### **DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH 30 2001**

### Pakistan

## Prisoner of the past

**EKRAM KABIR** 

AKISTAN'S military ruler, General Parvez Musharraf, seems an insightful follower of the past. He understands the inability of the political parties to get organised against his (military) rule. Musharraf has again re-stated last week his desire to stay in power till the election in October next year, the deadline set by the Pakistan supreme court. He said his regime still had a lot to do, and the main priority was to revive the country's economy.

But democracy is important for Pakistan. But all indications say that General Pervez Musharraf may follow the footsteps of his predecessors - Ayub Khan and Ziaul Haq and is likely to stay in power longer than is expected, even after push for restoration of democracy at various levels in that country. Within a year of coming to power, Musharraf had expressed his strategy when he said that he would introduce new brand of politics - genuine democracy - where the tested politicians, who were in power in the past, would have no place. When the time will be opportune he may also assume, like his predecessors probably, a quasi-civilian coating for legalising his regime, form his own band of political party and handpick persons loyal to him.

This gives a depressing political culture in Pakistan as far as democracy is concerned.

Political culture and conventions are products of a social milieu which strengthen with the democratic commitment and time. A broad-based and well-organised political party usually serves as a mediator between the social thought and the political action, so say experts in Political Science. When it comes to power, the party works as a bridge between the society and the state. It is commonly said military coups in Pakistan are because of the failure of democracy and democracy fails because of weak and corrupt party system.

When Pakistan became independent, say historians, Muslim League started losing its influence and prestige and was involved in bureaucratic and military policymaking. In 1954, the Muslim League suffered a crushing defeat in erstwhile East Pakistan provisional election and was reduced in former western wing. Even in former West Pakistan, Muslim League did not sustain itself as a major political party, due to the several greedy politicians and bureaucrats. On the other

hand, the then East Pakistan formed its own party Awami League under the leadership of HS Suhrawardy. In 1967, Pakistan People's Party was formed by Zulfikar

Ali Bhutto, which emerged as the party with new vision. However, it remained as "West Pakistan's party" and Bhutto as "West Pakistan's leader". When erstwhile East Pakistan emerged as an independent country, People's Party emerged as the single-largest party in Pakistan. Then again due to internal rivalries and the domination of the

vested interests, the People's Party lost the popular faith. Although Pakistan was founded as a democracy after the partition of the subcontinent, the army has remained one of the most powerful institutions of the country. This is in spite of the fact that in recent years the army has stressed that it has no desire to become embroiled in politics. Successive governments have always made sure that the military was consulted before they took key decisions, especially when those decisions related to the Kashmir conflict. Political leaders know that the army has stepped into the limelight in the past, and could do so again.

After Pakistan formally became a republic in 1956 under President Mirza, it faced an array of serious threats to its stability. Its conflict with India over Kashmir remained unresolved, relations with Afghanistan were poor, and the country suffered continuing economic difficulties, frequent cabinet crises, and widespread political corruption. In October 1958, Mirza abrogated the constitution and granted power to the army under General Ayub Khan, who subsequently assumed presidential powers. The office of the prime minister was abolished and rules by decree introduced. Ayub Khan's autocratic rule lasted until 1969, when he was forced to resign following serious unrest. Yahva Khan, the commander-in-chief of the army, who re-imposed martial law, replaced him in turn. He stepped down following the war with Bangladesh, and military rule temporarily came to an end.

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the new president, introducing a new constitution which came into effect in 1973. But after elections in 1977, the opposition challenged Bhutto's victory. and widespread riots ensued. Failure to reach a reconciliation prompted the army chief of staff, Ziaul Haq, to depose Bhutto in a military coup and declare martial law. This

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Despite the subsequent return to civilian government, the politics of Pakistan have remained closely linked to the military. Now the army's actions appear to herald an end to what has been the longest period in Pakistan's turbulent history in which the military has remained on the sidelines.

SOUTH ASIA

The influence of feudal and power-hungry people destroyed the party and ruined the political values in the country. So when a military man Ziaul Haq deposed Bhutto, Bhutto's party was not in a position to resist. In April 1979 Bhutto was executed and his party showed no signs of life. After a decade, when his daughter Benazir Bhutto became the prime minister after 1988 election, she herself was not able to 'clean' the party and did not pay any attention to party re-organisation, thus depended upon other levers of power.

Eventually, Benazir became the victim of the 8th Amendment to the 1973 Constitution, which was Ziaul Haq's quid pro quo for lifting the martial law.

Zia himself used it against Junejo, the prime minister of his choice, and dissolved the very National Assembly, which had passed it. Two years later, in August 1990, it was used by President Ghulam Ishaq Khan against Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and then again against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in April 1993, while they both commanded the support of the majority in the National Assembly.

The arrival of Nawaz Sharif, though in a way was able to revive the popularity of Muslim League who has been split up into various sections. However, the imbalances within the League remain there and he was not able to convey a transparent political system within the country.

Despite being the popular leaders of their time, neither Benazir nor Sharif made any attempt to strengthen their respective political parties. In fact, they neglected their parties throughout their tenures as prime ministers. They did not realise that the strong party is basic to the parliamentary system of democracy.

Parliamentary democracy in Pakistan has repeatedly failed only because its political leaders have not been able to build up well-organised and strong political parties. Given the performances of the weak pillars democracy, can one blame the army? And what would really happen when democracy returns to Pakistan in the same way it did in the past?

## Bangladesh

## Why not untie the knots?

**ZAGLUL AHMED CHOWDHURY** 

HE publication of this piece is likely to be synchronised with a major rally in the capital under the aegis of the ruling Awami League. The opposition political parties have called two-day general strike on April 1 and 2. The students' organisations allied to the opposition also called another day of strike on April 3 which virtually makes the anti-government strikes for three consecutive days. Unless any remarkable change occurs now, these events are to take place. Although such any dramatic change is remote, none should forget the maxim that "nothing impossible exist in political circles" and that too may take place not only in dramatic

True, there seems to be no permanent foes or friends in politics. In our next-door neighbour, Indian state of West Bengal, all political calculations are being shattered ahead of state assembly elections. Political exigencies dominate the scenario there rather than ideology even though none lags behind in uttering noble principles of righ teousness. The Trinomial Congress of Mamta Bannerjee is making a desperate bid to come to power in the state replacing the ruling Left Front and it is now about to forge alliance with the Congress whom it vehemently opposed all these days. Mamta has parted wavs with the centre-ruling Bharativa Janata Party (BJP) and also quit as a federal minister with an eye on the coming state assembly elections. Possibly, the character of politics is such and it will be a height of folly to think to reverse the established pattern by bringing into serious tone

It is no wonder that political polarisation may take place in this country too centring the elections strategy. If Jatiya Party takes a progovernment position after being a strong component of the opposition alliance in the past several months or a year, this should not make one sit up. Then again, division in the party on the issue is also not unexpected, as some would like to talk of being "uncompromising" and some seeking to find reasons in the new stance. But these are also not permanent or tangible as most of the exercises are experimental keeping the options open and it remains to be seen whether the party or parties concerned eventually gain or stands to lose.

Anyway, the bigger aspect of the complicated political situation that confronts the nation is the divergent positions taken by two main players of the political spectrum over the coming elections. When I wrote a piece on Bangladesh political scene two weeks ago on this page, the observation was that the people appear to have heaved a sigh of relief since election seemed round the corner and a pre-election fever began to grip the nation. But the optimism later proved misplaced as the developments in the next few days were otherwise. The

ter that she would accept any time for polls as suggested by the leader of the opposition had shown great maturity and wisdom, catching the opposition unawares. After all, accommodation does help in the hustings. Then the leader of the opposition met the president suggesting a time for voting, to which the prime minister reportedly reacted broadly favourably while in holy city of Medina. All these cleared the decks for smooth holding of the polls. The asking of polls within May by the opposition and the government seeking to give as less as possible time to the caretaker government for the purpose of elections do not exactly fall in the plausible arguments for conducting fair and free elections. Here their party and narrow interests rather than broader reasons dictated both sides. But the differences were not major and could be bridged by any mediation or contacts and both sides should not have shown rigidity on such issues of critical interests to

announcement by the prime minis-

the people and country. Unfortunately, good omens turned sour rather unexpectedly and both the two leaders came out with ultimatums and counterultimatum, hardening their points of views and queering the pitch of a soft atmosphere. While one can always toe with the party line or unhesitatingly tend to support the stance of the party or group that he or she supports, neutral analysts could question the sense of wisdom of both sides on several counts.

Was it really necessary to come out with such a tough line by the opposition like two-day hartal and asking the donors not to give money to the present government without fully exhausting the scopes for reconcili-

Likewise, was is reasonable on part of the prime minister to speak about her own "challenge" asking the opposition to pull her government down, particularly when she is in charge of the government with all the might like the state machinery? But all these are happening to the dismay and concern of the nation.

The prime minister, according to reports, has reiterated on March 27 the readiness to relinquish power after April 17 to pave the way for formation of a caretaker govern-ment. The newspapers of March 28 carried this news along with the tough stance of the opposition leader that there is no scope for calling off the strike programmes which she thinks forms the last denouement of the current antigovernment campaign. This situation has only heightened the tensions about the shape of things to come in the coming days. Papers are coming out with analytical reports on the present situation and most say that hard-liners in both sides are thwarting reconciliation by their belligerent approaches. This simply leads to the question: has the silver lining that had emerged some

Should ultimatum and counterultimatum dominate the scene at the cost of people's tension? Have the

time ago now disappeared.

people no right to experience good time or destined to suffer stubborn-

There is no denying the fact that charm, temptation and greed are some of the characteristics of rule. and these can be applied in any pattern of governance to varying degrees. However, democratic rule should instil the spirit of serving the people. Unfortunately, this seems lacking at the moment here. This is the reflection of an ordinary person on the street unless the mind is prejudiced. The other day a simple man was cursing both the sides for the present hopelessness situation: "why should the opposition leader become so tough or why should the prime minister forget the pledge that she made in a holy place like Medina at handliner's influence?"

Elderly and respected journalist Obaid-ul-Hug while writing in a Bengali daily on the current situation quoted from the speech of late American president John F. Kennedy from his inaugural speech as president of his country: "Those who foolishly sought power by riding on the back of the tiger ended up inside". Whether this applies in Bangladesh is up to the consideration of the people at large. Shouldn't the people in power demonstrate more pragmatism and wisdom as well as sense of accom modation for the sake of the country? Is it that difficult to untie knots those complicate the political situa-

cogently, how much money can we

think of spending on ourselves and

our near ones, or doing things in our

name? At what point does a stated

sum of money cease to represent

the equivalent of defined wants and

dreams, becoming instead a mere

abstract figure? What would a

middle-class person do with a

Bachchan range from the absurdly

modest (buy gifts for the family, take

a holiday) to the unrealistically

ambitious (set up a speciality hospi-

tal). Clearly, these people have no

practical notion of what the sum

signifies. It's a romantic concept

that literally means nothing to them.

The answers received by

crore?

# Improper growth?

KENCHO WANGDI in Thimphu

MPROPER growth, congestion, lack of parking space and bad state of sanitationsome of the problems that metropolis grapple withhave begun to rear their ugly heads in Bhutan, most notably in its capital city, Thimphu.

According to the Thimphu thrompon, Phuntsho Wangdi, shortage of parking areas and congested traffic are some of the problems begging immediate attention. Then there are the concrete structures which are not always built according to plans and have begun to dominate whatever little available

"Thimphu city has grown without a real comprehensive plan," said the thrompon, pointing out that the developments in the city have far out-paced the response the municipal body could provide.

One of the mandates that the City Corporation had been asked to fulfill when it became an autonomous body in February, 1995, was to maintain proper sanitation and the aesthetic beauty of the town. It was felt, at that time, that the direct involvement of the residents and the autonomy given to the newly established town committee would ensure that the responsibilities in administering, maintaining and developing Thimphu would reach a standard which would make all Bhutanese proud of their nation's capital.

But it was easier said than done. The City Corporation could not carry out "many of its planned activities" for lack of funds. Facilities like suitably located car parks had to be identified and built but the implementation was difficult because the parks would have encroached on the private lands.

The past planners might not have been farsighted; the new constructions in the already congested areas are symbolic of their shortcomings. With the increase in the number of vehicles, the problem today has aggravated. The area behind the Norzin Lam, locally known as the Hong Kong market. is one such place needing prompt attention. The road is small, narrow and crammed with vehicles.

Despite these hurdles, the City Corporation has initiated several projects aimed at improving the city by seeking loans from the Asian Development Bank.

A parking area is being developed at the milk booth area while the redevelopment of Changlam and the taxi parking areas had been completed. The latter has a two-way lane with a divider separating the parking, which can accommodate 28 cars, 43 taxis and five buses, and the carriage way. The construction of a link road along this stretch of road is expected to ease the traffic congestion along the Norzin Lam. Also in the plan is the construction of an additional parking along this road.

To encourage the use of the river side the City Corporation has begun the construction of what it calls the walk-way riverside. Scheduled to complete by the end of June, through the use of the walk-way, the City Corporation aims to increase environmental awareness of the public in keeping the city clean.

The City Corporation also begins this month the development of the Clock Tower Square which it claims will be the 'heart of the city'. The Square will serve as a civic center offering, among others, a venue for public awareness campaigns and cultural shows. According to a Thimphu resident, the development of the Clock Tower Square could not be more timely. "I hope it will be a place where everyone can come and relax and not be littered with beer cans and popcorn packets."

The problem of garbage has absorbed a great deal of the City Corporation's efforts and resources but a permanent solution is yet to be found. Rinzin Namgyel, Head of Environment Division at the City Corporation, laments the lack of progress while the thrompon threatens to implement the "carrot and stick" rule so that anybody found littering will be



A slice of Thimphu

In former times, the ecological cycle attended to whatever people churned out. Garbage largely constituted edibles which were consumed by dogs cats and birds, leaving no traces. With the advent of plastics, rubber, metal, glass and chemicals which are not edible nor biodegradable, the problem has left people anxious for solutions. Left unattended, today's garbage can be more than just the rotten stench and the eye sore. Thimphu generates about 12 tonnes of garbage everyday.

In what it calls the solid wastage management, the City Corporation has various initiatives up its sleeve. The door-to-door collection will be increased and dust bins provided to the households at a nominal charge. Two compacter trucks, funded by the DANIDA and the royal government at a cost of Nu 2.6 million each, will be bought this year to reduce the number of journeys to the landfill. The City Corporation dumps the garbage in Meme-Lakha on the way to Wangdue highway, 12 kilometres from Thimphu.

This move, said Rinzin Namgyel, will gradually remove the concrete bins. An over-stuffed concrete bin with stray dogs foraging about it has become symbolic of the garbage situation in Thimphu, partic-

Meanwhile the educated lot can better themselves and the city by educating their children about civic sense and not blatantly throw 'doma'-stained papers and plastics on the streets. The so called 'modern people" are quick to distance themselves from the ugly heap but they couldn't care less if distancing themselves means throwing an empty cigarette case out of their car.

"If the capital town of Thimphu, with its importance, infrastructure, and concentration of educated people cannot be kept 'clean and green', it would be unreasonable to expect other towns to do so," these words, spoken by Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Choden Wangchuck during the Keep Thimphu Clean and Green workshop in 1992, are yet be valued.

This piece first appeared in the Kuensel of Bhutan

## Nepal

# In memory of hope

N this all-pervasive gloom, it is getting increasingly difficult to keep the memory of March 1990 alive. But we must remember that Springtime of the People. It was a season of hope, an extraordinary time when Nepalis rose up spontaneously to express their determination to build a new future for themselves and their children On 16 March 1990 (3 Chaitra),

Nepali litterateurs wore black bands over their mouths, marched through the streets and were hauled away in police trucks. A movement led by students was snowballing into a wider protest. Poets, novelists, artists, singers, theatre personalities breathed new life into the Jan Andolan. Those were the days when every little action mattered and even minor protests sent out powerful symbolic messages. Then the engineers, teachers, lawyers, medics, journalists, airline pilots, bankers, traders, industrialists, government employees, and even some members of the police took to the streets. In these jaded days of democratic decay when street protests have become so commonplace that people don't even notice them anymore, it takes some effort to recall how daring and heady those protests were.

Then on 20 March (7 Chaitra) a professional solidarity group organised a seminar in Kirtipur, another in a series of protests that were becoming routine in the Kathmandu Spring of 1990. It was in fact an assembly of techno-dissidentslegal eagles, academics, engineers, career consultants, physicians and journalists. They were there at Tribhuvan University not just to protest, but examine the possibility of alternatives. Those exhilarating discussions were disrupted as the regime panicked. The Kirtipur Seminar has now come to be remembered merely as one of numerous protests of the prodemocracy movement. But to my mind, it was a seminal eventthe first to look beyond protests at possibilities, the first to discuss hope, not desperation. Even in those difficult times, people talked about the inevitable dawn that follows the

time, a crucial differenceinstead of hope we have foreboding. There is ominous talk of the Ides of March. Everyone is protesting something. some are protesting everything, but the common denominator is that they are all 'against' something, not 'for' anything. The fundamentalists of Balkhu have issued a fatwa that the prime minister must resign, and these Stalinists think democracy means holding parliament to ransom to oust a legitimately elected government. When asked about the alternative to Giriia Prasad, his opponents in parliament say evasively: "Well, anyone else from Nepali Congress." Can you get any more desperate than that? An opposition party running a mindless campaign for the express purpose of replacing one leader of the ruling party with another? Isn't that a problem for the ruling party: who it selects to head the government? Let the Nepali Congress sort out its own mess (and what a mess it is). The Lefts needn't paralyse the House, unless they are trying to bring it down, and parliamentary democracy with it.

Despair is not the monopoly of the main opposition. Their comrades-in-arms are in hot pursuit of utopia with a "Peoples' War" which has consumed nearly 2,000 lives, spread misery and brought development to a standstill. It's like a suicide bomber, this terror. The sacrifice is there, but it is meaningless. To die for a pie in the sky is fanaticism born out of a sense of rejection. The Taliban blow up the Giant Buddhas in Bamiyan, Maoists burn a village in Saptari to punish itboth are acts of outrage caused by deep despair. The Prachanda Path may prove to be the knife that will cut the selftightening noose around the neck of the Maoist movement, but only if the blade doesn't cut off its neck first. The Maoists are trying to offer an alternative. but it is a mirage of utopia that recedes the nearer we get to it.

The despair and recklessness of our political class (all erstwhile freedom fighters who offered us so much promise in 1990) is something we the people can force them to overcome. Politicians are experts at taking their cue from the political

It's yesterday once more. This windsock, and if the mood of society changes from dejection to anticipation, leaders will once again come back to the fore to be what Napoleon called "dealers in hope"

> Our intellectuals have turned into prophets of doom, but that does not dismay me either. To keep crying wolf is a part of their calling, they are expected to show us which way not to go, raising a red flag when society does so. Public intellectuals are expected to preach Camus' neither/nor. Neither the socialism of the gallows, nor the capitalist order riddled with inequalities. Ivory towers are not places to start digging new roads, it's good enough that they are just watch-posts.

What we should really worry about is the apathy of the intelligentsia. Wealth according to the gospel of Adam Smith is created primarily by capital. Marx said that it was labour that made and multiplied wealth. To those two factors of production, social democrats added the dimension of communication. It is communication that synthesises capital with labour, inspires innovation, and establishes harmony for the well being of the society.

Members of the intelligentsia perform that very crucial function of communication. They don't merely add, but multiply value. All of us have motives that makes us do what we do. For the ruling class, it is grandiose dreams of power. Fear fuels intellectuals, that is why they agonise so much. For the petty bourgeoisie, pretensionkeeping up with the Koiralas. For the masses, the challenge of survival is so urgent that nothing else matters. But the motive that keeps intelligentsia 'productive' is hope. Snuff out hope, and it loses its light.

It is the death of hope that has

immobilised the Nepali intelligentsia today. It must be resurrected if social democracy is to have a future. Where are you, all you doctors, engineers, artists and authors of the 1990 Kathmandu Spring? Where are you when the country needs you again? It is easy to curse politics and politicians, but show us the path of reform. Show us, and rekindle hope

# Notes on the creation of *crorepatis*

SUKANTA CHAUDHURI

OME time ago, I wrote about the deeper social risks of Kaun Banega Crorepati. I stand by my views; but last week's videotapes have placed them in a new perspective. No, I am not starting on a tirade against public corruption. Let us leave that pleasant task to the politicians of parties that happen not to be pilloried in the present instance. Sooner or later, their opponents will have their turn. In fact, the revelations have not revealed anything new beyond novel techniques of investigative reporting. Everyone knew all along that such things happen.

This makes it almost irrelevant which party is in power, whether the charges are entirely true, whether indeed the tapes are a fraud. Even if they were, they would conform to deeper truth of fiction about which Aristotle has much to say, in the equally sordid context of legend and history. The ancient Greeks knew all about public corruption, and could attack it more wittily than most journalists today. The latter would profit immensely by studying Aristophanes.My subject is different. It is speculative wonder as to what impels people whether or not those allegedly featuring in the tape to scale such mountains of money. to toss and bandy not only the names but the substance of such immense sums. As one awesome riposte in the dialogue put it, people in these circles talk of crores, not of a lakh or two.

A crore is still a magic sum to most people: hence the appeal of the title of Amitabh Bachchan's show. Most middle-class citizens today think in terms of lakhs: relatively few advance to seven figures. and virtually none to eight. Among humbler people, a lakh has the same exalted and inaccessible status. At a still humbler level at

few thousands represent a comparable romantic dream. To some. owning any money at all, or indeed being free of lifelong debt, is a wild fantasy. I do not know how many people belong in the last group; but in our fecund land, the tally must run into crores. We are used to such figures with

respect to population, not money. Indeed, besides all its other blessings, wealth acquires a new value namely, rarity value specifically in a poor country. Two generations ago. this rarity status could be earned by a standard of living that today counts as middle-middle. Most of us want a number of things that our exists chiefly as a quick upward climb among the snakes and ladders of consumerist affluence. It lets us buy that new fridge or TV, or that much more gold for our daughter's wedding. Then before we realise it, we are pledged to the higher mission of spending money because we cannot record, declare or preserve it.

We now splurge obscenely not merely on our children's weddings but on their birthday parties. We holiday abroad with grim compulsion. We scatter gifts among people we hardly know. We have to have a good time even if we don't want to.For long, needless to say, we do enjoy it as still more do our friends

design, as though it were a work of art. Metaphorised, this suggests the mindset of the true-blue tycoon which is not to say any jack-in-trade who might have amassed a few or a few hundred crores. The prince among plutocrats pursues wealth with a disinterested.

who views a banknote only for the

almost aesthetic purpose. Of course he does not forgo the pleasures, comforts and powers afforded by wealth (though a sprinkling of millionaires have eschewed these frivolities). Nor does he disown the crooked deal, the tax dodge, the mega bribe, the hired goon in fact, he might admit all these with greater zest, as an artist dispenses with

VIEW FROM KOLKATA

have thought of owning a car, any more than we think of owning a private jet. We want more things these days; those wants are translated into needs, above all by the wiles of the global publicity machine; hence we end up wanting or needing more money. As a rule, our wants are specific and, at any given stage, finite. We buy a TV, then a fridge, then a car, then a flat... The list may keep lengthening till we lose count; but it remains a list of concrete wants nonetheless.

This consumerist ambition which extends to educating one's children expensively and marrying off one's daughters marks the economic agenda of most members of the salariat. In this respect, the MBA with a seven-figure salary is soul-brother to the pen-pushing babu. The former has climbed higher up the ladder; but it is the same ladder nonetheless. Common-or-garden corruption involving ten rupees or a few lakhs

delights of wealth without its cares. In innumerable ways, having money is clearly more pleasurable than having none; that's why people who preach the contrary are routinely disbelieved. Nonetheless, some rich men tell us that it grows ever harder to find safe and novel ways of enjoying very large sums of money. The possession of such wealth generates its own stress and

This has nothing to do with the stress of avoiding taxes and concealing one's ill-gotten gains a crude burden by comparison, by which our super-rich seem little afflicted. The insouciant candour of the taped dialogue clearly proclaims as much. Yet we are still thinking of specific acquisitions and activities to satisfy concocted needs after the real ones have been amply met. Money is viewed as the means of obtaining them. We are some distance yet from the true mystique of wealth. Hardy describes a woman

social conformity in the interests of his art.I have virtually no interaction with the very rich. But in those nextto-none encounters. I sometimes discern a marked vein of creativity in this vision of wealth, over and above any specific creativity of idea, product or technique. It answers to a genuine phenom-

enon on the frontiers of entrepreneurship. Clearly, this explanation cannot apply to the bribe-taking babu or politician. The politician's "respectable" motive is simple: he needs funds to fill his party's bottomless coffers. But what of the functionary, whether official or politician, gathering wealth for himself? Making money is not his vocation; he cannot employ it to any creative purpose, merely to his own needs and fancies. He is tied down to a private shopping list. Such a list, as I argued above, can expand indefinitely; but is ultimately limited by the human capacity to absorb and consume. How far can this capacity extend? To put it more

To possess a crore would be like owning a magic carpet or the elixir of youth.At what height, I wonder, is a crore of rupees a matter-of-fact sum, one in a series you receive and store privately, and then (presumably) spend to some tangible benefit for yourself, as opposed to a social end or public work? And how does one keep track of this vast unrecorded wealth. like an elephant hiding in a jungle? A man I know, an honest member of a suspect profession, once said to me, "Every man has his price; no doubt I have mine. I have been offered sums that, though substantial, were not too much for me to resist. I can imagine being offered an amount so large as to scare or bewilder me. But somewhere in between, there's a point where I am vulnerable. I don't know

where it is. I only hope no one finds it

out." No one ever did, as far as I

know. But it is perturbing to think

that for very many people in the upper reaches of our public life, that level of vulnerability is pitched too high for the nation to gauge. Chaudhuri is a professor of English at Jadavpur