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April 1999



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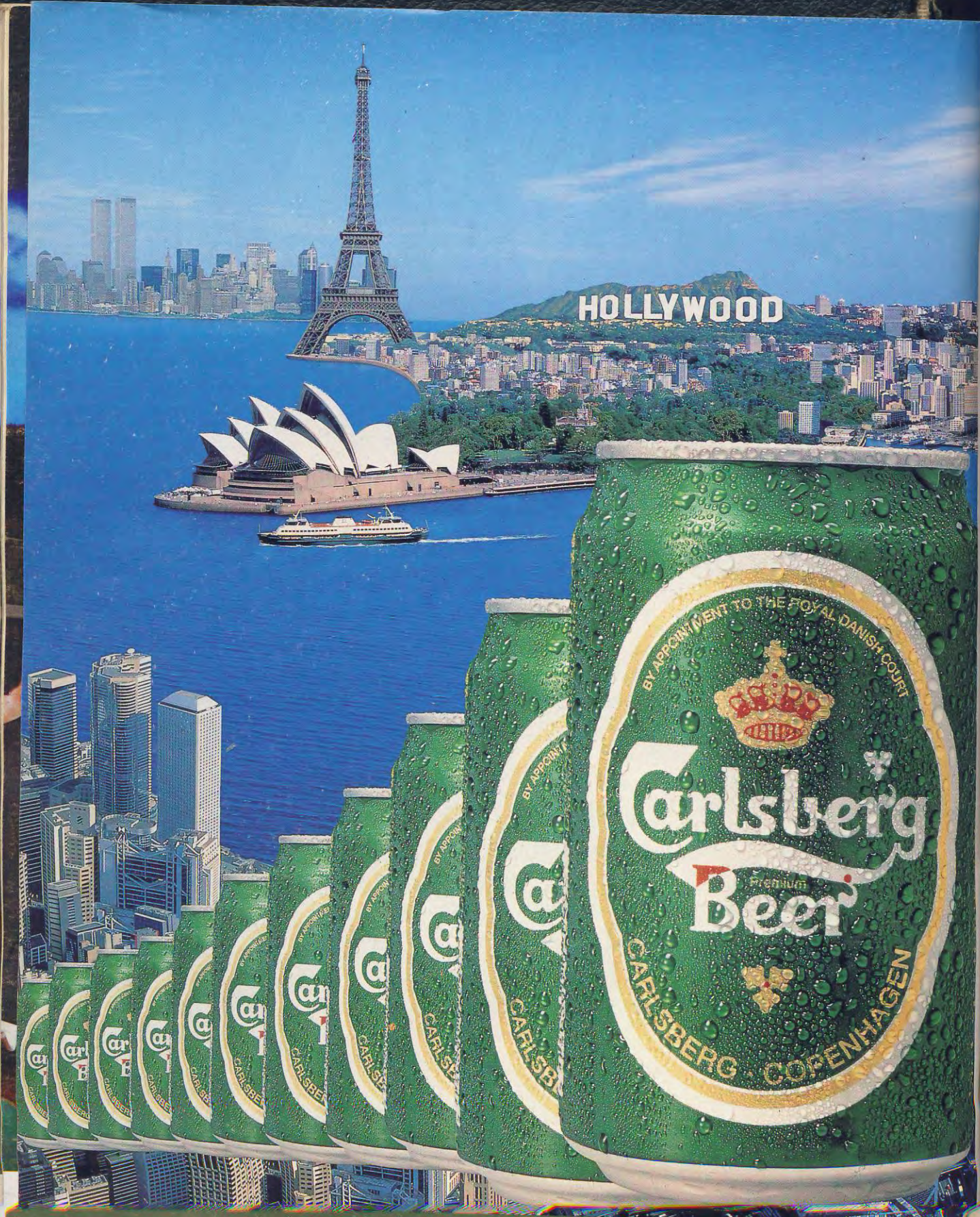
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MAIL 3

COMMENTARY 8

MOU, NOT I♥U

by Kazim Saeed

Militant season

by Afsan Chowdhury

Peace together

by Liz Philipson

COVER 14

Lions and Tigers

by D.B.S. Jeyaraj

Endless war 26

by Iqbal Athas

Burning bright 34

by Rohan Gunaratna

Killing fields in Serendib 40

by Sasanka Perera

MEDIAFILE 44

FEATURES 47

From the Tibetan Plateau
to the Deccan Plateau

by Keya Acharya

Monkeying around

by Rahul Bedi

Rape insurance

by Ranjit Dev Raj

Not Taliban-enough?

by zaigham khan

Bhutan-Nepal missive
exchange

by Sudhir Sharma

VOICES 56

Singapore's 'Indians'

Mother's sister

One Bengal, two systems

Indo-phobic Mao

Missing participant

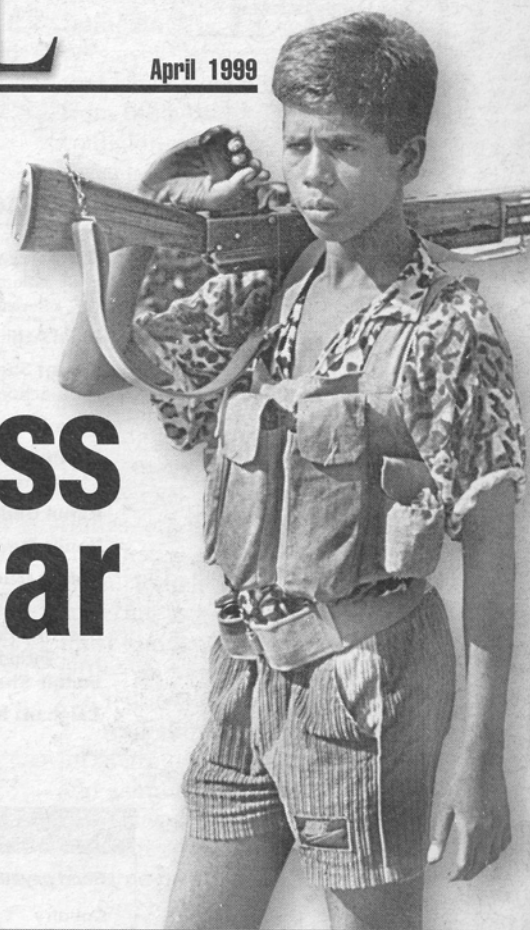
Song break

ABOMINABLY YOURS 60

14

Endless war

LIZ PHILIPSON
D.B.S. JEYARAJ
IQBAL ATHAS
ROHAN GUNARATNA
SASANKA PERERA



Monkeying around

50

Gross National Happiness

Not Taliban-enough in Malakand

Publisher's Note

On page 7 we carry an announcement in the Nepali Devanagari script soliciting subscribers for our sister publication, Nepali Himal fortnightly, which will be launched on 14 April 1999.

As editors of a South Asian magazine we are more convinced than ever that English is a South Asian language, and that a periodical which seeks to reach the whole region must necessarily be published in that link language.

But we have also known that the vast majority of South Asians who do not speak English must also have access to in-depth, analytical offerings of magazine journalism. The social, political and economic future of each of the countries and regions of the Subcontinent depends upon providing news and information to a billion-plus population that is not English-literate.

Himalmedia Pvt Ltd is the new publisher of this South Asian Himal magazine as well as the Nepali Himal fortnightly.

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Contradictions?

We are writing to you regarding your issue on trafficking "The Price of Our Daughters" (Himal, October 1998). In "My sister next?" Naresh Newar says that the people of Sindhupalchowk district in Nepal are fully aware of what is going to happen to their young women. However, the excerpt of the transcript from the documentary *The Selling of Innocents* quoted in the same issue suggests that the father did not know what work his daughter would actually be doing in Bombay.

John Frederick's article titled "South Asia's sex trade myths", on the other hand, states that among NGOs and government people, there is a strong denial of families' direct, willing involvement in selling children. Naresh Newar also writes that the girls do not know about the suffering they would face in Bombay but they do go to Bombay willingly to work.

Aren't there some contradictions here?

Matrika Bhattarai, Garima Shahi
and Prajita K.C.
Budhanilkantha School
Kathmandu

We really don't know

John Frederick responds to David Beine's letter to Himal in the March 1999 issue regarding his article, "Deconstructing Gita" (October 1999).

I would say that Mr Beine raises a vitally important question in asking: "Where are the hard facts to support the thesis of the prevalence of 'soft trafficking' of Nepali females to the brothels of India?"

Mr Beine, for me, the most important words in my article were: "What are the hard facts of trafficking? The truth is...we really don't know." If I have offered, as you say, rhetorically loaded comments replete with softeners such as "probably", "perhaps", "safely said" and "likely", it was entirely intentional—because we don't have the hard facts, and I will not

pretend that we do.

I don't profess to be a scientist. I am only a person who has an ear on the ground. I pose questions, and I question assumptions. That is my work. My father, though, was a research scientist, and from small-kid time he told me that one of the most important skills of a researcher is knowing the state of one's ignorance, and thus knowing what questions to ask.

I have presented only 'educated guesses', not hard facts. As with the possibility of life on Mars or a giant meteor nuking the dinosaurs, these suppositions must be borne out by research. Doubts about the Gita myth began to stir in me when I talked with my informants—people whose words I trust because they have nothing to lose by telling the truth. These are social workers with a decade in the Indian brothels, Kathmandu men who transported Tamang women to Bombay 25 years ago, and Calcutta sex workers I've known for 20 years.

Questions arose when I put their words against some basic 'hard facts' that we certainly know—that Nepali women have worked in Indian brothels for at least 30 years; that in

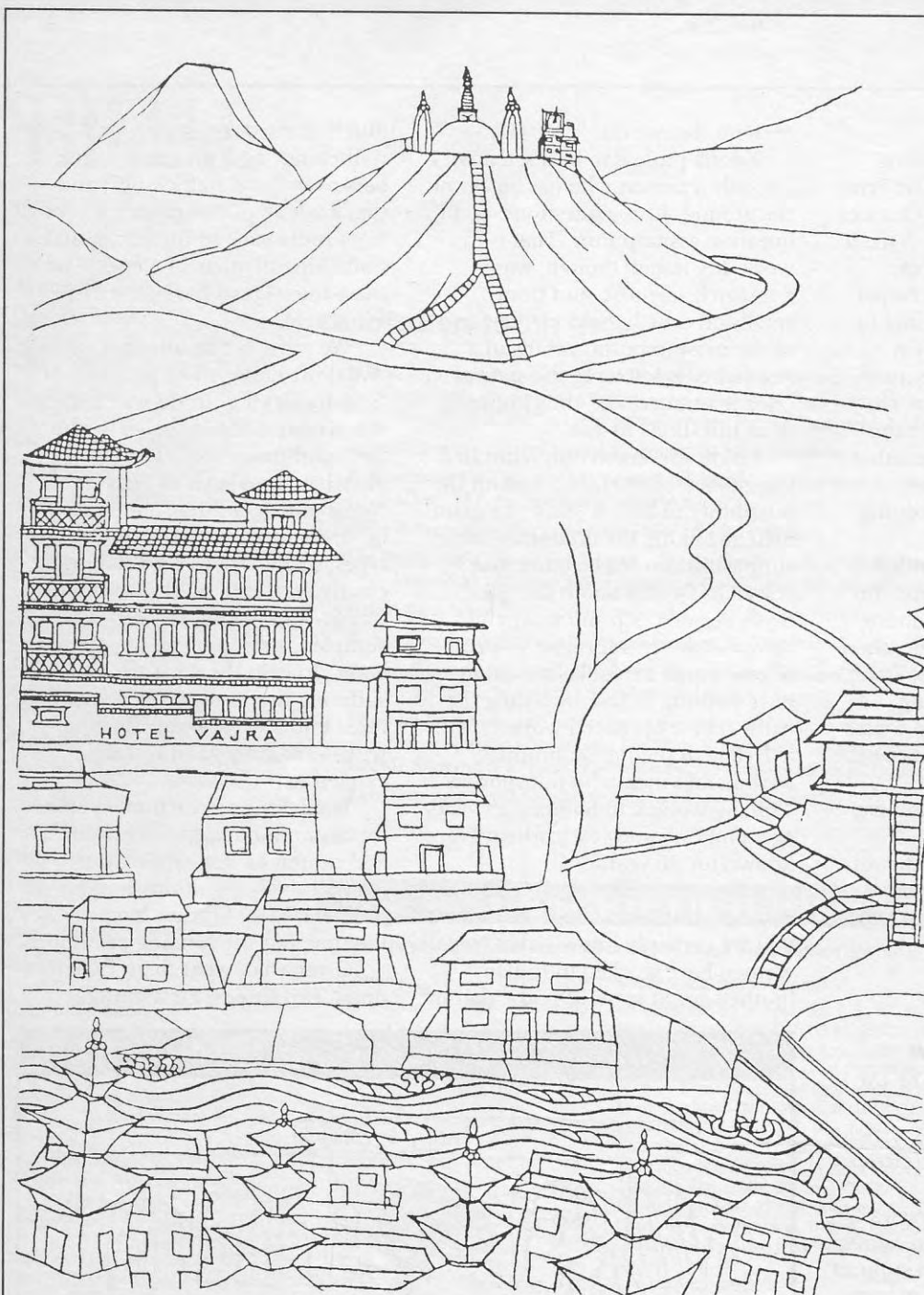
much of the developing world "soft trafficking" now prevails in numbers over "hard trafficking"; and that a whole pile of money is sent from India back to the traditional trafficking districts of Nepal. And these questions I have posed in the article.

We must not be afraid of saying "we don't know". The presence of "soft trafficking" in no way reduces the need to address the girls who are "hard trafficked". The work of stellar NGOs such as Maiti Nepal must continue, and must be strongly supported. Both types, many types, of trafficking clearly exist. We must not simplify things—trafficking is a very complex, subterranean phenomenon. To help the most persons suffering from the sex trade, we must know what we are dealing with—and only good research can tell us.

Trafficking research must cover a lot of ground in difficult terrain, and cannot be done quickly or inexpensively—and this is a problem. Most funders have neither the time nor the funding provisions.

Given that, what to do right now? Two things. First, until





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Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

I stayed a week at the **Vajra**, by which time I had become so fond of it that I stayed another.

John Collee
The London Observer

Vajra, a serene assembly of brick buildings, grassy courtyards, ivy-covered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis overlooking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time, February '99



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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research, with relative speed and minimal expense, by extensively interviewing the most accessible, trustworthy informants: social workers, AIDS workers, and sex worker peer educators in particular. That will give us an idea of where to point our questions.

Second, all of the concerned funders and their advisers could meet together, decide what research is needed, and divide the work and expense, as has been done with HIV/AIDS in the case of Nepal. We need a full, wide-spectrum research initiative, and no single organisation can, or should, carry that load. Beyond this, and very important, this research must be conducted with total sensitivity for the sex workers, used as a way to give them support and not just coldly extract information.

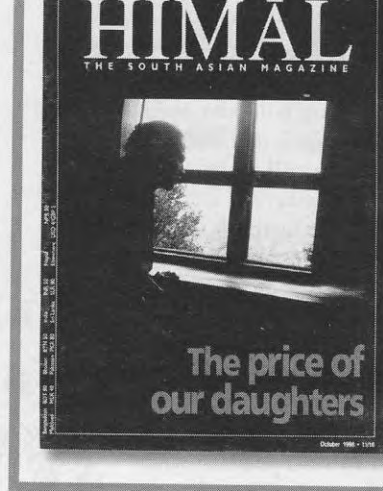
If Mr Beine is disappointed that I could not dish out hard facts, so am I. I wish I could, because I'm very frightened. The 'Kali Yug' is coming down on South Asia—as more girls and younger girls enter the brothels, they are meeting face-to-face with the AIDS plague. In a decade, folks, it will not be a pleasant scenario. This is no time to pretend we've got the answers. We don't, and we'd better start moving.

John Frederick
Kathmandu

Watching Vajpayee

I happen to live outside the Subcontinent and have the misfortune of only occasionally watching the Indian prime minister Mr Vajpayee talking on television. I have only very recently sorted out the mystery of why this most moderate falcon of the Saffron Flock keeps his mouth open for such long intervals in between sentences he utters.

The answer is that there is a secret device inside his mouth which receives long-distance instructions from the Sangh Parivar and retransmits it to the public in the prime minister's own voice.



Jokes apart, what interests me most is not this neo-Vedic technology as much as Vajpayee's last retransmitted call for a debate on 'religious conversion' in India. I agree with him that simply too many Hindus in India have been converted in recent time using foreign money and the most dubious means possible and this should stop.

I am referring of course to the way the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, using funds from unpatriotic overseas Indians, has been converting normally peace-loving Hindus into religious fanatics.

The BJP government's creation and appeasement of this minority of Hindu religious fanatics has gone too far and it is time for the majority to reclaim their rightful say in national politics.

If the proselytising by the Sangh Parivar—using money, muscle and sheer poison—is not stopped, one day, not so far in the future, it is decent human beings who will become a minority in India.

P. Jaya Raman
Penang

Himal fan

I've been a big fan of Himal since your founding. Now I read your articles on your website, but I almost cannot due to the small size

of the type. Maybe I need to subscribe. I will when I can. But, if you are going to offer the web samples, which is a great way to get subscribers, you might as well make it a pleasure to read.

Quibbles aside, you people make the best periodical publication in South Asia. I was moved by even the sample text of articles like Amitav Ghosh's piece in the November 1998 issue. This is only characteristic of the quality you have presented over the years.

Jim Traverso
via Internet

Homo sapiens non urinatur in ventum

As a mother who has to clean up after two grown-up boys and a husband, all of whom can't aim straight, I fully sympathise with "Abominably yours" (Himal, March 1999). Meanwhile, this news just in:

Michael Warwicker, 72, an amateur inventor in Britain claims to have found a way to restore peace to at least one battleground in the war between the sexes: with a toilet seat that automatically lowers itself.

"Men are just too lazy or forgetful to put the seat down when they've had a piddle. My

invention makes life happier for the women and easier for the men," Warcwicker said.

The device features a foot pedal at the base of the toilet bowl, which is used to activate an air pump to raise the toilet seat. Once the toilet has been flushed and the foot comes off the pedal, the seat falls down and closes automatically.

Jane Bridges
London

• Thanks to HIMAL for re-instating your last page columnist. For those of your readers who may think that her toilet humour is fantasy, let me quote from a letter (January 10, 1999) to the editor of *The Independent*, Dhaka, by Subrata Bhowmik of Dhaka University:

I would like to draw the attention of the people of the city to the scene at a busy corner of Dhaka. It is the south-west edge of the Bangladesh National Museum (BNM). If you visit the place, I am sure you will have the bite of your conscience and wonder whether we can still claim ourselves to be the members of a civilised society.

The footpath adjacent to the south-west boundary of the BNM looks like an ocean of urine. It is next to impossible to use the footpath.

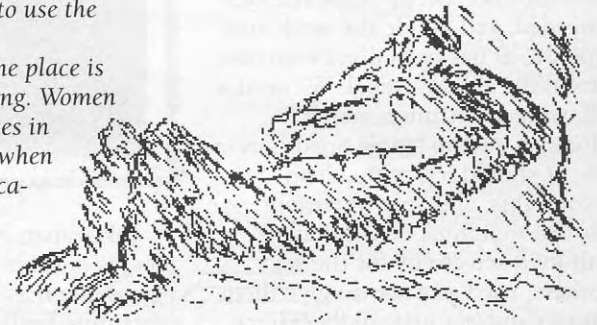
The stench of the place is extremely nauseating. Women often find themselves in awkward position when they face the predicament of passing through the corner.

Oddly enough, even well-dressed

people are found urinating in such a public place.

I urge the authorities concerned to take the necessary steps to rescue the place in question from being misused in this manner. Do our authorities know that public urination is a grave crime in many civilised societies?

Naila Hakim
Dhaka



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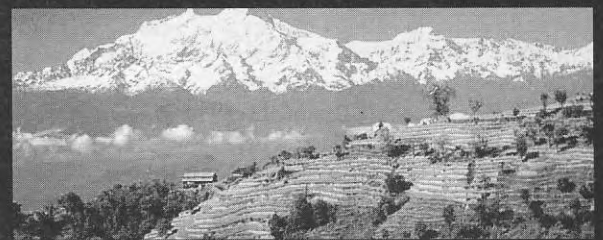


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*यो उपहार योजना नेपाल अधिराज्यभित्र सीमित छ।

INDIA • PAKISTAN

MOU, NOT I♥U

ON 21 February, the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) about measures "aimed at the avoidance of conflict". The signing was greeted by a collective sigh of relief in the two countries as well as in the international community.

But for all that, one can never forget that there is a nuclear cloud inside this silver lining. If one believes that nuclear restraint is only one step towards the real goal—nuclear disarmament—and that life under a blazing nuclear shroud is not an acceptable state of affairs, it is important to place this MoU in the perspective of disarmament in South Asia. To understand the kind of lobbying and activism this MoU suggests, it is crucial to identify what the MoU really means.

The underlying theme of the MoU's operative paragraphs focuses on reducing the probability of conflict caused by misunderstanding. The agreements reached are simple. Each will notify the other of ballistic missile test flights and of any accidental or unauthorised nuclear incidents. Measures for preventing untoward incidents at sea will be taken. Both sides will abide by their respective moratoriums on further nuclear testing.

Existing confidence-building measures and communication links will be reviewed and improved. And discussions will be held on "security, disarmament and non-proliferation issues within the context of negotiations on these issues in multilateral fora".

These highlights vary widely in value. The agreement to share notifications of missile testing and nuclear accidents is the most significant measure, as is also the one on preventing dangerous incidents at sea. But the very fact that each country intends to inform the other about these events indicates that both plan to continue their missile and nuclear weapons programmes. It is thus safety against misunderstandings that is paramount in this MoU—not safety against further development of weapons or against an arms race.

The mention of each country's respective unilateral moratorium is only an exercise in diplomatic rent-seeking. Each country declared its moratorium on nuclear testing unilaterally after its respective tests. And Vajpayee's visit to Lahore did nothing to change the status of either country's moratorium or to form any linkage between them. Pledging together to independently abide by a policy that each country has already chosen independently is not real progress. It is only an affirmation that each country stands where it stands.

The talk about existing and future confidence-building measures is also window-dressing, given the level of mistrust that exists between the two countries. The gains in mutual trust in this direction remain to be seen.

What is it then that the average South Asian interested in a life without the yoke of nuclear security can learn from the agreement? Four maxims spring forth to help chisel disarmament thought in South Asia.

First, this MoU has to be placed in the perspective of the international pressure that helped crystallise it. In eight meetings each

with key interlocutors of India and Pakistan since the nuclear tests, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott continuously recited the *mantras* of non-proliferation and arms control.

Since domestic voices for disarmament in both countries have been politically feeble, and as there was progress in only the risk-reduction area, it is clear how important the international pressure spearheaded by the US was.

The first maxim therefore is: *the South Asian citizen has*

to keep in mind the contours of international non-proliferation thinking and its power of persuasion.

Second is the fact that the various international arms control regimes that India and Pakistan are being pushed towards do not actually lead to complete disarmament. These international conventions cannot, and should not, be the final arbiter of the disarmament movement in South Asia. It is likely that domestic disarmament efforts may be enveloped by just such a cover not just due to the influence of powerful international forces, but also



by the willingness of the two governments to discuss disarmament and non-proliferation "within the context of negotiations of these issues in multi-lateral fora".

The maxim is clear: *disarmament thought and action in South Asia should certainly derive inspiration and strength but not its final roadmap from these international regimes.*

Third, the path taken by the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War may appeal to South Asians struggling with the prospect of a nuclear arms race. The MoU signed by India and Pakistan seems to take this route as a default choice.

However, it would be a mistake for South Asians to see Cold War agreements between the two superpowers as easy models to learn from, because the dynamic of that relationship was quite different from the India-Pakistan relationship.

For most of the Cold War, the US and the USSR were engaged in a worldwide empire-building competition with a sense of parity about each other's potential to dominate. The situation is very different in South Asia. India sees itself as filling the 'great power' vacuum in its neighbourhood and hopes to hold its own against regional as well as global players in this strategic ambition.

India is also a much larger country than Pakistan on any count and perhaps has the economic potential to follow through with these ambitions in the long run. This is the strategic wellspring of India's nuclear doctrine. Pakistan, on the other hand, is economically fragile and sees India as the largest player in its nuclear and conventional strategic calculations.

Expecting transplanted agreements signed by equals to become a stable basis for restraint between such unequal players is naive.

Thus the third maxim: *the apparent déjà vu with the Cold War times is really a mirage.*

The fourth is about the illusion of bilateral disarmament created by these agreements. With India and Pakistan headed along divergent strategic trajectories, particularly in the nuclear arena, the bilateralism implied by agreements on nuclear restraint stands on shaky ground.

Just the fact that India and Pakistan happen to have seen reason contemporaneously and clinched nuclear safety agreements at a given time does not imply that wider cooperation towards bilateral disarmament will follow. On the contrary—without meaning to belittle the milestone reached at Lahore—one has to recognise that the two countries have

merely agreed on routine safety measures while they still move along their respective strategic paths at their own speeds.

The maxim is: *the bulk of activism should concentrate on national-level and even local-level lobbying focused on specific nuclear installations.*

Peace, the ultimate bilateral prize, is much taller an order than can be served at this point. It is difficult to make peace while the uranium glows.

-Kazim Saeed

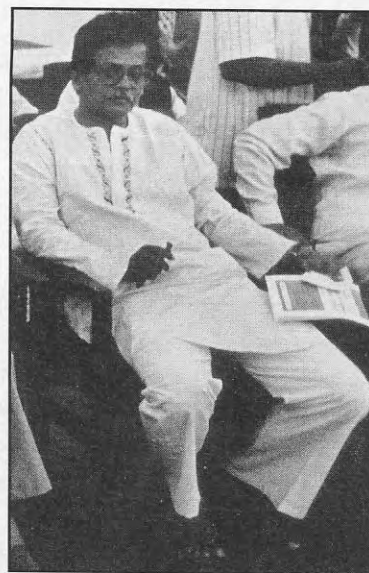
BANGLADESH

MILITANT SEASON

LESS THAN three weeks after Kazi Arif, deputy chief of the leftist Jatiyo Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) party, was gunned down along with five others while addressing a peace rally in the south-western district of Kushtia, on the night of 7 March 1999, powerful military-issue grenades rolled into a crowd watching a cultural show in the nearby city of Jessore. The explosions killed six people and sent over 150 to hospital.

The show in Jessore had been organised by Udichi, an organisation which has done much to keep cultural activities running during the country's hard times. Udichi began as the cultural wing of the erstwhile pro-Moscow Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), but over the years had evolved a distinct identity serving as a platform for budding artistes. It had never been thought of as a threat by anyone, and thus the sense of shock was more pronounced.

Initially, the attacks were blamed on local Maoists who are active in southwestern Bangladesh and who have been involved in violent attacks. Kazi Arif and CPB had an anti-Maoist stance and could be considered logical targets of Maoist wrath. But this was soon discounted in the Jessore case.



ATFEE HOOSAIN

Kazi Arif

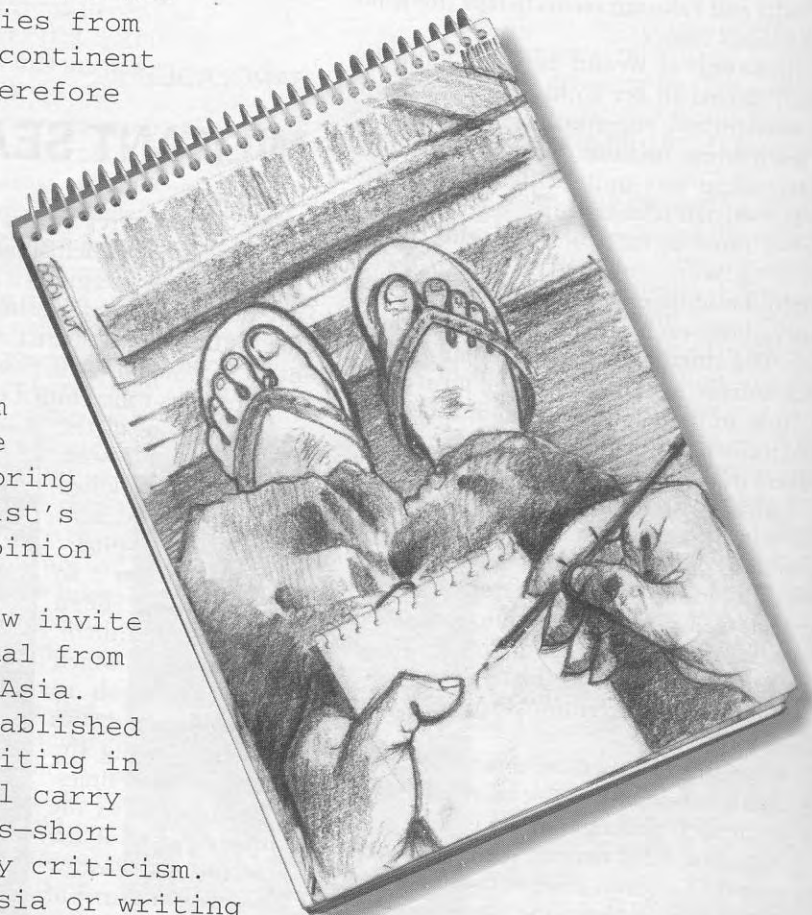
literary south asia

litSA

short fiction and poetry in Himal

At Himal, we believe that we are all losing something when stories from different parts of the Subcontinent are not shared. We have therefore decided to start a new department in this magazine, **litSA**, Literary South Asia, which seeks to bring together the literary rivers of South Asia in these pages. The creative voice of women and men from across the Subcontinent, we feel, are as necessary to bring to the fore as the journalist's presentation of news and opinion or the social scientist's analysis. This is why we now invite literary submissions to Himal from writers and poets of South Asia. **litSA** will feature both established writers and newer talent writing in English. The department will carry original or translated works—short fiction, poetry and literary criticism. Writers may be from South Asia or writing about South Asia.

When will the new department begin in Himal? As soon as we gather exceptional submissions to get started. Watch this space.



Or better still, send in your manuscript to:
Literary Editor, litSA, Himal, Radhamohan House, Relli Road, Kalimpong,
Darjeeling District, West Bengal, India - 734301
or email: mole@kalimpong.com

Manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and accompanied by self-addressed postal requisites. Translations should preferably be accompanied by a copy of the original work and (where possible) the author's permission.

Within a week, more than 50 people belonging to various Islamist parties were arrested. The newly cast terrorist shadow of Osama bin Laden and his alleged Bangladeshi front, Harkatul Jihad, sprang up as prime suspects. And unlike the bungled attempt on poet Shamshur Rahman's life (see *Himal March* 1999) in which axe-wielding alleged Jihadis were held back by the poet's wife and daughter-in-law, the tactics used at the Udichi show testified that the masterminds behind the attack were experts at mass killing, and trained to vanish without trace.

As far as the ruling Awami League (AL) and the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) were concerned, the lack of evidence did not prevent them from going for each other's jugulars. While cultural activists carried out protest meetings seeking exemplary punishment for the guilty, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina openly hinted that the BNP or at least some of its leaders were linked to the blast. The AL party went even further by trumpeting the fact that several BNP leaders hailed from Jessore, and had Maoist pasts.

For their part, the BNP and the religious parties alleged that the government had stage-managed the blast, and asked for its resignation (which responded by replacing home minister Rafiqul Islam with Mohammed Nasim, the powerful AL chieftain who has already held several ministries in the past).

Even as the BNP and AL pummelled each other, the media quoted police investigations pointing the blame at one Monirul Hasan

Modina, a 28-year-old Harkatul Jihad activist who runs a cloth shop in Jessore, as the prime hand behind the blast. When Modina was arrested, apart from propaganda materials, a revolver, and a photo album apparently showing him participating in bomber training sessions in Afghanistan, were recovered from his premises.

Reports said Modina was a student at an ultra-conservative Deobandh seminary in India. The Deobandhis are staunch Islamists who even opposed the creation of Pakistan on the ground that a Muslim could not be part of one particular nation-state as all Muslims belonged to one nation and therefore the whole world was their home.

Modina has said the pictures were not of him, but of someone killed in the Afghan war. He denied that he was ever trained as a bomber, but admitted that he had been recruited into the Harkatul Jihad in 1991 while he was in India.

Amidst such unsavoury happenings, what is disturbingly obvious is that for the first time in its 28-year history, the faceless image of mindless militancy—or terrorism—has begun to haunt Bangladesh. Every time the government presents evidence in such cases, Taliban and Afghan connections seem to be the common links. And as the law-enforcement authorities grope to fashion a containment strategy, more violent news may be lurking around the corner.

-Afsan Chowdhary



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PEACE

THE ANNOUNCEMENT by the International Committee of Red Cross that it had received over 600 dead bodies after the fighting at Killinochchi in December momentarily focussed the international community on the carnage in Sri Lanka. By January, their attention had passed to the violence in the northwestern provincial council elections and the threat this posed to Sri Lankan democracy in a year of at least four further elections.

Out of these two dark events came two potentially welcome outcomes: the horror of Killinochchi spurred the peace community to further highlight public demands for an end to the war, and a joint committee was formed by the opposition United National Party (UNP) with the ruling Peoples' Alliance (PA) to limit election violence. With gritted teeth, the UNP's Ranil Wickremasinghe and President Chandrika Kumaratunga appeared on the media shaking hands.

This is the first time the PA and the UNP have come together, despite considerable pressure from the international community that the two major parties develop a bipartisan approach to the war. But once the attention of the media, intelligentsia and politicians moves to the next crisis, it also moves away from the gains that have been forged. This switching on and off the spotlight is particularly damaging to Sri Lanka's peacemaking initiatives.

The continuing cycles of ever-escalating violence punctuated by short rests of negotiation illustrate just how important and badly needed is a sustained, strategic approach to peacemaking. But let it be clear: peacemaking and negotiation is not a soft option. Conflict Resolution has become the new buzzword among international agencies, but it is hardly a technical skill.

Conflict resolution is firmly located in the political arena. And though it is about developing new approaches to conflict and politics, it can still be top-down or bottom-up, pacifying or transformatory.

Transformatory conflict resolution is about society establishing norms within which violent conflict can be

minimised and conflict dealt with through established political structures in an inclusive way. This is a tall order and for many people ending the violence is sufficient, though approaches based on simply ending violence are often too coercive or too superficial to deliver a lasting settlement.

In Sri Lanka, the 1998 National Peace Council survey revealed that, though a majority of all communities want the war to end, 92 percent of Tamils want immediate negotiations with the LTTE, while only 21 percent of Sinhalese take this view, and a significant minority of Sinhalese want the war to end only by a military defeat of the LTTE.

The LTTE leadership and the Sri Lankan government have both acknowledged that the military option alone cannot bring peace, yet they are both politically and militarily locked in war. The LTTE have entered into negotiations twice since they became the only group at war with the government, once in 1990/91 with President Ranasinghe Premadasa and in 1994/5 with President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Those negotiations demonstrated that not only did the two parties have a completely different mindset, their understanding of the other was poor and often mistaken. They paid little heed to the preparation of the process, so 'process issues' interfered with progress on political issues. Mistrust mounted on both sides and each began to 'test' the other, thus further undermining any confidence in the negotiations.

These problems will be encountered again unless there is a deeper understanding and a more strategic approach by all parties. So the objective is not to move from a situation of hot war and a total breakdown of relations straight into negotiations—however desirable that may seem from a humanitarian perspective. It is most important to first generate the political will for negotiation at all levels of Sri Lankan society, a will strong enough to overcome the inevitable hurdles that will follow. Both negotiating parties need to develop confidence in alternative approaches and the leaders need the freedom to act, which may be much easier for Prabhakaran than for Kumaratunga, with her slender majority.

In the preparation process, as the conflict

Kumaratunga (below) and Prabhakaran (facing page, about to sit).



MARC ANTHONY



CE TOGETHER

moves towards pre-negotiation, issues of legitimacy and developing trust come to the fore. But parties who have been fighting each other for years cannot develop trust and confidence overnight. The first step towards building confidence is self-confidence. Each party therefore needs a political analysis of the situation and their opponents and a carefully developed strategy. The negotiation process thus gradually builds confidence and builds the recognition of legitimacy.

The pre-negotiations period will deal with 'talks about talks', agree on procedures and mechanisms for including other parties, agree upon agendas, deal with pre-conditions to settlement, and other administrative matters. Ideally, it is only after this that negotiations around substantive issues should begin—though of course, every step of the preparation has been crafted with full knowledge of what the key substantive issues are and which are the most difficult.

All said and done, however, there is no blueprint for peace. In Sri Lanka, the conflict has come from within the communities, and so it is only those communities that can forge new political and social structures that can meet their needs. Insights from conflict resolution literature and from other societies in conflict are useful, but it is the politics within Sri Lanka that will decide for war or for peace. Nevertheless, international pressure can assist in persuading both parties to move along this road. Both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government have indeed indicated that they will need external assistance to move towards negotiation. The government favours a more limited facilitation, and the LTTE mediation. The difference between these roles seems to be based on less or more foreign involvement but the debate within Sri Lanka has so far largely concerned itself with identifying a country to do the job. Other factors have been ignored.

In fact, a successful external mediator or facilitator will need to know more about the conflict than the parties themselves and their attributes, requirements, resources and knowledge will be crucial. Any external attempt to assist in finding a settlement will need to incorporate the perspectives of all parties on all major issues into their analysis of this stubbornly intractable conflict.

The issues of skill, knowledge, creativity and risk-taking are similar for negotiators, mediators or facilitators, though they may represent different interests. It is solely upon this point, interests, that the current debate regarding external assistance begins and ends. Though it is important to clarify interests, successful facilitation and/or mediation requires a dedicated team, each with different roles, and they need to be built up outside and inside Sri Lanka.

The non-strategic location of Sri Lanka and the discouragement of India have kept the international community largely at a distance, although it has been broadly supportive of the Kumaratunga administration. There are two reasons this may change. Firstly, if it is decided that the Sri Lankan conflict is now threatening the stability of a nuclear region; and, secondly, if the Sri Lankan economic growth of 5.2 percent between 1994-1998 proves more attractive following the collapse of the East Asian economies, the rather half-hearted offers of assistance "if we are asked to give it" from many countries, may become more tangible.

The next 12 months could be very productive if a gradual and incremental process was followed by those offering external assistance and by the parties in the conflict. Unfortunately, it is likely that a much more dangerous course will be followed. The LTTE is aware that the Tamil people need a rest from war and their own cadres probably do too. The Sri Lankan government is facing a year of electoral difficulties, and may feel that to move towards negotiations could re-establish its rather lacklustre international democratic image after the recent provincial elections. So they will end up doing the right thing for the wrong reasons, at the wrong time and without adequate preparation and it is unlikely that any serious third party assistance can be offered in those circumstances. If that happens, it may take another five or 10 years to move back towards negotiations from the explosion of violence that will follow the inevitable breakdown.

-Liz Philipson

UNCIVIL WAR

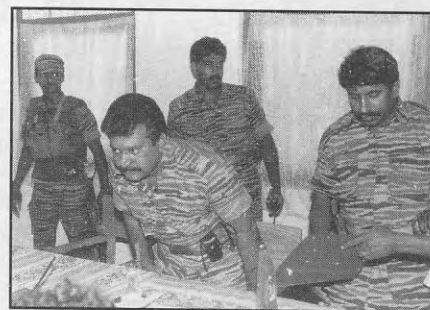
The war-like attributes of the Sri Lankan conflict seem to have been forgotten in the rush to analyse its ethnic origins, and to call it 'internal' or 'civil'. This issue's cover stories are an attempt to remind ourselves that this is indeed war, and that there is no other more violent corner in the world today.

There are of course insurgencies all over, from East Timor to Chiapas, and then there is genocide carried out by tyrants in Rwanda, or Kosovo. But it is in South Asia that the slaughter just goes on and on, despite our self-image of being compassionate. Kashmir, the Indian Northeast and Sri Lanka have for long been killing fields. Even within a violence-prone South Asia, Sri Lanka's war is in a class of its own—a modest-sized island with a small population, and continuously the most violent for decades on end.

This Himal issue goes into the technical aspects of the Sri Lankan conflict. It seeks to cover the war as war, taking in military strengths, strategies, losses, gains, and the receding chances for a negotiated settlement. Rather than take away from the ethnic and political origins of the tragedy, we feel this will help in providing a better perspective on the horrors in Serendib.

The writings of D.B.S. Jeyaraj, Rohan Gunaratna, Iqbal Athas, Liz Philipson and Sasanka Perera provide analytical grist for enquiring minds. But journalists have the duty to do eyewitness reporting from the battlefield, and not only from Colombo, Madras or even Jaffna. Keeping the conduct of the conflict—by both the LTTE and the government—out of the public's eye only ensures continuation of the killing. Future issues of Himal will try to fill this gap.

-Editors



MARC ANTHONY

LIONS AND

D.B.S. Jeyaraj examines the phases of a bestial war fought under the banners of beasts, and concludes that it will have to run its fearful and self-destructive course.

Mythological history traces Sinhalese origins to Prince Vijaya who in turn is believed to have had a leonine ancestor. Sinhaya is the Sinhala word for “lion” and the Sinhalese themselves are called “People of the Lion” or the “Lion Race”. The Sri Lankan national flag bears a sword-bearing lion, which is a replica of the one used by Kandy, the last Sinhalese kingdom to fall to the British colonialists. Attempts after Independence to adopt a non-racial flag instead of the one with Sinhalese lion was rejected but with a minor compromise—two ribbons were

added to denote the country's Tamil and Muslim ethnicities. When Tamil nationalism reached warring proportions it had an appropriate counter symbol—the roaring tiger, which was used by the most martial Tamil dynasty in India, the Cholas. Today, the Sri Lankan army has regiments called Sinha, or lion, and its adversary, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), popularly known as

Tamil Tigers, have leopards, panthers and cheetahs in their ranks.

Alien boundaries

The savage conflict in Sri Lanka has now become one of the longest-running armed combats in South Asia. The fighting that began in the early 1970s as a low-level insurgency waged by a handful of Tamil militants against the might of the Sinhalese-dominated state, has escalated over the years into a full-fledged fratricidal war between the Sinhalese majority (74 percent) and Tamil minority (18 percent) of this island nation.

In terms of proportion in the scales of death, destruction, displacement and despair, this has been one of the most intensely brutal conflicts of the century worldwide. But despite the enormous human suffering, the war in Sri Lanka grinds inexorably on, largely ignored by the international media, and with no settlement in sight.

“War is nothing but the continuation of politics by other means,” wrote Clausewitz in his book on military theory. This seems more true in the case of the fighting in Sri Lanka, rooted as it is in complex reasons and factors of Sri Lanka's political history.

Sri Lanka's pre-colonial history is full of instances where Tamil kings of the Chera,





AND TIGERS

Chola and Pandyan dynasties of South India conquered Sinhalese kingdoms. In many instances, Tamil kings also acted as kingmakers and Sinhalese rulers legitimised themselves by acquiring *maheśis*, or royal queens, from the South Indian aristocracy. Sinhalese kings sometimes also employed Tamil mercenary armies and captains, who in turn enjoyed influential positions at the court.

Through much of this historical period, power struggles between the powerful and those trying to achieve power could have been of little importance to ordinary people, although their existential plight could only have been worsened by these conflicts. Sri Lankan historians have yet to present a subaltern perspective to the past. The focus has been on the phases of intermittent conflict and virtually ignores the periods of tranquility and amity. Thus we have a Sri Lankan history that is projected as Sinhalese history alone—a chronicle of a beleaguered people struggling to survive as an entity in the face of overwhelming odds.

This history is emphasised as a glorious past where the assertion of independence against alien hegemony is portrayed heroically. An illustrative example is that of the story of Duto Gemunu, the Sinhalese prince whose dethroning of the “just and prosperous” reign of the Tamil king Ellalan in Anuradhapura is accepted as the high water mark of Sinhalese history. In a well-known anecdote, Gemunu’s mother Vihara Maha Devi asks the child Gemunu why he curled his legs instead of stretching them freely while lying on the bed, to which the son replies,

“How can I do that when the sea is constricting us on one side and the Tamils on the other?”

The prevalent atavistic paranoia got further complicated with the advent of colonialism. The first colonial power, Portugal, arrived in 1505. At that time, there were at least three kingdoms on the island, one of which was in the Tamil north and which had evolved as a separate entity a few centuries earlier, encompassing what is now the Jaffna district and the upper portions of Mannar, Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu districts in the present-day Northern Province. This Shaivite kingdom’s flag was that of the crouched bull, or Nandi, the vehicle of Lord Shiva.

After the Portuguese conquered Jaffna in 1619 and executed its king, they administered much of Jaffna separately as the Jaffna commandery. The Dutch, who took over in 1658, continued the practice. Finally, in 1796, came the British, who, in 1815, defeated the last remaining kingdom in the island, the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy and brought the island under a single unified administration in 1832. Colombo became the administrative, political and economic capital of the country.

In the run-up to independence, Sri Lanka, then still Ceylon, did not experience a mass struggle for freedom as in India. Sinhalese political leaders preferred a cooperative path through staggered con-



stitutional reforms. The little militancy there was, came from the Jaffna Youth Congress with its slogan of *Poorana Swaraj* (Complete Self-Rule). This group launched several agitations, including a boycott of elections, demonstrations to protest the visit of the Prince of Wales, and the hoisting of the Nandi flag in place of the Union Jack. But the Tamils never demanded partition.

When Britain granted it full independence on 4 February 1948, Ceylon was a unitary state. But a truly national identity had not been forged. What followed thereafter was another, and a very tragic, example of post-colonial conflict among ethnicities compelled to co-exist within boundaries of a modern nation state demarcated by their erstwhile rulers.

Sinhalisation

British rule was characterised by its familiar stratagem of divide and rule, separating politically what they united administratively. The principle of communal representation was introduced, a practice that aroused ethnic consciousness and prevented the evolution of an overarching national identity. There were other reasons too that drove the wedge deeper between the Sinhalese and Tamil communities.

Mission schools proliferated in the arid Jaffna peninsula and provided Tamils with better educational facilities. This helped the Tamils, aided perhaps by deliberate colonial policy, to dominate the professions and administrative services. Tamil entrepreneurs also began setting up commercial ventures in all parts of the island. All this led to increased Sinhalese rancour against Tamils.

There was also the matter of the increase in

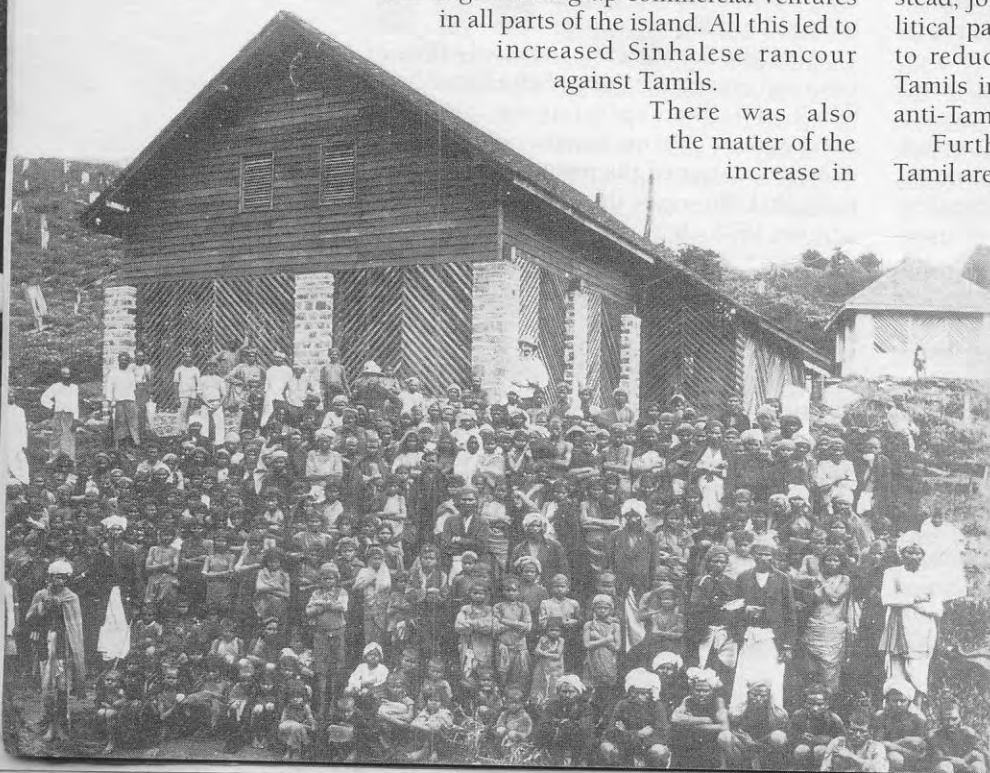
Tamil presence on the island with the import of Tamil labour from South India to work the tea and rubber plantations established by the British. (One of the first acts of independent Ceylon was to deprive the "plantation Tamils" of their citizenship and franchise rights. Two pacts signed with India in 1964 and 1974 ensured the repatriation of nearly a million back to India. Today the Tamils of Indian origin constitute about six percent of the population, and together with the indigenous Sri Lankan Tamils, make a combined Tamil strength of 18 percent.)

The decades preceding Independence saw the first visible signs of ethnic discontent. There were politicians who took advantage of the majority Sinhalese resentment over the perceived dominance of the Tamils in the educational, professional, administrative and commercial spheres. The Sinhalese were stronger only in political terms due to their numerical superiority.

During the post-independence years, the empowered Sinhalese polity sought to remedy the situation by using its political clout. Tamils were rendered officially illiterate by the adoption of Sinhala as the sole official language of administration through the 'Sinhala Only' Act of 1956. From the late 1950s through the mid-1970s, most trading and manufacturing establishments were nationalised and converted into semi-government institutions. The British system of recruitment through open, competitive examinations was scrapped in the 1960s and instead, jobs were made available through political patronage. All these measures tended to reduce the dominance enjoyed by the Tamils in employment and commerce. The anti-Tamil card had become a political ace.

Further, the demographic patterns in Tamil areas were systematically altered by settling Sinhalese through state-aided irrigation schemes. This practice, begun in the early fifties, continues still. Communal violence was unleashed on several occasions against unarmed Tamils by Sinhalese mobs, which at various times, was abetted unofficially by sections of the government. The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and set Tamil youths onto the separatist path was the introduction in 1970 of a 'standardisation' scheme for higher education, whereby Tamil students were required to gain more marks than

Tea planter in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) surrounded by his Indian Tamil "coolies" in the early 20th century.



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their Sinhalese counterparts for university admissions.

Bookworms to bombers

The Tamil road to secession has gone through different phases of attitudinal change. A people whose self-perception in the early part of the 20th century was that of being one of two equal nationalities on the island began to think later in terms of being the principal minority. After clamouring for balanced representation for the minorities vis-a-vis the Sinhalese majority in pre-independence times, the Tamils tried to accommodate themselves to new realities by adopting a policy of 'responsive cooperation' immediately after freedom and participated in government. But as a 'majoritarian democracy' continued to exercise state power in a manner that was clearly detrimental to Tamil interests, hopes of unity faded.

The Tamils who thought in terms of being an island-wide majority now thought of themselves as belonging to only the Tamil-dominated Northern and Tamil-majority Eastern Provinces. The harsh reality of Tamils from the South compelled to seek refuge in these provinces after being threatened by physical violence further reinforced notions of their being a territorial minority. Thus began demands for a federal unit comprising the Tamil areas, which was rejected outright by the Sinhalese hierarchy. Finally, the Tamils demanded secession in the form of a socialist, sovereign, secular state of Tamil Eelam (Eelam was the ancient Tamil name for the island), comprising the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

The idea of separation gained further impetus after the 1977 parliamentary elections. Leading moderate Tamil parties had come together in 1976 under the umbrella Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and asked the Tamils to vote for it in the parliamentary elections and sanction a mandate for Tamil Eelam. TULF garnered 81 percent of the Tamil and 57 percent of the total votes cast in the North and the East, winning 18 out of 19 Tamil-majority seats. This result conferred upon the Tamil Eelam demand a public endorsement of sorts. Even while this was happening, however, the Tamil youth had already wrested the initiative to achieve a Tamil state—through armed struggle.

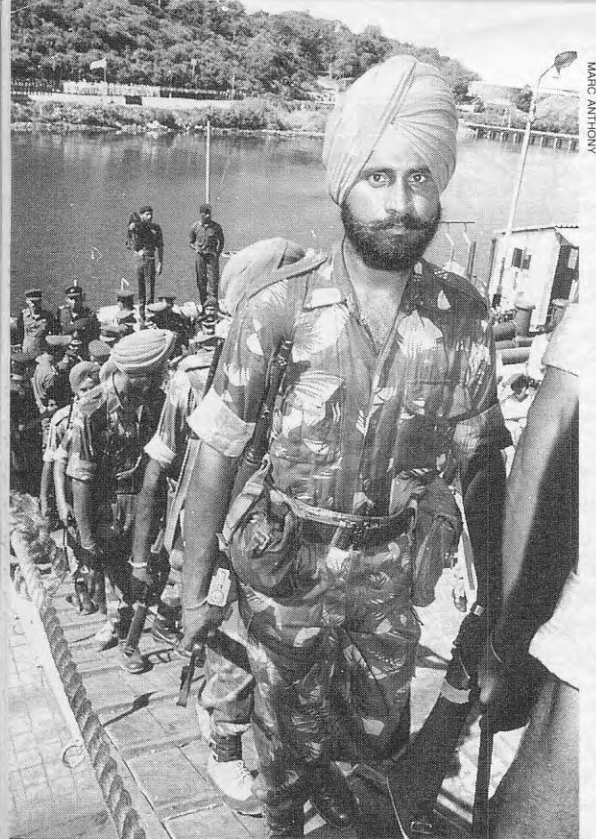
The militant views of the young Tamils were in marked contrast to the earlier moderate Tamil political leadership who were prepared for compromise. For instance, they for-



merly had been ready to accept limited devolution through district or regional councils instead of the full federalism which was their original demand. Their political strategy had been similar to that of the Indian National Congress' agitation/negotiation during the Indian freedom struggle. The Tamil leaders led civil disobedience campaigns while engaging in talks with Colombo governments. It was the failure of this Gandhian approach that led to the more extreme demand of secession.

Until the emergence of armed Tamil youths, it had been the Tamils who had been at the receiving end of violence, at the hands of Sinhalese mobs, the armed forces or both. There had been two types of political violence perpetuated against Tamils. The first was Sinhalese mob violence against unarmed ordinary Tamils living in areas of mixed ethnic composition. These were more like limited pogroms than spontaneous riots. The second was the deployment of the 'Sinhalese' armed forces and police in Tamil-speaking areas to suppress political protests.

Having been for decades at the receiving end of state-sponsored violence a deep sense of resentment and frustration had been instilled in the Tamil collective consciousness.



Indian Peace-Keeping Force leaves Trincomalee in 1990.

It was felt that the community was being treated in this way because of its passive resistance. Thus, when armed struggle was taken up, there was a sense of redeemed self-respect and pride, and the young militants were called "our podial (boys)".

Few had expected Tamil youths, stereotyped till then as "bookworms" interested only in pursuing higher education, to launch an armed insurrection, let alone sustain it. The earliest acts of violence were

not systematically organised and more in the nature of reflex reactions to perceived injustices of the Sri Lankan state. Much of it hinged around the promulgation of the new constitution of 1972, which enshrined the supremacy of Sinhala and Buddhism.

Cyanide guerrillas

The war that began in 1972 with a loose coalition of Tamil youth groups indulging in sporadic violence has now evolved into a full-scale conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the state security forces.

According to an estimate by *Asiaweek* magazine, Sri Lanka currently has the 34th largest army in the world, with a strength of 122,000. (The rate of desertion is high—24,000 at one point.) This figure does not include the 17,000 navy and 15,000 air force personnel. In addition, there is a special task force of police commandos numbering around 10,000, which is separate from the regular police force of 50,000. There is an auxiliary civilian force, the Home Guards, deployed in Sinhalese and Muslim villages bordering Tamil areas, who total more than 15,000. There are also about 3000 Tamil para-military forces supporting the armed forces. These were once members of organisations fighting for Tamil separation but are now mortal enemies of the LTTE and on the side of the government.

Together, the array of forces facing the LTTE number around 200,000. The numerical

strength of the LTTE is at best a tenth of that. A 1995 estimate put it at 23,000. Current figures are not available, but given the high rate of casualties as well as dwindling recruitment, a rough assessment would be 12,000-14,000 cadres. Of these, about 4000-5000 would be women.

The LTTE is organised on the lines of a conventional army. The ground forces include infantry divisions, brigades and battalions, although the numerical strength of the various units is less than generally found in a regular army, which is also the case with the Sri Lankan army. There is also an artillery brigade, and an armoured corps is being raised, both of which mainly use weapons and vehicles captured from government forces.

The LTTE is perhaps the only guerrilla force in the world to possess a naval arm—the "Sea Tigers", whose arsenal consists of a wide range of marine craft, including captured, purchased and self-assembled vessels. The LTTE also has a fleet of merchant ships under front companies which generally carry out legitimate international trade, but at times are used for arms and ammunition procurement. The Sea Tigers also has a "frogman" unit for undersea operational attacks.

In recent times there have also been reports of the LTTE having set up an air wing with at least two helicopters and two light aircraft, although these have not been used so far. The LTTE also has an anti-aircraft unit equipped with anti-aircraft guns as well as the deadlier surface-to-air missiles.

Then there are the two formidable units of the LTTE: the Leopards and the Panthers. The Leopards are the LTTE version of a rapid deployment commando unit, while the Panthers, or Black Tigers, are emotionally schooled and physically trained for suicide attack operations. The LTTE has developed kamikaze-type attacks to a very high degree of sophistication and calls its cadres embarking on suicide attack missions *uyiraayutham*, or "live weapon". The Leopard and Panther units operate both on land and sea, and membership consists of both sexes.

Embodying the LTTE cadres' resolve to sacrifice their lives for their cause is the potassium cyanide capsule they wear around their necks. LTTE fighters are expected to use it if and when captured. An LTTE commander once said: "We are the cyanide capsule guerrillas. No force on earth can defeat us when we have these."

For their part, Sri Lankan armed forces are also well equipped and adequately armed.



Neither the former United National Party nor the present People's Alliance governments has hesitated to spare expenses and support on the military. Defence allocations, now amounting to nearly a quarter of the total national budget, have progressively increased over the years, and an impressive state-of-the-art arsenal, complete with armoured vehicles, ships, gunboats, bombers, helicopters, etc, have been put together over the years.

The overwhelmingly Sinhalese army is motivated by its dedication to preserve the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. Initially, there was much criticism of the government forces for their callous disregard for Tamil civilian lives and brutal reprisals. In recent times, however, the better-trained and -equipped army has acquired a much more positive image. Despite the high desertion rate and dwindling recruitment, the soldiers continue to display a high degree of morale and commitment in the field.

The LTTE's breaking-off of peace talks and resuming the current phase of the conflict, along with the terror tactics employed by them, has also helped the army take the moral high ground. There is an increasing feeling among soldiers that they are waging a just war. Equally encouraging for the military has been the fact that India has distanced itself from the Tamil cause and Western sympathies are clearly on the side of Colombo. (There is still a lot of sympathy for the overall Tamil plight, but international opinion remains hostile to the LTTE).

Army-militia-guerrilla-terrorist

The terrain of the North-East does not have the mountains and dense forests traditionally associated with classical guerrilla warfare, but the bush country of the North-East continues to be used successfully as a cover by the Tamil rebels. However, it is not only as a guerrilla outfit that the LTTE operates. Like the Greek chimera that has a head of a lion, body of a goat and tail of a serpent, the LTTE possesses three combat characteristics. It is simultaneously a conventional army or militia, a guerrilla force, and a terrorist movement.

The LTTE fights like a conventional army when it holds and defends, or tries to capture territory. Adopting positional warfare is an attribute that makes it akin to an army or at least a militia. The Tigers are like a guerrilla force when they take on or ambush an army or police patrol. But when the LTTE explodes a powerful bomb resulting in loss of civilian life, or when it attempts to terrorise through

civilian massacres or assassinations, it becomes classified as a terrorist outfit (and not only because the US designated the LTTE a "terrorist organisation" in 1997).

The ongoing war has not been one of a continuous unchanging conflict. It has gone through five distinct phases:

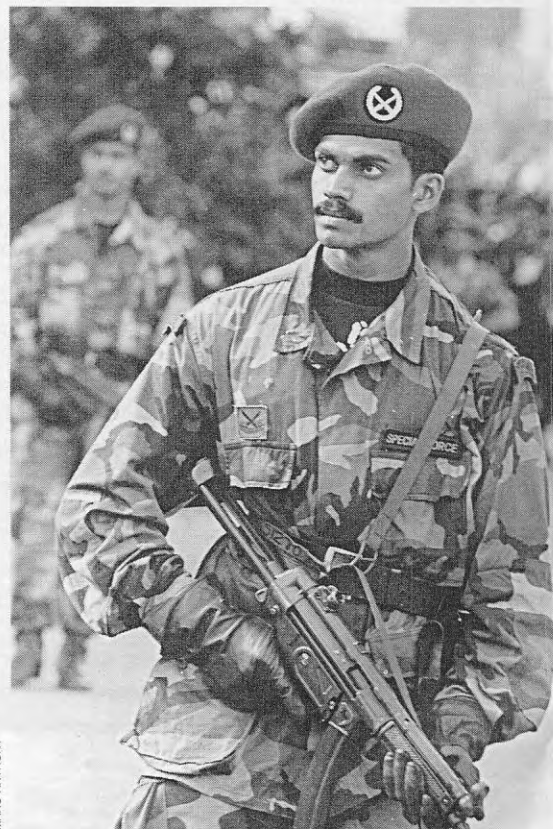
- Pre-1983 preliminary conflict
- 1983-1987 Elam War I
- 1987-1990 Indo-Elam war
- 1990-1995 Elam War II
- 1995-present Elam War III

Pre-1983 phase: The beginnings of Tamil militancy was in the semi-urban Jaffna peninsula. This was initially of the urban guerrilla hit-and-run kind. The LTTE originated in this period as one of the many groups in operation. Beginning as the Tamil New Tigers, it restructured itself as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 1976. The organisation then split into three factions in 1980: one became the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE); another disintegrated over the years; and the third continues to flourish under the present chief Vellupillai Prabhakaran.

The militancy among the Tamils in this period met with a carrot-and-stick response from the state. Limited devolution in the form of district development councils were set up but were never allowed to function effectively. A draconian piece of legislation known as the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced and massive repression unleashed. A state of emergency was declared in Jaffna and army rule imposed. The military was given orders to "wipe out terrorism in all its forms" by the then president J.R. Jayawardene. Human rights violations were rampant. In 1981, the Jaffna Public Library was burnt down by the police, an act that enraged Tamil sentiments. Then, on 23 July 1983, an LTTE ambush that killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers near Jaffna University triggered off a nationwide carnage against unarmed Tamil civilians.

1983 to 1987:
The 1983 anti-Tamil

Sri Lankan army Special Force.



MARC ANTHONY

Film South Asia '99

The second edition of the festival of South Asian documentaries
30 September - 3 October 1999

Film South Asia, the competitive festival of documentary films, invites entries from filmmakers of the Subcontinent and the world. The biennial event brings together the best non-fiction films of South Asia. It provides a visible platform for new works and helps promote a sense of community among independent filmmakers. Film South Asia '99 is also committed to developing a larger audience and market for South Asian documentaries within and outside the region.

Dates and Venue

FSA '99 will be held in Kathmandu for four days running, from 30 September to 3 October 1999 (Thursday-Sunday). Films will be screened back-to-back, and a three-member jury will announce awards at the closing ceremony. Time will be set aside for discussions following all screenings. Talk programmes and symposiums will be held concurrently.

Criteria

Entries have to be on South Asian subjects, broadly understood. They can cover any subject in the range available to filmmakers, from people, culture, lifestyle

and adventure to development, environment, politics, education, history and so on. Entries that have not been released publicly will receive priority. Filmmakers need not be South Asian.

Length

The duration of a film is not a bar. Preference will be given to full-length documentaries.

Competitive and Non-Competitive Categories

Films completed after 1 August 1997, if selected, will be admitted to the competitive category. (Entrants may ask not to be included in competition.) Films made before the cut-off date will join the non-competitive category.

Submission Deadline

All entries must reach the Festival Secretariat in Kathmandu by 30 June 1999. Entry is free of cost.

Entry Forms

Please contact the festival office for entry forms, or download from <<http://www.himalmag.com/fsa>>.

For more information, contact

Manesh Shrestha, Festival Director

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Tel: +977-1-542544/541196

Fax: +977-1-521013

Email: fsa@mos.com.np

Film South Asia '99 is organised by *Himal* in association with International Television Trust for Environment (TVE).



The Jaffna Public Library gutted in an arson attack by the police in 1981.

Countdown to conflict: 1931-1972



ACCORD

1931-47: Ceylon's independence constitution considered under British auspices. Tamil leaders demand disproportionate parliamentary quotas and are accused of communalism.

1947: The constitution for an independent Ceylon maintains the unitary state established under colonialism. No minority quotas.

1948: Ceylon granted independence. State power transferred to the elected United National Party. The Ceylon Citizenship Act denies citizenship to around one million Up-country Tamils ["plantation Tamils"].

1949: Tamil politicians, including S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, form Federal Party (FP) to demand Tamil self-determination within the Ceylonese state.

1951: Led by S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) is formed and aligns itself with Sinhala-educated rural elites.

1952-53: Debate on official language policy takes political centre-stage. SLFP pledges to establish as sole national language of the state.

1956: SLFP-led alliance wins elections. The Official Language Act makes Sinhala sole medium of state affairs. Communal violence kills 150 people, mostly Tamils. FP launches non-violent civil resistance.

1957: Bandarnaike signs pact with Chelvanayakam pledging to devolve state power through regional councils, to recognise Tamil as a national minority language and to slow Sinhalese resettlement in the north and east. Anti-pact protest march to Sinhala Buddhist stronghold of Kandy spurs mob attacks on Tamils throughout southern provinces.

1958: As communal violence intensifies, government abrogates the 'Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact' but passes the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, which allows the use of Tamil in education, public service entrance exams and administration in north and eastern provinces.

1960: Bandaranaike assassinated by Buddhist monk. His widow Srimavo leads SLFP into general elections. For

electoral backing from FP, SLFP agrees to revive the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact, but reneges after winning outright majority.

1965: UNP back in power after general election under Dudley Senanayake. Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact signed to get support of FP in 'national government'. Agreement to implement Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act, establish district councils and give preference to Tamil speakers and landless persons in North and East resettlement.

1968: Due to opposition pressure, District Councils Bill emanating from Senanayake-Chelvanayakam Pact abandoned, and 1966 Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Regulation is not implemented.

1969: Federal Party quits government.

1970-73: Small groups of militant Tamil youths launch unsuccessful assassination attempts against government representatives in Jaffna peninsula.

1970: SLFP-led alliance wins general election landslide. Srimavo Bandaranaike returns as prime minister, establishing a Constituent Assembly to frame new, republican constitution. Tamil Students League (TSL) formed to protest government plans to introduce communal quotas for higher education.

1971: Educational 'standardisation' leads to higher university entrance requirements for Tamil speakers. Many Tamil students instantly radicalised. Most Tamil members withdraw from Constituent Assembly after parity status for Sinhala and Tamil languages rejected.

1972: New constitution adopted and Republic of Sri Lanka born. New provisions whereby state will 'protect and foster' the Buddhist religion, giving it 'the foremost' place in the life of the nation. Sinhala also affirmed as the single official language of courts and state administration. FP and other groups representing Sri Lankan and Up-country Tamils come together to form Tamil United Front (TUF).

ADAPTED FROM *DEMANDING SACRIFICE: WAR & NEGOTIATION IN SRI LANKA*, ACCORD, CONCILIATION RESOURCES, LONDON.

violence was a watershed in the history of the war. The embryonic armed Tamil militancy moved to a more advanced stage. Seething with anger, and hurt by the July events, now the overwhelming Tamil mood was for a separate state to be attained through armed struggle. Thousands of young men and women started flocking to the mushrooming militant movements (at one point there were 34 of them). The response of the state was again predictable. After passing a constitutional amendment outlawing separatism, the government of the day started beefing up its armed forces and geared to crush Tamil dissent militarily.

By then, India had entered the scene, having gained a *locus standi* to get involved because of the influx of more than 230,000 Tamil refugees into its southern state of Tamil Nadu. When the Jayawardene government declined any direct talks with moderate Tamil leaders, India offered its 'good offices'. The chief consequence of India's new policy was the financing, arming and training of Tamil militant groups on Indian soil. Various organisations were allowed to open propaganda offices in Madras, the capital of Tamil Nadu. Delhi had its own agenda in promoting the Tamil cause, but it cannot be denied that there was genuine widespread concern and sympathy among the 55 million Tamils of India for the plight of their ethnic brethren in Sri Lanka.

Militarily, this period saw almost all guerilla attacks on the army resulting in retaliatory attacks on Tamil civilians. The BBC described the war at that time as a "series of massacres". However, by mid-1985, the various Tamil groups had succeeded in confining the army within its camps, and the peninsula assumed a semi-liberated nature. Then began a fratricidal power struggle between the Tamil groups, out of which Prabhakaran's LTTE emerged the lone star.

At the same time, the army's conduct of the war changed drastically. Gunboats began shelling coastal areas, and long-range artillery

began firing into civilian areas. Aerial attacks and bombardments became common. In May 1987, in a bid to wrest back territorial control of Jaffna, the armed forces launched Operation Liberation in Vadamarachchi, the northern sector of the Jaffna peninsula.

The LTTE withdrew from the area and it was clear that it was going to lose control of Jaffna. Just then, the India factor loomed large. India sent a silent warning by way of airdropping food parcels over Jaffna on 4 June, after which the Sri Lankan forces stopped their advance.

Rapid political manoeuvres by President J.R. Jayawardene led to the signing of an accord with the late Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi. No Tamil organisation was a signatory to the pact, but India guaranteed its implementation on behalf of the Tamils. All attempts to get Prabhakaran into supporting the pact before signing failed. Rajiv Gandhi was later to describe the accord as a "marriage without the consent of the bride". The end of fighting marked the end of Eelam War I.

1987 to 1990: The accord and its aftermath saw the Sri Lankan forces ceasing operations, and the Indian army stationed in the North-East as the Indian Peace-Keeping Force (IPKF). Amnesty was granted to all Tamil guerrillas. A staggered surrender of arms was set in motion. The pact promised official language status to Tamil and devolution of power to Provincial Councils. The Northern and Eastern provinces were recognised as areas of "historic habitation" by the Tamils. The North and East were merged into a single province under one chief minister, subject to the provision that the merger had to be ratified subsequently in a referendum in the Eastern Province. An interim administrative council with a majority of LTTE nominees was appointed for the transition period.

The Indian-brokered peace was short-lived. Its end came with the arrest of 12 LTTE members, including some senior leaders, at sea by the Sri Lankan navy. When, in a clear violation of the accord, the government prepared to take them to Colombo for questioning, the 12 took cyanide and died. The fragile ceasefire broke, and a vengeful LTTE went on a killing spree. In the end, referee India got into the ring, and in a remarkable change of roles, India started fighting the LTTE.

A major five-pronged thrust was made into Jaffna city in the face of stiff resistance from the LTTE. A large number of Tamil civilians were killed through accident and/or design

Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayawardene sign the Indo-Sri Lanka peace pact in Colombo in 1987.



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by the Indian forces. The LTTE later withdrew from the peninsula and established jungle bases in Wannai in the Northern mainland. In Jaffna, India propped up a puppet administration for the North-East through a fraudulent election.

Meanwhile, after a 12-year tenure, President Jayawardene retired and was succeeded by known Indophobe, Ranasinghe Premadasa. And, most unbelievable, Premadasa and the LTTE began talks. A ceasefire was signed obliging India to end direct operations against the LTTE. Premadasa also called for the withdrawal of the Indian army which New Delhi had to acquiesce to. A phased departure was announced by Rajiv Gandhi just before the 1989 Indian parliamentary elections. But, at the same time, Indian espionage agencies instigated the North-Eastern provincial administration into setting up a civilian volunteer force to double up as the Tamil National Army (TNA). It was aimed at creating a conflict situation so that the IPKF could stay on, but with clandestine support from the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE virtually annihilated the TNA.

With the coming to power of the V.P. Singh government in Delhi after the 1989 elections, the phased withdrawal of the IPKF was expedited. The Indo-Eelam or IPKF-LTTE war was over. The India-installed North-East chief minister, Annamalai Varadharajaperumal, fled the country after unilaterally declaring Tamil Eelam. It was a foolish and empty gesture and only served as a pretext for Premadasa to dissolve the Council. The LTTE re-entered the North and East and began re-asserting its dominance over the Tamil areas.

1990 to 1995: Within three months of the last Indian soldier leaving the island, war

broke out again, sparked off by a Sinhalese police assault on a Muslim tailor stitching uniforms for the LTTE in the eastern town of Batticaloa. Sri Lankan forces now concentrated on establishing control over the Eastern Province. The UNP government's strategy of controlling the East had a political objective. It wanted to undermine the demand of a North-East merger in either a separate state of Eelam or a merged provincial council.

A bitter consequence of this move was the growth of Tamil-Muslim tensions aided and abetted by interested third parties, most significantly the Sinhalese state. The early weeks of the conflict saw Muslim home guards and Sinhalese soldiers engaging in massacres of Tamil civilians suspected of being pro-LTTE. The LTTE responded through horrible revenge massacres of Muslim civilians and the expulsion of about 50,000 Muslim civilians from the LTTE-controlled North.

In terms of military control, the eastern sector consisted of three zones. The first was the littoral area which was totally cleared of the LTTE. The second was the immediate hinterland where the army dominated by day and the Tigers moved about only on nocturnal excursions. The third was the remote forest hinterland. Here, the LTTE was strong, and though it could not take on the army directly, neither could the armed forces establish a permanent presence.

It was different in the North, where the LTTE ruled the roost. The greater part of the peninsula and the northern mainland, with the exception of offshore islands, remained in LTTE hands despite several attempts by the army to dislodge them. The LTTE set up a parallel civil administration within its territory. Structures such as a police force, law courts, postal services, banks, administrative offices, etc. were established. Even a television broadcasting station was set up. Sweeping changes were made in the educational system. The LTTE was also able to develop its military machine to a very great extent during this period. It was also during this time that the LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi in Tamil Nadu (1991) and Premadasa in Colombo (in 1993).

Chandrika Kumaratunga, campaigning on a platform of peace, emerged triumphant in the November 1994 presidential elections. Earlier in August, her People's Alliance had also won the parliamentary elections. On 8 January 1995, Kumaratunga and Prabhakaran entered into a cessation-of-hostilities agreement. Thus ended the Eelam War II phase.

1995 to date: The brief respite from fight-

Woman injured in shelling by Sri Lankan troops in the battle for the Jaffna Peninsula. Facing page: Sri Lanka's main oil storage facility outside Colombo burns after LTTE attack in 1995.



DON DOLL

ing lasted only a hundred days. During negotiations, the LTTE wanted day-to-day problems to be resolved before fundamental political problems were addressed. It had four demands. Two of those relating to the lifting of the economic embargo and the ban on fishing were accepted. Two others, of a military nature, including the demand for the removal of a camp and authority for eastern province cadres to carry arms in public, were not immediately accepted. Colombo requested some time to consider the demands. The LTTE lost patience. A fax was sent at 9:30 pm on 18 April 1995 stating that it was revoking the ceasefire. (See pages 30-32.) Three hours later, Tamil Tigers attacked Trincomalee harbour and destroyed two ships. This was the beginning of Eelam War III, so far the most brutal phase of the conflict.

After some initial setbacks, the government got its act together. In opposition to its previous strategy of concentrating on the East, Colombo decided to capture and consolidate the North. An elaborate operation codenamed "Riviresa" (Sunray) was conducted from 1 October 1995 to 27 May 1996, in three stages. After resisting fiercely during the first phase, the LTTE began withdrawing from the peninsula in what turned out to be a replay of its encounter with the IPKF. Colombo's writ began to run in Jaffna, in its control after nearly a decade.

The LTTE withdrew into the Wannai after trying to engineer an exodus of the people from their homes. The idea apparently was to create a 'floating state'. The move was only partially successful. Hundreds of thousands of people defied the LTTE and refused to vacate the peninsula. Others who left began trickling back.

The government subsequently launched another operation, *Jaya Sikuru* (Certain Victory), in the Wannai region. The avowed purpose was to establish a land route to Jaffna and curb LTTE activity. This time, the Tigers offered fierce resistance in the form of a counter-offensive named "Do or Die". *Jaya Sikuru*, which began in May 1997, was suspended at the end of 1998. During all this time, the army had not been able to go beyond Mankulam. Only 44 km of the 76 to the target destination had been covered, and the armed forces incurred tremendous losses. The inability to achieve its publicised goal was demoralising. The only compensation was that the operation's partial success helped to sever territorial contiguity between the North and East, thereby preventing a permanent

merger of both provinces. On the other hand, the LTTE has gained the upper hand in the East because of the vacuum caused by re-deployment of security personnel to the northern front.

The LTTE does not have territorial control over the Jaffna peninsula now, but its cadres have started infiltrating the area again. Their agenda seems to be that of conducting a low-key campaign that would prevent normalcy. In recent times it has been systematically killing elected officials of local government bodies.

Human shield

The long war, spanning close to three decades, has resulted in over 60,000 lives being lost so far, with more than half of them civilians. Some 55,000 have been maimed, 750,000 Tamils have fled the country, and nearly a million Lankans are internally displaced.

A tragic feature about this war has been its brutality and callous disregard for humane concerns. International monitoring agencies have observed the conspicuous absence of prisoner-taking by both sides, and of civilians being used as human shields. Another aspect has been the use of landmines, which has resulted in the major portion of casualties. Civilians, 40 percent of them children, continue to be landmine victims in the 'cleared areas', but Sri Lanka has so far refused to sign the landmine ban treaty.

Although the war is supposedly waged on behalf of the people, neither the LTTE nor the Colombo government has ever given them much importance. Provoking attacks on civilians through *agent provocateur* tactics has been part of the LTTE game plan. The armed forces, meanwhile, are yet to display genuine concern for the Tamil civilian. Indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling take great tolls. There are the mass arrests, the detentions without trial, torture and 'disappearances'. There is also the deliberate deprivation of food and medicine to civilians living in LTTE-controlled areas, where malnutrition and disease are rampant.

Both sides have the capacity to prolong the conflict indefinitely, but complete victory by neither side is possible. A negotiated peace would be very desirable, but sadly there isn't any effective push, either nationally or internationally, for peace. Without such initiatives, this bestial war fought under the banners of beasts will continue to run its fearful and self-destructive course. ▲

End



War and peace in Sri Lanka have an inexplicable relationship. If there is a lull in the battle front, there is hectic activity in the peace front and vice versa. At the moment, prospects for a settlement either through peaceful means or an all-out military victory both seem elusive.

The peace initiatives of the past were sandwiched between phases of what has been called the Eelam Wars (named after the separate homeland demanded by the Tamil). The ongoing Eelam War III that ended 100 days of peace talks between the Government and the LTTE in April 1995 already has lasted four years.

Fresh hopes for peace emerged with a lull in the battlefield beginning December 1998. Making the first move for peace was LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran. During the annual "Heroes' Week" address over Voice of Tigers (VoT) radio, he declared that the "LTTE is prepared for a negotiated political settlement if peace talks are mediated by a third party."

Colombo was then under heightened security. As in years past, there were fears of bomb explosions and VIP assassinations dur-



Endless war

Iqbal Athas says that both peacemakers and warmongers are running out of options.

ing that period. The LTTE leader's offer of an olive branch thus came as a surprise. Officially, the government maintained a stony silence, but there were others who jumped at the opportunity, particularly UN diplomats whose official duties took them regularly to rebel-controlled areas in the northern Wanni sector.

Speak peace

In a conciliatory move, the LTTE allowed two senior government officials to visit the area. The task ostensibly set for N.A. Obadage, chairman of Resettlement and Rehabilitation Authority of the North, which functioned directly under the president, and David Ratnavale, chairman of the Disaster Management Committee, was to ascertain the movement of food and other supplies to civilians in the Wanni area. But, the more significant, though unpublicised, aspect of their visit, was a string of informal meetings they held with Thamil Chelvam, leader of the LTTE's political wing. As a result of these meetings, among other things, the LTTE agreed to allow a census to be conducted in the areas under its control. Interestingly, the information was to be shared by both the government and the LTTE.

Then came the visit to LTTE-held Wanni by a representative group of leading Buddhist and Christian clergymen. Upon its return to Colombo, a news conference was held and it became clear that the delegation had official sanction since it was the government's information department that sent out the invitations. During the press meet, the only lay member of the team, Tissa Vitharana, adviser to the ministry of science and technology, declared there were food shortages in the Wanni. Medical and educational facilities too were lacking. He also said that LTTE representatives with whom the delegation talked were

willing to have a negotiated settlement to the ethnic conflict. The state media gave wide play to the event.

But at the same time, reflecting the divergent opinions within the Sinhalese community, the newly emerged National Movement Against Terrorism (NMAT), an extreme nationalist group which wants to "eradicate separatist Tamil terrorism ideologically, politically and militarily" frowned upon the delegation's visit and branded the members as "peace mercenaries". It vowed to oppose any efforts towards talking peace with the Tamil rebels.

NMAT's views have not gained the national momentum that would make it a threat to any peace moves. However, there were other events which reflect the strong tussle between the hawks and the doves within the People's Alliance government itself. On 4 March, the three-month-old stalemate in the battlefield ended when security forces launched Operation *Rana Gosa* (Battle Cry).

Speak war

Two army divisions ploughed through arid terrain, unopposed, to re-capture 535 sq km of territory on the western flank of A-9, the Jaffna-Kandy highway that cuts through the Wanni. Not a shot was fired as the rebels backed out. Two weeks later though, a landmine explosion killed six soldiers on patrol. The message, as in the past, seemed clear: securing the areas for civil administration was going to be difficult. The security forces were stretching themselves too thin on the ground by seizing territory and the spectre of infiltration and attack was ever-present.

The LTTE also launched a devastating attack on the army's 212 Brigade Headquarters in the western seaboard town of Mannar. Taking cover from positions some kilometres away, they lobbed 120 mm and 122 mm mortars on the camp at Thallady. During four and half hours, over 80 rounds fell, causing an estimated damage of over SLR 25 million (USD 360,000) besides and killing 11 soldiers and three civilians. In this attack the LTTE also used, for the first time, multi-barrel rocket launchers (MBRL), clear evidence that the three months' stalemate that followed its call for peace, had been used as an opportunity to re-equip.

The attack on the Mannar base represented a new form of warfare, for this was no direct confrontation, but an artillery war—one that promised to take the confrontation to a newer level. That, along with intelligence reports that the LTTE was developing an air arm, for which

Tamil boy guerrilla in Batticaloa.

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it had acquired two small light aircraft and two helicopters, is likely to push the ongoing war towards greater intensity.

Colombo has taken the air threat seriously and is acquiring air defence system which include surface-to-air missiles, air-defence guns, short-range battlefield radars, mobile air-defence radars and thermal imagers. The cost for all this hardware is estimated to be over SLR 2500 million (USD 36 million)—a further burden on Sri Lankans who are paying for the war through a National Defence Levy that covers practically everything, including soaps and toothbrushes.

Meanwhile, government forces are continuing with their thrust. On 19 March, they launched the second phase of Operation Rana Gosa. With little resistance, they re-captured a further 325 sq km on the western flank encompassing the Madhu Church, considered most sacred to Catholics.

The new offensives, which signalled the resumption of hostilities in 1999, has seen a marked change in the government's strategy. Given that the LTTE has assumed a semi-conventional posture, President Kumaratunga has taken personal control of the military machine. She has set up a Joint Operations Bureau (JOB) and named former army chief General Rohan de S. Daluwatte its Chairman. The JOB has been tasked to prepare a strategic plan, present it to the National Security Council and thereafter co-ordinate its execution. President Kumaratunga also sent Gen Daluwatte to the UK, France and the USA to study how joint military mechanisms worked in those countries.

Operation Rana Gosa happens against the backdrop of the 6 April elections for five provincial councils—the first test of strength for the president's People's Alliance government. All these councils are outside the war zone and Kumaratunga is determined to put her government to test in the vote for the North-East Provincial Council as well. This is why the re-capture of territory with a civilian population becomes essential; not only for the provincial polls but also for the soon-to-come presidential and parliamentary elections.

The military operation is also seen as a precursor to the implementation of the devolution package to settle the Tamil ethnic conflict—so some PA leaders believe. The People's Alliance has only 18 months more to end its six-year term in the government. President Kumaratunga's own time in office ends in November 2000. Given the time frame, taking

the best political advantage of a military situation has become imperative. Military strategy has thus given way to political strategy.

The billion-rupee question is how the LTTE is going to respond to these moves by Colombo. The Tamil rebels have offered little or no resistance to the security forces' re-capture of territory, and only launched counter-attacks thereafter. To deny the armed

forces the advantages of concentrating resources, the LTTE seems to be spreading its operations over a wider area. It is doing this not just on the battlefield, but also in the populated areas where the government is compelled to maximise security to maintain its political clout.

As part of this strategy, the rebels have launched small-scale bombing of selective targets such as power transformers and telecommunication installations. These are attacks which will not lead to carnage at a level to draw international condemnation but which will nevertheless induce panic in government—a page off the IRA strategy.

To counter such a strategy, the government will be forced to implement counter measures, one that will impinge on the freedom and liberties of the public. With elections coming around, such harsh measures will not be to the liking of the people, but the government cannot afford to let its guard down.

The LTTE obviously hopes that this will place the government in a Catch-22 situation, and ease off the concentrated effort of the security forces on the battlefield. Sound military strategy that may be, but for the fact that it also narrows options for both peace-makers and warmongers alike. At this rate, the war looks set to continue well into the new millennium. ▲



Sri Lankan army patrol at Vavuniya in the central north.

MARC ANTHONY

The Office of the President
Colombo
Sri Lanka

12 April 1995.

Mr V. Pirabhakaran
LTTE Headquarters
Jaffna

Dear Mr Pirabhakaran,

We have considered the issues that were referred to in your letter of 6 April 1995; these also formed the subject matter of the talks that were held between our delegations on the 10th and 11th of April in Jaffna.

I was glad to be informed that Mr Thamil Selvan had in the course of his opening remarks, stated that the date referred to in your letter was not to be construed as an ultimatum but as an indication of a time frame within which decisions already arrived at were to be implemented.

I will now set out the four issues referred to and the actions we propose to take and/or our reactions. We are of the view that these issues vary fundamentally in character. Considerable progress has been made with regard to some of these issues and we now propose to take further positive decisions designed to ameliorate the living conditions of the people in the north. However, it is evident that other issues have military repercussions; these issues will therefore have to be addressed in the context of progress to be made with regard to political discussions leading to a negotiated end to the war.

1. The embargo

Only the following items will now remain on the list of goods prohibited for transport to the north:

Arms/Ammunition
Explosives/Pyrotechnics
Remote Control Devices
Binoculars
Telescopes
Compasses
Cloth material resembling army uniforms
Penlight batteries

All other goods can be freely transported to the north. The announcement of this decision will be made on 13 April and thereafter a gazette will be immediately issued containing the list of eight items still on the embargo list.

We have looked into your statements that earlier decisions on the embargo have not been fully implemented: we note that the free flow of items removed from the embargo list has been hampered by some obstacles. We have already taken and will continue to take firm action to ensure that all such obstacles are speedily removed and that goods can be transported to the north without impediment. As part of these efforts, we also set up at all checkpoints in and around Vavuniya civilian committees to whom any complaints can be made and immediate redress obtained.

2. Restrictions on fishing

The restrictions on fishing which were relaxed considerably by me on an earlier occasion, will be removed, taking into consideration your suggestions made to our delegation, so that fishing can be carried on at any time with only the following exceptions:

- (a) From Devil's Point to Thaliannar, fishing will be permitted only up to 5 nautical miles from the shore.
- (b) Fishing will not be permitted within an area one mile either side along the coast and two nautical miles seawards from all security forces camps on the coast.



HOW TO BE A BIG SENDER

(c) Fishing will not be permitted in all bays, harbours and estuaries along the coast. Any problems arising with regard to the effect of this exception in the east should be discussed, as agreed with you, at a local level.

In the seas from Thoundamannar to Devil's Point and in the Jaffna lagoon, fishing will be continued as at present.

The restrictions that remain are the minimum consonant with current conditions. The restriction on fishing in the seas from Devil's Point to Thalaimannar will be reviewed in three month's time within which period, the government will make all efforts to conclude arrangements to permit fishing within Sri Lanka's territorial waters.

In removing the embargo on goods for civilian use including diesel and petrol and in removing restrictions on fishing to the minimum we have taken those steps that are necessary to alleviate the difficulties facing people in the north and to bring back to a state of normality (sic) civilian life. We are both agreed that this should be our joint first objective. I have that with these measures and their implementation, we are well on our way to its achievement.

I shall now go on to the two remaining matters.

3. Pooneryn camp

You have asked for the removal of the Pooneryn camp on the purported ground that the Sengupidy road cannot be opened up for civilian use without this. We have withdrawn the camp perimeter by 600 meters and have given an undertaking to place no checks on the road and to allow unobstructed use of the road by civilians. We shall implement this.

However, it is not possible for us to take a decision on the removal of the camp at this time. The camp has military significance and it is also our understanding that under the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, the status quo should be maintained and that neither side should attempt to affect the other's military capability. Nevertheless, conscious that the peace and normality we are striving to achieve must ultimately mean the reduction of military presence, we will keep this question under constant review and revert to it in three months time or when political talks are under way, whichever is earlier.

4. The movement of armed LTTE cadres in the east

We believe that this is a matter that should be negotiated within the context of the Cessation of Hostilities (COH) Agreement. We are ready to discuss this immediately with you, negotiate an annex to the COH agreement to include this as well as any other matters that are mutually deemed necessary, and to implement fully the conditions of this agreement including the activation of the peace committees envisaged therein.

We believe that the action we have taken or propose to take on the four issues raised will be satisfactory to you and provide a firm basis for the continuation of peace talks until they reach a conclusion in the resolution of the ethnic conflict.

In this context we suggest that the next round of talks centre on

- (a) The negotiation of an annex to the COH agreement
- (b) The finalisation of residual matters such as the Joint Authority on Rehabilitation and Reconstruction so that work may be expedited and
- (c) The shape of future negotiations.

We propose that these talks resume on any day between 5 and 10 May 1995.

Yours Sincerely,

President Chandrika Kumaratunge

LTTE Headquarters
Jaffna

18 April, 1995

President Chandrika Kumaratunge
Office of the President
Colombo
Sri Lanka

Dear President,

Thank you for your letter dated 12 April 1995.

Having given careful and serious consideration to the contents of your communication, we regret to state that your responses and reactions to the urgent issues we raised fall short of our expectations and therefore, are unsatisfactory.

After a great deal of persuasion and dialogue, which lasted for more than six months, we are able to elicit from you a positive decision with regard to the relaxation of the embargo on fuel and other items. Though a decision to this effect has been made earlier and intimated to us in your letter of 24 March 1995, we are disappointed to note that deliberate delays have been caused in the process of implementation with the aim to off-set our deadline.

In so far as the other issues are concerned, your responses are partial, elusive, non-committal and subjected to determinations of further dialogue.

Apart from partial relaxation, the prohibition on large areas of fishing zones continues to operate, though you have pledged to remove all restrictions on fishing in your letter of 24 March.

On the most critical issues of opening a passage to Jaffna by removing the Pooneryn army camp and the mobility of our armed cadres in Eastern Province, your decisions are unacceptable to us since they have been subjected to review in future discussions.

The manner in which these critical issues have been side-tracked demonstrates the fact that your Government is not acting in good faith to create genuine conditions of peace and normalcy but rather seeks to promote the interests of the military. Furthermore, we are convinced beyond doubt, that your Government is making every effort to strengthen and consolidate the military capability of the armed forces under the guise of the current cessation of hostilities, violating the very terms of the agreement that insists on the maintenance of the status quo.

Since the above mentioned issues are not resolved to our satisfaction within the time frame set out in our deadline of 19 April 1995, we are left with no choice other than to take a painful decision to discontinue our participation in the negotiating process and from the cessation of hostilities from the stipulated date as we have indicated to you earlier.

We regret this unfortunate situation.

Yours Sincerely

V. Pirabhakaran
Leader, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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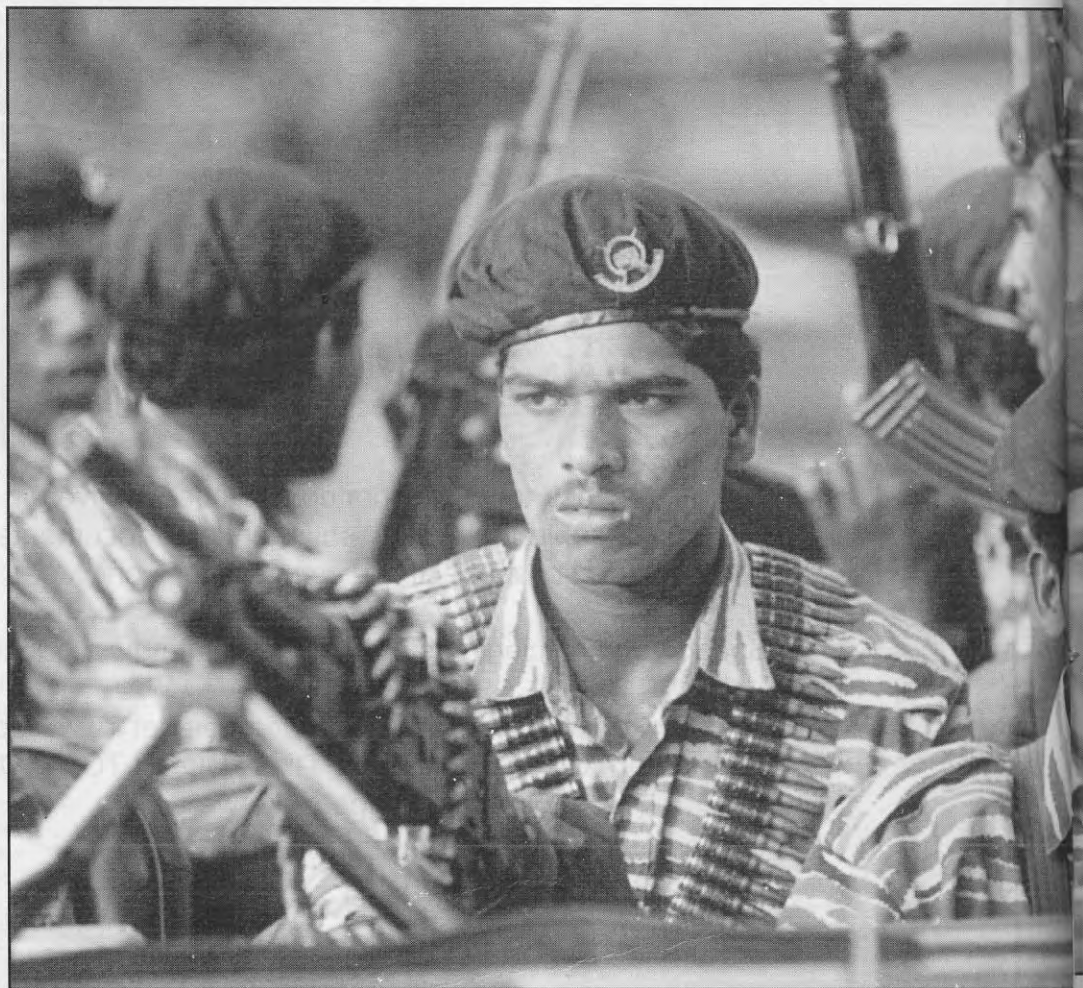
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TAMIL
TIGERS

Burning bright

Rohan Gunaratna looks at the factors, particularly with reference to the strife the same intensity as an inter-state conflict.



*LTTE fighters
in Jaffna.*

On 23 May 1997, a Greek-registered freighter named *Stillus Limassul* left the Croatian port of Rijkei for Sri Lanka carrying 32,400 units of 81mm mortars for the Sri Lankan military. Worth USD 3 million, the weapons were bought by the Sri Lanka Defence Ministry from the Zim-

babwe Defence Industries (ZDI) or so it thought. The consignment was not to reach its intended destination. On 11 July 1997, the LTTE triumphantly faxed the US Embassy in Colombo:

We, the Tamil Tigers, inform you by the present that on 11 July 1997 we have hijacked a vessel carrying arms destined for



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...e to the LTTE, that give Sri Lanka's ethnic



Colombo. We know that the manufacturer and the supplier of the mortar bombs is ZDI from Harare. The cargo [has been] confiscated. We make known and warn that we will take action against all persons participating in the supply of military equipment used against the legitimate rights of Tamil people and we will severely punish those concerned.

Subsequent investigations revealed that Ben Tsoi, an Israeli arms sub-contractor working with the ZDI had arranged for the mortars to be manufactured in Croatia and for it to be loaded on to an LTTE freighter. Tsoi's company, L.B.G. Military Supplies and ZDI, had provided false information to Colombo that the shipment had been loaded, as scheduled,

at the Mozambican port of Beira on 21 May and was en route via Walvis Bay and Madagascar. By the time Colombo learned the full extent of what had happened, the mortars had been off-loaded and trans-shipped via smaller vessels to LTTE jungle bases off the Mullaitivu coast. A month later, the weapons were already being used with devastating effect by the LTTE in the continuing battle for control

of the A9 highway in northern Sri Lanka. About 70 percent of the military casualties since June 1997 has been from mortar fire.

Open warfare

The fierce conflict between the Sri Lankan military and the LTTE is classified as one of the 16 major armed conflicts of the world. The open warfare between the battle-hardened LTTE and a standing military of a South Asian nation has directly claimed the lives of about 65,000 combatants and civilians. Some 40,000 more have died as an indirect result of the war.

The present wave of fighting that began after the LTTE broke a ceasefire with the newly elected People's Alliance government on 18 April 1995 has been the fiercest ever. With the ceasefire abandoned, the military launched a series of operations, and pushed the LTTE out of the Jaffna peninsula, the northern heartland of Sri Lankan Tamils. The LTTE, which had retreated to the Wannai mainland, south of the peninsula, regained its prestige by mounting a daring pre-dawn assault and over-running the heavily fortified military complex at Mullaitivu on 18 July 1996.

The operation, codenamed *Oyatha Alaikal* (Ceaseless Waves I), killed 1344 soldiers, the highest single loss faced by the Sri Lankan army. Although the LTTE also lost 315 fighters, the attack netted them USD 70 million worth of arms and ammunition, including heavy weaponry. Most important, it gained them the military confidence to fight on.

Subsequent military efforts to recover the Mullaitivu complex failed but in a series of operations—*Sath Jaya* (Seven Victories)—government troops captured Kilinochchi, the first major town in the Wannai. The battle for Kilinochchi, which had been developed as a backup base to Jaffna by the LTTE, resulted in the loss of 700 government troops.

The Sri Lankan military's longest operation, *Jaya Sikuru* (Certain Victory), was launched in May 1997 to recapture the A-9 highway that links the military-controlled South to Jaffna. The LTTE strongly resisted attempts to create a land route bifurcating the Wannai. The operation suffered more than six LTTE counter-attacks and led to the loss of billions of rupees worth of military hardware, including nine artillery pieces and seven tanks. Periodic attacks on the main column and raids to breach the defence line

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demoralised and slowed down the advance of the troops.

The military failed to accomplish its mission in time to mark the golden jubilee of Sri Lanka's Independence, 4 February 1998, because the LTTE was using its new Croatian mortars with deadly effect. However, the operation, claiming 3500 military fatalities and 9800 casualties, brought the military to the centre of the theatre of conflict.

Strategic map

Since the operation was aborted on 4 December 1998, the military has strengthened its thinly held defence line and prevented LTTE reconnaissance of their static positions through aggressive forward patrolling. The military is conducting raids into LTTE-controlled areas on both sides of the Wannu. However, recent military incursions using elite troops—special forces and commandos supported by technical intelligence—to locate and destroy the core and penultimate leadership of the LTTE have failed.

Today, the focus of the military is the Wannu jungles, from where the LTTE leadership controls its 10,000-12,000 fighting cadres, sleeper and operational cells in the South for conducting bombings and assassinations, an international network in 46 countries, and a fleet of two dozen ships.

The Wannu is made up of the northern administrative districts of Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Mannar and is sparsely populated. Due to undergrowth, visibility in the jungles averages 50 metres enabling the LTTE to engage the Sri Lankan military in guerrilla and semi-conventional warfare. This region is likely to be the principal theatre of warfare between the military and the LTTE for the foreseeable future, and the performance of 40,000 operational troops drawn from the 120,000-strong Sri Lankan army will be tested fully against the LTTE.

After the Sri Lankan army recovered the Jaffna peninsula, the bulk of the LTTE strength has been concentrated in the Wannu. In the eastern province there are only about 1500 cadres, but they are highly mobile and are strategically deployed to pin down around 30,000 Sri Lankan troops into guarding the main roads to the major towns and non-Tamil villages. The East serves two other functions for the LTTE—it provides both material resources and recruits to replenish the wastage of rank and file in the north.

The military is currently poised to assault Mullaitivu, the major bastion of LTTE military

power. Here, the LTTE maintains a complex of camps to produce full-fledged fighters. The infrastructure, concealed by the jungle canopy, provides basic and advanced training, special training such as Black Tiger (suicide missions), Sea Tiger and Air Tiger training, and manufactures weapons, from anti-personnel mines to an assortment of mortars and four types of fibre-glass boats.

LTTE merchant ships anchor in the adjacent sea of Alampil, outside the Sri Lankan territorial waters, while heavily armed Sea Tiger boats supported by suicide attack craft transport military and essential supplies to the shore. As the LTTE values Mullaitivu strategically, it is likely to conduct a pre-emptive strike on military positions to thwart a military buildup or an advance towards the Mullaitivu coast.

The LTTE's response to the military developments in the Wannu battlefield has been varied. In the theatre of operations, it moves in strength to prevent being attacked by small army teams probing for intelligence and to attack weakly defended military targets. Occasionally, the LTTE has concentrated its strength and overrun military defences to gather arms and ammunition, and to capture strategic ground. To prevent the military from pouring in its troops into the Wannu, the LTTE continues to conduct sporadic attacks outside the Wannu theatre—notably in Colombo, the eastern province, Jaffna—and Sinhalese and Muslim border villages.

LTTE operations in Colombo have been the bloodiest, extracting huge losses of life in bomb attacks. Intelligence reports reveal that the LTTE has mounted surveillance, and attempted to penetrate the inner circles of both President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the United National Party leader Ranil Wickremasinghe. Considering the LTTE capability in breaching security and striking important politicians, it is likely that the group will try to remove a national target at an opportune moment, such as on the eve of an election or at a national celebration to draw the maximum impact.

Camp attacks

Over the years, the LTTE has gained expertise in overrunning well-fortified military complexes. The first large-scale operation was in November 1993, when the LTTE overran the Poonaryn-Nagathevanthurai base complex, where it made off with a haul of extensive armoury, including a tank and four naval craft. To prove their capability to infiltrate the



complex, an LTTE intelligence agent removed a file from the command centre and replaced it after LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran had a look at it.

The LTTE's next major operation was to overrun and hold the Mullaitivu military complex defended by 1488 officers and men in July 1996—only around 100 of them survived the

attack. In the Mullaitivu raid, the LTTE recovered two 122-millimetre howitzers guns with 903 shells; this immediately put most military camps in the island's North-East within its reach.

The latest large-scale operation launched by the LTTE, *Oyatha Alaikal* (Ceaseless Waves) II, attacked the Kilinochchi military complex—comprising the Kilinochchi base, the Elephant Pass-Paranthan base and the Iyakkachchi-Vettalaikerni base—on 27 September 1998. As military intelligence had continuously warned of an impending LTTE night attack, the troops were in a high state of alert. Even so, 975 government troops were killed in the 48-hour battle, and the LTTE lost 717 male and female fighters.

LTTE tactics

Although the LTTE lost more members in this operation than in any other, it was an assault on a complex with exceptionally well-defended supply lines. Two military battalions that arrived from the Paranthan-Elephant Pass base to rescue Kilinochchi were attacked by large LTTE cutout teams. The air force's Israeli-built Kfir bombers refrained from making low passes, with the LTTE claiming credit for its enhanced air defence capability.

After the Kilinochchi battle, the LTTE announced that 100 sq km of territory had been "liberated". It demonstrated a semi-conventional warfare capability not only by repulsing attempts to recapture Kilinochchi, but by holding on to captured terrain as well. But for a guerrilla group, the cost of 1400 lives lost in defending, counter attacking and finally capturing Kilinochchi, from 1996 to 1998, was extraordinarily high—about 10



JAYANTHA DINESERERA

The LTTE blows up the Central Bank building in Colombo's financial centre in 1996.

percent of the total strength of the guerrilla force. This led the LTTE to step up recruitment and training in the East to replenish the losses suffered in the northern province.

The fighting tactics of the LTTE has been adapted to meet the threat level, evolution of military tactics, and the changes in the political environment. The rebels rely heavily on high-grade intelligence both to survive and to strike. Combat intelligence is the responsibility of two organisations—the Tiger Organisation of Security Intelligence Service and the little-known LTTE Directorate of Military Intelligence.

The LTTE lays heavy emphasis on gathering intelligence from civilians. Every civilian entering LTTE-controlled areas is held for 24 hours and questioned. The build-up of security forces is monitored by infiltrating military-controlled areas using sympathetic civilians and members. They also monitor military radio and vehicular communication to learn of the security forces' intentions.

Small groups are deployed parallel to the forward defence lines to identify staging areas for military offensives. These groups in turn inform highly mobile large groups of impending breakouts to which the latter respond rapidly in strength. When the troops are within small arms range, LTTE groups in well-camouflaged positions attack the advancing troops using maximum firepower. Meanwhile, reinforcements arrive from other areas, both supporting their members engaged in battle and preventing military reinforcements from reaching the battle area. When the security forces reorganise a counter attack, the LTTE groups withdraw and fresh groups respond by attacking the weak positions of the

military.

The fighting is assisted by claymores mines, buried improvised explosive devices, and booby traps. The LTTE used indigenously produced Jony and Fool anti-personnel mines (two mines cost one US dollar) extensively during the IPKF period when it faced a serious manpower shortage. Today, the LTTE relies less on anti-personnel mines and concentrates more on mortars and small arms.

The use of air power by the Sri Lanka air force is limited because the LTTE engages the troops only when they are at close quarters. The LTTE meets the threat of tanks by deploying tank-hunting teams. These three-man teams carrying Chinese rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPGs) or US-made light anti-weapons (LAWS), wait in well-concealed positions before ambushing their targets.

LTTE's survival is not in danger so long as there is no sound strategy and timely intelligence on the part of the Sri Lankan military. After the politicisation of the national intelligence apparatus in 1996, the government lost its capability either to forecast or disrupt LTTE operations even in the capital. The group carried out spectacular bombings in the heart of the financial capital in January 1996 and October 1997, destroying the Central Bank and damaging the World Trade Centre. It took the bombing of the sacred Temple of the Tooth Relic—the most hallowed shrine

of the Sri Lankan Buddhists—on the eve of Sri Lanka's 50th Independence day celebrations for the government to revamp its intelligence apparatus.

The LTTE stands out in many respects among contemporary guerrilla groups of the world. It is the only group that has assassinated two world leaders (former Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and Sri Lankan president R a n a s i n g h e Premadasa in 1993). It is known to have used

chemical warfare in 1990, and in 1997 it conducted a well-planned information attack on Sri Lankan foreign missions, paralysing their e-mail systems.

The intention, the motivation, and the fighting skills of the 45-year-old LTTE leader Prabhakaran have been persistently misjudged or underestimated not only by Sri Lankan political and military leaders, but also by the Indians. Everyone believes, however, that if Prabhakaran is captured or killed, the LTTE as an organisation will collapse.

The LTTE engages the Sri Lankan state militarily, politically, economically and internationally to weaken the capacity of the government to sustain a protracted military campaign. Internationally, anti-government propaganda by the LTTE has dramatically affected investment, trade, foreign aid and tourism, impeding economic growth and development.

Domestically, sporadic bomb attacks in Colombo and in the South and sustained guerrilla warfare in the North-East have increased defence expenditure. Today, nearly 25 percent of the national budget is spent on maintaining national security. Over the last decade, the LTTE has grown into a force capable of engaging the Sri Lankan military at division level. The intention of the military is now limited only to weakening the fighting capability of the LTTE, which threatens the very survival of the Sri Lankan state.

When the current round of fighting erupted in April 1995, the social and economic cost of the war escalated dramatically. While Eelam War I (upto 1987) claimed the lives of 900 service personnel and Eelam War II (upto 1994) killed nearly 5000, so far, 10,000 have been killed in Eelam War III (1995 upto now). About 30,000 military personnel have been maimed or injured. Only six weeks' training is provided to government troops, which has led to heavy material losses, casualties and desertions. One out of 10 soldiers desert, despite reasonably high wages and the threat of punishment.

The LTTE has lost about 12,000 cadres. Atrocities and fighting have killed more civilians than combatants—about 30,000 Tamil, Sinhalese and Muslim civilians have perished in the slaughter by both sides. The conflict has uprooted ethnic communities, altering the demographic landscape. The LTTE has expelled Muslims from the northern province and it continues to attack both Sinhalese and Muslim villages to discourage a non-Tamil presence in the North-East. But, the most affected in the conflict have been the Tamils.

Police officer inspects Tamil commuter in Jaffna.



MARC ANTHONY

For every Sri Lankan Tamil living in the island, one is internally displaced and one lives overseas.

International image

The LTTE has come under increasing international criticism in the international fora since Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. The image projected by the LTTE as a "liberation movement" was dented by its violating two ceasefires. The LTTE has also been criticised for trying to disrupt the military-assisted civil administration in Jaffna, shooting down a Russian-piloted chartered aircraft carrying Tamil civilians from Jaffna to Colombo, and for bombing non-military targets in the South.

The elimination of rival Tamil groups, Tamil human rights activists and mainstream Tamil politicians has similarly weakened LTTE's claim to be the "sole representatives of the Tamil people". Except for Indian support in the 1980s, the LTTE has received no state assistance. What outside support they have come from a few ANC hard-liners in South Africa, the Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes, Tamil nationalists leaders from Tamil Nadu, and Western parliamentarians with Tamil constituencies.

The LTTE has also been lambasted for recruiting and deploying child combatants. Sri Lanka is among a number of countries— together with Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Liberia, Cambodia, Sudan, Kosovo and Afghanistan— where children are in frontline combat; in Sri Lanka, they are also used by the LTTE for mine clearing, spying and suicide bombing. When the security forces struck Mankulam, 26 LTTE prisoners mostly ranged between 11 and 17 years. UK-based Sri Lankan researcher Dushmantha Ranetunge states that 60 percent of the LTTE members who have perished are under 18.

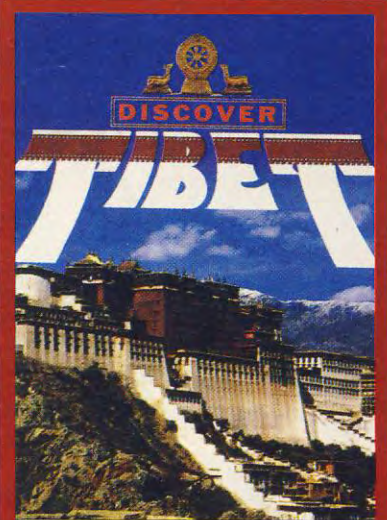
At present, no short-term or mid-term solution to the Sri Lankan conflict appears in sight.

A longterm politico-military solution may be possible, for instance if the opposition returns to power in 2000. But the country is likely to return to war unless there is both an international facilitator and guarantor with a capability to pressurise the LTTE.

It is highly unlikely that India will intervene again, nor will there be domestic support for international or UN mediation. The United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, several Scandinavian states, the Palestinian Authority, South Africa, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and many other international organisations have offered to facilitate talks between the LTTE and the government. But no country is likely to commit ground troops to enforce peace having assessed the ruthlessness and unpredictability of the conflict.

The LTTE strategy to call for political negotiations is to impress upon the world community of its commitment to peace while preparing for war. But whenever there has been a period of respite, the rebels have expanded militarily and politically, which explains why the Sri Lankan military is today firmly opposed to political negotiations.

Although sustained Sri Lankan military thrusts depleted the LTTE offensive capability in April 1995, the group has increased its international reach and depth, and expanded its support base. In the immediate future, the LTTE has the expertise and resources to engage the Sri Lankan military in the Wannai as long as its international supply and communication lines are open and they can replenish the depleting of the rank and file with fresh recruits. The government has failed to sever the arms pipeline and control recruitment from the displaced and other vulnerable sections of the Tamil people. Given these factors, it is very likely that the Sri Lankan conflict will continue into the foreseeable future. ▲



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Killing fields in Serendib

Sasanka Perera says the conflicts of the last two decades will leave a long legacy of political violence.

Over the last two decades, Sri Lanka's traditions of civil society and democracy have been seriously subverted. Its claim to being an island paradise has been overtaken by the numbing reality of being a case study in conflict creation and state power abuse. The serendipitous haven is clearly no more, except in propaganda leaflets of the tourism industry.

There are two main manifestations of political violence in Sri Lanka. The first is the situation in the northern and eastern parts of the country, where Tamil youth groups have taken up arms against the Sinhalese-dominated Sri Lankan state to fight perceived discriminatory practices against the Tamil community. The violence here is primarily the work of the state security forces and their proxies, the former Tamil guerrilla groups such as the People's Liberation



Jaffna 1998.

and 1991, with the state as well as the JVP responsible for thousands of deaths and disappearances.

For the outside world, it is almost as if violence in Sri Lanka is 'normal'. In 1998, more people were killed in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict than in the former Yugoslavia. But, other than the occasional bodybag stories, the killings in Sri Lanka made it neither to the other South Asian nor the international media. The destructive phases of the war over the last two decades has been largely ignored by the world, except when a massacre by one of the warring sides happens to be particularly gruesome or the number of corpses crosses a news agency's stipulated threshold. Meanwhile, the many facets of internal violence have received even less attention, due perhaps to their relative invisibility.

This 'normalisation' of violence also seems to have been accepted by the Sri Lankans themselves. Had it not been for the check points, permanently closed roads, camouflage painted barrels and increasingly younger soldiers with automatic weapons loitering near road blocks, many people in the main towns would have completely forgotten the war. And why not? The war does not directly affect many of them. Colombo-based hoteliers reported a marked increase in tourist arrivals for January and February, a classic example of alternate realities operating in simultaneous time.

Means of coping

A decade after the worst fighting was over in the South, the question of the psychological health of the survivors has not even been raised. Recent research has indicated that the experiences of the that deadly past has scarred the lives of a significant proportion. And since they are no formal mental health and counselling services, many have resorted to traditional methods of coping and intervention. These include attempts to visit misfortune upon suspected culprits by appealing to deities in the Sinhala Buddhist pantheon such as Pattini and Suniyam, who are popularly propitiated for justice and revenge.

The situation is not much different in the North-East when it comes to the ordeal of survivors. Here too, the victims resort to the conventional means of coping. But there is a crucial difference. The thorough militarisation of the North-East's Tamil

Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) and the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF).

The other major perpetrator of violence is the rebel LTTE, whose targets include Sinhalese villagers, military personnel, members of Tamil groups cooperating with the state, and dissidents within the Tamil community opposed to the politics of the LTTE. The organisation also carries out indiscriminate and spectacularly destructive bombing campaigns in areas outside the zones of combat, such as in Colombo.

The second manifestation of violence came in the Sinhalese-dominated South with the eruption in 1989 of the insurrection by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). This was JVP's second attempt to topple the state, having tried once before in 1971. However, the human casualties and physical destruction were much greater in the period between 1989



Girl Tigers at the cemetery for fallen comrades in Jaffna.

society has meant that violence has become glorified and ritualised. The LTTE has turned political violence into an art form, with a quasi-religious pantheon of deities and rituals.

The group's leadership has claimed on numerous occasions that the blood of patriotic Tamils spilt in battle in the North-East would purify the land. It is not life that is celebrated, but death, a canon that is manifest in the great care with which the LTTE's main martyr cemetery is maintained, and in the manner in which the organisation sponsors wayside shrines for its fallen heroes. And, most significant, there is the solemn ceremony attended by LTTE supremo Prabhakaran himself just before suicide squads embark on a mission.

What does all this exposure to violence mean for Sri Lankans? What is their future? What would be the future of the children recruited into the fighting ranks of the LTTE? And what is the future of the children in the South who saw their fathers and brothers being dragged off by different agents of death? If, as a nation, Sri Lanka has hardly raised these questions, there is also a serious lack of formal knowledge that would help understand these issues and recommend viable means of intervention.

The violence in the North-East and in the South may be two extreme examples, but they are also extensions of the violence that had already become an accepted mechanism of governance in mainstream politics by the

violence that threatens to tear Lankan society apart.

The politics of violence is not new to Sri Lanka and was present throughout the post-colonial period. But until the late 1970s, it did not enjoy the kind of state protection, and corresponding institutionalisation, that was established under presidents J.R. Jayawardene and Ransinghe Premadasa, during whose tenures thugs linked to their United National Party operated with near impunity.

But things are no different with the People's Alliance

now in power. The present government came into office promising to eliminate political violence in all its forms, but the killings, intimidations and other unsavoury forms of politics still continue. For all practical purposes, the change in regimes has merely meant that now a different set of thugs rule the roost.

Unfortunately, for the country, violence becomes an issue for political parties only when directed against them. Thus, the UNP, currently in the opposition after its brutal track record from 1977 to 1994, now organises rallies to protest political violence even though the politicians who orchestrated, and in fact mastered terror tactics in routine politics, still represent the party. At the same time, the UNP has never apologised for its assault on the nation and neither has the JVP. But what is telling is that the same absurd sense of amnesia also applies to the present ruling alliance, consisting of parties that were victimised by the JVP and the UNP not so long ago, and which are now the worst perpetrators of political violence. In the recent polls for the North Western Provincial Council, much of the election malpractices and political violence came courtesy the ruling People's Alliance. And when the election monitors published a damning report, rather than look into the allegations, senior ministers threatened to sue the authors.

Violence in some form or other is likely to be part of Sri Lankan politics for a long time to come. And unless this issue is addressed soon than later, the paradise shall stay lost. ▲

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THE BRITISH Broadcasting Corporation has to be renamed the **Balkan Broadcasting Corporation**, for the saturation coverage of Kosovo/Serbia/Albania we South Asians and the rest of the world have been suffering for the last year. It is hardly a "world service" when the radio and television continuously pummel us with a story which had been, until the NATO forces actually began their air attacks, mainly of geopolitical concern to Western Europe and North America. I do not for a moment doubt the tragedies that have hit the former Yugoslavia over the last decade, and they have multiplied in the last few days, but there has to be a sense of balance in news being purportedly broadcast to the world.

REMEMBER HOW the entire Gangetic belt came under never-ending fog this winter? Well, did the **smiling weathermen** and women of the BBC and the CNN ever deign to refer to this incredible (and new phenomenon) in which at least 80 million people suffered? No. And did they refer to the lack of the winter rains along the entire Himalayan belt this year, which resulted in above-average haze, dusty earth and forest fires, compelling flights into Kathmandu and Paro being diverted due to poor visibility? No, sir. No, madam.

IT IS accepted that cigarette and liquor manufacturers use the **bravery motif** in their advertising campaigns, but it is going beyond the bounds of decency, I think, to use butchery to move your stuff. A newly introduced "export quality very old vatted premium blended rum", called Gorkhali, advertises itself using the photograph of Indian army (Gorkha) jawans moving in for the kill, guns at ready (and thank god no khukuri showing). Are the soldiers drunk? Am I drunk? Is this entire ad campaign tipsy?



LONG AGO, when I was a kid at St Xavier's, an amazing human calculator came to my school and did amazing mathematical calculations in her head, on the stage. One would have thought that the redoubtable **Shakuntala Devi** would have retired into respectable old age, having made her name and fortune through her sheer mental abilities. Instead, with some sadness, I saw her advertise the other day in a Delhi daily as "Personal Consultant to Presidents, Prime Ministers, Royalty, Movie Stars and Top Business Tycoons Of The World". She hopes to help you achieve good fortune, prosperity and happiness through "correct placement" of your house, office, factory and showroom through the use of

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Vaastu Shastra. Life is unkind to some of the most gifted among us. Shakuntala Devi should be living in a mansion, not helping someone angle one right.



THERE IS a basic flaw in the Indian media's analysis of what it is trying to do in a country of nearly 1 billion. The flaw is all about numerical perspective. For example, the brouhaha around suspension of telecast of the serial **Shaktimaan**, which has the **Indian Superman** doing good throughout the land. Children, it was reported, were trying to emulate Shaktimaan's feats or hoping that he would come to their rescue as they fell off buildings. In a country as large as India, there will obviously be—through sheer play of probability—some adults, and even children, who do something mindless. It is unreasonable to cancel the serial, I believe, because some news agency (perhaps even wrongly) reports that children are being rash. India is a large country. Things will happen. One has to have a sense of proportion.

THE DAVP (Indian government's public relations arm) placed a massive ad showing Atal Behariji against a **glowing sunset**, and a poem about his one year in power. He ends with "*Sankalp ko dohoraye, nayi sadi ko bharat ke sadi banaye*" (Let us reiterate our resolve— Next Century will be India's Century). The very swadeshi Mr Vajpayee has let his Occidental slip show. Why should the supreme chieftain of *Mera Bharat Mahaan*, inheritor of five millennia of civilisation, be bothered about the start of a mere third millennium in the Gregorian way of counting time. For most of Atal Behariji's people, 31 December will definitely not indicate the arrival of a *nayi sadi*.

THE MARUTI company's suggestive ad for the Esteem brand is addressed at the Indian male's need to do business with "a **rich american**", "nationwide service network because you may want to show her the real India", "comfortable seats because you wouldn't want to cramp her style"... "superb airconditioning because you may need to play it cool", "optimum fuel-efficiency because who knows how far the partnership will go". Okay, I get the message. If I buy an Esteem, I get to have sex with an American businesswoman in the back seat.

A **KUENSEL** report on **tourism in Bhutan** is meticulous in reporting on tourism arrivals, which it is possible to do in a small country. The year 1998 saw 1293 Americans, 901 Japanese and 562 British visitors. "The least number of tourists from any country was a three-way tie between Ireland, Sri Lanka and Vietnam, with one visitor each."

"GUEST BIRDS don't find it safe to come," writes *The Independent* of Dhaka, referring to **migratory species** who have taken to shunning the Bangladeshi landing grounds of Sherpur and flocking instead to neighbouring Assam and Meghalaya. Sherpur no longer "throbs with the chirping" of the following "guest birds" (names given in local Bangla): Pyong, Bhuti, Chiti, Pankouri, Gangcheel, Kajla, Kechali, Bajunia, Hash, Kada Khecha, "and the like".



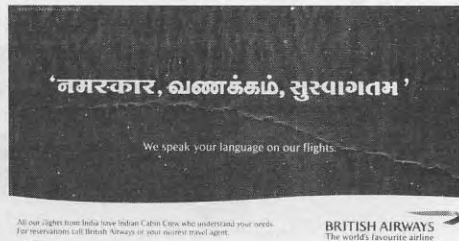
TAKE A look at this image printed in **full colour** by *The Independent*, showing "Rickshaw Puller Shukkur Ali, victim of a bomb blast in front of the Jatiya Press Club". Words fail, seeing the nonchalance of Shukkur Ali's pose, obviously caught in photographic time, in comparison to the horror which has visited him.

ACCORDING TO this advertisement in *The Economist* by **Equant**, the data-transfer company, it is 4:37 pm in Kathmandu Nepal, at 27.7 degree latitude and 85.3 degree longitude. Sounds impressive, all these coordinates and exact time, but hardly. The picture is from somewhere in the Tibetan plateau, probably closer to Mongolia. Typical, Western copy-writers once again mistaking of Nepal for Shangri-La although it long ago relinquished that title.



DHAKA ANOPHELES must have smiled smugly at this paragraph from "Mosquito Menace", an editorial in *The Independent*. "Swarms of blood-thirsty mosquitoes are now omnipresent, menacingly on the prowl for their human prey in homes, offices and every imaginable place in the city. As their number grows in geometric progression, the ferocity of their attacks and resistance to the conventional repellents also grow proportionately. With their breeding grounds altogether unchallenged by the City Corporation's conservancy and sanitation staff, the mosquitoes are now in an advantageous position." To get rid of this menace, the editors propose aerial spraying, and insecticide in every pond and puddle. Cancer is better than malaria?

THE SOUTH Asianisation of British Airways' ad campaign is welcome. The more local flavour and language, the better.



HERE IS one reason why it does not do to **think in English and report in Hindi**. The English flagship *India Today* did a cover story on designer drugs that is apparently the rage among young Anglophone Indians, although even that I doubt very much. This selfsame story was then

translated and repeated as the cover of the Hindi edition, whose supposed audience is even more remote from the topic. And also please do not let a graphic such as this get past you, as "crossing fingers" is not a Hindi-phone's gesture.

NEWSLINE, OF Karachi, has a last-page column called **end of the line**, in which appeared this cartoon of the foreign hand, which I believe speaks to every country of South Asia. As for the identity of the foreign hand, let's take a tally: in India it is USA and Pakistan; in Pakistan USA and India; in Sri Lanka, India; in Nepal, India; in Bangladesh, India. My knowledge of geopolitics comes to an end at this point, but I suspect that the foreign hand(s) in Bhutan are India and Nepal, and in the Maldives, it is India and Sri Lanka. Wouldn't it tickle those who cry "foreign hand" in India to know that it is India which is the foreign hand in most of the regional countries?

IF THE thief was indeed an "alleged", then there was no sense in beating him to death. When will the lynch mobs of South Asia learn? This with a Sylhet dateline of 28 February.

Alleged thief beaten to death
From Our Correspondent

KHUSHWANT SINGH at his malicious best in his 22 March syndicated column, where he comments on the Sathya Sai Baba's recent visit to Delhi by mulling over the attraction of godmen and then quoting author Peter Brent on the topic: "For Indians, particularly those of the middle classes, there are only two directions they can go to prove that they can love and be loved. One is towards homosexuality, the other towards the Godmen--the two not being mutually exclusive." Singh, who certainly has nothing to lose in old age when he has made a living out of being outrageous, adds that when an American disciple published a book, *Lord of the Air*, accusing the Sai Baba of sexual deviation, the book disappeared from the market in a few days.

FINALLY, I take your leave by reproducing this letter from Dr Naeem Ghani of Islamabad in *The News* of 1 March, with the note that I agree with his **sentiments** entirely.

Joy over nothing

Dr Naeem Ghani

Reference to the news item, "Japan signs Rs11.9 million agreement with seven NGOs." (*The News*: February 20).

Please don't add more insult to injury. Let the people live with dignity. What a pity! A paltry sum of Rs11.9 million—price of a one kanal plot in Islamabad, or half the value of any businessman's house in our country—makes flashy news in the print media, and described as an event of great importance! And this "colossal sum" of Rs11.9 million is to help seven NGOs with hundreds of social objectives.

I feel as if the print media is part of the elite, who are in a project of sale of dignity of our people and our nation.

Islamabad



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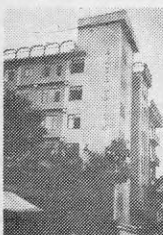
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KEYA ACHARYA



From the Tibetan Plateau to the Deccan Plateau

Tibet is being cloned in a tiny part of South India

by **Keya Acharya**

A strong winter noonday sun, a disciplined sea of bowing monks in red, and policemen everywhere. Then amidst the uneven sound of the bronze trumpets called *dhung chens*, and bustling officials clad in *chubas*, the Dalai Lama arrives in a cavalcade of cars to this remote part of Karnataka in South India.

This is the Doeguling settlement (population 12,000) in Uttar Kanara district, one of five Tibetan refugee settlements spread around Karnataka. Even on ordinary days when the Dalai Lama doesn't come visiting, this 3000-acre settlement looks typically Tibetan, but for the terrain and the climate. Women in Tibetan attire wait for taxis to ferry them to Mundgod town or to another of Doeguling's ten camps. Little monasteries dot the landscape. A cluster of whitewashed buildings with a playing field has a

board: Tibetan Central School.

Tibetans have been in Karnataka since 1960. Once refugees began pouring into India following the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru asked Indian states to take them in. Karnataka was one of the 10 states that responded positively, and gave the largest tract of land: 13,000-odd acres in the settlements located in Kodagu, Chamrajanagar and Uttar Kanara districts.

In the first wave, 14,000 refugees came into Karnataka between 1960 to 1974. Today there are 40,000 refugees here, and there is no more land for the next generation, or for newcomers. Every year over 2000 Tibetans come as refugees to India, says Nawang Choedak, the south zone development coordinator for the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA)

or Tibet's government-in-exile based in Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh.

CTA officials have transferable jobs and look after areas ranging from health to international relations in the 10 states of India that have refugee settlements. The CTA's relief wing helps those in need from its emergency funds, while the CTA itself runs on funds from voluntary contributions, from collections from the Dalai Lama's now well-established international network, and from CTA financial investments. India does not formally recognise the government-in-exile, but accommodates it.

Despite the nearly three-fold increase in population and lack of land, the Tibetans of Karnataka don't have to depend on outside help to shore up their finances. Industrious as a community, Deccan Tibetans thrive on trading: mainly in sweaters, and in running little restaurants and shops, even taxis. Take the case of 40-year-old Sonam Yangzon. Her husband is out selling sweaters for eight months of the year. She says the recession has slowed income, but they can still afford a mobile phone, a TV, electricity and another phone connection.

Not many go to town to see films, because a 'Tibetan' video shop rents out cassettes. Sonam's mother, one of the early comers with land, has a local Kannadiga to help out with her cows. Sonam herself is a busy housewife, taking active part in the Tibetan Women's Association, and helping the Tibetan aged and women in income-earning activities. She visits the monastery at Doeguling twice a week and attends cultural functions at the camp once a month. Friends and relatives from neighbouring camps are frequent visitors.

The community seems to get along better with the locals than do Tibetan settlements in northern India, says Sherup Choden, a visiting teacher from the Tibetan school in Dharamsala. The CTA is sensitive to the situation, and does not wish to heighten any undercurrent.

"They've been here 30 years," says Ashok Subedar, a Kannadiga

taxi-driver who ferries passengers to and from Mundgod and Doeguling. "Some of us speak their language, they speak ours. Karnataka is a hospitable land." The local police chief says he cannot remember a single registered police case against the refugees.

Coordinator Choedak says one of CTA's administrative objectives is to keep traditions alive so that it can eventually return and renew Tibet's threatened culture. "This is the only reason why we haven't really encouraged intermarriage or local assimilation." The Indian government has given them naturalised citizenship, but most are unwilling to change their status.

Assimilation into India though has taken a different meaning for the newer generation. Karma, 18, will soon graduate from the Tibetan school, and he doesn't think he wants to eventually return to Tibet. He plans to enroll in one of Karnataka's medi-

cal colleges, but like others of his generation, Karma faces a stiff challenge in getting into mainstream higher education in India. Only three medical seats and five engineering seats are reserved for Tibetans countrywide.

Monastic students face no such problems. The Doeguling monastic university (a replica of Tibet's reputed 500-year-old Doeguling monastic university, destroyed by the Chinese in 1959), has 3500 monk-students from many countries undergoing a rigorous Mahayana-Buddhist theological education and pursuing a spartan lifestyle.

It has 260 child monks, many of them from the Himalayan regions of India and neighbouring countries, and they learn general-school subjects along with theology. Doeguling is the largest of three similar universities in Karnataka, and its international reputation is growing, even as it strives to keep up with the standards set by its destroyed 15th-century predecessor.

Nearly 50 years after the Chinese occupied their homeland, Tibetans are still streaming out of the high plateau, and one of the problems in places like Doeguling is the increasing refugee population. In the absence of an official policy to promote family planning, the settlements have become overcrowded. However, Choedak is not worried that Karnataka could stop being a good host—he says they will be easily absorbed into India's huge numbers, and that the rate of increase is anyway slower than the host-country's population growth-rate.

What does worry Choedak is the situation in his homeland. Despite the Dalai Lama's optimism that Tibet will eventually receive some measure of independence, from down here on the Deccan, the possibility does look rather remote. In a reference to the prospering Tibetans worldwide, Choedak says, "The problem is not outside Tibet, it is inside Tibet." ▲

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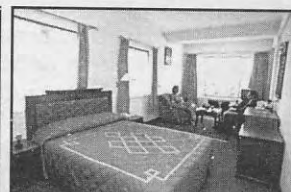
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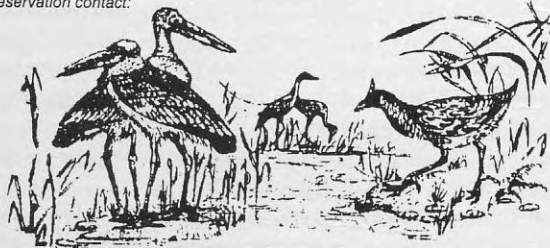
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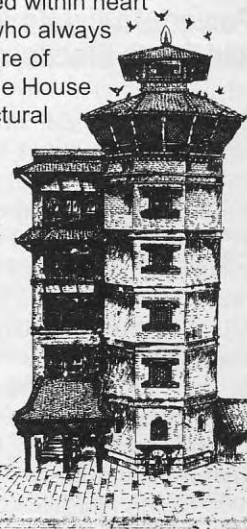
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SUMMER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 24TH SEPTEMBER 1998

FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR
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OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1200	1900

WINTER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1998/1999

FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR
OS4444	Thursday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900
OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900

Monkeying around

Powerful officials walk warily down the corridors of the North and South Blocks, alert for ambushes by monkeys.

THOUSANDS OF homeless monkeys have been living for decades in or around New Delhi's government buildings, including the prime minister's office and several city hospitals. But in recent years their numbers have swelled. Now under a new get-tough policy, squatting simians are to be arrested, kept in special halfway houses for three months before being exiled to neighbouring states.

The crackdown by India's federal environment ministry will snare over 5000 *Rhesus macaques*. The monkeys will first be gaoled in a city suburb before being transported to jungles in neighbouring Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. "We have tried putting the monkeys in forests around Delhi but they keep returning because food is easily available in the offices," said H.C. Dewan, chief wildlife warden.

Maybe this time they will stay where they belong. But till then, powerful officials walk warily down the corridors of the North and South Blocks, alert for ambushes by monkeys. North Block houses India's

home and finance ministries, while the prime minister's secretariat, the foreign office and the defence ministry are in South Block. Monkeys there frequently steal files and tear them up at leisure on the sprawling lawns outside.

Besides top-level government offices, monkey habitats extends to the campus of the nearby All-India Institute of Medical Sciences, India's flagship research institution. At the Institute, windows of all wards are bolted shut against gangs of rhesus, descendants of those who escaped from the Institute's laboratories over 25 years ago. The sight of monkeys chasing nurses and patients down the Institute's labyrinthine corridors is not uncommon.

Doctors say years of experience and familiarity have merely enhanced simian ingenuity. Patients in post-operative wards have been known to surface from the mists of anaesthesia to be greeted by a grinning, red-bottomed monkey sharing their



bed or casually playing with their blood-transfusion drip. Those trying to shoo the intruders end up being chased themselves or viciously bitten. Scores of monkey-bite victims have been treated in the Institute with expensive anti-rabies vaccine.

Monkey nuisance is not confined to Delhi, of course. In Patiala, some 300 km north in Punjab state, monkeys arrested for harassing people are locked up in a special jail for varying periods before being declared 'fit' enough to be released back into society. One hardcore inmate arrested from the campus of Punjab Agricultural University at Ludhiana for attacking students has been there for nearly a year while another ferocious pair, apprehended from a Patiala neighbourhood for snatching ladies' handbags and lunch boxes are reportedly coming up for parole.

▲
-Rahul Bedi

"A policy that equates rape with n

IT WAS with a bit of fanfare that the Indian government-owned General Insurance Company (GIC) announced its Rajrajeshwari Women Welfare Insurance Scheme on 17 March. This was an insurance plan that allowed women to insure themselves against various misfortunes like accidental falls, gynaecological surgeries, snake bites, divorce expenses, and rape (at an annual premium of INR 15 against "rape disability", victims would be able to claim amounts ranging from INR 12,000-25,000/USD 280-580).

If Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee meant the scheme to be his government's gift to the women of India when he launched it, he was probably taken aback by the outrage it caused among women's groups. The insurance scheme exposed the "callousness and insensitivity of current attitudes within the present right-wing,

Bharatiya Janata Party political leadership to the issue of rape," said Brinda Karat, general secretary of the All-India Democratic Women's Association. "In a country where rape and sexual attacks on women are increasing, the Prime Minister inaugurates a policy which equates rape with other marketable insurance policies."

The Rajrajeshwari Scheme comes in the backdrop of the declaration by Home Minister L.K. Advani a few months ago that his government favoured tougher laws, including capital punishment as a deterrent to rapists. Activists have been arguing that increasing the penalty for rape is less important than actually securing convictions—nearly impossible under the dated Criminal Procedure Code, which favours the perpetrator rather than the victim. "The conviction rate in rape cases which get to the trial stage is a mere 10 percent

Be happy

EARLY IN March, Bhutan's Planning Commission Secretariat brought together some 30 policy makers, 'thinkers', government officials and donors at a conference on Gross National Happiness (GNH). Officially, it was called "GNH and Human Development—Searching for Common Ground" to prepare for the release of Bhutan's first Human Development Report.

But given the "profundity of the concept", Bhutan's *Kuensel* weekly reports, there was some confusion about what exactly constitutes happiness. "We found out that happiness is far too complex and elusive a concept to be defined," said UNDP Programme Officer Stefan Priesner (probably the first person in the world to have a *Masters in Happiness*).

At the workshop's inaugural function, a rapturous Cabinet Chairman Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley scaled metaphysical heights saying that GNH defied any statistical device aimed at its quantification. "The possible measurability of GNH has been a thought provoking proposition... [it has been]

suggested that it would be a speculative exercise into what is essentially a subjective experience." Indeed, one man's happiness may cost another man his wife.

Nevertheless, Thinley proceeded to lay out the four pillars on which

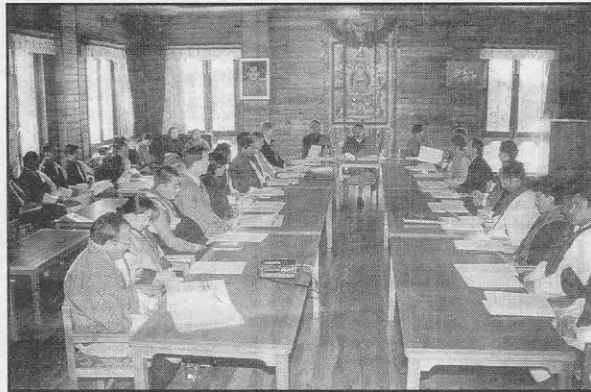
development philosophy worldwide," said one Bhutanese official. He could start with the world's least-happy region—South Asia. As for the rest of the world, it could also do with less sadness.

Indian economist A.K. Shiva Kumar, another expert at the seminar, questioned orthodox, consumerist models of economic development. He told *Kuensel*: "In other countries, we are trying to correct market failures while Bhutan is uniquely placed."

Bhutan's Royal Institute of Management has prescribed a series of workshops on GNH, while the Centre for Bhutan Studies wants to sponsor further research on happiness. The world could definitely do with some improvement. And

then maybe we can all live happily ever after.

In the meantime, lest anyone forgot the reason for this whole exercise, the provider of the GNH concept was none other than Druk Yul's His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk.



Delegates at the Happiness Summit in Thimphu in March.

GNH stands: economic development, environmental preservation, cultural promotion and good governance. Participants at the Thimphu Happiness Summit were not able to come up with a specific indicator for happiness.

"We feel we can contribute to de-

with marketable insurance policies."

and most opt to give up half-way—so what is the point in increasing the severity of punishment," says Ranjana Kumari of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti.

Among the many holes in the code is one which permits a defence lawyer to dig up a victim's past history and use it to weaken her case. "Even a sex worker should have the right to say no," says Mohini Giri, former chairperson of the National Commission for Women, a statutory body which, over the years, has forwarded to various central governments several unimplemented recommendations for amending anti-rape laws.

"A government which has been crying hoarse for capital punishment for rapes seems to have done a complete turn-around by asking women to pay in anticipation of being raped," said Shabnam Hashmi of the human-rights group,

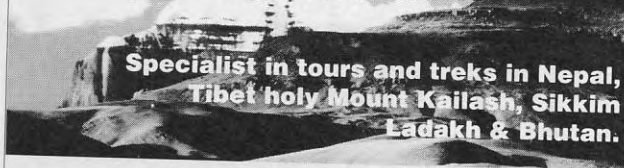
SAHMAT. She said the scheme opened up the possibility of increased child abuse for the sake of monetary gain. Besides, she pointed out, victims would still have to undergo the humiliating ordeal of proving rape to insurance authorities. GIC has made it public that victims can opt to prove rape through their own doctors, but there is still no way the police can be kept out of an incident that is criminal rather than civil in nature.

A GIC spokesman clarified that the idea behind the scheme is to take care of financial contingencies rather than trivialise the crime. That may be so, but the government seems to have got the message. It has removed 'rape' from the wording of the scheme although the crime remains both culpable and insurable.

-Ranjit Dev Raj

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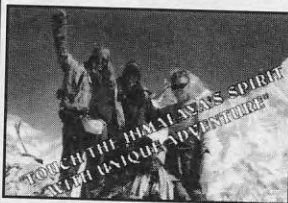
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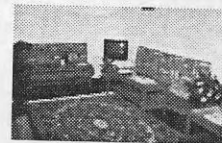
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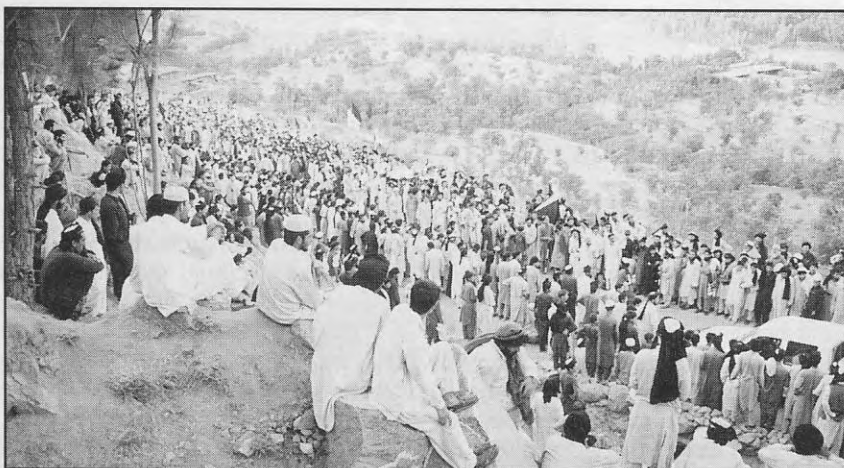
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Not Taliban-enough?



Pakistan's fiercely independent Pakhtun tribals become sacrificial lambs for Shariat.

by *Zaigham Khan*

Malakand's Islam is no different from the one being practised by the Taliban in Afghanistan," boasted the jubilant governor of Pakistan's North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP). He was referring to the promulgation of the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation 1999 (System of Islamic Justice Regulation) on 16 January, coinciding with the 27th of Ramzan, the most sacred day in the Islamic lunar calendar. This was the second promulgation of the Shariat in four years in Malakand, and came at a time when the central government of Nawaz Sharif was facing stiff opposition to its move of introducing the Shariat elsewhere across the country.

Since colonial times, Malakand, a mountainous region comprising seven districts of NWFP, has been ruled by special laws called Provincially Administered Tribal Areas Regulations (PATA). The British introduced this special arrangement for Malakand primarily because of the

difficulty in governing this land of deeply religious and fiercely independent Pakhtun tribals. The arrangement was continued by independent Pakistan. Under PATA, the judicial process is controlled by a hierarchy of executive officers who rule with the help of local notables. This perhaps explains the region's high degree of crime and lawlessness.

An attempt was made to change this structure in January 1994, when the Supreme Court of Pakistan ruled that PATA contradicted the basic human rights laws as enshrined in the country's constitution. Islamabad began preparations to include Malakand within the purview of Pakistan's Penal Code. And that is what might have happened had it not been for the ve-

hement opposition from a local religious group.

Tahrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM, or Movement for Enforcement of Shariah of Mohammad), adhering to the *wahabi* revivalist movement, was a silent group under PATA. But, with the federal government's attempt to introduce standard Pakistani law, they became vocal and launched a movement to get the Shariat enforced in the area. If some reports are to be believed, the TNSM had the backing of the local bureaucracy which wanted the old arrangement to continue in some form. Clashes between the heavily armed activists of TNSM and the paramilitary forces resulted in the death of 40 people. The government relented, and agreed to enforce the Shariat in Malakand, but not strictly of the kind TNSM was demanding. In November 1994, a Nifaz-e-Nizam-e-Shariat Regulation (Enforcement of the System of Shariat Regulation) was enforced in Malakand.

The 1994 regulations were similar to the Pakistani law as it applied to the rest of the country, but came with some amendments. One of them was in giving litigants the right to mediate their disputes in accordance with the Shariat if they so chose. The decision made by a mediator was binding though a judge could overturn it if he felt that it was not in accordance with the Shariat. The amendments were welcomed by the lawyers of Malakand for they felt that while the Regulations did not go against the spirit of the law of the country, it was also in accordance with local tribal traditions.

However, TNSM was not to be satisfied with the new dispensation and

The Nawaz Sharif government is using Malakand as a test case to generate support for its pro-Shariat constitutional amendment.

went on strike once again. Among other things, it demanded immunity for all crimes that were not prohibited by Islam, which were basically a euphemism for non-payment of all taxes except the religious tax of *zakat*, permission to engage in smuggling, and unhindered extraction of the area's rich natural resources. In June 1995, clashes once again broke out between the police and the TNSM, leaving 11 dead. Further unrest did not follow as the TNSM over time began to lose much of its support base, and nothing much was heard of or from the organisation, except for some stray statements and wild rumours (which included a 'TNSM announcement' that promised 50,000 rupees for bringing in the head of a white man). Malakand's crime rate, too, dropped drastically, and it appeared that the people had reconciled to the 1994 Regulations.

But, with the announcement by the NWFP government of the enforce-

ment of Shariat in the form of Nizam-e-Adl Regulation 1999, the situation has once again changed for the Malakand people. It is obvious here that the government is using Malakand as a test case to generate some pro-Shariat momentum to help push the 15th Constitutional Amendment (the controversial move that seeks to make the Shariat the paramount law in Pakistan) through the Senate.

The new laws give considerable importance to the clergy by allowing mullahs inside the court in the capacity of *muavin qazis* (assistant judges) and *alim wakils* (religious scholars-cum-lawyers). If that seems out of place in standard legal practice, more alarming is the new law's concept of territorial and tribal responsibility. It empowers executive magistrates to proceed against "a person, a section of persons or a community of a locality, in accordance with the concept of collective responsibility, subject to the

established principles of Shariat".

The move, seen as yet another concession by the government to the small but powerful religious lobby of Pakistan, has angered many. The legal community is opposing the Regulation saying that bringing in mullahs as *muavin qazis* and *alim wakils* is against the Bar Councils Act and the subordinate rules. Human rights activists contend that the new regulation is against Article 25 of the Constitution which guarantees equality of citizens before the law, the same clause under which the Supreme Court had declared PATA laws *ultra vires* of the Constitution.)

The new arrangement has not only woken up the TNSM, but it has rejected it as well—for the TNSM, the arrangement is not Taliban-enough. It remains to be seen whether this will spur the group on to another round of violence. Either way, it's bad news for the Malakand 'guinea pig'. ▲

Bhutan-Nepal Missive

IT IS a rare occasion when the Kathmandu government can be roused to strong action in its dealings with Thimphu on the issue of Bhutanese refugees who started streaming into Nepal 10 years ago. So it came as a surprise that a letter late January from the Bhutanese foreign minister briefly threatened to turn into an angry exchange of missives.

It began with the visit to Thimphu in early December by Nepal's Home Minister Govinda Raj Joshi as special emissary of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala (who also handles the foreign ministry). During Joshi's visit, it was agreed that preparations would be made in January for the resumption of bilateral refugee talks. Accordingly, on 15 December 1998, Joshi sent a letter to the Bhutanese foreign minister, Jigmi Y. Thinley, with a proposal to set the date and agenda of the meeting. Thinley's reply, sent on 26 January, astounded Nepali officials for what they perceived to be its unwarranted comment on Nepal's internal affairs.

Thinley wrote that Thimphu had been concerned with the political developments in Nepal (i.e. changes due to the nature of Nepal's coalitional politics whereby the ruling Nepali Congress replaced its partner in government days after Joshi's letter had been despatched),

and of what effect they would have on the Eighth Ministerial Joint Committee meeting. What particularly irked the Nepali foreign ministry was Thinley's statement that "in the light of the fact that the new coalition government seems to have taken upon itself the singular mandate of holding the next elections... it may not be appropriate to hold our proposed ministerial meeting until after the elections."

The Nepali government responded in terms that were the strongest ever since the beginning of the Bhutanese refugee problem. The foreign ministry dashed off a letter signed by Joshi to Thinley which said that both governments must "exercise caution not to allow an entirely constitutional and domestic matter to concern either of us come in the way of a bilateral process geared to resolving the Bhutanese refugee problem".

For good measure, the letter added: "You may note [that] solving this problem amicably is Nepal's priority and enjoys national consensus across the broad political spectrum."

Ever since the refugee imbroglio began, Nepali diplomacy has mainly been a reaction to initiatives taken by their Bhutanese counterparts. Perhaps Nepal's biggest blunder was during the 1993 meeting in Thimphu when

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the Nepali team led by then home minister (later prime minister) Sher Bahadur Deuba agreed to classify the refugees into four groups: bonafide Bhutanese who have been forcefully evicted; Bhutanese who emigrated; non-Bhutanese; and Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts. This classification left pro-democracy Bhutanese leaders dumbfounded for the sheer arbitrariness it entailed. No actual progress has been made since and an estimated 100,000 refugees continue to languish in the camps, nearly a decade since most of them exited Bhutan.

In March, the very man many refugees hold responsible for their flight from Bhutan presented his credentials to King Birendra of Nepal as the new ambassador. Dago Tsering, Bhutan's homespun home minister throughout the refugee crisis, is also Thimphu's ambassador to Delhi and is based there.

One Kathmandu foreign ministry official said, "Tsering's appointment as ambassador was perhaps a little too obvious an attempt to stick Nepal's nose in the mud." Meanwhile, when asked about Thinley's letter by Thinley, apparently all the new ambassador could say was that it was "wrongly worded". ▲

-Sudhir Sharma

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VOICES

Singapore's 'Indians'

DON'T TELL the Pakistanis, Bangladeshis or Sri Lankans, but Singapore lumps them all together as Indians. And not in the sense of the man in a bar in the Mexican border town of Juarez who, learning I was Indian, asked, "Chihuahua?"

If I bristled at what I took to be a canine comparison, many of India's neighbours would find it galling that everyone "with ethnic origins in the Indian Subcontinent" is regarded as Indian.

To ensure that no one escapes the net, Singapore's National Registration Department lists no fewer than 15 categories of Indian; and to be doubly sure, it includes Sinhalese as well as Sri Lankan along with Tamil and Bengali. But any Indian who might gloat over this terminological conquest is brought down to earth by the local university's indulgence of Sikh students, who are allowed to opt out of the Indian label.

Defining nationality is always difficult in old societies reborn as modern states. We live at many planes but the core identity—the one that matters—is clan, religion or language. The national concept is so remote that no Indian language, including my native Bengali, has ready words for India and Indian.

A continental identity is unthinkable, which explains why the political scientist Benedict Anderson calls Asia a Western invention. "People in Western countries believe in the massive existence of 'Asians,' but very few people in 'Asia' share this curious idea," he says.

Mr Anderson also says that Chinese immigrants in Indonesia had no idea they were Chinese, thinking only in terms of dialect groups, until the Dutch forced them into the Chinese straitjacket.

Even in China, they knew themselves as Hsia, Jung, Ti and Chiang. If Europe gave us national labels, it did so grudgingly. The early British in India called themselves Indian and dismissed sons of the soil as natives. "You're the only native present," said a patronising hostess in England to an Indian student, who shot back, "On the contrary, madam, I'm the only one who isn't!"

The word had pejorative overtones. So I was curious to see how a 19th century ancestor of mine had circumvented it in a protest to the viceregal authorities that resulted in Indian judges being given jurisdiction over the British. The document, when I obtained a copy from the India Office Library in London, was a masterpiece of diplomacy: My great-grandfather spoke of "the natives of India" as distinct from the Crown's "European British subjects". That signalled another linguistic revolution. Long before the European single currency, at the peak of the insularity that gave birth to the old "Channel frozen, Continent isolated" joke, the English in India were everywhere described as Europeans. Generously, they also included Americans, but with matching inconsistency defined anyone of mixed parentage—even those with names like Schwartz or Vitacovitch—as Anglo-Indian...

Singapore's fixation with race is just as baffling. Apart

from evoking shades of genetic classification, and some of Europe's more repugnant political creeds, the ethnic question, which pops up in all official forms, places the honest Indian in a quandary.

Should he write Indo-Aryan if he is from the north, Indo-Mongoloid if from the east and Dravidian if a southerner? The trouble is that officialdom makes no concession to accuracy. The only acceptable answer is Indian, which is not a race at all, but citizenship.

SUNANDA K. DATTA-RAY IN "WHAT'S IN A NAME? THE POLITICS OF DEFINING NATIONALITY IN ASIA" FROM THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE.

Mother's sister

SOME YEARS after I became a Catholic, I joined Mother Teresa's congregation, the Missionaries of Charity. I was one of her sisters for nine and a half years, living in the Bronx, Rome, and San Francisco, until I became disillusioned and left in May 1989. As I reentered the world, I slowly began to unravel the tangle of lies in which I had lived. I wondered how I could have believed them for so long.

Three of Mother Teresa's teachings that are fundamental to her religious congregation are all the more dangerous because they are believed so sincerely by her sisters. Most basic is the belief that as long as a sister obeys she is doing God's will. Another is the belief that the sisters have

Ministry of Trade and Industry Thimphu

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- Bars shall be open only after 1 p.m.
- Tuesday of every week shall be observed as dry day all over the country and the bars shall remain closed. Restaurant and Hotels shall also not serve alcohol on the said dry day.
- All bars must be separated from other business except in restaurants and hotels. It must be exclusive and operated from a separate room/house and no alcohol can be retailed from general merchandise shops. The existing bar owners will be given time upto 30 April, 1999 to establish separate rooms/houses for bars.
- All TAB classified hotels will hence forth be required to obtain a separate licence for bar.

The applicant shall be required to provide an undertaking to comply with the above rules. In the event where any licence is found not complying with the above mentioned rules, he/she shall be penalized with a fine of Nu. 1,000/- in the first instance. Subsequent violation shall result in cancellation of the bar licence and he/she shall not be eligible for any bar licence thereafter.

Joint Secret

April 1999

leverage over God by choosing to suffer. Their suffering makes God very happy. He then dispenses more graces to humanity. The third is the belief that any attachment to human beings, even the poor being served, supposedly interferes with love of God and must be vigilantly avoided or immediately uprooted. The efforts to prevent any attachments cause continual chaos and confusion, movement and change in the congregation. Mother Teresa did not invent these beliefs—they were prevalent in religious congregations before Vatican II—but she did everything in her power (which was great) to enforce them.

Once a sister has accepted these fallacies she will do almost anything. She can allow her health to be destroyed, neglect those she vowed to serve, and switch off her feelings and independent thought. She can turn a blind eye to suffering, inform on her fellow sisters, tell lies with ease, and ignore public laws and regulations.

Women from many nations joined Mother Teresa in the expectation that they would help the poor and come closer to God themselves. When I left, there were more than 3000 sisters in approximately 400 houses scattered throughout the world. Many of these sisters who trusted Mother Teresa to guide them have become broken people. In the face of overwhelming evidence, some of them have finally admitted that their trust has been betrayed, that God could not possibly be giving the orders they hear. It is difficult for them to decide to leave—their self-confidence has been destroyed, and they have no education beyond what they brought with them when they joined. I was one of the lucky ones who mustered enough courage to walk away.

It is in the hope that others may see the fallacy of this purported way to holiness that I tell a little of what I know. Although there are relatively few tempted to join Mother Teresa's congregation of sisters, there are many who generously have supported her work because they do not realise how her twisted premises strangle efforts to alleviate misery. Unaware that most of the donations sit unused in her bank accounts, they too are deceived into thinking they are helping the poor.

SUSAN SHIELDS IN "MOTHER TERESA'S HOUSE OF ILLUSIONS"
FROM *FREE INQUIRY* MAGAZINE.

One Bengal, two systems

THE BANGLADESH Liberation War was a struggle against the hardline exclusivist tradition in West Pakistan that was trying to supplant the liberal tradition in the eastern wing and turn it into a colony. Under the guidance of the Pakistani junta from the West, the Islamist parties made it their goal to eliminate the religious minorities and to discard the secularist strands from the composite culture of Bangladesh. They cried "Islam is in danger" to garner supporters for their invidious goals.

It was a national pastime in certain quarters during the Pakistan era to erect a psychological wall between West Bengal and East Bengal in the guise of championing

the cause of Muslim Bengal. There was a crack in this wall for a brief period during 1971-75. But, after 1975, for the next two decades, the wall was rebuilt and reinforced to mirror the prejudice and predilections of those in power. The master architects of this wall were the Pakistan-trained officers of the Bangladesh army who continued to look back to the pre-liberation days under Islamabad for political inspiration.

The balance of power in Bengal in the era of Permanent Settlement had indeed tilted disproportionately in favour of the Hindus. The 1947 Partition did serve to restore the balance. But it can just as easily be argued that East Bengal got rid of the overlordship of the local zamindars only to turn into a colony of West Pakistan. Furthermore, it was asked by its new rulers to sever all ties to 'Hindu' West Bengal with which it shared a common cultural heritage and where at least a quarter of the population was Muslim.

The Bangabhumi of yore is today's East Bengal. It had always been the core of Bengali language and culture. West Bengal was the Rarhbhumi which was part of Greater Bengal and had, till the coming of the British, looked up to East Bengal for cultural inspiration and sustenance. So, in a sense, Bengal's cultural heritage has its root in East Bengal. The proponents of Bangladeshi nationalism have their own agenda. It is to erase West Bengal from the canvas of Greater Bengal with a view to turning Bangladesh into a puppet in the hands of Islamabad's rulers who would be only too happy to use Bangladesh as the cat's paw to further their own interests.

There are those who have a vested interest to cry hoarse shouting, "Hindus of West Bengal and Muslims of Bangladesh are two distinct peoples. They have absolutely nothing in common." Inevitably, proponents of this juvenile thesis ignore the cultural affinities between West and East Bengal to dwell at length on the religious differences only. That is the only way they can erect a wall between the two Bengals. But even that is not easy because a quarter of West Bengal's population is Muslim. Will the religionists disown [Bangladesh's national poet] Kazi Nazrul Islam because he is from West Bengal?

There are indeed differences between the inhabitants of the two Bengals. But it is not simple to cut off West Bengal from our cultural canvas on the basis of these differences. Religion, ethnicity, dialect, and regional characteristics, all play an important role in defining our cultural ethos. It is as dishonest as it is misleading to try to define it in terms of religion alone.

Consider the regional component, for example. The immigrants in Calcutta from East Bengal, from long before the 1947 partition, had indulged in their regional pride by cheering for the East Bengal team on Calcutta's soccer field. And to this day they continue to do so. It pleases them no end when East Bengal defeats Mohan Bagan. The Islamists in Bangladesh will be hard placed to explain this exultation on the soccer fields of Calcutta in terms of their tactics of seeing everything as a confrontation between Hindu West Bengal and Muslim

VOICES

Bangladesh.

Region-based differences indeed seems far more significant than religion-based ones. A Muslim Bengali from West Bengal is likely to feel more at home with a Hindu Bengali from West Bengal than with a Muslim Bengali from Bangladesh. The age-old Ghati-Bangal issue has always transcended religion to give primacy to geography instead.

The endogamic tradition of the Subcontinent kept apart the Hindu migrants from East Bengal to India from the Hindu natives of West Bengal. Even some half a century after the partition of India, Calcutta newspapers continue to conspicuously mention the ancestral roots of prospective brides and grooms in matrimonial columns. One may attribute that to the discriminatory practices of the natives or to the exclusivist practices of the immigrants. But the fact remains that ancestral district can come in the way of tying matrimonial bonds between the Hindu natives and the Hindu immigrants in West Bengal. In fact, even among the Hindu immigrants themselves, a Baidya from Jessore or Bikrampur might find it beneath his dignity to have matrimonial ties with a Baidya from Sylhet or Comilla!...

Most religionists in Bangladesh take a victimological stance to justify their prejudice. They blame the arrogance of the Hindus from West Bengal or of the Hindu zamindar of yore from his own East Bengal for their antagonism toward all Hindus. But if they were honest enough, they would have readily admitted that there can be just as much a tradition of arrogance among the Muslims of Bangladesh. For many years, educated Bengali Muslims inhabiting the central part to the north western part of Bangladesh were extremely reluctant to enter into matrimonial ties with people from Noakhali, Chittagong and Sylhet. Similarly, many Chittagongians and Sylhetese never could harbour the thought of marrying "foreigners". I know of people from Noakhali who feel ashamed to disclose their roots. Many of them feigned to be from Comilla or Chittagong to get accepted by the Dhaka-centric "Bhadrolok" culture.

JAMAL HASAN IN "NUANCES OF CULTURAL COMPLEXITY AND THE PUERILE BID TO UNLINK THE TWO BENGALS" FROM THE INTERNET DAILY, NEWS FROM BANGLADESH.

Indo-phobic Mao

CHINESE COMMUNIST Party Chairman Mao Zedong was so antagonistic towards India that he even harboured doubts about the country's independence status more than two decades after the British had left, according to a new book.

"India did not win independence. If it does not attach itself with Britain, it attaches itself to the Soviet Union. And now, more than one-half of their economy depends on you (United States)," Mao said in a conversation with US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger on November 12, 1973.

The conversation is reproduced in the book *The Kissinger Transcripts*, edited by senior analyst at the National Security Archive, William Burr. It contains formerly classified transcripts of then President Richard Nixon's troubleshooter's talks with Mao, Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping and others.

To drive his point home, Mao also talked of \$10 billion that India owed to the United States at that time. "Was it all debts?" he asked. Kissinger interjected: "That was all debt together. It's not \$10 billion but closer to \$6 billion. I will have to check. I thought it was \$10 billion to everybody, of which India owed 60 per cent.

Chinese Prime Minister Zhou, who happened to be present there, intervened: "That includes the rupee debt." Kissinger: "Including the rupee debt, this is correct. Yes. And one can mention the dollar debt, too."

Mao even made light of Indian philosophy. Nor did he show any liking for Mahatma Gandhi.

The conversation reveals two major reasons for his dislike for India: New Delhi's close relations with the erstwhile Soviet Union and Beijing's friendship with Pakistan which was instrumental in putting Chinese leaders in touch with the Americans...

In the same conversation, Kissinger said: "There is a sentimental love affair between Western intellectuals and India based on a complete misreading of the Indian philosophy of life. Indian philosophy was never meant to have a practical application."

Mao: "It's just a bunch of empty words."


Kissinger: "For Gandhi (spelt Ghandi in the transcript) non-violence wasn't a philosophic principle, but

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NEWSLINE, KARACHI

VOICES

because he thought the British were too moralistic and sentimental to use violence against. They are non-sentimental people. For Gandhi it was a revolutionary tactic, not an ethical principle."

Mao: "And, he himself would spin his own wool and drink goat's milk."

Kissinger: "Partly, but also given the character and diversity of the English people, it was only a way to conduct the struggle against the British. So, I think Gandhi deserves credit for having won independence against the British." Mao then questioned Kissinger's assertion, doubting India's independence.

ROSAMMA JOSE IN "MAO DOUBTED INDIA'S 'INDEPENDENCE'"
FROM *MID-DAY*, BOMBAY.

Missing participant

THE MR Winter Workshop awards is poised for an exciting finish with the Sri Lankan scholar giving the rest of the South Asian faculty a run for their money.

Soon as he arrived in the arena, early morning on International Women's Day, an excited Pakistani asked, "Is he the missing participant from Bangladesh?" But it soon became clear that the new entrant was not a mere participant, but a highly sought-after policy analyst from Sri Lanka. "Now our workshop has gained new meaning," an Indian lady sighed. The tea break was abuzz with the lady participants hastily brushing up their knowledge on the Sri Lankan crisis, and touching up their make-up. Many wanted to pose the most 'relevant' question to the hulk. The informal poll conducted amongst female participants during lunch put the Sri Lankan much ahead of the rest of his field for the coveted award. A male Nepali participant, however, looked envious but confused. "What's all this fuss about?"

The Sri Lankan's clean sweep to victory was halted mid-step when a participant from India, also one of the foremost theorists of feminist practice in Indian academia, boycotted the poll. All upset when this reporter talked to her later, she said, "It is a pity that my fellow female participants have engaged in what I consider to be an act that only makes patriarchy stronger." She was still fuming in the evening when the *Godavari Herald* caught up with her. "If we are to build a pro-women imagined community in South Asia, we must stop these contests at once," she said and gave this reporter a free copy of her recent paper "Women Must Fight: Possibilities for Emancipatory Politics in Post-Third Wave Democracies in South Asia for Women".

Post-lunch, the Faculty chair brought a semblance of order to the proceedings. In a longish intervention, he said, "It has been a part of South Asian women's everyday tradition to judge men not only by their brains but also their looks. As a psychologist and a futurist, I can tell you that these contests and the conversations related to them are both the proof and the substance of the viability of the pro-women South Asian community for the

next millennium. Of course, our traditions contained some bad things as well but one need not read gender oppression everywhere."

The Bangladeshi scholar whose specialty was actually Refugees willingly agreed with the Chair and enthused, "If you do not essentialise this act on the part of the female participants while analysing the space for emancipatory politics for women in South Asia, then a gendered imagined community led by women is certainly viable by the year 2010 through such track two initiatives." The Sri Lankan scholar was happily unaware that he was the object of such heated debate.

IN "A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN"
FROM THE *GODAVARI HERALD*, THE RESIDENT NEWSLETTER FROM
THE COLOMBO-BASED REGIONAL CENTRE FOR STRATEGIC
STUDIES' WINTER WORKSHOP IN KATHMANDU.

Song break

HINDI FILMS are an important part of the country's socio-cultural landscape, the only truly original Indian art form of the 20th century, having evolved organically to create a pan-Indian identity. They are Indian in theme and structure, form and content, style and substance. Inspired by and plagiarised from many sources, perhaps, the final product is informed by a quintessentially Indian ethos: not only the sum of its parts, but even the ingredients are fully Indian—developed and completely original. Can the same be said for, say, Indian design or architecture?

Take the Hindi film song, for example, a totally homespun concept. In two or three short verses written in a metre that is strikingly different from most styles—the *ghazal* comes closest—it conveys an emotion at an important juncture in the narrative and takes the story forward. There is a Hindi film song for every conceivable human situation and every emotion: anger, patriotism, seduction and, of course, love in all its many splendoured shades. The songs have a life outside the films. Much before MTV was ever conceived, Hindi films had their own versions of music videos, a self-contained three-minute song that could be seen, heard and savoured independent of the film.

The lyricists were poets in their own right and achieved popularity far beyond what they would have as mere published poets. Their songs reached out and touched the lives of countless of their countrymen and women who knew that the songs were not only for them but also about them and in their language. Shailendra, Sahir Ludhianvi, Kaifi Azmi, Majrooh Sultanpuri and Shakeel Badayuni wrote about love and loss in the common man's language, and the music composers, the dance directors, the playback singers and most of all the actors and actresses who essayed them on the screen, added their own touches to make the Hindi film song an art form in its own right.

SIDHARTH BHATIA IN "HINDI FILMS ARE HOMESPUN KHADI"
FROM *THE PIONEER*, BOMBAY

Abominably yours



James Watson is considered to be the Father of DNA. Let me immediately digress here: how come when a male scientist discovers a new, improved way to kill rodents he is called the Father of Mousetraps but when a woman invents a new radioactive element she is known as Pierre's Wife, and the new element is just called "radium"?

In fact, male freedom fighters like Sheikh Mujibur go down in history as the Father of the Nation (or, when they are getting on in years like Mahatma Gandhi, they are affectionately called Grandpa of the Republic) but when Aung San Suu Kyi rises in Burma, she is not even called Nation's Aunt. In fact the only time the word "mother" ever crops up in the context of nation states is when Saddam the Hussein tries to lock his radars on American bombers and calls that The Mother of All Battles.

Back to Watson. If he really did (as reported) tell the 86th Indian Science Congress in Madras that arranged marriages are good for India's gene pool and that the caste system makes evolutionary sense, then the Father of DNA needs to get a head-analyser test. The amazing thing is that no one dared challenge Watson: how come mongrels are nicer, hardier and more intelligent? And what is it that gives British royals large lower jaws?

One thing Watson can't be accused of is being politically correct. Which is a rare commodity in an age of semantic tight-rope walkers who try not to hurt anyone's feelings so that the visually impaired can lead the physically challenged into the international year of the older person.

None of this tip-toeing with words for politicians determined to be incorrect at all costs: Bal Thackeray's fascination with fascism, or the Taliban addressing gender discrimination in its own unique manner. In Andhra Pradesh, actors-turned-politicians pride themselves in being politically wrong and recently had a wild

feast in which they dined on endangered migratory birds including whistling teals who were making a stop-over in Lake Kulleru. Taking their cue, politicians-turned-actors were also caught blazing away at protected black bucks.

Politically correct speech, on the other hand, is like the visible panty line. It changes with the times—it is OK to show it in 1994 but in 1999 it is suddenly not cool anymore. That is why today, we in poor countries are proud to call ourselves poor again, without having to wring our hands and say "underdeveloped" and later "developing". Rich countries are not embarrassed about being rich, even liberals there find it game to flaunt their wealth again. Blacks finally settled for "black". Gays thought "gay" was nice. But, like the VPL, all that could change again in a few years.



That is why I am glad to say that the publishers of this eminent periodical have gone back to calling the female president of their board a "chairman", instead of calling her a "chair". Never quite got used to the guys on the podium looking at me and saying: "I would now humbly request the Madame Chair to take her seat." (Or the nervous ones even: "Madame Seat to take her Chair.") Being mistaken for stools were some of the indignities that us women had to suffer on our road to post-post-feminism.

However, I must add at this juncture that there are some words we still have to set right by bringing out a Politically Correct Dictionary of Manly Words. Suggestions welcome.

For these words, we either have to find alternatives, or we have to change their meaning:

Manslaughter: A lesser homicide.

Manhunt: When police launch a statewide manhunt, I suppose they're not looking for female perpetrators.

Menace: Oh, yea.

Manure: Yesssss!

Menagerie: Zoo for the male species.

Manpower: Less power than horsepower.

Manmade: Next time you buy a Nike gymshoe, examine the label inside, it may say "Made by Man in China". And I guess it will take an average Chinaman a couple of manhours to make ten pairs.

Manhood: You don't want to know.

Manhole: Avoid this at all costs.

Manhandle: With care.

Mango: They usually do.

Godmen: The Creator's commission agents on Earth.

Maneater: Monica.

Manager: Women who don't like to be "man"aged need to be their own boss.

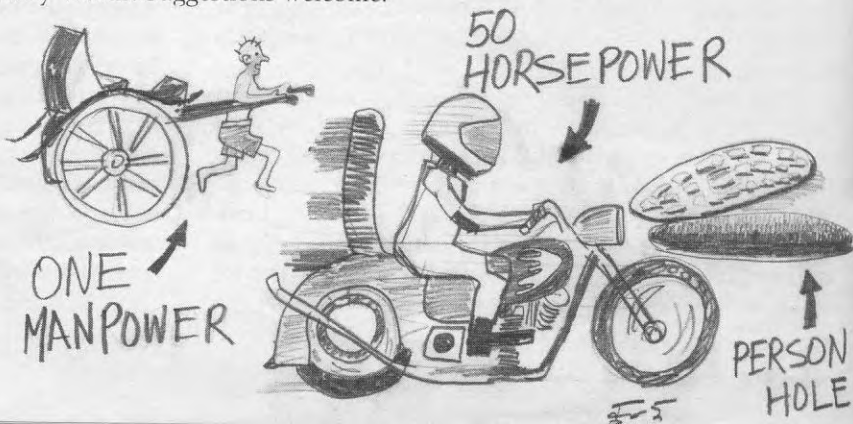
Manual: When you want to use the stick shift.

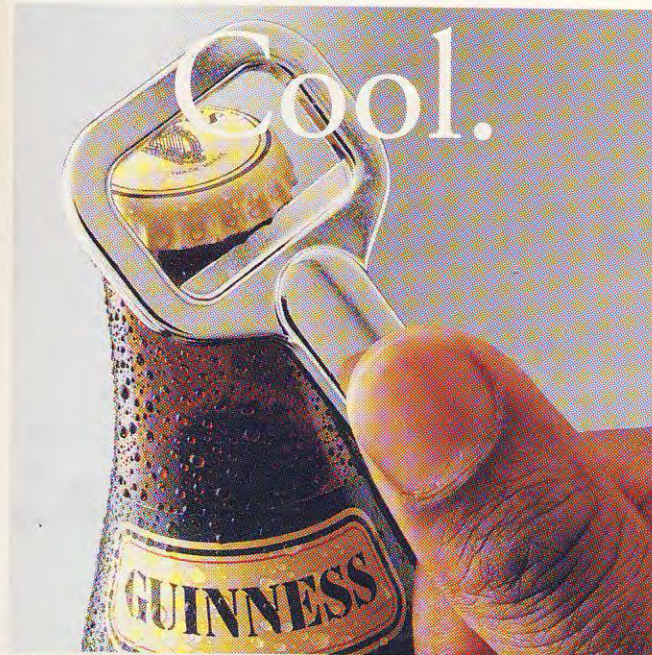
Man on the Street: That's where he ends up when you throw him out of the house.

Manicure: Things you do to him with your claws.

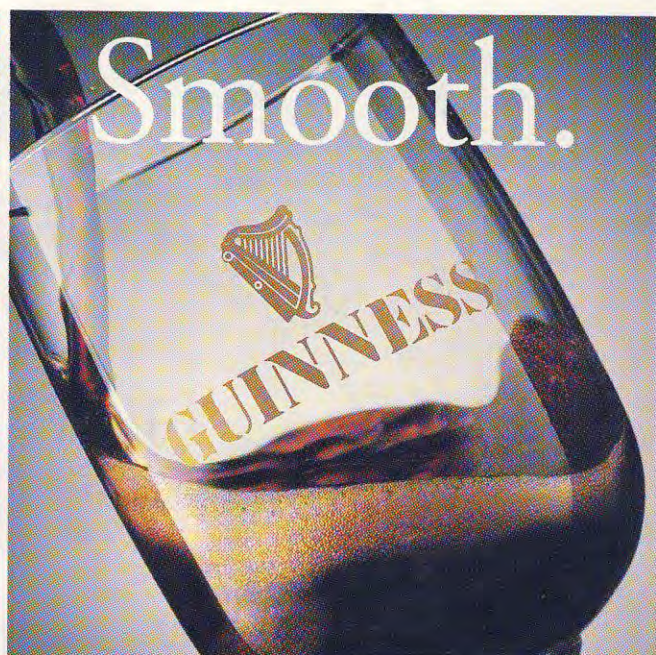
Mankind: Nyahahahahahaha. That'll be the day.

Several of you have written in asking if you can call me an abominable snowperson. That's fine. That's fine. Just don't ever call me a chair.





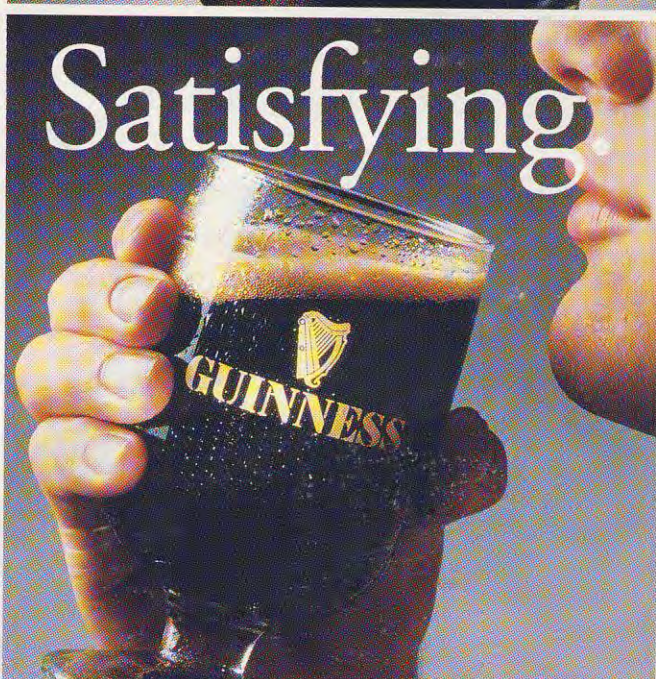
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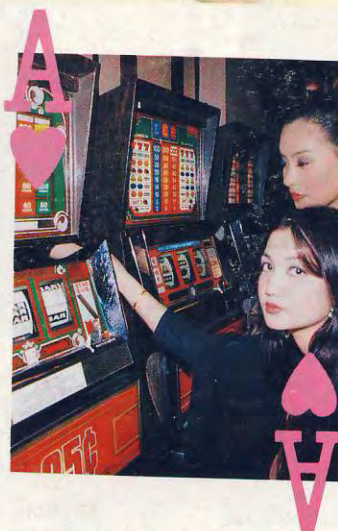
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