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HIMAL

HIMALAYAN MAGAZINE



House of Cards

Fearing
for Bhutan

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*The Abode of Gods, King of
Mountains, Himalaya
You bound the oceans from
east to west
A northern yardstick
To measure the Earth*

- Kalidasa (Kumara Sambhava)

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Associate Editor	Manisha Aryal
Managing Editor	Pema Wangchuk Dorjee
Photography	Bikas Rauniar
Administration	Balaram Sharma Prakriti Karmacharya

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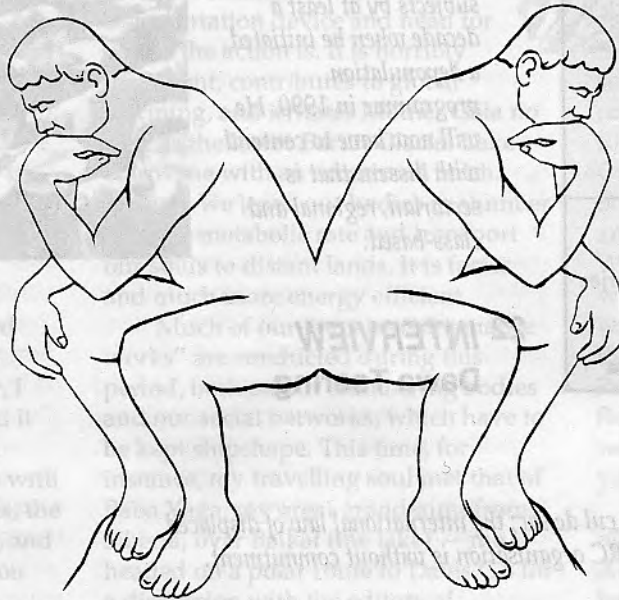
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What National Capitalism?

What I found interesting in Dipak Gyawali's article ("A Fate Other than Marginality", *May/June 1994*) was not so much his skillful restating of the general case for self-reliance, as the importance he attached to nationalism and national capitalists in reaching that goal.

It is true that nationalism has played an important role in capitalist development, with Japan as the prime Asian example. However, the link has not always been so close. Gyawali refers to the Asian 'Four Tigers' to bolster his argument, but it seems to me that only in the case of South Korea is nationalism undoubtedly an important factor. In Taiwan, the modern infrastructure and educational system left by the Japanese was, beyond doubt, a major part of the foundation for economic success as was US aid. As far as national sentiment goes, Taiwanese are of course divided, with some seeing themselves as part of a single Chinese nation, even though unwilling to acknowledge the authority of the current regime in Beijing, and others who favour Taiwanese independence, even while preferring not to proclaim it formally. Singapore and Hong Kong have economies entirely open to the international flows of trade and capital, and in Hong Kong, though most people certainly regard themselves as Chinese, the engine of economic growth has been the pursuit of personal and family advantage by people who willingly migrated from the



mainland to live under colonial rule.

The international economic web continues to grow in complexity. The rapid growth rates now being achieved in some South East Asian countries rely considerably on Japanese overseas investment and on the entrepreneurship of their Chinese minorities, who are still regarded with suspicion by the non-Chinese majorities. In the West, European economic integration continues, despite a backlash against the strengthening of the European Union's political institutions. And then we have the United States, a military super-power but still dependent on foreigners to fund its huge budget deficits.

These are the trends which Stephen Mikesell referred to when discussing *Shining Path* recently in *Himal*, and which led the British historian Eric Hobsbawm to suggest in his 1990 book (*Nations and Nationalism since 1780*), "Probably the only functioning 'national economy' of the late twentieth century is the Japanese."

Both these scholars are Marxists but, even as a non-Marxist, I find their arguments convincing. It is interesting that since Hobsbawm made the comment we have seen even the Japanese begin to give way to pressure to open up their domestic market.

If autonomous national economic development is becoming a doubtful possibility anywhere, it is particularly so for Nepal because of a central contradiction within Nepali nationalism. Gyawali unconsciously highlights this throughout his article by equating the hills with Nepal

and the plains with India, totally ignoring the Tarai, which, as Kurt Meyer reminds us, in "Tarai With Blinkers" in the same issue, now contains half of Nepal's population.

It is not surprising that Gyawali does this, because the emotional roots of Nepali nationalism lie not only in the cultural characteristics of the Nepali-speaking parbatias (i.e. principally Chetris and Bahuns) but also in the hillmen's sense of separation from and distrust of the plainsmen. The anti-plains attitude always surfaces in Kathmandu politics — from soldiers in 1840 denouncing the British Resident for his defence of "vile madhesis", to demonstrators in 1974 protesting the incorporation of Sikkim in India with shouts of 'Dhotiwal murdabad!' and, most recently, the United Peoples' Front targeting India-registered vehicles and cinema halls showing Hindi films. Build on this complex to help forge a path of development distinct from India's and you risk ethnic tension in the Tarai, where the population is now about one-third pahari and two-thirds madhesi. Broaden the definition of "Nepaliness" to include all the Tarai cultures and you lose the distinct boundary between "Nepaliness" and "Indianness".

The fluidity of that boundary for many Tarai people was first brought home to me as a college lecturer in Birgunj 22 years ago. When I once casually referred to an Indian colleague and myself as 'two foreigners', a Nepali student commented, "Mr. Jha is not a foreigner." For this student, the distinction between Maithili Brahmin from the Indian side of the border and one from Nepal side had no significance other than the purely technical. This response echoed B.P. Koirala's statement at the 1947 inauguration of

the Nepal Rastriya Congress that "Nepal and India are not two countries" and at a 1952 press conference that "Psychologically, we do not consider India as a foreign country." B.P. Koirala soon learnt to sound more nationalistic, but his early, unguarded comments still represent the feelings of many Nepali citizens who are non-pahari or who have had a large part of their socialisation among non-paharis.

Against this background, and with Indian capital behind so many nominally Nepali enterprises in the hills, can we really expect the emergence of "national capitalism" in Nepal? The face-to-face communities of village Nepal are one reality, and "market forces" operating across the border another. Finding some kind of balance between them is a key problem for the country. However, I do not see an intermediate role for the kind of Nepali national economy that Gyawali envisages.

John Whelpton
Hong Kong

Critique Appropriate

Kurt Meyer ("Tarai with Blinkers", *May/June 1994*) points out how Nepali authors discriminate when writing on the Tarai by denying Tharu culture its rightful place. He cites the examples of the works of Ram Dayal Rakesh and Hari Bansa Jha, who have done great injustice to Tharu by deliberately producing useless statistics and misleading information.

Both Jha and Rakesh studied national integration and cultural heritage of the Nepal Tarai while with the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, and yet have succeeded in producing such divisive work. Indeed, both the writers exclude Kanchanpur, Kailali, Dang Deukuri, Chitwan, Bara, Siraha, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang — those districts that have majority of Tharu. Meyer's critique is appropriate. Researchers like Meyer are welcome to study the Tharu.

Shankar L. Chaudhary
Kathmandu

Radical Configurations in Nepal

Points raised by Harald O. Skar in "No Shining Path in Nepal" (*Mail, May/June 1994*) are well taken. However, defining the "salient difference" of the recent

past in terms of Peru as "communist-socialist...under President Velasco" and Nepal as "totalitarian neo-feudal with a God-king" seems just as superficial, albeit more opaquely sesquipedalian.

I accept that, to a point, oppression tends to enforce passivity. I do identify the subject of violence not in the oppressed *per se*, but in the growing masses of schooled youth — whose formalistic education and empty certification are preparing them for a mythical bureaucratic world. Without such a discontented and inappropriately educated potato intelligentsia, there could be no Comrade Gonzalo to solicit and personify their illusions and frustrations.

Skar's delineation of terrorist versus revolutionary makes only the Shining Path the issue, whereas even the mainstream international press has repeatedly acknowledged that most killings, especially massacres of entire villages, have been at the hands of the Peruvian Government. Similar stories are coming out in the press from El Salvador, Guatemala and other places where there have been armed insurgency movements. What of pacified hamlets, land mines, free fire zones, administrative genocide, napalm, cluster bombs, defoliation, guns for butter, contractors, debt, World Bank funded public works projects, and IMF rescheduling? The Shining Path's "potato proletarianisation", no doubt rightfully criticised, pales in comparison with this state and agency sponsored "forced draft urbanisation" — and is derivative of it.

The word 'terrorist', like the word 'communist', has become a pejorative term used to reduce complicated social issues into demonology and legitimise market and state-sponsored violence of even greater proportions. I prefer Paulo Freire's dichotomy of "radical" versus "sectarian" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, available recently in Nepali as the *Dalitko Sicchan*, SPACE 1994). The radical is the person who refuses to accept either his own oppression or the oppression of others and who furthermore recognises the humanity of others, even of the oppressor. Where a rightist is by definition a "sectarian", a leftist may be sectarian if he is dogmatic and intolerant. My article identified the potentially radical tendencies of Peru as

situated in the urban and rural poor organisations, which have been caught between the Shining Path and the government and are suffering the greatest degree of violence by both.

As for future movements in Nepal, I sense that *radical* movements are emerging from below in totally unexpected forms, configurations and alliances, national and international — not directly in terms of the present political alignments or leadership, which seem moribund. We see intimations of this, for example, in growing numbers of reports of newly literate and organised women closing down liquor operations in rural Nepal; the public works projects will follow.

My appraisal of ethnicity is guarded regarding the experiences in Africa and Eastern Europe. Ethnicity and factions are derivative of larger processes which must be constructively confronted and dealt with in their own terms.

Stephen L. Mikesell
Kathmandu

Hard Work and Ethnicity

For two decades, my friends and I worked as political organisers in the Seti-Mahakali area of West Nepal, and I must express disagreement with Harald O. Skar's analysis of the ethnic politics of Rana Tharu and Dangora Tharu.

Both in Nepal's east and west Tharu are oppressed communities. Where they are organised and politically conscious, and where the Communist Party of Nepal has helped them launch struggles against exploitation, they characteristically choose the party. The reason the communist organisation is weak in the Seti-Mahakali Tarai is because the feudal-type interests underlying the Panchayat regime were most heavily entrenched here. This also explains absence of adequate consciousness and divided votes.

Tharu are exploited by the pahari people such as Thakuri,

PRESIDENTE
GONZALO
GARANTIA
DE TRUÑEO
MUNDO



Chhetri and Bahun, big landlords who are traditionally close to the Nepali Congress Party. This is why in the 1959 elections, the Congress received an absolute majority here. Today they use their overwhelming coercive influence over the Rana Tharu bonded labourers, who can do nothing but obey.

Clearly, the Communist Party's weak organisation alone explains why the majority in the area "embraced the Congress Party"; it was not because they wanted to "maintain the ethnic distance", as Scar believes.

Furthermore, if there were some primordial logic underlying the division of Rana Tharu and the Dangora Tharu, why has there been no history of strife between them? A tendency towards joint family among one and nuclear family among the other, by itself, is a meaningless explanation for revolutionary consciousness. If the elections could be explained so easily by ethnicity, why, for example, did the Nepal Rastriya Jana Mukti Morcha (subsequently renamed Nepal Rastriya Janajati Party) not get any seats in the Mechi and Kosi zones (the communists won all the seats in Mechi and 13 out of 19 seats in Kosi), despite overwhelming Rai and Limbu majorities in the region?

It is only when the Communist Party has done less work and has a weaker organisation at the grassroots that it cannot win the elections.

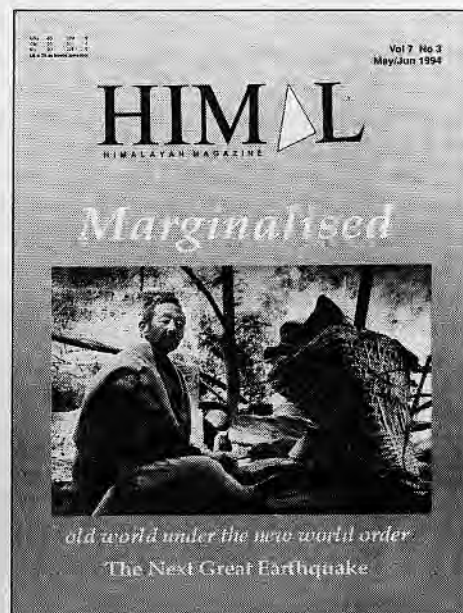
Surendra Pande
Kathmandu

Clean, Green Dharamsala

While Himal takes up issues that affect different parts of the region, it does not seem immune from desk-top journalism. Your reporter who filed "Discord in Dharamsala" (*Briefs, May/ Jun 1994*), it appears, has not set foot in Dharamsala.

Although there are inaccuracies in reporting the unfortunate incident which took place in April, I would like to dwell on the implied charge that Tibetans in Dharamsala are responsible for the "environmental catastrophe" here. Had your reporter checked with me or with the district authorities here, he would have become aware of the series of steps we Tibetans have taken to develop and protect the town's environment.

The only two public lavatories in McLeod Ganj were constructed by the Tibetan community in 1971. These are used by local Indians, Tibetans and visitors. Our office has organised regular environment awareness campaigns, video shows, lectures, and on Earth Day this year we opened a "green shop" in McLeod Ganj to promote eco-friendly products in the community; we have organised clean-up campaigns at regular intervals to rid the area of garbage, particularly plastic bottles; and are actively involved in the Indo-Tibetan McLeod Ganj Development Committee, which has been implementing a number of projects for the development of the



town and surrounding areas.

The above activities benefit all residents of McLeod Ganj, Indians, Tibetans and tourists. The Tibetan community has also been assisting the local Indian community at other levels, such as in reconstructing school buildings, making available health services (both traditional Tibetan and allopathic), and welcoming local students into our schools.

It may be true that some Tibetans here have certain negative characteristics, but it is certainly untrue to say that Tibetans have only been using local facilities without contributing to the development of the area.

Dawa Tsering
Tibetan Welfare Officer
Dharamsala

A Touch of Orientalism

Kanak Dixit's article "Delinquent Documentary" (*Mar/Apr 1994*) reminded me once again to be wary about documentaries. Separate from the docu-drama, the very nature of a documentary, as the name implies, is to document — see it and show it as it is. The documentary director/producer has a moral/civic responsibility not to colorise or aesthetise or try to change the scenario to make it appear more "exotic".

Injecting moods that certain audiences may want — supposedly catching an elusive instance by sticking in the lynx segment in a film on

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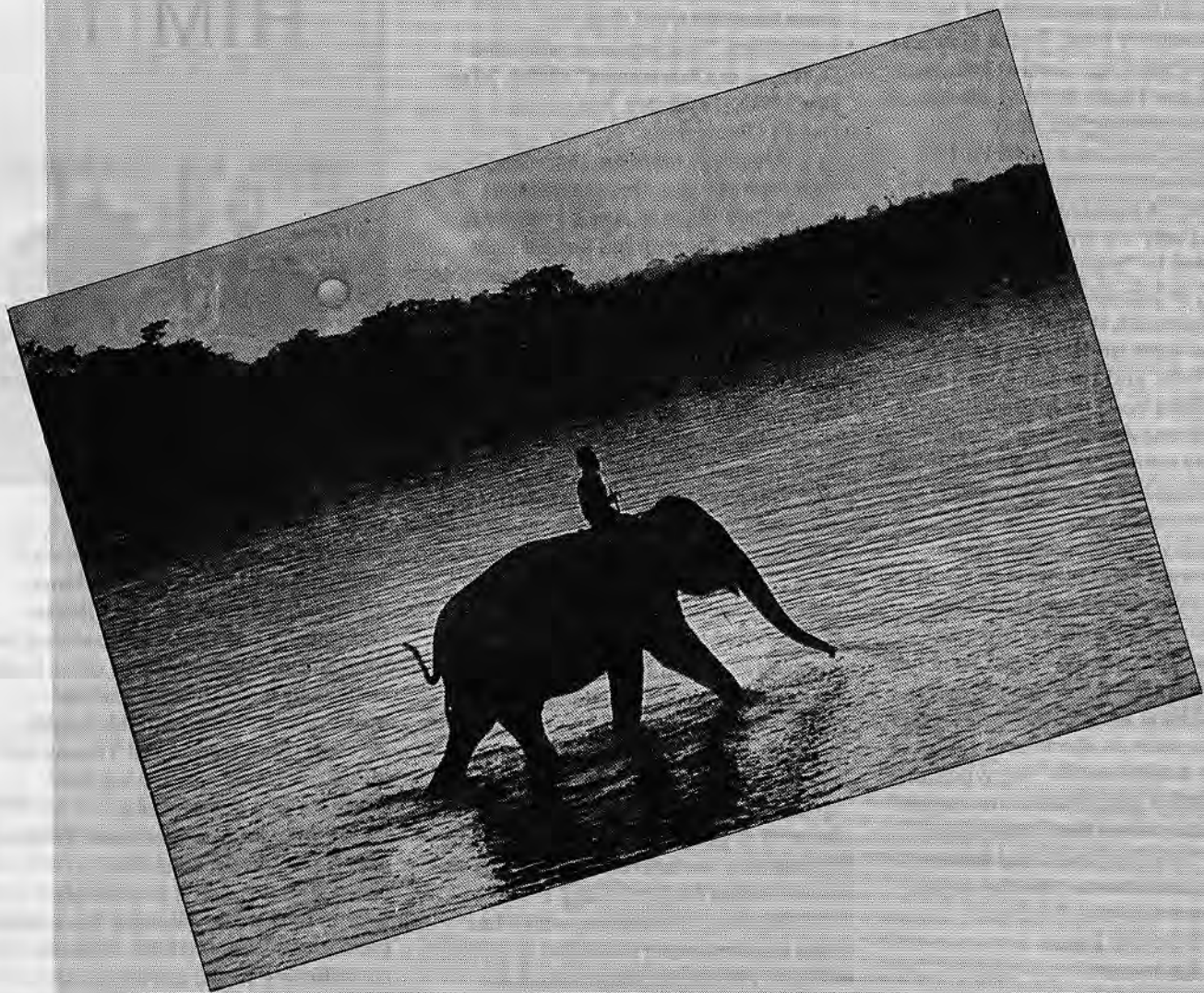
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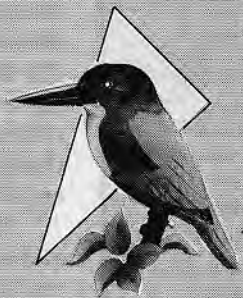
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Mustang, for example — rings with a touch of orientalism, as Edward Said would have said. If it is drama we want, we should stick to "NYPD Blues" or the network news, not turn to public television or the Discovery Channel.

Sakshi Sharma
Ithaca, New York

Essence of High Garhwal

Having read two recent issues of Himal on Chipko and the Himalayan Film Festival, I am baffled by the recurring propensity among us so-called lovers of the Himalaya to spend more time rubbishing one another than in singing the praise of our beloved.

I would remind the Chipko gurbhais ("Axing Chipko" **Jan/Feb 1994**) that when Sarala Devi was alive, both Sundarlalji and Chandi Prasadji regularly visited her in her ashram in Kaushani to avail of her pioneering environmental inspiration. This was in the early sixties, when I was there. Do these sparring partners ever stop to consider the pain their petty quarrel for precedence must cause the shades of Sarala Devi who was totally unconcerned about self-importance?

A similar "hate thy neighbour" tone prevails in the film issue (*Mirror*, *Mirror* **Mar/Apr 1994**). Kanak Mani Dixit, in "Delinquent Documentary", rather unfairly implies that film makers are habitual fakers. Let me remind Dixit that this tendency is not unknown in the groves of academia and journalism. Prof. Gerald Berreman's flaying of Victor Banerji's *The Splendour of Garhwal and Roop Kund* (as reported in Sanjeev Verma's "...because they are there"), I find, monstrously off-target. What's with Gerald sahib that he has to make his chosen field of study a battleground with his clients? Is it the crassness of expression or some hidden overhang of colonial paternalism that has found its way from the Landaur language school of the sixties to lurk under his chair in California?

What puzzles those of us who have struggled steeply to the windy buggials to confirm the authenticity of

Banerji's findings is the parameter of our pre-Berkeley hunter's research. How can a comfortable commuter out of Mussoorie's missionary cantonment strolling along the level, outermost ridge of the lesser ranges be so vociferous about the mood obtaining the scarcely visible Dev Bhumi heights? Especially when his field of study overlooks the Doon Valley and his back is turned to the snows.

Banerji's film has just won a national award. Our confrontationalist anthropologist's credentials as a film critic are as flimsy as his peripheral acquaintance with the essence of High Garhwal.

Bill Aitken
Oakless, Mussoorie

Surviving on Chipko

Although I have not read Manisha Aryal's "Axing Chipko" (**Jan/Feb 1994**), Vandana Shiva's response (**May/Jun 1994**) has prompted me to react. To say that a dharna by women in one pocket is indication of the overall continued vibrancy of Chipko in the hills seems far-fetched. Such sporadic actions are not confined to the Uttar Pradesh hills but occur irregularly in most rural areas. It is perhaps natural for such actions to hold special significance for those whose intellectual and professional survival is dependent on the so-called survival of Chipko.

Instead of getting locked in the debate of "who started Chipko", the issues that needs attention is that its proponents have done little to sustain the movement. They have done their level best to use the Chipko bait to feed their own interests. Everyone can see that the women who actively took part in Chipko are still as poor and deprived as they were before,

whereas the spokespersons of the movement are flourishing elsewhere.

Shiva's claim that "the contest and conflict is between women fighting to protect nature and their survival, and men engaged in theft, corruption and violence" goes against the grain of equality and social justice. Such sweeping statements might establish one's self-proclaimed status

as fighter for women's rights, but cannot help the cause for which the writer seems genuinely concerned.

Sudhirendar Sharma
Energy and Environment Group
New Delhi

Missing Chipko's Heart

Manisha Aryal missed the heart of Chipko in her article, I would like to remind Aryal that Chipko is not just a few known personalities or a 20-year chronology. It is basically a protest for natural rights and has always been visible in local history; what is dead is the movement created by the media. Though appreciative of her fieldwork, I expect deeper pieces from the writer in future.

Shekhar Pathak
Talla Danda, Nainital

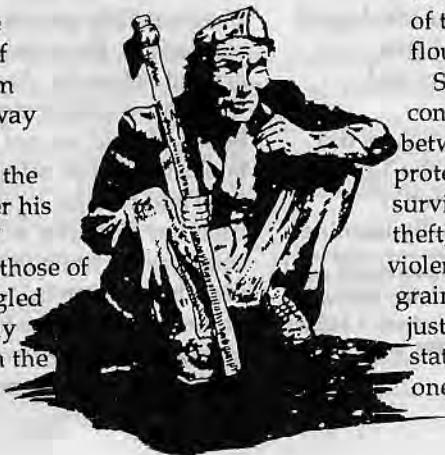
Analysing Conflict

Manisha Aryal has correctly analysed the internal conflicts of the Chipko movement. It was indeed due to individual egos that this movement failed to achieve its purposes. Foreign funders and academics were partly responsible for diverting Chipko from its path. Meanwhile, you must understand that the announcement that "Chipko is dead" would be a grievous blow to those who maintain themselves upon its name. What will they feed upon if Chipko were acknowledged to be no more?

However, it is probably not entirely true to say that Chipko is completely lifeless. Certainly, it is near death, but survives, for example, in movements of the hill people against dams and mining, the campaign to save seeds, etc.

What Nalni Jayal and Vandana Shiva have expressed in their letters (**May/Jun 1994**) is not true, and they are not representatives of the Chipko movement. They are academic-types, the sort who come up to the hills after a movement has passed, in motor cars. Shiva has been correctly depicted in Aryal's piece. Aryal will be glad to know that most of her views as expressed in her article are shared by the activists of the movement.

The one disagreement I have with Aryal is her linking the demand for a Uttarakhand state with Chipko. In fact, the creation of a separate state in the



hills was never in Chipko's agenda, and nor will Chipko's goals be achieved through such a state. If an Uttarakhand is carved out, it too is bound to be anti-Chipko and very much an instrument of the establishment.

Kumar Prasoon
Jajal, Tehri Garhwal

Addressing the Ignored

While appreciative of Saubhagya Shah's feature "The Gospel Comes to the Hindu Kingdom" (Sep/Oct 1993), I would like to address the ensuing debate and what was ignored in the article.

Shah overlooks the sociological changes based on historical transitions in the culture of Nepal when he says, "The poverty-stricken populace in Nepal was ripe with possibilities for the missionary". Historically, culture goes through an evolutionary process of renewal when a new movement emerges and some old doctrines are altered in the span of time, and democracy leads people to seek religious liberty along with political and economic freedom — that freedom which had been denied by our political social order, *not* the poverty of the people.

Shah also refers to the Matwali-Tamang being organised into voting block by converting to Christianity. I would like to assert that Christinity is not a political device used to motivate the Tamangs to set up voting blocks in Nepal. It is the oppression of the ruling class and the desire for equal opportunity that causes people to set up voting blocks; this is often regardless of their conversion to Christianity. True conversion is a personal spiritual transformation and has nothing to do with setting up voting blocks.

Tamangs constitute the largest ethnic group in Nepal. Yet, they are grossly under-represented in legislation and parliament. Thus the setting up of a voting block is an appropriate step in breaking away from the old systems of deprivation, manipulation and denial. It is the impetus given by the dawning of democracy, and the anticipated freedom

that is sweeping the Tamangs and other ethnic groups along, not conversion to another religion.

Susil Tamang in his comments on Shah's article (*Mail*, Jan/Feb 1994), questions the Western culture and the Christian God's intolerance of other gods. Racism or intolerance on the basis of race and colour one encounters in Europe is prevalent throughout the world, including Nepal. What would you say to Tamang women being kept as surrogates and men as pipas in the Ranā Durbars even to this day? If this is not demeaning racism then what is it? If Tamang, Newars, Bahun and the so-called untouchable Kami and Damai possess the same humanness, why is only one race considered superior in the Hindu caste system?

Furthermore, the high rate of divorce and various other ills of the Western world have nothing to do with the doctrine of Christianity. The deterioration of the socio-economic and the nuclear family structures are the main cause of the ills of the West. True Christianity tolerates all castes and creeds on the basis that the Christian God that has created the entire universe, loves creation.

When Tamang says that Christians are violating the human rights of Nepalis by imposing their religion through the promise of scholarships and education, he neglects to look at the other side of the coin. The issue here is the availability of education, not the group who is doing the sponsoring. Education makes people think analytically and act intelligently. It is unquestionably essential to a country's growth. Nepali students who are educated in Christian schools, and are taught about the Bible, for example, do not abandon their culture and become isolated Christians. In fact, they are more able to distinguish the ideological differences which leads to better appreciation of their families and cultural bonding.

Attending a Christian School did not stop the Nepali King, who Tamang considers to be an incarnation of Vishnu, from being Hindu. By learning

about the Christian faith in South Africa and India, Mahatma Gandhi did not sell his cultural heritage to the British. Karl Marx did not abandon his theory on class struggle between the capitalists and the proletariat while learning about the Christian faith.

When Tamang asserts that Christians impose their doctrine, and in so doing violate human rights, is not valid. Human rights does not get violated when one chooses to follow a different religious faith. It gets violated when the freedom of choice is denied. Imposition of a religion can only be realized in a confined situation where one is restrained by law. Human rights of those people were denied when they were incarcerated and persecuted for choosing different religious faiths. Nepal is ethnically and racially a multicultural society and should welcome all religious faiths and their leaders. Why shouldn't the Pope come to Nepal?

G. Hansel, also in the same issue informs us that Bible is being translated into the Sunar and Jirel dialects. His attitude towards the translators is twisted. The point is that the Bible has not only stood as a worldwide religious book, but also an outstanding piece of literature in the literary world. The whole world is aware of it, so why should anyone be prevented from reading it? The individual himself will decide whether to believe it or discard it once the information is available. Why should we remain in cocoons and why should only foreign tourists come and take stories and photographs of our primitive lives to dazzle their audiences back home? We should try to meet the challenges of the 20th century and leave religious stereotyping behind us.

Huta Ram Baidya, in the same issue, correlates Biblical verses to the Bhagwat Gita, pointing out the similarities. He writes that Hinduism arrived before the dawn of Christianity. If there are similarities in the religious books, should we not respect both books instead of being ethnocentric? His "soil and foreign saplings" metaphor, in itself has disparity when he tries to compare the finite to the infinite. The idea that foreign faiths spoil the nature of the land is not true because it is not uncommon to find many plants that do well when taken from one subtropical

Note: We wish to bring to the notice of readers that Indrani Aikath-Gyaltsen, whose death we noted in the last issue *Himal*, has been accused of plagiarism on her two books, *Cranes' Morning* and *Hold My Hand, I'm Dying*. The first book is said to have borrowed extensively from a 1956 novel by English writer Elizabeth Goudge, and the second is linked to a 1966 work by a Rhodesian writer, John Gordon-Davis.

— Editors

region to another. Likewise, the concept of god transferred from one continent to another. When he misapplies the New Testament and denounces the Book of Matthew, it is obvious that Baidya does not understand the Biblical scripture.

When the people of Gorkha look from their mountains to the plains of Hindustan, they will not only see the Christian missionaries coming towards them, but the wave of changes, and Democracy. Throughout history, the freedom of religion has provided an effective vehicle for social change, stimulating innovation and economic activity. Nepal needs religious freedom, political stability and economic growth, not a mono-religious purification. For no nation has ever flourished under protectionism or isolation. All countries of the world are connected and 20th century Nepal is certainly no exception.

The social and economic patterns in Nepal, and the peoples' yearnings call for the rising of Christian influence. Nepal is will continue emulating Western lifestyle and the people will continue embracing Christianity for consolation and the eternal salvation.

*Kumar Tamang
Berkeley, California*

Saubhagya Shah responds:

I would like to respond to the points raised over the past year in some letters to my article in **Sept/Oct 1993** HIMAL, "The Gospel Comes to the Hindu Kingdom".

Rather than taking a 'religious' standpoint, my objective was to delineate the process and impact of Christian missionary efforts in Nepal, making way for meaningful dialogue in a subject that has for too long remained obfuscated from all sides for too long. It might be worth mentioning here that I have not accused individual missionaries of trying to force the heathen to change their religion.

Kumar Tamang's theological advocacy and his explanation as to the rise of Christian influence do not hold up to sociological analysis. I fail to understand how he can claim that Nepal is will embrace Christianity for consolation and eternal salvation. Tamang making a confusing mismatch among evolutionary theories,



religious liberty and democracy, fails to see the simple difference between planned and spontaneous changes. While cultures undergo gradual transformations over centuries, the missionary work meant to achieve religious conversion in Nepal is a well-planned and well executed phenomenon with fixed time schedules. Regarding the setting up of voting blocks, my reference was only to the fact that certain areas voted en masse during the last election.

I would like to remind Edgar Metzler, Executive Director of United Mission to Nepal (**Nov/Dec 1993**) that I do not consider just the UMN when I use the term "mission" in my article; there are also other organisations actively working in Nepal. I do not agree with his statement that the modern church was not started or expanded by western missionaries. Even before 1950, it was the western missionaries working in Darjeeling, Raxual, Rupaiah, Pithoragarh and other border points who converted and trained Nepali speaking people to work in Nepal. After 1950s, the role of Western Missionaries has been in educating and training local Christians. The Bible Translation Service is one of the best such examples. Christian leaders that I talked to have accepted that some conversions have been due to material inducements.

Metzler also gets into the debate on the terms, "to proselytise" and "to convert". The important thing when dealing with Christian conversion in relation to non-proselytizing religions like Hinduism and other local religious traditions is that whether the conversion is done through spiritual preaching, enticement or any other methods, it has the same end result. Any attempt to separate culture and religion into two realms in Nepal is conceptually quite off the mark. The two are inseparable as they have "cosmo-biological symbolism" — an organic bonding.

In his letter, Ben Van Wijhe (**Jan/Feb 1994**) writes, "I came to Nepal to serve the people, which I believe brings glory to God." I would like to ask Wijhe, "Which god?" When so many religious beliefs are around, what is the truth?

Such absolute claims are not possible at a rational level. His is an expression of religious bigotry, intolerable and self-righteous. The Veda and Ramayana will appear full of lies to people like Wijhe, and a shaman healing a villager will appear full of evil and darkness. Instead of directing guilt pangs at an article that has not, in any way, challenged the Christian faith or its missionary character, I advise Wijhe that he admit honestly if he believes in conversion and take pride if he has converted some.

I would remind Ramesh Khatri, (**Jan/Feb 1994**) that my article referred to physical incentives as only one of the motives for conversion. On the matter of caste, the very fact that caste distinctions — in whatever forms — remain among Nepali Christians is a fair indication of the caste consciousness. Theoretically and ideologically, caste may not be of importance to Nepali Christians, but in actual practices — particularly in marriage — I did observe a fair degree of preferences to pair up with one's erstwhile caste group. At the same time, let us not forget that intercaste marriage takes place among Buddhists and Hindus as well as a result of education, evolving professions and urbanisation.

As far as Metzler's concerns about unity and conflict in Nepal, I would like to share my concerns which derive from a recent event in Northern Dhadang. The Christian converts in a village attempted to get the Dasain celebrations cancelled as "demonic and satanic practice". A conflict situation arose, but the local leaders were able to diffuse the tension before it could build up into a religious fight.

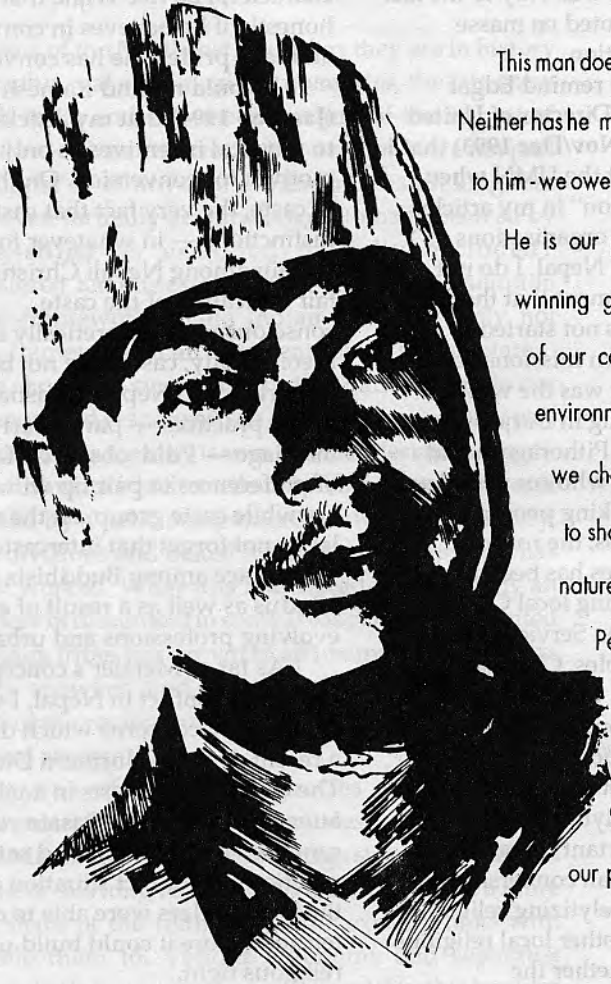
All said and done, the conversion issue has the potential of creating conflict and disharmony.

*Saubhagya Shah
Kathmandu.*


Debate on the issue of missions, missionaries and conversion is now closed. — Editors.



Readers are invited to comment, criticise or add to information and opinions appearing in HIMAL. Letters should be to the point and may be edited. Letters which are unsigned and/or without addresses will not be entertained. Please include daytime contact telephone number, if available.

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Bhutan today teeters on the edge of geopolitical ruin. It could tip over, or it could recover in time.

It is, basically, up to King Jigme Singye Wangchuk.

House of Cards

by Kanak Mani Dixit

In 1990, the rulers of Bhutan, a coterie of inter-related Ngalong elites from the western districts, initiated a successful depopulation exercise which has by now rid the country of a little over one lakh individuals. These are Nepali-speaking people, a majority of them Bhutanese citizens as even King Jigme Singye Wangchuk would have earlier acknowledged.

The eviction exercise was carried out in order to reduce the proportion of the Nepali-speakers, Lhotshampa, which a 1988 census showed to be higher than expected. The regime decided to act swiftly, using a combination of premeditated violence and mass intimidation, creating a fear psychosis which was channelled into orchestrated "voluntary emigration". Although a trickle of refugees continues to emerge from Bhutanese roadheads in the Duars, the bulk was out by late 1992, and lives today in eight

refugee camps in Nepal's southeast.

Thimphu initiated an effective public relations effort to dupe the world while engaged in a cultural wipeout. A tiny, seemingly vulnerable country ruled by a sophisticated and self-righteous nobility carried out a brazen operation which it continues to defend without censure or sanction.

Thimphu has used every opening to its advantage, from political confusion in Nepal, to the availability of a starry-eyed Indian and international media that loves efficient monarchies. It has also cleverly played on Western concerns for an exotic and indigenous Tibetan culture supposedly being swamped by a Nepali tide.

If individual lives are sacrosanct and the right to life applies equally to Lhotshampa and speakers of Dzongkha, the language of the country's north, only a

observer equipped with cultural blinders would regard the regime's action justified. The count is 86,000 Lhotshampa, most of them peasants, housed in the UNHCR-administered refugee camps, and another 30,000 or so scattered across Nepal, West Bengal and Assam. The visual proof is in the empty fields of the Sarbhang, Chirang, Samchi, Dagana and Samdrup Jonkhar districts of Bhutan's south, where probably for the first time in the millennia of human habitation of the Himalaya swaths of farmland are reverting back to original jungle.

Welcome to the World

The charmed hiatus in which Thimphu finds itself is bound to end before long, for there are obvious limits to credibility in selling a flawed programme. Thimphu strategists who sat down in 1989 to chart the present



course did not contemplate that there would be a refugee problem, nor that it would fester into the mid 1990s. The eviction operation was supposed to be brutal and swift. The Lhotshampa would disappear into the night, after which Bhutan would revert back to its self-image of innocent hermit kingdom.

But evictees became refugees and lingered in the camps as a blot on the national record. Despite continuous image management, the aura of Shangri La is now sullied. Says Ravi Nair, the Delhi-based human rights activist, who has followed the issue since the first refugees emerged, "The carefully nurtured image has shattered among those who follow the politics of South Asia. People have understood what the Bhutanese game is."

Meanwhile, the refugee leadership, while riven with conflict, survives to fight another day. A northerner-only political party in exile proposes to plumb the depths of disaffection among the Sarchop and Ngalong communities. The hapless political and bureaucratic machinery of Nepal has thus far been more help than hindrance to Thimphu, but a Nepali government might yet emerge to put up a fight. Similarly, the United States' clear public stance against Thimphu, while still only rhetorical, could translate into some kind of action.

India's steadfast support for the Bhutanese regime is cold comfort due to the potential it has to take a strategic about-turn the moment King Jigme is seen to falter. As of February, J.N. Dixit, a friend of the regime during whose term India's present Bhutan policy was defined, is no longer Foreign Secretary in South Block.

Exactly two years ago, when Himal first covered the Bhutanese crisis ("The Dragon Bites Its Tail", Jul/Aug 1992), the pertinent question seemed only that of the refugees and their return. While negotiations on repatriation remain the supposed task of the Bhutan-Nepal Joint Ministerial

Committee, Bhutan will increasingly be judged, like any other nation state, also on the basis of its record on human rights and representative governance.

By initiating the mass-scale eviction of Lhotshampa, King Jigme inadvertently accelerated the entry of his closed kingdom into the 20th century world of political parties, open and acrimonious discourse, and activism. The programme of eviction and its fallout over the last four years has politicised not only the Lhotshampa (both refugees and those who remain inside), but also northerners of the east and west. Inevitably, even as they are being asked to condemn the southerners, the Ngalong and Sarchop populations are being exposed to novel ideas and processes. Right or wrong, group politics is about to swing away from the dictates of feudal subservience.

Even if Bhutan were to countenance a return of only a fraction of the refugees, this will not be the quiescent group that fled the country. And what of the refugee captains of today? Certainly not a docile return to civil service and the teaching occupations that they emerged from.

Whichever way the refugee problem itself is resolved, the stage is set for Bhutan's late entry into the unstable world of South Asian democracies. King Jigme has told one over-awed interviewer after another over the last decade that he knows monarchy is not the best system of government and that when the time comes it will be gone. It would be unfortunate if the king had his wish fulfilled sooner than he expected.

Joint Ministerial Charade

Since July 1993, the fig leaf of movement on the diplomatic front has been provided by the Joint Ministerial Committee, set up under their respective home ministers by Bhutan and Nepal to resolve the refugee question. The Committee's four meetings have thus far been marked by Bhutanese stonewalling and Nepali indulgence. The positions of the

two sides are irreconcilably mismatched, but both have preferred to project an illusion of progress.

The Committee's task is to distinguish Bhutanese citizens from non-Bhutanese and repatriate the former. At first glance, a relatively simple task—to identify the antecedents of no more than 16,000 families. However, the exercise is made difficult because Bhutan insists on retroactive application of its laws on citizenship in a manner that would leave tens of thousands stateless. Furthermore, Bhutanese law also takes away the citizenship from those who emigrate—the reason why Thimphu orchestrated the "voluntary departures" of many Lhotshampa (recorded with pre-printed forms, forced signatures, video tapes and photographs).

In the Committee, the Bhutanese team has walked circles around the Nepali side, forcing the latter to accept self-denying compromises at every turn. It overrode Nepal's proposal that an independent panel verify refugee citizenship, after which it was decided to hand the delicate task to a bilateral team. In a fit of absent-mindedness that left the refugee leaders aghast, the Nepalis also agreed to Thimphu's proposal that the refugees be divided into four categories: "bonafide Bhutanese if they have been forcefully evicted," "Bhutanese who emigrated," "non-Bhutanese people," and "Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts". When Nepal said it was time for the bilateral verification team to travel to the camps, Home Minister Dago Tshering backtracked and was adamant that first there



To Thimphu we will go:
Deuba and Bastola take Druk Air to Paro.

be an "exchange of positions" on the four categories.

Acquiescence on categorisation was only to keep the talks from breaking down, according to the Nepali side. "It is true that we have not taken the offensive against a small neighbour," Home Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba told a public meeting in May, "But we have not given up anything by agreeing to categories. As far as we are concerned, all categories other than the one which refers to 'non-Bhutanese people' are Bhutanese citizens and will have to be repatriated."

The task before Deuba and his team is an impossible one: to insist that Bhutan accept back individuals that it insists are non-citizens according to its domestic laws. There is no way that this matter can be resolved on principle without involvement of independent experts, who will have to decide, one, on the international norms and practice as they apply to citizenship and the Lhotshampa, and, two, on that basis conduct the task of identifying camp residents who are Bhutanese citizens.

"There is no substance left to the ministerial talks. The Bhutanese have made a conscious and deliberate decision to stall, while the Nepali side has decided not to be proactive," says a Western diplomat.

On its own record, the Joint Ministerial Committee has become irrelevant; with the political turmoil in Nepal and the mid-term elections announced for the Fall, it will become even more peripheral to the national agenda. Nepal can salvage its position only by forcing a deadlock when the teams meet next, possibly in September, and withdraw from the charade.

Bhutan vs. Nepal

"The Nepali side has blundered at every step on the refugee issue. It is outgunned and outmaneuvered by a country that has the best foreign affairs secretariat in South Asia," says Ravi Nair. Sanjoy Hazarika, of *The New York Times*, agrees: "Dawa Tsering is one of the smartest diplomats I have met. He has played the southern problem with consummate skill."

If that is how smart Dawa Tsering is, Nepal has not even had a foreign minister to speak of, the portfolio having been held by a disinterested Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala since he took office in mid-1991. A senior Nepali official admits that with so much on its plate, the Government has been unable to pay attention to the refugee question, "whereas Bhutan has concentrated fully on the issue."

Nado Rinchen, Bhutan's Ambassador to India and Nepal and member of the

bilateral committee, believes that Bhutanese diplomatic acumen is exaggerated. "Nepal can keep diplomatic contacts all over the world, whereas we have only five missions and no senior career diplomats. The number of international delegations that visit Kathmandu in a month, we have coming to Thimphu in a year."

But then Bhutan knows where to pinch and where to jab. It has just despatched the urbane former Home Secretary Jigme Thinley as ambassador to Geneva, where human rights and refugee matters are discussed. Nepal's understaffed Geneva office is not at ambassador level and is unable to counter the Bhutanese offensive directed at the highest echelons of UNHCR, ICRC and Amnesty International. Bhutan's election recently to the UN Human Rights Commission has greatly enhanced Ambassador Thinley's ability to make friends and influence people at high places.

Bhutan has reaped advantage from numerous Nepali weaknesses: the Koirala Government's continuous preoccupation with challenges from the Left Opposition



and from within the ruling Nepali Congress party; a Foreign Ministry that is terminally afraid of taking initiatives and does not even maintain a complete dossier on Bhutan; and even the fact that the two political appointees in Nepal's negotiating team—Minister Deuba and Chakra Bastola, Ambassador to Delhi and Thimphu—do not see eye to eye.

Thimphu is also fortunate that Nepal does not have a stated policy for when descendants of historical migrants are forced to return en masse to its borders. Smaller groups have previously been dealt with on an ad hoc basis, but the Lhotshampa's arrival should spur the formulation of a paper on the matter. A sudden "cleansing" exercise in the Indian Northeast, for example, could lead to a repeat of the Lhotshampa influx.

Chakra Bastola (who is expected to

Kathmandu and Thimphu

When Nepalis of Nepal disparage the Bhutanese Government for what it has done to Bhutanese Nepalis, it helps add to perspective in Kathmandu by looking inward. The Thimphu attitude towards the Lhotshampa is akin to the Kathmandu-based Pahadi's resentment of the Madhisay of the Tarai. While there are obvious areas of dissimilarity, here too, the issues are of a plains population that represents a larger 'diaspora' in the Ganga plain; an open border and earlier migration into unsettled lands; and fears of cultural swamping. Not to forget the fundamental difference, however: Thimphu applied a programme of depopulation to correct a perceived historical wrong, whereas Kathmandu could not, or would not.

resign his ambassadorship to fight the elections) is unambiguous on the Nepali stand on the Lhotshampa: "Nepal is not a party to the whole affair. We are not part of the *mudda*. This is an issue between the Thimphu and the refugees, who happened to have entered our territory but who we refuse to accept, which is why they are in the camps. Bhutan has amended its laws to dispossess the second category and wants to wash its hands of them by involving Nepal. This may be possible under Bhutanese laws, but not under international law."

For all of Bastola's clear-headedness, solackadaisical has been his team's approach to the talks that some believe that Nepal could be persuaded to forget rights and wrongs and accept a substantial number of refugees as its own. "If Nepali officials can accept those categories, anything is possible," an Indian official says with a knowing smile.

It is the constant worry of the refugee that Kathmandu and New Delhi will make a deal over their heads and seek a 'practical solution' in the face of Bhutanese obduracy. As one leader said, "It is immoral and vulgar to think of a compromise on the numbers. The Government should take back all who are Bhutanese and not accept the rest. Let it be on principles and not convenience."

In July 1992, Prime Minister Koirala got an all party consensus and go-ahead for a three-step strategy under which if bilateral talks failed he would approach India, failing which he would 'internationalise' the problem. Stuck on the first rung, he has been unable and unwilling to go further. Available diplomatic and political channels with India and overseas governments have not been explored. It is clear that Koirala and his party colleagues do not want to waste the goodwill they have in Indian corridors of power for the cause of Bhutanese refugees.

Timid Kathmandu bureaucrats and uncaring politicians are unwilling to go to stage two (with India), or leapfrog to the

stage three (internationalisation). Meanwhile, Thimphu is active on both fronts, ensuring Indian non-involvement and internationalising the issue in its own favour.

Bhutanese Mohani

Thimphu respects only New Delhi, and only P.V.Narasimha Rao can pressure King Jigme into accepting the return of those refugees that international norms would recognise as Bhutanese citizens. India, indeed, holds the key to the Bhutanese crisis but is unwilling to use it. Why?

To begin with, both the Nepali Embassy in New Delhi and the refugees have failed to

bilateral matter between Bhutan and Nepal. According to a Nepali diplomat, the desk officers in South Block "do not even want to discuss the subject when we try to raise it. It is as if the Bhutanese have cast a spell on them." ("*mohani lagaeko jasto chha.*")

This *mohani* must be potent, for Indian officials as well as Dixit profess to believe that King Jigme is capable of using the "China card" — a tilt towards Bhutan's northern border — hence the need to treat him with extra deference. When it is proposed that India should get involved because Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering maintains that most of the refugees are actually from the Indian Northeast, Dixit waves it aside with an easy 'but the Bhutanese never told us so'.

When Bhutan refers endlessly to its fears of being converted into "another Sikkim", Indian officials seem willing to overlook the fact that this is a charge which sticks more on India than on Nepali-speakers, and Nepal is not even in the picture. If Bhutan were to be "another Sikkim", it would be New Delhi that would make it so, probably using the Lhotshampa as a tool for the purpose. (No one seems to have considered that geographically, and demographically in terms of spread of Nepali-speakers, a north-south Sikkim and an east-west elongated Bhutan are quite distinct. Swamping of the deep northern valleys by the midhill Lhotshampa population appears unlikely.)

But there must be more substantial considerations for humoring little Bhutan than because it is a pristine holiday spot with traditions of generous hospitality and gift-giving. Indeed, a Bhutan that is beholden to India (for looking the other way on the refugee issue) can be pressed for advantage. In international fora like the United Nations,

India once again has Bhutan's vote firmly in its pocket. Thimphu will hardly be inclined to side against New Delhi, as it did in 1979 on the question of Kampuchea. It was King Jigme that did Narasimha Rao's bidding in 1991 when he scuttled a SAARC summit meeting by giving an excuse and staying away.

There are advantages in other areas as well. Bhutan's economy will now be irreversibly linked to India's as a result of the hydropower projects on which agreements have been rushed through over the last two years—the Kurichu, Chukha Two and Three, and the Sankosh. Meanwhile, India's military continues to have unhindered right of passage over Bhutanese territory and air space.

The 1949 Indo-Bhutan treaty binds Thimphu to the guidance of India in its international affairs. While Kathmandu analysts tend to ascribe great significance to this proviso, Dixit and his colleagues are amenable to an extremely loose interpretation (*see interview*).

Ironically, the guidance proviso was included in the treaty so that India could manage Bhutanese affairs, and not for India to be forced to take responsibility for Bhutan's misdemeanours. Whatever the intent, however, a clear reading of the lines shows India to be dutybound to have a position on the present crisis.

But then, incongruously, it does not serve Nepal's long term interests to push this tight interpretation of the treaty as it seeks Indian involvement. After all, there are only two Himalayan kingdoms left, and it is better for Nepal to have a fully sovereign Bhutan by its side rather than one bound by a restrictive reading of the 1949 treaty.

South Block's inaction on the refugee question is also linked to the absence of pressure from the Nepali/Gorkhali regions of India. Nar Bahadur Bhandari, champion of India's Nepali-speakers, kept quiet on the Bhutan evictions while he was Chief Minister, although since his ouster in May

Garganda to Beldangi

Did the refugees make a grave mistake back in 1990 by being persuaded to enter Nepal, thereby ridding India of a problem and the need to resolve it? Among those who think so are Darjeeling politician Madan Tamang, JNU Associate Professor Mahendra Lama, and New Delhi human rights activist and documenter Ravi Nair.

R.K.Budathoki of the BPP, however, recalls that the refugees clung on to makeshift camps like one in Garganda in West Bengal and Assam until it was impossible to stay on due to lack of food and shelter. Says Bhim Subba, of HUROB, "If we had stayed in India, there would have been no refugees left today. We would have been like the millions of Bangladeshis in India, part of the South Asian diaspora. It was the very act of coming to Nepal that kept the refugee's problem alive and that today we survive as refugees in the Beldangi, Pathri and Goldhap camps."

lobby Indian politicians. (The refugee issue has only been raised once in the Indian parliament, in the Rajya Sabha). With the politicians out of the picture, it is the men from the ministry who are articulating the Indian policy on Bhutan.

A senior South Block official defends India's unwillingness to jump into the fray, saying, "You see, India used to be a non-status quo power back from the fifties through the seventies, which is when you saw the Sikkim affair. Today, India is a status quo power and does not have much stomach for adventure in the neighbourhood."

In full agreement, former Foreign Secretary Dixit maintains that India is tired of being called a hegemonist, and Bhutan apparently serves as the pilot case for trying out the new Indian live-and-let-live policy (*see accompanying interview*).

Delhi-based correspondents who approach the official South Block spokesman are brusquely told that the problem is a



King Jigme and Jay Khempo, Thimphu's spiritual head.

The View from South Block

India's policy-maker on Bhutan has been the powerful, say-it-like-it-is J.N. ("Mani") Dixit, Foreign Secretary till end-January 1994. It was during his watch that the Southern Problem peaked. Dixit regards himself a friend and mentor of King Jigme, who was a child when he served in Thimphu as development advisor. The former Foreign Secretary was just back from a Thimphu holiday when he spoke to Himat at his house in Gurgaon, Haryana.

On the origins of the Southern Problem: The ethnic demography of Bhutan is characterised by inevitable dichotomy. Tibetan stock in the high valleys and ethnic Nepalis in the foothills. The Nepalis were more urbanised, economically active and politically conscious. They began to be an intrusive and active factor in Bhutan's socio-economic scene. The assertion of the Nepali sense of self had a political fallout in Bhutan. The gradualness of political liberalisation would be accelerated uncontrollably, and the King's base among the Northern Bhutanese would be eroded. The authority of the Advisory Council, and of the monarchy itself, might be eroded. All this made him strict and generated some demands of the Nepali community, which in turn revolted, and the response was drastic, and the Nepalis left the country.

On the Bhutanese mindset: The Nepalis' status in Bhutan was the result of a very informal arrangement. There is collective socio-cultural paranoia in Bhutan, which is a very insulated society. It is a majority with a minority complex. It is like the Sinhala fear of the larger Tamil diaspora of 16 million in Tamil Nadu and eight million in Malaysia. The Bhutanese, similarly, fear the Nepali diaspora.

On King Jigme: I have known the king since he was seven or eight. He has discussed the problem when I was Foreign Secretary. I do not see any animosity towards Nepalis. He is worried about a polity that is trying to jump 300 years in 25 years. The king is perhaps a moderating and reasonable factor, and if you took him out the average Bhutanese would probably be much more jingoistic. He is deeply conscious of Nepali entrepreneurial abilities and of their exposure to the Bihar and Bengal culture. The king should be allowed to run a stable government.

On India's possible involvement: Delhi is averse to getting involved because our national experience in terms of demographic pressures on the Indian Republic, especially in the last 15 years, has been very critical. We have had problems with Bangladesh,



Sri Lanka, even Afghanistan. We do not want to get involved in a controversy. Because of our larger size, regardless of rationale, it tends to get interpreted as a facet of hegemonism. Prime Minister (Rao) has told Nepal, that the only advice he can give is to talk and settle the issue in a reasonable manner. 85,000 to 100,000 is not a large number.

On possible militancy from among refugees: If there is a move towards militancy, India would take firm and decisive action. Rather than ask the Bhutanese to take back the refugees, it would be more likely that we would suppress militancy. India's interest would be to quash it. We will not allow something that has a bearing on internal security to be resolved by resorting to diplomacy.

On Bhutanese claims that many refugees are actually from the Indian Northeast: The Bhutanese have not told us that the refugees are from the Northeast. The borders are both open, and it is difficult to regard them as refugees.

On the 1949 Indo-Bhutan treaty: The treaty obligation states that Bhutan "shall be guided". In the past, India's interpretation might have been overarching, but the reality is that "His Highness" became "His Majesty" along the way. Progressively, Bhutan's United Nations membership, its international memberships, etc. meant that the interpretation of the content is not what it was originally.

On India mediating between Bhutan and Nepal: We are disinclined, because we are tired. Whenever we have gone in with the desire to help, we have always been criticised. When Tribhuvan came to India, and we restored his monarchical power, that was not appreciated. We go to preserve the integrity of Sri Lanka and immediately we are labelled interventionist. We rescue the Maldives from insurgents and the rest of the region is antagonised. Bhutan has contacts all over. The China card, the potential access to Tibet, is still there.

Rongthong Kunley Dorji

Establishment of the Druk National Congress—the exclusively Sarchop and Ngalong party—was announced in Kathmandu on 21 June. Its founder is Rongthong Kunley Dorji, a prominent Sarchop businessman from East Bhutan who emerged from a two-month incarceration in 1992 to live in exile in Kathmandu.

On King Jigme: The king himself created the problem in the south, and he must think deeply and try to solve it. He has brought about divisions between the Ngalong, Sarchop and Lhotshampa. He has brought about divisions between the Kagyu and the Nyingma, discriminating against the latter.

Do not judge a book by the cover. The country, A to Z, is the King's to rule. A lot of money is spent spying on the people and the top-level bureaucracy. There is an atmosphere of fear, created by Kunpas, or informers. The king knows everything, but he has many tongues with which to fool the reporter or the diplomat.

How can you call a marriage to four wives traditional? Bhutan's old kings have never done what this king has done. He has shamed the country in front of the world.

About development in Bhutan: When visitors come, the Bhutan Government will show them Paro, Punakha and Thimphu, all the advanced districts from where the high government officials come. But go to Kurtey, Mongar, Tongsa; in the villages you will see true poverty. The Bhutanese king thinks only those who know English are advanced.

On hardships in Bhutan: There is forced labour (*goongda woola*), made all the more difficult because of the absence of the Lhotshampa. It is hard to till the fields. The militia is conscripted, and whoever shows any reluctance is called 'anti'. There is also disgruntlement in the civil service. If you are related to the king or the senior people, you are automatically in a senior position. The northern Bhutanese population wants to talk about all this, but is not allowed.

On his party's plans: Our plan is to sensitise the population about human rights—what other countries take for granted and what we do not have.

On the Indian stance: The Indian Government must understand that it must not blindly support the king, for the public will then become anti-Indian.

On the Shabdung: The Shabdung is India's trump card with the King, in case he does not do their bidding. If you took a vote today, the elites would vote for the Shabdung. The king is seen as just an ordinary person. If the king does not form a constitutional monarchy, it will have to be a choice between the Shabdung and the king. In Bhutan, we must separate religion from politics. Meanwhile, our party will certainly receive support from the power that resides with the Shabdung.

he seems more willing to speak up. Subhas Ghising, Darjeeling's strongman, does not want to offend a New Delhi which props him up against the West Bengal CPI(M) government. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Jyoti Basu would not be caught lifting a finger to help Nepali-speakers anywhere who would compete with the Bengali presence. Besides, as he is said to have exclaimed to Nar Bahadur Bhandari when conversation turned to King Jigme, "No, no, he is a good man!"

"The bottom line is that India will not act because Bhutan does not want India to act," maintains Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) academician Mahendra Lama. His point is confirmed by what the South Block official has to say: "The Bhutanese have convinced themselves that their survival is at stake. The strength of their feeling itself makes us not want to do anything. We would not get into the business of trying to run Bhutan. Besides, they have built up such an image that it would be a public relations disaster for India."

The Bhutanese themselves are exasperated with all the talk of the need for Indian involvement. Says Ambassador Nado Rinchen, "When Nepal and Bhutan have a bilateral dialogue going, we should give it chance to succeed. The leadership in the talks must ensure that no vested interest or external force will undermine it."

His Majesty's Voice

Journalists and scholars who are invited for guided tours of Thimphu and environs continue to surface with glowing accounts of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk: his humility and sensitivity, his commitment to Drukpa national identity, his concerns about accelerated modernisation, and his eco-friendliness.

Says a Western writer who was in Thimphu recently: "When I spoke to Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering and Home Minister Dago Tshering, there were clear ethnic overtones. It was quite blatant. But then you walk into the King's

presence, he is very rational and articulate, and probably more sincere than his officials. Here is someone who has more than the usual person's desire to protect his country."

JNU's Mahendra Lama, who was recently in Thimphu meeting all the important people, agrees, "The King himself is in the liberal faction. He is very accommodating." J.N. Dixit believes that without the King's moderating influence Bhutanese are liable to be "jingoistic".

But all this appreciation notwithstanding, the events since 1988 cannot be explained in the absence of King Jigme's directing hand. By and large, in interviews the monarch tends to speak of higher values while leaving it to Minister Dawa Tsering to present the propaganda. However, the king gave himself away in interviews to Delhi papers during a January 1993 visit, when he spoke combatively of "illegal Nepali migrants who were driven out of Bhutan", referred to fears of a Greater Nepal, and claimed that the refugees were all communists.

As always happens in the end with dictators and absolute monarchs, "Big Boss" (as he is known to Thimphu bureaucrats) too seems to be succumbing to false feedback. Elaborate preparations are made before the king makes his well-publicised forays into the districts. Underlings ensure that His Majesty hears what His Majesty wants to hear, which is that all is fine with the kingdom, and would in fact be better were it not for those *ngolop* traitors.

And so, when he visits the South, the Lhotshampa subjects tell King Jigme that they want to stay when they are all packed up to leave. In the East, the Sarchop peasants vociferously condemn the southerners when they really want to talk about forced labour, conscription, and the lack of development works.

While resident representatives of donor agencies might thank their careers for bringing them face to face with a real-life king this late in the century, King Jigme is not as 'royal' as many outsiders believe.





"MY DEAR CHAP, WHAT KEY?"

Says a Bhutan scholar, "The present-day monarchy is an usurped position, put in place by the British in 1907. The true divine sanction rests with the Shabdung, which is why for safety's sake Indian officials spirited him away to Manali."*

Back in the 1970s and 1980s when there were no difficult decisions to be made, King Jigme was liberal-minded and regarded by all, including educated Lhotshampa, as benevolent and well-meaning. He appears to have changed course about the year 1985, and this became obvious in the harshness with which he chose to impose the Driglam Namzha cultural code on the southerners, the unfair implementation of the 1985 citizenship law, and finally, the way he oversaw the ridding of a seventh of his subjects, who once used to receive Dasain Tika from him—the ultimate bond of a Nepali subject and monarch. The responsibility for what has happened to Bhutan is the king's own, and not to be shared.

Rongthong Kunley Dorji, who in June this year founded the northerner-only Druk National Congress, does not buy the arguments which absolve King Jigme. "The country, A to Z, is the King's to rule," he says (see interview).

What seemed quaint and charming just a couple of years ago, today is looking less benign. The King's marriage in 1988 to four sisters, by whom he had eight children by

the time of betrothal, must be seen for what it is: not a traditional convention in a polygamous society, but a marriage of convenience arranged by the senior queen and her father so that the monarch stayed within the family. While polygamy is sanctioned by Ngalong society, it is not a present-day societal more.

If the King's in-laws were not part of the political problem in Bhutan, and if they had not developed into avaricious economic exploiters of the country's resources, the matter of the royal multi-marriages might be left alone as nothing more than a story of strong desires. But many observers believe that the political and economic shenanigans of the in-laws have had a direct bearing upon the life and times of King Jigme's country and subjects.

By and large, the refugees wish to let bygones be bygones, knowing that for the moment King Jigme alone has the power to bring about a rapprochement within Bhutan. Says Om Dhungel, a former bureaucrat who is involved with the Human Rights Organisation of Bhutan (HUROB), "He should be able to do it. Big Boss is getting feedback that the public is behind him, and it will be too late by the time he realises it is otherwise. His Majesty should realise that the Thimphu hardliners are all bluster and no substance."

Says the Bhutan scholar quoted earlier: "The king must understand that the elites

will not lift a finger if India decides that things must go differently. Thimphu worships the power of the stick. These people are watching very carefully for a shift in the wind."

The world sees a kingdom in the clouds ruled by a benevolent monarch; a closer look, and King Jigme's invincibility seems in question, and the clouds are looking somewhat frayed.

Militancy or Assimilation

If one were to compare some other prominent refugee situations with that of Bhutan, the Lhotshampa appear to be un-inspired. Most of them are impoverished peasants caught unawares with their lives shattered and themselves atop Tata trucks headed for the Nepali border. Do these refugees have the staying power to wait out 40 years like the Palestinians in the refugee camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon?

Nor has the refugee leadership been able to inspire them. While the mass is all peasantry, the leadership is middle-class, which prefers to live in adjacent Nepali townships and Kathmandu rather than in the camps. Two years ago, the refugee *netas* appeared to have the potential to emerge as powerful players. Instead, they have fallen upon each other, heading fractious paper organisations which have lost even the leverage they had in 1992. This discord is sweet music to Thimphu's ears.

* Several officials, scholars and refugees (those with families 'inside') consulted for this article wished to remain anonymous.



intelligence agency in the world that would be interested in funding an uprising by Bhutanese Nepalese."

Neither does India seem too perturbed that Lhotshampa-instigated violence would affect its sensitive chicken-neck in the Duars—gateway to the super-sensitive seven northeastern states. "No, insurgency is not a major fear," says an official. Even if the Lhotshampa were to take to arms, J.N.Dixit told Him, New Delhi would deal with the situation as if it were an internal problem of India, crushing it.

As for assimilation, Thimphu's hopes ride on the single thread that, left to their own, the 86,000 camp residents might yet disperse. Such an outcome would not be too burdensome on either Nepal or India, and would leave a demographically "well-balanced" Bhutan. Bad luck that the refugees were recognised as such, but Thimphu expects that by prevaricating in the bilateral talks and whittling away at UNHCR's resolve, the hopes of dispersal can once again be revived.

Bhim Subba, a former senior official working with HUROB, scoffs at the suggestions of easy assimilation. "You have to abandon these simplistic notions. The history of en masse Nepali migration is only to areas where land is available. These hill peasants know only how to till the soil, and we know no one is going provide land in India or Nepal. These villagers have nowhere to go but back to where they came from. Even if it is living hell, they will stay in the camps."

Yankee Support

It has thus far meant little politically for the refugees that the greatest power on earth is firmly on their side. Two consecutive human

rights reports by the United States Department of State have lambasted Thimphu for human rights abuses and for its evictions programme.

Robin Rafael, US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, arrived in the camps in March to express support for the refugees, and pointedly referred to the Indian role in facilitating the transfer of refugees to Nepal through Indian territory. In June, Sandy Vogelgesang, the new American ambassador to Nepal, told the refugees that resolution of the refugee problem must be "in line with international law and principles of displaced persons"—precisely what Thimphu wants to avoid at all cost.

That is about as far as it goes, though. The Americans have been content to hold the refugee's hand and offer sympathies (and, incidentally, pay for a quarter of UNHCR's roughly US\$ 13 million annual expenditure on the refugees).

"We have no leverage on Bhutan," laments a US official, pointing out that Bhutan and the US do not have diplomatic relations. But the Americans *do* have a handle on Bhutan, through the United Nations Development Programme, which is the largest multilateral donor agency in the country. As a major contributor to UNDP and other agencies and development banks active in Bhutan, the US is in fact well placed to influence Thimphu, without affecting social sector programmes that would hurt the weak.

While Rafael is known to have raised the Lhotshampa matter with Indian officials, the US will not want to seem too meddlesome in India's backyard. Nuclear non-proliferation is the main American agenda for South Asia. Foggy Bottom would not squander its limited influence with South Block on an issue that Singha Durbar itself is not too preoccupied with. As the *Washington Post's* John Ward Anderson says, "The US has no economic, commercial or strategic interest riding on Bhutan. It is only a human rights issue."

The Refugee Agency

Thimphu's carefully laid out plan of eviction would have gone like knife through butter, and the whole episode would today have been but a fading memory, except for UNHCR's arrival. Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering's exasperation with the refugee agency is easy to understand (*see interview*).

Thimphu's plan would be to try to undercut UNHCR's senior-staff support for the Nepal programme by hard lobbying in Geneva, and it might even work. High Commissioner Sadako Ogata is known to have been impressed with Bhutanese

R.K.Budathoki of the Bhutan People's Party (BPP), a key player among the dissidents, agrees that "the Thimphu Government is not afraid of us because of our disunity." Shiva Kumar Pradhan, of the Peoples Forum for Human Rights, concedes, "We have disappeared into Nepali politics and have not focused enough attention on lobbying in New Delhi and elsewhere."

Ravi Nair is scathing in his comments: "They have done practically no lobbying. Ages ago they should have been filing complaints with the Human Right Commission's Sub-Commission on Minorities and Discrimination, with the Special Rapporteurs on torture, forced evictions, disappearances, and with the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. They should have used the ILO mechanisms and submitted memoranda to the political counsellors in the New Delhi embassies before the Bhutan Aid Consortium meetings."

With a vacuum in the place where leadership should be, how will the refugees situation develop? Observers believe in one of two directions: if the Bhutan-Nepal impasse remains and the quality of life in the camps begins to dip due to reduced aid, frustrated camp inmates, particularly the youth, might turn militant; or they may abandon the refuge camps to join the Nepali diaspora of South Asia, angry youth and all.

Militancy becomes the ultimate weapon of a dispossessed population when it sees no resolution in sight. Bhutan's national weekly *Kuensel*, at least, firmly believes in this, providing constant report of violent incidents involving *ngolops* with their base in the refugee camps. These 'Kuensel terrorists' invariably give themselves away for what they are—robbers—when they loot Lhotshampa households rather than going for government offices and installations.

The Lhotshampa population in the camps is not the stuff of passion. The unexposed peasants will not pick up khukuri, and the youth appear to have neither the ideological fervour nor the firebrand leadership that would mould them into guerillas. Further, as a Kathmandu-based diplomat says, "There is not one



Tahir Ali: refugee caretaker.

B. RAJNAR



Rongthong Kunley receives khada at his party's opening.

representations and exasperated with Nepal's diplomatic inability to even articulate Nepal's basic position on the refugee affair.

Bhutan's allergy to UNHCR's Nepal office has also to do with the fact that the agency has the expertise to conduct the identification and verification exercise to screen Bhutanese citizens from among the refugees. In normal situations when refugee repatriation is involved, governments neutralise the issue by inviting UNHCR to complete the technical details, as has happened with repatriation of Rohingyas from Bangladesh to Burma, or the Tamils from India to Sri Lanka. Thimphu is unlikely to have use for an agency which can do that.

Tahir Ali, UNHCR's representative in Nepal, says Foreign Minister Tsering's charge that his office is biased against Thimphu lacks basis. "There is nothing in our work that is anti-Bhutan. Our public

statements and positions are fully consistent with what the two governments are doing. We are waiting for the two governments to do business."

Asked about fears of reduced funding (with which UNHCR supports service-providers like Lutheran World Service and CARITAS), Ali replies: "While it is true we cannot walk away from a refugee situation, the donors are going to ask how long this is going to continue. Week by week this issue is moving to the margins of the international agenda as other crises preoccupy the donors. We've already been told by Geneva to pare down our budgets because of needs in areas like Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda."

What would this mean? "The UNHCR is legally obliged to stand by the refugees until a solution is found. But the reality is that with donor fatigue assistance programmes begin to fray and weaken. Sooner or later it will happen here, the shelters disintegrate and people start moving out due to pauperisation. Whoever has the option will utilise it and leave the camps. Then the story is over."

A Druk Party

The Lhotshampa problem which reared up unexpectedly in the late 1980s papered over the existing divides in northern Bhutanese society. These divisions are now re-emerging, under the harsher glare of modern expectations. The unquestioning acceptance of existing hierarchy and role playing, a centuries-old legacy, could not last long in modern-day Bhutan.

The Drukpa durbar is being charged with accentuating sectarianism and regionalism within Bhutan, favouring

Kagyus over Nyingma monasteries. Mid-level bureaucrats are unhappy that the king allows higher offices to be dominated by *dashos* (noblemen) from the western districts — twelve out of 14 ministers, for example, with only one Assistant Minister a Sarchop.

It is likely that the discontent within will be fanned by Rongthong Kunley Dorji's new northerner-only party in exile, the Druk National Congress. Rongthong Kunley is a prominent businessman of eastern Bhutan, a Sarchop who was jailed for two months and tortured in early 1991 for having raised questions about the Southern Problem and the East's inequitable treatment. Upon release, he went into exile and has been in Kathmandu for the last two years, concentrating lately, he says, in establishing a network of dissidents within Bhutan.

The new party's significance lies in its presumed ability to articulate the interests of northerners who are wary of the Lhotshampa, while at the same time antagonised by the Paro- and Haa-centricism (two western districts) of the present regime. The new group vies for recognition among those who constitute the present regime's base.

At its opening press conference in Kathmandu, the Druk National Congress raised issues of concerns of the northern population, which the Lhotshampa parties had not felt obliged to highlight. Thus, Rongthong Kunley protests the increasingly strict Governmental control over Nyingma monasteries, and says that the traditional system of forced labour has become extremely burdensome because of the absence of Lhotshampa labour. Conscription into the militia is another source of discontent, and the eastern Sarchop have



Happier times: Lhotshampa, Sarchop and Ngalong officials pose with the Druk Gyalpo.



gotten wise to the regional disparities in development works in favour of the west and the south. Rongthong Kunley also cites instances of torture and custodial deaths that have occurred in the north outside the framework of the Lhotshampa suppression.

The new party's main plank is human rights, says its spokesman Chenchu Jigme Dorji, a Ngalong. "Since the Lhotshampa problem and its extended fallout, the realisation has also seeped through to the north that we have no human rights in Bhutan, even on paper. We are the only country in South Asia where such a situation exists, and there is no reason we should maintain it for the sake of the present rulers."

The unspoken mass support for the Shabdung, "Bhutan's Dalai Lama"—whose present incarnation happens to be a Sarchop—is also potentially a reservoir of support for the new party. Says a Lhotshampa observer, "The Sarchop are by far the largest community in Bhutan, and they are a very sentimental people. The new party has the ability to mobilise them all."

Realising the ability of the new party in exile (the organisers do not consider themselves refugees) to provide credible alternatives to their own moribund programmes, Lhotshampa refugee groups have all welcomed its establishment, even though it is an exclusive northerner-only

party. R.K. Budathoki of the BPP even seems willing to pass the mantle of overall exile leadership to the new party, although it is not clear that the Congress would want such a role. "To do anything within Bhutan, the BPP desires that the leadership should be Drukpa. And Rongthong Kunley has the ability to bring the people together, and hence at this time we are willing to stand behind Rongthong Kunley," says Budathoki.

Why this alacrity to welcome the new party? Says one refugee, "Our struggle is seen as a merely a reaction to what is happening to us. Whereas a reaction from the east and west would constitute a studied attack on the regime's legitimacy."

Thinking in Thimphu

When members of the Thimphu aristocracy propose that everything they are doing is to protect the Bhutanese way of life, it is clear that they are, in the main, trying to safeguard their own positions of privilege.

The Bhutan scholar, who has studied Thimphu as a social scientist, is unrelenting in his indictment: "Aided by the West's glorification of their culture, the Drukpa are mistaking feudal background for religious fervour. If the Drukpa elites were religious, they would give their right arm to protect the system that they have. Instead, they use rituals for the sake of political expediency and have become bullies, a feudal people. A sense of moral conviction and Buddhist sacrifice cannot exist when you have all that power."

Historically, as in other feudal societies, anyone who represents dissent has been regarded with contempt. This was true with the Ngalong dissidents who fled to Nepal in December 1964, and is even more true today

of the attitude towards all exile leadership. There is a sense of betrayal, and blind anger against these deserters. With such a mindset, there can hardly be any trust, or ability to recognise moments of grave political peril.

The seething resentment against the Lhotshampa, in particular the refugee leaders, is very close to surface. This keeps Thimphu society, in the rush to pronounce judgements on ngolops and *namak-harams*, from comprehending why a dasho should leave a privileged position in the Royal Government to seek a life of refuge. It is such resentment which leads Ambassador Nado Rinchen to express perplexity: "Some may believe us and others may not, but there are people who really wanted to leave. We try to keep them, but they go anyway." (The ambassador, at least, should try to understand. Rinchen was one of the 1964 exiles and spent many years in Kathmandu before being pardoned and reinstated in high position.)

The *Washington Post's* John Ward Anderson says the high-ups he met in Thimphu "seem to believe in their own spins". He adds, "It is not such a huge acknowledgement to say that there were some mistakes made, but they do not do that. In speaking of protecting their culture, they have picked up the perfect issue. If they said they were protecting their monarchy or their privileged status, there would be no buyers."

Says Michael Hutt, of the School for Oriental and African Studies in London (SOAS), "Far more people know what has really happened in the south than one would think. They are aware that solving the crisis, that is letting the refugees back in, might constitute a threat to Bhutan. When I meet Bhutanese, there is a sense that mentioning the Southern Problem is considered ill-mannered, and that the subject is distasteful. 'The crisis should be left to run its course, it's a regrettable but necessary process, and so on...'"

It often happens that the mirror to closed-in Third World societies is held up by Western academics who are able to provide the objectivity of distance and scholarship. "But the Bhutan case has shown how spineless and intellectually dishonest the Himalayan academic community is," says a diplomat in Kathmandu.

Michael Hutt of SOAS, who organised the only international conference on the Bhutan crisis thus far in March 1993, and who has written several papers on the Southern Problem: "Bhutan has retained the loyalty of a select band of foreign academics who seem to swallow the 'voluntary emigration' and 'cultural



Think of the children...

JOHN ISAAC/UNITED NATIONS

swamping' arguments whole, apparently without question. These academics are fiercely protective of Bhutan, and constitute an important factor affecting Bhutan's judgement of the validity of its case."

With both outside media and academia remaining silent (and a severe dearth of indigenous journalists and scholars), there is nothing to temper the Thimphu aristocracy's contempt for all opposition and its self-righteous belief in the primordial right to culturally cleanse the country. To their own detriment, the rulers will be oblivious to reality when the ground begins to shift.

Democratic Bhutan

While Lhotshampa refugees and northerner exiles emerge from Bhutan to speak bravely for human rights and democracy, is it likely that they have a silent following within, even if not among Thimphu's superelite? Not if the population believes what King Jigme believes. He told Christopher Thomas of the *Times* of London in April: "But Bhutan has a very democratic monarchy. Most people think a country with a monarchy is backward and feudal. But Bhutan is more democratic than most democratic countries and definitely more democratic than any democratic Third World country."

The reality is elsewhere. Bhutanese polity is today balanced like a house of cards. A nudge or slight breeze and it could collapse all around King Jigme, and it will be more than the tragedy of one man. It will be the collapse of a polity that has much going for it.

Bhutan has among the best socio-economic indicators in South Asia, finely developing health and education programmes, and administrators capable of planning ahead and acting on their plans. But none of the benefits will accrue in the long term if newfound political desires are suppressed rather than channelled. Howsoever safe, sanitised and "democratic" King Jigme's system might be in comparison to, say, Nepal's disorderly democracy, he cannot now escape being sucked into the spiral. He must fashion a system that can maintain today's development momentum while providing more political space for his subjects.

Rather than philosophise endlessly to wonder-struck visitors, the king should have years ago initiated work on creating a polity where power and economic largesse was shared among Bhutan's three main communities and regions. Acting on his own initiative, he would

have been able to control the flow of events, whereas now it is fast becoming an all or nothing game.

The responsibility to do something lies with King Jigme because it was he who, by inaugurating the drastic action in the South, brought forward the political awakening of his subjects (of both southerners and northerners) by at least a decade.

Whatever may happen to the refugees, the Druk Gyalpo can look forward to a future of internal dissent — regional, sectarian and class-based. The dissent will come not only from the northern population and repatriated refugees, but from the tens of thousand Lhotshampa that have remained behind, whose psyche has been disturbed.

Externally, what appears to be India's rock-solid support could dissipate like mountain clouds in the evening. If New Delhi decides that Bhutan's instability jeopardizes its sacrosanct Northeast equation, or if it sees it in its larger interest to mollify a restive Nepali-speaking population of the region, it will act without care or concern as to what King Jigme desires.

Says an Indian official, choosing his words carefully: "There has not been a pronounced shift of power (in Bhutan), so why knock it?"

The heightened state of unease of these last few months in Assam, Arunachal and Nagaland is harbinger of a break in the regional equilibrium. When that happens, Home Ministry concerns rather than those of South Block will begin to dictate policy. At that time, there is no saying which way the cards will fall.

"The Bhutanese King should have no illusions. India will act on its own interests,"



Phuntsholing:
Gateway to Bhutan

"I Don't Know"

It was clear that the people knew something but were afraid to talk. They all agreed that many had left, but were unwilling to say why. This was the refrain of 10 or 12 people I met.

'Are you Nepali?'

'Yes'

'How long have you lived here?'

'All my life.'

'Have many left?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'I don't know.'

I only saw blank faces and heard the 'I don't knows'.

— John Ward Anderson of *The Washington Post*, recalling a tour he took of Samchi District, with Government escort, in Bhutan's south in April.

says Rishikesh Shaha, scholar and elder statesman on Nepal. "Back in 1950, Mohan Shumshere came back happy to Kathmandu when New Delhi plied him with assurances. Overnight, he was out of the door." The reference is apt in more ways than one, for Bhutanese polity, economy and environment are today where Nepal was placed at the end of the feudal Rana era.

India has several options to exercise should it believe that its security interests are affected by a suddenly unstable Bhutan. These extend from reinstating the Shabdung at one extreme to engineering a Sikkim-like putsch and adding a state to the Union at the other. More likely, however, India would enforce a 'pragmatic' solution by negotiating a tripartite division of the refugees, and dictating a new political structure under the king that takes account of the political realities within the country.

Better for King Jigme to seek these solutions himself. It is still in His Majesty's hands to design a forward-looking system which is inclusive of the three communities and regions of Druk Yul—the west, east, and south. ▽

Note to Readers:

When writer K.M. Dixit applied for permission to visit Thimphu in order to research this article, Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering wrote back saying "...it is difficult for me to clear your visit to Bhutan at this juncture", because Himal's coverage of the Southern Problem had been "highly biased and one-sided". When a similar application was made for Himal's Jul/Aug 1992 issue, the response had been "...your visit to Bhutan at present is not convenient to Royal Government."

Lyonpo Dawa Tsering



Dawa Tsering is the longest-serving foreign minister in the world. While he denied Himal entry into Bhutan, Lyonpo (minister) Tsering agreed to respond to questions by fax. (Readers should note that as a result there was no opportunity for follow-up questions.)

Was the presence of Nepali-speakers in Bhutan such that by the mid-1980s the Government was fearful of the loss of the age-old Drukpa cultural identity?

When you refer to the presence of Nepali-speakers in Bhutan in the mid-1980s, it should be understood that there are two types of Nepali-speakers in Bhutan, those who are Bhutanese citizens and those who are non-nationals. The presence of Nepalis in Bhutan began in the early 1900s after the government authorised the recruitment of Nepalis as contractual labourers to extract timber from the dense tropical forests in Samtse, the westernmost part of Bhutan's southern foothills. Initially brought as "tangyas" or forest labourers, they were allowed to stay as tenant farmers where the forests were cleared in Samtse, Tsirang, Sarpang and Geylegphug in the southern foothills. These Nepalis who had settled down as tenant farmers were granted Bhutanese citizenship by the National Assembly in 1958, and it is they and their children who constitute the bonafide Bhutanese citizens among the ethnic Nepalis in Bhutan.

Following the commencement of development activities with the launching of our First Five-Year Plan in 1961, many other Nepalis came to Bhutan. These were either labourers imported to work on the development projects and road construction, or illegal immigrants attracted by the better economic prospects in Bhutan. The presence of large numbers of illegal immigrants was revealed by the 1988

census. As would be the case in any other country, the presence and continued influx of illegal immigrants was certainly a cause for concern to us in Bhutan.

The policy to promote a national language and dress, and Driglam Namzha (traditional etiquette) to strengthen our unique national identity was supported by the Lhotshampa (Southern Bhutanese who are of Nepali origin) through the District Development Committees and during large public meetings with His Majesty the King which were attended by a member from every household in the south. This policy was deliberately distorted by a nexus of illegal immigrants and a group of Lhotshampa with vested interests and political ambitions to malign the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Contrary to the propaganda emanating from Nepal and elsewhere, the Royal Government of Bhutan has never sought to suppress the culture of any minority group in the kingdom, including that of the Lhotshampa. In my view the media and human rights groups in Nepal have been manipulated by Bhutanese dissidents living there. Contrary to the allegations made by them, the Nepali language is not suppressed in Bhutan. It is used in the National Assembly, the courts and in government offices. The national newspaper, *Kuensel*, prints copies in Nepali and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service also broadcasts

radio programmes in Nepali. The national dress is required to be worn only in the dzongs, monasteries, government offices, schools and for official functions.

Did the Government perceive a plan or conspiracy by the Nepali-speaking population of the South to overthrow the Royal Government and existing regime? If not, did it fear that such a situation could come about in the near future?

The Royal Government was caught totally unawares when the violent demonstrations broke out in the five districts of southern Bhutan in September 1990. Fully preoccupied with the implementation of development programmes, even the presence of a large number of illegal immigrants came to the government's notice only when the census in 1988 was completed. Moreover, with every effort being made by the government to bring the Lhotshampa into the national mainstream by allotting more development facilities and budgets to the south than to northern districts, and with the Lhotshampa enjoying better social facilities and a higher income than their compatriots in the north from cash crops like oranges, cardamom, ginger and betel nut, there was no reason for them to turn against the government or His Majesty the King who has always loved and treated all his subjects equally. Even before the violent demonstrations in September 1990, the general public of southern Bhutan declared total loyalty and support to the King and country and all government policies during the public meetings held by His Majesty the King with them in 1989 and early 1990.

How much of a parallel can be drawn between Sikkim and Bhutan, in that the process which led to the former's merger with India could be seen by some to apply to the latter as well? Do you see the Nepali-speaking population or its present leadership in exile capable of taking the country in a direction similar to that of Sikkim's?

In the case of Sikkim, the influx of Nepali settlers who migrated to Sikkim soon overwhelmed the local population by sheer force of numbers and took over political power. The same process is being repeated in Bhutan and unless the influx of Nepali-speaking economic migrants are curbed, there is every possibility that the native Bhutanese will become a minority in their own country. The root cause of the problem lies in Nepal where there is a population explosion. Until such time as Nepal can provide employment to its growing population, our problem will continue. As for Sikkim's merger with India, it was the people themselves who decided that Sikkim should become the 22nd state of India.

I do not perceive any future threat from our present population in the south because by remaining in the kingdom they have thrown in their lot with their compatriots in the north. In fact, the one silver lining in the present dark cloud is that thousands of Lhotshampa have moved to urban areas in the northern districts, and thousands of Lhotshampa children have been admitted to local schools in the north. This is good for national integration.

As far as the dissidents based in Nepal are concerned, I cannot fathom their real intentions as

the present path they have chosen is clearly negative and destructive. By maliciously distorting facts, fabricating allegations and attacking all institutions dear to the Bhutanese heart, they are foreclosing their own future options.

Do you feel that Bhutan's position vis-a-vis India has been strengthened or weakened in the last five years, in relation to its independent foreign policy, multilateral contacts, development projects funding and implementation, and security matters?

As in the past, Indo-Bhutan relations have flourished and grown over the last five years. Our two countries have always enjoyed warm and close relations and these ties have been consolidated over the years through close cooperation in numerous fields. This relationship is based on a convergence of national interests. We consider India as a genuine and close friend and this sentiment is fully reciprocated by the government and people of India. Our policy has been one of opening up cautiously to the outside world, both in terms of bilateral relations and aid. This policy continues on an even keel. In regional and multilateral fora, we have always been fairly active in spite of our resource constraints. In recent years, we have been elected to important international bodies like the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

How has Bhutan managed with the loss of skilled manpower which departed with so many Nepali-speakers? Are these being filled by temporary workers from India, or through Bhutanese manpower?

From 1990 till date 461 Lhotshampa civil servants have left Bhutan. Within that period, apart from Lhotshampa who joined the public and joint sector corporations, 890 Lhotshampa have been inducted into the civil service. As always, our friends, the Indians have come forward to help us meet any skilled manpower shortage we faced. So the departure of the 461 Lhotshampa civil servants in itself did not cause any real problems although some of them inflicted great loss on the government by misappropriating large amounts of government money and property before absconding. One interesting fact worth mentioning is that many relatives of dissidents leaders living in Nepal are still in government service in Bhutan. What is really causing a serious problem for the Royal Government and the people is the continued terrorist activities in the south, many of them committed by people registered in the refugee camps in eastern Nepal.

What is the Royal Government's attitude vis-a-vis UNHCR's role in the present crisis? Does it view the High Commissioner as a neutral party on this matter, and could it be seen as a mediator or independent third-party between Nepal and Bhutan?

We have the highest respect and admiration for the UNHCR and we deeply appreciate the outstanding humanitarian work this great organisation is doing all over the world. However, while I have the greatest personal respect for Ms. Ogata and her senior aides, I cannot say the same for some of the UNHCR representatives in the field in Nepal. They have often taken blatantly partisan positions on the

I do not perceive any future threat from our present population in the south because by remaining in the kingdom they have thrown in their lot with their compatriots in the north.

I believe that our system of government is in practice far more democratic than the systems in many so-called democratic countries.

basis of one-sided reports. Perhaps a high profile is good for their careers or they may have personal axes to grind.

It may be noted that although 234 persons claiming to be Bhutanese refugees came to Nepal's Jhapa District in January 1991, no one else making such claims came for the next six months. However, following an invitation in August 1991 by the Nepalese Government to the UNHCR to provide humanitarian assistance and the starting of a scheme by the UNHCR to provide food and shelter to 304 persons for the next four months, the number of people in Nepal claiming to be Bhutanese refugees rapidly grew to 6000 by the end of 1991. Since then eight refugee camps have been established in eastern Nepal by the UNHCR, and all the people claiming to be Bhutanese refugees were admitted to these camps without proper screening by the UNHCR field representatives in Nepal. Even after a screening process at Kakarvitta was started in July 1993, by which time the problem had already grown to its present proportions, the UNHCR field representatives admitted people into the camps who by no stretch of the imagination can be described as refugees. I personally feel that it would be very difficult for the UNHCR to be an independent party regarding the problem of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal.

Under what circumstances would Bhutan be willing to consider a neutral and independent third-party involvement in resolving the problems that have arisen with regard to repatriation of the residents of the camps?

The Royal Government is convinced that given the political will, it will be possible to resolve the problem through the ongoing bilateral process. The Joint Ministerial Committee talks are making steady progress and in less than a year have already reached a very crucial stage. As such, it would be better to resolve the problem through mutual understanding and dialogue.

It seems that those camp residents who fall under the category of "voluntary departures" among the four identified by the Committee are liable to be defined as non-nationals under present Bhutanese law. As this is likely to be the sticking point in verifying the status of the camp residents, is there a possibility that Bhutan would be willing to consider international legal norms, principles and practices as they apply to the case?

When you say "voluntary departures" I think you are referring to the agreed category "Bhutanese who emigrated". As bilateral talks are in progress, I do not wish to answer a question which falls within the purview of the Joint Ministerial Committee.

You have been reported as saying that most of those in the camps of Southeast Nepal are Nepali-speakers from the Indian Northeast. Is this a correct interpretation of what you have said?

I am afraid one of the major hazards of my job is to be misquoted by media people. Some do it unintentionally, while others do it deliberately. I do not think I would be foolish enough to make a sweeping comment of this nature without reliable

data. I think we are all aware that there are people in the camps who cannot be categorised as refugees.

What would be the Royal Government's stand if Nepal asked officially that India be involved as an interlocutor in resolving the problems that have come up between Bhutan and Nepal?

I do not wish to answer this question as it falls within the purview of the Joint Ministerial Committee.

There are only two Himalayan kingdoms, and it would seem that it is in their mutual interest to remain on the best of terms. What are your feelings, as foreign minister, to see that Bhutan's relations with its neighbour are at their worst in history?

It is certainly in our mutual interest to remain on the best of terms. Our friendship spans many centuries. There are shared values and aspirations. We have common interests because we are landlocked, least-developed countries. The important thing for us is to resolve the present problem as soon as possible so that we can restore our traditionally close and friendly relationship.

In what directions do you see relations between Nepal and Bhutan developing once this crisis is over? What advances do you see, for example, in the areas of trade, cooperation, cultural interaction, and so on, given the rapid changes that are coming about in South Asian geopolitics, communications, and inter-regional travel?

I think the scope of interaction between our two countries is rather small because of the similarity of our economies and the difficulties of transport and communications. The potential for trade is limited by there may be scope for joint ventures in business and industries in the future. Our entrepreneurs are enterprising enough to develop such avenues of cooperation. Presently, thousands of Bhutanese go to Nepal on pilgrimage. This is important because it will promote people-to-people contact. I am confident that once the present problem is resolved, our traditionally close and friendly relations with Nepal will be further strengthened.

Among the refugee leaders as well as in sections of the Nepali press, there is talk of bringing human rights and democracy to Bhutan. How does the Royal Government view these demands?

Which matters more, human rights and democracy in form or in substance? Bhutan has a monarchical system of government that is in practice very democratic and is a highly popular and effective system unique to our country. In fact, the system was established only 87 years ago when the Bhutanese people elected Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck as our first hereditary monarch. Since then the institution has brought peace and stability to our country, with each successive monarch introducing reforms and changes, devolving more power to the people and involving them increasingly in the decision making process.

In my view, the real essence of democracy calls for the participation of the people in the decision making process and a system of government that is dynamic, efficient, enjoys the support of the people

and is capable of fulfilling their aspirations. We have this in Bhutan. The Bhutanese people, through the Block Development Committees at the village level, the District Development Committees at the district level, and the National Assembly at the national level, participate actively in all decisions affecting them and have a say on all issues of national concern and interest. I believe that our system of government is in practice far more democratic than the systems in many so-called democratic countries. Moreover, His Majesty the King has repeatedly made it clear in the National Assembly and public meetings that the future political system of Bhutan lies in the hands of the Bhutanese people.

Actually, the best way to judge a system of government is from the results it has produced. Within a span of just three decades, Bhutan has been able to take a quantum leap from the middle ages to the modern world. Our people enjoy freedom from hunger, have adequate clothing and shelter, and are provided with free health care, education and other highly subsidised social service facilities. We have a merit-based, corruption-free and result-oriented government and administrative system. Everyone is equal before the law and every citizen has free and direct access to the King for redress of any grievance they may have.

The dissidents have been raising the slogans for democracy and human rights merely to malign the Royal Government of Bhutan and to gain international sympathy and support. I believe that those people in Nepal echoing the same slogans raised by the dissidents are doing so due to a feeling of ethnic affinity with them.

Do you see dangers to the viability of the Bhutanese nation state as a result of the present crisis? If you see dangers, from which direction do they emanate?

If by the present crisis you refer to the problem of the people in the refugee camps in Nepal, it does pose a serious threat to the Bhutanese nation because the "refugee problem" was deliberately created by the dissidents to circumvent Bhutan's citizenship laws. Our citizenship laws are the only safeguards against an ever-threatening tide of illegal immigration into Bhutan. The objective of the dissidents has always been to congregate a hundred thousand or so "refugees" in Nepal in order to generate international pressure and force Bhutan to accept people in the camps not entitled to Bhutanese citizenship as "Bhutanese refugees". Once the citizenship laws are circumvented it would only be a matter of time before this safeguard against the waiting tide of illegal immigrants would be rendered useless and the fate of the Bhutanese nation would be sealed.

What do you have to say to those politicians, academicians and (Nepali and foreign) diplomats in Kathmandu who insist that "the key to resolving the Bhutan-Nepal crisis lies with New Delhi"? Is this belief in New Delhi's power to influence the Royal Government appropriate or misplaced?

Indian leaders have publicly gone on record to say that the present problem between Nepal and Bhutan should be resolved through bilateral talks. We all know that India is a genuine friend and well-wisher

of both Nepal and Bhutan. As such we should heed this advice and make every effort to resolve our problem bilaterally, instead of making innuendos against India as has been frequently done by certain sections of the Nepalese media and politicians. If Nepal and Bhutan who are the two parties involved cannot resolve the problem bilaterally, how can a third party, however well-intentioned, resolve the matter?

Is there polarisation between the Ngalong/Sarchop and Lhotshampa community within Bhutan? How does the Royal Government plan to bring about a rapprochement, given that this would seem to be essential for the long-term stability of the country?

The general public in northern Bhutan have been by and large very upset that a section of the Lhotshampa turned against their King and country and created a situation which threatened the security of our country. This has been voiced by them both in public meetings and in the National Assembly. However, there is no polarisation or communal disharmony between the northerners and southerners inside Bhutan. Bhutanese society has always been remarkably open and tolerant. Also, Buddhism and Hinduism have great affinity and are compatible religions. One evidence of communal harmony is the large number of Lhotshampa who have moved north after the outbreak of terrorist activities in the south and settled down in Thimphu and other towns of northern Bhutan. Many of them have become businessmen and contractors while others have sought government and private employment. Once the southern problem is resolved, strengthening the traditional goodwill between the northern and southern Bhutanese people will be a natural process. Our goal is "one nation, one people" by which we mean that every Bhutanese should have a feeling of oneness with his fellow countrymen and have pride in being a Bhutanese citizen.

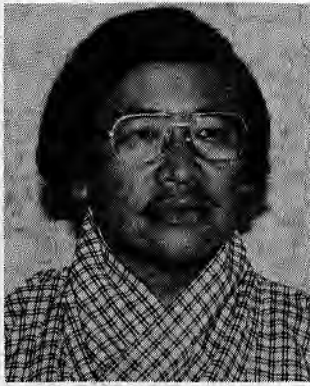
From what one reads in United Nations reports and media accounts, Bhutan is the lone country in South Asia that is capable of delivering a high-standard human development to all of its population. This might be possible in economic terms, but how does Bhutan plan to attain and maintain high living standards if it is to be an island of prosperity within a generally destitute South Asia?

Yes, the future economic prospects for Bhutan are indeed bright. With over 60 percent of our land still under forest cover, we have clean fast-flowing rivers which have a huge potential for generating hydropower. There is a vast market in India for hydropower and we can also value-add our production of electricity by setting up power-intensive industries. We have implemented our development programmes very well over the past 30 years, and have been able to provide 90 percent health coverage to our people and raise school enrolment to 67 percent. Our per capita income has also increased from US\$ 140 in 1971 to US\$ 425 in 1991. But more than mere economic statistics, the Royal Government attaches great importance to giving our people a good quality of life.

Regarding our region, I do not share your view that Bhutan may be an island of prosperity within a



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generally destitute South Asia. I believe that with good governance and bold initiatives, our neighbours in South Asia can achieve a good measure of economic progress and prosperity. For instance, the economic liberalisation policy introduced in India is already giving a boost to the Indian economy and I have no doubt that it will lead to India becoming a major economic power.

Bhutan is credited for having a very efficient foreign office which is able to make optimum use of diplomacy, public relations and personal contacts to convince the world of its point of view. This is seen in stark contrast to Nepal's inability to do the same. Your comments?

I think you are giving the Bhutanese foreign service much more credit than it deserves. We have only three resident embassies, in India, Bangladesh and Kuwait, and two missions at the United Nations, in New York and Geneva. In total, we have diplomatic relations with only 18 countries. His Majesty's Government of Nepal on the other hand has 15 resident embassies abroad and diplomatic relations with over 81 countries. The Bhutanese foreign service is also much less experienced than the Nepalese foreign service. I have always been greatly impressed by the intelligence and competence of Nepalese diplomats. I think your impression about the efficiency of our foreign service and critical views against your own foreign service may be a result of manipulation of public opinion in Nepal by the dissidents.

In public pronouncements, the Bhutanese Government seems worried about the threat posed by Nepali-speakers to Drukpa culture. Is there not a larger and inevitable threat that derives from exposure to the outside world, as represented by education, travel, tourism and media? Is it possible to control the often negative forces of modernisation, and will Bhutan be able to control the inevitable acceleration of change when it happens?

It is not correct to say that the Royal Government is worried about any threat being posed to Drukpa culture by Nepali-speakers. In fact, the Hindu culture of our Lhotshampa has very close affinities with the Mahayana Buddhist culture of Bhutan. For instance, we have the same pantheon of gods in both religions. Our genuine concern about unchecked illegal immigration by ethnic Nepalis who happen to comprise all illegal immigrants coming to Bhutan should not be mistaken as misgivings on the part of the Royal Government regarding our citizens in southern Bhutan.

Nor is the Royal Government concerned about exposure to the outside world as represented by education, travel and tourism. The process of modernisation will certainly have an impact on the traditional culture of Bhutan. Of course, we have to be on guard against such negative side effects of modernisation as juvenile delinquency and drug addiction. I believe we can do this by making our people more aware of the values of our rich cultural heritage while at the same time absorbing the benefits of modernisation.

What we are concerned with is the need to preserve our unique national identity and our rich

cultural heritage because they are very important for strengthening and preserving our security and sovereignty. Other countries can rely on economic power, military might or physical size to safeguard their security. For a small landlocked country like Bhutan with a very tiny population, our unique national identity and rich cultural heritage are our greatest strength in this regard. Our efforts to preserve our unique national identity and rich cultural heritage does not in any way conflict with the process of modernisation.

Would you comment on how Bhutan's international diplomatic profile has changed over the last few years, including membership in various international bodies? Are you satisfied, as Foreign Minister? While we have joined practically all international bodies which have relevance to us, we continue to follow a cautious policy with regard to the expansion of our bilateral relationships. We are a country with limited interests. We have no ambition of becoming a major actor on the international stage. Our priorities are to promote international peace and development so as to improve the quality of life of our people in an increasingly interdependent and smaller world.

Has there been a change in perception of the northern Bhutanese communities regarding the Nepali-speakers who remain in the country, given the crisis and exodus of Nepali-speakers?

The resentment expressed by the Northern Bhutanese against those Lhotshampa who turned against their King and country and those who left Bhutan despite the appeals made by His Majesty the King for them to stay back are not directed against the Lhotshampa who remain in the country. In fact there is close harmony between the Northern Bhutanese and the large numbers of Lhotshampa who have moved to northern towns since the outbreak of the terrorist activities in the south. The Royal Government is also more than happy with the Lhotshampa who did not leave our country at a time when it is going through a very difficult period in our history. By remaining in the country they have rejected the machinations of the dissidents and have cast their vote in favour of a united Bhutan.

Given the Royal Government's belief that most of the Nepali-speakers in the camps of Southeast Nepal are not Bhutanese citizens, what are its views on how this population will adjust itself if there is agreement with Nepal not to allow all or a majority to return? I do not wish to answer such a speculative question, particularly as it prejudices the work of the Joint Ministerial Committee.

Would you like to address any other matter which has not been raised in the above list of questions? I have answered 23 of your questions. May I take the liberty of asking one question?

Has there been a sincere effort by any of the politicians, members of the media, and the intelligentsia in Nepal to reflect and find out whether the establishment of the refugee camps itself could have been the real cause of the present refugee problem?



The Lhotshampa refugees have been driven into a cul de sac by Bhutanese persecution, Nepal's inability to make its case, India's disinterest, and an international legal regime which does not provide a clear-cut way out.

by Anirudha Gupta

The responsibility of nations takes on multiple dimensions when a particular group of refugees bear affinity or connections with more than one country. Such is the case with the Bhutanese refugees now living in camps of eastern Nepal, many in their fourth year in exile. Linguistically and by origin, they are Nepali; they also have links with India, where their ancestors migrated to first; and they are settled in Bhutan, acquiring Bhutanese citizenship over time. These three dimensions must not be lost when we try for a solution to the Lhotshampa refugee problem.

In times of great stress and uncertainty, a migrant population usually tends to return to its country of origin. Naturally, therefore, when faced with persecution the Lhotshampa fled Bhutan and headed west over Indian territory towards the Nepal border at Kakarbhitta.

As such, Nepal cannot deny the refugees entry or asylum on the plea that its limited resources will be stretched by the extra burden. India, too, must own up its responsibility towards the Lhotshampa in the sense that a) the refugees' exodus was first into Indian roadheads, and b) it is Bhutan's public claim that most of these refugees have their origins in the Indian Northeast.

Finally, since most inmates in the Jhapa camps claim to be Bhutanese citizens, Thimpu's authorities simply cannot wash their hands of them without providing a convincing rebuttal. The fact that the refugees fled their homes in Bhutanese territory should alone persuade the Drukpa authorities to make adequate arrangement for the safe return of those who request repatriation.

All this is easy to say, but hard to put into practice.

Proving Persecution

The 1951 UNHCR convention which deals with the status of refugees does not properly define the term 'persecution'. The Convention's Articles 31 and 33 only refer to those "whose life or freedom may be threatened", leaving a wide margin for interpretation. Cannot discrimination or deprivation with regard to basic rights other than to life and freedom, such as denial of education or means of livelihood, also constitute persecution?

Persecution or forcible eviction cannot be easily proved. When people flee a country en masse, they do so out of fear. And, fear is subjective. How does one quantify it? A 1969 convention adopted by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), at least, lifts the burden of proof from the persecuted. It states: when people are compelled to leave a country to escape violence in general, they do not have to prove that their fear of persecution is "well founded",

as required by the 1951 UNHCR convention.

Many of the refugees in Jhapa fall into this category of people who flee persecution without the ability to 'prove' it explicitly. They might have been too frightened or ignorant to have brought with them the evidence of forcible eviction, or even their testimonials to citizenship (except perhaps the identity cards they were issued before 1985, which the Bhutanese authorities unconvincingly claim are forgeries). Many seem to have signed voluntary departure forms after having been made to accept some compensation, and sat meekly for departure photographs in their *gho* and *kira*.

From a purely legalistic viewpoint, the substantiation of claims of having being evicted or having Bhutanese citizenship is therefore full of difficulty. In the circumstances, any mechanism to verify refugee categories can only frustrate Nepal in its efforts to send the refugees back to where they came from. Neither can Kathmandu hope for a change in New Delhi's stance so long as the latter chooses to turn a Nelson's eye to the happenings in Bhutan or in eastern Nepal.

It would be height of diplomatic folly for Kathmandu—for its own long-term geopolitical interests—to point to the 1949 Bhutan-India Treaty and maintain that New Delhi is treaty-bound to advise Thimpu as regards to its external relations.

In other words, Thimpu will own up its citizens only if India asks it to do so. India will not.

Spirit of SAARC

If the bilateral talks do not hold out much hope, and India keeps itself out of the picture, are there not opportunities for the regional organisation SAARC to find a humane solution to a problem which has arisen between two of its members? Before any sovereign, independent state emerged, peoples of the region moved across the vast span of South Asia to settle in faraway lands in search of livelihood, cultural cohesion and kinship. Population movement has always been an accepted fact of South Asian society. Once the nation-state came into being, however, national boundaries were drawn to obstruct this natural flow of people. At the same time, divergent citizenship laws overnight turned settled populations into disenfranchised strangers and hunted species.

Over centuries, impoverished masses from Nepal and the eastern sector (the two Bengals) have been migrating to the South Asia's great cities in search of work. Today, they are all known as legal or illegal migrants, who can be shoved across borders at will.

With the emergence of the nation-state has come a set of

discriminatory laws against immigrant communities on the basis of their separate language, religion or geographical origin. Such laws would sooner or later be applied for "ethnic-cleansing". Hence, today we have the influx from Bhutan of Nepali-speaking people; of Tamils from Sri Lanka; of Chakmas from Bangladesh; and of Rohingyas from Myanmar.

What status do such people have when they flee? What future will their children face? Poverty and faceless identity? Most South Asian governments claim to be giving top priority to poverty alleviation. So, with over 50 percent of the population below the poverty line, is it proper for them to acquiesce to the creation of yet another category of the destitute born of discrimination — immigrants, non-citizens, and refugees? Is this all that the SAARC countries are capable of, while continuously mouthing truisms about their commitment to removing human misery? And where, indeed, is the much ballyhooed "SAARC Spirit" when it comes to resolving one of the gravest humanitarian issues if the region that involves not two but three member countries?

The presence of 100,000 refugees from Bhutan on Nepali and Indian soil is a blot on the face of SAARC, even more so because the Lhotshampa refugee problem is one which has arisen after the setting up of the regional organisation. It is not a festering problem which has lingered for decades.

SAARC Citizenship

At the root of this new problem in dealing with migrant populations is the Euro-centric concept of refugee, one which the Governments of South Asia also ascribe to. Looking at the situation of the Lhotshampa refugees today and studying the history of population movements in South Asia, one begins to feel the need to radically alter — if not abandon altogether — the very concept of 'refugee'. Does this term fit the context in which South Asian population movements have occurred?

As a term, 'refugee' springs from the European experience. It originally applied to the French Huguenots who came to England after revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Even the UNHCR's Convention has a European flavour in-as-much as 17 out of 26 drafting states were European.

Since they accept the concept of 'refugee', all South Asian governments follow the predictable path of confrontation on the issue of illegal immigrants and refugees. The country which expels a long-settled immigrant population commits in the first place an outright violation of human rights. A second sin when it refuses to own up to such violation. The country which receives an expelled population demands that they be repatriated to the country they came from. In the process, nothing progresses except an exchange of hot words.

What can be the alternative? First, expulsion of the Westernised concept of refugee. Instead, South Asian governments must accept that immigrants and refugees constitute an integral part of the region's great mosaic of cultures, religions, and languages. Hence, they together share a common obligation towards them. How can this be achieved?

I suggest that SAARC governments hold a convention to confer SAARC citizenship on those termed 'refugees'. Once the criteria are worked out — and the convention accepts them — it would become obligatory on the part of signatory states to secure their right to work, to health and education, and to move freely as SAARC citizens. In one word, a guarantee for human existence as distinguished from that of captive animals in quarantine.

△

A. Gupta is Professor of Political Science at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

On the way up



Dare a Nepali from the midhills of Nepal write an article about Bhutan, more particularly an analysis of the innermost challenges before Drukpa society today? Can a Bengali do justice to Mizoram, or a Garhwali to Punjab?

Obviously, the answer is 'yes', but only with full respect for his/her subject and the exercise of repertorial rigour. Whether these conditions are fulfilled in this issue's lead cover feature on Druk Yul is for readers and those who are part of the story to judge.

Himal faces challenges quite different from other South Asian journals because we write from within and about a region that has not received in-depth journalistic treatment in the past. As we turn our lens on the multi-ethnic region, therefore, it is natural to step on toes that have never been stepped on before. Sensitivities are being bruised the very first time around.

It is additionally difficult for a midhill Nepali to get under the skin of Tibetan speaking societies in general, and to understand the spiritual underpinnings and urges that drive the polity of a country like Bhutan's. But if one is to respect (northern) Bhutanese as a real and not "exotic" people, they deserve the reporter's curiosity like any other community.

While on the question of the ethnicity-related challenges Himal faces, a unique problem arises when letter-writers use nom de plumes. The use of a pseudonym is acceptable when the correspondent's reluctance to use his/her own name is offset by the importance of the idea contained in the letter. If a pseudonym is used, that fact obviously has to be acknowledged in the copy. So far so good.

In Himal, we have seen that it is also important for the pseudonym either to be ethnicity-neutral, or it should indicate the same ethnicity, tribe or caste as that of the correspondent. Grave injustice can be done and confusion sowed, for example, if a Bahun appropriates a Limbu name while arguing a janajati-related matter. For our part, we at Himal will continue to try our best to screen out mail which constitute such breach of privileges, by whosoever committed.

As regular readers know, we have for years been trying to make Himal a more Himalayan magazine — by covering more of the region, better. We do not consider adequate our coverage of Sikkim-Darjeeling, the Indian Northeast, Himachal and Kashmir (while there are obviously those who think we look too closely at Bhutan). Bide with us.

In order to make Himal more Himalayan, we have decided to form a panel of persons from the Himalayan rimland who will provide continuous input and advice. In the past, we have relied on consulting editors who gave valuable time to helping the magazine grow. We thank Anmole Prasad who, based in Kalimpong, is continuing with us in the panel. Thanks and farewell to Sanjeev Prakash, who provided counsel on subjects as diverse as water resources, the environment and Tibet. Even he, however, was unable to rein in our abominable back-page columnist, who will go her way.

On the subject of columnists, mountain lovers will welcome the resumption of our Know Your Himal column, which has been revived for this issue by Manesh Shrestha. From Jaigaon, the gateway to Bhutan, Dr. Sonam Wangyal has started his column, Placenames, which will help us learn history, geography and language all at one go.

- Kanak Mani Dixit

ABSTRACTS

Earthquake Hazard and Large Dams in the Himalaya

Vinod K. Gaur, editor

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, New Delhi, 1993
ISBN 81 900281 2 X
IRs 250

A workshop on hazards posed by large dams in the Himalaya was held in New Delhi in January 1993; nine papers presented in this workshop are contained in this volume. Prof K.N.Khattry, analysing the patterns of seismicity along the Himalayan arc, predicts at least three great earthquakes in Uttar Pradesh and Nepal; K.S.Valdiya elaborates on the persistent tectonic activities in the densely populated lesser Himalaya where several dams are located; V.K.Gaur predicts a great earthquake in the 300 km stretch between Haridwar and Tanakpur; and Prof Bruce A.Bolt of U.C. Berkeley discusses difficulties in research due to lack of high quality seismic data. Papers by Profs Lian Finn and Narayana Iyengar deal with specific aspects of the Tehri Dam in Garhwal.

Converting Water into Wealth Regional Cooperation in Harnessing the Eastern Himalayan Rivers

Q.K.Ahmad et al, editors

Institute of Integrated Development Studies, Kathmandu, 1994
NRs 100, US\$ 10

This book is the product of a joint study by three institutions — New Delhi's Centre for Policy Research, Kathmandu's IIDS and Dhaka's Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad — on harnessing the eastern Himalayan rivers for equitable benefit of the co-riparian countries. Regional cooperation offers gains far beyond what can be achieved through isolated national efforts. The present impasse on the subject "is not primarily a product of technical differences regarding what might be done and how costs and benefits should be shared," but more centrally "the legacy of political mistrust based on a variety of consideration and experience only partially related or even unrelated to water resource development." The waters of Ganga, Brahmaputra and Meghna/Barak have to be creatively and cooperatively used, as the eastern Himalayan region is too poor to afford further loss of time.

Strangers of the Mist

Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast by Sanjoy Hazarika

Viking by Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1994
ISBN 0670 85909 5
IRs 295

Ethnic coalitions, oral traditions and lifestyles matter a lot in the Indian Northeast. "Here men and women, with common origins but different nationalities, share a racial, historic, anthropological and linguistic kinship with each other that is more vital than their links with the mainstream political centres...it is this affinity that has played a role in the unrest and insurgencies that have long troubled the Northeast of India." Thus prefaced, this book by Sanjoy Hazarika of *The New York Times* looks at "how little men and women have reacted to imperial, insensitive administrations, politicians

and policies..." The hill people, he writes, have long felt isolated from the non-Mongolian communities and from the political and bureaucratic mainstream in New Delhi. Hazarika asserts that only a doctrine embracing regional, economic and security concerns (not the piecemeal approaches of the last 20 years) can transform the jungles of unrest into communities of prosperity. The book ends with a word of warning — without policies on population growth, migration, flood control, agriculture production, and sharing of resources, the people in the Northeast and bordering areas will confront each other in savage conflicts that would put Bosnia, Somalia and Azerbaijan to shame.

Trees of the Sikkim Himalaya

by Topdhan Rai and Lalitkumar Rai

Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994
ISBN 81 7387 001 2
IRs 800, US\$ 100

This is a book on the trees found in the Eastern Himalaya by Topdhan Rai, a Sikkimese forester, and Lalitkumar Rai, a photo-journalist from Darjeeling. Together, they portray (in words and colour) the place where "nature chose to create her garden". Each picture is accompanied by description about the individual species and its use.

Kumaon Himalaya: Temptations

by Shekhar Pathak and Anup Sha

Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam, Uttar Pradesh, 1993
IRs 580

Written and photographed by two diehard Kumaoni trekkers and produced both in Hindi and English, this book captures on film and phrase the beauty of the known, the lesser known, and the unknown, Kumaon. Amongst 152 colour photographs and 17 maps, the nine chapters describe the region's history, society, culture, natural resources, tourism potentials, pilgrimage spots, tourism routes, (including to Kailas-Mansarovar), and dos and don'ts for the traveller. Pathak advocates tourism planning as the only way of decentralising and dignifying tourism in the Himalaya, in which conservation and enjoyment of the Himalayan wilderness and heritage should be the "mul mantra".

Forests: The Ecological Ramifications

by A.P. Dwivedi

Natraj Publishers, Dehradun, 1993
ISBN 81 85019 35 5
IRs 495

Divided into 23 chapters, this book studies the physical features and interrelationships in the South Asian forest ecosystem. The forests are looked at in relation to people, precipitation, wind, soil, flood, global warming, air pollution, etc. Dwivedi also discusses the present status of forest in India and the factors that have led to the degradation of forest land. He recommends "the jurisdiction of forest subordinates such as the forest guards, foresters and rangers need to be reduced considerably and transport facility provided so that protection may be ensured. In sensitive areas, special protection forces may be posted." He concludes that models that have been successful (like in West Bengal) need to be repeated on a larger scale.

Sikkim: Society, Polity, Economy, Environment

Mahendra P.Lama, editor

Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994
ISBN 81 7387 013 6
IRs 350

It is nearly 20 years since the protectorate of Sikkim was merged into India. Contemporary writers look at Sikkimese society, politics, economy and environment in 21 chapters. Nilotpal Sarma writes that plainsmen are highly successful at occupational adaptation in Sikkim; Amal Dutta, writing on ethnicity and resource management, says that the "we" feeling of the Sikkimese has become very much important in determining their position irrespective of caste/tribe background. Other essays are on Bhutia-Lepcha women, Sikkim's identity as an Indian State, informal bazaars, government and politics, and so on.

Tourism in Ladakh Himalaya

by Prem Singh Jina

Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994
ISBN 81 7387 004 7
IRs 250

The book looks at changes wrought by tourist traffic in Ladakhi tradition, culture and beliefs, and how Ladakhis developed tourist-oriented ventures over the last two decades. Jina puts forward 35 recommendations for developing the full tourism potential of Ladakh, which would include more coverage of Ladakh in the Western media, hot water facilities in "A" class hotels, ensuring that Ladakhi culture does not become cheap and commercial, prohibiting the "movement of unlicensed animals" (cows, dogs) in Leh and Kargil, and so on.

Emotionally Disturbed Adolescents of the Himalaya

V.R. Dhoungiyal

Shree Almora Book Depot, Almora, 1993
ISBN 81 85865 12 4
IRs 180

Written by an educationist, this book analyses the attitudes of emotionally disturbed adolescents towards authority. Some adolescents enrolled in schools and colleges of Uttarakhand have been studied. Dhoungiyal concludes that a "special education for parenthood" needs to be organised in a systematic way so that "emotionally disturbed in particular" can be "reared up in the right way."

Royal Bardia National Park

by B.N. Uprety

National Conservation Strategy
Implementation Project,
Kathmandu, 1994

In this monograph, Uprety, a long time parks and wildlife man of Nepal, takes a detailed look at Royal Bardia National Park in the Churia hills. The monograph assesses the impact of the park on the local people, the impact of the local people on the park, problems with existing and proposed infrastructure projects, park management issues, and so on. Wildlife species in the park area are listed and a conservation fund recommended to support and involve local people.

When a GLOF Bursts its Banks

1957 - 59



1960 - 68



1993



by Pradeep Kumar Mool

Summer and winter at Tsho Rolpa, with Nepali scientists at work. The pictures look east towards the mouth of the Trakrarding Glacier. The lake already impounds 71 million cubic metres of water. Diagrams above right record the growth of Tsho Rolpa from 1957 to 1993.



There is a glacier lake up in Rolwaling Himal above the settlement of Beding that is about to rupture. An earthquake or avalanche is likely to break the weak moraine dam which props up the lake, and releases 71 million cubic metres glacial melt water.

If the water is released slowly, damage will be limited. But chances are that the marine collapse will be sudden, in which case Nepal will experience a Glacier Lake Outburst Flood, or GLOF, which is greater than all the GLOF phenomena of recent decades.

The glacier lake is known as Tsho Rolpa, and is at the headwaters of the Rolwaling Khola in Dolakha District, northeast of Kathmandu, below the Gauri Shankar massif. Over the last four decades, glacial melt from the Trakrarding Glacier has collected in a lake, held back by the loosely filled debris of the glacier's end-moraine. The glacier is receding fast, and it is in the process of releasing a large volume of water which goes into the lake.

Satellite data, aerial observations and on-site investigations by the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat (supported by Japanese funding) show that the size of Tsho Rolpa has increased relentlessly. The surface area of the lake was about .23 sq km in 1959, while in 1993 it had expanded to 1.4 sq km. The elongated lake is today 3 km in length and has an average width of half a kilometre. Towards the middle, one measurement showed a depth of 132 m.

Like earthquakes, GLOFs are a fixture of Himalayan history. The evidence is found in erosion along river banks and breaches of terminal moraines. Pokhara Valley's topography, in fact, was defined by debris brought down by a massive GLOF that occurred several centuries ago below Machhapuchare peak.

Even though it is a fixture of history, the awareness of GLOFs, and their potential to wreak havoc, is a recent phenomenon. Even at this late date, Nepal and Tibet/China are the only two countries in the Himalayan region that are doing any scientific work in the field.

Chinese scientists studied the July 1981 GLOF from Zhangzangbo Lake on the Boqu River (Sun kosi- Bhote Kosi) in Tibet. In Nepal, the first GLOF event to draw scientific attention was when the Dig Tsho Lake on the Langmoche Glacier (at the headwaters of the Dudh Kosi, Khumbu) burst in August 1985, destroying trails, foot-bridges, the

Namche small-hydel project, and taking lives.

There have been many other GLOFs in just the last few decades. They include: release from Gelhaipuco Lake (Tibet) along the Arun River (Nepal), 1964; Phuchan Lake along the Tamur River (Nepal), 1980; the Arun basin (Tibet, west of Chomolongma), in 1968, 1969, 1970, 1982; along the Sun Kosi (Tibet and Nepal), 1935; on the Longda at the Trisuli source (Tibet), 1964; on the Nare Glacier (south slope of Ama Dablam peak), 1977; and Chubung GLOF at Ripimo Shar Glacier in Rolwaling, 1991.

Besides Tsho Rolpa, other glacier lakes that accelerated growth and bear watching are: the Thulagi Glacier Lake on the Marsyangdi Basin which has reached 2 km length today, up from .6 km in 1960; the Imja Glacier Lake which started forming around 1963 and today holds about 28 million cu m of water; the Lower Barun Glacier Lake in the Arun Basin, which is not seen in the 1967 topographic map, but is today 0.6 sq km in area and contains 28 million cu m.

To understand the devastation that a break of Rolwaling's Tsho Rolpa can lead to, the relatively modest 1981 GLOF on the Sun Kosi destroyed the diversion weir at the Sun Kosi hydro project, two bridges, and large sections of the Kathmandu-Lhasa Arniko Highway. For comparison's sake, the Dig Tsho burst in the Khumbu involved release of no more than 10 million cu m water volume, compared to the 71 million cu m already impounded in Tsho Rolpa.

A sudden burst rather than a delayed release, would devastate downstream areas all the way from the Sherpa-inhabited Rolwaling through the entire stretch of mid-hill Nepal, and possibly as far as the Tarai beyond Tribeni where the three main tributaries of the great Sapta Kosi meet. Certainly, this would be one of the largest GLOF event of the last few decades.

Though time is short, it is possible to mitigate the impact of a Tsho Rolpa GLOF. The lake can be drained by a controlled breaching of the moraine, using massive water pumps, or tunneling under the dam. The most effective method seems to be siphoning of the lake, a method that is used in the Andes. Besides the high expense of massive siphoning structures, however, one has also to be careful that draining procedures do not themselves trigger a GLOF due to some unprecedented event such as creation of a tidal wave when a glacier serac falls into the lake.

Many studies have been done on glacier lakes of the Eastern Nepal and on Tsho Rolpa to indicate that the situation of Tsho Rolpa is dire. While continuing research, there should now be a concerted effort to raise funds and gather expertise in order to drain the lake before it is too late.

P.K. Mool is a geologist with the Water and Energy Commission Secretariat, Kathmandu. △



Other lakes that might be close to breaking. Imja Glacier in the Khumbu (above); Thulagi Glacier in the Marsyangdi Basin (right); and Lower Barun Glacier in the Arun Basin.



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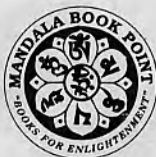
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Snow Leopard Menace

Northeasterners Resist the Lollypop

Interesting news bites from Shillong over the last couple of months, when put together, indicate that unsettling times lie ahead for the Far Eastern Himalaya.

On 6 June, a news item in *The Times of India* reveals that Arunachal Pradesh is shunning New Delhi's proposals for two large dams, on the Subansiri and Dehand rivers, which together would generate 25,000 megawatts of hydropower. Vidya Charan Shukla, Union Minister for Water Resources, admitted that the opposition was delaying the implementation of the Brahmaputra Master Plan.

On the same day, *The Statesman* reported that some states of the Northeast were showing "a distinct lack of enthusiasm" for the Indian Railways' plans to expand its sparse network in the Northeast, "afraid that it might affect their pristine cultural identity."

Soon thereafter in Shillong, Union Home Minister S.B. Chavan announced plans to lift the inner-line regulations which restrict free movement of Indian citizens in Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland. The theory might have been that after the relaxation of the Restricted Area Permit to enable foreign tourists to visit the region, it was incongruous to maintain the inner line restrictions system in place for Indian citizens. The Minister of State for Internal Security, Rajesh Pilot, endorsed Chavan's

If the snow leopard is more endangered in Manang District of Central Nepal today than it was earlier, it is, ironically, due to filmmakers and researchers who come to study them.

In an ironic twist, the very researchers and filmmakers who have come to study the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) in Manang District Nepal have had a role in their increased peril. Residents of Ngisyang Valley believe that providing bait to assist easy sighting of the rare cat has made it more predatory of village livestock. As a result, villagers are not taking kindly to the snow leopard, an animal that they had little reason to detest in the past.

For several years, a Japanese cinematographer working for Asia Nature

Vision used goats as bait so that the cats would come close to his camera, even under the glare of floodlights. Later, a Nepali student researching his M.Phil. thesis was active, darting the



Radio collaring a snow leopard

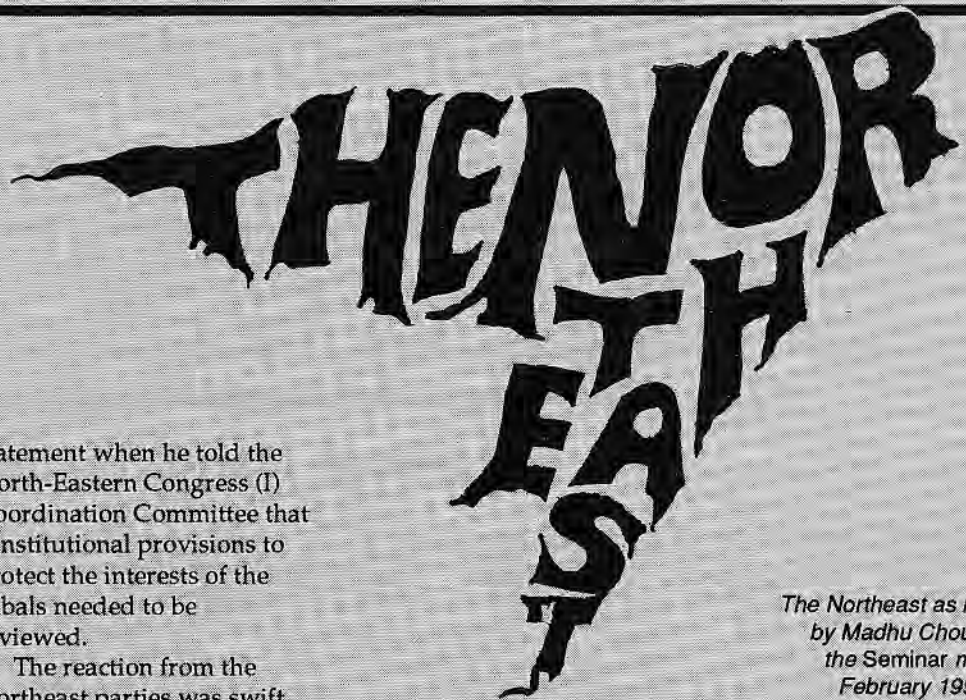
leopards, radio collaring them, and following them about.

All this made the leopards confident about humans and

willing to come down to villages in broad daylight to poach on livestock (yaks, horses, sheep, goats and cattle), claim the villagers. Earlier, livestock used to be lost on rare occasions while out on pasture, and when they were not stockaded at night. Today, snow leopards attack even in sheds, and they cannot be scared off by torches or human shouting.

In the winter of 1993-94, more than 25 yaks, 20 goats, one horse and two cattle were killed by snow leopards in Ngishyang. This is a great loss for subsistence farmers who rely on raising livestock on high land pasture. At one time, up to 30 goats of one farmer were killed by snow leopard.

- Gehendra Gurung/
Som Ale



statement when he told the North-Eastern Congress (I) Coordination Committee that constitutional provisions to protect the interests of the tribals needed to be reviewed.

The reaction from the Northeast parties was swift and unequivocal; all attempts to scrap the inner line regulations would be firmly opposed. Mizos, Nagas and Arunachalis were minority communities which had received protected status from British times, and they

insisted on its continuation.

Clearly, we are in for a period of jousting in which the Central Government tries to 'integrate' the Northeast, with the Northeast offering firm resistance. All eyes are on three committees set up

by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao under the leadership of the Union Home, Finance and Commerce Ministers to deeply study the problems facing the tribals of the Northeast.

The Northeast as rendered by Madhu Choudhury in the Seminar magazine February 1990 issue.

Meghalaya Coal

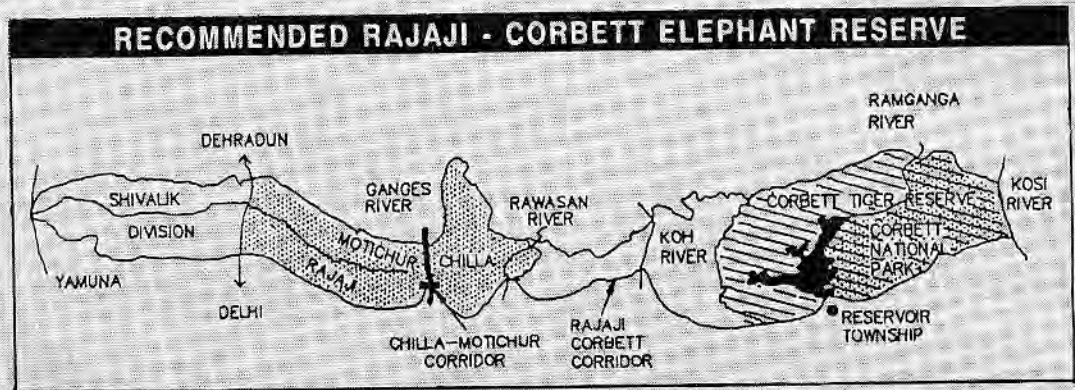
Meghalaya is facing wholesale degradation of its air, soil and water by coal mines which are digging wide and deep into the forests and farmlands of this Northeast state.

Coal mining was started in the Khasi Hills as early as 1840, but till the mid-1980s the industry had remained smallscale. However, recent steep hikes in the demand have spurred extraction — from 39,000 tonnes in 1970 to 1.7 million tonnes in 1989.

Because the Meghalayan coal seam is close to the surface, the mining is cheap but ecologically destructive. The miners dig a pit, dumping the overburden on adjacent land as work progresses. While the surrounding land is inundated with debris, monsoon water that accumulates in the coal pit turns acidic and toxic.

One reason for the runaway mining is that most of the deposits are in private lands, and the profit from coal mining is much greater than from agriculture. There is no regulation of the miners by the State Government which does not seem interested in promoting organised and scientific mining that is less destructive. Mining landowners who register as "cottage industry" are not driven to restore the integrity of the land by replacing the topsoil and backfilling of the coal pits.

- CSE/Down To Earth Features



Elephant Corridors in Western Tarai

In the ongoing tragedy of habitat loss all over, once continuous belts of wildlands are being relentlessly transformed into isolated pockets. The latest region to fall to the settlers' axe are the forested districts of the western Nepal Tarai — Kailali, Kanchanpur and Bardiya. In the central Nepal Tarai, the Chitwan National Park is well cared for, but the Tikauli jungle, the only corridor linking Chitwan to the Mahabharat Lekh, has shrunk to a strip barely three kilometres wide.

It seems such an effort to just try and maintain what is left of the forests that no one has actively proposed relinking areas that have become islands — until "Project Elephant" came along. The Dehradun-based

Wildlife Institute of India has proposed linking the series of "islands" in the UP Tarai so as to improve the survival prospects of the Asian elephant.

According to *The Times of India*, WII recommends the setting up of the Rajaji-Corbett Elephant Reserve, roping in a continuous area from the Jamuna river eastward to the (Uttar Pradesh) Kosi. The Shivalik Forest Division by the Jamuna would be linked to the Rajaji National Park, which would be connected by a corridor to the Corbett Tiger Reserve, astride the Kosi. Altogether, the new reserve would cover an area of 2660 sq km, including 820 sq km of Rajaji, 1320 sq km of Corbett, and 520 sq km of the four forest divisions that

would provide the corridors.

Rajaji (whose two halves are presently severed by human settlements) presently contains an elephant population of around 350, reports *TOI*. The absence of a forest corridor has blocked migratory routes and resulted in inbreeding and genetic abnormalities. Says A.J.T. Johnsingh, WII's Senior Wildlife Scientist, "If the Asian elephant is to be saved in Northwest India, this area should be managed as one conservation unit using the elephant as a flagship species."

Unfortunately, there seems little likelihood that this corridor could be extended from Corbett further east to the forests of the Nepal Tarai. The intervening woodlands are gone...

Dabur wants *Taxus baccata*

The Himalayan yew (*Taxus baccata*) continues to make news. This time it is the claim of Dabur, the Indian ayurvedic giant, that it has perfected a method to extract taxol from the leaves of the tree rather than from the bark. (See *Himal Jan/Feb 1993*, which reports on Dabur's plans to harvest 1500 metric tons of *Taxus baccata* leaves annually from Nepali forests.)

Taxol is a potent drug used to treat ovarian and breast cancer. It was cleared for use in the United States in January 1993 after evaluating its side-effects. However, there were subsequent reports which questioned the drug's efficacy. (See also *Himal Nov/Dec 1993*)

The drug was first extracted in minute quantities from the bark of the Pacific yew (*Taxus*

brevifolia), and is only in the last couple of years that attention shifted to the Himalayan yew. This resulted in the destruction of whole sections of Himalayan forests in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Nepal.

Dabur's scientists claim that their process of extracting taxol from leaves is far less destructive of forests than deriving it from the bark. Once the bark is

Trees and the Caste Barrier

There is more complexity in forest protection movements than meets the eye or is reported by a laudatory press. A recent item on Himachal by Max Martin carried in the *CSE/Down To Earth Feature Service* shows how there can be class and caste struggle even over a proposal as supposedly virtuous as one to protect trees.

A plot of forest of Tutu village near Shimla had been mistakenly declared "barren land" and under a programme to allot property to the dispossessed, a part of the plot had been given to a certain Kesu Devi, a Dalit.

In 1985, women from the local Mahila Mandal (women's organisation) had planted 1000 deodar saplings in the forest. Kesu Devi died in 1986. The trouble began in 1992 when Kesu Devi's son Teju Ram decided to fell some deodar trees and begin farming. The Mahila Mandal objected and put pressure on officials to stop him, even

dashing off a letter to the Chief Minister. In January, the Revenue Department agreed to transfer the land to the forest department.

The women of Tutu were elated, reports Martin. And Girja Sharma, president of the Mandal, said, "We women can wait but we do not give up."

Teju Ram, meanwhile, is angry and determined to take the women to court. He sits by the wooden balcony of his small house and says, "I am a poor Harijan. The high caste women of the Mahila Mandal just cannot stand seeing me prosper. It is my land. I'll do what I want there."

The opinion on the deodar issue is now sharply divided along caste lines among Tutu's 200 households. "There are many other Brahmin families who have forest land with deodars. Why don't these women fight for that land?" asks Teju Ram's friend Raghu Ram. "Because they all belong to the high caste."

stripped off, the whole tree usually dries up and dies.

It is not all smooth sailing for Dabur, however. The Himachal-based Himalayan Nature and Environment Preservation Society has protested Dabur's exploitation of yew leaves from the forests of the state. It claims that Dabur's hired contractors lop off entire branches, affecting the slow-growing conifer. Moreover, the royalty paid to the Forest Department is meagre and the local people see hardly any benefit from the

harvest of the Himalayan yew from their forests, says the Society.

Dabur, which has already invested about US\$ 4 million in the taxol project, claims that it is conscious of the need to conserve the yew. It plans to initiate a project to identify varieties of yew that have high taxol content and to propagate them using tissue culture techniques. The company also plans to set up yew plantations in Uttar Pradesh and Nepal.

- CSE/Down To Earth
Features

PLACENAMES

by Dr. Sonam Wangyel

(An occasional column on names and their origins, starting with names of towns, rivers, mountains of the East.)

The earliest names of places in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling are Lepcha in origin. Later names we encounter are Tibetan or Nepali, with many of them being literal translations of original Lepcha into the tongues of the settlers. Some names have grown out of historical events while others are rooted in folklore and culture. Almost every name has a story to tell.

Kurseong: Hill station situated between Darjeeling and Siliguri. 4860 ft. Appears in first English written reference in 1839 as 'Kurseonggurry'. Present-day plainsmen speak of 'Koorasang' while locals prefer 'Kharsang'. Kurseong is Lepcha term meaning 'white orchid', in particular the species 'Star Venus'.

An improbable suggestion by O'Malley in the *Bengal District Gazetteer* is that the term refers to a cane grove that used to exist in the area. In Lepcha, he writes, *kur* is 'cane' and *sheang* means a stick. A contemporary expert R.K. Sprigg, however, says "I have not been able to trace a word *kur* meaning 'a type of cane'; *shang* means 'wood' in the sense of 'firewood' or 'fuelwood', as in the Nepali *daura*."

Darjeeling: Widely accepted meaning is 'the place of the *dorje*', the reference being to the mystic thunderbolt of Lamaist religion. O'Malley's gazetteer refers to a monastery which once stood on Observatory Hill being known as 'dorje-ling'. There was a monastery atop the hill of Darjeeling as far back as 1766 (E.C. Dozey, 1916), which the Gorkhali ransacked in the early 19th century. The *Gazetteer of Sikkim* refers to a Lama Kangchen Ralpa Dorjee of Tibet who settled at Rishihat around 1736-41. It is possible that the lama chose Observatory Hill as the place to raise prayer flags, as is done even today.

L.A. Waddell, in *Among the Himalaya* (1900) inexplicably provides the translation as "the cave of the mystic thunderbolt", for the Tibetan word for cave is *phugpa*. More amusing than perplexing is K.C. Bhanja's claim in *The Mystic Tibet and the Himalayas* (1948) that the name refers to a Tibetan monk named Dorje Lama.

A recent Sanskrit claim, made in a tourist guide edited by A.P. Agarwala, maintains that 'Darjeeling' comes from Durgay Ling, said to refer to "Siva of invincible powers, who rules the Himalayas". If one is desperate for a Hindu angle on 'Darjeeling', then it is better to go with Shiva Pradhan's (in *Bhasik Andolan: Safaltako Goreto Samma*, 1992) theory which refers to mention of a 'Durjayat-ling' in the Puranas as being a part of Prag-Jyotishpur kingdom.

Early Nepali settlers affectionately called Darjeeling 'Gundribazar'. Perhaps this name survives in the truncated 'Bazar', which is what the population of the surrounding locality call Darjeeling.

In Sep/Oct 1994 Himal, we take up 'Kalimpong'.

Dr. Wangyel, from Darjeeling, has his practice in Jaigaon, at the Bhutan/West Bengal border.

Back Breaking Rotors



Looking up-valley towards Ama-Dablam.

Helicopters now plying the Khumbu region could permanently change the nature of tourism in this region, and in the process affect the livelihoods of thousands of mid-hill Nepali porters.

While helicopters have flown the Nepali skies ever since civil aviation began in the late 1960s, it is the deregulation of the airways a couple of years ago that has led to sudden turbulence in the industry. In particular, Asian Airlines' Kazan Mi-17 helicopters have made heli-travel and portage suddenly more accessible.

The heavy-lift Russian helicopters, captained by Russian pilots, carry up to 3000 kg. In less than the one hour that the chopper takes to fly from Kathmandu to Syangboche (3760 m), it can put 500 porters out of jobs for over ten days. (Calculation based on 30 kg porter loads and ten porter days for Jiri-Namche stretch.)

Porters have been exploited historically because they have never been able to organise themselves, scattered as they are by region and ethnicity and made vulnerable by poverty.

With the Government looking the other way even as hundreds lose the only avenue of cash income on the Khumbu trail, it is unlikely that anyone else will speak up for the porters' loss.

There was, however, a demonstration and strike against Asian Airlines by the residents of lower Khumbu (Chaurikharka Village Development Committee), more particularly the lodge-owners of Lukla. The famous airstrip has till now served as the gateway to all Khumbu. The villagers saw clearly the loss of income as Mi-17s thundered overhead on the way to Syangboche airstrip, which lies on a hill above Namche (and which cannot handle fixed-wing aircraft larger than the seven-seater Pilatus).

Given its hauling capacity, the 24-seater Russian helicopter (leased at US\$ 2,000 per hour of flight) now offers an alternative to the Khumbu-bound expeditions. Earlier, the mountaineering teams relied solely on fixed-wing flights to transport their loads to Lukla, famous for flight cancellations due to river valley clouds.

Lukla's villagers fear that it is only a matter of time before all trekkers bypass their village for a more direct approach to the upper Khumbu. Sherpas Ang Tshering and Dawa Norbu, the trekking businessmen who started Asian Airlines, have been aggressive in introducing their helicopter service. Their scheduled twice-a-week Kathmandu-Syangboche flights have been doing well since they were begun in June. Since last December, they have been offering chartered flights to Syangboche and further up-valley, and they have even picked up tourists from the Tengboche monastery lawns.

These are times of flux for tourism in the Khumbu, and in time some kind of market equilibrium will probably be reached. Trekkers might still wish to fly into Lukla (2800 m) in order to get acclimatised on the low march along the Dudh Kosi before Namche. However, it is certain that most travellers will prefer to take a quick heli-exit out of Syangboche or further up once their mountaineering expedition or trek is over. "Already, the expedition teams are flying

from Syangboche to Kathmandu, and not bothering to come down here to Lukla," says Ang Karma Sherpa, a Lukla lodgeowner.

Expeditions and even local traders will see no reason to fly their equipment in STOL aircraft to Lukla when they can save two days' portage by simply taking the Mi-17s to Syangboche. Ang Tshering claims the opposition to helicopter flights doesn't enjoy popular support. "It's only a few Lukla-based businessmen who are bickering over it," he says, producing a letter of support for Asian Airlines which bears 600 signatures from upper Khumbu villages such as Thame, Khunde/Khumjung and Pheriche.

According to Ang Tshering, even the mid-hill porters have nothing to worry about. "It is only the expedition teams that are likely to fly us — the trekking groups will continue to walk from lower altitudes, either at Jiri or Lukla. We are opening up tourism to the upscale market, and the locals are bound to benefit. The porters will soon be absorbed by the growing local economy, possibly in other jobs."

Ang Tshering adds that because Asian Airlines' helicopter service is not going to be fazed by the monsoon (unlike fixed winged aircraft which find it hard to fly into the narrow valley of the Dudh Kosi), "Khumbu will witness the development of year-round tourism."

For the immediate term, though, it is clear the mid-hill porters will have to find work in the larger marketplace among those who still can use human backs rather than whirring rotors.

- Akhilesh Upadhyay

Fascinating, Informative and Excellent Reference Books on the Himalayas/Environment/Forestry

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Himachal Pradesh: The Land and People By S.S. Negi / Rs. 250 2. Kinnaur: A Restricted Land in the Himalaya By S.C. Bajpai / Rs. 250 3. Account of Koonawur in the Himalaya By Alexander Gerard / Rs. 425 4. Lahul-Spiti: A Forbidden Land in the Himalaya By S.C. Bajpai / Rs. 200 5. Festivals, Fairs and Customs of Himachal Pradesh By Goverdhan Singh / Rs. 200 6. Buddhist Monasteries in Himachal Pradesh By O.C. Handa / Rs. 150 7. Tabo Monastery and Buddhism in the Trans-Himalaya By O.C. Handa / Rs. 1450 8. Buddhist Art and Antiquities of Himachal Pradesh By O.C. Handa / Rs. 650 9. Paschimi Himalaya ki Lok Kalayen (in Hindi) By Om Chand Handa / Rs. 225 10. A Handbook of the Himalaya By S.S. Negi / Rs. 400 11. Himalayan Rivers, Lakes and Glaciers By S.S. Negi / Rs. 200 12. Handbook of National Parks, Sanctuaries and Biosphere Reserves in India By S.S. Negi / Rs. 250 13. Himalayan Wildlife: Habitat and Conservation By S.S. Negi / Rs. 250 14. Hill Resorts of U.P. Himalaya: A Geographical Study By Nutan Tyagi / Rs. 320 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Chronicles of the Doon Valley: An Environmental Expose By P.K. Thadhani / Rs. 500 16. History of Garhwal: 1358-1947 By Ajay S. Rawat / Rs. 250 17. Garhwal: The Land and People By S.S. Negi / Rs. 250 18. Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya By Harshvanti Bisht / Rs. 350 19. Kumaun: The Land and People By S.S. Negi / Rs. 250 20. Ladakh through the Ages By Shridhar Kaul & H.N. Kaul / Rs. 450 21. Tourism in Ladakh Himalaya By Prem Singh Jina / Rs. 250 22. Kashmir: History and Archaeology through the Ages By S.L. Shali / Rs. 800 23. Darjeeling: A Fovoured Retreat By Jahar Sen / Rs. 120 24. Sikkim: Problems and Prospects of Development By Manas Das Gupta / Rs. 180 25. Sikkim: Society, Polity, Economy & Environment By M.P. Lama (ed) / Rs. 350 26. Trees of the Sikkim Himalaya By Topdhan Rai and L.K. Rai / Rs. 800 27. Hill Cities of Eastern Himalaya: Ethnicity, Land Relations and Urbanization By A.C. Sinha, et al (eds) / Rs. 250 28. Environmental Protection of the Himalaya By Aamir Ali (ed) / Rs. 150 | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 29. Himalayan Environment and Culture By N.K. Rustomji & C. Ramble / Rs. 250 30. Energy, Environment and Sustainable Development in the Himalayas By P. Monga & P. V. Ramana / Rs. 350 31. Environmental Degradation and Crisis in India By S.S. Negi / Rs. 350 32. Environmental Ruin: The Crisis of Survival By R.M. Lodha (ed) / Rs. 450 33. Biodiversity and Its Conservation in India By S.S. Negi / Rs. 350 34. Ecosystem Pollution By S.G. Misra Dinesh Mani / Rs. 180 35. Remote Sensing for Environment and Forest Management By A. Mehrotra and R.K. Suri / Rs. 350 36. Forestry in British India By Berthold Ribbentrop / Rs. 200 37. Himalayan Forests and Forestry By S.S. Negi / Rs. 300 38. History of Forestry in India By Ajay S. Rawat (ed) / Rs. 350 39. Indian Forestry: A Perspective By Ajay S. Rawat (ed) / Rs. 450 40. Man and Forests: Khatta and Gujjar Settlements of Sub-Himalayan Tarai By Ajay S. Rawat / Rs. 200 41. High Himalayan Unknown Valleys By Harish Kapadia / Rs. 350 |
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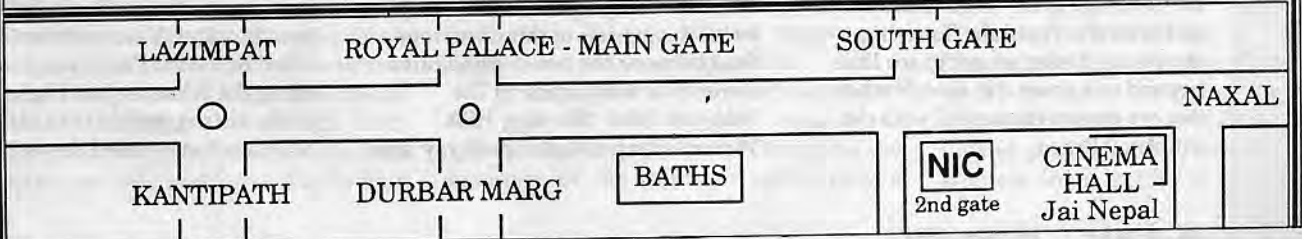
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It is not often that mainstream media looks at the **portering industry**. Tucked away in the business page of Kathmandu's *Kantipur* daily recently, was exceptionally good reporting on the porters of Bhojpur in East Nepal. Porters provide the commercial backbone of this roadless district, lugging *bharis* of salt, cigarette, rice, sugar, soap and kerosene to far-flung villages. The trails are dangerous, and lives are often lost together with loads. Recently, Mailo Baral slipped and fell to his death on Dumma hill. Maney Kami lost NRs 1000 worth of goods when his *bhari* fell off the edge in Nagipol. The sahu has appropriated Kami's land as compensation. Men and women from age 10 through 60 ply the trade, says the report, and poverty pockets like Sindrang, Patalepani, Okhray and Mulpani supply porters. Mulpani's Rameshwar Karki was forced to become a porter when his pair of oxen died last year and he had to earn enough to buy their replacement. Some porters talk among themselves of unionising, but this does not seem about to happen.

The standard advice to trekkers is to **bury faeces** to speed decomposition. Dig a hole, tip the shit in, cover up. But at Himalayan heights (the sacrosanct term has been taken over by a upscale Kathmandu locality), buried waste is very slow to decay and disease-causing organisms survive for a year or more. So, *kay garney?* *Summit* magazine carries suggestions from John Hart: to assure rapid decomposition, the best method would actually be to smear faeces on the ground in a sunny area. A thing to remember the next time you go trekking — take spatula instead of shovel.

Raj Kamal Jha writes a wonderful piece in the *Statesman* on India's **servile press**, which she says spends time on pseudo-events, gaudy lies and cheap shots. Jha refers to jaundiced coverage of the Babari Masjid demolition, the disregard for the Chakma refugees living in Tripura, the myopia when New Delhi policemen raided Kathmandu. The more peripheral the region, the worse the coverage gets. "With knees bent and with the Tricolour fluttering above our desks, we get to see little beyond our noses. No wonder then that we equate the capital with the country." Bravo.

Now that **Kim Il Sung** is dead, Chhetria Patrakar — always a bit yellow — can speak out without being labelled a radical red. And so let me refer you to the full-page advertisement in the *Rising Nepal* of 14 April, where the Guiding Spirit of the Generation, the Destiny of Korea, Great Leader Generalissimo, provides sage advice that leaders of Himalayan states would do well to internalise: "No nation can be successful by carbon copying the movement of another nation... The first and foremost task of rural cultural revolution is to make the whole society intelligent... All the farms must treasure the land and cultivate it neatly, take good care of the tractors..." The Great Lamp Bearer of the East was right, it has to be said.

The demise of the **Panchayat System** was a fait accompli, and both we and Subhas Ghising will have nothing more to do with it. But Jyoti Basu, West Bengal CM will have the Panchayat and he will have the Panchayat. We refer to the gram panchayats in the Darjeeling hills, where elections are due in October in keeping with the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution. As Supreme Leader of the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council, Ghising just knows that Basu and his band of babus will use the gram panchayats to undercut the authority of the DGHC. Hence his unflinching stand against the panchayat system. By the way, did you know that the Darjeeling hills have a Water Finding Committee whose job is to, uh-uh, find water for parched ridgetop settlements? Basu says that, if need be, he will supply the aqua "8000 feet up in the hills with the help of pumps," reports *The Telegraph*.

If there is a Hutu-Tutsi divide in the Himalaya, in degree of violence if not in volume, it must be the **Kuki-Naga strife** in Manipur. The best description yet of the genesis of this disastrous feud between the two communities comes in a short article in *The Telegraph* titled "Burning Hills". Writer Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay says

Comrade Kim Il Sung will live through the ages



the origins of the feud is traced back to the first British attempts to force a passage to the Naga hills in the early 19th century. Naga defiance led to the British bringing in Kuki from Burma in 1840, providing them with rations and firearms to fight Naga. Naga wealth was plundered and the Naga population decimated, writes Mukhopadhyay. For the next century, till 1992, the hills were quiet, although Naga maintained their fierce independence while the Kuki were always willing to side with authority. A century of peace between the two communities ended in 1992 when Kuki who had laid low in the face of Naga nationalism felt confident enough to take on Naga, emboldened by (it is reported) state and central government patronage.

Indian volags (voluntary agencies — read 'ngos') know well the name **Sukha Majri**, the village nestling in the Shivalik foothills of Haryana that does development well. A paper by P.R. Mishra of the Society of Hill Resource Management School at a recent conference lets us in on Sukha-Majri's key to success: it is a cyclic mode of sustainable development known as the Chakriya Vikas Pranali. In CVP, "the benefit from one investment cycle becomes the capital input for the next one, and thus goes on providing employment to make the village self-sufficient." CVP must work, for an almost barren land of a couple decades ago is today converted into a green belt, and the local Gujjar community has freed itself from poverty and malnutrition. Now wouldn't it be lovely if some ngo were to pop up this minute to arrange for the villagers of Nepal's very own green village, Madan Pokhara, to meet Haryana's Sukha-Majri?

If the *UNI* news agency is to be believed, **cash-starved militants** have taken to plundering the forest of Kashmir because their source of funds from across the border in Pakistan has been blocked. Vast tracts are being felled in the Pir Panjal range and all along the Srinagar-Leh Highway, in Doda district, and in the Lolab valley. Militants have pulled down timber

worth nearly IRs 200 crores in Doda alone over the last two years. Srinagar officials say 100,000 trees have been felled statewide in the last three years. Self-styled area commanders charge as little as IRs 300-500 for adult trees, while forest smugglers reap a windfall.

Himal's hopes of reaching readers in Patna have died with the impending closure of the one place where readers congregated — Readers' Corner on Fraser Road. "With Patna's association with intellectuals nearing its end, the shop, too, is being pushed into history," writes Soroor Ahmed in *TOI*. If Patna does not read, it is likely that neither do Lucknow, Benaras, Gonda and Muzzafarpur. With the Cow Belt in intellectual stasis, no wonder magazines with highbrow pretensions travel deeper into the red.

Is anyone listening? The largest statue in Asia of Gautam Buddha, the apostle of peace, has been dug up in Bangladesh by archaeologists even as the frenzied clerics bayed for the blood of Tasleema Nasreen. The bronze statue weighs 40 maund (archaic usage — still surviving in B'Desh), measuring five feet by four and was dug up close to the site of an ancient vihara dating 1300 years back.

Speaking of Tasleema, what of Salman Rushdie? He has begun litigation for ownership of a house in Solan, the hill town between Kalka and Shimla which was originally owned by Rushdie's maulvi father, Anis Ahmad and reportedly gifted to the son in 1969. Now why would Rushdie want to hole up in this Himalayan hamlet? Town residents speculate that Rushdie has tired of the heavy expenditures that go with the "Super-Z" category security he is saddled with in England. India might be cheaper.

All said and done, is Bernardo Bertolucci a liar? In order to ensure that his 35 million-dollar production schedule was not derailed, he promised Nepali officials that he would change the name of his saccharine-sweet *The Little Buddha* to *The Little Lama*. When you mouth a vow knowing full well that you will not fulfill it, an untruth can be said to have been uttered. When will a Himalayan film reviewer have his/her

say on *The Little Buddha* so we can forget Bertolucci altogether?

Subhas Ghising's quote of the month, in a diatribe against Jyoti Basu, "The time has come for us to do something big and drastic. I will explode a political atom bomb, no matter what happens to my political career." All take cover, or call in the IAEA.

They said 'Everest' would not work either. A 6650m peak in Garhwal has been christened Mount Rajiv by a climbing party from Madras, with the blessings of the Home Ministry, reports *PTI*. The summiters placed a bust of Rajiv Gandhi on the summit. Sure, if Mao could have his bust placed on Chomolungma's top, Rajiv's has even more right to be on Mount Rajiv.

One more high-profile Himalayan junket inflicted itself on the mountains last month, when the Himalayan Environment Trust organised a model trek for white and brown sahibs, which is to be filmed for the edification of lesser mortals. A deluxe coach deposited 'trekkers' to Gangotri, whence they took a two day trek to Gaumukh, picking up garbage along the way. On hand to provide the media attention were the standard line-up of Sir Ed (Hillary), Reinhold Messner and Junko Tabei. Does one believe the birdie who told us that because there was no garbage to pick for the camera, expedition members had to throw away and pick up their own plastic water bottles? Are we also to believe, horrors, that *no* homegrown Garhwali was involved in the entire operation, one which seemed to have been thought up to provide employment to retired *laptan karnels* of the Indian Army? Oh, my, don't we just love to be vicious.

Relative to their population, **untouchable castes** are severely underrepresented in development agencies working in Nepal, says a report by Thomas E. Cox for Save the Children/US. Untouchables make up 15 to 20 percent of Nepal's population. Of the 2809 Nepalis employed by 15 selected development agencies, only 71 were from untouchable castes, or 2.5 percent.

The Forest Department in Lucknow is stealthily trying to regain control of

van panchayats in the UP Hills, which presently come under the Revenue Department, reports *Down To Earth*. If the Forest Department succeeds, it means further erosion of the people's control over community forests which were established 63 years ago to sustain the mutual dependence of the hill people and the woodlands. The tug-of-war in Lucknow between the Revenue and Forest people should be over soon, and before the monsoon is out we will know who won, who lost.

Word comes late of the Seventh International Snow Leopard Symposium, held last July in Qinghai Province, with participants from eight of the twelve "snow leopard host countries". The twelve are China/Tibet, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgystan and Kazakhstan. The mountain range represented by this lineup: Karakoram, Tien Shan and Himalaya. Estimates on how many snow leopards remain differ wildly, from 1500 to 7500. *Summit* reports, in prose that is almost George Schallersque: "the species has played a starring role in high-altitude conservation in Central Asia, for it is a habitat barometer, the predator at the top of the food chain whose presence or absence reflects the health of the ecosystem." The snow leopard's disappearance will also most likely bring about the extinction of the 14 other endangered species in the Central Asian highlands, from the wild yak to the Siberian white crane.

A more serious outing was the Central Asian Cultural Expedition, initiated by Major H.P.S. Ahluwalia, which sought to strengthen "the cultural bond between India, China and Tibet". After six years of trying, Ahluwalia finally got permission, and just spent two months with 17 Indian colleagues (including a Doordarshan filmmaker and social scientists) in five Indian-made jeeps passing through the heartland of Asia. The wheel-chair Ahluwalia and his team started out from Tashkent, Uzbekistan and first did the Silk Route trail across to Urumqi and Turfan. It came down to Lhasa via Golmu, and arrived in Kathmandu on 16 July. The Indian ambassador hosted a reception, but forgot to invite anyone from Himal.

- Chhetria Patrakar

V O I

THE TRICOLOUR EVOKES NO RESPONSE

in the Indian Northeast, but the campaigns of separateness is being waged under a certain "tactical framework", writes M.S.Prabhakarn in the Delhi Pioneer.

The problems of the Northeast, rooted as they are in history and geography, real and imagined memories, the late entry into British India and the uneven nature of the impact of colonial rule — substantial tracts of the region were not part of British India or of any native Hindu/Muslim kingdom and were even formally acknowledged to have been so by being classified as excluded/partially excluded/unadministered territories and areas — admit no solution within the framework of the Indian State, certainly not within the framework of an over-centralised Indian State.

The cherished symbols of Indian nationalism do not evoke the expected response in an even manner in every part of the country. This tepidity is seen as a manifestation of anti-national sentiments which needs to be both suppressed and appropriated by a judicious mixture of sweet talk, bribery, splits and divisions and naked force. But this approach has simply not worked. What was four decades ago merely an obscure speck of discontent in some areas of Assam inhabited by some Naga tribes has grown to an insurgency which has not merely spawned and inspired other insurgencies in every part of the region but has also acquired a measure of international recognition.

Everyone of these insurgencies represents two seemingly contradictory aspirations: a desire to distance the people from India and even seek sovereign status: and without losing sight of this long term objective, also to secure a more equitable share of the returns that the existing links with India entitle them to. Various autonomy and separatist movements are being waged essentially within this broader tactical framework.

The very persistence with which the marginalised people of the region have refused to be appropriated by 'India' is matched by the readiness with which their leaders, including those who once led the insurgencies, have made peace with 'India'. This is a feature whose political and ideological significance has escaped most analysts. For instance, the Governor of Manipur and Nagaland recently sent a report to the Union Government sharply indicting the political leaders in these States, including those in the Congress, of being in league with insurgents. Senior political leaders in Delhi apparently constantly complain that the political leaders of the region, honourable Congressmen all, not merely have links with the insurgents but also nurse such

insurgencies. But the same honourable leaders accused behind their backs of nursing insurgencies, were accepted as loyal Congressmen during the recent AICC session in Delhi.

LIVESTOCK COST MORE THAN A WIFE, says

Bill Aitken, reflecting on women's status and men's attitude in Kumaon, in his recently released book, The Nandadevi Affair (Penguin India, 1994).

One noted immediately how Kumaon's southern slopes (to Bhowali) ambled up with pine covering and then fell more precipitously on the cooler northern face to the shade of oak. It was also obvious from the start that the women did all the work. Those not athletically cutting grass on steep hillsides staggered under the weight of the wide baskets of manure on their heads, awaited by lines of more toiling women wielding hoes. Cheerful and tough, the lot of the Kumaon village woman was as captively confined as the regime of the menfolk was effete and exploitative. Closer acquaintance with this monstrous regiment showed women to be childbearing chattels and the joke about whether a buffalo or a village woman had right of way was easily settled in an economy where livestock cost more than a wife. The men loafed their lives away in the tea shop huddled around the caste hookah, the Brahmins disdaining even to plough. 'Sir dukko devi' was their constant advice to women: Cover your head, devine female — but the contradiction lay in their open disgust at the physical manifestation of female mysteries. On one hand the Devi principle was worshipped as inherently sacred, on the other women were revoltingly untouchable for the duration of their menstruation.

END OF A NATION STATE is in sight as, outside the media limelight, Afghanistan hemorrhages to death. Edward Gorman, reporting in The Times of London, describes a situation which could well be a prelude to some other states of South Asia.

The destruction of Kabul is not just the death of a once elegant capital city, but marks the end of the idea of the nation state of Afghanistan. The legacy of the Soviet occupation and the disastrous experiment with communism has been to set in train forces that are pulling the country apart. The civil war of the past two years, which has reduced much of the capital to rubble and continues to kill thousands, has accelerated this process. Mediation efforts based on the idea of nation-building look very unlikely to succeed.

Afghanistan is reverting to its pre-19th century form of a loose and warring patchwork of fiefdoms defined by tribal, ethnic or military power over which the capital exerts no influence. Kabul is divided between the Pushtu forces of Mr. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the Prime Minister, and the mainly Tajik forces of President Rabbani. This military deadlock is sustained by huge stocks of weapons and could go on for years. Other areas are held by Hazaras and Uzbeks and the political geography is in constant flux. In rural Afghanistan, the absence of central authority, which was largely imposed by imperial Britain and Russia, has allowed local former Mujahidin commanders and tribal leaders to reassert themselves.

The "festering void" as one Western diplomat in Islamabad put it, is not entirely bad for the West and Russia. The military stalemate makes for a rather effective buffer state. It has prevented Mr. Hekmatyar from establishing an Islamic dictatorship in Kabul, which the Americans fear could destabilize the Central Asian republics with Afghanistan as a centre for international terrorism. The Russians are concerned for the same reasons. For Pakistan, however, which still backs Mr. Hekmatyar, instability is a barrier to the trade routes of Central Asia.

By contrast, in rural areas reconstruction is underway as refugees continue to return to their villages and replant their fields, few of them concerned with the affairs of a distant and broken capital.

DEVELOPMENT UNDER CHINESE RULE is inherently problematic, writes Gabriel Lafitte in an article on foreign assisted projects in Tibet carried by Tibetan Review in its June 1994 issue.

Now it is Tibet's turn to be developed. China makes much of its development efforts in Tibet, and now the institutions of the modern world, always under Chinese control, are to assist in the development of Tibet.

Already a wide range of projects are underway or in the pipeline. Pasture improvement, artificial fertilisers, irrigation, livestock breeding, hospitals, schools, mining, transport infrastructure, technical training, animal feedlotting, artificial insemination, embryo transfer, hybridization, urbanisation: all are happening.

The key question, seldom asked, is: what do the Tibetans want? Until answers are known, it is hard to be confident that development will be beneficial. Do Tibetans want development which makes them more dependent on

China? Do they want development which makes them part of the global trading economy? Do they want development which enhances their autonomy and self-sufficiency?

No one has answers, because no one is asking Tibetans what their questions are. Why don't we know? Two reasons stand out. The Tibetans are colonised, occupied by another country, and there is no way they can freely and safely articulate their aspirations, and no willingness by the Chinese to listen. Secondly, the international aid agencies, locked into a system which partners them with Chinese authority, have neither the means nor the inclination to discover what is in Tibetan hearts. The aid they feel best able to deliver is seen as technical, delivering a known technology of citrus cultivation or sheep breeding or laser land-levelling, which is the same anywhere it is used.

The international aid machine has little interest in understanding the complexities of the real world, the uniqueness of each situation, the implications of delivering new technologies via the established power structure controlled by China. What the aid machine is able to do is deliver new technologies, via the existing power hierarchy, and leave.

In principle, development in Tibet is a good idea. It is not development in itself that we question, but the kind of development. Specifically, we question development in which Tibetans have little say in planning, implementation or outcome of the development process. Our concern is that top-down development will have little benefit to people whose primary problem is colonisation and the influx of powerful outsiders who control their lives.

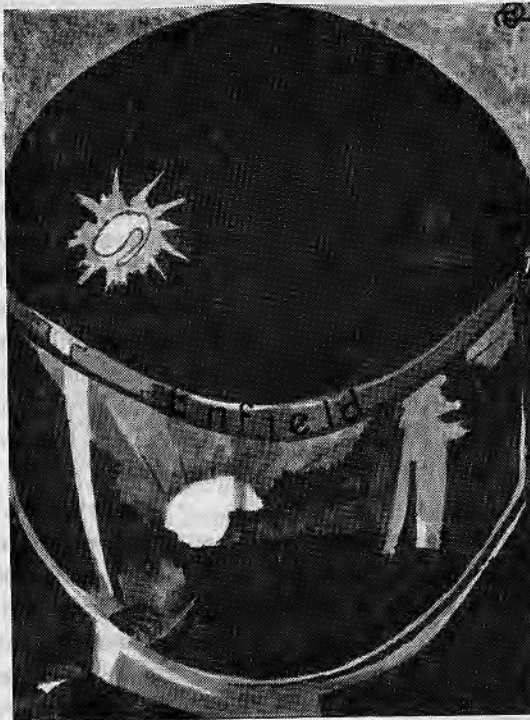
TIBETAN REARVIEW, cartoon column by Gyatso in Tibetan Review (July 1994), takes a look at Tenzin by day and night.



THE PRICE OF A ROOSTER

They stopped him above Tista where the road curved up into the vicious climb called Kaazimaan-ko-ukkaalo: each armed with a long curved knife and the tallest dangled a black revolver from languid fingers. Are you, they asked him, the one that killed the rooster this morning?

The rooster. Funny how, after all these years, he automatically avoided calling it a cock. A knee-jerk reaction, he wryly acknowledged, acquired during his school days when the inadvertent double entendre had often made him the butt of ribald jokes. The red rooster had been poised for flight on the far side of the road, safely out of his path. He had seen it well in time but had been concentrating on bringing the Royal Enfield fast down the steep incline, its big four-stroke engine a threnody in second gear. The nervous bird, a picture of indecision, decided to dodge across the road at the last -- and worst -- possible moment. Brakes. Slight skid. Bike lurching, straight again. A squawk. And then it was gone. Leaving a note of querulous agony pegged on the staves of the warm morning air.



by Anmole Prasad

By the time it occurred to him to stop, he was half-a-kilometre away, pushing the bike recklessly around the fresh-baked farm cottages and into the cool of the dense teak forest that curled like a caterpillar along the left bank of the Tista. Questions flooded his mind: should he stop, go back, apologise; had anybody seen him; ought he have gone back and made amends; would they be waiting for him when he returned in the evening. An ancient grey TATA hauling water to the drought stricken town loomed suddenly in his path almost sending him off the road. He eased the throttle back a bit, grinned self-consciously and relaxed. Getting jumpy, aren't you, he chided himself, things could be worse.

It had been a good hard ride. Along the twisting NH-31A through the Tista valley, the hamlets flashed by: Geilkhola, Rambhi, Lohapul ('Iran' to the insider who was always short of petrol), Kalijhora, Sevoke and he was out of the mountains, pounding over the molten highway that lay like a spear on the plain. Fifteen minutes more and into Siliguri — that sweltering town of iron and grease. Orders placed, purchases and small-talk made with the faceless white-clad hardware merchants and then it was time to go.

He was still tingling with the euphoria of the ride back through the cooling valley, the tricky mudslide, across the

Bailey bridge and streaking up the sinuous road home. The faint sense of unease that had nagged him all day now turned into apprehension. It was not, he reflected ruefully, the happiest of times to run over a rooster. The political turmoil in the district had washed up motley bands of roving delinquents and it was just possible that one such group would be waiting for him up there, eager to make a name for themselves. He weighed the several alternatives. He could shove the Enfield into second and charge through them: the bike was powerful enough. On second thought, no. It would mean no more riding around this side of the hills for quite a spell. The prospect of turning back to spend a day or two in Siliguri was equally distasteful. He'd bluff it out, he decided; after all, they wouldn't eat him. If at all they had recognised him. If at all anybody was up there, waiting for him. He cheered up. Perhaps I did not even hit the damned bird. Perhaps it only got rattled a bit.

Humming tunelessly, he gave himself to the sheer joy of hurling the Enfield round the looping bends just a little faster than safe.

A blinding flash, a stab of pain and a warm rush of blood from his nose brought him back to his predicament. Dabbing vaguely at his face with a gloved hand, he studied the lad who had hit him: young, barely sixteen, the boy was a pimply gangling specimen whom adolescence had not treated kindly. His beady, close-set eyes stared wisely from over a flat nose and a loose, long upper lip that cried out for a moustache.

"What's the matter, lost your tongue?" Longlip thrust his revolting face close.

He heaved the bike on its stand, turned and stood facing them with palms spread in what he hoped was placatory gesture; fear had fattened itself like a leech upon his self-assurance.

"Look lads," he essayed a grin. "I nearly did hit a rooster this morning but I'm sure it escaped. Unhurt."

"That's what you think!" this from a lout sporting skin head look.

"O I'm sure it went unscathed. You see, I was coming down on the far side of the road like this and the rooster was on

that side right here... " waving his hands about like a pavement conjurer with an unsympathetic audience, he turned on the spiel.

Keep talking, he told himself, don't give them time to think. They crowded round, some fingering the Enfield's controls, some trying on his helmet, others trying to look menacing. Half his mind stood off to one side, dispassionately watching him perform. His inquisitors were dressed in what the video films informed them was the height of fashion. Cropped temples, beads, cut-off shirts, army fatigues, plastic gauntlets and imitation Reeboks, they had managed to pull off a sartorial synthesis of the urban guerilla and the rock star. Only the laboured accents betrayed the yokels in them. An educated and fairly wealthy young contractor, he felt supercilious and condescending as he automatically catalogued their place in the local pecking order. The greed and envy with which they eyed his expensive imported clothes was as palpable as his smugness. An irrelevant image of an empty mansion formed: the butler and valet in the living room, dressed in his Lordship's suits, drinking his cognac, smoking his cigars.

We're all caught in the same trap, he thought mirthlessly. "...and you see," he was saying, "I'm quite certain that the rooster was safely across before my bike could touch it."

Stony silence. Then the tall youth with the gun led an old man forward, holding him by a gaunt wrist.

"This is the owner of the rooster. He's very angry at what you've done. He wants compensation. Don't you, Abirman?"

The old man peered uncertainly about him, licked his lips and mumbled something about not making any trouble. And received a stinging backhanded slap for his courtesy.

"Say that again, old man. Just say that again," the tall one screamed. He turned, struck a pose.

"An offence has been committed on our soil and you, *baaje* speak of not making trouble! What if it was only a rooster. It was a rooster belonging to one of our people. By killing the rooster, he has committed an offence against the people (although he is one of our race). And he must pay dearly for it. He is guilty of... of..." here the tall youth broke into English, "genocide crime!" He paused triumphantly. There was a reverent silence and for a moment, the motorcyclist expected the others to burst into applause. He seized his opportunity "Abirman — *baaje*, yes, he's right. I must pay you for the rooster. I'll certainly reimburse you for the loss. Tell me how much do I owe you for the bird? It was a fine specimen. Just name your price and I'll let you have the money now."

The old man opened his mouth to reply. With a casual movement, the tall boy laid open his wrinkled cheek with the gun.

"Shut up. We'll do the talking here. We'll decide what to do with this *chikne*." "Look," the motorcyclist urged, "I'm ready to pay for the rooster — just tell me what it costs and I'll pay up. I'll pay twice the price. It's getting dark and my batteries are low: I've got to get home while there's still some daylight." He smothered a quaver in his voice, feeling angry and foolish.

"Shall we cut off his balls *daju*?"

"Shall we have some fun with him before we send him off to join the rooster?"

"Let me take his entrails out *dai*."

They clamoured and closed in hungrily. A Kanpurey boot caught him in the testicles. He went down, retching. They

dragged him to his feet and held him there as the others smashed him again, again and again. While the tall youth stood to one side, dapper, addressing him.

"Offering us money, are you. What do you take us for, you son of a whore? Do you think you can buy us out for a few hundred? Don't you know that we are sons of the soil who struggled for our identity? Are you trying to bribe us, who are loyal citizens of the country, sworn to serve our beloved Prime Minister?" He ended a little pompously.

Just then, the smallest member of the band, barely taller than the knife slung from his shoulder, came scrambling down the embankment screaming, "Seeyarpi, *daju*, Seeyarpi, Seeyarpi, Seeyarpi *aayo*, Seeyarpi!" But it was too late. A jeep lurched round the bend, lighting up the scene: the motorcyclist with his bloody face and outstretched arms sagging between Longlip and Skinhead who held his biceps, the rest a row of gaping mouths, frozen in the tableau of a latter day Crucifixion. The reel spun again. Action. The jeep hesitated, accelerated suddenly and flashed past, its haunches slung low under the weight of men and guns. The motorcyclist caught a brief glimpse of a weasel-faced driver, teeth set in a grin of terror. The assailants were bounding off in all directions like jack rabbits. Abirman's pale shanks gleamed briefly in the twilight as he went loping over the terraced fields. The motorcyclist stood convulsed over the Enfield as a wave of relief anaesthetised his trembling body.

Two bends below, the jeep stopped. Weasel clutched the steering wheel as the big CRPF sergeant poured abuse on him: *behen-ki-chut*, had he forgotten that he was a policeman? And a member of the Central Reserve Police Force! Who had ordered him to scamper off like that? Did he not realise that those desperados back there were probably insurgents? Sent to destabilise the nation? Did he not suspect a Foreign Hand? Would Weasel kindly turn the jeep around *double-jaldi* or did he need some encouragement in the shape of a *danda* up his arse?

If only to change the subject, Weasel flung the jeep into a screeching turn and hurled it back up the road. The constables looked grim and took the safety catches off. They came in the true tradition of the police: shooting first. The jeep roared up the slope, bristling with guns that spat flame in all directions, bullets ricocheted off into the gathering dusk.

"There's one of the *maaderchodes*!" the sergeant shouted cheerfully as he emptied his gun through the windshield in his anxiety to get his man. The jeep careened past the parked Enfield and stopped a safe two hundred yards away.

The heavy .303 slug took the motorcyclist high in the left buttock and exited from the front, taking with it a piece of his hip-bone and most of his stomach. The impact lifted him off his feet and set him down on the soft loam of the embankment.

He could see the glimmer of the first stars in the darkening sky: it was very quiet. He thought he could hear the Tista faintly, far below. And, as the light faded from his pain-filled eyes, he exclaimed very softly, in wonder,

What is
the
price
of a
red rooster
anyway

A.Prasad is a writer and lawyer and lives in Kalimpong.

A Quiet Day

Ride from Airport to Lhasa, Nyethang Monastery, Settle into

When the travel bug bites, first buy a guide book, or buy them all. A review of travel tomes.

Hotel, People's Park, Gyatso Village, Dinner in Hotel!

The drive from Gongkar Airport to Lhasa introduces you to the natural and man-made colours you will encounter during your stay.

Valleys hemmed by beige mountains which stand in sharp contrast to the blue vault overhead, a sky whose hue verges on cobalt at this high altitude

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Writings in Monochrome

by Charles Ramble

The preface to Donald MacIntyre's *Hindu-Koh: Wanderings and Wild Sport on and beyond Himalayas*, opens with a curious apology: "The subject of Himalayan travel and sport is now so old a story, that an attempt to create further interest in it is an almost hopeless undertaking". That was in 1889. The author was writing even before the spate of publications on Tibet that was to follow the Younghusband expedition little more than a decade later. Travel books about the Himalaya in those days had the burden of rousing from cold the interest of armchair adventurers who had little hope of seeing these exotica for themselves. The recent reprinting of the book (New Delhi, AES, 1993) is perhaps justified by the grim truth that the subject is again hopelessly exotic: no long because readers cannot afford the passage, but because the fairyland of forest and steppe with wall-to-wall big game has gone for ever.

Books about Himalayan travel for those who don't go there are still written, but they're not about hunting. One of the commonest idioms nowadays is the Inner Journey, also known as the Voyage of Self-Discovery, that is conspicuous in

varying concentrations in numerous books and magazine articles. For the Himalayan region, the genre may have been pioneered by Peter Matthiessen's *The Snow Leopard*. The quality of this kind of writing naturally varies considerably, but the prevailing idea is that of the physical journey as a metaphor for coming to terms with private affliction. Self-discovery seems to be resonant with the spirit of the Himalaya. Hindu literature (written, for the most part, by people who lived in the plains) speaks lushly of the Abode of Snows. Tibetan travelogues, in the form of pilgrims' autobiographies, tend to be more prosaic. Typically, the roads are long and difficult, and the hard-pressed writer has to cross many miserable passes to reach squalid villages only to be set upon by bandits and bitten by big dogs. But here, too, nature is vulnerable to revelation. All sacred mountains are shorn by visionary pilgrims of their individual character and reduced to much the same crystal stupa roofed with rainbow tents and ringed by divinities who mass there like clouds.

Western writers on the Himalaya are not usually given to 'visions, but the

tendency to transcendence is still there. At worst, the place is flattened to two dimensions, and the Himalaya becomes an exotic wallpaper where the writer hangs a sequence of monochrome portraits of his own soul. It all depends on how it's done, of course. Agony is readable only when it's crafted, and simply setting it in the finest scenery in the world is no substitute for skill. Flaubert said something like that in a letter to one of his mistresses: "Do not imagine you can exorcise what oppresses you in life by giving vent to it in art. No. The heart's dross does not find it's way onto paper. All you pour out there is ink."

Flaubert would have liked F. Kingdon Ward. Ward was a man who knew how to handle ink, and if there was anything that oppressed him in life he had the decency not to write about it. In fact, all he seems to have cared about were rhododendrons and meconopsis poppies, and it's a clear testimony to a writer's talent that he can distill the subject of collecting seed-pods into a page-turner. *Plant Hunting on the Edge of the World* (1930) is one of several of his books that were reprinted in the 1980s. Part of his

secret may be a rare gift for saying appalling things about places and people -- when he bothers to mention them at all -- without sounding peevish, and somehow conveying the assurance of being someone utterly devoid of malice. Nor is it just a question of making allowances for a writer who lived in the Dark Ages of political correctness. Ward's approximate contemporary, F.W. Bailey (*No Passport to Tibet*) who travelled in much the same area, makes for uneasy reading by comparison.

So what is being written today by the successors of these early wanderers? Travel books about the Himalaya are now legion, and cover a range of genres, from scholarly journeys over a vast terrain (notably David Snellgrove's *Himalayan Pilgrimage*, deservedly reprinted by Shambhala in 1989) to glossy pictographic cameos of one high valley or another. A minimal conspectus of travel-writing over the whole Himalaya would fill more space than any sensible editor would care to cede, so where should one focus? Guidebooks have proliferated faster than any other breed, and Nepal has undoubtedly spawned more such literature than any other Himalayan area. It might be hard to cover everything even within this narrowed field, but given the abundance of the material it would be equally perverse to begin anywhere else.

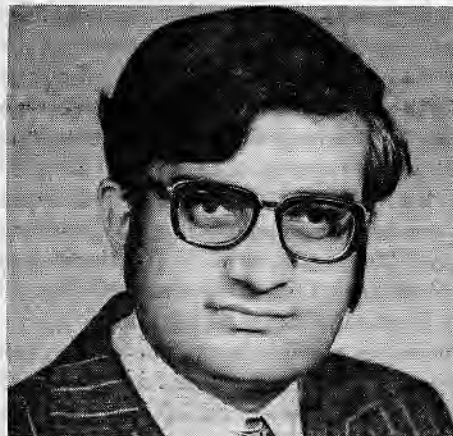
Them and Us

So let's imagine that the works of MacIntyre and Ward and others of that ilk had achieved their aim of inspiring interest in the Himalaya, and that we are living in the present day when access presents few problems. And let's imagine a duly inspired but clueless Anglophone couple arriving in Kathmandu and gravitating towards the nearest bookshop in search of something that doesn't merely inspire but informs. They will be staggered to find more than a dozen books offering to guide them through various parts of Nepal. Which should they buy? As they begin to leaf through the display, considering (let's say) only English language publications since 1990, perhaps we can look over their shoulders...

Unlike MacIntyre, writers of guide books don't have the task of stimulating the reading public's interest in an area. They merely have to feed it. Coffee-table books form the vanguard nowadays. However, one of their major concerns

must be to balance the quantity of information that needs to be put across against the absorptive capacity of the reader. Only a well-established reputation for excellence can let a guide book get away with didacticism, as in the case of France's merciless *Guides Bleues*. For the rest, compilers have to remember that we're on holiday and are liable to rebel against anything too redolent of education. Nor surprisingly then, most guides have a tabloid ethos that helps the stuff go down with a variety of sweeteners and cosmetic devices.

The blurb on the back of *Nepal, the Rough Guide* (second edition, 1993), advertises its subject as "the most complete travel handbook" for the country, which is only slightly more modest than the claim of the first edition to be "the only complete handbook". If completeness is measured in terms of the quantity of subjects covered, the obvious casualty is



Prakash A. Raj: he has the best bargain.

detail. The treks are necessarily trimmed to highlights, but do at least enable first-time travellers to narrow their focus onto a suitable region. Generally, the book adopts the Briefing-for-a-Descent-into-Hell approach to guide book writing, with the author firmly on the side of a reader apprehensive about acquiring disgusting diseases and walking into the mantraps of mortifying cultural gaffes. But the range of information is indeed impressive, even more so than in the case of its predecessor, and if the same misquotation of Kipling is in there, I didn't see it. The presentation of the material is imaginative, and the style of the author, David Reed, has a cutting edge that is unusual in this kind of writing.

A book that badly needs -- and deserves -- an updated edition is Kerry Moran's *Nepal Handbook* (Moon Publications, 1991). Moran's greater

osmotic familiarity with the country is evident not just from its rich content but also in the omissions of national pécadilloes (stone-throwing children, open sewers, incompetent bureaucrats and suchlike featured in the *Rough Guide*) that familiarity renders invisible. She's already more Them than Us, but the journalistic professionalism that tackles the complexities of the country restore the reader's confidence.

If our prospective purchasers, having budgeted their trip on the basis of prices quoted in a superannuated guide find themselves strapped for cash while seeking something more up-to-date, they should certainly go for Prakash A. Raj's *Kathmandu and the Kingdom of Nepal* (Nabeen Publications, 1993), at Rs. 240 the best bargain on the whole shelf. Now in its eleventh edition, the book served for five incarnations as the Lonely Planet Guide. One of its agreeable features is the inclusion of extracts from correspondents' letters. Most are anodyne, a few salutary, but they contribute to a general user-friendliness.

The current Lonely Planet guide, *Nepal, a Travel Survival Kit* (1993), retails at nearly Rs. 800, something that may tilt a potential buyer in favour of its nearest rival, the modestly-priced *Rough Guide*. It calls Newars Newaris, derives Tamang from horse trader, defines Bon as "the animist religion of Tibet prior to Buddhism" (but then so does everyone else), and gets Bhot and Bhote the wrong way round in the glossary (though not in the text). Detailed trekking information is limited to Helambu, Khumbu, and Annapurna. Six other areas are potted in a few lines each. But these are quibbles, and it's hard to find something unpleasant to say about the book: the sheer quantity of information it provides, from the serious to the frivolous, its sensible advice, and its agreeable presentation, make it arguably the best guide in the market.

Trekkers and Sahibs

Having solved the problem of their survival, the shoppers may well want to expand their knowledge of subjects that receive cursory treatment in these all-purpose guides. For trekking, they would do well to stay with the stalwarts (Stan Armington, Hugh Swift and the excellent Stephen Bezruchka), although they'd enjoy O'Connor's *Adventure Trekking in Nepal*. The proportion of other kinds of

supplementary material varies a fair amount from one book to another. Some are basically survival manuals with guest appearances by various specialists. The *Trav Bugs* guide (1992) is a nice compilation with contributions on a variety of subjects. Information in the main text is sometimes a trifle shaky: for example, the passage on caste in Nepal is actually a rather abstract summary of *varna* in India; Rara was not the first national park, created in 1956 (it was actually gazetted in 1976), and Kawaguchi was not the first foreigner to visit Bodnath. Captions to photos sometimes evoke visions of an exhausted editorial crew labouring into the small hours to meet a printer's deadline. A very lovely portrait of a purple-robed woman, worthy of Gauguin, is a "dark-skinned Nepalese beauty". But these observations shouldn't deflect us from buying what is generally an agreeably written and well illustrated book.

Survival tactics are relegated to the small print in the *Insight Guide: Nepal*, a book intended less for guerilla tourists than for travellers of officer class. It's bigger, designed to be kept in an Antler suitcase rather than the thigh pocket of a pair of combat fatigues. Probably the best in this particular sub-genre. (*Insight* have incidentally brought out two pocket guides, slenderer volumes but still for pretty deep pockets: *Tibet, Lhasa-Kathmandu* by Steve van Beek, and *Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong*, by Wendy Brewer Lama. Both are well researched and competently written, but the Have-a-Nice-Day prefaces and other gadgetry take reader-friendliness to the threshold of invalid care.

Since we've parenthetically crossed the border north of Nepal, it's worth noting that there are a number of more substantial guides to Tibet. Gary McCue's *Trekking in Tibet* (The Mountaineers, 1991) has justly enjoyed considerable success since its

appearance. This might also be an appropriate place to welcome onto the bookshelves Victor Chan's *Tibet Handbook* (Moon Publications, 1994). A damned thick square book, as the Duke of Gloucester once remarked to Gibbon, the *Handbook* underwent a disturbingly long period of gestation that earned it the nickname of the *Grey Annals*. It's pleasing to see that the end result has nothing grey about it. The mixture of conventions used for rendering Tibetan names might irritate some readers, but on the whole the author and his editor must be congratulated for hewing an extraordinary mass of material down into a crisp, relatively slender eleven hundred pages.

Nepal (Nelles Guides, 1990), edited by Susanne von der Heide, is rather unusual as far as guide books go in that it delegates the major topics to experts in the appropriate fields. The main essays are supplemented by a number of cameo entries on a wide range of topics, including an incisive little piece on art theft by Axel Michaels. While readers will certainly learn a great deal from it they may be irked by the large number of typos - again, perhaps, a symptom of editorial fatigue, since the work was translated from German. (And incidentally, the photo on page 201 is of a forest leopard, not of a snow leopard.) But if we're relaxed enough to overlook these slips, the book is worth buying as a well-balanced combination of popular and scholarly writing.

A few other works on particular areas of the country are worth a mention. *Trekking in the Everest Region* by Jami McGuinness would be a good choice for anyone planning on going to Khumbu. Pedants they might wish that, instead of suggesting a spectrum of possible meanings harvested from uninformed sources about the etymologies of Sagarmatha and Qomolangma (or however you want to render it; Jo-mo

glang-ma in Tibetan), the author had simply got someone to look the names up in the relevant dictionaries. One of the many pleasant features of the book is the brief history of early attempts on peaks in the area: the portrait of Tichy smoking his way to the top of Cho Oyu with his two companions, one suffering from sciatica and the other under par from having once been shot through the lung, is a gem.

For adventurous spirits without the time or energy to trek in the mountains, Annick Hollé's *Kathmandu, the Hidden City*, will be a handy little companion. It's something like one of those computer games that lead you through dingy vaults to glittering prizes in marble palaces, except that the prizes here are the hidden details of the dungeons themselves. (The fact that the author is an experienced potholer may not be entirely coincidental.) The impression is enhanced by the Macintosh graphics-programme maps and the Image-writer print; one half-expects to be confronted by a sword-waving dwarf-pala in the next bahal. The only problem is that there's not enough of it. A short introduction, and more information about selected places would have been a useful prophylaxis against readers setting out on the proposed itineraries armed with the oeuvre of John K. Locke and Mary Slusser. Let's hope for a bolder second edition.

We could go on, but that's probably enough to keep our bewildered visitors busy for a while. It's just as well they heard about the recent reduction in visa fees and decided not to remain mere armchair travellers: a couple of months ago they could have asked a friend to buy them everything on the Nepal list for the equivalent of a week's visa and still have had change left over for a year's subscription to *Himal*.

C. Ramble is an anthropologist.

Porters and Nepali staff sometimes die on trek. There is no national registry for this. We at the Himalayan Rescue Association would like to keep track of such deaths on trek. As foreign tourist or Nepali trekking staff, if you witness such a death or have credible reports on such a death while on trek, please call the HRA or come by and visit us. You will be rendering an important service to the underprivileged.



Himalayan Rescue Association

Phone: 418755

Located near the Immigration Office in Hotel Tillichho at Thamel

Address: PO. Box 4944, Thamel Kathmandu, Nepal



The Northern Passage

by Manesh Shrestha

Climbing expeditions to K-2 normally approach the peak from Islamabad, travelling up the Karakoram Highway to Baltistan and to the base of the mountain. In April this year, however, an Anglo-American team used a different route. Going roundabout, the climbers arrived in Kathmandu, took China the South West Airline flight northeast to Lhasa, thence further east Chengdu, then all the way west to Urumqi, and finally to Kashghar, from where they used camels to the base camp. Expedition equipment and provisions were carried by road from Kathmandu via the Kodari border post.

This unique approach to K-2 served to highlight a new facet of mountaineering that Himal-watchers have tended to ignore — the north faces of border peaks. Like K-2, which lies on the border between disputed Kashmir and Tibet/China, there are numerous peaks along the Himalayan rimland that sit astride frontiers. This happens almost by definition, because the high ridges provide the defining element for cartographic delineation of borders between the countries of South Asia and Tibet/China.

While it is true that Chomolongma/Sagarmatha/ Everest has been climbed by non-Chinese expeditions since the late 1970s, Cho Oyu and K-2 were the only other border peaks open for climbing from the north.

In 1992, the Chinese Mountaineering Association (CMA) opened 23 mountains for climbing in Tibet, including several border peaks — Langtang Ri, Lhotse, Namochuli, Melungtse West, Pumori, Makalu and Gauri Shankar (Tashi Tseringma). For various reasons, including lack of information and high climbing fees, these newly available north faces have yet to see high demand from climbers. This situation is likely to change,

however, with lowered fees, more information and a one-window policy that has streamlined paperwork.

For the moment, all of the newly opened border peaks are those along the Nepal-Tibet border, and peaks astride India and Bhutan are not likely to be opened from the north for some time, given unsettled border questions. Lhotse, Makalu, Pumori, Gauri Shankar — none have been climbed from the northern side.

As more teams attempt jointly-held peaks from the Tibetan side, unique administrative problems are likely to arise, particularly when routes high on the mountain traverse the political boundary. Cho Oyu's example, which is likely to be repeated in the future other mountains, is a case of point.

When Herbert Tichy, the Austrian, scaled the peak in 1954 with permission from the Nepali Government, his climb took him over the Nangpa La and into Tibetan territory. Since then, teams starting their climbs from Nepal have used Tichy's West Ridge route as the normal line to the top. The Chinese started issuing permits for Cho Oyu from the Tibetan side only in 1985.

Last year, climbers from the north complained to the Chinese that the mountain was overcrowded with climbers from the south. Two armed soldiers are said to have turned up and given a German team and a Spanish team a choice: cough up US\$5,000 and be escorted back to Nepal, or pay US\$15,000 and continue the climb. A combined 'fee' of US\$5,000 eventually got both teams to the summit.

The Chinese government has not yet lodged complaints with Kathmandu regarding the incursions on Cho Oyu and neither are the officials in the Nepali Ministry of Tourism spending sleepless hours contemplating legal complexities, but clearly with more teams climbing

along the border some coordination between the mountaineering czars of the two countries will be required before long.

There must be many more attempts on transboundary peaks than reported. Last autumn, a Dutch climber who had been trekking north of Chomolongma (with permission) claimed that he had climbed Pumori (without permission). Technically a possible feat, since the mountain is an easy trudge from its north side, but in the Chinese record books Pumori remains virgin.

Even as climbing picks up north of the border, Kathmandu will remain the staging point, due both to its road connections and the Lhasa air link. Taking this into account, the CMA this year appointed a Kathmandu-based trekking agency as its agent in Nepal. There is no need for climbers to go to Lhasa to file applications; the permits are brought right up to Kodari.

It takes but two days for expeditions from Kathmandu to make it over jeepable tracks to the northern base camps in the Chomolongma area. It takes at least a week to get to the base camps of Khumbu peaks from Kathmandu, but the climbers gain in acclimatisation what they lose in time.

Mountaineering in the central Himalaya has come a full circle. In the first half of the century, it was Nepal which was closed (under the Ranas) and Tibet that was open, with the Dalai Lama allowing expeditions to enter the Chomolongma area via Shigatse and Tingri. Subsequently, with the arrival of the Chinese, Tibet was closed while Nepal allowed free access. Now, at the end of the century, you can climb selected peaks along the frontier every which way you want.

△

M. Shrestha is a Kathmandu-based freelancer.

Abominably Yours,

The early monsoon is a good time to sit back and get philosophical. The clouds, rain and sleet drive off tourists more sustainably than Kathmandu's solid and liquid wastes, and one can have all the fresh mountain air to oneself. Good air aids in deep thinking, and addressing the Really Big Questions.

One such RBQ is: why is the period between the two full moons — Buddha's birthday (this year on 23 May) and Kartikeya's on 23 June (Shiva's son and the more lovable Ganesh's elder brother) — the busiest time in the Himalaya? It is understandable for us zen types; the cosmic vibes are just too strong at this period. Why the humans? Whence this need for orchestrated frenzy?

Having reflected long and hard over this question, with additional input data from friends and family, I have come up with the answer, and it has nothing to do with the two full moons. In fact, it has nothing to do with anything lunar or solar. The truth is, the fiscal year endeth, budget freezeth, and the eye wandereth to stake claims on new allocations.

If the office or project has not spent the current year's budget, it cannot ask for more in the next. Hence the mad rush in this month to award tenders, open LCs, and generally begin to finish the entire year's work in this one month before the monsoon rains pour and the budget lapses. Unfortunately, the rain clouds do not respect fiscal years and account closures. Kathmandu streets are soggy testimony to water, telephone and electricity utilities competing with each other to dig the roads in time for the rains.

In the districts and hereabouts, irrigation canals and trail bridges are conceptualised, bids called for, and the work completed all within the two full moons. Of course, these constructions cannot be seen afterwards because the moon is not bright enough and vitamin A deficiency is a serious problem in these undernourished parts. In daytime, the sun is just too bright to risk looking at anything as shiny as a brand new suspension bridge.

To touch upon another RBQ: why is

the period so important for us abominables? What cosmic vibes?

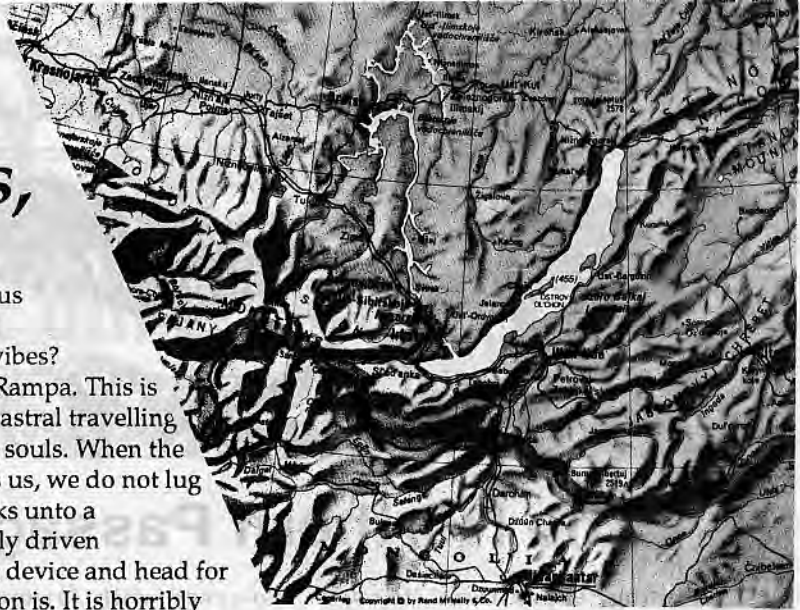
Ask Lobsang Rampa. This is the season for astral travelling and switching souls. When the travel bug hits us, we do not lug our bulky hulks unto a petrochemically driven transportation device and head for where the action is. It is horribly inefficient, contributes to global warming, and irritates Mother Gaia no end, as the lower Barun Glacial Lake warns me with an occasional belch. Instead, we leave our bodies to slumber at a low metabolic rate and transport our souls to distant lands. It is faster and much more energy efficient.

Much of our "repair-maintenance works" are conducted during this period, both on our slumbering bodies and our social networks, which have to be kept shipshape. This time, for instance, my travelling soul met that of Baba Yaga, my great grand-aunt from Siberia, over Baikal (the lake) — me headed on a polar route to Davis CA for a discussion with the editors of *Mountain Research and Development* about my lapsed subscription, and she on her way to see the World Cup games in LA using the great circle. We compared notes about Boris Yeltsin and Mahesh Acharya, and about free markets gone berserk, both in the upper Barun and the Taiga under the Arctic Circle between the Ob and the Yenesei.

The real shock was when Baba Yaga's soul showed me a picture of her hulk snoring in deep astral sleep in a snow cave jut outside of Norlisk. The body was a perfect 36-22-36. How did my plump and parallel great grand-aunt acquire such voluptuousness?

Up there in the rarefied air above Baikal, Auntie finally came out with the truth — what had transpired was that under what goes for liberalisation in Russia (basically operated by old communists who used to sell blue jeans to Brezhnev in the black market), our abominable Siberian cousins have "gone the way of all economy", to quote a wizened Nepali econometrician.

The inevitable happened. The



secret formula for astral travel — which used to be passed word of mouth from Rimpoche to Rimpoche and Gubhaju to Gubhaju — was leaked to the market. Someone had sold his soul, ancestry and honour, for thirty pieces of silver. When the market got this formula, it was a free for all, Auntie said. Instead of waiting for auspicious full moons and the guidance of venerable Tantrics and Rimpoches, the travel-starved Rooskies floated global tenders at a pace that would make the World Bank wince. Did you say nothing is sacred anymore?

Overnight, the demand for bodies of all shapes and sizes became bullish. Auntie first learned about this second-hand market at rock bottom prices from a Bangladeshi engineering student in Odessa who was in dire financial straits and needed money to send his uncle on a Haj before the *paramparadis* began to mark out households without a Haji. What he was offering was the body of a Russian junkie while she was on a drug-induced stupor.

Auntie Baba Yaga rejected the emaciated offer, but once on to what seemed like good thing, she went on a shopping spree. She finally settled for a swap of her god-given (and fat) body for what a Russian mafioso had on offer — a teenage blonde fourth runner-up for Miss Russia 1994. While we hovered over Baikal, I asked her what had happened to the fearsome original Baba Yaga figure. She said the mafioso put it on a godown shelf and the last client who had shown an interest was Steven Spielberg.

Oi-yoy-yoy...



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*Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside*

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

*John Collee
The London Observer*



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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