

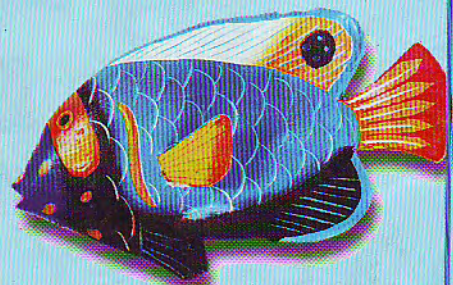
# HIMM L

SOUTH ASIA

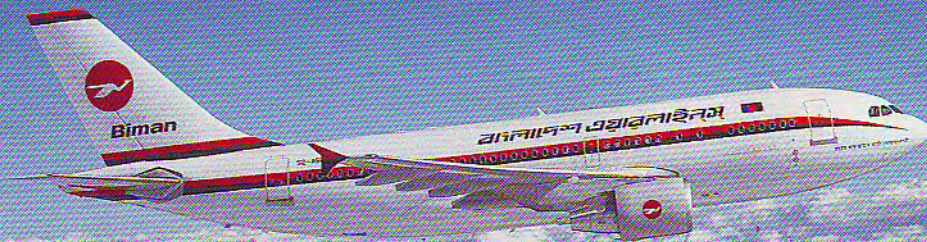


## SOUTH SOUTH ASIA

Meaning of Kabul  
The Padre and Mary



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SOUTH ASIA

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## We are on the Web

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For subscription details, see page 31.

## COVER

- 10 South South Asia  
 13 Dashed Hopes in Serendipity  
 by Stanley Kalpage  
 18 Chandrika's Tight-Rope Walk  
 by Ranjeeth Perera  
 22 A Mixed Bag for 1997  
 by Mohan Samarasinghe  
 23 Not Just Tea and Coconuts  
 by J. Srinivasan



- 26 Maldives, Sri Lanka and the "India Factor"  
 by Ravinatha Aryasinha  
 30 "Ours is certainly a democratic system..."  
 Interview with President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives

Cover shows mask of fire-breathing devil used in rituals in southern part of Sri Lanka and a "Maldivian Fish". Both are wooden handicraft items bought in February in Colombo and Male.  
 Pictures: Rajbhai Suwal.  
 Cover design and separations by Wordscape, Kathmandu.



## Features

- 48 A New Plan for the Colombo Plan  
 50 The Defiant Padre

## Arts & Society

- 63 An End to Revisionist History  
 by Naeem Mohaiemen



Reviews  
 Northeastern Sources  
 Far Side of the Range

## Departments

- 2 Commentary  
 Will the State Wither Away?  
 Sins of Statecraft  
 The Fifty-Year Test  
 Tamils and Lhotshampas  
 New Media and the Social Purdah
- 32 Opinion  
 Monitoring the Monitors  
 by Sasanka Perera  
 Wilting of the People's Party of Pakistan  
 by Manzur Ejaz
- 41 Briefs  
 Indian-Pakistani *Bhai Bhai*  
 Belligerent Villagers  
 Fourth-Born and Others  
 Lady Ambassador  
 Ishini  
 Welcome to the World, Thimpu!  
 Uighurs Arise  
 Four Tibetan Choices
- 54 Mediafile
- 57 Analysis  
 What Is Kabul to Us?  
 by Barun De
- 70 Saarconomy  
 Foreign Aid in Nepal:  
 What Do the Data Show?  
 by Bikas Joshi
- 72 Abominably Yours





Pakistan

## WILL THE STATE WITHER AWAY?

The discussion on failing states in the developing world is not something new. However, the ongoing passionate debate on whether Pakistan is a "failed state" goes back to an article in the February 1994 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* by Robert B. Kaplan. Building up on the work of environmentalists, sociologists and deriving material from his own first-hand experience in Africa and Asia, Mr Kaplan suggested at the withering away of many states in the twenty-first century.

While this debate was being carried on in academic circles, rumours surfaced that Robert Oakley, ex-ambassador to Pakistan, was publishing a book declaring Pakistan a failed state. Mr Oakley has denied the existence of such plans, but many Western intellectuals are convinced that Pakistan has failed or, at the very least, is a failing state. Very recently, Richard Haase, director of foreign policy issues at the Brookings Institution, and Gideon Rose, a national security fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, also hinted at the possibility of a failure of the Pakistani state.

Shariff), especially when they can't find new paradigms to explain the changes (or stagnation) taking place in the world. In fact, some in the nationalist intelligentsia believe that invention of such terminology is a pretext to justify future intervention by the sole superpower.

Picking up the debate, some Pakistani political scientists point out that as long as the state's monopoly power over coercive means is not challenged—the way it has been in Somalia, Ethiopia or Rwanda—the state cannot be declared failed. Hasan Gardezi, a professor at a Canadian university, believes that the Pakistani state's monopoly over coercive power has not been challenged in this way.

According to this school, the social anarchy and political disorder in Pakistan has yet to reach the point where it may pose a severe enough threat to the state's monopoly power over coercion. Karachi might be taken as an exception, but even there, and at least for the moment, the use of the heavy hand has kept matters "under control". No one can predict with certainty the fate of the Pakistani state if Karachi-like social disorder continues and escalates, but it is safe to say that Pakistan, as yet, has not 'failed'.

On the other hand, looking at it from Mr Kaplan's perspective, Pakistan certainly does seem to fall among that category of countries where the state, as an institution, could fail. His theory is that "to understand the events of the next fifty years, then, one must understand environmental scarcity, cultural and racial clash, geographic density, and the transformation of war".

Expanding on the theme, Mr Kaplan says that the phenomenal growth of population will deplete natural resources resulting in ecological disasters. The massive migration of peasantry to the urban centres will lead to degradation of the natural and social environment which will generate religious, ethnic and cultural clashes that will, ultimately, undermine the existence of many states.

Most of Mr Kaplan's conclusions are based on the conditions of African countries where tribal identities are still alive and strong. One observes similar symptoms in Pakistan, too, where the degradation of natural and social environment is not only obvious in the metropolises of Lahore and Karachi but even in remote villages of Punjab. Different institutions are being taken over by a newly urbanised peasant elite which shows an extreme lack of societal sensibility. And this is manifested in the state's institutional anarchy: fiscal inviability, chaos, corruption, nepotism and the Darwinian economics of "survival of the fittest".

Society is losing its sense of a social contract and is becoming oblivious of any "common will" that furnishes the underlying ethical principle in non-dictatorial societies. In short, if the state is taken to be the "embodiment of the ethical idea and the

Human history is replete with examples of ruling classes that went on the destructive course and are not traceable now in the graveyard of history.

While they did not address the matter directly in their report, which was on US relations with India and Pakistan, the writers called on Washington DC to reinstate economic and other links with Pakistan. This was because "Pakistan's political system is in dire shape; the country has the potential to become a failed state. That would be a humanitarian nightmare—and a threat to the regional, even global, peace. The United States needs to try to head off such a tragic outcome."

Many Pakistani political scientists dispute this assertion on technical and factual grounds. Tracing the genesis of this notion of failed state, they note the infinite propensity of Western academia to coin catchy terminology ("wordsmithing" according to Prof Z.

moral will of the community", as defined by Hegel, the existence of the Pakistani state becomes a question mark.

There are some scholars, however, who believe that these abysmal conditions are designed outcomes of the creation of the Pakistani state and not symptoms of its failure. To put it bluntly, the Pakistani state is successfully doing what it was made for—transfer wealth from the poor to the rich—and the pronouncement of its death is quite exaggerated, to say the least.

Abdul Samad, a prominent political economist, is the main proponent of this idea. He asserts that Pakistan is a predatory state which is designed to benefit the traditional elites at the expense of the rest of the population. Examining different Pakistani institutions, at a micro level, he has shown how the state has been a vehicle of transference of wealth from the poor to the rich. The burden of the almighty state is shifted to the common man, through indirect taxation, while the benefits of the state-run institutions are exclusively enjoyed by the ruling classes. The present conditions of the Pakistani state are most suitable for the elites, and it is not in their interest to make reforms to firm up the major institutions.

The basic problem with Mr Samad's argument is his assumption that the elites calculated such an outcome rationally. There is no doubt these elites have contributed to the prevailing chaos and anarchy and have benefited from the mess. But had they been consciously aware of where it was all headed, they would certainly have foreseen the ugly future awaiting the whole of society, including themselves. Human history is replete with examples of ruling classes that went on the destructive course and are not traceable now in the graveyard of history.

It is true that the Pakistani state's monopoly power has not been challenged in any significant way and its sovereignty is not seriously jeopardised by external forces. This, however, does not mean that the present internal conditions of chaos and anarchy will continue forever without generating severe repercussions. Most of the region that makes up what is today Pakistan was under the empire of Ranjeet Singh (1799-1839). Even in the notoriously anarchic era of 1839-1849, the state was sovereign, and maintained unchallenged monopoly over coercive power. However, lacking societal will and an 'ethical idea' to enforce order, the state ultimately collapsed. Therefore, one cannot preclude the possible withering away of many states (and not only Pakistan) due to social anarchy resulting from depleting resources and fast growing populations.

Pakistan, along with many other developing countries, is going through a transition of mammoth magnitude while exhibiting the symptoms described above. Whether Pakistan will come through this tumultuous period unscathed and intact is probable, but not certain. The one saving factor may be that, unlike many African countries, the bulk of Pakistan's population is homogeneous in many respects and, except Baluchistan, is by now well beyond tribal divisions. But Pakistan will still have to travel this

bumpy road of history towards an uncertain destiny.

It is the classic case recalling Nietzsche's lament that Western society had abandoned the old morals with no replacement. Nietzsche's Europe went through enormous destruction before it took its present shape. That may happen in Pakistan, too.

- Manzur Ejaz

## Nepal

# SINS OF STATECRAFT

The Spring of 1990 ushered democracy to Nepal and with it the hope for the achievement of a more just society created by upright leaders commanding popular respect. Half a dozen years later, is the sheer hopelessness of it all... What went wrong? Who, or what, is to blame? Which is the way out?

Perhaps a term which has just joined the Nepali lexicon sums it all: *pajeroabaad*. The term has its origins in the Japanese luxury four-wheeler and refers to a government decision allowing all members of parliament as well as senior bureaucrats and judges facilities for the duty-free import of vehicles without disclosing their source of income.

Absolute power was wrested from the king in 1990 and representative power was given to the politician-commoner, who has proven incapable of living up to the high standards of diligence, dignity and integrity required of him. Today, though empowered, the Nepali politician, like Nero, fiddles on his *sarangi* while the country burns. Senior political leaders have used their parties more as fiefdoms of nepotism for personal gain than as vehicles of ideology and development philosophy. All pretence of meritocracy has been abandoned.

The list of sins in statecraft is long and starts right at the beginning, in 1990. The new rulers, rather than punish the wrong-doers of the old regime, opted for what then seemed like magnanimity but which now is obvious was a lack of courage or conviction. Any revolution owes its future a cathartic cleansing of the past, and Nepal's "people's movement" was denied that purification.

The result is clear for all to see: the corrupt and the criminal are loose or back in power, providing their brand of expertise to party bosses lacking the self-confidence. The bad apples of the Panchayat era—when the king ruled supreme—infected all, including those in the mainstream left and the Nepali



Cry, the beloved country.

Congress. Today's national level politics is essentially about the Congress and the United Marxist Leninists, the two main forces of the People's Movement, vying with each other to curry favour with the former 'Panchas'.

The material and political corruption has levelled the playing field. Parties which fought the King's Panchayat rule in the difficult decades of the 1960s and 1970s have all too quickly lost the moral and ideological high ground. The Nepali Congress, despite perfunctory genuflection towards the late B.P. Koirala's notions of democratic socialism, has surrendered itself to indiscriminate privatisation of public assets accompanied by a retreat of the state from leadership in development.

The United Marxist Leninists (UML), having tasted power for nine months in 1994-1995, are thoroughly confused and lost in infighting. They maintain the rhetorical facade of proletarian revolution for the sake of the cadres, but are busily hewing the right-of-centre line. Its leadership would like to come back to power, and stay in power, and are willing to make any compromises to make that happen, including sleeping with the enemy. Given the geopolitical and foreign aid compulsions of Nepal, dictated as they are by Indian concerns and Western diplomatic pressure,

its alliance with the old Panchayat aristocracy. The political spectacle comes from the UML's unconvincing acrobatics as it strives to meet the lower middle class's aspirations of mellow comfort while shackled to a radical rhetoric meant for the landless and the proletariat.

This failure of the political middle within six years of democracy has now re-legitimised the far left and the far right, making radical subjects, once unthinkable, routine conversation at homes and in workplaces. A Maoist uprising which was supposed to wither away unnoticed has just marked its first anniversary with loud chest-thumping. It is helped by the collapse of the carpet and garment industries, sluggish tourism, administrative paralysis, poor foreign aid disbursement, rising unemployment among under educated youth, and a coalition government that has neither philosophical direction nor administrative competence. The romanticism of revolt has an increasingly receptive audience in Nepal today.

This situation is also encouraging the far right. Those clamouring for a return of active monarchy have found new voice, even though a diffident King Birendra would probably prefer not to do them the favour. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that the politically incompetent and financially bloated middle—both from the Congress and the Left—will find collusion with the royal palace a less fearsome option than a takeover by the Maoists.

Neither of the extreme paths can be recommended, however. The slow wearing down of the ethnically fractured Nepali peasantry does not have the tinder to spark a Bolshevik-type conflagration. Also, it is difficult to see how both internal forces (the upper and middle classes in a country with practically no proletariat or absolute landless) as well as external (superpowers north, south and trans-oceanic) would allow such an uprising to expand beyond a containable nuisance value.

As for a royal takeover, its basic requirement is an astute and assertive personality untainted in the public eyes. A King Mahendra in 1960 had these assets; a King Birendra, after 20 years of providing "active and dynamic leadership" to the Panchayat system, sits with these intangible assets severely depleted. There is talk that the stature of the King has risen in recent years, but that is a deceptive illusion born out of the relative dwarfing of other 1990 icons and hardly a firm basis from which to launch such a risky adventure as a royal putsch.

If the middle has failed, and the left and the right cannot work, what, then, is the way out? It is to recreate a new middle, through a more assertive civil society, a fearless intelligentsia, and takeover of party machines by a younger, alert crop of political leaders determined to build a political culture of values and sacrifice. This will be more difficult, and challenging, but more sustainable than the romanticism of the Maoists and the vacuous adventurism of the royalists. But short of that, the country will either continue to muddle along in despair or be plunged into a cauldron of terror.

- Dipak Gyawali

## **T**he view that the stature of the King has risen in recent years is a deceptive illusion born out of the relative dwarfing of other 1990 icons.

Marxism Leninism has become, for them, an embarrassingly bothersome burden of history instead of an inspiring ideology.

And, so, the mainline communists continue to spit out anti-Indian rhetoric in public while bending over backwards to please New Delhi when it comes to agreements on high dams on the Kosi or Mahakali. They denounce the IMF and the World Bank in speeches but write letters agreeing to any and all conditionalities the donors may impose just as long as the grant and loan faucets are kept open. One of their leaders waxes eloquent about the need for a republic while another sings praise of the monarchy; one says the party should drop 'communist' from its name even as another loudly celebrates Kim Il Sung's birthday.

As the Bolsheviks fight the Mensheviks within the party, it is clear that the UML is a party upholding the interests, values and aspirations of the Nepali lower middle class, a group that only recently was abandoned by a Nepali Congress seeking to cement

India

## THE FIFTY-YEAR TEST

Two score and ten years ago, India's founding fathers gave the country a parliamentary democracy with a fine system of checks and balances. Half a century into freedom and most of its institutions lie in shambles. The people elected to keep them going are burning themselves out on the treadmill trying to retain their position, power and means of personal aggrandisement. One no longer anticipates visionary legislation of far-reaching consequence from the elected representatives. Neither has the executive shown itself to be capable, either in the Centre or in the states. Tales of scams and widespread corruption are too well known to warrant repetition.

Only one institution appears to have withstood the 50-year test—the judiciary—the watchdog of the other two arms of governance. The Constitution of India expressly balances the three organs and allows the judiciary to interfere with the powers of the executive and legislature only when the liberty of the individual is at stake. However, the justices are today stepping in to make laws, establish policy, and initiate action to cover for inept and inactive ministers and parliamentarians. It is the courts that are formulating rules to run prisons, homes for destitute women and the mentally ill, again, it is the courts that are setting schedules for examinations, ensuring resettlement of evicted pavement dwellers and displaced persons from dam sites, and saving national monuments, rivers and forests from environmental degradation.

The judiciary has also taken upon itself the task of cleaning the Augean stables of political corruption in the country. At least six cases dealing specifically with political corruption are before the Supreme Court of India, the most celebrated being the Jain Hawala case in which bribes were paid to prominent politicians through a business family with laundered money. The judges have literally been forcing the executive to report to the court on this matter. The judges have also declared their intention of wiping out black money from politics.

As the justices raise dust, are they encroaching upon executive and legislative preserves, and disrupting a delicate system for momentary relief? Is the so-called 'judicial activism' actually unconstitutional? Justice J.S. Varma, before whom the Jain Hawala case is pending and who is designated to be the next Chief Justice of India, maintains that this flurry of activity is all part of the constitutionally delineated function of judicial review. Accordingly, the judiciary is the ultimate interpreter of the constitution; it has the task of determining the extent of power allocated to each branch of government.

Justice Varma told a SAARC law conference in New Delhi that judicial activism is a constitutional imperative because of the role assigned to the judi-

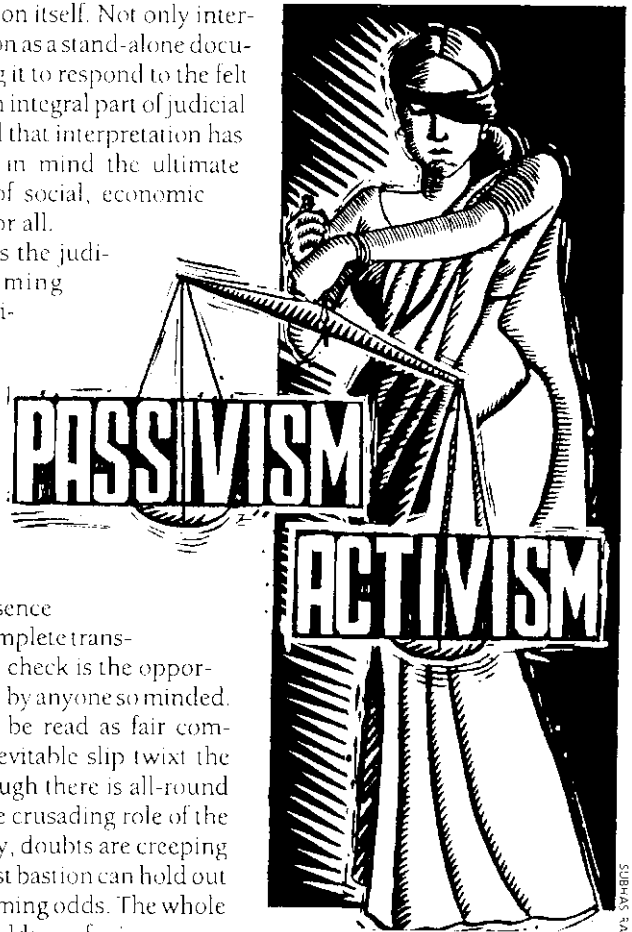
ciary by the constitution itself. Not only interpreting the constitution as a stand-alone document, but interpreting it to respond to the felt needs of the time, is an integral part of judicial function, he said. And that interpretation has to be made keeping in mind the ultimate constitutional goals of social, economic and political justice for all.

What, then, stops the judiciary from becoming all-powerful and arbitrary in its functioning? According to Justice Varma, the very fact that the court acts only on cases brought before it acts as the first check; secondly, the judges function in open court in the presence of lawyers ensuring complete transparency; and the third check is the opportunity for fair comment by anyone so minded.

Yet—and let this be read as fair comment—there is the inevitable slip twixt the cup and the lip. Although there is all-round public applause for the crusading role of the judiciary in India today, doubts are creeping in as to how long the last bastion can hold out in the face of overwhelming odds. The whole country is one large cauldron of mismanagement and corruption, and the courts are just not equipped to tackle the minutiae of executive and legislative governance. Besides, given that many public officials—and institutions—are past learning, should another way be sought to set an example rather than through the judiciary taking on the role of the two other organs?

There is also the question of the justices themselves. Given that the probity, rationality and wisdom of individual judges may not be of the same level as of a Justice Varma, is there possibility of miscarriage when the agenda for judicial activism is picked up by those less capable? Then, there is the recent spate of decisions which indicate that the courts may be over-using contempt provisions.

In early February, Bal Thackeray, the maverick Shiv Sena leader, was handed a week's jail term by the Bombay High Court for telling a public rally that an unnamed judge had demanded INR 35 lakhs for passing judgement in a litigant's favour. Last year, another court imposed a ban on public demonstrations against judges accused of corruption or misbehaviour. A couple of months ago, a bench headed by none other than Justice Varma shot down a public interest litigation petition challenging the appointment of a judge of dubious reputation to the Tamil Nadu High Court. The bench refused to entertain the petition on the ground that judicial appointments could not be subject to judicial review. In 1994, the same Justice Varma made a ruling which took judicial appointments completely out of the



hands of the executives and into those of the judiciary. In 1992, the impeachment process of judges, constitutionally vested with the legislature, was brought within the pale of judicial review.

Key judgements that allow courts to override existing laws, punish certain offences without trial, and allow them to go into the reasons for the central government's imposition of central rule on a state, also form part of what some have begun to recognise as an alarming trend. Also to be seen is whether it is the judicial system which is acting with restrained activism, or whether that has been only the legacy of a few upright and capable judges. There is no saying what will happen if bad judges get judicial activism into their heads; the Supreme Court then will have more than its share of distasteful appeals on its hands.

Take a look at the experience. Would the Jain Hawala case have had such significant repercussions if it had continued to languish before the bench of former Chief Justice M.N. Venkatachalaiah and not fallen into the docket of Justice Varma? And would the whole set of path-breaking environmental legislation have been possible but for the zeal of Justice Kuldip Singh?

While the judiciary has been assuming more and more power by stepping into the vacuum created by a dysfunctional executive and legislature, it is clear that its accountability has been correspondingly on the decline, notwithstanding what Justice Varma had to say to the South Asian lawyers' meeting. This in itself is a dangerous and insular trend. Mixed with the heady elixir of public approval, it could spell the beginning of the end of a committed and responsible judiciary. △

South Asia

## TAMILS AND LHOTSHAMPAS

The case of "up-country Tamils" of Sri Lanka, highlighted in a recent article in *The Hindu* by V. Suryanarayan of the University of Madras, suggests some interesting possible parallels with the case of the Lhotshampa Nepali-speaking refugees of Bhutan. Essentially, it is a story of how governments find—or may find—it convenient to sweep a problem away due to larger geopolitical considerations.

Up-country Tamils are quite different from "Sri Lankan Tamils" of the North and East of the country in that they are descendants of Tamil labourers brought to colonial Ceylon to work on coffee, tea, rubber and coconut plantations. At the time of Independence, these up-country Tamils actually numbered more than Sri Lankan Tamils, who make up about 12 percent of the population.

The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948 and the Indian and Pakistani Residents Act of 1949 together served to disenfranchise the up-country Tamils and

render them stateless. The question of these stateless Tamils remained a major issue in Indo-Lankan affairs, with Colombo making the implicit assumption that those who failed to qualify for citizenship "were unquestionably Indian nationals and that New Delhi should regard them as such", while New Delhi's

**J**awaharlal Nehru emphatically maintained that except for those who voluntarily opted for Indian citizenship, the Indian settlers and their descendants were the responsibility of Ceylon.

policy was to discourage overseas Indians from applying for Indian citizenship. "Jawaharlal Nehru emphatically maintained that except for those who voluntarily opted for Indian citizenship, the Indian settlers and their descendants were the responsibility of Ceylon," writes Mr Suryanarayan.

Nehru's principled position was reversed by his successor Lal Bahadur Shastri, who reasoned that India could easily absorb a million Tamils from Sri Lanka. It is a tragedy of India-Sri Lanka relations, says Mr Suryanarayan, that this Indo-Lankan agreement was finalised without taking into consideration the feelings and views of the up-country Tamils themselves. As prominent Sri Lankan trade unionist and politician Mr Thondaman put it, the people of Indian origin were reduced to the status of "merchandise", to be divided equally between the two countries in the name of good neighbourly relations.

Turn, now, to the refugee camps of Southeast Nepal, where nearly a hundred thousand refugees crowd in camps set up to house these Lhotshampa, or Nepali-speaking 'Southerners' of Bhutan. While the case of the up-country Tamils is a past tragedy, and that of these 'low-country' Bhutanese is very much current, both problems have potentially similar underpinnings: the uncertainty facing colonising populations who migrated upon express invitation, citizenship and naturalisation laws which rendered individuals stateless, the media's disinterest, and, finally, a people's interest sacrificed (or to be sacrificed) on the altar of good-neighbourliness.

In the case of the Lhotshampa, it was a clear-headed Thimphu administration, made up of the Northwestern Ngalongs, that set out to correct a perceived "demographic imbalance" which, it feared,



would lead to an ultimate takeover by the Nepali-speaking population of the south. So, through a carefully modulated state policy of intimidation buttressed by the finest diplomatic public relations South Asia has seen, over a hundred thousand Lhotshampa, comprising a seventh of the country's population, were made to flee the country, most of them during 1989-1992.

Bhutan claims that the refugees, even if some of them might have been originally Bhutanese, have forfeited their citizenship by voluntarily leaving the country with the intention to migrate. Thimphu officials point to the Citizenship Act of 1985 which does contain such a provision, even though it might not stand to international judicial scrutiny.

The Nepali government claims it is an interested party in the matter only to the extent that the refugee camps are in Nepal. But the Lhotshampa are clearly a matter of low priority for Kathmandu politicians. New Delhi, as the only entity with the clout to prod Bhutan towards repatriation—and which helped direct the emerging Lhotshampa through Indian territory into Nepal in the first place—prefers to support Bhutan by its very inaction.

If Bhutan's contention is accepted, then we have a stateless population in our hands. Given the present unequal state of Indo-Nepal relations, the weak government of Sher Bahadur Deuba, and the continuing diplomatic offensive by Thimphu, the situation is ripe for a 'realpolitik' solution to emerge. Under which Nepal would be persuaded to accept a large section of the refugees as its own, given that—to use Lal Bahadur Shastri's argument in the other instance—a few thousand more would not make much of a difference in a country of 20 million. Bhutan would magnanimously offer to take back a few thousand, and India would pick up the balance. Who are these Nepali-speakers, anyway, to muddy the waters of South Asian amity? △

South Asia

## NEW MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL PURDAH

So, President Bill Clinton of the United States in all likelihood did invite Paula Jones to come into his office and in all likelihood did demand oral sex from her. She claims so, and the mainline American media, which earlier pooh-poohed the idea as a right-wing plot against a liberal president, is now coming around to take a second look at the evidence, which is apparently convincing.

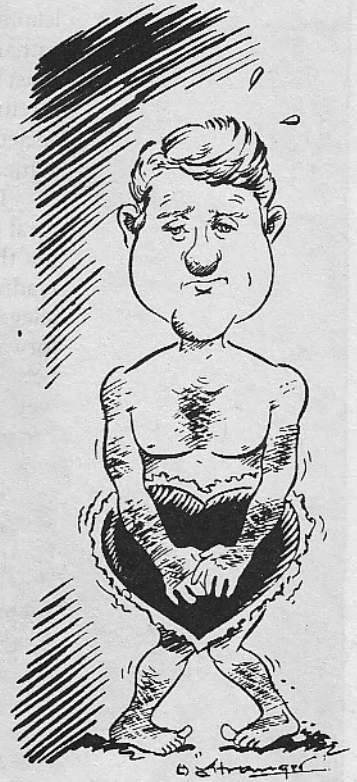
The law will take its course, as P.V. Narasimha Rao was fond of saying, in the United States, as elsewhere. Sex scandals are a regular feature of the media-eat-politician scenario that is developing the

world over. What is different is that, earlier, news of peccadillos either never got printed by knowing newsmen (as with Kennedy and Marilyn or Nehru and Edwina), or even if it got out, the readership or viewership (in the case of television) was limited to a society which was already at ease with the kind of revelation a muckraking journalist comes up with—trysts with film stars, prostitutes, and Mata Haris.

What is different with Mr Clinton and Ms Jones is, firstly, the explicitness of the charge made on a sitting president, including the ability to identify bodily specifics. Secondly, it is the willingness of the media to carry the charges in all their barebone details. Thirdly, and this is what concerns us, is the ability and willingness of globalising and homogenising media (print, radio and television) to transfer this news to the far corners.

Let no one claim that South Asians are pruders. Diversionsary (as in the case of oral sex), alternative (as in homosexuality), deviant (as in S&M) and criminal (as in paedophilia) sexual behaviour is without doubt prevalent here as well. But it would be safe to say that, overall, the mass of South Asian society is sexually conservative, and there are certain aspects of sexuality that are less common here as yet.

Even if elective sexual behaviour is widely prevalent in South Asian society, a social purdah keeps certain subjects out of general discourse. Many Ameri-



**L**et the boyfriends, too, make girlfriends, as long as they know how to pace themselves.

can schools, for example, regularly hold discussions on sexuality, sometimes among children not yet in their double-digit years. Whereas in South Asia's more traditional peasantry and middle-class urban masses, a sizeable proportion of grooms and brides enter marriage without knowledge of the mechanics of the sex act.

So, the no-holds-barred discussion of gayhood, of paedophilia, of alleged sexual adventures of President Clinton, has hit South Asia like a muted thunderclap (muted, because there is not enough sociological discussion of the phenomenon). Newspapers in Hindi, Nepali, Bengali and other 'regional' languages have had to search the far reaches of the lexicon to come up with terms like *mukh maitun* for oral sex, *samalingi* for homosexuality, and *bal youn soshan*, which is an unsatisfactory rendering for something as heinous as paedophilia.

All this talk is, of course, inevitable, and the open discussion on natural and unnatural human sexual

leanings can only be for the better, whatever the catharsis of the moment. However, social scientists must begin to study the impact global media (first and foremost satellite television) is having upon village society when they are hit with the information that someone demanded oral sex of someone else.

The subject is not cultural imperialism, but cultural confusion. The mechanisms are not in place to put things in context and to explain to a newspaper-reading 13-year-old what it was that Bill Clinton allegedly asked Ms Jones to do. The usual arguments forwarded in such circumstances—that such sexual behaviour probably exists in Southern societies as well, or that we all have to learn *some time*—do not carry weight because this kind of discovery can be wrenching, with no counselling in sight.

Howsoever adaptable the human mind may be to new mores and methods, traditional societies are not equipped to take such change without something slipping, somewhere. Unfortunately, in South Asia as a whole, there is too little psycho-social preparation for the kind of information that the no-holds-barred information society makes available. With instant media, and a Westernised media elite in South Asia acting as the carriers of the message over to the larger mass, the time is just not there for preparation.

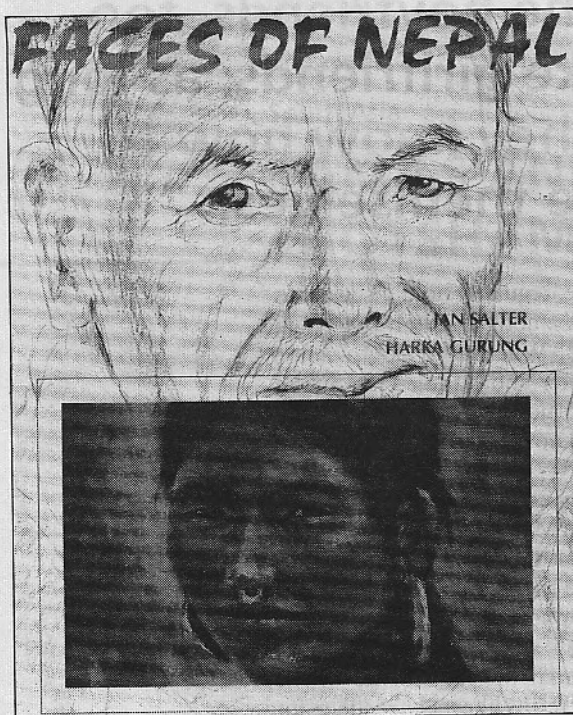
There is a time lag of decades between societies that are generating most of the news for international consumption and our millions who are presently receiving that news. There is no saying, therefore,

where all this will lead, and we are loathe to propose any solutions. In South Asia, the audience as well as the media elite are united in their passive response to new media.

What all this means, also, is that South Asia's diverse communities will become more and more superficially Westernised and increasingly like one another. With the advent, first, of the Archies teenybopper gift chain and then FM radio, Indian urban society has gone in with a rush for Valentine's Day, which has now far outpaced Raksha Bandhan as an 'event'. This year, Kathmandu too, with its own FM radio, woke up to Valentine's Day, and suddenly boyfriends seemed to have found girlfriends.

It all goes back to our subcontinent's surprising inability to react collectively to the media challenge of the marketable West. One reason that the public's challenge is muted might be that the commercial overseas channels have a monopoly over the airwaves targeting the whole region whereas we, the audience, are too fractured by region, linguistic ghettos and political boundaries to mount a potent protest against the way things are going.

As that is the case, why stop at Valentine's Day? Since South Asia wants willy nilly to emulate the American new society, let's celebrate Ground Hog Day, Halloween and Thanksgiving as well. By all means, let's do Columbus Day to mark Christopher's landing, even if he was not where he thought he was. Let the boyfriends, too, make girlfriends, as long as they know how to pace themselves.



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by Jan Salter and  
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Published by Himal Books

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# South South Asia

**F**orty-five minutes on a flight out of Madras, the southern tip of India comes into view below the right wing. On the other side, a yellow sliver of land snakes out over the blue-green Palk Strait like a tendril.

From this vantage point, geology, mythology and history of the Subcontinent merge into one. During the last ice age when sea levels were much lower than today, this formed the land-bridge between the southern Indian peninsula and Sri Lanka. But as the oceans rose, the rocky islands of Dhanushkodi were submerged and came to be regarded as a remnant of the Ramayana times—the bridgehead for the invasion of Lanka. And today, the Mannar region on the Sri Lankan side is the scene of fierce combat as the military carries out Operation Edibala to push Tamil Tiger guerrillas out of the western flank of its access routes to Jaffna.

It is difficult to imagine that we are flying over a war zone. An estimated 85,000 people have been killed since 1983 in this South Asian conflict. Millions have been made homeless, and yet this war gets scant attention even in the rest of the Subcontinent. Daily body count journalism has numbed the region's consciousness, and Sri Lanka scores a blip on the media's radar screen only when a bomb devastates the heart of the country's capital. And it remains

on our screens only for as long as there is live footage of burning buildings.

It is not just Sri Lanka. The Subcontinent's south, also comprising the Maldives and the Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka, has always been treated as a periphery by the northerners. After all, the north is where 85 percent of South Asia's 1.3 billion people live. This North-South divide is easily seen at SAARC gatherings where Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Indians get together in Hindustani huddles while the Maldivians and Sri Lankans stare at the ceiling.

Things have got so bad that one Maldivian diplomat calls his country a part of "South South Asia". In this sub-subregion, there is an unspoken but perceptible wish to be somewhere else—the feeling that it was a fluke of

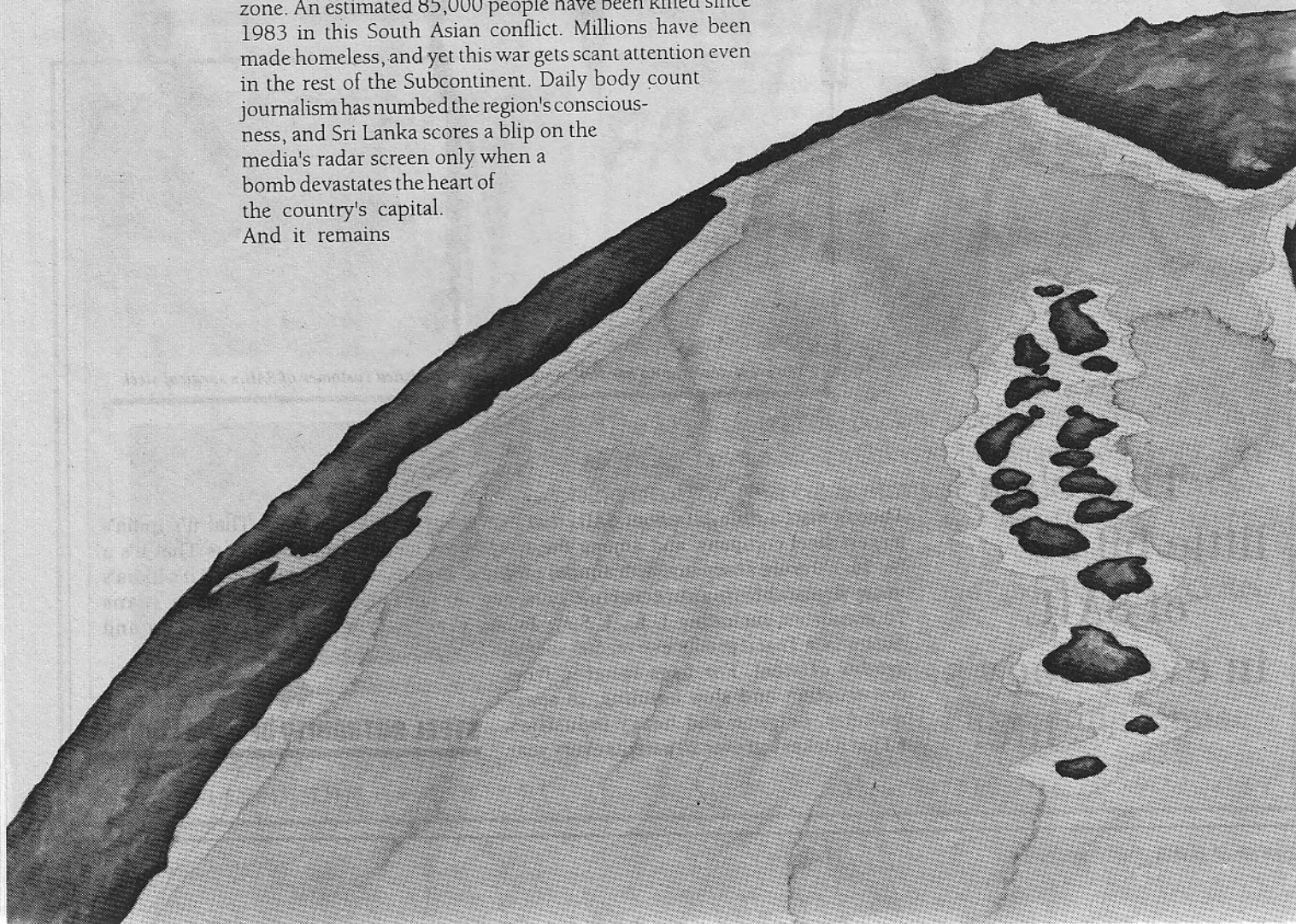


plate tectonics that plunked Sri Lanka and the Maldives offshore from the Subcontinent and not in the Straits of Malacca.

In 1977, when the United National Party of J.R. Jayawardene came to power in Sri Lanka, it dismantled controls and unleashed South Asia's first economic liberalisation programme. Politicians openly voiced their admiration for Lee Kuan Yew and Mahathir Mohamad and said they were going to remake bi-ethnic Sri Lanka in the image of multi-ethnic Singapore or Malaysia. Mr Jayawardene even made a serious bid for ASEAN membership, but Colombo was just too far away across the Bay of Bengal for it to be seriously considered and the application was rejected in 1982. But hopes of emulating South-east Asia's economic miracle have not died.

The February issue of Colombo's business magazine *Lanka Monthly Digest* has a big bold strapline on its cover: "MALAYSIA, INC: Role Model for Sri Lanka?". Inside, Mahathir's economic adviser, Daim Zainuddin gives Sri Lankans some big brotherly advice: peace, harmony and political stability are pre-requisites for development.

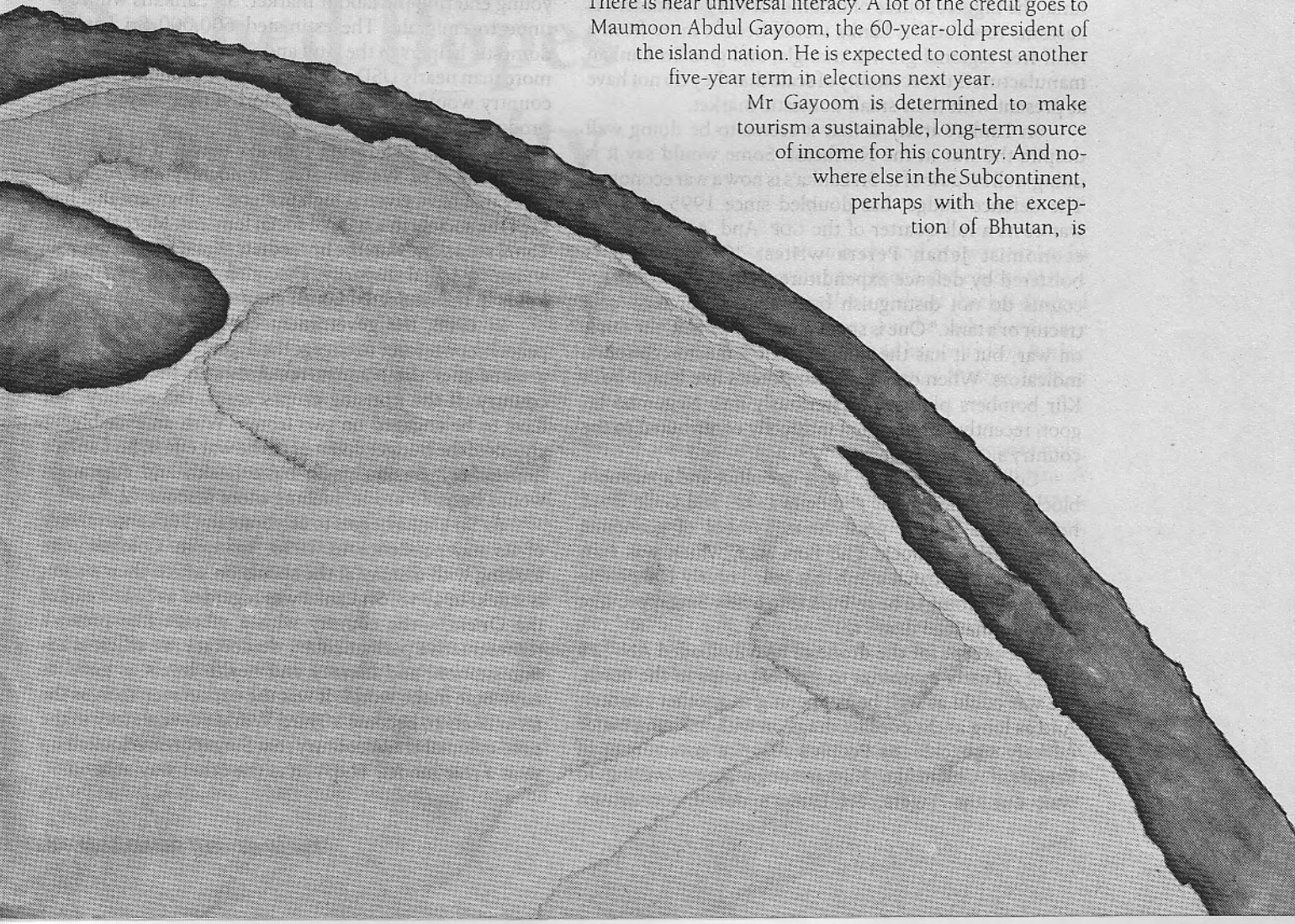
Just like Singapore profited from being the economic and financial hub for the southeast Asian hinterland, Sri Lanka would like to be the gateway to the Subcontinent. Already, East Asian investors, especially from South Korea and Japan, are looking at Sri Lanka as a stepping stone for exports to the vast Indian market. South Korea's Hanjung conglomerate has just bought into the newly

privatised Ceylon Steel, a move that would not make economic sense unless the Koreans were looking years down the line at exporting steel to the Hyundai car plant coming up in Madras.

In the Maldives, the country's planners pay homage at the altar of SAARC but are busily building more earthy links to ASEAN, especially Malaysia. Male today even looks like a mini-Kuala Lumpur, complete with its own gold-domed mosque. Air Maldives has got off the ground with Malaysian help, its resorts are full of Singaporeans and Malaysians celebrating the Chinese New Year, and trade relations are booming. If it is not ASEAN, it is the Gulf and beyond. Male's markets are stocked with South African apples and mineral water from Dubai. The relative affluence has also brought migrant workers flocking in from other parts of South Asia. There are at present 5000 Bangladeshis and as many Sri Lankans employed in menial jobs that Maldivians will now not do.

It is obvious where all this affluence is coming from: upmarket tourism and the modernisation of the fishing industry. The Maldives has deliberately priced itself at the high-end of the holiday business, and an average visitor spends USD 200 a day. With a population of less than 250,000, the nation of atolls is expected to receive more than 370,000 tourists this year and their cash will pump in nearly half the Maldivian exchequer's annual revenue. Tourism income is invested directly on health and education: the country's child mortality rate has been reduced to 32 per live births from 130 in 1977, average life-expectancy has risen from 46 to 70 in the same period. There is near universal literacy. A lot of the credit goes to Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the 60-year-old president of the island nation. He is expected to contest another five-year term in elections next year.

Mr Gayoom is determined to make tourism a sustainable, long-term source of income for his country. And nowhere else in the Subcontinent, perhaps with the exception of Bhutan, is



tourism practised as carefully as it is in the Maldives. The country has made sure it gets the maximum monetary benefit from tourism while minimising its social and environmental impact. The only Maldivian that a visiting tourist comes in direct contact with could be the Immigration Officer at the airport. As soon as they get off their charter flights landing at Male's island runway, tourists are whisked off to resort islands in speedboats or sea-planes. Resort development is allowed on only 73 uninhabited islands, although 14 more licences are about to be approved. Only one-fifth of the land area on an island is allowed to be built up, and no construction is allowed to exceed the height of a medium-sized coconut tree.

At the end of their holiday, tourists are encouraged to take all waste paper, plastics and other rubbish back to their home country. Much of the cargo container of a departing LTU charter flight last month was taken up by white plastic bags bulging with tourist trash.

Back in Colombo, after the visit there of Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral, there is talk of a Southern Growth Triangle encompassing the Maldives, Sri Lanka and southern India. The Gujral Doctrine would slash Indian tariffs on Maldivian and Sri Lankan exports and encourage three-way trade. It looks good in theory, but will it work in practice? At present, Maldivian exports to India are negligible and Sri Lanka buys the traditional dried 'Maldivian Fish' and not much else. With such an imbalance, the Maldivian Trade Minister is less than enthusiastic about a tariff-free zone. After tourism and tuna, the biggest source of income for the government is customs revenue. Sri Lanka would benefit more from a tariff-free regional growth triangle, and give Sri Lankan manufacturers the economy of scale that they do not have at present with their small domestic market.

Sri Lanka's irony is that it seems to be doing well despite the war in the Northeast. Some would say it is doing well *because* of it. Sri Lanka's is now a war economy. The defence budget has doubled since 1995, and the war costs a full quarter of the GDP. And, as Sri Lankan economist Jehan Perera writes: "Our growth is bolstered by defence expenditure. National income accounts do not distinguish between the purchase of a tractor or a tank." One is spent on development, the other on war, but it has the same effect on macro-economic indicators. When one of the Air Force's five Israeli-built Kfir bombers plunged mysteriously into Negombo lagoon recently, the accident indirectly contributed to the country's GDP!

Colombo is bustling. High-rise office and apartment blocks sprouting along the Beira Lake, and Galle Road now boasts of that great Asian symbol of economic growth—the gridlock. The Fort area, which was torn apart by a huge truck bomb that killed nearly 100 people last year, is going to be re-built into a new Singapore-like seafloor financial district.

So, except for the drone of heavily loaded AN-32's flying off early mornings to supply troops in the north, the war could as well be happening in another country. And as long as the conflict drags on without more major military setbacks, the People's Alliance government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga seems willing to wait out the Tigers. Sri Lanka's donor consortium

has approved a hefty foreign assistance package, pacified by Ms Kumaratunga's peace offer of devolution to the Tamils.

But privately, most Sri Lankans have given up hope that the conflict will be resolved politically. Positions have hardened on both sides after the ceasefire broke down in 1995. The government launched an aggressive military campaign and captured the Tiger stronghold of Jaffna. Doves in Colombo are no match against the uncompromising rhetoric of Sinhala radicals, and moderate Tamil politicians have been eliminated one by one by their own brothers. The momentum of war has built up, and it seems impossible to stop the juggernaut—the conflict has to burn itself out. There has been too much blood spilt, and too much bad blood all around, for more talk. The bereaved, the orphaned and the maimed have no voice in its resolution: war has to come to its own denouement.

There is a precedent. Many in the military hierarchy seem to think that they can repeat the dramatic crushing of the southern JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) insurgency in 1989. An intelligence breakthrough led to the capture of the JVP hierarchy, which was then eliminated, and the insurgency fizzled out. The military would give anything to do the same to the Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, and his comrades.

But the longer the war goes on, the more remote will be economic recovery. Foreign investors and tourists will continue to bypass Sri Lanka, and as long as that happens it will be harder for the government to provide jobs to the young entering the labour market. Sri Lankans will continue to emigrate. The estimated 600,000 Sri Lankan domestic helpers in the Gulf and Southeast Asia pump in more than nearly USD 1 billion into the economy, but the country would benefit much more if they stayed home productively employed.

Sri Lanka's enduring paradox is that it is the very combination of Western-style democracy and high literacy that have given it high under-employment that has kept the society in a state of social ferment. More than the Tamil separatist war, the immediate threat is inflation and widening social disparity. Discontent in the JVP strongholds in the neglected South simmers still.

In 1988, the government cleverly got the Indian peacekeeping force to engage the Tigers in the north while it went after the JVP insurrectionists in the rest of the country. If the uprising erupts again, the military will have to be engaged on two fronts. With an ever-bigger chunk of the budget diverted to the war effort, Sri Lanka's impressive investments in basic health and education would begin to erode, fuelling more discontent.

As Sri Lanka begins to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its independence in 1998, many in Colombo are looking with dismay at the shoals on which their nation is stuck. In 1948, Sri Lanka was regarded as "The Pearl of the Orient"—the country with a vibrant free press, a representative parliamentary democracy, an efficient administration, and literacy and health levels as good as anywhere in the world. It was the nation seen then as the most likely to become a Third World success story in the post-colonial era. A country that Singaporeans looked up to as a role model. Today, it is the other way around.



KUMUDA DIXIT

Sunset after a storm, looking towards Colombo's city centre.

# Dashed Hopes in Serendipity

*Despite bungling its race relations, squandering its democratic momentum, and its descent into anarchy and civil war, Sri Lanka continues to be regarded as a model for other developing countries. Heavy early investment in basic health and education have given the island's citizens an unparalleled quality of life within South Asia. But the failure to resolve a civil war that has dragged on for 14 years has dashed hopes for real prosperity. The country has been compelled to pay for the lack of visionary and enlightened leadership. How much more ahead would Sri Lanka have been if past politicians had known to look further down the road? **Stanley Kalpage**, well-known Sri Lankan diplomat and former ambassador to the United Nations, looks at the lessons.*

Given the problems of the more populous countries of South Asia, Sri Lanka's geographical location and small population should have made governance relatively easy. At Independence, on 4 February 1948, Sri Lanka had a head start on most other post-colonial nations: it had an efficient bureaucracy, seemingly alert politicians, and a high level of literacy and health of its citizens.

And so, expectations were high and prospects seemed bright for "Ceylon" when it gained independence. The country had achieved freedom after some 450 years of colonial rule (under the Portuguese, Dutch and the British), but without the bloodshed and bitterness which had marked independence elsewhere in the region. For the small island of 25,332 square miles, with only 6.7 million

people and a density of just 265 persons per square mile, the difficulties and pitfalls ahead were hardly evident. A relatively good infrastructure of roads and railways, a sound plantation economy for earning foreign exchange, and an efficient administrative set-up, all were in Sri Lanka's favour.

Back then, statesmen of Southeast Asia used to openly say that Sri Lanka was their model. Today the tables are turned, and the overall picture in the island is one of gloom and even despair.

### Living with a Bane

Regular parliamentary elections based on universal adult franchise have been a constant feature of independent Sri Lanka, continued from the inauguration in 1931 of the

Donoughmore Constitution, named after the Earl of Donoughmore, who chaired a commission on constitutional reform appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Two political parties have governed the country throughout the post-independence period: the United National Party (UNP), mostly contesting elections alone, and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), usually in alliance with other groups, mainly left-oriented.

The constituency-based electoral system resulted in three landslide victories—in 1956 for S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's Mahajana Eksath Peramuna, in 1970 for the United Front under Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and in 1977 for the United National Party of J.R. Jayewardene. A system of proportional representation was introduced in 1978 in the hope that it would prevent wide swings of the political pendulum. As a result, no single party has been able to sweep the polls since 1978, and a sizeable and vigorous opposition has been a feature of the parliamentary process.

On the other hand, the dictatorial power of the executive presidency, also introduced in 1978, has severely encroached upon the legislature's prerogatives. During the runup to the last elections, the People's Alliance had been categorical about its intention to abolish the executive presidency which, before assuming power, they considered to be "the bane of [our] country since 1978". Having enjoyed the powers of the executive presidency for over two years, however, President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her government seem in no hurry to do away with it.

Over the years, increasing rivalry at election time has resulted in bitterness amongst the political leadership as well as the rank and file. The SLFP (in association with leftist parties) and the UNP have failed to find common ground on important national issues; this has been one reason for the country's inability to come to grips with the deep-seated ethnic problem. Violence and corruption have crept into electioneering and into public life. The country has been politically polarised between the two political groupings.

The three election landslides of 1956, 1970 and 1977, assassinations of several political leaders, two youth insurrections by the militant Marxist-oriented Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) in the south (1971 and 1988-89), and the continuing Tamil militancy in the north and east, have marked the tortuous path of Sri Lanka's journey since Independence and great expectations to its present condition, 49 years later, of confusion, corruption and economic stagnation.

The population has almost trebled in 50 years, even though effective family planning programmes seem now to have curbed growth. Human development indicators are still among the best in the region and the quality of life remains high—but only in relation to the South Asian neighbourhood. In the 1950s, Sri Lanka had a per capita GNP twice that of South Korea (USD 162 versus USD 82). Today, South Korea's per capita GNP has soared to over USD 8000, while Sri Lanka's remains at about USD 600. Malaysia and Sri Lanka both have similar populations and multi-ethnic societies, and yet Malaysia (which became independent nearly 20 years later) has an economic output seven times that of Sri Lanka.

## Tension and Conflict

The reasons for the present social and economic crisis can be found in the majority Sinhala leadership's failure to develop a sensitivity to the rights of minorities, and in the concurrent demand for Eelam (an independent Tamil state) by frustrated Tamil politicians. With the introduction of universal adult franchise under the Donoughmore Constitution of 1931, Tamil political leaders had become apprehensive of the advent of independence from colonial British rule. Members of the Tamil community had enjoyed better educational facilities in the northern province and were able to enter the public services in numbers often far in excess of their ratio (about 12 percent) in the total population.

Some of these Tamil leaders even argued against the granting of independence. When the Soulbury Commission, sent by the post-war British Labour government to propose constitutional reforms, was conducting sittings in 1946, some, including G.G. Ponnambalam, leader of



the Tamil Congress, argued for "balanced representation". According to this formula, 50 percent of the seats in the legislature would represent the minorities, who constituted 25 percent of the population, and the other 50 percent the majority Sinhala, making up 75 percent of the population. Tamil politicians established the Federal Party in 1949, demanding self-determination in the so-called "traditional Tamil homelands" which, they said, were made up of the northern and eastern provinces. These provinces had been demarcated in the nineteenth century by the British mainly for administrative convenience.

The demands for self-determination in the northern and eastern provinces lay practically dormant until the mid-1950s, when the governments in power introduced certain measures which alienated the Tamil community.



S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike rode to power in 1956 on the slogan of "Sinhala Only in 24 hours" (the introduction of Sinhala as the official language overnight) and aggravated the feelings of fear and concern among the Tamil minority. The ethnic problem accelerated progressively after the promulgation of the Sinhala Only Act, but there were other irritants, such as the unscrupulous "standardisation" of marks for university admission (1970), and the enactment of a republican constitution (1972). The former set minimum entry mark for admission to medical faculties at 229 for those educated in the Sinhala medium and 250 for those coming from Tamil medium. The latter deleted the clause of the Soulbury constitution which stated that "no law shall make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made liable". The Tamils revolted against the discrimination, and later their demands escalated to include a separate Tamil Eelam.

Bandaranaike himself attempted to respond to the feeling of disappointment and dismay among the Tamil people by proposing the formation in 1958 of regional councils in the north and the east with a fair amount of autonomy. This started the process of successive governments in Colombo vying with each other to meet the demands of the Federal Party for Eelam as a way of solving what was then known as the "communal problem". Pressured by the members of the Buddhist clergy and the UNP in opposition, Bandaranaike withdrew his proposal for regional councils even as an acceptable solution seemed within reach.

Ethnic discontent persisted and other leaders tried their hand at solving the problem. However, none succeeded in convincing the majority Sinhala people that their particular proposals would not pave the way for separation. Dudley Senanayake's scheme for the devolution of power to district councils (1966) and J.R. Jayewardene's proposal for district development councils (1981) were opposed by the SLFP, the party in opposition on each occasion.

Violence broke out on the streets of Colombo when the Indo-Lanka Agreement (also called the "Rajiv-JR Accord" of 1987) was signed. The violence was directed at the Jayewardene government for what was said to be his sellout to India. The first elections to provincial councils, set up as per the terms of the Agreement, were boycotted by the SLFP and by the successor to the Federal Party, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which is now generally regarded as the 'moderate' element in the spectrum of Tamil politics.

The attempt by the present People's Alliance government to solve the ethnic problem through a "package" of devolution proposals has given rise to a divisive debate. The proposals are essentially those presented by the TULF to Rajiv Gandhi in 1985 during the tripartite talks in Thimphu (considered neutral ground) between the government and various Tamil groups, with the mediation of India. The proposals go beyond the devolution of power in President Jayewardene's 13th Amendment (1987), which was modelled on the lines of devolution of power from the Centre to the states in India. The government feels that the implementation of this "package" will help marginalise the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).



**HOT SPRING**, a magazine with Tamil Tiger leanings published from Paris, recently featured, not surprisingly, Velupillai Prabhakaran on the cover. Here is an editorial from the issue, which gives us some more of the "one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter" argument.

*... The one who is determining the political and military agenda in Colombo is nowhere near Colombo, holds no office, sports no military title, but what is more ridiculous, he carries a price on his head, and is known in Sri Lankan political terminology as a 'terrorist'.*

*We know of terrorists planting bombs in secret, but where in the world do you get over 1000 "terrorists" in full view, attacking a well-fortified camp, overrunning it, wiping out the entire garrison, and taking away heavy weaponry? Is it not obvious that the Sri Lankan terminology is flawed? Once the terminology is flawed the thinking gets erratic, and the entire behavioural pattern gets muddled. That is the basic semantic self-deception that is preventing the successive Sri Lankan governments from making any headway in its 13-year-old war against the Tamils. You can keep on calling a powerful liberation force like the Tigers as "terrorists" till you are blue in the face, but that can only help you display your anger—your helpless anger at that—but will never help you come to touch with cold reality.*

*Careless use of the word 'terrorist' could also result in final embarrassment. Some "terrorists" of yesterday have the habit of turning up to be tomorrow's "Your Excellencies". Some even end up receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace!*

*...Madame President (Chandrika Kumaratunga) has only one Prabhakaran to contend with. But it has to be remembered that the Tamil leader has seen three Presidents before her, come and go. He has seen three War Ministers from Lalith Athulathmudali to Ranjan Wijeratne to the present Uncle General. He has seen ten Indian Major Generals in the northeast in his time, not to mention dozens of Sri Lankan ones with pips and ribbons and swagger sticks. And he has not been trained in Sandhurst or Lebanon or military academies, not even in Wirawila.*

*So what makes him tick? What makes the Tigers such a formidable force that Israeli weapons and Chinese gunboats and American training do not daunt them? In trying to get the right answers to these questions lies the hope for peace in Sri Lanka. And the day the Sri Lankan government and the Colombo Press and the Sinhalese people stop throwing the word "terrorist" around will be the day when wisdom will dawn and peace prevail in that island so favoured by Nature but so sadly brought to the brink of ruin by its leaders. That will also be the day when the Sinhalese people take control of their own destiny and the Tamil people of theirs.*

### Economy and Society

Until the policy of economic liberalisation was instituted in 1978, both UNP and the SLFP-leftwing coalition governments continued with social welfare policies to improve the education, health and nutrition of the growing population. Free education from kindergarten to university, introduced back in 1944, was continued together with free health services, subsidised rice—and even free rice for a short period in the mid-1960s. School children have been provided with textbooks, midday meals and school uniforms, all free.

Generally, the efforts of the UNP governments have led to improved economy, while the SLFP's stints in power have strengthened social welfare benefits. The policies of liberalisation have resulted in economic growth, but the gap between the haves and have-nots has also widened. In the 1988-93 period of his term in office, President Ranasinghe Premadasa emphasised poverty alleviation, through the *Janasaviya* (self-reliance) project, which the present government is continuing in its own way as the *Samurdhi* (prosperity) programme. These safety-net schemes were put in place to ease the pains of liberalisation.

After years of socialist policies and an economy which was largely state-controlled, when Sri Lanka embarked on a free market path in 1978 there was significant economic growth and considerable optimism of an economic take-off. During the period 1978-82, the economy grew at an average rate of over 6 percent per year, in real terms—nearly double the rate of growth compared to 1970-77. Investment increased from 14 percent in 1977

to 29.6 percent in 1982. Unemployment was halved from 26 percent to 12 percent of the work force. The inflation rate fell from 18 percent to only 5.4 percent in 1982.

However, the violent civil disturbances of July 1983 shattered the dream of sustained success. The liberalisation of the economy was done too quickly and without adequate safeguards to protect national interests. "Let the robber barons come," President J.R. Jayewardene declared. And so, they came. The privatisation programmes for nationalised ventures, initiated in 1988, led to corruption, the extent of which is only now being revealed through commissions of enquiry set up by the present government.

The healthy social indicators as well as innovative economic policies put in place since 1978 should have paid dividends. Unfortunately, the great promise has not been fulfilled. Colvin R. de Silva, a leading left politician at the time of Independence had cautioned: "One language will result in two nations, two languages can make one nation." His warning was not heeded. Ignoring communal rumblings, the decision to make Sinhala the only official language planted the seeds of civil strife which has resulted in a fractured society that cannot take advantage of the economic possibilities that are there.

Democracy has been a consistent feature of Sri Lankan life after Independence, and the citizens value their democratic traditions. But the society would have been far ahead economically if the ethnic problem, aggravated by a non-visionary leadership, had been resolved in time.

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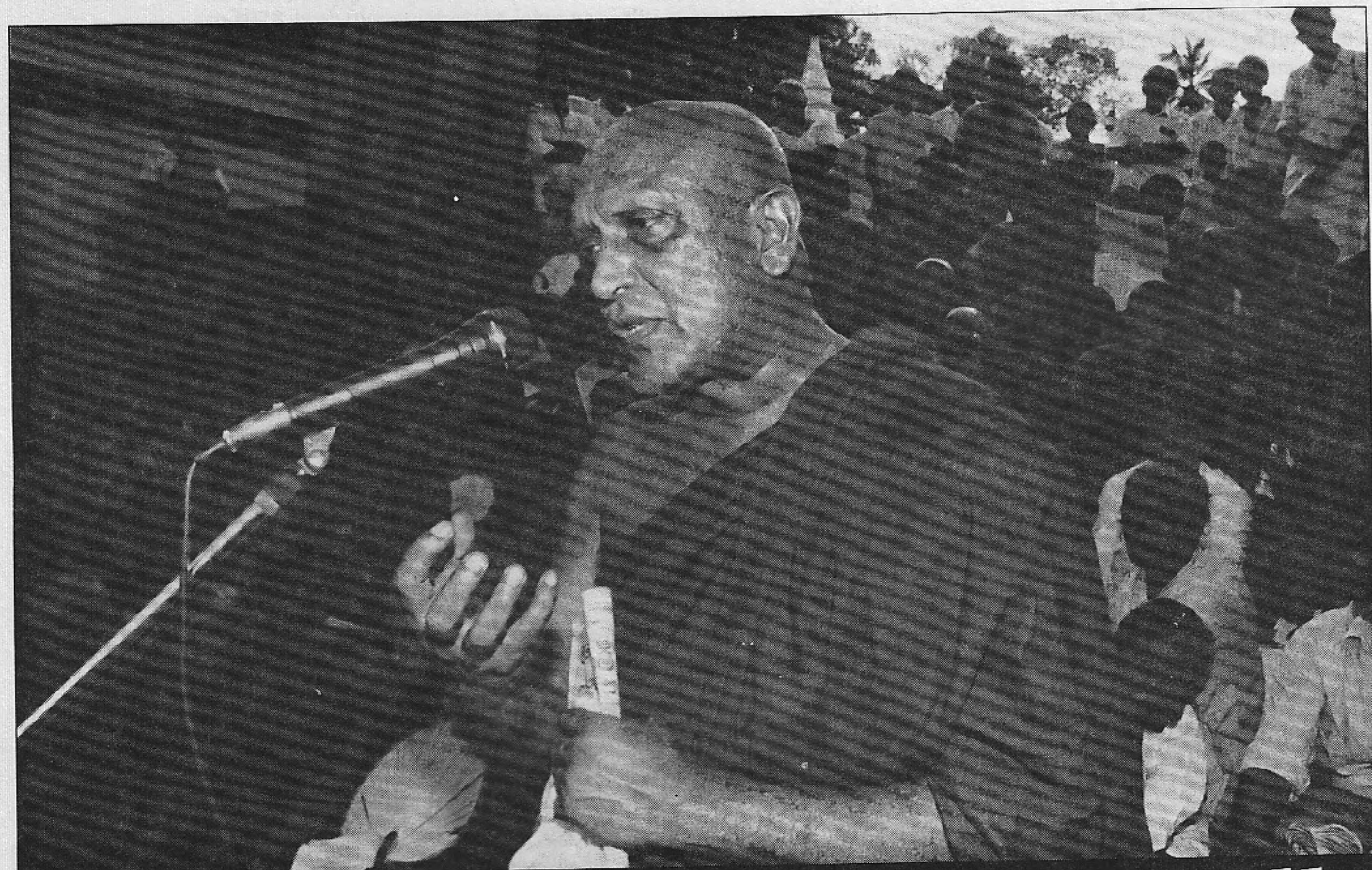


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ANURADHA LOKUHARARACHCHI

## Chandrika's Tight-Rope Walk

*Sri Lanka was the first South Asian country to start the privatisation process, long before it became de rigueur in the rest of the region. How is this pioneering privatiser faring?*

by Ranjeeth Perera

Conscious of strong employee resistance to privatisation of state-owned commercial enterprises, Sri Lanka's former United National Party (UNP) government thought of an imaginative way to sugar coat the pill—gifting employees of companies that were being sold with 10 percent of their shares, free, gratis and for nothing.

But the first privatisation in 1989 of United Motors Ltd, a government-owned motor vehicle importer holding the profitable Mitsubishi agency and running a repair workshop in Colombo, hardly generated any wild excitement either among the company's few dozen employees who were getting 10 percent of its equity without charge, or among the general public to whom the rest of its shares were offered at par.

That was hardly surprising given the country's condition at the time. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front), into its second armed insurrection after 1971, had brought the country to the brink of anarchy. In 1988-89, Colombo was embroiled in two wars, one in the northeast with the Tamil Tigers that had forced President J.R. Jayawardene to bring in Indian troops and the other against the JVP.

Most agreed that the timing of the United Motors privatisation was fatal. Who but a fool would buy shares in any company that was being divested by the state when the very viability of the state was in question? But President Ranasinghe Premadasa, who succeeded Mr Jayawardene, and his government were determined to soldier on with the privatisation agenda despite the terror

Monks at a protest meeting called to oppose the privatisation of the Ceylon Steel Corporation.

that stalked the land and that fact the business confidence had plummeted to zero.

Predictably, there were very few takers for the shares on offer and most of them devolved on the underwriters. The government did not even bother to formally distribute the free employee shares at that time. But the picture was to dramatically change just a few weeks later when, by the end of 1989, the security forces broke the back of the JVP insurrection and liquidated its leadership. Sri Lanka's business climate improved dramatically and the United Motors share appreciated almost three-fold. That was when United Motors' employees got their share certificates and government made good propaganda of employee benefits from privatisation.

The free-market formula was based on the number of years of service an employee had put in the company that was being divested by the state, regardless of his or her position or salary. The gardener who had served longer than the managing director got more shares. And there was no requirement that benefitting employees had to hold on to their shares. They were perfectly free to sell them on the market if they so wished. Many of them did and there was no lack of buyers.

With the stock market beginning to take off by the time the first free shares were distributed, Mr Premadasa was not slow in reaping political mileage. The state-controlled media, particularly, made great play of the fortunes that small people had made out of their free shares, and the sugar coating certainly tasted extra sweet. The free-share strategy seemed to be working nicely where most companies down for privatisation were concerned with little or no employee resistance.

But it did not work everywhere, especially not in the nationalised tea and rubber plantations, and adaptations had to be made. Mr Premadasa understood very well that complete privatisation of the plantations would be difficult with strong trade union resistance inevitable. Also, it would be politically suicidal giving free shares in plantation companies to their resident Indian (of recent Indian descent) labour while the neighbouring indigenous villagers suffered from acute land hunger. The president, therefore, decided to privatise the management of the plantations and give the workers 10 percent of the profits rather than a 10 percent equity share.

### Golden Shares

Between 1989 and 1994, when the UNP government ruled, 23 state-owned enterprises had been privatised. The new People's Alliance government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga, accepting the reality of the need for the process to continue despite steadfast opposition from its leftist constituents, had, between

June 1994 and the end of 1996, privatised a further 23 enterprises, netting government coffers a revenue yield of SLR 8.2 billion. Among the businesses that the incumbent government had divested were 13 regional plantation companies, a gas distribution company and a duty-free operator at Colombo's Katunayake Airport.

Special conditions were imposed for plantation companies. The buyers were given loans for capital development of the estates. Government, however, retained a 'golden share' in each of these companies with wide-ranging veto powers as well as the right to periodically look into their accounts. Such restrictions did not totally inhibit buyer interest, although the early plantation privatisations yielded less than true value to state coffers. The picture has, since improved.

The government had hoped to derive considerable budgetary support from privatisation proceeds and even use some of the surplus to retire public debt, but the going has been slower than anticipated. There were also some unforeseen problems relating to the divesting of some of the plantation companies, with a couple of early buyers flogging their acquisitions for fat profits to companies with foreign links. Concern has been expressed about Indian interests like Tata Tea having bought into the Lankan tea sector. Critics said this would be to the long-term detriment of Ceylon Tea.

Excellent tea prices in 1996 and a buoyant rubber market have made plantation companies most attractive to buyers and this is expected to be reflected in what the remaining companies will fetch. State authorities have also learnt their lessons from early mistakes. One of the worst of these related to the handing over of the government's gas monopoly to Shell. Shell has within five months of takeover twice raised cooking gas prices, provoking a howl of consumer protest. "Is this the much-vaunted efficiency of the private sector and the promised 'benefit' to consumers?" asked one critic.



### Shell-Shocked

Embarrassed, the government announced that the deal with Shell would be re-negotiated. Shell-shocked by the flak it has taken, and looking also at other petroleum-related privatisations down the road, Shell has until now not resisted that proposal. Once the biggest importer and distributor of petroleum products into Sri Lanka until the industry was nationalised by the first Sirima Bandaranaike government in the early 1960s, Shell is looking forward to once again playing a major role in the petroleum industry of Sri Lanka. Buying the gas distribution arm of the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation was only a first small step in that direction.

In addition to the second gas

Buyers at the Colombo Stock Exchange.



Aiming high: an L-1011 Tristar of Air Lanka departs Katunayake.

price increase which has been widely considered malafide, there has also been a scandal of the same firm of Colombo lawyers representing both Shell and the vendor, the Public Enterprise Reform Commission (PERC) of the government, in wrapping up the gas facility sale deal. On top of that, constituents of the government itself are becoming more vocal in their opposition to privatisation. Recently, angry employees, egged on by groups including some government MPs, obstructed the South Korean buyers of the Ceylon Steel Corporation from entering the premises. In a tense situation, nearly a thousand police-

men had to be deployed to enable the buyer to take possession of his property.

Privatisation is the cornerstone of Sri Lanka's move towards a market-oriented economy. But there has to be a trade-off between equity and efficiency. It is generally agreed that the private sector is better equipped to run commercial enterprises than the state. But profit is what private business is all about, and concerns about equity such as providing socially desirable services at affordable prices come low down the priority list of any privately owned commercial undertaking.

That is why Sri Lanka's ongoing privatisation is a walk on thin ice. It is particularly difficult on the Chandrika Kumaratunga administration in view of the socialist 'baggage' it carries as well as the history of all its coalition constituents. But the demands of the major donor agencies and of its own budget, the conviction of the president and her inner cabinet, taken together with the contemporary global view, provides little option.

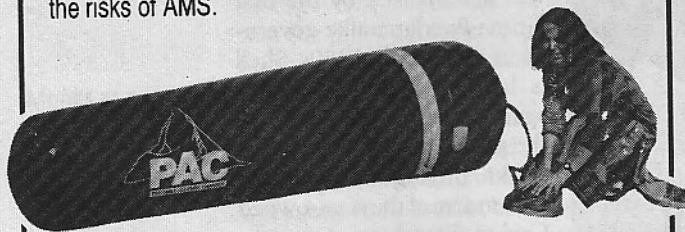
Ms Kumaratunga denounces the "crony capitalism" of her predecessor UNP administration and has even enacted special legislation to repossess some public sector undertakings sold by the previous government. She has promised transparency in continuing the privatisation process, but is confronted by determined resistance not from her political opponents but from her own friends and supporters as she moves towards partial privatisation of the Port of Colombo and some other public utilities like Sri Lanka Telecom and the Ceylon Electricity Board.

Though the journey is going to be along a tight rope, it is a trip that has to be made. President Kumaratunga has clearly made her choice and though the progress may be slower than she would wish, the direction has been clearly charted. ▲

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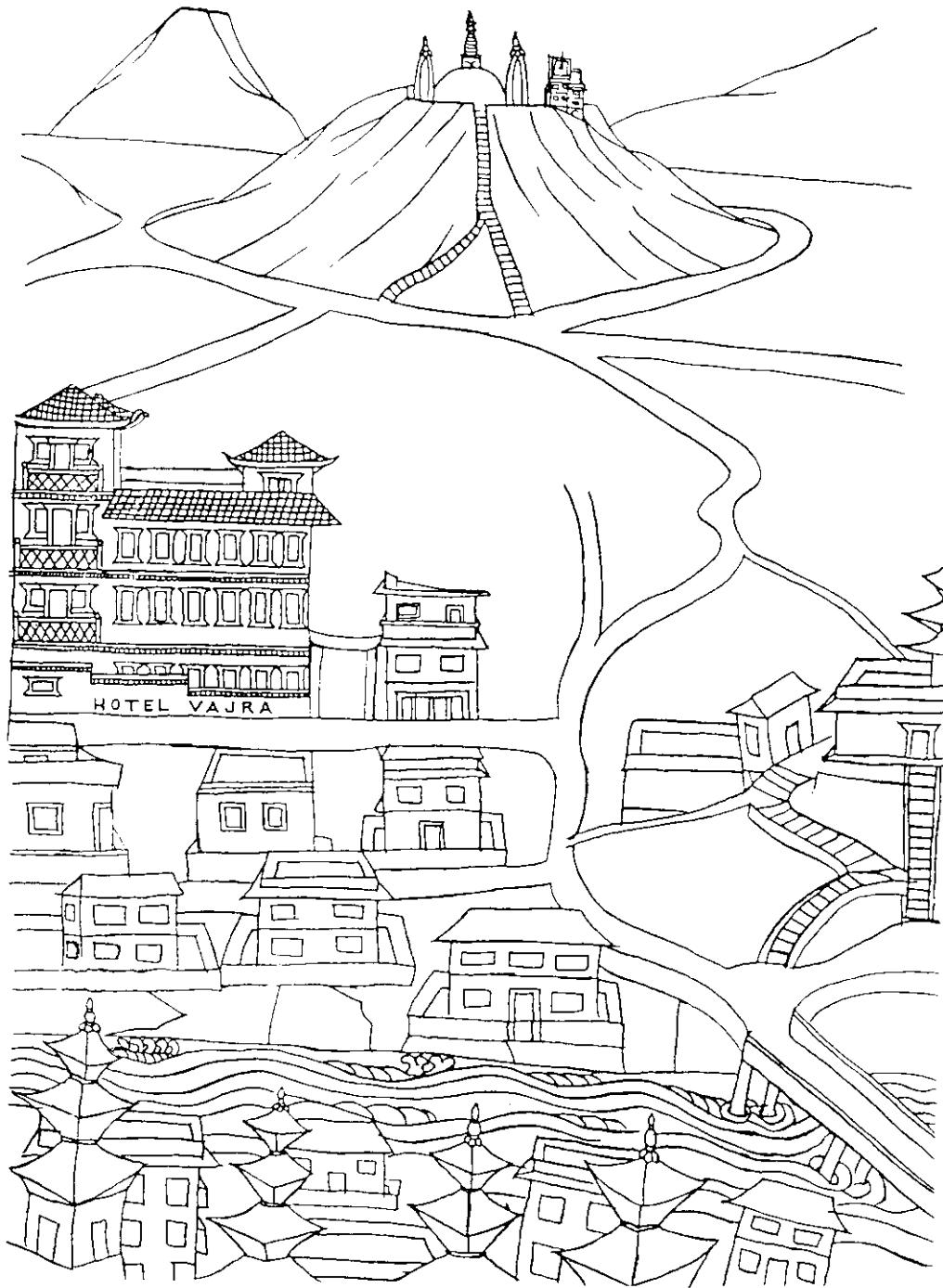
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## ECONOMY

# A Mixed Bag for 1997

*Sri Lanka's economy in 1996 was pounded by soaring defence spending, power cuts and political unrest. Why, then, are the planners bullish about the coming year.*

by Mohan Samarasinghe

Planners in Colombo's Central Bank say that the Sri Lankan economy should rebound in 1997. They are pinning their hopes on recent victories scored against the Tamil rebels on the ground coupled with less capital expenditure anticipated for defence, and a general improvement in investor and market sentiments. According to R.A. Jayatissa, head of the Bank's economic research unit, the inflation rate, GDP growth and the balance of payments will require close scrutiny in the months ahead. "Our primary target is to achieve sustainable GDP growth of at least seven percent from 1998 onwards and contain inflation to about six percent."

To do that, the country must achieve intermediate targets, such as money supply growth of about 16 percent, compared to the current 12 percent, and reduce the budget deficit to 7.3 percent of GDP in 1997. GDP growth is expected to dip to about 4 percent in 1996, down from 5.5 percent in 1995 and 5.6 percent in 1994.

The budget deficit in 1996 is thought to have been just below nine percent of GDP, compared to 8.4 percent in the year previous. Annualised inflation in 1996 stood at 15.9 percent. Mr Jayatissa says the ratio of investment to GDP this year will have to rise to 30 percent from 24.5 percent last year, with the majority coming from the private sector.

The Central Bank believes inflation could be slowed, despite a recent easing of monetary policy, because industrial production and agricultural output were expected to rise. The Bank relaxed monetary policy earlier this month by cutting statutory reserves and allowing exporters foreign currency borrowings. The Bank's commitment to low rates is evident from the benchmark one year Treasury Bill yield, which fell from 19.05 percent in January 1996 to 15.28 at the end of the month. In January, the Bank

also cut its overnight repurchase rate to 11.50 percent from 12.75 percent.

The wheat subsidy and drought-related power cuts are cited as the reasons for recent budgetary problems. Spending on wheat subsidies was cut in 1996 by raising the retail price of a kilogram of flour by five rupees (nine dollar cents) to 16.95 rupees (30 dollar cents). "Last year's power cuts reduced company profits and was one of the main reasons for the market's poor performance," says Rajiv Casiechitty, research manager at Colombo brokerage CT Smith.

The threat of power cuts, indeed, is very much in the minds of investors as they look ahead to 1997. More than 85 percent of Sri Lanka's power needs are met by hydro-electricity generated by hydro reservoirs based in the hill country, which has seen little rain for the second year in a row.

Last year, Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), the state power utility was forced to introduce daily eight-hour power cuts during the height of the drought, temporarily shutting out many of the island's small and medium businesses and industries. The CEB says it seeks to increase its thermal power generation capacity to account for about 50 percent of total output, which would technically tide over the hydro shortage.

"Considering all this and conservative production estimates for 1997, we do not expect major slippages in the budget," says the Central Bank's Jayatissa. But analysts warned that soaring defence spending, one of the main factors that hobbled the economy in 1996, may continue to be high this year too.

Defence spending in 1995 rose to 34 billion rupees (USD 629 million) from the budgeted figure of 24 billion (USD 444 million) as the government's war with the separatist LTTE got into high gear. Defence was the single biggest item of expenditure in

the country in 1995 and the budgeted figure for 1996 is 38 billion rupees (USD 703 million). It is expected that around 44 billion rupees (USD 771 million) will be spent on arms in 1997.

However, analysts are not optimistic of the government keeping to this budgeted expenditure, not after the air force lost three planes (and one drone) during the first two months of this year. In this short span, an Antonov-32 transport, a Chinese-built Y-12 transport aircraft, and an Israeli-built Kfir fighter jet went down in various places.

Air Vice Marshall Anslem Peiris, the air force chief, said the loss of the aircraft, though great, would not be allowed to affect "the government's strategy of militarily defeating the LTTE". But, a private sector analyst said: "Ours is a small air force and it is going to need new planes if it is to play its role in the government's war plan. The bottom line is we will have to buy a few planes this year and they will be expensive."

While the government is losing money in the air, however, it is making gains on the ground against the rebels. The military made its latest breakthrough in the war on 21 February when it captured a key highway linking two northern towns, effectively limiting the rebels' movements in an area which was once dominated by them.

"Each military gain makes the government look good and in control," says the analyst. "Basically, that is what makes an economy tick. It improves investor confidence." The Sri Lankan capital has not been disturbed by rebel attacks for nearly eight months and is seeing a gradual improvement in the mood as the war is confined to corners in the north and east.

However, "investor confidence" may still be clouded if next month's local government elections turn violent, say observers. The 21 March polls, the first test of popularity for the ruling People's Alliance since coming to power in September 1994, has already been marred by the killing of a young ruling party legislator. This was followed by two days of rioting. As Mr Casiechitty says: "Elections are periods of violence, low productivity and damage to infrastructure."

M. Samarasinghe is a Colombo-based journalist.





ANURUDHA LOKUHARARACHCHI

# Not Just Tea and Coconuts

*With improved bilateral relations and some positive trends in commerce between the two countries, Sri Lanka and India together might just show the way to the brave new world of SAPTA, then SAFTA.*

by J. Srinivasan

The highlight of Foreign Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's visit to Sri Lanka in early February was India's unilateral move to lower tariff barriers on 70 to 80 Sri Lankan items under the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) umbrella. Even though the results of this concession will be some time in coming, there is clearly a new chapter opening in the trade relations between the neighbours in the south of the Subcontinent.

To begin with, so far as heightened economic relations are dependent upon better political atmospheres, the Gujral Doctrine of developing non-reciprocal relationships (of which the lowering of tariff barriers was also a part) is definitely clearing the air between New Delhi and Colombo.

Indeed, bilateral relations have come a long way since the 1970s and 1980s when the ethnic tensions and clashes in Sri Lanka were at their height, and India was dragged in because of the cultural links in India of the Tamils fighting for a separate state. The relations hit rock-bottom during and after deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) and its "tragic post-script", as political commentator Nikhil Chakravorty put it, was the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. The IPKF episode and the assassination vitiated the atmosphere such that, as *The Hindu* wrote, "the other tracks of varied relations had remained in deep freeze..."

But after the visit of Mr Gujral, as the same newspaper commented, "the Indo-Sri Lankan relations are set to emerge from the shadow of the recent past. By placing them on a broader framework, distancing them from the wretched ethnic issue, Mr Gujral has helped bring a measure of balance to the bilateral ties. Years of mutual suspicion and fears are now overcome... The stage has thus been set for the relations to be put back on the rails in their diversity..."

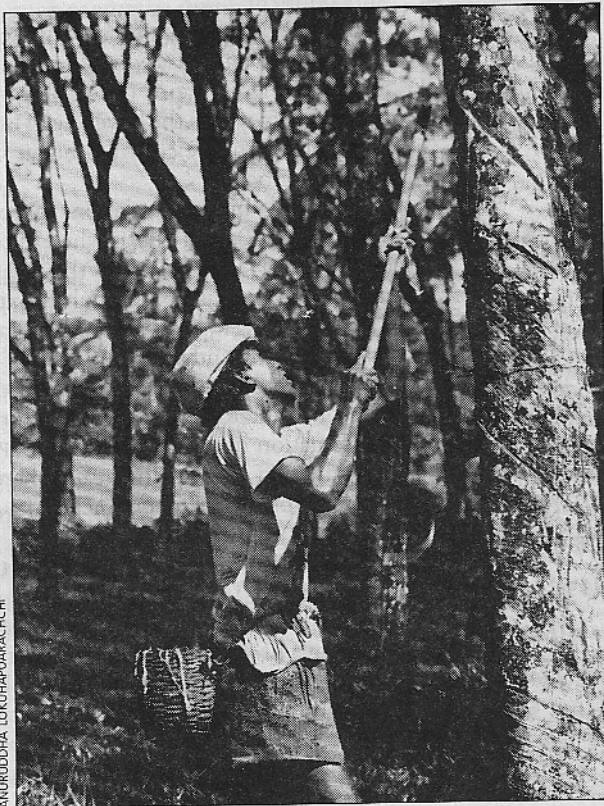
### The Nearer North

Colombo has been chafing under a severe adverse trade balance, with its imports from India soaring to USD 450 million annually while exports are stagnating at USD 35 million. The trend is clear from the fact that India's export to import ratio with Sri Lanka, 4:1 in 1989-90, was 15:1 in 1995-96.

Mr Gujral's gesture in Colombo was but a first step towards improving economic ties between the two countries, which needs to be followed up with initiatives by both sides to build synergies rather than to compete with each other in the world market. A major aspect of Indo-Sri Lankan trade, one that tilts the trade balance against Colombo, is that India does not want the commodities on offer from Sri Lanka because it is itself a major producer and exporter of these items.

Thus, while there is a ready market in Sri Lanka for Indian vehicles and transport equipment (these constituted 22 percent of the total exports to Sri Lanka in 1994-95), machinery (7 percent), glass, cement and ceramics (7 percent), cotton yarn and fabrics (14 percent), and metal products (2 percent), Sri Lanka's major export items of tea (the country exports 95 per cent of its production), rubber and coconut are not important for India. From Sri Lanka, India imports mainly scrap metals followed by foodstuffs.

While Sri Lanka earlier looked Westward for automobiles and machinery, and towards East Asia for supplies, with growing improvement in the quality of Indian products, Colombo has started looking to its nearer north. India can expect to gain a considerable market in Sri Lanka, particularly for its fast-expanding automobile sector, if Sri Lanka were to cut the tariff rates, which in some cases are stiff. Presently, because of easier terms for used vehicles, Sri Lanka is over-run with



ANURIDDHA LOKUHARACHCHI

re-conditioned Japanese imports.

As much as India, Sri Lanka seeks a market with its neighbour. This is where the lowered preferential tariffs under SAPTA would come into use. In addition, India and Sri Lanka are both signatories of the Bangkok Agreement (which also includes Bangladesh, South Korea, Papua New Guinea and Laos), under whose framework New Delhi has extended substantial tariff concessions in respect of 66 items.

But more than these concessions, it is joint ventures with Indian companies which would perhaps be of more interest to Sri Lanka in its relations with India's larger economy. This would help Colombo expand its production and supply base while allowing Indian entrepreneurs access to raw materials and market. In fact, Sri Lanka has already attracted a number of Indian business houses in sectors as diverse as engineering, chemicals, travel and tourism, hotels, automobiles and textiles.

There is already considerable Indian involvement in the Lankan economy, for example, the turnkey construction of a sugar factory by an Indian company (KCP Ltd) under the ADB aegis; operation of public sector textile mills under management contract; contract for hotel management (by the Oberoi chain); consultancy services for improvement of the railway system; and construction of oil storage tanks, also on a turnkey basis. While a number of big corporate houses such as Jay Engineering Works, Colour-Chem, Voltas International and Ashok Leyland have joint ventures, Apollo Hospitals are looking to building a giant facility in Sri Lanka, and MRF is reportedly looking at putting up a tyre unit.

Indian entrepreneurs venturing to Sri Lanka have faced the problem of payments, but things are likely to improve with Mr Gujral having offered a line of credit worth USD 15 million. An earlier tranche of a similar amount, as part of a USD 30 million aid package sanctioned last January, was used up largely to buy passenger buses.

### Competition over Tea

While more and more Indian enterprises are going in to take advantage of the liberalising Sri Lankan economy, the same cannot be said for Sri Lankan businessmen wanting to set up units in India. With the problem of militancy persisting, Indian authorities have been suspicious about the bona fides of some of the applicants and preferred to err on the side of safety. However, according to a trade source, this can be "sorted out" by involving the chambers of commerce and government agencies in the screening process.

The best opportunity for joint Indo-Lankan effort is perhaps offered in the tea sector where both countries are competitors. Though India is the larger producer of tea, Sri Lanka has now replaced India as the number one exporter, capturing 22 per cent of the world market. Tea was a complete government monopoly in Sri Lanka till 1992, when the government opened up the industry enough to allow management by the private sector. Under private management, which included Indian corporates, Sri Lanka's tea production improved from 179 million kg in 1983 to 231 million kg in 1993, according to Colombo's Finance Ministry data. The improvement was also in quality, and Lanka tea was soon competing with South

Indian teas in the global market. Its advantage is that Sri Lanka produces up to 12 varieties of flavoured teas, including a mango flavour.

Partly affected by Sri Lanka's robust showing, India's tea exports dropped to 150 million kg in 1993-94 from 215 million kg in 1991-92. Colombo's coup actually came the year when Russia, which had till then been India's major buyer, began purchasing its teas from Sri Lanka, lured by the liberal line of credit offered (often up to one year) and the Bank of Ceylon writing off several bad debts. In fact, such is the demand for Sri Lankan tea that Indian varieties are now imported and re-exported under its brand equity. At times, the competition between the two industries has been ugly, as for instance when the Indian industry organised a seminar on South Indian versus Sri Lankan teas.

This kind of scrabbling is best avoided, as the buyers then make much capital of it. Much better, for the two countries to come together and take advantage of their pre-eminent position as tea producers. Tea consumption is growing steadily in India, and it is said that by 2005, the country may be consuming all of its production. It would therefore make sense for India to import some quantities from Sri Lanka for domestic consumption, releasing its superior varieties for export. Another idea that has been floated is to set up joint projects to blend Indian and Sri Lankan teas in a 1:4 ratio for export. Indian tea producers are interested in such collaboration, and companies such as Tata Tea have entered Sri Lanka by buying equity stakes in plantations.

According to a paper prepared by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the two countries can also benefit by co-operating in the areas of natural rubber, cloves, chemicals, transport and automobiles, railways and tourism.

There is also said to be considerable opportunity in shipping. Even now, most foreign vessels trans-ship at the Colombo port which offers faster turnaround than

nearby Indian ports, but to make better use of this facility the ferry service to India needs to be strengthened. The Tuticorin-Colombo port ferry, suspended at the height of Tamil militant activity, is to be restored and this should help particularly the small traders who were badly hit when this link was snapped.

As important as restoring the ferry service would be ensuring a rationalisation of freight rates, which get skewed because of the large one-way flows. The FICCI paper suggests a circular route involving India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, which would consolidate cargo movements.

### South Asian Harbinger

Clearly there exist considerable synergies for the two countries to take advantage of. Hopefully, the visit of Mr Gujral and activated SAPTA will improve the trade ties. According to a study on India-Sri Lanka Economic Cooperation by the World Institute for Development Economics and Research (WIDER), "closer market integration of Sri Lanka and India through the extension of reciprocal trade preferences can be expected to lead to welfare gains from trade creation based on existing state comparative advantages."

In a "free-trade" world which is actually witnessing increasing bloc formation, South Asia must not be left behind. Already, much time has been lost in quibbling between South Asian neighbours, which has been to the detriment of the regional economy as a whole. For those who would like to see the SAARC organisation activated as an effective trading bloc, the economic promises held out by the Indo-Lankan rapprochement is something to pin hopes on. It should provide a solid leg to the visualised edifice of regional trade. △

*J. Srinivasan is Assistant Editor with the Madras-based Business Line.*

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# Maldives, Sri Lanka and the "India Factor"

*Colombo has been a "traditional friend" and New Delhi a "friend in need" of this strategic yet vulnerable republic, the smallest member of SAARC.*

by *Ravinatha Aryasinha*

**T**here is no record of when the first settlers arrived in the Maldives. It is thought that an original Dravidian population from South India settled here as early as the 4th century BC, and that two millennia ago a second wave of settlers, Aryans from India and Ceylon, eventually dominated the islands. The Maldivian language, Divehi, is Indo-Aryan in origin, and Buddhism was the religion here till AD 1153, when the king was converted to Islam by a travelling Moroccan saint and the entire country adopted the Muslim religion.

Unlike its nearest neighbours India and Sri Lanka, the Maldives has suffered little direct foreign domination. Over the centuries, the islanders repulsed attempts made by the Portuguese, the Malabar potentates and others to control their atoll. All along, the contact with the outside world tended to be through Sri Lanka, although the Maldivian sultans enjoyed good relations with the Moghul empire as well.

In December 1887, confronted with internal skirmishes fanned by Indian Bohra merchants based in Colombo, the Sultan of Maldives signed an agreement recognising the suzerainty of the British. Patterned after the treaties the British signed with some Indian princes and the Himalayan kingdoms, the agreement recognised British monopoly over foreign affairs but provided for non-intervention in domestic affairs. The British authorities in Colombo left this protectorate in "splendid isolation" until 1932, when, following a court rebellion, Sultan Muhammad Sams-ud-Din Iskander III renounced some of the royal prerogatives held for 800 years. He introduced the Maldives' first written constitution, which largely resembled the Donoughmore Constitution of Sri Lanka of 1931.

On the eve of Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Male was eager to assert its independent identity vis-a-vis Colombo. The rulers were particularly conscious that about 90 percent of the country's trade was with Sri

Lanka, in particular the export of Maldivian Fish ('Blood fish', coated in ash and dried in direct sunlight, which is used in Sri Lankan cuisine along with spices) and import of rice. Besides the excessive economic dependence on Colombo, Male also feared that Sri Lankans would try to play the role of king-makers in the atoll.

The Maldivian fear of "Indian penetration", going back to the harassment suffered in previous centuries from the Malabar coast, may also have weighed in favour of the decision to enter into a political alliance with a remote power. Thus, in 1948, the Maldives became a protectorate of Britain. (Back in World War II, the Maldives was an important link in allied defences and had hosted a British military base on Gan island.)

The Sultanate was abolished in 1953 by Amin Didi, who attempted to introduce a republican form of government under which he became President. Although he lasted less than a year in office, Didi is regarded as the "father of Maldivian nationalism" for having set the backward atoll's course for modernisation. A coup returned the Maldives to a sultanate in 1954, but three years later Ibrahim Nasir became President of the Second Republic. Nasir, who ruled with an iron hand until he stepped down in 1978, presided over an expansion of Male's relations with the world and also the diversification of the economy, including into tourism. He was succeeded by Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who is currently in his fourth five-year Presidential term and widely expected to run for Presidency for another term in 1998.

Maldives was granted independence by the British in 1965, and for the first time in a century the country was able to chart out her destiny on matters related to defence and foreign affairs. Initially, the country's involvement in the international fora was in a low key. Part of the reason was the continued lease of Maldivian 'Gan' island as a British military base, which became vital to the British following the Sri Lankan Government of S.W.R.D

Bandaranaike seeking the withdrawal of British Bases in Sri Lanka in 1957. However the premature termination of the Gan lease agreement and closure of British bases in 1976, helped consolidate Maldivian independence and "self image" in no mean measure.

The credibility of the Maldives, as a small power eager to retain her autonomy and independent status, appeared to have grown due to its consistent refusal in later years to permit the use of Gan island for anything remotely resembling a militaristic purpose. In 1977, Male refused a USD 1 million offer from the Soviet Union to use the island for its fishing fleets, and later it rejected a suggestion of hosting a "recreational facility" for American troops based in Diego Gracia. Similarly, in 1982 Male rejected a Singaporean firm's bid to buy the Maldivian fish catch only because it was to use Soviet ships.

Male followed this stance of strict non-alignment even on issues of regional security. Thus, she supported the proposal backed by Colombo and New Delhi to declare the Indian Ocean a Zone of Peace, the Pakistan-initiated Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone in South Asia, as well as the now-lapsed proposal to declare Nepal a Zone of Peace.

### Male, Colombo and Delhi

Male's demonstrated abhorrence to extra-regional intrusions won it some degree of admiration in New Delhi, which is why India has assisted the Maldivian development efforts since the country secured independence. However, until 1988, India's involvement in the Maldives was limited and was confined to the socio-economic spheres, such as the offer of scholarships to students under the Colombo Plan, maritime cooperation, modernisation of transportation, cultural affairs, and so on.

The Indo-Maldivian relationship was devoid of irritants which affect India's relations with its other neighbours, such as border problems, presence of persons of Indian origin, spillover of internal conflagrations, economic competition, or the fear of intervention. The only flutter recorded was over the issue of Minicoy Islands, when during the 1982 Independence Day celebrations President Gayoom's brother Abdullah Hameed declared it was part of the Maldives. Soon afterwards, the President had to clarify that the reference was to affirm the religious, linguistic and cultural affinity between the Maldives and Minicoy, and that the Maldives was not laying any political claims on the Indian island.

While Sri Lanka's role in providing economic and technical assistance to the Maldives may not have been as impressive as India's, Colombo, to quote President Gayoom, remained "the Maldives' gateway to the world". Male's greater emphasis on relations with Colombo rather than New Delhi is clear from the fact that

other than for New York, Colombo was (and is) the only capital that the Maldives has resident diplomatic representation. Colombo was also the place where most affluent Maldivians had their secondary school education, and where they headed for holidays or medical treatment.

Sri Lanka dominated trade with the atoll state until the early 1970s, providing 65 percent of Male's imports from the South Asian region (India's share was only 32 percent). Further, 10 percent of the country's exports was to Sri Lanka, whereas India's share was a negligible 0.03 percent. As of 1988, it was Sri Lanka and not India that had a greater involvement with the Maldives—economically, diplomatically, politically and culturally.

### Coup Attempt

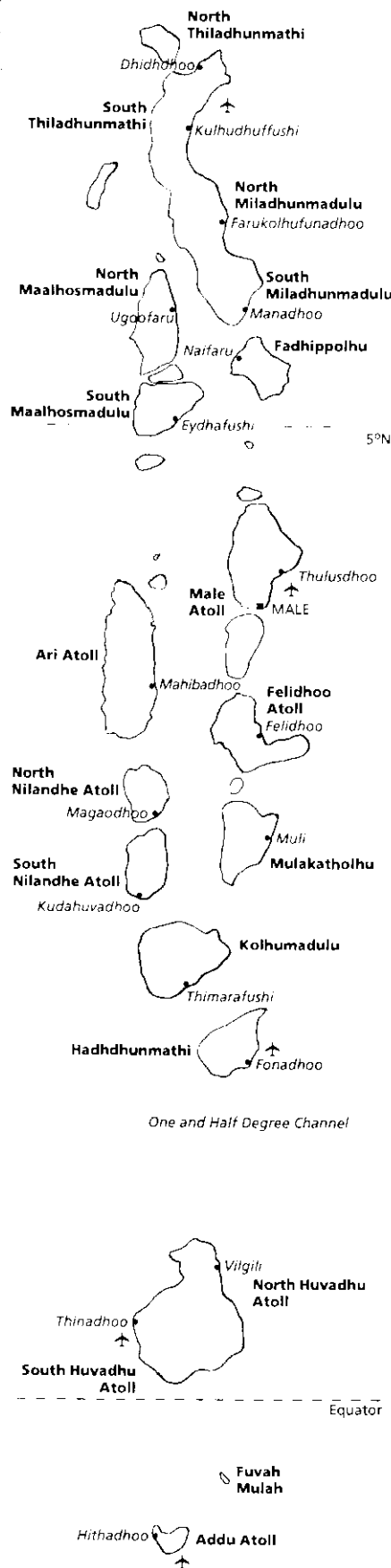
The cathartic moment for the Maldives in the modern era was 3 November 1988, a week before President Gayoom was to be inaugurated for a third term. Two Colombo-based dissident businessmen from the Maldives, Abdullah Luthfi and Sagar Nasir, along with about 80 Tamil mercenaries belonging to the left-wing People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), one of the five major Sri Lankan Tamil guerrilla groups of the time, attempted to overthrow the Gayoom regime.

The Maldives had no army or navy. Its all-purpose National Security Service (NSS), 1400 strong at the time, was able to hold off the intruders to allow President Gayoom to phone Colombo and seek urgent assistance. Sri Lanka's preparations to fly 150 of its elite police special task force were abandoned, however, when it was known that an Indian force was already on its way to Male.

The takeover bid ended after nightfall the same day when some 1600 Indian commandos reached Male by air and sea. The mercenaries were captured while fleeing with hostages. Altogether 20 were killed in the coup attempt, and 68, including four Maldivians, were captured. Of them, 16, the Maldivians included, received death sentences which were later commuted to life imprisonment.

The motivation for the attempted coup is still not clear. Former President Ibrahim Nasir, living in Singapore since 1973, strongly denied his involvement. At his trial, Mr Luthfi claimed that he had been a "victim of circumstances" and that the coup was funded by the Marxists of PLOTE, who wanted a secure base from which to fight Colombo. In retrospect, the coup attempt may well have been an attempt by the Maldivian dissidents to capture the reins of power while giving PLOTE certain economic benefits and an operational base.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi told the Indian Parliament that he saw the event as having "provided an opportunity for India to assist a friendly country and frustrate an attempt to



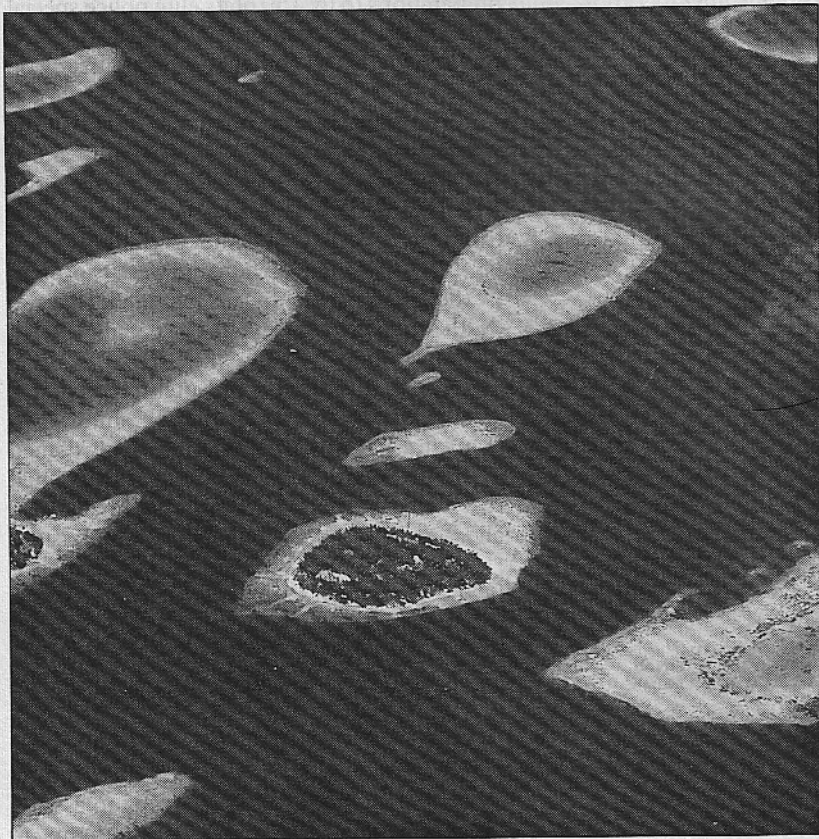
overthrow a democratically elected government." While the big powers, including the United States, endorsed India's intervention, the world media interpreted the action as indicative of "the scale of its ambitions in South Asia", as *Time* magazine observed, a confirmation of India's growing role as a regional superpower cum policeman.

In Sri Lanka, while the Jayewardene government breathed a sigh of relief that Male's ordeal had ended peacefully, *The Island* daily observed that "it would be ostrich-like to ignore the fear of small nations of South Asia, about current developments providing opportunities for what has been described as the spread of Indian hegemonism." *Time* also noted that, there was similar disquiet among India's other neighbours, although the governments of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal endorsed India's action. Pakistan, however, was critical, even accusing India of having "stage-managed the coup attempt".

Indian diplomats and political analysts find such criticism unfair and point to the fact that it was Male that sought New Delhi's help. A.K. Banarjee, who served as India's High Commissioner in Male during the crucial 1987-1989 period, but was out of station in Delhi the day the coup took place, observes that "to the contrary, despite traditional cordial relations, the importance of the Maldives to India was not fully appreciated in Delhi until the coup, and it is the possibility that the Maldives could have turned elsewhere for help that subsequently established Male in New Delhi's psyche".

As Jasjit Singh, Director of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, observes, "The lack of dramatic initiatives on Male in the past is consistent with New Delhi's attitude to act with a degree of hesitancy and caution not only in bilateral relations with her smaller

Islands in the sun: small population, big prospects.



neighbours but even in SAARC in general, so as to avoid being misunderstood as attempting to wield an over-bearing influence on them."

### Game of Zero-Sum

If the coup attempt brought India and the Maldives closer together, it also inversely affected relations between the Maldives and Sri Lanka, if not at the official, at least at the public level. Following the overthrow attempt, Sri Lankans who had been integrally part of the country's development came under heavy suspicion. Many were required to leave, and a visa requirement was also imposed on Sri Lankans visiting Male.

President Gayoom made an attempt to quell anti-Sri Lankan feelings by telling Parliament that "although the mercenaries were a Sri Lankan terrorist group this would in no way harm the long and friendly relations between the two countries." He also observed elsewhere that the special relationship Male was developing with New Delhi should not affect the ties with neighbouring Colombo.

In spite of such pronouncements, in the immediate aftermath of the abortive coup, it was not possible to avoid viewing the improved relations between Male and New Delhi and the cooling off of relations between Male and Colombo as a 'zero-sum' affair. The stalemate regarding the venue of the Fifth SAARC Summit of 1990 (ultimately held in Male rather than Colombo) was also indication of the extent to which relations had soured. There was also dissatisfaction in Male about the Premadasa Administration's decision to release the convicted militants of the PLOTE group, who had been deported to Colombo to serve out their sentences at the request of the Sri Lankan government.

There was a sharp decline in Sri Lankan involvement in the Maldivian economy immediately after the coup attempt, as a result of the changed attitude towards Sri Lankans. Colombo's exports to the Male dropped in value terms from USD 8.2 million in 1988 to USD 5.8 million in 1989.

This apparent 'marginalisation' appears even more obvious when juxtaposed against the dramatic changes in relations with India since 1988. While in earlier times Indo-Maldives relations had grown largely within the broader framework of SAARC cooperation, since 1988 it has had a momentum of its own. In 1990, Male's Foreign Minister Fathulla Jameel went as far as to say that his country is keen to forge a "model friendship" with India, and President Gayoom said that the relationship with India was "unmatched by any other country".

There has been unprecedented growth in Indian projects in the atoll republic, including a 200-bed Indira Gandhi Memorial Hospital, supply of Doordarshan programmes for rebroadcast on Maldives TV, increased frequency of flights to Male, and additional scholarships provided to Maldivian students. While only 382 Maldivians visited India in 1982, the number had risen to 6804 by 1989. There was a nearly four-fold increase in bilateral trade between 1987 and 1989, largely due to the increase of Indian imports, which increased in value terms from USD 1.4 million in 1987 to USD 5.3 million in 1989.

It is this seemingly conscious 'shutting out' of Sri Lanka from a country which had for a long period continued to draw sustenance on her, and the dramatic

'opening up' to Indian goods and services that made it unavoidable to view the Indo-Maldives and Maldives-Sri Lanka relationships as a zero-sum game.

### Back to Old Times

The process of restoring normalcy in Maldives-Sri Lanka relations was facilitated by an exchange of visits between President Gayoom and President Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1991. As a first step, visa restrictions imposed on Sri Lankans were removed. Subsequent years saw a re-building of economic relations, which have also improved considerably following President Chandrika Kumaratunga's assumption of office in August 1994.

Colombo's exports have also progressively increased in value terms from USD 11 million 1992 to USD 15.2 million in 1995, though it is significant that Indian exports during the same period grew from USD 12.4 million in 1992 to USD 31 million in 1995. Sri Lanka is today the fourth-largest exporter to the Maldives, behind Singapore, India and the UAE. Lankan investments in the Maldivian garment, tourism and fisheries sectors have increased significantly and the Sri Lankan workforce has once again picked up in size and today stands at approximately 10,000 in the government and private sectors.

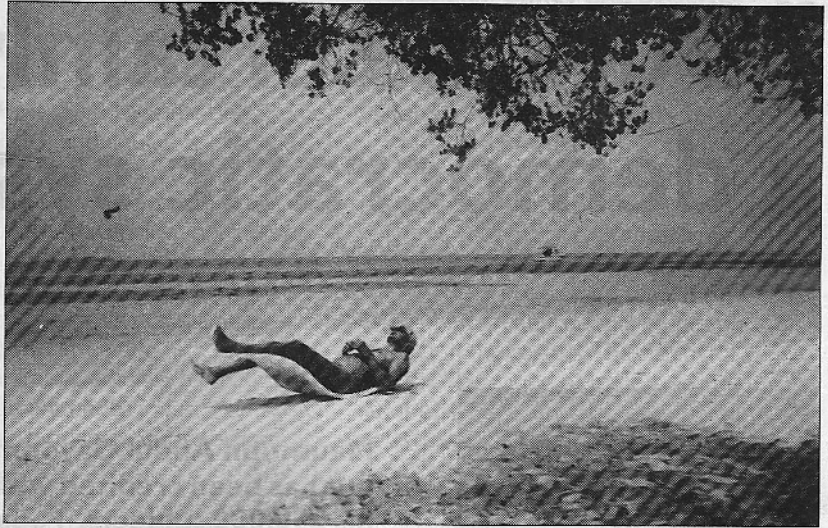
Bilaterally, the most significant achievement was the amicable resolution of the problems caused by Sri Lankan fishermen poaching in Maldivian waters. Colombo has gone to great lengths to educate Lankan fishermen not to venture into Maldivian waters, and, in January 1997, Foreign Minister Jameel confirmed that there has been no poaching in recent times. This act has been seen by the Maldives as an example of great sensitivity shown by Sri Lanka in a spirit of "good neighbourliness" to a serious concern of a neighbour.

It is fortunate that the 'marginalisation' of Sri Lanka in the 1988-1990 period was not to be a permanent feature, and with the current improvement in Indo-Sri Lanka relations it is no longer necessary to view the two relationships as zero-sum. However, there is no doubt that the momentum lost by Colombo subsequent to the coup attempt and the undue advantage derived by India in the process, are likely to take a considerable time to level off, particularly in the economic field.

### Global Warming, Small State

As it moves towards the 21st century, there appears to be many a hurdle the Maldives will have to overcome, despite the socio-economic advances made. The economy is presently growing at almost 7 percent per annum. GDP has increased six-fold since President Gayoom assumed office in 1978, to a projected USD 191 million for 1996. GDP per capita during that period has risen five-fold to USD 768, among the highest in South Asia. However, the need for greater diversification of sources of income remains a priority, in this state where tourism and fisheries remain the key national industries.

Faced as it is with grave environmental threats resulting from global warming, which some experts fear could result in this nation being flooded out of existence 70 years hence, the Maldivian authorities are giving high priority to promoting "environment friendly tourism". Coral mining is banned, and certain marine species are



protected to keep the atoll's reputation for good diving. Foreign Minister Jameel insists that "the Maldives is not sinking, but that it is the sea level that is rising". He is also emphatic that Maldivians are not contemplating running to some other country as environmental refugees. "All we can do is to sensitise the world population and governments and hope that action be taken to slow the global warming process," he says.

Still no doubt affected by memories of the 1988 coup attempt and also somewhat wary of dependence on a single country in an hour of crisis, Male's foreign policy concentrates on mustering support of the international community towards evolving a mechanism to protect small states in the event of external threat. A Maldivian resolution to this effect was adopted without a vote by the UN General Assembly in October 1989. The Maldivian position is that "the security and protection of small states must be accepted as an integral part of international security and peace".

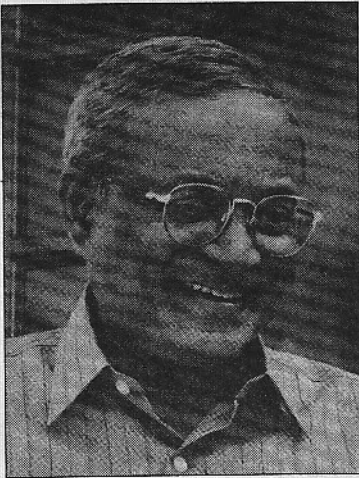
The principal challenge before the Male regime, however, is handling the quest for greater modernisation coupled with economic liberalisation and democratisation. The Gayoom administration has in recent years come under increasing pressure from opposite sides, those who seek greater liberalisation of society as well as conservative forces who would like to emphasise the country's "Islamic identity".

The Maldives, which assumes the Chairmanship of SAARC in May 1997, would also wish to use this forum, where it has uncontroversial relations with all other member states, to further its own interests. This would include cushioning the ill-effects of the dangers it faces through collective regional action. President Gayoom's traditional ability as a "synthesist" will no doubt be put to its greatest test in meeting the many challenges before Maldivian society. In this quest, both Sri Lanka, a "traditional friend", and India, which came to be its "friend in need", would continue to play an important role. △

*R. Aryasinha is a scholar and diplomat, presently Spokesman of the Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry. This article is an updated adaptation of an earlier one which appeared in the book, India's Relations with Her South Asian Neighbours Other than Sri Lanka, Colombo, BCIS/Swedeshi, 1992. The opinions expressed here are the writer's own.*

At Club Med in Maldives: no more good times after the globe warms up.

# "Ours is certainly a democratic system..."



**Maumoon Abdul Gayoom rules his atoll nation with a firm hand, but has been credited with bringing unprecedented prosperity to his 250,000 subjects. Today, the Maldives has the best standard of living among South Asian countries: the highest life expectancy, near-100 percent literacy and the lowest infant mortality rate. Mr Gayoom has also tried to give the Maldives a higher international profile, and he will once again be chairing SAARC after its Summit in Male in May. Gayoom spoke to HIMAL South Asia recently about various issues relating to his country, including governance.**

## **On what President Gayoom set out to do when he first assumed office in 1978 and whether he is satisfied with what has been achieved.**

When I first took office as President in 1978, my main objective was to lay a strong foundation for the economic, social and political development of the country. I wanted to provide better health care, promote education, stimulate economic development and try to bridge the gap between Male and the atolls. In general, I wished to see the people enjoy a higher standard of living and a greater participation in the political process.

Our achievements on the whole have been extremely satisfactory. I am particularly pleased that we have been able to maintain an economic growth of around 8-10 percent for the past fifteen years. Our GDP has increased six-fold from around USD 30.5 million in 1978 to USD 191.5 million at present. The GDP per capita has, in the same period, grown from USD 160 to USD 768. In the area of social development too, we have made a lot of progress. Life expectancy at birth has been raised

from 46 to 70 years, while infant mortality has been reduced from 127 to 32 per thousand. We covered universal child immunisation by 1990. We have attained a functional literacy rate of 98 percent.

The political system has been liberalised. Authority has been decentralised, and ministers have been given more powers. Freedom of expression and freedom of the press have been ensured within the limits of the law. To allow for more political reforms, the Constitution is currently being revised.

## **On the yearning among many young and educated Maldivians exposed to Western values for a Westminster or Western-style democracy.**

Though it had been a British protectorate for almost 80 years, the Maldives had never been under direct British political influence. Our political system has, through the years, evolved on national lines. There could be some people who would like the Maldives to adopt a Westminster-style democracy, but I doubt very much that the

majority would want that. Indeed, during the recent debate on the revision of the relevant section of the Constitution, most members of the Citizens' Special Majlis were not in favour of changing the present system.

Our electoral process does differ from that of Western-style democracy. Nevertheless, ours is certainly a democratic system. Free and fair elections for the presidency and for Parliament are held every five years. If the concern is because we have no political parties, I have to say that in a small, closely knit homogeneous society like ours, the pros and cons of having party politics must be weighed carefully before venturing into an hitherto unknown world. In fact, some foreign leaders who have visited the Maldives and compared the political stability and harmony here to the continued political unrest in many developing countries with multi-party systems, have expressed their view that we should preserve our unique political system that has served us so well. However, our laws do not prevent people from forming political parties if they want to.



**About whether he is wary of the dangers of moving too fast too soon in strengthening the democratic system in the Maldives.**

The Maldives enjoyed democratic traditions even before independence. Our first Constitution was adopted in 1932. As I have said, I want to establish a more liberal form of government. The Constitution is being redrafted in its entirety by the Citizens' Special Majlis to ensure that. It is not an easy task. So, it is taking time. However, a number of chapters have already been redrafted and passed.

**Does he intend to seek a new term of office when his fourth term as president expires in 1998?**

I haven't given much thought to that matter yet. After all, it is the people who will decide whom they want to lead them into the next century.

**On the economic strategy followed by his government and plans for the future, and whether he is satisfied about the distribution of new wealth that has been created.**

My government places great emphasis on the concept of sustainable development. Currently, we are implementing the fourth national development plan in which the highest priority is given to enhancing economic growth and equitable distribution of the national product. During the past 17 years, our goals have been to promote economic diversification, increase the productivity promote economic development of the atolls and liberalise trade. We have been able to maintain economic growth at quite a high level. That has been made possible by the rapid expansion of the fisheries industry and the remarkable performance of the tourism sector. This has led to a notable increase in the standard of living throughout the country. However, my government is making further efforts to ensure better distribution of the wealth through its decentralisation policy for economic activities. Important ventures like fish-canning, frozen fish storage, garment manufacturing and boat-building are located in the atolls. Therefore, a lot of employment opportunities are made available to the people of the outlying islands, while also upgrading the health and educational facilities available to them.

**On foreign policy and SAARC.**

Our foreign policy is based on promoting international cooperation. We work towards strengthening friendly relations with those states that respect our sovereignty and national integrity. In view of this policy, we now enjoy excellent bilateral relations with many countries, large and small.

SAARC is progressing well. It has established greater people-to-people contact in the region. The signing of SAPTA and the liberalising of trade among SAARC countries is a vital achievement.

The reaction of the international community to the security concerns of small states has been positive. The unanimous adoption by the UN General Assembly of the three resolutions submitted by the Maldives on the subject proves that. The unprecedented response of the UN to the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, I would say, is also an indication that the world is sensitised to the issue. The Commonwealth also has extended a lot of support to us since the very beginning of our initiative to strengthen the security of small states.

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# Monitoring the Monitors

*Come election time in any South Asian country, organisations fuss about getting together groups to go monitor the polls. Have monitors outlived their purpose?*

by Sasanka Perera

For the last few years, every general election in a South Asian country has seen a group of individuals from the region fly off to monitor the polls. The South Asian monitors, who are mainly academics, former ambassadors, retired civil servants, society women, journalists, politicians, various kinds of retired folks, and relatives of various VIPs, have so far been hosted by Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan.

Similar monitoring groups also parachute down with predictable regularity from overseas: they come from the European Commission, from assorted North American think tanks, and the Commonwealth. They come with a pious mission of civilising and democratising the natives, flying in on the penultimate days before polling and leaving as soon as the counting is done. The high points are the meetings with the head of state, the prime minister (interim or otherwise), leaders of the political opposition, and so on. It is also enjoyable to don the photo IDs and go around booth-hopping with local liaisons and—best of all—appearing on television to declare that the polls were “generally free and fair”.

As soon as the Pakistan elections were announced last November by President

Farooq Ahmed Khan Leghari, the monitor organisations were once again scrambling to arrange the next election tourism package. As far as the SAARC region was concerned, more or less the same categories as mentioned above were put together. In and around the 3 February elections, the regional monitors spent 12 days or so in Pakistan monitoring elections, writing reports and issuing press releases.

The fact that what the SAARC monitors had to say hardly made it into the Pakistani press is a separate matter. The main reason seems to have been the presence of another monitoring group, of the Commonwealth and led by former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. The status of the Commonwealth group, representing among them the colonial forebears of South Asia, seems to have helped overshadow what the SAARC group had to say, even though possibly more important.

## Civil Society Initiative

What does all this monitoring mean in real terms? Funding for these activities come from sources outside South Asia and are channelled through various NGOs in the respective South Asian countries. All monitors get an all expenses paid, reasonably

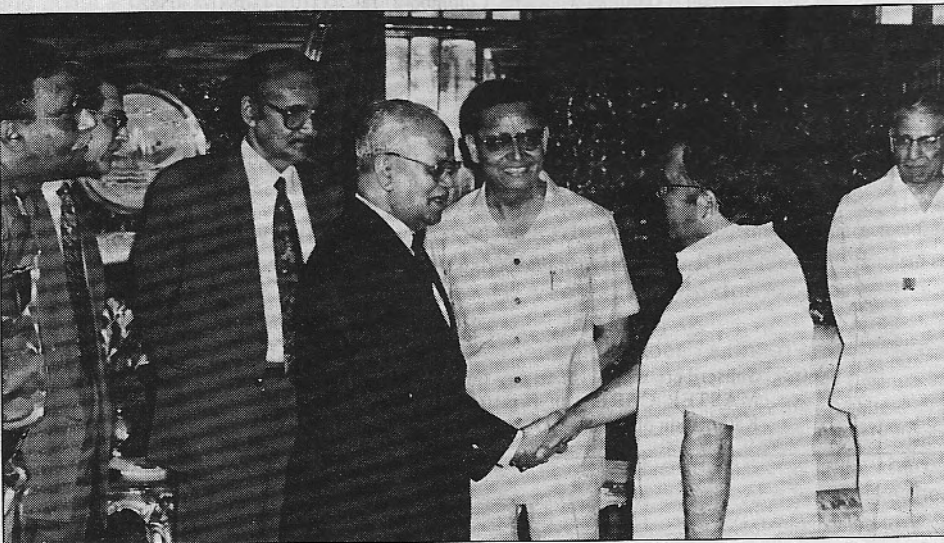
comfortable travel in a neighbouring country with a chance to visit far-flung places which would ordinarily form no part in an average traveller's itinerary. There is also some spare cash to buy a few curios from the local bazaars. Usually, a “comprehensive” report may get written, as was the partial outcome of observing the last Pakistani elections in 1993, or the Bangladesh polls of June 1996. So far so good.

But beyond this, what are the benefits of these “civil society initiatives”, as such exercises are usually termed? What does civil society in South Asia get out of all this? It is doubtful that either the monitoring or the reports that come out of such exercises have much of an impact on the way elections are conducted in South Asian countries. The political forces in each of the countries have their own agenda, and it is hard to imagine them bowing to the presence of monitors, whether regional or otherwise. At best, these forces may temper their activities in areas where the monitors do reach for momentary visits. On the other hand, regimes are likely to take quick advantage of the green signal given by monitoring teams.

Programmed as they are to pronounce polls as “generally free and fair” due to their short stint and lack of preparation, it is never clear that freedom and fairness has overwhelmingly marked an election exercise. The word ‘generally’ is introduced as a face-saving measure to take care of non-democratic practices that might have occurred followed by a few examples of minor election malpractices. There is thus the possibility that a monitoring group can derail the ‘natural’ evolution of a democratic polity—for example by providing simplistic analysis of the political situation or giving more credit than due. Local and foreign media are likely to home in on monitors—particularly Western monitors—immediately after the polls are held for quick and credible-sounding sound bites.

Those leading observer teams are sometimes long-retired (like Mr Fraser) or South Asia-oriented politicians (like former US Senator Stephen Solarz, in the case of the Bangladesh elections of last June) craving for the limelight. These gentlemen and ladies are all too willing to speak into cameras about societies and processes they are not familiar with. On average, an election observation team through its flying-squad visits is only able to say that “due process” has been followed, and not much else. Intimidation,

Monitors from Nepal and Pakistan at the presidential palace in Dhaka in June.



# Wilting of the People's Party of Pakistan

*The father delivered "middle Punjab" to the party, and the daughter had lost it all by 1997. Ideological betrayal plays its part.*

by Manzur Ejaz

At the time of Independence, the political and social elites of Pakistan came from Hindu- and Sikh-dominated urban centres of Punjab, while Muslim politics was dominated by rural feudals, large land-owners and *bradri* (caste) chieftains. After the departure of the non-Muslim elite, traditional rural feudal politicians, incapable of grasping the essentials of running a modern state, kept themselves occupied with palace conspiracies. The reins of the Pakistani state thus came to rest, by default, mostly in the hands of culturally alien migrated elites of Uttar Pradesh.

The traditional brand of politicking did not cease either in the pre-Martial Law parliamentary stunts of the 1947-1958 era, or during Ayub Khan's hybrid political system of "Basic Democracy". The mass of the population remained un-empowered. It was waiting for a new leadership to take the place of the migrated non-Muslim elites. This was the situation when the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) made its entrance and the party, founded by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, led the first-ever socio-political revolution in the heartland of Punjab, which is its real power base.

The population of middle Punjab, the non-feudal belt stretching from Khaniwal to Rawalpindi, comprising mostly of peasants, artisans and labourers at the time of Independence, was 'coming of age' when PPP was formed in late 1967. Ayub Khan's Green

Revolution in agriculture, the formation of an industrial base, rapid urbanisation and extension of educational services, had produced a significant mass of educated youth that was semi- or totally unemployed. By 1968, when Ayub Khan was celebrating ten years of his rule, the Pakistan People's Party, led by Mr Bhutto, was igniting fires in the area. The population was keen to better their lives by freeing the system from the stranglehold of the traditional feudal and bureaucratic elites. The downtrodden masses, urban poor, owner peasants living on the economic fringe and the rural poor *kammis* (menial labourers) were ready to follow the mass of politically conscious, unemployed youth, who, for their part, were ready to put their lives on the line.

The anti-Ayub Khan movement of 1968-1969, for the restoration of democracy, turned into an expression demanding economic and political change. The campaign touched every home in every town, village and hamlet in central Punjab. Provided with the revolutionary slogan of *roti, kapda aur makaan* (food, clothing and shelter) and targeting the feudalism and bureaucracy for keeping the country impoverished, this fired-up youth generated a mammoth movement in which, among others, caste system and religious sectarianism were both smashed. It was this strong momentum created by the millions of PPP workers that kept the party alive for the next 25 years.

unfortunately, does not mostly occur on the last day, within walking distance of the polling booth. If the monitors were to find time in their busy schedule to go and spend time with the people, rather than with those seeking the vote, it might be possible to see to what extent they feel empowered. Here, what I have in mind is an extended exercise somewhat like anthropological field work, which would invariably take more time and as such perhaps unattractive to funders.

A monitoring group, even if it be from the neighbourhood of South Asia, is bound to be seen as made up of 'outsiders'. It would be much more important, therefore, for those involved to try and develop 'in-country' long-term monitoring capabilities. Many countries already have democratic-minded and courageous individuals and groups, all of whom must be supported to provide much more conscientious monitoring.

To ensure such an outcome, at the very least, poll monitors should have the power and the ability to expose election malpractices as they occur. That is not so easy when a bunch of armed and uncommunicative cops and sometimes thugs (if there is a difference between these categories) who apparently do not share your dreams of democracy in South Asia are peering over your shoulder. That is also not easy when your press releases are not taken too seriously by the press or the election officials. And neither is it helpful that reports published much later are not for mass consumption, and which in any case make little or no impact on the conduct of future elections. The only likely use of such publications would be as a document for future scholars researching some aspect of South Asian socio-political history.

There is not much one can say or do about the overseas monitors who bring their officious presence to South Asia. But their experience of monitoring polls in the Sub-continent over the last half decade should provide enough experience for the South Asian monitors to think of alternative ways of supporting the evolution of free and fair polls. They have, to be sure, engaged in a more serious effort than some of the other groups in terms of far-reaching recommendations and so on. However, it is doubtful that all the activity so far has had a direct improvement of the electoral process in South Asia.

As things stand, there are probably many alternative ways to spend the money that is spent in the travel and hospitality of monitors. △

S. Perera is with the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo.

Insurgency in East Pakistan, war with India and ultimately the breaking away of East Pakistan had dire effects on the country, but not all the upheavals of the time could tame the djinn that had been released in middle Punjab. The political tidal wave of the PPP started abating only after Bhutto took over power which he did with a landslide victory in middle Punjab. (Sindh remained under the big feudals, who won on PPP tickets. The North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan remained under the influence of regional and religious parties.)

### Decline...

Bhutto nationalised the industry and, as a symbolic gesture, gave some residential plots to those without property. Other than that, his lukewarm land reforms, half-baked bureaucratic changes and other policies did not expand the domestic economy enough to absorb the restless youth with time in their hands.

Bhutto's policies, however, brought unprecedented prosperity to the urban merchant class. This class was composed of the socially conservative and, by 1977, it was this very bazaar category which provided the backing for the movement against him that resulted in Bhutto's ouster and, in the end, hanging. In the modern context, the genesis of Nawaz Sharif's rise can be linked to the upsurge of this merchant class.

A large chunk of the PPP's political workforce was co-opted into the system through jobs in government and endowment of licences and ration depots. A large number of those who couldn't get anything went abroad. Part of the progressive-minded drifted towards the more radical political formations like the Mazdoor Kisan Party (Labour and Peasant Party). Furthermore, expulsion of progressive elements from the party and Mr Bhutto's newly found (or revived) solidarity with the feudals of south Punjab and Sindh disheartened the remaining activists.

In short, by 1975, the PPP had lost the core of its best political workers through state co-option, migration or ideological betrayal by its leadership. Progressive politics, within and without the PPP, collapsed. That was one reason why the PPP was not able to mount a vigorous protest movement when Martial Law was decreed in 1977. During the Zia-ul Haq era, its worker base shrank further through repression, on the one hand, and newfound economic prosperity, on the other.

Through harsh repression, Zia-ul Haq forced many of the remaining PPP activists to leave the country. A large number headed West during the 1980s. Meanwhile, the

economy expanded with remittances from immigrant workers, massive infusion of foreign aid linked to the Afghan war, and the booming drug business. Economic growth and prosperity absorbed and depoliticised many of the already disgruntled PPP activists.

It so turned out, therefore, that by the mid-1980s the party was being led by second rate workers and leaders who were mere agitators. Nevertheless, the PPP retained a silent majority of followers who still kept the faith, and the struggle for democracy and justice remained a credible ideological force to keep the People's Party going. Then, consciously or unconsciously,



What has my daughter gone and done now?

Benazir Bhutto, who had taken charge of her father's party, forced out the remaining few intellectuals who may have been able to redefine the new tenets of appropriate ideology.

### ...and Fall

Cashing in on the residual political capital of the 1970s and pent-up anger of its constituency, the PPP still remained master of the streets in middle Punjab. Benazir Bhutto's welcome to Lahore by millions upon her return from exile in 1986 not only frightened its enemies, but also reinforced the self-righteousness of this 35-year-old self-centred feudal aristocrat. She felt vindicated in her decision to force out the intellectuals and the experienced party hands, and the outpouring of support in middle Punjab blinded her to the pitfalls of history. Her subsequent victory in 1988, won against all odds, only added to what turned out to be Ms Bhutto's delusions.

Benazir Bhutto's need to gain power at all cost and make compromises later is a matter that can be discussed at length. But there is no doubt that she entered the office of prime minister with a mediocre team of opportunists and amateurs. She was also

leading a party that had no vision, little ability in terms of management skills, and ignorant in the art of governance. It was thus inevitable that Mr Bhutto's abrupt and unjustified ouster two years later had her back in the streets with an agenda no different from that of her opponents.

The conflicts with the establishment of her successor, Nawaz Sharif, gave Ms Bhutto a second chance to come back to power in 1993. By then, however, she had internalised the feudal ethos of her husband, Asif Zardari, who himself was an even worse combination of feudal egotism and petty but artful wheeling and dealing. The Benazir Bhutto that emerged now was an arrogant, know-all mistress of politics who demanded millions of rupees for granting party tickets for the elections. More importantly, by that time, the party structure, at all levels, had come to be dominated by traditional local chieftains (*numberdars*, petty *chauthries*, etc)—the same people who had opposed it in the heady days before the PPP had tasted power. As the remaining committed workers jumped ship, the PPP of 1990 was more like the Muslim League of the pre-1970 era.

Given such a party, it was no surprise that Ms Bhutto once again ran a visionless campaign against an opponent, Nawaz Sharif, who, besides enriching himself during his rule, had remembered to make symbolic gestures which were to pay returns in a do-nothing society. Ms Bhutto, therefore, could not defeat Mr Sharif even in middle Punjab, the keeper of the Bhutto flame. She lost in all the urban centres of this region and her victory margin came from the rural constituencies and the feudal belt, not won because of any ideological fervour but through traditional politicking.

About Ms Bhutto's second term as prime minister, the less said the better. A lot has been reported on the corruption of her husband and colleagues, but corruption charges are no longer so unsettling in a corruption-immune society. It was, again, her arbitrary style of governance through home-made experts, her unwillingness to listen to sane voices, and, most importantly, her directionless political course, that marked Ms Bhutto's second term.

Ms Bhutto did not make symbolic changes, but neither did she provide any relief to the common man, who made up her party's key constituency. Prices kept on rising while incomes continued to dwindle. She evoked hatred against herself among the downtrodden and the poor. They paid her, and her party, back properly at the polls in 1997.

M. Ejaz is a US-based economist.

## The roof of the world.



*Mt Everest . 8848 m . 29 may 1953*

## A roof for the world.



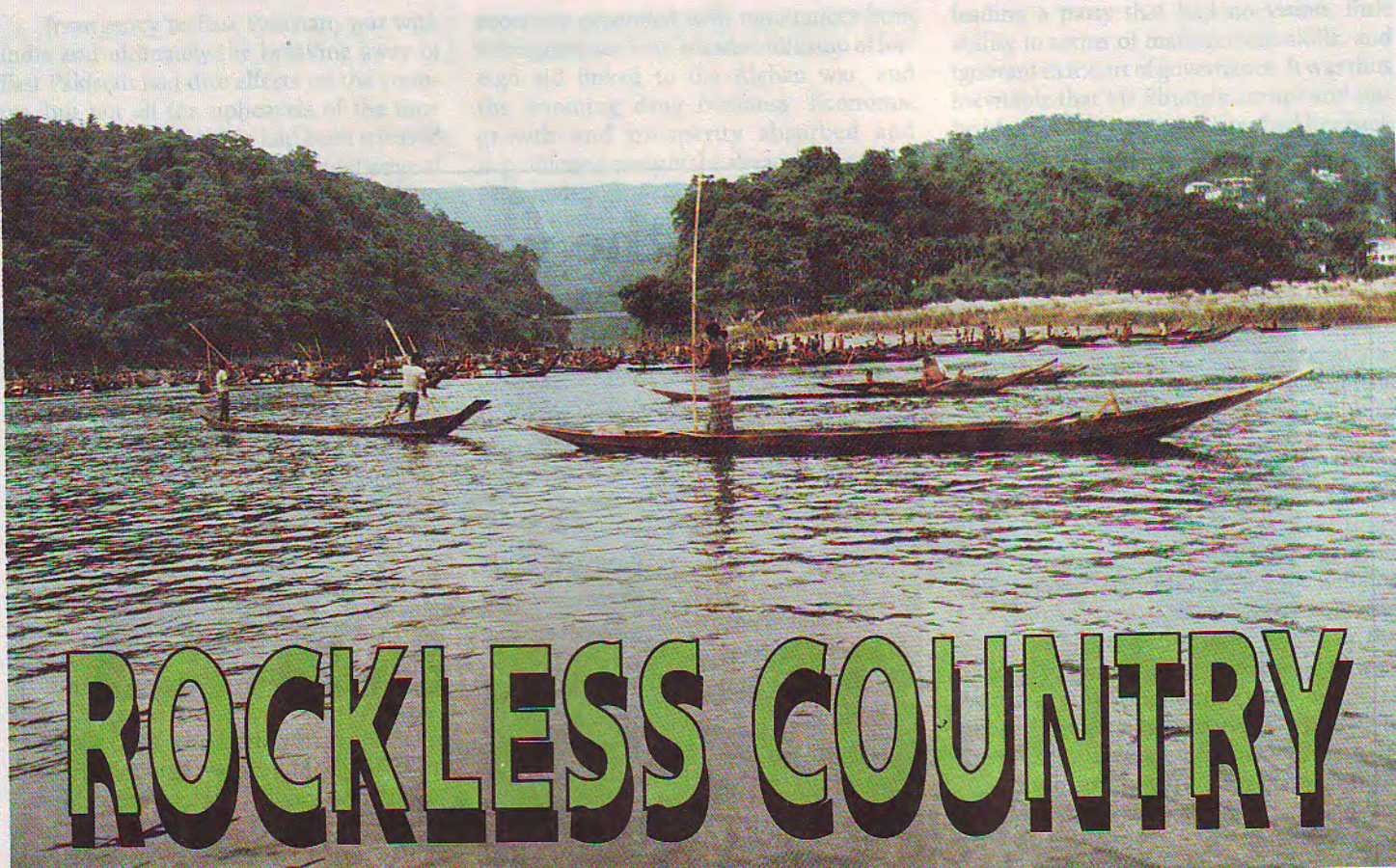
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text and pictures by Philip Gain



**R**ocks are hard to come by in the land of Bangladesh, a large part of whose expanse was formed by the silt carried in by the Ganga and the Jamuna/Brahmaputra rivers. There is a lot of stone quarrying done in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, the only mountainous area in Bangladesh. The hardest rocks, however, are the ones that roll down across the border from the Garo and Khasi Hills of Meghalaya in India.

The river Pyong brings water and sand from the Meghalaya hills into the district of Sylhet. But more importantly, it brings rocks. During the monsoon, the rushing waters wash down rocks and pebbles from India into this picturesque haven in Bangladesh, known as Jaflong. This area attracts tourists from Dhaka by the thousand, but it is also a magnet for labourers who descend on Jaflong to mine the rocks. The tourists get lost amidst the stones and toil.

With dawn every day, more than a hundred little boats with bare-chested, barefoot labourers enter the Pyong river, buckets and spades in hand. Each boat generally has a team of three, and one of them goes into the water to gather a bucketful of stones and pebbles. Then there are others who pick out plots on the dry river bed and get to work digging pits in order to extract stones as there is not enough for all the boats in the flowing river.

As soon as a boat is full, the workers come to the shore where rock merchants are waiting. A boat normally makes three runs a day, each time earning an income of 200 taka (about 5 dollars). Every day, hundreds of truckloads of rocks head out from Jaflong to be used in the construction of buildings, bridges, dams and roads. Many of these trucks travel all the way down to Dhaka, almost 250 kilometres away.



Opposite top: Bangladeshi flotilla on the Pyong beneath Meghalaya hills. Bangladesh Rifles keeps watch, below.



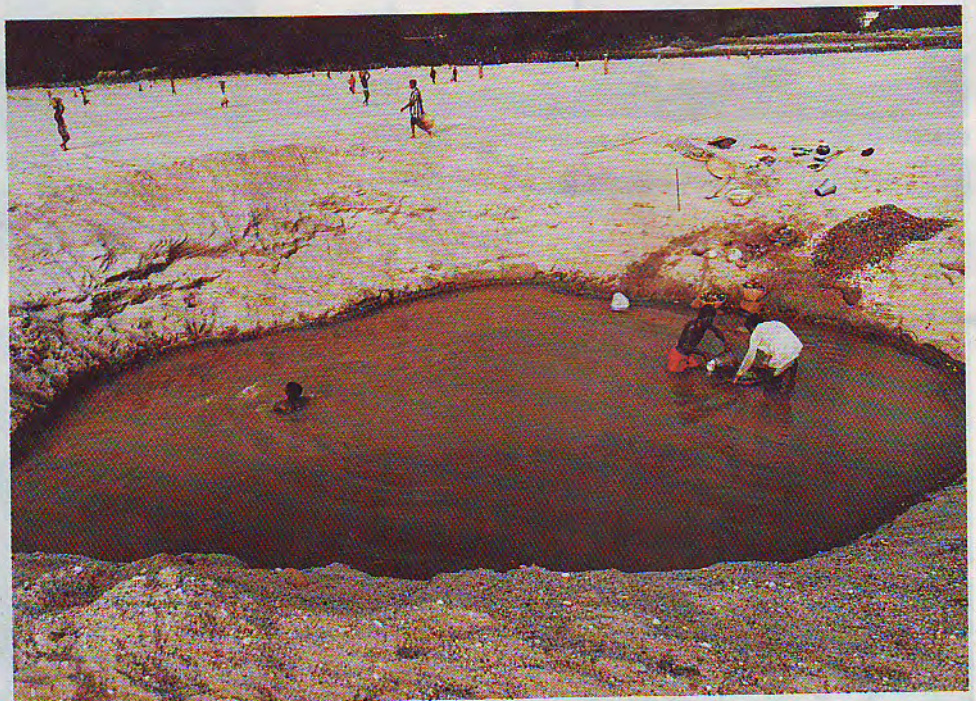


Mining the riverbed, above, and the river bank, below.

This is one trade which has a geological limit. The stones that tumble down the riverbed from India are decreasing in volume, and the labourers are already taking the risk of invading the no-man's land in the Indo-Bangla border. More than once, the Border Security Force on the Indian side has fired at the Barki, as these stone excavators are known.

The conditions of life on the two sides of the border are a study in contrasts. While the Bangladeshi stone collectors are engaged in a battle for livelihood, the people on the Indian side look comparatively calm and relaxed. No one is seen raiding the Pyong for stones. While south of the border, kids remain at work throughout the day helping their fathers load the boats, on the other side they are busy playing, fishing or bathing. The mountains, trees, stones and sand all are more plentiful on the Indian side. In Bangladesh, it is all toil and struggle, as the workers empty the river of its rocks. △

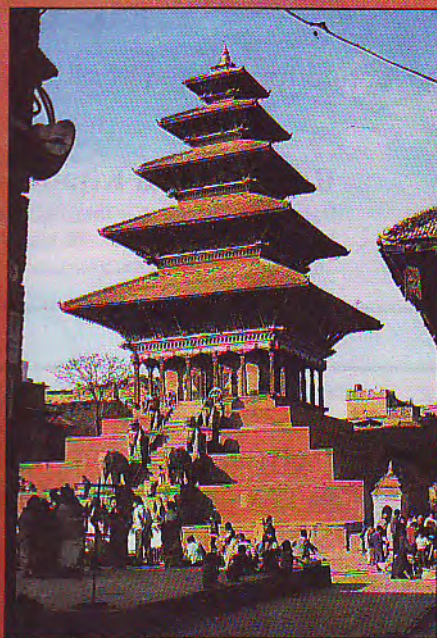
*P. Gain is a Dhaka-based reporter and activist.*





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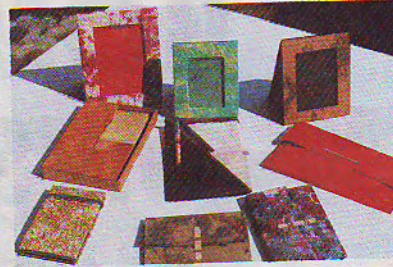
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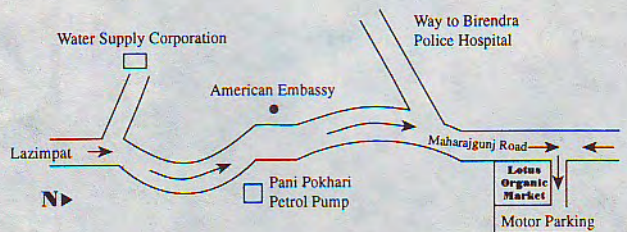
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# Indian Pakistani *Bhai Bhai* (at least with this group)

A HUNDRED AND sixty-seven Pakistanis arrived in Calcutta in late December for the Third Joint Convention of Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy. How they arrived itself says something of the accelerating thaw in South Asian people's affairs.

Fully 142 of the 167 Pakistani participants arrived overland rather than by air, crossing over the Wagah border and then riding Indian railways across the breadth of North India to Calcutta. "In itself this is a historic event in the 50th year since Independence and Partition," said Deendayalan, one of the organisers of the meet.

The train was hours late checking into Howrah station, but the Pakistani guests told their hosts not to worry: "*Yeh to bilkul hamara jaisay hai, sab thik hai.*" (Don't worry, this is just like back home.)

Under Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral's direction, the Pakistanis were given unprecedented visa privileges: they could visit eight Indian cities of their choice, and the requirement of reporting to the local police station in each was magnanimously waived.

The Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy was formed on 2

September 1994 in Lahore by a group of concerned citizens from both sides of the border. The objective was to initiate a people-to-people dialogue between the two countries whose official animosity is keeping the whole region from moving forward, socially and economically. The Forum, a haven for progressives, believes that "the crisis in the relations between India and Pakistan is being deliberately maintained by ruling elites in utter disregard of common interest and aspirations of the people of the two countries."

Calcuttans welcomed the participants with an enthusiasm that was unprecedented, and this helped the proceedings gain a degree of spontaneity which was lacking in earlier meetings in Lahore and Delhi. Besides the formal sessions and "intersectoral dialogues", impromptu huddles took place among Indian and Pakistani artists, scholars, businessmen, engineers and trade union officials. "There was a sense of discovery and learning among the participants," says Tapan Bose, another organiser. "It made a difference that this was Calcutta. The enthusiastic response of Calcuttans helped expand the constituency for this kind of thing."

On the last day of the Convention, all the delegates and about 300 Calcuttans held a public rally in Esplanade East, near the famous Calcutta Maidan. It ended with Pakistanis and Indians holding hands, calling each other "*bhai bhai*" and singing, "We shall live in peace." It was enough to make even the cynics among those present—and there were some of those too—a bit misty eyed for lost opportunities and what might yet be.

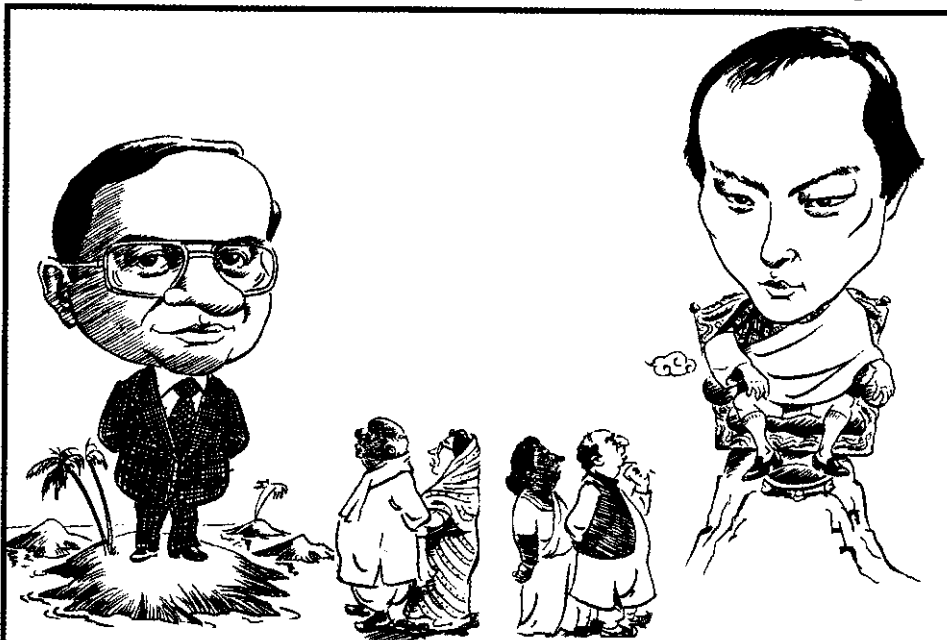
Between 28 and 31 December, delegates held intensive discussions on four major themes, which were demilitarisation, denuclearisation and peace dividends, religious intolerance, Kashmir and governance. They also reviewed the "postures and policies" of the two states in the last half century and concluded that, by and large, the public in both countries had been deprived the promise of freedom. Diversion of precious resources to wars and preparation for war, had condemned millions of people in the two countries to poverty and squalour.

At the end of the conference, a "Calcutta Declaration" was adopted. It called upon India and Pakistan to sign, "by 14-15th August 1997, a comprehensive treaty providing for the employment of internationally recognised mechanisms of mutual negotiation, mediation and arbitration for conflict resolution that could guarantee durable peace." (The two dates mark the independence days of Pakistan and India, respectively.)

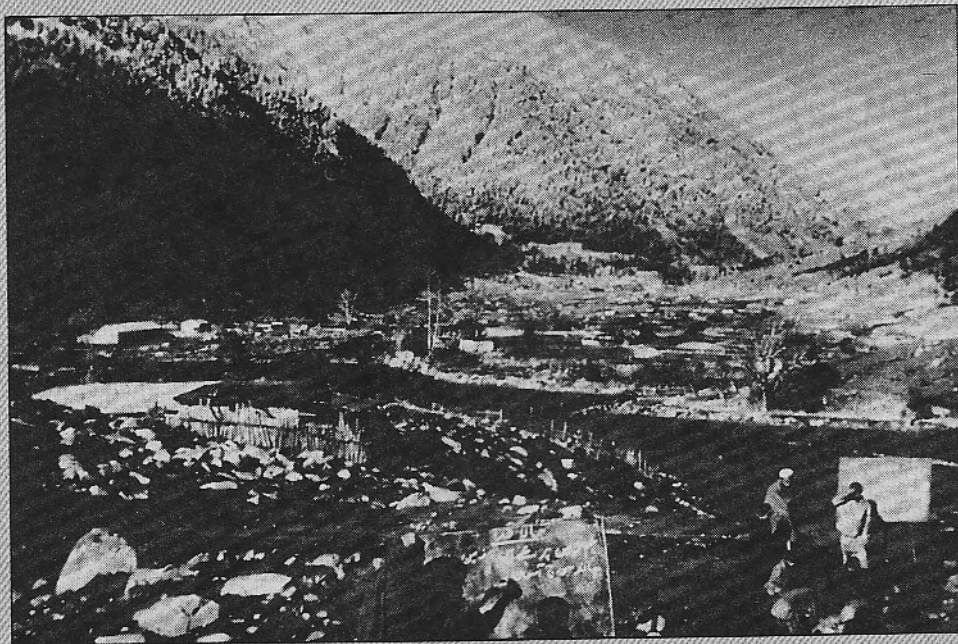
The Declaration also called upon the two states to enter into bilateral agreements on free travel across the border, unfettered exchange of information and publications, reduction of communication and travel costs, removal of trade barriers, and granting of most-favoured-nation status to each other.

The Forum called for both governments "to stop intermittent firings across the border, to put an end to proxy wars and to demilitarise Siachen", and asked them to ensure transparency in their defence budgets and desist from nuclear preparations. The participants decided to continue to try and combat intolerance and prejudice, particularly in education (specifically, the teaching of history); media and performing arts; state, law and politics; literature and culture. On Kashmir, the Forum decided to try and organise a meeting where representatives of Kashmir from both sides of the Line of Control could come together so that recommendations on a future course of action could be made.

At the end of the meet, taking advantage of Mr Gujral's magnanimity, the Pakistanis scattered to the far corners of India, to Bhopal, Lucknow and Hyderabad. We presume they have arrived home by now.



The thought came to the editors of *Himal South Asia* that there were two heads of state in South Asia who do not get pilloried by cartoonists in their national papers—President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. It was decided to set things right by commissioning artist Subhas Rai to lampoon the two gentlemen. What he has come up with were kindly images which will surely be appreciated by the king and the president.



Open-air classroom in progress in Shimshal Valley.

## Belligerent Villagers of Khunjerab

A MAJOR CHUNK of the Karakoram region in the extreme north of Pakistan was declared the Khunjerab National Park in 1975, but it was a national park that ran into problems as soon as it was set up. The government backed out of its commitment to pay compensation to the pastoralists who had vacated a 12-km "core zone" established to protect the rare Marco Polo sheep, and this provided the spark to a long-lasting conflict between the park management and the locals.

Wildlife and the environment bore the brunt of the damage resulting from this estrangement. Several pastures, including a lambing ground for Marco Polo sheep, were over-grazed and the animal itself was shot for sport. The number of Marco Polo sheep, ibex and blue sheep plummeted and carnivores were poisoned in vast numbers.

To reverse the situation, the World Wildlife Fund (Pakistan) prepared a comprehensive management plan for Khunjerab, taking all of seven years to do so. Among other things, the plan has recommended nearly tripling the park's area to 6150 sq km, encompassing the entire valley of Shimshal together with subsidiary valleys and a great chunk of land on either side of

the Karakoram Highway (KKH) just before it enters China.

The management plan proposed by the WWF, which received assent of the local communities back in January 1992, allows use of traditional grazing only where it does not pose a threat to wild species. In case grazing affected wildlife, it would be abandoned against compensation. Protection of wild species including predators and birds would be the responsibility of the grazier communities who would stand to lose their grazing concessions if they violated the rules or if they failed to report poaching.

The launch of this very ambitious management plan in November 1996 was attended by several representatives of local communities who have generally been supportive of the programme. The people of Shimshal, however, decided otherwise. They have opposed the plan, and it is thought that their attitude could affect the very implementation of the Plan.

Of all the peoples in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, the Shimshalis are the most educated and urbane. As Ismailis (followers of the Aga Khan), they are easy-going in matters of religion, and without the militancy often seen among followers of the two

major sects of Islam in Pakistan.

However, there is nothing a Shimshali likes more than a good argument, and their education and exposure makes them effective opponents of the WWF plan. The Shimshalis' primary argument is that Shimshal, comprising nearly 80 percent of the area of the park, was neither properly surveyed, nor was any Shimshali included in the formulation of the Plan. They also believe, incorrectly it would seem after looking at the WWF document, that that they will be completely deprived of their grazing rights and that agricultural activity will be disallowed in the park. It has not helped matters that the Shimshali are piqued over the way the government dishonoured its earlier pledge of compensation.

Some Shimshali representatives also argue that there are no Marco Polo sheep, and indeed have never been, within the KNP boundaries, whereas, in fact, it was the Shimshalis who agreed to vacate the core area for the protection of very this mammal in 1975.

Following the example of nearby Bar Valley, a successful conservation project run by WWF Pakistan, the Shimshalis want to begin ibex and blue sheep trophy hunting in KNP. They, however, would like the authority to issue licences to rest with their own community. They have offered 20 percent of the proceeds to the government while the remainder would be spent on the community.

The people of Shimshal, it seems, want almost complete autonomy in matters related to the national park. They assert that they are capable of protecting their land and maintain its sustainability like their "forefathers did in the past". This is questioned by some experts, who point to the state of Furzen Dur, the Valley of Birches, which lies half a day's march north of the village of Shimshal. This valley, once rich with birches, is today completely bare, a victim of unsustainable logging which cannot be ascribed to "outside dynamics".

If the management plan is implemented in letter and spirit, there is no reason why the Shimshali should not gain from the national park of which they are part. But they are wary of government pledges and outside advice. This has made the WWF work on a separate plan for Shimshal Valley within their Management Plan, after first hearing out local grievances. Perhaps, then, more than two decades after its founding, the Khunjerab National Park will have a workable plan for its management.

- Salman Rashid

# Listening to the Melancholic Fourth-Born and Others

CRISP JANUARY AIR from a half-open door invigorated discussions among the literati of India and Nepal gathered for a writers' colloquium in a conference room of the India International Centre in the heart of New Delhi. Karan Singh, the erudite Chief Guest, recited Sanskrit *shlokas* in praise of Saraswati, goddess of learning and wisdom,

Nepal, there were Bairagi Kainla, Abhi Subedi, Nagendra Raj Sharma and Tulsi Diwas. Lok Raj Baral, political scientist and Nepal's Ambassador to India, was the guest of honour.

The meeting lasted three days, with the authors discussing "regionalism" and "nationalism" in Nepali and Indian writings, the folk tradition in the literatures of the two nations, emerging literary trends and creative writing, and publishing in the two countries. "Literature has always been an effective weapon against oppression, dictatorship and tyranny and authors and poets have always been at the forefront to resist

any imposed socio-political system," said the Nepali poet

Til Bikram Nembang, whose nom de plume, Bairagi Kainla, means "the melancholic fourth-born".

Both societies have opted for liberalisation and the consequent integration into the world economy. This is naturally reflected in the emergence and spread of consumerism and rapidly changing values in formerly traditional and conservative societies.

For most writers, to grapple with this new phenomenon was a major preoccupation—not only as it affected society, but also how it affected themselves as writers. Most seemed to be worried about commercialisation taking away the soul from literature. Should writers and poets cater to the market and thus garner a larger readership and money for other more serious works or should they write as their conscience dictated and continue in splendid isolation and, of course, relative penury?

Said Prof Gangadhar Gadgil: "The process of globalisation has created similar problems and tensions in all our countries. Apart from a general reluctance to shed or change drastically our old ways, there is the further question about the kind and degree of change we want to make. We have to look to each other and to other neighbouring countries to find out how we should grapple with these problems and the consequences of the decisions we take."

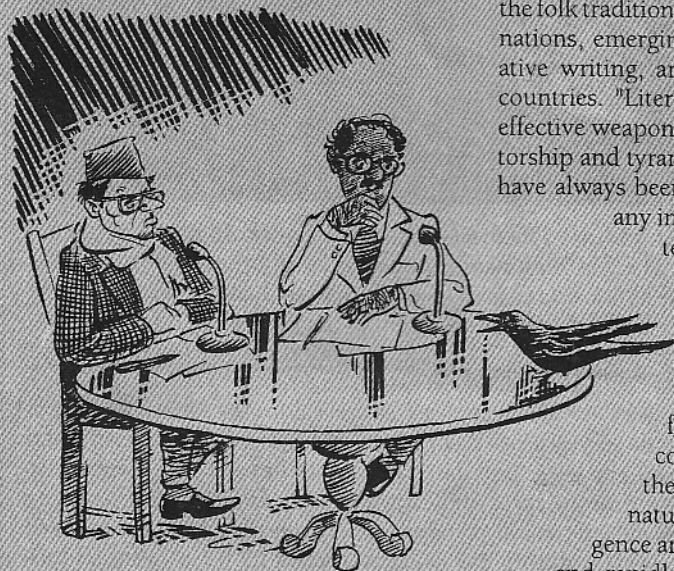
In addition to this was the probing of ideas like nationalism and regionalism that have changed in value and significance over the years. In short, most writers, through

their craft, were seeking to formulate new world views that could correspond with the changing times. In this, the interchange of ideas and animated discussions sans national frontiers proved most illuminating. In fact, it was decided that the India-Nepal Writers' Colloquium should not remain a one-time affair and such meetings between writers should continue.

## Lady Ambassador



THE ONLY WOMAN presently serving as ambassador, inter-SAARC, has just taken up office in Thimphu. She is Mahmuda Haque Choudary, a career diplomat, reportedly the first Bangladeshi woman ambassador anywhere. The new ambassador told *Kuensel* weekly that she intended to make economic relations between Bhutan and Bangladesh her priority. "What I am at is to create an environment that will ensure the free flow of commodities between the countries so that the business community will feel encouraged to conduct business free of unwanted hindrances." Her emphasis would be on improving communication links between Thimphu and Dhaka, establishing joint venture projects in agriculture, forestry and other labour-oriented fields, and the renewal of the Cultural and Trade Agreement between the two countries.



even as a solitary crow threw itself repeatedly against the glass panes of the conference room trying to force its way in.

He (the crow) must have the soul of a poet to want to gain entry, commented Dr Singh. Some truth there, for the august gathering included top writers in Indian and Nepali languages exchanging ideas and mapping out new idioms to comprehend and write about the fast-changing modern diaspora.

While meetings among parliamentarians, journalists and sundry experts from the South Asian region are quite common by now, this colloquium was one of the rare efforts to bring together prominent literateurs from two regional countries. Jointly organised by the Himalaya Today Society of Gangtok (chaired by Dil Kumari Bhandari, former Indian MP and spouse of Sikkim's ex-Chief Minister, Nar Bahadur Bhandari) and the India International Centre, the meeting was sponsored by the B.P. Koirala Nepal-India Foundation.

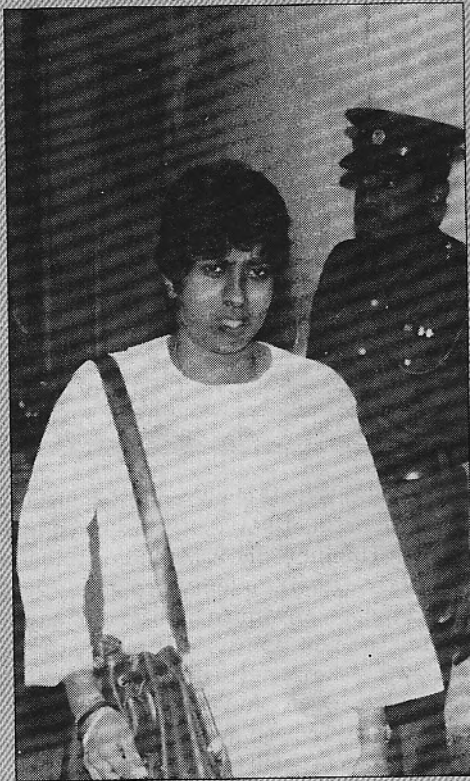
Among the prominent participants from India were Kamleshwar, Sitakant Mahapatra, Bhisham Singh Sahani, Ranga Rao, Gangadhar Gadgil and Krishna Sobti. From

## Ishini

THE YOUNG WOMAN in the picture is Ishini Wickremesinghe Perera, Commercial and News Director of Telshan Network Ltd (TNL), one of Sri Lanka's two privately owned television stations.

She is a great grand-daughter of D.R. Wijewardene, Sri Lanka's Beaverbrook who founded the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd, the country's dominant print publisher and one of the biggies in the news industry in the South Asian region.

Young Ishini, 29, who married an MP of the ruling People's Alliance last year, has been grabbing local and international headlines as a result of the Criminal Investigation Department moving to use the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) to prosecute (some say persecute) TNL over an allegedly inaccurate news report telecast over its evening bulletin some weeks ago.



The use of the PTA in a matter such as this was widely faulted by the Lankan press, including sections which had supported the People's Alliance in its 1994 election campaign partly on account of its pledge to liberalise the media. The flak clearly embarrassed the government and President Chandrika Kumaratunga is now on record saying the PTA should not have been invoked. There have been hints that the whole



DAPPER KING. Upon return from a medical check-up in Bangkok, King Birendra of Nepal slips behind the wheel at Kathmandu's international airport. Soon after his return on 17 January, the nation was treated to an orchestrated nation-wide arousing to mark the 25th anniversary of the king's accession to the throne. Hundreds of day-to-day events, from high school fetes to painting exhibitions to *losar* new year celebrations, were labeled "25th anniversary events" in an attempt to lionise the king's role in Nepali life and politics. A "civic reception" organised for the king's pleasure at Kathmandu's national stadium was a lacklustre affair, and a far cry from the spic and span of similar Panchayat-era fests. But the Narayanhiti Royal Palace seemed to welcome the sychophantic gestures as indication of the monarchy's increasing popularity. After half a decade of treading carefully, the royalist forces which enjoyed total and unaccountable power during the Panchayat years till 1990 were all-too-willing to grab the opportunity that presented itself. A weak and feckless Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was happy to pander to the palace to bolster his weakening hold over events. The heightened sense of self within the royal palace—complemented by increasingly ineffectual governance by commoners—seemed to be feeding the royalists with a false sense of where public opinion lay. In all the pedestrian hype surrounding the 25th anniversary, for example, there was no commentator to make the point that the responsibility for the country's dilapidated state (evidenced by the need to venture abroad for a routine health check-up) goes back to action and inaction during King Birendra's absolute rule of 18 years, which was nearly double that of his much-maligned father Mahendra. Better for those who would want a higher profile for the king to have him pursue his constitutional duties more effectively. Other sectors of Nepali society, meanwhile, must learn to demand accountability from the commoner-politicians who are today ruining the national prospects.

business will be dropped with "necessary action" taken under administrative provisions governing the licensing of television stations.

TNL is run by Ishini's father, Shan Wickremesinghe, whose brother, Ranil, is the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and leader of the United National Party (UNP) which ruled Sri Lanka from 1977-94. The station is not popular with the government, which perceives it as anti-People's Alliance.

Old stagers at Lake House, as ANCL is popularly known, remembers Ishini's great

grandfather as an iron-willed martinet who was both tough and fair-minded. One story is that when even senior journalists were summoned to the old man's presence, they would first visit the toilet to empty their bladders. The genes seem to have passed down the generations because Ishini made it very clear that if there was a rap, she would take it personally rather than let lesser fry face the music.

The stand-off between the government and TNL is far from over. A lot more slugging remains to be completed, so, seconds, out of the ring....

# Welcome to the World, Thimphu!

"EVIDENCE MOUNTS against man arrested for shocking murder in the capital", said the leader headline in *Kuensel* of 15 February. A drunken brawl leading to a killing on New Year's Eve has apparently served to shock Thimphu's citizens and serve as reminder that modernity's dark side is knocking at the door of this most forbidden South Asian kingdom. For, if murder is a sign of modernisation, Thimphu has now made the grade.

Excerpted here is the *Kuensel's* editorial, which indicates the extent of disquiet that the incident has caused in Thimphu.

*Even as most of us begin a lo-na (inauspicious year) by taking the necessary steps to ward off bad luck to the extent possible,*



*the eve of the new year was marked by one of the more chilling acts of violence we are likely to see.*

*The apparently ruthless killing of a young man on the streets of Thimphu was horrifying because of its senselessness. But it is more frightening because it involved persons we have the tendency to categorise, in recent years, as Bhutanese youth who are going astray. The implication is that the situation involving our youth is rapidly*

*deteriorating.*

*For the generation of Bhutanese which knew the Thimphu of the past few decades, such an incident must surely be agonising. Many of us continue to despair at the social ills which are festering right before our eyes.*

*When the young man was knifed to death after a bar room brawl on January 31, he was not just killed. It symbolised the death of an era...*

## Uighurs Arise

China's discontented national minorities:  
A Uighur man and a Tibetan woman share  
space on a five-yuan note

TIBET WAS THE only 'separatist' problem China has had to tackle. Even as Deng Xiaoping chose to depart this world, now there is Xinjiang, where the eight million Muslim Uighurs of China's far west suddenly managed to attract the world media spotlight.

The restiveness among the Uighurs, and the shifting of Central Asian alliances of which they too doubtlessly form a part, is bound to change to some extent the geopolitical balance in the continent, including countries in South Asia.

The immediate reaction in the Subcontinent was to read the role of the "foreign hand" into the events in Xinjiang, and worries about how the Uighurs' agitation unsettle the given power equation. Given that this is a Muslim uprising, so the theory quickly developed, the Taliban regime in Kabul must be involved. In India, itself seeking to quell autonomous-minded ten-

dencies, analysts naturally aligned themselves on the side of the Chinese state, calling for the need to guard against the secession of Xinjiang—although it is not even clear what the Uighur activists are demanding.

One Indian pundit referred to the fact that both Uighur and Tibetan groups were gaining support among "Western non-governmental organisations active on the human rights front", as if that were in itself some kind of disqualification.

The Chinese are reported to have accused the (Pakistan- and Saudi-supported) Taliban as well as a Lahore-based group known as the Tablik-e-Jamat of fomenting strife in Xinjiang. There are also those who see in Xinjiang an American conspiracy to carve out a Western sphere of influence in Central Asia which would keep both Russia

and China on an uneven keel while maintaining access to the petroleum-rich region and its pipelines.

Amidst all this punditry, this seeking of motives and ferreting out of conspiracies, the Uighurs themselves somehow seem to have been forgotten. Whoever else may be 'using' them, the lofty principles of cultural identity, self-determination, and the right to be heard must lie with the Uighurs as well—even if few had heard of them and their desires till now.



# Four Tibetan Choices: Tick One

TIBETANS IN EXILE, spread all over the world but concentrated in India and Nepal, are engaged in a hot debate over whether to go in for a referendum which would decide on the course of their "Free Tibet" struggle.

The referendum was an idea first proposed in March 1994 by Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama. As fleshed out by the Tibetan Government in Exile, the referendum would ask Tibetans to choose one from four options: one, complete independence, two, continuation of the present middle-way approach, three, *satyagraha* struggle (which would involve a march to Tibet and a Gandhian agitation), and, four, self-determination.

Some Tibetan leaders suggest that the referendum proposal has simply created confusion among the rank and file. To begin with, the Dalai Lama has himself tipped the scales by making no secret of his own preference for the middle path. Further, the proposal is flawed because it mixes objectives and methods: independence, for example, is a goal, whereas a *satyagraha* is only a means to an objective.

There is also the problem of conducting the exercise in Tibet itself although the Dalai Lama says he will find ways to collect "representative opinions from different parts of Tibet". But, the larger dilemma is how such a referendum could be held in the face of uncompromising attitudes among a considerable section of Tibetan exiles. Although they do not oppose the Dalai Lama directly, they make it clear that they are not in favour of a referendum. For example, these opinions were compiled by the Tibetan Association of Chicago recently from among its members.

"The referendum is long overdue but needs refinement because the choices offered are very narrow and idealistic... We should not miss an opportunity to make a big push for the independence of Tibet during the lifetime of HH Dalai Lama as our government is very vulnerable in his absence and we are not likely to do better in future."

"We must try every possible means to attain our goal. If necessary, we should follow both violent and non-violent means for that purpose... The bottomline is that Tibetans should be in a position to set the terms of the talks with the Chinese rather than dance to their deceptive tune."

"The Tibetan legislature [in exile] must assert the Tibetan agenda. The agenda is *rangzen* (independence). Dharamshala is notoriously known for its mediocrity and unclear messages often leaving the public groping in the dark."

There are some who hold thoroughly militant views as well, particularly in the Tibetan Youth Congress and the Tibetan Women's Association based in Dharamshala and some centres overseas, who have started calling for a line of direct confrontation with China—either by marching into Tibet or by rousing the Tibetans within to take up arms.

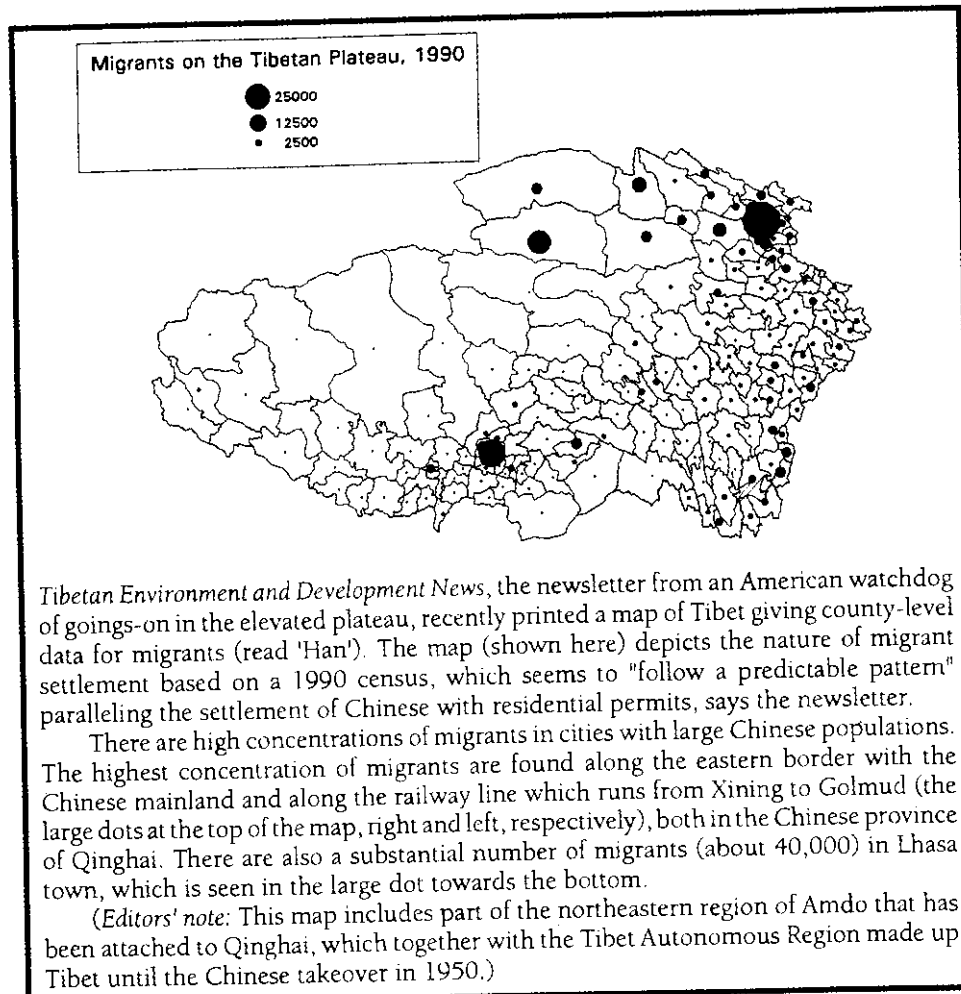
The most vociferous advocate of the *satyagraha* approach is Samdhong Losang Tenzin Rinpoche (the chairman of the Tibetan legislature), who believes that time is running out for Tibetans. "We know it may be a kind of suicide, but unless we do take action in the very near future there will be no Tibet left to free," he told a reporter recently.

Despite the divergent views, Dharamshala looks determined to hold the referendum, which is slated for July 1997 after being postponed in August 1996. A workshop was organised in Dharamshala in late January to discuss the various referendum options, as a way of "educating" people on the coming ballot.

The workshop was attended by around 250 delegates from all over, and speakers expressed their views supporting one or another option. At the meeting, the Dalai Lama once again emphasised his preference for the middle way, which essentially means: confirming Tibet to be a part of China while insisting on negotiations over the degree of autonomy.

Die-hard supporters of total Tibetan independence, who include much-in-the-news Hollywood actors, may be disappointed by the Dalai Lama's present stance but he seems convinced of its pragmatism. Tenzin Gyatso says the idea of separate small nations has become out of date due to the rapid globalisation of the world. Tibet as a separate state cannot survive all alone.

- Batuk Vohra



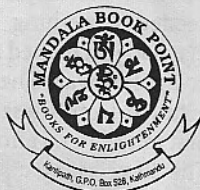


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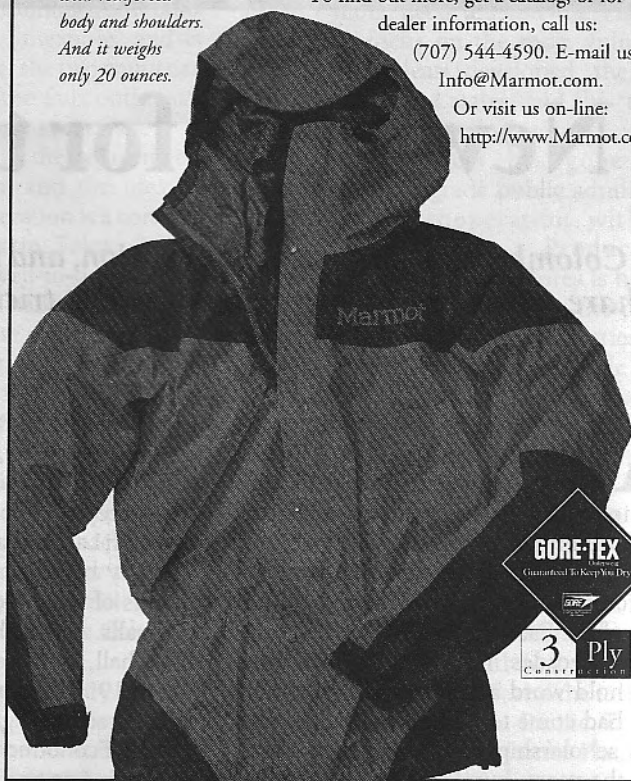
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The Commonwealth Conference on Foreign Affairs in Colombo in January 1950 which conceived the idea of the Colombo Plan. Group photo shows Jawaharlal Nehru flanked by Ghulam Mohammed Khan (in dark glasses) and D.S. Senanayake. J.R. Jayewardane is seen behind Nehru.

## A New Plan for the Colombo Plan

*The Colombo Plan has a new incarnation, and its mission is to get prosperous East Asia to share a few development management tricks with impoverished South Asia.*

After suffering a near-death experience, the Colombo Plan is in the throes of a Japanese-initiated rejuvenation effort. The goal: to turn the organisation into a pan-Asian agency that can help the region's poorer countries benefit from the experience of the economic tigers of the East.

For decades, The Colombo Plan was a household word across Asia. "Going on a Plan" had come to mean winning a prestigious scholarship to a foreign university. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of Indians, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and Nepalis benefited from the Plan, earning degrees mainly in civil engineering, business management, urban planning or economics. Plan alumni today are in senior echelons

from Malaysia to Pakistan.

By the 1990s, the Colombo Plan had slipped into obscurity. Even today, its two-storey, tile-roofed secretariat on a bylane in the Sri Lankan capital has the ambience of a sleepy backwater. Inside, fading photographs of stern-faced past directors adorn the walls. Across the city near the Colombo town hall, a granite obelisk marks the meeting in 1950 that launched the organisation called, rather lengthily, The Colombo Plan for the Economic and Social Development of South Asia and Southeast Asia.

But those were ambitiously optimistic times. The Second World War was just over, Asian countries were emerging out of colonialism, and the Cold War was already freezing up. Leaders and ministers of the

British Commonwealth, including Jawaharlal Nehru, J.R. Jayawardene and Ghulam Mohammed, decided that Asia needed something like the Marshall Plan that had just helped rebuild Europe after the ravages of war. The Colombo Plan, which resulted from these deliberations, was the first multilateral effort in foreign aid in Asia. The key donor countries were Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain and the United States, and the organisation included Asian members of the Commonwealth like India, Ceylon and Pakistan.

By the late 1950s, membership had expanded to include non-Commonwealth nations like Thailand, Nepal, Indonesia, Laos, South Korea, Iran and Afghanistan. For the next decades, the Colombo Plan

helped Asian developing countries with thousands of development projects, skills training, and scholarships. In three decades, a staggering 350,000 students had gone on the "Plan".

### Gracious Retirement

Over time, the Colombo Plan's role was duplicated and then eclipsed by the better-endowed bilateral assistance programmes and sectoral multilateral aid agencies such as UNDP, the Bangkok-based Economic Commission for the Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Regional groupings like ASEAN and SAARC diverted people's minds off the Colombo Plan and its mandate. And as East Asia began to prosper, there was less and less need there for outside help in technical training.

Britain and Canada lost interest in the Plan and pulled out, funding started to dip, and, by the mid-1980s, the organisation teetered on the brink of extinction.

At a meeting called in 1989, a delegate from one of the remaining donors diplomatically suggested that the organisation should consider "retiring gracefully from the international scene".

But, in a move that also symbolises the shift in the world's economic epicentre, the East Asians decided to step in and revive the organisation. Japan and Korea, which were once beneficiaries of the Plan, began pumping in money to revitalise the organisation. The strongest indication of the East Asian interest in the Colombo Plan was the appointment in 1995 of South Korean economist, Hak-Su Kim, as

the new Secretary General. A former UNDP official who worked on developing the Tumen Basin of northeast Asia, Mr Hak is uniquely qualified for the post and is determined to take the Colombo Plan out of the doldrums. He is already working on changing the agency's constitution, preparing an interim strategy to take it up to the year 2000, tapping new funding sources, and planning for a new, bigger, secretariat building in Colombo.

"We are in transition," Mr Hak says. "We want to see how the industrialised countries of the Far East, the newly-industrialised Southeast Asian countries, and states of the South Asian region can learn from each other."

He believes the Colombo Plan is the ideal agency for a new age in pan-Asian cooperation in training, technological knowhow and information exchange. The Secretary General feels there is a lot South Asian countries can learn in development strategy and planning from countries like Malaysia and Singapore, and is promoting a project to get the two countries to sponsor training for the Subcontinent's planners and development strategists.

The prime mover of the rejuvenated Colombo Plan is Japan, and the idea of greater inter-Asian cooperation is a concept dear to aid bureaucrats in Tokyo. Japan would also like other well-to-do member countries like Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore to be more active members. "Japan has a very strong attachment to the Colombo Plan and is strongly behind the Plan's revitalisation," says Mr Hak.

Tokyo appears to have sentimental reasons to return to the Colombo Plan. When it joined as a member in 1954, its post-war rehabilitation was in full swing back home. Japan became a donor nation for the first time in 1954 when it provided small grants for technical assistance under the Colombo Plan to developing Asia.

Each Colombo Plan country pays a membership due of USD 11,700 per year; in addition, countries make voluntary grants to their favourite projects. Despite the East



The Plan HQ

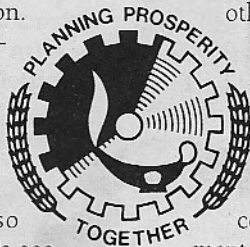
Asian rescue effort, the Colombo Plan's budget does not match its mandate or the immensity of the challenges of technical cooperation in the Asia-Pacific.

### Tiger Economies

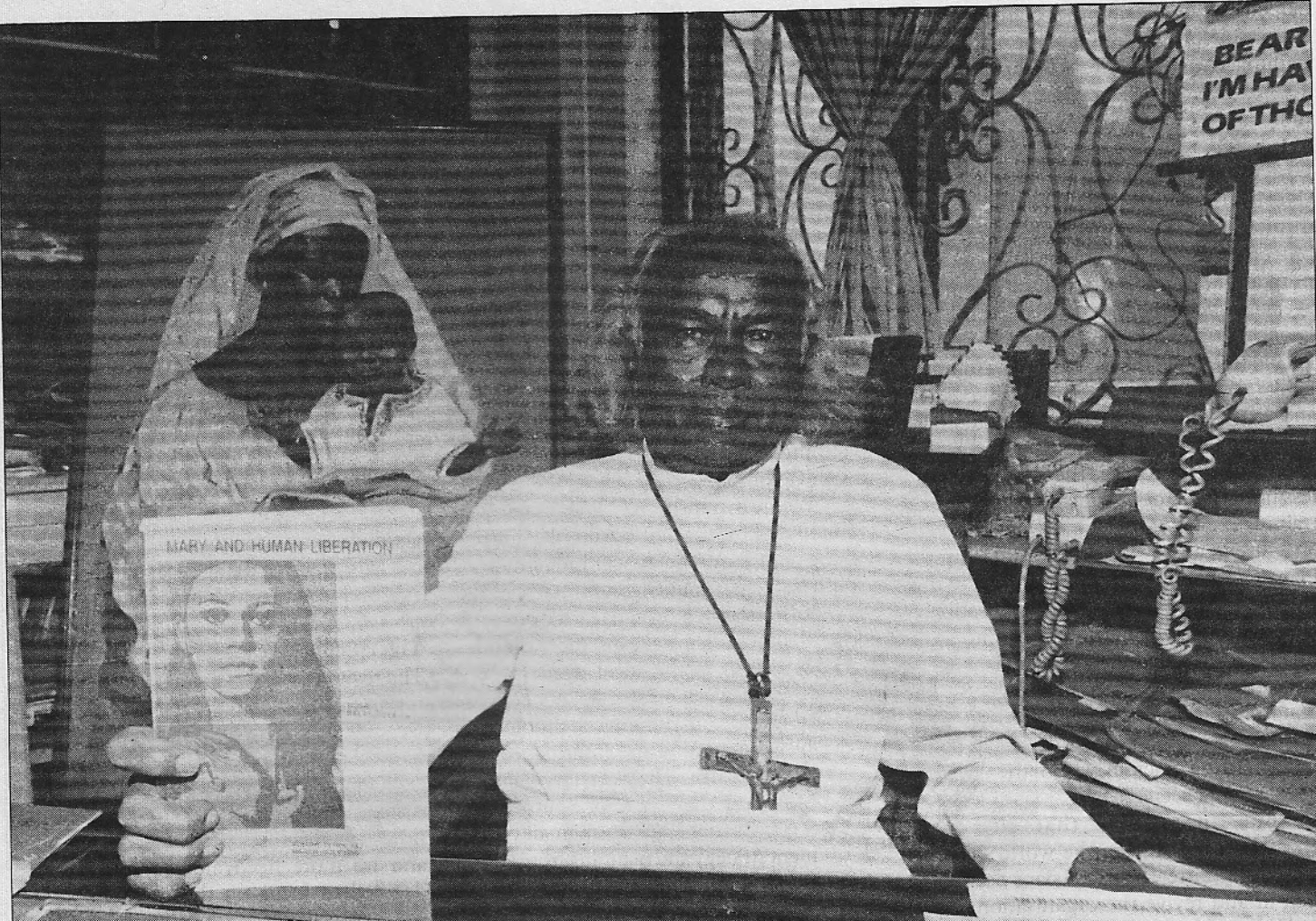
The revitalisation plan, approved at a meeting in Seoul in 1994, sought to make the Colombo Plan a primary agency for South-South cooperation within Asia for exchange of technical expertise. Most East Asian members of the Colombo Plan have now become tiger economies themselves and no more need aid. So the Plan has decided to focus on the most vulnerable countries: the least developed, the landlocked, tiny island states, and the "transition economies" of Indochina.

Japan's support has gone to a programme to upgrade public administration skills in cooperation with the Tokyo-based Asian Productivity Organisation (APO). South Korea is helping with a programme to develop the private sector in Asian developing countries—especially for small- and medium-scale enterprises. The United States and Japan are continuing to support the Colombo Plan's advisory programme for drugs, which coordinates regionwide efforts to reduce supply of and demand for narcotics in Asia.

The Colombo Plan will soon be 50 years old, and its history reflects the changing fortunes of empires in the second half of this century. The sun has set on the Commonwealth that gave birth to it, the Americans have come and gone, and the torch has been passed on to the Asia-Pacific. The East Asians plan to take the Colombo Plan out of intensive care, but a lot more needs to be done to find the organisation a new niche. Mr Hak seems to be on the right track: using the Colombo Plan to get newly-prosperous Asians to show less prosperous Asians how they did it.



Hak-Su Kim at his Colombo desk.



## THE DEFIANT PADRE

*Sri Lankan priest Tissa Balasuriya maintains that he has every right to question Vatican dogma and is fighting excommunication handed down by the Vatican. His brand of liberation theology has now set up a South Asian challenge to Vatican orthodoxy.*

Although published in 1990, *Mary and Human Liberation* had not created too many ripples until the Vatican decided it was heresy and excommunicated its 72-year-old Sri Lankan author, Father Tissa Balasuriya, earlier this year. Says the defiant padre: "I am fighting against the excommunication. I am not asking for a pardon, I am asking for justice. I want those who did this to be tried."

It was the Vatican Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, the Roman Catholic Church's doctrinal watchdog, that issued the notification excommunicating Fr Balasuriya, a priest for 51 years and widely respected in Sri Lanka for his grassroots

links. On 5 January, the Congregation issued a statement saying Fr Balasuriya had incurred the severest form of excommunication, or *Latae sententiae*, because he distorted Catholic dogma. The last person excommunicated in Sri Lanka was the reverend Leonard Feeney—an American—in the 1950s for an alleged statement he made against salvation outside the church.

Fr Balasuriya's most recent book (he is author of nine) ruffled the papal cape because it challenges fundamental Catholic beliefs related to baptism, original sin and immaculate conception. The Vatican has accused Fr Balasuriya of questioning the validity of sacred tradition and of minimising

the validity of faith. It says the priest's presentation of original sin questions the basic teachings of the church regarding Jesus Christ and his mother Mary and casts serious doubts on the divinity of Christ, the role of Christ as redeemer, and the privileged position of Mary in the history of salvation.

Fr Balasuriya refutes it all, saying, "I firmly state that I have never denied, rejected or deviated from any doctrine of the Catholic faith. It follows that I have not committed any form of heresy. Therefore, there is no basis in fact or in law to make a declaration that I have incurred excommunication."

The priest, associated with the

# Mary and Human Liberation

Logos Vol 29 Nos 1 & 2, March/July 1990

Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, SLR 100/USD 8

Colombo-based Centre for Society and Religion, which promotes Christian values, says he was not given a fair hearing and argues that his excommunication is nothing more than the Church's way of sending a message to those who differ on dogma and may similarly want to go public. Fr Balasuriya is also angry he has been singled out. He says: "Many other writers, specially in the West, have expressed identical or similar views. None of them, as far as we know, has been treated so severely and with the threat of excommunication. Why am I subjected to such unique and selective discrimination?"

Not surprisingly, many Lankans have rallied around Fr Balasuriya, saying the Vatican was labelling him a "rebel priest" as a warning to its many detractors. "This is disturbing for many Catholics," says Bernadine de Silva, Assistant Director of the Centre where Fr Balasuriya works. "They are wondering why this is happening to Father, whom they have known for many years and who has presided over mass so many times and spoken of the Gospel in relation to society."

The priest says he stands to be corrected if proved wrong and adds, "**Dogma does not come from heaven direct.** Theological formulations are the result of spiritual inspiration, revelation and intuition, plus expression of human language." He also claims to be arguing for a theology more in tune with today's multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world which has diverse levels of needs and priorities.

"Nearly 50 years after independence, our people are trying to get over old hostilities and to get to the essence of beliefs, values and relationships. My Christianity is also in this tradition, the tradition of Asian thinking and struggles."

- Mohan Samarasinghe



## Construct of Traditional Catholic Theology

The development of theology concerning Mary—or of Mariology—is a very interesting and intriguing example of how a religious institution can evolve its teaching, patterns of worship, life style of members and spirituality from very simple beginnings. It reveals the importance and impact of the first presuppositions on the course of subsequent evolution of theology.

Traditional Marian theology was developed in the Catholic church in the background of its general construct of theology that has prevailed from the early centuries till Vatican II—and in some ways up to the present times.

Many elements of Marian theology specially the defined dogmas are not contained as such in the Gospels which narrate the life and work of Jesus. Mariology is very much an evolution of subsequent centuries—with first references going back to St Irenaeus in the second century.

The Church teaching has been evolving over the centuries with the proclamation of:

- Mary Mother of God: in 432 at the Council of Ephesus.
- Virginit of Mary: by Pope Martin I, 649. Perpetual and perfect virginit of Mary before and after the birth of Jesus. Lateran Council—Denz.503.
- Immaculate Conception: in 1854 by Pope Pius IX.
- Assumption into Heaven: in 1950 by Pope Pius XII.

## Role of Imagination in Theology: e.g. in Mariology

Some of the foundations of traditional Mariology are derived from the mythical presentations of the Old Testament developed rather imaginatively into theology and at times dogmas. This need not be a problem if the doctrines had no unfavourable impact on the relations among persons and communities.

But in Mariology they have had disastrous consequences on the understanding of the relations of the sexes and religions. The Adam and Eve story has been a foundation of an ideology of male domination: Mariology is linked to it as Mary is presented as the second Eve. Both Mariology and Christology as they have been historically developed are closely related to the myth of the "Fall" of humanity and its consequences such as original sin and the type of redeemer that humanity is in need of. This has [in] turn led to the exclusivist and intolerant teachings and attitudes of Christian theology and "Christian" Powers such as the European colonisers in Asia, Africa, the Americas and Oceania in the past five centuries.

There is much room for imagination in Mariology because the content of the teachings in traditional Mariology have been very much concerning things about which we do not have verifiable information or are beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand and comprehend. For example,

- the conception of Mary and the relation of divine grace to her from the first moment of conception,
- the conception of Jesus by Mary through the "overshadowing" of the Holy Spirit,
- the "perfect and perpetual virginit of Mary",
- her being "mother of God",
- her bodily assumption into heaven,
- her role as mediatrix of grace and coredemprix of the human race.

Yet these have been (and are) very much the content of the teaching and preaching concerning Mary. Due to their being derived from the mythical elements in both the Old and the New Testament there is much room for the human imagination to interpret them—naturally in favour of the interpreters.

Thus, there are different explanations concerning the origin of Eve from Adam, but generally in favour of the priority of the male. Varying interpretations are given con-

cerning the condition of Adam and Eve before the alleged "Fall". This is spoken of in general Catholic theology as the state of original justice. This is something about which we cannot know anything by reason or experience. The Genesis narrative itself does not describe it except briefly and idyllically. It is later writers who refer to the action of the first parents (in the myth) as a grave sin against God's commands. The concept of original sin such as we have in Catholic theology is evolved over the centuries of Christians experience—with St Augustine throughout the Middle Ages to the definitions of the Council of Trent in the 16th century.

The differences between the Catholics and Protestants, and even among Catholics and among Protestants show what varieties of interpretation are possible. Each view presents an explanation of the state of original justice, the nature of the "fall", its consequences and correspondingly a concept of redemption. While we know from experience that human fallibility and mortality are combined with the desire for good and for immortality, we cannot know the historical origins of this predicament. But different theories or hypotheses propose varying views about the condition of humans at a time chronologically prior to the "fall" in an earthly paradise. Is not what is said about that state and stage very much a matter of theological imagination—e.g. such as Adam and Eve not being subject to concupiscence or death?

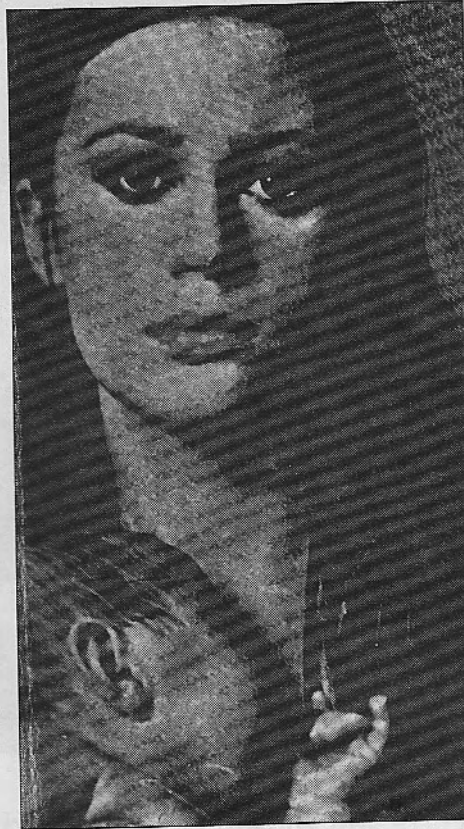
Yet these concepts led to conclusions about the nature and necessity of the grace of Christ and of the Church for the salvation of every human being. From thence it was easy to conclude—as the Churches did—that the other religions were not salvific. Thus very vital theological questions were responded to on the basis of conclusions derived from the interpretation over time of a mythical story. Naturally, each succeeding generation in the Church could give the value of "Tradition" to the interpretations of their predecessors in the faith.

The graces and privileges of Mary are deduced from the presuppositions assumed on the basis of the creation myth and its later reinterpretation, specially by Paul. These in turn led to the proclamation of Jesus as Son of God and Mary as Mother of God. The immaculate conception of Mary depends on the concept of the state of original justice and original sin in Catholic theology.

Developments in theology concerning the virginity of Mary and role of Joseph in the holy family are another area in which the imagination of preacher and writers as well as of ecclesiastical teachers has had much leeway. Who can know, after the time of the

Apostles, whether Mary was a virgin even after the birth of Jesus? Yet, due to a desire to affirm a certain perspective of holiness there has been a trend to attribute perfect and perpetual virginity to Mary even when the scriptural evidence itself is of doubtful import, as we mention later.

These considerations show us that it is important that we adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion in order to try to evaluate the impact of myth, ideology, imagination and prejudice in the evolution of dogmas. This is particularly necessary in situations in which



dogmas have a divisive impact in the pluralist society or deflect the attention of Christians from the more important issues of human community living and core message of the Gospel.

### Mary and Society

The traditional Mariological dogmas are in many senses not adequate for understanding Mary in relation to Society. In many ways they have been used for domesticating Mary, women, religion and spirituality. We have to try to understand Mary in relation to what Jesus was about. A holistic approach is necessary because there would have been a very close relationship and friendship between Jesus and Mary. It would be natural in an ideal family. We should also include Joseph in this for he is perhaps one of those most discriminated against and marginalised by theology.

### Mary and Jesus

We can think that Mary had an understanding of Jesus. She thought of him and his views. They grew up together. We can think of a partnership of Jesus and Mary, and later a search together. After some stage Jesus would have had the leading role; but Jesus died young and Mary continued with the group of followers.

In order to reflect on Mary and society we should not begin with the traditional dogmas of a descending Mariology; immaculate conception, virginity, mother of God, assumption and coronation. We should rather begin with Jesus and his work. Then we can try to see how Mary related to Jesus. More than any one else Mary lived for Jesus. Her life was linked to his.

...it is necessary to consider Jesus in relation to his mission of integral human liberation. Mary participated in this task, perhaps even helped to evolve his thinking, life style and way of presenting himself to the public.

### An Individualistic Asoial Mariology?

While Marian spirituality is historically deep-rooted and geographically widespread among the Catholics in Sri Lanka, its impact is of a rather individualistic and/or even other-worldly nature. It has not contributed adequately to the understanding and growth of new dimensions of mission and ministry required in our day as desired by the popes too...

Marian theology in Sri Lanka has come first from Portugal and in the British period after 1796 mainly from Southern Europe. Hence there is a great accent on external performances such as the processions and feasts. Their type of spirituality fits in readily with our national temperament, our traditions of external celebration and dependence on deities when facing difficulties in life such as in sickness and misfortunes...

(There were) limits of theological development under the Portuguese and later under the British. The Catholics had to develop their theological reasoning in the background of the dominant theology of the day within a framework of European domination of the colonies, and of the popular religiosity of the colonised people themselves.

Hence such a theology, when concerned with Mariology, would find it convenient to elaborate teachings and religious practices that relate to angels, the garden of Eden and idyllic presentations such as shepherds. They would have been rather embarrassed if they directed their attention to the more earthy socio-political realities such as her flight

into Egypt, her exile, the later contestation by her son and his companions of the local religious establishment and of the foreign rulers and their false values. Thus we do not find in classical Marian theology this dimension of liberation from social, economic and political oppression that highlighted the Magnificat and is now emphasised by recent Popes. Neither do we find in the Mariology prior to recent decades an inspiration for the liberation of women from male domination in society or within Catholicism itself.

Now that a new approach to Christology is being derived from the Gospel witness to his commitment to human life and social justice, a new Mariology is also emerging and can be developed. Correspondingly the prayers, meditations and hymns to Mary can be evolved so that the prayer life itself would bear witness to Mary's radical commitment of human fulfilment and social liberation in this life also. This is a task that this generation can fulfil, specially due to our present challenges.

### Re-Thinking Theology

In the 19th century, the central leadership of the Catholic Church had long-term objections to accepting democracy and liberty even in civil society, especially due to the French Revolution. Then authority was said to so come from God that it could not be from the people. The objection to the socialistic demands for societal reforms was even more deep seated, till the historic encyclical of Leo XIII on the "Condition of the Working Classes" in 1891. Even this encyclical was very much downplayed in many churches during several decades.

The changes in the situation of colonial peoples after their independence made the churches reconsider the attitude towards other religions. Now due to much work for consciousness raising in some local churches, the Catholics have changed to be among the foremost defenders of democratic rights and of free and fair elections, as in the Philippines in 1986.

In the growth of new theologies, creativity is moving, especially in theology concerning class and religions and cultures, away from Europe, and to some extent from North America also, to the so called "younger churches" or the "Third Church" as Walter Buhmann calls it. In the different stages of this evolution, the church authorities have had difficulties of acknowledging the validity and significance of these new perceptions. They are attached to the long-standing orthodoxies which have acquired a sacredness due to tradition, not to mention the advantage to them as the dominant society or social force.

The process of re-adjustment of thought and life is not without conflict and much heartburn within the churches. The authorities think they have to preserve the simple religiosity of their faithful. The faithful brought up according to the conventional modes of thinking and pious practices have a sentimental attachment of them even when these domesticate them to accept different forms of alienation and oppression. The internalisation of one's own subjection to the powerful acquires a legitimation and sacredness.



Nepali artist's rendition of Mary

On the other hand, the more thoughtful—especially the younger generation—tend to lose confidence in the entire system and even become "unchurched". This happened to the working class in Western Europe which Pope Pius XI mournfully regretted in the 1930s as the scandal of the 19th century. If the church does not rethink its theology and spirituality in a manner relevant to the present generation and their needs, the churches will be by-passed as irrelevant to their principal concern. During the past 50 years, there has thus been a large-scale "unchurching" and secularisation of persons who call themselves Christians in Western Europe. The Catholic priesthood is ageing and decreasing in number. In the not too distant future the Catholic Church in Western Europe will be a clergyless church, unless some radical changes are introduced to remedy this irrelevance.

The churches in Asia and Africa have to seriously ask themselves whether and how they can avoid such a fate. The more perceptive among the leaders such as Bishop Julio Labayan in the Philippines, Kim Chi Ha in South Korea, Samuel Rayen in India and the feminist theologians in every country are pathfinders seeking new orientations. But they are still somewhat marginal to the mainstream of the churches.

### Mary of the Third World

In most of Asia and Africa today we need a model of Mary that also relates to our presently exploited neo-colonised Third World context. Our local rulers, authoritarian, if not despotic, are often the Pilates and Herods of modern multi-national empires.

Marian Spirituality would be deeply and desperately concerned with the present situation in the world where the condition of the poorest of the poor is worsening in both relative and absolute terms. Mary, as the mother of Jesus and a universal mother of all humanity, would naturally be concerned most with those who suffer so much physically and psychically.

A Marian approach to the Third World would be inspired by the perceptions and programmes implied in the Magnificat of feeding the hungry and exalting the humble. Marian devotion and Marian shrines throughout the world would thus be invited to look into the present situation in the world, to understand the causes of the growing gap between the affluent and the poor and to take steps to remedy the situation.

Third Worldness can be got rid of in a short time if the human community had the will to do so. If Marian spirituality led to such a conviction it would have an immense impact on this situation as many of the dominators are in countries with many persons who are devotees of Mary.

In Asia (and Africa) we need to develop a Mariology that, while incorporating the best in other theologies, is also concerned with issues such as

- local elites and the marginalisation of the masses
- patterns of development, specially their impact on women, debt, human life, torture, human rights,
- economic, political, social, cultural and religious domination and liberation. IMF/World Bank policies of Structural Adjustment.

Asia can also help develop a Mariology that is global and relates to the planetary theology that is emerging. △

Here's a journal that means business. *Communalism Combat*, a hefty monthly tabloid that targets primarily the Hindu-

Muslim divide in the Subcontinent, and by that token is also more concerned with the India-Pakistan cleavage. Nevertheless, here is a publication from Bombay that plumbs the depths of intellectual discontent regarding the **Subcontinental Indo-Pak Bifurcation**. This Indian publication has managed to access a fairly large cross-section of Pakistani thought, from school children to activists. An article in the August 1996 issue mentions the travails of former Indian Navy Chief Admiral Ramdas—written by his spouse—when daughter got married to a Pakistani. *Communalism Combat's* husband-wife editorial team of Javed Anand and Teesta Setalvad, who started the publication after the 1992 post-Ayodhya Bombay riots, have managed to get quite a few Bombay-based commercial houses to advertise in the monthly. This indicates that there is still hope for progressive magazines. Write to them at: PO Box 28253, Juhu Post Office, Bombay 400 049.

A welcome trend visible in the Indian press is the shedding of old insularity and, in some instances, an ability to juxtapose interesting **cross-border issues**. One such example is an article in the *Times of India* by Ajit Kumar Jha entitled "Pakistan and Punjab", which compares the experiences of Pakistan (including Punjab Province) and India's Punjab going simultaneously into elections in February. The common need, says Mr Jha, is the need for democracy, for "democracies are never known to attack each other". And this is his analysis: "While a mere 25 percent turned out to vote in Pakistan's national election, over 65 percent voted in the assembly elections in India's Punjab. Although the mandate in both cases was decisive, and largely inspired by anti-incumbency, the former represents public cynicism at its worst, the latter signals collective enthusiasm at its best..."

# COMMUNALISM COMBAT

Be a little careful with **Vision Things**, i.e. all those claiming to bring overbearing prescience to bear on the problems of South Asian society.

I have received an undated little publication, titled *Vision 2022*, that seeks to do the near-impossible, "to develop a strategic vision for India's future and a course of action to translate such a vision into reality". Meant to chart a course "to transfer India into a fully developed economy", this particular effort has its origins in Bombay, an effort of the International Centre for Peace Initiatives, with a steering committee made up of societally-minded leaders of Maharashtra industry. Coordinated by Ilmas Futehally, the report seeks nothing less than the "reinvention of Indian democracy". I'm sure they will mail you a copy if you write to the ICPI at C-306 Montana, Lokhand-wala Complex, Andheri West, Bombay 400 053. The intentions are honourable.

Didn't know I was out of touch with the advances made by **women's glossies** in India over the last year. When a lady house guest arrived with the full range of what is now available for the (rich) Indian woman to read, I was properly humbled. The production quality is Western European, and the copy is final indication that the globalised takeoff has reached the (rich) Indian woman: *Elle* wants to tell you "What makes a man good in bed", *Cosmopolitan's* Madhu Gurung shares with you "The Art of Feel-Good Flirting", and homegrown *Femina* waxes on "Womanpower in the Boardroom". Perhaps for their European flavour, the bi-monthly *Elle* and *Cosmopolitan* rip a 50 (Indian) rupee hole in your purse; the monthly *Femina* is a better buy than the other two (it seems to me) at 25 rupees. Can all three survive in the Indian market? Probably not, and I am rooting for *Femina*. But let me just add: dumb South Asian that I am, I always thought scantily clad women on the cover were meant for girlie mags to be read by salivating males.

Now, late in life, I understand that the chastely underclad will do for the high society *meems* as well.

For my money, although I do not have any to spare, there is a real cool society/women's mag waiting to be born in South Asia. There is *Libaas*, published from London, but it mostly focuses in on the India-Pakistan jet set. How 'bout a **South Asian high society mag**? It will help bring us all together, especially if there are the aforementioned scantily underclad on the cover. Nepali belles frolicking on Maldivian beaches, Sri Lankan swimwear being modeled beneath the Potala. Quick, let's start a competition for a name. On the other hand, let's *guarantee* the new mag's failure by calling it *SAARC High Society Bulletin* and putting the various First Ladies (and Queens, including Bhutan's four) on the cover!

**Big, brazen advertising** are an increasingly common sight in the Indian dailies. This one in the *Indian Express* is of the variety that supports development projects that are better not made. "Without Sardar Sarovar There Is No Hope" is the tag line in a massive advertisement put up by a collection of Gujarat-based (and obviously government-funded—at least for this effort) NGOs. With a picture of starving African children, the ad tries to scaremonger with lines like "Ethiopia, Somalia and Now...North Gujarat and Saurashtra-Kutch." Only the Sardar Sarovar Project, it seems, "can save Gujarat from becoming another Ethiopia." Without going into whether the Ethiopian Embassy in



## 6 POLITICAL PULSE

**Vaghela strikes back again** **Gupta wants CBI to probe MP case**

**WORLD BANK HAS CAUTIONED:**

**WORLD BANK HAS ASSERTED:**

**WITHOUT SARDAR SAROVAR THERE IS NO HOPE**

**Ethiopia, Somalia and Now.... North Gujarat & Saurashtra-Kutch?**

**WORLD BANK HAS CAUTIONED:**

**WORLD BANK HAS ASSERTED:**

**WITHOUT SARDAR SAROVAR THERE IS NO HOPE**



# A sack full of problems

Under the Jute Packaging Act, the Government is considering to order that a certain percentage of cement produced must compulsorily be packed in jute bags. Consider the colossal national waste it would result in.

## Jute bags cause seepage and transit loss of 4-5%

Rs. 18200 crore worth of cement is produced annually. This seepage would cause a staggering Rs. 900 crore loss to the country, besides posing a serious pollution hazard.

## Jute bags can put an additional burden of Rs.980 crore on customers like you.

Because a jute bag costs Rs. 7 to Rs. 8 more than a plastic one.

## Cement packed in jute bags loses strength due to natural humidity.

This deterioration in quality is virtually non-existent in plastic bags.

## Jute bags are technically unsuitable for packing cement.

Cement, a fine powder, tends to react with the moisture in the air. So, it is technically unfeasible to pack cement in a porous material like jute bags.

## Jute bags will be absolutely anti-consumer.

Correct weight, proper quality and easy identification will not be possible with jute bags.

Cement production has doubled to 70 million tonnes since the Jute Packaging Act was passed in 1977. In the last 4 years, cement transit loss has increased to 4-5%. Cement simply refuses to stay in jute bags. In spite of cement remaining packed in jute bags, the consumption of raw jute for the last 4 years has been far greater than the output of the country. Under the Jute Packaging Act, the Government orders that a certain percentage of cement produced must compulsorily be packed in jute bags, besides opening a Pandora's box of serious problems for the consumer and the country. Can we afford it? **Just think about it.**

New Delhi sent a protest note to Mr Gujral, is it not malafide to quote a World Bank report in favour of the SSP dated December 1990 when the Bank itself pulled out of the project in 1993 following the Bradford Morse committee report? And, does it make a difference that the project is based in Madhya Pradesh and not Gujarat?

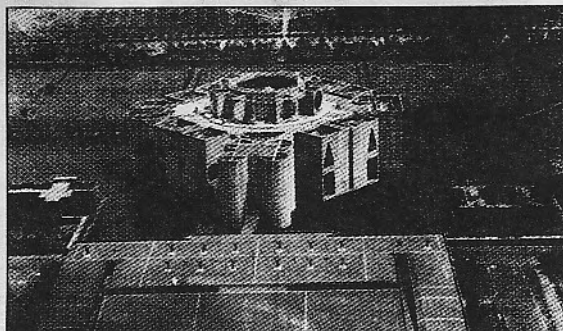
Now take a look at this other full-pager, an advertisement in the *Times of India* "issued for information of the public" by the **Cement Manufacturers' Association**. The ad is protesting GOI's order that a certain percentage of cement produced must compulsorily be packed in jute bags, an effort to provide some protection to the jute industry of West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and Orissa. This no-holds-barred attack on jute by the cement producers claims that seepage and transit loss of 4-5 percent that occurs with the use of jute bags means an annual loss of nine billion rupees for the nation, that each jute bag costs seven to eight more rupees than plastic, and that cement packed in jute loses strength due to natural humidity. Say the cement-wallahs: "Jute bags are absolutely anti-consumer." With bated breath, I now await the answer from the Jute Factory Owners' Association of India, or perhaps a tripartite response from hemp producers in the Indo-Bangla-Nepal triangle. Or, will they give up without a fight?

I do not grudge anyone who likes the look of the **Bangla Sangsad Bhawan** over in Dhaka, but for my money it ranks among the architectural monstrosities of the

region. Designed in a fit of post-modernist hysteria by Louis I. Kahn, this concrete nightmare tells me nothing of the Bangla landscape nor of the Bangalee character. It is, in a word, ugly. This ugliness probably explains why the building sees so many walkouts by whichever opposition is in power. The BNP has recently taken over the task from the Awami League—anything to get out of that horrible building. I was, therefore, sorry to see that the Sangsad Bhawan was given as the subject for a watercolour competition among the city youth by Dhaka's *The Independent*. And the results were quite imaginative, as the brave young ones sought to soften Mr Kahn's harsh lines with colours, greenery and pool reflections. Lest I be accused of having something against Bangladeshi democracy, let me hasten to add that I hate specific buildings in other countries with equal fervour. Do you want to hear me on what they put on Raisina Hill?

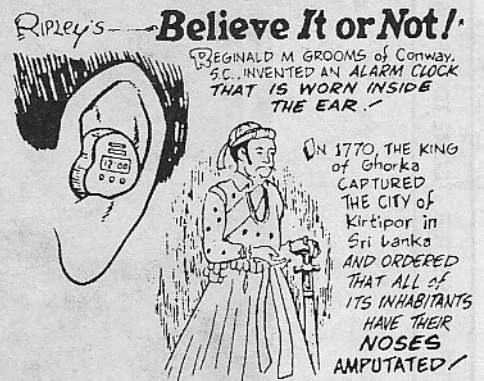
So, **Madeline Albright** becomes Secretary of State in Foggy Bottom and South Block is supposed to count its chickens. The fact that her father was a scholar who wrote sympathetically from the Kashmiri viewpoint is supposed to be bad for India. On the other hand, the fact that she had a row with Robin Raphael which meant *phut* to the State Department/South Asia stint of that Pal of Clinton's, is said to be good for India. But then again, the fact that Madame Albright is a shoot-from-the-hip, no-nonsense kind of person is said to be bad for India, whose officious foreign office wallahs do not take kindly to presumed affronts. It seems Ms Albright will be half-way through her term before the pundits are done with discussing whether her coming is good or bad for India.

The **2nd International Congress on Yak** is being organised in early September in Xining, Qinghai, by the Yak Research Institute. If you want to attend and learn all there is to know about these Himalayan



ungulates, contact Dr Han Xingtai at fax 86-0971-513-5080.

Here is the latest **Believe It or Not** snafu as it relates to South Asia. Firstly, I am indeed impressed that Mr Grooms of Conway, South Carolina has invented an alarm clock that is worn inside the ear. More power to him and his (left) ear! But how interesting, that the king of Ghorka captured the city of Kirtipur in 1770 and ordered that all of its inhabitants have their noses amputated. Several corrections are in order, and may the BION fact checkers listen carefully. Gorkha, not Ghorka, Kirtipur not Kirtipor,



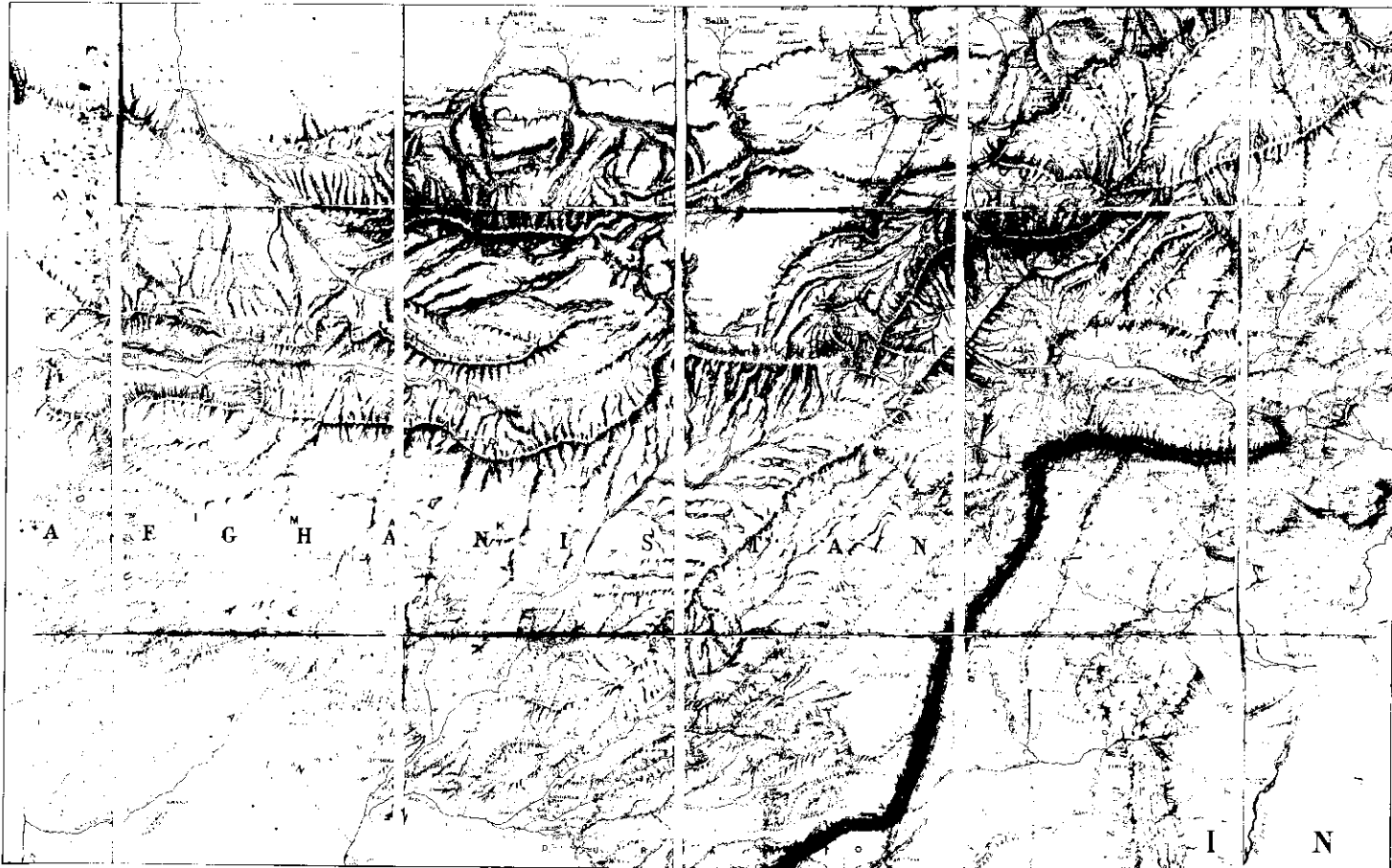
1765 not 1770. The country is wrong also. If my history serves me right, Prithvi Narayan Shah, the king of Gorkha, was uniting the land of Sita's birth and not the land where Ravana purportedly held her hostage.

I enjoyed Sanjay Suri's writing in the *Outlook* of 26 February, where he goes after Akbar Ahmed, who is producing the film *Jinnah*, for some foolish talk on the presumed **sexual politics of Partition**. Mr Suri writes:

... Ahmed's contention was that the Nehru-Edwina relationship gave Nehru an access to Mounbatten that Jinnah never could have. And this helped India get Kashmir, Ferozpur and Gurdaspur. But would such an affair not have provoked Mounbatten into jealousy and rage (with Kashmir, Ferozpur and Gurdaspur possibly then for Pakistan)? That question is answered with the simple suggestion [by Ahmed]: Mounbatten may have been bisexual. But does bisexuality negate jealousy by definition? Or did India get Kashmir, Ferozpur and Gurdaspur because Mounbatten was physically attracted to Nehru? Such suggestions made, silence on their implications becomes respectful.

- Chhetria Patrakar





# What Is Kabul to Us?

*The Taliban are attempting to impose a new moral order in Afghanistan and they are doing it at gunpoint. The Afghan experience has lessons for the rest of South Asia, rent by violent dissension everywhere.*

by Barun De

**T**he fall of Kabul to the Taliban in September last year exhilarated jaded headline writers in the press. "Kabul Falls, Najibullah Hanged", screamed an English daily in Calcutta on 27 September across the top of the page. The picture of the first ex-communist president of the Soviet bloc, who had to hide for five years in a UN compound in the capital he once dominated, dangling with his brother from street poles in front of a gaping crowd, were globally published.

Would Islamic fundamentalism take over northern Afghanistan? Would it enter Panjshir, which, in the 1980s, had kept out the Russians themselves? What would happen to ex-communists in Balkh and Mazar-i-Sharif, including Babrak Karmel and Anahita Ratebzad? Would the new alliance in the internal game of "round and round the mulberry bush" between Ahmed Shah Masood and Rashid Dostam, succeed, where previous improbable heavy dancers had "all fallen down"? Were

northern ethnic warlords going to drive Pathan mullahs from the south and east out of Kabul and re-establish a relatively modern, and less sexist government?

By October-end, the press, notoriously quick on the draw with conclusions about future scenarios was predicting that the Taliban would have Kabul imploding in their faces. The city had blown down previous rulers who sought to change traditional ways of political culture and had seen internecine warfare from the times of Amanullah and Bacha-i-Saqao in 1929 to those of Prince-President Daud, and then Nur Muhammad Tarakki, Hafizullah Amin, and latterly, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Najibullah.

The Western journalists, who live on Chicken Street (Kabul's version of the pony-tailed foreigner-infested Thamel of Kathmandu), had begun to be cynical about old stories, that Afghan politics was paradigmatic of *buzkashi*, the crude form of polo where horsemen grab

Above: Section from Stanford's Large Scale Map of Afghanistan, Showing the New British Frontiers According to the Treaty of Gandamak, Edward Stanford, London, 1879.

after a disembowelled sheep's carcass. They had started to look forward to the days when bottles of Scotch would be easier to get, and women could once more be glimpsed unveiled.

Afghanistan had petered out from world headlines by late autumn, even as the rocketry continued to whine between contesting parties in the plains north of Kabul, and south of the Salang Tunnel in the Hindu Kush. The anti-Taliban northern ethnic coalition however, has teetered to a halt near the military airfields of Bagaram and Shindand on the flanks of the Hindu Kush. In addition to Kabul, the Taliban still hold the western city of Herat, which lies between the Uzbeks in Balkh, the Turkmen in the northwest, and the Iranians in Meshed (who are sympathetic to the northern coalition and antagonistic to Sunni fundamentalists who have oppressed and treated as heretics, Shi'ahs between Herat and Kandahar in the west central hills of the Hazarajat).

The Taliban are wedged firmly across the Russian-built highway from the southeastern Afghan border past the Bolan Pass and Quetta in Pakistan to the Afghan northwestern frontier on the Turkmenistan border south of Mary (Merv). They appear to have achieved the objective of securing those routes which they set out to in early 1994 offering protection to convoys using the rhetoric that this would improve tourist traffic to Herat and the Turkmen Desert.



Few in the world were then aware of even that rhetoric. And if the present status quo persists, Pakistan will have secured an alternative route to northern Central Asia with its natural gas and oil as well as the presently untapped metal and gold reserves. This route is much shorter than the northeast-southwest passage by rail from Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, through Saraakhs and Meshed to the Gulf and thus into the Arabian Sea. In a sense, the latter route represents two sides of a triangle with its base being the Pakistan-Turkmen line running through presently Taliban-held territory. It gives Pakistan a strategic position in Hither West Asia—a position that provides "deep defence" against Central Asian (as CIS surrogates) or Iranian threat, and releases its armed forces, to that extent, to engage India in the east.

The press does not find much of interest in these arcane geopolitical details. In December, the same Calcutta newspaper, which has been so titillated by the lynching of an ex-communist who had liquidated (as its American news agency sources told it) "thousands" of anti-communists in Kabul prison, had a small snippet in its inside pages reporting the death from cancer in a Moscow clinic of ex-president Babrak Karmel, Najibullah's predecessor and patron of General Dostum. Equally small snippets reported on how the Kabulis were bemoaning the Taliban's insistence on using plastic instead of paper (which should be better used for the holy word) for pack bags, much as they bewailed the royal order forcing them to wear European hats and suits during the days of Amanullah (the ill-fated last Barakzai monarch) just before his downfall in 1928, and how Westerners in Chicken Street dash around buying stocks of toilet paper since it has been rumoured that paper will be banned even for personal sanitation.

Beyond this transition from tragedy to farce, as history repeats itself in a more macabre way in Kabul seventy years later, however, lie deeper problems. Not just of this kind reported in a back page some time ago: moderate Taliban leadership, presumably sensitive to State Department and Pakistan Presidential rule blandishments, are seeking to build, through talks in Mazar-i-Sharif, a coalition between the ex-communist Dostum, a dissident Shi'ah in the West and their still fundamentalist Sunni selves. Beneath this recursive trend of coalition of ideology, improbable only to the US fundamentalism of Huntington's "clash of civilisations" lie factors of loose texture which are the warp and weft of the modern Afghan polity.

**Tribal Fissures**

Afghanistan can hardly be relegated, as Western journalists in their blase manner do, to the Grand Guignol of genocide in Srebrenica and Ruanda-Burundi or mass slaughter in Hobart, Dunblane or Oklahoma. They practise President Clinton's naive reductionism about a Western Orientalist set of images—an image of ferocious mountaineers, incapable of governing themselves, whether in Yugoslavia, Central Africa, the Caucasus, or the hillknots from Kurdistan to Karakoram all the way from Turkey to Kashmir, and requiring State Department mediation or UN police forces to keep them in order. Let us first consider some geo-cultural specificities.

Afghanistan became a sovereign state in the modern



sense of the term, with a feudal sense of nationality, if not a civil society, only a little over 200 years ago. That happened when Ahmed Shah Abdali, a southern Afghan tribal chieftain, carved it as his principality out of the ruin of Nadir Shah's brief Iranian successor state to the Safavids (1501-1736). Before that, the only well-known Sultans in Afghanistan had been the early 16th-century fugitive from Ferghana, Babur, who used Kabul to invade North India, and the 11th-century Ghaznavid and Ghoriid Sultans Mahmud and Muhammad, who raided the Indus Plains.

Abdali's grandson Shah Shuja had his imperial domains whittled down to the west of the North-West Frontier of the Indus Basin up to the Oxus in the north, the Helmand Basin in the South north of the Baluchistan waste littoral of the Arabian Sea and Kandahar and Herat in the west. This 19th-century residual mountain domain was a fragile political integration, which Amir Dost Mahomed and much later Amir Abdur Rahman and his son Amir Habibur Rahman could hold against the imperialist clutches of both Russian and British expansionism.

But between the First and Second Afghan Wars (1838-42 and 1878-80), the political domain fissured around the cities on the four sides of the Afghan compass. Tribally dominant clans among the Pathan people held social and economic authority over the countryside, divided not just ethnically, but also by Islamic sects. They were equally fractured in terms of differentiated access to trade routes—to Baluchistan and Sindh, to Peshawar and the Punjab, to Chitral, Gilgit and Ladakh, to the South-eastern Bukhara Emirate across the Amu Darya, to Merv of the Turkmans, and to Meshed in Iran.

This fragmentation is not a creation of imperialism or Soviet occupation or US-Pakistani arms buildup against the Russians, though each has contributed its share to chaos, endemic to the Afghan political culture. Only iron nerves have held the balance and then only too briefly.

The making of the Afghan centralised state under British pressure from the east since the 1880s, initiated by the later Barakzai Amirs, was cumulative and ephemeral. Equally so was the reformulation of their absolutism into a neo-Kamalist modernisation under Amanullah in the 1920s. It practised the same aggrandising state rapine of the South Asian eighteenth-nineteenth century principalities, briefly built by Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan in Mysore, Mahadaji Sindhia in Gwalior, or Ranjit Singh in the Punjab. Like them, it had no traditional legitimacy to establish hegemony, the sort that even the House of

Gorkha has been able to establish over Kathmandu Valley since the late eighteenth century despite fratricidal court intrigue for controlling Nepali absolutism.

Without even such feudal absolutist legitimacy and representing far more deep-rooted traditions of tribal dissonance and regional strife over trade tolls and ethnic differentiation, the *Loya Jirga*, or tribal sovereignty, of the Afghan monarchy became the pawn of Prince Daud's Marxisant court intrigues, backed by Karmel's Communist Parcham faction. This destroyed the Afghan monarchy in the early 1970s. In quick succession came the role of the Khalq faction in the new Republic in 1979, leading to Soviet occupation, the intensification of mujahedin insurgency, and the present endemic civil warfare which has now continued for almost two decades now.

### Cat's Cradle

In this crisis of state and society, it is too often forgotten that Afghans had intellectual as well as trade contacts which were not national but extra-territorial. They studied in the *madrasas* (theological seminaries for Islamic morality) of Bukhara, Iran, even Al-Azhar as far west as Cairo, and certainly in revivalist Islamic seminaries of North India such as Deoband, north of Aligarh (since the middle of the nineteenth century) and further east in Lucknow or Azamgarh. They had spiritual affinity with Naqshbandi and Qadiri Sufi traditions of Central Asia, with Shi'ahs of Iran and Tajikistan, and with the orthodox ways inculcated by Shaikh Ahmed of Sirhind in India, known to later Muslim generations in Pakistan and West Asia as Mujaddid-Alf-i-Sani. Afghan maulanas who supported the old monarchy were certainly traditionalist and orthodox, but they were not uneducated and certainly they maintained, however brittle, a culture of tribal compromise and hospitality which, while fiercely autonomous, was cross-national rather than politically chauvinistic.

Examples may be found in the first and second presidents of free Afghanistan after the downfall of Najibullah. Pir Sibghatullah Mujaddidi, the last of the family of Hazrats of Shor Bazar, 31 of whom were liquidated in the communist crackdown after 1980, was descended from spiritual advisers to the orthodox rulers of Kabul. He was the first consensus choice for the impractical two-year rotating presidential term. Responding to an Indian TV interviewer's query about Pakistani aid to his group in the war of resistance, he said he could not be inimical to India, from where his ancestors had learnt devoted faith in the great Mujaddid whose cognomen he bore. Sarhind was his spiritual home. In this conflation of territorial boundaries (Sirhind is in Pakistan now) he reminded one of Nepalis who through the ages have looked to Benares and Darbhanga for their cultural learning, to Calcutta for their modern values in the days of British rule, and now through Delhi to the consumerist Western world.

On the other hand, Maulana Burhanuddin Rabbani, the next President, who failed to leave office after completing two years, and became known for Indian support of his Tajik militias of Ahmed Shah Masud in contradistinction to Pakistani support first of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, and then of the Taliban mullahs, was educated at Al-Azhar in Africa. The cultural mix of Islam all the way from

Landmine warning, the ubiquitous legacy of the 20-year-old civil war.

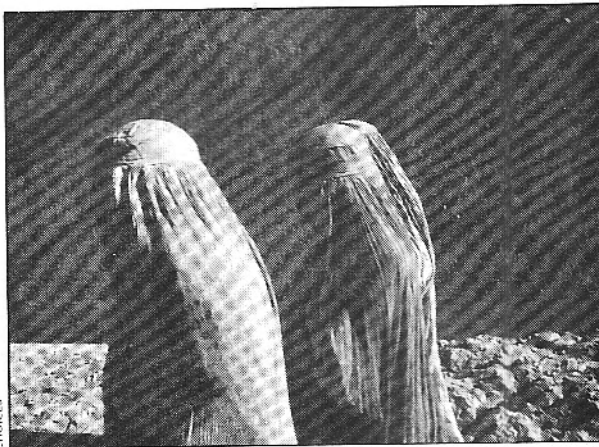
*The cultural mix of Islam all the way from Hindustan to the Maghreb is part of the Afghan intellectual loose texture.*

Hindustan to the Maghreb is part of the Afghan intellectual loose texture.

But this loose fabric is shot through by distinct strands which give its culture particular colours, religious sectarian as well as ethnic. South and east are Pathan in their regional composition, with affinities to cousins and kin in the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan; west are Hazaras of the central hill fastnesses and Turkoman around Herat with affinities divided between the Shiah brethren of the Hazaras in eastern Iran and Turkomans of the CIS Republic of Turkmenistan; north are Uzbeks in Cisoxania with socialist sympathies similar to those of the people in Uzbekistan across the CIS border; the northeastern Tajiks with ethnic affinities with the Badakshani villages across the border in Tajikistan, but with no sectarian affinities with Shiah Tajiks of the autonomous region of Gorno (mountain) Badakshan in the Republic of Tajikistan. Sectarian tensions are generally at cross purposes with the ethnic cross-border alignments.

In this cat's cradle of conflict and cooperation, further compounded by shifting alliances between segments, sectarian moieties and factions of coalitional political groups calling themselves, *jamiat* (gathering), *Wahdat* (union) or *Hizb* (party) of the faithful of Islam, the fact of resistance to the Russian invaders no longer unites. In Mazar-i-Sharif and the mineral rich region round Shibarghan close to the Uzbek state border, the rulers are militia who fought for Najibullah as late as the 1980s and they have not forsworn affinities with CIS and particularly

Perhaps the most publicised aspect of Taliban rule—veiled women of Afghanistan.



Uzbekistan. Close to them in an anti-Taliban and anti-Pathan alliance to defend Loval valley are the Tajiks of Rabbani and Masood, so that one may say that the Russian troops who hold the CIS border still have indirect influence over northern Afghanistan, much as their ancestors had over northern Iran in the early twentieth century, under the terms of the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907.

Thus the Russian Federation is still one of the major players in the new "game" for control of Kabul, and thus of the Afghan state. It must, however, be noted that after the Dostum-Masood alliance in October, when Iranian foreign policy took the initiative to work with India and Boutros-Ghali's UN, in defence of that anti-Taliban alliance, the Uzbeks who neighbour Mazar-i-Sharif were marked by their absence in the Tehran conference to reach consensus on a peace settlement. An Uzbek-Taliban realpolitik coalition cannot be ruled out.

## Bull Ring of Civil War

The other party to the early 20th-century convention to carving up Iran exists no more. There is no political structure such as post-colonial British India. The British have withdrawn from political influence through the Commonwealth of Nations and are now interested in multinational trade and bilateral industrial promotion ventures in South Asia—very much as subaltern officers of US superpower superordination. The US, now the informal residuary legatees of British imperial interests in littoral Asia, are keenly interested in controlling Shiah Iran's radical rhetoric of resisting the "Satanic" Empire of the Atlantic.

The State Department seeks to sanitise the Afghan civil war, so that anti-Pakistani forces seeking freedom from the financial and patronage liens of the anti-Soviet resistance movement which was regulated from Peshawar and Quetta do not join up with Iran and India. And neither does it want them to work out independent bargains with Central Asian post-communist state formations about oil and natural gas resource transfers from points of extraction by end users and by Western entrepreneurial agencies which facilitate this exploitation.

This new game is one of sanitisation of an area earlier turned into a bullring of civil war by the Cold War rivalry of USA and USSR, and their surrogates of Afghan communists and Pakistani-financed mujahedin. The US agencies find it in their interest to deflect Uzbeks and Tajiks from controlling the Pathans and upsetting an old ethnic equation of Afghan state power. This is the context in which the Taliban are treated as democratic insurgents against an ethnic regime, which usurped power by corruptly breaking compacts to rotate it among different elements of the mujahedin so that all resistance fighters against the communists could have their share of power.

The Taliban refugees of the southern and eastern Pathan provinces, uprooted by the civil war and educated in *madrasas* in Pakistan, are refugees often of the second generation without the loyalty to traditional political culture that indigenous citizens, even first generation refugees, cling to. These second-generation deracinees with grievances but armed with sophisticated weaponry call themselves not just *mullas* (practitioners of religion) but *Taliban* (novitiates in a new morality). They are fighting an utterly new type of civil war for our recent times, one that challenges in private homes and public streets the "actually-existing Socialism" of national literacy, women's enlightenment, or the patriotic financial austerity of the mixed economy at bayonet point.

This new morality is, of course, fundamentalist. But it is not the statist, constitutionalist, bourgeois patriotic fundamentalism, say of the Sangh Parivar of the Hindu Right of India, the Buddhist chauvinists in Sri Lanka, or the BNP/Ershad patronage controllers in Bangladesh. It is far more private and individualist, its legitimacy basing itself on the call of conscience, frustrated by political, bureaucratic and judicial corruption in post-colonial decadent state forms, for puritanical authenticity, rigid moralism, and recourse to corporeal violence on the body of offenders through public flagellation performances, reminiscent of medieval shows of fanaticism. It has worked in a milieu of "permanent dissension" (as distinct from "permanent revolution") in which public morality or the

sacredness of political accords and compromises has been seen to have crumbled. After all, Rabbani and his Tajik praetorian guards, as well as the Uzbek militias who betrayed Najibullah to the victorious mujahedin five years ago, flouted the compromise accords to share power by *loya jirga* consensus every two years.

It is this private, individualist defence of legitimacy which acts as a new morality for the Jamiat-ul-Islami in South Asia. It validates the ideology of Maulana Abul Al Maudoodi's epigoni; be it noted that the students' wing of the Jamiat-i-Islami is known as Jamiat-i-Tulba. Tulba and Taliban are alternative plural forms of *talib* (which means novice or religious student). Here lies the link between the Jamiat-i-Islami of Pakistan, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence spooks of General (retd) Hamid Gul (the political mentor of cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan) and Afghan fundamentalism resurgent.

This new concatenation of ideological and armed force is fuelled by the frustration of a generation, let down by the corruption and hypocrisy of their elders, and is manipulated by arms, drugs, and mercenary trafficking, by an unholy alliance between the sanitisation of radical Islam and export of the backlash of reactionary moralist Islam. It is this which gives a novel dimension to the struggles between Kandahar and Herat on the one hand, and Mazar-i-Sharif and Panjshir on the other for control over the autonomy of the latter. This is a conjuncture as much intellectual as geopolitical, which is the base of the rhetoric or rocketry, air strafing, and destruction of town quarters and villages in the Afghan hills. It is this conjuncture, which has to be transformed, before the trauma of the hills can even begin to be cleared. And it is not clear how such a transformation towards a new sanity can come.

### Brezhnevite, Islamic Zero-Sum

This is the dilemma which Kabul posits to South Asia. The horrors of Afghanistan caught like Laocoon in the coils of post-civil war anarchy can await Kashmir or Bodoland, in the way that they have rent Jaffna, and have traumatised the psyche of Indian Punjab or Pakistani Baluchistan and now Sindh. This is the horror of internecine militancy against the state and the counter dependent domestic militarisation in the interests of elite factions, intent on grabbing niches at gunpoint within the ruling class, instead of mobilising popular non-violent consensus.

The horror may go away when South Asia forgets the experience since the 1960s and 1970s of armed groups being conjured up to destabilise regions in the name of autonomy for "Liberation Fronts" or "Liberation Tigers". But the ancillary experiences of Nagaland, Bangladesh, Mizoram, Eelam, the *Jummas* in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Kashmir, or the suppression of segmentary demands of Uttarakhand, Darjeeling or Bodoland by other segmentary state elites are scored deep in the South Asian consciousness. These searing experiences make it incumbent on the popular consciousness of South Asia to combat the last twenty years of Kabul's history and seek a newer, more positive morality than zero-sum games, whether Brezhnevite or Islamic. Only thus can the popular sense of peace and progress be reasserted.

As matters stand in 1997, three years before this unhappy century ends, the search for a morality, newer than the barbarities of fundamentalism is not in high key evidence yet in South Asia. △

B. De is Director of Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Calcutta.

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# FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN DOCUMENTARIES FILM SOUTH ASIA '97

18-21 SEPTEMBER 1997

Day by day, South Asians are being increasingly exposed to the visual media through the rapid spread of cinema and satellite television. As a result, the space for documentary films is also expanding in the region. Documentary and 'alternative' filmmakers are being recognised as a potent force in entertainment, information and education.

Film South Asia is a festival of documentary films, an interactive venue for film professionals and connoisseurs from all over the region. It will help develop the market for documentaries within and outside South Asia, promote a sense of community among independent filmmakers, and provide a quality platform for exhibiting new work.

*Himal South Asia*, which ran the Film Himalaya '94 in February 1994, is organising the first Film South Asia Festival.

## WHY SEPTEMBER WHY KATHMANDU

Kathmandu has been chosen as the venue for the first Film South Asia festival because of its easy accessibility from most regional metropolises, Nepal's convenient visa procedures, a aside each evening for up to two discussion groups featuring directors, station owners, critics, etc. There will be maximum interaction among the participants through symposia, talks by special guests, and impromptu sessions. Pigeonholes for individual delegates and entries will help to maximise communication during the event.

## VENUE AND ORGANISATION

The Festival will be held for four days running at the Russian Cultural Centre in downtown Kathmandu. The Festival will open on the evening of 18 September, Thursday. Time will be set aside each evening for up to two discussion groups featuring directors, station owners, critics, etc. There will be maximum interaction among the participants through symposia, talks by special guests, and impromptu sessions. Pigeonholes for individual delegates and entries will help to maximise communication during the event.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT

Suman Basnet, Festival Director

GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal

Phone: 977-1-523845/522113, Fax: 521013, email: himal@himpc.mos.com.np

## FUTURE PLANS

The organisers of Film South Asia plan to hold the festival every two years. Future festivals can be organised in South Asian cities other than Kathmandu. The site for FSA 1999 shall be announced at the closing of FSA '97 following consultation with delegates.

Besides holding future festivals, the organisers are contemplating the setting up of a permanent secretariat which will act as a continuous go-between among South Asian makers of documentaries.

A South Asian Documentary Film Archive is also planned, and filmmakers and right-holders of the FSA '97 entries are requested to donate their films to the archive on a non-circulatory, non-broadcasting, non-rental basis. The Film Himalaya Archive, which grew out of generous contributions during the 1994 festival, will be telescoped into the planned South Asian Archive.

## ENTRY FORM

Entry forms are being distributed.

Contact the Festival Office in Kathmandu for your copy.

Forms can also be accessed at <http://www.atrav.com/film>

Entry selection deadline 15 May 1997.



## Song of Freedom

## An End to Revisionist History

A still from *Mukthir Gaan*.

A documentary film brings archival footage into the light and helps Bangladesh remember in its 25th year of liberation.

by Naeem Mohaiemen

**M**ukthir Gaan (Song of Freedom) is the first-ever full-length feature film on Bangladesh's 1971 liberation war. In 1971, the Bengali revolt against Pakistani domination and the subsequent army crackdown captured world headlines on an unprecedented scale. The papers enthusiastically dubbed it "The Bengali Holocaust". For a war-weary generation in the West, already on edge from Vietnam war protests, the "genocide" in the Subcontinent inflamed passions and triggered agitation against US arms policy, blockades against Navy ships, and guerrilla theatre in front of the White House and Hyde Park.

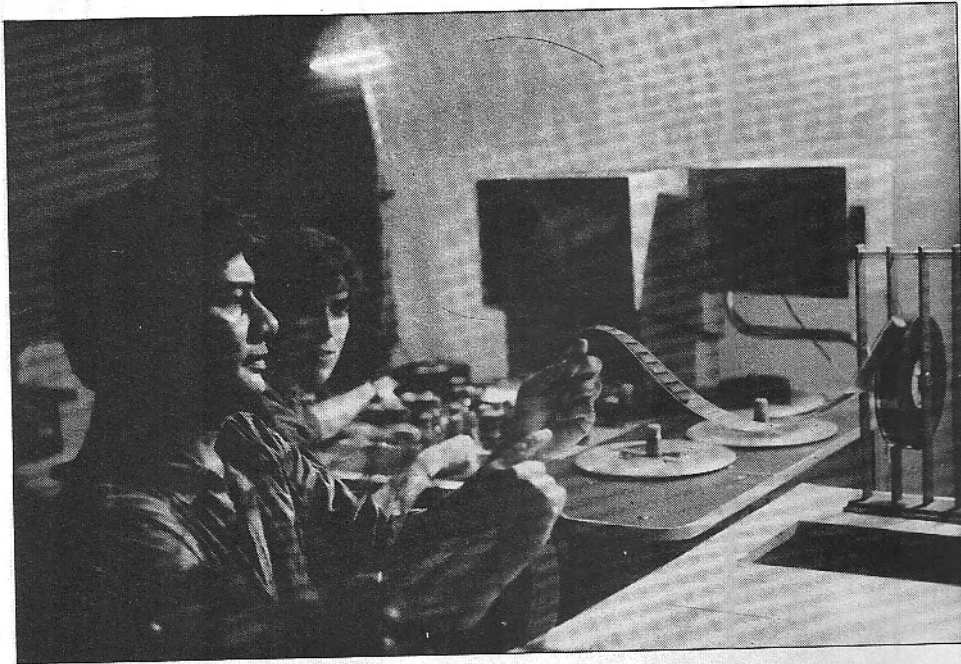
Yet, for an event that inspired such passionate, and seemingly selfless (unlike Vietnam, there were no Americans coming home in body bags) acts of defiance in the West, the Bengali liberation struggle disappeared from radar screens with unseemly haste. There were no collected "guerilla poems", no romantic novels with heroes parachuting into the middle of occupied Dhaka, no anniversary articles in the *New York Times*.

The media disappearing act was helped by the fact that the liberation struggle's charismatic leader Sheikh Mujib turned out to be an inept administrator, and his 1975

assassination left no larger-than-life leader to glamorise. Ultimately, media sources moved by their usual logic. With the end of the war, there were no more dead bodies—reporters simply got bored and moved on.

#### Feeding Frenzy

Filmmaker Lear Levin, whose work is the core of *Mukthir Gaan*, discovered the brevity of media attention span the hard way. When he set off to make a film on Bengali guerrilla camps in India, the struggle was the cause of the moment. Protesters had set up camp inside mock cement pipes outside the White House (representing the Bengali refugees



The Masuds at work editing.

huddled in construction pipes in India); Bill Moyers and his merry men had created human flotillas to prevent US Navy ships from leaving harbour; Chicago was treated to the bizarre sight of a sari-clad white woman on a crowded street carrying out guerrilla theatre depicting the "Rape of Bangladesh"; George Harrison and Joan Baez had both written hit songs with Bangladesh in the title; and presidential-aspirant Teddy Kennedy was clobbering Nixon over arms shipments to Pakistan.

By the time Mr Levin returned with over 20 hours of footage from India and Bangladesh, however, the media and the public had moved on. Cambodia, Watergate, the continuing struggle in Vietnam, and a host of other events had conspired to make the obsession with Bangladesh one of the brightest, yet short-lived, moments in the history of media feeding-frenzies.

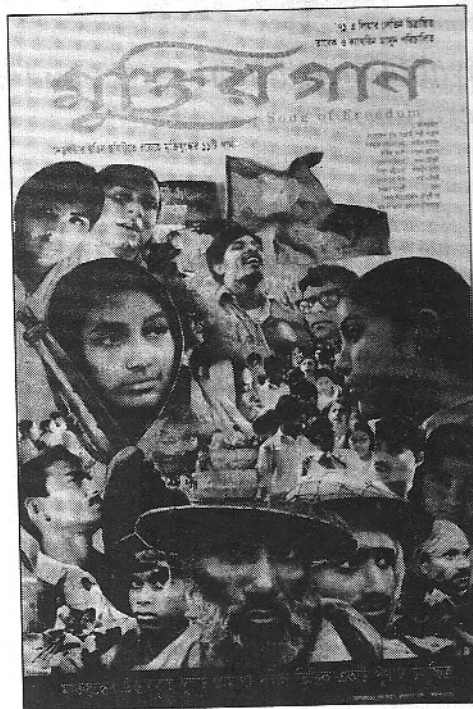
Disheartened by his inability to find commercial buyers for the footage, Lear Levin consigned his film stock to a Brooklyn basement. As the myth goes, a chance remark at Tareque and Catherine Masud's wedding in Dhaka led them on the 20-year-old trail of Mr Levin. In New York, the Masuds hit the jackpot when they not only found Mr Levin, but also obtained permission to use the footage without any royalty. Compared to the exorbitant prices the filmmakers had to pay for the few minutes of archival news-reports obtained elsewhere, Mr Levin's gift was a windfall that made the film possible.

A process of reverse script-writing then began, with the Masuds extracting sequences from 20 hours of footage to piece together a story of a travelling band of Bengali musi-

cians collecting funds for the war effort and raising the spirits of the guerrillas. Along the way, the husband-wife team found assistance from a variety of activists in the Bengali community in the US, including invaluable help in raising the seed money from fundraisers. For a community that is still struggling for economic stability in the US, being instrumental in a forty-thousand-dollar project was no small achievement.

**Lyrics and Chants**

The finished film is the story of a singing cultural troupe travelling through refugee camps and eventually crossing the border



into liberated zones of Bangladesh. Interspersed with this is invaluable documentary footage, including Sheikh Mujib's famous speech of 7 March 1971 ("This time the struggle is for freedom"—the first time the cautious Mujib echoed the radical student factions' long-running demand for total separation from Pakistan). Also here is the spectacle of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who precipitated the crisis by rejecting the Bengali victory in the 1970 Pakistan election, tearing up a United Nations resolution and storming out—with a listless George Bush, then Ambassador to the UN, looking on.

The troupe's song performances are gems of folk history, and the enthusiasm of the refugees at various shows is captured with a minimum of intrusiveness. A standout is the *kirthan*-style song where actor Swapan Chowdhury alternately goes into a trance and dissolves the chorus into an orgy of applause. This song's lyrics are also the film's sharpest barbs at the role of the Nixon administration in trying to send the Seventh Fleet to the aid of Pakistan:

*But now the Pak army flees for their lives  
and  
with them flees the Seventh Fleet  
Then Yahya Khan cries out  
Tell me, oh tell me,  
where did Uncle Sam go?  
But now the thugs flee,  
And with them flee the collaborators  
Then General Niazi cries out  
Tell me, oh tell me,  
where did Uncle Sam go?*

Other songs are familiar patriotic songs, mixed with chants of "Destroy the Pak invaders". The lyrics alternately affirm love for the land and proclaim universal brotherhood—themes popularly identified with Bengali nationalism of the late 1960s:

*From Jessore, Khulna, Bagura, Pabna,  
Dhaka they hail  
Not Hindus, Not Muslims, they are all  
Bengalee*

The sad irony of these lines and the presence of a large number of Hindu performers in the cultural troupe seems to have escaped audiences at most screenings. Given

Poster advertising the film.

the recent surge in Islamic iconography in Bangladesh politics (with even Sheikh Mujib's formerly 'secular' Awami League adopting visibly Muslim trappings), and the gradual diminishing of the Hindu presence in Bangladesh's cultural-political scene—the film is a sad reminder that although the 1971 liberation struggle was celebrated globally because of its secular beliefs (one League poster proclaimed: "Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, Muslims of Bengal are all brothers"), subsequent governments of free Bangladesh failed to approach any of the ideals declared on the battlefield.

The troupe's puppet theatre illustrates how Pakistani leaders like General Yahya Khan were transformed into larger-than-life villains. Here we see villagers—who had

documentary realism, with the exception of the few staged scenes of dialogue.

Offering a contrast to this is the parrot the troupe collects on its travels. Troupe members try to teach the bird Bengali, starting with the ultra-dainty "When evening comes slowly" couplet (one wag at a screening called this symbolic of the Bengali middle class—playing their elegant games while Dhaka burnt), and ending up with the slogan made famous by Sheikh Mujib: "Joi Bangla!" The parrot fails to learn either the gentle lyrics or the street chant—in real life, not everything happens on cue.

### Middle Class Liberation

*Mukthir Gaan* succeeds as an affectionate portrait of the travelling musicians in war-

ing middle class. But when the war broke out, the conflict mutated into Bengali vs non-Bengali—class differences were temporarily forgotten as peasants fled across the border in the same cattle-carts as their city-bred "betters".

Throughout the nine months of conflict, the middle class leadership repeatedly declared the struggle to be for the "Workers and Farmers of Bengal". But as soon as the war effort was over, each faction retreated to its own camp. With a nation of their own, the Bengali middle class prospered, the peasantry who returned across the borders of "free" Bengal found their status unchanged.

Most of the cultural troupe members are now well-placed members of Bangladesh society, but a search for some of the peasants seen on screen would probably place them in the same straw huts they lived in before the war. Not surprisingly, conspicuously absent in the New York screenings of *Mukthir* (attended by this writer) were the city's large Bangladeshi working class population. Ritual celebration of the war remains a middle class phenomenon—the only class that was truly "liberated" in 1971.

### Too Much Authenticity

The challenge faced by the Masuds in putting the film together paled in comparison to the difficulties they confronted in attempting to release

the film in Bangladesh. Inevitably, the film ran into the inter-party conflict that characterises the Bengali political establishment's approach to the history of independence.

Narratives glorifying the liberation war have traditionally helped the Awami League, whose strongest nostalgic connection to the voting population is through its role as leader of the liberation struggle. The League's traditional nemesis, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), attempts to weaken the AL's hold on "pro-liberation" sentiment by emphasising their founder Gen Ziaur Rahman's links to the struggle. A long-running and often raucous debate—played out in newspapers, speeches and parliament—focuses on Zia's famous declaration



never even seen a picture of Yahya—chuckling at a cowardly and perpetually drunk puppet with the universally recognised moustache and military cap. Filmed at night by the light of a bonfire, these vivid scenes are remarkable in the context of footage that is now over 25 years old. Also powerful are the Dantesque sequences where the camera goes roving down the hallways of refugee camps.

The weak moments in the film are the scenes of the singers relaxing off-stage, where the dialogue is clearly staged. These are also the points where the lines between documentary and make-believe become blurred. Although the film clearly states up front that it is a "film based on footage shot by Lear Levin", the overall production maintains a

torn Bangladesh. The subtext that is not explored in the film but is nevertheless clearly present on screen, are the class differences among the Bengali refugees and freedom fighters. The troupe members are, for the most part, from middle-class backgrounds. Yet, here in the course of the film, they mix with village refugees, farmers and foot soldiers. There is some awkwardness in these interactions, as when the troupe embraces a group of soldiers at a liberated zone. In these few moments, one of the fundamental contradictions of the war effort is visible on screen.

The Awami League's anti-Pakistan posturing was the expression of a nascent middle class frustrated in the face of competition for resources with the Punjabi- and Urdu-speak-



People listen to Ziaur Rahman's announcement on radio.

of independence on Chittagong Radio. In symbolism-obsessed Bangladesh, Zia's radio announcement is brandished as proof that he first declared independence, although the AL repeatedly points out that the announcement was made in Sheikh Mujib's name.

*Mukthir Gaan* stepped into this charged battlefield and ran immediately into the BNP government-controlled censor board. With its footage of Mujib's speech, and shots of soldiers yelling his name, the film was blocked as a partisan and doctored version of history. The sequence with a radio playing Zia's speech soothed the BNP stalwarts, but here the film ran into the unique problem of being *too* authentic. In recent years, the BNP had started publicising a staged version of the speech with the reference to Mujib cut out. But here was the original tape, recovered in Germany from a former employee of war-era Free Bengal Radio, with the reference to Sheikh Mujib as "great national leader" intact.

In the end, several factors worked in favour of the film. In 1995, the BNP government was engulfed by street protests as part of a two-year opposition campaign demanding neutral elections. Facing diplomatic and military pressure to yield to the election demands, the government seemed to have lost appetite for a showdown over *Mukthir Gaan*. Newspapers such as the popular *Bhorer Kagoj* played a key role by running feature stories with stills from the film. The Censor Board clearly recognised that newspaper reports were building growing public awareness of a film that was being called a "masterpiece", but facing suppression from the Board.

A Bengali writer, who assisted with the film, is of the opinion that the presence of an American, Catherine Masud, served as a powerful deterrent to the scissor-wallahs. This was no local production from struggling artists—the Masuds were well connected in New York, and there was no doubt that Catherine Masud would mobilise international opinion if the film did get banned. Already smarting from the Taslima Nasrin debacle in 1994, where the BNP had seriously underestimated the scope of international attention, the government was anxious to avoid another confrontation. In the end, the film received the long-awaited screening certificate with no visible compromise from the filmmakers.

As feared by the government, the film became a massive propaganda windfall for the Awami League. *Mukthir Gaan* was shown to wildly enthusiastic and overflowing crowds all over the country. Screenings were preceded by throngs of young men yelling "Joi Bangla". Showings at the army cantonment theatre, Garrison, were attended by the Army Chief General Abu Saleh Md. Nasim (who was later fired on charges of trying to engineer a pro-Awami League coup) and enthusiastic jawans. The Awami League, quick to recognise the huge publicity value the film had for them, distributed the soundtrack to campaign offices. Begum Zia's government made a half-hearted attempt to ban the film, starting with the Intelligence Forces' attempt to withhold issues of *Bhorer Kagoj* carrying in-depth coverage of the film. By then, however, public awareness of the film was too high for them to proceed further.

### Revisionist History

Beyond the artistic value of *Mukthir Gaan*, the release of the film is a landmark event in a country struggling to build a coherent version of its history. Over the last two decades, every government has suppressed discussion on the liberation war to protect its own vested interests—sometimes the civil servants who stayed in their posts through the war, sometimes army officers who feared that glamorising the war would help the Awami League, and sometimes the Islamists of Jamaat-e-Islami who had actively helped the Pakistan army in 1971 by forming militia and death squads.

Now, following on the footsteps of *Mukthir Gaan* and Channel 4 (UK)'s celebrated War Crimes Trial documentary, there is a renewed interest in documenting the liberation war. This upsurge coincides with the Awami League's recent election victory—its first time in power since Mujib's 1975 assassination. Suddenly, there is a rush to prove oneself a die-hard Mujib-ist. You may expect a flood of documentaries and books on the late leader to follow.

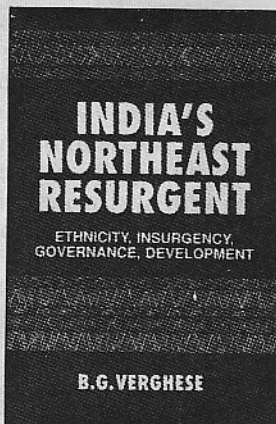
Certainly, a history of Bangladesh's liberation needs to include the Awami League's and Sheikh Mujib's role in the struggle. But in the midst of all the fanfare, will anyone raise the uncomfortable questions about the inherent contradictions of a war fought with peasant cannon-fodder, yet led by the bourgeoisie-dominated Awami League; about the deep-rooted distrust between the leftist guerrillas and pro-Mujib factions; the tacit understanding between Indira Gandhi and the AL about the need to destroy the Naxalite-influenced Sharbahara Party; and the subsequent persecution of Jasad (Jathiyobadi Shamajthanthrik Dal, or the National Socialist Party) and other left forces which represented the only opposition at that time to the post-1971 Mujib government?

Without an analysis of all sides of a remarkably fluid struggle, a renewed interest in the history of Bangladesh's independence may not be substantially different from the propaganda exercises of the past.

*N. Mohaiemen is works HBO Interactive Media, New York.*

*This article is reprinted from the Winter 1997 issue of SAMAR, a magazine of political and cultural debate with a South Asian focus published twice a year by an editorial collective based in New York.*

# Northeastern Sources



## India's Northeast Resurgent Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance and Development

by B.G. Verghese

Konark Publishers, Delhi, 1996

475 pages, INR 450

review by Subir Bhaumik

This book is a product of some sustained thinking, if not one of very original research. B.G. Verghese belongs to the old school of Indian newspaper editors, who, once they pick up a subject to write on, try to look at all possible angles of the matter. That is what he has done in this book which shows a serious attempt to understand the problems of northeastern India in the wider geo-political context.

Mr Verghese has a positive approach. He does not assume the Northeast to be a problem area for India, as most 'mainstream' writers tend to. Instead, he sees great potential for this region, which borders China, Burma, Bangladesh and Bhutan. The author rightly points out that if the Indian government were to manage the region properly, it could become India's gateway to the adjoining regions. As one goes through the book, Mr Verghese's optimism tends to get infectious.

The value of this work lies as much in the details presented as in the person who has put them together. When someone of Mr Verghese's stature takes to writing about a neglected region such as the Indian Northeast, and does a reasonably good job of it, the region benefits from the national attention it attracts. The work of an intellectual heavyweight like Mr Verghese is bound to be taken note of in the right quarters.

The author has avoided the 'quickie' approach that Indian journalists often employ when dealing with the Northeast, a region that

does have enough to offer those that want to adopt a semi-fictional, anecdotal style. He has also avoided the heavy, highfalutin jargon favoured by so many academics, who theorise endlessly with little grounding in reality.

### Secondary Sources

Having said that, one has to point out that the time Mr Verghese took for the research (as stated in the book) should have enabled him to go in for more original sources than the ones he has used. It is evident that published media material formed a very important database for Mr Verghese when he should have known that news stories originating out of areas like the Northeast have to be taken with a big pinch of salt. A work based so much on such secondary sources becomes slightly suspect and the same can be said of Mr Verghese's effort, particularly when he has drawn significant

inferences from them.

For instance, his conclusion that most Naga rebel leaders have properties in Shillong, which he based on a newspaper report by a journalist known for his anti-Naga and pro-Kuki bias, is an example of the unreliability of Mr Verghese's newspaper sources. Understandably, as the author is physically too far way from the Northeast, he is bound to have a problem assessing media material from the region, but one would have expected him to treat such material with more circumspection than he has.

The book also leaves out some important issues crucial to the relation between the Indian state and ethnic groups of the region—issues like militarisation, narcotics, and a parallel economy that is controlled by rebels and smugglers, soldiers and sleuths.

For too long, the Northeast has been treated as a backyard for rebellions. A high level of military, para-military and security agency deployment, for which the various insurgent groups operating in the region are responsible, has come to be taken for granted. This has jeopardised the very process of democracy in the region. While India prides itself on the success and survival of its democratic system, the Northeast is certainly not an area where the system has taken an institutional form. Human rights has been a major casualty, and both the security forces and rebels are to blame for this.

Militarisation and human rights are crucial issues in the Northeast. Without addressing oneself to these problems, no study of the region, unless clearly focussed on a particular aspect, can be complete. An analysis of government and insurgency that does not take these factors into account is bound to be lopsided.

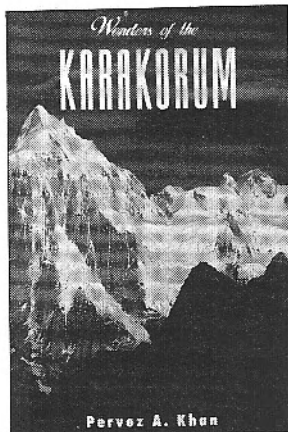
Having been critical on some counts, one cannot but concede that *India's Northeast Resurgent* will be useful to students of the Northeast. Mr Verghese is at his best when raising policy issues—or suggesting remedies for problems. Good, commonsense solutions. More than anybody else, policymakers who decide Delhi's programmes for the Northeast should read this book.

S. Bhaumik is BBC correspondent for eastern India.



A region of discontent: Bodo leaders at negotiations in New Delhi

# Far Side of the Range



## WONDERS OF THE KARAKORUM

by Pervez A. Khan  
Ferozsons, Rawalpindi, 1996  
160 pages, 87 colour plates, 2 maps

review by Harish Kapadia

While climbing in the Siachen Glacier, in the eastern Karakoram, I have looked at the panorama to the west and always wondered how the area would appear from the ground. These are the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Due to the troubled nature of the Indo-Pakistan relationship, as an Indian, I cannot visit them. The Indian passport specifically states "not valid" for the Northern Areas of Pakistan.

There are several books, expedition accounts and articles available that give you a taste of what it is like in the Western Karakoram. But then that is not like being there. As one goes through Pervez Khan's book with images and information on the peaks, people, sports, eating habits, wildlife and natural habitats, one aspect is clear. Political boundaries may separate the Eastern and Western Karakoram, but the mountains and people on both sides are essentially similar. Only the army divisions that stand in between separates them.

This book covers the part of the Northern Areas of Pakistan known as the Western Karakoram (though the author prefers to call them 'Karakorum'). The range is divided into two districts, Gilgit and Baltistan. The introductory chapter briefly covers various aspects of the range, as one would expect from a coffee-table book. Geology, climate, wildlife and exploration history are covered. The listing of the world's 8000m peaks looks out of place and the table of peaks in the Karakoram is incomplete. There are better pictures in the earlier book on the same subject, *The Karakoram* by Shiro Shirahata, but this one has certain specialities.

Firstly, it is written by a Pakistani, and no one can know a mountain area better than a native. Mr Khan's insights are valuable because he understands the language, region and religion, which is what sets this

book apart from the glossy publications brought out on the Karakoram, mostly by Western explorers and climbers. The author lets us in on little-known details of the life and landscape in Gilgit and Hunza, recounting, for example, the legend of Siri Badat (the last Buddhist king of Gilgit, who was slain by his son-in-law, the first Muslim king of the region), or explaining that the famous peak Bojohagur Dunashirs means "where only the horse of the demon can go".

In the margins, many well-known Pakistani and Asian explorers, climbers and surveyors are introduced. Among them is Khan Sahib Afraz Gul Khan, who surveyed the major parts of the Karakoram. He was a Pathan with a reputation for absolute fearlessness, and a supernatural sense of topography. In the realm of plane-table survey of high mountains, he had no peer. Prince Sultan Feroze Sufi, from the ruling family in Nagar, was a man of letters and poet laureate of the Northern Areas. This aristocrat, clad in a corduroy jacket, a necktie or a cravat always in place, and his plumed felt hat, will no longer be seen pruning his terraced *chaman* (garden), nor found ambling along the lanes of Gilgit. Neither will he be there at polo matches to throw in the ball, for he passed away in August 1994, already well into his eighties.

The author introduces many Pakistani

mountaineers with affection: Nazir Sabir of Hunza, a man of immense physical endurance and will-power who climbed K2 in 1981; or Raja Muhammed Bashir of Charehan, Muree Hills, who, after bracing a bitter cold night in the open at 24,700 feet, along with his Japanese climbing partners stepped upon the unclimbed 25,400 feet summit of Saltoro Kangri.

We are introduced to Nazir Abbas Mirza, who initiated organised expeditions and trekking in Pakistan. Several ace Pakistani climbers trained under him, including Nazir Sabir, Ashruf Aman and Rajan Shah. Mahdi, of Hunza, was part of the Ardito Desio expedition of 1954 which made the first ascent of K2. In his book *Ascent of K2* Desio writes: "Mahdi was very strong physically and had a vast experience of mountains...and as single-minded in his desire to reach the summit as the Italians."

Pervez Ahmad Khan, the author, too, is a man of two worlds. He was born in Shimla and graduated from Lucknow. He also had his schooling in Rawalpindi and now lives in Muree, the Pakistani hill station similar to the one where he was born, several hundred kilometres to the southeast. Mr Khan has undertaken several expeditions in the Karakoram, including some sponsored by

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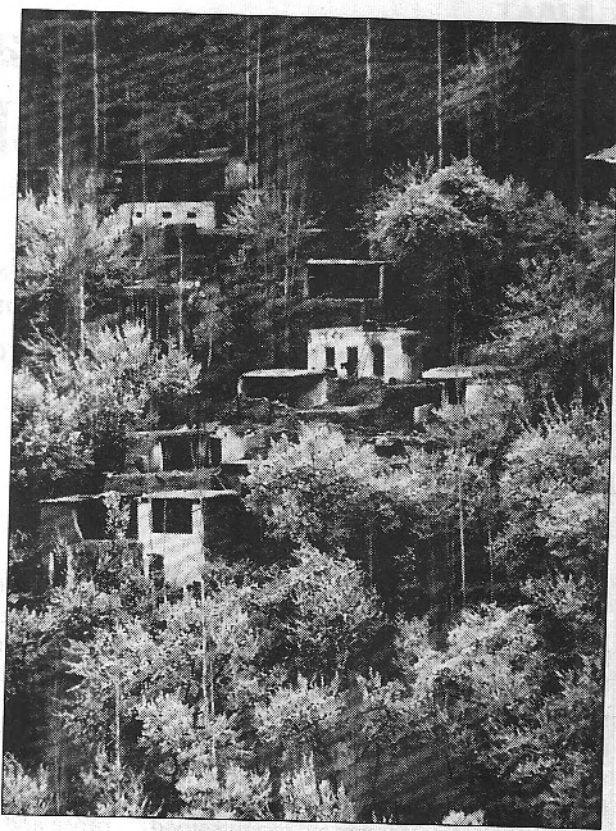
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PERVEZ A. KHAN

Not just mountains: the Karakoram region is home to diverse communities of people.



PERVEZ A. KHAN

the National Geographic Society. The latter half of the book is about the area of Baltistan, although incompletely covered. Several high mountains are discussed with a brief history and explanations of their names. Chogholisa (the great hunting ground), K2 or Chogori (the big mountain), Masherbrum, (the doomsday mountain), and Gasherbrum (the splendid mountain) and many others are mentioned. All these peaks are in the valleys of the Indus (the lion river) and the Shyok.

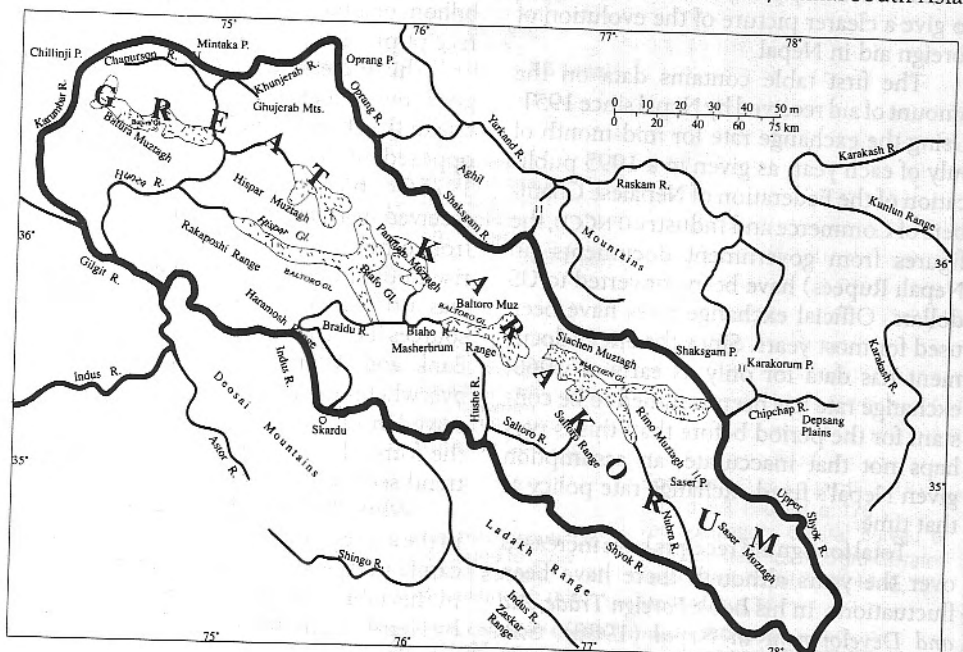
As we approach the eastern part of the great range, alas, the author has to stop: the valley where the Shyok originates is controlled by India. Just as I, as an Indian, cannot enter the Northern Areas, Pervez Ahmed Khan cannot come over to India. The Karakoram Pass, which gives the entire range its name, is situated on the divide which many consider to be the dividing point between the Subcontinent and Central Asia. (*Kara* means 'black' and *koram* means 'gravel'.)

The Subcontinental division high on the Karakoram is reflected in the lives of those that climb it. Nazir Sabir, who has been mentioned earlier, is the Honorary Local Secretary of the Himalayan Club, which has its headquarters in Bombay. As editor of the *Himalayan Journal* published by the Club, I correspond regularly with Nazir, who also happens to be the provincial Minister of Education for the Northern

Areas, to obtain results of various climbing expeditions in the Pakistani side of the Karakoram. The only time a policeman visited the Himalayan Club's office was to inquire why a Pakistani writes to me regularly from Hunza. When I recounted this to Nazir, he confirmed that he has faced similar difficulties. Suspicions were aroused regarding his regular correspondence with someone in Bombay about the sensitive areas of the Karakoram!

We communicate even today. And as this book so ably illustrates, the mountains, culture and environment of the Karakoram constitute a heritage which stands above the artificial barriers erected by South Asian man. These barriers can never dissolve the love of mountaineers for the Karakoram.

*H. Kapadia, editor of Himalayan Journal, was profiled in the last issue of Himal South Asia.*



BOUNDARIES OF THE KARAKORUM

# Foreign Aid in Nepal: What do the data show?

*A first-time compilation of Nepal's foreign aid receipts since Day One back in 1951 shows an economy overwhelmingly dependent on external support, first through grants and now through loans.*

by Bikas Joshi

From its modest appearance in the early 1950s, foreign aid has grown to form an integral part of the development process in Nepal, and it is amazing to note how remarkable this transformation has been. For the first five years, from 1951-1956, Nepal received NPR 95 million in aid, all in the form of grants. Four decades later, in fiscal year 1994/95, total foreign aid receipts stood much higher at NPR 12.3 billion. The latest budget, for fiscal year 1996/97, puts the estimated receipt of foreign aid at NPR 20.3 billion or 35% of total government expenditure of NPR 57.5 billion.

So far, Nepal has received more than three billion dollars in foreign aid (an average of about 92 million dollars a year since 1951). In what forms has this come, and how has it been distributed? The tables presented in the following page, with data culled from many different sources, attempt to give a clearer picture of the evolution of foreign aid in Nepal.

The first table contains data on the amount of aid received by Nepal since 1951. Using the exchange rate for mid-month of July of each year, as given in a 1995 publication of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI), the figures from government documents (in Nepali Rupees) have been converted to US dollars. Official exchange rates have been used for most years. Since the FNCCI document has data for only as early as 1960, exchange rate has been assumed to be constant for the period before that; this is perhaps not that inaccurate, an assumption given Nepal's fixed exchange rate policy at that time.

Total foreign aid receipts have increased over the years although there have been fluctuations. In his book *Foreign Trade, Aid and Development in Nepal* (1988), S.R. Poudyal identified the wars in the Subcon-

tinental (Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistan) for some of the dips in aid in the 1960s. Most of the other recent fluctuations have also had more to do with the external environment than with internal policies.

For each year, aid receipts have been broken down into loan and grant components (which are also similarly given in rupee and dollar terms). One obvious distinction is that aid given as loan has to be repaid (though most of credit offered Nepal have been at low rates with generous payment plans), while grants do not.

One of the most noticeable features of this table is the increasing share of loans in the composition of foreign aid. Initially, all of the aid received was in the form of grants. This pattern has changed since the early seventies, with almost two-thirds of foreign aid given so far in the 1990s being in the form of loans. In the latest budget, NPR 13.9 billion, or almost 70 percent of the total aid receipt projection, is in this form.

This increase in the proportion of aid given out as loans also matches closely the rise in the share of aid from multilateral, as opposed to bilateral, sources. As late as 1975/76, 65 percent of the aid that Nepal received was from bilateral sources (i.e. from other countries). Concurrent with the rise in the proportion of aid given as loans was a rise in aid coming from multilateral sources (i.e. from institutions like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank). An overwhelming proportion of the aid received from multilateral sources has been in the form of loans, which accounts for the trend seen in the data.

While the first table looks at foreign aid in the aggregate, the second table gives a per capita perspective. The data on population in this table is based the census conducted by Nepal's Central Bureau of Statistics. Census data are available for 1941, 1961, 1971,

1981 and 1991; population growth is assumed to be constant between two census exercises and population for the intervening years interpolated accordingly. The total aid has then been divided by the population for each year to give per capita aid for a given fiscal year. This figure can be interpreted as the average share of foreign aid for a person alive in that fiscal year.

This per capita aid figure is also rising. Even with a rise in the exchange rate (from NPR 7.6 to a dollar in 1960 to NPR 49.11 in 1994) and a massive increase in population from about 7 million in 1951 to more than 19 million in 1994/95, per capita aid receipt has increased from USD 1.56 in 1951 to USD 12.74 in fiscal year 1994/95. A hypothetical person born in 1951 can be said to have received USD 279.15 by the end of fiscal year 1994/95, at an average of USD 6.98 a year.

Nepal is thoroughly dependent on foreign aid; there is no ambiguity there. This dependence has also been rising over time. Foreign aid constituted about two percent of Nepal's total output (the Gross Domestic Product, GDP) in 1974/75. This had registered an almost three-fold increase to about 6.5 percent of the GDP by 1993/94. A large proportion of development projects has depended on foreign aid; the First Five Year Plan (1956/57-1960/61) was wholly financed by external assistance. The figures for later plans remain considerably high.

Foreign aid also seems to be concentrated in certain sectors; social services have generally been ignored (relative to their importance) while capital-intensive sectors like power have been heavily funded. This is ominous in terms of debt dynamics. Even with the low rates on the loans, outstanding debt as a percentage of exports of the country (that is, the total amount the country owes as a percentage of what it earned from its exports) has increased from 38.91 percent in 1974/75 to 525.12 percent in 1994/95; outstanding debt as a percentage of the GDP has increased from 2.16 percent to 57.31 percent in the same period. Similarly, repayments (the amount the country has to pay back on its debts) rose from 1.26 percent in 1974/75 to 12.82 percent in 1993/94. Repayments have also been rising as a proportion of GDP, from 0.07 percent to 1.4 percent in the same period. △

*B. Joshi was a columnist for The Kathmandu Post until recently. Issues raised here are dealt with in more detail in Foreign Aid: Sifting the Statistical Evidence, Institute for Integrated Development, Kathmandu, 1996.*



TABLE 1

Year	E-rate (Rs/\$)	Grant (Rsmillion)	Grant (\$million)	Loan (Rsmillion)	Loan (\$million)	Total (Rsmillion)	Total (\$million)	Grant as % of Total	Loan as % of Total
1951-56	7.6	95	12.50	0	0.00	95	12.50	100.00	0.00
1956-57	7.6	27.3	3.59	0	0.00	27.3	3.59	100.00	0.00
1957-58	7.6	58.1	7.64	0	0.00	58.1	7.64	100.00	0.00
1958-59	7.6	35.1	4.62	0	0.00	35.1	4.62	100.00	0.00
1959-60	7.6	125.3	16.49	0	0.00	125.3	16.49	100.00	0.00
1960-61	7.6	125.1	16.46	0	0.00	125.1	16.46	100.00	0.00
1961-62	7.6	181.6	23.89	1	0.13	182.6	24.03	99.45	0.55
1962-63	7.6	76.5	10.07	11.6	1.53	88.1	11.59	86.83	13.17
1963-64	7.6	165.9	21.83	11.4	1.50	177.3	23.33	93.57	6.43
1964-65	7.6	141	18.55	5.9	0.78	146.9	19.33	95.98	4.02
1965-66	7.6	175.3	23.07	3.3	0.43	178.6	23.50	98.15	1.85
1966-67	7.6	142.2	18.71	3.7	0.49	145.9	19.20	97.46	2.54
1967-68	7.6	158.1	20.80	0	0.00	158.1	20.80	100.00	0.00
1968-69	10.1	185.9	18.41	0	0.00	185.9	18.41	100.00	0.00
1969-70	10.1	243.7	24.13	7.6	0.75	251.3	24.88	96.98	3.02
1970-71	10.1	270.7	26.80	32.5	3.22	303.2	30.02	89.28	10.72
1971-72	10.1	242.1	23.97	38.9	3.85	281	27.82	86.16	13.84
1972-73	10.1	180.2	17.84	47.4	4.69	227.6	22.53	79.17	20.83
1973-74	10.5	222.6	21.20	87.9	8.37	310.5	29.57	71.69	28.31
1974-75	10.5	282.8	26.93	103.9	9.90	386.7	36.83	73.13	26.87
1975-76	10.5	359.7	34.26	145.9	13.90	505.6	48.15	71.14	28.86
1976-77	12.45	392.5	31.53	164.4	13.20	556.9	44.73	70.48	29.52
1977-78	12.45	466.6	37.48	381.8	30.67	848.4	68.14	55.00	45.00
1978-79	11.9	599.3	50.36	390.1	32.78	989.4	83.14	60.57	39.43
1979-80	11.9	805.6	67.70	534.9	44.95	1340.5	112.65	60.10	39.90
1980-81	11.9	868.9	73.02	693.3	58.26	1562.2	131.28	55.62	44.38
1981-82	11.9	993.3	83.47	729.9	61.34	1723.2	144.81	57.64	42.36
1982-83	13.1	1090.1	83.21	985.8	75.25	2075.9	158.47	52.51	47.49
1983-84	14.4	876.6	60.88	1670.9	116.03	2547.5	176.91	34.41	65.59
1984-85	16.3	923.4	56.65	1753	107.55	2676.4	164.20	34.50	65.50
1985-86	17.6	1120.6	63.67	2370.9	134.71	3491.5	198.38	32.10	67.90
1986-87	21.1	1078.3	51.10	2236.1	105.98	3314.4	157.08	32.53	67.47
1987-88	21.8	1984.2	91.02	3094.3	141.94	5078.5	232.96	39.07	60.93
1988-89	23.5	1478.2	62.90	4188.7	178.24	5666.9	241.14	26.08	73.92
1989-90	27.4	1798.8	65.65	4628.3	168.92	6427.1	234.57	27.99	72.01
1990-91	29.1	1630	56.01	4360	149.83	5990	205.84	27.21	72.79
1991-92	42.7	1531	35.85	6269.4	146.82	7800.4	182.68	19.63	80.37
1992-93	42.6	3273.9	76.85	5961.7	139.95	9235.6	216.80	35.45	64.55
1993-94	49	2393.6	48.85	9163.6	187.01	11557.2	235.86	20.71	79.29
1994-95	49.11	4998.7	101.79	7312.2	148.89	12310.9	250.68	40.60	59.40
Total 1951 to 1994/95		31797.8	1589.75	57390.3	2091.85	89188.1	3681.61	35.65	64.35

Sources: Exchange rates: *Nepal and the World: A Statistical Profile*, FNCCI, 1995, p 125

Loan/Grant: until 1975/76: S.R. Poudyal, *Foreign, Trade, Aid and Development in Nepal, 1988*, New Delhi, Commonwealth Publishers, p 176.

Since 1975/76: *Economic Survey 1995/96*, His Majesty's Government of Nepal, 1996, p 90

TABLE 2

Year	Total aid (Rsmillion)	Total aid (\$million)	Population (in million)	Per capita aid (in Rs)	Per capita aid (in \$)	Note
1951-56	95	12.5	8.011	11.86	1.56	average over period
1956-57	27.3	3.59	8.508	3.21	0.42	assumed constant
1957-58	58.1	7.64	8.682	6.69	0.88	growth rate between
1958-59	35.1	4.62	8.859	3.96	0.52	1941 and 1961
1959-60	125.3	16.49	9.040	13.86	1.82	(CBS Data)
1960-61	125.1	16.46	9.225	13.56	1.78	
1961-62	182.6	24.03	9.413	19.40	2.55	Presumes
1962-63	88.1	11.59	9.608	9.17	1.21	2.07% average
1963-64	177.3	23.33	9.807	18.08	2.38	annual growth
1964-65	146.9	19.33	10.010	14.68	1.93	rate between
1965-66	178.6	23.50	10.217	17.48	2.30	1961-1971
1966-67	145.9	19.20	10.428	13.99	1.84	(Given in CBS Data)
1967-68	158.1	20.80	10.644	14.85	1.95	
1968-69	185.9	18.41	10.865	17.11	1.69	
1969-70	251.3	24.88	11.090	22.66	2.24	
1970-71	303.2	30.02	11.319	26.79	2.65	
1971-72	281	27.82	11.556	24.32	2.41	Presumes
1972-73	227.6	22.53	11.863	19.19	1.90	2.66% average
1973-74	310.5	29.57	12.179	25.49	2.43	annual growth
1974-75	386.7	36.83	12.503	30.93	2.95	rate between
1975-76	505.6	48.15	12.835	39.39	3.75	1971-1981
1976-77	556.9	44.73	13.177	42.26	3.39	(Given in CBS Data)
1977-78	848.4	68.14	13.527	62.72	5.04	
1978-79	989.4	83.14	13.887	71.25	5.99	
1979-80	1340.5	112.65	14.257	94.03	7.90	
1980-81	1562.2	131.28	14.636	106.74	8.97	
1981-82	1723.2	144.81	15.023	114.70	9.64	Presumes
1982-83	2075.9	158.47	15.335	135.37	10.33	2.08% average
1983-84	2547.5	176.91	15.654	162.73	11.30	annual growth
1984-85	2676.4	164.20	15.980	167.48	10.28	rate between
1985-86	3491.5	198.38	16.312	214.04	12.16	1981-1991
1986-87	3314.4	157.08	16.652	199.04	9.43	(Given in CBS Data)
1987-88	5078.5	232.96	16.998	298.77	13.70	
1988-89	5666.9	241.14	17.352	326.59	13.90	
1989-90	6427.1	234.57	17.713	362.85	13.24	
1990-91	5990	205.84	18.081	331.29	11.38	
1991-92	7800.4	182.68	18.491	421.85	9.88	Assumed population
1992-93	9235.6	216.80	18.876	489.29	11.49	continued to grow
1993-94	11557.2	235.86	19.268	599.81	12.24	at 2.08 average
1994-95	12310.9	250.68	19.669	625.90	12.74	annual growth rate
Total aid (1951-1994/95)	USD 3681.61 million		Average population: 13.19 million			
Annual average for the period	USD 92.04 million		Total population: 527.55 million			
				Average aid receipt per capita (annual)	USD 6.98	
				Average total aid receipt per capita (for the period)	USD 279.15	

## Sources:

For aid: S.R. Poudyal, p. 176

For population: Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical (and growth rates) Pocket Book Nepal, 1994*, HMG, NPC Secretariat, p.34

# Abominably Yours,

Now that the US Ambassador in Delhi, Frank Wisner, is driving around Rajpath in a locally-assembled Ford Escort, I guess this will mean India's ambassadors abroad will take the cue to stop riding Ambassadors.

That would be a pity. Indian envoys in neighbouring countries have no reason to be embarrassed that they ride a Hindustan Motors' Ambassador: it is an outstanding automobile superbly suited for South Asia's roads.

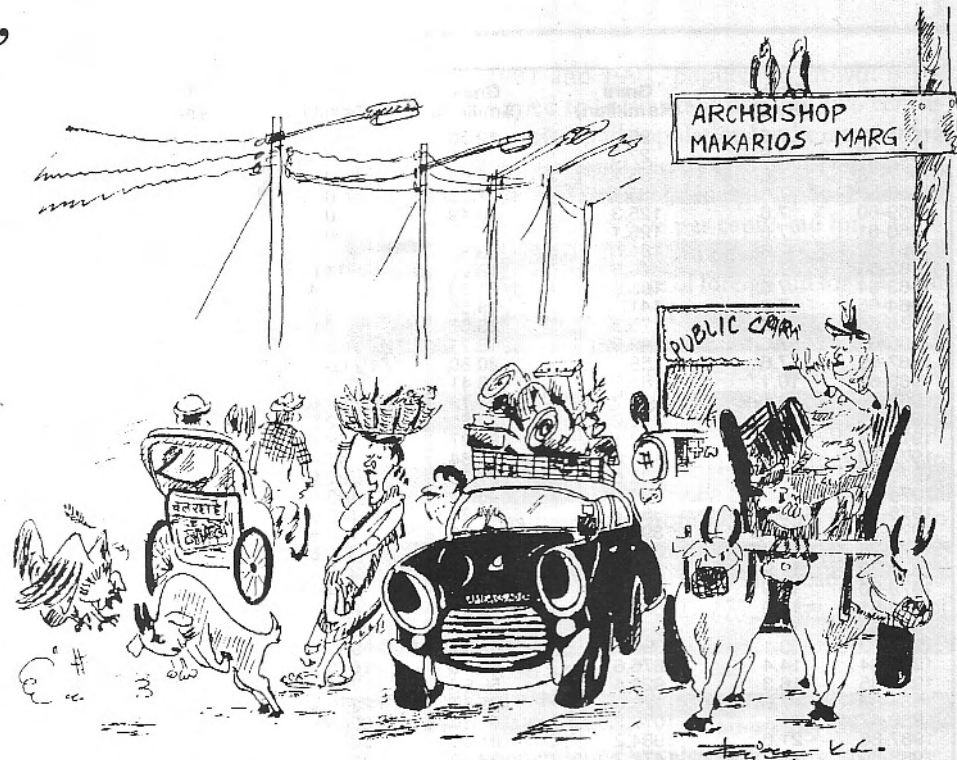
OK, the Ambassador does stand out amidst all the slim black Benzes of fellow diplomats—rather like a horizontally-challenged, follicular-deficient and anal-retentive *babuji* would stand out at a Mr Universe contest. But what the heck, the car is a diplomatic fashion statement. If it is true that you are what you drive, then the Ambassador is a defiant nose-thumbing at the Process of Economic Globalisation.

An ambassador cruising down Dhanmondi in an Ambassador with his tri-colour flapping is telling pedestrians: "Look at me: I may look like a jerk but at least I am a swadeshi jerk." He is also saying: this car may be a gas guzzler, it may take twice the amount of steel to assemble, and it may sound like an armoured personnel carrier, but at least it is making an Indian millionaire richer, and not a Japanese millionaire.

I also understand from my moles at HM's assembly plant in Parwanipur that 50 years after it was first designed, the Ambassador may get a facelift. What? A new model? That would be a disaster. It would be a waste of taxpayers' money to tamper with the design just as the car's sleek jelly-bean look is staging a comeback in design bureaus from Turin to Detroit.

Just like flared trousers and the mini-skirt, the Ambassador's languid and curvaceous silhouette has suddenly become cool again. Its New Edge look is about to take automobile couture by storm. It has the kind of contour that a stealth bomber would instantly recognise as kin, the billowy girth that would give the grunge generation the hots, a symphony of ovals that appeals to everyone from the His Excellency down to the Third Secretary's peon. A true *janata* car if ever there was one.

On the other hand, those clamouring for change may have a point. Ever since it was cloned from the Model 1952 Oxford by geneticists at HM, millions of identi-



cal Ambassadors have been set free on an unsuspecting public. There are wider ethical and moral issues at stake here. It is repugnant to think that cloned cars, genetically identical and deprived of their inherent diversity and individuality should be created. It is time, then, notwithstanding any of the above, to inject some variation on the Ambassador's chromosomes. Some ideas for new Ambassador-based models:

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## Jurassic Four-door Ambassador Classic

Don't like surprises? Then you'll like the Jurassic. Continuity, predictability, and permanence. In a world of accelerating change, one thing remains the same: the Ambassador Jurassic Classic. It's a fossil! Buy an Ambassador that is an exact replica (to the last window lever) of the one your great-grandfather owned. Complete with sun-hood, wood panel

dashboard, chrome-ribbed radiator grills! Heads will turn at Archbishop Makarios Marg.

## Le Charge d'Affair 320L

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- *Multi-belt™*. Save time, strap all five passengers in front with just one belt!
- Roof easily dismantled in one hour to convert Charge into a convertible affair!

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Thai	TG 600	HONG KONG	8.00		FINAL CALL	31
Thai	TG 632	TAIPEI	8.25		BOARDING	33
Thai	TG 403	SINGAPORE	8.40		BOARDING	32
Thai	TG 648	FUKUOKA	10.15		CHECK-IN ROW 7	3
Thai	TG 311	KATHMANDU	10.30		CHECK-IN ROW 6	6
Thai	TG 431	BALI	10.30		CHECK-IN ROW 2	30
Thai	TG 682	HANOI	10.30		CHECK-IN ROW 5	28
Thai	TG 640	TOKYO	10.45		CHECK-IN ROW 8	29
Thai	TG 664	SHANGHAI	10.55		CHECK-IN ROW 4	23
Thai	TG 696	PHNOM PENH	11.00		CHECK-IN ROW 1	5
Thai	TG 614	BELJING	11.05		CHECK-IN ROW 3	24
Thai	TG 620	MANILA	11.10		CHECK-IN ROW 6	25
Thai	TG 600	HO CHI MINH CITY	11.15		CHECK-IN ROW 8	20
Thai	TG 600	DHAKA	11.20		CHECK-IN ROW 2	21
Thai	TG 600	PORTA	11.35		CHECK-IN ROW 5	22
Thai	TG 600		11.40		CHECK-IN ROW 7	2

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