

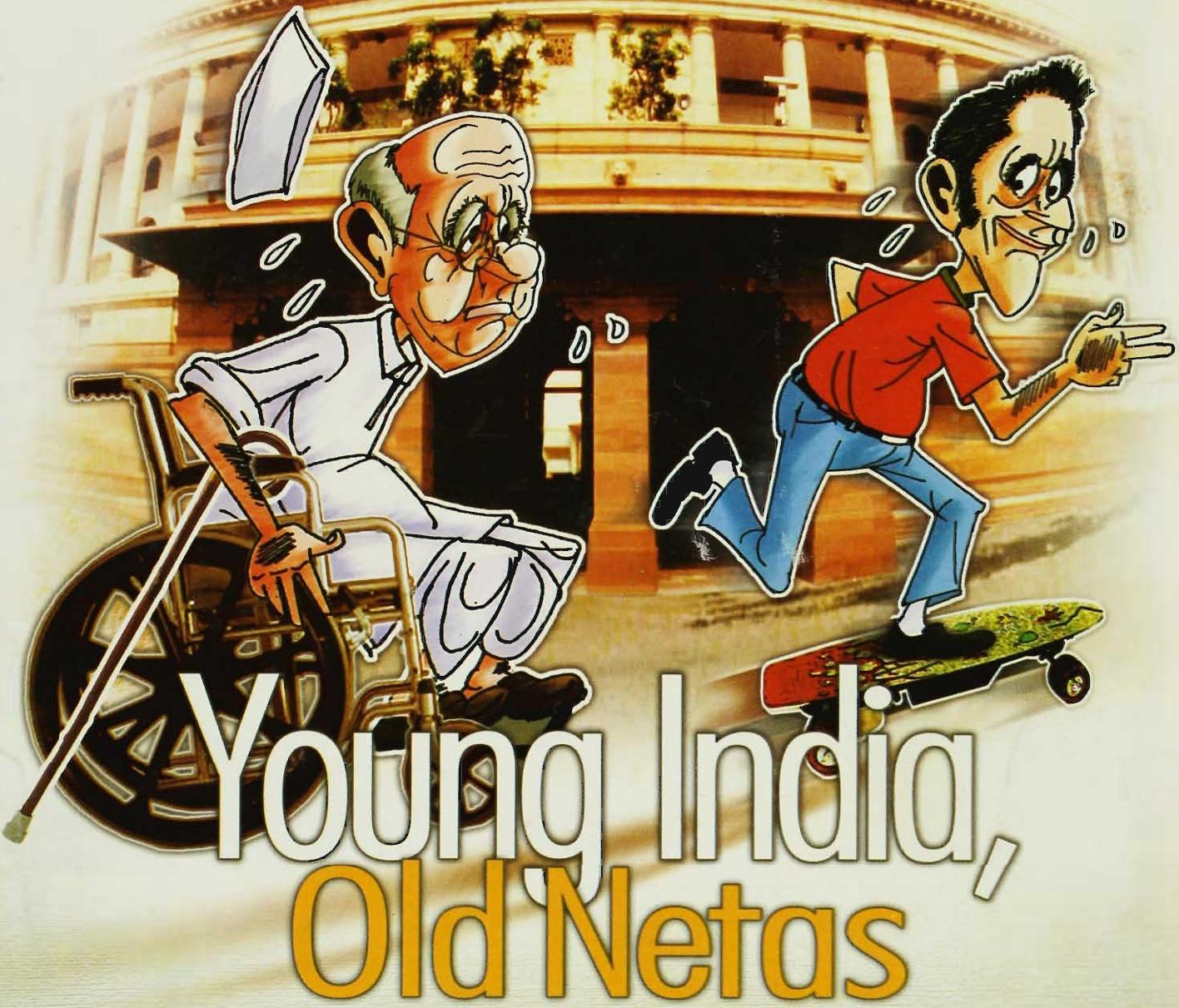
WEEKLY Rs 10 February 28, 2009

SAHARA

Time

Counterfeits: Art of fakes

The Power of Now



Young India, Old Netas

IPL: Is Modi the new Dalmiya? • Rahul's talent hunt

Too much grey at the top

In less than three months from now India will vote to elect members for its 15th Lok Sabha. A significant slice of the Indian electorate will become eligible to vote for the first time in 2009, and these young voters would also be looking for leaders of their age group who would translate their dreams into reality. The fact remains that an overwhelming majority of our population is under 40 years of age: that is why young leaders would be much in demand. Paradoxically, the prime ministerial candidates of the two major political formations who would be expected to lead this young India seem to be members of a geriatric club.

Barack Obama became the President of the US at the age of 47. Tony Blair, then prime minister of Britain, relinquished his office at 54 after serving for almost a decade. David Miliband, at 43, is the second youngest foreign secretary of Britain. While the leader of opposition LK Advani is 80 plus, his counterpart in England is half his age. Manmohan Singh, who is UPA's prime ministerial candidate, is 74. Chief ministers Achuthanandan and Karunanidhi are 80 plus. Ironically, a government servant retires from service at 60 but the chief ministers, prime minister and other ministers are considered fit even after 70 years of age. Retirement per se does not seem to be part of the Indian political lexicon. Or why would former vice president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat at 86 express his willingness to join the race?

So is this the right time for the older generation to move aside and pave the way for the younger generation? Are the younger politicians capable of exercising same degree of patience, tolerance and restraint that a seasoned and older generation politician would exercise in a sub-continent which is highly sensitive and volatile? The real problem with the Indian political setup is that the political parties have become excessively hierarchical where 'yesmanship' becomes the order of the day. Supine loyalty in that case becomes the ultimate virtue. Patronage is the rule of the game that passed from one political generation to the next.

Age may not be a vice by itself. But what we need to promote is a balance between youth and experience. What India needs is a rising profile of leaders born after independence. Hopefully, we will have more young leaders in the next Lok Sabha. ■

BUDHACHANDRA



FEBRUARY 28, 2009

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Published by Anil Abraham for Sahara India Mass Communication from 8th Floor, (Unit No. 804), New Delhi House, 27 Barakhamba Road, New Delhi and printed by Swatantra Mishra at Sahara India Mass Communication Press, C-2,3,4, Sector-11, Noida-201301

Noida off: 0120 - 2537245, 2538566, 2534524, Telefax: 0120- 2538911, 2547470, Mumbai: 022-56981111, fax: 022-26763898, Kolkata: 033-22829364, fax: 033-22829364, Lucknow: 0522-2337777, fax: 2370336, 2370380, Kanpur: 0512-2318330, fax 0512-2361044, Gorakhpur: 0551-2202362, fax: 0551-2202365, Bhopal: 0755 2578217, Dehradun: 0135-2651355, fax: 0135-2711355, Jaipur: 0141 2741765, fax: 0141-2741682, Patna: 0612-2210760, fax: 0612-2225483, Chandigarh: 0172-2645380 Ahmedabad: 079-27494201, fax: 079-27413508, Bangalore: 080-25582172, fax: 080-25582172

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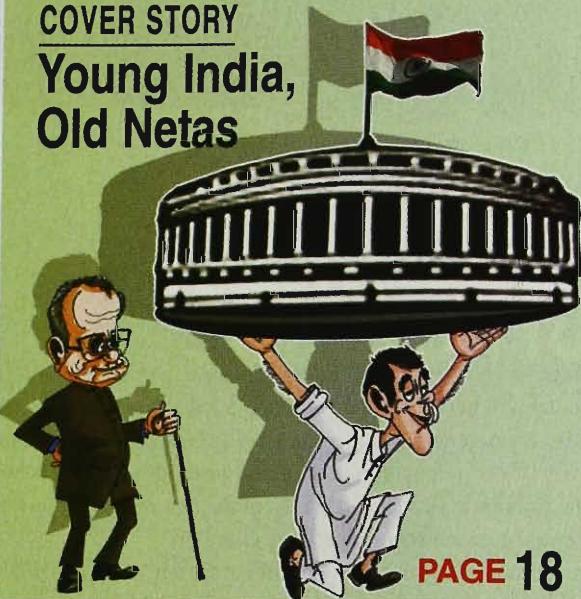
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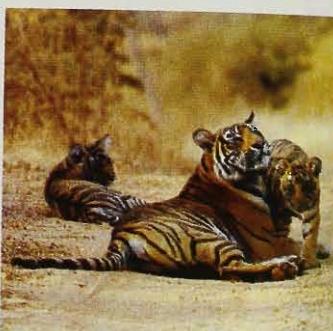


Centre is responsible for the mess in Jharkhand

—Babu Lal Marandi

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Tiger on prowl

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Pak in the grip of Taliban terror

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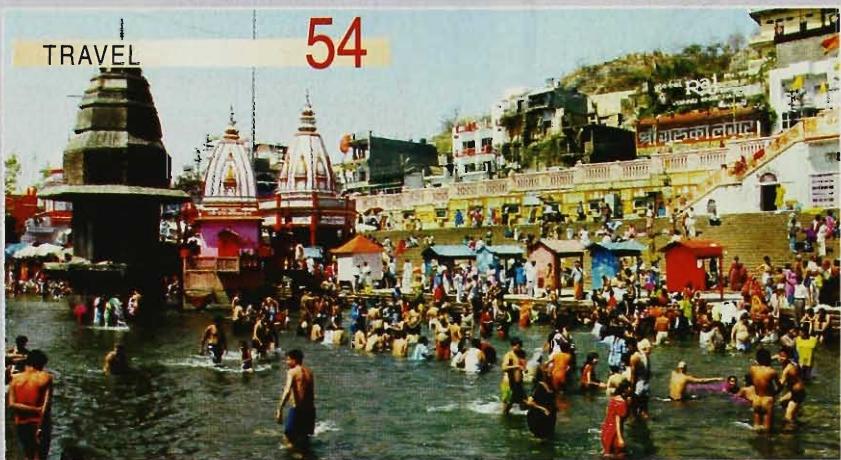
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'I never went to acting school'



with a stellar performance in fashion, deadly kicks in Drona, elevated fun quotient in Dostana and boyfriend backup in Love Story 2050, the year 2008 definitely belonged to Priyanka Chopra

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Unwitting accomplice

Of late, there has been much clamour about the danger that is believed to be stalking the Indian culture and tradition. However, I believe that a culture which can survive female foeticide, girl infanticide and other most inhuman barbarities inflicted upon its women would not crumble if a few women go to pubs and wear jeans. However, even more sad than the ugly crusade of the moralist brigade is the media unwittingly helping the nefarious designs of such scoundrels in grabbing the nation's attentions for the 15 minutes of fame.

Rajeev Khanna, Panipat



have done a colourful story on Surajkund but again you put it almost at the end. So, I think you should put such stories in the front or the mid section. Apart from that I think the entire magazine was full of meaningful stories.

Sourab Dhall, Agra

Time to think

I have noticed that you always save the colourful and bright stories for the last segment. Like last time you

Inequity breeds discontent

Lately Maoists have been striking at will, exposing the utter lack of our ability to tackle this war against the state. But the governments, Union as well as the states', seem to be occupied with other pressing matters, as they

have shown no willingness to weed out the root cause of this problem, which is assuming threatening proportions by the day. They still tend to dismiss these insurrections as merely law and order problems, which we know these are not. In fact, the root cause of the problem is our failure to ensure equitable enjoyment of gains of economic growth that India has witnessed since independence.

Amit Bhatnagar, Bangalore

Silver lining

The much delayed acceptance by Pakistan's interior minister Rehman Malik that people involved in the Mumbai carnage of 26 November are Pakistani nationals, has come as a silver lining in our fight against the scourge of terrorism. Made under tremendous international pressure, this admission has highlighted

LETTER OF THE WEEK

CULTURAL SHOWCASE

The article on Surajkund fair made an interesting reading. The writer is right in his analysis that the fair is a perfect platform in showcasing rich craftsmanship from all over India and is a beautiful amalgam of heritage and culture. Over the years the fair has become one of the most awaited one for the Delhiites. A stroll along the fair grounds gives you a sneak peek into the rich cultures that various states of the country boast of. One of the major attractions at the fair this time was the participation of the SAARC countries. Their stalls drew in large crowds, eager to buy foreign products. However, it would have further enriched the story if there was more coverage of international participants.

Rohit Singh, New Delhi





AIRWALKING: A participant in rural olympics at Kila Raipur near Ludhiana

the point that it is only with global co-operation that we can exterminate the evil of terrorism and not by teaching our neighbours a lesson.

M Sadanand, Delhi

Other side of coin

The Feb 21 issue of *Sahara Time* was a colourful one, very much in mood with the Valentine's Day celebrations. It is not that I am against Valentine or the kind of coverage that the festival receives from media but the outcome of such celebrations on the political picture of the country should also have found way

in your pages.

Seema Sinha, Ghaziabad

Unspoilt wonder

The travel piece on Bhimbetka is every bit worth mentioning. The rock art was refreshing for people who have been reading travelogues only on particular spots, especially of places that have made it big because of their promotion from the tourism sector. However, the photographs on it could have been more breathtaking.

Priyanka, Delhi

Riding communal bogey

At its recently concluded National Conclave in Nagpur the BJP has predictably failed to identify issues with which it wants to fight the forthcoming Parliamentary elections. Sensing that this pitiable absence of electoral issues is not going to better its electoral performance, it has again tried to whip up the communal bogey. I earnestly hope that the voters are not taken for a ride on the *Ram Rath*.

Ajay Nath, Bhubaneshwar

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6

"CBI has become Congress Bureau of Investigation. The CBI's status report to the SC in the case has 288 mistakes."



- **AMAR SINGH,**
Samajwadi Party, general secretary.

COUNTER-POINT

"CBI is an independent agency and the UPA government at the Centre has, in no way, tried to influence its working. We have never asked the CBI what to do in any case."



- **MANISH TIWARI,**
Congress party spokesman.

9



Pappu Yadav: ready to contest despite controversial past

Tug of war in Bihar

Pappu Yadav and wife Ranjita are being considered as Congress candidates as the party claims 17 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar – but the RJD wants to give only six

Sanjay K Jha / New Delhi

Bihar strongman Pappu Yadav is being considered as a Congress candidate from Madhepura Lok Sabha seat while his wife and sitting LJP MP is also being considered as Congress nominee from Supaul Lok Sabha seat. In fact, Pappu Yadav might field one of his representatives from Madhepura in case he faces any legal hurdle in his candidature.

This shift of Pappu Yadav came when he sided with the Congress during the crucial vote of confidence on Lok Sabha last year. Party is ready to award him ticket despite his controversial past. His wife Ranjita Kaur is also to be awarded ticket due to similar considerations. The JD-U MP from Nalanda Ram Swaroop Prasad also voted for the Congress during the crucial vote of confidence and he is also among the contenders for Congress ticket.

Congress has been working to improve its tally in Bihar. For this, the state leaders

have prepared a list of candidates for seventeen seats but the leaders may get contended at 12 odd seats. It remains to be seen whether RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav agrees to the Congress' demand or aggress for a friendly battle.

Congress will retain four seats including that of its three sitting MPs – Meira Kumar from Sasaram, Shakeel Ahmed from Madhubani, Nikhil Kumar from Aurangabad and also Begusarai seat that the Congress had lost in 2004. Another six seats where the

Congress is keen to field its candidates include Valmiki Nagar, Maharaiganj, Purnea, Nalanda and Jamui.

Former minister Vishwa Mohan Sharma and senior leader Mahachandra Prasad Singh are in fray for Maharaiganj Lok Sabha seat. Another Congress leader Tarkeshwar Singh is also in the fray for this seat. The RJD MP Pappu Yadav is keen field his relative from Purnea but the party leaders are also considering Amarnath Tiwari as well as senior functionary of Nehru Yuva Kendra Shakeel Ahmed to contest Purnea Lok Sabha. The Lok Janshakti has also declared its candidate from this seat and therefore the Congress is considering friendly contest in Bihar.

The Bihar PCC chief Anil Sharma is the party candidate from Munger Lok Sabha seat. Sharma is an upper caste strongman and Munger seat is comfortable for him due to merger of four important upper caste pockets – Barh, Mokama, Surajgarha and Lakhisarai – into this constituency.

Similarly, JD-U state chief Rajiv Ranjan alias Lalan Singh is will also contest this very seat.

Apart from Anil Sharma, Ashok Ram and Mahachandra Prasad Singh are also strong contenders for Congress ticket. Ashok Ram is the CLP leader in Bihar assembly while Mahachandra Prasad Singh has represented the legislative council in the state. Thus Congress has six definite contenders while eleven others are also being considered for friendly battle.

For Kishanganj Lok Sabha seat, union minister Md Taslimuddin is likely to be pitted against BJP's Dilip Jaiswal. Jaiswal is the treasurer of the state BJP.

In Jharkhand, Congress has six sitting MPs but the senior party leaders have already started claiming for nine Lok Sabha seats. The sitting MPs where the Congress has strong claims include Subodh Kant Sahai from Ranchi, Chandrashekhar Dubey from Dhanbad, Bagun Sumbrai from Singhbhum, Sushila Kerketta from Khunti, Furkan Ansari from Godda and Ramshwar Oraon from Lohardagga. Congress had lost Rajmahal seat in 2004 where senior leader Thomas Hansda was contesting.

In the present political scenario, RJD chief wants to get Koderma Lok Sabha seat for the RJD legislature party leader in Jharkhand Annapurna Devi. He also aims to field party leader Sarafraj Ahmed from Giridih as well as getting the Hazaribagh seat for the CPI. Congress leaders are keen to field their own candidate from Hazaribagh. Once again, Congress and RJD leaders have been facing conflict on retaining several seats in Jharkhand.

Like Bihar, Congress has already staked claim for nine parliamentary seats in Jharkhand against the existing six seats. The stakes are high for Laloo Prasad Yadav in Jharkhand too. If the Congress contests more seats and the number of seats gets lowered for the RJD, then this will be the end of the innings for Laloo Prasad Yadav as union railway minister. ■

● Sudhansu R Das

Isolate the greed virus

The worst ever economic crisis since the great depression of 1929 has gripped economies across the world. A growth model which was advocated by noted economists and international agencies turned into a bubble which got ruptured, unleashing a series of financial scams starting with Lehman Brothers and creating deep financial uncertainties across the world.

IMF in its latest World Economic Outlook said uncertainty and expectation will grip the economic and financial environment. A wide range of financial stimuli have been rolled out by economies across the world to put the growth machine on the tracks. The apex bank in India has reduced repo rate from 9 to 5.5 per cent and CRR from 9 to 5 per cent, injecting liquidity to the tune of Rs 388.045 crore from September 2008 to January 2009. The RBI is reluctant to further reduce the repo rate.

US President Barack Obama named greed as the main cause of the present crisis. He cautioned US citizens to cut consumption. What Obama has said is true as it is the greed virus which has contaminated economic policies and politicians across the world. Ultimately the market economy mantra – induce investment, increase trade, create jobs, improve living standard and consume more end up in promoting a few mono sectors in economy – a kind of economic growth which has created monsters out of human endeavor.

The two and half decade old globalization which aimed to integrate economies across the world actually destroyed many economic sectors. Livelihood of millions of people across the world was destroyed. Never before has global greed manifested such a demonic shape. The decline actually started in the late 80s. The last two decades witnessed various artificial means to stimulate mono sector growth.

The loss to China's environment due to its phenomenal growth will surpass the wealth generated by the country. According to the World Bank report China has 16 of the world's most polluted cities. Over 70 per cent of water in China's seven major rivers system is unsuitable for human contact. The per head water resources in China is among the lowest in the world. The global warming which threatens lives and livelihood of millions of people across the world is the manifestation of greed only. The Human Development Report 2007 warns the global warming would make drinking water scarce for 1.8 billion people.

Greed has clouded the economic vision. Who will buy products when people's livelihood is robbed due to fre-

quent natural disasters? United Nation's Environment Programme (UNEP) researchers found a brown cloud of hazardous gasses named as the Asian brown haze which affects livelihood of billions of people in India, China and South Asian nations. This was created due to shift of many hazardous industries to the Asia-Pacific region. Global traders created huge artificial demand for manufactured goods through aggressive ad campaigns. The majority of Indian films have marketed consumer products only instead of developing cinema as an art. People borrowed to live beyond their means as their societal behavior has changed. As a result a vague pursuit of status ends up in huge borrowings across the world. Economists with vision were replaced by market agents to help a few mono sectors.

In the 17th century, 80 per cent people in Europe depended on agriculture and natural sector. In the 19th century, the number reduced to 7 per cent only because the war-ravaged western and European nations tried to escape from debt and inflation. With minuscule percentage of land for agriculture, the developed nations resorted to trade distortion. The developed nations' agriculture subsidy has impoverished millions of farmers in developing nations. The US cotton subsidy almost squeezed out African cotton farmers out of jobs. Only 25,000 cotton farmers in US receive annual subsidy worth \$2 billion.

The once food-sufficient states Haiti, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Cameroon and West Bank are now dependent on external aids for survival. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation out of 37 nations who are in need of urgent external assistance, 25 are in Africa. The UN has predicted the food prices would further double in the next ten years. This will create a famine like situation amid recession.

A UN study says the bio-fuel cultivation area will double in the next decade. Bio-fuel cultivation in India, China, Brazil, US and in Europe got policy focus only to artificially boost automobile industries. Over two and half decades of globalization has chronicled growth opportunities amid business frauds, financial scams, money laundering, currency manipulation and all kinds of trade distortions. The Asia Pacific Human Development Report of UNDP says trade has increased inequalities among different areas, sectors and households and appealed for a bold new policy. There is a need for global consciousness to quarantine the greed virus and achieve integrated growth of industry, services and natural sectors. ■



Global trade has increased inequalities between different areas, sectors, and households. We need a bold new policy

Gandhiji Chaiwala

This tea stall owner spreads the message of Mahatma with his simple living, high thinking

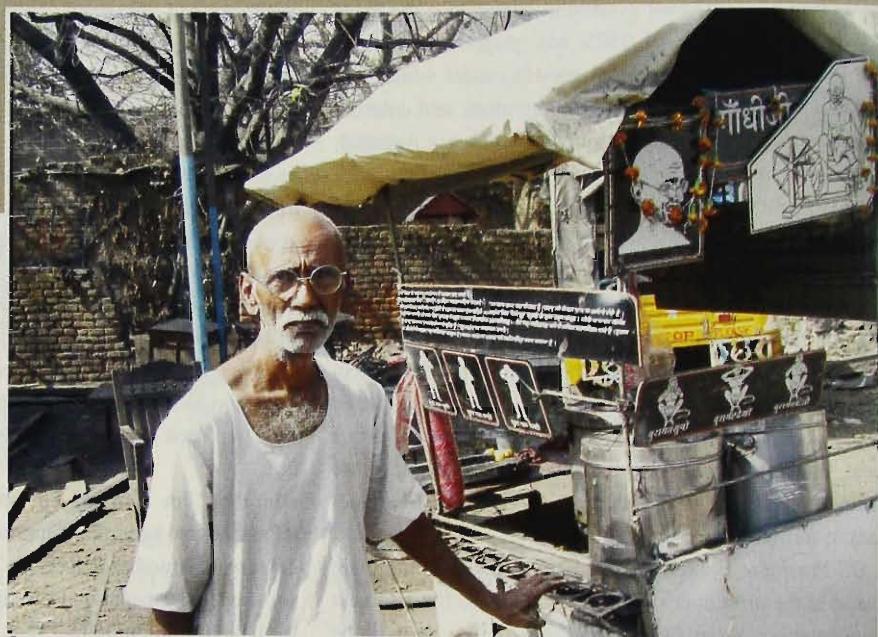
Sanjeev K Jha / Dhanbad

For octogenarian Shambhu Dayal Tamrakar, respectfully called 'Gandhiji Chaiwala' by the people of Kendua in Dhanbad, the weight of the purse seldom matters in giving a helping hand to others. Yes, solemnising marriages of underprivileged girls, distribution of warm clothes during winter, helping the poor to buy medicines and food feature among his regular expenditure.

The locals have nicknamed him Gandhiji Chaiwala for his looks, ideals, attire and way of living, which remind many of the Father of the Nation.

Born in Kendua, Tamrakar inherited his business from his ancestors. A higher secondary dropout, he had Mahatma Gandhi as his role model since childhood. For that, he considers himself among the very few luckiest men of India. "I still can't forget that moment of my life when God gave me a rare opportunity to meet Bapu when he had come to Kendua to meet his friends in 1948. Bapu is not the name of a man, rather it is the name of a God - made of blood and flesh," he said. He further informed that he also attended a public meeting by the great leader in Kendua.

"I was so impressed with his speech that I decided to follow his ideals like truth and compassion towards the poor," he told *Sahara Time*, adding, "It is only due to Bapu's blessings that my family has never opposed my actions. Rather, they extended full support in my mission."



Swearing by Gandhism: Tamarkar with his tea-cart

Like Gandhiji, his disciple, too, believes in non-violence and tolerance. "Till there is violence in the society, development will remain a mirage for us. Not only that, we must follow the principles of simple living and high thinking, he said, adding,

Yes, solemnising marriages of underprivileged girls, distribution of warm clothes during winter, helping the poor to buy medicines and food feature among his regular expenditure

"Mazdoor aur kisan ka saada aur shramnishtha jeewan hi sachchi zindagi hai (The simple and active life of the labourers and farmers of our country is the true life).

His septuagenarian wife Damayanti,

too, has no regrets for the poverty or sufferings caused due to her husband's charity. "My family has never slept hungry at night, so why should I curse my fate for more money?" she asks. She further adds: "The path of simplicity and truth is seldom easy."

Regarding his attire, he said he used to wear trousers and shirts earlier but thought he should stick to Gandhi's philosophy of simplicity and adopted dhoti-kurta. The makeshift tea kiosk of Tamrakar has slogans and ideals of Gandhi painted on it, which describes the principles of tolerance and non-violence.

His ideas and attire, however, have had deep impact in his area. Rajendra Kumar, a bank employee told *Sahara Time*: "I was so impressed by his ideas and slogans that I decided to give up non-vegetarian food in 2007. I have not seen Gandhiji. But if his follower can make such deep impact on our minds, one can think about the magnetic field of our Bapu."

Sanjeev K Jha / New Delhi

Rahul Gandhi's 'Talent Hunt' for young leaders from Bihar could have yielded clean, eager young politicians. Instead, the addition of four candidates from influential families to the 15 shortlisted led to a peculiar debacle: all four additions were selected -- and it turns out they have dubious credentials!

"When a team led by Jagdish Tytler came to Patna they held the first round of interviews and shortlisted 15 names. However, a couple of days before the interview in Delhi, four more names



Rahul Gandhi

each," he informed. He further recalled that Rahul left the house halfway through the interview, leaving the others to continue shooting questions.

The reported results of the interview created further tremors in the party in

Patna. The five selected persons included the name of one Kumar Ashish, who is an accused in a case relating to a question paper leakage of +2 mathematics papers in March 2005. The Patna police had seized original question papers from an apartment and arrested six persons, including Ashish, and the whole episode had hogged the headlines that time. Not only that, the then Bihar Congress president, Ram Jatan Sinha, had even announced the expulsion of Ashish from the party.

Anil Kumar Sharma feigned ignorance about the updated status of the criminal case against Ashish. He told Sahara Time, "Even if the case is still under investigation, I personally feel that Ashish should not be given any responsible position. Perhaps, the party high command is not aware of it. He, however, claimed that Rahul's talent hunt was "a very noble exercise" to promote young leaders, having clean image.

Other issues too, which have been giving sleepless nights to senior Congress leaders of the state. Former state NSUI chief Kesar Kumar Singh's resume is being questioned. Interestingly, Singh became an office-bearer in 1991, after completing the mandatory age of 19 years, but in his bio-data, he had reportedly claimed to be still less than 35 years of age. Another Youth Congress leader,

Talented criminals?

Rahul Gandhi's hunt for fresh-faced youngsters from the states is already copping a cropper – at least in Bihar

were included. All the four are close to influential leaders and Union ministers from Bihar," remarked a young man who was interviewed. However, the list of young leaders called for the interview was a surprise to the young aspirants.

On February 10, all the 19 'youth leaders' of Bihar were interviewed at 12, Tughlaq Lane, the official residence of All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary Rahul Gandhi. Lalan Yadav, who was also among the original shortlisted candidates, had this to say: "Rahul Gandhi, AICC general secretary Jeetendra Bhawar, Indian Youth Congress (IYC) president Ashok Tanwar and Rahul's private secretary Kanishka Singh took the interview. We were divided into two groups and asked one question

"I was framed and was later acquitted," claimed Ashish to Sahara Time, who with four other selected leaders, was on his way to Rae Bareli for training on organization and leadership. When asked whether he was the state party's spokesperson few years ago, he refused to answer.

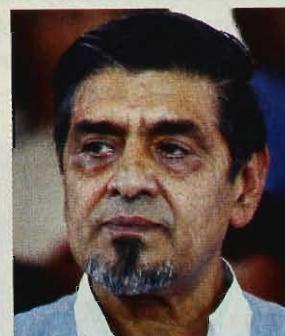
On the other hand, Ashish's claim is nothing more than eyewash for party rivals. "The chargesheet is yet to be filed in the case and investigations are still on. Not only that, a judicial magistrate of Patna had also declared Ashish absconding in a separate case," claimed another Youth Congress leader, preferring anonymity.

Meanwhile, Bihar Congress chief

Chandan Yadav, groomed to be the next generation leader, had to be removed as state president of Youth Congress for being over 35 years, minutes before taking the formal oath.

Another of the selected candidates Bipin Bihari Yadav, according to Talib Ansari, former Congress MLA, has a criminal background with many cases pending against him.

So Rahul Gandhi's Talent Hunt, in which he seems to have participated half-heartedly, seems to have yielded the usual crop of aspirants with dubious credentials. Reforming the grand old party is obviously not going to be that easy. ■



Jagdish Tytler

Bindra flies F-16IN

BANGALORE: India's ace shooter and first Olympics gold medalist, Abhinav Bindra, joined the elite VVIP list of fliers to be privileged with a flying experience in a fighter jet. Abhinav Bindra who was in Bangalore to be a part of the seventh Aero India 2009, Asia's premiere air show, flew aboard US based Lockheed Martin's fighter jet F-16IN, specifically designed for the Indian Air Force.

Bindra who took off in the F-16IN in the afternoon with Paul 'BEAR' Randall, 47 year old, Ex- Navy pilot, 4200 hours of flying experience is Lockheed Martin's most experienced test pilot, kept on skyscraping for nearly an hour before they descended back to the ground. "Words cannot explain the excitement I underwent in those 45minutes on board F-16IN. It was simply ecstatic and still coming to terms with my experience. It was probably similar to what I felt when I won the

Olympic Gold last August," said the completely exhilarated Abhinav Bindra. "I salute all those brave men who risk their lives to fly in the air to shoot targets unknown and invisible to them, and all this because they love their country. The F-16IN – I believe is a step towards making the lives of these brave men a little easy and make them better equipped miles above in the air", Bindra said.



Snake charmers form group

KOLKATA: A large number of snake charmers in West Bengal, who have been bearing the brunt of a ban on keeping the reptiles and their public shows, have formed a group to lobby for utilising their knowledge for benefiting society. About one-lakh snake



'Most common British addictions'



LONDON: It's not sex, drugs or fags, but coffee, chocolate and the social networking site Facebook that are the most common addictions in Britain, according to a new study into modern lifestyles. Researchers have based their findings on a survey that examined the lifestyles of 3,000 people in Britain, aged under 30 years. In the poll, the respondents were asked on substances and habits which they spent the most money on, those they had previously attempted to cut down on or give up and the modern impulses ruling lives in 2009. Coffee topped the list of the ten most common modern addictions, followed by chocolate consumption with Facebook in third place. What's surprising is that the much railed against vices of alcohol and drugs didn't figure in the top ten. Vanity came in the fourth place as a more traditional popular vice with beauty products while the practice of often checking bank accounts came fifth, thanks to the global credit crunch, *The Daily Telegraph* reported.

charmers in West Bengal, concentrated in the districts of Murshidabad, Birbhum, Nadia, Malda and Coochbehar, have been in dire straits because of the ban imposed under the Wildlife Protection Act. The hapless people, who belong to the nomadic Bedia community, left with no other means to earn a living, have formed a

Alarming increase in cancer cases

ERODE: Known the world over for its textile production and processing, Erode district is witnessing an alarming number of cancer cases due to drinking water contamination from the deadly chemical discharge by various factory units into Kalaingarayan canal. "Erode district is one of the worst hit cancer districts in Tamil Nadu and as on date, within just 18 months of starting the IICG cancer hospital, 1,320 cancer cases were examined in Erode alone," says Dr P Suthahar, consultant radiologist at the hospital. He said 35 to 40 per cent of those examined had liver and bladder cancer, a clear indication that it was due to consumption of water contaminated with dyes and chemicals. The hospital is now conducting regular camps all over the district to make people aware on the need to go for proper early diagnosis and treatment. "Everyday, a new case comes to the hospital," he said.



Satellite witnesses frequent blasts

NEW YORK: Astronomers using NASA's Swift satellite and Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope have been witnessing frequent blasts from stellar remnant 30,000 light-years away, the American space agency reported. The high-energy fireworks arise from a rare type of neutron star known as a soft-gamma-ray repeater. Such objects unpredictably send out a series of X-ray and gamma ray flares, NASA reported. "At times, this remarkable object has erupted with more than a hundred flares in as little as 20 minutes," said Loredana Vetere, who is coordinating the Swift observations. "The most intense flares emitted more total energy than the sun does in 20 years," Vetere said. The object, which has long been known as an X-ray source, lies in the southern constellation Norma. During the past two years,

astronomers have identified pulsing radio and X-ray signals from it. The object began a series of modest eruptions on October 3, 2008 and then settled down. It roared back to life on January 22 with an intense episode. Because of the recent outbursts, astronomers will classify the object as a soft-gamma-ray repeater – only the sixth known.



pressure group 'Bedia Federation of India' to lobby for utilising their expertise for the benefit of society. "Having lived with the reptiles since childhood, the snake charmers know only one vocation, that is handling snakes and holding public shows, but strong measures adopted by police and forest department for the last decade or so have put them in a difficult situ-

ation," the leader of their organisation, Raktim Das said. He argued that if they were not allowed to hold shows of snakes in public, they could be used as health workers and as a resource pool for anti-snakebite venom. Das was instrumental in uniting the snake charmers and he himself picked up the art of handling poisonous snakes.

Google to help families reduce electricity use

WASHINGTON: Internet search engine Google seems all set to bring power grids into the digital age – it is to soon launch a PowerMeter to help families "reduce their domestic electricity consumption". According to Google, using a special widget embedded on their personalised iGoogle homepage, people will be able to monitor the PowerMeter software through their computers, which will help them see where to cut down on electricity use. In fact, the PowerMeter will analyse the electricity consumption information captured by



"smart meters", and then translate it into easy-to-understand information, it said. Ed Lu, a member of Google's engineering team, wrote on the search engine's blog: "In a world where everyone had a detailed understanding of their home energy use, we could find all sorts of ways to save energy and lower electricity bills. "It may not sound like much, but if half of America's households cut their energy demand by ten per cent, it would be the equivalent of taking eight million cars off the road." In fact, the PowerMeter is currently in development, and is being tested among select members of Google's own staff before eventually being introduced to the wider public, media reports said.

According to Lu, Google's mission is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible as well as useful to people. "We believe that detailed data on your personal energy use belongs to you and should be available in an open standard nonproprietary format. You should control who gets to see your data and you should be free to choose from a range of services to help you understand it and benefit from it," he wrote. ■

Media in the crossfire

T S Raman / Chennai

Two deaths. One in Colombo, another in Chennai. Both critics of their respective governments. One, a murder; another, a self-immolation. Of two journalists who penned their thoughts so well that their last words have opened a fountain of emotions in Tamil Nadu as well as across the Palk Strait. Interestingly, both harboured high hopes of President Barack Obama and mentioned him in their last missives.

Ever since the Mahinda Rajapakse rule began, journalists have borne the brunt of the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. In



fact, a minister stated in the Lankan parliament that nine journalists have been killed, 27 attacked and four abducted since 2006.

On January 23, a motorbike-borne death squad attempted to kill Upali Tennakoon, editor of a weekly Sinhala-language paper for criticising the government. In the first week of January the MTV/Sirasa television station was torched for being anti-government. In March 2007, J S Tissanayagam, a *Sunday Times* columnist and editor of the *Outreach* website, was arrested. He is still under detention.

The civil war in Sri Lanka has claimed the lives of two journalists, while dozens have fled the country

Over the past one-month, dozens of journalists have fled from Sri Lanka, some to India including Iqbal Athas, a *Sunday Times* columnist, Sanath Balasuriya and Poddala Jayantha of the state-run Lake House, Sunanda Deshapriya and Uvindu Kurukulasuriya of the Free Media Movement, Upul Joseph Fernando and Rathnapala Gamage of Lankadeepa, and Anuruddha Lokuhappuarachchi, a Reuters reporter.

The ashes of 26-year-old K Muthukumar were placed into several urns and carried across the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu by pro-Eelam groups, "to generate awareness about the plight of Tamils in northern Sri Lanka", before they were finally immersed in the sea at Kanyakumari, Tiruchendur and Nagapattinam.

Muthukumar, a young journalist with a Tamil magazine, left behind a four-page detailed letter in Tamil, before he immolated himself in

Chennai on January 29. It was not only a pro-Eelam statement, but also an anti-DMK one.

Recalling the anti-Hindi agitation of 1965, Muthukumar appealed to law college students (on a fast to protest the Lankan bombing of Tamil civilians): "As it happened the last time, do not let selfish elements steal the gains of your struggle." The anti-Hindi agitation was a students' agitation that catapulted the DMK to power nearly 45 years ago.

The assassination of Lasantha Wickrematunge, a vocal critic of the Sri Lankan government, in Colombo on

January 8, generated a lot of anger in Tamil Nadu.

In an evocative editorial just before he died, titled, "And Then They Came For Me" Wickrematunge wrote: "We find ourselves in the midst of a civil war ruthlessly prosecuted (sic) by protagonists whose bloodlust knows no bounds. Terror, whether perpetrated by terrorists or the state, has become the order of the day. Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty. Today it is the journalists, tomorrow it will be the judges. For neither group have the risks ever been higher or the stakes lower."

"...we have consistently espoused the view that while separatist terrorism must be eradicated, it is more important to address the root causes of terrorism, and urged government to view Sri Lanka's ethnic strife in the context of history and not through the telescope of terrorism. We have also agitated against state terrorism in the so-called war against terror, and made no secret of our horror that Sri Lanka is the only country in the world routinely to bomb its own citizens...."

A long-time and close friend of Rajapakse, Wickrematunge wrote: "Mahinda...you have told me that your sons are your greatest joy, and that you love spending time with them, leaving your brothers to operate the machinery of state. Now, it is clear to all who will see that machinery has operated so well that my sons and daughter do not themselves have a father..."

Quoting Obama, Wickrematunge wrote, "If you remember nothing else, remember this: The Leader is there for you, be you Sinhalese, Tamil, Muslim, low-caste, homosexual, dissident or disabled." ■

● M L Kotru

Say thanks to Obama

AS IT waits for Pakistan to take the next step, New Delhi must acknowledge that American support has been critical in compelling Pakistan to move in the right direction. It was Americans who brought a new level of sophistication to the Mumbai investigation, the advanced techniques employed by the FBI helped to fully mine the communication trail of the attackers and establish beyond doubt that the Mumbai outrage was planned and executed from Pakistan. Couple this with Washington's willingness to turn on the political heat on Islamabad.

The assumption would be wrong that it was Indian opinion alone that persuaded Pakistan to accept that the terrorists who attacked Mumbai had used Pakistani soil to plan the attack or that eight people had been traced, six arrested and importantly that Lashkar-a-Toiba elements too were involved in the execution of the attack. No room for quibbling there except that Pakistan has also communicated 30-odd questions to Indian authorities, some of these obviously linked to local facilitators in Mumbai and elsewhere. The names of some associated with the Malegaon carnage including a serving colonel of the Indian army, have also been cited in connection with the Samjhauta Express train blasts.

Unlike George Bush, who had pursued a policy of investing huge sums in building up the Pakistan army, Barack Obama appears to have made it clear that his first option in Pakistan is to help establish civilian authority on the army. In fact, Pakistan has also been told unanimously that all future American aid must be used for the country's economic resurgence. The American commanders in Afghanistan and the Pentagon are very skeptical about the role of the Pak army and the ISI in the Talibanisation of the country. This, it is suggested by some, may be the reason that the Pakistani government finally chose to link Lashkar-e-Toiba, the banned offspring of the so-called relief-oriented Jamat-ud-Dawa, with the Mumbai blasts.

The fact just the same happens to be that the Asif Ali Zardari government is riven by dissension. A war of nerves has been a constant feature of the functioning of individual ministers working under Prime Minister Geelani. One of the most noticeable features of these dissensions is the often contradictory statements made by Cabinet Ministers. Geelani, a Zardari appointee, is actually using the Army's clout to force his Cabinet colleagues to fall in line.

Zardari himself seems to be getting into a deeper hole with his popularity falling by the minute, yielding ground to Nawaz Sharif, who is currently rated as the country's most popular leader. Sharif is playing his cards on the terrorism front rather deftly, neither owning nor disowning them, and in the process distancing himself from the American percep-

tion that he is soft on the Islamist fringe.

In a show of defiance, however, he dismisses Zardari as an unreliable partner who has gone back on several solemn pacts inked by him and the late Benazir Bhutto and Zardari himself. Zardari's refusal to divest himself of the powers given via a constitutional fiat issued by Gen. Musharraf – thereby reserving the right for himself to dismiss the Government and to dissolve the National and State Assemblies – is a sore point. Nawaz, at the same time, has refused to appear before the Musharraf-named Chief Justice in his election petition on the ground that Zardari has not restored the sacked chief justice, Iftikhar Chaudhry.

Nawaz is offering strong backing to lawyers who are planning to stage a nationwide demonstration to press the demand for restoration of all judges sacked by Musharraf next month. And as this bitter struggle between Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari unfolds itself, the President is said to have blessed the move to dislodge Sharif's brother, Shabbaz as the Punjab chief minister by forging a new alliance between the Musharraf was blessed Muslim League (Q), once known as the King's party, and the People's Party.

There is deep concern, though, that Nawaz League's present cooperative attitude on Mumbai may change with "political circumstances". If the PPP-PML (Q) ousts Shabbaz Sharif in Punjab, Nawaz League may find it expedient to latch on to any stick to beat the Zardari PPP with.

Shabbaz, who as Punjab chief minister has been restricting the activities of various terror outfits in the province, could well change course. The 35-acre Muridke Lashkar headquarters, just outside Lahore, was given much quarter by Nawaz Sharif in his earlier incarnation as Punjab chief minister and later as prime minister. The Jamaat-ud-Dawa, now headquartered in Muridke, has been the recipient of substantial Saudi aid (recently stopped) and it is quite likely that this channel might open once again should Nawaz Sharif continue to be denied by Zardari. Nawaz Sharif has a close relationship with the Saudi royal house than any other Pakistani politician. It could come very handy.

A shaky Zardari could avoid an open confrontation with Nawaz Sharif with a stroke of his pen: erase Sharif's conviction by Musharraf the same way as the former military ruler had done in the case of Benazir Bhutto and Zardari himself, simply by proclaiming the National Reconciliation Ordinance. In fairness to Nawaz Sharif, it must be put on record that Zardari has gone back on all the agreements and promises made by him just prior to the election to the National and provincial Assemblies. The bonhomie of a little more than a year ago has turned into hostility. Zardari's problem is that he has yet to find acceptance at the national level whereas Nawaz is seen as the man of the moment. ■



Unlike George Bush, Obama appears to have made it clear that his first option in Pakistan is to help establish civilian authority on the army

‘Centre is responsible for the mess in Jharkhand’

BABU LAL MARANDI – the first chief minister of Jharkhand and Union minister of state for forest and environment – had to resign and make way for Arjun Munda for the post of CM in 2002 following pressure exerted by some of the ministers. In the 2003 Lok Sabha elections, he contested from Koderma as a BJP candidate. His differences with the state leadership continued to increase and he even started criticising the state government in public. Eventually, he resigned from both Koderma LS seat and the primary membership of the BJP in 2006 and floated a new political outfit named Jharkhand Vikas Morcha. In the by-elections for the Koderma seat, he contested as an independent candidate and emerged victorious. He spoke to **Sahara Time** correspondent Vinod K Shukla on many issues, including going back to the BJP fold. Excerpts:



Q. What do you have to say about the prevailing situation in Jharkhand?

A. The situation in Jharkhand is similar to the situation in the country: central politics – of the Congress and the BJP – is responsible for the prevailing situation in the state. The difference in Jharkhand is that the reins of power are in the hands of relatively new players who have become pawns of big politicians. Whatever has happened in the state reflects in the system and administration. What I see is that the perception changes from person to person. If a poor person drinks, he is termed a drunkard but if a rich person does the same it becomes part of the lifestyle. The same is the case in other aspects of life and administration.

Q. Whom do you find responsible

for such a situation of the state?

A. Central leaders are solely responsible for such a mess in the state. Had not they compromised with the corrupt people, the situation in the state would not have been so awful. The BJP formed the government with the help of corrupt people in 2003 and the Congress did the same in 2006. On the issue of development they say that looting is being done: but who is doing all that? It is the same people who are looting and minting money.

The Congress claims that its leaders have made lots of sacrifices for the country but have they done it to recover with interest. Moreover they have forgotten everything in the case of formation of Madu Koda government in the state. They compromised and cheated people without any limit.

Independents had no commitment to the people and they truly worked on the agenda of making as much money as possible. But what had happened to parties like the BJP and the Congress?

Q. How can the problem of Naxalism be tackled?

A. It will be easier to solve the problem of Naxalism if the issue is understood first. This is a political problem. We want to get power through elections and democratic procedure but Naxals want to reach pinnacle of governance by means of violence. There is a need to destroy the resources of the Naxals. Poverty is a problem and Naxals select such places to make their stronghold over there, but not to help the poor. This is their roadmap. So we need to accelerate the pace of development in such areas and we must punish the people who take the law in their hands. They must also be provided with legal aid. Once these things are taken care of, they need to be dealt with strong willpower, which is missing in Jharkhand.

Q. Jharkhand is the richest state in the world in terms of mineral deposits. Even then it is so backward. Why?

A. Anywhere in the country, development needs strong willpower to execute projects. Meticulous planning is required. But it is unfortunate that whatever government took over the reigns in the state has concentrated more on the development of individuals. The individual development is such that people have invested their money in the foreign countries. These are the reasons why the state has been lagging behind in terms of development despite being the richest in the world in terms of mineral deposit.

Q. There is no thermal power unit despite the state being the largest producer of coal. Why?

A. There are a few thermal power units in the state. I would say that if the leadership is really concerned about the development of the state only then it would take place. On the contrary,

nobody is bothered about the development of the state.

Q. You had been the chief minister of the state; do you feel that creation of Jharkhand has made any difference in terms of development?

A. Certainly creation of Jharkhand has made a difference. The development in the state was started by me, but unfortunately except during my 28-month-long tenure, it has been a reverse development in the state. This is not my view, this is what people of the state say. People in the government have destroyed the plinth of development. There is development in Bihar but not in Jharkhand. This is the people's voice, not mine.

Q. You were the first BJP chief minis-

People in the government have destroyed the plinth of development. There is development in Bihar but not in Jharkhand. This is the people's voice not mine

still pending in the high court. They are misusing the hard earned money of the people for lavish spending.

Q. Is there any possibility that you may go back to the BJP?

A. There is no point going back to the BJP. We are going to contest all the 14 parliamentary seats and 81 assembly constituencies in the state.

Q. What about forging an alliance with the BJP?

A. What alliance? We are not discussing any alliance with the BJP. It is not going to happen.

Q. News is doing the rounds that you will be given three parliamentary seats



and the BJP will contest 11?

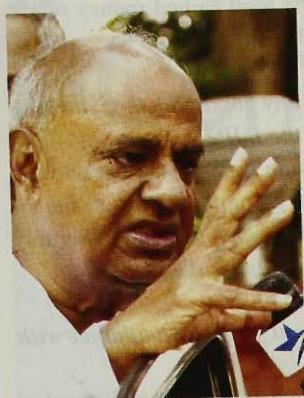
A. When there is no alliance, from where will the matter of three seats and 11 seats come? We are going it alone in the forthcoming elections.

Q. Will you merge with the BJP in the future?

A. No. There is no question of my going with the BJP. I have had enough with them. I am happy where I am.

Q. Are you talking to the Congress for alliance?

A. No way. I am not going to have alliance with anyone. We are working on the principal of *Ekla chalo* (walk alone). Let people decide my fate. Why should anyone else decide anything for me, even if it is the matter of Jharkhand CM's post? ■



■ Paternal affection

It was national executive meet of the Janata Dal (S) on February 14 in New Delhi and the party chief H D Deve Gowda was addressing the media persons when few correspondents started firing questions at his son Kumaraswami. Suddenly the veteran leader postured as the patron and mentor of the former Karnataka chief minister and declared that he would reply the questions and not his son. Despite the fact that Kumaraswami had already played an important inning as the chief minister of the state, Deve Gowda maintained that he was the chief minister only for twenty months. Therefore, the JD-S chief did not allow him to get exposed to the volley of questions from the media. Finally, the reporters could ask only few questions from Kumaraswami when the press briefing was over. Deve Gowda proved that his son was eligible to become the chief minister but was still immature to face the media. ♦

■ Old horses should retire

The CPI leadership minus the party general secretary A B Bardhan and his coterie is seething under frustration these days. In fact, majority of Left leaders are waiting for a day when Bardhan, like BJP stalwart and former Prime Minister A B Vajpayee, could tell the world, "I am tired and want to retire" from active politics. This, they are saying because the CPI has not been able to protect its interest and gain political weight in the last 10-12 years. On February 8, when Reliance industries' boss Mukesh Ambani went to meet CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat at the party's headquarters at A K Gopalan House in New Delhi and ignored meeting the CPI boss, the Left cadres' frustration reached a flashpoint. They blamed Bardhan for this situation. Their contention is that the CPI has increasingly ceded its ground to the CPI(M). This is the reason none bothers to drop to see Left leaders at Ajoy Ghosh bhawan, the political headquarters of the CPI. Aged Bardhan too has to often rush to the CPI(M) headquarters to meet younger Karat for some political discussions. In fact, that day when Mukesh Ambani went to meet Karat, the CPI general secretary had to wait for his turn at the CPI(M) office till the meeting between Reliance boss and the CPI(M) chief was over. CPI cadres' say they have no option but to remain dumb and deaf, as it is also a kind of class struggle. ♦



■ Raju ban gaya politician?

What is common between the millennium star Amitabh Bachchan and comedy king of the small screen Raju Srivastav? Both are Kayastha and both are non-political figures. While the former was chosen by the Congress to defeat Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna, Raju Srivastav may be in to wrest the seat from the Samajwadi Party. Amitabh Bachchan had won Allahabad parliamentary seat for the Congress 24 years ago but had resigned from the Lok Sabha after three years. Ever since the Congress could not win that seat. While Raju accepts that some one who matters in the Congress had approached him to contest from Phulpur (Allahabad) constituency, an insider says that Kripa Shanker Singh former, Maharashtra minister, floated Raju's name to counter Sanjay Nurupam who is awaiting his nomination by the Congress president. Since his constituency is presently represented by Priya Dutt, he is also a strong contender for Allahabad seat. He is a Kayastha and speaks the same dialect which Raju Srivastav and Amitabh Bachchan speak. Bhojpuri and Awadhi matters in Allahabad. ♦



■ Babulal Marandi: a hot property

The political leaders of different parties, including Muslim leaders, are luring former Jharkhand chief minister Babulal Marandi. The BJP is desperately trying its bit to bring the tribal leader to its fold but till now it has not succeeded. However, Marandi could not get the right person to reach out to the Congress leadership. Muslim leaders are visiting him with an assurance to help him out in the forthcoming elections. They have also made a commitment to share dais and canvass in favour of the Marandi's political outfit, as he is committed to contest all the parliamentary seats in the state. Let's see what political equations are made in the coming days. ♦



● Uday Shanker Sinha

Destination Moscow

Moscow and Soviet Russia were the two names that we used to breathe, eat and drink while pursuing post-graduation courses in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). Those were the days when we debated endlessly the pros and cons of Russian intervention in Afghanistan, the difference between the political ideologies of the CPI (M), CPI and the CPI (ML). University elections were fought on the issue of withdrawal of support from Charan Singh's government at the Centre. Ganga Dhaba was like a parliament where every issue that mattered could be discussed and debated upon.

Predictably, a visit to Russia, especially Moscow and St Petersburg, was part of our dream. Moscow was almost a pilgrimage for those JNUites who had willingly placed themselves left of centre. No other destination in the world attracted us as much as Moscow, that living testimony to a socialist society.

So a chance to visit Russia was like a long cherished dream come true – although it came at a time when the place was no longer the ideal destination for half-converted revolutionaries like me. America had taken over, because the US was considered the land of opportunity while Russia had become an example of decadent socialism. The Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia had collapsed and disintegrated into many nationalities.

I was not harassed much (unlike Mr Narayanmurthy) at the airport. A long drive to the hotel gave me a glimpse of a city still trying desperately to live up to the expectations of the modern world. Cellphones, jeans, swanky cars, motorcycles, big hoardings and huge hotels are now part of the Russian mindset. The only thing which surprised me was the near absence of people from the Indian sub-continent.

It was late evening when I was taken to a club on the New Arbad, a commercially important road in the middle of Moscow. I hung around the club which played loud music, where tequila was the most favoured drink after vodka. Girls approached every foreigner with a request to buy them a drink. They could not speak English but sign language conveyed everything that they wanted. They wanted dollars and promised some fun. The club did not offer food, so we had to go to a restaurant.

It was in the restaurant called Khajuraho where I met a Bihar entrepreneur Sujit Kumar Singh, chairman-cum-managing director of Shreya Corporation. Sujit came to Moscow as a young medical student and built a huge empire. The corporation deals in more than 6,000 pharmaceutical and medical products. Its combined sales figure touches more than \$500 million. The most surprising fact about Shreya Corporation is that it owns drug stores across the length and breadth of Russia.

Sujit is a keen India observer. He admits that his physical body is in Moscow but heart is still in Bihar. The best part of Sujit is that he is aware of his responsibilities and wants to return to society what he has taken from his native land. He has no political ambitions, has no party affiliations and is happy doing what he is doing in Moscow. People like Sujit who have made it big on foreign lands should be given full credit for their grit and never-say-die attitude. I had found a person who could dream big, make it big but still pursued a simple lifestyle. At the end of the day the people who are happy are those who do not complain and are happy pursuing their dream. I met a socialist Bihar in a metamorphised Russia which is also dreaming to be capitalist one of these days. ■



**Cellphones,
jeans, swanky
cars,
motorcycles,
big hoardings
and huge
hotels are now
part of the
Russian
mindset**

Many of India's politicians including the incumbent Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and the PM aspirant from the opposition camp LK Advani are over 70 years of age. The paradox is that while a large chunk of the population is young, its politicians are largely members of the geriatric club. Is it time for the older generation to give way to the new. Does age matters in politics? Is being old really an issue or being outdated in ideas and out of touch the root cause of the generational rift between the young India and the political class?

Young India, old

Vinod K Shukla / New Delhi

More than 65 per cent of the population is young, but India is being governed by a geriatric leadership. The assumption of office by US President Barack Obama seems to have hammered this point home. The

younger generation in India, now allowed to vote at 18 years of age, would love to have a leader like him to inspire and lead. But judging by the fact that all prime ministerial incumbents for Poll 2009 are over 70, the polity is in for a terrible mismatch.

Ironically, the situation is just the opposite in western countries, where the

leadership is getting younger despite the major part of the population growing older.

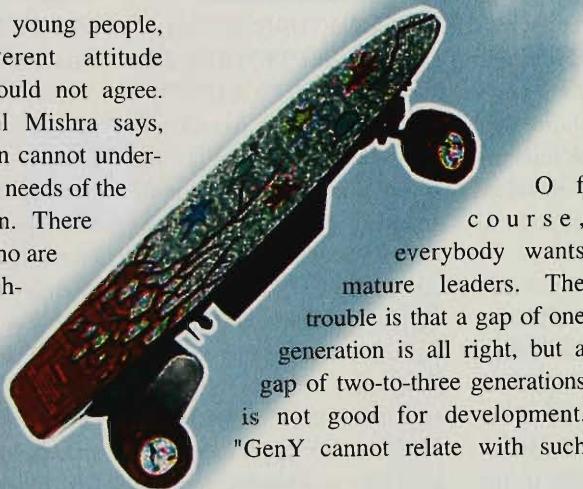
"There is a fundamental difference between India and the US. So can both the situations be compared? "India cannot be compared with the US as the US is a country of migrants. They might gather at one place and take a decision. But the situation in India is not that simple. We have a long tradition, culture and history. All those considerations come in the way while taking any decision. We need the guidance of our experienced leaders to put things in right perspective. So the situation in India and the US is quite different," said Kiren Rijiju, a young BJP MP from Arunachal Pradesh.

The average age of heads of states of prominent countries is much less than

ours. "The entire world is talking about young leaders. But they must understand that the guidance of experienced leaders is also very necessary for young leaders. There are certain things that can be learnt from the experienced leaders only. So we have to have experienced leaders around us as well," said Rijuji.

Of course, most young people, with their irreverent attitude towards elders, would not agree. MBA student Atul Mishra says, "The old generation cannot understand problems and needs of the younger generation. There are many people who are alien to the new technology. Some of them even have a mental block for technology – they don't know

am sure that Advani has the best young team. This is true in the case of MPs and MLAs as well. The BJP and Advani's team is miles ahead. The bigger question is: the country is in the trap of one family which it should get rid of," said Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi.



Of course, everybody wants mature leaders. The trouble is that a gap of one generation is all right, but a gap of two-to-three generations is not good for development. "GenY cannot relate with such

older leaders. So these days young generation is in dilemma over the leadership issue. Given a chance we would prefer a younger leader like Obama, Sarkozy, Gordon Brown or other younger leaders as their head of state," says Atul.

There are some functional hiccups in India. Voters here don't elect their head of state. "It is a group or a political party which decides the parliamentary party leaders. Even the House does not decide the leader of the house. People can elect only their Member of Parliament. So the chance of electing a young leader is not in the hands of the young population," said Uday Kumar, a Supreme Court lawyer.

Anurag Thakur, young BJP MP

Netas

how to open email. How can you expect from such leaders to understand complications of H1 Visa and other issues which affects the younger generation the most?"

Health is another issue. "We get news about most of the old leaders – that they have been moved to such and such hospital for such and such ailment. We get to know profiles of good doctors in the newspaper," quips Dhirendra Pundeer, a software professional.

The issue of Young vs Old did not go down well with some BJP leaders. "Propaganda is being unleashed against the BJP in the name of young leadership. I challenge those who are pushing such debates to take out the average age of Congress CMs and BJP CMs. I

Leaders are getting younger

US President Barack Obama assumed the office on January 20, 2009 the age of 47 years. Other world leaders too are relatively young

IN THE SOUTH ASIAN REGION:

- ▶ Both Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani are in their 50s. While Zardari was born on July 26, 1955, Gilani was born on June 9, 1952
- ▶ In Nepal, Prime Pushp Kamal Dahal, aka, Prachanda assumed office on August 18, 2008, at the age of 53 years
- ▶ Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's current Prime Minister assumed the office on June 23, 1996, at the age of 48 years
- ▶ Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa assumed office on November 19, 2005, at the age of 60 years

IN THE LARGER WORLD:

- ▶ Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso assumed office on September 24, 2008, at the age of 68 years.
- ▶ Chinese President Hu Jintao assumed office on March 15, 2003. At the time of assumption of office he was 60 years.
- ▶ Russian President Dmitry Medvedev assumed office on May 7, 2008, at the age of 42 years.
- ▶ Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin became Russia's Prime Minister on May 8, 2008, at the age of 55 years.
- ▶ Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero, the Spanish Prime Minister assumed office on April 17, 2004, at the age of 43 years.
- ▶ Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper assumed the office on February 6, 2006, at the age of 46 years.
- ▶ Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany assumed the office on November 22, at the age of 51 years
- ▶ French President Nicolas Sarkozy assumed the office on May 16, 2007, at the age of 52 years
- ▶ Gordon Brown, British Prime Minister assumed office on June 27, 2007, at the age of 56 years
- ▶ President of Mexico Felipe Calderon joined the office on December 1, 2006, at the age of 44 years
- ▶ Portuguese Prime Minister Jose Socrates Carvalho Pinto de Sousa joined the office on March 12, 2005, when he was 47 years old
- ▶ Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria, joined the office on July 17, 2000, at the age of 34 years
- ▶ Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan assumed office on March 14, 2003 at the age of 49 years
- ▶ President of Argentina, Cristina Elisabet Fernandez de Kirchner assumed office on December 10, 2007, at the age of 54.

Cong's Geriatric Ward

and son of Himachal Pradesh chief minister Prem Kumar Dhumal also has a valuable input. "It depends on political parties - are they are willing to include more and more young people in their fold? Now the trend has come that political parties are giving a chance to the younger generation. They must be given chance but not because they are sons and daughters of such-and-such politician. Their contribution to the party and public life must be taken into account before assigning any responsibility," he said.

On being asked if young leaders in the country are capable enough to take the responsibility, he says, "Of course. They are very much capable and have been doing a commendable job. Young politicians can do a better job. But they need to work in tandem with experienced politicians," said Thakur.

Looking at the situation around the world, young voters in India are definitely at a political disadvantage: they have no one to look up to. "The BJP is always in favour of young people. We have the maximum number of young MPs and MLAs. We will give tickets to the maximum number of young politicians across the country which might go up to 40 percent of the total seats contested," said Prakash Javedkar, national spokesperson of BJP.

But then, most political parties claim to be encouraging young leaders. The

ARJUN SINGH

**BORN: NOV 5, 1930
(79 YRS)**

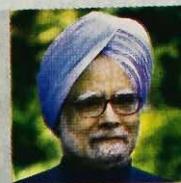


At the ripe age of 79, Arjun Singh has been suffering from ill health but the party leadership has crowned him with the ministry of human resources development for the last five years of UPA rule at the Centre.

Singh started his career as a lawyer in Rewa in Madhya Pradesh in 1954 and then turned towards assembly politics where he was the leader of the independent group of MLAs. He joined the Congress in the year 1960.

He was the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh from 1985 to 1990 and then governor of Punjab. He paved the way for Rajiv-Sant Longoval pact. Subsequently, he became the member of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the highest decision making body of the Congress. He was the chairman of the minority department of the AICC. Now that he is down with his ailing health, Singh is keen to ensure an important position to his son Ajay Singh in Madhya Pradesh politics. He is also a member of Congress' central election committee that decides tickets for assembly and Lok Sabha polls.

Singh has proved to be a constant source of embarrassment for the Congress for two reasons. Like the time he strongly advocated for reservation for OBCs in educational institutions just ahead of the assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh. ♦



MANMOHAN SINGH
**BORN: SEPTEMBER 26,
1932 (77 YRS)**

Manmohan Singh has already completed his tenure as the Prime Minister and is among strong hopefuls for another term for the top executive's job provided the UPA gets another term at the Centre. Like many septuagenarian leaders of the Congress, he is destined to continue at the top due to twin factors – his high capability and trustworthiness for the leadership. Singh's tenure is important due to the historic nuclear deal with the USA and also due to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

Though there were several contenders for the top job in 2004, Singh was picked by the party chief Sonia Gandhi and remained head of the state without enjoying the authority for political decision-making process.

Singh was fielded as the Congress candidate from the South Delhi Lok Sabha seat and lost it. But he has been given Rajya Sabha berth for three terms. He is recovering from bypass surgery and getting ready to play the role of a top campaigner of the Congress in the ensuing polls.

Singh introduced economic reforms when he was the finance minister in 1991, when he was 60 years old. Not too old to bring about change, obviously. ♦

SHIVRAJ V PATIL

**BORN: OCTOBER 12,
1935 (74 YRS)**



In his mid-70s, former home minister Shivraj Patil has always remained a credible face of the Congress. A law graduate from Bombay University, he joined active politics and became the member of the Maharashtra assembly in 1972.

As the home minister of India, Patil failed to prove his strong credentials and the party leadership asked him to resign after the Mumbai terror attack. His credentials were so strong that he emerged as the Presidential candidate in 2007. But the Left parties opposed his candidature tooth and nail and his name was withdrawn by the party leadership. This paved the way for Pratibha Patil, who finally became the President of India.

Patil contested and won Latur Lok Sabha seat in Maharashtra in 1980 and continued to win this seat for seven consecutive terms till 1999. He lost his Lok Sabha seat in 2004 but was given the top slot as the minister of home affairs. He got the Rajya Sabha berth also.

Patil made his first entry into the Union council of ministers in 1980 in the Indira Gandhi cabinet. His tenure as the home minister was of more than four years but Patil faced strong criticism for his failure to tackle terror attacks all over the country. Patil is now ready to contest the Lok Sabha polls. Age does not wither him? ♦

MOTI LAL VORA

BORN: DECEMBER 20, 1928 (81 YRS)

This octogenarian leader has dominated the Congress organization for the last one decade and holds the key position of treasurer of the All India Congress Committee. At 81, he holds the fort and all the senior leaders at the AICC need his advice for arriving at key decision of the party.

Vora has high credentials in the party and the leadership had also considered him as a presidential candidate in 2007. But finally this could not work. He is also being considered for gubernatorial assignment.

Vora started his career as a journalist in 1972 and remained in media till 1981. Then he turned to politics and became a member of Madhya Pradesh assembly and subsequently the vice-chairman of Madhya Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation.

Vora had a chequered career in politics as he remained chief minister of Madhya Pradesh and then the governor of Uttar Pradesh from 1993 to 1996. He was a Member of Parliament in 1998 and then got elected to the Rajya Sabha in 2002. Treasurer of the ruling party, there seems to be no successor to him in the near future. ♦



MOHSINA KIDWAI
BORN: JANUARY 1, 1932 (77 YRS)

Mohsina Kidwai is an important face of the minority in the Congress. She hogged the limelight as the chairperson of the Central Election Committee that was entrusted to distribute party tickets for the Delhi assembly polls in November 2008.

As the general secretary of the AICC, she was in-charge of Assam and Tamil Nadu. Soon after the resignation of her colleague Margaret Alva, she was given charge of Punjab, Kerala and West Bengal. Thus she has been handling five important states ahead of the Lok Sabha polls.

Kidwai belonged to a political family. She remained a member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council from 1960 to 1974 and contested and won three Lok Sabha polls. She held several important responsibilities as minister for health, transport and urban development in the Union council of ministers. As it is obvious from her present profile, at the ripe age of 77 Kidwai's political graph is quite powerful and she is expected to ride higher on the ladder of the Congress hierarchy at the AICC in the coming years. Age no bar. ♦

A R ANTULAY

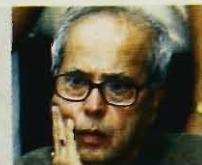
BORN: FEB 9, 1929 (80 YRS)



The minister for minority affairs A R Antulay has reached his 80s and has already declared his eagerness to contest election from Kulaba Lok Sabha seat in Maharashtra in 2009. Thus the octogenarian leader wants to continue his political innings even as those in their 20s are unable to get accommodated in the party's ranks.

Starting his career as the chief of the Youth Congress in early 1960s, Antulay became the general secretary of the party and then minister of state for law and judiciary. He became a member of Rajya Sabha in 1976 and then chief minister of Maharashtra in 1980. Thereafter, he contested and won Lok Sabha polls. This is Antulay's fourth term in the Lok Sabha but he is very keen to contest the parliamentary polls this year.

Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Yojna, introduced by him during his tenure as the chief minister, had made him a political personality of eminence. Though he is not hogging the limelight anymore and prime slot for the minority leaders have been occupied by others, Antulay exudes confidence to continue his political career at this age. ♦



PRANAB MUKHERJEE
BORN: DECEMBER 11, 1935 (74 YRS)

One of the most dominating political figures of the Congress for the last four decades, Pranab Mukherjee has always occupied key positions in the successive regimes ranging from Indira Gandhi to Manmohan Singh. While discharging his duties as Union minister, he is always the best brain of the party to seek input and advice on the issues of great political importance.

At present, he is the minister for external affairs when the country is handling a serious issue of terror attacks from across the border. At the same time he is the PCC chief of West Bengal where the party is working on tie-up with the Left parties. He is the most important cog in the Congress wheel and his inputs carry a lot of weight in the decision-making process of the party.

Having obtained a post graduate degree in political science and history, he started his career in teaching. He got elected to Rajya Sabha in 1969 and has successfully handled portfolios ranging from industry, finance and external affairs. He is also leader of the House in the Lok Sabha. He does the important job of hammering Pakistan. ♦

N D TIWARI

BORN: OCTOBER 18, 1925 (84 YRS)



A top ranking leader of the Congress, N D Tiwari is 84 now. He is continuing his political career as the governor of Andhra Pradesh.

When the Congress gained power in Uttarakhand, he was made the chief minister of the state in 2002. Tiwari always desired to return to Delhi as a Union cabinet minister but his desire never got fulfilled during Manmohan Singh's regime. Instead, the party leadership made him the governor of Andhra Pradesh when the Congress failed to get power in Uttarakhand.

Tiwari remained the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh for three terms and worked strongly to improve the road network of the state. He is considered an able administrator. With the advancing age, party leadership has given him gubernatorial assignment to utilise his face value in the Uttarakhand polls. As the Congress leadership lacks a credible leadership in Uttarakhand, Tiwari is still going strong. ♦

- Sanjay K. Jha

Congress claims to have a good representation even in the Union cabinet. The BJP also claims to have good representation in the party. "I am the national spokesperson at 47. It is my party's decision to give me the responsibility. How can you say that BJP ignores young leadership?" asks Rajiv Pratap Rudy.

However, there are people who disagree with the fact that only young leaders can take the country into development mode and old leaders cannot connect to the younger generation. "It is attitude that matters, as there are several older leaders who are well versed with technology. There are leaders like L K Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and film star Amitabh Bachchan replying on blogs at their age. BJP general secretary Anant Kumar has launched his site around nine years ago," said a BJP leader.

But even older commoners are not happy with the politicians of their age. "Now new faces should be brought into Parliament as the oldies are most of the time busy in wheeling-dealing. Another thing is that there is less scope for corruption as young leaders are more comfortable in material terms," said S K Ganguly, a retired WHO official.

But political parties talk in consonance on defending their old leadership.

"We need experienced leaders in the party as the young leaders can learn from them. The experience of the old leaders can prove to be handy in brushing up their administrative and political skills," said Rijiju.

"There are people above 70 who have the ability to bring to the table their decade-long administrative acumen. Not only can they think out-of-the-box but also they can implement their ideas. So it is all about their functional fitness," said Manish Tiwari, Congress spokesperson.

The young population of the country is looking at young politicians, as only they can understand issues related to them. Politicians might agree to the fact that more young leaders should be active in politics but they say experience is sacrosanct in the Indian political scenario. "The share of young people needs to be increased. Another thing to throw light upon is that the Congress does not have younger leaders than the BJP," said Rijiju.

There is also a view that age doesn't matter: voters know who deserves their vote, irrespective of age. They are looking at the party not the age of the individual. "The best example is the Delhi assembly election where a relatively mature leader like Sheila Dikshit was seen by Delhi voters as the custodian of the aspirations of the vibrant city despite her age," said a political analyst.

There is a common feeling that a naïve politician might prove to be a disaster. "Take the case of sports. We give a chance to a young sportsman only with an experienced player. They must be given as much work as possible and as tough as possible but under the supervision of senior

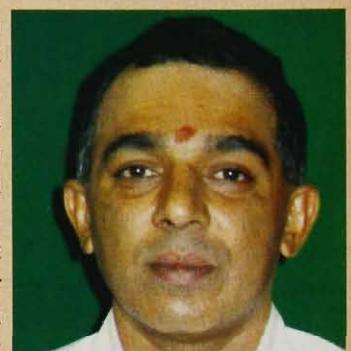
BJP's bright young sparks



Rajiv Pratap Rudy is a young Bharatiya Janata Party leader from Bihar. He was born on March 30, 1962. He represented the Chapara parliamentary constituency and defeated the RJD strongman Lalu Prasad from the constituency. He was the youngest member of the Bihar assembly. At present he is a member of the Rajya Sabha and national spokesperson of the BJP.

He is the former Union civil aviation minister in the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance and served as the Union commerce minister as well. He is in charge of Goa for the BJP. He is a lecturer in economics, AN College, Patna, Bihar. He makes special efforts to develop the district of Saran in Bihar as a model district by way of industrial investment, infrastructure and raising resources and creating employment opportunities for the posterity and fulfilling their aspirations. He was elected as the youngest member of Bihar Legislative Assembly in 1990. He attended the International Youth Festival at Moscow in the year 1985 and visited numerous countries as tourist and with official responsibility. He was first elected to the 11th Lok Sabha and re-elected to 13th Lok Sabha (second term). He was national vice-president, Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha. He is member, Committee on Finance and member, Committee on Environment and Forests. ♦

Manvendra Singh, the BJP MP, was born on May 19, 1964 is a member of the 14th Lok Sabha. He was elected to the Lok Sabha from Barmer constituency in Rajasthan defeating Sona Ram of the Indian National Congress. Manvendra is the son of Jaswant Singh, a former Union minister for finance. He was born in Jodhpur, he has an MA, having studied at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. He is a journalist by profession and was a columnist for Indian Express before entering politics. He is a captain in the Territorial Army. A widely traveled politician, this is his first term in the Lok Sabha. He is member of the Committee on Defence, Member of the Committee on Industry and Member of Committee on Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). He has the special skills in writing and likes reading. Football is the sports he likes the most. ♦



'Young MPs are not casteist'

Jitin Prasad, minister of state for steel, feels voters have higher expectations from young representatives



Dushyant Singh was born on September 11, 1973. He is a member of the 14th Lok Sabha. He represents the Jhalawar constituency of Rajasthan as a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He is the son of Shri Hemant Singh the erstwhile Maharaja of Dholpur in Rajasthan which was Jat princely state. His mother, Vasundhara Raje, was the chief minister of Rajasthan, former Union minister of state for external affairs, Maharani of Dholpur and a member of the Scindia royal family of Gwalior. Singh was educated at Doon School, Dehradun, St. Stephen's College, Delhi, Johnson and Wales University, Providence, R.I., and IHTTI School of Management, Neuchatel, Switzerland. Dushyant Singh is married to Niharika Kumari, a Gujjar from the royal principality of Samthar in Uttar Pradesh. He has two children Bhairavi Raje and Kunwar Vinayak Pratap Singh. He is the first cousin of the Congress MP from Gwalior and Union minister of state for communication Jyotiraditya Scindia. He wants to help India progress into a developed nation and improve the standard and quality of life of its people starting from Rajasthan. He worked for Hospitality Valuation Services (HVS), Delhi from July 2002 to October 2002 evaluating real estate and assisting in executive search for various positions for the firm's largest clients and gained tremendous insight into Real estate in commercial India. ♦

Syed Shahnawaz Hussain is a former Union minister and a politician of the Bharatiya Janata Party. He was born on December 12, 1968 in Bihar. He is a diploma holder in engineering from Patna and Delhi. He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1999 and was appointed Union minister of state for food processing industries, youth affairs and sports, human resource development and civil aviation. He was given independent charge of ministry of coal in 2001. He is one of a small group of prominent Muslim leaders in the Bharatiya Janata Party. While in Delhi, he organized rickshaw-pullers and fought for the rights of the poor hailing from his home state of Bihar. He candidly voiced against the poor and poverty-stricken image of those hailing from Bihar and blames fellow native and strongman Lalu Prasad for projecting the poor image. He is a liberal Muslim with insufficient following among Muslims and he has lost several elections, but re-entered the Lok Sabha in November 2006 in a bye-election when he won the vacant seat of Bhagalpur in Bihar. Shahnawaz is a well-recognized figure in a party despite being a Muslim in a party with a Hindu base. ♦

-Vinod K Shukla

Jitin Prasad, 34, is amongst the youngest members of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's team in the government. He is one of the important members of the core group of heir apparent Rahul Gandhi within the Congress party as well. Jitin accepts that he has come into politics because of his father late Jitendra Prasad but strongly feels that more and more people should come into politics from various sections of society. "This is the new mantra given by our youth leader Rahul Gandhi to the young generation of this country: that ordinary persons should join politics. His message is percolating down so well that young persons are approaching the party from all walks of life" says Jitin.

But in reality it has always been tough for young Congressmen to get into the mainstream of politics as there are old leaders occupying major space and not willing to go till their last breath. When asked, Jitin rebutted this and said, "In fact, Congress is the only party which has a fine balance of young and old leaders both." He elaborated further, "On the one hand Manmohan Singh is running the country efficiently with all his expertise while on the other Rahulji is acting as a symbol of youth for the new persons like us within the party and also guiding those who are aspiring to come into politics".



Still, there is a vacuum of young leadership as young voters of the young India have nobody to look up to. When asked about it, Jitin replied, "Congress is the only party which brings maximum young members in the Parliament and in the Assemblies both and now the Congress should be given the credit for providing young leadership of Rahul Gandhi."

Do people in his constituency have different expectations from him which they would not have from an older representative? He replied, "Yes, they expect maximum from us and they know that we have a different approach toward a particular problem." Jitin adds, "Especially in a state like Uttar Pradesh where casteism and religion plays a major role in the politics, it is more important to bring youngsters in the political mainstream, as majority of them do not believe in mixing caste and religion with politics".

Regarding the retirement age for politicians, he waxes diplomatic like a true politician: "We need the experience of the older generation and enthusiasm and idealism of the youth". ♦

-Shikha Parihar

leaders. There must be a balance between guidance and energy. We must also prefer competence to relationships," said Thakur.

But then, age cannot stop anyone from being progressive. It is the mindset that makes a leader progressive. If a leader is connecting to the people, age should not matter at all. "The most relevant thing is: how connected is a person with the younger generation? Thinking of the person is more important. If you are connected to the present generation with relevant thinking, age does not matter. Older leaders should put modern thinking in the right perspective. That will be good for the younger generation," said Rijiju.

A similar view was expressed by different speakers at the time of the launch of the website and blog of senior BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi. "Age does not matter, it is mindset and adaptability. I will try to answer as many blogs as possible," said Murli Manohar Joshi.

The issue of young versus old is well picked up by the principal political outfits of the country. They

Age cannot stop anyone from being progressive. If a leader is connecting to the people, age should not matter at all. Older leaders should put modern thinking in the right perspective

claim to be best placed for representation of the GenY. "The Congress has pioneered the effort of injecting young blood in the political process. The process started in 1972, when the party leaders in principle decided to bring in young leaders as a natural process. It was the Congress which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18 that created 3 million young voters in one stroke," said Tiwari.

If the Congress claims to have a battalion of young leaders led by its heir apparent Rahul Gandhi, the BJP claims to have a galaxy of young leaders. Both the political parties don't miss a chance to put down each other. "I am proud to have a galaxy of young leaders. They are so competent that I used to learn oratory skills from Pramod Mahajan and Sushma Swaraj still gives me a complex," said L K Advani, the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP.

The final word on the subject should surely go to the young. "The debate Young versus Old is misplaced, it should be young and old together," Rijiju says. ■

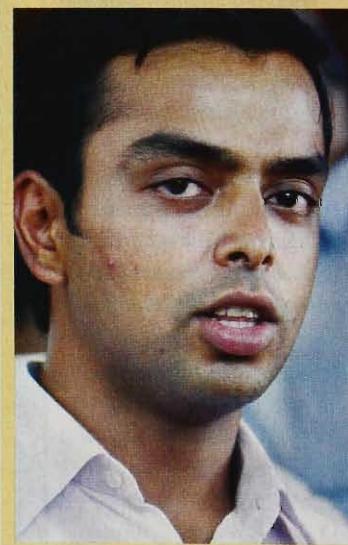
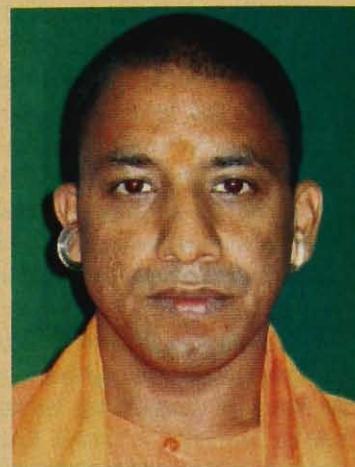
How active are young MPs?

Out of 90 parliamentarians who are below 45 years of age, only a few are making themselves seen and heard

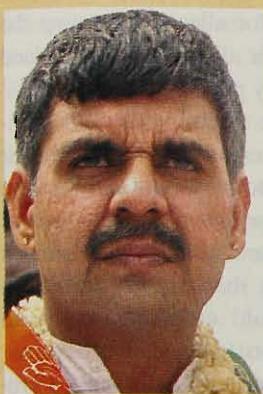
Shankar Kumar / New Delhi

In the 14th Lok Sabha, there are currently 536 MPs. Of them 90 parliamentarians are below 45 years. Senior citizens above 65 years account for 14 per cent.

Yogi Adityanath, BJP MP from Gorakhpur constituency, was born on June 5, 1972. He has been elected for three consecutive terms from this constituency of Uttar Pradesh. He has been a standing committee member on external affairs since August 2007 onwards. However, the significant part of his parliamentary life is that he has lost no time in raising questions on the issues, including continued Maoist violence in Nepal in the 14th Lok Sabha. In the current Lok Sabha, he raised as many as 66 questions.



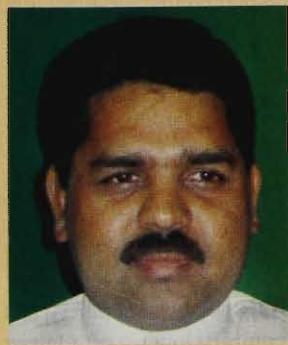
Milind Deora, the Congress MP from Mumbai south was born on December 4, 1976. He is a first time parliamentarian who is currently standing committee member on defence. He has often taken part in parliamentary debates. After the Mumbai attack, he was among the Congress' young turks who participated in discussions on the 26/11 incident. A part of Congress general secretary and Amethi MP Rahul Gandhi's inner circle, the 32-year-old MP has taken to politics because "it is the most effective way of driving and facilitating change."



Sandeep Dikshit, Congress MP from East Delhi, was born on August 15, 1964. Son of Delhi's three-time chief minister Sheila Dikshit, Sandeep is a first-time parliamentarian. Although he is known as a silent worker of the Congress, yet when it comes to participating in debate and discussions in the parliament, he has caught the attention of both treasury and opposition benches. His participation in the

debate about the 2005 budget and raising questions over Delhi demolitions in 2007 are still remembered.

Kiren Rijiju, the BJP's Lok Sabha member from Arunachal West of Arunachal Pradesh is a young face of Hindutava party. Born on November 19, 1971, he has attracted the attention of the nation by raising a question on the Chinese army's intrusion into Indian territory. In the more than 320 days sittings of the 14th Lok Sabha, he raised 90 questions, considered to be the highest by any parliamentarian in the Lower House.



Raghuraj Singh Shakya, the SP's Lok Sabha member from Etawah constituency of Uttar Pradesh, is 40 years old. The two-time parliamentarian from the country's highest populated state is known for his love for cricket and volleyball. But he is not among parliamentarians who shirk duty as a representative of people. In the 14th

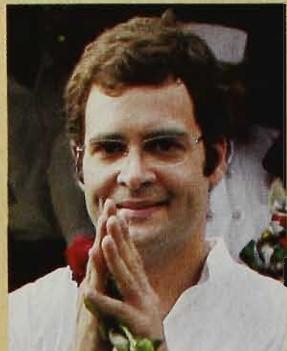
Lok Sabha, he raised 41 questions largely pertaining to education.

Asaduddin Owaisi, the lone Lok Sabha member of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul from Hyderabad constituency has already left his footprint on the political map of the country, though he is about 40 years old. He raised 51 questions in



the 14th Lok Sabha.

In contrast, **Rahul Gandhi**, the scion of Nehru-Gandhi family did little in the Parliament. Born in 1970, he participated only five times in the debate in the House during the more than 320-day sitting of the 14th Lok Sabha.



Even **Akhilesh Yadav**, the SP Member of Parliament from Kannauj constituency of UP did little in terms of participation in debate. In the country where every minute of parliamentary session costs Rs 23,083 to the exchequer, the 1973 born parliamentarian posed just one question in the 14th Lok Sabha.



Sachin Pilot, the 1977-born Lok Sabha member of the Congress from Dausa has often remained in the newspaper headlines. He is known for his political activism, which was on display during the Gujarat agitation of Rajasthan in early 2008. In the House, however, he participated only 12 times in debates. But still the young brigade of the Congress party commands respect both from treasury and opposition benches for his decency. ■

Hospitalised parliamentarians

| MEMBER | DATE OF ADMISSION | HOSPITAL |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|
| Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, Minister MP [Lok Sabha] INC | 13.10.2008 | Apollo Hospital |
| Ajit Jogi MP [Lok Sabha] INC | 20.12.2008 | Escorts |
| Atal Bihari Vajpayee MP [Lok Sabha] BJP | 3.2.2009 | AIIMS |
| Mahavir Prasad. Minister MP [Lok Sabha] INC | 6.2.2009 | AIIMS |
| Jai Prakash Narayana Singh MP [Rajya Sabha] BJP | 9.2.2009 | AIIMS |
| MP Verender Kumar MP [Lok Sabha] JD (S) | 16.2.2009 | RML |



Vasundhara Raje: on the backfoot

How the plot thickened

S Santosh / Jaipur

The quest for a permanent party office has spelt big trouble for the Rajasthan BJP, especially ex-CM Vasundhara Raje

In March 2006, when leaders of the then ruling BJP took a decision to have their own building for the state party office, they did not have the slightest hunch that not only will this plan not materialize, it would land them in deep trouble. Now the former chief minister Vasundhara Raje, chairpersons of the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Memorial Trust for which the allotment was sought and half a dozen BJP leaders are facing

police probe for allegedly cheating the government for allotment of prime land at a throwaway price.

During the assembly election campaign, Congress party leaders never missed a chance to mount an attack on the BJP on the issue, describing it as the biggest land scam and promised the electorate that if party comes to power it would order an inquiry to book the culprits.

On the instructions of the new government, after the directive of the lower court, Gandhi Nagar police station, on January 12, registered a case of cheating against Raje, chairpersons of the trust and five others, including the former mayor of Jaipur, Ashok Parnami, Pratap Singh Singhvi, former housing minister, Ajaypal Singh, former chairman of Housing Board, Lalit Kishore

Chaturvedi, Rajya Sabha members and the then commissioner of Jaipur Development Authority (JDA).

Soon after the registration of the case, CID was entrusted to inquire into the matter.

Though Raje and her party colleagues blamed chief minister Ashok Gehlot for resorting to political vendetta, Congress party leaders maintained that this kind of criminal case should be brought to its logical end. Some time in March 2006, the then ruling BJP leaders decided to

have the party's own building in the state capital as well as at district headquarters. Raje was party to the decision. She assured her colleagues that at government level things would start moving immediately.

A trust in the name of Deen Dayal Upadhyay was formed and she herself became its chairperson. Ashok Parnami, now a party MLA, as mayor of the city, was asked to identify a suitable piece of land in the heart of the state capital. A few years back, the government had acquired a huge chunk of land near the Civil Lines area. The land was part of Raj Mahal Palace, owned by the erstwhile ruling family of Jaipur. During British rule, this huge colonial bungalow with large surrounding land used to serve as the residence of political agents of the British government, thus the name

the then Commissioner of JDA, overruled this objection.

Though the Trust virtually had not come into existence, yet while recommending its case to the government for concessional allotment of the land, the commissioner put a note stating that it was doing an excellent work and such bodies should be given land at the cheapest rates. In July, a ministerial sub committee considered the matter and approved the proposal and put the price of land at Rs 65.50 lakh. The JDA on that very day allotted the land to the trust and on the same day trust deposited Rs 50 lakh as a part payment to get the possession of the land.

At this juncture, a leading Hindi newspaper exposed the scandal and came out with a story that the minimum price of the land was not less than Rs 50 crore.

Though the Trust virtually had not come into existence, yet while recommending its case to the government for concessional allotment of the land, the commissioner put a note stating that it was doing an excellent work and such bodies should be given land at the cheapest rates

Residency. Prevailing market price of the land, at that time, was around Rs 70,000 per square metre. Parnami, on behalf of the trust, on March 12, gave an application to the JDA requesting to allot 7693.40 meters of this land to the trust at concessional rates, as it was a social organization and was rendering social services.

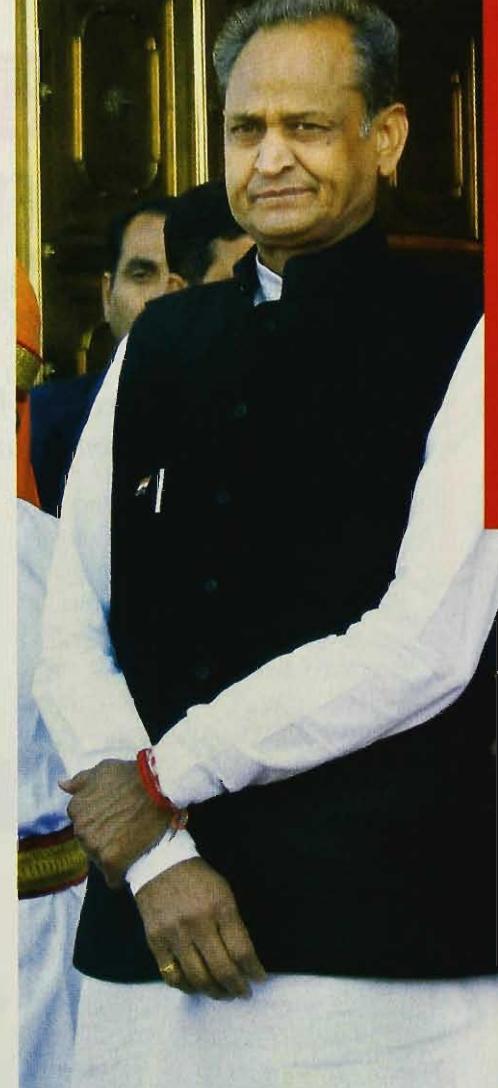
The Land Purchase Committee (LPC), met on June 6 and agreed to allot the land at government rates. It fixed a price of Rs 7.38 crore for the piece of land sought by the trust. Under the rules, all such bodies, which are registered and are working for the last three years, are eligible for allotment of government land at a concessional rate. Along with application, these bodies are required to submit its balance sheet of the past three years. Till June 6 the trust, which was formed in April, was not even registered. An officer of the zonal commissioner rank put a strong note on the file objecting this allotment, but his seniors, including

The Congress party was waiting for an opportunity to hit the BJP government. It organized rallies and dharnas to press for the cancellation of the allotment and alleged that the BJP was looting government money.

Around that time one Sri Krishan Kakkar, a small-time lawyer in Sri Gangangar, filed a case in the lower court. He drew the court's attention that since the trust has manipulated the documents, it is not eligible for concessional allotment of land. It further asked that the police should be asked to register a criminal case against the chairperson and other members of the trust. In documents attached with the petition, Kakkar said that price of the land in the open market was not less than Rs 50 crore.

In November the court directed the Gandhi Nagar police station to register a case. This was challenged by the government in the higher court.

Soon after the scam was exposed,



Ashok Gehlot: accused of Vendetta

BJP leaders decided not to go ahead with the plan and sent a letter to the JDA saying that trust was not interested in getting the land.

Government lawyers took the plea that since the trust has not taken the land and showed no interest in it, there is no case of cheating against anyone.

As this was going on, the BJP lost the assembly election and the Congress came to power. Newly appointed government lawyers changed their tunes and submitted before the court that they have no objection in registering the case by the police. While ordering to register the case, the court has asked the government to inquire the role of Jahangir Khan, the head of Gandhi Nagar police station, who had refused to register the case by Kakkar. He had approached the police station before moving to the court. This officer, within few days of refusal to register the case, was promoted as deputy superintendent of police. ■

Tiger on prowl

The terror unleashed by a man-eater in the villages adjoining the Dudhwa National Park has made life miserable for the villagers



Forest guards and other officials on a vigilance round

Biswajeet Banerjee / Kishanpur (Kheri)

Fear stalks a dozen villages of Uttar Pradesh where tigers are on the prowl and have killed at least seven persons. The foresters claim that seven tigers have escaped from the Dudhwa National Park and have entered the villages. "Please help, a tiger has eaten my nephew and the forest department is doing nothing to protect the villagers," lungi clad Lakhan Singh exclaimed to the senior officials who visited Tanda village, nestled in the

middle of the core forest area. The tiger had made three kills – all children aged between 8 and 15 years – in the last fortnight in this region, forcing people to stay indoors.

Several forest officials and policemen, all armed with guns, have descended on the village where a tiger was cited just half an hour ago. The pugmarks of the tiger were fresh, and these were testimony to the fact that the tiger had loitered around the area for quite some time before going back into a ravine adjacent to the Sharda river.

The pin drop silence in the village is

often broken by the whistling of the wind blowing through the farmland interspersed with the whispering of the senior forest officials who were chalking out the strategy to save the villagers from falling prey to the wild cat. The officials believed that the tiger could be quite close by. It might be prowling around and must be hiding in the grassland that mingled with the sugarcane crop – grown by villagers at the ravines of the river Sharda.

"Please save us from this tiger who regularly comes here ... it will eat us

one by one," Lakhan Singh said at the top of his voice. The senior official ordered his guard to take him away as Singh continues to shout amidst a few journalists who had come to cover the conflict between the man and the beast.

The foresters made a plan to tie a living animal as bait for the tiger. The strategy was if the tiger eats the bait, it would not venture into the villages and the human population would be saved. "It is a real struggle between man and animal in which we have to save both of them," K.K. Singh, district forest officials north Khiri said.

The fear is palpable in the village that had a population of over 500. There are three primary schools but children no longer go there as the teacher has stopped coming to school

"Who will risk his life when the sher (tiger) is around," Narendra Singh, a resident of Kaap Tanda village told the reporter

fearing the tiger. The villagers have stopped irrigating the wheat crop while the women folk have stopped going to forest to collect fuel wood.

"Who will risk his life when the *sher* (tiger) is around," Narendra Singh, a resident of Kaap Tanda village told this reporter. Singh's mother Jasodha Devi is the Gram Pradhan of three villages that lie almost at the centre of the core forest area.

With schools not functioning properly, the children are deprived of their nutritional meals that comes in the form of their mid-day meal scheme. "Yahan par na chori ka dar, na dacoity ka. Dar kewal sher ka hai, (We do not fear thief or dacoits in this area. The only fear for us is that of the tiger)," Singh said.

Incidentally, the village is not a trib-

Danger: no tigers ahead

The head count of big cats from around the country paints a gloomy picture of conservation efforts

Biswajeet Banerjee / DUDHWA

While the disappearance of tigers from the Sariska National Park shook the world wildlife fraternity, the reports of death of nine big cats in the Kaziranga National Park in the last three months is quite shocking.

Wildlife experts say that the toll must be higher and believe that the forest officials in Kaziranga are deliberately quoting a lower figure. Though the forest officials claim that the reason behind these deaths is poisoning by villagers apart from infighting among tigers in their old age while people also blame the poachers for such large scale killings. However experts also blame rhino poachers for these killings in Kaziranga. The National Tiger Conservation Authority had already sounded an alarm over the increase in poaching incidents, but it seemed to have fallen on deaf ears.

A decomposed tiger carcass was found at Agorotoli range on December 21 and bones of a male tiger were recovered on January 10. On January 21, the body of a tigress was detected at the Park.

India has lost more than 50 per cent of its tiger population in the past six years with the numbers dwindling to 1,411 from 3,642 in 2001-02, according to the latest tiger census report, the "State of tiger, co-predators and prey in India" a report of the Wildlife

Institute of India (WII), 2007, said that there has been an overall decrease

in the tiger population except in Tamil Nadu where the numbers have gone up substantially from 60 in 2001-02 to 76.

After much hue and cry raised over killing of 18 tigers in Sariska, the forest officials tightened their belts to ensure conservation of forest. The result was encouraging as far as the Ranthambore Tiger Sanctuary in Rajasthan is concerned. In May 2008 forest officials first spotted 14 tiger cubs in the park. This year, with the mating season fast drawing to a close in February, the thought of more tigers at the park has given joy as well as raised concerns over struggle for space.

"On an average an adult tiger needs almost 16 sq km of area for its own



These magnificent animals are falling prey to man's greed

territory. In normal condition the tiger could also travel almost 20 kms," says V P Singh of Terai Nature Conservation Society. On an average the tiger consumes 4-5 kg of meat but in some cases it can also overeat and then skip food for the next few days, Singh said.

The Ranthambore National Park does not have the capacity to hold more tigers than its present capacity. Such has become the pressure on the tigers that 35 of them are literally holed in 392 sq km of the forest area. Their straying outside the protected forest cover sparks fears of these tigers becoming man eaters. ■

Tiger Haven or Billy's den?

He was known as Dudhwa's tiger lover, but now his activities on the edge of the forest have become quite controversial



Billy Arjan Singh's jungle resort at the edge of Dudhwa

al villages. It is the lure of the lucre that has made the people to illegally acquire forestland here. The area here is fertile and the land, in local parlance, is called sona. This land is known to give a good produce with minimum labour and investment. This is why the area is famous for sugarcane, wheat and paddy production.

The journey to this village was not easy. It is situated almost in the middle of the core forest region of Kishanpur range. Driving through the rutted roads of the dense forest of 'saal' and teak for almost seven kilometers one reaches the open space with clusters of houses made of mud walls and thatched roof on one side and almost endless fields on the other. Acres and acres of land have young wheat crop with stalks popping out of it. Standing amidst these lush greenery were multi-coloured scarecrows to ward off the birds from spoiling the crops. "It is all forest area that has been illegally acquired by the people decades ago. They are in fact

living inside the region meant for the tiger. And if the tiger is attacking them now, we are asking for excuses," KK Singh said.

Just a few meters below the farmland, in the Sharda ravine, where sugarcane is grown. People were attacked

The forest officials managed to run to safety when the tiger attacked. But the beast dragged Raghuraj into the forest

when they had gone there to cut the crop. All the three people who were killed by the tiger, died near sugarcane crop.

The scene is almost same in Faizabad, around 200 south-east of

Biswajeet Banerjee / Dudhwa

Lying at the southern edge of Dudhwa National Park, close to the Indo-Nepal border, there stands Tiger Haven – residence of Dudhwa's Tiger Man, Billy Arjan Singh. Tiger Haven has now become a jungle resort.

Billy Arjan Singh, also known as Billy to his friends, lives alone with a family of retainers to look after the house. Tiger Haven is a collection of low, white-washed buildings constructed as and when the need arose.

In front of the house is an open yard with a couple of tall ficus trees. Beyond it are agricul-

Khiri, where the tiger felled three persons. Foresters say the tiger that got strayed from Dudhwa Tiger Reserve was responsible for these killings. Villagers there too have stopped venturing out fearing an attack from the tiger.

"Situation is bad. People are agitated. If no immediate step is taken people would kill the tiger," Manoj Mishra, a government official in Kumarganj said.

The body of Raghuraj Pasi (45) of Mubarakpur was found in the forest near Bewta Nullah. This was the tiger's second human kill in four days. On January 10, one Sirju of Godianpurwa village was killed. Bajrang Singh, who was an eyewitness to the incident, said Raghuraj had taken the team, appointed to kill the predator, at the spot, that the tiger visits frequently. The forest officials managed to run to safety when the tiger attacked. But the beast dragged Raghuraj into the forest. The forest officials reportedly did not disclose

tural fields. To the right is a wattled-fenced area, with a thatched roof or two showing above the fence, where the staff lives.

Billy has devoted more than 60 years of his life to wildlife conservation. He was instrumental in establishing the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in 1988.

There are reports about Billy using Tiger Haven to show foreign tourists how a tiger makes a kill. Billy denies the reports but some forest officials and local wildlife experts vouch that he had made money out of using his pet tigress Tara to stage a 'kill' when a live bait was tied near a 'machchan' on which foreign tourists were perched.

The forest department has also named Billy as one of the top forest land encroachers. They claim that he has grabbed over 1,000 acres of forest land.

the incident to their seniors. However, Bajrang Singh informed the villagers and hundreds of them gathered at the village Panchayat and did not allow the district administrative officials to send the body of the deceased for autopsy.

Realising that the tempers were running high, the state government had given an order to kill the tiger. The forest department had constituted special squads for killing a man-eater following the wave of terror unleashed by the beast in the district for the last three months during which it claimed four lives.

In the last three months of its prowling from Pilibhit to Faizabad via Barabanki, it has killed four persons and ate up the middle portion of their bodies, he said.

"These attacks are not due to the fall out of prey-predator equation, these attacks are due to human interference in jungle. More the interference, more there are possibilities of such attacks," convener Terai Nature con-

This allegation has also been denied by Billy.

In an interview a few years back, Billy had claimed that he had bought 250 acres of land to set up a farmhouse.

A man sitting on a tree kills a speechless animal, and he boasts of his bravado by flaunting the skin of the tiger before everybody

In one of its corner lies Tiger Haven. "This vast stretch of jungle has kept mankind at bay from Tiger Haven, thus

helping me to enjoy the solitude of jungle and the company of animals," he said.

It was a long journey of Billy's transformation from a hunter to a conservationist. He had killed his first tiger at the age of 12. His transformation from a hunter to a conservationist was astounding. A man sitting on a tree kills a speechless animal, and he boasts of his bravado by flaunting the skin of the tiger before everybody. But for this kind of joy, the country loses an animal. For his unflinching passion to save tigers he was honoured the Padam Bhushan. He is also the winner of Yash Bharati, an award given by the Uttar Pradesh government. Apart from all this, Billy has also been conferred the coveted Getty Award in 2004. ■



Right sighting of a tiger during a hunt by villagers

servation of Society Dr VP Singh said.

Tiger experts say the wild cat gets its food in the grass land. As people have started growing sugarcane in the vicinity of forest the tiger inadvertently enters the village taking sugarcane crop as grass land. "Moreover, tiger

also gets its food from wild boars who live in the sugarcane fields. The attack starts only when men enter the sugarcane fields to cut the crop," Singh said.

There is only one truth – it is man who has encroached upon the tiger's land. He is paying the price for it. ■

RJD, SP woo Left



Soulmates: Sitaram Yechury (left) and A B Bardhan (right) with Lalu Prasad (centre)

Shankar Kumar / New Delhi

The chief objective of the Left in the 2009 parliamentary election is to remain in contention for the high political ground at the Centre. The outfit sees an opportunity to achieve this feat by leading a Third Front cobbled together with a motley group of regional parties like the AIADMK, the TDP, the TRS and the JD (S).

The portents look good. Political parties of various hues – from the SP to the RJD to the Congress – are trying to woo the Left for both pre-and post-poll alliances. "This shows we are in the reckoning. We have not gone to meet them

(the RJD, the SP and the Congress). Rather, they are keen to meet us to renew their relations. You go and ask them why they need alliance with us," CPI national secretary D Raja told *Sahara Time*.

For the SP and the RJD, the 15th parliamentary polls appear to offer no bright chances. Muslims have been distanced from these parties in the wake of their support to the Indo-US nuclear deal. Their role in saving the Congress-led UPA government during the July 22 trust vote has left them with very little hope to win even a few seats in the election. To counter this possibility, both Mulayam Singh Yadav and RJD's Lalu Prasad Yadav tried to extend the olive branch to the Left, which in the eyes of Muslims –

whose population is 18.5 per cent in Uttar Pradesh and about 16 per cent in Bihar – has emerged as a secular force to reckon with.

In this regard, though SP general secretary Amar Singh was successful in meeting CPI general secretary, A B Bardhan, he failed to get time from CPI(M) supremo Prakash Karat. Virtually, Karat said "sorry" to the SP leader when he expressed his desire to meet him recently. With this started a buzz in the political corridors of New Delhi that the Marxists whose relationship with the SP had soured beyond repair after the party came out to support the nuclear deal, would not have any truck with it. Otherwise, the Left parties

In view of the impending general elections political parties of different stripes seem to be taking a Left turn

After the nuclear deal episode, both the Left parties have decided to plough their lone political furrow by forming a Left front with the CPI-ML. But this has not stopped the RJD from trying to establish links.

are themselves seething with frustration that the Mayawati-led BSP has not given them a single seat in UP. This, though CPI leader Bardhan, during the trust vote in July, had declared that Mayawati would be given a chance to lead the nation if the Third Front was able to form a government at the centre. "But this doesn't mean we should develop bonhomie with the SP. We have not yet severed our relations with the BSP," Suneet Chopra, CPI(M) central committee member said. With no categorical Left support and the distancing of Muslims from the SP, the party leaders are finding it hard to adjust to the emerging political situation in UP.

Almost a similar situation is being faced by the RJD in Bihar where the Nitish Kumar government has left no stone unturned to breach Lalu's vote bank in the state. To consolidate its Muslim support base in Bihar, Nitish Kumar in the past two years has provided free textbooks to students of the minority community and Rs 10,000 to all such students of the community who secure first division in their matriculation board examination.

Before this, the JD(U)-led NDA government announced that it would provide compensation to 128 families of the 1989 Bhagalpur riots, who did not get any compensation during the 15-year rule of the RJD. Not only that, his government observed the birth anniversary of the country's first education minister Maulana Azad as Education Day on November 11. Significantly, Bihar was the first state to do so.

All this has pushed the RJD to the wall, which in desperation is out to woo Union minister Ramvilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party and the Left. But both the CPI (M) and the CPI are determined not to have any truck with the RJD during the coming parliamentary

elections. In the 2005 assembly election, though the CPI (M) had supported the RJD, the CPI had kept itself out of any seat adjustment with the Lalu-led party. After the nuclear deal episode, both the Left parties have decided to plough their lone political furrow by forming a Left front with the CPI-ML

largesse to any state by the Congress-led UPA government. Recently, external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee who has now been appointed West Bengal Congress chief, was seen sharing the dais with CPI(M) leaders at Kolkata during the flagging-off of the Murshidabad Hazar Duari Express. This is the second such development.

Earlier, Pranab and West Bengal chief minister Budhadeb Bhattacharjee had shared the dais at a business chambers meeting in Kolkata where both attacked Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee for her anti-development stand. Since then,



Contemplating remarriage: Mulayam Singh Yadav and Prakash Karat, Yechury in happier times

as its third constituent. Still, RJD leader and Union rural minister Raghuvansh Prasad Singh has let the world know that his party will try to establish links with the Left parties.

Whether this happens or not, the current political situation has again put the Left at the centre of talks. Even the Congress has started cozying up with the CPI(M). The UPA government is in the process to clear Rs 1 lakh crore for petrochemical and petroleum project in West Bengal. This is first major

there has been speculation that the CPI(M) might walk a few extra political miles to support the Congress after the post-15th Lok Sabha election. Among Congress circles, too, there is a feeling that if the UPA falls short by only a few seats, it will have no viable option but to ask the Left for support. "We can't tell you at this moment what would be our stand. But in politics, there are no hard and fast rules. Whatever stand is taken, it will be in the interest of the country," Raja said. ■

*Girls in
Madhya
Pradesh have
a valid reason
to smile – and
so does the
government*

Madhya Pradesh

After Delhi, Uttar Pradesh



MP chief minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan at a function to promote registration of the girl child under the Ladli scheme

Ladli Laxmi Yojana, the brain-child of the Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, launched for the empowerment of girl child in Madhya Pradesh, has after Delhi now been emulated by Uttar Pradesh.

The scheme – envisaging payment of Rs 1 lakh to a girl child when she attains the age of 18/21 years – has become such a hit that even the

Under the scheme, Rs 7,500 would be deposited by the state government in the name of a girl child on the day she is born. This amount would accumulate to Rs one lakh after 18 years and would then be handed over to the girl. The scheme aims at creating positive thinking about girls among the masses, improvement in gender ratio and improving standard of education and health of girls apart from laying a solid foundation for their future especially in

income tax assessee and have two or less children are eligible for the benefit of the scheme provided they are registered with Anganwadi centre.

The popularity of Ladli Laxmi Yojana is discernible even among the people living in remotest parts of the state. The scheme has created considerable awareness in the rural areas of the state as well with the result that the desire for having atleast one male child is taking a dip and couples are

shows the way emulates *Ladli Laxmi Yojana*

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has gone on record appreciating it.

The birth of a girl child is considered a curse. The girls face discrimination at every stage, taking a backseat at home. The discrimination begins even before birth. Female foetus is terminated after sex determination test. The fortunate ones who do take birth are discriminated against in every respect, especially in matters related to health, nutrition and education.

The situation prevails in almost all states of the country. However, in Madhya Pradesh, the launch of the scheme has brought about a change in the mentality of people towards having a girl child. This is clear from the fact that the desire of a male heir is being increasingly abandoned by the families. And why not? After all, Ladli Laxmi Yojana relieves a poverty struck parent from the burden a girl child might bring – poor people who used to take the birth of a girl child as a 'curse' because of lack of the funds they would be requiring for her marriage now know that with the scheme in force, they need not worry any more.

the rural and tribal areas. And its popularity among the people living in remotest parts of the state from the first year of its launch can be gauged by the fact that 40,854 girls were benefited that year in 2007 against a target of 30,000 girls.

The scheme also intends to improve the educational and the health conditions of girls, check child marriage and encourage family planning. Under this, a National Saving Certificate is purchased in the name of a girl at the time of her birth. More importantly, it has been connected to their education.

On admission in the VI the girl is given a cash amount of Rs 2,000 and on admission in IX Rs 4,000. When she clears X examination and gets admission in XI she would get Rs 7,500 cash and Rs 200 per month to cover the expenses on education of XI and XII classes. On attaining the age of 21 years she would get Rs 1,18,000 cash. The novel scheme has yielded encouraging results also because the conditions to qualify for it are too simple. All those girls whose parents are domicile of Madhya Pradesh, not an

adopting family planning even after two daughters.

Such precedents have also been set when a couple underwent family planning operation after the mother gave birth to twin girls. Constant contact with Anganwadis by parents is also a sign of great popularity of the scheme. Birth of a girl has even become a festive occasion in some of the tribal dominated districts like Mandla, Betul, Chhindwara, Jhabua, Balaghat, Dindori and Seoni districts – thanks to Ladli Laxmi Yojana. "Following implementation of this scheme, the negative tendency in the society towards girls has started undergoing a vast change. Now, birth of a girl fills a family with happiness and joy at many a places", officials claim. It has not only brought about a sea change in the society's attitude towards the girl child and improving sex ratio in the state. In this connection, tribal-dominated Mandla district has set an example with achieving 422.10 per cent success in the implementation of the scheme followed by Betul with 399.57 per cent and Chhindwara with

TOWARDS WELFARE OF WOMEN FOLK

- 50 per cent reservation to women in the elections to local and civic bodies and recruitment of contract school teachers. Thirty per cent quota for women in the admission to medical education courses
- Mahila Panchayat was held for the first time in the state on July 30, 2006
- Thirty-one new child development schemes and 20,000 new Aanganwadi centres started during four years.
- Aanganwadi beneficiaries number goes up to 80 lakh from 65 lakh.
- New nutritious food policy introduced in Aanganwadis after 35 years.
- Now 20 types of dishes being served on the basis of local food model.
- Shaktimaan Yojana implemented in 19 districts gripped by extreme malnutrition
- Complimentary nutritious food's rate more than doubled.
- Well-applauded Ladli Laxmi Yojana benefits 11 thousand girls.
- Rs 161-core Tejaswini Yojana implemented in six districts for rural women's empowerment.
- Two Awards instituted for women for bravery and best achievement.



CM at a function organised by the women and child development ministry

350.92 per cent.

Seven districts have achieved more than 200 per cent success and 19 districts have achieved 100 per cent or even more success in implementing the scheme.

So far, 1,50,657 girls have turned 'Lakhpati' in the state due to the scheme.

While the maximum benefit of Ladli Laxmi Yojana has gone to the girls of Jabalpur division where 42,307 girls have become Ladli Laxmis, this is followed by Bhopal division with 28,358 girls, Gwalior division with 19,428 girls, Indore division with 18,593 girls, Ujjain division with 16,091 girls, Sagar division with 14,078 girls and Rewa division with 11,802 girls.

In view of the Yojana's importance in girls' development, the state government has further simplified its rules and formalities. Now, the first girl born after April 2008, is being given scheme's benefit even when her parents do no go in for family planning. Due to this measure taken by the state government, the number of scheme's beneficiaries has increased four fold.

By introducing Ladli Laxmi Yojana, the state government has made a solid move for curbing the tendency of assuming a child as a burden. It is also expected that with the effective implementation of this scheme, the mother

and child mortality rate and population will also come down in the days to come. Besides, literacy rate will rise and girls will be married off at an appropriate age.

The Union government is also going to implement this scheme in the same format adopted by Madhya Pradesh government while Delhi and Uttar Pradesh have already implemented it.

REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

In fact, last four years have borne witness to a revolutionary change in Madhya Pradesh and women of the state have found a new and real meaning of their lives. Since the character of our society is mired in paradoxes and discrepancies, womenfolk were languishing at the periphery despite being 50 per cent of the population. But now they have started to come out of the state of deprivation. This has been for the first time that the untold miseries of women have found expression.

This is due to the fact that the state government succeeded in identifying the real problems faced by womenfolk by studying them minutely. The government has also realised women's struggle for existence. Sex determination tests and killing of girl child's embryos had outraged women's honour and pride and they were on the brink of

waging war for their own existence. Women were being exploited in almost every field so much so that a woman labourer or worker had to be satisfied with less payment than her male counterpart for the same work as she was forced to provide two-time meal to her family. It was as if persecution by males instead of cooperation had become their fate.

The state government is determined to do away with all those practices and traditions which strengthen the foundation of discrimination against women and their exploitation. By formulating schemes helpful for women in every walk of life, the state government has proved that its efforts towards women's empowerment are not a mere sham. These efforts have offset the fact that the state government is in favour of equality in the inner core of society.

WOMEN PANCHAYAT

On the initiative of Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, first Mahila Panchayat was held on July 30, 2006. The idea behind organising women's Panchayat had stemmed from state government's transparent thinking of eliciting those women's views, who are active at Panchayat and grass root levels, about the important schemes implemented by the state government for women's uplift and empowerment. Every section of society has appreciated this novel move of the state government.

The proposals for women and child development given by women at the Mahila Panchayat included (1) Introduce Goadbharai scheme to facilitate pregnant women and help them in delivery, (2) Annaprashan scheme for introducing light food to a child when he is six-month-old (3) Starting Janma Divas (birthday) programme for increasing people's interest towards Aanganwadis and (4) Improvement in the quality of nutritious food supplied at Aanganwadis (5) Balika Suraksha Yojana (Girl child security scheme), (6) Matra Shishu Raksha Card and many other innovative schemes. The state government has given practical shape to all these proposals.

One of major proposals made at

Mahila Panchayat was setting of a women's desk in selective police stations in 38 districts. The state government has put a strict ban on sex determination tests by implementing PNDT Act with an iron hand. The state government has also announced a reward of Rs 10,000 for giving information of embryo sex determination test.

WOMEN-RELATED ISSUES IN PRIORITY LIST

The state government has included women-related issues in its priority list. The government is fully determined that children and women in the state improve their standard of life and have all the opportunities to march ahead.

A diehard votary of equality between

any of the bachelor or post-graduate courses offered by autonomous medical colleges in the state. The state government discussed women's problems at large by organising special Panchayat meetings in all the villages on the occasion of Maharani Laxmi Bai's martyrdom day.

NEW NUTRITIOUS FOOD POLICY

The state government also implemented the new Nutritious Food Policy after 35 years and ensured that 20 types of dishes are served at Aangawadis on the basis of local food model. This has refurbished the image of Women and Child Development Department. This decision would benefit children from the age of six months to



The CM accepts registration forms from parents of girl children

males and females, the government also wants to make mothers self-reliant and economically strong. It thus took courageous and important decision to give 50 per cent reservation to women in the elections to local and civic bodies as well as recruitment of contract school teachers.

Similarly, 30 per cent quota was fixed for women taking admission in

six years, expectant mothers and girl students at the Aangawadis. By increasing the rate of Complimentary Nutritious Food by more than double, the state government has made its intentions clear about worthwhile improvement in the lives of women and children. Dry fruits and *kheer-puri* are also served to the beneficiaries at Aangawadis on the occasion of festivals. ■

Burmese protest detention

Exiled Burmese in India are demanding the release of 34 compatriots detained in the Presidency Jail for 10 years

Nava Thakuria / Guwahati

Pro-democracy Indian civil society groups and the exiled Burmese in India came together in support of the 34 Burmese freedom fighters languishing in Kolkata Presidency Jail to demand their immediate release and to mount pressure on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for granting refugee status to those detainees. The 34 Burmese freedom fighters (most of them Arakanese) were arrested in the Andaman Islands on February 11, 1998. These activists were arrested by an Indian intelligence officer, who the Burmese allege betrayed them.

To mark this decade-long illegal detention, the Burmese pro-democracy organizations in India recently organized a demonstration in New Delhi. Simultaneously, a book, *Rough Agent*, authored by human rights lawyer Nandita Haksar and published by Penguin, India, was released by Tint Swe, minister of the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), in exile, in the national capital.

On this occasion, a memorandum was submitted to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh by the Burmese pro-democracy and ethnic organizations. The memorandum highlighted the role of New Delhi in supporting the Burmese people's movement for the restoration of democracy in the past. It also expressed gratitude to the government and the people of India for allowing them 'to take shelter in this world's largest democracy for 20 years now'.

"We recall that India was also the first neighbouring country that extended support to the Burmese democracy movement



Burmese demonstrators protesting detention of their freedom fighters in Kolkata jail

after the 1988 uprising. New Delhi also recognized Aung San Suu Kyi's peaceful and non-violent struggle and conferred the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding to the great lady in 1993," said the memorandum adding, "Although India does not recognize the NCGUB, it has allowed National League for Democracy (NLD) MPs to stay in India and carry out political activities."

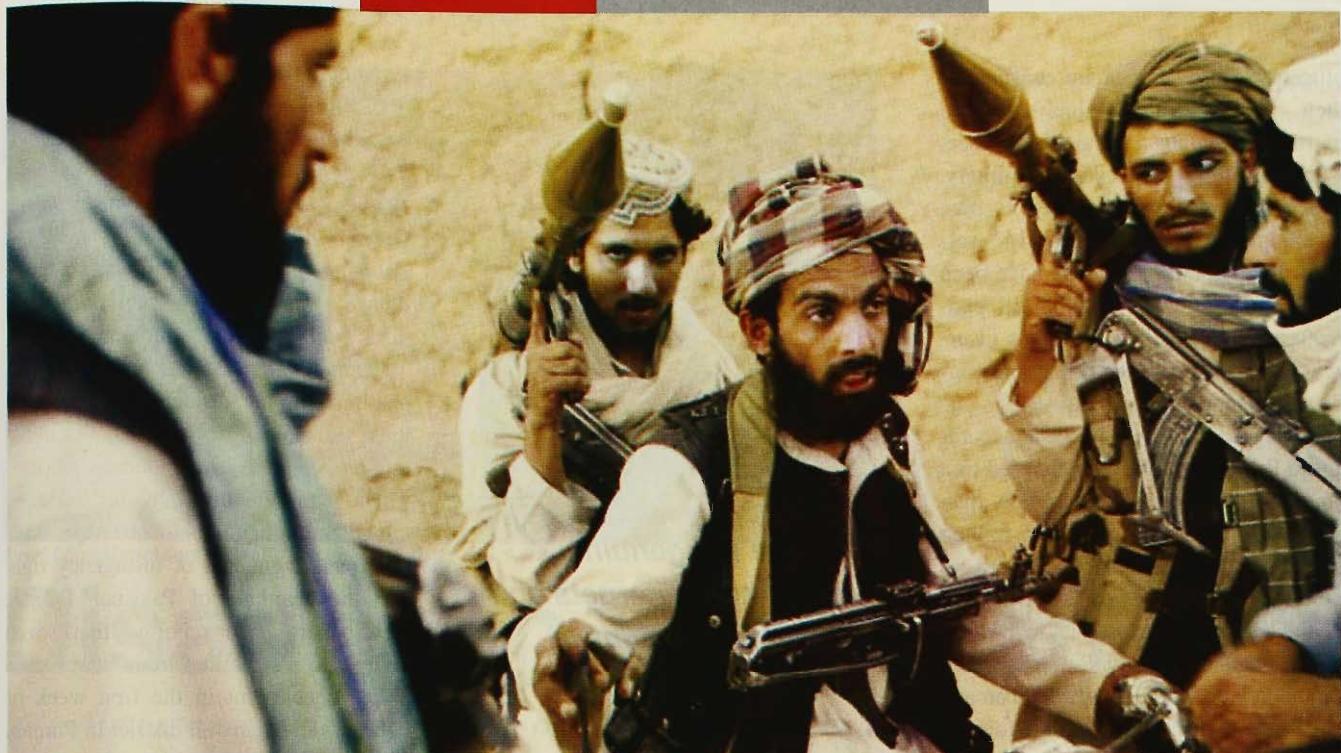
Burma (Myanmar) is reeling under military dictatorship for the last 47 years. Any form of dissidence against the military government at Nay Pyi Taw is dealt with in the most repressive and inhuman ways. The Nobel laureate Suu Kyi has been under house arrest for many years now. Her party NLD won the 1990 general election, but the junta denied transfer of power to the elected government. Since then the NCGUB has been functioning in exile.

"The people of Burma were also in negotiation with the government of India through Lt Col VJS Grewal (who was born in Burma and spoke Burmese fluently) for a base in India in 1995 and after two years of negotiations they were invited to come to Landfall Island in Andaman. However, on their arrival on February 10 (1998), 36 of the Burmese freedom fighters were arrested while six

of them were killed the same day. Out of the 36 arrested, two have gone missing from Andaman Jail. The others were kept for 9 years in Port Blair and later transferred to Presidency Jail, Kolkata and continue to be imprisoned there," the memorandum revealed.

The memorandum, signed by a number of organizations including the All Arakan Students and Youth Congress, All Burma Students Democratic Forces, Arakan League for Democracy, the Arakan National Council, the Burma Centre Delhi among others. It has also been sent to Sonia Gandhi (the UPA chairperson), Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee (chief minister, West Bengal), P Chidambaram (home minister), Pranab Mukherjee (foreign minister) and A K Antony (defense minister).

The memorandum concluded with conviction, "The trial of the Burmese freedom fighters has been going on in the city sessions court in Kolkata for more than two years now. Meanwhile, our comrades continue to be in jail. As you know, we are refugees in India and we survive with very difficult conditions in India... We believe that at the end of the trial, our 34 Burmese freedom fighters will be acquitted for a lack of evidence (and there is none)." ■



M K Shukla / New Delhi

THE PAKISTANI military and political elite is beginning to get a taste of their own medicine: the one they prepared to bring about the disintegration of India. They have to compete now for religious-jingoist space with forces spawned, trained, financed, and armed by them.

As the Pakistani military leadership finds its deceptive tactics thwarted by accelerating co-operation between New Delhi and Washington on Afghanistan, Al Qaeda's military commander in Afghanistan threatened India on February 10 with further attacks if the country attacked Pakistan. "India should know that it will have to pay a heavy price if it attacks Pakistan," Mustafa Abu Yazid said in a recently released videotape. "The mujahideen will sunder your armies into the ground, like they did to the Russians in Afghanistan."

Mustafa conveniently forgot that, but for American arms and logistics and intelligence, it was the mujahideen who would have been eaten up by vultures, dogs, and earthworms, said sources.

In the videotape, Mustafa referred to the

Pak in the grip of Taliban terror

As the Frankenstein monster – the Taliban – gets out of hand, the Pakistani government has begun to talk openly about the dangers faced by the country

November 2008 terror assault in Mumbai, saying the Indians suffered "humiliation" in the attack and more was in store if India retaliated against Pakistan.

Interestingly, two days after Mustafa's threat, the Pakistani government on February 12 admitted for the first time that the Mumbai operation was plotted and executed from inside Pakistan. The disclosure followed weeks of intra-government wrangling in Islamabad, signaling the Pakistani government was under gag orders from General Kayani and his boys not to own up any responsibility.

What made the Pakistani government so amenable to reason all of a sudden?

The talk in India's military and foreign

policy establishment is that the Pakistani state is frightened by the might of Al-Qaeda (AQ) and Pakistani Taliban (PT), which have together driven out the Pakistani army from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Swat. Lest its ranks split along the ethnic lines, General Kayani and his boys have chosen loss of honour to uncertain victory.

The military maintains four brigades, or an estimated 15,000 troops in Swat. But it has not been able to defeat a Taliban force of the strength of 2,000 to 5,000. Demoralization is so high that more than 800 policemen, almost half the district's force, have deserted or taken extended leaves of absence as the PT targeted their

officers. Security forces are confined to their camps and are routinely attacked by roadside bombs and suicide bombers when patrolling. The Pakistani military, which is known to downplay its own casualties, has admitted that 142 soldiers and paramilitary troops have been killed since August of 2008 till end-January 2009, making the Swat insurgency far more dangerous than the conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq.

The Taliban takeover of Swat, according to Pakistani newspapers, has led to a mass exodus of residents. More than 300,000 of Swat's estimated 1.5 million people have fled the district and more are expected to leave. The people of Swat fear the Taliban, and have lost faith in the government and the military. Residents claim the military does not fight the Taliban and often use indiscriminate force during fighting, resulting in civilian deaths.

Dismayed and shocked, Awami National Party senators Haji Adeel and Ilyas Bilour recently stated that the insurgency was spilling over to the rest of the country and would "reach Islamabad sooner than Lahore". Bilour said Taliban had demolished more than 300 schools in the region once considered liberal. Senator Razina Alam said more than 80,000 children could not go to school and 8,000 teachers have lost their jobs. Jamat-e-Islami Senator Prof Muhammad Ibrahim criticised the military saying it too has lost its writ in Swat. "How can Taliban demolish schools and behead civilians during curfew?" he asked.

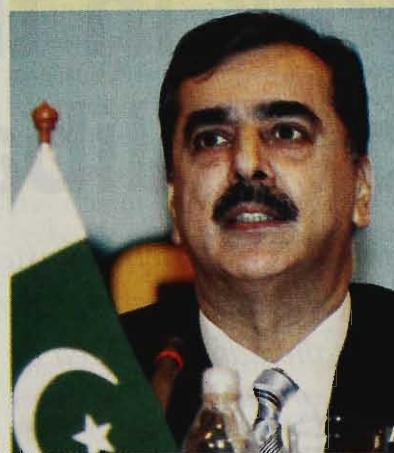
In the complex power structure of Pakistan, its Prime Minister Yusuf Reza Gilani has become the errand boy of the Army. On Jan. 30, in an attempt to whitewash the shame of the Army, he said the PT and AQ have largely been driven from much of the tribal areas. "We are genuinely attacking the targets and most areas have already been cleared of the terrorists," Gilani said. He also claimed that AQ operatives are no longer present inside Pakistan.

Such claims have been made from time to time in the last two years when the Army launched its operation in the



'We are genuinely attacking the targets and most areas have already been cleared of the terrorists'

**- Yusuf Reza Gilani,
Prime Minister**



FATA and Swat areas. Every time the Army suffers a humiliating reverse, the government downplays the situation in the northwest and claims the insurgency has been stamped out in FATA and is under control in Swat.

According to the *Long War Journal*, the Pakistani military boasted twice during the past two years that it would regain control of Swat. After launching the first operation to clear Swat in early November 2007, the military claimed it would clear the district by mid-December of that year. After half a year of brutal fighting, the government negotiated a peace accord with Fazlullah

in May 2008. Fighting restarted in July 2008. The government said the operation would be completed by September 2008.

The *Journal* further points out that Mingora's central square, known as the Green Chowk, has been renamed the slaughter Chowk, as the Taliban routinely dumps bodies there and occasionally conducts public executions. In December, the Taliban deposited 27 bodies in the square and ordered the residents not to move them. Taliban snipers routinely fire in the town, forcing residents to remain indoors

The utter confusion in the Pakistani establishment has emboldened AQ and PT to expand their area of insurgency right into the heartland of Pakistani Punjab. Newspapers have reported that seven policemen were killed in an attack on a police checkpoint in the first week of February in Mianwali district in Punjab. The attack took place in the early morning hours when Taliban fighters detonated a bomb outside an "an important checkpoint" in the region. The Taliban assault force then opened fire on the policemen, killing all seven manning the outpost. The police checkpoint "was completely shattered in the offensive," *Geo News* reported.

The Mianwali district borders the district of Lakki Marwat in the Northwest Frontier Province. Taliban forces loyal to Baitullah Mehsud are active in Lakki Marwat and control most of the region.

The attack in Mianwali, according to Pakistani newspapers, took place just two days after a suicide bomber killed more than 30 civilians and wounded more than 50 in Dera Ghazi Khan, also in Punjab province. The attack was mounted outside a mosque during a Shia religious procession. The bombing sparked riots in the district.

Dera Ghazi Khan borders the district of Dera Ismail Khan, which borders the Taliban controlled districts of South Waziristan, Tank, and Lakki Marwat.

Last year, Baitullah Mehsud had threatened to wage *jihad* and turn the provinces of Sindh and Punjab "into a furnace" if the operations in northwestern Pakistan did not cease. ■



A red flag celebration in Spain

been between the bourgeois capitalist class and the proletarian working class. It was so at the start. It still is today.

Though Socialism/Communism has changed, Capitalism has not. It is still the same exploitative class described by Marx. In the class struggle underway since the Industrial Revolution one has learned that trade unionism is NOT Socialism. Though anarchism shares many aspects of Socialism, the two cannot go the distance hand in hand. For education and leadership and the dream of a new State will always be requisites for enabling the quantum leap ahead to a

Disarray in European Left

Almost every party of the Left on the Continent – and that includes the range of Socialists, Social Democrats and Communist movements – has lost direction

Gaither Stewart

While the European Right in power gloats, today's Left reality is indeed sad. Disarray also in just what the Left idea is. Too many ambitious leaders some places, too few in others, while Anarchists deny the necessity of leadership at all. Insane concept for the Left! For people do not act alone. Or, left to their own doing, they go off in many directions. One needs a direction. One needs leadership. In Europe the situation is clear: the result of the lack of unity and leadership is before our eyes: decomposition of the Left into more and more splinter parties and groups.

Italy is a good example: three "parties" using the name Communist, divided by ...by what? Few people even know. By a name, by a symbol, by personal ambitions projecting incompatible ideas. Italy even has a so-called Social Democratic party that exists one day and vanishes the next. Despite the stirring hymn, despite the Left's legends, despite the ideals of worker unity, despite nostalgia for the old Communist Party, there has seldom been unity on the Left.

The Left role today, in my mind, is limited chiefly to holding its finger in the hole in the dike against the flood of the rightist market-cures-all, capitalistic, globalist, anti-social credo sweeping over the Continent. Though "the European Idea" of the social state still holds, it is leaking water on all fronts. The blue lights and the twelve yellow stars dressing the Eiffel Tower recalling the European flag was a symbol of the new Europe of multinationals and market economies gnawing away at all sides of "social Europe."

It is never out of place to look back at the history of Socialism. In the final analysis it is a sad story. My aim here is to show that the impulse toward unity of the Left has always been chimerical. The reader can see Wikipedia's History of Socialism for a comprehensive version of this story of hope, mirage and dream.

Socialism means struggle. According to its hymn it has been struggle from the start. The question is and has always been revolution or reform? That is, how is the change from Capitalism to Socialism to be brought about? The adversaries stand clearly before us. Mankind's basic social struggle has long

radically new political-social-economic system. The movement for radical change requires unity and leaders. The Left cannot remain an array of sects and hope to bring about social change.

In France, Socialism has been robbed of its original spirit. French Socialists still run local governments – France's 22 administrative regions, 58 of 96 departments, and two-thirds of cities of over 20,000 persons, including Paris itself. Administratively they are ubiquitous. But since they can't beat the Right in national elections, they are bitter and quarrelsome and more divisive than ever.

Late last century in countries with mass Communist parties like Italy, France and Spain, Euro-Communism was a reaction against the bureaucratic Brezhnevism in the USSR and against the move to the Right of Western Socialists. The ultimate economic collapse of the USSR under assault from the West and rising nationalism in Russia's member states-satellites changed the world scene to the detriment of Socialism and marked a victory of Capitalism – with the results before our eyes today. ■

Courtesy: Countercurrents

Though Lalit Modi may be in the eye of a storm, for the BCCI he remains the magician who will do wonders for Indian cricket



Is Modi the new Dalmiya?

Arijit Dutta/ New Delhi

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) hierarchy, it seems, always have had right men at the right time. First it had Jagmohan Dalmiya, who with his shrewd business sense and marketing, made the BCCI the richest cricket body in the world. Dalmiya, along with Bindra, can claim the credit for gaining the right to stage the World Cup in India in 1987, which brought big money into the subcontinent. They also led the commercialisation of the game in early 1990s.

Now with the change of guard and no longer having his once vice-like grip on the BCCI, Dalmiya's legacy as a shrewd marketing strategist along with sharp business acumen has been taken over by

the suave Lalit Modi. Having a persona that is sharp, brash, outspoken and sometimes controversial, Modi has literally changed the face of Indian cricket courtesy the Indian Premier League (IPL), which he visualized and executed with spectacular success in 2008.

As the second edition of the IPL starts in April, Modi is back in the limelight after having unveiled a bumper list of 111 cricketers for the IPL auction. It's known to all that the first edition of the Twenty20 tournament catapulted him to the international stage. Modi has been known to be very close to the previous Rajasthan government, especially the chief minister Vasundhara Raje, and is said to have played a key behind-the-scene role in her state election campaign last year. But after Raje's party was defeated in December, Modi has been

facing a string of allegations from politicians affiliated to the new Congress government and dissidents in the Rajasthan Cricket Association (RCA).

Complaints have already been lodged with the local police against Modi on some of these allegations, ranging from misappropriation of funds (like not giving money to the victims of the Jaipur blasts) to forgery. But Modi has denied the charges categorically and has hit back by divesting the association secretary Subhash Joshi, a loyalist-turned-dissenter, of all powers. He reportedly said that he would not react to the charges since they are subjudice and was of the view that when one does something good there are bound to be detractors.

With a string of allegations against him, where does it leave the flamboyant

'No boon for Rajasthan'

Former RCA president and BCCI treasurer Kishore Rungta, who is considered to be a bitter rival of Modi, feels that Lalit Modi had his way till now because he had friends in the Vasundhara Raje government. But now it would be tough for him. Modi might be counting the laurels for taking Indian cricket to a new level but his detractors in RCA feel that he has nothing for his own association.

"Rajasthan cricket has not moved a single inch during his tenure. In fact we have gone back. We are in the plate group in Ranji Trophy. During the IPL, he said that Rajasthan Royals will have four international players, four national and rest will be local talent. But there was not a single local player in the team," said Rungta. He adds that Modi is not interested in Rajasthan cricket and hardly spends time in the state.

Rungta also dismissed claims that Modi was the pioneer in bringing money in Indian cricket. "He didn't do anything. The money was brought by the game. Let him do it for foot-

ball or tennis, I will stand up and salute him," he said.

Modi in his defence is unnerved and confident of retaining his crown. "First and foremost what is going to happen in IPL and RCA doesn't affect me at all. I am the governing council chairman of the IPL for five years and Champions League. I am the BCCI vice-president for three years," he said in a TV interview. "It is not necessary that you need to be in a state association to be a member of the BCCI. You need to be nominated to the BCCI in the first place. I am not losing Rajasthan. I am here to stay, go out and win the votes irrespective if the government is vindictive or not. I have the votes and I am going to go forward and get them."

Modi sounds confident and speaks about the power he wields in Indian cricket. It will be a wait and watch game to see whether this confidence carries him through the tough times in Rajasthan cricket.

—Abhiroop Mukherjee

IPL commissioner in the days ahead and within the hierarchy of the BCCI? V Srivatsa, a cricket analyst, says: "It will not affect his standing within the BCCI". In fact, Rajasthan cricket may suffer because of all the harassment he is being subjected to. Modi finds himself in a spot of bother because he is so dynamic and brash. That's his major drawback. He also appears to be a man in hurry. He is one who doesn't care for his personal comforts when it comes to the IPL. Further, Modi is a dreamer and he can go to any length to get the work done. Is the Maratha stalwart and former BCCI president Sharad Pawar backing him? Srivatsa points out: "Why only Pawar, every politician would like an industrialist on his side. If Pawar is backing Modi to the hilt, it is because he has done wonders for Indian cricket. No cricketer will talk ill of Modi after what he has done to them". While there is already a buzz for the second edition of the IPL, it is high time Modi, before overseeing his second cricket extravaganza, put his own house in order. And after having bowled the world over with his administrative skill, Modi will need all his sharp business acumen to duck the bouncers that are hurled at him now. ■

SPORTSCAN

DEEPIKA PADUKONE'S NEW ROLE

Chairman of Force India Formula Team, Vijay Mallya, has roped in the gorgeous Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone to be the face of his team. Deepika said, if she could manage time from her busy Bollywood schedule, she would love to be one of the team's 'speed divas' and travel around the world for the Formula One Grand Prix event 2009. "I may make brief appearances during MTV's reality show, 'The Fast and the Gorgeous' and I'm looking forward to it," said Deepika as she sat on a McLaren-Mercedes-powered Formula One car to unveil MTV-Force India's, the Fast and the Gorgeous hunt for the 'speed divas'. Four 'speed divas' will be chosen from 20 contestants. Deepika, daughter of Indian badminton icon Prakash Padukone, loves sports and excelled in badminton in school.



PRAKASH PADUKONE PRAISES BCCI



Badminton officials in the country can learn a thing or two about marketing from the BCCI, said the legendary Prakash Padukone as he lauded the cricket body for the way it has promoted the game in the country. "I have always been a fan of the BCCI and the manner in which it markets cricket surely deserves to be praised," Padukone told reporters. The badminton authorities in the country should not shy away from having an IPL-style tournament that is being conducted by the BCCI, he said. He said the situation of badminton in the country has improved a lot during the last 10 years as a result of which several new faces have emerged.

S Santhanam / New Delhi

The Indian Cricket League (ICL) began amidst much fanfare two years ago with the promise of developing domestic talent in a big way as well as providing lucrative sports programming. It posed a challenge to the very existence of the Board of Control for Cricket India (BCCI). However, the ICL received a major setback recently when the International Cricket Council (ICC) virtually authorised the BCCI to decide on the



Air of optimism

The future of the Indian cricket league lies on the outcome of the crucial meeting in Johannesburg

ICL's plea for official recognition.

For the last two years, the ICL has been fighting for official recognition of its tournaments and its players. The ICC, during its meeting in Perth, agreed that a host member has the right to determine whether a match or a tournament within its territory was approved or disapproved. It also refused to lift the ban on players taking part in "disapproved" tournaments. It was also agreed that no members, members' players, coaches or match officials could participate in domestic cricket unless he obtains a no-objection certificate from his home board.

These decisions have surely upset the calculations of the ICL which was hoping to get an official recognition from the ICC. It also opposed the BCCI decision to withdraw pension money for retired cricketers representing teams in the ICL. With the latest ICC directive, the ICL has lost a major battle.

After two years of its existence, the ICL's potential to sustain its name is yet to be seen. Its rival IPL scored over it in terms of marketing in its inaugural season last year. The ICL is an Rs 100 crore project undertaken by Essel Group under the

leadership of Subhash Chandra of Zee Television. Initially, the ICL tried to capitalise on the sentiments of Indian cricket followers after the poor performance of the national team in the 2007 World Cup and the tour to South Africa. The ICL included in its fold several domestic and international cricketers, including Brian Lara, Inzamam-ul Haq, Nicky Boje, Dinesh Mongia, Imran Farhat and Rohan Gavaskar. Some promising domestic players, including Hyderabad's Ambati Rayudu, too joined in the fray as the ICL offered lucrative money.

But with the huge success of BCCI-conducted IPL last year, and with the BCCI making it clear that no player or official involved with the ICL would ever be taken in the national side, the ICL started losing its importance. Even after two seasons, ICL matches have not got the expected spectator support. One main reason was that the ICL managed mostly retired international stars along with a slew of domestic has-beens.

And with the latest ICC directive, the BCCI has cut the ICL to size. But the ICL hasn't lost hope as yet. There is already talk of some ICL officials trying to reach

BCCI top bosses to settle the issue. The BCCI, the ICL feels, would hear its side before deciding on the issue.

However, in a ray of hope for the beleaguered ICL, the ICC, even after its latest directive, is keen to see a solution to this imbroglio particularly for the 150 ICL cricketers who have been banned by their boards. Officially at least, the BCCI continues to insist that its stand on the ICL remains the same. If this was not all, the ICL too has hit recession mode with a series of moves that reflect the current economic realities. The World Series Twenty20 tournament, scheduled for March, now stands cancelled, and payments to players have been put on hold until the management completes a stringent performance review that could lead to downgrading of payments and even sackings. Himanshu Mody, the business head of the ICL, said: "The ICL is looking into the issues and the grievances, if any, will be resolved".

Sharad Pawar, the former BCCI president and ICC vice-president, has been known to enjoy a longstanding personal equation with Subhash Chandra. And that which is what the ICL and the ICC are banking on. So the ICL players and officials are keeping their fingers crossed and hoping that the Johannesburg meeting on February 21 would give them something to cheer about. ■

Get, set, go...

Team Sidvin India is ready with its new driver Gaurav Gill to achieve better results in this season of World Rally Championship

Chaitan Papnai

From hilly terrains to smooth roads, from sharp turns to highways and from high risk to no risk zone – that is what the World Rally Championship (WRC) is all about. From last year onwards India has also stepped into this exciting championship. The man behind it is none other than Mohan Nagarajan, the managing director of the Team Sidvin India (TSI). Last year when they had participated in the World Rally Championship for the very first time, they were quite shocked and surprised to see the level of competition there. "We had never expected such a competition. Last year was more like a learning experience for us. But this year we have worked on almost all the aspects of this sport," says Nagarajan.

The biggest change the TSI have done apart from a new look and feel in the Subaru is the appointment of Gaurav Gill as a lead driver for the season. They have a three-year programme with Gaurav. And the reason behind Gaurav's selection as the lead driver is his skill. "We tested Gaurav in October last year and everyone, including Tommi Makinen (builder of Subaru Impreza WRX STi rally cars), was surprised at his level of adaptation and speed. Gaurav has been driving a different car but when we put him in Subaru, he adapted it in a matter of few hours. We also know that he is the best rally driver in the

country today," says Nagarajan.

Nagarajan always believes to be on the front, as he doesn't like to be a back runner. This year TSI's main motto is to perform and at least earn some points and then from the next season they will go all out for the championship.

To earn a place in this sport one needs to be tough – mentally as well as physically. And that's the only reason Gaurav is training under the trainer who had also looked after Sachin Tendulkar and Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

At the time of recession it's quite tough to carry forward such an expensive sport and that too without any sponsor. "It's quite a brave decision to continue with this sport even at this point of time. We all are thankful to Nagarajan," says Gaurav. Gaurav also feels that there is a big difference between Asian rallies and the WRC. "In the WRC you have to compete with 30 drivers out of which 19 to 20 are

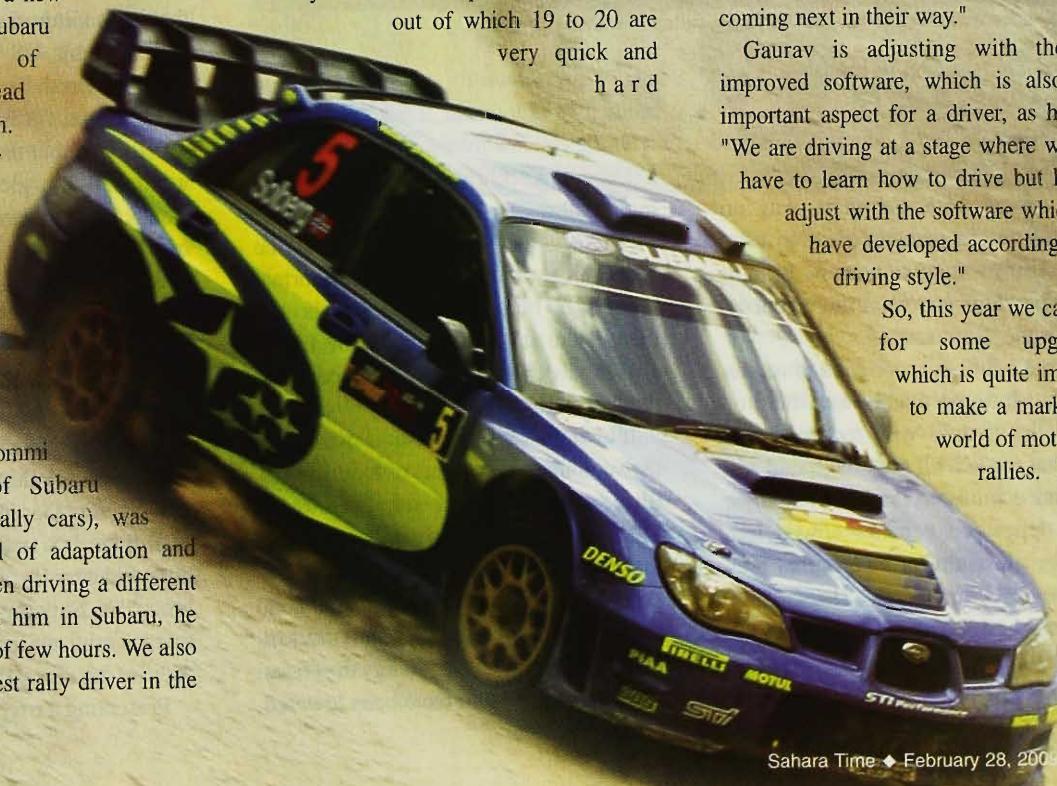
very quick and hard

to beat. But in Asian rallies you will find only four to five quick drivers who can give you a tough competition," says Gaurav.

The toughest part is to drive at a high speed and at a place you are driving for the very first time. In a calendar year you have to change several countries and are supposed to acclimatise to different climates. More than the driving, it is adapting to changing climate which is rather tough. "While in Cyprus you have to face the twisty mountains, in Greece you have to brave a temperature as high as 40°C. At times it's quite exhausting as there is no proper air to breath in. Then in Finland, a place of champions, you have to deal with ice and snow and at the same time drive at a speed of 130km/h," says Gaurav. He further says, "There is a big difference between A1, F1 and motor sports rallies. In A1 and F1, drivers have smooth roads but here drivers are totally unaware of what's coming next in their way."

Gaurav is adjusting with the new improved software, which is also quite important aspect for a driver, as he says, "We are driving at a stage where we don't have to learn how to drive but have to adjust with the software which they have developed according to my driving style."

So, this year we can hope for some upgrading, which is quite important to make a mark in the world of motor sport rallies. ■



Sounding the poll BUGLE!



Acting finance minister Pranab Mukherjee: a suitcase without surprises

Sanjay Thapa / New Delhi

UPA's last budget before the Lok Sabha polls, presented on 16th February, was no more than an election ploy with a clear message to voters – bring it back to power if you want more concessions for the '*aam aadmi*'.

"We see a further scope for a lower tax regime...I have no doubt when the time comes, the people will recognise the 'hand' that made it all possible," said acting finance minister Pranab Mukherjee as the opposition benches cowed him down for presenting a budget that they touted as a 'Satyam balance sheet.'

In fact, the immediate reaction of the industry on the 'plain vanilla' interim budget was palpable with the BSE sen-

sex sliding down by over 340 points to hit a record low at 9294, particularly with the finance minister's cautioning of a deepening economic crisis in the coming months.

"In fact, the non-presentation of the economic survey, which is a normal process in budget exercise just proves that all the said claims could be false," said Jagdish Shettiger, the BJP economic think-tank to *Sahara Time*.

It also puts a big question mark over the veracity of the claims of food and fertilizer subsidies. "Last time even as the UPA claimed the subsidy outlay no more than Rs 18,000 crore, yet the final figures showed the subsidy to be over Rs 90,000 crore," said Shettiger. Similarly various other parameters, including the fiscal deficit figures, could have been lowered,

With no economic survey preceding the budget and a clear 'vote-oriented' undertone to woo votebanks, the interim budget was no more than an election manifesto presentation exercise by the acting finance minister

Pranab Mukherjee

he said. Shettiger further said that the announcements were no more than an election gimmick attempting to woo vote banks.

Ironically, it was the same UPA government and the earlier finance minister P Chidambaram who had failed to see the impending slowdown despite early warnings by US economy before the Lehman Brothers collapse brought the world down. "It is, however, a matter of satisfaction that the Indian economy has weathered the global crisis reasonably well and is expected to post a growth rate of 7.1 per cent in 2008-09," said Chidambaram, reacting to the interim budget.

Inability to see this failure gave severe jolts to the economy – the gigantic stock market crash in January 2008 from 21K levels, the double digit inflation, a near recessionary industry at (-) 2 per cent growth for December, falling exports with huge US trade deficit for the first time, industry layoffs and last but not the least the Satyam scam – the acting finance minister left no stone unturned to take for 'handling the economy well.'

Presenting a rosy scenario of the coun-

try's financial health despite the global meltdown that began in 2007, Mukherjee said that the UPA had enabled a sustained growth of 9 per cent in the last three years and is banking on the estimated 7.1 per cent rate of GDP growth for the current year which 'makes India the second fastest growing economy of the world.'

He even claimed that the fallout of the global slowdown on Indian economy was countered with fiscal stimulus packages announced in December 2008 and January 2009. This is no more than kite-flying, as not only were the stimulus packages too small but would take time to percolate down to take effect. Moreover, North Block has been claiming high tax collections. This again is not beyond doubt as it is simple economics: as industrial production slips into negative and layoffs take place, how can tax collections go up?

The industry has expressed dismay and said that even though tax measures could be left to the full budget later after the elections, yet there were a number of areas which needed attention as they were part of the stimulus package announced in the earlier months. "The 4 per cent excise concession, announced as a part of first stimulus package to stimulate demand, should have been continued beyond March 2009...another stimulus package was expected...Industry was expecting targeted sector specific tax incentives to kick-start segments such as housing, steel, cement, consumer durables and passenger cars etc which have high output and employment intensities," said Satish Bagrodia, president, PHD chamber.

In fact, the industry has also expressed a let down earlier with no major concessions from Lalu Prasad Yadav in the interim rail budget last week. Given the economic slowdown in the economy and the fact that the industrial growth had slumped to minus 2 per cent for December, it was necessary to reduce freight rates to assist the industry in hard times. This was particularly for sectors like steel and coal which are largely dependent on railways for their freight movements.

Meanwhile, the acting finance minister left no opportunity untapped to take credit for attracting a record 45 per cent growth in foreign direct investment (FDI) by receiving \$23.3 billion between April and December 2008 over the same period in the previous year, despite the global slowdown.

This apart, the admission of a jump of the fiscal deficit level to a whopping 6 per cent of the GDP against the earlier FRBM target of 2.5 per cent for the current year was an eye-opener – even as it was quite expected that the penultimate year for a zero fiscal deficit target by 2009-2010 was impossible with the economic slowdown.

But despite the admission of a major

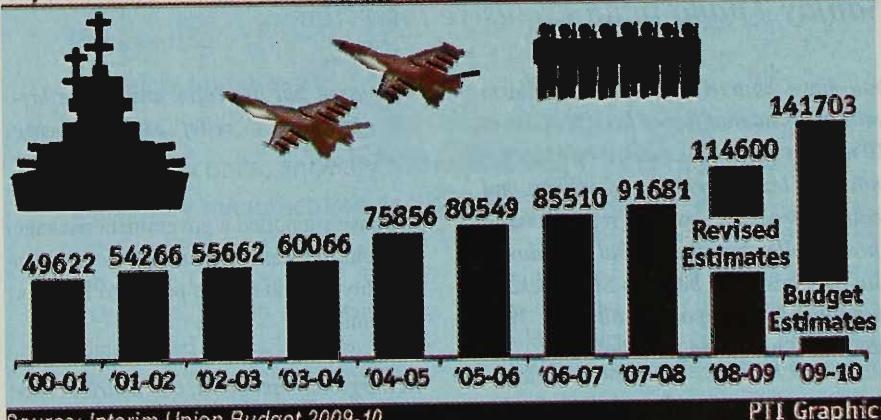
Scheme. Rajiv Gandhi Rural Drinking Water Mission was allocated Rs 7,400 crore, while Rs 1,200 crore was assigned for Total Rural Sanitation programme.

On similar lines, Mukherjee has praised farmers no end calling them the 'real heroes of India's success story' even as he patted its own back claiming UPA's recent farm debt-waiver as well as high support price for their produce. But it is interesting to note that the contribution of agriculture in the GDP is continuously on the downslide even as the acting finance minister said, "...our granaries are full."

"In the period between 2003-04 and 2008-09, our government increased the plan allocation for agriculture by 300 per

India's Defence Expenditure in Crore Rupees

An allocation of Rs 1,41,703 crore has been made for defence in the 2009-10 Union Budget. This represents a 23.65% increase over the 2008-09 revised allocation of Rs 1,14,600 crore. As a percent of GDP, the allocation for defence works out to 2.35%. Of every rupee spent by the Union Government 13 paise expenditure is on the defence account.

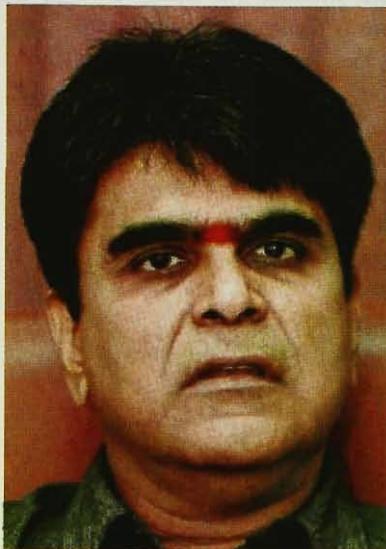


Source: Interim Union Budget 2009-10
PTI Graphic

fall in revenues and increasing fiscal deficit, the UPA has still wooed the rural vote banks in the 'interim budget' by jacking up allocation to a massive Rs 1,31,317 crore for social sector spending. It has allocated as much as 261 per cent for 'Bharat Nirman' meant for building rural infrastructure. An allocation of Rs 40,900 crore has been made for 2009-10, while the National Rural Health Mission has been allocated Rs 12,070 crore. Similarly, an allocation of Rs 8,000 crore has been made for the mid-day meal scheme, while Rs 6,705 crore proposed for the Integrated Child Development

cent," claimed Mukherjee. The farm sector, which contributes about 18 per cent to the country's overall GDP, grew at an average of 3.7 per cent in the last four years, he said.

Similarly, the budget tries to play up the softer side with reference to the 'Mumbai terror attacks' and has increased the allocation for defence to Rs 141,703 crore including Rs 54,824 crore capital expenditure. This again is not beyond debate as this allocation is too small and should have come in the full budget to be presented after few months post elections.



‘Exporters see 10 million job losses this year’

Global meltdown has led to a sharp fall in exports, deeply impacting India's various sectors which are facing dip in profits and hence are resorting to large lay-offs – as much as 10 million by March 2009. Commenting on the future trends in Indian exports, Federation of Indian Exporter Organisation (FIEO) president A Sakthivel speaks to Sanjay Thapa in an exclusive interview...

You have yourself signaled the alarm bells and said that forced layoffs of about 10 million people is expected by March – mostly in textile, gems and jewellery and leather products, as overseas demand shrink following the global meltdown. But why has there been no SOS package announced for exporters till now. Why has FIEO not asked for a bailout?

We expect the next stimulus package expected before the elections to focus solely on exports. We have already asked for some support from the government like increasing drawback and DEPB rate by 3 per cent, removal of minimum 7 per cent ceiling on export credit and providing 2 per cent additional subvention; moratorium on term loans; income tax exemption on export profits; creation of an Export Development Fund for providing marketing exposure to MSME exporters and reimbursement of differential of international price and MSP on cotton to exporters.

With this garment exporters are faced

with large fall in profits and hence lay-offs. Is there a relief package being worked on?

We have supported a government package wherein the staff laid off will be given a monthly stipend for the period to fend for his family.

In the global meltdown, our nearest competitor China has focused its economic bail-out packages in exports and housing while India has not. Comment?

Exports constitute around 37 per cent of the Chinese GDP while in case of India it is only 17 per cent. While their economy is bigger than that of India, the economic bail-out package need to be bigger accordingly. In the housing sector, the Indian government has also come out with some measures to boost demand for real estate. Interest rates on housing loans have been reduced, but the need of the hour is much more than what is offered. Since the housing sector consumes steel, cement, and various other things, a revival of housing

sector can revive the other sectors also.

Various bodies have warned of substantial lay-offs in the garments sector. CITI has said five lakh people have been laid off and another 7 lakh are likely to face problems. Comments?

FIEO had estimated that 10 million job losses would be there till March 2009. (See chart on facing page)

With the slump in demand, bank credit has fallen substantially and bankers refuse to lend to the red areas. What is the solution ?

The government has to come out in support of the sectors which are worst affected. As government provides oil bonds to the oil marketing companies to offset the losses in marketing the fuels at subsidised rates, RBI may come out with some scheme for banks so as to provide the loans to affected sectors at reduced rates. Out-of-the-box thinking is required to cope with the present situation.

Bank credit is the major bottleneck in the

current scenario, despite RBI's rate cuts last year from 9 per cent to 4.5 per cent in key rates and infusing over Rs 3 lakh crore there is still a paucity of funds for industry/exports. Where is the problem?

The problem lies at the banks' end. Banks do not want to extend loan to affected sectors fearing it to become the NPA. The liquidity is there in the banking system but unless it comes out in the market, it is of no use. Despite reduction by RBI of key lending rates, the market rate in India is still quite high: upto 9.5 per cent. Exporters are also not happy with the dollar loans – they are asking the government for rupee-based loans.

The two stimulus packages, first on December 7 and the second on January 2 announced by the government has not had any result. A third package is in waiting before the elections. What should be the content ?

As mentioned above, the coming package should focus largely on exports.

What is the trend in Indo-Pak trade which is around \$200 million after the 26/11. Has there been any decline or is it just hype?

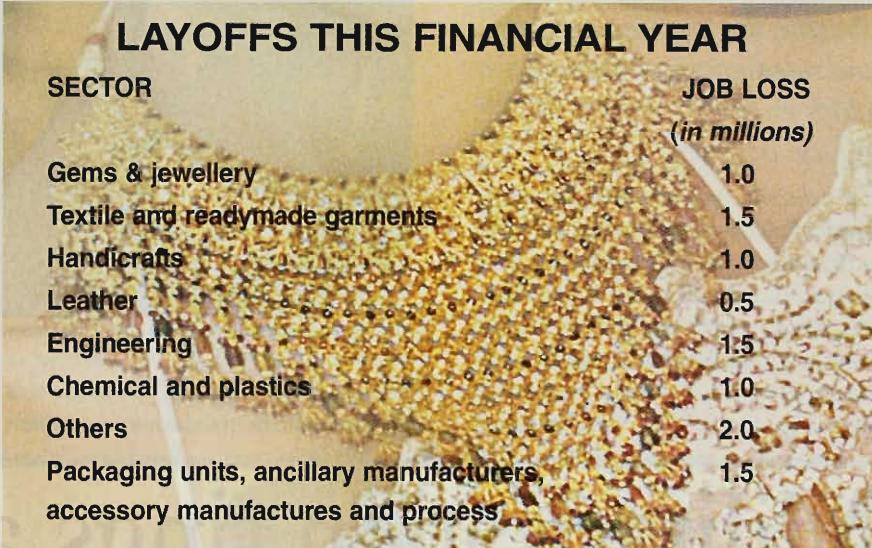
There has been no impact on Indo-Pak trade post 26/11, as it is the trade is very minuscule.

Since October onwards, exports have fallen drastically from a growth rate of 30 per cent to almost half 15 per cent. With this year's target of \$200 billion is far from reach. What are the SOS being applied ?

Yes, as the commerce minister Kamal Nath has himself admitted exports would touch \$185 billion for this financial year. Our exports will increase by 15 per cent on dollar basis y-o-y (year-on-year). As per the last stimulus package, the pre- and post-shipment export credit for labour intensive exports, i.e., textiles (including handlooms, carpets and handicrafts), leather, gems & jewellery, marine products and SME sector is being made more attractive by providing an interest subvention of 2 per cent upto March 31, 2009 subject to minimum rate of interest of

7 per cent per annum it has been decided to restore DEPB rates to those prevailing prior to November 2008. In order to support financing of PPP projects, the government has decided to authorise the India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL) to raise Rs 10,000 crore through tax-free bonds by March 31. An additional allocation of Rs 1,400 crore will be made to clear the entire backlog in TUF Scheme. Exporters will be allowed refund of service tax on foreign agent commissions of upto 10 per cent of FOB value of exports. They will also be allowed refund of service tax on output services while availing of

Yes, with the current recessionary trend is likely to result in building up of stocks in the industry. In order to ensure that exporters get a fair price and they do not resort to distress sales, it is necessary for banks to considerably allow time to achieve this end. A corporate loan at concessional rate of 7 per cent repayable within a period of 1 year against excess inventory should be considered. Owing to the extreme situation, crystallization and NPA by the banks may be suspended for the next one year and dollar support for such non-crystallization period may be provided by the RBI. Alternatively, the crystallization period may



benefits under Duty Drawback Scheme. Duty Drawback benefits on certain items including knitted fabrics, bicycles, agricultural hand tools and specified categories of yarn are being enhanced. These changes will take effect retrospectively from September 1, 2008.

In trade with the US, the BoP with India has become trade deficit from trade surplus. Why has there been no attention given to this front?

We have been taking up the matter with the government and are waiting for their response.

Similarly gems and jewellery export sector is demanding relief in excise and sought lower interest rates, monetary relief for workers and a waiver on excise duties. Please give details?

be increased from 30 days to 90 days after the due date. Supply of gold to exporters of gold jewellery may be freed from the STE and all status holders and exporters of good track record of 3 years with a minimum average export of Rs 1 crore may be allowed to import gold directly.

As the global meltdown deepens in the coming months and overseas demand evaporates – as Europe and North America, which account for 37 per cent of India's merchandise exports are reeling under recession and slowdown – what will be the impact on our exports in the coming months?

The coming days are going to be tough for Indian exports. An immediate reprieve from the recession in US and Europe is not expected. We need to look for newer markets and products. ■

Among the wild cats

On a visit to the 'guerrilla zone' in Jamui area on the Bihar-Jharkhand border, Sahara Time correspondent was confronted with the passion that ignites the Naxalites to liberate the 'masses on pins and needles' from their 'class enemies'. A first person account:

"*Lal salaam*", said so-called area commander Suleiman in his boisterous voice as he shook hands with me. He was in an olive green uniform with a Kalashnikov rifle slung across his shoulder. While some gun-toting 'soldiers' in similar attire stood tentatively, others were busy preparing lunch. The sun piercing



The fresh recruits of Guerrilla Army, learning to operate weapons

through the shrubbery of the jungle was giving respite from the winter westerlies.

"We guard our posts and take on the class enemies all seasons," Suleiman said.

Militarisation rings alarm bells

The government is more worried than ever as the Naxalites have acquired sophisticated firearms and have access to rockets and explosives

Sanjeev K Jha / New Delhi

Even as the government is grappling with the Naxal menace, latest official statistics show an alarming lethal firepower of the Left extremists who carry out 100 landmine explosions every year. And the latest but not the last in this series is the bizarre incident of Nawada district on February 9 – when heavily armed extremists of banned outfit CPI (Maoist-Leninist) killed eight policemen at Mahulitand village in Kauwakol police station limits of naxal-hit Nawada district.

A high-powered government panel has observed that the threat from the Maoists

has increased due to their increasing militarisation, acquisition of sophisticated firearms and access to technology of fabricating rockets and rocket launchers, besides expertise in Improvised Explosive Devices.

Citing several instances, the panel says IEDs have come to be used by the Naxalites for well-planned attacks on even high-security personalities apart from other targets like police stations and security vehicles.

The lethality of attacks on security forces and the large number of fatalities were demonstrated in Chhattisgarh, when more than 20 CRPF officials were killed

when a mine-protected vehicle was blown up in Dantewada district in the recent past.

Even in Maharashtra, the Naxals in Gadchiroli district killed 15 policemen recently.

In some major incidents in the recent past, the police chief of Prakasam district in Andhra Pradesh survived an IED attack, but his counterpart in Munger district of Bihar K C Surendra Babu was not lucky. He was killed in a landmine blast near Bhimbandh – a major tourist hub till few years ago.

"On a rough estimate, the Naxalites have so far been causing nearly 100

Incredible though it may sound, it was as good as a regular Indian Army post. The lethal People's Guerrilla Army has virtually taken over the entire region for all practical purposes. Suleiman is the commander of the Army of the CPI-ML (People's War), popularly known as the People's War Group. The section under his control comprised nine soldiers, including two girls. "They are most adroit among us, as they too have been baptized in accordance with the Red Book and they have virtually conquered the common physical passion," the commander said.

They are criminals for the police and fodder for the wild cats. Yet, they have decided to live under these inhuman conditions till they win over their class foes. "It is not easy for the police to confront us, as we have planted remote-controlled landmines around them – which if triggered can create graveyards for the invaders," said the girl beside the area commander. Not only Suleiman's, there were numerous PGA posts manned by

Kalashnikov-toting strangers. It was almost impossible for the police to reach the venue. And, the support of the villagers gives strategic depth to the PGA against the police. "The gun-toting PGA members are ever-present in our 'dukhdard,' admit the villagers.

The PGA soldiers appear well read too. Quoting Mao, Ranvijay, a PGA jawan, said: "We mingle with the masses like fish in water. We are the strength of the villagers. Now, no police or forest officials can use their girls as sex-workers." Perhaps, they have made deep inroads in the region, which has the people at war against the system.

The PGA is a new phenomenon in the chronicles of Naxalite history. The PWG, operating in Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh raised the PGA in 2000. Earlier, the Naxalite organisations banked only on its armed squads or people's mercenaries, designed and structured on the lines of the police force. "But, now we are the trained

lot," Ranvijay informed, adding, "The formation of the PGA became essential, as the government has no devise other than to suppress the revolutionary forces. Instead of rescuing the poor masses from the exploitation, the government formed special task forces to crush us.

He further said: "We have a well-drafted constitution. Article 1 stipulates that the PGA carries out a sustained war with people's support against the proletariat. Article 2 recommends an advanced military training to its cadres, to uproot the governmental systems like police stations and administrative offices. Article 3 orders us to pursue the war, against those who are instrumental to rip off the poor people."

And, now the PWG has finally launched a special drive to recruit boys and girls for the PGA in Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. "Any healthy and physically fit boy or girl above 13 can join our force," added Ranvijay. ■

landmine explosions every year with considerable loss of lives of security personnel of state and central paramilitary police," the second Administrative Reforms Commission said in its report on combating terrorism and described it as "quite a disturbing phenomenon".

Latest home ministry statistics show that while 236 security force personnel lost their lives in Naxal attacks in 2007, the toll was 175 till September last year – with Orissa accounting for the highest casualty of 72 followed by Chhattisgarh at 49.

The Naxalites, who largely completed their process of merger and consolidation with the formation of CPI (Maoists) in September 2004, have acquired self loading rifles (SLRs), Kalashnikov and INSAS series of rifles.



According to the reports, more than 10 states are badly affected by the Maoist violence with Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and Orissa bearing the worst brunt. More than 1,000 cases of Naxal violence have been reported last year in which over 200 security personnel and 300 civilians have been killed.

Chhattisgarh also accounted for the highest number of around 400 incidents last year followed by Jharkhand where nearly 350 attacks were reported, leaving over 200 civilians dead in both the states.

Major Naxal-hit states, at a recent meeting chaired by home minister P Chidambaram, strongly favoured joint operations backed by technology support, jungle warfare training to policemen and more focus on development to tackle the menace, recognising the fact that use of force alone would not suffice. It is high time these issues are treated with the urgency they deserve. ■

Stories for charity

Rowling's stories might lack in the thrilling element associated with the Harry Potter series, however, they are interesting in a gentle way and make for an engrossing read

Tanushree Podder

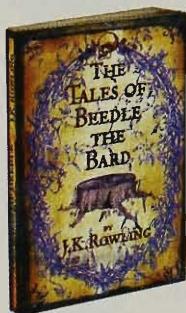
After her last book *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, news that JK Rowling had written another book came as a pleasant surprise for her fans. For all those who had been waiting to enjoy yet another magical book from the famed writer, the book '*The Tales Of Beedle The Bard*' comes as a bonanza.

Readers who have gone through her last book would remember that Hermione Granger inherited a collection of fairy tales, compiled by a 15th-century bard, from Professor Dumbledore. One of its five tales contained an important clue. The Bard is supposed to be the wizard world's equivalent of the Grimm brothers.

In the first story, 'The Wizard and the Hopping Pot', a kindly old wizard makes potions to solve the problems of all his

The book might come as a disappointment for her die-hard fans if they are expecting the thrill, magic and mystery of her past books

neighbours, including the muggles. After he dies, he passes his "lucky cooking pot" onto his son who is a selfish person. When the old wizard dies, the son refuses to help a warty old woman, only to find that his cauldron grows warts instead. The enchanted pot accumulates tears, vomit, and groans until the young wizard can bear no more and begins helping others. The pot transforms into its original state as soon as the young wizard turns generous and helpful.



THE TALES OF BEEDLE THE BARD

J K Rowling

Bloomsbury

Price : Rs 599/-

Pages : 108

'The Fountain of Fair Fortune' is about three witches – Asha, Altheda, and Amata, and a knight who set off on a hunt for a fountain that will cure their ills and get them health, wealth and love. They finally acquire what they want by going to the expedition, even before they complete it.

In the third story, 'The Warlock's Hairy Heart' a warlock hides his heart in an enchanted crystal casket, so that he can

pursue his worldly ambitions without ever falling in love. Taunted by his servants, he finally decides to marry a young witch only to find that the heart he had locked up has grown into a shrunken and hairy thing. The ending is tragic as he kills the maiden and tries to supplant his own heart with hers and dies.

However, it is the last story 'The Tale of the Three Brothers' that is the most captivating of the lot.

Dumbledore's witty, richly imagined analysis at the end of each story provides the readers an interesting aspect about the tale. His comments are geared towards promoting better acceptance between Wizards and Muggles and the need to avoid the arrogance for those who have the gift of magic.

All the five stories are narrated in Rowling's hallmark style of story telling. The illustrations done by her spark up the imagination of the reader and provide an interesting support to the stories. The book might come as a disappointment for her die-hard fans if they are expecting the thrill, magic and mystery of her past books. The slim book is priced at Rs 599, which might prove to be a little too steep for those with hollow pockets. The only consolation the buyers might derive from spending that much is that the money would be given in charity.

The Tales Of Beedle The Bard made its debut as a collector's copy with hand drawn illustrations from the author and only seven copies existed.

The book was first mentioned in 'Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows' and J.K. Rowling later created the brief collection of short stories to thank six people who helped her with the Harry Potter books and helped her in raising money for The Children's Voice. But, with thousands of fans wanting their own copies, the decision was made to release *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* for general public. She also declared that the sales of the public copies would also benefit a charity called the Children's High Level Group. ■



ABHA DAWESAR has a new book. It's only her fourth. One presumes she will write many more books. This is an alarming thought. I am alarmed. I will tell you why shortly. I had earlier reviewed Babyji for this paper and had pointed out how Daweser seems just a bit out of touch with the reality she seeks to write about. She continues to be out of touch. In her new novel, *Family Values*, she writes in the interstices between memory and journalism. Unfortunately, between these falls the shadow.

The good news first. The writing is fine, even good in parts: honed, crafted. The characters are fine, too: they exist. The narrative is fine: you want to read on, which is not something you want to do that often. The protagonist, a small boy who is referred to simply as 'the boy', is credible. Point of view is fine. The novel is situated in a material reality: in what is obviously Delhi. This is where the prob-

BUDHACHANDRA



lems begin to come in. Daweser's Delhi is based almost entirely on a notion. Her facts she gets from newspapers (this is the first book I have read in which the author herself acknowledges newspapers and news magazines as her sole bibliographical source at the end) and her imagination fills in the rest. The primary emotion meant to be inspired, and the one I am convinced the author feels, is disgust. That is why the dominant metaphors

All airy-fairy

The book insipidly describes how upper middle class families live in the capital



FAMILY VALUES

Abha Daweser

Penguin

Price : Rs 395/-

Pages : 296

in the novel are scatological.

The story first. The Boy lives with his parents, known simply as the doctors. They rent space from a woman referred to as Mrs Cowdung, who is in the habit of chucking water on their heads and generally being pestiferous: she fears pestilence, and the doctors have a little clinic on the precincts.

The doctors are part of a vile family: Grandfather, a cantankerous old gent, evil daughter in law Mrs. Six Fingers (so named because her spouse has six fingers) Psoriasis, Poop and Sugar Mills, the three other brothers, all of

There is a completely unbelievable sequence, which involves the other cousin, a boy called Flunky Junkie, the son of Sugar Mills, who, as his name might indicate, is a drug user. His mother sells her gold bangles to keep him in the habit, in an exaggerated mother-love move. Each of these characters is exaggerated. Seeking a type rather than a person, Daweser sets out to satirise the Great Indian Family. She's telling you all sorts of stuff about the underbelly of family life. Hold your breath. The Great Indian Family is vile enough: what about the Great Indian City? The Nithari killers are at large, Jessica Lal (coyly called Shampoo Girl) is shot dead, the city stinks and when you go out you come back with thick black snot in your nose. At least the boy does. Even though his doctor parents are rationalists they visit an astrologer. The astrologer tells them about which stones to wear. And so on.

Every writer worth her salt must

Every writer worth his/her salt must grapple with and negotiate that slippery terrain we call reality. The problem with Daweser is the flatness of that terrain

whose names refer to disease, disability and occupation respectively. There are a couple of sisters and an evil cousin, known simply as Cousin, who is Bad. He is pubescent and tumescent and is a composite of all the evil older male siblings and comrades ever read about in fiction.

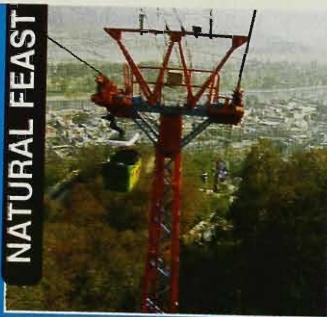
This family is caught up in-surprise, surprise – property disputes. I shan't bore you with the details, but the wicked daughter-in-law mistreats the old man, favours her own son etc.

grapple with and negotiate that slippery terrain we call reality. The problem with Daweser is the flatness of that terrain. In my opinion, this is the flatness engendered by relying on newspaper reports, the flatness engendered by not living in this country and yet continuing to use it as your main subject. Babyji had the same problems: the problem of credibility. *Family Values*, too, though marked by fine writing, is neither nuanced nor redemptive. ■

Teeming with humanity and spirituality, the ghats of Haridwar and the temples of Rishikesh put one in touch with one's roots

LAND OF SAINTS AND SAGES

NATURAL FEAST



Rishikesh is also for nature lovers. A beautiful view of the mountains ringing the gurgling and pristine Ganga is available from the ropeway. It is a must visit for adventurous souls for an exciting experience of white water rafting, and treks that go through some of the most scenic landscapes.

Tanushree Podder

I SHOULD HAVE known the consequences of offering my company for a vacation to my aunt, Jyotsna. The offer was made on an impulse on an emotionally vulnerable moment.

When she suggested that I needed a break from my gruelling routine, I delightfully prepared a list of places I would love to visit, which included destinations like Goa, and Kerala. I visualised myself lolling on the sandy beaches, watching the waves lapping at my feet. When she returned home with two round tickets for Haridwar I literally fell off my mental hammock. Haridwar was not my idea of a holiday destination. After a fierce argument and none too graceful retreat, I sullenly packed my gear and

accompanied my enthusiastic relative to the railway station. 'You will enjoy yourself,' was her final statement as we boarded the train laden with pilgrims.

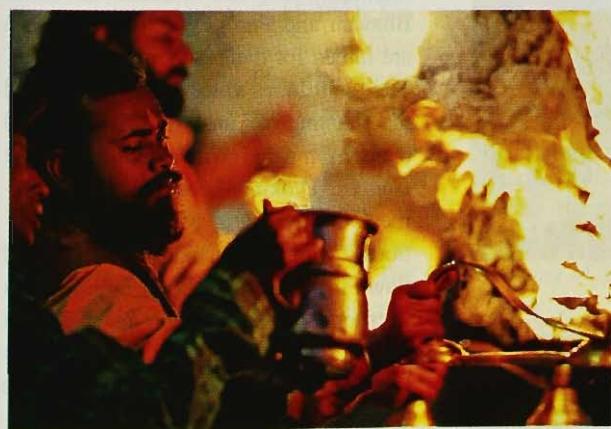
The uneventful journey ended at the none too clean destination and we rode a rickshaw to a modest lodge by the banks of a sedately flowing Ganga. My sullen mood was not mollified till I reached Har ki Pauri in the evening. Refreshed after a quiet siesta, I was in a better frame of mind and went to the ghat with a resolution to enjoy myself. It helped.

Although the ghat was teeming with people intent on dipping their physical bodies in the flowing river in anticipation of attaining nirvana, I felt no such inclination despite the pleas of my garrulous aunt who had struck friendship with several like minded women. Dropping my reservations I slid into the



water to the accompaniment of encouraging words from my aunt and her coterie. It felt good I admitted grudgingly. If it was going to lead me to heaven, might as well hog the path.

As soon the fiery orange ball of Sun began disappearing on the horizon the entire area around the ghat was lit up with floodlights and the shimmering reflection in the water was a spectacular sight. Dozens of vendors selling colorful floral offerings and lamps began raising their decibels. My aunt displayed her amazing haggling skills as she bought the floral diyas, and we set them adrift in the water with our prayers. My soul experienced a sudden uplifting sensation as the chanting and arti began all around me. All of us trudged towards the Daksheswara temple in our wet clothes drawn by a power beyond our control. Bliss descended on



Bliss descended on my tainted soul. The entire area took on a festive note as chanting reached a frenzied crescendo

my tainted soul as I joined in the prayer. The entire area took on a festive note as chanting reached a frenzied crescendo.

Har-ki-Pauri is considered the most sacred bathing ghat in Haridwar. It is also the site of the Kumbh which is held every twelve years and the Ardh

Kumbh every six years. Haridwar is a town of temples. Although my aunt expressed her profound faith in all the pandas dominating the temples, I irritated them with my skeptic comments till she decided to leave the excess baggage behind. I was delighted since it gave me

an opportunity to experience the different facets of the place without being harassed by the pandas.

The next morning, we headed towards the temple on the hills. Since the Manasa Devi and Chandi Devi temples are located on two opposite hills across the Ganga, we queued up for the Udan Khatola, (the local name for a ropeway). The ride was not without its exciting moments as we sat across a nervous lady and her equally jumpy companion who constantly thumbed her rosary. The trip was more than compensated by the magnificent view of the surrounding mountains and the carpet of colourful flowers that dotted the land down below. Since I was there, I took the opportunity of making a couple of wishes to the Goddess Manasa Devi, who is said to fulfill the wishes presented before her.

FACTFILE

REACHING THERE: Haridwar is the nearest railhead and is well connected to most major cities. It is about 200 kms from Delhi and umpteen buses connect it to the capital. To reach Rishikesh which is a mere 20 kms from Haridwar, one can take the Sumos and Qualises that provide a thrilling ride through the forested area.

going below the bridge added excitement to the moment. Shivpuri, located around 30 kilometers from Rishikesh is known as the whitewater rafting capital of India. The exhilarating experience of 12 rapids over a distance of 36 kilometers draws many sports enthusiasts to the place. I made a mental note to return one day without aunt Jyotsna, to enjoy the rafting experience.

Across the bridge, I found a host of small hotels where foreigners flocked together. One of them advertised a German bakery while a restaurant boasted of Israeli cuisine along with the usual Chinese stuff. Scores of shops selling rudraksha and other semi-precious stones, icons, rosaries, spiritual books and

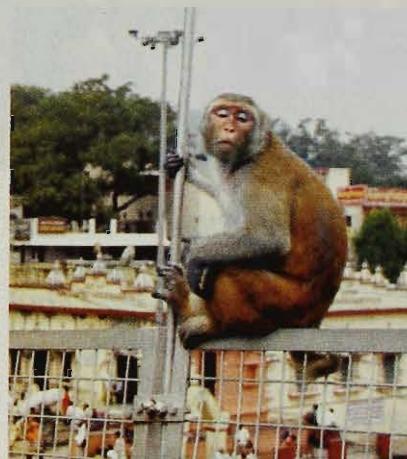
music lined the narrow streets. Surprisingly, I came across some of the best spiritual music CDs in the tiny shop under a hotel. Rishikesh abounds in institutes that impart lessons in yoga, meditation, and guarantee a one way ticket to heaven. That explains the hordes of foreigners who stay in the hotels to do their bit for the soul.

We trudged a kilometre down towards the Ram Jhoola which is a twin of the Laxman Jhoola. The ashrams and dharamshalas lining the bank near the Ram Jhoola are succour for the thousand pilgrims that make their way each day to keep their date with the almighty. My rumbling stomach led me to the famous 'Chotiwala' restaurant which provides some of the best dosas in the region. While my aunt drowned herself in a glassful of flavoured 'lassi' I chomped through a huge dosa and some vadas.

The day had passed too soon for me. It was dusk and time for the famous 'arti' of Rishikesh. We ran towards the Geeta Bhawan and Parmartha Niketan, which are famed for their rendering of bhajans. The mellifluous voice of the singers and the chanting of Sanskrit verses by small children melded with the flow of the Ganges, evoking strong spiritual sentiments in my heart. I strived to surreptitiously wipe away a tear that had strayed down my cheek but then I found almost everyone displaying their tears without embarrassment and let mine flow too. It must have cleansed my soul for I came back a much mellowed person.

I do not know whether the Gateway to Heaven will open up for me but I do know that some of my cynicism has dissolved after the trip to Rishikesh. The profound moment of truth did tantalise me for a moment as I sat quietly by the gently flowing Ganges in the twilight of a rather hectic day. ■

Twenty four hours and a dozen temples later we were on our way to Rishikesh, the famous sanctuary of saints and sages. Situated on the right bank of the glorious Ganga and surrounded on three sides by Himalayan ranges, it is a picturesque place. As we alighted from the rashly driven Sumo that had transported us to the place, I noticed the Kailashanand Mission Trust, a thirteen storey temple located right next to the famous Laxman Jhoola and while my religious relative paid her respects to the various gods in the temple, I stood on the suspension bridge, admiring the scenic panorama around me. A couple of rafting vessels



DON'T MISS



The food at 'Chotiwala' and the evening arti at Parmartha Niketan. A few quiet moments on the ghats in the evening can alter the entire psyche. Try it!

WHAT YOU CAN BUY

Buy the rudrakshas and semi precious stones at your own risk. I would suggest buying spiritual music and books, because I found a real good collection of them there.



Madhurima Mitra / Allahabad

AS *SLUMDOG Millionaire* creates a sensation world-over, pride of place must go to Allahabad, the Sangam city, as Indian diplomat Vikas Swaroop who authored the book *Q & A* which inspired the movie hails from Allahabad. He is the son of Vinod Swaroop, a senior lawyer of Allahabad High Court and Indira. He did his schooling from Boys High School, after which he graduated from Allahabad University. In 1985, Vikas was selected for the Indian Police Service (IPS) and next year for the Indian Foreign Service (IFS).

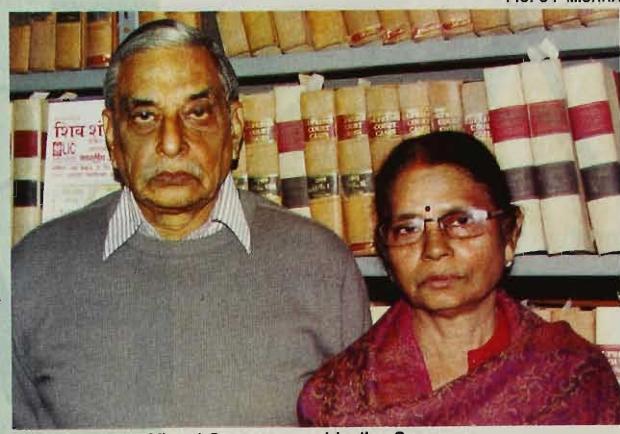
Now posted as deputy high commissioner in Pretoria, the administrative capital of South Africa, Vikas is basking in the fame and popularity of his book. His wife Aparna is a painter, his two sons Aditya and Varun are studying in class 10 and 8 at the American School.

Vikas took to writing in 2003 when he was transferred from London but had to stay on for three more months alone while his family returned to India. As his mother Indira relates, "It was when the famous reality show *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, hosted by Amitabh Bachchan was making waves. The idea struck Vikas of writing a book on the life of an inmate of an orphanage who makes a fortune through the quiz show."

In his free time, Vikas penned the first four chapters of his book and approached an agent of leading publisher Random House UK, to narrate the story idea. The concept immediately struck them and they gave it their green signal. The publisher signed a contract with Vikas for two books. The novel was completed and

'Vikas was an exceptionally bright student from his school days, an outstanding orator, for which he won many prizes'

Vikas Swaroop's parents share some lesser-known anecdotes about their son, the celebrated author of Q & A



Vikas' parents Vinod Swaroop and Indira Swaroop

'His book is much better than the movie'

published in 2005. It received widespread acclaim upon its release, was acknowledged as a bestseller and was published in 35 different languages – the Hindi translation is named *Kaun Banega Arabpati*. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) bought the movie rights of the book from him. The film was named *Slumdog Millionaire*.

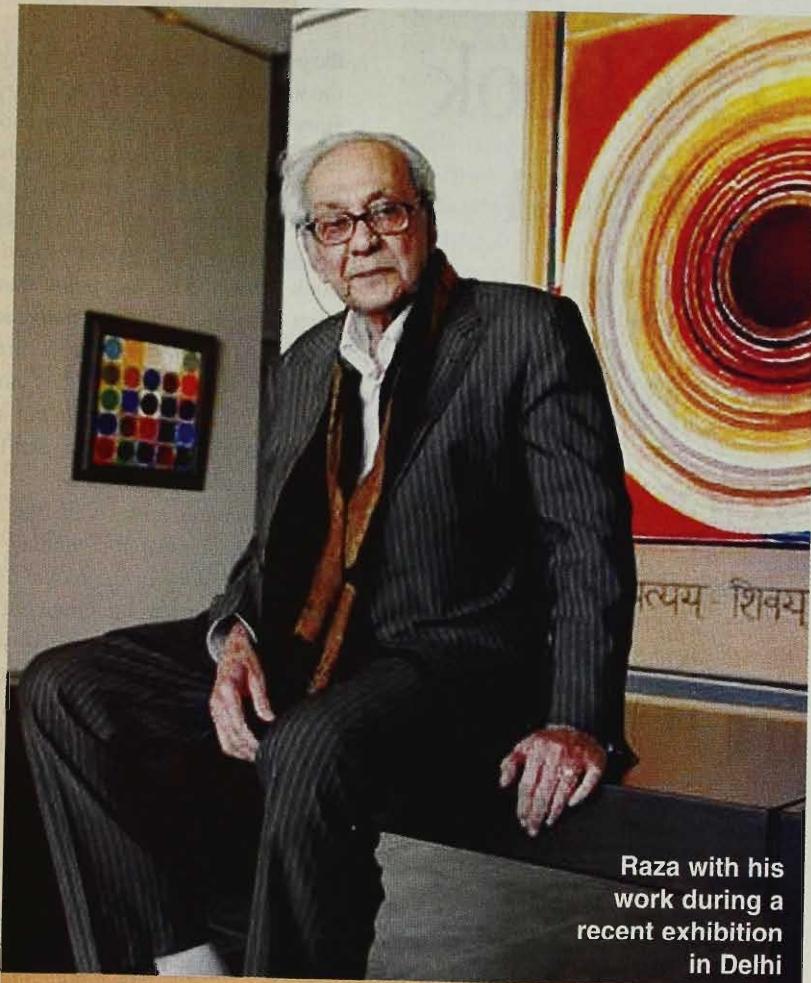
Why does the protagonist in *Q & A* have an impeccably secular and gimmicky name Ram Mohammed Thomas? The author's father explains, "A boy is picked up from the garbage by a priest and is brought up in the slums of Mumbai. He was named Ram Mohammed Thomas, as a controversy arose among the slum residents regarding his caste: some said he is a Hindu, others Muslim, while others said he is a Christian." Indira, the proud mother of

the prolific writer, is not very happy about the way the central characters, names and story have been changed in the movie by the script writer from the original book of her son. She insists, "Vikas' book is much better than the movie. The theme is intact but questions have been changed." The book underscores the point that even slum dwellers feel hope, motivation and optimism. Both the parents are very proud of their son, who has not only received recognition in India but all over the world with his bestseller - and that too before the movie was made.

The prologue opens with the line "I have been arrested for winning a quiz show." The story in the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* narrates the brutal but inspiring story of Jamal Malik, an 18-year-old orphan boy from the underbelly of Mumbai, working as a waiter in a restaurant, who is on the show and is a question away from winning the Rs 20 million jackpot. Astonished by the slum dweller's knowledge and suspicious of his integrity, the police arrest him and give him the third degree. Vikas Swaroop's second book *Six Suspects* was released in 2008, thereby establishing him as a reputed writer. His mother is not surprised. As she puts it, "Vikas was an exceptionally bright student from his school days, an outstanding orator, for which he won many prizes. Earlier, he never wrote anything as such except his debate speeches in school but he was always creative and wrote small skits and plays."

PIC: C P MISHRA

ART OF FAKES



'At 86, I think this could have been the last thing I wanted to do, to open an exhibition of my own fake paintings'

— S H Raza, Senior Artist

Ever since art became an investment, the duping game has been rampant. It is very difficult to differentiate between the fake and the real.

VIRESH VERMA reports

RIght now, India's art world is abuzz with a strange forgery case. S.H. Raza, one of the country's foremost artists, inaugurated an exhibition of his paintings in Delhi -- only to discover that most were fakes. Raza, who is based in Paris, had contributed some drawings to the show at the Dhoomimal Gallery while the gallery had borrowed about 30 more paintings that were supposedly his early works from his nephew Z H Zafari.

Raza is now filing a law suit against both his nephew and the gallery. He is very hurt about the incident. "It was on the opening evening of the exhibition. When I went looking around, I was stunned to see that almost all the paintings were fakes. To my utter disbelief, they had my signature also. At 86, I think this could have been the last thing I wanted to do, to open an exhibition of my own fake paintings", avers the mas-

ter of Indian contemporary art.

But the tale of fakes is not new for the art world. Established art galleries and even big auction houses like Christie's and Sotheby's have fallen victim to the blight of fakes. Established museums have also fallen in this trap despite sourcing their art from well-known connoisseurs of art who have either used their exalted status to betray the artist or had themselves been duped.

Asserts noted art critic Uma Nair, "Fakes have always been there. You have fakes of Husain, Ram Kumar, Raza and many others being sold here and there. But one thing we need to understand is that till the time we have a market for fakes there would be fake art works. There's a difference between buying a signature and buying an art work, similarly as there's a difference between a collector and a buyer. There are more buyers who are only interested in buying signature and these days people have unaccounted money to invest in art."

Uma adds, "We must realise that art is



'There's definitely a flourishing market for the replicas of all big artists of the art world'

Sunaina Anand,
Art Alive Gallery

not a commodity. This entire art boom has made it like a commodity. Work of art should be acquired because you love it and not because your neighbour has it. But if you have a taste for what is original, you'll never buy a fake. There are buyers who just want to buy tags, for them it's like buying a copy of a Gucci or a Louis Vuitton bag."

With more and more fake pieces of art seeping in the art market, artists, curators and connoisseurs recommend different measures to control fakes in future. Quips Sunaina Anand who

runs the Delhi based Art Alive Gallery, "I feel it's very difficult to eradicate the problem of fakes but yes definitely we can have a control over it. But this can only be done when we organise this sector. The artist should keep a database of his works and maintain a record."

There's also a flourishing market of the replicas of all big artists of the art world which are being sold in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar and other markets - but customers know these are replicas. But a person coming to a gallery to buy art thinks he will get authentic work."

There are two kinds of fakes available in the market: one is in the form of the forgeries of renowned or less known pieces, and the other is the attempt to mimic the style of a particular artist. With both cases, it is unfamiliarity with the composition of a particular artist that does the trick. Perhaps a third party in the form of an expert or an agent could have helped the buyers get only original art works.

Art curator Ina Puri has some suggestions about how to tackle the crime. "I

INTERVIEW ■
ASHOK VAJPEYI,
chairman, Lalit Kala Akademi



'Artists should sue fakers'

He has taken a few steps which art circles are applauding

Q. Fake art works are on a rise?

A. They are on a rise since there has been a growth of the art market in India and in the international market for Indian art.

Q. Do people actually mind buying fake art works?

A. There are careless and uninformed people who want to have good art at low price.

Q. What is the major objective of establishing a national register?

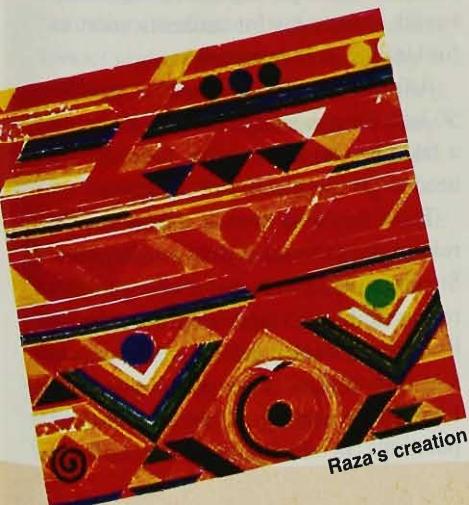
A. The register is made to create an authentic publicly accessible permanent record of any artist done in a particular year with all necessary details like images etc.

Q. What do you think the artist should do to avoid fakes?

A. They should keep a detailed record of their own work and register it and take legal action against those who fake it. Most artists don't take any action as they avoid getting into trouble.

Q. How do you see the recent incident that happened to an artist like S H Raza?

A. Fakes are usually made from the originals -- but those were from works which didn't exist. So actually they were original fakes. It was very distressing. I feel the gallery should have consulted someone senior who is an authority on Raza's work and has seen it over the years. ■



Raza's creation

Save YOURSELF

- ▼ Always buy from a reputed gallery
- ▼ Trace the origin, signature, year etc through published catalogues
- ▼ Always get an authentication certificate from the concerned gallery
- ▼ Before making up your mind, try to trace the trajectory of the particular work; where was it exhibited first and who were the former owners?
- ▼ If you are buying from an art dealer, consult experts before you decide. Here too verify the source of the work and reputation of the dealer
- ▼ If it is a contemporary work of art, try to cross-check it with the artist
- ▼ Double-check whether a similar work is in circulation or not
- ▼ Compare the style, time and available literature on the particular work of art
- ▼ Artists say even you would get a fake authentication certificate. So always consult the expert
- ▼ Before you decide to buy any work, do a detailed research on the history of that artist.

strongly feel that we need to share information with the people involved in art. Like whenever we come across any such fake we need to put it on some website so that it's immediately identified and necessary action can be taken. Another thing is that as we all are working in an independent capacity, it's fantastic that Ashok Vajpeyi has thought of the national register which we always wanted to have so that the art world is structured. If a body like Lalit Kala Akademi is taking this crucial issue then it's very good. I also feel that we need to have strict copy-

prominent among them is the greed among artists who have now suddenly become big and were no one till few years back. I think the artist is also responsible for his fakes. Like for instance take Raza. Now Raza has been painting for several years now. But initially none of these artists have kept a record of their paintings and signatures too undergo a change with every passing year. Now it's for the new artists to learn a lesson from these things and try to authenticate their works."

But does a collector mind buying



Kundu with
designer duo
Rahul - Gunjan

'Confirm with the artists before buying an artwork selling in their name'

— Nupur Kundu, artist

right laws." (see box)

But collectors have a different perspective towards this issue. A renowned collector of art works in India is the former Samajwadi Party secretary Amitabh Adhar who has a huge collection of art works from all over the world. Says Amitabh, "There are many reasons behind the fake art market and the

fakes? Answers Amitabh, "I'm sure someone who's paying whopping money would always go for authentication as for him it's an investment."

Affirms Uma, "If someone has paid Rs 50 lakh for a painting comes to know it's a fake, he can take you to court. So we need to get our machinery intact first."

There has also been a debate on the role of art galleries in this crucial issue. Sunaina Anand feels that it's the gallery's responsibility to check what it hangs on its walls. "I think a gallery has an important role to play in keeping a check on fakes. One who goes to look around paintings in the gallery has faith in

Uma with
Paresh
Maity's
painting



'Integrity and ethics are much more important than making money and the gallery owners need to understand it'

— Uma Nair, art critic

what's been showcased. So the gallery has a huge responsibility. It should ensure authenticity of what's hanging on its walls", says Anand.

Integrity and ethics are much more important than making money and the gallery owners need to understand it. Says Uma, "We are still a very nascent market and are very young as compared to the west. We haven't even touched the tip of the iceberg so there's still a long way to go." Veteran artist Nupur Kundu feels that a serious collector should also contact senior critics before investing in art work. "Buyers and gallery owners must confirm with the artist before buying an artwork being sold in their name", says Kundu.

Till a proper system is in place, the blame game will be played. Many suspect that galleries are involved in under-handed dealings. Others feel the fake art mart is led by brokers who skirt round the usual practice of selling art through galleries. And fakes continue to change hands in the market. ■

CONCERN

JOHNY ML

Real faking and faking real



COUNTERFEITS EXIST so long as the originals hold a peculiarly high value. When counterfeiting is done with an intention to forward a critique, it is inoffensive. But when faking is done consciously to dupe the consumer, it is a punishable offense.

The fake industry is a very complex maze. Most often fakes of the master artists are made and pushed into the market. There are two reasons for it. Before art became a highly competitive professional field, artists never used to document their works properly. Many master artists ran guild systems where apprentices painted and sculpted works for the master. In both these cases, authenticating a work becomes very difficult.

Comments of critics, family members of the artist, biographer of the artist (if there is one), museum experts and curators who have extensively worked on a particular artist, someone who has closely worked with the artist and available literature on the artist and his works are the only possible sources of authenticating a work of art. When these sources are absent, it becomes next to impossible to discern a fake from the original.

However, the advent of scientific methods like carbon dating employed in the preservation, conservation and authentication help considerably to keep fakes from the market circuit. It is said that even old paintings done by some unknown artists who were contemporary to a master artist, are purchased by the fake makers and those canvases are used for faking the works in order to dupe the scientific procedures that depend on the 'age' of the materials used in the production of a work of art. Sometimes the fakes are caught in act when the poor fakers re-create a master's work without considering

the 'age' factor.

At times, artists themselves, even if they come to know that their fakes are doing rounds, refuse to accept them as fakes for the backlash that even their original would face, if they openly accept that their fakes are there. I had couple of personal experiences in which the artists refused to acknowledge their fakes fearing backlash. The living contemporary artists, whose works are properly documented, catalogued and the market movements are constantly traced and scrutinized, are comparatively safe from faking thanks to the prescribed reasons.

It is important to have different sets of experts committees working from the national and regional levels, which could

The advent of scientific methods like carbon dating employed in the preservation and authentication help to keep fakes from the market circuit

include gallerists, curators, critics, writers, conservationists, artist's family members, biographers, academicians, collectors, buyers and museum personalities. These committees could function as nodal agencies of the responsible bodies like Lalit Kala Akademi and National Gallery of Modern Art. Scientific expertise also could be invited in this regards. Above all, the galleries and other players in the market along with the artists bring in more professionalism to the field. And as I said in one of my earlier articles, it is high time that the artists set up their Estates. Faking is now under normal criminal code of our law. Sub-clauses should be built into this law so that faking of art could be dealt with punitive action. ■

(Johny ML is a senior art critic)



All sorts of spicy stories are woven around the lives of sex workers, overlooking the fact that their precarious life is replete with real dangers. Nalini Jameela in her autobiography brings out the minuscule pleasures and numerous pains that are a part and parcel of their lives

Aditya Sharma

HERE IS no dearth of evocative stories about sex workers that have been turned into mesmerizing films and novels. However, it is debatable how accurate the portrayal of the life of a sex worker can get in literature and on celluloid. Writers and filmmakers are seldom averse to bending facts to further the agenda of their own creativity. In some flight of fancy you may have sex workers portrayed as promiscuous only interested in making money by selling their body, but at other times these women are presented as victimized souls – quite often 'too good to be true'.

It is largely due to the influence of popular movies and novels that society

‘Horrifying events are part of a sex

has missed out on the stark realities that surround the lives of such women. To set the record straight, what was needed is a book or a film by someone who has herself been a sex worker. And that is what Nalini Jameela's book is all about. The book's title – *The autobiography of a sex worker* – is self-explanatory, and once you read it, several misconceptions related to a sex worker's life are removed instantly.

There is no room for unrealistic portrayal within the pages of this book, which is all about dishing out the truth in cold clear prose. In a sense, Nalini Jameela seems to have conducted a sting operation on herself while writing this book. She got initiated into sex trade after the death of her first husband, when her mother-in-law began demand-

ing money from her to raise her children. After some years Nalini married again, this time to Koyakka, a Muslim, who had been married and separated twice. Nalini bore a daughter to him, but the birth of a child failed to keep them together and the marriage ended in a spate of acrimony. Nalini was back to square one, where sex trade was once again her way of life.

Nalini married again and this time her marriage lasted some years, but eventually this too fell through. Was Nalini too independent-minded to stick to one husband? To my pointed question, Nalini said, "I have always believed that there should be mutual respect in a marriage, and if that is lacking what's the use of sticking to it. My third marriage lasted

A stage actor would take her to a hotel, where he had told the staff that Nalini was his wife who was mentally disturbed and they had come to town. They garnered lots of sympathy from the hotel staff

her and became a regular client. He would take her to a hotel where he had told the staff that Nalini was his wife who was mentally disturbed and they had come to town to get some treatment. That sort of story made it possible for them to garner lots of sympathy from the hotel staff.

In another episode Nalini talks about an affectionate sales manager who became quite

enamoured with her. One day, when Nalini had washed her only set of clothes, and sat draped in a bedsheets, the police raided the premises. "I could have been arrested stark naked," Nalini writes. However, the salesman kept his wits about him, and managed to convince the policeman that his wife



■ EXCERPTS

It was a funny situation. Both the circle inspector and the police driver with him were my clients. Both these men were helpless. They couldn't come to my aid. These two experiences – of falling into a well and of seeing how people could be helpless to assist someone they felt for – stand entwined in my mind.



Everyone wanted me. Their problem was that I had a baby. Koyakka, who had once agreed to take care of the baby, was on the verge of saying that the baby could be cared for in an orphanage. Velayudhan would bring me food and clothes when he came to see me; but nothing for the baby.

worker's life'

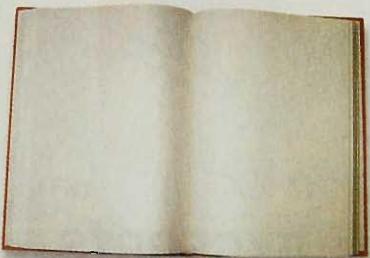
- BUDHA CHANDRA



for over 12 years, but after that my husband became totally indifferent to me. I feel that marriage for me has been a problematic institution. Society may treat sex workers indifferently but at times I feel our situation is better than those housewives who live all their life on the whims of their husbands."

In a communally sensitive country like India, Nalini is often asked about how she happened to acquire a name that has connotations of both Hindu and Muslim identities. She says, "I was born as a Hindu, but when I got married to a Muslim I changed my name to Jameela. However, many people knew me as Nalini so I decided to keep both the names!"

In the book Nalini talks about an episode where a stage actor took fancy to



EXCERPTS

After I became a sex worker, I used to go to meet my mother in secret. She would never accept any money I offered her. In her mind, the money earned from sex work was saturated with sin.



In earlier times, clients liked us to act like wives. They'd want us to wash their towel. Hand them the soap, walk behind them lugging their suitcase.

(Nalini) was fast asleep and the slightest sound would make matters worse!

The thing is that a sex workers life is full of danger not just from policemen but also from hooligans. There were quite a few times when Nalini escaped certain death. Once, while she was travelling in an autorickshaw, she found herself being chased by two motorcyclists. So to avoid a confrontation with the two ruffians, which could attract policemen, she got down from the auto and accompanied the two men. Later she found that they were sadists, who could kill someone just for the heck of it. They took Nalini to a building, under construction and had sex with her, and began provoking her. Somehow Nalini kept her cool and managed to escape from their clutches.

In another spine chilling instance, Nalini recounts how she escaped a gang rape by 17 men by keeping her pres-

sand, hide herself in the pit, cover herself with the sand and escape an excruciating trauma can only be attributed to her destiny and hyperactive instincts for survival!

In the book such episodes are described in a rather light vein. But Nalini avers that such horrifying events form part and parcel of any sex worker's life. "Prostitution should be legalized and that would do away with several ills plaguing the hapless women who are in this trade. By legalizing I mean that when two people agree to have sex, they should not be prosecuted by law."

Nalini doesn't feel that sex workers emotionally blackmail men who visit them. "We know that some men have this tendency of falling in love, particularly if they are not loved by their near and dear ones. However, we take care to keep a psychological distance with the men we meet. Sex workers are advised that they should avoid making love to the same man several times, as it may lead to emotional attachments. However it cannot be denied that at times we develop an emotional bond with our clients."

But what is the nature of relationship between a sex worker and her client. Is it exploitative in nature? Nalini doesn't like these words as she fumes: "The relationship between a client and prostitute is that of a 'give and take', similar to that of a nurse. Just as a nurse takes care of her patients, we take care of our clients. Our work is therefore a combination of both a nurse and a sex worker."

Nalini rubbishes the stereotyped image that people have about sex workers in their minds. We do not get to know the real life of a sex worker because prostitution is illegal in India and everything is kept under wraps. "The instances of men falling in love with sex workers and rescuing them are more a creation of our films than what happens in reality. When a client goes to a prostitute he is not seeking to fall in love but a physical pleasure that is of a short duration," she remarks. ■



Nalini avers that such horrifying events form part and parcel of any sex worker's life. She doesn't feel that sex workers emotionally blackmail men who visit them

ence of mind. One day she was tricked by an auto-rickshaw driver, who took her to an isolated place in the middle of the night. Finding herself alone in a coconut garden, she realized that danger was lurking just around the corner. What made her dig

REFLECTIONS

UDAY TARRA NAYAR

God's favourite son

HAVE BEEN wondering what must be going on in Allah Rakha Rahman's simple home in Chennai. How happy his mom, sister and wife must be with all the attention he's getting now which is certainly more than ever before. Fame and recognition are not new to Rahman. This is the reason why he's so cool and unaffected when excited television journalists thrust the microphone before him to answer their banal questions about "how he's feeling" about all the attention his music score for *Slumdog Millionaire* is getting him. He has been giving his characteristic humble reply: "God is very kind to me."

Sometime in late 1980s I recall watching the happy expression on the face of Rajnikant when Rahman's name was announced at an awards function in Chennai. I happened to be seated beside Rajnikant's wife Lata who was equally delighted when the young Rahman, clad in a white kurta-pyjama, walked to the dais to receive the award. "He is very gifted and has a sound music sense. A day will come when he will make us all feel proud that he belongs to our country.

Just like Pandit Ravi Shankar did for us," Rajnikant told me.

Rahman did not wait to meet the media after the awards. He just disappeared. I spotted him leaving the venue quickly with his mother. I got to know about Rahman's background from my friends in the media at the party following the event. I heard with rapt attention the story of his conversion to Islam and about his profound love for music inspired by his father who had had a close association with Salil Chaudhary and Naushad etc.

Some years later when he became the cynosure of Bollywood's eyes with his music score for *Roja*, followed by *Bombay*, I met him again at a prestigious awards ceremony. I quietly recalled Rajnikant's prophetic words. He had changed visibly - he was looking confident and mature, his individuality

was striking, his curly hair and his casual attire had become his personal fashion statements. When he arrived at the venue, photographers and reporters surrounded him and tumbled over each other to ask the all-important question: "How are you feeling today?" He smiled mysteriously and said: "God is great."

By the time movies like *Dil Se...*, *Taal*, 1947 *The Earth*, *Fiza* etc took the Hindi film music by storm, he had attained the stature of a legend in the making. While Subhash Ghai complained good humouredly about the youthful maestro's habit of staying awake at night to create his priceless tunes, Rajkumar Santoshi spoke gleefully about the same habit. "He is a night bird. It suits me as I too like to work in the night," Santoshi

revealed chirpily to the media.

When Rahman tied the knot with his charming, unobtrusive wife Saira, it made news. The news angle was that his original name was Dilip (before he converted to Islam and acquired the name Allah Rakha Rahman) and he had married a beautiful girl named



***When he arrived
at the venue,
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"How are you
feeling today?"
He smiled
mysteriously and
said: "God is great"***

Saira. The hype was so high that Dilip Kumar and Saira Banu were surprised one evening when Rahman called to ask if he could drop in at their bungalow to visit them respectfully and introduce his wife Saira who admired both of them. Needless to say the thespian and his wife met the newly-wed Dilip and Saira very warmly and blessed them.

Nothing has changed about Rahman even now when he is hailed as a world famous maestro. He continues to sport his unaffected smile and say "God is great" when asked to express his feelings about his achievement on any occasion. He still drives to Haji Ali Dargah straight from the airport whenever he lands in Mumbai even for a day's halt. No wonder he's one of God's favourite sons. ■

LONG LIVE TINTIN!

The world's most famous reporter is 80 now and is still immune to time, like all archetypal characters



Shoma A Chatterji

THE BEST thing about cartoon characters is that they never age. They do not have to bother about hair dyes or reading glasses, about rheumatism, hypertension or diabetes. Their gait remains the same, and so do their memory and their intelligence. They do not need facials and creams to retain the smoothness of their skins. Politically, they need not contest elections to seek a popular mandate. They are evergreen and their fans span three generations within the same family.

Tintin is an all-time hero among his peers ranging from Mickey Mouse to Superman to Batman and Phantom. He turned 80 on January 10, 2009. Tintin first appeared in Le Vingtième Siècle newspaper on 10 January 1929 and has sold millions of copies since. He has gone on 23 adventures. Tintin's popularity has spanned generations and national borders. His birthday is celebrated across the world. But he still looks the same with his tuft of curl raised above a thinly veiled egg-shaped head, with Snowy in tow.

More than 3 million copies of Tintin



The late French President Charles De Gaulle once said, 'Deep down, my only international rival is Tintin'

adventures are sold each year across 50 countries, in 58 languages. There have been films, TV series, videos and toys. These adventures have seen the boy with the tuft of blond hair confront mad scientists, spies and villains of all kinds across the globe and even on the moon. He and his dog, Snowy, and his friend Captain Haddock and police officers Thomson and Thompson, travel the world investigating crimes, tracking kidnappers, and looking for hidden treasures.

Though he is a Belgian, Tintin is hugely popular in France. The late French President Charles De Gaulle once said, "Deep down, my only international rival is Tintin". So seriously is Tintin taken in France that in December 1998, the National Assembly conducted a debate entitled "Tintin: Is he from the Left or from the Right?" During his 70th birthday celebrations, at a four-hour sale in Paris, collectors paid up to \$25,000 for original sketches and around \$30,000 for early books of his adventures, raising more than \$300,000 from the sale. A black and white sketch estimated to fetch \$17,000 went for \$24,000, and an early signed and numbered cartoon book sold for \$16,000. One of Tintin's travels took him to the moon in a red and white checked rocket, a model of which went for \$800 at the Paris sale.

Tintin joined the select group of people such as European royals, the Pope and Mozart -- to be featured on euro coins. The honour of his very own silver euro coin in his native Belgium marked his 75th birthday. The commemorative 10-euro coins feature Tintin with his dog Snowy on one side, and a map of Europe on the other. A Royal Belgian Mint spokesman said the demand for the 50,000 Tintin coins, on sale for 31 euros each, was very high.

Tintin's first adventure saw him tackle the Communist regime in the USSR in Tintin in the Land of the Soviets. Written in the 1920s -- a time when Europe felt threatened by Communism, it was created for an anti-Communist church-run newspaper. The Russians are depicted in an unfair way. Herge, Tintin's famous creator, had to apologise for this bias later. Despite this weak-

ness, Tintin in the Land of the Soviets offers wonderful adventure. Subsequent stories saw him battle drug dealers, travel to the moon and discover a lost Inca tribe. But the brave reporter also had to battle criticism for his alleged racist portrayal of Africans by some, and when Herge continued printing during the Nazi occupation of Belgium, his writing raised accusations of collaboration.

Later a political row over the adventures of Tintin in Tibet was settled in 2002. The furore sparked off when the book was published in China in 2001 under the title Tintin in Chinese Tibet. The change from the original title, Tintin in Tibet, led to protests by the widow of Tintin's creator, Herge, and the book had to be withdrawn from sale. It was relaunched under its original title in Beijing in July 2002 - the 95th anniversary of Herge's birth - as part of a new Chinese-language Tintin collection. The new editions are more closely modeled on the originals, using similar layout and style. Tintin went to China in The Blue Lotus, in 1936. In that book, he battled with Japanese-funded opium smugglers, aided by a young Chinese called Chang.

The beauty of the drawings of the classic Tintin series is another major reason for Tintin's timeless appeal. The rounded, clear lines have inspired artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, who once said: "Herge has influenced my work in the same way as Walt Disney. For me, Herge was more than a comic strip artist."

"No gale or storm at sea ever managed to decompose that triumphant tuft of hair. The checks on his plus fours -- particularly in the early black-and-white newspaper versions, later redesigned in colour when the series was reissued in book form -- are an equally immovable grid, as abstract as one of Mondrian's geometrical patterns," writes Peter Conrad. He is the same ageless creature he always was. He holds out the promise of a permanent childhood; he represents a paradise that can be regained merely by wishing for it. Herge, his creator, saw no reason to grow up: remembering the Red Indian games he played when he joined one of Baden-Powell's troupes in 1919. He said: "I never ceased to be a Boy Scout." ■

RETAKE

NEENA KUMAR

Casting away the real cast

IT ALMOST certain that the film *Slumdog Millionaire* is going to win some of the Oscars it has been nominated for. But will the real slum dogs who had acted in the movie and contributed to the two-third of its footage, be a part of the team attending it? Will they be there for the post-Oscar celebrations? Going by the prize-earning journey so far by the film's team, it's easy to guess that they won't be there. But their photographs will certainly be a part of the ceremony!

So, is it a case of use and throw? Well, one can't put any other word to it. There have been many critics of the pro-

abroad. They were only seen in the Indian launch of the movie. The reason is simple: just cash in on them!

The movie is a great success in the US and the UK and it's natural to think that these actors should have been included in the team like Dev Patel and Freida Pinto, who play the adolescent Jamal and his love interest. The child actors, on whom the entire movie revolves, acted in that part of the movie, which has made *Slumdog Millionaire* what it is today. Ask any one here or abroad and they will associate the *Slumdog Millionaire* with the slums and not the game show, which is only the cli-

max of the movie. Had it not been for the presence of these actors who put in real flavour of the slums into the movie, there might not have been so much recognition for the movie.

But is it a valid reason to discard them? Is it not the responsibility of the producers to groom them to be presentable enough to attend the shows abroad, like they groomed them to act in the first place!



ducers and directors of the movie for selling India's poverty to the western audience. Many of us didn't agree to it. Then it was being called a foreign film and here also we were inclined to call it an Indian film. But the sheer audacity of the *Slumdog* team in casting away the child actors who played the young Jamal and the rest of the gang and whose journey forms the first two acts of the movie, is something that needs great condemnation. They were nowhere to be seen in the Golden Globe awards, not in the Bafta awards, which were held

child actors are not so refined in their appearance and behaviour as the England bred Dev Patel or the convent educated Pinto. But is it a valid reason to discard them? Is it not the responsibility of the producers to groom them to be presentable enough to attend the shows abroad, like they groomed them to act in the first place! And if not, then they should accept that they are not as sensitive about Mumbai's slums as they have been harping about and they just made a movie on slums for profit (which is perfectly alright), period. ■

'I NEVER WENT TO ACTING SCHOOL'



With a stellar performance in Fashion, deadly kicks in Drona, elevated fun quotient in Dostana and boyfriend backup in Love Story 2050, the year 2008 definitely belonged to Priyanka Chopra. In a freewheeling tête-à-tête with Subhash K Jha she lets off steam on the year that was

Q. A lot is being said about how different you look. Is it plastic surgery?

A. It's just the confidence that comes from finding acceptance. When you're accepted you become more comfortable in your space. And that shows in your personality. Every actor goes through this metamorphosis and has shown it in the way he or she looks. Why am I being singled out? I've only now begun to understand camera angles. I know which side of my face and physique to present to the camera within the range of character.

Q. When did this metamorphosis happen?

A. I think I grew conscious of my best angles and ability during *Drona*. I focused on looking like two different characters in *Love Story 2050*. *Drona*, *Fashion*, *Dostana* and *Kaminey* made me realize of my potential.

Q. Did you enjoy working with Shahid Kapoor in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Kaminey*?

A. Oh he's a smashing actor. I've already wrapped up *Kaminey*. Now I'm shooting with Harman in *What's Your Raashee*.

Q. 2008 has been the year of Priyanka Chopra?

A. The fact that my films did well made me happy. Every time my film flops my heart is broken. Whether it was *Love*

Story 2050 or *Drona* I have worked so hard on every project. I hate it when people say I've sleepwalked through a film. I've never had the chance to go to acting school. I've learnt everything I know, about acting, on the job. It took me a long time to come into my own. In 2008 I finally began to understand the craft of acting. I watch people like Kay Kay Menon and Jayaji on the sets and I feel I'm still taking baby steps.

Q. Do you feel the change towards you within the industry?

A. The industry was never unkind even when my films didn't do well. I continued getting the chance to work with directors of repute. Yes, the audience did feel let down, and reacted. The effort that goes into my performance shouldn't show on screen. I've just begun to understand cinema.

Q. How different are 'Kaminey and What's Your Raashee from what you've done so far?

A. Oh, very! I seem to be saying that all the time. These are very different films and characters from what I've done so far. I think in 2009 I'll extend my abilities as an actor. When I work with a director I become very possessive of him. I feel the film is mine. And the director is my family. I can call him up at any hour to ask about my character. Every director from Goldie Behl and Tarun Mansukhani to Vishal Sir (Bhardwaj) and Harry Sir (Baweja) has become a friend. But *Kaminey* was very difficult.

Q. Why?

A. It's very real, very middle class. It's not a larger than life character. For the first time I'm playing someone who's so real. It's an electrifying character. To be able to add to the character's costume, language, body language made *Kaminey* a very special challenge. I've also given *Fashion* a piece of my heart.

Q. How different is Harman Baweja between Love Story 2050 and What's Your Raashee?

A. His confidence level has gone up

tremendously. He's going to make heads turn in *Raashee*. Come on, he's just two films old. I took three years to come into my own. He displayed supreme confidence in his two films.

Q. What do you think he has a competition from Imran Khan?

A. I haven't seen his film. But I've heard fantastic things about his performance. There're so many films I've missed.

Q. Kareena says she has no problems with you even if you call her a senior.

A. Kareena and I had great times together. She's a fantastic actor. It's ridiculous to pitch us as rivals. Whenever we meet we've a great time. As for her taking offence to my calling her a senior, she did come into the industry before me. She has a great body of work. And a great body too.

Q. So do you.

A. Fitness is a must these days. Kareena's and my body types are different. Every actor has a six-pack and

every actress is toned. But still our body types are different. As for success and failure, each film comes with its own destiny and an actor is a small part of it.

Q. Were you more relaxed in 2008?

A. I'm only focusing on my work. I'm relieved to have my dad healthy again. My dad is a general surgeon. Both my parents are doctors. And they're running a clinic. It's a multi-facility clinic and it was always there. What is new this year is the revival of the medical community services. They had discontinued that because of my dad's illness. I remember at the age of 10, I used to accompany my parents for medical care in small towns like Rae Bareilly and Lucknow. I used to sit at the registration desk and at the makeshift pharmacy and give out the medicines to the patients. I still do community work. But I don't enjoy talking about it. Now it's just between me and God. But yes, as a celebrity I can lend my name to community forums. But like I said it's too personal. ■

I have worked

so hard on every project.

*I hate it when people
say I've sleepwalked*

through a film



CULTURE CURRY**Musical fest**

SEEHER PRESENTS South Asian Bands Festival '09: a three-day musical extravaganza on February 20-22 featuring 14 popular rock bands from across seven nations. The event highlights the fact that music knows no boundaries and can play a significant role in strengthening people-to-people contact.



Timing: 5 PM onwards

Venue:

Purana Qila, New Delhi



Venue: Habitat Centre, New Delhi

Timing: 7:00am to midnight

Date:

Till Feburay 28

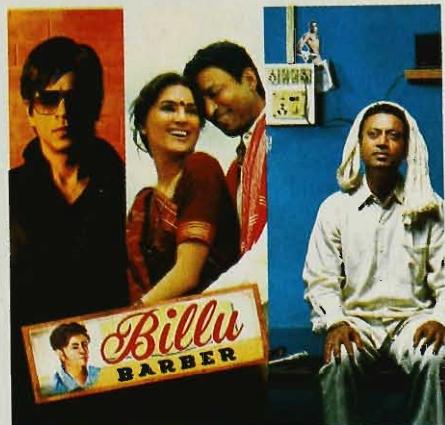
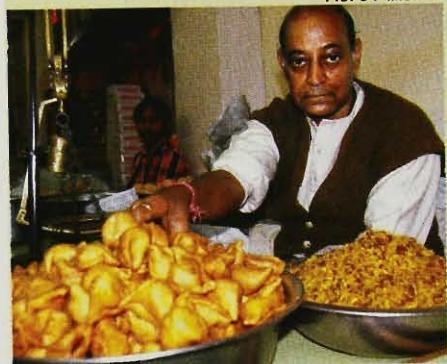
GOURMET**From the US of A**

THE ALL American Diner offers the great American meal experience - waffles, pancakes, eggs, burgers, malts, shakes and coffees in an ambience that's unmistakably reminiscent of the nifty fifties. Featuring a decadent all-day breakfast, the bar too is open all day.

FLAVOURS of INDIA**SPICY STREET**

Today one need not go to five-stars or big restaurants as one get all these foods on roadside counters! And it has the authentic flavours of the spices used. A visit to Loknath in Allahabad will pacify all the palates as we have the famous Hari Ram & Sons, founded in 1890 by Mithulal Purwar, the grandfather of Sri Ram Purwar, who now looks after the shop. Mithulal started by selling 'namkeens' which now has turned into a roaring business that

PIC: C P MISHRA

**WHAT'S SPINNING?**

| | | |
|---|---------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Mar jaani | Billu |
| 2 | Masakkali | Delhi 6 |
| 3 | Emotional atyachaar | Dev D |
| 4 | Aa Dekhein | Aa Dekhein Zara |
| 5 | Delhi meri jaan | Delhi 6 |

ALBUM

THE LATEST from the house of Mystica Music is the album *Devotion*. The album paints the beautiful landscape of longing and yearning with the colours of devotion and love. It is a soulful collection of bhajans of

Meerabai and Tulsidas, sung by the Sharma sisters. These melodic renditions fill the heart with immense peace and bliss.

Devotion
Mystica Music Rs 195/-

enables the proprietors to earn Rs 5,000-10,000 per day. They specialize in all types of 'namkeen' made in pure ghee like *samosa*, *kachauri*, *matri*, *alo ka laccha*, *khatta chana*, *papri*, *masoor*, *saag*, *palak*, *maheen sev*, *bundiya*, *masala kaju*, *dum aloo*, *chips*. The spices or masalas used in *samosa* and *kachauri* are unique and the recipe is known only to the family. These edibles last for months without getting stale, and are quite popular abroad too. Students and professions returning home in evenings don't forget to stop here and have a bite.

– Madhurima Mitra

Loknath**ALLAHABAD**

The numbers 1 to 9 represent the full scope of human characteristics. They are the nine archetypes that, when combined in an endless variety, form the basis of each individual's unique personality in much the same way that just three primal colours form the basis of millions of colours found in this universe.

1 (Born on 1st, 10th, 19th, 28th of any month)

Control your emotions and passions. Avoid controversies for sometime. You may spend money on vehicles or jewellery. You may get some news from abroad related to trade, study or tour. Take care of your health. Spend your time with your family. Treat your kids like friends and try to be close to them at the end of the week. There may be an opportunity to go to any gathering or meeting. There is a possibility of getting back wealth which was blocked.

LUCKY DAYS: Sunday, Saturday

LUCKY DATES: 22nd, 28th

2 (Born on 2nd, 11th, 20th, 29th)

At the end of this month, your health will be good and economic situation will also improve. You will buy land or house. Your wife will cooperate and you will receive gifts from your friends. Your recognition will grow and you grow in all the respects. In the mid of the week, ladies will suffer. There are chances of fights with wife. Your business may also suffer. You will become much focused and there are good indications in the last 2 days of the week. Love affairs will glow and some of you may tie the knot as well.

LUCKY DAYS: Monday, Friday

LUCKY DATES: 23rd, 25th

3 (Born on 3rd, 12th, 21st, 30th)

You will be friend high class people. Your economic situation will improve and your fame will expand. You may benefit from a foreign trip. You will succeed in competitive exams. Due to the presence of unholy planets there are some useless travels on card. You might get injured in an accident. The health of your son will worry you. Promotion will bring new business. Follow religion and do not be a false witness in the court of law.

LUCKY DAYS: Thursday, Friday

LUCKY DATES: 24th

4 (Born on 4th, 13th, 22nd, 31st)

There will be cooperation from ones life partner in this period. Health will be okay. Friends, wife, children etc. will be understanding and appreciative. This is a good week. There will be help from friends. There will be promotion and good reputation. The enemy side will be weak. There will not be peace of mind. There will be fear of disrespect and defamation. It will be good to stay away from disputes. You will succeed in studies and intellectual work. You will get favourable news.

LUCKY DAYS: Sunday, Wednesday, Thursday

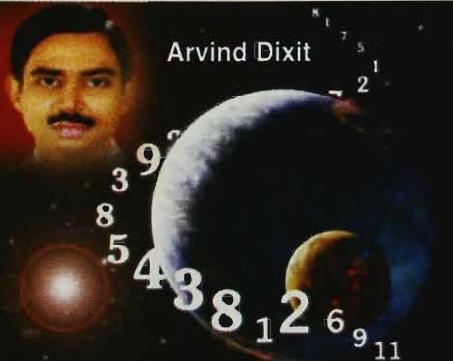
LUCKY DATES: 22nd, 25th, 26th

5 (Born on 5th, 14th or 23rd)

In the beginning of the week misunderstanding with working associates might happen. You will lose your confidence as fear of some elder's ill health will cause mental tension. But in the mid of the week misunderstanding in the recent past will resolve itself. You will be successful in putting together motivation and positive energy. Therefore try and be practical and avoid being emotional and sentimental. As the week would be a demanding one, give little scope to being emotional and sentimental; avoid driving under the influence of intoxication, as possibility of accidents remain.

LUCKY DAYS: Monday

LUCKY DATES: 23rd



YOUR LUCKY COLOUR

FEB-22 "Green" – Understanding, Conceptual, Appealing. Your personal colour reminds you to take care of your own needs as well as the needs of others. Green helps you ground your vision for humanity.

FEB-23 "Blue" – Provocative, Self-assured, Trouble shooter. Your personal colour resonates with vision and expansion. Blue helps you stay loving and open to new ideas and solutions.

FEB-24 "Pink" – Sensitive, Talented, Aesthetic. Your personal colour helps you express your love without becoming too attached. Pink accentuates your beautiful spirit and allows you to enjoy the treasures of life.

FEB-25 "Dark Blue" – Private, Humanitarian Dedicated. Your personal colour connects you with the sweetness of life. Dark blue helps you pursue your dreams in a loving manner.

FEB-26 "Violet" – Kind, Committed, Detailed. Your personal colour lends sensitivity to your strength. Violet helps you experience the depth of understanding and a desire to live life more truthfully.

FEB-27 "Brown" – Endearing, Talented, Fair. Your personal colour gives you the strength necessary to pursue your dreams. Brown supports your physical body with energy and vitality.

FEB-28 "Purple" – Determined, Energetic, Fun-Loving. Your personal colour reminds you to take care of yourself. Purple helps you relax and care.

NOTE: You can incorporate your colour into your life through art, culture, décor, wearing a scarf, eye-shadow, lipstick or you can paint your entire room.

6 (Born on 6th, 15th or 24th)

You should control your tongue this week otherwise you might fall into controversies. You will gain out of hard labour but beware of enemies in the end of the week. There are chances of loss of wealth. There will be some tension. Children could also trouble. Stalled work will be finished. Control your spending because you are likely to spend more.

LUCKY DAYS: Tuesday, Friday

LUCKY DATES: 24th, 27th

7 (Born on 7th, 16th, or 25th)

This week you should avoid internal conflicts and oppositions. You will gain respect and status. You will succeed in the field of business. Your goals related to property, flat etc will be achieved. You will get promotion if you are in job delayed work will be completed. Your sources of income will get delayed but you will gain some wealth with your moral principles in life, you will participate in social activities rivals will be calm. You may have to travel. You expenditure will exceed your income.

LUCKY DAYS: Sunday, Wednesday

LUCKY DATES: 22nd, 25th

8 (Born on 8th, 17th or 26th)

Your trade and commerce will improve but profit will be in the medium range. The plan that you made in the beginning of the week will be completed. You will get in touch with some influential person who will be helpful in future. Your spending will increase and you may find it difficult to maintain the balance. You will have to travel. Keep away from legal conflicts or else you may incur losses. You should work with patience. Your sources of income will grow. There could be unprecedented benefits.

LUCKY DAYS: Sunday, Thursday

LUCKY DATES: 22nd, 26th

9 (Born on 9th, 18th, 27th)

This week your source of income will grow. There are chances of pilgrimage. Your health be good. You will succeed in government jobs and business. Some auspicious ceremony may take place in your house. Children will face lots of trouble during the week. Purchase of land/house/flats is assured. Your employer will be happy with you. Enemies will not be able to cause any harm to you at any cost. Relation with your maternal uncle will be cordial.

LUCKY DAYS: Tuesday, Friday

LUCKY DATES: 24th, 27th

The numerologist is a consultant member, AIN, UK and research member AFA, USA

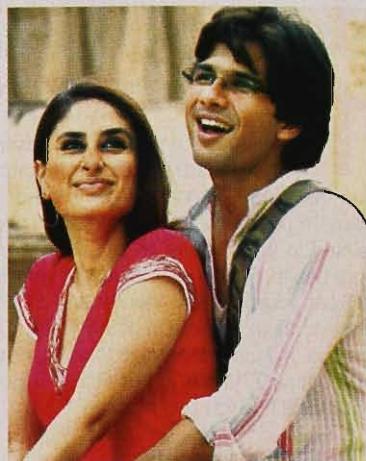
Fashion fray

IT'S YET another year of fashion fiasco. All the efforts of the textile minister and his new fashion body FDPC have proved futile as the fashion fraternity again gears up for two back-to-back fashion weeks. While FDCI would have its fashion week on March 19-24 at a new venue Hotel Eros Intercontinental, FFI would also have its week on the same dates at DLF Emporio in Delhi.



Kareena, Shahid phir milenge

FILMMAKER BONEY Kapoor is all smiles these days. His film *Milenge Milenge* that had been canned for almost two years is all set to release soon. Boney recently confirmed that *Milenge Milenge* is complete and Shahid has dubbed his portions and Kareena has promised to dub her portions very soon. It would be interesting to see them as lovers on screen again.



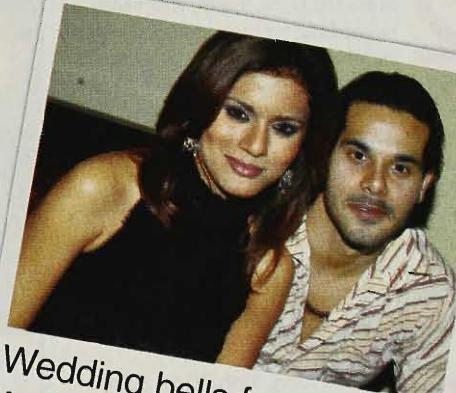
Bips in a Hollywood flick

BIPASHA BASU has been chosen to star opposite Hollywood actor Billy Zane who was seen in films like *Titanic*, *Phantom* and *The Mummy Returns*. And that's not all. If rumours are to be believed then Kareena Kapoor was the initial choice for the same. But Bips seems to have pushed her out. Sources confirm that it's music director Tabun's first production and the film will be a thriller and has been titled *Chaimera*.



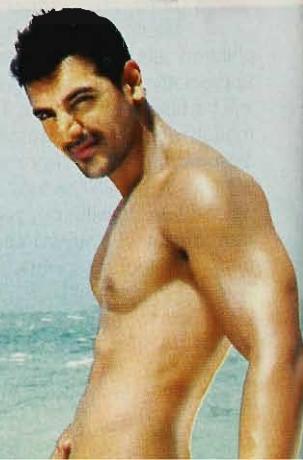
Wedding bells for Amanpreet, Raghav

FINALLY THE D-day has arrived for Delhi's favourite model Amanpreet Wahi and her boy friend Raghav Narula. Amanpreet denied commenting on the guest list but our sources confirmed that it includes many socialites and A-list Bollywood stars who would supposedly grace the big nite on 23rd February. Wishing you luck baby!



John's flick in a fix

IT SEEMS that a John Abraham film only sell when he exposes. Perhaps that's the reason the distributors of his next movie *Aashayein* has filed a case against the producers. It's a question that many are asking as this Nagesh Kukunoor-directed film is being called 'too arty' for a commercial release. Reliance's Big Pictures has filed a case against producers Percept Picture Company and T-Series because they felt the film had not measured up to their expectations.



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