

# Darjeeling

Chair: Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar

**Mr. Chairman:** May I call upon Mr. S.V. Krishnan, former Chief Secretary of West Bengal, to initiate the discussion?

**Mr. S.V. Krishnan:** I don't hide the fact that we did pass through very critical moments, difficult moments before the Darjeeling Accord was signed. It is quite rightly described as representing an unprecedented measure of autonomy. I don't believe that we had this measure of autonomy before in any Accord of the type. I do not wish to revive old memories too much except to the extent to which it is necessary to look forward rather than backward as to what is going to happen or can conceivably happen in the hills hereafter. I know, at the moment, there is some controversy which is probably an unfinished chapter in the Accord which may relate to the panchayats and other institutions. But I am sure the statesmanship that the Accord represents would be equally availed of and available in sorting these small matters.

I don't believe Darjeeling counted as a backward district. It had considerable growth in some areas. It had always depended on tea plantations. It absorbed a certain quantity of labour which kept on building up. But after the British left, there was a considerable fall in the productivity of tea plantations and investments here and, therefore, a fall in productivity as well. Similarly, the second major growth area was forests with which went animal husbandry and wild life. That area again, I don't believe, received the attention needed. In other words, these two areas, which were the main thrust areas, called for a sort of a Green Revolution, in my view. We haven't thought about, we have not at all really looked at, the technological improvements in tea and the improvements in forest management which would open up these areas for further growth. I know there are forest research institutions and tea development institutions. But

not the revolutionary thinking that is needed in both these areas in the manner that we have had for rice and wheat.

Another important point which I want to stress is the employment of the people of Darjeeling in the Indian Army. It is of considerable significance because Nepalese (or the Gorkhas as Mr. Subash Ghisingh would like to call them) are a very important force in the Army. They are growing and have done a great deal of service to the nation and continue to do so. I am sure they will absorb more and they will remit incomes which lead to the growth of the hills.

Yet another important point is the revival of Indo-Tibetan trade. You may say Indo-Tibetan trade is confined to Kalimpong. The traders used to bring the merchandise on ponies. They would occupy the whole of the *mela* ground. It was a very colourful function, and the Nepali people interacted with the Tibetans, much more importantly, psychologically. I feel it is important to revive this trade in the hills.

Going on to the business of agreements and feelings of discrimination, such feelings build up, encouraged, as I said, by local leadership, and the local leadership in Darjeeling — I don't hide the fact — was oriented towards one-upmanship — how can I beggar the other party — that sort of a feeling, leading to a snowballing effect that came to brinkmanship. This was, I believe, a failure not only of local leadership but also of leadership at all levels. This went on and finally I felt that it had gone too far. How do we tackle this problem which was at once psychological, economic, and political? Trade unions came up in a big way. Because you have plantations, you have trade unions. The support for the local political party comes through the plantation trade unions. So all these streams flowed in one direction which was lethal at that point of time. But it all called for a very great deal of statesmanship, and also objectivity. Such statesmanship led to the defusing of the situation, which came as a considerable surprise because one was psychologically prepared for the situation to get even worse.

This Accord is a model for other Accords. I am all for decentralisation and I am all for local leadership. But I do foresee that this business of building more and more institutions, whether panchayats, whether tribal councils, without adequate funds really leads nowhere. The more institutions you build up, the more infrastructure you set up, the more money you spend. I recall Rajiv Gandhi saying that very little of this reaches the people. But I believe the problem can be solved if people only saw that decentralisation was not really distributing poverty but distributing adequate authority to build up local resources, and maintain them, which was a weak point. The weak point in Indian planning is always maintenance. The local bodies have a big role in maintaining the assets which were created through the various Plans. And I believe these institutions, tribal councils, panchayats, or whatever we call them, should really act as local agents for the maintenance of assets created in the Plans by raising local resources and leading to local employment.

**Mr. P. Chidambaram:** I remember that there was a controversy about describing the Gorkhaland movement as “anti-national” and Rajiv Gandhi refused to describe it as “anti-national”. I don’t know whether you were Chief Secretary at that time or your successor had taken over. What did you feel, what was the reaction on both sides? It will be very useful to get an insider’s view of what happened in the Writer’s Building at that time.

**Mr. S.V. Krishnan:** Mr. Tarun Dutt, I believe, was the Chief Secretary at that time. Now the anti-national business really goes back to the time when the influence of the United Nations was sought to be invoked by a resolution. The second thing that fed this feeling was an appeal to the Maharaja of Nepal to intervene and bring in other neighbouring countries. And, I believe, a third one was even more relevant to the country as a whole, which was calling into question the very accession. It was not really an accession in that sense; it was sought to be made out that when the British left, the incorporation of Darjeeling did not follow as a *fait accompli* under the Indian Independence Act, and that it was outside the Act. So it was raking up the issue of the existence of Darjeeling as a part of India. And it was calling into question the very basis of the geographical limits of the country. All these items are in the records because the resolution which Mr. Ghisingh had in his name went to all countries, and also to the United Nations. He was saying that the question had to be renegotiated: How did Darjeeling come into the country? This sort of thing led to the feeling he was anti-national. The feeling was his stand questioning the integrity of the country. The press got hold of this issue and said that it may come under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code. We did examine that. And I recall, if I am not letting out any State secrets or if my memory does not fail me, that the legal opinion was it could very well come within that provision. I must say that Chief Minister Jyoti Basu in his discussions with me did not favour legal action to prosecute or to get hold of these people who were talking on those lines because the feeling was that it was predominantly a political issue and it should be settled politically.

If it were a law and order problem, we could come down to brasstacks and resolve it. But how do solve a psychological problem? How do we get into people’s minds and hearts? How do we know whether they have anti-national feelings?

**Mr. Subash Ghisingh:**\* With reference to Darjeeling, what are the “national” and “anti-national” problems? How to sort them out? What has been done and what has not been done? Shri Rajiv Gandhi did attempt to solve the problems, and we are grateful to him for that. I will not get an opportunity like this many times to speak my mind. When I speak in Darjeeling, my voice does not reach Delhi; so, since I am now in Delhi, I think it is better I speak here — as to what the truth is and what the falsehood is.

The problems of Darjeeling are quite old. The Central Government has not solved them yet; in fact, it has not looked at them properly. For instance, who exactly is a Darjeeling inhabitant? What are the geographical aspects of the region? What are the aspirations of the local people? What are their demands? No proper analysis has been done. Some small-scale measures have been taken which have been in the form of an eyewash. Therefore, there is dissatisfaction and frustration among the people.

We are technically Gorkha people. We have not been given justice as Gorkha people. That's why I started an agitation. We had written letters and sent telegrams to the authorities; we had stuck posters on the walls, but still we did not get justice. Consequently, we had to adopt other means.

Darjeeling has been an exploited area. The MLAs, especially of this area, have proved to be useless; they used to keep shuttling between Darjeeling and Calcutta without any result. They did not raise their voice against exploitation. *Consequently, in 1979, I demanded statehood for Darjeeling within the Indian Union.* But nobody heard my voice; nobody called me for discussions; there was no response at all.

I then thought I should study thoroughly the document of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, with emphasis on Article 7. Under Article 7, there was a reciprocal provision. In other words, persons of Nepalese origin could go from Darjeeling to Nepal and vice versa freely. They could buy property; they could seek employment; and they could settle down if they wanted. If they so wished, they could go back to their original regions.

We [the Gorkhas living in Darjeeling], however, firmly stated that we did not come under Article 7 of the Indo-Nepal Treaty. It is possible that people living in Assam or Mumbai or some other place could be covered under Article 7, but not us. To clarify our position, I went to meet the King of Nepal. I asked him: "Are we Article 7 people or are we Indians? Has this area been seceded from Nepal?" The King, however, remained silent.

In order to understand the exact status of Darjeeling, I examined several treaties (e.g., the treaties of 1950, 1923 and 1815). Later, I studied the Indian Constitution. Darjeeling was initially an "excluded area", and then a "partially excluded area". The term "excluded area" mean that Darjeeling was not "included" in the Indian Union. On this basis, I raised my voice and demanded statehood, but nothing happened and no justice was done. I wanted Darjeeling to be "included" in India, but again nobody paid any need to my demand, which I made many times. [Subash Ghisingh then launched an agitation for a separate State, which involved blockades and *bandhs*. Eventually, a tripartite Accord was reached among the Centre, the West Bengal State Government and the Gorkhas in August 1988, under which a Gorkha Hill Council was set up. This council was expected to look after the welfare of the Gorkhas. Its funds were, however, to be routed through the West Bengal State Government.]

Once the Council was set up, I no longer spoke about the 1950 Treaty. We also decided there should be no violence and no bloodshed.

Meanwhile, in 1991-92, a financial embargo was imposed. The situation involved the same politics and the same useless leaders. I had to now speak through the Council. I came to Delhi. I wanted the West Bengal Chief Minister to come, but he was not called. I visited Delhi many times, but, on each occasion, I was told to return the next day. This happened many times. We thought that New Delhi, i.e., the Central Government, was our guardian. I told New Delhi about our problems, especially the financial embargo. In this context, I was asked to go to Calcutta. I went. Allegations were made against me that I was "pro-Bengal" and "pro-communist". Next, I went again to New Delhi; now, Calcutta became angry. I was like a "pedulum", swinging between New Delhi and Calcutta. Even then, I managed to run the Council. We had to struggle a lot to maintain peace and discipline among our cadres, but we succeeded.

Regarding the finances for running the Council, we have not received till now a single paisa from New Delhi. Earlier, it was insisted that I accept the formation of a Council, and once I had done so, not a single paisa has come. In fact, we are getting money under the old district head! We have to fight with the State Government for getting finances. How much can we fight? We are really fed up. Yes, this is Subash Ghisingh speaking — the same person who signed the Accord.

At that time, Mr. Jyoti Basu (the Chief Minister of West Bengal) told me (at the Delhi residence of Mr. Buta Singh) to run the Council on a "trial basis", which I eventually did. But what exactly is the concept behind this Council, neither the giver nor the taker knows! In fact, the concept of the Council has clashed with the concept of the panchayat. In this context, Shri Rajiv Gandhi had taken certain measures to safeguard the Council. There was a Constitution Amendment Bill to the effect that Panchayati Raj would not be there in certain regions (such as Darjeeling, Mizoram and Manipur). Shri Rajiv Gandhi asked us to run the Council in our own way. Later, however, another Amendment (73rd) to the Constitution in 1992 necessitated Panchayati Raj. This meant the earlier Accord had been dishonoured. Such an Amendment should not have been done. So, now, we have to look for a political way for solving the problem. We do not want violence and bloodshed time and again. I am stating this openly (and also to the media) that in case we do not get justice, we will have to go to court, even to the Supreme Court. This is a fact.

We went to the North Block. We went to the South Block. We did not get justice. Which other Block do we have to go to in order to get justice? So, the court is our last resort. In court, there are no politicians and I think I will get justice. All hill people, whether in Darjeeling or Nagaland or Mizoram or Meghalaya or elsewhere, want justice directly not via some intermediary (like we are getting "justice" via Calcutta).

I have been running the Gorkha Hill Council for six years or so. Not once has the Central Government inquired as how the Council was working and what were the difficulties faced. That's why the Council is now in a bad

shape. Moreover, we don't want to quarrel with the West Bengal Government as a matter of policy, whatever be the issue. Under such circumstances, we have been compelled to approach the Supreme Court. We leave it to the apex court to determine Darjeeling's status (i.e., whether or not it has been incorporated into the Indian Union). We also do not want to struggle all over again and want to avoid violence and bloodshed.

I would like to inform this gathering that I have been running the Council because it was conceived by Shri Rajiv Gandhi. It is indeed unfortunate that he is no longer with us. Had he been there, I assure you, such a situation would not have arisen.

Finally, I would like to stress that the people of Darjeeling are pro-India and not pro-Nepal. They seek justice and redressal of their grievances just as in other regions such as Punjab or Mizoram or Nagaland. I am sure the great leaders of New Delhi will understand our problems and try to resolve them.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** You see, Mr. Ghisingh has been very very candid and the views which he has expressed today are the views which he has been expressing to me for the past many months. And he has raised this issue of whether Darjeeling is duly incorporated within the Indian Union or not. He has just repeated again that the status of Darjeeling is vague. We have Mr. Krishnan here as well as Mr. Dutt, both of them have been former Chief Secretaries. I think, it will be useful at this stage if both of them throw light on this aspect, even if Mr. Ghisingh has decided to go to the Supreme Court, something which he mentioned to me when I was in Darjeeling recently.

**Mr. Chairman:** In a sense the question which has just been raised, marginal to the central issue before the house here, which is Rajiv Gandhi's India, that is, the India that was during his prime ministership. This issue has come up in the sense that it is to be resolved within the framework of the Darjeeling Accord. We can, therefore, take up this issue. There is no problem in taking it up. But can I perhaps turn the discussion for the moment to Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and, after he has made his presentation from what will be a Congress point of view (as he was the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee President at that time), we could then revert to this specific issue a little later? So may I call upon Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi to present his views?

**Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi:** It so happened that at that point of time when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister and the GNLF [Gorkha National Liberation Front] movement in Darjeeling was at its peak, I was the party President of West Bengal with a dual responsibility to see that the ideals and the concepts of the Indian National Congress and the approach of the Union Government were properly disseminated among the people of Bengal. At that time, the Darjeeling issue was not merely confined to the GNLF movement. The local movement in Darjeeling, right from the days of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to Morarji Desai's tenure as Prime Minister, was

confined to the language issue. They wanted the Nepali language included in the Eighth Schedule. Then there were three distinct political entities operating in the Darjeeling hills — one was the Indian National Congress, the second was the Communist Party undivided and later on Marxist, and the third was the Gorkha League.

During the time of the reorganisation of States on the basis of language and ethnic issues, precisely the way it was done in Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal and Meghalaya, even at that time, if Darjeeling could have been favoured for a separate State identity, by this time, the people of this area would have prospered. This was precisely the talk of the people at the grassroots, even those who were not literate. I visited twice, incognito, the hills of Kalimpong, Kashiang and Mongpo to understand the gravity of the movement. At that time, Mr. Subash Ghisingh's audio cassette which explained the pain and agony and sufferings of the hill people had created a movement. I instantly submitted a report to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, saying that, in my opinion — it was December 1985 — the Darjeeling hill people were going to accept neither Jyoti Basu nor Rajiv Gandhi. Their Messiah was Mr. Subash Ghisingh. That was my first report. The Prime Minister wanted me to understand the issues in depth. I undertook a second and a third visit. During the third visit, I tried to organise a public meeting at Kalimpong which was attended by only 75 people. And then my own colleagues in the tea gardens and other areas said that Ghisingh's appeal and approach had found a place in the heart of the people, especially the women, and said that if the situation was not handled properly, all the people of Darjeeling would be totally isolated from the mainstream of India unless their aspirations were fulfilled.

My second visit was in February 1986 and my third in April 1986 and immediately after that there was a *bandh*. I submitted three reports to the Congress President at that time as well as to the Prime Minister. At that time, the language issue was fully backed by the State Congress Party, while the Indian National Congress and the Government of India were hesitant on this issue. But soon after the emergence of Sikkim as a part of India, the development there contrasted sharply with the lack of it in Darjeeling. This was explicit on both banks of the Teesta Valley. Subash Ghisingh tried to unite the people on that issue. With regard to other technical issues of Indian administration, Darjeeling was not incorporated in what was the Indo-Nepal Treaty, Clause 7. The accusation started that this movement was anti-national and Subash Ghisingh was anti-national. I objected to this accusation because the Congress point of view was that Subash Ghisingh's patriotism should be understood first because he made one point clear at that time. He said: "I am not asking for the right of the Nepalese nor do I like to describe myself as a Nepali. A Nepali of Nepal has a distinct identity and origin of an independent sovereign nation called Nepal. But I am an Indian and belong to India from the beginning and I like to identify my community as the Gorkha community. And Gorkhas in India have the same rights as Indians.

So I want the same justice from India that was given to Nagaland and Mizoram."

In sheer desperation, Ghisingh and his followers might have sent messages to the King of Nepal and the United Nations. But the very basis and approach of the movement, so long as it was limited to demanding something within the parameters of Indian Constitution, should not be identified as "anti-national".

I am of the opinion that Rajiv Gandhi was very correct in approaching the issue from a national perspective. He was not prepared to accept the term "anti-national" when we came to discuss the draft, that is, the all-party draft that was being prepared, in which this anti-people and anti-national issue was to have come up. He categorically conveyed the message: "Draft or no draft, you should not use the word 'anti-national' to describe the movement." The debate was started if *kukris* (daggers used by the Gorkhas) and arms used to combat the police and the other opponent parties could be construed as anti-national because we used this term in Punjab; the Congress point of view was there at that time that the Khalistani movement was altogether different because they wanted to defy the Indian sovereign status and to form a new country, whereas the GNLFF movement was to form a State within the Indian territory. So describing it at that stage as anti-national was wrong. It is true that one or two individuals from Congress echoed the view of the ruling party in the State [CPI (M)] that Ghisingh should be arrested and executed as anti-national. As PCC president I had to clarify that this was not the decision of the party or the party stance. In every State, the Opposition party, for political advantage, tried to take the situation into their control to make political mileage out of it. On the eve of 1987, that is, on the eve of the State Assembly elections we saw graffiti on the walls put out by the ruling party to the effect that the Centre was dividing the States and passions were running high among the Bengalis that they were being deprived of their rightful claim to Darjeeling and Darjeeling was being isolated and divided by the Prime Minister, the Centre and the Indian National Congress. There was a demand by the Congress that this was the opportune moment to persuade the Prime Minister to intervene by using Article 356 so that elections could be conducted under President's rule. But when a delegation met Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, he was very furious and he categorically said: "I cannot play politics on such a sensitive issue in Bengal, regardless of Congress winning or losing. In this matter, my job is to see that the hands of the Chief Minister are strengthened; my job is to see that Ghisingh is persuaded to leave the path of violence and an atmosphere is built to find a solution again to keep Darjeeling within West Bengal and to support their ethnic aspirations to the extent possible and an autonomous status accorded to their participation in the development process within the hills." That was Rajiv Gandhi's approach while the Congress thought it would be the ideal time to impose President's rule in the State. He acted more like the Prime Minister of the



nation, safeguarding Congress ideals without wanting to make political mileage. Not only that, the Prime Minister was prepared to go and repeat this stance in Darjeeling. The Prime Minister said: "I will go to Darjeeling to address a public meeting." I said: "There will be a *bandh*." He said: "I will announce that the problem should be solved within the State, keeping Jyoti Basu at the helm of affairs and that Darjeeling is a part of West Bengal." Rajiv Gandhi's approach was to take a long-term view of the problem rather than make short-term gains. And I must admit to you that in the 1987 elections, the Opposition Congress Party had to pay a heavy price as a result of that. I personally think that the Darjeeling issue is unresolved, and that the Hill Council is not a lasting solution. The Darjeeling issue is not merely an issue of satisfying the ethnic ego of the Gorkha people in terms of giving them some power, panchayats or a semi-*zila parishad* status. It would have been more appropriate to link the Hill Council's budget and financial process to the Government of India so that in spite of being in Bengal, a separate status could have been enjoyed by the ethnic community. Then the violence would not have erupted. Darjeeling, though it looks peaceful now, may erupt like a volcano in the near future. The hill people face another problem. In India, the recruitment to the Indian Army is done in two ways. As per the treaty, people from Nepal can come and join the Indian Army and the people originally from the hill region can also join. People who are of Indian origin, and recruited to the Army, feel that their Indian identity should be highlighted, protected and projected in such a manner that after retirement from the Army they should not be treated under Article 7 as foreigners. This issue could have been dealt with at the appropriate level in the Home Ministry.

Therefore, I feel the approach that Rajiv Gandhi took at that time was possibly three-pronged. One was to set up the Hill Council as well as protect the ethnic interest of the Darjeeling Gorkha people followed by financial support to development and, ultimately, to raise their profile in overall participation in events in West Bengal. This is what I feel. The Autonomous Council should have been given autonomy in the real sense and spirit of the Constitution of India.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Das Munshi. Before I call on the next speaker, I think it is important that we get one clarification from you on record. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi visited Calcutta on 18 September 1986 and it was at the press conference there that he was asked whether, in his view, the GNLFF movement was anti-national. And he replied that he did not think that it was anti-national. However, earlier in the same year, as far as I know, it was in August 1986, the Congress Legislature Party had become party to some kind of a resolution that was either being prepared or being passed which held the GNLFF movement to be anti-national. Could you please clarify this? What was the position of the CLP, what was the position of the PCC and what was the position of the President of the AICC?

**Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi:** On the eve of the visit of Shri Rajiv Gandhi there was a meeting in the State whether or not we should consider this movement as anti-national. Since this matter was to be discussed at the party level and not the CLP level alone, this was a political issue. So in the joint meeting of the CLP and the PCC, we decided that we should not treat it as an anti-national movement. One of the CLP members, one Mrs. Sumanta Pachchi, said that she totally disagreed with the party's view. Her dissenting view was that it was anti-national.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I think the time is now ripe for an intervention from Mr. Tarun Dutt.

**Mr. Tarun Dutt:** One of the issues raised is whether the GNLF movement was anti-national or not. My personal view is, as in the case of several other such ethnic agitations, that the leadership and others were suffering from inexperience. One of the points that is being noted was that they did not have experience of statecraft, of running the administration, etc. This point I had often discussed those days. And I sincerely believe that the references to the United Nations and to the King of Nepal were mistakes born out of lack of experience. Technically, they amounted to being anti-national. But that was not in their mind. Their intention was not to oppose the nation. But because they didn't know the realities, and they had no experience of what the implications were according to international law and according to the Constitution of India, they carried out their activities. This is my personal belief.

Again let me take up the question of the status of the ceded territory. As we all know, Darjeeling was originally not a part of Nepal. It was only from 1766 to 1835 that a portion of Darjeeling was under the Kingdom of Nepal. This is simple history. And at the end of the period, this was ceded by the Nepalese Government to the then British administration. Therefore, the problem in all such issues is how far back do you go? Do you go back to 1835 or to the 18th century before 1766 or to the 14th century or 15th century? The second point is with reference to the status of different parts of India at the time when the Independence Act was passed in the British Parliament. Whether that was the right way to go about it, I don't know. But that model has since been followed in granting independence to several other nations, like the Darjeeling model is being followed in giving local autonomy to other areas of India. And in that Act, special provision and options were given only for those territories within India which constituted native States. No other special provision was made for any part comprising British India at that time. And since Darjeeling at that time was not a native State, its position was, under international law and according to the terms of the Indian Independence Act, the same as that of any other part of India like Bengal or Bihar. But I must add that I have the highest admiration for the sentiments which Mr. Ghisingh expressed, when he said that he did not want unnecessary quarrels, and he did not want violence, and he only wanted to go to the Supreme Court. This is the essence of civilisation; this is the

essence of nationhood, and he had every right to do so. This is my feeling and this is the correct course.

Now, in human affairs, feelings will always have priority over statistics. Therefore, though the statistics undoubtedly show that Darjeeling was somewhere in the middle amongst the districts of West Bengal in every respect, this does not make any difference. There was a feeling that the potential for tourism was not fully developed, and that the Darjeeling people were not having enough say in deciding their own affairs. I would, therefore, submit that much of the ethnic demands and ethnic movements were based on the desire to have more say in their own affairs. It was basically a psychological problem. And this could be related to various other national and subnational concepts. Today there are a lot of analyses as to how there is a general movement all over the world in this newly emerging situation where individuals being in small groups tend to lose their identity in the emerging industrial societies. But the difficulty is that you have to decide the respective sizes, and Mr. Rajiv Gandhi faced that problem very acutely. You know there are different ethnic groups. The Todos today are an ethnic group having 150 members. Now what is the size which is appropriate to form a State? What is proper for a local authority? And what is proper for some other formation? This is the real problem and requires political skill and leadership of the highest degree. I must say Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, along with Mr. Ghisingh and Mr. Jyoti Basu, displayed the necessary skill and that saved the Darjeeling situation. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi took keen interest in the details of the implementation of this Hill Council scheme also. I came on the scene after the Accord had been signed and also the Act had been passed and also just after the elections were held. In the initial years, I was very much concerned for a year and a half with the implementation of the Accord and...

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you please give us the exact date when you became Chief Secretary?

**Mr. Tarun Dutt:** On 1 January 1989. And Mr. Gandhi visited Darjeeling twice during my chief secretaryship and addressed public meetings which were very widely attended. He took keen interest during that time in the processes of implementation of the Accord: how far subjects were getting transferred and how far they were being retained. Now that was to be expected. It took some time to persuade — and I will use the word persuade — the State Government Departments, i.e., the bureaucracy, to gradually give up power to agree to serve under the Gorkha Hill Council. It also took some time for the council to become properly equipped administratively and to have good chief executive officers. And all this took a year and a half. And there were allegations, counter-allegations. I had during that period at least seven meetings with Mr. Ghisingh to sort out administrative misuse. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi all along showed keen interest. As you know, he wanted to go into all the details of everything. He used to ask, "What is the difficulty?" And I had to explain several times, as a bureaucrat and as an administrator,

that "these are the bolts and nuts of administration which are missing." Finally, I said the only high-ranking Nepali officer in West Bengal should be the Hill Council's chief executive officer. And things thereafter continued to improve and gradually have settled down. I will give you an example. A few days after the handing over of power, when you went to Darjeeling, you still felt that you were coming under the aegis of the State Government. This time, after three years, I visited Darjeeling, and met Mr. Ghisingh. I don't know whether he knows, this time I rang up the State Government to make arrangements for my visit and found they did not have the wherewithal. I rang up his Chief Secretary also and immediately all the arrangements were made. I could see the change.

The Government of India has appointed a committee under my chairmanship to review the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, which is only 100 years old, and suggest amendments. I had held a meeting at the request of Mr. Ghisingh's chief executive, to be attended by ten Secretaries from the State Government in Darjeeling, during the tourist season when accommodation would normally be difficult. The State Government could not give me the accommodation. By the way, they said, that the meeting was immediately done. This showed that the situation has already changed a lot. I would, therefore, feel that the original vision of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi has come true. The Hill Council's Chairman has the status of a full Minister in the State Government. After this the *sabhadipatis* of *zila parishads* of other districts of West Bengal have been given, partly influenced by this example, the status of Ministers of State of the Central Government. But the Chief Executive Councillor is a full Minister in the State Government. I do not see any difficulty later on to extend this to other areas.

I repeat again that the recourse adopted by Mr. Ghisingh to approach the Supreme Court is most laudable. I do sincerely hope that the best way of paying homage to Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and to his foresight and realism in this respect would be to carry on with this experiment and not to give up the Gorkha Hill Council but to make it more realistic. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's insistence on pluralism in terms of Panchayati Raj was, I think, a direct result of his Darjeeling experience.

You can improve upon the Act in the light of your experience and as the other side gains more administrative experience and is able to put up an administrative apparatus. Mr. Ghisingh was right when he said that during the past one year at least he didn't have an administrative apparatus. He did not know what to do. He singlehandedly dealt with contractors, issued orders and considered tenders to handle the situation. But then the situation has now improved.

I would like to sum up by stating that the roots of the ethnic problem lie in an individual's inability to find his/her identity. But if he/she can do so, then he/she would become a wholesome individual and also a wholesome Indian citizen.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, Mr. Dutt. Before I call upon our next speaker, I would, despite the fact that I am sitting in the chair, like to bring something on record as one of the participants in the events of the period 1986-89. When we were drafting the 64th Amendment to the Constitution, the Ministry of Rural Development had prepared a list of subjects for inclusion in the draft Eleventh Schedule that would be based upon the provisions of the different Panchayati Raj Acts of different States. It was assigned to me as a specific responsibility to pick up the agreement with regard to Darjeeling and look at that draft list of the Ministry of Rural Development. In the light of the list of subjects mentioned in the Gorkha Hill Council Accord, we found that there were a number of subjects which had been devolved to the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council which had not been devolved by any State to any Panchayati Raj institution. And then we incorporated all those subjects in the Eleventh Schedule. That Eleventh Schedule to the 64th Amendment remained untouched through the period of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership, through the redrafting, during Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao's prime ministership, of what originally came to be known as 73rd Amendment, through the Select Committee procedure that we had for examining the Eleventh Schedule and, eventually, the Eleventh Schedule as it stood, was passed by Parliament in December 1992. It is, therefore, important to underline that some of the most important subjects now incorporated for devolution to the panchayats came initially from the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Accord. They did not exist before. In that sense, Darjeeling has played a seminal role in determining the nature of devolution and decentralisation in India under the panchayat system. Now, Dr. I.K. Barthakur would like to intervene.

**Dr. (Mrs.) I.K. Barthakur:** Mr. Tarun Dutt has very clearly indicated or suggested that if this particular experiment of Gorkhaland Hill Council could be continued, perhaps, it would be a better thing for this model to be seen. My question is now addressed to Mr. Ghisingh. Supposing there was a parity brought between Sikkim and the Darjeeling Hill Council, for fund purposes and for development purposes, then would there be any difficulties administratively that will not allow the area to come up equal to Sikkim?

**Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi:** In other words, if the Darjeeling Hill Council got as much money as Sikkim, could the former have run properly?

**Mr. Subhash Ghisingh:** No, it would not have been possible because the problems of Darjeeling are different from those of Sikkim. That is why we have gone to the Supreme Court.

**Mr. S.V. Krishnan:** The Supreme Court may not decide. One of the things at the time when Sikkim was mentioned was that Nepalese are there in Sikkim and Nepalese are there in Darjeeling. At one time, the movement took the direction that let us have a composite State. We defined Sikkim's boundary to include Darjeeling. It was not the view of anybody in the Government. But it was felt that this was assuming some importance; this sort of a feeling that Sikkim and Darjeeling could form a Government in a

Nepali State. It was induced also by certain talks or reports of talks between Mr. Ghisingh and Mr. N.B. Bhandari of Sikkim. We had no access to their thinking at that point of time except to note that they were in dialogue. Such a development worried me because it could change the scope of the movement and also change the direction. I am not aware whether the Congress or the CPM as such had expressed any view on that. But they were also probably watching to see what would happen. Two things are important here. Firstly, the Nepalese of Sikkim were different from the Nepalese of Darjeeling. In fact, if I am not saying anything rude, the Nepalese in Sikkim considered the Nepalese in Darjeeling much sharper than they were, sharper in every sense. Therefore, they did not react very well to the idea of a merger into a single State. Another point to remember is that development is not a consequence of only money. You may give any amount of money; you may make the per capita expenditure in the hills the same as in Sikkim or Delhi, but this is not going to give you development. So, economic development is based, as I see it, on cultural feelings, the political environment, the sociological conditions and so on. So money is not the only answer nor is the way in which we administer the Plan funds. So this "merger proposal" died a natural death.

**Mr. Tarun Dutt:** The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council had executive powers over land, forests (other than reserve forests) and many other items. May I suggest to Mr. Ghisingh, in all seriousness, that this is also a justiciable issue. If you feel that the Act is not being implemented properly, you don't have to go to the Supreme Court; you could go to the Calcutta High Court. The language of the Act is quite clear that the executive powers include financial powers. That I can tell you as an administrator.

**Mr. Subash Ghisingh:** It was necessary to go to the Supreme Court because of this court's judgement of 10 February 1992 (regarding Nepali immigrants to Sikkim, who have not been treated as Indians). We, the people of Darjeeling, are Gorkhas; *we are Indians*. The question is: Can an immigrant contest an election? This has to be considered by the Central Government and the Election Commission. Only on the basis of the Supreme Court's verdict can an answer be found.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** I was invited to visit Darjeeling by Mrs. Sheila Dikshit and Uma Shankar Dikshitji. I was there for ten days. A lot of people think that Ghisingh and I have been old friends. But I did not know him at all. Dikshitji was certain of the date, the month and year. This was, I think, 24 May 1986. Dikshitji was repeatedly telling me: "Inder Jit, why don't you meet Mr. Ghisingh?" I said: "Dikshitji, I have really come for a holiday. If I meet Mr. Ghisingh, then I will have to meet everybody else and that will be the end of my vacation." But he said: "If you meet him, I may then (this will be of interest both to Mr. Krishnan and Mr. Dutt) get some unfiltered information about what is happening in Darjeeling about the Gorkhaland movement." On the last day there, I happened to meet Mr. Ghisingh because my younger daughter, who was on the staff of *The Times of India*, was very

eager to meet Mr. Ghisingh. And we met and we had a long meeting for four hours. We raised many issues: the issue of being anti-national and so on and so forth. When I came back to Delhi six weeks later, I sat down and wrote two columns, one entitled "Gorkhaland — The Basic Issues" and the second "Need for Dialogue on Gorkhaland". The first appeared on 15 July 1986 and the second on 22 July. My meeting with Mr. Ghisingh convinced me that he was more sinned against than sinning. And when I had an occasion to meet Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, I told him candidly what I thought. And what convinced me about Mr. Ghisingh's attitude was the fact that he was not anti-national, and this was my main point of conversation with Rajiv Gandhi. I said: "He is not anti-national. Actually, what he wants is a separate State. We have conceded States such as Nagaland, Mizoram and several other ethnic areas and he feels that it is their due. He feels that Darjeeling is being treated as a colony by the Bhadrakok. And this could not possibly go on." In this context, may I take the liberty of reading out what I had written, in my second article which clearly showed Mr. Ghisingh's own stand and the fact is that, after these two articles appeared, he came to Delhi, met me, and sought my help. He said: "You have been pursuing me to seek a peaceful solution." The excerpt is as follows:

The GNLFF leader, however, went wholly wrong, to put it mildly, on one count and allowed his enthusiasm for Gorkhaland to run away with his claim to nationalism. In 1983 he visited Nepal and submitted a memorandum to its King advocating abrogating the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950 which, according to Ghisingh, has reduced the Nepalese-speaking Indians to the status of reciprocal Nepalis or foreigners. Subsequently, he sent copies of this memorandum to the President and the Prime Minister of India in 1984 as also to the UN Secretary-General and the Governments of the US, Britain, France and West Germany. Not only that, he also appealed to them to stop New Delhi and the West Bengal Government from "perpetuating genocide and apartheid against the Indian Nepalis".

I told Ghisingh that this appeal was "anti-national". He argued: "We are racially being discriminated against; this is apartheid. We are subject to mental torture; this is genocide. I was forced to write because the Governments of India, West Bengal and Nepal failed to respond." Then I told him that he was ill-advised and his explanation was far-fetched.

Now, against this background, Mr. Ghisingh came and I am glad that Mr. Dutt has made this point that he was not aware of statecraft, and as someone seeking a fair deal, and justice for his people, and finding no response from any quarter, he shot off this letter. But basically he was not anti-national, and I mentioned all this to Rajiv Gandhi and he said: "I am very glad that you have mentioned all this to me, this clears my mind completely." So he accepted this basic point that Ghisingh was not anti-

national. Ghising had quite a few demands, basically the need for a better deal for his friends in Darjeeling. But at the same time, it was equally clear that he could not push and support the demand for a separate State. Therefore, he asked me: "What do you think is the solution?" I told him, "If you are not willing to give up the demand for a separate State, then you have to think in terms of something short of that." And, incidentally, I had not known Mr. Jyoti Basu earlier and my first meeting with him was at the suggestion of the Prime Minister himself. This was in 1985. I forget the exact date. In fact, when I agreed to become a mediator, so to say, I made one condition. I said my name must not be disclosed to anybody but one day the Prime Minister rang me up and said: "Jyoti Basu wants to know who is helping us out." This was against the background of a remarkable decision, a nationalist decision taken by Mr. Subash Ghisingh. You would recall that they had given a notice that 15 August 1986 would not be celebrated. Their line was, if we keep on singing *Jana Gana Mana* for years, it has not brought us anything and 15 August 1986 would be observed as a black flag day. This posed a threat and everybody was worried because it could lead to a major conflagration. Therefore, the first task I was given by Rajivji was that we must persuade him to call off the black flag protest particularly. And he agreed. He agreed and his statement was remarkable in that he said that he was proud to be an Indian and a part of India and so on.

Now Jyoti Babu was very eager to know who was this gentleman who was trying to help them. Rajiv Gandhi still kept this information confidential. Otherwise, he would not have rung me up. This is another aspect of the man. He rang me up and said: "Jyoti Babu is very eager to know who is helping us." And I told him, he is someone who is non-aligned between you and us. Jyoti Babu laughed and said, "I cannot think of anyone who is non-aligned between us." Subsequently, again, this is Rajiv Gandhi's style. I think, I should mention it. He said: "Inderjit, may I mention your name?" I said: "Yes, I have no objection." And Rajiv Gandhi said, "He would like to meet you." Then the Home Minister, Shri Buta Singh, rang me up and asked me to drive over to his house. Once there, he said: "Get into my car. Rajivji wants me personally to introduce you to Jyoti Babu." You know the man in Rajiv Gandhi, he was very very eager to give his best and extend his best courtesy to anyone in whom he had confidence. I was introduced to Jyoti Babu. Mr. Buta Singh left and Mr. Basu asked: "Are you for a separate State?" His first blunt question. And I said (I remember the words come back to me very loud and clear): "Not as of today." He asked: "What do you mean by that?" I said: "Personally I stand for some fifty small States. After the experiment of Haryana, I think, we should have many more smaller States." After the creation of Nagaland, Mizoram and so on, I feel that we need now smaller States but not as of today because I don't think the time is ripe for redrawing the political map of this country. I remember very clearly at that point of time as to what had happened in 1986. For almost four years we



were doing nothing but fighting over villages, fighting over *talukas*, fighting over little pieces of land here and there. And I said: "The country can't afford it." Then he said: "What is your solution?" I said: "The solution is something short of a full-fledged State." So the principle was agreed upon between the two. And I must say in all fairness to Mr. Ghisingh that he was very clear that this may or may not work. But he was willing to go along and try to experiment with it.

**Mr. Chairman:** I think it is very important that you tell us at least approximately the date of this meeting with Mr. Jyoti Basu.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** I have a terrible memory. I did not keep a diary. But I think it was after 15 August.

**Mr. Chairman:** This would be August 1986.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** I would say September.

**Mr. Chairman:** The reason why I am stressing on this is, it would be important, I think, for a historian to know whether your meeting with Mr. Jyoti Basu took place before or after Rajiv Gandhi's 18 September 1986 press conference.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** No, this was before the meeting, before the visit.

**Mr. Chairman:** In other words, it had to be the first fortnight of September 1986.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** I think this 18 September visit is the one when I was also invited to come along to Darjeeling. Was it the 18 September or what is the subsequent one?

**Mr. Chairman:** Rajiv Gandhi travelled from Delhi to Cochin on 17 September. He spent the night in Trivandrum and then we flew up directly from Trivandrum to Calcutta on 18 August morning. There was a meeting between the entire Government of West Bengal and several Ministers of the Central Government in Raj Bhavan which started at about 10 o'clock that morning and continued till about 5 o'clock in the afternoon and then, at about 6 o'clock, there was a press conference in the Raj Bhavan where the question was asked: "Is Subash Ghisingh anti-national?" And Rajiv Gandhi gave the answer that got all the headlines the next day. He said, "Ghisingh wasn't anti-national" and the explanation that he gave then, since none of you has brought this on to the record, I feel I must do it, the basic explanation that Rajivji gave on the 18 September 1986 for not describing Subash Ghisingh as anti-national was: "How can I describe as anti-national a man who wants all his people to become Indian nationals?"

**Mr. Inder Jit:** Thank you very much for this intervention. It was not during this visit that I met Jyoti Basu, as you said, I think, this was before 18 September because he was visiting Delhi. I do not recall the exact dates. I had this meeting and we were agreed and you would remember, Mr. Chairman, the subsequent visit when he went along. Was it in early 1987?

**Mr. Chairman:** No, the subsequent visit to West Bengal took him to Darjeeling because I must stress that Rajivji did not go only to Darjeeling in

that visit. It was a visit that he made to several other parts of West Bengal including the town of Jalampur. This was on the same day. It was 18 December 1986 and this figure of 18 was connected between Rajiv and Darjeeling in some way. Because his last successful visit where he spoke at a successful public meeting was on 18 May 1986.

**Mr. Inderjit:** To come back to what I was saying. So far as Rajivji was concerned, he was clear. On the anti-national question, I must say that Rajiv Gandhi employed a considerable amount of political skill in handling this particular issue. I think I would like to place on record the fact that prior to his own visit to Calcutta, where he announced that Subash Ghisinghji was not anti-national, he earlier sent Arjun Singh to Calcutta. And Arjun Singh was asked to float the first balloon. And before that a lot of problems were created because Arjun Singh went along and said in so many words that Ghisingh was not anti-national. And then Rajivji went there, I remember, at one stage, matters were taking a little too long. You asked me about his own involvement, as Mr. Dutt wanted to know to what extent he was involved. Once I had spoken to the Prime Minister and I found that he was all along the line intimately involved, and very eager to know as to what was happening. He was eager to know what was the progress and so on. I remember at one stage, at a wedding reception, he came to know that things were not moving. If the things were not going to move, Mr. Ghisingh was going to launch another *bandh* or something. And he said: "Leave it to me and somebody will be in touch with you." So somebody rang them up at 11 o'clock that night and we had a meeting the following day. I think that was the first time the meeting was held with Arjun Singh who was very eager to know about the developments. He had been directed by Rajivji to find out what was happening. If I remember rightly, I think Gopi Arora was with him at that time, when we discussed the whole matter and a certain strategy was worked out.

Now, all along the line, let me reiterate he was eager to know what the progress was. One might turn around and say, well, should a Prime Minister have taken such an intimate interest? But he was very clear. This was a very important development. He was very, very eager. And I remember, on one occasion, Mr. Ghisingh rang me up and his friends had also rung up. There had been large-scale killings. And I remember getting across the message to the Prime Minister. He convened a meeting the same night and directed the DG, CRPF, to fly out to Darjeeling because I had said: "Unless you take some action which shows that you are going to give them a fair deal, our entire exercise may go up in smoke." And on one occasion I was very eager to talk to him at some length. He turned around and said, "I am myself very eager to know what is happening. There is no time. Will you travel with me to Jammu?" So I travelled with him to Jammu and, late that night, we spent an hour and a half at Raj Bhavan talking about Darjeeling. So, in other words, here was a man who was, all along the line, intimately involved, very eager to know what was happening or what was not

happening. I remember, on one occasion, when there was a late night meeting. Buta Singhji as Home Minister was not available. He had got Mr. Sommaiah, the Home Secretary, he got the head of the IB, I think, Mr. Narayanan was there at that time and a couple of other people and we reviewed the whole thing. Gopi Arora was there and he asked: "Can you leave tomorrow?" This was around midnight, I said: "I can't possibly, today is 17th. Can't he take the plane at 6 o'clock." He said: "We can take a special plane." I said: "No, don't put me in a special plane." He asked: "Can you leave tomorrow that is, 18th?" I said: "No that is rather difficult." "What is your problem?" he asked. I said to him, "Rajiv, it happens to be my wedding anniversary and I don't think I can afford to be away on that day." He said, "Great, why don't you take your wife along?" He turned around and told Sommaiah: "Get two seats booked immediately."

So far as Rajiv was concerned, all along the line, he was receptive to ideas. During one visit, which one it was, I think, the Chairman (Mani Shankar Aiyar) would remember much better than I. We had gone to Bagdogra and from there we took a helicopter and Jyoti Babu joined us from there. So we arrived at Bagdogra and I remember Jyoti Babu, he was very warm. I shook his hand and I still remember to this day what he said: "Thank you very much. Things are going well." Earlier in the plane, Mr. Chairman, I had said to him: "When you meet Mr. Ghisingh, who was going to bring a big delegation of 42 people, I think, it would be a good idea to get Jyoti Babu also to be present at this particular meeting." He turned around and asked: "Inder Jit, how do I get him there?" I said: "Why don't you ask him?" He said: "It is a bit awkward and he might turn around and say no and I don't want the Chief Minister to say no to a suggestion." Then I said: "Shall I try and persuade Jyoti Babu to be on this helicopter flight?" He said: "That is a good idea." So he so arranged our seating appropriately so that he went to the cockpit. And on that flight, I remember putting it across to Jyoti Babu that "a very crucial meeting is going to take place in the Raj Bhavan. Ghisinghji is going to come there and I think, it will be a good idea if you also are there." He said: "*Mein kya karoonga?*" I said: "No you should be there. It is important, it is historic. The Governor will be there if you are there." Then he said: "If you say so, OK. But you know it is not for me to go on my own. It is for the Prime Minister to invite me." So when we got off, I said, "Jyoti Babu is ready." In other words, he was receptive to ideas.

Now let me move to another aspect of his contribution. I think the evolution of the Darjeeling model is certainly a major contribution because it provides solutions to many of our problems. I am strongly of the view that although we have been free in this country for four decades and more, yet, we still have within our country several areas which could justifiably be described as "colonies". You have Jharkhand, a colony of the ruling elite of Patna; you have Vidharbha, a colony of the ruling elite of Bombay; you have Ladakh and so on. I think, this model provides a solution to this problem of liberation

of these so-called colonies. Now, it is unfortunate that this has not worked as it should, which reminds me of the famous words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly: "A good Constitution in the hands of good people becomes a good Constitution; a good Constitution in the hands of bad people becomes a bad Constitution."

I think it is a great tragedy that adequate opportunity has not been given to the functioning of this Hill Council as it should have been. This Council has really not been allowed to function as it should have. In fact, this particular model, if I might mention, was a model which was picked up by the Bangladeshis and, on one occasion, Rajivji himself told me that, in one of these Commonwealth meetings, President Mohammad Ershad had told him that he had considered the Darjeeling model for the Chittagong hill areas. Of course, subsequently we had the Bangladeshi High Commissioner trying to establish contact, and finding out what exactly was sought to be done. And, of course, what they did was an improvement on what we had sought to do because in our model, law and order were with the State Government and administration was with the State Government, which created its own problems. I remember on one occasion, sitting with Ghisinghji in his GNLFF headquarters when two or three boys came with bleeding heads. There had been some fight and now here was the most popular leader of the area helpless because there was nothing that he could do to provide any relief. So, I would say this is a model which has not been given an opportunity to be tried out as it should have been. But there are several problems. As Mr. Ghisingh has pointed out about the problem of finance, I remember even when we were thrashing out the Accord, he had raised a question that "whatever money is given, *humko paisa jo Delhi se milega, directly milna chahiye.*" But then the Chief Secretary, Mr. Sengupta, on behalf of the Chief Minister objected. He said: "*Paisa directly milega when you become a full-fledged State.*" Then I had suggested a compromise formula. I said: "All right, let the money go through the Writers' Building. Let the Writers' Building function as a post office — *thappa lagaya, aage bheja.*" At that time, I didn't know that the postmaster was going to keep money back with himself for his own spending! But this wasn't happening. The money was not being passed on. All kinds of excuses were being put forward. It didn't work. This is to cut a long story short.

**Mr. Chairman:** Sorry, this is so important a part of the story that you can't cut the long story short. I must bring on record that after Rajiv Gandhi visited Darjeeling in May 1989 in order to inaugurate the building of the Gorkha Hill Council, on his return here, I, as Joint Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office, was instructed to as closely as possible monitor the implementation of this Accord. And Mrs. Sarla Grewal as Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister was asked to also look into this.

**Mr. Inderjit:** Sorry, it was Mr B.G. Deshmukh at that time.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Deshmukh was also asked to look into these matters with the greatest interest. But Rajiv Gandhi's prime ministership, after his

visit to Darjeeling, lasted only another five months. By October 1989, we were into the election process. And indeed even by September 1989, our attention had started getting focussed on the forthcoming electoral process. It was only really in the months of June, July, and August 1989 that the Prime Minister's Office could take an interest in these matters. And the interest being taken at the PMO at that time was down to the very smallest detail. We were involved in attempting to ask the Tourism Ministry, for example, about what was to be done about hotels in Darjeeling. We were in contact with the Ministry of Urban Development to see about how the sewage system in Darjeeling could be overhauled. And it did seem to me that, since you are the continuing buckle between 1989 and 1994, it is necessary for us to know whether this kind of detailed interest on behalf of the PMO in the implementation of the Accord persisted after November 1989 or whether it was modified slightly, or was it totally abandoned? What happened with regard to prime ministerial monitoring of the implementation of the Accord which Mr. Ghisingh has described to us as the "Accord that was negotiated by the *malik*." He regarded Rajiv Gandhi qua Prime Minister as being the *malik* of the Accord. The Accord might have been, as it was, between the West Bengal Government and the GNLFF, but brokered by and blessed by the Prime Minister. Do you feel that attention at that level of governance has continued to be given to this Accord after October 1989?

**Mr. Inder Jit:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your intervention. The financial aspect has been the major problem. What has happened is, as I said earlier, was that monies were allocated by the Centre and they would never go across in time. There were occasions when I, as a Member of the Lok Sabha, got the money across to Calcutta, but then it was not passed on. Calcutta was talking in terms of a utilisation certificate from Mr. Ghisingh when he was given no administrative structure at all. He was himself having to sort out contracts. Now what was he supposed to do? Did he have to say that a particular road has been built at the cost of one lakh rupees? He wanted an infrastructure to be able to say that the monies had been spent. And numerous times Mr. Ghisingh came, and I must say, in all fairness, to our present Prime Minister and also to Mr. V.P. Singh and Mr. Chandra Shekhar, and I sought an appointment for him, they gave an appointment and we discussed the affairs. But each one of them pointed out a particular difficulty. They said that under the Constitution they could not give him money directly. The Home Minister saw Mr. Ghisingh, the Finance Minister saw him; Mr. Pranab Mukherjee (Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission) saw him, not once but several times. Mr. Ghisingh's refrain was: "The money is not reaching us, what do we do?" What is he supposed to do? At least we had promised him that you will not have a full-fledged State, but you would have an opportunity to develop your own area. But the money was not going through. I remember, for example, you (Mr. Chairman) and Mr. Mohan Dharia and I saw him as a friend personally. And Mr. Mukherjee kindly agreed and, I think, Dr. Barthakur was there at that time, and he

kindly agreed to give us a special Centre. And the problem of time were not reaching the intended people. Mr. Ghisingh came with all his problems, he said: "We know you have problems. But there is very little we can do because the Constitution bars us." At one point of time I even argued with Mr. Pranab Mukherjee who said, "I have personally spoken to Jyoti Babu, not once, not twice, but three times." And I wanted this also to go on record that the Home Minister sent, in my presence, not once but twice, crash messages, wireless messages, saying "Please release some funds". That was not done. And on the third occasion he said: "What can I do? You have seen me sending wireless messages. Nothing is happening." At one point of time, I suggested to the Prime Minister: "Why don't you say that the Planning Commission is allocating certain amount of funds to West Bengal. If they do not pass on the funds which are allocated to Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, those funds will be deducted and passed on straight." The Prime Minister said: "No, we can't do that because that would go contrary to the Constitution of our country." So this problem has continued. I am sure if Rajivji were around, he would have taken greater interest, and a solution would have been found. In 1991, after I was re-elected to the Lok Sabha, I went and saw Mr. S.B. Chavan. And I put across to him all the tales of woe and frustration and the agony of Mr. Ghisingh and all our friends over there. And I argued my case out. I said: "Listen, we had created this Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council with a particular view. We expected the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council to perform. It is supposed to meet certain aspirations and hopes. To what extent has this Council succeeded? Why don't we have a tripartite review?" He saw wisdom in this, he saw good sense in this and said, "Yes, it is a good idea. I think we have had this for three or four years. Let us have a review." And I was very pleased and, a fortnight later, I received a letter from the Joint Secretary in the Home Ministry saying that a tripartite meeting was going to be convened for reviewing the functioning of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. But a week later I received another letter cancelling that meeting because West Bengal had objected. I think it was unconscionable for West Bengal to have objected to it. It was a tripartite Accord and there should have been a review because, as I said, this Darjeeling model was something which one could follow elsewhere. And we should have seen what exactly had gone wrong with that model or what were the problems or what were the frustrations. Had this been done, I don't think, we would have reached the situation and the position which Mr. Ghisingh now talks about. There is absolute frustration. I know he is having a very tough time in keeping the Council going. I know that his councillors have told me informally not to go on pushing this Council. It will not work. But Mr. Ghisingh has gone along. He feels we must try and see what we can do. Therefore, I would say that even now there is a need for a full-fledged and honest review of what was intended to be achieved, and of what we have not achieved. Secondly, in terms of money, I think, Dr. Barthakur raised a very pertinent point and I

have been arguing all this out. You have Sikkim neighbouring Darjeeling and you have three and a half lakhs of people there and in the Darjeeling hill areas we have more than eight lakhs. What is happening? The Planning Commission allocates Rs. 100 crore a year for Sikkim.

**Dr. Barthakur:** Rs. 90 crores.

**Mr. Subash Ghisingh:** It was initially Rs. 60 crores; it has now come down to Rs. 10-12 crores. What we are given for five years, a small State is given in one year. This cannot go on.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** What does Darjeeling get? Only about Rs. 20 crores. The point is: money is important. You need money for development. Now in the Darjeeling hill areas Mr. Ghisingh has undertaken the construction of something like 200 kilometres of uphill roads. People want infrastructure, people want to move about. There is much else which is sought to be done. Today Darjeeling lacks adequate water supply. For three years, he and I have been waiting for the West Bengal Government to give clearance for the construction of the fourth water tank.

**Mr. Chairman:** Reservoir.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** OK, reservoir. What has happened? We have taken up the matter with the West Bengal Government. It will be of interest to both the former Chief Secretaries that the answer given was: "Look here, there has to be an advisory committee which must give a no objection certificate. And this advisory committee has not been set up for three years."

**Mr. Subash Ghisingh:** To solve the water problem, we need reservoirs. We would like to provide water to the local people and to the lakhs of tourists who come to Darjeeling. But to build reservoirs we need NOCs (no objection certificates) from the State Government. We had applied five years ago for an NOC but no action has been taken. We are being treated like enemies here.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** So, what I was trying to say is that, on the financial side, and on the development side there is need for a review to see what has not been implemented. Every time I have said that the Accord is not being implemented in its letter and spirit, people in Calcutta have taken great offence.

Well, I now conclude, Mr. Chairman, by saying that what has happened in Darjeeling raises certain basic issues. We have talked in terms of ethnicity; we have talked in terms of pluralism. You cannot apply different yardsticks to different areas of our country. The day Nagaland was conceded, I recall, at that stage, a group of elders (Mr. Vishnu Sahay was there and I was there, Mr. Shankar Prasad was there and my late lamented father was there) and they all said it was "a grave decision. After this you will have to create many more states on this particular issue." Now we have seven sisters in that particular area. Now, once you have done this how can you deny a certain position to other ethnic areas? Now take Ladakh. I think, if I am right, this Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council model was promised to Ladakh by Mr. Buta Singh when he was Home Minister. Five years have gone by. I

was in Ladakh for about a week, in response to the pressing suggestion of my good friend Mr. Namgyal who is here. The Ladakhis are not being given a council, despite repeated suggestions. Therefore, I say that we should draw lessons from what is happening. And if we are not willing to redraw the political map of this country at this point of time, then I think, we will have many more other issues to deal with in the light of our experience of what happened in 1956 and in 1990.

Finally, I think it is a great tragedy that we do not have Rajiv Gandhi in our midst today, because he would have taken a long-term view. In this context, I remember narrating a quip, which he greatly enjoyed: "Our world today faces many problems because there are lots and lots of politicians, but very few statesmen. As you know, a politician thinks only of today, but a statesman also thinks of tomorrow." But, in our country, the tragedy is even greater because the politicians seem to think only of the moment, not even the whole day!

**Lama Lobzang:**\* Although I am from Ladakh, I would like to state that there are a lot of similarities between the cultures and languages of Ladakh and Darjeeling, despite the geographical distance separating them. Also, the problems of the people of both Ladakh and Darjeeling are similar. Just as a Gorkha Hill Council has been set up for Darjeeling, a similar council should also be set up in Ladakh. The funds should be sent to the council directly from New Delhi, so that no intermediary gobbles them.

**Mr. Subash Ghisingh:** Let me reveal a secret about Shri Rajiv Gandhi. There was a danger to his life in Darjeeling. This is what I told Mr. Buta Singh (the Home Minister) and to Shrimati Rajendri Kumari Vajpayee. And we took all steps to protect Shri Rajiv Gandhi. Essentially, we told him not to address public meetings [where the danger was the highest]. But he went ahead and we made the required arrangements.

**Mr. Priya Ranjan Das Munshi:** I would like to raise a few points. First, Rajivji did advise the concerned ministries that the administration would have to contain the movement without extreme measures being taken. But matters were settled and the Gorkhaland Accord was signed. Future administrators should take note of this Accord and such a situation should not be allowed to develop in any part of India.

Next, on the arms' surrender day, the Gorkhaland activists handed over country-made weapons (Mr. Ghisingh will bear me out) and the Marxist party comrades handed over self-loading rifles and Sten guns, which were State-owned! This development created a very sensitive situation. I advised the Prime Minister to take up the matter with the State Government. However, for various political reasons, the checking was not done properly.

**Mr. Inder Jit:** There is one aspect of Rajivji's approach to the questions of how and why did he get so intimately involved. I remember he mentioned it to me not once but several times. He said: "We have to take active interest

\* Spoke in Hindi.



in this because if the West Bengal Government is allowed to pursue the policy which it is doing now, they will push Subash Ghisingh and his men over the border." This was his prime reason for his actively intervening to tackle this particular problem. I think this needs to be put on the record.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. We had called all of you as participants of history to put on record your recollections of the events. What I had not anticipated was that the very process of putting into history your recollections of that time would be an historic occasion in itself. And I think one of the most important consequences of the discussions that we have had just now is to, perhaps, give new life to the nation's endeavour to solve the continuing problems in the Darjeeling hills.