

## India Goes to Polls

## Who will Form the Government?

*A compromise is not the consensus. It often leads to an incohesive, weak, government. Ministers may not also be sparklingly clean. Temptations to go from one flock to another are going to be many.*

BOTH Congress and the BJP are making out as if the contest is between the two. Each one claims that it will secure a majority on its own and form the government. But both of them are in for a surprise. No doubt they are the two main political parties. Still, both of them, even put together, will not cross 300 in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

Regional and small parties look like getting 120 odd seats and they will be in the driving seat. Their natural affinity — a few of them are still members of the National Front — is with the combination of Janata Dal and the communists, which may obtain around 130. A non-Congress, non-BJP government is on the cards. Some members, elected on the Congress ticket, may go to the side of such an alternative, once they sniff power.

There are three post-election scenarios. One, Congress and the BJP form a coalition. Numberwise, the two will have the strength to constitute the government. But this possibility is hard to imagine. Politics make strange bed-fellows. Yet, certain situations are beyond the realm of even probability. If Chandrasekhar and George Fernandes, the life-long socialists, can join hands with communal forces like BJP, why not Congress president Narasimha Rao? This remark by a top Congress leader the other day makes me think that Indian politics has reached a stage where anything is possible. He went on to admit that there were many supporters of BJP in Congress.

If such a happening, beyond the known trends of politics, does take place, Congress will undoubtedly split. Party spokesman V M Gadgil's remark is significant. Asked what would happen if Congress were to divide on issue of joining hands with BJP, he said, "he for one would not join it. That was one way of saying that some of his colleagues might."

Can the BJP make out its own? It cannot because its presence is felt largely in the Hindi heartland, including Maharashtra and Gujarat. The total number of Lok Sabha seats of these states is 305. The BJP won only 126 in last election. State elections in 1993, after demolition of Babri Masjid, dipped its support still further. The party lost UP, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and survived by a wafer in Rajasthan. The gain in Maharashtra was through the Shiv Sena, more fundamentalistic in its posture.

The second scenario is that Congress, Janata Dal, the communists and regional parties — all of them come together to form government. It is plausible. Janata leader Ramakrishna Hegde suggested this long ago. However, he favoured Narasimha Rao to head such a coalition. This may neither be acceptable to the communists nor to most Janata Dal members. They may be persuaded to support Congress, but not Rao. Were he to step down from Congress leadership, the attitude of such parties as shun Congress would

## BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

change. Then a non-BJP grand coalition is possible.

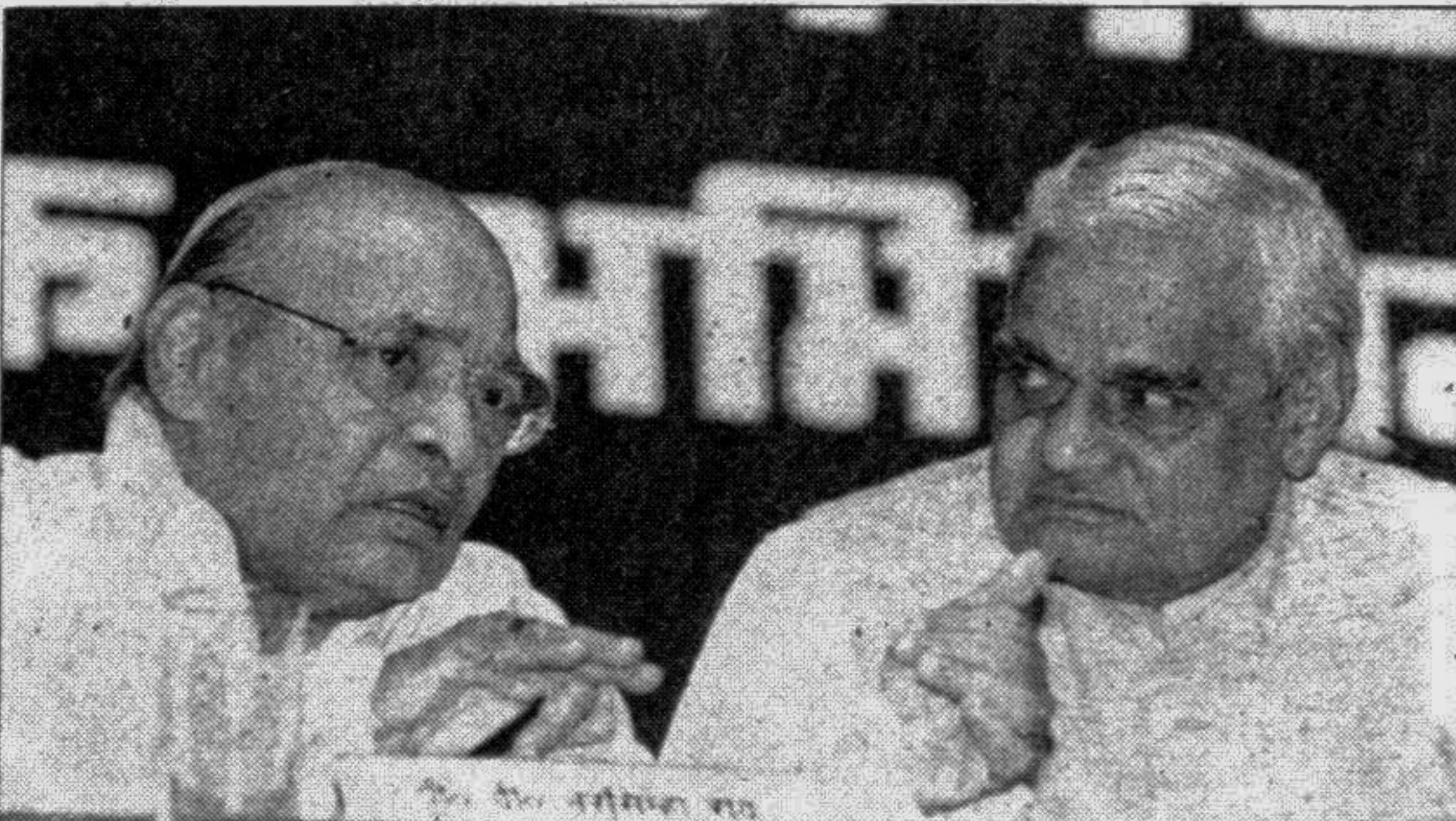
The future of Rao or, for that matter, of Congress is, in fact, dependent on the states — Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. If Congress captures 30 out of 42 seats in Andhra Pradesh, Rao's home state — this was the party's tally in the last Lok Sabha — Rao, more than Congress, will be entrenched. It all depends on numbers, whether Rao can steal enough votes from Telugu

serious economic programme.

In 1990, when VP Singh's government was floundering, there was an attempt to harness Basu as the head of a national government. The late Rajiv Gandhi was for it and so was VP Basu was then in London. I was at that time India's high commissioner to the UK. I was asked to sound him. His reply was that he would not like to be prime minister until his own party had a majority in Lok Sabha. Naturally, the

But his plus point is that if at all anyone is acceptable to Congress, he is the one. He may, in fact, be a harbinger of an alliance, which may bring old and new Congress men on one platform. This may one day become a real Congress party, a bit left of the centre, a bit of the days gone by.

Whichever scenario the parties prefer, the political scene will be uncertain. But it does not mean that a mid-term poll is round the corner. It means that the government in power will need to touch many points at the same time and placate several elements. The many feathers are going to be ruffled too soon and it will demand a lot of give and take. A compromise is not the consensus. It often leads to an incohesive,



Who will form the government, Rao of Congress (left) or Bajpayee of BJP — that is the question most voters have started to ask.

Desam, which is hopelessly divided between chief minister Chandrababu Naidu and late NT Rama Rao's wife, Lakshmi Parvathi.

The story in Tamil Nadu is slightly different. Even if Congress does badly, it won 26 out of 39 seats last time — Rao may not suffer personally. The victory of Moopanar Congress — very much on cards — may not be considered Rao's loss as the two are in constant touch with each other. Sometimes I suspect that the parting of ways was meant to have the best of both worlds. If anybody can re-install Rao as prime minister, he is Moopanar. Kerala's former Chief Minister K Karunakaran played the same role last time.

The third scenario is that Janata Dal, the communists and regional parties and a few others form the government. This is possible. But it will require yoking of too many disparate elements. The structure will be rickety, raising fire alarms all the time.

However, the birth and the sustenance of such a combination depends upon the person who comes to head it. West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu is an obvious choice. But his party, the CPM, may not agree to it. One, it will find it hard to keep the different groups in tandem. Two, it may not be able to implement any

proposal fell.

Yet, there is no person more suitable than Basu to head a coalition. As chief minister, he has been leading a front of 14 parties in West Bengal for more than two decades. It will be hard to persuade him, although he does not reject straightaway such a proposition. His observation — "what can one person do?" — does not slam the door.

If Basu does not agree, there will be efforts to draft VP Singh. His health does not permit him to take up the enormous responsibilities of prime ministership. But given a competent deputy prime minister like Hegde, he might be brought round. VP's advantage is that he, like Basu, is a converging point for many regional and smaller parties. Bihar chief minister Laloo Yadav and former UP chief minister Mulayam Singh, the two aspirants, may drive each other out

If Basu and VP insist on staying out, the dark horse may be Hegde. His drawback is that he is seen as Rao's Trojan Horse in the combination of Janata Dal and the communists. Many among them suspect that Hegde may bring back Rao through the backdoor. Janata chief Laloo Yadav is dead against Hegde and the communists are not too enthusiastic.

weak, government. Ministers may not also be sparklingly clean.

Temptations to go from one flock to another are going to be many. Both domestic and foreign capital may come to enjoy power, which is not good for the health of any government or country. Maybe, the nation has to go through such a phase to emerge strong. Even malleable material becomes steel after remaining in a red hot furnace.

One redeeming factor is that voters are more conscious of a politician's misdoings than before. They are not that glibly now. On the other hand, a process of discontentment has begun after the hawala scandal and the Supreme Court's rulings. This may awaken people to their responsibility to bring in to politics such people as are not cast in the familiar moulds.

This election will be far different and far meaningful. It will reap a different kind of harvest. A new India may take shape. It is a pity that some, who should help in accelerating the process, are losing heart.

It is a long haul, full of dangers and anxiety. But the road to any worthwhile destination is paved with the stones of commitment and grit. The intelligentsia cannot afford to withdraw at this time.

## Happy Days Again for Rent-a-Crowd Mob

The campaign for seats in India's 11th post-independence parliament had been unusually sedate, following the imposition of tight restrictions on election expenditure. But there have been some big rallies, and that, means work for the professional crowd.

A J Singh writes from New Delhi

## The cost of a vote

Posters: Rs 1.50 each

Graffiti: Rs 4 per sq ft

Banners: Rs 80-150 each

Hoarding rent: Rs 2,000-5,000 each

Plastic flags: 20 paise each

Announcements: Rs 250 a day for hiring an autorickshaw

S1= Rs 34

Handbills: Rs 200-250 per 1,000

Transport: Rs 600 for a bus within Delhi; Rs 750 outside

People: Rs 20-50 per person, Dale: Rs 1,500

Tents: Rs 5,000

Sound system: Rs 1,000

Food packets: Rs 5 each

Chairs: Rs 4 each

SHYAM Lal is a much sought-after man these days. The reason: he supplies crowds — any size — for politicians.

With election fever gripping politicians, says the Delhi slum-dweller, "happy days were here again."

He provided men and women to all parties competing in the parliamentary elections which began on 27 April. His going rate was 1,500 rupees for 50 people. Transport is extra.

"Why not make a killing when they (the politicians) are in great need of us?" he says.

He admits that elections are the only time he can earn money without doing physical labour — "a sort of paid holiday, like government officials get," he adds with a smile.

Apart from the daily rate for

the job, rent-a-crowd individuals usually receive a mid-day "food packet" — sometimes two or three — and perhaps the promise of local liquor at the end of the day.

A politician may employ 10-15 rally agents for a single rally, each bringing in 2,000 people from different parts of the city.

The result is that each rally agent's party heads for the venue in buses and lorries, carrying flags and shouting slogans as they pass through bazaars and streets, maximising the noise and razzmatazz.

Most of the hired hands are casual labourers who live in slums. In their usual jobs — pushing loaded carts, working on construction sites or as porters at bus stops and railway stations — they are unlikely to earn more than Rs 30

a day. So being part of a rally crowd is easy money.

"Why should I bother what they are talking about?" asks Man Mohan, who usually spends his days pulling a rickshaw. "For me, it is the food and liquor I get for attending rallies that matters."

He adds: "No other way can you get so many things just for sitting."

Another occasional flag-waver, Ram Singh, from Bihar state, says that working in a gruelling job is hardly enough to buy even one square meal a day. But when he is paid to attend rallies, the whole family receives a meal: "Where else can we get so much for doing nothing?"

A few agents are not after money. Bal Singh Gujjar of Sultanpur colony in Delhi says he mobilises slum-dwellers to

participate in rallies in order to protect them from the civic authorities who want to re-settle them outside Delhi.

Whenever the authorities initiate an operation, he tells the local politicians who he has been helping, and they intervene to halt the evacuation.

People are not the only cost. Posters have to be paid for, together with banners, transport, tents, sound systems and the rest of the paraphernalia. In Bihar, parrots have been trained to squawk, "Vote for Laloo," in support of Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav. The whole affair is becoming so commercialised that in Calcutta, poet Subhas Mukhopadhyay says: "In future, we may witness buying and selling of wall space for the writing of political slogans."

Costs can come down considerably if the rally is being organised by the party or politician in power, because the transporter will not submit their bill. They will claim their reward when they next need a political favour — obtaining a permit or getting clearance for a vehicle impounded by police.

If Indian political rallies were ever held to demonstrate the democratic expression, that day has long passed. They are now simply a show of strength for whoever is on the dais.

Aishwarya Nandy, a professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, says that political rallies exert no influence on the electorate. "They are merely expressions of financial power of one politician vis a vis another."

Delhi School of Economics sociologist Dr Veen Vass agrees, and dismisses rallies as a sham.

A J SINGH is a freelance journalist based in northern India.

## Screen Idols Vie for Power Roles

Indian politicians are seeking their fortunes in the stars in the election that has approached. While some are consulting astrologers, others have encouraged film actors and actresses to stand — to reap the benefit of famous images untainted by a big corruption scandal.

Ranjita Biswas writes from Calcutta and Rahul Bedi from New Delhi

ASKED who he would vote for, the middle-aged man replied without hesitating: "Jayalalitha of course."

Why? Because she's our amma (mother). And remember how great an actress she was?"

Enormous cut-outs of Jayalalitha make it clear who dominates politics in Tamil Nadu. Known for her ruthlessness, the head of the regional AIADMK party is so popular that even Prime Minister Narasimha Rao has made a political alliance with her in the state, much to the displeasure of many colleagues in his ruling Congress Party.

One unhappy dissident, G K Moopanar, has split off to form his own party and two senior central government ministers have resigned.

Jayalalitha's political support flows from her film-star charisma. Before she entered politics at the behest of her mentor, M G Ramachandran, another film idol with a huge following in the state, she

acted as a heroine in many films. After her mentor's death, she inherited his mantle.

She is an extraordinarily dominant and domineering figure, but she is far from alone in making the transition from screen to debating chamber.

And although Bollywood — India's Bombay-based Hollywood, the world's biggest film production centre — has lost ground to video and television, film stars continue to be sought as candidates by parties competing in the forthcoming parliamentary polls.

Despite the growth of alternative sources of entertainment, Bollywood's colourful, romantic, melodramatic, violent, tear-jerking Hindi-language films still draw millions of viewers. The screen heroes and heroines are larger than life, and fans often seem unable to separate the performers from their roles.

Film-star candidates have become even more sought after because of the hawala corruption scandal that has tainted politics recently. Sev-

eral politicians and civil servants are being investigated by police following discovery of their names in a businessman's notebook alongside sums of money which they were allegedly paid for acting as middle-men.

Socialist Party veteran and former central government Education Minister Sadanand Verma says: "The sordid hawala scandal was the last straw. In such a scenario, parties are clutching at any available role model in an attempt to benefit from their aura."

Deepika Chikhalia, for example, was put up by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in Gujarat, to cash in on her role as Sita, the "ideal Indian woman," in the popular Ramayana television serial.

Other parties have used the same tactic. Renuka Choudhury, a member of the Rajya Sabha (Upper house), says: "Film stars are misused by political parties, but they don't mind because the spin-offs are good."

It may seem ridiculous that

those more familiar with greasepaint than agendas should obtain parliamentary seats, though, as former film star and president Ronald Reagan showed in the United States, the phenomenon is not restricted to India.

Another form of star-gazing — astrology — continues to exert its influence. In New Delhi alone, an estimated 100 leading astrologers are patronised by politicians eager for advice on when it is best to hold meetings or travel.

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, ridiculed astrology, but his successors, including his daughter Indira Gandhi and her son Rajiv, and the current incumbent, Narasimha Rao, have been among their most willing clients.

Even T N Seshan, the highly-principled Chief Election Commissioner, always consults the stars. When he left his job as Cabinet Secretary he timed the handover to the second, in keeping with astrological advice. But the moment selected as most auspicious differed from the time chosen for his successor, a dihard numerologist.

A lengthy debate followed, leading to a compromise.

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## The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Saturday 4th May  
(All programmes are in local time. We recommend programmes printed in bold. There may be changes in the programme.)

## BTV

3:00pm Opening Announcement  
3:10 Recreation from the Tropic  
3:15 Movie of the Week 4:00  
News in Bangla 5:00 News in  
Bangla 5:25 Sanshar: Folk Songs  
6:00 News in Bangla 6:05 She-  
masher 6:30 Maner Mure 7:00  
News in English 8:00 News in  
Bangla 8:30 Masi-e-Manush:  
Programme Based on Agricultural  
Development 9:00 Ananta Dhar  
10:00 News in English 10:30  
Drama Series: Dynasty 11:30  
News in Bangla 11:35 Tomor-  
row's programme summary 11:40  
Close down

## BBC

6:00am BBC World News: 6:20  
Britain in View 7:00 BBC World  
News 7:10 Newsnight 8:00 BBC  
World News 8:20 Window On  
Europe 9:00 BBC World Headlines  
9:05 Correspondent 10:00 BBC  
World News 10:20 The Brain

## CHANNEL V

7:00am Asian Top 20 VJ Nite  
9:00 Big Bang Weekend VJ

Trust 11:00 BBC World News  
11:20 Window On Europe  
12:00noon BBC World News  
12:15 Heart Of The Matter 1:00  
BBC World Headlines 1:05 Great  
Racing Journeys 2:00 BBC  
World News 2:30 Time Out  
Tomorrow's World 3:00 BBC  
World News 3:30 Time Out  
Holiday 4:00 BBC World Head-  
lines 4:05 Horizon 5:00 BBC  
World News 5:20 Britain in View  
5:50 Earth Report 6:00pm BBC  
World Headlines 6:05 The Big Trip  
7:00 BBC World News 7:20 This  
Week 8:00 BBC World News 8:30  
Time Out: Film '96 9:00 BBC  
World Headlines 9:05 Correspondent  
10:00 BBC World News  
10:30 Time Out: Cats 11:00  
BBC World News 11:20 This  
Week 12:00 BBC World News  
12:20 The Brain Trust 1:00 BBC  
World Headlines 1:05 Horizon  
2:00 BBC World News 2:30 Time  
Out: Top Gear 3:00 BBC World  
News 3:25 Window On Europe  
4:00 BBC World News 4:25 This  
Week 5:00 BBC World News  
5:20 The Brain Trust

## STAR Sports

6:00am World Superbike Champi-  
onship 1996 Duxford Park  
Great Britain 8:00 Football  
8:30 1996 Omega Tour Tournam-  
ent Players Champs 9:00  
World's Strongest Man 1995

## STAR PLUS

6:30am Transformers 7:00  
Dungeons and Dragons 7:30  
Around the World in 80 Days  
8:00 Count Duckula 8:30 Capital  
Critters 9:00 Zoo Life With Jack  
Hanna 9:30 Saber Rider & The  
Star Sheriffs 10:00 Karts & Dog  
10:30 Voyage to the Bottom of  
the Sea 11:30 The Wild Wild  
West 12:00 Movie: "Bravades"  
2:30 Movie Classics "The Lady  
Vanishes" 4:30 Super Bloopers &  
New Practical Jokes 5:30 Movie  
Television 6:00pm Fantasy Island  
7:00 The Wonder Years 7:30 The  
Addams Family 8:00 The Simp-  
sons 8:30 Baywatch 9:30 Star  
Trek: The Next Generation 10:30  
LA Law 11:30 Code 3 12:00am

## ZEE TV

5:30am Infotainment 6:00 News  
6:30 Jagan 7:00 ZED  
Management 7:30 ZED  
Management 8:00 ZED Nava A  
To Z 8:30 All Out for no less  
9:00 Celeste 9:30 Bhayans  
10:00 Ad mad Show 10:30  
Game Anyone 11:00 Cartoon

## ZEE TV

10:00 World Wrestling Federation  
Action Zone 11:00 Australian  
Football League Highlights  
12:00noon SEA Touring Car Rd  
1&2 Bira, Thailand 12:30 95/96  
Volvo World Cup Showjumping  
1:30 US PGA Tour 1996 Kmart  
Greater Greensboro Open NFL  
2:30 NBA Inside Stuff 3:00 ATP  
Tour XI Bermuda Open From  
Bermuda Final Day 5:00 LIVE F1  
San Marino Qualifying Session  
6:00 World Wrestling Federation  
Meme 7:30 The Indianapolis 500  
1995 Official Film 8:00 Asia  
Sports Show 8:30 Prime Boxing  
11:00 Spanish Football League  
NFL 11:00 LIVE NBA Playoffs 1st  
Round Game 3 Chicago vs Miami  
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1st Rd Game 3 San Antonio

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Star Trek: The Next Generation on Star Plus at 9:30pm



FLU on Zee TV at 7:00 pm today

## STAR MOVIES

7:30am Film Club: Le Journal  
D'une Femme De La Chambre  
(English Subtitles) 9:30 Classic:  
Gift Of Love (Arabic Subtitles)  
11:30 World Cinema: Pepe Le  
Moko (English Subtitles) 1:30  
Adventure: Time Bandits (Hindi  
Subtitles) 3:30 Comedy: To Be  
Or Not To Be (Hindi Subtitles)  
5:30 Family: Magnos The Robot  
PG (Hindi Subtitles) 7:30 Family:  
Malachi's Cove PG (Hindi Sub-  
titles) 9:00 The Preview 9:30  
Leading Ladies: Susan Sarandon  
10:00 Bull Durham (Hindi Sub-  
titles) (New Contract) 11:30  
Comedy: House Party (Hindi  
Subtitles) 1:30 Fright Night: Hand  
Of The Ripper (Hindi Subtitles)  
3:30 Action: Blue Tiger (Hindi  
Subtitles) 5:30 Romance: White  
Light (Hindi Subtitles)

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## TOM and JERRY

WHY DOES YOUR  
PA SLEEP ALL DAY?

HE WORKS ALL  
NIGHT AS A  
GUARD DOG.

HE LAYS INSIDE  
THE FRONT DOOR AND  
SLEEPS, MOSTLY.

HE'S VERY  
ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT  
HIS CAREER!

WHAT DOES  
A GUARD  
DOG DO?

HE SLEEPS HIS  
SAFETY RAZOR  
HANDLE TO A  
PRECISELY NICKED  
POSITION  
THEN SAUNTERS  
OUT FOR A SWIM

HE SLEEPS HIS