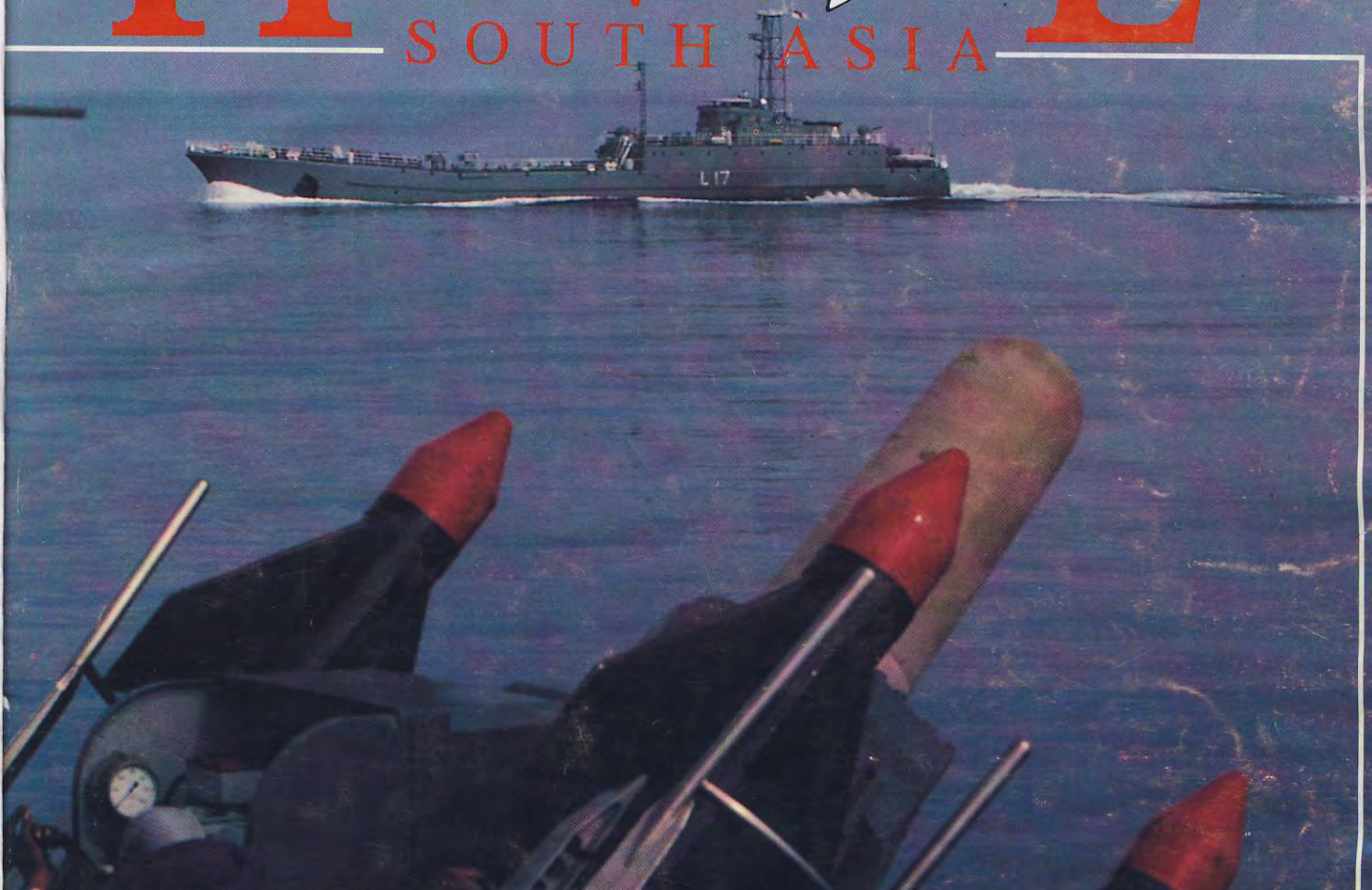


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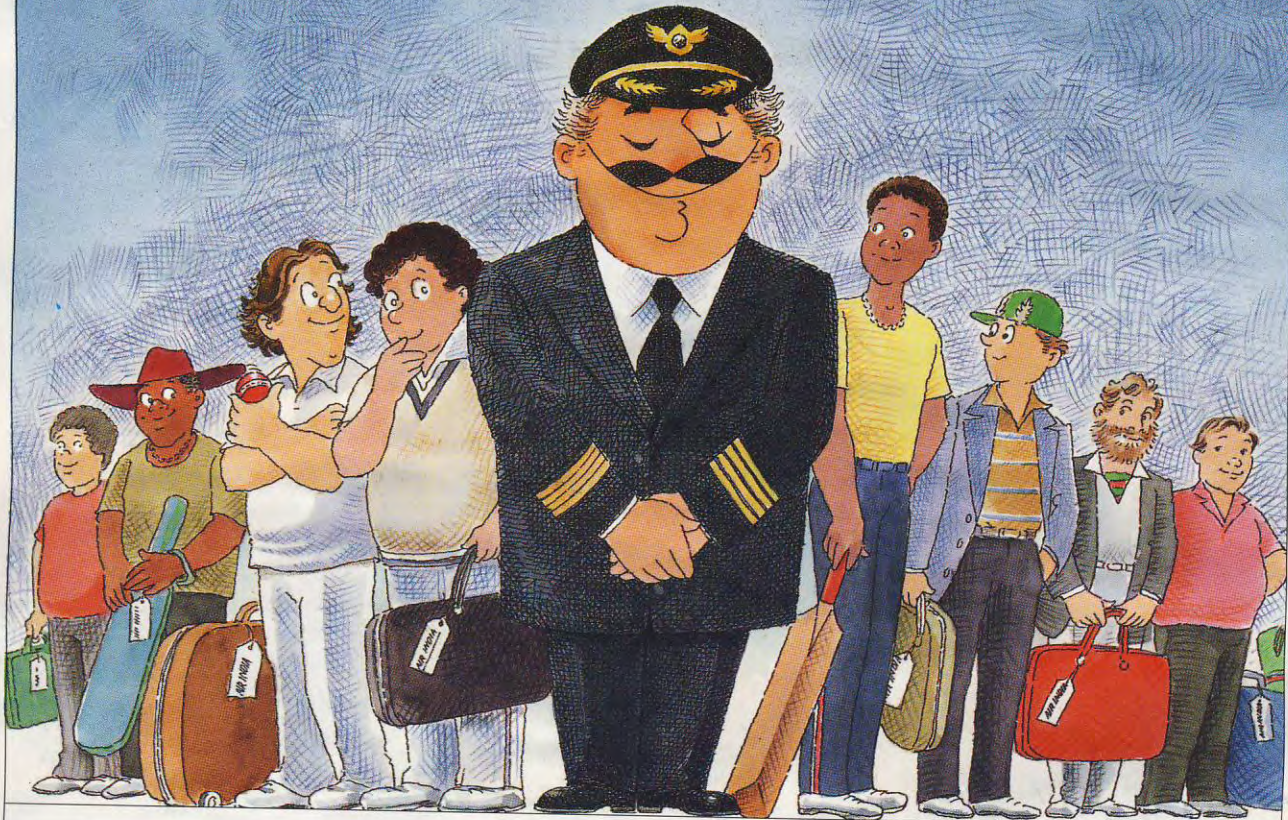
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Exchanging information among the nations of the region is the best kind of confidence-building measure for troubled South Asia. Transfer of news and opinion spurs diplomatic and intellectual communication, which can in turn trigger a chain reaction resulting in trade, investment, and economic growth.

Conversing across South Asian frontiers, therefore, should be a priority for the region's political, academic and economic vanguard. It is for this vanguard—you—that we have launched Himal South Asia, a monthly magazine from Kathmandu that jumps boundaries in order to present objective information and informed opinion.

The goal is reasonable, we feel, but as journalists we are also realists enough to note that there are hurdles even in doing something this obvious and necessary. These include historical legacies such as the rise of post-1947 nationalism, the entrenchment of elite interests in each country, the inertia of the state mechanism, and the tyranny of populism.

On the other hand, societal and technological advances have made it possible to contemplate a South Asia-wide media. With modern education and outlook, travel, and wider exposure to the world of ideas, the new generations in each country constitute the stepping stone for the kind of journalism Himal South Asia proposes to provide.

The last ten years, coinciding with the low-key existence of SAARC, have spawned almost continuous interaction among professionals of South Asian countries—activists, lawyers, academics and, lately, business executives. These motivated groups form a receptive wedge (and market) to start a regional monthly magazine.

While borders on the ground are not about to go away, satellite television has already opened up the airwaves. It is all the more necessary for the print media now to go pan-South Asian, in order to provide the kind of in-depth reportage and analysis which is not television's forte.

As South Asian journalism becomes a reality, and this magazine is part of the process, long-held geopolitical dogma on all sides will erode. To be replaced by what? Hopefully, a South Asia where borders remain but ideas mingle, trade flows, and economies resurrect.

South Asia is an east-west and north-south spectrum of cultures, religions and languages with some common ingredients. An imprecise, but very South Asian, identity extends from Sri Lanka's coconut plantations to the Nepali midhills, and from Manipur's jungles to the rugged Baluchi terrain. Afghanistan, the Tibetan plateau and Burma, too, are more part of this region than of any other.

It is the journalistic instinct that impels us here at Himal South Asia, and we are aware that an excessively emotional idealism is bound to be wasted. On the other hand, one has to have some of it. This is why we have decided to wait no longer for geopolitics to improve in South Asia. Publishing a regional magazine, we might be able to help drive that process forward.

There you have it. You hold a copy of the launch issue of Himál South Asia, incarnated from an earlier magazine that was Himalayan in scope.

With that, we bid you welcome—to South Asia!

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SOUTH ASIA

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March 1996

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Information for New Readers

Himal magazine was started in 1987 as a journal for the Himalayan region. With this March 1996 issue, the Kathmandu-based magazine transforms into the first and only South Asian magazine. Every month, Himal South Asia provides readers in the Subcontinent and overseas with reportage and commentary on issues and trends that affect the region's 1.3 billion people.

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Cover picture by Raghu Rai: Indian navy exercise
Inset courtesy Gorkhapatra

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Lumbini, Not Disneyland

The article "Lumbini as Disneyland" by Rachana Pathak (Nov/Dec 1995) has encouraged me to write a few comments as someone who has been going to Lumbini every year or so and who has been stationed at Lumbini since November 1995.

The article says Kenzo Tange's master plan needs to be reviewed as the Lumbini Development Project (LDP) has completed only 15 percent of the work in 20 years. However, the article failed to underline that besides corruption, politicised leadership and uninterested bureaucrats, the main reason for the delay was what can only be termed 'effortless expectation'.

The Lumbini Development Trust may be blamed for giving preference to those with money, but there are also those without money with the will and devotion to do something for pilgrims at the birthplace of Lord Buddha. Bhikkuni Sangh Nepal, Vietnam Phat Quoc Tu France, Dhamodaya Shabha Nepal and the Homestead Corporation Japan are some of those who make do with zeal what they lack in resources.



Siddhartha Gautama is a son of present-day Nepal and the light of all Asia, and it is important that we rise above the cacophony to show respect for all those who have faith in the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu. Even the Rana regime, which out-casted those who bowed to a lama guru (Kushyo Rimpoche) and expelled Theravadin bhikkhus from Nepal in 1923, enforced a ban on animal sacrifice at the Maya Devi temple, otherwise known as Rupandehi Mai. This was possible at the initiative of the late D.A. Dharmacharya during the time of Chandra Shumshere. Also at that time, the temple was renovated under the honorary managership of the zamindar of the village.

Some basic information provided in Ms Pathak's article is not correct. The Nippon Myohoji Shanti Stupa might obstruct the view of the Ashok pillar, but at a distance of more than 2 km! This is like saying that the Dharahara obstructs the view of Ghanta Ghar in downtown Kathmandu. The Vietnam Phat Quoc Tu temple does not go against the permissible 60 feet height limitation, as the reporter claims.

Here I would like to state that times have changed in Nepal, and it is not possible to demolish stupas as was possible under the earlier dispensation, when the Viswa Shanti Stupa on Pokhara's Andu Hill was demolished with the help of infantrymen, and land donors were put in separate prisons in Pokhara and Lamjung for 18 months when Shanker Raj Pathak was zonal commissioner of Gandaki. Nor will it be possible any more to drive out those who have faith in Buddhism and in the Sakyamuni, or to start afresh sacrifice at the Mayadevi temple!

Let us not forget that the momentum for developing Lumbini has been possible only after the dawn of democracy in Nepal. Other than the Mustang Monastery, Nepal Mandir, Sri Lanka Pilgrim Guest House and the Hotel Hokke, all 18 other associations that have registered with the Trust did so after 1993. What we can expect now, finally, is steady growth and development.

No one has come to Lumbini with a magic rod and big funds. All individual associations have to plan carefully and raise money before they can implement their projects. Also, let us not mix up LDP's responsibilities with the need for local development of the surrounding villages of Melhar, Padaria or Parsa. The case of Buddhanagar is entirely different, as it is inhabited by 'refugees'. Bringing socio-economic progress to these villages is the responsibility of the concerned offices of His Majesty's Government.

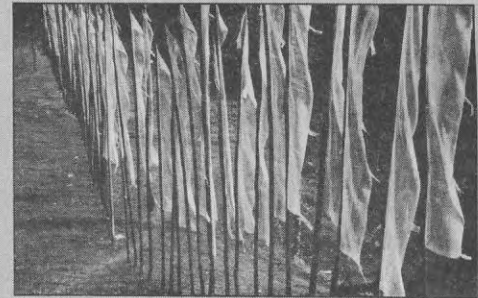
All in all, I prefer the lama's peace chantings to Hindi film music of picnic groups in Ms Pathak's Disneyland.

*Dharma Man Newa
Bhairahawa, Nepal*

Unfair to Tsongs

I was surprised to learn upon reading Ludwig Schaefer's article "A Sikkim Awakening" (Sep/Oct 1995) that the Tsong (Sikkimese Limbus) are Buddhists.

If this is true, why is there not one Tsong monastery in Sikkim? How does the writer account for the Phengdangma (Limbu priest), Manghims (Limbu temples) and Yumaism (the religion of the Kiranti and the Limbu)? He is also incorrect in the claim that all the Lepcha (Rong) are Buddhist. Rather, most of the Lepchas follow their own ancient traditional and religious customs, which are close to those of Tsongs.



Schaefer admits that the Tsong are one of the indigenous people of Sikkim but goes on to say that their demand for scheduled tribe status is unreasonable. This, despite the fact that the other indigenous groups of Sikkim, the Bhutias and the Lepchas, and even the non-indigenous Sherpas, Drukpas and Kagates (Yolmos), have already been classed as such. I do not understand what the writer finds unreasonable in this demand.

Regarding Tsongs' acquiring the protected lands of Bhutias and Lepchas, he should know that the Tsong have never laid any claim on the sacred land of the Rong, who were settled much earlier than the Bhutias. If western Sikkim (the region inhabited by Tsongs) is indeed the most developed region of the state, why would they covet other regions more backward than their own?

The writer, as a lover of the Himalaya and its people, could have suggested that both the Rong and the Tsong communities be protected. However, due to his blind admiration for Buddhism and Buddhist culture, he has been unjust to the Tsong.

*Amrit Subba (Limbu)
Bijanbari, Darjeeling*

Divided State

Corruption does exist in Sikkim, but to single out the state as Ludwig Schaefer does is hardly fair. Such practices prevail in every corner of India and in every country of the world, including Schaefer's own. The CCS (Concerned Citizens of Sikkim), to whom the writer seems so close, itself is corrupt. Is it true, for

example, that a package of IRs 3 crore had a role in calling off the hunger strike?

To learn the facts, Schaefer should have stayed in Sikkim longer. Copying a few facts from local newspapers and assembling them into an article to be published from another country does not make sense. Why could he not publish in Sikkim itself? Was it that no one heeded him here?

Why does Schaefer, who is so concerned about Bhutias and Lepchas, not feel the same for the Nepalis, who too are original inhabitants of Sikkim? The Supreme Court of India, in its final hearing of Bill No. 78 (*R.C. Poudyal vs. The Union of India*)—popularly known as *kalo bill* in Sikkim—stated that Bhutias migrated from Kham in Tibet around 1400 BC, and within a few years the Nepalis had arrived from the eastern part of Nepal.

From one perspective, Lepchas are the only original inhabitants of Sikkim. The Bhutia, though in a minority, hold high government positions (10 out of 15 important departments), have biggest landholdings in Sikkim, and are by far the richest of all of Sikkim's communities. The Constitution of India has reserved 13 seats for them in the Sikkim Legislature, which gives them considerable political leverage. Furthermore, they, together with Lepchas, have been classified as tribals and thus get reservations in everything from seats for higher education to government jobs.

At present, Sikkim is perhaps the only state in which every ethnic group, sub-group and caste has an association. There are altogether 17 associations to voice the demands of tribals—tribal women, tribal youth, Lepcha, Lepcha women, Lepcha youth, Buddhist monks, Lho-Men-Tsongs, Subba Tsongs, Kirat Rais, Tamangs, Tamu Gurungs, Newars, Sherpas, Mangars, Mukhias, and Schedule Castes. In such a state of divisiveness, Bahuns and Chhetris had refrained from forming any association until last year, but they too did so in April 1995.

As far as the Rathong-Chu project is concerned, there are thousands waiting with high hopes for its enormous employment possibilities. The project will not make much of a difference for the Bhutia since they can easily get a job or start a business. Should the sacred land of Yuksum remain barren and idle? While tourism might earn us some foreign currency, will it compare to the earnings that can be made from the power project?

It should also be noted that if the social, economic and educational rights of Nepali-speakers are not taken seriously, they will take to the streets and the consequences can very well be imagined.

Dhan R. Gurung
Deorali Bazaar, Gangtok

Unfair to Lepchas

Ludwig Schaefer clearly has many misconceptions about Sikkim. By suffixing 'Lepcha' to 'Bhutia' ('Bhutia-Lepcha'), Schaefer has done great injustice to Lepchas, who were the first to inhabit Sikkim and are a community distinct from Bhutias. The Bhutia are migrants from Tibet who wrested control of Sikkim from the Lepcha. The writer's claim that Bhutia-Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim is like stating that Aryan-Dravidians were the original inhabitants of the Indus Valley.

Schaefer refers to the Nepalis of Sikkim as migrants. It is an unfair and unjust designation as the not-much-earlier migrants, viz., the Bhutia, have been conferred indigenous status.

In any case, the very use of the terms 'indigenous' or 'migrant' is erroneous as the present-day boundaries of Sikkim came into existence just some hundred years ago. Until then, it was just another wooded tract bordering the modern-day borders of Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. It does not behoove a writer said to have more than a decade's experience of writing on the Himalaya to ignore such basic facts of history.

Vikash Pradhan
Kathmandu

Sikkim, Awake

Congratulations to Ludwig Schaefer on a well-written story. Also, my praises go to the CCS on their peaceful but resolute protest against the state government's proposal to destroy a sacred site.

As mentioned in the article, it is certainly a better idea if Sikkim took to exploiting nature's gifts in a more amiable way by resorting to tourism. Sikkim's prospect to attract tourists far surpasses her hydropower potential. This tourism potential needs to be developed. The beauty of the Khangchendzonga range seen from North Sikkim can be rivalled only by few other mountain ranges in the Himalaya. A European explorer once wrote that Mt. Siniolchu was the most beautiful mountain peak in the world.

Besides this scenic beauty, Sikkim has the more than 300 year old Nyingapa Buddhist culture. Zoologically, Sikkim lies in the transitional zone of the Palearctic and Oriental regions, where there is an immense variety in the flora, fauna and avifauna.

Following the examples of Nepal and Bhutan, the people of Sikkim too, should take up tourism. Ever since Sikkim's merger with the Indian Union, the state has received ample funds from the federal government for the purpose of development, but how much longer will the centre sponsor these development projects at the rate of 5 to 15 crores of rupees each year? Especially since most projects end up disastrously. It is really time for Sikkim to awaken.

Tashi Norden Sherpa
Gangtok

Porters or Choppers

I recall in the 1970s that we had major problems finding porters for the trekking trade. An acquaintance, a Peace Corps volunteer, assured me that in ten years' time there would be plenty of porters available. His prediction proved correct, for by the late 1980s, porters were available in abundance even during the autumn festival period.

What has happened in the Nepali hills, of course, is that a population explosion coupled with continuing economic stagnation has forced peasants out of their villages in search of cash income. This is the reality for a large portion of Nepal's population.

With reference to Kanak Mani Dixit's article "The Porter's Burden" (*Nov/Dec 1995*), it is easy to sound compassionate and emotional about the hardship of a portering life. However, to face stark reality, who will create jobs for the people?

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, not only did Mi-17 helicopters replace Nepal's hill porters, as Mr Dixit mentions, but also climbers from the former Soviet Union appeared on Himalayan peaks to replace high altitude Sherpas. This is a worrisome trend which may, in the future, cause significant disruptions in occupational patterns in Himalayan climbing.

With regard to the phenomenal weights that are carried by commercial



porters, the standard trekking load is only 25-35 kg. However, I have met porters who refuse to carry these light baskets, and instead will carry double the weight if paid accordingly.

Helicopters are used because they are cheaper than porters for certain types of loads. However, some development projects have a policy of using porters rather than choppers. Long before the Mi-17s invaded the Nepali skies, when the expensive French-built Super Pumas were in use, it would still have been cheaper not to use porters to ferry construction material for the Thame hydel plant in Khumbu. The project however, insisted on using porters. Similarly, the Swiss-aided Lamosangu-Jiri road project deliberately did not use heavy equipment as they planned to create jobs for the peasantry of the region.

Such porter-sensitive programmes are doubtlessly useful, but they are not enough to provide protection to Nepali hill porters. Mr Dixit has done well to describe the hardships of portering in Nepal, but who is going to help us search for humane, yet realistic, solutions for the well-being of hill porters?

*Tashi Jangbu Sherpa
Everest Trekking
Kathmandu*

Strength and Silence of Buddhist Women

While I was pleasantly surprised to see my paper discussed in such depth in Kim Gutschow's report on the Fourth International Conference on Women in Buddhism, held in Ladakh (Nov/Dec 1995), I found her harsh tone offensive.

The paper I presented, "Appropriate Treasure? Self-Reflections on Women, Buddhism, and Cross-Cultural Exchange", was an attempt to probe the complex set of issues that both connect and separate Western and Asian Buddhist women. I wanted to suggest ways in which mutually illuminating dialogues could be opened and sustained among women, living at all points along Buddhism's broad cultural continuum.

Gutschow, however, accuses me of "reifying the divide between Western and Asian women." Any close reading of my paper would have revealed that it was, in fact, oriented toward challenging rigid divisions of all sorts: the theoretical divides between essentialist and post-structuralist feminist theories, the philosophical divides between 'Buddhist' and 'feminist' thought, and the more

concrete cultural barriers between Western and Asian Buddhist women. Middle ways that negotiate between such extremes seem most appropriate to me.

Gutschow erred again when quoting me out of context and misinterpreting my statement: "Our contemporary Eastern Buddhist sisters remain at worst mute, at best anomalous participants in what, from one perspective, can be seen as a primarily male-dominated religious power structure." Clearly, the concept of an oppressive 'patriarchy' may be one constructed by Western feminism itself, and therefore inapplicable to women in other societies. I am happily aware from my own work in Nepal that, as Gutschow points out, "Buddhist traditions (are not) as male-dominated as Western feminists might assume."

According to Gutschow, "the conference boasted several Asian Buddhist women who were eloquent proponents of feminism in their respective Buddhist traditions." Although inspired by the Asian women who did speak, I was also disturbed by the more prevalent silence emanating from the Tibetan and Ladakhi women present.

Gutschow herself laments this situation many times in the course of her article, using words like "torpid", "bored", "hollow", and "strange" to describe the audience. Despite this understanding, Gutschow seems eager to create divides between she and myself by assigning me an inaccurate argument about Asian women's silence, while claiming a rather flat argument about their strength for herself. By denying them multi-faceted realities that may involve both strength and silence, either of these arguments taken alone objectifies the Asian women whom both Gutschow and I would prefer not to "speak for".

In any case, the issue of appropriation has once again reared its ugly head. With the exception of the Asian female academics whom Gutschow mentions, our current discussion in this literary, English-language forum implicitly excludes the indigenous women with whom both Gutschow and I work.

*Sara Shneiderman
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island*

South Asian Avatar

The transition from Himal to Himal South Asia comes as a surprise, for the reader's impression was that the Himalayan magazine was already sustainable, if not profitable. One cannot help feeling some degree of skepticism towards the new 'avatar'. To cover a region as varied as South Asia is a formidable task. It would probably require much more resources to maintain the same standard that one expects from Himal. If simple economics has dictated that Himal operate over a larger base, it might be difficult generating resources on the short term. And with its being a monthly, can it realistically afford to be entirely issue-based?

Having closely followed Himal from its Colombo-published prototype issue, though, infinitely better a Himal South Asia than no Himal at all.

*Niraj B Shrestha
nbshresth@seas.gwu.edu*

It came as a surprising but welcome announcement that Himal was transforming itself into a South Asian magazine. I trust, however, that the Yeti will not

disappear into the snows. A *maidani* magazine is fine, but the *pahad* should have the last word.
*Ramachandra Guha
Bangalore*

I would like to compliment you on the high standard of

content and the aesthetics of the *Nov/Dec 1995* issue. A rare quality of a broad and humane vision of the region comes through in the magazine and helps capture the unity as well as the diversity of this unique part of our planet. I wish you success in your endeavour to launch Himal as a South Asian magazine.

*Javed Jabbar
Karachi*

I have some serious reservations about Himal's shifting to a South Asia focus and wonder how you will differentiate yourself from other magazines of the region. We especially enjoy *Abominably Yours*, and, if she goes, we go. Keep her on!

*David Jones
Berkeley, California*

On the first point, there is no other regional magazine in South Asia. On the second, by popular demand, she stays on. Eds.



Sep/Oct 1995
**Fighting for
 Yuksum**

Ludwig Schaefer, who wrote the cover story on the Rathong Chu power project ("Sikkim Awakening" Sep/Oct 1995), provides an update on what has happened since. (See also mail section.)

ON 13 December 1995, the Sikkim High Court delivered its final judgement regarding the Rathong Chu Hydro Electric Project,

STOP PRESS: On 19 February, the Supreme Court granted the CCS a stay order on the Rathong Chu. The next hearing will be on 26 March.

which is opposed by the Concerned Citizens of Sikkim (CCS). The judgement was given in favour of the respondent, thus allowing the State Power Department to begin work in the sacred region of Yuksum.

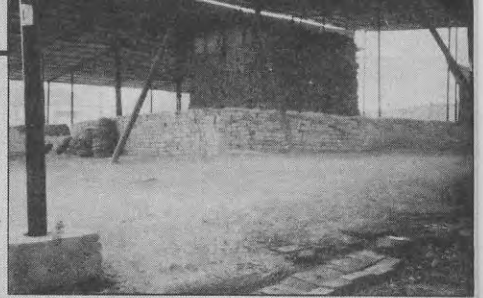
The verdict came as a surprise to many in Gangtok, since, during the proceedings, the Power Department's lawyer had not been able to counter the effective argumentation of Rajeev Dhavan, a well-known Delhi-based Supreme Court advocate. Even senior power officials were said to be surprised by the puzzling victory. More amazing was that Mr Dhavan's arguments seem not to have been considered in the final judgement, a decision that meted out shallow treatment to the issues at stake.

To top it off, attempts were made by some state functionaries to give the controversy a communal twist by turning Sikkimese of Nepali origin against the Bhutia-Lepcha.

The CCS appealed to the Supreme Court, hoping still to obtain protection of their religious and cultural rights as ensured by the Constitution. The Court held its first hearing on the case on 19 February.

The state government had named P.S. Ramakrishnan, Dean of the School of Environmental Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, to a one-man committee to look into the feasibility of the Rathong Chu Project. Not only did Mr Ramakrishnan find favour with CCS' arguments, he also recommended that the entire sacred Yuksum region be declared a "national heritage site".

The Government of Sikkim conveniently decided to dissolve the committee.



Nov/Dec 1995
**Spot of the
 Buddha's Birth**

THE LUMBINI Development Trust, the Japanese Buddhist Federation, and Nepal's Department of Archaeology together, had Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba call a press conference in Kathmandu on 3 February to announce their claim to have found the "exact location of the Buddha's birth." The discovery is based on an interpretation of an inscription on the pillar put up by Emperor Ashok nearby, which speaks of a stone marking the spot where the Buddha was born.

After chopping down a pipal tree that stood over the Mayadevi Temple, removing the nativity statue, demolishing the temple itself, and digging several metres underneath the sanctum sanctorium, the Japanese-Nepali archaeological team came upon a slab of rock. The fact that the rock (a conglomerate) is not native to the area, say the archaeologists, supports their theory. A scientific review of the evidence might not be a bad idea.

Nov/Dec 1995
**Why Hominid's
 Stood Up**

IN HIS article "The Porter's Burden", Kanak Mani Dixit reported on a theory that backloading by humans was part of hominid evolution, and that it probably promoted "upright bipedalism in people". *The New York Times*, suggests in a recent piece headlined "Did Sex Make Man Stand

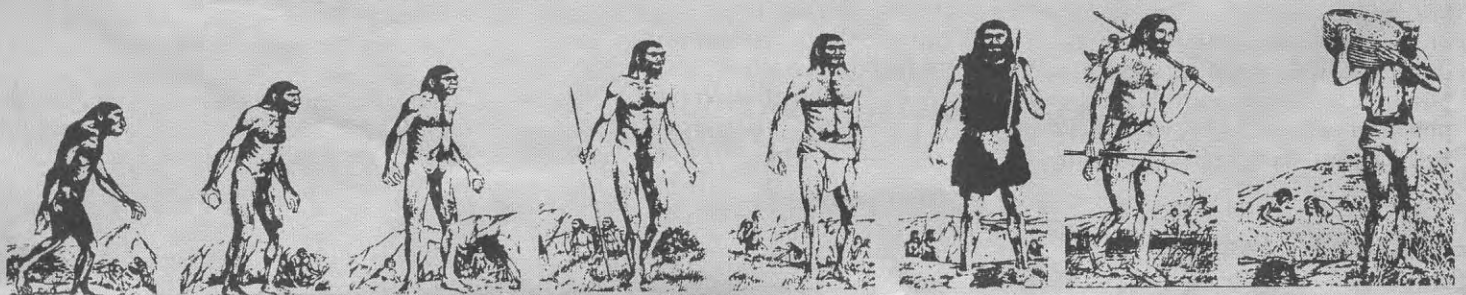
on Two Legs?" that the reason might lie elsewhere.

"Bipedalism is a fundamental human characteristic, yet virtually nothing is known about its origins," reports John Noble Wilford. He repeats the standard theory of upright locomotion: as grasslands took over (due to global cooling), evolving apes took to their feet from the rainforests where tree-dwelling primates lived and foraged.

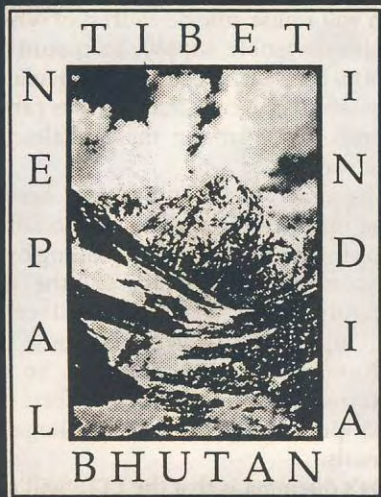
Such a theory, however, is too narrow to account for something as broad as bipedality, in the opinion of Dr C. Owen Lovejoy, an anatomist. Instead, he proposes

a behavioural explanation that has sweeping implications.

Dr. Lovejoy's hypothesis is that upright walking began in the relative safety of the forest floor, not on open terrain. Female hominids, restricted by the demands of infant care, would have spent time mostly at 'home'. "So there could have been an incentive for males to free their hands for carrying food from their wider-ranging foraging. They could have brought the food back and exchanged it for sex, which could be the forerunner of modern human mating practice."



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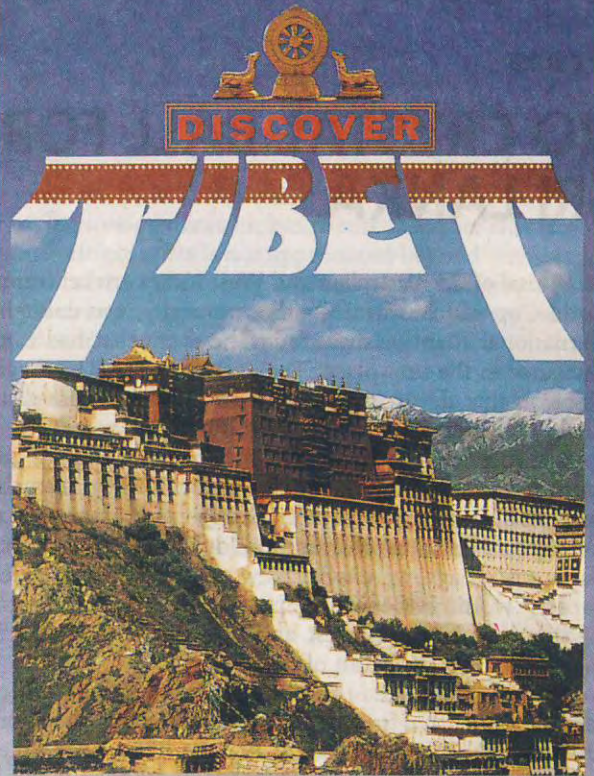
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Sri Lanka

NO CRYSTAL BALL FOR SRI LANKA

The refusal of the Australian and West Indies cricket teams to play World Cup matches in Colombo, ironically, was enough to shift international attention away from the event that had caused that reluctance in the first place. The event was the 31 January bomb explosion that devastated Colombo's plush business district and killed nearly a hundred people, injuring 1500 more.

The message that Vellupillai Prabhakaran and his Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sent was chillingly clear: the Tigers may have been driven from their lair in Jaffna, but they had not been de-fanged. Plastic explosives and dynamite hidden in a lorry carrying rice bags, were what blew up the city centre, destroying property worth billions of rupees. The imposing central bank building, one of the biggest and best in the city, and its 2300 employees, took the brunt of the blast.

What differentiated this blast from earlier ones, other than its magnitude, was that the middle and upper classes—senior Central Bank officials, business leaders and the like—were killed. Such people had been immune previously, at least from the physical effects of terror.

The lion flag of Lanka had been hoisted over Jaffna barely two months ago at the end of a bloody campaign, in which the death count was 2000 for the Tigers, and 500 for the military. Though ejected from their Jaffna stronghold, Prabhakaran has clearly signalled that the fanatically-motivated Tigers retain a frightening terrorist capability.

The Colombo attack was not necessarily terror for terror's sake. The tactic was to force the military to help secure vulnerable villages and thus, to provide more manoeuvrability to the Tigers. The Deputy Defence Minister and political boss of the armed forces Gen Anuruddha Ratwatte may also be forced to deploy more troops to secure Colombo, reducing the strength in the frontlines.

The Operation Riviresa (Sunshine), which drove the LTTE out of Jaffna, required troop deployments. This led the government to

lose ground to the Tigers in the previously largely-secured east. The strategy now is to retake the eastern province. It is highly probable that Prabhakaran will utilise suicide cadres, of which he seems to have an almost inexhaustible supply, to mount attacks on the southern and central parts of the country, particularly Colombo, to force troop reductions in the east. Such attacks can also provoke a backlash on Tamils living among the Sinhalese, a danger the government has always faced.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her ministers constantly exhort the majority community not to fall into that trap. Communal rioting in 1983, following the killing by the LTTE of 13 soldiers in Jaffna, cost the country dearly. But the risk of a backlash always remains. Any attack on Tamils will certainly alienate the international support the government now has in fighting a group which Kumaratunga says clings on "to their particular cult of savage terror" despite her best efforts to resolve the ethnic problem politically with a package of generous devolution proposals.

Kumaratunga's dilemma is that the LTTE will almost certainly not be willing to negotiate, unless the status quo is restored in Jaffna. Kumaratunga must also sell her political package to the Sinhalese, many of whom demand a fight to the finish. Prabhakaran too, is unlikely to meet the President's demand that a "substantial laying down of arms" must precede any talks. The reality is that no political package is worth anything without LTTE concurrence. The Tamils who favour the government's proposals cannot even go to the north. The biggest plus for Kumaratunga, in an otherwise gloomy scene, is the war weariness of the whole country. This is particularly true of the people of the north and east who have taken the brunt of the fighting.

Kumaratunga hopes that the LTTE can be isolated from those it claims to represent. However, it is unlikely that the Tigers, who have never stood an electoral test, will easily let go of their hold on the Tamils of the claimed homeland in the north and east. There is no doubt, on the other hand, that Ms Kumaratunga won immense popularity between January and April 1995, when what was officially called a "cessation of hostilities" was negotiated, and truce held for a hundred days.

The Tigers broke the truce unilaterally, partly because of their unhappiness with the popularity the President gained by stopping the fighting and beginning to supply the north with goods and amenities that the peninsula had long been deprived of. There were even instances when the public lit lamps under her picture during the period of truce.

But now Prabhakaran is trying to make a Jaffna out of Colombo. Ms Kumaratunga, who is very much a target of the LTTE, soldiers on, a virtual captive of her security corps—a prisoner in paradise. There is no crystal ball to indicate where Sri Lanka is headed.

Bhutan • India • Nepal

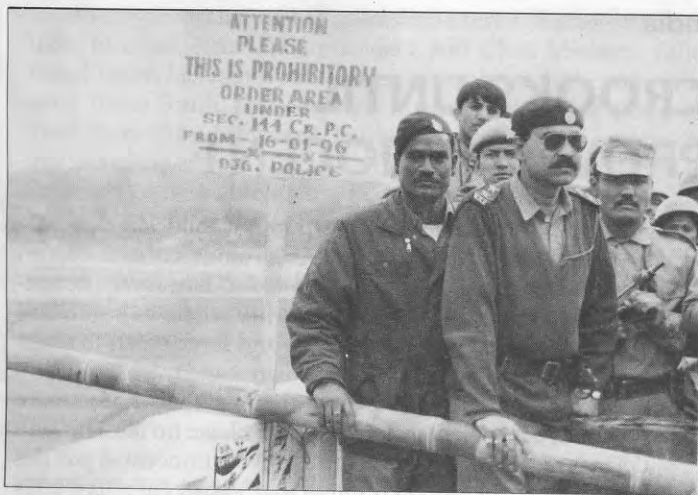
LHOTSHAMPA SHOW SOME INITIATIVE

The Lhotshampa refugees from Bhutan in the camps of southeast Nepal have finally raised some dust. Having tarried for over five years on UNHCR dole, waiting for desultory talks between Thimphu and Kathmandu to bear fruit, some refugees finally decided that they wanted to go back home.

JAYATHA DINESKERA



Colombo's devastated centre



USHA TIWARI

Section 144 at the Mechi border

As they crossed the Indo-Nepal frontier at the Mechi bridge in mid-January on their way to Phuntsoling, the Bhutanese border town more than a hundred km away, the government of India was, for the first time, forced to show its hand. It slapped a prohibitory order (Sec 144 Cr.P.C.) on the rallyists and arrested many, some of whom remained behind bars in Siliguri more than a month later.

New Delhi, which holds the cards on the crisis due to its influence over Thimphu, has steadfastly maintained that it desires no part in a bilateral issue between the two kingdoms. This translates as strong support for King Jigme Singye Wangchuk, whose government's determined agenda at the turn of the decade led to the outflow of the Lhotshampa, who are Nepali-speaking Bhutanese from the country's south. The arrest of the peace marchers was the first, and forced, act of the Indian government on the matter.

On the refugees' side, too, this was a first. Quarrelsome factions that call themselves political parties and human rights groups have mushroomed behind myopic personalities, and a common platform has till date proved impossible. Even while one group sits in *dharna* at the Indo-Nepal border, for example, another group organises a rival cycle rally in Siliguri. Accusations are flying.

Fortunately for the refugees, so is the dust. Having managed at last to get coverage in the Indian national dailies, the level of public awareness where it matters has risen above zero. On 30 January, West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu wrote to Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao urging him to try to resolve the problem.

Another significant development has been the support for the Lhotshampa from the Nepali-speaking populace of Darjeeling, Sikkim and the Duars, next-door to Bhutan. Partly a function of jockeying for position in the upcoming general elections in India, this should be worrisome to Thimphu strategists. At the same time, it threatens to add an unnecessary 'ethnic' Nepali colour to a matter which should be seen as a humanitarian issue.

As far as Kathmandu is concerned, in pure theory, this is not Nepal's problem: the Lhotshampa are Bhutanese who happen to speak Nepali. Nevertheless, 87,000 refugees are housed in Nepal, and in four years of bilateral talks, the smart and savvy Bhutanese diplomatic machinery has managed to waylay at every turn Kathmandu's blundering efforts at securing a Lhotshampa return.

Thimphu's strategy has been to stonewall the issue while trying to undercut UNHCR's support for the refugees. If support from the refugee agency were to dip, and the quality of life in the refugee camps were to drop below that of the surrounding Nepali countryside, people would leave the camps. The Lhotshampa would join

the South Asian diaspora of Nepali-speakers, and the demographic threat to the Bhutanese state, as the Thimphu autocrats see it, would be solved.

In the fifth year of the crisis, however, thinking persons in Thimphu without a direct role in the depopulation policy must be worried. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the affair, the crisis has continued for much too long and has soiled Bhutan's image as a Shangri La.

The masterful public relations of Dawa Tshering, the world's longest-serving foreign minister, has ensured thus far that the true extent of the refugee crisis is not appreciated beyond embassies in Kathmandu. International media attention on the refugees has been lacking, and foreign assistance to Bhutan from a few carefully cultivated donor nations has, if anything, risen.

Nevertheless, even Mr Tshering's peak efficiency has not succeeded in making the refugees disappear into the South Asian night. The longer the crisis festers, the worse it is for Bhutan's image and, ultimately, its internal political dynamics. Even an eventual return of the Lhotshampa will not be without its problems. The peasantry that was herded out a few years ago would come back with a taste of the outside world and of politics, and with a sense of having been wronged.

This is called painting yourself into a corner.

Nepal • India

A WATERSHED ON THE MAHAKALI

When Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and his Nepali counterpart, Prakash Chandra Lohani, put their signature on a treaty for the integrated development of the Mahakali river, which runs along Nepal's western border, it seemed that two unexpected advances had taken place, one relating to Nepal's domestic politics, and the other on resource sharing between two South Asians.

Firstly, there was the unbelievable unanimity among the major political parties in Nepal, those in the ruling coalition as well as the main communist opposition, that this was the right thing to do. It came as a welcome departure for a country where India-bashing on river projects has for decades been the feeding trough on which the political opposition has fattened, with the communists having been the best at it.

An agreement as far-reaching as this, dealing with the entire flow of the mighty Mahakali, was packaged and delivered within a few hours of negotiation. That the Left Opposition held a National Executive meeting the next day to "welcome" the accord rather than condemn it for populist mileage, must mean that political evolution since the dawn of democracy in 1990 has been much faster than one had been led to believe from the bellicosity of the national political scene just a few months before.

Secondly, with the Cauvery dispute still making the headlines from India's south, and Narmada and Tehri questioned by outraged activists, it seemed a wonder that Nepal and India could, like responsible adults, agree on the joint development of a river to the benefit of both. When it seemed that you could not utter the words "high dam" without having all sorts of insults and projectiles hurled at you nationally and internationally, here was an agreement signed and delivered to build the highest rock-filled dam in the Himalaya, and the third-highest on earth (see page 36).

Was a new era of infrastructure-building on behalf of South Asia's poor finally beginning? Were bilateral agreements on water possible, after all? Had the Indian Government found a formula to appease industrialising Uttar Pradesh's runaway thirst for electrical power? And had those uncompromising wild-eyed activists of Tehri finally been sidelined, simply by doing a deal with a neighbour?

In Nepal, the questions that should have been asked were swept away by media hype in which all partisan tabloids partook. Mahakali, said Nepal's water resources minister, was a "watershed" in Nepal's internal affairs and in its dealings with India.

The two sides are committed to complete the Detailed Project Report within six months after the treaty comes into effect, arrange financing within the subsequent year, and complete construction of the 315 m high dam, to supply energy (from an installed capacity of 6480 megawatts) to the grid of the two countries by 2003. The last Indo-Nepal cooperative venture in power generation was the Devighat project on the Trisuli, which produces only 14 megawatts.

What seems to have happened across the negotiating table at Shital Niwas, the seat of Kathmandu's Foreign Ministry, was that India managed to persuade Nepal to accept an "integrated" package that linked the minor Tanakpur project that lies downstream with the gigantic Pancheswar project upstream. The Nepali strategy had been to delink the two, in order to gain maximum advantage from the Pancheswar project. With India very keen to have the project, Nepal had been in a position to parlay it for diplomatic advantage elsewhere, which it has now lost.

What Mr Mukherjee did was to be seen to have magnanimously more than doubled Nepal's largesse from Tanakpur (which has been a major irritant in domestic Nepali politics since 1991), providing 70 million units of electricity and 300 cusecs of water. While doing so, however, he managed to rope in an agreement for the development of a project that is incomparably larger in comparison. In essence, Mr Mukherjee exploited a political lapse among Nepali parties which had made a nationalistic mountain out of a molehill of a project (Tanakpur), and made away with a much greater prize.

Nepal's intelligentsia and media, which might have questioned the deal, did not because they are not given to reading the fine print. The Left Opposition, incredibly (from its past performance), saw fit to keep shut. The main reason seems to have been that, during its period in government, the communist leaders realised that there could be no politics in Nepal without a minimum level of understanding with the powers-that-be in New Delhi. Given that the Indian government wanted the Pancheswar agreement so badly (to provide electricity for the industrialising Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh, and, perhaps, employment in the agitated hills of Uttarakhand), the Left of Nepal seems to have decided to fall in line with the coalition government of Prime Minister Deuba.

It will now be absorbing to see how the opponents of the Tehri project in Uttarakhand countenance this new project. The Pancheswar dam site is on the Kumaon-Darchula frontier, 200 km from the site of the Tehri dam on the Bhagirathi, which will be a 260-m high rock-fill dam producing 2000 megawatts.

Nepal has never gone in for high dams before, and the World Bank-proposed Arun-3 project, which was shot down by activists on economic grounds, was a run-of-river scheme that had no significant high dam or reservoir. Pancheswar will have both, and large. △

India

CROOKS UNTIL PROVED INNOCENT

It has become fashionable in some puppy (politically upwardly mobile) circles in India to idolise East Asian models of authoritarian capitalism and yearn for discipline and order. But, surely, democracy has to be alive and kicking in a country where its institutions throw the top political elite behind bars and force others to resign in a scandal that is gigantic even by Indian standards?

It is not as if the Indian people thought their leaders were squeaky clean, benevolent visionaries. They have no illusions, and a politician is regarded as a crook until proved innocent. A poll this month by an Indian newsweekly found that 45 percent of its readers believed "all" politicians are crooks. Another 51 percent thought "a significant number" cannot be trusted.

The fact that political heavyweights from across the political spectrum stand accused in what has come to be known as "HawalaGate" has led to speculation that all will somehow wriggle out of the law's grasp. But India's functioning anarchy has ensured that the judicial machinery—however rusty and slow—is creaking into action and justice is on its way to the once mighty of the land.

This too-hot-to-handle scandal would in most likelihood have been brushed under the *charpoy* like previous scams had it not been for a couple of crusading journalists who filed a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, which in turn decided to breathe down the neck of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

All three Congress ministers tainted in the scam have resigned. For a time it looked like the scandal had delivered a fatal blow to the chances of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) winning the April elections. Its leader, Lal Krishna Advani, promptly relinquished his seat in Parliament and vowed not to contest elections until his name is cleared. While Advani's future may be uncertain, his action was seen as quick damage control on behalf of the party.

However, going by the "smoking gun" theory of motive, it was Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao who benefited the most by deciding to let the CBI loose on the nation's politicians. In one stroke, he stood to decapitate the BJP, neutralise troublesome colleagues within the Congress party, and come out of the dungheap smelling like a rose.

Good thinking, but the stink is now enveloping Rao as well together with his supposedly spiritual and temporal guru: the controversial Chandraswami, whom the Indian media loves to call a "godman".

Now, as India's power elite shakily contemplates its fate, an intense debate has begun on the role of money in electioneering. It was slush funds from big business to politicians at election time that spawned the hawala scam in the first place. An average election in India used to see an estimated INR 670 million dangled as bait before politicians. In post-liberalisation India, the figure is bound to be much higher. However, the fear of diary-writing gift-givers and the humiliation of public exposure may curb the temptation temporarily, at least till the upcoming elections.

Accountability is fast becoming the name of the game not only for those named in the Jain Dairy but also to those powerful satraps who once lorded over their fiefdoms with little fear of all the shady stuff catching up with them.

Already, HawalaGate has unleashed a series of scam-lets across India. In Bihar, Janata Dal president and Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has found some dirt sticking to his hitherto spotless kurta. Down South, the seemingly invincible "Walking Goddess", Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha, finds herself under scrutiny for hosting extravaganzas like her foster son's wedding. And the Supreme Court has blown the lid off another huge housing scam involving hefty amounts than the Hawala loot.

In Hindu mythology, it was the churning of the ocean that squeezed out the ambrosia. There is still a chance that the present corruption upheaval will make Indian elections slightly cleaner.

Bangladesh

FOR WHOM THE POLLS TOLL

The 15 February elections in Bangladesh left a government loudly proclaiming victory, and almost no quarter giving it the benefit of the doubt. Voting day itself was marked with polling in hundreds of centres postponed, repolling ordered in many more, and an election-related death toll of 12. Amidst all this, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury said that the Government had achieved success in the sixth National Assembly elections and that the new cabinet would once again be under Begum Khaleda Zia.

The leader of the opposition, Sheikh Hasina Wajed of the Awami League, maintained that the country was government-less, and that the BNP's claim to power was illegitimate. She said the Chief Justice should be asked to form a neutral caretaker government to hold another round of elections. Sheikh Hasina called for "resistance" from the public and declared the Awami League's agitation would end only with the announcement of a new date for national elections.

The opposition did succeed in its plan to turn election day into a "dead day" marked by a "people's curfew". Even though the results might be called a "landslide" for the percentage in the BNP's favour, the minimally attended election gave no indication whatsoever of the party's standing with the people. In the face of the poor turnout, the BNP's stance was that the numbers did not matter as much as the legality of the election, which was a constitutional obligation.

More than legality, it is the moral aspects and popular image which will decide the shape of things to come. The Election Commission under Justice Sadeque is not really known for independence and assertiveness, but it did withhold results in 35 seats and order investigations in centres where turnout was suspiciously heavy.

Independent election observers as well as the national and international press reported largescale rigging. The Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), an outfit enjoying considerable funding support from Western development agencies, categorically stated that the election was "neither free nor fair".

For more than two years, Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina have been staring each other in the eye and waiting for the other to blink. Both ladies have shown an identical stubbornness while the country goes slowly under. Neither is willing to back down from her loudly held position, even though there would be considerable support from ordinary people for normalcy to return.

It is rumoured that Begum Zia will table a bill to amend the Constitution to provide for a neutral caretaker government, which would then organise an election of the kind the opposition wanted the last time around. But, it is said, the Awami League is not enthusiastic about such a prospect because Begum Zia would get all the credit. In other words, the swords are still being sharpened.

With the political leadership in the country bent on dragging the country down, anxieties about the future are heightened. One way or the other, it was hoped, the elections would be a watershed, but it was nothing of the sort. There is mounting resentment that while ordinary people have to live through hard times, politicians on either side of the barricade are unaffected.

The country has squandered its hard-won macro-economic success—near-zero inflation, soaring investments and a huge foreign exchange reserve. Inflation is now climbing past the 8 percent mark. Banks resort to credit curbs in order to stem inflation, and the country's performance is being criticised by the all-important "donors", including the World Bank. Begum Zia likes to put all the blame on the Awami League-led opposition, but the embassies may yet ask what she has done to bring



'V' for what?

them into the political arena.

As the politicians continue to fiddle, Bangladesh is hurting. The cities are swelling with the rural hungry and the weather plays havoc with the harvest. Remittances from workers abroad has dipped, and the garment industry, the mainstay of the country's exports, is weakened as worried overseas buyers seek other suppliers. Businessmen are weary as shutdowns bring the country to a standstill.

And ordinary Bangladeshis are held hostage by the clash of titanic egos.

Pakistan

HOW TO LOSE FRIENDS AND MAKE ENEMIES

Few can match the skills of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party when it comes to creating intimidating opponents and rivals out of whatever is available.

In the 1980s, this tendency helped Mian Nawaz Sharif, former prime minister and present opposition leader, in his ascent from being a local Lahore figure with few credentials other than a dislike for the Bhuttos, to the national political scene. Sharif remained a major target of the PPP workers throughout the latter half of the decade. The democratic period after the death of military dictator Gen Zia-ul-Haq has seen no let-up in this campaign by the Bhutto faithful, although now they have met their match in workers of Sharif's own Pakistan Muslim League (PML).

Politics in the country remains divided along pro-PPP and anti-PPP lines, and failure to enter the PPP is no cause of grief for political aspirants. All they have to do is oppose it, and the stronger



the opposition, the brighter his or her chances to go higher.

When Nawaz Sharif qualified for a seat in both the National Assembly and the Punjab Assembly from Lahore in the non-party elections of 1985, his success was largely due to the big push he received from voters who had traditionally backed the right wing Jamaat-e-Islami (JI).

But by the time JI and PML decided to contest 1993 elections separately, Jamaat had lost a number of its voters to Sharif in the constituency, as indeed elsewhere in the country. The reason was simple enough. These erstwhile JI supporters had learnt that the victory of a candidate, however close to them ideologically, was beyond their numerical strength, and it served their main interest in ensuring that PPP nominees were not returned to the assemblies by voting PML. Voters shifted allegiance but continued to be cast against the PPP.

The irony is that Benazir Bhutto, who has always been considered the more progressive of the two claimants to power (she still continues to enjoy that distinction, for some mysterious reason), was then forced to seek alliances with right-wing political parties. She succeeded in winning favour of some religious parties such as the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam of Maulana Fazlur Rehman. But, it is said, only after granting them certain privileges contrary to her liberal image. In those instances, the PPP achieved its objectives, but once again its supporters found it difficult to defend its actions.

The list of compromises is long and this has made it increasingly tougher for the liberal-minded in Pakistan to continue to support Bhutto. Indeed, many have crossed over to Sharif's side in the last couple of years, and many more are likely to be tempted.



Meanwhile, rather than check this dangerous erosion of support, the PPP is working on something that could ultimately lead to Bhutto facing another political rival.

This time, the PPP's ire is being channelled against Bhutto's fellow Oxonian, cricket great Imran Khan, and the campaign has been made easier by the fact that the party is in power. Advertisements about the cancer hospital built by Khan in memory of his mother have been (unofficially) banned on state-run Pakistan Television. Second-rung PPP leaders are already referring to Khan in the same tone as they have been using for Sharif.

Even Khan's achievements as arguably the greatest cricketer the country has produced have been ignored in programmes telecast in the run-up to and during the current World Cup. The emphasis has clearly been on rail-roading Khan out of the green, rather than neutralising his influence.

The policy has earned the PPP many more fresh opponents, and some in the Pakistani press now see Khan as a strong candidate for future prime ministership. Khan's apparent reluctance to enter politics, meanwhile, has shown signs of dissipating lately. Recently, he went so far as to say that he would join politics immediately if he could find a team of committed people.

If things follow their normal course, purely in the context of Pakistani politics, Benazir Bhutto may soon find herself pitted against a rival who perhaps ranks with Nawaz Sharif in political acumen, but is far more charismatic. What is more, Khan might find equally wily mentors from among his assortment of friends as was available to Sharif and General Zia-ul Haq. △

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The Subcontinent of Sub-Saharan Asia

*South Asia is just not prepared to enter the 21st century.
It does not invest enough in its people.*

by Mahbub ul Haq

The rest of the world is heading towards peace and prosperity, but India and Pakistan would not know it. Despite the crushing poverty of their respective populations, the two countries are spending \$20 billion a year on defence, twice as much as Saudi Arabia, a country 25 times wealthier. Both countries have six times more soldiers than doctors. Pakistan recently bought two French submarines at a cost of \$1.2 billion, and India deploys missiles while millions live on pavements.

How tragically comic that after bleeding their economies to fund defence expenditures, the two governments beg and submit to all sorts of conditionalities from international lending institutions. The economic costs of the continuing confrontation between Islamabad and New Delhi are prohibitive, but policy-makers in the respective capitals seem unable to recognise what is obvious to everyone else, that human security is the most important element of national security.

Some say that there is a need for balance of terror in South Asia. But where should that balance be set? If people are sleeping on pavements, ministers have no business shopping for modern jets and howitzers. While children suffocate in windowless classrooms, generals go about in air-conditioned jeeps. Nations might accumulate all the weaponry they want, but they have no strength when their people starve.

The World Bank, in a report on "the wealth of nations" which studied 190 countries, points out that 16 percent of the wealth worldwide comes from physical capital (buildings, roads, machineries), and 20 percent from natural capital (minerals, forests and other resources). Fully 64 percent of the wealth of nations is human capital. Yet, as we collect hardware and exploit our natural resources in South Asia, we do not bother about people. We all want to be South Korea, but that country invests \$130 per person every year in basic education. Malaysia spends \$128. India invests nine dollars, Pakistan three, and Bangladesh two.

With India and Pakistan leading the way, South Asia trails behind while the rest of the developing world surges ahead. Even Sub-Saharan Africa's basket case is doing better than South Asia in some sectors. Their average adult literacy rate is 55 percent, compared to South Asia's cumulative 47 percent. Also, 800 million South Asians do without elementary sanitation, fully 380 million are illiterate, and 300 million drink from ponds rather than taps. The scale of social deprivation and human despair is tremendous.

Global military expenditures, which were at one thousand billion dollars in 1987, are down to \$750 billion dollars today, a reduction of \$4 billion each year. Only two regions increased their expenditures, the two poorest in the world: again Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Every other region, including the Middle East and Latin America, reduced spending. These facts are not known, and have to be highlighted so that policymakers are embarrassed into action.

South Asia is just not prepared to enter the 21st century. It does not invest enough in its people.

Goddess of Growth

India hopes to be a regional superpower, but cannot become one with the scale of sheer poverty that exists. Indian policy-makers must mull over the Chinese growth rate of 12 percent, and see how China is investing in its people. The lesson of Cold War rivalry is not that capitalism triumphed over communism, but that political power not backed by economic strength is unsustainable. The Soviet Union collapsed because it could not feed its people; all its tanks, submarines and secret service meant nothing. Today, India has the largest number of poor people in the world. If it can manage to deliver social justice while it maintains or expands its defence expenditure, then India is welcome to become the regional superpower. But it cannot, and thus, should choose between bread and guns.

Fifteen years ago, in 1980,



the ratio of military to social spending was highest in Iraq (eight times), Somalia (five times) and Nicaragua (3.5 times). Yet, none could effectively defend its national security when the challenge came. On the other hand, Costa Rica abolished its army in 1948, and now spends one-third of its national income on education, nutrition and health. Today, it is the only prosperous democracy in a troubled Central America.

However, economic growth alone is not enough, there has to be distributive justice. Three decades ago, Pakistan had one of the highest rates of growth in the developing world, 7 percent a year. So, why were people protesting out on the streets? The reason was that economic growth had not touched their lives—income distribution was skewed against the poor. In West Pakistan, where most of the growth occurred, it was in the hands of landlords and industrialists—all of 22 families dominated the economy. The lesson was clear: you have to stop worshipping the goddess of growth, put people at the centre, enrich their lives, and provide them with options.

Amidst all the gloom, South Asia itself provides examples of the dynamism that can be released when human lives are made the focus. In Bangalore, once they started training people in computers, the industry took off and India is now the second largest exporter of software in the world. It presently sells a billion dollars' worth, and may top five billion by 2000. Before 1971, what was then East Pakistan did not have significant industry. Bangladeshi businessmen went into ready-made garments, put their skills into it, and today the country has out-competed India and Pakistan, and is exporting two billion dollars worth of garments to North America and Europe.

Towards Civilian Rule

India and Pakistan must take the lead and turn South Asia away from the abyss. The SAARC organisation, which has remained an exercise in protocol without substance, must be energised. Each member of SAARC must agree under a multilateral agreement to cut five percent of military spending annually, and to earmark the money released for education and health.

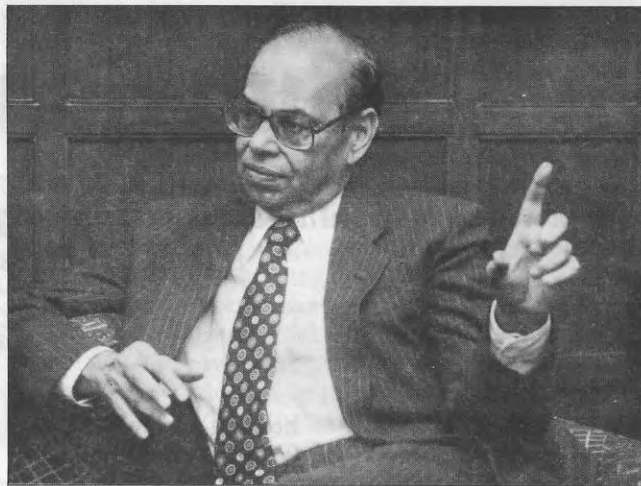
Why spend a million dollars a day to contest the frozen heights of Siachen? Why not withdraw the troops a few miles down the ridgeline, continue to argue across a table, and save some money? Both India and Pakistan must also come to an understanding on the nuclear issue, rather than keep embarrassing each other in front of others at United Nations forums, so that an enormous packet of funds can become available for social needs.

The existing political structures of India and Pakistan are not conditioned to accept proposals such as these, for they require too much rationality and statesmanship. For this reason, the *people* should take the lead, through energetic advocacy and use of the increasingly powerful and borderless media. It is time for civil society to conduct, what I call, a "bypass operation" around reluctant politicians, who are never willing to stake their lives and reputations for social justice.

Of course, there are tremendous vested interests in the power structures of the two countries, among policy-makers and military generals. That is a given. People are hesitant to challenge defence expenditures because it is camouflaged under the shroud of national security. There is little understanding of the social opportunity costs of buying more and more sophisticated armaments. But why should we assume that these things are immutable?

Everywhere outside our Subcontinent, people are leading change, which comes about much faster today because ideas cross borders much more easily. However, someone must generate those

Return of the Native



As an economist, Mahbub ul Haq started his career with the National Planning Commission of Pakistan, where he served from 1957 to 1970. He then joined the World Bank, and returned in 1982 to serve as Finance Minister under President Zia-ul Haq for eight years, "probably too long", as he told *Himal South Asia*.

Since 1990, Mr Haq has worked with a team of experts to produce the annual UNDP *Human Development Report*, with its emphasis on improving the quality of human lives rather than merely upping economic growth rates. "After years doing the UNDP report, I decided that the real challenge is in this part of the world, in South Asia, with its social deprivation and human despair," says Mr Haq.

And so, he moved to Islamabad and established the Centre for Human Development in Islamabad, from where he plans to produce annual human development reports specifically for South Asia. The documents, says Mr Haq, will be candid and hard hitting, and governments will be forced to pay attention. "I shall present the reports to the SAARC summits, go to the leaders of all seven countries, and try to convince them that they should invest a little less in arms and more on people."

Simultaneously, Mr Haq also hopes to organise meetings of opinion makers from all over the Subcontinent. "You've got to lift the intellectual curtains which separate these nations." The UNDP's Reports have had significant impact on governmental policies around the world, according to Mr Haq. "Whether it is possible to be as successful in South Asia, we will find out."

ideas. A movement of civil society is not possible without information, which must be generated by researchers and scholars and disseminated by journalists and activists. Change of the kind that is required can never be brought about by governments, political parties or armies, because they all have vested interests. Only the people of South Asia have the potential to change the complexion of South Asia.

The swamp of human despair can become a frontier of human hope once we begin to invest in education, training, and the spirit of the people.



TERRE DES HOMMES

An international children's foundation registered in Switzerland is seeking a number of
DELEGATES

to manage programmes in several locations overseas.

Terre des hommes supports programmes providing a range of services to poor and children in difficult circumstances around the world. A number of posts for country representatives will become vacant during the first half of 1996, notably in Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Romania), in Afghanistan and South Asia and in West Asia (Lebanon).

The Terre des hommes Delegate represents the organisation and heads the senior management team providing support and leadership to the various country programmes. It is Terre des hommes' policy to 'localise' these programmes through the development of local NGOs.

Broad based management experience gained overseas is required along with a good knowledge of child care issues. Good French and a knowledge of other languages useful.

Terms and conditions of service and salary levels will depend on personal circumstances. Applications and full C.V. with passport size photo to:

Suzanne von Allmen, Personnel Department, Case postale 912, CH 1000 Lausanne 9, Switzerland.



ICIMOD Announcement of Vacant Positions

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) was established in 1983 to promote an environmentally sound mountain ecosystem and to improve the living standards of the mountain populations of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas (HKH). This autonomous Centre focuses on the specific, complex, and practical problems of the HKH, covering all or parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The Centre, with an annual budget of \$ 4 million, is answerable to an international Board of Governors. The centre has a staff of about 100, of which 25 are internationally recruited professionals. Its headquarters is in Kathmandu, Nepal. During the first half of 1996 the Centre intends to fill in the following three positions.

Vac.96/1 - Farm Economist, Mountain Farming Systems Division

Vac.96/2 - Landuse Planner/Soil Scientist, Mountain Natural Resources Division

Vac.96/3 - Social Scientist, Mountain Enterprises and Infrastructure Division

The common requirements for all of the posts are :

- Post Graduate degree in the related field from an internationally recognised university.
- Good writing, presentation and communication skills in English including knowledge of word processing.
- Proven capabilities through publications and experience to take up the respective responsibilities.
- Willingness to travel frequently in the region and work harmoniously with persons of different nations and cultures.
- At least 10 years' experience in related field of which a major part should have been obtained in the HKH Region.

ICIMOD is making a major effort in having an acceptable gender balance among its professional staff and FEMALE CANDIDATES ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED TO APPLY.

Remuneration : Salaries and benefits are based on a modified UN system.

Duration : Three years, of which one year is probational, and subject to continuation of present funding levels of ICIMOD.

Starting date : 1st June 1996

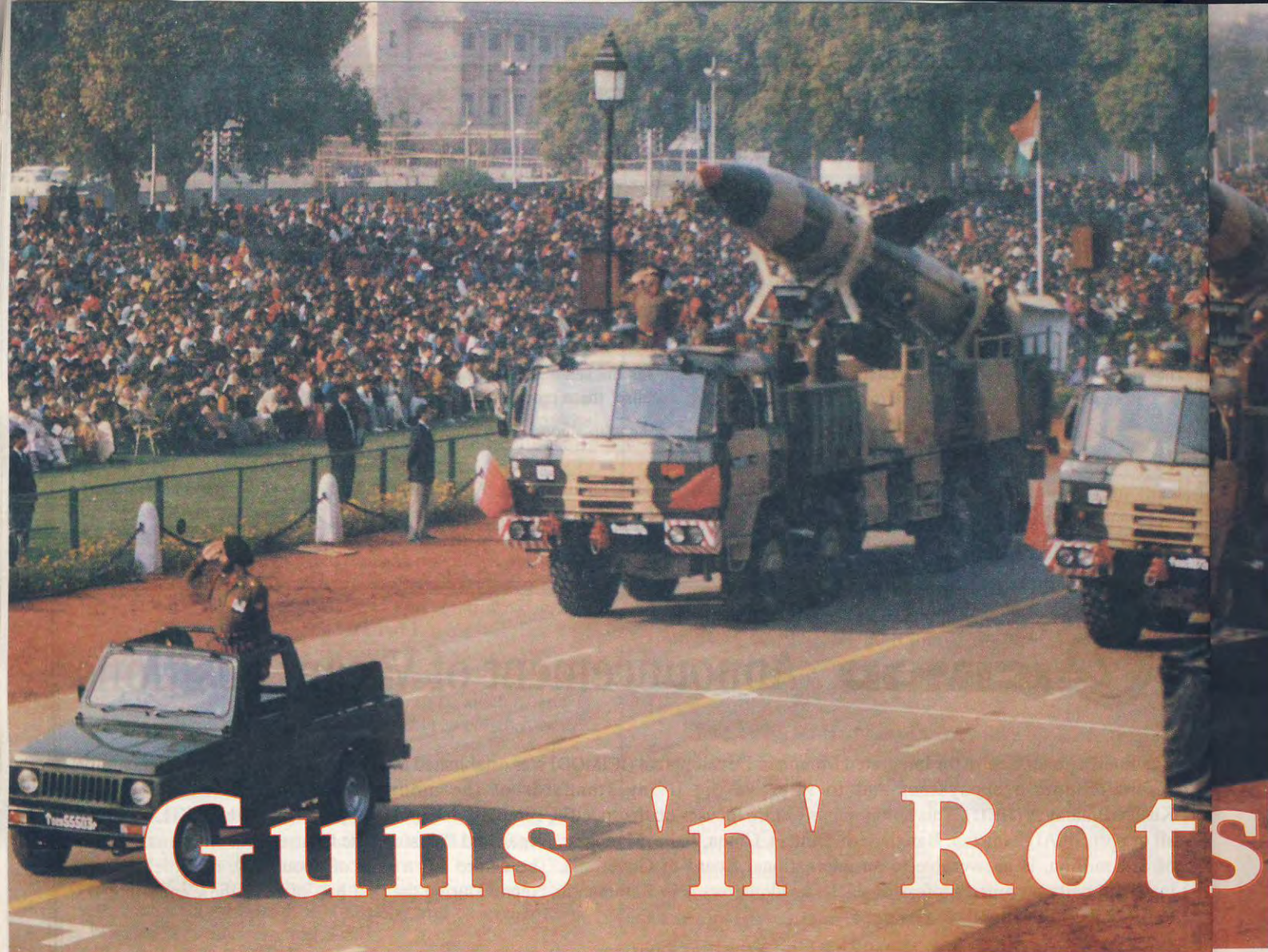
Age : Not exceeding 50 years.

Applications : Applications should be made in response to the detailed Terms of Reference for each position of which copies will be provided on request, quoting the vacancy number. Applications with names of three referees should be received before 10th April 1996 and addressed to :

M.R. Tuladhar, Head, Administration and Finance

ICIMOD, G.P.O. Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal

Fax: (977-1) 524509/524317



Guns 'n' Rots

Prithvi missiles in New Delhi, 26 January 1996

India is not really over-spending on arms, say New Delhi analysts. Besides, the neighbours are belligerent.

by Mitu Varma

The obscure district of Purulia in the rural backwaters of West Bengal had its day in the sun as 1995 drew to a close. A creaky Antonov-26 cargo aircraft with a motley crew from the former Soviet Republics flew in over Bihar and dropped a weighty cache of guns and grenades over fields and shrubland, surprising a sleepy village and sending the Indian civil and military establishment into a tizzy over the effortless invasion of national air space.

The incident was readymade for pontification by think tank pundits, and in an ominously worded piece in the *Asian Age* daily, former Director of the Intelligence Bureau M.K. Narayan warned of "what is possibly a well-planned and internationally-directed transfer of arms to pockets of turbulence in Asia and Africa from countries with surplus weaponry..."

That might or might not be the case, but just about a month later, all hell broke loose on the India-Pakistan border after a

rocket landed in a mosque in the Pakistani border village of Kahuta, killing 22 civilians. Islamabad said the Indians had fired the rocket, while New Delhi disowned responsibility and suggested that it was misfired by the Pakistani side while attempting to disrupt the Republic Day celebrations across the frontier.

A day later, even as the guns boomed on both sides, came the news that US President Bill Clinton had given assent to a bill allowing a one-time waiver on the Pressler



SARASWATI CHAKRABORTY

say gives enough cause to warrant increased expenditure on India's military machine.

"Make no mistake, the threats to India are very severe," says Maj Gen Dipankar Bannerjee, Deputy Director of New Delhi's prestigious Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA). "Though a major war with China or Pakistan does not seem likely, there is the intensive proxy war launched by Pakistan in Kashmir, and the Northeast is disturbed by ethnic insurgency. And there are other groups active in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere."

Defence analyst C. Rajamohan, too, does not buy the suggestion that the country's military bill is too large. He says: "India's defence expenditure is at below three percent of the GDP. It is one of the lowest in the developing world, and not enough to keep the Indian military at its current level of preparedness."

Mr Rajamohan asserts that India needs to raise its defence spending to at least 3.5 percent of its GDP if it is to replace obsolete equipment, modernise, and develop indigenous capability—especially because the former Soviet Union as India's chief arms supplier was unable to keep its commitments. He adds: "Though relations with China have improved, those with Pakistan have worsened. And now the waiver of the Pressler Amendment has revived the US-Pakistan strategic and arms relationship."

Mr Rajamohan and other defence experts point to several factors which have increased India's defence vulnerability. The recently sanctioned US arms sale to Pakistan will make India's commercial shipping and long coastline vulnerable to Pakistani strikes. Islamabad's recently-purchased 40 Mirage 2000E aircraft have the ability to jam guidance systems of India's Soviet-supplied surface-to-air missiles.

Besides, there's China. In a recent report, the Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence stated, "Despite warming relations with China, China is and is likely to remain the primary security challenge to India in the medium and long terms... India has no option but to continue to develop and upgrade its missile capability..."

And that, indeed, is what the Indian defence establishment is doing.

Missile Mania

Ignoring loud protests from Washington DC and Islamabad, on 27 January, India went ahead and test-fired the long-range version of Prithvi, its indigenously developed surface-to-surface missile. The new delivery system, which is capable of carrying nuclear warheads, belongs to a family of

five missiles produced by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The other four are the Agni, Trishul, Akash and Nag, of which the 200-km range Agni is also capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

Increasingly strident articles in the national dailies have been urging the government to exercise its nuclear option and conduct an atomic test before the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty is ratified. In a report from London, Pravin Sawhney, a visiting fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence, wrote, "The big challenge for the new government in India in 1996 is not whether it has a nuclear bomb which will work or which may work, but to justify tax-payer's money if the intention is not to produce Agni with a cost-effective and sensible nuclear warhead."

The Trishul and Akash missiles can protect the Indian Army's tanks and armoured columns from Mirage attacks. The former has an effective radius of 9 kilometres. The DRDO is also developing a naval version to counter the AM-39 missiles carried by Pakistan's Agosta submarines, which can destroy both ships and strategic shore installations. The Akash missiles can ward off American-built PC-3 Orion naval surveillance planes that form part of the Pakistani air power.

The development of indigenously built missiles is part of India's effort to attain self-reliance in defence and to stave off threat of sanctions from Western supplier nations only too keen to control the spread of missile and nuclear technologies. India's Ministry of Defence has a ten-year plan by the end of which, i.e. 2005, it hopes to retain 70 percent of its over \$3 billion annual arms shopping budget for local purchases.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao unveiled Arjun, the 58.5 tonne, \$300 million main battle tank (MBT) meant to replace Russian-built T-72s. The Arjun, which is rated among the top three



Akash test

Amendment, to enable the supply of \$368 million worth of arms to the Pakistan military. The Pressler Amendment bans the sale of weaponry to countries with nuclear weapons programmes, and the waiver came on the heels of a CIA report that Beijing had violated US anti-proliferation laws by exporting nuclear weapons technology to Islamabad (in addition to an earlier sale of M-11 missiles).

Justifiably Anxious

When asked to respond to the South Asian doves who clamour for the peace dividend, hawks in the Indian defence establishment are only too glad to point to these recent incidents—arms drops, cross-border shootouts, a superpower looking the other way while Pakistan goes nuclear. They cite these instances as proof of the deteriorating regional security environment, which they

MBTs in the world, will go into production by 1997. A little before unveiling Arjun, Prime Minister Rao had tried out the cockpit of a 21 million-dollar prototype of a light combat aircraft (LCA) scheduled to be deployed by 2002 to replace ageing Soviet MiG-21s.

Guns 'n' Rotis

Says Rahul Bedi, the New Delhi Correspondent for *Jane's Defence Weekly*: "India needs to replace at least a third of its naval equipment, one half of its army supplies, and fully two-thirds of its air force hardware, if it is to maintain an optimum level of defence preparedness."

This will not be possible within the 1995-96 national budget, however, which allocated only \$7.3 billion for defence, marking an increase of \$704 million over the previous year. Against an inflation index of 11.3 percent, defence spending is actually down in real terms.

This miserly treatment of the military will not allow India to go in for arms acquisition of any major consequence, and even medium scale modernisation will require more budgetary allocation. But if the cash-squeeze continues, India will find it difficult even to supply the urgent requirements of the military, such as advance trainers for the air force, ships, submarines and aircraft carriers for the navy, and self-propelled guns for the army.

There are some scholars, however, who believe that the defence establishment is merely raising the bogey of war in order to divert scarce resources from development to defence. Delhi University economist Dilip

CAPT K.K. AWASTHI, MINISTRY OF DEFENCE



The Arjun main battle tank

Swamy: "We have had no war since 1972, and yet our defence expenditure has steadily increased. It may at times have gone down as a percentage of GNP, but in actual terms it hasn't."

Adds Mr Swamy, "The budget amount may seem relatively small, but the actual amount of military spending is bound to be larger." He is not optimistic about the peace dividend either. The reins of the Indian economy are in the hands of the elite, which is not development-oriented and is easily swayed by the demands of the defence establishment, he adds.

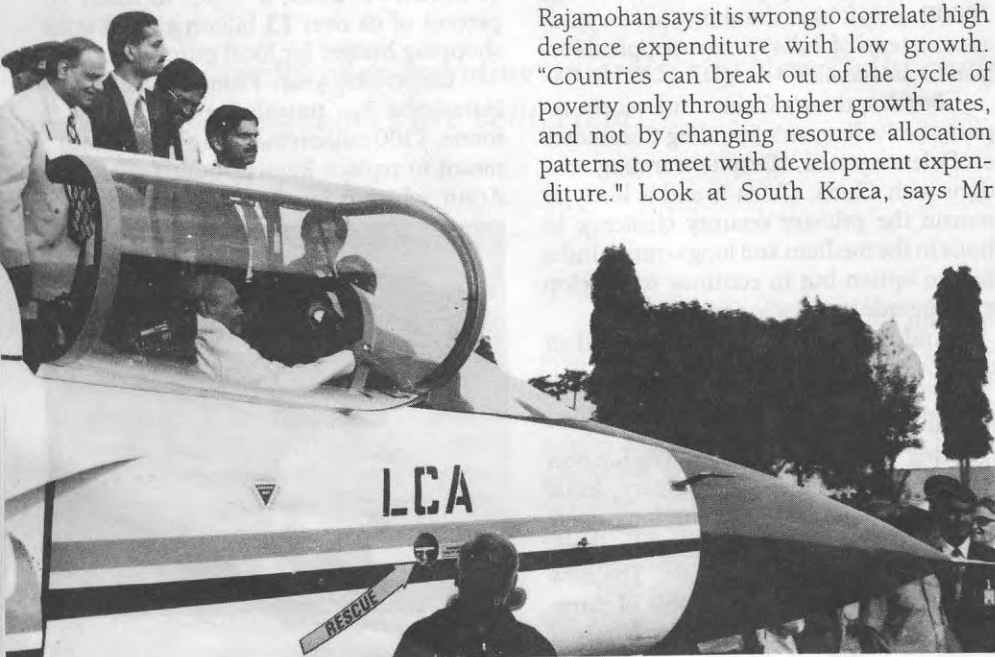
On the other side of the fence, Mr Rajamohan says it is wrong to correlate high defence expenditure with low growth. "Countries can break out of the cycle of poverty only through higher growth rates, and not by changing resource allocation patterns to meet with development expenditure." Look at South Korea, says Mr

Rajamohan, which has both impressive growth rates and a high defence expenditure. "Even in the Gulf, there have been remarkable improvements in human development indicators despite high defence spending."

"India has to take necessary steps to safeguard its national interests," says Maj Gen Bannerjee. "Instead of eyeing the defence budget, the government should cut the massive public subsidies, which are a complete waste and which amount to 40 percent of the spending in the military."

Outspoken former Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit, too, pooh poohs the suggestion of diverting money from defence to development. That might be feasible elsewhere, but will not work in South Asia for at least another decade. "The atmosphere of trust and political compromise which has to develop for such an idea to work just is not there at present," Mr Dixit says.

But what of those, like Mahbub ul Haq, who propose a campaign to bring India and Pakistan to their senses, and to reduce their military spending? Mr Dixit replies: "In the profession in which I have been, I look at realities as they exist. I cannot afford to be a dreamer." △



Prime Minister Rao in LCA cockpit

The Small Blue and Green Army

by Deepak Thapa



GOPAL CHITRAKAR

Royal Nepalese Army deployed against people's movement of 1990

Nepal has not fought a war since 1856. Of course, as Gurkhas (Gorkhas), hill people from Nepal have fought and died in other peoples' wars. But, it has been a long time since they have been asked to march out for Nepal.

The Royal Nepalese Army, as it is formally known, was the outcome of Prithvi Narayan Shah's sallying forth from his hill-top palace in Gorkha to conquer and unify what is present-day Nepal. It is this association with the creation of the nation that officers in the Nepali army are proud of, and one that is often forwarded in support of its continued maintenance.

For there are those in Nepal who feel the army may have outlived its purpose. They point to the futility of keeping an army to counter the Indian or Chinese juggernauts, and argue that a country that likes to flaunt its status as a "peace zone"

cannot have it both ways. An expensive standing army, said an unusually candid economic column in *The Kathmandu Post* daily, is like a "white elephant wearing an olive-green outfit".

Sensitive to this criticism, the army top brass maintain that their role is somewhat larger than protecting the hill and tarai from aggression, for which the army is "prepared enough". They point to the contributions of the army during peacetime.

The list is impressive. As the official guardians of Nepal's national parks since 1975, the men in green have served an environment defence role, and their rapid mobilisation during floods, landslides and earthquakes that regularly strike the Himalayan kingdom makes the Royal Nepalese Army a kind of a stand-by rescue force.

Lately, the army has also been building roads. And, since 1958, the army, donning

the blue helmet of UN peacekeeping, has brought considerable foreign exchange to soldiers' pockets and the national exchequer.

Defence officials say the army is also necessary for internal security, and recall the 1970s when the army was asked to put down the CIA-funded Nepal-based Khampa rebels who were making things difficult for the Chinese in Tibet. Given the ethnic, regional and ideological aspirations simmering just below Nepal's seemingly calm political surface, a strong deterrent is essential in the form of an army, they say.

Actually, it is not the army's mission, but its size and the cost of maintaining it what critics object to. Even the number of soldiers is secret. "That would be telling," was the coy answer of the spokesman for the Defence Ministry, but it is generally believed that the military is 50,000 strong.

The army does not lend itself to easy scrutiny. In fact, probing of any kind is discouraged, fuelling speculation that there is much that the army has to hide. It seemed that the era of hush-hush might end when a corruption scandal extending to the top brass broke a year ago. That did not happen.

Sources say that the spending on the army (Nepal has neither an air force nor a navy) is much higher than the 6 percent that has been shown in the budget for years. Funds are said to be siphoned off from other fiscal headings, bringing the total considerably higher than the 1 percent of GNP it is made out to be. A change in status quo cannot be expected at this point, however.

Political players in Nepal's multiparty democracy have a love-hate relationship with senior army officers, who make no secret of where their loyalties would lie if asked to choose—the Royal Palace. The most telling instance was in the Spring of 1990 when soldiers were a trigger-squeeze away from firing upon the public as it demonstrated against King Birendra's absolute rule.

As things stand, there is little likelihood of a reduction in the size of the Nepali army and the military sees no reason to be apologetic. Besides, it is currently riding high after having been asked by the United Nations to keep a standby force of 2000 men for rapid deployment.

Due to its long peace-keeping experience and because South Asian countries are being increasingly asked by the UN to serve as peace-keepers, the army is thinking of establishing a peace-keeping training centre in Nepal. That might be something to occupy a sizeable army in a tiny state. △

Always a Bridesmaid, Often a Bride

As squabbling politicians paralyse the country, will popular demand bring the army out of the barracks?

by Afsan Chowdhury

For a company that once ousted both the party presently in power as well as the main opposition, the Bangladesh armed forces in 1996 appear decidedly reluctant to do an encore. As the long-standing political crisis escalated into a national election entirely boycotted by the Opposition, some wondered whether a stretch of army rule might not be such a bad idea after all.

Mujib

The links between the armed forces and mainstream politics began to be forged in 1971, when, at huge risk, Bengali soldiers crossed over to the nationalist army. However, in newborn Bangladesh the military found it had no role to play other than when

called occasionally to impound illegal weapons and ration cards. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding father, imposed one-party rule, national emergency and even raised the Rakkhi Bahini, a personal para-military guard. Taking advantage of the considerable socio-economic chaos, a section of the army assassinated Sheikh Mujib, killed most of his family members, and sent his party, the Awami League, packing into exile from power, which has now lasted 20 years.

Zia

The August 1975 coup was not merely a reflection of public unhappiness expressed through military hands, but a sign of internal military discord as well. It unleashed

more coups by contending factions. On 3 November 1975, a group led by war hero and the army's number two, Gen Khaled Mosharraf, took over. Four days later, the charismatic veteran Col (retd) Taher, supported by a leftist civil-military combine, dislodged them. But before the night was over, the soldiers had opted for Gen Ziaur Rahman, the army chief jailed by Khaled for refusing to go along with his plan. Gen Zia, the most popular figure of the liberation war, emerged as a hero on 7 November 1975. He put the radicals behind bars and did away with a large number of them.

In the following years, while civilian politicians fought their petty battles and party-hopped, factions in the military periodically tried to take over. Between 1975 and 1980, Zia put down over 20 coups, before he was himself gunned down by fellow liberation war veterans in May 1981. Zia had by then become President, having founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Zia's widow, Khaleda Zia, today leads this party.

Ershad

Although Gen H.M. Ershad, the then army chief, did not take over as expected when Zia was assassinated, he did so a year later, in March 1982. He declared a "war against corruption" and promised to return to the barracks within two years. But, by the end of those two years, he had gained a reputation as a serious "crony capitalist". Ershad was also the moving force behind the formation in 1986 of another military-backed political party, the Jatiyo Party.

Ershad was also the first takeover supremo without a liberation war background. He felt that much of the discord within the army was due to friction between those who had taken part in the liberation war and those who had not. He systematically eased off most of the senior officers who had fought in 1971, which did reduce internal tension. The officers who remained were younger, and said to have strong links to civilian society. Meanwhile, the retired and released officers did well in business and politics.

However, opposition to Ershad mounted, due to the aura of corruption around his Jatiyo Party, plus general resentment over the open and covert military control of the civilian administration. Both Mujib's daughter, Sheikh Hasina of the Awami League, and Khaleda Zia, (the assassinated General's spouse), of the BNP proved to be determined opponents.

The opposition understood—what Ershad apparently did not—that in



Celebration of Arms: Tank outside Dhaka Cantontment lit up for Shab-E-Bakh

Bangladesh it is the urban populations that had a decisive say in political matters. Thus, while Ershad basked in rural support, the asphalt of Dhaka and other cities ignited in revolt. There was a feeling that the general had damaged the army's image, and so when it came to the crunch the officers refused to bail him out. They felt more threatened by his unpopularity than by the civilians demonstrating against martial law.

The army, especially the mid-level and junior officers, approved of Ershad's departure, and the public agitation carried the day. Ershad is now in jail under various charges, including a 14-year-old one of having plotted the murder of Gen Manzur, who had himself been accused of killing Gen Zia.

The Will To Intervene

The BNP's unexpected win in the 1990 elections, held under a neutral caretaker government, did not help its relationship with Awami League, which had been sour at the best of times. Since then, it has gone from bad to worse, leading the whole country into chaos. Over the last two years, the deadlock between the two parties has successfully resisted mediation, local, national and international.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission asked the army in January 1996 to help the

police in collecting unauthorised arms to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for the polls. This caused considerable embarrassment to the armed forces, as it was going to be their first public engagement after the departure of Gen Ershad. The well-nurtured image of a non-controversial army was bound to be tarnished.

The national political standoff is not expected to be resolved after the elections. As chaos and violence escalate, will the army be forced to step in? Maybe, but there are restraining factors.

"The military finds no reason to intervene because the soldiers are earning good wages as UN peacekeepers, and martial law imposition may threaten that," says Imtiaz Hussain of Dhaka University, a military watcher. He adds: "The donor governments have also stated that they would disapprove of a military takeover, so why should they be rash? After all, their status is not threatened."

But, if the situation worsens and the military has to play a more active "peace keeping" role at home, the neutral image gained in the last few years may also come under attack. Gen Abu Saleh Md Nasim, the present army chief, is not known to be keen towards any party and is said not to favour martial law rule. "You see, the military does not need to take over the country to protect its interests," explains Amir

Khasru, a journalist. "It is practically guaranteed by the administration. A takeover will only put all that into risk."

With access to dollar incomes in UN duties, guaranteed benefits during and after service, and de facto acceptance of their privileged position in the state hierarchy, the incentive to intervene will certainly have to be compelling. Mr Hussain believes that, while the army is elitist in character, it has changed in complexion over the years and many officers will be reluctant to oust a civilian government, something their predecessors might have done without compunction.

Most analysts believe that the military will take over only if requested by the Government, the Opposition and (most importantly) "the donors". Says Mr Khasru, "It is also a question of image management. They would like to be seen as fulfilling an onerous responsibility rather than looking after themselves."

In a recent survey by a Dhaka think tank, 49 percent of the people polled opposed martial law. Yet, few approved of the civilian politicians. Should the situation deteriorate, and the political crisis deepen, the military may become the only option, whether anyone wants it or not. And that could include the military itself.

Are you a SOUTH ASIAN SCHOLAR ?

Do you feel that you have to shed country-centric thinking, transcend borders and initiate dialogue on a number of issues that increasingly need to be addressed on a regional basis?

As a scholar, trying to develop a 'regional' perspective on live issues, do you feel enormous difficulty in gaining access to peers who are pursuing research on a 'local' level? Do you fear intellectual isolation?

Announcing, the formation of the FELLOWSHIP IN SOUTH ASIAN ALTERNATIVES (FISAA).

FISAA is a collaboration of a group of networking institutions from the countries of the region. It is implementing a one-year pilot programme where scholars from the non-governmental sector will get together in joint intellectual exercises designed to break the intellectual barriers that separate South Asian societies.

FISAA envisions creating a pool of scholars from which the faculty of a proposed South Asian University could be drawn in future. Able to create and teach courses to students from across the region, the faculty will initially engage in research on issues that affect the region, such as:

*Nuclear Disarmament
Ethnicity and Violence
Trade and Economics
Women Trafficking/AIDS*

*Water Management
Culture and Society
Resource Management
Drug Abuse*

FISAA is an ambitious programme which hopes to grow as a link between the intellectual communities of South Asia, across borders and disciplines. To succeed, **FISAA** requires the input and participation of the intelligentsia from all over South Asia and overseas. This is not an announcement requesting fellowship applications. We are, at this time, inviting comments and queries from young South Asian scholars, who can write to any of the following individuals.

Bangladesh : Dr. Imtiaz Ahmed, BASGAT, 1/203 Easter Place, 21, Siddheswari Lane, Dhaka-1217

India : Dr. Ashis Nandy, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 29, Rajpur Road, New Delhi

Nepal : Mr. Ajaya Mani Dixit, Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, GPO Box 2221, Kathmandu

Pakistan : Dr. Zia Mian, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, P.O. Box 2342

Sri Lanka : Dr. Iftexhar Zaman, Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, 4-101 BMICH, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo-7



Ploughshares into Swords

by Manik de Silva

In the days following independence from the British, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) was truly an island of serendipity, deserving the name of Serendib that had been bestowed upon it by early travellers. When the Ceylon army was raised in 1949, under the command of a British peer, Brigadier the Earl of Caithness, it had a mere 3000 men.

The Royal Ceylon Navy, as it was then called, was raised a couple of years later and was indeed tiny, with just a couple of hundred men. Its pride and joy was its single ship *HMCyS Vijaya*, previously the *HMS Flying Fish*, an ocean-going minesweeper bought from the British. Old navy salts still chuckle about the *Vijaya's* first voyage to England under the RCyN flag. Its docking at Plymouth was greeted by a local newspaper with the memorable headline "The Fleet Is In!"

The Royal Ceylon Air Force was no bigger. It was raised in 1950 with the ambitious idea of providing one air wing of three fighter squadrons to the South East Asia Command (SEAC). This was subsequently scaled down and the RCyAF, formed with

less than a hundred men, returned six crated Vampires back to de Havilland, the manufacturers, still in their original packing. The authorities had decided that an air wing was beyond the country's means and its tiny air force had to make do with Chipmunk trainer aircraft and a Balliol, until a small squadron of Jet Provosts was added later. The budget of the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs for 1948-49, was no more than SLR 20 million, which paid not only for the three armed services and the police, but also for the country's small foreign office.

The armed forces, predictably fashioned on the British model, were originally intended to complement the regular police in internal security functions, and also to perform a ceremonial role. A military parade on National Day was part of the scene and crowds used to flock Colombo's seafront Galle Face green to cheer the marching soldiers, sailors and airmen. The bands played, and cannons boomed a national salute and sometimes there was an air display. It was all spit and polish, not the blood and gore of later years.

Many Made Generals

This all changed in 1971 when the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), or People's Liberation Front, attempted a "hand bomb revolution" to topple Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike's United Front government, which included communists and Trotskyists. The JVP's homemade bombs packed in old cigarette and condensed milk tins may seem laughable today. But the threat then was serious and led to the rapid expansion and equipment of the armed forces and police. As a former commander later recounted, "That was when we fired our first shot in anger."

Subsequent developments have been directly proportional to the internal security threats that Sri Lanka, as the country was renamed by its 1972 Constitution, has faced. An army that was once commanded by a brigadier, now has a lieutenant general in command, a clutch of major generals and more brigadiers than once there were colonels. Two full generals are on the retired list and the deputy defence minister, the political boss of the armed forces, was promoted to that rank in February.

Troop strength is classified information, and even the budget estimates presented to Parliament do not specify the number of men in the armed forces. The press commonly uses a figure of 100,000 but well-informed sources say the total number is higher and rising. Given a population of 18 million, this is obviously no small change.

It is only 25 years since Air Vice Marshal Paddy Mendis argued with the Secretary to the Treasury for an additional SLR 0.5 million for the air force's SLR 11 million vote. Defence expenditures today run at a massive SLR 38 billion, five percent of the country's GNP and 12 percent of the budget. A civil war that bleeds the country of the flower of its youth and much of its treasure has added to the problems of two insurrections that in 1971 and 1988-89 took the country to the brink of anarchy.

The cost is frightening for a small country that lacks any threat of external aggression. Long gone are the days when Sri Lanka could boast that its defence expenditure was minuscule. A fanatically-motivated guerilla force of Tamil Tigers has compelled unaffordable militarisation with obvious implications both for democracy and development. Winding down seems a distant prospect even if the war is quickly ended. Armed and trained men on both sides of the lines cannot be overnight asked to turn swords into ploughshares. △

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The Statistics of Shame

Afghanistan's child mortality rate is second from the bottom, only Sierra Leone's is worse. A Nepali woman is more likely to die at childbirth than a woman in Niger. The percentage of Bangladeshi children who are underweight because they don't have enough to eat is the highest in the world—much worse than, say, Somalia. Even Sri Lanka, a country that was regarded as a model of development, is slipping.

Measured by the standard parameters for gauging human quality of life, southern Asia is right down there with the impoverished, dirt poor and war-ravaged African states. Shocking and shameful as these statistics may be, South Asia's misery stands out even more starkly because neighbouring East Asian countries are doing so well. Countries like Thailand, Malaysia and South Korea, which till 40 years ago were at the same level of development as some South Asian countries, now have education and health statistics at par with industrialised countries.

Asia, in fact, is no longer one continent. The gap in income and quality of life between Southeast Asian countries and South Asia today resembles the gap between Africa

and Europe. And measured in terms of the sheer scale of the misery, South Asia's poor outnumber Africa's nearly three to one.

More than half of the world's poorest, 600 million of them, live in South Asia, and half of those, mostly children, do not have enough to eat. One in every three new-born babies in South Asia is underweight because mothers are undernourished and anemic. There are fewer women per 100 men in South Asia than anywhere else in the world. Reason: preference for male offspring. One in every three South Asians cannot read or write. There are 150 million children here who do not go to school.

To be sure, there are bright spots. Bangladesh's dramatic reduction in fertility rate over the past decade is regarded as a Third World success story. Literacy rates, even in laggards like Nepal, have gone up. Vaccination and public health awareness campaigns have brought down child mortality to two-digit figures. However anarchic, South Asia's new-found democracy has brought political pluralism.

But these success stories have to be replicated across all sectors and in a regionwide scope, before they can even

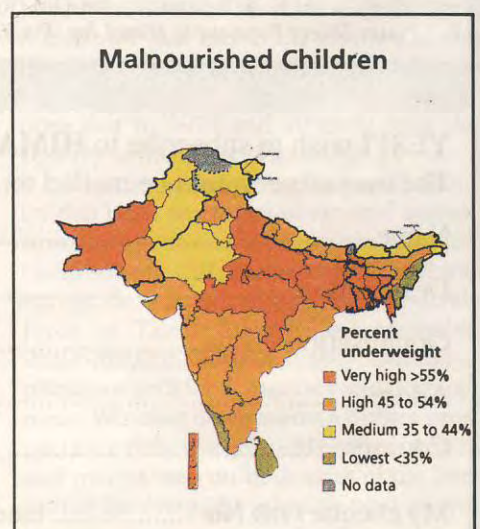
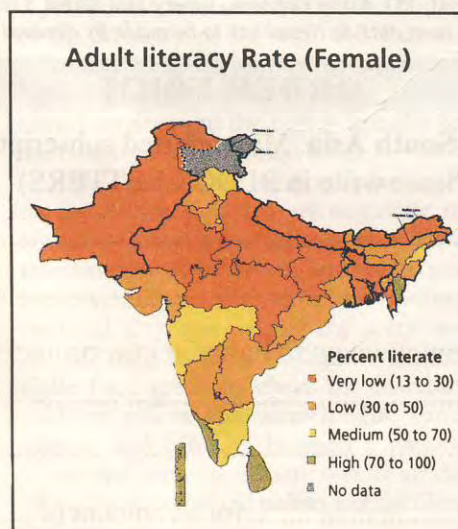
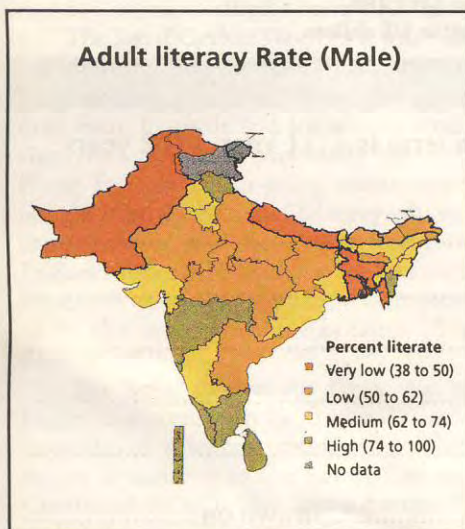
keep up with the gathering crisis of meeting the needs of the swelling numbers of South Asia's poor. A glance at the budgetary allocations for social welfare provides a grim reminder that the region's planners still have not translated into action the numerous speeches from United Nations pulpits on "investing in human capital".

Pakistan, for instance, is still spending more than twice as much for its military than what it spends on health and education combined. The 20 MiG -29 fighter bombers India recently ordered from Russia would have paid for primary education for 15 million girls who are out of school in India. Sri Lanka's massive military expenditures in recent years have hemorrhaged social spending. The once largely ceremonial Sri Lankan army used to take up only one tenth of the amount that was spent on health and education. Today, Sri Lanka's whopping military budget (\$350 million in 1992 reported) eats up nearly double the country's allocation for those two sectors.

"Education and health status have definitely suffered in Sri Lanka because of the resources being drained by the war," says a senior economist at the Manila-based Asia Development Bank.

The ADB is lending to Pakistan in what it believes is the key to breaking the country's poverty cycle: enhancing the status of women

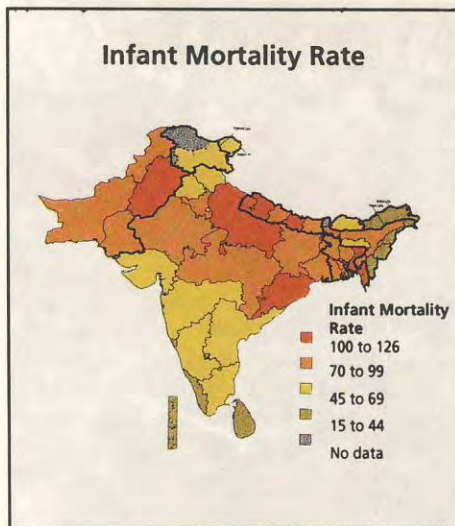
The source of the maps reproduced below is the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, Kathmandu. It notes: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted lines represent approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.



with a literacy and basic health campaign. However, the results are not encouraging. A recent poverty assessment report by the World Bank ranked Pakistan at the bottom of a list of countries lagging in primary education, especially for women. Even by South Asian standards, Pakistan ranks low. The country's under-five mortality rate (the number of children out of 1000 live births who die before their fifth birthday) is at 137, even higher than Nepal's 128.

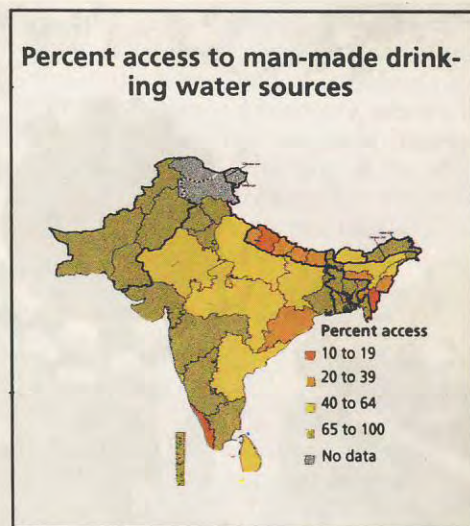
Economists at the World Bank and ADB may be gloomy about South Asia in general, but mention Nepal, and they shake their heads in despair. Confided one senior ADB economist who had visited Nepal recently: "In India and Pakistan, the problem is vast but there is a definite commitment and trend towards allocation of budget to social sectors. In Nepal's official circles there really is no appreciation of the needs of the poor. They are ready to borrow for big power projects but refuse to borrow for primary health care and education."

"The figures look very bad, Nepal really must get its act together quickly," says the expert. In 1990, Nepal had only one hospital bed for 4000 people. Only Afghanistan, where hospitals have been bombed and rocketed since 1980, has figures as bad as



that. Nepal has only one physician for every 20,000, which is by far the lowest ratio in all of Asia.

The country that shows the most promise in spreading basic services is Bangladesh. Its achievements in reducing fertility rate, in lowering infant mortality through massive immunisation campaigns, and a strong government-NGO collaboration for improving literacy, has brought dramatic results. Bangladesh's contraceptive prevalence rate has shot up from 8 percent in 1975 to 31



percent in 1990, whereas in Nepal it has remained more or less at 15 percent for the past 20 years. Bangladesh's annual population growth rate is expected to plummet from 2.4 percent in the 1960-1992 period to 2.2 for 1992-2000. (Nepal's rate will actually go up from 2.4 to 2.6 in 1992-2000, portending a serious drain on the country's resources.)

In the end, it is 'basketcase' Bangladesh that might show the way ahead for all of South Asia.

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Army or Air Force schools, and army wives buy provisions at subsidised rates.

A good percentage of what is called the "hidden" defence expenditure of Pakistan goes into these subsidies, cantonment upkeep, running of schools, and other developments that benefit armed forces personnel.

And since Pakistan's inception in 1947, and particularly since the first martial law of 1958, the main justification given for spending so much on the armed forces has been India's hegemonic ambitions and the three wars that have been fought between the two countries.

"Every emerging nation wants economic development to provide a better future for its citizens," wrote N.A. Jaffary, who was financial advisor to the Ministry of Defence during the time of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in an article in *The Muslim* of Islamabad last August. "This is only possible when its independence is ensured... Umbrella protection and defence pacts do not work."

A Missile for a Missile

Many Pakistani analysts argue that India has to start the process of reducing defence expenditures. Asks Jaffary: "How can India, almost five times larger in size, eight times larger in population, and seven times higher in GDP, feel threatened by a small country like Pakistan? It should, therefore, take the lead."

Nazir Kamal, of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, says one reason Southeast Asia has raced ahead in the last quarter century is due to sound leadership and vision shown by one powerful state. "Indonesia, with a clout similar to India's in South Asia, turned away from traditional power politics in favour of benign regionalism. It was this enlightened self-interest that accounts for ASEAN's economic miracle and Indonesia's remarkable progress."

"So long as there is the bilateral dispute with India over Kashmir, it is unrealistic to think that Pakistan will unilaterally reduce defence spending," says economist Akmal Hussain. Hence, in its effort to keep up with its eastern neighbour, Pakistan is caught in a race where to "counter the threat," as Gen (ret'd) K.M. Arif puts it, "you must possess the same capability as the opponent enjoys... a nuclear device against a nuclear device, a missile

against a missile, a plane against a plane, and a tank against a tank."

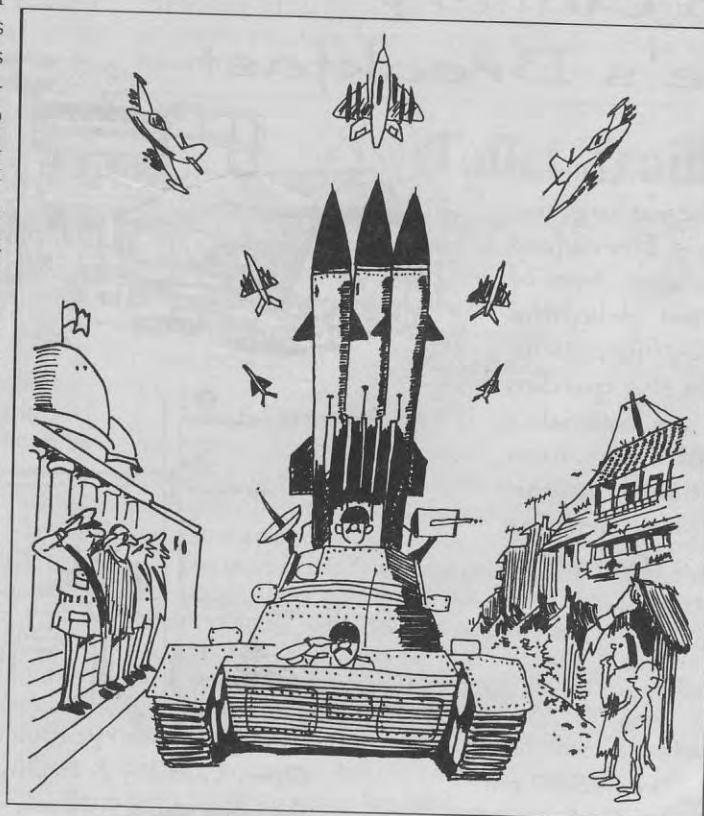
Even though this ambition is not possible, given the country's size and resources, Pakistan still ends up diverting a far larger share of its budget than India, into its military. The most recent cause for alarm was the firing of India's long-range Prithvi missile, which Pakistan sees as a direct threat and will no doubt scramble to counter.

Though it is possible to counter threats through diplomacy, no one is banking on it.

No Bofors in Pakistan

As long as regional tension and large military spending continues, many have publicly argued that at least the defence budget should be properly accounted for, and slashed, where possible.

Mr Jaffary believes that the overall defence expenditure can be safely reduced by 10 to 12 percent without touching the pay and allowances of defence personnel. He suggests that, since Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is also Finance Minister, "she can take the initiative and decide that the defence budget consistent with security requirements be discussed in the National Assembly." The House, for its part, has to ensure that the defence allocations are "properly spent and the country gets its money's worth," he adds.



Since 1958, Pakistan's defence budget has appeared almost always as a single line entry in the annual budget statement presented to the National Assembly, where it is subjected to vote. The entry reads simply: "Defence services to defray salaries and other expenses of the defence services." There are no breakdown or details provided.

"The issue is not that we want to dismantle the army, but that there has to be value for money, and accountability," says economist Shahid Kardar. "We recognise that there is a threat from India. But where is the defence budget going? Are they spending it on orderlies or staff cars? As a tax-payer, I want to know."

Mr Kardar is forthright in his views: "The monster is slowly devouring us, and the Punjabi and Pathan politicians who have historically remained silent, partly for fear of jeopardising their political fortunes and partly because their communities are the main beneficiaries, have to start asking how long this *langar* (charity) will continue. Especially now that the expenditure on defence pensions has even exceeded the current salary bill of defence personnel. In Pakistan, we are now in a position where instead of a country needing an army, there is an army that needs a country."

Pakistani politicians maintain a discreet but palpable silence on the issue, however. Even while there is no constitutional provision preventing a detailed scrutiny on the defence budget in Parliament, they are not keen. Says Akmal Hussain, "In all democratic societies, Parliament subjects defence expenditures to public scrutiny and ensures that it is cost-effective."

The Human Rights Commission's Mr Rehman agrees: "There is no discussion here. Contracts are made, money is allocated, no one knows what happens to it. They had the Bofors scandal in India. Something like that has never happened here."

Civil Demands

High military spending is not a law of nature, points out Zia Mian, of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) in Islamabad. "It is a policy choice made by a particular state at a particular time. Why that choice has been made in Pakistan is obvious: it is due to the role the military plays in domestic politics. Since independence, Pa-

April 1990

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kistan has had a series of weak governments and strong military dictators. Thus, the military as an institution, and the Army in particular, has become the strongest determinant of foreign policy as well as budgetary priorities."

"The armed forces have no relationship with civil society. As a result, the defence budget, with its hidden and non-hidden expenditures, is non-productive," says Mr Rehman. "In developed countries, defence expansion is largely derived from civil society, like companies that provide parts or machinery, or laboratories and establishments whose experiments and discoveries also benefit civilians. Here, there is no integrated technological, scientific development base."

But economist Akmal Hussain's answer to the problem of high defence expenditure is not to reduce defence spending, but to develop an industrial base and indigenise defence production. "The history of industrial growth in the West is linked to defence spending. The US economy took off during World War II, and Germany's in the 1930s," he says. "In India, 80 paisa of every rupee spent on defence goes back to their economy and stimulates it. Here, in Pakistan, it is the opposite. For every rupee spent on defence,

80 paisa goes into foreign exchange and benefits another country's economy."

The percentage of Pakistan's defence expenditure as part of GDP has dropped from 7.10 in 1985-86 to 6.88 in 1995-96. However, the actual money allocated continues to increase because of a high inflation rate, of 13 to 18 percent annually. In comparison, only about 3 percent of the GDP is allocated for health, education and related sectors.

Mr Kardar points out that Pakistan spends PKR 975 per capita on defence, and only PKR 105 per capita on health, education and related services. This is almost ten times as much on defence as on the social sector. "There are about eight soldiers per doctor in the country and 1.5 soldiers per teacher. The actual ratio of doctors may be worse because so many qualify and then join the administrative services."

As a result of what Mr Kardar calls "these skewed priorities", Pakistan has the ninth largest army in the world, holds 30th position for arms imports in proportion to total imports, and stands 127th in terms of national literacy and health related expenditure. The economist notes that the expenditure on defence and debt servicing is PKR 13 billion more than the tax revenues of the

federal government. "For four years running, the government's declared expenditure on defence has surpassed the allocations in the budget for development activities," he says. "Even the government's limited achievement in compressing the fiscal deficit, has come about almost entirely by retrenchment in development expenditure."

"The social sector is of primary importance. It is the only long term way of ensuring national security," says Akmal Hussain. "You have to give the minimum conditions of civilised life to your own people, or you will have internal security problems and unrest."

"What is security?" asks Mr Mian of SDPI. "Is it really more and more tanks, faster and faster jet fighters, bigger and bigger armies, a desperate search for a new way of killing, for missiles and nuclear weapons? Security is also about the day-to-day feelings of ordinary people, having decent food to eat, clothes to wear, a home to live in."

Concludes Mr Mian: "The most important question to ask about security, however, is who gets to ask the question, and who gets to answer it. The tragedy of Pakistan is that asking questions is not encouraged."

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Tibet's Pilgrim Refugees

KATHMANDU—The world of refugeedom tends to be divided between political exiles and economic migrants, even though the dividing line between the two is often blurred. However, there is one other type of refugee that is unique to South Asia, the pilgrim refugee.

This term may best describe the Tibetans who every year continue to brave the Chinese military dragnet along the Himalayan rimland, surmount dangerous High Himalayan passes, and get exploited by rapacious middlemen, as they escape harsh conditions in the high plateau for the spiritual embrace of their Dalai Lama.

According to records at the UNHCR refugee agency in Kathmandu, the flow of Tibetan pilgrim-refugees has averaged 2500 to 3500 annually in recent times. The set procedure is for UNHCR to hold the refugees in a halfway house in Kathmandu before transferring them to Dharamsala. There are many more who are said to head directly to India without bothering to contact the UNHCR. They descend through the middle hills of Nepal and wend their way through the plains of Uttar Pradesh and up to Dharamsala, and the smoothly functioning reception machinery of the Tibetan government-in-exile.

It is not always that easy, however, for the Nepali Government has blown hot and cold on this continuing flow of Tibetans. Nepal's geopolitical compulsions—that of the need to balance India's overwhelming presence with good relations with Beijing—has made Kathmandu succumb to Chinese whims on the matter.

As tensions rise in Lhasa, such as in autumn 1995 when the Chinese administration was celebrating the 30th anniversary of the founding of Tibet Autonomous Region, the flow swells. At the same time, so does the pressure from Beijing on Kathmandu authorities to accost and send the Tibetans back across the frontier. In UNHCR parlance, this process of send-back is known as 'refoulement'.

The nominally pro-Chinese Left Government was in power in Kathmandu during the period of the 30th anniversary celebrations in Lhasa. At a meeting of district administrators held in the town of Pokhara, an instruction was issued to crack down on those infiltrating the high passes.

While any pass that is low enough is useful for the crossing, most middlemen whom the refugees hire guide them down to the plains by avoiding the main trails and police checkposts, or travelling by night only. The most-used routes are in Mustang and Manang in central Nepal, and the Nangpa La trail into Namche Bazaar in eastern Nepal.

The Tibetan-speaking populations of Nepal's northern areas have been friendly to the refugees, and the idyllic valley of Junbesi that lies between Kathmandu and Namche Bazaar is where many rest and recuperate before continuing to Dharamsala. It is a different matter, however, when the refugees confront administrators.

The present coalition government in Kathmandu has dealt with the situation gingerly. It has issued a go-slow order to the outlying district administrators. What is interesting is that Nepal has no reason to be defensive about its humanitarian attitude towards the Tibetan travellers. These, after



A Tibetan father and daughter brave inclement weather on the Nangpa La border pass before descending to Namche Bazaar. The picture is one of a series taken by Swiss photographer Manuel Bauer in the spring of 1995.

all, are docile pilgrims, not firebrand militants.

Says a government official who once served in the Border Administration Department of the Home Ministry: "Officially, we do not acknowledge that Tibetans are allowed safe transit to India through Nepali territory. But on practical terms that is what is happening, on purely humanitarian grounds."

"It is silly that we cannot even take credit for a good deed that is done," says a Tribhuvan University political scientist. But who will tell that to the Chinese?

- Suman Pradhan

Toilet Training

NEW DELHI—When Lee Wang-Fend and Cheu Chulu Kuel were married in a public loo in Taiwan on 14 January, little did they dream that their wedding, splashed in newspapers the world over, would prove inspirational for a social service organisation in India.

Sulabh International is a Delhi-based group which has been campaigning to provide clean toilet and bath facilities at nominal rates in the proliferating slums and other congested areas of Indian cities.

The news of the Taiwanese couple wed in a public toilet gladdened the hearts of Sulabh officials, who decided to publicise the importance of such facilities. Sulabh even ventured to invite the couple for a honeymoon in India.

"We have heard of aeroplane and underwater marriages, but this bathroom marriage is conspicuous, for the lack of such facilities," said one Sulabh rep. "We have

invited the young couple to celebrate their honeymoon in India and also to visit interesting places in the country."

Founder of Sulabh International, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak, wrote to the couple, "By marrying in a public bathroom, you have broken the social and attitudinal barriers that have separated bathrooms from the rest of houses and thus, keeping them unclean and neglected."

Sulabh wanted the couple to inaugurate newly-built bathroom and toilet complexes in India during their visit to highlight the importance of these facilities for urban living. "We can keep cities clean and people healthy by promoting toilets as an institution that should be clean enough for weddings to take place, as Mr Lee and Ms Cheu showed in Taiwan," says Dr Pathak.

At the time of going to press, Sulabh International told HSA that the newly-weds had yet to respond to their invitation.

Going Organic in Pakistan



LAHORE — Being a woman in the male-dominated field of farming in Pakistan is the least of Samiya Mumtaz's problems. This 25-year-old pioneer from Lahore says she faces more resistance as a *shehri*, a city dweller, "who supposedly does not know agriculture."

An even bigger problem, it seems, is the kind of 'agriculture' she proposes. For Ms Mumtaz is one of a small but growing breed of environmentally-conscious farmers who are seeking to undo the legacy of the so-called Green Revolution that took the country by storm in the 1970s.

The farmers who have gone organic believe that reliance on fertilisers and pesticides is short-sighted. They are extremely critical of the government's campaign to convince farmers to let go of their traditional practices, as it can only ruin productivity in the long run. They have even let go of their practice of dividing land into two portions: one with high-cost chemical inputs for the market, the other chemical-free, for home consumption.

Artificial methods and fast-growing hybrids threaten to obliterate indigenous crop varieties. It took Ms Mumtaz two years to locate a farmer who still used *desi* (indig-

enous) wheat. Not exactly a discovery one would expect to electrify a young, female, upper-middle class city-dweller—but then, Ms Mumtaz has unusual pursuits. She plans to grow the indigenous wheat on the 16-acre organic farm she runs in the Punjab plains outside Lahore.

The farm, bought over two years ago, in partnership with seven friends and relatives, meant making Ms Mumtaz's dream of putting her environmental beliefs into reality. She hopes to prove that agriculture in Pakistan can flourish by using indigenous methods and low-cost inputs.

She is not entirely alone in her organic interests. A few scientists at the University of Agriculture at Faisalabad (formerly Lyallpur), are working to develop ecologically friendly biological fertilisers, and there is now an All Pakistan Organic Farmers Association. The Association's President, Syed Asad Hussain Shah, is reclaiming unproductive land using bio-fertilisers.

Mr Shah came to Ms Mumtaz's aid after salinity had consumed three acres of her land and threatened other patches. His solution: plant the indigenous kallar grass, which actually feeds on salinity. Ms Mumtaz, who is still using kallar, explains: "You can tell that the soil has been desalinated when the grass starts dying. While using gypsum, there is no way to know if you've got the right proportions and you have to keep testing to see if the soil is fertile again."

Kallar use, apparently an ancient method of coping with salinity, is now being rediscovered by organic farmers. Ms Mumtaz says part of her crusade is to convince farmers that their old ways are also scientifically sound. "They insist that the productivity of their land is due to chemical fertilisers, whereas the fact that they automatically throw food waste and peelings onto the dung heap is probably what does the trick."

Says Ms Mumtaz: "My first harvest was a disaster, the soil was so poor, and the locals felt vindicated in their scepticism. But this year my vegetables have been good and they are now taking a second look at my compost heap, which was their way until the Green Revolution came along."

- Cassandra Balchin

Border Porters

WAGAH — Midway between the two great cities of the Punjab, Amritsar and Lahore, lies the border crossing of Wagah, which is open only to foreign nationals. Indians and Pakistanis have to take the more expensive air route.

Passing through the border post is a ritual that is very much determined by bilateral geopolitics. The Pakistani porters, clad in red, and their blue-coated Indian brethren, are not allowed to cross over no-man's land. Luggage-laden travellers therefore have to reach into their pockets twice during the brief transit.

It is not, however, the handful of tourists a day who provide the main sustenance for these border porters. They rely on the limited trade that does take place, and swing into action as soon as trucks bearing raisins and pistachios from Afghanistan heave into view.



Pistachios cross over from Pakistan

As these porters scurry to and fro balancing sacks on their turbanned heads, they are quite oblivious to the nationalist sloganeering overhead. "Welcome to India - The World's Largest Democracy", says one, while another proclaims, "Long Live Pakistan". In a bid to have the last word, the Indian side declares, "Hamara Bharat Mahan", in a message sponsored by Pepsi. Don't they sell on the other side, too?

- Daniel Haber

A Tale of Two Four-Wheel-Drives

BIRATNAGAR — Both the Kosi Project and the Sunsari Morang Irrigation Project (SMIP) take water from the Kosi river as it descends to the plains from the eastern Nepal hills, but the similarity ends there. The Project's target is to irrigate more than 600,000 hectares of land in Bihar, while SMIP has a more modest goal of 66,000 hectares for Nepal.

However, a look at the vehicles that ferry the project bosses around might give the opposite impression. The Kosi Project chief drives his own Willys jeep, a World War II model, which came to the Project when construction began in 1954. His Nepali counterpart is chauffeured in a three-million-rupee Toyota Land Cruiser.



As long as comparisons are being made, let it also be said that while it cost the SMIP NPR 300,000 to water each hectare of land in Sunsari and Morang, the Kosi Project was

able to do it for less than NPR 65,000 per ha. Four decades ago, India was a net importer of foodgrains and Nepal exported its surplus. The situation is just the reverse today.

The Indian project engineer makes do with an open jeep, spends money in India, consuming (most likely) everything Indian. The Nepali boss, on the other hand, drives around in a foreign-made four-wheel drive on a road built by the World Bank, lives on rice imported from Burma, Thailand or India, and (most likely) drinks Scotch bought at duty-free shops by foreign contractors, foreign consultants, or by himself, while on 'study trips' to foreign countries.

- Rajendra Dahal

Forget Goa, Head for Kuakata

DHAKA — "Nobody visits Bangladesh, not even Bangladeshis," is a common refrain. Bangladesh has the dubious honour of being the only South Asian country not mentioned in any serious tourist brochure. But the fact is that if you go looking for it, you will find tourism in Bangladesh.

While the efforts of the Parjatan (Tourism) Corporation are sluggish like those of any other government agency, the private sector has taken initiatives, and tourism destinations today include the mangrove woodlands of Sundarban, the inland region with its villages and meandering rivers, and the beach of Cox's Bazaar.

Sundarban is the world's largest mangrove forest, located south of Dhaka where the deltaic country meets the ocean. An added attraction is the Royal Bengal Tiger, often visible while gliding along the placid canals on motor launches. While large tracts of Sunderban have been felled by timber contractors, there are areas where the locals, known as Bawali, continue with their traditional lifestyle. The wrath of the tiger, often man-eating, is such that the Bawali call him "baro miah" (the boss), and they regularly worship "Bonbibi" (Forest Goddess), hoping she will keep his anger and hunger under control.

For those who prefer a rural to wilderness experience, there is Bangladesh's ver-

sion of eco-tourism along the river Padma (which is made up of the flow of the Ganga and Brahmaputra). A tour package is organised by the activists of a group known as the People's Environment Programme to raise funds for its projects. Says Saleem Samad, a member of the group: "The whole tour is so natural, and the local villagers act as guides. You suddenly discover that Bangladesh has sights which are as good as those we watch on foreign TV."

The tour package, which centres around the village of Maluchi, includes a tour of the wetlands, "river sunbathing", nature camps, folk theatre, and fish straight from the river into the pan. Some tourists prefer to spend their nights in a renovated residence of a local landlord, happy in the knowledge that the landlord does not come with the package.

Those who tire of fresh water can always head for the beach.

Parjatan reports that Cox's Bazaar, the seaside resort boasting the longest white sand beach in the world, saw the highest number of visitors ever this year. Among them were tourists from overseas.

Apart from Cox's Bazaar, promoters are now talking about Kuakata, a beach which allows a sight of both the sunrise and the sunset, if that's possible. The area is also home to an ethnic group known as the Rakhines, which adds an anthropological angle.

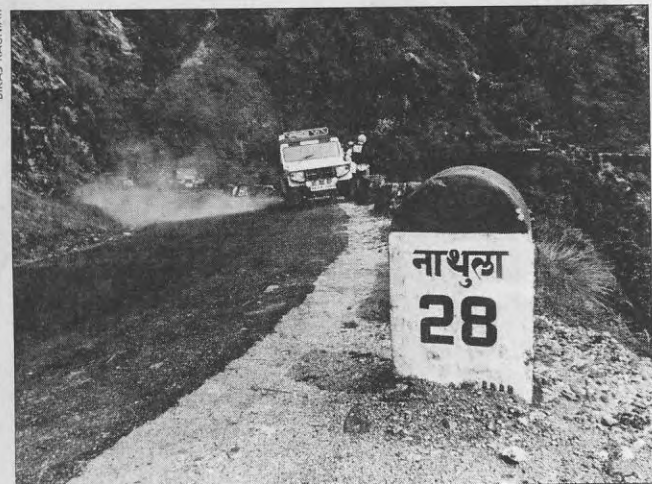
With tigers, eco-tourism, and beaches, who says Bangladesh and tourism don't mix?



Not always a scenic river float



Border Town Pines for Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai



Road up to Nathula pass, Indian side

As far as the residents of Yadong are concerned, the India-China rapprochement cannot proceed fast enough. In fact, the residents of this Tibetan frontier town are exasperated that the Nathula pass remains firmly shut.

Yadong used to be the busiest commercial centre in the Himalaya, with its strategic location at the mouth of the famous Chumbi Valley, through which a route was forced by the Younghusband mission in 1904. The trade route led up from Siliguri via Kalimpong and over Nathula into Yadong. The 1962 Indo-

Chinese border war put an end to all traffic, but the road is still there.

The businessmen of Yadong have been reduced these past decades to casting envious glances westward towards the bustling trading town of Zham (Khasa) on the Nepal-Tibet border near Kathmandu.

According to Foreign Ministry sources

in Beijing, the delay is due to "some sensitive diplomatic issues" relating to developing a reciprocal venue in India to Tibet's Yadong. The Chinese side wants it to be Kalimpong in West Bengal, but the Indian side is apparently pushing for Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. "Acceptance of a Sikkim town as Yadong's counterpart would run against China's stance of not recognising Sikkim's merger with India," says one source.

Yadong would also be the staging point for trade with Bhutan, but this too is a problem. Since Thimphu's security and foreign affairs come under the ambit of the Indian foreign office, it is said that China has to first reach an agreement with India before this avenue can be explored.

Meanwhile, the frontier residents feel that they cannot wait for the slow wheels of diplomacy to turn. Despite the official prohibition, they are engaging in brisk barter trading at Yadong. Everything from rubber shoes to thermos bottles and clothes to wrist watches are bought in return for jeans, saffron and American dollars. The commerce has been lucrative enough to attract merchants from as far as Sichuan.

The local government's policy is to look the other way. "Who knows, this kind of barter trade might lead to an officially recognised, larger-scale border trade?" says Tsering Tashi, the county chief.

- Xiong Lei/China Features

YADONG — China and India have been in almost continuous dialogue for the past three years on de-escalating tension along the disputed frontiers in the Indian North-east and Ladakh. They have also been discussing the opening up of the mountain passes for commerce and travel.

Broadsheet Explosion in Kathmandu

KATHMANDU — Six o'clock in the morning, the famous Kathmandu fog still covers the city streets as Amar Thapa heaves the shutters of his popular kiosk at Putalisadak.

Outside, there are five newspaper delivery boys waiting to hand him their bundles. Just a month ago, there would have been only two: from the government-owned *Gorkhapatra* and the three-year-old *Kantipur*. Now there are three new Nepali dailies in the market: *Himalaya Times*, *Aajako Samachar Patra* and *Sri Sagarmatha*. Another one, *Lokpatra*, is in the offing.

For years, under the Panchayat system, Nepal had a muzzled press where the only daily of note was the *Gorkhapatra*. With the arrival of press freedom in 1990, the expansion of the consumer market, and an increasingly literate populace, newspapers suddenly seemed like a viable commercial proposition. *Kantipur* was started by two Nepali Marwari brothers, belonging to the Indian

Express clan of Ramlal Goenka. The newspaper ran at a loss for the first two years, but emerged in the black in early 1995.

As soon as *Kantipur* began making money, and also because there were those



Old Gorkhapatra has friends

who disliked its purported Nepali Congress-leanings, the other publishers came up with their own dailies.

The sudden deluge of daily broadsheets has the public confused, but no one seems to mind. This is quite different fare from the opinionated and politically blinkered news presented by the Nepali weeklies, almost all of which act as the mouthpiece of one political faction or the other.

Bharat Dutt Koirala, Director of the Nepal Press Institute, believes that the quality of journalism in Nepal is bound to improve with the competition. "The market for newspapers is now Nepal-wide, and the public has also become much more discerning. It is demanding better news coverage," he says.

But Mr Koirala and other media experts say there will be heavy mortality among the new entrants, as the market is not large enough for all of them. Says one lecturer of journalism at Tribhuvan University: "*Gorkhapatra* will survive because of its monopoly on government ads, and *Kantipur* because it was first off the wire. There is a market here for one more daily, and may the one that is best edited win."

-Salil Subedi

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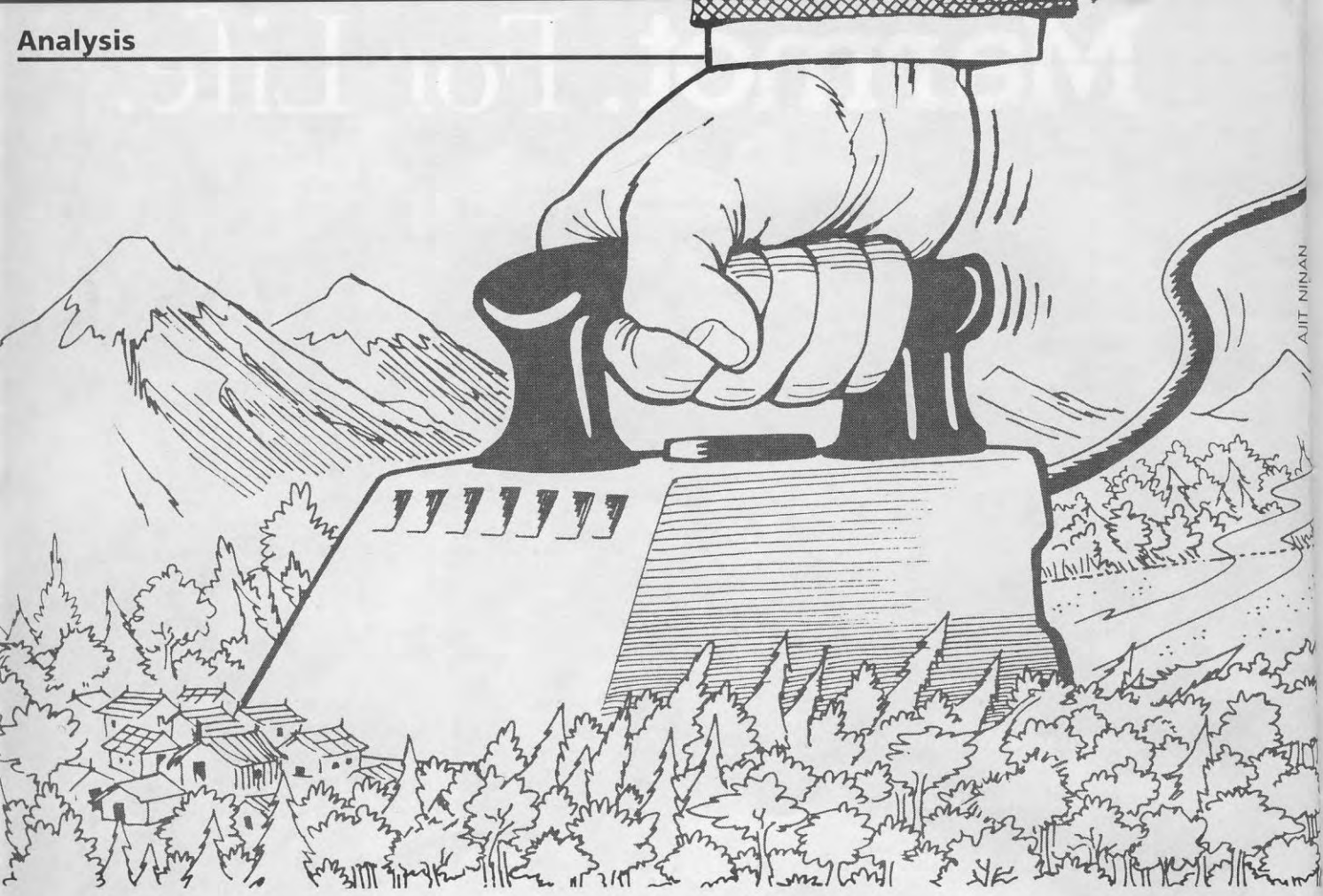
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AJIT NINAN

HIGH DAMS FOR ASIA

Neo-Gandhian Maoists vs. Nehruvian Stalinists

When everyone thought that the day of the large dam was over, the tables turned with a sudden agreement on a massive project on the Indo-Nepal border. Will all of South Asia follow suit, blundering into fiscal haemorrhage and social strife?

by Dipak Gyawali

Much as environmentalists and social activists all over the world may want, it is too early to write an obituary for large dams. Though there are signs of new and alternative thinking, with opposition seen in Narmada, Tehri, Nepal's Arun-3, the Bangladesh Flood Action Plan, and even the immense Three Gorges in China, the undercurrent of old thinking and entrenched interests is still the rule, and is strong enough to force decisions in favour of large dams.

Old thinking and entrenched interests still rule, and are strong enough to force decisions in favour of large dams.

Narmada and Tehri in India, and Three Gorges are relentlessly moving ahead, despite protests nationally and internationally. Now Nepal, too, joins its two giant neighbours in pushing forward a high dam project in the Himalaya that is about 25 times larger than the country's entire installed hydroelectric capacity.

On 29 January 1996, a new draft treaty on the "integrated development of the Mahakali river" was signed by the foreign ministers of India and Nepal. This accord and the letter exchanged with it commits the two coun-

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tries to build the Pancheswar hydroelectric project and its 315m high dam within ten years.

Age of the High Dam

That the Pancheswar mega-project, conceived and pushed by India for its large system—and resisted by Nepal for over two decades as inimical to its smaller development needs—could be on the front burner so soon after the demise of the controversial Arun-3, which was 'only' two times larger than Nepal's total capacity, holds several lessons.

The first is that no economic or policy lessons have been learnt by the powers that be, either in Nepal or India, regarding the unacceptable levels of risk imposed by importing the experimental technologies of large dams to societies with tiny incomes. Dominant thinking is still supply-led, and insensitive to conservation-oriented demand management. (In both India and Nepal, given the extent of electricity theft, it would make more sense to prevent leakage than to build new dams.)

Secondly, South Asian infrastructural planning is dictated by short-term strategic gains for the political parties jousting for power, backed by large business interests with an unjustified belief that bigger is necessarily better. Thirdly, with Pancheswar, those who advocate the alternative mode of more people-centred, conservation-oriented and fiscally-prudent development have lost a major battle without even having had a chance to fight it.

Thinkers and activists of this school should wake up and gear up if they wish to win the war. For, while the Age of High Dams may have ended in North America and Europe, the starting gun has just been fired in Asia. In the coming decades, we can expect nothing but a surfeit of hype from the political and technocratic elites who will advocate high dams, and angst among the victims.

Even before the ink has dried on this new agreement, Pancheswar has already done what mega-projects do, i.e., induce major distortions into a society's institutions. Nepal introduced the famous Article 126 in its 1990 Constitution, requiring a two-third parliamentary approval only for projects of a "pervasive, serious and long-term nature." It was included primarily to improve Nepal's bargaining position on natural resource sharing and not to be forced willy nilly into large-scale projects without the chance for a national consensus. Indian officials regarded it as an anti-Indian measure.

Article 126 is a unique and controversial provision, and it cries for interpretation. However, this has never been done. The Supreme Court passed the buck to Parliament when a case was filed before it on the issue of the controversial Tanakpur project. The Parliament waffled for three years but provided no answer.

Now, comes the Mahakali agreement as a political jack-in-the-box. By engulfing Tanakpur within the larger Pancheswar mega-project, Nepali politicians of all shades have skipped the need to provide necessary justification for not accepting it in the first place. The political wounds continue to fester, charges of "sell-out" on Tanakpur have not been given a decent burial, and the rationality of the Constitution's clause remains unexplained and thus, by default, debased.

This Pancheswar precedent now leaves India less worried about Article 126. It corrals political parties in Nepal to look for two-third support without first fixing the criteria for invoking Article 126. Given the political energy that would have to be expended to justify why a project is of a "simple" nature (and not requiring a two-third approval), any normal government would now balk at reaching a settlement on the smaller rivers of Nepal. These smaller rivers are more productive as far as the small farmers of Nepal and India are concerned. If the entire rigmarole of parliamentary approval is required, so the thinking would go, why not just go for a mega-project?

The political groundwork for the Age of High Dams in the Nepal Himalaya has thus been laid, thanks largely to the unprofessional nature of Nepal's bureaucracy and the rivalries of Nepali politicians who are fixated on personalities rather than on issues and their implications for national development.

Oriental Despotism

Nepal is not only a country comprising mostly of land-hungry subsistence farmers hovering near the official poverty line, but also a country where an absolute monarchy changed into a constitutional one in a fifty-day agitation with less than fifty people killed. The country has a poor stomach for violence. It might all change. How? One may ask a Cold War American congressional committee for an answer.

In 1959, a group of US senators and American power company chiefs visited the USSR, amid growing uneasiness that the Soviets were surpassing the Americans in hydropower development. During their visit, the Senate team (which included Edmund Muskie) was suitably impressed not so much with the advances in technology, but with the fact that a totalitarian and monolithic system of government could push its dam-building program faster and more efficiently than a democratic government. They saw the Stalingrad dam (now Volgograd) fill its reservoir and inundate a considerable section of the fertile Volga Valley (and a section of the city of Stalingrad). It had required the resettlement of a hundred thousand people.

The Americans, who had bled through resettlement battles at home, were incredulous when told that the Russians had faced no relocation difficulties. On the pre-determined day, 100,000 citizens were simply invited to quit their homes and move to new communities—which they did without a murmur of protest. The Senate team, in its report, concluded that "regardless of the pros and cons of broad political philosophy, it is simpler and faster in many ways to drive a vast power programme under a totalitarian, monolithic Communist regime than under an American democratic system of government."

The lesson of this dog-eared archival report is not that we need a Stalinist government to exploit Nepal's much-vaunted 83,000 MW of hydroelectricity potential. Rather, the danger is that political parties of all democratic persuasions in Nepal and in India (and the government machinery they command) would—if they uphold the large-dam dream—probably take on totalitarian attributes. The political dynamics of building and running a mega-

Dam-builders are rational, but not benevolent.

project are such that, as far as the population directly affected is concerned, the state and its partners turn inevitably totalitarian.

The most obvious example is the matter of forced relocation of populations, in which the South Asian record is nothing to be proud of. India, according to Thayer Scudder of Caltech, has the "worst resettlement record in the world." Nepal's is not much better: the Marsyangdi project, completed in 1989, required fully compensating and resettling all of seven families; even that it was unable to do. While unilaterally constructing the Tanakpur project, India caused the erosion of about 36 ha of farmland in Nepal, which affected 77 families. These *les miserables* are yet to receive compensation.

It is sobering to think that the new pact, which engulfs the Tanakpur project within a larger Mahakali package, did not even bother about compensation for those 77 families. Now, Pancheswar's high dam will force the two governments to resettle thousands in a land-hungry part of the world. One may be forgiven in wondering which will be more difficult—the technicalities of building a high dam or educating and moving governments onto a higher social sensitivity curve.

Speaking of sensitivity, Nepal's Water Resources Minister Pashupati Shumshere Rana, in an interview with the official daily *Gorkhapatra* on 2 February, three days after the deal, sounded like any Gujarat chief minister when talking about Narmada. Mr Rana said that mega-projects could not be built in Nepal and India because they were democratic, whereas in Pakistan (which presumably is not up to the high standards of its eastern neighbours), a large 1500 MW hydro project was built with World Bank support without a murmur of protest. What is significant is not the inaccuracies in the minister's statement, but the wistfulness in his voice for an order that is more conducive to building large dams.

Large-scale hydraulic civilisations are, after all, built on the totalitarian traditions of an all-powerful bureaucracy identified by sociologist Karl Wittfogel as "Oriental Despotism". It is a path that, once entered, is near-impossible to reverse. It is similar to an evening out. Once one chooses to go to, say, a Chinese restaurant, the possibility of asking for naan tandoori is out. Decentralised

communes and *gram swaraj* will give way to or come under the grip of a centralised managerial bureaucracy which, because it is dependent on the efficient operation of these mega-structures for its maintenance and prosperity, will perforce have to adopt policies of total power that can hardly be called benevolent.

In Wittfogel's words, "A pirate does not act benevolently when he keeps his ship afloat or feeds the slaves he plans to sell. Capable of recognizing his future as well as his present advantages, he is rational, but not benevolent." The same can be said for those who would build high dams.

Vedantic Onion

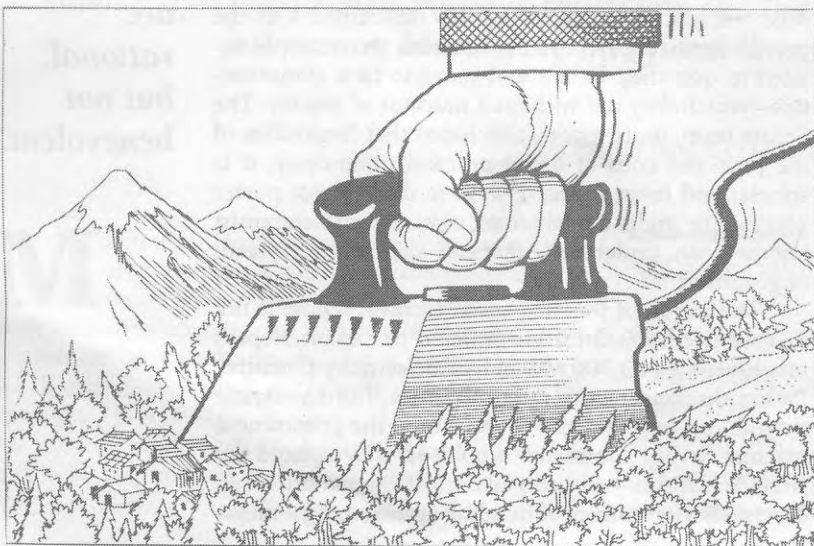
An intellectual examination of the serious social implications of large dam-building programmes has not been done thus far in South Asia. This is because the intelligentsia has been bowled over by the Pollyannish dreams peddled by political merchants. Because of sheer social diversity, there is tension in South Asia between what may be termed the neo-Gandhians (after the Mahatma) and the Nehruvians (including the Gandhis of this dynasty). Even though historically the latter are the political heirs of the former, the economic philosophies they represent are poles apart.

Neo-Gandhians uphold equity, self-reliance, local capacity enhancement with small scale and decentralised schemes. This approach is perfectly comfortable with a heterogeneity of solutions and their inevitable clumsiness. The Nehruvians, on the other hand, put production efficiency on the hallowed pedestal. This approach naturally leads to large-scale, expertise-based, often imported, hierarchic structures, for whom pushing a neat single-minded mission is as important as promoting the welfare and protecting the legitimacy of the missionary.

This same tension between two forces has existed in modern China since the 1950s, where the fight has been between the Maoists who promoted massive micro-hydro development programmes controlled by the communes, and the Stalinists who went for heavy industry controlled by the bureaucracy and who today push the Three Gorges project. Even though, politically, they seem to be each other's inheritors, sociologically, the Maoists and Stalinists are diametrically apart.

While they are constantly accused of holding the view, the neo-Gandhians do not actually say that small is beautiful, because they know beautiful is beautiful, small or big. What they do maintain is that small is less risky, more self-empowering and, ultimately, more beneficial. The neo-Gandhian view is that economic analyses that are exuberant about technologies would externalise social and environmental costs. They would jettison risks onto an unsuspecting population either in the margins of society or in the future. On the other hand, economic analyses which are true to society rather than technology would show that one should not risk more than is necessary. Or, as a Nepali saying goes, "Swallow a bone only after you size your gullet."

Indeed, large engineering projects seem to have a Vedantic attribute to them: like the outer manifestations of an onion, they embody a poor society's hopes and visions of development, but when one looks closer, veil



after veil can be peeled off without arriving at any real substance inside.

The Kosi Project, one among the many "temples of modern India", is a good example. While billions of rupees have been expended since the 1950s to make an immense network of canals in North Bihar, it is the growth of private tubewells—sometimes right by a flowing canal—in the Kosi command area which is boosting agricultural production in this area. This is a classic case of designing an expensive Porsche when all that was required was a bicycle. The farmers of the area needed water, the water bureaucracy needed construction work, and the twain could not meet. The canal project itself has managed to put more land out of production than it has been able to irrigate, and continues as a major fiscal haemorrhage for the Indian exchequer.

Smug Northern Certitude

South Asian boondoggles such as the Kosi Project and elsewhere, on the arid Punjab-Rajasthan plains or the northern dry zones of Sri Lanka, are not born out of the "ignorance of the natives". They result, instead, from the way institutions are organised. Single mission outfits—of the types that are designed to build large dams or canals—suffer from the hubris of over-confidence. They are known for their smug certitude that "there is no alternative" to whatever it is that they are proposing. They suffer from hype, boast of capabilities they do not really have, and they erect a protective wall around themselves to effectively filter out criticism. Voila, Oriental Despotism!

This institutional malaise is not limited to the Third World and its under-development. The late Arun-3 project, which was aborted before the World Bank's elitist bureaucracy could foist it on Nepal's unsuspecting poor, has shown that the First World is as susceptible as anyone.

Sweden entered the Nepal Aid Group in 1990 after a gap of thirty years. Its democratic socialist government pulled out in the 1960s after a royal coup overthrew the democratic socialist government of B.P. Koirala in Nepal. Its first act upon re-entering Nepal was to pledge 30 million dollars for the 1.1 billion dollar Arun-3.

What is surprising is the apparent institutional amnesia on the part of the Swedish donors. Between 1978 and 1985, Stockholm had provided almost two-thirds of the funds required for the Kotmale hydroelectric project in Sri Lanka, which is identical to Arun-3, with three turbines totaling 201 MW. The only difference was that Kotmale was five times cheaper.

Now why would Sweden go and get involved in a controversial project in Nepal at five times the cost of an identical project that it had funded in Sri Lanka? And, what entrenched force of belief in distanced institutions such as the World Bank would cause a US ambassador to write to the State Department urging it to support Arun-3 because, without it, "democracy in Nepal would be in danger"?

The answer seems to lie in the sociology of large bureaucracies. Questions raised earlier in the South regarding the technical and economic flaws of Arun-3 were screened out by the protective filters of the large Northern agencies. These institutional filters are not born of the stupidity or incompetence of any individual, but arises

from the nature of the institution itself. For donor agencies, in protecting the mission as well as the missionary, truth becomes one of the parameters juggled among many others.

Moreover, with the Second World's communism basically becoming part of the Third World, Northern governments did not have an institutional tool other than the World Bank with which to modulate the behaviour of raucous Third World governments. It was important, therefore, for foreign policy establishments in the North to protect the image and legitimacy of this powerful agency, be it the Swedes or the Americans.

Institutional Filters

The politicians and technocrats of both the North and South may be prepared for the Age of High Dams, but are the people of South Asia ready for it? The answer, clearly, is no. If such is the case, the task now is to chisel away at the inherent belief systems of large hierarchic institutions, the perceptual filters that operate therein, and the international co-geniality of the cultures of these mega-institutions that support them.

Breaking the barrier of institutional filters, such as those erected by the World Bank and its partner bureaucracies of the South, requires a North-South partnership that is not pre-defined by bureaucratized international agreements in such a way as to make arriving at a "Three Gorges" Chinese restaurant inevitable. Mega-dams require more and more esoteric expertise, much of it imported and operated through international institutional arrangements, something not intelligible even to the average intellectual.

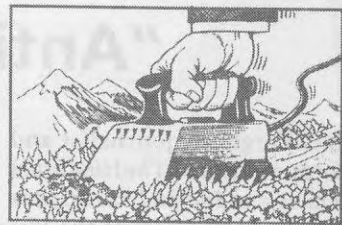
If the kind of misplaced belief that occurred with Arun-3 could happen with Sweden and the US, governments that are known for their egalitarianism and accountability to their taxpayers, what might happen with mega-projects such as Pancheswar or the proposed Kosi High, that need accountability of the state structures of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Nepal?

Accountability must be forced, and it requires shattering the smug certitude that allows large bureaucracies to get away with boondoggles. This task must be taken up by those outside the hierarchic framework, such as activists, voluntary groups and independent intellectuals, who can shout from the mountaintop, that the emperor has no clothes. Civilised pressure must be applied at minimum cost and maximum benefit, but it must not be forgotten that such pressure points in South Asia are far fewer and more calloused than in the North. Southern bureaucracies, after all, do not depend upon their taxpayers.

Manasa Karmana Vacha

Sunderlal Bahuguna of Tehri is fond of expressing the need for a unity of the head, the heart and the hands (the scientists, the poets and the activists) for successful agitation. This then, is what civilised pressure is all about, using good science, committed activism, and staying power, to strike at the very root of the intellectual and political legitimacy that sustains Oriental Despotism. Δ

D. Gyawali is a Kathmandu-based engineer and economist.



The task now is to chisel away at the inherent belief systems of large hierarchic institutions.

"Anti-dam activists are romantics"

B.G. Verghese, journalist and former editor of *The Hindustan Times* and *Indian Express*, has for the better part of the last decade, been studying the use of water for social advancement. Among his works are the landmark *Waters of Hope* (Oxford IBH 1990), and the more recent *Winning the Future: From Bhakra to Narmada, Tehri, Rajasthan Canal, and Converting Water into Wealth* (1996, which he co-edited).

HSA's Mitu Varma met Mr Verghese in New Delhi to seek his views on the need for large water projects such as Narmada.

▲ *The Narmada Bachao Andolan's major quarrel with the \$3 billion Sardar Sarovar Project is that it will displace more than 200,000 people. What are your own views?*

• People in that region are already being displaced by hunger because of inadequate harvests resulting from uncertain rainfall, lack of irrigation facilities and the environmental degradation caused by population pressures. The harvest is not sufficient even in a good year. Seasonal migration is common and sometimes entire families leave in search of livelihood. They land up in the cities as unskilled labour. When they are being moved in a planned manner and given a better deal than at present, I do not see any cause for protest. It is true that displacement from one's natural environment is traumatic and that people should be dealt with compassion, sympathy, understanding and generosity, but it doesn't make sense to abandon a project which will actually improve their standard of living.

▲ *Are there any studies of migration patterns to support this argument?*

• I do not know why the project authorities have failed to undertake a survey of migration patterns, but the fact that such migration is rampant is evident if one visits the area repeatedly.

▲ *What do you see as the benefits of the project which would offset the negatives?*

• The biggest benefit will be the provision of potable water to at least 30 million people in a semi-arid region. People in the command area who migrate every second or third year when there is a drought will no longer have to leave their homes. The women will be saved the drudgery of trudging miles in search of water, and the health of the people will improve. Flooding in surrounding areas and downstream will be prevented.

▲ *But anti-dam activists suggest that a series of smaller dams would mean less human displacement and suffering.*

• The Narmada Tribunal says that no number of small dams can store as much water as this project envisages. It is fanciful to suggest that a similar quantity of water can be provided with the same level of water security and at the same cost through smaller dams.

As for displacement and suffering, there are those who say that such large-scale rehabilitation of people is not physically possible. This argument defeats the very basis of human progress and the desire to aspire and achieve. What we should do, of course, is to move ahead and then deal with the shortcomings in an appropriate manner.

The trouble with the anti-dam activists is that they are philosophically opposed to the pattern of development envisaged in the building of big projects like this one. But their

idea of small-scale decentralised development will not work for two reasons—firstly, the large population factor is a given, and, secondly, if you are poor and helpless in a predatory world, your margin for manoeuvring is limited.

The anti-dam activists are romantics and they have a nostalgia for the past. However, their ideas have been overtaken by events. You cannot, for instance, supply water and electricity to a city like Delhi through a small scale project. This romanticising of the way of life of the indigenous people of the region who have actually been suffering hunger, degradation, squalor and poverty, is a dangerous thing.

▲ *What about the arguments for not letting an alien pattern of development thrust upon the indigenous people?*

• But what right has anybody to deny them the alternative of a better way of life and an opportunity to break out of the cycle of poverty? The problem is that we are not an achieving society. No one is counted among the 'people' unless they are poor and underprivileged. The project will benefit a larger number of people in the long run than the short-term costs that some of the displaced persons will have to suffer. The cost-benefit ratio favours the project in both money and human terms. The cost of not building the project will be far more than the cost of building it. If the project displaces 100,000 people by the year 1995, not doing anything would displace half a million or more because of hunger and poverty.

▲ *On Narmada, those displaced complain about resettlement, par-*



ticularly about the inferior quality of the compensatory land.

• The land quality is definitely much better in the rehabilitation areas, and irrigation will come with time. The promised irrigation facilities have been delayed because the project itself has been delayed. Besides, the project is also providing housing assistance, markets, schools, electricity and water supply for the people being rehabilitated. Temporary problems of grazing, firewood and fishing will be there, but they will definitely be balanced out. The people will move from well below the poverty line to near or above it. The current problems are teething troubles that can be rectified with proper supervision and care.

▲ *Both the greens and the NBA point to the large environmental costs of the project.*

• For every tree lost, the project envisages planting at least a 100 more. No endemic species will disappear that cannot be replaced. Some fishing may be affected but this will be more than compensated by stocking the reservoir. Compensatory afforestation will improve the catchment area, while the formation of five new sanctuaries envisaged by the project will provide a new home for the displaced species. ▲

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The BJP's Neighbourhood

Among South Asian countries, there is some anxiety about a possible Bharatiya Janata Party victory in the upcoming Indian elections. Surprisingly, BJP pragmatists might live and let live.

by **Rachana Pathak**

with reports from Colombo, Dhaka, Lahore and New Delhi

At the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) headquarters in New Delhi, the mood is upbeat. Though it is early, many dhoti-clad hopefuls with the ubiquitous tilak on the forehead are hanging around, in search of a party ticket to contest the general election tentatively scheduled for April.

Sushma Swaraj, the party spokesperson, says the BJP is confident of obtaining a comfortable Lok Sabha majority. While political pundits may not all share this optimism, most predict that the BJP will emerge as an important player in the post-election scenario. The implications of a BJP victory, both for minority groups within India as well as the rest of South Asia, are indeed consequential.

The resignation of Lal Krishna Advani, the conservative pro-Hindu party's prime ministerial candidate, because of murky Jain bribery scandal allegations has not dampened spirits. In fact, says Ms Swaraj, "By resigning and vowing not to contest the elections till his name is cleared, Advaniji has thrown the ball back in Prime Minister Rao's court."

The party's strong showing in municipal elections in the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh, its joining a coalition government with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, and its respectable elec-

toral results in Karnataka in the south, where it previously failed to make a presence, have all pushed the party into what some believe is a neck-to-neck position with the ruling Congress party.

Vir Sanghvi, of the political weekly *Sunday* says, "The anti-incumbency syndrome that has dominated assembly election results in recent years will work against the Congress. And now that the Janata Dal

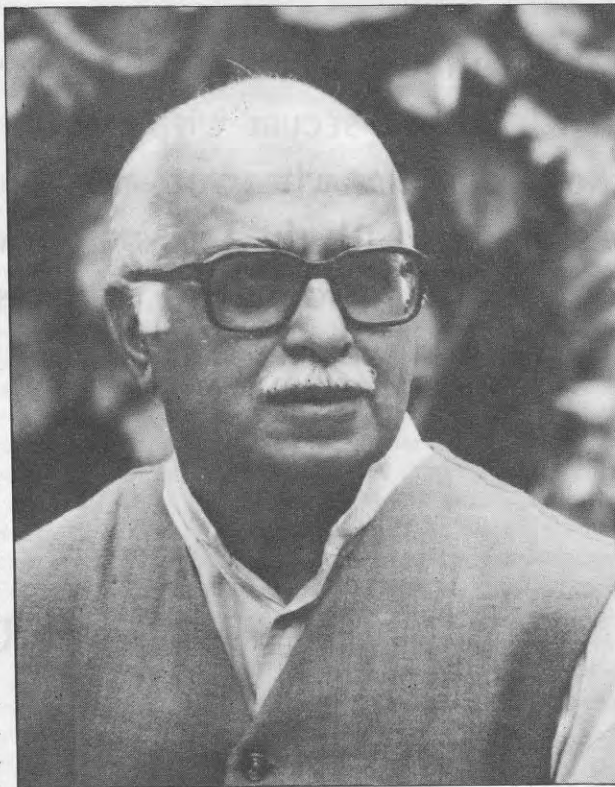
has self-destructed, the BJP will be the obvious alternative." Some say the centrist and left parties will align to keep the BJP out of power, while others predict an alliance between Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao, select Congressmen and the BJP. Whatever the prediction, no one is leaving the BJP out of their calculations.

And that includes analysts in the neighbouring countries of South Asia. The majority of those consulted in Pakistan and Bangladesh consider the prospects of a BJP victory with some trepidation. These fears have to do with the implications of a party pushing an overtly Hindu agenda.

Former Indian Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit agrees that apprehensions are expected, especially in Pakistan. However, much of these fears are misplaced. "No party can drastically alter the country's foreign policy, as they all must acknowledge and operate within the limits of responsibility," he says.

And there are those within the BJP, looking ahead to the day when the party would actually have to rule, who have been trying to project a more moderate image and to distance the BJP from the stridency associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

In the quiet, tree-lined office, a confident Ms Swaraj makes light of all these fears. As the major player in the region, India has to provide sound leadership by adopting "a helpful attitude and avoiding the overbearing big-brother mantle," says Ms Swaraj. "Our priority is to have cordial relations



Lal Krishna Advani bows out, for now

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with all South Asian countries, especially Pakistan." But, she adds, "If Pakistan fails to reciprocate despite India's goodwill, we will not bow down."

Advantage for Jamaat-e-Islami

In Islamabad, some experts are positively skeptical about the prospects for bilateral relations if the BJP rides the chariot. Says senior journalist and political observer Abbas Rashid: "The BJP coming to power would increase tension and certainly not be very promising for South Asia. Ominous is more like it, however bad the Congress might have been." Mr Rashid says that although many welcome the BJP's economic policies, "on political issues, the party's rational side is swamped by the hysterical element."

There is consensus among the Pakistani analysts that the immediate advantage of a BJP win would go to the religious parties of Pakistan. Mr Rashid says, "It would strengthen the politico-religious lobby here. They would point to Indian secularism as a sham and feel justified in urging Pakistan to forge ahead with its Muslim identity."

Ever since the restoration of democracy after the death of Zia-ul Haq, religious parties in Pakistan have found it difficult to carve a niche for themselves in mainstream politics. The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan and the start of intra-Afghan fighting left the religious parties without an issue. Staunch supporters of the religious right have since deserted, as shown by the 3 percent vote secured by all religious parties in the 1993 polls.

"There is no enemy anymore to launch jihad against, and the people are fed up with the militancy of the religious groups," says a former leader of the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan. However, if the Hindu right manages to secure a share of power in New Delhi, the repercussions on the political scene in Pakistan will be immediate. "Qazi Sahib is already in search of a strong issue to regain the political clout that his party lost in the last elections," says one political analyst in Lahore, referring to the Jamaat chief, Qazi Hussein Ahmed.



Which way to the Hindu Kingdom?

The Jamaat is today faced with internal wrangling and disillusionment among workers on the one hand, and an unresponsive political environment on the other. "A BJP victory across the border will make it easy for parties like Jamaat to cultivate support from people on various religious and political issues," says Khaled Ahmed, editor of the Lahore Urdu weekly *Aaj Kal*. "Because of their extreme viewpoints on issues such as Kashmir, the religious parties here are bound to gain a definite political advantage with a BJP victory."

Two-Nation Ideology

There are other political scientists, however, who maintain that relations between Islamabad and New Delhi might actually start improving with the BJP in power. Indo-Pak relations recorded an all-time high when Atal Behari Vajpayee was Foreign Minister for 28 months in the Janata Dal coalition in 1977-79.

Mr Vajpayee, who is heralded as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate after Mr Advani's withdrawal, recently told an Indian magazine that he had always tried to develop good relations with Pakistan.

Professor, S.D. Muni, a specialist in South Asian studies at New Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, is hopeful about better Indo-Pak relations under a BJP government. "This would give India a more perfect Hindu identity and reinforce the two-nation ideology on which the very formation of Pakistan rests."

Mr Dixit agrees, "Extreme antitheses always find a way to co-exist. The trouble Pakistan faces is confronting India's secular identity." He suggests that Islamabad would find a BJP government with a strong majority easier to deal with than a confused coalition. "Pakistan's relations with India have always been the best when there has been a strong government here at the centre," he says, citing the days of the Rajiv Gandhi regime before its credibility began to erode.

Conceding that foreign policy is a "delicate issue" that will not witness a drastic turnaround with a

change in government, Ms Swaraj says that there is actually more likelihood that the Kashmir issue will be sorted out bilaterally under the BJP.

Support for Tigers

As Sri Lanka enters the 13th year of bitter civil strife caused by the Tamil demand for a separate homeland, Ms Swaraj says that a BJP government would raise the Tamil issue in international fora for humanitarian support. "However, we will not send any signals of support for terrorism, the Tamil question is essentially an internal matter of Sri Lanka." While the BJP would support a negotiated settlement, "no vocal support for the Tamil cause would be beneficial for any political party at this stage."

In the past, the BJP's views on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were clear. At a meeting of a visiting Lankan parliamentary delegation in July 1990, the party's leadership said that the LTTE should be "isolated and crushed". Dr Stanley Kalpage, Sri Lanka's then High Commissioner in New Delhi, recalls that Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee were present.

Times have changed, and the BJP's own stance on the Tigers has been influenced by

the need to garner support from the Tamil-speaking Indian South. The BJP's sympathies for the LTTE, even though muted, are explained by the fact that "as a party of the north, with little support in the south, it is seeking to identify with southern causes," according to one Lankan analyst.

However, others believe that the BJP is not inclined to support the LTTE's militant campaign despite the overt sympathy of the Shiv Sena, the BJP's more radical ally, for the Tigers. The situation in Tamil Nadu, rather than the inclinations of the Shiv Sena, will be the deciding factor in relations with Sri Lanka, says Prof Muni. And both the major political parties of the state, AIADMK and DMK, generally oppose the Tamil Tigers, much to the satisfaction of Lankan diplomats.

'Theocratic' Nepal

As a self-declared Hindu kingdom, with a majority Hindu population, and a written ban on cow slaughter, Nepal has commonalities with Hindu India. Its ties are bound to be even better in the case of a BJP victory, according to many observers. According to Prof Muni, "Relations with Nepal would witness an upswing." The consensus is that, among the national parties of the kingdom, a BJP victory would most benefit the more tradition-bound Rastriya Prajatantra Party, made up of politicians of the old Panchayat regime.

Recent press reports speak of the BJP's support for radical Hindu elements in Nepal's tarai region, which is culturally-linked to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, where the Hindutva wave is strong. Asked about this alleged support, Ms Swaraj says, "We



Sushma Swaraj

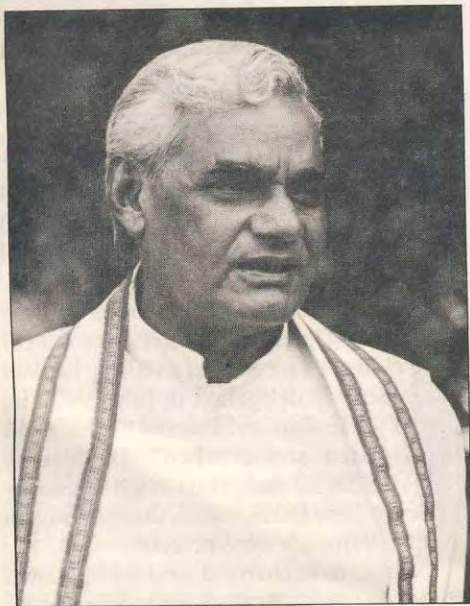
don't have to support them. Nepal is the only declared theocratic Hindu state in the world."

However, according to one Tribhuvan University scholar, the BJP's backing of King Birendra's (Hindu) monarchy during the 1990 pro-democracy movement makes some Nepali democrats wary. Ms Swaraj says that the reports of BJP's support for King Birendra are erroneous. "We support democracy there," she adds.

Achyut Raj Regmi, a former cabinet minister and President of the Nepal Committee of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, feels that the rise of the Hindutva wave has been positive for Nepal, as it has "strengthened

They All Love Vajpayee

Bangladeshis say he got them the fairest deal yet on Farrakka, Nepalis say he arranged a trade and transit treaty, and analysts in Sri Lanka and Pakistan agree his term was the best for bilateral relations. There is considerable nostalgia all over South Asia for Atal Behari Vajpayee, when he served as foreign minister during the Janata Dal coalition of 1977-79. If there is to be a BJP government in New Delhi, an overwhelming majority wants Mr Vajpayee to be foreign minister once again, if not the prime minister.



our Hindu culture and provided spiritual upliftment." He adds, "India should not hide behind the name of secularism. Because of secularism, there is no peace in India."

This is not how Sridhar Khatri, a political scientist at Tribhuvan, sees it. "Any type of fundamental revivalism will encourage negative and unnecessary reaction in Nepal, especially among non-Hindu or semi-Hindu minority groups of Nepal," he says. Mr Khatri and many other scholars maintain that the cross-border influence of political Hinduism has needlessly aggravated Hindu-Muslim relations in the tarai region, as is evident from the rioting that took place in Nepalganj in November.

Rajendra Dahal, editor at the Nepali weekly *Deshantar*, has another perspective: "Even though Nepal is perceived to be a Hindu rastra, what is prevalent is a more liberal brand of Hinduism known as *sanatan dharma*, and not the didactic Hinduism pushed by the VHP." Mr Dahal says that Kathmandu's intelligentsia prefers Mr Vajpayee's liberalism over Advani's harder line. "Vajpayee, as Foreign Minister, was far more accommodating towards neighbours than Prime Minister Morarji Desai. It was under Vajpayee that the Indo-Nepal trade and transit was possible."

Dhruba Kumar, another political scientist at Tribhuvan, holds determinist views. "It does not matter what party is in power in India," he says. "India continually takes advantage, and exploits its smaller neighbours and will continue to do so, no matter what."

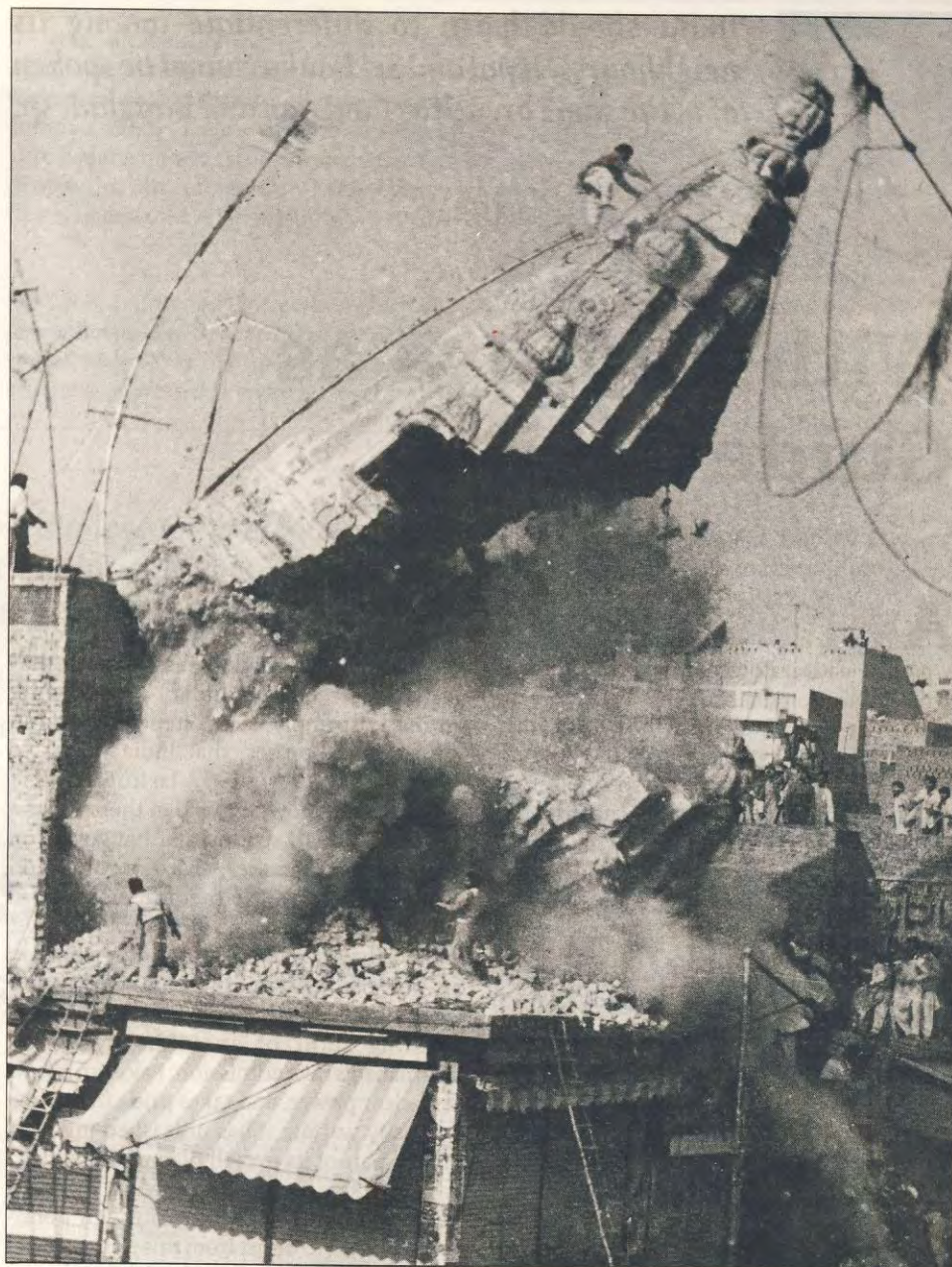
Bangladesh

"That the BJP continues its angry rhetoric of Hindutva causes uneasiness among Bangladesh's 90 percent Muslims," says an expert at Dhaka University. He, like most others, is convinced that a BJP victory will be translated into less accommodation on bilateral matters. This would include the Farakka water issue, Bangladesh's main bone of contention with India, disputed sovereignty of Talpatty island, and other border disputes.

Prof Muni feels that bilateral relations will depend mainly on how the political crisis in Bangladesh sorts itself out. "It is true with all the South Asian neighbours, including Bangladesh: the weaker the government, the more adversarial a stance it will take with India. This would be true even with Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina, who is perceived to be pro-India."

A BJP victory is bound to trigger a more anti-Indian-than-thou race in Bangladesh.

In the future, no one can afford to enflame passions in one country, for retaliatory waves are bound to engulf neighbouring countries. Picture shows the Jain Mandir in Lahore falling to a mob, following the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992.



The rise of the BJP has, in fact, already affected Bangladeshi parties, with most shifting towards a more "Islamic" stance on issues. This shift has also been made by the Awami League, with its traditional Hindu support. It is also seen to have a weakness for the Congress party because of support received during 1971. In fact, Shiekh Hasina, who was criticised for not condemning the Babri mosque demolition vehemently enough, is expected to ensure that nothing of the sort happens again.

Ms Swaraj says the BJP would like to revert to the cordial Indo-Bangla relations that existed when India supported Bangladesh's movement for independence in 1971. However, there are three ticklish issues that have to be resolved. "The first is Bangladesh's support for the insurgencies in the Northeast. The second, the question of Chakma tribals who fled their homes because they have been given the choice between death and conversion. And third, the large-scale Bangladesh infiltration that poses an economic burden as well as a political risk for India as many of them work for Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence."

There are those in Dhaka who believe, as one journalist puts it, "that the BJP's bark will be stronger than its bite". They cite the threat to deport thousands of Bangladeshi refugees in Bombay—which did not happen. Others feel that the Bangladeshi parties must mute their anti-Indian and anti-Hindu rhetoric so that the BJP is not forced to react belligerently. The Bangladesh military, especially, is said to be worried that anti-Hindu fervour in Bangladesh may lead to a Hindu exodus to India, angering the BJP.

The economic pragmatists are the least worried. They point to the fact that Bangladesh is the 11th largest market for Indian goods and services. "It would not be in the interest of a government in New Delhi, BJP or otherwise, to spoil the marketing relationship," says a businessman. The recent refusal by the Indian Government to lower tariff barriers for Bangladeshi goods has already caused worries among Indian businessmen that Bangladesh might reciprocate.

What is interesting is that India's stunning capture of the Bangladeshi market happened during the reign of Begum Khaleda Zia of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, a supposedly 'anti-Indian party' in

relation to Sheikh Hasina's 'India-leaning' Awami League.

What seems obvious, in Dhaka as in Colombo, Kathmandu and Karachi, is that it is too early to give strait-jacket explanations of party positions and reactions. What a BJP victory will mean for bilateral relations with India's neighbours, and for South Asia's divided nations, is difficult to predict. There are too many variables, both in issues that impel the BJP itself in its politics, and in the issues that impel the domestic politics of each of India's neighbours. Perhaps the fallout of a Bharatiya Janata Party win will surprise all, especially the pundits. ▽

Reporting from Pakistan by Mazhar Zaidi



India should learn to differentiate among its neighbours. Nepal and Sri Lanka cannot be spoken of in the same breath as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

by N.N. Jha

With Kautilya as Guide

A good policy, according to Kautilya, must achieve four things: to acquire what the nation does not have, to preserve what it has, to enhance what is preserved, and to use for the welfare of the people what is enhanced. Foreign policy, too, has to serve these ends. Kautilya also wrote that power was the only means to ensure friendly relations with other countries. This fundamental precept must serve as a guide to the foreign policy of a future central government in India. And, as power is best achieved by strengthening a country's national security, this must be given top priority in India's foreign policy.

Neighbouring countries, quite understandably, play a vital role in Indian foreign policy projections. At the same time, New Delhi has tended to judge all of India's South Asian neighbours by the same yardstick. It has taken us a long time to realise that such a policy has stood on foundations that are patently shaky. To place Nepal and Sri Lanka in the same category as Pakistan and Bangladesh is simply absurd.

At the worst of times, Nepal's and Sri Lanka's perceived lack of cordiality towards India has been more reactive than original. Usually, this has resulted from these countries' lack of comprehension of India's policies, in which case it was equally India's responsibility to remove any apprehension felt by them.

India's relations—or, to be more precise, the lack of cordiality therein—with Pakistan and Bangladesh, on the other hand, is another matter. They cannot escape the negative weight of history. The rectificatory mechanism has its own momentum, and can and must be assisted. However, the process cannot be rushed, a point which must be borne in mind by policy makers.

The fact that Pakistan and Bangladesh are products of secession from India is often overlooked. (Bangladesh, as a part of Pakistan, did secede from India.) This does not in the least imply, as is often suggested in these two countries, that India wishes to undo the partition of 1947, far from it. What it does mean, however, is that there exists a vague, residual, sentimental hangover, on the part of all parties, that does not lend itself to a quick dispersal or dissipation.

It must be clear to all except the most biased that Pakistan is doing everything in its power to destabilise India. Its policy of creating instability and unrest in India is nothing short of an inimical act. By Islamabad's own admission, Pakistan is now a nuclear power, and takes pride in the low intensity warfare it has unleashed in Kashmir as part of its overall plan to destabilise, even balkanise, India. Pakistan must be prevailed upon, preferably through political dialogue, to desist from this policy, for its plans to 'bleed' India can rebound very severely upon it.

Of course, some of the blame for the present situation in Kashmir lies with India. Successive Congress governments in New Delhi have, over the decades, fostered a sense of separateness among the Muslims of Kashmir. This has resulted in their keeping aloof from the national mainstream. It is necessary, therefore, to restate unequivocally that Indian sovereignty over the whole of Kashmir is beyond questioning, and that India will go to any length to preserve that sovereignty and will never allow anyone to challenge it. A great deal has changed from 1947 to 1996. It is certainly not within the power of a few latter-day zealots to change history. India will not tolerate any attempt at mediation by any power. Whatever exter-

nal problem may exist regarding Kashmir, it is a bilateral matter that falls within the purview of the Shimla Agreement and should be discussed by India and Pakistan alone.

India is fast reaching the limits of its tolerance regarding Pakistan-sponsored terrorism and it should be justified in taking whatever steps it deems fit to put an end to it. Terrorism is the very antithesis of democracy and its eradication should be the primary concern of the votaries of human rights.

As for Bangladesh, the illegal migration into India is proving to be a major irritant in Indo-Bangladesh relations and has cast its shadow on the entire gamut of bilateral ties. The continuing influx and the continued presence of such persons in eastern and northeastern India is causing an intolerable strain on the body politic and national fabric of the entire country. India should be prepared to consider participating in international efforts to tackle this problem, including assisting in the economic development of those regions from where such influx takes place. This would, naturally, be on the condition that it does put an end to influx from that country.

With Nepal, the most cordial ties exist and must so continue. Nepal's sense of unease with the Treaty of 1950, and its grievances with regard to the utilisation to its water resources and hydel potential need to be seriously and sympathetically addressed. The past must not be allowed to come in the way of the future. The agreement on the Mahakali signed in Kathamandu on 29 January is an example of a highly positive and constructive approach on the part of both countries. At the same time, Nepal cannot be oblivious to the fact that the entire Himalaya has a most strategic bearing on India's security and defence-related thinking. One cannot be blind to one's geography.

Furthermore, India is confident that Nepal will avoid, even subconsciously, becoming a part of ISI's designs against India and by creating a base for anti-Indian terrorist activities.

On India's part, however, it must seek to ensure that there is a large measure of complementary and mutual benefit to both countries in any shared project. India is also aware of Nepal's deep feelings over the forced migration of Bhutanese refugees of Nepali origin to Nepal. The action of the

Bhutanese government, in this regard, cannot be condoned. Nevertheless, India hopes that this problem will be resolved in a spirit of cooperation and understanding.

Regarding Sri Lanka, India throughout its history, has had warm and fraternal relations with all sections of its population. India supports the realisation of legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people within a united Sri Lanka. India has a direct interest in an early resolution of the ethnic conflict and must, therefore, exert to the utmost to bring this about.

The ultimate objective of Indian foreign policy is to make human beings everywhere realise that they are all members of a compact family. This is what India's sages of yore had meant when they placed before its people the idea of *vasudhava kutumbakam* (the whole world is your family). ▽

N.N. Jha, retired foreign service officer and former Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, is a member of the BJP's National Executive. The views expressed here are his own.

news on the question of Pakistan granting MFN status to India.

Preferential trade within the region is but a stepping-stone, we are told, to free trade; SAPTA will become 'SAFTA'. Instead of paying steep prices to distant producers, South Asia's consumers will pick up items inexpensively made in their own neighbourhood. Once citizens are locked together in trade, politicians will find it difficult to mobilise them for strife.

An attractive concept, but the region's fears and hates have squashed it for years, and may do so once again. Why should common sense, long subdued by emotion in South Asia, now triumph? Have new circumstances or leaders suddenly blessed the region?

We can acknowledge the global trend in favour of regional cooperation, exemplified by ASEAN, EC, NAFTA, and APEC (promoting Asian-Pacific cooperation). No doubt many in the region ask themselves why South Asia should be the odd one out.

For quite a few, the question has led to a quest. This was shown in 1995 during two successful rounds of the India-Pakistan People's Dialogue, one held in Delhi and the other in Lahore. Participants found friendship and common ground and issued joint statements. They also found, in both Delhi and Lahore, cordiality in encounters outside the dialogue.

Perhaps, too, there is some truth in the view that new veins may contain less toxic blood—that new generations in both India and Pakistan may be more willing to let the past stay in the past.

Yet, just one negative headline about a neighbouring country can kill the fruits of a series of dialogues. Putting it differently, we must hope that bridge-builders on both sides of the gulf will withstand a series of negative headlines.

What, to vary the question, is required of builders of a South Asian Community? For a start, they have to think of all of South Asia as *their* region.

This would cut across the South Asian 'norm' of rubbing out the disliked neighbour from our thoughts and even our maps. It would mean a desire to let a flood, drought or earthquake in a neighbouring country affect us as much as a disaster in our own land would; it would mean a deliberate stretching of our hearts.



New veins may contain less toxic blood. New generations in both India and Pakistan may be more willing to let the past stay in the past.

by Rajmohan Gandhi

A Common Sensitivity for South Asia

In March 1948, when Indo-Pak bitterness over Kashmir was fresh, Eric Streiff of the *Neue Zurcher Zeitung* asked Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder and Governor-General, whether India and Pakistan would cooperate against any outside aggression. Jinnah's reply, reproduced in Karachi's *Dawn* of 12 March 1948, and later on page 499 of S.M. Ikram's *Modern Muslim India and the Birth of Pakistan*, was as follows:

Personally, I have no doubt in my mind that it...is of vital importance to Pakistan and India as independent sovereign states to collaborate in a friendly way jointly to defend their frontiers.

But this depends entirely on whether Pakistan and India can resolve their own differences in the first instance... If we can put our own house in order internally, we may be able to play a very great part externally in all international affairs.

In this response, Jinnah saw South Asia as a unit, a "house" that needed to be put in order "internally" so that it might help in "all international affairs".

Just now, as I recall the far-seeing words, India-Pakistan relations seem a tiny bit better than they have been for months, which is not to say that they are warm. All the same, Nawaz Sharif, leader of the opposition in Pakistan, has said that he favours Indo-Pakistani talks, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has referred to his remark in positive terms, and India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukerjee has welcomed the idea of talks with Pakistan.

A more meaningful sign, perhaps, is the evident progress over regional trade. Meeting in New Delhi, the commerce ministers of SAARC have agreed to lowering tariffs and non-tariff barriers between the member countries. Pakistan's Commerce Minister, Ahmed Mukhtar, has been quoted (*The Times of India*, 9 January 1996) as saying that there will soon be good

True builders will go beyond this. They will strive for a common sensitivity towards all wounds inflicted by humans in the region, no matter what the dateline—Karachi or Kashmir, Bombay or Manipur, Colombo or Jaffna—and no matter who the culprit militant, soldier or policeman. They will stretch minds as well, and fill gaps in their knowledge and understanding of the SAARC Seven.

Common Realities

True builders will recognise the similarities in the psychological and cultural traits of different parts of South Asia. Whether in politics, on the screen, or on the playing field—whether in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, and perhaps, in Nepal as well—we have always wanted not performers, but stars. We don't really want them to perform; we only want them to shine.

We want stars and we want dynasties. Our stars and dynasties love to feud, and to carry over their feuds from presidents and generals to their daughters or widows, and from one generation to the next. This is not an Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan or Bangladeshi thing; it is a South Asian trait.

In politics and outside politics, we hate compromises and coalitions. Our political alliances do not last as long as they seem to in Southeast Asia or in Europe, but our political stalemates can seem endless.

In almost all South Asian countries, another common trait is to see the state as the Great Provider, the Great Protector, and, at times, the Great Persecutor. The state seems Great, and the individual a helpless midget.

A focus on the past—sadly, not to learn from history but to avenge it—is another common feature. Who deceived or betrayed whom in the past is the staple of politics in almost every SAARC country.

Builders of a South Asian Community will recognise other common realities: the failure of state institutions to provide justice or redress, large economic disparities, remote-control from an often-distant national capital, discouragement or suppression of local identities and local political forces. They will face these formidable realities and yet extract hope from the fact that the realities affect all of South Asia.

They will also recognise the region's joint assets that include a language—call it Hindi, Urdu or Hindustani—that brings

much of India, Pakistan and Nepal together; another language, Bengali, that cements Bangladesh with India's West Bengal; and a third, Tamil, which is common to the north and east of Sri Lanka and the south of India. They will note that South Asians laugh at similar things, enjoy similar food, and appreciate similar music.

Further, the region's bridge-builders will recognise that cycles of revenge and the spiral of an arms race can destroy all hope in a precious part of the world called South Asia, providing retrospective justification for the alien hand that, for all its presumption and greed, brought some order to the region for two centuries.

They will listen patiently to opposite points of view, enlarge the friendship constituencies that exist, underline the similarities among South Asia's adversaries, and, wherever possible, encourage wise initiatives. The region's peacemakers thus have a role ahead of them which may not be any less important than that of attaining independence. △

R. Gandhi's latest book is *The Good Boatman* (Viking, 1995), about his grandfather, Mahatma Gandhi.



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SAARCONOMY AND FREE TRADE

The recent meeting of the Commerce Ministers of the SAARC countries and the SAARC Trade Fair culminated in announcements and commitments. SAARC Trade Centres are going to be established and so are Corporate Clubs. The removal of trade barriers has been unanimously brought forward to 2000.

From the time the SAARC organisation was established, such announcements have been a regular feature. In December 1995, tariff cuts were announced by all the seven member countries, but the goods given such preferential treatment comprise less than five percent of the total regional trade.

Each country harps on the need for barriers to go down. But the announced tariff cut on import of chewing gum by Nepal or dental cement by Bangladesh will not boost regional trade. The true test of free trade will be when Pakistan starts importing tea from India and not from Britain.

India is still seen as South Asia's "shark economy", and the foundation of true free trade will be laid only when this perception starts being erased. New Delhi has taken the right step by giving

most-favoured nation status to Pakistan.

Where the entire region is being strapped by liquidity, why do the governments not allow intra-region investment, wherein a share of a Pakistani company could be traded in Nepal or Sri Lanka? Why should a factory in Bangladesh not be funded by a consortium of Indian and Pakistani banks? Why is it that people in Assam cannot buy Bangladeshi goods and have to pay heavy transportation cost of bringing cargo long distances overland?

The truth is Saarconomy has thrived all along without SAPTA at an unofficial level, where gold is smuggled from Nepal into India, Bombay *satta* market is backed by financiers from Karachi, and Indian goods find their way into Sri Lanka. Governments need to think about formalising this trade by removing barriers.

The price of deferring this decision is being paid by South Asia's 1.3 billion people. Freedom cannot come in stages. South Asia is either a free trade zone or not. Cutting tariffs on chewing gum and dental cement is not a start, but stalling.

-Sujeev Shakya

WHAT A DOLLAR WAS WORTH ON 22 FEB '96			THE PRICE OF TEN GRAMS OF GOLD ON 22 FEB '96		
BANGLADESH	Bangladeshi Taka :	41.90	BANGLADESH	Bangladeshi Taka :	N.A.
INDIA	Indian Rupees :	36.56	INDIA	Indian Rupees :	5390
NEPAL	Nepali Rupees :	58.25	NEPAL	Nepali Rupees :	8448
PAKISTAN	Pakistani Rupees :	34.30	PAKISTAN	Pakistani Rupees :	4843*
SRI LANKA	Sri Lankan Rupees :	53.70	SRI LANKA	Sri Lankan Rupees :	7625

*As of 19 Feb '96

STOCK EXCHANGE INDICES

3500.48	657.30	791.78	1816.00	195.98
BOMBAY	COLOMBO	DHAKA	KARACHI	KATHMANDU
BSE SENSEX	COMPOSITE CSE	DSE INDEX	KSE 100 INDEX	NEPSE INDEX
22 February '96	22 February '96	19 February '96	19 February '96	22 February '96

KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	GNP US \$ b	GNP per capita US \$	GDP (PPP) per capita US \$	INFLATION %	HDI RANK (Human Development Index)	PRIME LENDING Rates (%)
BANGLADESH	24.80	220	1230	7	146	14
INDIA	274.20	300	1230	8	134	15
NEPAL	3.40	190	1170	8	151	15
PAKISTAN	54.30	440	2890	10	128	16
SRI LANKA	9.90	540	2850	11	97	14

The Saarconomy page contains a short commentary on a regional economic issue or trend, as well as basic financial statistics from five countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). We hope to expand and develop this page as a quick and correct reference to business and finance in South Asia.

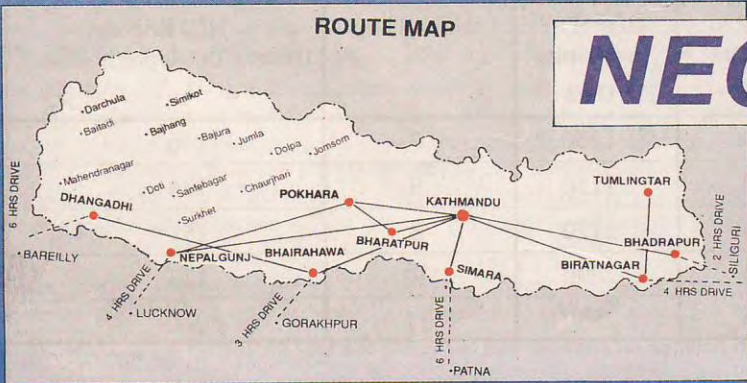


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HIMAL SO



GAMRUZZAMAN

No Cricket in Dhaka

History, climate, and the Bengali way of doing things conspire against a Bangladeshi presence in World Cup cricket.

by Zayd Almer Khan

More than a billion eyes are now glued on the Subcontinent, with the World Cup well underway. And with India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka jointly hosting the event, the quadrennial extravaganza has a truly South Asian feel to it. But, amid all the regional camaraderie on the playing field, what of Bangladesh?

It is a matter of chagrin for the millions of cricket-lovers of Bangladesh that for the sheer volume of their interest, their country is still not up to world class cricket. World Cup '96 is nothing but a reminder of this harsh reality.

It has not helped that for many years Bangladesh has been dubbed the most promising young nation in the international arena of cricket. Their performance against fellow associate members of the International

Cricket Council (ICC) over the years has been impressive, to say the least. In 1981, when Sri Lanka got their "Test-playing nation" status, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe (in that order) were singled out by the ICC as the next two probables for the elite group.

Fifteen years on, Zimbabwe now brush their shoulders with the best in the sport, having gained Test status two years ago and with a victory against world champions Pakistan behind them. Bangladesh still hovers in the periphery, faced with the unthinkable prospect of being overtaken by former non-entities like Kenya, Holland and the UAE.

Shattered Wicket

Being an associate (read, lesser) member of the ICC, Bangladesh does not automatically

qualify for the World Cup, as do the nine Test-playing nations. Rather, they have to go through the ICC Trophy, the official qualifying tourney for the elite event, which makes the Trophy as important for Bangladeshis as the World Cup is for Indians or Pakistanis.

Bangladesh's finishing among the top four in the ICC Trophy ever since their first participation in 1979 can be called impressive. But they have never managed to win the championship in order to qualify for the World Cup, having always been beaten to it by Zimbabwe. However, the 1994 edition of the once-in-four years competition presented them with a golden opportunity to transform this dream into reality. For the first time in the history of the tournament, not one but three top finishers would make their way to World Cup '96. And with Zimbabwe not playing (being a Test nation by then), the top-favourites were the upcoming Holland team and obviously, Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshis saw their chance and prepared for it as never before. Mohinder Amarnath, former Indian test star and hero of the 1983 World Cup final, was roped in to coach the promising outfit. Months of training followed, as did numerous foreign

tours, and practice games were played by the dozen. Bangladesh was ready for the challenge, and could already hear the roaring stands at World Cup '96.

Well, they came close. All of 13 runs separated Bangladesh from a maiden World Cup berth. In what turned out to be the decider for the last qualifier, host Kenya overcame a valiant Bangladeshi fightback and pipped the top-favourites at the post in a high-scoring affair. Bangladesh was out of contention and a nation's dream was shattered.

But it was not Kenya or joint-favourites Holland who snatched away the coveted goal. Both were expected to make it to the finish along with the Bengalis, anyway. Rather, their 'rightful' place, as all Bangladeshis like to think, was taken by an unfairly compiled UAE outfit. Bringing in first class cricketers from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka and handing out citizenships overnight, the Arab side was "the best of the Indo-Pak-Lanka second elevens," as an angry Dhaka enthusiast dubbed it. And so it was. The UAE, or "United Arab Expatriates", ran away with the Trophy.

Controversies apart, the Bangladeshi team returned to Dhaka a crestfallen outfit. With no one ready to shoulder the blame, accusations started flying. The skipper pointed at the selectors, the selectors the skipper; the team management blamed the players, and the players one another. The press, characteristically, blamed everyone. As for coach Amarnath, he did not even bother to return to Dhaka.

The bottom line was that Bangladesh had fallen behind even its earlier unenviable ranking. This was how World Cup '96 arrived with no home team for the Bengalis to root for.

Cricket Backwater

As one of the more enduring legacies of British rule, cricket was taken up by coun-

tries in the Subcontinent with gusto. But, among the former colonies (or parts thereof), Bangladesh was never up to the mark. Many reasons have been proffered for this backwardness, some stretching back into history.

And so the story goes that the proud people of Bengal, never willing to submit to the Englishman, purposely refused to learn his game. The fact that Bangladesh never had public schools is also thought to have a role in ensuring that the country remained a cricketing backwater.

Only a week into his brief stint as the national coach, Amarnath had complained of the limited facilities available for training. Although competitive cricket is played in as many (or, as little) as ten grounds throughout the capital, only two are fit to host top-flight domestic cricket which is hardly enough to develop a world-class team. At a ground in Mirpur, where first division matches are played, cows come in to graze during intermission. These grounds also double as venues for weddings and fairs, which leads to a bumpy outfield and almost unplayable wickets.

Dhaka Stadium, the only ground properly equipped to hold international matches, hosts both the Premier Division cricket as well as the football leagues. Football, being the main spectator sport in the country, always gets preference. The result: the cricket authorities have the field at their disposal for no more than five months a year. Golam Faruk, a member of the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB), says, "It takes at least a month to prepare a top-class pitch. We get only ten days to do so. How can you expect any better?"

If there were not already enough hurdles to world class cricket, there is also the weather to blame. With the monsoons and humid summer prevailing for almost half the year, the game can only be played during winter and in early spring. Says Faruk, "Holland and the UAE train throughout the year in their indoor facilities, while our players can go out only for a few months each year."

Fast bowling on Dhaka street during hortal

Facilities apart, the structure within which the game is played in Bangladesh is also in question. The only form of cricket played at competitive level is the one-day game. Critics believe that has to change. Len Chambers, manager of the West Indies Youth team that came to Dhaka a couple of months ago, says, "To win matches at the highest level, you need to have the right temperament and one-day matches get you nowhere where temperament is concerned. You've got to play three or four-day games to be top both mentally and technically."

Satellite Cricket

Things are changing, however. With the satellite television-induced rise in popularity of cricket in Bangladesh, the standard of the game is also said to be rising. And the ICC Trophy debacle seemed to have acted like a tonic to an ailing sport.

Preparations are already on for the next ICC Trophy to be played in 1998. Artificial turfs for the '98 tournament have been laid at two different grounds in the capital. Other grounds have been given a facelift and wickets relaid, complying to international standards. A new, only-for-cricket international stadium is being planned.

But the main improvement has come in the quality of play. With a new generation of cricketers coming up, common complaints about poor fitness, sloppy fielding, and not-enough handwork are heard less often. The game is also being de-centralised with leagues and competitions being held throughout the country. The lack of fast bowlers, for years the shame of Bengali fans, is no more to be felt thanks to those who have come out of different "pace foundations".

The BCCB is also active in promoting school cricket. A few years back Nirman Ltd, a local construction company, came forward to sponsor a nation-wide school cricket competition.

The result of these developments can already be felt. The under-19 team won a tournament in Malaysia last year, defeating Sri Lanka. The national side have recorded victories against both India "A" and Sri Lanka "A" teams. Bangladesh also came out on top when the Kenyan team came on tour in late 1995, and the youth team, playing to a home crowd, pulled off a historic 3-0 series win over the West Indies. That was impressive enough for Gus Logie, former West Indian test player, to comment, "The way I see things, your cricket can go only one way—ahead." △

Z.A. Khan is sports reporter for The Daily Star of Dhaka.



RAFIQUR RAHMAN

The Comeback of Urdu Cinema...Not



Pakistani film-makers continue to revel in mediocrity. Rumours about a revival of the Urdu cinema are greatly exaggerated.

by Farjad Nabi

If Indians travelling abroad repeatedly find themselves in situations where they are expected to know what brand of toothpaste Madhuri Dixit is currently using, Pakistanis face a similar hounding. The difference is that Indians are quizzed about their movie stars, while Pakistanis are grilled about their TV actors.

So it may come as a mild shock to the uninformed that Pakistan churns out over a hundred feature films a year. The logical question that follows is: "Then why hasn't anyone seen them?", to which the answer is, "Because they are so bad that even the Pakistanis don't see them." Ask any Pakistani you meet at a seminar or meeting hall about the national cinema, and more likely than not, he will respond with an apology.

For almost half a century, cinema in Pakistan has been climbing a slippery slope. Just when it seems to have gotten a grip, something comes along to send it tumbling down again. The problems are manifold. The riots during Partition took their toll on the film industry. The Upper India and Shoori studios of Lahore were ransacked and gutted. Three were left unscathed, of which Pancholi was the first one to be revived in the new-born country.

The artistes who opted for Pakistan found themselves practically without a film infrastructure, and, in any case, the majority of brains (and faces) of Lahore's film industry had already moved to the more established markets of Bombay and Calcutta.

Pakistan's cinema circuit was (and is) minuscule compared to India's, and the initial free flow of Indian films did not help nurture the fledgling industry. A ban finally imposed after almost two decades did spur local production, but the film-makers always found it easier to copy Indian movies—a tradition which continues to this day.

The National Film Development Corporation (NAFDEC) was formed in the 1970s to promote healthy cinema. After initial success with films based on classical novels, the Corporation ran out of steam. Today, it is a virtual non-player in the movie industry. The biggest blow was the martial law under Gen Zia-ul Haq, who ordered the re-censoring of all movies made in Pakistan and let the industry shrivel.

While cinema was strangling, television was progressing rapidly, producing high-class plays and serials. The upper and middle classes that once patronised the movies began to stray. The 1980s were marked by the rise of the gun-toting, law-defying 'Sultan Rahi phenomenon' of Punjabi films. These movies changed for-

ever the face of Pakistani cinema—and that of the cinegoer.

The single most important reason why Pakistani film remains stuck in the mediocrity rut is the lack of respect for the artiste. Pakistan's film industry draws heavily from the 'talent' of red-light areas, whether actresses or musicians. To date, there is no film academy in the country.

"No matter how established an artist is, he always feels at the back of his mind that society does not respect his profession," says Mushtaq Gazdar, a well-known documentary maker who is writing a book on Pakistani cinema. "As a result, incongruously, many people in the film industry turn staunchly religious." The best example of this interesting side-effect was none other than the late movie idol Sultan Rahi who always found time to go door-to-door preaching Islam.

Munda Bigra Jaye

Fast forward to 1996. The prevalent belief is that, finally, the times are changing, and that Urdu cinema is on the up. Four films are cited as examples to support this theory: *Munda Bigra Jaye*, *Jeeva*, *Sargam*, and *Jo Darr Gaya Woh Marr Gaya*.

The film that stands out among these is *Sargam* because of its non-commercial treatment. Inspired by the Indian *Paakeezah* by Kamal Amrohi, it revolves around a male protagonist's love for classical music and the non-violent conflicts that surround his adventures. Another major factor was the casting of the angelic Zeba Bakhtiar (of R.K. Studios' *Henna* fame) as the delicate heroine, who is the diametric opposite of the pelvic-thrusting Reema, Pakistan's number one female star.

A major feature of *Sargam* is its high selling soundtrack composed by Adnan Sami Khan, who also plays the hero. Sadly, Asha Bhosle's vocals in the original soundtrack were replaced by a

Zeba Bakhtiar: Meena Kumari would approve



Pakistani singer's before the film was released in Pakistan, due to official meddling.

Sargam lasted two months and failed financially. As a commentary of class tastes, throughout its showing the galleries were sold out whereas the cheaper stalls below remained empty. This is what had people optimistic that the middle class had finally returned to Urdu cinema.

Jeeva's main contribution is the return of movie tunes that could be hummed. The hit song "Janoo Sun Zara" did much for the movie's success. *Jeeva* was shot in Turkey and its cinematography was more imaginative than the average. *Munda Bigra Jaye* is a venture by the actress-turned-director with a Midas touch, Shamim Ara. She combines comedy, romance and action in a well-balanced mixture, resulting in a film that has drawn the largest number of female viewers in recent times. The plot was plagiarised, as in the case of the Indian *Andaaz Apna Apna*, from Hollywood's *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*.

The most notorious of the lot is *Jo Darr Gaya Woh Marr Gaya*. A sickeningly garish big-budget production, the movie owes its box office success to unprecedented vulgarity. Neeli, the top heroine of a few years ago, pulled all stops and a few buttons to earn a comeback, including a thirty-second sequence where, clad in skin-tight leotards, she writhes on a bed with remarkable suggestion. Incidentally, the film is a blatantly plagiarised version of *Consenting Adults*.

Film pundits who interpreted the crowds at these movies as indicating the revival of Urdu cinema are off the mark. While more Urdu films are being made today than two decades ago, the people thronging the theatres are not the same. Women and families are conspicuously absent, while rowdy young men make up the bulk of the audience. If this be revival, then let us do without it. Δ

F. Nabi is a Lahore-based journalist with The News on Friday.

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REVIEW

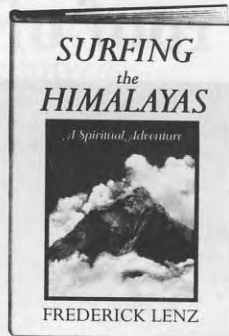
Are Half Truths OK?

Surfing the Himalayas: A Spiritual Adventure

by Frederick Lenz
St. Martin's Press
\$14.95

A much-hyped book raises questions about the transmission of Tantric Buddhism to the West.

review by Broughton Coburn



There is more than one Buddhist vehicle to enlightenment, and Frederick Lenz in this heavily-promoted book offers a new one: a snowboard, the flexible plank that is now terrorising North American ski slopes. It is a tribute to readers' good sense that the publisher's promotional efforts have not pushed *Surfing* above 146 on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

In January, the *Washington Post* ran a long expose on the dalliances of the author, a rich and dangerous cult figure with mansions scattered around North America. So, this is who South Asia and the Himalaya get as their latest representative in North America's mass media. And it is clear that Lenz is using the medium of a book supposedly on Tantric Buddhism to push through his own agenda.

The nameless protagonist in *Surfing* is a young snowboarder who needs no name because he represents the West, the Occident. He acts as a primitive device for the monologue of the book's spiritual guide and only other character, Master Fwap Sam-Dup, "the last master of the Rae Chorze-Fwaz School of Tantric Mysticism and Buddhist Enlightenment." They meet when the snowboarder runs over the master on a mountain near Kathmandu. Master Fwap's own guru had prophesied that a tall young man on a snowboard would "bump into" Master Fwap. This is how Eastern dharma is transmitted to the West.

While Master Fwap, in mystical tones, explains his brand of Tantric Buddhism to the snowboarder, I found myself searching for evidence that the author had travelled to Nepal, as he claims in the epigraph. In Kathmandu (which is misspelt in the book) he stays in a "youth hostel" on a cot, and eats

hard bread and gruel. The next morning it snows as he rides a yak-drawn cart across the city. Overlooking an elevation problem there, I wonder whether a yak would ever submit to such a device.

The master—swathed in the robes of an omniscient Tibetan guru, except that they are the wrong colour—conveys opinions that are frequently more Western than 'Eastern'. Conveniently, he has learned about modern science and society, which facilitates his conspiracy with the author's wide-ranging philosophy agenda. "Without my knowing how or why," says Master Fwap's disciple, bathed annoyingly in waves of kaleidoscopic golden light, "I simply 'knew' that what he had told me was true." The young snow surfer has blindly caught the wave of Eastern Mysticism, and though he doesn't know where it is going, he doesn't want to get off.

Master Fwap's pronouncements are improperly described as "Tantric Buddhism" and "Buddhist Yoga," and his discourse mostly meanders through an agglomerated mystical landscape of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, common sense, contrivance, Chinese *feng shui*, the "Atlantean Mystery School," something Egyptian I'd never heard of, and New Age nonsense such as "vibratory soul types," "auric patterning," and "psychic pollution of the earth's aura." Master Fwap says, "You must look beyond my words in order to know what I am talking about."

"Fwapism" would be a more appropriate title for this discipline. No known Tibetan traditions or sects are referred to, and Master Fwap is the sole source of the book's ancient wisdom. But Buddhist philosophy isn't copyrighted, so I wonder why Lenz borrows and invents when the real Tibetan

Buddhist concepts work just fine.

Master Fwap correctly identifies karma as quite simply the law of cause and effect, sometimes realised over a period of many lifetimes. Later, he slips into the stereotypical and incorrect sense of karma as 'fate'. "...the winds of karma change direction, and we are blown into yet another life... And if you don't follow your karma, if you try to avoid it and run away from whatever your karma happens to be, you will never be happy..." Sounds good, but unfortunately, that isn't karma.

Master Fwap claims to have been enlightened in dozens of past lifetimes, which defies a core Buddhist belief that *nirvana* liberates one altogether from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. He confirms that humans are habituated, indeed slaves to the "weather" of our transient emotions. He also touches on Buddhist emptiness, but in doing so fuels numerous myths: that Buddhism is largely mystical; that meditation is a means to stop one's thoughts (Buddhists observe the mind, they don't control it); that enlightened masters always tell the truth (not necessarily); that Tibetan monks aren't ordinary people (really?); that "To suffer because of anything you see, feel or experience here in the world...is a mistake." One of Buddhism's most practical lessons is that the experience and understanding of suffering is our greatest source of compassion.

Surfing raises questions about the introduction of Tantric Buddhism to the West. Are half truths better than nothing? Might this book actually impair a proper understanding of Buddhism? I don't know. Perhaps simply inspiring readers in the West to regard the world differently, while providing them a narrow glimpse of emptiness and the transitory nature of existence, is good, especially if this leads them to further inquiry.

Surfing can be looked at as humorous, I suppose. The protagonist says, "I had been sitting in meditation for several hours, even though it had only seemed like seconds to me." He ascribes this to the higher *pranic* currents of the valley where he is sitting. Real Buddhist masters recognize this state of mind as *sleep*.

Those interested in learning about Buddhism would be better off snowboarding past the poorly-researched crud of *Surfing* and start with any of the readable, clear, consistent, *humorous* books written by the Dalai Lama. △

B. Coburn's most recent book is *Aama in America: A Pilgrimage of the Heart. He lives in Wilson, Wyoming.*

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Stateless in 1997

China favours Chinese-speakers, India does not allow dual nationality, and Britain would rather they stayed away. Ethnic Indians of Hong Kong are beginning to feel like castaways.

by Yojana Sharma

There are about 20,000 ethnic Indians living in Hong Kong, and many of them continue to hang in limbo as the handover of the British Colony of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in June 1997 draws nearer.

Many of these Indians descended from those that came to Hong Kong as traders, police officers and civil servants more than a generation ago when India was still a British colony. They hold Hong Kong British passports and could become virtually stateless after the handover because these passports do not grant them the right to live

in Britain. China seems set to allow only ethnic Chinese the right of permanent residence in Hong Kong after 1997. And, many of Hong Kong's ethnic Indians do not fulfil the residency requirements for Indian nationality.

"Most of us were born and raised in Hong Kong and don't have an Indian passport," says Mohan Chugani, a garment trader and member of the Indian Resources Group (IRG)—a lobby group of influential Indians trying to press Britain for British passports. "We have been told by the authorities that granting British passports is not an

administrative decision. It has to go through (the British) Parliament and that will not be easy."

Show Your Links

The granting of passports to non-whites is an emotionally charged issue in Britain. In 1991, with some difficulty, the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had managed to push through a package to grant 50,000 British passports to Hong Kong people in order to shore up confidence in the wake of the June 1989 Tiananmen killings in Beijing.

While some Indians acquired full British passports under that scheme, no special lobby exists for those who might become stateless in June next year. Instead, they must fulfil the requirements on education, qualifications and links to Britain that other Hong Kong people too must show to obtain passports.

The IRG's Ashok Sakhrani, a lawyer, says Britain has a moral duty to provide for their future. "But we believe the British and Hong Kong governments are attempting to wash their hands of responsibility for these British subjects." Despite the obvious hurdles, the IRG seems determined not to give up its lobbying effort. Last month, a petition was presented to Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten, and there were plans to go higher up with another one.

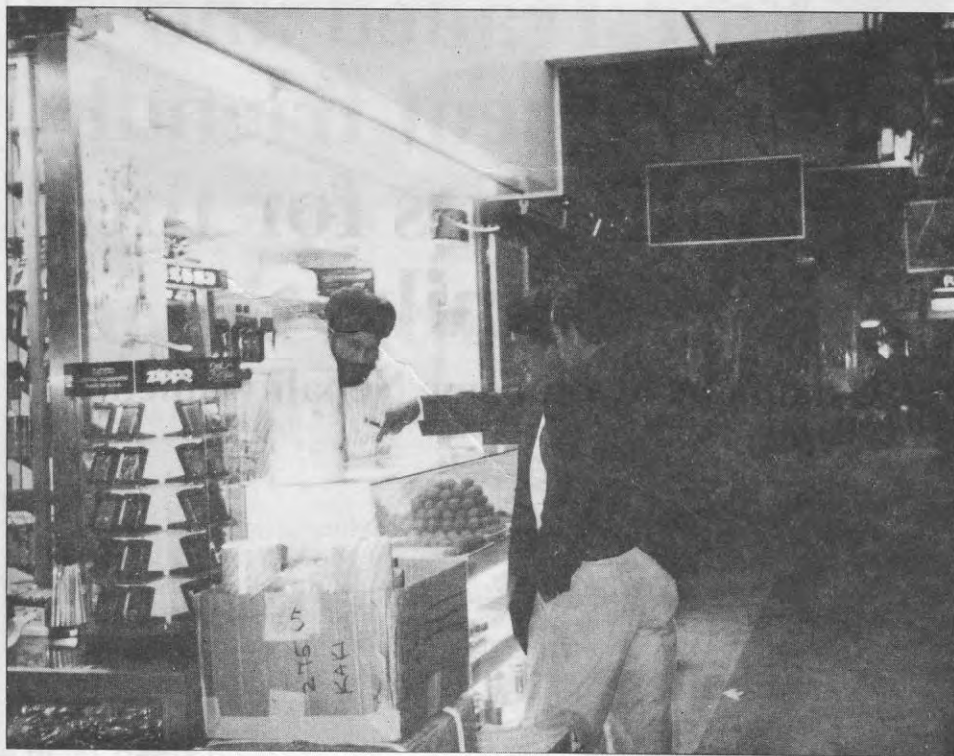
There is one small ray of hope. The IRG says it has the sympathy of Britain's opposition Labour Party leaders. With a British general election due before mid-1997 that is widely expected to return a Labour government, there may be some way to get those passports. However, the group's members admit that passports for ethnic Indians in Hong Kong are unlikely to top a new Labour government's parliamentary agenda.

Dual Nationality

And even swift action may come too late. "People here cannot wait till 1997, they need to arrange their future now. Most have already done so," says Mr Chugani. Many have already joined the hordes of Hong Kong Chinese seeking passports overseas through emigration, mainly to Canada, the US and Australia. Some 62,000 Hong Kong people are leaving each year with overseas passports.

"Most others, particularly the business community will look elsewhere in Asia, such as the Philippines and Singapore," says Mr Chugani. "If you invest a lot of money in these countries they will grant residence."

Others are hedging their bets by illegally taking out two passports, one Hong Kong and the other Indian. They may need



RAGHENDRA NEPAL

No laddoos in Hong Kong after 1997

their Hong Kong passports to continue living and working in Hong Kong after the handover, but if things go awry after 1997, they can fall back on their Indian nationality. "I know there are a couple of hundred people in Hong Kong who are trying to hold both documents illegally," says an IRG member, who cautioned that those who are trying to have it both ways may be weakening their case for claiming British passports. "In the unlikely event that Britain is persuaded to take positive action, these people will be excluded from the benefits," he says.

Meanwhile, it would not take long for the Indian authorities to weed out the double nationals, and South Block apparently frowns at this development. "Dual nationality is against the Indian Constitution," says an Indian consular officer in Hong Kong, adding that those who are found out would be asked "to make up their mind and surrender one of the passports." He adds, "We have no problem with anyone preferring to hold Chinese, British or American passports rather than Indian. Just as long as they do not violate the Constitution."

Notice Is Served

The IRG is also seeking minimal assurances from the Chinese government before the

transfer of sovereignty so that the ethnic minorities can continue to invest, and conduct their businesses with the same rights and privileges as non-Chinese nationals. Amidst all this lobbying, the resignation last January from the government of Haider Barma, Hong Kong's transport secretary and the colony's highest-ranking ethnic Indian, sent jitters through the Indian community.

Mr Barma, 51 who was born and raised in Hong Kong and speaks Chinese, admitted his decision to step down was related to uncertainty over non-Chinese Hong Kong nationals after 1997. "One has got to be pragmatic," he says. "I am not Chinese, and one has to accept the reality of historical developments."

China has served notice that non-Chinese cannot serve at the higher levels of the civil service after 1997, but local Indians read more into Mr Barma's resignation. "Clearly, the Chinese have not been forthcoming with any assurance for the Indian community," says one.

Hong Kong NRI

Some accuse the Indian government of inaction, and for not raising the matter with the British. However, Indian diplomats say, a

little defensively, that the matter of ethnic Indians of Hong Kong is firmly in the British court. Says one diplomat, "We would help them if they ask us, but many of them do not want to settle in India. It is a very complex issue. We have to see first to what extent Britain will help these people, to what extent China will help them, as well as to what extent India can help them. Some may not even bother asking us for passports."

In India, the idea of granting dual nationality and special residency rights for non-resident Indians (NRI) has been mooted, particularly for those who invest in India. Such measures might have helped the Hong Kong Indians out of their dilemma, but no decision is expected soon.

According to a Hong Kong-based diplomat, South Block had warned Whitehall several years ago that if the question of Hong Kong British passport holders was not resolved before the handover, there would be a crisis of statelessness. "We are not in a position to say whether Britain would act on that representation," he says. "No one can really know what will happen until June 1997."

Y. Sharma is a Hong Kong-based journalist.

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Bard of the Brahmaputra

by Sanjoy Hazarika

A few weeks ago, in the northern Assam town of Tezpur, a small group gathered in the elegant drawing room of the Goswamis, a prominent doctor couple, sipping drinks and listening to a long-time politician recount one of his favorite anecdotes in the Assam Assembly.

The politician spoke of how a mischief-making MLA had got another opposition member, who was quite easy to

sway, to challenge the then leader of the opposition, Dulal Baruah, in the House on a point of order. An outraged Baruah thundered at his backbencher to shut up, but the instigator was not done yet. "Press on a point of order," he hissed at his wavering colleague.

"Point of order!" yelled the member, now defiant, but once again stumped when the Speaker asked him, quite

legitimately, "On what grounds?"

He fumbled, but then his friend whispered again, "Say, bad grammar."

"Bad grammar, sir," suggested the legislator.

The House dissolved in laughter as Dulal Baruah turned purple with rage and gazed balefully at his two tormenters.

The name of the assemblyman is not important, but there is much to be said of the mischief-maker, who was no other than Bhupen Hazarika.

Bhupenda, as he is lovingly called by millions, is recognised by many as one of the greatest cultural figures that Assam has produced, next only to Sri Sri Sankaradeva, the Vaishnavite preacher of the 15th century, and Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla, the early 20th-century singer-composer.

Bard and balladeer, poet and politician, journalist, singer, lyricist, musician, filmmaker, writer—but Bhupenda is much more than all this. He is a communicator of romance, passion, universalism and humanism. He has gathered awards aplenty: for his contribution to cinema, to music, to culture, and to the vigour he reinstilled in the Assamese, jostling them awake through song, and forcing them to rethink old attitudes. In 1994, he was awarded the Dada Saheb Phalke Award, the highest award in India for contribution to films.

Hazarika is cherished in Dhaka as much as he is in Guwahati. His song on the war of Bangladesh's freedom, "Joi Joi Naba Jata Bangladesh" (hail the newborn Bangladesh), is a stirring marching tune which was on every Bengali's lips during those harrowing days. His songs are not limited to Assamese and Bengali, and Bhupenda's rich baritone is equally at ease with Hindi, Urdu and English.

Hazarika's internationalism (or 'regionalism') goes further than his vocal chords, as is evident when he talks of his special relationship with Nepalis. He was born in Tezpur, a town that has quite a significant number of them. The black Nepali cap, which is his signature, he began wearing, he says, when his father died many years ago and someone in the neighbourhood gave him a *topi* to wear. The *khukuri* pin that adorns his *topi* is a gift from Hazarika's friends and admirers in Nepal.

Bhupenda is without doubt one of the greatest living cultural communicators of South Asia. He has swayed millions with the power and passion of his voice, and the message of universal brotherhood and

humanism, which comes through in his songs. He has a genius for weaving a magical tapestry out of traditional Assamese music and lyrics, breathing new life into the language, synthesising old and new strands of music, and instilling a sense of pride among the inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley.



Hazarika showed signs of early musical genius even before he started singing on All India Radio in 1937, at the age of eleven. As a young adult, he swiftly made his mark as singer and composer. Later, Hazarika travelled to New York, where he earned a doctorate in audio-visual and mass communications from Columbia University. He served in the Assam Assembly in the 1960s as an independent MLA. He has also headed the Assam Sahitya Sabha, the literary bastion of the Brahmaputra valley's dominant civilisation.

Few know that, during his time at Columbia University, Hazarika was a friend of Paul Robeson, the great black American singer, actor and civil rights activist.

Robeson's passionate crusade for social justice and black pride has permeated Bhupenda's own worldview. Inspired greatly by Robeson's powerful rendition of the song "Ole Man River", Hazarika created his own moving ode to the Brahmaputra.

The waterways of Assam have been a the source of inspiration for Hazarika's songs and lyrics all these years. "The Brahmaputra is the lifeline of Assam," he says. One of his notable collaborations for Doordarshan was *Luit Kinare* (by the banks of the Luit), a mosaic of ordinary tales that is both cheerful and poignant. (The Luit merges with the Dibang in Arunachal to create the mighty sea-like expanse of the Brahmaputra.)

Whereas he had been a legend in Eastern India for decades, it was his compositions for the film *Rudali* which won Hazarika recognition across the Subcontinent. At the age of 70, he retains the energy of a much younger man, and he is presently working on a television

serial on the freedom movement in Assam.

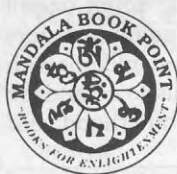
Perhaps the best example of the humanistic ideals that imbue his works is the song "Manuhe Manuhar Babe" (for man), composed in 1964:

*If man wouldn't think for man
With a little sympathy
Tell me who will—comrade.
If we repeat history
If we try to buy
Or sell humanity
Won't we be wrong—comrade?
If the weak
Tide across the rapids of life
With your help
What do you stand to lose?
If man does not become man
A demon never will
If a demon turns more human
Whom shall it shame more—comrade?*

S. Hazarika is Delhi-based correspondent for the New York Times and an author with special interest in the Indian Northeast. Bedabrata Lahkar of the Assam Tribune helped research this article. Translation of "Manuhe Manuhar Babe" by Pradip Acharya.

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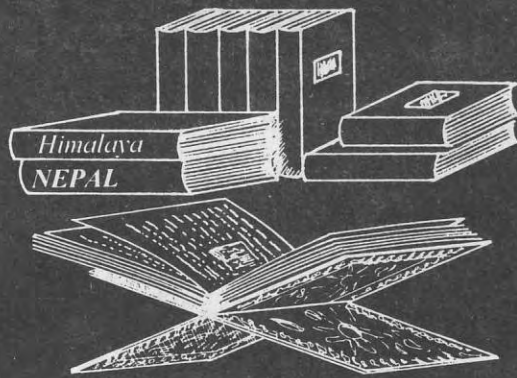


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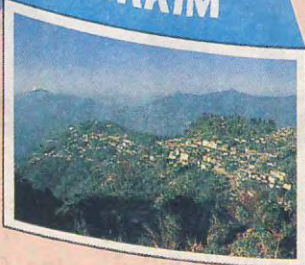


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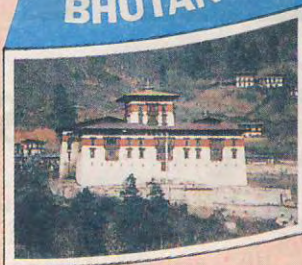
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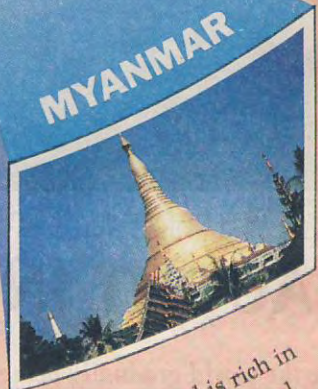
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DRUK-AIR





A teenage Tamil Tiger with his AK-47 rifle

This Young SouthAsian page is for and about children. In this rapidly changing world, young readers need to engage with issues and ideas—sometimes serious, sometimes not—that affect their lives and shape their future.

In this special section, which is dedicated to the young citizens of South Asia, you will receive information that we hope is interesting. The first instalment of Young SouthAsian presents you with a report that happens to be somewhat related to the cover story of this issue on militarisation and social justice.

Please write to Young SouthAsian, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal, and tell us what your interests are and what you would like us to include in this section in the future.

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE OF ADULT WARS

I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty, too, will end.

THESE ARE THE words of a 15-year-old girl. They could have been written yesterday, by a child in Bosnia or Afghanistan. They were written 50 years ago in the Netherlands, by Anne Frank, who died shortly afterwards in a Nazi concentration camp.

Since the end of the Second World War 47 years ago, there have been 149 major wars, which have killed more than 23 million people. This is double the number of war

deaths in the 19th century, and seven times greater than in the 18th century. Among the millions killed in those 149 wars, many, many were children.

It is especially sad when children die or are wounded in wars because they are caught in a crossfire that is not of their making. Obviously, children are never consulted when adults decide to fight wars. Nevertheless, millions of children are killed, disabled, orphaned, separated from their families, and physically and psychologically traumatised due to armed conflicts. Life is not easy even for those who survive the fighting, for they often re-live the terror of battle. The deeply disturbing experience can leave children fearful, insecure and

bitter for the rest of their lives.

The statistics are quite numbing. Over just the past ten years of fighting around the world, 2 million children were killed, 4 to 5 million were disabled, more than a million were orphaned or separated from their families, some 10 million were hurt psychologically, and 12 million were left homeless.

Wars also affect children indirectly because fighting disrupts the services taken for granted, such as schooling, health care, and the distribution of food. Most of the children who die in wars are not killed by bombs or bullets. Instead, they have succumbed to starvation or sickness.

Millions of children who have never even seen a gun are also affected by fighting, because wars

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force governments to squander money on arms and ammunition which could have been spent on textbooks and hospital beds. Most recent wars have been fought in Africa and Asia, by countries that can least afford them, countries like Sudan, Cambodia, Angola and Afghanistan.

War forces children to experience things that those living in countries that are at peace would never imagine. A 1995 survey of children in war-torn Angola found that 66 percent of the children had seen people murdered, 91 percent had seen dead bodies, and 67 percent had seen people tortured or beaten.

With so many conflicts raging in our own region, surely, if a survey were conducted, we would find that many South Asian children have horrifying experiences similar to those of Angolan children. In northern Sri Lanka, a war between the government and Tamil rebels has been going on for 11 years, and in Afghanistan, numerous factions have been fighting each other for more than 17 years.

Other flashpoints in South Asia, from where nearly every day, news of fighting and mayhem is received, include the Kashmir region, Karachi in Pakistan, and

the entire Indian Northeast. The headlines are so regular that we tend to lose interest. However, this does not make the violence any less real for those boys and girls who find themselves dodging bullets and taking cover from bombardments.

One of the saddest things to happen in recent years has been the use of children as soldiers—some as young as six years old.

Whereas in the past, lethal weapons were heavy and cumbersome, nowadays light assault rifles can be held and fired by boys who are not even in their teens.

The guns most

in use are the Russian-made AK-47 and the American M-16.

The men who plan wars find children very useful as soldiers because they can be bullied and forced to follow orders. Children are less likely to run away, and they do not demand salaries, unlike adult soldiers. In 1986 alone, as many as 200,000 children became gun-toting soldiers. In Sri Lanka and in Burma, militant groups have especially used child soldiers, depriving them of their right to go to school, to play, and to live with family.

In Sri Lanka's north, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has been active in using school children in the battle field. In Burma, parents volunteer their children for the rebel Karen Army because the guerrillas provide clothes and two square meals a day. It is estimated that 900 out of the 5000-strong Karen Army are boys under 15.

World leaders talk ceaselessly about the need for peace. And yet, all over, children continue to pay the price for the follies of adults. When will this stop? When will the world grow up? △

Information for this column has been taken primarily from Unicef's The State of the World's Children 1996, which focuses on children in war.



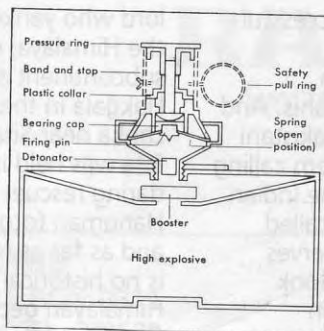
This picture shows two Afghans—one old, one young—both of whom have lost a foot to land mines. They are walking with the support of artificial limbs.

OF MINES AND MINORS

OF THE TWO types of land mines—anti-tank and anti-personnel—the latter are most dangerous to children because they explode with the application of even the gentle pressure of a child's hand or foot. In 64 countries around the world, there are about 110 million land mines still lodged in the ground—waiting.

Currently, about 800 people die every month because of exploding land mines. Thousands of others are maimed or disfigured for life.

A land mine can be bought for \$3 and to clear a single one of these hidden killers can cost between \$300 to \$1000. Afghanistan is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. △



Abominably Yours

We South Asians are in the horns of a conundrum. Our society thrives in contradiction, and this subject deserves a chhota dekho.

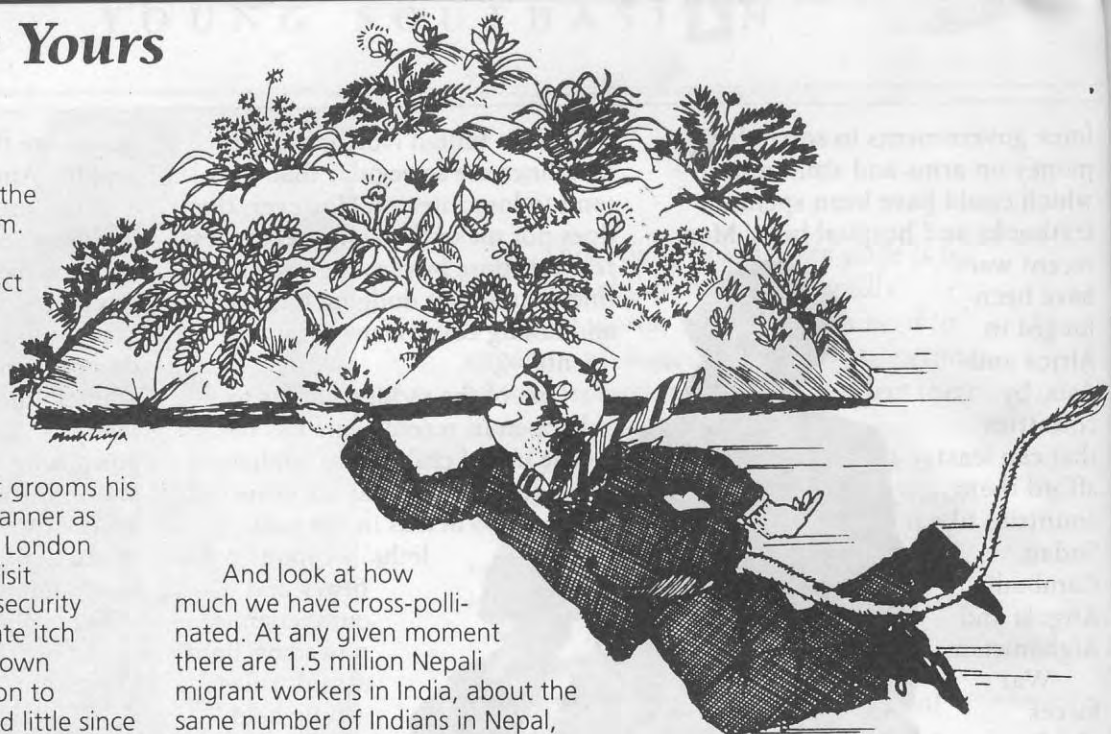
Here we have a rich and vibrant culture going back millions of years (ok, thousands) and the Immigration Officer at Indira Gandhi International Airport grooms his nose in a rich and vibrant manner as passengers on BA 262 from London disembark. And when you visit Mohenjodaro, a khaki-clad security guard is attending to a private itch using a technique handed down (pardon pun) from generation to generation, and has changed little since the zenith of the Harappan Civilisation.

In an area of the world that saw the dawn of the Great Hydraulic Dynasties where ancient Kings could build irrigation canals that traversed the countryside for 15 kilometres or more in a gradient of two centimetres without any help from the World Bank, we have citizens lined up against the wall at bus stops attending to IDD calls from nature.

In Allahabad, descendants of the authors of the world's first love manual take gender sensitivity very seriously indeed as they let their hands roam inside crowded buses.

The denizens of Dhaka have decided to turn their city into the Shutdown Capital of South Asia just when it was earning a reputation for being the Chinese Food hub of the subcontinent. Our advice to Bangladesh's squabbling politicians: you can't have your Dim Sum and eat it too. You either have to open up your city, or close down the Chinese restaurants.

Compared to their shutdown cousins back home, Bangladeshis overseas are real busybodies: carpenters in Kathmandu, successful slum dons in Bombay, and in Manhattan every other Indian restaurant is run by Bangladeshis. And just about everywhere else, Pakistani restaurateurs have no problem calling their cuisine "Indian". And the Indian running a Nepali restaurant (called Gorkhaland) in Washington serves fried vegetarian momos that look and taste surprisingly like plain old samosas.



And look at how much we have cross-pollinated. At any given moment there are 1.5 million Nepali migrant workers in India, about the same number of Indians in Nepal, Biharis in Bangladesh, Bangladeshis in Assam, Sri Lankan dentists in Male, Bhutanese in Nepal, Tibetans in Mysore, Afghans in Pakistan, Urdu-speakers in Sindh, Sindhi-speakers in Punjab, Punjabi-speakers everywhere else, Malayalis in Delhi, Goans in Bombay, and Germans in Goa...

With so much in common, it is difficult to see why South Asians can't get along. Outsiders see us as one race, so why can't we? When skinheads dewog neighbourhoods, they don't ask which side of Punjab your grandfather came from. And what of the rich heritage of myths that binds us together?

Godmen of the *Ramayana* went back and forth between India and Nepal without passports and visas—an honourable practice that continues to this day. And when Ram marched down to Lanka with his trusted Hanuman to show guerrilla king Ravana who was boss, he had to invade Jaffna—another endearing tradition that was reenacted recently.

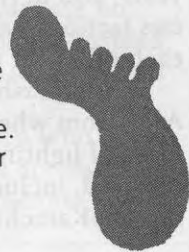
Hanuman was the levitating simian lord who yanked out a whole hunk of the Himalaya, carried it across the subcontinent and deposited it at Hakgala in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka near Sita Amman Kovil where Sita was held in detention until her daring rescue. After the victory, Hanuman forgot about his mountain, and as far as my research shows there is no historical record of this piece of Himalayan geology together with its flora and fauna ever being returned to

the rightful owners. A question of intellectual property under the International Biodiversity Convention might or might not be raised, depending on which way SAARC amity progresses.

What use have the Sri Lankans put the slopes of Hakgala to? If it is tea gardens, the people of Uttarakhand would like a rebate on *chai* imports. If hydropower is being extracted, howsoever micro, let there be power lines from Serendib to Shangrila.

And while talking of regional peace and friendship, does it do for Nepalis to gloat, as they are, over the latest excavations at Lumbini which prove conclusively that Siddhartha Gautam was indeed born in Nepal? Let me hasten to add that although the place of birth entitled him to Nepali citizenship, we cannot tell for sure what nationality he opted for when he grew up. For all we know, and going by evidence provided by the great Italian historian, Bernardo Bertolucci, he could have carried a Bhutanese passport. (Isn't it weird? When Nepalis become famous they suddenly don't want to be Nepali anymore: take Tenzing Norgay, Udit Narayan Jha, Arniko.)

And don't ask me why Hanuman was wearing a coat and tie. Perhaps that's how air cargo executives dressed even five thousand years ago.



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A sure feel for the aesthetically perfect, a personal style and a purposeful differentness: these are the characteristics of people who wear the La Coupole 'C ramique'. A watch whose true nature you experience when you put it on for the first time: soft as velvet, supple, incomparable. And imperishably beautiful, thanks to the slightly curved sapphire crystal and the scratchproof high-tech ceramics bracelet. Rado La Coupole 'C ramique' – a beautiful watch that stays beautiful – a watch that fits as though moulded to your wrist.

A different world



La Coupole 'C ramique'.
Scratchproof high-tech ceramics bracelet.
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