

# HIMAL

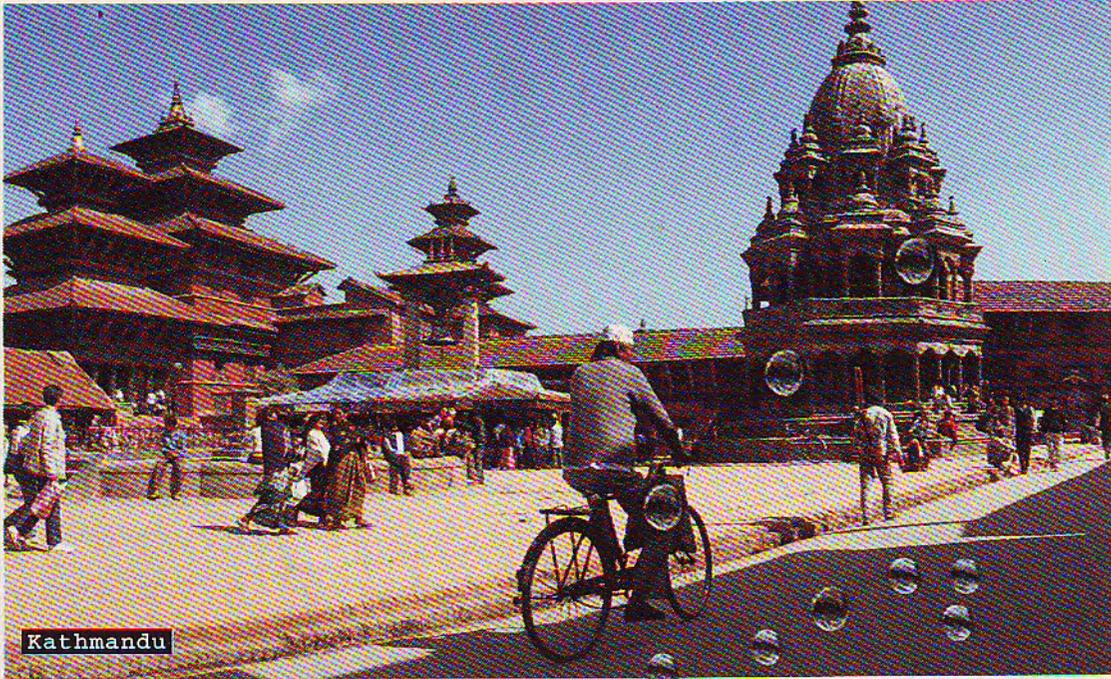
SOUTH ASIA



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# HIMAL SOUTH ASIA

Vol 9 No 5

July 1996

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### Information for New Readers

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

### We are now on the Web

Himal's latest table of contents, selected articles, subscription information plus other items of interest are now accessible on Internet.  
<http://www.south-asia.com/himal>

For subscription details, see page 30.

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Cover: Delacroix's Liberty Leading the People (shown below) was painted in 1830 to commemorate the five-day uprising in Paris that ended the reign of Charles X. When shown in the 1831 Salon, some critics found the painting of a bare-bosomed Lady Liberty leading demonstrators slanderous and ignoble. Filled with fervour for his nation state, France, Delacroix wrote to his brother: "If I did not fight for our country, at least I will paint for her."  
 \*Himal's adaptation of the Delacroix original is by Nepali artist Subash Rai. Here, the Lady wears a sari and represents the nationalist urge in contemporary South Asia.



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# The **BUKHARA**

Renowned for its Tandoori cooking from the North West Frontier Region of India, the Bukhara is now open at the Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza.

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### Ideology and Ignorance

Having worked with Tibet and Tibetans for 25 years, I have reached the conclusion that there are basically two reasons for the South Asian intellectual's lack of interest in the Tibet issue, a point highlighted by Tsering Wangyal (Opinion, May 1996).

First, there is the ideological bias. South Asia and South America are the only two places in the world where old-style communism still lives on. It is still fashionable, to a certain extent, to be a communist in these countries. In Europe we could easily see what life was like in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and in Southeast Asia, the deterring examples were China and Vietnam. But in South Asia, the communist countries were far away and so the people never saw the obvious faults of the communist system. Although China (Tibet) is geographically close, it is culturally and politically distant.

Second, ignorance abounds. Even educated and otherwise well-informed South Asians are often surprisingly ignorant about each other's countries and about other Asian nations. For example, Indians often tell me that they are making hefty progress in the telecom sector and that India now has over ten million telephone lines. When I tell them that China installs ten million telephone lines every year, they don't believe me.

Another example: the otherwise so pious and devout Sinhala Buddhists of Sri Lanka have absolutely no idea about Buddhism in Bhutan, Tibet or Mongolia, and they hardly know anything about the Tibetan refugees, the Dalai Lama, etc. Just two weeks ago, before the Dalai Lama's visit to Sweden, I told the chairman of the Sinhala Buddhist Association here in Sweden about his visit (he had no idea about it although it had been in the press for many days) and his response was: "Is he coming directly from Tibet?"

This ignorance is, of course, partly caused by the Western (or Anglo) complex that still pervades former British colonies, where people are quite well-informed about the West but take very little interest in their neighbourhood. The Indians were not interested in Japan until the Japanese "discovered" India, and in

three years, took over the entire two-wheeler market.

Because of all this, incidentally, I think Himal South Asia is trying to do a very good thing. In your Internet homepage, you say you want to inform Indians about Pakistan, Sri Lankans about Nepal, etc. That's commendable and necessary.

David Stahl

Empatum AB, Stockholm

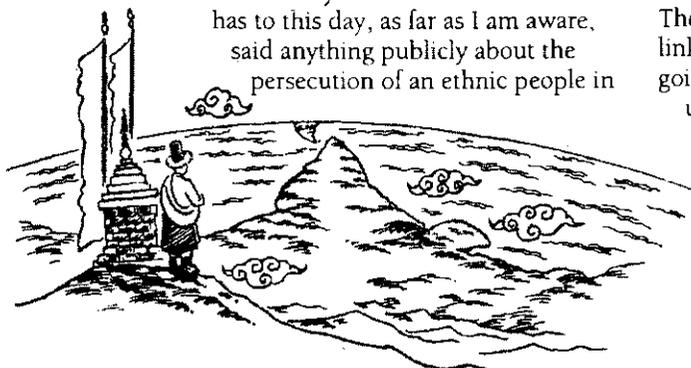
### Tibetan and Bhutanese Refugees

With reference to Tsering Wangyal's opinion "A Jaundiced View of Tibet" (May 1996), in which he refers to the South Asian intelligentsia's neglect of the Tibet issue, as an exiled Tibetan intellectual in New Delhi, the writer is, I am sure, aware of the expulsion of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan. And yet, there is great silence about this on the part of the South Asian intellectual as well.

There are by now about as many Lhotshampa refugees from Bhutan as there are Tibetan refugees, and yet the whole world knows about the latter, while it knows next to nothing about the former.

To take the matter further afield, as a Nepali living in America, I remain concerned as to why there has been almost total silence in the American media about the human rights issue in Bhutan.

And certainly no American intellectual has to this day, as far as I am aware, said anything publicly about the persecution of an ethnic people in



yet another Himalayan "Shangri La."

Individuals, like nations, have their own agenda. They support or ignore a cause according to how such a cause fits into their personal or private scheme of things. Sometimes they are moved to act out of genuine concern and good will; at other times, for private, selfish gains. Despite protests, the United States

government has once again awarded the most-favoured nation status to China.

I have a coffee cup with the following words: "So many books, so little time." I will paraphrase that to "So much suffering, so little (selective?) outcry ..."

Rajendra S. Khadka  
Berkeley, California

### Celluloid Successes

Ramyata Limbu is right ("Back to Square One", May 1996). Nepali films lack the glamour and sophistication of Hindi cinema although Nepali producers copy the *masaladar* Bombay-type films of India. But what surprises most is that producers

have not bothered to take advantage of the beautiful stories written by Nepali writers and convert them into celluloid.

As for not having our own Satyajit Ray, I would like it to be remembered that the Nepali-speaking world has had its share of good films in the past, such as *Paralko Aago*, *Hijo Aaja Bholi* and *Manko Bandh*. Satyajit Ray himself was quite impressed by *Paralko*

*Aago* directed by Pratap Subba and had, in fact, even booked a theatre to screen the movie for some of his friends. It would seem from this that some of our directors are worthy of consideration.

It is not true that Nepali films started out as copies of Hindi films. The deterioration in quality is somehow linked to the change in the movie-going public from being of the upper and middle classes to that of the lower classes. Producers began to sense that it is the formula films similar to Bollywood productions which would succeed. The only hope is that some bold directors and producers come along and extricate the Nepali film industry from its present degenerate state.

Bidur Gurung  
Darjeeling

### Universal Hindus

Dipak Gyawali's article on Hinduism, ("Challenged by the Future, Shackled by the Past", May 1996) will, of course, be of interest to many South Asian Hindus. But when Mr Gyawali states that it is hard to reform an archaic religion like Hinduism



because "there is no visible enemy in the form of another religion without, and no pope to attack within", he seems to have forgotten that Hinduism is not a religion but, rather, a way of life.

The strength of Hinduism lies in its many ways of analysing the universe and our life in this planet and beyond. Its universality and colourful inquiry of life is the cornerstone of Hinduism. It would be wrong to interpret this characteristic of Hinduism as complacency.

*Bikas Man Shrestha  
Asan Tole, Kathmandu*

### Health and the Hindu

Dipak Gyawali's attributing to Swami Vivekananda the statement "Burn the Gita and take up football if they really wanted to practise spirituality" in his article "Challenged by the Future, Shackled by the Past" (May 1996) is misleading.

It is true that the swami made some strong statements.

When the mass of the population was weak, forceful assertions were required to awaken them, but I am not aware of Vivekananda having ever made a call to "burn the Gita."

After his return from America, Vivekananda said that Brahmins are physically weak because they do not consume meat and that they should eat meat and play football to make their bodies strong. Only then can religion be understood, he said.

It was necessary to say this at that time because able-bodied, strong men were required to confront the British regime. Those who are mentally strong are always few in number while those with physical strength are numerous.

Gautam Buddha too had not eaten any food for 39 days, but he realised later that such extreme austerity was taking him nowhere and he consequently broke his fast by eating rice pudding. It was he who later suggested that people follow the middle path.

Likewise, in the *Gita*, it is said:

*Yukatahara viharasya yukata  
cheshtasya karmasu  
Yukata swapnavodhasya yogo bhavati*



### *dukha ha*

(Those people who regulate their diet, habitation, sleep and work, progress forward in the yoga.)

Vivekananda has also said that one cannot understand religion on an empty stomach and likewise a poor person cannot understand charity. Therefore, just as to understand charity one should be economically well off, to understand religion one should have a healthy physique.

*Bimala Sharma  
Lalitpur, Nepal*

### Lure of Danger

There is something I would like to add to your piece on the Everest tragedy last spring (June 1996). As a direct result of the fantastic, world-wide coverage this tragedy received, in all likelihood, there will be many more tourists taken up by the magnificence and death in the Himalaya. Ironically this has achieved in terms of advertisement what Nepal's financially strapped Ministry of Tourism could never have dreamt of. But what the potential trekker and mountain climber has to realise is that these activities and expeditions are fraught with danger if basic rules are disregarded. And, certainly, they should be wary of expedition organisers who guarantee hundred percent success. In expeditions to mountains like Everest, it may be safer to say all bets are off.

*Buddha Basnyat  
Medical Director  
Himalayan Rescue Association  
Kathmandu*

### Missing Maldives

I was quite impressed by the standard of the magazine. What I could not understand, however, is why, while you have covered all other South Asian countries, the Maldives is missing.

*Prayaḡ Sharma  
Baneswor, Kathmandu*

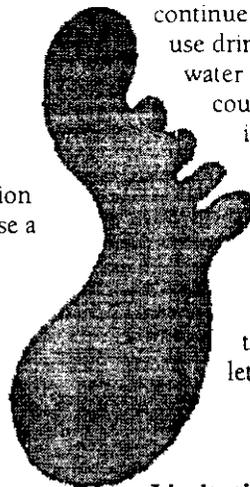
### 30 Billion Litres

I found the "Abominably Yours" of the May issue particularly apposite, especially the fact that 30 billion litres of extra water will be needed if everyone in South Asia were to use flush toilets. Even in Britain, people are beginning to observe, after last year's water shortages which will probably

continue this year, that it is ridiculous to use drinking water to flush toilets, water gardens and wash cars. But, of course, nothing will be done about it, as it will not in South Asia.

But the way, when I moved into my London flat many years ago, the flushing system marked "Thomas Crapper & Son, Chelsea." It must be the same Crapper mentioned in the British High Commissioner's letter to Sulabh.

*Joseph Johnson  
Leysburn, United Kingdom*



### Limitations of Discipline

Before I present a few of my observations on Dilli R. Dahal's "The Fallout of Deviant Anthropology" (May 1996), I would like to make my premises clear. Lionel Caplan and Mr Dahal are both senior and well-respected anthropologists. (Introducing Mr Dahal as a "social scientist" was perhaps inappropriate, if not camouflaging.) Both have done monumental work on eastern Nepal.

The main allegations of Mr Dahal against Mr Caplan is that the latter indulged in "biased anthropology", that he did not look into all the facts, that his study was methodologically faulty, and that he drew a pre-ordained conclusion. In short, he did not do justice to the Bahuns of Ilam district in eastern Nepal in his book *Land and Social Change in East Nepal* (1970).

The first two charges can be taken together. Mr Dahal seems to have a puristic view of how scientific disciplines like anthropology should behave. In any discipline, the innate activity is to build concepts and theories. The process of concept/theory building is essentially the process of what is called the sifting of data/experiences: those which fall in a pattern are included and those which do

Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in HSA. Letters should be brief, to the point, and may be edited. Letters that are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Include daytime telephone number, if possible.

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not are excluded. This process of inclusion and exclusion is inherent in any discipline, be that anthropology or physics. If every datum/experience is to be taken into consideration, this scientific exercise comes to a standstill, or is stunted, or no conclusions can be drawn at all because, as Mr Dahal rightly says, the facts constitute a complex phenomenon. Therefore, if such a scientific exercise proves to be biased, it is the limitation of the discipline, not of its practitioner.

I would like to know what methodological fallacy Mr Caplan had committed but Mr Dahal is silent about it after having made the claim. I would like to point out that methods of inquiry need to be chosen according to the context. The textual knowledge of methodology is an asset only to begin with; it may not lead one to the destination sought for which impromptu modifications/changes are often necessary. Mr Dahal, being an experienced hand at fieldwork, must certainly know this.

Regarding pre-ordained conclusions, Mr Dahal will surely agree that it requires some amount of prior information about the problem under investigation. British academic orthodoxy being what it is, Mr Caplan must have read a lot about Nepal and learnt the Nepali language before going to Ilam, but could he have gone to the field with a conclusion which he confirmed after 13 (not 12) months?

Even if one were to grant that Mr Caplan had pre-conceived conclusions, it should not be forgotten that the (re)production of knowledge about Nepal, particularly about east Nepal, was until then almost entirely in the hands of high-caste hill Nepalis, the people who were castigated in *Land and Social Change*. On the other hand, the accounts of British administrators were too descriptive and generalised to indicate anything towards what Mr Caplan finally arrived. This also negates Mr Dahal's imputations about pre-conceived conclusions.

It may be further pointed out that Mahesh Chandra Regmi (in his monumental work, *Land Tenure and Taxation in Nepal*, published six years after Mr Caplan published his), agrees with Mr Caplan's views on the *hipat* system, which form the core of the latter's book. The only difference between these two scholars is that while Mr Regmi uses terms like "non-Limbus" and "high caste", Mr Caplan

bluntly uses "Bahun" thereby causing a lot of heartburn and irritation among those who have not been able to shed "Bahunism" in Nepal.

Finally, I would like to say that "deviant anthropology" is more a merit than a demerit. Mr Dahal perhaps takes it as a negative attribute because his own doctoral thesis entitled *Poverty or Plenty: Innovative Responses to Population Pressure in an Eastern Nepalese Hill Community* (1983) could not prove to be "deviant". His book only confirmed what the Aryan discourse on Nepal says about the backwardness of the Mongoloid hill Nepalis—that they have become backward because of their own cultural vices like alcoholism and non-vegetarianism. This is what the dominant discourse says and Mr Dahal has only supported it with his data.

Tanka B. Subba  
Department of Anthropology  
North-Eastern Hill University  
Shillong, India

#### Fashionable Homogenising

Dilli R. Dahal may be right in taking Lionel Caplan to task for homogenising "the Brahmins" and oversimplifying the ethnic relations in the region he studied. But Mr Dahal is guilty of precisely the same error in homogenising "Western anthropologists", who surely vary as much in the degree to which they wear "cultural blinders" and are "career driven" as Brahmins or any other group vary in their degrees of greed or honesty.

It is also simply not the case, as pointed out by Mr Dahal, that questions of the "ethics of anthropological practice" are "rarely raised". It is fashionable these days to trash anthropology, yet this field—more than virtually any other—spends a good deal of time reflecting on questions of ethics in research, although we may not always get it right.

Instead of placing blame on either some undifferentiated Brahmins or some undifferentiated anthropologists, we would all do better to examine the structural and historical conditions under which any privileged group or individual is able to wind up with a disproportionate share of the wealth of the nation.

Sherry B. Ortner  
Professor of Anthropology  
University of California,  
Berkeley

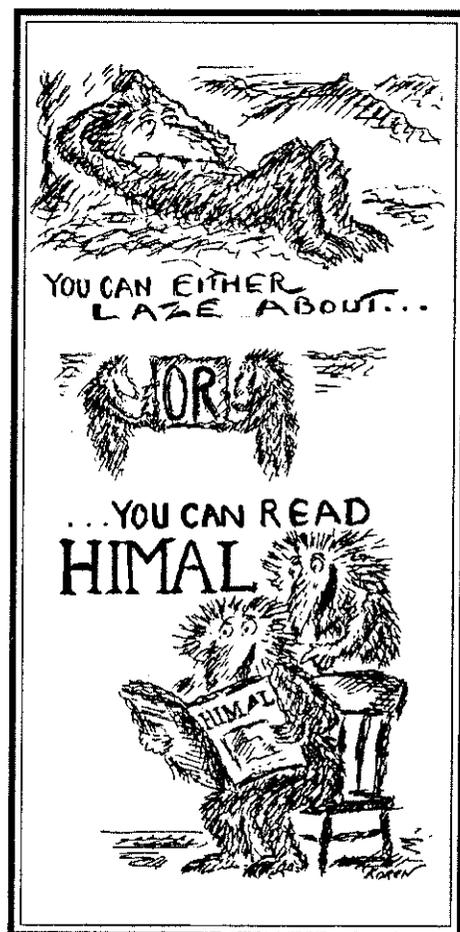
#### Surpassing the Limits of Suggestion

South Asian countries today are gradually coming closer to each other day by day through multifarious programmes. From this angle of vision, the publication of a journal which incorporates information on the different fields of South Asian activity is a very timely gesture.

But I have a minor suggestion to make. The cover picture of the June issue is perhaps not befitting the spirit of this publication. Keeping in view the name of the journal, a very charming picture of the Himalaya or of Mount Everest or a prominent natural scene may find place on the cover which, to my estimation, will make the journal much more attractive and consuming.

I do not know if I have surpassed the limit of going to the extent of giving this type of suggestion, but as a first reader of your journal, I considered it my duty to point out to you what I thought better. If it is considered as an excess exercise, I may kindly be excused.

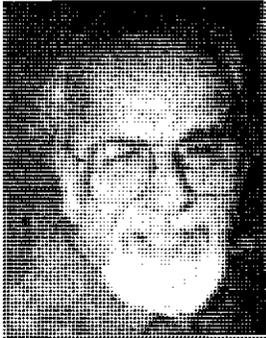
Abdul Quayyum Thakur  
Joint Secretary  
Ministry of Planning, Dhaka





India

## "LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR"



Within India, the image of the United Front government in New Delhi might have begun to tarnish after an all-too-brief honeymoon with the media. But, were a poll to be conducted in the surrounding countries, Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda's coalition would emerge with flying colours.

No sooner had Mr Deve Gowda assumed office in June, than there was a message of congratulations from across the border in Pakistan. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto offered to resume high-level bilateral talks that had broken off acrimoniously in early 1994. (Earlier, when the Bharatiya Janata Party held power in New Delhi for all of two weeks, there had been deafening silence from Islamabad.)

Within 24 hours, the Indian side responded positively to the overture and despite some minor hiccups, the talks are very much on the anvil. Significantly, the two countries have also decided to include Kashmir in the talks.

Pakistan has also accorded India the Most Favoured Nation status and allowed the import of key Indian goods that had hitherto been banned. This follows Islamabad's initialling of the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement. For its part, India had already allowed Pakistan access to its more than 900 million-strong market.

It is hoped that escalating trade will ultimately help thaw the frigid bilateral ties between the two big players of South Asia. The new government in New Delhi, bound neither to the supra-nationalist rhetoric of the predecessor Bharatiya Janata Party government, nor the legacies which are the Congress Party's burden, is ideally situated to push through initiatives on the diplomatic front.

Inder Kumar Gujral, the new External Affairs Minister, has said that relations with Pakistan would follow the model of relations with China where talks progress despite contentious issues. "Ultimately when issues like trade and travel improve we can even sort out the pertinent issues in a more tranquil atmosphere. The suspicions are less and the intentions are not doubted," he told a fortnightly news magazine.

Just as, or because, the Deve Gowda government represents regional interests within India (see *Commentary*, June 1996), it will perhaps be better able to appreciate the need for a regional outlook in South Asia. Mr Gujral has said that his foreign policy priority will be to enhance regional cooperation. Even as a statement of intent, this represents a sea change in New Delhi's sensitivity towards a need for regionalism. As the biggest power by far in South Asia, India has always been the most reluctant regional partner, and it comes more naturally to the smaller neighbour

to speak of cooperation.

With surprising forthrightness, Mr Gujral said, "I am willing to give more than I take. The central shift from my predecessors will be that I am not an advocate of quid pro quo. I believe that larger nations must have larger hearts also." Brave and unprecedented words these, but Mr Gujral should be cautioned that hold initiatives must be taken right at the beginning, with enough groundwork to allow the momentum to carry it along. Any delay will mean that the room for manoeuvre in key foreign policy issues will rapidly become narrow.

India is, no doubt, in the big league globally when it comes to size of economy, geographical mass and military prowess. This reality should dictate magnanimity and willingness to compromise and "give more than it receives", which is also Mr Gujral's attitude. His emphasis on the importance of the region and the need to underplay India's size and clout reflects an appreciation of a changed world situation where empty sabre rattling over decades has left South Asia where it began while the rest of the world has prospered. Economic compulsions dictate the need for building strong regional trade links so that South Asia emerges as a viable trading bloc.

The problem with centralisation of power in New Delhi is that the Foreign Office takes the macro and Delhi-centric view while deciding what is good for the country. Thus, a number of initiatives that could benefit different parts of the nation are either neglected or ignored. It is now time for New Delhi to appreciate the advantage that could be reaped by individual Indian states as a result of a South Asian regional warming. Thus, a liberal and open attitude towards cross-border trade and interaction could lead to promoting economic activity involving, say, Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Nepal. For decades, the interests of the North Eastern states of India have been held hostage due to the inability of India and Bangladesh to agree on accessing Chittagong port. Dhaka has also been unable to obtain New Delhi's permission to sell goods directly to the North East. Bangladesh now hopes this will be granted under SAPTA.

Mr Gujral has said that because the Indian economy is the largest in the region, he is willing to go in for asymmetrical relationships and grant concessions. This should be sweet music for Bangladeshi ears, for Dhaka has also been asking for a reduction of tariffs on Bangladeshi goods entering the Indian market to improve the trade balance that is currently overwhelmingly in India's favour.

Given the volume of the Indian economy, the positive fallout from an opening of trade and commerce across South Asian boundaries may not at first seem sizeable. However, the amount of trade will rapidly grow to be big enough that even the largest players in India will not be able to ignore it. Already, Bangladesh provides a multi-million dollar market for Indian goods and services. One senior Indian journalist in a Dhaka seminar recently made light of the value of such trade, but his businessmen compatriots will doubtless disagree.

Thus, the positive fallout for all countries of South Asia from a policy of regional opening up is incredibly large. The activation of the principle of comparative advantage, already being used by Bhutan to sell premium fruit products to Bangladesh, will lead to a more efficient economy in South Asia as a whole.

When trade flows and money begins to be made or saved, tension level will start dropping. With a liberal-minded baggage-less government in place in New Delhi, and with Islamabad making overtures, it seems that the region as a whole is tantalisingly close to a breakthrough of great magnitude.

"Love Thy Neighbour" seems to be the credo of the new Indian government. If it lasts out its term, or stays long enough to make a difference, it could mark a new chapter in South Asian relations. △

## Bangladesh

# EXPERIMENTS WITH CARETAKER

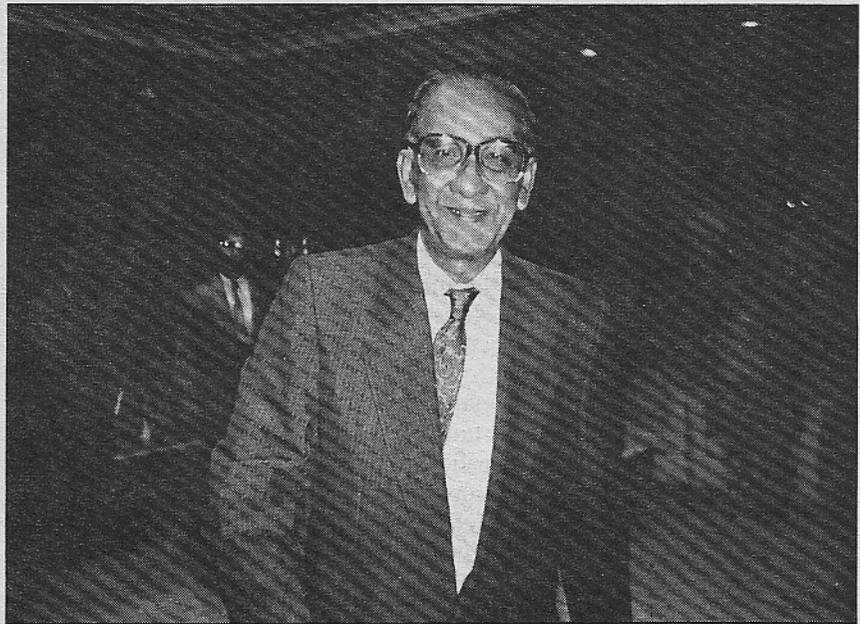
The successful conclusion of elections in Bangladesh on 12 June can be credited largely to a constitutional innovation—the provision included by the 13th constitutional amendment earlier this year which requires all general elections henceforth to be conducted under a caretaker government. Ironically, that amendment itself was adopted by a Parliament which had little or no legitimacy, comprised as it was entirely of members of Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party that had been elected in the 15 February polls boycotted by all other parties.

Whatever the pedigree of the amendment, the idea was put to the test on 12 June and it passed with full marks. Thus, the caretaker-government-during-elections concept becomes something that neighbouring countries too might study for its relevance.

The main reason the caretaker government worked was that the Chief Advisor and other Advisors (as they are called) were competent individuals, former justices, bureaucrats and technocrats with unimpeachable references. As Chief Advisor (really the Prime Minister), former Chief Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman was scrupulously fair in running the government.

Justice Rahman's most important task, the *raison d'être* of the 13th amendment, was to ensure free and fair elections, and so he took extra special care in selecting the Election Commission team, headed by former bureaucrat Md Abu Hena. And because of the transparent neutrality of the "non-party" caretaker government, both the major political parties found it difficult to cry foul.

Will the caretaker government system work for any of the other regional countries? It is difficult to say. It has worked in Bangladesh this once, and might again, but the fortuitous circumstances that throw up



KANAK MANI DUTT

individuals who are both competent and neutral might not always come together. Indeed, even in Bangladesh, the expectation is that constitutionally mandated caretakers are a temporary measure and that the country should ultimately go back to the tried and tested system where the government in power also runs the elections.

The alternative, of course, is to have a consensual and depoliticised process for choosing the election commissioners. However, this is easier said than done, for even with the strongest of guarantees, the election commission cannot be immune from the pressures of a government that wants to have its way. Hence, in the extreme situation that Bangladesh was faced with a few months back, the experiment was in ensuring the neutrality of the very government that appoints the election commission.

The Bangladesh experiment with a custodian government, thus, begins to look more attractive for those countries where 1) party polarisation is so extreme that there is no chance that the losing party will willingly sit in opposition, and 2) where neutrality of the election commission—or the ability of the commission to enforce its neutrality—is in serious doubt.

The Thirteenth Amendment was the end result of two years of acrimony between Bangladesh's two powerful parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. As a senior member of the Awami League told the press, the caretaker concept was intended not only for transferring power, but for strengthening the democratic process as a whole. "With a view to developing a democratic culture, which was never practised in the country, we want to continue this process for several terms more," he said.

Indeed, it would seem wise to maintain the present innovation for some time to come. But the fact remains that the caretaker system brings a hiatus, albeit for a few weeks, in the normal running of

Job well done:  
Chief Adviser Rahman

government, of which holding elections is but one activity. This break in continuity cannot be dismissed lightly. Ultimately, as more sober politics begins to be practised, there has to be a return to the handed-down system of an elected party running a country till it is ready for the handover to whoever wins next.

And so, Bangladesh, too, would be well advised to move towards developing a political culture which does away with the very need to have a caretaker. In the meantime, the new Awami League government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed must immediately tackle the anomaly that exists in the Thirteenth Amendment—the provision which entrusts the Chief Advisor the task of conducting elections and the routine functions of government, while the control of the armed forces rests entirely with the President. This incongruous provision could be taken advantage of by a President bent on mischief. For, under the amendment, the President remains a party-appointed constitutional head of a non-party caretaker government.

Pakistan

## THE ROT AT THE TOP

Pakistan has the dubious distinction of being the world's second-most corrupt nation, after Nigeria, according to the findings of the Berlin-based non-governmental organisation Transparency International (TI). TI's findings are based on a survey of business executives of multinationals in 54 countries dealing with politicians and bureaucrats "who enrich themselves in transactions with companies".

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto promptly dismissed the survey as rubbish, but no one in Pakistan appeared particularly surprised at its findings. There seems to be a general consensus that although corruption exists everywhere in varying degrees, in Pakistan it is particularly widespread, Bhutto's disclaimers notwithstanding. The TI report may have dealt a blow



**When the common man sees powerful ministers spending lakhs of rupees, who can blame him for wanting a piece of the pie?**

to Pakistan's image abroad, and the situation certainly needs to be tackled internally and immediately.

Hard on the heels of the TI report came the news item in the London-based *The Sunday Express*, which

reported on a secret purchase of a 355-acre mansion at a cost of 2.5 million pounds in Surrey, England, by the prime minister and her spouse, Asif Ali Zardari. The government's denials and threats to sue the *Sunday Express* were weak, to say the least, particularly since the paper's management stood by its story and expressed readiness to face legal charges.

A gleeful opposition capitalised fully on 'Surreygate' as the affair has been dubbed, and brought a reference against Bhutto and Zardari, seeking their disqualification as National Assembly members on charges of concealing the purchase and not making known their source of income for it. This is the first time that such a scandal has hit the powers-that-be in Pakistan. Previous rumours of commissions, kick-backs, and misappropriation of public funds for private use have rarely been proved.

To be fair to politicians (and bureaucrats), at least some of these rumours that do the rounds may be exaggerated, or even unfounded. But the very fact that general perception takes them to be true is something which needs to be dealt with. The way to do so is not through a "corruption commission" as Opposition Leader Nawaz Sharif has demanded. That in any case is seen by most observers as the political move it basically is—an attempt to embarrass Ms Bhutto's government further, and hardly a solution.

Tackling the problem of corruption, or even of perceptions of corruption, is not to deny that it exists, but to tackle it by offering accountability and openness in the system. So far, newspaper investigations into embezzlements and other corruption activities have generally come to naught—no arrests, no convictions, no resignations—even when backed with documents and other proof.

Accountability must begin at the apex, with those in power initiating the process of laying themselves open to scrutiny. There must be laws that allow questioning and freedom of information, as frequently demanded by journalists and non-governmental organisations. And these laws must be enforced. If a customs officer suspended while under investigation for charges of corruption can be reinstated with a stroke of the pen by the country's top government functionaries on the request of a leading personality, how can there be any question of accountability?

The 'rot' starts at the 'top' and finds its way to the 'bottom'. When the common man sees powerful ministers spending lakhs of rupees on their children's weddings, or misappropriating public property for private use, or importing luxury cars duty free (with approval from the assemblies), who can blame him for wanting a piece of the pie? And when this is supplemented by the ever-increasing cost of living, and the unrealistic salaries paid to many government functionaries and low-ranking civil servants, many find it even easier to justify 'bending the rules' a little.

So you have low-and middle-class families paying a little extra to the metre-reader so that their electricity bill is manageable; an autorickshaw-walla refusing to run his vehicle on the metre and charging three times the official rate per kilometre; a traffic policeman looking the other way in the case of a

red-light breaker or a polluting vehicle, in return for a little something for 'chai-pani'.

The little people are the ones who sometimes get caught. The big fish, those who take kickbacks and commissions worth millions of rupees go scot-free, and are seen to go scot-free. Parliamentarians and ministers use their powers to increase their own perks and privileges, like importing duty-free luxury cars, at one third the cost of the local market and then selling them for lakhs of profit in the market.

The situation in Pakistan may seem hopeless, but there exists widespread disillusionment which is fertile ground for a pathbreaking judge or courageous politician to take the cue. In the meantime, if the South Asian chapters of Transparency International are serious about tackling corruption, they would do well to look at realistic innovations and advances within South Asia rather than fawn over idealised corruptionless societies of the West.

If it is true that the most corrupt are those at the top, then in India at least, an awakened judiciary is actively directing affairs against arrogant leaders who have cheated the public without a second thought. The pursuit of high-profile cases against the mighty of the land is a process that hopefully will transfer by osmosis to the neighbouring countries, including Pakistan. And speaking of underpaid civil servants who take to corruption, Bhutan shows the way with its tiny but well-paid bureaucracy which, at the very least, we are told, does not bother with petty corruption. △

## Nepal

# HANG THE ENVIRONMENTALIST

June was "hang the environmentalist" month in Nepal, with the chorus led by Water Resources Minister Pashupati SJB Rana, followed by an assortment of establishmentarian politicians and bureaucrats, and journalists who do not read. The focus of their ire was activists and intellectuals who were allegedly obstructing the construction of the Kali Gandaki A project.

Kali Gandaki A is a relatively modest but important power project in central Nepal which needs to be built to meet the country's growing energy needs. Interestingly, none of the activists was saying that Kali Gandaki A should not be built. Instead, what they were going on about was the lack of transparency in decision-making related to the project, and asking why its estimated cost had suddenly escalated in recent years.

Why should there be so much aggravation when questions are raised about the high cost? Rather than answer the question, the tack has been for politicians, bureaucrats and newsmen to lambast "environmentalists" for being anti-dam, anti-development and anti-national. They blame the "environmentalists" for

having "lost" Arun III for Nepal, and are fearful that the same thing will happen with Kali Gandaki A.

"Environmentalism" is a dirty word, according to this crowd, and there is no convincing them that it was not "environmental" arguments that killed Arun III, the project which was cancelled by the World Bank last year. Instead, it was the challenge by well-informed specialists who put forward cogent arguments on the need for in-country capability-building and the economic risks of an inappropriate project. Those who successfully opposed, and whom the World Bank heard before making its decision to back out, were not eco-fundamentalist dam-haters. The arguments against Arun III, however, do not apply in the case of Kali Gandaki A.

While the World Bank might have learnt its lesson from Arun III, the Nepali establishment certainly hasn't: witness the continuous atavistic baying all of the month of June against "environmentalists" when a) the activists have not called for cancellation of Kali Gandaki A, and b) when these activists have not uttered a word about the environmental unsuitability of Kali Gandaki.

A social scientist, some day, will make an enquiry into the current state of mental stasis in the Nepali government. He/she will learn that the country has been led up the garden path by powerful and arrogant politicians supported by weak bureaucrats and advised by the unlettered. They will use any argument as long as it is in their interest, which is to tender, tender, tender. Thus, they need not even understand all that the term "environmentalist" means to use it over and over as the bogeyman to fulfil their own ends.

While the government employs the services of clowns and comedians to counter the "environmentalists", it does not answer the one questions that the activists have: why has the cost of Kali Gandaki A skyrocketed? In November 1993, a panel of experts from the Asian Development Bank stated that the base cost of Kali Gandaki would be USD 280 million. The project estimate now, in mid-1996, is USD 450 million after so-called "design simplifications". The fear of cost-padding on the one hand and unnecessary donor conditionalities on the other are genuine, and the government is asked to respond.

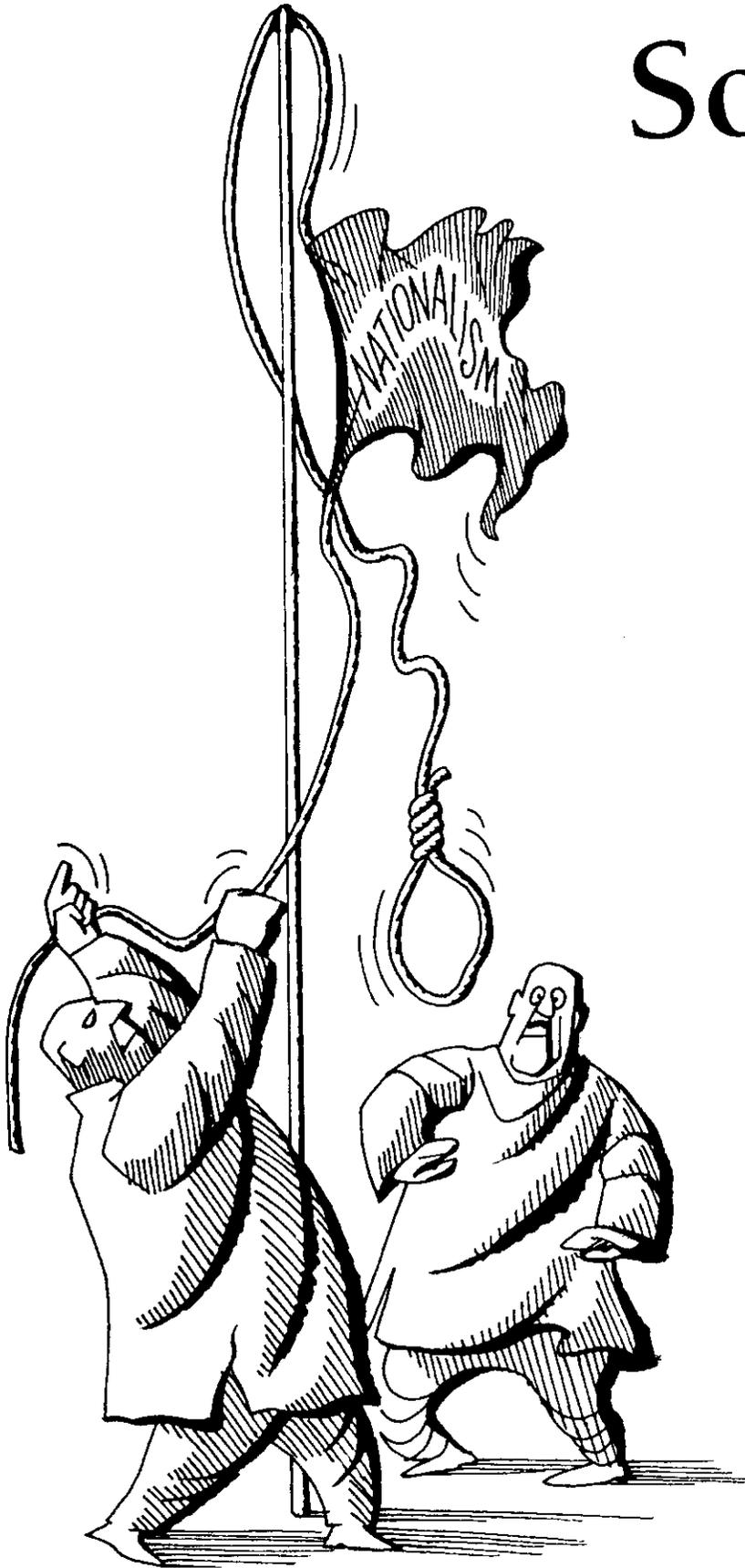
As Minister Rana goes about calling activists names, he gets carried away. All who oppose dams are part of a conspiracy of Western powers who do not want progress in the South, he says (*see sidebar*). These are arguments that are passe by a decade at least, and the minister does serious discredit to Nepalis when he implies that they are incapable of questioning projects on their own and that they are tools of the "foreign hand".

The campaign against "environmentalists", unfortunately, represents the state of Nepali politics today, directed as it is by the arrogance of power unrestrained by ideological underpinnings, an inability to envision development, and a lack of self-confidence. It is so much simpler to label all those who disagree with you as anti-development and anti-national. △

These purveyors of the pastoral dream have a hidden neocolonialist agenda. Having achieved the highest levels of development in the West they want to freeze underdeveloped countries in pastoral poverty. The West does not need any more large dams, has built enough. Europe exploited the world's environment to achieve its development. Now they want to prevent us from exploiting the natural resources in our own backyard, with even the best measures of environmental mitigation. So that we are condemned to perpetual underdevelopment. So that the difference between the advanced nations and backwards ones can be institutionalised. Let us oppose their neocolonialist agenda disguised as environmental idealism.

— Nepal's Minister of Water Resources, Pashupati SJB Rana speaking at a workshop on "Managing the Environmental Impact of Water Resources Development" in late June.

# A Post-Nationalist South Asia



*The South Asian Nation needs to re-invent itself before it is torn apart by internecine conflicts.*

*by Imtiaz Ahmed*

In South Asia, 'nation', 'nationalism' and 'nationhood' are all products of colonial history. There is no evidence of such concepts or ideas having any relevance to South Asia's history prior to the arrival of the Europeans.

Indeed, the very fact that the Europeans (first the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch, the French and the British) arrived in South Asia as 'nations' contributed to the diffusion of such ideas propagating a 'governing principle' for reproducing and replacing colonialism—the former by way of organising the power of the colonialists for the benefit of the European fatherland and the latter by way of uniting the indigenous population under the leadership of the local dominant forces.

Nationalism in South Asia soon became one of the major tactics for organising the majority of the people for reproducing state power. But paradoxically, due to its alien-ness and the mechanical way it was applied, it also became a source of tension and unrest for pluralist South Asia.

Nationalism is first and foremost a modern construction with precise political ends. An obvious question to ask is, what is modernity? What does it signify intellectually and politically? Modernity, in essence, is the wisdom

of the West. Having its roots in the European Enlightenment, modernity nurtures a linear vision of progress, including the idea that the West occupies a central position in the history of the world.

Accordingly, 'progress' is measured by the extent to which non-Western, non-modern societies have succeeded in replicating the experience of the modern 'Western' state politically, economically, technologically as well as militarily.

In South Asia modernity is a condition of colonial history. This fact itself separates South Asia's experience with modernity from the one that has been nurtured by the West. But there is more to it. In the nearly 200 years of British rule, the latter succeeded in transforming the societies of colonial South Asia to such an extent that a certain kind of stigma, otherwise referred to as the colonial legacy, continues to haunt the people of South Asia and there seems to be no respite from it in the immediate future.

This has come about not merely as a result of the physical presence of the British, although it was a necessary condition, but more importantly as a result of the organisation of 'colonialism proper' (a synonym for intellectual dependency of the South Asians on the West) by the British.

Such replication of modernity, however, had two critical impacts. On the one hand, it created a milieu where a South Asian mind could survive without being imaginative, for 'imagination' rested with the 'modern West' and South Asia needed only to borrow from it.

On the other hand, contempt for indigenous things became a national elitist trait as more and more 'development' of the nation state was modelled in the image of the modern 'Western' state. Put differently, modern South Asia was placed in a pitiful situation; it was made to reproduce itself not only unimaginatively but also with things that were alien to it.

This intrusion of modernity and the organisation of 'colonialism proper' has brought into South Asia a precise model of nation state-building, different from both the latter's pre-modern experiences and the modern 'Western' state. 'Model,' however, is understood here not in the sense of a miniature or a device representing the appearance of things but rather as a device organising and reproducing the tactics and strategies best suited to the task of nation state-building.

Let me explain this by reflecting on three general areas of nation state-building, namely, 'politics,' 'economics' and 'military,' which, in the light of their colonial and post-colonial experiences, are no longer in their puerile forms but represent specific 'models' of nationhood, development and security.

### **Model of Nationhood**

In all the South Asian states, nation-building is organised and measured in terms of the 'will of the majority,' the latter defined, however, by the dominant social forces. That is, nation states have tended to reproduce hegemony and the power of the ruling class by fulfilling the demands and aspirations of the majority people, who are often reconstructed by categories as diverse as 'ethnic,' 'religious,' 'race,' 'language,' or even a combination of some or all of them.

If this has resulted in the organisation and consolidation of a 'majority,' it has also created alienation of minority communities. The fragmentation of people into 'majority' and 'minority' communities has critical consequences both at home and regionally. Let me explain this further.

Under the subtle guidance of the hegemonic forces, Hinduism in India is increasingly being transformed from a multi-faceted religious system into a single unifying conformist religion, almost in the likes of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition. Such a transformation, however, obliterates the social reproduction of the caste system.

The 'outcaste' Dalits, who are often found in a disadvantageous situation vis-a-vis the caste-conscious Hindus, have already reacted to this modernist trend. But aside from this, there also exist inter-caste conflicts, particularly between Brahmins and the so-called 'backward castes'.

In a situation as complex and chaotic as this, the only way to ensure the modernist transformation of Hinduism and the organisation of a 'Hindu majority' is to play the communal card, mostly in the form of Muslim or Sikh or, as it is increasingly found, non-Hindu bashing. In this effort, all political parties, either for making the majority community the target of their electoral campaign or for remaining dependent on it for recruiting members, are involved. And that includes the Communists as well!

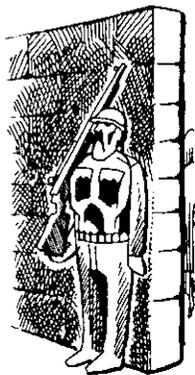
The power of the 'Hindu majority' in India is felt at several levels, from communal riots to the demolition of Babri Masjid at the hands of fanatics to the state-sponsored militarisation of Kashmiri society. Each of these levels, either singularly or collectively, tend to reproduce hegemony and the power of the majority community.

Such levels of violent conflicts are less the outcome of a state-sponsored conspiracy than the result of the very structure that has been organised to reproduce hegemony. But in this context, the reproduction of hegemony in India, in so far as it breeds fear and leads (for instance) to the underdevelopment of the minority Muslim community, creates conditions of mistrust and misgivings within the majority Muslim communities across the border, namely in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The reverse is equally true. That is, in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the consolidation of the 'Muslim majority' leads to the alienation of their respective minorities, often contributing to the deepening of animosity between them and India.

The nationalist consciousness in Sri Lanka also began to be constructed in a way, which, while favouring the 'Buddhist-Sinhala majority', put a burden on the latter to 'govern' and 'lead' the rest of the society, almost in the fashion of Kipling's "White Man's Burden". The alienation of the non-Buddhist-Sinhala, particularly that of the 'Hindu-Tamil minority', remained rooted in the nationalist discourse that unfolded in the island. The success of the Buddhist-Sinhala identity only undermined the interests of the Hindu-Tamils to the extent that between 1956 and 1970 there was a drop from 30 to 5 per cent in the proportion of Tamils in the Ceylon Administrative Service, from 50 to 5 in the clerical service, 60 to 10 in the professions (engineers, doctors, lecturers), 40 to 1 in the armed forces and 40 to 5 in the labour forces.

*Modernity, in essence, is the wisdom of the West and it nurtures a linear vision of progress in which the West occupies a central position in the history of the world.*





**National education tends to make the students 'nationalist', which has critical implications in the maintenance of inter-state animosity.**

It does not take much imagination to contemplate how the Hindu-Tamils would react. Indeed, the 'Tamil Tigers' arose out of a nationalist discourse well-disposed towards the 'Buddhist-Sinhala majority', one which has been organised, nurtured and meticulously followed in post-independence Sri Lanka. Not long after such developments, the (Sri Lankan) Hindu-Tamils impressed their plight upon the 'Hindu majority' of India, a factor that soon contributed to the state of misgiving and suspicion between India and Sri Lanka.

The case is no different for other nation states of South Asia. Today, 'Muslim Pakistan,' 'Hindu India,' 'Buddhist Sri Lanka,' 'Muslim Bangladesh,' 'Hindu Nepal,' all suggest the simultaneous organisation of the 'majority community' and the 'nation state,' albeit in each case in the manner defined by the dominant social forces.

Interestingly, both 'regimented' and 'democratic' regimes play identical roles in this regard, both catering to the hopes and aspirations of the majority community; in the case of the former, such catering is more often deliberate and crude compared to democratic regimes.

In fact, in democratic regimes, the organisation of majoritarianism is more related to electoral politics, where parties are forced to woo the majority section of the people to win elections. In a socially fragmented society, often the party or candidate would settle for the easiest way—that is, heat up communal or religious feelings to organise the nation and the nationalities.

In this context, Nepal's case is an interesting one, where the transition to democracy is equally matched by a transition from a predominantly 'Hindu Kingdom' to a (democratic) state which is increasingly championing conformist or syndicated Hinduism to reconstruct the majority community.

**Model of Development**

But lest one understands the activities taking place in the political domain as something bordering on a series of conspiracies under the leadership of the dominant forces, it is important to refer to the 'developmentality' of the state, i.e., a mentality where 'development' is primarily geared towards the needs and aspirations of the 'majority' of the people.

The critical thing to reflect upon is the task of making the bourgeois 'national.' While lots of emphasis has been given to the bourgeois side of the term 'national bourgeoisie,' little attention has been given to the other half. An example or two will make this clear.

It is common to say that in India the economy is developing under the leadership of the 'national bourgeoisie,' while in Nepal or Bangladesh it is developing under the leadership of the 'rising national bourgeoisie,' the latter having strong imprints of compradorism and pettiness. But how did the members of the bourgeoisie come into being? What sort of schooling did they have? What constructed their minds? From where do they get their fresh recruits?

Indeed, the organisation of the national bourgeoisie requires certain specific tactics, which, at times, include elements as diverse as intellectual intervention and developmental protectionism.

Education, or more precisely, national education, is vitally important. In all South Asian nation states educa-

tion is delivered in a way which, while reproducing the model of development suited to the hegemonic forces, tends to make the school-goers and, later on, the learned few 'nationalist'. With this is an implied bias towards the majority community which has critical implications in the maintenance of inter-state animosity.

Moreover, the governments of all South Asian nation states are involved not merely in the development of the public school system but also in organising the content of knowledge. Such governmentalisation of knowledge, however, not only limits competition and creativity, which otherwise could be found in autonomous and independent schooling, but also caters to the populism of the majority community bent on organising the developmentality of the state.

This situation undermines the quality of education on the one hand, and invites dissent from the minority communities on the other. It creates conditions for civil and inter-state conflicts (between majority and minority communities, and between the different nation states of the region), and retards the generation of innovative ideas towards resolving such conflicts.

It is not difficult to see the intellectual parameters in which the public at large and the national bourgeoisie in particular are brought up in South Asia. Once the developmentality of the state takes shape, it quickly begins to influence the entire range of activities, including the much-respected phenomenon of developmental protectionism.

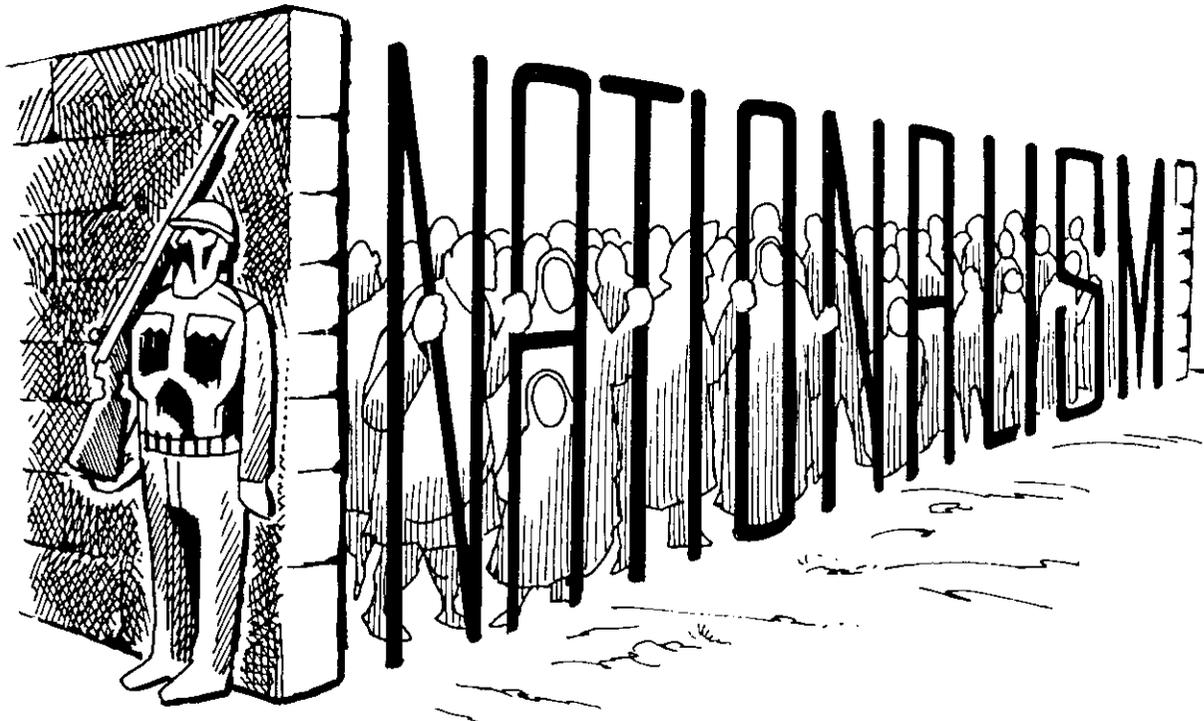
In the case of the Farakka Barrage and Kaptai Dams, for example, the citizens of both India and Bangladesh, when tutored about the merits of their respective dams, find themselves being fed with strong scientific and technological reasoning, including the reasoning of progress and modern development. But such reasoning ends at their respective borders, for both governments take a moral position, and this time thoroughly devoid of any scientific and technological reasoning, when referring to the consequences brought about by the dam of the other.

Bangladeshis, forced to live with an alarmingly low level of water in the rivers during winter seasons, are time and again reminded of the ill-effects of Farakka, while the Indians, forced to share the burden of settling more than 50,000 Chakma refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, blame Kaptai for the refugee flow. Neither, however, dares blame the development of dams within their own borders!

Indeed, we have been brought up in a way to believe that unless our 'national interest', 'national waterways', 'national market', 'national development', etc, are protected by the states, not only will there be no development of the country but the leadership (or more precisely, the bourgeoisie), in whom the onerous task of development has been entrusted, will also cease to be national. In the process of glorifying the 'nation', we seem to have trivialised the people both within and outside our borders!

**Model of Security**

There is an intrinsic relationship between the development of the modern state and the development of modern security forces. This is true not only with respect to the security forces as an institution but, importantly, with



regard to the question of organising and defining the security problems of the country.

In fact, not only do the security forces, in the back-drop of the organisation of the nation state, become 'manned' by the members of the majority community (much above their percentage in the country's population) but, interestingly, the majority community itself becomes the 'purpose' for the organisation and development of the security forces.

Consequently, national security becomes a thing of the majority, predisposed towards the task of organising and reproducing the latter's hegemony. In the case of South Asian nation states, this has led to the construction of hostile structures only to reproduce inter-state animosity between the countries.

In the backdrop of the communalisation of the modern state, the development of the Indian security forces is viewed in Bangladesh in communal terms. A sizeable section of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia views the might of the Indian military, including the 1974 nuclear explosion at Pokharan, as something representing the might of the majority Hindu community.

It is from this perspective that one must understand that behind Bangladesh's endorsement of Pakistan's South Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone and Nepal's now-defunct Peace Zone Proposal lies its tacit approval for a 'balance of nuclear terror' in South Asia, one which has been made possible by nothing other than the alleged development of Pakistan's 'Islamic bomb'.

Given the balance (or rather the imbalance) of forces between India and Bangladesh, the latter's Indophobia is understandable. What is less understandable is India's concern with the organisation of Bangladesh's national security; unless, of course, it is viewed from a majoritarian perspective. True to its modernity, Bangladesh's security forces, like those of India, have become a thing of the majority. This is best reflected, albeit to different degrees, in the alienation of the minority communities, both Hindus and the hill people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

While the insurgency in the CHT, as one Indian scholar maintains, "is being actively supported by New Delhi, which sees it as an opportunity to control its impoverished neighbour," it is less important, outside the State of Tripura, in reproducing hegemony. Indeed, far more important in this task is the manner in which the dismal condition of the Hindu minority in modern Bangladesh is interpreted and organized in 'Hindu majority' India. It is no surprise, therefore, that the issue of migration from Bangladesh gets top priority in India, including (alas, amongst many serious litterateurs and their works) Taslima Nasreen and her *Lajja*.

One important fact that needs to be stressed is that both Hindus and Muslims, albeit more 'poor Muslims', have migrated from Bangladesh to India to overcome economic and environmental hazards. We need not go into the relationship between the development of such hazards and the development of the state, which is not very difficult to discern. What is interesting is that the activities surrounding migration have become more of a security issue, with security forces on both sides of the border playing a determining role. It is otherwise not difficult to see that India's 'push back' policy or, inversely, Bangladesh's 'push in' problem, while strengthening the security forces, help reproduce hegemony and the power of the majority communities in both India and Bangladesh. In the meantime, the people suffer....

#### **What is to be done?**

The answer begs both theoretical and practical interventions. If the organisation of the nation state itself is the source of alienation and suffering, it is futile to keep strengthening the nation state to try to contain such alienation and suffering.

In fact, what is required is not only a critical appreciation of the state of things but more importantly, the imagination and the will to 'rethink' and transform the state of things. It is very difficult to outline a precise plan, particularly relating to the practical side of the 'rethink-

*In the process of glorifying the nation, we seem to have trivialised the people*

**If the nation state itself is the source of alienation and suffering, it is futile to keep strengthening the nation state**

ing' and the transformation that is to be accepted from it.

Let us look at just three areas where innovative intervention is required to transform the current state of things:

**1. Reinventing Security.** The triadic representation of security forces (i.e., army, navy and airforce, with the nuclear option for some) has outlived its utility even from a purely strategic perspective (unless, of course, one assumes that we are still living in the age of territorial expansion and the colonisation of people). In fact, in the case of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the air force can safely be dismantled and the regular army replaced by (three-year service) voluntary armed forces.

As for India and Pakistan, given their current state of arms buildup, a more realistic approach would be to decentralise the national army and provide avenues for non-offensive defence to take over. But this would require a new mode of thinking in defence strategy, something that is now a taboo to military personnel and 'well-wishers' of the modern armies of South Asia.

The urgency for reinventing security, however, lies elsewhere. If anything is going to bring about reinvention, it is paradoxically the increased use of security forces in civil conflicts in South Asia. This is because the more security forces become essential to the task of conflict resolution, the more the art of government becomes paralysed, leading to further militarisation.

Indeed, the art of government, if it is to remain civil and innovative, requires freedom. It cannot spread and develop in an environment of regimentation. It is, therefore, no surprise that in the midst of an increased use of the security forces, the governments of all South Asian states time and again fail to nurture a lasting solution to their respective civil conflicts.

If civil unrest is to be contained, the much-abused notion of 'national security' needs to be replaced with a more sober and practical notion of societal security. With the organisation of the latter, much of the current thinking on security, including the arsenals that it had helped to reproduce, will simply become redundant.

**2. Reinventing Development.** In light of the consequences of (mal)development, it is quite clear that the politically-constructed modern majoritarian state has lost its will to support and nurture the material aspirations not only of the minority communities, but also of a sizeable section of the majority community. In this context, it is high time for the public and the politicians alike to rethink development. Education is one area to start with.

The modernist mind has become uncooperative and conflictual, when what we need is an education that can produce 'cooperative minds' in large numbers. Set to reproduce the power of nations and nationalities, modern education tends to reproduce violence and conflicts, even considers them acceptable, so long as they are directed against alien cultures, nations or countries. Much of the problem, apart from illiteracy, lies with the kind of education that we have been providing. The children of South Asia are literally brought up as 'nationalists,' tutored to fall in love only with the nation that they have been born in. Making people literate is, of course, the first step. But literacy alone will not guarantee the produc-

tion of 'cooperative minds'. Modern but fragmented Sri Lanka, with a high literacy rate, is a good example. What we need is a thorough and an innovative remaking of our education, at both national and regional levels.

Nationally, the organisation and reproduction of the 'national curriculum' must be abandoned and in its place a curriculum of the people must be designed to perform the newer task of cooperation. At the regional level, there must be cooperation among issue-oriented faculties throughout the region to create 'South Asian' minds, through something like a "South Asian University". If such a university, along with the changes in the curriculum nationally, could be introduced and sustained, it would go a long way in freeing our minds from the conflict-prone nationalist and communalist discourses. Development will then cease to be 'national' and 'communal,' instead it would be constructed on newer and friendly grounds, with people as its sole concern. Its students would look into the business of organising cooperation in diverse fields, not from the standpoint of nations and states but from the standpoint of people.

**3. Reinventing the State.** The urge to identify ourselves in national terms, including the practices of modern majoritarianism, has created havoc. Given our pluralism, one which is far different from the Western experience, the organisation of such national states has led to the alienation and suppression of minority communities. They have become pariahs in their own states. This has to be rectified, not merely for sake of idealism, but for the interest of the country and the region. Put differently, the very rationality of the state must be 'rethought.'

There ought to be 'reasons' in life, but it is difficult to understand why such 'reasons' must be borrowed ones, that too mostly from a bygone period of the West. This is not to suggest that we replicate what is fast turning out to be a post-modernist era (albeit a 'pseudo' one) in the experience of the West, particularly of Europe, with the European Union as its flag-bearer.

In fact, one can have serious reservations about some of the developments now taking place in Europe, particularly on immigration and the treatment of aliens. Rather, what would be welcome is a serious, innovative and indigenous effort in developing a rationale for the state that is responsible to all 'living' and 'would-be living' things around, devoid of the current practices of both inclusiveness and exclusiveness.

This is no easy task, but unless we have tried, and tried well, we cannot just brush it aside simply as another dream in the quest for free souls and a living blessed with tranquility in a post-nationalist South Asia!

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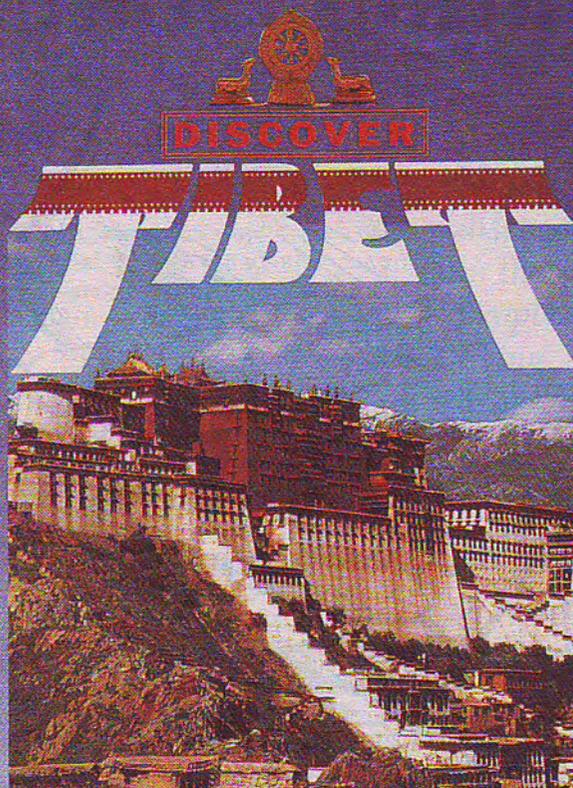
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# Nation, State and Self-Hatred



*South Asia lifted the idea of nation state from borrowed books. There is, however, another way of entering the twenty-first century.*

*by Ashis Nandy*

*The West Asian Muslims are the authentic prototypical Muslims, according to European scholars and their South Asian disciples*

When South Asia started its independent journey as a collection of states in 1947, it was in one sense a continuation of the project South Asians had given themselves towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The project was the modernisation of the region, and it had three clear components. We wanted to build nation states the way those who then ruled South Asia had already done in Europe; we wanted 'development', even though the term had not yet come into vogue; and we had to inculcate in our generally "superstitious", "change-resisting" people an appreciation of the principles of scientific and technological rationality.

All three of these responsibilities were formally vested in the growing states of the newly decolonised countries. Thus, the new South Asian states had to ensure not only national security, which states had been doing for centuries, but also carry the hopes and ambitions of millions.

Fifty years after independence, it is obvious that there was something wrong in the way South Asia imported the concept of state, as if it

were a talisman. We picked it up not from life but from books. As a result, our idea of the nation state was more purist than that of colonial societies on which it was modelled. We thought we could get what we needed from Anglo-Saxon universities like Oxford or Cambridge, so we did not bother with the particulars of state-formation and nation-building in the Continent.

The South Asian elite was also oblivious of the fact that state-formation and nation-building usually had quasi-criminal antecedents. Everywhere, nation states were built on human suffering and disenfranchisement of large sections of the population. This was true even in England. If we had read between the lines of the formal textbooks of history and politics, we would have found many instances—from the Enclosure Movement to the denial of franchise to women—which showed that the emergence of open society in the West did not come with the state's benediction, or from constitutional changes introduced by an enlightened elite, or from texts. They came through *political processes* which the state did not control.

Not learning from the experience of the West, South Asia has merely telescoped the Western model into its own societies. A kind of self-hatred is involved in the exercise of remodelling ourselves according to someone else's history. That is the tragedy of virtually every society in this part of Asia.

## **A Kind of Self-Hatred**

Nothing shows the hazards of this dependence on texts better than the surge of ethnic chauvinism in South Asia. In Sri Lanka, for instance, the august principles of Sinhala chauvinism, the root cause of today's violence, were worked out, among others, by Dhammapala. He devised the model of a monocultural Sinhala nation and a monolithic, dominant Sinhala culture the same way that V.D. Savarkar developed the principles of Hindutva sitting in Nagpur. The only difference is that Dhammapala sat at Calcutta in his formative years and was influenced by Vivekananda's writings on Hinduism. I do not hold Vivekananda responsible for the bloodshed today in Sri Lanka, but Dhammapala might have chosen to see in Sri Lanka a

different kind of community having a different concept of public life and a different form of tolerance. He did not. Having given himself the task of improving the Sinhala, Dhammapala managed to create posthumously two antagonistic nationalities in his country, the Sinhala and the Tamil.

The tragedy of Sri Lanka is the tragedy of every society in this part of the world. Thus, since the end of the nineteenth century, most major Muslim reformers, reportedly operating on the basis of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, have found the Muslims of South Asia and Southeast Asia deficient. They have seen the Indonesian Muslims, who form the largest Muslim country in the world, as peripheral Muslims; Indian Muslims, the world's second largest Muslim community, as no better; and, of course, found the fish-eating Bangladeshi Muslims, the world's third largest Muslim community, quite obnoxious.

By this reckoning at least 80 percent of the world's Muslims have been rendered peripheral by nineteenth-century South Asian Islamic reformers and scholars influenced by European specialists on Islam. According to these European scholars and their disciples in South Asia, the West Asian Muslims are the authentic prototypical Muslims and other Muslims have to try to approximate them.

### The Politics of Knowledge

The politics of knowledge in South Asia must begin with the awareness that knowledge resides not only in us, or with our patrons or mentors in the famous universities of the world. Knowledge also originates, exists and is waiting to be discovered in the people living around us. I, for one, was pushed into this awareness not by studies of systems of knowledge, but by studies of politics and cultures of politics.

Year ago, some of us, when told of the structural and functional prerequisites of democracy and why democracy could not survive in countries where education, economic growth, urbanisation and modernisation were low, wanted to find out why it was, then, that democracy had survived in India. We found that the so-called illiterate, rural, poor Indians had a larger stake in the democratic system because they wanted to

change their fate through the use of political power. Often, their rates of political participation were higher and they granted greater legitimacy to their political system than the electorate in the "advanced" democracies.

We began to suspect that the argument about structural prerequisites, whether it strengthened democracy or not, were meant to endorse the regimes of those Southern societies which had suspended democratic rights but were part of the Western bulwark against the "red menace". The whole of Latin America was at that time full of tin-pot dictators. South Korea, Taiwan and Indonesia also had autocratic regimes. Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines used the argument to best advantage. He was, he said, a democrat at heart, but the Filipinos were not yet fit for democracy. For the short run, therefore, said Marcos, he had to act like a strict school master.

Engaging formulations of this argument have been ventured by everyone from General Suharto to Mahathir Mohammad. Mahathir still repeats it, with the only difference that he now adds that, in Islam, the concept of democracy is different.

It is while defying this argument that we have been pushed towards other kinds of ideas that would legitimise culturally-rooted open societies. Creation of such societies would involve a rediscovery of our other cultural selves, which we have under-valued. For their part, South Asians are challenged to rediscover themselves and come to terms with their multicultural identity.

### Simultaneous Identities

Through the voluminous study of the Indian Anthropological Survey on the peoples of India which began to be published in 1994, we find that there are some six hundred communities in India which still cannot be identified with any single religion. They are simultaneously Hindu and Muslim, Hindu and Sikh, Sikh and Christian, Sikh and Muslim, and so on. But in cases like that of the Meos, the largest Muslim community around Delhi, which traces its ancestry from the *Mahabharata*, discrimination and communal riots have increasingly threatened this bicultural identity. To the Meos, this identity now tends to be a liability, exactly as

it is an embarrassment to the Westernised Indian.

I have gradually come to suspect that every person in South Asia has more than one identity. There is perhaps no other part in the world where people live with such immense variety--with about 2000 languages, 20,000 castes and subcastes, more than 250 tribes, and scores of regional, ecological and other cultural differences. Sometimes, many of these difference are to be found within a person.

The South Asians know how to live with this diversity, though they may have forgotten some of these skills in recent years, having chosen to wear new ideological blinkers that blind them to all traditional community-based, culturally-transmitted skills. The idea of nation state we have imported has played an important role in this self-inflicted blindness, for the nation states fears diversity.

The Japanese are not embarrassed when their census reports that a majority of Japanese are Shinto and, also, that a majority of them are Buddhist. But to modern South Asians, such facts are an embarrassment. They would like to see someone either as a Hindu or as a Muslim, because that is the way of European scholarship, and we look at ourselves through its prism.

The end result was that the politicians started exploiting the potential of having clear-cut self-definitions. Using such definitions to divide the populace, they are herding our societies up dangerous paths. However, the politicians make use of these new possibilities only because modern-day South Asian intellectuals and the middle classes have allowed them a free run in the area of culture. We have stood as silent witnesses to the destruction of our heritage. We could have used this heritage differently and more creatively, but we have not.

The intellectual challenge in South Asia, therefore, is to rediscover the South Asian self. For that, we need to first transcend our own self-hatred and self-doubt.

*A. Nandy is with the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi.*

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# A State and Its Death Sentences

*Killer words have a place in the lexicon of states.  
Their use can devastate societies.*

by Zia Mian

Nations and states are talked into existence, and kept alive by words. Listening to such words suggests that while states and nations can speak different languages, the structure of the languages they speak is basically the same. And, as Noam Chomsky has suggested for the more mundane, day-to-day languages of people, state languages may also have a grammar that is pre-wired.

The basic "deep structures" of state languages include national identity, the interests of the state, development and security. From the United States of America to Niger (ranked last in the UNDP Human Development Index), these categories are part of every state's language. But unlike human language, every state's grammar has a space

for killer-words. These are words that allow murder to be thought and committed.

There are state killer-words that are backed by the power of the state: a declaration of war which leads to the deaths of thousands, if not millions, or a judge passing a verdict of guilty and condemning a person to death. What marks such words is that only particular people can speak them, and that, too, only after a process of judgement. These state killer-words are part of the vocabulary of a system of official power. Without the legitimacy that the system offers, they are just words.

There are also ideological killer-words, which form part of a state's political process, but are not legal. For instance, for a person to be called a communist was a

certain way of getting killed in Chile, Guatemala, Iran or Indonesia.

Then there are words that can kill by unleashing the mob. Almost anyone can use these words and produce a result. The legitimacy, and thus effectiveness, of these words lies not in law but in history and culture. But make no mistake, the state is here too, as the carrier and arbiter, of collective history and culture. Where the state picks up these words and transforms them into ideology, or into law, there is genocide. Where it is silent, it allows other voices to speak these words.

In Pakistan, these killer-words are being used with ever greater abandon. They started as a whisper and have become a chorus. In the process, other voices are being drowned out.

### State-words

The Pakistani state has long been speaking murderous words, turning again and again to violence to solve political problems. East Pakistan was just the first speech. One description of what the Pakistani armed forces did will suffice: "The Bengali working class and intelligentsia were the first major target. The army shelled Dhaka University and wiped out all the students and lecturers it could find; soldiers invaded the women's hostel, raping and killing the inmates. Artillery units flattened working-class areas, and trade-union and newspaper offices were burnt to the ground. Tens of thousands were killed in the first few days."

As it is with such things, as time passes the speaker remembers little of the details of what was actually said, and constructs memories of what they think should have been said. The massacres in East Pakistan have become "Indian dismemberment of Pakistan". Similar processes are at work in the wake of the state's recourse to violence in Baluchistan in the mid 1970s, Sindh in the early 1980s, and then Karachi.

These passionate orations have been accompanied by the more restrained, some would say civilised, conversations that take place in the courts. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), from 1993 to 1995, 361 people were sentenced to death. There are now 2416 people awaiting execution in Pakistani jails.

The rate at which people will be tried and condemned to death by the courts is certain to increase, as the death penalty has been extended to more and more crimes. There are already 2432 Ahmadis who have been charged with "religious offences" and of these, more than 500 are blasphemy cases. The punishment for blasphemy is death. With the death penalty now imposed for possessing illegal weapons and a confession made to a senior police officer being admitted as evidence in a trial, the basis is being laid for a glut of convictions and executions.

These, however, are the official functions where death is discussed. War and the dispensing of justice are both instances where the state has special power because it has special responsibilities. But those who have heard, and spoken, killer words cannot forget the sounds easily. They begin to rehearse the words to themselves, quietly enjoying the way they roll off the tongue.

One such murderous phrase is "police encounter". It has become commonplace and describes that remarkable situation where people are arrested by the police and

despite eyewitness evidence that they were unarmed and did not resist, they turn up dead. HRCP recorded 180 such extra-judicial killings in Punjab last year and said there were "several hundred" such killings in Karachi.

Another is "death in custody". In Karachi, there were 200 deaths in custody, attributed by HRCP to torture. This should come as no surprise. There is no investigation to speak of, no policeman is arrested, none tried, none convicted.

### Ideological-words

While war and the application of justice are 'lawful' speech situations sanctioned by the constitution and the law, there are other situations in which lawfulness does not enter, but killer words can be spoken nonetheless. These are situations that concern the state and especially its security. These situations arise when someone disagrees with the state.

Earlier this year, there was a seminar organised by the Islamabad branch of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy on what Pakistan's response should be to India's Prithvi missile. It had prominent speakers: there was Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy, Dr A.H. Nayyar (both physicists at Islamabad's prestigious Quaid-i-Azam University) and Dr Inayatullah (a political scientist), and the Chief Guest was Air Marshal (retired) Asghar Khan (the former head of a "liberal" political party).

The speakers outlined the implications of Prithvi, and the dangerous consequences of Pakistan getting into a missile race with India. The stress was on the simple fact that arms racing of any kind, in nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles or conventional weapons, would exact a much higher price from Pakistan than India. This was because

*There are now 2416 people awaiting execution in Pakistani jails*



India has both a much larger economy which allows it to easily afford higher spending on weapons than Pakistan, and a far more developed scientific and technological base from which it starts in any such race. Like the Soviet Union, Pakistan would end up destroying itself from the consequences of diverting ever-more of its precious resources (economic, scientific and human) to the desperate search for military security.

The speakers called for a radical rethink of what kind of security Pakistan actually needed and how to try to create the conditions which would allow such security to be attained. These conditions had to start with a realisation that peace with India was not only beneficial but necessary for Pakistan, and that the military burden was fast becoming unbearable and had to be reduced before the country was crippled for an entire generation.

The headlines the next day told a different story: "People's Forum Meeting: Ridiculous Speeches Poking Fun at Islam, Abusing Armed Forces". Another claimed: "No Difference Between Islam and Hinduism; Armed Forces are Eating Away the Country Like Moths". From the scandal sheets like *Al-Akbar*, *Markaz*, *Khabrain*, *Pakistan*, and *Asas*, to the large circulation, supposedly quality, Urdu language papers like *Jang* (which covered the story under the headline "Objectionable Speeches at the Pakistan People's Forum"), there was unanimity that something awful had happened at the seminar.

But it was in the follow-up to these reports that this act of mischief created space for the rats to come out of the gutter. On 12 February, *Jang* carried a news story with the headline: "Prime Minister has ordered an enquiry into speeches against Pakistan and Islam. Organisers of non-governmental dialogues between India and Pakistan are not patriots. Cases should be instituted against them."



The story was a series of comments by politicians baying for the blood of the participants. The same story was carried by *Asas*. The headline was "Prime Minister has ordered an enquiry into the slander against armed forces. This is treason against the country." There were some of the same rent-a-quote politicians who had had their say in *Jang*, and a few more.

Newspapers seemed to compete for outrageous comments from politicians. *Nawai-Waqt* was not one to be left out. It carried a press release from Hafiz Idrees, a member of the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, in which he talked of "traitors and irreligious Indian agents" and demanded that "those who made fun of the ideology of Pakistan and the sacred duty of jihad should be tried for treason."

There were those who were not content with reporting the preparations for the kill. They wanted a piece of the meat. On the same day as it carried the news quoting the politicians, *Jang* carried an editorial repeating the story from the day before, and this time the tone was even more sinister: "...speakers engaged in the worst slander against Islam, Pakistan and the armed forces and mocked jihad, faith and piety." The comment followed: "We don't say that a case of treason be instituted and they be immediately arrested, but our standpoint is that the government is bound by law to take action against those who spread these kinds of views."

There were others, but there is little to be gained by labouring the point. What was happening was an act of controlling free speech. What states choose to call "consensus" on national security, was being challenged by a discordant note and state-speak requires silence on everyone else's part.

#### Mob-words

Another situation in which murderous words are spoken is when the "common-sense" of a nation is challenged. This sense, as Antonio Gramsci pointed out, is not eternal. It is affected in large measure (if not totally determined) by the "sense" of the ruling class at any given time. There is no law, not even ideology, at stake. Traditions and customs are brought into play. It becomes a question of values.

A little over two months ago, the news first broke that the government had decided to sell several hundred acres of land in Quaid-i-Azam University campus to its staff to allow them to build houses. The matter became highly charged as two faculty members, Professor Pervez Hoodbhoy and Dr A.H. Nayyar, objected to the sale of public property for private gain and went public.

There were both supporters and opponents of the proposed housing scheme, and it became a public issue attracting interventions from well-known people and institutions in the leading newspapers and journals in the country.

Confronted by an eloquent, determined and clearly moral position, perhaps sensing that public opinion was starting to turn against them, the supporters of the QAU Housing Scheme, as it came to be called, began to attack the integrity of those who stood in their way. It was the way in which this was done that exposes the connection between state and custom.

On the walls of the University, posters claiming to be from the "members of the QAU Staff Housing Scheme"

**State-speak  
requires  
silence on  
everyone  
else's part**

started to demonise the two faculty members who dissented. It was no longer a disagreement about a bit of land, and the balance that needs to be maintained between public property and private profit, or the needs of future generations as compared to satisfying the desires of the present. Amid the most amazing accusations—of 25-year-old conspiracies hatched in the United States, secret meetings in far-off places with Indians and Israelis, and dubious bank accounts—the dissenters were labelled "anti-patriotic", "Ahmadis" and "anti-Islamic".

Among all these words there is one that is lethal beyond a doubt. To call someone an Ahmadi in Pakistan is no simple act of religious identification, as everyone knows. The violence that is done to the Ahmadi community, legitimised by the profoundly unjust law that marks them out from other citizens, is common knowledge. 'Ahmadi' is a killer word.

What is particularly significant is that everyone at QAU knows that in October 1994, Dr. Nasim Babar, a faculty member of QAU who lived on campus, was killed in his own home by a masked intruder. Dr. Babar was an Ahmadi and, not surprisingly, no one was arrested for his killing. By connecting dissent with the QAU Housing Scheme to the Ahmadi issue, it is clear what signals are being sent. There is no ambiguity. One poster ends, ominously: "Has our university become a refuge for evil-doers? All of us have to answer."

While the 'Ahmadi' word stirs the professional zealots, it is not guaranteed to bring out the mob. That now requires an accusation of blasphemy. Just how frightful this can be was witnessed last year with the case of Salamat, Rehmat and Mansoor Masih, three

Christian citizens who were accused of blasphemy. One was killed and another wounded outside the court while under trial.

The survivors, after being found innocent, still had to flee the country. Even more horrific was the case of Hafiz Farouq in Gujranwala, dragged around the streets and then set on fire after someone alleged he had committed an act of desecration of the Koran. The allegation was sufficient and no one even remembers who first made it.

**Value-words**

As the French writer Albert Camus once observed, bloodshed is like alcohol, it eventually intoxicates like the headiest of wines. Pakistan has been drinking deep of this deadly vintage for years and now seems to have reached that state of drunkenness where judgement is lost, speech becomes passionate and then starts to become blurred. Things are said, and forgotten by the next morning. There is only a hangover, and some embarrassment, as reminder.

At risk from this are that handful of people who are trying to do what sincere intellectuals are supposed to do. They are raising their voice, the voice of intellectual conscience. They are unwilling to accept simplistic formulas masquerading as truth, and reject the comforts of agreeing with whatever the government of the day, or social convention, may want to be true. They refuse to speak the language of the state.

*Those who have spoken killer words begin to rehearse, quietly enjoying the way they roll off the tongue*



Z. Mian is a research fellow at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad.

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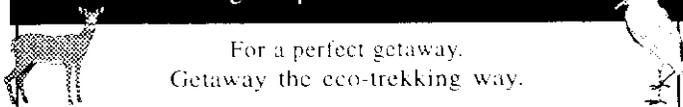
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*Not every project that the World Bank proposes to the countries of South Asia is in their interest. So how do you go about challenging the Bank?*

## Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the World Bank (in South Asia)

*by Pratap Chatterjee*

Joe Wood is probably the most powerful man in South Asia although hardly a man, woman or child in the hundreds of thousands of villages and cities in the Subcontinent would be able to tell you what he does or where he works. Yet, from his office, Mr Wood has a major say in the budgets of every one of the seven South Asian countries. In 1995 alone, he presided over USD 3 billion in projects across the Subcontinent, ranging from health care to mega-dams. In the 52 years of its existence, his institution has loaned over USD 59 billion to projects to South Asia, from high-

ways in the Himalaya to fisheries in Indian Ocean atolls.

Mr Wood (picture above) is Vice President of the World Bank and Director of its South Asia Regional Office.

A US citizen who went to school at Yale, the University of Munich and Oxford, Mr Wood does not work in Karachi, Dhaka or New Delhi. Neither does his right-hand man, Heinz Vergin, a German who studied in Berlin, the London School of Economics and the University of Minnesota, and who oversees all the Bank projects work in Bhutan, India and Nepal.

For the past 28 years, Mr Wood has reported for work to two buildings that lie a scant four blocks from the White House. Wood works at 701 Nineteenth Street and his assistant, Mr Vergin, on the third floor of 1776 G street—both of which are part of a complex of buildings in Washington DC that house the headquarters of the World Bank.

Ten Nepali activists had a unique opportunity to do battle with Mr Wood in late June 1994 when they came to this city to question a proposed World Bank loan for a billion dollar dam on the Arun River in east

Nepal. Dressed uncomfortably in suits and ties, the activists sat down to argue with his staff about the high cost of the project (more than the annual budget of the kingdom) as Mr Wood moderated the discussion.

Mr Wood's position was clear. "We are not in the business of negotiating this (project) with interested parties. Our obligation is to consult to try and improve the quality," he told those gathered in the room. That was not entirely correct, of course, for the World Bank had for long appointed itself as the "lead agency" for developing Nepal's power sector, making plans and directing affairs to the extent of choosing feasible projects, demanding fiscal discipline, and raising electricity tariffs.

And so, a year later, the Nepali activists might well have chuckled over Mr Wood's discomfiture as his new boss James Wolfensohn, President of the Bank, overrode his suggestions and cancelled plans to pay for the dam. Within Nepal, the Arun cancellation was a debacle for the Bank, and today it finds itself in the periphery of power sector discussions. However, the potential impact goes far beyond Nepal's borders, for the success of the anti-Arun activists proved to activists all over that it was possible for local groups armed with information and commitment, to challenge the Bank and force its hand.

Earlier, activists who opposed the mammoth three-billion dollar Sardar Sarovar Project over the Narmada river in India had also been successful in forcing the bank to review its impact and cancel financial support.

Because of its ability to influence the course of societies, before Narmada and Arun III, there was a belief that it was impossible to question what the Bank did. The cancelling of support for the two projects showed the Bank's inability to defend schemes of which it had been a vehement supporter. It turned out that the moment knowledgeable activists put on the heat, the Bank's defences collapsed. From the two instances, activists have got an idea that the Bank, after all, is not invincible. It can be right, but it can also be wrong, in which case it should be brought to task.

Unfortunately, the lessons from the two episodes are not being learnt by the governments of South Asia. The Indian government has decided to go through with the Narmada project despite the withdrawal of support by the Bank, blaming activists for blocking 'development' and 'progress'. And, the Nepali government regards Arun as a national disaster that was brought about by unprincipled 'environmentalists'. Their arguments made for national capability build-

ing and against the top-down method of development that Arun exemplified are regarded as mere sophistry. Elsewhere, in India and Nepal, as in the rest of South Asia, it is business as usual as far as the donor banks and recipient governments are concerned.

### Development as Usual

While the two episodes might be seen as a setback for the Bank as far as the highly-visible dam projects are concerned, its influence in other spheres continues unabated, from education to sanitation, highway projects to coal-powered power plants.

The big development projects like dams are not the only thing that the Bank lends money for. No, Mr Wood has far more clout than that. He gets to dictate the terms and conditions of national budgets although in recent years the Bank has sought to downplay this aspect of its work after Bharat Bhusan, a journalist with the *Indian Express*, revealed that officials in Washington were given drafts of the Indian government budget proposals even before they were presented to the Indian Parliament.

Perhaps the most dangerous instrument that the Bank has ever had at its disposal is something called "structural adjustment programmes" (SAPs) which are essentially loans to the general coffers of the government in return for very strict changes in the government budget such as cuts in health and education expenditure and privatisation of national agencies like the electricity and telephone companies. The Bank's logic is that the government should not subsidise sectors that can pay for themselves and turn a profit. Unfortunately, most of these industries are often snapped up by

foreign multinationals who see no reason to provide services to the poor for the simple reason that they cannot afford to pay for the cost of providing these services to remote areas.

It is not that macro-economic figures have not improved as a result of SAPs. Bangladesh, which embarked on the path of liberalisation in the early 1990s, saw its exports surge by more than 25 percent in the first half of 1994-95 over the same period in the preceding year. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) rose by 5 percent, up from 3.4 percent in 1990-91. Industrial growth was estimated at 10 percent against 4.5 percent five years before.

However, critics say that, as is the case all over South Asia, economic liberalisation of the kind promoted by the Bank has only helped Bangladesh's rich and not the two-thirds of the 120 million population which lives below the poverty line. Worse, hundreds of textile mills, battery manufacturers, ceramic units, small machinery and spares making concerns are having to pull down shutters in the face of competition from foreign manufacturers. According to economist Anu Mahmood, some 3.5 million Bangladeshi textile workers could lose their jobs if effective steps are not taken to check imports of foreign goods allowed by the liberalised policies.

The Pakistani government's privatisation policies have already laid off tens of thousands of workers. More than 60,000 workers were eased out when the previous Nawaz Sharif government sold 69 state-owned industrial and commercial units to private purchasers. Privatisation plans of the present Benazir Bhutto administration threaten to axe another 240,000 jobs in the power, railways, telecommunications, en-



Jawaharlal Nehru, prime minister of India, and Ayub Khan, president of Pakistan, sign the Indus Waters Treaty, 19 September 1960, while Sir William Liff of the World Bank looks on.

ergy and transport sectors.

Even Nepal, with its very tiny industrial sector, has not been spared. A study found that nearly half of the about 2,400 workers employed by the 10 state enterprises privatised since 1992, have lost their jobs. In countries like India where the public sector, particularly services, is the largest employer of women, (11 percent of all jobs are held by women) closure and privatisation are already pushing large numbers of working women to labour under dismal conditions in the unorganised sector.

### The Region's Health

The International Labour Organisation, in a study published this April, points out that SAPs simply aggravate poverty and inequality of incomes rather than the intended opposite. That, in turn, rebounds to the detriment of education, with less favoured economic groups withdrawing their children from the school system, especially secondary institutions.

In Bangladesh, experts blame the Bank's SAPs for the sharp drop in agricultural growth rates from 5 percent in 1989-90 to 0.2 percent at present, even though 80 percent of the country's population toil on the land. According to Bangladesh farm expert M. A. Sattar, the government's withdrawal of subsidies from the agricultural sector—under SAPs—is directly responsible for the decline in farm yields.

SAPs have also been blamed for the recent declines in healthcare. Last September, the regional office of the World Health Organisation (WHO), based in New Delhi, voiced concern in a report entitled *Alternative Financing of Health Care*. The diminishing expenditure on basic health care in South Asia—one percent or less of the GNP of the regional countries—was "more notable in those countries undergoing political and economic reforms," it stated.

Dr Prabir Chatterjee, a doctor in a tribal area of Bihar, complains that the Bank has its priorities distorted when it urges governments to privatise basic health services. India's health priorities are being set by international organisations like the World Bank, he says. "They lend us money to use to buy AIDS testing kits made by foreign companies but there is no money to buy medicines that can be made in India for diseases like malaria which kill tens of thousands of people."

Elsewhere in South Asia, too, experts feel that the Bank has taken its AIDS prevention work too far. Last July, the Bank told Bangladesh that the number of tuberculosis cases related to HIV infection (the virus that causes AIDS) will hit 12,000 by the end of

this century, a figure that the health ministry rejected as "absolutely bogus, baseless and unfounded."

Elsewhere, Bank projects are said to be the source of health problems. In the state of Orissa, experts found an astonishing 67 percent of men and 64 percent of women near a Bank-financed coal-fired power plant suffering from fluorosis, a bone-weakening disease. And now, the Bank's private sector affiliate, the International Finance Corporation, proposes to place India's biggest steel mill with its own sizeable coal-fired power plant in the tribal Ganjam District, where infant mortality rates are already among the highest in the world. In the Singrauli region of central India, Bank-financed coal mines and power plants have displaced some 150,000 people, some as many as five times over in the last two decades.

This May, the Bank lent Orissa another USD 350 million to facilitate power expansion in the state. Although the Bank has also just approved a USD 63 million loan for social programmes and environmental rehabilitation for people affected by power projects and mines, it now plans to give India another USD 500 million to expand 25 coal mines. Billions more are expected to pay for expansion of coal-fired power plants in coming years.

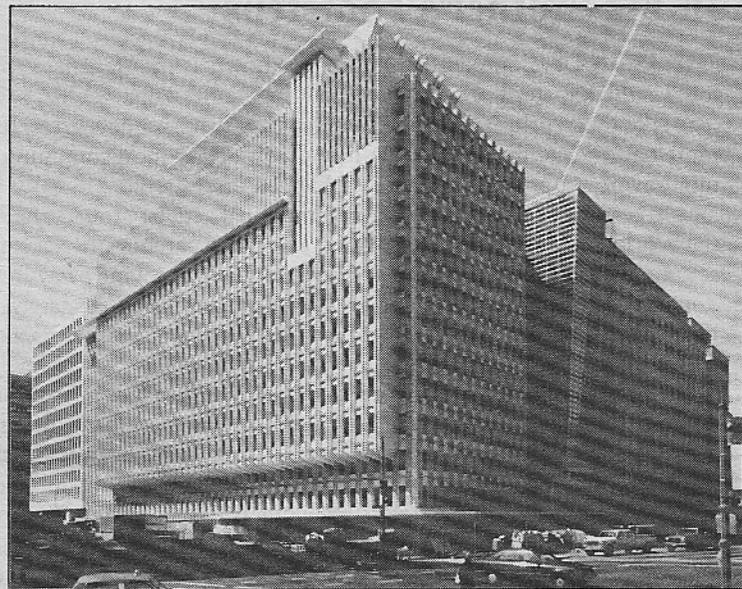
These activities make activists see red. "The loss of natural resources, loss of occupation for thousands of fishermen and farmers, the miseries due to health hazards and displacement far outweigh the development that coal-fired power in Orissa is ushering in," says Sisir Tripathy, coordinator of the District Action Group (DAG), a group of 21 non-governmental organisations in the heavily industrialised Talcher-Angul region of Orissa.

But these expansions are inevitable, says Paul Mitchell, a spokesman for the South Asia department of the Bank. "In general, there is no getting away from coal being mined in India and used for power generation, given that coal, with reserves of about 250 years, is the least cost source of energy for most uses in the country. So the question is to use the resource most effi-

ciently and with the least negative impacts," he says.

### Internal Assessments

Does the World Bank ever admit that its grand economic policies and mega-projects sometimes fail? Only sometimes, and with reluctance. Projects funded by the Bank in South Asia are assessed on the basis of the Bank's operational directives and policies by the Bank's own staff who generally work in one of the two country departments that Wood runs (see Pg 28 for current list of division chiefs and department directors). The country department staff work closely with several other specialist departments such as the Asia Technical department which oversees matters like engineering and the Environmentally Sustainable Development department which offers advice on environmental matters. These departments do not often see eye to eye and it is not uncommon



1818 H Street NW, World Bank's newly renovated HQ

for country department staff to hire outside consultants in order to avoid negative evaluations from staff environmentalists. Outside consultants rarely ever give negative evaluations for fear of losing work in the future.

Once a favourable project report has been prepared and approved by the board, the only way to stop work from going ahead is by appealing to the newly created Inspection Panel. This body, which was set up in the autumn of 1994, was instrumental in stopping the Arun III project. But it is disliked intensely by the Bank management, which takes every opportunity to hamstring its work. Finally, even after a project is finished, there is one department that can still take the Bank to task for mistakes made during the execution of the project. This is the Operations Evaluation Department



(OED), which can review completed projects, although its recommendations are not binding on the Bank.

The OED recently did a negative evaluation of the Mahaweli dam scheme in Sri Lanka, a project in which it played a prominent advisory role. The evaluation report stated that "incomes were much lower than expected" at the project appraisal stage. However, said the report, "the project turned out to be unsatisfactory in economic terms, less because of poor design, or poor implementation, but because the terms of trade shifted against rice production."

**The Loan Process**

It is one thing for the Bank to do an ex-post facto evaluation and quite another for activists to question the rosy claim made in an appraisal report before a project is commis-

*Projects funded by the Bank in South Asia are assessed on the basis of the Bank's operational directives and policies by the Bank's own staff*

sioned—which was what the Nepali activists did in the case of Arun III. Indeed, questioning the Bank's experts or challenging it is no easy task. What the Arun case indicated is that those who would challenge the Bank must have authentic information in their hands and be able to skilfully use various points of support to counteract the Bank's own traditional bases of support (most important of all, the governments themselves).

Even if a person who is troubled by a new Bank project in the Subcontinent decided to pick up a telephone to dial Wood's

office or tried to send him a fax or an email, the chances of getting a personal reply are rather low. As with all bureaucracies, the tendency is to ignore the petitioner unless he makes such a compelling case and so much noise that it is impossible to ignore.

The very first step before going public, then, is to get detailed information about the project and the Bank's decision-making process itself.

Projects like the Arun dam often first see the light of day at regular country-specific "donor" meetings that are typically held at the Paris offices of the Bank (sometimes the meetings are held elsewhere just as India's meeting will be held in Tokyo this year). Large borrowers like India are granted these special audiences with the Bank every year, while smaller borrowers like Bhutan may have to wait for other opportunities to meet individual Bank officials to propose new projects.

One such forum is the Bank's own annual meetings which take place at its Washington headquarters every autumn and are attended by finance ministers of almost every country in the world. (This meeting is held outside the city once every three years such as the one in Madrid in 1994 and the upcoming one in Hong Kong in 1997.)

Unfortunately none of these discussions are ever made public, so the activist might prefer to take the next best route to find out about proposed new projects, which is to subscribe to a monthly Bank publication called the Monthly Operations Summary, which lists all the projects in the world that the Bank agrees to study for possible funding. Theoretically, one should also be able to get such information from local finance ministries but in practice that might be a little more difficult.

Technology permitting, slightly more detailed information on all projects that are close to approval can also be immediately obtained via an electronic search of the World Bank's computer site on the World Wide Web (<http://www.worldbank.org/html/pc/PIDs/html>) where a page-long summary of proposed projects can be found (this is known as the Project Information Document) together with a summary environmental impact statement (known as Environmental Data Sheets). The Bank also often makes available paper copies of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the project if the borrower government is-

**In Big Brother's Footsteps**

THE ASIAN Development Bank (ADB) is known as the "Japanese" bank, and largely follows the footsteps of its big brother, the World Bank.

Like the World Bank, the ADB says it has turned a new green leaf to make itself more nature-friendly and people-friendly by giving local communities the opportunity to voice opposition to projects deemed undesirable.

In response to criticism from international activist groups, the ADB has followed the World Bank in putting into place greater transparency in project planning and the setting up of "inspection panels". The bank is also moving away from its traditional domain—big infrastructure projects that critics said ultimately benefitted only Japanese contractors and car exporters—to social welfare sectors like education and basic health.

The Bank says it has achieved its target of having half of its projects in the social and environment sectors. It claims that 40 percent of its loan column is given over to these "soft" sectors. Says ADB vice-president Peter Sullivan: "We started out as an infrastructure bank, which concentrated on things like irrigation and power. Now we're looking at environmental issues, women's issues, maternal and child health care and micro-credit."

Critics, however, are not satisfied and would like to study the criteria the bank uses to classify "social projects". They have banded together into a regional campaign to reform ADB's lending policies, and maintain that although there is a welcome change in the "commitment level" at the ADB, it is still business as usual in many areas of implementation.

"Compared to the World Bank, the ADB is more cautious, discreet and operates more on consensus," says Antonio Quizon of the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development. But despite the new disclosure policy, he says the Bank is not fully transparent about project information.

Bank sources say they are drawing up a list of "outside experts" to comprise panels that the board of directors can appoint to discuss complaints by activists and affected residents from project sites. These independent panels would be able to present "reasonable evidence" relating to projects that they believe violate the Bank's own standards.

South Asian activists who met with their regional counterparts recently in Manila, where the ADB is headquartered, say that they too are not satisfied that the ADB is completely transparent about projects that it intends to be involved in. Activists in Gujarat say that despite denials from Manila, a huge loan provided by the Bank to India for new energy projects will go partially to build the USD 3 billion Sardar Sarovar dam on the Narmada River. This was the project that the World Bank pulled out of three years ago.

sues permission. Most of these documents are available at the Public Information Centre of the World Bank in Washington and should also be available at the local offices of the World Bank in national capital cities (see the end of the article for phone and fax numbers of these offices).

Do people affected by the project go to these offices to look up these documents? The answer is no because most of the affected people are too poor to travel to such places. Instead the Bank recently discovered that these offices are mostly frequented by the people who hope to make money out of the projects, i.e. engineering consultants and building contractors. These groups bid against each other to help Bank staff prepare more confidential Staff Appraisal Reports (SARs) on each project before it gets taken to the Bank's board of executive directors for a final funding decision.

Executive board meetings are conducted every Tuesday and Thursday at the Washington headquarters. Once a project is approved by the board of directors, it is almost too late to stop it from going ahead. All countries are represented through one or the other of the 24 executive directors but the voting power of each official depends on the dollar contributions made by the countries he or she represents. Thus Abdul Karim Lodhi, the director representing Afghanistan has no power for all intents and purposes, while Jan Piercy, the executive director who represents the United States, controls almost a fifth of the votes on the board.

### Consultants for the Bank

Wealthy countries, like the US, often make all of the project documents (including the SARs) directly available to contractors and consultants. In the US for example, there is a library in the Department of Commerce where anybody can borrow reports overnight. Often reports arrive before they are approved in contravention of the Bank's own guidelines. In every state capital in this country, there is an office to assist potential contractors and in embassies such as in Jakarta, Indonesia, lists of projects in the country for which external finance is available, are provided and updated regularly.

Regular perusal of such reports can give consultants and companies advantages in winning contracts. Borrowers also have to advertise internationally for all projects over a certain amount to establish a competitive bidding process. All projects are also advertised through *Development Business*, a bulletin

published by the United Nations, within two weeks of approval of the board of directors. Subscribers to this publication, which costs USD 500 a year, are a lucky lot: one advertisement for it claims that one in three subscribers wins a contract from the Bank. Better still they offer an electronic service that allows companies to access the information as soon as it is approved. This service costs over twice as much.

The consultants who the Bank hires make a quick three-week trip to the site for fees that can range up to USD 10,000 a month per head. Technically, companies from any country can win contracts but in practice it is the wealthy countries that profit the most. A United States Treasury study of the number of contracts won by US companies, shows that US companies won USD 2.7 billion in contracts in 1993 for the

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## *The International Labour Organisation, in a study published this April, points out that SAPs simply aggravate poverty and inequality of incomes rather than the intended opposite*

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USD 1.5 billion that the government contracted to the multilateral banks. The authors of the Treasury study say that the estimates are crude and represent perhaps 40 percent of the real amount because not all contracts are identified by country of origin, especially if they are below a certain amount.

Contractors who have been big winners in recent years include (for amounts above USD 50 million) Newmont Mining of Colorado, General Motors of Michigan, McDermott of Louisiana, Caterpillar of Illinois, Ameritech of Illinois, Coca-Cola of Georgia, General Electric, and Chevron Chemicals of California. Other big winners include Time-Warner of California, 3M, Bankers Trust, Cargill, Dupont, Exxon, Ford, Harvard University, Monsanto, Mack Trucks and Union Carbide.

The work that many of these consultants and contractors do is often shoddy. World Bank statistics collected in 1993 by Willi Wapenhans, a former World Bank vice-president, showed that 37.5 percent of Bank projects were failures on economic grounds alone, let alone on environmental or social grounds. Patrick McCully, of the California-based International Rivers Network, says that one recent example of poor quality work was a study conducted for the

Bank by a UK-based company called Environmental Resources Management (ERM), which travelled to the Narmada Valley in India in March 1993 to examine the impact of the Sardar Sarovar dam project.

The Bank was told by the ERM team about the marvellous "public health benefits," "opportunities for environmental improvement provided" by the project with "no major work outstanding (for) afforestation" which was carried out "in accordance with the wishes of the oustees." Yet, the team spent most of their time at an office hundreds of miles away, had visited the dam site once and never bothered to visit the resettlement sites.

One member of the team claimed that when she visited the site, she had not seen any trees, and concluded that the environmental impact of the dam would be minimal. "They went there in March, well into the dry season when the deciduous trees of the area have lost their leaves," says McCully, adding, "Consultants like these are just prostitutes who take their clients' money and do what they know that the client will like. They have no professional accountability to anyone other than their paymasters." Likewise, McCully

says the consultants' acceptance of government claims of adequate plans for resettlement was naive.

### Proposed New Loans

Does its long list of failures, its collaboration with often questionably-motivated governments, its poor quality of contractor-consultants, deter the Bank from pushing more and more projects on South Asia? Hardly, it would seem. Today, the Bank has plans for big new loans to South Asia. The latest Monthly Operation Summary lists some USD 220 million in proposed new loans to Nepal (that is to say, another USD 220 million in new debts in a couple of years unless these project generate some income, which is unlikely given the Bank's track record to date); USD 450 million in proposed new loans to Sri Lanka, USD 1.3 billion in proposed new loans to Bangladesh, USD 1.4 billion in proposed new loans to Pakistan, and a staggering USD 6.5 billion in proposed new loans to India. △

*P. Chatterjee is San Francisco-based Global Environment Editor of the Inter Press Service news agency.*

# How to Get at the Bank

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(All telephone numbers in the Washington DC headquarters are with country and area code +1 202. All officials can be emailed by following a simple formula of prefixing the surname with the initial of the first name and then adding @worldbank.org to the end of the surname. A message to Heinz Vergin should be addressed to [hvergin@worldbank.org](mailto:hvergin@worldbank.org) and a message to Richard Cambridge, for example, would be addressed to [rcambridge@worldbank.org](mailto:rcambridge@worldbank.org))

*Bank officials and government officials are often unresponsive to pressure emanating from organisations in recipient countries, so it pays to have access to people in Washington D.C. A variety of groups based in that city will help local groups press their grievances with the appropriate officials. Perhaps the best way to start is to contact a group called the Bank Information Centre (BIC), a non-profit organisation that researches information for project-affected people. BIC will help arrange support from other expert environmental and development groups and meetings with key Bank officials if necessary.*

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# The Shadow Citizens

*There are gays in every society, including Bengali society, and there is no sense in suppressing and stifling homosexuality.*

by Afsan Chowdhury

They will forgive me if I commit a murder but not if they find out that I have a boy friend." Mohsin is 28 years old, a Bangladeshi, and a gay. He was speculating on the possible reaction of his upper middle class family members if they were to discover his sexual preference. Having graduated two years ago, Mohsin has landed a decent job in a development outfit and knows his mother will push for his marriage as soon as his youngest sister ties the knot. He is terrified of that moment. He plans not to tell his family, and not to marry either.

Is he overreacting? There has been a

number of cases where the family has accepted the same sex proclivity of their sons, and even daughters. While family dinners with same sex partners are still not in, children are not thrown out if they are revealed to be homosexuals.

## Gay Bangla

But there certainly are difficulties when homosexuals first declare their preference, known as "coming out" in gay parlance. Most families respond with dismay and a kind of corporate shame. Many feel that they have gone wrong somewhere in the

child's upbringing.

Since some gay activists in Bangladesh are very highly educated, once in a while, foreign education is cited as a reason for being gay. In fact, Bangladeshis are very active on the global gay scene. But those still in the closet oscillate between confusion, guilt and fear. "Why do they hate us?" asks a gay man in Dhaka. "Except for preferring people of the same sex as partners we have done nothing wrong."

Being gay in Bangladesh isn't easy because society responds differently to sexuality in public and in private. To put it bluntly, society is hypocritical, for it says one thing and does another. People involved with gay issues say that between 5 to 10 percent of the population is homosexual. That would mean at least 6 to 12 million Bangladeshis, more than the total population of many countries, prefer the same sex.

Even if that estimate is considered to be on the higher side and is reduced by half, the number left would still be significant. But almost no discussion can take place on the subject, even with the threat of HIV/AIDS looming over Bangladeshis and gays being identified as one of the most vulnerable groups.

## Criminal Behaviour

One of the reasons that homosexuality is treated so gingerly is that the country's Criminal Code decrees sodomy (homosexuality or advocacy of the same) a crime which is punishable with a jail sentence. Any discussion, not to speak of debate, is hence ruled out and homosexuality is driven into the shadow world.

Demonstration of homosexual tendencies for short periods is quite common in Bangladeshi society. Those practising it are not ostracised, although if caught, are ridiculed. Like in other societies, gay relationships flourish in dormitories, barracks, labour colonies and hostels, and authorities are hard pressed to keep them a secret.

In the Dhaka University dorms, cases of young boys being kept as "regulars" are well known. Male prostitutes are available in most towns. And in rural areas, homosexuality is generally considered something that young people do for fun and some elders may do in secret. Male homosexuality is tolerated despite religious sanction. Yet divorce citing gay behaviour by any

partner is not known.

It is a different story for lesbians, however. Although it is no secret that dormitories record incidences of lesbianism, and studies have corroborated the fact, it is kept a secret fearing loss of marriage prospects. And marriage, after all, is society's idea of a woman's ultimate nirvana. Literature has recorded a high incidence of *shakhi* culture, where proximate friendship develops between two women in which emotions are at least romantic and may lapse into "touching", though both parties may deny any sexual overtones in such relationships. Psychologists say many *shakhis* may be substitutes for boyfriends.

Society frowns upon single women, and the social pressure to marry--doesn't matter who to--is intense. Most succumb to it, despite their sexual preferences, and end up miserably knotted.

Heterosexual girls suffer in marriages with male gays too. "I can't run away from my responsibilities. I have a family. So I stay although we are like strangers at home," says Sultana, a 30-plus housewife married to a gay. Many gays, forced into marriage, often resort to clandestine and then increasingly open gay relationships, leaving women with a dead marriage to have and to hold. Children, economic dependence and "shame" prevents any divorce actions.

There are some instances of lesbians

entering permanent relationships, but most lesbians are married and whatever sexual liaisons they may enter into are purely by chance. "I have had sex with a woman only once in my life," says Zaheda, who works for a travel agency and lives with her disabled sister. The tolerance level for lesbians is very low in Bengali society. It is low for women in general. One either worships them (mother models) or abuses them (partners).

### West Bengal

The situation is somewhat different in Bengali society across the border in India. At the elite level, there is considerable acceptance of homosexuality and of gay groups. Homosexuals keep in touch with each other through magazines like *Provortak* (published from Calcutta) or through gay organisations. Some activists in Calcutta are directly involved in running sexual health projects jointly with official agencies.

Although India also has the same laws relating to sodomy, gays are not prosecuted. A petition for scrapping the sodomy laws is awaiting action at the Supreme Court in New Delhi. A number of organisations like the Humsafar Foundation have been working for wider acceptance of gays in Indian society with some degree of success. In West Bengal, there have been occasional instances of harassment, but gays can operate with relative openness. Gay prostitution is high,

operating out of parks and other public places.

Some Calcutta lesbians, many of them married, have set up private clubs which are basically places to get together. But the stigma of female homosexuality remains strong in West Bengal as well, even though the pages of *Provortak* are full of pieces by lesbians discussing their problems.

In Bangladesh, it looks as if the sodomy laws will remain in the books for some time to come, not a little because of religious opposition. **Whatever society may do in private, publicly they want respectable laws.** In India, social attitudes are more liberal and relaxed, which allows gays to "come out" and access health and other services more easily.

Meanwhile, the least that the authorities could do is wake up to the reality of gay behaviour and recognise that health and social issues are becoming more and more pressing where homosexuals are concerned. Homosexuality does not disappear by ignoring it. Some Middle Eastern societies have adopted a pragmatic approach by maintaining that because homosexuality is a crime committed against God, the matter should be dealt by Him on Judgement Day. Perhaps this interpretation should be used to provide Bengali gays with some respite as well, if not in society at large, at least in law?

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- A seminar/workshop on Leather and Leather Products is scheduled for the month of July 1996.
- Preparatory meeting preceding the Third SAARC Ministerial Conference on Children of South Asia Islamabad, Pakistan, 24 July 1996.
- SAARC conference on Cooperation in Police Matters is scheduled to be held in Colombo on 29th July - August 1996.
- Meeting of the group of Experts to Review the "SAARC chairs, Scholarship and Fellowship Scheme" which is scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka from 26 - 28 July 1996.

## South Asia Tourism

There is now a South Asian Tourism Secretariat (SATS), headquartered at the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo and supported by the European Commission. Three regional workshops have been held so far, in New Delhi, Male, and the latest in Kathmandu in late June. The Secretariat is working to develop regional occupational standards for the tourism sector in South Asia and to seek recognition for those standards from international organisations. According to an official, the occupational standards will allow recognition of work skills (in areas such as housekeeping, food production, travel operations, tour guiding, etc.) across the tourism sectors in each of the regional countries. The Secretariat is the executive arm of the Regional Tourism Human Resource Development Committee, which itself represents national committees in each of the seven regional countries. (SATS, Taj Samudra Hotel, 25 Galle Face Centre Road, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka. Fax: 94/1/348717 Email: sats@sri.lanka.net)

## Poverty Eradication

"SAARC Seven Sisters: District development coordination and improved poverty project design" is the title of a project just launched by SAARC, envisaging the creation of six districts, one in each of six of the seven member countries (Bhutan has not joined). A four-day workshop held at the SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu saw the initiation of an exercise to prepare well-tested designs of programmes for poverty eradication.

## South Asian Peace Charter

This news has reached us late. A seminar on the role of the human rights community and conflict resolution in South Asia was held in Strasbourg in December 1995. At that seminar, a group of South Asians who attended—notably Tapan K. Bose, Haroon Ahmed, Rishikesh Shaha, Enayetulla Khan, Henri Tiphage, Augusthy Thomas, Ranabir Samaddar, Joe William, and Imtiaz Ahmed—decided to work for the formation of a South Asia Peace Charter. The objective of the initiative, according to coordinator Tapan K. Bose is to promote a South Asian perspective and develop a South Asian 'voice' on human rights and security concerns. The group hopes to intervene where necessary and impress upon the governments of the region the need for peaceful resolution of conflicts. The group plans to meet in Dhaka shortly.

## SADF

The South Asian Development Fund (SADF) was launched in Dhaka in mid-June, marked by the first meeting of its Governing Board, which is made up of chief executives of development financing institutions from the regional countries. SADF's first chairman is Khariul Huda, managing director of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh. Mr Huda said SADF would work to identify and develop social and infrastructural development projects, and institutional and human resource development projects. The idea of a regional fund was first put forward by King Jigme Singye Wangchuck of Bhutan in 1991, and the idea was endorsed at the New Delhi SAARC summit last May. The SADF has a paid-up capital of USD 5 million from member states, and Mr Huda is looking forward to add to this amount by approaching the big players, the World Bank and the ADB. Bangladesh is to remain SADF chairman for two years.

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# The Priceless Jewel

PRINCE GYANENDRA, brother of King Birendra of Nepal, has kept a low profile since the royal family was swept off the front pages following the people's movement of 1990. The backlash against royalty affected most the prince and Queen Aishwarya, both of whom had maintained an active role during the heyday of the Panchayat system when the king ruled supreme.

Against such a background, Prince Gyanendra, who remains one of Nepal's richest men and at the same time an active promoter of nature conservation as chairman of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), has been making a careful comeback. A recent address by the prince eulogising King Birendra in front of Nepal's rich and powerful at Kathmandu's Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza hotel seemed a calculated move to enter the limelight.

Coming from normally tight-lipped royalty, the speech was significant for two main reasons: firstly, no one among the elected plebeians who currently rule the kingdom have command of the profuse and flowery English that His Highness does; secondly, the speech sent out a clear political message that the royalty was not being appreciated.

Some samplings from the speech, which was in the form of a "felicitation address" on World Environment Day, 5 June:

"As rivers blend and placidly continue, the people of Nepal always look up to the monarchy as a symbol of honour and unity and have reposed boundless faith in and drawn sustenance from this revered institution..."

"Man, at times, unlike any other species, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts and emerges ahead of his accomplishments. This is how Your Majesty's contributions in the past quarter century—a period marked by momentous changes and transformations—will be remembered in the history of Nepal..."

"Time and again, Your Majesty has reminded us that of all the hues and colours that go to make up the national spectrum, being green is not being far-left or far-right, but being far-sighted..."

Prince Gyanendra ended the address with a not-so-subtle jab at the nay-sayers who had brought such toil and trouble to the institution of monarchy: "May God grant you peace, and all of us, the wisdom to appreciate the exalted position you hold along with the burden of all its trappings. If eternity is the divine treasure house, hope is



Prince Gyanendra felicitates

the window through which the Nepalese people continue to see in Your Majesty the preservation of their unity and well-being. Of you, sir, may I say that your magnanimity

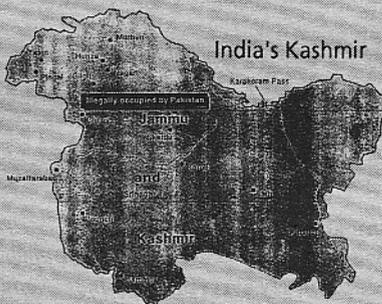
and sagacity, your ability and humility make you a priceless jewel, the worth of which some have yet to comprehend."

What did he mean? Who did he mean?

## Janus on Kashmir

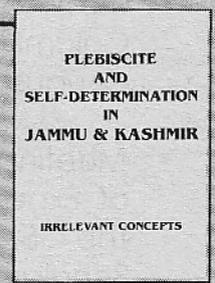
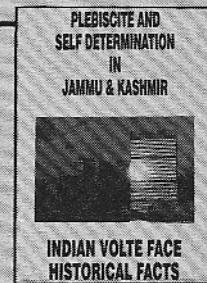
IT IS BY NOW a well-worn truism: the governments of India and Pakistan see only their side of the coin when it comes to Kashmir.

The editors of Himal South Asia recently received a bunch of government-produced (or at least government-sanctioned) literature on the disputed region. One stack was from the GOI and the other from GOP. On the table, they look exactly alike in terms of size, production quality, and the subjects they tackle. But the sub-



stance, of course, presents the strident Delhi position as diametrically opposed to the equally strident Islamabad view.

Amidst the claims and counter-claims, there is wide scope for selectivity. Take the example of the oft-referred to resolutions of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) of 13 August 1948 and



5 January 1949. Neither side finds it necessary to lay down the full texts, although both are quite happy to present copious excerpts of their choosing.

The publication of the All Party Hurriyat Conference from Azad Kashmir, *Kashmir: An International Issue*, has part of the 5 January resolution reproduced with the following clause highlighted: "The question of the accession of the State of

Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan will be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite." As if in answer, *Plebiscite and Self-Determination in Jammu*

*& Kashmir: Irrelevant Concepts*, published by the Government of India, states that "the UNCIP Resolution of January 5, 1949 reiterated the requirement of meeting the provisions of the Resolution of August 13, 1948 before any plebiscite could be considered." It also emphasises that "the (13 August) resolution also called upon Pakistan to !...

It also emphasises that "the (13 August) resolution also called upon Pakistan to !...

# Rimpoche Jones, Cool Dude

IF YOU THOUGHT lessons on Buddhism came packaged in esoteric tomes or in cryptic discourses by sedate gurus, here is a surprise. A thirteen-year-old monk in Wyoming is doing it in the language he knows best—American slang.

Pema Jones, a rimpoché born to a Tibetan mother and American father, lived in a monastery in India till the age of seven before moving to USA. *Cybersangha* ("Buddhist Alternative Journal"), in its Spring 1996 issue, had the young reincarnate speaking about his life as an Asian-American teenager lama growing up in the heart of America's redneck region.

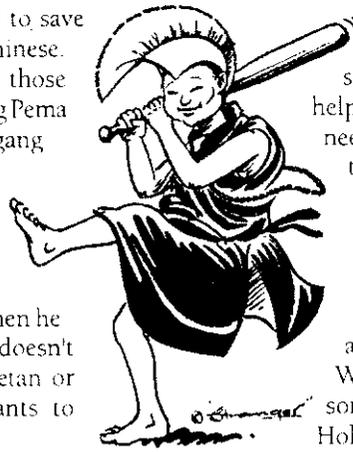
On the surface, the young rimpoché is just a regular guy who goes around in jeans, attends school, plays baseball, hangs out with a gang and has girlfriends. Very few outside the circle of those "in the know" suspect that Jones is a teacher of Buddhism as well. He would never tell his school chums that he is a lama. "I get dissed enough as it is just being Asian, he says."

Pema's father is the one who encourages him to continue the religious teachings. His mother does not really care for religion, her intense faith having died, we

are told, after it failed to save her people from the Chinese. And it is just one of those ironies of life that young Pema belongs to a Chinese gang in his hometown. He admits that "it's strange to have Chinese friends when your family has been treated so badly by the Chinese," but then he says, "Some skinhead doesn't care whether I'm Tibetan or Chinese. He just wants to stomp my head."

Being a teacher is not all that easy, confesses Pema, especially when his students ask for a personal interview to talk about relationships, a subject he has not had much experience with. He has, however, found a way out. He has worked out a "business arrangement" with a psychologist friend of his father's to whom he refers his disturbed followers and who, in turn, takes him and his brothers and sister for ice-cream for every new client that is passed on.

The street-savvy rimpoché has his own views on non-violence. "Some guy just dissed me and I tell myself that he really doesn't exist separate from me. It's like he's dissing himself. That works fine. But what happens when he stops talking and starts beating on me? You need to be able to take care of



yourself so you don't get killed. We live in *samsara* and doesn't spacing out about nirvana doesn't help anyone... Sometimes people just need to be reminded that they're actually hitting themselves."

And on the Dalai Lama's precepts on non-violence: "The Dalai Lama is an awesome old dude and a killer teacher. But he's got like a dozen bodyguards around him when he's travelling. What do you think would happen if some butthead pulls a gun on His Holiness? Do you think those dozen bodyguards will practise non-violence, or shoot the guy in the arm or bust some karate move on him? No way man, a bodyguard sees this dweeb with a gun and he's gonna pop a cap in his ass."

There is something to be said for that, and the young rimpoché shows promise as a teacher who says it like it is. But Pema does not intend to spend his life solving others' problems. He does not think it fair that gurus have to be involved with the troubles of their students which, he says, is one of the reasons that many teachers die of cancer. He has set his sights on other possibilities—baseball! "I want to be the first Tibetan in the major league. America can grow its own lamas, they don't need Tibetans."

Down-to-earth wisdom, that.

secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purpose of fighting." The appendix contains the 13 August resolution in toto but the 5 January resolution is not given.

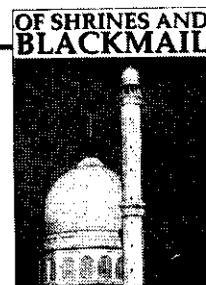
The Hurriyat Conference's response is a booklet that has the same title but a different subtitle, *Plebiscite and Self-Determination in Jammu & Kashmir: Indian Volte Face, Historical Facts*. This one begins with a list of 14 facts, 12 of which quote Jawaharlal Nehru to prove the "Indian volte face". Says one, the substance of which is more or less repeated in the others: "In his report to All Indian Congress Committee on 6th July, 1951 as published in *The Statesman*, New Delhi on 9th July, 1951, Pandit Nehru said, 'Kashmir has been wrongly looked upon as a prize for India or Pakistan. People seem to forget that Kashmir is not a commodity for sale or to be bartered. It has an individual existence and its people must be the final arbiters of their future...'"

It is not only over the hoary questions of plebiscite and self-determination that the

two sides cross pens. Last year's destruction of Charar-e-Sharif and who was responsible is as much a bone of contention. The two titles that tell each side of the story, *Of Shrines and Blackmail* (blaming the militants) and *Who Burnt Charar Sharif?* (blaming the Indian army), are similar both in terms of presentation, which is slick, and the language used, which is ponderous. Incidentally, both have reproduced press reports that appeared in the "hostile" country to bolster their arguments.

From *Of Shrines and Blackmail*:

Two comments, as they appeared in the Pakistan press, would suffice to prove to the hilt how Charar was burnt...an article by A.S. Yousufi in *Dawn* of October 10, 1995 datelined Peshwar, which derided the fact that the Jamaat-e-Islami is "consistently presenting Mast Gul before the people as a 'Ghazi' who risked his life and fought several battles with the Indian Army...a status



which is questionable because many people subscribe to the view that it was Mast Gul and his gun-wielding band of indisciplined mercenaries from outside occupied or even Azad Kashmir who razed Charar Sharif in their bid to escape from a tight Indian Army cordon."

From *Who Burnt Charar Sharif?*:

The *Frontline* (June 2, 1995) emphatically stated: "While the army went to great length to defend itself and convince the media that the 'militants' had set the shrine on fire, word spread across the valley like wild fire that it was the army that had done it to end the two-month stand-off between the forces and the 'militants'."

The booklet also reproduces articles that are sceptical of the official Indian explanation by senior Indian columnists Kuldip Nayar and Nikhil Chakravarty.

Obviously, on the question of Kashmir, truth is Janus-faced.

# Free, But Hungry

IF HUMAN MISERY were to have a face, it would belong either to South Asia or Sub-Saharan Africa—the poorest regions in the world. Struggling with large populations, low human development indicators, political violence and natural calamities, the two have much in common.

Politically, both the regions are witnessing a shift towards democracy, but with a difference. A recent survey carried out by *The Economist* on political pluralism in Africa shows how more and more governments are being 'elected' in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Of the 42 mainland states, 30 have had elections, four have military rulers, one (Swaziland) is a kingdom, one a one-party state (Eritrea) and six (Somalia, Rwanda, Angola, Liberia, Burundi and Zaire) are wracked by civil strife with no legitimate government.

Even among the 30 states where elections have been held, a number of them like Ghana, Burkina Faso, Sudan and Guinea have merely legitimised military rulers. Elsewhere, democracy is threatened either by the military or by autocratic civilian rulers as in Kenya, Zambia or the Cote d'Ivoire. Niger was taken over by the military this year and the general looks set to win elections. In Chad and Gambia too, the military rulers appear destined to win the battle of the ballot. Rebels who seized power in Ethiopia and Uganda have retained it through elections. Says *The Economist* "...most of Africa still likes men with guns—with or without democracy".

Contrast this situation with populous South Asia on the other side of the Indian Ocean. If you were to count Afghanistan and Burma as well, all the countries in between have democratically elected governments. While India and Sri Lanka have been democracies right since they won freedom from colonial rule, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh too have now joined the ranks of parliamentary democracies with authentic elections.

Among the tiny South Asians, Bhutan is an absolute monarchy, and the Maldives leans towards authoritarianism. Afghanistan is at civil war, while Burma is the only one ruled by the military.

But while South Asia has more political freedom, there are more people who go hungry here than in Africa. What's even

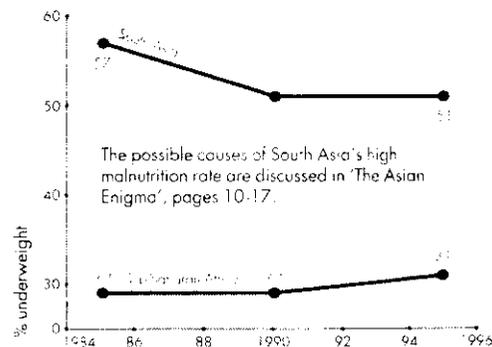
more shocking, according to the UNICEF *Progress of Nations* report released last month, is that the proportion of undernourished children is higher in South Asia.

While 32 percent of the children in Sub-Saharan Africa are chronically hungry—the figure for South Asia is 51 percent. Why this difference? UNICEF's experts say they are not sure, but a major factor seems to be the low status of women not only in society, but also within the family. South Asian women are forced to give a higher priority to their husbands and in-laws, while the children come second, the study says. African mothers, on the other hand, give

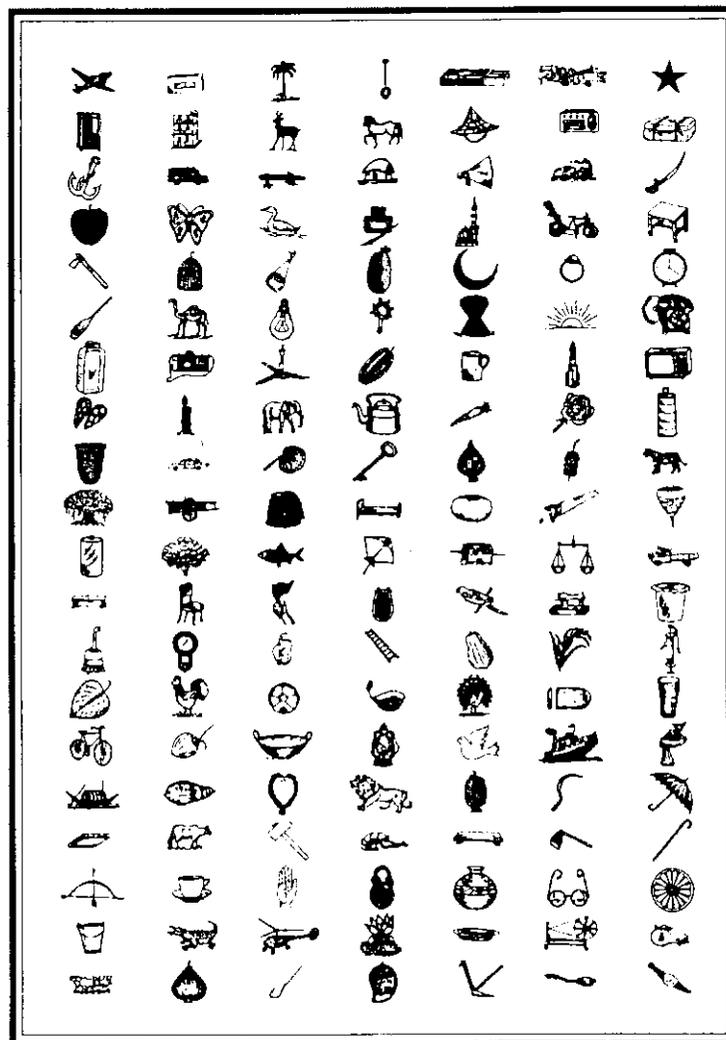
priority to their children.

South Asia does have more freedom and democracy, but is that anything to crow about given the fact that it cannot even feed its own people?

**The 10-year track record**  
% of children underweight, by region, 1985-1995



## Who won in Bangladesh?



There were 138 symbols available to the 81 political parties which contested the 12 June elections in Bangladesh. The voter turnout among the 57 million voters for 300 constituencies was 73 percent. The election results may have been determined by the large turnout of women voters, who were brought out in force by NGOs. However, the candidates were still overwhelmingly male—only 36 of the 2574 contesting candidates were women. The boat symbol of the Awami League (first column, 16 down) got to form the government. The sheaf of grain of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (sixth column, 13 down) is the main opposition.

# A Bhutan-Assam Corridor For Wildlife

SOUTH ASIA'S WILDLIFE biologists have always argued for the creation or maintenance of 'corridors' which link one nature reserve with another. It makes perfect sense for plant and animal species to be linked across a spectrum of climatic zones. With the possible advent of global warming, and the need for ecosystems to shift from one zone to another, the importance of such corridors has heightened.

While the maintenance or creation of wildlife corridors within a country is hard enough, it is something that is much harder to do across international boundaries. Under such circumstances, it is welcome news that Bhutan and the state government of the Indian state of Assam have moved to create a wildlife corridor that links up the Black Mountains of the former with the Manas National Park of the latter.

The eastern Himalaya is one of the conservation "hot spots" of the world where areas of high biological diversity are being subjected to widespread habitat destruction. And now, the effect of global climate change which predicts wetter monsoons and drier winters in South Asia is adding to the dilemma of the protected areas that are increasingly being isolated by

encroaching development.

Research from elsewhere shows that biotic communities react to climate change by moving to more favourable locations, but this will prove difficult in the eastern Himalaya because the region has small biotic communities that are widely spaced from each other. This means that the ability of a species to shift toward better habitats during climate change is hindered because human landuse comes in the way.

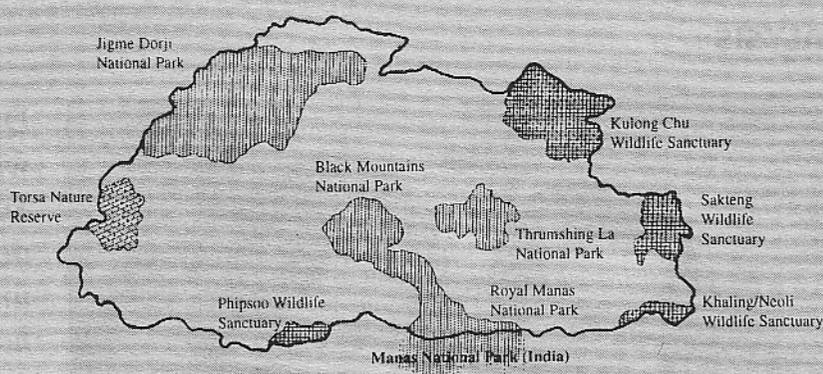
All the more need in the Eastern Himalaya, therefore, for wide corridors to connect isolated wildlife preserves, and for transfrontier conservation programmes to help plants and animals cope with the change in climate.

The Black Mountains reserve, in the form of a mountainous backbone in central Bhutan, is a 1400 sq km home to a wide range of broadleaf forests, conifers and alpine pastures. This mountain region is linked to the slightly smaller Royal Manas National

Park in southern Bhutan, which in turn spills into the 500 sq kms of the Manas National Park of Assam further south. The latter is part of the larger Manas Tiger Reserve (2837 sq km), prime habitat also of the Asian one-horned rhinoceros. What we have, thus, is nearly 5000 sq km of contiguous wildlife habitat that encompasses a north-south topographical range from the tropical region known as the *duars* to perennial snow.

Determining what will happen to living species in the Himalaya as a result of climate change is a task fraught with complexity because of the many unknown variables. But as habitat fragmentation and global climate change threaten biodiversity, the creation of wildlife corridors which link historically connected natural areas to facilitate movement of living species, is perhaps the best strategy planners can opt for today.

-Pralad Yonzon

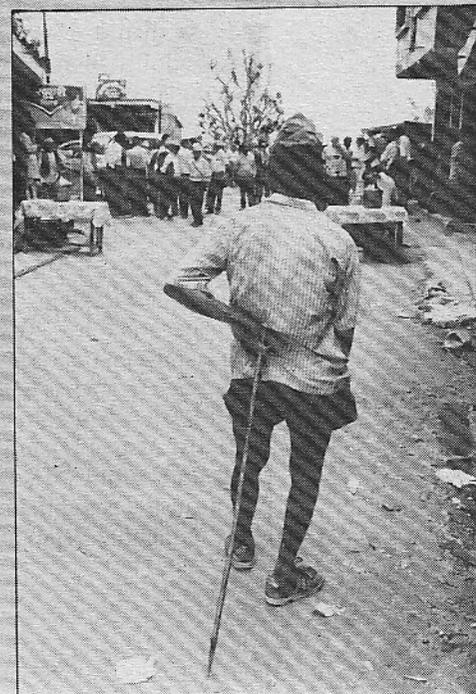


THERE ARE TWO good examples of transfrontier conservation practice in Nepal. The Qomolungma Reserve reaches out from Tibet into the Sagarmatha National Park and the adjoining Makalu Barun Conservation Area in the Everest Region and in a similar manner the Kattamia Ghat Sanctuary in India and the Bardiya National Park in Southwest Nepal are one and the same jungle.

There is one forest tract in central Nepal known as the Tikauli Corridor which links the Mahabharat range to the jungles of Chitwan in the south. This narrow stretch, a remnant of a much wider swath of forest cover that draped Chitwan just a few decades ago, is being strangled by human encroachment. Conserving this corridor within Nepal seems urgent.

## Hillman's Rest

Trust the scientific-minded Nepali highlander to come up with the perfect use for the Tripod Principle. Walking down the main street of Tansen town, photographer Min Bajracharya came across this common-enough sight. He circled the subject and clicked from all angles to show the scientificism of the method. The trick seems to be: slouch on your two legs, and lean back on a sturdy stick. Provided you have the angle right, the stick will take just the right amount of load which, minus the effort used up by the two legs, is the energy saved.





*Druk Yul, the Kingdom of Bhutan, is within striking distance of what all South Asian countries want—development. But now it has an unsettling refugee problem on its hands.*

by A.C. Sinha

## The Ethnic Statement on Bhutan

# Who Will Upset Whose Applecart?

Less than a decade ago, Bhutan, the last lamaist Buddhist monarchy in the Himalayas, was considered the ideal locale in which the Sri Lankan government and rebel Tamil militants might negotiate a solution to their violent ethnic conflict. Within a couple of years, however, Bhutan itself had turned into another theatre of ethnic strife, this one pitting the dominant Buddhist communities in northern Bhutan against an immigrant Nepali Hindu community in the southern third of the kingdom. The situation quickly became a stalemate, and for the past five years it has remained the most significant political issue in the country, although it tends to be treated as a problem of law and order.

If one reads the proceedings of Bhutan's Tshongdu (National Assembly) and speeches by its members, one rarely finds a forward-looking statement that rises above populism and xenophobia. Nor has there been an honest effort to identify issues affecting the body politic. How-

ever, the Tshongdu is handicapped as a forum for dissenting voices, and structural reforms in the style of representation are badly needed. Visitors to Bhutan are told that political reforms are on King Jigme Singye Wangchuck's agenda but that he is unsure about the timing of their introduction and his subjects' response.

The Tshongdu and most of the national fora are located in Thimphu, the capital. District development councils continue to operate out of district headquarters, but under the benign gaze of the bureaucracy, and village groups appear to suffer from "development fatigue". But, in what seems to be a step in the right direction, villages have been grouped into blocks (geong) for developmental purposes, and it is said that the most important recent development has been 'democratisation' at the block and village levels. This means that villagers and the *gups* and *mandals* (heads of village councils) are now deciding their development priorities without the *dzongda* (district com-

missioner). It has reached the point, according to reports, where bureaucrats are now resigning their posts and contesting elections to the Tshongdu. Southern Bhutan, however, is totally paralysed structurally, and development priorities have been adversely affected, if not shelved.

In 1994-95, the Bhutanese government netted revenue worth Nu 1,686 million. That was a mere 1.7 percent short of the expenditure that year. Electricity, trade and tourism contributed two-thirds of the total revenue and were the most paying sectors in descending order. The top six dzongkhangs (districts) in order of revenue were Chukha, Thimphu, Samtse (Samche), Samdrup Jongkhar, Paro and Sarpang (Sarbhang), which contributed 96 percent of the income. It is instructive that four of these districts are in southern Bhutan, a predominantly Nepali-speaking (or Lhotshampa, meaning southerners) territory. The rest of the 14 districts in the northern and interior areas provided a mere 3 percent to the exchequer, and required a higher rate of investment and expenditure.

Despite the overall rosy picture, the finance minister is candid in acknowledging that there are dark clouds hovering over the national economy. While project and programme implementation has been satisfactory, development activity—particularly in the southern districts—has been hampered by frequent riots and what are said to be acts of militancy by Lhotshampa dissidents. Similarly, progress in trade and industry continued to be disrupted, as all major commercial and industrial centres are located in southern Bhutan. The government has had to engage a large number of security personnel to protect industries, service facilities and forests, as well as people's lives.

The controversial claim that Bhutan has only about 600,000 bone fide subjects has helped the country achieve

another miracle. The Human Development Report issued by UNDP lists Bhutan among the least developed countries. But by adjusting the claimed population figure, per capita income, literacy and life expectancy, Bhutan's ranking went up from 162 to somewhere around 130. Bhutan, however, is one of the few countries in which statistics do tell lies. And the reality is that the social development undertaken is far more significant than the achievement rates indicate.

### Closing Ranks

By tradition, Bhutan is a Buddhist monarchy in which the Drukpa community has been ethnically dominant; it is also a country in which predominantly Hindu Nepali-speaking immigrants have been living for nearly a century as subsistence farmers in the southern foothills. In other words, this Lamaist kingdom has a sizeable immigrant population strategically located in a frontier zone over which the centre may not have complete control. The land-hungry Lhotshampa farmers have actively contributed to the economic development of Bhutan, turning the "negative" southern area into a vibrant zone of prosperity. Many of them were educated and sent abroad on scholarships, after which they returned to fill responsible government posts. They took advantage of the state policy of ethnic assimilation in which cash grants of Nu 5,000, later increased to Nu 10,000, were given by the government to encourage inter-ethnic marriages. This provision stands withdrawn now.

But when the Drukpa establishment saw a threat to the monarchy, the religion and the laws of Bhutan, it required the Lhotshampa to accept the national traditions and be incorporated into the system. This resulted in an ethnic flare-up leading to the flight of thousands of the



*At Bhutan's stage of national development, policy makers in Bhutan feel Western concepts of representative democracy, competitive party systems, consumer culture, and standards of human rights could pose a serious threat.*

Nepali-speakers to refugee camps in Nepal, including many who left government positions.

The argument goes on about the future return of the Lhotshampas. What face will returnees show to those left behind in the camps and to those who did not leave Bhutan in the first place? Will the government rely on them again to fill responsible posts? Will the Lhotshampa in Bhutan, who have been subjected to violence by the dissidents, accept them again? And can those who left the country willingly—sometimes against the pleas of state functionaries—even be termed refugees?

In the face of a worldwide uproar in favour of the refugees, the Bhutanese establishment, from King Jigme to the least significant functionary, closed ranks and made a concerted effort to counteract what they claimed was Nepalese disinformation. Cabinet ministers, High Court judges, articulate members of the Tshongdu, senior bureaucrats, and above all, the king himself, worked aggressively to explain their point of view. They prepared reports and statistics, sent delegations to various fora where the refugee issue was debated; invited scholars, journalists, jurists, and concerned opinion leaders to Bhutan; welcomed representatives of UNHCR, the refugee agency, as well as dignitaries from the United States, India and other countries; and engaged in talks with His Majesty's Government of Nepal to try to resolve the deadlock.

The effort has paid off. The Bhutanese have successfully portrayed themselves as victims of a Nepali conspiracy, as people who had nothing to hide and whose only objective was self-preservation. The diplomatic offensive mounted by the small Bhutanese establishment has been so effective that despite the uproar, the refugees have been left with no significant support voice in world fora.

#### **Withdrawal Syndrome**

Bhutanese policy makers do not hide their rejection of some Western ideological and cultural concepts. At Bhutan's stage of national development, they feel, Western concepts of representative democracy, competitive party systems, consumer culture, and standards of human rights, as well as activities of NGOs (church-sponsored or otherwise) could pose a serious threat. They say that the economic growth required for the welfare of the population needs political stability, and they fear religious plurality will go against the grain of age-old Bhutanese traditions in which life revolves around the institution of religion. Such ideological underpinnings have resulted in a kind of withdrawal syndrome.

The Bhutanese, who have developed a sense of confidence in their ability to handle the ethnic conflict in their own way, believe the talks with Nepal (seven in all, with Kathmandu governments of all hues) have deflated the issue. Once the talks were underway, it became a game of numbers. The Bhutanese accept that some of the refugees will return to Bhutan, but many of them will remain in Nepal; some may opt for India, although India is not officially involved in the negotiations. Bhutanese officials hasten to add, however, that those who do return are certain to face social, economic, cultural, and even administrative problems. They are also worried about the role of the international NGOs

that have been active in the refugee camps.

In Thimphu's perspective, the refugees in the Jhapa camps are deserters, and not the victims of any state-organised eviction. In support of this view, officials cite an account of the departure of Lhotshampas from Dorokha block in Samchi district in April 1994 on the eve of the third round of Bhutan-Nepal negotiations. After 44 families (269 members) had filed papers to leave Bhutan, officials advised them not to leave and reminded them that under Bhutanese laws they would lose their citizenship if they emigrated.

The king issued an edict (*sasho*) to the dzongda instructing them to "meet with all the families who have to emigrate, and do your utmost to persuade them not to leave the country". Those who withdrew their applications and returned to their villages would be exempt from all rural taxes for three years. Just five families and two individuals decided to stay back in Bhutan and the rest left for the Jhapa camps. Unlike in the past, most of them were Brahmins by caste. It is an odd experience to watch an 180-minute-long videocassette prepared by the government which shows a persuasive state establishment, represented by the Samchi dzongda and superintendent of police, on the one hand and the impassive but determined heads of the households from Dorakha Block.

#### **Those Who Stayed**

It seems that dissident violence has continued against the loyal Lhotshampas, especially those with official status. In some of the villages, these officials cannot spend nights in their own homes. In the first half of 1995, in Sarpang district alone, dissidents are said to have committed as many as 440 crimes against Lhotshampa—murder, kidnapping, rape, assault, and damage to property.

One can see barren, overgrown paddy fields, deserted villages, and crumbling houses all over southern Bhutan. While they do fear the violence from former neighbours now in the refugee camps, the loyal Lhotshampa are losing faith in the Bhutanese system as well. Although the king, the royal family, and a number of higher officials have been sympathetic to the Lhotshampa who have stayed, many Drukpas do not hide their pleasure at the plight of the Nepalis who remain behind.

From the two southern districts of Samchi and Sarpang, with an estimated population of 45,000 and 50,000 respectively (and less than ten percent Drukpa inhabitants), as many as 40,000 Nepalese have fled to the refugee camps. These refugees were more from the newer villages than from the larger and older settlements.

The village of Taklai in Sarpang is today totally deserted. The inhabitants have moved en masse to the refugee camps or elsewhere because the living conditions became difficult or because the overall atmosphere became too intimidating. It did not matter that this area had one of the most developed small irrigation projects in the southern Duars. The Lhotshampa abandoned their properties and rushed to the camps, obviously in the hope that quickly enough they would come to Bhutan on their own terms.

Once they left, even if temporarily, households were looted—of roofing sheets, tiles, doors, windows, wooden beams and frames—by thieves, bullies, businessmen or unscrupulous officials. All over these southern districts,



one can see long stretches of fields unattended for some seasons side by side with patches of well-cultivated paddies and orchards. The economy of southern Bhutan is completely stagnant.

Naturally, King Jigme is under heavy pressure to allot the fallow land to his loyal Lhotshampa or to the more-than-loyal Drukpa. There is another powerful lobby which seeks to cash in on the current international environmental emphasis by converting these agricultural lands, developed by the sweat of generations of Lhotshampa, back to the original jungle. This is not something that will be hard to do in the tropical sub-Himalayan terrain, where regeneration is swift. It is to King Jigme's credit that these deserted lands have not been usurped by aggressive lobbyists of any kind. However, this also leads to speculation that the Drukpa establishment at the highest levels expects some of the refugees to return to Bhutan.

Those left behind in the villages, often from families which are now divided, are living under a sense of panic, fear, uncertainty and continuous harassment. The officials are invariably cold to them; the fugitive relatives are hostile; and they are scared to even venture out to the fields because of fear of attacks. Worst of all, many of them are considered spies by both sides—the Drukpa establishment as well as the refugees. They cannot even be hired as labourers, because the contractors prefer to bring in cheap and pliant workers from India (and Bangladesh). The economy is paralysed, so far as the Lhotshampa of southern Bhutan are concerned.

### No Meeting Ground

For the Bhutanese authorities, the ethnic conflict represents a problem of law and order, and left to themselves, they would handle it in their own way. In the viewpoint of those who have left, the real issues facing the kingdom are not illegal immigration, anti-national activity, or terrorism as claimed by the government, but rather the establishment of political pluralism, democracy, and protection for human rights. The two sides are as far apart as it is possible to be in their perception.

The Thimphu view is that the Lhotshampas have abused the royal trust reposed in them. The Lhotshampa know that Druk Yul was a Drukpa country, with its own king, court, language, religion and laws. The immigrants must accept the national traditions and make an effort to be a part of this Bhutan. Once they do not accept the system and withdraw from it, they cease to have any claim for Bhutanese indulgence. Interestingly, there are a considerable number of articulate senior bureaucrats, not necessarily of Drukpa extraction, who hold such views. The Lhotshampa having showed their hand, an aggressive policy of Bhutanisation is now being pursued. This may be seen in the discontinuation of Nepali and Sanskrit teaching in the schools, cancellation of cash incentives for inter-ethnic marriages, and the changing of the Nepali placenames back into Dzongkha: Samchi—Samtse, Sarbhang—Sarpang, etc.

Meanwhile the leaders of the refugees in the camps show signs of desperation. Nothing is going in their favour. The international support base for their cause is shrinking. They appear to be far from happy with the patronage they received from their ethnic brethren, i.e.

the Nepalis of Nepal and their government. They are also terribly upset with the coldness with which the world fora have received their appeals. They are equally puzzled and distraught at the lack of response from the Indian media and political system. Despite their proverbial factionalism and inability to arrive at consensus among themselves, the refugee leaders have tried to do what is possible and logical; to educate the world and Indian public on their plight.

On the diplomatic front, the Bhutanese continue their aggressive and sophisticated lobbying. The refugees have had successes in getting media coverage in India, but the fact that they are divided into a dozen advocacy groups and political parties considerably weakens their clout. As far as the government of Nepal is concerned, the collapse of one government after another has meant changing faces and lack of continuity in the delegations which have met the Bhutanese side over the refugee issue.

The latest round of Nepal-Bhutan talks, in April, were led by the foreign ministers of each side, whereas all the earlier rounds were held at the home minister level. Meanwhile, the Indian authorities remain dismissive about the possibility of a role in resolving the conflict.

### Political Ferment

The continuing diplomatic deadlock has given birth to some movements in the sultry camps in southeast Nepal. Their patience having stretched to the limit, the refugees have started to become restive. Despite continuing factionalism among their ranks, they have managed to cultivate a section of Indian human rights and democratic movement protagonists. Additionally, they have appealed to the sensibility of their ethnic Nepali-speaking cousins in Sikkim and in the Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal. When the refugees fled Bhutan, they came by way of this region, known as the Duars, and they hope that the Indian Nepalis of this region will help facilitate the reverse journey to the Dragon Kingdom.

The political churning among the refugees has led to formation of two new groups, in addition to the political parties and human rights groups that already exist. These are the Bhutanese Coalition for Democratic Movement (BCDM), a political forum, and the Appeal Movement Coordination Council (AMCC), a human rights action group. After holding rallies and press conferences in Kathmandu, Delhi, Calcutta, Siliguri and elsewhere, they decided to march from their camps in Nepal to Bhutan across Indian territory to petition the Bhutanese king.

The BCDM is an umbrella organisation of political parties, youth fora and student organisations demanding drastic democratic changes in the body politic of Bhutan. The AMCC has appealed to the King for restoration of democratic rights and an early repatriation of the refugees, failing which they propose to file cases against the Royal Bhutan Government in Bhutanese courts. Apparently, while the former views the problems of the Bhutanese refugees as originating from a political crisis leading to arbitrary deprivation of subjecthood, the latter regards the issue as basically that of the violation of human rights.

Since January, the refugees have been staging demonstrations on the borders of Nepal and India at Kakarvitta

*They hope that the Indian Nepalis of this region will help facilitate the reverse journey to the Dragon Kingdom*

across the Mechi river with their ethnic supporters from India and Nepal. The district administrations of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri have declared their assembly and march to Bhutan illegal and imposed prohibitory orders. This has forced the refugees to squat on the borders and court arrest. Close to two thousand people have been arrested and sent to jail. The in-custody death, in June, of one of the detainees gave the marchers cause for demonstrating against Indian authorities. At the same time, support from ethnic Nepalis is becoming more evident with a five-day strike having been called in late June in Darjeeling.

Cutting across political affiliations, the Congress, CPM, Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League and other political parties from Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri have expressed solidarity with these stateless persons. The state government of West Bengal, which bears the brunt of the refugee march to Bhutan, has approached New Delhi for more forces immediately. It has also demanded that the central leadership find a resolution to this political problem, as it is not an internal problem of the state.

Meanwhile, King Jigme, in a state visit to New Delhi in March, sought to underscore the mutual interests that held India and Bhutan together. The Indian Home Ministry approached Bhutan to initiate an extradition treaty to handle the Bodo insurgents, who use the Bhutanese jungles for sanctuary. Economic ties were further strengthened with the signing of agreements on the Tala hydro-electric project and the Dungsum cement plant. And, no one has missed Bhutan's enthusiastic espousal of India's candidature to the United Nations Security Council.

Even as the refugees take the pitch of their agitation higher, the Thimphu government's approach seems to be

to ignore the refugees altogether, and go above their heads to concentrate on deepening ties with New Delhi.

In Shavian tradition, when there is a conflict between the monarch and popularly elected ministers, the monarch wins handsomely every time when personal ability and good sense are all equally divided, thus, upsetting the populist appletart. The wise king defeats the pompous, vain and arrogant populists. In the case of Druk Yul, who, indeed, will upset whose appletart, the Bhutanese royalists or the populist Lhotsamphas? The answer is anybody's guess, as the Bhutanese diplomatic offensive continues while the refugee activism in the Duars seems to gather steam. △

A.C. Sinha is professor of anthropology at the North Eastern Hill University and author of several books on the Indian Northeast, including *Bhutan: Ethnic Identity and National Dilemma*.

## NEXT ISSUE

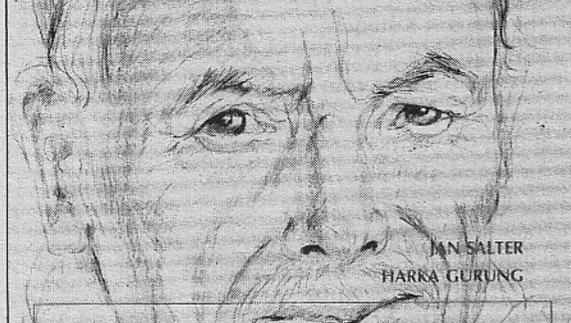
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## FACES OF NEPAL



## FACES OF NEPAL

by Jan Salter and  
Harka Gurung

Published by Himal Books

"The 85 portraits in the book by Jan represent a mosaic of the Nepalese people. Most will find them of immense diversity...But bereft of particular ethnic ornamentations, the faces bear a common expression of forbearance..." says Dr Harka Gurung, whose meticulously researched and lucidly written text accompany the pictures by the well-known hand of Jan Salter in *Faces of Nepal*.

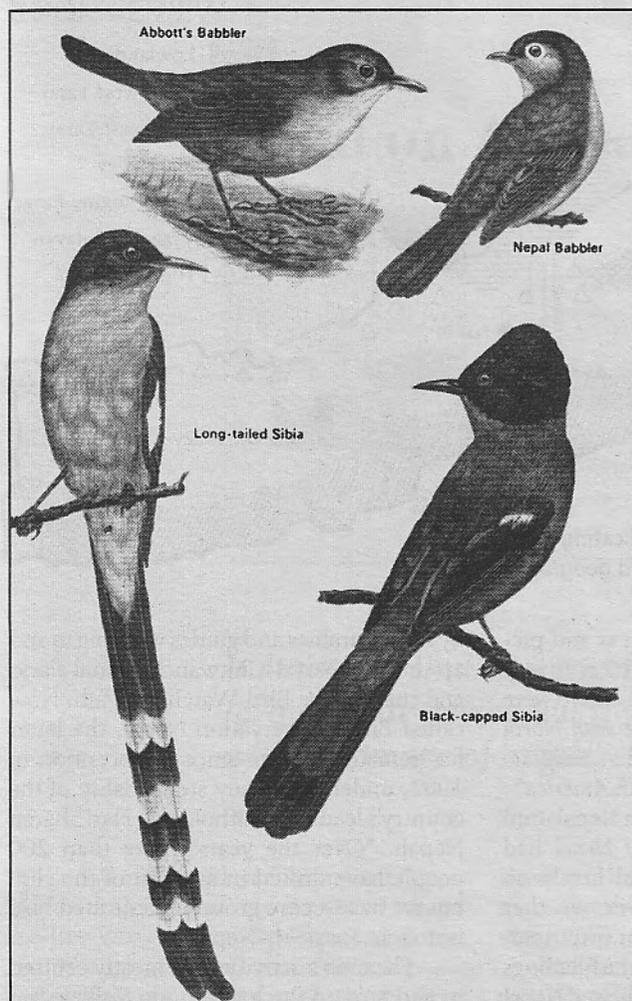
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Page 213 of *Birds of Nepal*. Picture at top right shows Robert Fleming, Sr with Lain Singh Bangdel (glasses) standing behind (l to r) Hira Lal Dangol, Robert Fleming, Jr and Hem Poudyal.



## The Birds of Nepal, and a Book

*Bird watching is trying to gain wing in Nepal, spurred by a unique manual prepared by an American father-and-son team.*

by Deepak Thapa

Nepalis are not known to be great book readers to begin with, and due to the neglect of English education, publications in English receive scantier attention. So it is a wonder that a book on birds written in English commands a high premium in Kathmandu's handful of English bookshops.

*Birds of Nepal*, written by the father-son duo Robert L. Fleming, Sr & Jr, has been sold out for five years, and the stray copy that surfaces now and then is snapped up by bird enthusiasts for up to USD 250 (NPR 15,000), much over the cover price of NPR 250.

The book by the American authors also has the distinction of introducing the ornithology of Nepal to the world, and getting the Nepalis themselves interested in the birdlife which is so abundant in their country.

### Senior and Junior

The story behind *Birds of Nepal* goes all the way back to 1928, when Robert Fleming Sr moved from his native state of Michigan, USA, to Mussoorie, India, to teach at the well-known Woodstock School. It was in Mussoorie that he met his wife Bethel, a medical doctor. During vacations, the couple would take off for isolated corners of the Indian Himalaya to do what the family enjoyed most—bird watching.

Mr Fleming Jr, who joined in on those forays when he was old enough and is today a well-known wildlife expert who leads nature tours in Asia and Africa, says his father had a great love for beauty in nature. He remembers his father trying to inculcate a similar appreciation by carrying him up to a flower and enunciating "pretty", going to another flower repeating "pretty", and so on.

During the course of their 25 years in Mussoorie, the Flemings used to receive many bird enthusiasts at home, including the grand old man of Indian ornithology, Salim Ali. It was during one of Mr Ali's visits that a young Mr Fleming Jr, got a chance to impress him. Hoping that Mr Ali would be able to identify a bird he had shot at 3310 m in the Dodi Tal area of Garhwal, he brought out the specimen. Mr Ali promptly identified the bird as Gould's Shortwing (*Brachypteryx stellata*), but was suitably surprised to know that it was found so far west, whereas he had once led an unsuccessful expedition in its search in Sikkim, almost 1200 kilometres to the east.

### One Tenth of Birdkind

Nepal had long beckoned to the Flemings, for it was *terra incognita* as far as ornithology was concerned. It was next to impossible to

visit Rana-ruled Nepal in those days, so Mr Fleming Sr used some influence he had with the American embassy in Delhi to gain entry. His first foray was up along the Kali Gandaki valley in Central Nepal, a bird-watcher's paradise, then almost untrodden by Westerners. Mr Fleming came back, with family, in 1951 and 1952.

As a missionary couple, the two were drawn to the idea of helping improve and develop Nepal's almost non-existent educational and medical facilities. In 1953, the family moved to Nepal as part of a team to establish the United Mission to Nepal, an inter-denominational Christian help group.

Once resident in the country, the Flemings were to find enough variety of birds to match their passion. As they write in the introduction to *Birds of Nepal*: "There are few places in the world where snowy-white egrets perch in front of giant peaks, both turning pink in the setting sun. And very few places where one can observe birds at 8235 metres and still be on the ground."

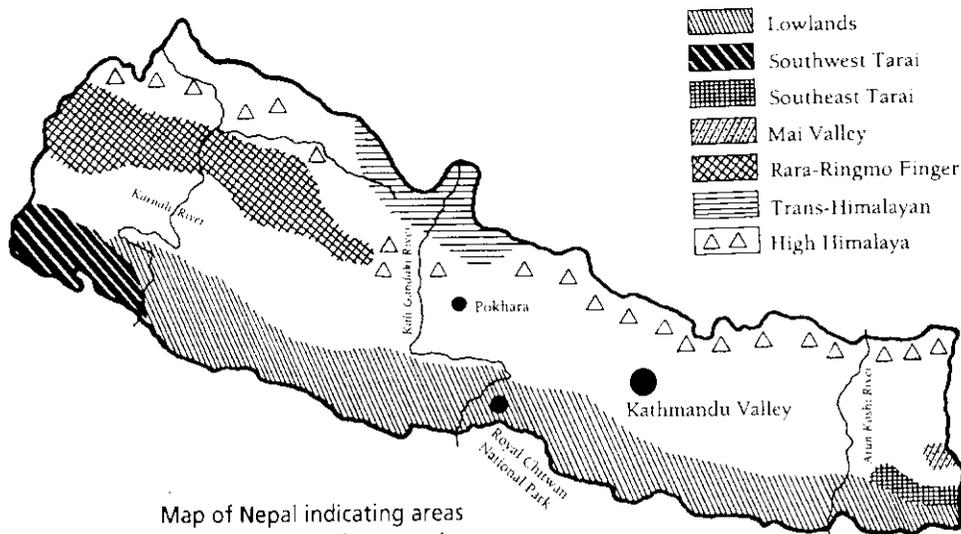
A tenth of all known birds of the world can be found in Nepal. It is not only the altitudinal difference that makes the country so bountiful in bird species, Nepal is also unique for its geographical positioning in Asia. Zoo-geographically, it lies at the centre of the continent, providing habitats that sum up the range of Asia's climates, from the hot and humid rainforests of Indochina to the cold, dry deserts of Central Asia.

### Ornithological Delight

By 1968, the data on Nepal's birds the Flemings had collected was voluminous enough to make a book. But a publication on birds is useless without accompanying visuals, and so they solicited the help of eminent Nepali artist Lain Singh Bangdel. Under Mr Bangdel's supervision, two young artists, Hem Poudyal and Hira Lal Dangol, set to work on the illustrations.

Having the material ready was one thing, but finding a publisher quite another. There were numerous rejections from publishers who thought such a book would never sell. In the end, the family decided to self-finance the book, "more a labour of love than a commercial venture," recalls Fleming Jr. His father sold off his grand piano to make the payments, saying he could do with a smaller one.

It was 1976 before the book finally came out and quickly made its mark as a classic. It went in quickly for two editions, 1979 and 1983. Besides being very informative, the book was also a visual delight with the fine paintings of Mr Poudyal and Mr Dangol to illustrate the text. Apparently, this was only the *third* book of its kind



Map of Nepal indicating areas important in bird geography

published anywhere that had text and pictures on facing pages which makes it very user-friendly in the field (the other two were *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East* and *A Guide to Field Identification: Birds of North America*).

Mr Fleming Sr was to live in Nepal until 1979, by which time *Birds of Nepal* had succeeded in imprinting Nepal firmly on the minds of enthusiasts all over, whether bird watchers, 'bird banders', or ornithologists. "We have to be grateful to the Flemings because their book not only publicised Nepal as a treasure house of bird species but it also spurred interest in bird-watching among Nepalis," says Karna Sakya, co-founder of the Kathmandu-based Bird Watching Club.

### Valley Naturalists

Bird-watching has not as yet caught up as a popular national pastime in Nepal. The required conditions for the hobby—affluence, leisure, and awareness—are still not there to the extent required. However, one increasingly finds excursion groups with a copy of *Birds of Nepal* on hand negotiating some of the thick woodlands on the outskirts of Kathmandu.

Villagers of Nepal are, of course, natural birdwatchers. Says Mr Fleming Jr, "The city dwellers will be able to recognise crows and sparrows, whereas outside the city I only have to open the book and people instantly point out the birds they know. But their interest is only poetic. It is only when one makes a deliberate attempt to see different birds, seeks them out and makes a study of them, that one becomes a true bird-watcher. I am glad our book has been able to lead Nepalis in that direction."

At present, there are at least two groups actively watching birds. There is one formed

by the naturalists and guides working in and around the Royal Chitwan National Park, and there is the Bird Watching Club. Now called Bird Conservation Nepal, the latter has remained active since its inception in 1982, under the steady stewardship of the country's leading ornithologist, Hari Sharan Nepali. "Over the years, more than 200 people have drifted in and out of the club but we have a core group of dedicated bird watchers," says Mr Nepali.

The club's activities are mostly centred in and around the Kathmandu Valley, but the valley provides an abundant variety of birds so there is never a dull moment. The Flemings once had a bird count competition going with a friend in Sri Lanka who had the whole island to find his birds while they restricted themselves to the valley. "The tally ran neck-to-neck all the time," recalls Mr Fleming Jr.

Mr Sakya is pleased that many of the youngsters who had joined the club have gone on to become naturalists and wildlife experts. He believes that as a birdwatcher's paradise, Nepal should be able to take economic advantage by hosting the hundreds of thousands of bird enthusiasts the world over. (Mr Sakya is also a successful hotelier.)

That indeed is what Mr Fleming Jr does when he is not leading nature tours elsewhere—he brings tour groups of bird watchers to Nepal. For the next six months, however, he will not be travelling. He will be home, preparing the fourth edition of *Birds of Nepal* for press, and there is a lot of work up ahead. For, while the first edition listed 787 bird species, with new sightings, the number is now more than 830. Mr Fleming Jr will have to do it all alone this time, his father having died in 1987.

# Dead on Arrival



## Testing Times: The Global Stake in a Nuclear Test Ban

by Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik  
Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation  
Uppsala, Sweden, 1996  
71 pages, ISBN 91-85214-23-X

by T.T. Paulose

**India might find ego-gratification by emerging as a nuclear power, but it will have to contend with the image of 'rogue' state.**

The end of the cold war brightened hopes for the emergence of a nuclear weapons-free world. But the presence of some 20,000 nuclear warheads and their sophisticated delivery systems with the nuclear weapons states (NWS) on the one hand, and the activities of the threshold nuclear powers on the other, have ensured that it remains a difficult proposition. The initialling of a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the end of this year was supposed to have been an important step in this direction.

In *Testing Times: The Global Stake in a Nuclear Test Ban*, journalist-researchers Praful Bidwai and Achin Vanaik write: "The completion of a truly comprehensive, universal, non-discriminatory zero-yield, and verifiable treaty to prohibit testing (so necessary for qualitative improvement of nuclear weapons) would provide a logical way out of the nuclear impasse that has lasted half a century."

But the 28 June deadline for wrapping up the draft of a CTBT has come and gone without any accord. On 20 June, the newly elected United Front government in New Delhi announced it would not sign the CTBT unless the NWS—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States—agreed to disarm within a given time frame. It also announced the withdrawal of all facilities for seismic verification from the purview of the International Monitoring System (IMS).

However, India would continue to sit in on negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, it said.

Pakistan promptly announced that the treaty would be "dead on arrival" if any of the eight nuclear-capable powers declined to sign. Simultaneously, China expressed its reservations, saying the clause on peaceful nuclear explosions (PNE) should be revised after 10 years. Russia, China, France, Pakistan and UK were of the view that India, Pakistan and Israel should ratify the treaty for its entry into force. Russia, China and India expressed reservations on the matter of "on-site inspection" and the US position on National Technical Means of Verification.

Negotiations collapsed and a revised version of the draft was presented to the delegations at the CD to take back with them and study before talks resume on 29 July.

The well-argued monograph by Mr Bidwai and Mr Vanaik was conceived as an intervention in the negotiations and the public debate on the CTBT. Supported by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, the study, in the words of the authors, "attempts to assess the main areas of dispute between potential signatories and possible forms of their resolution, and to point to the larger political value of establishing a good CTBT, something that is now within our reach."

The study thus retains its topicality and is significant in that it is the first publication of its kind, and all the more significant as it comes from India, a country that has a critical role in the CTBT process. It follows on the book-length study *Nuclear Weapon Tests: Prohibition or Limitation?* (1988) edited by Josef Goldblat and David Cox, and two monographs on the CTBT by Eric Arnett.

The authors of *Testing Times* maintain that theirs is an attempt to familiarise readers from the global South, and especially India, with the international debate on disarmament and to acquaint the international reader with the debate in India on the issue. The objectivity of the concise, meticulously researched and readable text is in sharp contrast to the selective analyses and biased research on the same theme by some well-known writers of India on nuclear issues, who so strongly advocate that the country withdraw from the CTBT negotiations.

The authors make no secret of their own stance on whether India should go nuclear. It should not. After devoting a section to the analysis of the Indian position and mapping out the options available to the country, Mr Bidwai and Mr Vanaik are of the opinion that India should initial the treaty at the earliest.

They write: "The ongoing talks on the CTBT represent an encroaching 'Day of Judgement' for New Delhi. It is to be hoped that it will wisely choose the path of nuclear sanity and work for and be part of a consensus CTBT that is now close within the world's reach".

They warn: "If the world yet again fails to complete the CTBT in the near future, the impact will be to strengthen hawkish lobbies in the governments of both the NWS and threshold states. This will end hopes for a fissile material production ban (Fissban) and even jeopardise existing arms control agreements including START-II and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty."

### Hidden Agenda

The authors point out India wants to be seen as seeking the moral high ground reflecting its seriousness about advancing the cause of nuclear disarmament. However, they write, New Delhi is resisting signing mainly because it will limit or narrow its nuclear option. While refusing to sign the CTBT in its present form, India, nudged by its power elites, may be seeking an escape route to a



belated nuclear weapons programme. This hidden agenda which goaded India to act as a 'spoiler' at the CD negotiations in Geneva is now becoming apparent even as some higher-ups in the defence services openly advocate that India exercise its nuclear option.

In effect, the situation is fast approaching the one described by the authors in the monograph. They say the US and Russia may now go forward with the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) process, enlarging its scope to eventually include the other NWS, while India could take a retrogressive step by emerging as a new NWS and ending up as a 'rogue' nation.

The book provides valuable insights into the global stakes in a test ban, the vacillating stand of the NWS on the CTBT, the probable holdouts (Russia and China) and the potential spoilers (India). The writing is simple, lucid and to the point. Seven boxes within the monograph elucidate the basic tenets essential for understanding the political and technical complexities of the CTBT. Under a separate head, a brief history of the CTBT talks since 1954 is included.

The book unabashedly advocates the CTBT and its stated objectives of banning all attempts by the NWS to further refine or modernise their arsenal and to cap any further weapons development by the threshold states. It acknowledges that the treaty is limited and that not a single nuclear warhead from the existing stockpile will be destroyed because of it. Nevertheless, the authors believe that the instrument will be an important step forward for nuclear disarmament.

They write, "In all probability, if a CTBT is not completed and signed this year, that will also weaken the credibility of the multilateral process of arms control negotiations and devalue the CD as a forum. The world may have to say goodbye to nuclear disarmament for a long time to come."

The monograph will have to go through a quick revision and be updated as well if it is to retain its relevance, as it was written before elections in either India or Russia and before the 28 June deadline was crossed. Although it deals with India's security concerns as an aspect of the domestic debate on the CTBT, the authors do not do justice to the extent of concern which exists in New Delhi about the external security environment. This, after all, is what makes analysts and policy-makers come out vociferously in favour of exercising the nuclear option.

T.T. Paulose is a Delhi-based scholar who follows the nuclear issue.

## Man of Comparative Insights



### The Conditions of Listening: Essays on Religion, History and Politics in South Asia

by Richard Burghart  
 Edited by C. J. Fuller and Jonathan Spencer  
 Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996  
 Price: INR 695  
 ISBN 0 19 563807 7

by Pratyoush Onta

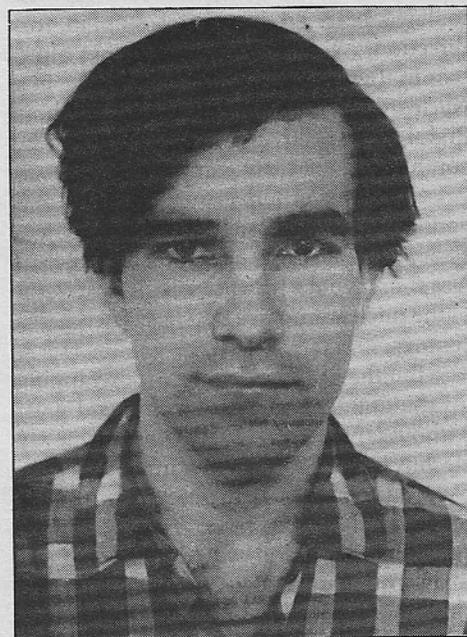
When anthropologist Richard Burghart passed away in January 1994 at the age of 49, he left behind several incomplete and unpublished research reports and a huge corpus of published writings. An American by birth, Mr Burghart finished his college in western Massachusetts and went on to complete a doctoral dissertation entitled *The History of Janakpurdhham: A Study in Asceticism and the Hindu Polity* in 1978 at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. This ethno-historical work was never printed in its entirety even as Mr Burghart published several articles based on it. While he taught in the UK (1978-1988) and later at the University of Heidelberg, Mr Burghart published many articles which now stand as testimony to his stature as a formidable scholar of South Asian history and society.

These writings also established the scholar as one of the foremost historical anthropologists of his generation. However, they remained scattered in various academic journals and books, and were never compiled in a publication while Mr Burghart was still alive. Some of his most important essays have now been brought together in the volume under review by anthropologists C.J. Fuller and Jonathan Spencer who have also edited and introduced this selection of Mr Burghart's writings.

The essays in the book are organised in three sections. The first of these contains essays on the interpretation of Hindu society and others on Mr Burghart's empirical research on the ascetics of the Ramanandi sect. Together, these essays provide an original critique of Louis Dumont's most influential interpretation of Hindu society, proposed majestically in *Homo Hierarchicus* (1966 in French, 1970 in English). Mr

Dumont identified a single caste hierarchy—led by the brahmin—based on the ritual encompassing of the impure by the pure as the most essential feature of Hindu society. He was rightly taken to task by various scholars, some of whom argued that notions of hierarchy in Hindu South Asia included other aspects such as authority, honour and prestige, and could not be reduced to a single ritually pure-impure model.

Using historical materials from his research in Nepal, Mr Burghart, in what was an original critique of Mr Dumont, argued that the traditional social system of Hindu society consisted of a complex tripartite hierarchical scheme led by the king, the brahmin and the ascetic respectively. In working out the complexity of this scheme,



Richard Burghart in 1973

Mr Burghart used the notion of intra-cultural translation as deployed by each of the three agents who, he argued, "absorbed elements of the other two codes into his own code and then claimed the absolutely supreme rank in the social system." This complexity, Mr Burghart suggested, could be ignored by the outside anthropologist interested in intercultural translation only at a great risk of misrepresentation.

### Conditions of Listening

The second section of the book contains papers on the history of the political culture of the nation-state in Nepal. As a set, they exemplify both Mr Burghart's skills as a meticulous historian and his interest in transformations of Nepali idioms of power, authority and agency during the past two centuries. "Gifts to the Gods" is a classic account focused on the king's agency as someone engaged in cultural transaction with respect to the gifting of lands to divinities, both celestial and human.

"The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal" is perhaps the scholar's best-known essay among Nepal specialists. In it, and in a following essay dealing with the use of the category "Hindu", Mr Burghart concerns himself with the history of the use of these ideas in governmental discourse in Nepal. His formulation helps us to understand one aspect of the history of the Hindu-based, Nepali-language-based exclusive nationalism in Nepal.

In one of the other essays in this section, using ethnographic details from the teachers' movement of the mid-1980s, Burghart argues that in a hierarchical social structure with no civil society (this is how he interpreted Nepal during the Panchayat era), the "conditions of listening" have to be created by first generating "the moral space in which subjects can publicly criticise." He interprets the movement's three phases—symbolic strike, open procession and *bandh* (closing down)—as a way in which the subjects communicate with the king and not simply rebel against the lord.

In the third section entitled "Complex Agency", we find three essays that exemplify some of Mr Burghart's other concerns: culture in the South Asian diaspora, medical anthropology and development, and the description of spoken Maithili.

### Powerful Insights

By publishing a selection of Richard Burghart's scattered essays in a single volume, the editors' purpose was to present the intellectual unity that characterised the diversity of the scholar's writings. They have succeeded, for *The Conditions of Listening*

certainly provides that opportunity and assists our appreciation of Mr Burghart's insights into South Asian history and society.

As a scholar who used historical materials from Nepal (more than anybody else) to speak about the dominant organising concepts of the anthropology of South Asia, much of Mr Burghart's work helped in extending the otherwise India-dominated focus of the field. By forcing most of his colleagues who did research on 'South Asia' (most of them would have obtained their doctorates without having read a single thing on Nepal, for example) to think about a part of the Subcontinent that had escaped direct colonial rule, Mr Burghart provided powerful comparative insights for others who delved into the corresponding transformations in colonised South Asia.

For Nepal specialists, Mr Burghart's writings provide a good perspective on the cultural history of the Nepali state and society. It is another story that Nepali historians from the country have largely ignored this distinguished scholar's work at the cost of their own continued intellectual incarceration within the narrow confines of political history.

Finally, it must also be recognised that the anthropological highways that brought Mr Burghart into Nepal, despite his historically informed analyses, limited his view of Nepali society. Obsessed with the king, brahmin and the ascetic in traditional Hindu

Nepal, Mr Burghart's appreciation of more recent Nepali society under the Panchayat system was rather limited. His evocation of the idiom of lordship in the essay "His Lordship at the Cobblers' Well" does not reveal much of an understanding of the idiom and substance of development.

In failing to notice the agency of the middle-class Nepali nationalists in the propagation of both Hindu- and Nepali-language-based Nepali national culture, Mr Burghart could only hold a narrow view of the Panchayati public sphere. His readings of the teachers' movement in the 1980s and of the 1990 *Jana Andolan* (People's Movement) that brought an end to Panchayati rule (published elsewhere) indicate that his obsession with the idiom of lordship and governmental discourses on Nepaliness prevented him from seeing much that happened as way of public criticism of the Panchayati rule and the institution of kingship in Nepal during the 1980s. One possible reason for this could be the late academic's neglect of recent Nepali-language sources, including insightful literary works produced by Nepalis whose terms of reference do not necessarily overlap with those of the anthropologists of Nepal and South Asia.

*P. Onta is an editor of the new journal Studies in Nepali History and Society.*

1st announcement, July 1996

## FILM SOUTH ASIA

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN DOCUMENTARIES, 1997

Between 21 and 23 February 1997, Kathmandu will host a festival of films on South Asia. Film South Asia will be screening works by Bangladeshi, Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan as well as expatriate directors.

Film South Asia (FSA) follows the Film Himalaya '94 festival which was organised by Himal magazine in February 1994. While FSA 1997 will showcase documentary films, future festivals will also include experimental films, short films, features, tele-dramas, and so on.

FSA 1997 will be a unique gathering place for documentary film-makers from all over South Asia and overseas. FSA 1997 seeks to create an interactive venue in Kathmandu where those involved with documentary films will come together to exchange ideas and plan future work. Besides directors and producers, the event will also be attended by critics, station-owners, buyers and connoisseurs from all over Asia.

**Subject criteria:** Entries will have to be on South Asian subjects, broadly understood. They can cover any subject in the range available to documentary makers, from people, culture, lifestyle and adventure to development, environment, politics, education, history and so on.

**Length:** The duration of a documentary will not be considered a bar.

**Format:** For selection, films should be sent in VHS (PAL, NTSC or SECAM).

A selection meeting is scheduled for November 26, 1996. All entries must reach the Festival office by the first week of November 1996. Entries which are chosen will be allowed to compete and awards will be presented to winners in different categories. More details will be provided in the second announcement, in August.

**For entry forms and other queries, please contact:**

Suman Basnet

Director, Film South Asia

PO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.

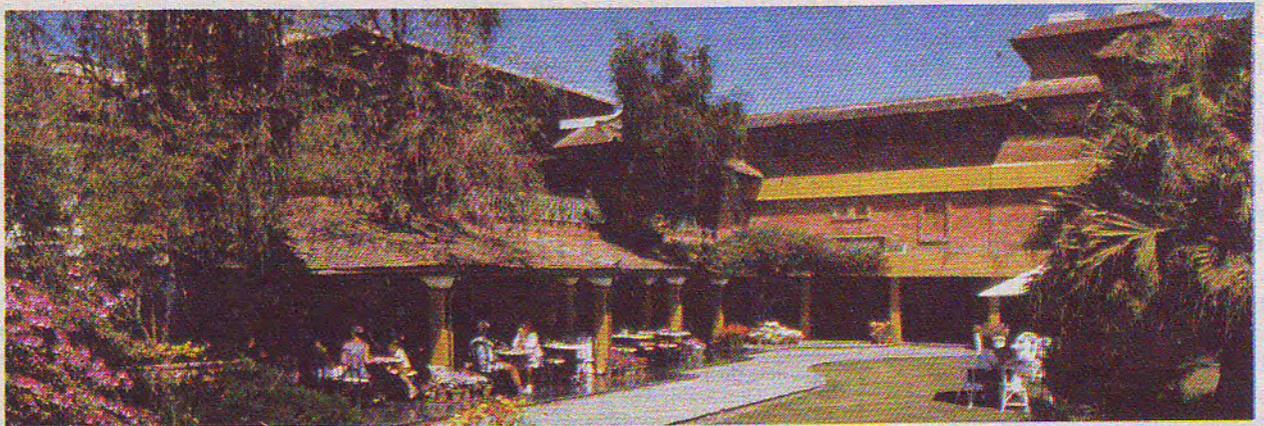
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Lyn de Alwis

## Sri Lanka's Mr Zoo

*This Sri Lankan man is able to bring pleasure to millions with his knack for running zoos. He also saves wild elephants.*

by Manik de Silva

"I'VE SPENT THE best years of my life here," says Lyn de Alwis, now back at the Dehiwela Zoo outside Colombo to which he devoted 30 years of his working life, 23 of them as its Director.

Those were golden years for the zoo, located in a southern suburb, and regarded as one of the finest in the region both for its collection as well as its beautifully laid gardens. But more recently, Colombo's zoological gardens have been in acute decline and the government has recalled the former director from retirement to serve it as a consultant.

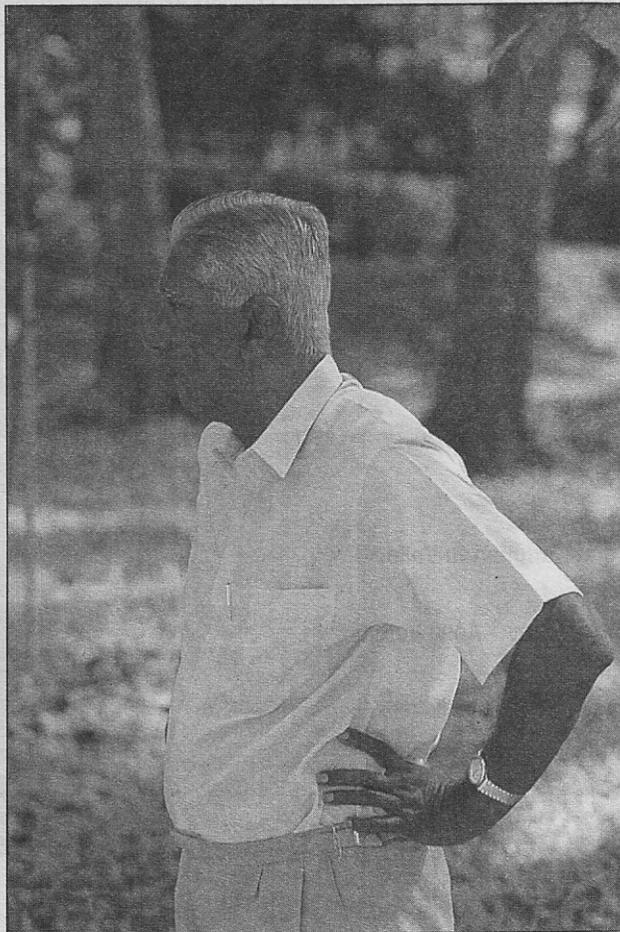
The impact of his return is already being felt, with a new enthusiasm evident among both staff and visitors who are returning to a once-favourite recreation spot in growing numbers. Decidedly, there is a new bloom around the place. Mr de Alwis says that a lot more remains to be done, but is quietly confident that the zoo can regain its past glory.

### Night Life

For five years between 1965-70, Mr de Alwis concurrently held the position of both Zoo Director and Director of Wildlife Conservation. He firmly believes that the best way to study animals, whether in their natural habitat or in captivity, is on foot. So he does a lot of walking every day in the gardens in much the same way an estate superintendent would in a plantation under his care, spotting the myriad

things that need doing, giving instructions, following up.

The achievements at Dehiwela during Mr



de Alwis's years was what attracted Singapore authorities to invite him to set up the new zoo they were planning. That was in 1970, when he was given a 225-acre

forest and a mandate to create an open air facility incorporating the features of a modern zoo. "They knew what they wanted, having toured many zoos, particularly in the US and Europe. They saw what we had at Dehiwela and decided to give us the job," Mr de Alwis recalls.

The Singapore Zoo took three years and a lot of hard work to build. The result, however, was immediate: one million visitors a year soon after opening. The zoo that Mr de Alwis built is now firmly on the tourist map of Singapore. It is patronised by locals and is also popular among foreign visitors.

In 1986, when Mr de Alwis retired from his position of Director of the Dehiwela Zoo, Singapore invited him to come back and use the remaining land to set up what has become its unique Night Safari. Having seen leopard and tiger 'beats' under lights at the Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal, Mr de Alwis believed that it would be possible to give zoo visitors a unique experience of watching the night-time behaviour of animals in a simulated nocturnal habitat.

"Actually, it was my wife who gave me the idea," Mr de Alwis admits. "I always felt that if we could show nocturnal animals out in the open with a certain amount of lighting, people would get a much better understanding of how animals behave at night." The Night Safari is now the rage in Singapore, where visitors can see several species of animals mingling at night in enclosures that are much bigger than normal zoos. Mr de Alwis originally wanted truly "huge" enclosures, but had to compromise. The size was reduced so that the animals would be clearly

visible to visitors. "The darkness conceals many of the devices that advertise the animals' captive condition in the daytime--fences, moats,

walls, chain links," writes Nirmal Ghosh, an Indian journalist based in Singapore, in an article for *Silver Kris*, the Singapore Airlines inflight magazine. "The zoo experience will never be the same after you've visited the Night Safari, a one-of-a-kind exposure to the nocturnal habits of some of the members of the animal kingdom."

The Singapore Zoological Gardens have now set up a consultancy group to which Mr de Alwis belongs. Its role is to help other countries with their zoos. This group has already been approached by Burma, Cambodia and Indonesia.

### Elephant Man

Mr de Alwis's professional involvement with animals is somewhat unique because not only has he dealt with animals in captivity, but has also headed his country's Wild Life Conservation Department, running Sri Lanka's national parks and regulating the fauna conservation effort. As in many other developing countries, this has been an uphill battle with man and animals competing for resources that become scarcer by the day.

In retirement, new life has been breathed into Mr de Alwis's interest in wildlife conservation with his appointment as head of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AESG) set up by the World-wide Fund for Nature and the World Conservation Union. The Asian elephant now survives in the wild in 13 countries and four of them (India, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka) are represented in the AESG mandated to develop conservation proposals.

Mr de Alwis, who has been travelling to Burma and Indochina as part of his new responsibilities, says some very worthwhile breakthroughs have been made. "We must look at the whole of Asia and not just a few countries. I started approaching governments and governmental agencies in many countries where the Asian elephant survives and have had some very encouraging responses," he says.

"Burma's Minister of Forestry has been most enthusiastic and he personally invited us to his country. He sent us under escort to elephant country in difficult areas and himself organised a workshop. We

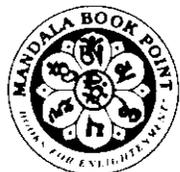
made a similar approach to Cambodia and they were very open and very keen. We have also sent a group to Vietnam and right now we are getting into Laos."

Most elephants in Indochina live in huge contiguous forests covering the territory of three countries--Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. An estimated 300 elephants live in this region. Ideally, an elephant reserve would be created encompassing the territory of all three countries, and Mr de Alwis is optimistic. "All three countries are keen on protecting this heritage," he says. AESG is also involved with elephant conservation in Szechuan in southern China, where there is likely to be an estimated population of 300 elephants.

"When there is the resource and funds are available, you are encouraged to think of new enterprises", says Mr de Alwis. "Whether it is zoos, conservation or anything else, we all talk glibly about the need for political will. But it is we who must be the instrument of securing that will. And when you start something, the beautiful thing is that you get support which you least anticipated."

### RECENT ARRIVALS

1. **Contested Hierarchies: A Collaboration Ethnography of Caste in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal** – David Gellner & Declan Quigley.
2. **Claiming the High Ground: Sherpa, Subsistence & Environmental Change in the Highest Himalaya** – Stanly F. Stevens.
3. **Three Years in Tibet** – Ekai Kawaguchi (*Reprint*)
4. **The Treasure Revealer of Bhutan** – P. Tshewang, K. P. Tashi, C. Butter & S. K. Saetreng.
5. **Images of a Century: The Changing Townscape of the Kathmandu Valley**
6. **Gods, Men & Territory: Society & Culture in Kathmandu Valley** – Anne Vergati
7. **Anthropology of Nepal: People, Problems & Processes** – Edited by Michael Allen
8. **Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies** – Geoffrey Samuel (*Mandala Edition is being published by arrangement with Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC, USA*)
9. **Faces of Nepal** – Jan Salter & Harka Gurung



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# Airline Schedule for South Asia

FROM TO	FLT NBR	DAY	AIRCRAFT	STD/STA
<b>Bombay (BOM)</b>				
CMB	UL 182	4	A320	0400/0630
CMB	UL 142	7	A320	0400/0630
DAC	BG 018	4	DC10	0620/0935
DAC	BG 030	7	DC10	0425/0740
KHI	PK 275	1234	A300	1015/1130
KHI	UL 181	3	A320	2200/2330
KHI	IC 631	37	A320	1500/1625
KHI	PK 277	7	A300	0145/0300
KTM	RA 202	1	B757	2050/2340
KTM	RA 202	5	B757	1120/1410
<b>Calcutta (CCU)</b>				
CGP	BG 698	25	ATP	1545/1730
CGP	IC 225	1	B737	0700/0820
DAC	BG 092	45	F28	0850/1000
DAC	BG 092	267	F28	1150/1300
DAC	BG 092	2367	F28	1150/1300
DAC	BG 092	1	F28	1305/1415
DAC	BG 092	3	F28	1320/1430
DAC	BG 094	X15	F28	1940/2050
DAC	BG 094		F28	1940/2050
DAC	BG 094	1	F28	2005/2115
DAC	BG 096	X4	ATP	2055/2210
DAC	BG 094	5	F28	2205/2315
DAC	IC 723	1356	A320	1300/1415
KTM	IC 747	1246	B737	1035/1210
KTM	RA 214	2	B727	1955/2120
PBH	KB 106	5	BAE146	1325/1505
PBH	KB 106	7	BAE146	1105/1245
<b>Chittagong (CGP)</b>				
CCU	IC 226	1	B737	0900/0920
CCU	BG 697	25	ATP	1420/1505
<b>Colombo (CMB)</b>				
BOM	UL 181	3	A320	1830/2100
BOM	UL 141	7	A320	2300/0130
DEL	UL 191	35	A320	2225/0200
KHI	PK 775	3	A300	0105/0410
MAA	IC 574	DAILY	A300	1450/1510
MAA	UL 121	1	A320	1140/1300
MAA	UL 123	1	A320	2005/2125
MAA	UL 121	23	A320	0755/0920
MAA	UL 123	25	A320	2110/2125
MAA	UL 121	467	A320	0755/0920
MAA	UL 121	5	A320	0820/0945
MAA	UL 123	6	L1011	1945/2105
MLE	UL 101	1	L1011	0730/0830
MLE	UL 103	1	A320	2040/2140
MLE	UL 103	2	A320	2020/2120
MLE	UL 101	3	A320	0730/0830
MLE	UL 103	3	A320	1300/1400
MLE	PK 777	4	AB3	1230/1325
MLE	UL 101	45	A320	1300/1400
MLE	UL 103	4	L1011	2050/2150
MLE	UL 101	67	L1011	0730/0830
MLE	UL 103	6	A320	1940/2040
TRV	UL 161	12	A320	1015/1115
TRZ	UL 131	27	A320	1330/1435
TRV	UL 161	456	A320	0815/0915
TRV	UL 161	3	A320	1320/1420
TRV	IC 908	357	A320	1150/1140
<b>Dhaka (DAC)</b>				
BOM	BG 017	3	DC10	1850/2100
BOM	BG 029	6	DC10	1655/1905
CCU	IC 737	1356	A320	1505/1520
CCU	BG 091	1	F28	1215/1225
CCU	BG 091	3	F28	1230/1240
CCU	BG 091	267	F28	1100/1110
CCU	BG 091	45	F28	0800/0810
CCU	BG 091	2367	F28	1100/1110
CCU	BG 093	X15	F28	1850/1900
CCU	BG 093		F28	1850/1900
CCU	BG 093	1	F28	1915/1925
CCU	BG 095	X4	ATP	2000/2015
CCU	BG 093	5	F28	2115/2125
DEL	BG 011	2	DC10	0130/0320
DEL	BG 009	6	DC10	0130/0320
KHI	PK 267	24	A310	1235/1500
KHI	BG 023	7	A310	1730/2000
KTM	BG 703	1	F28	1130/1240
KTM	BG 703	37	F28	1345/1450
KTM	SQ 414	47	A313	1150/1250
KTM	BG 703	5	F28	1130/1240
PBH	KB 110	3	BAE146	1135/1245
PBH	KB 110	3	BAE146	1135/1245
<b>Delhi (DEL)</b>				
CMB	UL 192	46	A320	0320/0650
DAC	BG 010	1	DC10	0250/0530
DAC	BG 012	4	DC10	0250/0530
KHI	PK 273	3	A300	1110/1240
KHI	PK 273	5	A300	1510/1640

FROM TO	FLT NBR	DAY	AIRCRAFT	STD/STA
<b>Delhi (DEL)</b>				
KHI	PK 291	7	B737	0230/0400
KTM	IC 813	DAILY	A300	1100/1245
KTM	RA 218	X37	B727	2015/2200
KTM	KB 108	14	BAE146	1140/1345
KTM	RA 206	14	B727	1135/1320
KTM	RA 206	2367	B727	1045/1230
KTM	RA 206A	3	B727	1715/1900
LHR	PK 271	1246	B737	1800/1840
<b>Katmandu (KTM)</b>				
BOM	PK 274	1234	A300	0630/0845
BOM	IC 632	37	A320	1730/1935
BOM	UL 182	4	A320	0040/0300
BOM	PK 276	6	A300	2200/0015
CMB	UL 184	1	A320	0115/0520
CMB	PK 776	4	AB3	0730/1125
DAC	PK 266	24	A310	0700/1120
DAC	BG 024	7	A310	2115/0550
DEL	PK 272	3	A300	0700/0925
DEL	PK 272	5	A300	1100/1325
DEL	PK 290	6	B737	2215/0040
KTM	PK 268	12	B737	1330/1705
KTM	LH 764	26	A310-300	0510/0845
KTM	PK 249	4	B737	0645/1030
KTM	PK 262	5	B737	0500/0845
MLE	PK 774	2	A300	1730/2105
<b>Kathmandu (KTM)</b>				
BOM	RA 201	1	B757	1730/1950
BOM	RA 201	5	B757	0800/1020
CCU	IC 748	1246	B737	1245/1350
CCU	RA 213	2	B727	1800/1855
DAC	BG 704	15	F28	1315/1430
DAC	BG 704	37	F28	1530/1700
DAC	SQ 413	47	A313	1400/1530
DEL	IC 614	DAILY	A300	1345/1510
DEL	RA 217	X37	B727	1800/1915
DEL	KB 107	14	BAE146	0910/1045
DEL	RA 205	14	B727	0810/0925
DEL	RA 205	2367	B727	0830/0945
DEL	RA 205A	3	B727	1500/1615
KHI	PK 269	12	B737	1830/2050
KHI	LH 765	37	A310-300	1045/1255
KHI	PK 250	4	B737	1145/1405
KHI	PK 263	5	B737	1000/1220
PBH	KB 108	14	BAE146	1425/1545
VNS	IC 251	2467	B737	1205/1245
<b>Lahore (LHR)</b>				
DEL	PK 270	1246	B737	1500/1640
<b>Madras (MAA)</b>				
CMB	IC 573	DAILY	A300	1130/1350
CMB	UL 122	1	A320	1420/1540
CMB	UL 124	1	A320	2235/2355
CMB	UL 122	X15	A320	1040/1200
CMB	UL 124	25	A320	2235/2355
CMB	UL 122	5	A320	1105/1225
CMB	UL 124	6	L1011	2235/2355
<b>Patna (PAT)</b>				
CMB	UL 102	1	L1011	1000/1155
CMB	UL 104	1	A320	2300/0100
CMB	UL 104	2	A320	1230/0030
CMB	PK 774	2	A300	2205/2355
CMB	UL 102	3	A320	1000/1200
CMB	UL 104	3	A320	1510/1710
CMB	UL 102	45	A320	1510/1710
CMB	UL 102	67	L1011	1000/1155
CMB	UL 104	4	L1011	2250/0045
CMB	UL 104	6	A320	2150/2350
KHI	PK 777	4	A300	1425/1755
KHI	UL 183	7	A320	2040/2355
TRV	IC 964	X5	A320	1430/1610
TRV	IC 964	5	A320	1515/1655
<b>Port Blair (PBH)</b>				
CCU	KB 105	2	BAE146	0730/0810
CCU	KB 105	4	BAE146	1630/1710
DAC	KB 109	6	BAE146	0730/0840
KTM	KB 107	14	BAE146	0730/0825
<b>Trivandrum (TRV)</b>				
CMB	UL 132	27	A320	1545/1650
<b>Trivandrum (TRV)</b>				
CMB	UL 162	12	A320	1225/1325
CMB	UL 162	3	A320	1530/1630
CMB	IC 907	357	A320	0910/1100
CMB	UL 162	456	A320	1025/1125
MLE	IC 963	X5	A320	1250/1330
MLE	IC 963	5	A320	1335/1415
<b>Varanasi (VNS)</b>				
KTM	IC 252	2467	B737	1015/1125

This is a schedule for direct flight connections between countries of SAARC, compiled by HIMAL South Asia on the basis of information provided by airlines. Please note that in some cases, travel between South Asian cities tends to be routed through outside hubs.

## AIRLINE CODES



Air Lanka = UL



Bangladesh Biman = BG



Druk Air = KB



Indian Airlines = IC



Lufthansa = LH



Pakistan International = PK



Royal Nepal = RA



Singapore Airlines = SQ

## DAY CODES

1=Monday, 2=Tuesday,  
3=Wednesday, 4=Thursday,  
5=Friday, 6=Saturday,  
7=Sunday  
All=Every Day  
X=Excluding

All timings are local time.  
Indian Airlines schedule effective from July 15.

A correspondent from Dhaka taking exception to my comparing Bangla businessman **Salman Rahman's** joining politics with that of Pakistan's Imran Khan, writes, "The tycoon (Rahman) has the highest profile in the country and is Chief of the Federation of Chambers and Beximco Group which has more than 20% of the total share market capitalisation. His candidature was challenged in the Court on the grounds that he is a loan defaulter which is a disqualification but he obtained a last moment stay order and campaigned vigorously. But in the election his deposit was forfeited. His Samridhho Bangladesh Andolon (Prosperous Bangladesh Movement) partisans did even worse."

More on Bangladeshis of note which I have not read in the press but which has arrived on Chhetria Patrakar's desk: "**Runa Laila's** second marriage to a Swiss geriatric went bust. She has sought and got Court protection from the Swissman's harassment. RL, by the way, celebrated her personal crossing of the 300 pounds weight mark by becoming the heroine of a movie based on her life. Presumably paid for by her too. Ignore if you know this all."

Indian activism is galloping along the **information superhighway**, leaving the blunderbuss government far behind in the effort to win hearts and minds through the internet. During Sunderlal Bahuguna's 73-day-old most-recent fast against the building of Tehri Dam, the Save Himalaya Campaign was actively seeking support, providing last-minute instructions, and generally using this new information device to great use. I list below the addresses that the SHC kept informed about Bahuguna's fast. From what comes below, what I find most interesting is that it is Indians talking to each other. If you look carefully at the addresses, you are bound to recognise names and email addresses of people you know. I counted 17 I definitely knew, including Himal's.

Wed, 26 Jun 1996 13:47:53 IST +5.5  
 From: sss@soldarty.unv.ernet.in  
 To: bandyopa@sc2a.unige.ch,  
 panoslondon@gn.apc.org,  
 bernbaum@violet.berkeley.edu,  
 abyers@igc.apc.org, gcampbell@igc.apc.org,  
 postmaster@proter.org.pe,  
 ddenniston@igc.apc.org,  
 himal@himpc.mos.com.np,  
 ileia@antenna.nl, hli\_pun@idrc.ca,  
 commonfuture@gn.apc.org,

- vkl@unv.ernet.in, dpratt@igc.apc.org,
- irn@igc.apc.org, john@ilbom.ernet.in,
- aiache@unv.ernet.in, ajit@unv.ernet.in,
- akothari@unv.ernet.in, cendit@unv.ernet.in,
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- system@ifrcin1.unv.ernet.in,
- jac@unv.ernet.in, komet@unv.ernet.in,
- mona@unv.ernet.in, muppall@unv.ernet.in,
- nandy@unv.ernet.in, pghate@unv.ernet.in,
- rajeev@pilsarc.unv.ernet.in,
- pnkj@unv.ernet.in, pria@unv.ernet.in,
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- smenon@unv.ernet.in,
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- system@ccaind.unv.ernet.in,
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- sunar@gres.unv.ernet.in,
- hansv@hsm.unv.ernet.in,
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- sakdel@sakshi.unv.ernet.in,
- asad@sanam.unv.ernet.in,
- siambhi@scpl.unv.ernet.in,
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Since the political boundaries defined by the 1947 colonials are really not to anyone's liking, those whose job it is to be concerned over this sort of thing have long been pondering over some other basis for the **division of South Asia**. Since one criteria is good as another, how about splitting the Subcontinent on the basis of geological forces which are at this very moment tearing India into half. *The Journal of the Geological Society of India* is very specific on where this divide occurs. Frac-

ture, it states, "will develop from Ongole in Andhra Pradesh in a north-west direction towards Gujarat, along a segment passing through central Maharashtra." It seems that North India decided to stop all movement after it collided with the Asian plate, while Southern India, as always having a mind of its own, has decided to continue without reducing speed towards the east. The suspicion that South India wants to join ASEAN by itself is thus proved correct.

It has long been known to those who follow geopolitical trends of the Subcontinent that Pakistanis will willingly let go of their claims on Kashmir if they can get

SPECIAL REPORT

**'Madhuri de de, Kashmir le le'**

*While Indian and Pakistani politicians have taken five decades to make lukewarm overtures to each other, never really abated*

Madhuri Dixit in return. Nikhat Kazmi, the cinema connoisseur, now places that fact before the Indian public with the headline "Madhuri de de, Kashmir le le." Question: will the great Indian nation willingly part with the luscious Ms Dixit? What of the mega-star herself, will she go? Where will she live, Karachi or Islamabad? I would suggest Lahore, the city where South Asian cinema really began. The only problem is if the Kashmiris decided that they want Madhuri.

"What if Maldives Disappears Under the Sea" is the headline, without question mark, in the latest EEG



Feature to arrive by mail. What indeed, if the Maldives disappears under the sea? Most importantly, it would devastate the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which would have to come down

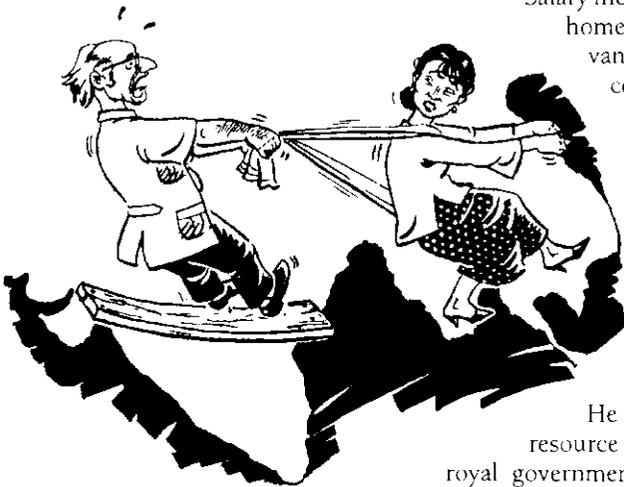
from an all time high of seven members to six. So the big challenge then would be which one of the whirls on the SAARC logo should be dropped. I propose a summit meeting in Male soon, before it disappears underwater, to consider the matter.

We have hardly had time to deal with the Maldives problem when **I.K. Gujral** comes along to complicate matters. The first major policy announcement the new Indian



Foreign Minister had to make as he took office was to announce Afghanistan and Burma should also be brought in as members of SAARC. Several problems.

What about the logo, again? On Afghanistan, do we first wait for the country to break up, so that we can have more members? And Burma, if even Aung San Suu Kyi were to join ASEAN, do we drag her kicking and screaming into SAARC?



Nepal's national (government-owned) news agency Rashtriya Samachar Samiti reported on 2 July that "a herd of 12 wild elephants were seen fleeing the park areas towards India via Kithayandhalak on June 26". The very next line, which completes the news item: "Like other wildlife, elephants also migrate every year," it is stated. So now let us get this clear, so that we do not have a diplomatic incident with any one country accusing the other of harassing wildlife or trying to loot pachyderm wealth from across the border. If the elephants were fleeing, who was pursuing them from the Nepal side, and why would the Nepalis want to lose their well-earned elephants? If there was an intention of India to want these creatures for whatever purpose, it would be enticing them, in which case the elephants would not be fleeing, but being drawn across the border. So, newsmen, let's get our descriptive terms right. We do not want a diplomatic incident of elephantine proportions in our hands.

The New Nation of Dhaka is teaching me arithmetic all over again. Five out of three women who stood for elections, it seems, got elected. Which leads me to only one conclusion. Each Bangladeshi female candidate must make up about 2.5 women. So, if two women candidates win, that makes a total of five, right? Please get my abacus, the South Asian life is getting complicated.

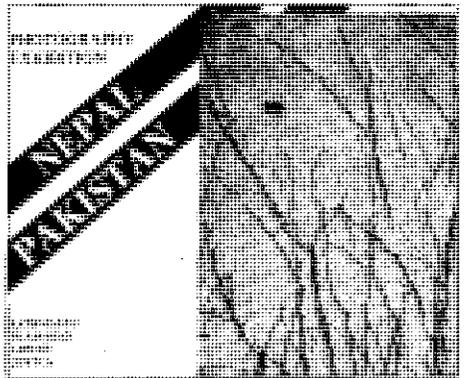
What would I not give at this point to be a **Bhutanese civil servant**? For the headline in *Kuensel* reads, "His Majesty Commands Salary Increase". It seems, the take-home of all Druk Yul civil servants will be up by 25 percent from 1 July 1996, and 50 percent for *gups* and *chimis*. (Make that a correction, I'd rather be a *gup* or a *chimi*.) Finance Minister Lyonpo D. Tshering said that there had been a 90 percent salary increase at the lower levels since 1988. He added, "In the event the resource position improves, the royal government will consider further increases in the salary of civil servants in the near future." Wow. It must be true what they say, that Bhutan will soon overtake Singapore, leave SAARC and join ASEAN. Who needs SAARC with those pay scales?

Good letter in selfsame *Kuensel*, by a musician/forestry adviser (honest) from Zhemgang named Egger Topper, who comments on the worries expressed by the editor that Hindi, English and Nepali songs are more popular than Bhutanese songs. While Hindi and Nepali music has successfully incorporated modern elements into their modern traditions, there is an attempt to protect Bhutanese music through isolation. At the same time, at the popular level, the beautiful Bhutanese melodies, the gentle and subtle voices are being drowned out by cheap synthesised accompaniments. Mr Toppe suggests that Bhutanese musicians be trained in the rudiments of modern music, particularly in harmonisation, so that they can try and reach for a "quality fusion of traditional and modern music.... Preservation of culture is a dynamic ongoing process and not

## 2 out of 3 women candidates elected

merely a static protective one." Forestry? This man should be made the new Director General of UNESCO.

Glad to learn that bilateral links are being established between **photojournalists of South Asia**. Just arrived, an announcement that in late September, a joint photo exhibition will be held in Kathmandu by the Photographic Society of Pakistan and the Nepal Photographic Society. The exhibition will include 113 photographs of 27 Nepali and 27 Pakistani photographers. After Kathmandu, the exhibition will travel to Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta and "possibly" Karachi. Which gave me an idea, doubtless unoriginal: South Asian cooperation does not always have to involve all South Asian countries. Often, shows and seminars might be more interesting, and more interesting, if they were to be held under the South Asian banner, but involving bilateral or trilateral participants.



The headline I understood least during the month of June, from *The Independent* of Dhaka:

**UN conference on cities**  
**Leaders moot women's sexual rights**  
ISTANBUL, June 13: With various forms of the family order, Muslim and Catholic co-moments

- Chhetria Patrakar



*The national-level politicians and political parties have failed Nepal, oblivious as they are of cynicism and desperation that is developing countrywide.*

by Rishikesh Shaha

## Idea and Reality, Nepal and Rolpa

Nepal is passing through a critical state of transition. The institutional development of democracy can easily receive a serious setback if the key players on the national political stage do not play their cards skillfully and cautiously. The future of democracy will largely depend on the success of the people of Nepal and its leaders to bridge the gap between the country as constituted by law and the country as a reality. That this gap is widening into a chasm is amply visible in the violence that has overtaken central Nepal.

In welcoming parliamentary style government, the country has apparently wrenched off the roof of tradition but the fact remains that tradition always dies hard. It remains to be seen how Nepali polity will fare in the coming years. There is enormous disparity, as Carlos Fuentes would have put it, "between the revolutionary texts, the ideas and the reality, the acts, (and) what has actually happened" in Nepal.

The problem is that this euphoric spell of freedom brought about by breaking the chains of tyranny and tradition may only prove to be ephemeral, and age-old historical conditions and deeply ingrained habits of thought and mind may prompt these societies to move in reverse one day.

### Magarat

King Prithvinarayan Shah, the founder of Nepal as a state, had long ago declared himself the King of Magarat. This was a federation which existed prior to the 13th century, in what is now central Nepal, of 12

petty states extending from today's Tanahu district to Rolpa district. By the 15th century, in the wake of the Muslim invasion of India, Rajput chieftains from Rajasthan are said to have made their way into the hill areas inhabited by Magars and other indigenious tribes and carved out principalities for themselves and their progeny. All those principalities were eventually incorporated into the modern Kingdom of Nepal by Prithvinarayan Shah and his successors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Today, Magars, constituting 7.2 percent of Nepal's population, are the largest ethnic group in the country. And it is this very area of Magarat that is now bearing the brunt of the Maoist "People's War" launched by Mohan Vaidya aka Kiran, Pushpa Kamal Dahal aka Prachanda, along with Baburam Bhattarai and Pampha Bhusal of the United People's Front (UPF).

What started in mid-February with a series of simultaneous attacks on the police stations in the neighbouring districts of Rolpa and Rukum, appeared to have been effectively tackled by a police operation code-named "Romeo". But events since then have shown the "war" to be far from over. Rather, as we found out during a human rights fact-finding mission to the region in May, more and more people are being affected by the violence around them.

Following the insurgency by the UPF and the reciprocal counter-insurgency by the police, the common people of Rolpa and the surrounding districts have had to suffer

all kinds of excesses and atrocities through no fault of their own. They are terror-stricken and traumatised. Cases of rape, brutal killings and arson by both sides have victimised innocents with gross injustice, brutal excesses and atrocities.

There is no civil government in Rolpa except for the presence of the Chief District Officer and his staff and the army and police personnel. The district court is not functioning and neither is the District Development Committee. The Tulsipur district jail is meant to handle no more than 50 inmates but houses more than a hundred. Both male and female detainees are herded together and are separated only at night. Each group is shut in with a bucket of water and a pitcher, and nothing else. The only respite in the entire region seems to be provided by the army which has organised a medical mobile team to provide succour to the victims of both the police and the Maoists.

### Callous Unconcern

Because the situation in Magarat is a harbinger of desperate times for the rest of the country, it is important for leaders of Nepali society to find a political solution. Skirting the issue in the hope that police action will set it right is being extremely naive and short-sighted. Unfortunately, the attitude of the top-level leadership of all the major political parties seems to be precisely that, which is only representative of the national capital's response to the violence.

The Kathmandu-based media and the national-level political parties seem to be hardly aware that nearly 50 people, almost entirely villagers, have already lost their lives due to the anti-'Maoist' reaction of the state. The news stories are mere after-thoughts, and the headlines get smaller by the day. The editors are piously oblivious of the state of insurgency and counter-insurgency that has prevailed in these remote hill



districts for more than five months. Other than straight reports, no Kathmandu periodical or newspaper has delved into the origins of this grave state of affairs.

One can very well imagine what would have happened if so many people had died in Kathmandu Valley, where many a time political parties have exploited even accidental deaths of individuals to try and topple governments and subvert constitutional processes. Kathmandu's complacent and indifferent attitude towards the events in Rolpa and elsewhere merely reflects the unconcern of the mainstream political parties about the happenings in remote areas.

### Commoner's Despair

It is the dismal performance of these mainstream national political groupings so far that has served to strengthen the Maoist appeal to the people in some areas. Unscrupulous, viciously selfish, and narrow-minded party politics has already made the common people despair of political pluralism and the multi-party political system even before it has attained its adulthood. The people of Nepal have already seen all the national level political parties in and out of the government. Their utter lack of any sense of accountability, efficiency and capacity to implement their election promises and deliver the goods have made people cynical about the nation's prospects in future.

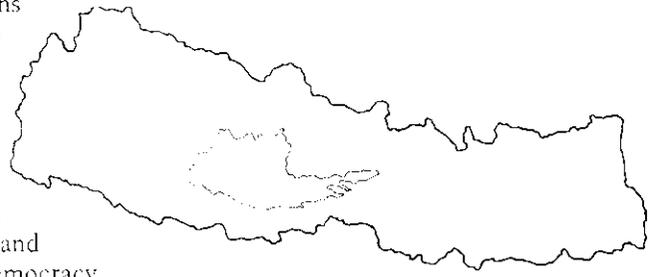
The very foundation and structure of the state seem to have been adversely af-

ected by the nefarious designs of the political parties to politicise the permanent civil service and other constitutional organs of the state such as the judiciary, the Public Service Commission and the Auditor General's office, which are the formal and external safeguards of democracy everywhere.

There is no doubt Nepal has a popularly elected parliament and a government directly responsible to it. But the electoral success of the party does not in itself lend legitimacy to the constitutional process of governance. "Legitimacy involves both the performance capacity of the system and the sentiments of the population towards governmental authority, and basic to a legitimacy crisis is a change in the way governmental authority is conceived or itself acts," said veteran American scholar Lucien Pye.

In other words, getting elected, though an essential prerequisite, is not in itself a sufficient condition of legitimacy. Legitimacy also entails efficient performance, a sense of accountability and the maintenance of order and stability. The signs of an imminent legitimacy crisis are already visible in Nepal's fledgling democracy, and the immateriality accorded to the civilian deaths in Rolpa is a foretaste of difficult days ahead.

*R. Shaha, Nepal's statesman scholar, has been active in human rights in recent years.*



Magarat in Central Nepal

fact is, Hindus hardened their hearts against the Indus several thousand years before Partition.

A founding myth of today's right-wing Hindu neo-Aryans (*neo* for 'northern', 'extremist' and 'orthodox')—those committed to re-establishing what they cherish as a glorious era in Indian history—is that the fair-skinned Aryans possessed a superior civilisation to that of their darker Dravidian foes whose cities they overcame.

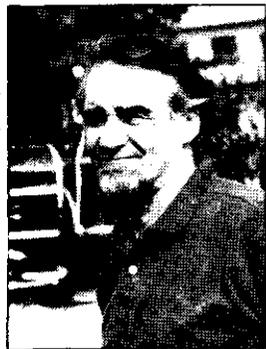
In fact, the opposite was true. And if you want modern evidence of Dravidian superiority in matters of urban civilisation you only have to visit the civic orderliness of Mysore or Cochin and compare it with the uniformly scruffy and anarchic municipal mess that characterises any town in the Cow Belt of the north.

Another fast one that the neo-Aryan tries to pull is the myth that India is essentially an Aryan, orthodox, high-caste-driven nation. Embarrassingly, this claim does not mesh with ground reality. India includes Dravidians in the south and Mongols in the North-East, who have never accepted brahmanical domination.

India gets her name from the Indus and refers simply to the people living on its further shore as viewed from the Aryan heartland of Iran. From Indus also sprang Hinduism, a polytheistic religion of the people loosely organised under the remarkable institution of brahmanical authority based on popular respect.

*Hindustan* refers to the land of the Hindus, but in fact their 'sthan' is confined to the north and west where Hindi is spoken, Hindi being the orphan of the dead classical language Sanskrit, the immaculate, elitist tongue of the Aryans.

The Aryan north's ignorance of the Indian reality is seen in its blindness to the culturally superior claims of the Tamil tongue to be India's leading language. Unlike San-



*The root problem of divisiveness in the Subcontinent stems from the arrogant assumption of the contemporary (Aryan) exponents of aggressive Hinduism that they speak for the whole of India.*

by Bill Aitken

## Neo-Aryan Bid For Power

For what it is worth, this is a traveller's contribution to the current heated debate over India's hung Parliament. Mainstream thinking considers the Indian electorate bloody-minded in its indecision. But one can also regard the impasse as inevitable, owing to the clash of past religious

prejudice against the masses and the psychological hangups of a minority who seek to re-establish their hold on power.

Any overview of India's religious history usually starts at the ancient Indus valley site of Mohenjodaro. Though now alienated from Hinduism in the heart of Pakistan, the

skrit, which died because of its brahmanical aloofness, Tamil is still going strong and is the only claimant to living classical status in the Subcontinent. If the Aryan seeks what is noble, why does he not cultivate an ancient tongue that is still alive?

We know inter-denominational hatred is as much a reality as the hostility between different faiths. Travels around the Subcontinent confirms in my mind the thesis that current politico-religious tensions derive from that unresolved conflict witnessed at Mohenjodaro.

### Wannabe Maharashtrian Aryans

Consider the fact that leading exponents of neo-Aryanism derive moral sustenance largely from Maharashtra, which borders India's south. Here, zeal for the supposed brahmanical way of doing things is a characteristic that distinguished great Hindus like Chhatrapati Shivaji (who bought his high caste status), and lesser exemplars like Tilak and Savarkar, who were openly communal in their recipe for India's recuperation from foreign domination. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which provides the storm troopers of the 'Hindutva' movement, also has its headquarters in Maharashtra.

The chorus of wannabe high-caste Maharashtrian Aryans of whom the latest and shrillest voice is that of the maverick Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray, is that Hinduism, as they understand it, is under threat. Significantly, before Islam became the bogeyman for neo-Aryans, Mr Thackeray considered Dravidians to be the threat.



Aryan Shri Ram

"Swaraj is my birthright and I will have it," is the typically pugnacious voice of the Maratha, but the brahmanical Tilak, who first voiced it, made no reference to the birthright of the lower castes. Incidentally, the word Maratha originally connoted *shudra*, the base of the Hindu caste pyramid.

The word "varna" from which caste derives means "colour", with the implication of Aryan superiority attendant on the fall of Mohenjodaro. Neo-Aryans assume fair, aquiline noses are civilisationally in advance of dark broad noses, as is evident from today's matrimonial demands.

### Anthropomorphic Hinduism

Hinduism, the mother of all faiths, is the great matrix of spiritual inventiveness, ancient in her sponsorship of the honest, questioning mind, and modern in her liberal hosting of an anthropomorphic solution to the nature of divinity.

Exemplars of Hinduism's highest teachings include the intellectual genius of Sri Aurobindo, the *advaitist* exponent Sri Ramana Maharishi, and devotional *avatar* Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The Sangh Parivar and the rest of the family that the BJP keeps, including the Shiv Sena, prefer to operate from the gutter level, mouthing populist stunts to grab the attention of the masses. It does not even shrink from employing neurotic *sadhvis* to pour venom on other religions publicly. The destruction of a national monument was the fruit of such vandalistic policies.

More enlightened Hindus are aghast at the hijacking of their religion by the neo-Aryan ginger group but, at the same time, are apprehensive about the likely poor performance of a low-caste government.

The occasion for the territorial isolation of the BJP in the recent elections is due to the hangover of Partition. Most of their supporters in the north and west were those dispossessed by the terrible trauma of cultural eviction. They thirst for revenge. To cloak their hatred of Pakistan, they adopt the mantle of born-again Aryans, blind to the real cause of their hurt.

India's striving since independence has been to assert a national identity worthy of her civilisational strength. Conquest by Muslim armies and assimilation by Indian armies of the colonising British are perceived by some as an insult to be avenged. The partition of India to accommodate Muslim Pakistan was viewed as the last straw.

Nathuram Godse, the RSS member who shot Mahatma Gandhi, voiced the frustration of this lobby. He also revealed, under

his brahmanical pride, the bottom line on how the lofty original teachings of Hinduism have been betrayed by its priestly custodians. Gandhi was shot for allowing the repatriation of funds to Pakistan.

These high-caste feelings of outrage are usually attributed to the inter-faith war between polytheists and monotheists. But the traveller finds much more rapport between two Punjabis—one an Indian Hindu and the other a Pakistani Muslim—than between, say, a Hindu Punjabi and a Hindu South Indian.

Clearly, there is a deeper cause for the Indo-Pakistani hatred and this may well lie in the fallout of the Mohenjodaro conflict. Many of the Indian converts to Islam were from the lower castes who felt their new religion offered them more dignity than the old.

The strength of the brahmanical faith is extraordinary as it has managed to survive intact even after the vicissitudes of millennia. But its fatal weakness lies in its weapon of spiritual heredity. Only a few were able to realise this was not meant to be taken literally as a physical fact.

The downward graph of social injustice started when psychic truths were ignored and the easier path of literalness was followed. Mohenjodaro-type victories added to the physical sense of lording it over lesser beings and the divisions of society based on colour, then caste, hardened.

With the power interregnum created by the Muslim and British paramountancy over, today's neo-Aryan hopes to reclaim the driver's seat but fail to realise two points, to their detriment. First, that democracy is antithetical to hereditary claims and the privileges of birth can no longer be cashed in on to intimidate those of inferior social station. Second, by championing the escapist Vedic ideal of Advaita, they distance themselves from the majority of Hindus who prefer the devotional mode of religious expression.

### The Ayodhya Act

Hindus are not great haters. The genius of their religion is inclusiveness in spite of the current propensity of the debased brahmin to exclude. The culmination of neo-Aryan attempts to bully Indian democracy to take note of the narcissistic, arrogant agenda was the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. This one action, more than anything else, has served to lower the reputation of Hinduism internationally.

The act in Ayodhya points to how far from Indian ideals neo-Aryans are prepared to go for a share of power. The original Aryans, as is well known, were quite the

opposite from what they are being made out to be by the distorting propaganda of the RSS. They drank heavily, gambled wildly, and ate meat, none of which appeals to the puritanical RSS, whose mission, therefore, has to include the deliberate obfuscation of history.

The missionary zeal of neo-Aryans is a giveaway of their alien credentials. They have consciously adopted the Semitic tone of paternalist morality with its black-and-white view of life, a stance that is foreign to the true Hindu rainbow view of the universe. The Sangh Parivar has preferred the narrow vision of fundamentalist monotheism over the Hindu heritage of plurality of approaches to the divine.

The traveller to the South finds that matrimonial ads there are less insistent on "fair" brides. High castes might get away with rape and murder in the North, but can find themselves discriminated against in the South. Periyar, the vociferous voice of the Dravidian ethos, is today the atheistic mentor of Tamil politics, in head-on collision with the Sangh Parivar over the status of the Aryan hero-divinity Ram.

In the scripture-epics of the north, the Dravidians are depicted as the Rakshasas, demons, to underline how the Aryan mindset has not wavered in the 5000 years since the *Rigveda* was composed. Few north Indians are even aware that the Tamils have their own epics. Interestingly, the Tamil depiction of womanhood is totally at variance with the north Indian ideal of Sita, the submissive wife. The southern Kannagi is a fiery character who demands and gets justice.

### Love To Hate You

Two other examples will suffice to reinforce my thesis that the root problem of divisiveness in the Subcontinent stems from the arrogant assumption of the Aryan that he speaks for the whole of India.

First, there is the violent rejection of the modern north-Indian politician V.P. Singh by India's middle classes even though he belongs to a princely family, is a man of poetic parts and, like the archetypical warrior-king Ram, is not desperate to assume power. What was his sin? He championed the cause of social justice that would empower the lower castes. The raja is now viewed as a traitor to his class. The second example is in the "colonies" of Delhi where, in the last ten years, iron gates have burgeoned at private expense to signify fear over the city. Who are the

capital's rich afraid of?

These two examples point to the same enemy, the enfranchised masses, those lower castes that Indian high society has loved to hate for millennia. The hates of the neo-Aryan are much more in evidence than his loves.

Perhaps the most curious omission of the "outcaste" leader Dr Ambedkar was his failure to address the basic psychological hangup of Hinduism's higher castes, the concept of their inborn superiority. While untouchability occasioned by the arrogance of the "twice born" was legally abolished, the privileged aura surrounding brahmanical spiritual pedigree remains.

India's rulers, the kshatriya class, were summarily dispossessed of their titles and pensions in 1972 to show the aggressive face of republican sentiment, but

## *The Aryan north's ignorance of the Indian reality is seen in its blindness to the culturally superior claims of the Tamil tongue to be India's leading language*

nothing has been done to derecognise the brahmin's assumed right of way in contemporary India.

In a typical high-caste sleight of hand, no mention of brahmins is made in the latest census of India's religious communities. In order to conceal their minority status, they are presumed not to exist on a priestly basis but only surface as a caste. The ludicrousness of pretending that guardians of Hinduism are no longer in control of their hereditary rights shows to what lengths the high castes of all political parties will go to evade ground realities.

### The Learned

The strength of the brahmanical order has been its ability to command the voluntary respect of Hindu society by virtue of its commitment to learning. It is significant that the only centralised dynasties were the Buddhist Mauryas, the Muslim Mughals and the Christian British. The Gupta empire was restricted to the north and the equally impressive Vijayanagar empire to the south.

The third Hindu empire, that of Shivaji, was a sideshow of more symbolic significance than of physical extent. This organisational looseness of Hinduism allowed village republic panchayats to operate over the centuries though not without the attendant injustice of caste exclusion. It was the British intrusion and stimulus of commercial centres that threatened the

brahmanical status quo.

What is not asked is why the nationalist Marathas with their vast territorial conquests allowed alien traders to wrest their right to rule? The truth is the British looted to some purpose while the Marathas pillaged at random. The former appeared to be a lesser evil. The British broke the monopoly on brahmanical learning to allow the masses the right to read as well as provided a model for a democratic society. The Marathas would have restored the brahmanical right of way.

But the enduring strength of brahmanical civilisation was neither lost nor defeated by the alien interregnum. This is the error of the neo-Aryans whose debased vision focussing forever on past fantasies blinds them to the facts of religious history. Hinduism survived the foreign onslaught not only intact but enriched, thanks

to the strength of character of the true Hindu. They, unlike the votaries of the monotheistic faiths, displayed remarkable freedom, adaptability and fearlessness of mind.

Thus, the neo-Aryans seem to be fighting a battle that is already won. Their concern for

Hinduism's vitality is misconceived. Hinduism beat the odds and was shaping up as a modern faith worthy of international respect until its reputation was besmirched by a lunatic fringe whose feelings were played upon by reactionary right-wing politicians at Ayodhya.

The real battle the neo-Aryans fight shy of facing is reconciliation of caste imperatives and regional identities. Already, the BJP's flourish of Sanskrit in Parliament has led to Tamil being officially imposed on signboards in the South. The folly of this confrontation supports my thesis that what we are seeing in today's hung parliament are ingredients of a Mohenjodaro recontest, between the rude and arrogant inserters of ads for fair brides and the mass reality of well-tanned kisans; the elitist raisers of urban railings versus the deprived who are determined to share their lifestyle.

For India to have a prime minister from a Dravidian state and a speaker from a Mongol minority background seems the best medicine to bring home to the neo-Aryans how far-fetched their assumptions about India's composite identity are. The pseudo-nationalism of the Sangh Parivar stands exposed by the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Real nationalists do not destroy national monuments.

*B. Aitken is a traveller and writer who lives alternately in Delhi and Mussoorie.*

# A South Asian Labour Rights Charter Why Not?

by *Mukul*

ALL THE MAJOR trade unions, federations, labour support organisations from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal who gathered for the first time in Kathmandu in end-May agreed on one thing—there must be a South Asian Charter of Labour Rights.

In the past several years, diplomats, writers, artists, scientists, social activists, lawyers and development-wallas have had their South Asian meets. So why should labour unions stay aloof from this very positive trend towards regional understanding and cooperation?

The South Asian Consultation on Labour Rights in Kathmandu was the culmination of work begun in early 1995, when the major trade unions and support groups from India and representatives from neighbouring countries met to discuss the proposal to introduce a social clause (on labour and environmental standards in international trade) as part of the World Trade Organisation.

The meeting overwhelmingly rejected the inclusion of the clause because it felt it would be used by the industrialised countries to deny South Asian goods access to their markets. But, at the same time, they decided to seek alternatives to help improve the labour rights situation in the Subcontinent.

The 35 labour organisations represented in Kathmandu agreed upon the principles to govern the formulation of the South Asian Charter of Labour Rights, whose goal would be "to establish basic labour rights in all South Asian countries, bringing all labour laws in conformity with the relevant UN and ILO Conventions and Declarations and their harmonisation into an enabling South Asian Labour Code."

That was not all. As J. John, the spokesman for Consultation, stated, "The South Asian labour organisations also demand the establishment of a SAARC code of conduct for transnational corporations; establishment of an institutional mechanism which provides a SAARC work permit which would protect the rights of workers; establishment of a mechanism to protect working people in border areas of South Asian countries

from detention and atrocities; labour rights commissions in all South Asian countries to monitor the labour rights and implementation of laws, and a regional commission at the SAARC level."

Secretary General of SAARC, Naem Uddin Hasan, responded positively to the initiative, saying that the coming together of the labour representatives was significant. Pointing out that the 11 areas of cooperation identified by SAARC (agriculture, communications, health, population, etc) did not include labour, he said, "We would consider proposing the inclusion of labour as one of the areas of cooperation in the next SAARC official meeting." He also suggested that the united labour body seek the status of a "SAARC Regional Apex Body" to facilitate long-term regional cooperation.

## No Tokenism

There was no mere token presence at the Kathmandu conference. It boasted some of the most powerful labour organisations from all over the subcontinent, including the Centre of Indian Trade Unions, All India Trade Union Congress, Hind Majdoor Sabha of India, Pakistan Trade Union Federation, All Pakistan Trade Union Organisation, Railway Worker's Union of Pakistan, Bangladesh Garments Workers & Employees Federation, National Workers Federation of Bangladesh, Public Sector Trade Union Federation, United Federation of Labour, Sri Lanka, and the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions.

All these organisations will be busy in the coming three months, organising national conferences for a thorough discussion on the proposed Charter. The final formulation and subsequent adoption of the document will come up in the next consultation to be held in three months' time.

The resolution adopted in Kathmandu states that, for all of South Asia's social ills, the situation is even more grave for workers. Not more than 10 percent of South Asia's workers are unionised, and a large portion of the rest are in the informal sector where they are denied basic labour rights.

Globalisation and structural adjustment

programmes are resulting in increased unemployment and a drastic deterioration in living and working conditions for labour. "The disturbing fact is that the process of informalisation in the industrial sector is increasing," said the resolution.

Muchkund Dubey, India's former Foreign Secretary and who is closely associated with the formulation of the Labour Charter, said that there was a need for "genuine regional solidarity" among the trade unions so as to articulate their interests in a coordinated manner. This was because the international economic system was undergoing a process of reorganisation on the basis of economic regions, "so much so that transnational capital is initiating investment and managerial policies and programmes in terms of regions."

## Fish

There were other, even more pressing matters that were raised by the labour representatives, and activism in terms of fish-workers seemed to indicate the shape of things to come in the labour movement in South Asia.

Muhammad Junaid Awan of Pakistan's Worker's Confederation, Thomas Kocherry of India's National Fishworker's Forum, and N. Saranapala De Silva of the United Federation of Labour (Sri Lanka) had common questions: Why, for the last two years, were 191 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails and 21 Pakistani fishermen in Indian jails? Why did Indian coastguards continuously harass Sri Lankan fishermen, and why did Bangladesh regularly arrest Indian fishermen and confiscate their boats?

For the first time, South Asian labour organisations have jointly demanded the cancellation of all the licences given to foreign industrial fleets in Indian deep seas. This has depleted the fish resources in the Indian Ocean and caused endless havoc to the livelihood of fisher folks among South Asia's coastal communities.

A letter to the Indian Prime Minister demanded that the Indian Ocean be saved from destructive fishing practices. Failure of the government to act would result in united action by South Asian trade unions against the Indian deep sea fishing policy. That would be the start of regional trade unionism.

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# Surplus of Deficit

THE COMMON STRING that binds all South Asian economies is the ever-menacing problem of fiscal deficit. The region's finance ministers always have a difficult time presenting deficit budgets, for they can only offer short term corrective action which do not really tackle the structural correctives that are required.

The gap between revenue and expenditure is ever-widening and is a matter of grave concern for every South Asian country. While inflation plagues all of them, the high deficit has curbed the growth of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The remedial measure of privatising industries to generate revenues has only been partially successful, and high government borrowings have raised regional interest rates to one of the highest

in the world. In a scenario where political dominance over economic issues prevails and hunger for power results in populist moves such as providing subsidies and sanctioning profligate feel-good schemes, the burden on the state exchequer is immense.

The fiscal deficit in the region has hovered around five and six percent, bringing down the GDP growth to below four percent. India, which generates 80 percent of South Asia's GDP, has been raising the price of petroleum products. The purpose, which could be considered ridiculous, was to bridge the fiscal deficit gap. However, the move is will have a cascading effect on prices of all commodities. Inflation that has been

kept at single digits for the past few years may rise, leading to the vicious circle of higher interest rates, lower economic activities, higher deficits resulting in higher borrowing.

The way out may be a long drawn policy on encouragement of economic activities. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows in infrastructure are a necessity coupled with a transparent business environment that induces public accountability. FDI investment in developing countries is expanding at 10 percent per year, but the figure rests at a low 3 percent for the South Asian economies. The challenge is to increase the FDI-to-GDP ratio in these regions. Unlike other trade blocs, where intra-regional trade bails out nations with problems, this safety valve is not available to the economies of our region. Here, intra-regional trade is under five percent of the region's trade, requiring the economies to have more of a global vision.

Fiscal discipline can be brought in by rationalising expenditure and simplifying revenue collection, administration and procedures. The parallel economies created in the countries of South Asian have helped sustain trade activities in Dubai or Singapore. The curtailment of flight of capital aided by plugging of revenue leakage shall contribute to narrowing the gap. While reforms are underway in the region, the speed of integration shall determine the destiny of these nations.

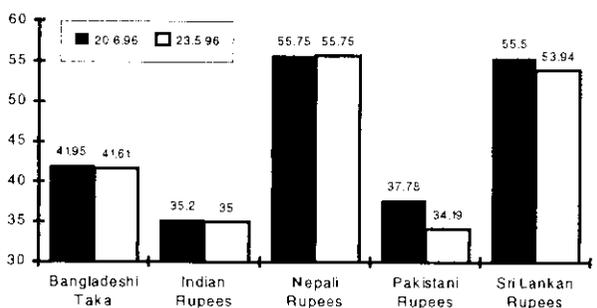
—Sujeev Shakya

## STOCK EXCHANGE INDICATORS ▲

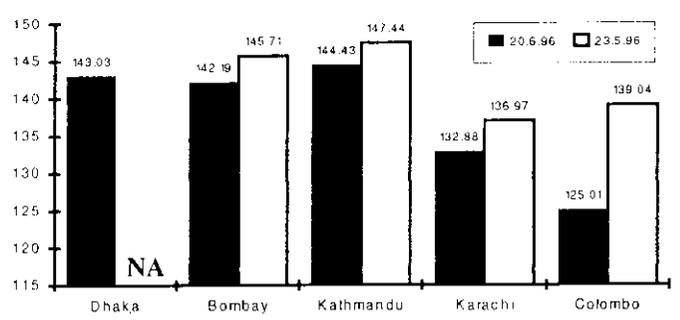
<b>(+311.21)</b>	<b>(-45.2)</b>	<b>(+90.26)</b>	<b>(+32.86)</b>	<b>(+8.32)</b>
<b>3995.20</b>	<b>610.1</b>	<b>969.95</b>	<b>1718.83</b>	<b>183.3</b>
<b>BOMBAY</b>	<b>COLOMBO</b>	<b>DHAKA</b>	<b>KARACHI</b>	<b>KATHMANDU</b>
<b>BSE SENSEX</b>	<b>COMPOSITE CSE</b>	<b>DSE INDEX</b>	<b>KSE 100 INDEX</b>	<b>NEPSE</b>

As of 20 June '96 compared with 23 May '96.

## Price of a Dollar



## Price of 10 grams of Gold (in USD)



## KEY ECONOMIC INDICATORS

	GNP per capita USD	GDP USD (billion)	PPP estimates of GNP per capita USD	Average Annual Growth	Average Annual Inflation
BANGLADESH	200	26	1330	4.2%	6.6%
INDIA	320	172	1280	3.8%	9.7%
NEPAL	200	4	1230	4.9%	12.1%
PAKISTAN	430	52	2130	4.6%	8.8%
SRI LANKA	640	12	3160	5.4%	11.0%

Source: World Development Report, 1996.

UNICEF/CS/SHAMSUZZAMAN



This pile of rubble was once Meenu and Naresh's home

# TORNADO TALES

by Deepa Grover

## A TRAIL OF TRAGEDY

IT CAME WITHOUT warning. Ferocious and violent. It lasted for just a few very terrifying minutes...and then it was gone. The unreal calm that followed was in utter contrast to the devastation it left in its wake. In time, the calm was pierced by the cry of an infant. She was fortunate. She had survived. She had not been sucked into the vortex of the debris created by one of the most wrathful of weather monsters: the tornado.

Just before sunset on 13 May this year, the tornado roared into the Tangail-Jamalpur area of central Bangladesh, some 100 km north of Dhaka. It was the worst in recent memory. Standing crops were snatched into the air. Houses were smashed, their tin roofs pulled into all directions. Trees were uprooted. Power connections were snapped.

The 'twister' which ripped across the countryside at a mind-boggling 200 kms per hour, reduced 80 villages to indistinguishable rubble. Raging debris killed over 700 men, women and children. More than 34,000 were wounded. Crushed limbs, skull fractures, lacerations and contusions were the commonest injuries. In some cases, rice grains had flown with such

intense speed that they had punctured and penetrated human flesh like so many thousand stumpy needles. Almost everyone in the 15 km path of the tornado received some injury—major or minor.

When they saw the clouds gathering, the inhabitants of Tangail thought it was another nor'wester in the making. In Bangladesh, summer is the time for nor'wester or *kalboishaki* storms which are characterised by strong winds and crashing, pelting thunderstorms. People rush for cover when the *kalboishaki* comes. Once the storm passes, it is business as usual. Nor'westers are not necessarily friendly, but they are an inevitable feature of the hottest months. They are even welcomed because they bring respite from the oppressive heat.

It is for this reason that the few people who did hear the storm warning on 13 May did not pay too much attention to their radio sets. In any case, May is a busy month for peasant farmers who work

from dawn to dusk harvesting paddy. This activity proved to be fateful this year, for most of those who were outdoors on the day that the tornado struck, were either injured or killed. As they scrambled for shelter they were battered unmercifully by a variety of airborne missiles—branches, stones, razor-edged tin roofs, household items...anything that the winds could up-root or unfasten.

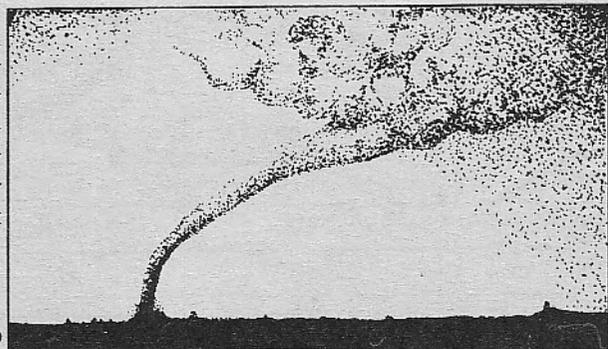
## THE SURVIVORS

Forty-year-old Zarina of village Koilla was cooking the evening meal when she suddenly heard a furious wind. She ran out of the house and found that the sky had turned a fiery red. A huge chunk of earth flashed past her. "I have never seen such a violent storm in my whole life nor ever heard of anything like this," she said in a voice choked with emotion. All of Zarina's three sons were badly injured.

In the village of Mirikpur, 10-year-old Nanda courageously threw himself over his sleeping baby sister Mukti. She survived. Her brother, in shielding her, received serious head injuries. Their parents did not live to see them. Nanda and Mukti's father was crushed under a falling tree and their mother buried under the rubble of a collapsed portion of the house.

Perhaps some of Nanda's friends were among the children of Mirikpur Gangacharan Tafshili High School who were killed when the building they were in came crashing down. There were innumerable other distressing stories. Widowed men and women, orphaned children and bereaved families everywhere—dazed and uncomprehending. In the time that it took for the storm to pass, lives were changed permanently and minds scarred forever.

It will be a long time before the survi-



A typical killer tornado

vors of the Tangail tornado can piece together their shattered lives. The blow of their personal tragedies was somewhat softened by the spontaneous assistance and care offered by their neighbours from unaffected areas as well as by governmental and non-governmental relief teams. The tornado victims needed all the help they could get.

Everything had been swept away by the howling winds—their houses, food, the utensils they used for cooking, their savings, children's school books, clothes, everything.

Shamsuzzaman, a photojournalist who visited some of the tornado-hit villages a week after the disaster had this to say: "I was deeply impressed by the resilience of the people there. They had lost all that they possessed and yet there seemed to be a strong sense of determination among them...the resolve to make a new beginning was almost palpable."

## UNDERSTANDING TORNADES

Meteorologists and scientists tell us that although they have been studying the tornadoes for a long time, much still remains to be learnt about the phenomena. The word *tornado* comes from the Spanish *tronada* (thunderstorm), derived from the Latin *tornare* (to make round by turning).

The tornado is the most violent of atmospheric storms that are caused by low air pressure. It consists of a powerful vortex or "twister", whose speed as it spins about can easily go up to 480 km per hour, and in some instances may exceed 800 km per hour. The intense updraft that occurs near the twister's centre is capable of lifting quite heavy objects such as trees and cars into the air and of upending even heavier objects such as railway cars or aircraft.

There is relatively low pressure right at the centre of the tornado's funnel-like vortex. This causes cooling and condensation, thus making the storm visible as a revolving column of cloud, called the funnel. The lower portion of the tornado funnel often appears as a mass of dust and debris picked up by the vortex. The rim of the funnel is usually rendered visible by clouds produced by the condensation of water vapour. The path of the average tornado averages only 700 metres in width (although there can be great variation), but they can travel over tens of kilometres wreaking havoc before they lose strength.

Tornadoes are generated from severe thunderstorms, which form readily when warm, moist winds clash with cool, dry

ones. The precise atmospheric requirements involved in the generation of tornadoes, however, are not completely understood. Tornadoes often form a line of thunderstorms along what is known as a squall line and generally travel from southwest to northeast, although those that develop from tropical cyclones travel from east to west.

Besides Bangladesh, countries reporting tornadoes include Australia, Great Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Hungary, India, Italy and Japan.

The first visible indication of tornado development is usually a funnel cloud, which extends downward from the cumulonimbus cloud of a severe thunderstorm. As this funnel dips earthward, it becomes darker because of the debris forced into its intensifying vortex. Some tornadoes give no visible warning until their phenomenal destruction strikes down on the unsuspecting victims.

The areas with the greatest potential for casualties are those that combine a high tornado incidence with a thick population concentration. Tornadoes may occur any month of the year, but are most numerous in summer. Although they may strike at any hour of the day or night, they generally form during the afternoon or evening, between 3 pm and 7 pm, which is the period most favourable for the development of the severe thunderstorms from which they are bred.

According to Mir Fakhru'l Qayyam, the Director of Bangladesh's Meteorological Office, there is no established mechanism to measure the strength of the tornado. Indeed tornadoes destroy all standard mea-

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Shurat of village kolya was swooped up by the 13 May tornado. He lost consciousness as his body was whirled. Luckily for him he landed in a pond where he was found battered and bruised the next day.

suring instruments, hence most values given for velocity, pressure and energy distribution have to depend on theory and estimates of structural damage after the event.

Some advances have been made in tornado detection and warning systems, including analysis of surface and upper air weather, detection and tracking of atmospheric changes by radar, and spotting severe local storms. At the same time, many more ways of gathering and communicating information about tornado formation and movement need to be developed, in order to help people take appropriate precautions. ▽

## Mail

I enjoyed your article about planes in "Young SouthAsian" of the April issue. It taught me a lot more than I knew about planes. I had no idea that people took up watching planes as a hobby.

Zain Omar Ali  
Sunbeams School, Dhaka

## Virtual Vortices

Hollywood's latest offering is a purely illusory, digitised tornado. Film director Jan De Bont's *Twister* is Hollywood's latest blockbuster offering. It follows on the trend of films having menacing non-human protagonists which was started by the film *The Towering Inferno* (fire), and continued by films like *Earthquake*, *Jaws* (sharks) and *Swarm* (bees).

The central 'character' of *Twister* is a computer-generated tornado. The film cost USD 85 million to make and harnessed the talents of 60 computer-graphic artists from Industrial Light and Magic company of Northern California—the number one special effects (FX) house of the United States.

While the 'human' parts of the film was shot on location in Oklahoma, which is hit by natural tornadoes all the time, the real work of creating fake clouds, wind vortices and whirling debris was done at a high-power Silicon Graphics work station. Altogether, 25 minutes of storm scenes were fabricated digitally and combined on film with real actors and location footage.

*Newsweek* (20 May, 1996) warns, "Don't try this on your laptop; *Twister's* shots take up to 17 trillion bytes (equivalent to about 12 million floppy discs) of memory. The state of art FX cost 15 million dollars."

Ironic isn't it, that while some people lose everything they have to real tornadoes, others create artificial ones to improve their material well-being?

# Abominably Yours

**(Editor's Note: In response to popular demand, this installment does not contain any reference to bodily functions of any kind and has been rated PG.)**

Strolling through the park in Jakarta below a towering obelisk that locals reverently call Sukarno's Last Erection, I was suddenly struck by the strong whiffs of the Subcontinent this far out on the edge of the Pacific. The flamboyant sculpture of a Ramayana chariot charging across a traffic island on Thamrin Avenue seemed to belong more to BJP-ruled Delhi than to the capital of the world's most-populous Muslim nation.

Through the din of puttering Bajaj scooter-taxis came the unmistakable sound of a demonstration being broken up by riot police. The rally in question was being led by a person named Meghawati Sukarno-Putri (daughter of the clouds and of Sukarno at the same time, if you know your Sanskrit). As female offspring of a former leader removed in a coup, Meghawati is Indonesia's answer to Indira, Benazir, Chandrika and Hasina.

People who think of the South Asian diaspora as just the East End of London or the Keralite suburbs of Dubai are wrong by a couple of millennia. It is much older than the sardarjis of Vancouver or the Punjabi-Hispanic communities of the southern United States. It goes further back than V.S. Naipaul's ancestors in Trinidad and the Gorakhpuri cane-cutters in Fiji, or even the out-migration of Gypsies from Rajasthan.

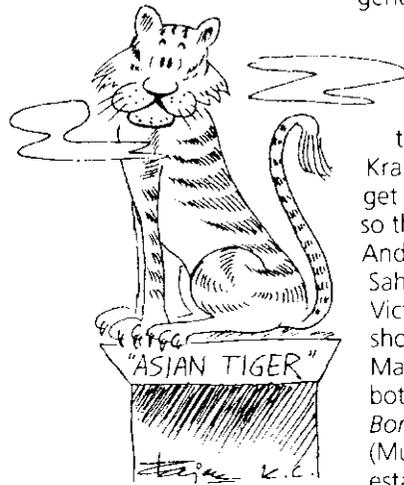
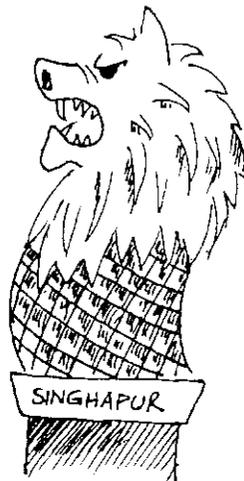
For whatever reason, maybe floods or perhaps volcanic activity, early South Asians ventured out from the Subcontinent nearly 1500 years ago. They crept down (up, if you do not believe that north is up) through Burma and Siam to Cambodia. Another group branched off down the Malay peninsula to set up the vibrant Sri Vijaya maritime empire in what is now Java and Bali.

Here, they still call their money "rupiah" while we've gone Anglicised with "rupees". Their airline is called "Garuda" from Vishnu's own winged transport, while the farthest we've gone is to call ours "Biman".

Off Surabaya is the island of Madura transplanted straight out of Krishna's birthplace, and in Bali they have Muslim brahmins. Remnants of Sanskrit

placenames peer from below layers of Malay and Portuguese. Sulawesi Utara is Northern Sulawesi, there are remote islands off Flores with names like Sankhapura, a smouldering volcano on Java named Mount Arjuna.

It was while flying back to South Asia on Garuda via Singapore (named after lions—Singhapur—but now an Asian tiger) and trying to pick out the Sanskrit words in the Bahasa flight safety announcements that I got to thinking about names and what makes people want to change them all the time.



The Sri Vijaya Empire at one time stretched northwards across Borneo to the Philippines where dictator Ferdinand Marcos much much later decided it was preposterous that his archipelago should be named after an obscure potentate who lived in Madrid in the 16th century. Rightly so. So he issued a presidential decree announcing that the country had been renamed "Maharlika", which is what the Sri Vijayans called everything north of Mindanao.

The name would have probably stuck, had some wicked Hispanophile not spread the canard that Maharlika in Sanskrit means "big phallus". It does not, as far as my own rusty Sanskrit goes, but the dictator quickly cancelled his decree and reverted to the name King Philip bestowed on his nation. (Much more likely that the original derived from Mahapalika, the big protector, than Mahalinga.)

Other efforts to rename nations have similarly come to naught. Kampuchea springs to mind. Myanmar, as far as I know, is used only by the country's national airline and the United Nations despite a recent SLORC threat that any magazine using Burma will be banned in

Yangon. Watch out, Himal.

Us females understand this curse: you are happily Indira Nehru, and suddenly overnight, as it were, you turn into an Indira Gandhi. Indira knew there were certain political advantages associated with the name of the Mahatma so she kept it. The rest of us are not so lucky and know the trauma of Zeba Varma turning into a Zeba Sodabottleopenerwala after popping the cork and tying the knot. Changing established names is a very male-centred, macho, unfeminine thing to do. You'll notice only male politicians and generals with edifice complexes who do it.

So I sympathise when my Bombay friends suddenly find they have to wade through traffic at Hutatma Chowk, past Krantiveer Vasudev Balwant Chowk, to get to the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus so they can get the hell out of Mumbai. And now, there is a fight between Sahar (nee Santa Cruz) airport and the Victoria Terminus about which one should be named after the great Maratha Moghul-slayer. Why not both? While we're at it, rename *Bombay*, the film, move on to spirits (Mumbai Dry Gin), then to every establishment whose names starts with a 'B' (Mumbai Saree Palace, Mumbai Dying—aaargh).

Over in Calcutta, the name-changing seems to have subsided after the frenzy of the Cultural Revolution of the 1970s in which the state government deliberately renamed the street where the US consulate was located into Ho Chi Minh Sarani. Renaming airports is the favourite past-time of governments, but they only seem to be interested in "international" airports. What's wrong with domestic airports? Why isn't Palam worthy of its own national figure to be named after? What's wrong with Indira Gandhi Domestic Airport?

In Nepal, they set up a Committee to think of new names for Himalayan mountains. We're lucky they did not go for deceased but illustrious Nepalis, of which there is such a scarcity. (There is also a dire shortage of living illustrious Nepalis.) Imagine the headlines; "Indians Conquer Prithvi Narayan", "Aussies Assault Arniko" or "Bhrikuti Virgin No More". Even Meghawati would draw the line at a volcano being named after her.



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