

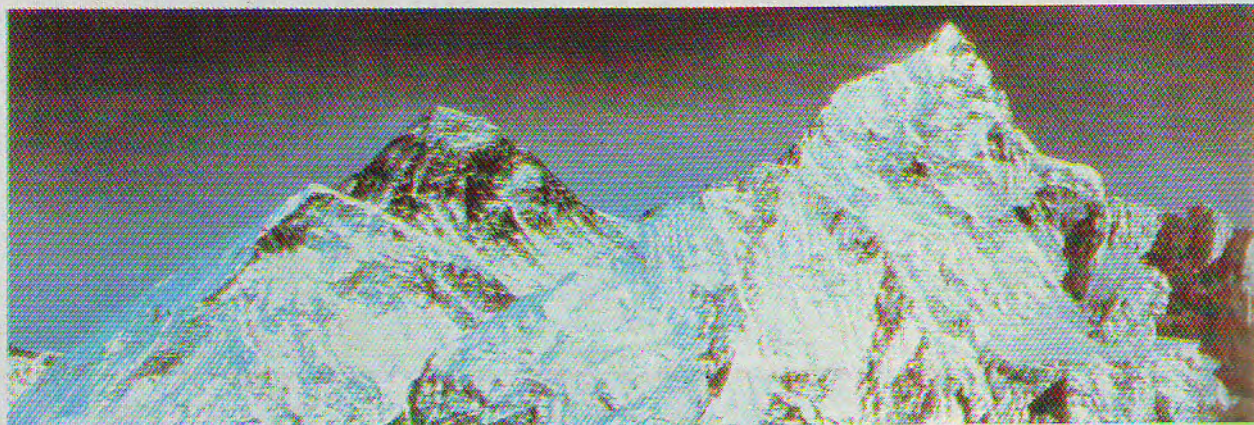
HIMAL

THE SOUTH ASIAN MAGAZINE

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Witness-victim

As a South Asian and a native of Pakistan and India, I was glad to read the very scholarly study of the history of the Muslim League, a party which changed the face of the Subcontinent ("The Muslim League: A Progress Report", February 1998). Whatever good or bad it did for the Muslims of India, the League surely,



in the years 1945 to 1947, by its sway, twisted the minds of many innocent persons who made many sacrifices for the cause its leaders

propagated. I myself am a witness and a victim of the League's short-sightedness.

I studied your publication in light of my experience with this party. You have done a great job in preserving the important features of its history. Let the educated generation of this Subcontinent find a true perspective and decide for itself the future course of its action. As a student of Islamia College, Lahore, in the year 1946 I received the Certificate of Mujahid-e-Pakistan, signed by Jinnah and Liaquat. Today I look back at the events long past and note their impact on this Subcontinent, most importantly the Indo-Pak division. I have nothing to admit but my folly in being misled or blinded by the programme of the Muslim League.

In my opinion, the League's performance in the years 1946-1947 has ensured that the Subcontinent will be in turmoil for a long time to come. Steve Coll, now the Managing Director of *Washington Post*, while he was a correspondent of the same newspaper, had written a book, *On the Grand Trunk Road*, wherein he gives the reader a multi-dimensional picture of the region's personalities and their actions, portraying the stupidities in

which the masses are trapped.

Please continue the great job you are doing.

Shamim A. Mirza
Jupiter, Florida

Vedic reaction

Regarding the letter by Mark Turin, "Don't pick your nose", concerning the contents of the "Bhraman Barsha" (Visit Nepal Year '98) leaflet (January 1998), I feel that there's nothing wrong in making suggestions to the people of Nepal, though I agree with Turin that Nepalis are more civilised in their behaviour towards foreigners, at least more than Indians are. During my four days there on a recent visit, as I went to different places, not once did a beggar or urchin accost me. This can hardly be said of Indian public places where even the locals are heckled by such people. So, kudos to Nepal. Since this was my second visit after the one in 1957, I would also like to mention that there has been a sea change for the better in living standards and other developmental aspects.

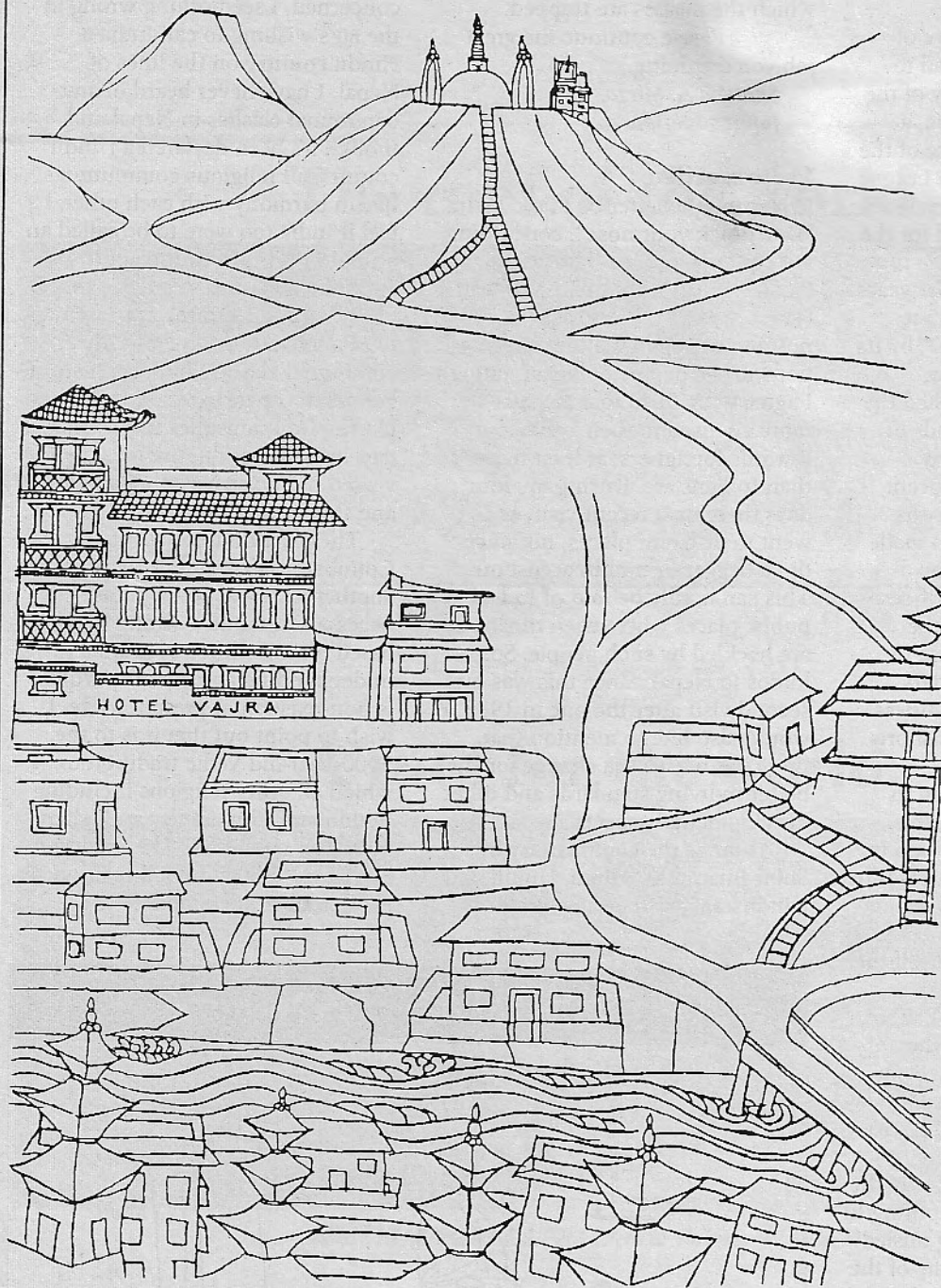
As far as the commentary by Subir Bhaumik, "Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan", in the same issue is

concerned, I see nothing wrong in the BJP's wishing to call India a Hindu country on the lines of Nepal. I have never heard of any communal clashes in Nepal and though it's been declared a Hindu country, all religious communities live in harmony with each other. I feel if India too were to be called an absolutely Hindu country, all communal clashes would disappear. But now, thanks to the appeasement of Muslims, there are not only communal clashes, but also disturbances in the form of loudspeakers blaring from mosques five times a day. In Kathmandu, the mosque I visited did not have a loudspeaker and things were peaceful.

The recent bombings in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu is another lesson as to why it is necessary to build a strong India based on the edifice of mutual understanding and equality which is non-existent at present. Here, I wish to point out that it is to the 5000-year-old Vedic tradition to which all other religions including Buddhism, Christianity and Islam owe their evolution. This tradition is a way of life and not a religion, as is often misunderstood. What is

KRISHNA'S CORNER





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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

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

John Collee
The London Observer



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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important for the survival of mankind is the evolution of a universal way of life like the Vedic tradition, with changes suitable to changing times. I am not alone in thinking thus. Thinkers like Bertrand Russell and Arnold Toynbee had stated categorically that in the future, the West has to look to India and the Vedic tradition.

S. Ramakrishnan
Calcutta

Mr Ramakrishnan may be sadly mistaken about the reality of and potential for communal clashes in Nepal. Editors.

Moving

The article "The visa war" by Salman Rashid (February 1998) was moving. I've read a lot of stories in Indian magazines about the plight of Indians who want to visit Pakistan to meet their relatives and see their ancestral towns, but I did not know that Pakistanis were treated similarly when they want to visit India. Rashid's story makes amply clear that it is not the people of Pakistan and India who are responsible for the sorry state of relations between the two countries, but the governments. I would like to extend my sympathies to Salman Rashid.

Ramesh Kumar
<Ramesh.Kadali@aolberta.ca>

Know your Kautilya

I was quite intrigued to read that Kautilya wrote "several important economic policy documents", as claimed by Jayanto Bandyopadhyay in the March 1998 issue of Himal. I only know of one book Kautilya wrote, *Arthashastra*. The term, as R.P. Kangle, translator and commentator of the work, states, "is understood as the science dealing with state affairs in the internal as well as the external sphere: in other words, it is the science of statecraft or of politics and administration." Thus, while *arthashastra* currently does mean economics, it did not



always carry this meaning. In any case, it would be of immense use to us South Asians if Bandyopadhyay would cite the economic policy documents Kautilya wrote.

As for the caption beneath the sketch of a fictional Kautilya which states that he is an economist, I am not sure whether this is the view of the writer or of the editorial board of Himal. Perhaps all of us should read *Arthashastra* again, if we have not read it already.

Rajendra Pradhan
Kathmandu

Jayanto Bandyopadhyay replies: *As the reference to Kautilya was not central to the article in question, rather than describe him as an author on the topic of "science dealing with affairs of the state", the phrase "economic policy" was used. Obviously, in an article on Kautilya himself, the detailed description asked for by Mr Pradhan would have been essential.*

Abominable

It does not bfit your magazine to print an offensive piece ("Abominably yours", March 1998) which, under the pretext of being a humorous article about Bill Clinton, denigrates Hinduism. The writer sounds like a pseudo-secular politico-religiously correct individual with a superficial knowledge of Hinduism. He seems intellectually servile, and used to worship-

ing at the altar of prejudicial Western notions of eastern doctrines, especially Hinduism. I wonder if he would have the courage to write such a diatribe against Islam or Christianity. It would be easy to refute his Westernised concepts regarding Dharma, Karma and Vedic scriptures, but for now I request that your magazine refrain from printing such inflammatory junk in future.

R. Dahal
<RDHAL@aol.com>

HIMAL

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Tsering Wangyal, Tibetan Review

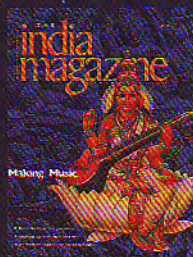
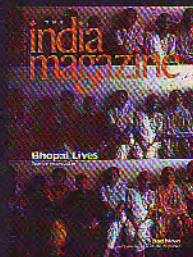
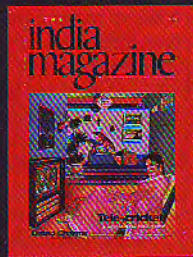
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A real dam in Pakistan

DAMS ARE NO stuff of fantasia. Between the charged debates for and against high dams (Himal, March 1998), they continue to be built and are sought to be built. A dam project, it seems, never can be wished or protested away; it may be discarded for months, even decades, until someone comes along and gives it the kiss of life. The arguments for such a revival form the building blocks of what is said to be the irrefutable pro-dam logic: quenching the water needs of present and future population, better irrigation facilities, more power, etcetera.

These arguments have now come in handy to the Pakistan government and some technocrats in justifying the proposed construction of the Kalabagh Dam on the Indus River, a project on the back burner since the 1960s. Suddenly this section, with some able support from the print media, is pushing the cause of Kalabagh and more dams as the saviours of a "water-starved" country, its agriculture and power. Suddenly, institution heads like Chaudhry Rashid Khan of Institution of Engineers Pakistan (IEP), have been hit by the

realisation that: "We cannot afford to live without the Kalabagh Dam now. It must be built as early as possible."

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, too, is convinced the dam is inevitable for his country.

Apparently buried now are the controversies that led to the shelving of the initial proposal for the dam three decades ago. Then, Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan provinces were not too keen about their water resources being used for

the benefit of the lands of Punjab. More importantly, the NWFP was concerned that the project would inundate some of its own areas. Now, Pakistan Muslim League legislators in the NWFP assembly are confident of pushing through a resolution paving the way for the construction of the dam, the completion of which is expected to take just under a decade. Here it is significant that the Kalabagh Dam has just been re-christened "Pakistan Dam", perhaps in a bid to highlight that political consensus has been reached.

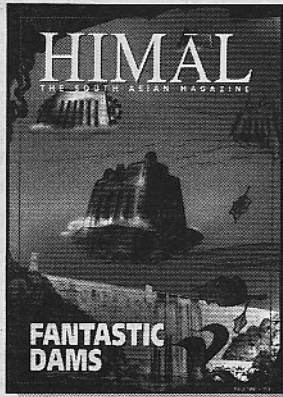
Political rhetoric may have us believe that the Kalabagh dam is the

only way to overcome Pakistan's water woes, but not the logic of sound economics, according to Syed Ayub Qutb, a prominent Pakistani agriculture economist. He believes that the dam would be one colossal wasteful exercise, a case of 360 billion rupees hoping to do what a mere 30 billion could easily achieve.

According to Qutb, the most optimistic estimates about the Kalabagh dam suggest that it would be able to store only six MAF (Million Acre Feet) of water in the summer (for use on the winter crops). The same volume, he says, can also be saved, and at 12 times less expense, if the country invests in the lining of its 100,000 water courses, and distributaries, leveling of land, and so on. The cost of saving one MAF by these methods would be around PKR 5 billion, making it 30 billion rupees for six MAF.

Undaunted by such heresy, the proponents of Kalabagh claim that all the spadework for the dam is complete. Which is certainly true, but true three decades ago. The World Bank says the feasibility reports are outdated, and would have to be redone, at a much higher cost. Meanwhile, more feasibility studies will have to be carried out now, now that legislators and government technocrats are convinced about the need for two other large dams on the Indus - Bhasha and Dosu.

Stuff of dangerous realism is what big dams are. △



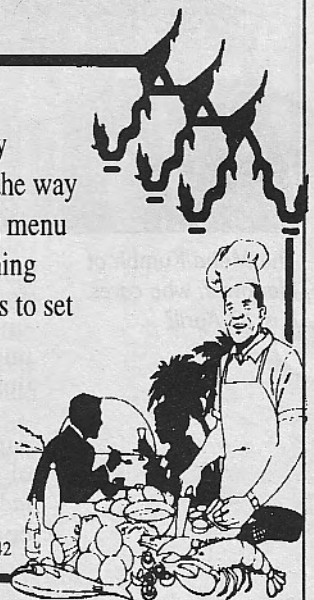
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SOUTH ASIA

HAPPY NEW YEARS

ON 13 APRIL, the holy northern Indian town of Haridwar saw a *Purna Maha Kumbh*, a gigantic religious *mela* of a crore devotees crowding to take a dip in the Ganga where it emerges into the plains. Now, this event is defined by the lunar calendar, and the gathering of the religious did not really care that it was in fact 13 April. However, the national Anglophile press of India insisted on calling it "the century's last Maha Kumbh".

This mixing of calendric apples and oranges is symptomatic of the English-speaking upper class schizophrenia when it comes to identity and interests. And it pushes us once again in these columns to insist that the distinction between the local calendars of the Subcontinent and those of the Gregorian era be maintained. While we have no wish to question the unassailable position the latter calendar has secured in our lives, we only wish to alert the English-speakers amongst us not to assume that the billion-plus South Asians are going into any swoon over the upcoming transition from 1999 to 2000. This is someone else's millennium, by and large, and let us not get carried away by the hype that will doubtless get more intolerable as the months roll on.

Indeed, the middle of April saw a new year arrive in various parts of South Asia – as Baisakh in Nepal, as Boisakh in Bangla regions, and as Vishu in Kerala. Likewise, Punjab, Andhra and many other parts of South Asia marked a new turn of the calendar, albeit in different *sambats*, or eras.

New Year's is not even a transition that need necessarily be greeted with glee, as has been the fashion that has gained ground even with vernacular turn-of-year events. The "happy new year" greeting has been forcing all of us to paste a smile on our faces. New Year's eve parties, as imported from the Gregorian/Western tradition, are flourishing all over.

Rather than make-believe glee, marked with the setting off of firecrackers, hanging of coloured light-strings, and offering of *laddoos* all around, the year's transition should be a moment for pragmatic contemplation. Let

us relegate loudness to 1 January, and enjoy the other new years more sedately.

The only people who truly and wholeheartedly enjoy multiple new year eves during one calendar year are the marketing executives at the daily newspapers. One Kathmandu newspaper, for example, revels through four new year events, each with a great fallout of celebratory advertisements: Lhosar (the Tibetan calendar); Vikram Sambat (the officially adopted Nepali calendar); Nepal Sambat (the new year celebrated primarily by the Newar community of Kathmandu Valley); and, of course, the New Year of 1 January.

Some of us would prefer to sleep through it all. △

INDIA

BY GEORGE!

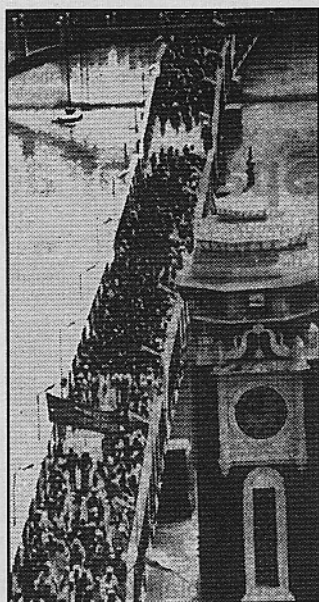
SURPRISE IS WHAT George Fernandes is all about. The maverick socialist, with several causes to uphold, was expected to remain outside the Bharatiya Janata party-led coalition ministry when Atal Behari Vajpayee was busy forming a government out of the chaos created by a fractured mandate. Suddenly, Fernandes decided to give government another try.

Vajpayee was hard put to find a "suitable berth" for the man who, as industry minister in the first Janata government (in which they were cabinet colleagues), threw Coca Cola out of India in 1978. And could have been a trifle worried too. But while the two stormy ladies, Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu and Mamata Banerjee of Bengal stayed out of the government, George Fernandes became India's defence minister. And within a week, he had created a major controversy.

On a tour of the northeast states of India immediately after taking charge, Fernandes told the BBC that China was a much greater threat to India than Pakistan. Many, like India's leading columnist Inder Malhotra, supported Fernandes for "calling a spade a spade". Others, for whom Pakistan is cause for paranoia, were critical. And this included leaders of the BJP, with whom Fernandes' Samata party is allied.

But Fernandes was far from finished.

Within a few days, he was back at China-bashing, this time alleging that the Chinese had illegally constructed a helipad in Indian territory, in the frontier state of



The Maha Kumbh at Haridwar: who cares it is 13 April?

Arunachal Pradesh. This time, Beijing's response was furious. Vajpayee buckled under pressure, called Fernandes over and asked him "not to provoke the Chinese". Pakistan's response was interesting. Gohar Ayub Khan, the foreign minister said that whatever Fernandes might have said, India was in no position to take on China and that all her military efforts were, in reality, focused on Pakistan. Whatever the truth of the matter, Fernandes has managed to trigger off a fresh debate on "threat identification" in India's defence establishment.

Apart from China, Fernandes is bound to upset Burma's ruling military junta as well. His official residence in New Delhi – 3, Krishna Menon Marg – remains the India office of the All Burma Federation of Students Union, which spearheaded the pro-democracy upsurge in Burma during 1987-88 before a fresh coup snuffed out the movement. Burmese diplomats in India have said they were upset that the BJP government could not find anyone other than Fernandes to be the defence minister. They say his "anti-Yangon bias will definitely affect relations between India and Burma."

After taking over as minister, Fernandes has also stirred a hornet's nest within the defence establishment – he wants to withdraw the army from counter-insurgency operations and train it for meeting the external threat. He wants the Armed Forces Special Powers Act withdrawn to project a more humane face for India's over-stretched, over-worked army and to restore the democratic process in areas the army has been out of too long.

Why did a man as desperate as Vajpayee to avoid controversies, to keep the neighbours including China happy, and to keep foreign investments flowing, give such a high-profile ministry to Fernandes? Here is a man, after all, attached to his very non-mainstream causes – besides bringing democracy to Burma and Bhutan and keeping multinationals out of India (he might actually be a bigger proponent of *swadeshi* than the BJP, which has espoused it as its policy), he is also for freedom for Tibet and espouses several other causes. Obviously, it was the incredible compulsions of coalition politics which forced the BJP to accept Fernandes in the cabinet. They just had no choice.

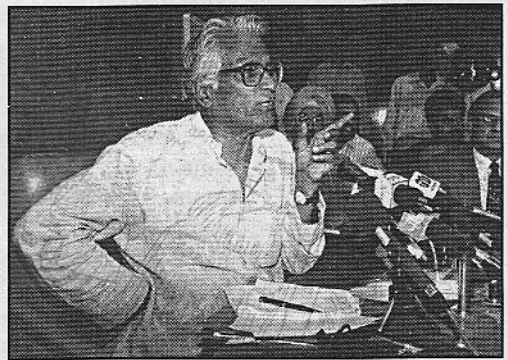
Fernandes's Samata Party is one of the many parties without whose support the BJP government will collapse. It is also powerful in Bihar, a state where the BJP wants to increase its influence and wrest political control from the hands of Laloo Prasad Yadav. Since Yadav now supports the Congress, BJP's major chal-

lenger at the Centre, it is all the more important for the BJP to build its base in Bihar.

Fernandes also has interesting connections in the Indian North-east, and the BJP wants to utilise these to bring some of the region's separatist groups to the table for negotiations. Fernandes is already in touch with the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland; during his sojourn in Guwahati, Assam's capital, he is reported to have spoken to the Bodo rebel chief, Ranjan Daimary. That may be another reason why Vajpayee will keep Fernandes in his team: to secure a breakthrough in the Northeast.

But Vajpayee knows better than anyone else that to do any kind of mainstream politics, Fernandes will have to be kept under control. Most previous coalition ministries, in which Fernandes served as minister, realised his worth in pushing things through, but feared his potential for controversies. Vajpayee's feelings about his maverick ally are likely to be no different.

-Subir Bhaumik



SRI LANKA

AGE OF AQUARIUS

WHEN SATURN MOVED to the house of Aries after 30 years at 1.27 pm on 17 April 1998, some politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties in Sri Lanka went off abroad hoping to escape the malefic influences. Some newspapers regarded as 'hostile' by the ruling People's Alliance had a field day reporting astrologers who said that the next few months were going to be particularly bad for those born under Aquarius. Those newspapers took pleasure presenting a doomsday scenario and naming the ministers who had flown off.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga made haste to tell her party MPs that the April planetary changes were actually good for her personally as well as for the government. When

The failure of the government to keep its election promises will force voters to think beyond established parties.

a newspaper claimed that she was in Europe as the celestial changes were occurring, the state-owned television channel moved swiftly to reassure the public that she was very much in Colombo and attending to her duties. The same telecast presented a favourable forecast for the country following the planetary changes featuring an astrologer who used the opportunity for some free advertising: "Ordinary readings Rs. 50," said the sign in front of him. "Special reading Rs. 250."

While the mainline politicians of the People's Alliance and the opposition United National Party were thus indulging in "planetary politics" and sizing up each other's chances at the August provincial council elections, a third force that twice attempted to overthrow Sri Lanka's elected governments by armed insurrection was organising to mount a bid for power at the next general election due at the turn of the century.

The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP, People's Liberation Front) was getting ready to stage a big May Day show in Colombo. The party has protested obstacles put forth by the police for the demonstration and believes that the government is planning a crackdown on them. The JVP vehemently opposes the devolution package with which the People's Alliance hopes to end the civil war that has hled Sri Lanka white during the last 15 years.

According to Tilvin de Silva, the JVP's general secretary, the government is using the state media to prepare the ground for the crackdown. He insists that the party's militant past is now behind it and that they were now very much in the democratic mainstream (see HIMAL, "Sri Lanka's South Still Smoulders", May 1996). The JVP takes credit for 'educating' the people about the ill-effects of the devolution package and says that the government, sensing the JVP's role in creating the growing opposition, is seeking to terrorise its activists.

Sri Lankans well remember 1988-89 when the JVP's military wing nearly pushed the country over the brink into anarchy. The security forces, whose family members had been threatened by the JVP, cracked down brutally on the rebels under orders of the UNP government of President Ranasinghe Premadasa. Thousands were killed and bodies floating down rivers and so-called "tyre pyres" on the roadside were the order of the day. The JVP leadership was liquidated and normalcy restored at a heavy price on life and limb. The methods used were undoubtedly extra-legal but were claimed to be necessary given the circumstances.

There is no escaping the reality that many

sheep died with the goats. Private grudges were paid off under cover of the insurgency, with politicians and others exploiting the forces' willingness to bump off anybody branded JVP. With the change of government in 1994, various commissions of inquiry have probed disappearances and excesses by the forces. There has also been a lot of witch-hunting, all of which means that the security forces will be far less willing to act the way they did during the height of the JVP's second adventure.

Today, few remember that when the JVP launched its first insurrection in 1971, the government of the day comprised the present constituents of the People's Alliance. Then, too, there was a harsh crackdown and similar extra-legal killings. The difference was that the 1971 insurrection was smaller than the attempted putsch of 1988-89, and required less state terror. Many analysts believe that the scale of Sirimavo Bandaranaike's rout in 1977 was partly due to the JVP's determination to see her Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and its left allies roundly defeated to settle the score of 1971.

There is no doubt that both the United National Party and the People's Alliance have a solid block of support each. "It's like money in the bank," said one analyst. "Whatever the issues, the two sides have their committed core of supporters who will always vote for them." But the floating vote that both sides woo is now increasingly turning to the JVP which, regardless of its present professions, has a history of armed insurrection. With the number of military deserters in the country, and the increase in crime attributed to them, along with the support that the JVP had always shown itself capable of mustering in the universities, the established parties must recognise the re-emergence of a monster.

The economic policies of the People's Alliance are no different from those of the United National Party. This is why the failure of the government, whether PA or UNP, to keep their election promises will force increasing numbers of voters to think beyond the established parties. If the JVP welsches again on its promise of working within the democratic structures, Sri Lanka will be hard pressed to fight both the Tamil Tigers in the north and a Sinhala insurgency in the south.

The last time around, the Indian army was brought in to fight the Tigers and the JVP jumped onto the SLFP bandwagon to oppose the UNP government on that score. Soon it had escalated its protest into a full-scale insurgency that frightened all established political parties in the country, both in government and

opposition. Some Tamils too are now reported to be joining the JVP, which claims to be non-racist. Even though it might not win an election, the party is now showing its ability to command significant support. Its showing at the August provincial council elections will be keenly watched to spot its place in the political constellation.

NEPAL

CONSTITUTIONAL ICEBERG

NOT ALL, BUT some of the problems of the nascent Nepali democracy seem directly linked to the Constitution which was drafted over the course of 1990 under the aegis of three mutually suspicious forces – the royal palace, the Nepali Congress and the Communists. Promulgated hurriedly in November of that year, the flaws in the master document have become more glaring over the years as day by day the country suffers from the antics of unaccountable politicians. These new rulers are, of course, amply supported by an intimidated hureaucracy, an undemanding academia and a politicised bar.

Jurist Shambhu Prasad Gyawali, who has been Nepal's longest serving Attorney General from 1959 to 1970, observes that Nepal's polity is in a state of "functional anarchy". This is so because constitutional organs have been hamstrung by structural defects in the Constitution that leave these bodies unaccountable. Gyawali suggests that many gaps and omissions, which have become obvious in the last seven years of its application, should be rectified through suitable amendments that do not leave room for contradiction between Acts passed and the Constitution. At the current stage of evolution of democratic culture in Nepal, it is unrealistic to expect politicians to discipline themselves; and this is the reason why some amount of constitutional engineering is in order. Here are some of Gyawali's suggestions.

* The Nepali judiciary has emerged as one of the weakest entities under the 1990 Constitution, ample judicial powers notwithstanding. This has happened particularly because the Chief Justice has been left with very little powers for the administration of justice. His position is today completely beholden to the Justice Council, a motley group made up of three judges, a politi-

cian and a lawyer. Today, the Chief Justice of Nepal is unable even to ensure discipline among junior colleagues, much less direct an important wing for the functioning of democracy.

* That the role of the constitutional monarchy has not been clearly defined under the Constitution has often been cause for friction between the prime minster and the king. On the one hand, the executive power of the government has been unnecessarily divided among the king, the cabinet and the several ineffectual constitutional organs. Ideally, all executive actions of the government should be the responsibility of the prime minister, with the king acting only on advice. On the other hand, the king's ability to provide suggestions to the cabinet is not sufficiently defined, which has kept King Birendra away from independently providing counsel on occasions when it might have been useful.



* The Constitution of 1990 has not provided for local self-government, and this lacuna has to be filled. Until such time, politicians and ministers will only mouth platitudes about decentralisation without doing anything about it.

* The Constitution should limit the number of members in the cabinet, pegging it to around 15 ministers and 10 junior ministers. The option of allowing unlimited expansion, which on one occasion resulted in 48 MPs flying flags, creates a situation in which selfish expectations are heightened.

* To stop the 'criminalisation' of national poli-

tics, the Constitution itself should bar from Parliament a person who has a criminal case pending or has been convicted in such a case. This would immediately raise the moral quotient of the government and parliament, as a few, but extremely troublesome, criminal elements have exercised great mischief-making power.

- * There is presently no compatibility between the Constitution and the law dealing with defection from political parties. While the Constitution's understanding is that defection involves a written resignation or some other such obvious indication of withdrawal, the law seeks also to penalise for defection an MP who goes against his/her party's whip and is absent during a halloot or does not vote in the case of a division in Parliament. This leads to a contradiction that, if challenged successfully in court by such MPs, may prevent political parties from maintaining discipline among members and ideological consistency.
- * The Constitution stipulates that the matter of perks and privileges for ministers

and MPs is to be laid down by an Act of Parliament. But the practice has developed to confer more privileges by fiats of government. It seems important that the Constitution should furthermore now specify that any violation of the concerned Act would result in the loss of the guilty party's official position. This is necessitated so that the politicians do not get carried away (as they have), act illegally, and force great losses on the national exchequer.

The Constitution is not an end in itself: it is but the means towards providing a country with a polity which will deliver social and economic well-being to its citizens. No national charter is sacrosanct, and if it has problems it has to be altered. The period of experimentation with the 1990 Constitution is over, and as it is unlikely that the legislature, or the judiciary of Nepal, is going to take the initiative, it devolves upon lawyers, scholars and journalists to start building up public opinion for such change.

As jurist Gyawali notes, "If corrective action is not taken, there is an accident waiting to happen to the Nepali ship of state."

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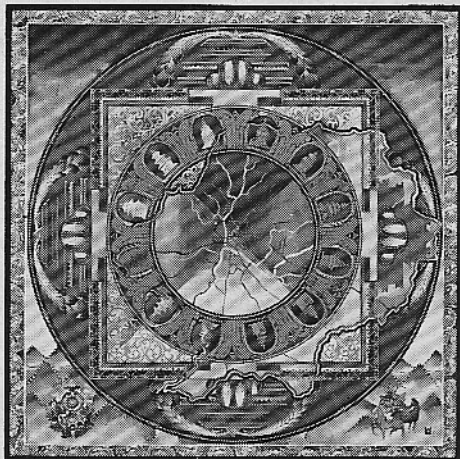
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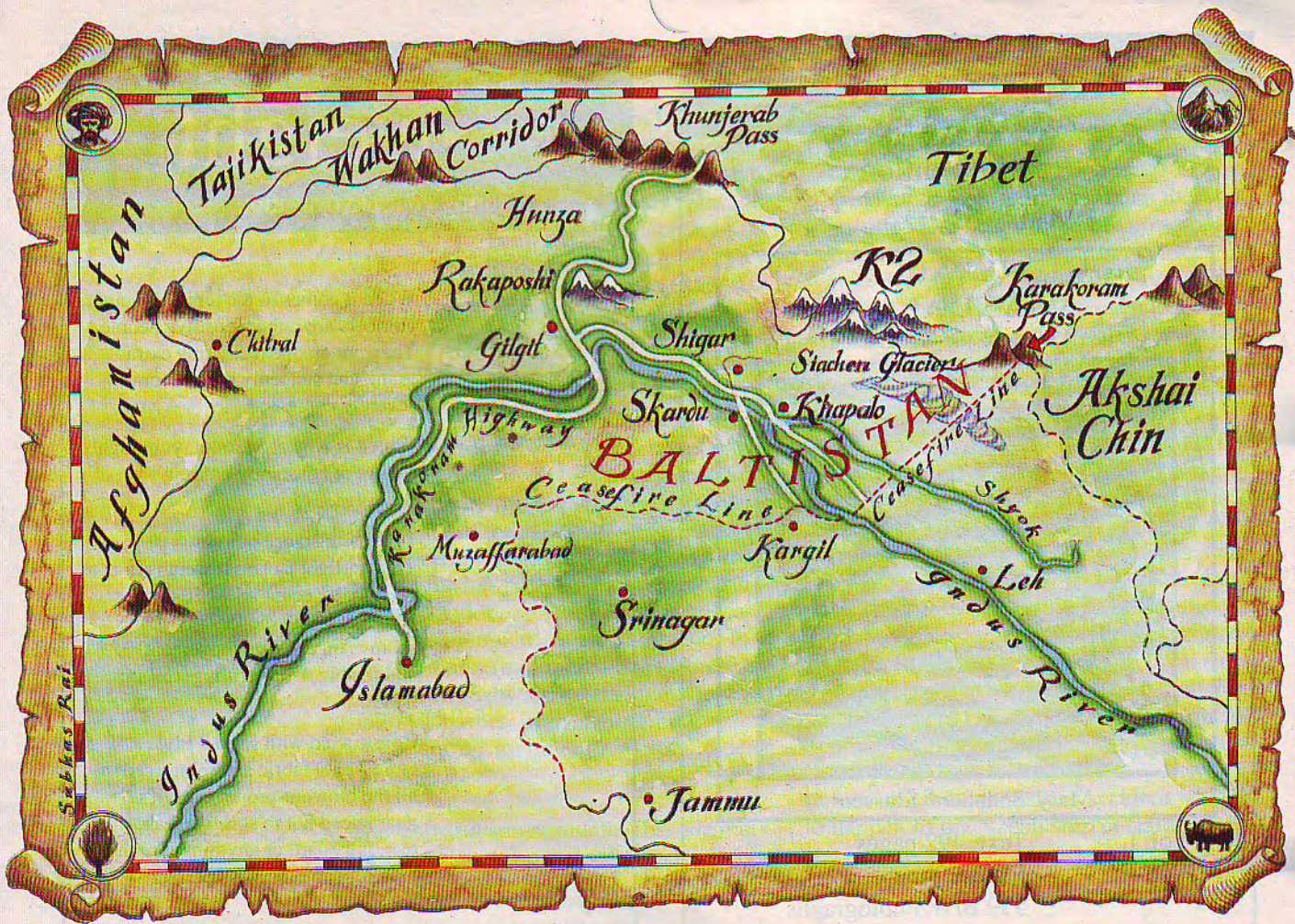
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BULTI or BULTISTAN – a small state north of Kashmir, and bearing the name of Little Tibet, by which prefix it is distinguished from Middle Tibet or Ladakh, and Great Tibet or Southern Tartary. – A Gazetteer of the Countries Adjacent to India on the North-West, including Sindh, Afghanistan, Beloochistan, the Punjab and Neighbouring States (E. Thornton, 1844).

LITTLE TIBET

RENAISSANCE AND RESISTANCE IN BALTISTAN

While the forces of globalisation may be Westernising other Himalayan tourist hubs like Kathmandu, Leh and Dharamsala, they are helping to shape a new identity in Baltistan.

by Tarik Ali Khan

The cold winter nights in the Karakorum are warmed by Radio Pakistan's Skardu broadcast of the life story of Ali Sher Khan Anchan. At a time of growing sectarian and political divisions, the 17th-century Balti king is one figure everyone shares a love for. Other heroes include Hazrat Ali (the son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad) and the legendary Tibetan folk icon, Gesar of Ling, the latter although Baltistan's traditional links with the Tibetan plateau have been severed for the past 50 years.

But despite being on the margins of the Pakistani nation state, the pace of cultural change in what the Mughals once called Tibet-i-Khurd (Little Tibet) is quickening. In recent decades, Balti identity has been re-shaped by ties with the Iranian Revolution and Pakistan's Punjabi-dominated culture. But as the new generation enters the information age, in Baltistan's de facto capital, Skardu, more and more Baltis are dreaming of the day when the ceasefire lines will no longer separate them from their Himalayan kin in Ladakh and Tibet.

The agrarian communities that inhabit the valleys of the Indus, the Shyok, and their tributaries, have cultural affinities that stretch from Lhasa to Tehran. Linguists say that Balti may be one of the most archaic forms of spoken Tibetan. Its closest relatives are Purig (spoken across the ceasefire line in Kargil), Ladakhi and the Amdo dialect of Eastern Tibet. Over the centuries, Balti has become mixed with Persian, Urdu and Arabic, for here in the arid valleys of the Karakorum lie the historic junction of the Buddhist and Islamic worlds. Since 1948, the region has been under Pakistani control, and is now part of its federally administered Northern Areas, a region yearning for recognition and political rights (see story on page 28).

On Pakistan's periphery

Although it had been under [titular] Tibetan, and later Ladakhi rule, the five main valleys of Baltistan (Skardu, Shigar, Rongdu, Khapalu and Kharmang) were more often principalities left to the rule of *maqpons*, or 'dukes'. Baltis are proud of Ali Sher Khan Anchan (1590-1625) of the Maqpon dynasty as the king who unified Baltistan and briefly expanded its frontiers up to Ladakh and Western Tibet in the east, and Chitral in the west.

In 1840, Baltistan was annexed by the Dogras of Jammu as part of their conquest of Kashmir. Their rule is chiefly remembered for its exploitation, with Balti villages forced to pay tribute to masters in Srinagar in the form of forced labour (*begar*) and heavy taxes. Af-

ter the British conquered Punjab, they allowed the Dogras to keep nominal control over Baltistan under the 1846 Treaty of Amritsar, but maintained a watchful eye on the Maharaja's domains. Imperial Russia was expanding its Central Asian frontiers, and nearby Leh and Gilgit had become key listening posts in the 'Great Game'.

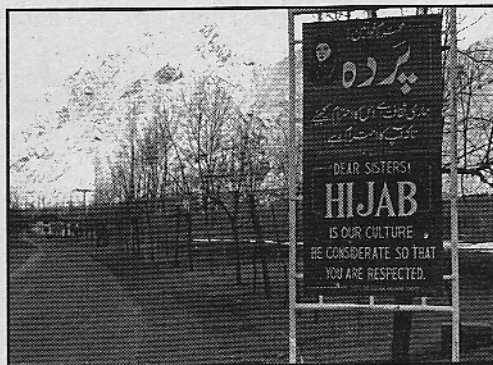
Baltistan's traditional cultural and trade arteries to Ladakh, Kashmir and Yarkand were severed by the 1948 war between India and Pakistan. The 1949 UN Ceasefire Line, which is regularly rocked by cross-border shelling, erected a solid barrier to what was once a most natural trade route.

Isolation, the ceasefire line, and the subsequent wars between Pakistan and India (1965 and 1971) have ensured Baltistan's absorption into the Pakistani nation state. Regular Boeing 737 flights and the completion of an all-weather highway connecting Baltistan to the Karakorum Highway have made integration into Pakistan more of a reality both economically and politically. Out-migration by Balti men due to the region's high birth rate and small land-holdings are also contributing to the integration.

Baltistan has seen some development projects in recent years, but most locals believe that these have been provided more due to the region's strategic importance than because of Islamabad's concern for the welfare of Baltis. But for the ongoing conflict with India on the Siachen Glacier, they believe there would be minimal infrastructure. It is also a fact that the presence of the Pakistan army in Baltistan provides a major boost to the local economy, particularly in winter when trekkers and tourists are scarce. Indeed, the army, and particularly the Northern Light Infantry (a successor to the British-raised Gilgit Scouts), is the largest employer in Baltistan.

Political bind

Pakistan's Golden Jubilee celebrations on 14 August, 1997 were met with indifference by the 400,000 residents of Balti-yul (yul = 'land')



TAMIR A. KHAN

Skardu bazaar signboard urges visitors to comply with Islamic code.

Skardu Valley in winter.



TARIK A. KHAN

in Tibetan). A week later, the Baltistan Students Federation (BSF) organised a 'black day' to highlight the fact that Baltis are still denied basic rights such as voting in national elections and the ability to approach a higher court.

The Baltis' disillusionment with Pakistan lies in the 1947 uprising which overthrew the Dogra rulers of Jammu and Kashmir. Since the mid-1800s the Dogras had also exercised nominal suzerainty over neighbouring Gilgit. The British, keen to protect their frontier from Russian expansion, formed the Gilgit Scouts as a local paramilitary force, trained a group of young men from the region's feudal families as Viceroy's Commissioned Officers (VCOs), and placed a British Political Agent in Gilgit.

When the British left India, they handed control of Gilgit over to the (Hindu) Maharaja of Kashmir two weeks before the partitioning of the Subcontinent. The Muslim majority of Gilgit favoured joining Pakistan, and when it became known that the Maha-

raja of Kashmir had declared accession to India, Gilgit saw an insurrection on 1 November 1947. The Dogra governor was imprisoned, and the Gilgit Scouts, together with a Muslim company of the State Troops, took over the local garrison. A provisional local government was established in Gilgit under the presidency of Raja Shah Rais Khan, a member of a former local ruling dynasty.

Before the insurrection, the officers of the Scouts had asked for assistance from Pakistan's ailing founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who had expressed his inability to help due to the pressing problems faced by his new government. However, the insurrectionists were determined to join Pakistan, and, two weeks later, a Pakistani representative flew in and took over as Political Agent for Pakistan. Serious differences emerged immediately between the Political Agent and the local leaders since the Agent stripped the latter of all power, and it was only after they backed down that Agent withdrew his threat to return to Karachi.

The fighting was on, and the local troops, hastily enforced, continued their advance. Soon the fighters reached Skardu where they found the local populace eager to force the Dogras out. Balti irregulars armed with matchlock rifles helped lay siege to the Dogra soldiers in the Skardu Cantonment. Others were trained as guerillas and sent ahead to capture Ladakh. Despite having little by way of rations, they fought through the winter of 1948, seizing Kargil, Dras and the strategic Zoji-la Pass. One group reached within 16 kilometres of Leh before being pushed back by India's better-equipped forces. Another occupied Padum in Zangskar for six months after the ceasefire of 1949, unaware that a truce had been signed between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan's chunk of the erstwhile

Dogra domain of J&K. Shaded area shows "Azad J&K".



Maharaja's domains which are not technically termed "Jammu and Kashmir" include Baltistan and Gilgit. In 1949, the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Government officially delegated powers to Islamabad to control both regions through the Pakistani Political Agent. Baltistan and Gilgit were then governed under the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR). The arrangement was remarkably similar to the one that existed in colonial times, with the local *rajas* and *miris* allowed to maintain their power and continue to tax their subjects. Little had changed.

Until, that is, the 1970s when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the only Pakistani politician who is regarded well in Baltistan, abolished the FCR and ended the oppressive system of land revenue. By then, the entity known as the 'Northern Areas' had come into being, comprising of Baltistan's two districts, Skardu and Ganche, as well as Gilgit, Ghizar and Diamar. But despite Bhutto's reforms, there has been little commitment to resolve the political bind that the people of the Northern Areas find themselves in. Administratively, they are ruled by the federal government while constitutionally they are attached to Azad J&K.

Shia writ

The completion of the Karakorum Highway to China/Tibet in 1978 brought rapid change to the once-isolated Northern Areas. NGOs such as the Aga Khan Foundation have transformed it into a busy nest of development activity (see page 21), and the region has emerged as Pakistan's chief destination for tourists and trekkers.

But unlike other trekking regions in the Himalaya, Baltistan is not characterised by tourist ghettos, Bob Marley blaring out of cafes, or leather-jacketed local youth trying to pick up Western women. The graffiti and billboards in Skardu make it clear that Western influence is regarded with suspicion.

The Shias, who represent roughly 60 percent of the population, turn to Iran for education and guidance. Shia imams also offer formidable resistance to the forces of cultural change sweeping South Asia. There are no movie theatres in Skardu, satellite dishes are frowned upon, and even the all-pervasive video shops are scarce.

Skardu's Urdu graffiti extols the virtues of prayer and Qur'anic study, with the occasional anti-US slogan thrown in. There are numerous reminders to visitors to keep their bodies covered. A recent poster called for a day of mourning to mark the 1967 Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, Islam's third holiest city. As in so many other parts of Pakistan, a growing



Gilgit town centre with Sunni mosque.

An arranged marriage

WITH THE CAPITAL of the Northern Areas situated in Gilgit, and Baltistan's increasing economic reliance on the Karakorum Highway, Baltis now find their fate inseparably tied to that of their neighbours in Gilgit. This is a change from earlier times when Baltis traded exclusively with Yarkand, Ladakh and even Tibet's Changthang plateau. For, although Baltistan had controlled Gilgit in the mid-1600s, travel in that direction was avoided for fear of the hostile Kohistani tribes.

This modern-day union between Gilgit and Baltistan is not, however, a natural one. Compared to other districts in the Northern Areas, Baltistan is relatively homogeneous. The other districts have an almost equal mix of the Sunni, Shia and Ismaili sects, and a variety of languages such as Shina, Burushaski, Gojali and Khovar are spoken. The sects and ethnic groups have been forced into co-existence in Gilgit town. In contrast, Baltistan's lingua franca is Balti, and Skardu's predominant Shia culture is obvious to any visitor.

Historically, Baltistan's settled communities contrasted with the pastoralists of Gilgit, who maintained a strong pagan tradition until their conversion to Islam. The Baltis' term for the Shins of Gilgit is *brokpa* (highlanders), as nomadic Shina speakers have inhabited the high pastures of Baltistan for centuries. It is believed the Shin were brought as captives by Ali Sher Khan Anchan to protect their high passes from outside attack. Over time, the term *brokpa* became synonymous with 'uncivilised'.

On the other hand, Gilgitis themselves find the Baltis a strange breed: poor, untrustworthy, resistant to change. To prove their point Gilgitis emphasise the low literacy levels in Baltistan – 35 percent for males and 3 percent for females, in contrast to much higher levels in other areas of the Northern Areas.

-T.A. Khan

Bone of contention: the Khapalu chaqchan.
(below) Shia imambargah.

Sufi revival

BALTISTAN IS ROUGHLY 60 percent Shia, 30 percent Nurbakshi Sufi and 10 percent Sunni. But this is a recent division. Much like the syncretic versions of Hinduism and Buddhism in the hills of Nepal, Baltistan's Islamic heritage reveals a close relationship between Shia and Sufi practice. Both trace their origins to the Persian sage Amir Kabir Syed Ali Hamdani. Hamdani is believed to have visited Srinagar in 1374 and introduced Sufism to Kashmir and neighbouring Baltistan. His *khanqah*, or retreat centre, is said to be the oldest standing Islamic shrine in the Srinagar Valley.

The Nurbakshis take their name from one of Hamdani's successors, Syed Mohammad Nur Baksh (1393-1465), a Sufi revolutionary who was tried and exiled from Persia a number of times for preaching the Sufi way. But by the 16th century, a unique Shia-Sufi synthesis had taken place through the political and military rule of the Safavid dynasty. The Nurbakshis of Baltistan are a remnant of this synthesis, their traditions preserved by the isolation of the Karakorum.

While historians doubt whether Hamdani or Nur Baksh ever visited Baltistan, they agree that one Sufi practitioner, Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi (d. 1526), was likely the first to successfully propagate the faith in Shigar, Keris and Khapalu in the late 1400s. By the end of the



TARIK A. KHAN

17th century, all of Baltistan had accepted Islam. The Nurbakshi version, with its emphasis on tolerance, divine love, and union with Allah, seemed to supplant Tibetan Buddhism with relative ease.

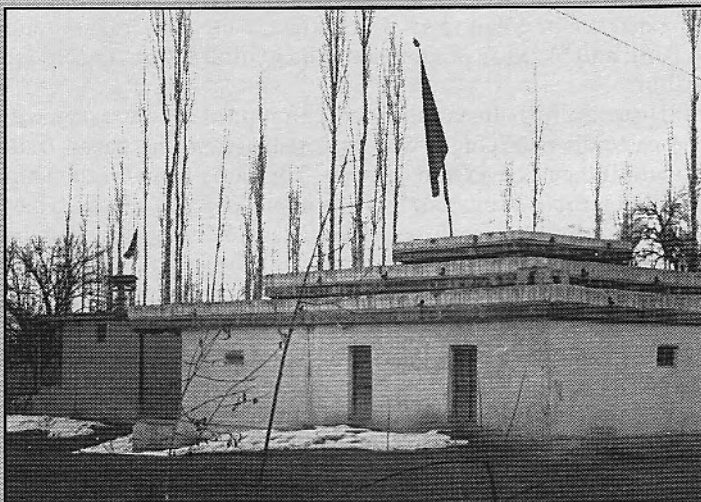
Syed Ali, a Nurbakshi leader, explains that conversion was never forced. "When the Sufis built the *chaqchan*, our oldest shrine in Khapalu, it was on top of a Buddhist temple. The departing lama asked us to protect the holiness of the shrine by not destroying the Buddha statues. So we are told they were buried intact under the shrine, and one Buddha was placed inside the *mihrab* which we still pray towards."

By the 17th century, Baltistan had become a haven for Persian Shia clerics seeking refuge from Mughal persecution. With their base in Skardu and Shigar, they discouraged Sufi meditation, song and dance, and encouraged a more rigid purdah system. The Shia claim the Nurbakshi as their own, contending that Sufi orders are not sects but rather contemplative practice lineages that exist within both the Sunni and Shia sects. The Nurbakshi are quick to reject this assertion though, and talk of forcible conversion by the Shia over the centuries.

Even with the spread of mainstream Shia practice, the two groups for the most part have co-existed peacefully. But, in 1986, sectarian violence erupted over the issue of control of the Khapalu chaqchan. Since then, Nurbakshi tolerance has been wearing thin. In Khapalu, where the Nurbakshis constitute 90 percent of the population, there has been a strengthening of Sufi customs such as *etikaaf* (meditation) retreats, and song and poetry recitals (*mehfils*). Nurbakshi leaders estimate that over a 1000 of their youth participated in the intensive *etikaaf* retreats last year.

"Until recently we had been very lax about our tradition. The recent troubles have made us redicover who we are," says Syed Ali. Under pressure to define their uniqueness, meditation is once again becoming the hallmark of the Nurbakshi identity in Baltistan. ▽

-T.A. Khan



TARIK A. KHAN

population of educated unemployed youth is fuelling the transformation of Balti culture via religious politics.

Bolstered by the success of the Iranian Revolution, the imams have become active politically and are represented by the Tehrik-i-Jaffaria Pakistan (TJP), a party which promotes Shia interests. Although Balti loyalty once rested with the Pakistan People's Party, in appreciation of Bhutto's willingness to abolish feudal power, the TJP emerged as a significant force in the 1994 National Assembly Council elections. They now hold four of Baltistan's nine Council seats (the other five are held by the PPP and independents) and are a force to be reckoned with in Skardu and Shigar.

Rinchen to Sadrudin

The hold of Islam on Balti consciousness cannot be doubted. But there is also another identity that Baltis cling to – the pre-Islamic one that looks to Tibet and Ladakh.

European historians claim that the original inhabitants of Western Tibet, Ladakh and Baltistan were the so-called Aryan 'Dards', and have suggested that Bolor (the name for Gilgit and Baltistan) was once a centre of Bon shamanism, the indigenous religion of the High Himalaya.



STELLA SNEAD

Buddhism came into Baltistan with the advent of the Mons, an Indo-Aryan tribe which arrived with Buddhist missionaries in the second century. (Mons today are "low-caste" musicians and carpenters.) Later, as the Indus Valley began to feature as an important artery of the 'silk route', Baltistan served as the conduit for the diffusion of Mahayana Buddhism from India into Central Asia and China.

The spread of Islam in the area can be traced to rGyalbu Rinchen (or Rinchana Bhoti), a Tibetan prince who ruled Kashmir from 1319-1323. Inspired by the example of a Muslim sage, Bulbul Shah, Rinchen converted to Islam and changed his name to Sadrudin. By the late 1300s, Sufi preachers had begun to arrive from Persia, ushering in

the Islamic era in Kashmir and Baltistan (see box opposite).

But despite the Islamicisation of Baltistan, intermarriages between the royal families of Ladakh and Baltistan were common. Buddhist kings took Muslim wives and raised some of their sons as Muslims. Even Baltistan's legendary Ali Sher Khan Anchan is said to have given his daughter Gul Khatoon (aka Mindoq rGyalmo) to the Ladakhi King Jamyang Namgyal (r.1560-1590).

Arrangements between the two religions may have been flexible; official records are not so accepting. Ladakhi songs in praise of its royal lineage are careful to omit the names of princes who converted to Islam. A.H. Francke, a Moravian missionary writing in 1907, speculated that, in turn, the maqpons of Baltistan may have fabricated their pedigrees with more Muslim names in a firm attempt to erase pre-Islamic history.

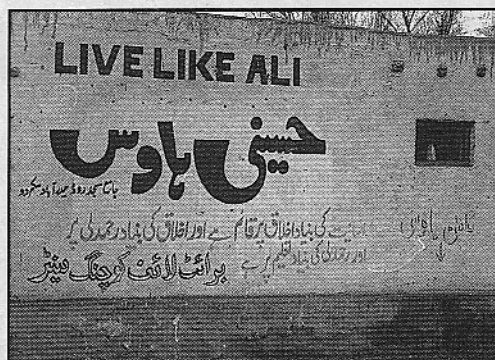
Reclaiming the Tibetan

Things are changing though. There are Baltis who lament the loss of pre-Islamic cultural practices, which have disappeared under pressure from the imams. Meanwhile, wedding rituals have become more 'Pakistani'. Traditional dancing and pre-Islamic Balti festivals such as *Me-phang* (literally 'throwing fire') have almost disappeared.

A small liberal set, which includes local scholars and a growing section of educated youth, are now making attempts to re-establish links with all things Tibetan or Ladakhi in a last-ditch attempt to save their culture from total Iran-style Islamicisation. Besides, they claim, culture is more than a question of being Islamic and non-Islamic.

One man involved in the renaissance is Syed Abbas Kazmi. As part of his dedicated efforts to save Baltistan's heritage from extinction, he prefers to eat out of a *photoh*, a traditional wooden bowl that today one only finds in Skardu's antique shops. Kazmi has erected a barbed wire fence around Skardu's ancient Buddha carvings to protect it from vandals and has plans to excavate monastery ruins above Shigar.

The real threat, says Kazmi, is Pakistan's dominant Punjabi culture. "We have lost our link with the past. To wear our traditional woollen clothes, or even to speak Balti is con-



TANIK A KHAN

Skardu graffiti exhorts Shia faithful.

Balti villagers carry goatskin raft to cross the Shyok.

Syed Abbas Kazmi. His barbed wire fence protects the Satpara Buddha engravings near Skardu (below).

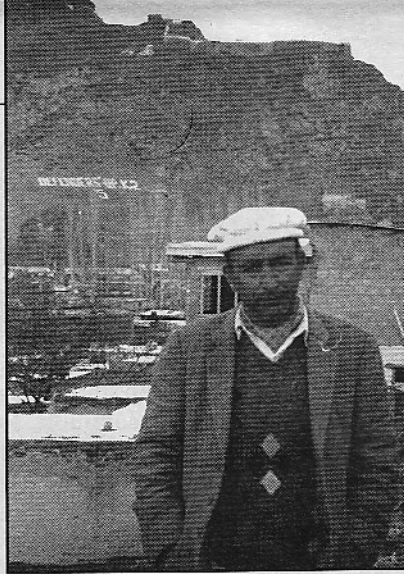
sidered a sign of backwardness. We dress like and eat like the Punjabis even though many of their customs are just as foreign to us as those from the West.”

For Mohammad Hasnain, a textile engineer settled in Lahore who goes by the Tibetan nickname “Senge Tshering”, cultural erosion began with the arrival of the first Islamic missionaries, who introduced the Arabic and Persian languages as the media for religious instruction. This erosion continues in the modern era because of Baltistan’s marginal position in the Pakistani scheme of things.

Says Tshering, “I feel sad about the drastic changes that have taken place in the last 30 to 40 years, and particularly since the Iranian Revolution. We have been destroying our culture and losing our identity.” With the help of email that is available in Lahore, Tshering now communicates with Tibetan scholars and activists worldwide.

Tshering, whose chosen name is understandably unique in the city he lives in, believes that it is important to bring back the Tibetan script. Arabic is quite inadequate to bring out the richness of the Balti language in the written form. The Balti inferiority complex is rooted in education, he believes. “Government schools use Urdu as the chief medium for instruction. So children learn Balti at home, then Urdu at school, and now English medium schools are confusing them further. To preserve our unique history and culture we have to learn the Tibetan script again.”

After centuries of Persian and now Paki-



TARIK A. KHAN

stani influence, Tshering, Kazmi and others like him seek to reconstruct their community’s bonds with the Tibetan-speaking world. They gather books, videos and anything to do with Tibet in an effort to reconstruct the long-lost past. One of the latest video hits in Skardu has been the development documentary film, *Learning from Ladakh*, brought in by Western trekkers. A film made by the

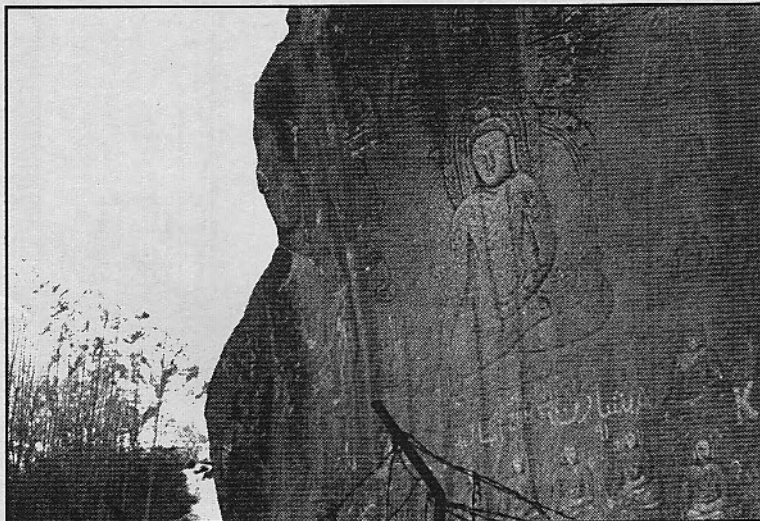
development activist Helena Norberg-Hodge which emphasises the cultural and economic strengths of Ladakh, *Learning from Ladakh* allowed Baltis a rare glimpse of their kin across the impenetrable border.

Local scholars have taught themselves how to read the Tibetan script and have initiated a dialogue with their counterparts in Ladakh. They research and publish mostly in Urdu, on topics ranging from the ancient Bon tradition to the Gesar epic. Kazmi feels the tide is slowly turning. “Young people have begun to come to me to learn more about our cultural heritage. They ask me to teach them the Tibetan script. Recently, I encouraged the Baltistan Students Federation to use the *yung drung* (swastika), our ancient Bon symbol of prosperity, as their logo. There are signs of change.”

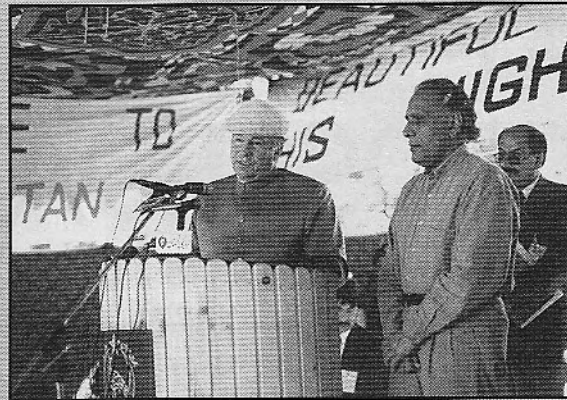
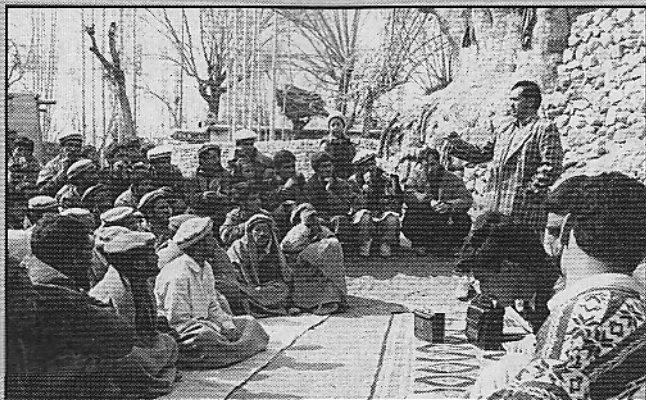
Despite the geo-political barriers, the prospects of communication may soon improve. Flights from Karachi to Kathmandu have spawned a trickle of trade in turquoise, a jewellery item that once came to Baltistan from Ladakh. Trekkers and climbers bring information from the other end of the Himalaya. Frustrated for the past 50 years by poor communications, the imminent arrival of email and Internet facilities in Skardu could also change things for Baltistan significantly.

The process of Islamicisation of Baltistan was gradual. Tibetan Buddhism and Bon were replaced over the course of centuries. But Baltistan’s absorption into Pakistan and the modern era of improved communications have quickened the pace of change. While the Iranian revolution is re-shaping its identity, the information age and current soul searching may help Baltistan embrace its ancient diversity. △

T.A. Khan is an MSc candidate in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph, Canada. He worked as a researcher in Baltistan for six months during 1997-1998.



TARIK A. KHAN



AKRSP meeting in progress (above). The Aga Khan addresses a village organisation while Shoaib Sultan Khan looks on.

Imam vs Imam

Aurat ki be-pardagi, mard ki be-ghairati. (A woman out of purdah reflects her man's lack of honour.)

- Skardu wall graffiti

ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY of Baltis are Shia, the population of the Northern Areas as a whole is an almost equal mix of Shias, Sunnis and Ismailis. The Ismailis, an offshoot of the Shia, follow their own imam. The present one, Prince Karim Aga Khan, is a Paris billionaire whose teachings are more secular than theological. Ismailis refer to him as *imam-e-zamanat* ('imam of the time') who has appeared in a distinctly modern form to address the modern needs of his followers.

In the early 1980s, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) began the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) in the Northern Areas to improve the living standard of the rural poor through social organisation, farming technology extension and access to credit. To manage it, the Aga Khan recruited one of Pakistan's rural development gurus, Shoaib Sultan Khan.

Initially, there were suspicions that the Programme was a front to convert Sunnis and Shias and to help create a new state that would link to Ismailis in Central Asia. (Ismailis live in almost contiguous areas that extend from Iran to Chitral and the Northern Areas through Tajikistan's Gorno Badakshan, Afghanistan's Badakshan province and Wakhan corridor.) Rumours abounded of such a nation-state in the making, called "Nuristan".

Overcoming such deep suspicions, the AKRSP was able to successfully organise villagers to complete self-help infrastructure projects such as the construction of irrigation canals and link roads. By 1986, AKRSP had begun operating in the non-Ismaili areas of neighbouring Chitral and Baltistan as well. In fact, local politicians, and even some imams, helped usher AKRSP into Baltistan.

The Programme has now reached the majority of Baltistan's villages and has offered swift development solutions in areas largely neglected by the government. AKRSP claims to have contributed to the doubling of the average income in the Northern Areas over the past 10 years through its development packages which include micro-credit, agriculture extension, and land development through irrigation.

Today, however, *fatwas* condemning AKRSP come fast and furious, and sometimes by fax all the way from Iran. Opposition from influential imams is based on the belief that AKRSP's credit facilities are un-Islamic (the charging of interest being forbidden in Islam), and that its female staff are a corrupting influence on local women. Rumours of down-country Pakistani consultants flouting local purdah norms, coupled with the sight of women and men driving together in jeeps, has generated resentment.

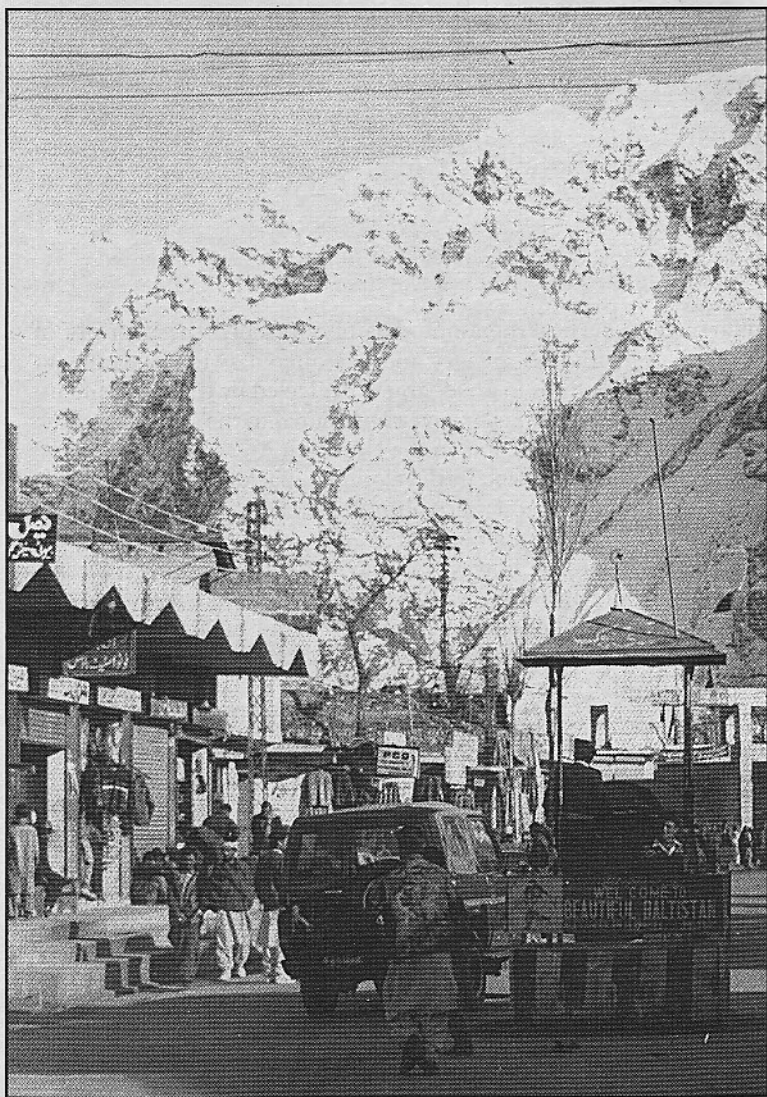
In the summer of 1997, a visiting imam from Karachi issued a fatwa, claiming that charging interest and promoting women's development activities were un-Islamic. He called on the people to resist AKRSP. While some residents were willing to ignore the fatwa on the grounds that the imam was an outsider, AKRSP's work in the Skardu and Shigar valleys ground to a standstill. Village women's organisations stopped gathering together, and the Programme's female staff remained at home. In January 1998, another imam, this time a Balti, issued a scathing indictment of AKRSP, in which he claimed that its female staff had disgraced their husbands and fathers with their work.

Communities seeking AKRSP's development packages are thus having to choose between the word of the imam and that of AKRSP. In turn, AKRSP, despite donor pressure, is being forced to take a more cautious approach to women's development.

-T.A. Khan

AT CROSSROADS

TARIK A. KHAN



Skardu, the commercial hub of Baltistan.

The periphery is now in demand, and the Baltis have got ideas.

by Nigel J.R. Allan

Billed a primitive place, unchanged, isolated, remote, with the greatest concentration of high mountain peaks in the world and the longest glaciers outside the polar areas, Baltistan actually has for centuries been the crossroads for trade and for Asian religions: Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. (Baltistan's 'capital', Skardu, or Iskaraldu, is said to have been founded by Alexander and the name of the town derived from the name he is known in this part of the world, Iskander/Sikander.) Despite their illustrious past, however, the Baltis today remain at the periphery of the Pakistani nation-state, their voices smothered under the cries of the plains Pakistanis.

Baltistan is more easily recognised in the West than it is in Pakistan itself. The adventurous Pakistani tourist who makes it up the Karakorum Highway to Gilgit in his 800 cc diminutive Suzuki car (the Mehran) and then along the Rondu gorge to Skardu is more impressed by the number of Westerners about than by the mountains. They delight in having their photographs taken with foreigners.

Distance, however, is a limiting factor, for it is a two-day trip to Skardu and few city-bred Suzuki owners will risk their cars on the weather-plagued roads. When planes do fly during patches of good weather, foreign tour groups manage to command priority as they spend hard currency.

But distance does not prevent all desirable consumer goods from making it to Skardu's bazaar. Imported soft drinks, Pakistani soft drinks, confectionery and chocolate biscuits are all available at premium prices. Like Namche Bazaar in the Nepal Himalaya, Skardu's shops stock a variety of imported tinned foodstuffs and clothing sold to local merchants by departing climbing expeditions.

Barley and bitter buckwheat, the two crops traditionally grown at high altitude, have now been supplanted by higher-yielding wheat. What is not grown locally is imported from the plains at subsidised rates. Cash-cropping steadily creeps northwards, as turnips and cabbages are grown in rotation with the now widespread potatoes. Was George Orwell correct when he said in *The Road to Wigan Pier* that a change in diet was more important than a change in dynasty? The eclipse of barley coincided with both the importation of subsidised wheat and the assumption of central control over the petty rajas of the region.

Goats and sheep, once kept for their role as dung machines to replenish soil fertility, are now sold for meat in the bazaars. While yaks roam the high altitude pastures well above 3000 metres, the demand for meat is such that old oxen – some even obtained illicitly from India – are trucked up from Punjab and slaughtered in Skardu.

The net result of the conversion to a cash economy has been that the local Baltis are much more at the mercy of outside middlemen. These traders, mostly Chilas from further down the Indus or Pushtuns from elsewhere in northern Pakistan, often clash over commercial territory, or the monopoly over brokering certain products. Periodic clashes between outsiders and locals are common. In the increasingly sectarian politics of Pakistan, these altercations take on a more sinister tone because the intrusive traders are Sunni Muslims and the Baltis are mostly Shias.

Global aspirations

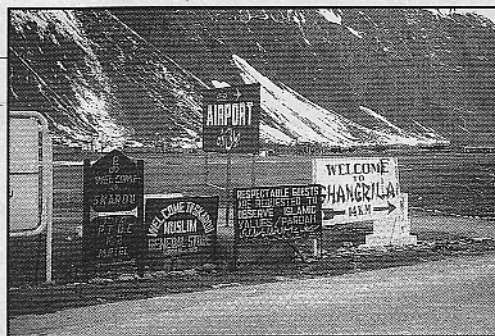
The Canadian cultural geographer Ken MacDonald has documented how Baltis were perceived by Europeans at the turn of the century. Their image then was of a people who hardly belonged to the human race. That model has now changed.

From being colonial dependents of the British a hundred years ago, in addition to being the subjects of local petty despots who forced them into corvee labour and tithing, MacDonald sees the Baltis now becoming the subjects of the 'neo-colonialist' – the foreign tourists, trekking groups and climbing expeditions, as well as world travellers checking out another place in their *Lonely Planet* guides.

The direct exposure to foreigners whose goal is the Karakorum mountains, along with increasing direct links to extra-territorial culture through satellite TV, means that Baltis can leapfrog over the efforts of Islamabad to make them obedient servants of the state. Foreign attention means they now have a global clientele to lobby for their interests, and access to global culture raises aspirations for a consumer lifestyle far beyond their current capabilities. Both the local elites, many of whom are remnants of the petty states, and the military-administrative officials (in substantial numbers because of the continuing carnage in Kashmir) now have to deal with sophisticated Baltis who can get by in English, French, German and a smattering of Japanese.

The Baltis, almost singularly identified because of their Tibetan language connection, now find it possible to promote their ethnicity by the territory they occupy. Once seen to belong to the locational periphery, the frontier, by the British (and one might add, by their 'primitiveness'), and on the political periphery by the dominant Punjabi culture of Pakistan, the Baltis are capturing the attention of the outer world through their accessibility from roads, airwaves and the skies. ▲

N.J.R. Allan, editor of the book Karakorum Conquered: North Pakistan in Transition, teaches geography at the University of California, Davis.



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LADAKHI BALTI

by *Martijn van Beek*



Kargil on the Suru.

The world differentiates between the two populations of the Ladakh region of India's extreme north – one Muslim, the other Buddhist – in interesting ways. Outsiders, be they from New Delhi or New York, tend to regard Leh as a place populated by pleasant people with a Buddhistic culture worth preserving; the Shias of Kargil, on the other hand, are regarded and treated as backward, conservative, ignorant, and even evil.

Indeed, Ladakh's Buddhists have been quite successful in drawing attention to themselves as a small minority precariously positioned on the borders of India. Meanwhile, the Muslim population of Kargil has long escaped attention even though their living conditions are worse.

Before 1989, tourists travelling to Ladakh overland from Kashmir had to spend at least one night in Kargil. Travel guidebooks describe the place as bedbug-infested, full of grim-looking men, a place to pass through as quickly as possible. With the escalation of violence in Kashmir Valley, and a route from Manali to Leh having opened up from the

south, few tourists today pass through Kargil, except those en route to Buddhist Zangskar. Turbaned and bearded mullahs and portraits of Iranian ayatollahs do not have the same appeal to tourists as red-robed lamas and monasteries perched on hill tops.

The Purigpa

Traditionally, a careful distinction has been made between the Shias, who were deemed to be 'indigenous', and the 'alien' Sunnis. The Shias, regardless of place of residence or origin, are commonly called 'Baltis', while the Sunnis are referred to as 'Khache', emphasising their links to Kashmir.

When Kargil district was carved out of Ladakh in 1979, the initiative, while sensible from an administrative standpoint, merely fostered the communalisation of politics, as happens when areas are marked off on the basis of religion. However, the distinction made by the Buddhist population of Leh between the Shia Baltis and the Sunni Khaches appeared to still hold when the Ladakh Buddhist Association was spearheading an agita-

tion to get Union Territory status from the central government some years back.

Under the 1989 Scheduled Tribe notification by the Centre, the vast majority of Baltis of Kargil are today officially classified as "Purigpa", after Purig, as the Suru River Valley in Kargil was traditionally known. Another tribe under the notification is called "Balti", which primarily denotes the Shias of Leh district, descendants of migrants who settled there perhaps as early as the 17th century. (The term 'Balti' itself, according to Ladakhi historian Sonam Phuntshog, derives from the ancient language of Zhangzhung and means "a gorge or valley (*bal*) with water (*ti*).")

The Baltis/Purigpa of Kargil, perhaps in ways different from their clanspeople on the other side of the Line of Actual Control, are also caught in the middle. Political leaders from both Leh and Kargil have felt the neglect of the Valley-dominated Jammu and Kashmir state government. However, the 'Buddhist' agitation for regional autonomy for Ladakh on the one hand, and the 'Islamic' insurrection in the Valley on the other, meant that whichever side they chose, the Balti/Purigpa could only be losers.

Understandably, they opted to keep their heads down, neither overtly supporting the Kashmiri insurgents, nor accepting the offer of an Autonomous Hill District Development Council as was granted to Leh in 1995. Kargil's 'neutrality', however, was not appreciated either by Leh's Buddhists or by the Kashmiri insurgents. When Kargil town came under attack from Pakistani artillery on 30 September, 1997, killing 18 people and causing widespread damage, some even regarded this as punishment by Pakistan for the Balti/Purigpa's lack of support for militants.

Progressive Islam

Compared to Leh district, Kargil is worse off in most respects. While Leh has seen the rapid development of a modern money economy, due to lavish investments by the Centre and the army as well as the influx of up to 20,000 tourists a year, Kargil district (as well as Zangskar and the Suru Valley) continues to be mired in poverty. Whereas Leh has direct air links with Delhi, Jammu and Srinagar, Kargil is still awaiting the construction of an airstrip.

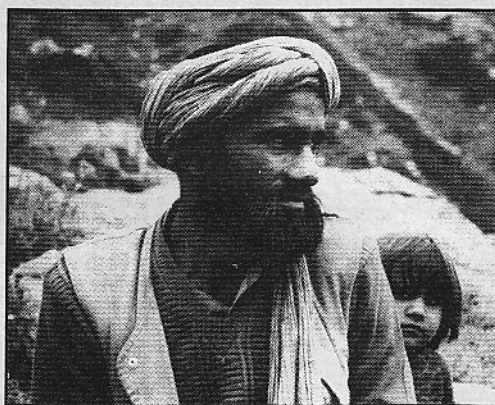
Also, while Leh has long attracted attention from foreign NGOs, it is only in recent years that some organisations have begun to work in Kargil. Local organisations in Kargil are dependent on local and national funding. Some flow of support is coming in from elsewhere, such as from Saudi Arabia, but this is

mostly tied to religious activities. However, a part of the Kargil economy is now supported by remittances from labourers in the Gulf.

Local leaders and activists in Kargil do not simply blame the outside world, or Srinagar, for the lack of concern for their district. Asked about the role of the local leadership, one NGO worker grimaced and said that "the local leaders have not done much leading". While few will openly criticise the religious leaders in Kargil and Suru, it is their lack of education and experience in the ways of the world that are seen as the main reasons why the area receives so little consideration from the state or central government. (Interestingly, Leh's population, too, charges its religious representatives with similar inadequacies.)

Poor education among the general population, however, is a larger problem in Kargil, where there has traditionally been considerable resistance to secular education. This is changing slowly, and today there are several local organisations that are seeking to promote education. As Nicola Grist, a British anthropologist who has worked extensively in Suru, points out, contrary to the popular notion that Kargil is in the grips of a conservative Islamic movement, people are in fact linking up with a progressive movement within Islam.

Kaneez Fatima, Kargil's first female college graduate and leader of the local Women and



DEBENDRA BANERJEE

Shia father and daughter from Kargil.

Children's Welfare Organisation, agrees that attitudes are changing. She says parents now generally expect their daughters to go to school and qualify for some form of employment. Shia imams themselves run a school in the upper Suru Valley that offers free places for girls. In 1997, there were 13,191 male students and 6,406 female ones in Kargil, which is an encouraging ratio. Such developments, although much doubtless remains to be done, belie the prejudiced notion that Baltis are by definition backward, ignorant and conservative.

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Skardu to Changthang

Although in popular and official imagination Ladakh is generally regarded as a Buddhist region, local intellectuals, including Buddhists, acknowledge the strong historical, cultural, economic, and political links with Baltistan. Not only in Kargil, but also in Leh, there is considerable interest in what goes on over on the other side. The people here are well aware of the cultural continuities between Ladakh and Baltistan. Linguistically, while acknowledging differences in dialect and the importance of classical Tibetan, the Ladakhis often emphasise the unity of the spoken language that exists from "Skardu to Changthang", distinguishing it from Tibetan dialects. Local scholars, such as Ahdul Ghani Sheikh, have sought to re-establish contact with colleagues in Baltistan.

One of the main obstacles to the restoration of exchange and interaction across the Line of Actual Control remains the suspicions of the respective national governments. Abdul Ghani Sheikh and Nawang Tsering Shakspo of the J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages were invited to attend a conference in Islamabad in 1993, but were barred from visiting the Northern Areas by the Pakistani Government. Still, they were able to meet colleagues from Baltistan, including Syed Abhas Kazmi and Yousuf Hussain Abadi, and discuss issues of common interest such as language.

The current interest in Baltistan in reintroducing the Tibetan script has helped rekindle interest in the cut-off region among Ladakhi Buddhist scholars as well. Among other Indian and international researchers, too, there is growing focus on the Muslims in Ladakh and their own links with Baltistan. Rather than juxtaposing Buddhists and Muslims, this recent research trend tends to emphasise the unique hybridity of the Ladakhi culture, and offers a corrective to the Tibeto-centricity of the past.

Many of Leh's intellectuals refer to Purig as the region where traditions of local folk songs and epics such as the *Gesar* are historically better preserved. However, local cultural traditions in Kargil are under pressure from conservative clerics as well as from mainstream Indian and Western influences.

Recently, a younger generation of educated Kargilis have taken up the task of protecting these traditions as well as of promoting development in the region. The Youth Voluntary Forum, founded in 1990, is one such organisation. Wazir Mohammed Ali, director of the well-known Ladakh Ecological Development Group (LEDEG), Kargil Branch, expresses an interest in recording the reminis-

Purig refugees

UNDOUBTEDLY, THOSE IN Baltistan who long the most for a re-connection across the ceasefire line are the migrants from Kargil and the Chorbat Valley. The three wars have driven many of them to Skardu and many others have migrated south to Pakistan's cities in search of off-farm employment.

Letters and audio cassettes from relatives in Kargil remind them of life across the border. Vilayat Ali recalls his father's first trip back to Kargil after 1948. "The visa took time, but once he made it home, the Indian security forces didn't bother him much. He was struck by how much poorer our relatives were on the Indian side. Owning even a beat-up old car was a big accomplishment."

The refugees of Chorbat Valley fled when Indian forces seized their three villages in the 1971 war. The land was never returned. A still more recent exodus occurred last summer when the 12 villages collectively known as Olding came under artillery fire from Indian forces near Kargil. The firing claimed four lives, and the majority of the villagers sought refuge in Skardu.

With India occupying the heights, the short farming season becomes easily disrupted by the skirmishes. Farmers from the border villages of Brolmo and Gangani, which are regularly in the line of fire, have fled permanently. Even if the hostilities end, their lives will remain difficult, they say, because India has blocked the irrigation channels that feed their fields. Last summer, the villagers faxed a letter to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif requesting material aid or relocation, but there was no response.

All of the refugees lament the intransigence of those in power. Some have given up hope. Recently, the Kargilpa refugees decided to build their first *imambargah* in Skardu. When asked why it had taken them so long, one replied: "We've been waiting to go back to the one we left in Kargil. We finally decided we've waited too long."

- T.A. Khan

cences of the elderly who still remember the songs and stories of old. Recently, a book with local history and a collection of folk songs was published in Kargil.

While some outsiders might prefer to see the Baltis just "roll over and die", as one observer put it, these recent initiatives as well as the active interest in re-forging links between Leh and Kargil illustrate that the Baltis/Purigpa are not quite ready just yet to let their culture disappear.

M. van Beek teaches Ethnography and Social Anthropology at Aarhus University, Denmark, and is member of the permanent committee of the International Association for Ladakh Studies.



View across Gilgit Valley.

MARTIN SÖKEFELD

BALAWARISTAN

HIGH COUNTRY

Not accepted within the fold of Pakistan, activists formulate a nationalist political ideology relying on the 'mountain-ness' of the Northern Areas.

by Martin Sökefeld

Come to Balawaristan! Experience the mystic serenity of Ladakh's Buddhist gompas, trek around the world's most splendid peaks, follow the course of the river Indus or enjoy the blossom of apricot trees in Hunza!" If the dreams of some political activists come true, these enticing words may appear in glossy tourist brochures in future. As things stand, however, the chances are bleak.

A search in the atlas for Balawaristan will be in vain. This 'country' is only indicated on

a map in a long-forgotten booklet published a decade ago in Gilgit, in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. The name 'Balawaristan' also most probably appeared for the first time in print in this booklet. Nevertheless, the idea behind Balawaristan has its own power – a power strong enough to provoke a government. Talking about Balawaristan using the wrong words to the wrong person in Gilgit can easily land one behind bars.

That obscure map of Balawaristan repre-

sents parts of the great but disputed mountain regions which are, from the respective points of view, called "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir" or "Indian-held Kashmir". It stretches from Chitral in the west to Ladakh in the East and includes the entire Northern Areas of Pakistan.

State policy

The name Balawaristan might be of recent antiquity, but the idea itself has a longer history. For the inhabitants of the Northern Areas, the idea of a unified region has its origins in the lack of fundamental democratic rights. This was as true under the despotic rule of Maharaja Hari Singh of Jammu and Kashmir, against whose unilateral decision to accede to India they rose in revolt on 1 November 1947 (see page 16), as is of governance by Pakistan after that. For although the Northern Areas is administered by Islamabad, it is not considered a part of Pakistan: its people cannot vote in the elections to Pakistan's National Assembly, they have no provincial legislative assembly, and they are denied access to the High Courts and the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

On the other side of the Line of Actual Control, the area of the erstwhile Dogra state of Jammu and Kashmir controlled by India has been integrated, with a number of provisions for autonomy, into the Indian Union. But Pakistan continues to deny the same integration to the Northern Areas, arguing that the status of the disputed area can not be altered until a final solution is reached.

The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) has handed administration of the Northern Areas to Pakistan until the Kashmir issue is resolved. And Pakistan's Kashmir case depends on the UNCIP resolution calling for a plebiscite in the Maharaja's former domains. Should Pakistan abandon its temporary caretaker status and grant full constitutional rights to the Northern Areas, it would be tantamount to abandoning the 'disputed status' of the area and recognising the ceasefire line as a permanent border with India.

The irony is that Islamabad has made separate arrangements for Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). Although it is tiny in comparison to the Northern Areas' size, AJK enjoys a semi-autonomous arrangement within the Constitution of Pakistan. It has its own prime minister, its own supreme court, and enjoys extensive media coverage in Pakistan.

In the decades that followed the 1949 ceasefire, this region of "Gilgit-Baltistan" continued to be administered by Pakistani politi-

cal agents in quite the same undemocratic terms that had been practised before by the British agents in Gilgit. The inhabitants of the area were more critical of the continuation of colonial taxation and *begar* (forced labour) than of the lack of democratic rights. But as more and more young men from there went to Pakistan for higher education and returned with degrees, a heightened consciousness of their 'special' status. During the 1970s, under the regime of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, some of the discriminating conditions of the Northern Areas were abolished, but the reform process ended when Zia-ul Haq staged his coup in 1977.

People of the heights

In the last years of Zia's dictatorship, students from the Northern Areas at universities and colleges in the various cities of Pakistan formed a number of regional student's organisations such as the Karakorum Students Organisation (KSO) and the Baltistan Students Federation (BSF). Having completed their studies, they continued their activism at home. A number of graduates became active in the "Unemployed Action Committee" in Gilgit. Public administration is the most important employer in the area, but most qualified jobs go to outsiders, that is, to people from Punjab or the North West Frontier Province.

Activists of the Unemployed Action Committee later formed the Balawaristan National Front (BNF). Among the founders were Nawaz Khan Naji, the author of the little Balawaristan booklet, and Abdul Hamid Khan, who wrote innumerable newspaper articles and press releases to attract attention to the political status of the Northern Areas. The activists proclaimed that the Northern Areas was a subjugated nation whose proper name was Balawaristan. The name is derived from the Persian *bala* (high, above). The inhabitants of this "land of the heights" are to be known as the "Balawar", the people of the heights.

The case for Balawaristan that Nawaz Naji builds in his booklet is a textbook example of the construction of a nationalist ideology. According to this view, the Balawar nation is firmly grounded in a common history, culture and the peculiarity of its high mountain habitat. That this nation is a fiction because historically, culturally, linguistically, etc, the region was and is characterised by a high de-



MARTIN SOKERFIELD

"Vote ka haq do"
(Give us the right to vote): Karakorum Students Organisation graffiti.



BNF flag

gree of differentiation among its so-called constituent parts is immaterial. Contemporary political science says that all nations have at one point in their history simply been imaginations. After all, the Pakistani nation itself began in the imagination of a few men – with lasting and tangible results – so the fiction of Balawaristan need not be seen as entirely lacking in potency.

Like all nationalisms, the imagination of Balawaristan is also part of a power game. Nationalism demands that the nation be invested with the right to self-determination, a right that is denied to the people of the Northern Areas by the politics of Pakistan.

Mountaineity

Until the early 1990s, the political demands in the Northern Areas were largely focused on demanding the region's integration into Pakistan as a regular fifth province. But because downcountry Pakistan showed no inclination for such a normalisation of political status, the activists began raising demands for autonomy, and even complete independence.

Following the Balawaristan National Front, other groups have taken up the idea, although the ideology and the nomenclature are at some variance. The Karakorum National Movement calls for a "Karakorum" nation, while the Boloristan Democratic Front wants "Boloristan" (from the ancient kingdom of Bolor, by which Gilgit and Baltistan were jointly known).

The different ideologies converge in the conviction that the mountains were decisive

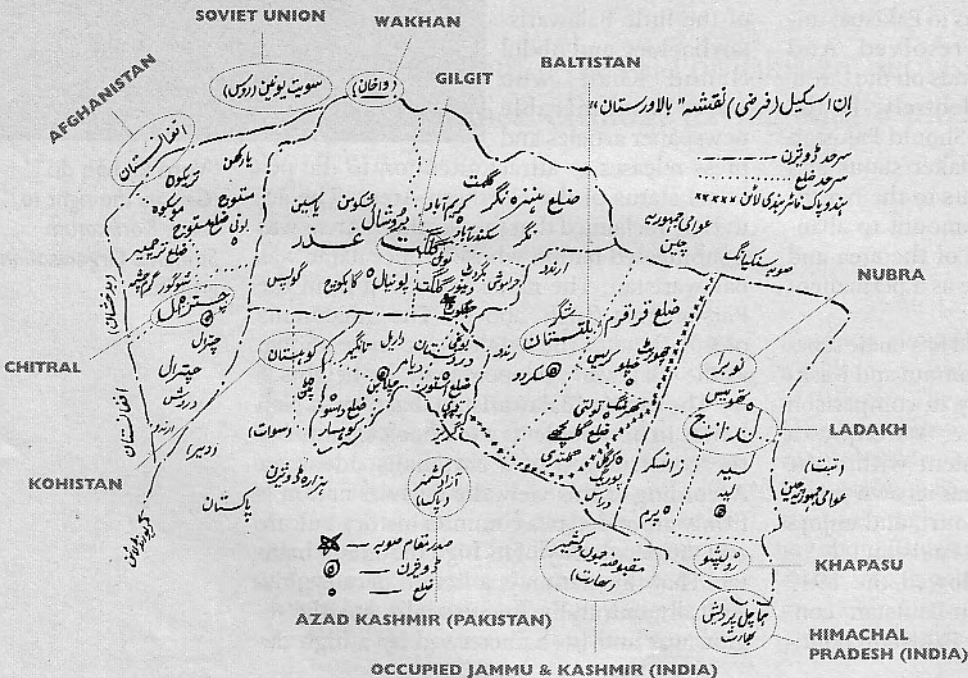
in shaping a peculiar national identity. In the perspective of a person from the lowlands, this "mountaneity" may be nothing valuable. On the contrary, the inhabitants of the mountains are stereotyped as backward, primitive, violent and uncultured. As often happens in such situations, the negative stereotype has pushed the subject into a positive self-evaluation. The ideologists of the mountains now stand by being different – they insist on it.

Accordingly, national symbols are derived from the mountains, like the chain of peaks and the ibex that make up the flag of the BNF (left). It is the essence of living in the mountains that, according to Nawaz Khan Naji, unites the people from Chitral to Ladakh. The territory of the Balawar nation, then, comprises not only the present Northern Areas of Pakistan, but also Chitral, a part of Kohistan (both are districts of the North West Frontier Province) and Ladakh, across the ceasefire line.

This nation of Balawaristan (or Karakorum or Boloristan), insist the activists, is different from Pakistan and different from Kashmir. They insist that the future of the nation be delinked from the never-ending Indo-Pakistan dispute over Kashmir, and that its present bondage to Pakistan be severed.

In developing a nationalist ideology, the plausibility of the Balawar nation is also sought to be enhanced through a considerable re-invention of history. Historical personages like Gohar Aman of Yasin, who earlier was remembered mostly for his cruelty while depopulating large areas, are now glorified as heroes of the national struggle for freedom.

Nawaz Khan Naji, and his 'map' of Balawaristan.



Northern united front

By imagining a separate nation, the mismatched fight for democratic rights has now become a struggle between two (almost) equals; the antagonism between a powerful state and a group of dispersed groups of a peripheral region has been turned into a struggle between two nations. That, at least, is the theory or strategy. In practice, the nationalists remain divided into a number of small rival parties because, as malicious gossip has it, everybody wants to be chairman.

For its part, the BNF has worked to bring about an

alliance of a number of oppositional groups in Gilgit. In April 1993, they convened the Gilgit-Baltistan National Conference, in which 12 different organisations, including branches of Pakistani national parties such as the Pakistan People's Party and the Pakistan Muslim League, took part. The participation by Gilgit's Shia and Sunni communities also was considered significant because sectarianism is another pressing issue in the Northern Areas.

The 1993 conference resulted in a Northern Areas United Front, a political alliance which included the various activist groups as well as politicians of all sects. In the following years, the Front organised many demonstrations and assemblies, and busily voiced the political demands of Gilgit's opposition. Even a period of sectarian violence in the summer of 1993 could not break the alliance.

Relations between the population of the Northern Areas and the government of Pakistan have become fairly strained. When Benazir Bhutto was in power, her government did announce some administrative reforms, but in the end they turned out to be entirely cosmetic. This included renaming the position of the "Administrator" of the Northern Areas as "Chief Executive". The Northern Areas Council, an area-wide elected but powerless body, could now elect a "Deputy Chief Executive". The Chief Executive, invariably a non-local appointed by Islamabad, could delegate work to the Deputy Chief Executive, but in practice retained all the powers of a governor.

Strict peacefulness

They might not know it, but up to 70 percent of all foreign visitors to Pakistan set foot in "Balawaristan". Indeed, the Northern Areas have emerged as Pakistan's most attractive region for overseas tourists, and this is another bone of contention. The nationalists say the Northern Areas today contribute a disproportionate share to the national economy. To tourism they add water: the Indus River runs through the mountains, collecting the waters of many smaller rivers like the Hunza and the Gilgit, and descends to the plains to irrigate large tracts in Punjab and Sindh. The Government of Pakistan does pay royalty for the Indus water – but to the North West Frontier Province, through which the river passes but only a short distance.

The BNF alleges that the government of Pakistan similarly gains from the Northern Areas' forests, mineral resources, customs revenue and so on. Much more money is drawn from the area than is returned by investments, it says.



Ibex memorial for freedom fighters of 1947-48.

The activists of the Northern Areas see themselves as the heirs of the fighters in the uprising against Indian rule in 1947. According to the Balawar nationalist view, many people from the region sacrificed their lives for freedom back then, but freedom was not achieved. Now, it is said, the time has come to complete the struggle – strictly by peaceful means.

In Gilgit, the first of November is officially celebrated with speeches, parades and tournaments as "Freedom Day". But the activists of Balawaristan and their allies have taken to boycotting that occasion, to commemorate instead a "Martyrs' Day" on 2 November.

In the summer of 1996, police opened fire at a demonstration called to protest Pakistani domination. One person was killed, some were injured, and many more arrested. When in August 1997 the 50th anniversary of the Independence of Pakistan was to be celebrated in Gilgit as in all over the country, the opposition groups prepared their demonstrations, determined to mark the event as a "black day" for the Northern Areas. But strong units of police prevented demonstrations. More than 60 activists were arrested and many of them remained for weeks in detention, some suffering maltreatment. Now, the leaders are being accused of treason. Having been released on bail, Nawaz Naji, Abdul Hamid Khan and others await trial for having betrayed Pakistan, a country that does not accept them as its citizens. ▽

M. Sökefeld is a social anthropologist who undertook research in Gilgit between 1991 and 1993 and has published a book and a number of articles on the area. At present, he teaches at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

RCSS SUMMER WORKSHOP IN SHANGHAI

The Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) invites applications from young South Asian and Chinese professionals to participate in the **Summer Workshop on "Defence, Technology and Cooperative Security in South Asia"** to be held in Shanghai, China during September 21-29, 1998.

The Programme includes lecture sessions, panel discussions and group work on conceptual, technical and practical aspects of defence, national security and regional stability. The workshop stimulates informed discourse, free from abstraction and polemics, on conventional and nuclear weapons control and related issues of contemporary regional interest. It promotes alternative thinking on defence and security, and facilitates collective consideration of possible options and approaches to stability, confidence building and cooperative security in the region.

The workshop facilitates maximum interaction between participants and faculty, and among the participants themselves. Nationals of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in the age group of up to 35 years are invited to apply along with the following:

- i) Full curriculum vitae including date of birth, nationality, sex, academic qualification, experience, and full contact address (Include telephone and fax numbers and e-mail address, if any. Provide name and full contact address of two referees.);
- ii) A statement in about 200 words stating future professional objectives and describing how participation in the workshop will be useful; and iii) List of publications/writings (enclose a recent sample preferably relevant to the theme of the workshop, if any).

Candidates from all related professional background are eligible. Evidence of sustained interest in the field and possibility of continued professional work with related policy-making & policy-influencing institutions, media and NGOs are important criteria for selection. **Female candidates are specially encouraged to apply.** Scholarships are available for selected participants to cover all expenses. Applications will be considered by an international selection committee. **Closing date for receiving applications is June 30, 1998.**



Regional Centre for Strategic Studies

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Protecting journalists by committee

OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS and terrorist organisations have a propensity to confuse the truth with bad news and to further confuse the news with the messenger. They labour under the delusion that if journalists, as the modern world's main purveyors of bad news, are leaned upon, imprisoned, tortured or killed, the bad news will stop.

The Committee to Protect Journalists, a New York-based organisation founded in 1981 and backed by heavyweights of American journalism, has been keeping public tabs on the effects of this delusion for over a decade. The record it has compiled of journalists in the line of fire around the world is a sorry one.

Having said that, the truth about the latest CPJ annual report (*Attacks on the Press in 1997*, 443 pp, USD 30) is that it seems to have been done on a shoestring. It does not cover attacks on journalists in any of the "Western democracies", and on occasion adopts a decidedly propagandistic approach to the situations it covers in the developing world.

Take India as an example. The relevant section begins: "India's aggressive economic liberalisation policies continued as the country celebrated the 50th anniversary of independence from Britain, but so did the harassment of the Press in some regions. India's claims to being a modernising democracy was undermined by State-tolerated assaults on and intimidation of journalists in areas traditionally troubled by violent secessionist and sectarian movements and other social tensions."

It is unclear why the incidents cited undermine India's "claims to being a modernising democracy". The report states that there were seven journalists killed in India last year, and includes in that number five members of a television crew killed in a bomb blast in Hyderabad. The bomb was meant for a politician-turned-film producer and the attack was allegedly planned by a business

rival. However, the report gives the impression that the journalists were the targets of a politically motivated killing. The killing of the two other journalists during 1997 was in Kashmir. Both worked for state-owned television and both were gunned down by militants and not the state, a fact which may have been worth mentioning.

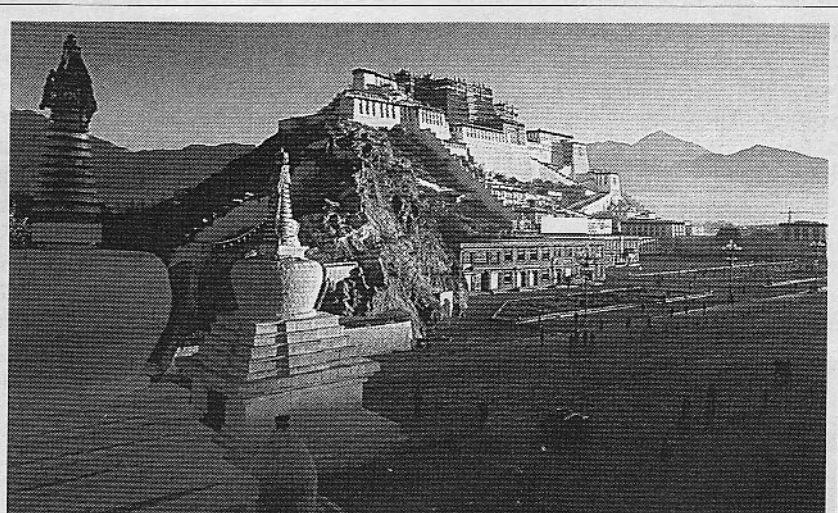
As for the rest of South Asia, the report is spotty. It covers Bangladesh and Pakistan but none of the other countries. "The killing of journalists has halted the flow of any semblance of honest journalism in Pakistan," CPJ Chairman Gene Roberts generalises in his introduction to the volume. But the section on Pakistan cites only one killing of a journalist - Z.A. Shahid, a photographer - in a bomb blast aimed at two Sunni Muslim leaders in

Lahore. Elsewhere, the report claims that the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif "hovers on the fringes of repression", including the introduction of the new Anti-Terrorism Act, a "harsh martial law-style response to factional violence".

Bangladesh gets off relatively lightly. The national press "enjoys considerable freedom" and "continues to play an important role in the transition to democracy". The journalists attacked seem mainly to be photo journalists. Two were assaulted while covering street demonstrations, and a third was hit on the head with a teargas canister fired by police attempting to control a street demonstration. One local journalist is quoted as saying that the incidents "represent irritations, not national problems".

That is about the only attribution to a local source. For the rest, the judgements are American and come from high above.

-Bhaskar Menon



GEO (above) TIBET PRESS WATCH (left)



MULTINATIONAL TAKEOVER OF TIBET: The Potala from afar still reminds of old Tibet, even though much of the rest of Lhasa town has gone the way of Muzaffarpur, Bihar.



ANWAR HOSSAIN

The Franco-Bangla mimodramatist

WHO IS THIS man in a body suit parading down a Paris street? And why is he essaying a classical Hindustani dance pose within a stone's throw of the Arche de Triomphe?

He is Partha Pratim Majumder, born in Pabna, Bangladesh, Master of Mime, and devoted disciple of the pantomime great, Marcel Marceau. In Dhaka recently to conduct a mime workshop, the 45-year-old artiste spoke to HIMAL about his devotion to a genre of dance which has not been appreciated enough in the Subcontinent.

Majumder is out to set this right. As his guru Marceau certifies, "Partha enmeshes the traditions of Bengal with occidental disciplines to achieve

universal dimensions." Originally inspired by the "millennial art" of Bharat Natyam and Kathakali, Majumder says he was soon attracted to the quintessential European form of mimodrama emerging from the Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian cultures. Majumder says he has tried to synthesise the two traditions in his work.

In 1990, Majumder, who had by then travelled the world to perform French mime with Marceau, opened his own school of mime in Bretagne, France. Now his overriding wish is to start a similar institution back in Bangladesh. This commitment translates itself, for the moment, into conducting workshops in Dhaka. Such as the very successful staging in 1994 of

a "mimodrama" written and choreographed by Majumder for the Dhaka Little Theatre.

Titled *Dushwapana* (The Nightmare, adapted from the French play *Cauchemar*), the show was about a father's love for his daughter which turns violent when the daughter takes a lover. This is how the *Dhaka Daily Star* described *Dushwapana*: "Silent shrieks ripped through the gracefully moving limbs, a daughter unmasked her assailant father and long shadows danced on the wall – a mimodrama (which) attempted to explain the chemistry of love and hate, cruelty and affection."

In the spring of 1998, Majumder was back in Bangladesh, working with the Dhaka Little Theatre on another production. What did he think about the 30 young boys and girls he was training at the Alliance Francaise? "They're not quite fit," he replied, adding that the graceful movements of mime require regular exercise, something not followed in Dhaka.

However, such stumbling blocks do not discourage Majumder, who remains nationalistic despite his many years in the Continent. Wherever he performs, he reminds the listener, he insists on printing 'Bangladesh' in brackets after his name.

Does he, then, intend to limit his productions to his home country, he is asked. He replies, "No! No! I would like to take my mime productions to Kathmandu! I would like to take them to Colombo!"



ANWAR HOSSAIN



HIMALAYAN HOLIDAYS

Heritage in flames

IT WAS A national tragedy for Bhutan when the Paro Taktsang, or Tiger's Nest, the most sacred amongst Bhutan's monasteries went up in flames on the Sunday evening of 19 April, 1998.

At least three of the few resident monks in the temples were killed, while countless statues, frescoes, painted scrolls, holy relics and numerous ancient Buddhist scriptures were destroyed in the blaze. It is suspected that ceremonial oil lamps may have caused the fire, but it is as yet not certain. Lightning is also reported to have struck earlier in the day.

Perched precipitously on a 2500-foot vertiginous granite cliff above Paro Valley, the wood-and-stone Taktsang was one of the most spectacular sites in the Himalaya, and a centre-piece of Bhutanese tourism, although the monastery itself had been closed for tourists these past few years, and was only accessible to native pilgrims. Nestled amidst a set of caves, the monastery was held to be blessed by Padmasambhava, the sage who brought Buddhism into Tibet in the 9th century.

It is said that when Padmasambhava visited Bhutan's Paro Valley, he transformed himself into the wrathful form of Dorje Drollo (one of the eight aspects in which Padmasambhava appeared at various times of his life), and, riding upon a tigress, flew up to a cave high on a cliffside. There, he imparted his teachings and initiations to several of his closest disciples.

Padmasambhava is then believed to have concealed many of his profound teachings, known as *termas* ("spiritual treasures"), which were meant to be rediscovered and spread at appropriate times in history to benefit beings according to their needs. It was in the 17th century that a remarkable Bhutanese teacher, Tendzin Rabgye, went on to build the several temples that hung almost miraculously on the cliff face.

In modern times, great Tibetan masters have revealed through visions and miracles the spiritual treasures at Taktsang. These teachers considered the place so sacred that one of them, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, once offered 100,000 butter lamps at Taktsang to commemorate Padmasambhava's anniversary in the Monkey Year of 1980. Khyentse Rinpoche then wrote:

Towering mountain clad in a virgin forest

Your peak, majestic in its snowy turban, stretches to the skies.

Your chest is draped with silvery scarves of mist;

*How happy the carefree yogi who lets go of this life's affairs!**

That eulogy now will have a tragic ring to it as thousands of believers mourn a monument that has been engulfed by the flames of impermanence.

**From Journey to Enlightenment, Matthieu Ricard, 1996.*

Treating torture

Custodial deaths, torture and beatings appear to be a part of the job profile of many policemen across the region. In India alone, 889 people died in custody during 1996-97. However, the country took a major step forward in April by opening a special medical facility for torture victims in New Delhi.

Inge Genefke, Secretary General of the International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT), often called the Florence Nightingale of torture victims, who helped open the New Delhi facility says that another centre will soon open in Calcutta and then elsewhere in India. Her efforts to open such centres in other South Asian countries have not succeeded so far, she says.

Says Genefke, "At least 72 countries continue to use torture as a means of interrogation and suppression and too many governments depend on torture to stay in power." As part of IRCT policy, she avoided naming any country or referring to the gruesome record of India's custodial deaths. The main mission of the organisation, she states, is to help erase the physical and psychological scars of torture victims.

The spadework for the New Delhi torture treatment centre was done by the Indian Medical Association, a self-regulatory organisation of physicians. They have also called for a 16-hour course on torture treatment to be included in the syllabi of medical schools.

Treatment of hapless victims of brute state power – now this might be one area where other South Asian nations may follow the Indian example.

Cremating contraband

IT'S A FAMILIAR scene in the African game parks: millions of dollars' worth of ivory and rhino horn going up in smoke in the name of conservation, while rangers and politicians watch on approvingly. On 22 March, Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife held its own public immolation of animal parts at a spot near the Royal Chitwan National Park.

More than a thousand items were hauled out of rank storerooms by sneezing guards and heaped onto the pyre. Skins of rhinoceros (over four tonnes), crocodile, tiger, leopard and of a host of other hoofed and clawed mammals joined trunkloads of tiger bone, monkey skulls and rhino horn. Most of the items had been confiscated from local poachers, and the Chitwan cache, being the repository of animal contraband seized throughout Nepal, contained its share of highland exotica – among other things, sackloads of Tibetan antelope wool, a snow-leopard skin, and a jar of the famous *Cordyceps* caterpillar fungus (*yartsagumbu*), nabbed on their way to the southern markets.

The event attracted criticism from the national press and some wildlife experts, who argued that the stock should have been sold, not burned. When Nepal signed the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) agreement in 1974, it committed itself to stop cross-border traffic in parts of rare animals, and that covered nearly everything that was burned in Tikauli. The ban is all very well for wealthy nations, say the critics, but Nepal needs cash to help its conservation programme, and the sale of the Chitwan stock

would have fetched a tidy sum.

But just what did find its way onto the pyre in Tikauli? This was no million-dollar African ivory-burn. The condemned skins were all rated as C-grade – threadbare specimens of little or no commercial value. Rhino horn can fetch upward of USD 15,000 per kilo in parts of Southeast Asia, but the eight items that were burned were all fake – ingenious constructions of



hardwood, bone and cattle horn; the tiger claws, seized in Kathmandu, were plastic imitations glued into tufts of goat hair; 10 of the tiger skins were nothing more than painted cow-hides; and the caterpillar fungus a heap of putrid crumbs.

So what was the purpose of the exercise? "The items in the store have been collected over the past 70 years," said Hridayesh Tripathi, then Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation. "The amount of material that had been accumulated was creating problems of storage." A task force had suggested that all the decayed, unusable items should be destroyed. (The logic of incinerating the forgeries, as a ranger pointed out, was "to reduce the importance that these things have in the public mind.")

Tirtha Bahadur Shrestha, Nepal's

eminent botanist, was cautiously opposed to the destruction of the stock, but not on the grounds that it should have been sold: "It may have been better to build new storage space and to keep everything at the park visitor's centre. The sheer quantity of the collection has a striking visual impact. It gives an idea of how much wildlife is poached in Nepal and also how effective the park personnel have been in confiscating contraband."

Destroying seven decades' accumulation of junk is only the beginning. "We still have the problem of what to do with all the other things in storage," concedes Tirtha Man Maskey of the Parks and Wildlife Department, who headed the task-force which recommended the immolation.

A number of steps have already been taken. Precious substances that are used in traditional medicine have been consigned to the Department of Ayurveda – such as musk-pods and bears' gall bladders. Many other pieces, including tortoise shells and rhino

skulls, will be allocated to museums and educational institutions within the country. The Home Ministry has even requested 38 skins of various species for distribution to mendicant yogis.

International sale of most of the remaining items may be out of the question, but Nepal's Ministry of Forests is negotiating with CITES about marketing them within the country. Maskey hopes that the good-quality rhino hides which still occupy a large storeroom can be cut up and sold to make the ritual cups that are a necessary part of Hindu death ceremonies.

So, the critics can be assured that the burning was not a sacrifice of national interests on the altar of an alien ideology. On the other hand, it wasn't a case of spring cleaning either.

-Charles Ramble

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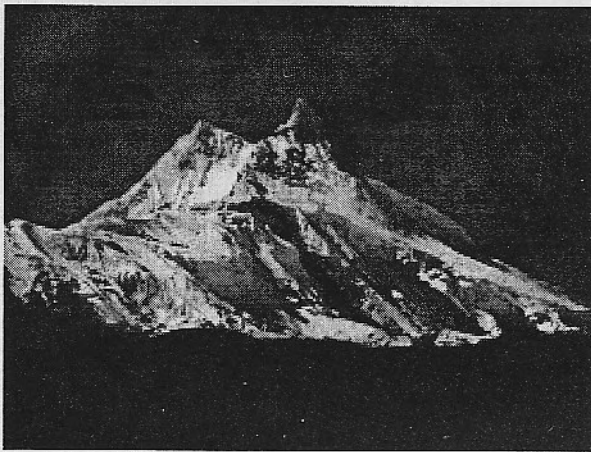
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WANTED

MANAGER

NEPAL AID PROJECT TO CANADA (NAPC)

QUALIFICATIONS

- * minimum 6 years' direct experience in participatory community development projects, particularly in over-industrialised countries
- * minimum 3 years' project management experience
- * Master's degree in the social sciences – broad interdisciplinary background
- * Nepali citizen
- * English or related language abilities preferred, though not required

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

We are seeking a competent person to manage a participatory community development project in the province of Alberta, in the western part of Canada. The mission statement of this project is to strengthen civil society in Alberta by conducting holistic multi-level community development projects in selected communities.

Unlike so many other projects which have only provided 'Band-Aid' solutions, addressing symptoms rather than causes, NAPC seeks to effect change at the root level, and will work with a systemic approach to influence positive changes at all levels of the problems faced by Albertans. This five-year project will concentrate its initial efforts in Alberta with a view to potentially expanding project activities to other parts of the country on the basis of the success of the Alberta project.

The province of Alberta was selected because the symptoms described below are particularly acute in this province. Recognising that Nepal possesses expertise in many of the areas in which the Canadian people are currently struggling (such as informal economies, community cohesiveness, eco-sustainable practices, non-pharmaceutical-driven health care systems, and a strong sense of cultural heritage/identity), through NAPC, the government of Canada has invited His Majesty's Government of Nepal to assist in the country's development process. Through mentorship, modelling, education and support, it is anticipated that at the end of five years, the project management will be handed over to local Canadian people.

Believing that in order to be successful, development must occur on many levels, and must be a holistic process, the project uses the following conceptualisation of development to guide its activities:

Development is an integrated total process of awakening taking place in spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political, and economic dimensions of human beings as

individuals, families, groups, village and urban communities, national communities and the human community as a whole. (Sri Lankan social worker Ariyaratne, 1991)

PROJECT GOALS

- * To make Albertans self sufficient, to strengthen small-scale and informal enterprises, and economies by increasing grassroots level control over economic structures.
- * To increase people's knowledge of alternative health practices (that is alternative to the pharmaceutical-led, illness-focused, and expert-driven health care system now dominant in Canada); and to increase people's (especially women's) control over their own health.
- * To revive traditional knowledge systems of sustainable ways for humans to live with each other and their environment.
- * To promote cultural reclamation; to increase people's (especially youth's) sense of cultural heritage; to build on the positive aspects of traditional wisdom, knowledge, and social patterns.
- * To empower women and other marginalised and oppressed groups traditionally excluded from power by increasing their economic, political and personal power.
- * To promote participatory democratic structures; to increase community participation in local self-governance and to empower people to take an active role in Canada's development process.
- * To create awareness about viable alternatives to the current environmentally destructive, unsustainable, and wasteful practices.
- * To increase incomes of the lowest income groups through creative income-generation activities, employment training, and savings and credit groups (bank loans are not available to poor people in Canada).
- * To counter traditional harmful beliefs and practices which stand as impediments to people's development.
- * To create sustainable community-based organisations and to address problems of community breakdown through the building of cultural and social patterns which bind community residents and provide collective meaning systems.

PROJECT MANAGER ROLE DESCRIPTION

In view of the problems outlined below, NAPC is looking

for a Nepali project manager who can competently and creatively manage a multi-level community development project which holistically addresses the social, economic, and environmental problems present in Canada. We are specifically looking for someone with a strong background in and awareness of grassroots development work, small-scale and sustainable agricultural practices, alternative health care systems (such as traditional ayurvedic practices), community participatory research and development methods, local resources management, and women's empowerment.

The successful candidate will demonstrate the ability to link community development strategies for over-industrialised countries to the economic, ecological, social and cultural spheres in which the activities take place. The project manager will also have to demonstrate dynamic leadership skills based on participatory leadership methods.

Salary will depend on qualifications, and will range between NPR 1,500,000 and 2,300,000 per annum. The project manager must be able to creatively and competently integrate and implement the project goals into concrete programmes and activities.

OVERVIEW OF COUNTRY SITUATION

As is typical of most over-developed industrialised societies, the people of Canada suffer from the multiple and interlocking effects of 20th-century industrialisation and globalisation such as transnational corporate control over all levels of the economy, growing levels of poverty and unemployment, social alienation and environmental destruction. The people of Alberta are particularly locked into patterns of chronic over-consumption, individualism, patriarchy, classism, racism and environmental exploitation.

Behind many of the structures and practices which stand as barriers to the development process of Albertans, are underlying belief systems which, in effect, are even greater barriers to progressive changes. Such belief systems include a blind faith in corporate capitalism and the concomitant inability to imagine social and economic alternatives to the present social and economic structures, fatalistic beliefs in the inevitability of environmental destruction, and irrational beliefs in the environment's ability to sustain ever-increasing exploitation and destruction. Moreover, many Albertans maintain a religious belief in the god of boundless economic growth, and a strong faith in the ability of neo-conservative doctrines to solve social and economic problems, despite clear evidence to the contrary in countries where these policies have been implemented (England, New Zealand, the United States, etc). These beliefs underpin the following problems specific to Alberta.

SOCIAL

Poverty

- * one in five children live below the poverty line
- * 2000 homeless in Alberta's two main cities
- * 80% poverty rates in the north of the province

- * exponential growth of urban food bank use over the last decade

Unequal gender relations

- * women earn 67 cents for every dollar earned by men, and women's paid employment is almost exclusively found in the narrow 'pink collar ghetto' of the service, social and health sectors
- * one in ten women is beaten by her husband
- * despite some advances women continue to be marginalised in political, social and economic structures

Social isolation and deterioration

- * Canadian suicide rates remain high relative to those of other industrialised countries
- * a third of girls and a fourth of boys are sexually abused by the time they are 16
- * social services each year records distressingly high caseloads of child abuse and neglect
- * clinical depression endemic among the elderly population

Cultural loss

- * residential schools and broken treaties have resulted in the demise of previously self-sufficient economies and intact cultural systems of the aboriginal people, causing loss of traditional knowledge of healing, restitutive justice, participatory community governance, and symbiotic living with the environment
- * widespread sense of cultural loss among the third and fourth generation Canadian immigrants

Structural domination by elites

- * political and economic elite are almost exclusively male Caucasians and maintain a system of dominance within the legal, judicial, political, educational and social structures, which not only exclude but discriminate against non-whites, women, homosexuals, and people with disabilities

Human rights violations

- * widespread human rights violations against aboriginal peoples and children
- * a token government-controlled Human Rights Commission has a backlog of 400 complaints
- * Alberta is the only province in Canada which has not signed the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child

Erosion of democratic structures and political diversity

- * average citizens have greatly restricted ability to influence educational, health, social and political structures, resulting in widespread political apathy
- * the political spectrum largely consists of a narrow range of right-wing parties

Health concerns

- * many health problems persist which could otherwise be easily cured or prevented with basic health and

nutrition practices

- * health problems resulting from industrial environmental pollution – asthma, toxic office syndrome, birth defects near pulp plants – are particularly high in Alberta

ECONOMIC

- * lack of collective and individual economic self-sufficiency: foreign (largely US) domination of market and ownership of resources – Canada is the largest branch-plant economy in the world
- * mono-focused economy: oil – a finite resource – is the major income generator of the province and takes precedence over a more sustainable and diversified economy
- * income polarisation: while the provincial income has increased, so have poverty rates and poverty indicators; while an ever-narrowing group of economic and political elite control an ever-increasing percentage of the province's wealth and resources, the middle class is slowly disappearing, resulting in a highly inequitable distribution of wealth between haves and have-nots
- * lack of employment security: while unemployment rates are generally lower than other parts of the country, these rates are largely due to increases in low-wage, part-time employment which usually are insufficient for people to meet their basic needs
- * lack of food security: with a decreasing percentage of the population involved in agriculture, food security

is increasingly jeopardised as large US-controlled commercial companies control an ever-increasing share of food distribution and production

ENVIRONMENTAL

- * rapid and increasing deforestation caused by the logging industry has resulted in loss of bio-diversity, endangering of forest species, and in overwhelming cultural destruction of indigenous peoples
- * industrial pollution and contamination caused by pulp mills, coal mines and oil rigs have caused grave human and environmental damage in various parts of the province
- * widespread overconsumption and overuse of natural resources have led to contaminated water, heavy vehicle pollution in the cities, chemical pollution in homes and workplaces, changes in weather patterns, and increase in all types of cancer – which are seen as linked to environmental and chemical pollution

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(This announcement was prepared by Erika Haug, a Canadian student of social work who recently completed her assignment in western Nepal.)



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The Mountain Forum (MF) is a global network, mainly electronic, of diverse institutions and individuals committed to information exchange and advocacy of sustainable mountain development. ICIMOD is serving as the Secretariat of MF for the period 1998-1999. The Assistant Coordinator of the Secretariat will assist the ICIMOD Coordinator with liaison and coordination activities of the forum and with designing, implementing and reporting of studies related to legal status of MF and its sustainability; provide administrative backup and support for Governing Council Meetings; and, manage day-to-day activities of the Secretariat.

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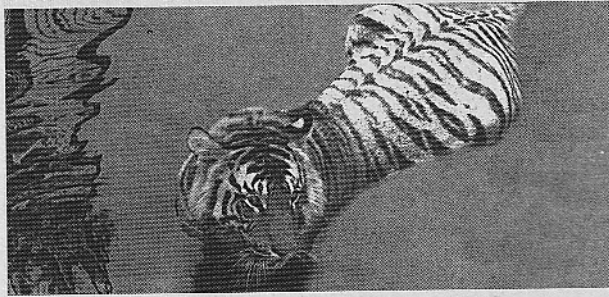
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IF THIS is a picture of a "Royal Bengal tiger cooling off in the Sunderbans on Saturday", as an AP picture caption had it, then I am a **hermaphrodite from Patagonia** sunning on an Antarctica beach. I say this as part of my responsibilities as Chief Photo-Inspector of South Asia, a post I take seriously. Take a look at the wavy reflection on left frame, and you will confirm that it is that of a man-made structure. No animal, vegetable or mineral in the natural state would leave patterns like that, even on moving water. If the reflection were part of a boat that happened to be visiting the Sunderbans, then there is no way that this tiger(ess) would be in such a pose of repose. Which leads me to believe that this big cat is in a zoo, probably Dhaka's. If AP can successfully defend itself, I am willing to be served up on a platter to the feline in the pic.

TOOK A many-day trip by train down the **Deccan backbone** of *hamara-Bharat-mahaan*, from Gorakhpur right down to Madras. It was media-

sensitive travel, given the variety of newspapers I got to peruse while the train chugged its way south (and then back north on a return trip). As we chugged through the badlands of central Madhya Pradesh, from a Wheeler's stall I picked up a copy of a paper that bills itself as "The Oldest and Largest Circulated Daily of Central India". It is *The Hitavada* from Nagpur, edited by Banwarilal Purohit (says it right there, below the masthead). Established in 1911, the volume count is at LXXXVI. The paper seems to be going strong, with 24 pages, and a good mix of advertisements.

AND AS the train slipped into Vijayawada station in Andhra, I parted with IRs 5 and got myself a copy of *Blitz*, "**India's Greatest Tabloid Weekly**", for old times' sake. And look! the back page still carries the traditional image of "Blitz Beauty" in grainy black and white. For decades these paleface ladies have been

adorning the rear of Mr Karanjia's paper. Printing technology and glossy four-colour now provide Indians who feel the need for it with much more real-life presentation of female flesh on paper – and there are now brown models who will show more than Mr Karanjia's choice beauties – but *Blitz* continues on in proper *swadeshi* style. Its beauties are just as (un)clad as they were decades ago, no more, no less.

AND HERE is a bit that I would not have known from the national papers, but there it was in the *Lokmat Times*, also from Nagpur. There has been a spurt in real estate prices in **Raipur** district in what today is still Madhya Pradesh.

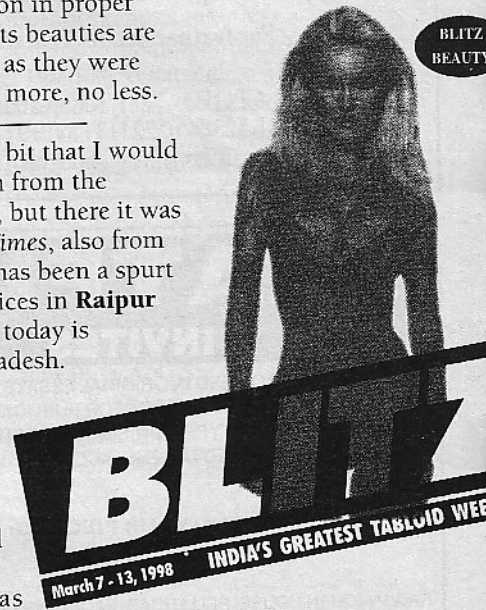
Why? Because the new BJP government at the Centre has promised to grant statehood to the region known as

Chattisgarh, rich in ore deposits (iron, coal and limestone) and industries (cement, aluminum, steel, thermal power, etc). Interesting, which proves once again why one should read more than the Indian national English (or Hindi) press. Or that one should take more rail journeys.

ONE PITHY passage that struck me over the course of perusing the *Calcutta Telegraph* in early April was by Ramachandra Guha, writing about the life and death of EMS Namboodiripad: "...EMS and his comrades went on to lead a double life of bankrupt ideology and meaningful practice. Totalitarian thinker and practicing democrat, subservient Stalinist and proudly patriotic Indian: this was the tragedy as well as the achievement of EMS Namboodiripad."

HIMALAYAN JOURNALS seem to be continuing to **bite the dust**. The latest to give up the ghost is (was) the one-man labour of Iran-born, US-based, and now moved-to-Japan geologist, Rasoul B. Sorkhabi. *Himalayan Notes*, covering "earth science and environment of High Asia", used to provide useful information on research, theses, recent publications and scientific reports. Writes Mr Sorkhabi in a letter, "It is difficult to continue this publication single-handedly." All one can say when a publication ceases to be, is that the good it did will live on after it.

WHAT DO you know about **High Himalayan Leucogranites**? The very last issue of *Himalayan*



Notes carries a report by a certain Djordje Grujic, a Yugoslav geologist, titled "Bhutan: Geology in Shangrila". It seems that a team of five stone-scientists headed out to central Bhutan, their main goal "to look at the contact of the High Himalayan Leucogranites". After much trial and tribulation they arrive at the mouth of the Chamkar Chu valley. They can see the leucogranite escarpments up-valley, but local authorities stop the group from proceeding further. All is lost! But then the team decides to give up on the leucogranites and focus instead on "roadside geology". They follow the highway all the way to the east of the country, "almost 260 km of almost continuous exposure of rocks and geological structures". They go home happy, and one Bhutanese valley remains unsoiled by prying Western hands!

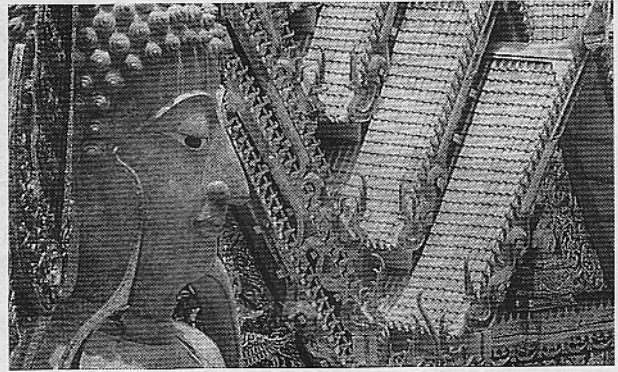
MEMBERS OF the **Delhi Dhobi Sabha** recently protested the harassment that washermen and women are constantly subjected to from the police in the Indian capital. I would wager that this is a major problem in every South Asian city. Therefore, let the washerfolk of South Asia unite. Their cause is just.

MEET KHUSRO Iqbal, introduced on the first page of the PIA inflight magazine *Humsafar* as your friendly air steward. Says the caption: "Air Steward Khusro Iqbal was born in Karachi. He has been with PIA since 1989. Khusro graduated from the Sindh Medical College Karachi. In his spare time, Khusro enjoys playing cricket." I somehow like the idea that here is a person with a unique sense of mission, one who gives up the medical profession to take up the humanitarian task of caring for air travellers. *Shabash!*



IT WAS buried deep in the Indian papers and the Pakistani press did not make much of it either, but how appropriate was it for Gen Dennis J. Reimer, **Chief of Staff of the US Army**, to visit the headquarters of the Indian Army's Northern Command near Jammu and then take a tour of some of the frontier areas in the sensitive region? The General told the press that he was able to understand "the complexities of what the Indian Army was facing while guarding the borders in the Northern Command area which shares its borders with both Pakistan and China." Remember, some of those borders are disputed; so why this high profile (but little covered) trip to the Northern Command when the east, west and south would have done just as well?

SOUTHASIA, A magazine that seeks to speak for the region, published from Pakistan, is one that obviously has editorial odds to surmount. To begin with, there is



a need to know the constituent nations of SAARC better. It does not do in their regional profile, for example, to introduce Bhutan with the Nepal-side view of Mount Everest; or to show a Thai Buddha and some wats and pass it off as Nepal (you've seen the eaves of one temple, you've seen them all). But the real howler was on poor Maldives, shown with fjord-like hillsides dipping down to the water – a rather unlikely version of a coral-island country which barely manages to rise a few feet above sea level at its highest. For India, the editors thankfully got it right. They offered the Taj Mahal, and not the Khyber Pass.



THERE IS nothing left for me to do but repeat *in toto* this item from a staff reporter of *The Nation*, Lahore, of 3 April, headlined "**27 percent women have head lice**".

ISLAMABAD - One woman in four from low economic status have head lice, says a government health report. Rural women are more likely to have head lice than urban women. Exception to this are women of low economic status of whom 27 percent of both urban and rural women have head lice. Educated women in the same category seem to have low incidence of head lice i.e. only 10 percent of women with matric qualification were found to have head lice. It was found that five percent of women over 15 years age belonging to the urban upper economic strata had head lice. Low economic status women in urban areas according to the survey "are more than five times more likely to have head lice". The presence of head lice was determined by passing a fine comb three times over the head. The comb was then checked for nits with a magnifying glass. Another government survey found that only 35 percent of the women in Pakistan brushed their teeth compared to 45 percent males.

– Chhetria Patrakar

Among the Naipauls

There are no pure origins for identities in the diaspora and, equally important, they cannot be claimed by appealing to pure homelands either.

by Amitava Kumar

It was Trinidad-born V.S. Naipaul who had famously described the India he visited as "an area of darkness". And, when his younger brother, novelist Shiva Naipaul, travelled to India, he had described its poorest province, Bihar, as "a dying state". Bihar, he stated in an article for the *British Spectator*, was "the subcontinent's heart of darkness".

A hundred and fifty years ago others had made a similar journey in the opposite direction. Many of the 134,000 indentured Indian labourers brought to Trinidad after slavery was abolished on the islands came from Bihar.

I was born in Bihar, but the his-

torical connection did not weigh terribly on my mind as I sat on the plane to Port of Spain. Growing up in India, the name West Indies had meant cricket. Otherwise, it figured in barely disguised racist jokes. A dark-skinned cousin in India is called a "West Indian" by my family in Patna. (I found out later that the epithet is returned by people of African origin in Trinidad, some of whom generally refer to those of East Indian origin as "coolie people".) The point, however, is that the early crossings of indentured labourers from India to the Caribbean, was hardly ever mentioned.

There is a poem of Derek Walcott's about Port of Spain. The city evokes

in Walcott's mind a comparison with Jorge Luis Borges's blind love for Buenos Aires, "how a man feels the veins of a city swell in his hand." My arrival in Port of Spain, however, was as a stranger. I took in the sight of the lights outside the airplane window, and, to the side and in the distance, the glow of the oil rigs near the Venezuelan coast. That was in October, a year and a half ago.

The ugly tourist

When I visited Trinidad for the second time this February, the plane was full of American tourists coming in for the carnival. I and my film-maker friend, Sanjeev, spent our time in

Indian skin: revellers at Port of Spain carnival.



flight downing glasses of the customary rum punch and taking down names of the carnival bands that were being recommended. There was this person from Indiana repeatedly telling us not to waste time eating oysters in Trinidad because they didn't really work as aphrodisiacs. He proceeded to inform us that we'd find "a lot of Indians down there... Boy, they're all over!"

But, it was the tourists who were all over. Not so many during the night mass called the *jouvert*, when revelers cover their bodies with mud and ash as they dance to the beat of the bands riding atop huge trucks, but certainly during the closing event of the carnival, the queen's parade. Everywhere in the parade, one witnessed white flesh protruding from under bright, tinsel costumes, like those we last saw worn decades ago by Hollywood's Roman soldiers on the sets of *The Ten Commandments*.

Returning to the hotel, I got into a conversation with some exchange students from a Lutheran college in Washington State. Their South African instructor at the University of West Indies was making them read Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, a fierce diatribe against the complacency of American tourists visiting the Caribbean. At my urging, one of the students stood against the balcony and read her favourite lines out loud for us:

The thing you have always suspected about yourself the minute you become a tourist is true: A tourist is an ugly human being... [A]nd it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you... They do not like you. They do not like me! That thought never actually occurs to you.

Fabricated societies

On the second evening of the carnival, we watched the calypso competition on television at the home of the Permasads. Ken teaches history at the University of West Indies and Roslyn is an attorney. During my earlier visit, I had read in Ken's introduction to his dissertation – which was written while he was a visiting student at the

Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi – about his feeling a "nagging sense of historical hurt".

Sitting in the Permasads' living room, leafing through the pages of Ken's book, I asked, "What is this historical hurt?"

"That's what lots of Indians feel," Roslyn replied.

Ken said, "That's what somebody like Naipaul went to India to work out. This place draws you... What am I doing here? It's very difficult."

Ken and Roslyn took turns explaining this to us.

"It has more to do with the violence of a rupture. Blacks in the new world suffer that too... It is about existence in these fabricated societies. Native populations wiped out, and people were brought out on denuded lands."

"You are placed there without a past that is indigenous to you."

"Indians in India have monuments, we are creating monuments. There is so much taken for granted there, here we are in the process of rooting ourselves."

What they said was very much in evidence in the temples and mosques we visited: that powerful sense of resilience evident in the signs of a culture that has survived against tremendous odds. Culture had worked to keep intact a sense of society after it had been, quite literally, set adrift.

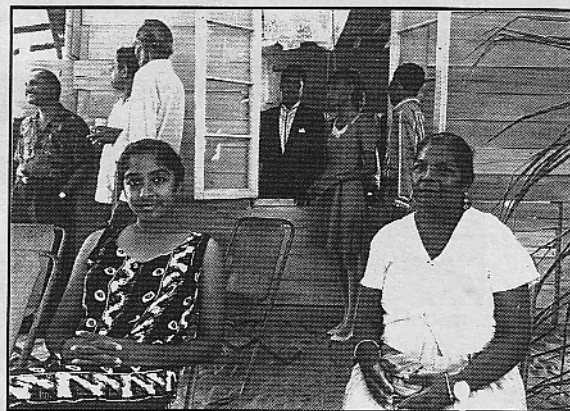
In ways not seen in the festivals and functions of Indians in the US or England, the Indians of Trinidad adhere to a memory that reaches far, far back. It is quite startling to see, for example, the tight clusters of *jhandis* – flags and pennants hoisted on bamboo poles – outside the Hindu homes in Trinidad today. One is returned at once to the villages of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; these are not sights seen any more in Bombay or New Delhi.

Trinidadian trinity

And yet, there is a curious denial in these gestures of steadfast remembrance. And this denial has a gravely disturbing feature to it. Not the least of which is the discomfort one feels in telling someone else that what they value as real, is unreal, or dead – or, for that matter, dangerous.

At a wedding lunch before the festival of Diwali, a man leans forward, holding a green chilli in his hand. He says, "*Hara mirchi* [green chillies]... the best anti-AIDS thing." He pours another shot of rum and proceeds to describe the way Indian women "move their bodies after two drinks" during the chutney dance. His eyes widen and he blows air hotly, "Oh-h-h, man..."

The chutney dance, it is said by some, arose as a hybrid form evolved by young Indian women whose parents would not allow them to go to calypsos. The prohibition was a way of ensuring inter-marriage among Indians alone. Such was the suppres-



Wedding reception, Mayaro.

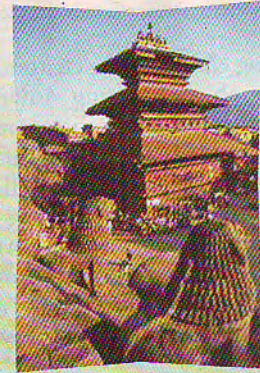
sion, indeed, that many Trinidad-Indian girls ended up taking their own lives. Apparently, drinking weed-killer was the most popular form of suicide.

I was told that the other night at the Diwali Mela, there were women handing out flyers about battered women, and so went looking for these women who had turned the traditional festival of lights into an occasion for enlightenment and consciousness-raising. These women were not to be found, but there were many signs like the following:

"When a man has begun to be ashamed of his "ancestors", the end has come. Here am "I" one of the "Hindu race" yet proud of my race, proud of my ancestors. I am proud to call myself a Hindu."

Together with these words of the late-19th century Hindu philosopher Vivekanand, the organisers had installed an imposing *papier-mache* statue of the swami in one section of

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the grounds outside Port of Spain. His words certainly seemed to find an echo among the Trinidad-Indians: "You must have an iron will if you would cross the ocean. You must be strong enough to pierce mountains." But, this was not simply a sermon about fearlessness.

For a visitor from India, familiar with the way in which nationalist Hindu pride is used by fundamentalists to persecute minorities, this insistence was more than a little alarming. Ravi-ji, one of the chief organisers of the festival and a leader of the Hindu community in Trinidad, was not perturbed by our expressions of concern. He defended himself thus: "I am valid. I am Indian. I am Trinidadian. I am Hindu. That's my trinity."

But, what of the fact that he was, in an undeniable sense, in the sense of inhabiting a shared history, also a Muslim? No, he said. He could have Muslim friends, and added, "My brother-in-law is a Muslim." But that was not his identity, and furthermore he was not about to forget the lessons of history.

What history, I pressed.

"The history of the Muslim invasions in India," he said, "and Muslims breaking Hindu temples..."

That was exactly what the destroyers of the Babri Masjid had said



before demolishing it on 6 December 1992.

Chaguanes to Chauhan

After the carnival was over, sitting in a roadside-bar near rural Mayaro one morning, I asked the woman at the counter whether the man on her poster, the long-haired, bare-waisted singer Chris Garcia, was an Indian. Yes, she said.

How come that name then? She didn't know. A few days later, by pure chance, reading V.S. Naipaul's fragmentary autobiography, *Finding the Centre*, I came across details of the accidents of a syncretic history.

During Naipaul's childhood, Trinidad was poor, even with American bases, and many citizens made the illegal passage to nearby Venezuela to find work. Naipaul writes, "Some acquired Venezuelan birth certificates; so it happened that men whose grandfathers had come from India sank into the personalities, randomly issued by the migration brokers, of Spanish mulattos named Morales or Garcia or Ybarra."

Similar cross-fertilisations of his-

tory, often mixed with the violent and bloody consequences of colonialism, provide the pedigree of other names in the region. Naipaul's birthplace, Chaguanas, recalls the struggles of the Amerindian tribe of Chaguanes against the Spanish. But then

Hindi-speakers appropriated it as Chauhan, a North Indian Hindu caste name.

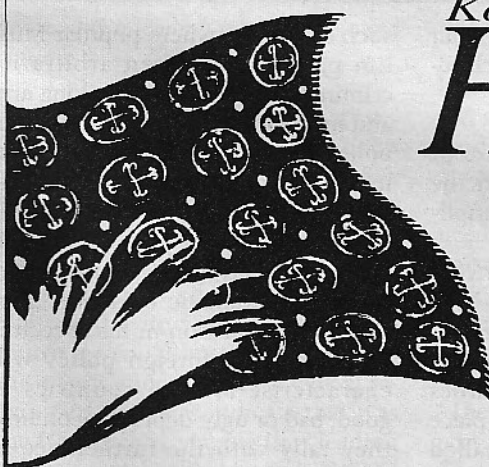
Crazy Columbus

There are no pure origins for identities in the diaspora and, equally important, the identities cannot be claimed by appealing to pure homelands either.

There is a detour through a larger lesson in the story of our own mad Columbus. He was the one who, stricken with homesickness, threw himself into the sea to swim back home. In trying to swim back to Calcutta from Guiana, he offered a lesson about the perilous gesture of return.

The *Daily Chronicle* of 22 December, 1899, tells us that our hapless swimmer was quickly jailed for 14 days for indecent exposure. Would-be travellers to imaginary homelands, stand warned! △

A. Kumar teaches English at the University of Florida and has recently completed (with Sanjeev Chatterjee) a documentary film on Trinidad, *Pure Chutney*.



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Great speech, Your Excellency

Cut through the twaddle of Bill Richardson's Dhaka oratory, and you notice that there is a distinct talking-down-to.

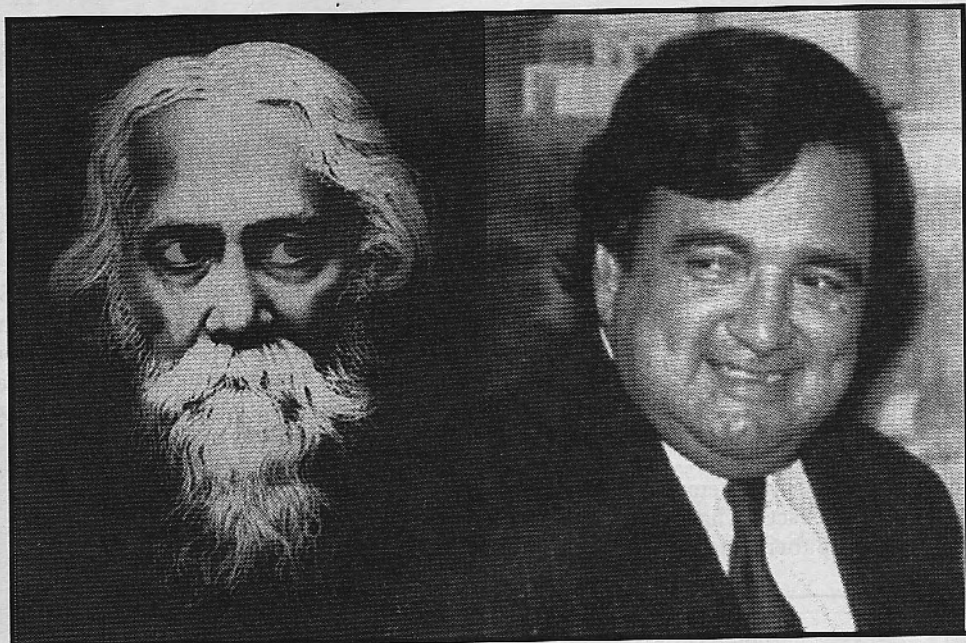
by Quddus Mia

An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country," said Sir Henry Wotton back in 1604, and some things never seem to change. American ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson came visiting as Bill Clinton's special envoy to South Asia in April. At the centre of his visit to Dhaka was a keynote speech he gave on 13 April at the Bangladesh Institute of International & Strategic Studies.

The talk bore the epic title "Making Democracy Work in the 21st Century", and as one would expect, Richardson used it to reiterate the current concerns of American foreign policy as it relates to the Subcontinent. His sermon included references to human rights, child labour, the advancement of women and international trade. All of it worthy stuff, spoken as though there was unity of purpose and objectives, shared by one and all.

Other aspects of Richardson's remarks, however, were at variance with the Bangladeshi experience. Let's start at the very beginning, on page one.

"Bangladesh is... a Muslim country and its track record of democracy breaks many of the conventional negative stereotypes about Muslim countries..."



Bangladesh is dramatic evidence that Islamic countries can be strong democracies."

So Muslims can be good guys too! Perhaps this should be read in the spirit intended, that is, as a compliment. Thanks, Bill.

But what's all this talk of "conventional negative stereotypes"? Whose convention, whose stereotypes? There are Muslim countries like Algeria where Muslim political parties have been denied their rightful place in government after the so-called transparent democratic elections. There are other Muslim countries,

such as Turkey, where popular Muslim parties have been arbitrarily criminalised. What has the long arm and loud mouth of American foreign policy done to promote those genuine causes? Afghanistan, home of the Muslim freedom fighters of the 1980s, has been abandoned by Rambo and no longer receives American largesse. The only "dramatic evidence" supplied by Richardson in his speech is that American foreign policy will characterise Muslim countries as good, bad or ugly, depending on how they tally with the furtherance of American interests. But perhaps we are being unfair, polemical and sim-

plistic. To move on, then, to other parts of the ambassador's speech.

"Bangladesh was one of the first countries to support international operations in Haiti... And for that we thank you."

And so he should. Because Haiti remains one of the most shameful and under-reported episodes in recent international affairs, subsidised and sustained by the United States. After having suffered decades under the Papa and Baby Doc dictatorships, in 1990 Haiti held its first democratic election which Jean-Bertrand Aristide won with over 67 percent of the vote. Eight months later, another military coup (thought to have been aided by the CIA) put an end to Haiti's aspirations to democracy and self-determination.

Three years later, the US led a United Nations force which included Bangladesh to "restore democracy". What it actually did was restore the status quo, providing the generals with asylum and other protection and effectively neutralising Aristide. The economic policies for which Aristide was elected were jettisoned. The IMF and World Bank suits swept in, structural adjustment followed, which the Haitians referred to as "the death plan" because of its effect on the peasant economy. The US Army confiscated 160,000 pages of documents from Haitian army headquarters and still refuses to return these as some of them provide evidence of US involvement in the 1991 coup. Well may Richardson thank Bangladesh.

"On a global scale, Bangladesh continues to play a leading role in the United Nations."

As a beneficiary of the United Nations' development largesse, Bangladesh can always be expected to play an active role in supporting a strong UN system, but this can hardly be said of the US. Aside from the US's well-publicised efforts to make the UN toe the line to US dictates in return for coughing up its arrears to the organisation, a random look at recent performances indicate that it is the US which is playing the "leading role" in undermining the United Nations.

For the fourth year running, the United Nations has passed a motion condemning the US embargo of Cuba. In 1997, the vote was 117 votes to three. The countries against were the US, Uzbekistan and Israel. Fourteen out of 15 members of the UN Security Council voted against the US veto when Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's name came up for renewed tenure.

So, what grounds does Bill Richardson have to praise Bangladesh for its exemplary contribution to the United Nations, coming from a country which is against the UN consensus, in these random examples, of 117 to 3 and 14 to 1? How can such a country proceed with any credibility to praise another? The answer is simple. If you think you're in control, you can say what you want.

"Throughout Bangladesh's proud history, from the first days of independence to the modern-day challenges of making democracy work, America has stood by your side."

Credit Richardson's speechwriter for meticulous historical research. For it was *before* the "first days of independence", with Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State, that the US had steadfastly supported the Pakistani military junta. Pakistan at the time was seen as an important broker in the Sino-American detente and the troublesome disturbances in East Pakistan were shabbily down-graded to an "internal affair" beyond the purview of international involvement.

There are doubts, however, that the US has been a consistent supporter of Bangladesh throughout its history. For one, in 1974 Washington DC's suspension of much-needed food relief to a vulnerable Bangladesh contributed to the terrible famine of that year. All because Bangladesh was impertinent enough to continue exporting jute to the much-hated Cuba, a hate that the American foreign policy incredibly continues to nurture till today.

"The great Nobel prize-winning Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore spoke of that future [of Bangladesh] at the beginning of the century..."

There's the old chestnut, dear to all foreigners who wish to ingratiate themselves to Bangladeshis. Yes, the quote from Tagore. But one wonders if the speechwriter was aware that the poet's pride in Bengal was not just that of a spiritual guru. It was as much political, as seen in his renunciation of the knighthood conferred on him by George V in protest of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. It can only be hoped that if Tagore was listening, he would have been tickled by cut-and-paste attempts like this to dignify diplomatic twaddle with his work.

Lest this write-up be perceived as an exclusive exercise in America-bashing, let it be said that if Burkina Faso were to behave as a loutish world power, Ouagadougou too would be subject to similar criticism. Being a world power carries with it the responsibilities to act like one.

One would welcome the support of the US to strengthen human rights in Bangladesh, but pause to consider US complicity with military dictatorships that have flagrantly abused human rights throughout the last 50 years. We look forward to further direct investment by American corporations, which Bill Richardson suggests may top USD one billion by the year 2000, yet we wonder about the redistributive potential and environmental impact of capital-intensive investment. We appreciate US support for child rights but wonder about the Iraqi children who now suffer from a six-fold increase in the incidence of leukaemia following American-led use of uranium-tipped bombs during the Gulf War.

To protest the fiction that it promotes so prodigiously, and its general poor taste, we may return Richardson's speech to him with the necessary corrections and suggestions based on fact. Perhaps in the comfort of his home back in New York, the good envoy will find the time to peruse his speech and consider how to be less patronising and more history-bound the next time around.

It was nice having you here, Sir. Do come again.

Q. Mia works for a multilateral development agency in Dhaka.

V

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Data collection. *Balmurli Natrajan in "Notes Towards a (Re)Arrangement of Love", SAMAR: South Asian Magazine for Action & Reflection, Summer/Fall 1997.*

Well-meaning Woman (WW): So, I heard that you two got married recently?

Wife (W): Yeah, only last July.

Husband (H): Although we knew each other for about a year before that.

WW (smiling): So, was yours a love or an arranged marriage?

Trrrring! The alarm goes off in the ears of H and W. They have to face another genuinely concerned, superficially informed, and arrogantly complacent inquisitor. And they have to decide quickly whether they need to seriously engage her, or take the easy way out and plant themselves firmly on the side of "love", since in such cases the inquisitor hounds the "arranged" folks, not the "love" folks. Finally...

W (with a mischievous glint): Well, what do we look like? The "arranged" or "love" types?

WW (with blank uncomprehending look): Well, what I meant...

H (philosophically): What is love? What is arranged? Aren't all marriages arranged somehow or the other? Do you mean pre-arranged?...

WW: Well, what I really meant...

W: What was yours...I mean was your marriage "love" or "arranged?"

WW (almost indignantly): Of course, "love". I wouldn't ever be able to agree to an "arranged" one. Although I have always been fascinated by people who do it that way.

H: A-ha! So we would not fascinate you if we said that ours was a "love" marriage.

Well-meaning Woman smiles nervously.

W: This may sound naive, but what is a "love" marriage?

WW: Well, it is one in which two individuals meet,

fall in "love", and then get married.

H: And so what is an "arranged" marriage?

WW: That is one which you should know better. I hear it happens all the time in India. (triumphantly) You see, I read some of your "matrimonial columns" in the Indian newspapers.

H: So, is an arranged marriage one in which two individuals don't meet, don't fall in "love" and then get married?

WW: I guess. (hurriedly trying to veer the conversation back to its beginnings) And so what about you two?

W (pretending not to hear WW): What if they don't meet, but fall in "love" anyway and then get married?

WW: How ridiculous. How can one fall in "love" without meeting?

W: Well, one could have one's friends and relatives talk about the person, build up some "data" regarding his/her characteristics, process that data into information, reflect upon it, transform the information to knowledge, feel this knowledge produce goose pimples and then know one has been smitten by "love" and is ready for marriage. In such a scenario, one's friends constantly discover that one has this faraway look in one's eyes and is prone to day dreaming – ostensibly revelling in this newfound "love".

WW: You must be joking.

W: Not at all. Isn't "data collection" what folks who meet in order to fall in "love" and then marry, do? There is even a term for it – "getting to know him/her." Right? Of course, in your scenario the couple first fall in "love" and then collect data, whereas in our scenario the couple collect data through their sources and then fall in "love". The end result in both is the much desired state of marriage.

H (helpfully): "The basis of love is knowledge" according to Erich Fromm.

WW: But it is all second-hand knowledge in the scenario you are talking about. It could be completely wrong.

H: Or it could be judged critically. It's all a matter of

C

methodology. Sociologists and psychologists use a lot of secondary data, collected probably by someone they never knew, not their parents, relatives or friends. Yet they seem to accept it, critically of course. Then again, anthropologists collect their own data (mostly for the reason that they can't get themselves to trust others) unlike the sociologists. In the end, all of these scientists make expert pronouncements about human beings and societies and it is at this level that one gets to evaluate whether they are right or wrong.

Literacy competition *between Indian and Pakistani heads of government will leave the latter far behind, according to M.A. Niazi in The Nation of Lahore.*

I don't know why, but the Indians seem to be developing a tradition of poet PMs, something we are apparently strongly against. Of the four persons who have held the Prime Ministership in India, three have been accused of writing poetry. Atal Behari Vajpayee is a writer and something of a poet, which was also the case with Inder Kumar Gujral and P.V. Narasimha Rao, actually a college professor until age 50. H.D. Deve Gowda is the only one of the four who never tried to rhyme 'moon' and 'June'.

On the other hand Mian Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto have never been seen at their desks gazing into space, chewing the top of their pens, murmuring, "Yeh na thi hamari fitrat...hasrat...zillat...kismat! Yes, that's it!" and scribbling quickly before the divine afflatus fades. In fact, Mian Nawaz is thought to believe 'kafiya' is Arabic for coffee, while Benazir's greatest regret is not visiting the East African state of Radeef as PM.

Both do know that poetry exists, of course. Mian Nawaz's taste in music inclines towards the classical and semi-classical, with lyrics by the great poets. Benazir tried to impress the world with her deep knowledge of American poetry by concluding her 1988 inaugural address to

E

the National Assembly with a quotation from one of Robert Frost's best known poems. But perhaps I'm being unfair, and she actually read the poem herself, for it's only three or four verses long, and the lines are conveniently short.

Rao, Gujral and Vajpayee are all unabashed intellectuals, who have prospered in politics. All took office as septuagenarians, all are habitual readers, all are authors, and all write poetry. Benazir did write *Daughter of the East*, but reading it tells us that she shouldn't try another...

I don't think it makes much difference, really, for I don't think Gujral or Rao were markedly better than Benazir, and Nawaz was definitely better than both. It doesn't take poetry to make a good PM, it takes good sense. If a PM can write poetry, that's nice. But it's not necessary.

Empress Lata speaks *From a rare interview with Lata Mangeshkar which appeared in The Sunday Pioneer of 19 April 1998.*

I cannot point to any particular reason. But there are several factors contributing to the qualitative deterioration of Hindi film songs. One, the kind of films being made today with the kind of masala, violence etc.

I would like to add here that we are becoming Americanised in all aspects of our society and not just in music and songs...it was always there (this Americanisation) but it is becoming more evident now in every sphere of society...

...if we (the film industry) give something unpleasant or unpalatable and people demand more, then we are the first to be blamed; for we supplied it in the first place...

You will agree that in the good old times, we were fortunate enough to have 95 percent good songs and five percent cheap/popular songs, but now the ratio has come down to nearly 50-50. A marked decline...

S

Cardboard Swadeshi

How "swadeshi" is the BJP? A checklist suggests maybe not very much.

by Vandana Shiva and
Claude Alvares

India is India because of its rivers, forests, hills, beaches and biodiversity. The devastation of the environment is in fact the devastation of Bharat Mata. No government can call itself *swadeshi* if it promotes judicially documented, environmentally and socially destructive activities.

Two recent decisions of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government in New Delhi have caused consternation in the minds of those who believed that the BJP would base its policies on a strong nationalistic plank. The two decisions involve the shifting of around 320 items on to the "free import list" and the revival of the Aquaculture Authority Bill (AAB) which was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by the United Front Government to protect the interests of the environmentally destructive aqua farming lobbies but failed to go through because of protests by coastal villagers, fishing communities and environmentalists.

The Export-Import (Exim) Policy is the main policy instrument for controlling imports and exports, and it is generally acknowledged to have impacts on domestic production, livelihoods and the environment. Trade liberalisation pressures require that all restrictions of the kind embodied in India's Exim Policy be removed in the interests of global traders. In particular, Article XI of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) makes any trading restrictions illegal.

From 15 to 19 April, the WTO was scheduled to undertake a Trade Policy Review of how far India has gone in

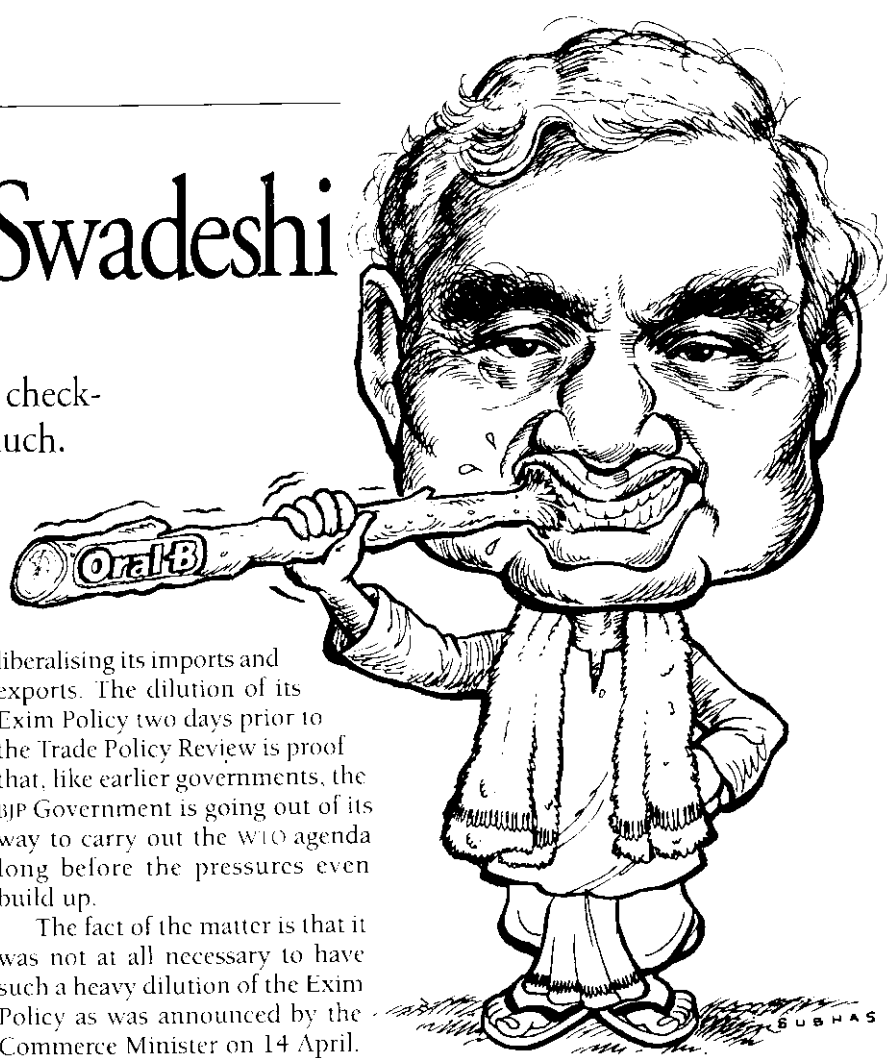
liberalising its imports and exports. The dilution of its Exim Policy two days prior to the Trade Policy Review is proof that, like earlier governments, the BJP Government is going out of its way to carry out the WTO agenda long before the pressures even build up.

The fact of the matter is that it was not at all necessary to have such a heavy dilution of the Exim Policy as was announced by the Commerce Minister on 14 April. The BJP Government could have studied the issue and taken a long-term decision in the national interest rather than a short-term ad hoc response purely to get good marks from the WTO.

On the domestic front, the Aquaculture Authority Bill – which died an ignoble death under the last government – is being resurrected by the BJP-led Government to protect the very interests that were defended earlier by the United Front and the Congress. The AAB is basically aimed at undoing the Supreme Court judgement of December 1996, which ordered the closure of all shrimp farms within the coastal zone. It is part of a policy to undo the entire environmental regulatory system meant to control destructive activities within the fragile coastal areas. It is tantamount to announcing "the rape of the motherland".

Higher standards

The BJP is required, in the interests of its much-touted *swadeshi* policy, to have a far superior and committed



environment policy than any of the previous governments. If the BJP seeks to compete with the previous government in dismantling India's environmental regimes then it will have to be denounced in even stronger words.

In the coming months, the BJP's commitment to *swadeshi* will face an even greater test. The government will have to take decisions on the following issues as a result of the WTO process, pressures from the World Bank/International Monetary Fund, and cajoling by the United States. All will involve critical *swadeshi* components, and the BJP's actions will indicate whether or not it can be trusted to defend the country's interests.

The Patents Bill. Amendments to the Indian Patents Act have become necessary in view of several new developments concerning plant genetic resources, plant breeding and biotechnology. The amendments have to promote culture, ethics and fundamental human rights of the people of India by excluding patents on life and

on indigenous knowledge in India and abroad, and by placing restrictions as well as having compulsory licensing in the area of essential medicine. If, however, the government at the Centre buckles under pressure of the MNCs and Washington DC to merely increase the monopolies of the US pharmaceutical and seed sectors, it will fail the swadeshi test.

Biodiversity legislation. India's economy and culture is based on biodiversity, and the Biodiversity Convention provides scope to protect India's culture, knowledge and lifestyles. If the BJP Government implements the Convention in full spirit, it will take the swadeshi agenda forward. But there is a danger that it may promote the undemocratically prepared present draft of the biodiversity law inherited from the earlier Janata Dal regime, which merely seeks to provide foreign corporations with access to intellectual property rights.

The Farmers' Rights Act. The hasmati rice patent controversy has proved the urgency of immediately moving to protect farmers' right by preventing the global seed industry from gaining rights over indigenous seeds. To evade the "anti-national" charge, the BJP Government will have to draft laws which promote the conservation of India's biological diversity and seed heritage, and which protect farmers' rights and farmers' innovation with legitimate and limited granting of breeders' rights to the seed industry.

Food grain imports. Here, the Centre has already failed the swadeshi test, having stayed with the mindless decision of the last government to import wheat from Australia to the detriment of Indian farmers. New Delhi is also in the process of importing genetically engineered soyabean from the United States, even though soyabean neither is a staple in the Subcontinent nor a part of the food culture. During the recent visit to India by the US envoy Bill Richardson, there was ample indication that the Vajpayee Government was negotiating an anti-swadeshi agenda in the area of food and food security.

Exports of meat and raw hides. While all non-BJP governments have

promoted meat exports, leading to rapid depletion of the country's animal genetic wealth, the BJP has always promised to take steps to halt this destruction of bovine stock. Will the new government, with its commitment to animal welfare, be able to announce within a year that it has reduced or completely halted all export of meat, and export of live animals for meat? Will it be able to say that it has successfully rejected the new pressures for exporting raw hides to the international market?

Foreign direct investment and liberalisation of the financial sector. There is pressure building in the WTO process to permit free and restrictionless investment by foreign companies, and this is embodied in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) proposal which is being negotiated in the OECD. The BJP government must play an energetic part in an international effort to permanently block the MAI proposal. Similarly, it must prevent the takeover of India's banking and insurance sectors through the liberalisation of the financial services.

Will it? As far as the entry of multinationals into non-priority sectors such as food processing is concerned, the entire BJP election campaign was run on the slogan, "Computer chips, not potato chips". However, key ministries are already stating that the potato and agro-processing sector will have the highest priority in terms of liberalisation and foreign investment.

Alcohol and tobacco advertising. There is a wholesale takeover of the country's electronic media by programmes that

promote wholly degraded Western lifestyles. These are creating enormous social and gender related problems in the society and undermining the very fabric of traditional cultural values. The programmes on sports, for instance, unabashedly promote the consumption of foreign liquor and foreign cigarettes. We await appropriate action from the Ministry of Culture, which is controlled by Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharati, and from Sushma Swaraj at the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

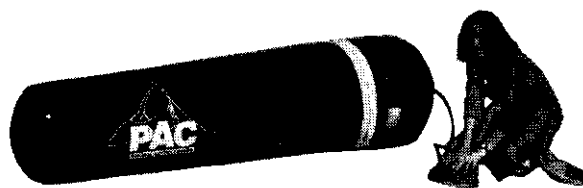
You cannot fool all the people all the time, and on all matters mentioned above it is clear that the BJP Government itself is not convinced about its swadeshi agenda. In which case there was no real need to have installed a new government in place of the old.

V. Shiva is a well-known eco-feminist and C. Alvares is an activist/journalist. This article was made available by Third World Network Features.

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World Bank Book (Shhh!)

by Max Holland

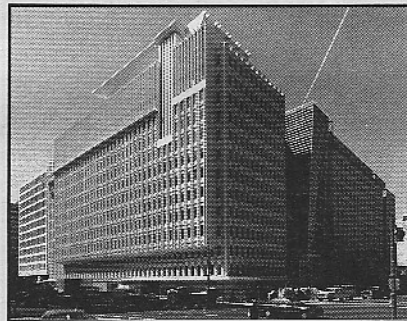
Normally, when two Washington bulwarks spend more than USD 2 million for an authorised history, publication is marked by a bang, not a whimper. That's why people in the economic development field are scratching their heads over the reception of *The World Bank: Its First Half Century*, a two-volume history authorised by the bank, published by the Brookings Institution and underwritten by both. To say that the 2,000-page tome has been greeted with reticence by the bank doesn't quite capture its not-so-benign neglect.

The World Bank still has a vast mandate and considerable influence, even though anti-Communism – the primary geopolitical impulse for US participation – has evaporated, and the bank's net annual lending of USD 7.4 billion represents only 2 to 3 per cent of the total flow of capital to developing countries. Simply put, the bank is to economic development theology what the papacy is to Catholicism, complete with yearly encyclicals. The bank, with its 5,400 full-time employees, still leads and other lenders or donors follow. It is particularly instrumental in orienting officials and politicians in poorer countries to economic development, World Bank-style.

The authors' integrity may have everything to do with the bank's neglect of the book, a standoffishness so marked that it suggests bank management surreptitiously hopes the history will go unread. (Brookings, very much the junior partner in underwriting the project, has promoted it through its usual channels.) There was an early consensus that at least one of the principal historians ought to hail from the world the bank is ostensibly dedicated to improving. So in addition to John Lewis, former dean of the Woodrow Wilson School

at Princeton, a "South" economist, Richard Webb, was recruited. Webb, a Peruvian, is an expert on income distribution.

Webb took the writing of the bank's history very seriously. He had been invested with a great public trust – to write an enduring account of a highly influential international institution during the second half of the twentieth century – and he proceeded accordingly. Together with an Indian national, Devesh Kapur, whose indisposability caused him to be promoted to full co-authorship, Webb



WB HQ, 1818 H. St., DC

went about the job thoroughly, combing the bank's archives for internal memorandums and transcripts of meetings, even seeking out the private papers of retired bank officers.

The result of this seven-year labour is a remarkably candid and balanced institutional history, and a sobering one, too. Some villains in the story work at the bank, but by no means all. Loan recipients, non-governmental organisations and the creditor nations are not exempt from scrutiny, least of all the United States, which has been inordinately responsible, as the largest shareholder, for what has gone right and wrong. In the post-Cold War environment, moreover, these authors don't have to be as circumspect as were two earlier co-

authors who wrote an institutional history in 1973. The subsequent effort contains unflinching looks at US unilateralism and those occasions when the bank's lending policies and priorities were bent to align with Washington's.

A chapter on the greening of the bank, written by Professor Robert Wade, now with the Russell Sage Foundation, is almost worth the steep price, USD 160 for both volumes. Wade offers an unusually vivid depiction of how, over a period of 25 years, the bank was alternately pressured and embarrassed into taking ecological factors into account. The chapter is one of the best exposes ever of the bank's inner workings. Wade describes how NGOs hammered away at the bank's deeply rooted obfuscations and how a system of internal incentives rewarded staff who reliably moved projects forward for board approval amid the bank's indifference to results achieved on the ground.

All this seems reason enough to promote discussion and debate over the bank's history. But the reception the bank has given its own authorised examination smacks of its mindset on after-the-fact evaluations of its projects. What happened yesterday doesn't matter because "we're doing things better now." Current World Bank president James Wolfensohn has acknowledged that management changes are needed and has vigorously shaken up a sprawling bureaucracy. But if indifference to bank history is also part of his attitude, Wolfensohn's vaunted re-invention is likely to be little more than a makeover. △

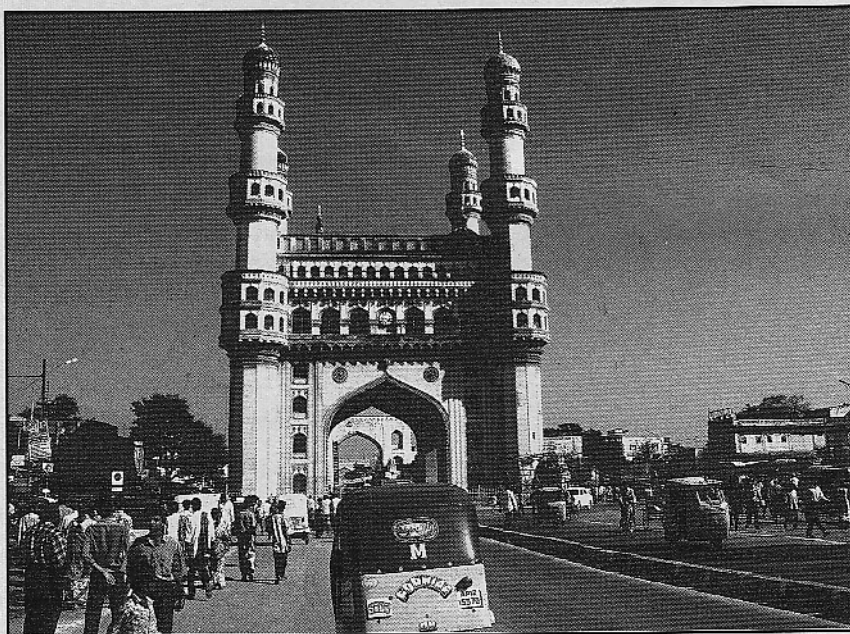
M. Holland is contributing editor of The Nation of New York, where this review originally appeared.

Silicon tectonics

Bangalore's loss is Hyderabad's gain.

by J. Srinivasan

T. NARAYAN/OUTLOOK



Charminar going cyber.

Bangalore developed rapidly through the early 1990s as the software and computer capital of India. It is now equally quickly losing its monopoly hold over everything that has to do with software and computers. The Garden City's place in the sun is being challenged by other metros of the Indian south, mainly Hyderabad, Madras, Pune and Bhubaneswar, in that order.

There were several reasons why the global players flew in to set up shop amidst the tree-lined avenues and colonial and post-colonial villas of Bangalore. These included Bangalore's fine legacy of higher education, a 'cosmopolitan' population, its salubrious climate, and importantly, a receptive Karnataka state gov-

ernment offering a variety of incentives. The mix had proved irresistible.

All too quickly, however, roads and power supply failed to keep pace with the growth of industry and population. Despite its hifalutin industries, Bangalore began to look and smell of just another crowded, unplanned, congested Indian city, and the software companies began to look at other options.

Bangalorian blues

Karnataka, or in fact largely Bangalore, accounted for INR 12 billion, or 29 percent, of India's software exports in 1996-97. Karnataka presently hosts 130 of the 700 major companies in the software business in India. The spectacular rise of Bangalore had

mainly to do with the quick clearance of projects. Karnataka was the one place where the 'single window' policy actually worked. In 1996-97 alone, for instance, projects worth INR 16 billion were cleared by the government. The software technology parks (STPs) set up by the state also had a lot to do with this growth and development: the Bangalore STP alone has some 150 units, the biggest in the country.

Against this backdrop, if the fact that the software industry is looking elsewhere comes as a surprise, the answer lies in the complacency which overtook the Karnataka authorities. They just did not provide a reliable power supply, which meant that most units were forced to set up their own backup units. Start-up firms could not afford this. Neither could they contemplate real estate, given the fact that the sheer money power of multinationals had pushed rentals in Bangalore sky high.

Another problem was human resource. In the first flush of success, as Indian firms won and executed projects and multinational corporations moved in, software engineers asked and were paid a king's ransom. But the high payscale could hardly be sustained, particularly by the Indian start-ups, which went scurrying to 'affordable' cities such as Hyderabad and Madras. Bangalore also no longer had a monopoly over the supply of skilled manpower once software institutes sprouted in the other cities.

Another drawback that became evident as time went on is that Bangalore does not have a fully opera-

tional international airport. Nor has Mangalore port developed as an easy conduit for Karnataka-based industries.

Paradise lost

Bangalore's fall from grace was confirmed during the National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom) '97 meet – the industry's annual showcase. The theme of the conference was "India – A Software Paradise". Though held in Bangalore, not one Karnataka minister was present. R.V. Deshpande, the then state Industries Minister, said that he had not received an invitation to the event, to which Nasscom's President K.V. Ramani replied: "Ours is not a political conference. Not to all our meets do we invite politicians..."

It cannot be overlooked that the chief guest in Bangalore was the Chief Minister from Hyderabad, Chandrababu Naidu, described by Ramani as "the most IT-savvy person in the country". And so, right under the nose of the host Karnataka Government, the laptop-carrying Naidu wooed information technocrats to "investor-friendly Andhra Pradesh". He showed a remarkable grasp of technology, and wowed the software industrialists with talk like this: "We wish to bring a SMART – simple, moral, accountable, responsive and transparent – government."

While others promised single window passage for entrepreneurs, Naidu was one step ahead, offering a "multi-media window" for IT initiatives that chose to come to Andhra. If this did not worry the Karnataka Government, what certainly did was Naidu's plans to set up an "Indian Institute of Information Technology" in Hyderabad and to build a cyber city – Hitec City (Hyderabad Information Technology and Engineering Consultancy City).

To counter the marauding Naidu, Karnataka is not without solutions, including its own planned "Indian Institute of Information Technology" as part of the much-touted Policy for the IT Industry, announced by the state government on 9 June 1997. This ambitious policy includes, besides various fiscal incentives, the cre-

Indian chips

A TURNOVER OF INR 64 billion, a growth rate averaging 50 percent per annum, and exports exceeding USD 1 billion. This is where the software industry in India is. The industry has been bullish for the last few years, recording in 1996-97 an overall growth rate of 53 percent over the INR 42 billion turnover in 1995-96. Of the INR 64 billion turnover in 1996-97, INR 39 billion was contributed by exports, while the remaining INR 25 billion came from domestic revenues.

The software industry is driven by three main spurs: one, off-shore software development, which is its bread and butter; two, the Millennium Bug or the Year 2000 ("Y2K") problem, on which count software companies are assured of business at least till the end of the century; and three, the Internet. With their overseas arms, Indian companies are well placed to take advantage of this exploding industry which offers limitless opportunities.

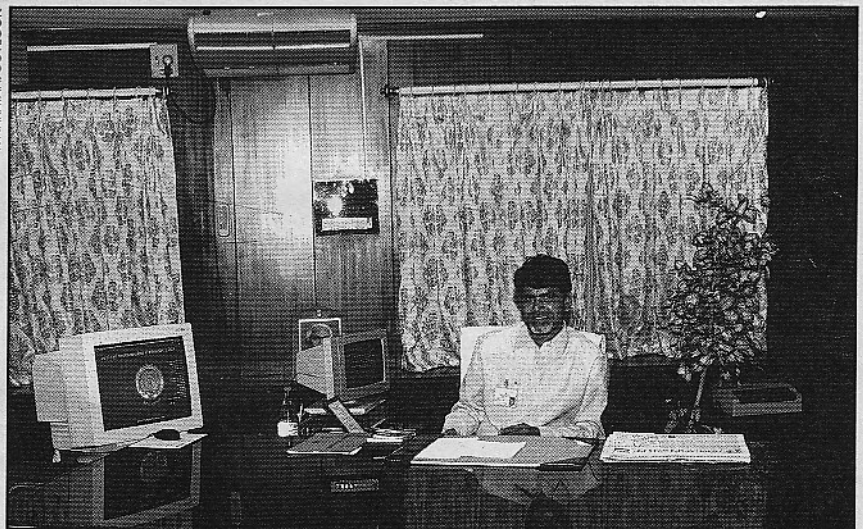
The industry has also been trying to move up the value chain. Beginning in 1992-93, it has rapidly moved from on-site services to off-shore services and packages. As a result, the contribution of offshore services to total exports went up to 41 percent in 1996-97 from 29 percent in 1992-93. Many players are trying to move towards what is known as "systems integrating activity". Little wonder then that a World Bank study puts India as the No 1 choice for sourcing software packages and professionals.

- J. Srinivasan

ation of a pool of software engineers to meet the demand-supply gap, software parks in Mysore, Mangalore and Dharwad, a VSNL gateway for electronic communication, and training centres in districts. The policy also envisages the issuing of internationally recognised quality certifications such as the ISO-9000.

All good intentions, but the policy

has been gathering dust in the State Legislature. In contrast, over in Hyderabad, Naidu is backing up promises with action. Besides the Hitec City, his initiatives include a "Government Internet", video conferencing facilities between Hyderabad and the districts, and promotion of Andhra as a site for IT-related projects of the Centre. The



Geek Naidu

speedy decision making has impressed potential investors, who are also attracted by exemption from sales tax, plans to ensure regular supply of power, and single-window clearances that cut delay and red tape. Naidu has also come up with innovative plans to build a software-related workforce through an extensive training programme.

While as of now Hyderabad has attracted only low-end operations such as "Y2K", the future seems assured. Hyderabad's climate is harsh in comparison to Bangalore's, but there is enough to tilt the balance in favour of the Andhra capital. Hyderabad is also said to be attractive to Non-Resident Indians who wish to set up facilities because many affluent NRIs happen to be Telugu-speakers with origins in Andhra.

Cosmopolitan competition

Besides Andhra, there is a redirection of software companies to other centres in the South. Madras has emerged as an attractive destination because of its abundance of software engineers: some 25 percent of all software engineers in India are from Tamil Nadu. Besides this, the state government's Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation and the Electronics Corporation of Tamil Nadu have been doing a commendable job of wooing IT investors with various incentives. Madras has emerged as the IBM-Mainframe capital of the country, and a lot of "Y2K" also gets done here.

As for elsewhere, high-end computer work, whenever it moves out of Bangalore, tends to head for Pune, which is fast emerging as another major software development centre. Besides its welcoming climate, the major advantages of Pune are its good educational institutions and its proximity to Bombay, India's commercial capital. Much of the low-end work has also got diverted to other metros such as Bhubaneswar in Orissa.

At the start of the software revolution only Bangalore looked cosmopolitan enough for the multi-nationals to touch down on. Today, other cities also seem to be coming up to the mark. There is no doubt that Advantage Bangalore is a thing of the past.

What matters ultimately is that India retains its edge in cornering a significant portion of the international software business, as far as the local economies are concerned, yet it is indeed of interest which city gains and which loses. For the moment, Bangalore's continuing loss is indeed the gain of others. However, given that the projected turnover of the software industry is expected to be upwards of INR 200 billion by the turn of the century, just a couple of years hence, it would not harm Bangalore to correct its course and get back on track.

△

J. Srinivasan is an Assistant Editor with Business Line, Madras.

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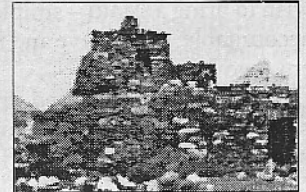
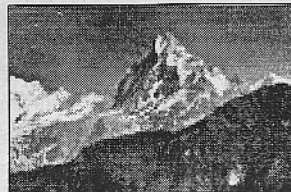
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Abominably yours

Have you seen the polls lately? Eighty percent of Britons think that members of the Royal Family secretly dip their biscuits in tea. This is a startling revelation: it means that no matter what Buckingham Palace does to set an example of good etiquette, a huge chunk of the population still thinks Prince Charles uses his fingers to fish out gooey blobs of soggy Cream Crackers from his afternoon cuppa. This is not cool.

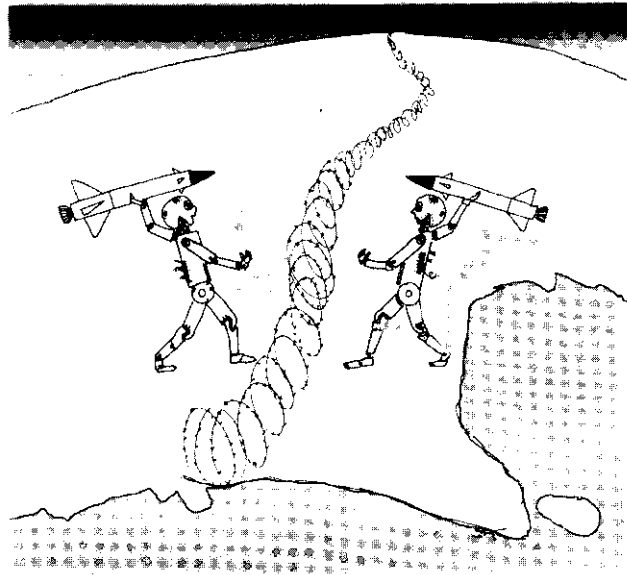
Possibly to counter adverse public opinion, Queen Liz recently visited a pub to promote the new image of Cool Britannia. What can we Subcontinentals, many of us former subjects of the Empire, do to emulate a newly-cool Britain? With the temperature in the Indus-Ganga Plains now soaring past the 42 Celsius mark, being cool is the Number One preoccupation of roughly half-a-billion people. One place we could start is by declaring it uncool to dip Britannia Biscuits in tea in all SAARC countries. This should start with the Secretary-General of SAARC, who is known to enjoy a clandestine dip in his office when no one is looking.

While the British royalty was bar-hopping, hack home in the Subcontinent, the media was busy revealing the true extent of South Asia's hidden crisis of male impotence. This was interrupted by a newsbreak: Pakistan had just test-fired a new missile scoring a direct hit on its own territory. This prompted India's new Defence Chief George Fernandes to go hallistic. Separated at birth, India and Pakistan have to constantly show the world how similar they are and I guess they had to demonstrate that despite the impotence statistics, their armed forces are as virile as ever.

If you ask us South Asian females, all we can say is Tough Luck! We'll tell you that even if impotence is spreading its tentacles far and wide among our male

cohorts, that is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, a hit of impotence may do our wombs and our nations a whole lot of good. And the missiles? Well let me put it this way – it is potentially the most effective family planning device that India and Pakistan have so far developed. It will work, where everything else has failed. And they can't seem to wait to test it on humans.

One country, already puffed up as the most virile in the region but sorely waiting for an opportunity to prove it, develops a missile called Prithvi, naming it in all likelihood after the earth. The other country,



which is weak in Sanskrit, decides that it must be named after the ancient commander Prithviraj Chauhan, and so develops its own missile and calls it Gauri, the historical figure who defeated the historical Prithvi. Soon, some vernacular paper in the other country (which produced Prithvi in the first place) is going to get it all wrong and think that this infidel missile is named after Gauri, Shiva's consort.

Thor. That's the name given to a high-tech crash dummy developed by a resident non-Indian in the United States. What I don't understand is: why is it necessary for an Indian to go to North America before he can design a five-million-dollar crash dummy? What's wrong

with producing them here, home of The Jaipur Foot and the Agni Missile?

From news reports, I gather that they want to use Thor in all manner of tests, so that scientists can closely study what happens to an average human body when a 50-kiloton warhead blows up under his nose. Jokes aside, you can strap Thor into the front seat of a car, accelerate it to sub-orbital velocity and make it collide head-on with a T-72 Main Battle Tank and scientists can monitor and confirm on a computer a safe distance away that within the first millisecond of impact, the Thor is pulverised into sub-atomic particles. Incredible. Imagine how useful all this new knowledge will be to improve on the armour plating of the T-72.

One thing the spread of impotence in the Subcontinent is going to do is improve the sales figure for virility cures. Men are going to buy up all stocks of ginseng, rhino horns and reinforced steel girders from pharmacies and national parks across the nation. This is not to say that us women are taking all this lying down, we are contributing greatly to the

cause of nationhood by making ourselves fairer. If you have read recent news reports you will no doubt have seen that skin lighteners were selling like hot-nuts during the annual All-India Paan Vendor's Convention. For as little as 23 rupees, Indian women can now have a fair skin in 10 days with the Fair and Lovely Fairness Cream. And if present trends in the growth of the Fairness Index continues, all Indians can hope to be palefaces by the year 2015. And that goes for non-resident Indians as well.

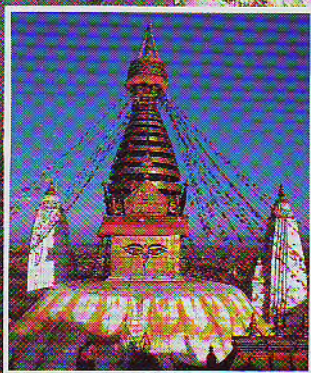
And 51 years after independence, it is a shame that we still have biscuits named Britannia. What's wrong with Thor?



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