

Macedonia, rebels on warpath

By Vaiju Naravane

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PARIS, JUNE 6. The Macedonian Prime Minister, Mr. Ljubco Georgievski, today called for a formal declaration of war against the country's ethnic Albanian minority after five soldiers were killed in an ambush by Albanian rebels.

The attack against the soldiers, which took place in the hills near the town of Tetvo which borders Kosovo and Serbia, was the deadliest in six weeks of fighting. "A strong military response is the only way to achieve peace", Mr. Georgievski's spokesman said. He said the Prime Minister was calling for a full scale declaration of war which would give the Government and the military emergency powers to call up reservists and launch a full scale attack against the rebels.

The decision by the Prime Minister to seek such powers from Parliament is bound to further escalate tensions in the region and could push Macedo-

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nia closer to an all-out Balkan war which would inevitably pull in the neighbouring Serbia and Kosovo. Mr. Georgievski had attempted to obtain a state of war declaration from Parliament last May but was persuaded by Western powers to stay his hand and continue negotiations with the ethnic minority.

Albanian guerillas say they are fighting for equal rights and opportunities as those enjoyed by the Slav community. The Macedonian Government says they are out to grab land in order to realise the dream of establishing a "Greater Albania".

Mr. Georgievski would like the MPs to take an oath of allegiance to the state and to clearly state that they are "opposed to the murderers", the spokesman, Mr. Antonio Milosovski, said. Such a call for a public show of loyalty is likely to widen the cleavage that already exists within the coalition Government that includes several Albanian deputies.

Yugoslavia joins Macedonia effort to fight ethnic rebels

BY MISHA SAVIC

AA-5 by
Skopje June 5: Fresh from ending its own ethnic Albanian insurgency, Yugoslavia is offering to help Macedonia in its battle against rebels stubbornly resisting Army attempts to flush them out of their northern highland strongholds.

Yugoslav defence minister Slobodan Krapovic and Vlado Buckovski, his Macedonian counterpart, signed a deal on Monday under which Yugoslavia could provide intelligence and weapons to Macedonia's Army.

"It is no secret that our country needs weapons," Mr Buckovski said. He said that as of Tuesday, "Our teams of experts will consider possibilities for a broader cooperation between our defence ministries."

The insurgency erupted in Macedonia in February. Ethnic Albanian rebels say they are fighting for broader rights, while majority Slav leaders regard them as "terrorists" bent on seizing control of a large piece of the country. In renewed fighting on Monday, the Northern Hinterland of Macedonia's second-largest city, Tetovo, resounded to heavy exchanges of mortar and machine-gun fire.

Mr Krapovic backed Mr Buckovski's claim that "human and minority rights are being used here to hide the real goals of Albanian extremism and terrorism, their fight for territories."

Yugoslavia battled its own ethnic albanian militants for years, in and around its southern Kosovo province. Kosovo's war ended in 1999, when Nato bombed Yugoslav government troops, accused of a brutal crackdown against Kosovo Albanians, forcing them to withdraw.

Kosovo has been controlled since then by Nato and the United Nations. But a smaller ethnic Albanian insurgency in a strip of Serbia around Kosovo was eliminated by Yugoslav troops only in recent weeks, under Nato supervision.

Nato, Macedonia and Serbia, the larger Yugoslav republic, say that the Macedonian insurgency is supported by militants from within Kosovo, as were rebels in the strip of Serbia seaming the province. Nato peacekeepers deployed in Kosovo pledged Monday to stop arms supplies crossing into Macedonia.

"We will further reinforce the border region with highly mobile troops... And interdict logistics support for the armed extremists" said squadron leader Roy Brown, a Nato spokesman.

Political paralysis has hurt Macedonian efforts to defeat the rebels. Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski acknowledged on Sunday that the current Cabinet of both ethnic Albanian and Slavic parties is "barely functioning" and that early elections are needed to overcome fruitless negotiations about the crisis.

While ethnic Albanian politicians insist that upgrading the status of their constituency — more than a third of Macedonia's 2 million people — is needed to defuse the rebellion, Mr Georgievski spoke of the need to "militarily defeat the terrorists" and talk later about reforms.

There are fears, however, that a strong offensive could endanger thousands of ethnic Albanian civilians in the villages controlled by the rebels.

On Monday the International Committee of the Red Cross evacuated 66 civilians from the area. Of those who remain, some are believed to do so voluntarily, while others are said to be staying under duress. (AP)

Attack on ethnic Indians in Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, MARCH 11. Tension was running high in a suburb of the Malaysian capital today when the number of persons killed in clashes between ethnic Indians and Malays rose to five. But, there was no plan to impose curfew in the largely residential petaling Java area, police said.

The Bernama news agency quoted the Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Mr. Mohamed Jamil Johari, as saying that one of those killed was an Indonesian. Three persons killed earlier were Indians, while the fifth was not identified.

Skirmishes broke out last Sunday when members of a Hindu funeral procession passed through a Malay wedding party instead of following an agreed-upon alternative route, a Hindu leader said. Three people died after clashes on Thursday night over a smashed car windscreen.

After an initial skirmish, a



Malay Muslims with their homemade weapons search for ethnic Indians from the rooftop of a house in Kampung Datuk Harum, in the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, on Sunday. — AP

group armed with machetes, sticks and iron pipes attacked residents of several blocks of flats in the area. The fighting in which hundreds were involved

left 18 wounded, five of them seriously. Police arrested 153 persons. "The situation is under control. In fact, the number of personnel patrolling the area

has been reduced," a police spokesperson said.

The Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, advised residents not to worry. "The clashes were not planned. There were no racial clashes, but when people start spreading rumours that Indians are attacking Malays, then people come out and it happens," he was quoted as saying by the *Sunday Star*.

The Government has played down an ethnic element in the fighting and asked the media not to publish "inaccurate news" which could inflame the situation.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Abdullah Badawi, said the media should rely on police for information and not seek comments from residents.

This is the first serious ethnic conflict since March 1998, when Hindus and Muslims clashed over the relocation of a Hindu shrine in northern Penang. — Reuters

THE HINDU

12 MAR 2001

4 ethnic Indians die in Malaysia clashes

BY SEAN YOONG

Kuala Lumpur, March 12: Authorities arrested 23 people carrying knives and explosives in a violence-scarred Kuala Lumpur suburb on Monday, as the official death toll from Malaysia's worst ethnic bloodshed in three decades rose to six.

"I'm upset because six people have died. One Indonesian, one Malay and the rest Indians," deputy prime minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

Hundreds of riot police armed with batons stood guard beside trucks mounted with water cannons, watching children return to school in five villages after four days of intermittent clashes.

But some villagers on the outskirts of this southeast Asian nation's largest city refused to leave their houses, fearing that the violence, which spread to at least two nearby districts over the weekend, could flare again.

Selangor state police chief Nik Ismail Nik Yusoff said officers detained 12 ethnic Indians and 11 Malays who gathered in the area early on Monday, apparently to fight each other.

The police seized 34 weapons, including homemade bombs, steel pipes and machete-like knives called parangs.

This took the number of arrests since Thursday to 184 people, which includes seven Indonesians who have since been released. The remaining total, 99 of whom were Malays, are expected to be detained for up to two weeks for questioning. Mr Nik Ismail told reporters that police planned to charge some of them with offenses including murder — which carries a mandatory death penalty. (AP)



ROUNDED UP: Dozens of ethnic Malays and Indians sit on the compound of a police station after being arrested following four days of racial clashes on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur on Monday. The official death toll rose to six. (AP)

Deputy PM calls for calm after violence

Petaling Jaya (Malaysia), March 12: Malaysia's deputy prime minister appealed for calm on Monday in a neighbourhood still seething after days of bloody clashes between Indians and Malays, the worst racial violence in over 30 years.

"I'm upset because six people have died. One Indonesian, one Malay and the rest Indians," Mr Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told some 1,000 residents gathered in a hall of the troubled district on the edge of the Petaling Jaya, a satellite town of the capital Kuala Lumpur. The Opposition Barisan Alternatif Front questioned the official death toll and said the situation was still serious and yet to subside. "Based on reliable family and hospital sources, we fear that

the actual number of deaths is greater than the official figure," the four-party group said in a statement.

But Mr Abdullah denied there had been more deaths, although some of the wounded are in a critical condition. "There are stories going around that more Indians and Malays have died — this is not true," he said. The police said a sixth man died from his wounds on Sunday, a victim of the past few days' battles between groups fighting with sticks, machetes and pipes in Taman Desaria, a poor area in Petaling Jaya known for its violent crime and gangs. Most of the victims were hacked or bludgeoned to death. Twenty people were still hospitalised for injuries, four of them in serious condition, he said. (Reuters)

Malay official softens stand against Net newspaper

Kuala Lumpur, March 12: A senior Malaysian official on Monday softened the government's attack on an Internet newspaper it considers biased against it, and indicated he would help its reporters to get official credentials. Information ministry parliamentary secretary Zainuddin Maidin met with senior editors of the Malaysiakini.com website, who sought the meeting in an effort to end government attacks over its feisty political coverage.

Ministers have attacked the site in recent weeks as having an anti-government bias, linking the claims to a report in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* magazine that the website received funds from US financier George Soros.

Mr Mahathir has blamed Soros' currency speculations as a leading cause for the Asian economic crisis of 1997-98. The site has denied it receives any funds from Soros and sought a meeting with government officials to explain its funding and discuss its editorial policy.

Malaysiakini editor Steven Gan said that he and Mr Zainuddin had "agreed to disagree on the role of *Malaysiakini*." "I think (he) would want us to be less critical of the government, but our position is of an independent media and we will criticise where necessary," Mr Gan said. (AP)

This cocktail's not for sipping

Frustration, revenge and polarisation reached a flashpoint in Kuala Lumpur, with clashes involving ethnic Indians. Lack of inter-racial interaction is a reason. BRENDAN PEREIRA reports

trouble came two Sundays ago — the day a Malaysian family was celebrating a wedding and an Indian family was preparing to bury one of its own. A member of the burial party was upset that a temporary shed had been placed on the road outside the wedding house. He rode his motorcycle through, kicked the chairs and tables and sped off. A while later, he came back, this time with 10 armed men. They attacked the groom's father and another relative. Swift reprisal followed the next day. Gangs of unidentified men entered a predominantly Indian area of the colony and vandalised vehicles.

On Wednesday, came incident No 2. Two groups of Indians involved in traffic accident were about to come to blows when two Malays tried to intervene.

Sharp words were exchanged and both groups turned on the Malays. Word of the attack spread through the area — a vast collection of cinder block zinc-roofed houses, vacant lots and poorly lit streets. By the hour, a new layer of half-truths was being added to the story.

The explosion came the next day. A Malay boy's wayward catapult shot smashed a lorry windscreen. The owner of the vehicle, an Indian, demanded compensation. But the boy's father wanted the lorry's owner to make the demand in more polite language.

Both parties stormed off but not before making threats. By now, residents in Kampung Medan had started arming themselves, believing self-generated rumours that a battle lay ahead. Even housewives like B Parameswary (28) took no chances.

She fashioned a weapon by driving a nail into a wooden stick. At around midnight on Thursday, the combustible mix of anger, fear, suspicion and

revenge that had been percolating for days exploded. Today, everyone is counting the cost of that battle.

The underlying reasons for the violence remain unclear. The government blames it on wild-fire rumours and outside elements bent on some blood-letting. The villagers have their own theories. They say that frustration is palpable in everyday life, making it easier for people to gamble with life and limb. Petty traders are sick and tired of the protection racket run by gangs, some residents complain of uneven development in the area, others say religious fervour has made their neighbours arrogant and uncompromising.

Add polarisation to that list. Like in other parts of Malaysia, it has become a fact of life for Malays to mix with Malays, for Chinese to seek only Chinese company and Indians to socialise only with Indians.

A recent survey by Universiti Malaya found that 98 per cent of Malay respondents did not interact with students of other races. Similarly, 99 per cent Chinese respondents and 97 per cent of Indian respondents also did not mix with other races.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar patterns of behaviour are also the norm in primary and secondary schools. Without a history of growing up and sharing experiences, there is a good chance that people will view each other through jaundiced eyes.

There is also a good chance that people will sit around coffee shop tables and recall how they surrounded and attacked defenceless men. Kampung Medan could be a lasting reminder of what the rest of Malaysia should never become.

— The Straits Times/Asia News Network.

THE STATESMAN

14 MAR 2001

Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia ^{HF-11} defy Govt troops ¹⁸⁷³

Shipkovica, Macedonia, March 17

THE ARMY mounted a heavy artillery attack to push ethnic Albanian rebels northward, but the scene in this hill town above Macedonia's second-largest city reflected a rebel force ready to stay put and step up their fight.

The sound of detonations from Government artillery pieces Friday were ignored by armed lookouts lurking in the woods. Weapons were loaded and ready in nearly every home. Ethnic Albanian insurgents, with pistols peeking out from camouflage uniforms, confidently strode along the only paved road.

Police on late Friday claimed a "successful offensive" pushed the rebels back from Tetovo. But the hills southwest of Tetovo remained in rebel control.

The message to the Slav-led Government is clear: the uprising has deep local roots and the support of many who say they are ready to expand the fight for greater rights. The rebels, whose insurgency started a month ago in a village on the border with Kosovo, appeared determined to expand their struggle from that sparsely inhabited area to Macedonia's principal cities.

The unrest is linked both to Kosovo, a province in southern Serbia administered by the United Nations and NATO-led peacekeepers, and a buffer zone adjoining it, where Yugoslav troops were deployed on Wednesday. Rebels and arms have been moving relatively freely from one area to the other, and the militants share aspirations for ethnic Albanian self-determination — if not out-

right independence. Fighters in Shipkovica and nearby villages contradicted the claim by Macedonian authorities that the rebellion is being directed by ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. The scene in those communities also showed some level of rebel organisation developing in areas that have slipped from Government hands. The Government asserts that Macedonia is a model for ethnic coexistence and minority rights in the Balkans, and many urban ethnic Albanians say that while changes are needed they must be accomplished peacefully.

But villagers expressed unqualified support for challenging a system they say places ethnic Albanians on a second-class level. "If we have to fight for our rights, it's a just cause", said teacher Fatmir Seremi, who monitors a checkpoint for the rebels outside Shipkovica.

Some rebels say they took part in the Kosovo Liberation Army's battle with Yugoslav forces in Kosovo. But they insist their latest struggle is homegrown, and that they only inherited some weapons and other equipment from the KLA. They claim ethnic Albanians face discrimination on many levels, from police harassment to problems getting bank loans and building permits. They also express deep disappointment with the Democratic Albanian Party, a partner in the Government of Prime Minister Ijubco Georgievski.

The discontent could be a prelude to a power struggle between the militia and party leader Arben Xhafari, who has appealed for an end to the armed resistance. **AP**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 MAR 2001

Macedonia on brink of ethnic war

By **Batuk Gathani**

BRUSSELS, MARCH 21. The Macedonian Government's decision to stop firing at ethnic Albanian rebels expires later today. It remains to be seen if the Muslim secessionist guerillas will end their armed resurrection and opt for negotiations. All indications are they will not do so and the Macedonian military may launch a fresh counter-offensive. Mr. Javier Solana, the European Union's chief foreign affairs and defence chief, is currently in Macedonia and opened a dialogue with ethnic Albanian political parties in a bid to end the fighting in the north-west region of the republic.

According to a statement signed by leaders of the two largest Albanian parties and broadcast last night on state television, both parties called for "groups which have taken up arms on the territory of our state to lay down their arms and return to their homes peacefully". But, despite such reconciliatory signals, the "Democratic Party of Albanians" which is a member of the Macedonian coalition Government, may pull out of the coalition. In such an eventuality, according to diplomats, the violence in Macedonia may develop into a full scale ethnic war.

According to estimates, Albanians constitute one-third of Macedonia's population. The European powers are trying to work out a constitutional consensus between the two ethnic groups.

THE HINDU

22 MAR 2001

Fresh attacks on Indians in Malaysia

Kuala Lumpur, March 21 (Reuters): Youths attacked two ethnic Indians in Malaysia today, in separate incidents following bloody clashes earlier this month between majority Malays and minority Indians, police said.

A police spokesman said that two Malay youths on a motorcycle attacked one man as he was waiting at a bus stop in central Selangor state, inflicting cuts to his head and body. A second man was slightly hurt in a similar incident later. "The man was waiting for a bus when he was attacked," a police official said.

Sporadic clashes have occurred between minority Indians and majority Malays since police brought under control a major flareup between the two communities which killed six people and injured many more earlier this month.

Selangor police chief Nik Ismail Nik Yusuf said a hunt was on for the attackers.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 . MAR 2001

Indian attacked in Malaysia

THE STAR
ASIA NEWS NETWORK

PETALING JAYA (Malaysia), March 24. — A 29-year-old Indian tea-stall owner was repeatedly slashed by three machete-wielding men during a predawn attack in Templer Street yesterday.

"He cycles past Templer street, where he usually gets off his bicycle to push it up the steep slope. Yesterday, a red car stopped nearby and three men armed with parangs got down from the car and confronted him," a relative of Asrat, Mr Nijam Kathar, said.

"Asrat pleaded with the men to spare him as he was a Muslim like them, but they shouted 'Don't lie to us' and started attacking him," Mr Kathar added.

Mahathir comment: The Prime Minister, Mr Mahathir Mohammad, said poverty and not racial problems had triggered the ethnic violence earlier this month, news reports said today, adds AP.

"Poor people are easily stirred to violence," the *Sun Daily* quoted Mr Mahathir as saying. "We have become lulled by the low poverty figures that is reported in the country without realising the actual situation."

Police said six people have died and around 50 others were injured in fighting between ethnic Indians and Malays, which broke out on 2 March and continued intermittently for four days.

THE STAR

25 MAR 2001

Indonesia ^{ethnic problem} violence toll reaches 400

REUTERS ^{5/10}

SAMPIT (Indonesia), Feb. 25. - Indonesian security officials today flew into Borneo's ravaged district, where continuing ethnic bloodshed has claimed up to 400 lives since last week.

The visit marks the first serious response from Jakarta to the violence between indigenous Dayaks and Madurese immigrants that has witnessed people being beheaded and their heads paraded through Sampit.

Chief security minister, Mr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, led the delegation to this town, scene of most of the killings. He said top priority was to save lives. The team also included military chief, Admiral Widodo.

"The military and police deployed here should be used effectively to control the situation and return conditions to order," Mr Yudhoyono told reporters in an apparent criticism of the armed Dayaks, who have allegedly carried out most of the massacres.

Local officials have claimed that the death toll was 270, but the state run Antara

News Agency said it had received information of 400 deaths. Dozens of people have been wounded, the agency added.

Antara also reported that several immigrants' buildings in the provincial capital, Palangkaraya, had been burned today. It was, however, unclear if there were any casualties and police were not available for comment.

A Sampit official expressed shock at the reluctance of the 2,000 soldiers and police there to disarm the Dayaks.

"We don't see the police and the military disarming the Dayaks. There are some groups of Dayaks who still patrol the street with knives and sharp weapons, and the security apparatus is doing nothing," the official said.

Officials claimed that the troops had not been ordered to disarm the gangs in Sampit.

Military officials were not available for comment, although television pictures have shown security officials collecting the odd stake with nails protruding from one end.

THE STATESMAN

26 FEB 2001

Indonesian ethnic clash kills 75

REUTERS *6/11/2001*

JAKARTA, Feb. 22. - More than 75 people have been slaughtered in the savage ethnic bloodshed on Indonesia's portion of Borneo island, local officials and media said today.

A worker at Sampit's Public Hospital, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "More than 80" corpses had been received there since fighting broke out on Sunday.

The official Antara news agency said 20 headless corpses were discovered after Sunday's revival of bitter clashes between local Dayaks and immigrant Madurese in Central Kalimantan province. Local reGENCY spokesman Mr Jauhar Puzni said 55 bodies, all with heads, had been recovered so far, but added the death toll was increasing.

THE STATESMAN

23 FEB 2001

SIKHS UNDER FIRE

Shiv
Prabhu Protection may not be enough *5/8*

THE Mehjoor Nagar incident in Srinagar in which six Sikhs were killed, suggests that the Chattisinghpora massacre was no flash in the pan; there is a systematic jihadi campaign in both Jammu and Kashmir against the community. The immediate intention must be to put pressure on the authorities and the ceasefire, by opening up new theatres of confrontation and setting new targets, extending and intensifying the conflict. There is, of course, an ethnic cleansing aspect to all this: with most Pandits already driven out, the Sikhs remain the only visible representation of the larger Indian entity. Sikhs represent another advantage for the militants. They are, essentially, even in Jammu, relatively small and isolated communities and, therefore, vulnerable to the kind of tactics in use. The tactics are working: most Sikhs in Srinagar have no confidence in the government and want to leave for Jammu.

Government, for its part, has announced the deployment of paramilitary troops in Sikh villages and hamlets in Jammu. But troops keep getting redeployed, while it is almost certain that Sikhs are now a long-term target for militants. It is commendable that Shabbir Shah and Yasin Malik have come out strongly against these attacks, but then these two represent the more catholic segments of the anti-Indian faction. Sikhs are entitled to come to the conclusion that security and expressions of support are not enough and we may witness their exodus at least from Kashmir. This is all the more likely to happen since, unlike the Pandits, the Sikhs can put down roots elsewhere. All this will only sharpen the communal polarisation in the valley and serve the militants' purpose. Is there a strategy to counter this?

THE STATESMAN

1 FEB 2001

Sri Lankan children alive to ethnic divide

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, FEB. 7. She argued confidently, telling the audience of discrimination against Tamils through language, in education and other spheres of life. She spoke of distortions in history textbooks and asked why the Sri Lankan national anthem could not be sung in Tamil.

And she objected to her being described as a Dravidian and demanded to be known as a Thamilar.

Her Sinhala counterpart was equally forceful, arguing that the existing Sri Lankan Constitution had ensured that the minorities had been given rights and representation in proportion to their population.

These were not cynical politicians trying to win votes, but 16-year-old school children participating in a television debate on Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, telecast here recently.

It was the brainchild of Young Asia Television, a Sri Lanka-based public service broadcaster that makes issue-based programmes and sells them to channels all over the region. "Our intention was to give voice to young people, to try and get them to think of their future," said Ms. Sharmili Boyd, editor-in-chief, YA TV.

Four of the capital's leading schools sent in their teams,

which the producers then shuffled around to have an equal mix of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. The three teams had to argue for one of the three communities.

Some participants were thus forced to adopt positions that might not necessarily have been their own. The silver lining was that a Tamil, Muslim or Sinhala teenager showed the capacity to put himself or herself in the other's shoes, though this could have been purely due to the competitive edge of the debate.

For instance, a Tamil boy arguing on the Sinhala side asked why the Sri Lankans, divided only by two languages as opposed to two dozens in neighbouring India, could not live in peace. He wondered if a separate Tamil state could live in peace with itself, let alone its Sinhala neighbour.

A Sinhala teenager on the Tamil team said while the Sinhalese were in a majority and therefore got more representation in Parliament, it was the duty of these parliamentarians to ensure equal rights for all communities.

As the debate demonstrated, the ethnic divisions have seeped down to the youngest minds. Even if peace were to be restored tomorrow, it may take a few generations for the Sri Lankans to be rid of the social

and political baggage they have inherited from their forebears. Over the long years of conflict, feelings of being wronged have hardened, as have ethnic stereotypes, which are reinforced by the education system.

The policy that schools shall impart education only in the mother tongue of the child has led to the segregation of children in separate schools, and sometimes, separate streams in the same school.

Not surprisingly, the programme, the first of its kind on Sri Lankan TV, has created a buzz. Given the long-entrenched attitudes, perhaps it was also not so surprising that producers drew flak from adult viewers for mixing the teams.

One caller, apparently from the majority community, said the Tamil member on the Sinhala team had no understanding of the issues facing the community and had therefore, weakened the argument. Sadly also, the participants who argued convincingly for another community said later they feared criticism from their elders and peers. But the producers said keeping the teams intact might have led to ugly clashes.

The discussion was divided into four parts, of which three have been screened so far.

THE HINDU

8 FEB 2001