

LETTER FROM NEW DELHI

The ten-week-old agitation against reservations in Gujarat which has so far claimed 30 lives, is the second most serious agitation of its kind in the country since the Constitution was adopted in 1950. The first was in Bihar in 1978; it took 30 lives. Tamil Nadu is preparing to launch a similar agitation soon. While the Gujarat agitation is grabbing front-page headlines in the national Press, the question everyone appears to be asking is: aren't 30 years of reservations for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes enough to uplift them? The fact that the agitation should have erupted in Gujarat, the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi—that great champion of the downtrodden, is only a tragic sidelight.

On 21 February Gujarat dominated our editorial conference. We then decided that the issues raised

by the unrest in Gujarat were important enough to merit cover treatment. What needed to be looked into was not just what has been happening in Gujarat, but something more fundamental: should reservations be scrapped?

Accordingly, Associate Editor Ajay Kumar and photographer Sondeep Shankar rushed to Gujarat to gauge the rawness of feelings there while Correspondent Chaitanya Kalbag went down to Madras to size up the movement that is slowly but surely building up against reservations in Tamil Nadu for the past six months. Staffer Vivek Sengupta researched in Delhi for material on the three-decade-old issue. A major task of his was to wade through the 500-odd pages of the report of the Commissioner for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Sengupta also interviewed politicians, government

officials and church leaders for their views on reservations.

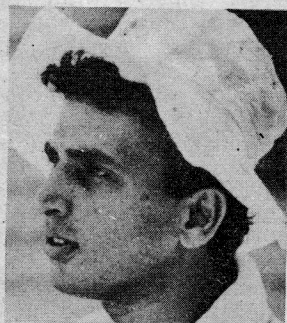
The cover story is thus a combined effort of Kumar, Kalbag, Sengupta and our correspondents in the state capitals who pitched in with case studies. Says Kumar: "Never have I seen a stranger agitation than the one in Gujarat. On the face of it, life was absolutely normal in Ahmedabad. More people were seen in front of theatres screening *Kranti* fighting for tickets than at demonstrations against reservations. Yet the undercurrent of tension was unmistakable."

Among the other major stories we present to you in this issue are: an exclusive interview with Sunil Gavaskar and a report on the Afghan refugees and rebels in the Indian capital. You will recall that it was through a NEW DELHI interview that Gavaskar made it known last Septem-

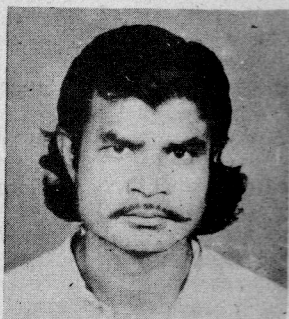
ber that he would love to lead India against Australia and New Zealand. This interview, conducted for us aboard an aircraft between Australia and New Zealand by London-based cricket writer Ashis Ray, is the first the little master gave on the tour down under and has a good deal that will interest cricket lovers.

Madhu Jain and Mehru Jaffer set off on the trail of Afghan refugees in Delhi but stumbled across Afghan rebels in the seedy hotels of Fatehpuri: they come here for rest, recreation, medical treatment and money to buy arms to fight the Russians. The queues of Afghans at the hurriedly set up Delhi office of the UN High Commission for refugees are getting longer. The Afghans are also queueing up before the American Embassy for political asylum. Meanwhile, India refuses to treat them as refugees.

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Interview With Gavaskar: A month after India's tour of Australia some issues still rankle: why did Gavaskar lose his cool at Melbourne? How bad was the umpiring? Gavaskar replies in an exclusive interview to Ashis Ray. Page 12



Sankar Neogy: In the mining town of Dalli-Rajahara, crucial for the Bhilai Steel Plant, labour leader Sankar Neogy is a folk hero. Last month he was labelled a Naxalite and arrested under the NSA. Kalyan Mukherjee reports Page 16



Cover Story: The whole of February, Gujarat was in the grip of an unprecedented caste war. The agitation brought up a crucial question as never before: should reservations be scrapped? On the spot report from Gujarat Page 22



Afghans in Delhi: It is not widely known that there are over 10,000 Afghan nationals who have fled to Delhi. Of them, many are freedom fighters healing their war wounds. Madhu Jain reports on their plight. Page 40

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