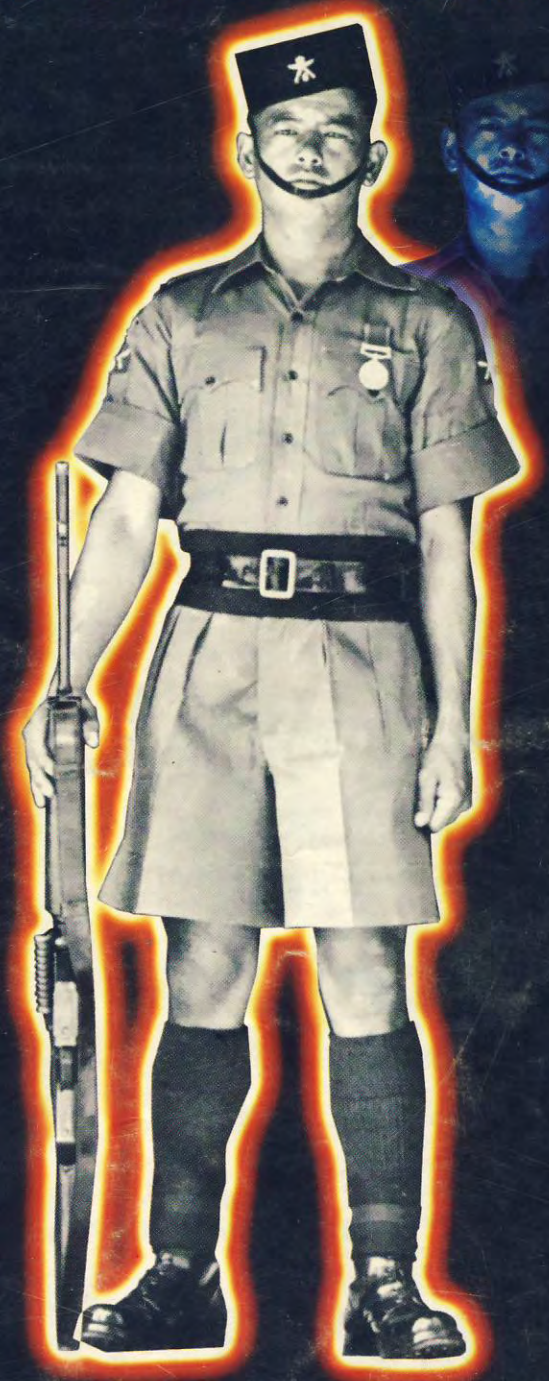
HIMAL

SOUTH ASIA

Maldives MLR 20 Pakistan PKR 40 Sri Lanka SLR 40 Elsewhere USD 5



Heinrich Harrer

Carl Muller

Rongthong Kunley Dorji

POOR GURKHA ? !

July/August 1997 • Vol 10 number 4

HIMAL SOUTH ASIA

Vol 10 No 4 July/August 1997

Editor Kanak Mani Dixit
Associate Editor Deepak Thapa
Contributing Editors Afsan Chowdhury DHAKA
Manik de Silva COLOMBO
Beena Sarwar LAHORE
Prabhu Ghate
Mitu Varma NEW DELHI
Senior Executive Marketing Basanta Thapa
Suman Shakya
Sujata Chhetri
Administration Balaram Sharma
Mamata Manandhar
Anil Shrestha
Layout Chandra Khatiwada

Himal South Asia is published and distributed by Himal Inc. Pvt. Ltd.
PO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Tel: +977-1-523845, 522113
Fax: 521013
email: himalmag@mos.com.np
Library of Congress Card Catalogue Number 88 912882
ISSN 1012 9804
Printed at Jagadamba Offset, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-521393, 536390

The Editors Wish All Readers HAPPY MONSOON!

Visit Our Web-site

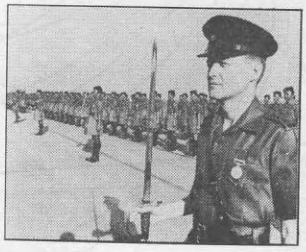
Himal's latest table of contents, selected articles, subscription information plus other items of interest are accessible on the Net.
http://www.south-asia.com/himal

Please note Himal's new email address:
himalmag@mos.com.np

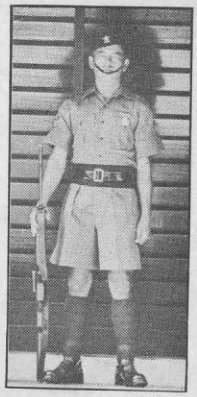
For subscription details, see page 12.

INSIDE

COVER



Johnny Gurkha, will he make up or break up with his saheb?

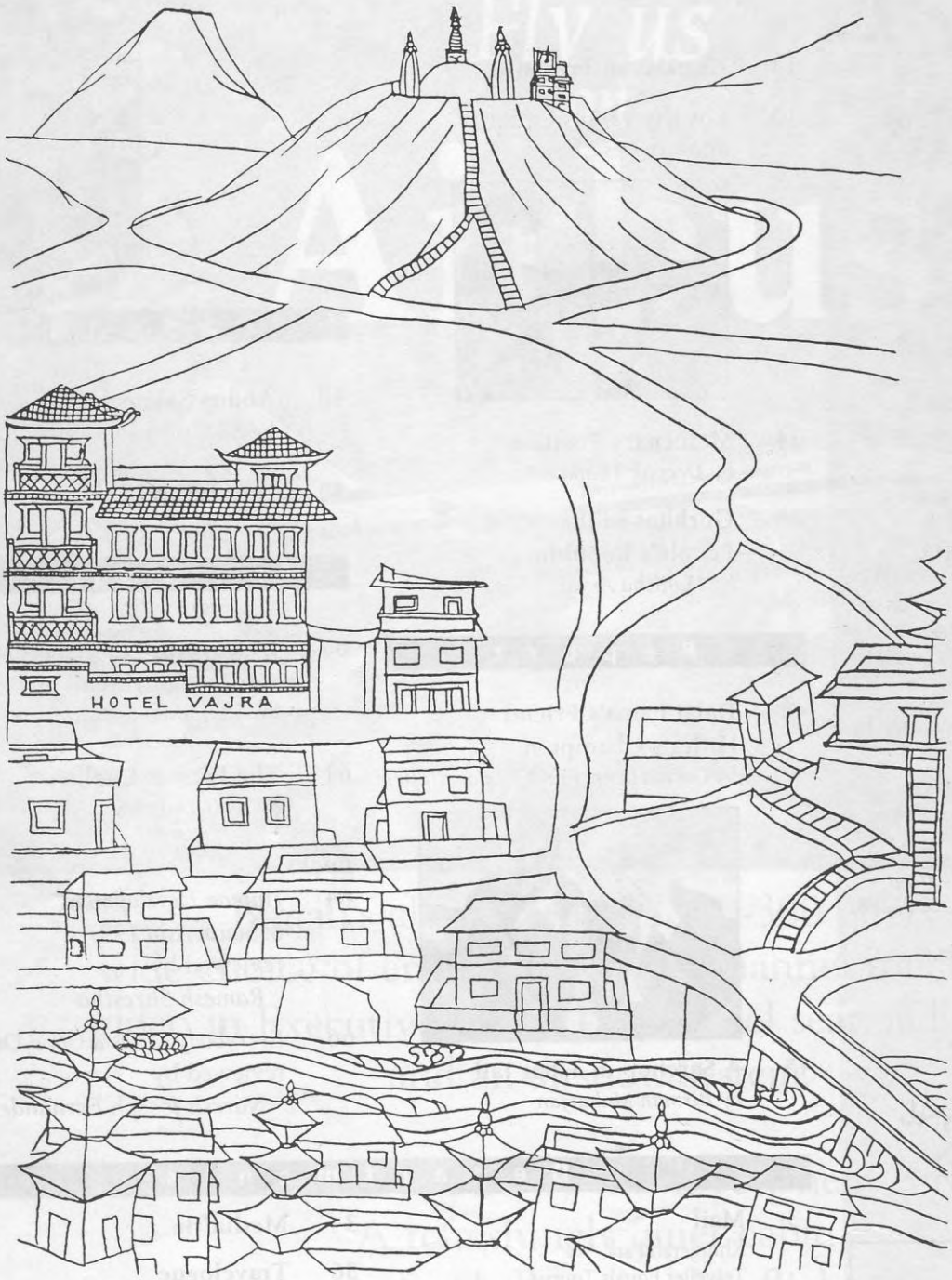


Passage

Arts & Society

Report

Departments



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

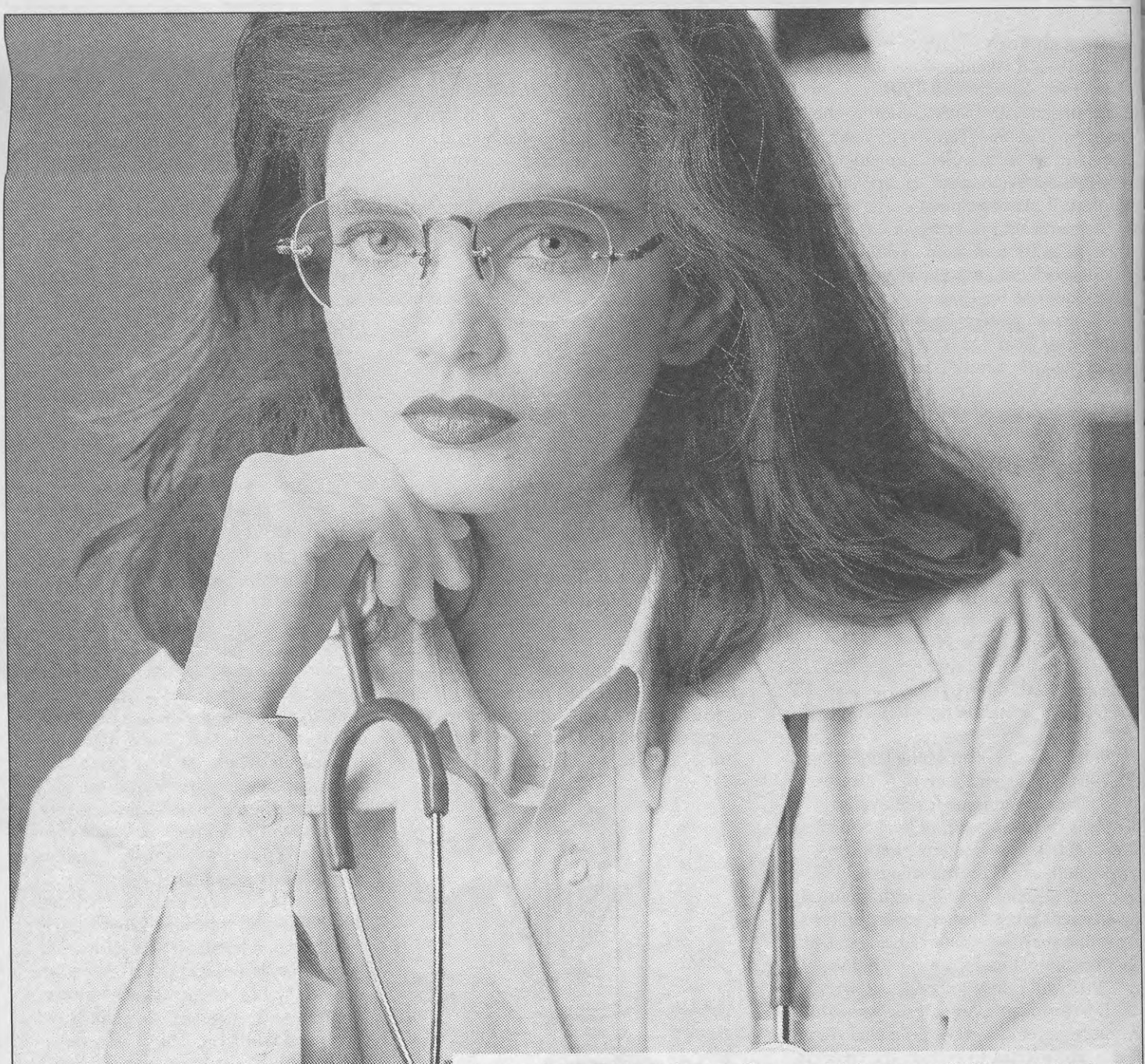
Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

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

John Collee
The London Observer

in Kathmandu, the Vajra

Swayambhu, Dallu Bijyaswori, PO Box 1084, Kathmandu
Phone 271545, 272719 Fax 977 1 271695



You see a doctor with her stethoscope. We see a satisfied customer of SAIL's surgical steel.

There's a little bit of SAIL in everybody's life.

There's also a little bit about SAIL that everybody should know : • That it's India's largest steel company, and among the world's top steel manufacturers. • That it's a Rs. 16,000 crore company, with annual profits of over Rs. 1300 crores. • That it's India's most profitable manufacturing concern. • That its export clientele spans 70 countries, including U.K., U.S.A., Japan, France, Russia, Germany, China and Australia. • That it produces over 500 special grades of steel. For uses ranging from construction and ship building, to space rocketry, defence and heavy industries. • That it takes out over 20 patents every year.

STEEL AUTHORITY OF INDIA LIMITED

dor lights, there are times when it is important to dip one's lights.

The Ambassador, through careful planning, has a braking system that allows it to stop almost within a hundred yards at a speed of 70 kmph. This, no doubt, contributes greatly to the average of 65,000 people killed per year on Indian roads. There is a powerful argument that the huge momentum and heavily strengthened body of the Ambassador gives it a killing edge over the small Maruti cars and the hoi-polloi on their scooters and bicycles. This argument can best be appreciated from the back seat of an Ambassador at thirty kilometres an hour with the brakes fully applied during a graceful slowing from 60 kmph. The "thud" of a bicyclist impacting on the solid framework of an Ambassador is much more reassuring than the "ting" noise that one hears from a Maruti. Then again, in the same conditions, the Maruti would have stopped twenty yards earlier, avoiding the awful "ting" noise.

The Ambassador is the product of a protected market. It is the symbol of lethargy, corruption and smug security of protected industry that never bothered to even consider driver comfort and driver safety. This is to say nothing of the cost to the country of the increased steel, rubber and fuel consumption. It is, in fact, an extravagance with no attendant benefits. It is a result of industrialists paying corrupt government officials to ensure that no better product could be released into the market.

The argument that it is better to pay a *desi* millionaire than a Japanese millionaire is valid if the payments are the same. The question is: "Just how much are you paying the desi millionaire?" If the figures were to be worked through I suspect that India would find that they have been subsidising Hindustan Motors for a good many years.

Arguments will be raised that the durability of the Ambassador is a major benefit. The evidence used to support this theory is the age of the average Ambassador. This theory is erroneous. The longevity of vehicles is directly related to the maintenance costs in relation to the purchase costs. Rolls Royces are rarely seen in the wrecker's yard. This is because it is cheaper to repair than purchase anew. The same law applies to any vehicle on the Subcontinent.

The Yeti would have us believe that the Ambassador is a true "Janata" car. It is a car that is beyond the reach of the masses, is inherently expensive to make and run, is dangerous to driver, passenger and pedestrian. I would rather apply that appellation to the Maruti 800, which is cheap, efficient, reliable and stops well.

The Yeti seems to have revealed himself as a rather cosseted old Yeti. I have noticed that the enthusiasm of many people for Ambassadors seems to stem from fond memories of childhood where the driver (together with his inevitable back problems) guided the trusty old beast through numerous trials and tribulations en route to the family bungalow in the hills. I find few people prepared to drive the beasts they own.

If the ambassadors and high commissioners of India wish to project an image of a country of corruption, lethargy and suffocation of innovation, they could choose no better vehicle to ride in than the trusty Ambassador.

Siddharth Ghosh
New Delhi

Nun Enlightenment

Your commentary "Buddhism on the Mainland" (May/June 1997) mentions a "population seeking some spiritual sustenance". Therefore, an inkling of the real nature of this "sustenance" should be sought.

In the times of Arhat Buddhism, originally established by our Lord Gautama Buddha, countless women - Buddhist nuns -attained the path of enlightenment as is historically recorded. However, during the nearly one thousand years till the present day, the Dalai Lama caste, originally established by the lamas, excluded women - Buddhist nuns - from investigation into the paths of education, intellectual reasoning and teaching.

Maria de Fatima Machado (Nun)
Kopan Monastery
Kathmandu

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

PO Box 7251 Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel 977-1-522113, 523845
Fax 521013
email: himalmag@mos.com.np
http: //www.south-asia.com/himal

Zis and Zat

Writes reader ***Subhashri Subramaniam*** *from Sydney: "Before the SAARC-wallahs go overboard with gooey regionalism, ending perhaps in the hybridisation of South Asian languages, it is important to study the pitfalls that unified Europe, role model for all sentient beings, is just beginning to face. I plucked this off the Net. Perhaps it is advisable to leave South Asia well enough alone, if this is the direction we have to go?"*

The European Commission has just announced an agreement whereby English will be the official language of the EU, rather than German, which was the other much-talked-about possibility.

As part of the negotiations, Her Majesty's Government conceded that English spelling had some room for improvement and has accepted a five-year plan that would allow a "Euro-English" implementation.

In the first year, "s" will replace the soft "c". This will sertainly make the sivil servants jump with joy. The hard "c" will be dropped in favour of the "k". It will help klear up konfusion and keyboards kan have one less letter.

There will be growing publik enthusiasm in the sekond year, when the troublesome "ph" will be replaced with the "f". This will make words like "fotograf" 20 percent shorter.

In the third year, publik akseptanse of the new spelling kan be expekted to reach the stage where more komplikated changes are possible. Governments will enkorage the removal of double letters, which have always ben a deterent to akurate speling. Also al wil agre that the horible mes of the silent "es" in the language is disgraceful, and these should be dropd.

By the fourth yer, peopl wil be reseptiv to steps such as replasing "th" with "z" and "w" vith "v". During ze fifz yer, ze unesesary "o" kan be dropd from vords kontaining "ou" and similar changes vud of kors be aplid to ozer kombinations of leters.

After ze fifz yer, ve vil hav a reli sensibl riten styl. Zer vil be no mor trubls or dificultis and evrivun vil find it ezi tu understand ech ozer. Ze drem uff a union vil finali kum tru!

South Asia

START CARING

BIKAS RAUNIAR

In the macho military logic of Subcontinental hawks, any talk of even a freezing of defence budgets is treason. Our pampered generals know that their privileged lifestyles are threatened by peace. That is why, when reconstituted doves like Mahbub ul Haq go around calling for a reduction in the military budgets of India and Pakistan, the military and its lapdog media on both sides of the Sutlej dismiss them as utopian peaceniks. But it is an indication of the overall cooling of Indo-Pakistan bilateral tensions that the media were unusually tolerant of Mr Haq during his latest development shuttle through SAARC capitals in May.

Mr Haq was pushing the conclusions of his *Human Development in South Asia 1997* report to the region's leaders just ahead of the summit in Male. The timing couldn't have been better to talk about the links between peace, development and democracy. The unusual spring thaw in Indo-Pakistan relations presented a narrow window of opportunity. But the present rapprochement is precariously dependent on the longevity of fragile coalitions and the tolerance threshold of itchy military brass.

The South Asian human development report shows clearly how military spending in every region of the world has gone down since 1985 - except in South Asia, where it has actually increased by 12 percent. And yet, as we are all aware, this is a region that can least afford to keep standing armies. The ratio of soldiers to doctors in South Asia is revealing: four soldiers for every doctor in India, nine for Pakistan and a shocking 35 soldiers per doctor in Nepal.

The report expounds on a new definition of security that does not confine it to military matters: "It is widely recognised that national security cannot be achieved in a situation where people starve but arms accumulate; where social expenditure falls while military expenditure rises." In short, the governments of India and Pakistan simply cannot afford to remain enemies any more. The slums are already encroaching into the outskirts of the cantonments.

With India and Pakistan, it is pretty clear what must be done: mutual confidence-building exercises to make the thaw last so that the war machine on both sides can be frozen at present levels which will free up a peace dividend worth 40 billion dollars. You don't have to be a peacenik to realise that the only way to save a patient is to stop the haemorrhage first, that will buy time to cure the other ills.

But what of the small South Asian countries who keep large armies even though they have no discernible external enemy? The Human Development Report is silent on internal security, and its cause-effect links with development. Bhutan, which has evicted one-sixth of its population, may have admirable per capita parameters simply because existing resources are divided up among a much smaller population.

Military spending for "internal security" could be the subject for next year's report by Mr Haq. Sri Lanka today spends close to a quarter of its annual budget in pursuing a military solution to a festering civil war that threatens to erase past achievements in basic health and education. Nepal keeps a bloated, outsized army that seems to be kept intact only because it is a national heritage.

Internal security and human development are intertwined in a vicious cycle. You don't have to be a blood-thirsty military dictator lavishing large slices of the national budget to the men in green to be responsible for deprivation. Apathetic and unaccountable elected leaders incapable of understanding the long-term implication of their neglect, corruption and indifference can be even more lethal. As grievances pile up, oppressed people pushed to the brink resort to violence.

Of the 82 conflicts in the world in the past two decades, 79 were within nations and 90 percent of the casualties in them were civilians. Most of these conflicts were the result of falling incomes and lack of jobs. Many so-called "civil wars" are actually a direct result of wrong priorities in development. As Dr Haq told us in an interview: "These struggles are often dubbed 'ethnic conflicts' or problems of 'internal security' but that is a mistake. These are, in fact, breakdowns of human development, explosions of human despair, manifestation of frustrated human expectations. The solution is neither a big stick nor a firm hand but greater priority for human development."

The Human Development in South Asia report is a warning not just to the rulers of India and Pakistan to stop their mutual destruction, but also to smaller South Asian countries to start caring about their people.

South Asia

SUN 'N' SAARC

SAARC summits and the high level meetings leading up to them are long-drawn out affairs. Three consecutive two-day meetings of the heads of SAARC divisions in the foreign ministries, of the foreign secretaries, and of the foreign ministers of the seven countries, precede the three-day summit itself, during which the leaders take the middle day off for a "retreat".

However, no one was complaining at the ninth summit held in the Maldives 6-14 May. All the delegates were put up on one of the coral island resorts near the capital island of Male, in villas fronting white sand beaches and turquoise lagoons.

Transportation was by speed-boat, between Hulele's atoll runway, Kurumba island resort, where

the leaders stayed, Bandos where the officials were put up and where the pre-summit conferences were held, and Male, for the inaugural and closing sessions of the summit. The retreat was to be held on a fifth island, at Full Moon Beach Resort, but rain and choppy seas kept the leaders confined to Kurumba.

Not such a bad place to be confined in. In a dramatic demonstration of the importance attached to tourism in the Maldives, the king, presidents and prime ministers attending the summit had to share the facilities at Kurumba with sunbathing tourists and scuba-divers. There was something surreal about the phalanxes of leaders and their entourages charging around the coral walkways for their one-on-one bilateral (seven times six are a lot) meetings. "You have to be careful not to get run over by a head of state here," said a snorkeller with fins and mask stepping niftily aside on his way back to his cabana.

It was about as far away as one could get from South Asia without actually leaving it, and a useful reminder of the advantages of globalisation beckoning the region. One wondered, though, whether the more usual South Asian mix of status consciousness and protocol would have made this possible anywhere else. Not that security was neglected. But it was unobtrusive, and made easier by the archipelagic nature of the country.

The Male summit started out on a much more hopeful note perhaps than any previous summit. "In the two years since the last summit the mood has changed from one of cynicism to cautious optimism," said one delegate before the inauguration ceremony. "Both the politics and the economics of the region have improved dramatically." On the former front the big change has been improvements in India's relations with Bangladesh and Nepal as a result of the "Gujral Doctrine", which abandons India's traditional insistence on reciprocity in its dealings with neighbours. The big question on everyone's minds was whether the summit would witness a similar breakthrough in the Indo-Pakistan ties.

The first indication that it would, came in a statesmanlike speech by Nawaz Sharif, who said, "We cannot afford the continuation of tensions, military confrontation and escalating defence budgets." Without referring to Kashmir but only to the stalled dialogue with India, he held out his hand to say "We are determined to continue with this process so that all outstanding issues can be comprehensively addressed. The dividends for success will be enormous not only for Pakistan but for the entire SAARC region."

I.K. Gujral seemed to have been taken by surprise, as the prepared text of his speech contained no reference to political issues. In an extempore add-on, however, he referred to Mr Sharif and his overture with great warmth, and said he looked forward to their meeting that afternoon. Perhaps anticipating the agreement to resume talks, establish a hotline, and release all civilian prisoners, he became the first of several leaders to refer to the summit as "historic".

In their declaration, the leaders "agreed that a process of informal political consultations would prove useful", a cautiously worded statement that could over time lead to SAARC evolving into an explicitly political organisation like ASEAN. Observers see India's willingness to go along with the rest on the issue as yet another expression of its new-found confidence in dealing with its neighbours.

The other important decision was to fix a firm date for the commencement of SAFTA, or the South Asian Free Trade Area, by 2001. The formulation until now had been "preferably by 2000, or by 2005 at the latest". Fixing a firm deadline helped focus the attention of the trade negotiators of the seven countries, who met in Thimphu in mid-June, on accelerating tariff cuts to reach zero level, and eliminating non-tariff barriers within the next four years.

Interestingly, the impetus for free trade came as much from the smaller members as from India, which formally proposed a South Asian Economic Community. Indeed, looking beyond free trade, the declaration adopted by the summit called for "specific steps to promote and protect investments" in joint ventures, avoidance of double taxation, customs standardisation, mechanisms for arbitration and most importantly, improvements in trade-related infrastructure such as communications networks.

SUBHAS RAI

SAARC sunrise

The summit laid to rest the controversy that had developed over the initiative taken by Nepal to undertake sub-regional development jointly with India, Bangladesh and Bhutan in the north-eastern corner of the SAARC region. The remaining members had expressed fears that smaller groupings within SAARC might weaken the body as a whole. However, it has now been agreed by all members that sub-regional cooperation in growth "triangles" or "quadrangles" will be taken under the umbrella of SAARC whose charter provides for cooperation on specific projects between three or more members.

An important decision was to extend the term of the secretary-general from the present two to three years. While the proposal has been discussed before, the obstacle was the question late President J.R. Jayawardene of Sri Lanka is reported to have asked: "Does that mean we will have to wait for 21 years for our turn?".

While the decision represents the kind of incremental progress that has characterised SAARC so far, it is the very concept of "taking turns" that the organisation will have to grow out of, as ASEAN has. "If the organisation has to grow, the psychology of sharing a post will have to go," as one diplomat noted. Others pointed out that Sridath Ramphal headed the Commonwealth Secretariat for 12 years.

The organisation will be particularly fortunate to retain the services of the present Secretary-General, Naeem U Hasan, for another year. He is regarded as having been particularly effective.

Now that SAARC seems to be headed in directions more central to regional cooperation, some of the relatively peripheral activities it has busied itself in the past may be in for pruning. The metaphor was used by Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga when she asked: "Does the proliferation of activities over the last decade signify anything more than the growth of barren foliage on a vast tree?" Responding to Mr Sharif's suggestion, the summit set up a Group of Eminent Persons (GEP) to review activities so far and chart directions for the future. It will report to the next summit.

Maldives has taken over the chair from India. Next summit: Sri Lanka 1998.

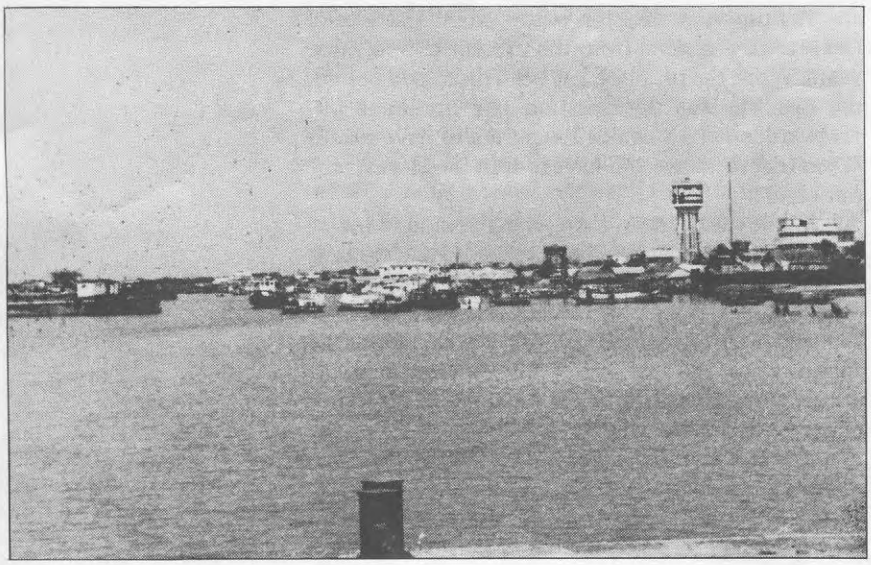
Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal

ROADS WITHOUT BORDERS

If one does not count the Indo-Pakistan land border, which has to have its own solutions, the problem of closed terrestrial crossings may be resolving itself elsewhere in South Asia. We are referring to the so-called "growth quadrangle" that includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Indian Northeast.

Inder Kumar Gujral visited Nepal in early June, and perforce the Gujral Doctrine had to be applied. New Delhi decided to grant Kathmandu, with immediate effect, a land access to Bangladesh through the Northeast "chicken neck" on a six-month experimental basis. While the exact route details are still murky, and notwithstanding a bit of a fluster among Nepalis on what to do with the route once it was granted, this event has to be seen as an advance for regional understanding one which will possibly have a snowball effect.

Regardless of how useful the land corridor eventually is to Nepal, Mr Gujral's decision has to be welcomed. India was acceding to an obvious principle of good neighbourliness by allowing Nepal the use of third country transit, thereby giving it the option of challenging the monopoly of the Calcutta Port Authority, under whose inefficient straitjacket Nepal's government and business have suffered for decades. The possibility that now exists of Nepal exploring a route to the sea other than Calcutta will certainly be sobering for the *babus* over at the Authority.



Mongla Port needs to develop.

The route granted Nepal starts at the country's southeast border post of Kakarbhitta. It runs east along Indian Highway 31C, and a turnoff at Bagdogra brings it to the customs depot at Phulbari, across from where lies Bangabandh in Bangladesh. A highway built as a pork barrel for the people of North Bengal by then-President Hussain Mohammad Ershad takes one southwards to the delta country, over the Ganga, past Jessore and Khulna to the port of Mongla.

While nothing to rave about for the moment, the Khulna region is economically active, with many Korean businesses having set up shop here. The port itself, or the distributary Pusur, is being spruced up with financing from the Asian Development Bank.

Kathmandu officials hope that the new route, besides providing an alternative route to the sea, will allow access to the Bangladeshi market, in much the same way that is already happening between Bhutan and Bangladesh. The market is there for Nepali produce, horticulture, livestock, and even rocks, in high demand in the deltaic country. Nepal's total export to Bangladesh in 1995/96 was NPR 386 million, and imports were to the tune of NPR 680 million. The officials project an increase of more than half in those figures within a couple of years, with upto 60 trucks travelling between the two countries every day.

The Nepali foreign ministry is, of course, looking at Bhutan's experience in all this. For, and this may come as a surprise to many, Thimphu has quietly been enjoying for years the very transit facilities which have just been granted Kathmandu. Trucks from Phuntsoling in Bhutan cross over into Bangladesh Budimari, further east of Phulbari.

New Delhi hopes that its bonafides as evident in granting the Phulbari route will push Dhaka into acceding to India's own demands for transit through Bangladesh. In fact, Nepal's then-Foreign Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani used the very argument in the negotiations with Mr Gujral. And indeed, the northeastern states have never been closer to getting a route to the Chittagong port, what with a friendly government in power in Dhaka and New Delhi talking the Gujral Doctrine. It is quite likely that Bangladesh will be amenable to helping out the Northeast, if only because Dhaka businessmen would be the first to benefit if any major (and unexpected) economic upturn were to overtake the Northeast. It is less likely, however, that Dhaka will be agreeable to a more direct land connection between the northeastern states and the Indian mainland (rather than Chittagong), which is a much more sensitive matter in terms of domestic Bangla politics.

Beyond transit, the breakthrough Nepal has achieved could also lead to more developments.

Indian businessmen themselves represent a pressure *group* which has been demanding more transit points for doing more commerce with Bangladesh, which has opened as a lucrative market for India. The port in Mongla could conceivably benefit not only Nepal and Bhutan, but in a region where efficiency and cost differential might mean more in future than it does today, also North Bihar, West Bengal and Assam.

Taking the tantalising vision one step further, there is always Tibet. Once the slumbering economic giant up beyond the Himalayan divide chooses to rise, it will look for immediate access to the sea, which for Lhasa is the Bay of Bengal rather than the South China Sea. Coming over the high mountain passes into Gangtok or Kalimpong, trucks from Lhasa, too, may, in the not too distant future, start taking National Highway 31 into Bangladesh.

As an Indian commentator who travelled to Kathmandu with Mr Gujral put it with regard to the granting of the Phulbari access, "The importance of the thing is surely psychological as much as economic at present. But one must always look ahead."

Once the dominoes fall, and the Phulbari route could be the beginning, who knows where the chain reaction will reach. Such is the power of commerce, and it is not always for the worse.

Nepal

DOOM AND GLOOM

If observers have been concerned about the squabbling parties and the resultant political downturn in Nepal, take a look at its economy. With the financial year coming to a close on 15 July, and the yearly ritual of the budget presentation during the upcoming monsoon session of Parliament, it is time to take stock. And the news is that the economy is in deep crisis.

As far as the monetary and fiscal situation is concerned, there are three things to be worried about. One, the budget deficit has been contained by reducing expenditure rather than by increasing revenue. Two, inflation has been 'contained', not through the implementation of sound policies, but by creative accounting. Lastly, with the Indian Rupee moving robustly towards convertibility, the Nepali Rupee is all set to be "found out" and ratcheted down a notch or two.

But more on that later. The economic downturn is all around for Nepali citizens to see, and no expert analyst is required to point it out. All along the Tarai, the industries are closed or functioning at extreme undercapacity, hit by low demand (people do not have money to buy). This is across the board, for rice and flour mills, textile factories and breweries. In fact, one reason the country as a whole is not facing grievous power outages despite the closure of the Kulekhani power project, which supplies nearly half of the country's electricity, is because the mothballed factories are not making demands on the national grid.

In Kathmandu Valley, whose real estate market till a couple of years ago reminded one of boomtime Manhattan, even speculators are not buying property, construction has come to a halt, and to-let signs abound in every lane and neighbourhood. Foreign aid receipts, on which the Finance Ministry as well as Kathmandu's rentier classes have long relied, are down drastically.

The reduced income from smuggling has severely squeezed the national economy.

The budget deficit for the last nine months was NPR 3.5 billion against the year's projected deficit of NPR 17 billion, which in itself does not look bad and the year should end with a deficit of NPR 5-6 billion. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved due to any great show of fiscal discipline on the part of the previous and present governments, but it merely reflects lower spending. Revenues have been low at NPR 20 billion in the last nine months, which is only half the year's target set for the year.

Out of the total NPR 57 billion allocated, only NPR 28 billion was spent in the last nine months. While the regular expenditures have been in line with the budgets set, the so-called development expenditure has performed dismally, with only NPR 10 billion spent against the budget target of NPR 33 billion. It is inconceivable how the Nepali economy can proceed with such a sluggish development sector.

One of the most significant trends of the past year is the plummeting of the "miscellaneous cash receipts" which had helped prop up the economy as a whole by providing the liquidity flow. From a high of NPR 15 billion in the first six months of the last fiscal year, the receipts were down to NPR 3.5 billion for the same period this year. These refer, of course, to the income from smuggling gold, silver, electronics, and so on, mainly from Southeast Asia into the quasi-protected Indian market. The reduced income from smuggling has severely squeezed the national economy.

Interestingly, however, there is money aplenty in Nepal's banks even though there is no cash in the market. Entrepreneurial activity is at all-time low, and the banks while away their time buying treasury bills and making interbank transactions. There can be no better indicator than this to show where the economy stands, or droops.

Inflation, although pegged at 7 percent by the Nepal Rastra Bank (the central bank), does not reflect the true price situation as there have been increases in both components of food and non-food and service

groups. The weightage assigned by the Nepal Rastra Bank, the central bank, has always resulted in an underestimated reading as to the extent of inflation. A drastic oil price hike announced by the government in mid-June in anticipation of a price rise in India will push inflation to levels it has not attained before.

The trade deficit is widening, and during the previous nine-month period it stood at about 21 percent of the GDP, which is on the higher side. Foreign exchange reserves as they stand are good for less than six months of imports. The only welcome sign is the marginal decrease in the trade gap with India, compared to the same period last year. However, this is offset by a jump in trade deficit with other countries. While exports to the other countries have increased by only 10 percent over the last year, imports have jumped by 38 percent, leading to an increase in deficit by 51 percent over the comparable period a year ago.

The likely devaluation of the Indian currency will have an immediate and devastating effect in Nepal.

The strengthening of the US dollar against all the major world currencies will not leave the Indian Rupee alone. The Indian exchange rate is unreal, and in all likelihood New Delhi will soon decide to let it move with the market and achieve full convertibility. Such a move by the Reserve Bank of India will affect all neighbouring countries, but for Nepal it will be immediate and devastating for the much closer link its economy and currency has with India. The Nepali Rupee's value will depreciate, with the trend of exports slowly pointing towards India. The fixed exchange rate will have to be reviewed downwards from the present rate of INR 100 = NPR 160 to as far down as INR 100 = NPR 180 to reflect the true value of the Nepali rupee. The shock waves that a devaluation would generated would be very destabilising for a country already reeling from political turmoil.

The situation is bad enough for Western diplomats in Kathmandu to have begun openly to castigate Nepali aspirations, as the German Ambassador Klaus Barth did when he ridiculed plans to seek foreign direct investment even while a Maoist insurgency picked up steam in the hinterland.

But what of the people, one might ask, as the economy heads for the lower regions. What is to become of them, a people which as the latest Human Development Report of UNDP indicates, are already the most destitute in all South Asia. In the past, because the economy was non-monetised, the public remained largely untouched by macro-economic trends. This is no longer the case; the Nepali people are hurting and it looks like they will be hurting some more.

-Sujeev Shakya

HIMALAYAN TREASURE

If the best of a commodity happens to come from the Himalaya, should it trade more cheaply in world markets than lesser brands simply because it is South Asian? Despite the intense free-market rhetoric currently directed at South Asia from Western centres of capital, for one commodity the firm answer to this question has so far been yes - the best should come cheap if it comes from an impoverished place.

The notion of payment according to value is discarded in this arithmetic. Instead, a basic equation of colonial days comes to the fore: those compelled to sell at under-market prices should be silently grateful for what they receive. One gets the urge to check the calendar: which century is this? Wasn't it 50 years ago this coming August that the South Asian colonial economy came to an end?

The commodity in question has been lovingly described in countless volumes, its pricelessness extolled. There are manuals for its acquisition in raw form and its subsequent refinement. These make fine distinctions between the product of one micro-region and another, grading different types and sub-types like diamonds in the rough. There are many testimonials to the quality of this treasured Himalayan commodity, describing its exemplary performance, durability and superiority to comparable products from anywhere else in the world. And finally there are memoirs that describe the opportunity to make use of such an extraordinary thing - simply made, perfectly suited to its purpose, and performing practically flawlessly for years on end - as a rare privilege, even a life-changing experience. Sparingly paid for, it is lavishly praised. All in all, an ideal commodity. Moreover, when its useful life is over, it can simply be returned for a small fee.

This rare Himalayan commodity was first discovered by the British in the early 19th century. At that time they imagined the Himalaya to be full of hidden riches - gold and other precious metals, jewels, spices, fine wool and cloth. Rapaciously seeking access to these riches brought them into battle with those whose territory they sought to infiltrate. And there, in battle, they found an unanticipated treasure. It was a man.

They would call him Johnny Gurkha. Short in stature and of unassuming appearance, they glimpsed him through the smoke of battle and the fog of Orientalism. Seen in that light, his "determined bravery" and "astonishing exertions" in the face of superior military force were understood as expressions of an innate martial spirit. Here was a Himalayan treasure that could prove invaluable in the continuing quest to mine the riches of the Orient.

The British promptly began to purchase it - drawing first on captured stock and then, as its value was proved, creating an elaborate mechanism to extract more from the then forbidden Nepal Himalaya. In more recent years they were able to openly collect the "raw material" of the Gurkha Brigade in the hills of Nepal. Demand has risen and fallen over the years, but they have not stopped mining the Nepal Himalaya yet.

BIKAR RAUNIAR

Loyalty *versus* Equality

by Mary Des Chene

"It's better to die than to be a coward."
"It's better to be clever than dead."
"It's better to die than to be a coward. For what? For bread? For right? Or for nation?"

These three short slogans mark moments in the long, strange history of imperialism that has joined parts of the globe together in unlikely ways. The first, popularised by British officers of the Gurkhas, is said to be the Gurkhas' own motto, a concise summation of their bravery and warrior spirit: It's better to die than to be a coward.

The second is a pragmatic revision of the first, coined a decade ago by an ex-Gurkha to describe foreign military service as a form of long-distance wage labour of men doing their best to survive. The third appeared on a bright red banner outside the Kathmandu City Hall last January during a programme organised by the Gorkha Bhutpurva Sainik Sangh (Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organization, or GAESO) to promote their campaign for equal treatment for Gurkhas within the British army and redress of past financial and other discrimination.

In 1996, GAESO presented four demands to the prime ministers of Nepal and Great Britain: 1) Pensions for those made "redundant" during reductions of the army and sent home pensionless; 2) Gurkha pensions equal to those of a British soldier of the same rank and length of service; 3) Assistance to establish educational and training institutions for Gurkhas' children; and 4) Right to work permits in Great Britain after retirement.

While GAESO's specific demands mainly concern retired Gurkhas, their campaign has important implications for serving Gurkhas, and for Nepal's international reputation. All their demands refer back to two core principles. First, that Gurkhas clearly be accorded equal status as an integral part of the British Armed Forces (through equal pay, pensions, benefits, etc). Second, that the taint of the mercenary label be removed forever (by making clear the Gurkhas' equal status as an integral part of the army).

If GAESO is successful, current Gurkhas will serve under conditions of full equality. Whether successful or not, GAESO has already challenged the nation to think about why Nepali and British governments have quietly allowed Gurkhas to be treated as second to their British counterparts, even while their British officers proclaimed them to be second to none.

Are they Mercenaries? The Traffic in Gurkhas

Over the past 182 years, men from the Nepal Himalaya - so often described as "closed" and "unchanging" until the mid-twentieth century - have reached virtually every corner of the world, as Gurkha soldiers of the East India Company, then of the Raj, and still today as members of the Indian and British armies, and the Singapore police. From one political perspective, this history is read as a record of glorious military service and unparalleled loyalty. From another position, it is read as a history of mercenaries, fighting fascism and independence movements with equal enthusiasm, and as a blot on the record of Nepali sovereignty.

Some might wonder why the label 'mercenary' should be an issue at all for soldiers famous the world over for their exceptional loyalty. Indeed, nothing raises the ire of those who respect the Gurkhas more quickly than the mercenary label. But the idea that Gurkhas are merely hired killers is not a new nor a particularly uncommon one, as evidenced by Nepal's

Rana rulers' insistence in 1947, when Gurkha service in the British army was being negotiated, that the "stigma of 'mercenary troops' may for all time be wiped out".

As the legitimate right to muster armed forces became increasingly reserved to nation-states, and military service became tied to citizenship and patriotism, the term 'mercenary' had, by the 20th century, taken on increasingly ugly connotations. Definitions vary, but all except those that celebrate "soldiers of fortune" understand it to be a damning description. Who has tried to pin the mercenary label on the Gurkhas? And who has tried to deny it? What has been at stake and what's at stake now?

Jang Bahadur Rana was the first Nepali ruler to assist the British militarily. He did so not by enabling Gurkha recruitment (which was obstructed by Nepali governments before, during, and after his time) but by personally leading Nepali army troops against the so-called "mutineers" at Lucknow in 1857. Meanwhile, Gurkhas in British employ were fighting, by all accounts valiantly, at the "Siege of Delhi". What was the difference? The difference, for Jang Bahadur, was that leading his own nation's troops in aid of the British showed the strength, sovereignty and independence of Nepal, while accumulating a debt that might be used to advantage later. Allowing his subjects to enlist directly in British service had the opposite implications.

By the late 19th century, Rana resistance to Gurkha recruitment had eased, and during World War I the government even assisted in a massive recruitment drive, often amounting, as historian Prem Uprety has shown, to conscription. But the Ranas' concern over the effects of Gurkha recruitment for Nepal's international stature had not lessened, rather it was ameliorated through elaborate diplomacy. The Ranas were constantly garlanded with honorary titles. More substantively, they were granted an annual "gift" of one million Indian rupees after WWI in appreciation of their (i.e. the Gurkhas') contribution to the war effort. And in a 1923 treaty, the British finally formally acknowledged Nepal's sovereign status.

Jang Bahadur preferred to go into battle himself.

JWALA SAMA AFTER GEORGE BRYANT CAMPION

The Ranas cared not about whether individual Gurkhas were or were not mercenaries but about whether the bartering of citizens for the Ranas' own gain (which could well be termed mercenary) would make Nepal look like a subsidiary state, and thus diminish their own prestige as its rulers. These concerns over appearances did not disappear along with Rana rule in 1951. Instead, Gurkhas have been disappeared from national history because, as another historian Pratyoush Onta has shown, their service under foreign flags cannot comfortably be accommodated within the dominant national narrative of unvarnished independence. Successive governments have continued quietly to allow recruitment while being unwilling to bring notice to the practice. It was not until GAESO began its advocacy in 1992 that the conditions under which Gurkhas serve have come to national attention. And it was only on the initiative in 1994 of another ex-Gurkha organisation, the Gurkha Memorial Trust, that Gurkha Victoria Cross recipients were publicly honoured in Nepal.

A different set of claims about Gurkhas as mercenaries, this time in the affirmative, came from Indian nationalists and from Nepali anti-Rana activists resident in British India. Indian nationalists were acutely aware of the utility of Gurkhas as a counterforce against their movements. Nepali nationalists found the whole practice of Gurkha recruitment humiliating to the nation, and a practice that kept parts of the peasantry from clearly reflecting on the oppressive conditions of Rana governance within Nepal. Gurkhas were variously urged to cast their lot with Indian freedom fighters and settle in an independent India, to recognise their "blood brotherhood" with other Hindus, and to atone for their sins in supporting the British in 1857 and massacring civilians in Amritsar in 1919. The mercenary charge was often blunt, even while ultimate blame for Gurkha conduct was directed at the Ranas and the British:

> *Today the Gurkhas stand like boulders and thorns on the road to Indian independence.... The Gurkhas have now become a martial class. All that their mothers have got to do is to bring forth babes to make food for powder in war in defence of the British Government. And such things as patriotism, motherland, culture of human community have no value whatever in the eyes of those babes. The English also know too well that such useful and cheap soldiers cannot be had anywhere else. So they hold the Ranas of Nepal in so much regard and remain fondly attached.* (Naya Hindustan, *6 May 1939*)

After the end of Rana rule, the left within Nepal continued to criticise Gurkha recruitment as a blot on Nepali sovereignty, especially while Gurkhas fought communists in Malaya in the 1950s and 1960s. Nor have views of Gurkhas as mercenaries been confined to the Subcontinent. Most recently, during the Falklands war the Argentinean press criticised the British for using mercenary troops when they sent Gurkhas into battle.

The British line of defence against such charges follows the wording of an Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949. On the basis of that document's definition, they argue that Gurkhas cannot be called mercenaries because they are not recruited specifically for a particular armed conflict, are

not compensated "substantially in excess" of other combatants in the British army, and are "integral members" of the British armed forces. Gurkhas are not side-switchers and in this sense no one could reasonably call them mercenaries. But Gurkhas swear *loyalty* to foreign powers, and in this sense some will probably continue to call them mercenaries, no matter how the Geneva Conventions define the term, and whether or not they receive equal treatment as GAESO demands, within the British army, or any other armed force in which they serve.

The uncomfortable implications of foreign military service for Nepali sovereignty help to explain why passions often run high when questions about Gurkha service are raised. But to understand why British Gurkhas, whether one considers them mercenaries or loyal soldiers, are not already treated equally to their British counterparts, requires revisiting the long strange history that has brought Nepali men to be departing British Hong Kong for the UK dressed in British military uniforms.

"Good Value for the Money"

GAESO's demands are forcing reexamination of the curious recruiting arrangements made in 1947 by Britain, Nepal and newly-independent India. It has often been stated that the 1816 Treaty of Sugauli, under which Nepal ceded territory at the end of the Anglo-Nepali war and allowed a British resident in Kathmandu, also granted the British the right to recruit Gurkhas. The Sugauli treaty remains a potent symbol in the politics of sovereignty in Nepal today, as the first in a long series of compromises with foreign powers, but it did not grant the right of recruitment. In fact, recruitment remained a matter, first, of subterfuge (sending serving soldiers back home to slip new recruits across the border) and, later, of elaborate diplomacy right up to 1947.

The question of Gurkhas being incorporated into the British army was raised by the Viceroy, Field Marshal Wavell, in 1945. Wavell, who commanded Gurkha troops during the war, considered them to be "probably among the best soldiers in the world if properly officered and trained". He was joined in his advocacy by Commander-in-Chief of the Indian army, Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck. Both men joined a sharp eye for British military interests with a sense of obligation and gratitude to Nepal and the Gurkhas (though Auchinleck pictured them, perhaps prophetically, as becoming a kind of "Foreign Legion" within the British army). But the decision then passed to military strategists in the UK, who had larger strategic concerns on their minds.

In Britain, it was not a foregone conclusion that Gurkhas should be brought into the British army. After much discussion, the War Office determined that Gurkhas might be useful as an imperial garrison force in Southeast Asia. The assessment of the Chiefs of Staff was that a division of troops was necessary "to protect our interests in Asia, particularly in Southeast Asia", and that "it will probably be cheaper to maintain a British/Gurkha Division than a purely British Division". Despite all the soaring rhetoric advanced in public about Gurkha bravery and loyalty, it was this military and economic calculation ("good value for the money," as a British Defence Committee put it in 1989) that governed decisions then and undoubtedly govern them now.

GURKHA: THE LEGENDARY SOLDIER/ROBIN ADSHEAD

Saheb and sipahi

"Expose the Least Surface Possible"

The tri-partite agreement (TPA) eventually signed by Britain, India and Nepal in November 1947 was hammered out as the British hastily quit India, and bears many traces of the unresolved conflicting interests that lay behind it. The ruling Ranas of Nepal, as a matter of national pride and sovereignty, wanted it made clear that Gurkhas were not mercenaries. Therefore, they insisted that Gurkhas be treated on an equal footing with the other soldiers of the armies they served.

But, despite contributing the most important clause on behalf of Gurkha interests, the Ranas let India and Britain work out the details, and signed a very sketchy document. They also allowed to stand a bi-partite agreement between India and Britain that contravened their stipulation of equal treatment for Gurkhas by tying British Gurkha salaries to the Indian army pay code. India had, ironically, inherited the British interest in Gurkhas as an impartial internal military force that might be used to control communal violence, and wanted to keep them in the new Indian army. Britain wanted, above all, to establish an agreement in principle for recruitment, realising that such an odd arrangement would be impossible to establish later. The Gurkhas themselves, as usual, had no representative present as their fate was being determined.

The British strategy was, as one negotiator put it, "to expose the least surface possible". An example will show how they played their cards. British negotiators soon discovered that India's main objection to British recruitment was the possibility that British Gurkhas

would be used to fight against independence movements elsewhere in the Empire. Besides an objection on principle, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru also thought that, since Gurkhas had long been Indian army troops, it could "appear as a continuation of the Imperialist link with India."

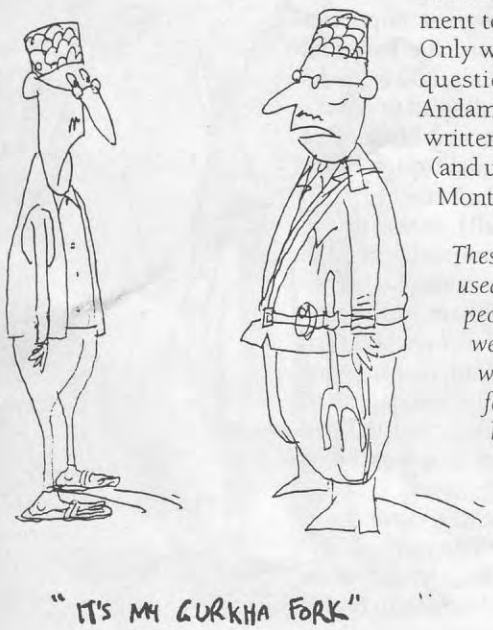
The position of the British Government was as follows:

> *In any given Colonial territory the primary responsibility for internal security rests with the troops raised and maintained by that territory, e.g., in Malaya, the Malay Regiment. Nevertheless, other troops whether British or Gurkha cannot in practice stand aside should the situation become such as to require their assistance and it could not be the policy of His Majesty's Government to refuse to allow troops to be used in this role. Any restriction on the use of Gurkhas for internal security purposes is therefore wholly unacceptable.*

But the negotiators were told to stress that the force in Southeast Asia, of which the Gurkhas would be a part, was to be a "strategic reserve" and to simply state that:

> *Responsibility for internal security in any Colonial territory under the British Crown lies primarily with the troops raised and maintained by that territory.*

When this half-truth did not do the job, Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was sent personally to meet with Nehru. There was yet more British subterfuge involved in rushing Montgomery to the scene. The British wanted to keep the Andaman and Nicobar islands for their own military purposes. As the Viceroy explained in a secret telegram of June 1947, in the event of a delay, Nehru "will have discovered proposal to exclude Andamans from India. This latter proposal may well enrage him to point of exercising option given him by Maharaja of Nepal to refuse India's agreement to use of Gurkha troops by British. Only way to force quick issue on Gurkha question before he discovers about Andamans." By Nehru's own account, written immediately after the meeting (and unaware of the Andamans scheme), Montgomery assured him that,



> *These troops [Gurkhas] were not to be used locally and certainly not against any peoples' movements for freedom. They were not to be used at all, in fact, unless war came. Malaya was a suitable place for them to be stationed; otherwise they had nothing to do with Malaya.*

According to British military history, war never did come to Malaya, only a protracted "emergency", but nonetheless Gurkhas were heavily used. According to that same version of events, of course, Gurkhas didn't fight against a "peoples' movement for freedom", but rather against "communist insurgents". In any case, Montgomery's assurance was only a tactic to bring India back into negotiations, and India subsequently failed to ensure that it was written into the recruiting agreement. But there were other assurances written into the 1947 TPA, and GAESO now argues that those agreements have been broken. The most critical passages are the following:

- *"In all matters of promotion, welfare and other facilities the Gurkha troops should be treated on the same footing as the other units in the parent army so that the stigma of 'mercenary troops' may for all time be wiped out" (Nepalese Suggestions, Annexure III, Section G)* [emphasis added]
- *In his letter to the Maharaja of Nepal dated 7th November, the terms of which were acknowledged and confirmed by the Maharaja on the 9th November, Mr. Symon made clear that "subject to the limitations of finance and supply, welfare facilities would be provided for Gurkha troops on similar lines to those provided to British (United Kingdom) troops". In a Tripartite meeting at Katmandu [sic] on the 7th November, attended by Indian representatives and by the Maharaja of Nepal, Mr. Symon emphasized that the United Kingdom Government in no way regarded Gurkha troops as mercenaries, and that they would form an integral and distinguished part of the British Army.* (Footnotes to Annexure III, Section H).

However, the Bi-Partite Agreement between the "Government of the Dominion of India" and the UK that was attached to the TPA contains a crucial and contrary stipulation, namely that: "The basic rates of pay admissible to Gurkha Officers and soldiers serving H.M. Government shall approximate to those laid down in the present Indian Pay Code". Although it went on to provide for an additional allowance for overseas service, this stipulation put Gurkhas and British soldiers on a different footing from the very beginning. And because pensions are figured on the basis of basic rates of pay only, Gurkha pensions have remained far lower than those of British soldiers.

A preamble to the TPA stresses that the "whole basis of the arrangement...is mutual goodwill between the Governments of the United Kingdom, India and Nepal" without which British recruitment of Gurkhas "would inevitably be rendered impracticable". In the present dispute over whether Britain has lived up to the terms of this agreement, much may turn on the legal interpretations of "welfare facilities", and "limitations of supply and finance" which appear in the TPA. Whether the bi-partite agreement between India and Britain is binding on Nepal or not (GAESO lawyers argue it is not) will also be important. But however these issues are argued, the Nepali government's intent, as inscribed in the agreement, was very clear: "In all matters...the Gurkhas should be treated on the same footing". And despite the clever language of the British agreement to this condition

The Gurkha Soldier

When the Great One made the Gurkha he must have had
in mind His ideal sort of human being, an elite among
mankind...

For He took a hunk of cheerfulness
And gave it kind dark eyes
And bestowed upon it bravery
Far beyond its size.

To a body short in stature,
Of black hair and wheaten skin
Were mixed in lots of gentleness
And a flashing, white-toothed grin.

Reliability, determination, honesty,
And a wee bit anger too,
Were deftly added by the Lord
And carefully kneaded through.

Made most generous of all men,
With the manners of a king,
Also made the happy warrior
With a love to dance and sing.

Straightforward and uninhibited
From a mountain way of life,
Patient, loyal and uncomplaining,
Inured to pain and strife.

Made proud and independent
By his Maker up above,
In battle bold and doughty,
In peace, goodwill and love.

With little in his pocket,
And but a small house on the ground,
No man is ever turned away,
No shelter left unfound.

Of different tribal habits,
Of varied jat and clan,
They all have this in common–
God's perfect gentleman.

–Anonymous

From **The Mountain Kingdom** *by B.M. Niven in which this old poem is printed in full.*

When my mother asks...

Poor souls!

My mother will ask where is her boy
Tell her that the battle has begun

My father will ask where is his boy
Tell him he's in midst of battle

Big brother will ask where is little brother
Tell him his inheritance has grown

Younger brother will ask where is big brother
Tell him he died in battle

Elder sister will ask where is her brother
Tell her, one less *choli*

Younger sister will ask after her brother
Your *maiti*'s become smaller, tell her

My son will ask for baba
Remind him to take off his cap

My daugther will ask for baba
Ask her to offer *daan* of gold bangles

My love will ask after her husband
Tell her she is now free

Sister-in-law will ask where I am
She can kill a goat, celebrate

My buddies will ask for Lahuray
Tell them to kill all memories

Mother, don't cry, don't cry.
If I live, I'll send you my photograph

Fathers cry for a year
Mothers weep their whole lives.

"When my mother asks..." was sung by nationally known gainay Jhalak Maan Gandarva, and is archived in Radio Nepal. **Gainay** *are minstrels who walk the trails of central Nepal singing the travails of rural life.*

cholis – clothing brothers gift sisters
maiti – married woman's parents' home
daan – ritual offering

("subject to finance and supply") it seems clear that the British should join GAESO in assessing Gurkha treatment against the "same footing" standard, if not out of genuine concern for their Gurkha troops, then at least for the sake of "mutual goodwill".

"Mind the Gap"

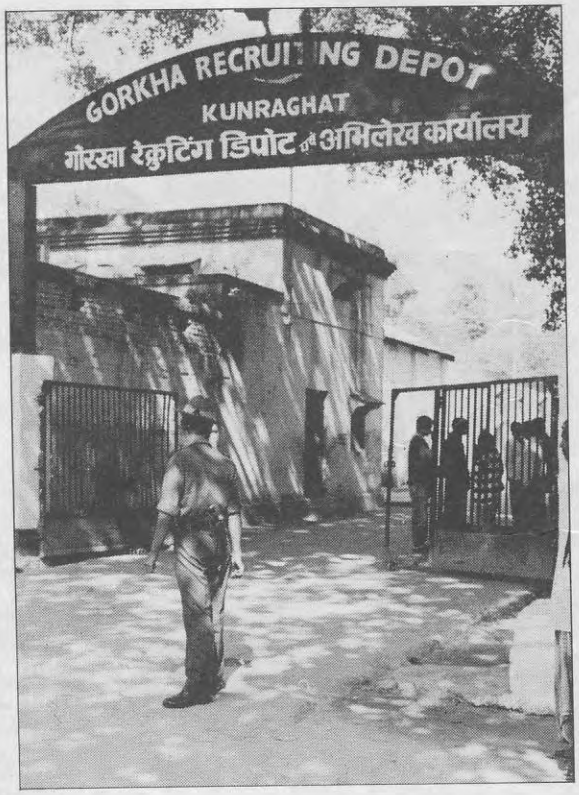
In 1947, as negotiations were getting underway in earnest, there was an announcement in the House of Lords: "We shall see that fair treatment is accorded to these gallant men to the best of our ability." In the negotiations over Gurkhas there has always been an escape clause on the British side: "To the best of our ability", "subject to finance and supply"... But as the British well know, Gurkhas rarely let those who wrong them escape. Former Gurkhas are now saying that the British have not only failed to exert themselves to the best of their ability, but have failed even to meet the legal requirements of the TPA. If the governments of Britain and Nepal do not soon work out revised conditions of service for Gurkhas that satisfy their demands, GAESO is preparing to file a suit in a British court.

What is already clear, looking back to the 1947 negotiations, is that British decision makers had things other than "fair treatment" of Gurkhas on their minds, namely cheap and able soldiers to protect a dwindling empire. Despite considerable individual goodwill in the House of Lords and among the British public again today, there is no reason to think that the situation is substantially different now.

When the doors to a London underground train open, a recorded voice helpfully reminds passengers to "mind the gap" between train and platform. The voice is cheerful, but the message is serious, for a misstep could be lethal. As ex-Gurkhas pick their way through the booby-trapped terrain on which the terms of service of British Gurkhas have been hammered out, there is no concerned British voice to guide them.

During their 50 years of British service, have the Gurkhas been treated "on the same footing" as their British counterparts? They have been paid less. They have received far smaller pensions. Gurkha officer messes have been separate from those of British officers. Their promotional structure differs from that of British soldiers, and very few have reached the higher ranks. They are rented out to the Sultan of Brunei. During "redundancies" Gurkhas have been cut proportionately more than British units. These and other differences look more like signs of a segregated army, or the "Foreign Legion" within the army that Auchinleck envisioned in the 1940's, than a situation in which Gurkhas are treated on "the same footing" as British nationals.

The "least exposure" principle seems still to be at work. Far from reminding us to "mind the gap", a praise-song of devotion, proud tradition and mutual goodwill was sung publicly, drowning out the pragmatic voices discussing the basic economic and strategic defence considerations that guided British decisions during the latest reduction of the Brigade and its relocation from Hong Kong to the UK. Although public assurances of fair treatment were made as the Brigade was reduced and prepared for transfer, serving Gurkhas did not know the terms under which they would serve in the UK before they were transferred. The Nepal Government appears neither to have been consulted nor to have inquired. Even the British Government's own House of Commons Defence Committee, charged with assessing the future of the Brigade of Gurkhas after 1997, had a difficult time extracting the information it needed to compare Gurkha and British soldiers' conditions of service. How much more difficult, then, for ex-Gurkhas who are raising issues that the British military would rather not have examined.



USHA TIWARI

The first Gurkha recruiting camp established by the British at Gorakhpur, presently maintained by the Indian army.

Ayo Gurkhali!

Among the favourite British images of Gurkhas is one of them rushing eagerly into battle, khukuris raised shouting "Ayo Gurkhali!" (The Gurkhas have come!) to strike fear into the hearts of their opponents. Retired Gurkhas are appearing today in new places: at press conferences and in Gurkha Welfare Trust offices asking questions about the disbursement of funds, in meetings all over Nepal discussing among themselves their rights, and exchanging information about their past treatment. They have lawyers at their sides rather than khukuris in their hands. This may not strike fear into anyone's heart, but they do seem to have annoyed and discomfited some.

The British embassy in Kathmandu felt it necessary to call a press conference to defend British conduct as in accord with the TPA. A high ranking former British officer described GAESO as "self-serving" and a "fringe" group (*South China Morning Post*, 7 January 1997). The press, in Nepal and abroad, has

THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM/B. M. NIVEN

Recruit line-up and oath of allegiance at Dharan, Nepal.

been very favourable overall to GAESO, but some journalists do suggest that their campaign could result in the end of British recruitment. The Nepal Ex-Servicemen's Association, which is requesting only a pension increase and not full equity, charges that GAESO is putting serving Gurkhas livelihoods in jeopardy. How representative of former and serving Gurkhas is GAESO? And what are the implications of its campaign for serving Gurkhas?

Ex-Gurkhas are dispersed throughout Nepal and many find it financially necessary to work abroad again after retirement. Thus GAESO's potential constituency is far-flung, but available evidence points to broad support. GAESO has "Action Committees" in most of the districts of Nepal headed by ex-Gurkhas from across the political spectrum (which contradicts allegations that GAESO is only for United Marxist-Leninist party supporters). Regional meetings around the country over the past year have been attended by hundreds, including elderly and disabled veterans from surrounding villages who went to great effort to attend. A GAESO rally in Kathmandu in March 1997 was attended by an estimated 15,000 people. Support among serving Gurkhas is most difficult to assess since their employers are under criticism. But, off the record, serving soldiers say that the common sentiment in the barracks is: It's about time!

What about the notion that GAESO's campaign might result in elimination of Gurkhas from the British army altogether, either by rendering them too expensive, or due to "politicisation" of the Gurkha connection? First, if the British army cannot afford to expend equally for 2900 of its soldiers (the current number of Gurkhas) as for the other 100,000 or so, then it should certainly reduce its forces by that number or more. But if finances alone are at issue, there is no reason those eliminated need be Gurkhas. Second, the Gurkha connection has always been political. GAESO's activities have simply begun to make it necessary to add Gurkhas' needs and rights into those political calculations.

If the Gurkha connection is ended it will most likely be because of assessments of military needs in an ever-dwindling British Empire, though if it happens anytime soon, some might try to place blame on GAESO for what would be an unpopular decision. But even if those who suggest that GAESO's activities might bring the end for British Gurkhas are right, one can ask whether current employment for 2900 should outweigh the needs of thousands who have already given their youth and sometimes their health.

"Lahuray"

THE BRITISH first called them 'Goorkhas' or 'Ghoorkhas', and finally 'Gurkhas', the name under which Nepalis have become famous as soldiers the world over. This term was a mispronunciation of 'Gorkha', the central Nepal hill state from where Prithvinarayan Shah, the first king of the current Nepali dynasty, had ventured forth in the mid-18th century to expand his kingdom. The expansion of Gorkha territory did not stop after his death but continued until it reached Sikkim in the east and Kumaon and Garhwal in the west. It was during this expansion that the Gorkhali state came into confrontation with the East India Company, at the end of which Gurkha service under the British began.

But the British were not the first to recruit soldiers from the new Gorkhali state of Prithvinarayan Shah. The term 'lahuray', by which Gurkhas, from both the British and Indian armies, are commonly referred to within Nepal, derives from this earlier history. In the course of the Gorkha Empire's westward expansion, its troops were stopped at Kangra by those of the Sikh leader Ranjit Singh in 1807. Whether defeated soldiers were recruited at that time, as the British would do eight years later, is unknown. But by 1809 there were Nepalis serving as infantry in Ranjit Singh's armies. The term 'lahuray' harks back to this earliest known service in a foreign army, deriving from the name of Ranjit Singh's capital - Lahore.

BIKAS RAJNIKAR

Lachhuman Gurung, WW II hero and Victoria Cross holder, leads GAESO rally in Kathmandu in March earlier this year.

Pay and Pensions: What Price Loyalty?

In February Nicholas Soames, the British Minister of State for Armed Forces, announced to Parliament that married accompanied service will be allowed in the UK, and that, as of July 1997, Gurkha salaries will be brought "broadly into line with that received by British soldiers". This is good news, but remembering to "mind the gap", we should take note of the phrase "broadly into line" and watch to see what that will mean in practice. The British have made much of this announcement as an answer to Gurkhas' grievances. In its press releases, GAESO too has called this step a victory, and so it is, as an indication that the pressure they are exerting is having an effect. But it is not so great a victory as it appears at first glance.

Married accompanied service will continue to be available at any given time only to 25 percent of serving Gurkhas below commissioned ranks, for a single period of three years during their service. Pay will continue to be pegged to the Indian Pay Code. What has been changed is the amount and the applicability of additional allowances. Prior to the announced change, Gurkha basic pay represented about 10 percent of their total pay, the rest being added in the form of overseas and married accompanied allowances. These criteria for determining additional allowances has been abandoned - all Gurkhas wherever they happen to be stationed, with or without their families, will receive the same additional allowances to bring their salaries "broadly in line" with British ones. But this move does nothing to redress one of the central demands of GAESO, equal pensions.

Pensions are figured on the basis of basic pay only, which the British claim is in keeping with the TPA, though nothing there precludes adding pension allowances, or figuring pensions on the basis of total pay (i.e. base pay plus allowances). Mr Soames' announcement included no change in the current unequal pension rates applied to Gurkhas. The pension issue is fundamental, for a recognition that the TPA does not prevent payment of a full pension (or indeed, recognition of its more fundamental provision for equal treatment) would result in significant increases to thousands of ex-Gurkhas and perhaps necessitate retrospective compensation as well. The pension issue is also fundamental because it is here that the limits of British understandings of equality for Gurkhas become evident.

A *London Times* editorial entitled "Home for the Brave" (18 February 1997) reported approvingly on the announced plan to equalise Gurkha and British salaries. But this otherwise sympathetic editorial had the following to say about pensions: "What cannot be entertained is equal pension benefits: Gurkhas retiring will live not in Britain but in Nepal, where the cost of living is far lower." Not only does this show an insulting ignorance about the financial demands faced by ex-Gurkhas. The colonialist arithmetic that lies at the heart of this British "common sense" about pensions should not be missed. If the British military appears to be concerned that ex-Gurkhas might acquire unseemly wealth in comparison to their neighbours, we should ask whether this is a sudden (and very partial) expression of communist sentiment in an unlikely place, or just a familiar old imperialist tactic: acquire them cheaply, and take every advantage of their poverty.

The *Times* editorial concludes by saying, "Yesterday's changes are intended to show that the welcome is as warm here as it was in the last garrison of the Empire." But the comment on pensions inad-

vertently shows that, for Gurkhas, the "last garrison of the Empire" is to be Great Britain itself.

The End of Empire?

Like most military affairs, the story of the Gurkhas is not, when looked at closely, as uniformly glorious as it is often made out to be. Gurkha history includes many feats of bravery and sacrifice. It also includes the infamous Jallianwalla Bagh massacre in 1919, where Gurkhas were among those firing on unarmed Indians on behalf of the British. Gurkha history includes generations of Ranas enriching and empowering themselves by trafficking in the sweat and blood of their countrymen. It includes the British getting and keeping the most advantageous deal they could make for themselves at any given moment in order to acquire troops they have found extremely adaptable to meeting their military needs.

Thus to lay all the blame for the sordid sides of Gurkha history on the shoulders of individual Gurkhas, by condemning them as mercenaries, would be a denial of a much larger collective responsibility, first and foremost that of successive British-Indian, British, Indian and Nepali governments who have, each for their own reasons, happily trafficked in Gurkhas.

Successive Nepali governments have failed to advocate for their citizen-soldiers. As GAESO gatherings have grown large, the political parties have rushed to the scene with words of support. It remains to be seen whether they have simply realised that winning the "Gurkha vote" could mean wider gains in the *janajati* (ethnic minority) communities from which British Gurkhas are overwhelmingly recruited - a significant consideration in Nepali politics today. If a Nepali government really becomes serious about ensuring equal treatment for Gurkhas, it will terminate the messy agreement of 1947 and develop a new one that clearly implements the principle the Ranas set out, "In all matters...the Gurkha troops should be treated on the same footing".

To do so, however, might well bring under public scrutiny the potentially volatile issue of Nepalis serving in the Indian army (estimated variously at 40,000 to 100,000). While the symbolism of British recruitment is more striking, with its imperial past, in real numbers it now pales beside Indian recruitment. Perceived Indian encroachments on Nepali sovereignty have long been a potent issue in Nepali politics. The Mahakali hydropower treaty, Mechi border dispute, and Indian army deployment in northwestern Nepal make it a flashpoint today, and there may not be a government brave enough to risk adding fuel to that fire in the interest of impoverished ex-British Gurkhas or the few thousand citizens serving in the British army today.

This may also explain why the Indian government has thus far declined to make the obvious statement that a few thousand Nepalis serving in the British army poses no challenge to India's ability to recruit Nepalis for its own army - and thus that there is absolutely no need today to tie the British Gurkhas' remuneration to the Indian army pay code. Indeed, despite the fact that Britain says its hands are tied by the bi-partite treaty with India, the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu tells GAESO that this is a matter for the British and Nepali governments to decide.

No 3549 Rifleman Hari Bhakta Gurung, 1/3 Gurkha Rifles (1940-1948) today in front of his house in Lumle village, Central Nepal.

The eyes of poverty often see the world more clearly than those shielded from its harshest realities and blinded by protective instincts towards private wealth or public power. Many Gurkhas, though they have not had access to all the documents that tell the tale of what has been done and said in their name, have long been critical of the conditions that make foreign military service an opportunity to be grabbed. Former Gurkhas now working to become their own historians, and to develop a comprehensive interpretation of Gurkha history will, in the long run, have to grapple with the contradictions inherent in that history. But for the moment other aspects of the Gurkha past rightly take precedence, those that have created the very difficult living conditions of thousands of retired Gurkhas, and the unequal conditions of service that continue today. An examination of that history leads directly to the doors of government in Britain, Nepal and India.

As GAESO has raised its voice, Gurkha loyalty has come under question by opponents. This is a management strategy familiar to workers the world over who demand improvements in their conditions of labour. The more pertinent question concerns responsibility. In the final analysis, a simple question can be posed to the British military. Having proclaimed far and wide, for over a hundred years, that Gurkhas are among the best infantry soldiers in the world, how can it be just that they have received less rather than more than other British soldiers for their service? GAESO, modestly and generously, is only asking for equality. As has happened many times in the past, Gurkhas are showing their British employers the way to high ground. Let us hope that they follow as willingly as when Gurkhas have led them out of danger on the battlefield.

M. Des Chene is an editor of the journal Studies in Nepali History and Society.

Mercenary Position

In the battle for high ground between the British authorities and the Gurkha pensioners, there is space to question the latter's position.

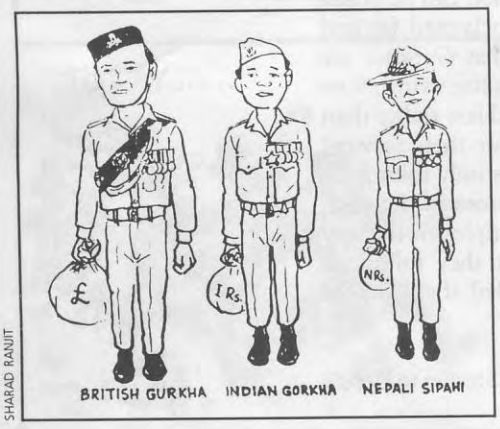
by ***Deepak Thapa***

The demands being made by the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) of the British Government raise intricate questions that reflect the complexities that arise when one country recruits another's able-bodied men as soldiers.

The most important demands relate to pay and pension which amounts to GAESO insisting that Gurkhas be treated equally with British soldiers. The argument is that since Gurkhas are supposed to be an "integral part of the British army", all terms and conditions of service should be the same, including what Gurkhas earn.

Complications begin right there: if the British Government were to agree that both British and Gurkha soldiers get equal treatment retroactively, many of the agitating Gurkha pensioners would get a rude shock. Most Gurkhas retire after 15 years' service, which is when they become eligible for pension. British soldiers, on the other hand, are required to serve 22 years before they get pensions. Those who serve less than 22 years (but have put in more than two years in the army) begin to receive pensions only from the age of 60, the amount depending on the number of years they have served.

There is no similar provision for Gurkhas serving less than 15 years, and the majority of those receiving pensions would not have served 22 years. If GAESO got its demand of equal treatment on salary and pension, many Gurkha pensioners might have their monthly payments stopped, with the direction that they apply upon reaching 60. Should this happen, the pension they would then receive would of course be twenty times more than what they now receive. But, even after taking into consideration that the average life-expectancy of Gurkha pensioners is slightly higher than national average of 54, there is the question as to how many would be around to collect the amount.



SHARAD RANJIT

(It must be stated that amidst the strident calls for equality, GAESO officials seem willing to reach some middle ground on their demand for pensions, such as the cut-off date when "equal pensions" would begin.)

Even as these complexities stand, and without going into the legality of the issue raised, it has to be asked how tenable GAESO's position is in view of the ground realities. To begin with, Gurkhas are not conscripted. They join the British army of their own free will (although there is evidence that during World War I, Nepal's then Rana rulers did conduct a conscription drive to please the British). In fact, when they do manage to get into the British army, the recruits know they are the lucky ones. For every new recruit clad in his first olive greens, there are hundreds who head back home disappointed, perhaps to join the 'lesser' services, i.e. the Indian army and, failing that, the Nepali army. At the time of signing up, the expectation of equal pay with the British is farthest from the minds of these would-be Gurkhas; they want in, whatever the conditions and that's that.

Also it cannot be denied that service in the British army opens many opportunities that are closed to Nepalis who serve in the Indian or Nepali armies. For instance, the Gurkha Reserve Unit, the Sultan of Brunei's guards, employs more than two thousand ex-Gurkhas, with pay packets that are comparable to their earnings as British army soldiers. Ex-Gurkhas also find ready employment as security guards in places like Hong Kong *(see following story)* and the Gulf. While not every ex-Gurkha is successful in building a second career, it is certainly true that the British army connection has helped many former Gurkhas to live comfortable lives in relation to other servicemen.

Career Soldiers

Another of GAESO's demands relate to those Gurkhas who were sent back at the end of World War II and during the cuts made in the British army in the 1960s without pensions. At the time of those reductions in army strength, no soldier, British or Gurkha received pensions, unless, that is, they had served the required number of years to make them eligible. GAESO wants that these veterans be awarded pensions.

There seems to be some merit in GAESO's demand even though it goes counter to its "equal-treatment" demands. In the context of Gurkha recruitment, there is no denying that the British had been high-handed when they sent back Gurkhas pensionless.

For all the claims of empathy with "the boys", the sahebs failed to appreciate what distinguishes Gurkhas from British soldiers. Gurkhas are career soldiers. For a Gurkha, joining a foreign army is born out of economic compulsion, and it is not something he

tries out for a period before deciding whether he likes it or not. And, being a professional soldier, he expects all the benefits that go with soldiering, including a pension at the end of the day. This factor was never a consideration when the rules governing redundancy were being applied across the board on all of the British army.

It can be contented that WW II was, after all, was fought for the high ideal of "defending world freedom", and the countries involved did not expect their brave young men to be rewarded. But were Gurkhas swayed by such lofty principles to fight the war? Most likely not. A war was on and they joined up, for the same reason that Nepalis had been joining the saheb's army for more than a century - a chance to make some money and, if possible, see the world. It is because they were fighting for something other than imperial glory that many Gurkha veterans of the war felt cheated when they were sent packing with nothing more than their last salary, and a service medal.

A parallel can be found when the end of the Malay campaign made a large number of Gurkhas redundant. As is the norm, lump sums corresponding to 18 months' salaries were handed out. Given the huge disparity in the pay scales of Britishers and Gurkhas, the latter got a pittance in comparison, although neither got pensions. It is a different matter that due to the different conditions in the two countries, ex-soldiers from the UK had many more opportunities open to them, while for most of their Nepali brothers-in-arms the only option was to go back to working the land, which they had left in the first place for an army career, and expectation of a pension.

These considerations help explain the feeling among Gurkhas who had to leave the army without pensions that they were given a raw deal. However, demanding equal treatment does not address this issue.

Having It Both Ways

Two other demands made by GAESO have nothing to do with seeking equity with British soldiers. GAESO wants ex-Gurkhas to be given work permits in the UK on the plea that the soldiers, having given the best years of their lives to serving the British, should be allowed to work in the UK and its territories. The organisation also seeks British Government assistance in creating educational and training institutions for children of Gurkhas. Children of British soldiers enjoy no such facilities, but GAESO's justification has a logic of its own.

GAESO argues that since most Gurkhas have to live without their families for 12 years out of a general service period of 15, their children grow up in the absence of a father figure, and tend to go wayward. Also, as the children have to change schools while moving to and from Hong Kong, and now the UK, their education suffers. Since it is their fathers' service in the British army that is responsible for this, the British Government should do something about it.

A former British officer sees it differently: "The Gurkhas want to have their cake and eat it too. They want to be treated equally, but then again they want preferential treatment."

There is also the question of the fate of the 3000 or so Gurkhas presently with the British army. By making the British Government irritable, GAESO might be putting the very existence of the Royal Gurkha Rifles (as the much-reduced Gurkha Brigade is now called) at stake. For London, faced with a public relations challenge, a court case, and what not, might find itself wearied into writing off the Gurkhas altogether.

The possibility that the British Gurkhas may be disbanded as a result of its activities does not seem to bother GAESO. Why should 3000 matter when a hundred thousand stand to gain? While the pragmatism of this view cannot be judged when there is no indication as to how its demands will fare, GAESO fails to consider the fact that 3000 is not an absolute figure. It means many times that number of soldiers over the years. (In terms of the Nepali economy, a conservative estimate has it that British Gurkhas presently serving

Johnny and Tommy

THERE HAS always been a section of the British military hierarchy that has wanted the Gurkha Brigade disbanded, especially during the periodic reductions in the armed strength. Every time a cut is announced, quite a few British regiments, all with their own glorious histories of centuries past, are disbanded or amalgamated. Why, it is asked, should 'native' regiments suffer even as a 'foreign' one is pampered.

One might also ask why do the British want to hold on to the Gurkhas now that there are no colonial outposts left to garrison? Tony Gould, a former British army officer who is writing a book on the history of the Gurkhas, says there are two reasons why the Gurkhas continue to be part of the British army: "One is, of course, the long tradition, and all that. The other, more important one, is that so long as there is even a single Gurkha soldier in the army, if a situation should arise, more Gurkhas can easily be recruited. It is always reassuring to have a ready supply of soldiers on the standby."

According to another retired British Gurkha officer, due to changing social values in the UK, as in the rest of the West, military service is no longer considered 'honourable'. Says the officer, "Because of this, our army faces an acute shortage of manpower. There have been cases where undermanned 'white' regiments have taken in Gurkhas, and this situation is likely to continue into the future."

Seen in this light, and despite the agitating pensioners in Kathmandu, it seems likely that Johnny Gurkha will be marching together with Tommy Atkins for some time to come, even if not into battle any time soon.

bring in more than NPR 250 million, or more than USD 4 million, *every month* into the country.)

Meanwhile, there has been no public reaction from the serving Gurkhas till now. This, despite the fact that they are the ones who will be immediately affected, whether GAESO succeeds or draws a negative reaction from the British Government and public. A serving soldier says the Gurkhas have been subtly warned by their officers "not to rock the boat" since their very future may be at stake.

However, there seems to be conditional support for GAESO: the serving Gurkhas will cheer if GAESO gets its demands, but turn away from it if it fails. Take the case of the young Gurkha sergeant home on leave in Kathmandu. He is thrilled that he will be earning at par with British soldiers with the new pay code which came into force on 1 July. He also silently supports GAESO because the demands relating to pensions would secure him a lavish future.

Yet, the Gurkhas find nothing unfair in the present dispensation, otherwise they would not be serving. At the same time, they would not mind a change in the status quo, but only if that would gain them additional earnings. Therein lies the paradox.

And What of the Gorkhas?

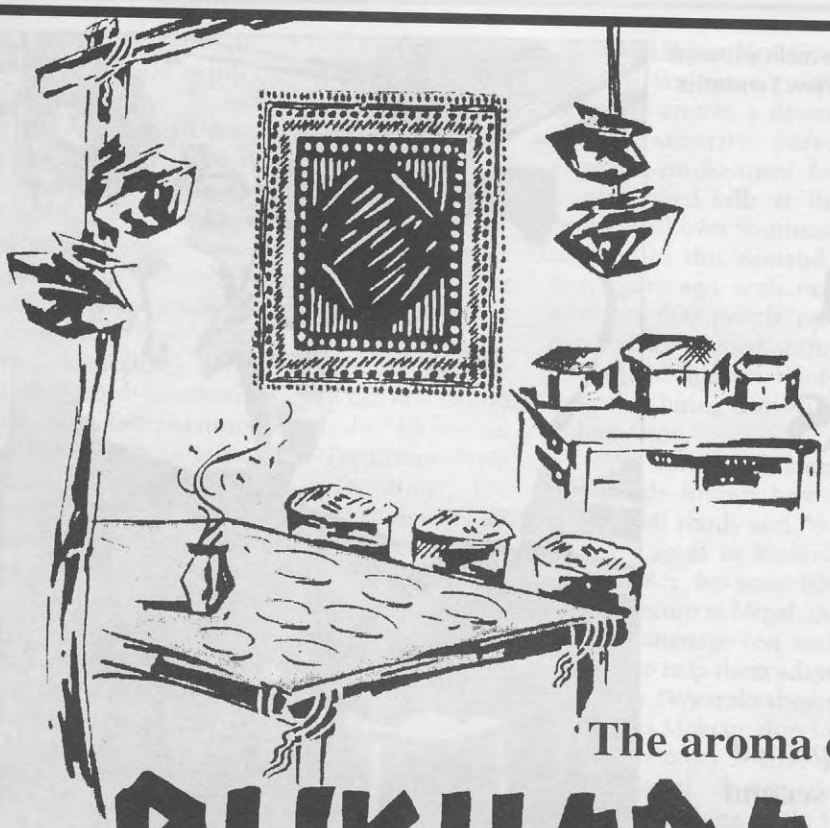
WHILE CONCERN runs high for the 3000 odd Gurkha positions remaining in the shrinking British Army, no one is talking about tens of thousands (the exact number is unclear) Nepali men who continue to soldier as the Indian military's own 'Gorkhas'. In these days of South Asian bonhomie through the medium of the SAARC organisation, it will be a distasteful reminder to some that Nepali citizens stand ready to fight India's wars, both internal and external.

Nepal has on occasion been embarrassed by the use of its citizens by a foreign power in post-colonial times, as when the British Gurkhas mopped up insurgents in Malaya, or when the Gabriel Garcia Marquez condemned them as mercenaries during the Falklands/Malvinas War. However, it is the use of Nepal-born soldiers by the Indian army which brings the issue too close for comfort.

The Gorkhas of the Indian army fought the Chinese in 1962, and the Pakistanis in 1948, 1965 and 1971. Despite the stipulation by the Ranas in the tripartite agreement of 1947 that Gorkhas not be used against Hindus, as part of the IPKF, they were deployed against the Tamils in Sri Lanka by Rajiv Gandhi. Today, as New Delhi uses its army to control insurgencies, Gorkhas are found fighting Kashmiris, Bodos, Nagas, Assamese, and stand ready to be deployed anywhere, with no questions asked by the home country.

Recruitment of Nepalis into foreign armies is the curious outcome of the economy and history of the hills of the central Himalaya. It reflects both a fact of life and an embarrassment as far as the sense of self of modern Nepal, the nation state, is concerned. No other SAARC member has its citizens fighting in the army of another member country.

As things stand, neither Nepal's economy nor its internal politics will countenance any tinkering with the situation in which its citizens go to fight for the Indian state. Nepal can only hope that the peace offensive underway in South Asia will have a long run, at the very least, with no cross-border wars which will pit its nationals in battle with India's enemies.



The aroma of

BUKHARA

Soaltee Holiday Inn Crowne Plaza, Kathmandu presents awe inspiring culinary traditions of India's Northwest Frontier at its best.

A team of master chefs, create culinary magic for lunch and dinner by working with recipes and processes preserved since Medieval times.

Recipes savored by ancient warriors and perfected by our chefs using rare and exotic spices in an ambiance of rugged interiors, makes a meal in the Bukhara an experience that you will relish forever.

Ancient, yet Regal. Rugged, yet Grand. This is the Bukhara for you.

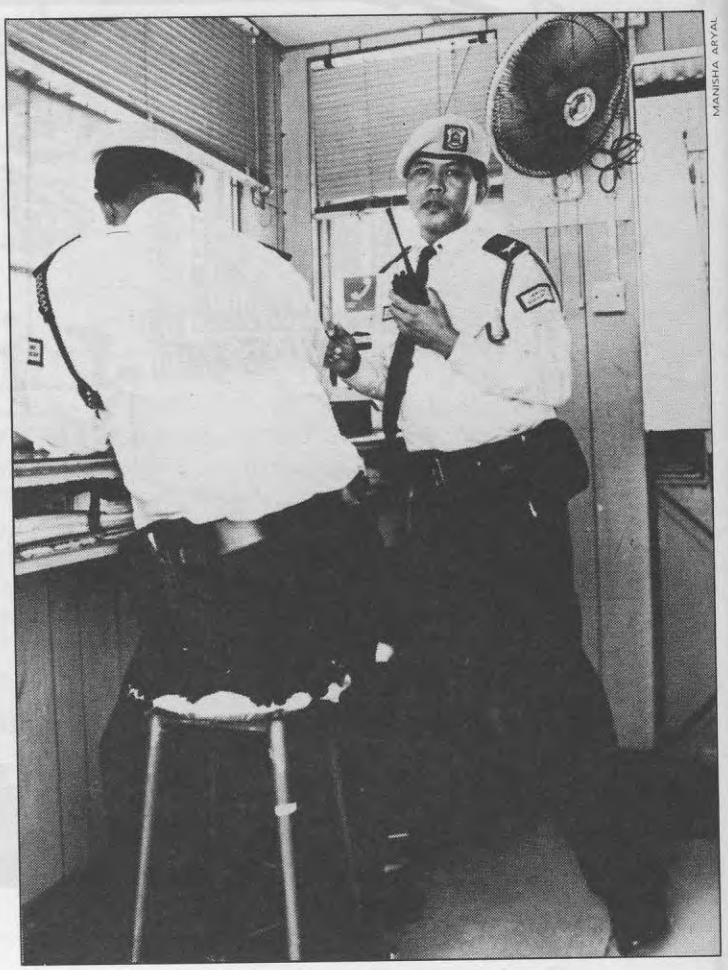
SOALTEE

Holiday Inn

CROWNE PLAZA®

KATHMANDU

For Reservations please call Restuarant Manager Abhay Raj Gurung or Chef Bhaskar Sankhari at 273999 Extn 6555


MANISHA ARYAL

Karna Bahadur Gurung and a colleague guarding the main entrance of the camp in Tuen Mun, New Territories.

Gurkhas in the People's Republic

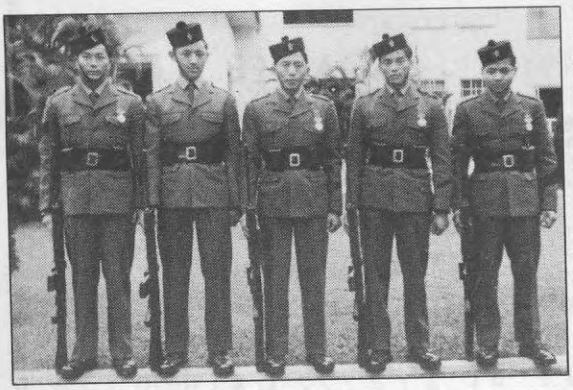
A Hong Kong security company has picked up soldier retirees and given them a second career. It has ambitious plans for expansion.

by Manisha Aryal

The British sailed away on 30 June, but the Chief Executive of China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Tung Che-Hwa seems to have made up his mind about the Gurkhas. The soldiers who served in the former British colony will be allowed to stay on in Hong Kong - as security guards, that is!

Six Nepali soldiers, who retired after serving the British crown, now control access to Mr Tung's quarters. They are contracted by Jardine Securicore Gurkhas Limited (JSG), a private company that specialises in supplying high-end security in Hong Kong. Some 600 Gurkha retirees work with JSG. The company combines the reputation of the legendary Gurkha with their training in disciplined services to provide security to the top five percent of the Blue Chip companies (computer industry, telecommunications industry and investment firms in the former colony), Red Chip companies (investments with mainland connections), government, banks and the United Nations in Hong Kong.

Forces Guard, Hong Kong, 1969



At a time when Nepalis are rapidly filling in the lowest echelons of the job market in East Asia and West Asia, the development of the job market in Hong Kong is good news not only for retiree Gurkhas but for Nepal's economy as a whole. The development of the Hong Kong employment scene provides an example for other regions, with the Gurkhas able to parlay their reputation and experience for well-paying alternatives.

When Chandra Pun retired from the British Army in 1993, he could not find a job in Nepal. "I tried my hand in business," Mr Pun said as Royal Nepal Airlines' Boeing 757 took off from the Kai Tak Airport and headed east to Kathmandu. "But I was no good with business. After 18 months, I left for Hong Kong for this job." Mr Pun was returning to Nepal in June after finishing his two-year contract with JSG as Mr Tung's chief of security.

Like Mr Pun, other highly skilled Nepali soldiers

who spent their youth in service of the British crown find it hard reintegrating in Nepal. With the Nepali economy in shambles and employment opportunities limited for these hill people who have lived all their working lives away, their choices are limited to starting retail shops with their savings, or starting small-time businesses. Nepal has not made concerted efforts to create employment or investment opportunities for the returning Gurkha soldiers and they are forced to look abroad.

"Jobs in security, wherever they are, provide continuity," said Juktiman Rai, the Gurkha liaison officer with International Catholic Migration Commission in Tuen Mun, New Territories. "This is similar to the work we do in the army." The Commission has contracted out the security of Pillar Point Refugee Centre, which houses approximately 1500 Vietnamese refugees and their children, to the JSG.

Mr Rai, himself a retired Gurkha soldier, worked with JSG for two years before joining the Commission. He manages 18 Nepali security guards, who patrol the centre in two shifts. The security company's managing director Christopher Hardy said the idea of employing ex-servicemen for security came to him as he was trekking along the Madi river in West Nepal. "The British Government announced the cuts (in the number of Gurkha soldiers)," Hardy said. "And the *budos* (old men, who had worked with the British) were worried. A repeat of 1966, when the British pulled out of Malaysia would be devastating."

With the thought in his mind, Mr Hardy came back to Hong Kong, resigned from Her Majesty's Service and started Maximum Security Asia. A year later, in 1993, the company merged with Jardine and has grown ever since. Soon, said Steve Hagwood, operations manager for the company, it will start providing high-end security in Malaysia, Singapore, India and Papua New Guinea as well.

The fast-paced growth of the Southeast Asian economy creates a demand for trained and disciplined security personnel and JSG, with eager-for-employment former Gurkhas from the impoverished hills at its disposal and extensive contacts all over Southeast Asia, seems well-placed to cater to this demand. The JSG, which started four years ago with only a handful of people, now has 600 people on two-year contracts. The demand for trained security guards has grown so much, said director Hardy, that the company will soon start hiring Gurkha soldiers who served in the Indian Army.

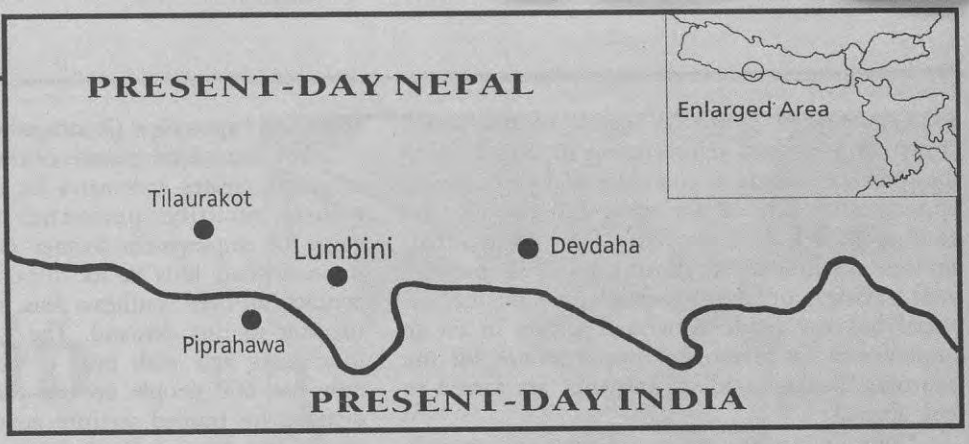
"We started with Hong Kong because Gurkhas are already known here as professional, efficient people," Mr Hardy said. "It was a natural beginning."

JSG's agent in Kathmandu, Nepal Re-employment Service, has some 800 members. When retiree soldiers return to Nepal, they register at NRS, take an English language test and are given a week-long training to help them adapt to work in the commercial sector. "We make them ready for a second career," said Bijaya Moktan, director of NRS.

While other South Asians born in Hong Kong [also Nepalis], line up the immigration tower in Wan Chai, along with Filipinos and mainland Chinese to get permits to work as maids or construction workers, the retiree Gurkhas do not need to form a queue. Hong Kong Government's Supplementary Labour Scheme, which allows companies to import skills locals do not have has provided badly needed second careers to the soldiers who served the crown.

M. Aryal, presently based in Berkeley, California, was in Hong Kong to report the handover of the Crown Colony to China.

Buddha Brouhaha



Queen Mayadevi was headed for Devdaha: did she come from present-day Tilaurakot or Piprahawa?

IT WAS a classic case of much ado about nothing.

An exhibition of Buddha's relics preserved in India was jointly organised by New Delhi's National Museum and Thailand's Department of Fine Arts in Bangkok earlier this year. Everything went smoothly, including the opening of the event by S.R. Bommai, India's Human Resources Development Minister. Everyone went home satisfied with the bilateral cultural exercise.

But in nearby Nepal, there were angry voices. It began when the Nepali embassy in Bangkok saw a brochure produced for the exhibition. In a letter sent to the Foreign Ministry in Kathmandu, the embassy expressed concern that the brochure associated Siddhartha Gautam with Piprahawa in Uttar Pradesh, India. "This shows India's unwillingness to acknowledge Lumbini as Buddha's birthplace," the letter stated.

Now, if there is one thing Nepalis are really proud of, it is the fact that the Sakyamuni was born in Nepal. Therefore the ensuing brouhaha that has still not quite subsided. First came a news report that quoted a Foreign Ministry official as saying: "It's a sordid attempt to drag a non-controversial subject into ugly controversies. [Nepal's] Lumbini is Buddha's birthplace. It's an established fact."

The rest of the Nepali press quickly took up the issue and before long, the Dharmodaya Sabha, a leading Buddhist organisation, was expressing regret and strongly condemning "the mention that Buddha was born in India". The government daily *The Rising Nepal* editorialised: "Stating India as Lord Buddha's birthplace is most regrettable. The reason behind such blunder...can only be ignorance."

Another daily, *The Kathmandu Post*, wrote in its own editorial: "By asserting India to be the birthplace of Lord Buddha, the Thai - obviously sponsored by India - has blatantly tried to distort and tamper with centuries-old historical facts... The motive behind this...is not difficult to seek. India has always claimed that Buddha was born there."

In the rush to nationalistic posturing, no one seems to have bothered to read the brochure properly, the first sentence of which reads: "The birth of Siddhartha, who was born to king Suddhodana, the ruler of Kapilvastu (identified with Piprahawa, Distt. Basti, Uttar Pradesh) and Mayadevi in about 566 B.C. was a significant event in the history of mankind." The brochure goes on to say that Buddha was born in Lumbini. (Queen Mayadevi gave birth to him sometime between 623 BC and 543 BC in Lumbini while travelling between Kapilvastu and her parents' home at Devdaha.)

Although it does not say where Lumbini is, the brochure does not claim that it is in India either. In fact, India has never laid official claim to Buddha's birthplace. To cool the needlessly frayed Nepali tempers the Indian ambassador to Kathmandu, K.V. Rajan, took the unprecedented step of announcing at the celebrations to mark the 2541st birth anniversary of the Sakyamuni, that "Buddha was born in Nepal and there should be no ill-feeling between the peoples of India and Nepal over this issue."

Not that there exists no controversy between India and Nepal regarding Buddha's heritage. It does, but that has to do not with Lumbini but with the location of Kapilvastu (*see Himal Nov/Dec 1995*), where Suddhodhana's palace was located and where Siddhartha Gautam spent the first 29 years of his life. Since its discovery in 1899, Tilaurakot, which lies in present-day Nepal, had generally been understood to be the site of Kapilvastu. Until, that is, the mid-70s, when Indian archaeologists began claiming that the palace site was in Piprahawa, across the "open" border in India. Claims and counter-claims have been issued by both sides and there seems no end to it.

The distinction between Lumbini and Kapilvastu is what eluded the media in Nepal. Mere mention of Lumbini has many press folks foaming at the mouth expressing anger at New Delhi's "hegemonistic" tendencies. Says Kosh Prasad Acharya, Chief Archaeological Officer of Nepal's Department of Archaeology, "The newspapers, out of ignorance, have missed the issue and blown the whole thing out of proportion." He then hastens to add, "But at the same time we have to be aware of India's high-handedness in not mentioning Nepal being Buddha's birthplace."

To repeat, then: the differences that do exist between some Nepali and Indian archaeologists is over Kapilvastu, Buddha's hometown, and not Lumbini, the place he was born. And the brochure distributed in Bangkok simply reflected what Indian experts have held for some time now. But then, if that had been clear to the indignant journalists, it might have made no story at all.

-Manesh Shrestha

TWO CONTRASTING Buddhist notions observed in May. In a Kathmandu monastery, the monks were in their counting house, counting out their money.

JEAN HERBST

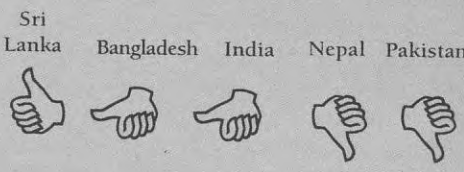
Om Money Probly Come

In Colombo, the following excerpt of a poem, "Wesak Thoughts", by Kumari Kumarasinghe Tennakoon, in the *Express* newspaper indicates a sentiment somewhat removed.

Wesak fullmoon soft, silvery beams,
Star studded serene dusty skies,
Whispering hopes of much wanted peace.
Sprinkling universal love in sympathy
The Buddhist way, in serenity.

Population Scorecard

Nafis Sadik and her rating (below)



FAMILY PLANNING services in South Asia have seen uneven progress. Sri Lanka gets the best grades, India and Bangladesh get high pass, Nepal barely scrapes through while Pakistan has failed.

And in each of these cases, the factors are clear: family planning has worked best in parts of South Asia where female literacy and the status of women is highest, says United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) Executive Director Nafis Sadik, in a recent interview with Himal South Asia.

The difference is most glaring when Bangladesh and Pakistan are compared - especially since they were one country till 25 years ago. "Bangladesh with all its poor economic indicators and infrastructure has had the strongest political support for family planning, it's been consistent no matter which government has been in power," Ms Sadik noted. "And in the end it seems to have paid off, with contraceptive prevalence level as high as 48 per cent, and with the growth rate declined to 2.2 or 2.1 and, in some areas, even lower."

The average size of the Bangladeshi family has fallen to about 3.5, while in Pakistan it is still between 5-6. In Pakistan, despite potential 30 percent or so contraceptive use, lack of access to contraceptives has strangled efforts to curb growth. "It's a question of political commitment, providing information and access to services, creating an enabling environment with education and improving the status of women," said Ms Sadik, herself a Pakistani.

"It's a health approach, not a demographic approach," she explained. East Asian countries have progressed because they have consistently provided services and information rather than sanctions.

Across the border in India, progress on population management has been uneven. While growth rates had fallen in the south and this trend showed signs of moving northwards, family planning programmes have had very little impact in Uttar Pradesh the most populous state, Bihar and, surprisingly, Punjab.

In Punjab, despite relative economic wealth, the status of women was low. "This corresponds to what has been happening in Pakistan," she said. "In Pakistan there are lots of factors, including the lack of political commitment to social investment in general, so all social services have languished. In addition to that, these societies are very feudalistic, women have no status, they don't make decisions for themselves, their role is seen as one of service, and as producers of children. And there is a bias towards sons in both India and Pakistan."

"Leaving the choice to individuals is the key. That has not happened in South Asia," said Ms Sadik, attributing this to political and cultural factors.

-Nirmal Ghosh

PNG Fatwa

IN MAY, Sri Lankan expatriates were fleeing Papua New Guinea, victims of an extraordinary coincidence of ancient rules of blood feuds and international migration.

The trigger was the murder in downtown Colombo of Joel Pera, a PNG national and international rugby coach, in which the son of Deputy Defence Minister Anuruddha Ratwatte is linked.

Suddenly, the hundreds of Sri Lankans who have made a cosy life for themselves in PNG as engineers, doctors and teachers were the target of taunts and threats by members of a clan from PNG's central highlands of which Mr Pera was a member. The people from this region known as Tari, and Papua New Guineans in general, have a "blood for blood" tradition; a fellow clan member

Joel Pera

(called "wantoks" - from the pidgin for "one talk") can exact reciprocal revenge on a rival clan.

As one Sri Lankan educator who fled told the press: "The Papua New Guineans are amiable people, but when a crime is committed, action must be quick and retribution must follow. They do not think, they act."

Apparently, those most in jeopardy were Sri Lankans of Joel Pera's age group, as well as the age group of his grandfather, as the old man, too, died of shock upon hearing of Mr Pera's killing.

"Unless compensation is paid for the number of years the victim would have lived, they chop. After the dead person is buried, they plant a tree, usually a banana tree, at the grave. Before the tree bears fruit, they chop to death five or more (the number is not specified) members of the clan believed to be responsible for the death."

Right or wrong, the scare has affected not only Sri Lankans but all others who look South Asian, including Indians and Malaysians. At the moment of going to press, however, no murders have been reported in Papua New Guinea, and the hope is that in time the anger will die out.

Zee Is Zee Right Choice, Maybe?

Will Ayub Khawar's quality Urdu tele-serials be seen on Zee?

SOUTH ASIAN couch potatoes, rejoice! Zee TV, the mother of all entertainment channels, plans to go South Asian. Already popular across the Subcontinent for its mix of Bollywood masala and dramatic soaps, the channel is now seeking programming from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

High-ups in the Zee echelons are cagey about their plans, saying they would not like to hurt the sentiments of neighbours whose programmes are rejected. The private corporation that is part owned by the Hong Kong-based STAR television network proclaims that it is already a South Asian channel and the only difference will be in inviting programmes from other countries. Sniffing the heady ambience of the Gujral Doctrine, the Zee TV bosses aver that they also have to play the role of cultural ambassadors.

The channel's CEO, Subhash Chandra, travelled to Pakistan in April, and received a host of proposals from producers in that country. Soaps, talk shows, cooking programmes, etc, are all under review by a special team set up by Zee. But, rumour has it that the primary interest is in Pakistani teledramas that are hugely popular across the border, in Bangladesh and in Nepal.

Proposals from Bangladesh and Nepal are also under review, says Zee Vice President P.C. Lahiri. Refusing to disclose many details, Mr Lahiri says most programmes under review fall under the parameters of Wholesome Family Entertainment that the channel proclaims is its forte. News and issue-based programmes are not being considered, he adds.

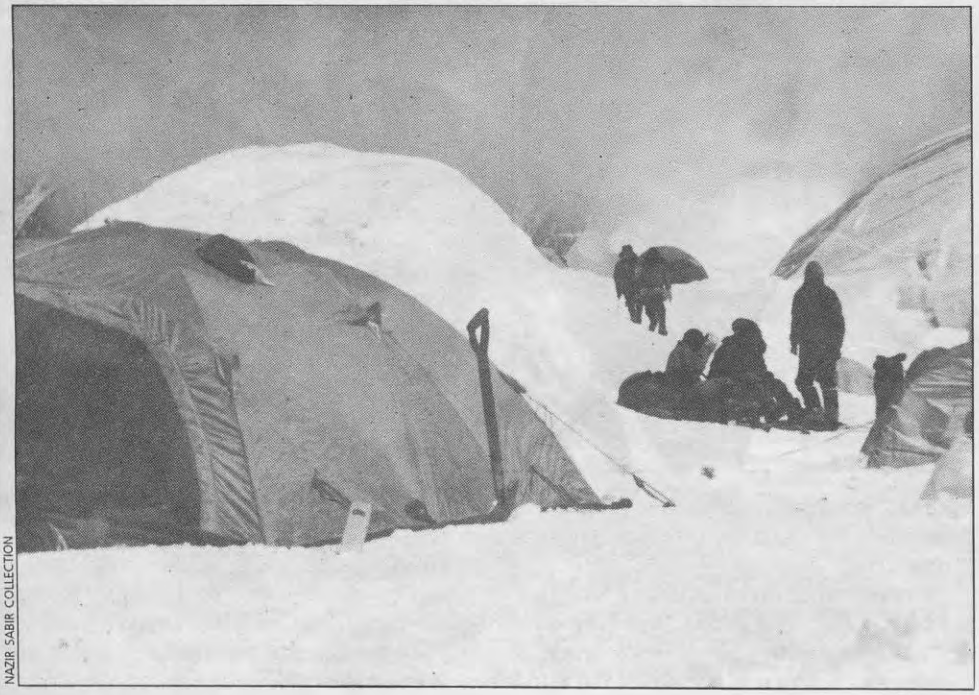
As for the language, says Mr Lahiri, Zee is primarily a Hindustani channel which is why only programmes in that language are under review. Asked how countries like Sri Lanka are supposed to participate in that case, Mr Lahiri optimistically says that Lankan producers will be drawn to submit proposals purely from a business point of view. Giving the example of Zee's Indian producers making programmes in Bahasa Indonesia, Mr Lahiri says the vast audience potential would be sure to draw producers even from non-Hindustani regions.

The culture, ambience, setting and stories of all programmes would be local, that is of the country of origin, with only the language being Hindustani. The creative input, argues Mr Lahiri, would thus be provided from all over South Asia. He refuses to commit when the programmes will be aired, but is hopeful that they will lead to cultural integration of the region.

Even accepting that cultural integration is a good thing, it might take more than television programmes in Hindustani to do the trick. In any case, let's wait and Zee!

Everest Mulaqat

Pakistani Camp at North Col, 7070 m.



NAZIR SABIR COLLECTION

WHEN THEY evacuated Base Camp on 16 June, the Pakistan Everest Expedition 1997 were the last to come off the mountain. They had not been able to reach the top of the world, but it was not for want of trying. Three times they had climbed to over 8000 m, once within a tantalising 200 m from the top, and three times the weather had beaten them back. In the end, with the monsoon winds brewing up, the seasoned mountaineers decided to withdraw, to try another time.

There is no doubt that the Pakistani team was the strongest to have been climbing Everest from the northern Tibetan side this season. They were confident enough not to take any high-altitude guides with them, but then climbing depends so much on how the weather favours you, and after a certain point skills take the backseat.

"When we reached 8650 metres on our first attempt, it was such a beautiful day," recalled Lt Col Sher Khan, the deputy leader and commandant of the President's Bodyguards. "But for the wind, which threatened to blow us off the mountain, we would have made it in about two hours. So close we were."

Man on the Spot

THE PERSONALITY and calibre of the person who sits as foreign secretary in South Block is extremely significant for all South Asia, for, in most respects having to do with foreign affairs, the buck stops there. While the Minister for Foreign Affairs (an office presently maintained by Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral) is the upfront face of Indian foreign policy, the detail is the turf of the foreign secretary.

The often huffy Salman Haider *(see May/June 1997 Himal South Asia)* retired at the end of June after leading the Indian team to Islamabad for bilateral talks. He has been replaced by P. Raghunath, who, it seems, was chosen by Mr Gujral specifically to complement his own worldview and agenda in foreign affairs. Going by Mr Raghunath's calibre, personality and experience, as much as is clear from a distance, there is reason to believe that he is the appropriate man for the job of redefining South Asian geopolitics, inasmuch as South Block with its clout can redefine it.

These are times when South Block needs to show more than an ability to maintain status quo. Besides the perennially pesky questions of India's international relations (including permanent membership in the Security Council, the nuclear option, liberalisation, Kashmir, etc), New Delhis' policy makers are now required to look more closely at their own region. Much of the renewed emphasis on SAARC-related activities, from work on a regional free trade zone to a loosening-up of rigid border controls, were achieved during the past two years when India was chair of SAARC. These initiatives are innovative and untested, and the new foreign secretary, one hopes, will continue to give them deserving priority.

P. Raghunath belongs to the 1962 batch of the Indian Foreign Service and has experience of most parts of the world. He was ambassador in Bangladesh just before returning to New Delhi as Additional Secretary (his post before he was elevated to the top job at the end of June). He has also been high commissioner to Nigeria and the Philippines, was Consul-General in San Francisco, and served in the Indian Embassy in Moscow when Mr Gujral was the ambassador. Mr Gujral relied heavily on Mr Raghunath when he was foreign minister before he became Prime Minister, and among other things the latter visited Afghanistan and met Ahmed Shad Masood.

THE HINDU

Mr Raghunath is said to be unassuming and low-key, but also accessible and engaged. He is less hierarchical than his predecessor, and is "regarded as intellectually far superior to most Indian Foreign Service officers", according to one South Block watcher journalist in Delhi. "An extremely erudite diplomat, Raghunathan is gentle in his manner, but this belies the fact that he has firm opinions and is capable of quick decisions," says S. Ranganathan, former Indian ambassador to China and Nepal.

The language Mr Raghunath was "allotted" at the beginning of his career was Chinese, and he served in China during the heyday of the cultural revolution. There, he even figured in an incident that attracted international attention. Mr Raghunath and another junior Indian diplomat (P. Vijay, who has since resigned and become a philosopher) were mobbed by the Red Guards during a visit to Guangdong, accused of spying, and asked to leave the country.

Mr Raghunath is a man of many interests, and once drove overland from Europe to India. His Sikkimese wife is an accomplished pianist, and both are into Western classical. The Foreign Secretary's father was an ICS officer of the Bihar cadre, which has allowed him to master both the north Indian culture as well as his own (Tamil).

So, all pointers are that Mr Raghunath is up to his job, all other variables being equal! For the variable that Mr Raghunath himself represents to be effective, however, Mr Gujral will have to consider extending his term because he is due to retire barely within a year of taking up his new position.

Meanwhile, a disconcerting note from the 29 June *Sunday* of Calcutta while reporting on the Indo-Pak talks just concluded in Islamabad: "...If Raghunath had the choice of making India's foreign policy, he would tirelessly work towards one objective: the sustained weakening and eventual disintegration of Pakistan."

We cannot bring ourselves to believe that this is true.

The Everest expedition, led by Nazir Sabir, a provincial minister, was part of Pakistan's golden jubilee celebrations and received saturation press coverage. The Alpine Club of Pakistan, which had sent the expedition, released day-by-day accounts of the team's progress which was enthusiastically carried by the media.

All the hype created needless pressure on the climbers on the mountain. After their first failed attempt, President Farooq Ahmed Leghari called up himself called via satellite phone. The Prime Minister's office also showed interest.

"Of course we desperately wanted to succeed. That is why we made three separate attempts," explains Mr Sabir. "If it had not been for the monsoons, we would still be up on Everest trying some more."

Adds Mr Sabir, "People have said when climbers turn back after bad weather in May, Everest opens up her arms. Nothing of that sort happened."

Mr Sabir accepts the expedition's failure with the equanimity of a veteran mountaineer. But he and his teammates resent the reaction of their countrymen who think the expedition had a duty to the nation to emerge victorious. The team got a taste of this mindset in Kathmandu when a Pakistani banker asked them: "How come you could not reach the top while others could?" (The others refer to the 27 who reached the top of Everest from the north this time.)

"That is the kind of question we will be asked back home," said Mr Sabir with obvious premonition. "Pakistanis do not know much about mountaineering. They do not know that a mountain which looks so friendly can change into something totally different in no time."

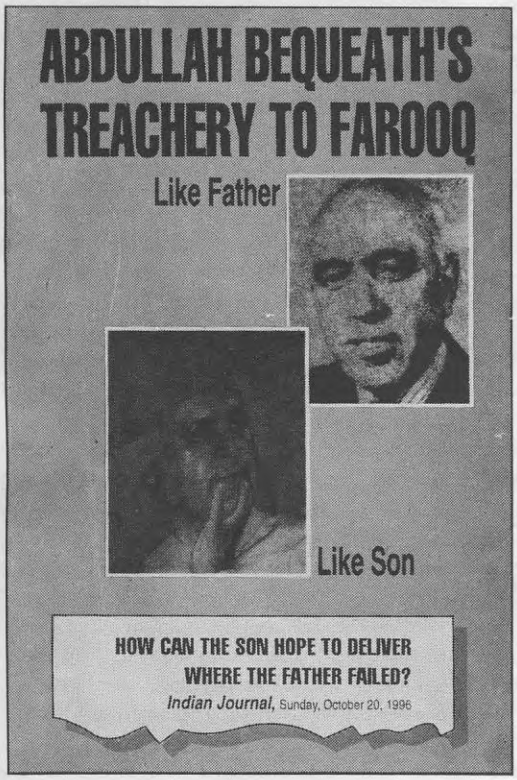
The mountaineers feel the excessive publicity generated very high hopes. "Nazir and I have been climbing for 25 years. But never before has so much attention focused on us," said an indignant Col Khan. "There was just too much expectation."

"For a nation as ill-informed about mountaineering as Pakistan is, this will be a sobering experience," said Mr Sabir. "As for me, I am satisfied with what we were able to do. We did not lose a single climber although we took great risks by going up three times."

The Pakistanis hope to be back soon. They will, perhaps, find a mountain that is friendlier than their countrymen.

Citing fantastic evidence, Prof A.D.T.E. Perera writes in the Colombo *Island* that Jerusalem's famous **Dome of the Rock**, holy of holies to Islam and Christendom, is actually the site of a monastery built by Punnathera, "a well disciplined disciple of Gautama Buddha". Samundragiri Vihara was supposed to be by the sea? Answer: like the great seas in the Gobi and Taklamakan deserts, the Dead Sea must have shrunk from the time when it lapped the shores of the temple in Jerusalem. "The good scholar claims that 'salem' derives from 'sila' or 'saila' in Sanskrit or Pali, meaning rock or stone. Well, what about prefix 'Jeru'? Nothing so far but more research will yield a link says he. While this is where the Arabs believe Mohammed ascended to heaven, Mr Perera believes the reference could be to an historic event "when Gautama Buddha visited and sanctified the rock shrine and placed his sacred footprint on the stone altar." The same Ven Punna apparently built another monastery called Makulakarama, which Mr Perera claims is the present-day Mecca in mainland Arabia. Why not also lay claim to Machu Picchu and Uluru and the ziggarauts in Mesopotamia!

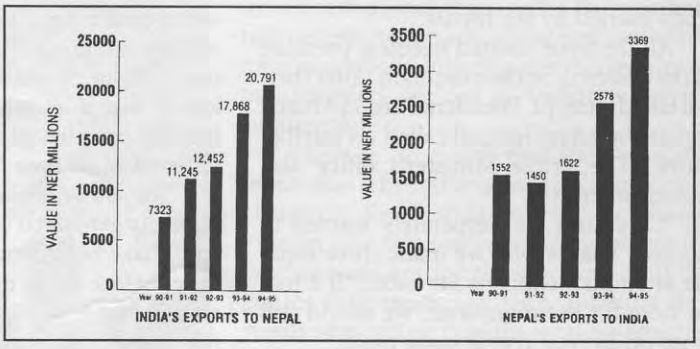
If war desecrates cultural property, the **Photoshop** programme on the computer has the incendiary ability to spark societal havoc. It is now possible for anyone with a desktop scanner and computer to turn out artificial images, and Pooja Bhatt's head placed on a nude torso might have caused her some consternation. But the use of Photoshop for purposes of political propaganda goes beyond titillation, and can fan the flames of communalism. Take this Kashmir propaganda brochure produced in Pakistan on the "treachery" of Sheikh Abdullah and his son Farooq Abdullah. While the latter may well have on occasion put on a turban and even a tika, what has been presented in the picture is clearly computer manipulation. A close examination of the full-colour cover of the booklet shows that the image is a computer-generated collage. The hand on Farooq's chin is fake, and the tika and turban too are computer-generated, or at the very least computer-enhanced. In colour, one can note that the tika and the turban have exactly the same shade of orange, clear proof that someone is using the computer "paintbrush". Let us hope that the propaganda war on Kashmir doesn't dip any further.



Bhutan is definitely the **darling of the international press**, and this conviction is buttressed by scanning the *International Herald Tribune* of 13 May. There are three references to Bhutan, two of them inadvertent, which says to me that the land of the Druk dragon has managed to sneak into the subconscious of journalists, which is quite a feat for a small country that claims a population of no more than 650,000. Firstly, there is the lead picture showing Prime Ministers I.K. Gujral and Nawaz Sharif together seemingly felicitating King Jigme Singye Wangchuck at the SAARC summit. Next, a front-page article on the spread of the free market in Asia whose lead para starts with, "From Beijing to Manila and Bhutan to Mongolia, American calls for deregulations and liberalisation at last appear to have..." Another front-page story on the Asianisation of "Western" influence Asiawide provides anecdotes on Thai real estate in Burma, Cambodians watching violence-prone Japanese films, and, Hong Kong videotapes in "the remote Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan". Well, you can't always be remote, if you are forever in the press!

While Arundhati Roy was doing her international book tours, another very deserving author was doing the rounds in the United States but in a lower key. It was the estimable P. Sainath, selling his book *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* (I believe Himal's editor has a review somewhere in this issue) as he went along. Speaking to Barbara Crosette of *The New York Times*, Mr Sainath said something with which Chhetria Patrakar agrees. Talking about modernisation and Westernisation, he said, "It is a simplification to reduce everything to the word 'Westernisation,' and a bit foolish to make the argument that anything and everything that comes from the West is bad. Millions of things have moved both ways over the centuries which we all live with and are comfortable with. What I see is something different. The super-rich are seceding from their nations. So what you have is not a Western or East Asian or Southeast Asian or Chinese model. We are building **enclaves of super-privilege**. What you're having is not a global village but a series of global ghettos. The Western elite is not the sole villain."

"**A Futuristic Partnership**" between India and Nepal, announced the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), in a full page ad in *The Kathmandu Post* to mark Inder Kumar Gujral's visit to Kathmandu in early June. The copy showed two charts indicating the exports of one country to the other. To make Nepal's abysmal performance look somewhat better, the value for Nepali exports to India is shown in a scale of 500s, whereas that of India to Nepal is shown in 5000s. Visually, at least, the trade volumes look well-balanced. Likewise, while India's



exports to Nepal do reflect a natural and dramatic rise, the rise in Nepal's exports to India obviously has something to do with the 1989-90 embargo slapped by New Delhi against Nepal.

Disaparedos was a term we always used to describe political activists "disappeared" and killed by the state in Latin American dictatorships. Well, guess what, the term is moving closer home. According to the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, the phenomenon has almost disappeared in Latin America. No disappearances were reported in 1996 in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Nicaragua. On the other hand, the case of disappeareds was rising in Asia. An emerging pattern of disappearances is reported in Tibet, according to the Working Group, which says that there were 17 new cases of disappeareds in China last year, 16 of them Tibetans, including eight monks. In India, the number is as high as 250 cases, mostly Kashmiri and Sikh disappeareds. Meanwhile, seven disappearances were reported in Pakistan, where there were about 50 other outstanding cases, mostly members of the Mohajir Quami Movement. Some serious introspection needed here, for the lack of disquiet this has caused in our media, and among our intelligentsia.

I do hope that the Taliban commander who threatened to blow up the Buddha statues at **Bamiyan** has re-thunk his sacrilegious thoughts. As someone who has climbed up the tunnels of that rock-conglomerate cliff to look down upon the larger of the two standing Buddhas from on high, I would refer the said commandant to a speech given by E. Clement of UNESCO at a seminar on cultural heritage law held in Kathmandu recently, as to why it is important to protect cultural heritage in time of war:

> *Loss of or damage to treasured structures cause despair and feelings of overwhelming suffering to the inhabitants of the affected area; it also makes the rehabilitation of their community much more difficult when the conflict is over.*
>
> *There has never been any doubt in the minds of international lawyers that the protection of cultural property in time of armed conflict is part of the international humanitarian law. Identity is inextricably linked with the visible symbols of culture.*

Therein lies a catch, however, with regard to identity being linked to culture. What do you do when, with the march of history, the **present-day custodians** of a heritage site do not identify culturally with it. This is the case with so many Buddhistic sites in Pakistan and Afghanistan, from Taxila and Gandhara to Bamiyan. (In Bangladesh, on the other hand, even with the Islamisation of centuries, there is still visible cultural pride of being the cradle of historic Buddhism.) And so, the only thing to do is to appeal to the potential desecrator's sense of history and imagination. For while the Taliban commander might not think his Islamic identity is linked to the two mute Buddhas towering over him, their flanks defaced by earlier marauders, he might spare a thought to the millions of Buddhists and other spiritual seekers around the world, if and when his platoon does overrun Bamiyan village.

Type ***Bhutan.com***, *Bhutan.net* or *Bhutan.org*, the most obvious addresses for Druk Yul on the World Wide Web, and what do you get? Not any snarling dragon or Takstang Monastery shrouded in cloud. If you type Bhutan.com, for example, you get the image of a man lounging in a hammock beneath palm trees. It turns out that John Black, a businessman from Vancouver who has dealings in the Caribbean, has "captured" the address and is willing to sell it, for USD 50,000! His entrepreneurial spirit was not applauded in Thimphu where, reports *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, the officials were just waking up to the need to counter "misinformation regarding the nation's treatment of ethnic Nepalese" on the Net. So Kinley Dorji, editor of *Kuensel*, has started Kuensel.com, but not before he dashed off an editorial on the cyber-speculators. "Anyone who is ready to believe that the world is full of well-intentioned people need to seriously review their naivete," wrote Mr Dorji. How naive!

One would forgive the media for forgetting momentarily who govern Nepal, due to the **faceless men** who have been running the country for some time now. In fact, the present prime minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, is so uninspiring that the country goes for days without even thinking about him. Nevertheless, it does not do for the editors of the Calcutta *Telegraph* to show King Birendra as the head of state/government in Nepal. In the lineup of Nawaz Sharif, Sheikh Hasina, Chandrika Kumaratunga, King Jigme, how does King Birendra fit? He is titular, and may it long remain so.

NEIGHBOURS


Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan


Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh


Chandrika Kumaratunga, Sri Lanka


King Birendra, Nepal


Jigme Singme Wangchuk, Bhutan

On 5 June, the *Dainik Dinkal* newspaper, reportedly a mouthpiece of the Opposition BNP of Khaleda Zia, published a sensational front-page report naming 59 senior journalists allegedly receiving **monetary favours** from the Indian High Commission on a regular basis. Then the cowdung hit the fan. There was, as they say, *babaal*. The High Commission reacted furiously against the newspaper's "malicious intentions", and some of those named on the list threatened defamation suits. On 6 June, the newspaper apologised. End of episode, apparently.

Chhetria Patrakar's coveted **Magazine Design Award of the Year** goes to *folio*, the book-sized monthly put out by *The Hindu* of Madras whose latest issues is on Cuisine. The use of colour photographs on newsprint, the understated layout, use of small type, and overall unostentatious creativity is just the counterpoint to imported Western glossies such as *Cosmo* and *Elle*. Congratulations to 'Designations', the outfit credited with the design for *folio*.

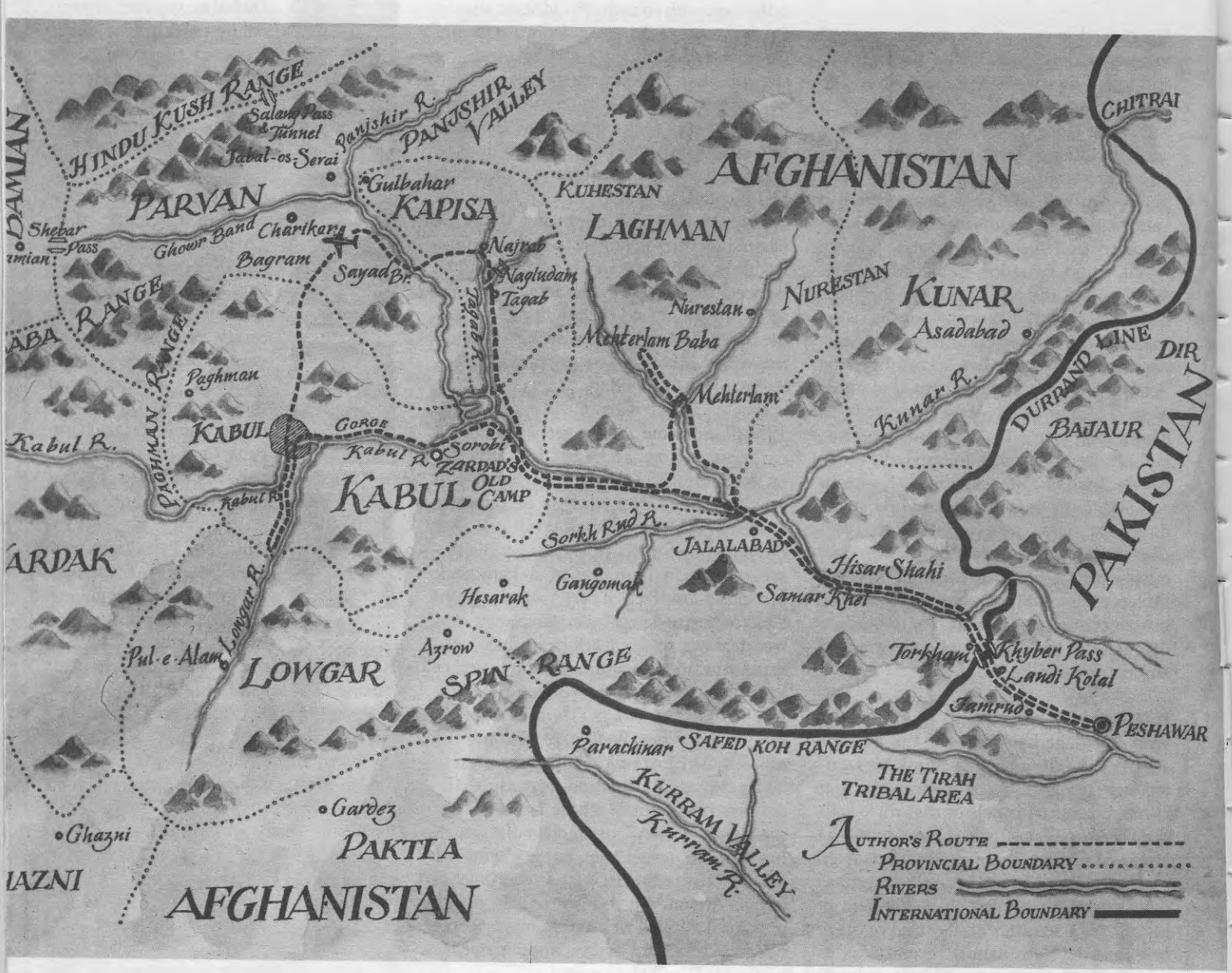
folio

cinema | 2|8 | june 97

Seeing an item on the possible extinction of the **Indian** (pardon me, South Asian) **rhino** in *The Hindu*, I wonder whatever happened to the lady caught with one of the largest hauls of rhino contraband ever, Deiky Wangchuk, aunt of King Jigme? The royal was caught entering Taiwain in 1993 with "a consignment of nine bear gallbladders and 22 rhino horns worth 769,000 dollars," the paper reminds us. Knock, knock.

- Chhetria Patrakar

Ruling the Unruly



A trip around Taliban-held Afghanistan, up to the frontline, shows a country and population that has been largely pacified. But where do "the students" go from here?

by Sean Jones

As you enter Afghanistan by road from Pakistan at Torkham, leaving the border checkpost, there is a small hand-painted notice in Pushtoo, nailed to a tree at the side of the road. Translated, it reads, "The Taliban should rule our people by winning over their hearts with their good character."

This seemed like an official exhortation to all the Taliban, the "students" who have taken over almost the whole country, rather than to the people. If the onus was on the students to earn the approval of the people as a pre-requisite for their mandate to rule, this seemed encouraging, but would this

noble principle manifest itself in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. How do they win over the hearts of all Afghans? After all, the very word Afghanistan means "Country of the Unruly".

It was to try and find an answer to such question that, as someone who has been attracted by Afghanistan since my first visit 30 years ago, I had accepted with enthusiasm an invitation from my friend John in Peshawar to tour the Taliban-held areas. And so 26 March found John, my wife, Ariane, and myself in a pickup truck, headed into Afghanistan.

Bad Press

There has been a lot of bad publicity for the Taliban, but we were keen to see the real situation for ourselves, first hand. There were tales of women being beaten for showing their ankles under the 'beehive' type cloak with the crenelated visor; lifetime civil servants were being sacked by the score for having no beard, and even for keeping beards that were too short; and now they were checking if people shaved their armpits, as Abraham had done, and as therefore recommended in the Holy Koran. In Laghman, a woman had been stoned to death for attempting to leave the area with "a male non-family member". In Kandahar, a murderer had been executed at a football stadium, shot by the victim's relatives (under Taliban supervision) in front of a crowd of thousands. And two French workers in Kabul had been charged with "consorting under the same roof" with some "half-naked" women (their faces had been exposed).

Would we be stoned, or just flogged for being infidels as we left the safety of Pakistan, my wife and I wondered. Or were these horror stories just isolated incidents which had been exaggerated in the media, due to 'Islamophobic' inclinations? The recent shocking report that the giant Buddha statues of Bamiyan were to be dynamited as soon as the Taliban could get there, was indeed nothing more than a scare story from an irresponsible journalist who had asked the wrong person the wrong question.

In what proportions were the Taliban ruthless, barbaric, medieval, wily, naive, innocent, enlightened and benevolent, to have taken over and pacified this brutalised, war-torn country, apparently by winning the support of the people? In the face of all the prejudice and negative reporting we had seen against the Taliban in the media, the only way to find out was to go and see for ourselves.

We had climbed the historic defiles of Khyber and passed through Landi Kotal, the wild smugglers' capital at the head of the pass, before descending to Torkham. This green oasis was thronging with refugees, returnees, redundant Mujahidin, traders, nomads, truckers - and a few intense-looking young Taliban with Kalashnikovs, bushy black beards and sumptuous, colourful, trailing turbans, riding ostentatiously in the most macho-looking four-wheel drive vehicles on the road. The Taliban's favourite model is the Toyota Hilux pickup [pix], which seats six inside plus any number behind. This happened to be the very vehicle we were using, which gave us an advantage on the road as other drivers mistook us for top-brass Taliban.

After reading the Taliban aspiration to win over people's hearts by good character, we were soon flying along the old Jalalabad road, a long avenue of huge cedars, between extensive olive groves. Some of these had not been tended for few years, in others we could see people working to re-irrigate, prune and weed. From the uneven, stony plain west of Peshawar, and the rocky mountains of Khyber, we had come out onto a higher plateau, the first step up towards the lofty mountains of central Afghanistan and the steppes of central Asia.

The aspect was much changed; though desolate, the countryside felt somehow free and wild, truly one which invaders had never succeeded in conquering. It was exhilaratingly different. The feeling was reminiscent of the old Central Asia of Gurdjieff and Hopkirk, rather than of the Subcontinent which, up to the border, had borne the British colonial stamp.

On the dry plains of Hisar Shahi we passed extensive camps for refugees displaced from Kabul during the fighting between rival Mujahidin factions, before the Taliban took over. Further on at Samar Khel was another huge camp, empty now, since the Taliban had facilitated the refugees' return. Our smooth progress to Jalalabad was suddenly halted, but inquiry revealed it was simply time for prayer. A word from John to the Talib in charge, and with a nod and a wink we were allowed to proceed.

Jalalabad's Explosion

An hour later we were in Jalalabad, which had just been rocked a few days previously by a huge blast. We went to the Governor for permission to visit the explosion site, which had been a munitions dump, and his deputy was delegated to escort us to the scene. Escorted by a pickup with a half a dozen Kalashnikov-toting men, we arrived at a cordoned-off area. Where rows of substantial buildings had been, was a scorched, bare wasteland, around a 30-foot-deep crater; the buildings had been blown to atoms. A ring of shredded trees, all leaning outwards and with most branches simply torn off, stood in a circle three hundred yards or so in diameter. Everything else was gone, leaving only grey earth. Beyond the trees, were rows of twisted military trucks, personnel carriers and tanks in what must have been a military carpark. The earth all around was littered with pieces of guns, mines, mortar and artillery shells and all sorts of unrecognisable shrapnel, mixed up with soil, branches and pulverised masonry.

An Irish UN munitions expert called Paddy who was assisting the clearing-up operation came up and told us his team had collected 5,000 pieces of live ammunition in the area that very morning alone. He pointed to a badly damaged building across the road, saying it was another munitions store with piles of shells and rockets, "plus what literally blew in through the windows when the first one went off". He added, "And that building over there, they won't even let me near it, so it's sure to be another dump. They're all over the place. Another lot can go off at any moment, and more's the pity." He rolled his eyes eloquently.

No wonder the Taliban had seemed nervous. They had admitted to 60 dead and 150 wounded in the explosion, but Paddy said we could double that to start with and still be conservative. There was a jail in one part of the building, he said, which had been blown to bits with forty prisoners in it.

Later, we interviewed a Talib whose brother had witnessed the explosion and survived to tell the tale. Apparently three Russian incendiary projectiles rockets called "alew-andaz" ('fire-bomb') were being unloaded when one had ignited and started setting off other munitions in the store.

Tomb of Noah's Father

Feeling somewhat shell-shocked by the proximity of so many recent horrible deaths, we eventually resumed our journey. Rather than entering the spectacular Silken Gorge which leads up through another great mountain barrier to the higher plateau of Kabul, we turned North into Laghman Province, to visit a *ziarat*, or pilgrimage shrine, called Mehterlam Baba. We found an expansive, walled garden enclosure laid out with a spacious domed building. Inside was an enormous, 30-foot long tomb, draped with green and red cotton and velvet sheets of cloth, decorated with bunting. We asked the people sitting around on the outside verandah and inside, if we could take photographs. Of course, they said, of course! Ariane got busy with her camera.

A blind Hafiz (one who can recite the whole Koran) told us in Pushtoo that the

saint commemorated here was pre-Islamic, and not only that but pre-Flood. In fact, Mehterlam Baba was none other than the father of Noah himself, said the Hafiz, as in the early Old Testament. The light was fading as we sat contemplating the timeless beauty of the place, and the full moon soaring over an ancient watertank nearby.

Suddenly a young Talib came up and saw us sitting there at the holy place, three Westerners including a woman who was not fully covered up. Foreign infidels defiling the shrine! He rudely ordered us away. John tried to argue with him, referring to the edict we had seen at the border.

"Are not the Taliban supposed to rule by virtue of their good character" he asked rhetorically. "How can the way you are treating us be considered as of good character?" The young man replied defensively that this was a religious place and we were infidels. Meanwhile, the old scholar agreed with John and scolded the young Talib for his bad manners.

"The hussy even had a camera," countered the outraged Talib. "Did she dare to take any photographs?"

"No, oh, no!" protested all the people together, "do you think we would let her do that?"

It seemed clear that the people felt the Talib was being over-zealous, and discreetly took our side.

After a very refreshing tea we took our leave of this idyllic place as night fell and drove back South to the Kabul River valley. For several hours we drove through the darkness, across areas which until very recently had been highly dangerous, even for Afghans to travel in during the daytime, until the Taliban took over and cleaned the place up. We eventually found a place to spend the night at a roadside refuge outside Soribi, right on the raging river, trapped between craggy cliffs vaulting skyward on both banks, where the caravanserai, or motel Afghan style, had catered to travellers for centuries or even thousands of years.

We had no Afghan money, but the hotelier accepted Pakistani rupees and gave us eighty thousand Afghanis change, which sounds a lot, but is worth less that three pounds. A pound used to make 200 Afghanis in the old days, but now it's worth all of 30,000; you could buy a good horse for 7,000 Afs once, but that would hardly pay for our tea now.

Into the Countryside

We studied the map and decided where to head next. Northwards, towards the Panjshir valley seemed a good area to explore. The hotel keeper informed us that in the Kabul river valley where we were, the people were Pushtoons, in Panjshir they were Tadjikhs, and up in the hills were the Kohistanis or 'Kushtianis'.

We crossed the river, skirted the lake and set off into Kapisa, a small province around the valley of the Tagab. After a pleasant but bumpy drive through inhabited and cultivated areas we came to the village of Tagab and its school, part inside and part open-air. Several classes of boys between six and ten were in progress. A mat was brought and John joined our hosts to interview them on the education situation.

There were of course no girls in sight, and we questioned the teachers about girls' education. It had simply never occurred to them that girls should go to school, and it was an interesting proposal. We suggested they put all available teachers to work educating girls at home, if it was not their custom for girls to attend school. They assured us that this was already being done of course, for girls had always been educated at home by other educated members of the family.

Leaving this friendly and welcoming school and its accompanying bazaar to push on towards Najrab, ever closer to the war front, some people hailed us. As we slowed down, men, women and children swarmed onto the back of our pickup. With about a dozen of them clinging on, we bounced and swayed down the road. Soon we came to the scene of what had been quite a substantial battle, near the Naglu dam, with some dozens of burnt-out military hardware left amongst the trees on the hillside and around the old government buildings in the valley below. The Naglu dam itself had been badly damaged, with its hydel station rendered inoperative.

A little further along the road was an International Red Cross camp which was helping rehabilitate refugees which had fled this area. Why had they fled in the first place? It turned out that this whole valley had been a battleground in a huge fight between Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Masood. Now the Taliban had come and chased both these famous commanders and their armies away to the north, allowing the inhabitants to return, and Hekmatyar and Masood, the deadly enemies, had joined forces against the Taliban in an effort to save themselves from being overrun.

Climbing further up onto the plateau, leaving the river valley and cultivated areas far below and behind, the scenery opened up with flocks and herds spread over a wide area, and the magnificent snowy peaks of the Hindu Kush range standing off to the north, ever nearer.

Mind That Tank!

The next stop was Najrab, pronounced 'Najrao', where we came to a substantial school building which had been taken over by the Taliban forces as the local HQ for their war operations. This was only twenty miles away from the frontline at the gate of the upper Panjshir Valley. Half a dozen tanks were parked, along with the usual military vehicles. There was a truck-mounted rocket launcher, with 20 or so actual three-metre-long rockets lying haphazardly on the ground nearby like so many scaffolding pipes, with another heap of huge artillery shells lying just nearby for good measure.

As in many such installations, there were a few Taliban sentries with Kalashnikovs lounging on a string bed. Their officers emerged and started talking to John, who asked about road conditions. The leader pointed to the nearest Kuhestani hills to the north, beyond which lay the upper Panjshir Valley, which Engineer Masood had held against the Soviets, and said: "Behind that hill is our enemy. You must take the left road at the fork, and cross over the river towards Bagram. Don't go any further up the Panjshir Valley, or towards the Salang Pass. The fighting only stopped there yesterday."

"Would you like your photographs taken?" John suggested genially.

"By all means," they grinned back, adjusting their turbans before lining up for a group portrait with the school HQ as a backdrop. Then they saw us off, wishing us a safe journey and reminding us again to take the left fork towards Bagram.

Not far ahead we had problems fording the multi-channelled stream of the Tagab river, whose bridge had been blown up. While we were negotiating the freezing snowmelt, we heard loud engine noises from beyond the bluff on the far bank. Suddenly it came to the brow of the hill: an old Russian T-72 battle tank, with four men sitting on top of it. It revved and roared down the narrow rutted track, spouting clouds of grey smoke. As the tank tipped down towards us, the Taliban riders waved frantically to us to get out of the way. As they went crashing and clanking past, the fighters saw we were Westerners and held up their Kalashnikovs triumphantly and grinned broad grins, aware of the impression they were making.

When the soldiers stopped to ford the river, John called out to greet them and soon struck up an amiable shouted conversation. They had come straight from the fighting, we found out, having helped to push the frontline back a few kilometres in the Panjshir

Valley.

"Do you want to take photographs?" they asked at length when the conversation flagged.

Snapping done, after a few more shouted invitations and pleasantries such as "may you never feel tired" and "may you never become poor", their tank lurched off into the river, and we continued on our way north.

The Panjshir Valley

The trail led up out of the Tagab valley, with the Hindu Kush looking ever closer. On a bend in the road we passed a pile of rocks with a white silk flag on a stick, and a star embroidered in the middle of the flag; the grave of another Taliban commander recently killed leading his followers into battle.

Suddenly, we were at the edge of the desolate plateau, and the road plunged down through a gap in the near horizon, revealing a broad, deep swathe of the lower Panjshir Valley far below to the west, floodlit by the sinking sun, the river snaking like a broad silver belt winding through the dark green farmlands and villages. As we proceeded, we took the left fork as advised and crossed the river on the still-standing 'Sayad' bridge. Another photo-opportunity with the Taliban when we stopped to confirm our route at the intersection was interrupted by the approach of their commander, upon which the other Taliban discreetly advised us to hide our cameras.

Proceeding further, we passed just south of Charikar, "the City of Knives", where all kinds of cutting instruments from small penknives to Pushtoons' long daggers are forged and sharpened like razors. Trying to figure out on our not very detailed map exactly where we were, we suddenly came upon a very large gateway in a clump of buildings. A little too late, we saw it was a checkpost with a string-bed load of Taliban on duty. We screeched dramatically to a halt as they leapt to their feet, guns at the ready, peering to see who we could be, friend or foe. Then we saw a model jet fighter, 15 feet long and painted silver, on the right side of the gateway.

"Oh god, it must be the military airbase!" someone cried, as the Taliban fanned out around us. We had landed ourselves at the gate of the Bagram airbase, the biggest in the country.

"Cherta zey! (where are you going?)" barked the chief at John, who was driving.

"Kabul ta zu!" he responded. A moment's perplexity, and then they laughed. We'd taken the wrong road they said, and we should go back and turn left at the first junction. No problem. The airbase probably didn't have any planes anyway, since General Dostam flew most of them up to Kunduz when the Taliban came along. And the Taliban always travel by road in their cars and jeeps, so it never occurred to them to question these three unescorted foreigners for turning up uninvited there, a few miles behind the front-line. If there was a civil war going on here, this side at least seemed to be extremely confident and relaxed.

Hitch Hikers and Other Children

Outside Kabul, after darkness had already fallen, two small and half-frozen boys dressed in pitiful rags hailed us for a lift. After some hesitation, we allowed them to haul some heavy sacks on to the back. These were full of scrap iron collected from battle sites, to be sold to a metal dealer in Kabul for a tiny amount. In this way the boys were supplementing their family's income in order to survive. We had heard about this miserable business, and the number of casualties that occurred when small boys handled the live ammunition lying about.

Heading into Shar-e-nau, the more modern quarter of the city where all the tourist hotels used to be, we were besieged by a mob of aggressive beggars, mostly small children. As we handed out some money, they became extremely nasty, clawing at us through the windows, swearing and abusing us, spitting, and kicking the vehicle. These were the street children of Kabul, war orphans, the homeless, the dispossessed, the product of two decades of brutalising war.

Our host in Kabul, a journalist, regaled us with stories of his interviews with Taliban officials. He had asked the Chief of Police whether he was satisfied with the average beard-length in Kabul these days, and was told no, there were far too many beard-trimmers about, and beards were generally far too short and thin, and needed to be much, much bushier. At another interview, with the Minister of Culture, he had asked how the songs brought out by the Taliban was permitted, yet all other music was banned. It was the musical instruments used in other music which was un-Islamic, the minister explained, whereas the Taliban songs were voice-only and therefore pure.

We saw that 60 percent of Kabul was 90 percent destroyed. Whole main streets were lined with the ruins of shattered buildings, none of them habitable, all the roofs and most of the walls collapsed, pockmarked with countless bullet holes, mostly nothing more than piles of rubble. To the east of the city, we patrolled the Dahna Maidan, or 'Mouth of the Plain', a wide avenue alongside the sports ground where tourists used to hire horses in the old days. Every single building had been destroyed.

In the middle of one terrace, however, we spotted some fresh plaster and saw that someone had found a ground floor which could be restored and was converting it into a tea shop. The owner told us he had the permission of the Shahr Wali, or Municipal Committee, to make good the premises in the skeletal row of ruins and open his business there. The whole street was government-owned, and the committee was meeting few days later to decide on a fair rent for him. The fresh plaster in the row of blackened ruins, and the newly-cut timber of the window frames recalled a phoenix rising from the ashes; the very first sign of recovery from a devastating war. He had been sent to Bulgaria by the Communist Government for three years' training in Philosophy. We wished him lots of luck with his tea shop.

Work was also starting on the premises next door as well. It seemed like many others would follow his example, and if the Taliban's rule could be consolidated, the whole city could be rebuilt and working in a comparatively short space of time.

Taliban Make Their Point

Before starting our return journey, we had to obtain exit permits from the Immigration Office. Arriving at the impressive building, we had to push through a thick crowd at the entranceway, and were brought in to the chief officer. He welcomed us with a warm handshake, invited us to remove our shoes and join him sitting on a bare rush mat thrown on the ground outside the building in the sunshine. Tea and sweets were brought while he tore up a sheet of paper into four squares, scrawled on them, and stamped them with an indecipherable rubber stamp. Our exit permits were ready.

Soon we were leaving Kabul, past dozens of blocks of communist-type flats, and more wrecked and shell-pocked administrative buildings, finally onto the flat and empty plain to the east of the city. We followed the Kabul river, which flowed straight into a crevice in the hills, with the road squeezing in alongside. This crevice became a magnificent soaring cleft thousands of feet deep in the naked rock, with the road clinging half-way up, passing through a series of tunnels in the cliff face and s-bends, and the river looking like a tiny stream far below.

As we stopped to stare at the giddying scene, a loud explosion suddenly echoed round the deserted mountain faces. Through a crack between two mighty buttresses, we saw the ruins of a village on the mountain face, with red flags fluttering to indicate

demining activity. White flags meant an area had been demined; red meant demining was in progress. We had seen a number of demining parties working in various places on our journey, always with a Red Cross tent nearby in case of accidents.

Emerging from the gorge towards Soribi and the confluence of the Panjshir and Kabul rivers, we came to a military encampment which had been the headquarters of the Mujahid Commandant Zardad, now occupied, of course, by the Taliban. Zardad had been a "loose cannon", an irregular follower of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hesb-e-Islami party who had controlled the main road to Kabul from this point.

As we approached, three Taliban emerged from a building to welcome us. We salaamed and asked about Commandant Zardad. With a smile they pointed up the Panjshir Valley to the North, and said he had fled to join Dostam when he heard the Taliban were coming from Gandomak, despite all the mines he'd laid in the road to try to hold them back.

The three Taliban holding this camp were glad to find a Western audience in us, so John conducted an interview. The Taliban, they said, had taken over most of the country peacefully, with minimal fighting and destruction, by means of friendly persuasion. They relied on winning the support of the people inside Mujahidin-held areas before negotiating a peaceful hand-over.

Said one, "In this way we have taken over the whole country except the Northern quarter. We have disarmed and dispersed all the Mujahidin, and all the bandits. We have chased away the warlords, closed down the checkposts of the robbers and oppressors of the people, brought law and order back, and we have the support of the vast majority of the people. So why are we not being recognised as a legitimate government by any other country?"

The spokesman continued, "When it was recognised as legitimate, the Rabbani Government controlled only a small part of the country and had the support of a very small minority of the people. So why is the government of the Taliban not being recognised? At no time did Rabbani control the country and impose peace and security, as the Taliban has already done."

The logic of this complaint seemed irrefutable, and it summed up the arguments we had heard all along the way from Afghans from all walks of life who had praised the imposition of this "Pax Talibanica" after all those years of fighting, suffering and strife that had started with the Soviet invasion in 1979. With some justification, as far as their skilful termination of the civil wars was concerned, they claimed success in peaceful conflict resolution which seemed an example to the rest of the world. Even the urban Afghans with Western education we met had expressed their willingness to make whatever personal sacrifice was necessary to accept, in the over-riding public interest of peace and order, what was for them the medieval rule of the Taliban.

Pros and Cons

Despite this general acceptance, however, amongst such Western-educated people there is still resentment against some of the Taliban's extreme measures, especially the ban on women's work and education. Often, this has affected families financially, and unless the Taliban are able to deliver economic betterment as a 'peace dividend' and some improvement in living conditions, the level of support they are currently enjoying might soon begin to erode.

We were assured by one educated Afghan man, whose own wife was also educated outside Afghanistan, that all the womenfolk in his family were more than happy to accede to the Taliban edicts on women's role in society, for the sake of peace and security, and for the certain knowledge that their own husbands and sons were no longer likely to be slaughtered at any moment. We could not confirm this with his wife directly, however.

Neither were we able to find out anything about all those unfortunate women who had already lost their menfolk in the 20 years of war, and who had become the breadwinners for their children. How did they feel, having now been thrown out of their jobs because of the Taliban edict against women working? We could only imagine their desperation. What is the Taliban's answer, how are these women, and their children to be provided for?

A little further down the road, back in the roadside hotel outside Soribi, one of the staff, when asked how he felt about the Taliban peace achievement, exclaimed, "So there is peace. So what? What can we do with this peace? We have nothing! What's the use of peace to us?"

What with the unresolved conflict in the north beyond the Salang Tunnel, it would seem the Taliban are living on borrowed time; they will have to complete the conquest, and take measures which provide for the economic betterment of the people. There is runaway inflation, little or no infrastructure, and widespread destitution. Unless they can do something about these problems, they run the risk of losing the support which they have indubitably won within the country.

To make things worse for the Taliban, UNICEF has been urging the international community "to increase pressure on the Taliban until every woman has her basic human rights restored". These young Islamic peacemakers, subduing the warriors who defeated the Soviets, certainly have a challenge on their hands if they are to get any support, or even recognition, from outside the country.

S. Jones is a retired businessman now a working trustee in development for The Appropriate Technology for Tibetans Trust UK.

CLASSIFIEDS

THE OTHER INDIA PRESS

New Titles:

The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism *by Frederic F. Clairmont.* This book is one of the deadliest barrages ever unloaded on capitalism. Clairmont rips apart the so-called virtues of liberalisation and capitalism. Pp. 356 INR 150

Gandhi: His Gift of the Flight *by Jehangir P. Patel and Marjorie Sykes.* A fascinating memoir which sets out to describe the impact of Mahatma Gandhi's personality on two people from very different backgrounds. Pp. 213 INR 90

Please order from:

The Other India Bookstore
above Mapusa Clinic
Mapusa 403 507, Goa
INDIA
Tel: 91-832-263306 Fax: 91-832-263305

TRINITY TRAVELS

..... for the discerning travelers.

Make a wise choice while choosing your tour operator. And of course, at unbeatable costs.

Tours, treks, air tickets, mountain flights, wild-life safaris, river rafting, group incentives, cargo reservations, hotels, trips to Tibet and/ or 'tailor-made-to-fit' packages of your choice within Nepal, India, Tibet, Bhutan & Sikkim.

Contact:

P.O. Box 221, Kamaladi, Kathmandu, NEPAL.
Tel. 245573, 222160, 246367,
Fax. 977-1-227160
TRINITY@wlink.com.np

While at Pokhara stay at ...

HOTEL RABI

Just 5 minutes' walk from the bus park & five minutes drive from the airport

- 24 hours hot & cold water
- Fax/Tele communication service
- Laundry service & luggage storage facility
- Safe deposit
- Doctor on call
- Air, bus and train ticketing
- Sight seeing by bus or van
- Transport rental
- Trekking guides and porters
- Booking to Royal National Park

Sreejana Chowk, Pokhara
Tel: +977-61-24836 Fax: +977-61-23964
P.O.Box: 8973 A 522, Kathmandu, Nepal

Some people think Environmental Degradation is inevitable sooner or later
But we think otherwise
For Better Environment and Quality Laboratory Services Consult
"Nepal Environmental & Scientific Services" [NESS (P) Ltd.]
Thapathali, Kathmandu, Phone: 244989, Fax:: 226028
Ours is the First and the only Laboratory in Nepal to be Accredited by Nepal Council of Standards. Our specialized services include:

- Analysis of Air, Water, Soil and Plant matters,
- Quality control and Analysis of Raw materials, Food and Industrial Products,
- Surveying and Consulting for Environmental Studies,
- Technical Consultancy for EIA, Pollution Control, Environmental Management, and Design of Pollution Treatment Systems

Bhakta Prasad Bhyaguto –
Adventures of a Nepali Frog
A travel adventure for children of all ages.

Rato Bangala Kitab
Patan Dhoka, Sridarbar Tole, Lalitpur
Mailing Address: P.O.Box. 42, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-522614, Fax: 977-1-521013

TOP OF THE WORLD

Himalayan View * Green Hills overlooking Kathmandu Valley from Rooftop Terrace with Restaurant & Bar * All rooms with attached bath * Hot & Cold Shower 24 hours * Laundry service 2 times a day * Free luggage storage * Safe deposit * Tour Agency at reception * Postal Services * Direct International Call

HOTEL MT. EVEREST

Paknajol 15/63, Thamel, Kathmandu
(Behind of Hotel Marshyangdi)
Tel: 977-1-420189

"Explore the Himalayas through the Nature Trails"

We specialise in

●Trekking & Expedition ●White Water Rafting ●Unique Cultural Tours Hotel Reservation ●Wildlife Safari ●Sight Seeing ●Air/Bus Ticketing ●Trip to Tibet, Bhutan and other tourist related services.

For details please contact:
Nature Trail Trekking (P) Ltd.
G. P. O. Box: 7405, Thamel, Kathmandu
TeL +977-1-425925/4245926
Fax: +977-1-425926

CONSULTANCY FOR FOOD PROCESSING PROJECTS

Expert food technocrats doing projects/product development in Asian countries (including Nepal) and East African countries offer know-how for setting up various modern and economical food projects like bread plants/all types of biscuits and crack-ers/cakes/extruded snacks/canned products/vermicelli/haka noodles/potato chips/ snack food/MALTED FOOD POWDERS/CASHEWNUTS PROCESSING etc. on turnkey basis.

Entrepreneurs interested in modification of existing processes, product development and/or new product ideas and concepts are assured better results cost effectively.

Contact:

Rajendra M. Anvekar, Creative Food Consultants
6, Gee Jumbo Darshan, Western Express Highway,
Near Bahar Cinema, Andheri (East), Mumbai - 400069, INDIA
Tel: +91-22-8117567/8394823 Fax: +91-22-8218808

"Innovation and Excellence in Handmade Paper"

HIMALAYAN PAPER WORKS

Manufacturers and Exporters of High Quality Handmade Paper Products

Note Books, Stationeries, Writing Sets, Gift Boxes, Photo Frames, Albums and Others

Factory: Kamal Binayak, Bhaktapur (Tel: +977-1-613344)
GPO Box: 12226, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-418267
Fax: +977-1-224431
Email: hpw@webnepal.wlink.com.np

Try Our Product & Feel the Difference

DALAI LAMA'S FRIEND
Hitler's Champion

ALOIS ANWANDER/LOST LHASA: HEINRICH HARRER'S TIBET

There's a little secret, perhaps not too dirty, about the man whom Dharamsala regards as a friend and supporter.

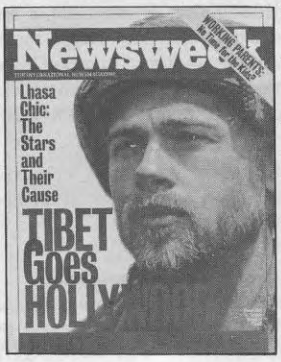
by Gerald Lehner and Tilman Müller

Tibet Goes Hollywood" said the *Newsweek* cover, while the British newspaper *The Independent* wrote of a "love affair" between Beverly Hills and the high plateau. There are seven major films on Tibet in the pipeline this year, including a biography of the Dalai Lama, *Kundun*, and an adaptation of the well-known book *Seven Years in Tibet*. It is in the role of Heinrich Harrer, the main protagonist and author of *Seven Years in Tibet*, that Brad Pitt stares solemnly out of the *Newsweek* cover.

"The film is a tremendous honour for me," says Mr Harrer proudly, speaking to us in front of his mountain home, high above the village of Hüttenberg in the Austrian province of Carinthia. "Fifty million people have read my book, but Brad Pitt will draw a movie-going audience in the billions, including many people who have never even heard of Tibet."

In a sense, it seems only right that Mr Harrer's character should personify Tibet's entry into the wide-reaching world of films. For it was his book that introduced Tibet to entire generations around the world since it was first published in 1953.

Mr Harrer's story is certainly the stuff of film. On his way back from a climbing expedition to Nanga Parbat 1939, due to the outbreak of World War II, he was interned in a British prison in India because he was German. Along with another internee, he made a dramatic escape to Tibet and wandered about the then forbidden plateau for more than a year before he reached Lhasa on 15 January 1946. There he served the 11-year-old Dalai Lama as a teacher of English, mathematics, geography and photography, while introducing many innovations into the city that amazed the Tibetans. He got along well with the Tibetans and lived in the city until 1951 when the Chinese invasion of Tibet forced him to flee in a hurry.



After the Tibetan revolt in 1959 and subsequent exile of the Dalai Lama, Mr Harrer has stood firmly by his Tibetan friends. His has been one of the loudest Western voices against the Chinese occupation. In 1987, he expressed outrage when German Chancellor Helmut Kohl visited the Chinese rulers in Lhasa, the first Western head of government to do so. Now, he says he is happy that there is going to be a film version of *Seven Years in Tibet* for "that will be a big blow to Chinese propaganda".

Mr Harrer's friendship with the Dalai Lama has remained strong over the years. TV productions that tell the story of Mr Harrer and the Dalai Lama, both as a young man and as the present worldly statesman, have been broadcast all over the Western world.

Every time, he comes to Austria or Central Europe, the Tibetan leader spends time with Mr Harrer. He was there during the opening of a museum of Tibetan history and culture in Mr Harrer's hometown, and they are often seen together conducting press conferences in the West. And now, as chance would have it, both are subjects of major Hollywood productions.

There is every possibility that these films will ride the wave of what human rights advocates have proclaimed to be the "Tibet Year in Film". Should that happen, it is very likely that *Seven Years in Tibet* will ride the crest of that wave, for Mr Harrer, as its main subject, idealises the perfect union of the Western discoverer with that of the politically correct human rights activist.

This champion of human rights, however, has a past that he does not care to talk about.

SS-Oberscharführer Harrer

To find out about Heinrich Harrer's hidden past one has to visit the Berlin office of the German Federal Archives, which houses the original holding of the "Document Centre" that the Americans set up in 1945 using captured Nazi files. Among them are documents from the Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt or RuSHA (Main Office of Racial and Settlement Affairs) which contain information on members of the dreaded elite corps known as the Schutzstafel (Protective Echelon) or "SS" for short. Somewhere in this maze of records is a pink file folder hand-labeled with black ink in the upper right corner: "Harrer, Heinrich, born July 6, 1912". Below that: "SS Unit 38, *Sippennummer* (family number) 73896".

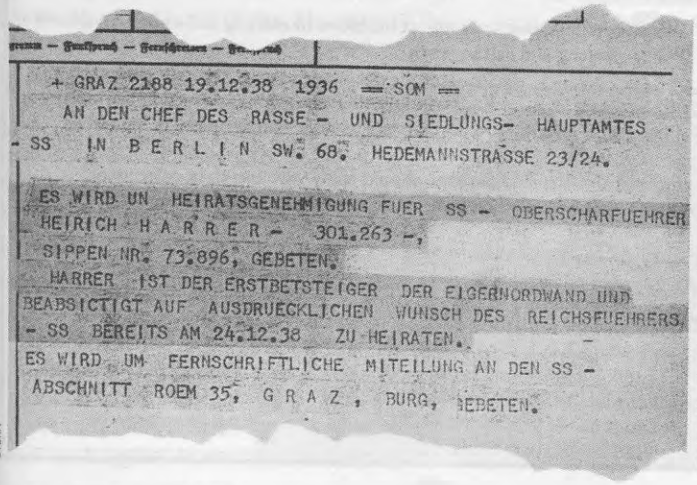
The Harrer file contains 80 pages. One item that catches the eye within the first few pages is a telegram dated 19 December 1939, sent from SS Section 35 in Graz, Austria, where Mr Harrer was an athletic instructor at the time. The telegram *(below)* is addressed to the "Head of the RuSHA" and reads: "Permission to marry is requested for SS-Oberscharfuhrer Heinrich Harrer, Sippennummer 73896. Harrer is the first man to climb the Eiger North Face and intends, at the express request of the Reichsfuhrer-SS, to marry already on December 24, 1938."

"Reichsführer-SS" meant none other than Heinrich Himmler, the dreaded head of SS, who demanded that his SS men and their brides-to-be submit detailed family trees tracing their ancestry back to AD 1800. Only those who could prove their perfect Aryan heritage were permitted to marry.

The RuSHA records show that the Austrian Harrer and his Hamburg-born-wife-to-be Lotte Wegener complied in almost exemplary fashion. Bride Lotte had belonged to the Nazi youth organisation BDM (Bund Deutscher Madchen or "German Girls' League") since 1936. Groom Heinrich joined the SS on 1 April 1938, and had been a member of Hitler's second terrorist organisation, the SA (Sturmabteilung or "Storm Troops") since October 1933, at which time the organisation was still operating illegally in Austria. In a handwritten curriculum vitae, the young Heinrich Harrer confirmed that he had joined the SA and the SS. He enclosed a photograph that showed him with a Nazi insignia on his lapel.

When confronted with the documents, Mr Harrer first denied everything. "I never wrote a request or anything of the kind," he said. "I was just assigned to the SS as an athletic instructor." Mr Harrer even denied he was a member of the SS. Until, that is, he was shown the completed RuSHA questionnaire with his handwritten CV and asked, "Is this your handwriting?"

"Yes," said Mr Harrer upon seeing that under the SA membership the entry on the form reads "since October 1933" and under SS membership "since April 1938". After a moment of silence, he said: "I just wanted to boast a little there."

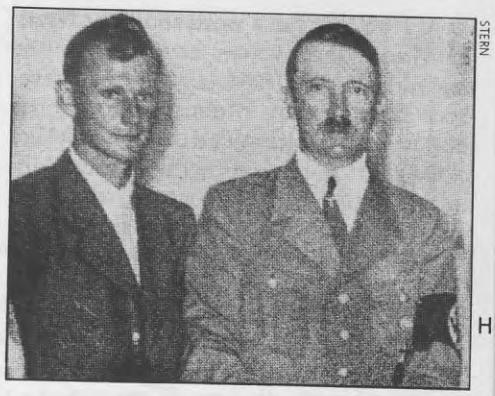


+ GRAZ 2188 19.12.38 1936 ==SOM ==
AN DEN CHEF DES RASSE - UND SIEDLUNGS- HAUPTAMTES
- SS IN B E R L I N SW. 68. HEDEMANNSTRASSE 23/24.

ES WIRD UM HEIRATSGENEHMIGUNG FUER SS - OBERSCHARFUEHRER
HEIRICH H A R R E R - 301.263 -,
SIPPEN NR. 73.896, GEBETEN.
HARRER IST DER ERSTBETSTEIGER DER EIGERNORDWAND UND
BEABSICTIGT AUF AUSDRUECKLICHEN WUNSCH DES REICHSFUEHRERS
- SS BEREITS AM 24.12.38 ZU HEIRATEN.
ES WIRD UM FERNSCHRIFTLICHE MITEILUNG AN DEN SS -
ABSCHNITT ROEM 35, G R A Z , BURG, GEBETEN.

STERN

Boasting! At the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials, the SS was classified as a "criminal organisation". Of course, as he was in India and Tibet from 1939 to 1951, Mr Harrer probably cannot be held responsible for SS atrocities during the war. "But these documents do indeed cast a cloud of suspicion on someone who denies having ever been a member," says Berlin-based



STERN

historian and SS expert Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, who examined Mr Harrer's SS records on behalf of *Stern* magazine.

Hero of the Reich

Heinrich Harrer was no ordinary SS man. On 24 July 1938, at the age of 26, he and three fellow climbers succeeded in the first-ever climb of the Eiger North Face, considered the hardest mountaineering challenge in the Alps. This triumph was celebrated throughout the Reich. The quartet of climbers was quickly lionised by the Nazi propaganda machine. A blond mountain lad from the "Ostmark", as Austria was known in the administrative jargon of the Nazis, Mr Harrer became the darling of the Nazis.

Right after the Eiger triumph, Adolf Hitler congratulated the climbers personally before a crowd of 30,000 cheering spectators in Braslau. "My, my, you certainly have achieved a lot!" said the Führer. Himmler was also there. Recounts Mr Harrer today, Himmler came up to him and said, "I know of an expedition going to Tibet if you would like to go along."

The Nazis' dream couple of young Mr Harrer and his first wife, Lotte, were in a hurry to get married "because I," so wrote Mr Harrer to the Berlin RuSHA on 5 November 1938, "am a member of the team of the German Nunga-Parbat Expedition and will be leaving for a six-month stay in the Himalaya". Permission received, they were married on 24 December 1938, the day on which the Nazis celebrated the Germanic Yule festival instead of Christmas Eve.

SS-Oberscharfuhrer (the rank corresponds to that of a sergeant) Harrer left for India in May 1939, where he and his climbing party were later imprisoned. It was only in 1944 that he and his late companion Peter Aufschneiter (who had joined NSDAP, the Nazi party, in 1933) managed to escape prison and make their way to Tibet.

Until we confronted him in Carinthia, Mr Harrer had never acknowledged his erstwhile link to Nazi organisations. He has written dozens of books since returning

from Tibet, but not a word about the Nazis. Now and then, voices have been raised regarding his Nazi past, but there had never been documentary proof. Someone once discovered a book entitled *On the North Face of the Eiger*, published by the Central Publishing House of the NSDAP, in which Mr Harrer wrote: "That is an invaluable reward for us, to see the Fuhrer and be permitted to speak to him. We climbed right up to the North Face of the Eiger and over the summit until at last we reached our Führer."

Today, Mr Harrer claims that he was interviewed after his Eiger triumph, and that a ghostwriter did the writing.

Denazified Nazi

When the hero of Tibet returned home in 1952, coming to terms with the past in a serious way was not on the agenda. "My husband was *entnazifiziert* (denazified) back then," Carina Harrer, the climber's third wife, explains today, "and then he went on with his life."

Mr Harrer certainly did go on with his life. In the 1950s, he toured the Andes and traversed the Amazon. He was the first man to climb three Alaskan peaks. Later, he travelled to Borneo, Greenland, Congo, and, time and again, Tibet. His books are written with much love and understanding for foreign people. There are no traces of nationalism, nor any remnant of Nazi ideology. Mr Harrer has always maintained that concepts such as "primitive" should be avoided at all costs when dealing with indigenous tribes. Whether this had anything to do with his long stay in Tibet can only be a matter of conjecture.

Heinrich Harrer, son of a postman risen to become a superstar, was feted on his 80th birthday at New York's Waldorf Astoria hotel. Illustrious friends from the Explorers Club, the ranks of which included names like Thor Heyerdahl, Neil Armstrong, Edmund Hillary and Reinhold Messner, were on hand to raise the toast: "We honour the greatest of us all."

Whatever he might have been in his youth, it would be difficult to call Heinrich Harrer a Nazi diehard. The confrontation with his SS past seems to have given the grand old man a fright at best. As he escorted us to the door with a happy spring in his step, he said cordially, "We knew that this great film was also going to bring us some trouble."

Journalists G. Lehner and T. Müller are based in Salzburg, Austria, and Hamburg, Germany, respectively. A version of this article first appeared in the German magazine Stern. *One of Mr Harrer's first reactions after the* Stern *article appeared was that it could be the work of the Chinese agents sent to destroy his life's work.*

Nazis in Tibet

The "chic-Tibet" to which Hollywood pays homage today, the Nazis had already laid claim to back in the late 1930s. Heinrich Harrer was not the first "Reichdeutsche" (Reich German) in Lhasa, but rather it was SS Untersturmführer (2nd Lieutenant) Ernst Schäfer of Hamburg. The expert on Eastern Asia, who has since died, used to work in the SS Genealogical Research Centre set up by Heinrich Himmler.

In 1938, Mr Schäfer left for Tibet with 30 men and a large cache of weapons, arriving in Lhasa in early 1939. The journey was called "SS Expedition Schäfer". In 1964, a companion of Mr Schäfer's admitted to historian Michael K. Kater that the SS storm troops were on a mission to persuade the Tibetan army, by giving them gifts, to wean it away from British influence.

The Germans had more than that one agenda in Tibet, however. Himmler considered the Tibetans to be "racial relatives of the Aryans" and many high-level Nazis saw a Shangrila in Tibet. They wanted to study Tibetan agriculture and lifestyle. The plan was that, with all the Slavic people in Siberia and Russia eliminated, it was Tibetans who would teach Germans how to survive in the harsh environment.

Mr Schäfer took away a lot of material from Tibet which can still be seen in the Haus der Natur in Salzburg. Some years ago when the Dalai Lama opened the Salzburg Festival of Classical Music, Mr Harrer took him to see the Tibetan exhibits there. What His Holiness might not have known was that the Haus der Natur was founded by Eduard Paul Tratz, a biologist, who was also a member of the SS.

A Sarchop in Tihar Jail

What was the Bhutanese Home Minister doing for so many days in Delhi? He left empty-handed and a dissident leader lives to fight another day.

by ***Birman Maharjan***

In 1989, Teknath Rizal, a Bhutanese dissident who had taken shelter in Nepal, was kidnapped by the Panchayat-era authorities and handed over to Thimphu's security officials who waited by a Druk Air jet at Kathmandu airport. Tek Nath Rizal has been in a Bhutanese jail since, declared a "prisoner of conscience" by Amnesty International.

An identical modus operandi almost played itself out in mid-April this year when a Druk Air plane was commandeered by Thimphu's Home Minister, Dago Tshering, and waited on the tarmac at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport. The minister's mission, to spirit home a Bhutanese dissident, whom the Indian Government had detained following an extradition request made by Bhutan. But the ending turned out to be different this time.

As soon as the New Delhi police arrested Rongthong Kunley Dorji on 18 April, the Bhutan Solidarity Group based in the city got active and immediately filed a habeas corpus petition with the Delhi High Court, thus preventing the Ministry of External Affairs from deporting Mr Dorji without due process. This put a spanner in the works, and Minister Tshering had to return home alone, but not before his plan of action had created enough problems for Mr Dorji.

Non-Lhotsampa Dissident

Thimphu's powers-that-be have no reason to like Rongthong Kunley Dorji. In 1991, the businessman from East Bhutan was arrested on charges of consorting with Lhotshampa (i.e. Southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin) dissidents and imprisoned for almost two months. After his release, Mr Dorji along with his family fled the country and took up lodgings in Kathmandu. In 1994, Mr Dorji established the Druk National Congress (DNC) and earlier this year took up leadership of the newly formed United Front for Democracy (UFD), a five-party Bhutanese opposition grouping which sought to bring together the bickering exile leadership under one umbrella.

Mr Dorji's nuisance value is very well recognised by the Bhutanese state. He belongs to the Sarchop community, the largest of the three main population groups in Druk Yul, the others being the Ngalong who provide the ruling elite, and the Lhotshampa. Mr Dorji's leading the opposition UFD tends to undermine Thimphu's claim that the "democratic movement" against it is inspired and guided by *"ngolop"* (anti-national) Nepali-speakers.

The Bhutanese authorities responded by trying to weaken Mr Dorji's standing. Various charges of fraud and non-repayment of loans have been levelled against him, besides accusations of conspiring against the state, of subversion, and so on. Interestingly, it is these very political charges - and India's enviable tradition of judicial due process - that may yet save Mr Dorji from being sent back to a Bhutanese gaol.

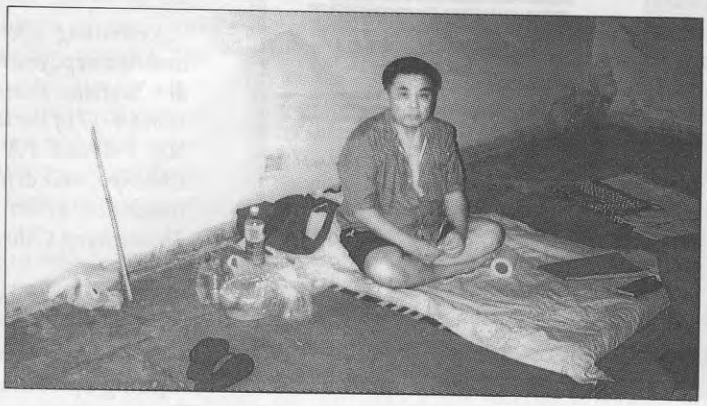
South Asian Cooperation

It happened this way. On 20 December 1996, an application seeking an arrest warrant against Mr Dorji was made to the High Court of Bhutan, which obliged by issuing the papers the same day. The warrant wanted him back in Bhutan to answer for,

1) *Commission of offense against the state under Sections 6, 7 and 8 of the National Security Act.*
2) *Commission of offenses amounting to fraud and non-repayment of loans under Sections NGHA 4-10 and 4-14 of the Loan act.*
3) *Commission of fabricated allegations and threats under Section NA 1 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo* [legal code].

The next step was to seek India's help in snaring Mr Dorji, for Nepal was not likely to comply with an extradition request. It was well known that Mr Dorji often travelled to India to raise support for his cause. The 1949 treaty of peace and friendship between Bhutan and India stipulates that India will hand over Bhutanese citizens accused of crimes "in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Extradition Act".

On 12 February, Minister Tshering made a formal request to India seeking the arrest and extradition of Mr Dorji. In a letter to the Indian ambassador in Thimphu, he lists the charges of fraud, etc, against Mr



Dissident Dorji under Indian Government detention at Lampur Sewa Sadan beggars' home.

Dorji, adding that he "has been engaged in conspiracy and unlawful activities against the State for which he is required for prosecution."

Confident that the Indian authorities would follow through with the request, Mr Tshering was in Delhi on 17 April, the day Bhutanese intelligence had informed the Indian authorities that Mr Dorji would be arriving there from Kathmandu.

The Indian authorities were most accommodating towards the Bhutanese minister. On the same day as his arrival, N. Ravi, joint secretary at the Ministry of External Affairs who had earlier served in the Indian mission in Thimphu, wrote to a counterpart in the Home Ministry asking that Mr Dorji be detained. His letter says that Mr Tshering had made a request for extradition "at the command of His Majesty, the King of Bhutan".

If Mr Dorji had arrived by air as expected he would most probably be languishing in a Bhutanese prison at present, for it would have been just a matter of picking him up as he alighted from his Kathmandu flight and depositing him with Minister Tshering. Instead, he came by train and it was only the next evening that he was located and detained by the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer (FRRO), New Delhi. Mr Dorji's refugee colleagues believe that had there been night landing facilities at Bhutan's Paro airport, he would have been flown out the same night. Since this was not the case, Mr Dorji had to be kept in Delhi overnight and by the next morning the High Court had begun seeking his whereabouts.

The detention order requires a detainee to be at the FRRO's disposal, and so in this particular instance Mr Dorji's was kept at the Lampur Sewa Sadan, a beggars' home about 60 km away from New Delhi. The FRRO explained the detention in the following words: "According to them [Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs], Sh. R.K. Dorji is Chairman of the U.D.F. [sic], Bhutan, the avowed aim of which, is to seek a change in the system of governance in that country. The pursuit of the aims of this Organisation, especially on Indian soil, would affect in an adverse manner the close and friendly relations that exist between India and Bhutan for the last many decades. According to them it is not possible for the Govt. of India to tolerate any form of anti-Bhutan activity by any person from within the territory of India."

The FRRO's order was challenged by Anand Swaroop Varma of the Bhutan Solidarity Group in the habeas corpus petition arguing that since Mr Dorji is a Bhutanese citizen and the 1949 treaty allows Bhutanese citizens free movement in India without visas or travel permits, FRRO had no jurisdiction over Mr Dorji. While hearings on this were going on, the High Court ordered that Mr Dorji be produced before a magistrate to decide whether he had committed an extraditable offence or not. Accordingly, the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) of Delhi took up the case.

Extradition Act

So far, the Indian government counsel has not produced any document before the ACMM to support the charges against Mr Dorji. He has pleaded that the papers from Bhutan are being awaited. Regardless, with her 2 June ruling, the Magistrate remanded Mr Dorji to judicial custody and sent him to New Delhi's Tihar Jail under Article 34 (b) of the Act which states: "On receipt of an urgent request from a foreign state for the immediate arrest of a fugitive criminal, the Central Government may request the Magistrate having competent jurisdiction to issue a provisional warrant of arrest of such fugitive criminal."

Mr Dorji's lawyers have challenged the court order on the grounds that since the charges against him are of a political character, extradition proceedings against him go against the Extradition Act. They point out Chapter V, 31 (a) of the Act which expressly forbids the surrender of a fugitive if the offense "is of a political character" or if he is able to prove that "the requisition or warrant for his surrender has, in fact, been made with a view to try or punish him for an offense of a political character".

This provision in the Act had earlier prompted the ever-imaginative Bhutanese authorities to come up with a new arrest warrant to replace the 20 December 1996 document. The political charges were dropped in this "revised" warrant, issued by the Bhutanese High Court 25 April 1997. The Court now wanted Mr Dorji for:

> *...committing offenses amounting to fraud and non-repayment of numerous loans under Sections NGHA 4-10, NGHA 4-14 and NGHA 4-17 of the Loan Act, sections DA 2-8, NA 1-2 and PA 14 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo, and defamation and criminal intimidation under Section NA 1-1 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo.*

The defence lawyers have questioned the validity of the "revised" warrant which the Court has accepted. They argue that the conjuring up of the new warrant itself casts

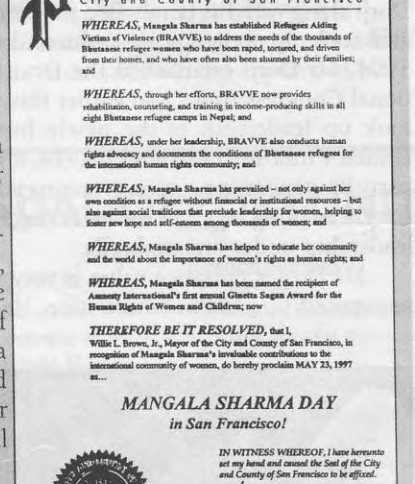
Refugee Has Her Day

While a Bhutanese dissident counts his days in the summer heat at Delhi's Tihar Jail, another refugee is feted in the West.

Mangala Sharma, described by the *Washington Post* columnist Mary McGrory as a "small, bright-eyed woman from Bhutan", became the first recipient on 14 May in Washington DC of Amnesty International's newly instituted Ginetta Sagan Award for Human Rights of Women and Children. Ms Sharma received the award for helping "women abused and traumatized by civil strife...from Bhutan for her ethnicity."

Meanwhile, Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr of San Francisco signed a proclamation declaring 23 May 1997 "Mangala Sharma Day". Although not of earthshaking import in the day-to-day life of that city, was this symbolic affirmation of the existence of a refugee community which otherwise is all but invisible in the world stage?

Mr Dorji still awaits his day in court, while Ms Sharma has been granted political asylum in the US.



Proclamation

City and County of San Francisco

WHEREAS, Mangala Sharma has established Refugees Aiding Victims of Violence (BRAVVE) to address the needs of the thousands of Bhutanese refugee women who have been raped, tortured, and driven from their homes, and who have often also been shunned by their families; and

WHEREAS, through her efforts, BRAVVE now provides rehabilitation, counseling, and training in income-producing skills in all eight Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal; and

WHEREAS, under her leadership, BRAVVE also conducts human rights advocacy and documents the conditions of Bhutanese refugees for the international human rights community; and

WHEREAS, Mangala Sharma has prevailed – not only against her own condition as a refugee without financial or institutional resources – but also against social traditions that preclude leadership for women, helping to foster new hope and self-esteem among thousands of women; and

WHEREAS, Mangala Sharma has helped to educate her community and the world about the importance of women's rights as human rights; and

WHEREAS, Mangala Sharma has been named the recipient of Amnesty International's first annual Ginetta Sagan Award for the Human Rights of Women and Children; now

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that I, Willie L. Brown, Jr., Mayor of the City and County of San Francisco, in recognition of Mangala Sharma's invaluable contributions to the international community of women, do hereby proclaim MAY 23, 1997 as...

MANGALA SHARMA DAY
in San Francisco!

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the City and County of San Francisco to be affixed.

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr.
Mayor

serious doubt on whether Bhutan will honour the terms under which Mr Dorji would be deported. For Chapter V, 31 (c) of the Extradition Act states that a fugitive criminal shall not be surrendered "unless provision is made by that law of the foreign State...that the fugitive criminal shall not be determined or tried in that State for an offense other than (i) the extradition offense in relation to which he is to be surrendered or returned".

Faux Pas

Rongthong Kunley Dorji's case has put the spotlight on India regarding its Bhutan policy. Amnesty International (AI) has expressed concern that the new warrant could have been presented to circumvent the provisions of the Indian Extradition Act, 1962 and that Mr Dorji may be tortured if he is extradited. And, although AI is about the only international body to have spoken out, Western embassies in New Delhi have finally begun to show an interest in the refugee situation and Bhutanese dissidence. Earlier, it was only the Western embassies in Kathmandu that were considered 'sensitive' to the issue.

Mr Dorji's supporters are confident that he will not be sent back to Bhutan. The ACMM can place him in custody only for 60 days, that is until 1 August, under the provisional warrant issued. If the promised papers do not arrive from Bhutan by then (and they had not at press time), Mr Dorji will have to be released. But, whether the papers arrive or not, Mr Dorji's lawyers are preparing to fight the case in the High Court charging that the entire process of his arrest was, among other things, "malafide, wrong and fraudulent".

It now looks as if the 60-day period will be allowed to pass before Mr Dorji is freed. By not sending in the documents, Bhutan seems willing to let the matter lapse. The entire episode has ended a diplomatic faux pas as far as Thimphu is concerned, for it has created a victim's halo around Mr Dorji, has attracted the attention of the Delhi embassies, and seems to have given a fillip to opponents of the Druk government, particularly among the Sarchops of the east. Unwittingly, too, South Block may have done the Bhutanese refugees a favour at a time when their movement was going nowhere. Rongthong Kunley Dorji is not an unknown quantity anymore.

Thimphu will have to wait for another opportunity to lay its hands on Mr Dorji. This adventure has proved more costly than it had bargained for.

Call For Papers: Conference on South Asian Mediocrity

Himal South Asia magazine is organising a conference on South Asian Mediocrity, to be held in Spring 1998. The conference will seek to identify and explain the levels of mediocrity found in all aspects of South Asian life, from scholarship to business, from politics to media, from architecture to public health. The gathering will strive to understand why South Asians lag ever-further behind in terms of our economies, culture(s), intellectualism and selfimage.

Scholars and specialists from across disciplines and from all South Asian countries will come together to present papers not necessarily restricted by theme, country or orientation. Because of its open-ended nature, and in order to plan the conference, we ask those interested to send in concise synopses of papers for consideration. Please restrict yourself to a page in single-space.

Announcements of conference details, including venue, duration and panels will be made in November on the magazine's web site and in its Nov/Dec 1997 issue.

Address your paper proposal to:
Mediocrity, Himal South Asia, PO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal
fax 977-1-521013 tel 523845/522113 email himalmag@mos.com.np

Unification Theorist Who Brought Together Third World Scientists

by A.M. Harun ar Rashid

The Sixth BCSPIN Summer School on "Current Trends in High Energy Physics and Cosmology" held in Kathmandu in early June owes its origins to the inspiration of the late Professor Abdus Salam, Nobel Laureate in Physics. Abdus Salam's legacy was not just his outstanding contributions to particle physics but also the ceaseless championing of the cause of young and talented scientists of the developing world.

A few years back, some of these young people gathered at the institute established by Abdus Salam, the International Centre for Theoretical Physics in Trieste, Italy, and decided to start a Summer School in Physics to help train and expose young physicists from the Asian region. This school has held classes in Kathmandu every two years since 1989, with lectures by many renowned physicists, including a few Nobel Laureates. The acronym of the summer school, BCSPIN, refers to the six countries from where young physicists are drawn for training: Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, India and Nepal.

The burning passion of Abdus Salam's life was using science and technology to alleviate poverty. As he said at a science conference in Dhaka in 1961: "It is a new concept that not merely sections of the society, but entire societies can be lifted out of the quagmire of poverty and that entire peoples can now crash through the poverty barrier."

Abdus Salam carried his message to kings, presidents and prime ministers. When he visited Nepal in 1989 to inaugurate the First BCSPIN Summer School, during a meeting with King Birendra he forcefully pleaded for one percent of Nepal's GDP to be spent on the development of science and technology for the benefit of the people.

If Mr Salam did not achieve as much success as he might have in this personal crusade, it is because he was ahead of his time. But Mr Salam had greater success in his other mission in life: the unification theory to better understand the divine design in Nature.

When he started his research career in Cambridge University as a young man from Punjab, we knew that there were really four forces of Nature: the strong nuclear force, the weak nuclear force, electromagnetism and gravity. Thanks to his life-long research, we now know that there is only one unified force combining the first three and with a strong indication about how the fourth could also be eventually unified.

Garden of Eden

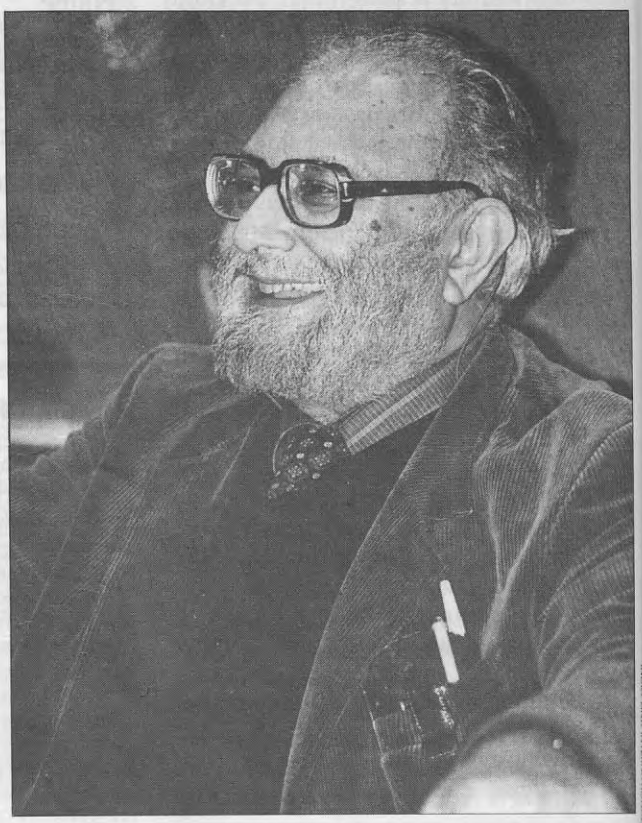
Abdus Salam was born in Jhang, Punjab, on 26 January 1926 to a deeply religious family. He himself remained a liberal but religious man all his life, with implicit faith in the words of the Creator as enshrined in the Holy Book of Islam. Those of us who had the good fortune of knowing him over 30 years will always cherish the memory of a cosmopolitan man who loved his fellow human beings because he loved the Creator above everything else.

Young Abdus Salam was educated at Government College, Lahore. At the age of 21, he wrote a paper extending some work of the great Indian mathematical genius, Ramanujan. He took his PhD degree from Cambridge in 1952, working on a very difficult problem of mathematical physics known as "overlapping divergences" which occurs in the quantum theory of fields. The young man's outstanding work made an immediate impact and he came to be recognised as an authority on the quantum field theory.

But Mr Salam's magnum opus was really the unification theory and very soon he, along with his colleague John Ward, took the first steps towards explaining it as far back as 1954, when he was only 28. The idea was revolutionary and beautiful. Mr Salam was one of the very first few who immediately understood the great importance of the concept of "gauge variance" when it was first published by C.N. Yang and R. Mills.

It was of course not easy to make use of this principle in the quest for unification, principally because of a problem which Mr Salam called the "Serpent in the Grass". As soon as we make a theory using the gauge invariance principle, a zero mass particle makes its appearance out of nowhere, and nobody knew how to deal with this beast in the Garden of Eden.

But physicists are nothing if not resourceful, and very soon fine works of Peter



Higgs, Thom Kibble and others gave us an elaborate prescription of generating mass for the Yang-Mills vector particles. This was the last important ingredient still missing, and very soon Sheldon Glashow, Abdus Salam and Steven Weinberg, working independently, were able to construct a Unified Theory of Weak and Electromagnetic Interactions, now called the Standard Theory. Hundreds of tests were made on the Standard Theory to confirm it, and the three great physicists were awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979.

Bosons, Fermions, Hadrons

Perhaps guided by the great mystique of Asian religions like Buddhism, which look for unity and harmony in everything, Abdus Salam had always searched for symmetry in physics. During the 1960s, he, along with some Japanese physicists and Murray Gell Mann, repeatedly emphasised the importance of symmetry principles as encoded in the mathematical theory of groups. This theory soon found its numerous applications in the classification of strongly interacting particles called hadrons.

But the elementary particles of Nature are broadly divided into two groups called bosons and fermions, and physicists soon discovered an abstract form of symmetry known as supersymmetry, placing bosons and fermions on the same footing. Incidentally, bosons are particles of even spin named after the great Bengali physicist S.N. Bose, and fermions are particles of half-integral spin named after the great Italian physicist, Enrico Fermi.

BCSIPN seminarians in Kathmandu heard from top-notch physicists.

In 1974, Abdus Salam and John Strathdee invented a mathematical framework for supersymmetry known as "superspace", which every student of physics must now learn. It is this work of Mr Salam on supersymmetry and its numerous applications and enlargements which are at the centre of current research in physics, and it is this type of research all over the world which was reviewed, discussed and analysed in the Sixth BCSPIN Summer School in Kathmandu.

In a myriad of ways, Mr Salam touched the lives of tens of thousands of young men and women all over the world and it is fitting that every two years some of them should come together in Kathmandu to learn, and in doing so to pay homage to this great man.

A.M. Harun ar Rashid teaches physics at University of Dhaka.

Dorab Patel's Second Innings

by Beena Sarwar

With the passing away on 15 March of former Supreme Court judge Dorab Patel, Pakistan lost one of its most prominent and dedicated human rights activists. A slightly built figure, always conservatively dressed in suit and tie, he was an unlikely national hero with his Anglicised background and conservative, elitist upbringing as the son of a wealthy Zoroastrian businessman.

The story of Justice Patel's life as a human rights crusader, starting from the time he chose to retire on principle during the rule of military dictator Gen Ziaul Haq, is one through which Pakistan's chequered history since that period could be told.

On 24 March 1981, he refused to take a fresh oath under the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), promulgated by Gen Zia, which not only negated the independence of the judiciary but also prolonged martial law by nullifying the effect of a judgement giving Gen Zia's regime limited recognition. As a signatory to the judgement, Dorab Patel could not have taken the new oath, given his strict conscience.

A lesser man might have succumbed. The temptation certainly would have been great: due to seniority he was all set to take over as Chief Justice of Pakistan as soon as the incumbent retired the following year, and would have headed the apex court for seven years.

Justice Patel did not think twice about rebuffing Gen Zia, relates a fellow judge, Fakhruddin G. Ebrahim. As was the custom, the Chief Justice put the question first to the junior-most, at that time, Justice Ebrahim. "Not without apprehension I said, 'Sir, I am going home.' The same question was put to my colleagues in the reverse order of seniority, and most of them were willing to take the oath," he recalls. "I walked up to Dorab Patel, who was seated close to me, and asked him in Gujrati, 'What is your decision?' Promptly and without the least hesitation, he said, 'How can I take such an oath!'."

The decision, taken without fanfare, marked a pivotal moment in Dorab Patel's life - and for the human rights movement in Pakistan. For, after retiring, he helped found the country's most respected human rights body, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in 1987. The organisation, in the words of Justice Ebrahim, "laid the foundation for a new chapter in Pakistan's quest for providing dignity and respect for its citizens."

At the age of 72, Dorab Patel lost his year-long battle with leukemia - just a week before the HRCP's Annual General Meeting on 23 March 1997. This was the first time he was absent from this major event and he was sorely missed.

It was in keeping with his secular, liberal tradition that a non-Parsi was allowed to sit with the body (during the funeral) - Asma Jahangir, the country's most prominent woman advocate and activist, whom Justice Patel, a bachelor, referred to as "my daughter". For Ms Jahangir, who co-founded the HRCP with Justice Patel and whose name is synonymous in the public mind with the country's human rights movement, he was a mentor. "He was one of the finest people I have known, a man of great integrity and principle," she says.

Justice Patel's regard for civil liberties and human rights are expressed in several judgements. Prominent among them is the case of *Ali Hussain vs the Government of Sindh*, regarding the freedom of expression. The government had banned two newspapers, *Mehran* and *Jasarat*, for publishing something considered unacceptable under the Press and Publications Ordinance. The latter is an organ of the Jamat-e-Islami, Pakistan.

"Those who knew Justice Patel did not expect him to show any sympathy for the publishers or, at the very least, for the tone of the published material," recalls Sabihuddin Ahmed, a judge of the Sindh High Court who had worked closely with Justice Patel. "But what was important for him was the principle - the freedom of expression and the press, and he held the ban to be unlawful."

Another significant case was that of *Yusuf Ali Khan*, in which Justice Patel liberalised the law of contempt of court and departed from several precedents, including judgements of the House of Lords, to hold that an allegation of bias against a judge, if expressed in temperate language and without attempting to scandalise him or alleging ulterior motives, did not constitute contempt.

His dissenting judgement in the *Z.A. Bhutto* case came as no surprise, points out Mr Ahmed, referring to the case which ended with the hanging of former prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. "...But he promptly dismissed the review application because, under the law, the fact that some judges had disagreed with the majority was not a valid ground for review. The law had to prevail over personal opinion."

Born in Quetta in 1924, Dorab Patel lost his mother when he was a baby. He attended various boarding schools before graduating from Bombay University and obtaining a Bachelor's Degree from the London School of Economics. He was called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn and began practising law in Karachi in the early 1950s. He was elected secretary of the High Court Bar in 1964, and was raised to the bench of the then West Pakistan High Court in 1967. Elevated to the Supreme Court in 1976, he resigned in 1981, and devoted the rest of his life to waging a crusade for the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden.

In 1990, he became the second Pakistani to be elected member of the exclusive International Commission of Jurists.

"A judge has rarely acquired such fame and recognition after retirement," says Sabihuddin Ahmed. "In his judicial career he was only a highly respected judge. In the second innings of his career, his crusading for human rights turned him into an international celebrity."

Master of Faction

The Sri Lankan Henry Miller, a Burgher with a German first- and surname and a to-hell-with-it attitude, says he will continue to write, furiously.

by Manik de Silva

Carl Muller, undoubtedly Sri Lanka's best-selling English novelist, coined the term "faction" to describe his work which he says is a combination of fact and fiction. There clearly is a strong streak of autobiography and sex running through his writing which, he is not shy to admit, has been spiced up some to make the story read better.

Mr Muller is a Burgher or, to use the kind of language he favours, a "Burgher bugger". Most of Sri Lanka's Burghers, relics of Dutch and Portuguese colonial rule, have emigrated to Australia, or, as many Lankans, have it: "Burghered off down under". Once favoured by the British for a variety of jobs in government departments like the railway, customs, excise, prisons and the police, the Brits also found them comfortable berths in the plantations in the countryside and mercantile firms in Colombo.

The attraction then was that they were more Anglicised than the Sinhalese and the Tamils. The majority of the Burghers lived among the Sinhalese, and spoke Sinhala well, but their preferred language of communication, or their "home language", was English. Sinhalese (or Tamil in the plantation bungalows where many Burgher planters served as superintendents or assistants) was only spoken to the servants.

Once the Sinhala Only Act was adopted in 1956 by Prime Minister S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, and English ceased to be Sri Lanka's official language, the Burghers felt that their time was up in a nation which they had over generations learned to love. Usually white skinned and with European-sounding names, the white Australia policy of those days was no deterrent to their emigration and they left, first in a trickle and then in a stream. They might have done better in the USA or Canada, but few thought of

striking in that direction. Australia, by far, attracted the greatest numbers and they are doing very nicely in that country where they have been joined by many Sinhalese and Tamils who, like the Burghers, found conditions at home not strictly to their liking.

Among the Burghers were the elite "Dutch Burghers", who still have their Dutch Burgher Union (DBU) in a sprawling Colombo mansion where circumstances have now forced many to drink arrack which in their heyday was considered good for the natives and the not-so-pukka Burghers who comprised the majority middle class. At the same time, there were also the so-called "shoe Burghers", cobblers by trade, who spoke a peculiar patois of a combination of several languages.

Father's Son

Carl Muller belongs to the middle class. His father drove one of those Puffing Billy-type of steam engines (and later the diesel locos that followed) for the Ceylon Government Railway (CGR). Muller Sr was, by all accounts, one of those hard-drinking, fun-loving, roistering archetypal Burghers whose mission in life was to eat, drink, be merry, beat up the wife, kick the kids around, and generally raise Cain. That background gave Mr Muller the insights to write on the subject he tackles best - the Burghers and the railway.

A lot of what he has written in his racy, irreverent, inimitable style has infuriated the 'good' Burghers who do not relish his portrayal of them as an uncouth, incestuous, rowdy lot. Also, Mr Muller has chosen to pinch some of the shoe Burgher patois which he puts into the mouths of middle class people who never spoke like that or, if they did, only a little bit. In the Muller dialogue, that was the English they exclusively spoke. (*"Oi, Sonnaboy, who that fellow you clouting?" "Damn bugger, saying he won't marry Anna." "Never said that," Anna screeched, "I jumping in well now." "If you don't shut up I'll put you in the bloody well." - from* The Jam Fruit Tree, *Penguin Books, India, 1993.*) But then Mr Muller does not claim empathy with the upper class of his tribe and makes no secret of the fact that the DBU is one of his pet hates.

"Now, at 62, I can't ride the carousel any more. I am very much the victim of my own 'to hell with it' philosophy and very sick," says Mr Muller. "All I do is write, and keep writing furiously." Since his first novel, *The Jam Fruit Tree*, was published in 1993 by Penguin India, he's had two more Penguins (*Yakada Yaka* - literally "the iron demon") and *Once Upon a Tender Time*, following in quick succession, making it a trilogy. Puffin printed an anthology, *The Python of Pura Malai and Other Stories* in

1995 and then came two more Penguins, *Colombo* and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cemetery*.

All these since his first success. *Jam Fruit Tree* and *Yakada Yak* were particularly good although from Mr Muller's account, they have not made him rich. Says he: "Making money? Not on your nelly. Royalties trickle in once a year and I am taxed 30 percent at source by the Indian government. I can't depend on writing alone."

So Mr Muller does other things. He works for the Central Province Chamber of Commerce in Kandy where he lives, editing the chamber's newspaper. He also edits a children's newspaper out of a Kandy press and serves as publicity officer for the Queen's Hotel, the grand old lady that is the best-known hotel up in Sri Lanka's central hills.

Rib Prodder

Mr Muller's knowledge of the Burghers and the railway served him well in his first two books which won him his well-deserved reputation of being a good, if somewhat bawdy, storyteller. Predictably, the Ceylon Government Railway has accumulated a lot of railway lore in the 100 years and more that it has run the trains in Sri Lanka. The engine drivers and train guards were a colourful bunch whose many escapades had been retailed and roared over arrack-and-sodas in Railway Institutes in various parts of the country and in the running bungalows where train crews slept in-between duty stints.

Carl Muller has squirrelled away these yarns which he has skilfully woven into his novels. A knack of telling a good story honed in several newspaper and advertising jobs in Sri Lanka and the Middle East, and lots of rich experiences. ("I lost my first job as a weigh bridge clerk in a Colombo mill one week after starting work. I was fired for making eyes at a pretty Swiss girl. How the devil was I to know that she was the boss's wife?")

After his first mishap at Mosajee's Wystevyke Mill at age 17, Mr Muller spent four years as a rating in the Royal Ceylon Navy and was co-opted to an ex-servicemen's squad in the Ceylon Army in 1958 to quell the communal rioting that broke out that year.

"I was chucked out of the Ceylon Signal Corps in four months. Post-traumatic epilepsy following a series of blows on the head in various half-forgotten brawls, incidents and accidents sent me into the military hospital from where I was discharged from the army as unfit for further duty. I then joined the Colombo Port Commission as a signalman in the pilot station."

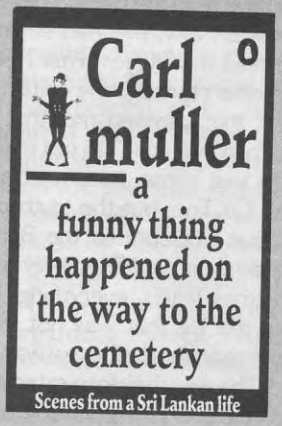
Two years later he joined a new advertising agency set up by Tim Horshington, a fellow Burgher, where he began to "experiment with the pen". His first article was printed in the *Ceylon Observer* in 1962. "I continued writing thereafter while working any and everywhere. Jobs included advertising, travel and entertainment (he was a pianist at a resort hotel close to Negombo) and work for several newspapers in Colombo before taking off to the Middle East for more newspaper jobs (*Gulf News* in Dubai, *Gulf Weekly Mirror* in Bahrain). I chucked journalism to join the Sharjah Chamber of Commerce and Industry where I became vice-president for international sales at the Export Centre in Sharjah where we conducted up to 15 international trade fairs a year. I moved to the *Times of Oman* for the Gulf war period and finally came back home, broken in health, and began writing in earnest".

Several more manuscripts have been completed. *The Children of the Lion* is due to come out in Viking hardcover in November. The army-navy days will be dealt in *Spit and Polish*. A whole lot of other novels are in his head and being written, including *The Jawbone of West Asia*, based on his seven years in the Middle East, which will be his first British Penguin.

Mr Muller has been featured by *The Age* in Melbourne, *Time* magazine and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. He's won the Gratiaen Memorial Prize for English writing in Sri Lanka, takes very unkindly to any kind of criticism of his work and cheerfully admits that his Sunday column for the *Sunday Island* in Colombo annoys a lot of people.

"Part of being a maverick, I suppose - prodding sundry ribs all the time. The indiscipline is in my writing too. But then I have always been the despair of many. Guess I'll reform after I am dead!"

Maldive Kite



IN 1960 I visited the Maldive Islands. That was, considering the march of history, a long time ago. It was the kite flying season and every Maldivian male between six and sixty was engrossed in fashioning weird contraptions with coloured tissue and slivers of wood and sending them aloft where they would soar silently upon a still offshore breeze.

I went to the single post office where a single clerk sat behind a counter. I needed a two larees stamp. The clerk gave me a pained look. One of his hands was stuck out of the window. He signalled greeting with the other and raised a black eyebrow.

He shoved across a sheet of stamps. I detached one carefully and, with his one free hand, he pushed the rest of the sheet away, accepted my money and doled out some small coin. He didn't speak. All the while he kept shifting his gaze to the hand that was stuck out of the window. He would also arch his neck and bob his head to glance obliquely out then resume a more human position.

I stuck on the stamp. The free hand waved me to the post box. He intrigued me the way a cat would be intrigued on seeing a mouse pushing a wheelbarrow.

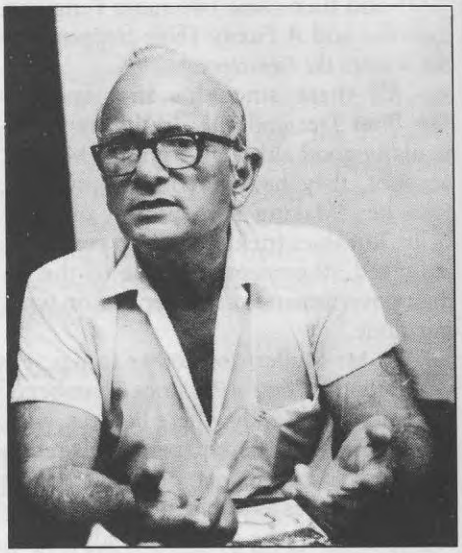
Some Maldivians trooped in with sing-song voices and bad-toothed smiles. They, too, received the one-handed service. They did not seem to mind the fumblings and contortions in the fishing out of the registration tab, the daubing of some runny gum on the better part of the envelope and the awkward dispensing of small change. Very curious, I went outside, walked to the side of the building where that window was. Yes, the hand was there. It twitched occasionally. It held a spool of thread.

My post office wallah was flying a kite.

From *"You Scratch My Back..."*, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cemetery, *Penguin Books India, 1995.*

Lankan Aphrodisiac

Carl Muller talks to Lankan journalist and poet **Afdhel Aziz** about his critics, his upcoming books and dinner parties at the end of the world.



▲ *How do you cope with the critics ?*

• Who is the qualified critic that you know, who can take your book and look at it as a critic and write either charitably or uncharitably about it? Who has come through a school of criticism? Who has got a diploma in literary criticism, right? When an author writes a book, invariably, the author sends a copy to the newspaper, who calls a sub-editor or reporter and says: "Here, I've got this book. Review it." And bang comes a review.

▲ *Are you saying that the best criticism comes from a layman?*

• The best criticism is the type of letters that come from the readers - the people who have read the book. They can say what they like. Now, I've had so many people who read the *The Jam Fruit Tree*. They sent their letters through the editor. There were letters that damned me, that cursed me. One man even said I'm not even a Burgher. "With that name, he must be some German." OK fine, but the truth of the books was that I celebrated the Burghers. I celebrated their weddings, their funerals, their Christmas feasts, everything. I wanted to show the life that was not being publicly shown to anybody; the real way the Burghers lived. The way they fornicated, the way they died. I did everything possible to show them that they were a unique culture, and the people who could live together with everybody, which is why in *The Jam Fruit Tree* I made the observation that while the other buggers are throwing bombs at each other, we Burghers are getting on without any problems.

I am what my books are. Now that can be a dangerous thing for an author, because people judge you by what you write. They don't see the fiction in it or the faction. They see you in it.

▲ *What have been some of the reactions from the Burgher community? Are they all negative?*

• There are people who love it and these are the hard-working Burghers in Australia for instance, young boys and girls who have to start by carrying crates of apples and learn how to get on in that country the hard way - they don't forget. The others who went with black market money and got their funds into Australia and settled down the easy way - they forget. But they still write to their relatives saying "Send me some *katta sambol*" or "Send me some *ambul thiyal*" - they can't do without that. They pose - OK you got money, you got wall-to-wall carpeting - but why don't you think about what you were, where you came from. If you came from a small suburban house in Dematagoda, why don't you say that instead of saying that you had dinner every night at the Intercontinental - this is what some of them say.

My life has been very crowded. These are all memories. Now what I'm doing is drawing from life, I'm drawing from experiences of my friends and all the people who knew me and they all have stories to tell. There's an old duck, a Burgher lady who's 80 years old and she talks to me about the days when she was young. I keep writing to this old lady and she writes to me about how when her husband used to come back drunk, and she used to get into the dirty clothes basket and hide. OK, so now that's life. Now what is more fun - recounting all the fun of this Burgher life or trying to show that you're a very prim and proper person with Wedgewood china in your cabinets?

▲ *Tell us about your upcoming books.*

• I am writing all the time, hoping to do something with these books. Hoping that when *Children of the Lion* comes out in July as a Viking hardback, it's going to be good. Penguin is raving about it, they say that they are submitting it for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. I'm hoping to crack that - it's a cheque for one and a half million rupees.

Another book is science fiction. It's called *Exodus 2300*, about when the world ends and people have to migrate to another planet. That's finished. I've started a book about my seven years in the Middle East - I was actually going to call it *Dollar-hu-Akbar*, but now I am calling it *The Jawbone of West Asia*. I went into Iran, at the time when the Shah was doing a bunk. I was at the Pahlavi prison when they were taking out all the guys who were put their by SAVAK. Fantastic stories, I just wrote to Andrew Kidd, who is the editor of Penguin UK, and he said send me the book. England loves books on the Middle East, so maybe I can have my first Penguin UK book by 1999.

I've got *City of the Lion* in July, *Spit and Polish* in October, then *Children of the Lion*, a 1,400-page sequel, right up to the fall of Anuradhapura. Then I have a sequel to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Cemetery*, and they are titling it *Carl Muller Still on the Way to the Cemetery* - I hope I don't die before that.

▲ *If you had a dinner party at the end of the world, which five people from any era in history would you invite?*

• In fact I had made out a list. I'd like to have Apuleius - the author of *The Golden Ass*. I would also like to have Giacomo Girolamo Casanova. I think Cleopatra would be a very nice person to have at this party - she did fantastic things with her mouth. And I'd like to have Princess Diana just for the fun of it, and the Marquise de Pompadour, because she had a very Ceylonese approach to everything she did especially when it came to aphrodisiacs. She recommended coriander, curry leaves, all the things we have growing here.

FESTIVAL OF SOUTH ASIAN DOCUMENTARIES

FILM SOUTH ASIA '97

18–21 SEPTEMBER 1997

Film South Asia announces awards

Cash prizes of US$2500, US$1500 and US$1000 will be awarded to the three best documentaries on the basis of overall excellence. The winning entries will be judged by a three-member jury.

The entries

FSA '97 has received more than 100 high-quality entries from all over South Asia, many having won international awards. About 15 documentaries will be premiered at FSA '97. Thirty films will be screened for competition and another 20 will be shown in the information section.

Check FSA web site or the September/October 1997 issue of Himal South Asia.

The Festival

Film South Asia will run for four days. Filmmakers, connossieurs and trade persons from South Asian countries will attend the festival. Besides film showings, there will be opportunities for workshops and interactions.

Delegates

The festival office in Kathmandu is finalising travel, accommodation, and recreational arrangements (tours & treks) for FSA delegates. Travel and accommodation discounts will be provided to South Asian filmmakers on a limited basis.

See web site for details.

For further information, please contact

Suman Basnet
GPO Box 7251
Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone: +977-1-522113/523845
Fax: 521013
email: himalmag@mos.com.np
http://www/atrav.com/film

The Tarnished Rays of 1947

Refugee movement near Ambala, Punjab.

Azaadi meant both freedom and partition. In celebrating 1947 this August, let us de-communalise our minds.

by ***Vijay Prashad***

Anniversaries are useful occasions as a way to remind us of the values that are enshrined in our history. The golden jubilee year of Indian and Pakistani independence, 1997, is an opportunity to remember those whose sacrifices ended colonial rule. This year also serves to highlight the values of hope and patriotism which infused the struggle for independence.

The national struggle for control of the state was one which allowed the oppressed to experience the powerful consequences of organised social action. While current historical scholarship correctly demonstrates the fissures within the national movement in British India, it misses the mighty sense of belonging engendered by the movement. A dalit man in the 1930s spoke of donning a Gandhi cap and feeling at that moment, in the crowd, during a demonstration, like an Indian, like all those around him who constituted themselves in opposition to the authoritarian state. Those who came into the orbit of the national movement found their sense of self in struggle and in fellowship.

For this reason, our celebration of 1947 must not degenerate into the glorification of Great Men - those heroes (as Gandhi liked to call them) could only become so because of the immense sacrifice of the masses. Freedom ought to be remembered as the collective struggle which possessed within itself the possibility not only for the creation of bourgeois republics, but also, in time, of socialist societies.

If one dalit man felt fellowship, another felt betrayed in 1947 by the limited nature of our freedom. "Listen friend Nihala, have you seen freedom?" asked the communist poet from Jalandhar, Guramdas 'Alam'. "No, my brother Prava, I have neither seen nor eaten her, but I heard from Jaggu that she has come upto Ambala." She has her back to the common people, he sang, and her face to Birla.

Of course, the promulgation of the secular Republic in India (1950) and the Islamic Republic in Pakistan (1956) allowed for far more political initiatives than what was permitted during British rule. But the assassination of the secularist Liaquat Ali Khan in October 1951 and the persecution of the communists significantly narrowed the scope for political action in the latter, while the dismissal of the 1957 communist ministry in Kerala and the police actions against the guerrillas in Hyderabad somewhat constricted the space in the former.

The capitulation to imperialism (by both India and Pakistan through US 'aid', but more by Pakistan through its 1954 entry into the South East Asia Treaty Organisation and its 1955 entry into the Baghdad Pact) narrowed the options that the new states had for just socioeconomic development. The temper of the national struggle rapidly degenerated into crisis management, and greed overtook all. The limited nature of freedom does not need to be belaboured: the continued exploitation of South Asia is empirical proof of the state of imperialist rule, as is demonstrated in P. Sainath's *Everybody Loves a Good Drought: Stories from India's Poorest Districts* (see review, page 66).

The Grief and the Glory

1947 was also the year in which Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) offered us that haunting image, "*yeh dagh dagh ujala, ye shab-gazida sahar*," which my friend Agha Shahid Ali translates as "these tarnished rays, this night-smudged light". This was not the dawn, Faiz wrote, for which the patriots set out in

sheer longing.

When we remember 1947, let us remember not only the glory of the national movement, but also the grief and suffering of Partition, because as Amrita Pritam wrote in 1947, "my mother's womb was helpless" as it produced new contentious nations in a bout of pain. The death toll during the transfer of populations is estimated at about one million and by March 1948, about 13 million people had become refugees.

These are facts to commemorate as much as the flag ceremonies in Karachi and Delhi on the 14th and 15th of August respectively. Those who remember Attenborough's *Gandhi* will recall the poignant images of the two flag hoistings and then the cut to Gandhi, at his ashram, spinning under an empty flag-pole. How are we to recall *azaadi* with these events in mind?

First, the wrenching of India-Pakistan must not be seen in isolation. Just after the Second World War, the British people elected a government which, unlike Churchill's regime, was less wedded to the Empire. The new regime was interested in rebuilding a shattered Britain by creating a social welfare state. The massive peasant and working-class uprisings across the Subcontinent (from the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny in 1946 to the Telengana, Tebhaga and Punnapra-Vayalar rebellions) as well as in West Asia (notably with the formation of the Arab League in March 1945) was crippling to the British military.

In both areas, the British drew up hasty plans to withdraw. The method of their withdrawal was by the construction of partitioned states, which continue to fight over the lines in the sand drawn by overworked British jurists. The British created two 'hot-spots' (in Israel/Palestine and India/Pakistan) which have endured over the decades.

Second, the trauma of partition drives many of us to see the world in terms of religion. Because "the lust of ageing men" (in Samar Sen's poetic words) created states along the basis of religion does not mean that the popular masses thought entirely in the framework of religion. Many people had no idea what kind of state was being negotiated, since the discussions did not have a democratic content (the Empire was, lest we forget, a despotism). Others, such as characters in Rahi Masoom Reza's *Adha Gaon* (1966), believed that their own villages, far inside what is today India, would be divided into Hindu and Muslim sections.

These popular ideas demonstrate the lack of clarity with which the people experienced Partition. Others, gave their lives to protect their neighbours; neighbourhoods, rather than religion, often formed the basis of community. Over time, such notions appear to have lost their relevance as people find themselves being mentally and spatially communalised. This is one of the tragic effects of Partition. Perhaps in our celebrations we can try to de-communalise our minds.

1947 was a remarkable year and we are right to celebrate the inauguration of a process of decolonisation which is ongoing. India, the Jewel in Britain's Crown, sundered itself from the Empire and set in motion a process which swept through the rest of Asia (with Indonesia in 1949) and Africa (starting with Ghana in 1957). Despite the trauma of Partition, the colonised world recognised the vanguard role, adopted without self-consciousness, of our national struggle.

At the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955, Nehru ensured that the final communique condemned colonialism as "an evil which should speedily be brought to an end" and that the conference declare "its support of the cause of freedom and independence for all [colonised] people." We should not trivialise these sentiments. Our celebrations, in the context of the temper of freedom and the memory of partition, should be held with humility and with doubt. These moments should be used as opportunities to inquire rather than to boast.

V. Prashad teaches International Studies at Trinity College, Connecticut.

Psyche Warfare

The dynamics of the Indo-Pakistani conflict have to be understood, largely, in North-Subcontinental context.

by Manzur Ejaz

Talks between India and Pakistan are periodically resumed and abandoned, with both sides fixated in their positions and little hope for reconciliation. Rather than throw one's hands up in despair, it is educative to look into the underpinnings of the Indo-Pakistani conflict and the deeper causes for the locked positions.

And indeed, a closer look reveals that this ceaseless South Asian conflict is an outgrowth of inter-communal contradictions of northern India in general and Punjab in particular. It serves to be reminded that an average South Indian, Pathan, Baluch or Sindhi is, at the most, apathetic towards seemingly never-ending Indo-Pak conflict.

North Indians and Pak-Punjabis constitute the majority of the population in both countries and, directly or indirectly, they are the ones who set the foreign policy parameters on each side. To stay in power, the leaders coming from the other 'nationalities' within India and Pakistan, if they make it to the top slot, have to play the game. As a matter of fact, the leaders coming from minority nationalities, such as in the case of Benazir Bhutto, have to go an extra mile to prove their loyalty to the majority group.

Historically, a long-standing contradiction had existed between Punjab (mostly in Pakistan now) and Hind (northern India): Punjabi literature is replete with references to this fact. In a way, the Indo-Pak conflict is a continuation of this historical trend. However, the matter was further complicated, after 1930s, when both Muslim and Hindu Punjabis started following the leadership of the Uttar Pradesh elite. While Muslim Punjabis - quite underdeveloped then - went along with the Muslim League (led by the UP elite), the Hindus started identifying themselves with the sensitivities of the Hindi belt (and its language). The Sikhs, the third largest group, were put into an odd situation of choosing between the lesser of the two evils (as they perceived).

Ironically, Punjabi Muslims, the main Pakistani protagonists in the Indo-Pak conflict today, were only marginally involved in the creation of Pakistan. The seeds of anti-India ideology were sown by the elite

that migrated from UP and the non-Muslim Punjabi migrant to North India exacerbated the centuries-old contradiction between these two regions by becoming the basin of anti-Pakistan sentiments in various ways. The causes of inter-communal conflict among Punjabis, however, had its roots in the socio-economic make-up of pre-Partition Punjab. And it was these socio-economic conditions of Muslim Punjabis, before and after Partition, that played a pivotal role in determining the overall Pakistani attitude towards India.

Mutual Massacre

The communal make-up of the Punjab was quite odd before Partition. An overwhelming majority of the business and other elites were comprised of Hindus and Sikhs. While the Muslim feudals occupied the highest positions in the political spectrum, common Muslims served either as labourers or artisans in the urban centres. For example, Muslims constituted two thirds of the population of Lahore, the main city of Punjab, yet there were only a few Muslim shopkeepers at the Mall or in Anarkali Bazaar. In the city, Muslims were mostly known as hawkers (*sabzifroosh*) and menial workers. Census figures and fictional descriptions (as in Yashpal's novel *Jhoota Such*) confirm such a view.

In retrospect, one can argue that the lack of Punjabi Muslim participation in the movement for a separate (Pakistani) homeland was more due to an absence of a meaningful urban middle class and less because of their brotherly feelings for non-Muslim Punjabis - the mutual massacre of each other in 1947 proves this point beyond a doubt. It is understandable that the Muslims, due to economic disparities and the effective control of the state and commercial institutions by non-Muslims, harboured an immensely repressed animosity. The operational caste system in day-to-day life, also rankled. Many interviews conducted by this writer reveal that even those Muslims who had deep friendships with Hindus and Sikhs - and who are quite nostalgic about the long past period - were resentful of being treated as untouchables.

After the partition of Punjab, a vacuum was created in the urban centres due to the migration of the non-Muslim elite. The local Muslim artisan and working classes, and migrants from East Punjab and other parts of India (appropriately portrayed in Sathya's film *Garm Hawa* starring Balraj Sahni) grabbed entire cities overnight. Having no background in business, commerce or matters of governance, a Punjabi Muslim middle class came into being that had no choice but to follow the intellectual leadership of the migrant UP elite, a group that was extremely hostile to India. Again, this played well into the repressed hostility of Punjabi Muslims.

While a thorough sociological study of this phenomenon is in order, this much is evident, that the new urban elite of Muslim Punjabis provided the groundswell of conservatism and anti-India chauvinism in Pakistan.

Post-Partition Demonisation

It will also be appropriate to try and grasp the feelings of Hindu and Sikh urban classes who, due to forced migration, were deprived of their homeland and everything they owned. Their expertise, education and entrepreneurship had helped them dominate urban life in United Punjab, and this experience helped them to quickly assume a similarly prominent role in the state and commercial institutions of post-Partition India. Their grief and resentment against the newly created state of Pakistan must have been intense. Therefore, it is understandable that the non-Muslim Punjabi migrants, being a vocal and influential group, would have created an anti-Pakistan environment in India.

On both sides of the border, the Punjabis used every method – through media, religious institutions, educational curricula and much else – to demonise each other. Such sustained propaganda proved to be morally stunting, including for those who were born after Partition. Muslim Punjabis of Pakistan, born after 1947, know little of a Hindu or a Sikh, and the reverse is true of Sikhs and Hindus living in the East Punjab. The almost total lack of interaction has only deepened the dehumanisation of the other side for the post-Partition generations of Punjabis.

In Pakistan, to differentiate themselves from Hindus and Sikhs, the Punjabi Muslim ruling elites not only tried to eradicate vestiges of common Punjabi culture and heritage, but also abandoned their mother tongue, Punjabi. Conscious efforts were made to burn all the bridges that connected them with non-Muslim Punjabis across the border. Again, this process was initiated by the migrant elites of Uttar Pradesh but was continued as part of state ideology by the Punjabi Muslims as they began to dominate the state of Pakistan. It suited them, as the new rulers of Pakistan.

Institutions were built on the basis of ideology that would enhance uniformity, rather than unity. In practical terms, the uniformity was supposed to be achieved through imposition of religion and a common language, Urdu. The linguistic policy, supported by the Urdu-speaking Punjabi ruling elites, created great conflicts, first with East Bengalis and later with Sindhis. However, these Pakistani elites, in their zeal to develop a unique Muslim identity devoid of Hindu-Sikh cultural elements, would not let go of such policies. Anti-India passion so blinded the ruling elites that they did not see that this policy was detrimental to the interests of the state of Pakistan.

Over on the other side, Hindu Punjabis too identified themselves with Hindi and promoted uniformity of the state at the expense of their indigenous culture and language. The ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party is but a reflection of this phenomenon.

A whole generation of Pakistani Punjabis was raised to define its existence in anti-India terms. An element of insecurity and uncertainty played a critical role in shaping up their psyche, with the constant reminder that "Muslims could not have prospered in the presence of Hindus and Sikhs." Eventually, this psyche garnered institutional interests, particularly, in Islamabad's foreign policy establishment and in the military.

Against the backdrop of forced migration that resulted in loss of lives and property, the antagonistic mentality must have coloured the management of key state institutions in India as well. And now, these attitudes have assumed a life of their own in such institutions of both countries. There have been drastic changes in objective circumstances, but these institutions are unwilling to abandon the besieged mentality.

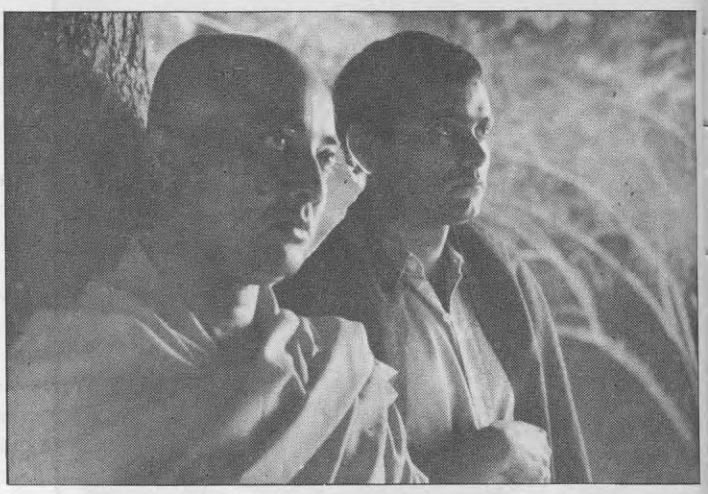
Today, a third generation of Punjabis after Partition is coming of age in India and Pakistan. This generation is not prisoner to past experiences, specifically the bloody communal carnage of 1947. While, on both sides, they certainly are fed the same poisonous propaganda as the preceding generation, the desire to communicate with the Punjabi brethren across the border is very much there today compared to yesterday.

The movement for the rehabilitation of Punjabi language and culture – and of exploring the common heritage of all Punjabis - has steadily gained momentum in Pakistani Punjab. In short, the grounds for mutual understanding are being laid in both countries and, with accelerated interaction between the communities, this region can come to terms with itself. This, in turn, will help India and Pakistan to come to terms with themselves.

M. Ejaz is a US-based economist.

Discovering the Cinema of Another Burkina Faso

by Altaf Mazid



The sanyasi and the seeker in *Raag Birag*.

The cinema of the Indian Northeast has been said to be a cinema of underdevelopment. Since the economy of this region is not going anywhere, it is natural to expect that cinema, which is basically an industrial-scientific activity, would be in a similar state of atrophy. It comes as a surprise, therefore, that this region produces some of the best documentaries and feature films in the country.

The record proves it. Only 10 feature films were produced in the Northeast in 1995 and 1996, yet seven of them were selected for the prestigious Indian Panorama Section of the International Film Festival of India of those two years. The range and depth of Northeastern cinema was proved once again at "Unveiling the Northeast", a festival held at New Delhi's India International Centre (IIC) from 15 to 22 April.

Unpretentious presentation seems to be the underlying characteristic of these Northeast films. The story-lines, while typically regional ("local"), tend to have universal appeal, which is probably why they have been appreciated at international venues. Some connoisseurs have even compared the Northeast's output with the fine cinema that emerges from the unlikely Sub-Saharan state of Burkina Faso.

The realism that is the true hallmark of films from this part of India is primarily the legacy of one person - Jyotiprasad Agarwalla. In the late 1920s, Mr Agarwalla was trained in the famous UFA studio in Germany, and his cinematic approach belonged to the Soviet and German schools of realism. So, when in 1935 he made *Joymoti*, the first Assamese film, he did not follow the theatrical style of acting, painted faces, and glossy costumes, which were the common features of Indian cinema of the day. "Though the work ended as a failure, both technically and financially, it helped lay a different path for our Northeast films," says the elderly director today. The directors who followed Mr Agarwalla to this day prove him right.

Some films

Jahnu Barua's *Hkhagoroloi Bahu Door* (It's a Long Way to the Sea, 1995) and Aribam Syam Sharma's *Sanabi* (The Grey Horse, 1995) showcase what the Northeast is capable of. The first is the tale of a boatman from a nondescript Assamese village who clings to tradition, yet has a yearning to see the wider world through the eyes of his little grandson. *Sanabi*, on the other hand, is a Manipuri film which seeks to keep culture and tradition intact, and revolves around a grey pony that is the central character.

We see further manifestation of this philosophy in Mr Sharma's other feature, *Ishanou* (The Chosen One, 1995), and in the documentary, *Orchids of Manipur* (1994). In the former, the director depicts mystery and occult experience as a part of contemporary reality, while in the latter, he delves into the spiritual meaning of orchids to inhabitants of the Manipur hills.

Sanjeev Hazarika's *Meemanxa* (The Verdict, 1994) and Santwana Bordoloi's *Adajya* (The Flight, 1996) deal with the plight of young widows. In *Meemanxa*, a very daring production, a young widow fights a legal battle against an attempted rape by a dominating landlord. In order to teach her tormentor a lesson, she goes to extremes, even to the extent of using her body.

On a different plane, *Adajya* narrates the difficult and different lives of three high-caste widows belonging to a single family. In her directorial debut, Ms Bordoloi shows sure command of the celluloid medium and sensitive treatment of the subject.

The title of the Bodo-language *Hagramayo Jinahari* (Rape in the Virgin Forest, 1995) has dual significance. Director Jwngdao Bodos draws parallels between a molestation and the deforestation of Assam's rainforests. *Itihas* (The Exploration, 1995), directed by one of the seniormost Assamese directors, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, examines the life of a woman who is prey of circumstances and yet tries to maintain a dignified appearance.

Bidyut Chakraborty's altogether unusual *Raag Birag* (Vocation of a Sanyasi, 1996) emphasises the essence of duty in human life with an ironical twist at the end. A sanyasi is urgently called from a distant hermitage to persuade a would-be sanyasi from following the vocation. Before he leaves the scene, the guru finds himself attracted to his young friend's lady-love. *Raag Birag* was chosen the inaugural film of the Indian Panorama Section of the IFFI held at Thiruvananthapuram earlier this year.

Among the documentaries, the most remarkable work is Prabin Hazarika's *Hastir Kanya* (Daughter of the Elephant, 1996). Here, the director attempts to capture the life of Pratima Barua Pandey, a celebrated folk artist of Assam. Ms Barua's haunting melodies were in themselves enough to keep viewers riveted to their seats at the India International Centre.

All Alone If Need Be (1994) is about Sarat Chandra Sinha, an outstanding politician and statesman of Assam. Ranjit Das succeeds in his portrayal of this ex-chief minister, whose austere lifestyle has made him a legendary figure. The film was a dream come true for the producer-and-script writer Amulya Kakoty, who lives in the same neighbourhood as this great personality.

Dipak Bhattacharjee from Tripura establishes the links between the erstwhile Tripuri king and Rabindranath Tagore in *In Search of Relations*. The fact that the king supplied material for Tagore's much-acclaimed work *Bisarjan* is not known to many.

A. Mazid is a film critic based in Guwahati.

The Patient English

by Jyoti Thottam

PHIL BRAY

Naveen Andrews as Kip and Juliet Binoche as Hana.

Nostalgia, either for old-fashioned movie romance or for Michael Ondaatje's writing, has obscured the real tragedy of *The English Patient*: that it took an arresting, original story and created from it a film bound by the cinematic cliches of empire.

As with any film adaptation of a novel, particularly one so praised as Mr Ondaatje's, director Anthony Minghella's vision for *The English Patient* has been judged first by the standards of the book. Mr Minghella's fans say he fashioned a passionate film from a difficult, elliptical book, while Mr Ondaatje's purist readers fault the director for ignoring Hana and Kip to focus on the more glamorous Katharine and Almasy. Both camps, however, ignore a much more useful comparison. A look at the two other Oscar-winning films of empire, *A Passage to India* and *Out of Africa*, reveals *The English Patient's* deeper flaws as well as its intriguing possibilities.

The similarities begin with the heroine, a minor character in the book transformed into the movie's star. This choice is a screenwriter and director's prerogative, but Mr Minghella took from the novel only what was most easily recognisable - the story of a privileged woman whose romantic life is upset by her experience of a strange land. Everything appealing about Katharine Clifton in the movie - her intelligence, her passion, her willingness to buck convention and immerse herself in the 'real' Egypt/India/Kenya (in these films, backdrop is secondary to the central romantic drama) - is cribbed from Karen Blixen and Adela Quested.

Each of these women chose for a husband a reliable man of her own circle. Love for them was less important than a comfortable faith in convention. In *The English Patient*, Katharine marries the solid, patriotic Geoffrey, her childhood friend, after a string of disappointing love affairs. The choice echoes in both Karen Blixen, who marries the agreeable brother of a lover who rejected her, and Adela Quested, who agrees to marry an Indian Civil Service officer despite her fears that he has become a supercilious saheb. More importantly, though, all three use their marriages to leave the confines of wealthy European society and taste a bit of the exotic.

Thus, Katharine Clifton, our plucky heroine, endures a night submerged in a sandstorm to prove she can survive in the desert. A powerful scene, but not much different from Karen Blixen enduring a lion attack to prove she can survive in the veldt, or Adela Quested enduring a trip through the Malabar Caves to prove she can survive the company of Indians. The experience transforms them and forces each of these women to rethink her belief in the benign intentions of colonialism.

However, following the logic of its predecessors, ***The English Patient* seems to suggest that the most dramatic consequence of colonialism was the havoc it played with European marriages.** Katharine, her passions awakened by the desert, abandons her marriage at the first opportunity. Had Geoffrey, the poor dupe, watched *Out of Africa* or *A Passage to India*, he would have known the hazards of bringing his beautiful wife to such a place. He joins Rohr Blixen and Ronny Heaslop on the list of men who seemed like agreeable enough husbands back in Denmark/England but who didn't quite measure up in Kenya/India.

PHIL BRAY

Michael Ondatje on location with Ralph Fiennes

The Lurid and Familiar

Into the break steps our dashing hero, Count Lazlo de Almasy. Almasy's tragedy, like that of Denys Finch-Hatton in *Out of Africa* and Cyril Fielding in *A Passage to India*, is that of the well-meaning internationalist. He explores the desert driven by his conviction that nationality doesn't really matter. An idealist who slips in and out of the bazaar, and the local language, with equal ease, Almasy can abide neither passports nor marriage licences. What does he hate most? "Ownership," he says to Katharine in the bath. In a similar scene, Denys chides Karen for her illusion that she possesses anything, least of all him, in Africa. "We're not owners here, Karen. We're just passing through."

The hero's convictions eventually lead him to abandon his class. Almasy's devotion to Katharine supersedes national loyalty, and he becomes a spy for the Germans to be with her. Fielding's slightly different passions, for the brotherhood of Englishmen and Indians, lead him to side with the Indian doctor accused of attempting to rape Adela.

The dynamic of the pairs is the same: the idealistic man free of conventional ties who frees the woman from her bourgeois morality. Almasy wants to believe that his rarefied little world is "something finer" than the arrogant nationalism around him, but he, like those before him, is unwittingly drawn into the colonial project. Almasy's maps, like Finch-Hatton's game hunting and Fielding's English teaching, are vital to Britain's imperial interests. What makes these men any different from the pukka sahebs? They speak the language, they don't press their khakis, and some of their best friends are natives.

Even the gorgeous scenes in which

Almasy and Katharine's affair unfolds are little more than perfected adaptations. Katharine and Almasy make love nervously at an absurd colonial Christmas party. (Karen and Denys kiss nervously at an absurd colonial New Year's Eve party.) They read Herodotus in the desert. (Karen and Denys listen to Mozart on safari); Almasy makes a scene at a dinner party. (Fielding makes a scene at the club.) Katharine strolls casually through the bazaar. (Adela rides casually through the bazaar.) The formula for these films is a simple one: show enough of that lurid, teeming world outside to make things interesting, but focus on the familiar - beautiful people in beautiful clothes.

Epic Romance

Ironically, *The English Patient's* rehashing of romantic movie conventions fuels much of its appeal. This film is considered a rare contemporary specimen of that nearly extinct species, the epic romance. Katharine and Almasy dance, gaze, swoon, fight, and eventually tear each other's clothes off without a hint of irony to spoil the fun.

Perhaps the film's adoring fans cannot be faulted for falling under the spell of a great romance, but its director-screenwriter certainly can be faulted for the choices he made with this particular story. Isak Dinesen and E.M. Forster wrote *Out of Africa* and *A Passage to India* from their own experiences as citizens of a colonial empire. The film versions of their stories thus address the excesses and absurdities of colonialism from the perspective of a liberal European. Says the wise English woman, Mrs Moore, in *A Passage to India*: "India forces one to come face to face with oneself. It can be rather disturbing."

The English Patient was something entirely different. This book, written in 1992 by a Sri Lanka-born Canadian, is a sort of origins myth of the post-colonial hybrid. The surviving characters are the subjects of the British Empire, and through their experiences of dislocation and ambivalence Mr Ondaatje created a new language in fiction to tell the old stories of *Pax Brittanica*.

These stories, however, don't fit neatly into movie conventions. Hana, the Canadian nurse who stays back in the Italian villa-turned-hospital to look after the English patient, and Kip, the Sikh anti-mine expert, fall in love without much complication. Caravaggio plots a revenge against Almasy and then changes his mind. This may be why the film itself seems unable to contain them; they are unpredictable and startling, and, in the end, more interesting. Director Minghella's challenge was to create a similar new language for these characters in film. Instead, he chose to re-create familiar characters and scenes, using what was most powerful about Mr Ondaatje's story only as a frame for a classic colonial love story.

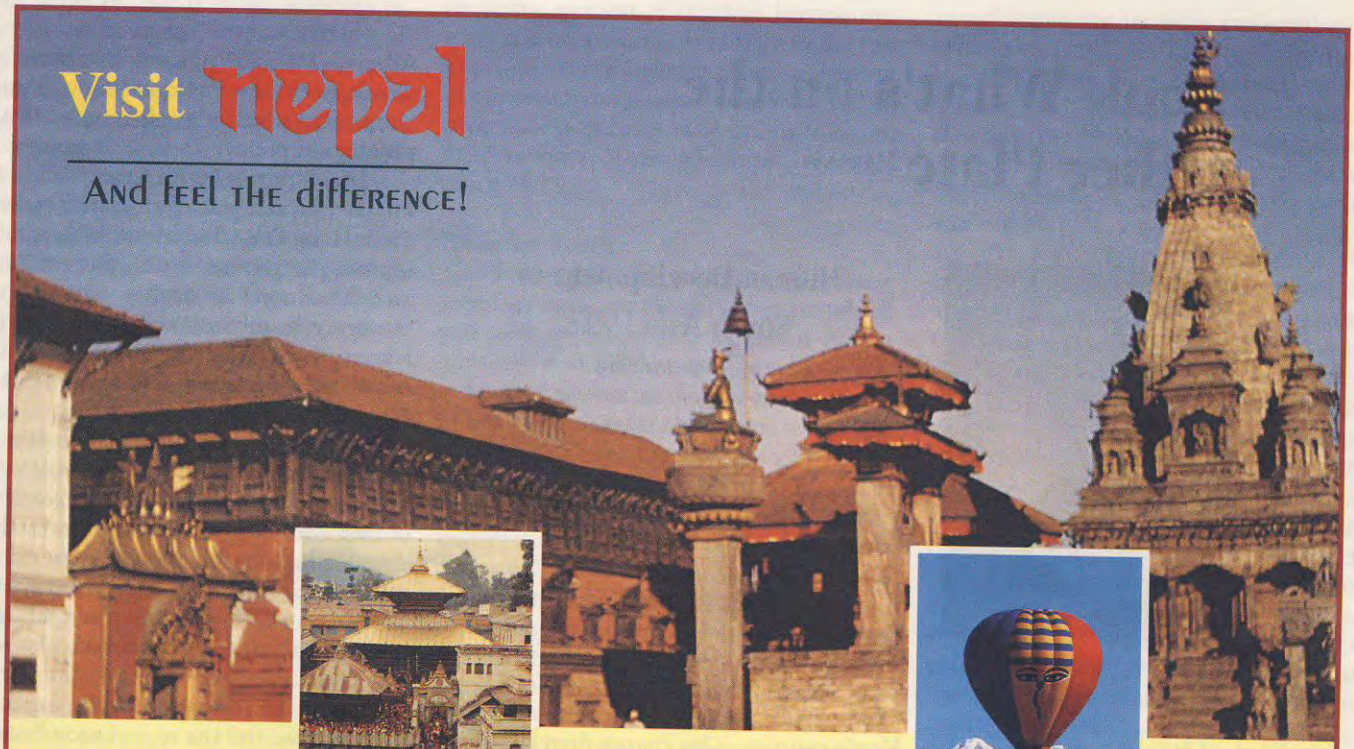
The film offers one glimpse of originality, and the squandered potential of the film, in the scene where Kip hoists Hana up a pulley in a darkened, bombed-out church so she can see and touch the faded but still beautiful mural on its walls. The scene recalls one from *Out of Africa*, in which Denys, as a gesture of affection, takes Karen into a plane for the first time so she can see Africa from the sky. They gaze serenely over their land "through God's eyes", as Karen describes it, connected by the romantic ideal that love conquers all, beginning with several million Africans.

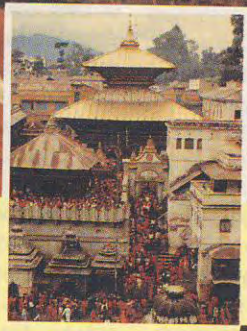
Hana and Kip have no such pretensions. They stumble over the rubble of a war that neither can claim as their own and reach out to each other in a moment of pure connection. Theirs is a much more difficult story, and *The English Patient* in film does not even try to tell it.

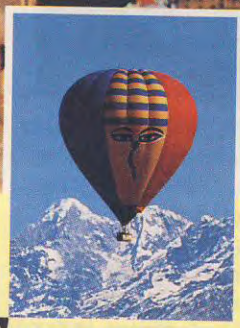
J. Thottam is a student of international affairs.

Visit nepal

And feel the difference!



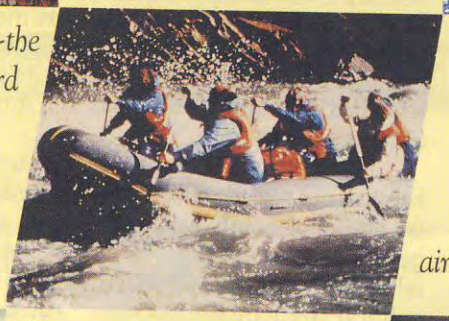




Where you are:

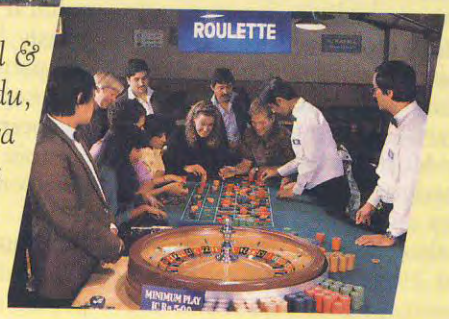
Blessed by Lord Pashupatinath-the greatest of Hindu deities and Lord Buddha - the Apostle of Peace.

Dazzled by the splendour and beauty of mountains, rolling hills and countryside.



Filled with the thrills of White-Water-Rafting, Trekking, Mountaineering, Hot-Air Ballooning, Pleasure ride on ultra-light aircraft, Jungle Safari, and so on.

Lost around the mythical & mystical tours of Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Pokhara and other new destinations in the day and amidst the bustle of cultural dances and casinos at night.



नेपाल भ्रमण वर्ष १९९८

अतिथिदेवो भव

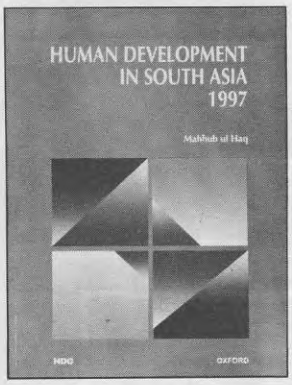
Visit Nepal where the tradition of rich hospitality awaits you !

visit nepal '98

A WORLD OF ITS OWN

Visit Nepal '98 - Secretariat, Ministry of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Singha Durbar, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: (977-1) 246185/226992/246024 Fax: (977-1) 227758 E-mail: motca@mos.com.np / vny@mos.com.np

Look What's on the Other Plate



Human Development in South Asia 1997

by Mahbub ul Haq

Oxford University Press, Karachi, 1997
ISBN 0 19 577773 5

reviewed by **Ramesh Shrestha**

Mahbub ul Haq, the guru of development science, has tried to present the everyday reality of South Asia in this publication, where he employs the Human Development Index (HDI) he helped develop for UNDP for inter-country comparison and ranking on a development scale. Overall, the situation in South Asia described by the author and his Islamabad-based team of researchers is a close reflection of Subcontinental reality. The book does a creditable job of collating information on a South Asia-wide scale, addressing a myriad of diverse issues such as rising military expenditure, government's "benign neglect", growth of NGO activities, and mobilisation of savings and investment. The country-wise human development profile is also of great interest and utility.

It is when Mr Haq insists on comparing South Asia's performance with those of Sub-Saharan Africa on the one hand and East Asia on the other, however, that he enters shaky ground. Here, his report easily falls prey to the pitfalls of generalisation. Going by his calculations, India is behind Kenya and Lesotho; Bhutan is behind Rwanda and Liberia, and Nepal is behind Sudan. Anyone who has lived or visited these countries may draw their own conclusions. By the obvious indicators of development such as personal security, economic growth centres, individual purchasing capacity, relative economic stability, relative freedom of individuals and press, South Asia must be ahead of its African counterpart region.

The comparison between the two regions and the relative ranking given by Mr Haq is spurious. One cannot deny the deprivation that exists in South Asia, which has a massive problem of development largely due to population size. Its natural resource base is smaller, and South Asia has more than twice the population of Sub-Saharan Africa. Its landmass (4.1 million sq km) is less than one-fifth of Sub-Saharan Africa (22.4 million sq km).

Indeed, the 43 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa would collectively have ranked far ahead of South Asia today given the potential natural wealth of this region in relation to its population. But the fact is that political freedom and economic equity is grossly lacking in Sub-Saharan Africa in comparison to South Asia. If the egalitarian philosophy of President Nyrere of Tanzania had been implemented in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, the situation might have been somewhat different.

Romanticised East

The author argues that investment in the population could transform South Asia into the East Asia of the 21st century. Would it? Technological development and the world consumer market have been nearing saturation point for the last ten years or so, which severely limits economic prospects in the future. Further, you need less people to manufacture a product in a shorter period today than ever before. The simple formula of upgrading human capital will not work. Even if massive investments are made in human development, and this is the author's main suggestion, South Asia's population will not become a capital for development. All in all, Mr Haq's philosophical treatise on development does not give enough importance to the need for a coherent South Asian population policy.

In comparing South Asia with East Asia, Mr Haq's treatment of the latter (taken to mean Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand) is highly romanticised. Strangely, he misses some of the underlying factors which have led to the Subcontinent's economic stagnation and East Asia's advancement.

Human Development in South Asia 1997 does not even glance at the role of the Vietnam War in the economic advancement of East Asia. Annually and for more than a decade, billions of dollars were pumped into this regional economy. A massive technology transfer also took place, all in the name of halting the communist takeover of Indochina. This is what resulted in the dramatic transformation of the region; industry grew, and the region soon became a production hub for Western consumers.

Further, how could Mr Haq and his team have forgotten that, unlike South Asian states with the exception perhaps of Bangladesh, individual countries of East Asia are all very homogeneous, and this is an essential factor in generating mutual trust and dialogue, which leads to development. South Asia, on the other hand, presents some of the most diverse human populations in the world, fertile ground for contempt and mistrust to take root.

The investment in human capital in South Asia is further complicated by the lack of awareness among the illiterate masses of South Asia, which have allowed family dynasties to rule over them under the guise of nominal democracy. Autocracies in South Asia have not put national interest before personal interest, unlike in East Asia. The authoritarian rulers of East Asia managed to maintain law and order (with American support, despite Uncle Sam's apparent passion for human rights) which brought stability, a prerequisite for all-round growth and development.

Composite HDI

The HDI does appear to be sensitive enough in its ability to line up the countries of the East, West, North and South against some scale. However, it is not fine enough to pick up the actual development efforts of the countries. The index is the product of three indicators (life expectancy, adult literacy and GDP per capita). Individually, these indicators measure the achievements in eq-

uity of services, be it basic education, immunisation coverage, or accessibility of family planning services. Collectively, however, it may not actually measure what we want to measure, namely: equity of social services taken as a whole.

In the present publication, Mr Haq also introduces two new concepts of development measures not included in his earlier work with UNDP; these are the Capability Poverty Measure (CPM) and Human Deprivation Measure (HDM). The CPM is a composite index of three negative indicators measured by number of births unattended by a trained health worker, underweight children under five years, and the adult female illiteracy rate. The HDM is the tail side of the HDI coin, consisting of six negative indicators: population without access to safe drinking water, underweight children under five years, illiterate adult population, out-of-school children and population without minimum income needed for basic necessities of life.

Political leaders thrive on optimistic declarations, and so it will be hard to sell them the concepts of CPM and HDM which deal with negative indicators. A more sensitive index would be a combination of infant mortality, percent of children leaving primary school, percent of children under five above B2SD in weight for age ratio, percent of population with access to safe water and percent of population with access to health services within 30 minutes (by any means of transport).

Need for Teeth

The author proposes to universalise basic social services over the next 15 years, which will cost approximately USD 8.6 billion annually, which he says can be managed by restructuring the budget. In making proposals like these, Mr Haq seems to wilfully ignore the long shadow of sovereignty claims and mutual suspicion among South Asian states. He might have made a welcome and well-meaning political statement, but it has no teeth. What is needed in each country is a dramatic shift in political and economic decentralisation aimed at reducing disparities, controlling economic leakage, and political education of the mass. Reducing defence expenditure and demobilising armed forces will happen only when people realise its need and demand it.

The pervasive corruption in public and corporate sectors predisposes governments to making wrong decisions and emphasising wrong priorities. Taming corruption must be a priority if we are serious about human development in South Asia, yet discussion of this specifically South Asian malady (in terms of scale) is conspicuously missing in Mr Haq's comprehensive report.

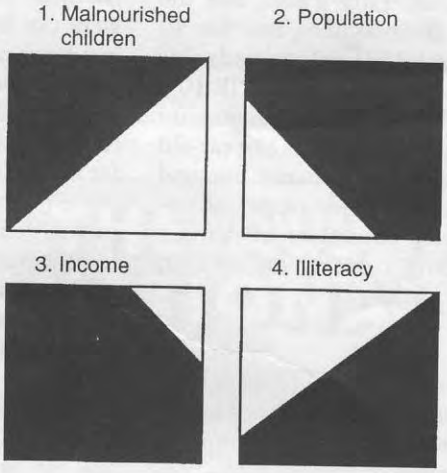
The role of ethnic and religious differences in the region is under-played. The author states that Sri Lanka made the mistake of extending some social services on a discriminatory basis, unlike the practice in Malaysia, which led to the Tamil-Singhala conflict. This is all a bit simplistic in terms of Subcontinental politics, and it must further be noted that Malaysia does insist on a discriminatory preference for Malays as opposed to the ethnic Chinese and Indians. Similarly, the author holds Bhutan out as an example of a multi-ethnic society free of ethnic tension, apparently unaware of the existence of a hundred thousand primarily Nepali-speaking Bhutanese in refugee camps managed by UNHCR.

HDI is a simple tool that tries to measure complex dimensions of development. In the absence of more acute measures, it has no competitor at the moment. For this reason, HDI may be used, but cautiously. For actual planning and policy-making, disaggregated data is the only answer, not HDI.

In summary, despite some of its failings, this is a useful publication that provides an overall socio-economic picture of the Subcontinent under one cover. Although, both Africa and East Asia has no resemblance to South Asia, in many respect there still are lessons to be learnt from their experiences. The development priority for South Asia lies in institutional reform (political and economic) whereby the concept of decentralisation of planning, land reform, job creation and job security will actually begin to contribute towards economic equity which is what human development is all about.

R. Shrestha heads the UNICEF Office in the Maldives. The views expressed here are his own.

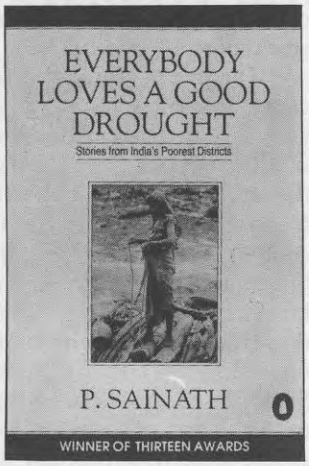
South Asia: The Most Deprived Region in the World



The four squares given on the cover of *Human Development In South Asia 1997* show the various dimensions of human deprivation in South Asia. The white area in

- the top right hand square shows that the region contains 22 per cent of humanity;
- the bottom left hand square indicates that, despite this vast human potential, South Asia's share of global real income is a meagre 6 per cent;
- the bottom right hand square shows the region's massive share of the world's total illiterate population (46%) – over twice as high as its share of the world's population;
- the top left hand square represents the fact that 50 per cent of the world's malnourished children live in South Asia.

"Malaria for All by 2000"



Everybody Loves a Good Drought

by P. Sainath
Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 1996
pp 467 INR 295
ISBN 0 14 25984 8

reviewed by **Naresh Joseph Fernandes**

In the early 1980s, villagers in Naupada district in India's eastern Orissa state became the subject of one of the most farcical developmental experiments ever. The poorest residents of the district were given "miracle cows", which were to be inseminated with Jersey semen to ensure a high milk yield. To ensure that the wondrous beasts did not ruin the experiment by mating with local studs, all the region's sturdy Khariar bulls were castrated. And to make sure that the hybrids were well fed, other poor villagers were given plots of land, not to grow food for themselves but to raise *subabul* trees for fodder. The bureaucrats congratulated themselves at the genius of this perfect anti-poverty programme.

Two years and two million rupees later, eight weak calves were born. Most of them died soon after. The survivors did not produce any milk at all. The Khariar cattle, which produced between four and five litres of milk a day, have all but become extinct. Though *subabul* saplings were planted by the thousand, few survived. So the district administration took the land back from the programme's 'beneficiaries'. Naupada is still among the ten poorest districts in India.

This is just one among the dozens of anecdotes that P. Sainath employs in *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* to demonstrate the tragic comedy of India's developmental process.

Mr Sainath's book is a landmark in Indian journalism. Combining sole-burning fieldwork with incisive theoretical insights, the author tells the story of the 312 million forgotten Indians who live below the poverty line. Without resorting to rhetoric, he forces us to reconsider the economic model we have adopted. The book goes behind the statistics to learn and reveal how real people have been affected by the plans that bureaucrats insist will improve their lives.

As he travels more than 80,000 kilometres through seven Indian states Mr Sainath discovers what the poor do to earn a living over the 200 days during which there is no agriculture to practise. Some of the survival strategies are astounding.

In Bihar's Godda district, Mr Sainath meets with Kishan Yadav, who, like the heads of 3,000 other families, marches 40 km and 60 km with 250 kg of coal tied to his bicycle handlebars. This to earn INR 10 a day, less than a third of the state's minimum wage. In Ramnad, he encounters 27-year-old Ratnapandi, who earns between five and eight rupees a day as a toddy-tapper, climbing 50 trees - the equivalent of doing a 250-floor building - during his 16-hour workday.

Teesra Fasl

Before he bagged a Times of India Fellowship in 1993, which is what allowed him to pursue his interest in human development of which the result is this book, Mr Sainath worked in the United News of India (UNI). He later joined on the Bombay-based *Blitz* weekly. His book has won him 13 awards, including the European Commission's Lorenzo Natali journalism prize. He contributes to the Calcutta *Telegraph*, *Frontline* and *Business Line*, in addition to lecturing on social communications media at Bombay's Sophia Polytechnic.

The author's journalistic and academic background are brought into good use in the book. As we travel with Mr Sainath, we come to realise that India's health and education umbrella offers so little protection as to be almost useless to the people who need it the most. Only 70 of every 100 Indians of school-going age actually enrol in Class I, writes Mr Sainath. Half of these drop out before they complete primary school. Not even five finish high school. Those who do stick through school have a tough time getting to class: though India's National Council of Education Research and Training boasts that 85 percent of the students have to walk less than three km to reach the institution, Mr Sainath points out that this is often over harsh terrain.

As the book emphasises, child labour would be hit hard if education were both free and compulsory up to the end of the secondary level. Yet, India continues to subsidise higher education at the cost of basic literacy, stunting the country's basic economic capabilities.

The country's public health system is just as flaw-ridden. India spends approximately 1.3 percent of its GDP on health, compared to Nicaragua's 6.7 percent, Brazil's 2.8 per cent and China's 2.1 percent. With the market 'reforms' of 1992 and the drive towards privatisation, public spending on health has decreased further still. This, Mr Sainath proves, has already led to disaster. In the 1992-93 budget, funds for the National Malaria Eradication Programme were cut by 43 percent. Since then, the incidence of malaria has rocketed countrywide. The funding cuts and medicine shortages, one Orissa-based doctor told the author, would lead not to health, but "Malaria for all by 2000."

Development projects like big dams, canals, thermal plants and defence installations have resulted in the eviction of 18 million Indians - more than the population of Australia - from their homes. Rehabilitation is most often cursory and the 'beneficiaries' of the projects find themselves dispossessed of their cultures, facing unemployment and discrimination.

Mr Sainath does not romanticise the poor. He knows that they have the same imperfections as those who are better off. But as he reveals in the essay from which the book takes its name, poverty is a business from which enormous profits can be made. While drought is among the more serious problems India faces, he says drought relief is, beyond question, rural India's biggest growth industry. This is why some villagers call drought relief the *teesra fasl*, the third crop.

Most drought relief goes to private con-

tractors to build roads, dig wells and send out water tankers. In 1994-95, the western state of Maharashtra spent INR 1.17 billion (approximately USD 325 million) on drought relief, which was more than the combined profits the previous year of India's cement, automobile, tea and coffee companies. Yet, this money has done little to make life better for Maharashtra's citizens.

A Book for Us

Mr Sainath did the bulk of the reporting for his book in 1993. The project, he says, had long occupied his attention, but, till the Times Fellowship came along, few newspapers believed that poverty was a subject that would grip the attention of readers. The book, which sold out within 15 days of hitting the shelves in India, shows how far off the mark the editors were.

It is easy to see why Mr Sainath's work has become such a phenomenon. It is passionate without being shrill. It tells complex stories without confusing the reader. It reveals the big picture without ever losing sight of the millions of individual Indians for whom developmental decisions are made in New Delhi and New York, Rio de Janeiro and Geneva.

Most significantly, Mr Sainath has resisted the temptation to explain Indian poverty to Western readers. In his book, he is firmly addressing his fellow South Asians. *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* has only a sketchy glossary and makes allusion to situations that - while they have great resonance to people in the Subcontinent - few Europeans or Americans would understand right off. Far from being a weakness, this gives the work a sophistication and depth that would have been lost should Mr Sainath have paused to clarify every little detail to the Western reader.

N.J. Fernandes, formerly with the Times of India, *Bombay, is presently at the Columbia School of Journalism, New York.*

Abominably Yours,

What is it in the subcontinental mindset that makes our men treat airline stewardesses as if they are comfort women? Why is it that an overwhelming number of male passengers on Business Caste behave as if they are misogynist wife-beaters?

How else do you explain this cow belt redneck boor on seat 7-C in front of me who parks a hold-all in the aisle, reclines his seat right into my lap, then repeatedly punches the orange flight attendant button which some gender insensitive Boeing interior designer has emblazoned with a stylised female form wearing a conical miniskirt. And when she arrives, he barks out for *Stardust*, *The Hindustan Times*, a pillow, a blanket and a double whiskey for breakfast - even before the hatch has closed.

And that is your normal passenger. We're not even talking here about the VIP flying somewhere over the Western Sector who recently relieved himself against the emergency exit because the toilet queue was too long. (He must have taken the bright red "Use Only In Emergency" notice a bit too literally.)

Or the angry passenger who had to be put down with a tranquiliser dart gun after he lunged at a stewardess after she informed him that they were out of non-veg meals, or the guy who went berserk and demanded to be let off the plane when he found out that the uniformed female crew member inspecting the cabin was not a stewardess but the Captain.

A frequent-flyer anthropologist who has made a study of the demographics of air travel tells me that something akin to road rage grips South Asian male airline passengers when they are tied down to their seats in an aluminium tube hurtling through the upper atmosphere at 1000 km hour. She says the Subcontinent's caste-based division of labour seems to get even more entrenched at 39,000 feet.

All cabin attendants engaged in manual work such as collecting your defiled plates and retrieving used barf bags are seen to be shudras. Only the cockpit crew is accorded the slightly elevated warrior caste functions of the kshatriya -probably due to their epaulettes and stripes on their jacket sleeves. So, when a stewardess bangs on the toilet door to tell a passenger puffing away inside, she is met with verbal abuse that casts serious aspersions about her on-ground off-duty activities.

But there is another side to the sociology of the airline industry. Today's air crew is from a cosmopolitan, well-travelled upper middle class bracket, with enough earnings to be able to afford off-season vacations in Mauritius. Whereas the average economy class passenger is on a first flight: usually to a job in the Gulf at which he will have to slog for six months just to pay off the price of the airline ticket that is taking him there.

With such disparities, there is bound to be tension in the cabin. It is surprising there aren't more uprisings on our intra-regional routes. Just as well, can't have the pilots worrying about more revolutions per minute that they can handle.

So, when you have flight attendants who feel it is beneath their dignity to pander to every whim of a passenger whom they would probably employ at home to unclog the septic tank, then political scientists will tell you that objective conditions are ripe for revolution. It is only a question of time before you get the Gramsci of the airways, or airborne Maoists to incite Working Class to rise up and take over Bourgeois Class with its choice of 15 movies on a personal screen on every seat. Proletariat of the skies unite, you have nothing to lose but the cabin pressure!

There are already signs of skirmishes in this great aerial class war. On a recent flight, a passenger whose socks stank so bad that they set off the smoke detector alarm refused to put his shoes back on despite the stewardess begging that she would do it for him. At the flight deck, the odour was treated as a flight hazard and the Captain pulled the lever which dropped oxygen masks in the cabin. The passengers did not panic only because no oxygen masks dropped - a function of deregulated skies when airplanes do not work properly.

It could be the altitude, but something inside that metal tube seems to set off the hormone pumps and let loose a surge of testosterone among male passengers - a fact that airlines like Singapore have skilfully used as a marketing tool. A control group of women reported no higher levels of lust at cruising altitude. Needless to say, any future Singapore-Tata merger will have to first get rid of the flight attendant's sarong kebaya, otherwise we'll have a riot over Indian air space and a serious air traffic control situation.

Meanwhile, we can all learn from the selfless devotion to service that is characteristic of China Southwest Airlines, which had the accompanying write-up in its in-flight magazine, *Eagle*. South Asian stewardesses can learn a lot from their class conscious colleagues of China Southwest. They must shed their innocence and (considering we are headed for revolution) garner some useful tips on air defence.

Sun Huaiqun, a stewardess of CSWA Chongquing Company has devoted herself to the blue sky. For her broad and pure mind, she has become the paragon of Chinese stewardesses, which is rooted in the minds of passengers. Since she began to work in the attendant team, Sun has learnt physique training, outline of aviation, air service, English, service practicing, psychology, air defense and mastered the knowledge soon, growing from an innocent girl to an excellent stewardess. - *from* Eagle

Fascinating beauty. Imperishable material.

A sure feel for the aesthetically perfect, a personal style and a purposeful differentness: these are the characteristics of people who wear the La Coupole 'Céramique'. A watch whose true nature you experience when you put it on for the first time: soft as velvet, supple, incomparable. And imperishably beautiful, thanks to the slightly curved sapphire crystal and the scratchproof high-tech ceramics bracelet. Rado La Coupole 'Céramique' – a beautiful watch that stays beautiful – a watch that fits as though moulded to your wrist.

A different world

La Coupole 'Céramique'.
Scratchproof high-tech ceramics bracelet.
In three sizes.

RADO
Switzerland

Authorised Sales & Service Centre
SULUX CENTRE
Khichapokhari P.O. Box: 3659, Kathmandu, Nepal Tel: 222539

Also available at:
24 Ct (Gangapath)
New Nevies Corner (Super Market)
Blue Bird Department Store (Tripureshwor)

FLY OUR COLOURS, SMOOTH AS SILK TO THE WORLD.

Thai now brings you more of the world than ever before. More countries in Asia, Europe and worldwide. And, naturally, more of the smooth as silk service for which we're renowned. Thai. Smooth as silk.

Thai

NOW YOU CAN FLY THAI ON THE WEB THROUGH WINDOW ON ASIA

http://www.thaiair.com

For further details, please contact Thai Airways International PCL., Durbar Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal Tel. 223-565, 225-084, Fax. 977-1-221-130