

BJP Jittery about Bihar Issue

Pallab Bhattacharya writes from New Delhi

Buoyed by the success in preventing ouster of RJD ministry in Bihar, Laloo Yadav and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, who formed a new political front called "Rashtriya Loktantrik Manch" a few months ago, mounted efforts to galvanise unity among anti-BJP forces.

CRITICISM from allies and the need to avoid a stand-off with President KR Narayanan prompted the BJP-led government not to press ahead with its decision to dismiss the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) ministry in Bihar state, according to BJP sources.

"In deference to the wishes of the President, we have decided not to press for the recommendation on Bihar," said Home Minister L K Advani emerging from a meeting of the cabinet on Saturday night.

The BJP leaders, however, the sources said, were keen not to give the impression that the party was embarking on a path of confrontation with the President and force on him the cabinet recommendation by sending it to him the second time after Narayanan had returned to it the first time.

Besides, what influenced the cabinet's decision was the strident criticism by some parties of the ruling coalition like Akali Dal, Lok Shakti and Biju Janata Dal who disfavoured

dismissal of RJD government in Bihar. Representatives of Akali Dal and Trinamool Congress did not attend the meeting of the cabinet the day it recommended the dismissal of RJD ministry. Telugu Desam Party, which bailed out the Vajpayee government in its first confidence vote in March, also let it be known that it was opposed to sacking the Bihar government.

All this had made BJP jittery as the saffron party feared the possibility of the cabinet recommendation failing to earn the approval of Lok Sabha, where the ruling coalition enjoys a wafer-thin majority, and in the Rajya Sabha where the opposition is in majority.

Under Indian constitution, the cabinet decision to dismiss a state government needs parliamentary endorsement even after it was cleared by the President.

Although the government bowed to the wishes of the President, BJP disagreed with his contention that constitutional machinery had not broken

down in Bihar. The reaction of the opposition to the President's decision to return the cabinet recommendation went along predictable line. The entire opposition welcomed Narayanan's ruling.

The CPI(M) went a step ahead by demanding that the President's communication to the cabinet be made public to facilitate debate on the issues raised by him. RJD President Laloo Prasad Yadav stood out by claiming that Vajpayee government had been reduced to minority on the issue of dismissal of his party's government in Bihar and should, therefore, seek a fresh vote of confidence.

Buoyed by the success in preventing ouster of RJD ministry in Bihar, Laloo Yadav and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, who formed a new political front called "Rashtriya Loktantrik Manch" a few months ago, mounted efforts to galvanise unity among anti-BJP forces.

Laloo Prasad Yadav met CPI(M) and CPI leaders and discussed the possibility of finding some common ground to build on the unity shown by opposition parties on the RJD ministry issue. Mulayam Singh Yadav said he was willing to hold talks with Congress for an anti-BJP front.

But opposition sources said it was premature to interpret the unity displayed by the opposition on the Bihar issue as a prelude to a fresh political alignment. A senior Congress leader said a joint opposition offensive against the BJP-led government on the RJD ministry could not provide a platform for long-term alliance, electoral or otherwise, with RJD in Bihar or Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh.

Only last month, majority of senior Congress leaders disfavoured any alliance with RJD or SP as the assessment in Congress now is that tie-up with the two parties in the past had contributed to Congress' decline in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh from its number one position in electoral battles.

Sweden Left-turn Could Lead to Aid Boost

The general election in Sweden has shifted the government to the Left. As a result, the country could move away from Blair-Clinton centrist policies and greater attention may be paid to the needs of developing countries. Gemini News Service reports on the sudden growing influence of Gudrun Schyman. Moussa Awounda writes from Stockholm.

GUDRUN Schyman, leader of the Left Party, has suddenly become a key figure in Swedish politics. After elections which cut the Prime Minister's party to 36.6 per cent — the lowest in 70 years — the Left has become the third largest with 43 seats in parliament.

Her views will now carry much more weight. Just before polling on 20 September, Schyman, a 50-year-old reformed alcoholic and single mother, summed up her view on the state of the world:

"There's no doubt that globalisation has increased inequality between the rich countries in the North and those in the South." She said her party would champion the cause for economic justice inside Sweden as well as globally. She cited the growing public clamour to compel the World Bank to write off debt to the most indebted countries in Africa, Asia and South America, and said:

"We hope to strengthen solidarity with movement across the world so that the problems of mass unemployment and poverty are fought together. I support the Jubilee 2000 Movement (on debt relief) and I hope to pay more attention to what is required to be done."

In an election fought on domestic economic problems besetting the Swedish welfare system, the Left Party and the Green Party were among the few in opposition to dedicate issues of global interdependence in their manifestoes.

In its election manifesto, Yes to the World — No to the European Union, the Left wrote: "The plundering by the affluent countries of the world's raw materials and labour is creating poverty, war, oppression and environmental destruction."

The European Union, it warned, is part of the unfair international order. Its purpose is to strengthen western European capital against competitors in Japan, the US and the Third World.

It is now evident that the Left Party's global vision, egalitarianism and militancy against "Fortress Europe" capitalism, has paid off, confounding critics who ruled them out as living in the past of failed Marxist

ideology. The Left Party has emerged from the election as the real winner in the Sweden's socialist bloc. With 12 per cent of the votes, it eclipsed the Liberal and Centre Parties. Both lost heavily.

The popularity of the Left is reflected in its 5.6 per cent gain from the last election four years ago when it had only 6 per cent. Only the inward-looking Christian Democrats surpassed the Left with a rise of 7.7 per cent new votes.

Part of the Left's popularity springs from the personality of Schyman and her style of leadership. She is not shy to use first-hand experiences of childhood poverty, single-parenting, and alcoholism to illustrate her commitments to social change.

Her success in reviving the Left's socialist ideals is being regarded as upstaging the rightist tendencies of Sweden's Social Democrats, who are inspired by the drift to centrist policies of Tony Blair's Labour Party in Britain and Bill Clinton's Democratic Party in the US.

Goran Persson, Prime Minister since March 1996, leads the Minority Social Democrats, who lost 8 per cent. To retain office he has to seek the hand of Schyman to form a coalition government in the next parliament. She has won a kingmaker's role.

Will the Left live up to its campaign rhetoric, especially on Swedish policy towards the developing countries? Eva Zetterberg, spokeswoman for the Left on North-South cooperation, is sure her party will stick to their guns.

After the election, she spoke enthusiastically about Sweden's future role in fighting global poverty and exploitation.

She will call in Parliament for aid to be raised from 0.73 per cent to one per cent of GNP. She says: "We want to show that Sweden is still committed as a front-runner in global cooperation. We lost this tradition in the past few years. Moreover, we want aid to be channeled through the NGOs and targeting children, women and the elderly."

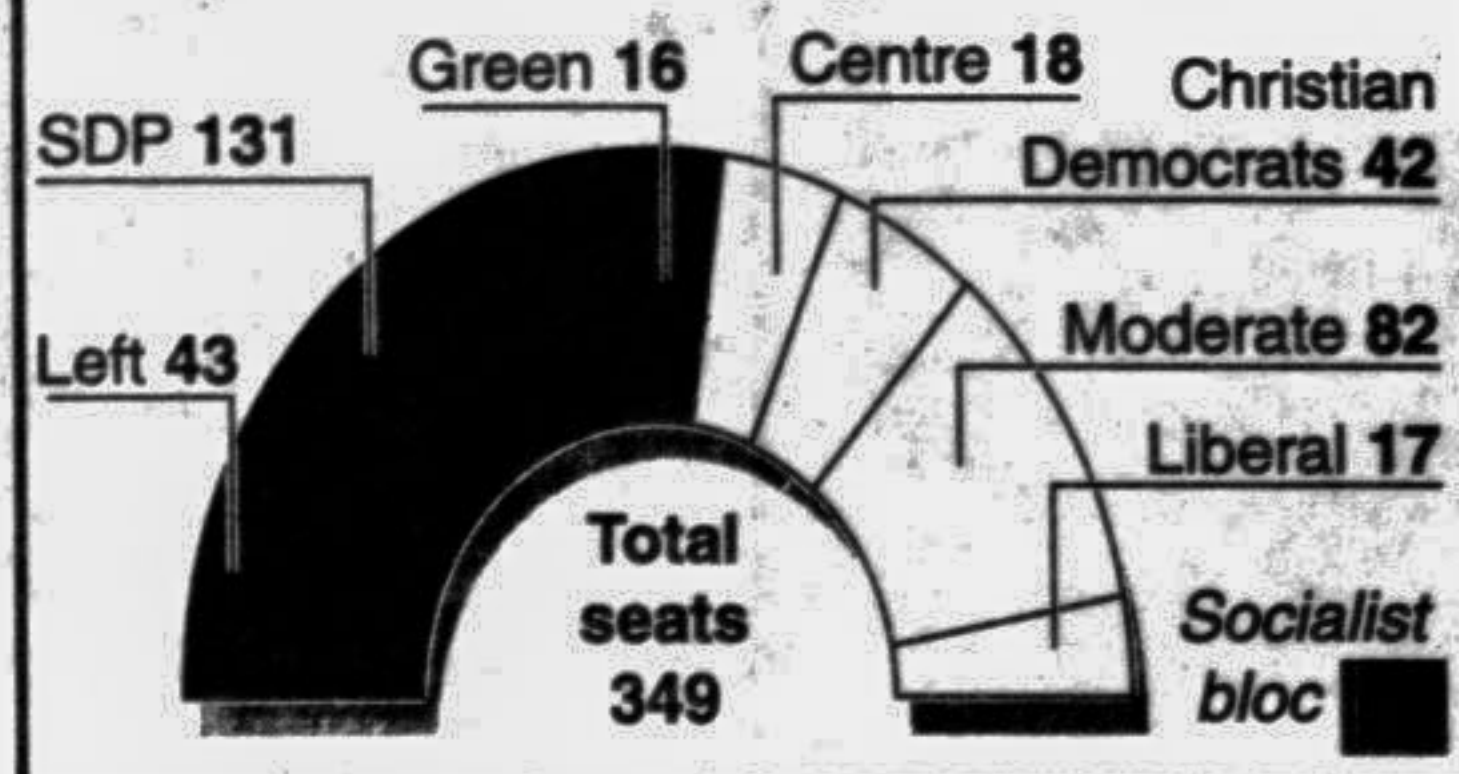
Voice from the Left



'Is it not abundantly clear that the experiment in competition and marginalisation has a price which the majority do not wish to pay?'

Gudrun Schyman, Leader of Left Party

Sweden's new parliament



the World Bank-led Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), particularly in Africa. We are going to support debate about how this should be changed and at the same time give support to the Jubilee 2000 campaigns which calls for debt-relief measures."

Although, almost all the major political parties in Sweden support debt relief and there is consensus on foreign aid, campaigners agree the will to push things along is lacking in a climate of aid fatigue and economic recession.

NGOs in Sweden says the Left may be able to provide a catalytic role. Lars Olof Hellgren, campaign co-ordinator, Swedish Coalition for Jubilee 2000, which brings together 42 NGOs, says:

"We hope that with a strong Left, it will push the government to be outspoken on aid issues and raise the debt question with the World Bank. We particularly think it is good to have the Left Party because the Social Democratic Government had written to us to show their commitment to Jubilee 2000 demands. The Left, we hope, will use this to push them to implement things."

"For every dollar given as aid to Africa, the Africans are paying us back one dollar 30-

cents. This can't go on. Something has to be done."

For the African community in Sweden the triumph of the Left Party brings optimism that the priority and focus on Africa can be regained. Since joining the European Union three years ago, Swedish aid policy has tended to loosen its close association with the African continent.

Although the ruling Social Democrats last year created as an afterthought at the end of the parliamentary term a blueprint called Partnership Africa, observers believe it lacks the vitality and that in reality Swedish aid is looking more towards the Baltic States, and Central and Eastern Europe. About 10% of aid last year went to those countries.

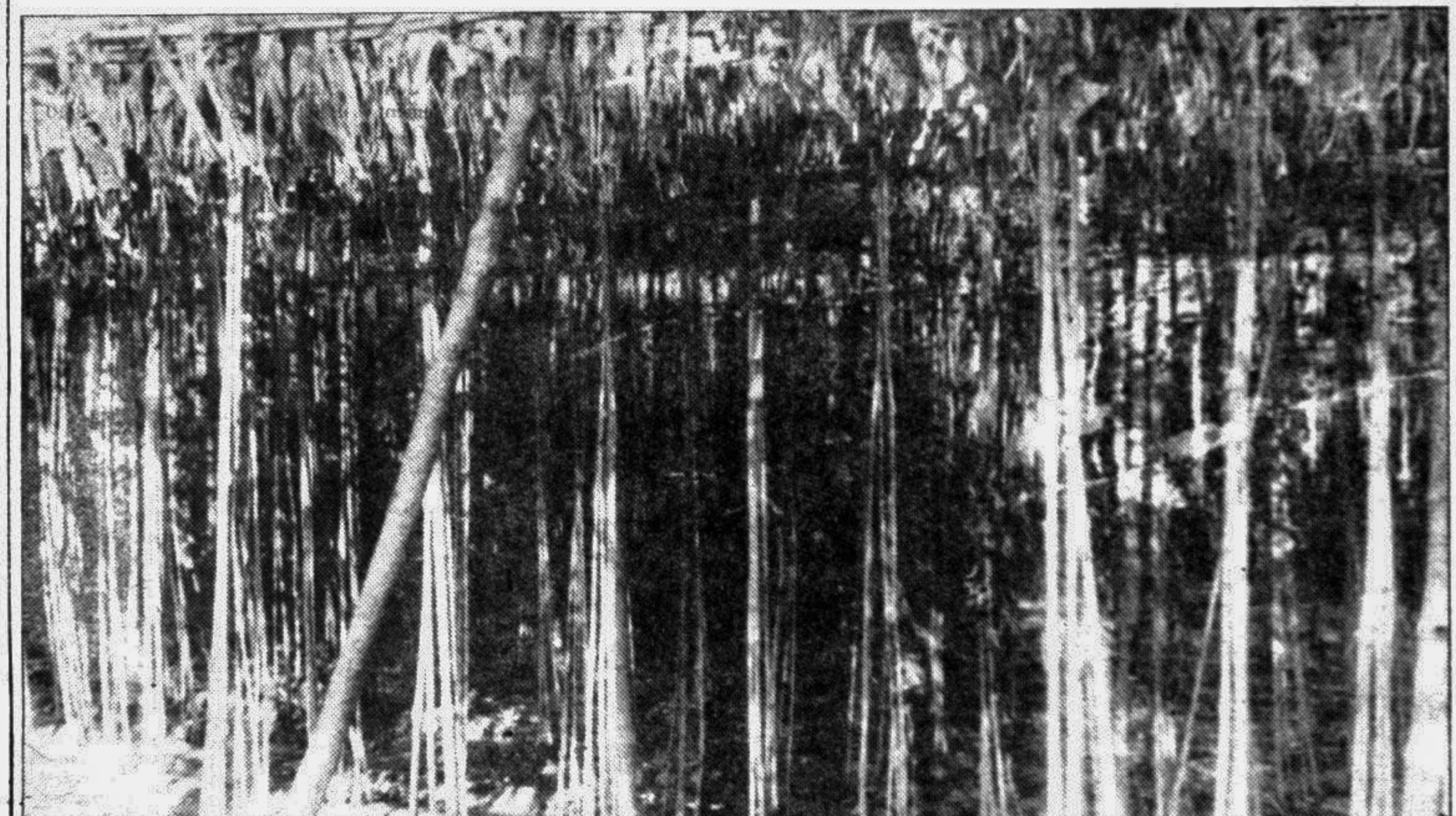
Persson did not visit Africa in his first term in office. The days of close affinity between, for example, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Olof Palme, who led Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s, are not being renewed, partly because of the ideological crisis that has been facing those in power.

The writer is a Kenyan journalist who has been living and working in Sweden for several years.



Devastated by Deluge: The famous banana (above) and betel (below) plantations of Munshiganj bear the marks of battering.

— Star feature photos by A K M Mohsin



High Noon in Kosovo

by John Shattuck

SLOBODAN Milosevic has proclaimed the end of the Kosovo conflict for weeks now. But the brutal work of his security forces has only continued reports of new civilian massacres abound. Earlier this month [September], I traveled through Kosovo with Senator Bob Dole on a human rights mission. We witnessed not only a human rights crisis but a humanitarian catastrophe in the making. The world should not be taken in by the Yugoslav president's rhetoric. It has little to do with the bitter reality of Kosovo.

The Milosevic regime appears determined to punish the civilian population there. The devastation goes far beyond any legitimate police action. The violence is punitive, not incidental. Houses are burned from the inside, while neighbouring homes stand untouched. On a daily basis, government forces obliterate the infrastructure that makes their lives tolerable. The resulting plague of destruction is not remotely justified by government claims of "apprehending terrorists."

Since the fighting began, hundreds of thousands have fled from their homes. The vast majority remain within Kosovo, living in the open both day and night, on the edge of winter, facing freezing temperatures and with limited access to food and shelter. Some families return to their villages during the day, only to flee into the mountains at night. We saw signs of malnutrition on the faces of children. Unless the international relief community

takes immediate steps to intervene, tens of thousands could starve or freeze to death this winter.

The looming humanitarian catastrophe now threatening Kosovo is only a symptom of a political and military crisis that threatens again to destabilize the region and undermine the Bosnian peace process. Mr Milosevic created this broader crisis. He must take the steps necessary to resolve it. Despite his claims that he favours the return of the displaced to their homes, his security forces have created a climate of deep and pervasive fear throughout the civilian population.

Mr Milosevic must stop his government's brutal assault on towns and villages and withdraw security forces. Meanwhile, Albanian political representatives and the Kosovo Liberation Army should do all they can to end civilian deaths and harassment and provide information on missing Serbs to the international community. Both Albanians and Serbs stand to benefit from independent forensic investigations, as neither side will believe the other. We should not let propaganda add to the pain of those already grieving.

The US is taking steps to ratchet up the pressure on Mr Milosevic. Last week at the United Nations, US leadership resulted in a strong Security Council resolution demanding a cease-fire, the withdrawal of security forces, and immediate, unimpeded access for the Red Cross and other humanitarian

organizations. At the same time, NATO is completing preparations so that it will be ready for military action if necessary.

In Kosovo, the US is providing a direct response to the needs of displaced persons, including more than 840 million to address immediate human needs. US Ambassador Christopher Hill is leading international efforts to broker a settlement that will let the people of Kosovo govern themselves within Yugoslavia.

There are other initiatives that the US will continue to advance to pressure Mr Milosevic toward a just and peaceful settlement. Since the conflict erupted this spring, we have worked with our international partners to tighten sanctions on Serbia, especially to stop international purchases of Serbia's aging economic infrastructure — purchases that would give Mr Milosevic the spending money he needs to finance current and future Kosovos.

The US is also strengthening the "justice track" in The Hague, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia has jurisdiction over Kosovo, and the US has increased its financial support for its investigation into the prosecution of crimes there. The US is also supporting efforts by the Security Council to change Milosevic's dismal record of cooperation.

The US is stepping up its support for the democratically elected government of Montenegro, and is working to en-

sure that Montenegro reopens its Kosovo border. The willingness of the Montenegrin government to assist refugees and to cooperate with international humanitarian relief agencies as well as the Yugoslav War Crimes Tribunal demonstrates that there is a democratic way out for those willing to find it.

What has happened to date in Kosovo does not yet match the sheer magnitude of Bosnia. But the latest reports of civilian massacres show that the potential for a similar catastrophe — a Srebrenica or Omarska — is real, and should galvanize the international community to further action. Everywhere we went we saw shelled, destroyed, and sometimes still burning towns, abandoned to packs of wild dogs and heavily armed police and army units. We learned that Serbian authorities had started rounding up civilians and separating men and boys from women and children.

What Senator Dole and I saw underscores the high stakes the Kosovo conflict represents for those under Mr Milosevic's rule. The stakes are also high for the international community. Ultimately, as with Bosnia, only a strong international response can induce Mr Milosevic to do the right thing. Over the longer term, only democratic institutions and respect for basic human rights can provide the basis for the states of former Yugoslavia to assume their rightful and peaceful place in the European family of nations.

The author is US Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labour

By Hanna-Barbera

Knowledge Gap May Widen Rich-Poor Disparity

by Vasantha Arora

THE World Bank has warned against the possibility of widening knowledge gap pushing developing nations further behind in the race for development, accentuating thereby the disparity between the rich and poor countries.

But it also says that the global explosion of knowledge, now under way, has the potential of lifting hundreds of millions of the world's poor out of poverty.

A study titled "Knowledge for Development" analyses the risks and opportunities that the

global information revolution is creating for developing countries and concludes that access to financial, technical and medical knowledge is crucial to improving the health and living standards of the poor. Bank President James Wolfensohn, in the foreword, says the rapid growth of knowledge is raising the danger of the poorest countries and communities falling behind more rapidly than ever before.

"In our enthusiasm for the Information Superhighway, we

must not forget the villages and slums without telephones, electricity or safe water, the primary schools without pencils, paper or books," Wolfensohn says. "For the poor, the promise of the new information age knowledge for all can seem as remote as a distant star."

The report says that low national incomes are not the only reason why poor countries are less prosperous than richer ones. Many developing countries lack the capability to acquire and adapt the economic, technical and social knowledge that has spurred many of the world's development success stories. Since creating this knowhow is often costly, industrial countries have greater opportunities to use knowledge to obtain better health and rising prosperity for their populations.

It, however, says countries can narrow the knowledge gap by putting in place policies to acquire and adapt knowledge from abroad and by making the most of indigenous knowledge. Countries that do this can greatly improve the living standards of their citizens. For example, 40 years ago Ghana had the same per capita income as South Korea. By the early 1990s, the latter's per capita income was six times higher than Ghana's. Some development experts claim that at least half that disparity can be explained by South Korea's greater success in acquiring and using knowledge.

Poor countries also differ from the rich in their pursuit of knowledge by having fewer public institutions to safeguard the quality and truth of the information people need to lead healthy, more affluent lives. Often there is no capacity to cer-

tify the quality of goods or services, enforce standards and performance and gather as well as disseminate key information needed for business transactions, it adds.

"Knowledge can make the difference between sickness and health, between poverty and wealth," says Carl Dahlman, director of this year's World Development Report team. "Governments that adopt policies to make the most of knowledge will have a major advantage in improving the lives of their citizens."

The report recommends three types of actions to enable developing countries to make the most of knowledge. First, developing countries should adopt policies to narrow the knowledge gaps that separate them from rich nations by investing in education, maintaining an open trading regime which brings foreign investment and licensing agreements and removing barriers to competition in the telecommunications sector as well as building on and applying indigenous knowledge, it says.

Second, the report recommends that governments, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organisations and the private sector must work together to strengthen the mechanisms needed to resolve information problems, it adds.

Third, governments must recognise that knowledge gaps and information problems cannot be eliminated, but by recognising that knowledge is at the core of development efforts, policymakers can sometimes discover unexpected solutions to seemingly intractable problems, the report says.

— India Abroad News Service

Bangladeshi Hindus Celebrate Puja in NY

Jyotirmoy Datta writes from New York

FOR the Bangladeshi Hindu community here, Durga Puja this year was a much longed-for milestone: the 1998 festival was conducted in a temple of its own.

In previous years, the festival took place on the two days of any weekend in a convenient church compound that was available in the Queensborough, regardless of whether the weekend dates actually coincided with the dates in the Bengali calendar.

This year the festival was strictly according to the scriptures and the calendar, extending to its full five days.

Each day, starting from 'anjan' (flower offering) early in the morning to the goddess to the end of the evening with a cultural programme at 11 p.m., the temple with its spacious and front courtyards was a whirl of activities. The closing of a temple of

its own has been the crying need of the community, said community leader Dwijen Bhattacharya.

The desire for a temple to assert their separate identity and preserve their traditions led the community members to launch a campaign across North America. After only a six-month fund-raising drive headed by Vancouver-based freedom fighter Suraranjan Das and California-based Kali Pradip Chowdhury, the temple was purchased for \$430,000 in July.

That the community hankered for such a magnet was proved by the endless flow of Bengali Hindus thronging the Puja hall, Bhattacharya said. "It is freedom indeed to be able to attend a Puja, wearing dhotis and saris, and let into our children our tradition without fear," he said.

— India Abroad News Service

TOM & JERRY

SEA SLAVE IS NOW FULLY UNDERWAY, GENTLEMEN. BE GUIDED BY THE CONTROL FROM OUR CRUISER

AT THAT SAME MOMENT, ANOTHER VESSEL IS OBSERVED BY THE SEA SLAVE AT LONG RANGE

YOU ARE QUITE SURE YOUR INFORMATION IS RELIABLE, HERR KREST?

DON'T WORRY YOUR TINY LITTLE HEAD ABOUT THAT, CAPTAIN — WE HAVE THE TEST AREA ALL STAKED OUT!

A TOP-SECRET ROBOT, OR DRONE, SUBMARINE IS BEING TESTED IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

OPERATIONAL DATA BEING TELEMETERED BACK BY TRACKER WITH COURSE AND DEPTH INDICATED INDIANLY ON THESE TWO SCOPES

By Ian Fleming
Drawing by Horak