

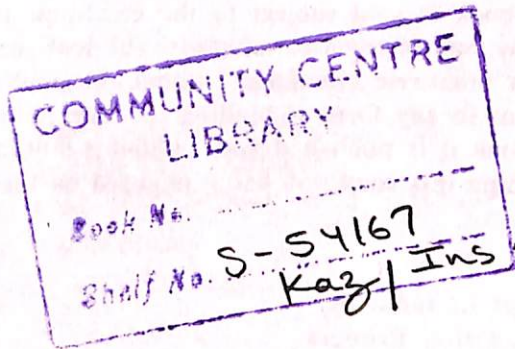
INSIDE SIKKIM

**AGAINST
THE TIDE**

Jigme N. Kazi

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(India)



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PREFACE

In his column, *Mediawatch*, published by *Sunday* magazine of Calcutta, eminent journalist and recently-elected President of the Press Club of India, S. Nihal Singh observes : "...the fighters of press freedom are not those who declaim the virtues of the freedom of the press at great gatherings, useful as such exercises are as reminders of principles. They are the small-town journalists who spurn temptations of political patronage and personal monetary gain to do their jobs honestly".

Singh then goes on to add: "The fourth estate has a growing responsibility in pinpointing the evils because it is often the only pillar of democracy to be found in these areas". He finally comments: "But newspapers need to do more to support lone journalists fighting against great odds... It is, therefore, the duty of the national press to highlight the sacrifices of little-known men and women fighting at the real frontiers of press freedom...The old battle against Indira Gandhi's Emergency was fought and won in the capital and other metropolitan centres. The new battles are now raging elsewhere. Let us salute those who are fighting them."

Singh's words describe the Press in Sikkim perfectly. The non-existence of an effective opposition and the absence of a democratic atmosphere in the former Himalayan Kingdom of Sikkim has resulted in the local Press shouldering greater responsibilities than it was meant to, often taking calculated risks to life and property.

Independent newspapers such as the *Sikkim Observer* have over the years gone through enormous hardships in maintaining their independent existence and not submitting to the diktats of those in power. Some of us have had to live under constant pressure and often have been unjustifiably penalised. For instance, the *Eastern Express* and *Sikkim Observer* printing presses, two credible and independent newspaper establishments in Sikkim, were completely ransacked following

electoral 'victories' of the Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari's Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) in the Assembly elections in 1985 and 1989. Assaults, threats, intimidations and pressure exerted on the local Press in Sikkim in the past one and half decades has completely and systematically silenced it. The printing of the *Sikkim Observer* had to be undertaken in another State (West Bengal) after 1989. Still, the paper was forced to suspend publication many times.

After May 1993, the *Sikkim Observer* ceased publication. Efforts are now on to bring the paper out even further away than West Bengal as the law and order situation and the political process steadily deteriorates. Bhandari's stranglehold on the State Legislative Assembly has been somewhat spoilt by one legislator, Pawan Kumar Chamling, deciding to break away and forming a one-man opposition under the banner of the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF).

In spite of its supporters and leaders having been arrested and tortured in police custody, the SDF has become hugely popular of late and may just succeed in its objective of putting an end to a "reign of terror". The Press naturally welcomes this bestirring of the opposition because for too long it has offered the sole resistance to the regime. Our job as journalists and newspaper-owners is to give a balanced view of events and issues. It is for the people to initiate change for which the Press can only act as catalyst.

The *Hindustan Times*, during the 'merger' period, warned that India would not be able to convince the world that Sikkim's inclusion within the Union represented the will of its people. "Elsewhere protectorates are graduating to independence and colonies are marching to freedom. In Sikkim, a protectorate is moving to freedom within India," it commented. Today, the people of Sikkim are questioning whether "moving to freedom within India" has benefitted them socially, culturally, economically and politically. Or whether they were better off being a Protectorate rather than a part of the Indian Union. Acknowledging that he did not approve of the manner in which

Sikkim was merged with India, the former Indian Prime Minister, Morarji Desai, in 1979 said while the 'merger' was a 'fait accompli', he hoped that the people of Sikkim would benefit from it.

Whether the merger has benefitted the people or not can be best gauged from the fact that the Sikkimese people continue to be deprived of their basic fundamental human rights and freedoms despite having been a part of the world's largest democracy for almost two decades. The former Chief Minister and the chief architect of the 'merger', Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa, has stated on more than one occasion that New Delhi has failed to honour its word and abide by the 'terms of the merger'. Kazi has declared that the 'merger' was conditional and the Government of India was morally and constitutionally bound to respect the terms and conditions under which Sikkim became the 22nd State of the Union and protect the 'rights and interests' of the Sikkimese people and thereby preserve the distinct identity of Sikkim within the Union.

The constant betrayal of the people's trust by political leadership in Gangtok and New Delhi and the poor economic condition of the people speak volumes of how the 'hopes and aspirations' of the Sikkimese people have been sacrificed in order to secure peace in this strategic border State and satisfy the growing greed and ambitions of power-hungry politicians and bureaucrats. What New Delhi fails to admit and realise is that the peaceful atmosphere that is prevalent in Sikkim today is nothing other than the 'peace of the grave'. For under the peaceful facade, the undercurrents are high and tension is mounting day by day.

Not many people believed that the demand for 'closer ties with India' and 'full-fledged democracy', made prior to the 'merger', would lead to Sikkim becoming a part and parcel of India. Similarly, no one this time can predict where the present anti-Bhandari wave and the pro-democracy, pro-Sikkim movement for 'freedom and democracy' will eventually lead to.

CHAPTER 1

Press Under Pressure

"News is what somebody somewhere wants to suppress – everything else is advertisement".

"The freedom of the Press illustrates the commonplace that if we are to live progressively, we must live dangerously".

The Hutchins Report on Freedom
of the Press in the U.S.A.

After the *Sikkim Observer* resumed publication from Sikkim in November 1990, I was able to bring out the weekly paper regularly every Saturday from the Prenar printing press located some way down the Gangtok hills. At times, due to various reasons, the paper hit the news-stand only on Mondays and sometimes even on Tuesdays.

As I was not able to get the matter ready for printing on Saturday (October 26, 1991), I planned to bring out the paper two days later on Monday (October 28, 1991). But there were other problems, too.

With the arrest of several prominent opposition leaders in the State, allegedly involved in the publication of a scandalous pamphlet alleging that the Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari, was suffering from AIDS, the political situation in the State in the month of October 1991 was tense. The visit of Central leaders to the State during the same period also en-

couraged the State unit of the Congress (I), Sikkim Pradesh Congress Committee-I (SPCC-I), led by its President, Ashok Kumar Subba, to get organised and face up to the challenges of the day. The visit of Central Government or Congress party functionaries – a rare occasion in the State – always unsettled Bhandari. While the Chief Minister managed to keep his party and his legislators together, there were rumblings amidst the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) which could surface given the right political direction. So much depended on the Centre's views on Sikkim and on the region. It seemed to me and a few other observers that the Centre was indeed "interested" in what was happening in Sikkim.

As a journalist and as an owner of a paper which commanded high regard in the State where people give more credence to newspaper reports than what politicians say, I was quite aware of my responsibilities. Sensing the seriousness of the situation and being familiar with Bhandari's style of functioning in a given situation, I knew I had to take great care in what I published in the paper and also what I filed for newspapers and other publications outside the State.

What concerned me most in this particular issue of the *Observer* was the front page story on the CPI(M) (Communist Party of India - Marxist). It was based on the party's reaction to the arrest of Duk Nath Nepal, the State Secretariate Member of the CPI(M) in Sikkim, who was allegedly involved with the pamphlet which was by now the main subject of discussion in political circles and *bazaar* gossip all over the State and particularly in Gangtok. The allegation that Duk Nath was involved in the publication of the pamphlet came from the ruling party. The State unit of the CPI(M) was, however, completely unaware of what was happening and who were responsible for the pamphlet.

However, when I handed over the four-page lay-out of the *Observer* to the manager of the Prenar Press, Sundar Sharma, on Monday (October 28, 1991) morning, he did not

raise any objection. Perhaps he was unable to grasp the content of the news-item at first glance. I left the lay-out material there at the press hoping that it would be printed.

As had been done in the past, I went to collect the paper from the press in the evening. I was surprised to find out that the paper had not been printed. I felt terribly disappointed and quite angry, too. No reason was given for it and the press appeared to be functioning normally. Nothing had gone wrong with the printing machine and all the workers were also present. Only Sundar was not there at the press. The workers felt quite awkward telling me that the paper had not been printed. They said that I should see D.P. Sharma, the owner of the press, who lived near the Paljor Namgyal Girls' School, located at the other end of the town.

Naturally I was disappointed – more so when they failed to inform me about their inability to get the paper printed. This issue, which was supposed to have come out on Saturday (October 26, 1991), could not hit the stands even on Monday. This was a big failure on my part although I alone could not be held responsible for the delay.

I have always insisted on bringing out the paper on Saturdays as scheduled. In fact, on several occasions in the past, we made efforts to have the paper on the stands on Saturday morning instead of in the evening. This meant that the lay-out should be ready for the press on Friday morning instead of on Saturday. If this system was followed then the paper would hit the news-stands on Saturday morning instead of in the evening. It also meant that those in the districts and readers outside the State would get the paper on Saturday afternoon or evening through bus services. At times when printing of the paper was delayed on Saturday, the paper was out in the market only on Sunday. Unfortunately, we weren't very successful in bringing out the paper on Saturday mornings. We could function effectively and efficiently only if we had our own off-set printing establishment.

It then struck me that the main reason for withholding the

paper from being printed could be the CPI(M) piece placed on the front page demanding medical examination of Bhandari's health. On our way back from the press, Jigga, my brother-in-law, suggested that we should see Sharma and talk things over with him. My own immediate reaction was to go down to Siliguri and get the paper printed there as had been done in the past. However, I accepted Jigga's suggestion and decided to see Sharma.

I met Sharma at his residence at 5.30 p.m. I asked Jigga not to accompany me as I wanted to meet the printer personally. When I got to his place, Sharma was in his sitting room with A.K. Upadhyaya, a local Nepalese lawyer who was close to the State Government. I was at once quite suspicious of him. Upadhyaya was not only close to some ruling party members but he always seemed to me to be a suspicious character. I was also under the impression that he might be up to something. It was also possible that he had a hand in stopping the paper from being printed. However, I could have been wrong, too. I came to know later on that Upadhyaya, who had come to Sikkim from Assam in 1983, was also known to Anjan Upadhyaya, the man in-charge of the CPI(M) in Sikkim.

"I'd like to talk to you personally", I told Sharma who at once took me to another room where we chatted for about five minutes. He was very frank and polite and without any hesitation came to the point straightaway and advised me to drop the CPI(M) story. "If you can do that I'll print the paper", he said.

I had known Sharma, originally from Darjeeling, for quite sometime and we got along well. He was not only my printer but was like an older brother to me. He was also closely related to some of my school friends in Darjeeling. I was quite agreeable to his suggestion but told him that I would have to think it over. By then, I had already decided to kill the CPI(M) story and replace it with the SSP women's wing story which was also connected to the matter reported in the pamphlet.

I handed over the revised lay-out to the press on Tuesday

morning and the paper was out by evening. It sold like hot cakes! The CPI(M) story was scrapped and was replaced by another news-item captioned: "SSP women's wing seeks justice". It carried the women wing's reaction to the pamphlet. They had not only condemned the pamphlet but also put up quite a good show in registering their protest over the content of the pamphlet which also placed the Sikkim Lok Sabha MP and wife of the Chief Minister, Dil Kumari Bhandari, in a poor light.

What made me accept Sharma's suggestion? First of all, I felt that since the situation in Gangtok was quite tense it was OK if the CPI(M) story was dropped. The contents of the Press statement issued by Anjan were quite controversial and might have created unnecessary problems for Sharma and myself. Anjan had in a letter to the then President, R. Venkataraman, and Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, asked for a high-level medical enquiry into the Chief Minister's health to check whether he had AIDS or not. Bhandari certainly would have gone wild if this piece had been published.

To compensate for our losses in the *Observer* we sent similar stories to the *Statesman* and *The Times of India*. My wife, Tshering, and I are correspondents for these two papers in the State and we felt it was our duty to report on the CPI(M)'s reaction, irrespective of what may happen to us if Bhandari chose to react. Unfortunately, I did not see the story in these two papers. They may have come out in other editions but not in the ones that came to Sikkim. Later, we filed another report on the same issue from a slightly different angle and both the national dailies carried the report. The *Statesman* report which was placed on the front page almost got me into serious trouble.

Another reason for killing the CPI(M) story in the *Observer* was the realisation that if I, or for that matter anyone, wanted to bring out newspapers to inform people about politically controversial subjects, it could not be done without taking extra precautions. At times, we have to either com-

pletely do away with sensitive stories or carry them without making them look too controversial while getting the message through.

At any rate, I had to adopt such a policy for this particular issue, not only for the survival of the paper but also for the safety of the printer, my wife and myself. While I was the editor of the paper, my wife was its printer and publisher. Our names and the name of our printing press, Hill Media Publications, appeared on the printline instead of Sharma's press. He didn't want to take any risk by having his establishment's name on the printline as our printer. This arrangement was legally not permissible but with the situation being what it was in Sikkim this was the only practical solution. Otherwise we would have no printers and the paper would not come out at all. As far as I was concerned I had to bring out the paper anyhow – come what may.

It may be noted here that the lead story in this issue (Monday, October 28, 1991) was on the arrest of four opposition leaders – Hem Lall Bhandari, Convenor, Citizens For Democracy (CFD), James Basnet, Joint Secretary, SPCC(I), Tashi Wangdi Fonpo, General Secretary, Denzong People's Chogpa (DPC) and Duk Nath Nepal (CPI-M) – in connection with the pamphlet. The report was a simple one with photos of all the four arrested under the caption – "Arrested". It was quite effective, particularly when we were the first ones to break the story in this way.

The publication of the next issue of the *Observer* was naturally delayed due to late publication of the previous issue. I again decided to bring out the paper on Monday (Nov 4) instead of on Saturday (Nov 2). The delay was also due to the two-day SAARC seminar on Development of Housing Plan in Hilly Areas which was inaugurated by the Union Minister for Urban Development, Mrs. Sheila Kaul, in Gangtok on November 2.

On several occasions, the press had to delay publication of the paper to accommodate important events and develop-

ments which took place during the weekend. This was done in the interest of our readers who expected the *Observer* to carry all important events of the week in the paper. However, only on rare occasions were we forced to resort to this arrangement and most of the time the paper came out every Saturday.

I was quite positive that nothing would go wrong with the November 4 issue. As usual, the four-page lay-out was handed over to the press on Monday morning. When I went to collect the printed matter at around 4.30 p.m. in the evening I was told that the paper had not been printed. The workers at the press told me that the negatives of pages 2, 3 and 4 were made but nothing had been done about the first page. According to them, at about 2 p.m. Sundar had taken the page one lay-out to Sharma for his approval and had not returned.

I was furious this time – really mad. There was now no question of going to Sharma for consultation. It was his duty as the printer to let me know in time what had been decided on the paper. Submitting to censorship in this manner once again meant that the authorities, or ruling party functionaries, would resort to the same tactics in future. This was unacceptable.

When I went down to the press at 9 a.m. the next day Sundar was standing on the lawn talking to someone. He told me that the paper could not be printed due to the CPI(M) story on page 3. I didn't quite believe him. By now I was quite angry and told him that it was highly irresponsible on their part to keep me in the dark all the while and not inform me about their decision not to print the paper. I told him that by keeping the lay-out matter with them for 24 hours and not getting it printed nor informing me about it they were aiding those who were trying to sabotage the publication of the *Observer*. Delay in publication was bad enough; withholding the paper from being printed at this late stage was totally unacceptable.

"Mr. Sharma tried to contact you through phone but failed to get through to you", said Sundar apologetically. He told me that he himself wanted to come up to my place, situated about a kilometre above the press, on Tuesday to in-

form me but I had arrived just then. Whatever the reasons may have been they had failed to contact me on time. It was sheer irresponsibility and negligence on their part to take up such important matters so lightly. The publication of the paper had already been re-scheduled and further delay would be very damaging for the paper in all respects. My own credibility was at stake, particularly when people expected so much from the *Observer* on the present developments.

While Sharma insisted that the reason for not printing the paper was the CPI(M) story, I personally felt that the real objection was a news-item on page one and not the CPI(M) story which appeared on page three. The fact that negatives of the other three pages were made and that the positive of the front page was taken to Sharma for his approval justified my doubts.

I had highlighted the statement given by the Industries and Information and Public Relations Minister, Pawan Kumar Chamling, on the front page. Chamling, one of the most controversial and popular men in the Bhandari Cabinet, had denied reports that he was involved in a "conspiracy" to overthrow Bhandari. This news-item captioned: "No move to oust Bhandari, says Chamling" was prominently placed in the middle of the front page along with Chamling's photograph.

The report was based on Chamling's statement given to the Press at a Press conference held in Hotel Mayur in Gangtok on October 31, 1991 where he stated that the news-item carried in the *North Bengal Citizen*, a sister-publication of the Siliguri-based Hindi daily, *Janpath Samachar*, alleging that he was making moves to topple Bhandari, was "false and baseless".

Chamling alleged that the editor of the paper, Rajendra Baid, was trying to create "misunderstanding" between him and the Chief Minister, whom he considered the "undisputed leader" of the people. While Chamling's statement regarding his activities was quite clear, I doubted his motives. The public statement on a sensitive issue given at a time when many Central leaders were visiting the State would certainly raise

eyebrows. It was to me a shrewd move to become the centre of attraction. And Chamling needed this more than anything else at that time. There had been during that period strong rumours that Chamling had at least 12 of the 32 MLAs with him and it would be possible even to topple the government and form a Congress (I)-backed government headed by Chamling if the Centre gave the green signal.

At the Press conference, Chamling also threatened to take legal action against Baid if he failed to tender an apology within 48 hours from the time of receipt of the notice which would be sent to him. This was all reported on the front page of the *Observer* which would automatically draw the readers' attention more than any other report on the same page which had the SAARC seminar as its lead story. During the Press conference, Chamling called for R.B. Subba, a practising Sikkimese lawyer who was also in-charge of the SSP's legal cell, and asked him to immediately issue a notice to Baid.

The CPI(M) item on page three, which was politically of lesser significance than Chamling's story, was based on the Press statement given by Anjan, who alleged that Duk Nath was arrested on "false charges" and "severely beaten up" by the Sikkim police at Gangtok's Sadar Thana where he was being detained along with the others arrested. The CPI(M) had also appealed to all "democratic people and parties, and human rights organisations" in the country and to the Union Government to raise their voice against what they perceived as a "barbaric and fascist rule" in Sikkim.

This item appeared on the top right hand side of the paper on page three under the headline: "CPI(M) appeals to democratic, human rights organisations" and had Anjan's photograph along with it. While the stand adopted by the CPI(M), as reflected in Anjan's statement, was quite strong, it was devoid of any personal attack on the Chief Minister. I felt that it was quite safe to publish the story though I had some reservations. It was important for the people of Sikkim to know the stand taken by the CPI(M) on the present crisis.

This time I was determined not to submit to censorship. I left the press in a huff and decided to go straight to Siliguri and get the paper printed there. Siliguri, across the State border in the plains of West Bengal, offered an ideal base for independent publishing. But even Siliguri was not safe enough as I was to discover. I withdrew some money from the bank and left for Siliguri at 11 a.m. Gachung Bhutia, the young boy from Bixthang in west Sikkim who was working for my uncle and staying just above our house in Deorali, accompanied me. As usual, I was at the wheel. Fortunately, my jeep was in good condition and we reached Siliguri at around 3 p.m.

I went straight to the residence of M. Choudhary, editor of *Bharat Darpan*, a Hindi daily in Siliguri, which is located beside the national highway at 2nd mile near Siliguri. For four months in 1990 after the curious elections, which returned Bhandari's SSP to power with all the Assembly seats captured, I brought the paper out at Choudhary's press at 2nd mile. Apart from heavy political interference, my own press had been pillaged by unknown persons one night. After that, no local printer was willing to undertake printing of the *Observer* for fear of harassment by the authorities in Sikkim.

The Choudharys were not only very helpful and cooperative in matters regarding printing of the paper but were also very good to us and made us feel at home whenever we were at their place. "You can stay here at our place instead of going to the hotel", Choudhary used to tell me often. I was very grateful to them for allowing me to print my paper at their press and didn't want to bother them too much. Their helpful nature made things a lot easier for us who were going through a tough time in all respects.

Luckily for me, all of them were there when I reached Siliguri, including Choudhary himself and his eldest son, Sandeep, who practically looked after their printing establishment which was well set up in their own residence although the editorial section and the office were located in the main town. After briefing them on the purpose of my visit I got to the point

and asked them whether they would print the paper. They had a quick look at the positives which I had carried with me and although they said they didn't find anything objectionable, they were quite hesitant and didn't make any commitment at that point. "The CPM article is a bit anti-Bhandari", said Sandeep browsing through the lay-out. I was, to be honest with myself, quite surprised at their reaction but had no option but to hope for the best.

They were willing to print Chamling's piece as it was against their rival – Baid. "Although we are not pro-Bhandari, we are anti-Baid", said Choudhary bluntly. This was quite understandable as the two daily Hindi papers from Siliguri, located at the same place at Seth Srilal Market, belonged to these two families who didn't seem to get along well with each other.

Choudhary finally asked me to see him in the evening at 7 p.m. at his office in the town. While I was quite positive about their final decision I was also quite apprehensive and was not certain how they would finally react.

After this I went straight to see my friend, Chulthim Denzongpa, who was then the Deputy Commissioner of the Income-Tax Department in Siliguri. I met him at his residence in Pradhan Nagar. I often visited his place whenever I went down to Siliguri. Chulthim has been a good friend of mine and has always shown a keen interest in my work. We also shared similar views on important political and social issues of Sikkim. Both of us wanted to see a lot of things happen in Sikkim but somehow the politicians were not up to the mark. Chulthim was quite positive that Choudhary would print the paper and we decided to meet at the *Bharat Darpan* office at 7 p.m. in the evening. His presence would have helped.

The next person I wanted to contact was Anup Deb, a senior advocate and former Advocate General of Sikkim, who lived in Collegepara in Siliguri, which is slightly away from the main *bazaar*. He is not only one of my few well-wishers but he also turned out to be a very helpful and reliable person. We

worked together on many occasions, including the State's Assembly seat reservation case in the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, he was out of station.

My next stop was at Anjan's residence near Deb's place. This was my first visit to his place and it took quite a while before I could locate his residence. After waiting for about half an hour at his place Anjan arrived and I at once briefed him about the problems that I was facing and the political situation in Sikkim.

I came to know Anjan in Gangtok during the Lok Sabha elections in Sikkim held in May-June 1991. Although originally from Assam, he was then in charge of the party's State Committee in Sikkim and normally resided in Siliguri. Unlike other members of the party, I found Anjan to be fairly reasonable, sober and balanced in his outlook. His views on Sikkim politics and his party's role in the State made some sense although the party still had a long way to go in Sikkim before the people could feel its presence. The CPI(M), including Anjan himself, got a lot of coverage in the *Observer*, *Statesman* and other local and national papers during the Lok Sabha elections in mid-1991.

As usual, Anjan seemed very interested and listened attentively to what I had to say. However, leaving aside his personal feeling, I was quite doubtful of the CPI(M)'s attitude towards what was going on in Sikkim. Its leader, Duk Nath, who was the party's candidate for the lone Lok Sabha seat in Sikkim, had been arrested and locked up at the Sadar Thana but surprisingly there was no reaction from the party at the national level. This was indeed very damaging and discouraging for the party's morale in Sikkim. During the Lok Sabha polls, Duk Nath had become quite popular and a section of the opposition even projected him as an opposition candidate against the ruling party's D.K. Bhandari, who eventually got elected with an overwhelming majority.

There were also strong rumours that Duk Nath and Hem Lall, who was also arrested in connection with the publication

of the pamphlet, were severely beaten up and tortured by the police. So far, the CPI(M)'s only reaction was to issue a mild Press statement from Siliguri through Anjan, who himself failed to come to Gangtok, where his presence was very much needed.

There were so many things that the party might have done but didn't. Could it be that the party leaders at the national level were with Bhandari? Irrespective of whichever party they may belong, most people in Sikkim never trusted Central leaders. I, too, shared the same view and had my own reservations on many Delhi-based national leaders.

The CPI(M)'s inaction was explained by Anjan himself who told me that his party could not react as it was not quite sure of Duk Nath's non-involvement in the publication of the pamphlet. Anjan also told me that he had made contacts with Duk Nath at the *thana* through someone and found out that he had not been beaten up as reported. However, my sources said he was beaten up badly. Later on, I came to know that I was correct. How could a national party like the CPI(M) make such blunders – I wondered.

Anjan also informed me that he strongly suspected Hem Lall to be involved with the publication of the pamphlet which he said was very damaging for both the CM and his wife. This also puzzled me as I was under the impression that Hem Lall was not at all involved. I felt that he was being framed by the police, who had wanted to get at him on many occasions earlier but failed. Anjan also said his party was making arrangements with their lawyer for Duk Nath's release the next day. The CPI(M) could formally react only after getting the real picture from Duk Nath himself. Anjan felt that even if the content of the pamphlet was correct, the foul language and the manner in which the allegations were made would not be acceptable to the party.

Unfortunately, Duk Nath, a post-graduate in Nepali from NBU (North Bengal University), who was arrested from his residence at Kanchen View Hotel complex in Deorali on the

night of October 24 by the Sikkim police, was released only on November 11 after facing much torture and humiliation. Surprisingly, even after his release there was no reaction from his party. Duk Nath himself told me just after his release that he would call for a Press conference and reveal everything.

He, however, left Deorali and shifted to some other place. He soon disappeared from the political scene altogether. And with that the brief challenge of the CPI(M), a party so powerful in neighbouring West Bengal but helpless in Bhandari's Sikkim, came to an abrupt end.

Both Duk Nath and Hem Lall, my friend and college-mate from the Government Law College in Bombay and a practising lawyer in Bombay High Court, were handcuffed and publicly paraded through the town when they were taken from the *thana* to the District Court by the police in connection with their bail application. This was one of the methods adopted by the authorities to harass and humiliate 'anti-government' forces in Sikkim.

Anjan and I decided to meet again the next day at the CPI(M) leader and former MP, Ananda Pathak's residence, which was near the SNT (Sikkim Nationalised Transport) office in Siliguri. As planned, I went to the *Bharat Darpan* office in the evening to meet Choudhary.

It was Diwali night and the whole of Siliguri town was in a festive mood. The town was colourfully decorated with the usual crackers bursting from every corner of the streets. It was both very noisy and somewhat frightening. This was our first experience with Diwali celebrations in a major town in the plains and it was indeed a spectacular sight, particularly for Gachung, who had been living in the village all the while. The sights and sounds and the rush in the town fascinated him and he enjoyed every moment of it.

The festivities were lost on me however, and I was in no mood to enjoy and appreciate what was going on. Because of our eagerness to get things done and to get them done on time and in the proper way, we journalists lose a lot of fun and

laughter that life offers us. But this is a part of our profession and we have to learn to live with it.

After a brief chat, Choudhary asked me to come to his place in the morning. Because of the noise of crackers just outside the office and the general Diwali atmosphere, it certainly wasn't the ideal place to discuss serious matters. So we decided to meet at his residence the next day to talk things over. To my great surprise, Chulthim never turned up. Perhaps he was busy or perhaps he didn't want to get involved. I thought he might contact me at the hotel but he didn't. I made no efforts to contact him either.

Anjan turned up 45 minutes late the next day, but by 9 a.m. we were at Pathak's place. This was my first encounter with the veteran Marxist leader. I had heard of him and read much about him in the papers but here I was meeting him face to face. Pathak is perhaps the only well-known CPI(M) leader in the hills of Darjeeling. However, he was a total stranger in Sikkim. The question of the *Observer* being printed at the CPI(M) press in Calcutta, which figured during my talk with Anjan the previous night, did not come up. I did not initiate any talk on the subject either. We had a cup of tea in the small, simple sitting room and left after a short while. Our next move was to get in touch with the DYFI (Democratic Youth Federation of India) Secretary, Tulsi Bhattarai, to explore the possibility of the paper being printed in Siliguri.

The meeting with the DYFI Secretary was inconclusive. Finally, we decided to get at least this issue of the paper printed either in Calcutta or in a nearby town in Nepal, which was not very far away. But firstly, I would try Choudhary's press. The final arrangement made was that if the Choudharys refused to go ahead with the printing, then I would leave the negatives of the paper with Anjan and he would make arrangements to get the paper printed somewhere. I appreciated his concern and cooperation and then left him.

Apart from *Bharat Darpan*, the only place where I could get the paper printed was at Baid's press. The rest of the print-

ing presses in Siliguri, excepting one, were all letter presses and they would be of no use to me since my paper had to be printed on an off-set press. I knew Baid well enough to make a request to get my paper printed at his press. However, I had earlier decided not to get in touch with him for various reasons but mainly because of the fact that the front page article on Chamling was against him and he would certainly not oblige me. I was also told that Baid was away in Bhutan for some work and there was no point in going to his place to try him. Choudhary had told me earlier that the *Uttarbanga* press, where the daily Bengali paper was printed, would not take up the printing of the *Observer* as they were quite close to Bhandari. In any case, they had to get permission from the owner who was away in Calcutta.

When I got to Choudhary's place the next day I was told that Baid had been picked up in the early hours of the morning and the situation was quite tense. Choudhary, who was obviously in touch with what was happening, said he had been informed that a Sikkim journalist had visited Baid the previous evening. He asked me whether I had met Baid. I said I didn't. Apparently, the Sikkim police had been keeping an eye on Baid's residence at Seth Srilal Market, where his Press office was also located. The police may have thought that I had met Baid the previous night when I went there to see Choudhary at his office, which is less than ten yards away from Baid's residence.

I was told earlier that Baid had been away in Bhutan but came to know only afterwards that he had returned home the day I arrived in Siliguri. It is possible that he wanted to be back for the Diwali celebrations. He was picked up illegally by the Sikkim police acting outside its jurisdiction around 6 a.m. on November 6 while on his morning walk.

I wasn't exactly sure why he was arrested. I never asked anybody, including Choudhary, who, realising the gravity of the situation, advised me not to get the paper printed. "It will unnecessarily lead to all sorts of problems", he said. He,

however, said he would carry Chamling's story in his own paper as it was against Baid. After discussing publication of this particular piece in *Bharat Darpan* with Sandeep, I decided to go to the town and get them a zeroxed copy of the front page.

I left their residence in a hurry and headed for Siliguri to get the photocopy of the front page. And then my instincts came into play. I had this sudden impulse to leave everything and get back to Sikkim straightaway. I cancelled my earlier plans and decided not to give Chamling's story to Sandeep or the negatives of the paper to Anjan for publication.

Half way through to Siliguri, I turned my vehicle and headed home. It was an instant decision based purely on instinct. It was 11 a.m. I didn't even stop at Choudhary's place on my way back but drove straight home. I was apprehensive of trouble on the way but luckily nothing happened. If the authorities had kept an eye on me they would certainly have become very suspicious. I had the printing materials carefully tucked away somewhere in the jeep to avoid being apprehended on the way back.

Instead of going straight to Gangtok, I took the diversion to Kalimpong, had lunch with the former Sikkim chief minister, Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa, at the Chakung House, and reached home on the same day late in the evening. I was happy that I had done my best as a journalist to get the paper out. But things were far beyond my control.

"I make a fervent appeal to all my colleagues in the Press, both within and outside the State, to do whatever they can to oppose the forces of suppression and to stand together for preservation of the Freedom of the Press which is guaranteed in our Constitution"

Jigme N. Kazi
President, Sikkim Press Association (1992-93)

"We have been merged; we shall not be submerged"

Nar Bahadur Bhandari
Chief Minister, Sikkim

"We fought for democracy and freedom. What we have in Sikkim today is dictatorship of the worst type".

Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa
Former Chief Minister, Sikkim

"Politically, the time has come for Centre to take bold steps in Sikkim".

Bhim Bahadur Gurung
Former Chief Minister, Sikkim

"We shall sacrifice ourselves on the altar of democracy. The fight for freedom and democracy must go on relentlessly".

Pawan K. Chamling
President, Sikkim Democratic Front

"We shall fight in the Assembly. We shall fight in the Parliament. We shall fight in the Court and in the Press. If need be, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets. Wherever we are, whatever we do, we shall fight. We shall never surrender".

Sikkim Observer

INSIDE SIKKIM: AGAINST THE TIDE is an account of one man's lone struggle to protect his freedom and dignity. Jigme N. Kazi, Editor of *Sikkim Observer* and Correspondent of *The Statesman*, fought an uphill battle for ten long years in a harsh and unkind system that thrives on lies, deceit and corruption.

INSIDE SIKKIM: AGAINST THE TIDE reveals the real issues at stake in the tiny Himalayan State of Sikkim and exposes the rot and hollowness of the 'democratic' system which was thrust on the Sikkimese people at the time of 'merger' in 1975. The struggle of the Sikkimese people to preserve their 'distinct identity within the Union' and the fight for free movement and expression is the story of this book, which comes out at a time when the people in the former Himalayan Kingdom are, once again, marching for freedom and democracy and demanding a better deal from New Delhi.