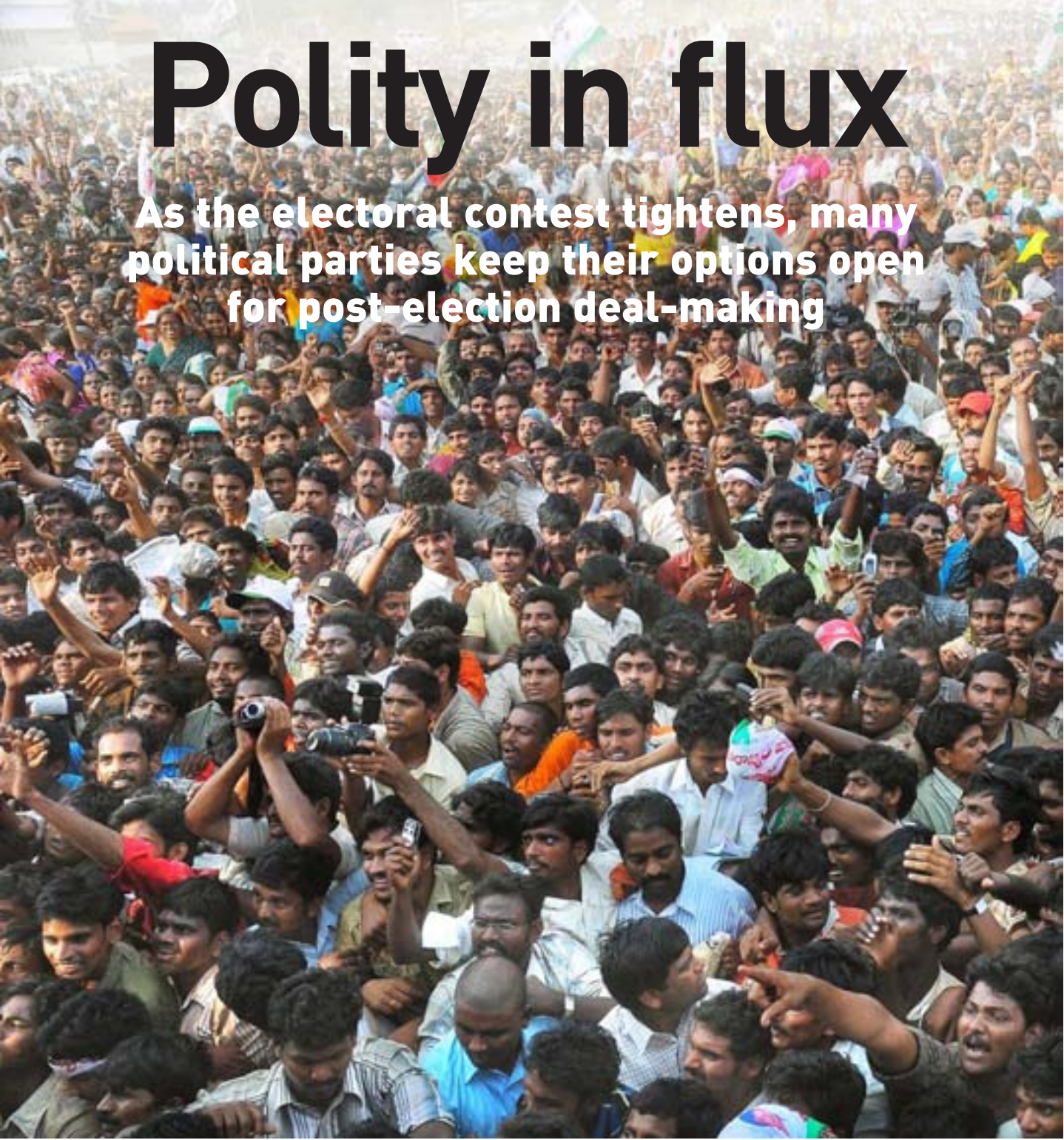
FRONTLINE

MAY 8, 2009 WWW.FRONTLINE.IN INDIA'S NATIONAL MAGAZINE RS.20

WORLD AFFAIRS AFGHANISTAN
Obama's war **44**

ENVIRONMENT KERALA
Ruining Vembanad **64**

ESSAY TIBET
Case for diplomacy **83**



Polity in flux

As the electoral contest tightens, many political parties keep their options open for post-election deal-making

LG
Life's Good

Incredible picture meets pristine sound.

LG 32LH20

LG 26LH20

Now get an LG Home Theatre with the LG LH 20 LCD TV at an amazing price.

Enhance the visual experience of the LG LH 20 LCD TV with the pristine sound of an LG Home Theatre. Live the complete experience with LG.

LG HT 353SD

#Offer Plan

Model No	Combo MRP	Combo Offer Price	Saving
42LG80FR	83,700	72,700	11,000
32LG80FR	53,690	47,690	6,000
32LG80UR	50,690	44,690	6,000
26LH20R	35,690	29,690	6,000
32LH20R	45,690	39,690	6,000

LG SERVICE 1800-180-9999, 39-01-0909 (MTNL/BSNL Toll Free) (Prefix STD Code) SMS 5757554 CLICK www.lgindia.com lgservice@lgindia.com

To know more about LG, visit www.lgindia.com For Corporate/ Institutional enquiries, please write to enquiries@lgindia.com.

Regd. Office: LG Electronics India Pvt. Ltd., Plot No. 51, Udyog Vihar, Surajpur Kasna Road, Greater Noida-201 306, U.P.

*High Definition only. #Offer not valid on 22LG30. Terms and conditions apply. Features may vary from model to model. **Finance at the sole discretion of the dealer. Limited period offer. Stocks also available without offer. Available on select models. #Offer valid from 5th March to 31st March 2009 (Limited Period Offer). Terms and conditions apply. Features may vary from model to model. Stock also available without the offer. †SOURCE ORG-gfk JAN - DEC' 2008.

Branch Address Chennai: LG electronics, AA11, 2nd Avenue, Fathima Towers, Annanagar (West), Chennai – 40. Alwarpet: Abirami Audio & Video 9840030229, 42109963, Abirami Home Appliances – 42108156,9940140767 Amsavision 24994141, **Anna Salai**: Vivek's – Spencer's Plaza – 9840970968, 42952900, Standard Electric Co. 42155715, SHAH's - 9444525143. **Adyar:** SHAH's - 42114155, Vivek's 42952500, Vasanth & Co 42010579, Jainsons 24912626, **Annanagar:** Girias – 43993333, Jayam & Co 26211310, SHAH's- 9940104904, Vivek's 42952700, Jainsons 42026608, **Ambattur:** Jayam & Co. – 26580494, **Chrompet –** Shah's 22380844 **Choolaimedu:** Chellamani & Co. – 23745502. George Enterprises – 23742001, Vasanth & Co – 42010582 GP **Road:** Standard Electric Co. - 43520620, **MOUNT ROAD**.,VGP -28525705, 940629002 **Kilpauk:** JD Electronics - 3058 2222**, Sowcarpet**: Sri Roonwal Marketing Pvt Ltd - 94440 25333, **Kellys:** Chellamani & Co. – 26421131. **Sowrashtranagar:** George Enterprises - 23746129 , **Mylapore:** Viveks 42952100, Vasanth & Co – 42710578, Jainsons 24990313, **Medavakkam:** Sathya Agencies – 9894087985 **Nanganallur :** Balasubramaniam Enterprises 22336688, Viveks – 42952800, Vasanth & Co – 42056514, **NSC Bose Road:** Fomra – 25350555. **Padi:** Vasanth & Co – 26243593, **Porur** : George enterprises – 24765483, Vasanth & Co - 4201 0581, Sathya Agencies – 9952407985 **Purasaiwalkam:** Vivek -42952200, Fomra & Co 26413550, Sathya Agencies – 9894050985 / 45558375, Vasanth & Co - 26422059, 42010571 , Jainsons 42056930 Standard Electric-42174162Rathna Stores **–** 9884409999, Chellamani & Co - 9940198702 **Royapuram:** Vasanth & Co - 25952435**, Pallavaram:** Chellamani & Co – 9840998712, **Teynampet:** Redington India Ltd – 39181441/3,**T.Nagar:** Fomra - 28142353, Vivek's 42952300,Vasanth & Co 28341445, Vasanth&Co (8A)) - 24347764 Vasanth & Co (45) 24344767, SHAH's – 28143186, Jainsons 28153005. Rathna Stores Pvt Ltd-24359909 **Madhavaram** Santhosh&Co – 9444373938**, Tambaram:** Vasanth & Co - 9840045050, Amutha & co 22266962, Viveks -42952600, Jainsons 22261470, Palaniappa Electronics - **Vadapalani:** Vivek's 42952400, Sathya Agencies – 45576185, **Vellacherry :** SHAH's 22593369 ,Jayam & Co – 42022157 Vasanth & Co – 9840039797 Chandra Traders – 22430210,9842929576 **Villivakam** – Sathya Agencies 43554582, **West Mambalam:** Eltech Corporation 98403 98498, **Washermenpet:** Vasanth & Co – 25952861, Sathya Agencies – 42699285, **Valasaravakam:** SHAH's - 42647755 Jainsons – 2486833, Omega TV Centre – 23643110, **Ayanavaram**: Bharatham Stores -26742951. For further details pls contact – **Mr.Aslam** – 9943048890, **Mr.Hemant Kumar** – 9884711779, **Mr.Kimberly Bentick** – 9962598893, **Mr.Krishnamurthy** – 9962529288, **Sharat Bindu -9962592296**

Rediffusion-Y&R/Del/LG/LCD/340

FRONTLINE

VOLUME 26 NUMBER 9 APRIL 25 - MAY 8, 2009 ISSN 0970-1710 WWW.FRONTLINE.IN

WORLD AFFAIRS
Obama's war in Afghanistan 44
North Korea's 'satellite' shock 51
Israel: Right on top 55
A plan and a half 58
NATO at 60: Signs of fatigue 61

ENVIRONMENT
Kerala's Vembanad Lake: Wetland or wasteland? 64

ESSAY
Tibet: A case for quiet diplomacy 83

INTERVIEW
Elizabeth H. Blackburn, Professor of Biology and Physiology, University of California 91

FOCUS: CAREER & EDUCATION IN DELHI
Training minds 100
Interviews:
P.S. Ravindran, Director, Vajiram & Ravi 101
V.P. Gupta, Director, Rau's IAS Study Circle 104
A.R. Khan, Director, Khan Study Group 106
Prof. Arindam Chaudhuri, Indian Institute of Planning and Management 108
Nuzhat Hasan, Director, National Book Trust, India 110

COLUMN
C.P. Chandrasekhar: Fatal attraction 41
Bhaskar Ghose: CBI as a political tool 89
Praful Bidwai: For nuclear sanity 96
R.K. Raghavan: Will the elections be peaceful? 98
Jayati Ghosh: The G-20 summit: Fanfare & failure 112

UPDATE
Life term for Fujimori 54

BOOKS 73

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 82

LETTERS 126

COVER STORY Polity in flux

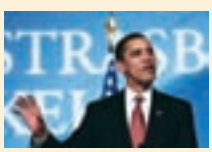
The election scene becomes complex as political parties eye post-poll regrouping. 4

RELATED STORIES

Interview: Prakash Karat 8
Interview: L.K. Advani 10
Uttar Pradesh: Minority factor 12
Bihar: Social equations 14
Haryana: Faction fights 17
Punjab: Back to identity politics 19
Interview: Amarinder Singh 20
Delhi: Edge for Congress 23
Jammu & Kashmir: New equations 25
Rajasthan: Surprises galore 27
Madhya Pradesh: Muslim factor 29
West Bengal: Tough fight 31
Assam: Alliances on test 34
Sikkim: Smooth sailing 39
Tamil Nadu: Banking on populism 114
Battle of Madurai 118
Karnataka: Money & power 118
Andhra Pradesh: Chiranjeevi factor 120
Gujarat: Modi myth? 122
Maharashtra: Closely watched 124
On manifestos 127
What is on offer 131

WORLD AFFAIRS

Obama has managed to raise the monthly average kill rate achieved by George Bush, from 32 during 2008 to 45 a month (February-March 2009). 44



ENVIRONMENT

The Vembanad lake, the second largest wetland in India, is in a state of precipitous decline. 64

ESSAY

The record of the Dalai Lama's talks with Jawaharlal Nehru when they first met after he left Tibet yields conclusions that are still relevant. 83

The cover price of Frontline is being revised from **Rs. 15 to Rs. 20** from this issue. We request continued patronage from our readers.

MANAGING DIRECTOR

On the Cover
At an election meeting addressed by Praja Rajyam chief Chiranjeevi in Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CH VIJAYA BHASKAR
COVER DESIGN: U. UDAYA SHANKAR

Published by N. RAM, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860, Anna Salai, Chennai-600 002 and Printed by P. Ranga Reddy at Kala Jyothi Process Private Limited, Survey No. 185, Kondapur, Ranga Reddy District-500 133, Andhra Pradesh on behalf of Kasturi & Sons Ltd., Chennai-600 002.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: N. RAM (Editor responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act). All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission is prohibited.

e-mail: frontline@thehindu.co.in

Frontline is not responsible for the content of external Internet sites.

ARKO DATTA/REUTERS

POLITY IN FLUX

The election scene becomes more complex as the political parties make moves with post-poll deals in view. BY VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN IN NEW DELHI

The number of States that can throw up surprise results is growing. The Congress and the BJP, the major contenders for power, are worried **that the emerging trends may upset** their calculations.

"THE number of jokers in the pack is increasing. Without doubt, this is not good news for the polity or for political stability." This is what a senior Congress leader told a group of friends and party activists on the evening of April 16, even as reports on the polling trends in the first phase of the general elections started pouring into his office from different parts of the country. Barely an hour earlier, the leader was waxing eloquent on how a special team of experts from various disciplines was drawing up plans for the first 100 days of the next Congress-led government. "All those who have left us temporarily will come back once the polls are over. We will have enough seats to attract them back," the leader had said. The reports about the polling trends seem to have shaken his confidence.

The tone and tenor of the discussions that went on among the leader and his colleagues that evening indicated that the party's calculations did not match its expectations. While the Congress had expected setbacks in Andhra Pradesh and Jharkhand among the 14 States and three Union Territories that went

SUPPORTERS WAVE TO Sonia Gandhi, Congress president, at an election rally in Sakoli village, 95 km from Nagpur, on April 10.

RANJEET KUMAR

PTI

V. GANESAN

PEDRO UGARTE/AFP

RAJEEV BHATT

PRAKASH SINGH/AFP

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP left): Nitish Kumar, Lalu Prasad, Mayawati, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Sharad Pawar and Jayalalithaa.

to the polls on April 16, it had firmly believed that it would make major gains in Kerala and Orissa and minor gains in Uttar Pradesh. It had also expected to hold on to its previous score in Maharashtra. The feedback that the Congress leader received from the States did confirm the expected reverses in Andhra Pradesh. However, affirmation about any gains was absent in the reports from Kerala, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. A variety of factors, ranging from organisational apathy to the presence of new regional parties, such as the Praja Rajyam in Andhra Pradesh, and small-time spoilers, such as the Ulema Council (U.C.) in eastern Uttar Pradesh, were cited as the reasons for this.

It was not the Congress alone that got its expectations wrong. The debate among several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) insiders in Delhi was that the party's performance in Maharashtra was not what had been projected in the detailed study notes it had prepared. However, there was also the assumption that the gains accrued to the BJP in eastern Uttar Pradesh were much higher than its expectations. As per the feedback available to the BJP leadership, the party appears to have maintained its position of advantage in Chhattisgarh and Orissa. Given the trend in Maharashtra, the BJP is not sure if it will be able to push the Congress to the number two position in the remaining phases. The doubt was expressed by none other than Sushma Swaraj, former Union Minister and senior BJP leader. Her comment, made a few days before the first round of polling, was that she was not sure whether the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would get a majority or whether the BJP would emerge as the single largest party. Other top leaders of the BJP, including party president Rajnath Singh and prime ministerial candidate L.K. Advani, however, continue to maintain that the BJP would

SAURABH DAS/AP

SONIA GANDHI ADDRESSING a Congress election rally in Varanasi, which went to the polls on April 16.

AJIT SOLANKI/AP

L.K. ADVANI AT a party workers' meeting in Gandhinagar, his constituency, on April 8.

emerge as the single largest party. Congress leaders nurture similar hopes.

In a nutshell, the message that emanated from the camps of the two big parties was that their calculations had gone awry. Both the parties had displayed a penchant for miscalculation while assessing the affinity or lack of it of their existing and potential alliance partners. This inability was evident when the BJP lost an ally in the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Orissa and the Congress watched the spectacle of the Lalu Prasad-led Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Ramvilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) charting their own independent course in association with a potential Congress ally, the Samajwadi Party (S.P.).

Other constituents of the coalitions led by the two parties were also making disparate noises, which obviously did not suit the larger goals of the two main contenders. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Sharad Pawar, a constituent of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), repeatedly stressed the importance of an alliance with important Left parties after the polls. On the NDA side, Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal (United) leader Nitish Kumar came up with an ambiguous statement: "Today, I am with the NDA, who knows what will happen tomorrow?"

According to an associate of the senior Congress leader, what was most worrying was that four more phases of polling remained. "Things can get quite volatile during this period. The big question is whether the leadership of our party will have the kind of skills required to handle such uneven political situations," he said.

In the early run-up to the polls, the general assessment in political circles was that the gains of the Big Two would even out their losses. For example, it was expected that the Congress would make some gains in Punjab (where it got only two of the 13 seats in 2004) and that would be nullified in Haryana, where it had nine out of 10. In Gujarat, the BJP was expected to improve upon its 2004 tally of 14 out of 26, while the tally of the BJP-Shiv Sena combine in Maharashtra – 25 out of 48 – was expected to come down. In Karnataka, too, the BJP was expected to maintain its high score (18 out of 28).

But as electioneering gathered momentum, with dramatic developments such as the one that saw journalist Jarnail Singh aim a shoe at Home Minister P. Chidambaram at a press conference in protest against the clean chit given by the Central Bureau of Investigation to Jagdish Tytler in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots case, all the poll arithmetic became increasingly defi-

cient. The Sikh resentment against the Congress nomination of Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, another accused in the riots case, is naturally bound to have an impact in Punjab, where the population is predominantly Sikh. Naturally, doubts were expressed about the projection of the Congress' gains in Punjab. In the case of the BJP, the developing political climate marked by the growing public resentment against the governance in Karnataka, which is seen as promoting aggressive Hindutva, raised questions about the projection that the party would maintain its winning streak in the State.

The withdrawal of the RJD, the LJP and the S.P. in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand from the UPA to form a fourth front added yet another confusing dimension to this process. These States account for 134 of the 543 seats in the Lok Sabha (80 in Uttar Pradesh, 40 in Bihar and 14 in Jharkhand). Any gains or losses in this belt will be crucial for the Congress and the BJP. The effort of the fourth front was obviously to become the most dominant player in the region and thus call the shots when the Congress or any other secular formation emerged with sufficient numbers to form the government at the Centre.

Given this background, the number of States that can throw up surprise results has grown considerably. According to the veteran political analyst Hariraj Singh Tyagi, the most crucial battles will be those fought in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Punjab. According to him, the elections in these States, taken individually and cumulatively, can impact the three formations to such an extent as to make or mar their importance at the national level. These States together have 301 seats.

While the electoral trends in these States are crucial for the two big players, the trends especially in Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are equally important for the Third Front. A good performance by the Third Front in these States will basically be at the cost of the Congress and its allies. A positive result for the Third Front in the 143 seats in these States will naturally make it more appealing to the fourth front.

It is important for the Congress to hold on to its tally in Andhra Pradesh (29 out of 42) and make dramatic gains in West Bengal, Kerala and Punjab where it won six out of 42, none out of 20 and two out of 13 respectively in the last elections. The NDA will have to strive hard for good results in Bihar (where it won 11 out of 40) and Uttar Pradesh (10 out of 80) and maintain its position in Rajasthan (21 out of 25). According to a senior BJP leader, the

RUPAK DE CHOWDHURI/REUTERS

CPI(M) SUPPORTERS AT an election campaign rally addressed by Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee at Naxalbari village near Siliguri on April 17.

'Three-way contest'

Interview with Prakash Karat, CPI(M) general secretary. BY VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

PRAKASH KARAT, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), points out that the most significant characteristic of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections is the emergence of a non-Congress, non-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) combination. "It was being said that this election was going to be a two-way fight, but it has become a three-way fight and that has changed the overall equation." In an interview to *Frontline,* Karat expresses the optimism that many more parties, which are aligned at present with either the UPA or the NDA, will find the Third Front attractive. Excerpts:

A. ROY CHOWDHURY

PRAKASH KARAT: "I think the realignment of forces reflects the long-term decline of both the Congress and the BJP."

The long election process, spread over 30 days, has started. What is your evaluation of the situation at this juncture?

Viewed in its totality, one thing is clear. There is a three-way contest in this election. There was a thinking earlier that it would be a two-way fight. But that has changed concretely with the formation of the non-Congress, non-BJP alliance, which is fighting as a pre-election alliance in many States. The formation has emerged as a major presence in many States across the country, such as Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. This has changed the overall equation nationally. There is a clear three-cornered contest.

What, according to you, are the principal factors that caused this realignment of forces?

I think it reflects the long-term decline of both the Congress and the BJP. In the last election, these two parties together got 48.6 per cent of the votes. This time around, what we see is that most of the partners of the Congress in the UPA are charting their own paths, be it the RJD, the LJP or the S.P. If the Congress was really picking up and getting more, none of these allies would have liked to leave it. So the ground reality is that all these parties, which were keen on an alliance with the Congress earlier, are no longer of the same view. So, the reality is that the space for the Third Front has expanded with the decline of the two major parties.

What would you say is the single most important reason for the shift of several regional parties away from the Congress and the BJP?

In the past five years, one of the successes of the Left was that when we supported the UPA government, we kept the issues of the people squarely before the country and before the government. Questions such as the employment guarantee scheme or tackling the agrarian crisis came up as part of our efforts. Even the issue of farm loan waiver finally came as a response to the position we took on such issues. Now there is the impact of the global economic crisis, loss of lakhs of jobs, and then we have the failure to tackle the price rise of the essential commodities continually. They say the rate of inflation is below 1 per cent. But the prices of all food items continue to shoot up. These are

the issues that I think determine the people's choice.

There is also a perception that many of these parties have come out of either the BJP-led coalition or the one led by the Congress essentially because they were unable to strike a good bargain with these big parties in terms ofseats.

I do not think that is correct. Take the example of Bihar. If the RJD had given a couple of more seats to the Congress, it would have stayed on in the RJD-led alliance. So, the projection that it is the result of bargain is too far-fetched. It is more a recognition that we don't need the Congress. It is more an assertion of the fact that the UPA partners are realising that it is not necessary to be with the Congress to win the elections. This way they also keep open multiple options after the elections. If the Congress does well in the polls, they may still go with it. But right now, in the elections, they don't see the Congress as a party that can help their prospects.

While many parties have come together to fight the elections, do you think the policy framework of the third alternative has really taken some kind of shape?

See, the Left parties have been putting forward third alternative policies. We have had discussions with parties we have allied with in the States, such as the TDP [Telugu Desam Party], about the policy platform we should build up. This is a State-by-State alliance.

We have started not with a national alliance, but by having electoral understanding in various States. There we are putting forth our policies for the people. And in two States, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, in the Assembly elections also. We talk in concrete terms about the things the new governments there should do. So I think that constitutes the alternative set of policies that we can build upon after the elections when the question of formation of the government comes up.

There are some issues on which there are major differences. For example, the question about statehood for Telangana in Andhra Pradesh, where the constituents of the 'grand alliance' speak in different voices.

We know that. We are aware that most of these parties are for a separate state of Telangana. We will address that question after the elections.

What exactly is the equation between the BSP and the Third Front in practical terms?

We arrived at an understanding, which was reflected in the statements made on March 15 after the nine-party meet. The statement said that we would work together to defeat the Congress and the BJP and after the elections we would work together for the formation of a non-Congress, non-BJP government. That is the understanding. It [the BSP] is fighting the elections on its own. But it is also fighting the Congress and the BJP and we are also fighting the Congress and the BJP. After the elections we can come together.

But the BSP is fighting against you too in many places.

Well, we don't see that as a major problem. Their fighting a few seats in Kerala or West Bengal or we fighting some seats in Uttar Pradesh is not going to upset the common goal.

There is a perception that more parties of the UPA and the NDA may find the Third Front more attractive after the elections. How would you respond to such views?

We hope so. We hope that they will find us more attractive after the elections.

NDA will have to double its seats in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in order to be anywhere in the reckoning for power. "Only such a result will make us attractive once more to former and prospective partners such as the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [AIADMK] and the BJD," he said.

Obviously, all this is easier said than done. According to the Lucknow-based political analyst Indra Bhushan Singh, the problem with the two big parties is that they are forced to fight known adversaries as well as unknown, undefined ones. The strengths and weaknesses of the known adversaries can be measured with some level of accuracy, but gauging the impact of unknown adversaries is almost impossible.

"And the current political climate is such that even known political entities are at times acquiring the dimensions of the unknown. It is a kind of surreal political flip-flop. It is these flip-flops that you see when Nitish Kumar wonders where he will be tomorrow or when Lalu Prasad or Sharad Pawar say that the Left parties are natural allies. Undoubtedly, this has complicated the picture further for the big parties."

Indra Bhushan Singh's observation does have great relevance when one considers the fact that barring the Left, all parties are talking about post-poll regrouping. Even the big two are not exempt from this kind of convoluted discourse. BJP leaders, including Advani, are on record that they are still hopeful about the return of regional parties such as the AIADMK, the BJD and the Trinamool Congress to the fold, while Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has made bold to say that "regional parties are not good for the development of the country" and that he "regrets having had to part with the Left".

He also added that the Congress would be only too happy to take the support of the Left parties after the elections. Evidently, the message about too many jokers in the pack has spread far and wide in the country's elections to the 15th Lok Sabha. □

'No Advani agenda'

Interview with BJP leader L.K. Advani. BY VENKITESH RAMAKRISHNAN

RIGHT from the start of the election campaign, L.K. Advani, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) prime ministerial candidate, set himself a punishing schedule. On an average, he addresses three public meetings a day and packs in a number of strategy meetings with State and regional leaders in different parts of the country.

Frontline accompanied him for two days during one of his tours, which involved flying long distance from Delhi to Coimbatore to Thiruvananthapuram to Raipur in a chartered aircraft and chopper-hopping to different destinations in Chhattisgarh. The conversation with the 81-year-old leader comprehensively covered the many issues raised by the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the current elections and the electoral prospects of the party. Excerpts:

You have been campaigning extensively for over two months. How would you evaluate the popular reaction to your campaign and the overall political situation in the country?

I can say confidently that the BJP is all set to become the single largest party in this election and the NDA the single largest combine. We will come up with excellent results in a number of States, including Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Chhattisgarh and in Assam and the other north-eastern States taken as a whole. As I began the campaign, I said at a few meetings that the current elections had two major differences for the BJP compared with earlier ones. One difference was sad and the other joyous. The sad part was that I was campaigning without the guidance and participation of my senior colleague and leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The happy part was that for the first time, the BJP was without the tag of a North Indian party.

Our victory in Karnataka and the formation of the government in this South Indian State has made the BJP an all-India party. On the other hand, the Congress is steadily declining and this is evident from the manner in which the United Progressive Alliance [UPA] has disintegrated. The allies of the Congress in the UPA have deserted it and this reflects the realisation that aligning with the Congress is not beneficial to them.

But the BJP has also lost allies. There was indeed a high after the Karnataka victory, but after that the Telugu Desam Party and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) made it clear that they would not be with the NDA. More recently, your long-term partner in Orissa, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), left you.

You cannot compare the disintegration of the UPA with the situation in the NDA. The TDP was never part of the NDA. Barring the departure of the BJD, no allies have left us. And this too has happened not on account of any political differences. The BJD is under the impression that it does not require the BJP to win the Assembly elections in Orissa, and it created, during the seat-sharing talks, a situation where the alliance could not have continued.

In fact, the NDA was a true model of what a coalition should be in this country, whereas the UPA and the understanding it had with the Left parties for most part of its regime meant a mismatch from day one. What can one say about an alliance that revolved entirely around the premise that the BJP has to be kept out of power? The Congress and the Left came together on this singular opportunistic premise even when the differences between them on a number of policy issues were evident from day one. Both the sides are now forced to face the wages of opportunism.

But the Trinamool Congress too chose the Congress ahead of you.

The Trinamool Congress is a different kind of party.

The BJP has raised the slogans of "good governance, development and security" as its main election plank. This has been projected on to your personality too, with the supplementary slogan of "strong leader, decisive government". Do you think that in the course of the campaign any of these issues got greater prominence?

All the three slogans are equally important and have captured the minds and hearts of the electorate. The points that we have mentioned, the security of the country and defence, have received great attention. In the absence of good governance, internal security has deteriorated considerably and it is a major concern.

Also, our document on IT [information technology] vision, which emphasises using this latest invention for spreading better education, improving the agricultural sector, improving services and also strengthening security in such a manner as to prevent illegal immigration, have all received wide acceptance and appreciation.

The issue of bringing back Indian black money kept in Swiss bank accounts, too, is being widely discussed.

When I first saw this news report about the readiness of the Swiss banks to divulge the names of those who have illegally stashed away their money, I wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to take steps to pursue this. There was no move from the government. Our point is that if this money can be brought back, it can be channelled to strengthen development programmes.

Would it be right to sum up that the economic policy issues you have raised in the manifesto and during the campaign are evoking greater response than other issues? Especially in the context of the economic slowdown and price rise?

The issue of bringing black money back from Swiss banks is just not about illegal money parked by the rich abroad. It is also about security. Even the National Security Adviser had pointed out that black money from outside the country finds its way into the Indian market as "terror money".

The NDA will pursue this as a serious matter that concerns not only the economy but also internal security. In terms of economic policy, I will say the cardinal mistake of the UPA has been the neglect of agricultural irrigation and farming. Tens of thousands of farmers have committed suicide on account of this neglect.

There is also a stream of opinion that many regional parties have left the UPA and the NDA essentially because they have sensed a disconnect between people's concerns and the economic policy thrust of the Congress and the BJP.

As I mentioned earlier, no regional party other than the BJD has left the NDA. And the BJD's departure has nothing to do with policy thrusts or perspectives.

But you have gone on record as saying that the bubble of Sensex-generated prosperity has burst and that such undependable devices of the free market economy cannot be the basis for building a truly prosperous nation. Given this, would there be a course correction in the policy perspectives that the NDA pursued during its six years in office?

RAJESH KUMAR SINGH/AP

ADVANI: "THE BJP is all set to become the single largest party in this election."

We have said that the steps we took in the direction of improving our infrastructure is the right economic policy direction. The steps that we took to build the East-West Corridor, Golden Quadrilateral and the initiative to set up a task force to interlink rivers are part of this direction. We will continue to follow that line.

There is also a view that there is a qualitative difference in the NDA's cohesion this time. For the first time since 1999, there is no common NDA manifesto. The BJP has come up with its own manifesto emphasising the core Hindutva-oriented issues that were kept out earlier. Now the question is whether there is a Vajpayee agenda and an Advani agenda in this. In 1999 and 2004, Vajpayee was the leader of the BJP's parliamentary section and there was no emphasis on a BJP manifesto, but now under Advani the emphasis is back.

There was a BJP manifesto even in 1998. The agenda of governance came after government formation. Between the 1998 and 1999 polls there was not much gap and hence the BJP did not issue a separate manifesto. Only in 2004 was there an NDA manifesto, without one of the BJP's own. We have had to make some effort to make our cadre understand that in a coalition government, the government can implement only those issues on which all the partners have agreed. I remember, in 1998, when our agenda was discussed with our allies, all of them said that they had no objection to our distinctive plan of making India a nuclear power, but I could not expect them to agree to either Ram temple or the abrogation of Article 370.

We are still continuing with that premise. There is no need to see a Vajpayee agenda or an Advani agenda in this.

Aggressive pursuit of Hindutva has not been officially part of the BJP's campaign these days. But there are organisations, such as the Sri Rama Sene, which have taken up this. There are also sporadic communal speeches, such as the one by Varun Gandhi. There is a view that this is all part of a larger Hindutva plan of multi-speaking.

The BJP has no connection with Sri Rama Sene. In fact, it had contested against the BJP in the Karnataka elections. There is little doubt that it is an extremist group. Will you hold the CPI(M) responsible for the extremist crimes of naxalites? As for Varun Gandhi, he has denied that he made the alleged communal speech. Let investigations be completed on this case.

Strategic moves

Bipolarity is no longer a feature of elections in North India; several States see multi-cornered contests this time.

Two new Muslim parties are **threatening to upset the calculations** in eastern and central U.P.; new social combinations have an edge in Bihar; and the Akalis return to Sikh identity politics in Punjab.

UTTAR PRADESH

MINORITY FACTOR

By Venkitesh Ramakrishnan in Lucknow

IN the early run-up to the elections for the 80 seats in Uttar Pradesh, the general assumption was that the contest in the State would be bipolar, that is, between the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Samajwadi Party (S.P.). The elections were viewed as a test of the two principal contenders' ability to keep or lose their core constituencies. And the two important factors considered in this analysis were the amount of support the BSP had lost on account of the anti-incumbency factor and the extent to which the S.P. would be able to capitalise on it. However, as the five-phase election process made its tortuous course across the most populous State in the country, the idea of bipolarity got diluted, although it remains a central factor. Put simply, the elections are becoming multidimensional, with different factors getting prominence in different parts of the State. In effect, a number of constituencies have assumed absolutely unique characteristics.

JITENDRA PRAKASH /REUTERS

A VHP ACTIVIST at an election campaign rally in Allahabad on April 17.

Cases in point are Pilibhit, which goes to the polls in the last phase of the elections, on May 13; Basti, which has voting in the second phase, on April 23; and Azamgarh, where polling was completed in the first phase, on April 16. The main issue in Pilibhit is not the governance of the Mayawati regime or that of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) at the Centre or the efficacy of the S.P. or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as opposition parties. The debate in the constituency revolves around the communal speech made by the BJP candidate, Varun Gandhi, and the reactions it has evoked from the State government as well as from the different parties in the contest. The debate, clearly, has assumed communal overtones of the Hindutva variety.

Azamgarh, too, represents a sort of communal feeling, albeit with a difference. Here, the widespread hurt and anger that the Batla House encounter in Delhi's Jamia Nagar on October 18, 2008, had caused among large segments of the Muslim population has evolved into an important political factor. Termed the "Batla House effect" locally, this anger has resulted in mass mobilisation of the Muslim community under the banner of a variety of new organisations such as the Ulema Council (U.C.) and the Peace Party of India (PPI). Both the U.C. and the PPI advocate a particular brand of secular politics that opposes not only the BJP's Hindutva but also secular mainstream parties such as the BSP, the S.P. and the Congress.

Tahir Mahdani, leader of the U.C., says: "The Muslim minorities have been repeatedly let down by the leadership of all the secular parties. For 44 years since Independence, the upper-caste leadership of the Congress took the minority community for a ride, while those like the S.P. and the BSP, with non-

PAWAN KUMAR

LOK JANSHAKTI PARTY chief Ram Vilas Paswan with Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh at a joint election rally in Safai, Uttar Pradesh, on April 9.

upper-caste leaderships, also did the same after 1991. This serial betrayal has made sincere secularists within the community and outside to come together and look for new alternatives."

The U.C. has put up candidates in seven constituencies – Azamgarh, Lalganj, Jaunpur, Machli Shahahar, Ambedkar Nagar, Kanpur and Lucknow. Most of those killed and captured in the Batla House encounter hailed from Azamgarh. The PPI has fielded candidates in five seats – Khalilabad, Deoria, Varanasi, Basti and Gonda.

The popular response to the U.C.'s Azamgarh candidate, Dr. Javed Akthar, and the PPI's Khalilabad candidate, Rajesh Singh, have been so striking that the supporters of the BSP and the S.P. have started complaining that the U.C. and the PPI are only indirectly helping the BJP and its communal agenda.

The majority of the seats where the U.C. and the PPI have emerged as significant factors were held by the BSP or the S.P. in 2004. By all indications, the impact of the two outfits is felt, in varying degrees, in 15 seats in eastern and central Uttar Pradesh. The claim of U.C. and PPI leaders that they have enough organisational power and political appeal to win some of these seats is viewed with scepticism, but there is little doubt that in terms of sheer electoral arithmetic the presence of these parties in the fray and the division of minority votes they can cause has given a fillip to the BJP in a number of seats.

AFP

ACTOR AND SAMAJWADI PARTY secretary-general Sanjay Dutt and the S.P. candidate Nafisa Ali, in Lucknow on April 15.

It is a moot question whether the saffron party will be able to convert this impetus into electoral victories, given the degeneration its organisational machinery has suffered in the past decade. Vinay Katiyar, BJP leader, summed up the situation as follows: "A quantification of the seats that the BJP will ultimately get may not be possible at present, but there is little doubt that we have moved far ahead of the predictions made by former Chief Minister and BJP deserter Kalyan Singh, who put our 2009 tally at five, plus or minus one." Katiyar said that the development efforts in the ar-

eas inhabited by the minority community in eastern and central Uttar Pradesh, coupled with the BJP's alliance with the Ajit Singh-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), would help improve the party's tally substantially. The RLD wields significant influence in some pockets of western Uttar Pradesh.

The party that is most upset with the turn of events is the S.P. The frontrunner in the 2004 polls, with 39 seats, the S.P. had hoped to repeat that performance by capitalising on the anti-incumbency feeling against the Mayawati government. But the emergence of factors with communal overtones is wrecking its chances in a number of constituencies. S.P. leader Ram Gopal Yadav points out that the BSP and the BJP have been playing an orchestrated game to stoke communal polarisation in the State. He is optimistic that the people will ultimately see through these games.

S.P. insiders, however, admit that the party did make some organisational mistakes, such as associating with Kalyan Singh. The resentment this action has evoked within the party has been expressed even by senior leaders such as Azam Khan, and this has strengthened the position of the new Muslim outfits. Clearly, the S.P. needs to take some drastic steps to hold on to the advantage it had at the start of the election process.

In spite of these new developments, the BSP leadership maintains that it will still emerge as the largest force in the State. "Our core vote is in tact, incumbency or no incumbency," said Satish Chandra Mishra, the party's Brahmin face and No. 2 in the hierarchy. Other party leaders support this view, stating that the BSP has a strong core vote base in 55 of the 80 seats in the State.

"All that we need to do is to supplement this core vote with additional votes from other communities. And it is happening across the State in about 40 to 50 seats. The revival of the BJP in eastern Uttar Pradesh will drive the Muslim minorities in other constituencies to seek the strongest anti-BJP candidate, and that candidate has been provided by the BSP in the majority of seats," said a Lucknow-based BSP leader. The BSP has a large number of muscle-men candidates and it remains to be seen whether the minority community will seek this kind of strength when it looks for an alternative to the BJP.

The Congress' campaign, essentially spreading out of Rae Bareli and Amethi, the traditional strongholds of the Nehru-Gandhi family, has had a strong ripple effect this time in the neighbouring constituencies of Sultanpur and Pratapgarh. This has added to the multidimensional nature of the polls in U.P., albeit in a small way.

PEDRO UGARTE/AFP

AT A BAHUJAN Samaj Party rally in Nuh, 100 km south of New Delhi.

BIHAR

SOCIAL EQUATIONS

By Venkitesh Ramakrishnan in Patna

"THERE are always some imponderables in politics, and they raise their head from time to time. The elections in Bihar this time are no exception." This was how a senior leader of the ruling Janata Dal (United) responded to the Maoist violence in the first phase of polling in the State on April 16. Apparently, the Nitish Kumar-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's assessment was that Bihar was less prone to Maoist attacks on the election process as compared to the

PRASHANT RAVI/AP

BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER Nitish Kumar addresses an NDA election rally in Buxar in Bihar. BJP leader L.K. Advani is also present.

neighbouring State of Jharkhand as well as Chhattisgarh and Orissa. However, Maoist attacks were widespread in a number of districts of Bihar. In the holy town of Gaya, a policeman and a Home Guard were killed even as the militants took away an electronic voting machine and four rifles.

Cases of assaults were reported from constituencies such as Maharajganj, Jehanabad, Karakat, Aurangabad and Jamui. In Jamui, the district president of the JD(U) was injured in an attack. Obviously, neither the government nor the ruling combination had anticipated such a concerted attack from the extremists.

In a sense, this lack of anticipation of the threat posed by adversaries and detractors and their potential to cause harm is not confined to the question of Maoist violence. In Bihar's current election scenario, this is becoming a crucial weakness of both the major formations in the fray in the State – the NDA and the fourth front rustled up by combining the RJD, the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) and the S.P. As a result they have been forced to fight with their backs to the wall in many constituencies, which they had otherwise considered sure seats.

The cases in point are Banka and Supaul, which go to the polls in the third phase on April 30. JD(U) leader Digvijay Singh, who was a Minister in the previous NDA government at the Centre, belongs to one of the aristocratic families of Banka and has been contesting this seat since 1991. In the last elections in 2004 he lost it by just 4,500 votes. Given his track record, Digvijay Singh was sure of contesting the seat this time. Nitish Kumar's JD (U) thought otherwise. Digvijay Singh was denied the ticket and Damodar Raut, a leader belonging to the Extremely Backward Castes (EBC), was chosen as the candidate. The argument was that this would help the party consolidate its base among the EBCs. Digvijay Singh promptly quit the JD(U) and has entered the fray as an independent. In the process, he has rallied a sizable section of his own Thakur community, the traditional support base of the BJP, a partner of the JD(U) in the NDA, behind him. The RJD has fielded the dynamic Jaiprakash Narayan Yadav as its candidate and is clearly enjoying the divisions in the NDA.

In Supaul, the situation is reversed. Here the sitting LJP candidate, Ranjeeta Ranjan, was nominated by her party, but the demands made by her controversial husband Pappu Yadav, a murder convict, were not accepted by the fourth front leaders Ram Vilas Pas-

RANJEET KUMAR

INDO-TIBETAN BORDER POLICE personnel take out a flag march on the eve of the first phase of polling in the Jehanabad constituency, which is in a region in Bihar affected by naxalism.

wan and Lalu Prasad. Ranjeeta Ranjan left the LJP and joined the Congress along with her husband, who was earlier with the Lalu Prasad-led RJD. In Supaul, which goes to the polls in the third phase, and in Purnea, Pappu Yadav's original constituency where his mother Shanti Devi is contesting as an independent, the fourth front has, in a sense, queered the pitch for itself.

Another interesting turn in this round of elections is the manner in which the Congress, which used to accuse all the major forces in Bihar including its one-time allies – the RJD and the LJP – as havens of criminals, has started accepting scores of people with criminal records, after they have been sent out of the regional parties in the State. The list includes Sadhu Yadav, Lalu Prasad's brother-in-law and former RJD MP, who is contesting from West Champaran, Tarkeshwar Singh (Maharajganj) and Shamim Akhtar (Valmikinagar). All of them have dozens of criminal charges against them. Lovely Anand, wife of Anand Mohan, a murder convict who has been barred from contesting by the court, is the Congress candidate from Sheohar. Whatever the electoral gains it makes by accepting leaders like this into its fold, the Congress has certainly lost the moral high ground it had chosen to tread for a quite a long time.

However, many Congress leaders in the State pointed out that the fourth front leaders had insulted them roundly by offering a measly three seats and that the primary task this time around was to win more seats, at any cost, and take revenge on the RJD-LJP leaderships. Whether this would ultimately work out is to be seen, but the Congress leadership is brimming with hope in many a constituency.

According to the senior JD(U) leader, "imponderables" have affected almost all formations equally and hence it may not alter the net result substantially. In all probability, the only formation that has not succumbed to this factor "is the Left combine consisting of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist, Liberation) or CPI (ML), the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). However, the Left combine is not uniformly strong across the State and is concentrating on select constituencies. Its campaign is most intensive in the constituencies of Siwan, Arrah, Begu Sarai and Jehanabad.

CRUCIAL MINORITY VOTE

Common perceptions on the net result have it that the NDA and the fourth front will share the majority of the 42 seats, with the Congress and the Left combine managing to win a few seats. The big question, however, is which of the two major formations will go ahead in the battle for the number one spot. Here, the issue comes back to the questions as to which of the formations has the winning social combination. Overall, the Other Backward Classes-Yadav-Dalit Dussadh social combinations of the fourth front would be more or less matched by the OBC-Kurmi-EBC-upper caste combination of the NDA. In this context, the battle of the two formations, right from the early stages, has been to garner a larger chunk of the Muslim minority vote. The community, on its part, seems to be adopting tactical voting on the basis of constituencies and candidates.

This marks a shift from the community's position in the early stages of the campaign, which held that though Nitish Kumar's secular credentials are acceptable, minorities cannot vote for the JD(U) because the NDA's ultimate aim is to elevate Hindutva's original charioteer L.K. Advani to the Prime Minister's position. By all indications, the formation of the fourth front itself has contributed to this shift. For, the functionaries of the RJD and the LJP have been complaining across the State as to how the JD(U) leadership has kept lines of communication open with both the Congress and the Third Front.

Nitish Kumar himself has been, in a sense, reinforcing these perceptions by making statements such as "today I am in NDA, who knows where I will be tomorrow". The overall effect of all this should finally result in an edge, albeit not too huge, to the Nitish Kumar-led NDA. □

HARYANA

FACTION FIGHTS

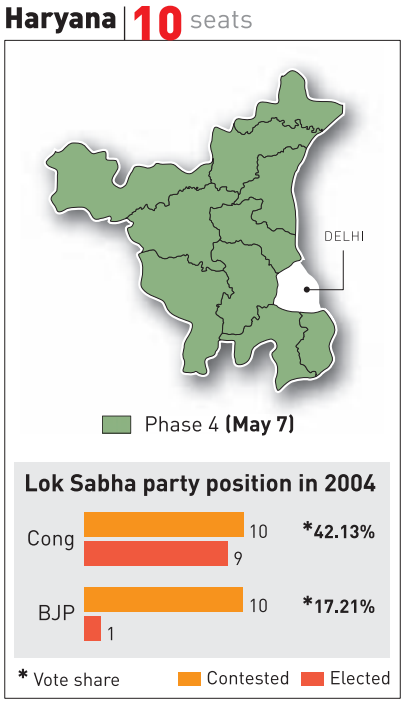
By T.K. Rajalakshmi in Rohtak

IF there was one State in the north, other than Delhi where the Congress had fewer obstacles in winning a comfortable number of seats, it was Haryana. But the situation is not so comfortable this time as faction feuds have begun to emerge in the party. These factions are led by some ambitious leaders, each one trying to establish himself as an alternative to Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. These leaders, some of whom are Ministers in the Hooda Cabinet, have expressed their unhappiness rather publicly over the distribution of the party ticket and have accused the Chief Minister of ignoring the interests of certain castes. Some of them even approached the party high command in Delhi with their grievances.

On April 14, Birender Singh, Finance Minister and a strong claimant for the Sonepat seat, declared his unwillingness to be part of the campaign rallies led by Hooda. The Congress nominee for Sonepat is Jitendra Malik, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and a Hooda loyalist. "The Finance Minister wanted the Sonepat seat for himself as it is a comfortable seat for the Congress," said a Congressman in Rohtak.

In view of the factionalism and the unpopularity of the sitting MP, Avtar Singh Bhadana, Faridabad may no longer be considered a safe seat. So a party that romped home with nine out of 10 seats in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections and secured an overwhelming majority in the Assembly elections a year later may find even reaching the halfway mark difficult. In the Assembly elections, the Congress consolidated its votes in a decisive manner, winning 67 of the 90 seats. There was no challenge to Hooda's leadership then.

Four years down the line, the law and order situation has deteriorated, industrial unrest across the State has been put down brutally and the government's acquisition of land for industry has faced resistance. The people have begun to see the Hooda government as no different from the previous one led by Om Prakash Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). Yet, Hooda is considered the Jat alternative to Chautala. The Jat vote, political observers say, had shifted from the INLD to the Congress in a big way. The INLD and the BJP are contesting five seats each, as constituents of the NDA. The BJP may find it difficult to retain Sonepat, the only seat won by the NDA in the previous elections. The INLD drew a blank.



BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA, Haryana Chief Minister.

Another reason why the Congress may face an uphill task is the entry of the Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) headed by Bhajan Lal and his son Kuldeep Bishnoi on the election scene. Political observers pointed to a possible understanding between the INLD and the HJC over some seats, including Hisar where Bhajan Lal is contesting.

The troubles for the Congress increased as A.C. Choudhary, Minister for Urban Local Bodies, protested against the State leadership for ignoring the claims of the "Punjabi" community. He even threatened to resign. Efforts are on to placate him.

The BSP is trying to get a foothold in the State. Party workers pointed out that Mayawati addressed four massive rallies in the State. "At all her meetings, Behanji appealed for a non-Congress, non-BJP alternative," said Shekhar Raj Sharma, son of Raj Kumar Sharma, the BSP candidate for Rohtak. Raj Kumar Sharma, who was with the BJP for more than two decades until 2007, faces Dipender Hooda, sitting MP and son of the Chief Minister.

Unable to hold on to the Amabala (S.C.) seat, which the BSP had won in the past, all energies are focussed on Gurgaon, which has a decisive and sizable Meo Muslim population. The party candidate for the seat is Zakir Hussain, son of the late Meo leader Chaudhary Tayyab Hussain. Congress nominee Rao Inderjit's antecedents are as lofty as that of Zakir Hussain's. His father, Rao Birender, was a well-known Ahir leader in southern Haryana. BSP candidates are depending on social engineering, hoping that while they get the caste votes of the candidate, the vote bank of "behanji" would automatically come to them.

The Congress has an advantage in the sense that it faces a fragmented and disparate opposition. Inderjit Singh, CPI(M) State secretary, said a third front in the State could have tak-

PTI

HARYANA JANHIT CONGRESS chief Bhajan Lal with son and party leader Kuldeep Bishnoi (right) and party candidate Chander Bhatia in Faridabad.

PTI

RAO INDERJEET SINGH, Congress candidate for Gurgaon, on the way to file his nomination papers.

en charge had the BSP, the NCP, the HJC and the Left come together on some issues. "On the basis of a common minimum understanding on policies, we wanted to prevent the division of the prospective third front parties such as the BSP and the HJC. Unfortunately, the leaders of these parties did not understand the seriousness of the situation. This kind of a platform could have formed the basis for an alternative. Maybe we can take it up in the future," he said.

Inderjt Singh said that the BJP-INLD alliance had hardly any issue to campaign against the Hooda government. The model of development pursued by the Congress did not help the common man in any way, he said, but as none of the other parties, barring the Left, had an economic agenda different from that of the Congress, the electorate did not feel optimistic about the alternatives. The CPI(M) and the CPI are contesting Sirsa and Karnal. Sirsa has the largest number of S.C. votes in the State. The CPI(M), he said, had gained a foothold in Hisar, Sirsa, Jind and Bhiwani, thanks to its work among the peasantry and agricultural workers.

Ram Kumar Bahbalpuria, the party's candidate in Sirsa, is the State gen-

eral secretary of the All India Agricultural Workers' Union. The Congress has fielded Ashok Tanwar, the all-India president of the National Students' Union of India, although the INLD candidate, with some support from the HJC, seems to be in a better position to win at this stage. Interestingly, Congress factionalism is at its lowest in this constituency.

"The Hooda government has done nothing. Development is about creating jobs. The Congress government managed to get only one unit of Asian Paints during its regime. How many jobs do you think that will generate for the whole State?" Sant Ram, former MLA and INLD spokesperson asked. He said Hooda's son would be defeated in Rohtak.

PUNJAB

BACK TO IDENTITY POLITICS

By Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta

THE Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal), which is facing a strong anti-incumbency sentiment, is hoping to cash in on the fresh anger in Punjab against the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. Just ahead of voting in the State on May 7, the SAD (Badal)-led government has managed to stir up passions by organising mass protests in New Delhi and in several districts of Punjab after the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) exonerated the Congress leader Jagdish Tytler in the anti-Sikh riots case.

Farmers, local *chaiwallah*s and shopkeepers, journalists or whoever this correspondent met in Patiala, Sangrur and Bhatinda discussed only one issue: the clean chit to Tytler. When the journalist Jarnail Singh hurled his shoe at Home Minister P. Chidambaram at a press conference in New Delhi, opinion was divided about the form of protest. But the political fallout in Punjab of these recent developments has been beyond expectations. The SAD has not only shifted the electoral focus away from developmental issues but ventured back to its long-abandoned Sikh identity politics.

Punjab | 13 seats

Phase 4 **(May 7)**

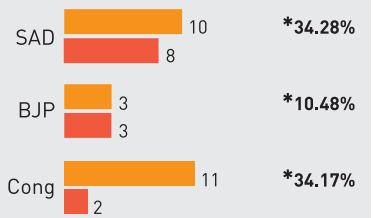
Phase 5 **(May 13)**

KEY PLAYERS

SAD: Sukhbir Singh Badal

Congress: Amarinder Singh

Lok Sabha party position in 2004



* Vote share Contested Elected

Since 1995, the SAD has in principle followed the Moga Declaration, which espoused the cause of "Punjab, Punjabi, and Punjabiyat". By doing so, it distanced itself from the Sikh identity, which had been on its agenda since the Anandpur Resolutions of 1973 and 1978. The Anandpur Sahib Resolution demanded that the Central government cede control of Punjab to a Sikh government and also stated that it wished to reclaim some territory given to other Indian States. The demands made in the resolution became the central tenet of the Sikh separatist movement in the 1980s for an independent state called Khalistan. The SAD did not fully participate in the militant movement, though.

In the Moga Declaration, the SAD delineated a general shift in policy to cooperative federalism with the Indian state and an agenda to make Punjab an inclusive society and polity and not just a Sikh state, with emphasis on reconstruction. This was hailed by many political analysts. One of the reasons for this policy shift was the SAD's inability to get a majority in the State Assembly.

Says Professor Ashutosh Kumar of Panjab University: "The SAD could never win on its own with the Sikh agenda. Its ideology alienated Hindus, who form 44 per cent of the population of Punjab. [The Sikhs comprise 54 per cent of the population.] As such, the alliance with the BJP is not just beneficial for the SAD but also necessary, as they complement each other's vote bank. This has helped them to come to power several times. Earlier, it was the Jan Sangh-SAD combine."

Therefore, the recent protests in Punjab against the candidatures of Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar, another accused in the riots case, should not be seen as a mere outburst of Sikh sentiment. A paradigm shift in Punjab politics leading to greater polarisation appears to be in progress. The agitations were mainly organised by the SAD or by the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), or by some fringe Sikh groups.

The SGPC has over the years ceded much of its control to the SAD. So, it can be safely said that the SAD planned the agitations well and chose the eve of the elections to stage them. The question is not whether the SAD has politicised an emotive issue. The reason for the party's readoption of Sikh identity becomes clear as one travels in the constituencies of Punjab.

It is harvest season in the Malwa belt, which consists of mostly rural areas such as Bhatinda, Ferozepur, Patiala and Sangrur. Farmers and agricultural workers this correspondent spoke to openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the SAD-BJP go-

'It is Congress in Punjab'

Interview with Punjab Congress leader Amarinder Singh. BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

CAPTAIN Amarinder Singh, former Chief Minister of Punjab, is back in the reckoning. The party high command preferred the list of candidates provided by him over those given by other State party leaders, pulling him out of the sidelines he was relegated to after the party's defeat in the last Assembly elections and his expulsion from the Assembly on corruption charges. In an interview to *Frontline*, he spoke about the poll issues, the party's agenda, and controversies that dog the State Congress. Excerpts:

How do you plan to take on the SAD (Badal)-BJP ruling combine in this round of elections?

We have been fighting them for so long. At the moment they are passing through a bleak period primarily because of their misgovernance. Misgovernance, strong anti-incumbency sentiment, treatment meted out to Congressmen – these are things that we are going to use to counter them. I think that even at the grassroots–level, people are waiting to get back at the Akalis.

If the Congress wins, what will it do for the State?

Obviously, the election thrust is going to be national. Our manifesto is a forward-looking one. The economy has to be rejuvenated. In the case of Punjab, we are going to take up other issues as well. For instance, water and power supply will be major issues.

PTI

AMARINDER SINGH: "I am here purely because the Congress president has given me this task."

How would you address the widespread agricultural and industrial distress?

You cannot survive in this State purely on the basis of the agricultural sector. A modern state can sustain itself only by bringing in industries. I had brought in 399 mega projects. Even if 50 of those projects had come into being, the total commitment to Punjab would have been Rs.1,07,000 crore. Punjab's groundwater level is declining, rivers are drying up. Paddy [cultivation] is being encouraged instead of high-value cash crops. The State government is not serious. It is busy making money by selling sand, buses and liquor.

How do you plan to ensure food security if you stress so much on cash crops?

For paddy, you have many sources coming up – Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and the Ganga project. Punjab has led the Green Revolution since 1966. It has been paddy-wheat rotation since then. The end result is degradation of soil quality. Cash crops would mean ensuring green manuring, something people in power are not looking at.

Has the death of Captain Kanwaljit Singh and his son's rebellion against the SAD made the Congress's position favourable?

They [SAD leaders] were treating Kanwaljit badly. In the last zilla parishad elections, Sukhbir Badal put up candidates against him and defeated his candidates in Zirakpur. They were trying to minimise him. Obviously this hurt the family. I think his son is an intelligent and brave young man. He may lose one or two elections but he is establishing himself and I am sure he will do well.

Actually, Kanwaljit's passing

vernment. They complained of an increase in the cost of inputs, poor power and water supply and the absence of a good market price for the wheat crop. Deputy Chief Minister Sukhbir Badal has been advocating the establishment of more special economic zones (SEZs), the construction of highways and the development of real estate and has shown little concern for rural issues in a largely agrarian State economy. This has alienated from the SAD the rural population, which his father Prakash Singh Badal had cultivated over the years.

While the State government blamed the Centre (the Food Corporation of India did not lift Punjab's wheat last year), the farmers said the State government was indifferent to their plight. Moreover, in a feudal society such as Punjab, respect shown to senior leaders count. Many of them are unhappy with Sukhbir Badal's autocratic ways (the Students Organisation of India founded by him allegedly resorted to large-scale violence during the panchayat elections last year). Although Prakash Singh Badal has attempted damage control many a time, the Badal family is apparently wary of dissenting party members.

Badal's concern is not misplaced as

away is a tragedy as he was a friend; we were in the same regiment. He was one of the upright persons in the Akali party. People from every district are leaving the SAD and joining us. This indicates the widespread feeling of nepotism that has come into the Akali Dal. Out of the 13 Ministers, seven are relatives [of Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal]. In Bhatinda, they could think of no one else, so they put up their daughter-in-law. So, everything is concentrated in the Badal family. There are people in the Akali Dal who have been MLA seven times, but they have not been given ministerships. His [Sukhbir's] brother-in-law won for the first time and he was given Cabinet rank.

People are hurt. In our case, Sonia Gandhi has made it absolutely clear that people who have been three-time MLAs must be given Cabinet rank and those who have been elected twice must be made Ministers of State. That is the system that works.

Both your wife and son are contesting on the Congress ticket. Does this not amount to nepotism?

I was not the one who decided the seats. I was not on the parliamentary board, chaired by the Congress president. Perhaps they chose Raninder because he has been serving as the party general secretary in-charge of Bhatinda for eight years. In the last Assembly elections, he was able to secure for the party eight of the nine seats. And as far as Preneet is concerned, she has been MLA or MP twice. Sonia Gandhi must have had a favourable opinion about her because she has made it to Parliament twice. This was entirely her choice.

We hear that you made a list of 13 candidates and got it passed and that is why we see their names.

That's not the way it happens in the Congress. Certainly I gave my views. They decided to choose the people I recommended. I did it because I felt they were the best Congress candidates. Dr. Jagneet Brar, Manish Tiwari, Santosh Chaudhary are all senior members. The three choices of the Youth Congress are entirely Rahul Gandhi's.

Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar's candidatures, the CBI's clean chit to Tytler, and now the Sikh groups' agitation seem to have affected the Punjab Congress a bit.

It has not affected us at all. As far as Tytler and Sajjan Kumar are concerned they have been in Parliament for 10 years. Ten years ago nobody raised this issue. Five years ago nobody raised it. It is a mere electoral ploy. There have been so many gruesome incidents in Punjab where hundreds of people were killed after the SAD came to power. All the people who were agitating were with Sukhbir Badal in his house. People have faith in the judiciary and let the law take its own course.

So will it be right to assume that you have assumed supremacy in the State for these elections and you are calling the shots ... that you are the undisputed leader of the Congress party in the State?

No, that's not true at all. I am here purely because the Congress president has given me this task. I am a soldier. Whatever jobs are given to me, I carry them out.

A media survey says that the Congress will win as many as 11 seats. Your number?

Thirteen and I shall tell you why. If you see the groundswell of opinion in Punjab, it is totally pro-Congress. The fact that the Akalis are leaving the party and joining the Congress indicates this.

They are responding to what the ground wants. There might be one or two seats that might need a little more effort. But when we go to the polls, I think it is going to be in our favour.

You say that the misgovernance of the SAD-BJP combine will contribute to their defeat.

The BJP itself is fed up with the SAD. Do you know there have been fights between BJP and Akali MLAs, and BJP and Akali workers? They are also fed up with the system. They are sticking on because of compulsions. When Sukhbir Badal became the Deputy Chief Minister, all the Ministers from here went and complained. But [Prakash Singh] Badal ensured that his son became what he is today. High degree of nepotism.

many top leaders have migrated to the Congress in recent times. Prominent among them are Manjit Singh Calcutta, Rajbir Singh Padiala and Paramjit Singh Sarna. Further, events such as the death of State Cooperation Minister Captain Kanwaljit Singh on March 28 in an accident and his son Jasjit Singh Bunny's dissension and his subsequent "homecoming" have had a severe impact on the party. Bunny openly revolted against the party and even intended to contest the election from Patiala as an independent. But the Badal family managed to persuade him to return to the party's fold. His candidature would have made the victory of Preneet Kaur, the Congress candidate and Captain Amarinder Singh's wife, that much more easy, as he would have cut into SAD votes.

Although Bunny has relented, political observers feel that in view of his disgruntled behaviour, most of the votes commanded by his father in Patiala and Anandpur Sahib would now go to the Congress.

Although the BJP expressed its displeasure at Sukhbir Badal's governance a number of times, it has little choice in the State considering its declining presence. It is in this context that the SAD's electoral campaign

AKHILESH KUMAR

SAD (BADAL) GENERAL secretary Sukhbir Singh Badal with his wife, Harsimrat Kaur Badal.

must be viewed. The shift to identity politics is perhaps the only way out for the ruling party to battle the anti-incumbency sentiment. The party knows the political risk in this, but if anything goes wrong, it can be corrected in time for the Assembly elections.

The new political trend was visible when, immediately after he was sworn in on January 21, Sukhbir Badal announced that the SAD would continue to fight for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The statement was, however, withdrawn by the Chief Minister. In a similar incident, the SGPC, which runs all Sikh religious institutions in Punjab and is referred to as the Sikh parliament, filed an affidavit in the Punjab and Haryana High Court in January defining a Sikh. The party's silence over this issue was, perhaps, an indication that it was trying to bring the discussion of a Sikh religious and political identity into the public domain.

CONGRESS GAINS GROUND

Meanwhile, the Congress, which was on the back foot trying to defend Tytler and Sajjan Kumar's candidatures and the clean chit given to Tytler by the CBI, has gained some ground following their withdrawal from contest. Throughout the controversy, the State Congress was deeply divided over the issue, with some leaders, including Bir Devinder Singh, even resigning from the party's membership. Since then the party has adopted a defensive stand by reinforcing the image of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

Patiala royal Amarinder Singh, who is back in the reckoning after his list of candidates was preferred over Pradesh Congress Committee president Mohinder Singh Kay Pee's, told *Frontline*, "The CBI clean chit to Tytler does not mean that the Supreme Court should accept it. Even in the Nithari killings case, the Supreme Court rejected the CBI report on Moninder Singh Pandher. But the SAD must explain why it raises the issue only during the time of elections. The SAD was a constituent of the ruling coalition at the Centre when Tytler was first given a clean chit in 1999." The former Chief Minister was sidelined after the party's defeat in the last Assembly elections and his subsequent expulsion from the Assembly on corruption charges.

Prakash Singh Badal, however, said: "The real issue is not the withdrawal of the ticket but exemplary punishment to the guilty. If this decision [to withdraw the ticket] indeed shows the Congress' concern for Sikh sentiments, may one ask why the ticket was given to the guilty in the first place? Besides, they were not only allotted the Congress ticket continuously since 1984 but even rewarded with plum portfolios in the Union Cabinet. Is anyone in the Congress apologising for that?"

The Congress could benefit from the anti-incumbency sentiment, but it is sharply divided between the factions led by Amarinder Singh and the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal. Their rivalry runs deep and was a troublesome factor when the party was in power.

In the last Assembly elections, the Dera Sacha Sauda had ordered its 40 lakh followers to vote for the Congress in view of the SAD-led violence against its followers. As a result, the SAD was almost decimated in Malwa, despite winning in other parts of Punjab. The party has adopted a softer stance on the Dera and has distanced itself from

the Sikh groups demanding the execution of the sect chief, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh. Both the SAD and the Congress have been seeking the Baba's audience these days.

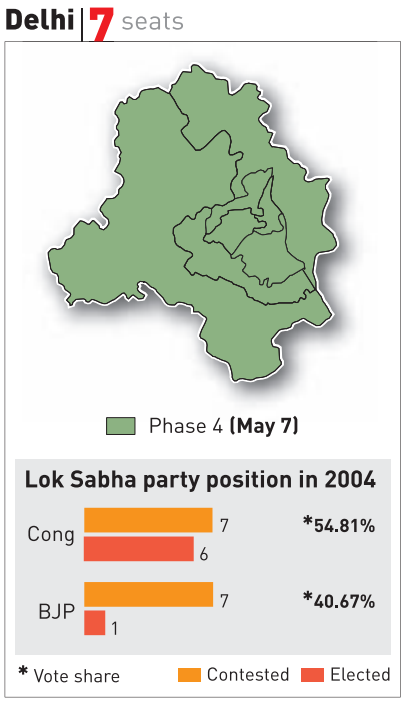
DELHI

EDGE FOR CONGRESS

By Ajoy Ashirwad Mahaprashasta

SUDDENLY the "aam aadmi" has gained prominence in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections in the shy-of-slums Delhi. The main contenders – the Congress and the BJP – are vying with each other to address the issues concerning the population living in *jhuggi-jhopri* clusters, underdeveloped colonies and the suburbs. Top leaders make it a point to visit the slums every day and make promises of food security and regular water and power supply to houses there. Such measures ahead of the elections are common in States where provision of basic amenities is an issue. Delhi's progress and development are generally measured by mega projects such as Metro Rail, air-conditioned buses, flyovers, Commonwealth Games and introduction of compressed natural gas in the public transport system and not basic issues, despite the ever-increasing migrant population.

The credit should go to the Congress for identifying the issues early. Sheila Dikshit's government in the National Capital Region made an effort to address systematically the housing and drinking water problems of these colonies, where more than 50 per cent of Delhi's population lives. It was primarily for these reasons that the Congress registered an emphatic victory in



V.SUDERSHAN

KAPIL SIBAL, CONGRESS candidate for the Chandni Chowk parliamentary constituency, with Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit on his way to file his nomination, in New Delhi on April 16.

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

THE BJP'S SEVEN candidates for Delhi, (from left) B.L. Sharma Prem, Vijay Goel, Meera Kanwaria, Vijendra Gupta, Jagdish Mukhi, Chetan Chauhan and Ramesh Bidhuri, at the State BJP headquarters in New Delhi on March 28.

the elections to the Delhi Assembly in December 2008.

Having failed to win the Assembly elections on the development plank, the Delhi BJP unit is once again trying to project itself as better equipped to handle the common man's problems.

Its president O.P. Kohli said: "Despite the claims of the government that price rise has been curbed, prices are increasing every day. The government claims that inflation has declined to 0.26 per cent; yet according to government data, the prices of food items have gone up by 17 per cent. Foodgrains have become costlier by 9.61 per cent, pulses by 8.46 per cent, fruits by 8.02 per cent and milk by 6.22 per cent. Even the price of salt has increased by 11 per cent. We would tell people of Delhi to vote against such a government."

The BJP's attitude has changed. It is no longer relying on the middle-class voters, traders and shopkeepers (a large chunk of this section voted for the Congress in the Assembly elections). The Congress, which has been ruling Delhi for the past 15 years, has managed to create a substantial base among almost all the classes and communities owing to its strong organisational presence.

Another trend reflected in Delhi is that local issues, more aptly bread-and-butter issues, have gained importance over national issues. L.K. Advani's "strong leadership" qualities and terrorism find mention in the BJP's campaign, but soon the twitter is about basic issues. Except in a certain section of educated middle class, issues such as terrorism and leadership of the country seem to have become non-issues in Delhi.

Delhi's demographic structure in terms of class and caste and community composition explains this trend. The population in rural areas, slums and lesser developed colonies have become a lot denser than in the posh and middle-class areas. Almost 60 per cent of Delhi's population consists of members of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), the Scheduled Caste (S.C.), Poorvanchalis (migrants from Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh) and Gujjars. In the 2004 parliamentary elections to the seven Delhi seats, the Congress was elected in six where this section is predominant. The party lost the posh South Delhi constituency to BJP's Vijay Kumar Malhotra. The BJP is now trying to win the votes of the underprivileged lot.

Muslims and Jats together make up around 22 per cent of the population. The Congress enjoys their support too. By denying former Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma's son Parvesh Verma the ticket for the West Delhi constituency, the BJP seems to have lost the Jat votes too, though it succeeded in preventing Parvesh from leaving the party.

Punjabis, Sikhs and government employees form the other categories of Delhi's population. Their voting preference is evenly divided between the two parties. The BJP knows that it cannot get the Muslim and Jat votes in bulk. So the only option left is to address seriously the economic problems of the majority of the population, an area ignored by the party all these years.

The BSP, the only party other than the Congress with considerable influence in this section, is emerging as a significant player in Delhi politics. Continuing with its "social engineering" model, the BSP has fielded three Muslims, two Brahmins, one Gujjar and one S.C. candidate. Although the party got around 14 per cent of the votes in the Assembly elections, political experts say that its weak organisational presence is a handicap in large constituencies.

The delimitation process has upset the political equations and is responsible for the kind of campaigning that Delhi has been witnessing. While earlier, Chandni Chowk was the smallest constituency with 3.4 lakh voters and Outer Delhi was the largest, with 38 lakh voters, the biggest constituency post-delimitation is North-West Delhi

with 17.90 lakh voters and the smallest is New Delhi with 13 lakh voters. Such was the change that even the sitting MPs of the Congress, who were once again chosen to contest, had difficulty in deciding the constituency. For instance, 92 per cent of the new South Delhi constituency comprises parts of the erstwhile rural Outer Delhi and the richer areas have become a part of the New Delhi constituency. Although the number of seats after the delimitation has remained the same, the constituencies have been altered considerably.

THE SIKH FACTOR

While the Congress has the advantage of known faces contesting the elections and a virtual absence of anti-incumbency sentiment, the Sikh agitations, which resulted in withdrawal of the candidatures of Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar from North-East Delhi and South Delhi, could affect the party a little. The issue not only brought back the memories of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots to the fore among a large chunk of voters but also put away two leaders who had a considerable mass base.

Delhi Congress president J.P. Agarwal said: "Both these leaders have won many elections and as true Congressmen would support and campaign for the party in true spirit. Both of them have been getting Sikh votes for so many years." The Congress high command has taken care to keep the two leaders in the loop so that they can continue to extend their support to the campaign.

As nominations started on April 11, three constituencies geared up to throw some interesting battles and possibilities. In the West Delhi constituency, the Congress decided to field a Poorvanchali candidate and three-time MLA Mahabal Mishra to take on four-time MLA Jagdish Mukhi of the BJP. About 45 per cent of the constituency's population is made up of Punjabi Hindus, Sikhs and other urban voters, who are expected to vote for Mukhi, a Punjabi himself. Mishra could throw a surprise if he manages to get the Jat votes. Mishra is expected to get the Brahmin, S.C., OBC and Poorvanchali votes. The nomination of Mishra has helped the Congress in other parts of Delhi as it has managed to appease the Poorvanchalis.

Chandni Chowk has unpredictable prospects. Kapil Sibal of the Congress is contesting against Vijendra Gupta, Chairman of the standing committee of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi. A large chunk of people have complained about Kapil Sibal neglecting the constituency. The candidature of a Lok Janshakti Party MLA, Shoaib Iqbal, who could cut into the Muslim votes, is compounding Sibal's problem.

In the North-East Delhi constituency, the BJP candidate B.L. Sharma Prem, 80, is widely known to be a hard-core Hindutva ideologue and Rashtriya Swayamsewak member. Sharma was away from active politics for 12 years and was working in a Hindutva propaganda magazine in Haridwar when he was recalled by the BJP. He has been openly talking about his "Akhand Bharat" vision of "a united India which would include Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh". His unique campaign methods, such as holding drawing-room discussions, have made him popular in the area and in the media.

While the Congress enjoys an edge, the changed strategy of the BJP could throw up some surprises.

JAMMU & KASHMIR

NEW EQUATIONS

By Shujaat Bukhari in Srinagar

ELECTIONS to the six parliamentary constituencies in Jammu and Kashmir have come close on the heels of the State Assembly elections in December 2008. However, the campaign that is on is devoid of the enthusiasm witnessed in the Assembly elections.

The State goes to the polls in all the five phases, beginning on April 16. Six seats may not be a significant number, but given the coalition phenomenon in the country even a single seat matters.

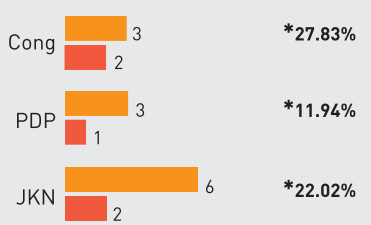
Jammu & Kashmir | 6 seats

Phase 1 **(April 16)**
Phase 2 **(April 23)**
Phase 3 **(April 30)**
Phase 4 **(May 7)**
Phase 5 **(May 13)**

KEY PLAYERS

N.C.: Farooq Abdullah
PDP: Moulvi Iftikhar Ansari
BJP: Leela Karan Sharma
P.C.: Sajjad Gani Lone

Lok Sabha party position in 2004



* Vote share Contested Elected

Union Minister Saifuddin Soz's one seat brought down the A.B. Vajpayee government in 1998.

New political equations determine the nature of the contests this time. The National Conference (N.C.) and the Congress, which joined hands after the Assembly elections to form a go-

PTI

AICC GENERAL SECRETARY Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah at an election rally at Vijaypur, near Jammu, on April 14.

vernment, have divided between them the seats on the basis of their prospects in the Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh regions. While the Congress is contesting from Jammu, Udhampur and Ladakh, the N.C. took Baramulla, Srinagar and Anantnag in the Kashmir valley.

It will be a triangular contest among the Congress, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, and the BJP in the Jammu region, whereas the N.C. and the PDP will fight it out in the Kashmir valley. The Congress will have a tough contest in the largely Buddhist-dominated Ladakh constituency against the Ladakh Union Territory Front (LUTF), which has once again fielded its sitting MP, Thupstan Chhewang.

The Congress' fortunes in Ladakh will depend upon the candidate it will nominate as also the support of the N.C. cadre from Kargil district, which is Muslim-dominated. Analysts point out that the Ladakh region has the tendency to get divided on communal lines. It remains to be seen to what extent the N.C. will be able to shift its votes in favour of the Congress with which it had a stiff contest in the Assembly elections. The BJP, which put up a remarkable performance in the Assembly elections and took its tally from one to 11, has fielded Leela Karan Sharma, who spearheaded the Amarnath land agitation, in Jammu.

The Congress has fielded sitting MPs Madan Lal Sharma for the Jammu seat and Lal Singh for the Udhampur seat. Jammu is crucial for both the Congress and the BJP to ensure that the support base they gained in the Assembly elections is intact.

The PDP, which did well in the Muslim-dominated areas of Rajouri and Poonch (which form part of the Jammu parliamentary constituency) in the Assembly elections, has fielded former Rajya Sabha member Trilok Singh Bajwa; it is eyeing the N.C's Muslim votes in the region. In Udhampur, the Congress has reasons to

NISSAR AHMAD

PDP PRESIDENT MEHBOOBA Mufti with Peer Muhammad Hussain, the party's candidate in the Anantnag constituency, at an election rally in Trail in south Kashmir on April 14.

feel secure as most of the Assembly seats in the constituency are in its kitty. The N.C. enjoys good support in the region. Moreover, former Congress Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad's home district, Doda, is part of Udhampur and this should help it have an edge over the PDP. But there is a possibility that the PDP may be in a position to woo the Muslim voters away in the absence of an N.C. candidate. The candidates of the Congress and the BJP in Udhampur, Lal Singh and Nirmal Singh respectively, had lost the Assembly elections.

In the Kashmir valley too, the new alignments make the outcome uncertain. The N.C.-Congress alliance poses a challenge to the PDP. And with People's Conference chairman Sajjad Gani Lone deciding to fight the elections from the Baramulla constituency, the dynamics have changed further.

In south Kashmir's PDP bastion of Anantnag, the alliance has fielded a relatively weak candidate, Mehboob Beg, who was defeated by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed in the Anantnag Assembly constituency. He was recently nominated for the Legislative Council. The PDP has fielded former Minister Peer Muhammad Hussain in the Anantnag parliamentary constituency. N.C. insiders admit that it is difficult to take on the PDP in south Kashmir.

In central Kashmir's Srinagar constituency, the PDP has fielded the influential Shia spiritual leader Moulvi Iftikhar Ansari. This led to a rethinking in the N.C. camp, which asked its president Farooq Abdullah himself to contest. Former Chief Secretary Sheikh Ghulam Rasool's name also figured in the list, but many N.C. leaders voiced their opposition to it and asked the leadership to take Ansari's candidature seriously. Following party pressure, the senior Abdullah announced that he may contest himself, adding that Srinagar Mayor Salman Sagar would also file his nomination from Srinagar and that the final decision would be taken ahead of the last date for withdrawal of nominations.

The PDP is banking on the sizable Shia vote in central Kashmir. Farooq Abdullah, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha, is not keen to go to the Lok Sabha. "It is certainly important for the N.C. to win Srinagar, which has been represented by the Abdullah dynasty for decades," said Tahir Mohiuddin, Editor of the Urdu weekly *Chattan*. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah was elected to the Lok Sabha from Srinagar in 1998 and 2004.

Similarly, north Kashmir's Baramulla constituency, with 15 Assembly segments, is throwing up an interesting contest this time following Sajjad Lone's entry. The PDP has considerably improved its tally as well as vote share in north Kashmir. It won five Assembly seats in 2008 and finished second in at least five other Assembly segments. With Congress support, the N.C. candidate, Shariefuddin Shariq, may be able to get a handsome share of votes.

In Kupwara, where the N.C. bagged four out of the five Assembly seats, Sajjad Lone also wields considerable influence as it was his father Abdul Gani Lone's bastion. Sajjad's entry may bring down the N.C. vote share. The PDP has fielded Dillawar Mir, a former Minister.

But all depends upon the voter turnout. The United Jehad Council, an amalgam of militant organisations, has called for a boycott of the elections, and a hardline faction of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, headed by Syed Ali Geelani, is vociferously supporting the call. For this and other reasons, unlike in the Assembly elections, the voter turnout may drop.

RAJASTHAN

SURPRISES GALORE

By T.K. Rajalakshmi in Jaipur and Dausa

THE 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in Rajasthan, which go to the polls on May 7, will be more or less equally shared by the ruling Congress and the BJP. But a few surprises cannot be ruled out – that is, independents or non-BJP and non-Congress candidates getting elected. The constituencies to watch out for are Jalore, Sikar, Bharatpur, Bikaner and Kota; even Jhalawar-Baran, from where Dushyant Singh, son of former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje, is contesting could provide an interesting result.

One thing is clear: the Congress is not going to perform as well as the BJP did in the 2004 elections when it won 21 seats. In the December 2008 Assembly elections, the Congress won only 96 of the 200 seats and could not muster a simple majority on its own even though it emerged the single largest party.

The stability of the State's Congress government was recently put to the test when Kirori Lal Meena, a Minister in the former BJP government and now an independent legislator, prevailed upon his wife, Golma Devi,

Rajasthan | 25 seats

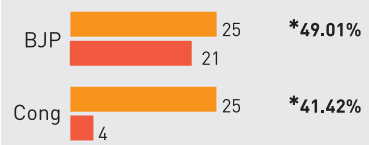
Phase 4 **(May 7)**

KEY PLAYERS

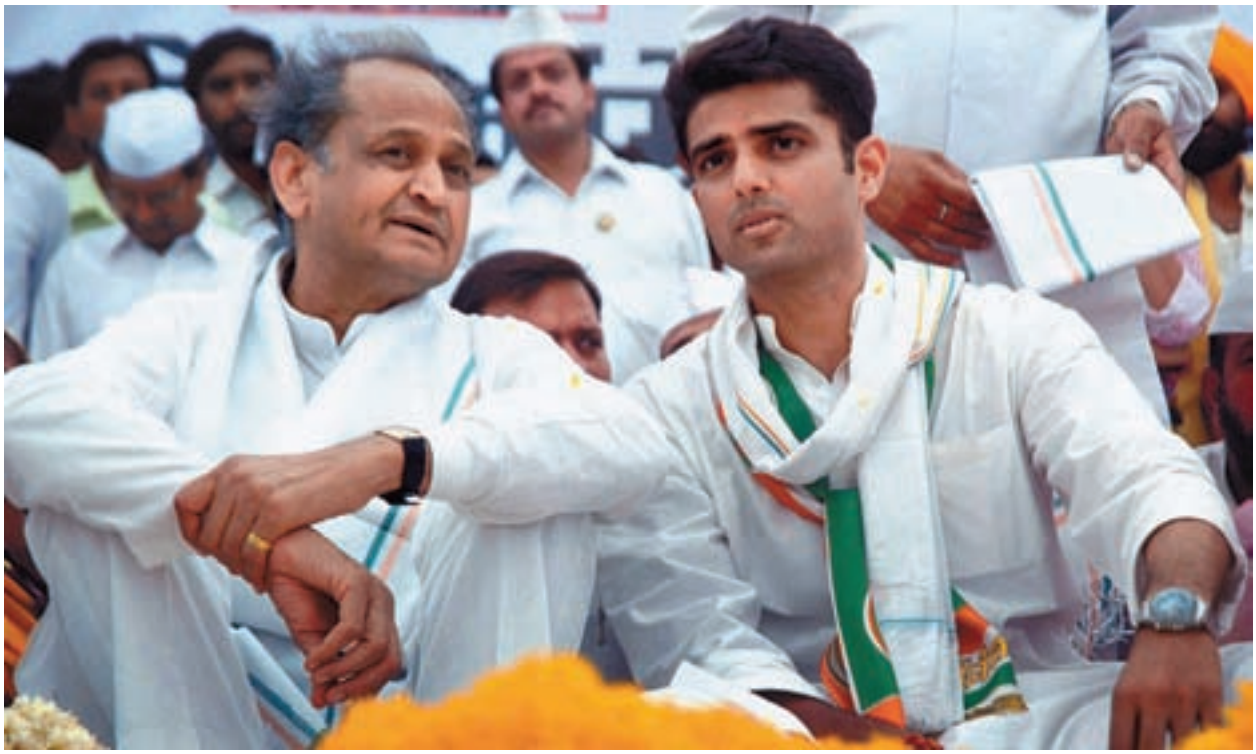
BJP: Dushyant Singh

Congress: Sachin Pilot

Lok Sabha party position in 2004



* Vote share Contested Elected



PTI

RAJASTHAN CHIEF MINISTER Ashok Gehlot with Sachin Pilot, the Congress candidate for the Ajmer seat, at an election meeting on April 15.

who was elected from the Mahwa Assembly constituency, to quit the State Cabinet. His action was over the distribution of the ticket in eastern Rajasthan, which is considered a fiefdom of the Meena leader.

"I alone can influence the outcome in 13 constituencies. I am concerned about the performance of the Congress in the Lok Sabha elections. I do not want the State government to fall but I won't stand being humiliated," he told *Frontline*. Certain statements by Namo Narayan Meena, Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests, made the situation worse.

Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, sensing an imminent withdrawal of support by as many as four legislators, all supposedly followers of K.L. Meena, roped in all the six BSP MLAs, who promptly quit their party to join the Congress. The legislators said they were unhappy with the way the BSP leadership had distributed the ticket for the Lok Sabha elections and alleged that money had changed hands in the distribution of the ticket for the Assembly elections as well. The coup by the Congress, which left the BSP bereft of any representation in the Assembly, could impact the prospects of the BSP candidates for the Lok Sabha elections, especially in eastern Rajasthan.

In another surprising development, Kirori Singh Bainsla, the architect of the 2007-08 Gujjar agitation which claimed around 70 lives, joined the BJP. While some quarters in the Gujjar leadership, especially the All India Gujjar Mahasabha, have been critical of his decision, others feel it was not an unexpected move. One of the first things he said after joining the BJP was that he would get the Governor's assent for the Reservation Bill. Bainsla is expected to contest from the general seat, Tonk-Sawai Madhopur, where he will face Namo Narayan Meena of the Congress.

PTI

KIRORI SINGH BAINSLA, the Gujjar leader who is contesting on the BJP ticket.

The move is meant to pacify Gujjars, who hope that Bainsla will take the community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) status forward. It also conveys the impression that the BJP is ready to make amends to the Gujjar community by nominating one of their own to a prestigious seat. In the December elections, the BJP fared well in eastern Rajasthan, the hotbed of the Gujjar agitation.

The BJP has renominated most of

its sitting MPs. The old faces include Manvendra Singh from Barmer, whose father Jaswant Singh, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, has decided to contest from the Darjeeling parliamentary constituency with the help of the Gorkha Janamukti Morcha.

The party has also fielded newcomers in some seats. For instance, the candidates for Bharatpur and Banswara are relatively new to electoral politics but are experienced Sangh activists. Ghanshyam Tiwari, former Education Minister and the BJP legislator from Sanganer, is to contest from Jaipur.

Senior BJP leaders including State party president Om Prakash Mathur have been saying that there is a need for "social engineering" given the new situation after delimitation. The BJP has not been able to keep dissent at bay either.

The Congress is in a position of relative advantage, being in power and having secured a fractionally higher vote percentage as compared with the BJP in the Assembly elections. Gehlot, on his part, feels very much in charge since most of his detractors within the party lost in the Assembly elections. For instance, had former Pradesh Congress chief Narayan Singh not lost out to Amra Ram of the CPI(M) in the Assembly elections, he would have been the obvious choice for the Congress in Sikar. As Amra Ram is very much in the fray here, the Congress had to look for another candidate. A triangular contest is likely here between three-time BJP MP Subhash Maharia, Amra Ram and the Congress nominee.

Congress loyalist Raghuveer Meena is contesting from Udaipur, which has been declared a reserved (S.T.) constituency. The chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Girija Vyas, is the Congress candidate in Chittorgarh. In Ajmer, Sachin Pilot of the Congress faces Kiran Maheshwari, president of the BJP's Mahila Morcha. Kiran Maheshwari hopes to cash in on the "Vaish" or "Bania" population. At Jhalawar-Baran, Dushyant Singh may have an edge over the Congress nominee, Urmila Jain, wife of Public Works Minister Pramod Jain who trounced the BJP stalwart Raghuveer Singh Kaushal in the Assembly elections.

In the absence of a third front in the State, the outcome may not be different from that of the 14th Lok Sabha elections. The BSP would have had a chance in Bharatpur had the exodus of party MLAs not taken place.

The CPI(M) has fielded its three MLAs in Sikar, Ganganagar and Bikaner. The candidate from Bikaner, Pawan Duggal, represents Anoopgarh in the Assembly. Duggal had won with a handsome margin of 25,000 votes in the Assembly round. The CPI is contesting from two seats, Chittorgarh and Udaipur Rural. Unlike the dominant parties in the State and some others who are trying to get a foothold on the basis of "social engineering", the Left parties do not bother about "caste calculations". In fact, the CPI(M) managed to win the three Assembly seats, for the first time, on the basis of the movements and struggles it had organised.

There is growing voter disenchantment with the mainstream political parties, as is evident from their declining vote shares. There seems to be an undercurrent of anger towards them among the numerically weaker and dispersed castes. In 2008, as many as 25 candidates were elected to the Rajasthan Assembly either as independents or as representatives of non-Congress and non-BJP fronts. In the 2003 Assembly elections, nearly 19 such candidates were elected. What is interesting is that even though the Congress won this time, its vote share was only marginally higher than what it was when the party lost to the BJP in 2003.

One of the major factors that helped the Congress form a government in the State was its victory in the reserved seats. In southern Rajasthan, including Udaipur, it had regained the S.T. and S.C. seats. The BJP was able to sweep the 2003 Assembly elections and the 2004 Lok Sabha polls partly because of the aggressive campaign by the Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad, a tribal outfit. BJP rule from 2003 to 2008 was characterised by a spate of clashes between tribal people and the minorities.

Despite the absence of a cogent third front here, it will be an interesting battle as no party is taking victory for granted. Even before the electoral lists were declared, Gehlot had launched his campaign blitzkrieg. Being in power has its advantages, but whether they will translate into a decisive mandate in favour of the Congress will need to be seen.

MADHYA PRADESH

MUSLIM FACTOR

By Purnima S. Tripathi

in Indore, Khandwa and Khargone

THE BJP and the Congress are engaged in a direct contest in the 16 constituencies that go to the polls on April 30 in Madhya Pradesh. The Congress even appears to have a slight edge this time in this region, unlike in the November 2008 Assembly elections, following the consolidation of Muslim votes. (The first phase of elections in the State for 13 seats is on April 23.) The fear of the BJP coming to power at the Centre or simply "Advani phobia" is the driving the Muslims to rally around the Congress.

"In the Assembly elections, the Muslim vote got divided. Some people voted for the BSP, some did not vote at all and some took paltry amounts and kept away deliberately. This cost the Congress many seats," says Ishrat Ali, the Shahr Qazi of Indore, who wields a lot of influence in the region.

The Congress was defeated with very slim margins in several constituencies. The voter turnout, which had never been below 60 per cent in previous Assembly elections, was as low as 25-30 per cent in some constituencies.

"It is not because of any great love for the party. The Congress has betrayed us, it has not stood by us. It has done nothing substantial for us. It did not provide even the minimum safety

when Bajrang Dal goons were committing atrocities, killing innocent Muslims, during the past five years of the Shivraj Singh Chauhan government. But there is no alternative and we are forced to vote once again for the Congress. We don't even have the option of not voting this time because this will ensure a walkover for the BJP," says Riyaz Hussain, a former Congress MLA from Khandwa and an active party worker.

Ahmad Patel, a Congress councillor and Pradesh Congress Committee delegate from Khandwa, who is also the city Congress vice-president, agrees that Muslims are forced to vote for the Congress because of the possibility of an Advani-led government at the Centre. The consolidation of Muslim votes, political observers say, will help the Congress improve its tally, that is, if the organisation shows an interest in involving responsible members of the community in the campaign. "But the organisation is absolutely disinterested. It has taken our votes for granted and does not even bother to ask for our votes. The Congress is the biggest anti-Muslim party, but we are helpless as there is no alternative," says Salim Khan, a former Congress leader in Khandwa.

"One thing is clear. We have to vote in order to defeat the BJP. If there is no other candidate, I have told my people to vote for the Congress, despite all our grouses against the party," says Syed Ansar Ali, the Shahr Qazi of Khandwa.

Eighty per cent of the State's Muslim population is concentrated in the Indore division, which includes Khandwa. "Muslims constitute 8 per cent of the [State's] population and can influence the results in 103 Assembly seats, which means roughly 10 Lok Sabha seats. Since their vote got split because of the community's disenchantment with the Congress, the BJP was able to return to power in the State," says Ishrat Ali.

The Indore Lok Sabha seat, which was held by the Congress until 1989, shows how the BJP gained because of the division of Muslim votes. The constituency has over 1.8 lakh Muslim voters. In 1989, during Barawafat, 26 Muslims and one Hindu were killed in a riot. Bala Beg, an independent candidate for the seat, got 89,000 Muslim votes in the elections that year. Sumitra Mahajan of the BJP, a first-time winner, defeated Prakash Chandra Sethi of the Congress, who was then a Union Minister. Since then she has been winning from Indore. This time, the Congress has fielded a novice, Satyanarayan Patel, against Sumitra Mahajan. His chances of winning are slim. The BSP has fielded Abdul Rahim Khan, who will only end up cutting into the Congress' votes, once again making the BJP's victory easy.

A.M. FARUQUI

SHIVRAJ SINGH CHAUHAN, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister.

"Muslims were in two minds on whom to vote but not any more. Advani has changed all that," says Ibrahim Qureshi, former Chairman of the Madhya Pradesh Minority Commission and at present chairman of the MP Muslim Education Society. If the Congress is in a position to improve its tally in the State, the person to thank is Advani. In the 2004 elections, the BJP won 25 of the 29 seats with 48.13 per cent of the votes. The Congress won four seats with a vote share of 34.07 per cent.

Significantly enough, the BJP has realised that polarisation of the electorate along Hindu-Muslim lines will eventually benefit the party. Hence, there seems to be a concerted effort by Sangh Parivar affiliates such as the Bajrang Dal to create trouble in the area. In the past three months alone, there were 11 attempts to trigger a communal disturbance in Khandwa. The efforts of the elders in the Muslim community, especially religious leaders such as the Shahr Qazi, helped defeat them. On March 10, the remains of a pig was thrown into the Khadagpura mosque compound ahead of the Barawaft procession. On March 11, a dead pig was thrown into another mosque.

A sense of fear is palpable in Khandwa. People avoid venturing out after sunset. "The atmosphere is vitiated," says Imtiaz, a young fashion designer who runs a boutique and also teaches fashion designing at an institute. He used to hang out with friends until late in the night but not any more. Interestingly, the BJP does not deny this. "A little bit of tension is always there, especially during festivals and elections. It is nothing uncommon," says Sunil Jain, the BJP's media incharge. He says unabashedly: "Here only the HM [Hindu-Muslim] factor works in the elections."

It is the same story in neighbouring Khargone, Dhar, Ujjain, Dewas, Mandsaur and Ratlam. How the Congress will be able to capitalise on this situation is to be seen. Neutral observers say that if the Congress tries sincerely, it can win many seats in the region because some of its candidates are good.

Adding to the BJP's worry is the resentment of the people displaced by the Omkareshwar, Indira Sagar and Sardar Sarovar projects across the Narmada. Even Sumitra Mahajan concedes that this could affect the BJP's prospects to some extent.

Also going to the polls on April 30 are the seats in the Gwalior division, which is considered a Congress stronghold because of the influence of the Scindia family. The party is likely to win at least four seats here. However, overall, the BJP appears far ahead because of the performance record of the Shivraj Singh Chauhan government. Even staunch BJP opponents are unable to wish this factor away. □

Testing ground

The elections in West Bengal, Sikkim and the seven north-eastern States have become crucial in the final power game.

New political alignments may throw up surprises in West Bengal, but the CPI(M) is confident of winning comfortably. A third force has made **the mandate unpredictable in** Assam. It is advantage SDF in the Sikkim Assembly elections.

DIPTENDU DUTTA/AFP

BUDDHADEB BHATTACHARJEE AT a CPI(M) election rally in Siliguri on March 28.

WEST BENGAL
TOUGH FIGHT

By Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay in Kolkata

THE three-phase Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, to be held on April 30, May 7 and May 13, have taken on the appearance of a dress rehearsal for the 2011 Assembly elections, for local and regional issues have largely eclipsed national issues. The Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front swept the 2004 elections by winning 35 of the 42 parliamentary seats, while the Trinamool Congress and the Congress had to be satisfied with one and six seats respectively.

But this time round, the Congress-Trinamool combine, as CPI(M) patriarch and former Chief Minister of West Bengal Jyoti Basu himself has admitted, will make things tough for the Left. At a meet-the-press event in Kolkata on April 14, CPI(M) general secretary Prakash Karat said: "My party's assessment is that we will have a tough battle in West Bengal and one of the main factors is the Congress-Trinamool alliance. But we have faced such united opposition in the past and our party has taken that into account." He said he expected the party to win "a majority of the seats".

After much wrangling over seats, the Congress and the Trinamool reached an understanding on March 12 to face the polls together, with the Trinamool fielding 27 candidates and the Congress 14. One seat has been set aside for the Socialist Unity

Centre of India (SUCI), an ally of the Trinamool.

The alliance did not come about easily as old wounds, inflicted by the two foes-turned-friends on each other, took time to heal despite desperate efforts by the top leaders on both sides. The animosity between the two parities was such that until recently Trinamool supremo Mamata Banerjee referred to the West Bengal Congress unit as the "B team" of the CPI(M). Even on the issue of land acquisition for industrial purposes – the bedrock of Mamata's latest political strategy – the two parties do not see eye to eye. Moreover, a sizable section of Congress workers are disgruntled that the seats they consider "winnable" have been conceded to the Trinamool, reducing the party to a junior partner in the alliance.

Dismissing the electoral pact of the two opposition parties, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said, "Such unprincipled alliances against the Left have taken place before also. But ultimately, the mandate of the people has always prevailed."

The Left Front is contesting all the 42 seats, with 18 new faces and two women in the fray. The CPI(M) has fielded its candidates in 32 seats, the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) in four and the All India Forward Bloc and the Communist Party of India (CPI) in three each.

NANDIGRAM PLATFORM

It is significant that Mamata kick-started her campaign not from her Kolkata South constituency but from Nandigram in East Medinipur district.

Nandigram saw one of the bloodiest turf wars in the State's recent history, and it was initiated by the Trinamool in 2007 over rumours of land acquisition for a proposed chemical hub. The Trinamool's showing in the previous parliamentary elections was disastrous: only Mamata got elected. This was followed by a dismal performance in the Assembly elections in 2006, with the party winning only 29 of the 294 seats as against 60 in 2001.

The Nandigram agitation, during which 14 villagers were killed in police firing on March 14, 2007, became the turning point in Mamata's political career. She said: "It is Nandigram that has opened the door for change in West Bengal and it will continue to do so." She has promised to carry an urn containing what she calls the "holy earth" of Nandigram across the State during her poll campaign.

Mamata's anti-industry stand probably stems from the belief that the rural masses will perceive her as a leader who has come to protect them from the perils of land acquisition, even if it means losing some base among the urban middle class. In 2008, her persistent agitation succeeded in driving out the prestigious Nano car project of Tata Motors from Singur in Hooghly district – a project that was expected to turn around the industry-starved economy of West Bengal. It ultimately went to Gujarat.

Mamata's confidence got a further boost from the results of the panchayat elections in 2008, when spontaneous informal local alliances between the Congress and the Trinamool managed to dent the Left's rural vote bank significantly in some districts. The Trinamool also won convincingly in both Nandigram and Singur, and in January 2009, it won the Nandigram Assembly seat in a byelection.

CONTRAST IN CAMPAIGNS

Despite the setback they suffered in the elections to the local bodies, the Left parties' hold over rural Bengal cannot be underestimated. The Trinamool's campaign against the CPI(M)'s "misrule" and its pro-farmer, anti-land acquisition rhetoric, as embodied in the slogan "Ma, Mati, Manush" (mother, land, man), are not likely to cut ice everywhere. Ratan Rai, a farmer of Bankura district's Bhairavpur village, which falls in the Bishnupur constituency, told *Frontline:* "I don't want to buy a plough for my children. I have hopes for a better future for them and that can only come through industries."

Basudev Ray, another farmer from the same village, said: "We will vote for the third alternative, as both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party are the same in their anti-farmer policies, and on top of that, the BJP has been trying to divide the country on religious grounds." Interestingly, Bhairavpur has an all-Hindu population, and so the views expressed by the farmers here speak of the fine balance the CPI(M) has struck between local and national issues in its campaigns there.

West Bengal | 42 seats

ARUNANGSU ROY CHOWDHURY

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS LEADER Mamata Banerjee addressing a gathering at Nandigram.

Shiuli Saha is the Trinamool's candidate for the Bishnupur seat. Her claim to fame: she hails from Nandigram.

ANTI-INCUMBENCY NOT A FACTOR

The anti-incumbency wave that the opposition parties are banking upon may not be as widespread as they would like it to be. Kanai Bagdi, a landless labourer of Harialgara village in the Bankura constituency, said, "The CPI(M) is always there for our needs – blankets in winter, assistance when there is no work. I don't care who comes at the Centre as long as the CPI(M) is here." In fact, a local Congress leader in Jalpaiguri in north Bengal admitted: "The difference between the Congress and the CPI(M) here is that while the CPI(M) works throughout the year, the Congress sleeps except during election time."

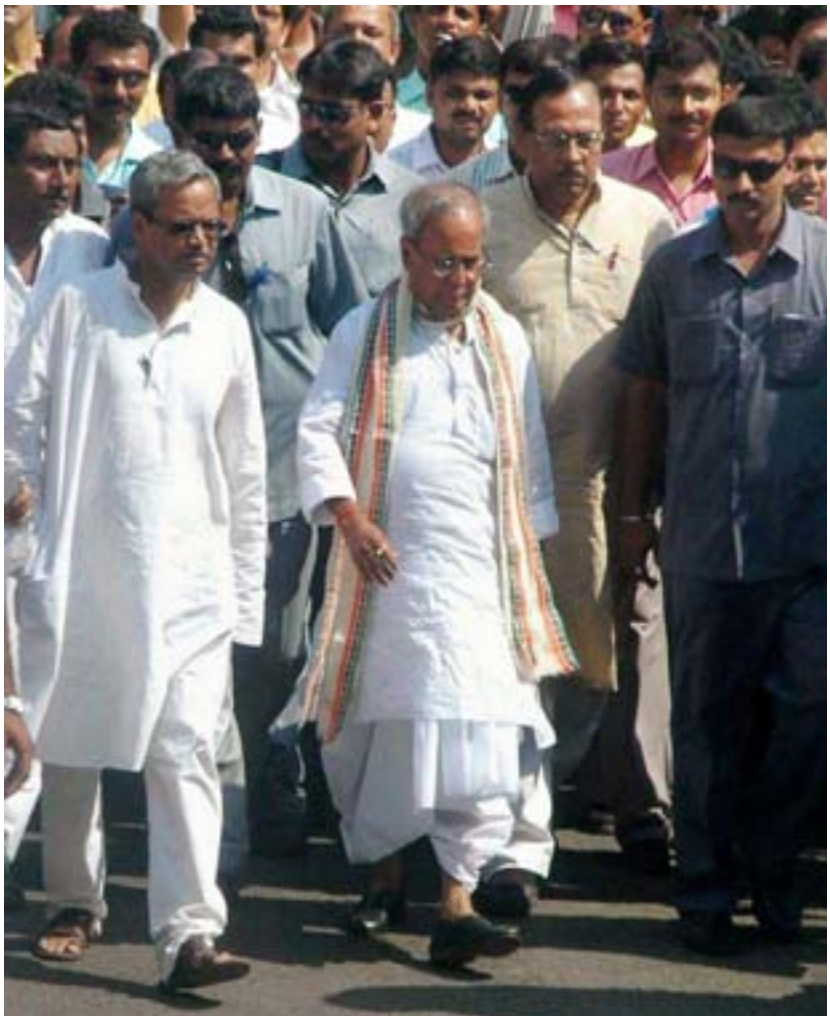
According to an informed CPI(M) source, voters in the 18-35 age group may vote decisively for the Left. "They constitute about 31 per cent of the electorate [of over 5.2 crore]. They want employment and the opposition has totally overlooked their concerns." All things considered, the worst result for the Left, he said, could be 28 seats, seven less than its 2004 tally.

If the opposition is banking on the reported alienation of the minority community from the Left, it may be proved wrong, as time and again the minority voter has shown that he is capable of voting on ideological and political lines rather than on communal ones.

In the first phase of the elections for 14 seats, four regions, each having witnessed a secessionist movement of varying degree, will go to the polls.

The Gorkha Janamukti Morcha (GJM) has been demanding a separate Gorkhaland comprising not only the Darjeeling hills but also parts of the contiguous areas in the Terai and the Dooars in the plains. In its attempt to enlist the support of a national party, the GJM has fielded BJP stalwart and former External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh in Darjeeling. With the GJM backing it, the BJP, which hardly has any presence in the State, is confident of winning the seat. Karat said the BJP's decision was "opportunistic and unprincipled" and something they will "regret". The voters in the plains may turn to the CPI(M) to prevent a division of the State.

The Kamtapur and the Greater Coochbehar movements, which began



PTI

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, AFTER filing his nomination papers for the Jangipur parliamentary constituency in Behrampore.

mainly as a result of widespread unemployment and underdevelopment, are not as serious as the Gorkhaland movement.

The Maoist movement in the tribal belts is, however, more serious although localised in nature. In Lalgarh in West Medinipur district, the Maoist-backed People's Committee against Police Atrocity (PCPA) has been trying to create a "liberated zone" on the lines of Nandigram by denying entry to the police. Last November an attempt was made on the life of the Chief Minister at Salboni in the district. The PCPA even sought to cut off the neighbouring districts of Bankura and Purulia from the rest of the State. The Chief Electoral Officer of the State, Debasish Sen, has been holding talks with the PCPA chief, Chhatradhar Mahato, in Kolkata to make the latter see reason and allow the police to be present on polling day. Mahato insists that civil society and leading intellectuals can substitute the police in overseeing the conduct of the elections.

The Aditya faction of the Jharkhand Party, which supports the Lalgarh movement, has demanded that the tribal belts of Bankura, Purulia and West Medinipur districts be merged with Jharkhand.

The Trinamool's association with the Maoists, first in Nandigram and then in Lalgarh, where Mamata shared the dais with Mahato, will not go down well with a large section of the voters in the region, who, fearing another partition of Bengal, may just vote against her.

Amiya Patra, CPI(M) district secretary of Bankura, told *Frontline* that "80 per cent of the people who voted against us in the panchayat polls have returned to our fold after the opposition's support to the secessionist movement in Lalgarh".

NORTH-EASTERN STATES

ALLIANCES ON TEST

By Sushanta Talukdar in Guwahati

ASSAM: Going by the campaign issues, electioneering for the 14 Lok Sabha seats in Assam this time is not much different from that in 2004. Infiltration, insurgency, law and order, ethnic identity and development are the dominant electoral issues this time too. A total of 158 candidates are in the fray for the elections scheduled for April 16 and 23.

In 2004, the results favoured the Congress. It won nine seats, while the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the BJP won two each. One seat went to the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU)-backed independent candidate, who later joined the Bodoland Peoples' Front (BPF), a partner in the ruling coalition. The Congress secured 35.07 per cent of the votes, the BJP 22.94 per cent and the AGP 19.25 per cent.

This round of elections will provide the ground to test whether the new political alignments in the State will work. The AGP and the BJP struck a seat-sharing deal in order to prevent a split in their votes. This, they hope, will ensure the victory of their common candidates. With an eye on the 2011 Assembly polls, the BJP has made a calculated bid to expand its base in the State, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley, by persuading the regional party to concede eight seats, of which five are from the valley. The alliance, however, suffered a jolt when the nomi-

RITU RAJ KONWAR

GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER and senior BJP leader Narendra Modi with AGP president Chandra Mohan Patowary (left) and Romen Deka, BJP candidate for the Mangaldai constituency, at a rally in Rangia, near Guwahati on April 11.

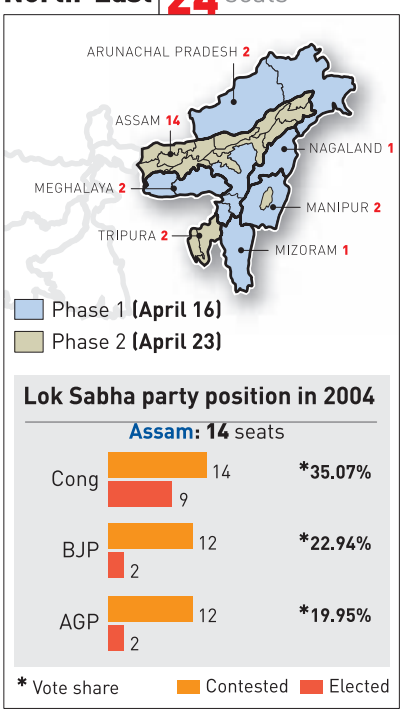
nation of the BJP candidate for the Dhubri constituency, Nilimoy Pradhani, was rejected on the grounds that he had not filled up the mandatory A and B forms along with his nomination papers.

However, a number of grassroots-level leaders and workers of the AGP are wary of this tie-up. They fear that a substantial portion of their traditional support base may permanently shift to the BJP and this will weaken the party ahead of the Assembly polls. Owing to such reservations among grassroots workers, the transfer of votes between the two parties may not take place on expected lines.

There was also some confusion among the rank and file of the two parties regarding the actual nature of the alliance. AGP chief Chandra Mohan Patowary had to issue a clarification that the tie-up was limited to seat-sharing and that his party had not joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as was claimed by some senior BJP leaders. However, he maintained that the BJP would be the senior partner in the Lok Sabha elections and that the roles would be reversed in the Assembly polls. The confusion at the grassroots was reflected in the joint rallies attended by the alliance's star campaigners, the BJP's prime ministerial candidate L.K. Advani and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The rallies failed to attract an equal number of supporters of the two parties. The third force represented by the CPI(M), the CPI, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF) and the Bodoland People's Progressive Front (BPPF) had evoked considerable response among those voters who were disenchanted with the ruling Congress-BPF coalition and who were not willing to go along with the AGP-BJP combine. However, the unilateral declaration of candidatures by the AUDF before the finalisation of the seat-sharing deal hampered the prospects of the third front in a number of seats. The CPI(M) and the AUDF failed to reach a seat-sharing agreement.

AUDF president and perfume mogul Badruddin Ajmal unilaterally declared his candidature from Silchar in the Barak valley where the CPI(M) has a strong support base. The AUDF also put up a candidate for the Barpeta seat, which was won twice by the CPI (M); for Tezpur, the two parties fielded their own candidates. In Guwahati, too, despite a formal agreement to leave the seat to the NCP, the AUDF hurriedly decided to put up its own candidate before the close of nominations.

North-East | 24 seats



CONGRESS SUPPORTERS TAKE out a motorcycle rally in Boko village in Kamrup district of Assam on March 30.

However, despite the internal contradictions and the confusion over seat-sharing, the emergence of the third force has made the contests triangular and the mandate unpredictable.

The decision of the BPPF to leave the BJP-AGP bandwagon and join the third force came as a boost to the efforts of the Left parties to unite the non-Congress, non-BJP parties on a common platform. This is likely to influence the poll outcome in the Bodo-dominated areas of lower and central Assam. It has brightened the poll prospects of the BPPF candidate for the Kokrajhar constituency, Urkhao Gwra Brahma. Brahma, who led the revived Bodo statehood movement as the president of the influential ABSU, is putting up a tough fight against the Congress-BPF candidate and sitting BPF MP Sansuma Khunggur Bwismuthiary, who is seeking a fourth consecutive term. Bwismuthiary was credited with the highest victory margin in the State – 4,84,129 votes – in the 2004 Lok Sabha election.

If the 2004 Lok Sabha election helped Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi to consolidate his position within the party and retain the hot seat in Dispur for a second consecutive term in the 2006 Assembly elections, the 2009 elections will be a test for the popularity and performance of his government. The ruling party campaigned on the plank of development.

However, Gogoi faces an uphill task because of the AUDF factor. The AUDF made its debut in State politics in 2006 following the scrapping of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act by the Supreme Court. It caused an erosion of the Congress' Muslim votes in the 2006 Assembly elections, and the AUDF won as many as 10 seats in the 126-member Assembly and prevented the Congress from gaining a majority.

Badruddin Ajmal's candidature will make the contest for Silchar tough for Congress heavyweight and Union Minister for Heavy Industries Sontosh Mohan Dev. The Congress has put up candidates for 13 seats, leaving the Kokrajhar (Scheduled Tribe) seat to its ally, the BPF. However, the BPF is engaged in a "friendly contest" with its coalition partner in Mangaldoi.

To counter the AGP-BJP combine's high-profile campaign involving leaders such as Advani, the Congress brought party president Sonia Gandhi and External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee.

The campaign of the Left parties and their allies focussed on the adverse impact of the economic policies of the Congress-led Union government, while the Congress and the AGP-BJP combine were engaged in mudslinging. The Congress accused the AGP-BJP combine of reaching a tacit understanding with the AUDF.

There has been a spurt in extremist violence in the run-up to the elections. A series of fatal bomb blasts rocked

RITU RAJ KONWAR

Guwahati and a few other places. Attacks on security forces and railway property by the militant outfits Dima Halam Daogah (Jewel Gorlossa faction) in North Cachar Hills district and by the Karbi Longri and N.C. Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF) in Karbi Anglong district were pointers to a violent round of elections in the Autonomous District (S.T.) constituency. The run-up to the polls also witnessed violent attacks between the supporters of two rival candidates in Kokrajhar constituency. The incidents provided the opposition parties ample opportunities to attack the State government over the deteriorating law and order situation.

The AGP and the BJP made the infiltration from across the porous India-Bangladesh border a major election issue. They pointed out that the Congress had not made any mention of the issue, which posed a great danger to Assam, in its national manifesto. The Congress and the third force countered this by alleging that the AGP, which was in power for two terms in the State, and the BJP, which headed an earlier government at the Centre, did nothing to detect and deport foreigners and seal the border.

SMALL BUT VITAL

During the days of single-party rule at the Centre, parliamentary elections in the smaller north-eastern States of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya did not interest the mainstream parties much; the small number of seats from these States was not so important for them to reach the magic number required to form the government. But in today's era of coalition politics, when every single seat matters, the six States have become crucial in the final power game.

Of these States, which go to the polls on April 16 and 23, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur have two seats each, while Nagaland and Mizoram have one each. Barring Tripura where the ruling CPI (M)-led Left Front campaigned for an alternative government of left, democratic and secular parties at the Centre, electioneering in the other five States centred around unresolved and sensitive local political issues.

MANIPUR: The State's territorial integrity has topped the campaign issues. All India Congress Committee general secretary Rahul Gandhi promised, at an election rally in Churachandpur, that the Congress would not compromise on the issue of protecting Manipur's territorial integrity. However, the party had stated in its election manifesto that it supported the integration of the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The contest for the Inner Manipur constituency was multi-cornered. The Congress nominated its sitting MP Thockchom Meinya, while the Manipur People's Party (MPP) fielded for-

PTI

NCP LEADER P.A. Sangma with his daughter and MP Agatha Sangma, who is contesting from the Tura constituency of Meghalaya.

PTI

SUPPORTERS ACCOMPANY KHAGEN Das, the CPI(M) candidate for the West Tripura constituency, when he went to file his nomination papers on March 29.

mer Union Minister Thounaojam Chaoba Singh. Former Manipur Chief Minister Wahengbam Nipamacha Singh and Dr. Moirangthem Nara are the candidates for the BJP and the CPI respectively.

Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh and other Congress leaders are confident that Meinya will retain the seat as 19 of the 32 Assembly segments in this Lok Sabha constituency have Congress representatives.

The sitting MP of the Outer Manipur constituency, Mani Charenamei, is contesting as the candidate of a new political platform, the People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), this time. The PDA was floated by the Naga legislators of Manipur. He is locked in a four-cornered contest with D. Loli Adanee of the BJP, L.B. Sona of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Thangso Baite of the Congress.

NAGALAND: In Nagaland, the Naga political problem and the integration of the Naga-inhabited areas of certain neighbouring States to create 'Greater Nagaland' dominated the campaign for the Nagaland parliamentary seat and also the byelections to four Assembly seats.

The ruling Nagaland People's Front (NPF)-led Democratic Alliance of Nagaland (DAN) tried to woo voters by projecting the Congress dilemma on the issue. The Congress, on its part, told voters that it was during Congress rule that the Nagaland Assembly had twice passed unanimous resolutions supporting the integration of Naga areas. The party said it would continue to work for an acceptable and honourable solution to the Naga political problem.

Altogether three candidates are in the fray in Nagaland – retired bureaucrat C.M. Chang of the NPF, Congress veteran and former parliamentarian K. Asungba Sangtam, and All India Trinamool Congress candidate Dr. Rialthung Odyuo. In 2004, the seat went to the DAN.

TRIPURA: That the ruling CPI (M) will retain the two Lok Sabha seats in Tripura is a foregone conclusion. State Chief Minister Manik Sarkar, at his election rallies, urged voters to ensure the victory of two sitting MPs – Khagen Das and Bajuban Riyan – with record margins. Sarkar and other leaders of the ruling Left Front told voters in the State that because of the strong presence of Left parties in the outgoing 14th Lok Sabha, many "anti-people" policies of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government at the Centre could be resisted. They appealed to the voters to respond positively to the formation of a non-Congress, non-BJP government at the Centre by the Third Front.

MEGHALAYA: In the Tura constituency of Meghalaya, which is under President's Rule, sitting MP Agatha K. Sangma of the NCP, the daughter of former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno A. Sangma, was seen putting maximum efforts to continue the Sangma legacy. She is pitted against former Deputy Chief Minister Deborah Marak of the Congress. Agatha Sangma, 28, became the youngest member in the 14th Lok Sabha when she made her political debut by winning the May 2008 byelection from the constituency after it was vacated by her father. Sangma, who had won the seat nine times, decided to return to State politics last year.

For the Shillong constituency, Vincent H. Pala of the Congress was locked in a three-cornered contest with United Democratic Party (UDP) candidate John Flimore Kharsiing and Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) candidate P.B. Basaiawmoit. Tribal Welfare Minister in the Manmohan Singh government Paty Ripple Kyndiah won the seat on the Congress ticket in 2004.

At her election rally in Shillong amidst a bandh call by the militant outfit Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), Sonia Gandhi urged Meghalaya voters to reject smaller parties. "Smaller parties have narrow and divisive agendas. They shift loyalties. They have no regard for the overall development of Meghalaya and the nation as a whole," she said. The UDP made the imposition of President's Rule the main poll plank to counter the Congress campaign; it told voters that the Congress did not want regional parties to rule the State.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH: In Arunachal Pradesh, where inaccessibility poses tough challenges for poli-

ticians as well as polling teams in reaching out to voters, the two sitting BJP MPs, Khiren Rijuju from Arunachal West and Tapir Gao from Arunachal East, face tough opponents. Rijuju is locked in a direct contest with Takam Sanjoy of the Congress, a former president of the influential All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) and a former Education Minister.

MIZORAM: After scripting history in the recent Assembly polls in Mizoram by securing a four-fifths majority, the Congress is confident of winning the lone Lok Sabha seat from the State with a huge margin. It has fielded C.L. Ruala, while the opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) and Mizoram People's Conference (MPC) have backed an independent candidate, Dr. H. Lallungmuana, since the sitting MP, Vanlalzawma of the MNF, decided not to contest.

Sikkim | **1** seat

Assembly | **32** seats

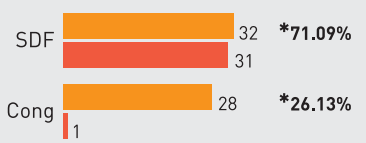
Phase 3 **(April 30)**

KEY PLAYERS

SDF: Pawan Kumar Chamling

Congress: Nar Bahadur Bhandari

Sikkim Assembly party position in 2004



* Vote share Contested Elected

SIKKIM

SMOOTH SAILING

By Suhrid Sankar Chattopadhyay in Gangtok

AS the tiny Himalayan State of Sikkim prepares for simultaneous elections to the Assembly and Lok Sabha on April 30, the advantage clearly lies with the ruling Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF). As in 2004, its main challenger will be the Congress. The SDF swept the polls in the last elections by winning 31 of the 32 Assembly seats. The Congress won the lone Sangha seat reserved for the monks and nuns of Sikkim's monasteries.

A unique feature of Sikkim's politics is that it is dominated by individual leaders rather than political parties. The two main contenders for power since 1994 have been the present Chief Minister and president of the SDF Pawan Chamling and former Chief Minister and Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee president Nar Bahadur Bhandari.

Chamling contests from the Poklok-Kamrang and Namchi-Singhithang Assembly constituencies in South Sikkim, while Bhandari contests from Khamdong-Singtan in East Sikkim and Chakung-Soreng in West Sikkim.

However, in spite of the impressive track record of development work undertaken by the SDF government over the past 15 years, traces of anti-incumbency feelings are surfacing although they may not be strong enough to topple the government.

"Fifteen years is a long time. Even the Bhandari government changed after 15 years," Swapan Lepcha, a tour operator on the outskirts of Gangtok, told *Frontline*. He was not the only one to voice such an opinion, but this was no reflection on Chamling's performance. "Chamling has done a lot for the State – beautified Gangtok, made Sikkim a tourist hub, and so on – but some of his Ministers have not been performing well, and that might affect the SDF's results," a shopkeeper in Gangtok told *Frontline*.

Chamling has dropped 20 sitting Members of the Legislative Assembly, including 10 Ministers in his 12-member Cabinet, in order to induct new faces and also stem any anti-incumbency factor. Although the reason he gave for "resting" them was that they prepare themselves to provide an "alternative" to him, Chamling's political adviser B.B. Gooroong said the Chief Minister wanted "a thorough change as per the wishes of the people, and this way the party will also be able to tackle anti-incumbency feelings". Chamling's decision has not caused dissidence in the ranks. In fact, the MLAs who were dropped from the list passed a resolution expressing their support to the Chief Minister's decision.

Even the sitting Member of Parliament, Nakul Das Rai, for the lone Sikkim Lok Sabha seat had to make way for the younger Prem Das Rai. In the last election, Nakul Das Rai won by a margin of over 1.2 lakh votes. The SDF is expected to win the seat again, but political observers feel the Congress' K.N. Upreti, who was a Minister in the Bhandari government, will make the contest a tough one. "Upreti is a well-known and respected leader, who many feel is just in the wrong party. Rai, on the other hand is young and well educated, but he is an absolute newcomer in politics. Most people don't even know about him," a political source in Sikkim said. As before, Sikkim will be joining any alliance that forms the government at the Centre. "We are dependent on the Centre for our development and for that purpose we always join the alliance in power," Gooroong said.

ATTEMPTS AT ALLIANCES

The opposition parties have realised that they can take on the SDF only if they put up a united front. The first initiative in this regard was taken by the State unit of the CPI(M), which tried to set up a United Democratic Front comprising the Congress, the BJP, the Sikkim Gorkha Prajatantrik Party and the Sikkim Himali Rajya

SUSHANTA PATRONOBISH

CHIEF MINISTER PAWAN Chamling at a public meeting at Rhenock in East Sikkim district on April 14.

Parishad (SHRP). However, this alliance fell through as the central leadership of the national parties, with the exception of the BJP, rejected the proposal. "Had this alliance actually taken place it would have worried us, but it is most unlikely that it would have been strong enough to defeat us," a source in the SDF told *Frontline*.

The Congress tried to have an alliance with the SHRP, arguably the strongest among the regional opposition parties, but the proposal foundered on the issue of seat sharing. The only alliance that seems to have stuck is the one between the Sikkim National People's Party and the Sikkim Janekta, called the United Sikkimese Alliance. However, these two parties are not big players in the State's politics. They have invited other parties to join them, but as of April 14 no party has shown any interest.

The disadvantage of the opposition parties is that they are mostly Gangtok-based, have hardly any grassroots support, and generally surface only during election time. The SDF is a well-organised, cadre-based party, which keeps in touch with the masses throughout the year. Of the three lakh voters in Sikkim, 70 per cent belong to rural areas, and they are the SDF's backbone.

The Sikkimese population is divided into three ethnic groups – the Nepalis (70 per cent), the Bhutias and the Lepchas (around 20 per cent), and others, mostly traders and professionals. More than 70 per cent of the Nepalis belong to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), and their unwavering loyalty lies with Chamling, who himself belongs to an OBC community. The upper-class Nepalis constitute Bhandari's vote bank. In the 2004 elections, the SDF got around 76 per cent of the total votes, while the Congress could manage only 20 per cent, and that too mainly owing to Bhandari's defection to the party. In 1999, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP), which was then led by Bhandari, won seven seats in the Assembly.

LIMBOO AND TAMANG

In 2003, the Limboo and Tamang communities, which constitute over 10 per cent of the Nepali community and play a decisive role in five Assembly seats, were included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. Since then the SDF government has canvassed in vain for reservation of seats for these two communities. The Congress hopes to take advantage of the situation by promising to reserve seats for the two communities. "The Limboo and Tamang communities have been totally deprived of their political rights. The Chamling government has badly let them down," Bhandari told *Frontline*. He feels that it would be to the benefit of the people of Sikkim if a national party rather than a regional one is at the helm of affairs. But traditionally that has not been the way in Sikkim politics.

THRUST ON DEVELOPMENT

The main thrust of the SDF's campaign has been development. "We have promised to banish poverty in all its manifestations from Sikkim by 2015 and make the people of the State completely self-reliant," Gooroong said. Around 70 per cent of the State budget is earmarked for rural development. The net State domestic product rose from Rs.496 crore in 1995 to Rs.1,730 crore in 2007. The tourism industry has thrived, generating substantial revenue and employment.

The opposition's campaign mostly centres around corruption charges against the government, populist promises, and the decision of the Central government to exempt all incomes of Sikkim Subject Certificate cardholders from the purview of direct taxes.

DZONGU HYDEL PROJECTS

The other issue that will be a key factor in the elections is the proposed hydel power projects in the Dzongu region of North Sikkim. These projects are expected to generate 5,000 MW of power by 2015.

The region falls under the protected area of the Lepcha community, who fear demographic changes if the projects are allowed to come up. For over a year now, the people of the region have been staging relay hunger-strikes against the project. These developments will certainly have their impact on the results in three Assembly seats that fall in North Sikkim. The Congress has promised to scuttle the project if elected to power.

The anti-incumbency factor that the Congress is pinning its hopes on could cost the SDF a few seats but is not strong enough to defeat the party. The SDF's inherent strengths – disciplined workers, organisational excellence and a well-oiled party machinery – along with an impressive performance record will most likely see it through for a fourth term in power. □

Fatal attraction

There is evidence of growing fragility in India's financial sector as a result of its transformation to approximate the Anglo-Saxon model.

Economic Perspectives

C.P. **CHANDRASEKHAR**

THE official Committee on Financial Sector Assessment, chaired by Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor Rakesh Mohan, released its report at the end of March. However, its output, which consists of six volumes (an executive summary, an overview report, and reports of the advisory panels on Financial Stability Assessment and Stress Testing, Financial Regulation and Supervision, Institutions and Market Structure, and Transparency Standards) running into more than 2,500 pages, has not received the attention that the effort seems to warrant. Possibly, its sheer bulk has deterred many an analyst.

There could, however, be another reason. The assessment is a part of the Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) which, as the preamble to the Executive Summary notes, is a joint initiative of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank that began in 1999. That programme ostensibly "attempts to assess the stability and resilience of financial systems in member countries", though there are a number of instances such as in the case of Argentina where a positive and upbeat assessment made under the programme came not long before the onset of a financial crisis. In the event, the credibility of the FSAP has been in question.

And that is even truer today. This is because the programme is anchored in the belief that the integration of financial markets in developing countries with their global counterparts is necessarily positive so long as the structure, procedures and regulatory framework prevailing in "mature markets" is adopted in these countries. Hence, the programme attempts to assess "the status and implementation of various international financial standards and codes in the regulation and supervision of institutions and markets", as well as the adequacy of "the financial infrastructure in terms of legal provisions, liquidity management, payments systems, corporate governance, accounting and auditing". For all these, the benchmark is the system in the developed countries, especially the United States. The assumption seems to be that the greater the degree to which financial structures in emerging markets are reshaped in the image of those prevailing in the developed countries, the more resilient they will be.

It hardly bears stating that the financial crisis that engulfed the developed industrial countries and led up to the current recession in the real economy has proved this assumption to be wrong. This in itself is reason for ignoring the report. However, since the assessment is a country exercise owned by national regulatory authorities even if inspired by the IMF and the World Bank, there could be nuances that can contribute to a better understanding of the effects of financial liberalisation and globalisation.

IN FAVOUR OF GLOBAL FIRMS

In the case of this mammoth exercise undertaken by India, the report exudes confidence that the Indian financial system is stable and resilient. But lurking beneath this confidence is evidence of growing fragility in the financial sector as a result of its transformation to approximate the Anglo-Saxon model. It is now well accepted that countries seeking to attract capital chose to liberalise their financial policies in two ways. They eased entry provisions with respect to foreign institutions that are the "carriers" of that capital, as it were. They relaxed regulations relating to the markets, institutions and instruments that constitute the financial structure to provide a favourable environment for global firms. Even though liberalisation of regulations with respect to foreign institutions and foreign capital inflows is not a sufficient condition for attracting such inflows, it obviously is a necessary condition.

This is illustrated by the Indian experience, where capital inflows rose significantly long after it liberalised its financial sector. Liberalisation began in the early 1990s and was substantial by the middle of that decade. But it was only after 2003 that India witnessed any surge in capital inflows. Until 2002-03, the maximum level that net inflows had touched was $8.2 billion, in 2001-02. The surge occurred thereafter. Capital flows rose to $15.7 bil-

lion in 2003-04, $21.4 billion in 2005-06, $29.8 billion in 2006-07 and $63.8 billion in 2007-08.

It now appears that the problems for monetary and exchange rate management that this surge created and the liquidity overhang it resulted in led to a sharp increase in credit provision in India as the Financial Sector Assessment Report (FSAR) indicates. Total bank credit grew at a scorching pace from 2005 onwards, at more than double the rate of increase of nominal gross domestic product (GDP). As a result, the ratio of outstanding bank credit to GDP, which had declined in the initial post-liberalisation years from 30.2 per cent at the end of March 1991 to 27.3 per cent at the end of March 1997, doubled over the next decade to reach about 60 per cent by the end of March 2008. An aspect of financial liberalisation and "economic reform" was an increase in credit dependence in the Indian economy, which is a characteristic that seems to have been imported from developed countries such as the U.S.

At first sight, this increase in credit appears positive inasmuch as it reflected a greater willingness on the part of banks to lend. Thus, the growth in credit outperformed the growth in deposits between 2004-05 and 2005-06, resulting in the increase in credit-deposit ratio from 55.9 per cent at end March 2004 to 72.5 per cent at end March 2008. This increase was accompanied by a corresponding drop in the investment-deposit ratio, from 51.7 per cent to 36.2 per cent, which indicates that banks were shifting away from their earlier conservative preference to invest in safe government securities in excess of what was required under the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) norm.

Rapid credit growth has meant that banks are relying on short-term funds to lend long. Since March 2001, there has been a steady rise in the proportion of short-term deposits with the banks. Deposits maturing up to one year increased from 33.2 per cent in March 2001 to 43.6 per cent in March 2008. On the other hand, the proportion of term loans maturing after five years has increased from 9.3 per cent to 16.5 per cent. As the FSAR recognises, while this could imply increased profits, the rising asset-liability mismatch has increased the liquidity risk faced by banks.

However, these changes do not appear to have been driven by the desire to provide more credit to the productive sectors of the economy. Retail loans, which grew at around 41 per cent in both 2004-05 and 2005-06, have been one of the prime drivers of credit growth in recent years, despite the moderation in growth rates to 30 per cent in 2006-07 and 17 per cent in 2007-08. The result was a sharp increase in the retail exposure of the banking system, with overall personal loans increasing from slightly more than 8 per cent of total non-food credit in 2004 to close to 25 per cent by 2008. Of the components of retail credit, the growth in housing loans has been the highest in most years.

The danger here is that this rapid increase in credit and retail exposure, with inadequate or poor collateral, could have brought more tenuous borrowers into the bank credit universe. A significant but as yet unknown proportion of this could be "sub-prime" lending. According to one estimate, by November 2007, there was a little more than Rs.400 billion of credit that was of sub-prime quality, defaults on which could erode the capital base of the banks.

It also appears that to attract such borrowers the banks have been offering attractive interest rates. The period of increased credit off-take has also seen an increase in loans provided at interest rates below the benchmark prime lending rate (BPLR). The share of such loans in the total rose from 27.7 per cent in March 2002 to 76 per cent at the end of March 2008. This increase has been marked in the case of consumer credit. According to the FSAR, the rise in sub-BPLR loans can be attributed to "an increase in liquidity, stiff competition, buoyant corporate performance which lowered credit risk and growth in retail credit

(housing)". That increase, in its view, reflects a mispricing of risk that could affect banks adversely in the event of an economic downturn.

But this is not the only evidence of the mispricing of risk. According to the committee, the exposure of the banking system to the so-called "sensitive" sectors, such as the capital, real estate and commodity markets, was also on the rise. Thus, at the end of financial year 2007, it stood at 20.4 per cent of aggregate bank loans and advances, with real estate contributing 18.7 of that figure, the capital market 1.5 per cent and commodities 0.1 per cent.

The FSAR also notes that the off-

R. SHIVAJI RAO

AT A "PROPERTY fair" in Chennai on February 13. Since growth in the housing, automobiles and consumer durables sectors had been driven by credit-financed purchases encouraged by easy liquidity and low interest rates, a fall in credit offtake could intensify the effects of the ongoing crisis.

balance sheet (OBS) exposure of banks has increased significantly in recent years, particularly in the case of foreign banks and new private sector banks. The ratio of OBS exposure to total assets increased from 57 per cent at the end of March 2002 to 363 per cent at the end of March 2008. This increase is mainly on account of derivatives whose share averaged around 80 per cent. Public sector banks have followed, with their exposure rising subsequent to the amendment of regulations to permit over-the-counter (OTC) transactions in interest rate derivatives.

However, as the FSAR recognises, currently prevailing accounting standards do not clearly specify how to account for losses and profits arising out of derivatives transactions. Given the lack of prudential accounting and disclosure norms, the propensity of some players to use derivatives to assume excessive leverage is a source of concern, since it is difficult to gauge the quantum of market and credit risks that banks are exposed to.

To deal with its increased exposure to risk, the Indian banking sector too had begun securitising loans of all kinds so as to transfer the risk associated with them to those who could be persuaded to buy into them. As the U.S. experience has shown, this tends to slacken diligence when offering credit, since risk does not stay with those originating retail loans.

The effect of securitisation is partly seen in the income structure of the banks. Although net interest income has remained the mainstay of banks in India, fee income has been contributing a significant portion to the total income of the new private and the foreign banks in recent years. Treasury income, which was the second most important source of income until 2003-04, has declined to negligible levels.

THE IMPACT

These changes in the financial sector point to two ways in which the current crisis can affect India. First, the credit stringency generated by the exodus of capital from the country and the uncertainties generated by the threat of default of retail loans that now constitute a high proportion of total advances could freeze up retail credit and curtail demand, as is happening in the developed industrial countries.

Second, individuals and households burdened with past debt and/or uncertain about their employment would prefer to postpone purchases and not take on additional interest and amortisation payment commitments. Thus, the offtake of credit can shrink even if credit were available, resulting in a fall in credit-financed consumption and investment demand.

Since growth in a number of areas such as the housing sector, automobiles and consumer durables had been driven by credit-financed purchases encouraged by easy liquidity and low interest rates, this could intensify the effects of the ongoing crisis. □

The real world vs Obama's imagery

Afghanistan: U.S.' Afghan war rages in provinces close to Kabul, in the Pakistani border regions and in the cluster of southern provinces. BY MARC W. HEROLD

In some 80 days in office, Obama has managed to raise the monthly **average kill rate achieved by George** Bush from 32 during 2008 to 45 a month (for February-March 2009).

"Omission is the most powerful form of lie."
– George Orwell

"During a war, news should be given out for instruction rather than information."
– Joseph Goebbels

First Bush then Obama and their NATO allies have been killing twice as many civilian women and children than civilian men in America's Afghan war.
– Marc W. Herold

ON March 31, 2009, Jon Stewart, in his "Daily Show", announced that Commander-in-Chief Barack Obama's mission of "Redefinition Accomplished" was in full swing.[1] A new Orwellian vocabulary, more soothing and politically correct, has been invented and marketed to the American citizenry by Obama. But as Peter Baker of *The New York Times* noted, "For all the shifting words, Mr. Obama has left the bulk of [George W.] Bush's national security infrastructure intact so far."[2] In the real world, average Afghans and Pashtuns in the Pakistani border areas experience this continuing brutality daily as I shall now document, but Americans are largely oblivious, remaining enthralled in the puffery of "Yes, We Can" and "Change We Can Believe In". The phrase "civilian casualties" is non-

ADAM BERRY/BLOOMBERG NEWS

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA at a news conference after a NATO meeting in Strasbourg, France, on April 4.

[1] See and listen to at http://www.thedailyshow.com/video/index.jhtml?videoId=222759&title=redefinition-accomplished
[2] Peter Baker, "The Words Have Changed, but Have the Policies?", The New York Times (April 2, 2009) as well as Michael Barone, "Obama's Foreign Policy is Very Much a Continuation of the Bush Policies", U.S News & World Report (April 8, 2009) at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/04/09/usnews/whispers/main4932324.shtml

Table 1

Monthly fatalities of Afghan civilians (killed by U.S./NATO) action and of foreign occupation troops, October 2008 – March 2009

	(1) Afghan civilian deaths	(2) U.S./NATO troops deaths	Ratio of (1)/(2)
October 2008	91-97	19	4.8-5.1
November 2008	95-138	12	7.9-11.5
December 2008	41	27	6.8
January 2009	84-88	25	3.4-3.5
February 2009	53	24	2.2
March 2009	36-38	28	1.3-1.4

Sources: Afghan civilians from my Afghan Victim Memorial Project data base and foreign occupation troop fatalities from ICasualties.org at http://www.icasualties.org/oef/

Table 2

Distribution of foreign occupation troops deaths in Afghanistan, 2004-08

Year	U.S. deaths	Other foreign troop deaths	Total foreign troop deaths	Other as % of total
2003	48	9	57	15.8%
2004	52	7	59	11.9%
2005	99	32	131	24.4%
2006	98	93	191	48.7%
2007	117	115	232	49.6%
2008	155	139	294	47.3%
2009*	47	37	84	44.0%

*through April 8, 2009
Source: ICasualties.org at http://www.icasualties.org/oef/

existent in Obama's vocabulary as a search of Google reveals. Dead Afghan and Pashtun civilians have simply been redefined as non-existent.

As Obama's Afghan "surge" takes hold, more fighting and more civilian deaths are certain (as well as renewed efforts by the United States to redefine, omit and suppress reporting upon such). The U.S. mainstream media will mostly be a cooperative partner in the Pentagon's news management. Many an Afghan sees no realistic prospect of peace as long as foreign soldiers remain in Afghanistan, and the Taliban have no incentive to compromise when they are in a winning position.[3] An additional 17,000-21,000 U.S. troops – the Obama surge – means nothing in a country where military experts estimate that 400,000-500,000 foreign soldiers would be necessary to quell the resistance.[4]

While much continuity with Bush policies exists, some opportunistic changes in the execution of the Afghan war have been made. Most are inspired by the aim to better market "the good war" to the American public. For example, under Obama U.S./North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) forces are relying less upon deadly air strikes, which are 4-10 times more deadly for Afghan civilians than are ground attacks. As a consequence, the monthly total of Afghan civilians[5] killed by U.S./NATO action has declined moderately at the same time as the monthly death toll of occupation forces has risen (Table 1).

Whereas the Associated Press reported that during the first two months of 2009, "militants" had killed 60 people and U.S.-led forces killed 100, my data indicates that U.S./NATO attacks led to the death of 137-141 Afghan civilians (Table 1)[6].

As a result, the ratio of Afghan civilians killed per occupation-soldier death – a measure of the lethality of America's Afghan war for Afghan civilians relative to that for U.S./NATO occupation troops – has been falling from above five during late 2008 to about 1.4 during March 2009. This ratio was 2.9-3.5 in 2008, 4.4-5.6 in 2007 and 3.4-4.0 in 2006.[7] Combating the Afghan resistance with ground operations is simply much more dangerous for foreign forces than relying upon air strikes. By reducing air strikes, foreign forces kill fewer Afghan civilians per attack but suffer greater fatalities and injuries, which, in turn, fuels home country opposition to the war.

A case in point was in August 2008 when 12 French troops were killed and another 21 injured, which resulted in an outpouring of public questioning of France's role in Afghanistan. Two-thirds of French citizenry already opposed any French involvement in the Afghan conflict.[8]

The U.S. astutely manipulated some NATO countries in 2004 into doing the heavy lifting of fighting (and taking casualties) in parts of Afghanistan, for example, the British in Helmand, the Canadians in Kandahar, the Dutch and the Australians in Uruzgan. Quickly, non-U.S. foreign troops' casualties rose dramatically in both absolute and relative terms (Table 2).

Indeed, as I have reported, the relative lethality for non-U.S. foreign

[3] For example, expressed in Chris Sands, "War-Weary People Fear Little Hope for Peace", The National (March 9, 2009) at http://www.thenational.ae/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20090309/FOREIGN/614496422/1002 , Kathy Gannon, "Afghans Fed up with Government, U.S.", Associated Press (September 5, 2008) at http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2008/09/07-3 and Abdus Sattar Ghazali, "Obama Embraces Bush's 'War on Terror' Policy Without Naming It So", OpEdNews (February 25, 2009) at http://www.amperspective.com/html/obama_embraces_.html

[4] Paul Daley, "Taliban Thwart Bid to Rebuild", Sydney Morning Herald (February 1, 2009) at http://www.smh.com.au/text/articles/2009/01/31/1232818793464.html

[5] I include in this number, Pashtun tribes people in the Afghan-Pakistan border regions.

[6] "Toll: More US Troops More Casualties", Press TV (March 1, 2009) at http://www.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=87200&sectionid=351020403

[7] Details in my "Matrix of Death", Frontline (October 24, 2008), pages 4-23. Also published in Canada's Global Research at http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=10506

[8] "Afghan Ambush Kills French Troops", BBC News (August 19, 2008) at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7569942.stm

Table 3

The relative lethality for troops fighting in Afghanistan, 2006

United States	4.45
Britain	6.3-9.8
Canada	14.4
NATO	5.0-12.9
Soviets (1980s)	12.5

troops is higher than for U.S. soldiers.[9] The lethality ratio (the *lethality ratio* is defined as soldiers killed per 1,000 in-theatre troops) for NATO occupation forces in 2006 was two to three times that for U.S. troops (Table 3). The French seemed to have understood the dynamic and announced that by the end of 2006 they would withdraw their 200 Special Forces combat troops from southern and eastern Afghanistan (where they had been deployed since July 2003).

The level of lethality for U.S. occupation forces is actually much higher than the figures above suggest. This is because of the "*long tail phenomenon*" as applied to the U.S. military (the number of support personnel (the tail) required to support combat troops (the tooth)). The tail has also been greatly lengthened as the U.S. military has contracted out to private military contractors (for example, Halliburton-KBR, DynCorp, Triple Canopy, Blackwater, Executive Outcomes, and so on) for support services (with all kinds of problems regarding lack of oversight, corruption, over-billing and so on). Such outsourcing has been driven less by cost considerations and more by a desire to reduce military casualties, which are politically costly in the U.S.

DEADLY TRADE-OFF

As regards Afghan civilian casualties, a deadly trade-off is at work. Whereas fewer very deadly air strikes are taking place, more less-deadly ground raids by U.S./NATO forces are occurring. The number of U.S./NATO incidents in which Afghan civilians perished during 2009 is as follows: January: 11; February: 28; and March: 31. The total number of Afghan civilians killed in U.S./NATO actions during January 1-April 8, 2009, is 194-202. This number will rise markedly as winter passes and the fighting season begins in earnest, propelled forward by a doubling of U.S. occupation troops in Afghanistan under Obama's "surge". The number of civilians killed reported here is an underestimate for two major reasons: air strikes in remote areas, as in Kunar and Nuristan, go unreported; and Waheed Muzhda, a political analyst, also blamed the international forces for giving unfair reports about civilian deaths in Afghanistan. Muzhda said that there were several such incidents in which civilians were killed and the foreign troops said that they killed militants.[10] Even Afghan officials have differed on many occasions with foreign troops' reporting about civilians' deaths, he added.[11] The pattern has continued under Obama,

> Each report follows a very similar pattern – U.S. forces report some number of militants killed, then a report from local authorities appears saying something like, "No, actually that was just a family in our village (or a wedding party, or a...), and we want answers." Eventually, there's a report that a U.S. officer has visited the village, handed out a check... and expressed our deepest apologies – and then a commander in Kabul issues a very serious statement about how troubling the civilian casualties are, and how we are now going to change our approach and take all sorts of steps to protect civilians. The most recent of such statements included a promise to coordinate all raids with local Afghan forces.[12]

At a more general level, a thorough review of past counter-insurgency operations carried out by the Rand Corp noted that history tells us that increasing troop levels to fight an insurgency is not a winning formula. The Soviets learnt this after 10 years in Afghanistan; the French learnt it in Algeria, and the U.S. had its lesson in Vietnam. The larger the foreign troop presence in wars of counterinsurgency, "the worse the outcome tends to be". That was the sweeping conclusion drawn in a 2008 study by the Rand Corp.[13] Others have asserted that the presence of more foreign troops in Afghanistan today will raise the numbers of civilians killed. The huge footprint left by foreign forces in Afghanistan – whether by killing civilians, breaking and entering compounds, beating and/or abducting persons, hooding prisoners, acts of outrage such as photographing a captured Afghan man naked,[14] and so on – has fuelled the Afghan resistance to the foreign occupier. Graeme Smith of *The Globe & Mail* reported on the night-time raids by foreign forces, which cause almost as much resentment as the more lethal air strikes.[15]

For example, in the January 24, 2009, raid in Laghman in which 22 civilians (18 children, two women and two men) were killed, Ghazi Gul, an intelligence officer in the Karzai military, lost his father, mother, two brothers, a cousin, a nephew and two nieces, who were killed by U.S. forces in the raid on the village of Garoch in Laghman province. On February 18, Gul told the *Chicago Tribune*, "If we talk about the Americans, they are my enemies. And if I can, I will hurt them."

In an important recent essay on the Afghan war, the French scholar Gilles

[9] See analysis and data in my "Relative Lethality. Survival Odds for Civilians and Occupiers in Afghanistan and Iraq", Cursor.org (January 6, 2006) at http://cursor.org/stories/relativelethality.html

[10] Hundreds of such cases are documented in my data base, The Afghan Victim Memorial Project, at http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mwherold

[11] For one, Karzai has been critical of U.S. killing Afghan civilians. See also Javed Hamim Kakar, "Taliban Dispute UN Report on Civilian Deaths", Pajhwok Afghan News (February 19, 2009) at http://www.pajhwok.com/new/viewstory.asp?id=70028

[12] From "An Afghan Surge...in Civilian Casualties" (March 15, 2009) at http://firedoglake.com/2009/03/15/an-afghan-surge-in-civilian-casualties/

[13] David C. Gompert and John Gordon IV, War by Other Means. Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency (Santa Monica: RAND National Defense Research Institute, RAND Corp., 2008)

[14] For the photo by the German reporter, Perry Kretz, see http://www.stern.de/politik/ausland/:Afghanistan-Osama-Laden--/526526.html?cp=5

[15] Graeme Smith, "Report Slams Tactic of Night Raids on Afghan Homes", The Globe & Mail (December 23, 2008).

Dorronsoro was explicit,

> The mere presence of foreign soldiers fighting a war in Afghanistan is probably the single most important factor in the resurgence of the Taliban.[16]

Frederico Manfredi, adviser to the Belgian government, wrote recently about his trip to southern Afghanistan where he was introduced to a traditional community leader in a mud-brick village about an hour outside of Kandahar. Manfredi writes,

> A gracious elder entered the room. He was tall and slender…he introduced his lineage, and said nonchalantly, "You know, half my family is Taliban."…I listened carefully: "Here in the south, whenever people see foreign armies taking over, they want to fight them. I don't blame those who join the Taliban. At least the 'Taliban' are Afghans, they're Pashtuns, they're kin…. I'm not a Talib. But I want the occupation to end."[17]

The case of Logar province is very instructive here. The foreign troop presence in Logar before 2009 was minimal. Consequently, the Taliban held sway. Relatively little fighting took place and few civilians were killed or injured.

Then, the Americans – Task Force Spartan with 10th Mountain Division troops as part of Obama's surge – arrived in early February 2009. Fighting picked up and civilians began dying: five killed in February, six killed in March, and seven killed in the first week of April. For example, on March 13, Abdul Rashid and his four sons were killed by U.S. soldiers, leading to public protests.[18]

Angry with reported innocent killing of five persons of a family by the U.S. forces in a raid in central Logar province, protesters besieged the building of Charkh district headquarters the next day. More than 300 protesting people, chanting

LIU JIN/AFP

AN AFGHAN YOUTH walks past a U.S. soldier on the outskirts of Naray in Nuristan province of Afghanistan on April 3.

[16] Gilles Dorronsoro, "Focus and Exit: An Alternative Strategy for the Afghan War", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report (January 2009) at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/afghan_war-strategy.pdf

[17] Frederico Manfredi, "Rethinking U.S. Policy in Afghanistan", World Policy Journal 25, 4 (Winter 2008/9): 23.

[18] Details in Shahpur Arab, "US Forces Kill Five Civilians in Logar: Officials", Pajhwok Afghan News (March 14, 2009) at http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2009/03/14/us-forces-kill-five-civilians-in-logar-officials.phtml

anti-American slogans, called for an immediate trial of the killers.

DRONE ATTACKS

During January 1 to April 9, 2009, the regions with the highest numbers of civilians killed by foreign troops were Laghman, the border areas of Pakistan, Helmand, Logar, Kapisa and Herat (Table 4). In other words, America's Afghan war rages in provinces close to the capital of Kabul, in the Pakistani border regions where Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) drones do all the killing, and in the cluster of southern provinces (Uruzgan, Helmand, Herat, and Kandahar). Deadly CIA drone attacks within Pakistan have continued since Obama took command. Of the 60 cross-border U.S. drone attacks upon Pakistan between January 14, 2006, and April 8, 2009,

> Only 10 were able to hit their actual targets, killing 14 wanted al-Qaeda leaders, besides perishing 687 innocent Pakistani civilians. **The success percentage of the U.S. predator strikes thus comes to not more than six per cent.** Figures compiled by the Pakistani authorities show that a total of 701 people, including 14 al-Qaeda leaders, have been killed since January 2006 in 60 American predator attacks targeting the tribal areas of Pakistan. Two strikes carried out in 2006 had killed 98 civilians while three attacks conducted in 2007 had slain 66 Pakistanis, yet none of the wanted al-Qaeda or Taliban leaders could be hit by the Americans right on target. However, of the 50 drone attacks carried out between January 29, 2008, and April 8, 2009, 10 hit their targets and killed 14 wanted al-Qaeda operatives. Most of these attacks were carried out on the basis of intelligence believed to have been provided by the Pakistani and Afghan tribesmen who had been spying for the U.S.-led allied forces stationed in Afghanistan. The remaining 40 drone attacks went wrong due to faulty intelligence information, killing hundreds of innocent civilians, including women and children. The number of the Pakistani civilians killed in those 50 attacks stood at 537, in which 385 people lost their lives in 2008 and 152 people were slain in the first 99 days of 2009 (between January 1 and April 8).... Of the 14 attacks targeting Pakistan in 2009, three were carried out in January, killing 30 people, two in February killing 55 people, five in March killing 36 people and four were conducted in the first nine days of April, killing 31 people.... Of the 14 strikes carried out in the first 99 days of 2009, only one proved successful, killing two most-wanted senior al-Qaeda leaders – Osama al Kini and Sheikh Ahmed Salim Swedan. Both had lost their lives in a New Year's Day drone strike carried out in the South Waziristan region on January 1, 2009.[19]

Table 4

Geographic distribution of Afghan civilians killed by U.S./NATO actions in 2009 (through April 8, 2009)

Region	Total civilian fatalities	Number of incidents
Laghman	53	3
Pakistan border areas	23-27-152	5-14
Uruzgan	19	3
Logar	18	5
Helmand	18	8
Kapisa	15-19	1
Herat	16	3
Kandahar	14	4
Khost	13	5
Zabul	6	1
Kunduz	5	1
Nangarhar	3	2
Ghazni	2	1
Paktika	1	1
Kabul	1	1
Totals.....	**194-202-354**	**44-53**

Table 5

The demographics of Afghan civilians killed by U.S./NATO actions during Obama's presidency (Jan. 21 – April 9, 2009)

Men	41-43	27.6% of total
Women	15	9.9%
Children	56	36.8%
Undetermined	38-40	25.7%
Total...	150-154	100.0%

Source: Derived from the Afghan Victim Memorial Project database

In other words, **in some 80 days in office, Obama managed to raise the monthly average kill rate achieved by Bush from 32 during 2008 to 45 a month (for February-March 2009).**

Most of this has been omitted or misreported in the U.S. Totals are never published. Even if totals are published, as the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) did for 2007 and 2008 or as the Associated Press did, the figures are not credible as no disaggregated data is provided, thereby violating a basic premise of social science, namely, that all results should be reproducible. George Orwell would label all this a lie.

An analysis of the demographics of Afghan civilians who perished at the hands of the U.S. and NATO since Obama assumed the presidency reveals the following (Table 5). **Women and children killed by U.S./NATO forces amounted to 63 per cent of the identifiable deaths (and men 37 per cent).** This compares to figures respectively of 72 per cent and 28 per cent during January-August 2008.[20] The difference is accounted for by the much greater reliance upon bombing strikes during 2008. **In other words, first Bush, then Obama, and their NATO allies have been killing twice as many civilian women and children than civilian men in America's Afghan war.** Very little change in the relative proportion has occurred since Obama became Commander-in-Chief. My argument here includes men as civilians, thereby not falling into the essentialist trap of equating women and children with innocent civilians.[21]

[19] "60 Drone Hits Kill 14 Al-Qaeda Men, 687 Civilians," The News (April 10, 2009) at http://www.thenews.com.pk/print3.asp?id=21440

[20] Derived from my "Matrix of Death", Frontline (October 24, 2008).

[21] A theme explored in R. Charli Carpenter, 'Innocent Women and Children': Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 217 pages.

KAMAL SADAT/REUTERS

A VILLAGER LOOKS at Jannat Gul's six-day-old infant killed in a midnight U.S. ground attack on April 8/9, 2009, in the district of Gorbaz, near Khost.

The high proportion of women and children killed reflects the fact that U.S./NATO forces are assaulting domestic or home spaces.

What does the Obama imagery emphasise? Talking about the Obama surge we are instructed that, "These troops are going to help us counter Taliban territorial advances, deny safe havens and create security for Afghan civilians," said a senior Obama administration official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak publicly.[22]

The photograph on this page shows one of the 56 Afghan children killed by U.S./NATO forces since Obama became Commander-in-Chief.

CONCLUSION

What was originally (2001-04) an American war (with "poodle" Blair tagging along) became a U.S./NATO war during 2005-08, but that is now changing. As has become apparent, Europe – especially Old Europe – is bailing out on America. They see Afghanistan as America's war. Obama's effort at the recent NATO meeting in Strasbourg to cajole and beg Europeans to do more fighting and provide more monies failed miserably.[23] Patrick Buchanan lays out the European thinking clearly,

> Because Europe sees no threat from Afghanistan and no vital interest in a faraway country where NATO Europeans have not fought since the British Empire folded its tent long ago. Al-Qaeda did not attack Europe out of Afghanistan. America was attacked. Because, said Osama bin Laden in his "declaration of war", America was occupying the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia, choking Muslim Iraq to death and providing Israel with the weapons to repress the Palestinians. As Europe has no troops in Saudi Arabia, is exiting Iraq and backs a Palestinian state, Europeans figure, they are less likely to be attacked than if they are fight-

[22] Julian Barnes and Greg Miller, "Obama Orders More troops to Afghanistan", Los Angeles Times (February 18, 2009) at http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-afghan-troops18-2009feb18,0,7002157,print.story

[23] Superbly articulated in Hans Vogel, "The Emperor's New Clothes: Mr. Change's Recent Europe Trip", Pravda.RU (April 10, 2009) at http://english.pravda.ru/opinion/columnists/10-04-2009/107385-Change_Emperor-0

STEVEN SENNE/AP

SAID T. JAWAD, Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S. He recently proclaimed that all that the Americans needed to do after killing Afghan civilians was to apologise and all would be well.

ing and killing Muslims in Afghanistan.[24]

The continuity by Obama of Bush's policies is striking, the soothing rhetoric notwithstanding. Obama continues the troop build-up begun under Bush during 2008.

Drone attacks in Pakistan multiply. Foreign forces' midnight raids upon Afghan homes continue. The hopeless effort to build up an Afghan police force persists, or "Afghanise" the war in a way the U.S. attempted in Vietnam and failed. Most importantly, Obama's primary justification for the continuation and escalation of America's war upon Afghanistan has reverted to precisely the one President Bush uttered after 9/11: the bombing and invasion is intended to deny a haven to Al Qaeda in Afghanistan where it might plan further attacks. Never mind that the 9/11 attacks were planned in Hamburg.

The Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan were very low-tech, primitive operations where the primary emphasis was upon physical training and discussion/education. Such activities can easily be carried out just about anywhere in the world; certainly Yemen, Pakistan, and the Sahara are prime locations. The effects of the U.S. bombing and invading Afghanistan have been to stir up hatred of the West and to decentralise radical Islamic groups, thereby creating a much more dangerous and hidden "enemy". Obama is pursuing precisely a military tactical policy guided by the three dangerous or misleading propositions Gilles Dorronsoro warned against: "playing local", "searching for 'moderate' Taliban", and pressuring Pakistan.[25]

Obama's military policies continue killing Afghan civilians. In the wee hours of March 19, 2009, a U.S. ground attack killed two civilians. A Reuters reporter, Rafeeq Shirzad, described what happened,

> The early morning raid was aimed at disabling an al Qaeda cell of bomb-makers and planners in Bati Kot district in Nangarhar province... the U.S. military said in a statement. "Two armed militants engaged the force and were killed, a total of four suspected militants were detained," it said. But district governor Khaibar Momand condemned the killings, saying the victims were civilians and that the operation had not been coordinated with Afghan troops. About 100 residents gathered to protest against the killings, saying they would not bury the bodies until they received an explanation. Four houses were also destroyed in the raid, residents told Reuters. "It is better to join the Taliban than be neutral and be victimised," one resident named Rahmatullah said. "Foreign forces are not here for our security; they capture civilians in the middle of the night and kill them. The government is useless and we won't ask anything from it. We can take our own revenge ourselves," he said.[26]

But Afghanistan's Ambassador to the U.S., Said Jawad, would not understand. He recently proclaimed that all that the Americans needed to do after killing Afghan civilians was to apologise and all would be well.[27] An "I'm sorry" will make revenge, so central to Pushtunwali, evaporate. From the safety and comfort of Washington, Jawad instructed his suffering compatriots back in Afghanistan, "This is a price *that we have to pay* if we want security and stability in Afghanistan, the region and the world."

The Guardian's one-time correspondent in Moscow during the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan, Simon Jenkins, summed up the future admirably,

> As with the Russians so with the West: this poor, intensely private country will one day see off another invader who sought to reorganise its history with guns, bombs and money. It was never going to work. Painfully, we are now beginning to realise this.[28] □

[24] Patrick J. Buchanan, "Why Europe Won't Fight", Antiwar.org (April 9, 2009) at http://original.antiwar.com/buchanan/2009/04/09/why-europe-wont-fight/
[25] Dorronsoro (2009), op. cit.: 4-7
[26] Emphasis added by M.H. - Rafeeq Shirzad, "Afghans Protest anti-Qaeda Raid Which Kills two", Reuters (March 19, 2009) at http://www.reuters.com/article/latestCrisis/idUSISL435097
[27] "Afghan Envoy Defends US Raids", Al Jazeera.net (April 11, 2009) at http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/04/2009410225414127835.html
[28] Simon Jenkins, "Parallels with Nam", The Guardian (March 31, 2009) at http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-03-31-parallels-with-nam

'Satellite' shock

North Korea's latest "satellite" launch propels into focus a potential reconfiguration of the East Asian order. BY P.S. SURYANARAYANA IN SINGAPORE

Pyongyang has jolted not only the United States but also Japan, South Korea and China. The **fulcrum of any future power** equation might well be the U.S.-China relationship over time.

THE controversial launch of a "satellite" by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) on April 5 has once again upset the strategic calculations of major powers in East Asia. As a "resident power" in the region, the United States is leading the campaign to tame the DPRK.

However, the U.S. and its allies see the launch as no more than a partially successful test-flight of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). America is not as alarmed by it as it was by China's space-faring feat of successfully carrying out an anti-satellite test in 2007. From the standpoint of U.S. military experts, the 2007 event was as significant as the former Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik, the first orbiting satellite, in 1957. While the DPRK's latest test poses no threat to the U.S. supremacy in outer space, President Barack Obama has led a new diplomatic offensive. Thereby hangs yet another story of a potential reconfiguration of the East Asian order with reference to the DPRK itself. Surely, diplomatic experts do not expect any such reconfiguration to take place in the near future. However, Pyongyang has yet again jolted not only the U.S. but also Japan, South Korea and China.

LEE JAE-WON/REUTERS

SOUTH KOREANS BURN signs denouncing North Korean leader Kim Jong-il and the rocket launch, near the U.S. embassy in Seoul on April 5.

At the time this report is written, the United Nations Security Council is likely to debate a draft resolution condemning the DPRK's latest action. In the first place, the draft was not at all easy to formulate. Differences between China and Russia, on the one side, and the U.S. and Japan, on the other, were slowly narrowed. It was not as if China and Russia were at first supportive of the DPRK's ballistic missile programme, already a subject of the Council's sanctions. The initial concerns of these two veto-empowered permanent members were centred on a matter of principle. They were against any censure of a U.N. member-state for its attempt at space exploration under international law. They wanted to be sure that the DPRK had deviated from the path that Iran recently charted by demonstrably launching a satellite into space.

A FLYING OBJECT

At stake in this entire closed-door debate was the DPRK's failure to show that a satellite was indeed put into orbit. A Japanese spokesman told *Frontline* that the DPRK, by launching "a flying object" of the kind monitored, had violated the relevant U.N. resolutions. He was speaking shortly after Japan detected the first signs of the launch. What could not be missed were the sarcasm and diplomatic delicacy behind his reference to a purported satellite as no more than a flying object.

Sarcasm was writ large over the assessment that

Pyongyang's much-advertised satellite test had in fact failed. For weeks before the launch, the DPRK was busy announcing its plans to put a satellite in space for peaceful purposes. Due diligence was also evident in the DPRK's pre-launch notifications to the relevant international maritime and aviation authorities. They were advised to keep clear of the likely flight path in the sky and the waters below during the planned launch between April 4 and 8. It was quite extraordinary that the DRPK, often dismissive of the larger international community's "norms", took so much care now.

The DPRK is fully cognisant of the U.S. as a "resident power" in East Asia.

At the same time, it was diplomatic nicety on Japan's part to describe the purported satellite as just a flying object. After all, a satellite launch is not tabooed under international law, although the application of this norm to Pyongyang remains highly debatable. Japan said Security Council Resolutions 1695 and 1718 "clearly prohibit North Korea from developing ballistic missile technology".

This position, Tokyo said, would be valid, regardless of Pyongyang's claims that it had launched a satellite and not an ICBM. For Tokyo and its allies, the technological bottom line was that the launch involved a dual-use rocket with potential military capabilities. The diplomatic bottom line, though, was that the launch would have "a negative impact on peace and stability in East Asia". In such an elaborate context, Tokyo's initiative for an emergency session of the Security Council was readily accepted by the other members.

Two versions on the technical data, one by the DPRK and the other by Japan, merit attention for the light they shed on the importance of the launch. The DPRK state news agency said a home-made three-stage rocket, Unha-2 (Milky Way), put an indigenous communications satellite into orbit. The entire operation was said to have taken nine minutes and two seconds. The satellite, with an unspecified technical profile, would take 104 minutes and 12 seconds for each orbit around the earth, the agency emphasised. The satellite would, in its "oval orbits", come as close to the earth as 490 km and go as far away as 1,426 km, the DPRK informed.

A logical issue is whether the elaborate statement was a fake progress report on a botched-up launch or indeed the intended orbital plan of an actual satellite. In any case, Japan, South Korea and the U.S. had, before the event, gone on military alert against the possibility of a threatening or wayward launch. However, as the controversial launch progressed, none of the countries felt the need to intercept or shoot down either the rocket or its "debris".

Significant in this context is the Japanese account of the launch. It was estimated that the first "part" or stage of the "flying object" fell into the sea at a point about 280 km west of Japan. The second "part" was estimated to have plunged into the Pacific Ocean at a point about 1,270 km east of Japan. These initial estimates were later fine-tuned. As for the "third stage" of the rocket, the DPRK's estranged ethnic neighbour, South Korea, said the launch as a whole was "not a success". Seoul asserted that "no object entered orbit". Obviously, the U.S. was in agreement.

The Security Council held an emergency session hours after the launch, but the five permanent members and Japan agreed on a draft only a week later. While the details of the draft are not definitive, the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Japan are concerned. It is understood that a range of sanctions on the DPRK, already in place, will be tightened. These are an arms embargo and other steps designed to prevent the flow of missile-related and nuclear-weapons-related traffic to and from the DPRK.

AN IMAGE MADE available on April 7 shows the "rocket" lifting off from Musudan-ni, North Korea.

A matter of utmost interest, on the eve of a final decision by the Security Council, was the DPRK's likely reaction. Pyongyang had threatened to walk away from the six-party talks (the U.S., the DPRK, China, South Korea, Japan and Russia) on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme in the event of new sanctions. These parleys,

AP

chaired by China, have made slow but real progress towards formulating principles and procedures for the DPRK's nuclear disarmament. The proverbial devil is not in the details of these agreed norms but in their actual implementation on the ground. If the North Koreans walk out, a possibility one week after their "satellite launch", disarming them in the nuclear and missile fields will be tougher.

Around the time North Korea launched its "satellite", Obama was touring Europe, with nuclear disarmament as one of his priorities. He announced a firm commitment, for the first time ever by the U.S., to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, including his country's, over time. While being realistic about the futuristic scope of such a commitment, he did pledge a serious beginning by the U.S.

It is too early to predict whether his affirmations will push forward the multilateral efforts to disarm the DPRK in the nuclear and missile domains. The six parties will need to agree upon a set of security and economic guarantees that could persuade North Korea to abandon its nuclear and missile plans. Additionally, the issue of Pyongyang's existing capabilities in these domains, however acquired, will need to be addressed. This is a tall order.

The DPRK test-fired a stream of missiles to coincide with the Independence Day celebrations in the U.S. in 2006. On October 9 that year, Pyongyang tested a nuclear explosive device: the explosion was generally believed to have measured 3 to 4 on the Richter scale.

China voiced "firm opposition to the test", while Japan took serious note of "the small experiment". Those two actions by the DPRK, after the process of the six-party parleys began, led to sequential U.N. sanctions in Resolutions 1695 and 1718. In fact, Pyongyang carried out an intermediate-range missile test in 1998. That was also described as a "satellite launch".

It is against this background that the impact of Pyongyang's latest "satellite launch" on East Asian power equations will be felt. Already, South Korea has pledged to take "concrete countermeasures". And Japan is assessing the long-term trajectory that the DPRK might potentially take if allowed to remain unchecked.

Pyongyang views Tokyo and Seoul as hostile neighbours. With China and Russia, the DPRK's ties have fluctuated from political warmth to indifference.

Above all, the DPRK is fully cognisant of the U.S. as a "resident power" in East Asia. In large part, DPRK leader Kim Jong-il's public celebration of the latest test is directed at the new powers that be in Washington, and at China. Indeed, the fulcrum of any future power equations in East Asia might well be the U.S.-China relationship over time. In fact, Western experts such as Kenneth B. Pyle point out that "Japan's leaders do not want to be hostage to the China policy of the United States". All these long-term issues have been propelled into focus by the DPRK's latest action. □

Fujimori gets life term

ALBERTO FUJIMORI, former President of Peru, was sentenced to 25 years in prison by a special Bench of the country's Supreme Court on charges of human rights abuse, including murder and kidnapping. The 70-year-old Fujimori will now conceivably spend the rest of his life in prison.

The progress of the case against Fujimori, who ruled Peru with an iron hand for more than 10 years, was followed with great interest throughout Latin America. This is the first time that a democratically elected head of state has been convicted for abuse of power in the region. The Switzerland-based International Commission of Jurists said the court's decision "constitutes a new step for justice in Latin America and in the world: a former head of state, democratically elected, has been found guilty of crimes against humanity by a national court".

Other heads of state in Latin America, such as General Augusto Pinochet, the former President of Chile, who may have been guilty of far more grievous crimes were allowed to retire, go into exile or die peacefully in bed. Fujimori too had fled to Japan (he is the son of Japanese immigrants) after his administration started unravelling in 2000 following revelations of his government's involvement in the bribing of parliamentarians. Graphic evidence of the involvement of Vladimir Montesinos, his spy chief, trying to buy off legislators was aired on the national television. Montesinos, who was given a free hand by Fujimori to conduct anti-insurgency and covert activities, is also serving a life sentence in Peru.

The charges, which the three-member Bench upheld, included Fujimori's involvement in two massacres of civilians carried out by a military death squad called Grupo Colina. The judges, in their 711-page ruling, described Fujimori as the "intellectual author" of the massacres in a working class district of the capital, Lima, and in the University of La Cantuta. The court also held Fujimori responsible for the kidnapping of two journalists in 1992. The former President was sentenced last year for six years in another case pertaining to misuse of power. Ninety witnesses and experts testified in 160 sessions during the proceedings against Fujimori.

REUTERS

ALBERTO FUJIMORI AT at the court, on April 7.

A defiant Fujimori vehemently proclaimed his innocence throughout the 15-month-long trial. He tried to portray the trial as politically motivated and described himself as the man who rescued his countrymen from the twin threats of hyperinflation and terrorism. His supporters, led by his 33-year-old daughter and political heir Keiko Fujimori, staged demonstrations outside the court premises and elsewhere in Lima protesting against the verdict.

A recent opinion poll showed that around 30 per cent of Peruvians support the former President's policies. Fujimori's daughter, who has signalled her intention to run for the presidency, described the Supreme Court's verdict as a "victory for terrorist groups".

During the trial, Fujimori told the judges that the current President, Alan Garcia, should also have been called to account for the massacre of peasants during his first term of office in the late 1980s. In 1986, when Garcia was President, 300 guerillas of the Shining Path, a Maoist group, were murdered in two separate prison complexes.

A key segment of the populace continues to remain diehard supporters of the former President. They credit Fujimori with having brought in economic and political stability to the country. Their numbers may only increase, mainly owing to the political and economic mismanagement by Garcia, who is serving a second term in office after a gap of more than 16 years. By the mid-1990s, Fujimori had liquidated the top leadership of the Shining Path. Their leader, Abimael Guzman, was arrested in 1992 and is serving a life sentence.

The trial and conviction of Fujimori has already had a global ripple effect. There are calls for the same legal yardstick to be applied to George W. Bush and Tony Blair for their crimes against humanity, which are more brutal and larger in scope than the crimes of Fujimori.

The Spanish Judge Baltasar Garzon, who first shot into fame by trying to get Pinochet tried in Europe for crimes against humanity, has now opened criminal investigations against five senior Bush administration officials. They include Alberto Gonzales, a Bush administration Attorney General and Douglas Feith, former Under Secretary of Defence and a neoconservative ideologue. The investigations relate to allegations of torture against detainees in the United States military base in Guantanamo, Cuba.

John Cherian

DAN BALILTY/AP

DAN BALILTY/AP

PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman in the Knesset on April 6.

Right and racist

The Likud-led government in Israel debunks the Annapolis peace deal on the creation of a Palestinian state. **BY JOHN CHERIAN**

Israel is worried about the course the U.S. is going to take on West Asia as Obama has said that his government **is "strongly" committed to Israelis** and Palestinians living side by side "in peace and tranquillity".

THE formation of a coalition government in Israel headed by an avowed hawk, Benjamin Netanyahu, more than a month after the election results were announced is more bad news for the region and the world. For the first time in the history of the Jewish state, individuals and parties with fascist ideas have seized important levers of power. The coalition government, led by the right-wing Likud Party, has as its major partner the Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel is Our Home) Party led by the racist demagogue Avigdor Lieberman.

In order to give the government a secular mask and make it more palatable to the international community, the Labour Party, under the leadership of Ehud Barak, has also been co-opted. In the words of the veteran peace activist and former Cabinet Minister Uri Avnery, by making a deal with Labour, Netanyahu has in one stroke "turned a government of lepers, which would have been viewed by the whole world as a crazy bunch of ultra-nationalists, racists and fascists, into a sane and balanced government of the centre. All this, without changing its character in the least."

Lieberman, who was born in Moldova, has been

given charge of the Foreign Ministry. He is currently under investigation in Israel for tax evasion, fraud and money laundering. One of his first statements after being named Foreign Minister was to debunk the United States-sponsored Annapolis peace process.

His party's manifesto calls for the 1.5 million Palestinians in Israel to be subjected to a loyalty oath to the Jewish state. If they fail to submit, the manifesto emphasises, Palestinians should be booted out of Israel to join the millions of stateless Palestinians living in refugee camps. Just before Israelis went to the polls, there was a Lieberman-inspired move in the Knesset (parliament) to bar Palestinian parties from fielding candidates. Lieberman himself resides in an illegal settler colony, outside the internationally recognised borders of Israel.

The move was supported by the so-called centrist parties, including the Kadima Party led by Tzipi Livni. The move could have succeeded but for the intervention of the Israeli High Court, which termed it illegal. Lieberman had on a previous occasion called for the execution of Knesset members who met the elected Hamas leadership in Gaza. He told an Israeli newspaper that his priority was "entrenching of the Jewish state". He went on to add that if there was a contradiction between democratic and Jewish values then "the Jewish and Zionist values are more important". In his book *My Truth*, Lieberman writes that the Arab minority, which today constitutes one-fifth of Israel's population, poses the greatest threat to the future of Israel. This opinion has been voiced by the leaders of the Left parties in a more diplomatic manner. They prefer to refer to the Palestinians inside Israel as a "demographic problem", which needs to be addressed urgently.

Lieberman, who was a night club bouncer in Moldova, is not known for diplomatic niceties. In 1998, he advised the Israeli government to bomb the Aswan Dam because Egypt supported the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and its chief Yasser Arafat. More recently, he told Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak "to go to hell". In January, during Israel's war on the civilian population of Gaza, Lieberman said that Israel "must continue to fight Hamas just like the U.S. did with the Japanese in the Second World War". He was no doubt suggesting that Israel drop nuclear weapons on Gaza as the Americans did over Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

NASSER SHIYOUKHI/AP

A PALESTINIAN PROTESTER argues with an Israeli solider during a demonstration against the barriers in Maasara village near Bethlehem.

Lieberman's extremist views are no doubt alarming to the rest of the world but they do have a receptive audience in Israel. His party got around 10 per cent of the votes polled in the last general elections. The outgoing Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, has voiced support for Lieberman's idea of forcibly expelling the Palestinian population.

In an interview to *Haaretz,* Olmert said that if Jews did not separate from the Palestinians, then Israel would cease to be a Jewish democracy. The Israeli political establishment, cutting across the political divide, has concluded that the only way to retain a Jewish state is by instigating even more violence and repression against the Palestinian majority, which just refuses to accept defeat.

Netanyahu, who is close to the American "neoconservatives" who shaped the U.S. policy during the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush, was one of the most vocal opponents of the Oslo accords. This time, he ran for the elections on a pledge of giving a proper burial to the peace process.

During his first stint as Prime Minster in the mid-1990s, he speeded up the illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. But it was the Labour government under Ehud Barak, which succeeded the Likud government, that further accelerated the settlement programme under the benign gaze of Washington. In fact, the "Centre-Left" Labour-led government was responsible for the building of more settlements in the West Bank than even the Likud government.

Recent history shows that no Israeli government has been serious about statehood for Palestinians. Yitzhak Rabin had told close colleagues after the signing of the Oslo accords that there was no provision for a separate state in the document. In a way, Rabin was correct. The Palestinian side, in a hurry to sign the Oslo accords, did not bother to look at the fine print. There was no mention of "self-

determination" or "independence" for Palestinians in the accords.

All the same, the international community remains committed to a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine issue. U.S. President Barack Obama told the Turkish Parliament during his recent visit to the country that the U.S. remained "strongly" committed to Israelis and Palestinians living side by side "in peace and tranquillity". In a message obviously intended for Tel Aviv, Obama demanded that both sides adhere to the goals laid out in the Road Map (the international peace plan signed in 2003) and the one (creation of Palestinian state) at the Annapolis Conference. The incoming Israeli Foreign Minister had in his induction speech in the last week of March said that Israel was no longer bound by the commitments made at Annapolis and was changing its policies *vis-a-vis* the peace process.

"Israel does not take orders from Obama", was the reaction of Gilad Erdan, a senior Cabinet Minister belonging to the Likud Party, to Obama's speech in Ankara. Erdan said that the people of Israel, by voting for Netanyahu, had sent a message that "they will not become the 51st State of the U.S.". Israel is the biggest recipient of U.S. military aid every year. But for American munificence along with diplomatic and political support, Israel would not have survived in its present incarnation.

The Israeli establishment is worried about the course the new U.S. administration is going to take in West Asia. The Obama administration has promised a "new relationship" with the Muslim world in general and the Arab region in particular. Washington knows that the resolution of the Palestinian problem is the surest way to achieve this goal. To the chagrin of the Israeli establishment, Obama has already shown a willingness to engage with Iran at a time when Netanyahu is threatening to bomb the country. The Israeli Prime Minister continues to maintain that Iran is a clear and present danger to the very existence of the Jewish state.

There are strong indications that Obama is giving the Palestinian issue much more importance than the previous administration. At the same time, Israel and its powerful domestic lobby in the U.S. are working overtime to stall any meaningful new peace initiative from Washington. The case of the former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Charles Freeman, is an illustration. Obama had named him to the important post of Chairman of the National Intelligence Council (NIC). He would have been in charge of summarising the intelligence reports of all 16 U.S. intelligence agencies, which employ around 100,000 people.

FREEMAN'S GUILT

His appointment was immediately met with strong protests from lawmakers, academics and prominent columnists having strong ties with Israel. Freeman was wrongly accused of being in the pay of Chinese and Arab business interests. Though his immediate boss, Admiral Dennis Blair, the Director of National Intelligence, defended him, Freeman chose to resign in the face of unremitting hostility from influential sections of the political establishment. Admiral Blair was of the view that Freeman was just the kind of man the Obama administration needed to revitalise America's intelligence services, which were highly politicised during the Bush years and skewed in favour of Israel.

Freeman's guilt, in Israeli eyes, was that he was an expert on West Asia and the Israel-Arab conflict. In a speech in 2005, he criticised Israel's "high-handed and self-defeating policies" originating in the "occupation and settlement of Arab lands". He described Israel's policy of occupation as "inherently violent". In another speech, in 2007, Freeman said that the U.S. had "embraced Israel's enemies as our own" and that Arabs had retaliated by "equating Americans with Israelis as their enemies". He charged the previous administration with backing Israel's "efforts to pacify its captive and increasingly ghettoised Arab populations" and to "seize ever more Arab land for its colonists". Freeman also rightly concluded that the terrorism the U.S. faced was to a great extent because of "the brutal oppression of the Palestinian population by an Israeli occupation that has lasted over 40 years and shows no signs of ending".

Obama did not come out in support of Freeman as he came under the sustained attack of the powerful Jewish lobby. The President has still not found the confidence to challenge the pro-Israel lobby. In fact, during the campaign for the presidency, he openly pandered to it, going to the extent of saying that Jerusalem should be the capital of Israel. *The Washington Post* wrote that the Obama administration "suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the lobbyists the President vowed to keep in their place". Freeman stepped down with all guns firing. He said that "unscrupulous people with a passionate attachment to the views of a political faction in a foreign country" were behind his ouster.

After the barbaric attack on the civilian population of Gaza and now with the election of a rabid right-wing government, public sympathy for Israel in the U.S. is waning. In the middle of March, nine former senior U.S. officials and one current adviser to the Obama administration urged Washington to start a dialogue with the Hamas leadership. The bipartisan group includes economic recovery adviser to the Obama administration Paul A. Volcker and former National Security Advisers Brent Scowcroft and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Talking to Hamas would be a dramatic turnaround for the White House. Hamas has been classified as a "terrorist" organisation by the U.S. The group wants the White House to push hard on the Palestinian peace process. The new government, on the other hand, is trying its best to see that the peace process is not put back on track. The U.S. could finally end the policy of issuing blank cheques to Israel and may even rethink its "special relationship" with the Jewish state. □

A plan and a half

President Barack Obama's decision to pursue the Afghan war more vigorously causes a division in the anti-war movement in the U.S.

A recent poll shows that 42 per cent of the U.S. population opposes the Afghan escalation. The anti-war **movement will try to speak for this** sizable number. But first it will have to figure out how to move the population around Obama.

PRESIDENT Barack Obama inherited two seemingly intractable wars, in Iraq and in Afghanistan, alongside a financial crisis that continues to escalate. Obama positioned himself against the unpopular Iraq war, but he did not place himself in the anti-war camp. It had become strategically important for his electoral success to make the claim that President George W. Bush's adventure in Iraq had reduced the pressure on Al Qaeda and that it therefore increased the insecurity of the United States.

From the very first, then, the Afghanistan war was to be the good war, while Iraq was the bad war. The anti-war movement's Left flank went along with the Obama tidal wave because it enabled part of its goal to be met: it brought the criticism of the Iraq war to the mainstream and it rejected the view that U.S. security could only be purchased from the barrel of a gun. The anti-war movement's liberal section was never against war itself but only against the Iraq war. It is this unstable union of those who opposed the Iraq war only and those who opposed U.S. warmongering in general that has now come apart.

On February 27, Obama made a cautious statement about drawdown from Iraq, promising to remove 142,000 troops and to end all combat operations by August 31, 2010. This appeased the liberal anti-Iraq war wing, who were broadly pleased with the "responsible" and "thoughtful" exit strategy, even as some of them wanted the timetable to be shortened.

The Left anti-war bloc was disappointed by the vagueness of the statement, which did not touch on the question of a permanent military presence (through bases). "The good news is that he has a plan," said Leslie Cagan of United for Peace & Justice (a Left anti-war coalition), "and that obviously his election in no small measure was the result of the massive anti-war sentiment in the country, and he understands that." The bad news is that U.S. militarism continues, and "our work as an anti-war movement is far from over," said Leslie Cagan.

In early April, Obama earned the approval of two-thirds of the U.S. population, much higher than that of Bush and Bill Clinton at this point in their presidencies. Two wars, a complex financial crisis, and a major national debate on his stimulus spending have not dented his enormous popularity. The typical mood is to give Obama time to try out his policies. Republican grumbles sound like bitterness. In fact, the Republican Party has now dissolved into irrelevance, being caught up in an internecine debate over its future (much the same happened to the Conservatives when Tony Blair first took office in 1997). The Democrats are loath to criticise Obama, and Democrat-leaning groups are equally wary.

The 77-member Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) in the U.S. House of Representatives has been very quiet, offering suggestions that are couched in reverence. Representative Jose Serrano of the Bronx, New York, was an outspoken critic of the Bush wars. After Obama's speech in which he spoke about the plan to withdraw by 2010, Serrano offered his support and then carefully tried to say more: "Do I wish [the withdrawal date] was nine months [from now]? Absolutely. Do I wish [the U.S. would leave] zero troops? Absolutely." The tone of both Serrano and Leslie Cagan's comments is also indicative of how far one can go with criticism; the good news comes first, and then, gently, the bad.

Obama's February 27 statement seems to have removed Iraq from the table. Over the past four months, the U.S. economy has shed an average of 684,000 jobs. Attention within the U.S. is now on

Letter from America

VIJAY **PRASHAD**

LIU JIN/AFP

U.S. SOLDIERS ARRIVE at an operation post in Nishagam, in Afghanistan's Kunar province, on April 7. Obama's promise to end all combat operations in Iraq by August 31, 2010, does not mean the end of U.S. militarism.

the precariousness of one's livelihood. Over the past five years, the U.S. military had a hard time filling its ranks. Now things have changed. The military says that the upsurge in recruitment has to do with the good news coming out of Iraq, but the surveys they have conducted show that the spur is the poor civilian job market (and a reduction in the military's standards for who it recruits). Military spokesperson Eileen Lainez told the CNN: "Recruiting is always a challenge, but a tighter job market provides many opportunities to make our case to young men and women."

The regular news of bomb blasts have now been moved to the centre pages of the newspapers, and they have all but disappeared from the television news. Such disturbances are no longer news, having become what the U.S. population assumes is the normal condition of life in Iraq. Only 42 U.S. troops died in the first three months of this year compared with 108 in the first three months of 2008 and 245 in 2007 during the same period.

A new book by *The Washington Post* reporter Thomas Ricks, *The Gam-*

ble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2006-2008, claims that the great victory in Iraq is not far and that the credit for it should go to the Surge that began in 2007. This sort of account provides comfort that Obama's gradual withdrawal will now end what should never have begun in the first place.

The real war, Obama suggests, is the Afghan one: Bush should have prosecuted that conflict with all the resources of the U.S. government rather than shifting talent and firepower to Iraq. The imputed success of the Surge led to a section of the Obama administration making the case for more military force and greater concentration of power to clamp down on the insurgency, to repeat, in other words, the Iraq game plan. The army, it said, should not concentrate on the interdiction of the enemy, but on the protection of the population. That is the basis of the Surge. But another camp in the administration called for an alternative strategy.

Writing in *The Guardian* (March 30), Representative Mike Honda of California captured the tenor of this second approach: "This administration recognises the benefits of a more comprehensive security strategy and that we must help the tribal Pashtun-Pathans feel secure by making sure they have a crop that won't be sprayed, a school that functions, a hospital that is stocked with basic supplies, and a job that pays more than $3 a week. That is a definition of security that is likely to provide more long-term security, given what we know about increased income, employment and educational enrolment correlating directly with decreased risks of violent conflict."

The Obama plan on Afghanistan draws from both sections of his administration, with a commitment to troop increase to try out the Surge and an increased commitment to social spending to bolster the well-being of Afghans. The plan makes no mention of an exit strategy, and neither does it promote the start of a genuine political arena within Afghanistan. For instance, the creation of political parties to harness the opinions in the country into a democratic process.

The split in the Obama position (many more guns, some more butter) disabled unity within both the CPC and the anti-war movement in general. The two co-chairs of the CPC disagreed, with Representative Lynn Woolsey of California taking a strong anti-war position and Representative Ray Grijalva of Arizona adopting the Obama strategy. Representative Dennis Kucinich of Ohio, like Lynn Woolsey, came out against the Obama plan, saying, "I simply cannot endorse a budget or a plan that sends more of our brave men and women to Afghanistan, a conflict which has the potential to become this generation's Vietnam."

The Out of Iraq Congressional Caucus is also split on Afghanistan, here between Lynn Woolsey and Representative Barbara Lee of California. Barbara Lee is the only one in the U. S. Congress who voted against the authorisation of the war against Afghanistan in 2001, but she is as yet silent. (Her office says that she will offer only a joint statement with Lynn Woolsey, and that they are working on this.) The CPC held a vibrant forum on March 25 on "Afghanistan: A Road Map for Progress", and has planned to hold five more such forums. The CPC is using these forums as a way to study the issues and to derive a policy based on their own discussions. It is not clear when it will be ready to have a single policy framework to offer as an alternative to the Obama plan.

FRACTURED MOVEMENT

The anti-war movement that is outside the Congress is much more fractured. Sections of the liberal wing that opposed the Iraq war are now closely aligned with the Obama administration. The Centre for American Progress, MoveOn, the Service Employees International Union, and Win Without War were the core elements of the Americans Against Escalation in Iraq (AAEI). This group spent millions of dollars to stop the Bush agenda and, later, to elect Obama to the presidency.

The Centre for American Progress became the main conduit for those who entered Obama's administration (its head, John Podesta, ran the Obama transition team). During the debate within the administration, the Centre set up the Sustainable Security in Afghanistan team, whose report, authored by Lawrence Korb and others, was released in March 2009. The report warned the administration not to mimic the Iraq Surge, but yet it did not offer any plan for de-escalation or withdrawal. It called for more military commitment, as well as more economic commitment, the same tonic that would eventually find its way into the Obama plan.

The AAEI was run by three men, all of whom are now in the Obama administration: Steve Hildebrand and Paul Tewes are political aides to Obama, while Brad Woodhouse is Obama's Director of Communications and Research. MoveOn, meanwhile, has abandoned its anti-war activism for a new grassroots campaign on clean energy and health care. The liberals, in other words, have abandoned the anti-war terrain. A demonstration held in Washington, D.C., on March 21 failed to draw the kind of crowds that came to anti-war protests before the past election. A few thousand people gathered, as Jerry Young of the National Assembly to End the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars asked, "How can we ensure that our next demonstration is larger than this one?"

Groups such as Code Pink, World to Win, PeaceAction, American Friends Service Committee, the United for Peace & Justice coalition, and ANSWER have begun to test the waters, to see whether they can galvanise people into action against the build-up in Afghanistan and the continuation of warfare in Iraq. A recent poll shows that 42 per cent of the U.S. population opposes the Afghan escalation. The anti-war movement will try to speak for this sizable number, as will the CPC. But first it will have to figure out how to move the population around Obama. □

Signs of fatigue

In its 60th year, NATO is troubled by Afghanistan and faces criticism about its expansion even after the reason for its creation has disappeared. BY JOHN CHERIAN

MICHEL EULER/AP

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER Gordon Brown, NATO secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, U.S. President Barack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the summit in Strasbourg, France, on April 4.

Barack Obama's decision to escalate the war in Afghanistan has not gone down well in many European capitals. Russia has not taken kindly **to the alliance's enlargement up to** its borders.

THE North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), a product of the 20th century's Cold War, celebrated its 60th anniversary on April 4 in the French city of Strasbourg and the German town of Kehl, across the Rhine.

United States President Barack Obama, who along with leaders of other member-countries attended the function to mark the anniversary, said in his speech that the trans-Atlantic organisation was gearing to face the challenges of the new century. His address mainly focussed on NATO's "crucial tasks" in Afghanistan.

The 28-member NATO (Albania and Croatia joined the alliance on April 1, 2009) took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in 2003. Most of the NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan are in those areas that have very little Taliban presence. The bulk of the fighting in that country is led by American forces, supported to some extent by British, Dutch and Canadian soldiers. The Germans and the French have shown a marked reluctance to engage the resurgent Taliban head on.

Obama's decision to escalate the war has not

gone down well in many European capitals. Despite his persuasive skills, the President has not received any significant commitment from European NATO members either to increase the number of troops in Afghanistan or to undertake combat missions in Taliban-controlled areas with the troops they already have on the ground. In fact, the public mood in Europe is for ending the occupation of Afghanistan and for a speedy withdrawal of troops from there. The Obama administration has now come to the conclusion that the only thing that it can reasonably expect from the major European members is more financial backing for the war.

"out of arQuestions are also being asked about NATO troops being deployed in Afghanistan, an Asian country, in the first place. Article 5 of the NATO Charter states: "An armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America will be considered an attack against them all." The first serious NATO military action so far invoked under Article 5 has been in the "out-of-area" Afghanistan.

NATO was created to confront the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, who played a key role in ending the Cold War by disbanding the Warsaw Pact (the military alliance formed by Communist countries to counter NATO) and allowing the Berlin Wall to be dismantled, was promised by Washington that NATO too would be disbanded as it had outlived the rationale for its creation. The threat from the Eastern Bloc, if there ever was one, has been non-existent since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Yet NATO has been expanding even after the reason for its creation disappeared. During the Cold War, the alliance had 16 members. Today, it has 28 members, with more East and Central European countries eagerly waiting to sign up. France, which left NATO's military structure in 1966, has now rejoined. Many Left parties as well as influential sections of the media in France are questioning the timing of President Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to make the country once again a full-fledged member of the military grouping. President Charles de Gaulle took France out of NATO's military command when the Cold War was at its height. Critics of Sarkozy (and their number is growing by the day) say that the decision marks the end of an independent foreign policy for France.

NATO expansion since 1949

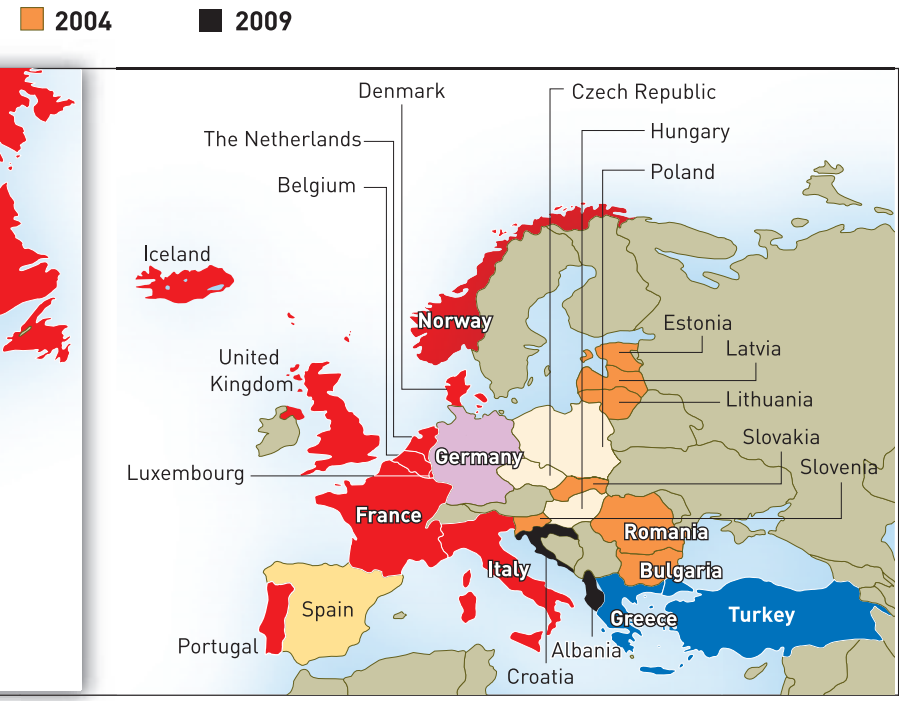
Note: In October 1990, what was the German Democratic Republic also became part of NATO following German reunification.

RENEGING ON PROMISES

Successive U.S. administrations have reneged on the promises that were given to Moscow before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Instead, NATO has aggressively expanded right up to Russia's doorstep by admitting former Warsaw Pact members into the Western military alliance. The U.S. has used the opportunity provided by the demise of the Warsaw Pact to wage wars of aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia and in the heart of Europe.

Yugoslavia, which had resisted absorption into NATO, paid the price by being first dismembered and then bombed into submission in 1999. Neither the war in Iraq nor the one in Kosovo had the sanction of the United Nations Security Council. NATO's role was pivotal in the creation of the "mini-state" of Kosovo. The U.S. now has one of its biggest bases there. Under U.S. supervision, NATO is slowly but surely moving the battleground to the South Caucasus and the Black Sea. Georgia has given U.S. and NATO forces full access to its Black Sea ports.

Important NATO members such as Germany and Italy, which are dependent on Russia for energy supplies, have aired their misgivings about the course NATO is taking. Meanwhile, new East European members, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, want NATO to focus more on consolidating its influence in Europe instead of focussing on far away Afghanistan and Pakistan. The conservative Polish and Czech governments are putting pressure on the U.S. to expand NATO further by expediting the admission of Ukraine and Georgia.



The Kremlin was incensed with the Bush administration for its plans to put up anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia is already ringed with NATO military bases on its European borders. The Obama administration, however, is having second thoughts about the proposal. Moscow had threatened to take strong countermeasures if Washington went ahead with its plans to build a missile shield adjacent to its borders or expand NATO into areas that it considers are within its traditional "sphere of influence".

The military humiliation of Georgia by Russia late last year was a strong message sent to the U.S. Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, speaking at the NATO summit last year, said that the "emergence of the powerful military bloc at our borders will be seen as a direct threat to Russia's security". The decision of the Kyrgyz government to eject the U.S. from its only military base in Central Asia is viewed as a retaliatory act on the part of Russia to counter NATO expansion. The Manas airbase was crucial to the U.S. air force in its war in Afghanistan.

Earlier in the year, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev envisaged the creation, along with six other former Soviet states, of a rapid reaction force that would "be no weaker than similar forces of the North Atlantic Alliance". The force would operate under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a military alliance that Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan formed in response to the eastward spread of NATO.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, many influential voices in Europe have called for an independent and greater military role for the continent. Lord Ismay, the first secretary-general of NATO, had said that the organisation's main goal "was to keep the Soviets out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". NATO's basis for existence was the fear of the Soviet Union – the fear that superior conventional forces from the East would overrun Western Europe.

TURKEY CRITICAL OF U.S.

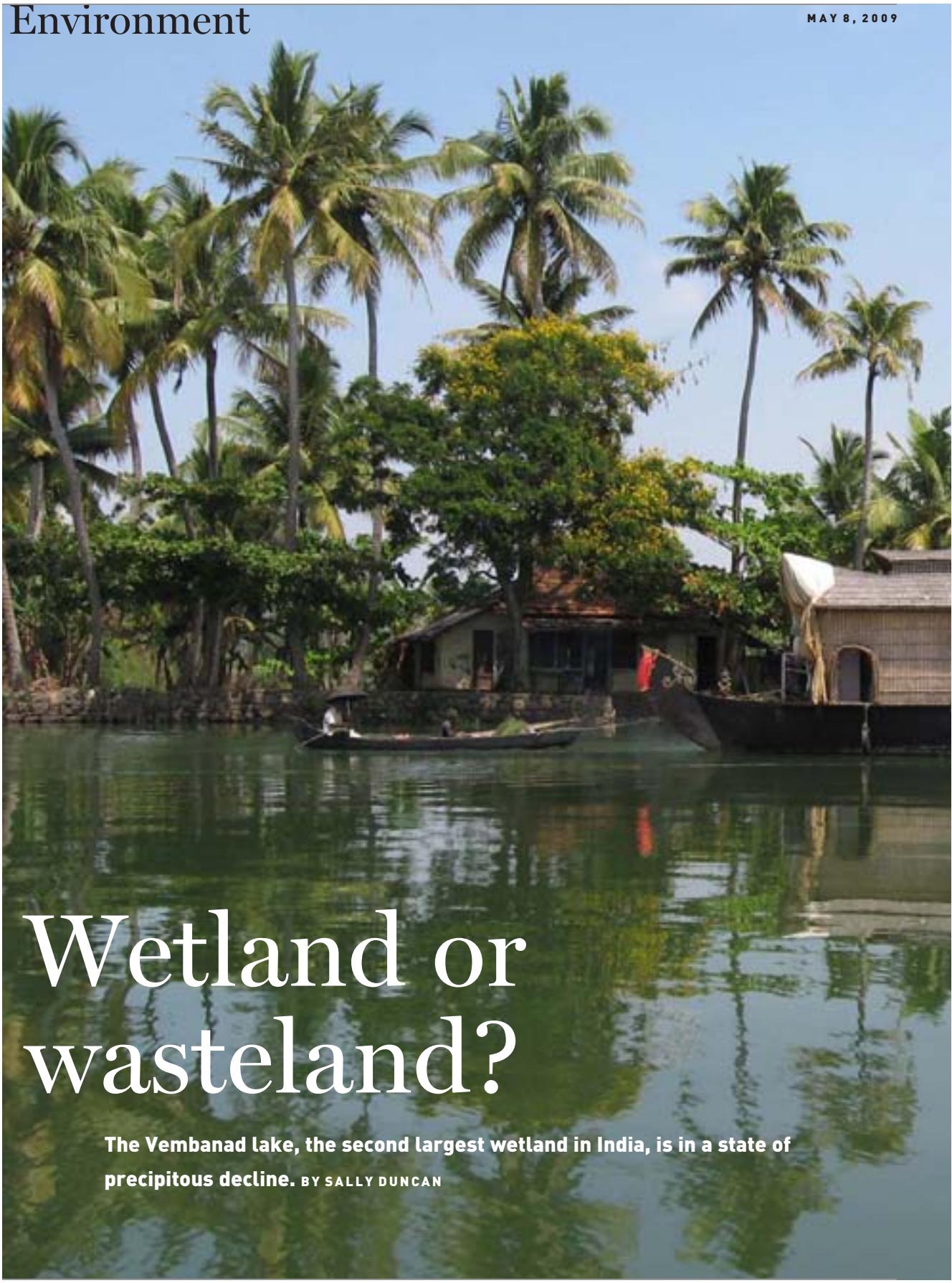
Turkey, which was the last stop in Obama's much ballyhooed tour of Europe in April, has been critical of American leadership of the trans-Atlantic alliance. Though situated far away from the Atlantic coast, Turkey joined NATO in 1952 to help the U.S. militarily in the Korean War.

The Turkish army is the second largest contingent in NATO after the U.S. army and has shed a lot of blood for causes dear to the U.S. The Turks had expected the rest of Europe to welcome them with open arms. But they find that the doors of the European Union have been shut for them. The entry of a big Muslim nation into a "Christian club" has been virtually vetoed by countries such as France and Germany.

Now, to add insult to injury, NATO has gone ahead and chosen Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen as its next secretary-general. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan objected to Rasmussen's appointment because of the way his government handled the controversy that erupted after scurrilous cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad were published in a Danish newspaper in 2006. The cartoons had sparked off violence in many capitals around the world. Rasmussen's right-wing coalition government, which won power on an anti-immigrant platform, was far from apologetic about the cartoons. Instead, it defended the newspaper and the cartoonists by invoking the right to "freedom of expression" of the media .

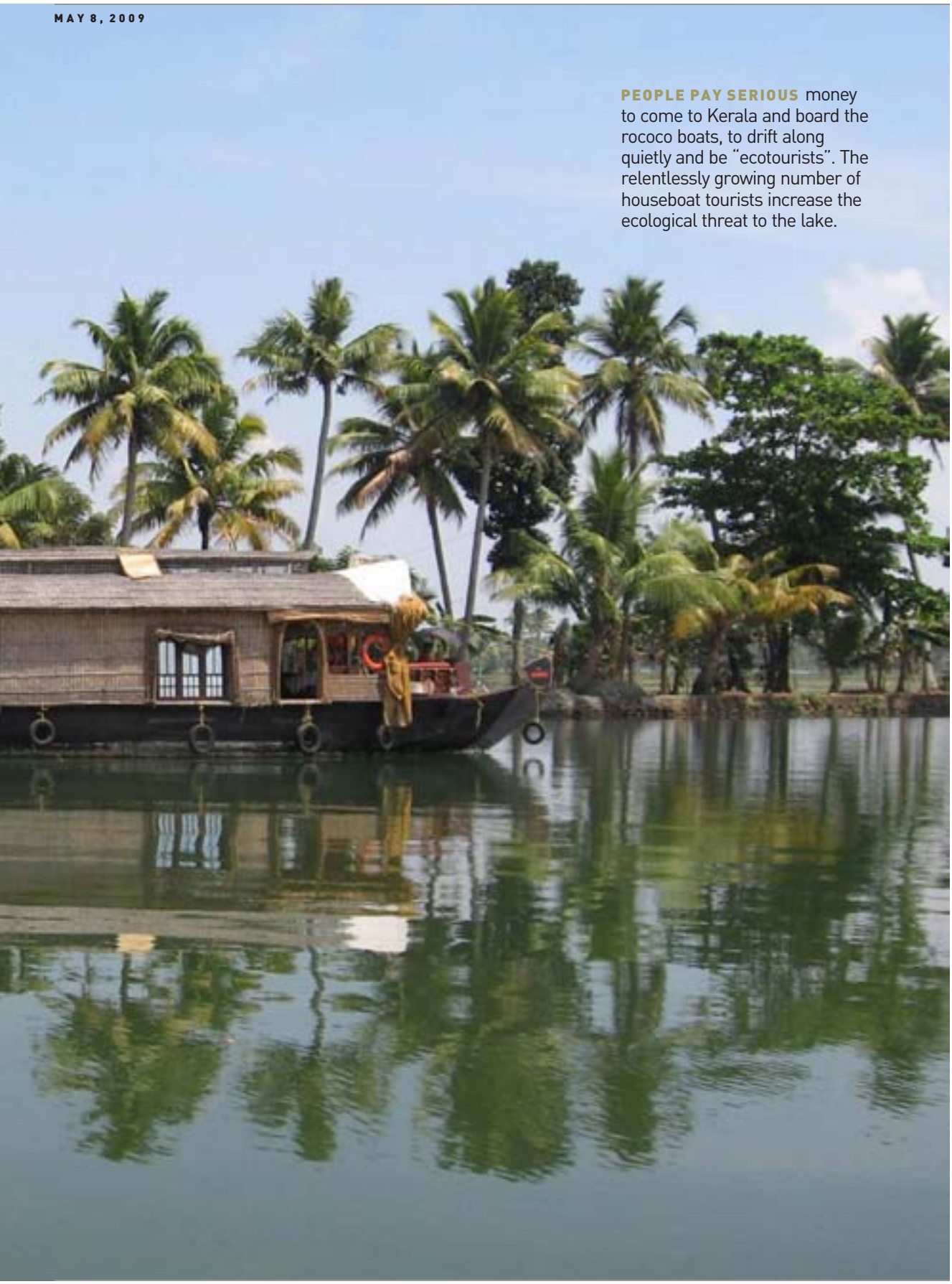
Professor Andrew Bacevic, an expert on international relations at the University of Boston, recently opined that the only way to save NATO was for the U.S. to quit it. "The alliance has lost its sense of purpose. The way to get it back is for the U.S. to withdraw and for Europe to be responsible for its own defence," he wrote in *Los Angeles Times*. □

MAY 8, 2009



Wetland or wasteland?

The Vembanad lake, the second largest wetland in India, is in a state of precipitous decline. BY SALLY DUNCAN



PEOPLE PAY SERIOUS money to come to Kerala and board the rococo boats, to drift along quietly and be "ecotourists". The relentlessly growing number of houseboat tourists increase the ecological threat to the lake.

RAMESH KANNAN

ONE OF THE canals leading to the Vembanad lake at Varanad, near Cherthala in Alappuzha district, carrying effluents from a distillery. A 2004 picture. Fishermen watch fish stock dwindle as the lake ecosystem struggles with pollution in many forms.

It has shrunk to one-third of its original size in over a century and a **half and is a sink for pollutants** brought in by six rivers. However, a conservation effort is on, involving local communities and other important stakeholders.

IN a convincing, grandmotherly voice, an elderly woman tells her uncaring grandson that he must stop throwing rubbish into the river. This is pollution, and it is bad for the river, she scolds him. But he does not listen – she is old and does not know what she is talking about! Furthermore, they use a well to draw drinking water, so why worry?

As time elapses, a drought comes. The wells have dried up, and people are going to the river to find drinking water. Ah, but the river is polluted! The water is not potable either in the river or when it flows into the lake. A crisis is born. The grandson, the grandmother and the community take a pledge to manage their river and their lake better in the future.

A Bollywood movie? A parable? No, a puppet show. The puppets are crafted from recycled paper by schoolchildren, and the highly topical show is scripted and performed by them for local communities and visiting audiences, for wetland festivals, and perhaps, eventually, for policymakers. They have a message and a cause, and they have joined school-based Wetlands Study Centres, organised by the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), to spread the word of conserva-

JOHNEY THOMAS

ATREE CERC, ALAPPUZHA

THE SCHOOL-BASED WETLANDS Study Centres, organised by ATREE, spread the word of conservation in every way they can. Here, a workshop on butterflies.

tion in every way they can: puppet shows, posters, dance, poetry, singing, costumed festival performances, a special magazine, a video documentary. Perhaps a movie is not far behind. The light of excitement and commitment in their young eyes may be the brightest part of the future of the Vembanad lake in Kerala.

The view of the Vembanad lake from a five-bedroom houseboat with a swimming pool has to be beautiful. People pay serious money to come to Kerala and board these rococo boats, to drift along quietly and be "ecotourists", to be fed, housed, and conducted aquatically in peace, then to go home and tell their friends about their exotic Indian experience. Coconut palms form a living fringe on the lake in every direction. Iridescent paddyfields have colourfully dressed women planting rice. Traditional fishing vessels ply the lake waters while their sun-baked crew skilfully and photogenically toss their circular nets into the water.

Villages along the bunds and lakeshores provide intimate scenes of women timelessly beating clothes against stones to get them clean. Aged men languidly bathe on the stone steps in the same shallows. Massed purple flowers across the water surface paint the lake golden-lilac at sunset, and large flocks of birds of many varieties fill the hungry binoculars of tourists. Children frolic and swim and shriek along the banks. It is all there, just like in the movies.

But let us roll focus to the close-up, and there are plastic bottles everywhere you look. Other plastic and solid rubbish lines every shore and canal, regularly clogging motorboat engines. The water is more like slurry – you cannot see deeper than the first inch or two. That purple flower is invasive water hyacinth, carpeting the lake and choking it of the oxygen it needs. The circular fishing nets frequently come up empty. The coconut fronds are yellowed with disease. The paddyfields bleed their chemical fertilizers and herbicides freely. We should not watch too closely as the old man "bathes" by the shore – and people drink this water. Come to think of it, what exactly happens when you flush the toilet on this houseboat?

The answer is complicated by system failure that is social, ecological, economic and political. Without the children and their puppets, and all they represent, the lake might be doomed simply by the relentless pressure on it from the 1.1 million people living around it, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of tourists arriving each year.

A great deal is at stake. The Vembanad lake is the second largest wetland in India and the largest tropical wetland ecosystem on the country's southwestern coast. It is recognised as a Ramsar site – a wetland of global importance as defined by the Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, and joined by India in 1981. Like many other permanent backwaters, its environmental condition is in a state of precipitous decline, representing a looming ecosystem crisis.

"The functions performed by such wetlands in biodiversity conservation, flood control, livelihood assistance to the millions of people living around them, watershed services and services to the industries in the region are invaluable," says Dr. Latha Bhaskar, project coordinator for ATREE's small Vembanad team. "However, this fertile region, which was once called the rice bowl of Kerala, is now known as the waste bowl of Kerala, and today we

import our rice from neighbouring States. The lake is a sink for pollutants brought by the six rivers draining into it, and human-induced changes have led to the depletion of fish and other resources."

But it is not just the ecological failure that is creating the crisis. As the extent of the lake shrinks and its quality deteriorates, conflict inevitably arises between the stakeholders. Vembanad is second only to the Arabian Sea in terms of supporting livelihood activities.

The lake has been reduced to 37 per cent of its original size during the last century and a half, mostly by reclamation of fertile land at its perimeter for farming. Farmers make their living on land that is below sea level, so keeping salt water out of their agricultural systems is crucial.

But fishermen watch fish stock dwindle as the lake ecosystem struggles with pollution in many forms, exacerbated by today's limited flushing of the system by salt water. A barrage built in the 1950s remains closed during summer. This has meant that marine fish and prawns cannot migrate upstream, weed growth has increased, and natural flushing of pollutants has been radically restricted. Thus, the interests of farmers and fishermen are diametrically opposed. Add to this the relentlessly growing number of houseboat tourists served by hundreds of unregistered houseboats, stagnant waters in surrounding canals, the continuing absence of solid waste treatment facilities, and the recipe for an ecological disaster is complete.

"Coastal backwaters and inland water bodies have traditionally been economically efficient systems. Now they are fast declining owing to improper management, over-exploitation, and a lack of care and awareness," says Dr. D.R. Priyadarsanan, Fellow Scientist at ATREE. "Traditional livelihoods such as farming and fishing are under heavy pressure from ecological change and strong competition from other sources of support. In particular, the recent growth of the tourism industry has been exponential, opening up new areas of livelihood opportunities. But the lack of vision and organised planning is clearly visible," he said.

WETLANDS POLICY

The state of Indian wetlands policy leaves a lot to be desired, according to a variety of researchers. Although the most recent environmental legislation begins to turn this situation around, there remains jurisdictional overlap and non-recognition of wetlands as a separate ecosystem, to complicate the wetland context. "No legislation on land or forest in India legally defines wetlands, and there are no special enactments for their conservation," explains Priyadarsanan. "Wetland protection has to depend upon the legal status of spaces or localities of which they are a part."

In Kerala, that legal status does not exist. A draft Regulatory Framework for Wetlands Conservation has been produced by the Central government, but, according to a report in *The Hindu* on February 9, 2009, the Kerala government recently conveyed its objections to the framework, which was notified by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Kerala Minister for Water Resources N.K. Premachandran said the State had approved a report terming the proposed framework an infringement on the rights of the State on its water resources. "We accept the need for a regulatory mechanism for wet-

THE INVASIVE WATER hyacinth carpets the lake, choking it of oxygen. (Right) Children with plastic waste collected after a boat race on the lake. Plastic and solid rubbish lines every shore and canal, regularly clogging motorboat engines.

D.R. PRIYADARSANAN

ATREE CERC, ALAPPUZHA

lands. But taking into account the local environment and other factors, we have requested the Ministry to bring out a broad National Wetland Policy and guidelines, based on which each State can prepare its own legal framework," the Minister said.

[The Minister said the complex nature of wetlands in Kerala would make their management a difficult proposition under the system proposed by the Centre. "Water being a State subject, the proposal to bring wetlands listed in category A under a Central Wetlands Conservation Committee is questionable. It will force the State to relinquish administrative control over major water bodies."]

Recognising the vulnerable state of this vast wetland, the recent engagement of ATREE has focussed on developing the capacity of local communities around Vembanad to take care of their future, according to Priyadarsanan.

The Community Environmental Resource Centre (CERC), established in Alappuzha, has a fully integrated mission, addressing interacting themes in four areas:

- Assess the institutional, policy and information gaps that adversely affect the conservation and sustainable use of Vembanad wetlands.
- Increase environmental awareness among various stakeholders and enhance their capacity to address conservation issues pertaining to wetlands.
- Enable local communities to participate in the design and implementation of the management plan.
- Facilitate discussions on long-term, effective and inclusive institutional mechanisms involving government agencies, academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local community groups.

"We have recognised that the most effective approach to influencing policy is to work through the panchayats, where the voices of stakeholders have the greatest chance to be heard above the noise of conflict," says Latha Bhaskar. Developing the required trust is time-consuming but crucial, and the local CERC team has addressed this challenge in multiple ways.

Six rivers (Periyar, Muvattupuzha, Meenachil, Manimala, Pamba and Achenkovil) flow into the Vembanad wetland system, which covers 2,195 square kilometres. The area is a complex network of waterways: coastal backwaters, lagoons, marshes, mangroves, and reclaimed lands, interlaced with natural and man-made channels. Much of the reclaimed land lies below sea level, making it a recipient of nutrient-rich alluvial soil when flood waters recede.

Extensive areas of the lagoon have also been subjected to large-scale draining, filling, and other development activities. Most of these have been sponsored by the government with the goal of increasing food production and also mitigating flood damage.

JOHNEY THOMAS

The Thanneermukkam barrage, built in the 1950s to control flooding and salinity and to enable farming during the wet season, has succeeded in its primary purpose but has also stood in the way of the natural flushing action of salt water through the system, which has a direct impact on the health of fisheries. Irrigation schemes assist in the movement of agricultural chemicals into the estuarine system. Urban solid waste systems drain directly into the lake in many cases, and water-borne pathogens affect humans and fish alike. The lake has been referred to as "a bowl of agrochemicals and faecal matter". Historically, the lake system was known to host more than 150 species of fish, but recent fish counts have established numbers closer to 60 species.

The list of wetland challenges includes the deforestation of surrounding river basins, resulting in more than 30 million tonnes of sediment being added to the lake during flooding. Sedimentation is made worse by the removal of all but remnant stands of mangroves, the classic natural filters of wetlands. Industrial dredging disturbs the clam shell fishery on the lake bottom, and the retting of coconut husk on the shoreline eliminates prawn and marine fish nurseries.

The result of all these human interventions is a grossly altered wetland system, with the Vembanad lagoon now one-third of its former size, and half of its former depth, and the wetland system capable of holding just one-quarter of its former capacity.

Efforts to make more flexible and adaptable the operations of the Thanneermukkam barrage will probably improve the wetland flushing function, thereby enhancing estuarine fisheries and reducing pollution. Knowing that no single action can provide a solution, the ATREE team has designed a five-part approach to its collaborative work at Vembanad.

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE around the lake collect clams for a living. Industrial dredging disturbs the clam shell fishery on the lake bottom, and the retting of coconut husk on the shoreline eliminates prawn and marine fish nurseries.

The most developed is Jalapaadom, or Lessons on Water, designed for students in the region. "The programme aims to create awareness and advocacy among the students about the ecological functions of the lake's ecosystem and about the socio-cultural and economic significance of wetlands," explains T.D. Jojo, ATREE programme officer in charge of the Jalapaadom curriculum and school liaisons. The puppet shows, which he has helped develop, are part of the conservation education effort, implemented in 44 schools around the lake. Wetland Study Centres are established in all participating schools, each with 60 to 80 active members and two coordinating teachers. Diverse activities in and beyond the schools engage the children at many levels: performance, research methods, creative thinking, and hope for the future.

Learning data collection methods feeds directly into another component of ATREE's approach: Jaladarpanam – a participatory programme for water quality monitoring. Latha Bhaskar explains that constant monitoring of water quality is essential for a better understanding of the condition of the lake, helping the stakeholders as well as policymakers recognise its steady qualitative deterioration, and thus working towards improved management practices.

"The growing population pressure, migration, emergence of new stakeholders, private dominance of resource allocation and use, and the granting of rights by the government to use the water body without evaluating its cumulative impact/carrying capacity of the wetland and its biota, have all led to uncontrolled lake contamination," she explains.

The concept behind Jaladarpanam is that if people have a stake in managing common property, conservation initiatives are likely to show greater success, especially when government

ATREE CERC, ALAPPUZHA

ATREE'S JALADARPANAM PROGRAMME has many conservation initiatives that include stakeholders such as farmer and fishermen cooperatives, youth clubs, clam collectors, women's self-help groups, and educational institutions. Here, a self-help group meeting in progress.

intervention is failing or is absent. Caretaker teams around the lake include farmer and fishermen cooperatives, youth clubs, clam collectors, women's self-help groups, and educational institutions.

An ATREE-supported postgraduate student project with the St. Albert's College, Ernakulam, will map the magnitude and diversity of microbial pathogens around the lake to track disease vectors such as those of cholera and other intestinal ailments that break out seasonally. The data collected by participants will contribute to a publicly accessible comprehensive database on water quality. Data available through these sources are displayed on information boards set up in 14 basin stations around the lake and are also interpreted to the people through focus group meetings. For fishermen's groups the data about water salinity in the lake is valuable for intervening with the opening and closure of the Thanneermukkam barrage.

COLLECTIVE UNDERSTANDING

A gathering of 15 local fishermen, ATREE staff and several visitors fills a small meeting room in Muhamma in Alappuzha. The fishermen want more sanctuaries, differently designed, and by the end of the meeting, plans are in place to work with ATREE to set up a series of five sanctuaries that can provide experimental findings on their effects. "Our objective with such capacity-building activities is to help stakeholders participate in efficient and sustainable management of the Vembanad socio-economic system, by providing updated information on environmental quality, and also building local resource monitoring capacities," says Deepak Dayanandan, ATREE programme officer.

The interaction also improves their collective understanding of legislation and feasible management options. "The goal of a participatory approach is to recruit communities into the decision-making process and thus enable participatory resource management and wise use," Deepak says. "We draw in diverse stakeholder groups to create interactive learning forums that could affect both education and policy."

"Our policy analysis is expected to highlight policy gaps both in terms of insufficient regulatory provisions in prevailing laws and legislation, and in the lack of understanding of provisions themselves," explains Latha Bhaskar.

A wetland conservation information system, designed to assist in relevant policy development, is the final component of ATREE's current suite of projects. There are already many entities collecting ecological and socio-economic data about Vembanad's systems, but many potential users of that information neither know it exists nor have practical access to it.

The proposed system will include a reference library, a website, Geographical Information Systems, and information CDs and will complement the education programme already under way, right down to the grandmother puppet and her recalcitrant grandson.

The pledge taken at the end of the puppet show says it all: "We the people of this village pledge that we will keep all our water and wetland resources of the village clean. We will strive to keep it better and will defend any attempt to deform or pollute it. We promise to pass it to the next generation in its pristine state." □

Sally Duncan grew up on a farm in Australia, and is now policy research director at the Institute for Natural Resources at Oregon State University in the U.S. She is currently working with ATREE as a Visiting Fellow while fulfilling a Fulbright Environmental Leadership Fellowship.

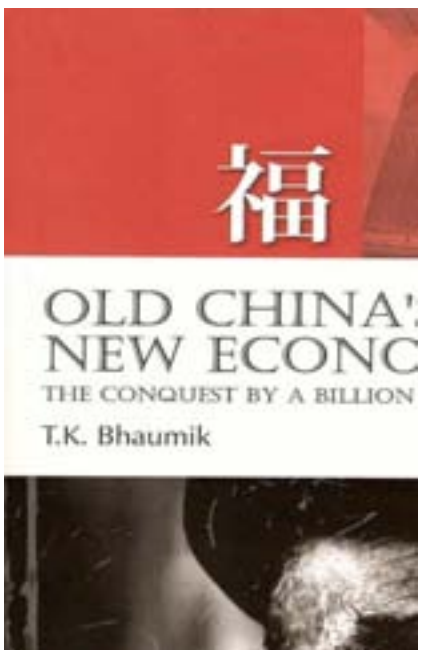
People's economy

A quick appraisal of the working, achievements and problems of China's new economy. BY C.T. KURIEN

IN the book under review, the author presents a concise and easily readable account of the phenomenal transformation of the Chinese economy, within a short period of half a century or so, from a stagnant, if not decaying, feudal set-up to the most rapidly growing economy in the world. China's economic order today is officially designated as a socialist market economy. There may be differences of opinion about whether the emphasis is on "socialist" or "market", but the undisputed fact, as the author points out, is that there is no other country in the recorded history of the world economy that has been able to sustain an almost uninterrupted phase of high growth of close to 10 per cent per annum and for well over a quarter of a century.

For those who are not familiar with old China's early economic history, T.K. Bhaumik provides a chapter at the outset dealing with its early phase from about 1700 B.C. until the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The treatment is short – just 25 pages – and admittedly sketchy.

Even Chapter Two, dealing with Mao Zedong's China (1949–1976), is brief. Mao's economic policies had come in for a great deal of criticism not only from his enemies but also from the then leaders of the Soviet Union, who were eager to see him follow what they had done. After his death, some of his close associates turned against many of his pet policies. Surely he had made mistakes – the Great Leap Forward (1958-62), which fumbled into the Great Famine of the early 1960s, for instance. But Mao had taken over a dilapidated economy that had suffered long decades of neglect, foreign aggression and civil war. His first task was to get hold of the situation and initiate a process of long-term reconstruction and rejuvenation. He paid attention foremost to letting the masses understand that it was their effort and hard work that would give them sustenance and security. In this task he was quite successful. Reviewing the performance of China's new economy up to the recent years, Bhaumik states that it is the people of China who built it up with the state giving them direction and support. Mao, then, is the founder of both the People's Republic of China and the People's Economy of China.



IN REVIEW

Old China's New Economy: The Conquest by a Billion Paupers by T.K. Bhaumik; Sage Publications, 2009; pages xxxiii + 294, Rs.350.

The main theme of the book is the changes in the Chinese economy in the post-Mao period; in fact, the distinct change in direction that Deng Xiaoping brought about after he consolidated power following the two-year power struggle in the wake of Mao's death in 1976. Deng assumed leadership under difficult circumstances.

Within the country and the party, he had to fight against Mao loyalists, including Mao's widow and Hua Guofong, the Chairman of the party, for a break with the past. The chaos resulting from the Cultural Revolution had to be contained and cleared up. In terms of China's relationship with the rest of the world, the Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union had ended and diplomatic relationship with the United States had been established. There was the global oil crisis of 1978-79 and most of the Western economies were experiencing recession.

In this situation, Deng found the opportunity to bring about radical changes in economic policies. One of his daring decisions was to open up the Chinese economy to external influences, both in terms of trade and more so in terms of capital inflow. In turn, it necessitated a greater role internally for money and markets. But markets

would function only if people were allowed to make use of them, to trade, to make profits and become rich. Whether such proclivities were compatible with the socialist ideology and the sense of community and equality that had been emphasised so far immediately became major issues. Deng deftly handled them. New slogans such as "To become rich is glorious" were introduced and popularised.

And to allow human instincts to have their legitimate role within a basically socialist system, the Household Responsibility System (HRS) was introduced. According to it, households could lease land for five to 15 years from the collectives, and with the help of family labour, produce what they liked and sell the produce at market price, subject only to a quota to be given to the collective and the state. This had the desired effect, and grain production increased from 304 million tonnes in 1978 to 390 MT in 1988, though there was a fall in the cultivated area. There was also substantial diversification of productive activity – into dairying, poultry, piggery and fishing – in the rural areas and a consequent increase in exchange and marketing.

More important, perhaps, was the stimulus given to non-agricultural activities. Many new township and village enterprises (TVEs) emerged producing primarily light consumer goods. The production processes were not particularly modern or even efficient from a purely technological angle, but they unleashed the entrepreneurial spirit and ensured that the growth of the economy was labour-intensive and employment-generating. Soon problems relating to the TVEs would become contested economic issues, but China, at that phase in its economic evolution, found a way to reduce poverty and enable people, especially in the rural areas, to enjoy the comforts of rising incomes and consumption. This emphasis on rural development also strengthened the decentralisation of administrative and fiscal systems.

The first phase of the open-door policy fitted in well against this background. China took advantage of the problems of the Western capitalist economies of the late 1970s and early 1980s and the eagerness of global capital to move into new territories to allow foreign capital to come in for direct investment, build foreign exchange reserves, and step up international trade. Initially at least, a "dual economy" was deliberately set up. The bulk of the economy, as described above, constituted the domestic sector and only selected areas of the coastline were brought under the regime of foreign capital, with very little contacts between the two segments of the national economy. Later on, this too would create problems, but at the time it was done, it was considered the most appropriate strategy.

PARTY IN CONTROL

By early 1990, China was ready to spell out its long-term objective. At the 14th Party Congress in September 1992, it was resolved that the goal of economic policy would be the "Socialist Market Economy". But it was not to be a reform to "Leave it to the Market" as had happened in most of the erstwhile socialist countries of Europe, or as enthusiastically canvassed for a while even in India. It was made clear that the party would still be in command, determining the character and nature of the transition to a market economy. In 1998, it was clarified that the thrust areas of the transition would be a rule-based system ensuring a level-playing field, clarity on property rights and ownership, and building of market-supporting institutions. That transition under the leadership of the party is still going on.

To be more specific, that transition has involved rationalising the vast body of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and making them responsive to market signals; establishing the links between the SOEs and the large number of private enterprises that were springing up; dealing with the problems of open unemployment resulting from the rationalisation of the enterprises; building up of banking and credit institutions; carrying out financial and currency reforms; tuning up the economy to international requirements, particularly after the country's formal entry in 2001 into the World Trade Organisation (WTO); and much more. The distinctive feature of China's new economy that is still taking shape is that all these matters are being deliberately thought through. China is showing that a socialist market economy does not just leave it to the market and that a market economy's concern is not merely to "get prices right".

Bhaumik devotes the main part of the book (Chapters Five to Eight on pages 115 to 230) on how these issues have been handled. The treatment is simple and well organised. Not even a summary is attempted here. But the following passage may give an idea of what the Chinese were able to achieve over a short period of a little over a quarter of a century: "In 1978, China had an impoverished, and, if one may say so, autarkic socialist economy, wherein over 950 million people produced a gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 215 billion and more than 43 per cent lived in absolute poverty. In 2005, 1.3 billion Chinese people had a per capita GDP of over USD 1,700, an eightfold increase over 1978. The size of the real economy in 2005 (at USD 2.2 trillion) was more than ten times the size in 1978. On top of this the economy grew by 10.7 per cent in 2006, and pushed the GDP to over USD 2.4 trillion and per capita GDP exceeded USD 1,800." Phenomenal indeed!

ACHIEVEMENTS AND NEW PROBLEMS

But this unprecedented achievement in human history has given rise to new problems also. In order to appreciate and evaluate these problems, it is important to take note of a comment that Bhaumik makes: "Actually, there are several 'Chinas' within the booming national economy." Several diverse Chinas, one must add. Although China now is more under a central authority than ever before, it is a fact that its

THE HINDU PHOTO LIBRARY

MAO ZEDONG (LEFT) with Deng Xiaoping. "Throughout the process of economic transition the Chinese Communist Party has demonstrated its unique ability to manage various challenges entirely on its own."

economy is still "a bunch of disjointed provincial economies". The provincial and local administrations retain a great deal of autonomy. The physical diversity makes this almost inevitable. Added to it is the fact that economic activity is now under different sponsorships – many are still state-owned, but there has been a rapid growth of privately owned enterprises during the past three decades while many old collective and cooperative units continue. Then there are the emerging modern corporations, including the multinationals. These production units have different rules of the game, though increasingly they all come under the laws of the market.

Under these conditions, rapid growth has led to an increase in disparities. What in an aggregate sense is referred to as the "growth of the national economy" has been substantially confined to the coastal regions and to industrial and financial activity, while large areas of the interior and the north-west still hold on to livelihood activities at rather low levels. While those who have been incorporated into the technologically advanced manufacturing activities have considerably improved their earnings and living conditions, many are becoming unemployed with little to fall back on.

Rural-urban differentials and housing also show glaring disparities. Above all, income inequalities have become embarrassingly conspicuous. As many as 300 million Chinese just manage to survive; of them 130-140 million survive on $0.55 a day, points out Bhaumik. The bottom 10 per cent, accounting for only 1.8 per cent of the total consumption expenditure, had a per capita expenditure of about $149. Against this, the top 10 per cent of the population, with a share of 33.1 per cent, enjoyed an annual per capita consumption expenditure of $2,750. However, this structure was not totally unanticipated.

If during the first phase of the transformation of the economy Mao aimed at equality at a low level, Deng and those who followed him were aware that the only way to move out of that situation was to have selective high growth resulting in inequalities. The Eleventh Plan (2006-2010) has been attempting broad-based high growth and remained substantially successful until the global recession made its adverse effect felt on the Chinese economy from 2008 onward.

CHOICE OF TECHNOLOGIES

There are other growth-related problems too. Technological upgradation is one among them. Those who engage in productive activity for survival do not bother much about the technology they utilise: they hold on to what they are used to or what is readily available. But a modernising economy aiming at high technologies and international competition must make intelligent choices about technology. New technologies have started flowing into China after it opened up. But are they the most suited for China? Already China's growth is proving to be extensive in the consumption of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation. Again, those at the helm of affairs are quite conscious of these issues. A Green National Accounting Study has been launched and since 2006 there has been a substantial increase in the allocation for research and development (R&D).

China's economic relationship with the rest of the world also poses new problems. In the initial stages of economic reconstruction, China had no intention of becoming a major player in the global economy. Indeed, for long China remained a closed economy. And when it opened up, an attempt was made to insulate the domestic economy as much as possible. For instance, foreign banks were not allowed to do business in domestic currency, and their operations were confined to the new special economic zones that were set up, that is, essentially to finance import and export transactions.

Foreign direct investments (FDIs) were heavily controlled too. Things began to change when foreign capital began to flow into the country in bulk. By 2001, foreign exchange reserves con-

AFP

FARMERS POLLINATE APRICOT blossoms in China's Shanxi province. According to the Household Responsibility System, households could lease land from the collectives, and with the help of family labour, produce what they liked and sell it at the market price, subject only to a quota to be given to the collective and the state.

stituted 17 per cent of the GDP, and by 2005 it went over 40 per cent, that is, $770 per capita, about the highest in the world. Foreign trade too picked up phenomenally. Exports, for instance, increased from less than $10 billion in 1978 to over $760 billion in 2005, while the exports/GDP ratio increased from 5 to 35 per cent.

It is no longer possible to insulate the domestic economy and economic policies from global influences (as China is learning now). One area where this is seen clearly is in terms of the Chinese currency, the yuan. For domestic reasons China is eager to maintain a stable value of its currency in terms of leading global currencies, especially the U.S. dollar. But the U.S., into which Chinese exports are flowing and thus making the country indebted to China, has been exerting pressure to have free convertibility between the two currencies, leading to an appreciation of the yuan (which will reduce exports into the U.S.). China has resisted this so far.

At another level, "China tends to buy regionally and sell globally", as the author puts it, piling up export surpluses with the U.S. and the European Union but having import surpluses from Japan, East Asian neighbours and the rest of the world. A matter of concern for China and the global economy as a whole is whether China will retain its export thrust, and if it does, how the rest of the world will cope with it. In particular, China will have to be concerned about the very unbalanced trade structure with the U.S. and Japan which will have economic and political ramifications. A further significant fallout of high growth, marketisation, and economic interactions with external agencies has been the high level and rapid spread of corruption. Contacts and influences have always had a prominent role in Chinese society and governance. Hard cash seems to be taking over their role now.

Bhaumik's concluding observations also deserve special attention. "China is a state-driven, state-managed market economy," he says. "It is the state that is at the helm of affairs," he adds. And, in China, for all practical purposes, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is the state, and "throughout the process of economic transition the CCP has demonstrated its unique ability to manage various challenges entirely on its own". Along with it is the fact that it was the people of China, initially the liberated peasants in the rural areas, who began to walk the tough road to prosperity. "Hard work is apparently an inbuilt quality of an average Chinese – male and female alike," says the author. "Driven by self-confidence, they believe that they can make a difference in their lives, if only they are allowed the scope to do so."

A country where the people know that they are the ones who shape their destiny and where there is a leadership that is alert and forward-looking will face many problems on its journey, but it will also find ways to deal with them.

For those who wish to have a quick appraisal of the working, achievements and problems of China's new economy, I recommend Bhaumik's book. □

Spies & diplomats

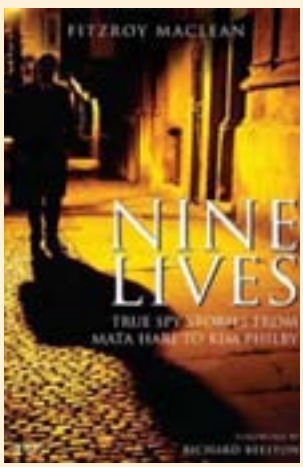
The volumes are a serious study of the world of spies and of outstanding diplomats who shaped world history. BY A.G. NOORANI

THE line that divides diplomacy and espionage has become blurred. Heads of secret services have been employed to conduct secret diplomacy with representatives of another country behind the back of the ambassador stationed there. The Central Intelligence Agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, the Inter-Services Intelligence, Mossad and the KGB are known to have conducted such extra-curricular activities. The advantages of such excursions are obscure. RAW's chief ("Sunil") was sent on a mission to Colombo though India was represented by an able High Commissioner, J.N. Dixit. "Sunil" asked that the fact of his negotiations with Kittu, a senior Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam leader, "be not disclosed to anyone in the Indian High Commission".

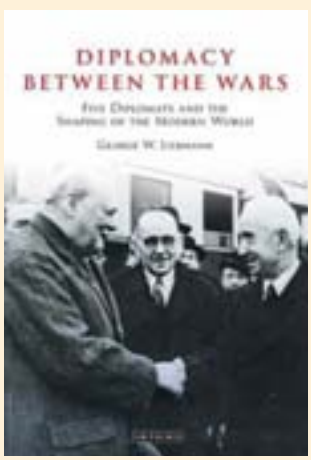
Rohan Gunaratna's book *Indian Intervention in Sri Lanka: The Role of India's Intelligence Agencies* may be tendentious in its analyses. But the texts of documents he reproduces, no doubt with the help of persons in power, reveal that RAW participated in the conduct of Indian diplomacy to a worrying degree. It apparently had even a "legal expert" in residence, who gave advice on Sri Lanka's election register. This is apart from another activity which has ceased to be extra-curricular.

Covert operations have come to be accepted as an integral part of the functions of the secret services. The result is a debasement of diplomacy and an impairment of the efficiency of the intelligence services. The spy acquires false notions and his masters come to rely on him not only for the intelligence he provides but also for his assessments, a task for which diplomats are better equipped.

BOOK FACTS



Nine Lives: True Spy Stories from Mata Hari to Kim Philby
by Fitzroy Maclean; Tauris Parke Paperbacks; pages 341.



Diplomacy Between the Wars: Five Diplomats and the Shaping of the Modern World
by George W. Liebmann; I.B. Tauris; pages 288.

These two volumes contain studies of the *creme de la creme* of both the foreign and the intelligence services in which the legendary Sir Fitzroy Maclean (1911-1996) won distinction. He served as a diplomat at the British Embassy in Moscow and as Winston Churchill's trusted personal envoy and commander of the British Military Mission to Josip Broz Tito and his partisans. He was dropped by parachute into German-occupied Yugoslavia, served in the Special Air Service (SAS) and was also involved with the Free French forces in Iran. He was one of the inspirations for his friend Ian Fleming's James Bond.

Fitzroy Maclean's volume is a serious work, a quality that is not to be overlooked by its riveting account of the lives of nine most famous spies from Mata Hari to Kim Philby, George Lonsdale and Oleg Penkovsky. Their motives varied from greed and the pleasure of betrayal to professional pride and ideology.

Philby was one of the three Cambridge spies besides Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. His faith was unshaken by Nikita Khruschev's disclosures on Stalin, and by Hungary and Czechoslovakia. But by the late 1970s life in Moscow was wearing him down. He became disillusioned because his hosts never trusted him and always kept him under watch.

The Dutch girl Mata Hari's was the most tragic case. She was actually out of her depth in espionage. France was gripped by a spy fever. She was executed though there was no substantial evidence against her. Richard Sorge was a German devoted to Moscow. From To-

THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

THE DANCER AND spy Mata Hari. She was actually out of her depth in espionage. But France was gripped by a spy fever and she was executed though there was no substantial evidence against her.

THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

SIR HORACE RUMBOLD was the Vice-Chairman of the Royal Commission on Palestine. "Is it not unjust to the Arabs?" he asked Winston Churchill apropos his partition plans.

kyo he accurately warned, several weeks in advance, of the German invasion of the United Soviet Socialist Republics. Stalin dismissed his reports as offerings by "a brothel keeper".

The most hilarious is the profile of "Cicero". He was Elyeza Bazna, valet of the British Ambassador in Ankara during the Second World War, Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen. He had acquired a taste for espionage. It was easy for him, in those relaxed gentlemanly times, to film the Ambassador's papers and sell them to the Germans. They included papers on the Second Front. Cornelia, Secretary of his handler in the German Embassy, whom he courted, was an American spy recruited by her boyfriend. She went over to the British. But it was Cicero's clumsiness that betrayed him. He entered the Ambassador's study – key in hand. He was not sacked; he resigned. Cicero found that his collection of Bank of England notes was worth little. Most were German forgeries. Spies seldom had a happy end. This one deserves a film on his life.

George W. Liebmann's book is a study of five outstandingly able diplomats who shaped events – Lewis Einstein, an American; Sir Horace Rumbold, himself the son of a diplomat; Count Johana Bernstorff, German Ambassador to the U.S. during the First World War; Count Carlo Sforza, Italy's Foreign Minister (1947-1951); and Ismet Inonu, Turkey's first Foreign Minister and Kamal Ataturk's successor as its President. It is a work of considerable erudition. The diplomatic successes and failures of the five are carefully described. On February 8, 1942, Einstein urged a pact with Moscow on its post-war frontiers. It might have averted the Cold War. He accurately predicted Stalin's policies in the absence of such a pact.

> Covert operations have come to be accepted as an integral part of the functions of secret services.

Rumbold's first posting was in Cairo in 1891. He was the charge d'affaires in Berlin when the war broke out in 1914 and returned as Ambassador in 1928. He met Hitler for the first and last time on May 11, 1933, and was livid at what he was told. In 1936, as Vice-Chairman of the Royal Commission on Palestine, he interrogated Churchill, who had suppressed the publication of his own evidence. "Is it not unjust to the Arabs?" he asked Churchill *apropos* his partition plans. "The Arabs are the indigenous people," he reminded the witness.

Bernstorff, born at the Russian Legation in London in 1862, was the German Ambassador to the U.S. during the First World War and did his best to avert war between the two countries. He went into exile in Switzerland in 1932.

Sforza served as Italy's post-war Foreign Minister for five years and participated in negotiations on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. He was a staunch advocate of Europe's unity since the 1920s. His diplomatic approach was empirical. He wrote to the young Henry Kissinger on his book review: "I would venture to suggest only this: less generalities and more factual data."

Ismet Inonu proved more than a match for Lord Curzon and Rumbold as they negotiated the Lausanne Treaty (1923). He used the Russians without becoming dependent on them and won remarkable territorial gain for Turkey. He even used his deafness to advantage. Curzon turned purple when, in reply to his reproach, Ismet Pasha said: "It is disgraceful and unbecoming of a human being to tease people for their natural disabilities." Inonu kept Turkey out of the Second World War.

The author is abstemious in his conclusions. But one fundamental emerges clearly: do not be too sure or too zealous. Diplomacy is like gardening, not mechanics. It places a premium on patience. □

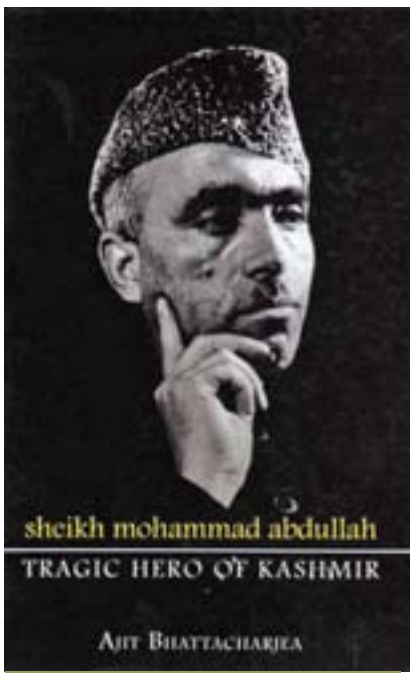
Kashmir's hero

Sheikh Abdullah believed in secularism and distrusted the two-nation theory, but short-sighted policies of the Indian political class alienated him. BY SHAKTI KAK

WHAT is lately being referred to as the "first family" of Jammu and Kashmir was not so until two generations ago. Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah (1905-1982), the grandfather of Omar Abdullah, the present Chief Minister of the State, came from a humble background, led a difficult childhood, and moved ahead in his personal and political life by sheer hard work and pragmatism.

Ajit Bhattacharjea has done a commendable biography of the Sheikh which focusses on the political life of the towering leader, who led a mass movement in Kashmir in the 1930s and 1940s with a secular and progressive agenda. The Sheikh was the dominant political figure in the State for nearly half a century. His was an eventful political life: arrests, confinement, banishment, relegation to political wilderness, and rise to the prime ministership and chief ministership of the State. In all, he spent nearly 17 years in prison.

First, Maharaja Hari Singh arrested him for "waging war" against the state as he was engaged in a mass struggle against the feudal order. In 1953, when he was the Prime Minister of the State, he was arrested again on the charges of carrying out "anti-national" activities and conspiring for an independent Kashmir, which were never proved. In this case, which came to be called the "Kashmir Conspiracy", it was alleged that Abdullah was on the verge of meeting a Pakistani spy in Tangmarg. In the earlier instance of arrest, by Hari Singh, Jawaharlal Nehru supported the Sheikh's cause and worked towards getting him released. In the latter instance, the Sheikh believed, Nehru was complicit in his arrest. He was incarcerated in the jails of Ooty (Udhagamandalam), Kodaikanal, Udhampur and Kud.



IN REVIEW

Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah: Tragic Hero of Kashmir by Ajit Bhattacharjea; Roli Books, 2008; pages 320, Rs.395.

There were pacts such as the Delhi Agreement with Nehru and the Kashmir Accord with Indira Gandhi, which became reference points for negotiations on the extent of autonomy that the Sheikh had envisaged for the State at the time of accession. He remained at the administrative helm of the State from October 1947 to August 1953, first as the Head of Emergency Administration (until March 5, 1948) and later as Prime Minister.

On August 9, 1953, his government was dismissed and he was arrested. He was externed from Kashmir in 1971 and was allowed back only in 1972. He was again the Chief Minister of the State from 1977 until his death in 1982. He was, however, at the centre of political developments whether in or out of power. Called Sher-i-Kashmir affectionately, he stayed a secularist until the end.

The Sheikh's life was intertwined with the politics of the State for nearly half a century. He returned to Kashmir in 1930, after getting an M.Sc. degree in chemistry from Aligarh Muslim University. He wanted to go to England for higher studies and applied for a scholarship to the State government. He was denied the scholarship as he was 24 years old. He considered this yet another evidence of discrimination by the Maharaja. He then settled for a schoolteacher's job.

The Sheikh played a pioneering role in mobilising opinion against the oppression and discrimination of the Dogra rulers in Kashmir in the earlier decades of the 20th century. Before the 1930s, the process of political mobilisation in Kashmir was driven by communal identities: Kashmiri Pandits, Hindu Dogras, Kashmiri Muslims, all had separate associations to put forward their demands. These community-based programmes laid emphasis on jobs, religious practices of individual communities, and dealing with religion-based discrimination.

There were several types of protest movements such as campaigns against the Dogra rulers by the Gilgit and Poonch principalities; protests by the shawl weavers and the landless labourers who were forced into beggary; conflict over religious places; and

campaigns for increased participation of the Muslim community in the affairs of the state. All these spontaneous struggles eventually formalised into a long-drawn struggle against the oppressive rule of the Dogras. From 1930, educated Muslims started debating issues that adversely impacted their social and economic condition and sought to ameliorate it. As a result, the "Reading Room Party", a cell in Fatehkadal in Srinagar, was set up by these people with the Sheikh as the secretary.

At a meeting in Jammu in June 1931, the Sheikh made his maiden speech explaining the reasons for the backwardness of the Muslim community. The dominant rhetoric of these meetings was religious as the community felt threatened by the Hindu ruler and by the sectarian mobilisation of the Pandit community in Kashmir and the Hindus in Jammu. The attention that these protest meetings received from Muslims outside the State led to increased repression by the State administration.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

The Sheikh's contribution in changing the direction and character of the Muslim Conference, which was renamed National Conference, is well documented. The formation of the All India Jammu & Kashmir National Conference in June 1939 under the Sheikh's leadership led to a transformation in the thrust of the political movement against the Dogra rule. The Muslim Conference was later revived by Chaudhry Ghulam Abbas. He supported the Maharaja in not aligning with the Indian Union at the time of Partition.

The political sagacity of the Sheikh is evident in the manner in which he formalised the campaigns and programmes of the party for mass mobilisation. The Naya Kashmir Manifesto, as it became known, was adopted by the National Conference in August 1945.

It had an inclusive charter for social change with emphasis on equal rights for women, the right to education and the right to work, among other progressive measures.

The most radical measure was the abolition of landlordism and the distribution of land to the tiller. He argued that such a progressive agenda could be implemented only by overthrowing the feudal order. The Quit Kashmir slogan became a potent movement, which kept large sections of people from all faiths together during the prolonged struggle. The Sheikh had to struggle against supporters of the Muslim Conference in Kashmir, the Muslim League in the rest of India, and sectarian Hindu associations within and outside the State.

The affinity between the Sheikh and Nehru as well as between the National Conference and the Indian National Congress developed as the struggle against the Maharaja drew support from the latter. At the Karachi session of the All India States People's Conference in 1935, the Congress declared that it would support the freedom movement of the people of the princely states unlike the Muslim League, which supported the rulers of the these states, including the Maharaja of Kashmir. Mohammed Ali Jinnah condemned the Quit Kashmir movement, while Nehru supported it.

The Congress accepted the Sheikh as the true representative of the people of the princely state. Balraj Puri, the writer and human rights activist, points out that the Sheikh received loud applause when he declared at public meetings that Pakistan was an enemy of Kashmir as it had tried to enslave it through force, whereas India was its friend, and that the Indian Army had come to defend its freedom.

The Sheikh was treated like a hero by Nehru through the 1940s. He was considered a beacon of secular politics by Nehru and Gandhi in 1947. According to Bhattacharjea, Nehru and the Sheikh reinforced each other's faith in the secular and progressive ideology. However, within five years, doubts about the Sheikh's loyalty to India were raised and Nehru increasingly gave in to the opinions of those opposed to the Sheikh's politics. As the Sheikh implemented land reforms, the landed class, both in Jammu and Kashmir, went against him.

It was easy to colour this event as communal since most of the landowning population was Hindu and the poor peasantry, who got the land, was Muslim. As anger against the distribution of land mounted, Nehru advised the Sheikh "to avoid provoking Jammu and Dogra sentiments in decisions concerning the sequestration of excess land and Hari Singh's orchards" (page 172).

The Sheikh was dismayed at the anti-Muslim riots that took place in Jammu in 1947-48. He held the Maharaja responsible for the murder of hundreds of Muslims. He often pointed out that while he and his party maintained communal harmony in Kashmir, the Maharaja and his wife incited communal violence in Jammu. The Sheikh's protests against the riots annoyed the Maharaja. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister, sympathised with the Maharaja and gave a communal turn to the statements made and the measures taken by the Sheikh.

According to B.N. Mullick, the intelligence chief, Sardar Patel did not trust the Sheikh and maintained that "[Abdullah's] antipathy to the Maharaja was not really an antipathy to the ruler as such, but to the Dogras in general and with the Dogras he identified the rest of the majority community in India" (page 185).

HINDUTVA MOBILISATION

The mobilisation by Hindu hardliners against the special status of the State was spearheaded by the Praja Parishad and supported by the Jan Sangh. The agitation became a galvanising force against the Sheikh. As the Praja Parishad started its campaign against the special status of Jammu and Kashmir, Nehru described the agitation "as a subversive movement of the most reactionary communal type".

In another note to the Home Ministry in January 1953, Nehru showed that he was aware that "communal organisations like the Jan Sangh, RSS

THE HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

SHEIKH ABDULLAH AND V.K. Krishna Menon in conversation at a meeting. Political developments in India after Nehru's death, the creation of Bangladesh, and the Simla Agreement made the Sheikh change his demand for a plebiscite to one on the extent of autonomy for the State.

[Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh] and Akali Dal [would] create trouble in Delhi on the basis of the Jammu Parishad agitation" (page 172). The demand for complete integration of the State with India by the Praja Parishad and the Jan Sangh was made on purely communal grounds.

The Sheikh's belief in a plebiscite and, pending that, the special status of the relationship of the State with India was further strengthened by the intensity of the agitation led by the Praja Parishad, the Jan Sangh and the RSS. In his much-quoted speech at Ransinghpura, he raised the issue of the hold of communal forces on politics in the country and the difficulty of the Muslim-majority State to function effectively under the increasingly communal atmosphere. Hence he advocated even more strongly the proposal for greater autonomy for the State.

His proposals varied from complete independence to United Nations trusteeship for 10 years to "detailed district wise suggestions for separating an independent Kashmir from Jammu and Ladakh that would remain with India. Kashmir would consist of Uri, Titwal, Gurais, Zojila, Tragbal and the Jammu side of Ramban (Doda District)" (page 174).

What disheartened the Sheikh was the lack of will on the part of Nehru to commit himself to his earlier promises of plebiscite and autonomy and his inability to contain the campaign launched by the Hindu hardliners. After 1950, as forces opposed to him and his progressive policies were consolidating their position, the Sheikh was reviled as "anti-national, pro-Pakistan and even communal" in the Indian Parliament and the press (page 170).

With the former Maharaja's son, Karan Singh, as the Sadar-i-Riyasat and Sardar Patel as the Home Minister at the Centre, the Sheikh became a victim of conspiracies to oust him from his position of leadership. Mullick "imported suspicion and a tinge of communalism into his interpretation of Abdullah's actions and speeches, eventually compiling the charges required to justify arresting the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir"(page 185).

Bhattacharjea gives details of the Sheikh's arrest at midnight on August 9, 1953, in Gulmarg. He highlights the role played by Mullick and Sardar Patel in undermining the Sheikh's position with the central political leadership.

Nehru made it clear that he thought that the Sheikh was confused. He wrote to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "My fear is that Sheikh Sahib, in his present state of mind, is likely to do something or take some step, which might make things worse" (page 174).

Subsequent correspondence between Nehru and the Sheikh indicates that Nehru had distanced himself from the Sheikh. In fact, the Sheikh was accused of delaying the implementation of the Delhi Agreement. The bias had reached such proportions that Nehru accepted the suggestion to dismiss the Sheikh's government on the pretext that he had lost the support of his Cabinet, and he was arrested on trumped-up charges. Commentators have termed this as the major rupture in the faith and trust that the Sheikh had placed in Nehru.

Political developments in India after Nehru's death, the creation of Bangladesh and the Simla Agreement made the Sheikh change his demand for a plebiscite to one on the extent of autonomy for the State. He found it difficult to deal with Indira Gandhi, who wanted to strengthen the Congress' presence in the State.

On February 25, 1975, the Sheikh was sworn in as Chief Minister of the State, after a gap of nearly 22 years. Though from 1977 to 1980 he had some respite from Indira Gandhi's continuous attacks, he realised that the new formation at the Centre was not favourable to his ideals of autonomy. The Hindutva elements of the Jan Sangh in the newly formed Janata Party revived the "issue of closer integration with the Indian Union, while Home Minister Charan Singh even favoured abrogation of Article 370" (page 234).

Bhattacharjea's biography of the Sheikh emphasises his belief in secularism and his distrust of the two-nation theory. He had faith in Indian secularism, which was amply articulated in his speech to the Constituent Assembly. It was the short-sighted policies propagated and implemented by the Indian political class that alienated the Sheikh and made him at times difficult to deal with. On the whole, he stayed loyal to the democratic and secular tradition, which he espoused in his earlier years of political mobilisation. □

Reset button

The reset button was pressed, hit or punched into politics on a grand scale in the coverage of Obama's victory in the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucus.

The English Language

WILLIAM **SAFIRE**

BEMOANING "a dangerous drift in relations" between Russia and the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organistion) nations, Vice-President Joe Biden told a conclave on security policy in Munich, "To paraphrase President [Barack] Obama, it's time to press the *reset button*."

At the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) headquarters in Virginia less than two weeks later, on February 19, Joe Biden paraphrased again: "The President has made it clear that he wants to hit the *reset button* on our relations with Russia." Just short of two weeks after that repeated indirect quotation, President Obama publicly embraced and extended the metaphor attributed to him: "We've had a good exchange between ourselves and the Russians. I've said that we need to *reset* or *reboot* the relationship there."

The *reset button* had been pressed, hit or punched into politics on a grand scale in world newspaper coverage of Obama's upset victory over Senator Hillary Clinton and the rest of the Democratic field in the 2008 Iowa Democratic caucus. On the eve of the New Hampshire primary, London's *Evening Standard* reported, "She has tried to hit the *reset button* and radically change her strategy." She adopted that figure of speech every time her campaign shifted gears, to no avail.

Not surprising, then, on her first European tour as Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton told National Public Radio in Brussels that in discussions with the Russians "we're going to hit the *reset button* and start fresh". She went so far as to present Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, with a red desk ornament representing a reset button, and they both merrily pressed it in a photo-op. Her gag gift was labelled in Russian as *peregruzka*, supposedly meaning "reset", but actually meaning "overcharge" – in the sense of "electrical overload", not meaning "gouging the unsuspecting consumer" – but the American mistranslation gave the Russian diplomat a chance for a sly dig. (The word most likely should have been *perezagruzka*. But an even better choice, I am informed by Regina Maksutova, who served 13 years at *The Washington Post*'s Moscow bureau, is *perenastroika*.) Clinton's usage, on top of those by Biden and Obama, repercussed in Moscow, which caused the Russian President, Dmitri Medvedev, to say, "The surprising term 'reset' really reflects the essence of the transformations we would like to see."

All this wild diplomatic resettlement caused *The Washington Post* columnist Anne Applebaum to write: "*Press the reset button*. Is there any phrase more enticing in the modern lexicon? We all know what it means: Press the reset button, watch your computer reboot and presto. A nice, clean screen appears, and you start again from scratch.... Unfortunately, it is also a deeply misleading, even vapid, metaphor for diplomatic relations." In an era of *do-overs* and *makeovers*, what is the synonymy of *start-overs*?

> "The term 'reset' reflects transformations we would like to see."

Restart is the most plebeian; it is the verb that describes what you do when the engine of your car or lawn mower stalls. *Reboot*, from *boot*, is rooted in "to pull yourself up by your bootstraps"; it is now applied to a machine, when repowered, that is designed to bring itself to a state where it can again operate on its own. *Reset* has a long, varied etymology ranging from jewellery-making to a sense of larceny.

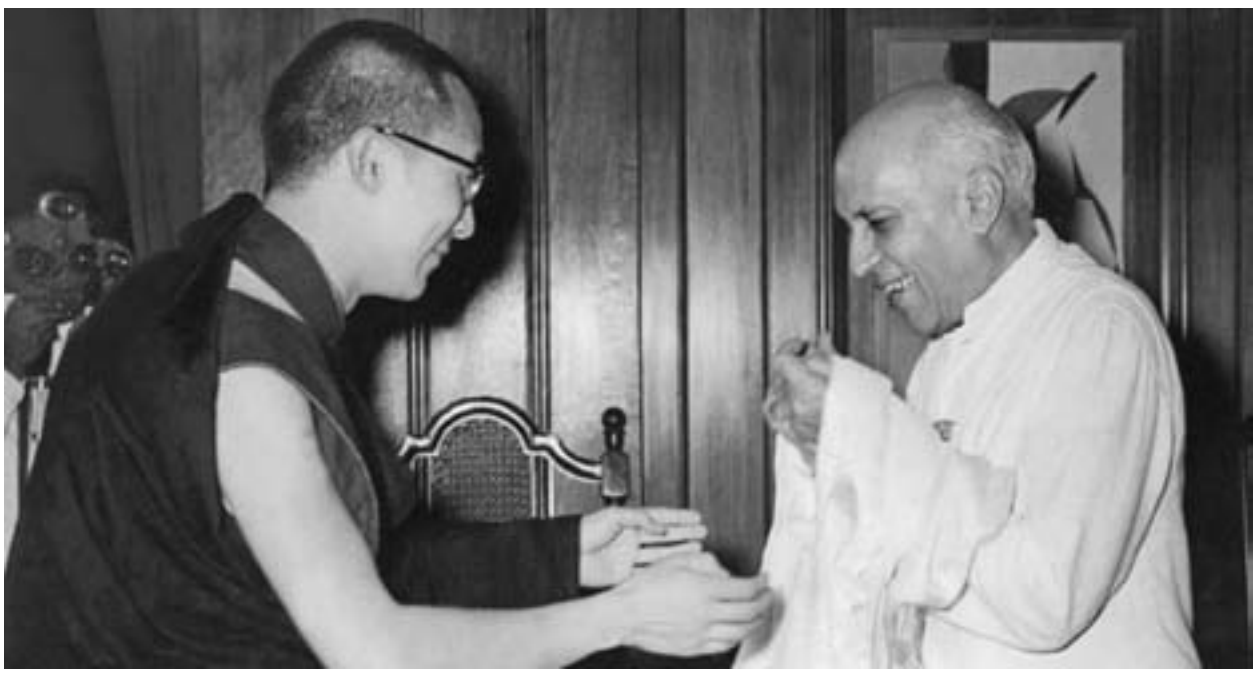
In current usage, all three verbs refer to fixing a misbehaving machine or system by switching it off and on again. But Obama said "*reset* or *reboot*"; is there a shade of difference between those two? Xeni Jardin of boingboing.net says: "*Reboot* refers specifically to hardware. *Reset* means returning to original or last-saved defaults, possibly by restarting or rebooting."

J.D. Biersdorfer, the technology Question & Answer columnist for *The New York Times*, says: "I find *reboot* to be more oriented toward computers since it is a software command with a whiff of modern tech-geek jargon about it. But *reset*, as in *reset button* – that's a nice, comforting physical switch you find on everything around the house from electrical outlets to video-game consoles. Push that button, and everything is supposed to be all right. Everyone wants the magic button." □

The New York Times Service

TIBET: A CASE FOR QUIET DIPLOMACY

The record of the Dalai Lama's talks with Jawaharlal Nehru when they first met after he left Tibet yields conclusions that are still relevant. BY A.G. NOORANI



AFP

SEPTEMBER 7, 1959: The Dalai Lama offering Jawaharlal Nehru a traditional Tibetan white sash when he visited the Prime Minister in New Delhi.

Why does the Dalai Lama not try old-style diplomacy in quiet earnest, away from the public glare and focussed on specifics, eschewing the hideous jargon of our times? **And eschewing trips abroad and** interviews to the media?

SO close, yet so far. That is how one feels on a close reading of the Dalai Lama's interview to Ananth Krishnan in *The Hindu* (April 1, 2009). He said: "We are not asking for separation. We are happy to be part of China. We just want dignity and respect." True enough, that is not all that he said. He made, besides, some points in the debate between him and China, a debate that is sterile and rancorous, reflecting distrust on both sides. But the crucial fundamental that he accepted provides ground strong enough on which a settlement can be built provided that there is, on both sides, a will to settle. The time has surely come to move forward and put the past behind.

Involved are three distinct but related issues – political, constitutional and administrative. China has very legitimate concerns on its national unity. The Dalai Lama has very legitimate concerns on Tibet's constitutional autonomy and on certain administrative measures.

The Dalai Lama can take a diplomatic initiative

that will instil confidence politically. He can explicitly accept the Constitution of the People's Republic of China as the basis for negotiations, its Section VI on "the organs of Self-Government of National *Autonomous Areas*".

Article 115 says: "The organs of self-government of autonomous regions, prefectures and counties exercise the functions and powers of local organs of state as specified in Section V of Chapter Three of the Constitution. At the same time, they exercise the power of autonomy within the limits of their authority as prescribed by the Constitution, *the law of regional national autonomy* and other laws, and implement the laws and policies of the state in the light of the existing local situation" (emphasis added throughout).

The Constitution was adopted on December 4, 1982, replacing the earlier one of 1950. "The law of regional national autonomy" envisaged by Article 115 can be negotiated anew. The Constitution gives financial autonomy (Article 117) and powers in respect of "economic development" (Article 118).

Article 119 says: "The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas independently administer educational, scientific, cultural, public health and physical culture affairs in their respective areas, protect and cull through the cultural heritage of the nationalities and work for the development and flourishing of their cultures."

Under Article 120, organs of the national autonomous areas can also organise "local public security forces" to maintain law and order. Article 121 adds: "In performing their functions, the organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas, in accordance with the autonomy regulations of the respective areas, employ the spoken and written language or languages in common use in the locality." Article 122 provides for financial and other assistance to "the minority nationalities".

The Dalai Lama's principal concern is preservation of Tibet's culture, religion and autonomy enough to enable its local government to fulfil that task. New legislation, even constitutional amendment, should not be ruled out to achieve these objectives once the Constitution and with it China's unity are put beyond all doubt.

> Nehru: "Sympathy at present for Tibet cannot be converted into help by any country."

COURSE OF NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations between Beijing and Dharamsala, begun since 1978, have followed a tortuous course unflattering to both sides. Dawa Norbu, one of the most distinguished of Tibetan scholars, who taught at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi and is, sadly, no more, traced their course in an article of scrupulous scholarship. While critical of Beijing, he pinpointed a good few mistakes and lapses by Dharamsala in an erudite article entitled "China's Dialogue with the Dalai Lama 1978-80; Prenegotiation Stage or Dead End?" (*Pacific Affairs*; Fall 1991; pages 351-372).

The Dalai Lama's aides published in 1996 a collection of the correspondence exchanged from 1981 to 1993 (*Dharamsala and Beijing: Initiatives and Correspondence*). The Chinese Embassy's news bulletin, *News from China*, regularly publishes China's version of the talks. There is need for a full, independent and comprehensive record of the negotiations from 1978 to 2009, by a non-governmental academic institution.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama might with advantage consult the record of his talks with Jawaharlal Nehru when they first met after he left Tibet, 50 years ago. Extracts from the record are being published here for the first time. The Prime Minister's sympathies with his guest's plight were evident. The soundness of the advice he gave the Dalai Lama has been vindicated in the half century that has elapsed.

The talks were held at Mussoorie (Uttarakhand) on April 24, 1959, and lasted four hours, from 15.20 to 19.20 hours, at one stretch without a break. In the first half, Nehru listened carefully to the Dalai Lama's account of the recent and immediate past and the Tibetans' fears and concerns for the future. Given the background, it is understandable that the Dalai Lama held that "they must gain complete independence and attain the real peace which can only be held by the practice of religion". He emphasised that "the Tibetans were no longer so conservative and wanted reforms to be carried out but according to their own people's wishes".

From this point, the record, for access to which the writer is indebted to the Nehru Memorial and Museum Library in New Delhi, proceeds: "Interrupting D.L., P.M. said emphatically: Let us be relevant. I agree with all this conception of a new world, etc. I myself would like to see a new India, but these are only wishes and one does not know whether I would actually live to see it. We have to see the situation as it is and understand realities. We understand about religion. If religion is really strong and dynamic it should be able to face up to a situation like this and if it is not able to do so, then there is something radically wrong with it. There are only two choices; either an armed struggle in which case the party with the bigger arms wins. The example of the students and their nationalist feeling is no doubt a good one and it goes to prove that you cannot convert a whole nation into anything unless they are themselves convinced that it would conform to their interests.

"P.M. continued: If one has to fight for anything one should choose one's weapons carefully – weapons which are to one's own advantage and not to that of the enemy. Violence is alright if one can be equal or superior to the

enemy in arms. One must also know how to use violence in the case. I am not criticising but only analysing the futures of the situation in Tibet. Spiritual efforts and physical force are two different things. In an actual physical conflict the physical force that can be brought to play and its results will have to be taken into account. Something to this effect I had spoken to the D.L. at the time I met him during the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations. Speaking practically and not philosophically, Tibet became an economically and socially backward country. Such a country is physically weak and a poor country which cannot easily resist the force of a powerful country. To say 'Now give us a chance to become a strong country' ignores the actual position. We cannot go on on that basis. In all such cases, the effort of the people themselves is required to improve their position. Take India's own case. We had a background of relative backwardness ourselves and how hard the Indian people had to struggle before they actually achieved Independence."

Nehru pointed out that "the choice is between recourse to arms or standing up to the Chinese in frank talks in direct manner. As regards help from India, undoubtedly there is a good deal of sympathy for Tibet in this country. Undoubtedly, we do not want the Tibetan religion to be suppressed or submerged by the Chinese or by communism. But exactly what do they want us to do? We cannot go to war with China or Tibet and even that would not help Tibet? What else do they expect us to do? Tibetans expect the achieving of independence in the long run. Let us face facts. One cannot bring heaven to the people in India even if I wish it. *The whole world cannot bring freedom to Tibet unless the whole fabric of the Chinese state is destroyed. U.S.A., U.K., and others or anybody else cannot do this at present. D.L. should realise that in the present context Tibet's independence would mean the complete break-up of the Chinese state and it is not possible to envisage it as likely to happen.* To defeat China is not easy. Only a world war, an atomic war can perhaps be the precursor of such a possibility. Can one start a world war? Can India start a world war? Let us talk of the present and not of the future and be more realistic."

D.L.: "Help is required for the present juncture. Since 20th March, the Chinese have been killing indiscriminately and burning large numbers of

K.V. PRASAD

POTALA PALACE, THE Dalai Lama's former residence, in Lhasa, Tibet.

people. Can't this be stopped? How can I stop it? How can I stop anything from happening inside Tibet? There are killings by machine-gunning from the air. If there can be only a solution to this." He added: "We do not have a speck of a desire to fight the Chinese violently for our independence. It was the Chinese who said that the Tibetans started the fight but this is completely untrue."

Nehru: "It does not matter who started the fight and there is no good complaining. Only old women complain! Physically it is not possible to fight on behalf of Tibet. Even such a suggestion will harm them and their cause. *Sympathy at present for Tibet cannot be converted into help by any country*. D.L. should be under no illusion and, therefore, should fashion his policy with reference to actuality. Gen. Chiang Kai-shek's name is in mud and an association with him would only tend to make the cause much more hopeless and likely to end in complete failure. U.S.A., U.K. can do nothing. Therefore, at the present moment if the D.L. reads newspapers he will find the anger of the Chinese against India. See for example the Panchen Lama's statement. We have gone to the limit of our efforts. It is true not much has been done. Today we cannot even privately advise Chinese, because of this suspicion. The so-called help being given to you would close all the doors to such help. D.L. would remember that P.M. had spoken about Hungary. The troubles there aroused tremendous feelings and sympathy, for hundreds of Hungarians were shot down but they could still not do anything except to help the refugees. Therefore, we have to consider all these things."

"NO REAL SYMPATHY FOR TIBET"

Nehru then referred to the requests for interviews with the D.L.: "The case of [Heinrich] Harrer [author of *Seven Years in Tibet*], who is known to D.L. and who wants to see D.L. While there was no objection in principle, the suggestion that he might be invited to Austria or to U.S.A., etc., would make the D.L. look like a piece of merchandise. This is an insulting way of dealing with His Holiness and it is clear that these attempts were merely efforts to try to make as much money out of him as is possible. In America, there is no real sympathy for Tibet. Chiang Kai-shek has no sympathy.... *They all want to exploit Tibet in their cold war with the Soviet Union*."

Nehru continued: "As a practical question, what can we do about it? We are anxious to help but our capacity to help is very limited and the moment we try to extend it, it would stop even that capacity. War was not possible. Cursing the Chinese was no alternative. It would only stop every possibility of a peaceful settlement. P.M. himself intended to keep very quiet except when necessary in speaking in Parliament. *His own advice would be to let the present excitement go down so that talks would be possible*. The Chinese say India wants to grab Tibet and with this suspicion they suspect everything we say. P.M. was trying in these few moments to explain some basic facts to the D.L. He asked for the D.L.'s reactions to what he had already said.

"D.L.: The Prime Minister has been kind enough to express the views of India. D.L. agreed India should be in the middle and try to *help Tibet through China. At the present juncture the attempt should be to develop good relations between India and China so as to find a solution to Tibet*. They cannot expect any military help from India knowing fully well the experience of Korea in the event of a conflict developing on the basis of a cold war.

"P.M.: At the moment, our relations with China are bad. We have to recover the lost ground. By threats to China or condemnation of China we do not recover such ground. On the other hand, we do not show any fear of China or surrender to China's strength. We have yet to maintain good relations with China, a middle but difficult course. Does D.L. agree with this?

"D.L.: Yes.

"P.M.: The mere fact of D.L. living in India has some consequences to India, to Tibet, to China and to the rest of the world. In China it is immediately one of irritation and suspicion. D.L. being in India, keeps alive the question of Tibet in the mind of the world. Tibet, as it were, cannot close up without news. It becomes a difficult thing to manage. The tendency of the Chinese authorities would be to crush Tibet as soon as possible. Nobody can help. I cannot understand how the Khampas can resist overwhelming Chinese force? One should, therefore, not close the doors of settlement; otherwise, it becomes a fight to the death.

"P.M. continued: I am glad that the D.L. issued a statement before coming here and not after reaching Mussoorie. This statement is also suspected by the Chinese. In the main it covers all points. P.M. then advised no more long statements. The only kind of statements, if at all necessary, could relate about peace and ending of fighting in Tibet. An indication that despite all her sufferings Tibet had no quarrel with the Chinese may be helpful. P.M. deprecated the taking up of an attitude like 'We must have independence or nothing else'. This would not help, nor would the cursing of China help. Stress on peace and stopping of fighting and killing will help in keeping the subject in the right place and level. P.M. then enquired whether D.L. thought this approach was all right.

"D.L.: Judging the situation in Tibet, this is correct.

"P.M.: Both the Tibetan situation and D.L.'s presence in India also warrant the adoption of such an attitude. For a month or six weeks there need not be any statements."

The Dalai Lama said he "had certainly no intention of embarrassing India, since he did not want India's relations with any other country to be at all adversely affected". To this Nehru responded: "It also comes in the way a settlement." Also, he "strongly advised to Dalai Lama not to have too many dealings with the press".

The record yields important conclusions that are still relevant. (1) The boundary dispute was not affected by

CARL DE SOUZA/REUTERS

THE DALAI LAMA with British Prime Minister Gordon Brown at Lambeth Palace in London on May 23, 2008. Clearly, the attempts to garner support in the West, far from helping, have only hindered Tibet's cause.

the Dalai Lama's flight from Lhasa, or Zhou Enlai would not have made a conciliatory offer to Nehru in April 1960 when they met in New Delhi. The two processes proceeded independently of each other. However, once Sino-Indian relations deteriorated, the Tibet issue became a subject of debate, quite needlessly; (2) Nehru wanted settlement of both the Tibet issue as well as the boundary dispute. He was, however, confused on the latter as the events showed; (3) Nehru did not exploit, and was dead against the West exploiting, the Dalai Lama to score points against China; and (4) Nehru's counsel against the military option was as sound as his sympathy for the Tibetans was sincere.

The record of the parleys since 1978 and of the Dalai Lama's trips abroad shows how right Nehru was. The Dalai Lama's best representative was his elder brother Gyalo Thondup, who speaks Mandarin fluently and whom the Chinese trusted. In Dharamsala, opinion has been divided on familiar lines – hawks, doves and noisy jays. He was distrusted by some Tibetans precisely because he was trusted by China. Devoted to his brother, Thondup, one of the most accomplished diplomats one has met, was only being realistic and sensible.

Towards the end of 1978, Li Juisin, director of Xinhua News Agency in Hong Kong, invited Thondup to visit China to discuss the Tibet issue, which he did with the Dalai Lama's approval. The Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping made three points in his meeting with Thondup – "Tibet is a part of China"; the Dalai Lama was free to send delegations to Tibet to investigate the actual conditions there; and 50 Tibetan teachers from India would be permitted to teach in various parts of Tibet (in acceptance of a Tibetan suggestion).

On March 12, 1979, Deng met the Dalai Lama's representatives in Beijing and said: "The Dalai Lama is welcome to come back. He can go out again after his return."

The Dalai Lama wrote a letter to Deng Xiaoping on March 23, 1981, in which he said: "I agree with, and believe in, the communist ideology which seeks the well-being of human beings in general and the proletariat in particular, and in Lenin's policy of equality of nationalities." He had by then sent three fact-finding missions to Tibet.

On July 28, 1981, Hu Yaobang transmitted through Thondup a five-point proposal. It envisaged the Dalai Lama's return but "it is suggested that he not go to live in Tibet or hold local posts there". Subject to this, he would "enjoy the same political status and living conditions" as in 1959. Hu was vice-president of the National People's Congress and vice-chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee. The Dalai Lama replied that this made the problem a personal issue.

But he now embarked on a course which was most unwise and which rankles in the minds of China's leaders to this day. He addressed the United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus in Washington, D.C., on September 21, 1987, and put forth a "Five-Point Peace Plan". The parleys were conducted by the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. Its head, Yang Minfu, wrote to Thondup reminding him of its warning to the Dalai Lama to "exercise the utmost care". Disturbances had broken out in Lhasa then. Yang wrote, "in the past, 'ultra leftist' influences had crept into our Tibet affairs. However, we admitted the past mistakes and took steps to rectify the situation." This elicited a reply on December 17, 1987.

On June 15, 1988, the Dalai Lama put forth "The Strasbourg Proposal" to the European Parliament. In Indian lingo, "internationalisation" of the Kashmir dispute is denounced. To

China, all this smacked of "splittism".

The Dalai Lama proposed Tibet's "association" with China, which would be "responsible for Tibet's [*sic*] foreign policy". He proposed talks: "A negotiating team...has been selected." On September 23, 1988, the Chinese Embassy conveyed a "message to the representative of the Dalai Lama in New Delhi". It recalled that contacts between the two sides "have not been interrupted since 1979" and offered "direct dialogue with the Dalai Lama" any time, at any place subject to three reasonable conditions: "no foreigners should be involved"; the Kashag government "in Dharamsala will not be an interlocutor"; and the Strasbourg proposal was unacceptable as implying Tibet's independence.

OPPORTUNITY LOST

On October 25, 1988, however, Tashi Wangdi, the Dalai Lama's representative in Delhi, replied suggesting talks in January 1989 in Geneva. But why did the Tibetans have to include "a foreigner" as "legal adviser" to the delegation? He was one Michael C. Van Walt Van Praag, author of *The Status of Tibet*. Besides, Beijing complained that the delegation was composed of "principal members of the Government-in-exile". On both counts, China's objection was justified. Also, the proposal was made public before it reached Beijing. A promising opportunity was lost. On March 8, 1989, China imposed martial law in Tibet. Wangdi proposed, on April 19, 1989, talks in Hong Kong to "resolve the procedural issues". Once again, it was instantly made public.

Map the distance between the rival positions and the tragedy becomes apparent. "I am not demanding independence for Tibet," the Dalai Lama told *Newsweek* on March 20, 1989. "Any issue is open for discussion except the question of Tibetan independence," Beijing said on March 6, 1989. Prime Minister Li Peng said in New Delhi on December 13, 1991: "Except independence, which is not negotiable, all other issues are open to negotiations." Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao rightly pointed out, on December 20, 1991, that "it is not a commonplace statement when he makes it on Indian soil".

In February 1990, this writer confronted Michael C. Van Walt Van Praag at a reception in Geneva and asked him why, if he wished the Dalai Lama well, he allowed his own name to be projected. There was no reply. By 1995, he vanished from Tibet's radar. He surfaced later as an "adviser" to one of the parties in the parleys on the Nagaland issue.

The Strasbourg proposal was withdrawn on September 2, 1991.

A Tibetan delegation that visited China in June 1992 was told: "As soon as His Holiness openly gives up the independence of Tibet, we are willing to enter into negotiations even tomorrow." In other formulations, he was asked to give up "splittism". Clearly, the attempts to garner support in the West, far from helping, only hindered Tibet's cause.

> The Dalai Lama told Newsweek in 1989: "I am not demanding independence for Tibet."

The present round of talks began in September 2002. The Tibetan delegation was led by Lodi G. Gyari. The second and third rounds were held in May and September 2003. Remarkably, the fourth was held on June 30, 2005, in the Chinese Embassy in Berne, Switzerland. The fifth followed in Beijing on February 15, 2006, while the sixth was held in May 2008. On his return to Dharamsala, Gyari said: "Despite major differences on important issues, both sides demonstrated a willingness to seek common approaches in addressing the issues at hand. In this regard, each side made some *concrete proposals*, which can be part of the future agenda. As a result an understanding was reached to continue the formal round of discussions. A date for the seventh round will be finalised soon after mutual consultations."

Three more rounds were held in 2008. The last was in November that year. China sees the demand for "genuine autonomy" as a euphemism for semi-independence. Acceptance of China's Constitution, with a draft law on Tibet's autonomy within China, as suggested above, should dispel doubt and distrust.

It should be clear to the Dalai Lama that, just as Nehru had predicted, the West *cannot* and *will not* help him; it will only exploit him. It is careful not to offend China. His own public pronouncements do not help either. Why not try old-style diplomacy – in quiet earnest, away from the public glare and focussed on specifics, eschewing the hideous jargon of our times? And eschewing trips abroad and interviews to the media, print and electronic?

Once the talks proceed in earnest, issues of history will cease to loom large. It is, in any case, not fair to ask a party to accept one's own historical narrative. Kashmir, Nagas and Manipuris have their own narratives. This writer is indebted to the distinguished journalist M.S. Prabhakara for a copy of the rare book *Constitutional & Legal History of Manipur* by M. Ibohal Singh (Samuron Lakpa, Mayal Lambi Law College, Samuron, 1986). Anyone who reads it will be struck by the difference in historical perceptions and by the depth of the people's feelings.

Henry Kissinger makes a similar demand on Palestinians – they must not only accept Israel's existence but also its narrative on the history of Palestine. Once the issue of China's sovereignty over Tibet is accepted by the Dalai Lama, coupled with acceptance of its Constitution, the issues of history will be no obstacle.

And once its concerns for national security are met, China's stature in the world will rise higher still if it tackles the Tibet issue in a statesmanlike and conciliatory manner. □

CBI as political tool

The real issue is the CBI's role in Indian politics; Jarnail Singh's shoe is as relevant to the issue as a slogan shouted by agitators in Punjab or Delhi.

Point of View

BHASKAR **GHOSE**

The facts are too well known to bear repetition. Much has been made of Jarnail Singh, a correspondent of *Daily Jagran*, and his "frustration" at the replies given by Home Minister P. Chidambaram to his questions.

Much has been made of Chidambaram's composure when the shoe was flung at him – although Jarnail Singh later claimed that he actually threw it to one side of the Home Minister and not directly at him – and then, after a week of passionate demonstrations by the Shiromani Akali Dal and its supporters, of Sonia Gandhi's "acceptance" of the decision of Jagdish Tytler and Sajjan Kumar to withdraw their candidature for the Lok Sabha elections.

But many magazines, newspapers and television channels got it wrong. "Shoe Misses Chidambaram but hits Tytler", was a headline in one newspaper and there were a number of similar headlines and lead stories. The fact is that Jarnail Singh's shoe was about as relevant to the issue as a slogan shouted by the many agitators in Punjab or in the streets of Delhi.

The real issue was the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) report to the magistrate's court that no case could be made out about the involvement of Tytler or Sajjan Kumar in the riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination in which over 2,000 Sikhs were murdered.

The CBI had actually submitted such a report in November 2007. But when the eyewitness accounts of Jasbir Singh and Surender Singh that Tytler had exhorted his followers to kill Sikhs and burn a gurdwara were presented to the court, it directed the CBI to re-examine the entire case. The CBI did so and, rather surprisingly, reiterated its stand that there was no case against the two Congress leaders.

CONVENIENT TIMING

More surprising is the timing of the report. It was conveniently presented before the filing of nominations to the seats for which both Tytler and Sajjan Kumar were candidates so that they could say with complete confidence that no criminal case was pending against them; nor was there any possibility of their being mentioned in any charge-sheet of any case to be presented.

This conclusion of the CBI re-ignited the simmering anger against the two. They had, after all, stood for election in 2004, and there were no agitations or angry demonstrations then. But the manner in which they were exonerated by the prosecuting agency is what brought up the anger at what happened in October 1984. The sheer injustice of it all: 2,000 people and more, brutally murdered for no reason other than the fact that they belonged to a particular community. And in the 25 years that have followed, nothing except commissions of inquiry.

Not one arrest, not one arraigned as guilty of mass slaughter. How quickly, in contrast, the case against the rioters in Naroda Patiya was taken up and the accused named, including a serving Minister in the State government who had to resign and was then arrested.

It is a matter of shame for all the governments that have been formed at the Centre since then. And it is not as if the killing was done furtively; not only was there no attempt at concealment, there are stories that the police stood and watched when Sikhs were being killed. As they did at Naroda Patiya.

Jarnail Singh has certainly much to answer for. If he was attending the press briefing as a journalist, he had no business giving vent to his personal anger. If he needed to do that, he should have gone to the streets and agitated, joined a political group or done something more in consonance with his behaviour. His action has done journalism a terrible harm. Journalism will survive, as it has always done, but he will never be trusted by any media group, nor indeed will he be permitted to attend any press briefing or other such event unless he goes barefoot, and even then he will certainly be watched very carefully.

USING THE CBI

But this aberration apart, there is one worrying issue that it has succeeded in highlighting. That is the perceived use

PRAKASH SINGH/AFP

SIKH PROTESTERS RAISE slogans against the CBI for having given a clean chit to Jagdish Tytler, outside the Karkardooma District Court in New Delhi on April 2.

by a ruling party of the one investigative agency thought to be professional and objective in its work, the CBI. Would the CBI Director not have discussed the report before submitting it to the court with someone in the political executive?

Manmohan Singh is an honourable man, and he says he was not consulted on this matter. Since it is he who is saying so, the statement will be accepted as true by everyone except those who have a different political agenda. But he also says that the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office directly responsible for the working of the CBI did not know of the report. He has said so, clearly, because that is what the Minister of State has told him. And the Minister of State, Prithviraj Chauhan, is not going to be given the kind of trust that Manmohan Singh gets. He was either told and did not tell the Prime Minister the truth, or he was really not told.

The CBI Director says that he told no one because this was a report the court wanted, and so it was submitted in a "routine" manner. Really? After the court had rejected the report and asked the CBI to consider the fresh evidence now available in formulating it? Fresh evidence that consisted of eyewitness accounts of two people who are staying in the United States because they fear for their lives?

Would a report disregarding these accounts – which the report has clearly done, or found some flaws in them – not have been even discussed with the Minister of State, and perhaps others, such as the Cabinet Secretary or the Secretary to the Prime Minister, before it was placed before the court? If for no other reason then at least because of the timing and the possible repercussions? It sounds most unlikely, and what is worse, it will be seen by many as an instance of clumsy lying in order to help the ruling party. This is what is so alarming.

We declare to the entire world more loudly than is sometimes necessary that we are a sound, genuine democracy, but then we engage in chipping away at the structures of the democratic system. Perhaps being more loyal than the king helps some people, but do they not see the dreadful damage they are doing over a period of time? If jobbery, intrigue and lobbying become the manner in which this country is administered, how long will our much vaunted democracy last?

The remedy does not lie in the hands of the administrators, the CBI Directors, the Cabinet Secretary and others like them. If one or more of them are indeed upright officers, they will be replaced by more pliant ones. It is really something that has to be looked at by the Prime Minister and by him alone. The remedy, such as it is, can come only from him, and from no one else, no one. □

Dealing with cancer

Interview with Elizabeth Blackburn, Professor of Biology and Physiology at the University of California, San Francisco. BY R. RAMACHANDRAN

"Cancer cells suffer a variety of **changes and they don't listen to** the signal that says [for example] that they are supposed to be in a certain part of the body but they migrate and metastasise and keep multiplying."

ELIZABETH H. BLACKBURN is the Morris Herzstein Endowed Professor of Biology and Physiology at the University of California, San Francisco. Her ground-breaking work involves the ends of eukaryotic chromosomes, called telomeres, which serve as protective caps for the genetic information in cells. She is also credited with the discovery of the cell enzyme telomerase, which replenishes telomeres. Her research has led her to demonstrate the significant role that telomeres and telomerase have in human health, in particular age-related diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Elizabeth Blackburn was in India in February on a lecture tour as the featured speaker of the 2009 Cell-Press-TNQ India Distinguished Lecture Series, which included her talks on "Chromosome Ends and Disease and Human Health" in Bangalore, Hyderabad and New Delhi. Continuing with the excerpts from the interview she gave *Frontline*:

The relationship of the immune system to telomere lengths and the consequent susceptibility to disease should be more dramatic in the case of people infected with the human immunodeficiency virus

Series

This is the second part of a two-part article.

RAJEEV BHATT

ELIZABETH BLACKBURN GIVING a lecture in New Delhi on February 13.

(HIV) or who have the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) where the immune system deteriorates very rapidly. Should it not be so?

Yes. We are looking at that. There are these successfully treated AIDS patients who have been on high activity antiretroviral therapy [HAART] for some years. Their lives have been saved, and they have been kept going for years on these drugs. The virus is kept [at a] very low [level] although it is never completely contained. And do you know what's happening? It's sort of an epidemic. These [successfully treated HAART] individuals are now developing diseases that look like the diseases of the aged. For their age group, these people are getting more cardiovascular diseases, more dementia, more osteoarthritis, more renal disease and a whole spectrum of diseases that are [making them] look as if they are really old.

I wonder if this is sort of a version of what happens to these disease susceptibilities in non-aged people. Will we see something in particular [with regard] to telomerase? We are starting some work now, collaborating with people who have been clinically involved with these patients for many years. They know thousands of these patients and suddenly they notice that this is not anecdotal anymore. It really has become a pattern that is looking like premature aging in the sense of their susceptibility to disease. So the thing to test is: Are their blood telomeres running down faster than you expect?

We have been looking at another group of HIV positive patients with collaborators who are clinicians. Their patients have HIV but have not progressed to AIDS, but they are watching them very carefully. And we have been looking at their immune system's telomeres and telomerase. Of course, their [levels of] CD4 T-cells [a kind of immune system cells] are very low, which is characteristic [of HIV infection] although they are not falling so dangerously low that they are going to be really susceptible to AIDS. So they are

K. MURALI KUMAR

"The only way that a cancer cell is going to be able to survive is to have telomerase."

watching them like a hawk to make sure that their levels don't fall really low. And actually their distribution of telomerase, in particular in white blood cells, doesn't look too off...it looks reasonable. But remember that they haven't got AIDS yet and their immune system hasn't been destroyed although it has certainly taken a hit.

So it is really interesting to try and understand what's going on because the longer they can stay without going on medication – they are HIV positive, there is nothing genetically special about them, they are just people who are able to stay without getting AIDS – we then might be able to understand what helps these people stave off AIDS from developing, what keeps the immune system going as long as possible.

Can you conceive of some biochemical pathway that could act on the telomerase to deplete its activity when the cause is genetic or stress-related or some other external factors?

Certainly, yes. The obvious one that we are testing is stress hormones, which normally are up and down in certain rhythms during the day. When someone is under chronic stress, those rhythms and those quantities are really different and everything in your body is sort of bathed in different amounts of stress hormones. If we take the blood cells and look at them in the lab, and ask what stress hormones do to telomerase, we certainly see that they modulate it.

Now we can use molecular tools to ask, how does it do that? Those cell-biology-type questions are, I think, quite answerable. And I already know the answer. It's going to be inherently complex, like every other set of signals that cells get, because that is what everybody has found with every other signalling system. Will that inform us a whole lot? It might well because we'll try and see how much that is accounting for the actual effects inside a person.

When it is genetic, it is more severe. If somebody has a genetic disease, things are difficult for them. They succumb to infections, and they do show aging too; their hair goes grey early, their skin is abnormal, fingernails and teeth are not normal, tissue renewal is not going on well, they have digestive disorders. So they are probably also stressed. And that might just compound the problem. Then the question is: How much do stress hormones modulate it? I don't know. No one can replace the genes. But can there be a modulation in some way that can perhaps bring it [the immune system] up to better levels?

You mentioned in a lecture that telomerase is not there just to accumulate DNA to the chromosome ends, it has other functions in the cell as well. Now do you know of situations where it does perform the other functions well but fails to replenish the telomeres?

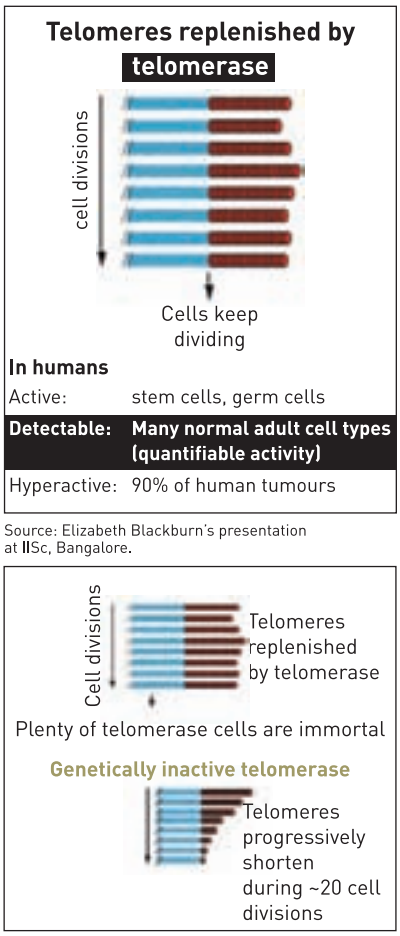
This is also new. Nobody has really separated those out. Certain things have been done in yeast, but it turns out that some of these other functions that one can see in mammalian sys-

tems, one doesn't see any evidence of them in yeast. Maybe it's just because yeast is a single-celled organism and doesn't have the layers of extra complexity and functions that one finds in multicellular organisms. And so I can certainly imagine the situations that you are talking about, but we don't really understand well what's going on with telomerase...and [these] other things that are happening...we call them functions because, when we perturb, we see changes in the cell that can't be explained by telomere length maintenance effects. But how they are working, we don't know.

Now there is this other side of telomerase activity, namely, its role in cancerous cells, which proliferate because of uncontrolled telomerase activity, the opposite of what we have been talking about.

Cancer cells have a lot of other things that are really wrong with them, and we should never forget that these are cells that have become deaf to all the signals that the body sends out, such as you can multiply a certain amount, you can be in a certain place in the body, where to stay, where to move, and so on. Most cells get a barrage of chemical messages from neighbouring cells, from neighbouring tissues, hormones, etc. Cancer cells suffer a variety of changes and they don't listen to the signal that says [for example] that they are supposed to be in a certain part of the body but they migrate and metastasise and keep multiplying.

So if you have a cell that is deaf to a signal that says stop multiplying and keeps multiplying, it will have chromosomes that will get shorter and shorter and the only way that a cancer cell is going to be able to survive is to have telomerase, which now has the ability to replenish those ever-shortening telomeres. And the funny thing about cancer cells is not that they have active telomerase but [that they] actually have a lot more than you think they ought to have. Why so much? Especially when their telomeres are not particularly long; they are actually, if



Source: Elizabeth Blackburn's presentation at IISc, Bangalore.

SCHEMATIC OF TELOMERASE action and its genetic inactivation in cancer cells.

anything, short. These other functions that telomerase has seem to push cancer cells towards having properties that make them more malignant. These other functions we don't understand at all but we see them when we perturb just telomerase in a very targeted way.

What's remarkable is that if we look at just the whole spectrum of human cancers and we look at how much telomerase activity there is in a tumour sample, 80 to 90 per cent of the time there is a lot of telomerase activity relative to what's going on in the normal cells where it's much more closely regulated and reasonable in amount. So what's really interesting is telomerase is a real favourite among cancer cells. There are very few things where 80 to 90 per cent of the cells have a given feature but this is quite unusual.

We know that certain genetic pathways that get unregulated in cancer cells – which start with genes and then pathways of signalling that make these cancer cells just multiply and go to the wrong places – and [there are] several different ones. But there is this commonality which I find very curious. Eighty to 90 per cent is really high. Now it's not a 100 per cent. Some cancer cells get by with low telomerase [activity]. You know the exceptions and those would be instructive to study but if you just look at the generality of human cancer cells it's almost like a defining feature. So we have to take notice of what cancers are telling you; we've got to learn something from this. And certainly the telomeres are maintained but what is revealing are these other things.

Do you see a kind of diagnostic technique based on telomere lengths emerging to detect disease-proneness or onset?

I could see that idea. But it's a piece of information in the whole clinical picture [that] would be useful to know. More than that, it would be really useful to know the rate of change. But even 80-year-olds, I don't think, have especially long telomeres as far as there's nothing wrong with them. So we don't know how fast the rate is. How that would play out exactly, I am not sure. In a way the information would be very useful if you looked over the trends. You can use that fact as long as you don't jump to conclusions.

Though we know that diseases are caused by a whole lot of factors, do you see a kind of paradigm developing that would ultimately, perhaps in the distant future, lead to a unidirectional telomerase-based approach for attacking disease?

You know part of me wants to say yes. That would be terrific, but you risk hubris when you say something like that because you are then immediately proved wrong. But, as I said, because so much evidence has come in a consis-

tent fashion, this seems like a pretty good attack on the problem. We see [that] these environmental factors like chronic stress are obviously acting on telomerase and telomere lengths through the immune system. We also see [that] when people are dealing with their stress well, it is correlating with having higher [levels of] telomerase and better telomere lengths. We put two and two together and say what if people could be helped to deal with their stresses.

Now you can't change life. You can't change the fact that somebody had a chronically ill childhood or the father has dementia. But, maybe, you can give people these tools, or things they can do that will help them cope. Would that modulate their telomerase up? I love it because it is very, very cheap.

This does not take a drug that has to be developed, which is very slow and complicated. You don't know when a drug is going to surprise you and give unexpected side-effects like some of the anti-inflammatory drugs. But if it's you being enabled to cope with this sort of situation, it's not your genes or something that you cannot change in the immediate future; I really like the idea. And I am not saying that this should somehow replace the older ways of medication. But if we can stave some of this off by these sorts of things...I am a great believer in trying to use the biology itself. This is biology...really complex; millions of years have evolved to this. This is doing something that we are not smart enough to reproduce. So why not deploy it, use the system that is already there as much as possible.

This is hardly new. Eastern medicine has been saying this for a thousand years...more sort of integrated medicine. Some philosophies have been using this idea for a long, long time. But it is just that when you see something like this, which you can quantify, finding a nice easy-to-understand number like telomerase levels or average telomere lengths that you can see and measure and see for yourself if it's useful or not....

K. MURALI KUMAR

"The most dangerous cancer cells are the ones that are more like stem cells."

In the modern context, could one perhaps even conceive of consuming some kind of drug, probably the enzyme itself, to enhance telomerase activity?

Oh, yes. You can absolutely imagine it. We just haven't got around to that. When you have medicines, when you are not yet sick, you want to make sure that the risk is extremely low. That's been the problem. But every drug, [even if] well designed, will have some risk and until we understand how well it works...which is always feasible.... There isn't something in the shop right now to say that here is a reliable telomerase activator and we will have one a day. That will be very nice. I am not saying one shouldn't look for it. Right now, we have only got physiology; at least [we should] try to use that as much as possible if it could be harnessed to work in [our] favour.

In your talk, you spoke of how the technique of ribonucleic acid (RNA) interference could bring telomerase RNA levels down. Could cancer be treated by targeting telomerase activity in this way?

When you bring telomerase RNA levels down by using a mechanism that targets the RNA for destruction, the cells which were running on very high telomerase levels are now running on a lean diet of telomerase. They are still proliferating but they change their nature. They stop being so aggressively cancerous in their properties and they start to look a bit more normal.

The most dangerous cancer cells are actually the ones that are more like stem cells, which have this ability to produce themselves over and over again. More and more cancer biologists say stem-cell-like cells in cancers are the most dangerous.

What's interesting is [by targeting the telomerase RNA] we can work them to being less stem-cell-like. We have also seen less metastasis; less metastatic lung tumours in the case of melanomas [for example]. That's another way of approaching the problem, to make the cancer cells less dangerous. You might still want to kill them off at the same time. But probably since cancers can change – like bacterial populations can grow resistant variants in response to certain antibiotics and then take over the entire bacterial population – if you hit them with one thing, they become resistant to evade that and then they are the ones to proliferate.

So you just want to hit the cancer cells in as many ways as possible without causing a whole lot of collateral damage to the normal tissues. It's nice to have other arrows in your armoury. Also, completely knocking out telomerase will make a lot of sense. True, but why not use what the cancer cells have told us, which is that the high [levels of] telomerase is also making the cells, for reasons that we don't understand, apparently more malignant.

But, since there is no clear tag that distinguishes the telomerase of one cell from that of another, is there a danger that you would get at the others as well?

Exactly. This is the whole problem with cancer. Cancer is us. It is not like some foreign bacteria or some malarial

parasite. It's us. And that's been the problem and just as with any other anti-cancer approach, they are after all our own cells and they are not completely different from the normal cells... . And one of the ways of thinking it out is that cancer cells have sort of become like addicts to certain of their ways of doing things. They seem addicted to their high telomerase [levels], which is a sort of fanciful way of saying it. But it is not a bad way of saying it. They become so adapted to running on very high levels of telomerase that all their cell processes are adapted to that situation.

Now, normal cells in the body are just adapted to running on a nice, lean, regulated diet of telomerase. So, when you suddenly have these addicts and you hit them and knock down their telomerase [levels], they are actually more susceptible than [what] normal cells might be. n analogy might be like a heroin user. It is a little bit of a simplistic analogy, but there is an indication that there is this idea of addiction of the cancer cells. So that gives you hope that if you are hitting something that is really high characteristically in cancer cells like telomerase, even though we have telomerase in normal cells, they might not be quite so shocked when you knock it down because they are already running on low amounts of it. So, that's the logic. Then everything depends on the realities of how well is the drug getting taken up.

The other way, since we want the drug to get to only the cancer cells, is to package up the drug into tiny capsules called liposomes – which are almost like tiny grease bubbles – coat them with antibodies which recognise surface markers that are particularly [like] dents on the surface of cancer cells.

Again, they are not completely absent in normal cells but they are dents on cancer cells. That differential between the cancer cell and the other cell is a way of making the liposome deliver preferentially to cancer cells. The other advantage is that it protects whatever drug or anti-telomerase agent is inside to be broken down only where the

"There's a new terminology.... People talked about lifespan [earlier]. Now it's healthspan."

medicine is to be delivered. These ideas are being tried for various things, and we are trying for telomerase agents as well just to see if that might help the situation but it is something one has to be aware of in any kind of anti-cancer approach.

Conversely, do you think telomerase could also be provoked to be more active and thus prevent or slow down the aging process, as some believe?

Here is my take on this. How do we estimate what is going on with aging? One way is to say, how long do people live? I think that's pretty genetically clear. If everything is going right, for humans it's not going to be more than 120 years, the maximum known. It's not clear to me how exactly telomere maintenance might relate to that because people have been looking at centenarians and looking for genes whose alleles are more or less represented.

So far nothing relating to telomerase or telomeres has shown up in these people. In fact, their telomeres look pretty good. You would see diseases of aging going up but people who live a long life seem not to get cardiovascular disease very much. Why they die is actually very unclear. Gerontologists would say that suddenly there would be a little crisis and they would just die. But that won't be accompanied necessarily by years of heart disease or anything like that.

Extreme-longevity people look very old but they seem to remain healthy throughout and free of disease for a long, long time. What gets most people are diseases of aging and that's where this link with the shorter telomeres and diseases of aging seem so consistent. I don't want to say completely that telomeres have nothing to do with the death of extreme-longevity people. It might in ways we don't understand. There might be connections but it's not unravelled.

So what might be feasible in a sort of dream world would be that if telomerase could be stimulated by any of these methods in a way that it is optimal, and doesn't turn it on to [do] something crazy, then would that be helpful in mitigating getting these diseases like cardiovascular disease and cancer? Because you are programmed pretty much for 100 plus years, you could be healthy up to that time in your life. And then something will happen as it seems to happen with very old people. Suddenly, some small perturbation happens and very quickly you go downhill – sometimes it's pneumonia, sometimes it's a fall or sometimes it's just something, and you just don't recover from it.

From what I understand so far, the telomere maintenance part will be much more related to whether you will have a healthy old age. Actually, there's a very nice new terminology that is catching up. People talked about lifespan [earlier]. Now it's "healthspan". What you would like to have is that healthspan should be as close as possible to your lifespan. As far as we know, there is nothing much we can do about lifespan. I have no particular feeling that humanity would necessarily want to live till 1,200 [years]. It might be fun but for the immediate future, we have got to live with what we've got. □

For nuclear sanity

India should welcome Obama's call for a nuclear weapons-free world and launch a spirited campaign for the rapid elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide.

Beyondthe Obvious

PRAFUL **BIDWAI**

PRESIDENT Barack Obama's April 5 speech in Prague calling for a world free of the scourge of nuclear weapons is a major foreign and security policy initiative that deserves applause. If he pursues its logic through to the end with the same sincerity and passion with which he outlined his commitment "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons", he could be the first United States President to go beyond nuclear arms control and to put nuclear weapons elimination on the global agenda. That would mark a turning point for strategic thinking the world over and open up new avenues through which to seek security.

This remains a big "if". Obama has not yet worked out the doctrinal, strategic and practical consequences of his fundamental premise that a secure world without nuclear weapons is both possible and desirable. His speech only outlines some necessary steps but without specifying their sequence or time frame, numbers (of weapons to be de-alerted or destroyed), the roles of different actors, the function of legally binding treaties, and so on.

But Obama has stated some premises upfront and emphasised their moral-political rationale in a way no major global leader has done in recent years. Thus, he said, "the existence of thousands of nuclear weapons is the most dangerous legacy of the Cold War"; these are "the ultimate tools of destruction", which can erase the world "in a single flash of light". The global non-proliferation regime is in crisis and "the risk of a nuclear attack has gone up"; soon, "we could reach the point where the centre cannot hold".

"We are not destined," said Obama, "to live in a world where more nations and more people possess [nuclear weapons]. Such fatalism is a deadly adversary, for if we believe that the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable, then in some way we are admitting to ourselves that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable." Logically, fighting fatalism means putting "an end to Cold War thinking" and reducing "the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy".

This sets Obama miles apart not just from George W. Bush but also from Bill Clinton. Obama is effectively reversing a long tradition beginning with the Ronald Reagan presidency towards either a hardening of the U.S. nuclear posture, or the development of new weapons such as "Star Wars"-style ballistic missile defence (BMD), itself premised on even more dangerous doctrines than that of nuclear deterrence, which is fatally flawed.

Thus, the U.S. has failed, even two decades after the Cold War ended, to move beyond relatively paltry reductions in its nuclear arsenal through the Moscow Treaty of 2002. Under Bush, it refused to take 2,200 weapons off "launch on warning" alert. The U.S. military establishment wants to develop a Reliable Replaceable Warhead for existing ones, find new uses (for example, bunker-busting) for old weapon designs, and has yielded to pressures from the nuclear weapons laboratories to modernise and refine existing armaments and do experimental work on fusion weapons at the expensive National Ignition Facility.

Bush was not only obsessed with perpetuating America's nuclear superiority. He gave it a particularly deadly edge through BMD deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic, thus exacerbating tensions with Russia and destabilising strategic balances worldwide. Bush also blurred vital distinctions between conventional and nuclear weapons, unsigned the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia.

Bush's BMD programme will militarise and nuclearise outer space, in which the U.S. seeks "full-spectrum" dominance. His paranoid response to the September 11 attacks resulted in the worst-ever fiasco in the history of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at its important review conference in 2005, liquidating all the significant gains made at the 2000 review.

Obama promises to change course, radically. He has spoken more boldly

and honestly in favour of a nuclear weapons-free world than any other U.S. President in decades. He has gone further than any other in acknowledging that the U.S. bears a "moral responsibility" for nuclear disarmament because it is the only power to have used the horror weapon. This speaks of exemplary moral clarity, as does his statement that the U.S. must take the lead on disarmament. However, that cannot be said about four other propositions in Obama's speech. First, he betrays an unpardonably naive faith in nuclear deterrence: "Make no mistake. As long as [nuclear] weapons exist, the U.S. will maintain a safe, secure and effective arsenal to deter any adversary...." He also believes in extended deterrence – deploying nuclear weapons in non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation countries.

This column has dissected the fallacy of nuclear deterrence far too often to warrant further comment other than that it is a fallible, fragile and unreliable basis on which to premise security (via a balance of terror). It involves unrealistic assumptions about capabilities and doctrines, symmetrical perceptions by adversaries of "unacceptable damage" means, and the complete absence of miscalculations and accidents – 100 per cent of the time.

Second, Obama continues to repose faith in BMD – he congratulated the Czech for their "courage" in hosting it – although he qualifies his support by saying BMD must be "cost-effective and proven". This ignores BMD's primitive, as-yet-premature status in intercepting missiles, and worse, the danger of escalating military rivalry to uncertain and risky levels where an adversary could feel tempted to neutralise a putative BMD advantage by amassing more missiles or launching wildcat strikes.

Third, Obama, like Bush and Clinton, makes a specious distinction between responsible/acceptable/good nuclear powers (the Big Five-plus-Israel-plus-India-plus-non-Taliban-Pakistan) and irresponsible/dangerous ones (Iran, North Korea). This permits double standards and detracts from the universal urgency of abolishing all nuclear weapons. Obama's endorsement of Bush's Proliferation Security Initiative – unilateral interception at sea of suspect nuclear-related materials – follows from this.

Finally, Obama believes that disarmament may not be achieved in "my lifetime". Such pessimism is unwarranted. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's thoughtful plan for global nuclear disarmament, presented to the United Nations General Assembly in 1988, set a 15-year timeline for complete nuclear elimination. This is realistic – if the U.S. and the international community musters the will for an early disarmament initiative.

If Obama effects deep cuts in U.S. nuclear weapons through the promised Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia this year, and launches a drive for banning nuclear testing and ending fissile production worldwide, the momentum can be accelerated, especially if U.S. policy shifts to no-first-use. After all, even the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – George P. Schulz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn – believe that nuclear weapons abolition can be achieved in the foreseeable future.

Obama's speech provides an opportunity to all those who believe in complete nuclear weapons elimination, a cause kept alive by the peace movement, a coalition of states, and several expert commissions. India too professes a commitment to this goal and must seize this opportunity.

INDIA'S LUKEWARM RESPONSE

Regrettably, Indian policymakers have extended a lukewarm, if not cold, welcome to Obama's speech. So fearful are they of pressure on India to sign the CTBT that they are clutching at straws. One such is Obama's statement that "my administration will immediately and aggressively pursue U.S. ratification of the CTBT". This is different from what he wrote in a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh before he was sworn in: "I will work with the U.S. Senate to secure ratification of [CTBT] at the earliest practical day, and then launch a major diplomatic initiative to ensure its entry into force." (The letter was suppressed by South Block.)

Indian policymakers are also reportedly relieved that Obama has not reiterated his letter's reference to India's "real responsibilities – [including] steps to restrain nuclear weapons programmes and pursuing effective disarmament when others do so". They are also pleased that Obama has appointed Ellen Tauscher, a Democrat Congresswoman, as Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security rather than Robert Einhorn, described by India's nuclear hawks as "an ayatollah of non-proliferation".

Such timidity is unbecoming of a nation that claims to be proud of its pro-disarmament record and has pledged to fight for a nuclear weapons-free world. India opposed the CTBT in 1995-96 not for its intrinsic flaws or demerits but because it wanted to test nuclear weapons. Having done so in 1998, India should sign and ratify the treaty. Even Arundhati Ghose, who famously declared that India will not sign it "not now, not ever", now says that she sees no problem with its signature. This may show a deplorable level of cynicism, but it is nevertheless a ground for correcting course and returning to the disarmament agenda.

Logically, this includes several steps such as the CTBT, Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, regional nuclear risk-reduction and restraint measures (including forswearing missile test-flights and keeping delivery vehicles apart from warheads) and, of course, deep cuts in nuclear weapons by all the nuclear weapons states, beginning with the U.S. and Russia.

India must boldly seize the initiative by updating the Rajiv Gandhi plan, opposing BMD and proactively arguing for rapid strides towards the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Here lies the litmus test of India's commitment to a nuclear weapons-free world and of its creative and principled diplomacy. □

Will the elections be peaceful?

A major lacuna in the Representation of the People Act is that it permits individuals facing criminal charges in a court to contest elections.

Law and Order

R.K. **RAGHAVAN**

AS I write this column on the eve of the first phase of polling for a new Lok Sabha, I perceive widespread fears that the election this time will be more violent than in the past. I know it is customary to say this every time we have elections. In a country where the quality of politics is vitiated by money power and all that goes with it, it does not require extraordinary intelligence to make such a bold prediction. This time, however, the apprehension is well merited if one goes by the more-than-usual personal acrimony between leaders of rival formations at the national and regional levels.

The exchanges between the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party leaders are in particular painful even to an objective commentator, however entertaining they may be to the average television viewer. Also, the stakes are much higher than before for any one group, however small it might be, to let go an opportunity to share power at the Centre and enjoy (read misuse) the fruits of office.

It is now well established that a party taking part in a coalition government can abuse its privileges and get away with no penalty whatsoever. And the incentives are far higher at the Centre than in the States. This is why a no-holds-barred fight for every seat that can be won is very much on the cards. The means used will just not count. Ideological differences will all be buried in the post-election scenario to cobble up an alliance, mainly to share in the booty by garnering "lucrative" portfolios.

Whether one likes it or not, the Indian polity is stuck with too many regional parties. For the foreseeable future, the trend seems irreversible. Those who are opposed to the rise of regional parties say that this is not a welcome phenomenon because, unlike national parties, these outfits may not be expected to adhere to the fundamental principles of dignified political conduct. They believe that a large national formation has a reputation to lose and a future to look forward to, and hence its leadership will steer the group along responsible lines.

Some recent utterances by those who belong to such all-India parties do not, however, inspire confidence. Incitement to violence on sectarian grounds and open threats to public servants who have to ensure fair elections by those who held public office in the past does not augur well for the peaceful conduct of elections and also for the future of our polity.

VIOLENCE AND MONEY

In politics, violence and money power go together. The sums of money that I hear are in circulation in most parts of the country are mind-boggling. The purchase of votes has become common and has made a mockery of the whole electoral process . More despicable is the use of money to set goons on rival party workers. With so much money available to many parties, I expect a greater use of it this time to engineer lawlessness. Few parties, except perhaps the Leftists, are saints in this respect. Until a decade ago, the south compared favourably with the north. Not any longer. The Election Commission (E.C.) is a helpless spectator. It lacks the bite required to instil fear in those indulging in unfair practices. The noises it makes are symbolic because it does not have the needed clout.

The credentials of some candidates are highly questionable, to put it mildly. The statistics of members in the last Lok Sabha who had a criminal record are forbidding. The picture is more depressing in the case of State Assemblies. As long as we are unable to cure this malady, our politics will remain muddy. Almost every party has a quota of criminals. Ironically, some of them

RAVEENDRAN/AFP

ACTIVISTS OF A voluntary organisation protesting against criminals contesting the parliamentary elections, in New Delhi on March 14.

acquire the authority to make law after having deliberately violated it. A major lacuna in the Representation of the People Act is that it permits individuals facing a criminal charge in a court to contest elections. This is on the specious plea that no one can be considered guilty unless convicted in a court of law. And you know how long trials last in our country, enabling many to remain in public office with impunity for years.

It is this permissiveness that encourages violence at election time. Any improvement in this area can come about only with an amendment to the election law that will bar an individual from contesting if a charge-sheet is pending against him or her in court. Many political parties allege that if there were such a law, the ruling party would manipulate election-eve charge-sheets against their rivals. This argument can be taken care of partially by ensuring that a charge-sheet filed six months before the notification of an election will be taken into account while examining the validity of nomination of a candidate. It is not very difficult to arrive at a political consensus on this issue.

The fundamental test of electoral fairness comes on the actual election date. How does one ensure that everyone who wants to exercise his or her franchise feels secure enough to go the assigned booth and cast his or her vote? The task boils down to one of protecting the minorities and weaker sections so that they can confidently take part in the process. The E.C. has done its bid by staggering the polling over a month so that enough security forces are available.

Even after this commendable exercise, policemen are thinly spread across the huge number of booths in a constituency, making it easy for miscreants to indulge in intimidation. Repolling at centres, from where there are credible reports of such intimidation, is the only answer.

What about the ability of police forces themselves to remain neutral during the polling process? The E.C. is acutely conscious of this. Wherever individual officers had come to its notice for partisanship, it has ordered their removal. This is good only as far as it goes. What about other policemen in the field? It is too much to expect them to be neutral if the ruling party men indulge in questionable tactics, including scaring away groups who are definitely known for their aversion to the party in power. Under the present scheme of things, when nothing has been done to ensure operational autonomy on the lines suggested by the National Police Commission (1977) and the Supreme Court (September 2005), the police will continue to be the handmaiden of those in power. They will be penalised if they display any enthusiasm for working to achieve a fair poll.

I still remember how an Inspector General of Police was removed from office about four decades ago simply because he saw to it that protection was given to members of a minority community who were determined to vote against the ruling party. Not only that. He was eased out of his official residence, which was promptly converted into an office building. The poor man died within a few months of a heart attack. In my view, such vindictiveness still dominates the higher echelons of the political hierarchy. Also, in the present times, no Director General of Police will ever stick his neck out if his Chief Minister is known to be opposed to a group and wants it to be prevented from voting. He may not connive at this, but he will certainly look the other way. This is the extent to which our police forces have been emasculated. □

Training minds

The civil services continue to attract a large number of aspirants as governance has acquired new dimensions. BY A CORRESPONDENT

As the government's requirement of personnel grows and the nature of question papers has changed, the **role of coaching institutes has** assumed added importance.

IF you find yourself being chased in the busy streets of New Delhi by random property dealers for rooms, in all possibility you are in one of those areas where coaching institutes for the civil services examination have mushroomed. The political economy around popular coaching institutes such as Rau's IAS Study Circle, Vajiram and Ravi, and Khan Study Group draws a large chunk of civil services aspirants to the capital.

A survey suggests that four lakh people take the exam every year. And as it requires at least one year of intensive preparation and another year to finish the process, coaching institutes assume importance.

But why do so many seek to get into the civil services? "It is a mix of high social prestige attached to the services and a desire to bring about a change in the system," says V.P. Gupta, the director of Rau's IAS Study Circle. This view is supported by the increase in the number of aspirants taking the exam every year. Interestingly, the economic recession has drawn more people towards a career in high-profile bureaucracy.

The civil services exam has a three-tier system. Owing to the vast number of applicants, the Union Public Service Commission selects the best of the lot on the basis of an objective preliminary exam. Selected candidates write a main exam consisting of eight papers including General Studies, languages, and two optional papers. Candidates who clear the main exam are then called for a personality test or interview after which the final selection is done and the services are allotted rank wise. Generally, the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), the Indian Police Service (IPS) and the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) are the most preferred.

NAGARA GOPAL

IAS AND IPS probationers take the oath of allegiance to the Constitution at the Dr. MCR Human Resource Development Institute in Hyderabad in September 2008.

Over the years, the examination has seen many changes. For instance, the pattern of both the preliminary and main exams has shifted from direct questions to more analytical and application-based questions. Now subjects such as reasoning, science and technology, statistics and public administration are getting as much importance as Humanities. A.R. Khan of Khan Study Group says, "We teach our students to apply their knowledge rather than just mug up facts."

The reason seems obvious. Since the inception of the Indian government's liberalisation policies in 1991, the role of bureaucrats, too, has seen a sea change – from regulation to facilitation. When this is said, the general feeling that the importance of the civil services has gradually been decreasing proves to be completely wrong. The number of vacancies for the services has gone up from 200 or 300 to 700 or 800 in the last three or four years.

Experts say that the role of the facilitator that civil servants have come to play does not mean less work. "Bureaucrats have many roles these days. The process of decentralisation in governance and the specialisation of tasks leading to the separation of departments has made the duties more demanding,"

says P.S. Ravindran, the director of Vajiram and Ravi.

One of the major reasons for the increase in posts was the Right to Information Act 2004, which necessitated the recruitment of new information officers to serve the Central Information Commission, which used to be manned by retired officials. The Central Vigilance Commission, formed in 2000, also needs more civil servants. Similarly, the birth of different Ministries, such as telecom, disinvestment and civil aviation, after the economic changes required more bureaucrats. And the requirement of security personnel, especially for the police services, in these disturbed times will also be fulfilled through the exam.

Of late, there has been a rise in the number of technocrats and doctors who write this exam. This would mean increased competition as the changing question paper pattern could be more suitable to them. However, some coaching institutes feel that it is wrong to say that the exam is more advantageous to science students, who, they feel, were at a disadvantage earlier because the General Studies paper had a tilt in the favour of Humanities students. This is where, perhaps, coaching institutes play an important part: by training students in a holistic way.

Coaching institutes also take care that students do not lose their spirit while preparing for this strenuous exam. "We tell our students that the average attention span of any human being is not above 12 minutes, and then train our students to do effective reading to assimilate better. This infuses confidence in them," says Gupta.

While this tedious exam, sometimes considered to be the toughest in the world, could still be a matter of luck, one cannot deny that hard work generally pays. The journey through the exam in itself is so informative that one could use it in any profession. Gupta says, "Learning about learning is actual learning. We must enjoy the journey of reading and preparing for the exam." If one sticks by this, perhaps, the civil services exam might not appear to be that difficult. □

Quality first

Interview with P.S. Ravindran, Director, Vajiram & Ravi.

BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

P.S. RAVINDRAN says, "We don't publish photographs of our successful students but our students keep interacting with us even when they are posted in other places." This explains the importance of his institute, Vajiram & Ravi, in the lives of many IAS officers.

As a coaching institute, how do you rate yourself in the market?

The institute started in 1976. For the past nine years in a row, our institute has given all-India first rankers. We not only make our students well-equipped to take the examination but also train them in a comprehensive manner.

BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

P.S. RAVINDRAN: "For the past nine years in a row, our institute has given all-India first rankers."

What is the focus of your teaching methods?

The primary thing is quality education. We believe in covering the entire syllabus, at least 95 per cent of it. Secondly, we offer quality teaching and cover the syllabus in time. Sudents are given a date on which the course is completed so that they can have a sense of completion. Another thing that we stress is commitment to the students and the accessibility of teachers so that students can clarify their doubts any time.

A year-long preparation could be tedious for students. How do you tackle this problem?

Our first lecture in any new session starts with a motivational talk. Once in a month we give them a pep talk. We have come to realise that students face problems like lack of motivation and self-doubts. These things increase as the examination closes in, so we ensure that we help them during that time. Some of our teachers stay here from early morning to late evening to counsel them.

What are the most popular courses of your institute?

There are many. General Studies, Public Administration, Psychology, Commerce and also interview preparation.

How do you address the continually changing pattern and syllabus of the civil services exams?

One of our institute's major recommendations is to refer constantly to the question papers. It is the question papers that make the syllabus complete. For instance, we stress on topics, the type of questions in those topics.

That suggestion is applicable to teachers as well. We believe that the teacher is the first student. He has to first learn to teach. One of the reasons why General Studies is very popular here is that the course needs more revision and updates every year than any other subject.

Current affairs, Indian polity and the economy change drastically every year. It is because of our ability to adapt and provide such cutting edge knowledge to students that we are able to remain competitive.

Fast-forward your preparation for Civil Services Exam.

We power your dreams with knowledge.

- Extraordinary FOCUS
- Extraordinary KNOWLEDGE
- Extraordinary TEACHING
- Extraordinary RESULTS

RAU'S IAS

A name that Nation trusts

Amazing Success

Our 2007 Exam Results : Six positions secured by our students in first 20 and 38 in first 100 with overall 237 selections. As regards the past achievements, Study Circle has contributed nearly one-third of the total selections done for Civil Services by UPSC since 1953.

It is a well known fact that Rau's is the most trusted and recommended name all over the country for IAS & PCS coaching.

Unbeatable Strategy

An Answer that matters : Do I have the talent ? is a simple question that stares at you, keeping you awake at night. But with the right knowledge & strategy you can answer this question easily. Rau's IAS is renowned for teaching that's as intensive as it is valuable. Our proven leadership in Civil Services Exam is all you need to prove yourself.

Be Sure

We have no branches or associates any where in India except Jaipur. Our name which has become a legend among students for the highest standards in teaching, and hence has been copied by a lot of people across India, but no one can match our quality.

Join the Best

Programme Highlights

Civil Services/PCS Exam - 2010

- Personal Guidance (English Medium) is available for -

  General Studies / Essay, Commerce, Economics, Geography, History, Law, Political Science, Psychology, Public Administration & Sociology

- पर्सनल गाइडेंस (हिन्दी माध्यम) -

  सामान्य अध्ययन / निबंध, भूगोल, इतिहास, लोक प्रशासन एवं समाजशास्त्र में उपलब्ध।

- Postal Guidance (English Medium) is available for -

  General Studies, Geography, History, Law, Political Science, Psychology, Public Administration and Sociology.

- पोस्टल गाइडेंस (हिन्दी माध्यम) -

  सामान्य अध्ययन, भूगोल, इतिहास, लोक प्रशासन एवं समाजशास्त्र में उपलब्ध।

- Hostel facility arranged.

New batches will start from 5th June 2009

Admission Open, Apply Now.

Contact personally or write for prospectus with a DD/MO of Rs. 50/- favouring

RAU'S IAS STUDY CIRCLE

Head Office : 309, Kanchanjunga Bldg., 18, Barakhamba Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001
Phone : 011 - 23317293, 23318135-36, 23738906-07, 32448880-81, 65391202, Fax: 23317153

Jaipur Centre : 701, Apex Mall, Lal Kothi, Tonk Road, Jaipur - 302015, Ph.: 0141-6450676, 3226167, 9351528027

Website:www.rauias.com **E-mail : contact@rauias.com**

Human development

Interview with V.P. Gupta, Director, Rau's IAS Study Circle.

BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

"We emphasise on three things: effective observation, effective **reading and effective listening.** We take our students through a psychological training programme that helps them assimilate and analyse facts better."

V.P. GUPTA of Rau's IAS Study Circle has been a friend, philosopher and guide to many successful civil servants. He has a philosophy behind his work: to enjoy the journey of life. And his focus is on learning and education and bringing a different approach to the business.

How long has Rau's IAS Study Circle been in the business and how have you contributed to making better bureaucrats?

The Study Circle came into existence in 1953. Its aim has not only been to help students qualify for the IAS, but to make them better human beings, honest, sincere and hard-working public servants devoted to the general good of the people. Thus our effort is aimed at all-around development of personality of the students and not at mere transfer of information on the subjects taught.

ANU PUSHKARNA

V.P.GUPTA: "At the Study Circle, there is an environment of meaningful learning besides encouragement to trust in one's own ability."

Do you have any unique method of teaching? Why should a student come to Rau's rather than go elsewhere?

At the Study Circle, the students get to study in an atmosphere that brings out their best. There is an environment of real and meaningful learning besides encouragement to trust in one's own ability. This is difficult to find at other places. Hence, the Study Circle experience helps bring out their leadership qualities and other skills required to become administrators of the country.

What is the unique selling proposition of your institute?

The faculty of the Study Circle handle all subjects with great ease and expertise. In our long experience, we have seen that there is a great demand for our courses on Public Administration, History, Geography, Sociology, Commerce, Economics, Law, Political Science and Psychology besides the General Studies and Essay papers, which are compulsory.

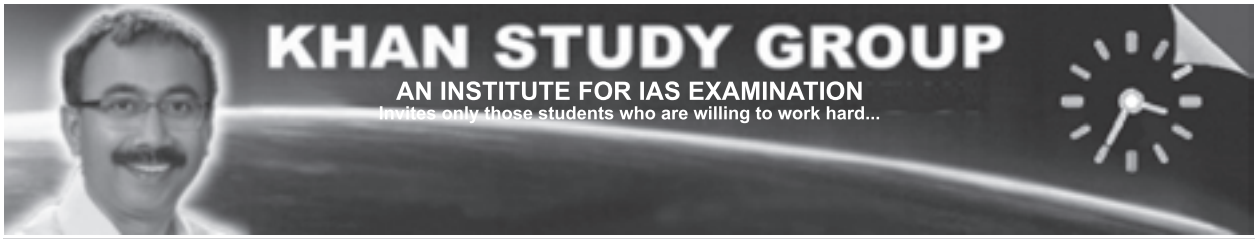
Are the notes given by your institute sufficient to crack this high-profile examination?

The Study Circle gives complete notes to the students for all the subjects taught. Here the idea is not to flood them with irrelevant information but to provide them with useful, specific and result-oriented material. This is appreciated by the students.

How does Rau's help students handle the pressure?

I have always said that learning about learning is real learning. We emphasise on three things: effective observation, effective reading and effective listening. Listening is a very difficult task as our minds tend to travel a lot. So, we take our students through a psychological training programme that helps them assimilate and analyse facts better.

Second, we stress on optimisation of attention. We understand an interpreted version of what we



2713 0786, 2713 1786 ● Website: www.ksgindia.com ● 2521 Hudson Lines, Near G.T.B. Nagar Metro Station, Delhi-110009 ● Ph: 011-6455 4955, **BATCHES FROM JUNE**

Khan Study Group is passionate about the success of its students, but it invites only those students who are hardworking and sincere.

Civil Services has traditionally attracted the best of the brains of the country. Usually, the brightest child in every family in India is seen as a probable candidate who when grows up will bear those coveted three letters after his/her name and bring prestige to the

family. But, most often it is not the brightest child that would make it but the child who grows up to have determination of steel and self belief like rock solid, ends up making into the services. These qualities are more important than just being wiser than the rest of the students in the school or college.

"Preparing for the Civil Services is a fresh evolution that a candidate undertakes after graduation, it needs to be properly directed" DR. Khan says. The UPSC is selecting candidates from a large number of optionals and it is fully aware of the fact that there will be a little use of their specialised knowledge in the fields of the civil administration. Yet, it checks their perseverance to hold on to their target and a determined will to get that.

The efforts of the students must be given a proper direction and it is here the role of the coaching institutes become very significant. There was a time when coaching was not even heard of amongst the successful candidates but now there would rarely be a candidate who at some stage of their preparation has not availed the advices of the experts in the field.

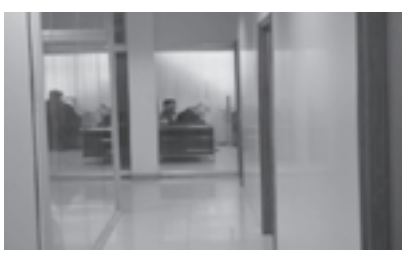
Coaching institutes can also be a double edged weapon because there is a probability that an institute for their own vested interest or just because of ignorance may misguide a student. Khan Study Group (KSG) is very sensitive to the role that it plays in this direction. One can always return the money or the product in a commercial transaction but one can never ever give back the time the students may have spent with them.

Khan Study Group is passionate about the success of its

students, but it invites only those students who are hardworking and sincere. There is no short cut to success. To keep the students oriented to their task and ensure the delivery is reaching, a unique methodology is evolved in the form of POD. When the teacher has given lecture

he is confident that he has done his job and the student after taking down the notes has done his part of job but neither of them have any proof that they are on the right track. So the proof of delivery (POD) become imperative both for the teacher as well as the students. This is done regularly to check the status of delivery and level of understanding both for the teacher as well as the students.

At KSG every student is an individual where its personal academic issues are in focus. KSG is an experience to go through and probably the best part of preparing for this examination; as



observed by one of the candidates. The students come from all over the country at KSG and it seems like a home away from the home as another student mentioned. These efforts have gone a long way and the KSG has been ranked "Best School in Imparting Training to IAS Exam Students" by Business Sphere Magazine in February 09.

Personal attention

Interview with A.R. Khan, Director, Khan Study Group.

BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

A.R. KHAN of the Khan Study Group (KSG) has been teaching IAS aspirants for the past 18 years. With an award to its credit for being the best in the business, KSG has delivered an 80 per cent success rate this year.

What is your idea of teaching the IAS aspirants?

We focus on the skills that are necessary for students to get into the job. Any coaching institute has a limited job. But in the process, we try to make them better people. We have our methods to keep the students oriented towards their goal. We call it POD [Proof of Delivery].

Both teachers and students, after their class, should feel that they have delivered at their levels. So what we do is to put them through a specially designed test. If they are able to answer the questions in the test, both the teacher and the students are satisfied. We pay attention to every student because we are not a huge number here.

SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

A.R. KHAN: "We continuously monitor the performance of every student."

So is this the USP of your institute?

We give them handouts and continuously monitor the performance of every student. So the student always knows where he stands. This helps him to put in that extra effort. Quite often when a student is learning by himself, he doesn't know his position. Our classes are not huge, which helps us even more. We would never go to a scale where our education becomes an industry.

What subjects do you specialise in?

General Studies is the most popular course here. We have got a team of people who specialise in their respective fields. We choose teachers who have the knack of interrelating things. To teach history, you need not be a historian. What this exam requires is proper weaving together of all the subjects so that students get a holistic perspective, and that is what our teachers do.

We focus more on answer writing. It's not about how much you know but how much you produce. Even with limited skills, the students should come up with fantastic answers, and that is why we are here.

Did the economic slowdown hit the sector in any way?

In these times of economic recession, a large number of people have shown inclination towards the civil services, which is quite contrary to the general myth. I have always seen people running towards it rather than going away from it. Now the seats are hovering at 600 to 700 a year. There was a time when it was around 400 seats.

The numbers are almost always demand driven. Bureaucrats are donning the role of facilitators now. In our context of indicative planning, there will always be a role for them.

SANDEEP SAXENA

AT THE RAU'S IAS Study Circle, students are taught techniques of visual learning.

listen to. But as objectivity is necessary to crack the exam, our teaching focusses on aspects that keep interpretation to the minimum.

How do you do this?

By just being aware of it. If both the teacher and the student are aware of these problem areas, you compensate for the break in attention. And then, you try to create a link between these chains of spans of attention. The leakages can be compensated thus. For instance, our techniques of mind mapping, single-page note-making, power notes, and so on, impart knowledge to the students in a visual sense, which helps them remember better.

What criteria do you have for selecting teachers?

Only educators who display the exceptional qualities required for handling the needs of the students preparing for such a tough exam are selected.

How do you foresee the role of your coaching institute in an economic regime where the role of the state seems to be reducing?

As the scope of Indian economy expands, we foresee an increase in the need for government services too. Hence, we feel there is going to be an increase in the role of the bureaucracy in the near future for a well-supervised and orderly expansion of the Indian economy. □

IAS '09

"Interestingly both Karthik(AIR-1) & Ashima (1st among girls) were students of Vajiram & Ravi"
– The Hindu (May17, 2008)

VAJIRAM & RAVI has the ***Unique Record*** *of having achieved* ***All-India first rank*** *in the IAS Examination for* ***9 years successively*** *from 2000 to 2008. And* ***many more ranks*** *within the first ten. Such is the* ***quality of teaching*** *in VAJIRAM & RAVI !*

For the convenience of **IAS** *aspirants we announce the commencement of the*

GENERAL STUDIES

course for the Main Exam from June 01, '09 from this year onwards.

Main exam course in

*** PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION * PSYCHOLOGY**
*** GEOGRAPHY * SOCIOLOGY * POLITICAL SCIENCE**

will commence on June 1, '09.

Admission opens on May 26, '09.

For details contact:

VAJIRAM & RAVI

79, Old Rajinder Nagar Market, New Delhi - 110 060
Phone: 011-2582 0000, 2573 4058, Visit us at : www.vajiramandravi.com

Managing the nation

Interview with Professor Arindam Chaudhuri, Indian Institute of Planning and Management. BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

"Gather as much knowledge as you can. Even in these difficult times, if a student can show that he can make **a difference to a company, there** won't be a dearth of jobs for him."

PROFESSOR Arindam Chaudhuri is the Honorary Dean of the Centre for Economic Research and Advanced Studies at the Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM). This economist, philosopher, film-maker, and writer reflects on the evolution of management education in India and tells us about the ways in which people can tackle the economic recession.

What was the vision behind the IIPM?

The vision was to set up an institute that would not just groom managers for the micro-level but managers who have a macro-level vision for the nation. That's why we call it the Institute of Planning and Management. Planning does not stand for just micro-managerial planning; it stands for national economic planning. Given a choice, our institute would have been called the Indian Institute of Planning and Administration of the National Economy. But then there would have been no market for us.

As a pioneer in management education, how do you think management teaching has evolved over the years? Have market needs necessitated this evolution?

Yes, market always influences education and it should, in the right manner. For instance, globalisation made us add a paper on global opportunities and threat analysis. Today we are the only institute from where students go abroad and study at top B-schools. As the digital revolution took place, management courses included papers like digital marketing. As investment banks closed down, the investment banking paper at the IIPM was rechristened wealth management. Management as an education stream has also evolved totally, thanks to market needs.

RAJEEV BHATT

ARINDAM CHAUDHURI: "THE vision [behind the IIPM] was to groom managers who have a macro-level vision for the nation."

What makes the IIPM different from other management institutes in the country?

The IIPM is different due to many things but the first and foremost reason is our education. It's unarguably superior to the education imparted at any B-school in the world. It's an MBA programme with compulsory specialisation in marketing and entrepreneurship combined with an M.A. Economics level course and a specialisation in national economic planning. So while the best MBAs are above 120 credits, the IIPM programme is 200 credits.

Then there is our faculty. They are the only ones in India who take regular workshops with the faculty of the top 20 B-schools of the world. Conducting corporate sessions jointly with them requires abilities that very few possess in this country, where every real estate company to sweet shop is imparting education.

The slogan "Dare to think beyond IIMs" is quite popular. But why compare with the IIMs?

We say it because if true education is what matters, then there is no institute better than the IIPM. And it's important to make people realise it in a comparative manner. The IIM aura, due to their placements, blinds people so much that they don't care about who gives better education. At the IIPM, we are waiting for our placement packages to touch the level of the IIM packages. When it does, people will start opting for the IIPM first.

NBT Books on Education & Career

Our Constitution:
An Introduction to India's Constitution and Constitutional Law

Subhash C Kashyap

Rs. 110.00 **346pp**

Factual, objective and analytical, this highly readable book is a handy but authoritative study of our constitution.

Our Judiciary
BR Agarwala

Rs. 70.00 **204pp**

The book traces the development of judiciary in India and examines different courts, commissions and tribunals in detail.

Our Parliament
Subhash C Kashyap

Rs. 85.00 **288pp**

The book describes the multifarious activities of Parliament, the working of the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, role of presiding offices, Question Hour and other procedural processes.

Our Political System
Subhash C Kashyap
Rs 90.00(PB)
Rs 300.00(HB) **86pp**

The book traces the history of political systems in India and introduces various components of modern Indian polity in terms of their structure and functions and how they interact in making it citizen friendly.

Public Administration
Padma Ramachandran

Rs. 65.00 **260pp**

Written in an easy and direct style, the book traces the history of public administration in India from ancient to contemporary times.

The Making & Working of the Indian Constitution
Shibani Kinkar Chaube

Rs. 250.00(HB) **285pp**

The book argues that the constitution of a country is as much a political document as a legal one and hence its success or otherwise is dependent on how it is interpreted and implemented politically.

A Career in Book Publishing
Samuel Israel

Rs. 55.00 **159pp**

To those thinking in terms of a career in the publishing industry, this book gives an idea of the nature of jobs, responsibilities and qualifications called for in editorial production and marketing of books.

Advertising as a Career
Subrata Banerjee

Rs. 55.00 **240pp**

The book describes different aspects of advertising and allied profession. Peppered with examples, the books would be of interest to those in the profession and also to those who are planning their professional career.

Education in India
Padma Ramachandran & Vasantha Ramkumar

Rs. 130.00 **430pp**

A thorough study of the theory and practice of education in the context of present day Indian realties, this exhaustive volume provides an authoritative insight.

Our Armed Forces
Gautam Sharma
Rs. 75.00 **223pp**

The book describes the contribution of the Indian armed forces in safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the worlds's largest democracy. The book contains graphic descriptions of different operations, proxy wars and combats with insurgency.

- Build your career with NBT books
- The Trust also conducts four-week traning course in Book Publishing
- Initiated National Action Plan for the Readership Development among the Youth.

BECOME LIFE MEMBER OF NBT BOOK CLUB & AVAIL 20% DISCOUNT

BOOKSELLERS MAY JOIN NBT'S FAMILY BY REGISTERING THEMSELVES AS OUR REGISTERED AGENT. FOR TERMS VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR CONTACT US.

Please contact your local booksellers for books or write to us at the following addresses:

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

Nehru Bhawan, 5, Institutional Area, Vasant Kunj, Phase –II, New Delhi –110070.

Phone: 91-11- 24156000 Fax: 91-11-26121883

Email: nbtindia@nbtindia.org.in Website: www.nbtindia.org.in

Mumbai: Telefax: 91-22-23720442
Email: nbtindiamumbai@yahoo.com
Bangalore: Telefax: 91-80-26711994
Email: nbtindiasro@vsnl.net
Kolkata: Telefax: 91-33-22413899
Email: nbtero@dataone.in

Inclusive publishing

Interview with Nuzhat Hasan, Director, National Book Trust, India. BY AJOY ASHIRWAD MAHAPRASHASTA

NUZHAT HASAN, Director of the National Book Trust, India, initiated the publishing of over 170 Braille titles towards developing an inclusive policy in the publishing industry. Her emphasis is on taking books to the remotest corners of India. Nuzhat Hasan speaks about the NBT's inclusive plan.

Could you brief us about the history of the NBT and the reason behind its establishment?

The NBT was established on August 1, 1957, with the objectives of publishing reasonably priced high quality books for children and general adult readers, and promoting a culture of reading.

The NBT is drawing up a National Action Plan for the Readership Development among the Youth. Tell us about the plan and its purpose.

Young people form the largest segment of the population in India. The literacy rate among this segment is also much higher than the national average. Our interactions showed that in order to connect with the youth on a sustained manner and at a macro level, a focussed national publishing programme was needed.

The National Council for Applied Economic Research has undertaken on our behalf the first national level readership survey among the youth from the perspective of the book-reading habit. This is the first step towards developing the Action Plan.

KAMAL NARANG

NUZHAT HASAN'S EMPHASIS is on taking books to the remotest corners of India.

What has been the focus of the NBT publications in recent times?

In recent years, the NBT started series on popular social science, Afro-Asian countries, the Indian diaspora, Indian literature, and so on. We brought out a collection of Sri Lankan short stories, *Bridging Connections,* which brings together representative writings in Tamil, Sinhala and English.

On the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations of the trust, the Golden Jubilee Anthologies project was undertaken. The idea was to publish authentic anthologies of post-Independence poetry and short stories in 22 Indian languages and plays in eight Indian languages. Now, 31 anthologies have been published, which include many in smaller languages.

You talked about an inclusive policy towards publishing. What do you mean by this? How have you addressed the growth of readership in regional languages?

We bring out books for Braille readers, organise book fairs and mobile exhibitions even in far-flung areas, workshops for the neo-literates and children in smaller language region, and the north-east. We encourage publication of original manuscripts written in regional languages.

P.V. SIVAKUMAR

STUDENTS AT AMAZE 08, the annual management and cultural event held at the IIPM in Hyderabad on December 23, 2008.

Has the economic recession changed your approach to management education?

Recession has not changed the IIPM's approach towards education at all. Yes, it has changed our approach towards placements. We had a team of 66 people doing placements globally. Now we have a team of 88, as more feet on the street means more companies on the campus.

This year we are concentrating on small and medium enterprises and aim to get around 750 companies to the campus instead of the 600 that we got last year.

Is the corporate sector the only option for management students or should students look out for other sectors such as non-governmental organisations and the public sector in such tough times?

When my students ask me where I want to see them 15 years from now, I always say politics. I tell them that they are the most suited to become politicians with their knowledge of management and economics.

What is your advice to MBA aspirants in such times?

My advice to students is: gather as much knowledge as you can. Even in these difficult times, if there is a student who can show that he can make a difference to a company, there won't be a dearth of jobs for him. □

ADMISSIONS 2009

INDIA'S GLOBAL B-SCHOOL

IIPM INTERNATIONAL

Delhi • Mumbai • Kolkata • Bangalore • Chennai • Pune • Hyderabad • Ahmedabad • Gurgaon • Noida • Chandigarh • Lucknow • Jaipur • Indore • Bhopal • Cochin • Bhubaneshwar • Dehradun

IIPM, now **Ranked No. 1** In **Global Exposure!!**

The **2008** Zee Business **Best B-School** Survey

OVERALL RANK	GLOBAL EXPOSURE	COURSE CONTENT	PLACEMENT
1. IIM(A)	1. IIPM	1. IIM(A)	1. IIM(A)
2. IIM(B)	2. IIM(A)	2. IIM(B)	2. IIM(B)
3. IIM(C)	3. IIM(B)	3. IIM(C)	3. IIM(C)
4. FMS, Delhi	4. IIM(C)	4. IIM(I)	4. XLRI
5. IIM(L)	5. IIM(I)	5. IIM(L)	5. FMS, Delhi
6. XLRI	6. IIFT	6. FMS, Delhi	6. IIM(I)
7. IIPM	7. IIM(L)	7. IIFT	7. IIM(L)
8. IIFT	8. FMS, Delhi	8. IIM(K)	8. IIFT
9. IIM(I)	9. XLRI	9. IIPM	9. IIPM
10. IIM(K)	10. IIM(K)	10. JBIMS	10. IIM(K)

Superior **Education,** Best **Global Exposure** Excellent **Placements!** IIPM. **World-Class.**

"DARE to THINK BEYOND the IIMs!"

Management Guru and Economist **Prof. Arindam Chaudhuri** is the Hony. Dean at IIPM. To know about his success mantras read his #1 Best selling book on management, **Count Your Chickens Before They Hatch**

SPRING - SUMMER ADMISSIONS ARE OPEN FOR THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMMES

STUDENTS/EXECUTIVES

Full Time Programme In Planning And Entrepreneurship

Students expecting graduation results by May /June 2009 may apply

Also making students eligible for a

MBA DEGREE

AFTER 10+2

Full Time Programme In Planning And Entrepreneurship

Students expecting 10+2 results by May 2009 may apply

Also making students eligible for a

BBA DEGREE

From International Management Institute, Brussels, Europe

FREE STUDY TOUR TO EUROPE/ USA etc.

leading to **CERTIFICATION IN GLOBAL MANAGEMENT** from one of the Top 20 Global B-School/University

Both the above programmes include a FREE STUDY TOUR TO EUROPE/USA etc. for 2 weeks inclusive of Industry visits for all students under IIPM's Global Opportunities and Threat Analysis programme (GOTA). From the batch of 2009 onwards GOTA is being taken to a completely different level all together. 100% of students joining IIPM will be doing a special course on Global Management for one week in one of the top 20 B-Schools/Universities* of the world and getting a Certificate in Global Management from the B-School/ University that they attend. Students will be sent to different institutions (which will impart the programme) as per the sole discretion of IIPM. More than 7500 students have gone for IIPM's GOTA to countries like USA, UK, Swizerland, Italy, France etc. in the last two years alone!

*The chosen B-Schools/Universities all rank amongst the top 20 in highly respected rankings like Business Week/Economist/ Financial Times etc. for the years 2006-07/2008.

Participating B-School: University of California Berkeley Haas School of Business

Partner B-School: CAMBRIDGE Judge Business School

Participating B-School: University of Virginia Darden School of Business

Affiliate B-School: The University of Texas at Austin McCombs School of Business

Participating School for GOTA: Cornell University ILR School

IMPRESSIVE PLACEMENT RECORD

For the class of 2008 **IIPM CREATED A NATIONAL RECORD** by placing 2670 students in more than 600 companies

INTERNATIONAL PLACEMENT FACTS#

YOUNG, *DESI* MBA-GRADS ARE OUT IN THE GLOBAL MARKET

International Placements 2008	IIMs	ISB	MDI	FMS	IIPMs
	249	111	7	31	165

#Original scanned portions from an article in Hindustan Times that appeared on 13th July '08 . For the complete article log on to www.iipm.edu

Collect your free prospectus (in person or by post) from IIPM office today itself.

LAST DATE OF REGISTRATION 16th May 2009

DELHI : IIPM, NBCC Plaza, Sector 5, Pushpa Vihar, SAKET, New Delhi-17

FREE LAPTOPS are provided to all IIPM students.

www.iipm.edu

Fanfare & failure

The G-20 summit has not come anywhere near pulling out the world economy from the unprecedented mess it is in now.

Preoccupations

JAYATI **GHOSH**

THE much-hyped G-20 summit was supposed to save the world economy from imminent collapse and provide much-needed relief to developing countries hit by an economic tsunami that was not of their own making. Even before the summit was held, it was already being hailed as the first sign of a changing global order, since at long last some large and economically significant developing countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Argentina were admitted to the "high table" of the self-appointed rulers of the world.

Though the G-20 is somewhat larger than the G-8 and accounts for the majority of the world's population, it is still an illegitimate grouping, in that it completely bypasses the United Nations. Even so, there were those who believed that, given the urgency created by the global economy apparently in near collapse, it could be the harbinger of a new "Bretton Woods" agreement that would reshape the international financial architecture, much in the way that the famous conference held at Bretton Woods in 1944 managed to do.

VAGUE STATEMENTS

Of course, we should have all known that this was not likely. This is because of not only the lack of adequate preparation for the summit and of legitimacy and representation from all nations, but also because there is still too much disagreement on most issues among the members of G-20. Even so, the summit's communique, released with so much fanfare, is deeply disappointing, particularly for developing countries.

In fact, there were precious few signs of the major players in the global economy acting together to revive it. Instead, there was deafening silence on the fiscal front, with no clear commitment to coordinated fiscal stimulus. The communique just had some vague statements. This reflected the successful resistance of Germany and France to the United States' attempts to ensure a collective plan for fiscal expansion.

Since there was no commitment to fiscal expansion, there was correspondingly no commitment to direct more resources towards new technologies and changing patterns of demand to ensure more sustainable and equitable use of the world's resources. Nor was there any evidence of a binding commitment to specific measures to clean up the toxic assets of the world's banking systems.

Instead, the communique simply stated that the leaders of these countries "are committed to take all necessary actions to restore the normal flow of credit through the financial system and ensure the soundness of systemically important institutions" without making it clear what such measures would be.

Yet, without such measures, the chances of early global recovery are extremely bleak. So exports of developing countries will continue to fall, international capital markets will remain skittish and tend to punish emerging markets out of sheer nervousness and uncertainty, the credit crunch will continue to constrain investment and therefore limit recovery, and many countries will find themselves desperately short of resources for meeting essential needs and development projects.

FUNNY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Despite these evident failures, two great "successes" of the summit were widely trumpeted in the international media: first, the declarations about tax havens, banking secrecy and financial regulation; and second, the announcement of a supposedly new $1.1 trillion "programme of support to restore credit, growth and jobs in the world economy" including $850 billion, which is supposed to be specifically directed towards developing countries.

But the promise of cracking down on tax havens is little more than a damp squib. To begin with, the approach chosen has been to agree to exchange information on companies and individuals suspected of evading taxes only "on request" rather than automatically, thereby reducing the efficacy of such a measure.

Second, the issue of misuse of tax concessions by companies – by far the biggest issue in tax avoidance – re-

ceived no attention at all. In fact, there was absolutely no attempt to ensure financial reporting or exchange of information on beneficial ownership in all tax jurisdictions, which would have helped governments crack down on corporate tax abuse.

The funniest of them all was the loud announcement of the intention to "name and shame" and then blacklist countries that do not cooperate. When the list was released the following day, it was laughable.

It consisted of only four territories: Uruguay, the Philippines, the Malaysian Federal Territory of Labuan, and Costa Rica. Since none of them is well known as a tax haven, and the more established tax havens in Europe (such as Lichtenstein and Luxembourg) were excluded by virtue of their membership in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, little appears to have been achieved on this front.

The only apparently concrete commitment was apparently the one made to poor countries that have been thrown into crisis by the global turmoil, by way of pledges of $850 billion in new funds. This sounds like a reasonable amount, but how much of it is for real? And how unconditional will such money flows be?

Not much, it turns out. For a start, the proposed new allocation of special drawing rights ($250 billion) is to be a general allocation, based on existing quotas. So the bulk of it will go to the G-20 countries.

The rich world alone will get approximately 60 per cent of the new SDR creation. Helping poor countries get more would require a special issue of new SDRs – something that was proposed in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1997 but vetoed by the U.S. and held in abeyance ever since.

REWARD FOR IMF

Much of the rest of the money will be conditional lending from the IMF, which has recently distinguished itself only by its utter failure to prevent or deal with financial crises in emerging markets because of its aggressively pro-cyclical conditionalities. It is amazing that the IMF is being rewarded for multiple failures.

This is after all the organisation that failed to predict the collapse of the U.S. sub-prime market, announced that the medium-term financial outlook for Iceland was exceptionally healthy just months before the country was declared effectively bankrupt, and has succeeded in making things much worse in most of the countries where it has forced its austerity measures in return for paltry loans.

The G-20 ignored the Stiglitz Commission's proposals on international financial reform.

So the single greatest beneficiary of this G-20 meeting must be the IMF, which would otherwise have been on life support as a global player. Indeed, the most disappointing – even most alarming – aspect of the G-20 communique is the declared intent to prop up and strengthen the IMF without doing anything about its completely undemocratic structure of decision-making or its unacceptable loan conditions.

What makes this especially troubling is that the IMF continues to impose these disastrous pro-cyclical conditions on countries that are forced to borrow from it at present: Ukraine, Pakistan and Latvia, for example, have all been told to cut government spending and raise interest rates and user charges for government services in the middle of the downswing in return for IMF loans.

Unfortunately, since the IMF has been given this unconditional gift from the G-20 leaders (including those from developing countries who should really know better) there is nothing to stop it from continuing to behave in this ridiculous and unjust way, which is also based on extreme double standards for rich and poor countries.

What is particularly unfortunate is the G-20 completely ignoring the recommendations of the Stiglitz Commission on international financial reform set up by the more democratic international body, the United Nations General Assembly.

That commission, which came up with its preliminary report just before the G-20 summit, made a number of useful short-term and medium-term recommendations. For example, it recommended an immediate new special allocation of SDRs, along with a new credit facility for development funds, strengthening regional initiatives and providing 1 per cent of all stimulus packages as Official Development Assistance. These would actually have made a much more positive difference to developing countries than the self-aggrandising posturing of G-20.

Even the G-20's commitment to avoid protectionism sounds ominous for developing countries, and not only because it is likely to be honoured only in the breach.

It was stated with the goal of "reaching an ambitious and balanced conclusion" to the World Trade Organisation trade negotiations – which can only mean forcing more trade liberalisation that has already led to agrarian crisis and deindustrialisation in much of the south.

The basic problem, though, is that the G-20 has not produced anything like the response needed to pull the world economy out of this unprecedented mess. Clearly, the idea is to put back the broken pieces somehow, to produce more of the same pattern of growth as before.

That is neither desirable nor sustainable, and will rapidly run into crisis once more, at a tremendous human cost. It is a pity that the would-be leaders of the world have shown so little generosity or imagination. □

New formations

The larger southern States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka see three-cornered contests, and the former two have new formations in the fray.

There has been a realignment **of forces in Tamil Nadu. Andhra** Pradesh, which votes for the Assembly too, has a likely spoiler in the fray. In Karnataka, others have to cope with the power of the BJP.

TAMIL NADU

BANKING ON POPULISM

By T.S. Subramanian and S. Viswanathan

IT is late afternoon. A group of women are gathering wood to feed the fire of the brick kiln at Peramur in the Tiruchi Lok Sabha constituency. An attempt to draw Sampoornam, one of the women, into a discussion on the elections brings a curt reply from her: "We will decide on polling day." A colleague comes up with a better ploy: "Have you got a free television set as promised by the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] government?"

K. PICHUMANI

TNCC PRESIDENT K.V. Thangkabalu receives the seat-sharing agreement from Chief Minister and DMK president M. Karunanidhi in Chennai on March 29.

That was enough to light up the scene. The entire group of sullen women rush towards us, virtually shouting, "No, in our village, Nachampatti, we have not received free television sets. We have not received free gas stoves either. Even in the neighbouring villages, while some households have received free television sets or gas stoves, others have not."

The reaction is the same across Peramangalam, Theni, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari constituencies. Meena of Pazhavur in Tirunelveli was sarcastic: "I have not got the television set. But some houses have received four television sets."

But they are all praise for the government's scheme to provide 20 kg of rice a month at Re.1 a kg. The quality is sometimes good, at other times bad, they say. They equally appreciate the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), under which villagers get employment for 100 days in a year at Rs.80 a day.

Cut to the Kalakkad-Cheranmahadevi road in Tirunelveli. Sitting on a chair and leaning on a signpost near Pudur along the road, R. Balasubramanian says: "The only scheme that is enshrined in the people's heart is rice at Re.1 a kg."

While most voters in the State agree with him, they are also angry about the rise in prices and how it has cut into what they have saved by way of this scheme. They are also incensed by the frequent power cuts, ranging from two hours to 10 hours a day, which has hit agricultural operations and small and medium enterprises. P. Ramasamy of Pagalavadi in Perambalur is happy that the government has waived his cooperative farm loan of Rs.23,000, but he is angry about the power cut in his area. "Although the DMK has big influence in this pocket, the power cut will definitely hit its chances. I am unable to operate my two pumpsets. It has affected agriculture," Ramasamy says. At Pattavarthi, young P. Venkatesan echoes his views: "The power crisis has hit the people hard. It will influence voting."

A tour of several districts in the State has revealed that four issues are uppermost in the minds of voters: the rise in the prices of essential commodities; the power cut; the shoddy distribution of free

television sets and gas stoves; and the Sri Lankan Tamil problem.

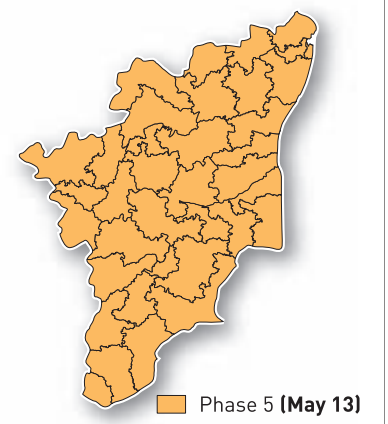
For the first time since the 1991 elections, the Sri Lankan Tamil problem will be one of the key issues. While the political parties were only too willing to use the Tamil issue to settle political scores, they gave it a wide berth when the elections were announced. However, the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK), the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) and the Communist Party of India (CPI) are determined to go to the people on what they call the inaction of the Congress-led UPA government at the Centre and the DMK government in the State.

"What is the use of our getting rice at Re.1 a kg when salt sells at Rs.7 a kg?" asks N. Kumar at Koneripatti in the Karur constituency. R. Murugesan of Musiri and Saroja of Peramangalam asked: "When salt sells at Rs.6 a kg and *kal uppu* [salt crystals] at Rs.12 a kg, what is the use of getting rice at Re.1 a kg?" Women are indignant that the price of gingelly oil has soared to Rs.125 a kg and good-quality Ponni rice sells at Rs.30 a kg. They are annoyed with the State government for increasing the bus fare through "subterfuge" – by introducing limited-stop services and new types of buses.

If in 2004, a formidable alliance of the DMK, the Congress, the MDMK, the PMK, the CPI and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) trounced the AIADMK-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alliance in all the 39 seats in the State and the one seat in Puducherry, the equations have changed dramatically now. The alliance formed by the DMK, the Congress, the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) is a much weakened one now.

While the contest will be essentially between the candidates of these two fronts, the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), founded by film actor Vijayakant, is ploughing a lonely furrow. The DMDK has fielded candidates in all the 39 constituencies in Tamil Nadu and for the Puducherry seat, sticking to Vijayakant's promise that his party's alliance is only "with the people and God". The BJP is in the fray in 12 constituencies.

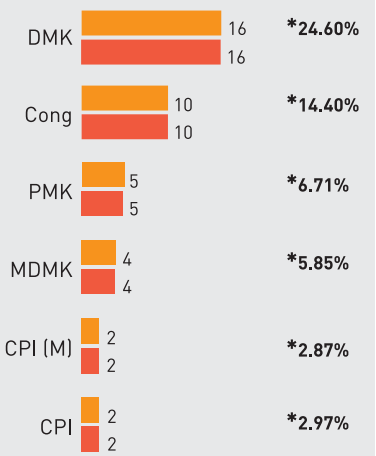
Tamil Nadu | 39 seats



KEY PLAYERS

AIADMK: J. Jayalalithaa
DMK: M. Karunanidhi
DMDK: Vijayakant

Lok Sabha party position in 2004



In the DMK-led alliance, the DMK is contesting 21 seats, the Congress 16, the DPI two and the IUML one. This is an uneasy alliance because the Congress and the DPI are at daggers drawn on the Sri Lankan Tamil issue. Until recently, the DPI, led by Thol. Thirumavalavan, had made common cause with the MDMK, the PMK and the CPI on the Tamil question.

Thirumavalavan, who makes no bones about his support to the LTTE, has asserted that his party will neither campaign for the Congress candidates nor oppose them. The PMK, which walked out of the UPA government on March 26 and stepped into the AIADMK parlour, has been rewarded amply.

The PMK has been allotted seven constituencies and one Rajya Sabha seat when elections to the Upper House are due in 2010. The MDMK, which joined hands with the AIADMK in the 2004 Assembly elections, got short shrift. The AIADMK gave the MDMK only four seats even though the latter first asked for seven and scaled down its demand to five. The MDMK wanted Arani and Tirupur but it did not get the two seats. The CPI (M) and the CPI will contest from three constituencies each.

On March 28, when AIADMK general secretary Jayalalithaa and PMK founder Dr. S. Ramadoss stitched up an alliance, both sounded upbeat. Ramadoss called the AIADMK-led front a "victorious alliance which will win all the 40 seats". Jayalalithaa described it as "a winning, unbeatable combination".

The DMK's strategy is to go to the people on the strength of its achievements. S. Muthukrishnan, DMK unit president of Kalakkad town panchayat in Tirunelveli district, said, "We will go to poor people and ask for votes on the basis of our performance." In the three years of DMK rule, 7,500 teachers were appointed on the basis of "merit" in government schools, he said. About 28,000 people were appointed in the Public Health Department as nurses and technical assistants and in other jobs. Educated unemployed youth were getting a monthly allowance.

A Rs.7.78-crore scheme was under way to provide water to Kalakkad from the Tamiraparani river. The State government had set in motion a project linking the Tamiraparani, the Nambiyaru and the Irumeniyaru at a cost of

R. SENTHIL KUMAR/PTI

AIADMK GENERAL SECRETARY Jayalalithaa joining hands with Left leaders A.B. Bardhan (left) and Prakash Karat at a meeting in Chennai on April 16.

Rs.369 crore. This would make "arid areas in Nanguneri, Sathankulam and Radhapuram taluks bloom," he claimed.

Muthukrishnan said: "We have done so much for the people that I have the unshakeable conviction that we will win. Jayalalithaa can only criticise. She can never list her achievements made when she was Chief Minister [from 2001 to 2006]."

Attention is also focussed on the Sivaganga constituency, where Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram of the Congress will face R.S. Raja Kannappan of the AIADMK in a tough fight. Raja Kannappan, who was earlier a puissant Minister in the Jayalalithaa Cabinet but defected to the DMK and crossed the floor again to the AIADMK this year, has been rewarded with the AIADMK ticket. He is popular in the constituency. K. Chandran of Karaikudi calls him "a super candidate". He belongs to the Yadava community, which has a sizable presence in the constituency. Chidambaram's campaign managers seem to be banking on the rash of bank branches that he has inaugurated in the constituency.

If Puthiya Tamizhagam, a Dalit party, has kept a low profile for the past few years, its founder Dr. K. Krishnasamy is back in the fray, in the Tenkasi (Reserved) constituency. His campaign plank is development of the southern districts. "The southern districts are ignored in industrial development. So my focus will be on industrial development, health, education, roads and transport," he said at Azhagapuri village. His candidature has enthused the party's cadre, who are sore with its earlier alliance with the DMK. Pitted against him are P. Lingam of the CPI and a Congress candidate (not named as on April 15).

Congressmen in Kanyakumari rose in a virtual mutiny against the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) leader K.V. Thangkabalu for failing to get the seat for the Congress and ceding it to the DMK. This also angered the fishermen of Colachel, a traditional Congress base. Fishermen such as A. Durairaj, K. Jerome, J. Killari and A. John are a disillusioned lot. "The Congress has not been allotted the seat. What is the use of voting for somebody else?" they asked.

It will be an interesting four-cornered contest in Kanyakumari, with Pon. Radhakrishnan of the BJP, A.V. Bellarmin of the CPI(M) and S. Austin of the DMDK in the fray. Disappointed Congressmen say they prefer Austin to the DMK's J. Helen Davidson. Christian fishermen at Reedemer Street in Kanyakumari are unhappy with the DMK for not waiving their loans or constructing a breakwater to prevent the sea erosion.

Radhakrishnan, who was elected in 1999 and became a Union Minister, is proving to be a strong contender. There were four issues before the Kanyakumari electorate, Radhakrishnan said. They were the achievements of the Vajpayee government (1999-2004); what he (Radhakrishnan) did as an MP; what others failed to do; and what he would do if elected again. He accused the rival parties of abandoning the NDA government's plan to establish a commercial harbour at Colachel, of scrapping the "Sagar Mala" scheme under which a harbour would have been developed at Chinna Muttom, and of trying to shift the proposed sub-centre of the Sports Authority of India from Rajakkamangalam near Nagercoil to Palayamkottai in Tirunelveli district. "People have seen my performance and it is registered in their hearts," Radhakrishnan added.

Bellarmin, the incumbent CPI(M) MP, seems to be banking on his performance. His achievements include obtaining administrative sanction for establishing a fishing harbour at Thengaipattinam, expansion of the Indian Rare Earth complex at Manavalakurichi, and setting up a regional Provident Fund office at Nagercoil.

WAITING FOR RELIEF

The distress of the tsunami-affected fishermen families along the Tamil Nadu coast and the despair of the victims of an agrarian crisis, particularly in the delta region, have placed the Congress and the DMK in an unenviable position. To win their confi-

dence and vote may prove an uphill task for the two parties.

From Chennai North to Kanyakumari on the eastern coast, in at least 10 constituencies, nine in Tamil Nadu and one in Puducherry, the fishing community has a presence and its vote will play a decisive role in determining the winner.

Thousands of people affected by the tsunami in 2004 are yet to get new homes as promised by the government. The survivors' complaints relate to the pace of rehabilitation, allotment of houses for fisherfolk in places far away from their work spot andnon-availability of basic amenities.

These apart, there are also charges of discrimination against Dalits who used to help fishermen in their operations, single women such as widows and divorcees, and families headed by women, in the distribution of benefits. A woman resident of Akkaraikkori, one of the worst-affected areas in Cuddalore, told *Frontline* that 25 per cent of the eligible families were yet to get new houses. There is no water facility in the area. As for the replacement of damaged boats, a fisherman said, "Not all who had lost their boats were given new ones, and at the same time many who did not own a boat earlier were given new boats."

"Fish workers' anger against the government will certainly reflect in the elections," said Marimuthu, CPI(M) MLA. He said that contrary to the government's claim, the rehabilitation of tsunami victims was not yet complete in the district. Apart from this, fish workers were also agitated over the continued harassment they had to face often from the Sri Lanka Navy.

"Our fishermen are frequently detained by the Sri Lankan authorities and our government has not ensured their safety and security," said Marimuthu. Marimuthu said that although the Nagapattinam Assembly constituency, one of the six components of the Nagapattinam parliamentary seat, has a large presence of the fishing community, agriculturists and agricultural workers account for the majority of the electorate in the other five Assembly segments. Agrarian crisis is likely to be a major poll plank in the Assembly segments of Vedaranyam, Thiruthuraippoondi (Reserved), Thiruvarur, Nannilam and the newly constituted Keezhvelur (Reserved) constituency.

Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam general secretary K. Balakrishnan said that *ad hoc* measures such as the Rs.7,000-crore loan waiver to agriculturists trapped in debt following the withdrawal of subsidies on fertilizers, and the Re.1 a kg rice scheme would not serve the long-term interests of farmers or farm workers. The NREGS had come to the relief of labourers to some extent, Balakrishnan said. There had been migration of labour to industrial centres such as Coimbatore, Tirupur, Chennai and Bangalore. The issue would be brought to the fore at least in the rural constituencies, he hoped.

Apart from the agrarian crisis and fishermen's woes, the handling of the Sri Lankan Tamil issue by the Congress and the DMK will also be a key issue, campaigners say. In the Nagapattinam (Reserved) constituency, sitting DMK MP A.K.S. Vijayan is contesting for a third term. In 2004, he defeated AIADMK's Arjunan by 2.2 lakh votes. Challenging Vijayan this time is M. Selvaraj of the CPI, who has represented Nagapattinam three times. His strength lies in the fact that the three Assembly components (Nagapattinam, Thiruthuraippoondi and Nannilam) are under the control of Left parties, while only two (Vedaranyam and Thiruvarur) are under DMK control. Keezhvelur is said to be a CPI (M) bastion.

Selvaraj is confident that the failure of the DMK government to distribute two acres of land each to the landless and protect fishermen from the Sri Lankan forces will help him get re-elected. Also in the race is Muthukumar of the DMDK.

In Thanjavur, Union Minister of State for Finance S.S. Palanimanickam (DMK) is seeking election for a fifth term and opposing him is Durai Balakrishnan of the MDMK. The DMDK nominee for the seat is Ramanathan. In 2004, Palanimanickam

G. MOORTHY

DMDK PRESIDENT VIJAYAKANT campaigning in Madurai on April 10.

won the seat by 1.17 lakh votes. Palanimanickam's popularity and experience will work in his favour. There is a small hurdle – his strained relations with some local party leaders.

Chidambaram, in what is termed as the Vanniar belt, about 100 km off Thanjavur, has drawn Statewide attention. Thol. Thirumavalavan is seeking election after two unsuccessful attempts from here. He is facing a formidable opponent in the sitting MP, E. Ponnusami, of the PMK. In 2004, Ponnusami defeated Thirumavalavan by about 90,000 votes. The margin was much more (1.2 lakhs) in 1999. Thirumavalavan, who contested both the elections on his own, finds himself in the DMK-led front this time.

He said that the fact that he was fighting this time as part of a "strong alliance" would be a major point favouring him. The discontent of a section of the electorate over the performance of the sitting MP would help him, he said. The welfare schemes launched by the government and its achievements in general, he hoped, would ensure his victory.

His poll plank is protecting the State's rights and the rights of Tamils all over the world, including Eelam Tamils. He said his party would strive for the provision of land and houses and 50 per cent reservation for the downtrodden sections and archaka rights for women, and the industrialisation of the State.

Battle of Madurai

ALL eyes are on the Madurai constituency in southern Tamil Nadu where Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi's son M.K. Azhagiri is contesting the elections for the first time. Azhagiri was rewarded with the DMK ticket after he enabled the party to win the Tirumangalam (near Madurai) Assembly seat in a byelection in January, defeating the AIADMK's candidate. Opposition parties called it a tainted victory because money and muscle power allegedly played a big role in it.

Azhagiri's boast is that he will win the seat by a margin of three lakh votes. However, his main opponent, P. Mohan of the CPI(M), is unfazed. Mohan, who was elected from the constituency in 1994 and 2004, is determined to give Azhagiri a run for his money. CPI(M) and AIADMK cadre have enmeshed like a battalion ready to proceed to the battle front. Evidence of this was available at their joint meeting at Melur. Applause broke out when Mohan told the workers of the two parties: "The DMK had [earlier] shown that it can win an election through money and rowdyism. It should be met with in Madurai. The blow we give [the rivals] at Madurai should be a blow in all the 40 constituencies."

S. JAMES

M.K. AZHAGIRI, the DMK candidate in Madurai.

Mohan told *Frontline:* "The focus of my campaign is on what I have done in Madurai in the past 10 years. Without showing any partiality, I have done sincere service." His list of achievements, he says, includes the removal of the bottleneck in the railway segment between Madurai and Dindigul by converting the metre gauge line into broad gauge; lengthening the runway of the Madurai airport, which led to the introduction of more flights; starting a Kendriya Vidyalaya at Tiruparankunram; setting up a Doordarshan studio; expanding the Madurai Rajaji Hospital to the unused land of the Anna bus terminus and using the MP Local Areas Development Fund of Rs.20 crore to provide education, health and other infrastructure facilities. He said he would press for the establishment of a Central university, a branch of Anna University and a Navodaya school in Madurai.

Azhagiri has made a range of promises, which include building an international airport; establishing a factory to produce jasmine oil; opening a unit of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, and making Madurai a "clean city, green city and E-city".

Voters are not sure what is in store for them as the campaign hots up. A. Shanmuganathan of Tiruparankunram said: "I am not able to fathom what is happening. But I can say it is not reasonable."

T.S. Subramanian

Ponnusami recalled his service to his constituency through the allotment substantial of funds for various schemes, including many railway projects. He supported the demand for due compensation to those who provided their land for a new project of the Neyveli Lignite Corporation and for provision of jobs to their wards.

One of the key constituencies in the region is Mayiladuthurai, where Union Minister for Panchayati Raj Mani Shankar Aiyar is seeking re-election for the fourth time. Taking him on in a multi-cornered contest is a former propaganda secretary of the AIADMK, O.S. Manian. Mani Shankar Aiyar's passion for panchayati raj and dedication to the cause of devolution of power to local bodies have received wide acclaim.

Manian, who has been a member of AIADMK since its inception in 1972, said both the Union and State governments had earned the displeasure of the people over acts of terrorism across the country and the sharp rise in the prices of essential commodities. Frequent power cuts had added to the misery of the people, he said.

KARNATAKA

MONEY AND POWER

By Ravi Sharma in Bangalore

CASH and caste are the catchwords in Karnataka politics as the Congress, the BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular) vie for the 28 parliamentary seats that go to the polls on April 30. Ideology and party loyalty seem to have given way to winnability, money power and rapport with the electorate. This was evident right from the selection of candidates to the defections and to the mode of campaigning.

Leading the way is the BJP, which, despite infighting, anti-incumbency sentiment and a consolidation of secular votes in a few constituencies, has been able to use its position as the ruling party to good effect and also attract a number of powerful communities and influential religious heads to its side. It is confident of retaining the 18 seats it won in 2004. (The Congress won eight seats and the JD(S) won two.)

The BJP, which is largely seen as a party supported by Lingayats (who along with Vokkaligas form the two most influential communities in Karnataka), was able to win the support of Vokkaliga leaders such as D.B. Chandre Gowda, H.C. Srikantiah and L.R. Shivarame Gowda in its bid to win seats in the old Mysore region, a stronghold of the JD(S).

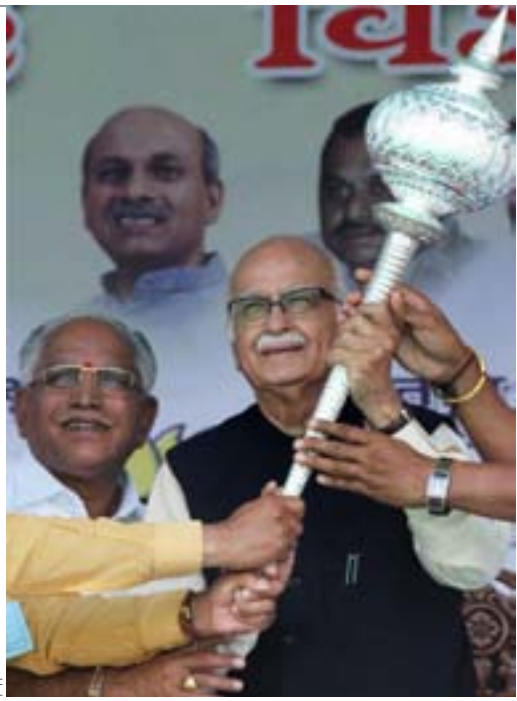
Senior leaders in the BJP averred that it was too early to make a definitive judgment on the Yeddyurappa government – the BJP's first-ever government in the South. "This is a national election and it should be decided on national issues. Why should the performance of a State government or regional issues be used to judge how the BJP will run the country?" said a leader.

In the Assembly elections of May 2008, the BJP won 110 of the 224 seats (it increased the tally to 115 after a round of byelections and poaching a few legislators from the opposition). The party draws ample support from the Lingayat community, which feels that Yeddyurappa, a Lingayat, was unjustly robbed of his chance to become the Chief Minister by the JD(S), the BJP's coalition partner in the previous government.

The Congress does not believe that the BJP was able to turn this sympathy, seen during the Assembly elections, into a consolidated vote bank. Explained Mallikarjuna Kharge, the Congress candidate in Gulbarga and until recently the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president: "Some voters may prefer to stay on with the BJP, but what we have seen in the last nine months is that the Congress has improved its position and won back many of its traditional voters, especially those among the economically backward sections, Dalits, the minorities, and even Vokkaligas and Lingayats. We have explained to the people the good work done by the UPA government in the past five years in areas such as the economy and law and order and the measures it initiated such as the loan-waiver schemes for farmers, financial assistance to minorities and other weaker sections, subsidised fertilizers and increased allocation for education and health. The people have also realised that the BJP, for all its claims, is nowhere near being a value-based party."

Former Chief Minister M. Veerappa Moily, who is contesting in Chickballapur, is optimistic about the Congress' chances. "Though the choice of candidates for certain constituencies will cost us some seats, it would not be surprising if we win over 18 seats. The people have realised the folly of coalition arrangements. They want single-party rule and only the Congress has the required experience to provide that," he said.

Yeddyurappa has a tough job in hand. A score below 18, the number of seats the BJP won in 2004, will be seen as a personal failure of the Chief Minister. However, the BJP has enough cash to spend and has a large number of party workers who are for the first time reaping the rewards of being part of the ruling party.



PTI

B.S. YEDDYURAPPA, Karnataka Chief Minister, with L.K. Advani at an election rally in Belgaum on April 6.

K. MURALI KUMAR

H.D. DEVE GOWDA, former Prime Minister and JD(S) supremo.

The inability of the Congress and the JD(S) to come together in order to consolidate the secular vote has also helped the BJP. In the few seats where the JD(S) either officially withdrew from the contest or put up weak candidates in a purely unofficial arrangement, the BJP was in a tizzy since the minorities would vote for the Congress rather than the BJP. Commenting on the reluctance of the JD(S) to join hands with the Congress, a senior Congress leader said that was because "Deve Gowda has his own arrangements at the national level".

Ironically, the Congress in Karnataka is today run by leaders who were once part of the united Janata Dal or its various avatars; some were even close followers of JD(S) leader and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda. KPCC president R.V. Deshpande, Kuruba leader Siddaramaiah, B.L. Shankar, V.S. Ugrappa, M.P. Prakash and C.M. Ibrahim had all been part of the Janata Dal.

But with a number of them now being bitterly opposed to Deve Gowda and his family, an alliance between the

ANDHRA PRADESH

Chiranjeevi factor

THE political script of film actor Konidella Chiranjeevi seems to have gone awry, judging by the performance of his party in the first phase of polling, in Telangana and north coastal Andhra Pradesh.

The Praja Rajyam does not appear to be the blockbuster that Chiranjeevi, the "megastar", promised it would be when he launched the party in Tirupati in August 2008. It looks like a substandard remake of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

The Praja Rajyam may end up in the third place after the ruling Congress and the "grand alliance" (*mahakootami*) comprising the TDP, the Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Communist Party of India.

The Praja Rajyam's strength lies in the coastal Andhra districts where elections will be held in the second phase along with the Rayalaseema region. Chiranjeevi enjoys a mass following among the youth and the Kapu community to which he belongs. The party is seen as "a spoiler".

A year ago, Chiranjeevi was seen as a messiah by sections that yearned for a change. His slogan of ushering in "social justice" and "change" appealed to them. His party promised to give the weaker sections a greater share of the political cake by allotting them the ticket for at least 100 Assembly seats. It also promised to root out corruption, provide better livelihood opportunities, and bring about radical socio-economic changes.

"Development," the party said, was "a chimera" as Andhra Pradesh ranked 10th among the 15 big States in terms of Human Development Index. It claimed that egocentric approaches of leaders had deceived the marginalised and that welfare schemes had been launched to subserve the interests of politicians. On the issue of social justice, the party observed that except for two years, when a leader from a Scheduled Caste was the Chief Minister, the reins of government had been held by the forward castes for 50 years. Of the 396 Ministers who took the oath between 1956 and 2008, roughly 70 per cent were from the upper castes, it said. Equal status and opportunities were still denied to 80 per cent of the people, the party stated.

This laudable vision, it appeared,

NOAH SEELAM/AFP

CHIRANJEEVI WITH SON Ram Charan inaugurating a "railway procession" in Hyderabad on April 11. The party's symbol is the rail engine.

two parties has always seemed unlikely. A senior Congress leader said that for almost 15 years, Moily, Oscar Fernandes, Margaret Alva and Janardhana Poojary had been the eyes and ears of the Congress high command in Karnataka; the fate of most Congress workers was decided based on their reports.

For the Congress, the entry of the erstwhile Janata Dal leaders into its fold has meant that a few loyalists had to be sidelined. The party is on the verge of replacing Kharge, a Dalit who has been with the party for 40 years, as the Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly with Siddaramaiah – a move that is bound to infuriate many loyal party workers. But that is the price that the Congress has to pay for roping in Siddaramaiah, who wields considerable clout in his Kuruba community, which accounts for around 6 per cent of the State's electorate. Moily, however, felt that the entry of leaders such as Siddaramaiah had "helped the Congress".

Though the JD(S) has considerable strength among voters in the old Mysore areas (especially Hassan, Tumkur, Mandya and Bangalore Rural), in other areas of the State, especially in the northern and coastal regions, it finds it tough to break into Congress or BJP bastions. An exception is Koppal, where JD(S) leader Iqbal Ansari appears to be giving the BJP sleepless nights. The JD(S) campaign, besides stressing on the failures of the Yeddyurappa government and the attacks on churches and women, has highlighted the achievements of the 20-month-old H.D. Kumaraswamy government.

Kumaraswamy, Deve Gowda's son, ran a coalition government with the BJP. Said a JD(S) leader: "Kumaraswamy is our most popular leader. He knows the political situation, and unlike his father acts according to the situation. He is not rigid. We lost many

would impress voters as the Congress is seen as a party dominated by Reddys and the TDP by Kammas. But, Chiranjeevi had other ideas. He entrusted prime responsibilities of the party to his two actor-brothers, "Power Star" Pavan Kalyan and Nagendra Babu, and appointed his brother-in-law and film producer Allu Aravind its general secretary.

Discontent brewed within the party. Party leaders felt there was a complete lack of transparency in the selection of candidates. C. Anjaneya Reddy, a retired IPS officer and vice-president of the Praja Rajyam, and Parakala Prabhakar, the spokesperson of the party, resigned from their posts. Prabhakar contradicted the claim that at least 38 nominees belonged to the Backward Classes. Several unsuccessful ticket aspirants accused the leadership of collecting money for issuing the ticket. The initial euphoria gave way to disappointment as many felt that the party was being run like a family-owned business. In several places, disgruntled party men attacked Praja Rajyam offices, causing confusion even in the coastal districts.

Chiranjeevi, in spite of being a debutant in politics, has been making politically correct statements on sensitive issues such as Telangana, and matching the promises of his rivals sop for sop, like free power supply to farmers for 10 hours every day. He has promised a package of essential food items at Rs.100 every month – 25 kg of rice, 1 kg each of dal, cooking oil and salt, and 500 gm of tamarind.

The party has said it will respect public opinion and hasten necessary legislative processes for the creation of a separate State of Telangana. But, going by the trend of polling in Telangana on April 16, the party may not make a deep dent on the Congress and TDP votes in the region.

In fact, the Praja Rajyam and the TDP will have to contend with the latest twist given by Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy to the Telangana issue after polls concluded in the region. Reddy, who has the reputation of being the only leader who is not pro-Telangana by conviction, asked the voters of Rayalaseema and Andhra to be cautious of the TRS and the TDP. He warned that if these parties came to power, people of other regions would become "aliens" in Hyderabad and would find it difficult to conduct business in a peaceful atmosphere. He also cautioned that pro-Telangana activists would not allow water to flow into the Rayalaseema region.

S. Nagesh Kumar

voters and the 2008 Assembly elections because of Deve Gowda's reluctance to hand over power to the BJP. We pleaded with him, saying that we could pull down the BJP government whenever we wanted. But Deve Gowda did not relent."

The JD(S) has put up no candidates in the Shimoga, Bellary, Dharwad and Chikkodi constituencies. And much to its chagrin, its candidate for Bagalkot withdrew in favour of the BJP. The party has also given the Mangalore and Udupi-Chikamagalur seats to its Third Front partners.

Explaining the absence of JD(S) candidates in some constituencies, Basavaraj Horatti, a senior JD(S) leader and former Minister, said that the party did not want to waste time and money on seats that it did not stand a chance to win. "Today the trend is for candidates to ask the party for funds, as they don't want to fight the elections on their own strength. During the last Assembly elections, we spent a lot of money."

Deve Gowda has been non-committal about the role he will play or the stance of the Third Front in the post-election situation. All that he has repeatedly said is that "the regional parties will play a key role after the elections". □

Special Subscription Offer!

News-stand price
Rs. 20/- per issue

Postal Subscription Rates - Inland

Term	You Pay (Rs.)	Saving
Half Yearly (13 Issues)	200	23%
Annual (26 Issues)	350	33%
Two Years (52 Issues)	650	38%
Three Years (78 Issues)	925	41%

Write to : Subscription Division, Circulation Department, Frontline, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002.
Ph: 044-2858 9060 / 2841 0643
e-mail: subs@thehindu.co.in

To subscribe online log on to **www.frontline.in**

Yes, I am interested in subscribing to Frontline, for a period of ☐ year(s). I am enclosing Rs. ..... by Cheque* or D.D. drawn in favour of Kasturi & Sons Ltd., payable at Chennai. *Add Rs. 10/- for non-Chennai cheques.

Name: .....
Address: .....
.....
.....
.....
Pin: .....
Ph: .....
Mobile: .....
E-mail: .....
Signature: .....

FRONTLINE
Leading the debate since 1984

Taking no chances

While the Modi factor plays a significant role in Gujarat, Raj Thackeray's MNS can turn out to be a spoiler in the third phase of voting in Maharashtra.

Narendra Modi's "development **agenda" can help the BJP win a** good number of seats. Terrorism, resettlement of slum-dwellers and infrastructure development are among the key issues in Mumbai.

GUJARAT

MODI MYTH

By Anupama Katakam in Ahmedabad

NARENDRA MODI = BJP. That is how it is in Gujarat. Such is the Chief Minister's hold over the State that even if the party appears a bit lost on the national stage, it may still win a significant number of seats in Gujarat solely on the strength of the Modi factor. People vote Modi and, therefore, the BJP. The party leadership has so much faith in Modi that it has put him in charge of 78 Lok Sabha seats – 48 in Maharashtra, 26 in Gujarat, two in Goa and two in Daman, Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli.

PTI

AT AN ELECTION rally of Chief Minister Narendra Modi in Balasinor on April 14.

Modi claims that the party will win 22 seats in Gujarat. Political observers, however, believe the figure may be closer to 16-17. In the last election, the BJP won 14 seats and the Congress 12. It was a very slim margin, considering the fact that the BJP has been winning the general elections with significant margins (20 seats in 1999).

Therefore, Modi is taking no chances. When the BJP's list of candidates was announced, it was obvious he had attempted to put together a winning formula. To begin with, not many of the previous candidates were given the party ticket. In choosing the candidates, Modi has taken into account a combination of factors: loyalty to him, caste identity, and the candidate's position in the power structure of the constituency. He has also picked a few persons with dubious backgrounds, which, observers say, could indicate his desperation.

"The BJP will gain a substantial number of seats. Perhaps not as many as in 1999 but definitely a reckonable figure," says Achyut Yagnik of the Centre for Social Knowledge and Action, an Ahmedabad-based non-governmental organisation working with vulnerable communities.

"Over the past few years, Modi has managed to appeal to every level in Gujarat. Earlier, he was just popular with the middle class and the affluent sections. He has worked hard on the rural population by understanding the caste and community dynamics. The minority population will never trust him and he makes little effort to woo this section," says Yagnik.

As in the previous elections, it will be a straight fight between the Congress and the BJP. In spite of a general discontent with the two parties, a third front has not emerged in the State. The Congress, it is felt, should have tried to re-establish itself in the past five years since it had won a fair number of seats in 2004.

"Unfortunately, the Congress is just too weak in the State. It has no structure, no method of functioning and no presence as an opposition party. Yet, it is an election machine. In the run-up to the polls, the party suddenly comes alive and gives the BJP a run for its money," says Yagnik.

For instance, the Congress has positioned Suresh Patel against L.K. Advani in the Gandhinagar constituency. Suresh Patel is influential in the Patel community, which has a massive presence in Ahmedabad. However, what could upset the calculations of the Congress or the BJP is the presence of the Bahujan Samaj Party, which has a following among the Kolis in the coastal belt and in the tribal areas.

No region in the State can claim to be the pocket borough of any particular party because of the frequent migration of candidates between parties. Any election here is mainly on the basis of the personality of the candidate rather than the party to which he or she belongs.

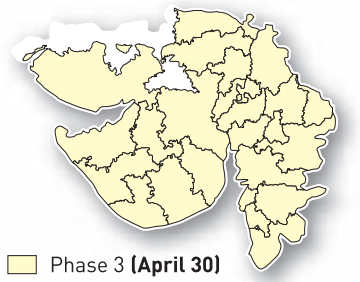
Modi has developed a multi-pronged strategy in the course of becoming a popular figure in Gujarat politics. His Hindutva politics continues to appeal to the right-wing Gujarati middle class and affluent sections. He has, however, attempted to play it down of late as he realises that it will not work at a national level.

Modi launched the "Vibrant Gujarat" programme to convert the State into a leading investment destination. As part of this, Modi promised to create infrastructure that matches global standards. The idea has appealed to the middle-income groups and the rich. The urban poor and the rural populace, however, are sceptical.

"Can you see anything vibrant about our locality or our employment situation?" asks Noor Banu Sayed of Citizen Nagar, a colony which was created in the wake of the 2002 post-Godhra riots. Located near the city's largest garbage dumping ground, the colony houses families that lost their homes in the carnage.

"There are no roads in this area. No buses come here. There are no health facilities. One small primary school exists. When the wind blows in this direction, fumes from the garbage dump envelop the colony. Children suffer from respiratory problems because of this," says Noor Banu Sayed. "There is no work for our men. Boys as young as 10 years work in restaurants, earning Rs.20 a day, to feed a family of five at least."

Gujarat | 26 seats

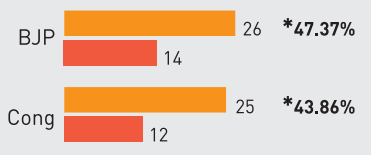


KEY PLAYERS

BJP: Narendra Modi

Congress: Suresh Patel

Lok Sabha party position in 2004



Rajesh Patel, a grocer in Ahmedabad, says "all this Vibrant Gujarat talk is for the rich. The poor and marginalised do not benefit at all." He says, "When we do not get regular and clean water in Ahmedabad, how will the smaller cities and villages get it?"

On the other hand, Shailesh Shah, owner of a three-star hotel in Vadodara, says the Modi government's aggressive economic development programme has indeed benefited him. He has experienced a significant rise in business in the past year. In order to further his economic development agenda, Modi offered Gujarat on a plate to the Tata group to set up its small-car project. Modi believes that the Tatas have endorsed Gujarat as an ideal destination for Indian entrepreneurs. Now industrialists such as Sunil Mittal of Bharti Telecom and Anil Ambani of the Anil Dhirubhai Ambani Group have started openly supporting Modi and even looking at him as a future Prime Minister.

"It is a shame that people of this calibre have forgotten what he did in 2002," says Cedric Prakash, director of Prashant: Centre for Human Rights, Justice and Peace.

Modi is trying to distance himself from the carnage to gain legitimacy in the West. "These corporate honchos are playing right into his hands. If Modi has land to give away, then let him give it to us. We can build a school or a hospital," says Prakash. "How many jobs can a car plant create?"

Prakash says the minority communities are persecuted in the State. The poor are neglected. There is no freedom of expression. Liberal thinking is not allowed. For instance, films such as *Parzania* and *Firaaq*, which deal with communal issues, were not released for viewing. Self-styled moral police have attacked artists in Vadodara and Ahmedabad alleging obscenity in their works. "Why would anyone want to support a man who runs a State like this?" asks Prakash.

During the past few years, Modi has worked hard to improve his image. So much so that he has convinced journalists, particularly in the West, that he is the new face of India, that he was responsible for Gujarat becoming one of the top three States of India.

Debunking this impression, Dipankar Gupta, a sociology professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, writes in a paper titled "Credit Misplaced": "In the years 1994-2001, Gujarat's state domestic product registered a growth average of between 10 and 13 per cent. At the tail end of this period Modi stepped in as Chief Minister. What then has Modi done that is so special?"

Gupta says, "this State was already among the top three in India by 1990. It took Gujarat 20 years after it was created in 1960 to climb up from the eighth rank to the third spot. Twenty years of hard work, led primarily by Congress governments, it may be added. Over 35 per cent of its infrastructural augmentation for power generation happened between 1995

and 2000. If Gujarat today can show off its treasure chest, it should gratefully remember its pre-Modi past."

According to Gupta, Modi was shrewd enough to realise this and use the growth to his advantage. "Modi was read as a one-talent wonder, good at leading riots from the front, but little else. Hence, Gujarat would soon show negative economic figures and, before long, its heirloom would be up for sale. But when that did not happen, Modi's skills at book-keeping, rather than bloodletting, began to draw attention."

COMMUNAL ISSUES

"I think by arresting Maya Kodnani, a Minister convicted for leading the rioters in 2002, the BJP tried to make some attempt to assure us it was doing something," says Rasheeda Ansari, an activist who lives in Juhanagar, another riot refugee settlement. "For so many years she has been roaming free. Now, suddenly, just before the election you arrest her?"

Approximately 1,044 people died in Gujarat in the communal violence perpetrated by the saffron brigade in 2002. Modi has been acquitted of any involvement in the riots. There are few signs of justice having been meted out to the riot victims. Muslims and Christians have been targeted consistently since 2002. Gujarat, a State traditionally known to welcome visitors, is now highly polarised. In fact, in cities such as Ahmedabad, Muslim and Hindus live in separate colonies.

"They think we are all terrorists. Any proper Muslim will tell you terrorists have no religion," says Khatoon Bibi of Citizen Nagar. "We have always voted the Congress but even that party has not done anything for us. The biggest problem is that there is no work. Besides, look at our living conditions," she says, pointing to the squalor. "Forget Muslims, no one does anything for the poor."

"Now the women have to earn a living. My neighbour makes Rs.5 for a dozen *rakhi*s she strings. She makes Rs.20-25 a day. With that she buys foodstuffs. Her husband cannot find work anywhere. If someone gets us out of this misery, then we might see a point in voting," she says.

MAHARASHTRA

CLOSELY WATCHED

By Lyla Bavadam

UNLIKE the rest of Maharashtra, where the battle is mainly between the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party and Shiv Sena-BJP combines, the third and final phase of polling will see some serious competition from contenders such as the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Samajwadi Party. The seats that go to the polls on April 30 are Mumbai South, Mumbai South Central, Mumbai North, Mumbai North West, Mumbai North Central, Mumbai North East, Thane, and the newly created Palghar, Bhiwandi and Kalyan, which came into being after the delimitation exercise.

The main factors that will influence this phase of polling are security measures; infrastructure development; slum rehousing; delimitation of constituencies; and the creation of Raj Thackeray's MNS. Predictably, security and prevention of terrorist activities are high on the agenda of candidates, and promises range from cutting defence expenditure by manufacturing arms in India, to autonomy and better training for the police force to the setting up of a National Security Guard centre in Mumbai.

PTI

RAJ THACKERAY, THE Maharashtra Navnirman Sena chief.

Delimitation has evened out the numbers, especially in the Mumbai constituencies. Every constituency has about 16 to 19 lakh voters. Constituencies now have mixed populations of castes and communities, and the affluent and the poor, which should force candidates to move away from the politics of religion. However, caste and community factors will continue to play a role in Thane and Kalyan.

Thane has traditionally been a saffron fortress and parties have always fielded Brahmin candidates here, though this time the fielding of an Other Backward Classes Agari candidate has served to strengthen the caste factor. In Kalyan, the large number of North Indians have vowed to give a fitting reply to the Sena and the MNS for their attacks on them.

As far as the MNS is concerned, Raj Thackeray's goal seems to be not so much to win as to play the role of the spoiler. A senior Sena leader described the MNS as a "fly buzzing around the tiger's head". For Raj, these polls are an opportunity to test the waters before the Assembly elections to be held later this year.

Mumbai South, one of the wealthiest constituencies in the country, is home to the financial capital's movers and shakers. Conversely, it is no stranger to terror attacks, having faced them from 1993. The Sena candidate hopes to win the seat on the basis of the work done by the party during 26/11. If, the Sena loses this seat, which it wrested from the BJP, its bargaining power in the Assembly elections will drop.

Delimitation also plays a big role in Mumbai South because less affluent neighbourhoods have been included in this area and the number of registered voters has shot up from 7.5 lakhs in 2004 to 19 lakhs. Milind Deora, the sitting Congress MP and son of Union Petroleum Minister Murli Deora, will benefit from the support of the affluent, while the hopes of the Sena's Mohan Rawle are pinned on the lower middle-class areas. Many are Maha-

PUNIT PARANJPE/REUTERS

MILIND DEORA (LEFT), the Congress candidate for Mumbai South, with actor Salman Khan at a campaign rally on April 12.

rashtrian areas but Milind Deora says, "People don't vote for divisive parties. They vote for progress and I have done a lot in these five years."

Milind Deora's belief that voters choose productivity rather than community was proved in 2004 when long-standing MP Manohar Joshi from the Sena was unseated by Congressman Eknath Gaikwad in Mumbai South Central. About 50 per cent of the voters in this constituency are Maharashtrian, but with the inclusion of two areas after delimitation, a large number of Dalits and Muslims entered into the 15-lakh-strong voting population. Gaikwad is expected to retain the seat. The Dharavi slum falls in this constituency and Gaikwad's promise of 300-square-foot permanent houses under the Slum Redevelopment Scheme will appeal to the voters, many of whom are Dalits, like him.

Ram Naik, the BJP veteran of Mumbai North, refuses to hang up his gloves. Naik lost his seat in 2004 to the Congress candidate, actor Govinda, after holding it for five terms. This time around Naik faces Sanjay Nirupam of the Congress and the MNS' Shirish Parkar Issues of concern to his voters are "mainly housing and suburban rail travel" though the attacks on North Indians will be an important issue here as in Kalyan and Thane.

The seat seems to be a sure win for Naik since the largely Maharashtrian and Gujarati voters are unlikely to be drawn to Nirupam, and Parkar is far too much of a novice to be a threat to Naik. Nirupam is banking on the votes of the North Indians. But there is no reason why they will not vote in favour of Naik. Delimitation has also worked well for Naik. The constituency has 16 lakh voters and those areas that voted against Naik last time are no longer part of the newly defined Mumbai North. He will, however, have to be wary of the slum voters, who form about 44 per cent of his constituency, for he supported the eviction of old slums on forest land.

Ever since actor-turned-politician Sunil Dutt fought from Mumbai North Central the seat has been in the public eye. Sitting MP and Dutt's daughter Priya Dutt has held the seat for two terms and hopes to come out on top against her rivals, Mahesh Jethmalani of the BJP and Shilpa Sarpotdar of the MNS. Shilpa is the daughter-in-law of Madhukar Sarpotdar, the Sena MP who was convicted last year for inciting violence during the 1992-93 post-Babri Masjid riots in Mumbai.

Though Priya Dutt's main concern will be Mahesh Jethmalani, the fight will actually be a three-cornered one because the MNS will have to be taken seriously by the BJP. Like Mumbai South, this area too has a wide diversity of voters. About 74 per cent of the votes will come from the slums though Priya Dutt will possibly find friends here because her father had opposed demolitions and evictions, often flying in the face of the law.

With 30 per cent of the city's major infrastructure projects under construction here, Mumbai North East is one to be watched. This is the only Mumbai seat that the NCP will be contesting. Clearly, the Congress had the upper hand this time when it came to seat-sharing and the NCP had to be content with just one seat. The NCP's Sanjay Patil will be up against the BJP's two-time MP Kirit Somaiya and the MNS' Shishir Shinde. Shinde is best known for pouring tar on the Wankhede Stadium's cricket pitch in order to prevent the Pakistani team from playing there, when he was in the Shiv Sena.

The candidature of Shalini Thackeray in Mumbai North West exposes the hypocrisy of the MNS. Giving the ticket to Shalini, a Punjabi who married into the Thackeray family, does not trouble the anti-North Indian conscience of the MNS. The 40-year-old is up against some veterans – the Sena's Gajanan Kirtikar, the Congress' Gurudas Kamat and the S.P.'s Abu Azmi.

Kamat's campaign strategy is a reflection of the state of politics in Maharashtra. He brushes off the competition, saying that he will remind his Maharashtrian voters that they continue to live in chawls and slums while their Sena leaders are *crorepatis*. His North Indian voters will hear how he has consistently opposed the MNS. And his Muslim voters will be told that the S.P. has tied up with Kalyan Singh, who supported the Babri Masjid demolition. The other seat in which the Muslim vote will play a determining role is Bhiwandi. Oddly, no party has deployed a strong candidate here. □

Music in stone

THE Madurai Meenakshi temple is not only "poetry in stone" (April 24) but also music in stone because one can play all the seven notes on one of the stone pillars in the temple.

It was rightly chosen one of the seven wonders in the country by NDTV. It has many mini wonders inside. If the Golden Lotus Tank reminds one of the greatness of Tamil history, the statues of 64 Nayanmars reflect Saiva spirituality.

A. JACOB SAHAYAM
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Election 2009

THE Cover Story with election reports from various States reflected the ground realities and captured the nation's mood ("The Indian Open", April 24). The issue of April 10 gave the readers an insight into the real issues before the people.

SIDDHARTH CHATURVEDI
LUCKNOW

THE 15th Lok Sabha election is certainly going to defy all predictions, with a swarm of regional parties forming an alliance with the Left as the nucleus, testing the waters. Also, the Congress' decision to go it alone at the national level has led to the development of new alliances and equations in U.P. and Bihar. Sharad Pawar's NCP is also inching closer to the Third Front, which is a setback to the Congress. Similarly, the BJD's decision to snap ties with the BJP and join the Third Front, and Nitish Kumar's quiet moves are clear indications of the current political flux.

Every party is only interested in making its manifesto more attractive than that of others by coming up with promises and offers of freebies that are difficult to keep. The people continue to be taken for a ride election after election.

K.R. SRINIVASAN
SECUNDERABAD

KUDOS for bringing the real issues into focus during General Election 2009. But the major political parties are fighting shy of these issues as all of them are responsible for the current debacle in education, agriculture, health and other important sectors. So if these parties highlight India's dismal record with regard to health indicators, for instance, it will be self-defeating for them.

ANKUR GARG,
CHANDAUSI, U.P.

THE Cover Story "The lawless and the law" has popped up a million-dollar question. I fully endorse the statement that "the law does not limit the E.C.'s power to issue a binding directive to the BJP to refrain from fielding Varun Gandhi in Pilibhit". India is a democratic nation and people have the right to voice their views, but what was the necessity for Varun Gandhi to make such an inflammatory speech when the whole nation is trying hard to maintain unity of all faiths in the context of increasing terrorist activities? In this situation, an attempt to divide the country with such speeches would do immense damage to its secular fabric.

VINOD C. DIXIT
AHMEDABAD

THE people of Uttar Pradesh are bored with the same manifesto promises presented by parties in every election. The parties should be more innovative. Now people vote on the basis of the parties' performance while in power. The parties try their best to win people's support only during elections.

ASHISH K. CHOUDHARY
RANCHI

Dalits

THE story of continuing untouchability in Tamil Nadu is disturbing ("Cracks in the wall", April 24). The photograph of a graveyard within the premises of a Dalit's house was a sad revelation of the caste prejudices in Tamil society.

The author has aptly credited the CPI(M) and the Tamil Nadu Untouchability Eradication Front with some useful interventions to secure the rights and privileges of Dalits. But the irony is that much of the print and electronic media and the articulate sections of the intelligentsia say that such movements "disturb" the otherwise peaceful social environments. The champions of status quo thus contribute to polluting young minds.

S.V. VENUGOPALAN
CHENNAI

Meenakshi temple

THANK YOU for the article on the newly renovated Madurai Meenakshi temple. Your readers would have been better served by a schematic diagram showing the layout of the temple.

While the authorities in charge of the restoration have taken a lot of pains to do the right thing, it boggles the mind to see that they have cemented the temple tank. Apart from being an integral aesthetic feature of any large South Indian temple, these artificial ponds help in harvesting rainwater. They ensure that the aquifers in the area do not run dry.

VIJAY VENKATARAMAN
CAMBRIDGE,
MASSACHUSETTS

ANNOUNCEMENT

Letters, whether by surface mail or e-mail, must carry the full postal address and the full name, or the name with initials.

Parties speak

Performance, promises and prospects: A comparison of the election manifestos of the Congress, the BJP and the CPI(M). BY VENKATESH ATHREYA

The CPI(M) manifesto argues that the Congress/UPA policies of liberalisation and privatisation have **greatly harmed the interests of rural** and urban workers, peasants, artisans, small entrepreneurs, women, students and youth.

THE election manifestos of the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) make interesting reading, both individually and in mutual comparison (see pages 131 to 134). It is a reflection of the prevalent paradigm of discourse in the media that these manifestos have received little careful attention. A major section of the media in all forms has tended to focus on high decibel verbal duels among key protagonists in rival formations rather than look at the substantive issues facing the electorate.

The Congress, facing the electorate after five years in office as the leader of a coalition and having lost quite a few of the coalition partners in the run-up to the elections, is strident about its performance, dismissive of its rivals and opponents and very generous in its poll promises.

The BJP, weakened by the exit of many erstwhile allies but having had the advantage of releasing its manifesto well after the Congress, seeks to outdo the Congress in terms of promises while also bringing on board its core Hindutva agenda.

The CPI(M) manifesto provides a systematic critique of the ideology and performance of both the national parties, spells out the role of the Left during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime and sets out its policies on a number of important issues before the people. It does not follow the Congress and the BJP in providing a long list of promises but sets out an agenda of what it would fight for, and seeks popular support for this agenda.

The Congress manifesto makes a series of what come across as somewhat arrogant assertions. It claims that it is "*... the only party that is forward-looking, the only party that believes a better future is the right of every Indian*". Claiming that it is the bulwark against communalism, linguistic chauvinism, regional parochialism and casteism, the manifesto dismisses the BJP as narrow, divisive and communal.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was the Left that enabled the Congress to be in power for most of the last five years, the manifesto accuses the Left of being responsible for the electoral growth of the BJP, an accusation inconsistent with the fact that the BJP has grown mostly in the Congress-ruled States. It lists as the achievements of the Congress the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and the Right to Information Act (RTI), though it is well known that these laws were the result of struggles of the Left and other social movements and that their final forms reflect to a considerable extent the inputs of these forces.

It highlights increases in public expenditure on health and education, the farm loan waiver, Bharat Nirman, the National Rural Health Mission

S. SUBRAMANIUM

CONGRESS PRESIDENT SONIA Gandhi and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh releasing the party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections in New Delhi on March 24.

(NRHM) and the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), all of which taken together imply a step-up in government expenditure. It is, however, deafeningly silent on its pursuit of liberalisation measures in the areas of finance and foreign investment as well as health and education. It claims to have done a lot for the benefit of weaker sections such as tribal people, Dalits and women, and to have been impartial and generous to State governments.

Significantly, it does not list the nuclear deal with the United States as one of its achievements though it talks of civil nuclear agreements having been entered into with many countries, allegedly "entirely on our terms". Predictably, it claims that the Indian economy has been resilient in the face of the global economic crisis and attributes this "resilience" to Congress policies – more specifically to Nehru-Indira-Rajiv policies. The repeated invoking of a few leaders – mostly belonging to the Nehru family – is a striking feature of the manifesto, and one that one would hardly associate with election manifestos in most modern democracies, especially those of the parliamentary type.

The Congress manifesto promises faster and more inclusive growth if returned to power, conceding implicitly that the growth so far has not been sufficiently inclusive. It also promises "at least 100 days of work at a real wage of Rs.100 a day for everyone as an entitlement under the NREGA". It makes a pledge "... to enact a Right to Food law that guarantees access to sufficient food for all people", but qualifies this immediately by the phrase "particularly the most vulnerable sections of society". It adds by way of elaboration that "...every family living below the poverty line either in rural or urban areas will be entitled, by law, to 25 kg of rice or wheat a month at Rs.3 a kg." This hardly inspires confidence, given the way the government has played around with definitions and measurement of poverty to the detriment of the poor.

These promises are followed by a series of promises pertaining to education, health, agriculture and farmers, small and medium industry, weaker sections, local body funding, and so on. The rather disingenuous claim is made that, while rejecting blind privatisation, "...the Congress believes that *the Indian people* [*sic*] have every right to own part of the shares of public sector companies while the government retains majority shareholding"(emphasis added). It is difficult to see the *aam admi* making a bid for a nice chunk of Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited shares. On energy, the manifesto promises "*a very significant increase in the share of nuclear power, both through domestic and imported technology, which has now been made possible by the civil nuclear agreements*". This is a recipe for disaster, given the exceptionally high costs of nuclear power based on imported plants.

R.V. MOORTHY

L.K. ADVANI at the release of the BJP's election manifesto in New Delhi on April 3.

BJP'S ROMANTIC VISION

The BJP manifesto has a long preface that abounds in sweeping claims about India's past that need not detain us, though they serve as a useful pointer to the perspective of the BJP being mired in a rather romantic vision of India's past. In its substantive part, the key slogans of the manifesto are "good governance, development and security". Good governance is assumed to hinge on the need for a "...determined leader who can restore Government's credibility and the people's confidence in themselves". No prizes for guessing who, the manifesto says, fills the bill.

The manifesto devotes a lot of space to the issue of security and proposes a wholly law-and-order-driven approach to tackle external and internal threats to security. It says that the Prevention of Terrorism Act will be revived and strengthened. It says that the "Chhattisgarh Model" will be applied to counter the Maoists. This is a reference to the notorious and thoroughly discredited *Salwa Judum* operations under BJP dispensation in Chhattisgarh. On foreign policy, the manifesto says that the BJP believes in a multipolar world.

Interestingly, the manifesto accuses the Congress of fooling the people on the India-U.S. nuclear deal by claiming that it will light up homes. It points out that nuclear power is enormously expensive. It argues that the deal disempowers India by making it dependent on the U.S. for nuclear supplies and tying India to discriminatory treaties. The manifesto proposes a constitutional amendment making it "...mandatory for the government to seek Parliament's approval/ratification by two-thirds majority before signing any bilateral or multilateral agreement that impinges on India's strategic programmes, territorial integrity and economic interest".

Like the Congress manifesto, the BJP manifesto makes a long list of promises concerning youth, women, Scheduled Castes (S.Cs) and Scheduled Tribes (S.Ts) and also minorities, although it accuses the Congress of using the politics of fear to gain minority support while keeping Muslims underprivileged. There is no shortage either of promises on health, education, welfare of senior citizens, and so on.

The unique agenda of the BJP manifesto surfaces in the very last sec-

tion on "*Preserving our cultural heritage*". This has a strident assertion that the "BJP will not allow anybody to touch the revered Ram Sethu". It also asserts the BJP's commitment to build a Ram temple at Ayodhya, removal of Article 370 and the status it confers on Jammu and Kashmir from the Constitution, "relentless" pursuit of cow protection and cleaning of the "revered" Ganga.

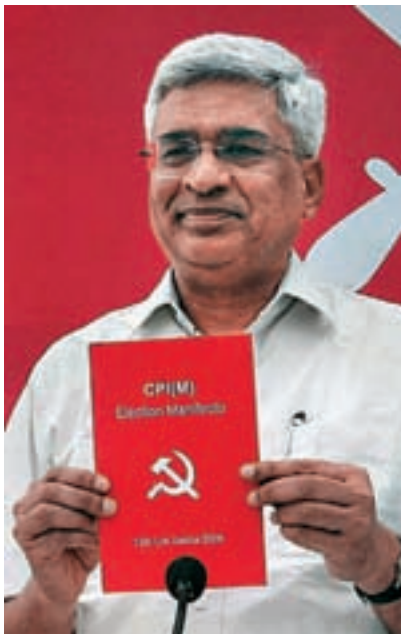
DUBIOUS RECORDS

The rhetoric of "communal" or "economic growth" apart, the promises in both the Congress and the BJP manifestos strain one's credulity, given that both these parties have been in power at the Centre for one or more terms and in a number of States as well over the years. Consider, for instance, the Congress and BJP promises on food security. The Congress promises 25 kg of rice or wheat a month for poor households at Rs.3 a kg, while the BJP promises 35 kg at Rs.2 a kg.

But what was the record of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and UPA governments on food security? The BJP, which now talks of a *universal* public distribution system (PDS), increased the issue price of grain through the *targeted* PDS to the so-called "above poverty line", or APL, households so sharply in 2000 that most APL households left the PDS. As a result, offtake from PDS fell dramatically, stocks with the Food Corporation of India (FCI) rose, and the nation saw the tragedy of 65 million tonnes of grain stocks with the FCI deteriorating while millions starved in the drought years of 2002 and 2003.

Worse, the NDA government exported millions of tonnes of grain at very low prices between July 2002 and September 2003 through private trade. The record of the UPA is not much better. It refused to procure wheat at affordable prices from farmers but allowed private trade – including multinational agribusiness outfits – to corner the wheat output, and ended up importing wheat at much higher prices just a few months later.

The Prime Minister and other spokespersons of the UPA government have, even while the UPA was gifting generous tax reductions and exemptions to the corporate sector, repeatedly called for a reduction of food subsidies, though the food subsidy has never crossed 1 per cent of India's gross domestic product (GDP).



VIJAY KUMAR JOSHI/PTI

CPI(M) GENERAL SECRETARY Prakash Karat releases his party's election manifesto in New Delhi on March 16.

Despite clear evidence that the targeted PDS excludes a large proportion of poor households from access to subsidised grain and that a universal PDS would not be much of a strain on the government's budget, the UPA government has refused to consider the restoration of the universal PDS.

A CRITIQUE OF POLICIES

The CPI(M)'s manifesto is in two parts. The first reviews the performance of the Congress-led UPA government against the commitments under the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP) of that government. The second part sets out the CPI(M)'s policies pertaining to important issues facing the people.

The manifesto argues that the Congress/UPA policies of liberalisation and privatisation have greatly harmed the interests of rural and urban workers, peasants, artisans, small entrepreneurs, women, students and youth. It points out that the agrarian crisis, of which the large number of farmers' suicides is a particularly tragic manifestation, has not abated. It traces the crisis to neoliberal policies that have increased input costs, led to great volatility in output prices, denied farmers adequate institutional credit, raised the real rate of interest, lowered rural development expenditures as a share of the GDP and dismantled the PDS in large parts of the country. It notes that the dismantling of the PDS has led to a large number of poor people being excluded from access to food.

The manifesto highlights the rise in food insecurity that has occurred under both the NDA and the UPA regimes. It also points out that the NDA and the UPA regimes have doled out numerous tax and other concessions to big corporations, Indian and foreign, even while seeking to slash food and other pro-poor subsidies. It reminds the electorate that even as the government claims that inflation has been coming down rapidly in recent weeks and months, the prices of essential commodities, especially food articles, remain prohibitively high for a large segment of the population, both rural and urban.

It castigates the Congress for pursuing foreign policies completely deviating from the promise of mutipolarity in the NCMP. It flays the nuclear deal with the U.S., pointing out that the Congress went ahead with the deal despite the majority opinion in Parliament being against it. Noting the continuity between NDA and UPA foreign policies, it warns the people against the danger of India becoming a junior partner of the U.S. and of the pitfalls of the Congress government's pursuit of the U.S.-Israel-India axis, initiated by the BJP earlier.

Dismissing the claim that the India-U.S. nuclear deal will light up rural homes, it reminds us that the cost of electricity from nuclear power will be a forbidding Rs.8 per unit. It provides a

critique of Congress/UPA policies that violated the spirit of federalism, as for instance, in the terms of reference for the Thirteenth Finance Commission. It argues that the Congress gave parliamentary norms short shrift by extending the monsoon session of 2008 until December and then doing away with the winter session altogether, not wanting to face a confidence vote after manufacturing a majority in July 2008. It points to the telecom and other corruption scams that surfaced during UPA rule and the refusal of the government to order probes into these scams, even as the impression emerged that it was using the Central Bureau of Investigation for partisan purposes.

Turning to the role played by the CPI(M) during UPA rule, the manifesto notes that it was able to intervene effectively, together with other Left and progressive forces, to improve the draft versions of the RTI, the NREGA and the Scheduled Tribes and other Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act so that the final Acts in all these cases were of greater value to the socially and economically vulnerable sections.

The manifesto recalls the role of the party and the Left in stalling many drastic measures of financial liberalisation that the Congress initiated, such as the Banking Regulation (Amendment) Act, which would have facilitated the takeover of Indian private banks by foreign banks, the Bill to increase the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap in insurance to 49 per cent from the present 26 per cent, and the Bill to privatise the management of pension funds. It is now widely recognised that the fact of limited financial liberalisation and the large presence of the public sector in finance have helped moderate the negative impact of the global financial crisis on the Indian economy.

The CPI(M) manifesto is also very critical of the BJP, describing it as "a regressive, backward-looking party based on an obscurantist ideology". It notes that both the BJP and the Congress have pursued the same neoliberal policies over the past 10 years. In addition, the BJP has been rabidly communal, while the Congress has been inconsistent in combating communalism. In the view of the CPI(M), both parties have been following similar foreign policies, pursuing strategic partnership with the U.S., as its subordinate ally.

The Congress manifesto does not list the nuclear deal with the U.S. as one of its achievements.

The CPI(M) manifesto argues for uncompromising secularism.

It proposes an alternative economic policy framework that includes:

- Annual Plan Expenditure amounting to 10 per cent of India's current GDP;
- Halt to further tax concessions to corporates;
- A drive to unearth black money, especially those stashed in Swiss banks and other offshore tax havens;
- Strong regulation of the financial sector and revival of development finance;
- Expanding minimum support price coverage to more crops and reviving commodity boards to set floor prices for commercial crops;
- Ensuring institutional credit to the agricultural sector at a maximum 4 per cent rate of interest;
- Universal PDS and supply of 14 essential commodities including sugar, pulses and edible oils under the PDS;
- Reduction of retail prices of petrol and diesel by cutting customs and excise duties on oil;
- Speedy and comprehensive steps for implementing pro-poor land reforms;
- Strengthening and expansion of the public sector, and no disinvestment and privatisation of profit-making and potentially viable public sector undertakings;
- Protection of domestic industry from indiscriminate lowering of import duties and takeover by foreign companies;
- Encouragement to the private sector to invest in manufacturing and services sectors;
- Prohibition of FDI in retail trade;
- Regulation of domestic corporate retailers;
- Reversing FDI guidelines to prevent backdoor entry of FDI;
- Protecting Indian interests and that of developing countries in the ongoing Doha Round of World Trade Organisation.

The manifesto seeks to strengthen democracy and federalism, including devolution of 50 per cent of tax revenue to the States. It proposes the pursuit of an independent, non-aligned foreign policy, with greater attention to building relations with developing countries and with China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa. It seeks a reworking of the India-U.S. nuclear deal to remove harmful provisions and enable the pursuit of self-reliance in civilian nuclear energy.

It seeks an increase in public expenditure on education and health to 6 per cent and 5 per cent of the GDP respectively. It proposes specific measures to ensure equality for and empowerment of women, S.Cs and S.Ts and minorities. It calls for the expansion of employment guarantee to urban areas as well, providing employment under the NREGS to all those seeking it, and decent minimum wages. The manifesto supports free/open source software and "...promotion of 'knowledge commons' across disciplines such as biotechnology and drug discovery". It also calls for a National Judicial Commission to ensure the accountability of the judiciary, and a Media Council to act as an independent regulatory body.

Taking an overall view, the CPI (M)'s manifesto offers a viewpoint and perspective that is distinctly different from those of the Congress and the BJP. □

What is on offer

Salient features of the election manifestos of three major national parties. COMPILED BY R. VIJAYA SANKAR

	CONGRESS	BJP	CPI(M)
INDUSTRY	AGAINST 'blind privatisation'; to uphold the people's right to own part of the shares of PSUs while the government retains majority shareholding; PSUs in the manufacturing and financial sectors to remain public; to sustain and deepen the revival of manufacturing industry; foreign investment with emphasis on maximising value addition and export potential; policy of attracting private investment for oil exploration to be extended to mineral resources; to ensure highest standards of corporate governance in private companies, especially to protect small investors; 'new deal' for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and for first-generation entrepreneurs, by giving them greater access to collateral-free credit, liberating them from multiplicity of laws and forms and freeing them from the clutches of inspectors; to give the SMEs access to finance, technology, marketing facilities and improved infrastructure.	MASSIVE public sector investments in infrastructure programmes to arrest loss of jobs; full support to the Hindustan Diamond Corporation to help the industry tide over the impact of the global economic crisis; to promote SMEs in the retail sector to generate jobs; reforms to improve productivity and greater capital formation; to impose countervailing restrictions on foreign companies, especially in the services sector; to strengthen regulatory bodies to prevent corporate fraud; to make India proud of Indian products and make Indian brands globally competitive; to make secret ballot compulsory for trade union elections; 'Workers' bank' to deal with the requirements of labour in organised and unorganized sectors; adequate compensation for retrenched labour, with the first option being redeployment; to revive minimum wages and expand safety net for the unorganised sector.	TO strengthen public sector in core and strategic areas; to promote its autonomy and efficiency; to halt privatisation of profit-making PSUs; to encourage SMEs in labour-intensive sectors; to protect traditional industries such as handloom and coir; to prevent takeover of Indian firms by foreigners; to prohibit FDI in the retail sector; to accept foreign capital to build productive capacities and acquire new technology; to amend the SEZ Act to do away with myriad tax concessions and regulate land-use; to halt privatisation of the mining sector. To revise minimum wage and price indices for workers; to implement recommendations of the Standing Committee on Labour on unorganised workers; recognition for trade unions through secret ballot; equal pay for women workers; to recognise anganwadi, rural health and midday meal workers as government employees; to protect the right to strike.
AGRICULTURE	BANK credit for small and marginal farmers at lower rates of interest; interest relief to farmers who repay bank loans on schedule; to make farming profitable; programmes for diversification, agri-processing and rural industrialisation; additional boost to dairying, aquaculture, fisheries, horticulture, and sericulture; to meet the special needs of crops such as tea, coffee, rubber, spices, cashew and coconut; emphasis on wasteland development and afforestation; a comprehensive crop insurance schemes; to examine the feasibility of direct income support to farmers in	TO adopt a national land use policy to regulate and facilitate land management; to amend laws to rectify anomalies in land acquisition; to compensate farmers at market rates for land acquired for infrastructure purposes; not to allow conversion of fertile land for industrial/commercial projects or SEZs. To waive farm loans; to set up a commission to study the debt crisis and find an actionable solution within six months; pension scheme for aged and helpless farmers; to make agriculture profitable; to implement farm income insurance scheme; to promote nature-friendly cultivation and	SPEEDY, comprehensive steps for land reforms; to take over and distribute surplus land above ceiling and hand over cultivable wasteland freely to landless and poor peasant households, with priority to S.Cs and S.Ts; joint pattas and equal land rights to women; to record tenancy and protection of the rights of tenants in all States; new Land Acquisition Act to protect landowners' interest and ensure informed consent of those affected; to prohibit land grab for real estate; to ensure adequate compensation and rehabilitation for all affected. To implement the pro-farmer recommendations of the

	CONGRESS	BJP	CPI(M)
AGRICULTURE	ecologically vulnerable regions; to offer minimum support price and ensure procurement at the doorstep of farmers; to eliminate controls on free movement of farm commodities and on processing farm products; to ensure minimum, market rates for land acquired for industrial projects; to give farmers the option of being stakeholders in such industrial projects; to ensure passage of the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Bill; to amend the Land Acquisition Act to protect the interests of land-owners.	provide incentive for organic farming; to create irrigation facilities for an additional 35 million hectares in five years; to ensure supply of quality power, seeds and other inputs; to strengthen national rural bank and allied services; to invest heavily in agriculture and make the farm sector an equal engine of growth along with industry and services sector; to promote horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture and poultry to generate additional jobs and supplement incomes; not to allow genetically modified seeds.	National Commission on Farmers; to expand MSP coverage to more crops, including oilseeds; to revive commodity boards to set floor prices for commercial crops; to ensure institutional credit for agriculture sector at a maximum rate of 4%; to expand public investment in power supply in rural areas and stop privatisation of electricity; uninterrupted power supply to agriculture; to expand irrigation facilities; to provide high quality inputs at affordable prices through public production and marketing.
EDUCATION	TO provide scholarships or loans without collateral repayable over a long period to students in any recognised institution; to add one model school in every block every year over the next five years; to implement fully the higher education expansion programme of setting up 8 new IITs, 7 new IIMs, 5 new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research, 30 new Central universities, 20 new Indian Institutes of Information Technology and 374 new colleges in educationally deprived districts.	9% of GDP on education by involving the private sector; to remove the digital divide; to strengthen, extend and concretise the SSA; to revitalize midday meal scheme; the local community and parent-teacher associations to decide primary school timings and vacations and make them flexible; universalisation of secondary education; special emphasis on girls' education at secondary level; assistance for national madrassas modernisation programme; new law to make ragging a criminal offence.	PUBLIC expenditure on education at 6% of GDP; to enact Right to Education Bill, with Centre bearing a major part of its financial commitment; to enact law to regulate fees, admissions and curricula in private institutions; no FDI in higher education; to revise pay scales of elementary school teachers; to regularise informal employment in teaching; to ensure democratic rights of students, teachers and non-teaching staff; to make students' union elections mandatory in higher education institutions.
HEALTH	TO implement the National Rural Health Mission with greater sense of urgency; to ensure that every family living below the poverty line is covered by the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, which offers health insurance to poor families, over the next three years; to upgrade district headquarters hospitals to provide quality healthy facilities to all.	A 'HEALTH FOR ALL' scheme through public-private participation; a telephone service for medical emergencies; war against malnutrition; a national authority to regulate private hospitals, nursing homes; private participation is welcome but cannot become a source of unrestrained profit-making; to improve primary, maternal and child health care; to reduce maternal and infant mortality; a vaccination programme against hepatitis; to promote Ayurveda and other alternative therapies; to strengthen and expand the public health system; to bring essential drugs under price control.	TO raise public expenditure on health to 5% of GDP; to strengthen and expand the public health system; to reverse the trend of privatisation of health care through the public-private partnerships; to ensure regular supply of essential medicine through the public health system; to bring all essential drugs under price control; to weed out hazardous formulations of medicines; to revive the public sector in the production of essential drugs and vaccines; to prohibit indiscriminate clinical trials by big pharma companies; to control and regulate clinical trials strictly.

	CONGRESS	BJP	CPI(M)
ENVIRONMENT	TO accord the highest priority to the Ganga River Basin Authority to ensure that development needs are met in an ecologically sustainable manner; to strengthen people's movements that work to protect and preserve the country's bio-resources and ensure their sustainable use; to implement in letter and spirit the National Action Plan for Climate Change within the overall framework of meeting the development aspiration of people for higher economic growth and higher standard of living.	EMPHASIS on energy security and sustainable energy with clear targets for energy efficiency and renewable energy; shift in subsidy from chemical fertilizers and reward farmers who pursue conservation and enhance local crop varieties; to make more effective laws protecting forests and reserve parks; to provide resources to protect forest land and animal reserves; stringent punishment for wilful destruction of forests and killing of wildlife; a permanent task force to protect tigers and lions; separate task forces to protect elephants and to take care of bird sanctuaries; mission mode approach to clean all rivers; to encourage citizens' participation in protecting environment.	TO make environmental impact assessment (EIA) process transparent, accountable and free of vested interests; to review the EIA Notification, 2009; to control emission of greenhouse gases through energy efficient technologies and effective regulation; to promote solar and other non-conventional energy resources; to increase Central allocations for National Calamity Relief Fund; more powers for States to tackle natural disasters; to check pollution of rivers and other water bodies through effective regulation; to implement the Coastal Zone Regulation Act and the Wetlands Regulatory Authority Act to promote the long-term interests of the people and the environment.
SECULARISM & MINORITIES' WELFARE	REITERATES 'unflinching' resolve to combat communalism of all kinds; to ensure the right to compensation and rehabilitation of victims of communal violence; NHRC to monitor investigation and trial in cases of communal violence; to ensure full protection of all constitutional rights of minorities; to increase substantially minorities' representation in public administration; to ensure reservation for minorities in employment and education at the national level; to establish a Wakf Development Corporation, a national Unani university and to double the corpus of the Maulana Azad Educational Foundation; to establish Equal Opportunities Commission.	AGAINST categorisation of communities as it perpetuates "notions of imagined discrimination and victimhood"; to implement policies committed to massive expansion of modern education among Muslims, particularly girls, through a network of schools in public-private partnership programme; capital assistance to new educational projects in low-income minority areas; cash incentives for the education of girls; computer centres in low-income urban areas and most backward districts; to revitalise Ministry of Minority Affairs into a hub for economic projects; to lift community relations from "the morass of misunderstanding"; to set up a permanent interfaith consultative mechanism to build harmony and trust among communities and to hold interfaith dialogue between Hindus and Christians on all aspects of life, including religious conversions.	FOR separation of religion and politics by, if necessary, legal means; a comprehensive law against communal violence; speedy justice and adequate compensation to victims of Gujarat pogrom; implementation of Justice Sri Krishna Commission report; to purge school textbooks of communal bias; to rein in organisations spreading communal hate and attacking minorities; to enforce Protection of Places of Worship Act to prevent raising of disputes over religious places; to form Equal Opportunity Commission to redress discrimination against minorities; to formulate a sub-plan for minorities to implement Sachar recommendations; special initiatives for employment, education and health in districts with Muslim concentration; to include OBC Muslims in OBC quota with specific Statewise allocations; to earmark 15% priority sector lending by banks; subsidised credit to Muslim youth; to promote teaching of Urdu in schools.

	CONGRESS	BJP	CPI(M)
SOCIAL JUSTICE	FREE education for Dalits and Adivasis at primary, secondary and university levels; to pay coaching fees for all entrance exams for at least one lakh S.C./S.T students every year; to increase national scholarships to these sections; to increase allocation under the Special Component Plan for the S.Cs and for the Sub-Plan for tribal people in accordance with their proportion in the population; to continue with the drive to fill job vacancies in the government through direct recruitment of S.Cs and S.Ts; to pursue affirmative active action for S.Cs and S.Ts in the private sector; to provide reservation for economically weaker sections of all communities without prejudice to existing OBC, S.C. and S.T. reservation; preference for S.Cs and S.Ts in awarding government contracts to stimulate entrepreneurial activities among these groups.	TO boost opportunities for entrepreneurship and commerce among Dalits, OBCs and other deprived sections; to deal firmly with those committing atrocities against Dalits and tribal people; special educational facilities through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan; water, health, sanitation for all families and habitations; to create a special component for deprived sections in all development schemes; to set up an 'Extremely Backward Communities Development Bank' to promote skill enhancement through learn-and-earn schemes; to introduce education and job quotas on the basis of economic criteria for all economically weaker sections of society other than S.Cs, S.Ts and OBCs who will continue to enjoy quota benefits; to initiate 'Van Bandhu Kalyan Yojana' at the national level, to be overseen by a 'Tribal Development Authority'.	STRINGENT action against untouchability and atrocities against S.Cs; to increase allocations under the Special Component Plan; a National Programme of Minor Irrigation for Dalit and Adivasi lands; reservation for Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims; a law on reservation in the private sector; to fill backlogs in reserved seats and posts and promotions for S.Cs with a special recruitment drive; to increase scholarships and hostel facilities and curb dropout rates among S.Cs; total liberation and full rehabilitation of scavengers and bonded labour; to regularise contract labour in safai services; to extend OBC reservation to private educational institutions. To fill vacant S.T. posts in government; to protect land rights of Adivasis; to implement fully the Forest Rights Act, 2006; autonomy for tribal compact areas under the Fifth or Sixth Schedule.
FOREIGN POLICY	TO continue to pursue an independent, pro-India foreign policy; to continue to strive for enduring peace and close economic relations with Pakistan and encourage people-to-people contacts if it takes credible action against those responsible for the Mumbai carnage and dismantles the terrorist networks operating from its soil; to help the Sri Lankan government and the ethnic Tamils reach an understanding as envisaged in the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987; to deepen bilateral ties with Bangladesh; support for the legitimate and peaceful aspirations of the long-suffering Palestine people and to urge for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state at the earliest; to deepen further relations with the United States, Russia, China and Japan and European countries.	TO build a multipolar world; to strengthen the strategic partnership with the U.S., without compromising on national interest; to strengthen relations with Arab countries and pursue enhanced cooperation with Israel; to revive the dialogue with China to solve the border dispute; no comprehensive dialogue with Pakistan unless it dismantles the terrorist infrastructure on its soil, actively engages in prosecuting terror elements and organisations, puts an end to the use of cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy, stops using third-country territories to launch terror attacks on India and hands over individuals who committed crimes in India; believes in Sri Lanka's right to deal with terrorism on its soil; at the same time the rights of Tamils must be protected by the government in Colombo.	FOR an independent, non-aligned policy; to revive NAM on a new basis; to improve relations with China; to oppose U.S. military interventions; to distance from U.S.-sponsored 'war on terror'; to promote people-to-people relations with Pakistan and resume India-Pakistan dialogue at a suitable time; diplomatic and political efforts to protect the lives of Tamils in the war zone in Sri Lanka; to work for immediate political settlement based autonomy for Tamil-speaking areas within the framework of united Sri Lanka; to support the Palestinian cause and sever military and security ties with Israel. To review and rework the 123 Agreement with the U.S.; to pursue universal disarmament through the U.N.; to abrogate the Defence Framework Agreement with the U.S. and stop India-U.S. joint military exercises.

MARUTI SUZUKI
Count on us

NON-STOP EXCITEMENT.

The Swift. Technology you'll love to drive.

Pulse-pounding looks wrapped around technology that makes the adrenaline flow. The Swift delivers class leading performance with advanced features that grace luxury cars. It's not for nothing that the Swift continues to rule the roost since its debut. Come, take a test drive and experience India's most exciting car.

Best-in-class Altec 32 Petrol Engine and DDiS Diesel Engine

Integrated Audio System with Steering Mounted Controls

Automatic Climate Control

Tilt Steering

Dual Airbags with ABS & EBD

AVAILABLE IN PETROL & DIESEL

For more information visit www.marutiswift.com

YOU'RE THE FUEL!

SWIFT

*In the premium compact segment.

ANYTIME MARUTI Call 1800 1800 180 (Toll Free), 09910202020

For a Swift test drive SMS **SWIFT** to **53636**

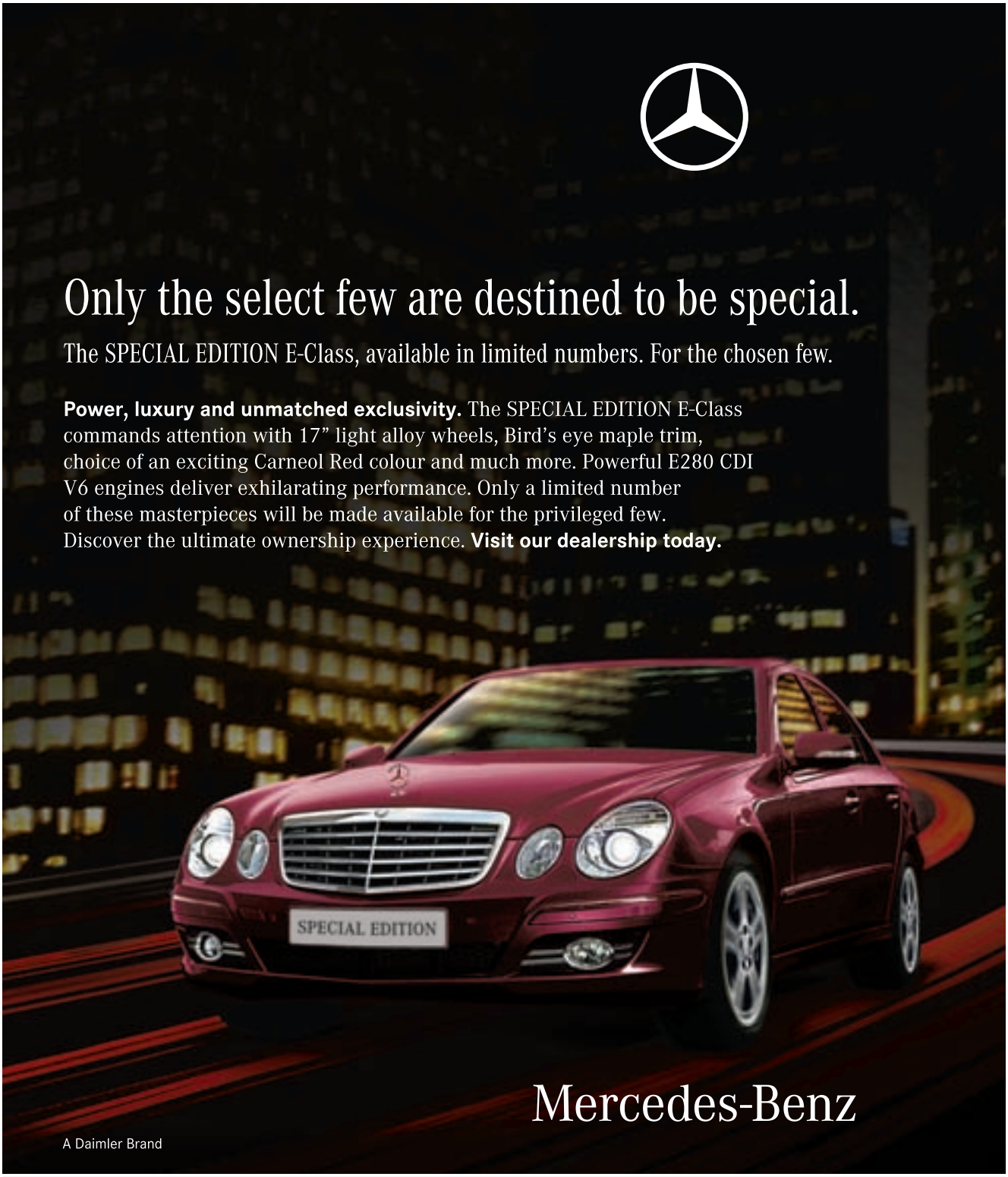
Capital/Swift/220

Published on alternate Saturdays.WPP No.CPMG/AP/SD-15/WPP/2008-2010 & MH/MR/South-180/2009-11.Postal Regn. No.TN/ARD/22/09-11. RNI No.42591/84

Only the select few are destined to be special.

The SPECIAL EDITION E-Class, available in limited numbers. For the chosen few.

Power, luxury and unmatched exclusivity. The SPECIAL EDITION E-Class commands attention with 17" light alloy wheels, Bird's eye maple trim, choice of an exciting Carneol Red colour and much more. Powerful E280 CDI V6 engines deliver exhilarating performance. Only a limited number of these masterpieces will be made available for the privileged few. Discover the ultimate ownership experience. **Visit our dealership today.**



Mercedes-Benz

A Daimler Brand

Mercedes-Benz India Private Limited: E-3, MIDC Chakan - Phase III, Chakan Industrial Area, Kuruli & Nighoje, Tal: Khed, Pune - 410 501 (India) Tel: 02135-673000/395000. e-mail: dccac1@daimler.com, dccac2@daimler.com, **website: www.mercedes-benz.co.in**

NORTH & EAST: DELHI: T&T Motors Ltd. - Connaught Place - 011-41017620-21, **Gurgaon** - 0124–4263060-62, **Okhla** - 011-26821005-06, **West Delhi** -011–41022304-06, **CHANDIGARH: Tai-Pan Traders Ltd.** - 0172- 4375555, **LUDHIANA: Tai-Pan Traders Ltd.** - 0161-4375555, **KOLKATA: Interkrafts** - 033-24483894/5, **WEST: MUMBAI: Auto Hangar (India) Pvt. Ltd. - Prabhadevi** - 022-66123800, **Andheri** - 022-67106660, **Sanghi Motorcar Co.** - 022-23842244, **PUNE: Millennium Motors Pvt. Ltd.** - 020-66085750, **AHMEDABAD:** 0-99229 94792, **SOUTH: CHENNAI: Trans Car India Pvt. Ltd.** - 044-24324141, **COIMBATORE: Sundaram Motors** – 0422-2452020, **COCHIN: Rajasree Motors Pvt. Ltd.** - 0484-2706432, **BANGALORE: Sundaram Motors** - 080-22070721, **HYDERABAD: Adishwar Auto Diagnostics Pvt. Ltd. – Mahavir Motors** - 040-66668008/9.

Please check with your nearest dealership for exclusive offers.

Accessories, colours and fitments shown may not be part of the standard specification. Mercedes-Benz cars: series W 211 meets Bharat Stage III emission norms.

R K SWAMY BBDO MB 18953 FL