

# Why Chandrika Was Targeted

By V. Jayanth

THE Sri Lankan intelligence, security forces and the political parties were all expecting such a strike on December 18. They knew that the LTTE will deliver a strong message as the curtains came down on the Presidential election campaign.

They were not sure who would be the target. The President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, was always on top of the hit list, followed by her Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadirgamar.

Perhaps for the first time, a suicide bombing mission of the LTTE has failed. The President has survived the assassination attempt itself could change the course of Tuesday's election and the future of peace in the island.

The wheel has come a full cycle. Five years ago, there was euphoria in Sri Lanka. Ms. Kumaratunga won a landslide victory in the November 9 Presidential elections in 1994. But her main rival, the UNP candidate, Mr. Gamini Dissanayake, fell victim to a human bomb as he addressed an election rally in central Colombo.

Both when she won the Parliamentary elections in August 1994 and again the Presidential poll in November the same year, the Tamil Tigers welcomed the verdict and described it as a "mandate for peace". The minorities had voted overwhelmingly for Ms. Kumaratunga in the Presidential election.

But in his Heroes' day speech on November 27, the LTTE chief, Mr. V. Prabhakaran, declared "The five-year rule of Chandrika has been a curse on the Tamil people. The monumental tragedy that our people encountered in the form of war,

violence, death, destruction, displacement, hunger and starvation was the worst form of tyranny ever suffered by the Tamils. Chandrika's oppressive rule marks an epoch consisting of blood stained pages of our history. Her tyrannical rule left a permanent scar on the soul of the Tamil nation".

It was that scar that the LTTE was allegedly trying to remove, by assassinating the President and preventing her from winning a second term in office.

Sri Lankan analysts argue that the "fall of Jaffna in 1995" is the scar that the LTTE has been obsessed with for four years. "It has denied their pride so much that they have not forgiven Ms. Kumaratunga for taking away their so-called capital, Jaffna", academics at the Colombo University explain.

The very same Tamil Tigers who offered a "unilateral ceasefire" for a week after Ms. Kumaratunga was sworn in President on November 12, and went on to open negotiations with her Government, have turned against her this time.

Those familiar with the LTTE psyche see in this a pattern - what the LTTE ideologue, Mr. Anton Balasingham, once called the "karma" - the cycle of motive and revenge. If former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was killed for sending in the IPKF, the Sri Lankan leader and President, Ranasinghe Premadasa, was bumped off after a honeymoon. The LTTE skillfully used him to get the IPKF out of Sri Lanka and acquired a lot of arms and ammunition from him to fight the IPKF. But he had to pay with his life for the "atrocities on the Tamils". The other similarity between the Rajiv assassina-

tion and the attempt on Ms. Kumaratunga is the use of a woman suicide bomber. The human bomb is itself an LTTE trademark, though other terrorist groups have picked it up. Similarly, former Minister Gamini Dissanayake was assassinated during his campaign because the Tamil Tigers considered him "a very close friend of India and one of the architects of the Indo-Sri Lanka agreement".

Obviously, the LTTE will find it very difficult to resume negotiations with Ms. Kumaratunga, if she is re-elected President. But they will come under tremendous international pressure to begin talks. That is why, the LTTE has quietly spread the word that the Tamils must vote for the UNP leader, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe. At least that is the message from the east.

Though the margin between the President and the opposition leader has narrowed considerably in the past three weeks, a Chandrika victory is still a distinct possibility. Given their scant regard for the democratic process, the LTTE is suspected to have engineered this attempt - both as a retaliation and to prevent her from returning to power.

It is quite possible that because of the failed mission, Ms. Kumaratunga may go on to win this election. But the LTTE has once again sharply polarised opinion in the island. Even if the innocent Sri Lankan Tamils have nothing to do with this attempt, they will suffer as a consequence. The chauvinist Sinhalese will cry for the LTTE's blood in retaliation and the "war for peace" will resume



Sri Lankan troops keep guard 22 December, 1999 near an election office as results in the country's presidential elections were being announced. President Chandrika Kumaratunga (portrait background) was re-elected for a second successive term after securing more than 50 percent of the vote. AFP

before long, continuing to take a heavy toll of lives.

Sri Lankan sources say that the former Army Chief of Staff, Maj. Gen. Lucky Alagana, now with the UNP, was singled out

by the LTTE probably because he was tipped to become the Defence Minister in the event of Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe winning the election. Courtesy: The Hindu of India

# Eastern (Red) Icon

M Abdul Hafiz examines whether Jyoti Basu is indispensable communist in West Bengal

EVEN after twenty-two uninterrupted years of chief ministership, his services cannot be dispensed with. Six years ago Jyoti Basu, for the first time, hinted about his calling it a day, in response an uninvited political party met only to discover that the party did not have anyone to succeed him. So Basu, doctrinally loyal to the party and its decision stayed put. Now after more than half a decade, the position remains unchanged: Basu has no alternative.

With his failing health the communist patriarch has since been trying to shed off his lifelong passion — a commitment to build a proletarian paradise in India — and more specifically in West Bengal. For last few months he gave way to his fatigue and reduced his working hours at Writers' Building to half. He seldom returned to office after midday break. Recently he categorically asked his party to relieve him of his leadership. Late last month the West Bengal unit of the party's politburo briskly met to consider Basu's plea for retirement. It was found that the party could not let Basu go even now for more than one reason. Also the two-day politburo meeting in Delhi was in no different mood. Both urged the octogenarian chief minister to stay.

Basu, the disciplined cadre of the party, complied. But for the first time he earned a deputy — Buddhadev Bhattacharya, the state's home minister. It was not immediately clear whether the latter would ultimately become the party leader. But for now Basu will, according to the deal struck, attend office twice a week and work from home the rest of the time. It is apparently a phasing-out process because holding Basu back

cannot obviously be indefinite. However, Basu's total disengagement will be painful process. The more Basu wants to quit, the more the party clings on to him. According to Kalamuddin Shams, a Forward Bloc leader as well as West Bengal's minister for food and supply, the Left Front needs him till his last breath. But then Basu at 86 may not take long to reach his last breath. The leftists are indeed baffled at the thought of India's Left world without Basu.

This is not without a reason. The Left Front could not, over the years, produce a second line of leadership — a fact laid bare by the Front's desperate dependence on an apparently reluctant mascot. Jyoti Basu still occupies the entire space of left politics in West Bengal. He is still a messiah to his followers and the biggest crowd-puller in election campaigns. In last Lok Sabha polls he addressed 17 public meetings where his physical faculties did not quite work but the magic of his personality worked in drawing record number of people. There is virtually none taller among the equals in the Left camp and no one who considers himself fit to put on Basu's mantle. But that is not the only reason for succession crisis.

There is already red signals before the Left Front. In last Lok Sabha election its tally has slashed down to 29 from 33 in 1998. As against this the TC (Trinamul Congress)-BJP combine has gained by improving its tally from 7 in 1998 to 10 this year. With its rising share also of popular votes the TC is on the ascendancy. It has made significant inroad into what was and still is the Left fort — rural Bengal. The growing stature of its leader Ms Mamata

Banerjee as a union minister and her rising popularity pose an immediate threat to the leftists' control of the state for over two decades.

In February 2001 the state assembly election is due in West Bengal. It will be time for a crunch test for the communists who are still in control but on the wane. With Mamata in a determined mood to wrest the state's chief ministership in the next election the Left Front will afford to party with Basu at this crucial stage. The incumbency factor also has started to have its telling effect on the Left Front. It is not surprising that the politburo has urged Basu to continue till his health crumbles but an unspoken deadline extends his tenure to at least that crucial election in 2001.

There are still more reasons for Basu's indispensability. The nine-party coalition that constitute the Left Front can be held together only by a leader of Basu's stature. Despite defections in the past Jyoti Basu maintained a fine balance among the coalition partners. Everybody recognises that in the hand of a lesser man, the coalition could just go to pieces. With the rising star for Ms Mamata Banerjee many from the Front are already fraternising with the TC. Basu is considered only man in the Front to stop any possible defection.

The CPI(M) seniors in Delhi want Basu to remain current in politics for different reasons. They believe that Basu is destined for greater good. They hope against hope that the BJP coalition at the Centre will not last long. So, Basu is needed to be in touch with politics to lead a new alliance at the Centre. If, at all, that materialises the icon will never retire.

# ...And Why She Won

Sugeeswara Senthira writes from Colombo

SRI Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga won a second term in office on Wednesday, securing another chance to fulfil her promise to restore peace in the island nation torn by ethnic violence. Kumaratunga, 54, scraped through with a vastly reduced majority from Tuesday's election, held three days after she survived an attempt on her life by a suicide bomber, suspected to be from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The assassination bid helped her win sympathy votes but fell short of triggering a wave in her favour. She obtained just a little over 51 per cent of the votes, against the 50 per cent required and the record 62 per cent she polled in the last election in 1994, and edged out her main rival, Ranil Wickremesinghe of the main opposition United National Party (UNP) who polled about 44 per cent of the total valid votes.

The radical Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) emerged as a clear third force in Sri Lankan politics but the five per cent votes polled by its candidate,

Nandana Gunathilake, clearly showed that the party has a long way to go to catch up with the two major Sinhala parties, Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) and the UNP. "It (the result) is a clear expression of faith in President Chandrika Kumaratunga's leadership," said Media Minister Mangala Samaraweera, UNP chairman Karu Jayasuriya however disagreed and attributed her victory to large-scale violence, impersonations and rigging allegedly indulged in by her supporters in many areas. "Despite all that her vote has dropped by more than 10 per cent compared to last time," he pointed out. Jubilation in Kumaratunga's camp was muted. Ariyananda Dombagahawatte, deputy editor of Sinhala daily *Lankadeepa*, noted that her mandate was not sufficient for her to push through her proposed sweeping constitutional reforms, including more autonomy for the island's estranged minority Tamils. "If the PA goes for parliament-

ary election now, they will not get the required two-thirds majority needed for adopting her draft constitution," he told IANS.

D.H. Hettiarachchi, of Shri Jayawardanapura University, predicted interesting political developments in the months to come, including the possibility of a PA-triggered "political coup" in the UNP to dislodge Wickremesinghe from the party leadership.

"The dissident group which extended support to Kumaratunga in the election would attempt to capture the UNP, but they don't have much hope because Wickremesinghe has polled a substantial number of votes. However there could be a change in the UNP leadership, if chairman Karu Jayasuriya, who is considered more acceptable to moderate UNP circles, decides to make a bid for party leadership," Hettiarachchi said.

Observers believe Kumaratunga clearly benefited from the attempt on her life by a suicide

bomber, suspected to belong to the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), two days before the polls as many had voted for her in sympathy, which however did not reach the proportions of a "wave." "It is more a victory for Chandrika Kumaratunga than an endorsement on the performance of the PA government," said political analyst Jehan Perera. "The government will have to pull up its socks if it wants to win the parliamentary elections which are expected early next year," he said. While Wickremesinghe polled 50 to 60 per cent votes in most of the constituencies in Colombo district, Kumaratunga won a clear majority in her home district Gampaha in the Western Province despite the vigorous campaign her estranged brother Anura Bandaranaike conducted for the UNP candidate. Kumaratunga also polled more votes in Kandy, north-central and southern districts. Wickremesinghe polled more votes in the Tamil-majority areas than

Kumaratunga, but the low percentage of polling, 20 to 35 per cent in the northern Jaffna peninsula put paid to his hopes of a victory. Under the Constitution, Kumaratunga, who called the election a year ahead of schedule, has the option of taking the oath of office as president for a second term at the completion of her first six-year term at the end of 2000 which virtually gives her another seven years in office. Despite incidents of violence, more than 70 per cent of the total electorate of 11.8 million cast its votes. International observers who monitored the election, while noting there had been malpractices in certain areas, expressed satisfaction over the overall conduct of the poll.

"It was a democratic exercise," said former Indian Election Commissioner G.V.G. Krishnamurthy, one of 22 observers. A Pakistani observer, A.M. Naveed, said the reported irregularities were not big enough to make any significant change in the final result.

— India Abroad News Service

# BJP and Its Agenda

Mansoor Mamoon explains why he thinks uncertainty looms over BJP's hidden agenda

WHEN regional parties like the Dravida Munnetra Kazagam (DMK), the Telegu Desham Party (TDS) and the Trinomul Congress and others joined hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in forming the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in the centre after the October 1999 fray, a broad consensus was reached that no controversial issues other than the agreed agenda will be raised. But within two months the BJP laid bare its fangs of *Hindutva* much to the discomfort of the alliance partners.

The Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Ram Prakash Gupta, who recently replaced Kalyan Singh (since ousted from the party for the BJP's poor show in the Lok Sabha polls) and his blistering criticism of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, opened the Pandora's box by pledging to build a temple on the debris of the Babri mosque. The demolition of the famed mosque believed to have been built in the 16th century by the first Mughal emperor Zahiruddin Muhammed Babar over what the fanatic Hindus claim was the ruins of the temple of their god Rama, in December 1992 sparked off the worst communal riot in India — since 1947 — taking a toll of over two thousand lives.

In protest against what it called the hidden agenda of the BJP the United Opposition staged a walkout from the Lok Sabha which witnessed pandemonium for several days centring the issue. So severe had

been the opposition reaction that Prime Minister Vajpayee had to contradict the UP Chief Minister and made it clear that the NDA government has no such plan of building a multi-million-dollar temple.

In a bid to mollify the angry opposition lawmakers Vajpayee had to further assure that the Alliance government is determined to keep all controversial issues out and that its election manifesto had no mention of building the Rama temple. But the united opposition led by the Congress were not apt to give credence to what Vajpayee said. It strongly demanded the resignation of Home Minister, and number-two man in the government, Lal Krishna Advani, Human Resources Minister Murli Manohar Joshi and Minister of State for Tourism Uma Bharati, all hardline Hindu nationalists indicted by federal investigators of conspiring to raze the mosque. Vajpayee, however, did not accede to opposition demand.

The controversy centering the alleged plan for building Rama temple could hardly die down, came two more bomb shells in the form of tabling two private members bill in the lower house of the Indian parliament one seeking to ban slaughter of cows and to declare it as the national animal of the country instead of tiger and the pertains to uniformity in the civil code.

Both the bills are contrary to the religious sentiments and interests of the minority communities, particularly the Mus-

lims. Sharp came the angry reaction of the three coalition partners — the Trinomul Congress, the DMK and the TDP. They joined in the vociferous chorus of the united opposition in demanding a clarification from Vajpayee, who reiterated his earlier stand and said that the BJP had no hidden agenda and the controversial issues would be kept out of the purview of the alliance government. He said the bill relating to adoption of uniform civil code, which alone could get through for discussion with a margin of two votes, is a private members bill and the BJP as a party has nothing to do with it.

The real test for Vajpayee will be when the bill will be taken for discussion in the Lok Sabha. If Vajpayee as a party supports the bill the NDA might even fall apart. Some of the coalition partners are likely to leave the alliance and take their own way. Knowing this well, why then the BJP is coming up with its hidden agenda of *Hindutva*? The answer is simple — it is to show to the Hindus that the leadership is very much serious about establishing Hindu Raj and have not deviated from their earlier stand. How long Vajpayee, a moderate, will be able to contain the fanatics and hardliners only time can say.

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# Distinct Sound of Floundering

Sending Nawaz Sharif to the cleaners was the easy part for Pak Chief Executive, but Ayaz Amir looks at the difficulties

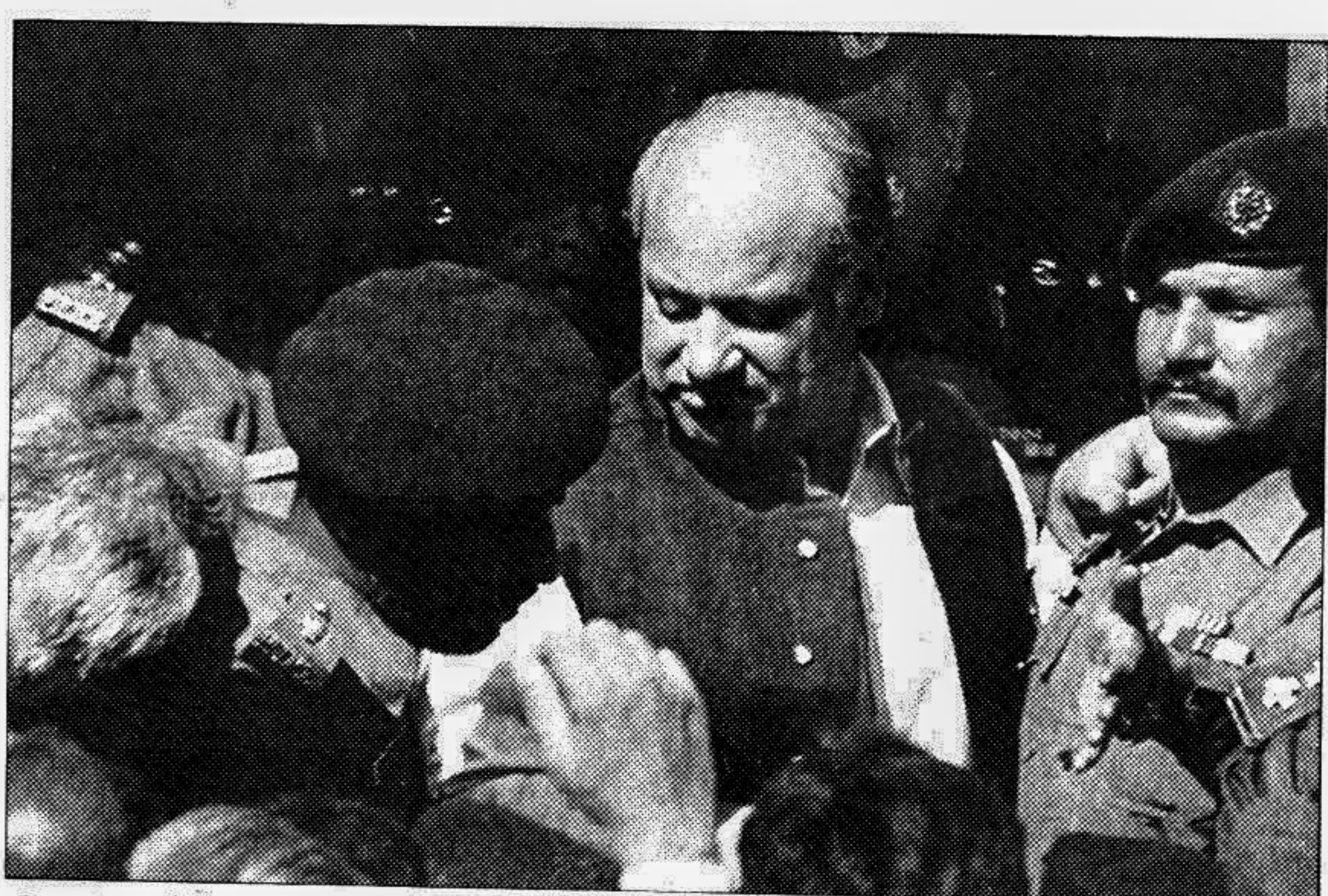
IF a bystander, his curiosity aroused by a strange sound, were to put his ears to the ground, chances are he would hear a strident creature thrashing its arms about in an attempt to keep its head above water.

Not to put too fine a point on it, this creature is the reformist government of General Pervez Musharraf, its clan already a bit withered and lost as it tries to fashion a coherent agenda from the rhetoric with which it has been trying to justify its assumption of power. There is certainly no dramatic turnaround in sympathy for Nawaz Sharif and his leading companions who now face the thicket end of justice. But public memories being short, Nawaz Sharif's massive failings are being obscured and softened as time passes.

Forget about the drawing room classes who preach high-minded reform and practice a different morality. Consider instead the mood of ordinary people for whom the hijacking case is not the obsessive thing that it might be for the army command. What has military rule meant for them? Prices have not fallen, new jobs have not been created and the administrative juggernaut (thana, tehsil, kutchery) is as rickety and corrupt as before. So much for the army's monitoring system.

Earnest men in starched khaki, their collars and peak caps ablaze with red tabs, will of course bristle at these suggestions. In imperious undertones they can almost be heard saying, "what do you expect in such a short time?" While they have a point they forget the rueful line that even a week is a long time in politics. And this regime has been around for nearly two months without much to show for itself.

True, a small herd of fattened cattle victims has been brought before the altar of accountability. But the voyeuristic delight provided by this spectacle has already palled. As it was bound to happen unless a constant stream of sacrificial victims was produced to feed the public's appetite for this kind of drama, a piece of psychology Roman emperors understood only too well. With no addition to this herd, and no public quartering either, the



Pursuing a fallen man

spectators in what can be described as our national arena are beginning to feel cheated. But by far more momentous is the regime's failure to set a clear course for itself. Where does it want to go? What is the holy grail it seeks? Good intentions abound but having heard too many of these in the past this is one thing the people of Pakistan are wary of.

Pressed for answers, the Chief Executive, who is giving more press interviews than his good for him, falls back upon a clutch of well-rehearsed lines: he wants to remove inter-provincial disharmony, revive the economy and devolve power to the provinces, and from there to the districts. For good measure, every now and then a shot is fired across the bows of 'sham' democracy. But a crucial question remains unanswered. If in a year the army has not managed to reform WAPDA, on what grounds of faith does it expect people to believe that over a similar or longer time span it can reform the nation?

A word too about another myth currently being flung to death: devolution. Quite apart

from the fact that devolution of any sort and military rule are a contradiction in terms, no one has precisely defined what kind of devolution the Chief Executive has in mind. However, is that when this still undefined concept acquires shape, 'real' democracy will arrive, bringing in its wake genuine 'empowerment', for the first time in their history, to the people of Pakistan.

No one need be under any illusion that the steel-frame of the central administrative structure is going to be dismantled any time soon or that with the coming of the new millennium deputy commissioners and superintendents of police will disappear into the shades. Devolution of power is just a fancy name being given to the concept of local bodies. Even when they come into existence (when precisely only the oracles can say), power will remain where it has always been: in the steel-frame of the administrative structure which even more than railways, camel custard and the English language — is the most enduring

legacy of Queen Victoria's Empire.

Even in climes more salubrious than ours, local bodies are vehicles for delivering better municipal services. Nowhere — not in the US, Britain, France or Germany — are they a substitute for national democracy. While Pakistan can do with better garbage disposal, its foremost problem is finding better leadership and reducing the corruption, waywardness and lack of vision of its governing class, of which, as should be obvious, the military is also a part. This is a long-term process and not a trick which can be performed by pulling a switch. In any event, how will local elections a year or so hence address this problem? Or does GHQ think that by merely stepping into the ring and seizing power this problem stands resolved?

All this is very confusing but, on examination, hardly surprising. This is a regime born in the midst of confusion, its leading lights themselves admitting that on October 12, in response to the action taken by the prime minister, they had to

act on the spur of the moment. So the 111 Brigade, which is to us what the Praetorian Guard was for the Roman Empire and the Janissaries for the Ottomans, was sent in and after a bit of confusion at the TV station, confusion being the hallmark of these events, power was seized, the prime minister and his colleagues arrested and the Constitution, that raddled document abused so often in our history, thrown into the dark once again.

This augurs ill for the future. Unlike a democratic government whose very legitimacy puts it under no desperate necessity to prove itself all the time, a government outside the constitutional pale has to justify itself by its performance. If it falters on this count it forfeits all reason to exist. General Pervez Musharraf's government, therefore, is under pressure to deliver. The question is, can it do so?

As if other problems were not enough, there is another theoretical knot which remains to be untangled. The army command's whole case for removing Nawaz Sharif is built on a single premise: that by removing General Musharraf as he flew home from Colombo and installing Lt-Gen Ziauddin in his place, Nawaz Sharif was sowing the seeds of factionalism in the army. His removal, therefore, had become necessary. Fine, but what justifies suspending the Constitution and banishing democracy? Between the premise and the conclusions we are seeing there is no logical connection.

If, however, the wider charge against Nawaz Sharif is that he was arbitrary in his ways and increasingly contemptuous of the institutional diversity of the state (a true enough accusation, by the way), how are matters helped by a retreat to militarism, a state of mind whose ruling principle is ad-hocism and the exercise of unquestioned authority? One can go on arguing like this till the moon rises but to no avail because in Pakistan today even elementary logic is open to abuse and imperial disdain.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

# Dawn of December 17

King Wangchuck of Bhutan was escorted in a traditional chipdrel procession to the National Day celebration ground where the Royal Bhutan Army presented a Guard of Honour, reports Phuntsho Wangdi

IT was a special day for Kurtoe, the remote and starkly beautiful ancestral home of the Wangchuck dynasty, when His Majesty the King, Their Majesties the Queens, and Their Royal Highnesses the Princes and Princesses joined the people to celebrate the 92nd National Day of Bhutan in the dzongkhag.

The morning of December 17 dawned cool and crisp over Lhuentse Dzong as thousands of men, women, and children gathered for the celebrations from all corners of the dzongkhag. His Majesty the King was escorted in a traditional chipdrel procession to the celebration ground where the Royal Bhutan Army presented a Guard of Honour. After a marching ceremony representatives of the clergy, the government, the business community and the people of Lhuentse offered the Ku-Sung-Thukten Mendrel to His Majesty.

As His Majesty the King spoke to the people of Kurtoe in his traditional National Day address, the words rang out to the rest of the nation. His Majesty shared his happiness with the successes of development in the dzongkhag, the improved quality of life which the Bhutanese people now enjoyed, the peace and stability within the kingdom, and also his deep concern over the grave potential threat to which the country faced from the presence of armed militants from Assam inside Bhutanese territory.

His Majesty the King announced that, since the people faced their greatest difficulties in times of death in the family and the destruction of their homes by natural calamities, the government had decided to increase the existing rural life insurance scheme from Nu 1,500 to Nu 10,000, the insurance claim for Nu 30,000 to Nu 100,000, and the claim for Category II houses from Nu 12,500 to Nu 40,000 from January, 2000.

The people will pay a nominal life insurance premium of just Nu 30.00 a year while the government will have to pay Nu 29.00 million to subsidise the premium. For the insurance of houses against fires, flood, landslides and other calamities the premium would be just Nu 150.00 for Category I and Nu 60.00 per annum for Category II houses while the government will pay Nu 39.00 million to subsidise the scheme.

His Majesty expressed his hope that the increase in the life and house insurance schemes for the rural population would alleviate the two biggest problems faced by the people.

His Majesty reminded the people of Kurtoe that the dzongkhag had seen dramatic success in the development programmes. When National Day was celebrated at Tangmarchu in 1977, the only development facilities existing in the dzongkhag were four primary

schools and one basic health unit. It was during the National Day at Tangmarchu that the decision was taken to build the motor road to Lhuentse.

"Today, when we look at the living standards of our people in the eight dzongs of Kurtoe, we can all see for ourselves how much the district has developed and the people have prospered," His Majesty said. "The tremendous progress and economic development that has taken place in our country is a source of deep satisfaction for me and I am very happy to see the great improvement in the living standard and quality of life of our people."

Three major projects — the Kurichhu Power Project, the Tala Hydro-electric Project and the Basochhu Power Project — had been started in the Eighth Plan and their construction was progressing well. The successful completion of these projects would go a long way in achieving the cherished national goal of economic self-reliance and bring immense benefit to the people. Bhutan's pristine rivers, His Majesty said, would prove to be the greatest source of revenue for the country, ensuring the prosperity of the people.

Concluding his address, His Majesty the King expressed his happiness at being able to celebrate National Day this year with the people of Kurtoe and extended His Tashi Delek to all the people in the 20 dzongkhags. Courtesy: Kuensel of Bhutan.