for the BJP in north India. Indeed, the Ram Prakash Gupta dispensation is plain lucky that there have been doubts on whether it was a money bill on which the Government was out-voted in the State Assembly. This is because the rule is ominously clear: a defeat on a money bill means a government's departure.

The Gupta Government lost face on what was only a motion to introduce the Trade Tax (Amendment) Bill. It was not a substantive motion. However, the Opposition is well within its rights to press the political advantage it has gained. It has claimed that it can set up an alternative government within three days. Clearly, we have not heard the last of the UP affair even if the Governor does not heed the Opposition demand to dismiss the BJP-led coalition. The embarrassment caused in Lucknow is BJP's alone and of its own making, which is rather unfortunate since it is the leading party of the ruling combine. Indeed, its allies may well have lent a willing hand in ensuring that the denouement did occur, given the state of the intra-coalition dynamics.

But at another level the development speaks of poor floor management during the budget session when politics in the State is known to be in a state of flux. Internally, the BJP has been in some turmoil after Kalyan Singh's expulsion and this showed up most recently in the Rajya Sabha elections. The party's minor partners have proved to be a greedy lot, forever seeking to extract concessions. Besides, the Chief Minister imposed on the State-unit by the Centre has failed to inspire confidence in his administrative or political abilities. The message is there for all to see: the BJP has to make serious efforts to put its house in order.

THINK IT OVER...

Money doesn't talk; it swears
— BOB DYLAN

G-77 and NAM should step out of their Cold War mindset, take up new identities and stop being cosmetic outfits

Stuck inside a time capsule

BY J.N. DIXIT

THE GOVERNMENT of India is undertaking high-level participation in two international conferences as this article is being published. Minister for Human Resource Development and Science and Technology Murli Manohar Joshi has proceeded to Havana, to a Heads of Government (summit) meeting of the Group of 77 developing countries convened by Cuban President Fidel Castro. This is the first ever summit of G-77 since its inception nearly four decades ago.

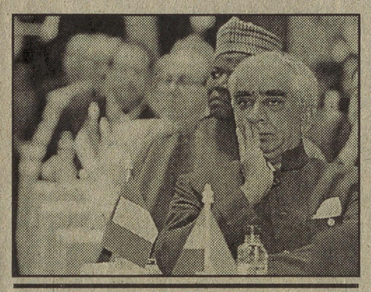
The Group of 77 essentially operated within the framework of the United Nations. It is a forum of developing countries which tried to evolve joint strategies and a common approach towards matters of shared interests in the spheres of economic development in all its dimensions. In some ways it was also supposed to be a forum which would collectively deal with the Group-7 (or now G-8), which is an arrangement of collaboration between the world's economically most advanced countries.

The second international conference attended by an Indian delegation led by Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh is the conference of Foreign Ministers of Non-aligned Movement, being held in Cartagena, in Columbia. This is one of the institutionalised meetings of the non-aligned Foreign Ministers which takes place between NAM summits.

India remains an active and leading participant in both these fora. The point, however, is that both G-77 and NAM suffer from twin handicaps. The first is of disunity and contradictions in the policies and approaches of the member countries constituting both these groups. The second is that of new regional cooperation arrangements replacing trans-continental arrangements between states with diminished importance of the latter in terms of political and psychological clout. An entirely new pattern of multilateralism is emerging in inter-state relations since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the end of Cold War and the market oriented globalisation of the world economy.

The relevance of India being involved in the activities of the G-77 and NAM as they exist today should be examined in terms of the nature of emerging multilateralism in the world. Trans-continental systems of multilateralism of developing countries have been replaced over the last 15 years by regional arrangements for both economic and political cooperation, including security affairs. ASEAN, SADEC and to a limited extent SAARC, are the focus of attention of the member states both in terms of policy and cooperative action, compared to their previous involvements with G-77 and so on.

The end of Cold War has eroded the ideological terms of reference and policy cohesion of the older fora. Member countries of the South have developed linkages with different political and economic power centres of the world. Consequently, the substance of their policies is subject to these equations which are geared to the individual national interests of the developing and underdeveloped countries.



Has the G-77 or NAM provided any operational support to India in matters of direct concern to it?

Besides, the overarching collective identity of NAM and the G-77 stands eroded by the narrow regional or ethno-religious identities which now claim the loyalties of a majority of developing countries. For instance, the member countries of the ASEAN or of the Organisation of Islamic Countries, have been less than enthusiastic in making collective moves or taking positions within the framework of NAM or the G-77, if such initiatives contradict the agenda of these two organisations.

Then there are changing attitudes of the advanced countries towards the older organisations of the developing countries. Following the Soviet-US and US-China detente, the more powerful countries have paid only cosmetic attention to the positions and advocacies of the developing countries. The end of the Cold War and what is described as donor-fatigue has compounded the assessment that the G-77 and NAM are diminishing factors in world affairs and global strategic and economic equations.

This attitude of advanced countries is also rooted in their confidence that the G-77 and NAM countries will not act unitedly but within the terms of reference of their individual or regional interests and subject to the influences of their relations with the major powers of the world. One also needs to evaluate whether the NAM or G-77 have made any impact on global issues, on political or economic crises in their parts of the world, and whether they took any collective stance on issues like the establishment of WTO, the indefinite extension of the non-proliferation treaty and the finalisation of the draft of the CTBT.

The fact is that barring the desire to have a united approach, the developing countries in the substance of their policies have not acted unitedly. Instead, they took autonomous decisions as per their individual or regional context. The result has been progressive marginalisation of the NAM and G-77. They are considered cosmetic phenomena at the worst and political theatre at best.

Developing countries and members of NAM are at different levels of economic development, technological capacities and political cohesion. Their strategic interests, threat perceptions, foreign and defence policies are subject to new equations and new influences.

The similarities in predicament and in political and economic policies which were there in the immediate post-colonial period no longer exist. Instead, there is only lip service.

The external responses to the movement, even when they were positive, have not resulted in productive interaction between the advanced and developing countries.

To illustrate the point, the Pearson Committee Report, the Report of the Brandt Commission and the latest Brundtland Report were all responsive to the common concerns of the developing countries. None of their recommendations have found any meaningful reflection in the policies of advanced countries over the last three decades.

Has the G-77 or NAM provided any operational support to India in matters of direct concern to it — like disarmament and arms control, the Kashmir question or issues which were discussed at the Uruguay Round? The answer, unfortunately, is a resounding no.

The meeting of non-aligned Foreign Ministers at Cartagena and the G-77 summit in which Murli Manohar Joshi is participating are supposed to discuss problems related to global security, disarmament, globalisation of world economy, North-South relations, South-South cooperation, issues related to flow of investments, transfer of technology and human resource development.

One anticipates that the Havana summit of the G-77 will come out with a declaration and a programme of action.

The Foreign Ministers summit will also come out with recommendations and resolutions for the next non-aligned summit. Whether these pronouncements and declarations will have any impact on the policies of the participants or reactions of the advanced countries is a moot point.

The G-77 and NAM in their old identities and orientations have become irrelevant. This reality has to be accepted.

There are new issues and challenges on which the developing countries have a convergence of interest. The G-77 and NAM should redefine their roles, comprehend the newly emerging changes in global relations and reformulate their objective. They must acquire the political will to act together with new identities and new terms of reference.

India's role at the two conferences should be to trigger collective cognition of these new realities and to urge participation in this new process. If this cannot be done, both G-77 and NAM will fade away.

Call of the wild

With the CITES mission seeking a ban on foreign funding and the Environment Ministry in a tizzy, radical action is needed if the tiger population in India is to be saved, writes USHA RAI

PLATFORM

IN A hard hitting indictment of tiger conservation work in India, the high level CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) political mission to India has recommended that financial support for tiger programmes in India should be stopped. "The ban on assistance to India should remain till the Government demonstrates that steps have been taken for efficient disbursement of foreign donor funds as well as Central and State budgets for tiger conservation," the Mission states.

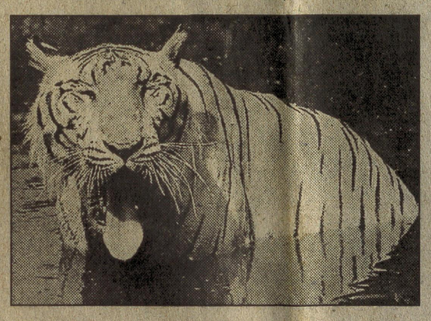
The mission's report will be presented at the ongoing eleventh meeting of the Conference of Parties which is now being held in Nairobi (April 10 to 14). The report says that all parties (150 countries), non-parties, international organisations and NGOs should "refrain" from providing financial support for tiger conservation work in India. The report also points out that though the Project Tiger budget was doubled recently, there is an annual "underspend" and money does not reach the field level. As much as 30 per cent of Project Tiger funds to the States remain unspent.

Though the mission was firmly of the opinion that all tiger range States are worthy of external support in their conservation efforts, it felt this help should be viewed against the relevant Government's willingness and genuine desire to commit themselves to anti-poaching, combating illicit trade and border control measures. Much of the anger of the mission is against the failure of India to set up a Wildlife Crime Bureau, a recommendation made by an Indian committee in 1994, to undertake enforcement activities. If India does not set up specialised units to combat wildlife crime quickly, it has warned that export/re-export to or import from India, of any CITES-listed specimens, could be stopped.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests is in a tizzy over the report which treats India as though it is some small sub-Saharan fiefdom. A suitable reply is being prepared. It is estimated that the Centre and States contribute around Rs 250 crore annually for wildlife conservation.

Contribution from foreign funds is barely Rs one crore. Yet there is no denying that foreign funds provide much needed export support to tiger reserves. They have helped NGOs to provide awards to forest personnel as well as much needed infrastructural facilities like vehicles, night vision binoculars and communication equipment.

However, what seems to have irked the CITES Mission is the Environment and Forest Minister T. R. Balu's failure to meet the team in Delhi, though an appointment had been assured. There was, of course, a



lengthy meeting with the Environment and Forest Secretary on information and intelligence networks, an agreement on introduction of trained sniffer dogs on India's borders and better disbursement of funds; but the mission was not satisfied. In fact, the Secretary is believed to have told the mission to focus on China and Korea for combating illicit trade rather than pick on India, which, because of its conservation efforts, still holds 60 per cent of the tiger population of the world.

The CITES team visited India from January 22 to 29 and for some strange reason the meeting was held in Khajuraho, better known for its erotica than for wildlife. The team visited the Panna Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and met senior forest officials and tiger conservationists, the CITES Management Authority and Director of Project Tiger. The team also held meetings with various people in Delhi.

Though the report is on the same lines as the earlier reports by Michael Day of the Tiger Trust and the Environmental Investigating Agency, what is shocking are the conclusions and recommendations. If this report is placed before the 150-member intra-governmental conference in Nairobi, there would be mud on India's long standing conservation efforts.

The report begins by referring to the two major seizures of tiger and leopard skins, bones and other parts at Ghaziabad and Khaga in Uttar Pradesh on the eve of its visit to India. However, it points out that the ease with which the poachers and wildlife traders are able to escape legal action shows they have the backing of big money and a criminal network.

The Tiger Cells at the Centre and States, it says, are not meeting regularly. The mission also heard that forest guards in some parts of India have not received their salary for 21 months. Though the Central Government officials are hoping to solve this dilemma by allocating budgets directly to field managers, the mission found a lot of tension between Central and State officials.

Basic essentials such as radio equipment, modern weaponry and suitable vehicles are not present in many areas though Project Tiger was launched 27 years ago and $ 8-10 million has been channeled into India by overseas governments and NGOs. The Union and State governments have also spent a whopping $ 130 to $ 150 million to save the tiger.

India has yet to establish eco-tourism that would benefit local communities. At present, hotel and tour operators do not have to pass any of their revenues to conservation. There is little incentive for local communities to value their wildlife and its terrain. The parks have failed to engage local people in the fight against tiger poaching, the report said.

The mission feels that tigers outside designated protected areas and even in reserves which are not show case ones, are neither properly protected nor valued. India's approach to tiger conservation and the combating of illicit trade is worthy of an in-depth and independent review. If the tiger population in India is to be safeguarded in the new millennium, it pleads for radical action.

TO MARKET, TO MARKET...

with R. KRISHNAN

'ICE, ICE, Baby....Whirlpool, Whirlpool....' This television ad of a global brand refrigerator seems to have conveyed a better view of the Bombay Stock Exchange than anything else.

The verbal content of the Whirlpool ad is sheer coincidence, of course. But tying up 'ICE' — the fashionable acronym for infotech, communication and entertainment stocks — with the image of a 'whirlpool' aptly summed up the volatility in the BSE where most investors saw themselves sucked in while some got to enjoy the cool effects garnered from the handsome profits they booked. The melting ICE, however, left more investors with holes in their pockets, reminding one of another ad copyline — investors' envy, profit takers' pride, or something to that effect.

The cycle of a steep rise and a steeper fall on the bourse was rightly described by Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha as irresponsible and unacceptable. This was in sharp contrast to what he had maintained soon after he presented the Budget in February.

At an informal chat with a journalist later that evening, Mr Sinha exuded confidence stating that he was happy because everyone else was unhappy. He added that he was also not too much concerned with the movement of Sensex which began a downward spiral since he presented the nation's balance sheet.

It was rather strange that the same Sinha sounded so apologetic 35 days later when he literally pleaded with the Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) not to be guided by a notice issued by a field formation of the Income Tax department asking a few FIIs to cough up Rs 8.47 crore in taxes.

The reason for Sinha's change of stance was that the same Sensex which did not bother him earlier had plunged by 352 points on April 4 following the IT notice to FIIs — expressing the department's inability to accept the institutional investors' plea that they could use the Indo-Mauritius double taxation avoidance treaty to their advantage.

The BSE lost a market cap of Rs 60,000 crore due to the FIIs' withdrawal. The other factors responsible for driving down the Sensex were external which included the steep fall in Nasdaq and a US district court ruling that Microsoft had violated US anti-trust laws.

Since there was nothing Sinha could do about Nasdaq or Microsoft, he chose the occasion to cozy up to the FIIs. Lo and behold! The market went up and up, recording a 700 points rise in three trading sessions.

Another reason for this 'recovery' was the reconfiguration of the 30-share Sensex where four old stocks — Indian Hotels, IDBI, Tata Chemicals and Tata Power — were removed and replaced (by Zee Telefilms, Satyam Computers, Reliance Petroleum and Dr Reddy's Laboratories) on April 10 resulting in the Sensex rising by 4.29 per cent.

The refrigerator market has been dominated by global white good majors. Similarly, the operations of Indian stock markets have also been monopolised by FIIs. While Sinha did nothing to stem the influence of deep pocketwallas, he could have at least taken an impartial view when it came to *desis* with shallow pockets.

How can anyone forget the differential treatment meted out to MNC-dominated joint venture companies and the state-owned MTNL in the application of tax laws to telecom licence fees? Sinha should ensure that the sauce is the same for both goose and gander. It can't be sweet for *videshis* and sour for *desis*.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exception to the opinion

Sir, — With reference to the letter of Mr Vivek Saxena titled 'Ban private tuition' (March 7), I wish to share my views. While I agree with Mr Saxena, I want to add that giving private tuitions should be banned only for those who are already teaching in schools and colleges. Those who are jobless but are qualified to teach should not be deprived of the opportunity to earn their livelihood.

SYED ALI ABBAS KAZMI
450/155, Abbas Nagar Muftiganj Lucknow

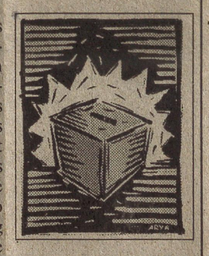
Harvest of scams

Sir, — India seems to have become a land which cultivates, nourishes and reaps scams. By meticulous research, we have also developed several varieties and species of this 'cash crop'. Just about a month back, we witnessed seat-fixing in the Rajya Sabha elections. Now, we have seen match-fixing on a grand scale in the gentleman's game, cricket. In the latter case, though, some arrests have been made, our law machinery, moving at snail's pace.

Cross-voters in Rajya Sabha, polls, however, go scot-free, clutching the currency-filled suitcase with the smirk of the cat who had cream. The Speaker, UP Assembly, Mr Keshri Nath Tripathi, had almost a month before the elections, warned about such possibility. He had also suggested that the only way to check it was to hold the elections on the floor of the house so that a whip could be issued and the anti-defection law enforced. But when polling takes place, like in general elections, the parties can only wait and watch. This certainly is a fit case for yet another constitutional amendment.

TN KHANNA
A-3/381, Vishwas Khand, Lucknow

The strength of the secret ballot



THE EDITORIAL *Secret ballot must go* (April 1) deserves serious deliberation. But, I have reservations about your suggestion for a different reason. The arguments for abolition of the secret ballot in the Rajya Sabha election are well reasoned but they do not take into account that some legislators forming the electoral college may have a conscience too as shown by the defeat of the Congress candidate in West Bengal, in addition to greed for money. A secret ballot gives them an opportunity of defying the party whip, for the sake of a vote based on conscience or personal preference. I also suggest that voting on all bills in Parliament, including money bills, be done by secret ballot. Voting in compliance with the party whip may, however, remain mandatory in crucial motions such as a vote of no confidence etc.

S. C. SHARMA Delhi

For better ties

Sir, — This refers to the news item 'Government may stop bus and train services to Pakistan' (April 8, 2000).

Bus and train services to Pakistan are the only possibility in improvement of relations between the two countries. Therefore, it should not be stopped in any circumstance. I request the Central Government not to discontinue the services.

DR NOORUL HASAN
Darul-Uloom Road, Maunath Bhanjan

The holy month

Sir, —Residents of Lucknow, like all over the world, are observing the holy month of Moharram, the festival of peace and truth. Shia and Sunni leaders must try to keep peace in the city. Communal riots have caused loss and damage many times. The citizens and administration should remain alert and immune to vicious influences.

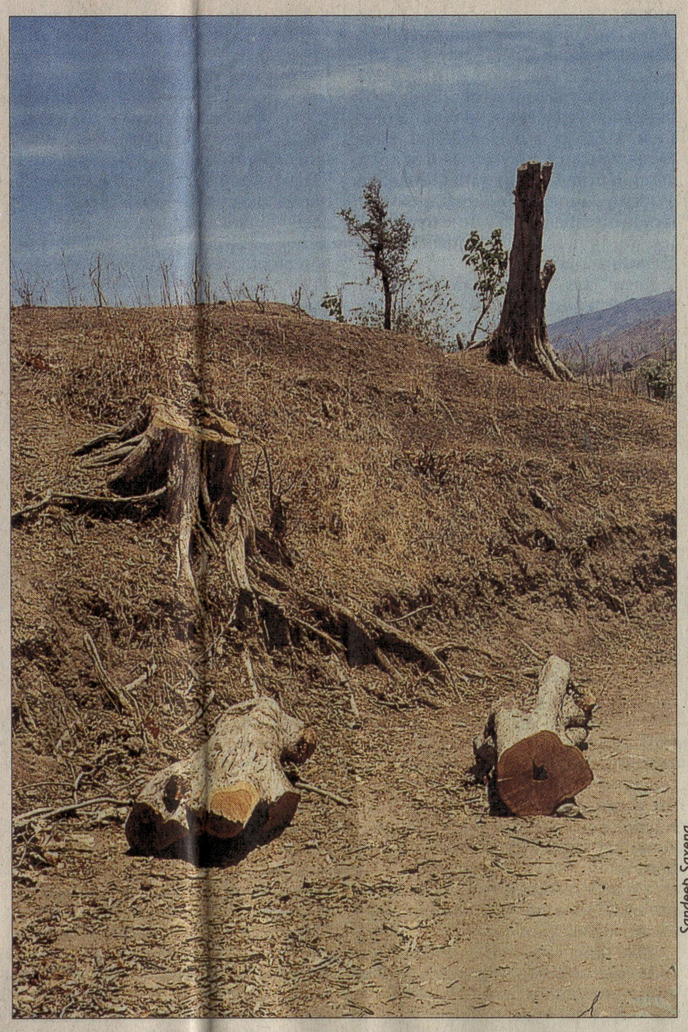
JAVED SHIKOH
178/37 Maqbara, Golaganj, Lucknow

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Planting the right ideas

Population and livestock pressure is a major threat to forests but this is an important issue that has been sidelined. A national forest scheme must combine bio-diversity conservation and gender sensitive forest management, which means that conservation and people's livelihood will have to be addressed in tandem.



Sandeep Saxena



K. Ganesan

Some five million hectares of forest land has been encroached upon and lost to fire fires caused deliberately to settle scores or to improve grazing. The problem may seem unsurmountable, but with the support of forest communities and villages, degraded forest areas are being regreened and protected.

ANYONE will tell you that India's forest cover is getting visibly thinner and in many areas, forests, with their wildlife and bio-diversity, have disappeared because of development projects like dams and mines. What is worse, there seems to be a lack of political will to check the erosion of our green gold.

The total area under forest cover is 63.3 million hectares. The National Forest Policy (NFP) prescribes that ideally, India should have 33 per cent forest cover – which means that 100 million hectares should have a green canopy. It is estimated that 15,000 hectares is lost annually to development projects. If it is any consolation before the Forest Conservation Act of 1980, 1.5 million hectares was being lost annually. Some five million hectares of forestland has been encroached upon and several thousand hectares more lost to forest fires that are caused deliberately to settle scores or to improve grazing and the collection of minor forest produce. Some 11 million hectares of forestland is under shifting cultivation, under an even greater threat as the cycle of shifting cultivation has come down from 20 years to four years.

Therefore, a great deal was expected from a recent seminar on "India's forests beyond 2000" organised by the Commonwealth Forestry Association (India) in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forests, DFID – U.K., the Planning Commission and the Ford Foundation. The deliberations, in which foreign donors and experts participated, were expected to provide the direction towards which our forest policy could be steered.

As against the 33 per cent forest cover prescribed by the NFP, just 19.27 per cent has forest cover, according to the Forest Survey of India, 1997. Barely 10 to 12 per cent of this would be forests with a good crown density. This year's forest survey, which has yet to be released, shows a 2,300 sq. km. increase in forest cover. But this is nowhere near the over 30 million hectares that have to be greened to raise the forest cover to the ideal figure of 100 million hectares.

Instead of trying to achieve this laudable target, the Environment and Forest Minister, Mr. T. R. Baalu, is keen on reviewing the policy and wants a more realistic target. Even the International Commonwealth Forestry Association and other experts have not been able to change his opinion. The recommendations of the seminar were quite obviously drafted by officials of the Environment and Forest Ministry. An important point says that to achieve the objectives of the NFP, the Central Forestry Commission must be revived and strengthened. It says the feasibility of achieving 33 per cent forest cover should be examined and a strategy developed for allocating adequate resources for an "achievable" tree/forest cover.

However, the second recommendation – accounting of national forest resources so that their contribution to the GDP can be clearly out-spelt is a good one. Valmik Thapar has been harping on the need to give the same value to our forests (as a natural resource) as we give to our gold bullion and money in banks. Only when politicians and the people appreciate the true wealth of our forests will there be a concerted effort to save them.

Population and livestock pressure is a major threat to forests but this is again is another important issue that has been sidelined. It is estimated that 270 million cattle graze in forests and there is no political will to check this. However, there is a recommendation to harmonise the NFP with policies of other sectors for bio-diversity conservation and gender sensitive forest management. This means that forest conservation and people's livelihood will have to be addressed in tandem.

In fact if there is one area of forest development that the Government can be proud of it is joint forest management. With the support of forest communities and villages, since 1990, degraded forest areas are being regreened and protected. In return, forest village committees get to share the usufruct. They collect fodder and the loppings of trees while not disturbing the forest stock. After seven or eight years of plantation when the trees have achieved the required girth and height, they can be cut and the money earned shared by villagers and the forest department. Some 36,000 village forest protection committees in 22 States are involved in the joint forest management of 10.24 million hectares.

In Andhra Pradesh, where some 1.6 million hectares is under joint forest management with World Bank support, excellent rural development linkages have been established. (Even the naxalite activities have been contained through such management). Good trends have also been recorded in Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Tripura and Orissa.

In an effort to involve women, this February, the Environment Ministry issued guidelines that half the general body of a committee hold a third of the posts in the executive and at least one post of office-bearer should be reserved for women.

In most States now 50 per cent of the usufruct of a project goes to villagers. In A.P., a hundred per cent of the usufruct goes to villagers but it is mandatory for them to plough back 50 per cent into the project. Some 1,500 more hectares of open forests where there is good rootstock has been identified to bring it under JFM.

So far this was restricted to degraded forest areas. But now, it was decided to extend it to good forest areas also. Extraction of non-forest timber products is being permitted in these areas.

But one needs to look beyond the joint forest management programme to get the requisite green cover for the country and restore at least the 26 million hectares of degraded forests in the country.

Though Rs. 1,600 crores is spent on afforestation every year, this is inadequate. Degraded forest areas alone need an investment of Rs. 1,900 crores for rejuvenation. Another Rs. 3,400 crores is needed for greening areas that are outside the forest purview. This money has to be found, if necessary from the World Bank and other donors and the money invested wisely. There has to be an army of people involved in tree plantation and regreening of the country. Just the symbolic *van mahotsav* will not do. The Government alone cannot take on this enormous responsibility. It could, however, ensure that no more forestland is diverted for mining and hydroelectric projects.

'There has to be an army of people involved in regreening ... The Government alone cannot take on this enormous responsibility.'

The rate of extraction from forests is so high that unless we grow more trees, we cannot meet the needs of our people. The total demand for fuel wood alone is 201 million tonnes – 98 million tonnes is provided from non-forest areas and 17 million tonnes from forest areas.

This is the legally permitted rate of extraction. The 86 million tonnes shortfall is also obtained from forests, but illegally.

This should give you some idea of the pressure on our forests. The demands for pulpwood and timber for other industries is not even being considered. In 2001, the demand for fuel wood is likely to increase to 243 million tonnes.

We cannot wish away our problems whether it is shrinking forests or a population growth that is spinning out of control and nullifying the little achievements of the country. We cannot scale down targets that we cannot achieve. We need to tackle them head on.



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GREEN TALK

Solutions that hold water



While the drought this year has been a nightmare in several States ... AP

Traditional systems of water harvesting have seen people through the worst days of summer, but with piped water supply becoming increasingly accessible, these have been sidelined. As drought ravages vast tracts of the country, there are a few heart warming stories of people who have reacted and looked to old systems again, says USHA RAI.

A FEW years ago the director of the United Nations Environment Programme predicted that there would be "wars over water." The over exploitation of this natural resource is already creating problems all over the world.

In India, hundreds of villages still do not have a single source of potable water. But the rich continue to over-exploit groundwater, sinking tube wells deeper and deeper into the earth to draw out this precious sustenance for cash crops like sugarcane.

The cycle of drought, poor irrigation facilities and bad management of water resources became a nightmare this year in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. In cities, fights over water have intensified and mass migration of man and cattle has begun in several areas.

But if people begin conserving water, particularly rainwater, this periodic water crisis can be averted. According to Dr. D. K. Chadha, chairman of the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), some 210 billion cubic metres of rainwater that is lost as runoff can be stored underground and 160 billion cubic metres of this water utilised. Dr. Chadha hopes that the new found enthusiasm for water harvesting can be tapped by the board and hydrologists all over the country.

Model experimental studies on water harvesting are being conducted through 38 projects in 14 States. The Prime Minister will be flagging off this new drive for water harvesting by inaugurating a rooftop water harvesting structure on Shram Shakti Bhavan in the heart of New Delhi.

What is rainwater harvesting? It is allowing water to seep into the ground rather than just letting it flow on the ground. Due to tarred roads and concrete structures, water, instead of draining into the earth and recharging aquifers, flows into storm water drains and is wasted.

The structures being constructed for recharging groundwater include sub strata dykes, inverted tube wells, ponds and tanks with shafts and dug wells.

In rooftop rainwater harvesting, water is collected from the roof and directed into the ground through a pipe where it is stored in a reservoir. Rooftop rainwater harvesting, says Dr. Chadha is the solution for water problems where there is inadequate groundwater supply or surface resources are absent or insignificant. Rainwater is soft water and free from bacteria and other organic matter. Rainwater also helps dilute groundwater that may be saline or high in nitrates and fluorides.

Rooftop rainwater can be used to recharge groundwater through the use of abandoned dug wells, abandoned or running hand pumps, recharge pits and recharge shafts. Before using a dug well as a recharge structure, its base should be cleaned and all deposits removed. Dug wells are recommended for buildings that have a roof area of 1,000 sq. metres. If a building has a roof area of just 100 sq.m, the recharge structure would be a pit. For a building with a roof area of 200 to 300 sq.m, the recharge structure is a trench – 0.5 to a metre wide, 1 to 1.5 m deep and 10 to 20 m long depending on the availability of land.

In Yawal *taluka*, Jalgaon district, Maharashtra, a predominantly banana growing area, excessive irrigation of cash crops led to heavy groundwater withdrawals and a steep decline in the water level. After the CGWB constructed six percolation tanks, a dug well and other recharge structures like an injection well and shafts. The area is once again green and there is no shortage of water.

In the National Capital Region, the CGWB has taken up two artificial recharge schemes in two different hydrogeological regions. While in one the recharge was done through check dams, in the other, roof top rainwater harvesting was done to recharge groundwater through a tube well and a dug well. In Kerala to harness groundwater that was flowing out from *nallas*, sub surface dykes were constructed.

Traditional systems of water harvesting have seen people through the worst days of summer heat and drought. But with piped water supply becoming accessible to a large section of the people, these traditional systems of water harvesting have been sidelined. Fortunately, there are now attempts to revive them.

The Centre for Science and Environment maintains that every village in India can meet its basic drinking water and cooking needs through water harvesting. It takes just 100 millilitres to cultivate 1.2 hectares of land, says Anil Agarwal of CSE.

Even as drought ravages vast tracts of the country there are heart warming stories of people and villages who have reacted and recharged their water sources and greened their villages. In the perennially drought prone region of Saurashtra, Khopala village was barren till a couple of years ago. But because of watershed management, this village of 5,000 people in the Narmada Command Area is today reaping two good crops over 6,000 acres. Though there was only seven inches of rain over two days last year, the 200 check dams and ponds were filled with water. Normally the village receives 12 to 15 inches of rain. The village *sarpanch* was delighted when the well he had dug on his farm seven years ago was recharged. Using drip irrigation he was able to harvest a bumper crop of cotton.

The farmers of Khopala were emulating the water shed development model of Rajsamadhiala village in the neighbouring Rajkot district. The latter had in turn looked to Anna Hazare's Ralegaon Siddhi in Maharashtra. In Alwar district of Rajasthan, farmers, under the guidance of Tarun Bharat Sangh, have rebuilt their old and crumbing water harvesting check dams and revived a dead river. Now prosperity has returned to Alwar district.

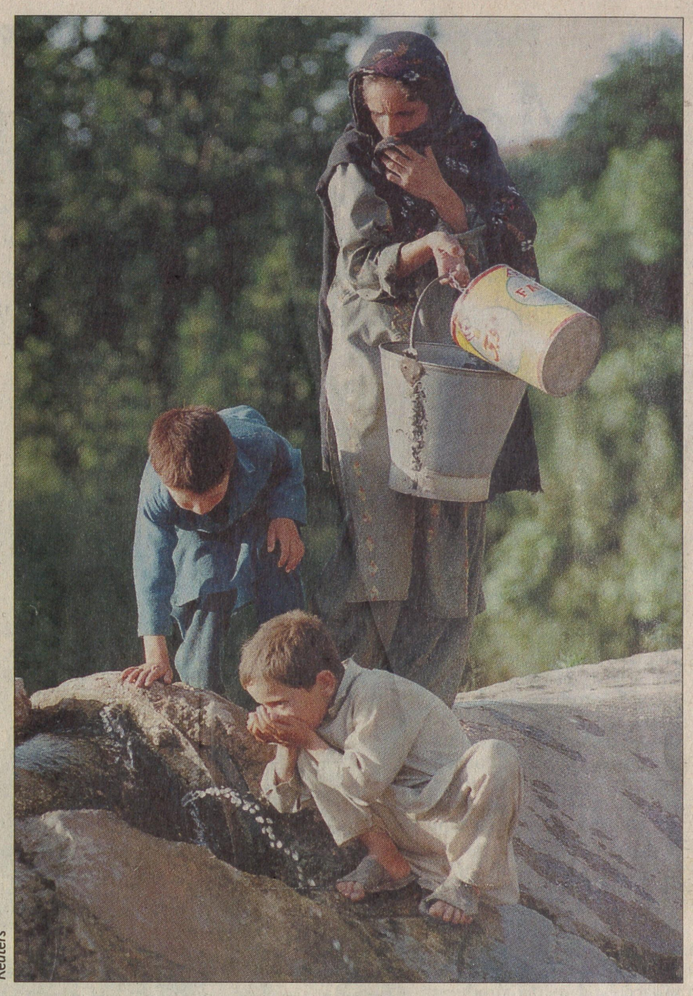
While non-government organisations have been in the vanguard of the peoples' movement for recharging dried water sources with check dams and watershed development, there are some government departments and officials who have taken the initiative for watershed development.

The tribal district of Jhabua had begun to resemble a moonscape because of extensive deforestation and soil erosion. Thanks to a 1995 State Government project on rainwater harvesting and soil-water conservation, the water table has been rising in many places. Check dams, tanks and community lift irrigation schemes dot this tribal belt and food production has gone up by 38 per cent. This miracle was possible because of the strong political will of the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, a committed administration and people's participation.

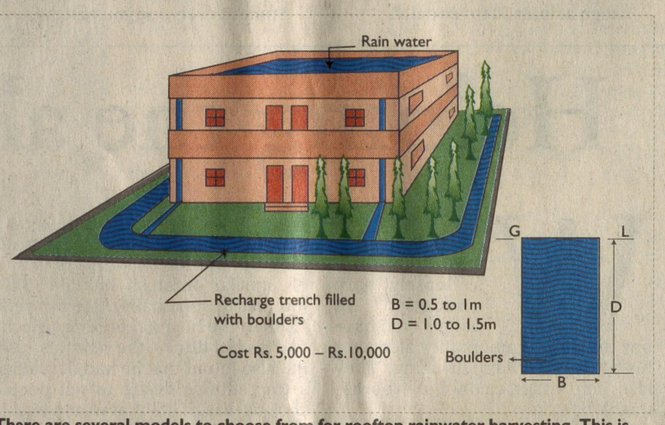
However, in Delhi the CGWB and its scientists have not been given the status due to them. It is treated as a poor cousin of the Ministry for Water Resources. Helicopters, aircraft and ships equipped with the sensitive equipment are needed to survey land and map out ground water resources that can be tapped. Though two expert committees, including the Rangayya Naidu Committee in 1995, have made recommendations, not much has been done.

Neither 2.85 million sq. km of the desert area nor the 500,000 sq. km of the hard rock Deccan area have not been properly explored for sub-strata water. In fact there is not a single scientific institute to explore water sources in desert areas. At least 10,000 people have to be trained as hydrogeologists so that they can fan out across the country and help people recharge ground water. Though the CGWB has been advocating recharging of groundwater for 20 years, people prefer to use tube wells for extracting water without bothering to recharge it.

With groundwater levels falling drastically all over – in Delhi by four to 10 metres in the last 10 years – there is talk of a groundwater recharge consultancy service being set up in Faridabad. In the Najafgarh and Mehrauli areas of Delhi, a ban has been imposed on construction of any new tube well. Any well drilled will be capped and the drilling company prosecuted. The Delhi Government is contemplating making rain water harvesting mandatory for new housing societies. The Ministry for Urban Development is seriously considering incorporating water harvesting in the building by-laws. ●



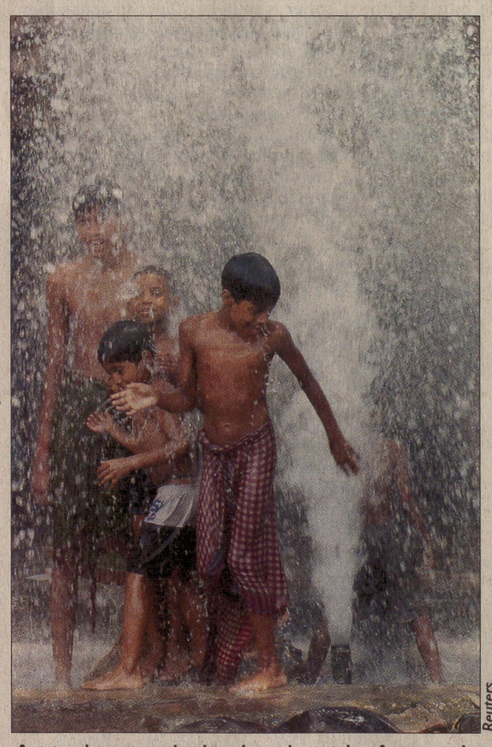
... can the newfound enthusiasm for water harvesting be tapped? Reuters



There are several models to choose from for rooftop rainwater harvesting. This is one for a building with a roof area between 200 and 300 sq.m.. Central Ground Water Board

Water has ...

Continued from page II



A natural resource that has always been taken for granted. Reuters

profligacy in the use of energy as well as groundwater. Since the water demands of the non-agriculture sectors will finally have to be met by reduction in agricultural demand, increasing water use efficiency in agriculture is a matter of priority. A hopeful estimate is that the share of agriculture of the total utilisable water potential would go down from 83 per cent at present to about 74 per cent by 2025.

In industry, where the water demand is small when compared to agriculture, there is considerable scope for water conservation. The "Three R(s)" – Reduce, Recycle and Reuse of water – should become a mission with industry. As many sectors of industry have demonstrated, substantial reduction in water use is possible and at no great cost.

Currently, a debate is raging on environmentally sound and cost-effective options of water storage. Successful initiatives undertaken by non-government organisations and villagers based on traditional and tested methods of water harvesting are in limelight. However, this has engendered a simplistic view that reservoirs to store and regulate water discharge for irrigation, power generation and flood control are an evil to be eschewed. This sterile debate of big versus small has needlessly whipped up emotions as evidenced by the flurry of charges and counter-charges traded by normally reasonable people in the media. The country can ill-afford the luxury of not having medium or big dams nor dismiss the traditional methods of water harvesting as primitive.

Even more alarming than the portent of insufficient water to meet the country's needs in the coming years is the ground reality of fast deteriorating water quality. The pollution of rivers and other surface water bodies like lakes, ponds and tanks through discharge of municipal and industrial effluents brings the crisis point a lot closer. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the quality of our river waters is, to say the least, poor. Contrary to what critics think, improving river water quality even by marginal levels is a stupendous task given the large habitations on their banks, poor sewage management, agricultural run-off, discharge of untreated industrial effluents and, above all, cultural and religious practices of people.

Is the situation, then, hopeless? No. At the heart of the water problem lies economics. Water has always been looked upon as a "free good" or a "nearly-free good" because of its seemingly plentiful availability and an innate feeling that to deny water to any being, man or animal, is to deny life. Civilisation has been nurtured on this sentiment and hence any suggestion to look upon water with a commercial eye has been anathema to the righteous. But as one statesman puts it, "Water has a price, whether it is paid or not." Added to this is the irony that often it is the poor who end up paying a higher price for water than the rich.

Water is not a "free good". It makes little sense to supply it free of cost or at an absurdly low cost. Two things need to be recognised. First, there is a social cost of water which must be recovered. The second, equity and social justice, should govern the distribution of the social cost among competing uses and competing users. An estimate has it that the economic benefit to society of providing the same quantity of water to industry as compared to agriculture is 14 times more. On a different plane, another estimate places the percentage of income spent on water to be as high as 25 in some households in India. The authenticity of the estimates may be questioned, but they point to the magnitude of benefits that may accrue to society at large if water allocation be optimal or the economic burden that may fall on the poor if social costs were to be recovered without regard to equity or social justice.

Compare water with a wasting resource like oil. Oil is found only in few places on the earth but is available everywhere, all because it commands a market. Water which is much more widespread than oil and is a recurring resource can benefit if markets are created for it. Economics has to be applied sensibly to a sensitive issue like water but it can be applied nonetheless.

Wars based on race, ideology or territory may have become things of the past. It would be unfortunate if conflicts over natural resources and that too over the most basic of them all for life, water, are allowed to take their place in the new millennium. Prophets of waterless doom have to be proved wrong. ●



The Hindustan Times

And justice for all

THE SNAIL'S pace at which the legal system moves in India has always been a cause of despair for litigants. Some of the latest revelations about the pending cases have underlined the enormity of the problem and the evident failure of all past ameliorative efforts. Apparently, no less than 2.5 crore cases are awaiting disposal in the various courts, probably qualifying for a record of sorts although those who are unable to secure a verdict will not be amused. According to a report submitted to Parliament, as many as 20,260 cases are pending in the Supreme Court alone while 32 lakh cases are yet to be disposed of in the high courts. Little wonder that Chief Justice of India A.S. Anand has sent a rather stern letter to the high courts.

He is unhappy that one of his proposals to ease the congestion in the courts has not been followed. It advocated trials on a day-to-day basis since "old matters cannot remain pending indefinitely". Moreover, the Chief Justices in these courts had been "directed" to monitor the disposal of old cases. But, as Justice Anand has noted, the latest figures have shown that the situation remains nearly as dismal as before. The reasons for the law's delay in India are not unknown. Lethargic police investigation, the habit of lawyers to seek postponements on frivolous grounds and the lack of an adequate number of courts and judges are some of them. However, despite the inordinate time taken for the disposal of the cases, it is noteworthy that the Indian public has not lost its faith in the legal system. Not only the number of cases but also the eagerness with which new ones are filed show that the people at all levels have confidence in the judicial process.

It is possible that the decline in some of the other spheres of governance as a result of the prevailing corruption and other evils has made an increasing number of people move the courts. One evidence of their faith is the recourse to public interest litigation, an aspect of the legal system which is perhaps unique to this country. It has made its appearance because of poor expectations of justice and fair play from the executive. The judiciary, therefore, can be said to be performing well enough to attract litigants pursuing both personal and public matters. If, in addition, the latest initiative taken by the Chief Justice of India to clear the backlog of cases bears fruit, a major step would have been taken to make its image a great deal brighter.

New efforts in Lanka

POLITICAL AND constitutional processes in Sri Lanka aimed at ending internal strife, and meeting Tamil aspirations, have followed a tortuous course over the last 15 years. One of the reasons has been an absence of understanding on principal issues between those in power in the island republic and those occupying the opposition benches, irrespective of parties. Indeed, there have been times when even the party in power suffered from a lack of internal consensus on key issues. This was among the major reasons why the India-Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) of 1987 was aborted amidst acrimony and blood-letting. The ruling UNP, it transpired, was divided on the ISLA, though its leader, President J.R. Jayewardene, had signed it. Fortunately, in the current round of negotiations, aided by mediatory help from the Norwegians and some quiet backing from India, hurdles of this nature have apparently been surmounted.

The good news is that the ruling People's Alliance Government of Chandrika Kumaratunga, and the Opposition under the leadership of Ranil Wickremasinghe, have jointly proposed constitutional changes relating to devolution of power between the Centre and the regions (called provinces earlier), though loose ends are still to be tied up. This will hopefully serve as insulation against a backlash from the conservative Sinhala elements who are wary of sharing power equitably with the country's Tamil minority. But nothing can be said at this stage of the response from the Tamil side, although the power-sharing proposals on offer within the framework of a united Sri Lanka are believed by many to be the best to emerge in recent years.

It is to the credit of the Sinhala leaders that they could bury political differences in an election year in order to come up with a practicable negotiating framework. Ms Kumaratunga has even said that the LTTE too could find a place in the proposed interim council if it gave up arms. The first response from the LTTE is not encouraging. Which means peace is some way yet. But the Norwegian mediators are said to be hopeful that the extremist Tamil organisation can join the dialogue at some future date. Only time will tell. One can only hope that this promising beginning is not nullified as in the past.

Signs of growth

OPTIMISTS MAY derive some satisfaction from the fact that India's GDP grew by 6.4 per cent against earlier projections of 5.9 per cent during the financial year 1999-2000. However, this performance is short of the 6.8 per cent growth clocked in fiscal 1998-99 and the forecast of 7 per cent for the year made by Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha. What led to an upward revision of the earlier estimate made by the Central Statistical Organisation was the more than expected growth in the manufacturing sector. The latest GDP growth estimates suggest that the industrial recession which gripped India in 1997, 1998 and the early part of 1999 is a thing of the past. The 1999-2000 growth could have been nearer to 7 per cent had the farm sector, which is a major source of rural demand, kept pace.

The manufacturing sector deserves special kudos since it grew by 8.5 per cent against the earlier projection of 7 per cent. It was the farm sector's growth of 1.3 per cent that apparently pulled down the overall 1999-2000 GDP growth to 6.4 per cent. During 1998-99, when GDP grew by 6.8 per cent, the manufacturing component rose by a mere 3.6 per cent while the agricultural sector grew by a massive 7.2 per cent. The dip in agriculture can have a delayed impact on the growth prospects of fiscal 2000-2001. But Krishi Bhavan has given a fresh breather stating that foodgrains production in the agriculture year July 1999 to June 2000 should see an all-time high of 205.91 million tonnes which may lead to a further revision in the GDP estimates for 1999-2000, just released by the CSO.

It might not also be wrong to draw an inference that the process of delinking the Indian economy from politics has begun. If the IMF is to be believed, the growth prospects for 2000-2001 may be even better with exports showing a new promise and tax collections a fresh buoyancy. If the Vajpayee Government shows greater determination over disinvestment, it may be able to inject more life into the economy.

THINK IT OVER...

Mother, give me the sun
— HENRIK IBSEN

If Al Gore wins the US presidential poll, Pakistan will continue to be in the dog house

Beating around the Bush

BY N.C. MENON

A FORTNIGHT ago, Indiana Republican Congressman Dan Burton, whose claim to fame is made up of a visceral dislike for Bill Clinton and a penchant for anti-India legislative activities fuelled by campaign contributions from the Khalistan Council, led a score of misguided Congressional warriors in writing to President Clinton urging him to declare India a terrorist nation. The plot to lobby the White House against India was reportedly hatched by the Khalistan Council, aided and abetted by an organisation named 'Pak Pac'.

Mr Burton recycled the atrocious claim that the March 20 massacre of Kashmiri Sikh villagers in Chattisingpura was the handiwork of Indian security forces. This is not the first time that he has accused India of unimaginable crimes. His latest polemical outburst evoked a sense of *deja vu*. Mr Burton had been lying low after his gleeful moralistic lambasting of Bill Clinton over the Lewinsky affair which was followed by the revelation that he himself had been unfaithful to his spouse and had sired an illegitimate offspring.

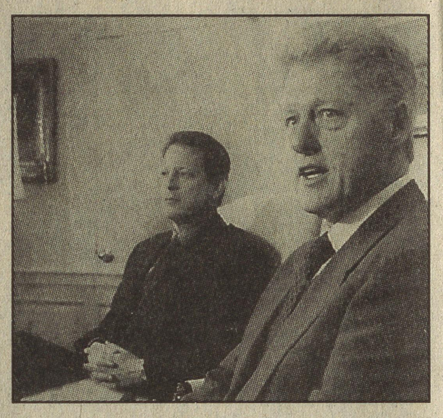
As usual, Islamabad's fingerprints are visible on the plan to defame India. Apart from 'Pak Pac', it is no secret in Washington that the Khalistan Council receives aid and comfort from the Pakistan embassy, which now feels desperately constrained to hobble India's warming relations with the US.

For Islamabad, the slide in its relations with the US began with President Clinton's visit to South Asia in March. The entire world watched the exuberance of Mr Clinton's five-day sojourn in India, the friendliness of his one-day trip to Bangladesh, and the cool, official propriety of his five-hour stop-over in Islamabad. It was an unmistakable signal of where each country fitted into the US scheme of things.

To add to Islamabad's woes, a Congressionally-mandated National Commission on Terrorism, comprising former government officials and private experts, issued a report in June calling on the administration to designate Pakistan as a nation "not cooperating fully" with anti-terrorism efforts. The category of "not cooperating fully" stops just short of a listing as a "state sponsor" of terrorism, but activates other punitive measures. For instance, if listed, Pakistan would be barred, among other things, from buying US military equipment.

There is no doubt that General Pervez Musharraf has been under American pressure to take his country back to democracy, make up with India, and to clamp down on fundamentalist terrorism. Partly in response, there was an effort here by the Pakistan embassy and its hired factotums to portray Gen Musharraf as a reasonable man who disapproves of terrorism and is willing to seek a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict with India. But the bizarre manner in which the initiative was played out left everyone unsure whether it was a genuine effort or a red herring.

This is what happened: Karamatullah Khan Ghori, Pakistan's ambassador in Turkey and a close confidant of Gen Musharraf, arrived here in April. He was prepared to deliver a speech offering an olive branch to India. But Mr Ghori suddenly cancelled two dinners with newsmen and diplomats and also failed to appear at the National Press Club for a well-publicised address entitled, "The Future of Pakistan: Between Extremism and Moderation".



The American publicist who had arranged the Ghori visit claimed later that Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdus Sattar — no friend of India — had ordered Mr Ghori to cancel his speech and return home. The publicist also had e-mail messages from Ghori stating that he had shown the outline of his speech to the 'CE' — Chief Executive Musharraf — and had received his approval.

The Washington Times even claimed to have a copy of the intended speech which, among other things, contained a Pakistani pledge to respect India's territorial integrity and the suggestion that in order to solve the Kashmir dispute, some pro-Pakistan Kashmiris might move from the Indian side to the Pakistani side of the Line of Control, with India transferring some land to Pakistan for their benefit. It is difficult to believe that the hawkish Gen Musharraf, the brain behind the Kargil misadventure and a strong protagonist of *jehad*, could metamorphose into such a dove. The whole affair might just be a propaganda ploy to convince Washington that the General was willing but is stymied by the military and civilian hawks surrounding him, and that he is more sinned against than sinning.

Mr Sattar landed here around mid-June with an air of sweet reasonableness and the plaintive cry that the US had cruelly shunned a faithful cold war ally and hit it with undeserved sanctions. Unfortunately for him, the US has finally learnt the painful lesson that it just cannot be even-handed between a much larger, democratic India, and a military-ruled Pakistan that is sinking under the weight of fundamentalist contagion and failed governance.

Mr Sattar could not but reveal his domestic compulsions when he suggested to an unresponsive US that the sanctions against the Taliban were "counter productive". An official here announced the same day that the US was considering asking the United Nations to strengthen the sanctions against the Taliban. It also transpired that Under Secretary of State Thomas Pickering had informed Mr Sattar that the US would like "a detailed road map" for a quick restoration of democracy in Pakistan.

It was pointed out that the US was not exactly ecstatic about Gen Musharraf's current road map, which was more of a three-year detour sanctioned by the questionable imprimatur of a flawed Supreme Court. Mr Sattar's claim of the government clamping down on religious extremism was also received with a great deal of scepticism by Washington which is well aware that the military regime is unlikely to last very long if it takes on the fundamentalist groups that are so well-entrenched within the Pakistani military and intelligence establishments.

As of now, the ruling elite in Islamabad appears to be holding its breath and hoping for a Republican win in the American presidential elections in November. It has concluded that it is futile for Pakistan to try to get into the good books of the Clinton administration, a situation that will continue under a Gore presidency. But if George Bush enters the White House, Islamabad feels that it would be a different — and more favourable — ball game. After all, Republicans have traditionally been soft on military regimes.

Pakistan ambassador Maleeha Lodhi has been putting that theory to practical use by cultivating the electoral establishment of Governor Bush. Ambassador Lodhi extended a red carpet invitation to Condolceza Rice, candidate Bush's chief foreign policy coordinator, to visit the Pakistan embassy, to be briefed on the strategic challenges facing Pakistan. Dr Rice duly obliged, and made the ambassador's day with the parting remark that "Pakistan is regarded as an important friend of the US". It is possible she was just being polite to an over-eager host, but it was enough for Dr Lodhi's 'achievement' to be lauded to the high heavens in Pakistan.

Islamabad might be making a grievous error in swallowing Maleeha Lodhi's hopeful formulation that a Bush victory will unleash a political storm that will quickly wash away the new structures of Indo-US rapprochement. It would also be foolish to depend on history to assume Republican support.

It must be recalled that it was President George Bush, father of the present Republican candidate, who put an end to the annual certification of Pakistan's nuclear innocence, allowing the Pressler Amendment sanctions to click in. If Bush junior wins the presidency, he would surely set his Pakistan policy exclusively on the basis of perceived American interests. And if Al Gore wins, Pakistan — having burnt its bridges with the Democrats — will continue to be in the dog house.

Gen Musharraf's military regime is thus in a holding operation, looking forward to potential salvation on a throw of the political dice. It does not realise that the dice might be loaded against it.

From zamindari to penury

Can Chandrababu Naidu use his computer network to zero in on those parts of the State where people find it so difficult to pull out of life's quicksands, asks USHA RAI

PLATFORM

SHE IS just 62 years, not old by the standards of the reasonably well off middle class of Delhi, but she looks about 75. She has the telltale limp of the arthritic. Her hair is flaxen white and she has no teeth. She could not afford to get herself fixed with dentures because there are no *sarkari* dentists in Gooty and she could not afford to go to a private doctor. Gooty with its ancient fort is literally a lost and forgotten little town in the heart of drought-prone Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh.

The story of S. Indiramma is probably the story of thousands of women who live in drought-prone areas of the country, struggling to raise a family on a pittance as the agricultural lands decimated by drought year after year refuse to yield a crop. In the cyber city of Hyderabad, driven by the missionary zeal of a technology savvy Chief Minister, people nurture dreams of a better life, but in Gooty life has come to a standstill.

Yet Indiramma had seen better days. She was married into a *zamindar* family which was on the decline but at one stage owned 1,000 acres of land and had at least a sackful of gold and silver. Her mother-in-law Balamma, who ruled like a queen, would give a *dhoti* and *angavastra* to every bridegroom and a *sari* and the *tali* (the gold symbol of marriage) to the new bride of the town. That was her way of blessing the young couple.

Though Balamma was a Brahmin, she ruled like a secular queen. The Muslim pilgrims that went past her house in droves would stop by to fortify themselves with a glass of milk. For this annual feature there was never a shortage of milk because Balamma in her hey days had plenty of cows and buffaloes.

Whenever drought or illness affected Gooty, there were special prayers at the temple of Yelamma. The *sari*, the blouse, the *haldi* and *kumkum* for the Lord, came from Balamma's house. Even devotees to the temple would stop by to collect *haldi*, *kumkum* and some glass bangles. The special offering of a mountain of rice, curds and milk to appease Yelamma was also given by the first family of Gooty.

But 16 successive years of drought in the Forties and early Fifties led to the land and the gold being sold off in bits and pieces to support the family. In those days no one talked about watershed development or rainwater harvesting. Even today there is not much awareness of such things.



Indiramma's husband was educated and was selected for a job in the police, but his mother would not allow the son to work like a plebian. Without money coming in, the decline was faster. First the agricultural land, then the cattle and the sundry landed property disappeared slowly but surely.

Balamma died and with her the glory of an era that was. Towards her last days she could not even get two square meals a day. But there was too much pride to beg for assistance or allow the educated daughter-in-law to work.

The pilgrims who still went past the house were initially given diluted buttermilk in place of milk, then were reduced to having water. As Indiramma's arthritis worsened it became difficult to even provide water, for the tap was located outside the house and water had to be fetched in earthen pitchers.

Then the husband too died and Indiramma was left with the sole responsibility of tending to her flock of four children — the eldest girl, the brightest of the lot, had run off, got married and died at the young age of 31 last year. The eldest son runs two or three scooters to drop children to school. The second son works as an attendant in a petrol station and her other daughter is a private school teacher. Between them the children bring in barely Rs 1,500 to Rs 2,000 a month because most of the money earned by the eldest son goes in paying back bank loans for the scooters.

The daughter, working for 10 years continuously, gets Rs 800 a month. There is no wage for the long summer holidays. She tries to supplement her earnings with tuitions and gets paid Rs 10 a month for an hour of tuition every day. In fact, the parents are constantly trying to beat down the tuition fee to Rs 5.

To get a job in a government school and a decent wage, a B.Ed degree is mandatory. To get the degree Indiramma's daughter would have to go to Bangalore and pay Rs 40,000 for admission to a recognised B.Ed course. It's the kind of money that Indiramma cannot even dream of at this stage of her life. So the children struggle on at an abysmal low level with no prospects for improvement. The ancient house leaks but there is no money to repair it.

This is the new India! There are pockets of affluence; cyber cities. But in several parts of the country time has come to a standstill. Can Chandrababu Naidu use his computer network to zero in on these parts of the State and people who find it so difficult to pull out of life's quicksands?

A telephone call from Drass

SWAPNA ROY

PASSING ON

IT SEEMS just the other day. The telephone rang on July 4, 1999 and all our worries and fears came to an end.

"Captain Sumeet Roy is no more. He was killed on July 3, late evening," said the adjutant from the distant Drass sector of Kargil.

As a mother, I had pinned all my hopes on my promising, young and robust son, just like any other mother. But I had worried a lot on his first posting to Kupwara, commissioned on December 12, 1998, in the 18th Battalion of Garhwal Rifles. I was concerned but proud. An alumnus of the National Defence Academy was deployed in the hot bed of militancy in south Lolab, Kupwara.

I felt very strange and hurt when I went to see the *Fifty-Day War*, Amir Raza's theatre production on Kargil, staged at Mehrauli in Delhi. The omission of the contributions made by the 'Garhwalis' left me miserable and disheartened. I am sure, the 18 Garhwal Rifles and the whole of Garhwal Regiment will always remember Sumeet for his exemplary leadership and courage.

Sumeet was born on September 10, 1977. A soldier's life was ingrained in his blood; he seemed to be fated to become a soldier. He was academically sound, physically tough and mentally strong. With sheer hard work and dedication, he undertook successful operations in the Lolab region, fighting a large number of terrorists. He also recovered huge caches of arms and ammunitions.

Sumeet, besides his academic experiences, did not really have much experience of life. Despite this lack, at 21, he entered and experienced the war and showed raw courage. Whenever the Battalion went for attack, Sumeet was there, leading with full energy.

"Sumeet led the Company in the two major attacks on Point 5140, Drass Sector," said Major Rajesh Shah, who escorted his coffin "back home" to Delhi, with wet eyes.

"He evacuated 15 men of his Company under heavy enemy artillery and small arms fire," said the jawan who brought his belongings home. There was a strange respect in his eyes. Also awe.

A year has gone by. Sumeet still lives with us. We have this intense feeling that he would return home one day. We know the hard reality of his death; but we wait.

Perhaps he was born to be a soldier. There are no regrets. No repentance. Destiny and the will of God has to be accepted gracefully. It is God's will that will be done on earth.

On July 6, his body was received at the gun shed at Delhi Cantonment and on July 7, he was brought home with full Army honours. He was cremated at the Brar Square in the Cantonment, and we realised that he has finally fulfilled all his wishes and desires with his determination to serve the armed forces and the motherland. Sumeet was awarded the Vir Chakra.

The Commanding Officer of the 18th Battalion of Garhwal Rifles had a lot of nice things to say about Sumeet the soldier. I felt proud to be his mother. He said, Sumeet Roy was courageous, daring and dynamic, with innate leadership qualities. He used highly sharp professional skills while capturing Point 4700 against heavy odds and strong, well-entrenched enemy attacks. He held the captured post for 72 hours despite several counter attacks by the enemy.

July 3, 1999. On this day Sumeet made his supreme sacrifice in the Drass Sector, marking his name in the nation's history.

The world has contracted and changed since then, though time, as usual, is flying. On the day Sumeet got commissioned as an officer, I was mighty happy. My elder son was already a commissioned officer in the Garhwal Regiment. I thought that, yes, I have done my "home work" well.

But nay, much home work still remains to be done.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Secular preconditions

THE EDITORIAL *RSS goes to Bollywood* (23 June), towards the end, suddenly goes into the private life of the Bollywood Khans. Do you think inter-religious marriage (which is often a marriage outside the religious norm) is a prequalification or pre-condition for being secular? If so, since apart from the infinitesimal minority, all the people of our country practise endogamy in accordance with the edicts of their religion or the rules of the castes, are they all 'communal' or anti-secular?

S. SHAHABUDDIN
Delhi

Clay feet

AFTER ASSUMING the Prime Minister's position certain actions of Atal Behari Vajpayee have disillusioned his supporters. No doubt he is leading a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, so he has to maintain a tight rope balance of alliance partners but he should not do so at the cost of the nation. First, the Kargil imbroglio was caused by his government's intelligence failure as has been clearly pointed out by the Subramaniam Committee. Secondly, Mr Vajpayee's cowardly submission to Communications Minister Ramvilas Paswan's decision on freebies to telephone employees, costing Rs 1,200 crore a year to the nation, was regrettable. Mr Vajpayee's need to remain in power is evident from his bland submission to Mr Paswan's financially unsound deeds. Hence Emerson's words "Every hero becomes a bore at last" is amply justified in Mr Vajpayee's case.

Y.S. BHASKAR
Delhi

In an Emergency

KRISHNA KUMAR'S article *Remains of the day* (June 27) makes an analysis of the root cause of the Emergency, i.e., the wholehearted support of the bureaucracy. The Indian bureaucrats, who are supposed to be servants of the masses, have not been able to get rid of the mentality of being its *mai baap* and carrying out orders of their masters howsoever unjust these may be, as was the case during the Raj.

As mentioned in the article "....the Emergency gave new vigour to the bureaucracy... The sumptuous mouthful of unquestioned authority munched at leisure during 1975-76 enabled our bureaucracy to regain its old obsession with power."

V.S. GARG
Moradabad

UN-ilateral action

APROPOS OF *A little bit of semantics* (June 28), according to Brahma Chellaney, the United States, through its brute power and unilateral action, has tamed 'rouge states' like Libya, Iraq and Yugoslavia. This is wrong because Libya handed over for trial two suspects involved in the 1988 Pan-Am bombing case due to pressure of economic sanctions imposed by the UN. Iraq has been devastated by the decade of severe sanctions and intermittent bombing following the UN Security Council resolutions. Yugoslavia was bombed into submission by the collective decision taken by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In all these cases, the US has not taken unilateral action.

H.K. PANDEY
Delhi

Autonomy discontents



B.G. VERGHESE has once again ignored the stark realities in the strife-torn Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh regions and sung the same old monotonous autonomy song (*Freedom and its discontents*, June 24). The demand of the people of the State is not for the kind of autonomy the writer and Farooq Abdullah consistently vouch for. They believe, and rightly so, that the sole aim of Dr Abdullah and his supporters is to re-arm the Valley's ruling elite with absolute legislative, executive and judicial powers, enslave all others and widen the already wide gulf between the State and New Delhi. What they really want is an end to the misrule and establishment of a genuinely people-centric, responsible, clean and fair administration. At the same time, they favour the political reorganisation of the State. Their refrain is that such reorganisation alone can empower the ignored regions and the marginalised people they house.

HARI OM Jammu

Evening law courses

DUE TO the Bar Council of India decision to abolish the three-year evening LLB (or) B.L. course in law colleges, thousands of graduates who wish to continue higher studies in law are affected. I appeal to the Prime Minister to intervene and see that the Bar Council drops the move.

U.V. SHANKAR RAO
Chennai

Poles apart

APROPOS OF *Beyond Guns vs Butter* (June 19), Nehru decided that Emperor Ashoka was the role model for India. Aurangzeb was Jinnah's role model for Pakistan. In India-Pakistan relations, Kashmir is not the core issue. Nor is conversion of the Line of Control into the international border the solution. Pakistan wants the Mughal empire. All we can do is to gird up our loins and rely on the valour of the armed forces to save us when the time comes.

K. YADAV
Mussoorie

GREENTALK

A reprieve for jumbo?

Having ensured that the international ban on ivory trade continues, India cannot afford to relax its vigil. Documentation presented at a recent CITES conference shows that the Asian elephant is still a poacher's favourite, says USHA RAI.



Gamma

IF there are battles galore and drama in the jungles of Africa or India, there are equally mesmerising wars being fought outside the forests by big nations to save a species or exploit it for commercial reasons, thereby sounding its death knell.

At Gigiri, Kenya, recently where the 11th meeting of the conference of parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), was held, one such battle was waged by India to reverse the decline of the Asian elephant and to get a reprieve for its African brethren.

In 1997, at the Harare meeting of CITES, the 10-year ban on international trade in ivory was lifted and Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia, which claimed they were protecting their elephants, were allowed a one-time export of ivory to Japan on an experimental basis. The limited sale was fixed at 59.1 tonnes. The Japanese use the ivory for making name-seals, called the hanko business.

But, lifting the decade-long embargo on African ivory has led to increased poaching of the Asian elephant. Even as horrifying tales of the brutal killing of Indian elephants become public, ivory traders here have begun lobbying for lifting the ban in India too.

The first comprehensive studies on pressures of poaching and the ivory trade on the Asian elephant were initiated in India in the mid-1990's. These led to fervent appeals to all those concerned with the conservation of elephants, including Government authorities and the international community, to take measures to tackle the threat to the species.

Studies were done, both in India and abroad, by some prominent conservation organisations of the country like the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre (AERCC), the Wildlife Protection Society of India and the Wildlife Trust of India, with support from governments.

At this year's CITES meeting, South Africa, represented by Mohammed Ali Moosa (of Indian origin), joined the other three African countries, in demanding limited export of ivory to Japan. However, a stout defence against exports was put up by India and Kenya. The United States came out openly against the ivory trade and the President, Mr. Bill Clinton, came on record to support a total ban.

Many international conservation organisations, the Environment Investigating Agency and the Species Survival Network, supported the cause with documents. India came out with an excellent, illustrated booklet, *Reversing The Decline Of The Asian Elephant,* an appeal by the Government of India to the CITES parties.

This time, Ian Douglas Hamilton, who has been working in Africa from the 1970's, and who has elevated elephant study to a fine science, joined the battle to get a reprieve for the jumbo. The other big name in elephant studies, Hezy Soshani, represented the American Elephant Research Foundation. Apart from officials of the Environment and Forest Ministry, India was represented by elephant man R. Sukumar, Vivek Menon and Ashok Kumar of the Wildlife Protection Society.

Also present was the Japanese Wildlife Conservation Society that had some excellent documentation on smuggling of ivory into Japan despite a legally permitted quota. This material was prepared for the 1998 meeting of the Standing Committee of CITES. Gung ho over the limited sale of ivory to Japan in 1997, posters began appearing in Tokyo and elsewhere on the reopening of international ivory trade. This was brought to the notice of the Standing Committee of CITES in 1998 and again in Kenya this year.

While Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa came up with proposals for continuing the ivory trade, India and Kenya put forth plans to upgrade the African elephant population, which had been downgraded to Appendix 2 at the Harare meet in 1997, back to Appendix 1. They also pleaded for revision of the international monitoring systems – Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants (MIKE) and Elephant Trade Information Systems ((ETIS).

The lobbies for permitting ivory sale were so strong that discussions continued till late into the night. Finally, all four African countries agreed to withdraw their proposal for ivory trade. Host country Kenya moved a resolution that African elephants from these countries continue on Appendix 2 so that they could export at least the skin used for making cowboy boots. Having ensured the international ban on ivory trade, India had to compromise by withdrawing its resolution to upgrade the population of African elephants.

However, India cannot afford to relax its vigil, for the poaching for ivory has decimated the tusk bearing male elephant population. As against 300,000 to 600,000 African elephants, there are just 35,000 to 50,000 Asian elephants, half of them in India. Further, unlike the African elephants, only male Asian elephants have tusks. This has led to a significant poaching pressure on adult male elephants, causing highly skewed sex ratios and threatening the long-term survival of the species.

While the total population of wild elephants in India is over 20,000, the number of tuskers of breeding age is just 1,000 to 1,200. It is this small fraction of the elephant population that is being targeted. In the Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala, an elephant stronghold, there are only five adult males left in a population of 1,000. And of these five, only two are tuskers. The other three are makhanas or tuskless males, says the report which was presented at the CITES meeting.

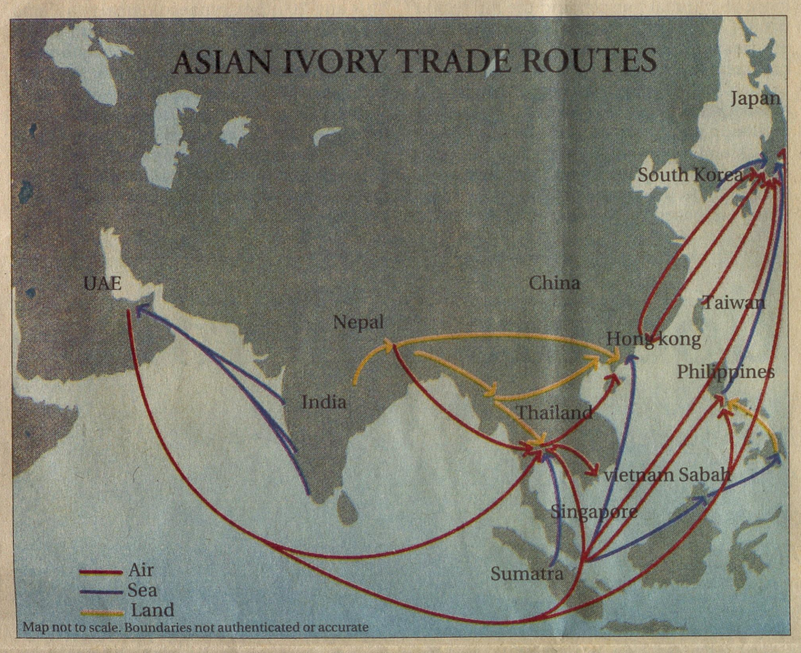
Further, poaching is not limited to adult tuskers of 15 years and above. Sub-adults and even juveniles of three and five years are killed. Because of this, there has been a dramatic reduction of the mean weight of ivory from poached elephants.

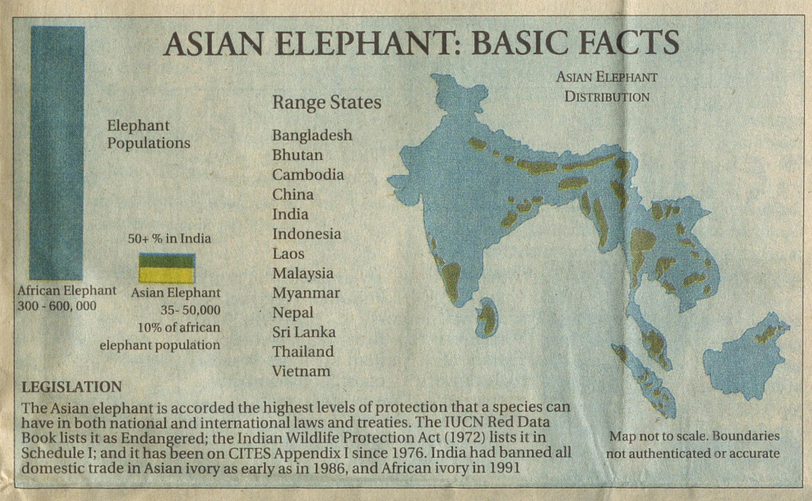
India's report meet pointed out that the year in which limited sale of African ivory was permitted, there was maximum poaching of elephants in India – 110 recorded cases till March this year, 91 cases of poaching were recorded in 1998 and 76 in 1999 ... data for the last couple of years is still coming in because of late detection of carcasses and verification.

The ivory is smuggled out of India by land, sea and air. By land it goes to Nepal then onwards to China and Thailand, the sea route for smuggled ivory is from the west coast to the United Arab Emirates, then by air to Thailand, China and Japan. Ivory hanko blanks have been seized in Jaipur. Though the Indian or Asian ivory is distinct from African ivory, it is difficult for most people to distinguish between the two. In fact the smuggled ivory from both continents can be mixed and sold.

While 80 per cent of the ivory goes to Japan, there is demand even in China, including Hong Kong and Macao, Singapore, Thailand and South Korea.

After a great battle, a small reprieve has been won for the elephant. But India will have to stay alert as pressure to lift the international ban on ivory trade is bound to come up again at the next meeting of CITES in 2002. ●





'I will be dead by forty'

Continued from page I

to know us fairly well, that there had been an incident with some young men. They had "teased" her, probably knowing her husband was away and she defenceless; the Sisters had got to hear a distorted version of the episode, and they, whited sepulchres, had sacked her. But they recognised she was a rare worker and recommended her to us. Pushpa did not say all this in a tone of complaint; she said it baldly, without any self-justification.

There was of course a vast gulf between her perception of society and ours. She saw this and attempted at times to explain things to us, but was usually not successful. It was partly her Bihari: We talked to each other in Hindi, but we could manage only the simpler sorts of conversation. When the discussion became complex she would fall back on her native dialect, and we weren't terribly good either at getting metaphysical concepts across in Hindi.

I remember once, after Kavery and I had established one night that there were mice in the house, I tried to convey the fact to Pushpa next morning, desiring her to procure some poison. Very strangely, I thought, she did not seem to understand my reiterated *chooha*, which I had thought is standard Hindi for "mouse". Much airpainting of the size and shape and characteristics of a mouse did not accomplish anything either. I attempted a murine squeak which died away in embarrassment. Finally I summoned up my Sanskrit and said "*mushika*". "Oh, *moosa*," she said, her eyes lighting up. I wondered what Marshall MacLuhan would have thought.

When Kavery discovered that Pushpa's son was not attending school, in fact had not been registered, she tried to convince her to enrol him. (It was no use talking of both children; we thought we would make a start with the son and then get to work on the daughter. She had reported quite openly to us, without any sense of its injustice, that she gave more food, and what better clothes she could, to her son than to her daughter.) By then it was November, and Pushpa said school would be closed soon. Kavery renewed her efforts in January. The parish ran an inexpensive school near by, and we offered to pay the fees and other school costs. Pushpa would not listen, she just smiled vaguely and waved it away. Some months later, the subject came up again when Kavery was with her in the kitchen.

"*Dekhiye,*" Kavery said, "if he has an education he'll get a better job than just cheap labour."

"He won't get any job," said Pushpa, the realist. I realised later, when I'd gone deeper into the subject, that this was true. He would be the wrong caste, or something; in any case, the only jobs worth getting were *sarkari* appointments, which necessate a down payment far more than anything Pushpa could have afforded. He would end up among the educated unemployed, like Durga Paswan, which is more miserable than being among the illiterate and occasionally employed.

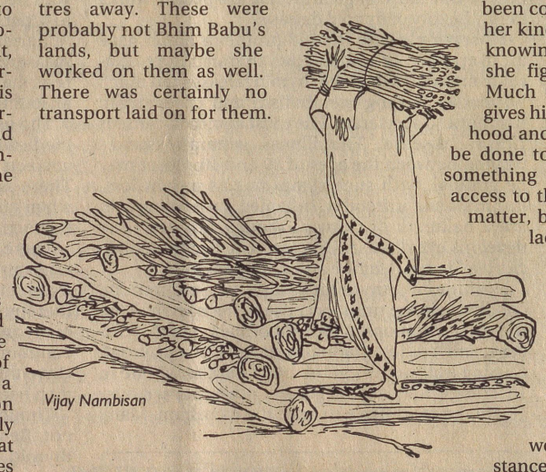
"But see," Kavery insisted, "when you grow old he can look after you better if he has a regular job. And he can't do that without an education."

"Why should I worry about that?" asked Pushpa, laughing. "I will be dead by forty."

★ ★ ★

When the harvest season drew near, Pushpa asked if she could come to our flat just once a day, at three in the afternoon or so. We asked why and she said she would go to work in the fields. With my memories of hired labour in Kerala, I thought this must be a rewarding few weeks for her, and we had no objection. After the first few days her face was burned almost black with the sun and she was clearly weary. Only then did I think to ask about the conditions of her work on the land.

I have gone into this briefly in chapter one: Pushpa and her neighbours would rise before dawn and walk to fields sometimes as many as six or seven kilometres away. These were probably not Bhim Babu's lands, but maybe she worked on them as well. There was certainly no transport laid on for them.



Vijay Nambisan

They worked in the sun – and the sun of the Ganga plain scorches – until well past noon, when they set out on the walk home. I suppose they were given water to drink, but certainly no food; and for pay they got no money, but a fraction of their pickings, never more than a kilogramme or two of mustard or daal.

We tried to make it easier for Pushpa: I did the washing-up in the mornings, Kavery gave her some food to take home daily for the children and suggested that she rest for a while at home before coming to the flat. But she was too conscientious to accept that suggestion. Some afternoons she was almost faint from exhaustion and would sink onto the living-room floor as soon as she came in, and I would attempt to revive her with cold water or a cup of tea.

Pushpa's brand of realism needs some thinking about, at least from my point of view it does. She took all that she had to undergo as just part of life, her life; she accepted it all as consistent with her understanding of life. She knew there are rich and idle people; she knew there were injustices being perpetrated all around her on a daily basis; and she knew they were part of her existence. But that did not affect her actions: She did what she had to do, she does what she has to do.

I would not have, I have not had the strength to do that. My instinct is to get out of an unpleasant situation, and my advantages of birth and whatever else goes with it have made it possible for me to contrive that the change of scene works to my benefit. Education is, I suspect, the determining factor, even ahead of will-power ... no, that's not so. Laloo Prasad Yadav had the power of will to leave a setting where the best he could have hoped for was a job as a peon in a government department, to work through school and not only to work through a political science degree but through another in law, fighting in J.P.'s movement all the while. That took some strength, it took a sense of hurt which was transformed into strength. He may not be a better man than I, but he currently is a better man than I am.

Does Pushpa feel no sense of hurt? It's worse for her: She is a woman. She has been conditioned, I suppose, and also her kind of realism has its strength in knowing she will suffer much worse if she fights what carries her along. Much of what activates Laloo and gives him his power is mardangi, manhood and pride of gender. "This cannot be done to me," he declares, and does something about it. Pushpa is denied access to that strength. So am I, for that matter, but never have I had to feel its lack except in situations of stress and in Bihar, and the life I have fashioned for myself permits me to get along without it, or with a reasonable and temporary simulation of it.

What imitation can console Pushpa or armour her? Damned by being born into her caste, damned by being a woman, damned by her circumstances (not least damning of which is the fact of being a citizen of Bihar and of India) – who can help her but herself, or the gods? And neither she nor I places much reliance upon any probability of a guided papier-mache chariot zooming down through the clouds and Nitish Bharadwaj or some Amar Chitra Katha hero beaming his silly smile upon her.

The English phrase "a place in the sun" means a situation of comfort or prominence. There are many Indian writers who parrot the phrase like fools, when "a place in the shade" would mean more to us. Well, Pushpa had her place in the sun all right, she would be burned black by it and she fully expected it would kill her by the age of forty.

Hers is a life whose grimness I flinch from, whose realities I am still too much of a coward to confront. I suppose it's an appreciation of reality which drives idealists to Naxalism and pragmatists to social work, or vice versa. I'm only writing about it. ●



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USHA RAI

Submerging travails

A visit to old Tehri, which may soon be submerged by the Bhilangana and the Bhagirathi, reveals that the issue of rehabilitation is still to be tackled.

OLD TEHRI township, with all its culture, history and dreams of men like Sunderlal Bahuguna, is gasping for breath. This may be its last summer! The swollen waters of the Bhilangana and the Bhagirathi have begun to engulf it and by mid-July the city will have been submerged. A visit to the "drowning" township showed that rehabilitation was far from complete.

Recently there were red flags fluttering all over and people were huddled in two groups — land and house owners on the one hand and tenants on the other — in a last desperate bid to get the visiting team of journalists to write about their travails. Sunderlal Bahuguna and his band of followers are still hoping for a miracle and that old Tehri will survive. But what is more important is that rehabilitation is completed quickly and efficiently.

The dam, according to the Tehri Hydro Development Corporation (THDC) officials, will affect 37 villages fully and 88 partially. Nearly, 5,200 hectares of land will be submerged and 5,291 urban families affected. Some 2,500 people were lucky to receive compensation for their houses and land between 1983 and 1988. Since the allotment of plots was taken up only seven years later, much of the money they received was spent on daily necessities and other odds and ends.

The chairman of the THDC, M.L. Gupta, has made an assurance that every villager ousted from his land will be given two acres of land and every house owner of the doomed town, 200 square metre plots. The rehabilitation work, which was earlier coordinated alongwith the THDC, has now been handed over to the Uttaranchal Government and the district magistrate, he maintains. But the local administration says it still rests with the THDC.

The whole resettlement/rehabilitation theory of relocating clusters in homogenous settlements so that they do not feel like aliens in a strange land, has been given the short shrift at Tehri. While 900 acres have been acquired at Pashulok, near Rishikesh, 2,500 acres have been acquired at Pathri block of Hardwar. The land here is said to be barren.

"This is a dam built with our tears," says Sunderlal Bahuguna, looking frailer and more gaunt than he was in the last two decades when the battle against the construction of the Tehri dam was at its peak. The hut from which he was conducting his battles has already been submerged and only his ancestral home remains. Other family members have taken their share of compensation and moved out but the old man refuses to go.

How does the State compensate the close to 500 people doing business in old Tehri. Cloth merchant Jamnalal said he had received a compensation of Rs. 60,000, with which he would never be able to buy a house or set up a shop. Carpenter Ramprasad, whose shop of 1983 was licensed till 2005, has not been allotted a place to go to. He is worried about the wooden artifacts he has collected over the years. Gopal Singh, ward no 1, house no 1, is a businessman but he has not even been offered compensation so far. Kartar Singh, a refugee from Pakistan who settled in Tehri in 1949, is desolate. He has a cloth making business and helps his son run a restaurant. Moving out is like going through the whole trauma of Partition all over again, he says. He too is dissatisfied with his compensation package. A lakh of people who live in the villages adjoining old Tehri still depend on the city for their livelihood. They sell milk, vegetables and grass to the city. It would take them a whole day to reach the new Tehri township, making it impossible to keep their produce fresh.

Thirty per cent of those having to leave their homes have got less than Rs. 20,000 as compensation. Is it possible today to get anything for such a small amount? Eleven per cent received between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 80,000 and 14 families Rs. 5 lakhs and above.

There is also a tremendous difference in the rates of compensation paid to homes on either side of the small road. While houses on one side have received compensation at the rate of Rs. 5 a sq.ft, the others have got Rs. 30 a sq.ft.

A young man showed us a photocopy of a cheque for Rs. 46, all the compensation he had received for the land acquired for the dam. Another man showed us a photocopy of a cheque for Rs. 88.20, for his old, traditional home.

Of course there are allegations of people getting compensation, then coming back and claiming money again. A woman activist claimed that 35 widows had not received any compensation because there was no one to help them chase the official machinery responsible for settling compensations. There was even a widow who got just Rs. 7,000 as compensation, while her brother received Rs. 3 lakhs for property of about the same size.

The cost of a two-room unit in new Tehri, a township of concrete blocks built on the hillslopes, is Rs. 4.28 lakhs. The residents of Tehri plead that they should receive a two-roomed unit as compensation or the cost of one. Mr. Gupta of course made the assurance that everyone will be rehabilitated but the point is when will it happen?

There are still two petitions pending before the Supreme Court — one on the safety of the dam and the other on compensation.

Yet it is not as though money has not been earmarked or spent on compensation. Till the end of August last year, out of the funds earmarked for rehabilitation, Rs. 582 crores had been spent. When the district headquarters moved to new Tehri in 1989, Rs. 47 lakhs was spent on building the residence of the district magistrate, Rs. 43 lakhs on that of the police superintendent and Rs. 92 lakhs on the field hostel for the officials. Also, Rs. 67.5 crores was spent on roads, a little over Rs. 20 crores on developing house sites, Rs. 34 crores on drinking water and sewage and Rs. 7 crores on electrification. Compensation for acquired land and houses to be submerged was only Rs. 94 crores.

Yet once in three days there is no drinking water in new Tehri. Money meant for rehabilitation is being spent on supplying water to the city.

About 200 metres of the 260 metre high dam has been constructed. A colossal Rs. 900 crores has been spent on constructing the dam complex, way above the Rs. 305.16 crores estimated in 1974. Some 2,400 mega watts of power will be generated by the THDC. Water is to be supplied to four million in Delhi and three million in western Uttar Pradesh in addition to irrigating vast tracts of land.

But there is a lot of speculation on the filling up of the reservoir. With the Gangotri Glacier, the main source of the Bhagirathi, receding at the rate of 18 metres a year, how much water will be available for the reservoir? According to a study by the Jawaharlal Nehru University, it had receded 800 metres in 40 years. With global warming, the melting of the glaciers may be further accelerated.

Despite all the assurances given by the dam authorities and the Russian engineers who have helped in constructing the dam, fears persist. Built on a fragile, earthquake prone area of the Himalayas, cities upto Delhi face danger should the dam burst.

Yet the madness of big dams, with the trauma they bring in their trail, persists.

Some 38 more dams are being proposed for Uttaranchal! ●



M. LAKSHMAN

Old Tehri town ... talking about compensation and the safety of the dam

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Security for wildlife

The new national wildlife policy cannot be effective unless backed by resources and the support of people living around protected areas.



AP

It is sought to have check points, dog squads and global positioning systems ... but will it still be safe for the tiger?

INDIA still has some excellent jungles where wildlife abounds but, unfortunately, these are under threat. Man-animal conflicts are on the rise and exquisite fauna is disappearing at an alarming rate.

The cheetah became extinct in the 1960s, while lions, which in the Mughal period could be found in North and Central India, are now confined to the Gir Forests of Gujarat. Tigers are fighting for survival. Elephants, which have traditionally been worshipped as Lord Ganesh, are killed for their ivory while their traditional migratory routes have been blocked or altered. The famous one horned rhino and several other species too face extinction.

Therefore, it is heartening to hear that the Environment and Forest Ministry is in the process of finalising a national wildlife policy/national wildlife action plan. Just how effective it will be is difficult to tell. In any case, the most wonderful of action plans cannot be effected unless backed by resources and the support of the public, especially those living around protected areas.

With most States facing a resource crunch and cutting back on jobs, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find money for conservation. National parks are a State's green crown jewels.

Mr. S. C. Sharma, Additional General, Wildlife, in the Environment and Forest Ministry, says State Governments say that they do not have the funds to run parks. Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka are some of them. Vacant posts of forest guards and wildlife staff are not being filled. Even in Karnataka, 40 to 50 per cent of the posts in the forest and wildlife service are vacant. This of course has a disastrous effect on the park concerned. In Bandipur National Park, Karnataka, 40 per cent of the posts are vacant, Mr. Sharma says. In fact the Ministry is seriously considering support to these parks – the money going directly to the parks and bypassing the States.

In fact the new policy seeks to conserve wildlife everywhere and not just in isolated and protected areas. Mr. Sharma calls it a "total landscape approach". So far, this protection was available only in national parks and, to some extent, in sanctuaries. Often protected areas are surrounded by agricultural land and when wildlife intrudes into these areas, they are shot or poisoned. So the areas around a park have to become buffers. In fact agricultural fields should be discouraged from coming up around protected areas.

In the hills and plains, leopards are being killed at an alarming rate. Apart from poachers, there are villagers who seek them out when their cattle fall prey to them (the leopards). Failure to provide adequate compensation on time has compounded the problem. In the absence of proper habitats and prey species for their survival, leopards resort to attacking cattle and dogs. Enraged villagers have no qualms about killing them. According to TRAFFIC India, between 1995 and 1999, over 500 leopard skins and as many kilograms of leopard bones were seized. This figure probably denotes only a fraction of the leopards killed. So the new policy will have to ensure compensation to farmers and on time.

In the policy too, there will be an effort to integrate the efforts of all sections of people in conservation. Management committees will oversee development of all protected areas other than national parks. They will determine grazing rights in protected areas and advise villagers on the kind of trees to be grown in areas free of herbivores. Tigers rearing their young in sugarcane fields surrounding the Dudhwa National Park, Uttar Pradesh, are a major cause of man/animal conflict in the region. So the vote of the committees in the area would be to dissuade farmers from growing sugarcane. This of course is not going to be easy.

To ensure maximum security for protected areas the enforcement machinery is to be strengthened. An enforcement cell on the lines of the narcotic cell with field level operations is on the cards. Check points will be set up on all sensitive trade routes for wildlife trafficking – the Nepal border, the Terai region, Jodhpur (Rajasthan), Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and the Sunderbans (West Bengal). Dog squads, trained by the Border Security Force (BSF), will be attached to important checkpoints. Also proposed are mobile patrol squads at centres of trade and a Global Positioning System.

The one forest guard-one beat system can no longer work, says Mr. Sharma. So armed constabulary for wildlife areas is being worked out. While existing field staff will provide the information, the enforcement will be conducted by trained and well equipped professionals. Several forest personnel have been killed while on duty without being trained or equipped to defend themselves. Forest departments have not been able to forget the manner in which District Forest Officer Srinivasan was beheaded by bandit Veerappan in the early 1990s, while in the Manas National Park, Assam, Bodo tribals often take away the rifles of forest guards. Emphasis is being given to a kind of para-military force for protected areas and strengthening of enforcement. There is some resistance to this idea from forest personnel. The hundreds of vacant posts will be filled by members of the new crack team – equipped with more effective guns, vehicles and communication facilities.

Maharashtra and Kerala are already trying out the forest police station system on an experimental basis. Action is now the need of the hour, as much time has been wasted on debate. ●

The local word

Continued from page VII

brought down campus crime 41 per cent, vandalism 55 per cent, assaults 83 per cent and liquor law violations 25 per cent. Penn State University has recently spent $9 million on building a 24-hour campus spa offering new "social options" to the students. Swimming pools, gymnasium facilities, free movies, dances, concerts, games and arts and crafts will be offered as an alternative to drinking – in a programme similar to Lehigh's. It will not be long before Indian campuses may also have to think of ways to tackle campus indiscipline, whatever the causative factors are.

There were, however, a couple of things the Americans do differently, which we could well follow with benefit. When Gururaj Deshpande recently gifted Rs. 50 million to his alma mater, IIT Madras, he was taking a leaf out of the American book. It was in the Lehigh Valley that I caught up with the F. M. Kirby Foundation gifting $32.5 million to Lafayette College in Easton, where four generations of

'To reach out to those alumni, American universities have full-fledged offices to regularly keep in touch with them. It is time Indian colleges began doing the same instead of waiting for the occasional largesse from the few like Deshpande.'

Kirbys had studied before going on a fortune. The old liberal arts college had in 1995 targetted raising $143 million by the middle of 2001; it has already raised $155 million and is now looking at about $20 millions more. Lafayette's president said that the College owed its fund-raising success to "alumni grateful for their experiences at college". To reach out to those alumni, American universities have full-fledged offices to regularly keep in touch with them. It is time Indian colleges began doing the same instead of waiting for the occasional largesse from the few like Deshpande.

Doing it differently again was the Lehigh Valley when it recently introduced a 3.5 per cent tax on hotel room rates and expected to generate $2.5 million a year from it. A quarter of the tax collected will be used as "development dollars" for tourism facilities and tourist projects, while the rest will be for the Lehigh Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau to "promote and market the valley". Now how much of any tax collected here from hotels, which in percentage is substantially more, goes into tourism projects and promotion?

Money also keeps pouring into each American county's Historical Society whose work – preservation, restoration and renovation – has made "heritage tourism the fastest growing segment of Pennsylvania tourism". Pledges to the Allentown Society from the private sector has enabled it to target $6 million this year; we are unable to get even some cost-free heritage regulations in place to enable the private sector to believe the State means business.

With so much more to offer visitors, why are we blowing our opportunities, not only here but throughout the country in areas like travel and tourism? ●



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TATA

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE

OaM 3651

The Hindustan Times

Bowing to the villain

THE ANXIETY and distress caused by Rajkumar's abduction have now degenerated into a farce with the bandit, Veerappan, ensconced safely in his not-so-secret lair, making the Governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka run around in circles. The latest from the videographed hideout is that the country's most wanted smuggler is satisfied with the Government's meek response to his various demands, including those relating to compensation for those who have experienced police 'atrocities'. There is no reference, at least for the moment, by any politician or official to the numerous atrocities which the outlaw himself has committed throughout his 'career'. All that is now being brushed aside as the two state Governments bend over backwards to keep him in good humour.

If India is sometimes described as a soft State, no better example can perhaps be found in confirmation of the charge than the Rajkumar-Veerappan episode. While negotiations with insurgents are a phenomenon that can be seen as much in Kashmir as in Northern Ireland or Spain or West Asia, kowtowing to a fugitive who has taken a hostage rarely wins much applause. Even when such postures are unavoidable when dealing with terrorists, the authorities like to make it clear that they are accepting the demands only under duress and would take the first opportunity to hit back. In the case of Veerappan, however, it is clear that the authorities will let him carry on as before whether or not he has the good sense to release Rajkumar.

In fact, the cynical suggestions that the rogue may be preparing to enter political life show how low the image of politicians and of those entrusted with the task of maintaining law and order has sunk in the public eye. Indeed, the apparent political connections between the brigand and some largely unknown Tamil extremist groups underline both the complexity of the present situation and possible future trends. For once, Ms Jayalalitha is right when she prescribes drastic remedies to end the drama. But then she has the advantage of being out of power. The Governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka obviously have to act with greater caution, but they cannot deny that by allowing the menace to grow all these years, they have brought the crisis down on their own heads. Had they been serious about hunting down Veerappan earlier, the situation would not have come to this pass. If the reasons why they did not do so — because he wasn't considered much of a threat or because of his political links — are revealed some day, they will show all the big guns in the two states in very poor light.

Lesson from the rains

ANDHRA PRADESH has lately had a run of poor luck with nature. First, it was a harsh drought which devastated large parts of the state, and now a torrential downpour has pretty much submerged the Telengana region, including Hyderabad, or Cyberabad — the name raising futuristic visions of progress, thanks to the much-publicised efforts of Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu. But the havoc wreaked by the rains has shown that much remains to be done at a more mundane level before the city can live up to its new name. Ironically, the flooding occurred soon after Mr Naidu convened a meeting of like-minded Chief Ministers to protest against the allegedly discriminatory treatment meted out to the so-called 'performing' states by the Eleventh Finance Commission. There is much to be said for his initiative, which has been endorsed by the Chief Ministers of six other states who also believe that they have not been treated fairly by the Commission.

But as the travails of Hyderabad in the aftermath of the rains have revealed, 'performance' can be evaluated at various levels. Undeniably, the computer-savvy Mr Naidu's efforts to provide Andhra Pradesh with a new modern image have won him many admirers. He is widely recognised to be different from the traditional run of Chief Ministers who are preoccupied with casteist and communal issues and are oblivious of a changing world. Instead, Mr Naidu's focus is on making Andhra Pradesh an investors' paradise. But if the rains have drawn attention to anything, it is to the stark fact that much more than the establishment of 'online' facilities is needed to make a state enter the 21st century.

In many respects, Hyderabad still lives in the 19th. Obviously, its drainage system can do with considerable improvement, although it is also true that few cities could have coped with the kind of downpour that it experienced. The way Delhi is flooded after only brief cloudbursts is an example of the condition of most of our cities. However, the woes of Hyderabad may have provided a timely lesson to which a man as hungry for success as Mr Naidu is will undoubtedly pay attention. Development is a many-sided affair. Urban distress is not Andhra Pradesh's only problem. Agricultural indebtedness driving farmers to suicide is another, and a more serious one. Perhaps the latest calamity will make the Chief Minister take a close hard look at such issues which may have been earlier partly overlooked.

Deadline in West Asia

INDIA IS known for its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause. That Israel should keep India informed about the progress and difficulties in the peace process is a measure of New Delhi's fast expanding ties with Tel Aviv. India has only limited clout as far as the Israeli-Palestinian talks are concerned. However, New Delhi has reasons to feel happy about the country being increasingly looked upon as a major international player. Indian leaders have understandably impressed upon both the sides to continue dealing with their disputes through negotiations.

Yasser Arafat is under pressure from within his own ranks to go ahead with the unilateral proclamation of independent Palestine. But such a course of action is fraught with dangerous consequences. Israel has time and again threatened that if Mr Arafat declares independence on his own next month, Tel Aviv may envisage annexing Palestinian territories or extending Israeli law to the strategic Jordan valley. The issue of Palestinian statehood has been postponed many times and it is Mr Arafat who has often been forced to make a compromise. It was the 1994 interim agreement on Palestinian autonomy which had fixed May 4, 1999, as the date by which time it was expected that a final settlement with Israel would be negotiated under the Oslo accord.

The five-year transitional period ended in May last year. At that time an international consensus emerged calling for an extension of one year. The Palestinians cannot be expected to accept a perpetual transitional period or subjecting the possibility of setting up the Palestinian State to the whims of the Israelis. But Mr Arafat will do well to avoid unilateral actions that may grievously damage the peace process. The Ehud Barak Government has its own difficulties. It may not survive till October. Time is running out for President Bill Clinton as well. The international community would have to ensure that the focus is not lost in West Asia and that things are not allowed to drift at this crucial stage.

THINK IT OVER...

Idle youth, enslaved to everything,
my extra-sensitivity will destroy me
— ARTHUR RIMBAUD

Monitoring and accountability should be the key components of the new population policy

Number crunching

BY USHA RAI

THE CENTRAL Council of Health is meeting on August 30. For all purposes, it has a difficult task ahead. The 'overpopulated' Population Commission finally had its first meeting to see how best to stabilise population growth. An action plan was prepared and a Rs 100 crore population stabilisation fund set up. With tax rebate on contributions to the fund, captains of industry are being wooed to chip in for the country's first mammoth post-Emergency effort to rein in the galloping population by 2045.

Ironically, Chief Ministers of Bihar and Orissa, two of the five states with runaway population growth, did not attend the meeting. The media, which front-paged the birth of the billionth baby and the setting up of the Population Commission, had little or no coverage of the action plan announced by Health and Family Welfare Minister a few days later.

Yet population stabilisation is such an urgent issue that unless there is consistent pressure and publicity, we would have missed yet another opportunity to check population growth after the hype of India's billionth baby. By the middle of the century, India would have the dubious distinction of being the most populated country in the world.

The National Population Policy (NPP), announced a few months ago, has spelt out socio-demographic goals that are challenging and difficult to achieve for a country that has been dragging its feet on the population issue since the mid-Seventies set back to family planning. Even the Swaminathan Committee's draft population policy of 1994 was put in cold storage for six years. The NPP ignores the structural changes recommended by Swaminathan, the main being to take it out of the ministry. There is a great deal of scepticism about the efficiency of such a mammoth body of Chief Ministers, Central Ministers of key ministries, NGOs, TV and film personalities and journalists.

This huge Commission can at best only be a think-tank. The decision to have several working groups has already been taken. The implementation, which is where we have always failed, is again being left to the Government, to bureaucrats who are constantly shuffled, to non-existent basic health infrastructure and to the handful of NGOs working on health.

Fortunately in C.P. Thakur, the country has a dynamic new Health Minister and a committed doctor. If his enthusiasm can be supplemented with political commitment from the BIMARU states in particular, population stabilisation can become a reality. Thakur and K.C. Pant, the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and Vice- Chairman of the Population Commission, have to ensure that condoms, drugs and basic medical equipment reach health workers in far-flung rural areas.



Unfortunately, the women's groups have been so critical of implants and injectibles that there is a far smaller choice of contraceptive methods in India than in smaller countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia. This trend has to be reversed. Auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) have to be provided mopeds or some means of transport to travel from village to village and doorstep to doorstep ensuring delivery of health services.

Under the action plan for 2000-2001, two important decisions have already been taken. One, to give cash rewards to panchayats with a population of 5,000 or more for reducing drop outs, birth rates and increasing the number of deliveries by trained attendants. Two, to give a health insurance cover for couples below the poverty line undergoing sterilisation after two children. This five-year insurance is expected to increase child survival and health of the mother. The compensation for tubectomy and vasectomy is also to be increased from Rs 200 and Rs 180 to Rs 300 and Rs 200 respectively. These are incentives that should work.

Technology missions within the Department of Family Welfare will focus on Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa that have below average socio-demographic indices and account for 54.27 per cent of the births in the country.

On July 11, World Population Day, India had a population of 1,002,594,606, which is almost 26 lakh more people from the billion on May 11. Though India has 2.4 per cent of the world's land area, it has 16 per cent of its population. The pressure of this staggering population on India's forests and natural resources are disastrous.

However, the good news is that we finally have a NPP even if the goals set by it seem ambitious — and now an action plan. The infant mortality rate is to be brought down from the current 72 per 1,000 live births to 30 by 2010; the maternal mortality from 407 per 1,00,000 live births to 100 and the total fertility rate (TFR) from 3.3 to 2.1 by 2010. The TFR or the number of children per couple is higher in India than in most countries. Though Kerala, Goa, Tamil Nadu and Andhra have achieved replacement level fertility, their achievements have been offset by the high fertility levels of 4 to 4.8 in the BIMARU states and Meghalaya.

In 1997, the Registrar General's expert committee on population projections predicted that while Rajasthan and Bihar would achieve the 2.1 TFR in 2019 and 2039 respectively, Madhya Pradesh and '*Ulta Pradesh*' may achieve this rate after 2060 and 2100 respectively.

There are discordant notes on family planning and abortion from religious groups, whether it is Christian, Muslim or Hindu. Though abortion or medical termination of pregnancy has been legalised, recently a religious leader called it "a sin worse than murder." These groups have to be won over and quickly. The sex ratio in India is among the worst in the world. Due to the preference for a male child and prevalent practices of female foeticide and infanticide, the female-male ratio is 960 to 1,000.

Though there has been a law in existence for some years now against the misuse of sex determination tests, in Punjab and Haryana, there has been a sharp decline in the birth of girls. With girls now demanding a share in the family property, even Sikh families do not want further fragmentation of agricultural lands by having girls.

The Population Policy seeks to delay the age of marriage for girls to 18 or 20 years. This is a Herculean challenge. Mass marriages of children below 10 continue in most states and in Rajasthan in particular. Has a Rajasthan Chief Minister or politician ever spoken out or taken action against these child marriages?

Will they do so now that they are members of the Population Commission and therefore morally obliged to implement the national policy. Simultaneously, the policy seeks 100 per cent registration of births, deaths, marriage and even pregnancy. These are all wonderful objectives, but how will we ensure that they happen?

In fact, at the rate at which populations are mounting in the Hindi heartland, the Population Foundation of India has predicted that in 2051, these four states will account for 51.4 per cent of India's population. The southern states of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which have been rigorously pursuing population stabilisation efforts, will account for just 16.5 per cent of the country's population.

Fortunately, the greater political representation to Parliament that the northern states would get on the basis of their population has been frozen till 2026. However, this highly uneven growth of southern and northern populations is bound to create all kinds of problems.

Monitoring and accountability should be the key components of the new population policy. This important responsibility has to be shouldered by the Planning Commission. Chief Ministers of India's populous states have ominous responsibility. They have to be pushed by the Prime Minister to deliver. Only then can we hope to have a stable population in 2051.

An icon hijacked

Swami Vivekananda made Hinduism humane and pluralist. Those now selectively selling his messages in their hate campaigns deny him his essence and spirituality, writes URVASHI DHAMIJA

PLATFORM

THE CONCEPT of Hindutva or the core quality of Hinduism can be understood as indicating that it comprises those who subscribe to it and share a unique cultural heritage. It is a bonding that generates a vigorous sense of unity and commitment to a shared destiny among all those who inhabit the territory of India, the historical homeland of the Hindus. It was in 1922 that Veer Savarkar first elaborated upon this view which has been further clarified over the years by Guru Golwalkar, among others, who have also pushed this as a form of political discourse.

In post Independence India, since the summer of 1998, the ideology of Hindutva has had unprecedented dominance in many parts of the country. This phenomena is frequently linked with the rise in the visible signs of exploitation of the Dalits and organised violence directed at religious minorities. The question which arises is whether there has been any other self- conscious exponent of Hinduism as a progressive social and political doctrine who can be referred to help reverse these contemporary trends? For instance, even a partial familiarity with what Swami Vivekananda wrote and spoke, and the way he functioned and lived his life, suggests that he is both an author and a transparent symbol Indians can definitely turn to in present times.

Swami Vivekananda's antecedents as a sophisticated commentator on the essence of Hinduism are impeccable. Born in a middle class Hindu home, he was exposed to both Hindu and Western intellectual influences. He found a *guru* in Ramakrishna Paramhansa who satisfied his spiritual yearnings fully. However, in the all encompassing debilitating environment of colonial India with which he became intimate by his travels as a mendicant, he felt that a sense of fulfilment was impossible unless one becomes an active agent of constructive and creative social change. He believed that Hinduism suggested the perspective for individual intervention so as to make India a vibrant, pluralist and sensitive civilisation.

Significantly, in 1993, the centenary year of his address to the Congress of Religions in Chicago where he had stumped the delegates by his speech on Hinduism, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad formally embraced him as one of their own. However, in their zeal to push through their aggressive and extremely limited and myopic agenda, they chose to overlook some inconvenient facts concerning Vivekananda's spiritual worldview.

Vivekananda had gone abroad basically to raise funds and orthodox Hindus in his time avoided him due to his scathing comments about their priorities and life style. Those who had participated in the destruction of a 400-year old place of worship associated with Islam at Ayodhya on December 6, 1992, chose to



forgot that their newly discovered icon held Islam in high esteem. Vivekananda believed that Islam had enriched India's architectural and cultural legacy and it had provided a living example of egalitarian social practices. His perception about Islam was far removed from what the VHP and other Sangh parivar fronts hold and propagate.

Significantly, since 1998, the Sangh parivar has used loose quotations to invoke Vivekananda's authority in defence of their campaigns against Christians whom they accuse of using material benefits to lure people into their faith. They have made Vivekananda an implicit partner in violence directed at not only churches and church functionaries but also Christian educational institutions and ordinary people. The flag bearer of the Indian nation, the State, seems helpless in checking the slow and multiple fracture of a political and cultural reality which sustains a billion people. In this context, by drawing upon authentic collections of Vivekananda's formulations (which are available at highly subsidised rates at the Ramakrishna Missions), can we take steps to generate a healing and countervailing influence?

To Vivekananda, honouring the core quality of Hinduism or Hindutva required hard and protracted anti-status quo work. Since the same undivided reality of *advait* pervaded all living beings, for him any religion was only a device for satisfying the universal yen for unity. All religions were thus on par.

"Ceremonies, books and forms — all these are links in the chain. Get hold of any of the chains that are stretched from a common centre. Blame no view of religion so far it is sincere," said Vivekananda.

Spreading disinformation about Hinduism or virtually forcing people to convert to another religion by offering incentives was unacceptable. An appropriate response lay in attacking the cause for the widespread deprivation among large number of Hindus who also belonged to the lowest rung of its social hierarchy. If the latter seemed "bound hand and foot — (with) scarcely any opportunity for the accumulation of wealth, or the earning of proper knowledge and education", it was because the higher castes were preoccupied with consolidating their privileges and maximising their own welfare.

In that sense, Swami Vivekananda's critique of Hinduism was a step forward; it was an effort to rid it of its oppressive and hypocritical chapters and resurrect its pluralist, humanitarian and vibrant essence. In the same vein, he pushed the secular discourse to its logical continuity, and he did not have to use the word 'secular' to prove this. Those who are now using his philosophical and spiritual paradigm by selectively pushing random messages directed against other religious communities, are actually not only denying Vivekananda his authentic place in Indian history and in the history of Hinduism, they are also making him an accomplice in the politics of hate and violence which he intensely abhorred and opposed all his life.

Passenger alert

UPASANA PANDE

OFF TRACK

WAITING FOR a bus, watching even the most unlikely people zooming off in imported cars, is not something one particularly relishes. But life is all about experiences. Or so I told myself one morning after a particularly intriguing incident that kept me amused throughout my trip in the good old 620 (from Shivaji Stadium to Vasant Vihar).

After perspiring for half-an-hour at the deserted bus stop, I finally boarded the bus with a sigh of relief. Getting a window seat was an added bonus. Congratulating myself, I took out a magazine and was settling down to read it when a slight commotion at the rear of the bus dragged me from the world of Hurriyat and Kashmiri militants.

"Get back, you blacky, stand on the other side," screamed a man who was sitting on the outer-side of a row on the right. "Hey man, what's your problem?" murmured the African clinging on to the bar and standing beside the well turned out and seated gentleman.

"Just shut up and do what I say," was the instant reply.

"I am not doing anything, so why should I move?" the African responded.

Unable to digest this, the man snarled, "I am a journalist and I know what kind of people you are. Just tell me where you're from, which backward jungle do you belong to and I'll take you to the police."

By then, the exchange had attracted almost everyone in the bus. A few were nodding, expressing solidarity with the 'journalist' while the rest — including myself — were seething with contempt at such blatant show of racial hatred. The African, on the other hand, seemed unperturbed by the outburst and refused to budge from where he was standing. "This man is crazy, he is out of his mind," he said to nobody in particular.

The 'journalist', meanwhile, had decided to exhibit his knowledge of 'clandestine activities' of Africans in India. "You must be from Sudan, one of those involved in drug smuggling. I know you people very well. I am a journalist and I'll have you arrested. Just tell me who you are," he demanded.

"I am a Nigerian and you don't realise what you're saying," the African replied. I could see the faint glistening of his eyes. Everyone watched this spectacle, some with amusement, others like me with contempt and the rest, including the conductor and the bus-driver, with sheer indifference.

The allegations didn't stop there. The 'journalist' felt it was his moral duty to inform all present about the trade that the Nigerian could have been practising in our country. "Just a few days back, the police caught three of them, involved in drug-trafficking. Open up your bag. I am sure you must be one of them too."

"He is out of his mind. Hey, you take me to the police and I will sue you for what you're saying," said the furious Nigerian who still was having difficulty digesting this blow to his self-respect.

Finally, someone was nice enough to offer the Nigerian a seat. But what actually soothed the tension in the atmosphere was the departing shot by the Nigerian: *"Pata nehi, yeh apne ap ko kya semajhta hai. Bina soche samjhe ye bole ja raha hai, iska sar garam ho gaya hai,"* he said in flawless, slightly accented Hindi.

His accent made everyone burst into laughter. The self-proclaimed journalist remained sullen-faced and got down at the very next stop.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Inseparable entity

THE PRIME Minister's address from the ramparts of the Red Fort that Kashmir was an inseparable part of India was, timely. He, however, went only half the way. He should have stated that it was primarily India and only incidentally Kashmir. Moreover, such Kashmiris who did not like India were welcome to go to whatever place that looked like providence to them. The principle of self-determination or referendum will have to cover the inseparable entity that is India and not be confined to any portion on the basis of religion, language, caste, geography or any other consideration. That way every village or *mohalla* can claim the right to secede.

RAGHU NATH SINGH
Jaipur

Best tributes

IT WAS satisfying that leaders of all political parties, cutting across party lines, paid their respects to late P.R. Kumaramangalam and Rajesh Pilot. Leaders like Ranga and Pilot need to be honoured by the present crop of politicians by taking them to new generation politics of boldness and honesty. This can be best done by propagating new norms like small family, minimum education for politicians and saving politics from criminalisation. Appropriate bills in this regard named after Ranga and Pilot may be the best tributes we can pay these young leaders.

SUBHASH C. AGRAWAL
Delhi

II

FIRST IT was Rajesh Pilot, now it is Kumaramangalam. Irrespective of the political parties they belong to these were the type of leaders on whom we were banking upon to steer India to great heights in this millennium. They were the leaders bubbling with youth and charisma. They were the 'cool ones' existing in the atmosphere of hot air in Indian politics. India has suffered a huge loss by the death of these young ones.

SANJAY KHANNA
Ghaziabad

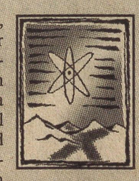
Fiji troubles

FIJI'S DEPOSED Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry is right when he says: "Now that George Speight has been charged with treason, the logical thing to do is to restore the Constitution and the ousted Government" (August 16). Fiji is a litmus test for the United Nations, the international community at large, more specifically for countries such as the US and UK, who lecture the world on democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and what not. What has come over them and Japan, a great power in its own right? Why are their responses so tepid and evasive with regard to the murder of democracy in Fiji?

It was hoped that at least Australia and New Zealand, being in the vicinity of Fiji, would show greater understanding and courage for the need to restore the democratically-elected Government of Mahendra Chaudhry. Instead, they have also been content to act as the camp-followers of the West.

S.C. KAPOOR
Noida

Nuclear masochism



THIS REFERS to *Nuclear interruptus* (August 23), no amount of vocal sexualisation of the nuclear bomb will justify the arms race and weapon sophistication. Nuclear interruptus, withdrawal of action before criticality is reached, subcritical (tests) as a cover for more promiscuous tests at a supercritical level, are all sexual imagery to hide subterfuge and deception. All this may 'sexcite' ultra-patriotic eroticism, but is irrational. Great strides have been taken towards nuclear disarmament after the end of the Cold War. The CTBT stipulates zero yield experiments as against Chellaney's advice of a 'tiny leak' while practising nuclear interruptus. The whole range of intermediate range weapons were eliminated by the INF Treaty. Tonnes of weapons-grade fissile material is to be degraded to civilian use, according to the decision taken at the Clinton-Putin meeting.

The nuclear weapon states are not doing enough towards nuclear disarmament. India should eliminate its nuclear weapons along with Pakistan, for which the latter has been agreeable. Kashmir problem need not stand in the way of making South Asia a nuclear weapon free zone. It is foolish to think that the nuclear threat from Pakistan could be countered by us having more sophisticated weapons.

N. KUNJU Delhi

Veerappan's demands

THE KIDNAPPING drama of Rajkumar is in the news these days and both the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu Governments have tried to meet all the demands of Veerappan including the release of the prisoners arrested under the TADA act.

How these states will convince those police personnel who had arrested them in the first place? Such acts will demoralise the police personnel and also lead to an increase in kidnapping of the popular persons. We should adopt other ways to overcome this problem.

MINAKSHI KAUL
Delhi

The Hindustan Times

Tied down by cable

AN ELEMENT of mystery surrounds the motives of those calling the shots in the current cable operators strike. The operators deny that the strike is motivated by resentment over the Government's determination to stop piracy, the dissemination of pornography and the advertising of liquor. All that, they say, is fine. They are not pirates, pornographers or booze-peddlers. So, what are they objecting to? Well, they say, the Government intends to hold them responsible for any obscene or objectionable programme transmitted by a satellite channel. This, they say, is unfair. If the Government objects to an obscene movie on say, HBO, then why haul up a poor cable operator from say, Pitampura? Fair enough. But there are many problems with this argument. One: the law that holds cable operators responsible is the Cable Act which was passed in 1995. So why suddenly complain now? Two: the Government has repeatedly clarified that in, say, the HBO example mentioned above, it would deal directly with the channel and not penalise some hapless cable-*wallah*. The provision in the Cable Act is to provide a second line of defence if a foreign channel does not cooperate. Assume, for instance, that the Government has problems with a programme on PTV. As the Pakistani channel is unlikely to remove the programme, the provision is to force cable operators to take off the channel if necessary.

Even if the cable operators remain circumspect about their true motives, the strike provides us with an opportunity to assess the state of the cable business. It is probably fair to say that in the midst of the TV boom, the one sector that has let India down is the cable industry. At present most subscribers are at the mercy of their cable operator. He can show them whatever he wants, take off channels at will, charge what he likes and provide lousy service because he knows that in most areas, the subscriber has no choice: there is just one operator. This leads to a bizarre situation in which the consumer is the king of the TV business, able to zap channels out of business with his remote but still a slave to his cable operator. Worse still, as the individual operators have signed on to take feeds from the big Multi-System Operators (MSOs), new, more potent monopolies have grown up. In most cities, one or two MSOs control all sets. If a new channel hopes to get shown, then it has to do whatever the MSOs want — and this sometimes involves kickbacks in foreign currency.

The only way out of this mess is to break the hold of the cable business. The Government has been reluctant to allow DTH broadcasting arguing that it will quickly be dominated by the two existing big channels which will have the power to squeeze out other players. This is a valid position but its consequence is to concentrate all power in the hands of MSOs, many of whom are, anyway, run by content providers. The solution is not to ban DTH but to increase the number of avenues available to a subscriber. Give us a choice between DTH, cable and the many new technologies that are now on the market. For instance, DD now has the ability to digitally transmit up to six channels per terrestrial transmitter. Similarly, MTNL should be encouraged to lay down lines that allow internet and TV to be disseminated. This strike has demonstrated that we have let the cable business get away with too much for too long.

No permanent enemies

A PICTURE showing Laloo Yadav, Sharad Yadav, Nitish Kumar and Rabri Devi engrossed in a discussion might make people rub their eyes in disbelief. It was not long ago that Nitish Kumar tried his utmost, with a bit of help from the Bihar Governor, to prevent an RJD Government from assuming power in the state and Sharad Yadav had gone on fast in the mistaken belief that his defeat in a parliamentary election had been engineered by Laloo Yadav. That such bitter enemies should now meet to talk things over indicates a remarkable turnaround in their attitudes. While an earlier initiative to bring all the Bihar leaders together was taken by Nitish Kumar to formulate an economic package for the state's revival, the latest conclave focused on how Jharkhand's creation will affect the rest of Bihar.

While the RJD's latest electoral performance has shown that its influence has reached a plateau, the BJP and Samata have also realised that their earlier hope of replacing the RJD Government is no longer a realistic one. Neither of the BJP-Samata's tactics of imposing President's rule and making Nitish Kumar the Chief Minister for a few days had worked. Since both the RJD and Samata have reached a dead-end so far as their political ambitions are concerned, their leaders might have wondered whether a relook at their old adversarial relations was desirable.

The need for such a realignment may have been necessitated by the uncertainties thrown up by the Jharkhand issue. No one knows how its formation will affect the fortunes of the various parties in Bihar. Their leaders have also been unnerved by the possibility of the people of Bihar holding their unprincipled shenanigans responsible for the state's partition. The organisational status of some of the parties, especially the JD(U), is also somewhat brittle. Factors such as these might have played a part in persuading these veterans of many battles to reassess their strategies. After all, they are all old friends.

Victorious basmati

AFTER THE victory over turmeric and *neem*, it is now *basmati*'s turn to revoke a US patent. For hundreds of years, *basmati* has been the special produce of a particular region in the sub-continent. But the Texas-based company RiceTec filed an application for a patent on a new rice which it wanted to call '*basmati*'. Under the WTO's Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Rights (TRIPS) agreement, patents are granted only to new formulations or the discovery of new properties of a plant or vegetable. RiceTec wanted to call its new strain of rice '*basmati*' on the basis of its discovery of unique aromatic properties and long grains. Clearly, these properties were known for centuries in the original *basmati* rice produced in India and the term '*basmati*' is a clear 'geographic indication' as it refers to a particular variety of rice produced in a special region of the subcontinent.

Such geographic indication is covered by the TRIPS agreement in the case of Champagne, which connotes a bubbly white wine produced in a specific region of France and no one else in the world can call a similar wine Champagne. After India challenged RiceTec's claim in the US Patents and Trade Marks office, the latter forced RiceTec to withdraw the four claims to uniqueness which it had made in obtaining the patent for its new variety of rice. But several of its other claims (about 16) have not been challenged by India.

Pakistan, which is also a producer of *basmati* and could have challenged the claim to the patent, has not done so. Even though Texmati and Jasmati were not the real *basmati*, few could tell the difference as it was the name which mattered. Challenges to patents in other areas like *karela*, *jamun* and brinjal are also being talked about. Indeed, it is time that India took stock of its vast traditional knowledge base and initiated immediate action against biopiracy.

THINK IT OVER...

I glory more in the cunning purchase of my wealth
Than in the glad possession
— BEN JONSON

Lifting the ban on non-iodised salt could make thousands of children mentally deficient

Fallacy of free choice

BY USHA RAI

THE MOST retrograde step taken by this Government has been the recent decision to lift the ban on non-iodised salt. The impact of this will be most on the vulnerable sections of our population — children, tribals, the illiterate, the economically depressed and those living in remote areas of the country. The rich will continue buying their iodised salt, whatever the price. The ones who will not are the poor and illiterate. They are also the ones more susceptible to goitre and brain damage.

Ironically, just a few months ago, the Salt Commissioner of India brought out a book which states that the most disturbing consequence of iodine deficiency is its effect on brain development during fettle and early life, resulting in lower intelligence and poor scholastic development. On an average, children living in iodine deficient areas have an IQ level that is 13 points lower than that of those living in iodine sufficient areas.

Iodine deficiency can also cause still births, abortions, increased neo-natal and infant mortality, congenital malformations and low birth weight. "It's a major worldwide nutritional and public health problem that compromises child survival and child development," says the Indian report echoing the sentiments of UNICEF, WHO and others. And yet, the Government has reversed its 1998 ban on non-iodised salt.

In the mid-Eighties, with a team of doctors from the Delhi-based All India Institute of Medical Sciences, I visited Padrauna in district Gorakhpur of UP, which is a goitre endemic area. I saw the impact of iodine deficiency on the people. A lot of them were stunted and had an abnormal gait. The intelligence level of the poor villagers was exceedingly low and they were called *bhokuas* or idiots by others. In fact, Padrauna was the classic 'village of idiots' with 30 per cent of the population mentally deficient. Goitre prevalence was cent per cent.

The doctors found that even the soil of Padrauna had been leached of its iodine. The healing touch was then applied. Iodised salt was made mandatory and the Government was able to arrest iodine deficiency disorders. Ideally, there should have been a study some years later to see if there has been a shift away from mental deficiency. Alas, it has not been done so far. The doctors at AIIMS may do so now to provide clinching evidence, if indeed such evidence is needed, on the benefits of iodised salt.

Scientific proof was provided in the Seventies itself. Prof V. Ramalingaswami and Prof N. Kochupillai and other experts conducted extensive studies in the goitre endemic areas of Kangra valley, Himachal Pradesh, between 1956 and 1972, and established the benefits of iodine supplementation. In 1984, the Government decided on universal iodisation of salt.



Pinch of salt: Miner at the Rann of Kutch

In fact, India is on the brink of eliminating iodine deficiency disorders (IDDs) with about 70 per cent of the population having access to iodised salt. Years of effort will now go down the drain and there is a danger of goitre and IDDs reappearing in pockets where they have been wiped out.

By leaving it to the states to decide on the kind of salt to be provided, the Government has gone back on many of its national and international commitments. India was on the drafting committee of the Child Rights Convention at the World Summit for Children in 1990 and sought the elimination of IDDs by 2000 through universal salt iodisation. This was subsequently adopted in the National Plan of Action for children and the National Nutritional Policy. Even the National Human Rights Commission has taken the stand that the elimination of IDDs is a human right. India has joined 110 countries of the world who have made universal salt iodisation compulsory.

India exports iodised salt to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and even to Africa. India should have greater responsibility for the future of the children in the entire subcontinent.

There is a ban on sale of non-iodised salt in 23 states and six Union Territories. In 11 states, it is being sold through the public distribution system. Only in Kerala, which has a high rate of literacy, there is no ban on non-iodised salt. In Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, the ban is partial. With the lifting of the ban, all these states will once again review their policy. In a recent high-level meeting, 20 states wanted to continue with the ban but the Centre brushed aside their concerns.

To say that it should be left to the people to choose what kind of salt they want is a farce. When water is given to people, do we give them a choice if they want chlorinated water or the untreated water? How can a foetus, struggling for life and the full potential for growth, exercise choice? Can a two-year-old or even an adolescent discern the merits of iodisation?

An informed choice means a billion people will have to know the views of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, a political organisation of the RSS, espousing the commercial interests of some petty traders of Gujarat, and the main opponent of iodised salt. They will also have to understand why the scientific community and health organisations are so disturbed about the lifting of the ban. Are we really in a position to provide the various options to a population that is 50 per cent illiterate?

The Indian Medical Association has said that we should not sacrifice the health and future of a nation for the commercial benefits of a few salt producers. But while protecting the livelihood of a few thousand salt manufacturers, the Government has ignored the health dangers which a billion people will face.

One of the arguments against iodised salt is that it is not advisable for patients with hyper-thyroid. Dr Prem Aggarwal, general secretary of the Indian Medical Association, has pointed out that from the average daily intake of 10 grams of iodine fortified salt, the availability of iodine would be 150 mcg, of which about 30 per cent is lost during cooking. The remaining 105 mcg is ingested and from this about 70 per cent is absorbed by the body. The level of iodine intake from iodised salt is 'safe' in our country, he points out. Even the reputed scientific journal, *Nature*, has recently commended the Indian salt iodisation programme as one of the most successful preventive public health programmes in the developing world.

If iodine is a therapeutic requirement, then iodised salt should be sold only by prescription, maintain the representatives of the 'non-iodised salt lobby'. Indeed, it is a normal, essential micronutrient, scientists point out. It is essential today because with the destruction of forests and environmental degradation, this vital micro nutrient has been drained out of our soil. Further, there is enhanced scientific knowledge on the link between iodine deficiency and brain damage and greater awareness about the benefits of iodised salt. The eye, as everyone knows, sees what the mind knows.

It was after a great deal of discussion that salt was selected as the most effective vehicle for universal iodisation. It is consumed in small and fixed quantities by all sections of the society.

Unfortunately, public health issues in this country do not get the kind of attention they should. It is most unfortunate that a Government that has opted for opening up its markets and is gung ho about the intellectual calibre of its info-tech whiz kids should succumb to the machinations of the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch and damn the intellectual development of its future generations. It probably found it politically expedient to give in on an issue like salt, which, by the way, is cent per cent manufactured and marketed by Indian companies (and not multi-nationals).

West Asia by any other name

RECENTLY, THE words 'Middle East' in one of my pieces was changed to 'West Asia' by the editor. India might well be the only country that uses this nomenclature to refer to the region east of Turkey and west of Iran. The Arabs and the Israelis have no problem with 'Middle East' and would be baffled if anyone referred to them as West Asians. Even from the point of view of the colonisers, 'Near East' would be more appropriate, as opposed to the 'Far East.' What we call South Asia or the Indian subcontinent is, geographically speaking, the middle east.

'West Asia' was probably the invention of the erstwhile Non-Aligned Movement as a blow against colonialism. But it never caught on, not with the people who live there.

On an even more arcane but important note, I wonder when 'India' will go the way of Bombay and Madras and become 'Bharat'. Perhaps not. The word implies a subcontinental primacy. We will lose a vast heritage associated with the name. And our Hindi fundamentalists are aware of it. Indian Ocean will not become Bharat Ocean. Whoever heard of the Iranian Gulf? It continues to be the Persian Gulf. It will always be Indo-China, not Bharato-China. Indonesia will not become Bharatonesia. It used to be Dutch East Indies. Indonesia? What an uninspired name. What was Sukarno thinking of?

India that is Bharat

ANOTHER NOTION has crossed my addled, pedantic mind. Pakistan has a better claim to the name 'India' than this country. No, really, think about it for a moment. 'India' originally referred to the territory around Indus, the river which flows through Pakistan.

Fortunately, the name never interested Jinnah, who preferred the newly-coined and very Islamic sounding acronym 'Pakistan'. (The *k* in *Pakistan* stands for Kashmir.) He was under the impression that neither side would go for 'India' which had a very colonial and demeaning connotation. The word does not occur in any of the ancient texts. 'India' gained its historical currency outside the subcontinent among people who had designs on the place. It made its first appearance in an inscription found at Persepolis in Iran. The word has no indigenous pedigree.

FLOTSAM & JETSAM

BHAICHAND PATEL

One would have thought that Nehru would have discarded it altogether in favour of 'Bharat', thereby honouring the most distinguished of the early *Vedic* clans. In fact, Jinnah expected as much and, according to Mountbatten, he was absolutely furious when he found out that Nehru and the Congress intended to keep the name 'India.'

You will find all this and more in *India, A History* by John Keay (Harper Collins, Rs 495). Keay is not a professional historian and that is why perhaps his 500-page epic covering 5,000 years is so witty and hugely readable.

London calling

THERE IS more to London than Marks and Spencer, the favourite store of the Indians, Pakistanis and the Arabs. There are the museums, the galleries and the pubs. And glorious theatre, best in the world. New York's Broadway doesn't even come a close second. Last week I was happy to find Montek Singh and his wife in a West End theatre enjoying *Stones in His Pockets*, an Irish play.

There has been a sea change in British eating habits since my student days. We now have an array of good restaurants offering food from all over the world. You will find better Indian eating places, thanks to fresher ingredients, than in any of our cities. But keep away from the so-called *balti* joints run by sailors from the subcontinent who have jumped ships.

London is one of the most multi-ethnic cities in the world. Since the arrival of refugees from Idi Amin's Uganda in the early Seventies, every third shop in the suburbs seems to be owned by Indians. They have assimilated very well and are now part of the thriving middle class. Unfortunately, most of them vote Tory and still pine for Margaret Thatcher.

There is something I wish to say about the British, however unfashionable. They have always been accused of being racists but in my experience they are far less racist than the Indians. You can ask any African diplomat posted in New Delhi. Our caste system is far more rigid than their class structure, which in any case is crumbling.

The English can be difficult to get to know, but once you have built up a friendship they are there for you for the rest of your life. The problem with the country is the bloody weather. It rained every day I was there.

Incidentally, the English no longer shop at Marks and Spencer. Nowadays, it's not considered trendy and the shops would have closed down had it not been for the foreigners.

Tailpiece

THIS WILL positively be the first and last *crorepati* joke in this column.

Amitabh Bachchan: So, Contestant One, you will win Rs 1,000 if you answer this question correctly. What is the Capital of India?

Contestant One: The Capital of India is I.

Bachchan: Sure?

Contestant: Sure

Bachchan: *Pakka*?

Contestant: *Pakka*.

Bachchan: Should I lock it?

Contestant: Lock it.

Bachchan: The computer says your answer is wrong. The Capital of India is New Delhi. I am sorry that you came nowhere close to being a *crorepati*, but you definitely have my sympathy.

Amitabh Bachchan: Here is your chance to win Rs 1,000. So, Contestant Two, who wrote the book *Freedom at Midnight*?

Contestant Two: *Freedom at Night* was written by somebody who slept through the day.

Bachchan: Sure?

Contestant: Sure.

Bachchan: Confident?

Contestant: Confident.

Bachchan: *Pakka*?

Contestant: *Pakka*.

Bachchan: Shall I lo...?

Contestant: Log in, lock it or boil it in coconut oil. I don't care. Just tell me fast whether I am getting thousand rupees for that answer or not. It's okay for you to keep asking me the same thing again and again in so many different words. After all, this is your show.

Bachchan: *Afsos*! The computer says your answer is wrong. It was actually written by a married man on night shift.

Honk for fatigue

SOUMYA BHATTACHARYA

I HAD always wondered. Now I know. As evenings gently melt into night after a bad, hard day at work, I would drive home, feeling woozy and woolly, somehow not getting the hand-eye-foot coordination right between the accelerator, the brake, the windscreen and the steering, somehow not even being able to screw up enough energy to swear at the cab cutting into my path from the right. I would wonder why I would be so hopelessly submissive, so inexplicably meek.

Now I know. It's not because I believe (or ever believed) that the meek shall inherit the earth. (How can they? The meek can't even save their own cars from getting rammed.) It's because I was too tired to think of being aggressive, and too tired to be trusted enough to drive you home.

Well, what I have just found out has answered a lot of questions. *The Guardian* published a news item earlier this month, saying the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* has discovered that according to path-breaking research, "sleep-deprived drivers are less alert than those who have drunk more than the legal limit of alcohol". The authors of the survey — professors from Australia and New Zealand — have discovered that "fatigue can reach dangerous levels at a much earlier stage than has been assumed".

OFF TRACK

Oh, well. That's it then. It's official. The tired and the meek can not only fail to save their cars from being rammed, but they are also risky enough to get you killed if you are riding with them. In comparison, the chap who has sunk a couple of pints at the nearest bar after a bad, hard day is better equipped to drop you home on the way back.

Frankly, going by experience, all this stands to reason. After a couple of jolly rounds at the bar with the mates, one is ostensibly armed with Dutch courage. I don't know how much of this bravery originates in the Netherlands, but it is, without doubt, courage. Unlike when one is tired, the easiest option when the surly cabbie cuts in from your right when you are drunk is to call him so many names that he will pause for breath before he starts calling you some, thereby giving you enough time to rev up and zip across past him.

Plus there's this. With a couple of pegs inside you and the tiredness subtly subsumed by bubbling euphoria, one is often in a quandary about which pedal is the brake and which the accelerator. Given that dilemma, my policy is simply this. Under normal circumstances, if I see a car hurtling towards me at a crossing, I honk, blink, wait and let it pass.

But while driving home when I am above the legal limit of alcohol but below the critical level of fatigue, things turn out quite differently. At these moments, I adopt the method of flooring the accelerator rather than ramming the brake. Horn blaring, headlights blinding, I race across the intersection, blithe in my belief that if I get across fast enough, the chap on the other side cannot possibly approach quickly enough to pose an iota of danger to me.

If that isn't safe driving, someone (not my wife) should tell me what is. Driving while above the legal limit of alcohol, clearly, induces a sort of bare-faced effrontery; driving when above the crucial level of tiredness can lead to a deadly sense of lassitude.

The proof-of-the-pudding-is-in-the-eating lesson about the whole issue can be gleaned from this. While driving home with as much alcohol inside me as to make me as inflammable as a powder keg, I have never ever come even close to crashing my car. Leaden-eyed and droopy with tiredness, I have managed it — well, nearly — twice.

The professors from Australia and New Zealand have given us fresh hope. Pack up your breathalysers. Bring out your fatiguemeters.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Don't be a spoilsport

INDIA'S PERFORMANCE in the second half of the hockey match against Poland in Sydney was an inspiring comeback, enough to make every lover of the game sit up with an air of expectation after a discouraging start. The end result may have disappointed many but it certainly did not justify the despondency of the various commentators as was seen on TV. We have to learn to be sporting and large-hearted. We must give a fitting reception to our boys when they come back and not act in an immature manner.

K.S. RANDHAWA
Delhi

Not a healthy practice

PRIME MINISTER Vajpayee had to go to the US for diagnostic confirmation of his osteoarthritic knee joint problem by a US-based Indian surgeon, who is scheduled to come to India to operate on him. Most ministers, high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats make trips to the US, UK or some other foreign country for treatment of their ailments. They all do so at Government expense. The orders on the subject are quite clear: a Government servant can be allowed to go abroad for treatment at Government expense, provided the Indian Medical Council certifies that there does not exist in this country the necessary expertise or medical resources such as equipment for such treatment. In the case of the Prime Minister's ailment, India has all such facilities, including some world-renowned orthopaedic surgeons. Obviously, the PM does not have faith in our doctors, which is a slur on the Indian medical profession. In the US, the President, who is also the C-in-C of the armed forces, only goes to the army's Walter Beed hospital for all his ailments, though he could opt for any other hospital if he so wishes, which he never does.

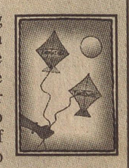
N.B. GRANT
Pune

Language barriers

PRIME MINISTER Vajpayee regaled a gathering of Indians in the US with his trademark quips in Hindi. As Vajpayee himself put it, "A person must always speak in the language that he is most comfortable with." When Clinton spoke with his typical American accent it bore the sign of authority. How can one expect Vajpayee to use that same tongue to build India's image as a global power? Lack of fluency in English does not imply lack of merit. Vajpayee's Hindi proved that point.

SUKANTI BANERJEE
Delhi

To be continued....!



THE WAY the Rajkumar abduction drama is being (mis)handled by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka Governments has brought disgrace to the whole nation. It calls for serious introspection. The two state Governments are relying on *Nakeeran* editor Gopalan. They have given Gopalan a free hand to handle the situation, thus projecting a poor image of the state forces as impotent and incompetent. The two Governments are being persuaded by Gopalan, the emissary, to deal with the situation on his terms. He advocates the acceptance of sandalwood smuggler Veerappan's demands but does not negotiate on behalf of the two Governments. Why are the state Governments just banking on Gopalan for Rajkumar's release?

The two Governments have miserably failed to tackle the situation and were willing to release over 100 TADA detenus but for the intervention of the Supreme Court. Soft-pedalling on detenus held under TADA, an Act used by the Government as a harsh tool to curb extremist activities, negates its very purpose. The present situation is the culmination of the complacency of the two states which constituted a task force but never followed it up to the logical end and is now relying on an emissary as the last resort!

S.K. SHAH Delhi

Despite differences

APROPOS OF the editorial *Views on an ally* (September 22), the dispute over farm subsidies between the United States and some European countries did not adversely affect relations between them. Despite differences over human rights and nuclear non-proliferation with China, the US has accorded high priority to it for promotion of trade. In the same way, there may be differences between the US and India over issues like the CTBT and global warming, but this need not hamper cooperation in other areas.

H.K. PANDEY
Delhi

Lacking credibility

REGARDING *Harappan era skeleton on display* (September 21), the exhibits from most of the Harappan sites here do not carry the much-needed support of published reports. As per norms, no scholar other than the excavator himself has his say on the material or evidence, until a comprehensive report of the excavated site is published through the ASI's forum. So the views expressed here are not very authentic.

S.S. SAAR
Delhi

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Towards a fair exchange

It is a matter of concern that 50 years after Independence, there is no policy or law to give legal protection to those displaced from their home or habitat in the name of national development. Land acquisition without rehabilitation will be a matter of injustice to those affected.

THERE could not be a more appropriate time than now to ensure a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy for the thousands of people displaced by construction of dams and other big development projects. The Supreme Court has gone ahead and given the green signal for the construction of a 90 metre high Sardar Sarovar dam that would only enhance the number of poor people who will be forced to leave their traditional homes to earn a livelihood in unknown and new surroundings. The higher the dam, the larger the number of those displaced.

Since 1986 there has been very little action in formulating and pushing through a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy. According to S. R. Hiremath, convenor of the Jan Vikas Andolan and president of the National Committee for Protection of Natural Resource (NCPNR), large projects have displaced 2.13 crore people since Independence. Rabi Ray, former Lok Sabha Speaker, however, puts the number at 1.5 crores. Whatever the figure, the numbers are colossal. Seventy-five per cent of those dispossessed/displaced were not rehabilitated in the true sense of the word. Land was only given to those who owned land. The landless were given some monetary compensation which, for lack of knowledge on investing it, they spent recklessly. Most of these people are in urban slums and destitutes.

In Uttar Pradesh and Orissa, where the Singrauli power plant and the Hirakud dam have come up, people have been displaced three or four times. All this has been documented by voluntary groups. But strangely enough we still do not have a national rehabilitation and resettlement policy (R and R). Now, voluntary groups working on people's rights and displacement issues have found out that there was a move to sneak through a Land Acquisition (amendment) Bill without the complementary R and R policy.

The NCPNR has been campaigning for combining the Land Acquisition Act and the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy to form the Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill, 2000. This is to ensure that even while the Government takes away precious land on the one hand it ensures a well thought out rehabilitation package on the other.

It was quite by accident that the NCPNR got to know that the group of ministers, headed by K. C. Pant, were trying to push through only the Land Acquisition (Amendment) Bill without incorporating points on rehabilitation. This meant the Government was reneging on its promise to voluntary organisations to merge the two issues of acquisition and rehabilitation after national consultation in January 1999.

Sending a copy of the voluntary organisations draft bill to the Prime Minister, former Speaker of the Lok Sabha Rabi Ray has pointed out it is a matter of concern that 50 years after Independence, there is no policy or law to give legal protection to those displaced from their home/habitat in the name of national development and progress. Pushing through land acquisition without combining key features of rehabilitation, as suggested by voluntary agencies, will be a matter of grave injustice to tribals and the rural poor.

What constitutes public purpose has always been a matter of dispute. In the draft, voluntary organisations and the concept of public purpose has been clearly stated. Acquisition of land for private companies, which work for profit, is not permitted or recognised as public purpose.

There is a fundamental difference in voluntary organisations and the official approach to land acquisition. The Land Acquisition Act, 1894 and later amendments are based on the doctrine of Eminent Domain where the State has absolute right to its property and that of the subject is only paramount. The citizen holds his property always subject to the right to take it away for public purpose. The draft bill pleads that the doctrine of Eminent Domain should be replaced by the Principle of Trustship, practised by American courts. Under the doctrine of trusteeship, the Government is a trustee of the property and has a clear moral and legal responsibility to justify that the acquisition is for the welfare of the people. So far this doctrine has been applied to natural resources and common property. The voluntary organisations point out that it can now be extended to land acquisition.

The right to property is no longer a fundamental right. It is only a constitutional right. There is at present no constitutional bar to the Central or State Governments to enact a law to acquire property for a purpose not defined as public purpose. However, by keeping out profit making companies from land acquisition, the draft bill seeks to reduce the extent of displacement.

The act did not define the term "project affected persons". This has been included in the present draft to include those displaced who have been deprived of their sources of livelihood as a result of acquisition. These include rural artisans, traders and persons deriving income from the collection of non-wood forest produce.

According to the act, notices for the intention to acquire and actual acquisition are to be published. It was assumed that every individual concerned was aware of the notice when it was issued or published in the gazette. However, in a country where there is such a high level of illiteracy, the nature of the project, the cost-benefit analysis, extent of acquisition and displacement have to be spelt out. The Government can approve the project only after obtaining the consent of the *gram sabhas* in the affected zone.

The anti-women provisions of the act have been dropped. Fifty per cent of those attending a public hearing have to be women. Land in lieu of acquired land has to be allotted in the joint names of the man and his wife.

The draft bill also clarifies that an affected person who does not want alternate land in the benefit zone must be paid the market value of the land offered to him. Those landless or those partially displaced are to be compensated with minimum wages for a year.

While State laws provide only for rehabilitation of those affected by projects notified by the Government, the draft bill provides for rehabilitation in all projects which have benefit zones.

So far, solatium is payable only to the extent of 30 per cent of the market value of the land acquired. The draft bill provides for 100 per cent solatium. Payment is not limited to landlords but to all project affected persons.

If a person is displaced for the second time within 30 years of the first displacement, he or she would be entitled to an additional amount of solatium, equivalent to the amount paid earlier.

A State Land Acquisition and Rehabilitation and Resettlement Commission has been proposed in the draft bill. It would have the power to monitor the implementation of the act and ensure rehabilitation and resettlement of the project affected. Provision has also been made for a National Land Acquisition and R and R Commission to deal with project displacement in two or more States and to assist the State commissions.

The draft bill reduces the period of land acquisition and rehabilitation from the existing three years to 18 months of the notification being issued to acquire land. The draft also spells out that if land is not acquired within a year of the notification being issued, the notification will be deemed invalid and those residing in the area will continue to enjoy all the benefits of occupancy. Land acquired for a specific purpose cannot be used for any other purpose. And the process of acquisition cannot be deemed to be over unless compensation in the form of alternate land or cash is paid.

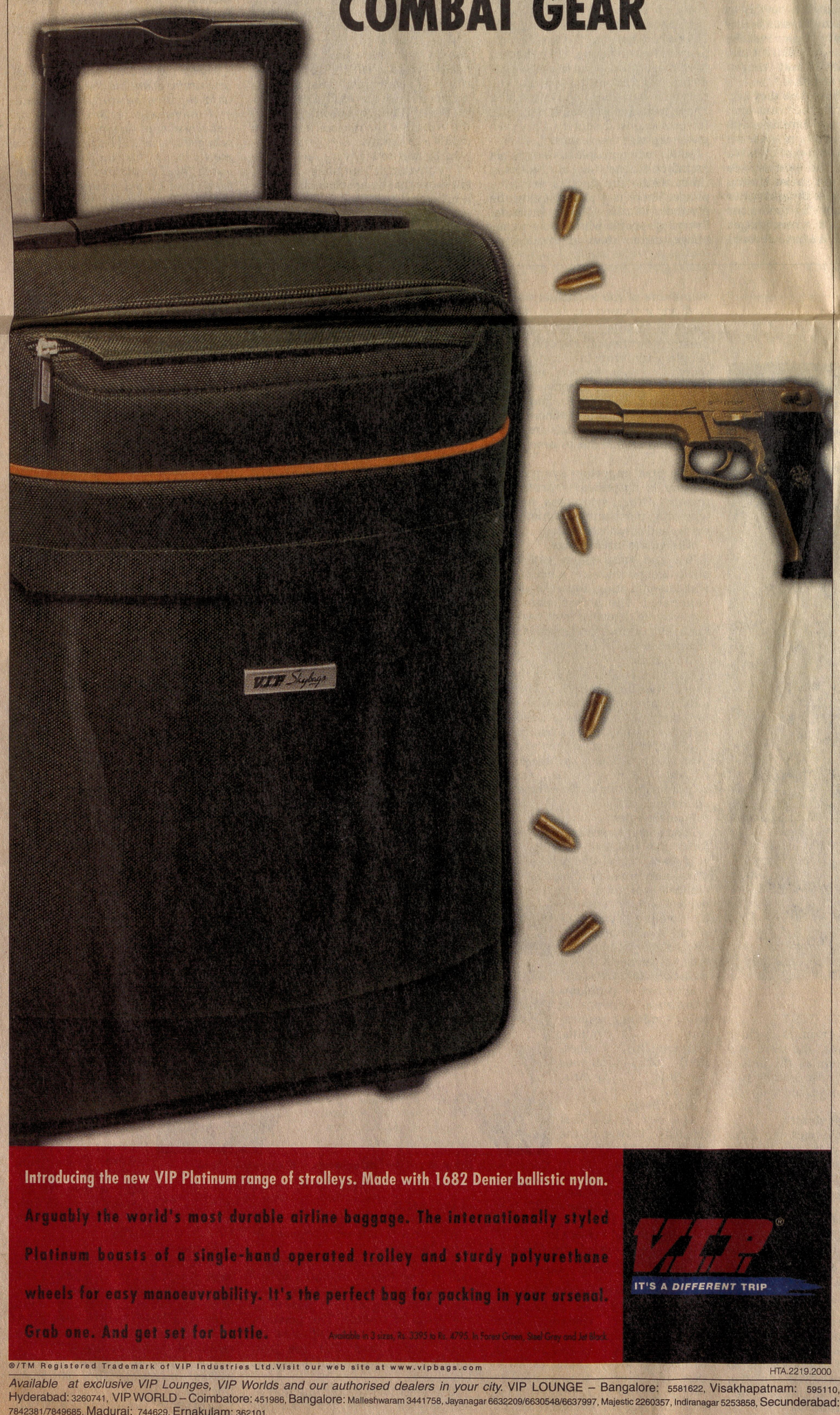
With eminent pro-poor MPs like Kuldip Nayar and Shabana Azmi, in favour of the draft bill, good sense should prevail at least now when the future of so many displaced by the Sardar Sarovar is at stake. ●



REUTERS

Displaced villagers from the Narmada valley ... Where do they go from here?

IT'S THE STUFF
BULLET-PROOF VESTS ARE MADE OF.
MAKES GREAT
COMBAT GEAR



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Judgment and after

Continued from page II

regard for the position of the parties concerned. Unfortunately, even these exceptional instances are diminishing rapidly in the face of globalisation.

The Bhopal gas case, where Union Carbide was let off with pitiful penalties, and the Enron case, where corruption was condoned and even rewarded, are two cases where highly paid lawyers and political pressures combined to engender patently unjust judgments with epochal repercussions.

So should we still pretend that all is well? Should the lack of study or the lack of courage of a few people be reason for irreversible measures that hurt the fabric of our system? Will citizens of this nation who rise up and say: "We do not trust your judgment your lordships" be hauled up for contempt? And what of the contempt shown by the court towards the poorest of this land and to those who champion their cause?

This sounds like sedition. Like a call to arms, except that the leadership of the NBA does not believe in armed struggle. The NBA has fought by putting its own life on the line, not by endangering the lives of others. For six years it put its faith in the justice system of this land. Today that system has failed.

With all legal avenues closed, in the months to come, the cry of "*Jal Samarpan*" (sacrifice by drowning) is bound to ring out once more. Already the valley is preparing itself for sacrifice. Already activists and their supporters can be heard saying that there is no alternative. Already the media is once more poised, like vultures hoping for the worst, so it has a good story. And if this time the worst does come to pass and we lose the best this land has to offer in terms of courage and humanity, who will have gained?



REUTERS

Will this land be shamed into dismantling its unjust system of privilege and denial? Will future generations remember the martyrdom and carry on the fight? Did Mahatma Gandhi's martyrdom bring about the society he dreamed of? Did Che Guevara spark the Revolution he lived and died for? At best they became icons whose posters are as ubiquitous as their ideals stay unimplemented.

If Prabhakaran can inspire so many to become human bombs, it is easy to see how people can be inspired to take their own lives without the guilt of killing others. But sacrifice is something we can admire the courage of, without admiring its wisdom. However glorious it may be, death is still escape. It is harder to live for a cause than to die for it, to continue the fight despite the humiliation of innumerable defeats.

So rise up people of the Narmada and all those who believe in a just, humane and sustainable world. Remove your heads from the chopping block that your enemies and some of your well-wishers have prepared. Regroup and rethink. Why did the courts not give us justice? Because we do not live in a true democracy. Martyrdom will not bring about this democracy. Hard work amongst the people will. Why did the courts not give us justice? Because we did not have the political power our opponents had.

The lesson cannot be clearer, nor the choice. ●

A peace movement ...

Continued from page II

energy/weapons establishment can be about safety and how callous it can be towards those living around nuclear facilities.)

In what gave the convention a truly global character, the Indian delegates were joined by 50 representatives from Pakistan and peace activists from the small countries (Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka) in the nuclear shadow of South Asia. Also present to share their experiences were representatives of well-known peace and disarmament movements in West Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand like the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Abolition 2000 and the Japan Congress against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

On the third day of the convention, the delegates decided to form the "National Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (NCNDP)". As the name suggests, the NCNDP is not going to be a centralised organisation but a co-ordinating coalition for groups opposed to nuclear weapons. The brief interim charter of the NCNDP demands first of all that India stop assembly of nuclear weapons, halt development of delivery systems (i.e. missiles) that can deliver these weapons and end production of weapons-grade fissile material (i.e. plutonium). It also demands complete transparency in this area and calls for proper compensation to all people harmed by government activities in the nuclear fuel cycle – from uranium mining to reactor operation to waste disposal. The charter calls for a similar roll-back in Pakistan and demands that the five nuclear weapons states immediately de-alert their weapon systems, commit themselves to a No First Use strategy and stop all research into advanced weapons. (A 50-member national co-ordinating committee was also constituted to prepare a more detailed charter for the first country-wide peace coalition.)

The NCNDP also drew up a detailed action plan for the next year. Some of the components are:

- To establish a "clearing house" of information to generate public awareness about nuclear weapons and a lack of transparency in the nuclear power sector.
- To build up a dialogue with all political parties, mass organisations, religious bodies and professional associations.
- To support organisations fighting the cause of nuclear radiation.
- To help set up a national federation of radiation victims.
- To work with the Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC) to identify 10 schools and 10 colleges in India and Pakistan which will be "sister" institutions that will discuss disarmament and peace.
- To liase with the PPC and prepare for a joint Indo-Pakistan civil society initiative that would highlight the dangers of nuclearisation of South Asia.

It was not as if there was unanimity at the convention on all issues. Many delegates had strong and differing views on India's nuclear power programme and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The discussions on power, in particular, were quite heated. While grassroots organisations working in Bihar, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu – areas where the environment and health fall-outs of government activities in different stages of the nuclear fuel cycle have led to considerable local protests – could not see how the nuclear power programme could be separated from weapons production, there were some who were against a clubbing of the two. If yet these differences did not come in the way of the formation of the NCNDP and formulation of a plan of action, then credit must go to the six months of preparatory work during which many of these differences were aired and compromises worked out.

In any case, a rainbow of views in anti-nuclear weapons movements are not uncommon around the world. Coalitions everywhere contain differences on specific issues while they remain focussed on the larger goals. Mr. Dave Knight, head of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the United Kingdom, who was a delegate to the convention, observed that "Where it took us years to agree on a broad agenda, it is a remarkable achievement of the Indian activists to have come to the same position so quickly".

Forming a platform and drawing up a plan of action is one thing. Building up a mass campaign and lobbying with the political establishment is the more difficult and longer term task. It will be a long haul. But a beginning was made in New Delhi on the road to a safer, more secure and nuclear-free South Asia, which is quite the opposite of what the nuclear scientists, the strategic thinkers and political elites have created for us. ●

GREEN TALK

USHA RAI

Danger in the wings

THE birds are dying. A drastic decline in the number of vultures, nature's biggest scavengers and cleansers, and the death of almost 40 peacocks, the national bird, in Morena district, Madhya Pradesh, have alarmed the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWFN) – India and environmentalists in general.

Equally frightening is the steady decline in all bird species, especially those that feed on insects, like drongos, thrushes, chats and warblers. These are not exotic, rare species but feathered friends regaling us for years with their chatter and enchanting music. These are birds that are intrinsic to the landscape – adding to the beauty and magic of our green spaces.

Across the country, bird species are on the decline. They are not only the ones which are exotic and rare but also those which are a part of the landscape. Chemical poisons are to blame.

Ornithologist Lav Kumar Khachher, who has been holding nature camps for children at Vashisht, Manali and Pirotan Islands, Gujarat, for several years, says the decline of these insectivorous birds is more visible in areas of intensive farming where pesticides and chemical fertilizers are used extensively. Grassland birds like floricans and partridges are also on the decline because the croplands on which they live are being sprayed with insecticides. The death of insects heralds the end of the birds that subsist on them.



As a scavenger, the vulture forms a crucial part of the food chain.

Most of us who have gardens at home spray insecticides to ensure a healthy crop of vegetables or flowers without realising the impact this would have on the pretty birds that flit around gorging on insects. Mosquito repellants and post-monsoon fumigation drives kill not just the blood sucking mosquito but a host of other insects and birds.

Adult birds that do not feed on insects have also been affected, but to a lesser extent. Fortunately, weaver birds and sparrows breed in the monsoons when insects are available in plenty to feed their young. But in Chennai and even in parts of Delhi, there are fewer sparrows today than before.

Migrant birds too have a problem whether they come from Central Asia or elsewhere. India is inhospitable to the birds. They stay here in winter to fatten up for the return flight. But there is not enough food for them, laments Lav Kumar. The black redstart and wagtail were once extremely common around homes and fields. But not anymore. Even in Manali, fewer redstarts and dipper birds are visible today because the Beas has been polluted with construction material and fecal matter. Because of the spraying of apple trees, the chemicals are washed into the river affecting insect larvae. The result is that our rivers too are becoming dead, warns Lav Kumar.

The population of larger birds like the saras crane is also nowhere near what it was 25 years ago, he says. While pesticides and insecticides are taking their toll, at the other end of the spectrum, unrestricted grazing and direct human pressure is reducing habitats. Many birds need trees to nest and when parks and sanctuaries shrink, the trees disappear. In the Gir National Park, peacocks can be seen nesting on pylons.

Faulty forestry practices like monoculture plantations and the introduction of exotics are also damaging bio-diversity. With the introduction of mechanised farming, hedges – the natural sanctuaries for several birds – are fast disappearing. Add to this the mushroom growth of concrete buildings, neatly laid gardens in place of the wilderness, increased pollution of rivers and the air over our cities and there can be some idea of the trauma birds face.

In the Delhi, Agra and Bharatpur belt, there were 20,000 vultures in the 1980's. Now their number is down to 150, says Sateeshan of WWFN, Delhi. In the 1990's, because of the large number of aircraft being hit by birds, on the basis of a BNHS report, carcass dumps around Delhi airport were moved out and slaughter houses were sealed to scavengers with wire fencing.

The birds then moved out to other areas in search of food. According to Sateeshan, when they moved out they began feeding on poison-baited carcasses. Around the Corbett National Park in Uttar Pradesh and other protected areas, farmers have been retaliating against tigers and leopards that kill cattle. They poison cattle carcasses. Vultures as scavengers come to clean up the remains and get poisoned. In the Annamalais area too, a scientist, Kannan, has recorded that vultures are getting wiped out because of animal baits. In North India, there is rivalry between villagers for hides. Cattle poisoning is quite common as a result.

Poisoning of wildlife and vultures is happening all over the world, says Sateeshan. He advocates the creation of special food reserves for vultures so that their population increases. The vultures can be relocated once their numbers increase.

While the poisoning of vultures needs urgent attention, disappearance of large tree species like the tamarind, pilkan and the banyan, which these large birds like to nest in, also contributes to the decline in their numbers.

The large number of peacocks that died in Morena ate *bajra* that had high levels of mercury salts. It had affected their kidneys, says S. C. Sharma, Additional Inspector-General for Wildlife in the Environment and Forest Ministry. Ashok Kumar of the Wildlife Protection Society of India says a large number of new seeds are coming into the market that are treated with chemicals and coated with fertilizers to ensure germination. They are supposed to be sown at least an inch below the ground. For a week after sowing, peacocks and other birds have to be prevented from digging up the earth and getting at the seed. This is not always possible.

Geeta Seshmani of Friendicos, a non-government organisation that cares for stray/abandoned animals and cattle in Delhi, says "seven sick peacocks were brought to them for treatment early this year. All died within 24 hours". In the last year and a half, Friendicos has also handled some 300 raptors, brought in a distraught, disoriented state. The spraying of gardens and scattering of chemically treated *bajra* is increasing sickness and paralysis in birds, says Seshmani.

Spraying areas outside public garbage bins harms cows, dogs and pigs that rummage through them for food. The Environment Ministry is caught in a classic catch-22 situation. It can only request the Agriculture Ministry to stop spraying of chemical pesticides and fertilizers within a five kilometre radius of protected areas, says Sharma. In other areas, he advocates testing for toxicity of treated *bajra* and seeds before release. The poisoning of wildlife will be discussed at the meeting to draft the national wildlife policy.

It will take a long time for policies to change. We cannot afford to lose any more time. In the words of Lav Kumar remember that "a bird friendly habitat is a human friendly habitat". A garden with climbers, bushes and wild growth can be your contribution to give a fresh lease of life to our feathered friends. ●



Clean and safe drinking water is as important a factor as food security. It involves rain water harvesting and conservation.

Freedom from hunger

Continued from page I

The Community Centred Food and Water Security System has two major components. The first relates to the conservation and enhancement of natural resources, particularly land, water and bio-diversity. A majority of the rural population depends upon on-farm employment for its livelihood. The rate of growth in rural non-farm employment, which can provide opportunities for skilled jobs to the landless poor, is slow. An integrated strategy for fostering sustainable and skilled on-farm and off-farm employment is yet to emerge. This is the second major challenge, since only productivity enhancement based farming and improved post-harvest technology leading to value-addition to primary produce and the emergence of agro-processing and agri-business enterprises, can help to eradicate rural poverty and thereby end poverty-induced hunger.

A *gram sabha* led programme for the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources, land and water will need local level institutional structures which can be operated by local women and men with the help of micro-credit. In addition to a community based land care movement, a village community could organise the following four banks.

Field gene bank

This is particularly important in tribal and rural areas rich in agro-bio-diversity. This will involve *in situ* on farm conservation of land races and local varieties of all major crops. Fortunately, there will soon be opportunities for recognising and rewarding community conservation efforts (mostly carried out by women) from the proposed national gene and bio-diversity funds. Provision for such funds has been incorporated in the Bio-diversity and Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Bill, currently under consideration by Parliament.

Village seed bank

Non-availability of good quality seeds of the right varieties at the right time is often the most serious constraint in farming. Hybrid seeds are becoming important even in self-pollinated crops like rice. Therefore, village level seed banks will fill a felt need and, at the same time, provide remunerative livelihood opportunities.

Village water bank

There is great scope for community water harvesting, conservation and equitable distribution. Mr. Anil Agarwal of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), New Delhi has been pointing out that even 100 mm rainfall falling on a one hectare plot can yield upto one million litres of water. Often our total rainfall figures are impressive but the distribution is highly skewed. Again the CSE has pointed out that our country receives most of its rainfall in just 100 hours, out of 8,760 hours in a year. Rain water harvesting and conservation are, therefore, essential for water security. Madhya Pradesh, as well as other parts of the country, have launched watershed programmes. Land and water care has to be institutionalised in every village. Where water availability is low, it will be preferable to grow low water-requiring but high value crops like pulses and oilseeds.

Grain bank

Community grain banks confer multiple benefits like the availability of good quality staple grains in a village, prevention of storage losses and a low transaction cost. Funds for such local level grain banks can come partially from the rural godown scheme of the Government.

In addition to the care of land and the conservation of water, genes, seeds and grains, a village community can undertake a systematic hunger-elimination strategy. Studies in Tamil Nadu, under a project sponsored by the State Government, have indicated that an effective community centred and controlled hunger-elimination programme can be implemented through concurrent attention to the following steps. The relative importance of these steps will obviously vary according to local socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. The precise action plan will have to be developed by local communities on the basis of generic guidelines.

● Who are the hungry?

The first step is to identify individuals in a village who suffer from endemic hunger (i.e., chronic under and malnutrition). This is best done by the *gram sabha*. Usually, men and women without any assets, and often with no education, fall under this category.

● Information Empowerment

There are numerous schemes of both the Central and State Governments intended for the poor. Quite often, the persons who ought to know about them, are ignorant about their existence. Wherever, information technology (IT) can be introduced, an entitlement database giving information on all anti-poverty programmes, disaggregated by gender, age, class and special categories of the under-privileged, can be made available. A household entitlements card can then be prepared from such a database by each family. Information on how to access the different schemes will also have to be provided.

● Protein-calorie deprivation

Undernutrition caused by poverty is the major cause of malnutrition in our country. Suitable arrangements will have to be made under the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the proposed rural grain banks to reach the hungry. The average calorie consumption in M.P. is about 2,697 kilocalories per consumer. The State also records much higher levels of consumption of pulses, unlike other States. However, the calorie consumption of the lowest 10 per cent of the population seems to be only 1,894 kilocalories per consumer. It is this group which needs attention.

● Hidden hunger

Hidden hunger arising from micronutrient deficiencies is a widespread problem. Iron deficiency (anaemia) among pregnant women has serious consequences in terms of the growth of the foetus. This problem will have to be addressed through the introduction of an **integrated nutrition system**, consisting of the essential use of synthetic nutrients and supplements and the more extensive use of home and nutrition gardens consisting of appropriate horticultural remedies to the nutritional maladies of the village. Fortification of common salt with iodine and/ or iron is one of the most effective methods of providing these much needed nutrients. The food based approach to nutrition can be combined with feasible fortification procedures.

● Clean drinking water

This, together with environmental hygiene, influences the biological absorption of food in the body. Diarrhoea and intestinal infection further compound the problem of malnutrition. Hence, attention to safe drinking water and environmental hygiene will confer valuable nutritional benefits.

● Multiple livelihoods

Economic access to food can be improved only by creating multiple livelihood opportunities based on micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit. The Government should ensure that import and export policies in the farm sector help to strengthen, and not erode, the livelihood opportunities of the poor. The import and export policy document should be accompanied by a livelihood impact statement. Present policies are generally not conducive to the survival of microenterprises which either depend on export opportunities for their economic viability or will have to compete in prices with commodities produced by mass production technologies.

● Special attention to women and children

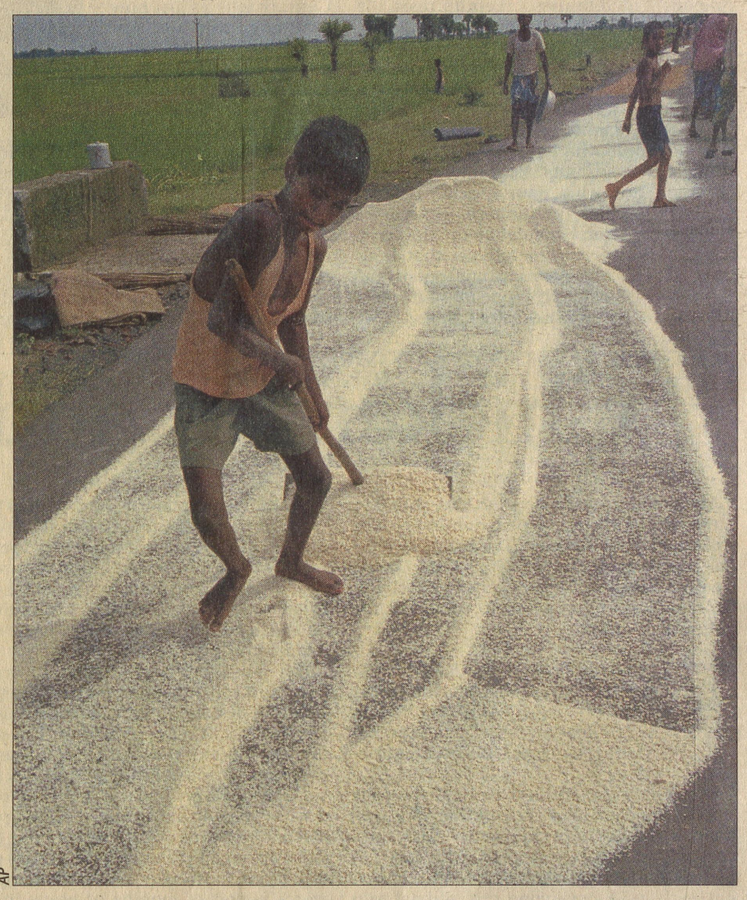
Almost every third baby is characterised by low birth weight, as a result of maternal and foetal undernutrition. This has serious consequences for the country's future, as such children tend to become handicapped in brain development. Hence, pregnant and nursing mothers belonging to families living in poverty need urgent nutritional support. With over 40 million tonnes of wheat and rice in Government godowns, it should not be difficult to allot three to four million tonnes of grains for a special programme designed to ensure the birth of healthy babies, which have a chance to participate actively in this knowledge century. **Children for happiness** should be the goal of the community-centered food and water security system. There is also need to attend to reproductive health and other steps needed to bring down IMR and maternal mortality rate.

● Population stabilisation

By enabling local communities to prepare socio-demographic charters for their respective areas, greater awareness can be generated about the population supporting capacity of their ecosystem. This will stimulate greater interest in the voluntary adoption of a small family norm.

To conclude, the fusion of people and political power resulting in both genuine grassroots democratic institutions and genuine gender equity will provide uncommon opportunities for achieving seemingly impossible tasks. The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Mr. Digvijay Singh, plans to make the community food and water security system an integral part of the **gram raj** movement being launched early next year. The fast expanding economic, demographic, genetic and digital divides in the country can be bridged only if our country becomes a land of opportunity for every citizen to lead a healthy and productive life. Freedom from endemic hunger is the foundation on which such a land of opportunity can be built. ●

Below: "Children for happiness" must be the goal of community oriented programmes.



AP



Something rotten ...

How bluebottles and beetles could help preserve your food.

BEETLES that dine on dead bodies and flies that nibble rotten fruit could soon be saving your bacon. Researchers in Britain are using the antennae of such insects to create sensors that warn when food is about to go rotten. If detected soon enough, such deterioration can sometimes be halted.

Blowflies, bluebottles, fruit flies and carrion beetles have a fine and discriminating sense of smell, thanks to nerve cells in their antennae. Carrion beetles, for example, can sniff out a dead animal from a long way off, while fruit flies pick up early signs of decay in fruit.

John Pickett, Lester Wadhams and Eleanor Pow at the Institute of Arable Crops Research in Rothamsted, Hertfordshire, are exploiting this keen sense of smell by inserting tungsten electrodes into the antennae of insects as small as aphids. The electrodes register discrete electrical signals created in the antennae when neurons are exposed to traces of volatile odours. "The substances we're looking for are not detectable by human noses," says Pickett. "The insects get there first."

By exposing the "wired" insects to substances emitted by rotting fruit, Pickett and his colleagues can identify the unique electrical signal each odour produces in the antennae. As little as one picogram of a substance is enough to generate such signals. "The olfactory neurons are quite specific for the compounds we are trying to analyse for," says Pickett.

Once the signature for a given chemical is established, Pickett and his colleagues can make a sensor to detect it by wiring up a live insect or a detached antenna. By examining individual neurons, Pickett's team has also identified the protein receptors for particular odour compounds. "It might be possible to fabricate these proteins into cellular sensors," he says.

Next, the team plans to develop sensors for meat that is starting to deteriorate. The project is being funded by the Anglo-Dutch company Unilever. ●

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GREEN TALK

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Taking on a troop

IT was in a bungalow with sprawling lawns in Lutyens' Delhi that I encountered Raju, a four-year-old, large, black-faced, long tailed langur. He was quite a novelty, far away from the home of langurs in the forested areas of Rajasthan or Madhya Pradesh. There was a party on the lawns and Raju kept an eye on the marauding rhesus monkeys of the area from a discreet distance.

Rhesus monkeys, much smaller, but bold and audacious, are what Delhi is used to. While its religious-minded inhabitants treat the rhesus as an incarnation of Hanuman, the monkey God, and feed it cartloads of bananas and other goodies, the *babus* of North and South blocks and the other Central Government offices in the vicinity are disgusted with them as it destroys precious files, leers at or attacks visitors and generally makes life miserable.

The rhesus monkey has long laid siege to Lutyens' Delhi ... Enter the langur.

For years, monkey catchers and civic authorities have made valiant attempts to catch the rhesus and translocate it but have failed.

The number of rhesus monkeys in the capital has now swelled to about 5,000 – up from 3,500 five years ago. With babies on their backs, you can see them scampering down drainpipes of high rise buildings or grooming each other on the sidewalks as the capital's traffic whizzes past them.

For some months now, a handful of langurs have been employed to keep the rhesus monkeys at bay. They have become the new commandos of Lutyens' Delhi. The langurs' large build frightens the rhesus monkeys – but the moot question is for how long?

Raju and his master, Shyam, report every morning – before offices open – at Nirman Bhavan. Raju sits on the pillion of his master's cycle all the way from Baljit Nagar Pahari near Patel Nagar in West Delhi. At 9 a.m. sharp, he walks in and around Nirman Bhavan – Shyam controls him using a long rope. Raju's furtive eyes keep darting around looking for the troop of rhesus monkeys he is expected to keep away. However, Raju is still a creature of the jungles. He has been in Delhi for some time now but is wary of the two legged creatures that haunt Nirman Bhavan. Raju does not chase or drive the rhesus monkeys away. His presence is enough.

Having done his rounds, he is off again – to guard a couple of other bungalows where he either finds a perch on a tall tree or plays with the friends he has made there. One of his best friends is a kblack puppy. He plays with the mongrel and even kisses him. But should the puppy try to grab the food given to him, he bares his sharp canines and gives the puppy a slap. So far, says Shyam, there have been no real fights with the rhesus monkeys. Nor has Raju (who has not been vaccinated) bitten anyone. Shyam, who has been looking after langurs for the last 10 years or so, says the if one is bitten, the antidote is to apply the langur's excreta.





1. Raju's day begins by riding on the back of his master's bicycle. 2. A moment of contemplation? 3. A playmate at one of the bungalows. 4. The outpost ... perched on top of a tree.

At 5 p.m. his day's work over, Raju goes home. After his evening meal of vegetables, *rotis*, milk and tea he curls into a separate bed provided for him. A month's work earns Raju a tidy Rs. 5,000 – considerably more than what he got earlier as a performing monkey, shaking hands with children or blessing them like Hanumanji. According to Shyam, there are four other langurs employed by defence units to guard their offices in the vicinity of Rashtrapathi Bhavan. It was a *thekedar* (contractor) who got Shyam and Raju their new assignment.

What is remarkable is that Raju has never tried to escape – not even while on guard duty on the seventh or eighth floor of a building. "This is because I ensure he is never hungry and has his fill of the greens (spinach) and carrots which he loves," says Shyam. Though Raju lives with Shyam's family in their small home, everyone keeps a respectful distance from the *ghar ka* Hanuman. Raju can jump 10 to 15 feet from one building to another. Mid-way he can even turn around and jump back.

However primatologist Iqbal Malik is not happy with the new arrangement at the Central Secretariat, and has written to the Prime Minister. The solution is to find a home for the rhesus monkeys in the jungles where there are fruit growing trees, says Iqbal. Care has to be taken not to disturb their family units and they have to be moved en masse.

Iqbal has received a dozen complaints of monkey bites from areas like NOIDA and the Nehru Park. This, she fears, is because a non-government organisation is releasing monkeys being used in experiments in these places. These traumatised monkeys, not used to searching for their own food, could be the culprits.

The municipalities which are supposed to be handling the problem, set traps for the monkeys and then release them in a neighbouring State. A permanent solution would be to trap the animals, sterilise and treat them for various infections, before releasing them according to their family groupings into a forest.

Employing langurs to guard buildings can at best be only a stop gap arrangement, says Malik, because by dispersing the rhesus monkeys from areas where the langurs are employed, you can cause a problem elsewhere. Malik says that after some time the rhesus monkeys will lose their fear of the langurs and tolerate them. This has happened in Tughlakabad where she did a study on the monkeys some years ago. Two langurs from Haryana strayed into Tughlakabad and stayed on for six months. While the langurs stayed on one side of the road, the rhesus monkeys kept their distance. Soon, a female rhesus was found grooming a male langur. One day the langur was run over by a vehicle while the other one disappeared. In six months the intra-species relationship had changed from one of aggression, to grooming and even trying to mate with the rhesus.The battle for moving the monkeys out from the heart of New Delhi has been on for about 15 years now and, with so many people feeding them regularly, the rhesus has got the upper hand. In 1986, recalls Malik, the civic authorities used leg hold traps. This was extremely cruel and the monkeys become increasingly aggressive. Then bigger traps – two feet by five feet were used. Caught, singly or in pairs, the family grouping was disturbed.

Translocating the monkeys was done for the first time from different areas to Tughlakabad in 1989. Malik, personally responsible for the movement, admits she was not happy with her programme. Helping solve a problem in one area had increased in another. Though 30 monkeys were treated before translocation, Tughlakabad soon became saturated.

What is needed is a complete plan. Even when for instance the monkeys of Brindawan, which attacked pilgrims and disappeared with their personal effects, were translocated to adjoining forest areas under a World Wide for Nature (WWFN) programme, it was a half-measure. No allocation was made for their sterilisation, for screening and treating them for diseases picked up in urban areas. But the people would not let their "local Hanumans" be moved out. Though the district magistrate promised protection to the people transferring the monkeys, it became a political issue. Five thousand monkeys had to be relocated. All of them could not be translocated. Nor were the monkeys moved as far out as they should have been from Brindawan. The result was that they returned.

The most successful instance of translocation has been in Kerala in December 1999. This was from Sasthamkotta in Kerala to the H.M. Goel forests, 80 km away. The forest department, the local administration as well as the people of the area and Iqbal Malik's organisation, Vatavaran, were involved. The rhesus monkeys were sterilised and given anti-rabies shots before being rehabilitated.

A year has lapsed and they are still there. Should the monkeys return, a group has been trained to catch them and move them out again.

Lovable as Raju the langur is, there is danger of the rhesus monkeys winning him over and returning to the areas he now guards. More lasting solutions are needed if the capital is to be free from marauding monkeys. People have to stop feeding them as slaves for their conscience! ●

