

# THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN

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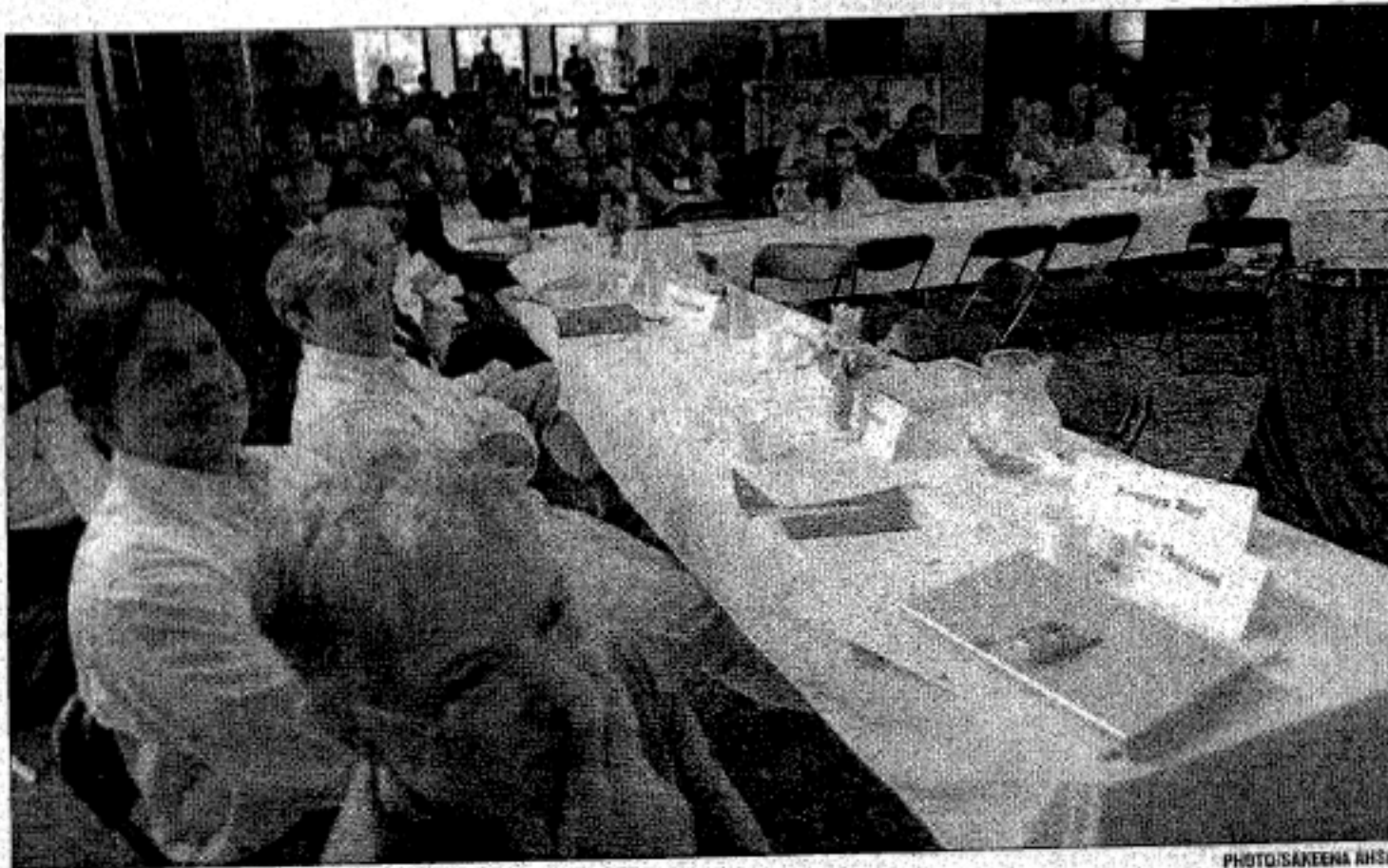


PHOTO: SANEENA AHISAN

Pradeep Chhibber, Sridar Iyengar and Ramesh Ramanathan (from front) at a conference on local governance in India.

## Conferees Discuss Democracy in India

by **Tamara Bartlett**  
Daily Cal Staff Writer

Indian political leaders and faculty members from UC Berkeley and other universities gathered at a conference last Thursday and Friday to discuss issues surrounding democracy in India.

The conference, entitled Local Governance & Empowerment, was put on by the Center for South Asia Studies, a research unit within the international and area studies department.

Jaipal Reddy, union minister of urban affairs and the opening speaker for one of the sessions, said India should be known for its democracy rather than its technological advances.

"India, in recent years, has come to be known for (its) software promise, for its technological base," Reddy said. "Democracy, I think, is the most magnificent of its achievements."

Reddy advised that India should focus on supporting individuals and groups locally if it aims to promote democracy.

"It costs quite a lot to improve the frills of upper-class society, but it doesn't cost so much to render services to the local poor," he said.

John Harriss, the director of the School for International Studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, examined the role of "new politics" in India, which he defined as "politics built around organizations in civil

societies" rather than workplaces.

"It worries me that (new politics) tends to be exclusive with regards to the poor," Harriss said. "It brings benefits to the poor but (the poor) are not being regarded as active agents."

In examining the role of the Indian media as a catalyst for empowerment, Kalpana Sharma, an independent journalist for Indian publications, said the Indian news has been localized for specific regions so that the news defines India's citizens based on whether the region is reported on.

Sharma also argued that a downside of local news is it may not necessarily be considered news elsewhere and may

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## CONFERENCE: Focus on Indian Democracy

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only reach a portion of the population.

"The tragedy of localization is it is only read in the place it is met," Sharma said. "Localization (is) only for locals without being news that's relevant for the rest of the country."

Many of the speakers agreed that India's democracy should be at the forefront of India's reputation.

"India must be known to be a great democracy. It is second in the world to none," Reddy said.

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