

agenda, I suspect, was to feign



Some News is Bad News

by Shekhar Deshpande

This has been an odd month in terms of media coverage of India. We've been in the news. Now if that is a cause for joy in itself, this was a good month. If content, style and substance matter, it is a wholly different situation.

Korea seems to drag an age-old issue on world stage. Little do they know over there (in Reaganese, this means whatever) in North Korea, that they are filling up a new punching bag for the United States. Nothing seems to work in Haiti or Bosnia, so the U.S. policy makers are trying to test the national virility in Korea. There is talk of nuclear threat from that ignored enemy, and the U.S. will not miss a chance to both give them a run for their testosterone and offer this President a boost to his all-round image right before one of the upcoming elections. (To continue the sexual metaphor, Clinton must be anxious to show his manliness, in more than one ways to end all this doubt in the air).

Thanks to Korea, the so-called nuclear threat from India became a fodder for the news and news analysts. India's refusal to sign the non-proliferation treaty (remember the Carter-Desai showdown in the late seventies?) puts it into the

list of "bad guys columns." Add to that the unsubstantiated rumors that India, Iran and China might build (or, are already doing so) a nuclear umbrella to defend themselves against the West, the stories about some third rate diplomat in the State Department carrying on his vendetta against India, our good old Dan Burton from Indiana aiming his matchbox at the Kashmir issue and the appointment of a non-descript diplomat to the post of U. S. Ambassador in Delhi, the picture begins to look quite gloomy.

This whole logic of nuclear threat (like the rhetoric of human rights) is bizarre anyway. On the one hand, the U. S. President has already promised us that if North Korea uses any nuclear weapon, the United States will end the existence of that country "as we know it." Now, if you understand plain English, you shouldn't mess with such a warning. But the North Koreans are playing the game in the style of Saddam Hussain and the West is building up something convenient, which it could either use to beat up at some politically opportune moment or let it linger so that imaginary issues drive their policies for a long time. For a country that has the capacity to incinerate this world a few times over, what is the worry of a threat from a

small country in the full light of the international theater?

The U. S. media use India either to explain how Korea should behave (and use self-restraint, so to speak) or to speculate how India might behave, if North Korea behaves mischievously.

Then the media had the occasion to watch the "historic" visit of the Indian Prime Minister to the United States. It made news only as part of the President's itinerary and the "incident" in Boston (see editorial). A whole lot of issues that came up matter to Indians perhaps, but for the U. S. media, it was almost a no-show, a non-event that did not carry any significance.

The report on McNeil-Lehrer news hour on Wednesday, May 25th on AIDS in India and its relationship to prostitution was instructive in many ways. When Indians spoke, the producers chose to use subtitles to explicate their speech. Now that isn't such a bad thing, is it? If the audience does not understand the speech, it seems necessary to use subtitles. With the same logic, we are assuming that accents are easy to understand from Ireland, England and France just to name a few countries covered on this prestigious network. But in these cases, subtitles are not used (and we are watching). The audi-

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ence is asked to make an effort to figure out the content of the speech even if that speech is riding on some of the most difficult and obscure accents in use today. It is a matter of tolerance, and in Pat Buchanan's words, an issue of assimilation. European accents are easily assimilated, those from India and other lesser lands are not.

The month was capped by the selection (or, should we say election?) of Sushmita Sen as Miss Universe in the international competition in Manila. Some years ago, whenever a woman was chosen from a non-white country, the fashion magazines used to dwell on the belief that the judges were tired of the same old standards of beauty

(read: Barbie dolls) and were looking for different, exotic examples. That explanation might sound like a whine from a culturally sensitive, feminist, progressive analyst who isn't easily satisfied with anything. So, it is time to celebrate this occasion and congratulate Sushmita Sen for her achievement.

She is equal to her competitors; in fact, she is better, since she got selected. She will put Indian women on the map, so to speak. She will enhance the cause of children in India (that's a hint from one of her answers). For a whole year, she will take pictures with important people that include film stars, politicians, community leaders, "office-bearers" of organizations, and of

course, children. She will be interviewed extensively in India and abroad, may be even on Regis and Kathie Lee show. She could have affairs with famous people, or we may feel that she is having affairs with them. For a whole year, we will admire her looks and hope that she becomes a symbol of Indian women and women everywhere. Even after she passes on her crown to someone else, we will remember her as someone who brought the spotlight to India. For that, we will be eternally grateful to her. Then, we will wait for another time in the future, when some other girl will have successfully prepared herself to be another Miss Universe. Happy days will return again.