

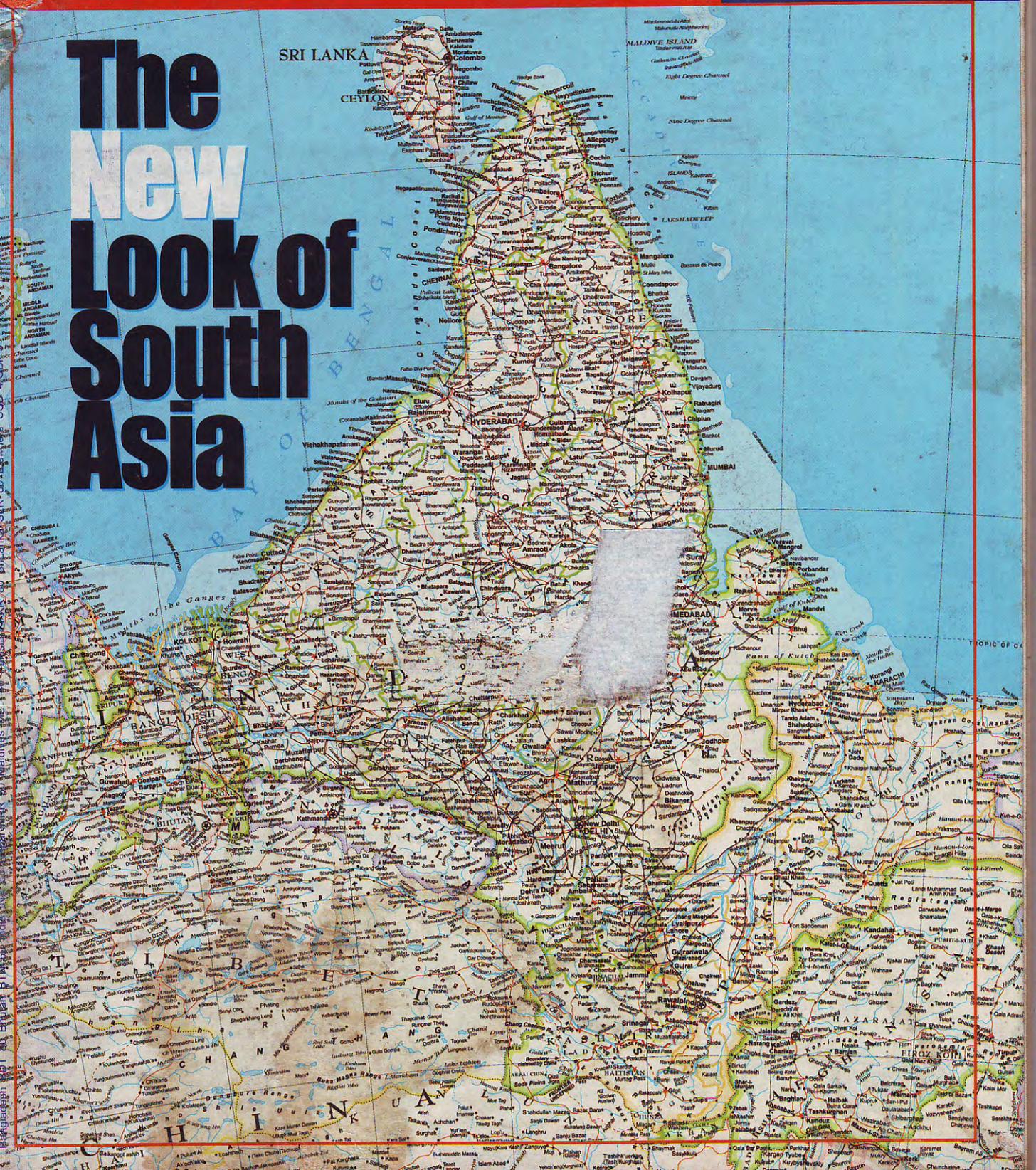
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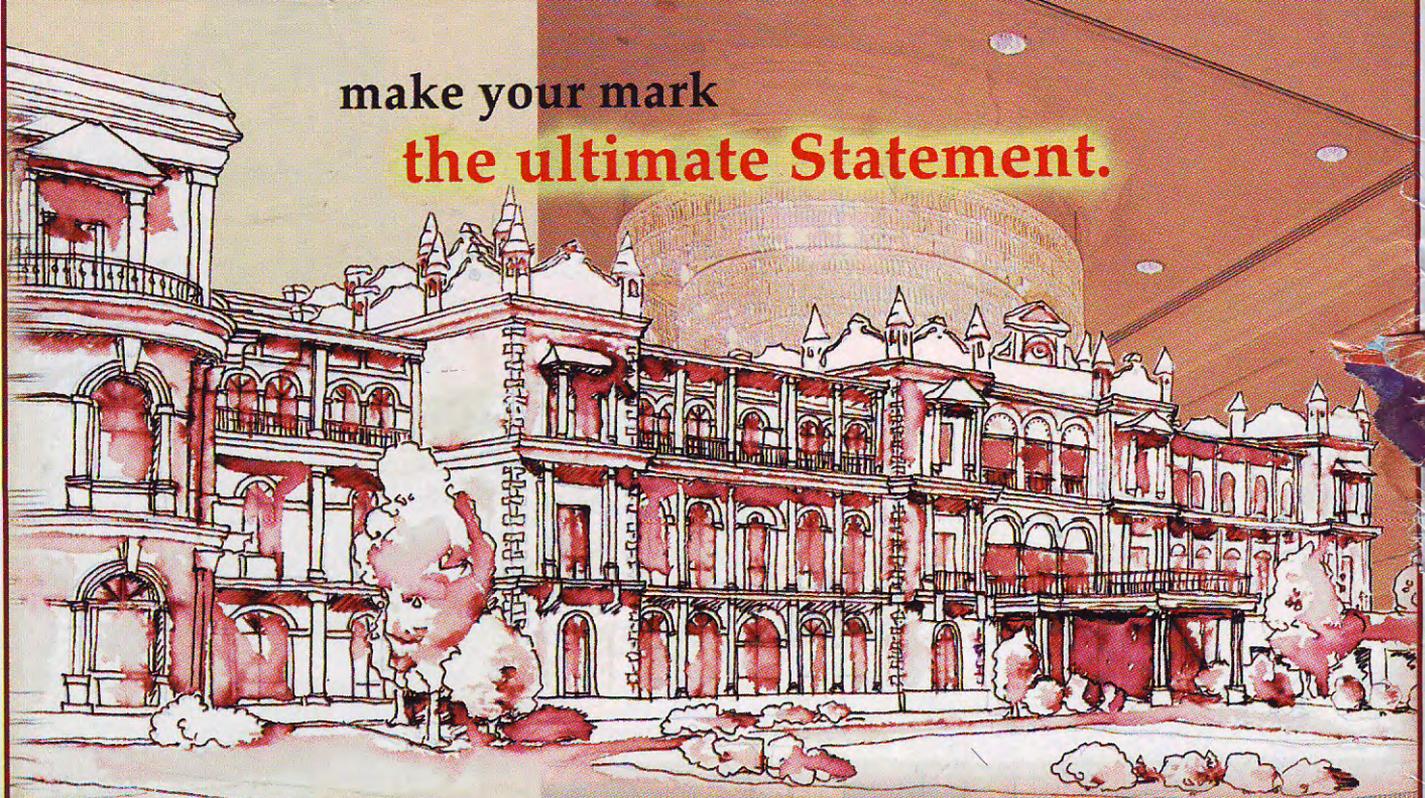
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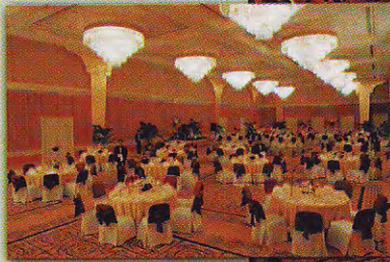
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Reconceptualise the Region

The map of South Asia may seem upside-down to some, but that is because we are programmed to think of north as top-of-page. This rotation is our attempt to help readers reconceptualise South Asia in their own minds. Going beyond the SAARC regionalism of seven nation-states, the neighbourhood of the future must be one of people rather than governments, of open rather than closed boundaries – it means going back to the past to travel to the future. All of which requires nothing less than turning our minds the right side up.

(This issue of Himal comes with an atlas-quality poster of South Asia created by Kathmandu artist Subhas Rai. For additional copies, write to subscription@himalmag.com or call Rinjina at +977-1-543333.)

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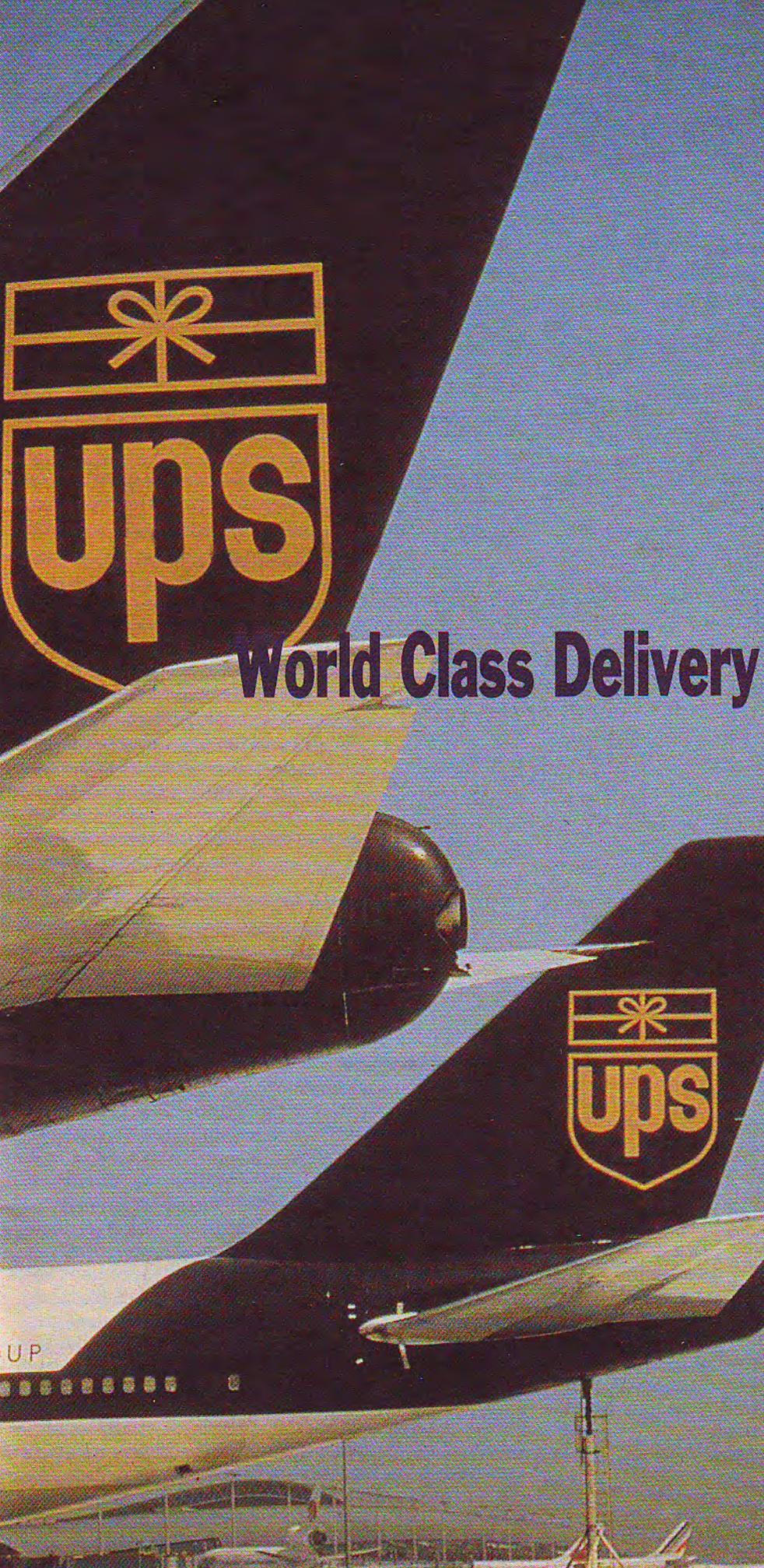
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NEPAL

THE YEAR OF MASSACRES, ROYAL AND OTHERWISE

THE YEAR 2001 was the most turmoil-ridden in Nepal's modern history, and arguably in its entire two centuries as a nation-state. The week preceding the new year was rather inauspicious, with the so-called Hritihik Roshan riots, in which the rumoured but unstated anti-Nepal remarks by the Indian matinee idol had sparked anti-India violence on Kathmandu streets. But things merely got worse as 2001 progressed.

Looking back, the two markers of 2001 were the Narayanhiti royal massacre and the wildfire Maoist insurgency. The associated fallout has been: an economy at standstill with capital flight, tourism downturn, drying up of investment, and the added burden of fighting the Maoists via the expensive military apparatus; the image of 'peaceful country' so important for tourism destroyed; and, lastly, the declaration of a state of emergency to tackle the violent insurgency. The Nepali population has every right to be confused and distraught, and is.

The year began with Girija Prasad Koirala in the Prime Minister's seat unable to curb the Maoist upsurge. The left opposition, with longstanding antipathy for Koirala, did its best to make life difficult for the septuagenarian Congress Party stalwart, with *bandhs*, *chakka jams* and a boycott of the entire 2000-01 winter session of Parliament. Likewise, strikes by tourism workers and school closures affecting more than a million children country-wide added to Koirala's troubles. Governance suffered as the police and bureaucracy lost motivation, problems arose with the bilateral 1996 trade treaty with India, and the Bhutanese refugees continued to languish in the camps of southeast Nepal despite the charade of a 'verification' process initiated with the Bhutanese authorities.

With Koirala beleaguered, the Maoists stepped up their violent so-called People's War, making a habit of storming police posts with hundreds of cadre. The attacks on the police—supposedly for past misdeemeanors and for representing the Nepali state—led to the largest mass killings in Nepal's history since the incident known as the Kot massacre of 1846 at the Kathmandu court. A single week in April saw 70 policemen dead, and a night in mid-April took the life of 41. Many were killed execution-style.

Even as the Maoists were making their gains over

large tracts of the hinterland, the national society was visited by a thunderclap in the form of the 1 June massacre within the Narayanhiti Royal Palace, in which King Birendra and nine members of his immediate family and other relatives died in a hail of automatic gunfire. With details not forthcoming from a devastated palace and with a government unable to fill the information gap, the country erupted in an orgy of conspiracy-seeking and looked variously for culprits in the surviving brother Gyanendra, his son Paras, or the intelligence agencies of countries near and far.

Once he ascended the serpent-backed throne, the new king Gyanendra provided full access to an enquiry committee headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Nepal, which after two weeks of investigations released a voluminous report detailing eyewitness accounts of the tragedy. These accounts pointed to Deependra as the perpetrator, a crown prince with access to the latest in automatic weaponry. However,

the rumours of conspiracy refused to die, considerably weakening Nepal's constitutional monarchy, which remains a significant player in national politics and is required to stand behind the country's parliamentary democracy.

Interestingly, the Narayanhiti massacre stopped being a factor in the political process quicker than one would have expected. 'Tuning off' may have been the public's way to come to terms with the tragedy, but more likely it was the preoccupation with the progression of Maoist violence in the midhills. Their action came to a head for the first time

when, in mid-July, a Royal Nepal Army contingent came close to a fight with the insurgents in their stronghold of Rolpa District in the west. Prime Minister Koirala appealed to King Gyanendra to persuade the generals to put up a fight, but when the latter demanded a procedural way to activate the army Koirala felt he had to resign on a matter of principle.

Sher Bahadur Deuba took over the helm in July, this change of guard allowed a series of political openings that had been blocked due to the innumerable eddies of political animosity surrounding Koirala. The left opposition in Parliament came around to a modicum of across-the-board understanding on the need to address the Maoist threat, and back-channel discussions between Prime Minister Deuba and the Maoists led to a ceasefire with the insurgents. The Maoists came above ground to conduct open rallies and meetings, but even as talks with their government got started the insurgents maintained their main political demands as non-negotiable—a republic sans monarchy and a constituent assembly to decide on a new constitution.

The phase of rapid expansion over the last couple of years seemed to have led to an over-stretching of the



King Gyanendra



Indra

Nepal, 9th-10th century, Copper alloy, gilded. Object 23

In this superb cast image Indra sits at ease holding a symbolic lotus seed in his hand extended in charity (varada mudra). His expression is benign and, unique to him, third eye is horizontal. He wears a magnificent three-crested crown but is otherwise chastely ornamented. His lower body is draped with a loincloth decorated with rosettes to simulate a textile pattern.

Photograph by Rupert Steiner. Printed at Jagadamba Offset, Patan.

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insurgent's command and control, one proof of which lay in the sudden escalation of extortion by professed Maoists. Then Chairman Comrade Prachanda announced a plan to amass half a million people in Kathmandu Valley to press for his demands. Till that point the Kathmandu middle- and upper-classes had been relatively unmindful of the Maoist juggernaut in the hills, but now with the insurgents knocking at the Valley's door, these classes turned decisively anti-Maoists. The broadsheet dailies, till then rather coy in their coverage of the insurgency, then came out strongly in their reports and editorials against the Maobaadi.

The Maoists were also cornered by some other factors in the last quarter of 2001. The 11 September attacks on the United States and the subsequent campaign against 'terror groups' did not work to their advantage, particularly after the Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh jumped the gun on the Nepali government in terming the Maobaadi as 'terrorist'. The Beijing government, for its part, pointedly signified its opposition to the Maoist action and support for the government's move against the insurgents. When it was learnt that Chairman Prachanda was openly holding court in Siliguri, West Bengal, and receiving Nepal's topmost left leaders, there was a media backlash against the Maoists for supposedly being coddled by the Indian establishment.

Perhaps due to this series of setbacks, the Maoists suddenly announced that their demand for a republican state was for now on the backburner. As the Maobaadi seemed to go on the defensive, the government and establishment began to feel energised, sparing little effort to provide a face-saving "safe landing" that some in the insurgents' political leadership said they required. There was also clearly a tussle within the Maoist leadership, with the military wing backed by gun-toting cadre that had been primed to storm the Nepali establishment unwilling to consider a compromise formula. This may have been the cause of the decisive break of 23 November, when, days after Comrade Prachanda announced his unilateral withdrawal from the ceasefire, a Maoist group overran an army garrison in Dang District close to the Maoists heartland of Rukum, Rolpa and Jajarkot.

Since the Maoists People's War was launched six years ago on 13 February 1996, the attitude of the Royal Nepal Army had been to keep its hands firmly in its pockets, forcing the ill-trained and badly-armed policemen to tackle the highly motivated insurgents. While the concern of the army brass not to be misused by the political parties was genuine, the generals were also without doubt using the military's historical proximity to the royal palace to keep from coming under the umbrella of the civilian government. After the severe loss of face following the debacle at Dang, however, the military was forced to come out of the barracks. But it did not do so before an Emergency was announced.

On 26 November, in one stroke, Prime Minister

Deuba: announced a state of Emergency, had an anti-terrorism ordinance take effect, and declared the Maoists a 'terrorist' organisation. The deployment of the Royal Nepal Army has not seen the immediate collapse of the Maoist structure that some had expected. At the end of December 2001, the army seemed to be consolidating its position across midhill Nepal's tortured terrain rather than going in hot pursuit of the insurgents. Meanwhile, the press in Nepal had gone meek under the Emergency, and in the resultant information vacuum it is not clear what is the state of war or peace in the country at large. Besides the fear of the rise of the right-wing in the Emergency period, the concern is that high-handed state action can lead to widespread country-wide human rights abuse. This can only promote further insurgencies in the future even if the Maobaadi of Comrade Prachanda are neutralised for the present.

The year 2001 was a time of telescoped historical experience for Nepal, which has had to undergo multiple traumas that countries elsewhere would have taken decades to collect. Nepalis look forward to some release from relentless bad *karma* in 2002.

PAKISTAN

OUR ENDANGERED SPECIES

NOAM CHOMSKY says humans are an "endangered species" and given the nature of their institutions, they are likely to destroy themselves in a fairly short time. When Chomsky was in Pakistan in late November 2001 to deliver the Distinguished Egbal Ahmed Annual Lecture, I asked him about the survival prospects of civilian institutions and society in Pakistan, a 'species' endangered by the institutional hegemony of a pathologically powerful military establishment. With a curiosity unique to his razor sharp mind, Chomsky threw the ball right back at me: "Do you see any glimmer of hope?" In response, I inadvertently found myself playing the proverbial prophet of doom.

At the turn of the new millennium, when most countries around the world have more or less accepted democracy as the best possible form of government, Pakistan is still grappling with unending praetorianism. After eleven years of electoral democracy in which power alternated between the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) often at the behest of the military, the generals seized direct control in October 1999.

How did Pakistan get here? The roots of praetorianism date back to the early years of Independence when a host of external and internal factors combined

to tilt the civil-military institutional equation in favour of the military. For one, a migrant political leadership lacking in a domestic political constituency continually resorted to extra-constitutional tactics to hold on to power. At the same time, the fledgling state prioritised national defence over critical development needs as it faced a hostile neighbourhood. Moreover, weak civilian administrations routinely fell back on the well-organised military to undertake even day-to-day civilian tasks. This reliance on the military gradually eroded respect for civilian authority among the men in khaki, spurring them to 'save Pakistan' at the slightest sign of political instability. The military ultimately emerged as a domineering vested interest in state and society.

This superimposition of the military on vital aspects of civil and political life over the decades has stripped civilian authority of even its basic functions. Be it federal or provincial administrations, universities, examination boards, public utility corporations, state research institutions, the military has gradually 'taken over' in the name of promoting accountability and reducing corruption. Militarisation is not just limited to the public sector. Name a vital sector of the economy (logistics, public works, fertiliser, cement, sugar production) and the military runs it tax free, clearly undermining any chances of fair competition, besides crowding out scarce investment resources required for private sector development.

Finance Ministry insiders also whisper of the financial rot within the military which, subject to little external scrutiny, claims a lion's share of the government's budget. The military's unquestioned dominance of state affairs coupled with its holy cow public image allows it to act the untainted angel while holding its civilian counterparts accountable for their actions. For instance, under the current military regime's much touted accountability process, civil officials and anti-military politicians are hauled up in the name of 'fair account-ability' while military officers are excluded under the convenient pretext of existing stringent internal accountability mechanisms.

Desperate optimism

The long-term effect of the military's consolidation of civil and political affairs has been disastrous in other ways. Military rule has wrought pervasive de-intellectualisation and de-politicisation on Pakistani society. The various factors have coalesced to tranquilise the society so that it is unable to tackle its internal contradictions, nor be aware of its due place in governing the country, or its inalienable right to challenge the state's unlawful coercion. Thus far, the 'attentive public' has remained confined to the fringes of politics. "Politics is just not our business," is the

ingenuous reaction of most middle-class Pakistanis to all matters political, willing as they are to give the military the benefit of the doubt till an imaginary "leader with vision" shows up on the horizon. The public has been confused by the constant harping on the failures of elected governments by democracy's influential detractors, liberal and otherwise.

In the opinion of these detractors, eleven years of what General Pervez Musharraf calls "sham democracy" had worsened corruption in government, failed to ensure the rule of law, fanned ethnic and sectarian politics, undermined key state institutions, politicised the civil service and failed in implementing much-needed structural reforms. Hence, military intervention had become a necessary evil. Given Islamabad's external threat perceptions, this acquiescence to the military's political involvement is even understandable. But in this desperate optimism, Pakistanis have failed to realise that with each foray into politics the military develops its own political ambitions and usurps civilian poles of power.



Pervez Musharraf

Military rulers, seeking political legitimacy, invariably play off ethnic, religious or other pro-military groups against mainstream political forces, thus creating a peculiar set of distortions in society. And in all fairness, the insecure elected governments have had little room to manoeuvre in the face of overwhelming policy constraints imposed by scarce government revenues, large debt and defence burdens, externally imposed harsh economic conditionalities, the needs of political give and take, and - on top of it all— a military establishment with an exclusive control over crucial national defence, security and nuclear policies.

Ironically, after two years in power the military remains as clueless about managing Pakistan's complex governance crisis as were the "corrupt" politicians it replaced to "reconstruct real democracy". Despite his self-important rhetoric of providing good governance, General Musharraf has set about the business of government by nakedly perverting the civilian share of the state, centralising power within a close-knit cohort of trusted senior military commanders, manipulating the political process in favour of pliant pro-military politicians, while brutally suppressing legitimate political opposition.

The events of 11 September 2001 and the changed geo-political alignments have turned out to be a blessing in disguise for the general. The immediate needs of the war on terror have made a secure and stable dictatorship in Pakistan indispensable for the Americans. As expected, the international community's calls for restoration of civilian rule have been pushed to the back burner. This outright international support gives the general-president complete control over the chessboard

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of Pakistani politics—in essence allowing him to create another period of ‘guided democracy’ in which the military determines who is fit to rule Pakistan.

The million-rupee question is this: where does the country go from here? Given the almost universal failure of military experiments in Pakistan, it seems safe to argue that the country’s salvation rests on an uninterrupted political process. Political democracy, despite numerous imperfections, makes citizens sovereign. Their allegiance to the state is contingent on their willful agreement to the exercise of its legal and political imperatives. At least in theory, the state is not allowed to exercise these imperatives for its own sake, or for granting preferential advantage to dominant groups or classes. Representative and judicial institutions keep a check on the state’s arbitrariness. Democratic political processes, however, evolve slowly. Institutional checks and balances, that may take a long time to evolve, ensure that no leader takes the public for a ride and gets away with it.

As a critical first step, the ‘attentive public’ of Pakistan must partake in politics. Indeed, the power of the state is so colossal that individual attempts to engage or challenge will be like crying in the wilderness. To be effective, societal political endeavours require the integrated support of a broad coalition of interests, and aggressive lobbying of the news media, political parties and Parliament too is critical. But all this can be done only if Pakistanis at home and abroad recognise that non-democratic experiments, whether military or civilian, are disastrous for the polity in the long run.

Towards the end of our meeting, Chomsky was curious about the state of the Pakistani intelligentsia. “What role are they playing?” he asked, “Have they been able to reach out to the larger public?” Exiled, co-opted, harassed, or marginalized, I replied, intellectuals too are an “endangered species” in Pakistan. ▽

—Aqil Shah

SRI LANKA:

PEACE AFTER ELECTIONS?

THE INSTALLATION of a new government in Sri Lanka after a bruising general election last month offers a measure of hope to a war weary nation. The election pitted the centre-left People’s Alliance (PA) government and its Marxist ally, the People’s Liberation Front (JVP), against the centre-right United National Front (UNF).

Outwardly, the general election in Sri Lanka on 5 December was about the role of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in a future peace process that would end the 18 year ethnic war. During the period of the election campaign, the powerful government-

controlled media focussed almost exclusively on a secret deal between the main opposition party and the LTTE.

But underlying the rhetoric was the grim reality of an economy that had registered close to zero percent growth in the last year. The latest estimates put growth in 2001 at minus 0.6 percent. The economy is still reeling from the impact of an LTTE suicide mission in July that left half of Sri Lankan airlines fleet destroyed at the country’s only international airport. Meanwhile, the PA’s alliance with the Marxist-oriented JVP did nothing to encourage investors.

The clear mandate of the people at this election was for economic progress and peace with the LTTE, which were the two foremost promises of the UNF in its election campaign. The electorate’s rejection of the nationalist propaganda of the PA, and the fear psychosis it tried to create, is a major encouragement for peace forces in the country. Ironically, the PA’s nationalist propaganda was defeated in part by its own success. Over the past seven years, President Chandrika Kumaratunga was in the vanguard of those propounding that there is an ethnic conflict in the country that requires a political solution. But her government was unable to deliver on its pledges.

The PA government’s failure in either proceeding with the constitutional reforms or in making peace with the LTTE made virtually every Tamil party contesting the elections in the north-east speak in the language of Tamil nationalism. The most successful party, the Tamil National Alliance, even went to the extent of extolling the LTTE as the sole Tamil representative at peace talks with the government.

Prabakaran’s Speech

During the runup to the polls, the LTTE itself made clear its preference for the UNF. In his annual Heroes Day speech in late November, the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabakaran indicated his willingness to come to a peaceful settlement. He also called on the Sri Lankan voters to vote for the parties advocating peace and against those advocating war, indirectly boosting the UNF’s campaign.

Some assessments of LTTE leader’s speech saw in it a willingness to drop the Tamil Eelam demand in exchange for a genuine peace process. The speech certainly had a large number of references to peace and a restarting of the peace process. However, there are also those who remain sceptical of the LTTE leader’s conditional words. Further, the LTTE’s peace thrust may merely be indicative of its sensitivity to the intensified global clampdown on terrorism.

As part of its 100-day promise, the new UNF government has pledged peace talks, a de-escalation of the war with the LTTE, and an interim council for the conflict ridden northeast. Peace talks between the two sides are likely to commence soon.

The LTTE’s post-election announcement of a month-long unilateral ceasefire beginning on 24 December has

been followed by a government decision to reciprocate with a similar ceasefire of its own. In addition, the government has also decided to relax the economic embargo on LTTE-controlled areas from 15 January onwards.

So far, the positive actions of the two parties have been unilateral ones, and they can be regarded in two ways. Those who have faith in the peace process, and see no alternative to it, may read them as confidence-building initiatives. Those who have little faith in the peace process may see these unilateral actions, particularly by the LTTE, as being in the nature of manoeuvres to embarrass the government.

Ceasefires have been controversial issues in Sri Lanka. In the past, they have always ended in disasters, with the LTTE striking first with heavy losses to the Sri Lankan armed forces. Obtaining agreement of the armed forces would be an important aspect of declaring a ceasefire.

Exactly a year ago, as head of the former PA government, President Chandrika Kumaratunga rejected a similar unilateral one month ceasefire by the LTTE, not once but on the three further occasions that it was renewed. At that time, the prevalent belief was that the LTTE was offering its ceasefire merely to reduce the chances of being put on the list of banned terrorist organisations by the British government.

The Kumaratunga government not only rejected the LTTE's ceasefire, it also resorted to a military attack when the LTTE stopped renewing its ceasefire. As a result, the former government brought about a situation in which there was high loss of life, culminating in the massive economic destruction at Katunayake Airport. The government lost more on the ground in terms of its capacity to counter the LTTE than it gained inter-nationally through the various international bans placed on the LTTE.

By declaring its ceasefire unilaterally this time around as well, the LTTE may have put the new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe on the defensive a bare week after it was sworn in, and before it could probe its relationship with the armed forces and their commander-in-chief, President Kumaratunga. But the new government under Prime Minister Wickremesinghe seems to have taken the challenge in stride. In making its response to the LTTE without any delay, the new government showed confidence in implementing its notion of the peace process. In particular, the prime minister has taken a huge responsibility on his shoulders.

There has been little public discussion as to what the best course of action on the part of the government would be. It does not appear that there was much discussion on this score within the government itself, and the decision announcing the government's

ceasefire came from the prime minister's office. This type of decision-making has its strengths and weaknesses. The strengths lie in the ability to make rapid decisions without getting caught up in endless rounds of discussion and dissension between different shades of opinion. The weaknesses are in the lack of broad-based support, especially when problems arise.

Comparable examples are the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord of 1987 and the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, both of which were neither widely discussed in the cabinet or among the general public prior to signature. As a result, both were derailed at their inception by opposition from within government ranks, and the rest of society.

Where today's ceasefire is concerned, the new government can justifiably claim that its election manifesto contained a pledge to de-escalate the war and to restore peace as a first priority. In addition there is a significant difference between a ceasefire, which is a temporary phenomenon, and an accord or pact that is permanently binding. Unlike in the past, there is also today a population that is much better acquainted with the costs of war and the merits of peace.

However, the peace process is unlikely to progress far unless the presidency and the Parliament cooperate with one another. So far, a bipartisan approach to peace talks has eluded the Sri Lankan polity and it remains to be seen how the president and prime Minister, of two competing parties, will

together run the polity.

The Sri Lankan constitution vests a large measure of executive power in the hands of the president. President Kumaratunga, who has four more years of office, is constitutionally empowered to appoint cabinet ministers, including the prime minister, to preside over cabinet meetings, and to dissolve Parliament at her discretion one year after its election. She is also the commander in chief of the armed forces.

The effort to overcome the uncertainty caused by divided power and the handicap to effective governance would invariably lead to intrigue and manoeuvres. These manoeuvres are yet not openly confrontational. The initial conduct of President Chandrika Kumaratunga in conceding all cabinet portfolios to the UNF was reasonably graceful. There were reports that the President had sought to keep the key defence portfolio with her, but relinquished it on wise counsel. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's initial words and actions too have been conciliatory. The new government offered the position of deputy speaker to the defeated PA.

President and Prime Minister

For the present, the new government seems focussed on conflict resolution with regard to the LTTE and the

“Especially where it concerns ethnic conflict, there has to be bipartisanship.”

economy. The danger, however, is that in the weeks and months ahead, the clash between the two executive branches will become more acute. There are reports that the new government is considering a crossover bill. This will enable parliamentarians to defect from their parties and join another party without having to forfeit their parliamentary seats. A significant number of opposition parliamentarians are reportedly prepared to crossover and join the new UNF government.

If more than twenty of them do cross over, as appears possible, then a two-thirds majority in Parliament will be within the grasp of the ruling coalition. The ground will be prepared for drastic action that could include an impeachment of President Kumaratunga or the passing of a constitutional amendment to abolish the institution of executive Presidency, and thereby President Kumaratunga's powerful post.

On the other side of the divide is President Kumaratunga and her hardline no-compromise party colleagues, who are practitioners of confrontational politics. At present, they are not in a position to challenge the new government, which is fresh and optimistic with its recent electoral victory. Additionally, recent disclosures of criminal and corrupt activities by leading members of the former government, in which the president is herself at least indirectly implicated, have seriously eroded their credibility. But with the passage of time, the new government will have to take unpopular decisions. Already power cuts are being reimposed and the cost of living is likely to rise relative to earnings for some time to come.

However, it is the restarting of the peace process, and the making of concessions to the LTTE, that is likely to become the focal point for agitation against Prime Minister Wickremesinghe's new government. At this juncture, President Kumaratunga will be positioned to exercise her powers as executive president to either sack UNF ministers or take over cabinet portfolios. This would pave the way for her to also dissolve Parliament after one year, which she is empowered to do.

A relationship between the president and the new government that is tense and fraught with menace to one another is likely to be self-defeating to both. Calculations of self-interest that exclude or defeat political opponents are easy to make. But they are less likely to deliver positive results in the resolution of major national problems. Neither party can be at their best when they also have to guard themselves against possible elimination.

Hopes of Non-confrontation

Recent public opinion surveys have shown that the public prefers a national government much more to any single political party wielding unilateral power. The

decision of the PA to turn down the offer of deputy speaker made by the new government was a blow to this aspiration of the people for non-confrontational politics. It is only to be hoped that the PA was not ruling out the prospect of a greater degree of power-sharing with the new government when it rejected the deputy speaker's post, which the new government has kept vacant.

Especially where it concerns the ethnic conflict, there has to be bipartisanship. It is not only a two-thirds majority in Parliament that is needed to effect the constitutional changes that are necessary to end the conflict. There is a need for the two main parties to be on the same side, or else the opposition to the constitutional changes being made will probably doom them, as in the case of the 13th Amendment. The main opposition party led people onto the streets to riot during this period, which vitiated the whole spirit of that exercise in the devolution of power. It provided the central bureaucracy and government ministries the opportunity to hold on to centralised power.

Further, for the ethnic conflict to end there has to be more than constitutional change and a restructuring of the polity. An accommodation with the LTTE is required, which the new government is pledging to do with Norwegian facilitation. There is no question that these essential measures require a bipartisan consensus between the two major political parties. Coming to terms with the LTTE requires not only military strength, but also adequate political reform.

During the recent election campaign, the UNF leadership was markedly reluctant to spell out a political framework that could lead to a satisfaction of Tamil aspirations, in part perhaps because of the apprehension that it would be distorted beyond measure by the state media and other political opponents. Perhaps another part of the reason was the belief that the framework needs to be worked out stage by stage in the negotiation process itself.

Where questions of political power and constitutional reform are concerned, there is likely to be a high degree of contestation regarding the way forward to a mutually acceptable solution. There will undoubtedly be differences between the government, opposition and the LTTE. These differences pertaining to issues of governance will be reflected among the people at large. A more consensual and consultative type of decision-making will be required at this stage than the new government has so far been able to demonstrate. ▽

—Jehan Perera



Ranil Wickremesinghe

Between Regionalism

THE HIMAL ROUNDTABLE ON RE-CONCEPTUALISING SOUTH ASIA

Why do the people of South Asia, who constitute more than one-fifth of all humanity, remain so overwhelmingly, materially poor? Why do our children continue to toil by the million, and women continue to die unnecessarily during childbirth? Why are we so unconcerned about the sharply widening economic disparity within our societies? And why do 1.4 billion South Asians matter so little in the world?

It could be that the very 'structuring' of South Asia and its individual countries is inadequate to meet our aspirations. It could be that this keeps our self-identity and native genius from flourishing. For a region of overwhelming demographic and geographic diversity, the growth of the sequestered state-centric national consciousness has not always favoured social, cultural and economic advancement of all the people.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SAARC, was a state-sponsored effort at rapprochement even before 'civil society' had woken up to the need for regionalism. But SAARC remains a bureaucracy-led effort of seven governments, a social solidarity designed to promote controlled management. Meanwhile, the region-

alism espoused by 'civil society' has been well-meaning but unproductive. Despite the numerous pan-regional conferences, seminars and workshops of the last decade, there is less peace and equity all over. Our economies, education, public health and cultural wellbeing remain under attack without adequate response.

Part of the problem may be linked to the insistence on the kind of regionalism that emphasises the unitary identity of all South Asia, one that is adequate for generic classification but cannot energise the people. Learning from the last half-century of experience, we must explore a new basis for defining South Asia, one which reaches beyond the nation-states on the one hand and regionalism as understood on the other--indeed, a concept of South Asia that highlights the garden of identities rather than asserts a superficial oneness that fails to inspire.

While SAARC is a necessary forum that will continue to evolve, those outside the governmental arena must thus begin to conceptualise a different regionalism. 'South Asia' has already become more than a foreign ministry project, and we must devise more pluralistic ways of organising the people of the different regions and countries of

Regionalism

Haris Gazdar: The size of India is one thing that makes South Asia an 'improbable region'. All of the surrounding countries have bilateral contests with India and all of these countries, even when taken together in terms of their demography, political weight in the world and economic strength, are all very small when compared with India. There is suspicion on the part of smaller countries about institutionalising a region in which India will play the role of natural leader, institutionalising a region of Indian hegemony. At the same time, for India, it is very difficult to take the region seriously because any regional forum, no matter how it is organised, very quickly becomes a trap for her. It becomes a forum in which the others will raise their bilateral issues with India, and club together to use their collective strength to bash up India.

There is also a structural problem, which becomes obvious when you place South Asia into the context of

world politics and economy. Because external powers can quite easily cultivate one of India's smaller neighbours to gain a foothold in the region, it allows others a very easy leverage in the region.

Madhavan Palat: We make an assumption of a common past over this territory, but this may not necessarily so. You have as much of a common past between north India and Central Asia as between north India and south India. In the second millennia AD, the Afghan region was ruled from Delhi, whose dominion stretched further westward and northwestward. Peninsular India was not part of that structure. Assumptions that we have a civilisation in common, or that we have a common past, are questionable. There is of course the regionalism of Punjab, which cuts across national lines; of Bengal; of Sindh; Tamils; of the Nepalis-- these are all cases where a kind of regionalism could work. Nation-states get nervous about it because it may undermine their authority. But that is exactly the fear India expressed at the time of the reorganisation of its

and the Nation-State

ASIA (18-19 NOVEMBER 2001)

South Asia. It is important, as the Eleventh SAARC Summit happens in Kathmandu, for the rest of us to look beyond SAARC as well as the obvious limitations of the present brand of regionalism.

To delve deeper into the issues of nation-state, identity, sovereignty, and regionalism, and to ponder over the notion 'India' and the meaning of recent earthshaking global events for South Asia, Himlal organised a roundtable of thinkers, on 18-19 November 2001. The purpose of the exercise was to chart a course for the future in which national boundaries become less important, where culture, history, economy and livelihoods receive more attention, and where the penumbra between regions is better appreciated. The idea of 'South Asia' must be reconsidered to reflect more closely the identities and aspirations of 1.4 billion individuals.

The following pages contain under different headings an edited transcript of the two days of discussions, as well as individual presentations by the scholars and theorists of South Asia who participated in the Himlal Roundtable.

The headings are: Regionalism, SAARC, 11 September Afghanistan, Poverty, India and the Indian intelligentsia, Identity and Sovereignty.

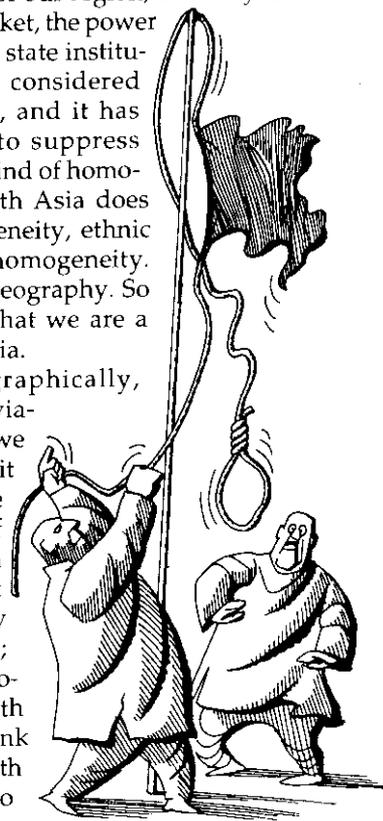
own states, that the country would break up. In fact the opposite happened. Promoting regions of this kind could therefore be a kind of South Asian strategy. Also, these regions feel more comfortable in a larger unit, such as Wales and Catalonia in Europe, precisely because in the larger unit the coercive presence of the existing nation-state is relaxed. This is why regional identities are flourishing in Europe, under European Unionism.

We all have our sporting meetings as national engagements: India versus Pakistan, and so on. Why can't we have a Punjabi team, or a Bengali team? We could have an Andhra team meeting a Punjab team. Why does it always have to be India vs. Pakistan? If each region can promote itself, we might have a completely different level of mobilisation politics and attachment emerging from it, which would be completely South Asian. After all, next to war, sport is one of the most important mobilisers. Instead of having the events along national lines, they could be done along regional lines.

Tasneem Siddiqui: Education is another area where commonalities can be developed so that there is a sense of healthy regionalism, particularly because of the demonisation of neighbours that has taken place in education. For example, in Bangladesh, those who have written the curricula had as their starting point the nationalist movement during the Pakistan period. Therefore you very often find hidden sorts of anti-Indian feelings in there. Then again, from a lot of Indian books studied in Bangladesh in the English medium schools, we find that history constructed from a particularly nationalistic point of view is also present. There is a sense of "we are much better than others" or "they are not as good as us". It should be possible to take a conscious step to pursue a more objective 'South Asian' text in the books. Even games for example, cricket has become politicised and I do not know whether this kind of regionalism is a good thing. But perhaps it is a good idea if the sub-regions of South Asia play each other rather than nation-states. But there are practical considerations that will prevent this from happening at this time.

CK Lal: Being recent creations, a strong rhetoric has been built around the states of our region, and they are aided by the power of the market, the power of military, and the power of state institutions. The state has always considered nationalities as a challenge, and it has expended no small effort to suppress them. A region needs some kind of homogeneity to define itself. South Asia does not have a religious homogeneity, ethnic homogeneity or economic homogeneity. The homogeneity is that of geography. So what brings us together is that we are a part of geographic South Asia.

Imtiaz Ahmad: Geographically, South Asia is explicit and viable as a concept, in so far as we are bounded by the sea. But it is less so if you look at the other sides. And, in terms of history, the problem South Asia's viability is dependent upon what kind of a history you are willing to invoke; because there is not one history but multiple histories with multiple memories. So I think that if at all the concept of South Asia is a viable one, it is so



sociologically. We spend far too much time discussing ethnic or social identities, ignoring the fact that there is also a thing called regional identity. South Asia has historically been what I would call concentric circles of identities of a regional nature, bounded by water.

Now, it would seem to me that there is in fact a boundedness to the region going by civilisational patterns, trade routes, the caste system, or whatever. So there is viability. But this sociological viability has to be juxtaposed with our recent political history. My contention is that whatever has happened in the recent political history – and I am not talking of the last 50 years but of the period before that— has tended to distort this scenario completely. To a certain extent and informally, the civilisation exists. But the mapping, the cartography of the colonial regime, has undercut or eroded the foundations of our regional inter-linking. This is why, while sociologically we have existed as a region, as a definable entity, we find ourselves divided into nation-states.

Ashis Nandy: For the first time, we are at a point where each of the nation-states of our region has more or less acquired a certain stability and recognition. The most uncertain is the case of Pakistan, because its self-definition seems to be incomplete. But on the whole, these nation-states have acquired autonomy and self-definition. Even more importantly, they can live without each other, apparently. Consider the fact that more than 95 percent of Indians have never seen a Pakistani in their lives. They see Pakistanis in the news photographs and on television. And probably more than 95 percent



of Pakistanis have not seen an Indian, except on television and movies. On the whole, we have a new generation with little memory of the pre-1947 South Asia. But this also means that they are less encumbered. And I am very hopeful that members of this less encumbered generation will relate to each other as if they were people from any two nations, and will be a little bit more sceptical of the state, and will have more confidence and less fear of dissolution of the self.

Siddharth Varadarajan: Until certain transformations take place in individual countries to create the conditions for South Asia to emerge, little can be expected to occur at the Subcontinental level. Critiquing history is very useful as an entry point, because, for me, nation-states are absolutely central, absolutely crucial

One-legged stool of the omnivore elite

WHY DO we need a South Asian regional “something”? Whose idea or interest is it anyway? Is it just the “ASEAN envy” of a few bureaucrats and politicians in the age of globalisation? Or is there a deeper need for it?

Popular imagination equates globalisation with the rapacious design of multinational corporations, but there have actually been three phases of globalisation, and the reaction at Seattle represents the transition to the third phase. The first wave came about with the League of Nations and reached its apogee after the Second World War with the formation of the United Nations. This was the globalisation of national bureaucracies. With the legitimacy of its nominal support, the Bretton Woods system of global financial control was what allowed national companies to set up transnational subsidiaries and ventures. This led

to the second wave of globalisation in the 1960s and 1970s, that of MNCs which really could not be classified as being under chaperoned by any one bureaucracy. However, neither the procedural fetishism of a globalised bureaucracy nor the freewheeling profiteering of the egocentric market could make a dent on global inequity or the plundering of the environment.

And so a third solidarity—the egalitarian civil society—emerged with globally networked activism. This, finally, completed the “three-legged stool” of a properly contested global policy terrain. In truth, had it not been for the globalisation of egalitarianism, many of the issues debated today would not have seen the light of day.

Leaving aside the intriguing question of what the pathway of global evolution will be, let us come back to South Asia and look at our institutions at the regional, national and local levels. How do we treat the different solidarities in our midst? Essentially, South Asia is a



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for any project in South Asia.

Madhavan: In international politics, at all levels, it will be important to assemble a 'South Asian' position. That is a singularly political task. The obvious pre-requisite for this is that the Indo-Pakistani confrontation has to convert to a collaboration. Strategic co-ordination must take place. They must see themselves as creating a common strategy for a South Asian future. Now, this is not entirely utopian, and the absence of the Cold War provides that opportunity. We must seize the opportunity precisely because it has been provided.

Haris: At one level, the window of opportunity for constructing a South Asian identity has closed. The period between the Cold War and 11 September was that period of opportunity, but the Indian and Pakistani states and the others could not make use of this opportunity. But now, there are new challenges but also opportunities, such as to build alliances across Asia and across the developed world. We must actually link the South Asian identity with the demand for a more just economic and political order in the world.

Imtiaz: On the one hand, we have a discourse developing in favour of the South Asian alliance, the South Asian conglomeration. But we also have an equally powerful discourse against hegemonic designs that are state-centric. I think of contemporary politics and political developments in South Asia, with some notable exceptions, as running contrary to the idea of a South

one-legged stool dominated by the hierarchic bureaucracy where other solidarities—genuine market and civil society—have been almost driven underground. Our markets function mainly in the informal sector, and when that informal profit-making activity increases in scale or attempts to work across national or administrative boundaries, it is labeled "illegal" by the hierarchy which has yet to show any interest in regularising this important South Asian activity.

Genuine civil society, one that is guided neither by the profit motive nor by the need for control but exhibits voluntariness for some ethical cause, also functions underground. In Nepal, traditional *guthis*, farmer-managed irrigation systems, and other community-based organisations still cannot function openly in an environment where the laws facilitate rather than control the hierarchy of rent-seeking opportunities. Educational establishments should have been the founts for such values of voluntarism, but in the name of modernity, South Asia has gone the way of "business schools", which are mere training grounds for building contractors. All non-profit and non-control oriented disciplines (those that would be termed

Asian identity. For the immediate future, therefore, South Asia remains a constructed notion.

Tasneem: I feel that within this South Asian context, there are certain problems, common issues, which need regional solutions for which we can draw upon the European experience, such as that you cannot vote for economic integration without making certain reforms within your own system. While there are many issues that we cannot resolve because of the state structure, perhaps we should focus on those that can be tackled because they are in the arena of economy, environment, or public health, such as the cross-border issues related to hydropower, irrigation, pollution and arsenic poisoning. There is need for a common approach, as well as for accumulating resources collectively that we may not possess individually.

"SAARC fails because the nation-states themselves are major failures."

SAARC

CK: You cannot deny that when you have two people, conflict is inevitable. The purpose of every institution is conflict resolution, starting from the institutions of marriage and family. The problem with the official SAARC is that it starts with the premise that it is not to address conflict resolution. No bilateral issues are to be discussed. That is why it has become a sort of redundant organisation. SAARC has to be re-conceptualised as a platform for conflict resolution. The term does not

"Liberal arts have been left to the Sanskrit pathshalas, the madrasas the telegurus."

"liberal arts") have now been left to the Sanskrit *pathshalas*, the *madrasas* and the telegurus. The modern universities of Europe evolved out of monasteries where both science and theology engaged each other to provide a new equipoise to society. In South Asia, modern educational institutions cater to the upward mobility of a globalised omnivore elite, while the traditional ones help stoke the anger of the marginalised.

Does SAARC in its current limited frame even discuss these things? Sadly, it does not show any inclination to do so and has thus remained merely a "foreign ministry project" of the respective bureaucracies where tokenism is the space provided for others. Informal merchants and producers need a "business SAARC" that allows them a better market and security for their investments. South Asia's activists need a "civil society SAARC" to address their concerns about ethics and equity across the man-made borders. Not giving them space will mean that policies made sitting on a one-legged stool will invariably lead to unexpected and unpleasant surprises. ▽

Future of a fragmented legacy

I LOOK forward to South Asia coming together in different ways and at multiple levels without our having to think of a single state or even a confederation of states. This should not in any way compromise the "unity and integrity" of any of the member states of SAARC. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are already fragments according to their formative political traditions. The Indian intelligentsia sees itself as the legatee of what is known as the National Movement. But India today is a fragment of what they had imagined before 1947; in an important sense, India has not been united since 1947. Pakistan is assumed to be the product of the Muslim League. But the League itself was a constituent of that national movement to which independent India lays a dubiously exclusive claim, and it matured on the premise of an undivided India until the final few years when the Pakistani option was suddenly exercised. Pakistan, like India, was bequeathed a fragmented legacy, and it splintered thereafter in 1971. By the same logic, Bangladesh must affirm the double fragmentation of its political traditions. Sri Lanka today is a virtually divided state. We are all splinters and, to a significant degree, victims of splintered pasts.

What then is to be the basis for a common future? It is the intelligentsia's common engagement with modernity as they experienced it in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the interpenetrating common politics that has developed over the 20th century. For that reason, both Central Asia and Southeast Asia have been excluded from the common modern projects despite the extraordinary intimacy of previous centuries between different parts of South Asia and these two regions. In modern times, South Asia has constituted itself as a region that is integrating itself through paradigms of politics and social movements that are becoming increasingly common despite, and because of, the numerous tensions and conflicts between the sovereign states of the region. The vision of a new South Asia is oriented to the future that may be fashioned, not to a past that has vanished. Let me suggest three major processes as strategies to be pursued to bring us together outside of and independent of the action of the sovereign states.

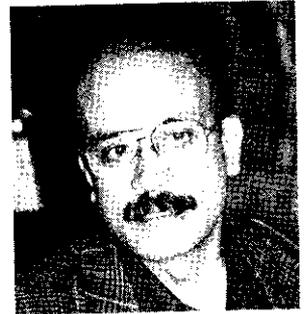
The first is regionalism. The experience of the Indian Union has demonstrated that regionalism has contributed to the unity of the Indian Republic in a manner that is both stable and democratic. It began with the Indian National Congress resolving itself into linguistic units in 1920, which blossomed in 1956 into the

linguistic reorganisation of the Indian Union. That was a major act of statesmanship. It is an experience that could be productively used to bring South Asia together. There are many regionalisms that cut across the boundaries of the sovereign states. Each of these could be promoted without undermining the integrity of the states in question. The obvious ones are Kashmiri, Punjabi, Bengali, Sindhi and Nepali regionalisms. They foster a level of difference and of competition other than of the states. With Afghanistan included, the Pathans would be the source of just such a regionalism that is common to Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is especially pertinent since the Pathans played a significant role in the national movement in the first half of the twentieth century.

This regionalism could be pursued in all the non-state spheres of civil society, including all forms of academic and cultural gatherings and joint undertakings, the common political pursuits of economic liberalisation, women's and children's rights, media, human rights, the environment, entertainment and so on. Among these, the most important may be sports, which is the greatest popular mobiliser beside war itself. Supranational regional sporting teams, or even exclusively city teams, would fuel popular enthusiasms into channels other than the confrontations between the sovereign states. Sports enjoys the added advantage of being able to attract big money and sponsors. That should perhaps be the starting or focal point alongside the entertainment industry.

The second is the pursuit of democratic electoral politics. This would be essential to mobilising popularly conceived regional identities, and there could be no regionalism without such democratic politics. Defining regions more sharply, but democratically, is more of what happened in India since 1956.

The third is a South Asian assertion in the world. If South Asian identity and strategy are to be pursued, they have to be recognised elsewhere in the world: they cannot remain private or local obsessions of the population of South Asia. There is nothing to prevent sundry non-state actors, each in its own sphere, from acting jointly in international fora as representatives of South Asian or regional movements, rather than only as movements of particular nation-states. That self-assertion would be a measure of the potency of civil society in South Asia. One of the essential conditions for such self-assertion now exists, and that is the end of the Cold War, which also allows the possibility of seeing an end to the permanent confrontation between India and Pakistan. It is an opportunity that the popular initiatives of civil society must seize. ▽



Madhavan K. Palat
Historian, New Delhi

have to mean negotiations— just raising issues can also be a step towards the direction of resolution. We must begin by looking for the strands that bind us together as the starting point for re-conceptualising South Asia.

Afsan Chowdhury: SAARC fails because the nation-states themselves are major failures. So seven failures cannot make one successful construct. Even within SAARC, there is this argument that it should be split into two groups, and this is an official stand of some delegates. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are more developed within SAARC. Whereas Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan— the Maldives does not figure in too many discussions— should be put together. And there are indeed two kinds of realities within SAARC-- it is itself already splitting up into two identities.

11 September and Afghanistan

Haris: The entire brunt of the American military campaign after 11 September is being borne by the people of Afghanistan. We must realise that the whatever you actually do inside Afghanistan is highly contingent on the domestic politics of Central Asia: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and even what kinds of relationships these countries enjoy with Russia. Similarly, the internal politics of Iran are being drawn in, and you actually have very well-worn arguments around how the micro-politics of the Pashtun in Afghanistan are very closely linked to what is going on in South Asia between Pakistan and India. The official Indian position certainly makes use of this issue factor, that these are the same *jehadis* active in Kashmir.

Madhavan: On the one hand we have lost an opportunity, and on the other hand we will find a new one following the events of 11 September. You may yet recover the collective struggle similar to the one that was once raised against colonialism. But perhaps we are reading too much into 11 September, and the primary reason for such an evolution of a revived cause may actually have to do with the end of the Cold War. Is the presence of potential American bases somewhere in the South Asian neighbourhood going to be the fact that makes all the difference? Surely the end of the Cold War is the biggest change that has occurred.

Haris: If we are actually looking for positive channels or positive areas on which solidarity and identity can be constructed, I would say that it is almost akin to the fight against colonialism. We are about to re-enter that era, and I am extremely concerned that the re-colonisation of Asia is only being opposed by a band of discredited Sunni militants.

CK: 11 September is being made out to be more important for us than it probably is. The one who gets to define the problem is seldom bothered about what is

the solution, because whatever the solution will be, it will be in his interest. 11 September is being defined as a problem that concerns all of us, but it concerns us in South Asia not because of gas lines and pipelines and energy, but because Afghans, our brethren, are suffering. They may not be part of SAARC, they may claim themselves to be part of Arabia or Central Asia, but we all know that historically and emotionally they are our South Asian brothers. So we should see Afghanistan from a perspective which is different from the perspective of Western groups.

Ramchandra Guha: Haris said that 11 September has fundamentally altered the world and South Asia. CK Lal believes 11 September is irrelevant to what is going on. That is obviously the difference between a person speaking from Karachi and one speaking from Kathmandu. Here in this lovely, isolated valley, there are no bombs and no Osama bin Ladens, while Karachi is much closer to the conflict, and has borne its brunt for the last fifteen or twenty years and will continue to bear it.

“The re-colonisation of Asia is only being opposed by a band of discredited Sunni militants.”

Siddharth: Imagine a situation after 11 September, where the BJP government in New Delhi had told the Americans: “Look, we ourselves are victims of terrorism. We are victims of the Taliban, and we condemn what happened in New York and Washington. But we believe that as per international law, as per what is good for our region, you should not attack Afghanistan. As a country, we are going to take a stand against your attacks on Afghanistan.” What would that kind of stand by New Delhi have produced? I think it would have put a lot of pressure on General Musharraf, and it would have been very difficult for him to have gone along with the Amer-

ican agenda. It might have actually created a path at the popular level for some India-Pakistan rapprochement, and created a very different scenario in Kashmir. This is all speculation, but if India had not taken this very predictable, narrow-minded idea of its national interests and thought in South Asian terms of how use the turn of events to create fresh momentum for relations with Pakistan, there might have been some good in all of this.

Imtiaz: Indeed, when India reacted to the war in Afghanistan, it did not do so as a South Asian state or as a nation. It reacted as a unitary nation-state in a context of international warfare. And because of the very strong sense of rivalry with Pakistan, India wanted actually to be in the centre stage, where Pakistan happened to be.

Siddharth: The response of the United States to what happened on 11 September was to use it to push its military presence into our region. Now there is going to be a sharpening of conflicts over resources and trade routes. All of this makes the project of South Asia a

much, much more urgent one. But unless we link this to projects within our individual states for the democratic transformation within, nothing much is going to happen.

Poverty

Afsan: While doing some research on the perception of identity among the Hindu minority of Bangladesh, I learnt that they did not see themselves as Bangladeshis. They saw themselves as Hindus. And many of them were migrating. So I asked if they saw themselves as Indians, which they did not. They saw themselves as Hindus. So I asked some more questions, and learnt that their self-identification as Hindus was a counter-identity, as someone who was not a Muslim. Essentially, therefore, they did not see themselves as having any identity. So I asked, "Who are you, then?" And they said, "I am poor."

When the Muslim poor were asked whether they thought of themselves as Bangladeshi, I found that they did not. I asked "Are you Muslim?" And they did not see themselves as Muslims. I am talking about the extreme poor, which is about 50 to 60 percent of the population. Yes, they did have certain cultural practices, but this was not the dominant part of their identity. So I asked; "Who are you?" And again, they see themselves as poor. Being poor is the most dominant identity of South Asia. But the people who discuss 'identity' cannot imagine poverty. Because poverty itself has been

"Being poor is the most dominant identity of the South Asian."

marginalised out of the elite's imagination.

All of the identities we construct— such as those we have been discussing— are not identities that have anything to do with the majority of the people. The crisis of 11 September does not mean anything to them.

The poor do not have a crisis in the sense that they do not have a way of getting out and constructing a new identity, of being less poor for example. And therefore, our discourse probably is about us rather than about the majority of South Asians who are not a part of and probably cannot be a part of this kind of identity formation.

Tasneem: On this question of being poor as an identity, perhaps that identity does exist but it is definitely subsumed

when political events overtake them, when even the poor pick up a political identity. In the end, no matter what, the national identity wins. The national identity can be exploited. You can become a Bangladeshi Muslim or a Bangladeshi man when you want to take over your sister's property. You are a Bangladeshi Muslim when you wrest property from a Hindu Bangladeshi. All of these interests feed into the national identity.

Dipak Gywali: What is bothering me in this exchange is that if you look at states right now, all of them claim to be speaking for the poor, all of them claim to have poverty alleviation programmes, and poverty itself has become an industry. However the poor may like to see themselves, they have been defined and they have become part of the state's politics.

Ashis: Somebody in an obituary of Foucault, wrote:

Identity, migration, regionalism

AS AN individual I hold many identities. In gender terms, I am a woman; ethnically, I am a Bengali; religiously, I am a Muslim. I was born and bred in Dhaka, educated in a missionary college and am Bangladeshi by nationality. Due to historical reasons, my Bengali national identity has appealed to me the most. But over the years, the experiences of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Northeast India and the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka have made me realise that each layer of identity of a person or community is important and nationalist identities can only be sustained when they accommodate other identities. In the same vein, a South Asian identity can only be strengthened when it grants space for other identities, including national ones.

The ongoing European integration process is perhaps the only concrete example of the successful evolution of a supra-national regional identity, which

retains identities based on nation-states. In Europe, the states have been the driving force in promoting regional integration, and the proponents of European integration were able to convince people of diverse nationalities that the process would ensure peace and economic prosperity. It took more than fifty years to establish a single market in Europe, and while the formulation of common foreign and security policies remains to be made, the region has progressed in respect to social policies.

Here in South Asia, too, the SAARC effort at regionalism is a state-driven initiative. Like the initial European project, SAARC has also concentrated on non-controversial issues. However, it appears that states themselves have become weary of the SAARC forum, and are increasingly making use of bilateral mechanisms. At SAARC, even when pursuing non-controversial matters, not much progress has been made. This is hardly the way out, however, given the enormity of



Tasneem Siddiqui
Political Scientist, Dhaka

"You have taught us the indignity of speaking on behalf of others." So I do not want to speak on behalf of the poor and oppressed of South Asia. I think it is very undignified to do so. We have two-dimensionalised millions in our countries, calling them poor and oppressed. As if there is no culture, no knowledge, no folk tales, as if their grandparents did not tell them stories, their mothers did not sing them lullabies. Calling them only poor and only oppressed, we get the right to engineer them and push them like so much cattle towards the future.

India, Indian intelligentsia

Ramchandra: I think the fly in the ointment of South Asian regionalism is not just the size of India but the cultural arrogance of India. This presumption of hegemony, the idea that India is the natural leader of the region, is an idea that is articulated not just by the political elite but also the intellectual elite of India. One of the remarkable aspects of Indian political commentary of the last decade is how little dissent there was on questions of foreign policy. In this respect we are becoming like the United States. There is dissent enough on questions of domestic policy—on liberalisation, globalisation and affirmative action— but the dissenters on Indian foreign policy are even more marginal than Noam Chomsky in the US. This presumption of hegemony leads to a foreign policy consensus, and to

the regional dimension of the problems that South Asia faces— from environmental protection, to harnessing water resources, human development, human rights, minority rights and migration.

To speak only of the cross-border movement of people across the porous borders that divide South Asian countries, we all know that the systems of fences and border guards will not work. A South Asian future has to be designed knowing that there is going to be migration when there is demand, for example, for Bangladeshis who travel to different parts of India and Pakistan to work using a chain of human smuggling. The numbers are quite significant, and they enter India and Pakistan by choice, with specific jobs in mind. In the case of India, the Bangladeshis cross over to fill the demand for seasonal agricultural and construction labour and domestic help. In the case of Pakistan, Bangladeshis get absorbed into the shipping and fisheries industries in Karachi, and work as cooks, guards, household help and cleaners. A large number of Bangladeshi migrants are women, as is also the case with Nepali workers in India.

the feeling of injured innocence whenever there is disagreement, just as in the US. So, if India and Bangladesh disagree, it will all be Bangladesh's fault— we are always right, they are always wrong, they are always evil or backward or misguided or selfish or corrupt or whatever. We must keep in mind, however, that

"External arrogance comes from the relative internal robustness and self-confidence of Indian democracy."

such a situation of external arrogance comes from the relative internal robustness and self-confidence of Indian democracy, the creation of a system of federalism and decentralisation.

CK: This is an interesting proposition, that Indian arrogance comes out of its belief in federalism. In my reading it is quite the contrary. It is precisely because Indians do not have enough faith in their federalism that they are afraid to deal with their neighbours on an equal footing. Take some concrete examples: if they support Tamils in Sri Lanka, will it complicate matters with Tamils in India? Once, they were fearful that support to Bangladesh may affect the faith of the Bengalis of India. A strong section of the Indian intelligentsia still harbours this kind of fear. If you let go of Kashmir, will the Indian federal structure come tumbling down? And this intelligentsia has a great influence on Indian foreign policy, though less so in domestic politics. I think the arrogance referred to earlier has more to do with the Brahminical hold on the Indian national polity than with the democratic achievement of India— the sense that modern India has inherited the mantle of ancient India and is on a

The irregular movement of people from Bangladesh is a major area of concern for India and Pakistan. In some states of India, this is a highly

"A South Asian identity can be strengthened only when it provides space for other identities."

charged political issue, particularly when migrants are used as vote banks. Periodically, the migrants are pushed back, causing major strains in bilateral relations. Meanwhile, successive governments in Bangladesh have refused to recognise that such movements exist. The porous border and movement of people and goods across it is an emotive issue used by opportunist political forces in both Bangladesh and India. What is clear is that the movement across the borders of a region that has historically had open or porous frontiers is inevitable, and imposing restrictions will not have any result. Rather than try and do the impossible, therefore, one could follow the

European example and simply work towards developing a method for orderly movements of people and goods across the borders. This can only be done through a regional approach. Δ

civilizing mission.

Siddharth: In trying to understand any country's national arrogance, one should guard against over-theorising. After all, arrogance is simply an exercise of power. I think this so-called Indian arrogance is simply a product of Indian democracy and federalism reaching their outer limits in terms of their ability solve societal problems. India is at a turning point where the limitations of the Western democratic model are becoming obvious.

CK: To exhibit its superiority, in dealing with Pakistan the Indian intelligentsia uses the argument of being more secular. In dealing with Sri Lanka, it presents itself as more linguistically tolerant. In dealing with Bangladesh, more democratic. In dealing with Nepal, more civilised. These are all pretenses that come out of lack of faith in the system. In fact, the

"It precisely because Indians do not have enough faith in their federalism that they are afraid to deal with neighbours on an equal footing."

Indian intelligentsia has not reconciled itself to the Indian nation. This is obvious when you meet a Gujarati who finds himself on the streets of Kathmandu. He would not like to put himself in the same pedestal as the Bihari there who sells vegetable on a bicycle. Rather than say, "We are Indians," he will say, "I'm a Gujarati and he is a Bihari."

Imtiaz: While it is true that the 55 years of democratic experience has drawn in backwards classes and groups that were outside the pale into political participation, the question remains as to whether this has contributed to a deepening of democratic values. You will find that the profile and discourse of the political parties that have been instrumental in bringing the relatively marginalised groups into the political process are structured on a strong nation-state iden-

The United States of South Asia

IN AT least two vital respects India is to South Asia as the United States is to the Americas. Within its borders, it is more reliably democratic than its neighbours. Outside, it acts with an impatient arrogance that is born out of its belief that it is of right the region's superpower. Many thinkers of what I call the Himal School of Thought tend to underestimate the strengths of Indian democracy. The argument often aired by this school is to the effect that, "The governments of India and Pakistan are bad, but the people are good." But the fact is that Indian politics is nourished by much stronger traditions of democracy and federalism than any of its neighbours. Most of the states of India have autonomous and vigorous traditions of cultural and intellectual life. In political and ideological terms, the Hindi 'heartland' is much weaker than, say, the Punjab in Pakistan.

Perhaps the relative strengths of Indian democracy are an accident of history. Nehru, the committed democrat, was at the helm for seventeen years, whereas comparable figures such as Jinnah, Koirala and Mujib died too soon. However, there is no question that, relative to its neighbours, there is a robustness to India's democratic traditions that even the chauvinist Sangh Parivar cannot undermine. At the same time, India has become increasingly insensitive to the needs and in-

terests of its neighbours.

The last fifty years of Indian foreign policy can be divided into three segments: the stage of 'neighbourliness', which continued until 1970; the stage of 'realpolitik', which ran from 1970 to about 1985; and the stage of 'attempted hegemony', which is where we are now. As in the case of the United States, there is an organic link between democracy at home and hegemony abroad. It is the strength of their democratic traditions that imbue both Indian and American opinion-makers with the necessary self-confidence that, when translated into relations with other, less democratic nations, transforms into an unnecessary arrogance.

An optimist would hope that this would change with the coming of coalition politics in India. Since the BJP and the Congress cannot hope to rule alone at the Centre, they are obliged to be far more respectful of smaller regional parties than they ever were in the past. Can this form of regional coalitions ruling at the Centre serve as a model for South Asian relations?

Perhaps, but I doubt it. At least in the short term, the prestige attached to the term 'democracy' in the post Cold War world will make India even more insolent with its neighbours, to claim that it is the 'natural' leader of this part of the world, just as the United States is the 'natural' leader of all parts of the world. △



Ramchandra Guha
Sociologist, Bangalore

"There is an organic link between democracy at home and hegemony abroad."

tity. My own feeling is that India's deepening democracy actually reinforces the nation-state model rather than question the idea. The idea of a strong nation-state is one that is held powerfully by the middle-classes as well as by those who get integrated into this democratic process.

Ashis: This arrogance we have talked about is very fragile. In psychological literature, there is nothing called a superiority complex, only something called an inferiority complex. When I first entered the discipline, this puzzled me, but then I learnt that what we call superiority complex is invariably associated with

Arrested history

SOUTH ASIA in an 'invented' nation. It is one of those 'inventions' that elites have imposed upon others to consolidate positions of power and authority. Statesmen, administrators and many intellectuals view South Asia as a very real entity, with a clear and definable past and a palpable future. A subset of this group— supporters of what has come to be called the SAARC process— hope that the present is a prologue to an even more promising future: a supranational order bringing peace and prosperity to all member nations. Equally, an opposed group, whom we might refer to as the SAARC sceptics, holds that such a consummation would be fatal to democratic national sovereignty and the power of citizens to determine their political destinies.

Contemporary debates about the meaning of South Asia are unquestionably tied to current political, economic and intellectual preoccupations. But they have behind them a recent history of the use of language in presenting and controlling political history. It is a part of that history that we should reflect upon, as well as cartography: the descriptions of land and water and their reduction to spoken and written words and images. South Asia is not part of Asia so much as it is presented as an extension of it. Even the map-makers have confined the meaning of the term to the peninsula, separated from the rest of the continent we call Asia.

The first naming of South Asia took place in the context of colonisation by Europe. Our colonial mentors used the term to demarcate disparate geographical territories into a geo-political entity, often grouping and regrouping societies into divided sovereignties in order to consolidate their political sway. Decolonisation, no matter how imperfectly the concept was constructed, continued the legacy of the colonial mentors. What constituted a geographically Subcon-

tinental entity ended up becoming a condominium of nation-states, each with the symbolic paraphernalia of international borders. One consequence of this legacy, easily accepted and justified by the elites in each of the countries, has been the recent historical experiences of political distrust, mutual antagonism, social conflicts and violence, and neglect of myriad problems of the common masses. VS Naipaul has called this process somewhat exaggeratedly as the arrested histories of the oppressed people.

Siddharth: A large obstacle to the democratisation

feelings of inferiority. The person who is self-confident, sure of himself, does not have to pretend to be superior. It is when the acceptance of self is absent that the problem begins. It is remarkable to look at, say, the nuclear policy or foreign policy-making bodies— the ultra elite— in which there is a preponderance of exactly those communities which have been peripheralised by the democratic process during the last 50 years. They are communities that have 'lost out'. The Bengali babu, the South Indian Brahmin, the Brahmins of Maharashtra, and some sectors of Punjabi Chettris and others.



Imtiaz Ahmad
Sociologist, New Delhi

"Beyond the narrowness of geography and cartography, we must seek the civilisation within."

Against this backdrop, the notion of South Asia stands in need of re-invention, to be relevant in a world order whose dominant and domineering impulse goes under the elusive title of globalisation. One possible choice is to outgrow the narrowness of outlook imposed upon geography and cartography by the colonials and link South Asia to a widened Asian identity. Perhaps, the meaning and significance of such a broadened vision can be seen in the discourse of the war in Afghanistan. Rather than responding to that catastrophic development from the perspective of its future implications to this part of the world, the clamour of at

least two South Asian states has been the desire to be at the centre-stage of the alliance with the United States.

The second alternative is to reinvolve the idea of South Asia as a civilisation characterised by a universalism, whose hallmark has historically been acceptance of diversities and a spirit of accommodation. Thus, South Asia, though not separate from Asia, would establish a Subcontinental heartland in which all frontiers, physical or cultural, are essentially indeterminate. South Asia would then move from being a geo-political entity to a civilisation.

of India, with due respect to all that has been achieved in the last five decades, is the refusal of the state and of political parties to deal with rights as a basis of citizenship, and of the extremely narrow views of national unity and integrity. We must have an approach that respects the aspirations of people, particularly regional aspirations. These aspirations should not be regarded as a law-and-order challenge, or as a problem of terrorism that has to be repressed by the police or military. In fact, these aspirations, and grievances, can lay the foundation for re-considering the Indian Union on a more democratic basis.

Cohesion from above, below

GIVEN THE internal political and economic structure of each country in South Asia, SAARC cannot function as a cohesive, democratic regional entity and it is futile for us to look wistfully at the experience of the European Union, ASEAN, or Mercosur. The real purpose of the EU is not to foster continental unity in terms of social solidarity but to build Europe – and European capital – as an economic and political counter to other global power centres, notably the United States, Japan and China. Of course, pan-European political institutions have arisen but not all of these have led to an expansion of people's rights. There is a European Parliament and a European Court of Human Rights, but there is also now a European Central Bank, which has effectively taken monetary (and even fiscal) policy out of the hands of national and even pan-European electorates. As for Mercosur and ASEAN, these have a higher degree of economic cohesion than SAARC because they are not dominated by one country's economy in the way that South Asia is.

For economic reasons, India (and Indian big business) will always be the most eager in South Asia for SAARC countries to develop greater cohesion. This allows Indian capital greater room to expand in its 'natural habitat' and compete better with other capitals. Precisely for this reason, but also because of the manner in which Pakistan and Bangladesh were created, any advocacy of pan-South Asianism from New Delhi will always be viewed with suspicion in Islamabad and Dhaka. Unless the initiative or impetus comes from Pakistan or Bangladesh, SAARC– or South Asianism from above– is doomed to still-birth. And

“Our problem is not that we are different: our problem is that we are too similar.”

or Burmese— but they also thought of themselves as 'Indian'. Today, the problem with the political identity of South Asians is that it is negatively defined. Anything that refers to cooperation arouses the fear in them

Pakistan will never take the initiative as long as Islamabad's and New Delhi's approach to the Kashmir issue remains unchanged.

What about South Asianism from below? This can work only if it is closely linked to political struggles for democratisation and the broadening of rights at the national level. Without this link, pan-South Asian advocacy will not have any real and direct political influence except insofar as it would hopefully broaden the political horizon and understanding of those who take part in conferences and seminars.

What are the domestic transformations that will help lay the ground for the rise of South Asia as a mutually beneficial economic and political area for all? Apart from striving for egalitarian economic structures, there has to be a shift in the kind of nation-building projects being pursued.

In India, the refusal to deal with rights as the basis of citizenship, and the obsession with an extremely narrow and self-destructive notion of "national unity and integrity" has to make way for an approach which deals with regional aspirations and grievances not as a law and order problem but as the foundation for the reconfiguration of the Indian Union on a more democratic, federal basis. In Pakistan, the 'Two Nation Theory' reached the outer limits of its usefulness as the basis for nation-building a while ago and is actually undermining the future prospects of Pakistan and its people. Now is the time when democratic rights, citizenship and a federal polity have to form the cornerstone of the Pakistani nation. ▲

“Indian big business will always be more eager for SAARC cohesion.”

Identity

Ashis: We must accept the reality that our identities are not exclusive— they have never been in this part of the world. We have always lived with multiple selves. When I was young, which was a long time ago, in the medical college in Calcutta, there were people from Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal. They were very proudly Sri Lankan, Malaysian



Siddharth Varadarajan
Journalist, New Delhi

of losing their identity. An Indian going to Lahore was advised by a Pakistani friend, "Do not overdo this you-and-I-are-the-same business, because in Pakistan the idea is we are not like you, that is why we separated". The crux of the problem is this fear of crossing borders and in the process losing your precariously held separate self. Our problem is not that we are different: our

problem is that we are too much alike. That is why we have to keep affirming that we are different. Nepalis will not allow it to be said that they are no different from Indians. It is something common to all seven countries.

Dipak: Essentially, it is the question of how much of this identity is of our own choice and how much of it

Rhetoric for secular regionalism

FIRST, IF a nation is to be self-defined as a political and cultural identity, and acknowledged by others as such, then South Asia has two major nations with religion as their defining feature – Hindu and Muslim – and several other relatively smaller nations centred on language or caste. Frequently, these identities overlap. Nation-states are facts of South Asia, but none of them is a reality: all nations extend beyond the political boundary of a single state and all states are multi-national. Even Bhutan, despite its Lhotshampa population, is a multi-national state. The term 'nation-state' reflects the desire of its ruling elite more than anything else.

Second, since nation-states are not realities, they are mere projects of elites. The powerful sell the dream of Pakistan as being for Indian Muslims, Sri Lanka for Sinhalas, Bangladesh for Bangla-speaking Muslims, and India a Hindu-dominated polity.

Third, since the 'states' in this region are themselves in the process of being formed (Nepal has the longest history, though still less than 150 years), this makes the concept of the supra-national region seem not just novel, but contradictory to the immediate task of 'nation-building'. India fears the concept of regionalism as a challenge to its predominance in the region, while all others fear Indian hegemony if an integrated region were to become a reality. This is reflected in SAARC's failures, though it at least serves as a platform for discussion.

Fourth, regionalism may not be a fact as yet, but it is a hard reality. If identity is not just what one defines herself to be, but how others see her too, then the South Asian identity has become a reality beyond South Asia. Whether one is dismissed as a 'Paki' or ridiculed as 'Indian', people from all over South Asia have come to be identified with curry, *qawalli*, cricket, Hindi films, and a distinct variety of imperial English. This identity has been historically known as 'Indian', but after the partition of the Indian Subcontinent, India ceased to be geographical-cultural expres-

sion and became the name of a structural political formation. Hence no other state of the region now likes the appellation, which points to the need to redefine this distinct regional identity, and the geographical name 'South Asia' was the least unacceptable.

Fifth, the problem with 'South Asia' as understood is that it is incomplete without Afghanistan in it. *Jambu Dwiipe Bharat Khande* may have been the mythological identity, as recited in the Hindu *shloka* at pujas all over South Asia, but it is linked to Hinduness and it cannot now accommodate the cultural aspirations of the Muslim and resurgent Buddhist population. South Asia as a geographical expression becomes valid only with the inclusion of Afghanistan.

Sixth, regionalism has a compelling economic justification – nations seldom rise, it is regions that do. Re-conceptualising South Asia as a functional region around a network of urban nodes can revitalise the economies of all nation-states by controlling waste and streamlining resource use. The most extreme example of waste is Pakistan, which imports Indian goods via South Africa.

Seventh, the cultural justification for the renaissance of 'nations' within nation-states is no less compelling. Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Maithili and Nepali represent language-dominated cultural communities that can immensely benefit by working together across frontiers of two or more countries.

To conclude, economic and cultural reasons exist for the political regional identity of South Asia. But it needs a rhetoric built around secular symbols that do not threaten 'national' identities. Some such symbols are: Lord Buddha, whose appeal goes beyond his religious followers; the heritage of Indus Valley Civilisation; the Himalaya mountains; the Monsoon rains; and the two symbols of British legacy— cricket and South Asian English. The challenge is to build a common identity around these and other secular symbols. ▽



CK Lal
Engineer/Columnist,
Kathmandu

"The South Asian identity has become a reality beyond South Asia."

is imposed upon us. The 'South Asian' self-identification perhaps will survive and grow simply because it is the least harmful and least damaging. It is much easier to go out and say, "I am South Asian, I come from this part."

Ashis: The Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda are said to be two tribes which are ethnographically the closest, just as Hindi and Urdu are the two languages of the world that are grammatically identical. What is true of language is also true in other areas, and this multiculturalism could have been built on. But we have not done it. We have this capacity to live with multiple selves without becoming schizoids. This is a personality feature in our part of the world that psychologists and psychiatrists have elaborated on, but we have not built on it. Instead, we try our very best to be exclusive and hierarchically organised.

Imtiaz: Any identity gets eccentric when it does not have a counter-reference. For a strong South Asian identity to develop and to be reinforced, it must be placed into the context of two points of reference. One would draw from the nation-state and the other from the wider entity called Asia. Because singly on the basis of a South Asian identity, we may end up no where. We may all say that we should have a South Asian identity, but it does not acquire a meaning.

Ashis: The South Asian nation-states are all negatively defined, because they have not organically grown out of our societies' political experiences. The only state which was not negatively defined was India, which was seen as a cosmic soup. India was what others were not. Now that is changing, India is no longer the cosmic soup, and it is getting to be what Pakistan is not. This is a new role, which we have learned from Pakistan.

Haris: You go into a village in Sindh in Pakistan, and the first question people ask is, "Who are you?" You say, "I'm an economist." They say, "No, we want to know your caste," which is like saying, "We want to know whether you are a potential person or not." The only non-parochial identity in the villages is when political parties organise and people say, "I am a member of the People's Party, my political identity is that I put up a flag, and I have a photograph of Benazir Bhutto." This is the only identity that transcends my being a Sunni, Shi'a, or Bihari, Punjabi or Sindhi. All of a sudden, it is a different form of identity. The political party of South Asia is a very important marker of identity and is absent from most discussions.

Sovereignty

Ashis: If you add up the total number of dead from man-made killings over the last century, the figure comes to a little over 200 million. That is 200 million! 20 crores we have killed! Out of this number, despite what you



may presume, only eight million died in religious violence. 169 million have died at the hands of their own state, which tells you something. When South Asia's colonised societies became independent, we wanted nation-states just like everybody else. Even today, if you give them half a chance, all the separatists in the region who fight against the oppression of the nation-state – from the Chakmas to the Kashmiris and the Tamils of Sri Lanka – will create their own nation-states. Exactly the kind of structures they are opposing today. But that is human nature. This cannot be explained by politics or economics, it is something do to with the way categories or ideas catch hold of us and drive us.

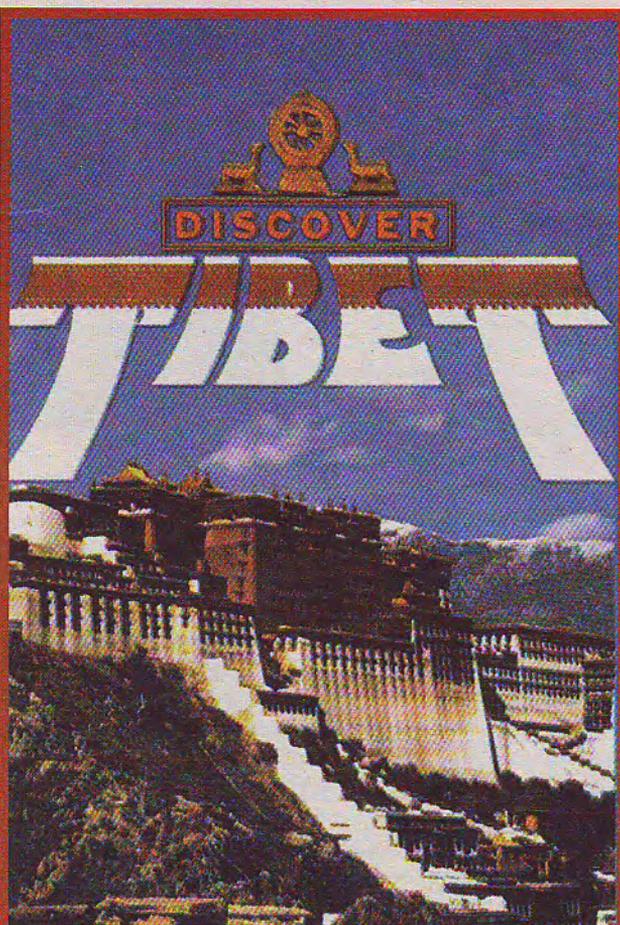
The record of the nation-state has been particularly dreadful in our case. In the five instances where specific accusations of genocide have been made in this part of the world, all except one involves our own states – whether it is the Pakistani army killing Bangladeshis in 1971 or the Indian state sponsoring and colluding in the anti-Sikh riots in 1984, or the 1983 riots in Sri Lanka against Tamils. Even the Baloch activists talk of genocide. Except for the Partition violence, in all other cases it is one's own state that was the perpetrator. We South Asians have to have a minimum amount of scepticism about the nation-state.

Afsan: When you attack the state and the notion of sovereignty, you have to produce a competitive product. Otherwise, it is like the Indian car industry, where the Ambassadors just keeps getting manufactured because no one introduces competition. The same is the case with sovereignty, where we will say, "OK, let us keep this going for another five years while we try and improve things." Unless we shut down the assembly line, there is no sense in arguing for a change while retaining the state structure. That is no challenge to the Sovereignty Mafia. Unless we say, "We do not even want this product," there can be no improvement.

Siddharth: Whether it is in India or Afghanistan, the state enjoys sovereignty over the citizen rather than the other way around. The state and the constitution create citizenship rather than citizens giving rights to

(continued on page 29)

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Indic Hindustan

THE IDEA of South Asia is an artificial one. It emerged in the 1970s and acquired more serious status in public discourse in the 1980s, because by that time other names – Hindustan, the Indian Subcontinent and Bharatavarsha – had become ideologically loaded. India's neighbours are uncomfortable with a geographic nomenclature that invokes Indian dominance. Anything 'South Asian' carries, therefore, a touch of artificiality and space has to be created for it by offsetting it not just against merely other regions but also against something like 'British India'. Thus, while reading Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, a young Pakistani reader is likely to be confused when in the context of Lahore, Kipling discusses Indianness and Indianisms. These cannot be easily reinterpreted as either Pakistani or West Punjabi identity, and talking of British-Indianness in this context sounds culturally meaningless. The personality traits and cultural features Kipling describes cannot have vanished with the disappearance of the British Empire, and something called India had entered the South Asian imagination by the time British India splintered into a number of nation-states.

So, South Asia is yet to enter our consciousness, and it may or may not do so in the future. Its real status is akin to that of Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in India. You can meaningfully talk of Biharis, Tamilians and Bengalis, but you cannot in the same sense talk of Uttarpradeshis, Andhrapradeshis, or Madhyap-radeshis. These terms have a touch of the comic about them. If you are an Uttarpradeshi, you usually identify yourself either with a city (you are a Lucknauvi or a Banarsi) or with a region (Awadhi or Purabhiya).

Let us admit that the idea of South Asia has emerged as a compromise of neutral terrain. The usage of 'South Asia' has frozen a cultural region geographically. In doing so, it has torn asunder countries like Afghanistan, which has played a crucial role in the region from epic times, and has virtually handed over to the Indian state the hegemonic right to the Indic civilisation, forced other countries in the region to seek a different cultural basis for their political cultures or to disown important aspects of their traditional cultural repertoire. Finally, it has made important civilisational strains look subservient to the needs of nation-states – Islam has become the responsibility of Pakistan, Hinduism that of India, and Buddhism of Sri Lanka, as if these faiths could not take care of themselves.

Some may find it particularly painful to admit that the idea of South Asia that has entered our conscious-

ness actually stands for India in its larger sense. This is the India AL Basham identified with the Indic civilisation, which of course is another way of describing only a partly territorial entity that has been the point of convergence of a number of civilisations and cultural areas. Strangely, this other India and its inhabitants – known for more than a millennium as Hindis – have subversive potentialities. Though some try to resolve the contradiction by talking of India as a civilisational state, Hindustan or Hind is actually in constant tension with the Indian nation-state. For the aim of the India nation-state is nothing less than to change the ground rules of the civilisation according to the needs of the nation-state and engineer the ordinary, change-resistant, cussed, backward-looking Indian into a proper modern citizen of a state that, idea-wise, is only a pirated edition of a 19th century European nation-state.

When our governments talk of SAARC, they have in mind a compact among these nation-states to live together – or rather fight together – within the format of the global nation-state system, not within the format of the cultural system within which they have survived for centuries. That is why they all fear the free exchange of news, information, ideas, literature, art, films and, most strikingly, the free circulation of free-thinking human beings.

The Indic civilisation is an inversion in this process. Being an edifice built upon layers of civilisations and a plethora of cultures, it is actually a confederation of lifestyles and life-support systems. The different strands within it are telescoped into each other so that none can be described adequately without reference to the others. South Asian nation-states, on the other hand, are exclusive by definition. They are all basically the same and yet have to pretend to be different. They are built on the lowest common denominator of our cultural selves. These states are presumptuous enough to claim to be the guardians of the people who inhabit the seven countries in the region, but they would be happy to get rid of their peoples and populate the space with various local versions of human beings that periodically catch their fancy – once the diligent Japanese or socialist Russians and today the national-interest-minded Americans of today. And when they run out of proper secular role models, they begin to work towards turning their people into proper Muslims, Hindus or Buddhists. ▽



Ashis Nandy
Psychiatrist, New Delhi

“SAARC is a compact within the global nation-state system, not one within the cultural systems of South Asia.”

The state, the child, and sovereignty

IT IS often said that the platform for South Asian regionalism is shared history and culture, but it seems that while many people of this zone have some common experiences, their histories are contrary, contradictory and sometimes downright hostile to each other. Yet 'South Asia' is a conglomerate of nation-states constructed on the reality of a perceived history. A regional reality is sought to be built on myth.

Whether it is the post-colonial state or the post-monarchical state, the nation-state has become the dominant or primary reality. All political action and policies are all defined around the parameters of the 'metaphysical core' of the nation-state. The nation-state, which is the most applied form of the state, becomes the womb of history, which then is constructed as a singular narrative. The South Asian failure to advance may actually be rooted in the nation-state.

The idea of a common memory is untenable: India was partitioned in 1947 while Pakistan became independent in 1947 and Pakistan was split in 1971 while Bangladesh was born in 1971. With these kinds of contrary, hostile narratives, the notion of common history can never succeed in South Asia. The past is therefore irreconcilable for most. We have come to accept the history of state formation as the dominant history, and we accept the state as the dominant construct.

States are by definition sovereign, and sovereignty thus becomes the ultimate moral quantity, the prime recipient of all loyalty, and it manifests itself through a variety of concrete socio-political institutions. It becomes the unquestionable reality by which all other realities are measured and all inequities justified. Because it is not questioned, we fail to note that the idea of the state is actually a very fundamentalist concept. Religious fundamentalism is sometimes accused of challenging the state, but by definition both varieties operate using the same system.

Just as religious ideas are protected by dogma, with its metaphysical sources, the state provides its own metaphysics through a series of political, economic, ethnic or idea-centric aspirations rooted in history and nationalism born of the colonial era. This includes the notion of internal colonialism, internal imperialism, and external and internal oligarchies that may appear later. Previous histories, always singular and never questioned, justify this process. Yet few would claim

South Asia to be successful in any endeavour except that of mutual hostility, rooted in expanding the reality of the nation-state.

It is common nowadays to hear the criticism of the nation-state, especially in South Asian seminars, but fortunately for the states, these critics do not matter. If threatening, the critics are marginalised by the conviction of the ruling classes regarding the canonical reality of the nation-state. Besides, the most important recognised 'thinkers' of South Asia are part of the Sovereignty Mafia.

But how can we argue against the (nation) state if we cannot think of an alternative? This, of course, is the position of the inconvenienced, the one who gains from the state's being. A lack of substitutes becomes the justification for accepting injustice. We tend to forget that sovereignty is also an idea and no more, a concept and no more, which exists because we endorse it, because we gain from the idea. Our refusal could dilute it.

Is there a functional alternative, a political alternative to the idea of the nation state? What is the other idea that can claim the status of sovereignty comparable to the state? I believe that idea is that of the sovereignty of the Child. It is only the idea of the Child as the supreme reality that can challenge the total domination of the State. The idea affects almost everyone and can become the new justification, the test for all actions. All actions can therefore be tested to see if they are respectful of the sovereign Child instead of the sovereign state.

The notion of the State and sovereignty barely exists outside the main municipalities and not even in every country. It is sustained by the Sovereignty Mafia, those who gain from the existence of the state. The poor of South Asia hardly appreciate the idea of the state, but they all believe in the Child. Because this idea does not have any historical connotation, the chances of being opposed by citizens are less.

If we agree that the sovereignty of the Child could be a better alternative than that of the state in South Asia, then it would be good to start doing something about it. By not acting, we agree that the present construct is the appropriate one. And we agree that the Child is not in conflict with the State. That fairly invalidates the idea that the South Asian Child is in crisis. That also means the South Asian mosaic of the nation-states is doing fine. △



Afsan Chowdhury
Journalist, Dhaka

“The notion of common history can never succeed in South Asia. The past is therefore irreconcilable for most.”



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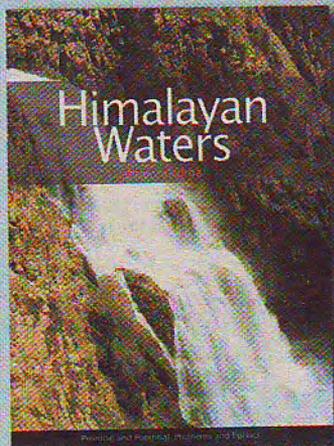
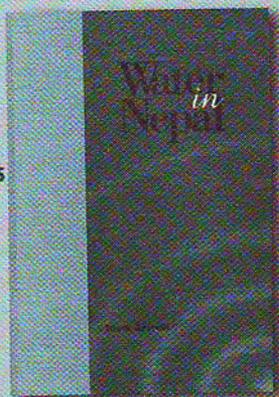
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the state. Nation-states today are expressions of power over the citizen, despite the existence of political processes that may be more or less democratic and more inclusive here or there. This is the part that is most problematic, which is why the notion of sovereignty must be diluted vis-a-vis the external world.

Ashis: The concept of nation-state was consolidated in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia and it is more than 350 years since. Even the Dark Ages in Europe did not last more than 200 years. The British colonial re-

gime did not last more than 200 years. But the concept of nation-state has lasted 350 years— that is more than enough. I mean, hardly an institutional arrangement in human affairs has lasted that long. There were states in Europe before that, there were states in this part of the world before that; there will be, I dare to presume, states after the concept of nation-state dies a natural or unnatural death. And I do think there are indications that the golden days of nation-states are over globally.

If we were less burdened by the notion of nation-

The recolonisation of Asia

THE QUESTION of South Asia's identity remains pertinent, but the context in which this question may be raised has undergone dramatic changes since 11 September, which has thrown into sharp relief a new but retrograde vision of the world. These events have placed new and unprecedented challenges before the peoples of all regions, including South Asia.

One of the key defining statements of this post-11 September era was the choice that President Bush placed before the world: "Nations have to decide whether they are with us or with the terrorists." At one stroke, an attempt was made to reverse the philosophical underpinnings of the "globalisation" of the 1990s and revert back to the political mindset of the late 19th century. "Nations" now have to decide whether they stand on one side or the other, and "nations" have to bear collective punishment for standing on the wrong side. Overnight, the US Presidency became the foremost enemy of the globalisation ideology of the 1990s— an ideology that called for the erosion of the nation-state and the elevation of the individual, the market, and the corporation.

One minute the nation-state was fading away into obsolescence and the next minute it was back, as the primary vehicle of decision making. The Pentagon became the bastion of an idea that had seen its day. The US military needs the nation and the nation-state, not only at home but also everywhere else. The world makes sense to the military mind only if all agency can be restricted to the militarised nation-state, be it an ally or an enemy. And of course, what President Bush really meant when he referred to 'nations' having to make the fateful decision of where they stood was not the people, but the military-political leaderships of nation-states all over.

The fact is, the militarised sectors of the US state and their counterparts elsewhere have no moral standing to lead the response to 11 September. After all, what the master criminals who carried out the attacks showed was the hollowness of the entire military

doctrine pro pounded by the US military over the last 50 years. The present military action might even be regarded by cynics as a crude attempt at burying the question of past failures, including those of Bush Senior from 1988 to 1992, underneath the debris of Afghanistan.

The carnage of 11 September warrants a radically different response, and we must try and envision a world where large sections of humanity are no longer marginalised from the global economy and polity. The fate of all of Asia and its four major regions— South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia, and to a great extent also East Asia— is being determined in the desolate mountains and plains of Afghanistan and western Pakistan. A militarised occupation by United States and European forces is on the cards, for it is thought that those who control Afghanistan and Pakistan will control the nature of economic development in Asia as a whole. Afghanistan and Pakistan are at the geographical and cultural crossroads of the four major regions of Asia. Two of these four regions are the largest sources of energy, while the other two are the largest future users of energy.

It is possible, however, to envision a radically more benign scenario, one where the four major regions of Asia become factors for growth and stability in the world. A world where the response to terrorism is not more militarisation but more just economic development and civil democracy. The people of South Asia must wake up to this attempt to recolonise the Asian mainland. The fight to safeguard Asia's future cannot be left to a fanatical band of Sunni militants, and the "fight against terror" cannot be left to the discredited military establishments of the US and its allies.



Haris Gazdar
Economist, Karachi

**"The
globalisation
ideology has
been turned on
its head, and
the nation-
state is back
at the helm."**

state here in South Asia, I suspect we might be able to go further. Just a glimpse of what could be possible: what would happen if each Kashmiri was given three passports, three kinds of citizenships? I do not think the world would collapse. Neither the global nation-states system nor the Indian nation-state system would disintegrate. It would be a new experience. Maybe someone will think of two passports for every Tibetan. Tibet would be a different kind of nation-state, where the sovereignty of China is not threatened but Tibetans would have a little bit more play.

The Enlightenment need not be the last word in

“The Enlightenment need not be the last word in human affairs.”

human affairs. And all other civilisations outside of the West are not destined to be only footnotes in the Book of the Enlightenment. I know that under-developed countries are not supposed to have any visions of the future, because their visions of the future are the present day West. And the West is supposed to know our future better than we do because they are living it. And our present at the moment is also the West's past. We are only a kind of anachronistic, redundant, obsolete representation of their past. That is what history has done to us. ▽

IN CONCLUSION

Beautiful neighbourhood

IF EVER we wonder why SAARC does not spark, the answer should be there at the Kathmandu summit, staring us in the face. It is completely state-centric. The non-governmental South Asian efforts at regionalism do not light either, because all are similarly premised on the seven-country formula that does not reflect our history, geography, or cultural reality.

SAARC started out as a feel-good exercise of kings, presidents and prime ministers, a copycat attempt to emulate regional groupings of the more advanced countries. While it is a necessary organisation, over the years SAARC has not managed to incorporate South Asian specificities.

It was to try and fathom these necessary specificities that we called the Himal Roundtable on 18-19 November, and as organisers we found our own views on the inadequacies of current regionalism reconfirmed by the thinkers gathered in Kathmandu.

South Asia is of course much, much more than seven nation-states. To begin with, these are a Disparate Seven, distinct in size, orientation, location. The equal-weightage 'consensual' model of SAARC is appropriate in-so-far as it defines the limited expectations of the member governments. But how do we, in a sense, take seriously an organisation that gives equal billing to a country of less than 300,000 population and others with a billion plus, 140 million plus, 130 million plus, 23 million plus?

A workable regionalism must also find a way to tackle the overwhelming presence of India. This massive country is both centre and torso of South Asia -- incomparably powerful economically and geopolitically, and touching all South Asian countries, none of which on the other hand border each other. Not only has this country managed to monopolise the historical name 'India', even satellite imagery of

the region gives us the recognisable coastline of India alone.

You could hardly call India a country, actually. Going by its girth (economic, geographic, demographic), it is a region — a proto South Asia even, depending on how it evolves. As India goes the way it must (federalism, devolution, internal regionalism) so will regionalism in this part of Asia come into its own.

In SAARC, the member governments have created an unwieldy structure that is cramped by the insular requirements of the political, bureaucratic and military establishments of each country. This regionalism of SAARC can remain the turf of governments, but the people must at least *think* of South Asia differently. They (we) must consider South Asia as comprising not the seven members but the more than a dozen regions which would have constituted themselves into nation-states had colonialism not intervened. These are units defined by geography, economy and language, and translate loosely into, for example, the states of India that have been demarcated linguistically, or the provinces of Pakistan.

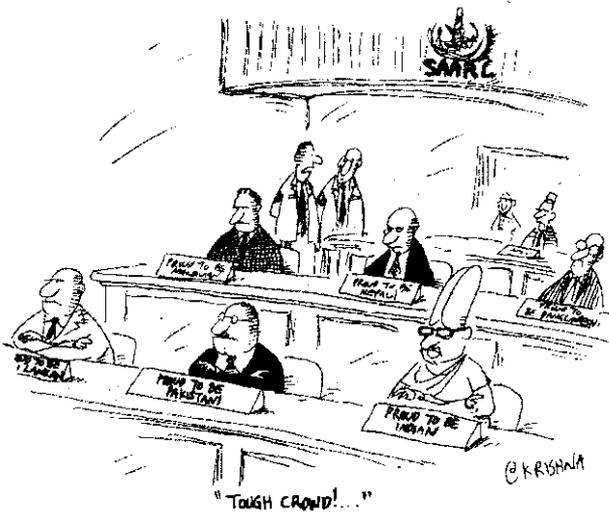
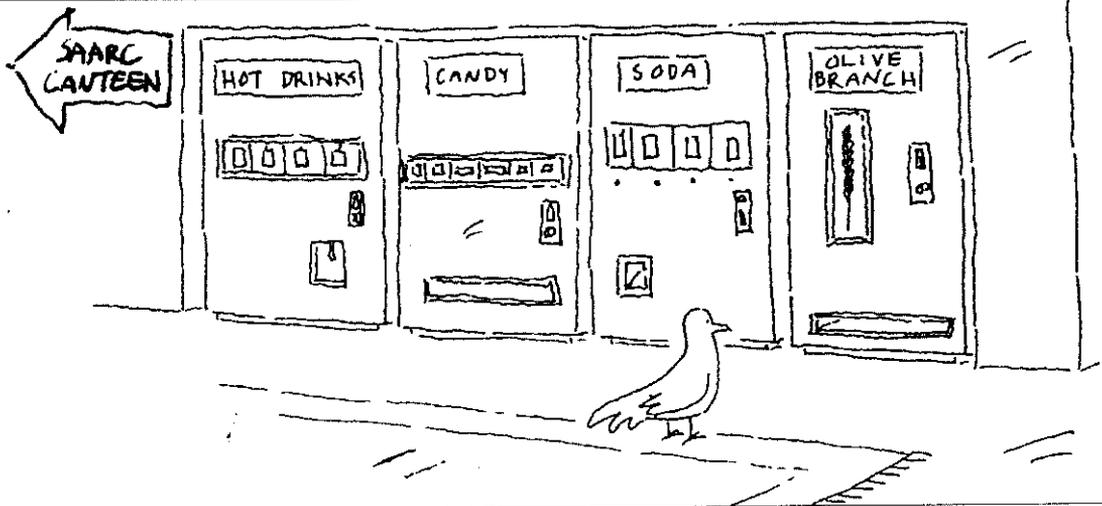
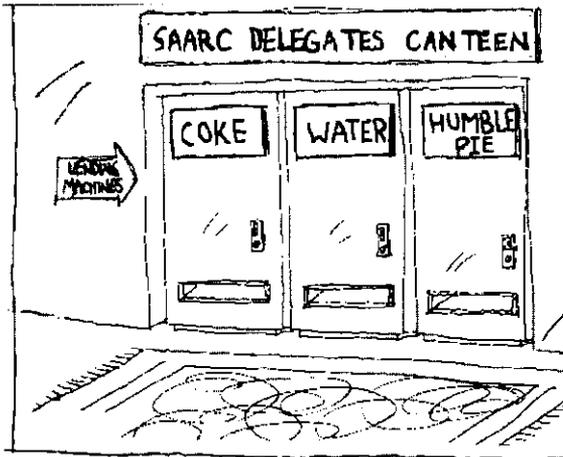
SAARC, as a non-symbiotic coming together, can only be a stepping stone into this other kind of conception, which emphasises the 'neighbourhood' rather than 'region' of South Asia. And, as long as we define it correctly now, over time this neighbourhood will be one where adjacent areas interact, where local languages get priority, where borders are porous if not open, and where the capital cities and their establishments would be less important.

All the best to SAARC. But let us develop a different kind of regionalism. Let's think neighbourhood. ▽



Kanak Mani Dixit
Journalist, Kathmandu

KRISHNA'S CORNER



Afghanistan 2001: The Long Distance War

THE IMPACT of the American bombing of Afghanistan, which started on 7 October, goes far beyond the issue of whether it 'flushes out' Osama bin Laden or not. The psychological impact goes far beyond what the terrorised men, women and children of Afghanistan have suffered during the bombing. This long-distance war, in which ordinance is launched from far-away naval vessels and airships wrought fullscale damage, has to be seen for the impact it has on the rest of South Asia, of which Afghanistan is fully a part.

Over all, the main effect has been a desensitising of the media and, consequently, the desensitising of the populace. We watched bombs fall on desert landscapes, an idealised situation for telephoto lenses of television cameras to capture up-close pictures. But the media remained just far enough away not to catch the screams and sobs, torn flesh and blood.

We played the Pentagon's game, willing ourselves to believe that there were no civilians in that landscape, no villagers rooted to home and hearth. And we convinced ourselves that, indeed, the only ones targeted by the United States' 'smart' missiles, cluster bombs and daisy cutters were the vicious turbaned 'mujaheds' of the Al Qaeda organisation. Of course, the Afghan villagers are different from Indian, Pakistan or Bangladeshi villagers and would have fled to the camps dotted along the Pakistan border. Who would be fool enough to remain as they sighted the B-52 contrails beginning to circle above in the sky so blue? But, of course, the high-altitude manoeuvres of the planes are known for their stealth, and countless Afghan civilians did die, trapped beneath the rubble of their homes and what was left of their nation.



An Afghan child at a refugee camp in Pakistan.

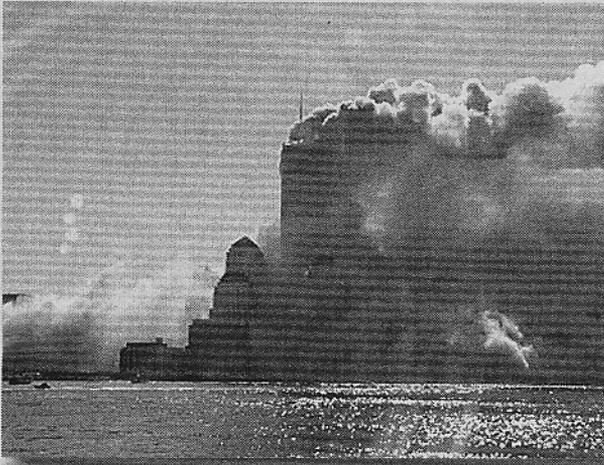
The cameras stayed a safe distance. After a bombing run – or even days after – we did not see the camera crews go into the villages. Rare was a journalist, particularly from television, who would venture into a village that had been cluster bombed, given that so many unexploded bomblets would still be lying around.

If they had gone in, they would have found what the journalists who visited Kama Ado, southwest of Jalalabad, found. The village had been bombed on Thursday, 29 November, and journalists who visited the following Saturday reported huge bomb craters, "debris of houses over two hillsides with children's shoes, dead cows and sheep, and the tail fin of a U.S. MK-83 bomb. Locals said scores of people had been killed in the bombed villages."

There were a few – just a few – who suspected that there must be death amidst all that rubble of Afghan mud huts and ramshackle dwellings. But no one was providing the figures. However, on 24 December, a professor at the University of New Hampshire in the United States, Marc W Herold, ventured a conservative estimate based on what seems to be a rigorous evaluation of media reports, and Pentagon and Taliban claims. There were deaths even though the world saw so little of this aspect in the massive coverage of the war day-in, day-out on television. According to Herold's report during the two months after the bombing began, 3767 Afghan civilians died in the US bombardment (The figure does not include the indirect casualties of the 'war' – impoverished Afghan victims who failed to get food or medical attention because bombs were raining down upon them). These innocent dead, who were killed as a consequence of the retaliation for the 3383 dead in the 11 September attacks, have not had a face given to them.

To keep their own body bags from coming home, the Americans bombed targets from a safe distance in the sky. No wonder Osama bin Laden – who is shown as taking indirect credit for the World Trade Centre attacks in the famous released tapes (the credibility of which has been reliably questioned) – has still not been found. After all, the US army tactic was to pulverise the Taliban and Al Qaeda, along with the civilian casualties (mere collateral damage), before landing their troops. Nor did the US military want to lose strategic aircraft, hence its preference for dropping bombs from a height of 9000 metres, far above the cloudy reach of Stinger missiles.

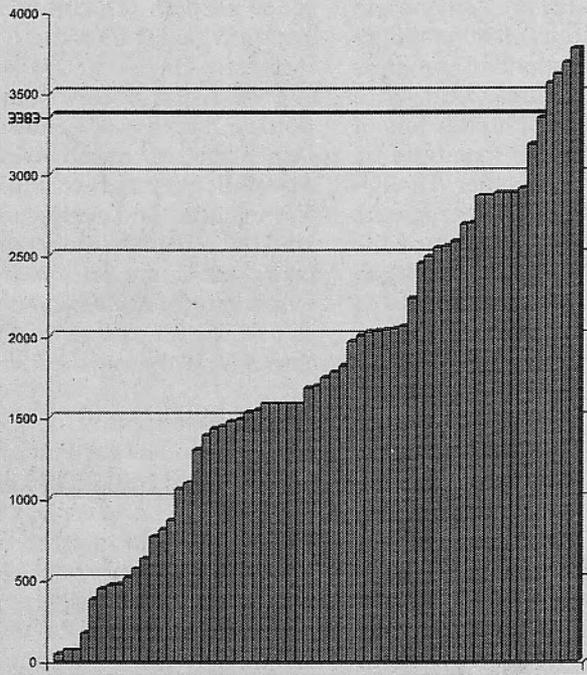
The agenda was surely set by American media and commentators. To begin with, the mainstream media everywhere followed the American lead, and the questioning done by journalists in Canada, France, Italy and England did not get play on powerful Western channels and was not picked up by readers, viewers and listeners in South Asia. The South Asian media followed suit, by and large, and was as breathless in covering the one-sided war as any Western counterpart. Other than some commentaries in the Indian and Pakistani



press which questioned the attacks, and some good on-the-ground-in-Afghanistan reporting done by a few Pakistani newspapers, the South Asian media left the public at the mercy of the Western, particularly American, television channels, news agencies and major newspapers. Editorial pages and opinion columns only occasionally protested the death and dying, and at other times papers known to be ideologically anti-West (the 'foreign hand' has suddenly lost its effect as a flogging stick) merely maintained a sullen silence

According to "History of Bombing", a recent book brought out by Granta, long-distance bombing has long been practiced by those who have the technology.

Joseph Conrad described the British naval bombardment of the African coastline, which "dealt death from afar". Italian airman Giulio Cavotti was the first to drop a bomb from a plane, outside Tripoli on 1 November 1911; it was said to have had "a wonderful effect on the morale of the Arabs." Within less than a de-cade, the British bombed Iraq from the air, and a bomber noted that "within 45 minutes a full-sized village can be practically wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured by four or five machines which offer them no real target." As the commentator Vijay Prashad put it, "this was all before the atomic bomb, and indeed, before the cruise missile".



Tallying the Dead: Data compiled by Professor Marc Herold showing the Afghan civilian war dead from 7 October to 3 December. The 3383 mark shows the total number killed in the 11 September attacks.

While not questioning the bombing of Afghanistan, the South Asian media and the public (which, to be sure, got much of its footage from the Western channels) was mesmerised by stock pictures and footage of the war-making machinery provided by the Pentagon. They followed the lead set by American television, relied on Western news sources, and rarely sat down to analyse the information sources.

What is of most concern is the impact this relentless and slanted coverage of American bombing will have on South Asian society. The sanitisation of war will make it easier for our own governments to wage war on our people. The military in each of our countries will

have more muscle when they vie with the social sector for funds. The conservative, rightist and reactionary forces in each of our countries will be more bellicose about the need to 'smoke out' insurgents, and the causative social, economic, political factors of insurgencies and militancies – and even terrorism – will be forgotten. No less is the damage that has been done to the psyche of viewers too young to comprehend the devastation behind the 'scenic dust-storms' raised by indiscriminate cluster bombing. The endless replay of glamourised war on prime-time television has desensitised South Asian children to the carnage of modern war. That is the power of the new media.

War will be easier to swallow after Afghanistan 2001.

—Chhetria Patrakar

Deep red in the heartland

Quiz: What is CCOMPOSA? Led by Nepal's Maobaadi, violent communism is picking up steam in South Asia even as it disappears from the rest of the world, and it is happening without help from Mao.

by *Sudheer Sharma*

The gun battles over Siachen and Kargil, and the long-lasting identity-related conflicts of Kashmir and the Indian Northeast, have diverted attention from some of the long-lasting Maoist insurgencies in the heartland of India. Even the six-year-old 'People's War' in the midhills of Nepal has come to attention of the larger region only after the declaration of the state of emergency by the Nepali government in late 2001. There is today a north-south band of insurgency inspired by the ideology of class warfare that stretches from large parts of midhill-Nepal to the Dandakaranya region of India, which encompasses India's communist heartland in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra states.

The red rebellion is thus a growth phenomenon in South Asia, inspired by the inability of democratic institutions all over to deliver social and economic progress and attracting the under-educated rural youth with gun-wielding romanticism. Like the mighty leaders of SAARC, the leftist 'ultras' too seem to be tantalised by the thought of a South Asian coming together. Though it is not clear whether such cross-border or regional alliances can really work, under the initiation of the Nepali Maoists, the violence-espousing reds of South Asia have even set up a regional network called the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA).

Many of today's Maoist cadres would not even know of the Naxalite movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but they are inspired by the same model of rural overthrow of local feudals that was fashioned by Charu Mazumdar. Back then, Mao Zedong was the hero and the helmsman for Maoists everywhere, but today's Maoists have to survive with little 'external' support. China cannot be considered even remotely an ally at a time when the Beijing government has gone out of its way to assure Kathmandu's rulers that they have no truck with the Nepali Maobaadi. Perhaps it is this lack of support from any international quarter – and the possibility dwindles even further with George W. Bush's worldwide 'war on terrorism' – that the Maoists of South Asia have decided that there is at least some safety in banding

together in CCOMPOSA.

The Coordination Committee emerged out of a meeting of comrades from nine Maoist parties, which happened somewhere in West Bengal in July 2001. There are four Indian groups in this alliance – the Communist Party of India-Marxist Leninist (People's War) of Andhra Pradesh, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) of the Bihar plateau, the Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (Maoist) and the Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (MLM). The Bangladeshi groups in CCOMPOSA are Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal (M-L), Purbo Bangla Sarbahara Party (CC) and Purbo Bangla Sarbahara Party (MPK). Sri Lanka and Nepal have one party each in the combine, the Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist) and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

The vision of this alliance is to stretch the revolutionary "successes" achieved recently in Nepal across larger parts of South Asia. This proposed "Compact Revolutionary Zone" is to stretch from Hyderabad to Kathmandu. Said the document to emerge from the July 2001 meeting: "We declare our principled unity and conscious determination to hoist the Red Flag of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Communism in all its splendour from the silver summits of the Himalayas and throughout the region."

Threat assessment

At the ground level, Maoist movements are active mainly in Nepal and India. On 26 November, the government of Nepal declared a state of emergency after Maoists walked away from a fourth round of peace talks and launched a frontal attack on the Nepali army. The November action represented a major shift in the Nepali Maobaadi tactics, as they had previously avoided confrontation with the Royal military. Clearly, the extreme communists hope that the achievements of the Nepali Maobaadi – highlighted internationally because they are fighting a nation-state rather than the Indian Maoists who might as well be fighting in the bush – will inspire dormant movements across the region. In

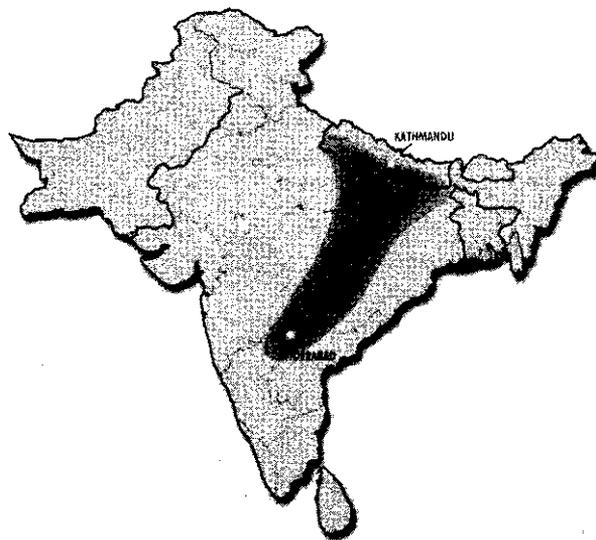
the early 1970s, it was the Naxalites in India who inspired Nepal's communists, today the situation may well be reversed.

After years of ignoring the Maobaadi of Nepal, the Indian media, intelligence community as well as the larger establishment has suddenly become concerned about the spread of this violent band so close to the Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Press reports indicate growing Indian concern about emerging ties among rebel groups of Nepal and India. In September, India's Intelligence Bureau Chief, KP Singh, was reported to have said that there is a threat to relations between India and Nepal being entangled in the new ties emerging among the leftist insurgent groups.

The Maoist danger now ranks third in the Indian Home Ministry's threat assessment, following closely on concerns over Kashmir and the Northeast. The Ministry has formed a Coordination Centre on Left Wing Extremism headed by the Union Home Secretary and India recently declared 23 rebel groups, including PW and MCC, as "terrorist" organisations, akin to the militants of Kashmir and the Northeast. India also has a new anti-terrorist law, the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) in the works, the passage of which would grant the government sweeping new powers.

Meanwhile, the far-left groups themselves are continuing to develop cross-border links. On 13 October, human rights activists and lawyers, some of them close to the Maoists, met in Kathmandu to form the Association of South Asian Lawyers and Human Rights Activists. Its convenor was Mukti Pradhan, a member of the newly formed Nepali Maoist "parallel government", the United Revolutionary People's Council, which is headed by the underground Maobaadi ideologue Baburam Bhattarai. Likewise, on 3 November, journalists sympathetic to the rebels, who call themselves "pro-people" scribes, announced the founding of the South Asian People's Journalists Association (SAPJA). The well-known "Naxalite journalist" of India, Ananda Swaroop Verma, author of the book *Rolpa se Dolpa tak* (from Rolpa to Dolpa), is spearheading this effort. Krishna Sen, editor of the Maoist *Janadesh* weekly, is the Nepali delegate to the seven-member SAPJA co-ordination committee.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) also has a seat in this SAPJA committee, filled by Ajit Kumar Bhuyan, editor of the Assamiya daily *Aaji*. His membership is an indication that Maoists have also entered into working alliances with some Northeast separatist groups. Last year, a Nepali government commission on peace prospects with the Maoists, which was headed by Sher Bahadur Deuba (Prime Minister since July 2001), concluded that the Nepal's rebels have ties with the Northern Bihar Liberation Front and ULFA. Though not ideologically Maoist, ULFA's ranks include people sympathetic to the cause of class warfare, including some Nepali-speakers of Assam. However, ULFA's chairman, Arvindo Rajkhowa, in e-mail correspondence



BLASH PA

with *Himal*, denied having any link with Nepal's Maobaadi.

India's PW, however, does have links with the Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers, and this may be seen at least indirectly to extend possible Maoist influence into Sri Lanka. The PW chief Mupalla Laxman Rao, otherwise known as Ganapati, has boasted, in an interview, of having received training from former LTTE fighters. Nepali and Indian Maoists also seem to have established contact with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN), a Northeast separatist group fighting for a 'greater Nagaland'. The LTTE, ULFA and NSCN are separatist organisations not fighting for class-equity but for ethnic self-rule. However, Maoists do not appear to be troubled by the possible lack of ideological justification – they are all welcome for being "national liberation movements".

People's war

Maoism seeped into South Asia from the north and east during the Cultural Revolution of the mid-1960s. While this particular brand of communism long ago passed from the scene in a China which has willingly embraced the marketplace, groups in India and Nepal are determined to sustain the movement. In fact, now that Maoist movements in Peru, the Philippines and Turkey have collapsed, South Asia is today's hotbed of leftist extremism.

Two non-insurgent Nepali Communist groups, the CPN (Unity Centre) and CPN (Masal) also profess to be guided by Maoist thought, although they explain that they are in the preparatory stages of the larger revolution and thus have not yet taken to guns. The Maobaadi, on the other hand, embraced the path of violence on 13 February 1996, and have since then not only managed to take control of substantial territory in the more-isolated midhill regions but also claimed to have 'people's governments' in 22 of the country's 75 districts before the army was sent out to fight them. Nepal's

Maobaadi are said to number approximately 5000 guerrillas and enjoy an expansive structure of frontal organisations of women, students, farmers, trade unions and human rights activists. However, the real strength is only now being tested, with the deployment of army troops and the declaration of emergency in late November. Earlier, the Maobaadi had been fighting an unmotivated and under-armed civil police force.

India has several Maoist groups, although the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) and the People's War group (PW), are the most influential. These two groups came out of the Naxalite movement, which was practically destroyed in West Bengal and elsewhere by Indira Gandhi. PW's predecessor, the Communist Party of India (M-L), emerged in 1969 but splintered after the death of Charu Majumdar. According to a report by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, PW has about 5000 cadres, who function mostly in squads of 9-12 fighters. PW has formed four platoons in Andhra's Karimnagar, Warrangal, Adilabad and Khammam districts announced last year the formation of an armed wing called the People's Guerilla Army (PGA).

PW is mainly active in the Dandakaranya area, which includes parts of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chattisgarh and Orissa, where the Maoists have parallel governments in about 125 villages. After the CPI-ML (Party Unity), another Maoist group, amalgamated with the PW in 1998, its influence has also grown in Bihar and Jharkhand. Another Maoist group, the MCC, already has considerable influence in these two states. According to the Indian Home Ministry's annual report for 2000-01, left wing extremism in Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa increased in the preceding year, although it decreased in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Today's MCC is the group that had stayed out of the CPI-ML in 1969 and was then known as the "Dakshin Desh", although it took its present name in 1975. MCC's fighting groups are said to be organised in 50 squads of 20 people each. The MCC, which claims to fight for the cause of landless peasants and dalits, has been battling on two fronts – against the government and the Ranabir Sena, a private militia formed by the large upper caste, landowners of Bihar. On 27 November 2001, the PW and the MCC joined hands to organise a general strike in Bihar to protest the US attacks in Afghanistan. Although the strike was not successful, this joint call was another sign that the two groups, which had earlier looked upon each other as adversaries, may be coming together.

South Asia has many more groups that call themselves Maoist parties, but most are no larger than "study circles". The Ceylon Communist Party (Maoist), led by N. Sanmugathansan, is a member of CCOMPOSA, although it barely exists within Sri Lanka. The Jana Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) tried to launch violent revolts in 1971 and 1989. However, when its leader Rohana Wijeweera was killed in 1990, JVP was already ideolog-

ically transforming from pure Maoism to Sinhalese nationalism. JVP is now back into mainstream politics, which Nepal's Maoists categorically say they are not interested in. "The CPN (Maoist) is not the JVP of Sri Lanka," Maobaadi ideologue Baburam Bhattarai categorically told the *Nepali Times* in July 2001. "There is absolutely no possibility of the CPN (Maoist) turning into a parliamentary party."

Bangladesh too was not immune to the communist upsurge of the 1960s and 1970s west of the border. Siraj Sikder's Sarbahara Party had a strong beginning, but it was decimated by infighting and public backlash to its support for Pakistan during the 1971 war. Today, most of Bangladesh's former Maoists have become NGO activists, though a few Maoist-inclined groups remain.

Pakistan is one country where there seems to be no Maoist presence whatsoever at present, but for an elderly handful – as reported in Himal some years ago – that reminisce in Lahore's Anarkali Bazaar's tea stalls about Mao Zedong. Communist politicians in Bangladesh and Pakistan have faced the wrath of Muslim fundamentalism, which perhaps explains the distance between Muslim extremists and left-leaning South Asia.

Speaking of Pakistan, the recent spate of reports in the Indian media about Nepal's Maobaadi include intelligence 'leaks' about the support received by the Maobaadi from the Inter Services Intelligence of Pakistan, as a means of fomenting revolution adjacent to India's sensitive Hindi heartland. However, anyone with knowledge of the Maobaadi operations and ideology knows enough to disregard such a link. If there is one thing going in their favour, Nepal's Maoists are a 'homegrown' phenomenon, and represent the reaction to misrule and hopelessness. The money the Maoists have are seized from the banks, government and public of Nepal, and the guns are looted from the demoralised police and public. The Maobaadi would not have a need – thus far at least – to befriend the ISI.

Maobaadi take the lead

Nepal's "internationalist" Maoists now have links with ultra left movements and groups all over the world, but it is their links south of the border which are most significant. Nepali Maobaadis have strong ties with India's PW group and weaker links with MCC. In fact, Nepal's top Maoist leaders in India are said to use either their own shelters or those of the PW, and India's Maoist groups have also openly supported their Nepali comrades. For example, as early as 13 September 1998, India's Struggling Forum for People's Resistance organised a meeting in Calcutta and called on all Maoists in the two countries to join hands in support of the struggle in Nepal. Another group called the Solidarity Forum to Support the People's War in Nepal even organised a rally and public meeting in New Delhi on 13 February 1999 to mark the third anniversary of the insurgency in Nepal.

Maoist insiders say that Nepal's rebels had con-



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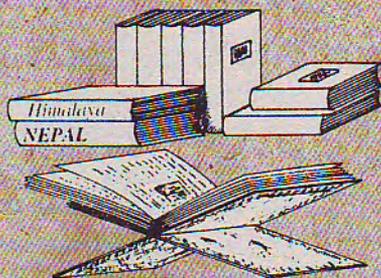
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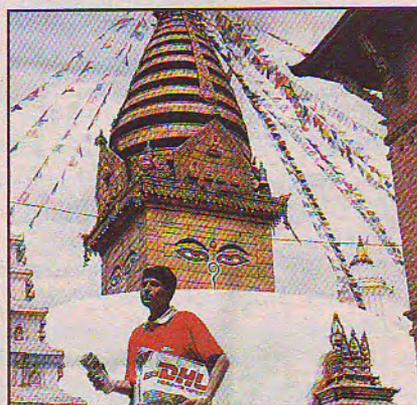
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sulted India's PW before selecting regions within the country that would be most conducive for launching their struggle. In 1995, PW strategists conducted two surveys to gauge potential insurgency and recommended Nepal's midhill Mahabharat range which runs across the country's length, as opposed to the high Himalayan region or the tarai plains. In particular, the PW 'consultants' suggested the midhills of mid-western Nepal. The PW also helped train the first few batches of the Nepali guerillas, although after nearly six years of struggle the Nepalis are said to have become more adept to rural guerilla tactics – particularly on hilly terrain – than even their former gurus. The Maobaadi fighters have also made ample use of landmine-laying and ambush techniques they have learnt from the Indian instructors. However, the Nepali comrades are said to lag behind on urban warfare techniques, which may be seen in the absence of their actions in the cities and larger towns of the country.

In early 2001, a Nepali police officer traveled to Hyderabad to learn counter-insurgency techniques from the Andhra police. During his visit, he was told by the Indians that the PW received arms and supplies from its Nepali comrades. Nepali government sources deny the connection and instead say that both groups buy arms from India's underworld. Nepali Maoists are also said to procure explosives and ammunition from Bihari criminal groups, which then can be easily carried across the open frontier into Nepal.

When Nepali Maoists began their People's War, it appeared that they were taking a leaf from the book written by the PW and the MCC. After battling since February 1996 and their quick spread across the midhills in particular over the last two years, the Nepali Maoists are today talking about leading the revolutionary struggle in the entire region. Nepali Maoists say they have considerable influence in the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM), which is thought to carry out some level of coordination for global Maoist activity. However, neither PW or MCC are members of RIM, which operates through a forwarding address in London. There are those who seriously believe that the influence of RIM is exaggerated, and who believe that it is used by the Nepali comrade simply to convince other Nepalis of their party's international connections.

Among Indian Maoists, the PW is said to have a fairly large network of disciplined cadre, while the Bihari Maoists are still said to be "backward" and centered only on the local struggle. MCC cadres still believe that intermingling of the sexes would affect their effectiveness and the movement largely does not include women. PW, on the other hand, even has separate women guerilla squads. PW, however, has not been able to significantly advance itself over the decades, in sharp contrast to the Nepali Maobaadi, who have been spreading like wildfire across midhill Nepal. The Maobaadi in November even announced a shadow central government while PW is still fighting its battle in



Mao Bahadur

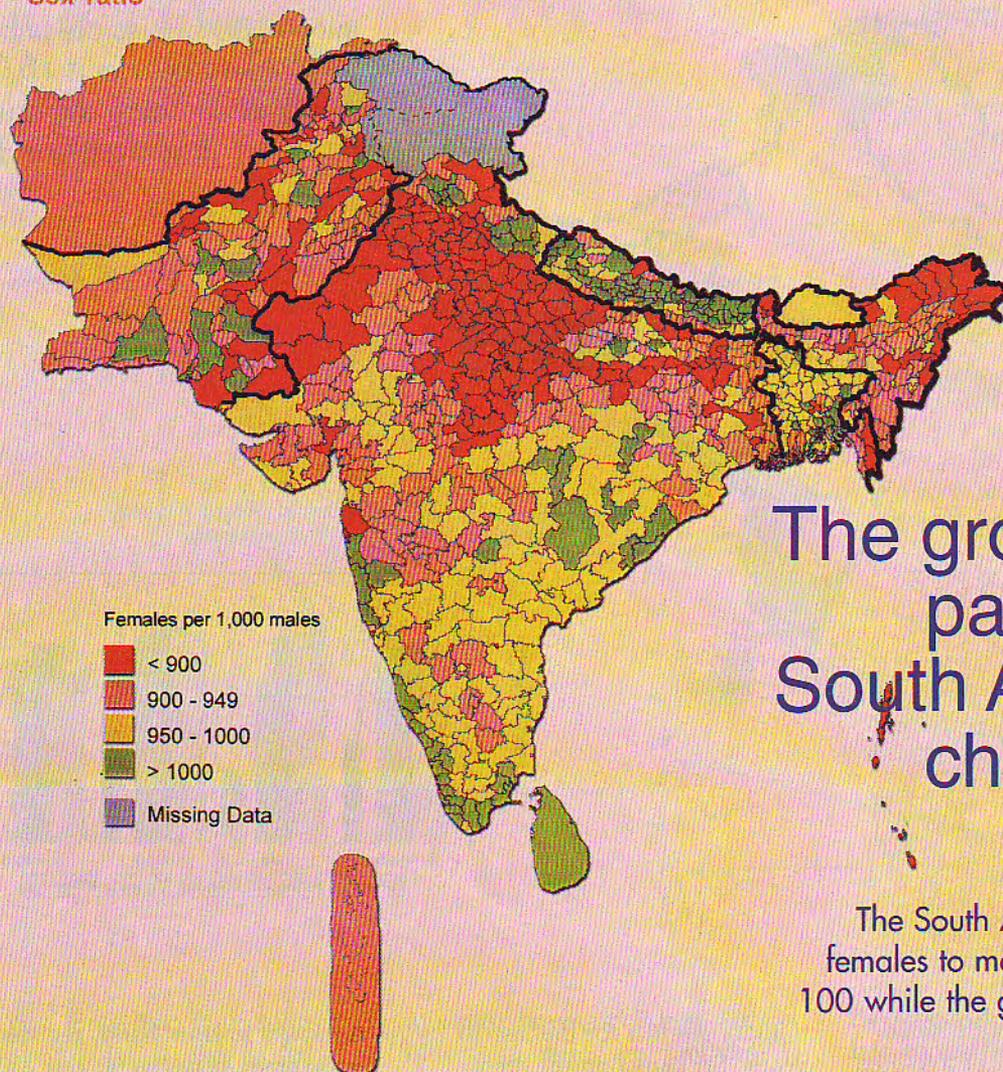
"guerilla zones".

Pusha Kamal Dahal, the Chairman of the Nepal's Maoists ('Comrade Prachanda'), in fact, has even been un-diplomatic and dismissive of his allies in the PW, saying in an interview with the Revolutionary Worker in February 2000, "For 25 years they say guerilla zone, but there is not any perspective, real perspective." Nepali Maobadis also appear to have combed more revolutionary guidebooks – from Stalin to Mao and everyone in between – than the Indian comrades. This shows in their present strategy, which is a fusion of a People's War in the hinterlands (from the Chinese model) and plans for urban mass uprising (borrowed from the Bolsheviks).

Comrade Prachanda now wants to share his 'success' with fellow South Asians. In a recent tract entitled "A Great Leap Forward: The Inevitable Necessity of History", he writes, "it has become an absolute necessity for the communist revolutionaries (to form a federation) to face Indian monopolist capitalism and its supporters and backers."

The twenty-fifth anniversary of Mao's death was quietly marked in September 2001. The Maoist movements of South Asia have survived long after their namesake's death, although their ultimate success remains as much in doubt as ever. It remains to be seen whether the recent spate of alliance building will advance the region toward a South Asian communist polity or if Maoists are destined to remain on the fringe. ▽

Sex ratio



The growing pains of South Asia's children

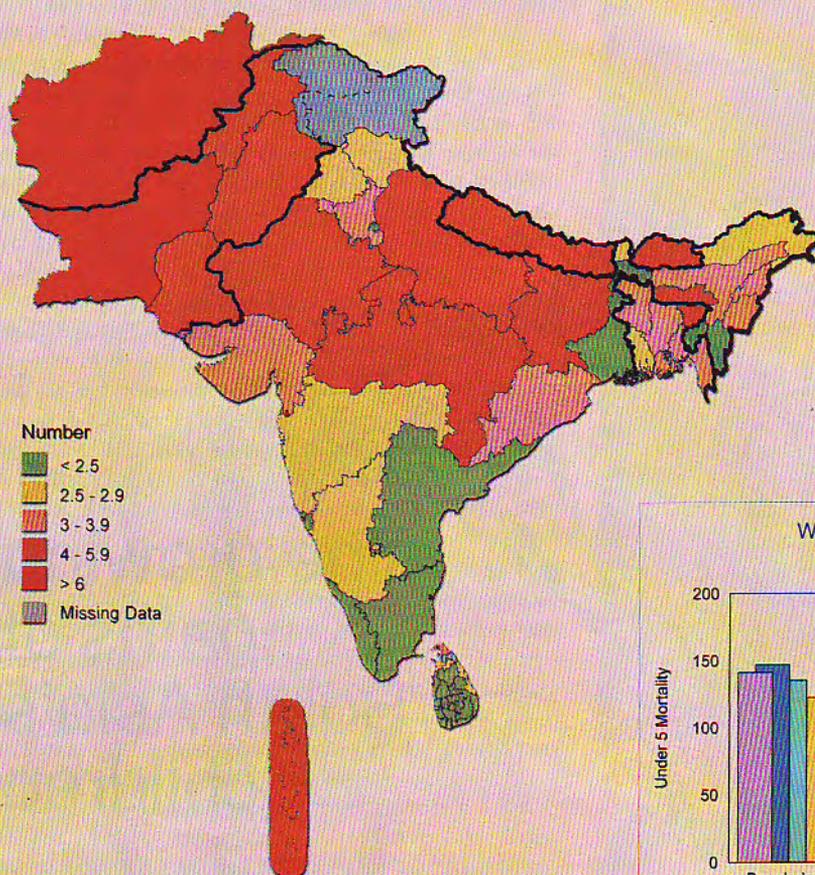
The South Asian ratio of females to males is 94 per 100 while the global ratio is 106 per 100.

If South Asia is one region, then its social and economic indicators – and not just its physical geography and political boundaries – should be available on one map rather than scattered over different national imageries. The Regional Office for South Asia of Unicef, the children's agency of the United Nations, has now given us just such regional images which allow us to compare and contrast achievements within and between the countries and regions of South Asia. In a special collaboration with Unicef ROSA, Himal brings you a selection of these maps, which will be part of the forthcoming *The Youth Atlas of Children and Women in South Asia*.

The maps and graphs featured in this section have been compiled by Unicef Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) on the basis of data from various sources. Text compiled by Himal's editorial team. The views expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of Unicef ROSA.

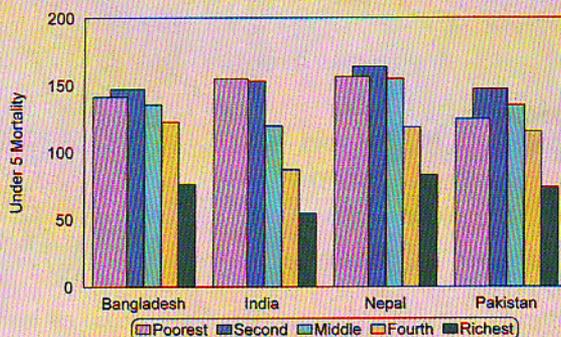
Under-5 mortality

Total fertility rate



Across South Asia, some 24 children are born every minute, 30 babies die unborn every hour and 10,000 children below the age of five die every day.

Wealth and under-5 mortality per 1000 live births



SEVEN MILLION South Asian children under the age of five died in 1990. In 2000 the figure had declined to about 3 million. However, the overall improvement in the statistical aggregate for South Asia conceals wide geographical disparities, with the gains made being largely confined to some areas. The trends suggest that the gap between countries has narrowed considerably over the last 40 years. As the graph indicates, Afghanistan has shown no significant progress, which is perhaps inevitable in a country that has seen sustained civil and

military conflict for the last 20 years. Sri Lanka on the other hand has posted very encouraging results.

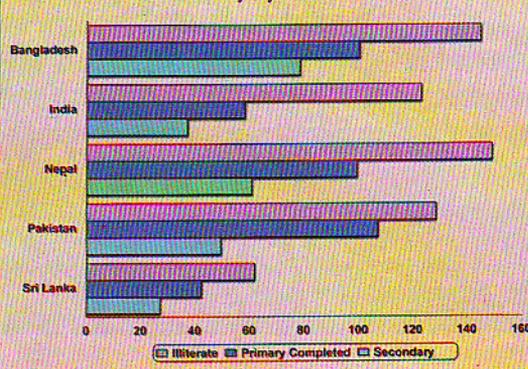
Sandwiched between the two, the other South Asian countries

occupy a narrow band, registering on average between 90 and 130 under-5 deaths per 1000 live births. But the average, like the aggregate, is deceptive. Central, western and south-western

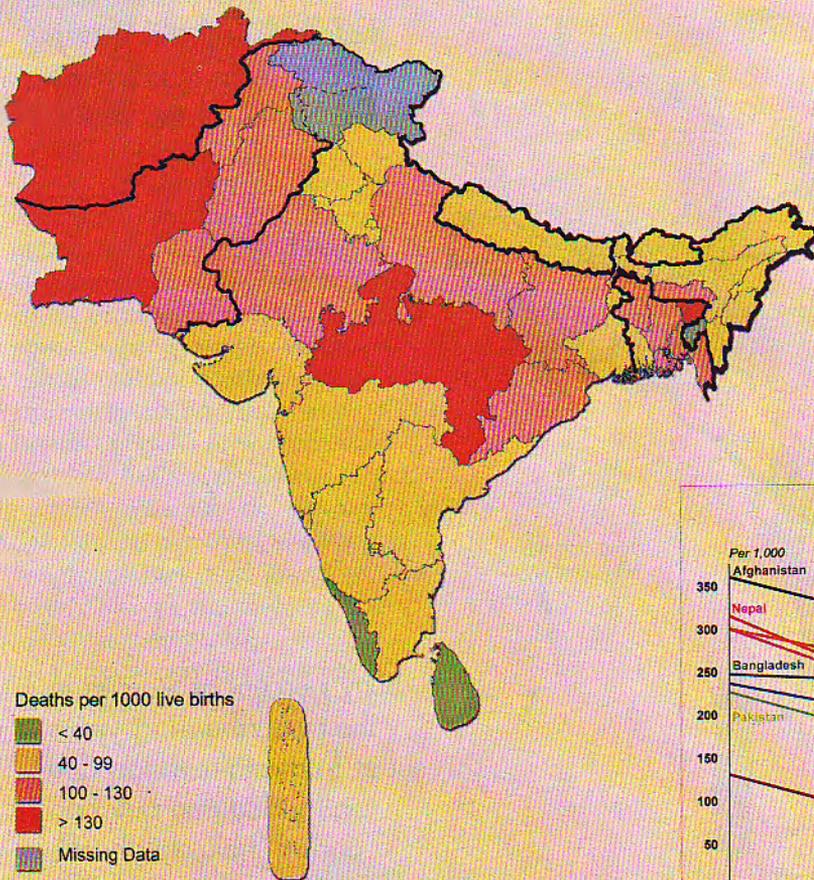
Pakistan and parts of central India account for the high intra-country variations in the magnitude of incidence. Mortality figures here are at par with the levels in Afghanistan, where mortality exceeds 130 children for every 1000 live births.

The regions with high under-5 mortality also have high fertility rates. Women in these areas tend to bear, on

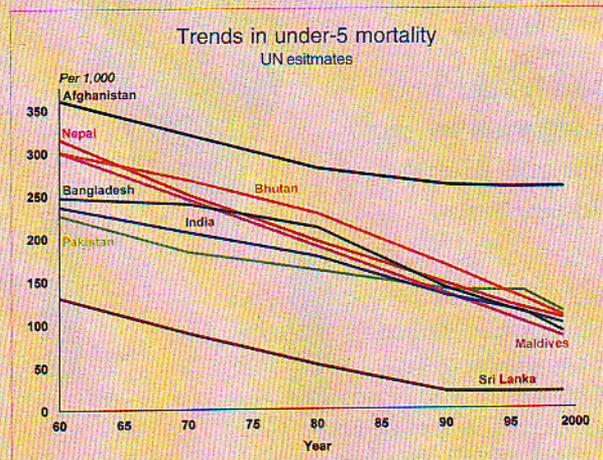
Under-5 mortality by mother's education



Under-5 mortality rate



On current trends, the SAARC goal for the year 2000 will not be achieved till 2025.



average, more than four children per head, going as high as six children in some areas. This geographical coincidence of high mortality and high fertility has serious policy implications. Institutional intervention in these areas must target both mortality and fertility simultaneously if adverse demographic consequences are to be avoided.

Variations in the incidence of under-5 mortality show clear correlations with other more specific criteria as is evident from the graph representing the relationship between mother's education and children's mortality. The gap between

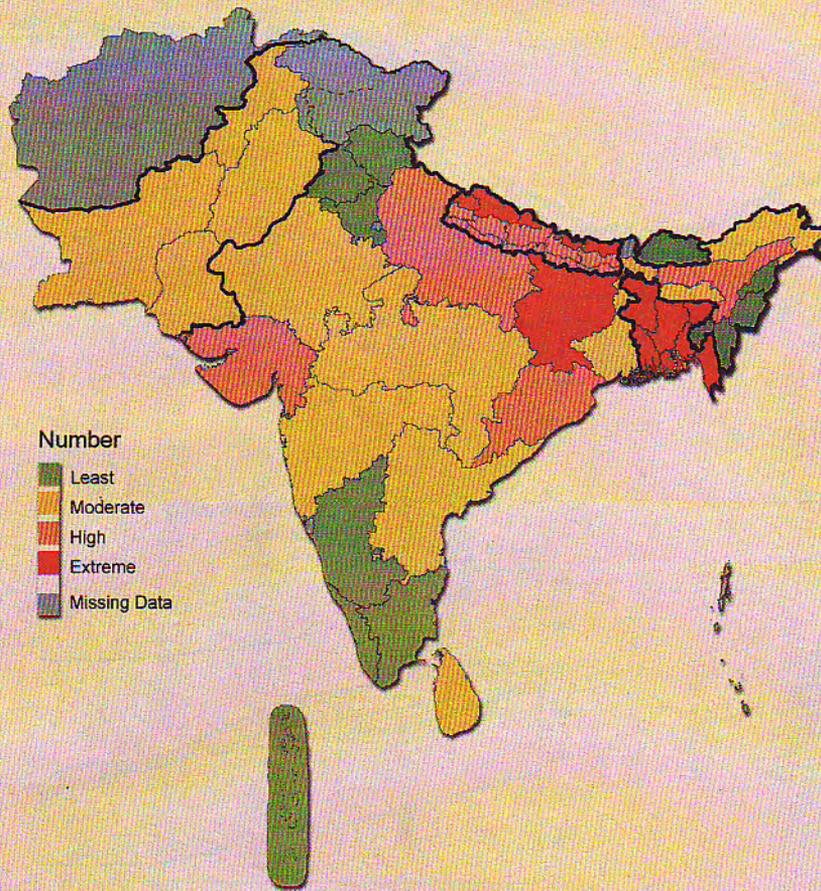
mortality among children with illiterate mothers and mothers with secondary education is too wide to be overlooked. Across the board, increased emphasis on formal education, up to at least the school-leaving level, is a necessary condition for diminishing the rate of child mortality. Likewise, income differentials play a role in child mortality. As indicated by the graph, the two poorest segments far outstrip the two richest segments.

SAARC governments had, in the 1990s, adopted resolutions in Colombo and Rawalpindi, specifying goals relating to child

development. Among others, they had committed to reducing under-5 mortality by a third or 70 per 1000 live births, whichever is lower. It is true that South Asia as a whole has achieved significant reduction in child mortality rates. But in most countries the bulk of the reduction was achieved before the resolutions were adopted. Progress has tended to be slow from the 1990s and on current trends the SAARC goal for the year 2000 will not be achieved till 2025. ■



Food insecurity in South Asia



There are more malnourished children in South Asia than in any other region of the world.

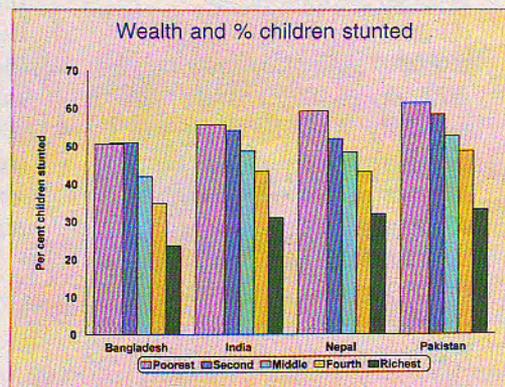
Sixty percent of women in their childbearing years suffer from malnutrition due to inadequate nutrition during their childhood.

FOR THE many children who die before their time, death ends the agonies that life only multiplies. To cite just one instance, 300 million people, or 40 per cent of the world's undernourished population, live in South Asia. This is an indication of the extent of food insecurity in the region. While extremely high levels of food insecurity are confined to pockets in Bangladesh, Nepal and India, the bulk of the population, spread over a wide geographical belt covering Pakistan, northern, central, eastern and peninsular India, middle and lower Nepal and Bangladesh, lives in conditions of moderate to high food insecurity.

Under such circumstances, an inordinately large number of children suffer from different forms of malnutrition. There are more malnourished children in South Asia than in any other region.

One index of sustained malnutrition is stunting. About 80

million South Asian children under the age of five suffer from moderate to severe stunting, that is, they are shorter than they should be for their age. This is just a little under half the total number of under-five children in the region. While the trend-graph suggests that there has been some reduction in the overall malnutrition figures, the improvement has been geographically uneven. Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka have made impressive progress, but in Afghanistan, Maldives and Pakistan the figures for stunting have actually increased in recent years. In India, the regions with high prevalence of stunting



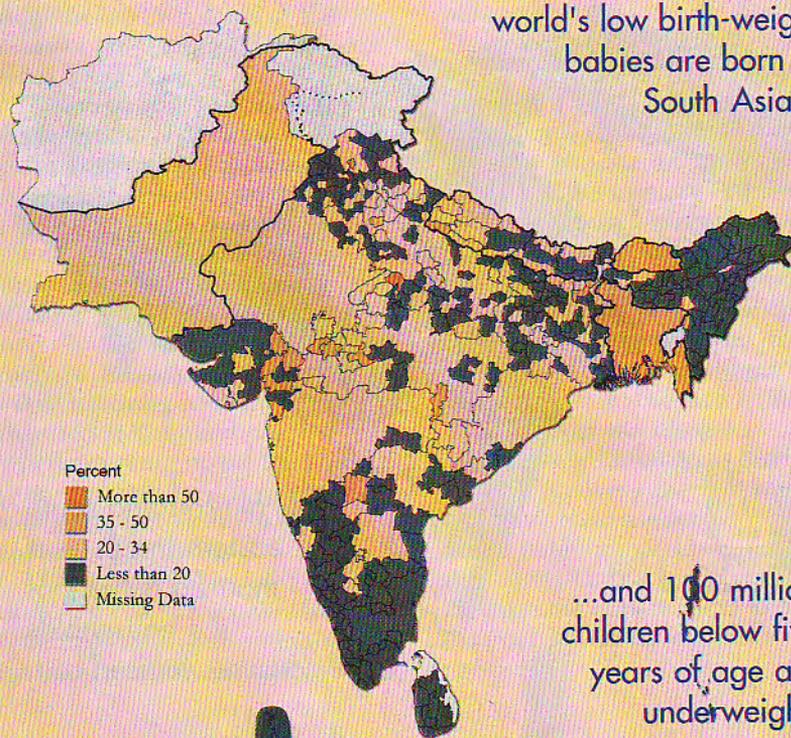


also have the highest under-5 mortality figures, and it is likely that a large number of stunted children eventually die before they reach the age of five.

Malnutrition is not confined to childhood and for many, especially girls, it is a life-long condition. One index of this is low birth weight among newborns. Barring a large stretch in Sri Lanka, parts of southern India and north-eastern India and isolated pockets in western and northern India and parts of Nepal, in much of South Asia, between one third to two third of all babies weigh less than 2500 grams at birth. This is a sign of sustained maternal malnutrition.

When the mother does not have sufficient nutrition it is

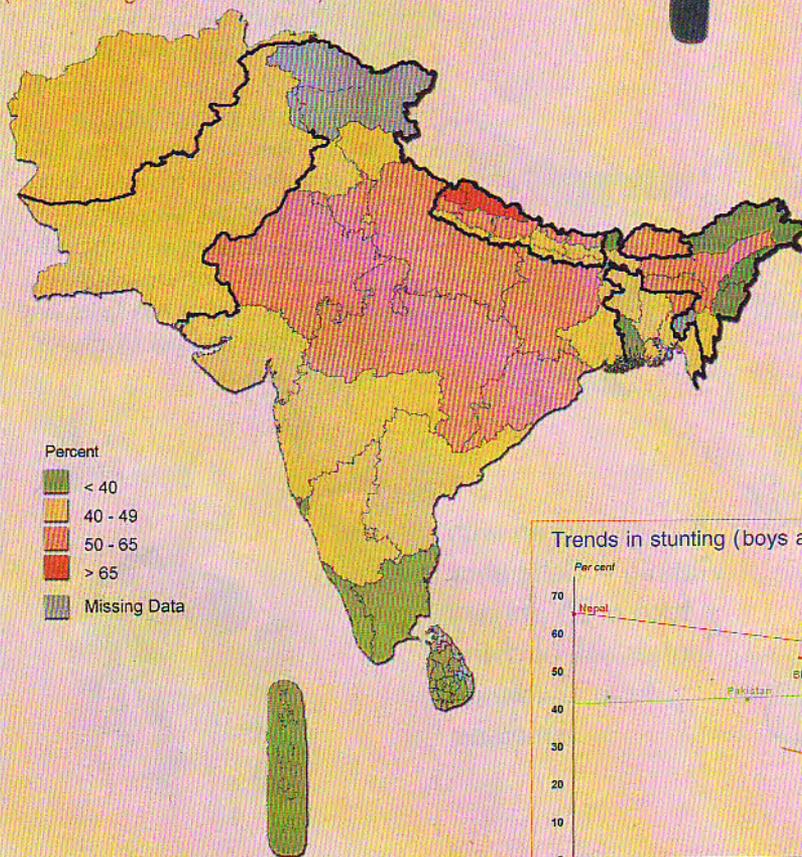
Birth-weight less than 2500 gms



More than half the world's low birth-weight babies are born in South Asia...

...and 100 million children below five years of age are underweight.

Stunting, moderate and severe (children aged 6-35 months)

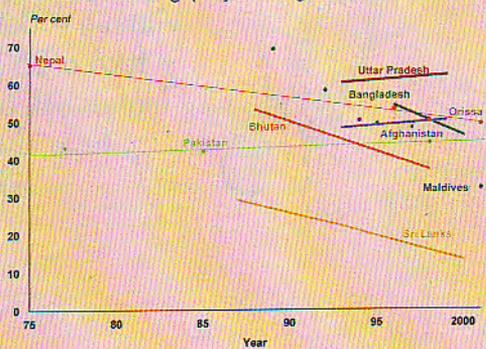


unlikely that the child will receive adequate nutrition. Nutritional deficiencies during pregnancy can have adverse consequences on the child even before it is born. Iron deficiency, which results in anaemia, is one such. Anaemia in children has to be controlled and reversed in the first three years if irreversible brain damage is to be prevented.

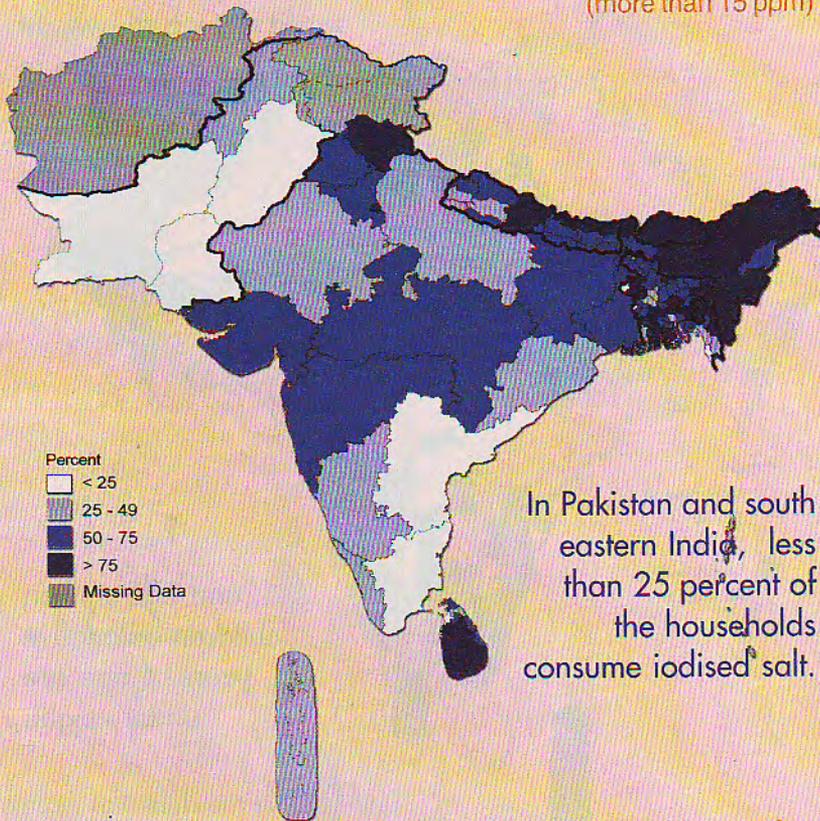
Iodine and Vitamin A deficiencies are among the major nutritional maladies endemic to South Asia. Iodine deficiency is the main cause of preventable mental retardation. Children born to iodine-deficient mothers face a

greater risk of dying before they are one year old. Iodine deficiency can be rectified through the consumption of iodised salt. While the last decade has seen considerable

Trends in stunting (boys and girls 6-36 months)

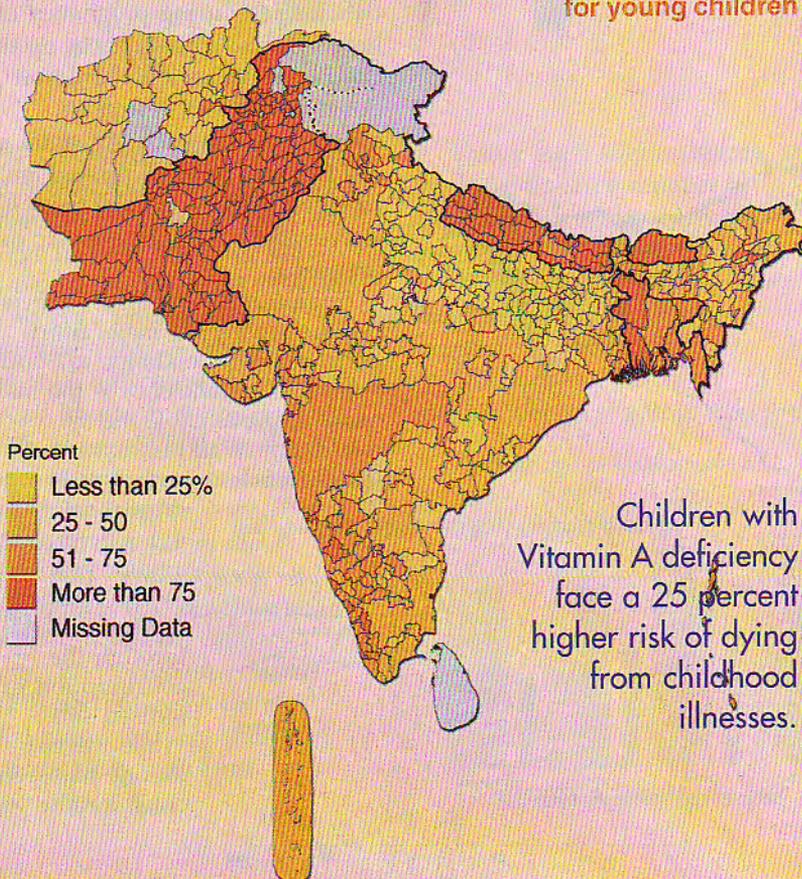


Households consuming iodised salt (more than 15 ppm)



In Pakistan and south eastern India, less than 25 percent of the households consume iodised salt.

Vitamin A supplementation for young children



Children with Vitamin A deficiency face a 25 percent higher risk of dying from childhood illnesses.

improvement in the number of households consuming iodised salt, there are large contiguous stretches in southern and northern India where less than half the households consume iodine through salt. The situation in Pakistan is particularly grim, with iodised salt being used by less than 25 per cent of the households.

Vitamin A deficiency affects about 100 million children worldwide and is the leading cause of blindness in developing countries. This deficiency even mild form can seriously undermine the immune system and reduce resistance to the diseases that account for a large number of child deaths. Children with Vitamin A deficiency face a 25 per cent higher risk of dying from childhood illnesses. Vitamin A supplementation through capsules is the usual mode of dealing with this deficiency. Barring Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan the progress in administering Vitamin A supplementation has been tardy, particularly in India. In some areas there has been a dramatic increase, but largely because Vitamin supplementation was included in the polio immunisation campaign, which has been one of the major success stories of South Asia. ■



Immunisation

the growing pains of south asia's children

DURING THE late-1980s immunisation coverage in South Asia saw a dramatic increase. In the period thereafter some of these positive trends have been maintained. Despite these achievements, four countries of the region—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan—are among the 10 countries that remain a global priority for immunisation. Besides, the progress registered in the region has been uneven, both geographically and by disease-type. In large parts of northern India there has been little improvement in the extent of routine immunisation coverage. Measles immunisation in some of these areas is even lower than in Afghanistan.

The greatest success in eradication has been registered in the case of polio, with the vaccine being administered on well publicised

National Immunisation Days. But the success of the campaign notwithstanding, most of the cases of polio reported today come from South Asia.

There is also a disturbing aspect to the relative success of the polio eradication programme. Its success has been accompanied by either stagnation or decline in immunisation against other diseases. It has been suggested that the campaign mode in which polio immunisation was carried out has distracted attention from other vaccine-preventable diseases. It is a moot point whether toning down the polio campaign will help revive the momentum of immunisation against other diseases.

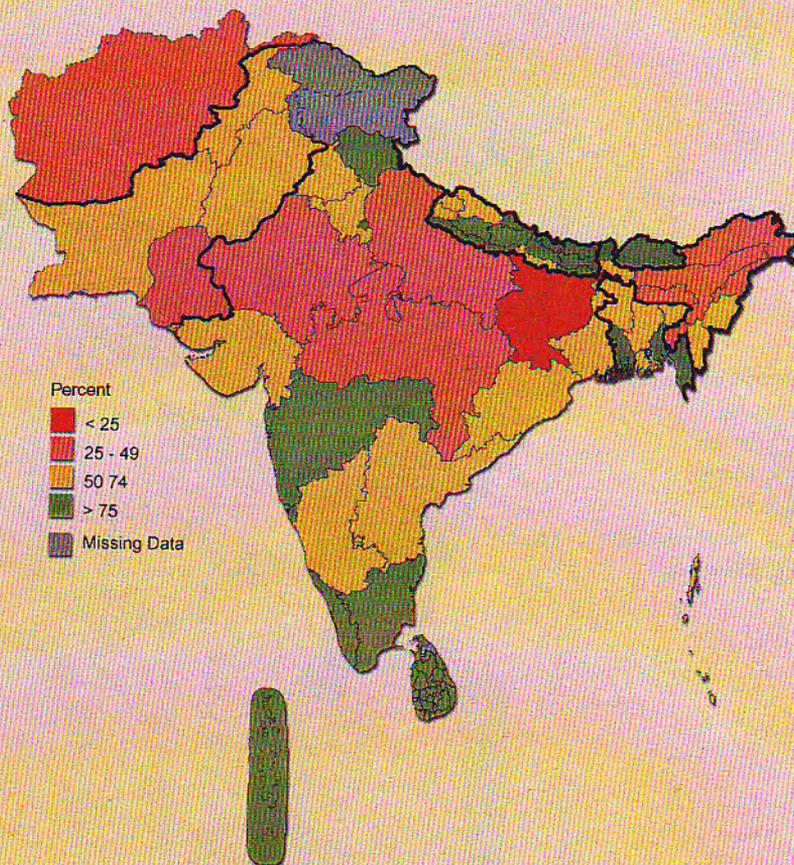
The World Summit for Children had called for polio eradication, neonatal tetanus elimination, measles mortality reduction by 90

per cent and general immunisation coverage of 90 per cent. Barring polio eradication, South Asia is far away from these goals. Diphtheria, whooping cough, tuberculosis and hepatitis B are the other vaccine-preventable diseases that continue to afflict children in South Asia.

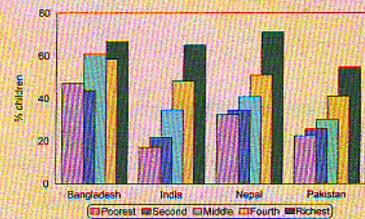
One of the primary causes of poor immunisation results is the lack of access to vaccines. Hepatitis B is a case in point. A vaccine for it has been available since 1982, yet by the year 2000 only 50 per cent of newborns in developing countries were immunised against the disease.

If immunisation goals are to be realised, delivery mechanisms will have to be strengthened. And, as the data on measles immunisation suggests, the gap in access between the richest strata and the poorest will have to be narrowed. ■

Measles immunisation coverage

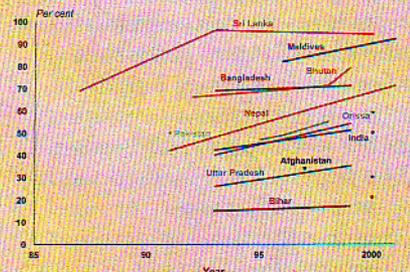


Wealth and full immunisation coverage (children 12-13 months old)



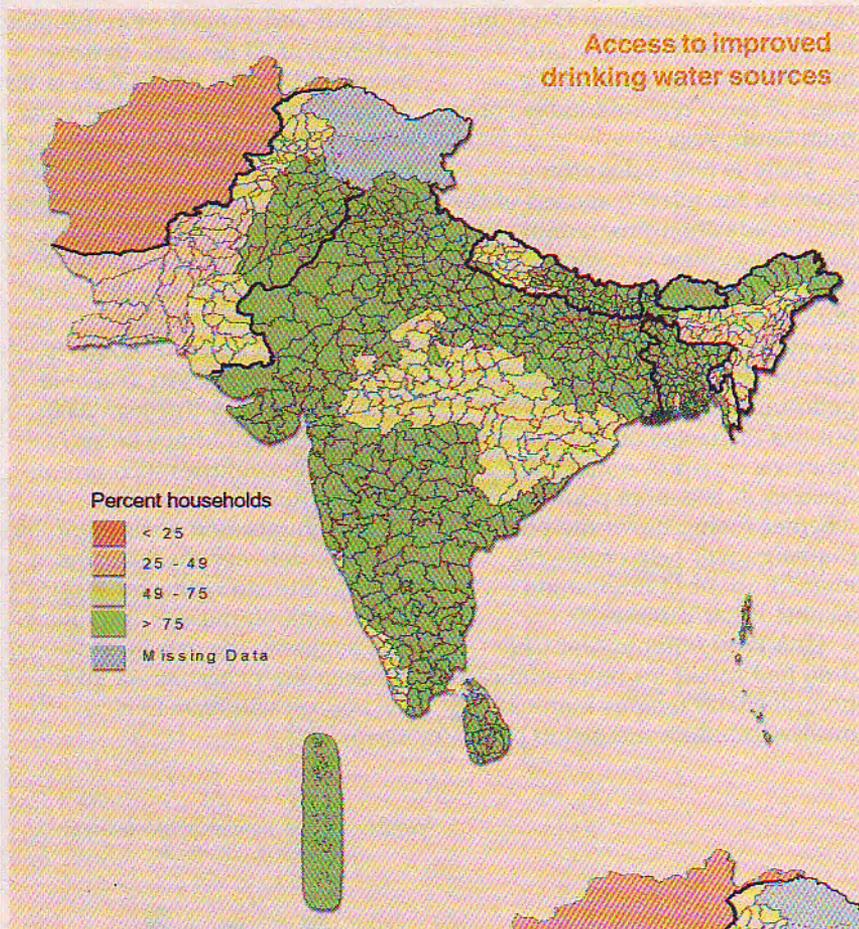
Of 10 countries on the global immunisation priority list, four are South Asian: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Trends in measles immunisation (children 12-23 months old)



Safe Drinking Water

Access to improved drinking water sources

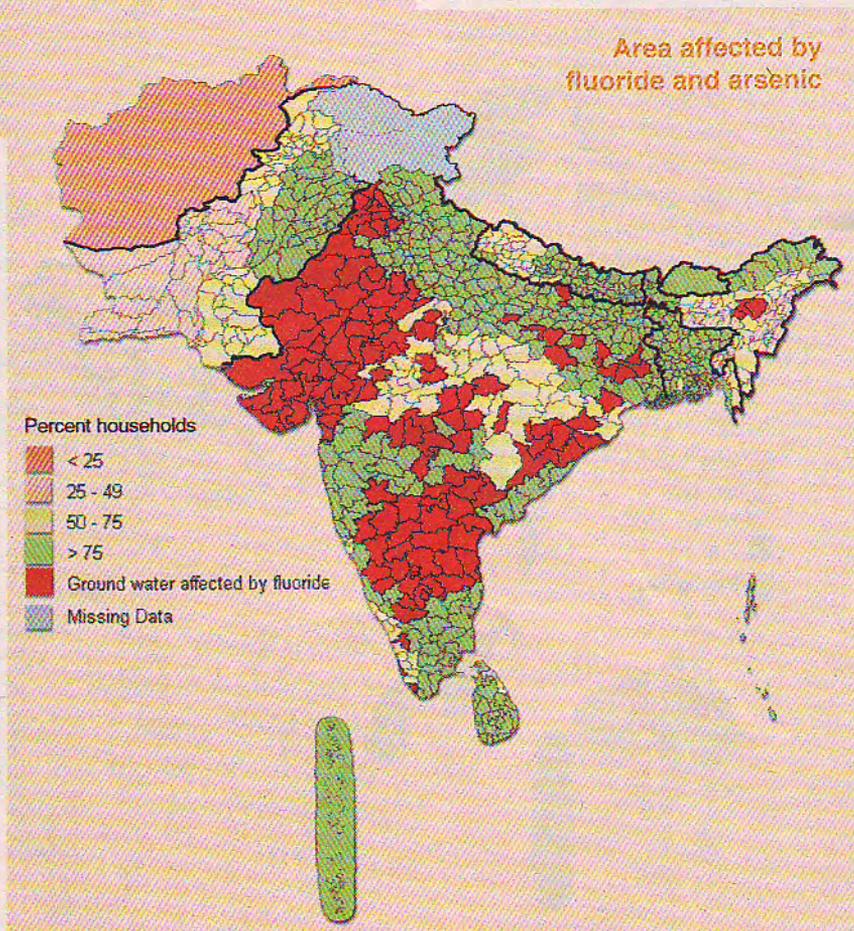


cent of the population in the countryside have access to this amenity. An estimated 50 million people, many of them rural, meet their water requirements from unprotected surface sources.

Ground water is generally considered to be relatively more free from contamination than surface water. However, the South Asian situation is complicated by a variety of factors. Faulty borewell construction and irregular or inadequate chlorination make ground water susceptible to contamination. Because there is no quality-surveillance mechanism in place, problems of this kind could go entirely unnoticed until they announce themselves through various chronic illnesses.

Population pressure poses an additional problem. Increased use of ground water has begun to

Area affected by fluoride and arsenic



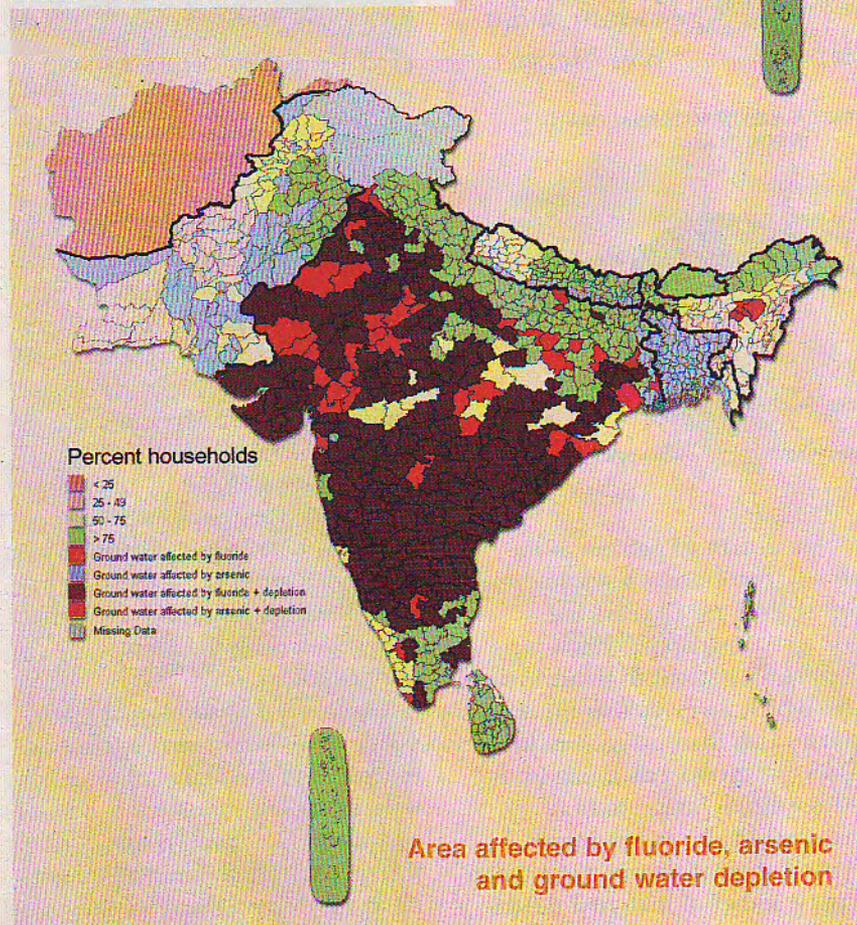
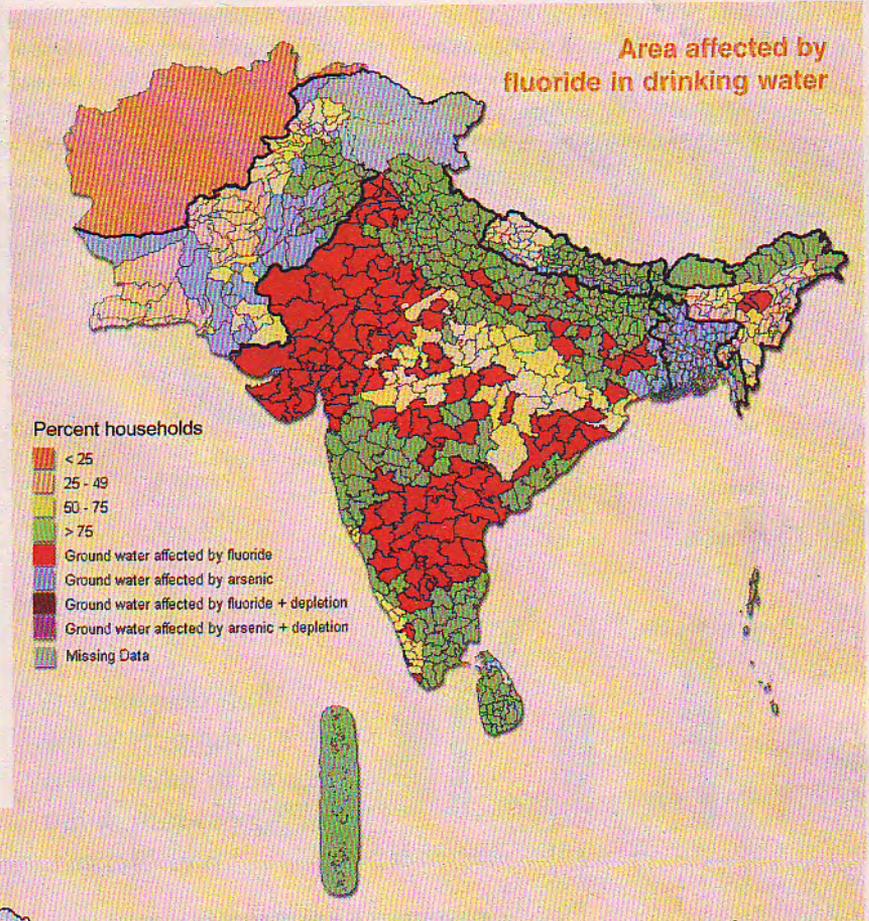
BY THE year 2000 about 80 per cent of the region's population was getting its drinking water from a protected source. Much of this progress has been achieved in the last two decades, largely through institutional initiatives in expanding the penetration of public supply systems and technological innovations, such as inexpensive but efficient hand-pumps.

But as with the other indices of well-being, the progress on this has to be suitably qualified by caveats. Because of systemic inefficiencies, at any given time between 20 and 25 per cent of public supply systems in South Asia are not operational. Besides, public supply has a marked urban bias. In a region that is predominantly rural, 90 per cent of urban residents receive adequate water, while only 70 per

affect the aquifer. In combination with the extensive reliance on ground water for irrigating commercialised agriculture, this has led to depletion. More than 70 percent of the fresh water extracted from the ground is put to agricultural uses, and the annual rate of depletion is greater than replenishment.

This is the paradox of ground water use in South Asia. The greater the number of people who are given access to this safer source, the sooner they lose access to it. Profligacy of ground water use makes it more prone to contamination by natural chemicals through the process of leaching. Fluoride and arsenic are the two most lethal contaminators of ground water. The geographical spread of both has assumed alarming proportions.

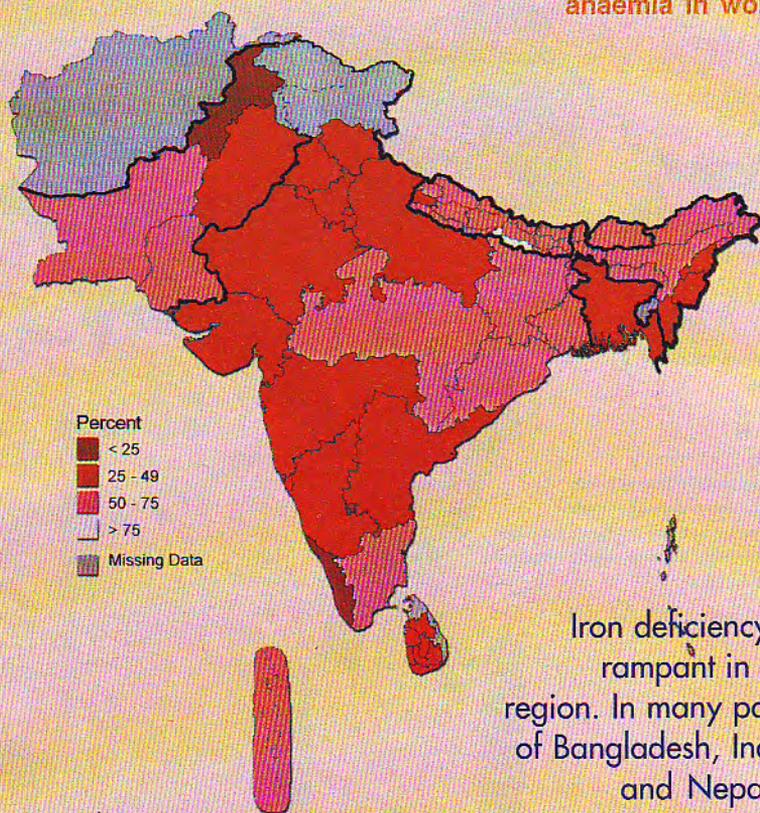
This series of maps in sequence



illustrates the gap between what should have been available to the region by way of safe drinking water and what is actually available after accounting for contamination and depletion. The area in green, in the first map represents the fairly high availability of safe drinking water. This begins to shrink when the area of fluoride contamination is mapped on it. The mapping of arsenic contamination, which is high in Bangladesh, West Bengal, parts of Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan, curtails the green area even more. By the fourth map, following the addition of ground water-depleted areas, the area in green is only a fraction of what it started at. If the situation is not rectified, South Asian children will face new dangers from water-borne maladies, even as old diseases continue to persist. ■

Maternal & infant mortality

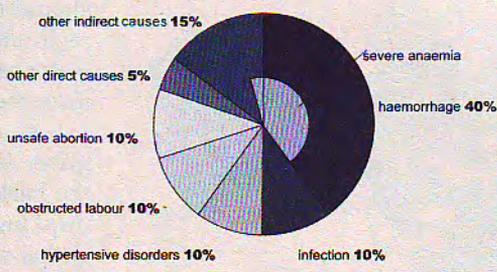
Prevalence of anaemia in women



Iron deficiency is rampant in the region. In many parts of Bangladesh, India and Nepal...

...90 percent of infants and children and 75 percent of pregnant women suffer from nutritional anaemia.

OBSTETRIC CAUSES OF MATERNAL DEATH IN SOUTH ASIA



EVERY TWO minutes a South Asian woman dies due to complications arising from pregnancy and childhood. This adds up to half of all maternal deaths in the world. Nearly 15 per cent of women who die during and after pregnancy are victims of violence, and in some areas the proportion of those who succumb to violent injuries is greater than those who die of obstetric problems.

More than 40 percent of the girls in South Asia bear children before they are 20 years old. Teenage pregnancy, which is as high as 15 percent in South Asia, and which involves five times greater risk than pregnancy in the 20-25 age group, has a role in the extraordinary magnitude of maternal deaths in the region. These bare statistics suggest that a large number of maternal deaths

need never have taken place.

Apart from the social and accidental causes of maternal mortality, there are the purely medical causes. The immediate medical causes of mortality are haemorrhage, obstructed pregnancy, unsafe abortion, infection and hypertensive disorders like eclampsia.

There are also indirect obstetric causes of maternal death, arising from already existing diseases or diseases occurring during pregnancy. These include anaemia, hepatitis, malaria and cardiac disease. Death in a lot of such instances can be prevented given the availability of emergency obstetric services (EmOC)..

South Asia has the technical capacity and the trained personnel to provide emergency obstetric services. The problem is that most women lack access to such facilities. Mismanagement of available public services is also a problem. Less than 5 percent of the existing EmOC facilities provide adequate emergency services.

One indication of the lack of access to professionally qualified services is the number of deliveries conducted at health institutions. Barring Sri Lanka and the extreme south of India where more than 75 percent of the deliveries take place under medical supervision, in most of the region, less than 25 percent are attended by qualified personnel. The graph merely confirms what could reasonably have been surmised—that access to professional medical assistance is lowest among the poorest segment of society.

Aside from institutional interventions to ensure obstetric services, there are fundamental long-term situations that have to be addressed. Anaemia is an instance of a problem that cannot have a purely medical solution. It

is essentially a dietary matter. Almost 80 percent of pregnant South Asian women are anaemic. Anaemia among pregnant women, besides endangering the lives of both the mother and child, can have long term consequences for the child in terms of brain development.

As the anaemia map suggests, iron deficiency is a general condition of women in large parts of South Asia, and this will have its cumulative effects for some time to come in as much as it will continue to obstruct the goal of reducing under-five mortality and and malnutrition among children.

The medical aspects of maternal mortality can be addressed through higher budgetary allocations and their efficient utilisation for the

extension and upgradation of obstetric services. But the social causes of maternal mortality, like teenage marriage and pregnancy, violence against women, and the prejudices and superstitions associated with pregnancy, will be by far more difficult to tackle since they require a different order of intervention.

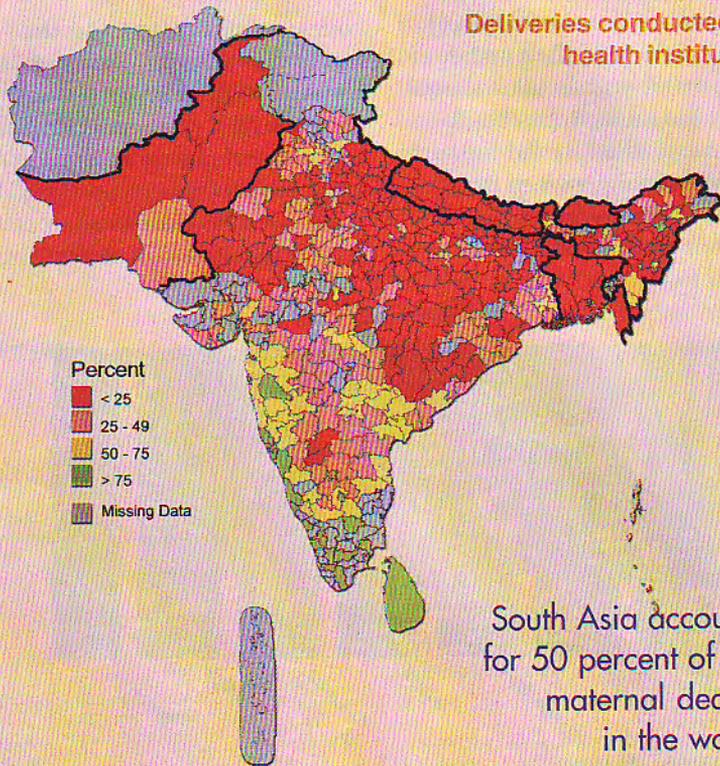
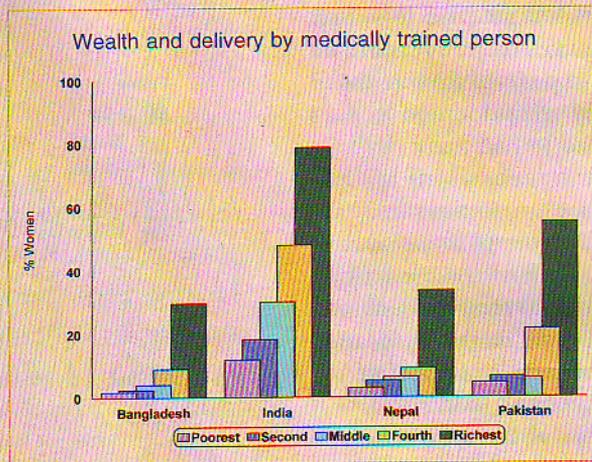
As a beginning, it is possible

to introduce legislation that will strengthen women's rights. But in a region that is notoriously lax in observing the law, this is only a necessary condition. The sufficient conditions can be created only through wider changes in civil society, in family relations and social attitudes. ■



Infant mortality figures per 1000 live births

Bangladesh	179
India	173
Andhra Pradesh	147
Assam	185
Bihar	193
Goa	67
Gujarat	147
Haryana	160
Himachal Pradesh	130
Jammu & Kashmir	101
Karnataka	150
Kerala	62
Madhya Pradesh	193
Maharashtra	112
Orissa	211
Punjab	105
Rajasthan	153
Tamil Nadu	141
Uttar Pradesh	233
West Bengal	162
Delhi	124
Nepal	186
Pakistan	178
Punjab	191
Sindh	190
NWFP	124
Balochistan	171
Sri Lanka	38

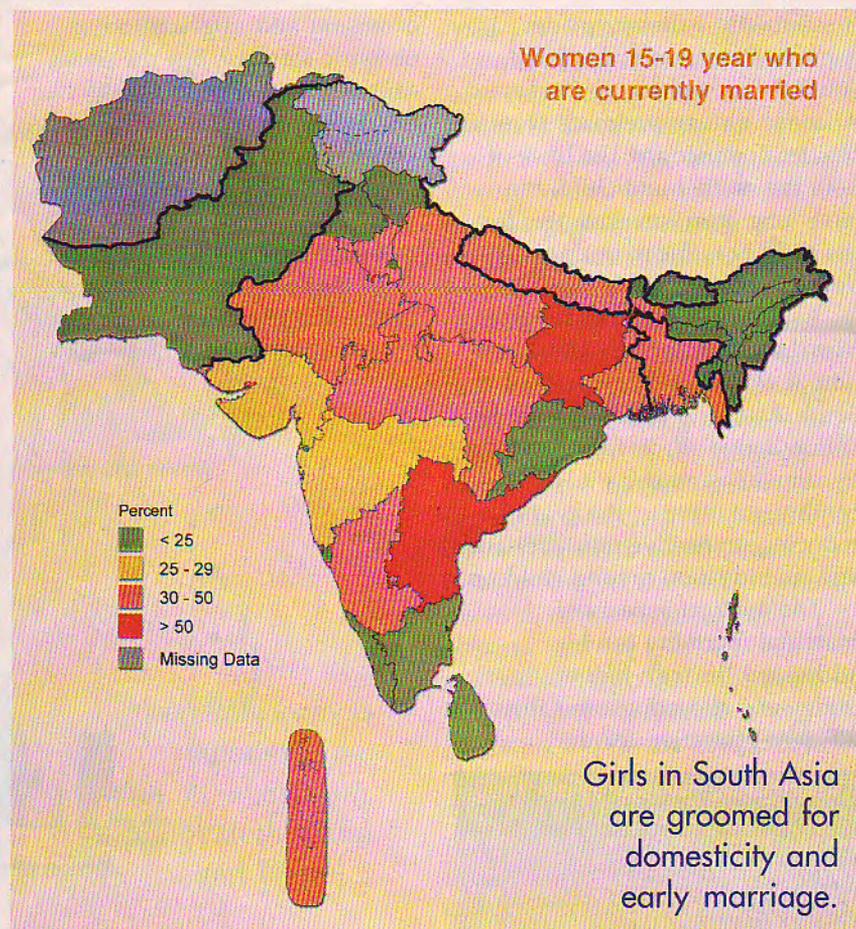


South Asia accounts for 50 percent of the maternal deaths in the world

Gender Disparities

SOUTH ASIA is unmistakably gender biased, with a record of discrimination against girls and women that is abysmal. Discrimination begins with the birth of the girl child and continues through her lifetime, manifesting itself in poor infant care and nutrition, differential childhood treatment, inadequate education, early marriage and financial dependence. In most work situations they have to work longer hours but get paid less than men. This makes them more vulnerable to poverty despite the fact that they often do more strenuous work than men.

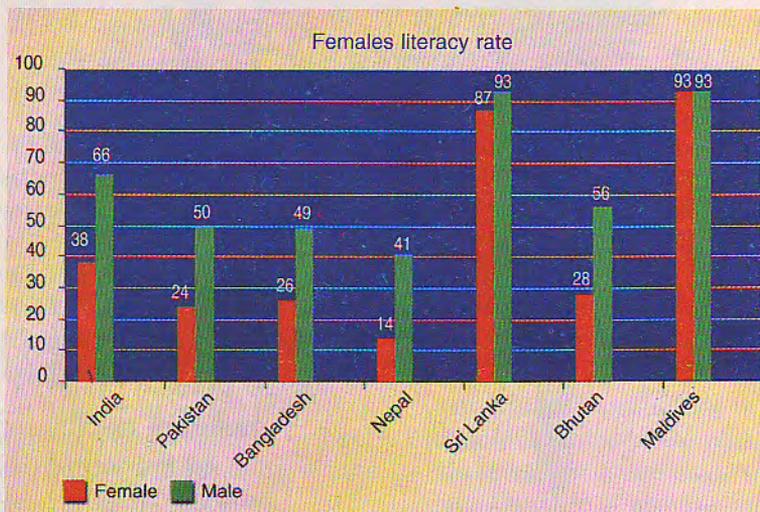
South Asia prefers sons to daughters and an adverse sex ratio for girls, a trend at variance with the global norm, is proof of this. For every 1000 men, there are only 940 women. For many death comes before birth or soon after. Socially sanctioned "son preference" is at the root of female foeticide and infanticide. In the state of Gujarat in India, about 10,000 female foetuses are aborted every year. In any society, the number of missing males and females should be about the same. But in South Asia it is estimated that at the turn of the millenium, between 70 to 90 million women are missing. Current trends indicate that in the



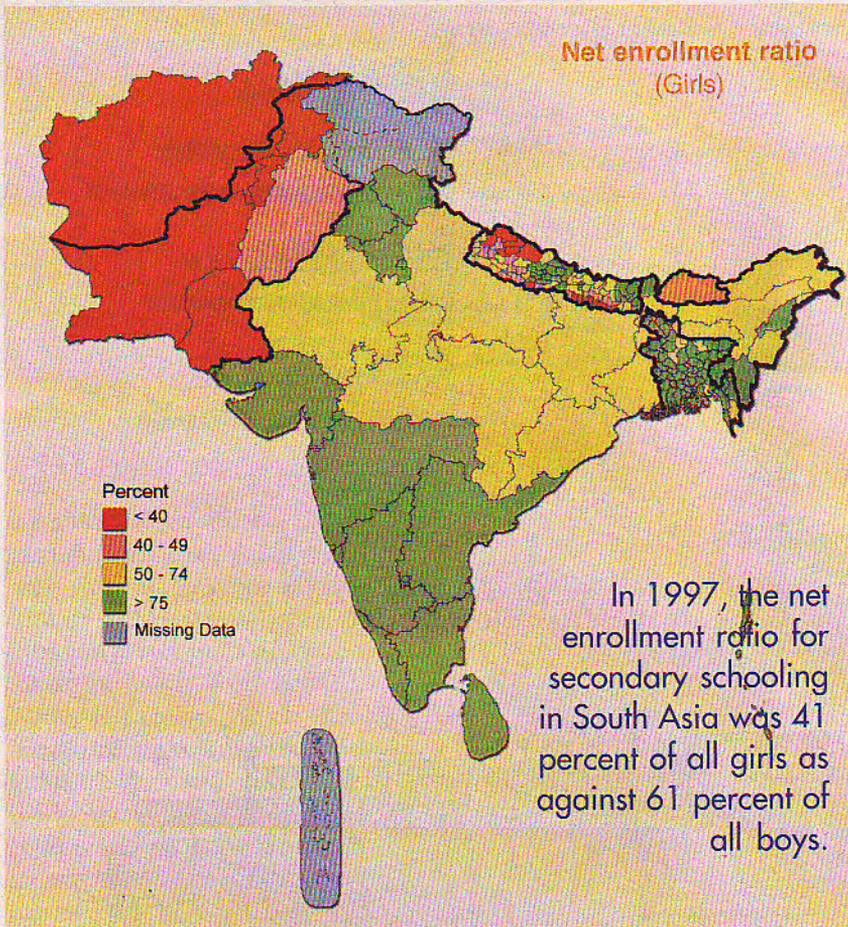
course of the next decade, the number of missing women will go up to 120 million.

Ironically, the availability of modern technology such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging has made sex-selective abortion of female foetuses a lot easier. The

unborn daughter is a conspicuous absentee in gender demography of South Asia. As the map indicates, barring a few pockets, across the region more boys are born than girls, with a fairly large area where there are less than 900 females per 1000 males.



Three out of every five South Asian women are illiterate, including three-quarters of Pakistani women and four-fifths of Nepali women. In India, 60 percent of the 110 million school dropouts are girls.



Another area of obvious discrimination against the girl child is education. South Asia is more attentive to the boy's education. The trends in net enrollment as between boys and girls show quite clearly that a cultural choice is exercised in equipping the male.

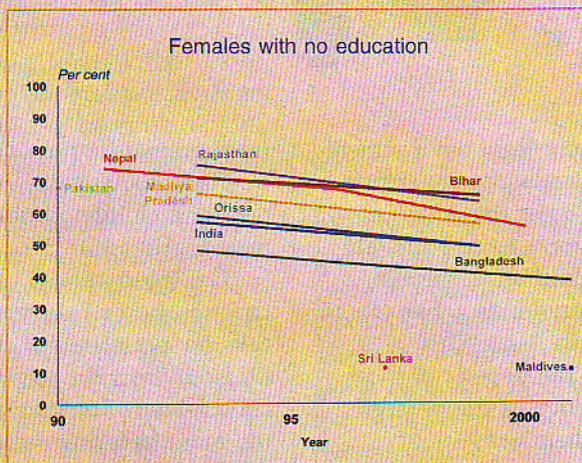
The areas of low female enrollment are also areas which show poor trends in other areas of child development as well, such as malnutrition and immunisation. The likelihood that these other poor indicators reflect to a greater extent the condition of the

girl child than the male child is therefore very high.

Poorer girls are less likely to escape the cycle of poverty than poorer boys. Trends in grade nine completion by sex and wealth suggest that where hard economic choices have to be made, the benefit will accrue to male children. A fairly large part of South Asia shows the most positive trends for grade nine completion by poor boys. Contrast this with equivalent educational attainment by poor girls. The most negative trend accounts for the bulk of South Asia geographically.

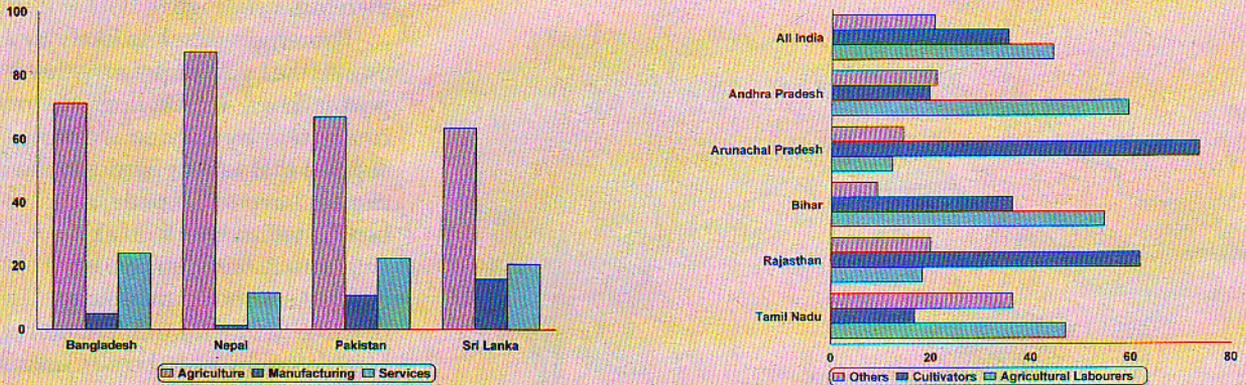
Even considering basic literacy, the figures are not particularly encouraging. Female literacy rate has shown only a very slight improvement in the last decade. The situation is particularly dismal in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan which began the decade with low female literacy figures and ended it with only marginally improved figures. Even the dramatic increase that Bangladesh registered in the late 90s has not helped very much, with a current female literacy figure in the vicinity of 40 percent.

By all indices, girls in South Asia are being groomed for domesticity and early motherhood: 15 percent of the pregnancies in the region are among girls below 18 years. This phenomenon then reflects itself in other spheres, like maternal and infant mortality and obstetric complications. Clearly, tackling institutionalised discrimination is a prerequisite for addressing many of the other problems that affect children in South Asia. ■



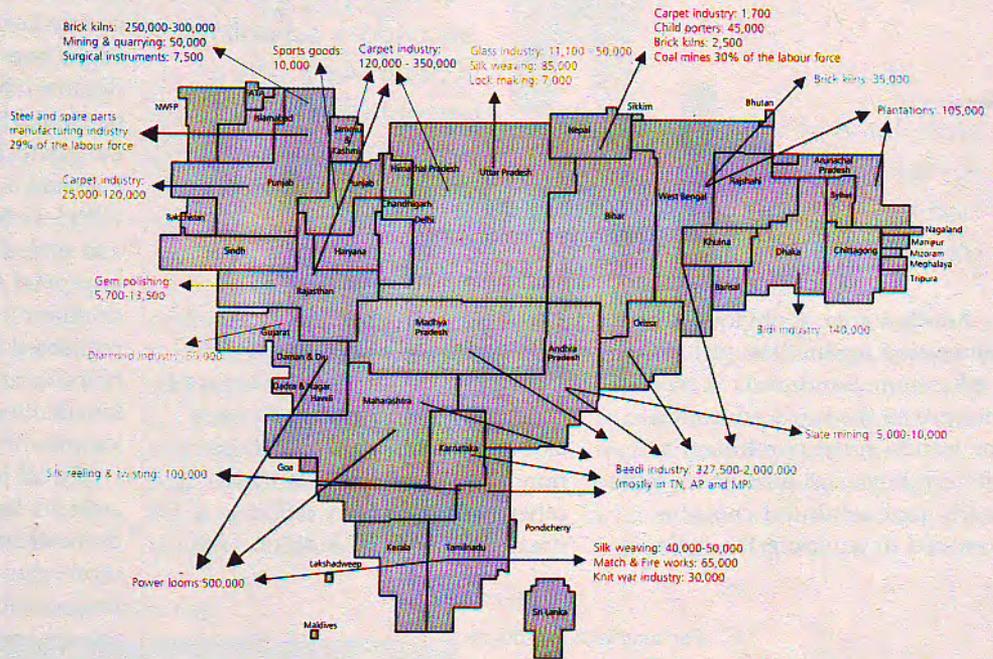
Child labour

Occupational classification of working children



About 8 percent of the working children in the region are employed in match and fireworks production, gem polishing, glass and metal works and carpet-weaving.

Estimated number of child workers (below 14 years) in hazardous manufacturing industries in South Asia



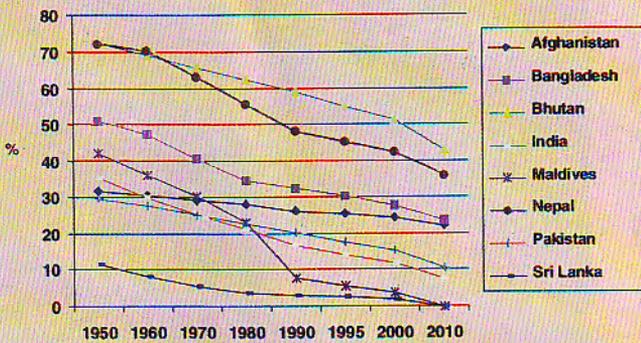
CHILD LABOUR is an economic reality that will require long term structural changes. But in South Asia, which is home to some of the worst forms of child exploitation, an immediate measure to curb some of its more pernicious forms could be to strengthen the legal provisions to regulate the age of entry into organised employment and the conditions of their work.

The current legal environment is pitifully inadequate to ensure the prevention or regulation of children's work. Approximately 43 million children in the age group 5-14 are in the active labour force of South Asia. What compounds the tragedy of these alarming figures is that a large number of them work in hazardous industries, and suffer

from premature physical debility. In effect, many child workers have neither a childhood nor any meaningful adult life.

The International Labour Organisation's Convention 182, calls for protection of children under 18 from the worst forms of child labour. But recent changes in the manufacturing sector in South Asia, particularly the expansion of

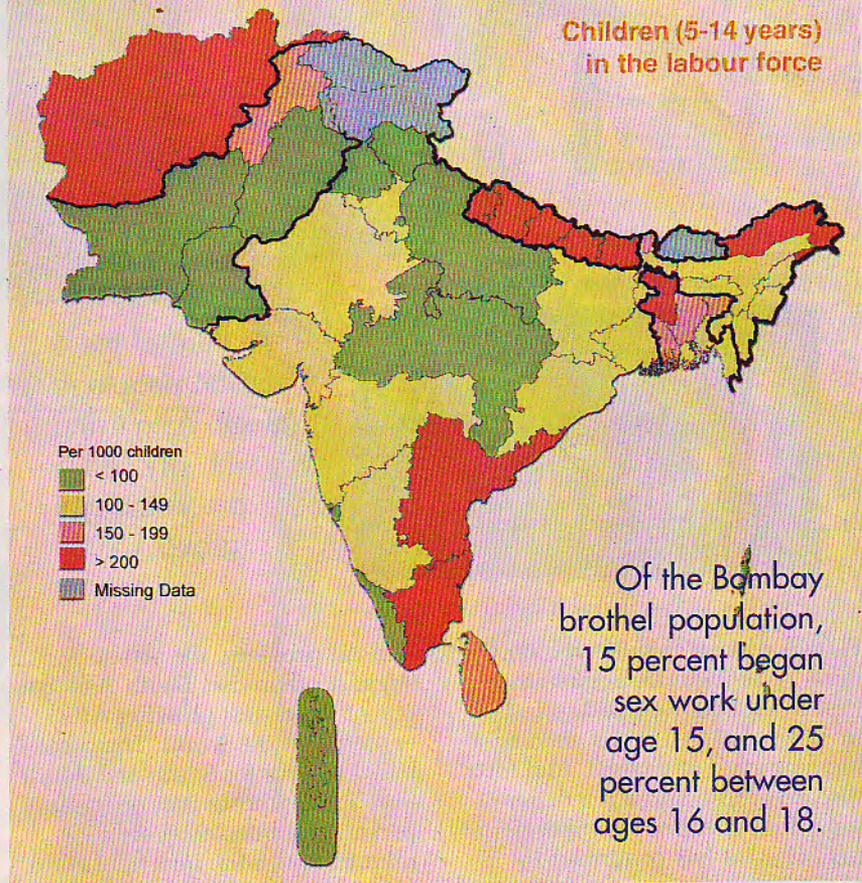
Trends in work participation rates of children (10-14 years) in South Asia



In 2001, about 50 million South Asian children in the age group 5-14 years were not attending school. Nearly 30 percent of adolescents in Pakistan have never attended school.

the so-called informal manufactring units, has made it more difficult for governments to control child exploitation. Informal sector units do not come under the ambit of protective labour legislation, which enables unfettered exploitation both in terms of wage and conditions of work. As a proportion of the total child work force, India has the largest number of children in the manufacturing sector, followed by Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Roughly 8 percent of working children in South Asia are employed in match and fireworks production, gem polishing, glass and metal work, all of which are hazardous.

Aside from employment in hazardous industries, another major area of child exploitation is the trafficking in children. The volume of trafficking has increased despite growing awareness of the problem in recent years. Trafficking takes place both within the region as well as to West Asia, South East Asia, Hong Kong, North America and Europe. In India alone some half a million girls are victims of trafficking. A large number of trafficked children end up performing sexual services. An estimated 20 percent of the prostitutes in South Asia are children under the age of 16, some of them being as young as 8 years



Of the Bombay brothel population, 15 percent began sex work under age 15, and 25 percent between ages 16 and 18.

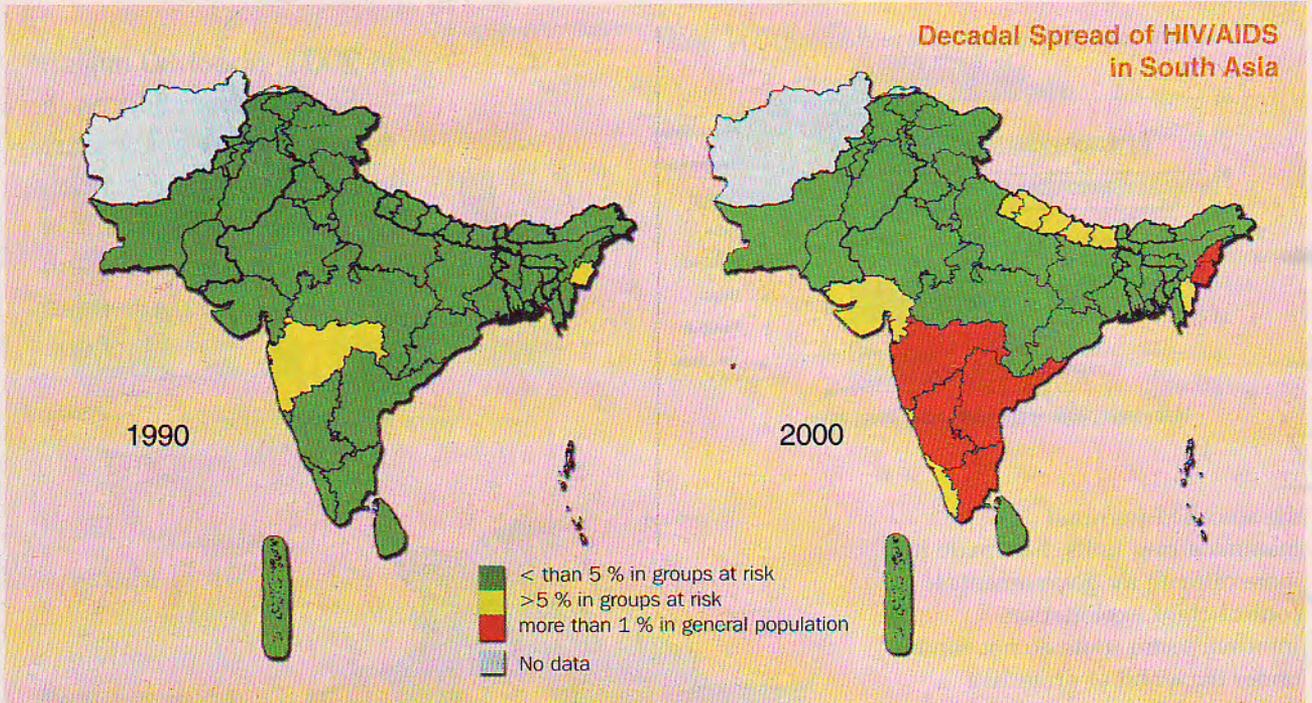
of age.

The problem of trafficking is additionally complicated by the fact that despite the commitments made to uphold the Convention on Child Rights, there is no coherent juvenile justice system in South Asia. As a result, many of the victims of trafficking also often become victims of the law being detained in police

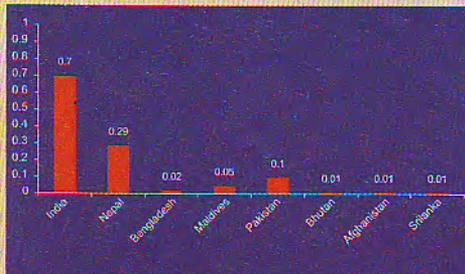
custody,ironically enough, for trafficking offences. ■



Decadal Spread of HIV/AIDS in South Asia



Adult HIV prevalence rates in South Asia, 1999



A third of the 4 million people in South Asia living with HIV/AIDS are in the age group 15-25.

FOR A disease that arrived only fairly recently in the region, the first case being reported in India in 1986, HIV/AIDS has claimed a large number of victims. And for a disease whose spread is dependent almost entirely on individual behaviour it has continued to grow despite the continuous awareness campaigns. By the year 2000 there were more than 4 million people living with HIV/AIDS. Of these, more than a million were in the age group 15-25. And, by far the most disturbing aspect of AIDS in South Asia is that already 125,000 children have been orphaned by the disease.

Though HIV/AIDS is commonly perceived to be a predominantly

African problem, the statistics suggest otherwise. South Asia has one of the fastest growing AIDS epidemics in the world. The combined figures for South and South East Asia indicate that one young person gets infected every two minutes. In India, infections doubled between 1994-1998.

Between 75-80 percent of HIV transmission occurs through unprotected sex while 5-10 percent happens through sharing of needles by drug users. Studies suggest that adolescents and young adults constitute a high risk group in both forms of transmission. This has serious consequences for a region in which as much as 54 percent of the popula-

tion is below the age of 25.

The experience of countries with high AIDS prevalence show that infections among young adults can have debilitating economic effects. A South African study projects that by 2010 the real GDP of the country will be lower by 17 percent than would have been the case in the absence of the disease. A study on India estimates that for the year 1991, the loss of productivity due to AIDS in monetary terms adds up to a staggering Rs 1014 billion.

Since AIDS is an expensive disease to treat, prevention is a cheaper alternative since prevention is largely a behavioural rather than a medical matter. What makes for an optimistic prognosis is that at the current rate of transmission, countries in the region still have a few years to go before the epidemic starts shifting from high risk groups to the general population. If the tragedy is to be controlled the time available has to be utilised effectively. ■



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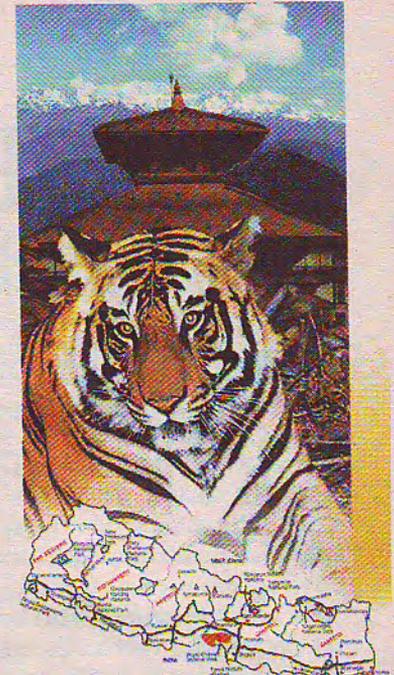
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COMMITMENT to children—THE TRACK RECORD

The rights of children will only be realised when those with power and in power in South Asia use it responsibly, and are accountable to those whom they lead.

by Nigel Fisher

The news is good – and bad

There are over half a billion children under the age of 18 years living in South Asia, and they make up a significant percentage of the world's children. It is no exaggeration to state that what happens to the children of South Asia affects the future of the world, for better or for worse. This issue of *Himal* examines the track record of the region in looking after its children, measuring progress against targets that SAARC leaders themselves established. There is progress to report, yet the track record in the region is uneven at best. Everywhere there are success stories, but not enough of them. To be blunt, in aggregate terms, the region gets a failing grade, the targets that it set itself have not been achieved. The current challenge that confronts the countries of the region is to address the disparities that South Asian children face today— between rich and poor, urban and rural, boys and girls, because of prejudice, neglect or entrenched patriarchy which disadvantages girls in so many facets of their lives.

There has been positive progress in the last decade, so let that be recognised and applauded. Overall, child mortality rates have declined significantly. In 1990, 6.8 million children under the age of five years died annually in South Asia. By 1999, this had declined to 3.7 million, a difference of over 3 million lives per year. Sharp declines in Bangladesh and the long history of low child mortality levels in Sri Lanka illustrate that accelerated and sustained gains are possible. But in several of the states of India, led by Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, under-5 mortality has stagnated at unacceptably high levels, which account for a significant proportion of India's high national and regional averages. With the exception of Sri Lanka, no country has attained the goal that SAARC leaders set for themselves, of reducing under-5 mortality by one-third, or to 70 children per thousand live births, whichever is less.

Gains have been made in net primary school enrolment, which overall today stands at 88 percent for boys and 66 percent for girls. Yet roughly 50 million South Asian children in the 5-14 age group are not going to school, approximately the same number as in 1990. And

even the growth in enrolment rates masks the poor quality of education that prevails in many parts of the region. Improved enrolment rates also mask the fact that 40 percent of children who do enrol drop out before completing the primary cycle, and most of these drop-outs are girls. Female literacy rates in particular are declining too slowly. In 2015, 220 million South Asian girls and women will be illiterate.

Access to safe water has been improved. Yet still, by 1999, ten percent of South Asians, or about 170 million people, lacked access to safe water. Also, the water supplies are endangered by drought, over-exploitation and groundwater contamination. Additionally, about two-thirds of South Asians are still without access to adequate sanitation. At the current rate of progress, the regional goal of universal access to adequate sanitation will not be reached until the next millennium.

In the meantime, new threats have arisen. Public health in general is deplorable, and now around 3.6 million South Asians are living with HIV/AIDS. Most of these are in India, where over 50 percent of new infections are in young people below 29 years of age.

Choices that leaders make

Poverty is a principal violator of children's rights in South Asia. Because of it, children die unnecessarily, suffer from malnutrition, cannot go to school, and work in exploitative conditions. Poverty breeds the powerlessness that impedes children and their families from realising their rights. But poverty cannot be considered a natural phenomenon. Much of it is man-made, the result of choices made by those with power and wealth in the management of resources, economies, trade and investment— choices that condemn the poor to remain so, that ensure a widening wealth gap even as the world's wealth grows. Such choices are not made with the best interests of children in mind. Yet even low rates of national economic growth provide no excuse for achieving limited progress in the living standards of the poorest. We know that some countries, or portions of countries, have been able to achieve a high quality of life despite relatively moderate economic growth. And

even where there are high levels of economic growth, much depends on whether the benefits of that growth are channelled into better public education, health care, or other programmes designed to address disparities and poverty. The issue so often comes back to leadership, and the choices that leaders make.

Perhaps it is too easy for an observer to be critical, and many will sigh at the almost predictable litany of failings cited in this article. Yet the data do lead to a sobering conclusion: there has been progress for South Asian children, but it has fallen short of aspirations, of commitments, of targets. Did this have to be so, and does this record of shortcomings have to continue?

It is encouraging that so much of the agenda of the upcoming Kathmandu SAARC Summit is devoted to poverty reduction and, within that, to improving the situation of the most disadvantaged children and women. The summit may well agree that the attack on poverty must give high priority to improving the well-being of children and to reducing the disparities that divide children from one another, particularly girls. The summit is also likely to approve a Social Charter and a regional Convention on Trafficking. All to the good. But will these lead to significant follow-up action, to renewed energy and resource allocations to achieve the commitments contained in these documents? Is this progress, a new start? Or will it be business as usual?

The last decade witnessed many conferences which have produced charters, conventions, declarations, or plans of action, often followed by conferences to evaluate progress on the commitments made at earlier conferences, and to set new goals— which, when they are not met, are revised ever further into the future. There is no doubt that there exists today an extensive normative framework for the rights of children. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, together with a substantial range of other human rights instruments and obligations, did not exist at the start of the last decade. The 1990s saw the SAARC Decade Plan of Action for the Girl Child and the 1996 Rawalpindi Resolution on Children of South Asia. South Asian countries developed their decade Plans of Action to meet goals set at the World Summit for Children in 1990, and each has duly reported on its progress. But the fact remains that countries rarely meet such goals, and there is no great demand for accountability. New commitments are made, new targets set, and the world carries on.

This is business as usual. But when progress for children falls below expectations and commitments, this is a clear indication that business as usual is not enough. So if we are to have summitry, let us have one of a somewhat different kind. What does that mean?

First, long lists of goals are recipes for failure. It is difficult to address a wide array of commitments. But the identification of a few key flagship targets can bind leaders and people in a common determination to make a real difference. Whether it is that final push to eradicate polio, to achieve universal child immunisation, to

iodise all salt, or whether it is agreement on a more complex goal— to end exploitative child labour or to ensure that all children get a basic education of decent quality— let one or two goals become the focus for rapid and concrete achievements for children. Commitment to goals needs to be immediately followed by commitment to action, the mobilisation of energy and resources, and accountability and monitoring mechanisms.

In this way, goals become achievable, encouraging others to be set and attained. If summitry is to retain its credibility, it is important that summits move beyond the ritual of setting goals, to the definition of how they are to be achieved. It is equally important that such gatherings are immediately followed up by the allocation of the necessary resources for the achievement of goals set. It is time to back up target-setting with resourcing plans and financing strategies.

The mobilisation of new, extended partnerships for children is a second element in the progression from the definition of targets to their achievement. The Kathmandu Understanding that emerged from the South Asia High-Level Meeting on Children in May 2001 emphasised the importance of partnerships for making substantive progress towards the achievement of progress. Leaders of governments have their obligations. But in today's globalising world, the private sector also has increasing power and resources, and a concomitant responsibility, which can be directed to children's benefit. South Asia already has outstanding examples of how this corporate social responsibility can be exercised. At the other end of the scale, parents and care-givers are accountable for the rights and well-being of their children in the home. But the poor and marginalised amongst them, their own rights violated, their resources scarce, require support, skills and access to knowledge so that they too can meet their obligations.

Some readers may be disturbed by this perhaps overly sombre review of the situation of the child in South Asia. Yet seldom has there been a time when proactive, constructive leadership for children is more needed. Tensions within and between the countries of the region are high. Violence touches children in many walks of life. The crisis in neighbouring Afghanistan is a stark reminder of the failure of leadership, national and international, to pursue peace, to invest in poverty reduction, to invest in children. Afghan boys have had ample opportunity to take up arms, but children— boys and girls— have had almost no opportunity to go to school, to learn for a better future.

Adults, especially those in positions of power, are responsible and accountable for the choices they make — for mortgaging the future or for investing in it, and in the children who are our common future. The leaders of South Asia meeting now in Kathmandu have the opportunity to make this summit one to remember — the Summit which progressed from rhetoric, to commitment, to action, to achievement. The children of South Asia deserve no less. △

Waiting to be heard at the Subcontinental centre

Bundelkhand is a region at the heart of South Asia, but you will not find it demarcated on the map. The evolution of history has decided that this historic region does not require recognition.

by *Lubna Marium*

I might be writing about Birbhum in West Bengal or about Rajshahi in Bangladesh, so striking are the similarities with Bundelkhand. The divides are not based on centre-state fault-lines but on differences between neo-urban and rural socio-cultural aspirations.

As the Bombay-Howrah Mail chugged its way across mile after rugged mile of barren, undulating terrain, interspersed with small patches of scrub forests and rocky outcrops, young eyes, accustomed to mere patches of blue sky above the bustle of Mumbai streets, stared transfixed, beyond the rattling window, far into the distant horizon. Then suddenly, furrowed brows cleared and the preschooler from Andheri turned and addressed his bored companion, slumbering with the sway of the train, "Papa, you're always complaining there is no space in Bombay. Can't we come and live here?"

Yes, that's how the vastness of the gently rolling plains of Bundelkhand hit you when you first see them. This semi-arid plateau, the land of the Bundela Thakurs, set in the heart of India derives its name from 'bund', 'a drop', in allusion to the attempted self-sacrifice by the founder of the clan, a Gaharwar Rajput. His son was born from the drops of blood, which fell on the altar of Vindhyabasini Devi.

Tales of the Bundeli tracts

Bundelkhand is located in the central Hindi belt, south of the Yamuna River, with Chambal marking its western boundary. Crossing beyond the Vindhya Ranges, the Gondwana (Mahadeo) Hills form its southern limits, while its eastern edges are enclosed by the Maikal, Bhandar and Keimur Ranges and the lower Ken River. Bundelkhand includes the Jalaun, Jhansi, Lalitpur, Hamirpur Districts and the Nareini and Karvi tehsils of Banda district in Uttar Pradesh and the Panna, Chattarpur, Tikamgarh, Datia, Sagar, Damoh, Narasinghapur Districts of Madhya Pradesh. However, bits of Jabalpur, Hoshangabad, Raisen, Vidisha, Guna, Shivpur, Gwalior and Bhind are also considered to be

Bundeli tracts.

Tales of romance and valour make up the history of this land. The Chandela Temples of Khajuraho (Chattarpur) are monuments dedicated to love; the glorious stupa of Sanchi near Vidisha is a reminder of the lovely Buddhist maiden, Vidisha-mahadevi, whose love is said to have inspired the ruthless Mauryan conqueror Ashoka to assume the mantle of 'Devanam Priyadarshini'—one of the most humane rulers to grace the annals of history; Lakshmi Bai, the brave Rani of Jhansi, shines as the epitome of courage; and the forests of Chitrakoot (Banda) are immortally bound with the myths of the exile of Ram, Laksman and Sita.

Never a major power centre, the history of Bundelkhand is that of lesser, more localised dynasties and their monuments stand testimony to the merchants and craftsmen who lived under their protection.

Besides being referred to in the *Mahabharata* as the land of the Chedis and though it contains Gupta Era ruins located in Eron (Sagar), Bundelkhand's recent past is a story of alliances and misalliances between the Chandels, the Bundelas, Marathas and Mughal subalterns. Chandel power reached its greatest height by the 10th century CE. Paramal, the sixteenth king of the Chandels, lost his kingdom to Qutab-ud-din in 1203 and thence they ruled as petty Rajas. The Bundela-Mughal equation went through many variations, until Chhatarasal, with the help of the Marathas, became the most important leader of the Bundelas, holding sway over most of western Bundelkhand by the beginning of the 17th century. Chhatarasal is known to have bequeathed one-third of his territory to the Marathas on his death.

British troops first entered Bundelkhand in 1776. A Gosain religious mendicant, Himmat Bahadur, rose to power and allied with the British to defeat Shamsheer Bahadur, a descendant of the Maratha Peshwa, Bajirao and his wild and beautiful consort Meherunnessa Begum. Both the Bahadurs were later made Nawabs under British tutelage. The British acquired Jhansi City

in 1886 from Sindhia in exchange for Gwalior fort and Morar. Post-independence Bundelkhand remains divided between the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Cultural Bundelkhand

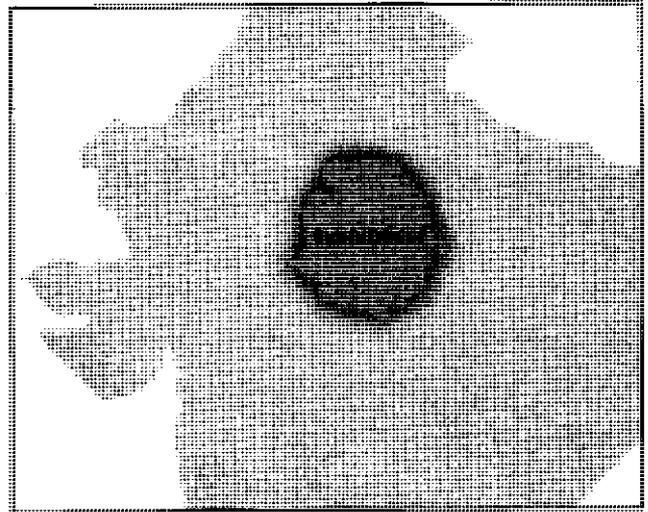
That is the story of the kings of Bundelkhand. Here, at the centre of South Asia, though, reality is deliciously multifaceted. Stone implements found in Banda and other tracts of the Vindhya testify to the presence of prehistoric people in Bundelkhand. The jungles of central India and its inhabitants have a strong infusion of Dravidian blood. The principal tribes are the Kols, Khangars, Saharias and Gonds, who though nominally Hinduised continue to practice animistic beliefs. The Kols, from the wooded areas of Chitrakoot, are a people whose entire lifestyle used to be shaped by the forests they dwelt in. The Gonds are believed to have dwelt in Panna, Sagar and Damoh areas since as far back as 5000 BCE. Every fifth person in Madhya Pradesh is a tribal.

If it is language which shapes the culture of a people, then it is the late 11th century 'Alhakhand', the first oral epic in Bundeli by Jagnik, composed by a poet patronised by the Chandela King Paramal, which molded the ethos of Bundelkhand. The ballads about the courageous feudal lords Alha and Udal, interwoven with rustic mysticism and codes of moral ideals, have been a favourite for centuries. In villages, the darkening of monsoon clouds signals a break from work to listen to the bards singing the 'Alha' to the beat of rainfall. A lilting dialect of Hindi, Bundeli is derived from Sanskrit and Sauraseni.

However, if Braj is maintained to be the land of devotional music, Bundelkhand is hailed for its *Sringar Kavya* or Lyrics of Romance. It is only natural that this melodious language lends itself to hymns of love. It is in Padmakar Bhatta's 18th century poetry that *Sringar Kavya* reached its greatest heights. The Bundeli poet Maithili Sharan Gupta has said, "We may be backwards in all other fields but romantic poetry is our intrinsic nature." In a 'phag' (Ode to Spring) Padmakar sings:

*Phag ki bhirei abhirei lei gahi Govind bhitar gori
Ayi kari man ki Padmakar upar nai abir ki jhori.
Cheen pitambar kammar tei su bida dai meerd kapolan rori.
Nain nachai kahou muskai, aiyyo Lala phir khelon hori.*

A definitive feature of Bundelkhand is the happy co-existence of various religious beliefs. Before and after Mahavir Swami's sojourn through Bundelkhand, Jainism found a lasting foothold in the area. Sonagiri, Dronagiri, Deogarh and Khajuraho are all revered Jain pilgrimage sites. The business community in the urban areas is largely Jain. During the Khalji and Tughlakh eras, many Sufi saints settled in various parts of Bundelkhand with a growing number of disciples. The *dar-gah* of Khurram Shah in Konch and of Mangal Peer in



Sagar stand testimony to this. Sevara and Kalpi are well known centres of Islamic learning. It is said that the Bundela king Chhatarasal had gifted 700 bighas of land to the Sufi saint Hazrat Mubarak Shah to establish his *astana*. The advent of the British brought Catholic, Protestant and Presbyterian Christian beliefs. Quaint little churches in the Gothic style dot the countryside. Missionary education is still rated highly among the affluent classes and continues to provide schooling even in small towns and villages.

Of course, religion still remains firmly instituted in the realm of faith with very little inter-mingling. Rare is the Pramani sect, which worships both the flute of Krishna and the Moon of Islam as symbols of integration. Founded by Devachand, it was promulgated by Pranath, who founded a centre in Panna, which continues to attract, from far and wide, followers of the Pramani belief. In this age of sectarianism promoted by organisations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Islamic group SIMI, one wonders if such a dialogue between faiths will ever again be allowed its natural development.

The flip side

This is the mosaic on which is bred the common Bundeli. Vitthal Bhai Patel, renowned poet, filmmaker, politician and in the vanguard of the 'Bundelkhand Mukti Morcha', insists that I write about the simplicity and industrious nature of the *samanya Bundeli*.

*Hatte-katte hardo vale, chaordi chakli kathi vale.
Thori kheti-bari rakhe, keval khate-pite-jite.
Deepak ki choti batti ki, mandi ujjiyari ke niche.
Ghanto 'Alha' sunte-sunte so jate murda jaise.*

But why the need for a separate state for Bundelis? Unfortunately, there is a flip side to this story.

The Bundelkhand region is characterised by some of the lowest levels of per capita income and human development in the country. Literacy levels are low,

especially among women, and infant mortality is high. Local inhabitants rely primarily on subsistence, rain-fed, single-crop agriculture and small-scale livestock production for their livelihood, with wheat, grams and oil seeds as predominant crops.

Population density in the region largely correlates with such factors as soil types, natural vegetation, industrialisation, and urbanisation. In rural areas, rising population has led to fragmentation of family land holdings. Human pressures on the existing natural resource base are compounded by livestock pressures: the human-to-livestock ratio is relatively high, almost 1:1, compared with a national ratio of 1:45.

The Bundelkhand region was densely forested until the late 18th century, after which rising demand for wood and agricultural expansion led to deforestation. Post-independence population growth and the Green Revolution brought even larger tracts of land under the plough and further increased wood-based energy needs. These factors, combined with poor land management and ruthless government-approved commercial logging, have drastically reduced forested area in the region. In addition, the growth of private land ownership has led to the rapid decline of forest cover, reducing traditional sources of fuel, fodder and food. Combined with limited rainfall and fresh water resources, this has resulted in low levels of agricultural productivity with many families unable to meet their subsistence needs. Throughout most of the year, the residents of Bundelkhand experience acute scarcity of water for agricultural and domestic use.

Dr R C Srivasta of Banda is an angry man. Over 65 percent of the population is poverty-stricken in his Jhansi District alone, he says. Rates of suicide are unnaturally high. There is a 36 percent migration rate from villages in Bundelkhand in comparison to only 11 percent in the entire country. The backwaters of this region are gravely and continuously dacoit-infested, which has resulted in the closing down of a large number of industries in Chattarpur, Damoh and Panna. But this need not be so, Srivasta explains. Panna District has a wealth of 1.4 million carats of diamond producing potential yet to be mined. Bundelkhand also is rich in sandstone, granite, aluminum, bauxite and other minerals. Building materials from here have found a market in Italy, Germany and Japan. Sagar is a well-known *paan* and *biri* manufacturing area. With the Chambal, Betwa, Dhasan, Ken and Narmada flowing through it, one wonders why women of Bundelkhand walk several kilometres every day in sizzling heat to collect water.

The Chief of Bureau in Sagar of *Rajya ki Nayi Duniya*, Ramshankar Tiwari, is well known in the town for his benevolence and love for all that is Bundeli. His paper regularly publishes articles in the dialect. "Leadership!" he exclaims. "That is the main problem. Bundelkhand and its problems have never been represented properly at legislative or executive forums. They are a people waiting to be heard."

In need of a voice

Where and at what point, then, is the voice of Bundelkhand getting lost? Trudging back from Tiwarji's nondescript two-storey office in the midst of the squalor and bustle of Katra Bazaar in Sagar, I could have been in any *sabzi bazaar*, in any part of the Subcontinent. The same muddy walkways between the rows of vendors squatting on the ground; the same haggling of prices; in fact, almost the same array of vegetables—*aloo*, *pyaz*, *bhindi*, *baigan*; and, of course, the ubiquitous pink and blue polythene carry-bags all over.

For all the heated debates on history and historians, the sameness of the concrete jungles of South Asian urban centres reflects little of their millennia of heritage. Run-down STD/PCO booths, shabby imitations of 'fast-food' centres, dingy cyber-dhabas, video stores and a few shining Marutis squeezing their way between dusty rickshaws and auto-rickshaws on the narrow streets of Sagar— all of this could easily have been a picture of either Multan, Patan, Comilla or Agra city.

And then a miracle happens. Bringing traffic to a halt with the beat of the *dholak*, a band of village bards and danseuses start a *Baredi* (cow-herd in Bundeli)—the tale of the immortal cow-herd Krishna and his retinue of frolicking *gopis*. As a crowd of spectators quickly encircle the streetside performance, an office babu scurrying along, briefcase in hand, warns me in dire tones, "Be careful, *ye log sub daru peekar nachte hai*." Such is the new world when what is most local, most regional, most South Asian and most originally South Asian, is denigrated in the eyes of the bureaucracy, the market and the media.

Obeisance

The distance between the reality of life in the villages of South Asia and the 'virtual reality' of our urban centres is attitudinal rather than spatial. The 'office-babu' in Sagar condemning the revelry of the village danseuses and bards performing in the streets as 'daru-intoxicated *nautankiwalas*' has, in fact, voluntarily distanced himself as far away from his Bundeli heritage as a Delhi-ite sitting a thousand kilometres away.

An 'oral' culture does not, in any way, make it 'less-er' despite our obeisance to technologically advanced textual culture. And material poverty cannot and must not be equated with cultural poverty. Unfortunately, we have learnt to revere the 'text' to the exclusion of the plurality of the non-textual cultural forms. It is this hegemony of homogeneity of the textual and, therefore, the more powerful culture, that has failed to encompass and include the diversity that is South Asia. Little does the 'churning mill' of our educational curricula absorb from its cultural multiplicity.

A couple of years ago, sitting in a Santhal village in Birbhum trying to drill English grammar into the minds of children weary from working in the rice fields, I looked askance at the texts so far removed from their lives. Nowhere will other children learn to understand the

aspirations of local children and their families, nor to honour the sheer hard work that they must take upon themselves to enable them to attend school. This, too, is where the Bundelis lost their identity.

The dreams of Dr Harisingh Gour, one of the brightest sons of Bundelkhand, remain unfulfilled. Dr Gour, who himself, through sheer hard work had broken the shackles of poverty to become the first Vice Chancellor of Delhi University, besides holding other posts of importance, had hoped the impetus of education would bring economic advance to this land. Through the years, there have been doctrates galore from Sagar University – in Botany, Pharmacy, Criminology- with most their first aim being 'to leave Bundelkhand'. A lot of learning, certainly, but not enough of this will translate into the welfare of the Bundelis.

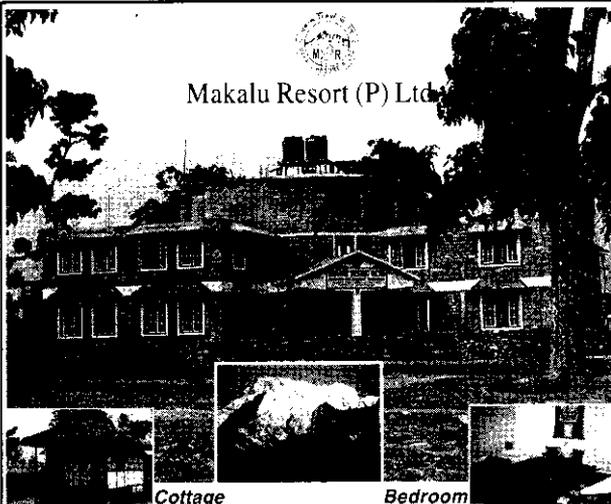
Town and country

Of course, through the years both the urban and the rural cultures have come to represent—equally—the two-faces of South Asia. We cannot wish either away. However, these differences must not be further allowed to culminate in a conflict of aspirations. Maybe getting to know each other's strengths and weaknesses, developing a respect for our 'I-ness' and the other's 'otherness' and allowing all our multifaceted sides to develop simultaneously will allow South Asia to reach solutions.

During another train journey, in a chance meeting with Medha Patkar, the person who epitomises all that is good in South Asian activism, I had asked if she thought NBA's movement was sustainable and she had replied, "This will never end, in itself. This... sort of retaining of this seed of simple-living, this seed of self reliance, this seed of equality of justice." The Narmada Bachao Andolan, which she chaperones, goes beyond the movement against the dam to critically oppose the consumer culture, lifestyles and goals of modern civilisation, the inequality and injustice which have become a part of the current world order, and to suggest an alternative vision for the future—a life of simplicity, frugality and tolerance based on biospherical justice. She has said, "There is a need to empower people themselves to fight with a mass base. Mass-roots not grass-roots. Grassroots are very superficial. But this specific, micro-level base, will lead to a macro-level impact on policy planning processes and structures, including the present politics."

Advice well worth listening to. However, the question is, "Are enough people listening?" Certainly, the Bundelis are a people badly in need of being heard. ▽

(Shama Parveen, a Bundeli journalist from Sagar, helped with researching this article.)



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Human Trafficking : A \$7 billion business.

UNIFEM, SARO: The global community has been constantly responding to the menace of human trafficking by formulating numerous national and international conventions designed to mitigate this rampant desecration of human rights. Some of these are the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) 1989. The Beijing + 5 conference as well as the recent SAARC Summit in Male agreed upon the need to work together against trafficking. Yet, human trafficking continues to generate \$ 7 billion every year as the third largest illegal transnational business after drugs and arms. The merchandise for this lucrative trade is mostly women and children from marginal communities looking for

viable employment and means of survival. The traffickers use the bait of better life opportunities to deceive victims mired in social and economic deprivation. Trafficking is particularly sinister and insidious because it exploits the innate human need to migrate for better opportunities.

Women and young girls are primarily trafficked to satiate the demand of the global sex trade. A fact most of us are familiar with nevertheless complacent about. This complacency helps us overlook the naked reality of the near total dehumanisation of the victims through trafficking. Before they are trafficked these women like countless others, are individuals seeking avenues to steer their lives towards a better future. Trafficking objectifies them into mindless purchasable bodies up for sale. It seems empty to state that their human rights are violated when in fact the spectre of violence and

abuse leaves little space for them to even comprehend that they have human rights, just like anyone else. The underlying principle of trafficking is the sheer powerlessness of the victims



It's time you know...

- Human trafficking generates \$ 7 billion annually despite numerous laws and conventions.
- Trafficking is the extreme manifestation of the dehumanisation and objectification of humans, especially women.
- An anti-trafficking effort must implement laws.
- Provide viable economic choices to vulnerable groups.



arising out of gender disparities and the lack of economic choices.

Any move towards the elimination of trafficking must attack the causes of trafficking. The vulnerable communities, especially women, must be provided with viable and safe economic opportunities.

Although each nation-state has laws and policies against trafficking it is about time that these are effectively implemented to make trafficking a risky business. All the different actors whether in the judiciary, the administration, the media or the NGOs, must work towards making human rights a meaningful reality for the victims of trafficking.

Nazma and her son had joined a group from Bangladesh with the intention of going to the Middle East for employment. Among the group were 12 children heading for Dubai to be used as camel jockeys.

The adults masqueraded as the parents of the children making their way to Mumbai. The Indian police raided their house and the traffickers were arrested.

Nazma was returned to Bangladesh by the Indian authorities. Her son, however, was missing. He was located with the help of an NGO and repatriated. She now works at the NGO office and participates in awareness workshops, telling her story and urging other parents not to participate in the traffic of their own and others' children.



RESUSCITATING SAARC AT Summit No. 11

SAARC is at such a point in its history that it must now be moving, and be seen to be moving, decisively forward. The alternative is regression and obsolescence

by Sridhar K. Khatri

The SAARC process survives on the summits, and during the sometimes extended gaps between meetings it wanders like a rudderless ship, without any power or a sense of direction. Since the organisation was established in 1985, at least four scheduled summits have been scuttled for various reasons. The first was in 1989, when President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka expressed his inability to hold the meeting given the presence of the Indian peace-keeping force (IPKF) in his country. The venue was moved to the Maldives the next year, but when Sri Lanka prepared to hold the following Summit in 1991, it had to be postponed at the last minute as King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan expressed his inability to attend on "health grounds". The situation proved to be embarrassing for the host country and to SAARC itself, particularly since the leaders of Pakistan and Bangladesh had already arrived in Colombo for the summit. In December 1993, the summit scheduled for Dhaka could not be held due to the communal riots that engulfed India and some of its neighbouring countries in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. And in November 1999, India called for a postponement of the Summit in Kathmandu just two weeks before the event, "on account of the military coup d'état in Pakistan".

When SAARC leaders finally get together for the Kathmandu Summit in January 2002 after a gap of nearly three years, they will be trying to make the best of a checkered history. This meeting is happening under the shadow of yet another round of dangerously escalated India-Pakistan tensions, following the failed Agra meeting of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and General Pervez Musharraf, the confusion following the American action in Afghanistan, and, lastly, the terrorist attack of 13 December on the Lok Sabha.

The slow pace of the development of South Asian regionalism has left a mixed impression on the peoples of the region. Cynics often compare the member countries of SAARC to seven porcupines attempting to consummate a relationship, while its staunchest supporters swear by it as the most viable means for growth and

development of the region. Even the Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) that was mandated by the 1997 Male Summit to present a plan of action for SAARC "that can and must be achieved by the year 2020" provided varied assessment of the SAARC process. While recognising that the organisation's achievements over the years had been significant, it nevertheless argued that "it has fallen short of the aspirations underlying the formation of the Association" due to the lack of political will, vicissitudes of the regional political climate, and lack of adequate resources for carrying out these commitments. It added, "As a consequence, disjunction developed between the decisions taken by the association and their implementation."

The "eminent persons" point at the following flaws in the SAARC process:

- failure to take up hard core economic issues for nearly eight years after the organisation's establishment;
- only marginal progress achieved through SAPTA, the preferential trade agreement;
- inability to develop a collective leverage in global economic negotiations;
- failure to include key economic issues like energy, manufacturing, services, money and finance within the SAARC area of cooperation;
- absence of any clearly delineated set of priorities for selection of its Integrated Program of Action (IPA) activities and plans of action to implement them;
- inability of the sectoral 'regional centres' to emerge as the centres of excellence, and their involvement mostly in routine activities which are no different from the national centres with which they are associated;
- ineffectiveness of the regional conventions (such as on Suppression of Terrorism and Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances) and agreements (such as the SAARC Food Security Reserve) in building inter-state relationships within the region; and
- stagnation of schemes involving people-to-people contact that have "degenerated into being a mere tokenism".



Equally critical was another panel created by the Secretary General of SAARC, the Independent Expert Group (IEG), which was asked to examine the core activities of the organisation under the rubric of IPA. It noted that despite the initiative taken by governments in 1995, "there had been no effective improvement in the functioning of the IPA so vital for the SAARC process." The IEG enumerated a variety of reasons for this failure:

- ♦ lack of prioritisation in the activities of the organisation's Technical Committees;
- ♦ inadequate level of representation of member states;
- ♦ duplication of activities;
- ♦ lack of well-identified, target-oriented and time-bound programmes;
- ♦ lack of adequate monitoring, implementation and evaluation;
- ♦ inability to sustain activities once initiated;
- ♦ budgetary constraints;
- ♦ poor coordination; and
- ♦ non-implementation of decisions.

When the leaders meet in Kathmandu, they will have to deal with the backlog of issues and give direction on the course SAARC is to take for the future. Given the backdrop of regional tensions, some observers are saying that SAARC should not aim high during this 2002 summit, and consider just the reality of a summit meeting as success enough. This would be most inappropriate, however, because one should expect much more from the SAARC process even in the midst of the regional geopolitical crisis. SAARC is at such a point in its history that it must now be moving, and be seen to be moving, decisively forward. The alternative is regression, obsolescence, and perhaps even a tragic winding down of a process that even today carries so much promise.

Kathmandu agenda

There are many issues in need of action before this summit. Among them is the draft treaty on the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which was circulated to the member governments more than a year and half ago, to which only one country has so far given its feedback to the Secretariat. As the decision to have free trade by 2001 has already been made moot, a concrete decision needs to be taken on how and when the provision for free trade in the region is to be implemented.

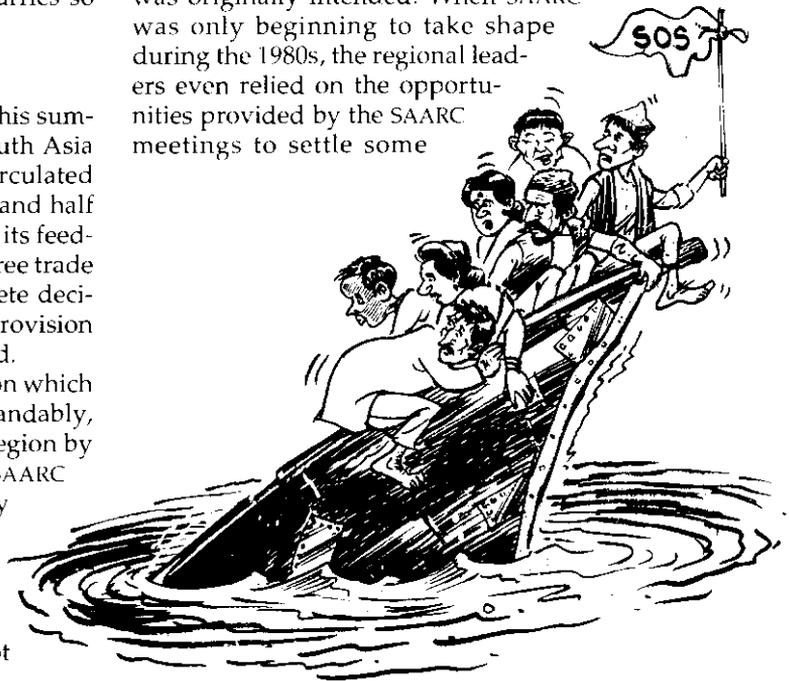
Another issue is that of poverty alleviation, on which an earlier Summit had prematurely, if understandably, called for the eradication of poverty from the region by 2002. There is also the matter of drafting a SAARC Social Charter, on which some work has already been done although work remains. The Report of the Group of Eminent Persons also lies on the table before the prime ministers and presidents in Kathmandu. This Report contains a comprehensive set of recommendations for not

only taking SAARC into an economic union by the beginning of the second decade of this millennium, but addresses social issues and the development of SAARC institutions to meet future challenges. Since a September 1999 informal meeting of the South Asian foreign ministers in New York already accepted in principle the creation of an economic union in South Asia, the Summiters will also face questions on this front.

Past summit experiences show that while inaugural speeches of the South Asian leaders can be very bold and upbeat, the final declaration often tends to be diluted and indecisive. On top of that, when SAARC falters at the implementation of even the downscaled declarations and agreed programmes, the consequences are most debilitating for an organisation with such an image problem. This is particularly so since SAARC lives amidst unexpectedly high expectations built up over the years among the peoples of the region.

Even a high-sounding declaration, so easily drafted in earlier summits, may be a challenge during the 11th summit, given the state of relations between India and Pakistan. On the other hand, the challenge before the presidents and prime ministers is to go beyond the high-sounding declaration, to see that some important components required to move the organisation forward are incorporated in its content. They include a number of principles that are important in resuscitating the SAARC process.

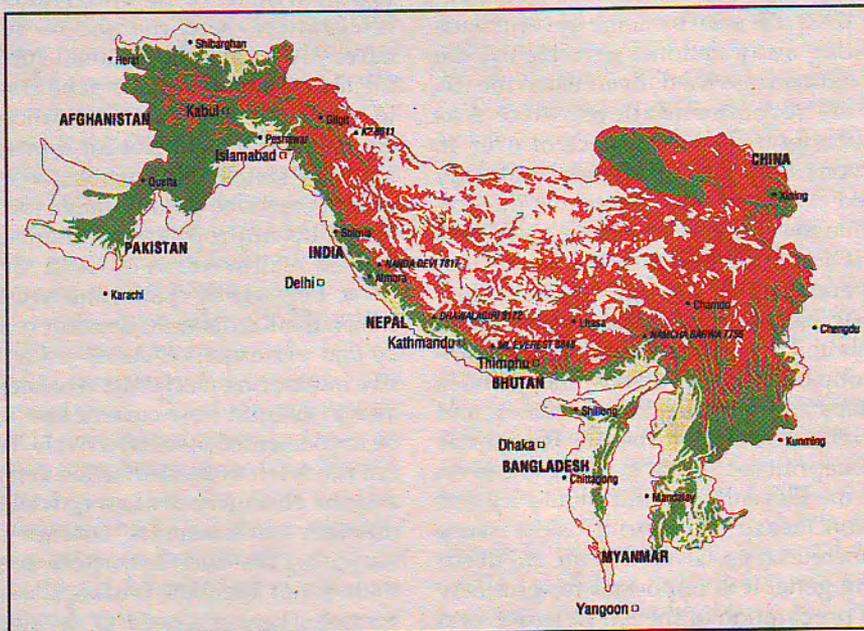
■ *Reaffirmation of political will*—There is a strong feeling in the region that the necessary political will to make regionalism succeed is lacking in South Asia. This could not be further from the truth, since without a political will SAARC would not have existed in the first place. What maybe be lacking today is the sustenance factor to get regionalism moving in the direction that was originally intended. When SAARC was only beginning to take shape during the 1980s, the regional leaders even relied on the opportunities provided by the SAARC meetings to settle some



ICIMOD and the International Year of Mountains 2002

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) was established in 1983 out of widespread concern about the environmental degradation of mountain habitats and the increasing poverty of mountain communities in the Hindu-Kush Himalayas.

The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, covers 3,500 kilometres of mountain areas from Afghanistan in the west to Pakistan, India, China, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar in the east. The region is home to approximately 150 million people and the topography and events in the mountains affect the lives of many more in the plains and river basins below. The region is not only the world's highest mountain region, but also the most populous and fragile. It is at one and the same time a region of great risk and hazard and one of opportunities and wealth in terms of natural resources, cultures, and beauty. Mountains everywhere are the guardians of one of the earth's most precious resources: water. Mountains are the water towers of the world.



To draw the world's attention to the issues of mountain areas, the UN designated 2002 AD as the International Year of Mountains (IYM). It is a year that has come to have special significance for mountain peoples and the organisations and individuals working with them. As one of these mountain organisations, the first to be established globally for integrated mountain development, ICIMOD has a programme of activities for IYM.

During a recent meeting of the ICIMOD Board of Governors in Bhutan, it was decided to launch activities that include renewed collaboration with Afghanistan, an International Conference of Mountain Women in Kathmandu, Nepal (May 2002) and a High Summit video conference among the mountain regions of the world (May 2002) in collaboration with the Italian High Summit. Other regions involved include Africa, Europe and South and North America. This occasion will be aired worldwide on the internet and on television. Noted scholars and personalities will discuss topics such as nature, environment, culture, economy, risks and policy.

Five of ICIMOD's member countries are members of SAARC. The fact that the Eleventh SAARC Summit will take place in Kathmandu at the beginning of January 2002 augurs well for the benefit of mountain people in the region. ICIMOD has a long history of collaboration with the mountainous areas of SAARC countries and will strengthen this collaboration during observance of the International Year of the Mountains. Accordingly, ICIMOD takes advantage of this occasion to welcome all the SAARC delegates to Kathmandu and wish the Summit a resounding success.

bilateral issues behind the official forum. During the Dhaka (1985) and Bangalore (1986) summits, the leaders of Bangladesh and India took time to sort out such issues as the Chakma insurgency and the Teen Bigha dispute, and were also able to make conciliatory steps towards the resolution of some differences over the sharing of river waters. Similar encounters between Indian and Pakistani leaders in Bangalore and Kathmandu (1987) culminated in three major bilateral agreements, among which was an understanding to prohibit attack on each other's nuclear installations and facilities.

Traditionally, regional cooperation has been accepted by governments in South Asia as not being a substitute for bilateral relations. While reiterating that same principle, governments also need to emphasise today that bilateral relations will not be at the cost of the SAARC process, on which more than 1.3 billion people have come to depend.

■ *Expediting economic 'integration'*—The concept of economic integration has been anathema to regionalism in South Asia since it is seen by some governments as somehow wresting away national sovereignty, the *raison d'être* of the nation-state itself. Even when the IEG met to consider its recommendations, there was reluctance to use the term. The experience of over 40 regional organisations from around the globe already disprove this dated notion of what economic integration is. Indeed, while the choice to cooperate and determine timeframes is a political decision, the means that are relied upon operate largely through economic integration. The classic Balassa model used by regional groupings for economic integration is the one recommended by the Group of Eminent Persons, and includes such successive steps as free trade, custom union and finally economic union. Given that the GEP Report has already drawn a blueprint for SAARC to move ahead on economic matters, the Eleventh Summit should try and expedite integration measures by prioritising issues and identifying concrete steps. Given that the old deadline is already long gone, it is important to set a new time frame for the preparation of the SAFTA treaty, and determine when it will be implemented.

■ *Making decisions on social issues through participatory process*—To some extent, civil society, private sectors and the Track II process, in general, are ahead of the inter-governmental process in exploring and identifying some of the core issues that afflict the region. The problem so far is that there exists no effective mechanisms through which their output can reach the decision-making level. Similarly, avenues also need to be found to involve civil society in preparing plans and programmes that affect all the people of the region. The drafting of the SAARC Social Charter through a participatory process is one of many such areas which the Summit can endorse in Kathmandu.

■ *Strengthening SAARC institutional mechanisms*—SAARC's checkered history reveals that some of its institutions are either malfunctioning or operating

below the average capacity needed to make the regional body effective. As the organisation prepares to embrace greater integration, there is a need to strengthen the core institutions without which expansion and consolidation of future regional activities will have no meaning. Decision-making bodies, such as the summits themselves and the Council of Ministers, need to be made functional while meeting on a regular basis under the SAARC Charter principles, while additional ministries (such as finance, planning, commerce, industry, tourism, and so on) have to be roped in to meet future requirements within a clearly-defined institutional structure to harmonise policies of the member states.

On the other hand, supporting SAARC institutions are either non-existent or very weak. Regional financial institutions, such as a regional bank or a South Asian Development Fund, need to be given shape very soon to support projects and programmes that the organisation will have to undertake to sustain greater integration. And the SAARC Secretariat, which is currently seen as a regional foreign ministry of the member states, will have to be restructured to enable it to act as a professional institution, rather than as just another assignment slot for diplomats from individual member states. Obviously, the Kathmandu Summit cannot prescribe a ready-made formula, but it can agree to set up appropriate mechanisms to carry out the needed reform within the next couple of years.

■ *Emphasising efficacy and performance*—A key theme which the Kathmandu Summit could embrace is efficacy and performance. As of today, SAARC has no effective monitoring mechanisms to keep track of its activities and to suggest how current and future programs may be implemented more effectively. Whatever runs or does not run is left to the dedication and ability of individuals and the concurrence of an unwieldy structure of seven member governments' foreign ministries. It is not surprising that such a structure does not function, when there is not adequate feedback, monitoring and quality control. There is a need to develop a new mechanism, preferably responsible to the Council of Ministers, which will not only act as watchdog but also prioritise programmes and chart sequential steps toward the goal of regional integration.

Diplomacy is the art of the possible. Anything can happen during the Kathmandu Summit, despite the doomsday theories. SAARC's future is contingent upon political initiatives. Although the summit is going to be held in the shadow of regional tension caused by terrorism, even a simple commitment by member states to promptly approve the required national 'enabling legislation' of the SAARC Convention on Suppression of Terrorism could significantly improve the regional political environment. This treaty has already been ratified by all the countries of the region, though it is awaiting enabling legislation in each of the countries that would make it operational.

A SOUTH ASIA

Nuclear Weapons Free Zone

Kargil was the first war ever between states possessing nuclear weapons. The doomsday clock is ticking and South Asia's civil society needs to do something.

by Zia Mian, AH Nayyar, Sandeep Pandey and Admiral Ramu Ramdas

Every country in South Asia faces myriad challenges and dangers. But there are some challenges that can perhaps only be solved by the people and governments of the region acting in concert. It was this insight that inspired the creation of SAARC a decade and half ago. Just as dangerous as the nuclear payloads they can deliver, Pakistan and India's development of ballistic missiles, with ranges of several thousand kilometres, places the very space within which South Asian politics is conducted in jeopardy.

In May 1998, after New Delhi and Islamabad tested nuclear weapons, both governments declared their reliance on nuclear weapons as part of their military and political strategies. The tests came after a half-century of tensions between Pakistan and India, which have plagued efforts to build prosperous, democratic and just societies in these countries. The three major wars (in 1948, 1965 and 1971) punctuated an enduring arms race that drained away scarce resources. Nuclearisation has now made things worse. The 1999 war between Pakistan and India in the Kargil region of Kashmir, the first war ever between two nuclear weapons states, raises the prospect that the next war may deliver a catastrophe beyond reckoning.

The political hostility that has marked official Pakistan-India relations has prevented all but the most limited efforts at regional cooperation; SAARC has achieved little but survival. Everyone is familiar with the Kashmir dispute as the major source of the tension between India and Pakistan. While the other South Asian countries should try to engage India and Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute, the nature of the dispute and that of SAARC limits the scope and form of possible engagement. At present, it seems there is little the countries of the region can do except urge the two states to find a peaceful settlement that respects the wishes of the Kashmiri people.

Few recognise that even if India and Pakistan were to resolve the Kashmir dispute, they would not necessarily either give up their nuclear weapons or resolve their mutual hostility. The experience of the superpow-

er Cold War makes this abundantly clear. Even though the obvious sources of conflict between the United States and Soviet Union ended a decade ago with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the logic of nuclear weapons has continued between the two. Despite limited cuts, the US and Russia still retain nuclear arsenals of about 10,000 warheads each, with several thousand weapons on hair-trigger alert, ready to launch. This suggests that India and Pakistan's nuclear weapons may ensure that the future of South Asia, too, will remain in jeopardy until these weapons are eliminated.

The nuclearisation of the Subcontinent has not been without contest. Against the backdrop of the nuclear weapons tests, peace groups sprang up spontaneously in towns and cities across India and Pakistan. Building on years of work by a handful of anti-nuclear activists in both countries, these groups articulated deep public concern about the grave dangers posed by nuclear weapons, sought for ways to educate and mobilise local communities, and reached out to make common cause with other civil society groups working on issues of sustainable development and social justice.

The past two years have witnessed the transition from small, scattered groups to a larger, more organised peace movement in Pakistan and India. In Pakistan, the need to coordinate the demands and activities of the diverse groups that became engaged against nuclear weapons led to a major convention in Karachi, in January 1999. This meeting, attended by about 500 activists and representatives of groups, launched the Pakistan Peace Coalition (PPC), a national network of groups organised around a common agenda of nuclear disarmament, peace and justice. A similar national convention was held in Delhi, in November 2000, involving several hundred Indian groups, who came together to form the Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace (CNDP). The speed and success of these efforts was, in part, due to the larger flourishing of civil society and social movements and more particularly, the organisational work that in 1994 created and subsequently has sustained the Pakistan-India People's

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Forum for Peace and Democracy, a major civil society dialogue bringing together Pakistani and Indian activists and groups working for peace, democracy, social justice, and human rights.

An important part of the politics of the peace movements in Pakistan and India has been a recognition of the history, geography, culture, problems, hopes and dreams, that South Asia's peoples share with each other. The search for a just and democratic alternative to the misgovernance, the grinding poverty, the often violent ethnic and religious conflicts, and growing religious fundamentalism that afflicts South Asia and ties its people together in misery, must include a South Asia-wide effort by civil society and governments. This search for collective, regional solutions is made all the more important as India and Pakistan press on with their nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, and as the pressures of globalisation and the need to negotiate with international capital and international financial institutions pose ever greater challenges to the people and policy makers of the region.

Following sustained discussions between Indian and Pakistani peace activists, the idea of a South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty has grown increasingly appealing. A peace movement-organised consultation in early 2001, in which the authors (representing the respective Pakistani and Indian peace networks), which traveled to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, found strong support for the idea of a nuclear weapons free zone treaty among civil society in the non-nuclear weapons states in South Asia. There was enthusiasm in these countries for a process in which national civil society and respective governments would work together to negotiate and bring into force such a treaty.

A South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty would build on a long and extensive history of disarmament efforts around the world. There are a number of nuclear weapons free zone treaties in force already in large parts of the world. The 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco established a Latin American nuclear weapons free

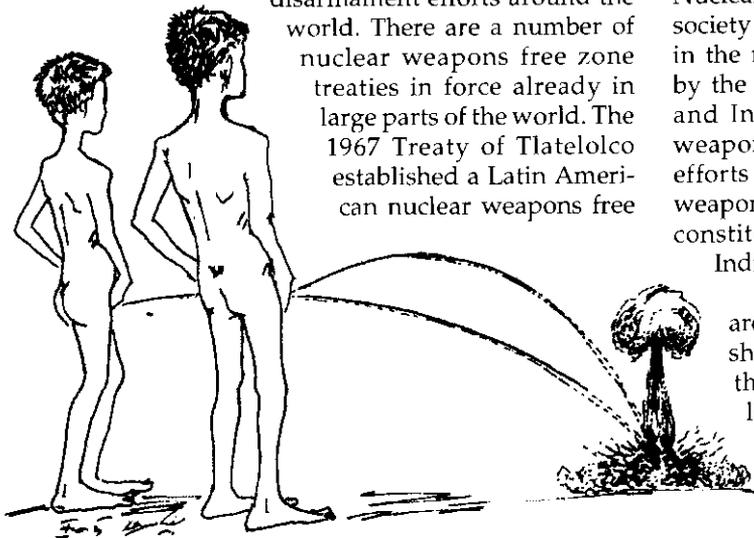
zone; the 1985 Rarotonga Treaty set up the South Pacific nuclear free zone; the 1995 Bangkok Treaty created a nuclear weapon free zone in South-East Asia; the 1996 Pelindaba Treaty established the African nuclear weapon free zone.

Some possible basic commitments of a South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty can be derived from the most recent of these treaties. A South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty would forbid each signatory state from possessing or seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, and includes a ban on research and development on such weapons, as well as outlawing production of the fissile materials used in nuclear weapons. It would also forbid the transit of ships and aircraft carrying nuclear weapons and the dumping of radioactive waste.

Admittedly, given their nuclear ambitions, India and Pakistan would oppose such a treaty. But the non-nuclear states of South Asia could negotiate among themselves and bring into force a South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty. None of these states have ambitions to wage nuclear war against their neighbours, near or far. Having signed the Treaty, the governments of the non-nuclear states and civil society across the region would be in a far stronger position to make India and Pakistan become parties, using all diplomatic opportunities and means to bring this about. There is a precedent. In Latin America, it was the smaller, non-nuclear, states of that region that created the Tlatelolco nuclear weapons free zone treaty and eventually persevered in convincing Brazil and Argentina, both of which had advanced programs to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, to sign. Closer to home, it is also worth recalling the historical role Bangladesh played in launching the idea of a South Asian regional organisation in the late 1970s and in hosting the first SAARC summit in 1985.

A combined effort in support of a South Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty by South Asian civil society and the governments of the non-nuclear states in the region would enormously strengthen demands by the national networks of peace groups in Pakistan and India for their states to give up their nuclear weapons and join the Treaty. Taken together, these efforts would make clear that a rejection of nuclear weapons is a basic feature of the region's identity and constitute a fundamental challenge to Pakistan and India's claims to lead South Asia.

The alternatives for the people of South Asia are stark. Either, the future may mean living in the shadow of nuclear war while being forced into cut-throat competition with each other in the globalised economy, where the South Asian poor will lose what little security of livelihood they have. Or, South Asians can work together for a nuclear weapons free, peaceful and co-operative neighbourhood, where resources are concentrated on meeting the needs of people. ▽



Who can go further in South Asia?

Nepal, India and Area Studies

There is a lot of talk on the need to understand each other in South Asia, but strangely nothing is being done to promote area studies Take one instance: the low level of intellectual activity in India about Nepal.

by Pratyoush Onta

While academics in one or another South Asian country have occasionally taken stock of their own national corpus of regional studies, they have seldom studied the obstacles that hinder a robust future for regional studies in South Asia taken as a whole. If such an exercise were to take place, the first task would be an analysis of the substantive orientations of previous scholarly research done in any particular South Asian country on any of the its neighbouring countries. Subsequently one would discuss how these orientations aid or do not aid the flowering of a good regional scholarship in South Asia and then consider institutions which can execute research on the concerned subjects. This kind of exercise is necessary because it is quite clear that without strong home bases for social science research activity in each of the South Asian countries, no region-wide South Asian scholarship can flourish. However we have not seen much of this kind of analysis.

A reading of South Asian academic journals, as well as *Himal*, indicates that there is not much reflection going on in the realm of area studies in South Asia. This lack is significant, at a time when much ink is being spent on the possibilities and limitations of SAARC and non-official South Asian cooperation initiatives. While there is a lot of talk about understanding each other in South Asia, one of the most reliable methods to achieve that goal, academic research about each other, remains mediocre at best. We can examine the extent of this problem by looking at the case of area studies in India, with particular focus on how Nepal has been studied there.

Area Studies in India: Focus on Nepal

Nepal Studies in post-Independence India started in the late 1950s after the establishment of the Indian School of International Studies in Delhi in 1955. This institution was founded at a time, in the words of B Vivekanandan, an area studies expert at Jawaharlal Nehru University, "When newly independent India felt

the imperative need for competent Indian academic specialists who could regularly watch developments in other areas of the world, interpret their significance, and give a studied second opinion or a critical evaluation of India's own external policies." As one former director of this School, MS Rajan, recalled, its founder A Appadorai was convinced that, "without an institution training specialists on international and area studies...it was difficult to promote Indian expertise in these fields."

That was at a time when India and its prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, were especially keen to foster friendly relations between Asian countries during the 1940s and the 1950s. Area studies programmes were established as a way to respond to this imperative. The Department of African Studies was established at the University of Delhi in December 1954 and the Indian School of International Studies was established in October 1955 with sponsorship from the Indian Council of World Affairs. In 1963, the University Grants Commission (UGC) of India appointed a committee to prepare a plan for the promotion of area studies. The committee recommended that area studies be promoted in a small number of universities and emphasised that reference materials, language training and fieldwork be made essential aspects of areas studies programmes. These recommendations were accepted by the UGC and, accordingly, more than 20 area study centres went on to be established in Indian universities.

Within five years of the founding of the Indian School of International Studies, Nepal Studies was started there in the form of research on political history and contemporary politics of Nepal as well as on Indo-Nepal relations. On the first of these topics, Satish Kumar did a dissertation on Nepal under the hereditary rule of the Ranas and Anirudha Gupta wrote about political developments in Nepal since the end of Rana rule in 1951. Kanchanmoy Mojumdar analysed India-Nepal relations during the period between 1837 and 1877. But the School was not the only place where research

on themes related to Nepal was picked up in the 1950s and the 1960s. A few researchers located in traditional departments elsewhere also worked on Nepal. One can recall, for instance, the work of historian KC Chaudhuri on Anglo-Nepal relations until 1816, completed at Calcutta University in the late 1950s. Political scientist Ramakant (who used only one name) completed a dissertation on the same subject at the University of Allahabad in 1960, focusing on the period between 1816 and 1877. Considering the time at which these research projects were completed and given the material and other constraints under which they worked, scholars like Kumar, Mojumdar, Gupta, Chaudhuri and Ramakant must be credited for setting up the initial high standards in Nepal Studies in post-Independence India.

The Indian School of International Studies was merged with the newly founded Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in June 1970 and is now known as the School of International Studies (SIS). Thirty years later, this school and two other institutions in India—the South Asia Studies Centre of the University of Rajasthan in Jaipur and the Centre for the Study of Nepal (CSN) in Banaras Hindu University (BHU)—are the main locations where social science research on Nepal is conducted on a regular basis. At SIS, Nepal has received attention from researchers affiliated predominantly with its South Asian Studies Division. About 40 MPhil. and PhD dissertations have been completed on Nepal-related subjects. Bilateral relations and diplomatic history (India-Nepal, Nepal-China) and research on the politics of Nepal since the late Rana era (c post-1940), informed by perspectives arising from the disciplines of political science, political history and international relations, have dominated the themes selected for study by researchers at SIS. On the rare occasion when researchers at SIS have focused on non-traditional subjects, these topics have also been amongst those in which the State in India was very interested. This can be seen, for instance, in the work of Mollica Dastider on Muslims and the State in Nepal, the topic of her recently completed dissertation at SIS. Dastider began her research on the Nepali Muslims in the early 1990s when sections of the Indian establishment started accusing them of being implicated in Pakistani ISI attempts to use Nepal as a launching pad for anti-Indian activities.

Nepal has also been studied by researchers affiliated with the South Asia Studies Centre of the University of Rajasthan. This Centre was established in 1963 by SP Varma as a programme in the University's Department of Political Science and was adopted by the UGC as a separate Area Studies centre only in 1968. In an unpublished report written in 1981, it is mentioned that when the Centre was established it was decided that it "would not be wedded to any given theoretical framework". Instead, it "preferred to adopt a multidisciplinary approach with a view to developing a com-

prehensive understanding of the socio-economic and political realities of the countries in South Asia". Nepal Studies became a subject pursued at the Centre from 1963 itself with the induction of Ramakant, who as mentioned earlier, had done a dissertation on 19th century Indo-Nepal relations. Some of the early Nepal Studies research students at the Centre included SD Muni (currently professor at SIS, JNU), RS Chauhan, and MD Dharamdasani who now heads CSN in Varanasi. The Centre has trained several other Nepal experts, almost all of them political scientists. Notable among them is BC Upreti who is its current director. Articles on Nepal by these researchers and others have regularly appeared in the Centre's journal, *South Asian Studies*, which was established in 1966. Several members of the faculty have written books on Nepal.

Muni's doctoral research resulted in the book, *Foreign Policy of Nepal* (1973). He later edited an important set of essays on Nepal under King Mahendra, *Nepal: An Assertive Monarchy* (1977). RS Chauhan's doctoral research was on politics in Nepal after the downfall of the Ranas in 1950. This resulted in a series of articles in *South Asian Studies* and the book, *Political Development in Nepal 1950-70* (1971). After becoming a faculty member at the Centre, Chauhan wrote critically about politics in Nepal under the autocratic Panchayat system and later an overly ambitious book on society and state building in Nepal. MD Dharamdasani, who also taught at the Centre until 1981, initially did research on Indian diplomacy vis-a-vis Nepal. Ramakant continued to do more research on the diplomatic history and foreign policy of Nepal, especially with respect to China, and published several articles related to this theme in the Centre's journal. Much of this research was later presented in the book *Nepal-China and India* (1976). Later, collaborating with BC Upreti, he wrote about regionalism in Nepal. Upreti's doctoral research was on Indian aid to Nepal. After becoming a faculty member at the Centre, Upreti has written about the Nepali Congress Party, water resources and on various aspects of Indo-Nepal relationship.

Nepal Studies in India is also carried out at the Centre for the Study of Nepal in BHU. The UGC established this Centre in 1976. Its stated objective is to sponsor and promote research on Nepal from a multidisciplinary perspective. The Centre has built up a documentation collection of materials on Nepal and organised more than ten big seminars. About 25 PhDs have been completed at the Centre, many by students from Nepal. More than 15 of these doctoral research projects have been from the discipline of political science. In recent years though, the Centre has not been very active due to severe resource constraints that have already affected its documentation collection project and staff retention ability. Apart from Professor MD Dharamdasani who heads the Centre, there is one lecturer in Nepal and several research associates and



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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

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John Collee
The London Observer.

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In the past, the Centre has undertaken several research projects on themes including foreign aid in Nepal, Nepal's elite, political ideology of the Nepali leader BP Koirala, status of Nepali women in modern Nepali literature, Indo-Nepal trade relations, and post-1990 democratic experiments in Nepal. Since 1987, the Centre has also published an irregular journal, *Indian Journal of Nepalese Studies*. The Centre has also published various papers on Nepal as part of an Occasional Paper Series. Eleven booklets have been published under this series up to the end of 1998. The topics covered have included the 1980 Political Referendum in Nepal, the Nepali elite, elections in Nepal, Nepali constitutional practices, Nepal's foreign trade, and parliamentary democracy. In terms of book publication by faculty members, apart from some books he published earlier on, MD Dharamdasani has recently edited *Democratic Nepal* (1992), *Nepal in Transition* (1997) and *India-Nepal Partnership and South Asian Resurgence* (2000).

State-as-protector

Scholarship on Nepal that has come out of the SIS, the South Asia Studies Centre, and the BHU's CSN, as the above discussion suggests, covers predominantly contemporary politics and political and diplomatic history of Nepal. While substantial in volume, this scholarship, especially the more recent ones, is significantly deficient in terms of quality and variety. First of all, as has been noted above, in terms of disciplines, political science, political and diplomatic history and international relations provide the analytical perspectives to a disproportionate number of studies. This means that Indian scholarship on Nepal tends to be restricted to a narrow band within social science research disciplines. In their review of area studies works done in India until the end of the 1960s, Bimal Prasad and Urmila Phadnis had commented that "it is disappointing to note that no anthropological and sociological studies have been attempted by Indian scholars on Nepal or on Pakistan so far." Thirty years later there has been no significant change in this situation. As the conference on the history of Indian anthropology and sociology organised by the Delhi-based Institute of Economic Growth in April 2000 noted, there has been very little research by Indian scholars of these disciplines on other countries. In fact, the Institute had started a programme on Asian Research in the 1960s but could not sustain it for "both a lack of resources, and the hostility of scholars in other SAARC countries to attempts to study their countries by Indian scholars."

As the first corollary of this fact, present-day Indian researchers on Nepal demonstrate very little awareness of the substantial amount of social science writings on Nepal (especially anthropological) in English and other European languages. The second corollary is that since the unit of their analysis is the state, Indian political

scientists, especially those working on Indo-Nepal relations, have seldom been able to establish positions that are clearly independent of those forwarded by the government in power in New Delhi. Why is this so? Kanti Bajpai, who teaches at JNU's SIS, has argued that Indian intellectuals tend to give the State "the benefit of the doubt" in its dealings with other states. He states, "In this international sphere, the image of the State-as-oppressor recedes and of the State-as-protector supervenes to the detriment of a critical-minded field of study." Bajpai further points out that, more often than not, the data needed for the kind of studies carried out by Indian scholars in the field of international and area studies is located within the state domains and the Indian state, like states elsewhere, is "stingy in sharing it with outsiders.... Those who are critical of the State and its policies could well find their access to State-owned information denied."

Another general deficiency of Indian scholarship on Nepal is related to the issue of language proficiency. Area studies programmes have emphasised that unless the concerned researchers are very proficient in the main language(s) used in the society under study, the resulting research can not be taken too seriously. Keeping this point in mind, the UGC had emphasised in the late 1960s that good language training should be an essential part of area studies programmes. While the first generation of post-Independence Indian scholars did exhibit language proficiency, the more recent Indian scholars of Nepal have shown virtually no ability to read Nepali, let alone the other languages used inside Nepal. As a consequence, English language sources—both from the world of media and academia—related to Nepal get disproportionate attention from the Nepal experts in India. This is unfortunate since English is not the popular mode of discourse in Nepal, even among its most influential intellectuals. English proficiency is limited to a small number of Nepali academics, and Kathmandu's English language media cannot function as a substitute for Nepali language media sources. Thus, whatever the discipline, a researcher of Nepal who lacks proficiency in Nepali is seriously handicapped.

This lack of language proficiency can perhaps be blamed on the absence of proper language training programmes within area studies centres. Except for the Centre in BHU, Nepali is not available at the other two institutions discussed above. It is no surprise to find out that published materials in the languages of Nepal are not systematically available even in the concerned libraries in Delhi, Jaipur and Varanasi. This state of affairs is in sharp contrast to how area studies programmes are supported through good library resources in as many languages as possible in the better institutions of the West. It is no surprise that most of the existing bibliographic reference books about South Asia have been compiled *outside* of the region.

The third limitation of current Indian scholarship

on Nepal is related to the notion of fieldwork employed by researchers. To begin with, many write their papers and books based on secondary and media sources, excusing this practice by referring to the lack of funds to do good fieldwork. This in itself is an interesting proposition, given the minimal costs required to do research "on the ground" in Nepal. But even when fieldwork is done, it leaves a lot to be desired. Due to the absence of anthropological regimes of fieldwork in the disciplines of the current crop of Nepal experts in India, a short visit to Kathmandu and interviews with a few well-known personalities constitute the entirety of fieldwork for all kinds of inquiries. Given their reliance on English language sources and interviews with Nepalis well-versed in English, it is no surprise that the nature of evidence used to support arguments remains almost the same in most of the works.

Accounting for Mediocrity

The main reason why area studies, including Nepal Studies programmes, are not thriving in India, is their overall poor financial resource base management. With respect to area study centres within universities (such as the ones with a Nepal focus in Jaipur and Varanasi) supported by the UGC, they are supposed to get 100 percent assistance from it under two categories: recurring costs and non-recurring costs. Under the former, the UGC should provide salaries for four faculty members— a Professor who would also be director of the centre, one reader and two lecturers. The UGC should also provide honorarium for two research associates. Calculated at current average salary rates, the total salary commitment amounts to about INR 948,000 per year. Under the non-recurring costs, such centres are eligible to get limited amounts of money to construct their buildings, purchase equipment and library material, and pay for fieldwork and conferences.

But is the UGC providing the amounts to the area study centres? During the fiscal year 1997-98, it provided a total sum of INR 7.6 million to 20 area study centres located in 17 universities. On an average each centre got only INR 381,500. During the fiscal year 1998-99, the UGC disbursed a total sum of INR 9.653 million to 19 centres in seventeen universities at an average of just INRs 508,053 per centre. The average annual salary of a professor in India is about INR 300,000 and that of a reader is about INR 216,000. From these calculations, we can conclude that the average amount each area study centre received during the year 1998-99 was not even enough to pay the salary of one professor and one reader in any area study centre, let alone be enough to buy books for the library or pay for fieldwork. The centres have also not received the non-recurring grant amounts promised by the UGC.

The implications of this fiscal deficit are evident in

all areas vital to the active life of research centres. Due to the non-availability of the committed monies under the non-recurring category, such centres cannot buy new books, journals and other material for their specialist libraries. Some may have computers, but cannot afford Internet connections. Libraries in the centres in Jaipur and Varanasi have suffered in recent years, and the building of the Centre for the Study of Nepal remains incomplete eight years after its foundation stones were laid by the former prime minister of Nepal, Girija P Koirala. Similarly research scholars and students do not have access to adequate amounts of funding for long-term fieldwork in the countries they want to study. Moreover, conferences with participation of scholars from the countries of the region has proved to be very difficult to organise. This situation has hampered the possibility of productive collaborative work between research scholars from two or more countries in the region. Due to the inadequacy of committed monies under the recurring category, area study centres have not been able to provide good language training to its students. Such centres have been unable to retain, replace and recruit outstanding faculty members.

Anirudha Gupta, a veteran Nepal expert and the former dean of the SIS at JNU noted in 1997, "Facing acute shortage of library material and facilities for field work, the faculty in area studies indulge in petty factionalism or, if based on Delhi, seek gainful outlets as unofficial PROs of the external affairs ministry or embassies of the countries which fall within their areas of specialisation." In other words, the funding crunch has made a direct impact on the quality of work coming out of such institutions. For the same reason, such centres are no longer able to attract the best students. Talking about the situation in his School, Gupta writes that it attracts students "who bide their time either because they have little else to do or use the University's hostel and library facilities to prepare for Civil Service Examinations."

Most area study centres have been opened in Indian universities in the absence of long-term plans. They have been opened on the fancy of individuals who were interested in creating academic jobs for themselves and those they patronised. As Gupta has observed, "Very often, such initiative lacked convincing rationale. Nor did the beneficiary university make any effort to build up suitably trained staff, language experts or library resources." Gupta further added that the UGC's approach to the opening of such centres "has been regrettably overindulgent or innocent of self-analysis." With respect to the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Nepal in BHU, Gupta said that it was "done without ever caring to assess how much effort and expenses must be spent to produce a single scholar 'adequately acquainted with the historical, cultural, social and economic background' of Nepal". There is no reason to believe that the story behind the esta-

ishment of many of the other area study centres is any different.

If they cannot be sustained, can some of the current area centres be closed? Yes, for instance, during the year 1997-98, one area study centre supported by the UGC was "discontinued...because of poor functioning". But closing down is hard to do in most cases. Once a centre has been set-up, those who secure permanent jobs understandably want all the facilities of pay and promotion offered to faculty members in regular departments. They eventually become an interested party in continuing the life of these centres even when there is not much money available for anything but the salaries of the few staff members. In addition these centres become susceptible to the fancies of university bureaucrats who feel no shame in adding more programmes to the burden of already disabled area studies centres for very personal reasons. For example, the Centre at BHU has been asked by university bosses to add a Japanese studies wing to it. This is so because the wife of a top university bureaucrat happens to be Japanese.

This kind of weak existence of area studies programmes in India must also be due to the rampant political patronage in key academia-related institutions and misplaced priorities of the political bosses. In the latest instance, not only the UGC, but many other government-supported research promoting institutions in India such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR), have had to suffer appointments of academically mediocre people faithful to the current ruling coalition led by the rightist Bharatiya Janata Party. These appointees have not been spending too much energy in trying to turn around almost defunct area studies programmes. At a time when there is not enough money for existing programmes, in fact, the UGC has decided to introduce studies in the pseudo-science of Vedic Astrology in Indian universities. The UGC lacks transparency and is increasingly seen to be academically inept. Meanwhile, speaking of misplaced priorities, when all academic studies including area studies programmes in India are suffering from inadequate funding, the Government of India has endowed IRs 120 million to Oxford University to establish a chair in Indian History and Culture.

No wonder then that, in the background of this developing academic environment, Nepal Studies in India is progressively losing its quality. The current Indian scholarship on Nepal does not match the academic rigour and competence level of the scholarship demonstrated by the first generation of post-Independence Indian scholars of Nepal. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the state of Indian studies on any other country of South Asia is any better than the case for Nepal (As far as the reverse is concerned, this writer has reported on the poor status of Indian studies in Nepal in the March 1998

Himal). Casual conversations with researchers from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have suggested that general academic governance related to area studies programmes in the universities of those countries is not any better than those in India or Nepal.

Given the present scenario regarding area studies in South Asia, remedial programmes involving a few individuals and institutions will hardly constitute a solution. A solution can only come in the form of investments in institutions— universities and research centres— and academics in each of the countries of the region in the long run. It is up to the individual countries of South Asia to decide what kind of priority they want to place on acquiring knowledge about each other in the region. Regional organisations such as SAARC and international agencies can at best play a supporting role. Given the negative academic and political environment in much of South Asia, the chances that fresh investments will be made for South Asian studies in South Asia are negligible. In that case, we are looking at a bleak future for South Asian Studies in South Asia. △



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Announcing Travelling Film South Asia 2002

Himal Association and Himal magazine announce Travelling Film South Asia 2002 – 15 outstanding documentaries from the neighbourhood. These productions were chosen to travel from among the 50 films screened at the Film South Asia '01 festival of documentaries, with the help of the three-member FSA '01 jury chaired by director Shyam Benegal. This edition of TFSA also has five silent shorts from among the 21 screened as part of Kathmandu Silent Night during FSA '01.

HOW TO HOST TFSA

The Travelling Film South Asia package comes with the 15 films in professional-quality VHS tapes, TFSA posters, the festival catalogue and display materials. We ask that TFSA be shown using high-quality video projection systems. Cumulatively, the travelling documentaries constitute 12 hours of viewing time, and may ideally be screened over three consecutive afternoon-evenings.

The TFSA festival will only travel to cities where host organisations are willing to take full responsibility for publicity, screenings and all associated logistics. As per FSA's agreement with the individual filmmakers and production houses, the screenings may only be non-commercial. This means that entry fees at TFSA venues may at most be used to offset screening costs.

There is no charge levied on TFSA hosts and venues within South Asia. Beyond the region, an all-inclusive charge of USD 600 per venue is levied by the FSA Secretariat in order to defray all TFSA-related costs (anything left over will go to the organisation of FSA '03, scheduled for September 2003). The local host (whether in South Asia or overseas) takes the responsibility of despatching the set of films to the next venue as directed by the FSA Secretariat.

For more details about Travelling Film South Asia, including travel schedule, contact: Manesh Shrestha, Director, Film South Asia, at fsa@himalassociation.org or fax + 977-1-541196. The complete listing of FSA '01 films and other relevant information is available at www.himalassociation.org/fsa



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A touch of jadoo ...

Reviving SAARC will be difficult but it can be done, says the former Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh. This time, however, government must play facilitator and let business and civil society get on with the job of advantageous regionalism.

by *Farooq Sobhan*

Since the first meeting in Dhaka in 1985, the ten SAARC summits thus far have been fairly predictable occasions. They have been heavy on ritual, with the inevitable speeches singing the glories of regional cooperation and lamenting the slow progress thus far. Meanwhile, don't we know it, everyone else has marched forward, leaving us poor South Asians simply getting poorer. So much for the eradication of poverty by 2002. While everyone readily understands that in this age of globalisation there is no alternative to building a strong regional grouping, we South Asians will insist on doing everything possible to ensure that we remain a divided region. Who will our leaders blame this time? Years of misgovernance have come home to roost; there is no one other than ourselves to blame for the sorry mess we find ourselves in; the heads must wake up to the fact that they must join hands to give the 1.3 billion people of the region a better future.

True, 11 September 2002 and the global recession will make life infinitely more painful for all our countries, although more so for some than for others. But the WTO ministerial conference at Doha nearly two months ago made it clear that there are certain things South Asia must do to get ahead—we must work more closely together as a regional grouping and move swiftly to a free trade area; we must develop our infrastructure on a collective basis; we must remove all the existing barriers to trade and investment; and we must function as a single economic market if we are to survive and escape from this quintessentially South Asian poverty trap.

No longer, therefore, can we afford to let this be yet another SAARC Summit that is heavy on ritual and poor on substance. The people do seek a miracle, and that is to see bold and imaginative leadership. Of course we are all painfully aware of the many bilateral differences that exist. We cannot wish these away, but we cannot any longer afford to wait to resolve all these difference in order to make progress on a regional basis. This,

then, should be the first decision of the Summit—that, come what may, SAARC will be put on the fast track. Or, to be more precise, the process of regional cooperation will be put on the fast track, but there will be some differences this time around. Governments will simply play the role of the facilitator; they will join hands to remove the bottlenecks that impede cooperation in all spheres, and provide the infrastructure. And, rather than government, it will be the private sector, civil society groups and NGOs that will be encouraged to move forward, undertaking joint projects and developing new networks.

Let the SAARC heads of state/government meet at Kathmandu separately or even collectively with business leaders, civil society representatives and the media for a free-flowing dialogue on breaking barriers and moving forward. If this should not be possible now, in Kathmandu, let the heads agree to such a dialogue in the near future. The heads must recognise that the past mechanisms have failed. The Technical Committees, the Standing Committee, even the Council of Ministers, have so far shown very little capacity for imaginative thinking, and even less so for action on the ground.

Implementation, implementation, and one more time implementation...should be the *mantra* for the revival of SAARC itself. The organisation, thus far, has been the cumulative reflection of this regional handicap, which is our inability to implement and convert pious words into action. We all talk about delivering good governance and corruption-free societies, and thus far talking seems to have been sufficient. In the new world order as it is evolving, we simply cannot afford the luxury of doing things in our own traditional South Asian way. We must all change, and this of course applies to SAARC and South Asian regionalism. We cannot perform miracles with a half-baked Secretariat and a Secretary General who is little more than a messenger between the capitals and their foreign ministries. To be truly effective in a region such as ours, the SAARC Secretary



IT Revolution: Creating a Network Society in the 21st Century

IT Conference
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 Venue: BICC, New Baneshwor

Introduction:

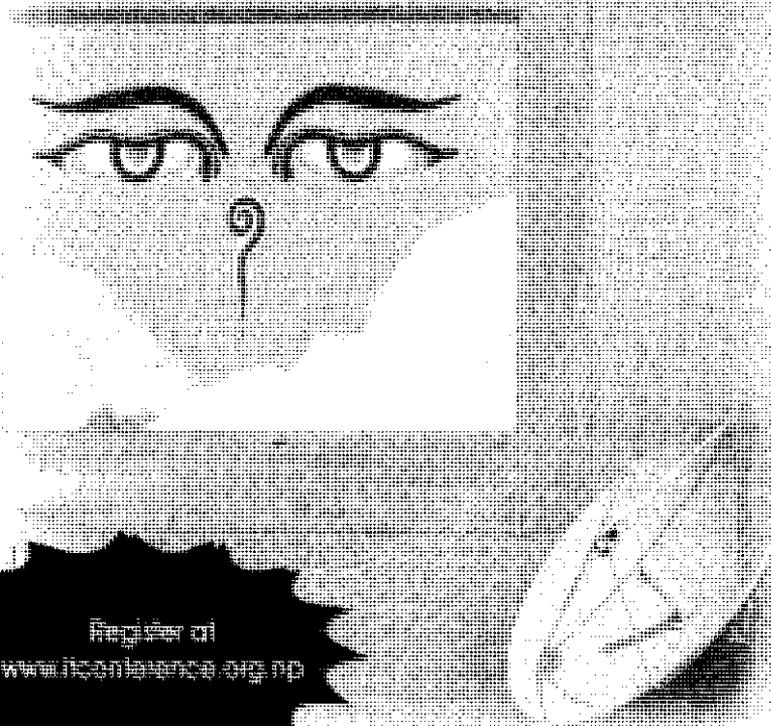
IT Conference 2002 "IT Revolution: Creating a Network Society in the 21st Century" presents a dynamic, integrated two days Information and Communication Technology (ICT) experiences at the foothills of the Himalayas. This international conference is being organized by Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) and will take place in BICC during CAN Info-Tech 2002. CAN Info Tech "Nepal Information Technology Show and Conference" is Nepal's largest and only ICT-focused international show and conference.

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General must be at the level of a former foreign minister, with access to the top-most echelons in each country. And he must be allowed the freedom to take a variety of initiatives, to be proactive.

One of the first things the seven country heads of state/government should do when they arrive in Kathmandu is to sit down together in a closed door meeting, foreign ministers included. At that meeting, they must acknowledge the fact that SAARC is facing a serious crisis, one which requires several bold decisions of them. The heads and the foreign ministers need to generate not only political will but also economic will, which comes from an understanding of the economic tasks that lie pending before the entire region.

In other words, miracles are needed at the Kathmandu summit. A little bit of South Asian magic, or jadoo, is what is required, for there is no way but ahead for SAARC and South Asian regional cooperation, and the quicker each country wakes up to the fact the better. Once the magic has worked, and the heads and the ministers do decide to take some genuine action towards reviving SAARC, they may consider the following specific measures to emanate from the summit:

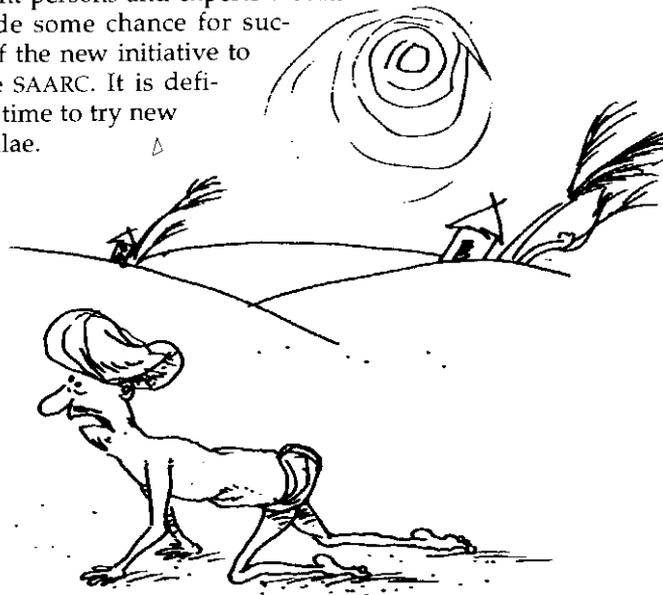
- 1) Issue a strongly-worded statement reaffirming commitment of the member countries to SAARC and, in reflection of this, pledge to undertake some specific measures on a priority basis.
- 2) Announce a programme for the implementation of the convention to combat terrorism.
- 3) Announce dates for a meeting of SAARC finance minister to re-examine the strategy to combat poverty.
- 4) Sign the convention to prevent Trafficking of Women and Children, including setting up a task force that would monitor implementation of the convention.
- 5) Set up a task force to prepare a draft SAFTA treaty that would be presented to the next summit for signature.
- 6) Set up a task force made up of both government and non-governmental experts to prepare a draft South Asian investment treaty.
- 7) Announce dates for a meeting of ministers of civil aviation and tourism that would put forward a plan of action to promote tourism and further air links between the countries of the region.
- 8) Arrange an annual dialogue between the SAARC heads of state/government and the regional civil society leadership to exchange views on improving people-to-people contacts and strengthening regional cooperation.
- 9) Announce the holding of an annual business summit in the Maldives along the lines of the Davos summit, to be jointly organised by the business and academic communities.
- 10) Announce dates for the completion of work on

a South Asian Social Charter.

- 11) Examine ways and means to strengthen infrastructure and communication links in the region.
- 12) Agree to strengthen the Secretariat, including upgrading the post of SAARC Secretary General.
- 13) Emphasise energy cooperation in the region.
- 14) Strengthen SAARC's cooperation with the European Union, ASEAN, the United Nations and its specialised agencies.
- 15) Stress the importance of presenting a common platform or position at crucial international conferences, particularly those related to economy and commerce, culture, environment, and the many social issues.

In order to ensure implementation of these measures, as well as to outline specific other measures to strengthen the Secretariat, the heads should announce a special summit, to be convened six months from now, to review the implementation of the above decisions and to consider adopting a specific plan of action covering all of the above. A special task force made up of eminent scholars and experts along the lines of the Group of Eminent Persons should be constituted within ten days of the end of the Eleventh Summit to prepare for this special summit.

This task force of eminent persons and experts would complete its work in three months and present its report to the SAARC Standing Committee. However, on this occasion, the task force members would be invited to attend and participate in the work of the Standing Committee and subsequently in the work of the Council of Ministers, and then eventually at the SAARC Special Summit itself. Since the pro forma meetings of the ministers and bureaucrats have already been tried and found wanting in the past, this involvement of the eminent persons and experts would provide some chance for success of the new initiative to revive SAARC. It is definitely time to try new formulae.



"LEADERSHIP! LEADERSHIP!..."

The summit attendance sheet

Though General Ziaur Rahman of Bangladesh was behind the idea of SAARC regionalism, he was assassinated by the time the organisation met for its first summit in Dhaka on 7-8 December 1985. The frequent changes since in the participation at summits by the heads of state and government is a reminder of the fickleness of political careers and, indeed, life itself (see schedule below).

Looking back, the first four SAARC summits (1985-1988) are remarkable for having been attended by the same leaders each time, with the exception of Pakistan. Islamabad was represented at the fourth summit by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, following the death of Chief Martial Law Administrator General Zia ul-Haq in an aircraft sabotage. In the fifth summit, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka sent new leaders. In the ensuing six summits, there were only two occasions when the leadership of all seven countries remained constant.

As the 1990s progressed, and as the attendance chart shows, the leadership of South Asian nation-states became more and more unstable. SAARC itself began to miss annual summit dates as the vicissitudes of bilateral relations took their toll, and as the original leadership which had invested more time in developing the SAARC concept moved along—till today (as the off-again, on-again Eleventh Summit prepares to finally, perhaps, to meet) when there is only one leader among the seven who has been here from the start. He is Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives, the smallest SAARC country with a population of 300,000.

King Jigme Singye Wangchuk of Bhutan (population 2,000,000) and President Gayoom are the only two of the 'Original SAARC Seven' alive and in power. However, King Jigme does not attend the summits any more, preferring to send the Foreign Minister to the summits. After losing power in 1990, Bangladesh's Hussain Muhammed Ershad—the host of the first SAARC Summit in Dhaka—spent six years in jail on corruption charges and is now a leader of a second

rung party. The rest of the founding leaders are all gone. Rajiv Gandhi, leader of India's 1985 delegation, was struck down by an assassin's bomb in 1991, within two years of leaving office. Gen. Zia ul-Haq of Pakistan died in a plane explosion in 1988. King Birenda, the constitutional monarch of Nepal, met a bloody end with most of his family in the June 2001 royal massacre. Only Junius R Jayewardene of Sri Lanka, who handed over power through the democratic process, had a natural death, in 1996.

There have been, on average, 3.5 leadership changes between each of the last four summits, meaning that there was exactly a 50-50 chance that any particular prime minister or president would still be in office when the next summit rolled around. During this period, Nepal sent a different representative to each summit. Indeed, attendance recently has been so fractured that the evident weaknesses of the organisation may be due to the lack of camaraderie which has emerged as a result.

Bangladesh

HM Ershad was the president of Bangladesh from 1982 to 1990, and hosted the 1985 inaugural summit. After losing power in 1990, Ershad faced over a dozen corruption charges brought by the new Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government of **Begum Khaleda Zia**, eventually being convicted on three counts and imprisoned. Begum Zia made way for the leader of the Awami League (AL), **Shiekh Hasina**, in July 1996 to form a government with the support of Ershad's Jatiya Party. This alliance with Shiekh Hasina's AL secured Ershad released from jail after six years of imprisonment. Khaleda Zia returned to power after the BNP-led alliance won a two-thirds majority in the elections of October 2001.

Bhutan

Jigme Singye Wangchuck became the Druk Gyalpo (Dragon King) of Bhutan in 1974 and is, at age 41, the

Summit	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India
1st - December 1985 (Dhaka)	Hussain Muhammed Ershad	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Rajiv Gandhi
2nd - November 1986 (Bangalore)	Hussain Muhammed Ershad	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Rajiv Gandhi
3rd - November 1987 (Kathmandu)	Hussain Muhammed Ershad	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Rajiv Gandhi
4th - December 1988 (Islamabad)	Hussain Muhammed Ershad	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Rajiv Gandhi**
5th - November 1990 (Male)	Hussain Muhammed Ershad	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Chandra Shekhar
6th - December 1991 (Colombo)	Begum Khaleda Zia	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	PV Narasimha Rao
7th - April 1993 (Dhaka)	Begum Khaleda Zia	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	PV Narasimha Rao
8th - May 1995 (New Delhi)	Begum Khaleda Zia	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	PV Narasimha Rao
9th - May 1997 (Male)	Sheikh Hasina	Jigme Singye Wangchuk	Inder Kumar Gujral
10th - July 1998 (Colombo)	Sheikh Hasina	Lyonpo Jigmi Y Thinley	Atal Behari Vajpayee
11th - January 2001 (Kathmandu)	Begum Khaleda Zia	Khandu Wangchuk	Atal Behari Vajpayee

*Dead of natural causes, **Assassinated, ***Murdered

world's youngest reigning monarch. In 1998, the king devolved executive powers from the throne to an elected cabinet, though he remains a powerful monarch. In 1998, **Lyonpo Jigmi Y Thinley** represented Bhutan at the 1998 SAARC summit as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, breaking the chain of the king's attendance since SAARC's launch. **Khandu Wangchuck** of the Royal Ministerial Council is scheduled to attend the Kathmandu summit.

India

After Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, **Rajiv Gandhi** succeeded his mother as head of the Congress Party, and was sworn in as prime minister. He attended all the summits until he left office in 1989, when he allowed a rump government led by **Chandra Shekhar** to be briefly installed in power. In the 1991 elections, the Congress emerged as the single largest party and the government of **PV Narasimha Rao** lasted its full term. However, in the 1996 elections, the Congress had to be content with supporting a coalition of parties led by **HD Deve Gowda** of the Janata Dal. Deve Gowda was pulled down by the Congress in 1997, replaced by **Inder Kumar Gujral** who led the same coalition until 1998. In the elections that followed in the same year, **Atal Behari Vajpayee**, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, forged an alliance with some of the constituents of a previous coalition and formed a government that is still in power. He has been sworn in to office on three occasions, having been prime minister for 13 days in 1996.

Maldives

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom has been president of the Maldives since 1978 and was elected to his fifth five-year term in 1998. In addition to being president, Gayoom is Minister of Defence and National Security as well as Minister of Finance and Treasury.

Nepal

King Birendra ruled as an absolute monarch for eighteen years before the people's movement of 1990 led him to lift the ban on political parties and hand over sovereignty to the people. **KP Bhattarai** became Prime Minister in 1990 and represented Nepal in the

1991 SAARC summit after the king became 'constitutional'. That same year, **GP Koirala** became Prime Minister but lost power shortly thereafter in the mid-term elections, though he has bounced back to power three times since for short periods. **Manmohan Adhikari** of the United Marxist-Leninists became Prime Minister for nine months in 1994, replaced by **Lokendra Bahadur Chand** of Rashtriya Prajatantra Party in 1995. **Sher Bahadur Deuba** entered office in July 2001.

Pakistan

Mohammed Zia ul-Haq came to power in 1977 and established martial law. Following his death in August 1988 and the elections three months later, **Benazir Bhutto** of the Pakistan People's Party, daughter of Zia's executed political rival Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became the first female prime minister of a Muslim nation. She lost power within twenty months, to be succeeded by **Mian Nawaz Sharif**. Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif alternated three times as Prime Minister between 1990 and 1997, although President **Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari** attended the 1995 summit. Sharif's government was overthrown in a coup in October 1999 by **Gen. Pervez Musharraf**. This coup as well as Gen Musharraf's involvement in the Kargil developments of June 1999 led India to scuttle the November 1999 scheduled meeting of the Eleventh Summit in Kathmandu.

Sri Lanka

After briefly serving as prime minister, **Junius R Jayewardene** became president in 1978 and stayed in office until 1988, when he retired of his own volition. **Ranasinghe Premadasa** was elected President in 1989 but was assassinated in Colombo on 1 May 1993. **DB Wijetunga**, who was then prime minister, succeeded the slain leader. He was followed by **Chandrika Kumaratunga**, who became president of Sri Lanka in November 1994 after becoming prime minister three months earlier. President Kumaratunga surrendered her prime ministerial office to Ranil Wickremesinghe following her defeat in the December 2001 elections, though she is expected to attend the Eleventh Summit. ▲

Maldives

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom
Maumoon Abdul Gayoom

Nepal

King Birendra
King Birendra
King Birendra
King Birendra***
KP Bhattarai
GP Koirala
GP Koirala
Manmohan Adhikari*
Lokendra Bahadur Chand
GP Koirala
Sher Bahadur Deuba

Pakistan

Zia ul-Haq
Zia ul-Haq
Zia ul-Haq**
Benazir Bhutto
Nawaz Sharif
Nawaz Sharif
Nawaz Sharif
FA Khan Leghari
Nawaz Sharif
Nawaz Sharif
Pervez Musharraf

Sri Lanka

Junius R Jayewardene
Junius R Jayewardene
Junius R Jayewardene
Junius R Jayewardene*
Dingiri Banda Wijetunga
Ranasinghe Premadasa
Ranasinghe Premadasa**
Chandrika Kumaratunga
Chandrika Kumaratunga
Chandrika Kumaratunga
Chandrika Kumaratunga

The South Asian Power Grid

Linking mainland electricity grids is a practical form of regionalism that benefits all parties. With rising populations and finite capabilities, the only way for all countries to move ahead may be for all to work as a single regional unit. How about beginning by creating a viable electricity grid?

by Santa B Pun

Sixteen years after SAARC's establishment, though it has made some progress in the areas of a regional preferential trading agreement and a free trade area (SAPTA, SAFTA), nothing as yet has happened on the regional trading of electric power. The Declaration of the Tenth SAARC Summit at Colombo in July 1998, does mention the need to develop "specific projects relevant to the individual needs of three or more Member States under the provisions of Articles VII and X of the Charter." One should note that the mention of "three or more Member States" has a special significance to regional water resources development, and this could open up the avenues of power trading between India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. As of now, power-trading is carried out purely on a bilateral basis, and that too is limited to India and Nepal, with Nepal importing about 200 million units in 2000-01, and India and Bhutan, with Bhutan exporting about 1300 to 1400 million units.

Present and Future Global Energy Scene

From the perspective of the world production of electricity, thermals shoulder a major burden of 63 percent (coal - 38 percent, gas - 15 percent and oil - 10 percent) with hydraulic and nuclear contributing 19 percent and 18 percent each, respectively. It is estimated that the world gross hydropower potential is 40,500 tera watt hours per year (TWH/year). Africa and Australia do not have large hydropower potential, whereas North America and Europe have already exploited over 70 percent of theirs; and while Asia has tapped only 20 percent of its hydro potential, South America has done better by tapping 32 percent. Though the global reserves of non-renewable energies (fossil and nuclear) are adequate for the next century, there are two major problems associated with their exploitation: a dramatic increase in greenhouse gas emissions, which could lead to climate changes with dire consequences on hydrological system and sea level rise; and the non-acceptability of nuclear power, particularly after the Long Island (US) and the Chernobyl (USSR) accidents. The 11 September attacks in the US reinforce the vulnerability

Table 1. SAARC Energy Resource Scene

Country	Crude Oil Barrels*	Nat. Gas cub. mt.*	Coal tons*	Hydropower MW
India	5.70	718	69.8	84,000
Pakistan	0.14	510	0.2	30,000
Bangladesh	0.06	360	1.0	600
Nepal	-	-	-	44,000
Sri Lanka	-	-	-	2,000
Bhutan	-	-	-	20,000
Maldives	-	-	-	-

* In billions.

of nuclear power stations, which were previously opposed only by the environmentalists.

As Table 1 indicates, the smaller SAARC nations have no fossil fuel resources, with Maldives having no energy resources of its own. Sri Lanka has already tapped over 60 percent of its hydropower potential and has recognised that, like Maldives, it cannot meet its energy requirement internally. Nepal and Bhutan are luckier with their vast untapped hydropower potential. Bangladesh has a substantial reserve of natural gas and it is quite cautious about its usage, knowing fully well that this is its only indigenous energy resource. Pakistan is endowed with both natural gas and hydropower. India, on the other hand, is endowed with substantial amounts of coal, hydropower, uranium and thorium deposits and even natural gas though, but with agrowing population, its energy requirement is escalating.

Most of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh's energy needs are met with thermal power; Maldives is totally thermal. Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Nepal have hydro-dominated capacities. This energy distribution pattern could be the strength of this region. Countries could complement each other on the energy front and this could be the major area of convergence for SAARC activities. Though India's nuclear contribution at present is a mere 3 percent, it has huge nuclear deposits of Uranium (10,000 Megawatt equivalent - Mwe) and Thorium

Table 2. Existing Electric Power Capacity

Country	Total Capacity	Thermal		Hydro		Nuclear		Kwh PCC
		Mw	%	Mw	%	Mw	%	
India	100,266	71,254	71	24,712	25	2,900	3	339
Pakistan	15,659	10,696	68	4,826	31	137	1	304
Bangladesh	3,770	3,584	94	232	6	-	-	57
Nepal	430	57	13	373	87	-	-	39
Sri Lanka	1,685	550	33	1,135	67	-	-	208
Bhutan	348	6	2	342	98	-	-	107
Maldives	13	13	100	-	-	-	-	843

* Per capita consumption in Kilowatt hours.

(300,000 Mwe). India is already the fifth largest producer of wind power in the world with 1260 Mw presently under operation.

Power Trading in the Region

The central economy of the South Asian region is that of India and the economies of all other South Asian countries, perhaps with the exception of Pakistan, are mere satellites. India presently suffers from an energy shortfall of 30 billion units and, on the power front, from a shortage of 9,000 Mw. In order to mitigate this power shortage, India immediately needs to invest well over USD 10 billion. Of the five regional grids of India, the Eastern Grid is the only one that has excess capacity (3,000 Mw). This has been attributed to lower load growth than that projected by the forecast. Pakistan, on the other hand, has excess capacity to the tune of several thousand Mw. This excess is due to the recent surge in the private sector thermal power producers, making an impressive 3,878 Mw already commissioned (ie, 25 percent of the total installed capacity). Maldives, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh are presently struggling to meet their own internal demands. Only Bhutan has been consistent in pushing a substantial 300 Mw of export to India. Hence, to strike a balance between shortages and excesses, regional power trading will be mutually beneficial.

Pakistan and India

Despite the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, about 20 Mw of power trading continued between the two Punjab states at Jogindarpur. The 1948 Kashmir war did not affect this power trading and only in the early 1950s did the two countries themselves sever the interconnection at the border. A half-century later, after the Lahore talks between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif, the two countries started to explore the possibilities of Pakistan initially exporting 300 Mw of power into India, with the potential for trading ten times that amount later on. With a bankrupt paymaster, the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), in Pakistan, the independent power producers (IPPs) saw the huge power hungry market of northern India as their saviour. Of course, this would be a win-win situation for all: for Pakistan, for the IPPs in Pakistan and

for India itself. The wrestling match over the price of power--Pakistan's demand for 7.2 US cents per unit versus India's offer of 3 US cents per unit (based on India's refusal to pay the 4 cents capacity charge and 0.2 cents wheeling charge), terminated inconclusively when the Kargil skirmish erupted. The Agra Summit in 2001 was unable to thaw the two countries' relationship and restart negotiations. The 11 September attacks, the "Bin Laden affaire" on Pakistan's northern border, the 13 December attack on the Indian Parliament, and the ongoing sabre rattling between the two countries have again pushed power trading possibilities into the "deep freeze".

India and Bangladesh

Despite India's Eastern Regional Grid having a power glut of 3,000 Mw and the western zone of Bangladesh suffering from a power deficit of 300 Mw, there is, as yet, no power trading between the two countries. In February 1997 India and Bangladesh met in Delhi and agreed to exchange 150 Mw of power on a "just, reasonable and compensatory to each party" principle. Bangladesh was to import power for her western zone from West Bengal in India and, in return, India's eastern state of Tripura was to receive power from Bangladesh. However, actual trading of power between the two countries has not occurred so far.

India and Bhutan

India and Bhutan, on the other hand, already have the largest regional power trade with about 320 Mw of trading from the 336 Mw Chukha and the just commissioned 45 Mw Kurichhu hydro projects. On average, Bhutan used to inject into the Indian grid about 1300 to 1400 million units per year. This power trading with India constituted 42 percent of Bhutan's gross national revenue in financial year 1997-98. The power tariff has recently been hiked up to 3.3 US cents per unit, and with Kurichhu's additional input, Bhutan could well be trading over 1600 million units annually and netting in a comfortable USD 53 million into her coffers. With another 61 Mw Basochu hydro project due for completion this year, this power trading will take a quantum leap in February 2005, when the massive 1020 Mw Tala hydro project will begin operation. The 400 Kilovolt (Kv) double circuit transmission lines linking Tala with the Eastern Grid will go through the Siliguri "chicken neck" and continue on to interconnect the Northern Grid through the 400/765 Kilovolt High Voltage Direct Current (Kv HVDC) transmission lines. India-Bhutan power trading is very much on.

Nepal and India

During the last thirty years of Nepal-India power trading, the quantum had stagnated at 50 Mw. Recently,

however, both the countries agreed to increase this power exchange to 150 Mw. The prevailing rate is about 4.5 US cents per unit at the 132 Kv level with an escalation of 8 percent per annum. During the last ten years, the balance of power-trade has been in India's favour with Nepal forced to import over 200 million units annually during the last four years. This chiefly emanated from the policy of pursuing the 400 Mw Arun III project for nearly a decade. With the commissioning of the 144 Mw Kaligandaki hydroelectric project at the beginning of 2002, Nepal is expected to turn this tide with an annual surplus of about 1,000 Gwh. This profitability will be possible only if Nepal can have access to the Indian market. But, sadly, the existing power exchange is on radial modes and not synchronous. The two existing major 132 Kv interconnections, as well as the two more agreed upon interconnections, are unfortunately in the power surplus Eastern Grid. The only 132 Kv interconnection to the power hungry Northern Regional Grid, Tanakpur-Bareilly, is used to import the free 70 million units that accrue from the Mahakali Agreement. Fortunately the planned and agreed Butwal-Gorakhpur 132 Kv interconnection with the Northern Regional Grid will help to trade Nepal's surplus power. The much talked about 6,480 Mw Pancheshwar Project on the Mahakali River, which could have broken ground on regional water resources cooperation in the whole SAARC region, is in limbo. So is the private sector-led cross border power trading 750 Mw West Seti Hydroelectric Project. Despite the government crying hoarse over its decade-old hydropower policy and tinkering around with the new Power Trade Agreement, the thirty years of power trading between India and Nepal is only tentative.

The Opportunities

The SAARC region, despite having one of the lowest per capita energy consumption rates in the world, is fortunate in having the highest growth rate in energy consumption. South Asia has a 5.5 percent an average annual growth in primary energy consumption of 5.5 percent, whereas Europe and North America have mere 0.2 percent and 1.3 percent growth rates, respectively. Though the existing power trading in the region is dismal or non-existent, this high growth rate in energy consumption will inevitably force the region to trade in larger quantum of power.

India is the engine of growth in the SAARC region. But this sleeping giant will have to wake up if it is to compete with the other Asian giant, China. While India's installed capacity has barely reached 100,000 Mw, China's capacity is three times that amount. The forecasted peak load of India at the end of its 11th Five Year Plan (ie, year 2011-12) is 176,647 Mw. This will mean that in the coming decade, India will need to install over 100,000 Mw of additional power plants. If it is to meet this demand, India might need to seriously look into cross border power trading and not limit

itself to just its domestic resources.

To be sure, the South Asia region is endowed with rich hydropower potential along the southern laps of the Himalayas (stretching from Pakistan, north and eastern India, Nepal and Bhutan), vast reserves of coal in India and also a sizeable amount of natural gas in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The exploitation and cross-border trading of electricity from these renewable and non-renewable energy sources would be mutually beneficial to the countries involved as well as to the developed countries that bring in capital and technologies.

The Asian Development Bank's South Asia Growth Quadrangle and the American-financed South Asia Regional Initiative for Energy (SARI/E) projects are expected to help and create this win-win environment for all. The Union of Producers, Transporters and Distributors of Electricity (UCPTE) of Europe already trades in about 10 percent of its total power consumption. The Scandinavian countries have already set up spot market trading in electricity. The South African Power Pool (SAPP), initially started with five countries, is attracting neighbouring countries for the simple reason that the benefits accrued will be shared equitably.

India's Northern Grid has a very high demand for power during the summer/monsoon period. This is due to the agricultural pumping load and the use of fans and air conditioners. This is also the time when the efficiency (i.e., the generating capacity) of the thermal steam turbines goes down due to high ambient air temperature. But the hydro-stations of Bhutan and Nepal could be running to their full capacities as the monsoon rivers would be in full discharge. This could be the time to carry out the planned maintenance of the steam turbines. On the other hand, in winter, hydro-generation goes down with the fall in river discharge due to cold weather; the efficiency of steam turbines, however, goes up. This then could be the time to carry out the planned maintenance of the hydro-stations. At a time when the ideal hydro-thermal mix in a power system should be 40:60, India's hydro contribution has fallen to a low 25 percent in 1998 from an all time high of 44 percent in 1970. Similarly, Pakistan's hydro mix of 38 percent in 1994 has slid to 31 percent in 1998. Thus, the hydro-stations of Nepal and Bhutan are compatible and complementary to the thermal dominated Northern Grid of India and the thermals of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka is totally dependent on imported primary energy, as it has already developed a major portion of its only indigenous energy resource, hydropower. Hence, Sri Lanka is exploring the viability of the submarine link between India and Sri Lanka for its future electricity requirement. This way it could supplement its energy requirement from other regional resources or perhaps wheel down Bhutan and Nepal's hydropower or Bangladesh's gas-based power in the foreseeable future.

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The Hypothetical SAARC Grid

India is in the midst of interconnecting its five regional grids (Northern, Eastern, North-Eastern, Western and Southern) through 400/765 Kv AC and HVDC. This is expected to be complete by the year 2006. The present inter-regional power transfer capacity is a mere 5,500 Mw (5.5 percent) of its total installed capacity. In the year 2000-01, inter-regional energy exchange was 9,874 million units, just 2 percent of the total energy availability. Nearly 75 percent of this transfer was from the power surplus Eastern Region. The India-constructed 1020 Mw Tala Hydro Project in Bhutan is scheduled to be complete in February 2005. The direct off-shoot of this Bhutan project is the construction of the double circuit 400 Kv transmission lines in the Eastern Grid and the interconnection to the Northern Grid to wheel the eastern region's excess power. The construction of these extra high voltage transmission lines along the narrow Siliguri "chicken neck" fits in with India's long term scheme of developing the huge hydropower potential of the Northeastern states. This 400/765 Kv transmission line (Guwahati, Siliguri, Biharsharif, Varanasi, Kanpur, Delhi) could become the future SAARC grid if India so wants. Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and even Pakistan could use it to hook in their power and feed India's most power hungry and fastest growing Northern Grid.

From Arunachal Pradesh in India to Baluchistan in Pakistan, there is a longitudinal difference of about thirty degrees. This roughly equates to a time difference of two hours between Guwahati and Quetta. This also means that the system peak of Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan will occur at different times. If the SAARC Grid were to exist then this would improve the load factors of the power system of the individual countries and thus ensure better utilisation of the system capacities of the SAARC countries.

Varying Perceptions

Energy, including electric power, is the fuel that drives the economic growth of all countries. Due to the absence of a cordial political environment in the SAARC region, electricity, or for that matter any form of energy, is being seen as a commodity with "strategic importance". Hence, the countries would not want to depend on each other for their electricity needs even on a partial scale. In this charged political environment the fear of "supply disruptions" has always been the dominant, inhibiting factor. This was perhaps best expounded by Jaswanf Singh, India's present Foreign Minister, when he said, "Energy is Security; deficiencies in this critical strategic sector compromises national security." This has indeed been one of the main stumbling blocks in regional power trading.

The Washington based World Watch Institute has already identified India as one of the countries to be worst hit by water scarcity in this millennium. The India-Pakistan Indus River, the India-Nepal-

Bangladesh Ganges River and the India-China-Bangladesh Brahmaputra River are all areas of "potential conflict". Power trading in clean renewable energy of substantial quantum means hydropower of substantial sizes. With the type of hydrological phenomena that South Asia is used to, this will mean large storage projects. The problems then get compounded: the upper and the lower riparian, the environmental concern and its mitigation, the benefits accruing from the augmentation, bilateralism or multilateralism, etc.

The India-Nepal Kosi, Gandak and Mahakali Agreements have been cited as examples of how not to do the treaties in South Asia. The 6,480 Mw Pancheshwar multipurpose project, despite being signed and sealed in 1996, gets occasional dustings in Kathmandu and Delhi for the Detailed Project Report (DPR) sessions. The Multi-purpose Kosi High Dam will hopefully not take the Mahakali route. With Nepal always raising the flag on the sensitive "water issue", India shifted over in the 1980s to Bhutan, a more willing partner.

With the huge 1020 Mw Tala project well under construction, India and Bhutan have already sighted the 180 Mw Bunakha and the 900 Mw Wang Chu for implementation. It is worth noting that the two countries are presently formulating the DPR for the massive 4,060 Mw Sankosh Multipurpose project. The above series of India-Bhutan joint ventures and the lack of it in Nepal exemplify how India wishes to tackle this dwindling regional resource. The South Asian countries' varied perception of water has been problematic in developing this clean renewable energy for cross border power trading.

So far, the policies of the South Asian governments have been very much focussed on power sector restructuring, the electricity acts and regulations, the regulatory mechanisms and private sector participation. These policies are all inward looking to meet the domestic power demand through domestic supply arrangements. India still does not permit direct sales by IPPs outside the state it is based in "without the consent of the concerned competent government". India does not see cross border power trading as its national priority. It is focussed on meeting its demand through increasing its inter-regional power transfer capabilities. Cross border power trading for India is a mere appendix of the newly created Power Trading Corporation, which has been nominated as the nodal agency for such activity with Nepal and Bhutan. Besides Bhutan, Nepal is the only SAARC country to have cross border hydro-power projects as its national priority. In spite of the Power Exchange Agreement with India, Nepal went a step ahead to sign the MOU on Power Trade Agreement with India - although some have argued that this policy, yet to be ratified by the Nepali Parliament, is unconstitutional.

Once the environment and the policies are in place, the next formidable task is that of financing. India's

100,000 Mw of additional capacity in a decade means a requirement of about USD 100 billion for the generation component alone. Such amounts are simply not available for cash-strapped South Asian governments. It is precisely for this reason that the power sector has been subjected to reforms by the governments. These reforms will enable the private sector to pool its resources and supplement the governments' funds in the power sector. The experience gained so far, be it in Pakistan, India's Orissa and Maharashtra, or in Nepal and Bangladesh, needs to be taken with a pinch of salt. Even the US is having its hiccups with power sector reforms in its rich state of California. American Regulators have now realised that capping the retail price to protect the interest of the consumers with the IPPs' wholesale price left totally unregulated to the market forces is a sure recipe to have the utilities bankrupted. It has also been realised that the reforms do attract private capital in the power sector. But the investors' perceived risks (political, commercial, regulatory etc) in this part of South Asia have exacted a much higher return, consequently leading to a higher electricity tariff. The recent Enron debacle in India may be gleefully greeted by the "we said so" chorus of the opponents of the Maharashtra Dahbol Project and the Karnali Chisapani hydroelectric project. But this glee is not going to help our tariff in the long run, as the risks to the investors have increased.

The Indian tariff for coal-fired stations vary from US cents 1.6 per unit at the pit head to US cents 5.2 per unit at the load centre; whereas, that of the hydro stations vary from US cents 1.0 to 5.5 per unit. India gets Bhutanese hydropower at US cents 3.3 per unit. Nepal's power exchange rate with India at the border point on the 132 Kv level is about US cents 4.5 per unit. The Indo/Pakistan power trade talks hinged on the issue of 7.2 versus the 3 US cents per unit. Such kinds of low tariff could be an inhibiting factor in power trading. Private sector power purchase agreements be it in Nepal, Pakistan or India invariably have a much higher price tag of about 6 to 7 US cents per unit at the generator's terminal.

Throughout the region, the IPPs' tariff is very much in the forefront, with some already at the courts. The impression that the IPPs are solely responsible for the utilities' bleeding to death is the utilities' way of hiding their deficiencies. South Asian utilities have a tremendous scope for improvement (capacity utilisation, losses, revenue arrears, manpower etc) and these should be seen as opportunities. The renegeing of a signed, sealed and done PPA should not be the first line of defence of the utilities. The sanctity of the contract has to be honoured by all the signatories. There is also the tendency of the developer to be too greedy and chew a large project in an unsettled environment, very aptly known as "fishing in trouble waters". This is what Enron tried to do with its second phase 1400 Mw Dahbol project in Maharashtra, now stuck with billions of dollars already

invested. Tariffs will continue to be the bone of contention in the foreseeable future in our part of the world. Power trading will only occur if the tariff is, to quote the Indo-Bangladesh draft Power Exchange Agreement, "just, reasonable and compensatory to each other." Though there will be some noises made on transmission line constraints in cross border power trading, this is not perceived as a major constraint.

The Way Forward

Nature has been very kind to the SAARC region. Energy-wise, India is blessed with the tenth largest coal reserve in the world. At the present forecasted rate of Indian consumption, this reserve is expected to last more than a century. SAARC's Himalayas could still provide us with over 160,000 Mw of economically exploitable hydroelectric energy. What is more, this is renewable and clean energy on a planet already plagued by green house emissions. Pakistan and India have substantial natural gas, but Bangladesh's natural gas reserves far exceed their national requirements. Though non-renewable, natural gas has been termed as clean energy. Maldives and Sri Lanka have no more indigenous energy resources of their own and are compelled to import all their energy requirements.

It is, therefore, high time that SAARC implement some beneficial cross border power trading projects. There are numerous constraints: the lack of a conducive geopolitical environment, the strategic commodity syndrome, policies that are driven more by national and less by regional requirements, absence of the regulatory mechanism on cross border trading, the huge financial resources crunch, the creation of an investor-friendly environment etc. But the prospects and the opportunities of power trading in the SAARC region are there as well: very well endowed with coal, natural gas and hydropower; at 5.5 percent average annual growth of energy consumption, the highest region-wise growth in the world; supplements/complements the development activities of the region. The European nations have been trading in power for decades. The ASEAN and the South African Pool countries are already ahead of us in this game.

That the Tenth SAARC Summit at Colombo on sub-regional cooperation declared that, "*the Heads of State or Government encouraged the development of specific projects relevant to the individual needs of three or more Member States.*" The Eleventh SAARC Summit will hopefully identify this "regional project". It is expected that this will be an energy-related project where cross border power trading will naturally ensue. One has to take note that India is both the "head and heart" of this South Asia region, and it must take the lead and become proactive so that this SAARC "regional project" together with the cross border power trading will materialise. This will help in uplifting the quality of life of the 1.3 billion South Asians. ▽

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Afghanistan's Ethnic Groups

Now that the bombing is over and Osama and Omar have evacuated themselves, Afghanistan will once again recede from our mindset. But we still do not know Afghanistan. In an attempt to keep Afghanistan in focus and to understand it better, HIMAL presents a checklist of Afghan's ethnic groups. Adapted from the report *Afghanistan: Minorities, Conflict and the Search for Peace* by Peter Marsden, published in November 2001 by Minority Rights Group International.

Pashtuns

The Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, occupy a belt of mountains that extends for much of the border with Pakistan, which has benefited their cross-border smuggling operations. In addition to occupying territory in the Registan Desert and around Kandahar, the Pashtuns also have a significant presence in the Helmand River valley, the Kabul River valley, and other scattered parts of Afghanistan's southeast. Pashtuns also own land in northern areas such as Kunduz, following a colonising process begun in the nineteenth century. By being able to draw primarily on irrigated wheat for their survival, they are at an advantage vis-à-vis other ethnic groups, which have to depend on a combination of rain-fed and irrigated wheat. The nomadic population of Afghanistan is predominantly Pashtun and there has been competition, historically, between these nomads and the Hazaras of central Afghanistan for control of pasturelands. Struggles for this land in the past two decades have alternated control between the nomads and the Hazaras. The Pashtuns organise their affairs through tribal and clan structures called *Pushtunwali*, which puts a strong emphasis on tribal honour and revenge and places great restrictions on female mobility, including the institution of *purdah*.

Hazaras and Tajiks

The western half of the central Hindu Kush range is largely occupied by the Shia Hazaras and the east by the Tajiks. Inhospitable agricultural conditions have rendered both the Hazaras and the Tajiks relatively poor, although the Tajiks have access to the Shomali and Panjshir valleys. The Hazaras are thought to be of Turkic origin and much of the population adopted Twelver Shi'ism after occupation by the Persian Safavids in the 16th and 17th centuries. The term 'Tajik' can apply to all Persian-speaking Sunnis who are not of Turkic origin and, therefore, Tajiks have a less pronounced collective identity than other groups. Prior to the 1978 coup, Tajiks were heavily represented in the

state bureaucracy, a situation which has almost certainly changed. Alternatively, Hazaras have tended to be marginalised and have normally occupied the most menial positions in the economy.

Turkomans and Uzbeks

Turkomans primarily occupy the Badghi hills of the northwest Hindu Kush and their origins date back to the Turkic tribes of Central Asia. Most Turkomans, along with thousands of Uzbeks, came to Afghanistan in the 1920s and 1930s to escape Soviet domination to the north. They brought with them *qarakul* sheep and the Turkoman rug industry. To the east of the Badghi hills is the Faryab desert and the Central Asian flat plain. Uzbeks, also of Turkic origin, are the predominant group in this area, although there are pockets of Pashtuns. This area suffered greatly after the closure of the border with Uzbekistan in 1998, although that border has recently been reopened.

Ismailis

Afghani Ismailis, a Shia group, are settled to the north and northwest of the Salang Pass, through which the main Kabul—Mazar-i-Sharif highway runs. Ismailis are intermingled amongst Hazara and Tajik communities, with significant numbers in Afghanistan's extreme northeast.

Baluchis

Baluchis occupy the inhospitable desert zone along the borders with Pakistan and Iran in Afghanistan's southeast. Many are semi-nomadic and some Baluchis have been heavily involved in opium smuggling into Iran.

Brahui

Sometimes considered to be a Baluchi sub-group, the Brahui live in Afghanistan's south and southwest and practise agriculture and animal husbandry. Some Brahui also work as tenant farmers for Baluchis.



The Asia Foundation has been programming throughout the Asia Pacific region, including the countries of South Asia, since 1954. At a time filled with mounting challenges, but renewed windows of opportunity in South Asia, The Asia Foundation supports programs in South Asia that help improve governance and law, economic reform and development, women's participation, and regional and international relations.

The Foundation's 15 resident offices across Asia include offices in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal. In the past year, the Foundation developed new initiatives in India and is in the midst of renewing its longstanding efforts in Afghanistan. Throughout South Asia, the Foundation supports local organizations in addressing the imperatives of near-term stability, while always maintaining a long-term focus on enhancing the prospects for permanent peace and prosperity.

The Foundation combines its nearly 50 years of experience and broad-based expertise with its on-the-ground presence in order to adapt dynamic and time-tested programs to the local contexts and histories of each South Asian country. In Pakistan this has meant supporting programs to expand the role of civil society, develop sustainable models of community participation for a wide variety of services, and contribute to an agenda and action for institutional reform and long-term good governance. In Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, this has included wide-ranging support for NGOs and civil society organizations to ensure free and fair national parliamentary elections in 2000 and 2001, respectively. Building on a region-wide emphasis on both women's participation and law reform, the Foundation provided training in legal rights and advocacy to more than 120,000 women in Nepal, and is engaged in a long-term effort to combat the trafficking of girls and women.

In India the Foundation inaugurated a cooperative program with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, supporting an Indian diplomat for a six-month fellowship at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. With decades of experience in Afghanistan, the Foundation is already engaged in early reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, including support for the Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), a Peshawar-based nonprofit organization that serves as a clearinghouse for information for development organizations. Future programs in Afghanistan will utilize the Foundation cross-sectoral approach to development and reconstruction, which emphasizes effective governance, public-private dialogue and cooperation, leadership and local capacity building, and long-term commitment.

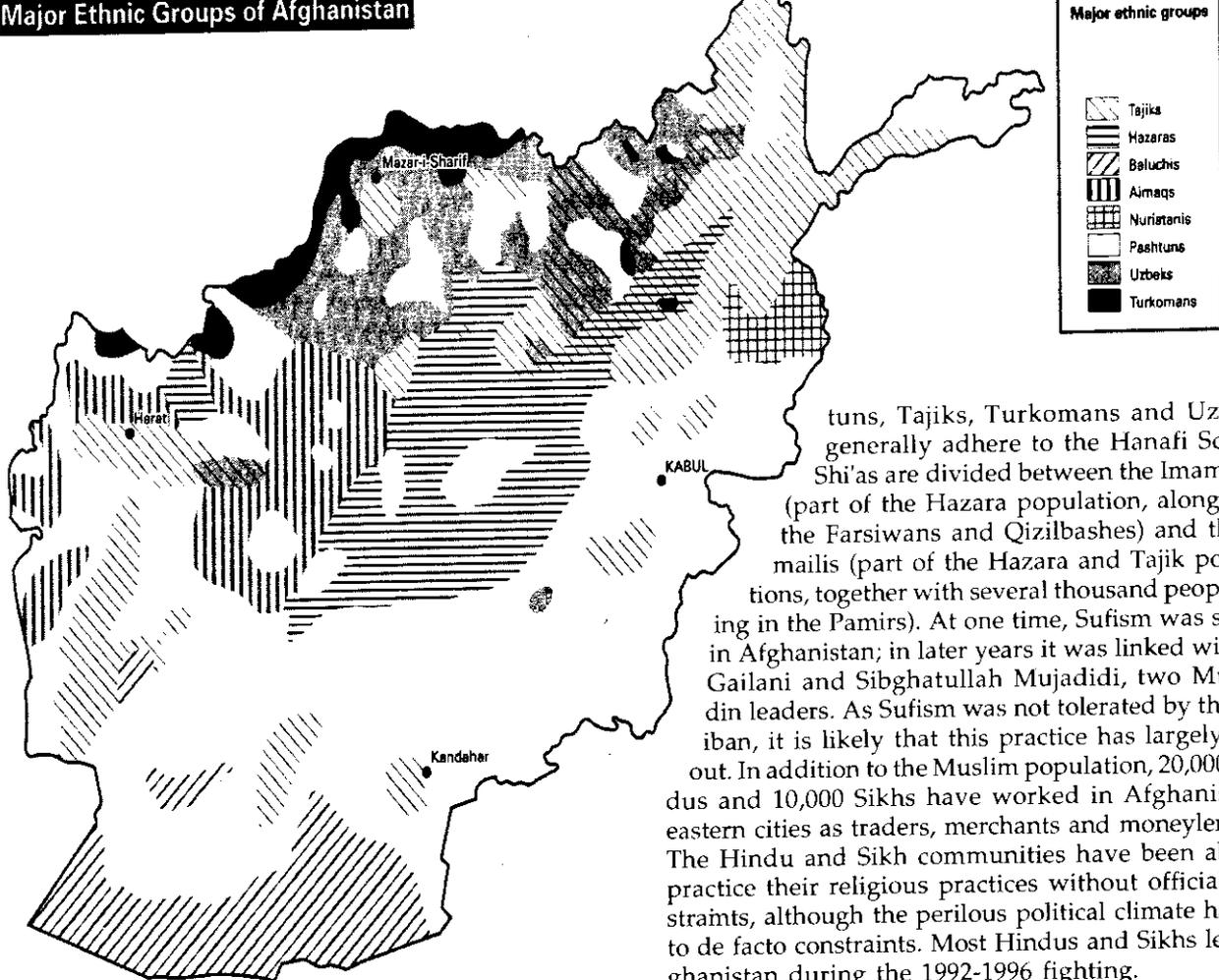
In the past year, the Foundation has also launched Give2Asia, a nonprofit organization that facilitates charitable giving to Asia. Give2Asia provides services which overcome the common challenges associated with giving overseas, making U.S.-Asia philanthropy accessible, secure, and tax deductible. With a flexible menu of giving options, Give2Asia provides individuals, families, corporations, and foundations with the tools for fulfilling their charitable goals in Asia.

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Nuristanis

The Nuristanis live in isolated valleys south of Badakshan in eastern Afghanistan and trace their origins back to the armies of Alexander the Great. They were forcibly converted to Islam in the late nineteenth century by Amir Abdur-Rahman and they survive primarily on goat herding.

Farsiwan

Located along the border with Iran, the Farsiwan are an Imami Shia group. They survive primarily through agriculture and are also located in some southern and western towns.

Qizilbash

Also Imami Shia, the Qizilbash are a small minority which used to be located in Afghanistan's urban areas, where they occupied senior bureaucratic and professional positions prior to the 1978 coup. As a consequence of more than two decades of war, emigration and purges, it is possible that this group's presence has declined significantly.

Aimaqs

The Aimaqs are of Turkic origin and are found in the westernmost part of the Hindu Kush.

Social Factors in Afghani Society

The Sunni population, comprising the Baluchis, Pashtuns, Tajiks, Turkomans and Uzbeks, generally adhere to the Hanafi School.

Shi'as are divided between the Imami sect (part of the Hazara population, along with the Farsiwans and Qizilbashes) and the Ismailis (part of the Hazara and Tajik populations, together with several thousand people living in the Pamirs). At one time, Sufism was strong in Afghanistan; in later years it was linked with Pir Gailani and Sibghatullah Mujadidi, two Mujahidin leaders. As Sufism was not tolerated by the Taliban, it is likely that this practice has largely died out. In addition to the Muslim population, 20,000 Hindus and 10,000 Sikhs have worked in Afghanistan's eastern cities as traders, merchants and moneylenders. The Hindu and Sikh communities have been able to practice their religious practices without official constraints, although the perilous political climate has led to de facto constraints. Most Hindus and Sikhs left Afghanistan during the 1992-1996 fighting.

Linguistically, the country is roughly divided along ethnic lines, with the Pashtun population speaking Pashto and the other ethnic groups, together with the urban elite, speaking Dari, a dialect of Persian. There are a number of minority languages, most notably Turkic, which is spoken by the Turkoman and Uzbek populations.

The heads of state from 1933 to 1979 were members of the Muhammadzai clan of the Barakzai tribe within the Durrani confederation, the most socially affluent of the three major Pashtun tribes. After the Pashtuns, the social hierarchy tended to favour other Sunnis, with Tajiks usually taking priority over Uzbeks. Shi'as were largely left outside the sphere of government. The leadership of the Soviet-backed government was from the Ghilzai Pashtun confederation. The Taliban reasserted the traditional dominance of the Durrani.

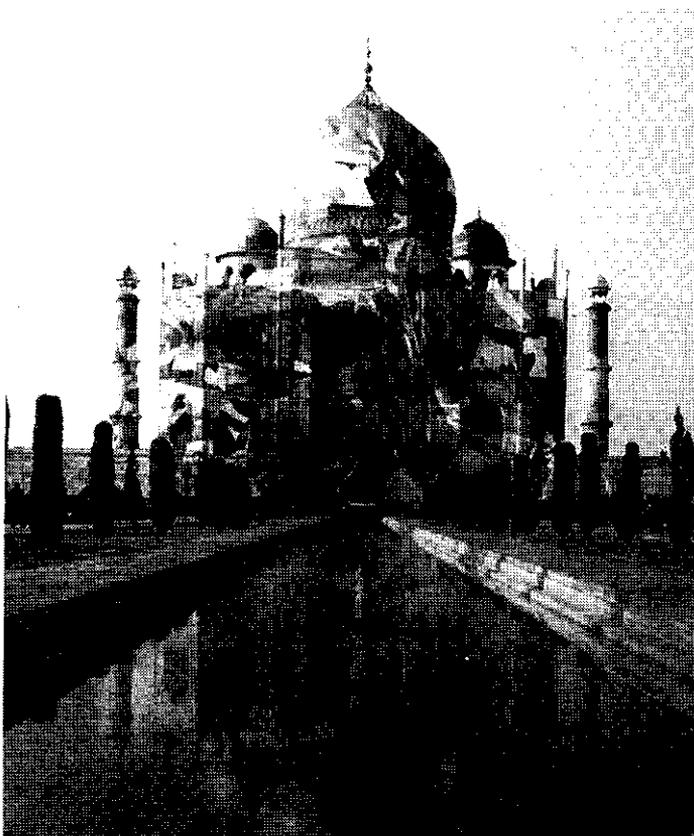
Numerous ethnic allegiances spill over Afghanistan's borders into neighbouring countries. There are equal numbers of Pashtuns in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, and many of the northern groups have ethnic loyalties that extend into Central Asia. Southern Baluchi groups have ties to both Pakistan and Iran. Pashtuns also have cultural links with Arabia. At the time of India's partition in 1947, Afghanistan argued for a separate Pashtun state, with the implicit aim of later incorporating it into Afghanistan. Tensions have risen over the Pashtun issue, leading Islamabad to pursue a policy of control over Kabul.

Camouflage the Taj!

So they're going to cover the Taj Mahal in a bed sheet. Good move. It shows there are some people in the political leadership of the north Indian plains who still have their wits about them even as they go in for the Uttar Pradesh elections.

After all, the Monument of Love stands like a beacon in the Jamuna plains: pointing enemy bombers even on a full moon night directly to the heart of India's defence assets. As tailors and textile workers across Uttar Pradesh are racing against clock trying to stitch together king-size bedsheets, can we make a humble suggestion, without putting down their patriotic endeavours?

MINU DIXIT



Why not just do the

Taj Mahal over with camouflage paint? This would be more effective than having to heave the heavy canvas over the monument every time General Pervez gives a defiant roar from across the Line of Control. Speaking of which, and come to think of it, remember that detailed recky the general did of the Taj environs during the scuppered Agra Summit? Now we know, feigning to pose on the love seat with his begum, Sahba, asking questions about the marble inlay at the entrance, General Pervez actually had an evil eye out for the monument.

You ask, why would anyone Islamic want to pulverise Shah Jahan's creation, the monument that would have been the one-and-only icon of the 'land of the pure' had it been on the banks of the Ravi instead of the Jamuna? "Jealousy!" says Murli the Manohar. He continues, "They are just jealous that we have the Taj and not they. They can't stand us. Alternatively, there is our illustrious Hindutva history which claims that the Taj was actually a mandir maliciously converted into a mausoleum. No wonder they would want

to bomb it! Alternatively, the Taj stands on the ruins of one of the greatest Hindu temples on the Jamuna. Maybe, therefore, we should bomb the Taj."

The last time we saw Murli the Manohar, he was squelching along the muddy banks of the Jamuna ghats, hands on his chin, and saying, "Hmmm." In his cellphone, he was trying to find the number for Dial-a-Historian.

But back to the Taj, Sri Govindacharya, sir, can we suggest that camouflaging the edifice would cheaper and less time-consuming? Confused enemy bomber pilots sent to search out and destroy with daisy cutters and cluster bombs would be

completely flummoxed, wouldn't be able to figure out where the hell they are, and may actually surrender in swarms. While we are at it, why stop at the Mumtaz's Makbara? Similar tactitcs can be used for other monuments across India's strategic corridors that need to be disguised in order to outwit the enemy.

Stealth and surprise, these are the two elements of warfare that we need to pay attention to. Some of these monuments are right there in Delhi: Rastrapati Bhavan can be disguised as the Taj Mahal, which would fool copy-cat suicide attackers in future, and the Qutub Minar could get a new façade to make it resemble an intercontinental ballistic missile -now that should really disorient the enemy which thinks it is too smart by half.

Top Gun to Base: "Passing waypoint Taj Mahal. Vectored on ICBM placement."

Base to Top Gun: "Roger. Launch two big ones on ICBM and get out of there low and fast."

Thus would we protect the Taj Mahal from enemy attacks.

Manohar Dixit

Start

The difference is, approach



End



हिमालयन बैंक लिमिटेड

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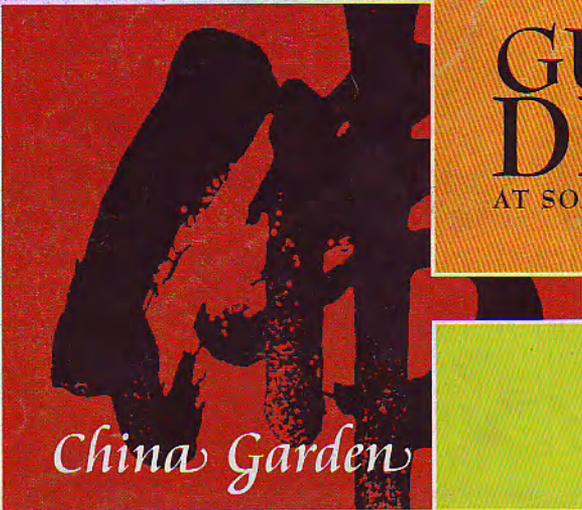
Banking with a difference

Making people go round in circles is not our idea of banking. Because for us, customers come first, giving everyone personalised attention. The fact that thousands of customers bank on us everyday makes us only keen to meet their individual requirements. This explains why we are one of the largest banks in Nepal with an asset base of US\$ 250 million and a network spread over the entire kingdom.

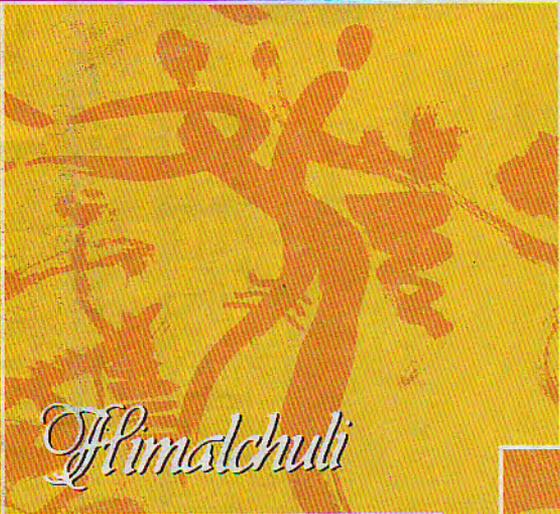
Head Office & Main Branch: Karmachari Sanchaya Kosh Building, Tridevi Marg, Thamel, P.O. Box: 20550, Kathmandu, Nepal, Ph.: 227749, 250201. Telefax: 977-1-222800. Telex: 2789 HIBA. NP. SWIFT: HIMANPKA. Website: www.hbl.com.np e-mail: hbl@hbl.com.np. **Branch Offices:** Kathmandu- New Road, Pulchowk, Maharajgunj, Birgunj, Parsa, Chitwan- Bharatpur, Tandli, Bharatpur: Nagarkot, Morang-Bratnagar, Rupandehi - Siddharthnagar, Makawanpur- Hetauda.

HIMALAYAN BANK HAS CORRESPONDENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH MORE THAN 250 INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED BANKS.

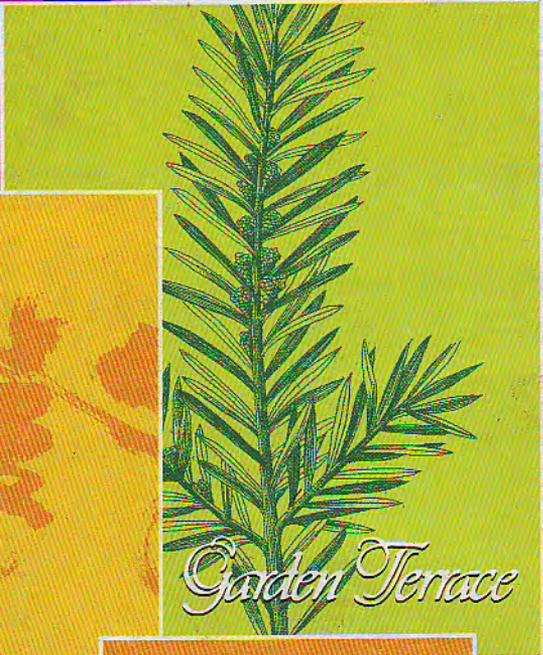
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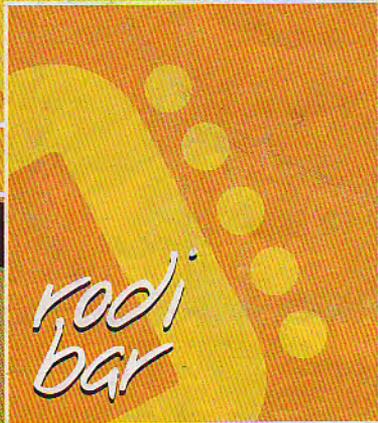
China Garden



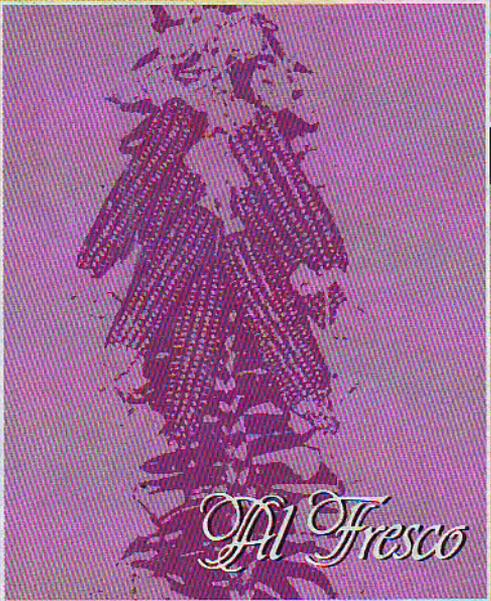
Himalchuli



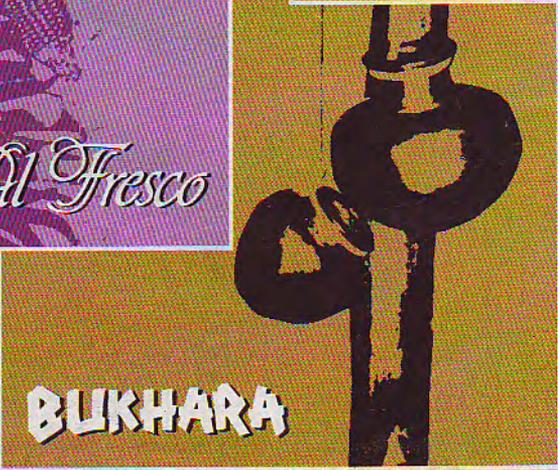
Garden Terrace



rodhi
bar



Al Fresco



BUKHARA

China Garden

Embark on a culinary voyage far beyond the shores of China. Definitely a Chinese experience with a twist.

Open for Lunch & Dinner

Himalchuli

Discover the rich flavours of authentic Nepali and Indian cuisine.

Open for Lunch & Dinner except on Tuesdays

Garden Terrace

Serves Continental, Oriental, Indian meals and light snacks. An extensive International Buffet is laid out for breakfast and lunch.

Open for Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Al Fresco

Nepal's finest Italian Restaurant, conveniently located by the pool side.

Open for Lunch & Dinner except on Wednesdays

Bukhara

Ancient recipes from the North-West frontier awaits your eager palate.

Open for Dinner except on Mondays

Rodi Bar

A popular rendezvous just off the hotel's lobby.

Open from 9 am till 12 midnight

SOALTEE



KATHMANDU