



THE BEST OF
LAXMAN



R. K. Laxman

PENGUIN BOOKS
THE BEST OF LAXMAN: VOLUME IV

R. K. Laxman was born and educated in Mysore. Soon after he graduated from the University of Mysore, he started drawing cartoons for the *Free Press Journal*, a newspaper in Bombay. Six months later he joined the *Times of India*, a newspaper he has been with, as staff cartoonist, for over forty years. He has written and published numerous short stories, essays and travel articles. Some of these were published in a book, *Idle Hours*. He has also published several collections of his cartoons and two novels. His recent novel titled *The Messenger* was published by Penguin Books in 1993.

R. K. Laxman was awarded the prestigious Padma Bhushan by the Government of India. The University of Marathwada conferred an honorary Doctor of Literature degree on him. He has won many awards for his cartoons, including Asia's top journalism award, the Ramon Magsaysay Award, in 1984.

R. K. Laxman lives in Bombay.

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Volume IV



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Introduction

Most of the readers who see my cartoons regularly are somewhat mystified as to how I get fresh ideas day after day. Vast numbers of them have their own theories about this. Rarely have these people had a chance to meet cartoonists and have their theories proved. But even if they happen to meet a cartoonist, I am afraid, they will not be greatly enlightened because the cartoonist himself is in a state of confusion on this matter. I do not know about the other practitioners of this art but as far as I am concerned this has been my experience all these years!

On many occasions I have met people who have told me that a cartoonist gets his idea in a flash. And then he immediately sketches it. And there you have the day's cartoon! I listen to this theory in despair. Is this the popular conception of a cartoonist's job? But then others come along to tell me that it is a gruelling business involving agonizing hours of thinking, analysing, reading several newspapers, keeping a close watch on political activities and so on. I listen to this awesome theory with a touch of self pity because I realize that I go through a great deal of mental torture every day just to make people laugh or smile for a moment. There are other theories about my profession which inform me that I neither read nor think nor get anything by way of inspiration. But they, of course, do not explain how I then finally produce my cartoon.

There are indeed many more such notions. Actually, come to think of it, there is an element of truth in all of them, however far-fetched or weird. It is sheer inspiration sometimes—making me wonder how I actually got the rib-tickling idea; sometimes it is knocking my head against the boring ministerial speeches, economic theories about bureaucratic misdeeds, riots, protest fasts, student agitations etc. But most days the political leaders themselves help me out by their actions and speeches thereby

inadvertently handing me the idea for the day's cartoon on a platter.

Bombay
April 1995

R. K. Laxman



With everything having foreign collaboration these days some sceptic thinks this new statue is actually Ben Kingsley!



Find out whose birth or death anniversary it is today. Mention he was a great patriot and did much to help the poor, etc. and release the statement to the press!



I am worried! He is acting peculiar! He is reading a book and not watching the TV saying he is tired of sex, violence and vulgarity.



Why should he get the best Parliamentarian Award? I have walked out 273 times and he, only 104!



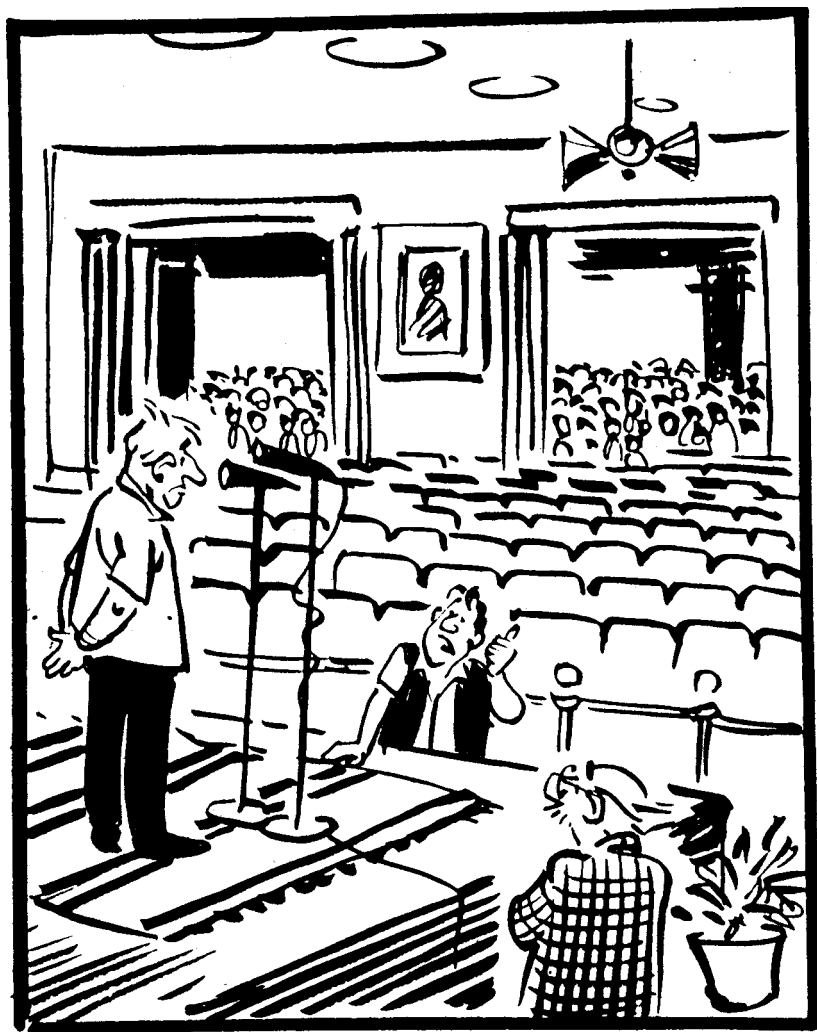
... now that I have retired, I promise to work to restore moral values, rid the system of graft, bring back Gandhian principles



This is most unfair! I called this all-party dinner-meet to solve the national crisis and they threaten to walk out if I raise the issue!



My sons Quit India last year—went away to the US, the UK, Australia ...!



They are not coming in because they say it's going to be the same speech and so is taken as heard.



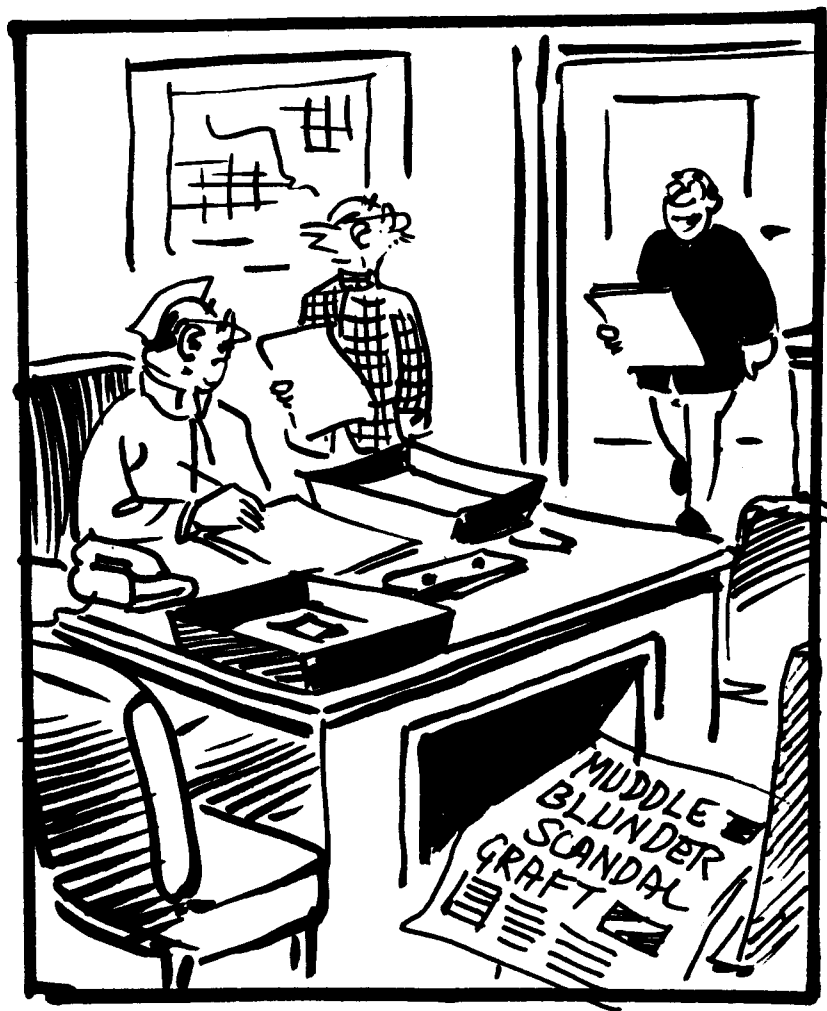
There seems to be something wrong in your calculation, sir! Backward class 55%, ST 30%, KP 21%, PC, NC and so on add up to 273%!



Our job is getting difficult. What do you make of it? He says he has decided to resign but won't confirm or deny it!



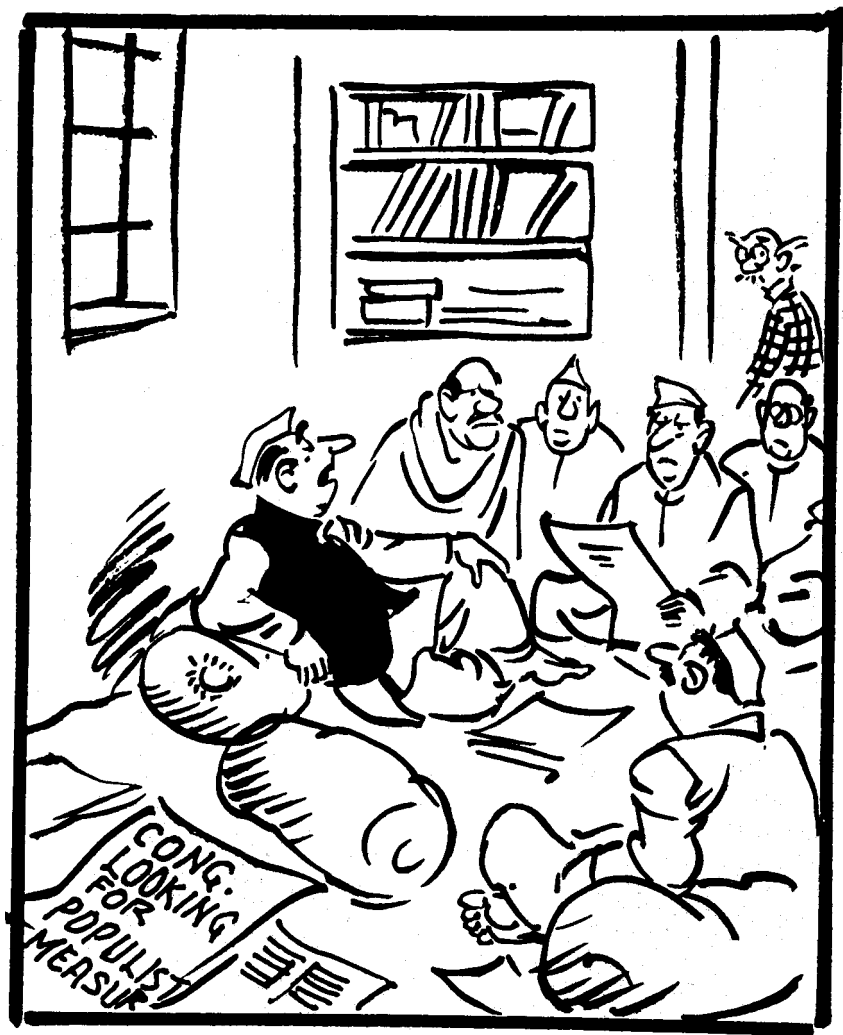
Too many enquiry reports, sir. If you remove a few, you can sit on them more comfortably.



Good news, sir! The enquiry report says that no one is responsible in the entire administration for anything!



At last, he has removed the ministers with tainted reputations from the cabinet.



Besides rice, free vegetables and milk for all is an excellent idea! Too good for the Assembly polls. We will keep it for the Parliamentary polls!



No use howling now, 'How am I to fulfil my promise!' I told you not to make such extravagant promises to give them water and food.



No, sir, it was not there when you visited your constituency last. It was just a sapling you planted then!



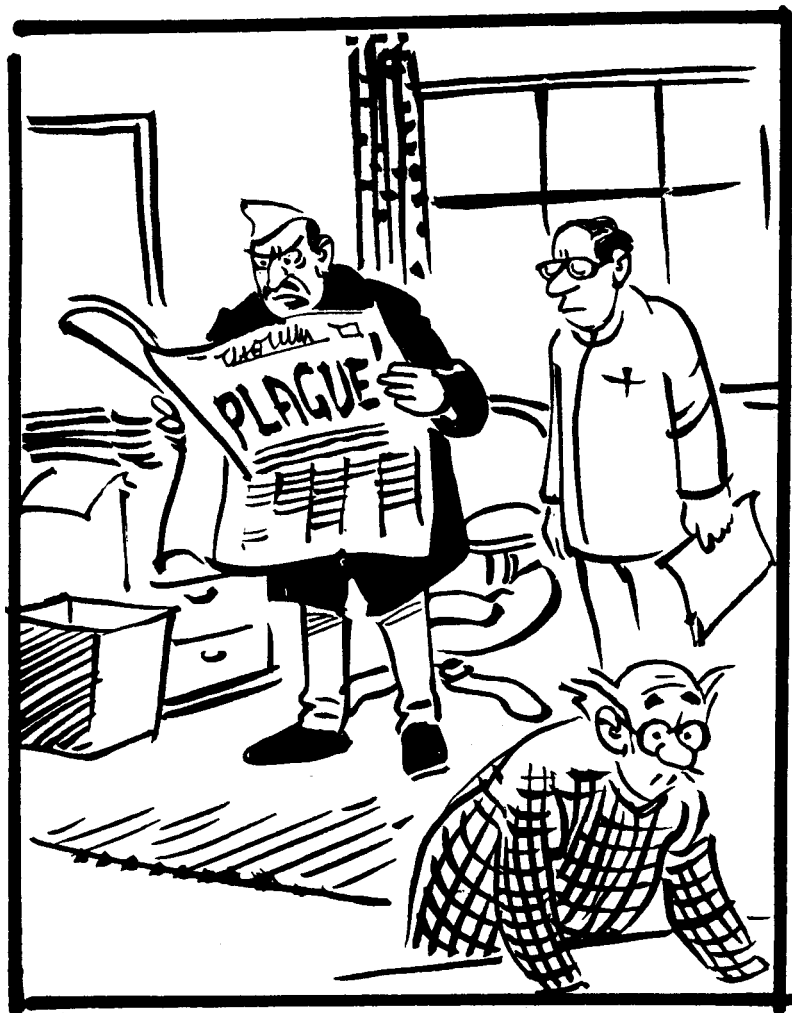
Fool! That's no place to go about telling the truth that the fulfilment of our promises are subject to the availability of funds, etc !



It will be a real problem finding rooms for them. I understand there's going to be a further expansion of the Cabinet!



Don't be silly! Of course, I saw the 'No Parking' sign. I didn't park it there. I fell in there.



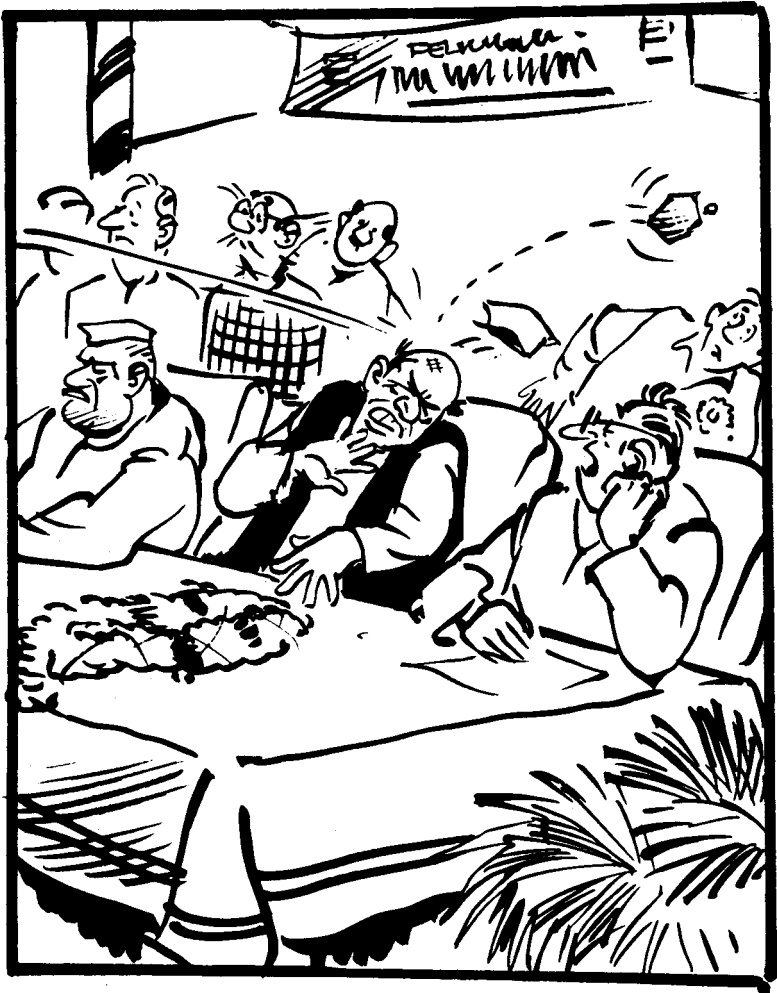
Get an aircraft ready. I must make an aerial survey of the affected areas!



No, I am not the new secretary. I have been working for the past three days and I'm due for transfer any time now!



Unreasonable demands! . . . Can't be granted. Why don't you agitate concerning some other issue? There are so many of them!



It's just bad aim! Your supporter, I am sure, intended it for your rival next to you!



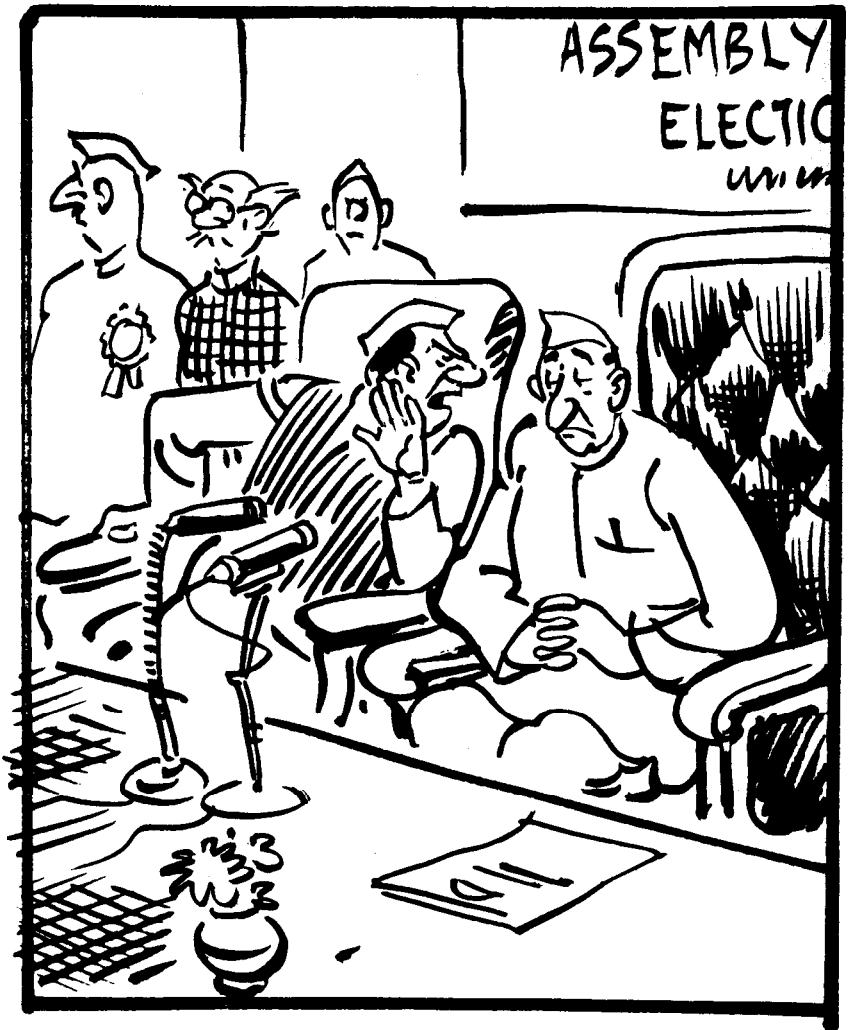
I agree, it is against our tradition, culture, morals, principles . . . but we are still allowing it because it is part of our liberalization policy.



True, the strike was over a long time ago but this has always been here even before the strike!



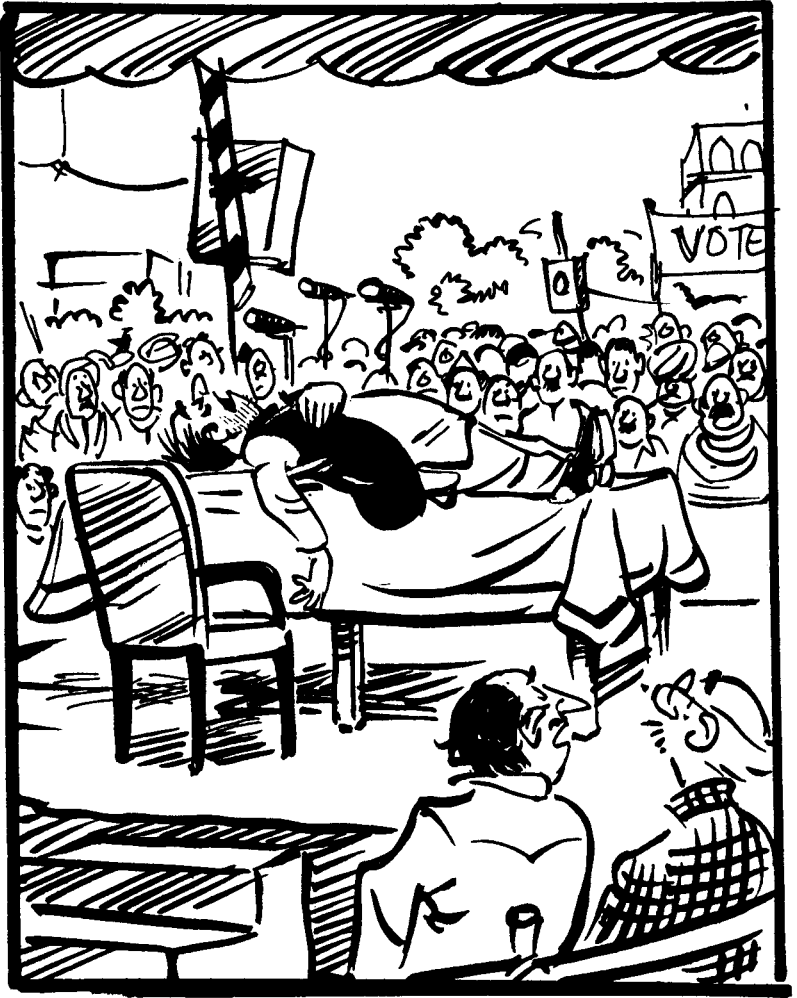
Yes, we use cut-out and taped speech in order to further tighten security.



OK, as a disciplined soldier of the party, I'll behave myself now. But once all this is over I'll make you regret bitterly what you have done to me.



Go back and correct it! You gave a full-throated call to vote for the Congress at the end forgetting you have resigned from it!



This is what is happening of late! He is over-cautious about conduct rules and goes from meeting to meeting on foot and gets exhausted!



I am proud of the spectacular transformations and improvements which are taking place among women of India.



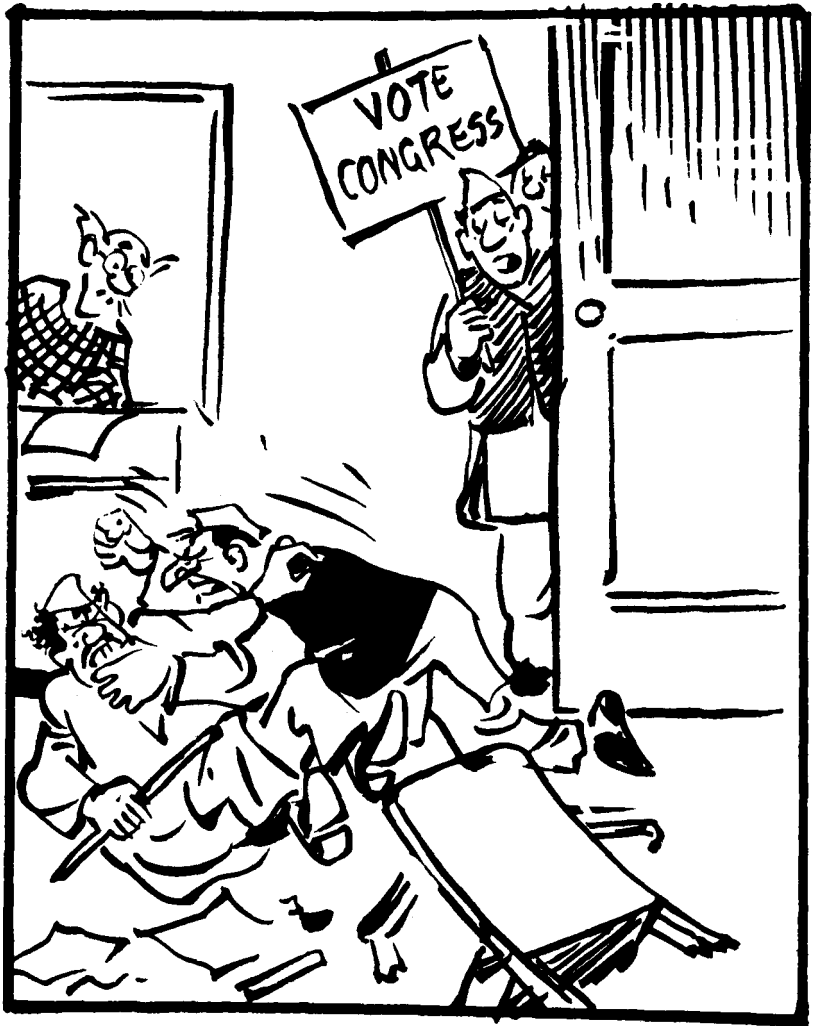
What, are we citizens of India? Of course, we are! Don't we look it?



Go ahead. Take it, sir! There's nothing wrong. Even in foreign countries they take bribes!



We should be careful whom we kidnap! That chap refuses to leave saying he is quite comfortable here.



We are going off to ask people to vote for unity, stability, solidarity. Coming?



Tell them about the Gandhian ideals of unity, service and selfless devotion to the party. All of them are rebels and dissidents.



So you claim to know better than they, do you? I am just back from the UK, USA, Germany, etc. There they simply marvel at our economic policy!



*Sons, sons-in-law, sisters, nephews, brothers-in-law, my kith and kin.
Our great democratic republic is about to start the election*



For decades I have used it and this time I want to change it. Can you rephrase, 'I promise to remove poverty . . . ' and make it sound different?



*Take care not to discuss matters of mutual hatred, hostility and dispute.
Stick to renewing and strengthening our friendship.*



Don't talk like that about your father! He burns books, cars and trains. Yes, but he is a responsible adult.



That was just to inaugurate the 'Keep The City Clean' campaign. I don't think he will do it regularly.



I am not responsible for it, dash it! If I take the decision it leads to riots. If I don't take any, it still leads to riots!



Take it easy, I say. We too were seized with shame and fear when exposed the first time.



I don't know what's wrong with this nation. We organized so many morchas, bandhs, strikes, demonstrations and yet there is hardly any improvement.



It's agreed then, we split after the assembly polls. Till then we remain united and serve the party loyally and work for its success.



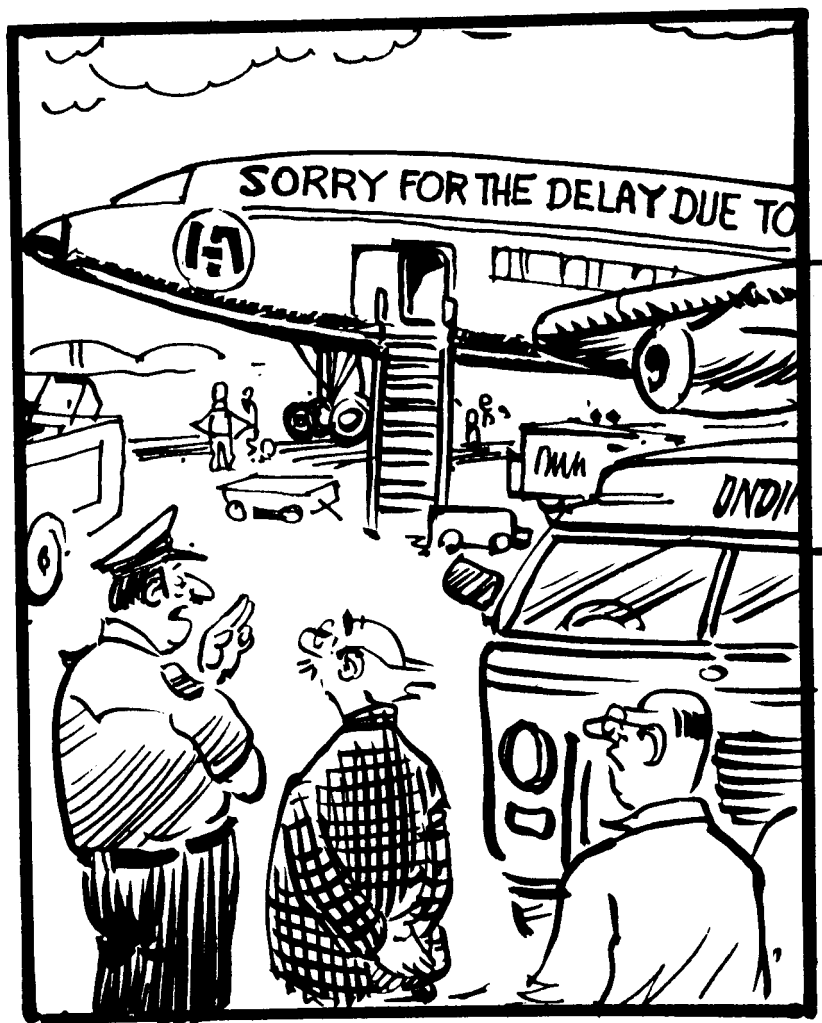
Don't think we are heartless. True, I beat you up mercilessly. But then I'm rushing you to the hospital, too! Think of that!



Today is not so bad, sir. You have only to deny the allegations on page one, five, seven, ten, fourteen, eighteen and thirty-four!



I have given him over a dozen extensions so far because he says he will write his memoirs when he retires.



We had that put up to give advance information for passenger convenience!



I can understand getting involved in a corruption scandal. But this sex scandal involvement! Aren't you ashamed?



Luckily the situation doesn't seem that bad. So far no minister has shown up to do an aerial survey of the flood-hit-areas.



*I am not a fool for not having enough evidence to prove I am not corrupt.
All this is only a part of it!*



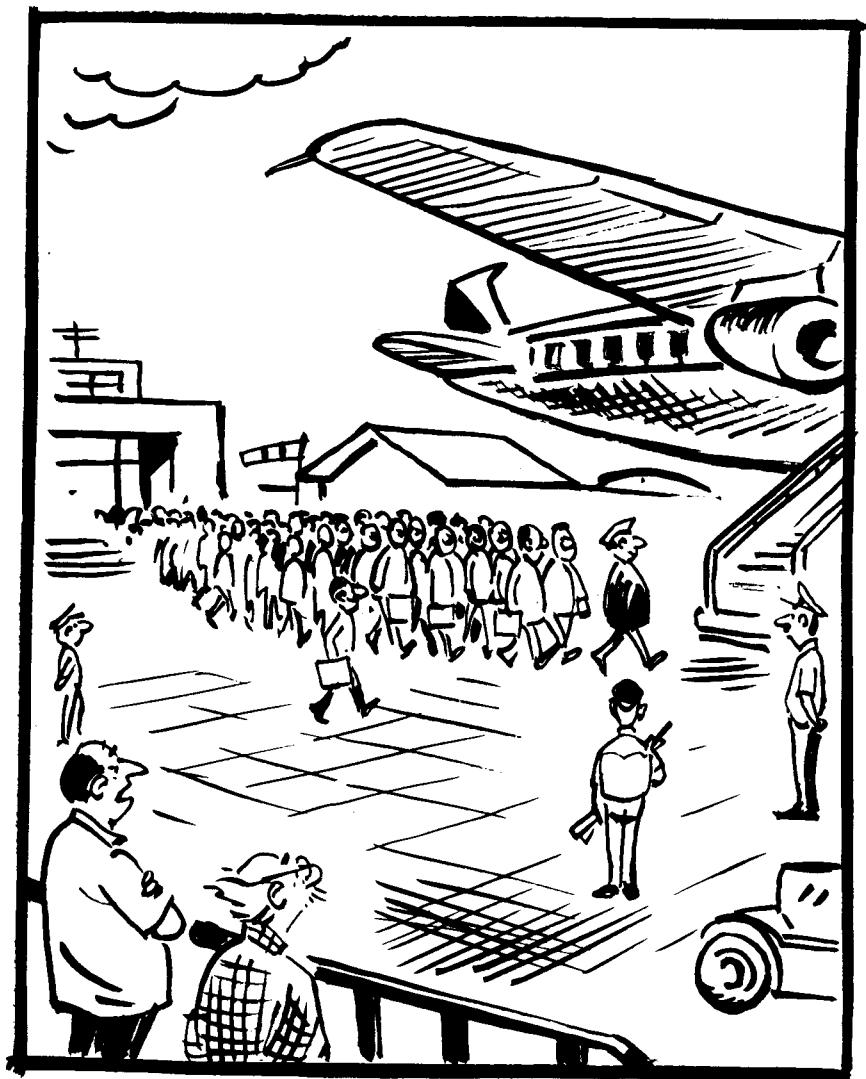
Oh, you are new! I didn't know there has been a cabinet reshuffle! . . . I am underworld Don Pogo, alias Bimru, alias Kuppu . . . !



Here is good news! Under the new plan the general improvement over here has risen from 11.5% to 16.75% ...!



No infighting, no groupism, no splitting! I tell you at this rate we will soon cease to exist as a political party!



It looks like he and his entourage are off on tour abroad to hold bilateral talks on tourism with several countries!



True, the IA passengers too misbehave! But that's because of delays, cancellations, off-loading, etc., and not due to drinking like they did in other airlines!



*High time we did something about it. The party is splitting rather rapidly!
Each one of them is the leader of a splinter group!*



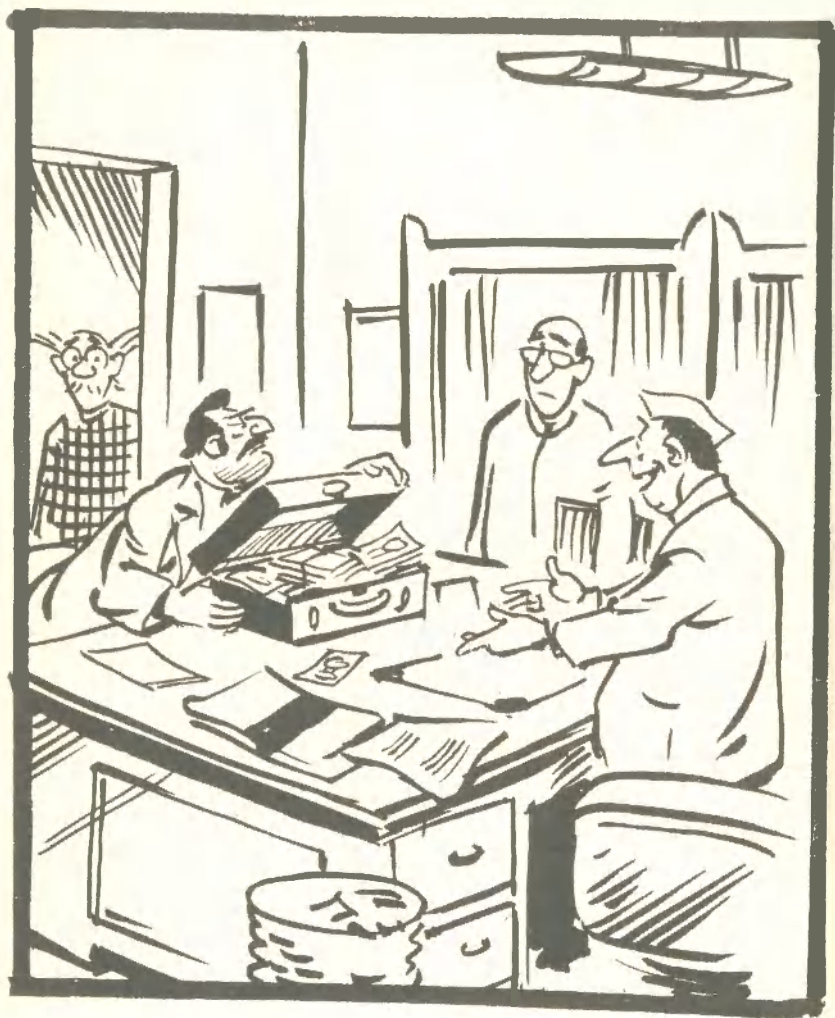
More sugar scandal! Someone has ordered the import of brown sugar!



... and this speech was sponsored by Crunchy Munchy Biscuits of Italy and Sipco Soft Drinks of USA.



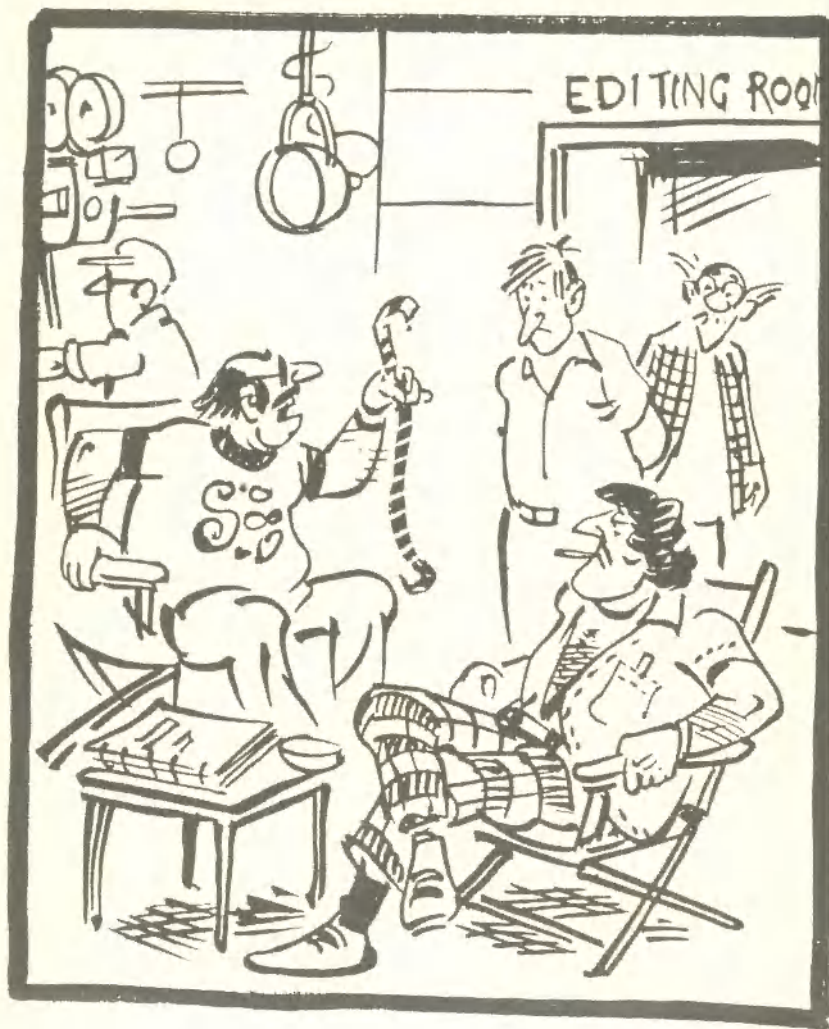
Of course, I too went to school. Where do you think I learnt to carry it like this.



Don't bother about him. He won't speak. He is bound by service rules not to reveal official secrets.



It seems the PM has summoned them with regard to the worsening party in-fighting!



Just as I expected, all the obscenities are cut as per the censor's order. How to survive in this business!



After being an active politician for so many years he is resigning from politics. He says he won't be able to serve the nation any more.



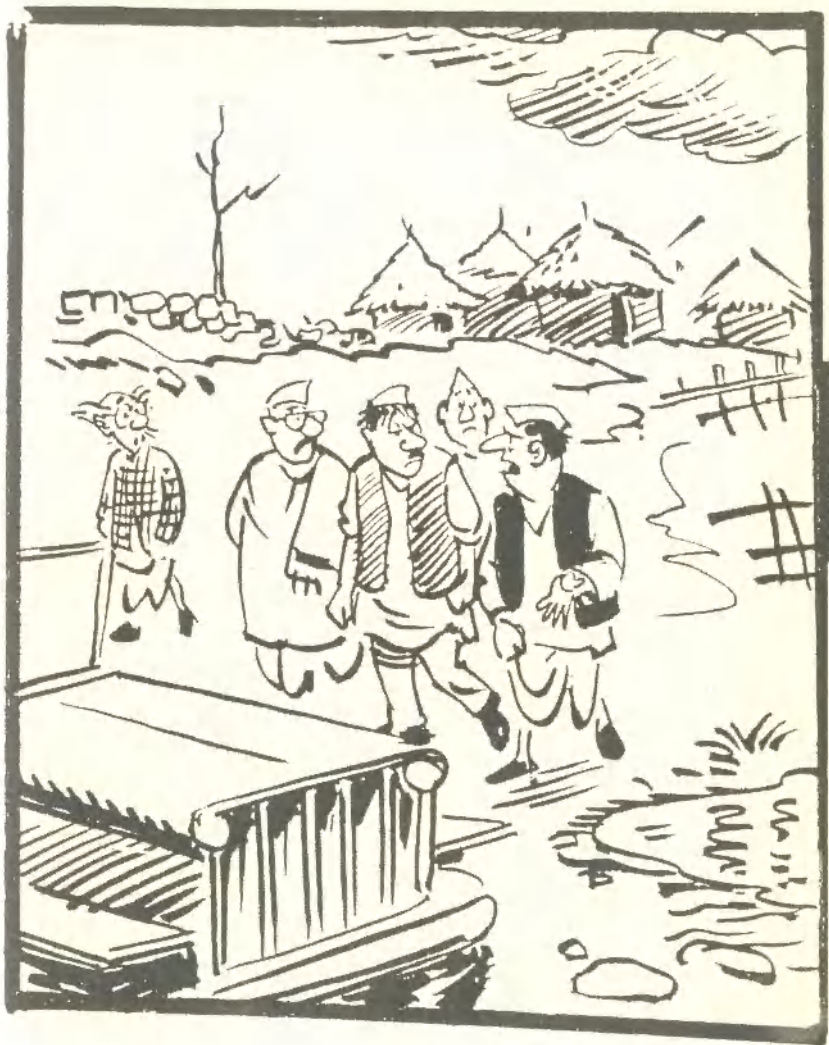
*You are making a mistake. He is not the one involved in the sugar scam.
He is involved in the bank scam.*



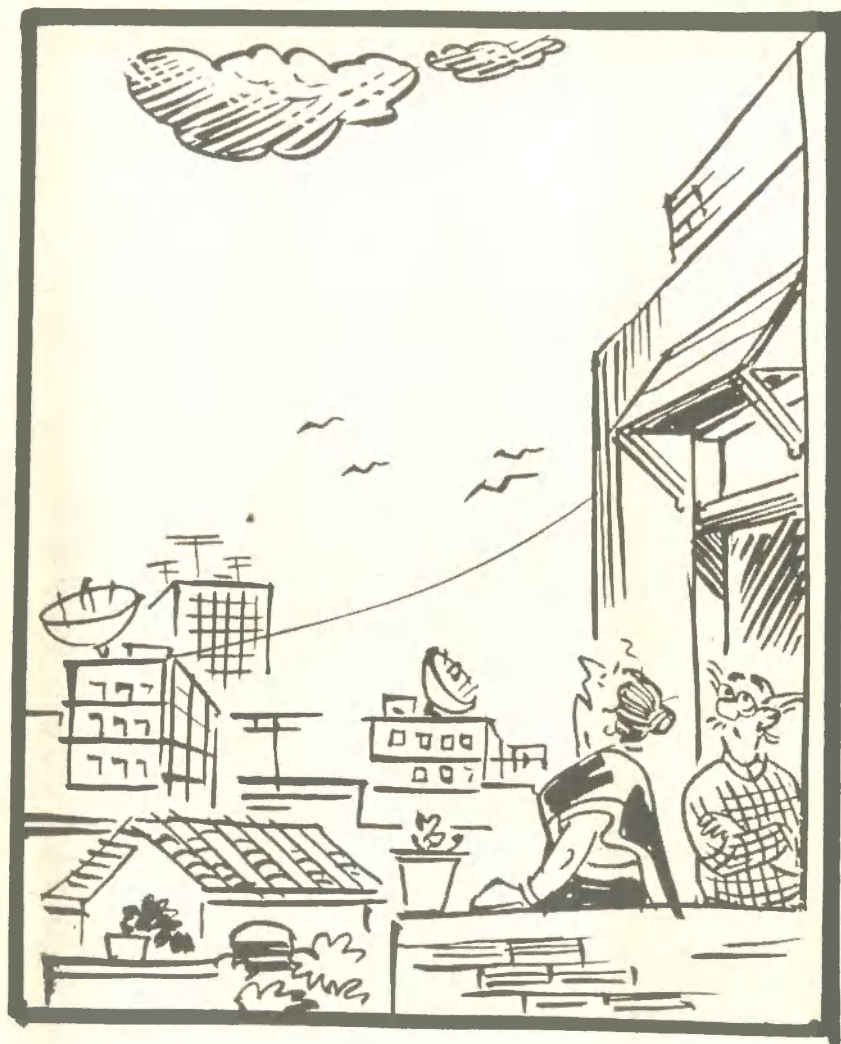
No, it is working all right. I got 23 wrong calls in the past one hour!



His excellency says the same bilateral cultural agreement is signed many times whenever various ministers from your country come here on official visits!



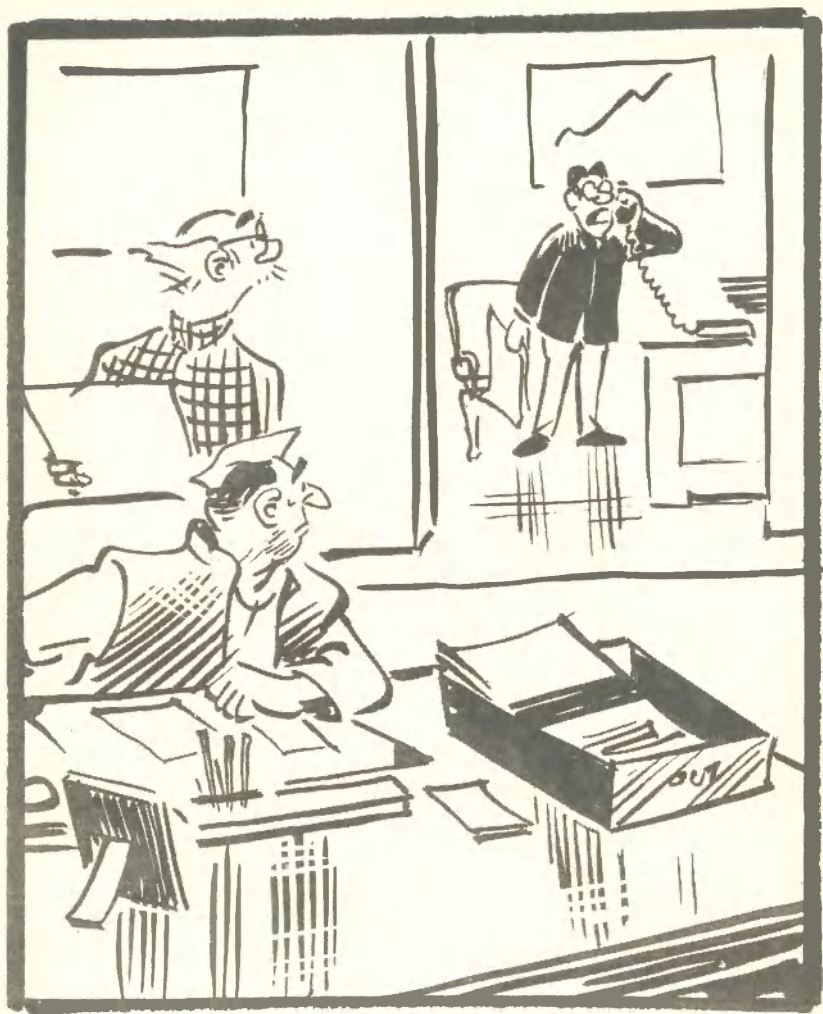
That means we are clearly losing our popularity. BJP, SP, BSP, JD, CPI, they know, but Congress they say they haven't heard of!



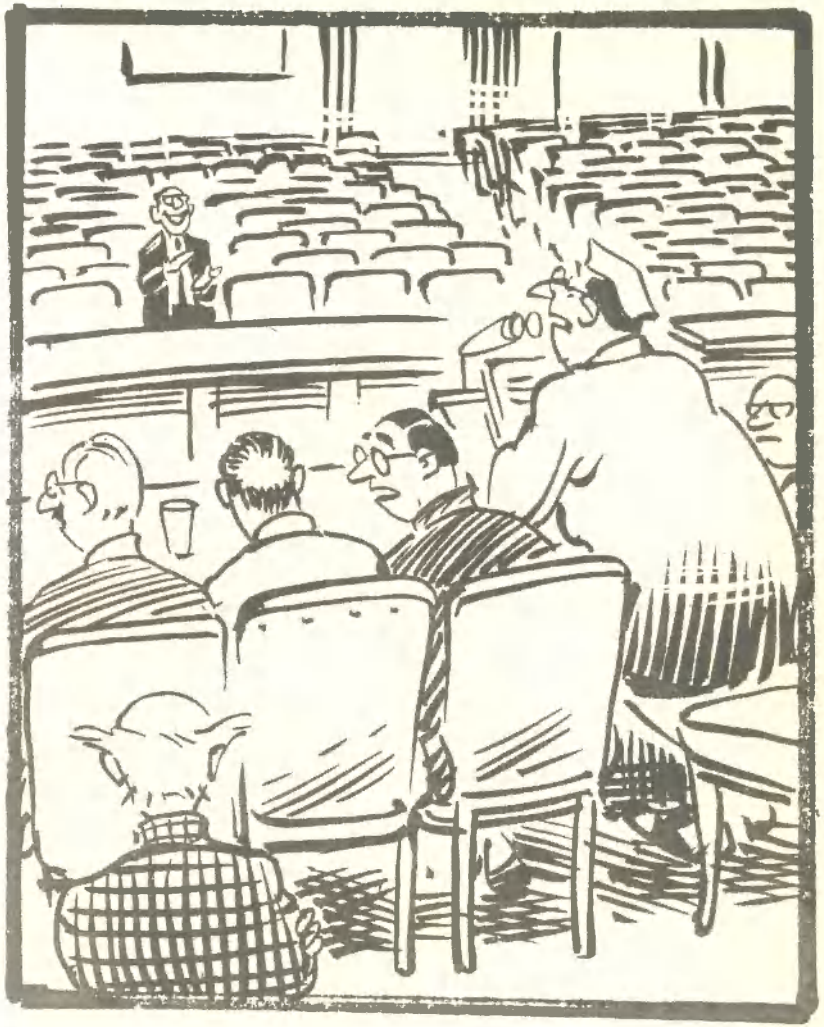
Here it comes! There go train service, telephones, power supply



Everybody knows why we lost. I am not interested in that. I want to know why we won.



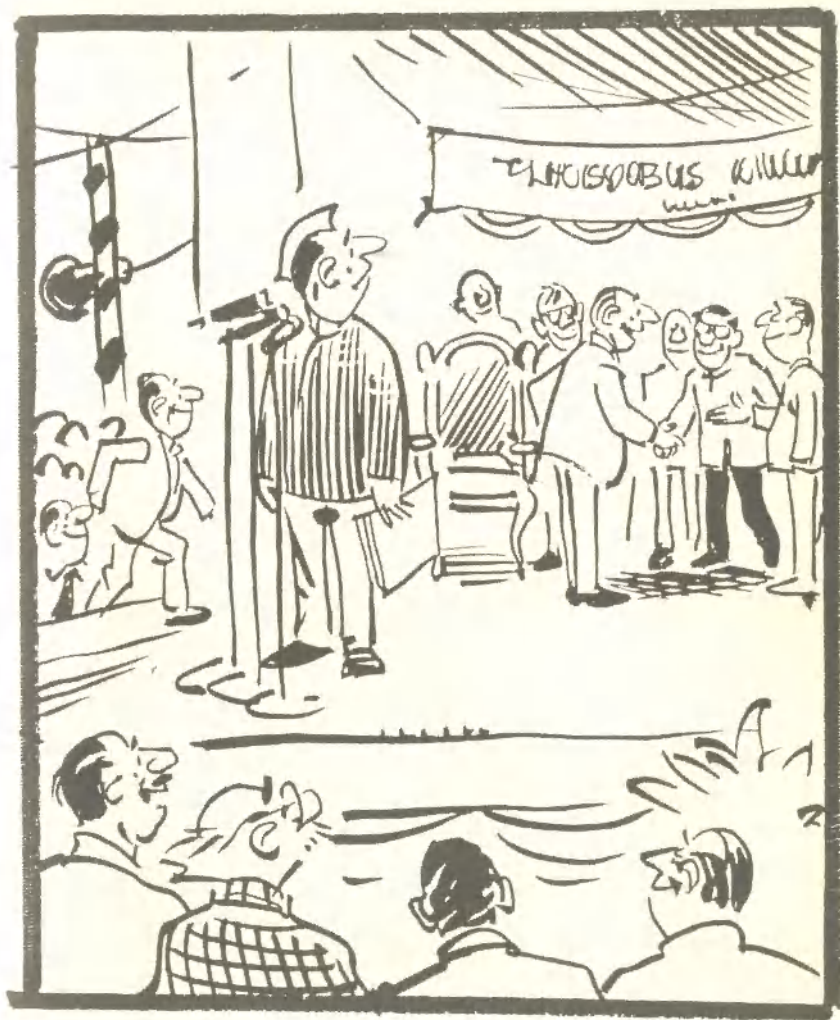
It's a malicious allegation! It's character assassination! He has no links with underground dons, never! But with upperworld dons only!



Rather a thin audience, yes. But he is getting a standing ovation, think of that!



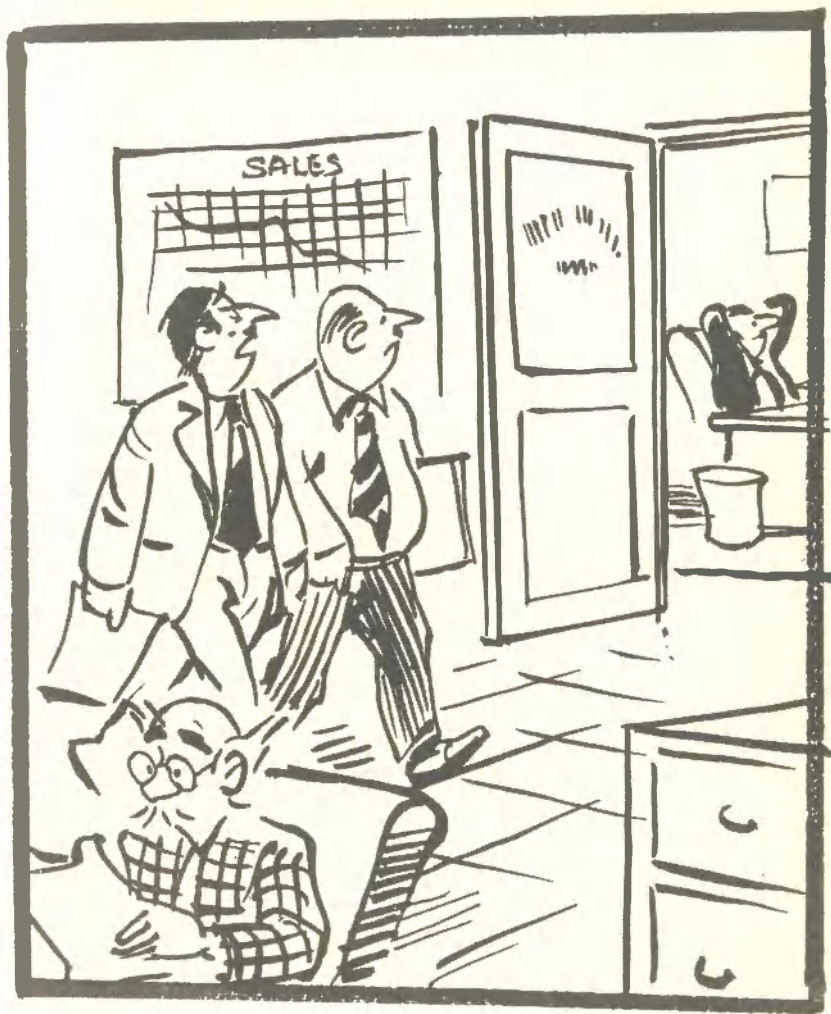
No, I couldn't get admission. I got only 82% in Maths, 83% in Science, 91% in Social History, 89% in



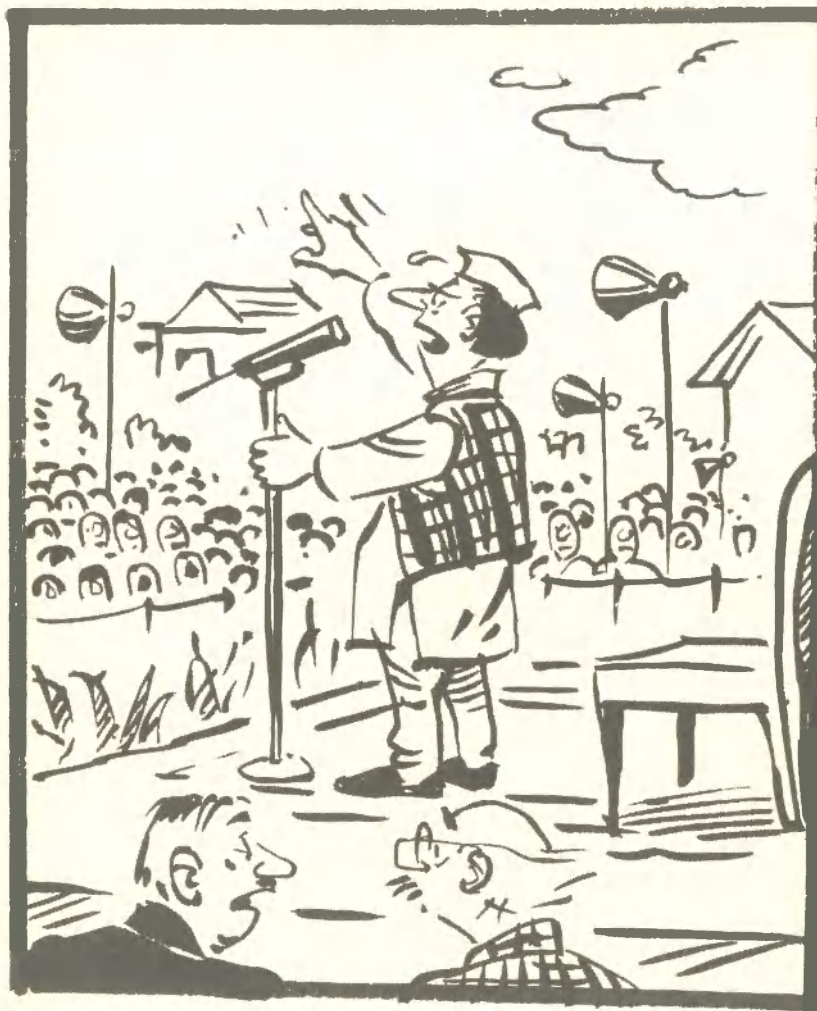
Did you hear what they are saying? 'Excellent speech!' and congratulating the speech writer—his P.A.



There is nothing wrong in campaigning against corruption. But it should not interfere with smooth administration and inconvenience.



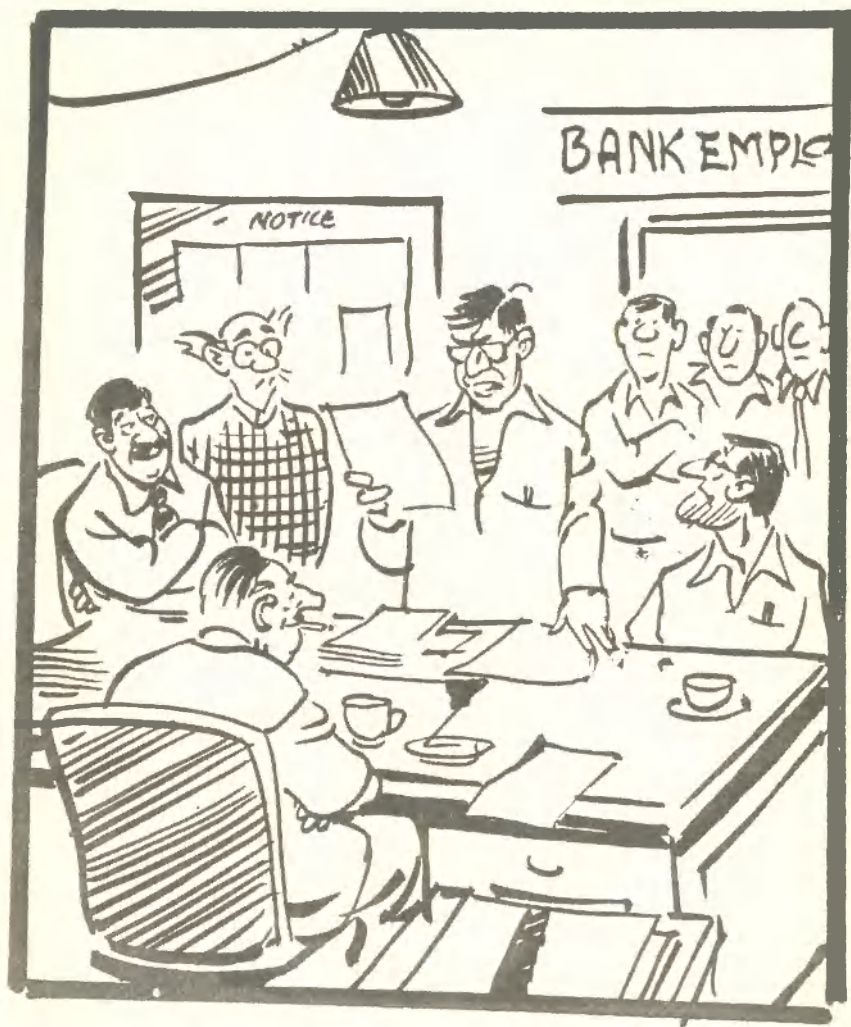
I think our sales manager is lazy and doesn't want to tour. He deliberately books himself on Indian Airlines whenever he has to travel.



We have disconnected the wires because no loudspeaker is allowed at this hour as per poll rules and he can make a spirited speech only before a mike!



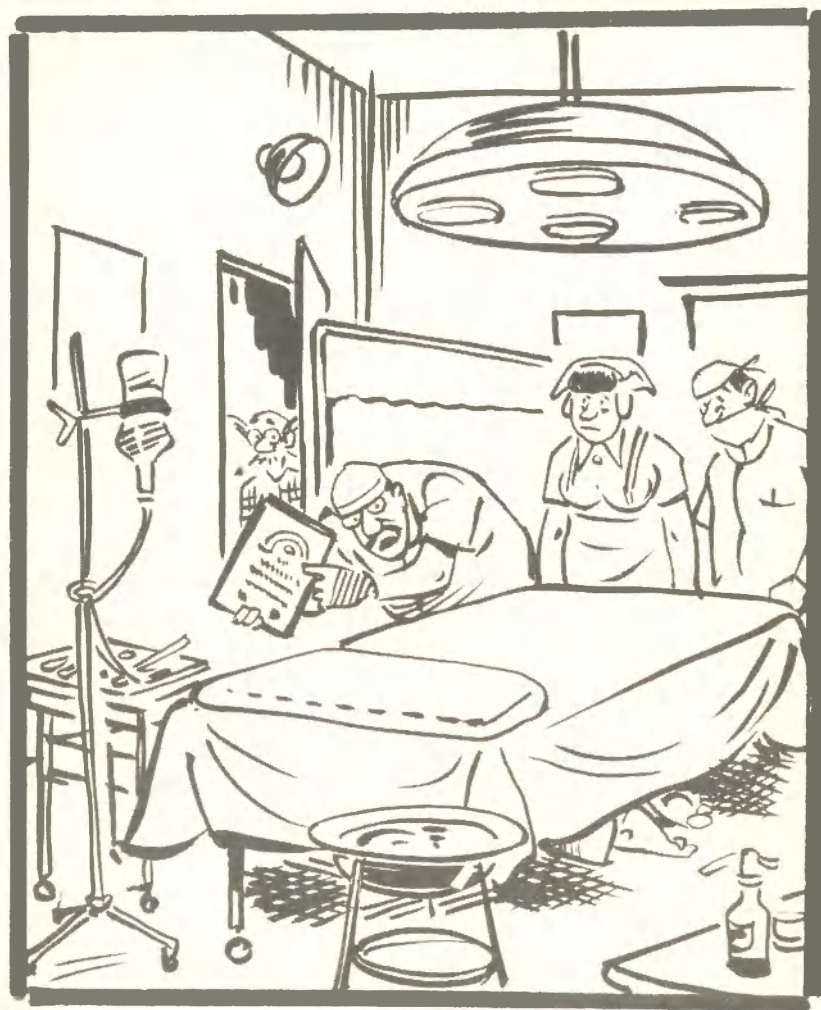
It could have been worse!—supposing he had demanded that we must observe these rules always, elections or no elections!



. . . and so to regularize our work-method we will declare strikes on alternate days and token strikes on other days . . .



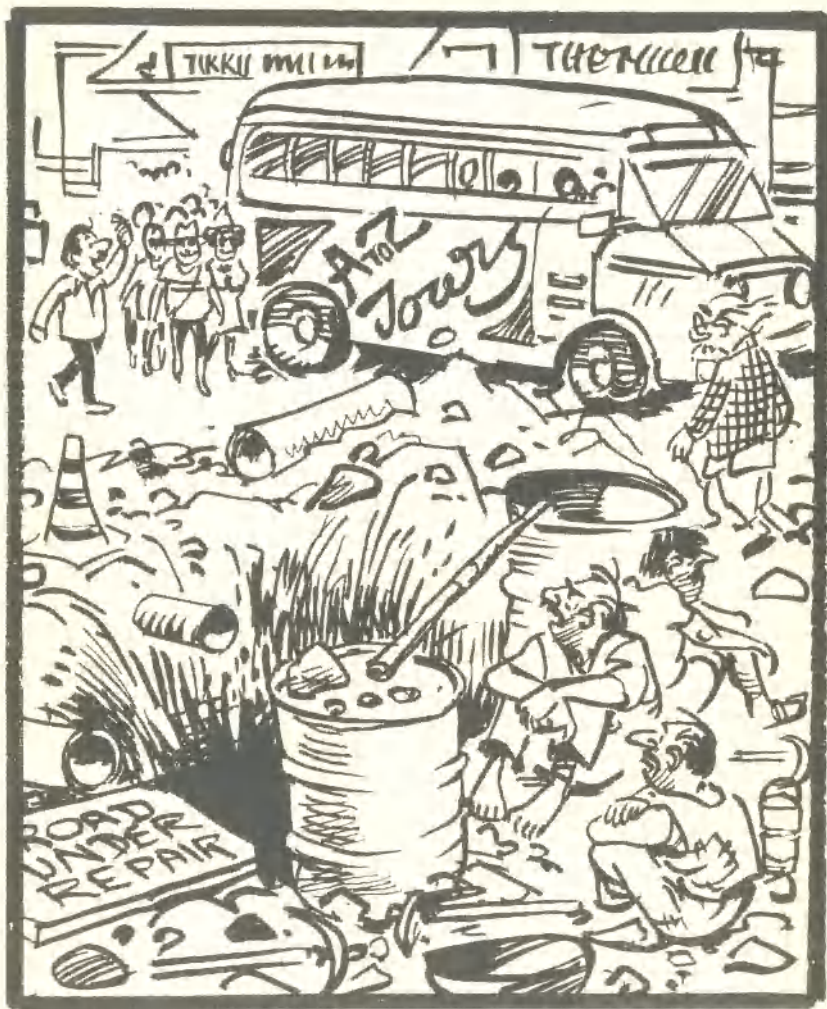
Sheer exhaustion, I suppose, denying again and again that no pressure is being put by the US to sign the NPT.



All right, have a look! Genuine degree and there was no bribing to get one in our days!



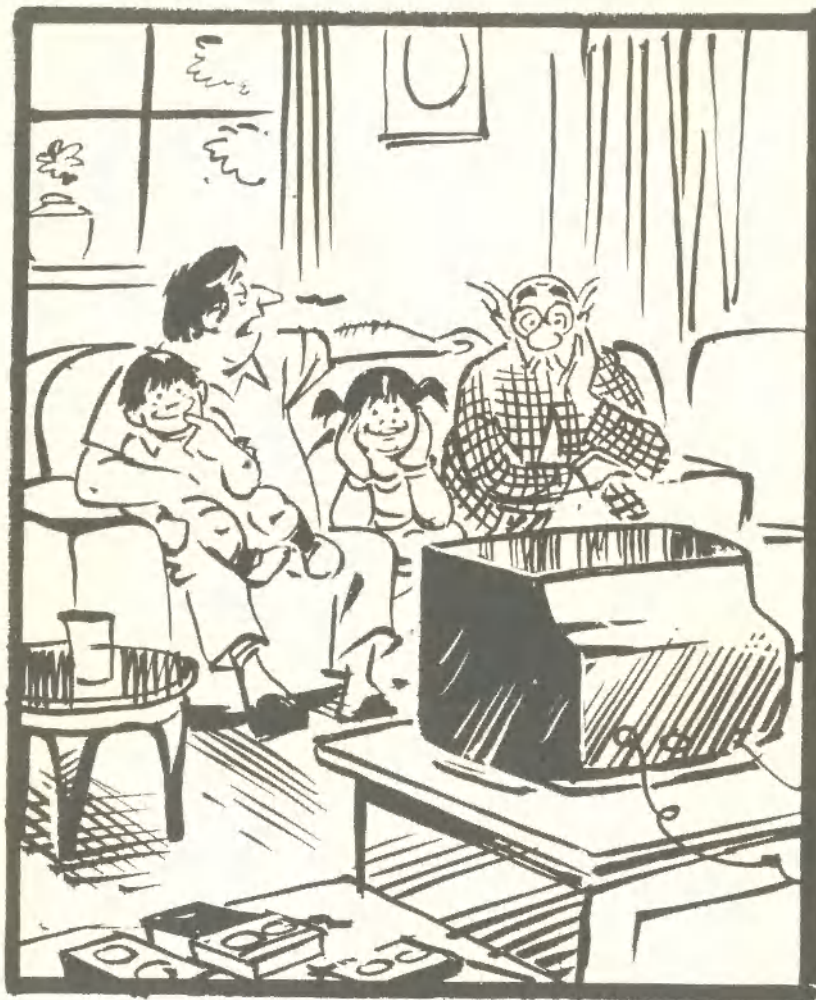
Of course, the liberalization of the economy has helped a lot. I used to spend only a few thousands on tours and now it is lakhs and lakhs!



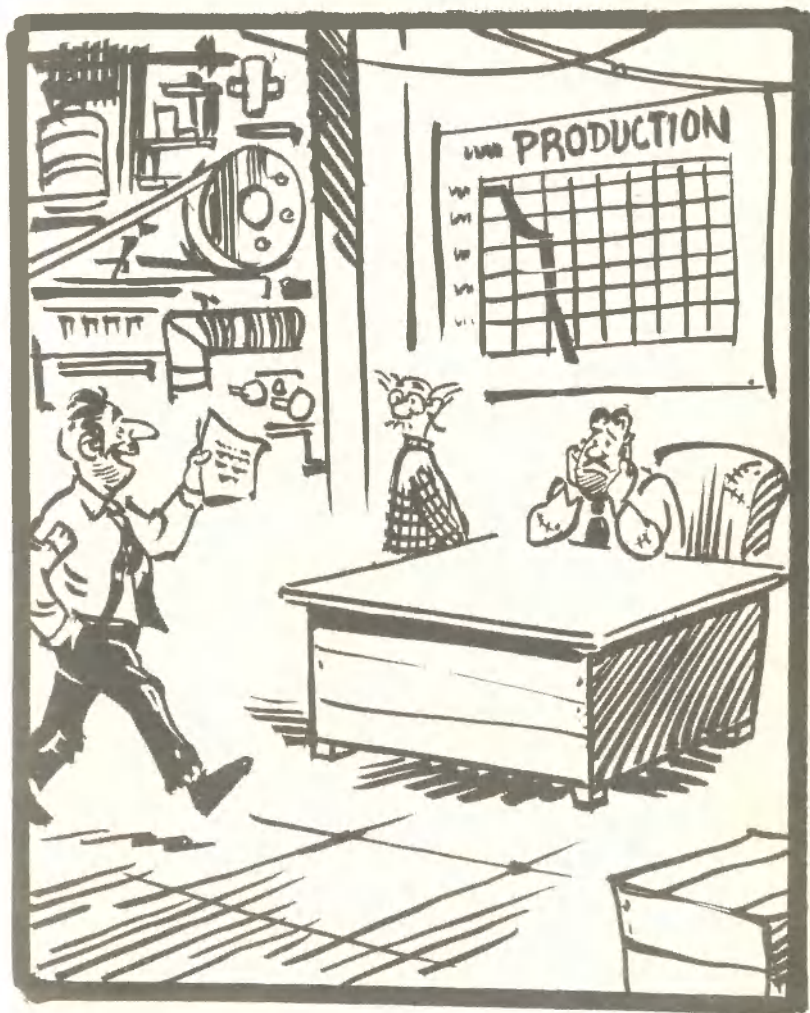
We must complain to the authorities! That guide regularly brings them to show this place as one of the most ancient spots!



It says, ' . . . this measure will be beneficial to US' Please check whether it means 'beneficial to the US' or 'to us'.



Come on, it is not vulgar, violent or obscene! It is quite decent compared to what will be shown as entertainment in the future.



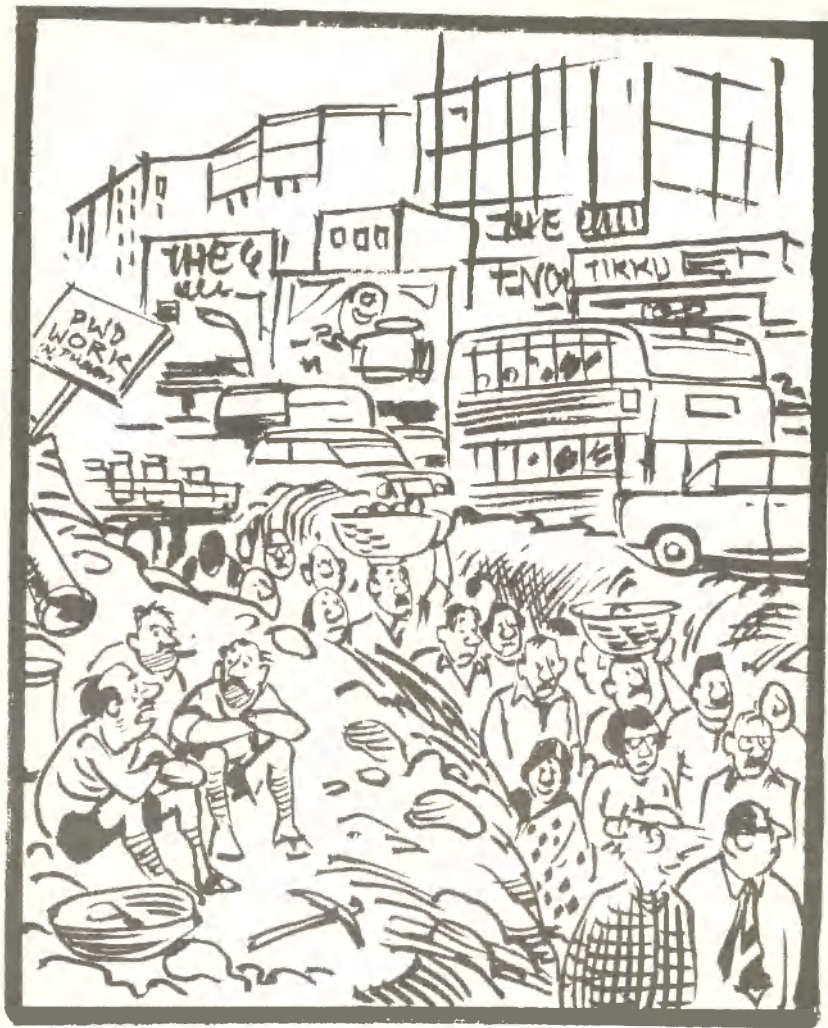
Exports liberalized further! Now I think we can export even our entire industry, machinery and all, and solve our problem.



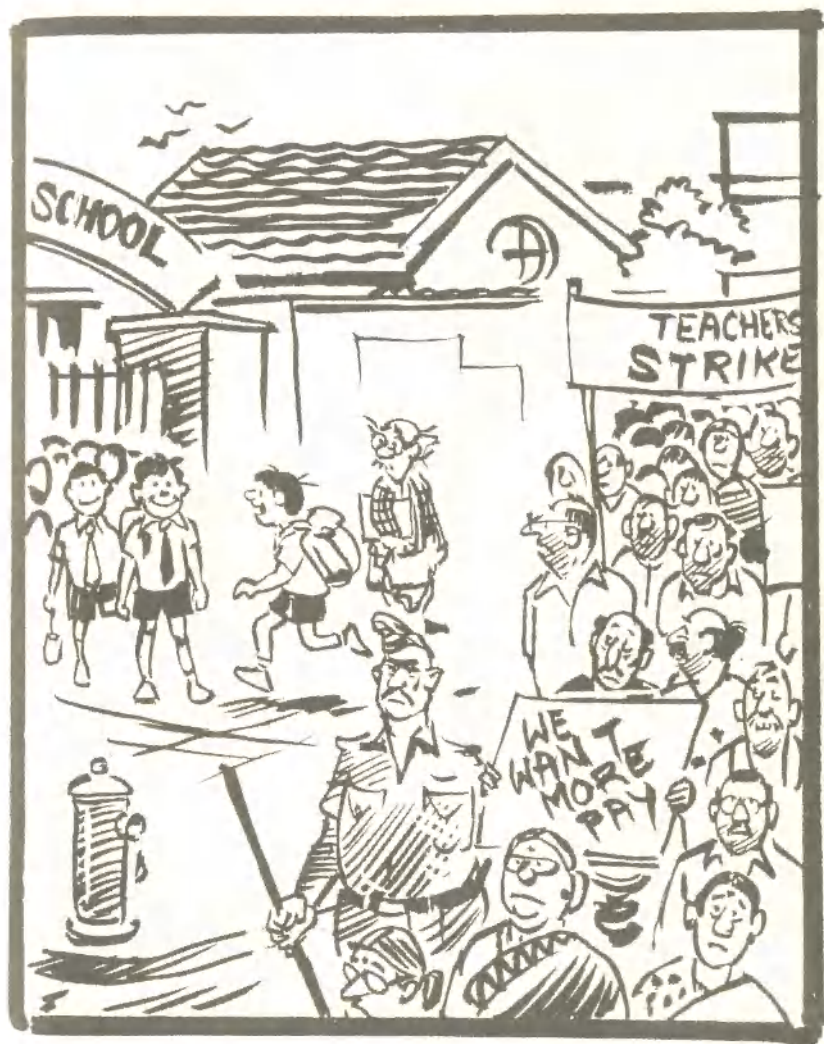
Why do you suddenly ask if I can prove that I am innocent?



If you are so confused you will not come to any good. Listen, those are last week's pre-exam papers and these are tomorrow's pre-exam papers!



I am not surprised. What do you expect if there is such a long delay in completing the work.



*Good news, boys! The talks have failed! They aren't getting a pay hike.
The strike will continue!*



Typical of Congress culture, refusing to step down from the leadership year after year!



I didn't interfere thinking I was to guard you against goondas, anti-social elements, and terrorists, not party members, sir.



Looks like it's yet another successful foreign visit! . . . I wish he was as successful in his local visits!



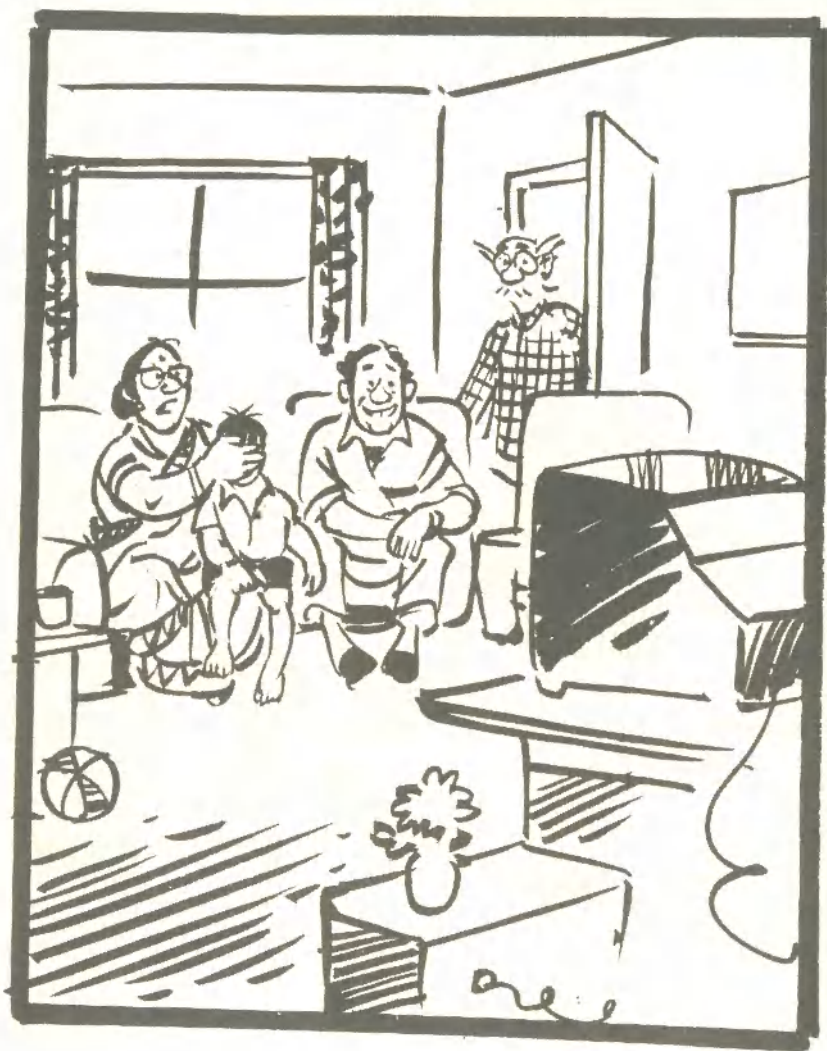
He was offered 300 million aid, but in their currency, sir, it comes to 105 dollars! They have a raging inflation in their country!



It's OK, sir. Anything is pleasant after answering those exam papers!



He is extremely liberal minded. Don't think your sudden transfer is due to caste prejudice. It's just plain prejudice.



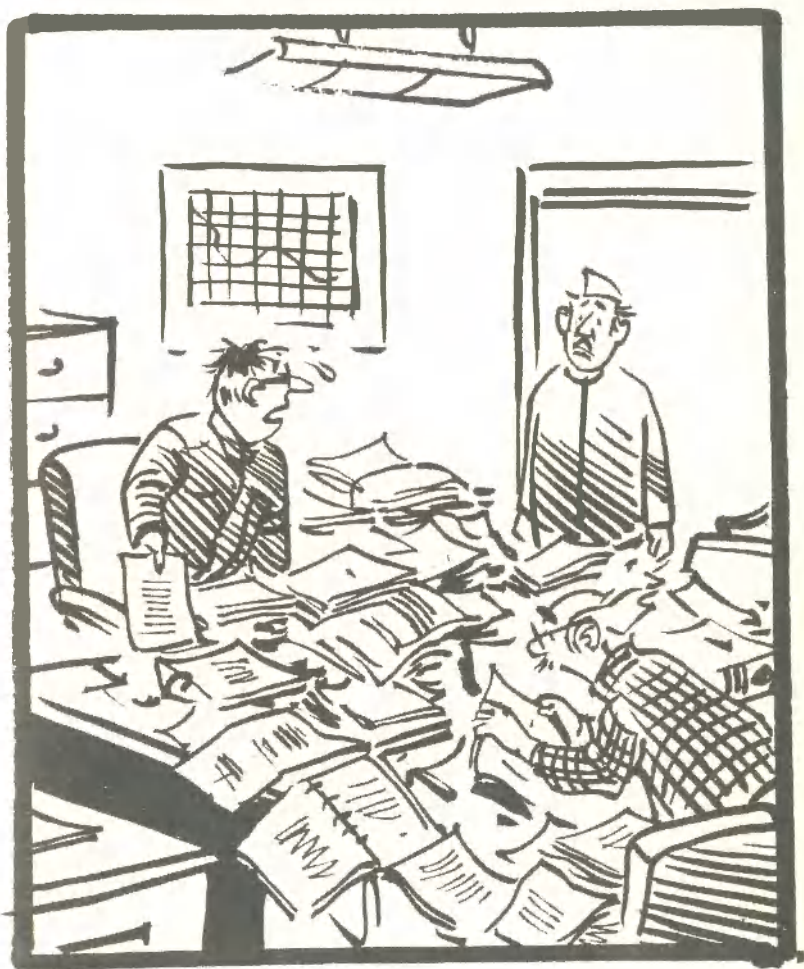
There's no censorship, I suppose.



Learn to balance it properly, silly girl! Remember, soon you will have to start working!



I think that would about complete all the countries in the world. Now, that delegation is here to seek trade ties with us!



Sorry, the papers are not yet ready, sir! After the simplification of procedures it has become complicated!



Father, remember you were suspended from service pending investigation? Well, it's concluded! You have been sacked!



Be careful, son, watch your steps! . . . He wants to be a pop singer.



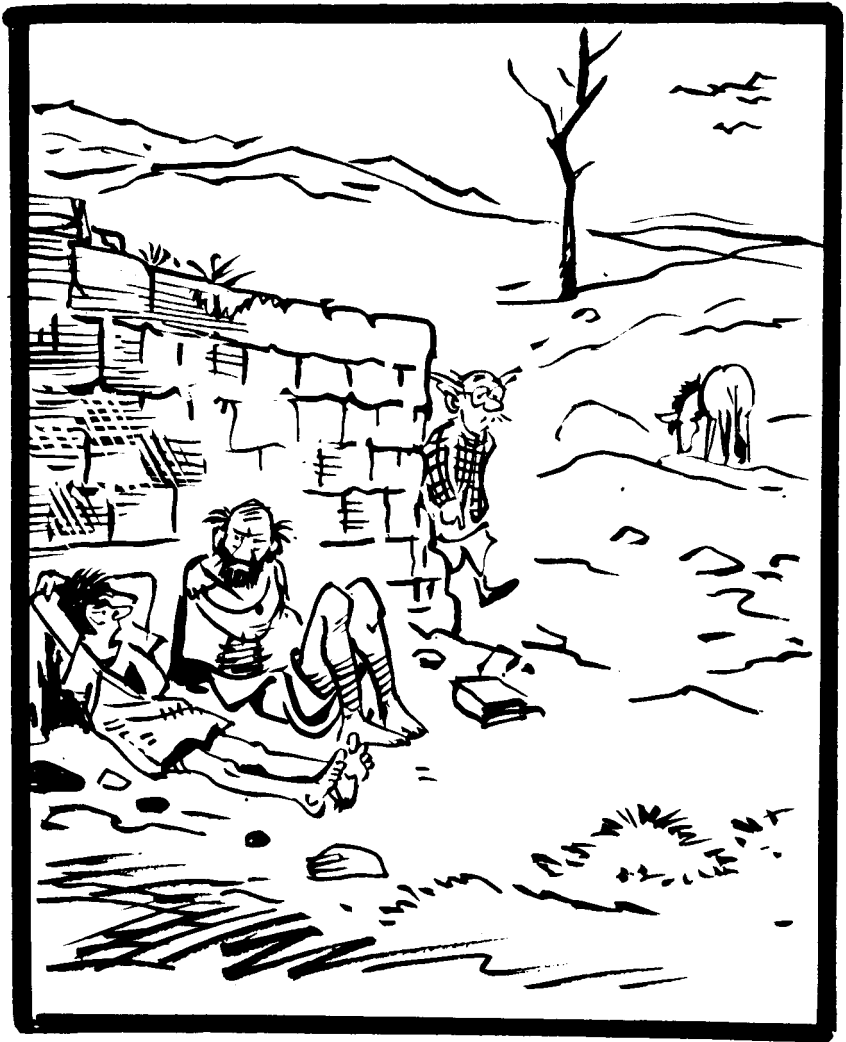
Did you hear the threat? 'Fulfil the last election's promises or you won't get a single vote in the next!' Some anti-Congress element is creating mischief.



Cheer up! I promise to appoint a committee within a month to examine and submit a report to a special panel to recommend suitable punishment to the guilty.



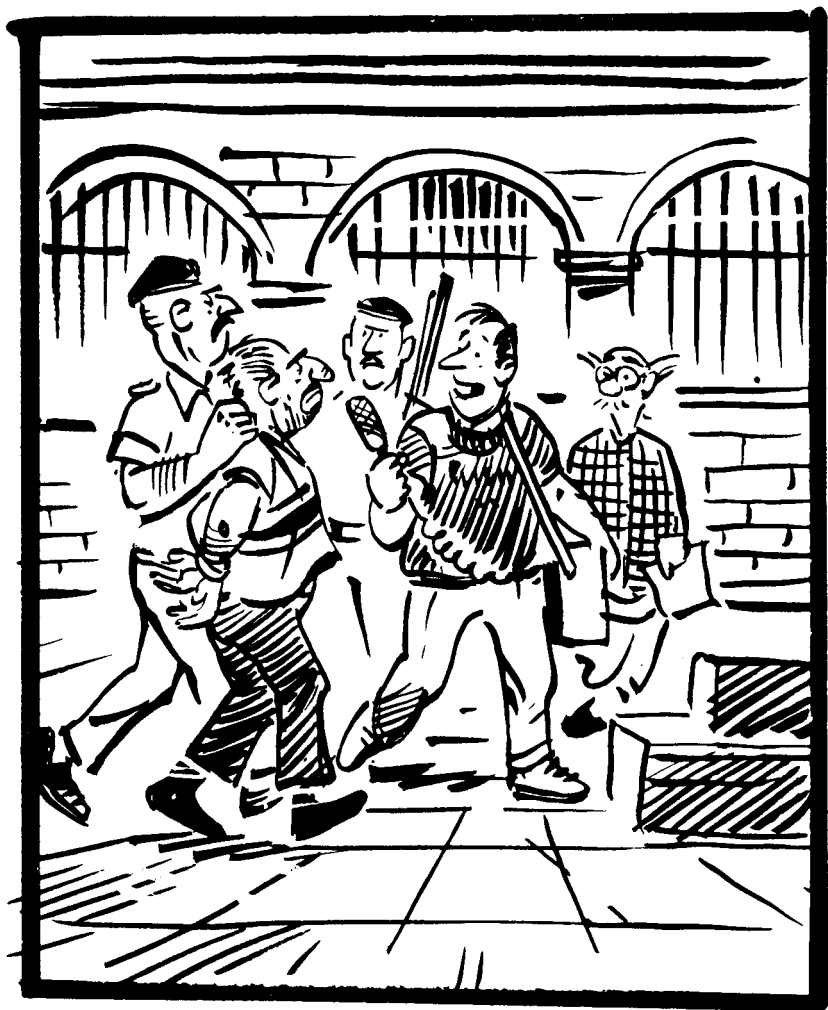
I am misrepresented! I did say the budget was great. But in my personal capacity and not as the Opposition member. I told the media so!



If the economic prospects really brighten I'll emigrate to the city and look for a place on the pavement in a posh locality!



We must think of an alternative job. If the new policy renders us redundant we shouldn't find ourselves without work.



Excuse me. Which party will you be joining when you are released?



Yes, we have nabbed a notorious criminal. A warm reception is accorded to him to please the US Human Rights Activists



It's all very well for him to declare that education should be given attention by every state on a priority basis! How does he expect to begin learning at my age?



I hope foreign competition is not allowed to enter our business too!



That's very generous of you, Your Honour, an 800 million loan. If you could add another 100 million for out-of-pocket expenses, it would really help!



Yes, there is scope to increase the prices of a dozen more essential items. But it won't be fair to the people. We will keep it for the post-budget hike!



Abroad they are delighted with the way we have combined simple Gandhian concepts with Nehruvian socialism and a dynamic market economy!



Official visits to one's constituency are banned, I know. The Election Commission would be glad to know that I've never visited mine at any time!



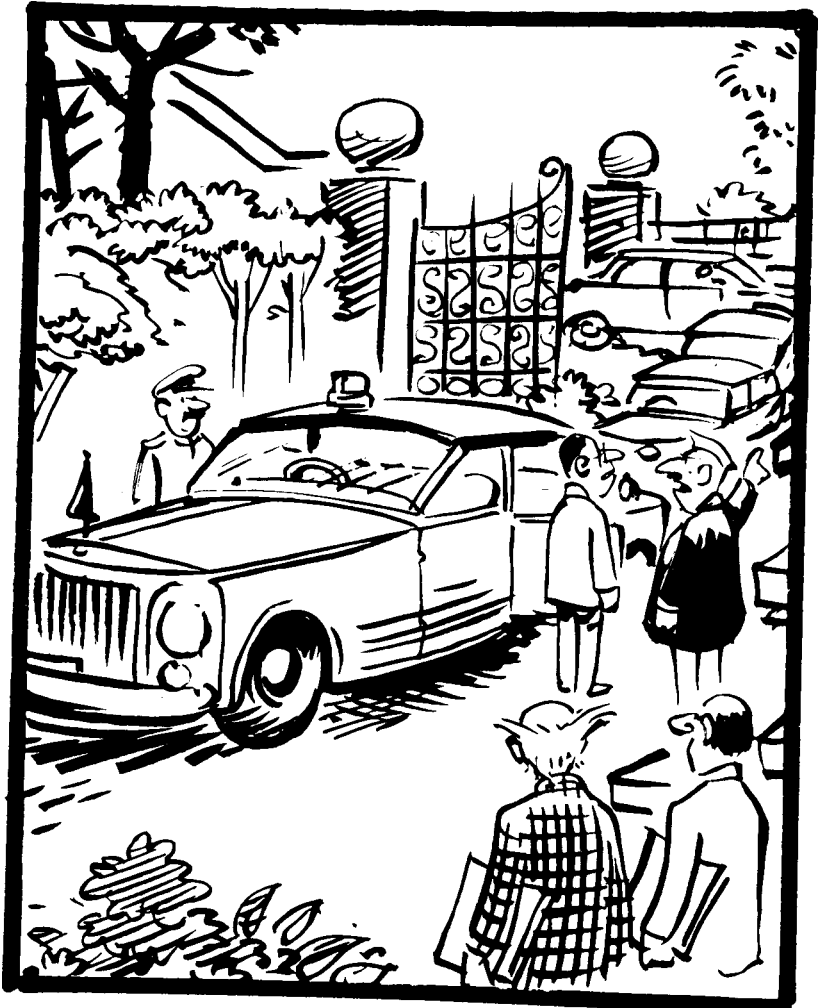
Consider yourself lucky. You don't have the purchasing power we have.



You are responsible for this. I had asked you to remove from my speech, '... assert your right courageously and act ... !' and you had not!



No, sir, they are not demanding more dearness allowance. They want what they call the new economic order allowance.



With the petrol price so high a 32-car convoy is a criminal waste! From now on I don't want more than 30!



Ah! What's that? A factory? Manufactures what? . . . Do come over to our country to start one like that!



You had better start looking smart—comb your hair, wash your face. Soon Seshan will want your photo.



It's like this, sir. We hike the price by 20% and when there are protests, demonstrations and bandhs we reduce it by 19% to lessen the burden!



I want it to be peaceful—no violence. Only six buses, ten lorries, a dozen scooters to be burnt, stones should only be thrown at



It's the observer you sent to find a solution, sir. He asks if he could take over as CM till a solution is found!



If only we knew how to read, we could have demanded it's change.



What do you mean lost your balance? You've been walking on this road for ages and are still not used to it?



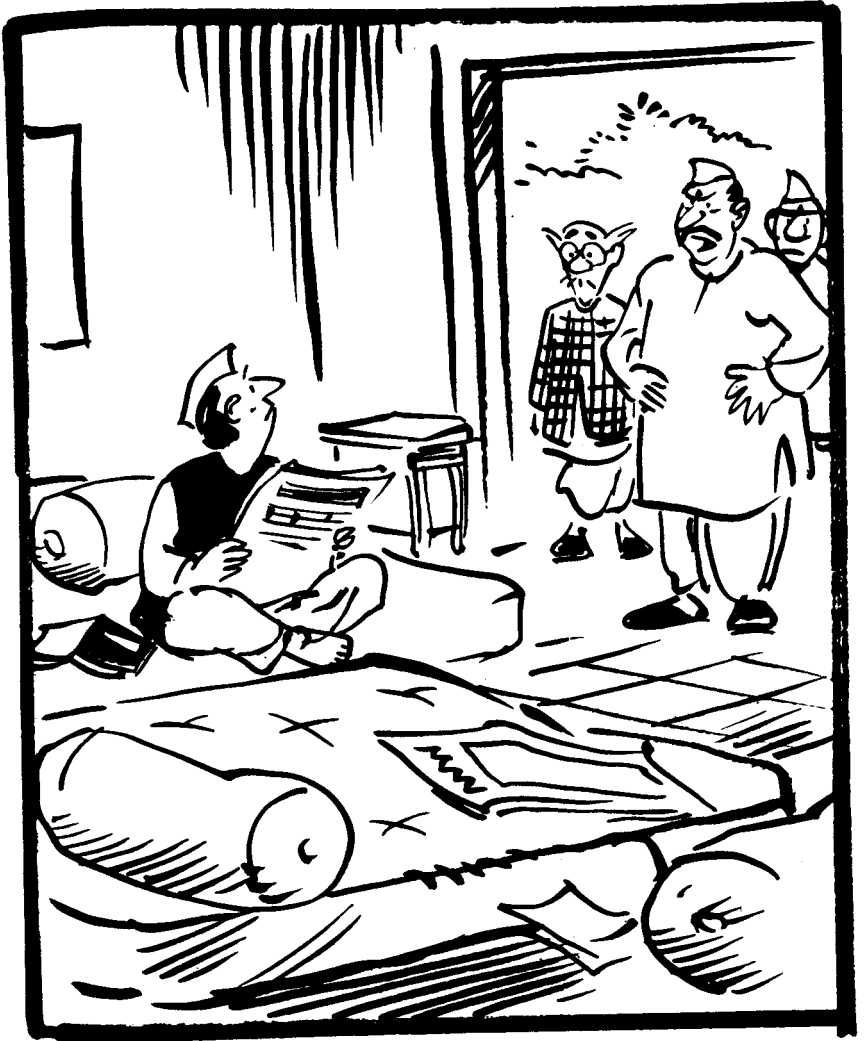
He has become irresponsible, abusive, violent! You are setting him a bad example! You must resign from politics!



During just two days of our bilateral trade talks you could visit only Taj and Jaipur! Come again for further talks and see Ajanta, Ellora, Jaisalmer.



I gathered them from the street! The way they are increasing its price we can't afford gas any more.



What? You are a rebel, you are not a loyalist! Then what are you doing in the party, may I know?



My opponents are spreading that rumour, sir, to get me transferred. I swear I never said I would book the culprit however big!



You have just resigned from the JD and wish to join the rebel faction of our party, do you? It's next door.



Yes, the meeting was fruitful. We agreed that we must meet again to discuss meeting again to hold a discussion to meet again to



I suspect he is trying to get expelled from the party! Just don't do it. Otherwise we will not have any hold over him!



No, not to fight corruption, I promise. I want to join you to fight for secularism!



Don't arrest me under TADA, sir. I am an innocent office-goer disgusted with irregularity, cancellations, indifference!



He has a good idea! Instead of wasting time cutting and chopping why not we ourselves write, direct, produce and save all the bother!



. . . as disciplined party members, you must stop raping, abducting, extortion, murdering, etc. Otherwise our poll chances may suffer.



No, no, I don't want to solve any of your problems and be accused of trying to cadge your votes.



You want water, sir? It is coming. A minister had promised it when he came here three months ago.



In the interview he gave me he said the rise in prices was due to inflation He is telling him the inflation is due to price rise! I'm curious to know what he told you.



I know he wants to retract! I wonder what politics is coming to? He admits he put the signature, but without his knowledge.



No, no! We have enough problems and I can't add to them by granting these people their request! . . . What is it they want, any way?



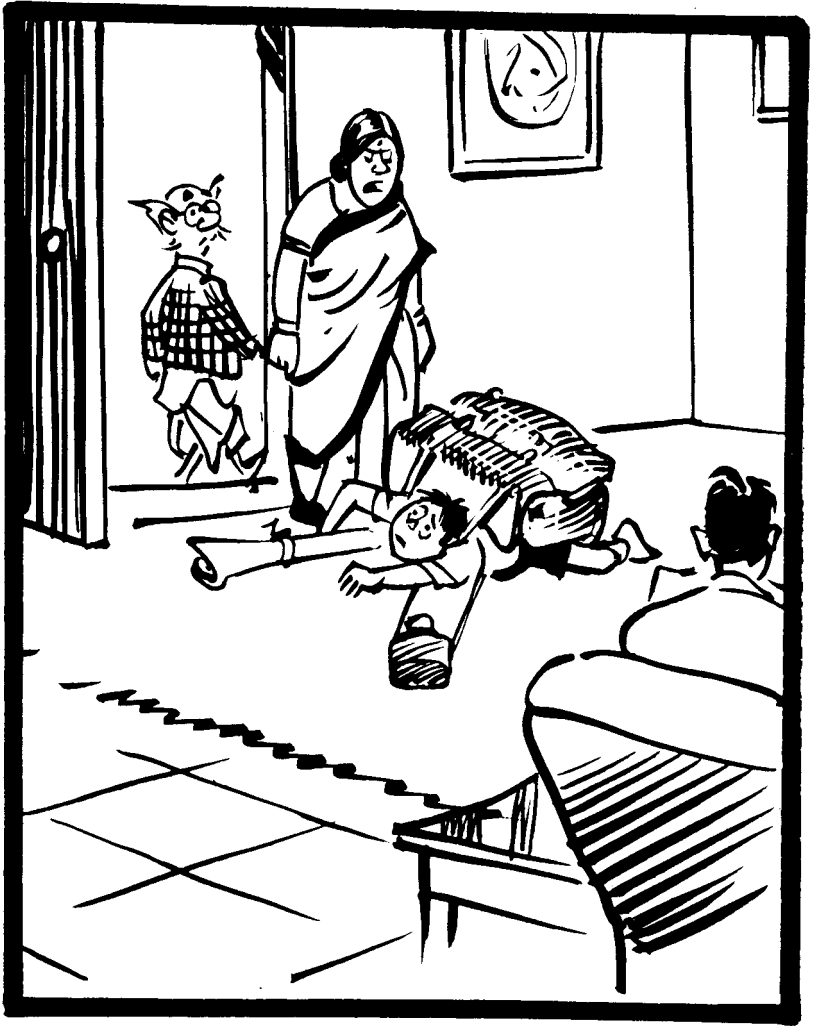
I suspect he is a well qualified chap. That ignorant backward appearance is a disguise to get appointed to some big post!



We have not done too badly considering that we are facing an enormous financial crisis, law and order problems besides having a minority government at the Centre



That new recruit should be told! Did you hear his answer? ... 'What, the weather? How are we to know what it's going to be?'



Too weak in history, geography, maths and now too weak even to carry the books!



Of course, I had informed His Excellency that the toast should be proposed with pure orange juice. Why do you ask, sir?



I wonder what these poor taxi fellows do for a living. They won't come north, they won't come east, west or south!



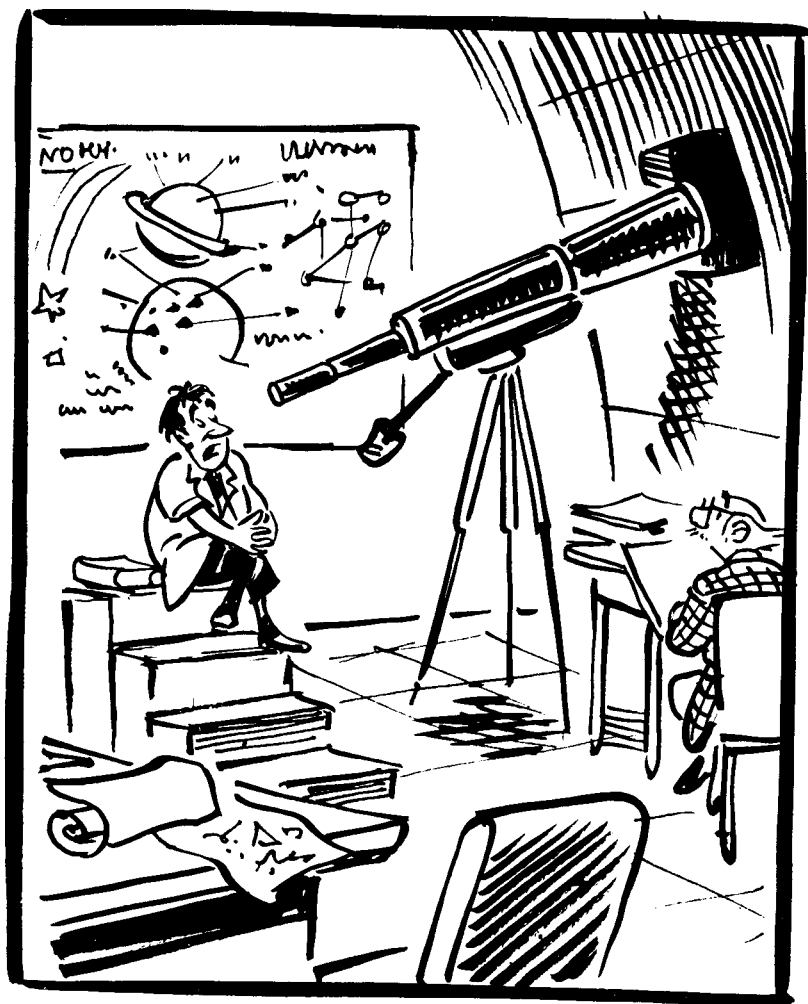
He is that pop singer. He broke his hip bone, dislocated his shoulders, sprained his ankle when practicing his new number!



This is the first time they are sharing the same platform after patching up their differences!



It's a shame! We should have recruited people with some commitment and some principles . . . !



Astronomy has no future. There won't be any more studying Mars or Jupiter. It will all be INSAT-2C, 6B, ... 10Q, ... 27R, ... 53Z ... crowding the sky!



I told you this building is too old and the terrace wouldn't be able to bear it!



... and what's more ... let me warn the Opposition. I won't step down when its bound to find something wrong in my conduct.



What do you mean, it's so many years and still they have not removed poverty? They have. We would have been worse off otherwise!



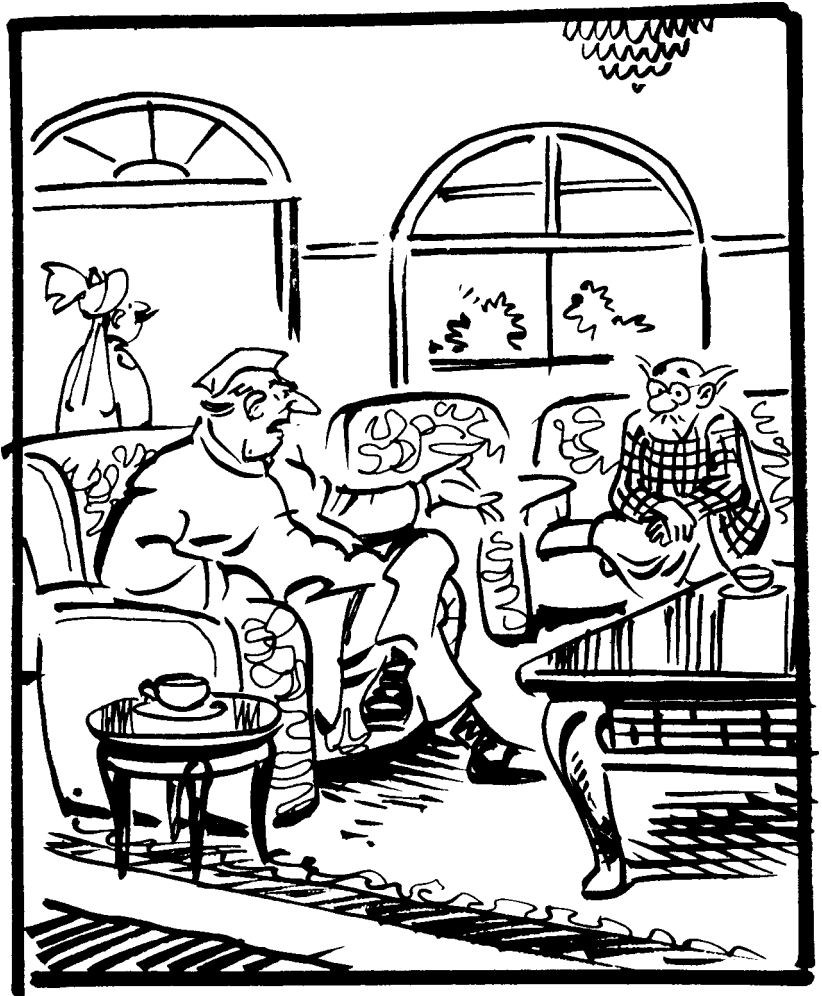
A veteran politician like you shouldn't be demoralized by those opinion surveys. Come on, get up and make that inspiring speech!



Because he was denied a ticket he is standing as an Independent. Now without having a party backing he has to do everything himself.



In political life one has to face the charges of land-grab, scam, robbery, rape, kick-back, murder, kidnap



In my 25 years as a political leader I have had no time at all to serve the nation because of our party in-fighting



Really decent of him. He is warning the rebels and dissidents without pointing at anyone in particular.



You shouldn't have tried to put sweets into his mouth when you got the ticket! He hates you! I told you.



Let them rave, rant, curse, hit! Anyway my astrologer has told me these are bad times for me and they will end on the coming Tuesday.



.... He left early morning by IA, luckily its just 11 now and he must still be in the departure lounge If you can contact him tell him



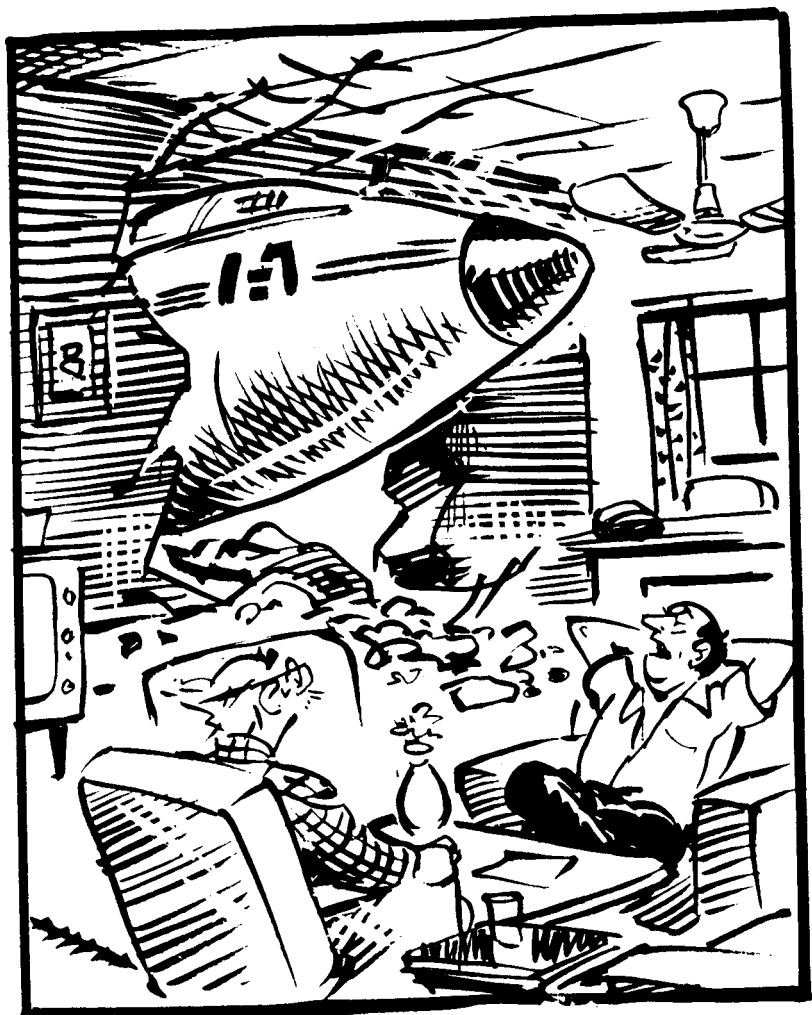
My lawyer advised me to apply. He tells me if I am selected then I don't have to worry about any of my affairs.



I have really nothing against him personally. It is his style of functioning as the chief that I dislike!



Who is he? He is the proprietor. It's been a sick mill for years!



The problem is it is overshooting more and more wide off the runway each time!



*There is no end to cheating and dishonesty! You must be more careful.
The attaché case left behind for you by that builder is full of fake notes!*



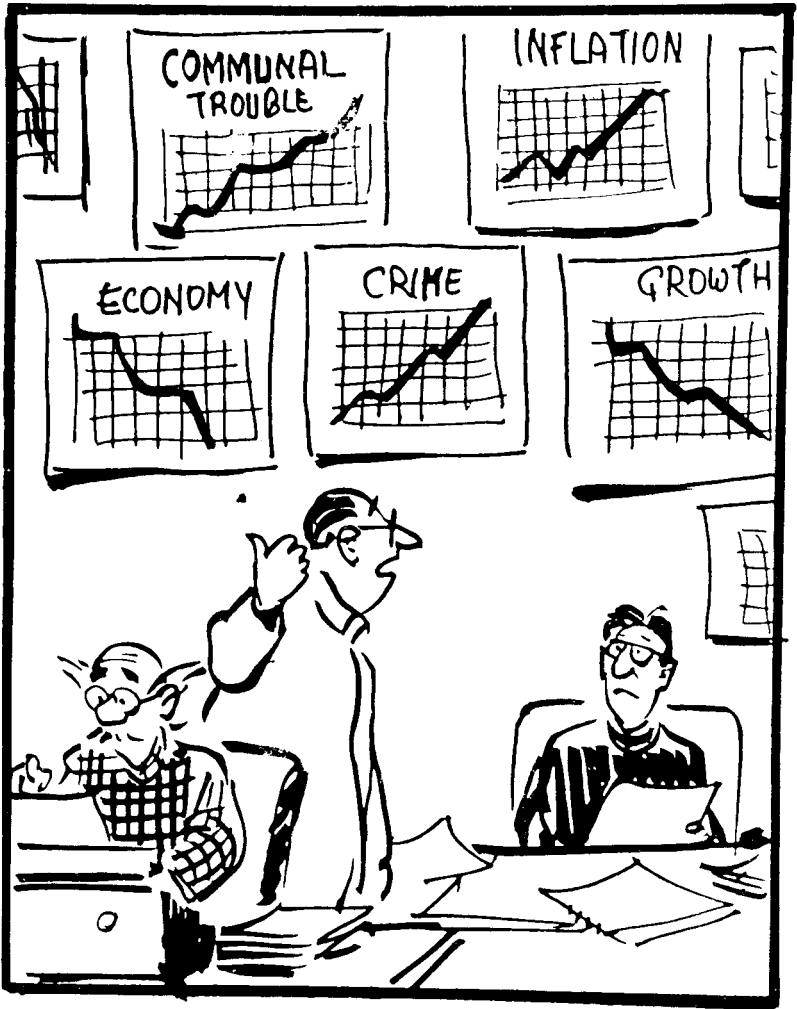
There are over a lakh in this morcha! If those against you still believe you are corrupt we will increase the number next time to over three lakhs!



We have signed a contract, all right, with one of the ex- Presidents for his memoir. But he is an ex-president of a Rotary Club. He just told me!



Grandpa, can I borrow your security for a while? I have to go out for a bit!



He wants a hope-oriented speech for 15th August, boosting people's morale, praising our achievements and progress.



Issue a denial! Utterly irresponsible reporting! '... those with criminal records must be barred from standing for elections ...!' I never said that!



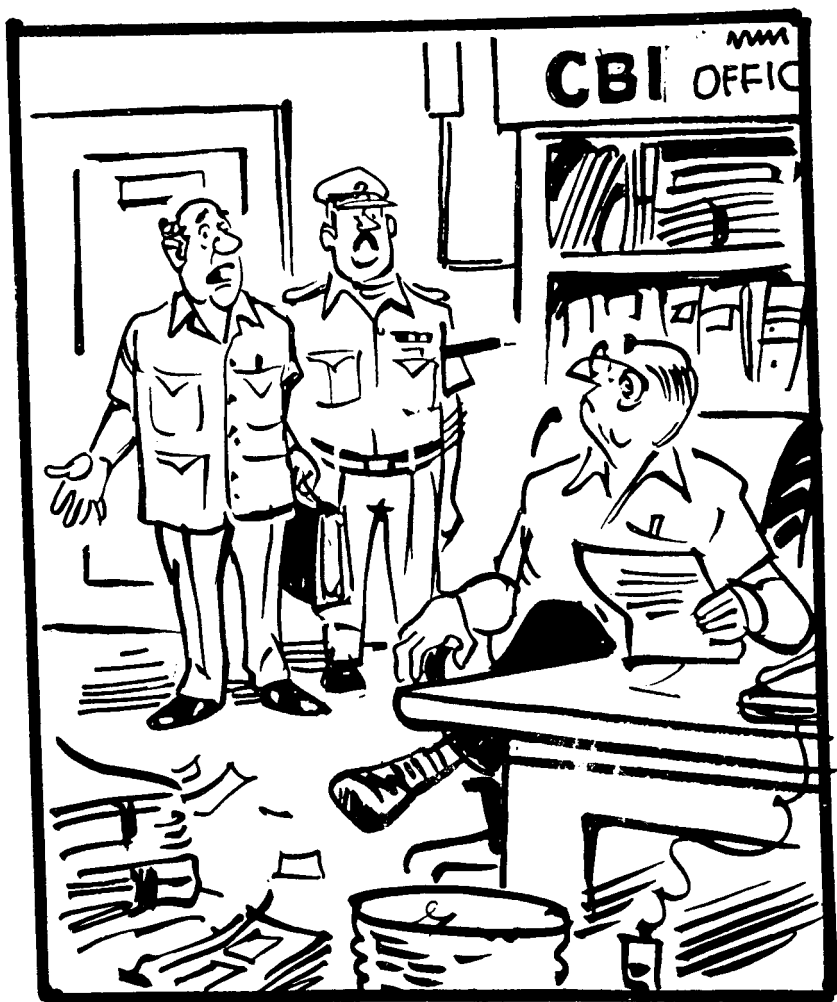
Oh, has it? Maybe because some crimes have been legalized!



... He has great loyalty to the party, deep respect for the leaders and above all he has pledged not to write his autobiography after retirement ...!



Why? In a democracy I have every right to express my opinion, that's why!



We find the official under investigation honest and he lives within the known source of his income, sir! But God knows how!



There he is! He comes regularly every year to lay the foundation stones for new projects: hydro-electric, housing, industrial complex, etc . . . !



'... immediate delivery, easy instalments, no down payment.' What's the use! If they offered roads too then it would be worth having it!



No, don't go. He will get angry! He cuddled and kissed you, yes. But it was 14th November, Nehru's birthday.



The situation is normal. All tests have proved negative—no plague, only malaria, jaundice, typhoid, cholera, dengue



Yes, everyone feels he should retire except himself!



He gave a free and bold interview. But, of course, without naming the minister or the department, or the nature of the scam . . . !



I appreciate it, of course. But I think its enough if he just sticks to the code of conduct rules.



Powerful rejoinder to the critics of the sugar muddle, I must say! I want a copy of his speech to find out what he has said!



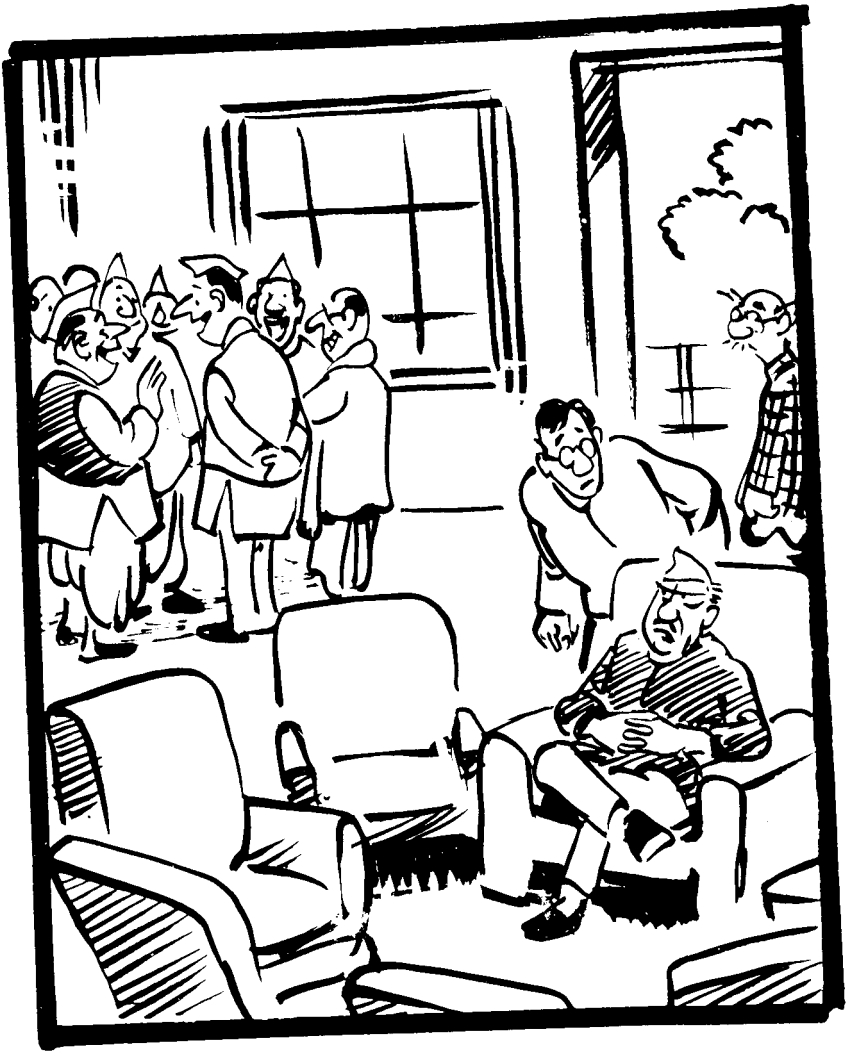
Resign from dirty politics. Allegation of corruption I can understand. But to say you are not a true Gandhian is going too far!



The Cine producers' group, sir. They want a ban on violence, sex offences, crime, bloodshed, etc. in everyday life as they have a bad influence on films!



How come I have become critical of the government now?—Because I didn't know it was so bad when I was working for it!



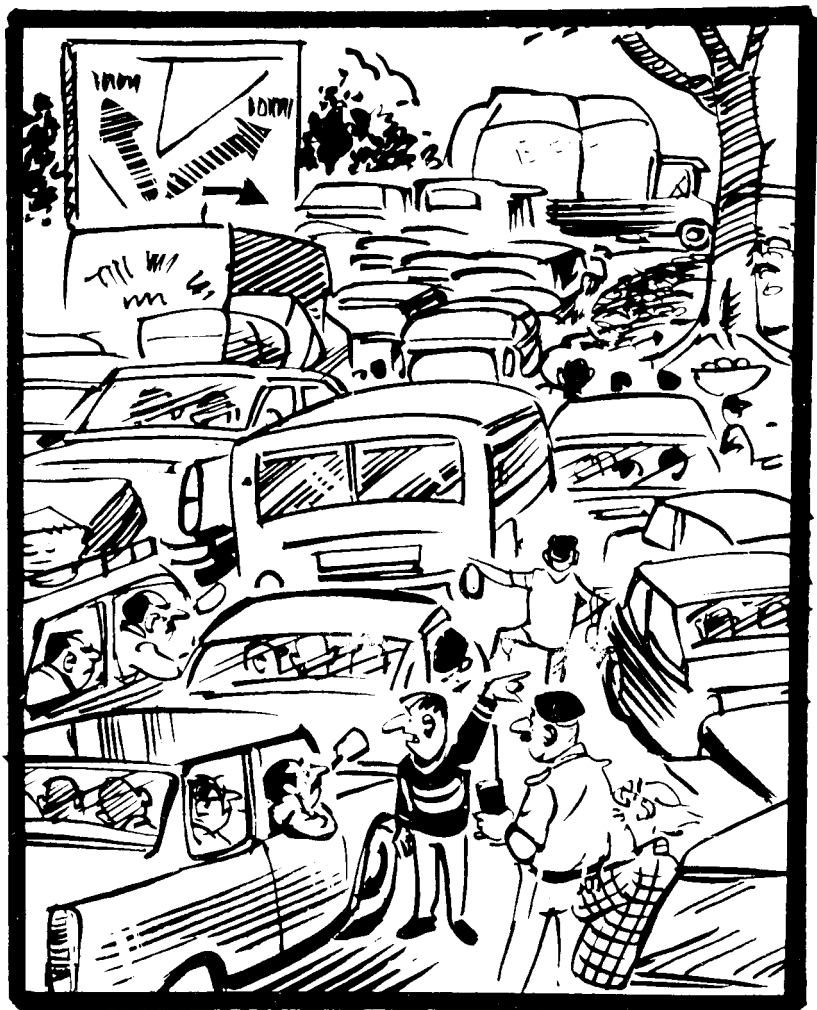
*Float the rumour that I am contemplating an imminent cabinet reshuffle.
They have again started taking me for granted!*



You are still living in the past. Of course, we have made tremendous progress—Kellogg's corn flakes, arrow shirts, Pepsi, Coca-cola, scotch



Market forces are really getting stronger. She said when asked what she had bought, 'I don't know! But I got 50% discount on all items!'



He says the traffic is stopped because they are expecting a state minister to cross the highway somewhere ahead!



Yes, I said mammoth crowd! I meant as compared to the last meeting.



Not to worry, sir! It's under strict control. We held it at 9.10% . Then again at 9.75% . Later we put the breaks at 10.70% . Now we will arrest it at 11.75%



We took an opinion poll: 20% support your opponent, 20% are for you and 60% can't say. This survey was conducted within our party!



That's good advice he gave us about simple living, self-reliance, self-sacrifice . . . He is a true Gandhian!



Last elections, if you remember, I promised water supply, drainage and clean living conditions. This time I promise . . .



Actually we have been saving a lot of it without effort for years! We hardly get any at our place!



If the economic prospects really
brighten I'll emigrate to the city
and look for a place on the
pavement in a posh locality!

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