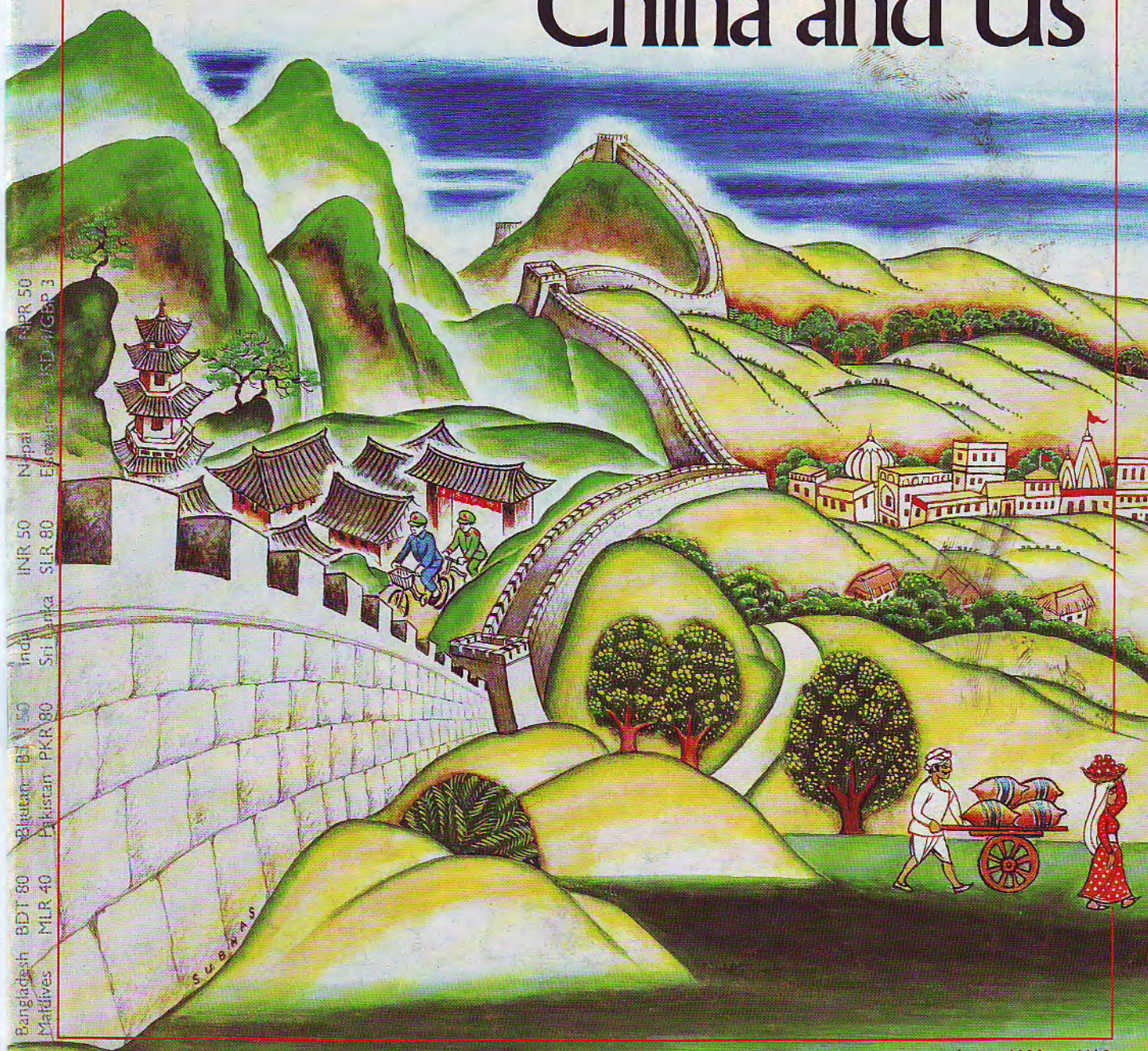


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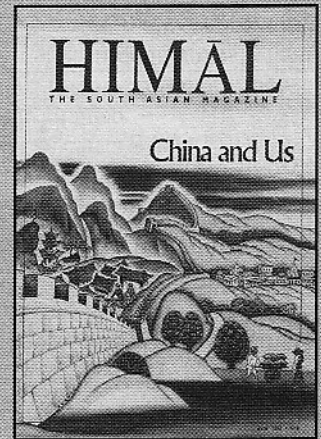
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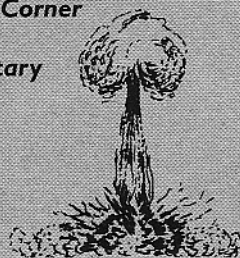
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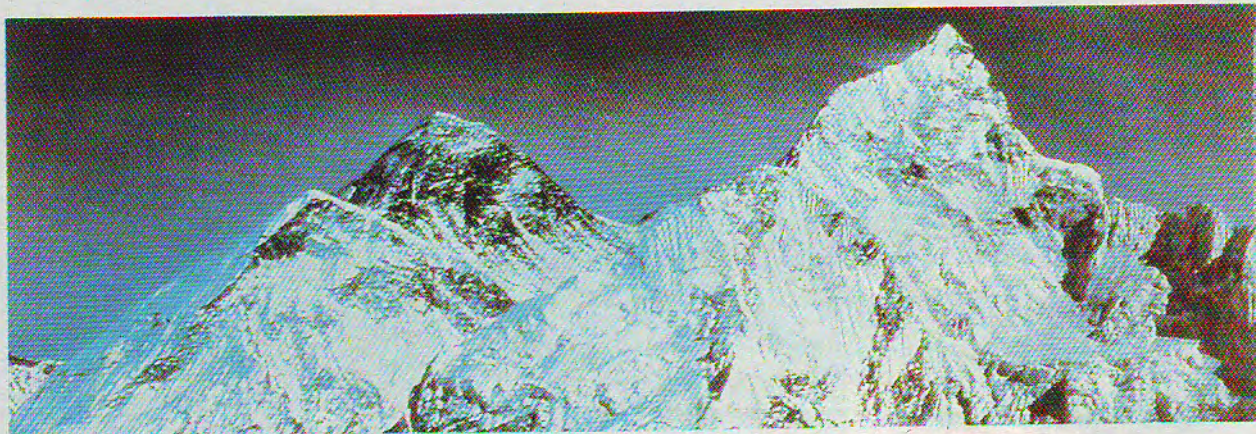
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The English link

In his interesting essay on the SAARC process in academia ("Where is the 'SAARC process' in academia?", March 1998), Pratyoush Onta suggested that regional scholars generally were too reliant on English as a medium of discussion amongst themselves and in the process failed to take sufficient account of data in indigenous South Asian languages.

It is certainly true that when an Indian political scientist works on Nepal he should generally consult Nepali-language sources since Nepali is the language of most political debate within that country and also easy to read for anyone already literate in Hindi. However, when it comes to discussing and publishing the results of the research, snobbish disdain for the 'vernacular' is not the only reason that leads most scholars to prefer English.

First, there is the simple fact that apart from English, there is no other language in use throughout the whole of South Asia. 'Hindustani' may be a natural lingua franca for (North) Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalis, but not for all SAARC members. A little while ago a Himal contributor described how the Sri Lankans and Maldivians were effectively excluded from the informal Hindustani conversations during the breaks between set-piece English speeches at SAARC conferences. Then there is the fact that since Hindi and Urdu are written in completely different scripts, even Hindustani speakers have to rely on English for written communication. The only alternative would be the European community's practice of producing versions of all documents in the national language of each member state, thus making consultation and decision-making both more cumbersome and more expensive.

Second, in the particular case of bilateral Indo-Nepali exchanges, where speaking and writing Hindi would be a practical possibility, linguistic nationalism is a stumbling block. Whether they are politicians or academicians, Indians and Nepalis do happily use Hindi together in private, but public speaking and written publication is another story.

Those Nepali politicians who do frequently use Hindi in public are often criticised for it by Kathmandu intellectuals more fearful of Indian than of Anglo-American 'linguistic imperialism'.

Sensitivity of this kind is not, of course, exclusively a South Asian phenomenon. It also explains the preference of many African states for using English as an official language rather than choosing an indigenous language, which would be easier for the general population to learn but would confer an advantage to one ethnic group over the others.

The resulting predominance of English does, as Onta complains, widen the gap between elites and the mass of the population, as was the case with Latin in medieval Europe and with Sanskrit and Persian at stages in South Asia's own history. Horizontal integration over a wider geographical area is only achieved at some cost to the vertical integration of particular local societies.

Programmes of translation into and from local languages can mitigate the problem to some extent, and both the Nepali-language bi-monthly sister publication of Himal and *Studies in Nepali History and Society* should be congratulated for their efforts in this direction as far as Nepal is concerned. However, if academicians want their

ideas to be available speedily to colleagues elsewhere in South Asia, not to mention the world beyond, it is neither surprising nor reprehensible for them to normally choose to work in English.

John Francis Whelpton
Hong Kong

Right and wrong

The short article in your April issue on Sri Lanka, "Absurd Survival", is one of the best pieces I have read about the very critical situation of the people in the Vanni region. These people are struggling under a blockade of food and medicine, agricultural supplies and building materials, and subjected to arbitrary aerial bombardment by Kfir jets. Because the media and most NGOs are blocked from the area, the growing crisis is hidden and an accurate assessment is hard to reach.

"State-sponsored starvation" is a very apt way to describe the suffering of the people. The State wants to make life miserable for these people by food-deprivation and shelling so that they will accept government rule. A former Red Cross official in Vanni said last November that, considering the circumstances, the people were coping better than any population he had ever observed because of their strong community

KRISHNA'S CORNER



"OH, ME? I'M CURRENTLY DIVERTING BILLIONS OF DESPERATELY NEEDED RUPEES FROM EDUCATION, WATER AND HEALTH PRODUCTS FOR USELESS NUCLEAR BLASTS... BUT, TELL ME, WHAT'S NEW WITH YOU?! ..."



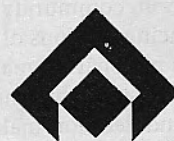
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sentiments and their capacity for organisation, but even these strengths are not enough without food.

The article, however, makes the only reference I have ever seen to the Tigers' killing "thousands of civilians" in Vanni. Why would they do that? The people in Vanni are there because they want to live under a Tiger administration. The government is trying its best to make them move back to Jaffna.

As for the *Sunday Leader* interview of CWC leader S. Thondaman that you reproduced ("Governor Prabhakaran", April 1998), he makes a mistake in assuming that Prabhakaran would serve as governor if offered the post. The Tigers' fight is not one for personal power, but for an acceptable structure for Tamil self-determination. As President Chandrika Kumaratunga revealed to *Time* magazine recently, she had put forth something similar [to Thondaman's suggestion] during her negotiations with the LTTE in 1994-95, but never received an answer.

In 1987, after the Indo-Lanka Accord, Prabhakaran was offered the chairmanship of the Interim Administrative Council, which he refused. At that time he said that, once the problem is resolved, he did not want any position in government. Turning Prabhakaran into a megalomaniac is another tactic of his enemies, along with insisting that the Tigers will settle for nothing less than a separate state.

Avis Sri-Jayantha
New York

Thanks

I, a Balti Tibetan, on behalf of the 500,000 Tibetans in Baltistan would like to thank you for your coverage of our region in your May 1998 issue.

Sengge Tsering
Lahore

With due apologies to Tarik Ali Khan, the editors regret an error that showed up in his article "Little Tibet: Renaissance and resistance in Baltistan" in our May 1998 issue. Both in the map and in the text, the area north of Khunjerab Pass is referred to as Tibet, whereas it should have been the Chinese province of Xinjiang.

What's happening in Sri Lanka?

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INDIA • PAKISTAN

LET THEM EAT GRASS

AS THE ATOM bomb exploded it created a fireball that was as hot as the centre of the sun. On the ground it created a firestorm which burned uncontrollably for six hours. Everything within two kilometres that could burn, including people, burnt. Anyone out in the open as far away as three and a half kilometres had their skin burnt. The fire raged, and people burnt, and there was no one to put out the fire. Even if there had been, they would have been helpless. The explosion had destroyed all the water pipes.

Buildings disintegrated from the shock wave that followed the heat. Almost nothing was left standing. Half a kilometre away from the explosion even the strongest buildings collapsed, their walls crushed by the shock wave. Even as far away as two and a half kilometres all the buildings were so smashed up that they were unusable. The city, now only rubble, became its own map.

The firestorm and the blast could have been produced by conventional bombs. It

would have taken about 300 tonnes of high explosives and nearly a thousand tonnes of incendiary bombs. But what these bombs could not have done was produce radiation. This killed people immediately; there was nausea and then vomiting, loss of appetite, fever, diarrhoea and spontaneous bleeding. Hair started to fall out, and the bleeding increased, blood seeped from every orifice of the body. Death, when it came, was a relief. There was no way to treat these living dead. No one knew how to treat such radiation injuries. There were no hospitals where they could have been treated. There were few doctors left alive and able to take care of themselves, never mind patients – the patients already in hospitals died. The complete destruction of the city's administration meant that there was no one to count the dead.

The radiation from the explosion meant that people kept on dying. It was a slow lingering death. Radiation made the bones of the living radioactive and killed them from the inside. Among the survivors, the number of people with leukaemia increased gradually, reaching a peak nearly 10 years after the bomb

was used. Other cancers also increased; especially cancer of the thyroid, breast and lung.

This is what one atom bomb did. This is the great attraction of nuclear weapons. A single bomb in a moment shorter than the blink of an eye snuffed out half the people of a city and demolished the city itself. It is the concentration of destruction. And, in the age of nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence, it is the fear of this moment that is meant to keep the peace. When two nations have nuclear weapons both must live in fear of this moment. They must keep fixed in their minds what it means to use nuclear weapons. They must let the bomb fill their days and nights. With their nuclear tests, the leaders of India and Pakistan have condemned their people to spend their lives dreaming of Hiroshima.

However, while the leaders of India and Pakistan have been seduced by the bomb and its terrible promise to destroy almost everything, they have not learnt that it is useless for anything else. The last 50 years of the nuclear age teaches us that simply possessing nuclear weapons is no guarantee that a state will win a war. Nuclear weapon states have elected to fight wars on many occasions and have lost. Britain fought and lost at Suez, even though it had already developed nuclear weapons. The United States suffered significant defeats during the Korean War and the war ended in a stalemate. The more famous examples are, of course, the defeat of the United States in Vietnam, and of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan despite their enormous stockpiles of nuclear weapons. In all these cases, a non-nuclear state fought and won against a nuclear armed state.

If nuclear weapons cannot guarantee that a state will win its wars, what else can they do? The last 50 years also teaches that nuclear weapons offer no freedom from attempts to intimidate or threaten. At different times during the Cold War both the US and the Soviet Union made nuclear threats numerous times, with the United States making around 20 such threats and the Soviet Union making five or six. Efforts at such blackmail were not affected even though both states had massive nuclear arsenals.

The complete failure of nuclear weapons to offer protection is one of the great dark secrets of the Cold War. Neither the US nor the Soviet Union could ever admit to this though. How could they explain that the weapons that were able to destroy the world were useless for anything else? So they kept quiet, and hoped no one would notice. But people did. What gave it away was that no matter how many nuclear weapons there were, there was

always a need for more, and bigger.

This is a lesson the leaders of India and Pakistan are starting to learn for themselves. The decades of claiming that a "nuclear option" was a deterrent finally gave way to the argument that a real deterrent needed tested weapons. Soon, this will give to the argument that only deployed weapons are a deterrent. This, in time, will give way to the claim that only tested, deployed weapons, on hair-trigger alert for use in a first strike are a real deterrent.

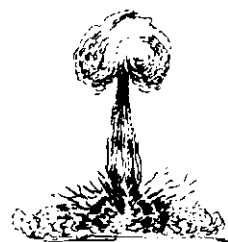
The fact is terror does not last. The dreams of Hiroshima become too familiar. People get used to them. New and greater sources of terror are required. This is clear from the arsenals of all five of the established nuclear states, which have all increased their arsenals from a few nuclear weapons to hundreds of weapons; they all rely on thermonuclear weapons that are tens if not hundreds or thousands of times more destructive than the simple nuclear weapons they started with.

It is clear that if the basis of Pakistan's security is to have nuclear weapons that can match India, then Pakistan will in time have to test a thermonuclear weapon of its own. And how many will it have to make? And then there are the missiles, and the command and control systems. The list goes on and on.

This arms race about to start is not something new. It has been a slow tortuous marathon for 50 years. It is the one constant, apart from hostility and proximity, in the relationship between Pakistan and India and it has always been an unequal race. Pakistan is less able to run, but the desperate terror of India, along with the occasional kicks and punches from its army, have forced it to keep the poor, tired and battered body of the nation on the move. It is exhausted despair that has made the nuclear test so appealing to so many. Pride in something, anything, no matter how misplaced, has offered them some consolation for all the pain. A nuclear medal.

Thirty years ago, when Pakistan embarked on its nuclear path, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had said Pakistan would have its own bomb even if it meant Pakistanis had to eat grass. Decades of hateful and wasteful military competition between India and Pakistan has already meant living in that squalid and desolate place between war and peace. The people of India and Pakistan would have survived if nuclear weapons were not tested. But many, if not all of them, would exchange their ticket into the nuclear club for a new hope for tomorrow. It is they who will be condemned to eat grass to pay for these nuclear tests.

-Zia Mian



INDIA

DOOMSDAY CLOCK

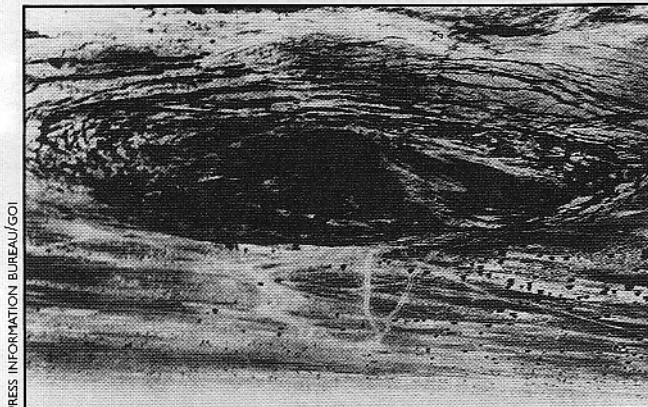
FIFTY YEARS AFTER the forces of Hindutva assassinated Gandhi, they finally put his legacy to rest by embracing the theology of mass destruction. The eleventh of May 1998 will go down in South Asian history as India's day of shame. Now, with Pakistan following suit, the dark shadow of a mushroom cloud hangs over all of South Asia. Nuclear devastation is no longer a distant threat; it is suddenly an immediate, felt danger for the 1.3 billion people who live in this turbulent, unhappy, tension-prone region.

India's tests were devoid of strategic rationale. Even before 11 May, India was militarily more secure than it had been a decade previously, owing to improved relations with China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The nuclear threat to India had actually decreased, not increased. Even if this were not the case, New Delhi would not have been justified in testing/mak-

Going by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's letter to United States President Clinton, the real reasons are not lofty or global but crass, regional and demeaning: India today feels "threatened" by China which "committed armed aggression" against it 36 years ago; and by Pakistan which China has "helped become a current nuclear weapon-state". This is a crude anti-China come-hither gesture to Washington. Further, Vajpayee proposes "cooperation" with (who else!) - the US "to promote the cause of nuclear disarmament". Since when did the US begin promoting the cause? Does this even remotely sound like the principled position of a self-respecting state?

The bomb's real rationale comes from Hindutva's delusions of grandeur, false notions of prestige, and hegemonistic ambitions. The bomb predates even Ayodhya on the BJP agenda. It goes back to 1951, 13 years before China even tested. For the BJP, it is an article of faith; it had intentions of conducting a test even during its predictably doomed 13-day tenure in 1996.

The amazing thing is that the BJP has brazenly bullied other parties and



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ing nuclear weapons. That would have gone against its own long-stated policy, and its considered doctrine that nuclear weapons are not an effective, rational or legitimate means of meeting threats and that nuclear deterrence is "abhorrent".

India has now taken the inglorious path of the nuclear states. The reason for this has nothing to do with the "principled" global arguments cited by the bomb's apologists: India is fighting "nuclear apartheid" through an "anti-imperialist" bomb; nuclear disarmament will now be taken more seriously by the big five; and this is the best means of jolting them after the indefinite extension of Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the imposition of the "discriminatory" Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

"middle-ground" opinion, and taken one fateful decision after another without a democratic mandate, or even the pretence of a strategic review. India's Operation Shakti signifies the country's degeneration as a democracy and the emergence of a macho national-security mindset. It celebrates mass-destruction weapons as prestigious.

Nuclearisation will degrade India's security through a ruinous arms race with Pakistan and China; destabilise Asian security and set back the global disarmament agenda - in which everyone's security lies. The implications for South Asia are now grim, with Pakistan too, as expected, having tested. Overt India-Pakistan nuclear competition will seriously threaten the region. The two have been to war three times and share a history of mu-

tual distrust and strategic miscalculation. Both are in for a spell of political uncertainty and unstable governments which are tempted with the gain of cheap popularity through nuclear sabre-rattling. Their missile programmes could greatly lower the nuclear threshold in the Subcontinent.

A nuclear war is far likelier now in South Asia than it was at any time between the US and the erstwhile USSR. The radioactive clouds that are released, knowing no national boundaries, will blow over the entire region. This is one reason why all the states of the region, barring India and Bhutan, have repeatedly voted for a South Asian nuclear weapons-free zone for 20 years.

That demand's logic remains valid. India and Pakistan must not henceforth test, nor make or deploy, let alone use, nuclear weapons. They must be pressed by other South Asian states to make solemn pledges to that effect. It is tragic that their neighbours have been virtually silent. Morally, their criticism would be far more damning than hypocritical America's. Popular protests all over South Asia against India's and Pakistan's tests would be the best contribution towards the emerging peace movement in these two countries.

△
-Praful Bidwai

PAKISTAN

SACRIFICING A BISHOP

*One day
I would like to take
Both my hands
(For I consider life
Itself too dear to lose)
Dip them in Petrol
Then set them alight
With a candle flame
And dedicate them
To those who acted
While I wept and wrote.
-Maimed Jam*

SO IT HAPPENED. Someone rose to make his ultimate protest. Knowing how his people wept, 66-year-old John Joseph, a Roman Catholic Bishop for 17 years, shot himself to death. He was one among the protestors of Pakistan's tyrannical blasphemy laws. He was engaged with others like him to push the protest to its ultimate limits but mere opposition

was of no use. The state authorities would not budge one bit. The pressure of fundamentalism was at its height.

What the protestors asked for was what people in most countries had and took for granted. They asked that the country's blasphemy laws incorporated in the penal code be removed and with it the unjust discrimination against the non-Muslim.

The protest went on for years but cases under the blasphemy law continued. Sometimes victims went into hiding and others like Bishop John Joseph helped them to survive. But not every one could be saved. Mobs acting under the instructions of manipulators attacked and killed some. It was just a few months back that two people were attacked in front of the sessions court of Sahiwal town in the province of Punjab, and one of them was killed. It was on the very spot where this man was killed, that Bishop John Joseph sacrificed his life.

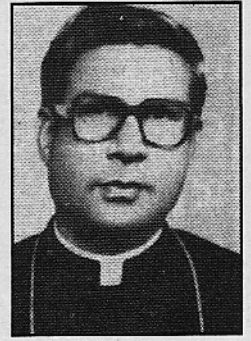
Some seem to find it difficult to understand the Bishop's final action, though they claim that they do sympathise with his cause. This is a convenient way of trying to forget the very message of this revered Bishop.

As a Roman Catholic cleric he knew very well the Catholic teachings against suicide. When deciding to ignore these he would not have done so lightly. His was not a hasty decision. He had warned about it indirectly. He had warned the government that if the blasphemy laws were not repealed, he would protest in an astonishing way. At international gatherings he had said the people would protest and the protest would take different forms. His was thus a long contemplated deliberate act of protest.

Would any other form of protest have mattered? There had been many years of letter writings, national and international seminars, prayer meetings, publications and everything else that usually go under the name of protests. Nothing worked. Cynical games of harassment, intimidation and cruelty continued, and even the courts were used for such purposes. On 26 April 1998, the courts sentenced another man, Ayub Masih to death. As in other cases, the victim was accorded no due legal rights.

The challenge then was either do something that mattered or just bow to the situation. Bishop John Joseph was no hypocrite. As chairperson of the National Justice and Peace Commission, he was well known for his human rights activism.

But there comes a time when mere activism would no longer suffice. Instead of exposing the poor and the weak to any more



attacks, it was time for a leader to face the challenge. He would take the suffering of his people on himself. Thus on 6 May, Bishop John Joseph offered his life on behalf of those he led.

His sacrifice poses a challenge to the leaders of the Christian community in his own country and outside. The questions he has left behind are these: will you just sit and watch or engage only in gestures that do not really matter, or will you do something meaningful for people who are so unjustly treated? Bishop John Joseph did what he thought he had to. Can anyone in Pakistan sit easy? △

-Basil Fernando

SOUTH ASIA

BRAVE NEW WORLD, ALMOST

FOR TWO DAYS in late April, the information ministers of the SAARC region (except those from Bhutan and Maldives) met and discussed information. Theirs was quite a progressive agenda, and at least at the rhetorical level there seemed to be recognition among these high personages of the proper path to take in information-sharing in South Asia.

There was recognition, but is there commitment? SAARC meets, after all, have always been long on proclamations and declarations and short on follow-up. And South Asian countries are quite good at signing any treaty or agreement on social issues put before them merely because it is the right thing to do. Take the case of the child labour declaration that SAARC social welfare ministers signed a couple of years ago in Rawalpindi, promising to eradicate all hazardous forms of child labour by the turn of century and all forms of child labour just a decade thereafter.

On 26 April, the SAARC information ministers did what they are good at, that is in

adopting a "comprehensive strategy for co-operation and a SAARC plan of action". While it is grandiose, the 18-point action is worth repeating for the "in-principle" understanding that it represents.

The plan calls for: ensuring free flow of information, newspapers, periodicals, books and other publications among the SAARC countries; reducing postal and telecommunication rates for media transmission and information materials; increasing cooperation amongst news agencies of SAARC countries; facilitating easier travel for "media persons" within the region; working towards a SAARC-recognised "Regional Media Forum"; holding an annual conference of editors and working journalists; enhancing exchange of data through email and the Internet; and arranging regular exchange of television and radio programmes.

Further, the SAARC ministers called for joint production of documentaries and films; holding of periodic SAARC film festivals; training programmes for media people (including something called "SAARC orientation modules" in the syllabi of national media training institutes); improving the programmes under the SAARC Audio Visual Exchange (SAVE) programme; evolving model guidelines on satellite broadcasting; examining the feasibility of launching a "SAARC satellite"; exploring the setting up of a "SAARC Media Development Fund"; and discouraging negative projection of member countries by media.

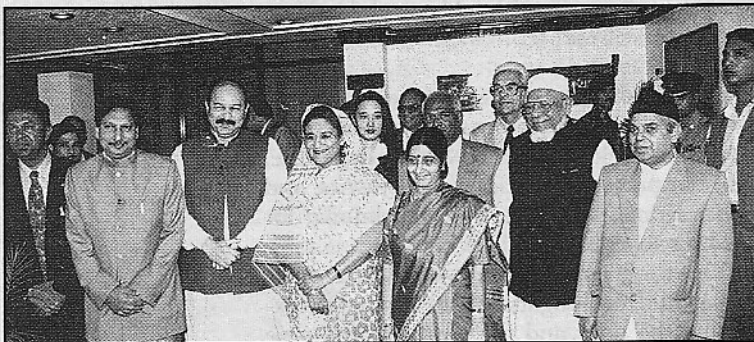
Promoting more media exchange and encouraging the transfer of periodicals across borders, easier travel for journalists and promotion of documentaries are welcome words to come out of an officious declaration. But with due respect, some of the other ideas in the Dhaka action plan are non-starters. The sheer costs and logistical challenges in lobbying up a SAARC satellite make it a pie in the sky. Also, as there will be little room for government-led media outlets in the future scheme of things, we hold little hope for the SAVE programme or the idea of news agencies (all of them either state owned or controlled) coming together.

The proper role of governments in South Asia would be to meddle least with their own media mechanisms and make it easier for independent media in each country to interact, collect and sell information to the other. Among the other things they did in Dhaka, "in principle" at least, the information ministers seemed to understand this point.

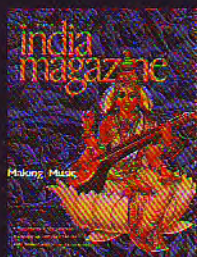
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-A.F. Hassan

The info czars in Dhaka.



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COUNTERVAILING POWER

China opposes Indian hegemony in South Asia, but realises its own limits.

by *Giri Deshingkar*

Two basic facts stand out when looking at the perceptions South Asian countries have about China. The first is that there is a sharp divide between India's perception and that of the other South Asian countries: India continues to regard China as an adversary and a long-term rival; India's neighbours, however, look upon China as a benign power, even a friend, with varying degrees of closeness. The second fact, somewhat related to the first, is that the perception of China in the eyes of other South Asian countries is shaped largely by their attitude towards India.

In this scenario, India nervously watches the progress of its neighbours' relations with China; the underlying assumption being that China wishes to drive a wedge between India and its SAARC partners. India's other assumption that the neighbours want to gang up against it is only reinforced by the China factor. Any number of Chinese protestations that Beijing wishes all the South Asian countries to live in harmony with one another invoke only cynical smiles at best and impatient dismissals at worst.

Why is China transferring all those military aircraft, tanks and other hardware to Pakistan and Bangladesh, ask Indian policy-makers and opinion leaders. Worse still, why has China been transferring technology to Pakistan for making nuclear weapons and missiles which can only be India-specific? Why egg Nepal on to become a "zone of peace" between India and China? Good questions. But most of them become

meaningful only if India's above-mentioned assumptions are granted. The only exception is about the transfer of nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan. But more about that later.

Turning the issue upside down, that is, China's attitude towards South Asia, it is clear that China looks upon India as a regional power with hegemonic intentions. China's relationship with each of the other South Asian states is, therefore, governed by the aim of supporting each to resist such an assumed effort to exercise hegemony. Where it perceives the attempts at hegemony to be blatant, as in the case of Pakistan or strong as in the case of Bangladesh, the provision of countervailing power is commensurate. But there are two exceptions.

In the case of Nepal and Bhutan, both landlocked countries with treaties and other agreements which limit their freedom to act independently of India, China has basically adopted a hands-off policy. The one attempt Beijing made to supply Nepal with some weapons (small arms and anti-aircraft guns) was abandoned abruptly when China realised that the effort could not be sustained. Chinese supply lines through Tibet were too long and precarious and other routes had to pass through India.

Since Beijing is deadly opposed to the break-up of existing states, Sri Lanka earned its support and sympathy when India extended all-out assistance to the fight of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) for secession from the Sri Lankan state. Even so, Chinese military aid to Sri Lanka was then



limited to small arms and some patrol boats for preventing the traffic in arms and insurgents from India. Since Sri Lanka is geographically too far from China, only political support and token aid were possible. Hence, China supported the Sri Lankan government in its demand that the Indian forces which had gone to Sri Lanka to fight the LTTE should be withdrawn expeditiously. However, later, when the Sri Lankan government sought India's aid to train its armed forces and for the supply of non-lethal items, China accepted Sri Lanka's decision. Similarly, when Indian forces were requested by the Maldives president to expel the rebels who were seeking to overthrow him, China accepted the fait accompli.

In short, although China opposes what it perceives as India's regional hegemony, it nevertheless realises the limits of extending its countervailing power in South Asia. In effect, it acquiesces with the Indian exercise of maintaining influence in several countries of South Asia. And these countries, in turn, understand the reality of India's proximity and power and also the limits of Chinese power.

Hard calculation

The China-Pakistan relationship, as state-to-state relations go, is extremely difficult to explain. When it was forged in the 1950s, the two states could not have been more different. China was a militantly Marxist state and it faced a military threat of regime-extirpation from the United States. Pakistan, then, was not only an ally of "US imperialism" and a member of the anti-China South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) pact, it was also ideologically anti-Marxist, having banned the Pakistan Communist Party as early as in 1954. A friendship between the two was even theoretically inconceivable. But they became friends, cautiously at first, and getting closer with the passage of time.

The initiative for reaching out to Pakistan came from the Chinese side, and it was the

result of hard calculation. In the late 1950s, India-China relations had already soured and a military confrontation was building up on the Indo-Chinese (Tibetan) border. Meanwhile, China's relations with the Soviet Union were deteriorating; by 1960 all Soviet aid to China was terminated. In 1959 came the revolt in Tibet; the Dalai Lama fled to India, much to China's embarrassment.

At that time, India enjoyed high prestige in the international arena, while China was looked upon as a pariah state. Having lost the friendship of the Soviet Union and the states of Eastern Europe (except Albania), China was desperately looking for friends. Later, as Sino-Soviet relations turned hostile and worsened into a military confrontation, China saw itself as being completely encircled by enemies of one kind or another. It was necessary to breach the circle.

Already by the late 1950s, China seemed to have sensed that Pakistan was using its US connection for achieving not anti-Chinese but anti-Indian ends, and that its anti-communism was limited to domestic politics and did not represent an ideological stance. This belief was reinforced when Chinese overtures to Pakistan were accepted in good faith. Pakistan responded positively to the extended Chinese hand despite US misgivings about the relationship.

Beijing, thus, gratefully discovered one soft link in the chain surrounding it at that time. The Chinese chose to look beyond the immediate Pakistani motivation, which was that the enemy's enemy could be considered a friend. This friendship could be qualitatively different from Pakistan's expedient friendship with the US, which was on friendly terms with India. Put another way, for Pakistan, the US was not the enemy's enemy.

Cultural relations

As China-Pakistan relations evolved, the element of political compulsions and the invocation of China's countervailing power be-

South Asia understands the reality of India's proximity and power and also the limits of Chinese power.

came less prominent. During the India-Pakistan war of 1965, China's moral and political support to Pakistan came without asking; in fact, China made threatening noises on the India-China border to concretely demonstrate its support for Pakistan. However, during the 1971 India-Pakistan war, despite Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's assurance to his people that the "largest power in Asia" would come to Pakistan's aid, China did not step beyond anti-India rhetoric.

Pakistan must have felt disappointed, but by that time China-Pakistan relations had taken on a distinctly non-ideological "cultural" hue, not in the sense of sharing a common culture but in terms of values such as friendship, trust, sincerity, the desire to help

the technology. Why would it then make an exception in the case of Pakistan?

When and exactly what kind of technology may have been transferred to Pakistan? Rumours say that after India's Pokhran explosion of 1974, possibly in the early 1980s, the design of a 1966 Chinese weapon was transferred. If so, why the relatively primitive design at such a late date? What is the nature of the agreement which made the transfer possible and were there any limiting clauses which, for such a long time, prevented Pakistan from conducting tests to make the weapon deliverable? No answers, even off-the-record, are available from any source.

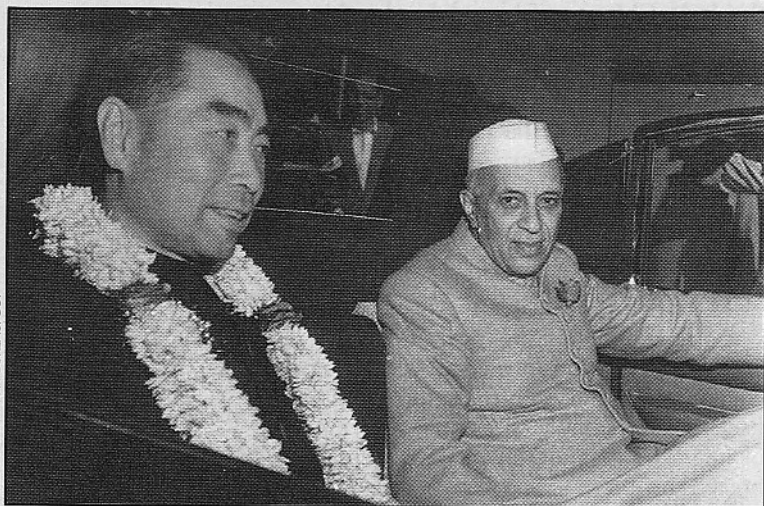
Such questions have never been asked in India, even by strategic specialists. The CIA leaks seem to be all the evidence they need. The net result has been the deepening of suspicions about China's motives towards India. The gradual improvement in India-China relations has done little to erode such suspicions.

Know thy enemy

There is an interesting sidelight to how South Asian countries view China: the presence or absence of "China studies" in the Subcontinent. As a general rule, adversary relations promote China studies; friendly relations do not. So, as is to be expected, the "know-thy-enemy" school promoted a number of institutes in India which engaged in the study of China, concentrated largely in the capital of Delhi, where the threat from China was most acutely perceived. In the other countries of South Asia, China studies are of peripheral interest, if at all. In Pakistan, they are generally subsumed under the rubric of international relations in one or two universities; there are very few places in all of South Asia where the Chinese language is taught.

Initially, the fact that China studies got concentrated in Delhi, close to the seat of power in India, had its academic fallout. The views of the older generation of scholars of international relations who switched to China studies strongly reflected the views of the government. However, with time, as younger scholars began to look at China, its ideology, culture, economy and foreign relations with more sophisticated analytical tools, a variety of opinions began to surface.

As this process continued, the view of China as an implacable enemy of India was abandoned. The accent became one of "understanding" China, with some sympathy thrown in here and there; Indian Marxists of the CPI(M) and CPI(ML) variety were clearly impressed by what China was doing but those



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Nehru and a garlanded Zhou in Delhi.

out a friend to the extent circumstances permitted, and respect for each other's viewpoints despite sharp differences. Standard theories of international relations have no space for such values, certainly not as the basis of state-to-state relations, but they seem to have played an extremely important role in the case of these two Asian states. Despite the slogan of *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* (Indians and Chinese are brothers), these values never entered India-China relations. This remains so to a large extent even today.

The alleged Chinese transfer of nuclear weapons technology to Pakistan, if true, remains a deep mystery. The only 'evidence' there is for it comes in the form of carefully controlled 'leaks' from the CIA. It is a mystery because no one has offered any explanation for it. It is known that Libya's Muammar Gaddafi once offered China USD 2 billion for the sample of a nuclear weapon, but China refused. When Vietnam and North Korea were threatened by the US, in the case of the former with threat of use of nuclear weapons, China again did not give them nuclear weapons or

at the "centre" of the political spectrum also became interested observers of the Chinese scene. The anti-Beijing sentiment, however, persisted in varying degrees in the government, the national media, and very markedly so in the Indian armed forces. That more or less remains the case today but the sharp edges of the opinions, acquired as a result of the defeat in the India-China border war of 1962, have become blunted.

The "normalisation" of India-China relations was an extremely slow process. Indira Gandhi had to walk on eggs when dealing with China for fear of being accused of "selling out" to the enemy; the government of India had painted itself into a corner with the public opinion it had itself created. Still, she began gingerly, first by elevating the relationship to ambassadorial level. An added factor was the nervousness with which the Soviet Union watched India-China relations; the Soviet Union had become India's only provider of armaments of all kinds, thus creating crippling dependence. India's informal probes for "talks" with China ("negotiation" was a taboo word) produced anxious enquiries from the Soviet Union. This was why there was no progress when the talks did take place following Deng Xiaoping's offer of 1980 (essentially a repeat of Zhou Enlai's proposal of 1960).

During the period of India-China estrangement, which nevertheless saw Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to China in 1979 as foreign minister, relations between China and the other South Asian countries continued to develop cordially. China and Pakistan signed a border agreement in 1963, but in order not to annoy India too much, China made the final status of the border conditional on the future ownership of the part of Kashmir it had control of. As mentioned earlier, China came down decidedly on the side of Pakistan during the India-Pakistan wars of 1965 and 1971.

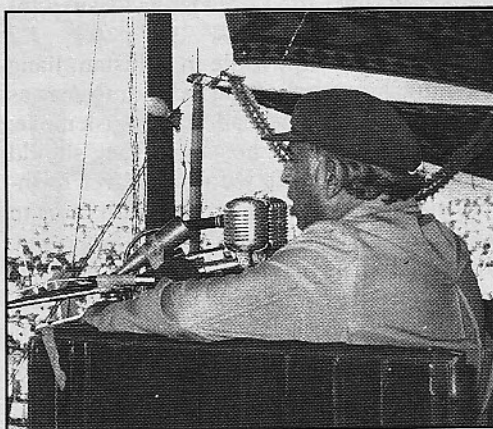
When the United States imposed an embargo on weapon exports to Pakistan and India after the 1965 war, China began to supply weapons to Pakistan free of charge; it also made up for the weapons losses suffered by Pakistan in the 1971 war. Beijing scrupulously refrained from recognising Bangladesh until Pakistan had become so secure that the United States used Pakistan as an intermediary to arrange Henry Kissinger's visit to China in 1972, which led to US President Richard Nixon's China visit.

Cultural revolution

The Cultural Revolution saw China's relations with many countries deteriorate because of the ultra-revolutionary policies then being

followed. India also became a target of attack and two Indian diplomats were manhandled and expelled from China. But India's neighbours were spared. Even the extreme revolutionaries of the 516 (16 May) group who had "captured" China's foreign ministry did not attack the establishments of Nepal and Bhutan, nor the domestically anti-communist regimes of Pakistan and Sri Lanka. That may have been because Premier Zhou Enlai swiftly intervened before further attacks could be made. India was then fair game only because it was still in an anti-China pro-Soviet phase.

That phase lasted well beyond the exchange of ambassadors between India and China. By the early 1980s, the anti-China rhetoric had lost its sharp edge on the Indian side, and China's critical tone about the Bangladesh war and the annexation of Sikkim was also subdued. Then, in 1985, came the bombshell of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's Ussuri speech, which brought about a change in Asian geopolitics. In the speech, Gorbachev essentially agreed to the Chinese demand for the Thalweg (mid-stream) in the Ussuri River as the Soviet-China border. Gorbachev had signalled to the world that the Soviet Union had abandoned its confrontationist policy towards China, and this came as a big blow to India because the Soviet counterweight to China



The populist Zulfikar in Mao cap.

would now no longer be available.

Meanwhile, the United States and China had also normalised their relations, and China was already occupying its seat on the Security Council. When it came to dealing with China, therefore, India stood isolated. Among its South Asian neighbours, only Bhutan looked to India when dealing with China. A couple of years later when Indian and Chinese forces confronted each other in the Sumdorang Valley, India's neighbours did not come to India's support. Except for Thimphu, each had its own China policy independent

George feigns friendship with General Fu when the latter came visiting in May.

of Delhi's. Their policies were on such even keel that even when, after much internal debate in the Indian government, the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi went to China in December 1988 and recognised that an actual dispute did exist over the border, India's neighbours were not disturbed about the prospects of improved India-China relations.

These relations have, of course, vastly improved over the last decade. There have been high level visits, numerous exchanges of delegations of military officials, parliamentarians, cultural groups and so forth. But above all, there have been two important agreements relating to the maintenance of peace and tranquility over the Line of Actual Control pending the settlement of the India-China border.

Love-hate triangle

The triangular relationship between China, India and the other South Asian countries having ceased to be a zero-sum game, China is now looking at South Asia as a more or less single unit. It shows no desire whatsoever of playing one against the other. Indeed, there is no longer any 'tilt' visible, not even towards its close friend of four decades, Pakistan. This became manifest during President Jiang Zemin's official tour of India, Pakistan and Nepal in November 1996, the first time such a high-ranking Chinese leader had visited India and Pakistan together.

During this trip, while in Pakistan, Jiang laid out China's policy towards South Asia as a whole. And then he made a high-risk move: he told his Pakistani hosts that they should put aside the dispute with India over Kashmir and seek a common ground with India to promote cooperation. As was to be expected, this piece of advice elicited much negative reaction in the Pakistani media but the Pakistani leaders must have been informed by China in advance that Jiang was going to say publicly what it had been saying to Pakistan privately for several years. As a result, the Pakistani leaders refrained from sharply expressing their disagreement with the Chinese leaders.

The important point is that Jiang's declaration of China's even-handed attitude towards India and Pakistan has not affected the friendship between Beijing and Islamabad. Pakistan continues to raise the Kashmir issue with India as well as in the international fora, and China, having made its point, does not react to this.

India-China hostility having become substantially muted, India no longer reacts nervously over Bhutan-China border negotia-



tions; India is kept informed but its guidance is not actively sought by Thimphu. India's intervention in Sri Lanka was not to China's liking but that episode has become a thing of the past. The "Gujral Doctrine" has elicited positive responses in China, which also looks positively at SAARC, which it hopes will develop positive cooperation among the subcontinental states.

Chinese military sales to Pakistan and Bangladesh do not meet with India's approval but are not regarded as threatening either. Only China's alleged transfer of nuclear weapons technology and missile transfers as well as the potential "nuclear threat" from China to India are repeatedly mentioned in different contexts. But, there again, India has never taken up the issue with China in the case of the former, possibly because the only "evidence" for such transfers has come in the form of "leaks" from the CIA. According to media reports on the Chinese PLA Chief of General Staff Fu Quanyon's visit, both India's Prime Minister Vajpayee and Defence Minister Fernandes raised the issue in their brief talks with General Fu. This is good because India, for the first time, will have received clarifications directly from a top-level Chinese official. Whether India trusts the information or not, it is a step forward.

It is against this backdrop that the 11 and 13 May nuclear explosions by India have to be seen – "a solution urgently looking for a problem". Having decided to go ahead with the tests, the decision had to be linked to some threat/provocation. But Pakistan had not yet tested (although it was to soon enough), so that did not qualify as a concrete provocation. As for China, one's "threat perception" does not have to be objectively proved.

This line of thinking is not new; it started with Indira Gandhi in the early 1980s when India went on an arms-buying spree. Having acquired the weapons, she went looking for threats which were then said to be coming from land, air and sea. This is a variation of

The triangular relationship between China, India and the other South Asian countries has ceased to be a zero-sum game.

Parkinson's Law of threats expanding to occupy available capability.

Enemy, or rival?

Opinion-makers in India have always regarded China as a long-term rival. The term "enemy" had gone out of usage until the escalation over the month of May, when the term has made some sort of a comeback. "Adversary" was still used by some but many were in the process of switching over to the terms "challenge" or "rival". Inside the government, depending on whether it is the armed forces, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the internal and external intelligence agencies, or the Ministry of External Affairs, the views range from "enemy" to "challenge". There does not seem to be any likelihood of the term "friend" being used except by the "friendship societies" and the communist parties.

Two other factors to bear in mind for the future are that policy towards China has never been an election issue in India and all progress in India-China relations has come about with bipartisan, indeed, multi-partisan support. Added to this is the fact that despite deep Indian fears of an aggressive China, the India-China border, barring three local incidents during the last 35 years, has

remained peaceful.

As for India and the SAARC members, the "Gujral Doctrine", even sans Gujral, is a departure from the earlier fear that the others would "gang up" against India. The smaller neighbours will continue to feel the weight of the Indian colossus but as disputes get resolved one by one in the spirit of the newly formed Indian generosity – the Ganga water dispute with Bangladesh and transit rights to Nepal are the big-ticket items – the fear of India will give way to making a dignified adjustment with India's powerful presence in the Subcontinent. China's countervailing power is not of much use for that purpose.

Chinese Marxists are fond of saying that "contradictions" are a permanent fact of life. Contradictions between India and China, between India and its neighbours and indeed between India's neighbours and China – Pakistan and China for instance, have a Muslim militants problem between them – will continue to exist. What matters is, to use a phrase of Mao Zedong's, whether the contradictions are "antagonistic" or "non-antagonistic".

G. Deshingkar is with the Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi.



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The Middle Kingdom and the Subcontinent

How should South Asia deal with a China which believes in its destiny to be the predominant Asian power.

by J.N. Dixit

The dramatic event of India's conducting nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May and declaring itself a nuclear weapons state changes the terms of reference of China's relations with South Asian countries qualitatively. The statements of the Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes describing China as a major threat even before the tests and Prime Minister Vajpayee's mentioning the Chinese threat as an impulse for India's nuclear weaponisation in his letters to the heads of governments of nuclear weapons states has changed the gradually and painfully created atmosphere of stability and tranquility in the South Asian region.

Regretfully, Sino-Indian relations have deteriorated precipitously after the tests, and the tension between the two countries affects the security of all the countries of the region. The setback to the process of normalisation of relations between India and China is a regrettable development which could have been avoided if Indian spokesmen, notwithstanding India's tests, had been more reticent and measured and if the Chinese reaction had been more patient. What has instead happened is that the strategic balance in the region has undergone a major change about which China has reservations – a change which India could not avoid in terms of its long-term regional strategic interests.

It is worth considering whether India's security concern vis-a-vis China is an articulation of an undercurrent of views that exist about China among the countries of both South and Southeast Asia. Are there deep and as yet not fully articulated concerns about China in this region, and are these concerns valid?

Perestroika sans glasnost

At the macro level, China's strategic position vis-a-vis the Subcontinent and the ASEAN countries is without doubt based on its domestic political compulsions, its perceptions about likely developments in regional politics and power equations, and its own military and technological capacities.

In terms of domestic compulsions, China has undergone profound transformation over the last two and a half decades. It has undertaken extensive and successful economic modernisation and reforms. The governing principle of this transformation has been a measured and effective "perestroika" with a firm rejection of "glasnost".

The present top leadership, represented by President Jiang Zemin and Prime Minister Zhu Rongji, is fully and effectively in command of the complex Chinese polity. The international community sees China as a politically stable country, an attractive economic partner, an effective technological and military power. All this is confirmed, among other things, by the country's average annual growth rate of nine to 11 percent over the last decade, its control of both inflationary and recessionary pressures, and by the considerable achievements in the quality of life index. China is a superpower in terms of its nuclear weapons and missile capacities, and it has trained manpower in all fields of science and technology.

China, of course, exhibits some negative characteristics as well, most glaring among which is the growing economic disparity between the special economic zones like Shanghai, Pudong, Hong Kong and Guangdong on the one hand and on the other, the northern, north-western and north-central regions

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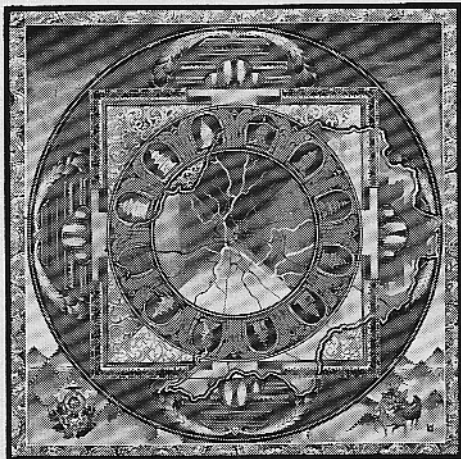
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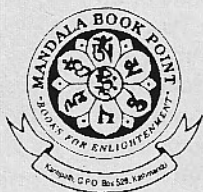
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which remain economically backward. This has generated political tensions, as acknowledged by the Chinese leaders themselves. There are also the simmering ethno-linguistic, religious and cultural centrifugal forces which can affect Chinese territorial integrity and unity. China also faces prospects of food shortages and large-scale unemployment in the next decade.

An immediate challenge to the Chinese state arises from the departure of the senior communist leadership from the "Long March" days, which has created a need to create a new equilibrium between the People's Liberation Army and the Chinese Communist Party. The older relationship was semi-military because they were both political leaders and military campaigners. This is not the case with the new Chinese political leadership

Inward focus

These, then, are the factors influencing China's attitudes and policies towards the world at large and, in particular, towards its Asian neighbours. Based on these, one can say that China's external orientations will be guided by the following objectives/motivations:

- * At present China wishes to concentrate primarily on domestic political consolidation and economic development. The focus is inwards.
- China wants an atmosphere of stability and peace at its borders in order to meet its own need for domestic stability and development.
- China, therefore, desires a practical, co-operative, working relationship with all its neighbours as well as with the US, Russia, Western Europe and Japan.
- Because China believes its destiny to be that of a country with superpower status, it will continue to build its technological and defence capacities to surge ahead of other technologically advanced countries.
- China is not at ease with a world order where the US and the West remain politically and militarily dominant.
- China has stood by its basic foreign policy principle of not interfering in the affairs of any other country while being absolutely firm and decisive in protecting its own national interest.

It is against this evolving mindset of the Chinese state that one may study Beijing's relations with its South Asian neighbours. The purpose here is not to proceed with a factually detailed description of Chinese relations with each of these countries. The objective is

to describe these relations in broad strategic terms and general political orientations.

While in the case of Pakistan and Sri Lanka, relations with China have been relatively steady, Beijing's associations with India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Burma have had their ups and downs.

Due to its differences with the Soviet Union which cropped up in the early 1960s, Beijing had been opposed to Soviet influence in Central Asia. For this reason, it cultivated Pakistan and developed a strong political, defence and economic relationship with it. China opposed the Soviet-supported revolution in Afghanistan but now has reservations about both the ongoing civil war there and the religious extremism dominant in the power structure of Afghanistan.

After the emotive friendship of the early 1950s, Sino-Indian relations have on occasion descended to the other extreme. Chinese territorial claims against India, rejected by the latter, resulted in a boundary dispute which led to a war. Despite the bitterness of the 1962 war, however, relations have gradually improved over the last decade. Since the late 1970s, both sides have agreed that the boundary dispute is complex and may be resolved in time by nurturing cooperative relations in various spheres.

Actual control

The period between 1991 to 1994 witnessed a qualitative improvement in Sino-Indian relations. Both countries signed an agreement in September 1993, agreeing to maintain peace and tranquility at the Line of Actual Control. It was also agreed to pull back forces on both sides of the Line and to implement mutual confidence-building measures which would ultimately lead to a final settlement of the boundary question. The whole process has, of course, now been jeopardised by the nuclear explosions as also by the recent statements of George Fernandes, and his avowal that India would not be pulling back the forces.

None of the facts quoted by George Fernandes in support of his assertion are new or of recent development. India has all along been aware of China's military strengths and missile deployments in Tibet, and it has also been aware of Beijing's defence and economic cooperation with Burma and Pakistan. Both India and China, while being aware of the implications of these phenomena, were consciously trying to build a working relationship insulated from the likely pressures generated by Chinese equations with India's neighbours. The strong and negative

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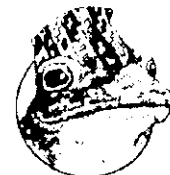
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Chinese response both to India's tests and to Fernandes' off-the-cuff remarks was to be expected, and it will take some time to bring Sino-Indian relations back on track.

Other South Asians

The tensions in China's relations with Nepal and Bhutan are by-products of India's relations with both these countries. Both China and India are apprehensive about the other becoming excessively influential in these two Himalayan kingdoms. While Nepal has shown a tendency to play each of its large neighbours against the other, Bhutan, being more dependent and hence closer to India, does not have a strong relationship with China.

The issues relating to Tibet are, of course, a major factor affecting China's relations with India, Nepal and Bhutan. Tibetan exiles and refugees in these countries are becoming increasingly vocal in their agitation against China, some demanding full independence and others greater autonomy. All three countries, of course, have recognised Tibet as an autonomous part of the People's Republic of China, but the Beijing government remains concerned about these neighbours being used as a base for separatist activities.

China had opposed Bangladesh's liberation, but after the initial bitterness, Dhaka's government has assiduously cultivated China, along with Pakistan, to balance off the politically overwhelming presence of India. Meanwhile, China's relations with Burma have become particularly close, with Beijing having provided assistance of up to USD 2 billion over the last decade. They have also been given some visiting facilities at the Coco Island naval base in the Bay of Bengal. The politico-strategic equation that Beijing has developed with Rangoon is certainly affecting the security in both South and Southeast Asia.

Position and responsibility

South Asia's governments and public must understand that China believes that it is its position and responsibility to be the predominant Asian power of the 21st century. Within the framework of this expectation and aspiration, China considers South and Southeast Asia as the definitive areas of Chinese influence. China does not consider the large powers other than itself in the region, India and Indonesia, as challengers to the role it desires. Nevertheless, Beijing is committed to maintaining its position at a higher level of political influence vis-a-vis those two countries, by remaining ahead militarily, strategically and technologically.

China would also like to develop equations

with Asian countries further afield, including Iran and the Gulf states, in order to develop its position as a balancing centre of power vis-a-vis the US, Western Europe and the Russian Federation, as well as Japan.

As far as the immediate interests of India, the dominant power in South Asia, is concerned, China will continue to have a close relationship with Pakistan and will have a benign but positive attitude towards Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and to a limited extent with Bhutan. India's own relationship with China will remain complex and tenuous for some time to come, particularly after the severe buffeting it has taken recently.

Political stability and development in all of South Asia require a practical and stable working relationship between, first and foremost, New Delhi and Beijing. The Sino-Indian confrontation, if it continues, will generate pressures on smaller countries in the region and will introduce elements of instability in their foreign policies. Such a confrontation would also intensify Sino-Pak cooperation in the spheres of defence and strategic affairs, which could snowball into adversary reactions from India. This has to be avoided.

It is not just desirable but imperative that Sino-Indian relations are brought back on track, restoring the dialogue for normalisation. So, while China's reservations about India's nuclearisation should be accepted as an unavoidable reality, China should also delink its views on India's nuclear weaponisation from the processes of normalisation which are so essential to ensure the fundamental interests of both China and India. For this reason, both sides should make every effort to avoid drifting back into confrontation, based purely on past memories and speculative apprehensions.

The other countries of South Asia can contribute to this process by encouraging India and China to sustain the efforts to develop 'normal' bilateral relations. Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, having borders with China and India, can play a particularly positive role in the process.

The guiding principle to manage the asymmetry between China and the Asian countries should be that of being aware of the competitive and confrontationist potentialities of the national psyche of countries like India and China and to temper them through regional processes of integrated political and economic cooperation.

J.N. Dixit, former Indian foreign secretary, is an author and writer on regional geo-strategic concerns.

Writer J.N. Dixit sends in this reaction to the Pakistani nuclear tests which took place after this article was submitted:

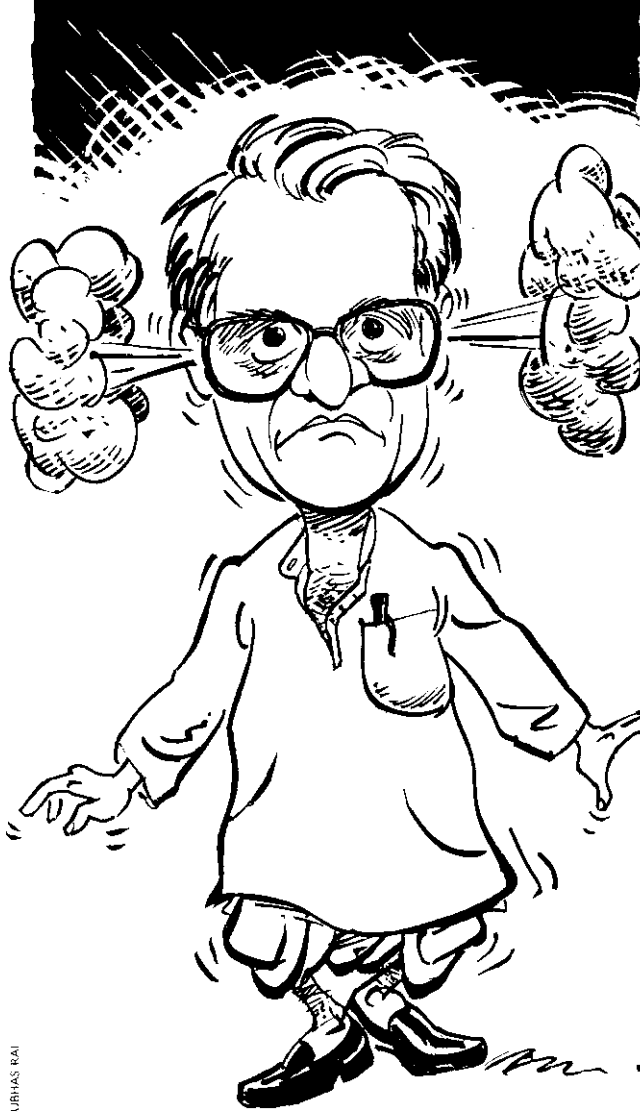
News has come in of Pakistan conducting nuclear tests and becoming a nuclear weapon state on 28

May. There are confirmed indications that the Pakistan nuclear tests were possible because of Chinese assistance.

The prospects of a China-Pakistan nuclear strategic nexus assumes critical dimensions for India's defence planning, specially so in the context of the recent deterioration in Sino-Indian relations which India could have avoided.

India has a particularly complex task of bringing back its relations on track with China. Any profound antagonism between China and India will obviously have a very negative impact on Asian peace and stability.





CRY DRAGON!

Now we know why George Fernandes was baiting China.

by Rita Manchanda

Sino-Indian differences, one would have thought till just a few moments ago, were being successfully managed, and the Chinese dragon was said to have been virtually dormant as far as India was concerned. That is, till the irrepressible George Fernandes, with all the responsibility of a minister of defence, targetted a battery of accusations against China and singled it out as India's "potential threat number one".

Apparently, while we were talking peace, the Chinese have been busy militarily encircling us, from Pakistan all the way across the Himalayan rimland to Burma, and into the Bay of Bengal. The disputed border, which we thought had been becalmed, is menacingly alive with Chinese incursions and Tibet is bris-

ting with nuclear missiles targeted at the cities of the Ganga plains. India is talking troop withdrawal, and the Chinese are building a helipad in Arunachal Pradesh! While we are shifting troops away from the east, China is elongating its airfields in Tibet so that they can handle more lethal jet fighters.

So, at least, says the new defence minister of India. Which makes one ask why has South Block been pulling the wool over the eyes of the people about the nefarious Chinese intentions. Good for George, to take the people of the country into confidence. "National security", he says, must become the "people's concern". How else will the people be imbued with the spirit of self-sacrifice to safeguard our frontiers?

Fernandes' gaffe-a-day had been a matter of ridicule. But now, it turns out there was a method in the adventurist outspokenness of the maverick minister. No sooner had the tremors subsided from the Indian blasts than Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee wrote to the United States' president citing the Chinese nuclear threat as the rationale for the explosions. A riled China hit back, opening up the 'healed' wounds of the 1962 war, charging India with occupying 90,000 sq kms of Chinese territory. Within weeks of the BJP taking over the government, the carefully nurtured framework of confidence building measures to manage the Sino-Indian relationship had come crashing down. India risked becoming China's "number one threat". But a smiling Fernandes continued to reiterate his "personal" opinion that China was the potential enemy.

Fanning flames

Fernandes' trumpeting the Chinese threat has come as music to the ears of the defence hawks. Manoj Joshi, an influential strategic analyst, welcoming the "right chord" struck by Fernandes, wrote, "India may well snap out of its self-imposed trance on matters relating to the Middle Kingdom."

The Indian establishment is fond of remembering how India was foolishly caught off guard by the bonhomie of the *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* period, to find itself unprepared when China attacked in 1962. However, fully convinced about the Chinese perfidy, it conveniently forgets the documentation which indicates Nehru's role in fanning the flames. For example, Indian analysts routinely neglect reference to how the jingoistic public debate, of a predatory China about to swallow up India's northern frontiers as demarcated by the MacMahon line, trapped Nehru in Parliament, leaving him in the end with little room for manoeuvre.

A revitalised China threat provides the perfect rationale to lobby for higher defence spending at a time when the guru of the Indian strategic community, K. Subramanyam, has himself acknowledged that inter-state wars are no longer a Clausewitzian option. Indeed, the proposal for a 25 percent cut in the force levels of India and Pakistan has picked up support, and it seems increasingly untenable to justify ever-larger expenditures on the army, air force and navy on the basis of the India-Pakistan war theatre. Step in Fernandes, then, with his finger pointed at China.

Low-intensity wars to fight insurgencies, which was what the analysts told the Indian

policy-maker to expect rather than inter-state hostilities, required a different force structure. Significantly, counter-insurgency operations would be funded not through the Defence Ministry, but via the Ministry of Home Affairs and the state governments. Given the competitive pulls on the state exchequer, it was not surprising that the defence establishment was losing out.

Alarm over a revived military threat from China could reverse the trend. The Indian Navy, particularly, could be saved from atrophy by newfound Chinese sea threats. In the India-Pakistan theatre, the navy had little strategic relevance, and the downsizing of India's regional ambitions over the 1980s had mothballed its blue water ambitions. The so-called Chinese threat also could breathe life back into India's naval dreams of a three-carrier navy.

The bomb lobby, which had been crying itself hoarse over the need to expand India's nuclear strategy beyond Pakistan to take in China as well, now finds a sympathetic ear. Little wonder that Indian strategists have enthusiastically clambered on to the BJP wagon. China is a fitting match for India, Pakistan never was, and the analysts have always bitterly resented Western powers which have boxed India in with Pakistan.

Sino-Indian detente

We have the word of, first, the defence minister and, later, the prime minister that Chinese capabilities and intentions are threatening. Why then did the responsible Ministry of External Affairs project Sino-Indian detente as a shining example of "step-by-step" diplomacy, that is, pushing forward on areas where cooperation was easier, building trust and confidence so as to be able to push through on the more difficult areas of settlement such as the border dispute? Certainly, there was no whiff of menace when Chinese President Ziang Zemin visited India in November 1997. Trade has been slow to take off, but the flurry of high-level military visits held out the hope that the ghost of 1962 was finally buried. In fact, the Sino-Indian approach was even held up as a model for managing the Pakistan-India relationship.

Be it the horder question or Tibet, there seemed to be no intractable issue left between China and India. As far as the border was concerned, to all appearances, China already had got what it claimed in Aksai Chin, and India would be left alone on Arunachal Pradesh.

As for Tibet, the special operations cell that Indira Gandhi maintained in the 1970s has long been disbanded. India has moved from

China is a fitting match for India. Pakistan never was, and Indians have bitterly resented Western powers which have boxed it with Pakistan.

China does not threaten India

by *Batuk Vora*

FORMER PRIME Minister of India Inder Kumar Gujral was late with his criticism of the Indian nuclear tests. But when he did, he blew a hole in the theory being proffered that it was the Chinese threat that forced India to take the extreme step. “[Playing the] China card is wrong and undiplomatic,” said Gujral emphatically.

It is time India’s politicians realised that their country has, for long, ceased to matter in China’s defence plans. Going back some decades, while it is true that the 1962 war left India with psychic scars, for China it was but a border skirmish, now nearly forgotten. Chinese military officers today say that for decades they have not done any contingency planning for a war with India. Even if they ever did, it is unlikely that nuclear weapons would have figured in those plans, since these weapons are of little use in border wars with limited aims.

At a meeting of American, Chinese, European and Russian nuclear scientists in Sichuan in 1996, none of the Chinese scientists thought India figured in Beijing’s nuclear policy. Interestingly, at the meeting (held jointly with the Ninth Academy – China’s equivalent to Los Alamos, the American nuclear facility), a participant from China’s Institute of Systems Engineering came up with a revelation: China’s last project to develop a medium-range ballistic missile – the DF-25 – stood cancelled for lack of funds. (The 1700-km-range missile is similar in many ways to India’s Agni, and was meant to have been deployed on the Tibetan plateau.)

Given China’s booming economy, that explanation was disingenuous, to be sure. According to a report by Eric Arnett for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the real explanation probably lay in Beijing’s lack of military interest in India. Arnett also noted that the DF-3A, the missile that the DF-25 would have replaced, is obsolete, and no other Chinese missile can reach major targets in India – the M-9 and M-11 would fall short of most Indian targets even if based in Tibet, and the strategic missiles would all overshoot.

Furthermore, the Defence Agency of Japan reveals that China’s nuclear bomber force stands de-activated after years of neglect. This has left the Xian Aircraft Corporation, China’s only producer of bombers, on the verge of bankruptcy.

All these are not indications of a sudden policy shift in Beijing, but rather a potent reminder of a change begun more than 10 years ago. The inescapable infer-

ence is that, as far as India is concerned, China should not be the basis of its military planning or its arms-control policy.

A question of priorities

It is also important to note Beijing’s nuclear-related assistance to New Delhi. According to data from SIPRI, China, sans any safeguards, supplied India with 130-150 metric tons of heavy water (D₂O) between 1982-1987. (Please refer to varying information on page 32. Editors.) It also supplied, under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards, low-enriched uranium (LEU) in 1995 for India’s Tarapur reactor.

As for China’s active missile programme, it does have a good-sized arsenal of ballistic missiles, with several more being developed. Ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons were the highest priorities of the Chinese Government in the first four decades of its post-war incarnation. In 1971, Beijing deployed the DF-3A, its first missile capable of striking India. But even then India was not the target; US bases in the Philippines were.

Until 1985, Chinese engineers had concentrated on increasing the range and performance of their missiles in the context of a war with Russia or the United States. In 1985, however, Deng Xiaoping gained approval for a military reform programme on the assumption that China would not enter a major war for several decades.

With the implementation of military, economic as well as scientific reforms which changed the way Chinese military production units do business, a number of state enterprises began developing short-range missiles independently to keep themselves afloat. The new missiles, comparable to India’s Prithvi, but more advanced, were meant for the international market. Three of these are now known as the M-7, the M-9 and the M-11 and may have been sold – wholly or in component parts – to Iran, Pakistan and Syria. They were also offered to India.

All the while, however, Beijing’s highest priority has been to ensure the ability of these newly-developed missiles to strike western Russia or the United States, in order to survive a pre-emptive attack. China’s modernisation programme is regarded by many observers as an “insurance policy”. In that sense, other nuclear weapon states have also sought insurance, and India’s nuclear option was maintained for much the same purpose. But again, in this context, India had no reason to fear a Chinese nuclear threat as Beijing had totally different priorities.

As for the worsening ties between India and Pakistan, especially so in the aftermath of the nuclear tests, China would obviously want the problem to drag on in its own interest. For while it is true that India does not figure prominently in China’s military planning, China would never want to see India achieving “big power” status to rival its own.

B. Vora is a writer based in Ahmedabad.

recognising China's suzerainty to recognising its sovereignty over Tibet. Although the Dalai Lama lives in India, New Delhi has been diligent in not encouraging anti-Chinese political activity on its soil. (Fernandes, however, is a well-known supporter of the Tibetan cause.)

Coming to the encirclement thesis, it is more neat than accurate. The defence minister, with his wide-ranging reach to militant groups in the Indian Northeast, must be aware that China has given up supporting insurgent groups in that region. There is no "enemy action" there. Nepal and Bhutan dearly wish that they could play off China and India against each other, but the fact is that since the early 1990s, China has abstained from playing competitive politics in the Himalayan kingdoms.

Watch it, George

Fernandes, the socialist, insists on seeing international relations as a zero-sum game. He refuses to see the possibility that China may have two independent and not necessarily competitive strategic relationships with India and Pakistan. Will it make any difference if someone reminds him that on the Kashmir

question – the litmus test for India – China has backed away from open support of Pakistan to recognising it as a bilateral dispute and even urging a "step by step" approach *a la* Sino-Indian detente.

But the mind of Fernandes is crammed with the image of a Tibet full of nuclear-tipped missiles pointed at India. This is curious, because Chinese strategic analysts like Hua Hun suggest that since the mid-1980s military strategy in China has shifted from planning for a large-scale war to planning limited wars or low-intensity or medium wars on China's borders. These do not require nuclear weapons. There is also reason to believe that the Chinese nuclear systems which are of greater concern to India are atrophying as a result of military reform. Tactical nuclear weapons are being dismantled, and one IRBM project has been cancelled.

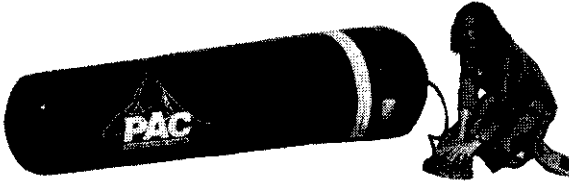
The George Fernandes who once threw the US multinationals Coca Cola and IBM out of India, will now in all likelihood be remembered as the defence minister who fitted India into the US gameplan of countering a rising China.

R. Manchanda is a Delhi-based journalist.

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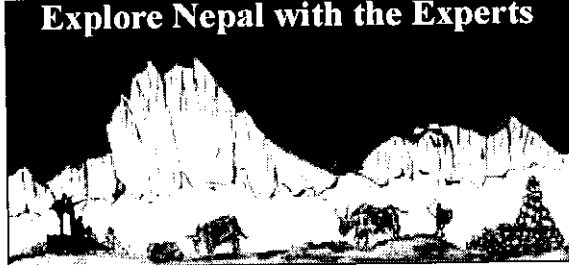
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The history of geography

The Sino-Indian border dispute has a lot to do with Tibet's past.

by *Dawa Norbu*

IT IS COMMON knowledge that one of the most contentious issues that has bedevilled the bilateral relationship between India and China is the matter of their common boundary. What is not generally known is that the dispute is complicated by the fact that, prior to 1950, Tibet was a 'suzerain' entity with the power to enter into treaties on its own. In short, the Sino-Indian boundary dispute is embedded in the disputed status of Tibet. What follows is a table that encapsulates various dimensions of the dispute vis-a-vis the Himalayan rimland.

Sector	Western	Middle	Eastern
Name	Aksai Chin	a) Bara Hott (Garhwal) b) Sikkim-Tibet border	Tibet-Arunachal border (Monpa Areas)
Disputed Area	24,000 sq km	320 sq km	51,200 sq km
Treaty	Ladakh-Tibet treaty of 1684. Maharaja Gulab Singh - Tibet treaty of 1842.	a. Discussions between Indian collector of Garhwal and Tibetan officials on 5-7 September 1890; also discussions between Tibetan Prime Minister and the Political Officer of Sikkim on 10 July 1914 confirmed Uttar Pradesh-Tibet border along Tunjun La, Mahri La, Shalshal and Balchandhura passes. b. Sino-Indian agreement of 1890 and Lhasa Convention of 1904.	Simla Convention of 1914 (India, China, Tibet). China initialled, but did not ratify; India and Tibet signed including the MacMahon Line.
Evidence	Indian Position: Part of Ladakh since 10th century. Some Ladakhi and Kashmiri records. Chinese Position: Part of Xinjiang and Ngari (Tibet). No Tibetan records on greater part of Aksai Chin—may be some Chinese since 19th century.	Indian Position: Traditional boundary confirmed by 1954 Treaty (Panchsheel) in which six border passes mentioned. Chinese Position: Part of Tibet and therefore part of China. Tibetan records.	Indian Position: (i) Except in Tawang area no Chinese or Tibetan evidence of administration. (ii) Simla Convention of 1914. Chinese Position: Names of rivers, passes and other places in Tibetan. Some Tibetan records on Buddhist areas of Arunachal Pradesh (Monpas).

Clues used by early colonial officials to roughly indicate Indo-Tibetan borders included an ethnocultural criterion of whether an area was under "Tibetan influence" or not. This, in practice, meant the presence of Tibetan-speaking villages showing some sort of loyalty to Lhasa and/or the presence of a *gompa* (monastery) in the said locality connected with one of the major monasteries in Tibet, or simply mountain ranges and passes with Tibetan names. This procedure was followed particularly in the extreme Eastern sector where there were various tribes such as Tawangis,

Charduars, Thengla Bhutias, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Abors and Mishmis.

Therefore, if an area was not under "Tibetan influence", it was largely the question of boundary engineering based on such criteria as strategic considerations and topographical suitability: "secure, suitable, strategic borders". In such cases heretofore of documentation, it was a question of whose expedition got "there" first, Indian or Chinese, and who put their flag up first. This has implications on the two extremities of the Western and Eastern sectors where Tibetan evidence was lacking.

All the pre-1950 treaties/conventions/agreements concerning the Tibeto-Indian/Sino-Indian boundary were negotiated and signed between Tibet and British India (or with the Himalayan states concerned) except the Sino-Indian agreement of 1890 on the Sikkim-Tibet border, which the 13th Dalai Lama's government refused to recognise. However, the British Government later sought Tibetan agreement on the said treaty, and was stipulated so in the Lhasa Convention of 1904.

Thus, seen from the perspective of this long-standing Trans-Himalayan diplomatic tradition and practice, it was not surprising that Sir Henry MacMahon, the British Plenipotentiary to the Simla Convention signed his famous MacMahon Line with his Tibetan counterpart, Lonchen Shtra, in 1914.

It should also be noted that most of the evidence, on which Chinese territorial claims are based, are from Tibetan sources, not official Han records. Such indirect evidence became valid only after 1954 when India recognised Tibet as part of the People's Republic of China; and there is not much ground that the 1954 treaty provisions should be applied retroactively to all past cases in history. The Panchsheel treaty did not abrogate past treaties/agreements/conventions signed between British India and Tibet; it did nothing more than recognise Tibet to be part of China with effect from 29 April 1954.



Nehru flanked by the Dalai Lama and Zhou Enlai in Delhi, 1956.

The fact is that Tibet had been exercising its treaty-making powers "with the full knowledge and sanction of the Chinese Government". The problem with the communist authorities in China is that they want to rewrite history according to their "revolutionary designs". Most historians would agree that powers-that-be cannot plough back history.

D. Norbu is Professor of International Relations at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, whose latest book, Tibet: The Road Ahead, was published in 1997.

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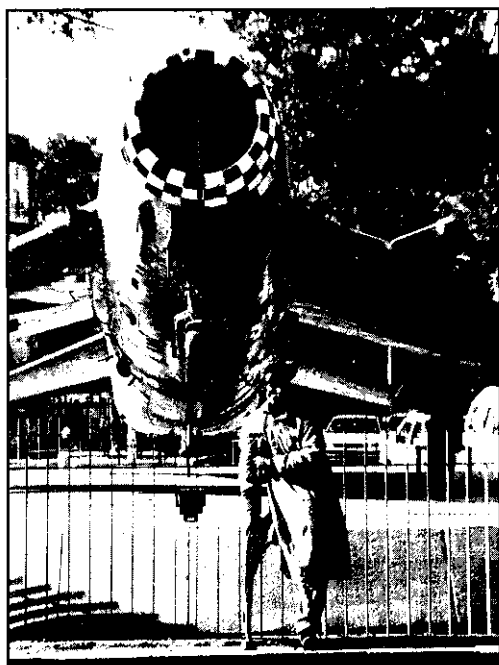
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Enemy of a friend = Enemy

China and Pakistan are comrades in arms thanks to India and the US.

by J.A. Naqvi



That bitter experience pushed Islamabad towards diversifying its sources of military hardware. As a first step, in 1966, China agreed to help Pakistan set up an ordnance factory in Ghazipur in the then East Pakistan. (The factory, commissioned in November 1970, was lost to Bangladesh after the 1971 war.)

The 1971 defeat taught Pakistan a few lessons. Defence ties with China grew deeper, given: a) Pakistan's security perception in view of the changing regional balance of power; b) the sense of betrayal by the United States; and c) efforts towards greater self-reliance in military technology through indigenisation.

While the war established India's conventional superiority over Pakistan, the 1974 Indian nuclear test in Pokhran added a new dimension to the region. Pakistan's insecurity was heightened and it never bought India's technical argument that the Pokhran test was a peaceful nuclear explosion, for the simple reason that the technology could be put to dual use. Besides, peaceful or not, the test demonstrated India's nuclear capability.

Another factor for Pakistan's vulnerability sprang from India's signing a Treaty of Friendship with the Soviet Union in 1971. While the treaty yielded India huge military, technological and other dividends, for Pakistan it was cause for concern on more than one front; on its western border lay a hostile Afghanistan, which had traditionally maintained close ties with both India and the Soviet Union.

In the mid- to late-1970s, the issue of acquiring a French reprocessing plant, too, assumed great significance for Islamabad. It had begun work on acquiring nuclear technology after India showed its conventional and nuclear superiority. The plans were frustrated by the United States which forced the French to backtrack on the deal for the reprocessing plant.

Pakistan's relations with the United States had reached their nadir, and the former fell in easily with China, both as strategic ally and client of defence hardware. It was only after Pakistan became the frontline state in

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Gimmie arms!
Chinese MiG-19 on
display at Lahore's
"China Chowk", a
popular begging spot..*

Pakistan formally recognised the People's Republic of China on 4 January 1950, and it was not guns and missiles that made it reach out. Pakistan was seeking a market for its jute and raw cotton, while looking to buy coal; in China, it found a willing trade partner. At the National Press Club in Washington DC on 4 May 1950, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan said that Pakistan had recognised China, "accepting an established fact and in order to ease [its] flow of trade".

Things assumed the shape of military ties more than a decade later, when after its 1962 war with India, China began strategically capitalising on the India-Pakistan rivalry. The amicable border settlement between China and Pakistan in 1963 further facilitated the new turn of events.

However, China-Pakistan defence ties, which now account for one-third of Pakistan's arms imports, began in right earnest only after the 1965 war, when the United States embargoed all military aid to Pakistan and even blocked supplies that were in the pipeline.

RAHAT DAR

the proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan that US-Pakistan ties improved in the early 1980s.

The Pakistani bridge

Importing arms from China had many advantages for Pakistan. Unlike the United States and other Western countries, China was not likely to embargo military supplies in the event of war with India. China's system of government also made it easier for Pakistan to acquire military hardware, for here there were no restrictive factors such as domestic public opinion in the supplier countries and international law/treaties. (Pakistan suffered the United States embargo on military sup-

plies in 1965 because the equipment it used in the war against India was supposedly given by the United States to fight communism.) Chinese military supplies were also much cheaper than Western imports. Moreover, China was willing to encourage Pakistan's efforts at indigenisation rather than keep it dangling on a dependency relationship.

For China, too, this was emerging as a beneficial relationship, and not only from the strategic viewpoint allowing it to promote Pakistan as a counterweight to India. Pakistan, after all, provided China a lucrative market for its relatively low-quality weapons. At the same time, China was able to gain access to Western military technologies that Paki-

Arm in arm

Al-Khalid MBT (Main Battle Tank)

Conceived in 1988, the agreement to jointly design, develop and manufacture Al-Khalid, also called MBT-2000, was signed in 1990. The plant to manufacture the tank was completed at the Heavy Re-build Factory in Taxila in 1992 as an extension of the HRF, which has been producing Chinese Type-69 MBTs since the 1980s.

The prototypes of the Al-Khalid, demonstrated in 1991, were said to have been manufactured in China even though the then Chief of Army Staff, General Mirza Aslam Beg, claimed that it was fully manufactured in Pakistan.

Production is expected to start by the turn of the century but reports suggest that it has run into difficulties because the design needs to factor in Pakistan's difficult terrain and very high temperatures.

Karakorum-8 jet trainer/fighter

A joint venture between CATIC (China National Aeronautical Import Export Corporation) and PAC (Pakistan Aeronautical Complex), the actual development of the aircraft, meant to replace the ageing T-37s, began with the collaboration of Pakistan's AMF (Aircraft Manufacturing Factory) and China's NAMC (Nanchang Aircraft Manufacturing Company). The aircraft was designed and built at Nanchang by a team of PAC engineers and the first trial flight took place in late 1990. Production started in 1992, and Pakistan has agreed to take regular deliveries of the aircraft.

Super-7 (FC-1) fighter

(See main story.)

Missiles (air defence weapon systems; 5SM M-11/M-9)

Most of Pakistan's air defence weapon systems, including radars, 37mm AD guns and RBS-70 Mk 1 and Mk 2 IFF (Identify Friend and Foe) surface to air missiles are Chinese. India has been alleging that China provided

Pakistan with its medium-range M-9 and M-11 surface-to-surface missiles – the allegations have been rejected by Beijing.

A case in point is Pakistan's IRBM, Hatf V (Ghauri). The immediate Indian reaction to its launch was that it was a Chinese missile. Later reports alleged that it was the North Korean Rodong (or Nodong) missile. However, these allegations were rejected by the more impartial Indian experts and commentators who pointed out Pakistan's indigenous capacity to manufacture sophisticated guided missiles.

Heavy Mechanical Complex

The complex, completed with China's help in 1979, houses the Heavy Forge Factory (HFF) and the Heavy Re-build Factory (HRF).

The HRF was built with China's extensive collaboration. It began with the facility to overhaul Chinese Type-59 tanks. Later, the facility was extended to upgrade critical components of the T-59s. In the eighties, HRF also started licenced production of Chinese T-69 tanks.

The HRF has since expanded with Chinese collaboration. The Factory now manufactures T-69 II BMPS, T-85 II MBTs and M-113 APCs, although some of the components are still imported from China.

Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC)

PAC began with a Mirage rebuild factory with French collaboration. Later, China collaborated with PAC and the facility was extended to provide overhauling facilities for the F-6 Shenyang fighter and the RD-9B-8II turbojet engines. Later, the facility was further expanded to accommodate FT-5s, FT-6s and FT-7s. In the mid-eighties, it also started overhauling F-7Ps.

Another turnkey project within the overall framework of PAC was the LAMF (Light Aircraft Manufacturing Factory). Operational since 1981, it manufactures Swedish SAAB Scania light aircraft for Army Aviation. The aircraft is commonly known as Mushak and comprises the biggest component of Army Aviation's Fixed Wing. This very facility later provided the jump off ground for the K-8 and the Super-7.

China made it easy for Pakistan to get military hardware.

stan possessed or was likely to get, given the Pakistani military's continuing relationship with the armed forces in the United States and other Western countries. Most importantly, Pakistan served as a bridge between an ostracised China and the Western world, especially the United States.

A significant element of ongoing Sino-Pak defence cooperation has been China's willingness to help Pakistan on the road to self-reliance by building infrastructure through turn-key projects (see box). This strategy, it seems, not only helps Pakistan but also provides China with long-term advantage. Take for example, the Sino-Pak collaboration in the development of the Super-7 fighter, which was originally a joint project between the China Aerotechnology Import Export Corporation (CATIC) and the US Grumman Corporation. Following the Tiananmen Square incident, Washington DC called off the deal. Since 1992, CATIC has been working with the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex as a junior partner in developing the Super-7.

Pakistan also stands to gain from the Chinese policy of inducting new weapon systems through higher imports. From the beginning of this decade, China has been modernising its defence forces by buying weapon systems from various sources, including Russia (like Su-27 fighters and T-80U tanks). Given the Chinese expertise in "reverse engineering" (copy producing on equipment till it suits the purpose), Islamabad could hope to get those weapon systems through China, incorporate them in its inventory and, over time, even start manufacturing them.

The thorns

It is interesting to note that, before 1963, there was nothing to suggest that Pakistan took any interest in China as a potential ally against India. If anything, Pakistan seemed willing to consider allying with India on matters relating to China. When Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, in a letter to the Indian prime minister in September 1959, challenged the legitimacy of the entire MacMahon Line (the boundary line drawn in the first years of the century to delimit British India's territory), President Ayub Khan offered Nehru a joint defence agreement between Pakistan and India, if India was willing to find a solution to Kashmir. The Indian prime minister rejected the offer with the famous words: "Joint defence against whom?" That, of course, he was soon to learn.

During this period, China was not particularly enamoured of Pakistan's membership of SEATO and CENTO, the US-led defence pacts meant to create a *cordon sanitaire* against Com-

munist. There were also occasions when Pakistan criticised China, such as during Prime Minister H.S. Suhrawardy's visit in 1957 to the United States.

More recently, in the early 1990s, the relationship saw a dip due to various factors, including the warming up of ties between China and India, despite the various existing Sino-Pak defence projects and despite New Delhi's allegations that Beijing was cooperating with Islamabad in the nuclear arena and in missile technology.

These developments unfolded in the backdrop of the demise of the Soviet Union and China's growing links with both Russia and the United States. There were also corresponding internal developments in China, including a turnaround in its old socio-economic patterns. Beijing continued its defence cooperation with Islamabad, but politically, its pro-Pakistan stand underwent a change. Most significant was Beijing's reluctance to unconditionally support Islamabad on the Kashmir issue, and see it instead as a bilateral issue between New Delhi and Islamabad. Additionally, China thrice refrained from openly supporting Pakistan when Islamabad sought an international vote on India's human rights violations.

Regionally, this change was underscored by the ongoing confidence building measures (CBMs) between India and China, which began from 1993. In fact, the BJP government's recent fulminations against China on the basis that the latter is a threat to India's security are but a diversion in light of the CBMs in place between the two countries. China has never been less of a threat to India than today.

Beijing has also maintained a studied silence on India's nuclear and missile programme and, in fact, assisted India by supplying heavy water at a crucial stage in January 1996. Meanwhile, there was friction between Pakistan and China on the question of Muslim uprisings in Xinjiang. Beijing's perception has been that these uprisings were supported by Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami and certain Afghan Islamicist groups.

However, the Xinjiang imbroglio too having been resolved, these wrinkles may now stand ironed out in the wake of India's series of nuclear tests at Pokhran in early May 1998. The strategic scenario has seen a sudden change, and the plans and expectations of the regional countries have all changed. It ushers China and Pakistan into a new phase, and possibly a closer relationship than ever before.

J.A. Naqvi is a pseudonym for a Lahore-based journalist.



NEPAL FORGETS TIBET

Kathmandu is closer to Beijing than to Lhasa.

by *Kanak Mani Dixit*

Till as late as the first decade of this century, the government in Kathmandu paid tribute to the Chinese court. Once every five years a party would head out of Kathmandu overland across Tibet, bearing gifts, taking three years for the round-trip to Beijing. A practice begun after 1791 when Chinese forces, responding to Tibet's call for help in what was turning out to be a very one-sided Nepal-Tibet war, reached within a day's march of Kathmandu before Nepal sued for peace.

China is still extracting tribute from Nepal today, albeit in a slightly different guise. These come in the form of the reiteration of the refrain: "Tibet is a part of China; Nepal will not allow any anti-Chinese activities from its soil; Tibet is a part of China..."

No matter whether it is King Birendra, prime ministers, trade delegations or journalists' groups who go visiting Beijing, the Chinese never fail to extract this oral tribute, which is mouthed as a matter of course. Needless to say, this does not do much to enhance

the Nepali self-image.

Poor sense of self has of course long afflicted Kathmandu's foreign policy generally. It is a far cry today from those heady days of the early 1960s when Nepali leaders such as Bishweswor Prasad Koirala, Nepal's first popularly elected prime minister, stood tall and self-confident, side by side with a Jawaharlal Nehru or a Zhou Enlai. It was back then that Nepal's China policy was designed, to be sure, taking into consideration the Cold War and the Sino-Indian rivalry. Nepal was having to prove its sovereign status to a sceptical India, and also needed China desperately to balance India's overwhelming presence in its economic and political life.

But even back then, China had implicitly recognised that Nepal fell within India's sphere of influence. According to the recently published memoirs of Koirala, *B.P. Koirala ko Atmabritanta*, 1998, when he had visited China during his brief tenure from 1959 to 1960, Zhou Enlai himself had acknowledged as much. Referring to the volume of Indian

Zhou hosting Koirala at the Huaijoui Reservoir in 1960.

aid to Nepal, the Chinese premier had indicated that Beijing's contribution would have to be slightly less. When Koirala asked why, Zhou replied: "It will not be good either for you or for us... We should not compete with India in providing aid to you."

Chinese crutch

Times have changed, and Nepal's own sovereign status is unquestioned. At the same time, the ability to play China and India against each other has diminished considerably (despite the immediate downturn over the course of May 1998). China now has, in so many words, conceded the south of the Himalaya as outside its immediate area of influence and interest.

This in itself need not be a matter to make Nepali policy-makers disconsolate, for it provides an opportunity for smart diplomacy to take the place of an outdated equidistance policy. It should be possible for Nepal to fashion an independent and self-confident regional policy for itself without the need of a Chinese crutch.

As far as Beijing is concerned, meanwhile, the place of Nepal in its scheme of things has diminished considerably over the years and today the importance is only in relation to activities that may be carried out from the south against its presence in Tibet. That, and the activities of Chinese construction companies and contractors in Nepal.

One may, of course, forgive Shital Niwas (the redbrick palace where Nepal's foreign ministry is housed) for not taking the initiative in defining a more self-confident approach towards China. It is the members of the Nepali intelligentsia and media which show an even greater lack of imagination. Since the diplomatic shackles binding the foreign ministry do not affect them, they could conceivably have taken an independent stance on China and Tibet.

They could, for example, dare speak on matters such as cultural inundation or the Han migration into Kham and Amdo, the matter of religious freedom and human rights, or the socio-economic conditions within Tibet. They could also raise discussion on Tibet's distinct identity within China, and the quantum of sovereignty that might be appropriate, something that even the Dalai Lama is willing to consider. They could, perhaps, speak up on allowing the Dalai Lama to visit Nepal on a purely religious mission, as is the formula employed elsewhere.

All this is, of course, what the Kathmandu intelligentsia *could* do. The reality, however, is that any person who raises one of these

points is immediately, and contemptibly, tarred as a "Free Tibet wallah".

(Interestingly enough, B.P. Koirala recalls in his just-published memoirs, "...For one thing, because we were socialists we were for Tibet's independence and we believed that the Chinese action was an aggression... When the talk turned to Tibet, I told Jawaharlal Nehru, 'You have given Tibet to China on a silver platter.' To which he replied, 'So, am I supposed to send an army to put the Dalai Lama on the throne?' My answer was, 'There is no need to send in the army. But you have given international endorsement to the Chinese action, you have recognised it. And you are also telling us to leave China to do what it will...'")

When in their bilateral banquet toasts the diplomats drink to the "age-old ties between Nepal and China", they mean, more than anything else, the historical links of Nepal with Tibet. But the lack of interest of the Nepali educated class towards Tibet over the last half century has accelerated the eclipse of Tibet from the Nepali mind. This, despite the fact that the most popular ballad in the Nepali language continues to be *Muna Madan*, the tragic tale of a Kathmandu trader who leaves his family to go trade in Lhasa.

Mao badges

Today, Tibet has become so remote that Nepalis do not even know enough to take pride in the fact that much of the great religious high art of Tibet, in bronze or canvas, have their origins in the great cultural outpouring of the Kathmandu Valley. For centuries, Nepali traders supplied Tibet with goods from India and maintained a strong mercantile presence in Lhasa and other towns on the high plateau, to the extent that Nepali coins were standard currency. The cross-border interactions between the 'Tibetan' regions of northern Nepal and Tibet have naturally been intense.

Much of the cultural, economic as well as cross-border community links were abruptly terminated with the Chinese takeover of 1959. During the Cultural Revolution, Nepal's hills were flooded with Mao badges, which pushed Kathmandu to counter with King Mahendra badges. For a while in the early-1970s, the Kathmandu government did look the other way as the Central Intelligence Agency, with connivance of Indian agencies, supported Tibetan insurgents in attacking Chinese convoys and installations from bases in Nepal. However, this did not last long; pressured by China, the Nepali army saw its only combat action in this century when it did away with the Tibetan insurgents in 1974.

Any person who seeks to raise discussion on Tibet's unique identity within China is immediately tarred a "Free Tibet wallah".

There is a highway, of course, which links the Tibetan plateau with the Ganga plains through Kathmandu. However, as the route is roundabout, Nepal's Tarai has not been able to utilise it fully to supply its surplus agricultural produce to Tibet. A more direct road, planned in 1960, was shelved because of Indian misgivings that such a road would mean direct Chinese military access to the Ganga plains.

The road is finally being built with Japanese aid, as a single-lane feeder road. There is cold comfort in this, however, as a more direct route from Lhasa to the Indian plains is in the offing. The roads are already complete on both sides, taking the Chumbi Valley route from Tibet, and into the Siliguri railhead in the Duars either via the Nathu La or Jelep La passes (in Sikkim and West Bengal's Darjeeling district, respectively).

Only diplomatic niceties having to do with Chinese lack of formal recognition of Sikkim's incorporation into India is said to be stopping the border from being opened. When that happens, the trade conduit from Tibet to the sea will open, and Nepal which has been the historical custodian of trade with Tibet will be left out in the cold.

Tibet is a vast storehouse of natural resources, and its economy will rise sooner or later. But because the Nepali government and

intelligentsia have forgotten Lhasa, the Nepali links to that city are by now tenuous. The private sector has come up with no initiative to maintain a presence in Tibet's growing market, nor has the government embarked on any effective economic diplomacy which could mature to the benefit of Nepal in the long run.

Trade with Lhasa

The bulk of the economic advantages of Tibet's opening will, of course, now be picked up by the Han Chinese whose influx has turned Tibetan demography on its head. What is left over, will be picked up by Marwari and other Indian businessmen who are bound to land up in Lhasa before long, and certainly once the Siliguri-Lhasa route is operational. At best, then, Nepal will remain a transit point for the western high desert of Tibet (or Changtang), rather than the populated and productive eastern regions of Kham and Amdo.

The lack of erudition and imagination which marks Nepal's foreign policy in so many other areas is also clear and obvious in the case of China/Tibet. The blacking out of Tibet from the Nepali mindset means that, when the time comes, Nepal will lose out to India in taking 'advantage' of Tibet. The traders in Siliguri are gearing themselves up, while Nepalis stick to the refrain "Tibet is a part of China..."



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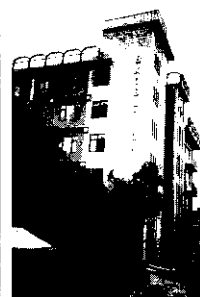
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Friendship at arms-length

Bangladesh really does not matter, but China is willing to remain a good friend.

by Afsan Chowdhury

The defining moment in Sino-Bangla relations probably came during the killings of 1971, when Beijing chose in its self-interest to side with Islamabad and Washington DC. (Those were the days of Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in which Pakistan was acting intermediary.) Besides, India, which was backing the Bangla population, was friendly with the Soviet Union, which, in turn, was not friendly with China.

There are those in Dhaka who remember that the Chinese did not even send a protest note to Pakistan on the massacre of innocents in the east. Realpolitik had won hands down over other 'realities'.

Over the subsequent decades, while it has remained a close and necessary friend of Pakistan, China's political or strategic stake in Bangladesh has diminished almost to nothing.

"China is a nice, good, helpful friend of Bangladesh. No more, no less," says A. Rob Khan, Research Director of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies. "China provides a large quantity of arms to the Bangladesh army though they are not exactly the latest sort. It also trains the army which is a major help."

The military support, says Rob Khan, is not provided as a strategic package but solely to help "a friend in need". Indeed, a considerable amount of goodwill is generated by sending cheap guns and hullets for the Bangla armed forces, which the country can barely afford at international market rates.

In return for its goodwill, Beijing gets a few perks as reward, such as Chinese involvement in the building of large-scale projects

such as bridges and in mining. China has also developed as a major supplier of industrial and commercial goods to Bangladesh. These are of uncertain quality, and, although there are complaints, a market is ensured to a considerable extent by the low price.

Short memory

China did not have a presence in Bangladesh till after 1975, when the then Awami League regime fell with the killing of its leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Much of the international politics of that era was decided by the Sino-Soviet rivalry and the Awami League was seen to be squarely in the latter camp. China therefore had reason to welcome the party's departure from power.

As the memories of 1971 faded, Bangladesh came to regard China as the only country seen to be seriously interested in taking up its cause. Thus, Dhaka has tended to seek Chinese intervention when it has problems with either of its neighbours, India or Burma. This was how Bangladesh brought China to convince Burma to take back the Rohingya refugees back in 1978.

However, the situation vis-a-vis Rangoon has changed over the last two decades, with China buying a massive stake in Burma. Deeply involved with the Burmese military and the mining industry, Beijing is said to have relayed its reluctance to intervene anymore in Bangla-Burmese matters. This is why Dhaka has had difficulty mustering adequate diplomatic assistance in resolving the problems related to the latest Rohingya influx.

The story is not much different in relation to India. Soon after the devastating floods of

1988, Bangladesh is said to have requested China to push its case for a water security regime in South Asia. Beijing, however, refused to lean on India, keen on cultivating a detente with New Delhi.

Market matters

"China's link with Bangladesh is on a government-to-government basis. There are no organisations which hold the Chinese brief in this country," says Rob Khan. The Chinese political presence is almost non-existent, other than a few moribund friendship societies to keep the banner of red memories flying. In fact, the so-called 'pro-Chinese' politicians who lent support to Gen Ziaur Rahman after he replaced Sheikh Mujib no longer hold on to that identification. They have scattered, joining political parties with agenda as varied as radical to Islamic fundamentalist. These formerly pro-Chinese politicians are basically still anti-India, which is what decides their position.

So does China matter? It does, in terms of a cheap armoury and easy-to-access training which keeps the army on its feet. China is said to have kept its hands off the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, although the Shanti Bahini had both a pro-China and a

pro-India faction. Shantu Larma, the present chief, who signed the controversial peace accord with Prime Minister Hasina Wajed, is an old pro-Chinese Stalinist, and the Shanti Bahini leadership is still in the hands of veteran comrades of the hills.

But China will have none of that. It wants to trade, sell its low-end technology, and stay out of trouble where it has no chance of value addition to its economy. As far as Bangladeshis are concerned, the unsavoury role of China during Bangladesh's birth does not seem to matter terribly.

"International politics is market- and convenience-driven not ideology-driven and that explains why China's position has not been that of a superpower in times of our need," says Muntassir Mamoon, historian at Dhaka University. He adds, "When memories surface or history is discussed, China's role is noted along with that of Pakistan in negative terms."

However, says Mamoon, this matter is moot with the new generation of Bangladeshis who are not as bothered by what the Chinese did or did not do a quarter century ago. Nobody cares much about the ideology-driven past. It's the market-driven present that matters. △

Few remember China's unsavoury role during Bangladesh's birth.

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Buddha and the Bomb

INDIA CERTAINLY did not choose an auspicious day for its 11 May nuclear tests at least as far as its 69-percent Buddhist neighbour, Sri Lanka, was concerned. The blasts were set off on Vesak day (Buddha Purnima) marking the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha.

Four days later, on 15 May, the predominantly Indian foreign press corps accredited to Colombo gathered at the watering hole of the Foreign Correspondents' Association (FCA) at the seafront Galle Face Hotel in squally weather for a luncheon meeting with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. Predictably, India's nuclear experiments and their impact on the region as well as Sri Lanka's own just-published reaction were the main topics of discussion.

The urbane, elegantly suited Kadirgamar, who was once president of the Oxford Union, deftly fielded the questions taking a tack which one local newspaper called "national self interest". Colombo knows the worth of Indian support with the Tamil Tiger bomb very much on its lap. So the foreign minister was certainly not going to say anything that would displease New Delhi. China and Pakistan too are old and good friends. Kadirgamar therefore was liberal with the syrup but candid enough to admit that Sri Lanka's statement was a deliberate understatement.

"It didn't say much," commented the correspondent for the Chennai-based daily, *The Hindu*.

"Statements are not meant to say much," countered the minister, "that's what diplomacy is all about."

But we digress from the Buddha. Over a lunch of prawn cocktail, French onion soup, stuffed chicken and a calorie-laden dessert which Kadirgamar passed asking for fruit which took a long time to come, the minister was given an account of how news of the successful accomplishment of India's first nuclear test in 1974 was broken to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

with the cryptic words, "The Buddha has smiled".

"I was so embarrassed," said the *Indian Express* representative who is the president of the FCA.

Kadirgamar, coming from old Anglican stock, but with the Buddhist *pirith nool* (blessed thread) round his wrist (his wife is Buddhist), raised an eyebrow clearly under the impression that the smiling Buddha code, mind you on Vesak day, had been used this time also. "I will take it up with Mr Vajpayee," he promised not once but twice.

As the code this time did not have anything to do with Buddha, the minister may have been spared the pain

of tackling the Indian prime minister. But that did not stop the following Sunday's newspapers from reporting that Indian headline writers had had a field day saying that in 1998 the Buddha had smiled not once but three times!



Laughing stock

A WITTY and acerbic series entitled *Goodness Gracious Me* is causing much hilarity on British TV screens these days. Originally a radio show, the series satirises the pretensions of British subcontinentals. It has just finished a series on BBC2, and judging from its enthusiastic reception it is sure to be back soon.

The comedy series features such instant classics as the Kapoors, an Indian family so desperate to fit in that they start pronouncing their name "Cooper" and change their first names Suzil and Sashi to St John and Charlotte. Such is their rampant Anglophilia, that when a brick crashes through their front window with the attached message "Pakis out!", they all nod heartily and say, "Quite right! Quite right!"

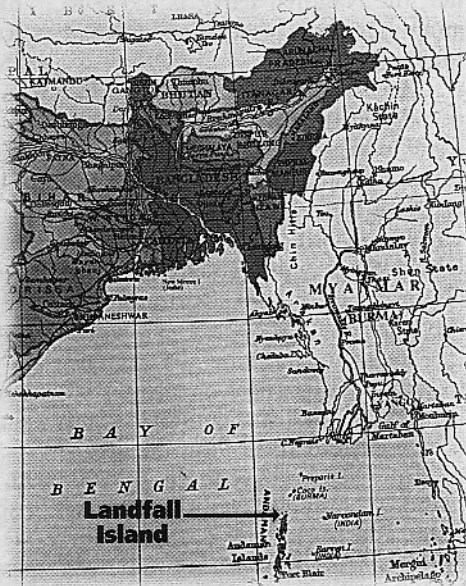
Then there's Bollywood showbiz gossip columnist Smitta Smitten (The Showbiz Kitten) who spends her time on wild goose chases in men's toilets and kebab shops all over London, looking for glamorous parties with stars Jackie Shroff and Akshay Kumar. What's great about the series is the way it effortlessly and accurately sends up all the stereotypical characters from



DELHI TO ARAKANESE: Drop dead

THE LEADING separatist group in Burma's western province of Arakans says India has betrayed them by attacking one of their arms supply ships, killing six militants and arresting others. On the morning of 17 February, the Indians blasted the Arakanese ship off the Landfall Island in the Andamans after a six-hour-long sea chase. The defence ministry said the Burmese rebels were gunrunners peddling weapons to insurgents from the Indian North-east.

Khin Maung, the "foreign secretary" of the outlawed National Unity Party of Arakans (NUPA), says that the six who were killed and the 74 others arrested were members of his party. "They were not gunrunners or anti-Indian rebels as claimed by the Indian defence ministry. They were Arakanese revolutionaries who were always cooperating with India against her enemies," Maung said in a letter dated 25 April to the Indian Defence Minister George



Fernandes, who received it only in mid-May.

Maung claimed that the Indian military intelligence had been informed about the ship, which was carrying weapons for the Arakanese militants, at least a month before its arrival. He wrote: "The Indian military

intelligence okayed our voyage and that is why we entered Indian territorial waters to avoid the Burmese navy."

So far, the Indian navy and coast guards have refused to disclose the identity of the "gunrunners", a terminology the NUPA vehemently opposes. The party was formed in 1988, after the military takeover in Burma, to fight for an independent Arakans.

Maung claimed in his note to Fernandes that "Major" Saw Tun, a senior NUPA military wing leader, had been in touch with a military intelligence colonel named Grewal for the past one year.

Wrote Maung, "We were cooperating with each other. The Indians asked us for help to track down gunrunners carrying weapons to north-east India and we helped them. So it comes as a shock to us that our ship, about which the Indians were given full information, should be attacked." A top NUPA commander named Khaing Raza was also killed during the operation.

Fernandes is known for his sympathy to the Burmese ethnic and pro-democracy movements. Incidentally, he was on a tour of the Andamans at the time of filing this report. NUPA sources say that Fernandes had not replied as yet to Maung's letter.

The Indian secret services started cultivating the NUPA ever since China started securing naval facilities on the Burmese ports and islands close to India. Says an Indian human rights lawyer with links to NUPA about the possible cause behind the attack on the group's ship: "It could be a change in Indian foreign policy. Delhi may be trying to cultivate Rangoon and therefore the volte face."

NUPA has now asked the Indian government to release the 74 Arakanese militants held in Port Blair, the administrative headquarters of the Andamans. "Under no circumstances [should] they be handed over to the Burmese military junta," wrote Maung to Fernandes. The fear is that they will be killed if they are handed over, as happened in the Chin Hills last year when India pushed back six Burmese soldiers who had fled.

-Subir Bhaumik

Asian life – the uncle who promises that he can get anything you need for half-price; the aunt who refuses to eat food at restaurants because she can cook exactly the same thing at home: "For half price.....all I need is a small can of aubergines."

One side-splitting sketch involves the parents who get tired of their son refusing to have an arranged marriage and therefore set him up with an arranged one-night stand. "She's a lovely girl from a great family and they don't mind how you violate her." There's the catty battling mothers who compare their sons' achievements in increasingly ridiculous terms: "My son flew all the way to Bombay to visit his uncle who has a heart problem," to which the other retorts, "Really? My son is flying all the way to Calcutta to visit his great-uncle who has a slight headache!"

British misconceptions of Asian culture are also ruthlessly turned inside out. One sketch features a group of rich young yuppies in Delhi who get drunk on beer and "go out for an English" – a direct reference to the famous British pastime of getting drunk and going for curry. The Indians harass the hapless white waiter, asking him for "steak and kidney pie with custard, and some of that, how do you pronounce it...chips?"

The West's obsession with all things mystic and Eastern is gently assaulted with the character of a swami surrounded by gullible Westerners while he chants sacred mantras – which just happen to feature the delicacies "Cocaco lafan tagulab jamun..."

-Afdhel Aziz



Pauline strikes again

READERS IN South Asia may not be aware of it, but, over across the Indian Ocean, Pauline Hanson is "dead". She is, of course, very much alive, but her slow descent into oblivion has made the legislator use some unusual methods to revive flagging support.

Hanson is the Australian legislator who gained fair notoriety some time back for her outright racist statements. Candidate for the Liberal Party in the 1997 election to the federal senate, she was dropped from the party after her criticism of government spending on Aborigines. She then launched her own party, One Nation, with an agenda devoted solely to being anti-Asian immigrant and anti-Aborigine (with outrageous statements like calling Aborigines "cannibals").

Hanson's poll support, never more than nine percent, had plunged to four percent by end-1997. She had also suffered the ignominy of being largely ignored by the media. In a bid then to restore her falling political fortunes, Hanson a few months ago, resorted to a bizarre and possibly suicidal gamble.

In a "message from beyond the grave", Hanson told fellow Australians, "if you are seeing this, it means I have been murdered". The 'message' went on to urge "fellow Australians" to continue her work though she had been "murdered".

Today, Hanson and her One Nation outfit are back in the news, once again for the wrong reasons. Queensland's Liberal Party recently directed its supporters to cast their preference votes to One Nation, ahead of the Labour Party. Although the

Queensland Liberals later backtracked on the preference vote after the ethnic communities council threatened to withhold all contributions to the party, its coalition partner, the National Party, is likely to announce their preference vote call for Hanson.

The Asian leadership has long noted that the prime minister is extremely weak, if not cynically opportunistic, when it comes to Pauline Hanson. Described by one political writer as "anti-anti-Hanson", the John Howard government has consistently failed to condemn the legislator's antics.

Obviously, the Liberal Party and its coalition partner the National Party, have studied the numbers and decided that there are more dividends in turning a blind eye to the Hanson brand of populism and Asian immigrant and aboriginal bashing. The clout of the Asian communities (largely East Asian, but with a fair number from South Asia too) do not add up, according to their calculations. But the concentration of ethnic Asians (three percent of the national population), largely restricted to Sydney and Melbourne, can swing the vote in several seats.

This does not prevent Howard from waffling on his pronouncements, however. So, on the one hand he pledges commitment to "multiculturalism", while on the other he hastens to describe Australia as having a "largely European heritage".

The prime minister's political

instincts have convinced him of Hanson's appeal among the predominantly Anglo-Saxon, Celtic rural communities battered by years of drought, uncertain prices and the winds of "economic rationalism", the Australian fallout of globalisation. "Multiculturalism", a term referring to the immigrants' right to preserve their distinct identities and cultures, is seen to be ominously anti-Australian by this crowd.

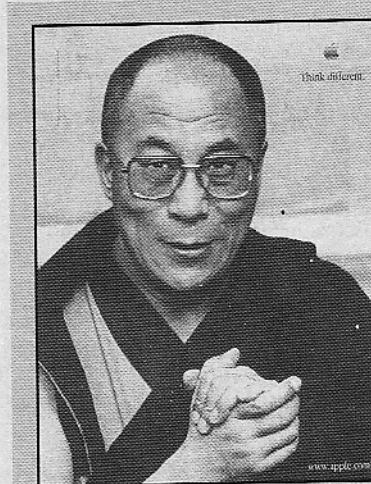
Hardly a week passes without a bank closing a branch in the Australian bush, or a company downsizing its operation in some small town. The cumulative effect of all this is rapid de-population of rural communities and the consequent economic slump suffered by local businesses.

By bashing "multiculturalism" as it applies to Asian immigrants and Aborigines, the Hanson brand of reactionary populism is exploiting the fears of the people in rural Australia.

As Howard faces a snap poll in early autumn, there are signs that it might be a "race" election dominated by the issue of Aboriginal land rights. A soft line on Hanson might possibly pay electoral dividends to the conservative coalition, particularly the largely rural National Party dominated by big graziers and pastoralists.

So, while it is true that Pauline Hanson's personal political obituary is all but written, her legacy of xenophobic fear-mongering is likely to continue supplying the electoral ammunition for sections of the Australian right.

-Narendra Mohan Kommalapati



The China syndrome

The richer you get, the more chicken you get. Apple (as in Macintosh) thought the Dalai Lama was good enough to use in its "Think different" ad campaign targetted at the West. And they pulled the ad from all Asian magazines because, the company maintained, the Dalai Lama was not well enough known in Asia. Fact is, they were afraid of offending the Chinese dragon which is also a rich dragon promising revenues deep into the future. The market segment held by Tibetans-in-exile is extremely small.

Love and bullets

Riffat Afridi



“MIAN BIWI razi, to kya kare ga Qazi?” goes the popular Urdu saying, referring to the cleric’s obligation to sanction a marriage involving the consent of both man and wife. Religious sanction for choice in marriage aside, traditional folklore in the Subcontinent is full of tales about star-crossed lovers, and villains who stand in their way. The sympathy is always for the lovers, even if they rarely win out in the end.

Real life in the Indus plains is not any different, and romance is having a hard time of it. To begin with, parental consent is required for most betrothals by custom and tradition, if not religiously or legally. But matters become quite complicated when love gets entangled in politics. For those who wonder what politics has to do with love, the answer is that allowing love to take its course involves loss of control – of parents over their children, of community leaders over their fold, and of patriarchy in general. More specifically, freedom of choice means loss of control over a young woman’s sexuality.

The politics of romance really took a turn for the worse with the unleashing of religio-conservative forces by the late military dictator Zia-ul Haq. Gen Zia eventually departed by way of an air crash, but the diktats

he laid down for over 12 long years have not only endured but have been internalised by many community leaders in Pakistan.

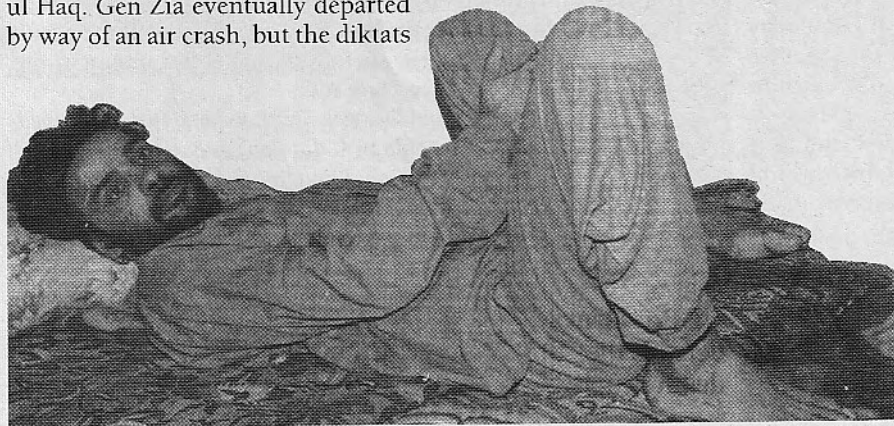
With just about the only effective challenge to his regime being the fledgling women’s movement in Pakistan, the General had tried to neutralise it by stressing on the need for women to be passive and confined within the *char-devari*, or four walls, duly covered by the *chador*. The emphasis on women’s modesty suited the conservative, the feudal and the ‘tribal’. Feminism was blasted as ‘Western’, while the ruling menfolk forgot that in their own indigenous traditions, both religious and cultural, women were active participants in societies rather than passive victims. Part of the reason that the tradition of ‘*karo kari*’ or ‘*sia kari*’ (honour killings) have not faded with modern consciousness is the retrograde steps taken by Gen Zia more than a decade ago.

The celebrated “Saima-Arshad Love Marriage Case” of 1996 was indication that revisionist conservatism which sought to throttle women’s rights had made its way from a rural, tribal setting to cosmopolitan, urban drawing rooms. In the said case, the

girl’s father, an influential religious leader, refused to agree to the marriage and claimed that under the sect of Islam he followed, the approval of the *wali*, or guardian, was obligatory. The case was dragged through the courts, with the couple’s lawyers having to deal with death threats. Fortunately, the couple was set at liberty by the court, but was forced to flee the country and is presently living in self-exile in Norway.

Barely had the dust settled on that case, when another one hit the headlines in Karachi, this time with ominous cross-ethnic overtones. When Riffat Afridi and Kunwar Ahsan eloped, the boy a Mohajir and the girl a Pakhtoon, the result was a communal flareup. Pakhtoon tribesmen rioted to protect their communal pride against this “Mohajir conspiracy”. The police put the lovers in protective lockup, but later, after Kunwar was arrested on charges of kidnapping Riffat, he was greeted by a hail of bullets on his way to court one morning. One bullet damaged his spinal column and he is presently paralysed (picture, left).

The Riffat-Kunwar case took place in urbane Karachi, which was one reason it drew international attention. Throughout the rest of Pakistan, the legacy of haywire social engineering continues to haunt the land. Pakistan has many other social tragedies, of course, but the subjugation of women is one that affects half the country’s population. What is seen as religious intolerance and communal bigotry is, in the end, merely the outer veneer masking an attitude that is essentially anti-woman.



THE WORD that *Kundun* is a fine film makes one think of the Dalai Lama. His Holiness is, of course, one of the most remarkable personalities of this century. Not for his spiritual or philosophical depth (I leave that to others more starry eyed), but for being a sunny-spirited, down-to-earth person who is *normal* despite his out-of-ordinary upbringing and present-day life as a global exile. But even the Dalai Lama must beware the dangers of over-exposure. He should not write forewords to every book on Buddhism/spiritualism that is placed before him, nor need he grant an interview to every journalist that comes asking. He should not be trooped around the world as a politician, although that is also what he is. All that from-the-heart spontaneity that he is forced to exhibit in front of Western audiences and the bonhomie he shows with Western celebrities, all of it must be quite tiresome. I wonder who His Holiness confides to. Who are his friends, as opposed to aides and well-wishers. It must be a lonely life actually, carrying all that political and spiritual burden.



WE HAD Robin Raphel on a harm offensive, as far as India was concerned, and now it looks like her successor **Karl Inderfurth** is on a charm offensive. What better way to get Indians on your side than to go see a Bollywood film, so he roped in former beauty

queen and Hollywood starlet Persis Khambatta and hopped over to Liberty Cinema in Bombay to catch the 6 pm show of *Dil To Pagal Hai*. While he was in the dark there watching the Shah Rukh Khan, Karishma Kapoor, Madhuri Dixit triangle, the Indians were planning five nuke tests. These Indians are definitely "*pagal hai*", the US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs must be thinking to himself.

EVEN THE best of us are not perfect, and I realised to my absolute and atavistic glee that R.K. Laxman, the great cartoonist of *The Times of India*, does not know how to draw a **Chinese dragon**! Let me lay out the proof before you. Check out the creature that broods over our check-shirted Common Man. To be sure Laxman has tried to present a firebreathing dragon, but the resulting creature is a cross between a cow and a buffalo, which would not convincingly scare anyone. Dragons are made of more sinister stuff.



THE NAMES of seven Indian journalists have been put on the "**Icons of Freedom**" list in something called the Journalists' Memorial at Freedom Park in Washington DC, reports the Press Trust of India. Two were Kashmiri

mediamen killed by militants, and five were members of a television crew who were killed by a bomb meant for someone else. So, while feeling extremely sorry for these deaths, I want to ask what is the fine line that separates journalists who die in the line of fire while courageously carrying out a reporting assignment, and those who happen to die of happenstance. A policy formulation is needed.

MADAME B. Bhutto travelled all the way to Harvard University to attend the first **Annual Summit of the Council of Women World Leaders**. There they were, the former presidents of Nicaragua and Iceland, as well as the ex-



prime ministers of Turkey, Poland, Lithuania, Dominica and Canada. Some functional questions come to mind: are these past presidents and prime ministers meeting because they have time on their hands? What happens if they get back their jobs in the next elections, or are Benazir and all the others now resigned to the fact that they will never get back to power? And, over crepes and tea, which way did the conversation go? Surrey, did Surrey figure in the conversation? And corrupt, philandering husbands? Am I being too vicious here? Lest I am seen as being such, to make amends let me quote BB's rejection of all charges, on CNN: "I categorically deny I received even \$1 in government kickbacks. And I categorically deny that I had anything to do with award of contracts which were awarded after a due process of tendering." There.

I THINK this is a very thoughtful posting by a certain Anbereen Hasan of New York on being '**South Asian**' and/or '**Indian**', which I picked off the South Asia Journalist Association (SAJA) discussion group back in January. Here it is:

Personally, I find the term South Asian a little contrived. I know that people in India don't see or refer to themselves as South Asian. I imagine that this is equally true in Pakistan, Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. Simple arithmetic ensures that most "South Asian" organisations are in fact overwhelmingly Indian. So why not do away with the tokenism and describe them as they are? The term Indian need not be exclusive if it is taken in its historical and cultural sense. To sum up, I think anyone with a subcontinental connection should have the right to

join an Indian organisation. Even with the name 'India' on it the tent is big enough to include us all. We shouldn't distort reality for the sake of the few who find themselves unwilling or unable to see that 4000 years of shared history should not be equated with 50 years of political separateness.

BANGLADESH DID it! It beat the rest of South Asia in introducing the modern long-distance **double-decker** coach, replete with a "cosy cafe" and toilet. If you are travelling from Dhaka to Chittagong, and happening to be travelling this grand and sleek beauty run by the company Neptune, and you want to take a leak...well, you do not have to fight shyness and ask the driver to stop the bus.



PRIME MINISTER Nawaz Sharif has gone ahead and appointed a video-store owner and travel agent as head of the Washington DC bureau of APP, the Pakistani news agency. **Zahid Hameedi**, truth be told, also runs a weekly one-hour Urdu television programme for the Pakistani community in the Washington DC area, but it is a small-time effort which airs reruns of Pakistan Television programmes. It is also "notorious for using superlatives to describe Nawaz Sharif," reports *Newsline* from Karachi. Hameedi's links to journalism has been in working as a film reporter for an obscure magazine back in the 1960s. *Newsline* says his salary is USD 6200 per month. Yum yum.

THE BJP government has created an INR 15 billion rolling fund for the development of "the Indian Northeastern states and Sikkim". The former-kingdom-and-now-state is supposed to be inducted into the Northeastern Council. All very good for the *janata* of Sikkim, but if the

government is according it so much importance, should not the media at least get to know the name of the Chief Minister. The following pic in *The Telegraph* had the caption, "Prime Minister greets Sikkim chief minister Manik Sarkar in New Delhi on Friday." That, of



course, is CM Pawan Kumar Chamling. Who is Manik Sarkar? Would he please stand up and be identified?

IT TOOK some stupendous lack of sensitivity back in 1974 for the **Indian nuke-wallahs** to call up Indira Gandhi and say "The Buddha has smiled" to indicate that the underground explosion at Pokhran had succeeded. And then they waited 24 years till the Buddha Purnima of 1998, the full moon day when the Sakyamuni was born, to blast three more devices (and two more a day later). The Light

of Asia, up there somewhere in the firmament, must have turned away. And I ask you, has anybody thought of Mahatma Gandhi and what he might have thought at this triumph of nationalistic triumphalism?

I AM glad to see that there was a **reaction from Sri Lanka**, which came quickly after the five blasts in Rajasthan: "It is a very sad development which ironically happened on the Buddha Purnima day when the world remembers the message of non-violence preached by Lord Buddha," said Venerable Hadigalle Pannatissa, chief high priest of the Maha Bodhi Temple in Colombo. "It is sad that the country of Lord Buddha and Mahatma Gandhi is now testing development of the most lethal weapon made by mankind," said Pannatissa, who is also the head priest of the Sanchi Temple in Madhya Pradesh, in central India. The Hindu conservatives will, of course, have their

answer ready, as they always do when Buddhists make their pitch: how could we be showing disrespect to Buddhists when Buddhism is but a part of Hinduism, etc, etc.

AHA! I always knew there was machoness and sex associated with the South Asian nukes. Check out the ad below in an Indian paper by a lubricant company named Sunstar, gleeful at the Pokhran II bursts. If they did it, why can't we? If they kill, why can't we? If they rub their noses in the dung, why can't we?

-Chhetria Patrakar

The Americans did it.
The Russians did it.
The British did it.
The French did it.
The Chinese did it.

Come to think of it, why do they raise such a hue and cry when we Indians do it. Nothing can stop us when it comes to our security. Not even the world. **Keep it up India.**

Sunstar
 Redefining Leadership

Sunstar Lubricants Ltd., B-10, 10, Haryana Road, New Delhi-110 007, Fax: (011) 501-8866

Digging up Lumbini

The birthplace of the Buddha, far from being Nepal's pride, is a disgrace.

by Sangeeta Lama

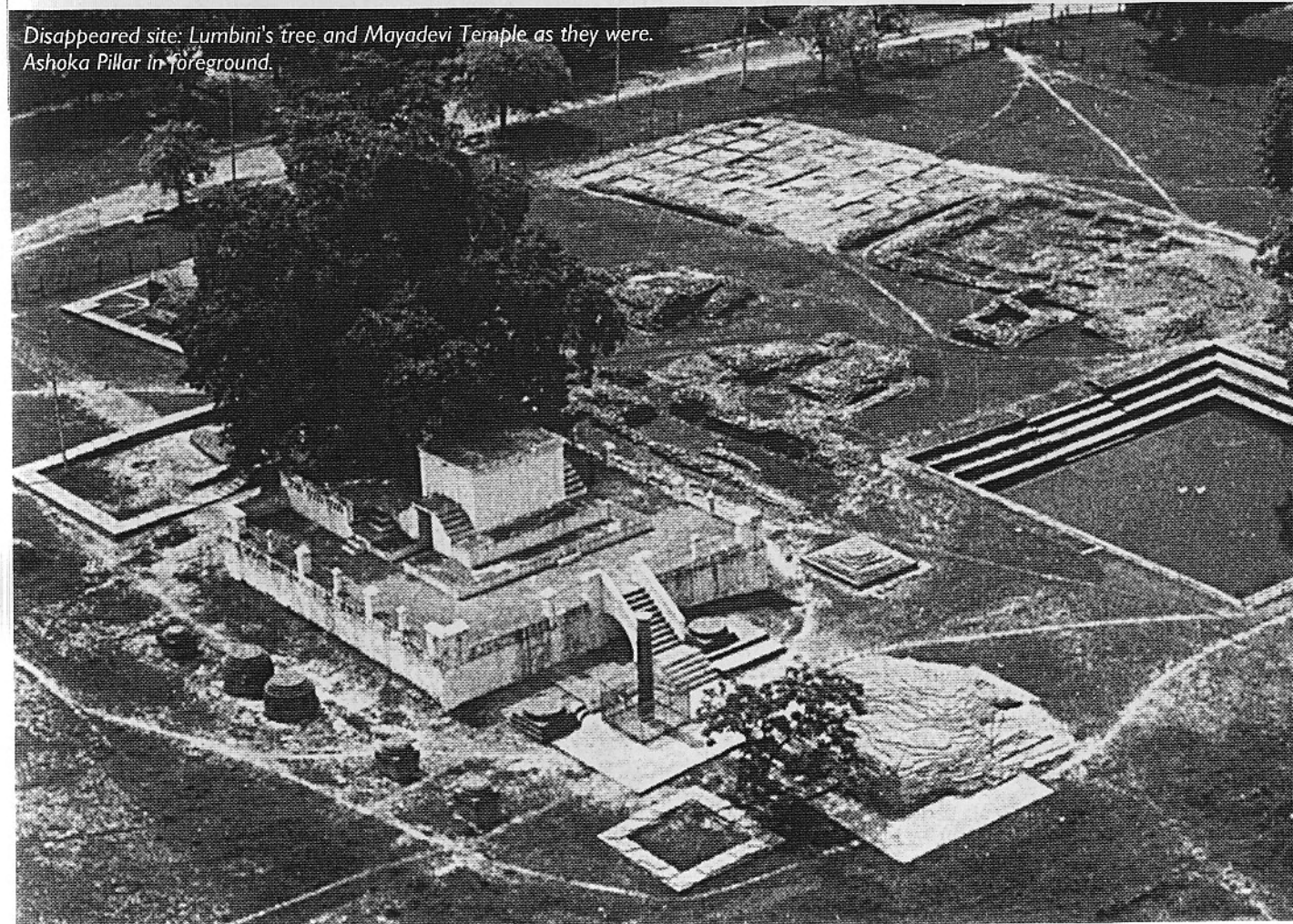
The world knows of Lumbini, the birthplace of Buddha, through the white-plastered Mayadevi temple and a huge pipal tree growing out of its side. Little does the world know that it has been about six years since the tree has been cut and the temple dismantled to beneath its foundations. The tourist brochures, postcards and news photographs still carry the images of yesterday's Lumbini, the nativity site

of Sakyamuni Buddha.

For the pilgrims and tourists who make it to the so-called "Lumbini Garden", it is a dismal setting. Where the temple used to be, there is an archaeological dig covered in yellow tarpaulin and topped by a tin shed. The nativity statue in black stone, showing Mayadevi giving birth to young Gautama, which earlier stood in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, has been moved to a nearby shed.

Increasingly a place where Buddhist religious sects compete with poured concrete stupas and monasteries, and where nationalistic Buddhism divides up plots among Burmese, Thais, Japanese, Sri Lankans; Taiwanese and Beijing-backed Tibetans, Lumbini is today even less a spiritually uplifting place than it has been for the last few decades. (Nepal's own Vajrayana Buddhists, without money and clout, do not yet have a

Disappeared site: Lumbini's tree and Mayadevi Temple as they were. Ashoka Pillar in foreground.



presence in the place.)

The atmosphere of this site, rescued from the jungle only so many decades ago, is today clouded by mistrust and suspicion between moneyed donors from East Asia and the ineffectual Nepali caretaker organisation, the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT), and marked by the uncaring attitude of Kathmandu-based politicians and bureaucrats.

Marker stone

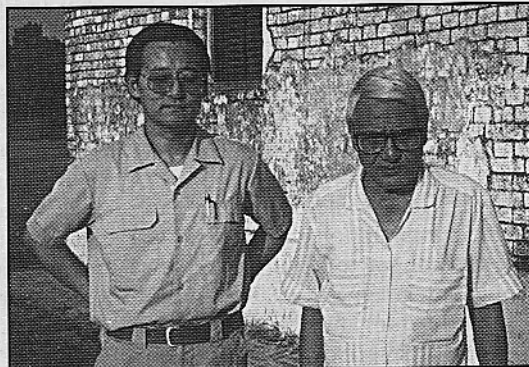
An agreement was signed between the Japanese Buddhist Federation (JBF) and the LDT back in 1990 to make the Mayadevi temple "vegetation free". This meant dealing with the great pipal, whose healthy canopy had over the years gained an iconic status as part of the temple, itself a rather unimpressive whitewashed structure built by a local governor in the last decade of the 19th century.

During the height of the Panchayat regime in Nepal, before 1990, the LDT had served as a fiefdom for palace-assigned administrators. At the very least, however, they had provided continuity and (in retrospect) a fairly sophisticated sense of preservation and development. Since the advent of democracy in 1990, the unstable evolution of party-led politics has greatly affected all aspects of national life, and Lumbini was not spared.

In the anarchical situation that characterises Nepali politics today, Lumbini is not a priority for the national-level politicians and it has been set adrift. Meanwhile, the LDT is hit every time during the numerous changes of government in Kathmandu, as a forum to provide employment to party flotsam. The Trust's staff has swelled, but the budget remains low, as does morale.

Soon after the political transition from Panchayat to democracy in Nepal, in 1992, the "Mayadevi Temple Renovation Project"

*Trans-Asian
collaboration:
archaeologists
Uesaka and Risal.*

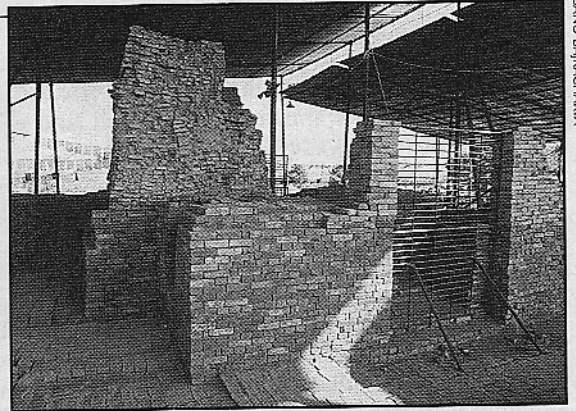


metamorphosed into the "Mayadevi Temple Restoration Project". This signified the addition of an exploratory archaeological element to what had earlier been an exercise to rein in the wayward pipal's roots. Without too much oversight from the LDT, and certainly without any semblance of a public information exercise, the tree was cut, the temple summarily dismantled, and the site excavated. (For further background, see "Lumbini as Disneyland" in *Himal*, December 1995.)

Two archaeologists were primarily involved in the digging, Satoro Uesaka from Japan, and his Nepali counterpart Babu Krishna Rijal. They made it their task to excavate the entire temple, with one of the aims apparently to prove that the Sakyamuni had been born at the site where the temple had come up. There were mild protests against this momentous act of excavation, with the argument that the rock pillar put up by Emperor Ashoka nearby was historical proof enough for Lumbini's claim to be the Buddha's birthplace. The protests went unheeded.

Venerable centre

The four years of archaeological excavations revealed some interesting aspects of the site, including antiquities which go back to the Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods. According to cultural historian



The Mayadevi Shed, above; left, the "marker stone" at the bottom of the dig.

Sudarshan Raj Tewari, the brickwork brought to light by the Lumbini excavations are indeed significant. Says Tewari, "The use of bricks in the foundation at the site indicates that Lumbini was a venerated spot long before Ashoka. If confirmed, this would also change the building history of the entire Buddhist areas of Nepal and north India."

The excavating archaeologists, however, went further to claim that, 16 feet below ground level, they had discovered the very "marker stone" indicating the spot where the Sakyamuni had been born. As proof, they cited the inscriptions in Pali found on the nearby Ashoka Pillar which, according to some interpretations, refer to a rock where the "marker stone" was found.

While the role of the "marker stone" is not clear, what is obvious is that even back then the Lumbini site had been a centre of veneration over many centuries. The lowest foundation, says Tewari, seems to indicate the presence of a *briksha chaitya*, or a tree with a rock colonnade around it and an altar on one side. This kind of structure is said to have predated the latter-day stupas and existed during

the time of the Sakyamuni.

What many critics question, however, is whether the spiritually hallowed temple of Mayadevi had to be dismantled to get at this kind of information. There is also severe professional criticism of the archaeologists for not having kept better records of their work and not presenting high-quality scientific reports of their findings. The substandard work is said to have made it difficult for religious historians, social historians, architects and archaeologists to study the site to their satisfaction in future.

There is also fear that the exposed structures at the Mayadevi site will rapidly deteriorate due to exposure to moisture. It has already been two years since the excavation was carried out, and no conservation work has been done at the digging. A tarpaulin cover and, within it, a tin shed covering the brickwork, are all that there is to see.

While all this scientific concern remained limited to a few scientists and scholars, the Nepali media seemed only interested, and that too momentarily, on the 'proof' provided by the Nepal-Japan archaeological team. Repeating a common mistake made all the time in Nepal, a LDT official said after the discovery of the marker stone, "We finally have absolute proof that the Buddha was born in Nepal." Actually, there has never been confusion on that score. True, there has been debate on whether the palace of

Tacky commercialism

The excavation, then, is a *fait accompli*, and the decision that is left (and which too could go wayward if no one is watching) is what is to be done with the dug up site. The fear is that an unsavoury decision may be taken and the place ruined by inappropriate construction based on the easy availability of East Asian hard currency and competition between different sects and nationalities.

As far as sectarian politics is concerned, already an area near the nativity site is crowded with cement and concrete structures presenting themselves as Burmese pagodas, Thai temples, Tibetan monasteries, and so on. If any little-known sect came by with the promise of a few hundred thousand dollars worth of support, it would not be past the Nepali caretakers to give permission to put up a structure over the nativity site. This should not be allowed to happen.

It is important for those who would want Lumbini to remain a spiritual legacy to all mankind, and not just the stomping grounds for a few sects with the money and the access, to keep watch on the Lumbini Garden so that nothing inappropriate and unrepresentative comes up on the site.

What the Nepali authorities, who have ultimate control, and the appointees to the LDT have to learn is that money will never be a problem as far as Lumbini is concerned. For this reason, they need not go scurrying to obscure

birth, a place which will never lack for 'funding' of any amount if that is what is required.

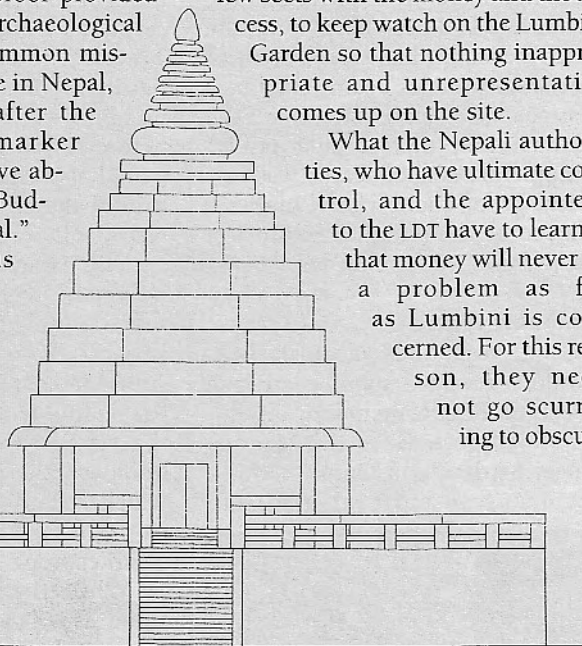
It is because of its lack of understanding of the very nature of the Lumbini site that the Nepali Government seems to have forgotten the fact that there is a committee for Lumbini, comprising of 15-member nations of the United Nations, that sits under the Secretary General at the UN Headquarters in New York. It has been years since the Nepali government has activated the committee, which was set up by the late Secretary General U Thant. This dormant committee alone could do all that is necessary for the uplift of Lumbini, and there are many other sources that can be tapped.

Best of all, Buddhists and non-Buddhists the world over would dearly love to contribute to make Lumbini a truly spiritual site, one that is not marred by ungainly construction and tacky pilgrim-generated commercialism.

Wayward architecture

The Lumbini Garden, as a whole, has already been ruined by the many monasteries, an ugly memorial in plastered marble to the late King Mahendra, and a "peace flame" which has no significance other than the fact that the United Nations commemorated 40 years of its existence back in 1986, in the middle of a low period under Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar. However, the future of the central, sacred site of the erstwhile Mayadevi temple still hangs in balance. The hope is that it will not be built up and 'developed' according to the whims of misguided architects and moneyed sects.

The JBF, under whose aegis the excavation was carried out, has indicated it wants to build a temple and congregation hall of its own design at the Mayadevi site. It has been pressuring the various governments of Nepal to approve its plan, a structure which supposedly incorporates the various elements of Buddhist architecture. Fortunately, in the interim, Lumbini has come under the umbrella of the UNESCO World Heritage list, which may restrict the possibility of wayward architecture



The Japanese promoters propose this temple and congregation hall at the nativity site.

Suddodhana (Gautama's father) is in Tilaurakot in present-day Nepal or across the border in Piprahawa in present-day India, but there has been no tussle over the nativity site itself.

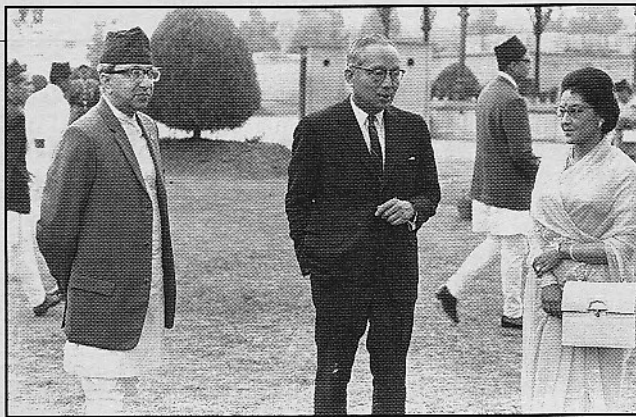
sources, and at the same time, any sudden availability of funds should not rush them to do anything that would spiritually devastate Lumbini. The authorities must appreciate the value of the place of the Sakyamuni's

invading the nativity site. There seems to have emerged a welcome disagreement between the Federation and the Trust on this score, which may stall the building plans for the moment.

Recently, the LDT invited 83-year-old Kenzo Tange, the man who drafted the original "Lumbini Master Plan", to Kathmandu, seeking advice on what to do with the nativity site. The elderly architect has decided not to come, it is said, because he does not want to get involved in the spat between the Federation and the Trust. However, he says he is willing to provide advice if the Nepali authorities are able to visit him in Japan. Now, there are a lot of Nepali officials who would like to travel to Japan for the purpose, but there is no money.

Natural state

Lumbini is, if anything, a spiritual site, and no human design or blueprint can ever hope to do justice to



U Thant with King Mahendra and Queen Ratna during his 1967 Nepal visit.

this place and to what it means to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. The most logical thing to do would, therefore, be to leave the nativity site, the place of the former temple, as natural and untouched as possible.

Under no circumstance should a new temple be built at the place. As some experts have already suggested, the archaeological dig should be conserved. A way should be found so that everyone can view the place, its various levels and stages of brickwork, as well as the figurines and the marker stone.

Indeed, maintaining the archaeological site as it is would be the clos-

est thing to leaving the place in its 'natural' state. Certainly, it would not do to allow any one structure or design, howsoever grand or sublime, to come up here and thereby identify for all time to come the birthplace of the Buddha. The temple that was once

here together with the long-gone pipal tree are memory enough. For the future, let there just be a well-preserved archaeological site at Lumbini, and let the worshipful derive spiritualism from it.

It is part of Lumbini's lore that UN Secretary General U Thant shed a tear for the place when he visited it in 1967. Today, seeing the Sakyamuni's birthplace as little more than a tin shed under a tarpaulin shroud, he would weep uncontrollably. ▽

S. Lama is a Kathmandu-based journalist with the Nepali-language Himal magazine.

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Maps of the human heart

by Aasim Akhtar

"Partition is a line on the map." - Tariq Ali
"Politics is a cottage industry." - A. Ramachandran

The terms "refugee", "exile", "border", and "national identity" are intrinsic to the vocabulary of Third World cultural and political debates. Contemporary concerns of any nature seem heightened in a region beset with conflicts between new associations and old identities. Homelessness, entailing the dramatic loss of power that goes with invisibility, had to be reinvented as a visible cultural contingent.

It seems art is both the memory and the chronicler of what might otherwise pass unnoticed, a medium in which the connections between personal history and broader sweeps of cultural life can be documented. "Mappings: shared histories...a fragile self", an exhibition by Indian and Pakistani artists, consists of semi-autobiographical witnessing (whether poeticised or narrated straightforward) of the Pakistani/Indian experience. It develops at the level of both absurdist comedy and storytelling.

There is a slow but continual loosening of boundaries between art forms, and with it there has been a drive to involve the viewer as witness or participant, not spectator. There is an undertow of disturbance beneath the veneer of artistic control, a sense of some impending wild loosening and dishevelment. Nothing will erupt and break surface to shatter the order the artist establishes, but there is a tension that is painful, gripping and eloquent.

Curated by Pooja Sud, "Mappings" was exhibited at the Eicher Gallery in New Delhi before it travelled across the Radcliffe Line to the National College of Arts Gallery in Lahore. The exhibition attempts to show the harrowing pictorial metaphors of six artists as they probe into aspects of contemporary sensibility in the shadow of the traumatic division.

There is remarkable depth, range of talent and sensitivity in the show, and the techniques rise above visual sensation. There is no struggle to cre-

Underground by A. Ramachandran, 1986).

The works created on both sides of the border rise out of past shadows and recollections, the pangs of rebirth, and the sorrows of exile. What makes these works incisive and sardonic is the fact that "both sides were blind to each other in the act of creation", as remarked by Salima Hashmi, organiser of the Lahore show. While the Indian artist expresses a nostalgia for India's severed limbs, the Pakistani counterpart wants to redeem the desecrated self to a fragmentary whole.

The artists exhibited, who included Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, are not casualties of the painful turbulence of 1947; instead they followed those who were disillusioned or mentally maimed for life. Nevertheless, as is evident in their rage and bitter anguish, these artists comprehend the violence concealed under the mask of law and order, and the mechanism of the politics of scarcity. Amazed at the propensity for destruction of the political and social systems, the artists seek valid images for experiences that have inwardly affected them.

Nalini Malani excavates images to stain an old quilt cover brought over from Karachi by her grandmother in 1947. This artefact is more than a backdrop; it is a field of intrigue, suffering, and exodus. The quilt cover, suspended in mid-air with texts, sub-texts, drawings and juxtaposed photographs inscribed on its



ate aesthetically inclined, self-contained, resplendent artefacts, but an urge to address the posthumous hubris of a self-ordained "national identity", and to "lick their post-partition wounds" (from *Notes from the*

skin, highlights and isolates an allusion to conflict and displacement. The two sides of the 'border' are shown on either side of the cover, and that only one side is visible at a time reflects the myopia inherent in the very act of seeing.

Bows of red and vermillion rope tied to the panel in a symmetric row by Malani may suggest sanguinal ties, promises of a bright future, or open wounds. The birth of the term "nation" gave shape to "national", "nationalism" and "nationhood" in our psyche, but to the exclusion of the "native". The dissident voices of many an estranged writer, such as Ismat Chughtai, Amrita Pritam, Saadat Hassan Manto and Bhisham Singh Sahni, are echoed in abundance in the creases and wrinkles of Malani's work.

The cleavage

Iftikhar Dadi's multi-layered computer ink-jet prints concentrate on exploring language and meaning, ambiguity and the tugs between opposing poles. In an attempt at historical correctness, Dadi does not embark upon the metaphysical task of revealing the "national identity". He fits neither today's description of a "Pakistani/Indian", nor its ideological definition. There is a surprising and beneficial absence of value judgements in his work.

From Dadi's amused contemplation of the "approved nation", and the excluded people, to the mullah's narrow-mindedness, Dadi plays off a wide-ranging world view in "Muslims are meat-eaters, they prefer food containing salt. Hindus on the other hand prefer a sweet taste". The proliferation of *barfi*, *laddoo*, *jalebi* and *paitha* makes for an unheirarchical assortment of communities living within the Subcontinent framed by four circles at the corners with a single star, and crescent for three showing Om.

In Sheba Chhachhi's "Cleave/To", word and image combine to sift through familiar conversations about

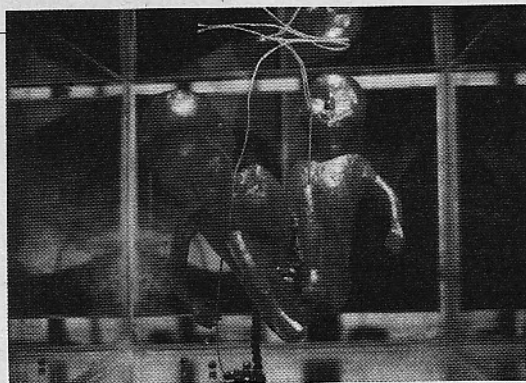
the birth of a 'nation'. A floating pair of Siamese twins, inseparable binary beings, swim in a glass jar surrounded by the etymology of its title. Chhachhi converts people's humour into a licence for impunity. The invention of the oral tradition, the sarcasm of political criticism, imaginative games and childhood memories inaugurate a catharsis of racial memory, cultural gathering and guided dreams.

Chhachhi, with the help of Sonia Jabbar, fuses, as John Berger puts it, "photography with social and political memory, instead of using it as a substitute that propitiates the atrophy of all types of memory". The photographs of the human body – up close – further delineate the concept of cleavage: parting lips, armpits, buttocks, etc. By this device, the photographer is no more an external witness or an emissary of an anonymous and remote public.

The map of India always brings to mind an engraved old sepia print of the colonial period. The narrow lanes, broken colonial buildings, stinking sewage, stark poverty and innumerable human beings hovering around like ants have become part of our experience. If one unwraps this conglomeration of dirt, garbage and milling crowd, one can inherit the broken voice of a teashop

radio that blares Muhammad Rafi favourites or Noor Jehan evergreens. Such are the fragments our identities are made up of.

In her polyptych, Risham Syed discovers the colonial remnants that pervade our sense of who we are. Constructed of square panels, the baggage of cultural belonging and a national identity generates a sardonic tone in this mural. In an attempt to recover the lost wealth and status of pre-Partition times, each square (in effect) is trying to el-



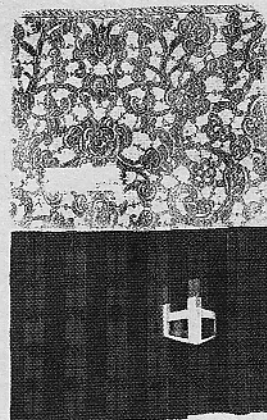
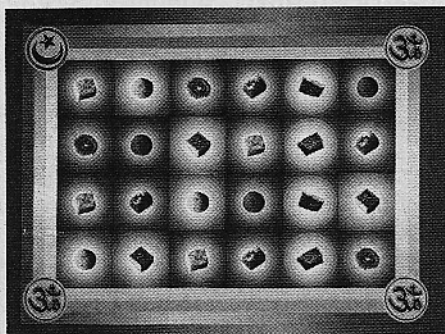
bow out the other to reach the apex of the pyramid – the White House. A tireless effort to blur the line between real image and ritual iconography is underway here.

Trauma and conflict

The youngest artist in the show, Syed voices the trauma of her generation within the exodus and with years of influences and exchanges that bismirch her times. Choices complicate themselves since the mirrored realism of the borderline presents itself as the only point of arrival. The post-colonial spiritual crisis of the new-fangled 'nationhood' manifests itself either as a circle of confusion or as the alphabet searching for itself between the politics of a "national language" (Urdu versus Hindi) and the sacred diet (meat versus vegetable).

In a series of prints entitled "Muqaddimah", Sylvat Aziz rejects out of hand accepted norms of social behaviour and conventional approaches to art and life. If one critic has said with some bewilderment that she "straddles several traditions but serves none", it is because her art is a frontal assault on all preconceived notions and aesthetic values, and an attempt at redefining the role of art in life.

Aziz sees human beings in a perpetual state of conflict over territorial possession. The woman is found in a state of torpid immobility; the atmosphere is foetid, the light sinister, the woman's flesh like a mauled and bruised pelt. Her contortions are not part of the game of passion with an excited



lover; he has become a spectator, a voyeur, who nudges the viewer, as it were, to share lasciviously, in the enjoyment of a pantomime. The emotional resonance of the postures of Aziz's females – like agonised dancers – convey their interest in the role of suffering in daily life, and the complex and uncertain relationships between victims and perpetrators.

In these works the violent brushwork, the lurid colours, the sense of claustrophobia and suffocation against an underworld coarseness and malevolence, set up a dialogue – the *muqaddimah* – to review societal discrimination and the triumph of the self.

Works of destiny

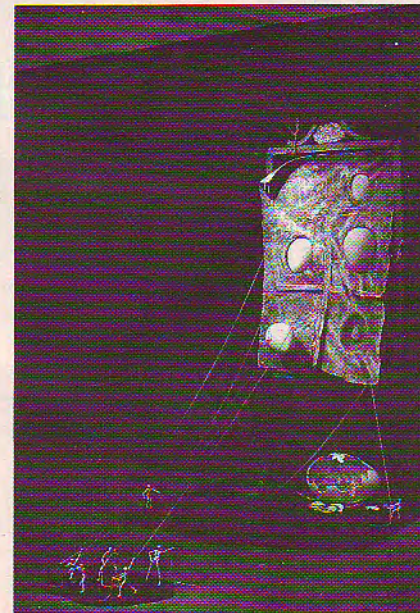
In P.S. Ladi's fibreglass and polyester installation, surface and subject melt into one another until surface plays a more formal function. Thus the imagery is distanced from the immediate narrative of place. The division is



adamant and paradoxically camouflaged. Ladi's ambidextrous circus reflects upon the Lilliputians' struggle to pull down Gulliver, mocking the portentous and the official, combining the comic, the banal and the poignant.

Small things and big issues pack a strong political punch. The divide beckons, promises a suffocating and exciting experience and ultimately liberates one from obvious prejudices. The formal and conceptual blending of soft, fragile matter with a tough one makes for a disruptive metaphor. With this new division, various notions emerge: ranging from hope and regeneration to reflecting a growing mistrust in the myth of contemporary realpolitik.

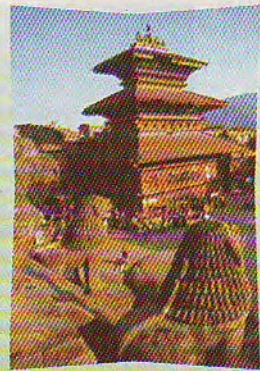
A journey is plural; it is open to all possibilities. In "Mappings", this openness permits contact with extremes and smudges the boundaries between the body and the mind, nature and humanity, the spiritual and the material, the cosmic and the earthly. There is no freedom of possi-



bility. In these works of destiny, freedom is made finite by the very language in which it appears. ▽

A. Akhtar is an art critic based in Islamabad.

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Beauty and the Jamaat

by Afsan Chowdhury



Everything was in place for the final selection of "Miss Beautiful Bangladesh" at the end of April when the Awami League government decided to step in. Organised by Model Watch, a private outfit, the competition had reached thus far after travelling through the five main divisional towns of Bangladesh, only to be halted when the conservative Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami threatened to disrupt the event.

Fifty young, upwardly mobile models – yummies? – who were vying for the national crown were left wondering, and perhaps for the first time understanding, what politics is all about. When the Jamaat gave its boycott call at a protest meeting in downtown Dhaka, cabinet ministers and senior police officers went into a huddle and served a restraining notice on the sponsors.

Beauty contests are not new to Bangladesh even though it is an 'Islamic' country to some. While the first contest to choose a Miss Bengal and a Miss Bangladesh was held in London in 1994, the event subsequently moved to Bangladesh. On the whole, beauty contests in the Brahmaputra delta are sedate affairs, considered harmless, rather like a flower show.

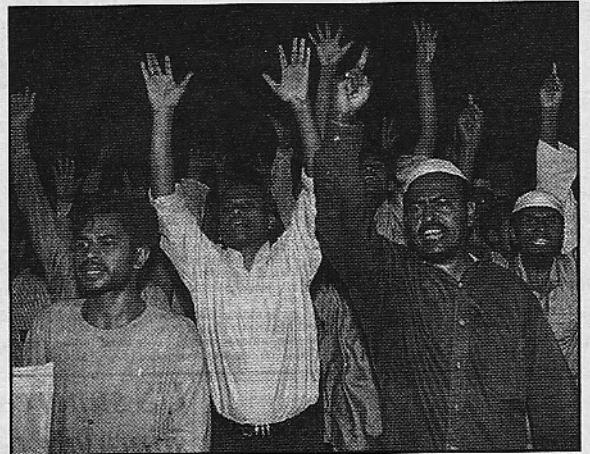
There was a time when ministers of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, while in power between 1991-1996, were eager guests at such contests. This time, however, the same faces joined hands with the Jamaat in demanding a ban. For its part, the Awami League

government seemed to have decided to concede to the conservative demands because it had enough problems on its hands trying to get the opposition to accept the Chittagong Hill Tracts treaty.

"It wasn't something which deserved this kind of response. Nothing considered remotely indecent is ever done at these events, such as swimsuit walkons, etc," said Chinmoy Mutsuddi, who was a judge at the first contest in London and now edits an entertainment weekly in Dhaka.

The Jamaat had raised no objection to the preliminary rounds held in the divisional towns, which were widely reported in the papers. Neither had there been any significant public reaction, and the judges ranged from municipality chiefs and MPs to local social figures. In fact, there had been mild surprise that the leadership of Sylhet, considered a very conservative area, had kept mum. But then, it has to be kept in mind that the original London contest was sponsored by no other than the enterprising expatriate Sylhetis, famous for selling Indian food to the English.

The unexpected threats from the Jamaat and the buckling under by the government left Rezaul Islam of



Chittagong beauties: (l to r) Miss Personality, Miss Beautiful and Miss Graceful; (below) the Jamaat protest.

Model Watch distraught. Having chaperoned the contest for months, he was naturally hurt by the clamp-down. "It was not just the loss of money but the pain of such a lot of effort wasted."

Jamaat leaders told journalists that beauty contests were "un-Islamic". When women are not allowed to show their face to men other than their husbands, how could they allow the whole world to watch women on stage, that too specifically to gauge their beauty, they asked. When asked why they were not in the forefront of protests against the sensational level of rapes and violence against women and children in Bangladesh, they preferred silence.

All that can be said, perhaps, is that this year, the contest was won by the Jamaat. △

TRAVELLING FILM SOUTH ASIA

REPORT

After the overwhelming success of Film South Asia '97, the first-ever festival of South Asian documentaries, in Kathmandu in late October 1997, Himlal decided to take a selection from the 55 films shown at FSA'97 around South Asia and the world. Fifteen documentaries were chosen with the help of the festival's three-member jury to reflect the quality, thematic variety, and geographic range of documentary-making in the Subcontinent.

For the convenience of local organisers everywhere the films were shown in VHS tapes.

The objective of Travelling Film South Asia (TFSA) was to give filmmakers, enthusiasts, scholars, students and the general audience an opportunity to view the latest and finest films from the Subcontinent. TFSA was an excellent opportunity to tell South Asian audiences of the concerns of serious filmmakers from their neighbourhood. Outside South Asia, Himlal hoped to create an awareness and a dialogue about South Asian concerns.

TFSA's worldwide journey was made possible by the support and interest of individuals and institutions all over South Asia and overseas. Their voluntary efforts in arranging venues, accessing equipment, finding sponsors, publicising and hosting the event, were well rewarded, we believe, in terms of audience participation all over.

Everywhere the festival went, there was something unique in the event. In Pakistan, this was the first time since the 1960s that India-made films were publicly screened. The crowd that came to see the Bangladeshi *Mukhtir Gaan* in Lahore was matched by the Calcutta audience attending the screening of *Mr. Jinnah: The Making of Pakistan*. All over, the film screenings led to discussions of issues covered, from the loss of traditional culture to re-evaluation of history, and from sexual identity to macho-communalism.

TFSA has proved conclusively that there is a worldwide audience for quality documentary films on South Asia. It also proved that there is an audience all over the Subcontinent for documentaries. The only thing lacking, by and large, is the venue.

The next edition of the biennial festival of South Asian documentaries, Film South Asia '99, will be held in Kathmandu in September 1999.

The following is the complete itinerary of TFSA with names of organisers, sponsors and supporters:

Venue	Date	Organiser	Supporter/Sponsor
New Delhi	6-8 Feb 1998	Himal	India Habitat Centre
Dhaka	12-14 Feb 1998	Chalachitram Film Society	Goethe Institut
Princeton University	5-7 Mar 1998	South Asia Students' Association International Centre, Woodrow Wilson School	Woodrow Wilson School, Department of History, Department of Politics, Department of Women's Studies
University of California at Berkeley	10 Mar-5 May 1998	Raba Gunashekhar	Centre for South Asian Studies Graduate School of Journalism
Harvard University	11-13 Mar 1998	Manisha Aryal William Fisher	Department of Indian and Sanskrit Studies, Department of Anthropology, The Asia Centre
University of Pennsylvania	16-18 Mar 1998	Bob Nichols, David Ludden	Department of South Asia Regional Studies
Colorado State University	19-21 Mar 1998	John Riley	Asian Studies Programme, College of Liberal Arts, Centre for Applied Studies American Ethnicity, Office of International Education
Lahore	21-25 Mar 1998	Farjad Nabi Beena Sarwar	The News International, The American Centre
University of Alabama at Birmingham	26-28 Mar 1998	Stephen Mikesell	Department of Anthropology, Centre for International Programmes
University of Hawaii	29-31 Mar 1998	Gregory Maskarinec Mary Chin	Centre for South Asian Studies, School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies
University of Chicago	2-4 Apr 1998	Gregory Price Grieve	Centre of South Asian Studies, International House Film Society, South Asian Outreach Educational Project
Cornell University	6-10 Apr 1998	Prasanna Dhungel, Eknath Belbase	Department of English
Wheaton College	6-8 Apr 1998	Bruce Owens	Department of Anthropology and Sociology
Karachi	16-21 Apr 1998	Tamasghar Media Network	The News, USIS
Calcutta	20-22 Apr 1998	S.V. Raman	Max Mueller Bhawan, Goethe-Institut
Jamshedpur	23-25 Apr 1998	Amitav Ghosh	Celluloid Chapter
Islamabad	14-16 May 1998	Peter Claes	Asian Study Group, Islamabad The Human Development Centre, The Allama Iqbal Open University
Colombo	26-30 May 1998	Nalaka Gunawardane	Television Trust for Environment, The British Council

Look out for the formal announcement on Film South Asia '99 in these pages in September.

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Elaborate eggshells

Like the monkeys in this fictional Guava orchard, Kiran Desai's new hook is creating a lot of fuss over nothing. Sampath Chawla, its hapless protagonist, is intended as a tragicomic hero: an unemployed postal clerk-turned-ersatz holy man. The story follows his meandering path as he blithely loses his job, climbs a guava tree, and attracts a bevy of human and animal followers. Desai tells the tale deftly enough. What she fails to do along the way is give her readers a reason to care about Sampath or any of the other "colour-ful" characters surrounding him.

Desai presents Sampath as a Forrest Gump-like soul who lives in his own hyper-sensate world. "All around him, his family lay and snored: his father, mother, grandmother, and his younger sister, Pinky, swathed in quantities of flowered organza. Rrrrr. Rrrrr. Phurrrr. Wheeeeee. Rrrrrrr. What a racket! Sampath listened to each hostile inhalation. Even in sleep, he thought, disgusted, his family showed themselves incapable of pleasant displays of consideration."

He finds bliss at his hoss's daughter's wedding, where he steals into her changing room. He relishes "the scents of musk, of mothballs, marigolds, and baby powder. Of sandalwood oil. Oh scented world! He felt his heart grow light. He held the fabrics to his cheek, let their slippery weight fall from one hand to the other and slide over his arms. He swathed lengths of pink and green and turmeric yellow about himself until he looked like a box of sweets wrapped up for the Diwali season."

Sampath's shedding of his wrappings is intended as high comedy but reads like laboured slapstick. "Sampath climbed deftly on to the highest tier of the fountain and, in one swift movement, lowered both his trousers and his underpants. His back

to the crowd, he stuck his brown behind up into the air and wiggled it wildly in an ecstatic appreciation of



Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard

by Kiran Desai
Viking Penguin India,
New Delhi, 1998
209 pp

reviewed by Jyoti Thottam

the evening's entertainment he has just provided." The book is full of such misadventures at work, with his family, and in the guava tree, where Sampath finally finds a bit of peace and recognition.

As a character, however, Sampath is so opaque, inert and uncommunicative that it is impossible to connect with him at any level. He rarely talks to anyone, and his interior monologues betray little more than annoyance or confusion. "How he hated his life. It was a never-ending flow of misery. It was a prison he had been born into. The one time he had a little bit of fun, he was curtailed and punished. He was horn unlucky, that's what it was." Such meagre glimpses into Sampath's character reveal nothing deeper than what everyone around him must see – a misfit who is singularly ill-equipped to deal with life outside the branches of his guava tree.

Desai manages to keep the story moving only by skitting from one stunning image to the next. "Sampath's concentration sharpened like a knife at all the places where his hones pressed against the hard floor"; "the sauces were full of strange hints and dark undercurrents, leaving you on firm ground one moment, drag-

ging you under the next"; "finely powdered beetles with kobl-rimmed eyes and clown-faced caterpillars with round noses, false beards and foolish feet." Descriptions like these are strewn about the pages like so many elaborately painted eggshells, beautiful yet insubstantial.

A host of stock characters try vainly to capture the reader's attention as it wanders away from Sampath: the indulgent grandmother with a home-made remedy for every ill; a food-obsessed mother whose curries fill the orchard with uncategorisable smells; the imperious father guarding his son's career prospects; *chamchas* (yes-men) in the local IAS cadre; and even the town itself. Shahkot is a hodgepodge of urban notions about small country towns, where superstition substitutes for thought and every scene is a spectacle.

Only one member of this rainbow coalition of colourful characters seems to own a human core – Sampath's sister, Pinky. When she becomes enamoured of a young ice-cream vendor at the local movie house, she bites off a piece of his ear in a Tyson-esque display of passion. Her letter of apology offers the only sincerely funny lines in what is supposed to be a comic novel: "I am so sorry to have bitten your ear. But it was done only out of affection. Please understand, the sight of you filled my heart with so much emotion, but it unfortunately came out in the wrong way. Here's wishing you a speedy recovery."

Here, at last, Desai gets into the skin of her character. Unfortunately, the balance of this book is a catalogue of one-dimensional eccentrics and second-hand emotion – beautifully written but bloodless.

J. Thottam is a New-York-based writer.

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Julius Robert Oppenheimer,

Director of the Los Alamos Laboratory burst into Sanskrit and recited the Bhagavad Gita upon seeing the brilliant flash of the first-ever atomic bomb at 5:29:45 local time on 16 July 1945 at Alamogordo, New Mexico. This crypto-Hindu leftist Jew could perhaps be called the architect of the first "Hindu Bomb".

Oppenheimer's sloka:

दिवि सूर्यसहस्रस्य भवेद्युगपदुत्थिता ॥

यदि भाः सदृशी सा स्याद्भासस्तस्य महात्मनः ॥१२॥

If a thousand suns burst forth all at once in the heavens, even that would not approach the splendour of the Supreme Power. (11.12)

At the border. Poem by Alokeranjan Dasgupta in the newsletter of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies, Calcutta...

At the tail end came a wagonload of refugees,
Some say they are all from South Asia,
Others claim they are a bunch of spies.
Yet sun and ice play below their eyes.
One has merely a broken mast in his hands,
Another is holding the bow for a fiddle;
Others have got books and magazines
Stuck in their ragged headcloths.
At that moment he stood up; if he so desired
He could demolish all the barriers of convention.
I trample ice and sun to touch him
and find he is nowhere.
Or did he carry freedom to the utmost limit
On his bodily frame, gaunt with martyrdom?
Failing to find his own name amongst the banished,
He died for all refugees.

Development myth. Iranian scholar and former diplomat Majid Rahnema bursts the development bubble in his introduction to *The Post-Development Reader* (University Press, Dhaka, 1997).

The disintegration of the colonial empires brought about a strange and incongruous convergence of aspirations. The leaders of the independence movements

were eager to transform their devastated countries into modern nation-states, while the 'masses', who had often paid for their victories with their blood, were hoping to liberate themselves from both the old and the new forms of subjugation. As to the former colonial masters, they were seeking a new system of domination, in the hope that it would allow them to maintain their presence in the ex-colonies, in order to continue to exploit their natural resources, as well as to use them as markets for their expanding economies or as bases for their geopolitical ambitions. The myth of development emerged as an ideal construct to meet the hopes of the three categories of actors.

For quite a long time, this temporary meeting of otherwise highly divergent interests gave the development discourse a charismatic power of attraction. The different parties to the consensus it represented had indeed their own differences as to the ways development had to be implemented. For an important group, *economic* development was the key to any kind of development. For another, *culture* and the social conditions proper to each country had to prevail in any process of development. On another plain, an animated debate witnessed major differences between people who wanted an expert-based and professionally managed development and others who were for an 'endogenous', 'human-centred', 'participatory', 'bottom-up' or, later, 'sustainable' form of development. These 'policy-oriented' divergences seemed, however, too weak to question the ideology of development and its relevance to people's deeper aspirations. In the 1960s, when an 'outsider' like Ivan Illich set out to challenge the very idea of development as a threat to people's autonomy, his stand was perceived by many as sheer provocation. Development, even more than schooling, was then such a sacred cow that it appeared totally irresponsible to question its relevance.

This almost unanimous support for development was somehow significant of the very gap it had started to produce in societies in which it had been introduced. For now it appears clearly that such a unanimity was far from being shared at the grassroots level, where it was supposed to reach the suffering populations. Only the authorities who were speaking on behalf of their target populations claimed that such was the case. The voices that, here and there, were heard across the barriers separating the rulers from the ruled, showed that the latter

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had never been seriously consulted.

It may well be said that when the national leaders of various anti-colonial struggles took over the movements emerging from the grassroots, they succeeded in making them believe that development was the best answer to their demands. As such, for all the victims of colonial rule, it did appear for a while as a promising mirage: the long-awaited source of regeneration to which they had been looking for so long. But the mirage ultimately transformed into a recurring nightmare for millions. As a matter of fact, it soon appeared to them that development had been, from the beginning, nothing but a deceitful mirage. It had acted as a factor of division, of exclusion and of discrimination rather than of liberation of any kind. It had mainly served to strengthen the new alliances that were going to unite the interests of the post-colonial foreign expansionists with those of the local leaders in need of them for consolidation of their own positions. Thanks to these alliances, societies that had invented modernised poverty could now extend it to all developing countries.

Nawaz, don't do it, said an editorial in Bombay's *The Economic Times*. Nawaz did not listen.

Mr Nawaz Sharif is under tremendous pressure to conduct a nuclear test as a counter to India's. He must resist that pressure. Pakistan's economy is in a mess, and it is altogether less capable of withstanding economic sanctions than India is. Some optimists thought sanctions would not really be imposed on countries that conducted nuclear tests. The swiftness with which sanctions have been imposed on India proves otherwise. So, Mr Sharif, do not be misled into thinking that you can conduct a nuclear test with impunity, or minimal penalties. In fact the penalties will be severe. You are currently negotiating emergency finance from the IMF to plug a trade gap of over \$4.5 billion. That loan will unquestionably be put on hold the moment you test. Your foreign exchange reserves, barely enough for seven weeks' imports, are under pressure with capital fleeing your country in anticipation of a nuclear hlast. Foreign investors have been told by their headquarters to dump their Pakistani shares at any price. Your trade deficit and fiscal deficit are going into the

stratosphere. You have neither the fiscal means nor foreign exchange to go for a nuclear race. This is no time to invite sanctions.

But, your partymen will tell you, if India has tested a bomb, so must Pakistan. You need a cool head to assess the true situation. Pakistan's strategic concern is to deter a possible Indian nuclear attack. And the nuclear capacity you have huilt up in recent years has already deterred India. No Indian defence planner is foolish enough to assume that you cannot hit targets in India with nuclear bombs. Since these are untested, maybe only two out of five bombs will go off. But even that is enough for deterrence. Believe us, we are not partisan in this matter, and have your interests at heart. India could afford the cost in the short run. Pakistan, alas, lacks both the logic and the money. So hold your fire.

Gurudeva's invitation to "divine souls" with computers and modems, asking if they would want to receive one of his five daily email lists, listed below.

Namaste Divine Soul: Gurudeva thought you might be interested in joining one or more of his five daily email lists, and asked me to inquire. There are the "Nandinatha Sutras", "Tirukural", "Dancing with Siva", "Daily Vedic Verses" and "Merging with Siva". Members of each list receive a daily email round the year one or two verses, or one lesson, or a few sutras, or a shloka and bashya. For example, of the Nandinatha Sutras ("Living with Siva") and of the Tirukural, there are 365 installments of each, for round the year inspiration. It's a great way to start the day! The subscriptions are free, of course. Anyone is welcome to subscribe or unsubscribe at any time by sending a request to the mailing list software for each list. Just send an empty message or short message with any subject, any content, to the email addresses listed:

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No big deal

As it came, Enron went.

by *Rajendra Dahal*

The *Wall Street Journal* billed it a national debacle akin to the World Bank's withdrawal from the controversial Arun III hydel project in August 1995. But strangely enough, the announcement by the multinational Enron corporation that it was withdrawing from its bid for the 10,800-megawatt project on the Karnali river raised hardly a ripple of concern in Kathmandu.

Enron 'came' to Nepal on September 1996, 16 months after the Arun III project had 'gone', the World Bank having withdrawn from the latter in the face of spirited challenges put up by Nepali activists. The lack of concern for Enron's departure might have had to do with the fact that Enron itself had been lackadaisical in bidding for Karnali, seeming to want only to have its foot in the door on the basis of grandiose claims about unbelievable bonanzas that would accrue to Nepal.

While Nepalis may not have been overly concerned over Enron's withdrawal, there was every reason to worry about the country's image vis-a-vis foreign investors, however. For, Enron being a loud and aggressive player in South and Southeast Asia, its departure attracted an unprecedented press internationally. Increasingly active in the Subcontinent, from Maharashtra to the Sunderban, Enron's withdrawal was read by the media as proof that Nepal was not yet 'ripe' for foreign direct investment.

Bad news, good news

The fact of Enron's departure was true enough, but the reasons for its pulling out was misconstrued by most of

the press. The spin that Enron's publicity department put on its departure, as reported in the *Wall Street Journal*, was that "the regional market for power may be insufficient at this time for us to continue our development efforts". The *Journal* also swallowed whole Enron's other claim for the departure, which was that "forecasts showed slower growth for China, a primary market to which Enron hoped to sell power from Nepal".

All this showed an extremely poor grasp of the South Asian market and Asian geography on the part of the *Journal* and other papers who reported on Enron. This allowed Enron the ability to get away with its story that the departure was based on the unavailability of market.

The fact is that while the Chinese market is indeed too remote to export to, the South Asian market at Nepal's doorstep is very much there. The power-hungry north Indian grid provides demand enough long into the future, other things remaining the same. What Enron miscalculated was the inefficiencies of the Indian power system, as well as the grey zones that yet exist in the Nepal-India axis in terms of sharing power. The latter point relates to the value of the 'regulated water' that would accrue to the plains as a result of a high dam at Karnali, and as such becomes a subject of bilateral state-to-state negotiation. This went beyond Enron's brief.

Essentially, Enron was into Nepal for an adventure which might give it some easy pickings. This was the strategy which in the end led to the company's retreat.

In proclaiming Nepal's lack of

readiness for foreign investment, the media outlets also failed to take note of some positive developments in the Nepali power sector. Firstly, the cancellation of the Arun III project has actually led to a flowering of several medium-sized projects over the last four years which, according to one analyst, "will provide a third more power in half the time at half the cost" than would have happened with the "crowding out effect" of the 201 MW Arun III project.

What was also ignored was a major US-Nepal joint venture breakthrough only a few months previously – agreement on a 36 MW project on the Bhote Kosi river in eastern Nepal which was approved by the Nepali government. The USD 97 million project has the participation of the US-based companies Panda International and Harza Engineering, and it has been praised as a relatively 'clean' project in a country where the waters are too often muddied by kickback merchants and influential middlemen. The Bhote Kosi project is managed by a prominent Nepali corporate house, and the dealings have been comparatively transparent.

Back door

Unlike Panda International and Hazra Engineering, and in keeping with its reputation internationally, Enron did not enter Nepal through the front door. Rather than make its application to survey the Karnali project with the Ministry of Water Resources and its Electricity Development Centre, as required by the law on prospective investors, the company made a direct approach to the office of the then

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba through its local agent who happened to be a cousin of Deuba's by marriage.

The Enron proposal was given the thumbs-up by the prime minister's office, with support from Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat, a well-known proponent of big-time investment in Nepal's water/energy sector. But then Enron's boat hit a rock in the form of Minister of Water Resources Pashupati Shumshere Rana, who, while also a big-project proponent, showed a sudden disinclination towards the proposal.

It was Rana's dilly-dallying that proved to be the undoing of Enron's bid, and this delay may have had to do with an uncertain period of politics in Nepal in which the minister may not have wanted to push through a controversial project. On the other hand, Rana's lack of reaction either way on the Enron application is strange, given the fact that he has been Nepal's minister of water resources a number of times and has intimate knowledge of all possible hydropower projects; also, he has long been advocating that Karnali be built before Pancheswar (the much-vaunted Indo-Nepal agreement to build a big dam on the Nepal-India border).

Because the authority to provide a survey licence rests with the Water Resources Ministry, Prime Minister Deuba sent his recommendation in favour of Enron to Rana, who sat on the file from October 1996 through January 1997. Then suddenly, he announced that both the Karnali and Arun projects would be opened for international bidding.

Hyped hope

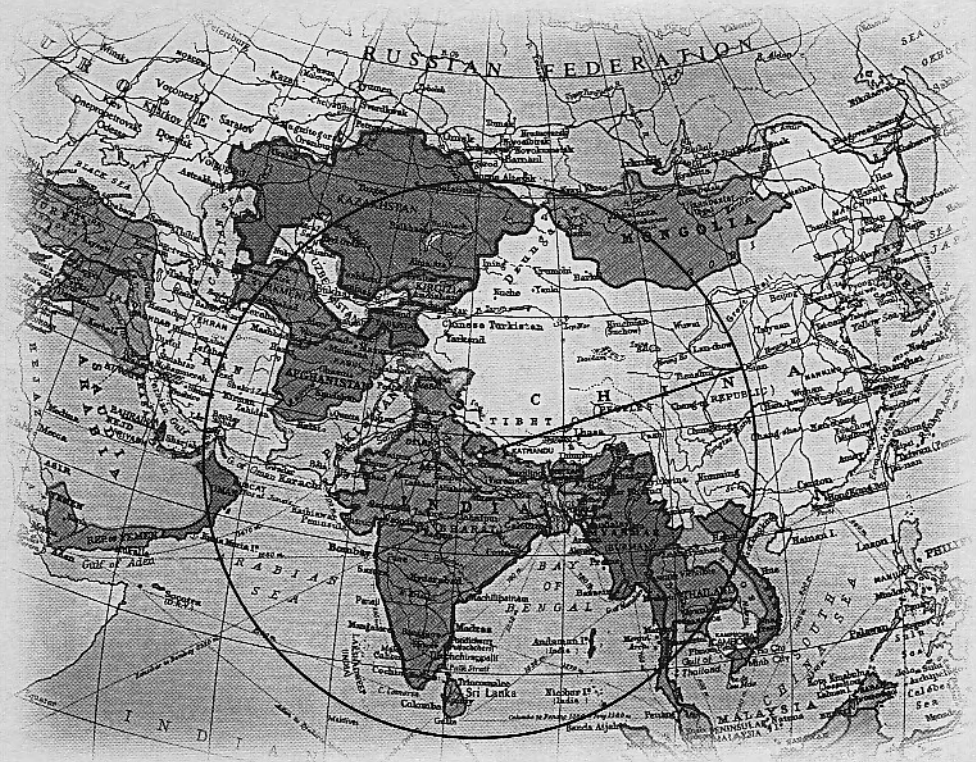
On January 1997, Robert Kelly, managing director of Enron International Renewable Energy, came to Kathmandu and put up a glamorous show for the benefit of ministers, MPs, and senior officials. With slides and overheads, Kelly painted a fiscal and financial utopia for Nepal. By al-

lowing Nepal to move ahead with the Karnali and Arun projects, said Kelly, the country would earn USD 70 to 130 million annually from royalty and taxes over the first 15 years. After that, the income would be as much as 10 times more. If Nepal did not go in for Karnali with Enron, right now, Kelly warned the gathering of VIPs, Nepal would be losing a total of USD 2 billion as sales revenue.

Whereas Nepali experts have only looked to the Indian market, now Kelly claimed that it was possible to look beyond India to market Karnali's electricity. In what was thought would be welcomed by supposedly Indo-phobic Nepalis, Enron claimed that it would export Karnali electricity northwards, across the expanse of the Tibetan highlands all the way to the Chinese mainland city of Xian. (Inci-

bowl over most of the ministers and MPs present who included members of the opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML). But not Pashupati Shumshere Rana. However, before Rana could go ahead with his plans for global bidding in the first half of 1997, he lost his water resources portfolio, which fell upon Prime Minister Lokendra Bahadur Chand. As Enron officials flew in and out of Kathmandu, Chand's government also fell.

It was as late as September 1997 that the first official meeting took place between Enron and the Nepali Government. Enron had come to realise, even if late, the need for an across-the-board understanding on the matter. Upon Enron's suggestion, an all-party meeting was held to discuss its proposal. Following the meeting, Enron was assured that it would



Enron's alleged transmission radius.

dentally, if it were that easy to export Nepali electricity to Xian, then Kathmandu's planners may as well plan on selling electricity to Irkutsk, Tehran, Bandar Abbas, Phnom Penh, and, why not, to Kanyakumari and Colombo as well. *See map.*)

The fast-paced American presentation of the brave new world did

receive the licence it sought to survey the Karnali site.

However, with the Water Resources Ministry not having provided the promised licence as late as November 1997, Enron finally buckled under and in December filed an application with the Electricity Development Centre, as required by law in

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the first instance. Even that, however, did not work for Enron, and it was yet to receive the promised licence when it decided to eject itself from the entire process on 9 April.

The truth was that Enron had undermined the merits of its own proposal when it tried to jump the queue and get its project approved by political fiat. When Enron withdrew, it did not refer to the problems it had within Nepal, and ascribed the blame instead to the downturn in the market. "The key decision to withdraw was market-driven... the uncertainty of selling a large block of power to certain entities outside Nepal," said an Enron spokeswoman.

While political uncertainty and a certain amount of malfeasance seem to have been present in Nepal, the major obstacles that Enron faced during its Karnali misadventure seem to have been of its own doing. It tried to bypass the set procedures, deciding to follow them only at the last moment. It made unrealistic claims regarding its marketing ambitions, which naturally made it lose credibility. And, in

the end, rather than point to the uncertainties of Nepali politics, the sensitivities of a cross-border project, and the unknowns that regard to the various state electricity boards of north India, Enron sought to hide behind the fig leaf of lack of market. Enron made its mistakes, but Nepal got its face painted black in the haute finance press in return.

The only person who seemed to be openly lamenting in Kathmandu, however, was former Prime Minister Deuba. Well, he and the present once-again Prime Minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, who used every pulpit as he took office in early April to call for Enron's return. So much so that when Koirala addressed a group of American businessmen (many of whom would have had no love lost for Enron as their competition), he asked their help to get Enron back to Nepal.

The prime minister's desperation was political, and understandable, for he did not want to be seen as the person who shooed Enron away. Besides, in the surface-level politics of Nepal, whichever government is able to

bring large dollops of foreign aid or projects is seen to be successful. That is why, even though in private conversation Koirala claims to be smitten by the 'small is beautiful' philosophy of E.F Schumacher, in public he speaks of the need for mega projects to convert the flowing water into green dollars.

That, at least, is what Nepali politicians have been saying ever since they knew that flowing water could produce electricity. Enron, too, thought so, for a while.

Endnote: Visiting Nepal in mid-May, China's Deputy Water Resources Minister Yan Kequiang dismissed the idea that China had any plans to import electricity from Nepal. Rather, he was keen on Nepal-China joint investments in hydropower to export elsewhere, i.e., to India.

R. Dahal is editor of the Deshantar weekly in Kathmandu who specialises in water resource reporting.

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Abominably yours,

As everybody is knowing, South Asia is becoming free and fair as skin whitener sales pick up in supermarkets across the land. Turnover would double if they named the cream something else. "Fair and Lovely" Fairness Cream, now what kind of name is that? Why not call it what the stuff is really meant to do: "Albino" Fairness Cream. Or: "Michael Jackson" Not-So-Black-Anymore Cream. (Slogan: "Never Again Be Mistaken for a Hindustani"). As the Subcontinent's *creme de la creme* puts on whiteners, we have to see if this is going to have any long-term effect on the national libido: will our women rather be white than have sex?

Either way, us females can handle it. But can the males? Last month's devastating news that

one in every ten middle-aged male Indian is impotent showed us just how problematic this issue is. No sooner had *India Today* hit the stands than the defence complex and scientific establishment in Delhi went into high state of alert. It was left with no choice at all. Something had to be done—and fast—to show that India was no eunuch. Boom, boom, boom, boom and boom. And from across the border, six retaliatory bang, bang, bang, bang, bang and bang. Pakistani male infertility rate is nearabout same as India's.

And unless US sanctions are going to affect Pfizer's plans for joint ventures to address the Indo-Pak male impotency crisis, there is

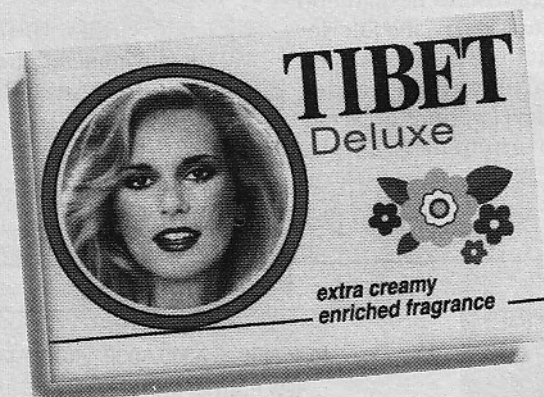
no doubt what Viagra should be called when it is marketed in India:

"Atom Behari Vajpayee". (Wife: I know you have taken off your dentures, dear, but have you taken your Vajpayees?) Viagra in Pakistan can be called "Neutron Sheriff".

(Mushahid Hussain: Wah! Mian Sahab, Wah!)

And now that General George Fernandes is getting ready to march to Beijing to give Tibet back to the Tibetans, one wonders if he checked with the Dalai Lama what he thinks

of all this nonsense. Can't fault George, though. He has been trying to free Tibet long before it became Hollywood flavour of the month.



With the release of *Seven Years in Tibet* starring His Holiness the Brad Pitt, Hollywood has launched its first salvo in retaking the plateau from the villainous Chinese. Then came *Kundun*, in which audiences across the world got to see spectacular closeups of Morocco. After that, there appeared in Pakistan the Tibet Brand Toilet Soap.

Shouldn't someone be paying royalty to Dharmashala for all this?

Across in Nepal, where Tibet is not yet a soap, there is a fallback option: Sherpa Brand Antiseptic Soap (Slogan: "Guaranteed To



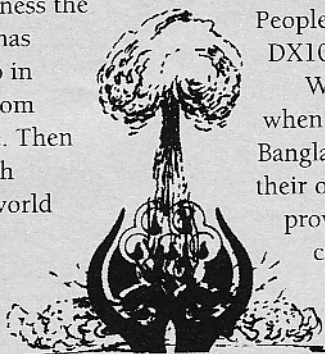
Restore Your Health and Potency"). But make sure you don't lather yourself with the Sherpa Brand Safety Matches (Slogan: "Highly Inflammatory").

It is difficult to say exactly when this tendency to name detergents after autonomous regions and ethnic groups first started, but there is plenty of room for improvement. We haven't even begun to scratch the surface for imaginative brand names for everyday household items taking after national liberation movements: like "Elam" Brand Coconut Vinegar, cough syrups called "Azad Kashmir" (or, "PoK" Lozenges on the Indian side). Cigarettes could truly reflect their incendiary character: "Naxalite" Filter Kings. Or honour the down-

trodden with a new Suzuki Peoples' Car, "The Dalit DX1000".

What I want to know is, when will Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal blow their own nuclear devices and prove their virility? All countries have equal rights to have their own blasts, with India and Pakistan providing the technology where

necessary. That way, SAARC can declare itself completely nuclearised so that we can show the world we are not eunuchs.



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