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SRILANKA

## MEETING PRABHAKARAN

WILL THE combined efforts of the good Samaritans of the Western world to bring the Sri Lanka government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), locked in a civil war for over 17 years, to the negotiating table, succeed? As November ended, that question remained tantalisingly poised, with informed analysts veering to the view that talks are likely, but uncertain of whether they would lead anywhere except, perhaps, some period of peace for the people condemned to live in the war zone that the LTTE claims as a Tamil homeland. The external pressure for the renewal of peace talks between the government and the Tigers has mounted to a considerable degree. There have been high-level visits from Britain and the US, and neither can Colombo ignore the upcoming Paris aid meeting.

The 1 November talks between LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solhiem was a well-kept secret until Solheim, facilitated by the Colombo government, entered the Wanni fastness from where the seldom-seen Prabhakaran runs a war machine widely considered to be among the world's most deadly. The global publicity value of the meeting between the Norwegian peacemakers and the LTTE leader, who had remained invisible to the world outside his guerrilla army for five years, was understandably immense. Prabhakaran had done away with the moustache he sported when previously photographed and had shed his military fatigues for a safari suit for the occasion. A picture of Prabhakaran with the Norwegians was later released to the press.

Solheim returned to Colombo to announce that the LTTE was ready for unconditional talks with the Sri Lanka government. But hardly had the ink on his first statement dried, the Tiger propaganda machine, feeding the domestic and international media from its London headquarters, came out with a totally different story. Certainly they were willing to talk, but there were several conditions. These included an "immediate cessation of hostilities, removal of military aggression and occupation, and withdrawal of economic embargo". While the government newspapers saw the first direct contact between Prabhakaran and the


What Prabhakaran! No
moustache?!
facilitator-as Norway is officially describedas indicating a "glimmer of hope", other media seized on the ambiguity surroun-ding the question of conditionality.

The Western nations, mainly those hosting Tamil refugees, have thrown their weight behind a negotiated settlement. Britain sent Peter Hain, its Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, to Colombo. Hard on his heels came Karl Inderfurth, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs. Both expressed support for the Norwegian efforts and called for a negotiated solution respecting Sri Lanka's unitary status as well as "Tamil aspirations". It is clear that the Western perception remains that Tamils suffer a disadvantaged status vis-à-vis the majority Sinhalese; Inderfurth said as much when he quoted a recent parliamentary statement of none other than President Chandrika Kumaratunga: "The real cause of the ethnic crisis is that the minority communities have not had a fair and reasonable opportunity to share in the political, social and economic power structure of the country."

## KRISHNA'S CORNER



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Many Sinhalese disagree with this viewpoint. Some argue that the disadvantaged in the country are not only the minorities, but whoever is poor-for example, anyone who does not have a good English education. And that includes many Sinhalese. They point out that the brutal civil war that has been the direct result of "LTTE terrorism" had allowed hundreds of thousand of Tamils to win refugee status in Western Europe and North America, where they have been able to achieve lifestyles that would never have been possible in their own country. This Tamil diaspora, estimated now to number nearly a million, is a major financier of the LTTE, both in voluntary contributions as well as extorted funds. Though countries like the US and Canada have banned the LTTE, calling it a terrorist group, and keep its front organisations under surveillance, the Tigers maintain an International Secretariat in London with a sophisticated propaganda apparatus. Colombo has long been pushing Britain to close down this office, and a planned legislation next year may possibly be another lever the West could use to induce Prabhakaran to talk serious.

With President Kumaratunga fighting a deteriorating economic situation, the thricepostponed aid consortium meeting in Paris in December, will be another source of external pressure on the government to work towards a negotiated settlement rather than pursue the military option, vigorously advocated by hardline Sinhalesc, including Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, who has been recently given increased responsibilities over the security forces. As Prabhakaran is accused of having literally suckered previous governments, and Kumaratunga herself, to talk peace in order to win time to rearm and regroup for fresh assaults, the armed forces as well as Colombo's influential sections will now not easily agree to lower the guard to enable peace talks. Lt. Gen. Lionel Balagalle, the Army Commander, went on record recently saying that it is up to Prabhakaran to establish the necessary trust, although he did not spell out how this might be done. As far as the LTTE is concerned, assaulting civilian targets has continued even after the most recent offer of 'unconditional' peace talks and the demand for normalisation of conditions in the war zone-the latest was the bombing of a bus killing seven and wounding nearly 30.

The big question now is whether Prabhakaran will be willing to settle for the extensive devolution that Colombo is willing to grant and stop short of his dream of a separate Eelam.

Some of his bankrollers want him to press on with the separatist war, but he is also under pressure both externally and internally from the people who live in the war zone, for a return to peace. International funding for repairing and rehabilitating the war-devastated areas is readily on offer if peace returns. Clearly, Colombo is willing to walk the extra mile towards peace and may even unwillingly concede the merger of the Tamil dominated northern province with the east. The whole country is war weary and looking for a respite.
-Manik de Silva

## PAKISTAN

## WHOSE MUMMY?

EVEN AS politics in Pakistan acquired a new turn last month with the forging of an alliance between longstanding rivals Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, a recently unearthed mummy of disputed origin has forced its way into public and media attention, and now finds itself mired in international controversy. Claims to ownership have so far been made by Iran, Afghanistan and Egypt and the

controversy generated by it has been so heated as to override, for the present, the question of its true identity. Most significantly, Islamabad finds itself in the uncomfortable position of trying to assuage two of its important regional allies, the Khatami administration in Tehran and the ruling Taliban in Kabul.

Meanwhile, the brief note on the mummy prepared by the experts at the Pakistan Archaeology Department reads: "This mummy is a princess aged 18 years old. Her name was Khor-Ul-Gayan or Tundul-Gayan, and 2,600 years (approximately) ago first ruler

If its provenance is verified, the mummy will be one of the greatest archaeological finds in Pakistan.
of the area Karoosh-ul-Kabir from the family of Khamam-ul-Nishiyan was her father. They were Zurtasht [Zoroastrian]. The gold plate on her chest, its cover and top of the box provides this information in Makhi Cunciform."

The mummy, found by the police in Quetta --the capital of Pakistan's southwest Balochistan province bordering Iran-is believed to be that of a prince or princess who lived more than 2500 years ago. It has been dated to the era of the Persian Khamam-ul-Nishiyan dynasty, circa 600 BC . The relic is currently in the National Museum in Karachi, as the police continue to investigate its mysterious trail. Following the discovery of the mummy, two Pakistani men, including the tribal chief at whose home it was found, have been arrested. It is believed the mummy had been put up for sale with a price tag of more than USD 1 million. Pakistani police are still looking into the murder of one of the dealers apparently involved in trying to sell it. After the murder, the mummy was hastily sent to Quetta to be hidden, where it was discovered by the police. It was found wrapped in a brownish wax cloth inside a wooden coffin and decorated with a gold crown, a gold mask and a gold chest-plate.

Pakistan is rapidly evolving as a source for the lucrative market in illegal antiques. For many years, dealers have smuggled out Gandharan statuary and artefacts from Pakistan as well as neighbouring Afghanistan. The price of such items has increased tremendously. This trade in antiques has reached serious proportions and though there is a law to deal with it the problem lies in its enforcement.

The international row over the mummy began when authorities in Teheran claimed that it belonged to Iran, and should be returned. However, there are some experts who argue that it could have come from ancient Egypt. Iran's demand for the return of the mummy is based on the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organisation's claim that the artefact is an ancient member of the Iranian royal family, citing the engravings in ancient Persian on the mummy as evidence. The organisation says it will take legal action under a convention of the UNESCO, to regain the mummy, which it claimed was smuggled into Pakistan, and identified it as the remains of an Achaemenian prince. The sarcophagus bears carvings and images of Ahura-Mazda, the god of Zoroastrianism, the ancient state religion of Persia. Though the mummy's breastplate and gold crown are ancient Egyptian in style, engravings on the breastplate are in ancient Persian. Pakistan has
so far refused to allow a team of experts to identify the disputed mummy. Well-known archaeologist, Professor Ahmed Hasan Dani of Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University, who examined it, says it is still unclear whether the mummy is Iranian or Egyptian.

The Afghan Taliban were quick to join issue with Iran and Pakistan. From Kabul, Culture Minister Qudratullah Jamal said that the mummy had actually been smuggled from Afghanistan's southwest Nimroz province to Pakistan, and that it should be returned. "The property of Afghanistan should be returned to the Afghan people. Its sale and purchase are forbidden," he said. What the minister failed to mention was that under Taliban rule the once prestigious Kabul Museum, which housed precious artefacts dating so far back as 8000 years, now stands stripped of nearly all its precious possessions. Taliban commanders have plundered, smuggled and sold them all. Some would find it difficult to see the antiidolatrous Taliban actually taking care of the mummy in contravention of its own strictures.

Whether the mummy has Persian, Afghan or Egyptian origins, Pakistan's Archaeological Department, however, is in no doubt as to its ownership. If its provenance is verified, the mummy will be one of the greatest archacological finds in Pakistan. Experts at the National Museum say that they are trying to find out whether the princess died a natural death or not. Commenting on the findings about the cause of her death-2500 years ago--and her age at the time, one official said, "Her vertebral column shows a major trauma." There is, meanwhile, no saying where this diplomatic trauma, that this antiquarian episode has had on the relationship among Teheran, Islamabad and Kabul, will lead to...
-Adnan Rehmat

## KASHMIR

## MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE

THE DECLARATION of a unilateral ceasefire during the month of Ramzan (November 29December 28) by Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has given a new lease of life to the failing peace process in Kashmir. This unilateral move has been hailed by many in India and abroad as the first positive step in the direction of peace after the colliapse of the August 2000 peace initiative of the Hizbul

# Why the Siachen fighting continues 

WHY DID the August 1998 Foreign Secretary-level talks between India and Pakistan fail? Talking to concerned officials, one has to come to the conclusion that the deadlock had its origins in the Indian side's reversal of its earlier acceptance of the proposal that both sides pull back their forces to pre-1985 positions in the undemarcated area of the Siachen Glacier. Pakistan saw this reversal as a betrayal of the 'principle of parity' which was apparently accepted by the prime ministers of both countries when they met on 16-17 July 1989 to work out the broad parameters of a possible agreement on the Siachen glacier.

The Indian army was unhappy about withdrawing from the Saltoro ridge, which, according to the generals, had given India the only advantageous position in the entire Kargil-Ladhak theatre. As a result, the 18-20 August 1989 meeting of military commanders of India and Pakistan, which followed the July 1989 meeting of the prime ministers, failed to finalise a Siachen Agreement. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, in the end, was unable to persuade the Indian generals to accept the wisdom of his political decision to pull back forces to pre-1985 positions in Siachen.

Rajiv Gandhi had, however, left the issue open, in the same manner as his grandfather Pandit Nehru and Pakistan's Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan had nearly three decades earlier, to refrain from a firm decision and to leave resolution of the Kashmir dispute to politicians of a future generation. This was how there still remained an opportunity for the Vajpayee government in 1998 to defuse the Siachen confrontation, which would make it easier to resolve the larger Kashmir problem. But in 1998, the Vajpayee government accepted the Indian Army's position that India must retain the 'upper hand' in Siachen. In other words, it rejected the proposal of demilitarising the Siachen glacier. Therefore, a truly senseless war continues at rarefied heights, at unthinkable human and material costs.

- T.K.B.
stalled once again in November of that year. In February 1999, Vajpayee took a bus ride to Lahore to kick-start dialogue, and this resulted in the Lahore Declaration and an accompanying buildup of hyperbole in the Indian media about how it was the harbinger of a new era of peace, friendship and cooperation. The fact that Musharraf and the other armed forces chiefs boycotted the Lahore event was noted, but not given due consideration. Within three months, in May 1999, came the letdown, the "stab in the back". Pakistani forces crossed the line of control in Kargil and started bombarding the Srinagar-Leh highway from the ridgeline.

In hindsight, it is clear that the Lahore Declaration, significant in itself, was mainly a statement of intent not translated into policy. This was why bureaucrats on both sides continued to drag their feet on pressing bilateral matters even after its signing. It is also true that Sharif was caught completely unawares by Vajpayee's acceptance of the invitation to visit Lahore by the inaugural bus from Delhi, which was the result of an off-hand remark during an interview Sharif had given to an Indian journalist. This unorthodox, almost Simon Perez-like initiative on the part of Vajpayee was
hailed as a bold and statesman-like step, particularly after the November 1998 round of secretary-level dialogue had failed (see box).

The Indian government was baffled by the attack on Kargil, and its military was unprepared. The fear of a nuclear confrontation increased as the fighting escalated, and international pressure mounted on the two capitals to end the hostilities. But how could the Vajpayee government talk to a Pakistan it was accusing of betrayal? So South Block decided to make a distinction between the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistani military. Pervez Musharraf was identified as the real villain and Sharif a weak but reluctant friend. The latter was temporarily absolved of the crime of 'back stabbing'. What seemed a good stratagem back then unfortunately boomeranged when Sharif's government was overthrown and the "rogue general" became Chief Executive of Pakistan.

The State Department has been advising New Delhi to retract from its position of not talking with Islamabad's military government. But the problem is not so much the military government as its Chief Executive. During and after the Kargil war, Vajpayee's government projected the General as the villain who wrecked the 'Lahore Agreement'. Through the ill-advised release of the Kargil Tapes as "living proof" of the General's direct involvement in the operation, the New Delhi authorities not only compromised India's 'intelligence assets', but the unfortunate personalisation of IndoPakistan relationship led to a cul de sac in IndiaPakistan relations.

The terms of the unilateral ceasefire indicate that Vajpayee is still not willing to talk to Musharraf. If this refusal was based on a principled objection to military regimes, then New Delhi should not be cosying up to the junta in Yangoon either. Vajpayee's offer of talks is limited to the militants and others from the India-held Jammu and Kashmir. His refusal to talk to those in Pakistan-held Kashmir or with Pakistan is bound to defeat the very purpose of his peace offering.

Jammu and Kashmir is a divided entity. Even the Shimla Agreement recognises that there is a 'dispute' between India and Pakistan over the region. It is an established fact that almost all Kashmiris, militant and non-militant nationalists belonging to all shades of politics and faith, are agreed on its 'disputed status'. All Kashmiris, whether they belong to Indianheld Jammu and Kashmir or the Pakistan-held portion, as well as the Kashmiri world diaspora, want to see their homeland united. Under
these circumstances, no Kashmiri militant or non-militant can be expected to participate in a peace dialogue with the Government of India as 'Kashmiris of Indian origin'. The August peace initiative of the Hizbul floundered because of the confusion over the terms of dialogue. The Kashmiri groups were unwilling to work within the framework of the Indian Constitution, and Prime Minister Vajpayee's clever phrase, of meeting within the "framework of humanism (Insaneeyat)" did nothing to resolve the issue. Ultimately, however, the August initiative broke down because of India's refusal to involve Pakistan in the dialogue.

This time around, and before the month of Ramzan ends, Vajpayee and his advisers must try and transcend their "stabbed in the back" psyche. New Delhi's response to the Hizbul ceasefire and its own current ceasefire offer are based on the same attitude. Unless India is willing to reconsider its position on dialogue with the Government of Pakistan and the 'nonIndian' Kashmiris, there can be no progress. In which case Vajpayee will merely be continuing a 'monologue on peace', hardly a dialogue.

A ceasefire is generally achieved through negotiations: even the Kargil ceasefire was arrived at through behind-the-scene talks while the guns were still booming along the LoC . For the Vajpayee government to insist that Pakistan stop all cross-border infiltration before the resumption of talks was untenable. But now that Gen. Musharraf has given the Vajpayee government an opening of sorts, by asking Pakistani soldiers on the LoC to exercise "maximum restraint" to "strengthen and stabilise" India's unilateral ceasefire in the Valley, one hopes that New Delhi will grab the opportunity that presents itself.

The Vajpayee government can turn this ceasefire into an opportunity for peacebuilding by immediately initiating steps to restore the rule of law in the Valley and ordering its forces to respect the human rights of the people of Kashmir. It should simultaneously lift all restrictions on peaceful public activities in the territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This will enable the people of the region to discuss their social and political problems and their future in a democratic manner. As Kashmiri civil society recaptures its lost space, the vexing question, 'Whom do we talk to in Kashmir?' will lose its relevance. A vibrant Kashmiri civil society in will provide the answers.
-Tapan K. Bose

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# Two deaths, three nations and a war 


#### Abstract

An Indian Gorkha officer dies in Kashmir while trying to rescue his Nepali comrade. His grieving parents want to dedicate their lives to set up a Peace Park in the world's highest battlefield.


by Kunda Dixit

LT. NAWANG Kapadia's death along the India-Pakistan line of control in Kashmir on 11 November would perhaps have been just another statistic in that endless and costly Himalayan war. But two things made it different: Nawang was the son of renowned Bombaybased mountaineer, explorer and writer, Harish Kapadia. And he died while trying to rescue one of the Nepali soldiers under his command, Havaldar Chitra Bahadur Thapa of Besisahar, Lamjung.

Nawang belonged to the 4 th Battalion of the 3rd Gorkha Rifles, was commissioned only in September this year and had just joined the platoon under his command in Kupwara near the Kashmiri capital of Srinagar two weeks before he was killed. The 4th Battalion had been involved in operations to stop infiltration across the line of control, and had previously taken casualties from the battle-hardened Afghans of the Al Omar Tanzeem group. On 10 November, the battalion received information about a large-scale incursion across the border nearby, and Nawang led his platoon on a search-and-destroy mission. The soldiers came under fire from a dozen or so Afghans hiding in a nearby forest. Chitra Bahadur was advancing towards the gun positions when he was hit in the
stomach. Nawang ordered covering fire and went in with his own guns blazing for the rescue. He slung Chitra Bahadur over his shoulder and had started rushing back when he was hit in the face and got killed instantly.

The attackers were all killed, and identified as belonging to a mercenary band of Afghans. Chitra Bahadur was taken by helicopter to a hospital in Srinagar, but died on the way. Chitra Bahadur was Nawang's "Guruji", an older Gorkha soldier whose responsibi-lity it is to teach every new Gorkha officer the nuances of being Nepali: customs, cooking, songs and lan-guage. Recalls his father, Harish: "When he last called, Nawang told us everything was fine, he was missing fish, but he was enjoying dal-bhat and even practised a few Nepali words."

When Harish and his wife Geeta came to Kathmandu they had planned to proceed onwards to Besisahar to meet the family of Chitra Bahadur. But when they contacted the Indian embassy here and were told it could not be verified if Chitra Bahadur's family had been notified or not, they decided to postpone it for some months as they did not want to be the ones to break the sad news.

The tragic deaths in Kashmir have once more brought home to Nepal the uncomfortable truth that

its citizens are fighting in the army of a SAARC nation that is arrayed against that of another SAARC country. There are seven Gorkha regiments in the Indian Army, and another 3,000 Nepali troops serving under the British flag. Another 4,000 more serve in the Sultan of Brunei's guards and in the Singapore Police. In the 1962 India-China war, Indian Gorkha regiments were deployed against the Chinese. In 1989, Nepali soldiers fought Tamil Tiger rebels on behalf of Sri Lanka as part of the Indian Peace-Keeping Force. In last year's Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan, 13 Indian Gorkhas were killed. And today, in an ironic twist, Nepalis are once more killing and getting killed by Afghans-170 years after the British Afghan campaign and the disastrous retreat from Kabul in 1842.

Harish Kapadia is an accomplished mountaineer who has climbed and explored with Dave

Wilkinson, Chris Bonnington and others. "It was very unusual for a Gujarati cloth merchant from Bombay to be interested in mountains, and they thought I was crazy," he says. And a near-fatal crevasse fall in the Himalaya 20 years ago in which he broke his hip confirmed their views. Harish learnt rock-climbing and took the basic course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjee-ling in 1964 under famous Sherpa climbers like Tenzing Norgay, Nawang Gombu and Sardar Wangdi.

The Kapadias named their sons after famous Sherpas: first Sonam, and then his younger brother Nawang. And it was natural that virtually from the moment they learnt to walk the Kapadia brothers were hiking and trekking with their parents. Nawang was the adventurous one; from a very early age he was reading up on military matters and was especially fascinated by Nepal's Gorkha soldiers who
earned a reputation for valour first in the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814-16, and later in the British and Indian armies. Nawang's friends in Bom-bay say his happiest moments were when he joined the Officers'


Nawang (facing page), parents Harish and Geeta in Kathmandu.

Training Academy in Madras at the age of 24 and when he passed out to join the 3rd Gorkha Rifles. "His dream was always to serve in a Gorkha regiment," says Harish with a sad smile.

Since the fighting in Siachen started in 1984, nearly 4,000 people have died and more than 10,000
injured on the Indian side alone. It costs India USD 2 million a day to keep the fighting going on at altitudes of more than 6,000 metres. For Harish, it is an uphill battle convincing the defence establishments to give up the senseless fighting, but he says there are more and more people who are fed up with the war. He has climbed and explored in the Siachen Glacier (Siachen means "rose" in the Balti language) and says the only facesaving way out for both sides may be to agree to declare it a transboundary Peace Park. He says: "The only solution to save this great wilderness is to stop the war. As a mountaineer and a lover of this glacier 1 can only pray that the powers that be will listen to the anguish of the glacier and the soldiers serving in it." With their son's death, the Kapadias are pursuing the Peace Park proposal with new energy and passion.
(Reproducet from Himal South Asian's sister publication, Nepali Times.)


The satellite revolution has consumed South Asia. Slickly packaged images and events have weaned audiences away from the staid fare of the region's national broadcasters. The responses to the new phenomenon has been far from uniform, and the impact too has been uneven. The consequences of television's immense reach and the grip it has on the psyche of South Asians are of a magnitude and variety that evade statistical measurement. Some dimensions of the new technology's impact on the region have been researched in considerable depth by David Page and William Crawley, who have tapped social responses through discussion groups in five countries, while also drawing on a host of sources. The outcome of the research is the book, Satellites Over South Asias Broadcasting Culture and the Public Interest, a rare media project that is pan-South Asian in scope. The book, published by Sage, is to be launched in New Delhi on 8 December, at a South Asian gathering Which will discuss issues raised in the book. Our cever feature has been adapec from she book excerpts.

I$n$ the town of Biratnagar in the Nepal tarai-where the North Indian plains confront the foothills of the Himalaya-students debated the impact of satellite TV on their lives and disagreed strongly among themselves. "Personally," said one boy, "I don't like Star Movies and Channel V. The life shown on these channels is far removed from the reality of our own country. Because of these channels, Nepali girls too have started wearing short skirts." A girl replied, "I think films are much more dangerous to society."
"Nepali boys are very quick at copying. That's why we see boys wearing earrings, bandanas on their heads and teasing girls. This is all due to films." "Our earrings and bandanas have nothing to do with TV," retorted another boy, "though the provocative clothes girls wear may be something they have learnt from TV." "I would not dare to kiss a girl on the road, just because they do so on TV," mused another male student. "But there have been changes in the way I dress and in the way I look at things."

Ten years earlier, Biratnagar had a choice only of Indian and Nepali state television channels, and the difference now is palpable. "Nepal TV programmes are not effective and neither are they good," said one of the same students. "In fact, every month, NTV programmes disappear from Biratnagar for days. This does not happen with the satellite channels." Another said: "Before City-cable came to Biratnagar, we had to watch the boring programmes of Nepal TV and I can say no one actually sat completely through any of them." "If we had only Nepal TV," said a third, "we would have come to know of the nuclear tests of India and Pakistan really late."

Satellite television has made a huge difference to the choice of viewing available even in relatively small towns in economically underdeveloped parts of South Asia. It has opened windows to worlds which were inaccessible before except to the well-to-do, and it has provoked a lively and often heated debate about the implications for nations, communities and cultures.

## The global window

CNN created an awareness of television as a new medium in international broadcasting, but it took other agents to transform the broadcasting environment in South Asia. AsiaSat-1, launched in 1990, was the first broadcasting satellite to cover the Asia Pa-
cific region. Owned and operated by the entrepreneur Li Ka-Shing, it was available to national and private broadcasters alike across a region stretching from Turkey to Japan. But it was Li Ka-Shing's own Hong Kong-based broadcasting company Hutchison Whampoa that provided the broadcasting catalyst for the South Asian region in the form of Star TV (Satellite Television Asia Region).

Star TV combined entertainment, movies, sports and news in the English language for a television audience across East, South and South East Asia. It offered a programme mix of chat shows, quizzes, soap operas and serials. Though made originally largely for a Western audience, these began to capture the imagination of the urban English-speaking TV audience, particularly in South Asia. The phenomenal success of Star in winning an audience in India was a surprise to Star's own managers. India had not been a central target, but within six months, it was their largest market.

An assessment of the real impact of Star TV in India has to take account of the limitations imposed by the English language, in which all its output was screened until 1996. For middle class homes that were the first to acquire satellite dishes or cable connections in India, language was only a minor barrier. It is argued that although only 5 percent of the Indian population may speak or understand English, even viewers who do not understand the language are attracted to American programming for its visual entertainment value. Moreover, the political and social influence, and economic weight of English-speakers to some extent offsets their proportionally small numbers in India's total population, even within the middle class. The growing strength of other Hindi language channels, the relative success of Star's own Hindi output, and the impact of South Indian regional language channels suggest that English language programming for India has become relatively marginalised. But the importance of the English-speaking audience in India for the profile of Star TV's English language programmes in Asia as a whole is indisputable.

Of the AsiaSat channels beamed from Hong Kong, the Hindi language entertainment channel, Zee TV, can claim more than Star TV to have reinvented the medium for a mass Indian market. In India, the popu-
larity of Zee TV helped the cable TV networks to expand from a cottage industry to a national media presence. The key selling point for this new channel was the one that made it specific to India and, within India, to its 400 million or more Hindi speakers. It was not just the appeal of the national language. The popular culture of Bombaybased Hindi cinema provided a readymade point of access to a mass audience beyond the Hindi-speaking heartland. TV was repackaged unashamedly as a medium of popular entertainment in which films and film-based programmes became the staple fare. The key to Zee's success has been 'hindigenisation'-the adaptation of a general entertainment formula to the Hindi language, unlocking the North Indian market. Zee appeared to have discovered a magic formula for a new and lucrative media industry. But as competition intensified, the magic was not easy for Zee to sustain or for others to imitate. The advertising market was growing fast, but not fast enough to sustain the number of channels dependent on it. Many of Zee's imitators struggled with their losses or fell by the wayside. Sony was an exception. Despite a shaky start, it established a growing share of the market at the expense of Zee as well as Doordarshan.

A special feature of India's induction into the global television broadcasting market has been the richness of the regional programme variants within India itself. But the underlying story of commercial development is very similar, with the Tamil language entertainment channel Sun TV replicating the success of Zee TV in winning a mass audience. The group acquired controlling stakes in Gemini TV, a Telugu channel, and set up the Kannada-language Udaya TV. In March 1999, it also started a new Malayalam channel, Surya TV. Among its competitors, Vijay TV, which was revamped to cater to the youth market, was never in the same commercial league. The only other private channel with a substantial following was Raj TV, which grew out of a video business owned by three Sri Lankan Tamil brothers.

In Andhra Pradesh, the initiative for regional language TV serving the Teluguspeaking population grew exceptionally out of an existing and successful media enter-prise-Ramoji Rao's Eenadu group, of which Eenadu TV (launched in 1995) is a part. The other Telugu language channel competing in Andhra Pradesh is Gemini TV.

## Reluctant State

SOUTH ASIAN governments have found it difficult to distinguish between their role as regulators and their role as broadcasters. The reluctance of governments to give up control of the state broadcasting media has held up progress on these regulatory questions. On the one hand, there seems to have been an assumption in most countries that autonomy for the state-controlled media is an essential prerequisite for establishing a new regulatory framework; on the other, the unwillingness of governments to take that step, despite promises to do so in several countries, has stymied progress in regulating the industry as a whole.

India's experience with the Prasar Bharati Bill is the best example of liberal intentions which were never quite translated into effect. India also illustrates the tenacity of the centralised state in confronting the new media market. Despite the fact that many satellite channels are operating services in competition with those on Doordarshan, the state has refused to license terrestrial competition with the state-controlled media.

Sri Lanka, unlike India, has diversified its terrestrial media. It now has a multiplicity of TV channels and radio stations, all independent of the government media, with their own transmission facilities. But Chandrika Kumaratunga's government ignored recommendations by high-powered committees for the establishment of an autonomous corporation regulated by a new independent Broadcasting Authority. Faced with a hostile press and lack of cross-party support for its constitutional proposals to resolve the Tamil crisis, it came to see continued control of Rupavahini and the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation as central to getting its message across.

Pakistan and Bangladesh have trailed behind India and Sri Lanka in implementing liberal media policies. Pakistan's elected governments showed no sign of licensing terrestrial competition for PTV in the 1990s and in the months before the military takeover in 1999, media diversity was actually reduced in response to the challenge of Indian satellite channels. In Bangladesh, a new terrestrial television station was licensed but on terms which, at least initially, sought to maintain government control of the news agenda.

Do restrictions of this kind make sense in a world where some viewers now have access to 50 satellite channels and newspapers enjoy freedom to print comment and opinion? Many politicians, in India and particularly in neighbouring countries, think they do. The economics of satellite competition means that India is the main market focus; very few international channels are interested enough in India's neighbours to be generating regular news about those countries. For managers of the electronic media in Pakistan or Bangladesh, therefore, retaining a state monopoly on news and current affairs ensures that there is no real competition where it counts most-in the detailed reporting of politics in that particular country. In India, the logic is less compelling, with Star TV providing 24 -hour coverage of elections and Zee's Alpha channels providing regional news bulletins. However, even in India, satellite TV is still an essentially urban phenomenon, except in a few states. Given the enormous importance of the rural voter in all these countries, an incumbent government retains a distinct advantage if it controls the media with the widest reach.


The Kannada language Udaya TV was started in the same year as part of the Sun group. Udaya TV has filled a gap in regional programmes in Kannada, but its reach is poor and it has not fared well in competition with Doordarshan's Kannada channel. Highly literate Kerala gave birth to Asianet, a channel which relied less on films and filmbased programmes and paid more attention to news, current affairs and documentaries.

The South Asian countries outside India were not prime movers in the satellite revolution. They were on the receiving end of programming devised primarily either for an Indian or an international audience. It was a largely passive role as Indian cultural products secured unchallenged dominance in the market. This dominance was not acquired because India was more permissive in its regulatory framework than the other countries. The main reason was the size of the potential market, indicated by the number who spoke different Indian languages and the spending power of consumers within those language communities. But the key to tapping the market and to the influence of the satellite media was the means and cost of distribution.

## Cabled Bangladesh, Nepal

TV satellite channels had arrived in Bangladesh in the early 1990s as wealthy homes, attracted by the entertainment on offer, installed dish antennae to receive them. The cable industry in Bangladesh started in 1992 with a few small networks working for a single company. This company-Translinks-began as a franchisee of the Star group. After actively marketing them for some time, the company's owner, Humayun Akhtar, gave up his rights to most of the Star channels except for ESPN/Star Sports. Akhtar claimed that the programmes were "anti-national culturally and anti-Islamic". However, he continued to maintain active business relations with the Star group and continued to sell decoders to cable operators for the sports channels.

The company developed as a small conglomerate, establishing a stake in every aspect of the satellite TV industry from programme franchises to manufacturing satellite dishes. It had the market monopoly of satellite reception equipment and claimed to have produced 30,000 dishes in the six years till 1998. Importing 90 percent of the basic equipment, the company manufactured the dishes required for establishing a
cable operation and acquired the rights to the most important programmes. It had a dominant position until the late 1990 s, when other players with international connections entered the market.

In Bangladesh, the viability of an audience for a Bengali channel reaching over the political boundaries to Bengali speakers in India and Bangladesh was openly debated. In 1997, plans by a Bangladeshi businessman to set up a Bengali channel uplinked from Singapore collapsed in the wake of a financial scandal over one of his other ventures. In 1998, ATN launched a channel under Bangladeshi management aimed at the all-Bengali market with some success despite the poor quality of the programming. In the same year, the Bangladesh government invited tenders and awarded an exclusive license to a private company-both for a second terrestrial channel and eventually a satellite channel.

In Nepal, both the national public broadcasting service-Nepal TV-and private television distribution services owe much to the enterprise of one man, Neer Shah, the first head of Nepal TV and later chairman of Shangri-La, a film production and microwave TV distribution company. In using microwave technology to create a TV home distribution service, Shangri-La was the pioneer in South Asia; similar systems subsequently operated in Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The technology is well-suited to providing a service when subscribers are thin on the ground. Unlike with cable, a connection can be made immediately, but the system requires an expensive decoder and this proves a major drawback in two ways. It limits customers to those who can afford to buy the decoder. It also exposes the service to pirated decoders.

As a result, despite the advantages of microwave technology and of being the first in the field, Shah's company has lost ground to a more recent competitor. He is Jamim Shah, a young entrepreneur who set up a cable distribution system in Kathınandu with American equipment capable of being adapted to fibre optics and to digital TV. By mid-1998, he was providing access to 22 channels to a claimed 65,000 subscribers in Kathmandu, and had formed ambitious plans to cable the main urban centres in Nepal. Though his operation was set up before the Broadcasting Act was passed, he appears to have been given an extraordinary license allowing him to establish a

## Satellites over Southern Skies

ASIASAT-1 was the first Asia-specific satellite available for television broadcasting in the region. The choice of satellites and the availability of transponders was increasing throughout the 1990s; and with digitisation costs were falling. At the end of the decade, the principal satellites servicing South Asia for the international networks were PanAmSat4 (PAS4), which carried among others the merged ABNI/CNBC business news transmission from Singapore, Sony Entertainment Television, BBC World and CNN International. The two AsiaSat satellites, AsiaSat-1 and AsiaSat-2, carried Star TV out of Hong Kong, as well as CNBC/NBC (on AsiaSat-2), the Zee group of channels and Pakistan's second government channel, PTV 2. Intelsat 703 and 704 carried the main commercial channels for South India. APSTAR 1, launched in 1994 leased transponders to a consortium including CNN lntemational, the leading international sports channel ESPN Asia, TNT and Cartoon Network, as well as the Discovery Channel. The same satellite carried American channels adapted for the Asian market such as Disney (Asia Pacific), the US movie channel Home Box Office (HBO Asia), and the youth music channel, MTV Asia, with its offshoots customised for Chinese and Indian youth, MTV Mandarin and mTV India.
cable system, to re-broadcast any international channel, to broadcast his own channel in Nepal and to uplink his own progranmes.

## Satellite Pakistan, terrestrial Lanka

Pakistan was quick to realise and exploit the possibilities offered by direct satellite broadcasting. It did not have its own technology, but in 1992 it hired a transponder for PTV on the AsiaSat-1 satellite. This gave Pakistan the opportunity to broadcast information, propaganda and entertainment to India, to other parts of South Asia and to the Gulf, where hundreds of thousands of Pakistanis were employed. But there was no govermment encouragement for private entrepreneurs interested in investing in satellite channels, and in Pakistan none of these plans came to anything. Not until 1998 did the Pakistan government respond to the popularity of the Hindi channels with the launch of PTV World with a brief to meet Pakistani entertainment and cultural needs among the South Asian diaspora.

Estimates of the number of people watching television in Pakistan have until recently been largely informed guesswork. Although Pakistan, unlike India, retains a system of licensing for television sets, the number of licenses is not even an approximate guide to the number of households with
sets or the number of viewers who have access to them, so official statistics are of little help. The number of television licences is only 2.5 million, whereas on the basis of surveys up to 1999, the Pakistani affiliate of Gallup International estimates between eight and 10 million sets.

It is in Pakistan's largest metropolitan city, Karachi, that satellite television is viewed most intensively. Karachi is also the only Pakistani city with developed cable systems which can compare with those in India. Cable has spread to most of the lower middle class and working class areas. The cabling of more prosperous suburbs has lagged behind poorer localities. By 2000, cable systems had begun to spread to Lahore and Islamabad, but not on a scale to rival the appeal of direct transmissions. Until that time, the only legal satellite TV distribution system in Pakistan was a payTV system run by Javid Pasha's Shaheen Pay TV Company, which is an affiliate of the Shaheen Board, a charity run by retired air force personnel. The pay-TV system uses a microwave system similar to that installed in Kathmandu. It gives excellent quality, but the decoder costs almost as much as a satellite dish and fewer channels are available.

Sri Lanka has absorbed the impact of the satellite revolution in ways different to its neighbours. The rapid extension of media competition in Sri Lanka dates from 1992, when the Maharaja group launched an entertainment channel called Maharaja TV (MTV). This was followed in 1993 by TNI., whose proprietor, Shan Wickremesinghe, had been involved in the first TV transmissions more than a decade earlier.

Sri Lanka's first pay-TV channel, Channel Nine, set up in 1998 with Australian collaboration, is not, strictly speaking, a cable network. Its nine different services are based on the same MMDS microwave technology used in Pakistan and Nepal. A second channel inaugurated towards the end of 1998 is a business investment promoted by a public company based in Canada in partnership with a Sri Lankan government agency. Another venture-Cable TV Network (Pvt) Ltd—planned to present an information and entertainment package initially of 30 channels, including Star TV, ESPN and Star Sports, with provision to add other speciality or niche channels later.

Neither cable nor satellite dishes have played a big part in the distribution of local and international television programming.

The cost of dishes and the nature of urban living may have been partly responsible for Sri Lanka's failure to develop cable systems, but the government's diversification policy has also played a part. By the time satellite services in Tamil and Hindi had acquired popularity in India, Sri Lanka already had four or five terrestrial stations competing against each other, picking and choosing from satellite menus and re-broadcasting some of the programmes to Sri Lankan audiences. This made the development of cable systems less of a commercial attraction thar. elsewhere in South Asia. Most Sri Lankans watch satellite television on the island's terrestrial TV networks, particularly the commercial channels; they watch foreign programmes, not foreign channels.

Among the different communities in Sri Lanka, the Tamils have benefited more than most from access to satellite programming. According to the leading commercial dish manufacturer in Sri Lanka, "most peopleover 75 percent of them-who have bought and continue to buy these dishes are Muslims". Most of Sri Lanka's wealthy Muslim trading community speak Tamil and have bought dishes to access Indian channels. Once the cost of dishes came down, the popularity of dishes also spread to the hill country, where Tamils working in the tea industry grouped together to buy them.

All these developments have had radical implications for all the countries of the region. The decade of the 1990 s has seen a massive change, both conceptual and practical, in the application of satellite communications to broadcasting. Satellite communication has transformed the immediacy of news and changed the nature and style of boadcast journalism. The monopoly of national broadcasters has come to an end, without negotiation or discussion of the international implications.

As the diversity of channels increases, foreign and culturally unfamiliar programmes have come into people's homes. The new channels have also created opportunities for promoting regional cultures and languages. Meanwhile, the new audiences created by the new media are an irresistable market for global advertisers and their multinational corporate clients. State broadcasters have had to square public service objectives with commercial priorities. Broadcasting has been thrust into the South Asian market place.


Vajra (literally-flash of lightning), is an artists' condominium, a transit home for many, providing a base during months of hibernation and creative inspiration. Its isolation, graphic splendour and peaceful ambience, make an ideal retreat from the clock of pressure.

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, ivycovered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time


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# Indianising South Asia 

Driven by the huge Indian market, television channels have been guilty of ignoring India's neighbours, who now feel marginalised, except perhaps Sri Lanka.

In some respects, reactions to international satellite programmes among India's neighbours are not very different from those in India itself. Insofar as En-glish-educated metropolitan elites in Karachi or Lahore, Colombo or Dhaka share the aspirations of their counterparts in Bombay or Delhi, satellite programmes find the same sort of welcome in those cities. However, the popularity of Hindi language entertainment channels has given rise to apprehensions that the culture of Bollywood is swamping other national cultures and even destroying the ideological boundaries of the nation state.

Such ideological worries have been most intensely felt in Pakistan; less so in Bangladesh or Nepal, though the popularity of satellite channels has presented a challenge to state broadcasters in those countries as well. In all three countries, those speaking for national cultures see Hindi satellite channels as carriers of an 'Indian' culture which threatens to break down the sense of difference which the state and state broadcasters have been trying to reinforce. Sri Lanka is the only country in South Asia where these issues have not featured so prominently.

There are also striking similarities be-
tween the reactions of some of India's regional cultures to the dominance of Hindi satellite television and those of India's neighbours. Issues of sovereignty add to the levels of apprehension experienced in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, but everywhere there are concerns that better financed and better India-produced programmes aimed at the mass market have reduced the space for other cultures. There is concern that Indian heroes will become better known than those of Nepal or Bangladesh. There are worries that efforts to develop national languages will be undermined by the greater familiarity with Hindi and English.

The coming of satellite television has posed peculiar problems for the official custodians of Pakistani culture because it has breached the ideological boundaries of the state in a much more intensive way than ever before. This is particularly the case with the Hindi language satellite channels which have found a ready audience in Pakistan because of their easy intelligibility. As Zahid Malik, editor of the Pakistan Observer, put it: "Our culture is threatened by the invasion of two cultures-the Western and the Hindu culture-and the latter is more dangerous than the former because it is Pakistan-specific..." The availability of these new channels has intensified debate within the country about what constitutes Pakistani culture, while the popularity of channels like Zee TV has shown up the inadequacies of state-controlled television.

These fears among opinion-formers in neighbouring countries have been reinforced by the failure of satellite channels to take any serious notice of what is going on in the region. "Why should Star TV only broadcast Indian news if the satellite is supposed to be a regional one?", was a common complaint in discussion groups held in Dhaka and Jamalpur. "Zee TV and other channels have excluded us," was another complaint. "Bangladesh TV doesn't show any problems and Indian TV only shows Indian problems," was a third.

Satellite TV has created a sense of marginalisation among the thinking middle class in these countries. Many commentators criticised the whole satellite TV experience as uni-directional. "Many Bangladeshi kids speak Hindi well," says Chinmoy Mutsuddi, "but no Delhi kid knows much about Bangladesh. This is neither desirable, nor sustainable, nor beneficial for the

## A South Asian lingua franca?

THE NEW satellite culture has challenged the linguistic orthodoxies of South Asia's nation states by producing its own lingua franca which mixes English and Hindi in ways which reflect the everyday speech of the English educated. This new language, pioneered by Zee TV, which has come to be known as Hinglish and sometimes Zinglish, has caught on with the urban young all over North India and has become a point of controversy with others.

Repercussions beyond India's borders have been coloured by concerns for national sovereignty. Language and culture are seen as inextricably linked and the evident popularity of Hindi satellite television is thought by some to be undermining national cultures. In Pakistan, an old debate about the role and character of Urdu as the country's national language has been revived by Zee TV and by the respectability it has given to mixing Urdu and English. Aslam Azhar, Pakistan's first managing director of television, ridicules this as 'Minglish' and sees it as part of a deterioration in standards, promoted by the Hindi satellite channels and imitated by Pakistan's commercial producers. Others are concerned that children are picking up Hindi words from television and using them in conversation at the expense of their Urdu vocabulary. To this extent, they see satellite TV as undermining the distinctiveness of Pakistan's lingua franca.

Iftikhar Arif, the Chairman of the National Language Board, believes some of the changes in approach to language provoked by satellite competition have improved communication. There has been a tendency to use fewer loan words from Arabic and Persian and to simplify language in order to speak more directly to viewers. Urdu in its pristine form is not only under attack from across the border; it is also changing its character and intonation within Pakistan as it is increasingly owned and spoken by Pakistan's other language groups.

However, there are concerns that the new style is an urban phenomenon which reflects the dominance of the middle class English elite in the new media and a lack of seriousness in communicating with the rest of society, which does not know English well. Some see the new trend as a result of sloppinessthe projection of the linguistic inadequacies of convent-educated trend setters onto the population as a whole. It is a criticism made not just about Zee TV but of many of the new FM radio channels in the big cities. In Sri Lanka, according to television producer Maleec Calyaratne de Silva, "people with British, American or any other foreign accent gained preference over those with Sri Lankan accents. Entertainment and idle talk became hip over the radio while responsibility was grossly neglected. Foreign investors who were behind these institutions seemed keen to introduce foreign cultures and commercialism through their radio programmes."
region." The same view was also reflected in Kathmandu, where journalist Kanak Mani Dixit deplored the fact that "...there is almost no Nepali news or programmes related to Nepal on satellite TV".

Several Bangladeshis noted that Star TV

## Serial fashion

A SURVEY of the impact of satellite television in two districts in India-Latur in Maharashtra and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh-provides ample evidence that satellite television serials are stimulating a growing interest in personal appearance and beautification. Though many of those interviewed denied they were imitating the styles of the stars, the proprietor of Amrita Beauty Parlour in Latur said her clients specifically demanded hair styles from Surabhi, Shanti and Tara as well as those of Sonia Gandhi and Princess Diana. Even in Udgeer, a smaller town in Latur district, clients of Jose Beauty Parlour, requested hairdos in the style of Renuka Shahane of the show Surabhi and the so-called 'Tara cut'. In Udgeer, five beauty parlours are doing comfortable business. In Latur, there are more than 200 beauty parlours with state-of-the-art equipment.

Evidence from dress shops in both Latur and Varanasi suggests that there is a roaring business in dresses popularised in films, with the Mumbai wholesalers dispatching them in volume once the film has become popular. Equally marked in Varanasi is the trend among the young towards T-shirts and jeans. The proprietor of Rohit Collections, a general dress shop, said that "Benares is changing very fast... The demand is sometimes based on costumes worn by actors and actresses; sometimes it is triggered by advertisements... In the last two or three years... the turnover of my shop has increased many fold...thanks to TV ads and serials." Staff at Grihasti, a cosmetics shop in Varanasi, reported that sales of cosmetics have increased dramatically since the early 1990s, with lipstick becoming much more fashionable.

The same programmes are also having an impact among the middle class in Pakistan and Bangladesh. According to informants in Islamabad, local designers not only watch Zee's fashion programme Khoobsurat; they also record it for future reference. They say many local designs and colour combinations owe their inspiration to this programme. Indian charnels may also be aiding a comeback for the sari, which went into an officially-enforced decline during the days of General Zia-ulHaq. Pakistani fashion magazines have been featuring saris again and the wearing of saris and bindis has become more common on festivals and social occasions, whereas in India the opposite has happened. Satellite TV has helped to popularise the salwar kameez at the expense of the sari.

Even in smaller towns in Nepal, these influences are acknowledged. Professionals in Birgunj said: "TV programmes are really affecting the way our women perceive themselves. We can see it in the number of beauty parlours that have come up after we began getting satellite channels here. These are things that have to be considered carefully. Women's fashion can lead to a strain in relationships for the simple reason that we can't afford the kind of fashion shown on TV."
had recognised the existence of Pakistan with its Postcard from Pakistan weekly programme. But no such concession had been made to Bangladeshi sensibilities. In mid1998, world interest in India and Pakistan's nuclear tests was adding to this sense of
neglect. In Pakistan, however, the paucity of coverage of Pakistani affairs is seen not just as a matter of neglect but as evidence that the prime purpose of the channels is one of cultural assault. "The way Indians are projecting their religion, their national identity, is an eye-opener for us," said a multinational executive at a Karachi discussion group. "What they have sold to Pakistan," said Khalid Hassan, then head of Shalimar Television Network, "is a highly glamourised image of India, unnatural and untrue... These channels can become links, but at the moment they are used negatively."

Reservations about the impartiality of the satellite media increased dramatically as a result of the coverage of two important events in 1999: the Kargil conflict in Kashmir in the summer and the hijacking of an Indian airlines plane to Kandahar in December. Opinion in the south of India was divided over media coverage of the Kargil hostilities. Some discussion groups praised TV's role in awakening a sense of patriotism. Others criticised it for "pumping patriotic messages". Professional mediawatchers agreed that the southern Indian channels had covered the conflict in much the same way as Doordarshan, often using footage provided by the state sector for their own programmes.

According to Father Joe Andrew: "Everything became a government version of it. Even Star-not just DD-became a pro-government mouthpiece... The pain and miscry was never reflected in any of the channels, be they private or public... Kargil revealed that we don't have a free media... All the channels were pro-war, pro-government, glorification of the war and demonisation of Pakistan." Another critic said: "TV told me that I should revive my narrow patriotism, which I don't have at all. I feel as sorry for the Pakistani who is shot, as for the Indian."

Pakistani viewers of satellite media saw little of this heart-searching on their screens. According to Kathmandu-based journalist Kunda Dixit, "the Indian media-especially Zee news and Star-behaved much like the American networks and CNN during the Gulf War, and the Indian military used and manipulated satellite television much as the American military did in Kuwait."

On the Pakistan side, P'TV behaved no less jingoistically, though it was less successful in carrying the public with it, which led some commentators to argue that
a diversified media would serve the country better. As Mir Jamil ur Rahman put it: "People are no more a captive audience. They have the choice to turn over to a dozen channels at the push of a button to test the veracity of the PTV version... Even if it was to tell the truth, the credibility gap would not narrow down. Therefore it is imperative to allow private TV channels in this country."

The hijacking of an Indian airlines plane by Kashmiri separatists from Kathmandu via Amritsar and Lahore to Kandahar in December 1999 provoked similar concerns, both in Pakistan and Nepal. According to a cover story in Newsline, a Pakistani political journal with a track record for independent reporting: "Zee TV, Star News and Doordarshan abandoned all pretensions of the ethics of independent journalism as they waged a virtual media war against Pakistan." Wrote Samina Abraham, "Though one might expect some journalistic legerdemain from the state-run Doordarshan, to hear the so-called independent channel Zee TV indulge in the same hyperbole came as $\vdots$ surprise." The article accused the satellite media of supporting India's efforts to get Pakistan declared a terrorist state and of broadcasting stories to implicate Pakistan in the hijack, which were subsequently proven to be groundless.

In the case of the hijacking, Nepal also came under media fire because the drama began in Kathmandu and the Indian government and media accused the Nepali government of being too sympathetic to Pakistan. Kunda Dixit says: "Zee TV has probably done more to harm Nepal-India relations at the people level than anything else in recent times... Satellite broadcasting, instead of bringing people closer is polarising them, and the reason is that Zee and Star are regional broadcasters but operate as if they were solely broadcasting to India."

Satellite channels like Zee and Star looked initially as if they aspired to cover South Asia as a whole, but they are now perceived by many Pakistanis as Indian channels with Indian slants to their coverage. According to Mahommed Malik of NTM, "In the early days of Zee, there was some pretence of striking a balance, but when they realised their biggest marketing was coming from India anyway, they openly took on Indian colours because it helped with their marketing." Malik thinks
that Star News has made the mistake of becoming an Indian channel. "There again, Pakistan has been left out... whereas they should have started with an impartial hue... People are not stupid... the slants are there."

Some Bangladeshi commentators, seeing the extent to which international channels have been 'Hindigenised' to appeal to the Hindi market, are resentful that the so-called Hindi channels have made no efforts at regionalisation to accommodate viewers in Bangladesh. Parveen Rashid of the Social Marketing Corporation (SMC) says: "The need to have the local stamp, the local colour and the local creativity is very important'. But she finds less and less of it in advertising by the multinationals. She echoes other social marketing experts in expressing her concern that India-based channels are oblivious to the existence of other cultures and believes this will have a negative impact even if no resistance is noticed."

## Satellite weaponry

Official reactions to these cultural intrusions have been largely defensive: hiring satellite transponders or aspiring to do so. Both Pakistan and Nepal use commercial arguments to support their thinking-the opportunity to tap the purchasing power of their nationals in other countries-but it is also a form of diplomacy by other means. In a world threatened by homogenisation, nation states feel the need to employ the same weapons as their attackers.

Beyond these defensive reactions, there is a more fundamental problem: how to build a more genuinely South Asian media which reflects the realities of the region. In its early years, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) tried to stimulate programme exchanges between the different countries in order to make viewers more regionally aware. But the initiative was largely confined to non-topical subjects and was not taken up with much enthusiasm by the national broadcasters. An Asian news-pool, which made national news footage available by satellite for wider regional use, was more successful. However, both were designed to strengthen regional coverage on national television. They did not address the issue of regional balance on the new commercial satellite services.

Kanak Mani Dixit had no illusions about the difficulties of building an effective regional satellite media, even before the hijacking episode. He does not believe satellite
channels will change until people in neighbouring countrics make them more aware of their South Asian footprint. He says: "It is not enough for people to lobby in Delhi; it must be South Asia wide." Nepal's leading TV professional, Neer Shah, believes that public-private financial partnerships might be a means to get smaller countries onto satellite and the same technique could perhaps serve a wider purpose. Much depends, however, on the regional satellite channels themselves. What is clear is that unless they address the sense of marginalisation, they are helping to foster and take their regional responsibilities more seriously, they will continue to be seen as Indian rather than South Asian broadcasters.

Though Sri Lankans exhibit some similar reactions to foreign programmes as those in evidence in Pakistan, Nepal or Bangladesh, anxiety levels are lower and there seem to be fewer worries about their social divisiveness. The rapid expansion of terrestrial broadcasting in Sri Lanka has brought other kinds of problems, but at least in relation to the satellite media, there are none of the complaints of marginalisation that are so widespread in Pakistan, Nepal or Bangladesh.

The framework of broadcasting already established in Sri Lanka ensured that there was less of a sense of 'them and us' in Sri Lanka's new relationship with the global and regional media.

If the satellite revolution has been less of a shock to society in Sri Lanka, it is partly because Sri Lankans watch what Sri Lankan editors have decided-for cultural or economic reasons-might be profitable or interesting to show them. There is a greater sense of ownership of the process and even channels with high proportions of foreign programming present a strong national profile.

In the new, highly compctitive, mass market, many Sinhala channels are supplementing their programmes outside prime time with Indian films and serials. This is partly on grounds of cost and partly because the themes of these Indian productions are more immediately accessible to local audiences. As a commentator on the Sri Lankan media scene put it: "Western cultural interests have now been replaced by castern cultural interests and whether India's cultural interests or Japan's cultural interests are always good for us, I don't know."


Evcrything you wanted to know about the two central Nepal districts of Gulmi and Arghakhanchi. This book is history, geography, enthnography and cultural studies all rolled into onc. The result of a nine-year-long rescarch by a team of Irench social scienusts-perhaps the first study of its kind in Nepal.
Resunga: The Mountain of the Horned Sage edited by Philippe Ramirez
(2000, pp. x+304)
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Ever wondered why Pokhara's Phewa Lake area has become such an eycsore? Or, how the opening of Upper Mustang has benefitted the locals there? This book has the answers, and more, as it looks at three other tourist destinations in the Himalaya and highlights the essential interrclationship between tourism and local progress.
Tourism as Development: Case Studies from the Himalaya edited by Pitamber Sharma
(2000, pp. xiii +179 )
When Toni Hagen first set foot in Nepal in 1950, he came as a development expert. Over the nine years that he walked $14,000 \mathrm{~km}$ across the length and breadth of Nepal, conducting its first reconnaissance survey, he grew to become a valued friend of the country. This is the original book that introduced Nepal, both to Nepalis and outsiders. This fourth edition of this classic includes the original reports and photographs even as it brings the reader up-to-date with the changes Hagen has seen over the course of a half-century.

Toni Hagen's
Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya revised and updated with Deepak Thapa (1999, pp. xviii+251)

The second and completely revised edition of this acclaimed picture book-cum-cthnography study by a British artist and a Nepali scholar. The new cdition deals with three additional population groups and comes with more colour plates and sketches, and an additional linguistic map of Nepal.

Fiaces of Nepal


## Vistas \& Vignettes of Kathmandu Valley \& Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Bhojan Griha... a grand old building restored and converted into the finest restaurant serving traditional ethnic cuisine GKantipur Gemple CHouse... a hotel that combines the unique architecture of a © Nenari Gemple nith traditional decor to create the perfect ambience Goshi Gappu GRildlife Camp... a remote luxury safari tented camp in eastern © Nepal for exclusive sightings of rare wild water buffaloes\& hundred of bird specie GDe like to bring you more with our deep commitment towards restoration \& conservation


# Global News 

# In their encounter with the region, international news broadcasters were soon enough forced to reorient themselves to the needs of a South Asian, nay Indian audience. 

When satellite television first came to South Asia, few concessions were made by the international channels to the varied cultural traditions of the countries within AsiaSat's massive footprint. CNN was the first in the field as an international news channel. The BBC's 24hour news and information channel on the Star network gave an alternative perspective and made a start in incorporating programmes designed for the Asian region.

It was some years before CNN began to focus on Asia as a market and as a theatre for news reporting. Its Asian production centre in Hong Kong was opened in 1995-ten years after the channel's launch. By 1998, seven of its 36 news bureaus world-wide were in the Asia Pacific region-two in South East Asia (Bangkok and Jakarta) and one in South Asia (New Delhi). Despite its reputation as a global news channel, CNN was slower than other international stations in Asia in extricating itself from the North America-centred agenda of its news programmes. Four programmes on the CNN schedule were specifically tailored for Asian audiences-all of them launched after the opening of the Hong Kong production centre in 1995. None of these were specifically targeted to South Asia or to the Indian audience.

In the field of regional programming for South Asia, other broadcasters were taking the lead. The rapid growth of the East and Southeast Asian 'tiger' economies before the collapse of 1997 put Asian regional television in the forefront of media and marketing expansion. Asian regional TV was seen as the fastest growing market place. In an area of high investment, television could be the most effective means of reaching key de-cision-makers. Deregulation was set to provide new opportunities for broadcasters in
a previously govern-ment-dominated information environment. International cross border broadcasting would encourage trade between Asian countries and provide a flexible reaction to the accelerating process of change.

A new genre of business television progra-
 mming, as developed by the Singapore-based Asian Business News International (ABNI), was a form of niche broadcasting or 'narrow casting' which took advantage of the global reach of satellite channels and their ability to address themselves to specific audiences within the Asian region. Within that niche there was a dual target: viewers and opinion-formers as well as potential investors. Programming specific to the region was identified as the best means to reach them both.

In the boom of the early $1990 \mathrm{~s}, \mathrm{ABNI}$ conceived and implemented ambitious and expensive regional news gathering aims with the help of local partners. These were scaled down in 1996-97 and the channel was merged with CNBC in February 1998. ABNI developed a policy of commissioning business programmes from independent production companies such as India's TV18. It carried items from 'Pakistan Business Update', a product of the largest independent film and TV production company in Paki-stan-the Karachi-based EverReady Company. This gave the channel a distinctive South Asian flavour and was an important influence in developing international links among India's new and expanding inde-
 an Indian satellite-INSAT 2B. The
 years, l eaving CNN where it was before. In 1995, CNN initiated a 24 -hour broadcast with the private company Dynavision in Sri Lanka. It also had a terrestrial re-broadcast agreement with Shalimar Television Networka majority owned government subsidiary of the national TV broadcaster in Pakistan-and a re-broadcasting agreement with Bangladesh TV, which was suspended in 1998. Unlike other international broadcasters, CNN has been wary of subcontracting programmes to private production companies.

The $\mathrm{BBC}^{\prime}$ 's international television service has been heavily constrained financially by the terms of the BBC's charter and its financial obligations as the British domestic public service broadcaster. Launched in Asia under a contract to Star, the BBC lost both the contract and its place on the AsiaSat carrier satellite when Rupert Murdoch's News Corp bought a controlling share of the network in 1993 and the
pendent software production houses. TV18, founded by Raghav Bahl, was also the first independent Indian programme supplier to the BBC World Service.

The nature of globalisation in the 1990s underlined the importance of strategic alliances between broadcasters, or between broadcaster and distributor, and the shortlived nature of some of those agreements. CNN has been through several stages of experimentation in the South Asian region: it has operated independently and in collaboration with private and public broadcasters in the region. It opened its New Delhi bureau in 1992 with small-scale collaboration agreements. One of them, in January 1993, was an agreement with the private company New Delhi Television (NDTV) for selected news coverage to be shown on Doordarshan's national network. From this small beginning, NDTV, headed by Prannoy Roy, has now become one of the most prominent and successful private TV news organisations.

Turner International, the CNN parent company, negotiated successfully in 1995, in competition with the BBC for a partnership with Doordarshan, making CNN the first private broadcaster to be allowed on

BBC ceased to fit with the strategy for Asia of Star's new owners. It was a demonstration of the regional and local exigencies of the new globalism that although in Europe the BBC and Murdoch had been able to reach a collaboration agreement, in Asia their plans did not match.

Like CNN, the BBC negotiated its own agreement for terrestrial links with national and private broadcasters. It lost to CNN on the elusive and short-lived prize of a rebroadcasting agreement with Doordarshan. Other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh were happy to balance their cooperation with CNN and the BBC, to some extent playing one off against the other and keeping windows open to both.

The loss of its place on the AsiaSat satellite was an inconvenience for the BBC, but by the time it took effect in March 1996 satellite transponder capacity was no longer at a premium. An important factor for an international broadcaster to India and South Asia was that cable operators should have comparable access to the satellite signal. The American PanAmSat satellite PAS-4 provided this. It put the BBC in good company, sharing a satellite with other international broadcasters interested in the South Asian

> As news and information acquired more prominence in the strategy of major channels, it also became more central to their perceived impact on South Asian societies and to government attitudes to their regulation.
audience, including CNN and the soon-to-be-merged ABNI/CNBC. But going it alone and securing advertisements on its own was not an easy option for the BBC. It could provide news services to other broadcasters but it was never in the driving seat itself. There were also problems of accountability. Though the BBC's commercial arm, BBC Worldwide, created in 1996, was separated from the publicly financed domestic television services and World Service radio, the news operations were closely integrated.

The BBC's partnership with the Hong Kong-based Hutchison Whampoa Group in providing a news and information channel for the Star TV Network was a radical departure for the British public service broadcaster. At the time, for both Star and the BBC, the alliance was one of mutual advantage. The BBC gained the opportunity to launch a rival 24 -hour TV news network to CNN without government funding. For Star, the $B B C$ gave a serious news profile to the network in bringing an established broadcaster with a high international reputation to what was primarily an entertainment network.

But once Rupert Murdoch gained control, the Star-BBC alliance was short-lived. The BBC was dropped first from the northern beam of the AsiaSat satellite (which delivered the Star signal to China and East Asia) and later from the southern beam serving India and South Asia. In the first case, Chinese government objections to BBC news coverage threatened the distribution of the Star network in China, where cable distribu-tion-and the government control that allowed it-was actively promoted by the Chinese government. In the second case, the BBC was not so much a commercial or political embarrassment (though it always had that potential as the coverage of the destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya by Hindu activists in December 1992 had shown), but was superfluous to Star's own development strategy, which was to emphasise regional rather than international news.

The BBC had long realised in radio broadcasting that the attraction of an international broadcaster lay in its ability to provide not only global news but regionally focussed programming. It was a lesson which Star took to heart in launching its 24 -hour news channel aimed primarily at the Indian market. The very large cable and satellite
audiences for Star's comprehensive coverage of the national elections in 1996 and 1998 gave a sharp edge of topicality and interest to its regional profile, though the heavy investment involved was part of a long-term strategy and not geared to shortterm profitability.

In another collaboration, the BBC signed a deal to supply Hindi news programmes to Home TV, one of the less successful Indian entertainment channels, which was cancelled in early 1998 leading to the disbandment of the BBC Hindi news team which had been based in Delhi. This setback put paid for the time being to the BBC's hopes of establishing itself in the growth area of Indian television in South Asia-regional language channels.

A plan for strategic co-operation announced in 1997 between the BBC and Discovery channel seemed a more promising partnership. These were two channels with established reputations as public service broadcasters in the widest sense. There was much common ground between a publicly funded organisation such as the BBC with a growing commercial arm and a commercial organisation such as Discovery with a programming strategy comfortably in step with public service broadcasting objectives.

As news and information acquired more prominence in the programme strategy of Star and other major channels, it also became more central to their perceived impact on South Asian societies and to government attitudes to their regulation. Much of the dynamism and effectiveness of these channels was derived from their employment of Indian production companies like NDTV. After its initial collaboration with CNN, NDTV had been contracted to provide current affairs programmes for Doordarshan as a means of upgrading the national broadcaster's news profile, and it was after proving itself in that arena that it was subsequently commissioned to provide Star TV's new 24 -hour news service in English and Hindi. Doordarshan's own role in outsourcing programmes and in encouraging private production companies played an important part in creating the expertise which was later to enable Star TV to make its powerful debut as an independent regional news provider.

## Agendas for Change



> Calling national and commercial broadcasters to account through the evolution of industry norms, decentralising the media in order to cater to specific and local requirements, and giving adequate space to public opinion in a way that strengthens civil society, are some of the ways in which public interest broadcasting can win over the allure of commerce.

The South Asian media revolution has been almost wholly unregulated. Unlike in Iran, China or Malaysia, South Asian governments have neither attempted to ban these developments nor have they provided an adequate legislative framework to deal with the new realities. They have been slow to acknowledge that the new situation requires a comprehensive rethink of broadcasting policy. National broadcasting authorities, faced with the superior entertainment on offer on channels like Zee or Sony, have presided over a massive commercialisation of their own output as a means of retaining audiences, neglecting other kinds of programmes in the process. Where Doordarshan led, other national TV stations have since followed, including even Pakistan TV, which earlier had a much more conservative cultural agenda.

However, moving towards a situation in which the electronic media are entirely commercial in their funding and approach would be a mistake for South Asia, where despite the growth of the middle class and
its attractiveness to international business, there are serious problems of development, of health, education and welfare, which need to be addressed by the media. The idea that the electronic media is primarily for entertainment and that people can obtain information on other subjects elsewhere is increasingly deployed by middle class South Asians, but the region is not as media-rich as such views might imply. In fact, rural South Asia, which accounts for well over 60 percent of the population, is for the most part media-impoverished.

Of a number of possible scenarios for the future, the most likely, on present trends, would see the state sector carrying on more or less as it is at the moment, preserved as a voice for government, offering similar programming in all areas but news and current affairs management, while relying for its revenues on a shrinking mass audience beyond the reach of cable networks. The preferred scenario, however, should involve the reform of the state sector, a clearer definition of its objectives, preserving an entertainment

## Targeting Children

THE NEED to protect children as a vulnerable group from exposure to unsuitable programming is a responsibility which government and broadcasting authorities take seriously all over the world. Many broadcasters operate watershed policies which keep programmes with adult story lines or excessive violence off the air until children are supposed to be in bed. But such policies are only partially effective, even with active parenting.

With the vast majority of households in South Asia only having one TV set, children spend most of their time watching programmes made for adults. But there is also a shortage of programmes for children, particularly on the satellite channels. The only frequently mentioned children's programme was Shaktimaan on Doordarshan, with a central character modelled on Superman. In Sri Lanka, there is a detectable demand for more children's programmes. Labourers in Matara regarded many programmes shown during the day as unsuitable for children. Matara home makers argued that "more programmes that are exemplary to both children and adults should be presented".

Another area of concern and one which is more difficult to monitor and control is the targeting of children in advertising. The exploitation of 'pester power' is becoming increasingly sophisticated and according to some marketing companies has now spread 'from sweets and snack foods'-often linked to film or television characters aimed at the under 12 s -to CDs, computer software, and even cars and holidays.

Parents are under pressure from their children to buy things. A group of working class women in Pune said they were influenced by advertisements, particularly for cosmetics and toiletries, with their children wanting them to try all sorts of new products. A Muslim broom maker in Millatnagar near Ahmedabad said of her son: "If he wants, then he wants. There is no stopping him."

In Pakistan, articulate teenagers from a slum area of Rawalpindi proved to be very familiar with satellite TV programmes. Most of these teenage boys and girls worked part time or full time; some went to the local government school. Several of them saw satellite TV as a strong aspirational mfluence. "They show such goodies that we immediately want to acquire them," said Samina, aged 14. "The only question is where to get the money from..." Bashir, aged 12, said: "I have learnt that America and England are the best places to be if you can get a job there. Then you can have access to all the things like Wrangler jeans, Nike shoes and of course Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds."
function but reasserting the need for a range of other activities as well. These include playing a greater role in articulating a sense of community, acting as a counterpoise to the commercially driven mass media and offering diversity and innovation and a greater voice for the public at different levels of society in debating the issues of the day. The realisation of such a vision, however, would require a re-appraisal of the role of
the state in the management of radio and television and a willingness to use them for more creative public purposes.

Failure to take stock and to legislate for the new situation will only leave more time for the commercialisation of state broadcasting and the longer the trend continues the greater will be the difficulty in establishing a viable public interest role for the media in future. Recent experience has demonstrated clearly the value of the market in widening media choice in particular areas of broadcasting. But the states' responses have betrayed a lack of clear thinking, both about the future role of the state sector and about what can legitimately be required of commercial broadcasters in serving wider public needs.

## Why wait for autonomy?

There are plenty of critics of the state sector who would argue that the only way it can become effective is by making it autonomous, removing it from the direct control of government and giving it the freedom to play its role more impartially and independently as an instrument of the whole society and not just of the party in power. However, given the polarised nature of politics in many South Asian countries, and the evident obstacles to the creation of autonomous institutions, it may make sense as a first step to attempt to achieve a measure of greater public accountability for national and commercial broadcasters without attempting a radical restructuring of the status quo.

This could take the form initially of consultation within the industry over the development of a national media policy to which both sectors would subscribe. Such a policy might cover such issues as questions of taste and decency, provision of programmes for particular sectors of the community, common standards for advertising and for media training and proficiency, agreed approaches for measuring audiences, and the creation of mechanisms for responding to public criticism and suggestions. Such acceptance of self-regulation could help to resolve some of the issues which concern media professionals and their relations with the public, and could act as a charter for both public and private broadcasters in their relations with government. Whether or not government ultimately retains control of the national broadcasters, the acceptance of industry-wide norms in such fields could act as a restraint
on ministerial highhandedness.
The development of such a media policy has already been mooted in Sri Lanka, where the virtually unregulated growth of the commercial sector has thrown up all sorts of problems which are not susceptible to existing methods of supervision and control. It will soon be needed in Bangladesh. In India's case, draft proposals for a new regulatory system failed to find acceptance with the satellite sector, but a new basis of agreement is urgently needed.

Beyond such voluntary agreements, one theoretically attractive way forward would be for the state by legislation to require broadcasters-of whatever description-to provide a minimum of public interest programming and to set certain quality standards, compliance with which would be essential for the renewal of licensing arrangements.

Internationally, there is a wide range of approaches to public accountability for broadcasters. In Germany, which has a predominantly decentralised structure of public broadcasting, the courts have developed sophisticated concepts with regard to programme standards, and have had a major influence in defining legal standards and obligations. Canada imposes common obligations for national content and cultural compatibility on public and private broadcasters alike. In Latin America, community radio and TV have long been a successful part of the broadcasting scene, with governments licensing non-profit and non-partisan stations defined by their social purposes rather than the market or their political affiliation. At an international level, the objective of the Southern African Broadcasting Association (SABA)-to reflect the interests and concerns of the citizens of its member states-seems relevant to the needs of broadcasters and audiences in the South Asian region.

Though quality thresholds of different kinds have been established successfully in a number of countries, they are obviously more difficult to implement where satellite broadcasters are apparently beyond the arm of the law, as also uplinking from other countries and not operating within a national legal framework. Satellite broadcasters would seem to be in a strong bargaining position for these reasons, though they do need to have a working relationship with their main target territories and will even submit to govern-
ment regulation if other objectives are met. Rupert Murdoch's concern to establish the Star network as one friendly to India and his willingness to accept Indian government censorship as a price worth paying for the establishment of DTH shows that the Indian government would have considerable leverage in negotiating such issues, if it chose to use it.

The acceptance of a common jurisdiction is undoubtedly complicated. The draft Indian Broadcasting Bill of 1997 attempted to achieve this by requiring all satellite broadcasters to uplink from India and to accept tough, indeed what were regarded as unworkable, terms for doing so. The refusal of international broadcasters like Star to agree to become majority-owned Indian companies brought progress to a standstill, though some of the Indian-owned channels were subsequently given permission to uplink from India to give them an advantage and to increase pressure on others. There is a good deal to play for on both sides in resolving these issues and any eventual compromise could also be extended to cover other matters of concern. One positive sign is that Zee and Sony have said they might be willing to produce more 'public interest' programming if other broadcasters, particularly Doordarshan, were bound by the same conditions.

## Regional public opinion

Extending such agreements to India's neighbours would be less easy. In Pakistan, Bangladesh or Nepal, the issues are very different anyway; their problems are with the Indian focus of the satellite channels as much as with the subject matter. Their governments might be willing to participate in South Asia-wide discussions about questions of taste and decency-and the widening of that discussion could in itself contribute to the pressures on satellite chan-nels-but persuading satellite channels aiming at the Indian market that they should do more to cover India's neighbours and be more sensitive to uses of their channels as extensions of Indian foreign policy would be more difficult, as coverage of the Kargil hostilities showed.

South Asian public opinion has no effective means of making itself felt at the moment, though there is scope for the creation of new networks for this purpose. Satellite channels are unlikely to invest in reflecting wider regional realities until adver-
tisers can deliver their goods more easily across South Asian borders. In South Asia itself, it is the Indian market which dictates the programme content. For India's neigh-bours-and the viewers in those countries-the most effective response to the new media environment, therefore, lies in putting their own houses in order.

## Decentralisation, localisation

In all South Asian countries, broadcasting is a 'central subject' and national control extends right down to the output of individual radio stations in remote parts of the country. It is an extraordinary fact that no provincial or regional government in South Asia has had any right to license radio or television stations. Traditionally, the political case against decentralisation has been argued in terms of the fragility of the nation state. Fears that substantial ethnic minorities like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Punjabis in India or the Sindhis in Pakistan, will misuse decentralised powers to demand separate statehood have resulted in tight control from the Centre, which has arguably exacerbated already difficult situations. These are also important issues in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, where national broadcasting policies have been challenged by the working of the satellite TV market, the massive popularity of Zee TV and the spread of a new kind of 'hindigenised' South Asian popular culture. In Pakistan, which has its own problems of finding a balance between centre and regions, PTV has attempted to combat Indian cultural influences by improving programmes in the national language-a counter-strategy which has actually reinforced existing centralising trends.

India's neighbours arguing the case for the decentralisation of broadcasting may seem like missing the main point. However, the experience of South India would seem to validate a different view: that decentralisation is in fact a means of strengthening national cultural defences rather than weakening them. In a globalising medial world, India's very large market has dictated its own localising terms, resulting in the Indianisation of many international satellite channels. However, what is localisation for India is a new form of globalisation for Pakistan or Nepal, which would probably be more effectively countered by encouraging localisation in these countries than by any kind of
head-on confrontation
A first line of defence, as Sri Lanka has found, is to license more terrestrial competition for the state broadcaster. This is the path which Bangladesh has also followed, with the establishment of its first commercial terrestrial channel. The advantage of such an option is that it makes the state broadcaster more competitive, sharpens its entertainment programmes and gives it a mass orientation-all services which have been provided by the satellite channels for Doordarshan and PTV-while at the same time appealing to a complete domestic television universe, which the satellite channels cannot do.

Such a strategy, however, will not serve the public interest in areas where the market is reducing choice rather than extending it. These areas include the provision of services for minorities, for special interests, for the reflection of 'high' or 'folk' culture, and the use of television or radio to serve smaller communities, for development, information or entertainment. Creating space to serve these needs requires a new willingness by the state to accept media decentralisation in principle and to fund it where necessary. This is an important challenge for South Asian nation states and one which they seem instinctively ill-prepared to tackle. Decentralisation is not just about language: it is also about greater participation. It is about encouraging democracy where it can be most effective in giving voice to public opinion and in holding politicians and others to account.

Radio could play an important part in this process of transformation. In most South Asian countries, national broadcasters already have at their disposal a network of radio stations providing services in different languages. All that would be necessary to activate them would be a new vision of what they could achieve. Cable television also has the potential to contribute to the growth of a vibrant decentralised media; indeed it has already done so in some parts of India and Pakistan. As cable itself witnesses a process of consolidation, with channel owners using the technology of encryption or digitisation as a means of extracting more revenue for themselves, the state has a chance to intervene to preserve some space for the local operator and the local service.

The Internet poses a completely different level of problem for the mechanics of control. It has given individuals and
organisations the capacity to develop their own radio and television services, something which is already taking place in a limited way and will undoubtedly expand significantly in the future. In the developing world, the lnternet is currently regarded rightly as a rich person's accessory but it may not be long before Internet and e-mail connections are available throughout rural areas too.

The satellite revolution in South Asia has played an important role in extending the bounds of civil society and the forum for public debate. If the new satellite media have contributed to the development of civil society, they have done so largely on the terms of the commercial entrepreneurs. Public feedback on these developments has been largely confined to the columns of a small number of newspapers and the activities of non-government organisations. Television programmes have generated huge volumes of correspondence, sometimes on a scale which producers have found impossible to process, but there are few organisations representing the viewer and listener in a more systematic way.

It is not sufficient to argue that the state has an important role to play in safeguarding the public interest. In the interests of the development of civil society, equal stress also needs to be placed on the development and reflection of public opinion on media issues. There is much to learn from the experiences of other South Asian countries, though as yet regional awareness is surprisingly low, except among a handful of media and development professionals. It is too early yet to talk of regional public opinion, but beyond the need to develop a more critical
 public opinion in individual countries, the regional character of the new media also requires a regional public response. With many South Asians now watching the same programmes, those who produce them, often with only Indian audiences in mind, need to be made aware of the wider public and their reactions.

Satellites over South Asia by David Page and William Crawley
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# CPI(M): Life after Jyoti Basu 

The last legacy that Basu leaves is a space for his party at the Centre. A Left liberal heading the Union government should give the Indian polity a new direction.

by Chintan Mukherjee

,yoti Basu ended his tenure as the longest serving chief minister ever in India in October this year. It had been almost exactly a year since he had first made public his desire to demit office on the ground that his health was not up to the task of governing a fractious state with numerous political, economic and social problems. And, to be fair to him, for some time Basu had been operating on less than all cylinders, spending lesser and lesser time in the state's administrative headquarters at Writers' Buildings, with Buddhadev Bhattacharya, his deputy, shouldering more and more of the quotidian administrative load. The public and the media were, nevertheless, taken aback by the suddenness of this decision to retire. Intense speculation about the party's motives behind letting the 'patriarch' go was fuelled primarily because of the timing of the decision.

In the first place, the elections to the State Assembly are scheduled for early next year. And it was more than conceivable that Basu could have kept going with an even more attenuated workload for another six months or so. His health did not seem to have registered any dramatic decline. Secondly, the party announced its decision to let Basu step down just a few days after its special conference, held in Trivan-
drum, had endorsed his line that in future the party could participate in a coalition government at the Centre, should the opportunity present itself. This was a decisive victory for Basu's views over the policy espoused by the 'hardline', and hitherto majority, group within the party.

Why was it that the party allowed Basu to go, in a sense, finally proclaiming that he was no more the indispensable prop of the show in West Bengal, at the moment of his triumph? Basu could have played a crucial role in the elections that the party will soon have to fight in West Bengal. The Left Front government which has ruled that state since early 1977 does not have the aura of invincibility that it had even a couple of years ago. The Trinamool Congress, a splinter of the Congress, has mounted an increasingly credible challenge to the Left Front. Its leader, Mamata Bannerjee, now a senior cabinet minister at the centre, has managed to become the centripetal pole of the anti-Left forcesand votes-in the state .

Basu's presence at the helm of both the government and the election campaign may have proved decisive in the election. His credibility as a political manager and an administrator is critical for the Left Front's appeal. Bhattacharya,

Basu's annointed successor, a somewhat dour ideologue, on the other hand, lacks charisma. To the extent that his administrative acumen has been tested, it has been found to be wanting. As a leader of men, he is not the ideal choice.

The CPI(M) put out two contradictory explanations for allowing Basu to relinquish his duties. On the one hand, they spoke about his poor health. On the other, they said that in the rapidly changing national context, his skills were to be utilised to help forge another 'third front' to provide an alternative to both the BJP and the Congress. If Basu was ailing to the extent that he could not hold out as chief minister, how will he be able to play an active role in forging a 'third front'?

More likely, the $\mathrm{CPI}(\mathrm{M})$ is now engaged in evolving a new strategic balance. Central to this is the attempt to achieve, at the national level, a greater policy flexibility of the pragmatic kind advocated by Basu. On one occasion at least, such pragmatism had disastrous consequences. It will be recalled that the adoption of the 'Bengal' line advocated by Basu, in preference to the 'Kerala' line espoused by EMS Namboodiripad, led to the CPI(M) supporting VP Singh's National Front government in 1989. This government also drew on the support
of the BJP. That 'pragmatic' political formation gave the BJP mainstream political legitimacy and the toe-hold it needed for its national ascent. The $\mathrm{CPI}(\mathrm{M})$ is now bemoaning the consequences of that decision.

At the same time, by allowing Basu to go, the party is also trying to signal that it is not about to loosen its grip. Basu had for a long time oeen pushing for a greater flexibility in economic programmes, labour policy and the functioning of the party. He had been shielding dissenters like Subhas Chakraborty and Saifuddin Chowdhury, who had started a campaign over a year ago to uphold the cause of greater inner-party democracy in an attempt to loosen the control of the 'hardline' faction over the party macininery. Chowdhury was expelled, and the party has thus indicated that dissent will not be tolerated, especially in its eastern bastion.

It must be said that there is something to be said for this strategy of the $\operatorname{CPI}(\mathrm{M})$. But it can work only if some ground rules operate. First, flexibility at the Centre cannot be used as a pretext for suicidal and unbridled opportunism of the 1989 variety. And this is a very real danger, given that the gencral secretary of the party, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, has earned a well-deserved reputation for being a power broker and a wheeler-dealer to whom no principle has sanctity. The policy of flexibility has to be used responsibly to build political formations that are viable. At the same time, in West Bengal, more stringent controls over the party machinery have to be blended with development initiatives that will take the state out of the backwardness that has overtaken it during the Left Front's undistinguished tenure. Controls must also be used to ensure that at the lower levels, state resources are not swallowed up by a party machinery that has become more and more corrupt and allpervasive. The Left Front has to shed some of its more meaningless and formulaic dogma and implement programmes that will promote in-
dustrial development, revive the once exemplary but now languishing land reform programme in new directions and reconstruct the crumbling social infrastructure, especially in health care, education and welfare provisions.

The $\operatorname{CPI}(\mathrm{M})$ has consistently refused to realise that in reality it is a bowdlerised version of a social democratic party. Bowdlerised because it operates fundamentally like the 'bourgeois' party that it is, while clinging to a constant state of denial. Merely repeating calls for 'dictatorship of the proletariat' convinces no one anymore. The $\mathrm{CPI}(\mathrm{M})$ would do the nation a great service if it recognised the need for a social democratic party and try to convert itself into one. By so doing, it could defend the middle ground and the substance of the liberal Nehruvian vision that is fast slipping in India today. The $\mathrm{CPl}(\mathrm{M})$ could try and push
welfare and secularism more centrally into the national agenda, at a time when the BJP has attempted to push the polity considerably to the right of centre. The CPI(M) could play a much more effective role in redefining the liberal vision and help marginalise the extreme Right.

And what does Basu have to do with all of this? He did represent the most encouraging facets of this tendency, but never managed, despite having been given a great opportunity. Basu had the bourgeois temperament and training that made him inherently flexible and acceptable to a broad spectrum. If he had combined this asset with flexible and pragmatic policies to turn West Bengal into something of a viable welfare model, he could have transformed both his party and national politics. Unfortunately, we now have to speak of Basu in the past tense.

## PROFILE

## Buddha Smiles...

Many of his party comrades, as well as colleagues in the Left coalition that holds power in the state, entertained fond hopes that Jyoti Basu would heed their appeals and consent to stay on as chief minister of West Bengal, at least until the state assembly elections, due middle of next year. But the patriarch of Bengal politics was determined to call it a day. But before doing that he had a strong agenda to push. Sources close to Basu say the 86-year-old chief minister had waited for one last victory-not in elections, not against his known political adversaries, but against a section of hardliners within his own party, who had effectively blocked the path to his becoming India's prime minister in 1996. At the special conference of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), held in the southern city of Trivandrum in October, the hardliners were routed. An
overwhelming majority of the delegates supported Basu's thesis that "the decision to not participate in the central government in 1996 was a historic blunder". Thus the way has been cleared for future participation by the CPI(M) at the central govern-ment in New Delhi.

Once the party endorsed the position he has often publicly asserted, Basu did not have much reason to stay on. His announcement of retirement was sudden, and even caught the party General Secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet off-guard. Basu says he had good reasons to quit when he did. "My successor must have some time to project himself, because he is going to lead the party in the next elections. If I hang on, it is not fair because my health is not good enough to do justice to my job anymore," he told this writer in an interview.

In itself, this was a unique move
by a unique man. Communists do not retire, he used to say, but by stepping down from office, he has created a unique precedent. "Basu is a shrewd politician. He wants the party to face no succession problems," says Ashok Mitra, his former finance minister who had fallen out with the old patriarch and resigned.

But another man who said he was fed up and resigned from Basu's government, is now at the top. The new chief minister of West Bengal, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, had resigned in 1993 as information and culture minister following factional squabbles. He then went on to write a controversial play Dusomoy (Bad Times), which was staged with some fanfare in a few Calcutta theatres. But Basu brought him back to the ministry, gave him additional responsibility as police minister, a charge Bhattacharya clearly did not enjoy, and has now got the playwright-politician to succeed him.

Bhattacharya comes from a family of leftist poets. He is a reasonable playwright, and has translated much foreign literature into Bengali. His roots are strongly Bengali; he loves Indian classical music, literature and good films. Bhattacharya seems more keen to play.Bengal's thought police rather than an effective police minister. He stopped singer Samantha Fox from performing in Calcutta, and is now engaged in a slanging match with his transport minister and party mobiliser, Subhas Chakrabarty, over the state government's support to a latenight Hrithik Roshan show. Bhattacharya sees Bollywood and Hollywood as "decadent cultures".

Chakrabarty got the Hrithik Roshan group to perform to a hundred thousand people in Calcutta's Salt Lake Stadium to raise money for the Chief Minister's Flood Relief Fund, just when the Calcutta International Film Festival (which

Bhattacharya takes personal interest in organising) was in full swing. "Why should our government patronise a show for Hrithik Roshan who has got patrons like Coca-Cola," thundered Buddhadev in an obvious broadside against Chakrabarty. The latter responded: "I don't want a lesson in culture from anybody. Who has said only Bengali programmes or something like the film festival is good culture. The Hrithik Roshan show stirred
to get leading filmmakers and intellectuals to come to the Calcutta Film Festival and the Calcutta Book Fair. He has ensured that the Book Fair is inaugurated by leading intellectuals, like the Frenc: philosopher Jaccques Derida, the Bangladesh poet Shamshur Rehman or the British physicist Christopher Hawkins.

The new chief minister's lifestyle is fairly simple and austere. His mother says the family would be more than happy to see Buddhadev as a school teacher and a playwright, which was how he started off. As a party full-timer on a wage of 200 rupees, Bhattacharya has seen his family struggle. His wife and daughter insist the "family will not change now". The new chief minister has refused to leave his middle class Palm Avenue three-room flat in Calcutta, though the police want him to do so for security reasons. His only
thousands, not a few so-called intellectuals."

Basu had to intervene to restrain his squabbling disciples, but the fracas gives some idea of the kind of person the new chief minister is. Immediately after taking over, Bhattacharya told this writer in an interview: "I am very proud of Bengal's contribution to India. Our people have excelled in all spheres of life. Maybe the 19 th century renaissance will not return but we need closer cooperation with our brothers in Bangladesh. Our interaction is important for the rejuvenation of Bengali culture."

However, despite being a proud Bengali and a self-confessed "committed Marxist", the new chief minister is far from parochial. When the Shiv Sena threatened to stop Pakistan's ghazal singer Ghulam Ali from performing in Bombay, Bhattacharya made extensive arrangements for a soiree in Calcutta's Science City auditorium. Ali sang to a full house. Bhattacharya tries
luxury perhaps are Benson and Hedges cigarettes, of which he smokes at least two packets a day.

Detractors say Bhattacharya is a rigid Marxist, at times very sectarian, who is always daring the BJP-RSS-be it in defiantly hosting a Ghulam Ali show or holding a cricket match with Pakistan in Calcutta. He also threatens to unleash his party cadres on the 'saffrons'. Basu had avoided throwing frontal challenges at India's ruling Hindu-Right brigade, although he has described them as being "uncultured", and "barbarians". Bhattacharya, the day he took over dared Delhi's BJP-led government to unseat the Left in Bengal, and rounded off by quoting from his uncle Sukanta's poem: "The enemy will soon discover, the soil of Bengali is no soft soil for the miscreant, the people will rise and teach them a lesson." Wait and see.
-Subir Bhaumik

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THIS MEDIAFILE, how about starting with a tour of the mail columns from around the Subcon? Delene St. Clair, of California, writes to Thimphu's Kuensel, all distraught over modernisation catching up on Shangrila:

Bhutan still has a chance to retain its integrity before it is too late. When a wrong path is taken, the road only diverts further and further from the truth. It is difficult, even impossible, to find your way back. From one who is on the outside looking in, I can see it clearly. It may be too late for America to regain its innocence, but it is not too late to Bhuton to retain its.

The price of immediate gratification through modern technological convenience is not worth the price you will pay in future generations. It is important to remember that not only is it important to preserve your culture by limiting the number of tourists coming into the country, but also limit the kinds of negative things that are now coming into the minds of the Bhutanese. By having the so-called wonderful materials like TV, video, and the Internet, comes the non-stopping flow of negative things like violence. Not only that, but the wanting of these material things are a slow and steady death of the spirit.

I see two different possible futures for Bhutan. One is the horrible path towards corruption and crime, drug and alcohol abuse. This is the road you don't even want to start down. Block off that trial now and let it overgrow. The other path is to honour your religion and culture and traditions and conservation, and follow the course which your Majesty has set for you. America would be so lucky to have a leader with such integrity and conviction.

I suspect our Drukpa brethren are constantly on the receiving end of such sanctimonious and patronising advice, easily given by those very people who use television, video, and the Internet (the letter-writer gives her own email address as HotPursuitBAnd@aol.com). Maybe they should stop receiving their visas.

HERE IS a letter that should be heard by all population groups of the Subcon who have been deprived by their governments of the power of FM (frequency modulation) radio, which, because of its broadcast quality as well as localised reach, has the potential to be the most democratic means for information sharing. The letter by Ammar Malik of Multan to The News:

We, the people of Multan fail to understand as to why we have been deprived of the wonderful facility of $F M$ Radio. We hear people talking about FM 100 and FM 101 stations being so popular in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi and Peshawar but aren't we the fifth largest city of Pakistan? Don't we need entertainment? Another aspect of our claim is that after Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi, most sales in the department of music are recorded in Multan.

Therefore, we are the rightful claimants of getting the FM Radio Facility.

OVER IN Bangladesh, of course, the subject of correspondence would be-you guessed it-fish. Hilsa to be precise. M. Waqar Khan of Dhaka's Rayer Bazar writes with concern:

This year the price of hilsa is still more than one-third higher than last year in our Barisal market. A good sized fish for a large family with the children almost grown up costs the astronomical sum of Takn 300. It is strange that though we have a shrimp industry, we do not have one for hilsa. It would appear that as traders depend on Jatkn or hilsa fry to nugment their loss, the hilsa is doomed like the whales in the oceans. And as whaling has become a dying (if not alrendy dead) industry, the hilsa being a migrant from the seas like the cel and salmon cannot be farmed like fresh water fish. But since salmon fishing is a flourishing industry in many countries where it is found, there is no reason why hilsa could not be the same here. We have shown, we cim nüap: quickly to modern technology. If the required funding can be managed, developing the required infrastructure is also possible. But is anyone listening.

Well, Mr. Waqar Khar, I would like to listen and be of help. But somewhere there in your digression from the hilsa to the whale, eel and salmon, I lost you. Please repeat.

ALSO IN The Independent was a letter from Nurul Basher of Dhaka, who writes that " 53 years" experience as separate states has confirmed that it is not possible to become totally isolated from one another in the Subcontinent. He makes an interesting case:

I believe we should reviczo the 1946 Cabinet Mission Plan and with reasonable adjustments should adopt (it). C-Zone should be the erstwhile Benyal Presidency and all areas north and east of the Presidency. B-Zone should be the present Pakistan with Kashmir and East Pumjab. A-Zone, the rest. The Central Federal Assembly should have representation from the major population groups, which would be Caste Hindus, Schedule Castes including untouchables, Muslims, Sikhs, Tribals and Adivasis, and others. The capitals would be A-Zone Delhi, B-Zone Islamabad, C-Zone Sonargaon.

Mr. Basher suggests that debates be organised all over the Subcontinent to discuss the matter. Let ideas for unity come out, he says, so that the Subcontinent can emerge from the "mess it is in".

WROTE THE Economist of 11 November: "West Bengal is situated confusingly in the east", from the article "Basu the Marxist bows out". And then the rejoinder in the following issue's mail: "If India's geographical nomenclature is hard to grasp then I recommend you avoid
pondering that of America altogether. West Virginia is an eastern state..North Carolina is firmly in the South. And as for New Mexico..." Tee hee...

ANOTHER ONE from The News, a letter by Wilson Massey which makes good points on what to do with tattered pages of over-used Korans. Some sections of the ulema say that the worn-out pages should be buried or thrown into the river. Writes Mr. Massey:

I personally feel that both these ways are desecrating. If we bury such pages in the ground, people will walk over these, unaware of the material buried underground. If these are thrown in the canals or rivers even then it will not be fair because people and cattle quite often urinate while swimming and bathing. It is my humble suggestion that such holy material should be burnt at a proper secluded and designated place in the presence of the elders of the area. So that no one could be victimised or no one could exploit situation to settle personal scores.

WE SOUTH Asians are humourless. We South Asians are uncreative. We South Asians are both humourless and uncreative. This becomes clear when you realise that altogether we do not have a single original Subcontinental popular cartoon
 character available in the cartoon corners of our news-

papers. To illustrate, let me just pick up the Deccan Herald that is lying on my desk here. Turn to page 11, and there you have Blondie, Peanuts, Hagar and Moose and Molly. Nothing else. Singular proof of how sodden we are as a Subcontinent. No wonder Kashmir festers, nuclear arsenals multiply, and we glorify in new Miss Worlds even while globalisation snaps at the heels of our povertystricken masses. Everything is explained by the fact that we do not have cartoon characters.

IN A paid advertisement, properly festooned with pictures of Chief Executivesaab and the Governor of the province, the Balochistan government announces the following achievements at the end of one-year under the rule of said CE: Over Rs 10.000 million allocated for each district (note that the decimal point comes after the first zero), Rs 341.950 million provided by the Federal Government for first phase of Poverty Alleviation Programme; deficit has changed into revenue surplus, and allocation of Rs 70.858 billion for current PSDP; work on coastal highway underway; physical
work on Gawader Deep Seaport "will start soon"; Federal Government intends to start work on Kachhi Canal too; to resolve water crisis in Quetta Valley, 30 bores planned along Murdar range. Plans, intentions, allocations, and approv-als-you will have to do better than that, Dear Balochistan.


BANDHS AND closures are the hallmark of nonmonetised societies. Wherever there are bandh calls, you can be sure that that is a country, state or province where the public at large is not bothered. Meanwhile, the trading classes are easily scared with threats of rain-

ing bricks and close up their shops. The Assam Youth Congress President, Ranee Narah, seemed second to none when demanding that Guwahati shopkeepers down their shutters. A good image captured by Ritu Raj Konwar of The Hindu.

WILL SOMEONE tell me why even an Anglicised elite South Asian football-fanatic readership needs to be shown this 'Just Married' photograph, as The Asian Age did, with the following caption? "Hand in hand: Mark Ferguson, the son of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson, and his South African bride Fiona after the two were married in South Africa on Friday." He is the son of the manager of Manchester United, for crying out loud. If I were Mark or Fiona, would be tickled to learn that the Indian elite readership was interested in their betrothal.

## - Chhetria Patrakar









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# PAKISTANI TRUCK ART Ghe road is ours! 

by Martin Sökefeld

Pakistan's economy is greatly dependent on truck transport, just as in other South Asian countries. And like in other parts of the region, the trucks in Pakistan too are loaded over the limit as they lumber across the plains or strain over the hills. But there is one big difference: the old Bedfords of Pakistan are part of another economy too, the profits of which are not paid out in rupees but in honour and aesthetics. This is the arena of images, symbols and dreams, expressed in the currency of popular art.

Pakistani trucks are veritable works of art covered as they are completely with paintings, ornaments, reflectors, hammered metal fittings, woodcarvings, and other decorations. On exhibit are portraits of national heroes, beautiful women, imaginary landscapes with wood covered hills and quiet lakes, as well as images that profess a profound regard for Islam. By Islamic standards, it might seem contradic-
tory to show unveiled (or only semi-veiled) females unabashedly, but these images are only as contradictory and multilayered as is the real life of most ordinary people.

There is an explicit order and hierarchy of values expressed in truck paintings, amounting almost to a syntax of truck art. The highest part of a truck is invariably reserved for Islam. Calligraphies reading Aya Allah and Aya Mohammad, along with pictures of the Kaaba at Mecca, are found on what is called ataj, the crown, a wooden construction that looms above the driver's cabin. The sides of the cabin are often covered with a kind of mosaic of metal reliefs intersected with small painted ornaments, and sometimes the doors are made of finely carved wood. However, the most important exhibition areas for truck paintings are the sides of the load area. The wooden panels of the sides are divided into small


segments by iron struts to frame a number of different pictures. The most common features are landscapes, women's faces, birds, tigers and flowers, but sometimes technological motifs like airports and trains can also be found.

Two basic types of painting can be distinguished in the way the truck sides are done. The first is the 'simple painting', which is basically a picture in each segment on the sides with some additional ornaments. The second type, which leaves no square inch uncovered, is the 'disco painting'. These 'disco-trucks' are the real masterpieces. Every time you take a look at them you discover new images and decorations. But whether 'simple' or 'disco', the paintings on the two sides are never identical, and not only because the name of the owning company is written in Urdu on one side and in Roman on the other.

The back of the trucks invariably exhibits one large motif: a building, an animal, a mythical figure like Buraq (the winged horse of Prophet Mohammad's celestial journey), or a portrait. These images are painted on separate wooden planks that are taken off when loading or unloading the truck. Only when the planks are inserted in the correct order, do the pictures appear properly.

These artworks are produced by clusters of tiny workshops of different kinds of artisans situated mostly

along busy roads on the outskirts of the big cities. In these places, mechanics deal with the machines, welders repair bodyworks, and carpenters construct the wooden bodies of the trucks that are finally painted and decorated with images, little mirrors, ornamental fittings, glittering reflectors and sounding chains. These sites are as much a beauty parlour for trucks as it is a technical workshop.

At a workshop in Rawalpindi, the ustaad, the paintermaster, works with two of his sons and some assistants, and are aided by an apprentice for the less artful works. For a 'simple painting' they need two days, a 'disco painting' takes longer. They are masters of their art and do not need models for painting. Generally they are given a free hand in what they do. And the motifs being what they are, they are usually accepted by the owners. Nobody objects to beautiful roses and birds or to a portrait of cricket star Imran Khan (at least before he aspired for the prime minister's office).

It is not only new trucks that are painted; many trucks are painted anew if the colours have lost their brilliance or if the truck has changed hands and the new owner now wants to see his name on the sides. When the painter-artists are done, the decorators take over with their accessories such as messages added in the form of little badges with slogans like "The road is ours."

May that be so for all times.


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# The tyranny of scholarship 

## Many of the 'Green' ideas that are bandied about the Himalaya environment have their origins deep within Germanic culture.

TThe perceptions of those who have seen the Himalaya, and even of those who have not, are products of their respective cultural milieu. These perceptions not only relate to the aesthetics of mountain land-scapes but also to 'scientific' notions about what constitute 'Himalayan environmental degradation'. This social construction of the Himalaya is not unique. It is evident in the perception and attitudes of Wester-ners to Tibet, as Peter Bishop records in his book The Myth of Shangri-La. My experience with Continental, especially Germanic, field scientists has taught me to critically examme the Himalayan knowledge that encumbers their minds. One major intellectual impediment of these European scientists is that they are invariably urban residents who have 'never done a day's work in their lives', that is, they have never made a living from the land; none of them has been a miner, a farmer, a rancher, a logger, or a fisherman.

I, too, carry my own cultural baggage around, but it is quite different from those of self-styled environmentalists prognosticating doom and gloom scenarios about mountains. I do not have an organic view of the world; moreover, I choose to live in a post-modern mountain landscape. I adhere to a stadial theory of mountain development, which is an outgrowth of the French Grenoble Stage model. In this model, Stage One is peasant life largely unfettered by the nation-state. Stage Two embraces imitial modernisation with state supervision of resources and the intrusion of wheeled vehicles. Stage Three ushers in motor vehicle routes, eliminating the friction of terrain, thereby stimulating a market economy promoting spa-
tial emancipation for mountain residents. This phase culminates in extensive migration out of a marginal mountain environment unable to support individuals who are imbued with a sense of modernism.

Futurists, like Joel Kotkin, describe the incipient Stage Four, which I now embrace, to be a product of emerging deurbanisation through the telecommunication revolution Imked with a desire to live in what

-reviewed by Nigel J. A. Allan
is termed a mountain amenity landscape'. This is not just an American landscape; we can see a nascent Stage Four landscape in the foothills of the Himalaya, especially Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal, and around the periphery of the Kathmandu Valley. Unlike the evolution of development in the Alps, the real problem with the Himalaya today is that all four stages of this stadial theory operate simultaneously in several places.

## Himalayan fuss

During the past quarter century, considerable attention has been accorded the Himalaya. Claims and counterclaims about the status of Himalayan habitat and society appear on a weekly basis. Zurick and Karan have provided the first attempt to systematically sift through all this detritus (including my own) that has washed off the steep slopes of Himalayan writing.

Outsiders, especially Europeans, have generated almost all the fuss over the Himalaya since the 1970s. It is, therefore, worthwhile examining the cultural baggage that Europeans bring to the Himalaya as they make pronouncements about the status of its habitat and society and whether or not the Himalaya can be considered a region. "If persons seek a single vision of the Himalaya, they will remain frustrated, for there is no such thing," say Zurick and Karan. Gazing at the Himalaya is not value-free. It has provoked images of fear and loathing in some local folk in South Asia just as it stimulates adoration and even worship in others. At one time I was also culpable. On my initial visit to Kathmandu in 1966 I bought Toni Hagen's coffee table book Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalayas.

The frenzy of attention on the Himalaya comcided with the rise of ecologism in the rich countries as many despaired about the slow progress of development in other parts of the world. Used in its normative sense, ecology is the rallying cry of those suffering from urban anomie wishing to return to an Arcadian rural life in a 'balanced' ecosystem-whatever that is. Today's myopic focus on the global environment probably started in 1972 at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. Barbara Ward and Rene Dubos' book Only One Earth predicted a global crisis in a world unable to sustain itself as population mushroomed. Similar predictions are still with us as organisations like Worldwatch churn out dire forecasts that are never realised. For the Himalaya, its environment was brought into focus as a result
of the coalescence of external global concerns, like the 1972 UN conference, anxious academics seeking government funding, and the Continental Green movement. In the intervening quarter century, what was called the 'German Diseasc', so named because of a preponderance of Germanic ideas infused in the movement, has spread around the world.

## Nazi aesthetic

Many of the 'Green' ideas that are bandied about the Himalayan environment have their origins deep within Germanic culture. The Nazi years brought many of these ideas to the fore and some are still with us. The quest for mystical ruralism was seen in Hitler's correspondence with the Dalai Lama and in Hirrmler's visit to Tibet, presaging the Schaefer .Vazi expedition there in the late 1930s. The annual Nazi scientific expeditions to the western Himalaya from 1933 to 1939 exemplify this fusion of the aesthetic and the scientific. Even today we have similar large systematic German organised 'scientific' studies spread across the Greater Himalaya. One parti-cularly noxious idea underlying the notion of 'sustaina-ble development' is the tyranny of place once seen in Nazi agricul-ture minister, Walther Darre's Blut und Boden, 'blood and soil', that reinforces the ties that bind and, I would say, doom people to the land.

It is not surprising, too, that food fads enter into this equation. Your breakfast muesli as conccived by the Swiss German medical doctor, Bircher, is meant to replicate the ideal food of Hunza at the western end of the Himalaya. The emphasis of local ngo's and 'community development', not individual initiative these days, reminds one of the ooelkisch sentiments expressed in Germany in the 1930s. Nature worship, health and nature cures seem to be in great demand among these people coming to the Himalaya for the first time. It was, how-

ever, in the realm of forests that German ideology first saw its impact on the Himalaya. Dietrich Brandis, appointed conservator of forests in India, was brought in to devise, for the British, forest planning and management on a large scale in the 19th century.

As Simon Schama has pointed out in his book Landsape and Memory, Germans are foremost a forest people. With this visage of vegetation and mountains, it was no surprise that by the early 1970s there should be a substantial German concern about mountains and forests. In 1974, the German Foundation for International Development held a workshop that highlighted supposed problems in the mountains. The workshop volume, edited by Mueller-Hoehenstein, foretold an impending disaster in the Himalaya. One ecologist stressed the need for an 'ecological balance' in the examination of mountains, as if mass wasting, glacial lake outburst floods and crratic monsoon rain deluges, and forest fires-all of which periodically shred the Hi-malaya-were not known. There never was any 'ecological balance' in the Himalaya. Migration, instead of being viewed as a progressive individual positive action by the mountain resident toward modernisation, was viewed as a 'negative spiral'. Further reinforcement of these cultural perceptions of the Himalaya, in particular, came at the 1976 Heidelberg Seminar of the Himalayan Ecosystem Research Mission to Nepal. The subsequent report has echoes of Friedrich Ratzel's raubwirtschaft-the exploitative economy-with references to deforestation and environmental degradation. This 19 th century sentiment does not wither away easily as United Nations reports, like the UNESCO MAB-6 projects about mountains, contain references to a 'Stability-Instability Thesis'.

These concerns about the Himalayan environment neatly meshed
with the academic ideas of the day, notably geoecology, the successor to 'landscape ecology', that was born in 1938 as a product of a Nazi sponsored Himalaya expedition. These Nazi expeditions were sent to the Himalaya, ostensibly for mountain climbing but often including in their scientific objectives the enumeration and gathering of wild and domestic plants grown by local people who were to be certified as Aryan. Physiognomic measurements of skulls and noses of the local resi-dents would certify that the Himalayan plant species that were to be planted in the colder, drier parts of the new lebensraum, in conquered Poland and the Soviet Union-once the local population was displaced-were indeed grown and eaten by authenticated Aryans in their native habitat.

## Nanga Parbat to Namche Barwa

Zurick and Karan, a young American from the Midwest and an older, sometime Indian, carry with them their own cultural perceptions of the Himalaya. They acknowledge that, "Scholars, politicians, and visitors continue to see the mountains in significantly different ways, and differently from the views of the native residents." Thankfully, they diverge from the Germanic view of the Himalaya. In writing their book on the Himalaya, they tackle the predominant environmentalist perception of reality head-on. I use the term environmentalist here in its contemporary sense and not in its traditional meaning of a person who believes in envirommental determinism.

The authors pronounce any generalisation about the Himalaya as untenable; such is the great range of habitat use in the mountains. They do this on the basis of field studies in seven locations, Kulu and the Sutlej in Himachal Jradesh, Alaknanda in Uttaranchal, the Annapurna region in Nepal, Sikkim, and two, Tongsa and Mongar, in Bhutan. The 15 chapters are written in a highly readable style for the nonexpert, providing the reader with four historical chapters in the middle of the book, a template if you
will, on which to lay out the conditions of the sampled locations. The seven sample sites were selected to examine the role of natural processes and development. I know of no other single volume that has embraced such a wide coverage of the Himalaya. Esually, when one reads about the Himalaya the focus is only on Nepal-just one quarter of the Greater Himalaya. However, in this volume the authors adhere to its geologically defined extent, Nanga Parbat to Namche Barwa. Topics tackled include the impact of roads, agricultural projects, tourism, and population growth producing environmental change. Perhaps, the most significant contribution of the book is the set of maps of 120 Himalayan districts. Once more, this is the first time a panoptic vision of the Himalaya has been published, despite the fact that one institution at least, ICIMOD in Kathmandu, is mandated to provide a comprehensive view of the entire South Asian mountain rimland. Only a co-edited volume produced by a Swiss-German alpine geomorphologist, Bruno Messerli, Himalayan Environment; Pressures, Problems, Processes: Twelve Years of Research, has atternpted to cover 'zones' of the Himalayan environment.

The authors sketch in some of the pertinent historical ramifications of Europeans in the Himalaya, especially in the past quarter century. Most of the conceptual thrust is aimed at examining the purported 'Theory of Himalayan Degradation' that was an outgrowth of the above mentioned field studies by Messerli and his colleagues in the late 1970s into the 1980s. Messerli's 'StabilityInstability' thesis provided the conceptual basis for a Swiss study of three sample sites chosen to represent his idea of the typical Himalayan environments: Khumbu representing the high mountains (where annual foreign visitors now outnumber the local population by

a ratio of 5:1); Kakani on the metropolitan outskirts of Kathmandu; and a low hills location in India near the state capital of Chandigarh. Zurick and Karan sift through this early period of Eurocentric concern, much of it faithfully recorded in a Swiss financed journal, Mountain Research and Development. They state that "the theory of environmental degradation in the end described a situation that was never the casc".

Opportunism by foreign development organisations flush with consultants, coupled with the commodification of the Himalaya by temporary sojourners, has diverted attention away from the basic fact that today, mountain dwellers with the aspirations of consumer society cannot fulfil their desires in resource-scarce mountains. Many, like their counterparts in the Alps in the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, will migrate to the plains, as pages 212-219, about migration and town life, describc. Maps in the book reveal the central theme of the authors' credo that no generalisation can be made about the Himalayan environment. Some districts exhibit increases in forest cover, others indicate a decline. Insofar as the notion that population increases cause the extension of agricultural land into forests is concerned, the authors state that, "there is no general condition of population and of the mountain resources although it is a critical factor at numerous specific locations".

While settling many claims and counter claims about the status of the Himalayan environment, I think the book also goads other researchers into examining in greater detail the meso- and macro-level features of the South Asian mountain rimland. Scholarly and scientific astigmatism has diverted attention away from working with data sets, accumulated over the
decades at a range of scales, to an emphasis on village studies. Almost all these village studies suffer from the universal fallacy of generalising from the attributes of the particular.

We know for Nepal, at least, that it does not really matter whether you live in the terai, hills, or mountains, the poorest districts of Nepal, as measured by the LNOP Human Development Index, are all concentrated at the western end of Nepal, the region farthest from the capital and the donor agencies.

The book under review demonstrates the advantages of an overview based on accumulated data. With the data at their disposal, I expected to see a comparative analysis of a set of variables common to all seven sample sites. I am sure the authors, however, did not want to overload this book intended for a general and not scholarly readership. For the same reason, i suggest, they did not want to enter into a slugfest about the contemporary cultural perceptions of Europeans viewing the Himalaya that gave rise to the 'Theory of Himalayan Degradation', as I have donc. One commentator, K. MacDonald, not mentioned in the book, in a lengthy review article on Messerli's work in the 1994 issuc of Environments: A Journal of interdisciplinary Studies, states that there never was a 'theory' of any kind.

With the limited resources available to two investigators, courtesy of the U-S.S. National Science Foundation, Zurick and Karan have brought to public attention a level of resolutionabruat life in the Himalaya that hitherto was unavailable. Many more lavishly funded efforts have only accomplished a fraction of the product of this book. Himalayan district maps and 27 pages of tabular material on a whole array of worthwhile topics in the book's Appendix should stimulate further interest.

For their part, Himalayan dwellers are voting, and they are voting with their feet; they are taking a hike down to the plains and settling into lowland life. Stage Three beckons.

## Not Moguls, but Gurkanis

TO READ The Baburnama is constantly to ask oneself what could possibly have prompted a man in Babur's position to write his memoirs. Historically, autobiography was not a form that flourished in Asia, certainly not in Central Asia, where Babur's roots lay. As for the Indian Subcontinent, I know of only one autobiography written there before the 19th century: a brief account of the life of a merchant,

The closest Babur comes to explaining his motives is this: "I have simply written the truth. I do not intend by what I have written to compliment myself: I have simply set down exactly what happened. Since I have made it a point in this history to write the truth of every matter and to set down no more than the reality of every event, as a consequence I have reported every good and evil I have seen of father and brother and set down the actuality of every fault and virtue of relative and stranger. May the reader excuse me; may the listener take me not to task."

But he may have come closer to
 the truth in his first poem, a ghazal, written at the age of 18: "Other than my own soul I never found a faithful friend / Other than my own heart I never found a confidant."

It was possibly a sense of lone-liness-or rather apartness-that compelled Babur to setdown these reflections on his life; it was probably the intimacy of that endeavour that led him to choose Turk-ish-his domestic languagerather than the courtly Persian that was generally used in his circle. Whatever the reason, the result was a memoir that was anything but a judicious chronicle of affairs of state. Written centuries before the discovery of the Self, The Baburnama is still, astonishingly, a narrative of self-discovery. Its tone is disarmingly open and trusting, and in self-revelation it yields nothing to the confessional memoir of the 1990 s .

Babur does not, for instance, neglect to record the sexual hesitancies of his first marriage ("since it was my first marriage I was bashful, I went to her only once every 10,15 or 20 days" $^{\prime \prime}$; he writes lyrically about an adolescent infatuation with a boy ("before this experience I had never felt a desire for anyone, nor did I listen to talk of love and affection or speak of such things"). His estimation of his relatives and his contemporaries are so frank and unguarded as to suggest that he did not expect his memoirs to be widely circulated.

Babur writes no less trenchantly about women than men: as friends or adversaries they were evidently a formidable force in his life. The women of The Baburnama are strong-willed and independent, and they declare their own agency without hesitation, in matters political and personal. We see him going into the women's quarters to ask advice at critical moments; we
read about the delinquency of a widowed aunt who gives away her son's kingdom to none other than the dreaded Uzbek, Shaybani Khan, in the hope of winning his love ("in her lust to get a husband, that wretched, feebleminded woman brought destruction on her son"); and about the sorry end of yet another aunt who was so domineering that her husband dared not "go to any of his other wives"; we hear of powerful princes being swiftly dispatched by ambitious concubines; we even learn of women who take the initiative in courting Babur. The Musliun fundamentalists of contemporary Afghanistan would do well to read The Baburnama: they would find that the past they want to return to is not quite what they imagine it to be.
...In his useful and informative introduction [to the translation of The Baburnamal Dr Thackston informs us that 'Mogul' is a misnomer for the dynasty that Babur founded. Babur and his descendents identified themselves as 'Gurkani' (sons-in-law), the Timurids being in-laws of the line of Genghis Khan. To Babur the word 'Mogul' denoted various "quasi-Buddhistic, quasi-shamanistic ${ }^{\prime \prime}$ groups and tribes in the remoter parts of central Asia. His loathing of Moguls surpassed even his detestation of Uzbeks, Šhias, Afghans and assorted mfidels. "Havoc and destruction," writes Babur, "have always emanated from the Mogul nation. Up to the present date they have rebelled against me five times-not from any particular impropriety on my part, for they have ofter done the same with their own Khans."
It is probably too late to enfertain objections to the Mogul title, no matter how well-founded. Are we likely ever to speak of Steven Spielberg or Subhash Ghai as movie gurkańis? I don't think so.

From "The Man Behind ite Mosque" by Amitav Ghosif in The Little Magazne.

## 'Not your kind of savayes'

IN YOUR E-MAIL you mention: "...will ensere that potential tourists to your wonderful country are aware of the mistreatment of Nepali hotel workers". There is no mistreatment that you speak so fondly of. "Mistreatment $\mathbf{t}^{\prime \prime}$ is a misunderstood and a very medieval word comparable to white settlers shooting at the aborigines for fun or target practice. The 21st century Australian white, now fat and contented from centuries of mistreating anybody who is not a white believed firmly that the poor Nepali hotel worker is forced to work more than eight hours with no overtime pay, no food, no clothes, no holidays and when sick, is thrown in the street. Sorfy we are not savages.

Do come to Nepal to sec things for yourself before you get on the keyboard. Hotel workers here are protected by the Government by its Labour Act. Holding a job in a hotel regardless of standard or the type of work is a very coveted one. The hotel employees are indeed well-paid by Nepali standard. Most hotels in Nepal provide their employees with Provident Fund, Dearness Allowances, Maternity Leave Allowance (for female workers), Health Insurance (even

I am not covered by insurance), Meal Allowance, Festival Allowance (our hotel gives one month salary), Holiday Allowance (our hotel gives $45^{\circ}$ days' pay), Overtime Pay (1hour=1.5 hours) and week-end paid holiday. Even a small hotel like the Garuda provides all the above facilities that the hotel-workers are entitled. [to].

Though this country can be termed backward, the Nepali investors and managements are very compassionate for the simple reason that compassion is in our genes. Do you know that Lord Buddha, the apostle of peace and compassion, was born here 2500 years ago? Though Nepal is economically poor, the people are gracious and always welcorne all tourists regardless of their attitude or the colour of their skin or their conduct or the manner they are dressed. Curious tourists are always welcome to visit the inside of a Nepali house and this is a rare opportunity in your country.

As a Nepali tourist in Australia, I would dare not to walk in torn jeans, antee-shirt and baseball cap in a church while the mass or sermon is going on; nor would I take pictures at close angle of weeping mourners in a - cemetery Your civilisation does not care for ours. Come to Nepal and you will see your people of the Caucasian race poking their cameras at corpses in our burning ghats and walking about in revealing ctothes in our monasteries and temples?

What do you know of our Labour Act? What do you know about the 10 percent service charge that the workers are demanding? What you do NOT know is that we have the most corrupt government in this planet. The issue of $10 \%$ service charge is highly politicised by our corrupt and heartless politicians who are willing to sell our country but for lack of serious buyers. You know nothing my friend while in the comfort of your house you write nonsense. You have only succeeded in fanning the raging fire that has overwhelmed this beautiful Himalayan Kingdome of Nepal.

By the way, do take care of your own hotel workers and those in Australian sweatshops filled with cheap Asian labourers-legal or illegal. You can make lot of money my friend from our Asian brothers and sisters.

Oh, where is the real Australia? Do you know it is built with the blood and sweat of the oppressed abörigines whose women were raped and their children were stolen from them to put in foster houses of rich white settlers. Save yourself first before "saving" us.

From trerresfonse (by emáti) to an Australlan's
CONCERN FOR THE HOTER. WORKERS IN NETAL WHO ARE ON strike against their emplos'res. The workers are seekinc
A 10 PERCEN゙T SERYMCE CHARGE, WHICH THER EMPLOYERS ARE NOT WILLLNG TO CONCFDE.

## Made in Darra

THE ARMS, bazaars of Darra Adamhel and Landi Kotal in the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan are famous for the production of light weapons for centuries. Both a colonial as well as Cold War legacy, these
traditional grey areas gained increased salience, after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This brought forth a new dimension to the light weapons production in this area-the unabated and immeasurable proliferation and inflow of illicit and illegal arms. Before the Soviet incursion, many a cottage industry in Darra used to produce mainly $9-\mathrm{mm}$ rifles and shot guns in addition to pistols ranging from 0.22 to 0.32 . The Darra manufacturers are now adept at producing more than authentic copies of Kalashnikovs, bazookas and even rocket launchers...

One"important characteristic of Darra and its various manufacturing units is that it is an unorganised, unlicensed enterprise. The government cannot also do much about the production/sale of weapons here, because the State laws do not have jurisdiction over the tribal areas-even the British couldn't establish their writ there. The government can only check the in-country movement of arms frof that area-again a very challenging task. The Darra manufactured weaponry is free from any state licensing, regulation and tax requirements. As for Darra, it is part of NiNFP's tribal belt where no formal "statç law has been accepted or applied and the tribal authority or what is better known as the Jirga mediates and enforces justice, law and order.

Famous for their skill, the Darra gunsmiths are known for their ability to produce any kind of weapon under implausible conditions. The artisans do not hold any tochnical expertise but have inherited the skills and have the ability to copy and make any kind of light weapon. Unfike the previous two categories of gunmanufacturers, the Darfa gunsmiths base their business on the demard and supply notion and are extremely vigilant of thie prevalent market trends and demand factors. The business here is conducted strictly to secure profit.

From "Domestic: Prollchon, Illegal Manufacture and Leakagr or Small Arms, A Case Sildy of Pakisfan" by Salva Malik in South Asia at Gun Point: Smatd,
Arms \& Light Weapons Prohefration (Regional Centre for Stratecic Siudfs, Colómbo, 2000)

## For hetter or warse

10. We don't have elections.
11. When we do, we do a better job of rigging them.
12. We don't have voting machines.
13. We can't count that hight.
14. The spooks would never allow it.
15. One cardidate would get killed in a police encounter.
16. Sita White would show up with the love-child of one candidate.
17. The fundos would declare the zohole process unIslamic.
18. NAB would arrest both candidates, freeze their bank accomts and put them in jail.
19. After two recounts, the amy would take ozer.

From "Tor Tek Reasons Pakistan Will Never Have An Ambricav-Style Eifction Crisis" by Aygda in thf. Friday Times.

when I moved into the house, it was the children that I noticed first. They were playing cricket in the maidan facing the backyard. Quite good cricket, with makeshift wickets and a tennis ball. I shouted at them because the ball kept coming into my garden, nessing the the newlydug flower beds. I was careful of my hedge. Distance is important to me. I like neighbours to remain that way. The youngest boy was sent in to retrieve the ball. He said, 'Sorry Aunty', in a nasal voice. His manner was pleasant so I was appeased, though I hate this 'aunty' business, a term or address the serving classes have picked up. I guess they want to be like us without really understanding what it takes. The layers of conditioning that would peel off like cabbage if we were to be stripped!

Off and on, I lectured to some, like this chokra at the bania's or the paper boy. Why not didi, or bahen. l'd ask. Why this 'unkel' and 'antee'? Why this disfigurement, this hotchpotch, this mismatch of terms? You see, I am an English-language teacher. But it's more than that. I'm from LIP, people these uncouth Delhi Punjabis and Haryanvis call 'bhaiyajis' because they have no understanding of anything beyond the grab and push which makes this city tick. Unfortunately, they have set the tone for Delhi, so we don't hear the sweet language that gave us Rahim, Abul Fazl and others, but just this crude jargon of these Westernised rustics who race metallic-coloured Marutis with stickers screaming 'Pappu di gaddi' and 'Munna de pappa di gaddi', sporting hip-hugging Levis and Raybans, a la Miami Vice. And think they're the cat's whiskers. Horrible! But my efforts to make them see culture always end as a lecture to myself. This is the authentic urban wild frontier and those boys playing cricket living in scrvants' quarters-well they want to be upcoming Delhi cowboys as well.

To get back to the boys. There must have been half-a-dozen in all, wearing loose baggy trousers and with slicked-back hair sporting little tails. Smarmy! It is amazing how particular they are about clothes nowadays. Not much different from us except for a certain something which doesn't quite go. Not that I'm trying to be superior. I'm all for the upliftment of the masses. And cast is one thing I hate. I myself have been to a missionary school and we gave generously to the Poor Fund and always make it a point to mix with the poor Christian children whose fathers were bearers or cooks in embassies or something.

But the boys, I was telling you about them. When I first noticed the father of those kids from the privacy of the veranda-window blinds it was his gleaming white vest that caught my eye. I remember thinking how sparkling white it was and wondering how his wife did it. I have two servants but the laundry never comes out looking like this. The vest looked fine against his olive skin. It had a luminescent oily shine, the skin I mean. Slender and graceful of body, he didn't immediately come across as the father of the brood. I noticed him often after that. You see, I am a part-time artist and
colours catch my eye. Rich brown skin, black hair and white gleaming teeth. Thought it was his clothes that had attracted my attention, I began to notice the way he walked. With a swagger as if he was in a constant slow-motion dance, a jingle playing in his head, moving it rhythmically this way and that, quite aware of its own perfection. I sometimes forgot it was the servants quarters he lived in, and stopped whatever I was doing to admire him. Naturally 1 don't like the idea of admiring these sorts. Something not quite proper in it. It did irritate me that the man tried to look so much like a ... er a sahib, when, let's face it, he simply wasn't. Why did he try so hard?

On Sundays, he would loll about on a folding cot that his boys dragged out for him. Kabadiwallas and vendors would stop by and salaam him, have a chat and move on. He never rose, but lay stretched out as they paid him what seemed like homage. His boys, there must have been half-a-dozen, hovered around him as though he was a prima donna. Except for the youngest, who stood a little aloof, with a constant cold, clinging to the folds of his mother's saree, snivelling and wiping his nose with his hand. I'm talking of the one who had said 'Sorry Aunty'.

Most days, a man on a motorcycle would come. White vest would clamber on and sit astride riding pillion, his head cocked in the air, a king. His sons flocked around him when he returned, dragging out his cot, massaging his head, taking off his shoes, etc. Often, a fancy white imported car drove up, the kids doing a thorough clean-up job, while a liveried driver lolled with the father on plastic knitted garden chairs, dragged on to the maidan under a giant pipal tree that cast its branches out like an awning; the wife would serve them hot tea in small glasses, entertaining in style, like us.

It was a while since we had settled in before I called the youngest-the one who clung shyly to his mother's skirts. I liked the child perhaps because I noticed that the father was rough with him. I thought I'd teach him English. He came eagerly with his books. The lessons his teacher had given himabysmal! The corruption and inefficiency that allowed the government to run this mockery of a school, and yet headlines lauded the sanction of more funds to these state-run schools! The boy came once or twice. I set him to work. He never came again. The father didn't like it, his mother apologised. He said that the kitaab-shitaab business was for the impotent. Let the boy learn manly work, he had reprimanded her.

I couldn't understand why the father should behave like this. I thought he would be grateful, my taking an interest and alt that. But no, he swaggered past our house, his head up in the air, as if he couldn't care less. I put it out of my mind after that, though, I must admit, his attitude rankled.

It was my cleaning woman who told me, good riddance. She hadn't dared put me wise before because word got around, but Memsaab, he's a bad
lot, she warned. Dirty man, she called him. I was surprised because he looked so... spruce always.

Bhagwanti's chance remarks indicated to me that he was feared. I make it a point to call Bhagwanti by her name, not 'Jamadarin'. I feel it isn't right, though some women continue to call their servants by their caste names.

Bhagwanti does six houses in our row so she knows all the gossip. Who gets along with whom and so on. At first, she had shifted to the Madnagir Resettlement Colony where these squatters were given free plots when they were summarily removed during the Emergency. Remember Turkman Gate and Sanjay Gandhi's time? But she found the commuting too much. Especially since she has this backward child. Munna Raja, she calls him. So she's given her jhuggi on rent and lives in another neighbour's servants' quarter, just around from here.

Bhagwanti usually talks of whatever is uppermost in her mind. And as the days went by White Vest was.

Did you hear about what he did the other day? Drunk as a fish! Leering after the dhobi Jagiiwan's woman, calling her randi and foul narnes like that. His wife pulled him back, or God knows what Jaggu would've done. He would kill him if he could. Only he's neckdeep in debt to him and everyone knows it. How the bastard's wife stands him, I don't know. Eyeing the girls like he was one of his boys. He probably gives it to her good at night and makes up for the scoundrel that he is. I don't like her getting too loose-tongued in my presence. I scolded her immediately. You never know where it will end. I learnt that most of her spite came from the fact that her son trailed after his children. It was natural. They made him do the things they were loath to do-pick, fetch and carry. It made him feel important. Adults never treated him normally. How could they? He was a spastic. But the children never gave it a thought. It rankled, because the child got along better with them than with her, though they made him run errands in return. She loved and hated that child. He was the only blood relation she had. Her husband had left her a long tiune ago.

Mopping the floor one day, she confided: people say he assembles country-made guns. They must be right or tell me where does he get all that money from? Some say he's a go-between in all this bomb-baazi. Tell me, Memsaab, what kind of a man makes money out of misfortune? He certainly has enough money to lend!

Another time, she told me he dealt in stolen goods. There had to be something for he never held a regular job and yet he had everything: a cassette-recorder, a cooler, a colour TV. Don't you see the clothes he

wears? And his children strut around in jeans and jackets like heroes. And not only Jaggu, but all the servants around are in debt to him. And what interest he charges! Demands a bottle of liquor too. If he fancies anyone's woman, he makes lewd remarks. Kalu and Hira owe only three thousand each, but they would pay to have him murdered if they could.

But there must be something to the man. After all, his dog follows at his heels, I interjected. I don't know why I took up for him. Dogs, dumb creatures, what do they know, she scoffed. And this one was a vilayati and therefore more stupid. True, it wasn't the usual brown mangy mongrel that servants kept, the rather nice porm of mixed lineage.

The dog engrossed us the next few days. Expecting a litter, Bhagwanti announced. It had been lying idle for some time. The boys had lined an abandoned carton with gurny bags and straw. One early morning, we saw the pups. Sweet balls of cottonwool that tumbled about. The children of the neighbourhood


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would play with them, running away when White Vest came home. Pestering chokras, he would yell. Soon the pups were distributed. The motorcyclist took one. The fancy car driver took another. And so they went. Except one. A little fluff called Maxi whom no one picked up because it was slow. Bhagwanti's son took to it. Now that he's stopped trailing after them, he trails after the pup instead, she complained.

Munna Raja sat by the pub for hours, letting it suck milk off his fingers which he kept dipping into a cup. As it grew a bit, he fed it masticated rotis. Later he tied a string to its neck and made it follow him till I went and got a proper collar, getting a shy smile in return.

Bhagwanti reprimanded me. Why was I wasting money on that man's dog? She scolded her son, but he had already run off. That boy, she grumbled. He will be the death of me. I'm sure he was the reason his father ran off. Couldn't bear the sight of him. But what can I do, Memsaab, he's my flesh and blood. See the way he runs. One day he'll come under a truck, and then?

The dog and the little fellow were inseparable. He sat long hours with it on his lap. Bhagwanti would scold, he has no brains and now he's sold what's left for a pup. Why don't you get the man to gift the pup, I asked her, then he won't be sitting in their house so often. She snorted. That man would want something in return! Businesswalla hai, pucca businesswalla.

It happened on the night of Diwali. Festive lights were put up all around, and the noise of crackers exploding intermittently filled the air along with the acrid smell of smoke. The man had been seen swaggering about a little more than usual. It seemed he had got a Diwali bonus, sold some more guns and bombs. His firecrackers, sneered Bhagwanti. Peeping out of the veranda-windows, she spied her son flitting in and out of White Vest's quarters. I dare not say anything before that Munna ka baccha or he'll repeat it. The fellow has a brain like a sieve. What goes in comes out.

White Vest had been drunk three nights in a row. A lot of rowdy men with well-oiled hair and bodies had been coming and going. They played cards on Dhanteras. His boys gambled with them. Chhi-chhi, said Bhagwanti, what father gambles and drinks with his own sons looking on? And that wife! She herself serves liquor to his friends! Aisa kya pyaar? I used to tell my husband. If you want to drink, don't expect me to sit with your friends in your drunkenness. A woman should have some shame!

It was late in the night when we heard the ruckus. I had put my new steel utensil on the puja thali with the flowers, and kheel-batashas. Not that I am religious, but I manage a little something. I was going to light the incense when I heard the fight. A quarrel? On Diwali night? We came out on to the veranda to peep through the blinds. There must have been twenty or so young men. Pulling and pushing in the darkness, their shadows boxing in the light of the
street lamps. It was just a lot of noise at first, but I felt the tension grow. It became frightening. They were cornering someone, hurling abuses even as he ineffectually tried to hit back. Then he ran. But in the thick folds of the chaotic shadows cast by the huge pipal tree, it was difficult to see which direction he took. Raised voices! In my own backyard, between clumps of bananas! It was then that we heard the piercing yelp, like a cry of excruciating pain, which raised the hair on my neck and arms. We heard a whimpering and then nothing. Then a shot. And then another. Then a woman's terrified scream.

He is bad, that man is bad, Munna sobbed to his mother later. White Vest had kicked his pup, had mangled its soft white body into a pulpy mass. Something beat in Munna's heart, rage like a strong bird flapping its wings till he became hot and a cauldron inside boiled over. If he didn't do something, he would burst. He had to put an end to the whimpering. It had to stop. His pup was in pain. He had seen where they kept it and he had seen it being cleaned. He ran in and got the gun out of its hiding place behind the TV. When he came out, he let it off. After he shot the pup, the gun was still in his hands.

White Vest raced towards him, mouth foaming in fury even as the crowd kept up its screams of cheat, cheat! Munna stared, still as an idol. He held the gun with both hands and let it off again.

It's a month later now. Everything is quiet. Bhangwanti has left with her son. She couldn't stay here any more after the police let him off. Luckily it was a country-made gun, they told her, so it just maimed. The new cleaning woman works better. She does the corners carefully, but I miss Bhagwanti. You see, this one doesn't talk much, nor does she live here to know what's happening.

As for White Vest, yes he's still around, but he doesn't come out that much. Except in the afternoons, when the back street is quiet. And all the kabadiwallas and vendors have gone. His boys are too busy to drag out his cot any more. The eldest son got a job as a part-time painter and the second works in a garage. They took the cooler away, and the cassette-recorder. It was on hire, his wife told the neighbours. The garden chairs too have gone.

As for him, his vests, they don't seem to glow that way anymore. Or may be it's his skin. It's begun to hang on his body. Or is it the swagger that's gone out of his walk?

He leans on his wife as she guides him outside. Then he settles on his charpoy. He lies on it all afternoon. The neighbours pass by uncaringly. They don't acknowledge him, and the vendors behave as if he doesn't exist. Who's afraid of a blind man, anyway?


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## Vessels pebbles

Preparations were elaborate, fit enough to welcome a king. Understandable, because the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu, across the way from King Birendra's Royal Palace, was expecting no less a person than an exRaja. Also an ex-prime minister of IndiaV.P. Singh. With a summit of South Asian state heads indefinitely postponed because of two fire-breathing colonial cousins, the Secretariat was perhaps hoping that some poetry reading would clear the air over the LoC.

The preparations were also fit enough to welcome a Singh. The Sardar of Malice, Khuswant Singh, was to descend on/ ascend to Kathmandu for the South Asian Writers' Conference. The Academy of Fine Arts and Literature, New Delhi, led by its redoubtable Founder President Ajit Cour, was organising the conference. It was she who had promised to deliver the two Singhs to the Secretariat.

Jo bole so Nihal, sighed a nearby participant as the SAARC Secretary General Mr. Rodrigo dropped diplomatic pearls of wisdom at the start of the programme. Madame Cour spent nearly an hour on the podium, from where she liberally spread fragrant grease on the high-and-mighty dignitaries. She obviously had time to kill, for both the raja and the sardar of sleaze had ditched her.

Neither had anyone come from Pakistan, so Her Excellency Madam Ambassador had to make up for the lack. Participation of the Bangali delegation was sabotaged by a delayed Biman flight, so His Excellency the Ambassador was there to keep the flag flying. The Indian Embassy was present in full force, befitting the considerable girth and weight of Bharat the Great.

When the time finally came to read poetry, Her Pakistani Excellency tried her best at rendering Faiz

## Perhaps

## there is no

## such thing

## as South

Asian
Literature.

Ahnted Faiz. Sadky, the outcome was leaden. Then His Bangladeshi Excellency came up to the dais and declared Sheikh Mujib to be immortal...

Sitting their amidst the gathering stupor, it was clear that no one was there really for promotion of South Asian literature. Even if they were, could literature be 'promoted' in this manner, by a gathering of flown-in invitees who were sure to never meet again, nor care? Appreciation of literature in groups can only happen inadvertently, and not by any matron, however revered, gathering everyone in one place and saying, 'Appreciate!'

It was not difficult to be quickly transported to a state of supreme indifference. And so when a Kashmiri poet asked...

> Is it dawn, or a mendicant has opened his eyes Is it dusk, or a bride has passed by the street. ...one was past caring.
The next day, the Kathmandu papers reported that the other writers and poets had walked out of the hall by the time the Nepali hosts were up to recite some of their own writings. One could sympathise with the guests, for how much badly-read poetry can one tolerate when there is shopping to be done at the Bhatbhateni Supermarket and crazy Thamel beckons, a stone's throw from the Secretariat in the other direction?

Rather sad that Madame Cour, the lady who once wrote an autobiography as lyrical as Pebbles in a Tin Drum, actually had to put pebbles in a tin drum to attract attention. A good metaphor for the entire SAARC organisation as well at this juncture.

Perhaps there is no such thing as South Asian Literature. Maithili, yes, Sinhala and Baloch and Urdu and Hindi, yes. But not South Asian...
-Chandra Kishore

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