

Who could have imagined that the Indian government would meet its nemesis so soon? Many among the educated in India were carried away by its jingoistic rhetoric when the BJP government went euphoric over its May 1998 nuclear blasts and were fooled into believing that gate crashing into the exclusive nuclear club insured India's security against aggressive neighbours like Pakistan and China. As far as China is concerned, the BJP government had to eat humble pie within days of declaring that our nuclear weapons were meant as a counter to the threat posed by China. As soon as the Chinese indicated that they had taken note of our declaring them enemies, our ministers and other policy makers got jittery. Since then they have been finding newer ways to placate the Chinese, including the recent trip to China by external affairs minister Jaswant Singh.

Our worthy neighbour Pakistan soon proved that it was as good as India in the tit for tat game. The Pakistanis took no time in setting off their own nuclear blasts. That presumably showed up India's claims for what they were. If a "rogue nation" that is also a "failed state" could match India, there was nothing so worthy of mention in India's so-called achievement in going openly for nuclear weapons. Parvez Hoodbhoy, Professor of Nuclear and High Energy Physics at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, interviewed in the June 4, 1999 issue of *Frontline*, aptly puts Indo-Pak nuclear achievements in perspective: "...making bombs and missiles of the type Pakistan and India possess is now the work of engineers, and

Of Warmongers...

○ Madhu Kishwar

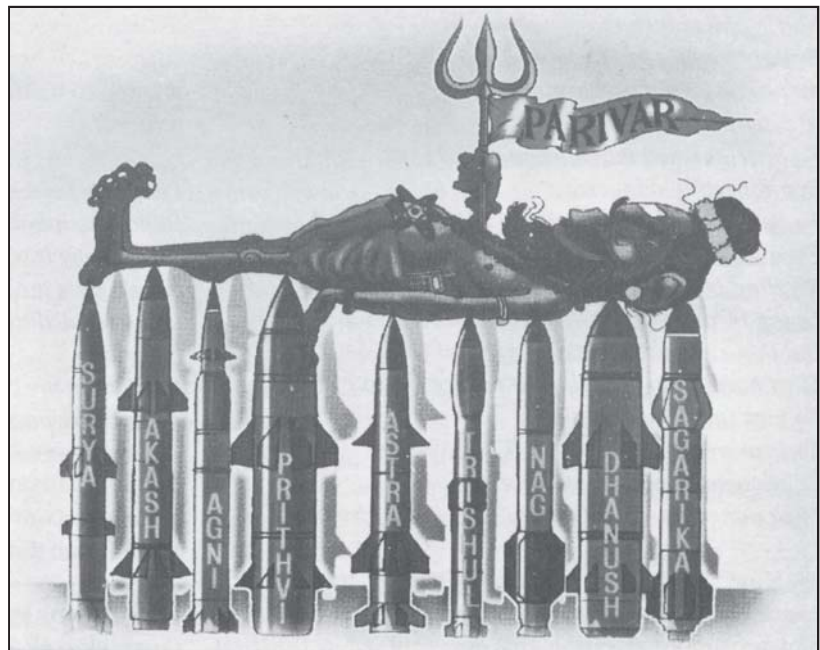
no longer that of scientists. In a world where science moves at super-high speeds, nuclear weapons and missile development is today second-rate science. The undeniable fact is that the technology of nuclear bombs belongs to the 1940s, and the furious pace of science makes that ancient history... Making these weapons no longer impresses the rest of the world."

The international scientific community has right from the beginning expressed serious doubts and made snide comments concerning the claims of both India and Pakistan with regard to

the actual magnitude of the blasts as well as the weaponisation of their respective nuclear delivery systems.

Within India too a few rational voices continue to express similar doubts about India's nuclear boasts. To quote A. Gopalakrishnan, the former chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, from that same issue of *Frontline*:

"It is now somewhat clear that the [Department of Atomic Energy] DAE and the [Defence Research Development Organisation] DRDO selectively used the nuclear test data through preferential analysis routes to show an unrealistically



Courtesy: INDIA TODAY

large explosive power from the devices that were tested. This aside, it is impossible to believe scientifically that the five nuclear tests of May 1998 have indeed made us totally capable of designing, fabricating and deploying weapons to suit our 'minimum deterrence' needs. Cleverly, the government or the scientists have never defined minimum deterrence; it is conveniently said that it can never be quantified. The same is the story with the Agni tests. After one test of the Agni-II, are we ready to deploy these missiles? The DAE, the DRDO and the BJP-led Government may have succeeded in fooling most of the people of India, but the rest of the world will certainly not accept these proclamations of strength. In order to become a nuclear weapons power capable of causing concern to China, we still have miles to go."

Only the Indian public remained uninformed and gullible. Many were led to believe that we had indeed demonstrated to the world our strength and resolve to become significant players on the nuclear international military scene credibly. That illusion lies shattered in Kargil.

India's possession of nuclear missiles did not deter the Pakistani military from sending intruders across the Line of Control to occupy portions of Indian territory in the Kargil region of Jammu and Kashmir. Our army is having a tough time pushing out the intruders. The government has had to admit that there was an "intelligence failure". The Indian government was unaware of this ongoing intrusion in its territory for a considerable length of time. It woke up only after the Pakistani

army had entrenched itself well enough to build sophisticated bunkers and other facilities for launching attacks to cut off the Kargil-Leh highway. The realisation of the significance of the intrusion was forced upon them by local people rather than being an outcome of their own intelligence. Moral of the story: the best of weapons cannot protect us if our intelligence is so flabby and the army is not trained to be efficient and proactive.

Pakistan's Nuclear Blackmail

Most important of all, the government seems genuinely nervous, despite all its brave rhetoric, about the continuation of this border conflict lest it break out into a full-fledged war. The nervousness is primarily due to the fear that the Pakistanis may not hesitate to use their missiles

Need for a Nuclear Audit

The international scientific community has questioned India's claims to have exploded a thermonuclear device on the basis of seismological and other data gathered by them (see *Science*, September 25, 1998 pages 1930, 1967 and 1968 with accompanying references). They assert that the Indian blasts detected by the international monitoring system were too low on the Richter Scale to be a successful thermonuclear explosion. At one point, the government spokesman did try to respond to international scepticism by saying that they would prove the truth of their claim that they had exploded a true hydrogen bomb by undertaking critical tests to establish the presence of tritium at the explosion site. However, after announcing that they were to start digging cores at the site, we hear no more of it. It is worrisome that the salient response of our nuclear establishment represented by Chidambaram and Ramanna has been to deflect our attention from the evidence and the ensuing claims and counterclaims that we successfully tested a hydrogen bomb and wrap themselves in the national flag and deflect all criticism and questions by alleging that this is part of a western conspiracy to belittle and undermine the achievements of India. They have failed to counter the scientific criticism of their claims to have a hydrogen bomb and a viable control and delivery system by producing hard, scientific evidence. And yet they are getting away with it all. They have even been given the status of heroes though there is actually no objective scientific, military or political audit of their claims and achievement.

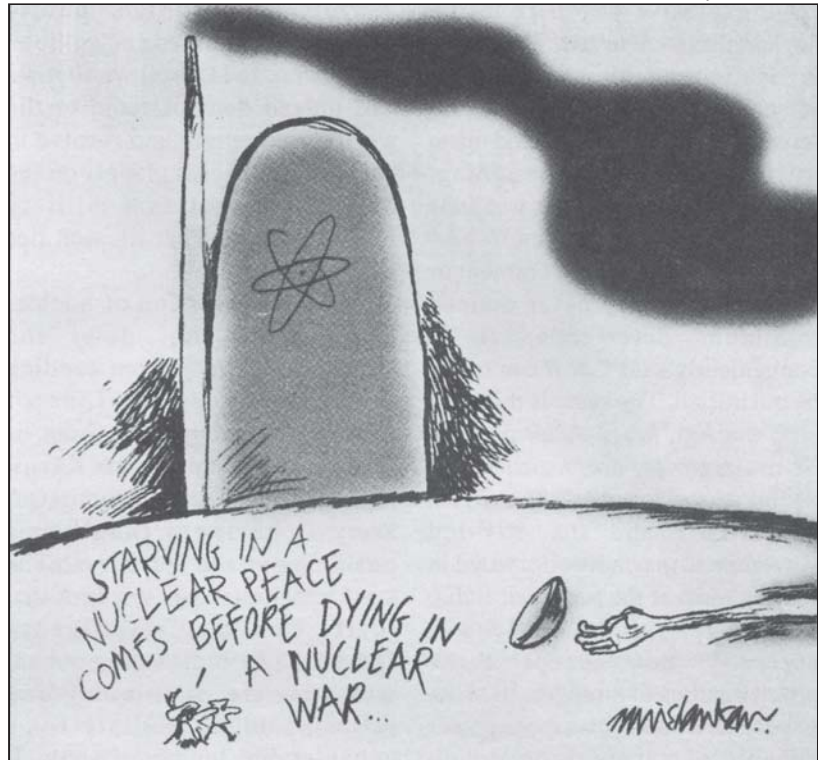
The Pakistani claims of the number of nuclear weapons tested are also treated with great scepticism. The more cautious among the sceptics point out that even if all of India's claims about the Pokhran II explosions are true, India has not yet perfected an easily deliverable nuclear weapon system. If it is indeed true that our delivery and guidance systems are not foolproof and that we are overconfident about them, the implications are truly frightening. We could easily blow ourselves up if a missile meant for Karachi lands in Bhopal. It is a mystery why the Indian nuclear establishment is refusing to provide concrete details about the actual state of weaponisation even after formally declaring India a nuclear weapons power. Our nuclear establishment has emerged as our most sacred holy cow whose credibility is not allowed to be questioned. In the same way the Pakistani army establishment has put itself above any civil or political control.

with nuclear warheads if they begin to lose a conventional war. The intransigence of the Pakistani rulers and Pakistan's continuing bravado is also based on their realisation that they can more easily keep India on tenterhooks now that they are a declared nuclear weapons power that has not given up the option of using its nuclear weapons even if India does not use them first.

In this dangerous scenario, there is no dearth of voices in India who try to add more fuel to the fire. One such irresponsible example is Brahma Chellany who, in a lead article on the editorial page of *The Hindustan Times* of June 16, 1999 argued that India should not hesitate to use its thermonuclear weapons to counter any Pakistani threat to use its nuclear missiles. The RSS mouthpiece *Panchjanya* has openly demanded that India should strike Pakistan with nuclear bombs.

This shows how unintelligent the Indian intelligentsia can be. What if the counterparts of Mr. Chellany in Pakistan were to take this threat seriously and indulge in a pre-emptive nuclear strike? Even if we actually had hydrogen bombs ready to hurl at them capable of causing even more damage in Pakistani territory than they do in ours, what do we gain? The whole subcontinent will be reduced to nuclear rubble.

If we are bent upon committing civilisational suicide, let us at least use less traumatic methods to destroy ourselves. Clearly the warmongers among us don't seem to have the slightest hesitation in proposing measures which will hurl us forward into a radioactive stone age. Our leaders should have the sense to know that you can't compete with lunatics and



Excerpts from the 'Hardtalk' conversation on BBC London between Tim Sebastian and Pakistan's Information Minister

Tim Sebastian: "India has said it will not use nuclear weapons first... but you won't tell me, sitting here and now, that under no circumstances will Pakistan ever use the nuclear weapons first?"

Mushahid Hussain: "Well, I can only say that Pakistan always has peaceful intentions and we hope that it will never come to that situation."

TS: "This is blackmail of the international community; you are saying, get involved in our dispute or I'm holding out the possibility of a nuclear war."

MH: "No, no, we never said that."

TS: "Yes, Sultan Mehmood on your side in Pakistani administered Kashmir said that saving the lives of a billion people on this planet, those lives are at risk unless this conflict is internationalised. That's holding the international community to blackmail."

MH: "The PM of 'Azad' Kashmir is entitled to his views."

TS: "You don't share his views?"

MH: "We hope that it won't come to that, that's why we feel the international..."

TS: "That's what is nuclear blackmail—get involved, otherwise there will be nuclear war."

MH: "No, we are the good guys, we are at the receiving end, we are the victims of aggression."

TS: "I should tell you, people don't accept those views—you have a hard job as minister of information, don't you?"

Times of India, June 25, 1999

hope to defeat them by pitching your own irrationality at a higher level than theirs. The Pakistani military and political establishment is filled with irresponsible power freaks. If we stoke their fears, they are capable of running amok without much regard for the well being of their own people. Our nuclear blasts and accompanying belligerent and bellicose noises have seriously increased the likelihood of such an eventuality.

India has emerged as a net loser by using Pokhran II to declare itself an official nuclear weapons state. India had unquestioned superiority over Pakistan in conventional weaponry and troops. By deciding to declare itself a nuclear weapons power it surrendered that advantage because, given the irresponsible character of the Pakistani military and political establishment, India is viewed as the instigator of nuclear threats

while Pakistan can use our error to pretend to be acting purely defensively. Thus, we have become even more vulnerable to nuclear blackmail. The recent BBC interview of Pakistani information minister Mushahid Hussain confirms this. (see *box on page 26*) Worse, still, the Pakistanis may be ready to sell nuclear technology to terrorist outfits like the Taliban. The Taliban is quite capable of not just threatening but actually using

Letter from Balraj Puri: Is Our Government Playing Pakistan's Game?

One of the motives of Pakistan in its Kargil adventure seems to be its compulsion to extend the area of conflict to non-Kashmiri Muslim areas of the state.

After militancy reached a plateau in the Kashmir valley, where predominant sentiment remained in favour of Azadi motivated by a strong sense of Kashmiri nationalism, Pakistan wanted to turn it into a Muslim movement for Pakistan. As the supply of Kashmiri youth as recruits for militant outfits declined, Pakistan increasingly relied on non-Kashmiri recruits from Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Punjab who had an ethnic affinity with the Muslim majority regions of Jammu.

The next target was a Muslim majority region of Ladakh, Kargil. Some of the intruders belong to the same ethnic stock across the Line of Control called the Northern Areas which have recently been merged with Pakistan as its fifth province. Surprisingly, there was no protest against this move by the Government of India or the Jammu and Kashmir state government. Armed groups from the Pakistan side of the LOC, along with army regulars, intruded on the Indian side, partly to divert popular discontent on the Pakistani side. Wittingly or unwittingly, the National Conference government in Jammu has given encouragement to communal polarisation.

In the Jammu region the BJP won both parliamentary seats for the first time and swept all Hindu majority segments in the 1998 elections. Earlier in normal elections the BJP had lost in each assembly segment. The National Conference consolidated its hold in three out of six Muslim majority assembly segments in the Jammu region on a blatantly communal plank. It campaigned for removing this area from possible Hindu domination by formally proposing, on behalf of the Regional Autonomy Committee, the division of Jammu region into Hindu and Muslim majority parts, after getting rid of me as Chairman.

On a similar note, the intrusion in Kargil followed a government proposal to divide an ethnically homogeneous region of Ladakh into the Buddhist and Muslim majority regions of Leh and Kargil.

Thus what Pakistan wanted to achieve through militant means has been attempted by the Jammu and Kashmir government, perhaps with BJP backing, through political and constitutional means. Ominously, the Pakistani and J&K government's moves follow renewed American pressure for division of the state on a communal basis. How far our central and state government are supporting the Pakistan and American game plans due to drift and ignorance is worth a serious probe.

***Balraj Puri is one our foremost human rights activists and former chairman of the
Regional Autonomy Committee of J & K***

nuclear weapons, should they come to possess them.

In the early decades of our independence, when India played an active role in pressing for nuclear disarmament, we were a respected voice in the world comity of nations. Apart from providing leadership to poor third world countries, even the first world powers which had the capability to produce nuclear bombs but had voluntarily forsworn nuclear weaponisation respected India. Our refusal to sign the CTBT accord was also seen as a principled stand as long as we rejected the nuclear option.

To be fair, it's not just the BJP government which has brought us to this greater vulnerability. The

madness started with Indira Gandhi trying to play Durga with the Pokhran I explosion in 1974, which told the world that India intended to be a nuclear power. That got the Pakistanis crazed enough for the then prime minister Zulfikar Bhutto to declare that they were willing to eat grass in order to match India's "nuclear might". And they did exactly that, using every possible means, including stealing nuclear fissile materials and technology from western scientific establishments and buying technology from North Korea and China.

Vajpayee only emulated Mrs. Gandhi's example, naively hoping that just as she was able to mesmerise people into believing she was invincible, he too would

get to be considered a powerful prime minister if he flexed India's puny nuclear muscles. Those who talk of nuclear weapons as a deterrent to war ought to feel embarrassed that we have been dragged by the ear into a near war situation by an otherwise weak neighbour so soon after our nuclear blasts in what is one of the most expensive and difficult battlefields in the world far more favourable to small numbers of infiltrators than to India's regular armed forces. The conflict also threatens to spill over into other areas (*see box of letter from Balraj Puri on page 27*). If dragged on, this is bound to precipitate a serious crisis in the already tottering Indian economy. That is, if we can avert a nuclear holocaust.

...And Peaceseekers Proposing An Asian Women's Day

We are so riveted on Kargil that (along with the rest of the world) we have neglected another kind of momentous battle being fought across the eastern border of India. Aung San Suu Kyi, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her leadership of the pro-democracy movement in Burma, seems to have receded in public memory. World leaders think they have satisfied the demands of their conscience by honouring her with several awards and prizes. Now they allow her to rot in Burma, a prisoner of the military junta.

On June 19, 1999, on the occasion of her 54th birthday, Aung San Suu Kyi issued a message to the women of Burma

to play a leading role in the fight for democracy.

"Half a century ago at the time Burma regained her independence the women of our country enjoyed a reputation for their vigour and progressiveness and for their ability to work shoulder to shoulder with their menfolk. Today, it is especially important for our women to work actively to overcome the difficulties with which our country is faced. According to a number of psychologists women are better able to cope than men in crisis situations. We should use this ability to bring peace and progress to our country, and to better the condition of people the world over. There is a great need for our women of Burma to use their capabilities to

bring democracy and human rights to our country. It is no longer possible even for housewives to keep out of politics, because politics have invaded the traditional domain of housewives...

As our country is a union of many people, it is only by building understanding and unity between the different ethnic groups that we will be able to achieve genuine success in any cause that we undertake. Therefore, would like to request the women of all the ethnic nationalities of Burma to strive together for our country..."

On June 19, in collaboration with the **Women's Rights and Welfare Association of Burma** and **India International Centre**,

MANUSHI organised a meeting to celebrate the birthday of Aung San Suu Kyi. She is one of the most outstanding political leaders of our time and is leading a courageous nonviolent satyagraha against one of the world's most tyrannical and long lasting military dictatorships.

Aung San Suu Kyi's father Aung San led the struggle for independence from British colonial rule and from the Japanese occupation. Much like our own Subhash Chandra Bose, he too was given military training by the Japanese during the Second World War. He and his associates, known as the legendary "Thirty Comrades", entered Burma with the invading Japanese army who promised Burmese independence. But when that promise proved false he went underground to lead the resistance movement with the Independence Army he had created. He assisted the re-invading Allies and negotiated the terms of Burmese independence with them. However, he and practically his entire provisional cabinet were gunned down by political rivals on 19th July, 1947 just a few months before the transfer of power.

Aung San Suu Kyi was only two years old when her father was assassinated. But stories of his selfless courage and vision of a free and democratic Burma had a permanent influence on her life. Yet, all those who knew her well, including her husband, testify that prior to 1988 it had never been her intention "to strive for anything momentous."

After her marriage to Michael Aris in 1972 she settled down in England and spent most of her time taking care of her family, while carrying on her research and writing on Burma as additional activities.

It was on the last day of March 1988 that Suu Kyi suddenly left for Burma after receiving the news that her mother had suffered a severe stroke. In the preceding months young Burmese students had begun to take to the streets calling for radical political reforms. The military authorities responded with lethal violence, killing thousands. On July 23, 1988 Ne Win, the military general who had ruled Burma for decades with an iron hand since he assumed power through a military

coup in 1962, announced a referendum on Burma's political future. Daw Suu, like other Burmese, was electrified. This announcement became the catalyst for her decision to step forward and play an active role in bringing democracy to her country.

Her husband has written in his introduction to her book of essays *Freedom From Fear* that from the time they fell in love and decided to get married Daw Suu used to say to him that if her people ever needed her she would not fail them. She constantly reminded him that one day she would have to return to Burma, and that she counted on his support. To quote from one of her early letters: "I only ask one thing, that should

my people need me, you would help me to do my duty by them." That is why she kept her Burmese citizenship and retained her Burmese passport.

In the nationwide turbulence which followed the announcement of a referendum, Daw Suu's house quickly became the centre of political activity because of her unique status as the daughter of Aung San – a man loved and revered as a founder of the nation. Despite all the frenetic activity in her house, she ensured it remained a haven of love and care for her dying mother.

By the time her mother died on 27 December, the wave of mass demonstrations prior to the elections had produced thousands of martyrs. Three puppet heads of state were forced by the people's movement to resign in quick succession though

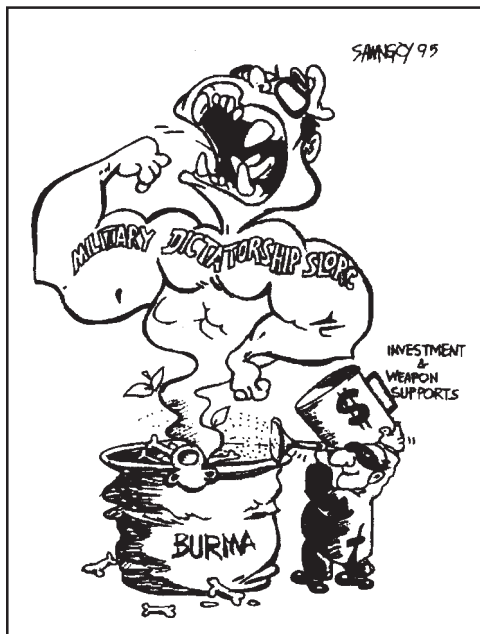
FREE BURMA!



"Until we have a system that guarantees rule of law and basic democratic institutions, no amount of aid or investment will benefit our people."
—Aung San Suu Kyi

ultimate power remained vested in the military coterie surrounding Ne Win. In September 1988 these officers rearranged their ruling group, and called themselves the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC). They reiterated the promise of free and fair elections while continuing shooting, jailing and torturing people to suppress the mass protests. Daw Suu and her associates responded to the challenge by forming the National League for Democracy (NLD). Through this period of repression, she kept issuing appeals to the military rulers for dialogue. Her appeals were all rebuffed. In the next seven months Daw Suu consolidated her party's support base by undertaking an extensive tour of the country even while enduring harassment and vilification by the authorities. However, the more she was attacked, the more support and love she got from the people.

On July 20 1989 she was placed under house arrest while thousands of her young party workers were killed or arrested. Suu Kyi went on a hunger strike demanding that she too be sent to prison to join her young supporters. She ended her fast only when she was given an



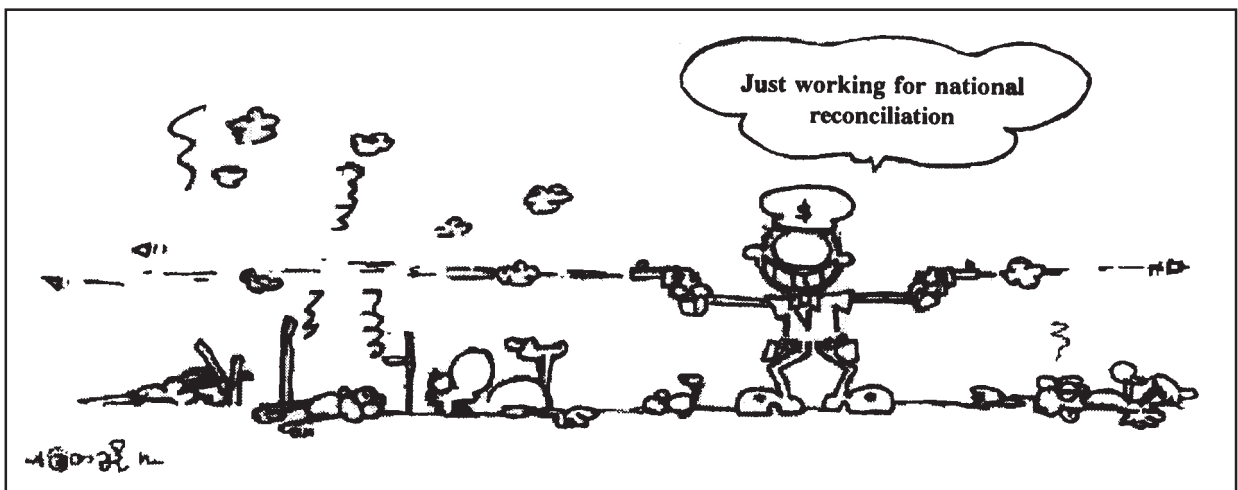
official assurance that her followers would not be tortured in jail.

Thereafter, the authorities tried breaking her spirit by making it difficult for her husband and sons to visit her. The children's Burmese passports were cancelled and all requests for visas denied to them. The authorities aimed to isolate her from her family hoping that in this way she could be pressured to leave the country for good.

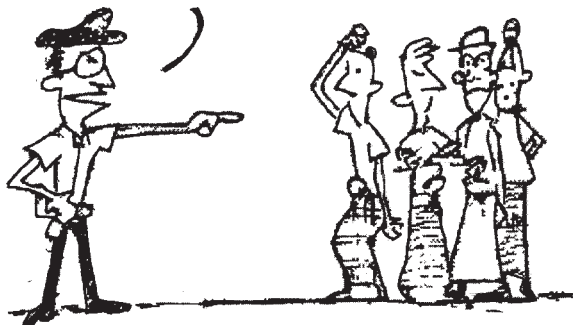
Even though the authorities contrived to declare her candidacy in the ensuing elections

invalid, it made no difference to the election results. On May 27th 1990 the people of Burma voted overwhelmingly in favour of her party and gave the NLD a landslide victory. The NLD won 392 out of the 485 seats. However, the military junta reneged on their promise to turn over power to the democratically elected government and instead began a fresh wave of repression. Thousands were murdered in the ensuing crackdown, many more put in prison and Suu Kyi herself was placed under house arrest. Thereafter, the military established an even tighter grip over Burmese society.

The continuing harshness of the regime can be gauged from the fact that SLORC recently did not even let her terminally ill husband come on a visit to see her for one last time, hoping that they could thus blackmail her into leaving Burma. Once again Suu Kyi stood her ground and declined their offer of exile, even though it meant not being able to see her husband before he died. Her democratic movement is currently at a very low ebb and the regime seems to have temporarily demoralized the



Are you trying to distintegrate
the nation like Yugoslavia?
I won't allow you to do that.



I'll do it
myself.



Burmese people. But Suu Kyi stands as a beacon of hope.

However, it was not just for her courage that she has been hailed as “an outstanding example of the power of the powerless” (Vaclav Havel). It is noteworthy that though she is the daughter of a military hero, she has not let her admiration for her father make her blindly follow the militarist path. She has been celebrated as the Mahatma Gandhi of Burma because she has upheld nonviolence, compassion, forgiveness and love as essential components of the Burmese movement for democracy. She harbours no bitterness even towards those who have incarcerated her and her colleagues and murdered and tortured many of her supporters. She has constantly appealed to them for dialogue rather than continued confrontation. Like Gandhi, Aung San Suu Kyi blends the quest for justice with the search for spiritual truth. “My highest aspiration is very much a spiritual one: purity of mind.” Hence her choice of satyagraha—devoted to truth and non-violence—as the weapon of her struggle for democracy. Her

essential message of self-responsibility, rooted in Buddhism, has been developed into an inspiring political ideology that she describes as Burma’s revolution of the spirit.

She has made Gandhi’s hope and vision come alive that “in the war against war women must and should lead.” She demonstrated by her example that if women bring womanly qualities into the political domain rather than masculinize themselves in order to prove themselves equal to men, their entry

into public life can act as a cleansing and purifying force. We can all be proud of this daughter of Asia for she dared provide vision and leadership not just to women but to all the people of Burma. Her political message, like Gandhi’s, transcends national boundaries and speaks to all those who cherish freedom and human dignity.

Celebrating Our Own

Many of us in the women’s movement are more familiar with



the writings of Germaine Greer than those of Sarojini Naidu or Aung San Suu Kyi. We know more about the politics of Washington or London than of the happenings in Colombo or Rangoon. We talk of international women's solidarity while we fail to lend even token support to women's peace initiatives in Sri Lanka or the momentous movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi. Those who don't make the effort to understand their own history and culture, their neighbours, their strengths, their weaknesses, their moments of glory and defeat are unable to forge meaningful relations with the outside world. That is why Indian (and most South Asian) nationalism is of a very phobic variety. It is only when we learn to recognise and celebrate our own heroes and heroines and create our own symbols of inspiration that we will begin to define our own aspirations rather than live off borrowed ideologies and borrowed inspiration. In the present day context, I cannot think of a more apt symbol of inspiration for us in India than Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Aung San Suu Kyi led pro-democracy movement in Burma is addressing itself to very similar challenges to those we are facing in India today. Burma's isolationist regime wrecked Burma's economy in the name

of building socialism. Within decades the country has been reduced from a wealthy land to an impoverished society. The pro-democracy movement proposes a far reaching programme of removing their own corrupt licence permit raj and promises revision or repeal of all laws, decrees, regulations and other restrictions that circumscribe productive economic activities.

In addition, she also faces the challenge of a multiethnic society in which many of the minorities have faced repression and even attempts at extermination at the hands of a regime which is dominated by military officers of Burmese ethnic stock. Aung San Suu Kyi's agenda is not to

replace the Burmese military regime by a majoritarian democracy dominated by the ethnic Burmese. The NLD has committed itself to a society which makes equal dignified space for minorities.

Most important of all she is endeavouring to liberate her people from fear and the habit of cringing before authority.

During the recent contentious debate on the women's reservation bill, I thought constantly of Aung San Suu Kyi as an example of the way I would like to see women perform in politics. At a time when our polity is undergoing a severe crisis, at a time when our political institutions are experiencing serious loss of purpose and

credibility, it would be very short-sighted of us to ghettoise our concerns to merely demanding a quota for women. We ought to play a leading role in rejuvenating our democracy and reforming our decaying political institutions. It is not enough to demand a piece of the pie, if the pie itself has gone bad. We need to develop the skills to bake a new pie which caters to the needs of all, not just this or that group. The future belongs to those who can rise above narrow sectional interests to create a consensual basis for a new polity to change not just the rules of the game, but devise a better society—just as Aung San Suu Kyi has endeavoured to do. □

