

# Curs Down in the LoC

BJP-led Indian government was chauvinistic, but what Pakistanis did in Kargil was nothing unusual in the context of the Kashmir conflict, says Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

THE Kargil war is officially over, although both sides will eye each other with suspicion for some time. There are evidences of the intruders pulling out from the strategic heights they occupied in Kargil. Indian Army has a sense of relief out of the disengagements from the war they were finding costly. Just what shape the imposed ceasefire in Kargil would take from this stage, however remains unclear. The war has apparently shattered the confidence of those who desparately promoted the cause of a good neighbourliness between the two arch rivals of the subcontinent. Doubts abound if the relationship can be brought back even to the pre-war level. Everyone agrees that peace and security have been the first casualties of the mistrust the war has generated afresh.

What Pakistanis did in Kargil was nothing unusual in the context of the Kashmir conflict. Kargil has been the scene of artillery duels and sporadic fightings for the control of tactically advantageous positions for years. As a matter of fact, the strategem has been prevalent all along the Line of Control many stretches of which are yet to be delineated. India did the same thing in Siachen during 1983-84. The only blunder Pakistan seems to have committed pertains to her choice of timing. Only after a month or so of the much publicised Lahore Declaration, Pakistani enterprise in Kargil did have the appearance of a be-

trayal which the international community found hard to stomach. Even though there has been peace in Kargil now at the behest of the United States, and even if the parties involved in the conflict would hopefully restore and respect the sanctity of the Line of Control, its permanent inviolability can hardly be guaranteed. There is a complex set of dynamics in the issue to propel it forward and no single authority in either country has complete grip over it. At times the local situation makes it mandatory for the local commander to take decisions which may be detrimental to the interest of the other side. There is, as such, no room for complacency that the peace imposed now will continue *ad infinitum*. Both India and Pakistan are aware of it and on their toes to respond to rapidly changing situations. Establishments in both countries under the firm control of the religious rights, the prospect of a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute as envisaged in Washington is bleak. If the Indians felt betrayed by Pakistan's violation of Lahore declaration, the Mujahideens now feel equally betrayed by the latter's action in backing them down in Kargil. Their reluctant withdrawal from Kargil heights keeps stoking the smouldering fire of their discontent. With their passions hurt they will be invariably played into the hands of the country's religious rights who would score political mileage by instigating them

against the incumbent government. A beleaguered Mr Nawaz Sharif has now to squarely face the challenges from multiple sources. The hawks of the country's powerful Army who were believed to have secretly initiated the Kargil operation, the influential Inter-Services Intelligence who could have masterminded it and, of course, myriad battle-hardened militant groups operating from Pakistan remain his source of anxiety. Pakistan People's Party, the country's main opposition which was trounced by Sharif's PML in the last general election and went into hibernation after the conviction of its leader Ms Benazir Bhutto has sprung back to life — thanks to the bungling in Kashmir and Pakistan's international isolation. Relieved of the Kargil war and rescued by the IMF, Sharif will now find battle harder on the domestic front.

The Kashmir issue is being notoriously politicised by Pakistani politicians many of whom rose and fell in the past, depending on how they played their Kashmir card in politics. They felt the need to invoke Kashmir to garner public support right from the beginning when they supported the tribal push to capture Kashmir in 1947. It was however Mr Z A Bhutto who knew of the full potential of the Kashmir card. He, as Ayub Khan's foreign minister during 1963-65 succeeded in reviving the Kashmir issue after its prolonged limbo. By distancing himself from the

Tashkent process he became a hero and that contributed to his postwar ascendancy in the late sixties. Although the issue was practically dead after 1972 Simla Agreement, Kashmir once again moved to the centre stage of Pakistan's domestic politics with the beginning of the ongoing insurgency in the valley. The credit for an extremely hawkish stand on Kashmir goes to Ms Bhutto who, with her pro Indian image built up by a decade long martial law regime, wanted to break free of it after she became prime minister in 1988. She and her party will now decry Sharif's retreat from Kargil and the peace agreement he struck. The opposition in Pakistan is already up in arms against the establishment in Islamabad which is accused of a 'sell out' in Washington. Although India does not have a Kashmir issue, the way the Pakistanis have, they have hugely politicised the Kargil war as a major plank of election due in the autumn. In an attempt of one upmanship, the politicians have brought in issues and arguments over Kargil which will only raise India's stake in Kashmir. While the opposition Congress has blamed the caretaker government of BJP for abysmal intelligence failure and being caught unawares in Kargil, the BJP has taken resort to its RSS stand of national chauvinism. To hide its clumsy conduct of war which was admittedly slow and sluggish, it later fell back to an attempt to create a war hysteria across the country. Desperate to

cover up its monumental failure in forestalling a Pakistani intrusion across the Line of Control, the BJP resorted to aggressive rhetoric. K N Govindacharya of *Sangh Parivar* demanded that the military operation should lead to the capture of Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The senior RSS leader H V Seshadri demanded that India should now 'dump the language of Panchsheel and speak in the language of Prithvi'. He reiterated the old RSS stance that 'only a rejuvenated and powerful Hindu nation could defeat the nasty design of Pakistan'. The *Panchajanya*, the RSS Hindi paper, went steps further to an insane demand that Pakistan should be subjected to nuclear attack. The observation of Shyam Prasad Mukherjee's death anniversary on 23 June as Kashmir Day at the call of BJP was marked by chauvinistic and communal rhetoric. The BJP, it is claimed in the newspaper advertisement, is more committed to the cause of Kashmir than any other party. The BJP, by its dangerous rhetoric and chauvinism will be susceptible to pressures to open up new areas for operation. Widening the conflict is a danger that can be precipitated by hawks on both sides of the border. The war has already hardened the attitude on either side of the divide and demolished the hopes for an architecture of amity, understanding and friendship. The road to meaningful peace may be, by all reckoning, drenched with more blood.

# Kargil Fallout

The Kargil fiasco has been a landmark in the history of Kashmir liberation movement and it is going to have far-reaching effects on its course, writes A. A Salaria

THERE is consensus among the people that the July 12 address of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Kargil situation was a flop. He disclosed a few facts but glossed over many, talking glibly most of the time with his tongue in cheek. The justification he offered for a turnabout in the official Kashmir policy was unconvincing. The Kargil fiasco has been a landmark in the history of Kashmir liberation movement and it is going to have far-reaching effects on its course. While a sprinkling of people, belonging mostly to the ruling party, have welcomed the sequence of events, a vast majority has deplored it. It is being described as an irreparable loss of a golden opportunity and a setback to the freedom struggle. It will be illuminating if a dispassionate assessment of the dark and bright aspects of the situation is made before passing a judgment.

**Credit Side**  
(i) War averted: The welcome outcome of the misadventure which culminated in Nawaz-Clinton meeting and subsequent issue of a joint statement, is the averting of a full-fledged war, which could possibly have developed into a nuclear conflict between India and Pakistan. Though the danger is still there and is likely to become more imminent if the

parleys on Kashmir reach a dead-end, at least the two countries have acquired a temporary respite to make another attempt for the settlement of the issue through talks.  
(ii) Kashmir Issue internationalised: Over the decades, the main objective of the Indian diplomacy has been to localize the Kashmir conflict and reduce it to the level of a regional bilateral dispute. It had succeeded in achieving this end as, both in Simla Accord and its offshoot the Lahore Declaration, it has been laid down that negotiations on Kashmir would be exclusively bilateral. This achievement of India has been nullified in the Kargil crisis. The occupation of military posts in the Kargil-Dras sector by Mujahideen and the danger posed to the supply-lines to Indian garrisons in the region, so much unnerved A.V. Bajpayee that he was literally running from pillar to post, appealing and begging world leaders to intervene and get the posts vacated to save his government from humiliation and almost certain defeat in the coming elections. This action of Mr Bajpayee internationalized the Kashmir issue, making it a focus of world attention and raising its status to a 'flash-point' of nuclear war in the South Asia. The Washington Declaration has made the rest.

(iii) Boosting of Mujahideen's morale: The episode has been responsible for boosting the morale of the freedom fighters defending the mountain posts, who repulsed the Indian attacks for over two months and inflicted heavy casualties on the advancing Indian troops, many times superior in number and armament.  
(iv) Economy: The threat to Pakistan economy posed by possible withholding of loans by the World Bank and IMF has been eliminated.  
**Debit Side**  
(i) Setback: Despite these advantages, the seamy side of the Washington accord has disappointed the majority of the people. The accord has made a serious blow to the momentum of freedom struggle. A God-sent opportunity to accelerate the struggle and carry it to its logical conclusion has been lost, due to the faint-hearted and pusillanimous policies of the ruling junta. Perched in their bunkers on snow-clad high mountain tops, the few hundred Mujahideen had put up a heroic resistance to the huge Indian troops, inflicting heavy casualties and forcing them to retreat. The Indian army was virtually cornered, because the supply lines to Siachen and Ladakh were exposed to attack. Carrying food and ammunition

supplies by helicopters to the huge Indian garrisons was almost impossible. The garrisons were therefore faced with two alternatives — starvation or surrender. The winter and heavy snowfall were around the corner, rendering the posts absolutely impregnable. The expected surrender of Indian troops would not only have been a windfall for the freedom-struggle but also avenged the 1971 defeat of Pakistan army in East Pakistan and thus evened the score with India.  
(ii) Isolation: Bluff, bluster and intensive spurious propaganda have been the effective instruments used by India to malign Pakistan and defame it at the international level. The campaign has met with considerable success. The main charge which has stuck to Pakistan is that of 'infiltrators', occupying the Kargil posts. India has claimed that Mujahideen, as claimed by Pakistan, but its army regulars, Indian agencies got published full-page advertisements in the western media, accusing Pakistan of falsehood and deceit. Circumstantial evidence to prove this charge was provided by the Premier Sharif by accepting the demand for the withdrawal of the Mujahideen and the promptitude with which the plan was implemented. No effort has been made by Pakistan to counter this propaganda and India is reported to be thinking of lodging a complaint with the UN, against Pakistan's duplicity. As a result of these uncontradicted charges, Pakistan stands

isolated in the comity of nations. Most of the western and US papers, including the weekly *Time* and *Newsweek*, are publishing anti-Pakistan stories. *The Time*, in its issue of July 12, has printed, on its title page, the photograph of a Pakistani soldier, alleged to be inside the Indian-held Kashmir beyond the LoC, while inside the magazine there is a story of an unnamed Pakistani soldier, who managed to abscond from the Pakistani troops who were defending the Kargil posts.  
(iii) One-sided accord: The Washington Declaration is lopsided. Instead of demanding a simultaneous pull-out of Indian troops from Siachen and withdrawal of seven lakh army from Kashmir, it focuses on Kargil alone. It reveals a definite tilt towards India.  
(iv) LOC: The Line of Control, which was originally a ceasefire line, has been given the status of a boundary line between India and Pakistan. The US seems intent upon converting it into an international border between the two countries. By restoring the 'status-quo ante' the ground is being prepared for a partition of Kashmir. The most disastrous effect of the Washington accord has been that by accepting it the Pakistan government has antagonized the Kashmiri community. The Kashmiris living on both sides of the LoC consider it a virtual 'sell-out' of the Kashmir cause.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

# A Rapprochement Move

There is evidence to show that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam is seeking to ingratiate itself with India when the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition is still in power. D.B.S. Jeyaraj writes

THE Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) seems intent on launching a campaign that would help it achieve a rapprochement of sorts with India. Although 'well-wishers' of the LTTE in India have been pushing its case for several years, without strikingly event seem to be doing it, and actively so, after the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre came into being in 1998. For instance, LTTE propaganda no longer gloats over the 'great triumph over the world's fourth largest army'. Instead there is a constant refrain that New Delhi should revise its Sri Lanka policy, without specifying how. It is becoming strikingly evident that the LTTE's hope is to ingratiate itself with India, when a political configuration led by the BJP is in power. An illustrative case is the LTTE's action in challenging through legal means the extension of the ban that India imposed on it in 1992. The Tigers did not follow this course of action on previous occasions, that is, in 1994 and 1996, when the ban came up for review, even though that option was available. They sought that remedy, though unsuccessfully, only last year when the ban came up for a similar review. The LTTE also stated its current position towards India succinctly in a press release in which it denied allegations of a conspiracy against Sonia Gandhi. It said: "The LTTE wishes to state emphatically that it has no intention of interfering in the internal politics of India, nor will it act in any way prejudicial to Indian national interests." Ever since the Kargil crisis escalated, the LTTE has apparently remained consistent with its declaration that it would abide by its professed position in support of India's interests.

Tigers), broadcasts news items and commentary that are favourable to India and critical of Pakistan. The Tiger daily circulated in the Wanni, *Eelantham* (Sound of Eelam), too has followed suit. The Tiger-controlled media of the Tamil diaspora have also been pro-India. Some Tiger journals have stated in recent times that the organisation has sent 'declarations of support' to the Indian government directly. According to these journals, the LTTE's London-based political adviser, Anton Balasingham, has faxed these letters to relevant agencies on instructions from LTTE supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran himself. Supportive missives are said to have been transmitted to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Defence Minister George Fernandes, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Home Minister L.K. Advani, Law Minister Ram Jethmalani and Power and Energy Minister Rangarajan Kumaramangalam. The content of the letters has not been revealed. There are reports that Balasingham also spoke to two Cabinet Ministers and a Secretary to the Government over phone, extending support. It has also been pointed out that the Tigers have expressed support to India while Sri Lanka is officially 'neutral' but secretly 'partial' towards Pakistan. There has been no independent confirmation of these reports. Even as the LTTE made a tentative foray into the realm of subcontinental affairs, events in the island-nation were of an interestingly assorted nature. On the battle front it became clear that the Government now hoped to establish a land route to the Jaffna peninsula via the Mannar-Pooneryn road on the northwestern coast. Aware of this manoeuvre, the Tigers are now offering stiff resistance,

unlike on earlier occasions. The Army, which captured without any real fighting, around 1,000 sq km of territory through three different operations, codenamed 'Rana Ghosa' (War Cry), finds itself bogged down. Troops of the 53rd and 55th divisions, engaged in Rana Ghosa IV, have not been able to proceed beyond the key Pallemdadu junction on the Mannar-Pooneryn road. The LTTE's artillery unit, named after its former commander Kittu and commanded by Bhanu, has been stationed at strategic positions and is reportedly unleashing a barrage of shells on advancing government soldiers. It is becoming clear that with the Tigers resisting its moves the Army will no longer be able to repeat the 'cake walk' marches. The Army has to take control of a further 50 km of the road between Pallemdadu and Pooneryn, a stretch of running through places such as Luppakadavai, Vellankulam, Mulankavil and Pallavaraayankattu. The shift in fighting to the northwestern sector from the earlier central and eastern parts of the Wanni has been highlighted by another development. Earlier the entry point for civilians crossing to and from LTTE-controlled regions into Army-dominated areas was at Uylankulam on the Mannar-Vavuniya road. After the conflict heightened in Mannar district, transport was curtailed. This drastically affected the distribution of food supplies. As a result, an alternative has been proposed by the Government and accepted by the LTTE. Ironically, the new route is along the A-9 Highway between Jaffna and Vavuniya, for the control of which Government troops launched the bitter campaign codenamed 'Jayasikiri' or 'Certain Victory' from May 1997 to December 1998. The Army could not proceed beyond

Mankulam on that road and had to seek another route - the Mannar-Pooneryn road. Now the stretch of road between Vavuniya and Mankulam is to be utilised as a point of entry for civilians. It is envisaged that all civilians going into the Tiger-controlled region would be checked at Thandikulam and the transport into Army buses to Mankulam. Likewise, people who venture out from LTTE areas will be brought from Mankulam and checked at Peyaadikoolankulam. The same rules will apply to vehicles taking rations. The willingness of the LTTE to allow new entry points on the A-9 highway itself has been necessitated by the severe food shortage. The reality is that if rations sent by the Government to the rearports, there are no alternative sources of food supply for the people of the Wanni. Even at the best of times enough food was not available. Now, food scarcity is acute. Opposition leader Ranil Wickremasinghe has accused the Government in Parliament of using food as a weapon of war. Further compounding the civilian's misery is the callous manner in which the LTTE itself manipulates food distribution in areas it controls. Official circles have alleged that the LTTE siphons off for its own consumption 20 per cent of all food rations immediately upon their arrival. A recent report of the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) states that the Tigers have introduced compulsory military training for all able-bodied persons in the Wanni. The intensity of training differs according to gender, age and physical fitness. What is tragic, however, is that while the Government is criticised for using food as a weapon, the LTTE too is using food distribution as an instrument of coercion. The UTHR says that people who refuse to take military training are denied the rations. Even as this goes on, Tiger propagandists abroad proclaim that the people of the Wanni are gearing up for a 'people's war'. The position on the ground is, however, the opposite of this. Moreover, the LTTE decision to resort to crude modes

of conscription only suggests a severe shortage of cadres. The shrinkage of the area under LTTE control and the corresponding drop in the size of the civilian population it controls have reduced the scope for new recruitment. Moreover, the recent fighting has caused a number of deaths and debilitating injuries. There have been desertions also. The main cause for the inadequacy of personnel to meet the LTTE's military requirements is the interesting reversal of roles caused by the current Tiger strategy. It is a universal credo that the guerrilla does not hold on to territory and is essentially mobile, and follows generally hit-and-run tactics. Thus the guerrilla retains the element of surprise, picking and choosing his targets. The time and place of attack are determined by the guerrilla movement, and the conventional army is placed in the untenable position of only responding to attacks. Unlike the average guerrilla outfit, the Tigers at one point of time gained the strength to exercise territorial control. The LTTE has aimed at territorial entrenchment and adopts positional warfare. Although the area controlled by it in the north has shrunk considerably, it retains a rectangular swathe between Pannaiyur in the north, Mankulam in the south, Mullaitheevu in the east and Nachikudah in the west. However, the Army surrounds this territory in all four directions. This means that the element of surprise now lies with the Army. The security forces pick the time and place of conflict in the Wanni and the Tigers, in a bid to preserve their territorial control, are compelled to defend their areas. This is a logistical nightmare for the LTTE in the Wanni as the Army is in a position to launch a series of multiple incursions from diverse points.

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# 'Kolkata' Incites Debate in Calcutta

What's in a name? Well, Sakaysen Mittra thinks there's a lot one can think of

THE debate over the renaming of Calcutta to 'Kolkata' in West Bengal to 'Bangla' continues. However, there is one fact that is to be pointed out here — even though the change of name for Calcutta may be a relatively easy process, the change regarding the name of the state may not be so. Sources in the Central Home Ministry said that if the recommendation had come from the state Assembly, it may not be accepted by the Centre. The change of names are handled by a department called the 'Ministers and Governments' in the Home Ministry. The last time when the name of a state was changed was in 1973 when Mysore became Karnataka. Giving a number of other examples, the source said, "It took three years for Bombay to become Mumbai, while Madras became Chennai in only seven days. On the other hand, the department has not changed the name of Ahmedabad to Karnavati even though their assembly passed the motion in 1961. Even then as far as the city is concerned, the transformation will not be much of a problem. It will be for the state. The department has already started talking to a number of prominent people of the city regarding the change. The idea is to feel the pulse of the inhabitants. We have already had protests. Even political parties have been opposed to the change," disclosed the source. He also added, "To change the name of a state a Constitutional amendment is necessary. So ultimately it will be for the parliament to decide whether the name of the state will change or

not." Some eminent personalities in the city however, made it clear that the change would be perfect. Noted writer Sunil Gangopadhyay said on July 26, "I have no idea why such a hue and cry is being raised on this issue. The state Government has taken the right decision in changing the name of the state from West Bengal to Bangla. We are Bangalis and we should be proud of this. I also do not think that this will cause any sort of confusion with our neighbours Bangladesh. We have quite a lot similarities going with Bangladesh. So it is quite natural that our state should be called Bangla." Two noted film personalities namely Soumitra Chatterjee and Mithun Chakrabarty have also supported the state government on this issue. Both said, "There is no justification in West Bengal. We do not lie to the West of Bengal. If east Bengal can become Bangladesh, what is the fault in West Bengal becoming Bangla. There are a large number of politicians who have not been able to accept the close links that we are developing with our neighbours on the other side of the border. That is the main reason why some are against the change of name." The popular opinion may be for the change. However, within

the Assembly Atish Sinha accepted the proposal without even consulting the party. He has no authority to do that." Other leaders of the party have openly criticised Sinha on the issue. A harassed Sinha on July 26 said, "We have called a meeting of the executive state committee on July 29, to reassess the situation. The party policy will then be announced regarding the change of names." When asked as to why he accepted the CPIM's proposal at the first place, Sinha said, "One of the general secretaries of the state unit Saugata Roy was with me when I took the decision. We never felt that there would be opposition from our members." The former Chief Minister of West Bengal Siddhartha Shankar Ray however, made it clear that it had been a mistake to straightaway support the CPIM. "First of all it will send wrong signals to the voters before the elections. They will think that we are really the 'B' team of the CPIM as some politicians point us to be. Secondly, the CPIM is today taking the credit for the change of name. In 1973, I had initiated the move. However, when the Left Front Government came to power in 1977, they shelved the entire plan. We should have clarified that it was the Congress and not the CPIM that had started the movement regarding the change of name."

This is one controversy, that will linger for some time now. Already, the *Asian Age* which has an edition here has started giving the dateline 'Kolkata'. Editorials are being written, street corner past time for and against the change are on the rise everyday.

# Calcutta's Dead, Long live Kolkata...

By renaming the city, the guardian angels of Bengali culture hope to resurrect their lost pride, writes Soutik Biswas

WHAT Bengal thinks today, India thinks tomorrow. In Calcutta, one of the world's youngest and India's second largest cities, even the cliché died young. Chauvinistic rulers in Bombay and Madras slapped local names—Mumbai and Chennai—on their cities and went provincial three years ago. Now Calcutta, run by the world's longest-running democratically elected Communists, seems to be following suit: its warped rulers and intellectuals are hellbent on changing the city's name to Kolkata. Not only that, they want to rename West Bengal as Paschim Banga. All this before the year's out. Why now? Not surprisingly, a section of Communists, led by its faux cultural czar and self-styled home and information and culture minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya, and a curious gaggle of friendly intellectuals and hangers-on feel the Bengali identity is under severe threat. Stoking these fears is a recent study by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA) that suggests that there's been a decline in the city's Bengali-speaking population over the past four decades. Then the government stumbled on to a Bengali and Jyoti Basu hate-site on the Internet and sent its thought police to track down and arrest its host, a young non-Bengali software startup entrepreneur who's still behind bars on charges of attempting to cause ill-will and hatred between communities, impersonation and defamation after being nabbed on June 22.

Never mind that this teeming city of 10 million has been reduced from a thriving metropolis to a lawless hick town. Never mind that one of India's most advanced states has degenerated into a bankrupt industrial wasteland clogged with six million jobless youth and run by party-backed mafia-like unions with a pathologically sick work culture. Rename the city and the state and, the government believes, Bengali identity will reassert itself. "It's only when the bread runs out that those who hanker for a footnote in history turn to the distraction of the circus," says Sunanda K. Dutta Roy, columnist and former editor of *The Statesman*, who returned to the city recently after a long hiatus. The circus is now fast morphing into a burlesque. Last week Bhattacharya told the state assembly how the government would encourage a private TV channel to "safeguard Bengali culture and way of life". Then he declared that the state government would engage computer experts to find out ways to stem the proliferation of hate-sites on the Net! Such assistance, the apparatchik elaborated, would be sought from the ailing state-run Webel or the West Bengal Electronics Industry Development Corporation Ltd. Some Rs 50 crore would be needed to fund this cultural revolution, and, predictably, the government alone isn't in a position to cough it up. "We're entering an era of Bengali chauvinism," seethes Radha Prasad Gupta, an expert on the city. "They're destroying Bengal's catholicity by involving themselves in non-issues. Shades of the Shiv Sena's moral and cultural cleansing of

Mumbai. The move, say its opponents, will only unleash fascist forces in a city that's long been known for its multi-culturalism. This isn't the first time there's been a faddish chorus of approval among the rulers and a section of the citizenry to rename the city and the state. The Marxist government had once formed a committee to consider new names for Bengal. The latest move stems from the efforts of the Calcutta-based Bhasha Shahid Smarak Samiti (Memorial For Martyrs of Language Society), a cultural organisation floated last year to promote Bengali language and culture by invoking memories of citizens who died in the inspiring language movements of undivided Bengal. The Samiti, which includes such denizens as filmmaker Mrinal Sen and litterateur Ananda Shankar Ray, came up with a 10-point wishlist some time back. That list included a demand for renaming Calcutta and West Bengal, making Bengali compulsory till Class VIII in the state's schools, and launching a 24-hour Bengali TV channel. "We can't let the Bengali language and culture die just because there are more important things to do," says Sunil Gangopadhyay, celebrated novelist-poet, who heads the Samiti. "We're also not trying to alter Calcutta's metropolitan character in any way."

Gangopadhyay's concerns are genuine. But the decline in Bengali language, cinema, arts and its folk arts has more to do with the falling quality of its practitioners, the Marxist appropriation and patronage of subpar state-sponsored culture and an abysmal educational system where none of the languages are taught properly by errant and politicised teachers. To quote an example, the state public works minister Kshiti Goswami, who presides over the city's worst roads outside Bihar, helped build a sleek 60-ft-long marble statue honouring the martyrs of the language movement because he's a member of the Samiti. "The Bengali language has been vulgarised, trivialised and abused by its own practitioners," says Gupta. For most, the renaming exercise simply doesn't make sense. Says Dutta Roy: "About a decade ago the state government put me on a committee to consider a new name for West Bengal. I told the CM (Basu) then that while the West is redundant, Bengal is as acceptable nationally and internationally as Basu, the English rendering of his name, which offends no one's nationalistic sensibilities. Similarly with the city. In Bengali we'll continue to refer to Kolkata: in English it remains Calcutta like Roma and Rome. The proposed change will add nothing to Bengal's pride which should be rooted in more important things."

Agreed a scathing editorial in *The Telegraph* last week: "Bengal is a multi-cultural and multi-racial society. The identity of a Bengali can't be reduced to a language. A refusal to accept this wider definition of who's a Bengali has produced a false identity crisis and an equally misplaced show of aggression." Adds Magaysaywin, social worker and novelist Mahasweta Devi: "The Marxist government has failed the people in the state. There are a lot more important things to do, like development and improving the work culture." But saving Bengali culture and identity, clearly, tops the government agenda these days. Typically, half-a-dozen pressure groups have emerged. The Samiti, for example, has erected a small open air stage on the Maidan, where poets recite their work and local folk arts are on display. Also commenced is the *Nabobdagar* (Renaissance), a motley group of Bengali journalists, managers, barristers, doctors, sportspeople and police officers, which wants to usher in a "second renaissance" in Bengal. Registered as a trust, it plans to organise mobile cells that'll travel through the city and districts to goad Bengalis into opening businesses instead of looking for jobs. It also plans to give away awards to Bengali language toppers in secondary examinations. It's the sort of Bengali nationalism, not chauvinism," says Ashoke Dasgupta, editor of *Aajkal*, who also heads the trust. "The effort's to build the economic backbone of the community, that's been broken."

Meanwhile, the flight of capital continues unabated, its infamous work ethic refuses to improve and militant unionism continues to hold Calcutta's citizenry to ransom. A couple of centuries after Job Charnock, a petty British trader, pitched his tents on the east bank of Hooghly and made a start on Calcutta, the city had evolved from Rudyard Kipling's "packed and puerile town" into a cosmopolitan, plucky and congenial city, the intellectual capital of the nation and a thriving political and arts arena, a promising industrial belt. The future seems to be a rest-belt boondock with a new name.

**A Question of Numbers**  
This 214-page document is a detailed and most authentic survey ever done of the socio-economic profile of Calcutta households. Conducted between November '96 and May '97 by the Calcutta Metropolitan Development Authority (CMDA), the survey covered the entire greater Calcutta area including three municipal corporations, 34 municipal towns, 62 non-municipal urban areas and about 400 villages spread over six districts. The '81 census of this area put its population at around 10.2 million. The sample size was 20,298 households, in the study on distribution of population of the old Calcutta Corporation area comprising 100 wards, it was found that its Bengali-speaking population has declined from 65.6 per cent in '51 to 57.5 per cent in '96-97, the period of the survey findings. On the other hand, the Hindi/Hindustani/Urdu/other language speaking population in the city has gone up from 34.4 per cent to 42.5 per cent in the same period. This is what has set alarm bells ringing among the Bengali pressure groups. "For all you know, this might mean that the core city area has become more cosmopolitan," avers Dr Animesh Halder, economist and director, socio-economic planning, at CMDA, who headed the survey team. But that's of little comfort to the pressure groups. Courtesy: The Outlook magazine of India.