

HIMAL

THE SOUTH ASIAN MAGAZINE

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SIACHEN Frozen War

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Vol 11 No 12 December 1998

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Associate Editor
Deepak Thapa

Copy Editor
Shanuj V.C.

Contributing Editors
Afsan Chowdhury DHAKA
Beena Sarwar LAHORE
Manik de Silva COLOMBO
Mitu Varma NEW DELHI
Prabhu Ghate NEW DELHI

Marketing
Suman Shakya
Anil Karki
Sambhu Guragain
Awadhesh K. Das

Administration
Anil Shrestha
Tripti Gurung
Roshan Shrestha

Layout
Chandra Khatiwada

Marketing Offices

Ajoy Biswas Dhaka
Tel: +880-2-812 954, 911 5044 (fax)
office@dnk.net

Media Sales Representative

Tim Karachi
Trans Indus Media (Pvt) Ltd
2nd Floor, Haroon House
Ziauddin Ahmed Road
Karachi 74200
Tel: +92-21-567 0081, 567 0085 (fax)
tim@xiber.com

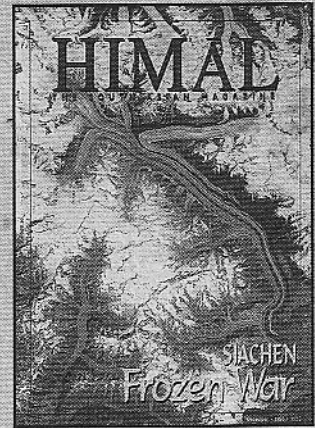
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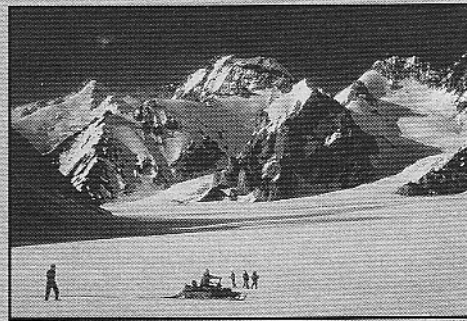
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Toni Hagen's Nepal

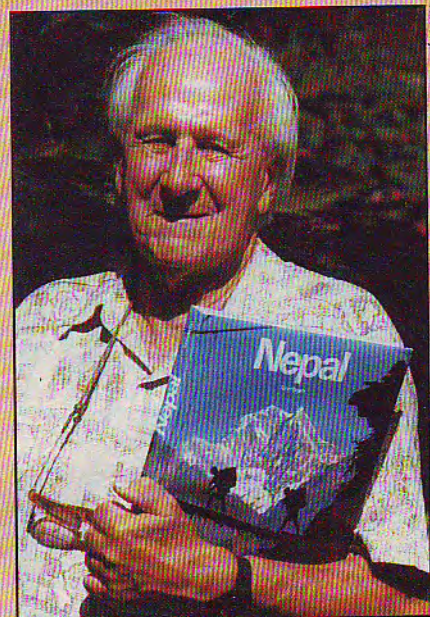
Himal Books, October 1998

Toni Hagen first set foot on Nepali soil in 1950, when Nepal was still 'forbidden' to outsiders. Starting from the Tarai plains, then still malarial, he traversed Nepal's populated midlands, and up to and beyond the high Himalaya. He walked a total of 14,000 km over nine years while carrying out the first-ever reconnaissance of the country for the United Nations.

The Swiss geologist saw Nepal like no one had before him, and very few have since. He visited areas that are till today closed to tourists and observed so much of the country that has been overtaken by the march of time. With the meticulous mind of a scientist and the rendition of a storyteller, Toni Hagen first published *Nepal* in 1961. This, then, became the original book to introduce Nepal, in text and unmatched pictures, to the world as well as to the administrators of the newly awakened country.

Over time, as a development expert and a valued friend, the author has been returning regularly to these mountains, hills and plains. He has seen the country's transformation from a medieval-era state to a parliamentary democracy, and the population's rise from eight million when he first came to 22 million today. Toni Hagen has not been just a casual observer; he has continuously engaged in discussion on issues that affect the people, such as the merits of the prevalent development model, or questions of political evolution and ethnic assertion.

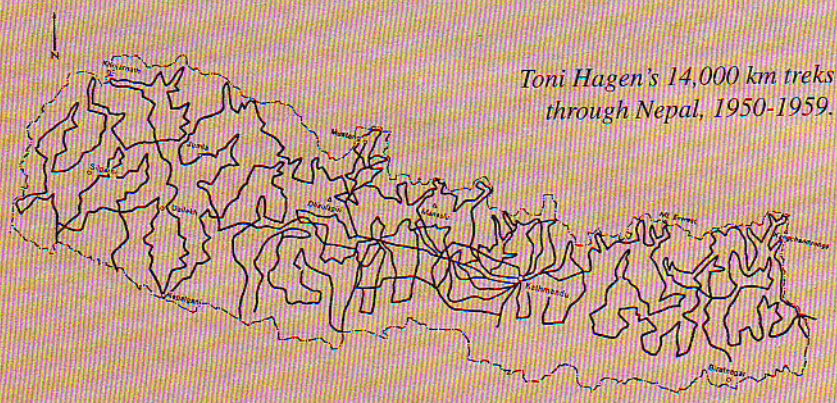
There have been others who have since studied more thoroughly certain areas and become better acquainted with various communities of the country, but Toni Hagen is undoubtedly still *the* expert of Nepal as a whole.



TINI BAIKACHANDRA

Toni Hagen's

Nepal: The Kingdom in the Himalaya
revised and updated with
Deepak Thapa
Fourth Edition, 1998
Himal Books, Lalitpur, Nepal
pp 251 (172 plates: 121 colour+51 b&w)
US\$ 60 (including postage)



Toni Hagen's 14,000 km treks through Nepal, 1950-1959.

This 1998 edition of *Nepal* is the result of a unique transcontinental collaboration between the Swiss geologist-turned-development philosopher Toni Hagen and Nepali journalist Deepak Thapa, who is an editor of *Himal* magazine in Kathmandu Valley. This revised and updated Fourth Edition includes the original reports and photographs by Toni Hagen; at the same time, it brings the reader abreast with the changes the country has witnessed and the ideas that have evolved over the decades. An impressive amount of new information is collected in this edition, including up-to-date data and discussion on matters as diverse as history, development, tourism, agriculture, geography, ethnography, and the process of modernisation. The book ends with an essay looking ahead, maintaining that the country still has the potential to deliver a fine quality of life to its population.

The earlier editions of *Nepal* helped define Nepal to the world for the last four decades. The 1998 updated and revised edition will continue to do so for many years hence.

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Still in denial

Himal must be congratulated for having the journalistic courage to print frank articles like John Frederick's about sex trafficking (October 1998). We have heard voices objecting. Objecting not to the sorry state of affairs, but objecting to its being made public. They say that this will reflect poorly on the reputation of the country!

Where do these people live? This reputation has already been damaged by the denial of the problem. Further decline can be avoided only by addressing the problem head-on. Just as alcoholics can only be healed if they admit to their dependency, it must be admitted that the sex trafficking problem exists before the healing can begin.

*Kurt and Pamela Meyer
Los Angeles*



not get a share of it.

Another hypocritical issue is the proclamation that this verdict will unleash 'Western-style promiscuity'. It implies that men, knowing that sex does not mean marriage, will have rampant sex. It takes two to tango, otherwise the sex act is called rape. Educating women about the SC's verdict and its implications would certainly be a

lot more productive and beneficial to women's rights than the existing system that denies females a fair go in life.

Even in this day and age, men are reluctant to share the sole right they have to parental property; women only have the privilege of taking what their parents and brothers give them—a perpetual lower hand.

Perhaps if women owned more property, they could make more decisions themselves instead of always relying on their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons to decide what is good and what is bad for them.

*Jyoti Thapa
Melbourne*

When bulls fight

Last summer, I, as a Nepali, was pleased, even proud, that two South Asian countries, India and Pakistan had the knowledge, skill and discipline to conduct nuclear tests successfully. This misplaced pride was mainly because I perceived the hypocrisy of countries such as USA and Japan. I did not think that the US, the only country to have actually used the atom bomb and which continues to maintain a large stockpile of nuclear weapons, had any moral right to criticise India and Pakistan. Japan's displeasure is understandable, but its stance is similar to the Buddhist priests who preach against the killing of animals yet at the same time eat meat; even as Japan speaks out against nuclear weapons, it readily accepts the protection of the American nuclear arsenal.

All the same, I was also worried of the possible effects any subcontinental or trans-Himalayan nuclear war or accident would have on this region. Should there be an atmospheric nuclear explosion in northern India or Pakistan, radioactive matter carried by westerly winds would settle on the Himalaya and the Tibetan plateau, the source

Male chauvinism

With reference to "Sex and marriage in Nepal" (September 1998), it seems to me that the male journalists fanning the flames of fear induced by the Supreme Court judgement can only be protecting their own rights. Their self-proclaimed concern about the jeopardy to the rights of women living in *de facto* marriages smacks of selfishness and chauvinism. Why can't they just be honest and confess that what they are really scared of is the idea of women obtaining power through property rights?

Nepali men's primary fear seems to be their sisters' laying claim to parental property. The fact that their wives may compensate for any loss in property since they, too, will have property rights is irrelevant because a man's pride does not allow him to see his wife's property in the same light as his own *purkhyauli sampatti* (ancestral property). Hence the move to ensure that his sisters do



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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside

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

John Collee
The London Observer



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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of the major rivers of Tibet, China, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Nuclear radiation does not respect political boundaries.

It is said that when two hulls fight, they do not care about the destruction they cause. Humans are more destructive than hulls but arguably more intelligent also. However, the big powers are either incapable or are unwilling to reflect on the catastrophic and long-lasting damage a nuclear war would have on their neighbours. After all, diplomacy and wars are about self-interest, not altruism.

The Indian establishment, for all its moral posturing, has turned out to be no better than the members of the 'disarmed' circle of nuclear powers. Certainly, there are Indians (and Pakistanis) who oppose the nuclearisation of the Subcontinent and who have protested publicly. Many have written well-argued and perceptive articles denouncing the tests and all that they imply as can be seen in the contributions published in *Himal* in the past few months, including the most recent

one by Amitav Ghosh (November 1998). But these reflections are only about India and Pakistan, and to some extent, China and the West. Little has been written on the effects of the subcontinental (and trans-Himalayan) nuclearisation on Nepal and other countries. This is extremely worrying.

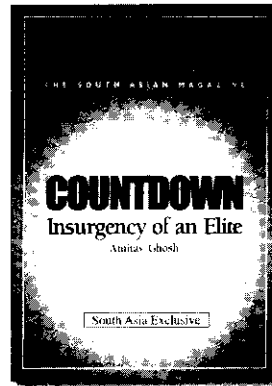
Amitav Ghosh has persuasively argued that the targets the Subcontinent's rulers have in mind (in developing nuclear weapons) are their own people. By keeping quiet on the dangers to the neighbouring countries, the intellectuals participate, perhaps unwillingly and unknowingly, with the rulers they criticise, in the war against the dominated.

I had expected a more sensitive and imaginative response from Indian intellectuals, who have some of the finest brains in the world. But Indians, no matter what their

ideology is, do not want to dialogue with Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, or even Bangladesh. They would like to talk to China, whom they fear and envy, and perhaps with their twin, Pakistan, whom they would lecture to rather than converse with. Most of all, they would like to be engaged in conversation with the West as equals. This is why India is trapped in the structures of discourse and ways of thinking dominated mainly by the West.

There is an urgent need for us South Asians to initiate a dialogue among ourselves as equals, to discuss the effects of nuclear explosions on all the countries of the region and beyond and to think of strategies which will help us break away from the dominant structures of discourse and ways of thinking.

Rajendra Pradhan
Kathmandu



TIBET

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BANGLADESH

TRY THEM ALL

IT IS no secret that what has kept Sheikh Hasina going all these years was an uncompromising desire for revenge. All members of her immediate family, except her sister, Rehana, with whom she was on a tour abroad, were killed on 15 August 1975. While her sister stayed away from politics, Sheikh Hasina returned to Bangladesh in 1980 to take over her father's party, the Awami League. And she never gave up her mission to try the killers.

A few of them had actually confessed to the killings. Part of their bravado lay in the fact they were protected by an Indemnity Ordinance promulgated in 1975, which was later incorporated into the constitution through an amendment. It was believed a two-third majority would be required to repeal the amendment, but Awami League lawyers successfully challenged the case in the Supreme Court after

the party came to power in 1996 and a simple majority proved enough to remove the constitutional security blanket against the trial.

Most of the accused had left the country almost immediately after Sheikh Hasina won the elections, but

there were some who could not or did not. After two years of trial, on 8 November 1998, the District and Sessions Judge sentenced 15 army officers of various ranks to death by firing squad, and if the criminal code did not allow for that, to be hanged to death.

Sheikh Hasina had triumphed in the end. She never wavered once in her objective, proving once again that South Asian women who enter politics have more steel in them than most of their male counterparts. It was an emotional moment when, while talking to the press, she choked upon recalling the death by bullet of her youngest brother Sheikh Russell (named after the British philosopher Bertrand Russell), who would have been 32 years old now if he had survived the massacre on that fateful day in 1975.

When Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was killed, the country was under a one-party rule. The way in which Sheikh Mujib died was dread-

ful, but there were many who were also glad to once again have a multi-party, multi-option society. The right to disagree without the fear of being punished has proved to be an option without which socio-political constructs can't develop.

Having said that, we can't forget that the situation in Bangladesh seems to defy improvement. The country is in such a bad shape that it needs foreign aid to help it learn to manage governance. When governance becomes a foreign-funded, bureaucracy-driven project monitored by a section in a ministry, one must ask if money alone can inspire politicians to learn. It also automatically means that Bangladesh didn't know better before and that includes all previous regimes—that of Mujib, Zia and Ershad. That is a harsh statement, but nevertheless a true one in donor-driven Bangladesh. That is why lessons need to be learnt from the trial and the people's response to it.

The fact that almost everyone in Bangladesh welcomed the verdict means people don't want a system in which laws are flouted. It also means they want criminals, political or otherwise, to be tried. And that doesn't only mean criminals who commit murder but those involved in corruption as well.

It took a daughter's determination and political and legal authority to try a cluster of killers. But so far no politician has been convicted of corruption. Just as people don't approve of killing, they don't like corruption either. By passing judgement on a nearly quarter-century-old crime, a faint glimmer of rule of law and accountability has been established.

If former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia ever comes to power again, she may also try the killers of her husband, Gen Ziaur Rahman. And that too will be as much welcomed by the people. But the leaders will be misled if they think that the people's interest is focussed on the victims only. The fact is they are welcoming the process of trying and punishing the guilty.

That is why Sheikh Hasina should continue with such trials. She should herself reach out and try the killers of Gen Ziaur Rahman. She should examine other cases as well, including the hanging by the Zia regime of Col Taher, the liberation war hero whose insurrection propelled Gen Zia to power. She should also initiate an investigation to find out if the police killing of Maoist leader Shiraj Shikdar in 1974 (see *Himal Sep/Oct 1997*) was carried out extra-judicially.

Not every killing which awaits justice can be as zealously pursued as was Sheikh Mujib's. By trying the killers of her father, it has now



The accused being taken to jail after the hearing.

become Sheikh Hasina's sacrosanct duty to try all killers.

SRI LANKA

BUGLE CALL

FOR THE past two months the Sri Lankan government, using the state media, has been trying to pull off the impossible. They have been projecting the terrible losses suffered by the army at Kilinochchi, on the road to Jaffna where an estimated 1500 or more soldiers perished in September, as a relatively small price to pay for the capture of Mankulam, also on the road to Jaffna though at a more southward point. One justification provided was that, in percentage terms, the LTTE had lost far more than the army.

The Sri Lankan media has been forced to put up with censorship by the military for the past seven months. The country has known censorship before, but it had mostly been for partisan political purposes and never before have the armed forces been the censors. At one level, what censorship has done is help the government lull the Sri Lankans' sense of outrage and transport them to a fantasy land where defeat is victory, and where the dead are not "dead" but "missing".

These propagandistic accounts are beginning to have an impact, but not in the way the government would want it. Can the situation be really so bad? Would the government lie so blatantly? The censorship of news coupled with government propaganda has caused doubts to rise. This is true mainly for people living in the cities, as, unlike their rural counterparts, most of them do not have relatives at the northern front, nor do they have access to the informal network of news-gathering of the villages.

Indeed, one morning, an irate ex-soldier called to complain about a story he had just heard on the state radio. According to the news item, the army's top brass had just been awarded the country's highest military awards. Sounding very bitter, he said the government must be living in a world of fantasy. The worst-ever military defeat had taken place only two weeks ago at Kilinochchi, and there were thousands of weeping families across the length and breadth of the country. And here, ridiculously enough, the officers were being decorated with medallions...

There are other signs as well of the road to doom that Sri Lanka is taking. The passage

of the SLR 12 billion (USD 180 million) supplement to the already huge defence budget was an event of major consequence, especially at this time of economic downturn. This amount exceeds the entire budget for health, but it was approved by the parliament with hardly any debate. If not for some columnists who wrote of this increase, it might not even have been known. But no one complained. Who wants to begrudge the soldiers at the front the money anyway?

The indefinite postponement of the provincial council elections two months ago was another significant event, justified once again on the grounds of military necessity. And true to the trend, the public accepted the postponement without much debate. While the silence on the part of the citizenry can be attributed to the fact that they do not wish the massive sacrifices of the soldiers to be compromised, it is disturbing that, in the process, democratic norms are being steadily eroded.

The absence of effective democracy and civilian rule in the northeast has not been contested (and for good reason, many will say, pointing to the presence of the LTTE). The military has been the *de facto* ruler in these parts for some time now. If anyone had had any doubts on that count, by November those doubts were cleared when the government appointed a recently retired army general to the governor's post in the northeast province. What's particularly disturbing is that not only the northeast, but also the south is coming under the increasing influence of the defence establishment. The country's priorities and resources, it seems, are going the military way.

The military setbacks may make immediate elections unattractive to the government. But the fact is the government is fast approaching a crossroads where it will have to choose between rule by parliament or rule that is ultimately determined by the defence establishment. Any further postponement of elections will be a clear signal of the direction in which the country is set to travel.

-Jehan Perera

PAKISTAN

MORE THAN A NAME

WHEN, ON 17 November, a 'private members' day', the leader of the small opposition, Saeed Manhais, stood up to speak in the ma-

jestic colonial building of the Punjab Assembly in Lahore, those in the galleries expected a strong tirade against the government over issues such as rising inflation, rampant lawlessness and a spree of extra-judicial murders by the police. Instead, the honourable member moved a resolution to change the name of Rabwa, a sleepy town of 50,000 located some 150 km south-west of Lahore. "In the opinion of this house, the name of Rabwa should be changed to 'Chak Dhaggian' or any other name," went the resolution. And in an unparalleled show of solidarity, the move was unanimously adopted by all 76 legislators present in the House. The only objection came from a minister who said that Chak Dhaggian was not a proper name, so a committee was formed to find another one.

The move came as a rude surprise to residents of Rabwa who came to know of it only the next day through news reports. They had no idea a change was being considered, and indeed the arbitrary decision was intended only to provide sadistic pleasure to the country's small but powerful religious lobby. That is because nearly everyone in Rabwa belong to the Ahmadiya community, the religious sect that was declared a non-Muslim minority by parliamentary act in 1974.

Most of the people of Rabwa migrated from the Indian Punjab town of Qadian during the Partition in 1947. Qadian is the birthplace of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, considered by the Ahmadiyas to be the Messiah promised in many holy books of Islam, including the *Qur'an*. When Mirza Ahmad proclaimed himself the new prophet of Islam towards the end of the 19th century, many religious scholars had denounced him and his followers for blasphemy, saying that there was no place for a new prophet in Islam. For their part, Ahmadiyas continue to insist that Mirza Ahmad's position is in accordance with the scriptures.

Most Ahmadiyas living in present-day India decided to move to Pakistan after independence. Though they settled in different parts of the country, those coming from Qadian decided to live at one place and create a new centre for the community. For this the Central Ahmadiya Organisation bought some 11,000 acres of barren land and named it Rabwa, a word from the *Qur'an* which means high and fertile place. As the seat of the community leader, called Khalifa by the Ahmadiyas, Rabwa soon became the new Qadian in Pakistan, a focal point for the Ahmadiya community, which claims a membership of three to four million in Pakistan alone.

Ahmadiyas had actively participated in the formation of Pakistan. The first foreign minister of the country, Chaudhry Zafarullah Khan, was an Ahmadiya. (So was Pakistan's only Nobel laureate, the late Abdus Salam.) But contrary to their expectations, Ahmadiyas soon became religious pariahs in Pakistan. The movement, at times violent, to declare Ahmadiyas non-Muslim started in the early fifties, but successive governments stood firm against the mullahs.

It took the first elected prime minister of Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, to bow to the religious lobby and sacrifice the Ahmadiyas. Through the Second Amendment to the 1973 constitution Ahmadiyas were declared non-Muslim. "Qadianis, or who call themselves Ahmadiyas, are not Muslim only for the purposes of constitution and law," declared the amendment. In 1984, Gen Zia-ul Haq took the matter to even more absurd heights and through ordinance disallowed Ahmadiyas from calling their places of worship mosques and from using certain specific symbols of Islam.

Their calling themselves Muslim was made a criminal offence punishable by two years in prison. Even quoting a line from the *Qur'an* on invitation cards could land an Ahmadiya in jail. The ordinance was given constitutional status with the 8th Amendment to the Constitution in 1986, which started a whole new chapter in the persecution of Ahmadiyas. Their present leader, or Khalifa, Mirza Tahir Ahmad, fled the country the same year.

Ahmadiyas are probably the most persecuted community in Pakistan. Dozens of Ahmadiyas have so far been murdered by religious zealots and hundreds have been put behind bars under the country's 'blasphemy laws'. When it comes to Ahmadiyas, so complete is religious apartheid that all Muslims, while getting official documents like the national identity card and the passport or getting registered as a voter has to declare that they are not Ahmadiyas and do not consider Mirza Ahmad a prophet or a reformer. As a result, Ahmadiyas have been disenfranchised. There is not a single Ahmadiya representative in Parliament or any of the provincial legislatures. What is even worse, the media and human rights groups often choose to remain silent on the issue of their persecution for fear of a backlash from the religious groups. For even a supporter for the human rights of Ahmadiyas can be dubbed an Ahmadiya, perhaps the most dangerous label to carry in Pakistan.

Going back to the re-naming of Rabwa, Ghalib Ahmad, a spokesperson for the

Ahmadiya community argued, "Rabwa is private property. How absurd it is that we can't even name our own property and that too a name which is not controversial and which doesn't hurt anyone's feelings."

But there is more in the attempt to change the name than is obvious; it shows a deeper malaise in the society. As the English daily, *Dawn*, noted: "The idea of changing the name is an example of our tendency to get passionately involved with non-issues and to recklessly drive our people deeper into mire of bigotry and sectarianism. It also shows how the majority feels threatened by such insignificant symbols of minority cohesiveness as the name of a place."

-Zaigham Khan

NEPAL

RADICAL CHEEK

SINCE 13 February 1996, when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) launched their 'People's War' in the districts of Rolpa and Rukum in the mid-western hills of Nepal, the insurgency has spread to nearly a third of the 75 administrative units of the country. Maoist violence has come as close as to districts adjoining the capital, Kathmandu. Statistics of lives lost during this period varies between about 200 and 2000. However, neither the Maoists nor the government has been able to achieve anything to justify such high casualties.

The Maoists are led by two Brahmins—Pushpa Kamal Dahal alias Comrade Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai. Not much is known about Comrade Prachanda except for his background as a student activist during the late seventies when college campuses in Nepal bristled with foreign agents of all possible hues. But Bhattarai, an alumnus of the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi, was a high-profile Kathmandu academician with plum consultancy assignments before he went underground three years ago. He has his family safely tucked away in England while he enunciates his interpretation of Maoist ideology through party-funded newspapers in the capital. For a while, he even had a home page on the internet from his underground hideout when such a facility was more of a rarity. These two gentlemen of priestly class have everything to gain and nothing to lose, not even their reputations, no matter who wins the People's War.



Nothing to lose:
Comrade Prachanda
and Baburam
Bhattarai.

The government does not appear worried. Contrary to claims, no sophisticated weapons have been recovered from the Maoists from anywhere in the country. The insurgents appear to command little support and even less respect in a society mired in religious orthodoxy and an ingrained fatalism. They also appear to be resource-starved, apparent from actions like looting the wages of workers from a rural road project. On the other hand, the government has almost total control over the carrots—amnesty, incentives, offices, opportunities—and wields a huge stick in the form of a relatively large police force. Just as the Maoist leadership wants to prolong the confrontation, the government too can afford to wait and test its resilience.

While each side waits for the other to blink, the real losers are the people caught in the crossfire. The secretary general of the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist), a minority partner in the government, has claimed that more than 300 people were killed in a recent police operation against Maoists. Development works have come to a standstill in the affected areas. Donor agencies have withdrawn projects, and embassies have issued advisories against travelling in these areas. Even the allocated budgets have remain unused as the local government units had not been formed until recently due to Maoist threats and government employees did all they could do to stay away from their postings in the affected districts.

The money set aside for a special development programme in these impoverished districts for the current fiscal year is a paltry NPR 80 million (USD 1.2 million). But even so, the institutional arrangements to utilise the money are yet to be worked out—months after the announcement of the package. The hills continue to burn even as the fire of insurgency has begun to spread to the southern Tarai plains districts adjoining India.

In the aftermath of the much-vaunted police operation, the Maoists appeared to have gone into hibernation and the police had started to gloat over their apparent success.

With the onset of winter, however, the insurgency has begun heating up again. Maoists have started their 'Base Area Preparation Campaign' and the police have struck back with equal ferocity. An escalation is likely.

Meanwhile, the intelligentsia and other elites of Kathmandu Valley are indignant at this disturbance to their merry money-making and blame the government for being insensitive, incompetent and brutal, all in one breath. The national media comments on Maoist-related casualty figures with the nonchalance of reporting cricket scores. The government damages itself as it fights an enemy it cannot see, while Maoists are killed by the score in their quest for a communist republic in an inhospitable social reality. This war, if it can be called one, shall continue to produce losers all around.

The first move in search of solutions has to be made by the government. Local elections, despite limited participation, have been a step in the right direction. Emergency relief measures in the form of small, village-based, labour-intensive development projects need to be initiated without further delay. The offer of amnesty has to be implemented, and implemented in good faith. The police deployed in these areas need to be given special orientation to cope with the dangerous levels of job stress. The government needs to acquire credibility by prosecuting not only Maoists, but also various other offenders who have been getting away with a lot under the guise of being police informers. Awareness levels need to be raised by leaders of political parties visiting the affected villages. These solutions are simple to the point of being simplistic and are unlikely to end the confrontation in a day, but the other option, bullets, is as uncertain a solution.

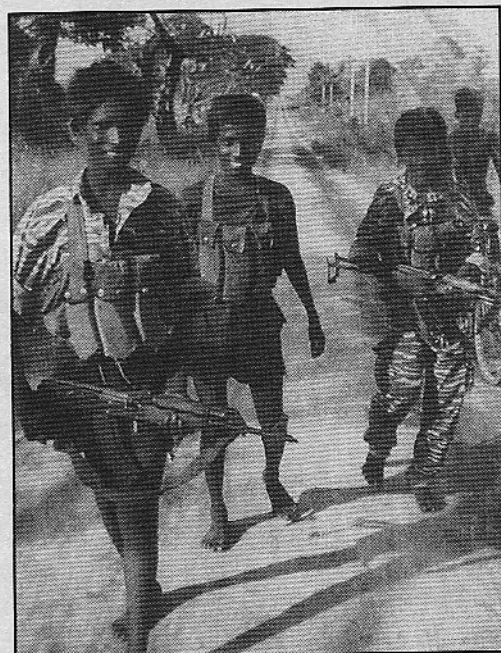
Maoist cadres need to realise the futility of an armed confrontation in a democracy where politics permits alternative solutions to the permanent problems of society. Their leadership may consist of hounds too old to learn new tricks, but there is simply no escaping the reality that retreating into the jungles after hacking a few 'class enemies' can never deter an elite steeped in the culture of exploitation.

Going for broke when it's the establishment that holds all the aces is not heroic, it's suicide, a moral surrender. Social struggle through political competition to fight the common enemy of poverty, ignorance, unemployment and discrimination is still an option that deserves another chance both from the government and the Maoists. Δ

-C.K. Lal

SRI LANKA

KID STUFF



Tamil cubs.

THERE IS no doubt that children are great fighters. They are easy to indoctrinate and will follow blindly where their heroes lead. When children fight in a war, it is a sign of the complete breakdown of all things moral. Children in armed combat are clearly vulnerable to manipulation by adult soldiers and commanders. They often resort to joining the battle not because of a burning desire to serve the cause, but because they have few other options.

Some weeks ago, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar issued a severe rebuke to the Director of UNICEF in Sri Lanka. UNICEF, the only UN organisation dedicated exclusively to children, has a great track record, and a web page that says that "recruiting children into armed forces or sending them into combat situations of any kind should be considered a war crime by the proposed international criminal court".

What occasioned the dressing down from the foreign minister? After the recent battle of Kilinochchi, 26 fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) surrendered their arms. Many of them were under 15. Article 38 of the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC) states that children under 15 should not be used in war. (The international community is now, albeit somewhat late in the day, advocating an Optional Protocol to raise the

legal age for war to 18.) In employing child soldiers, the LTTE had clearly violated children's rights and the Sri Lankan government wanted this to be obvious to everyone. But UNICEF refused to issue an official statement condemning the LTTE's actions.

UNICEF has many roles to play in Sri Lanka at the moment. One of the most important is ensuring that food, basic health care and essential supplies get to the about 300,000 children who live in LTTE-controlled areas like the Vanni jungles. UNICEF did not issue a condemnatory statement because it needs to maintain open lines of communication with the LTTE so that supplies for children, both soldiers and students, can get through.

Olara Otunnu, the United Nations Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict visited Colombo three months ago, and brokered some commitments between the government and the LTTE. These concerned access to humanitarian supplies, return of displaced persons and the recruitment of child soldiers. The LTTE gave their commitment not to use children under 18 as soldiers, and not to recruit into their forces those who were under 17. They also agreed to a small but important caveat: as a way to identify any violation of the three commitments, a monitoring framework would be set up, to which the government also agreed. However, no one has yet put the crucial mechanism in place.

Now, faced with the evidence of the LTTE's violation of the commitment it made, Colombo can't seem to decide who was responsible for the monitoring. The LTTE could hardly have coordinated it from the deep

jungles in which they hide. The UN could have come up with a monitoring process, but the government is pretty touchy about what it perceives as "undue interference" by international aid agencies. As the sovereign entity in the negotiation process, the government is responsible for coordinating monitoring efforts. Of course, had the government tried to monitor the commitments themselves, the mechanism would no longer have remained completely neutral. The UN might then have had to step in anyhow.

Guerilla warfare by definition is a hidden war. Whoever monitors the LTTE's commitments is hardly likely to be able to conduct troop inspections every morning and send under-age cadets home. As there is no way the LTTE's commitments can be monitored, why is UNICEF so afraid that issuing a strong statement would provoke the LTTE and deny them access to the 300,000-plus needy children that they want to help? Surely the LTTE would want all children (turned soldier or not) living under its hattle-torn jurisdiction to have food and clothing?

UNICEF is a high-profile organisation and its actions speak loudly. If UNICEF were to publicly condemn the use of child soldiers by the LTTE, it may dawn on the LTTE's top fundraisers in the West that the organisation on whose behalf they canvass does not act within international conventions. It would not have been without precedent, as UNICEF has extricated children from combat and assisted demobilised child soldiers in both Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

-Aruni John

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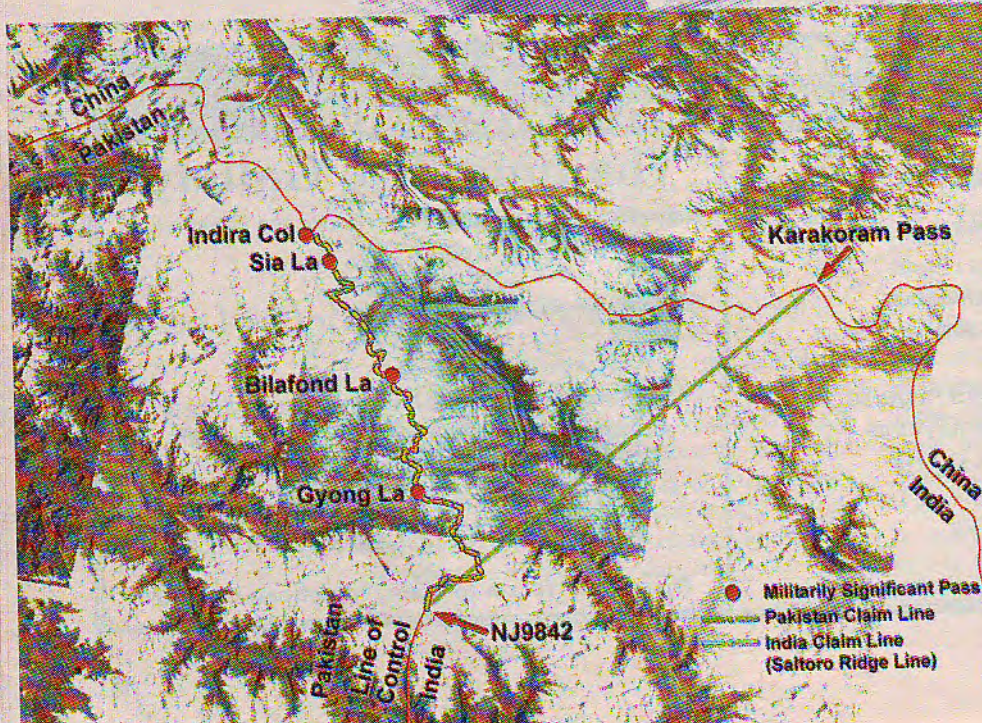
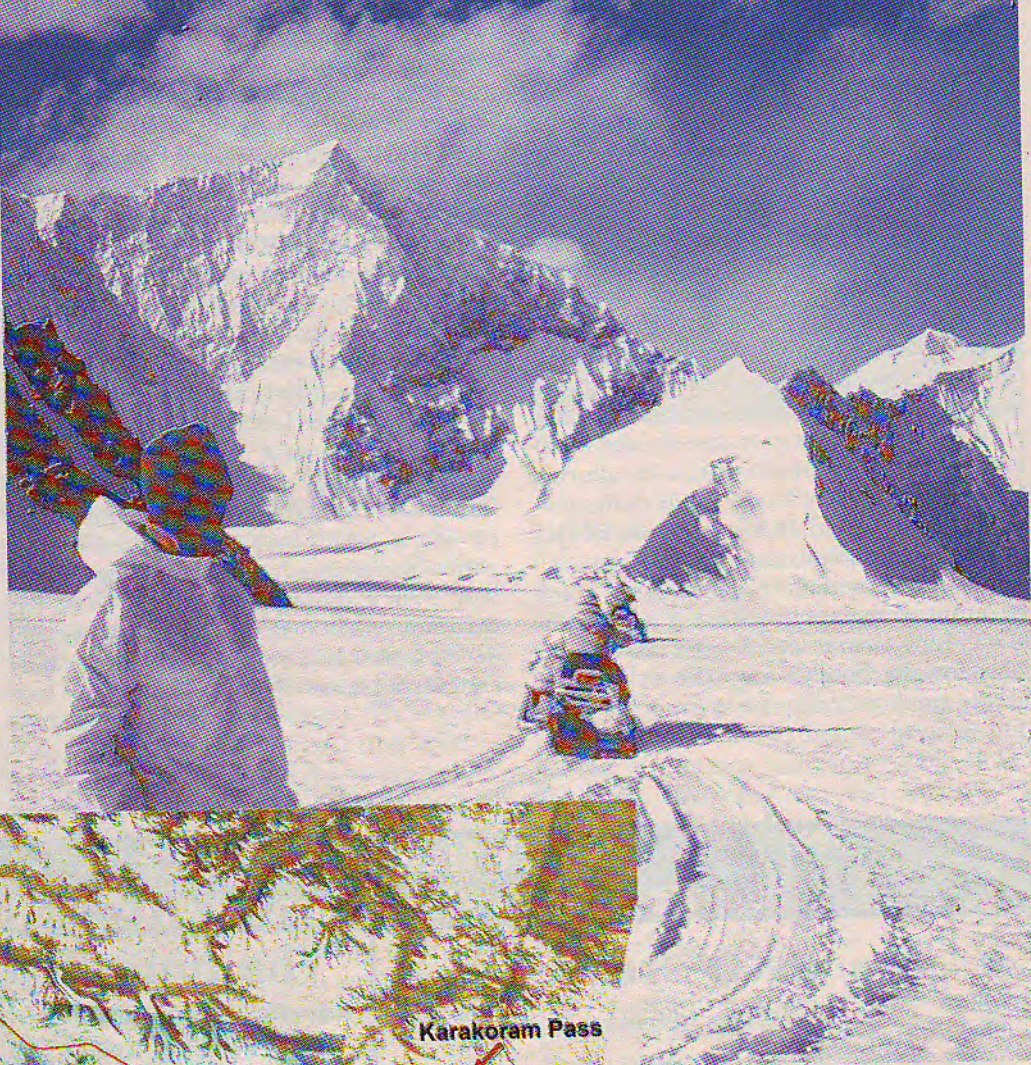
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Frozen Frontline

by Samina Ahmed and Varun Sabni



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HARSH KARNIA

Since 13 April 1984, Indian and Pakistani troops have confronted each other, eyeball to eyeball, for control of the Siachen Glacier and its approaches in the eastern Karakoram mountain range, adjacent to the borders of India, Pakistan and China. The conflict has resulted in hundreds of casualties, caused more by adverse climatic conditions and harsh terrain than the occasional military skirmish.

This is by far the longest-running armed conflict between two regular armies in the 20th century. However, this is not a declared war. India and Pakistan continue to maintain full diplomatic relations with each other, and have many other ties, including economic and academic. Neither is this a conventional conflict: although both armies are conventionally armed, weather, altitude, and terrain make this uninhabitable region an unlikely zone of armed strife.

The Siachen Glacier is one of the most inhospitable and glaciated regions in the world. Sliding down a valley in the Karakoram Range, the glacier is 76 km long and varies in width between 2 and 8 km. It receives 6 to 7 m of the annual total of 10 m of snow in winter alone. Blizzards can reach speeds up to 150 knots (nearly 300 km per hour). The temperature routinely drops to 40 degrees Celsius below zero, and even lower with the wind chill factor. For these reasons, the Siachen Glacier has been called the "Third Pole".

This epithet, however, is misleading as it focuses solely on the adverse weather conditions and completely ignores the deleterious impact of altitude and terrain. The high altitude compounds the severity of the bitter climatic conditions. Base camp for Indian forces is 12,000 feet above sea level. The altitude of some Indian forward bases on the Saltoro Ridge ranges from Kumar (16,000 feet) and Bila Top (18,600 feet) to Pahalwan (20,000 feet) and Indira Col (22,000 feet). Because of the steep gradient of the Saltoro Range, the area is also prone to avalanches. These adverse conditions have direct consequences: since the war began, only 3 percent of the Indian casualties have been caused by hostile firing. The remaining 97 percent have fallen prey to the altitude, weather, and terrain.

Pakistani combat casualties are equally low because troops are dug in, artillery fire over mountain peaks is generally inaccurate (as winds are erratic and difficult to predict in such terrains), and infantry assaults are seldom made in the harsh climate and difficult terrain. As with the Indians, most Pakistani casualties occur because of the climate, terrain, and altitude. Pakistani positions are, for

the most part, at altitudes lower than the Indian ones, ranging between 9000 and 15,000 feet, although some, such as Conway Saddle (17,200 feet), which controls ingress to the glacier, are much higher. On the other hand, glaciers at the Pakistani frontlines begin at 9440 feet and Pakistani troops are stationed on steep slopes, exposed to harsh weather.

The fight for the Siachen Glacier involves territory claimed by both states but controlled by neither until the mid-1980s. The origins of this armed conflict lie in the India-Pakistan dispute over the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1948, following an inconclusive war, the areas of the disputed state that fell under Pakistan comprised of the Northern Areas (Baltistan and Gilgit Agency) and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, while India controlled two-thirds of the territory including Jammu, Ladakh, and the valley of Kashmir.

A cease-fire line (CFL) was established as a result of the 1949 India-Pakistan agreement that concluded the war in Kashmir. The CFL ran along the international India-Pakistan border and then north and northeast until map grid-point NJ 9842, located near the Shyok River at the base of the Saltoro mountain range. Because no Indian or Pakistani troops were present in the geographically inhospitable northeastern areas beyond NJ 9842, the CFL was not delineated as far as the Chinese border. Both sides agreed, in the vague language that lies at the root of the Siachen dispute, that the CFL extended to the terminal point, NJ 9842, and "thence north to the glaciers".

After the 1965 India-Pakistan war, the Tashkent agreement resulted in troop withdrawals to positions along the 1949 CFL. No attempt was made to extend the CFL further. Following Pakistan's defeat in the 1971 war, the Shimla Agreement of 1972 established a new Line of Control (LOC) as a result of the cease-fire of December 1971. The Siachen Glacier region, where no fighting had taken place, was left undelineated, and again nothing was done to clarify the position of the LOC beyond NJ 9842. The LOC was merely described as moving from Nerlin (inclusive to India), Brilman (inclusive to Pakistan), up to Chorbat La in the Turtok sector. "From there the line of control runs northeastwards to Thang (inclusive to India) thence eastwards joining the glaciers."

Since the Siachen Glacier region falls within the undelineated territory beyond the last defined section of the LOC, map grid-point NJ 9842, Indian and Pakistani territorial claims are based on their respective interpretations of the vague language contained in the

1949 and 1972 agreements. Pakistan draws a straight line in a northeasterly direction from NJ 9842 up to the Karakoram Pass, while India's line of claim moves north-northwest from NJ 9842 along the watershed line of the Saltoro Range, a southern offshoot of the Karakoram.

Eyeball to eyeball

Any attempt to analyse the Siachen dispute and identify potential opportunities and mechanisms for its resolution involves not only mapping the geographical dimension but also mapping the policy terrain of the two disputant states. A look at Indian and Pakistani perceptions is equally essential since these shape policies and preferences in both countries.

For India, the Siachen Glacier is the wedge of territory that separates "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir" from Aksai Chin, that part of Kashmir claimed and occupied by China. Siachen's geostrategic importance lies in the fact that its control would support India's defence of Ladakh, Jammu, and Kashmir against Pakistani and/or Chinese threats. It would prevent the outflanking of Indian forces in the Leh and Kargil sectors and connecting the Aksai Chin highway with the Karakoram pass. Control over Siachen would enable India to keep watch over the Karakoram Highway and the Khunjerab Pass, while fortifying its position in border negotiations with China.

Controlling the commanding heights is crucial for India. Its significance stems from basic infantry strategy: height confers a tactical advantage. Except at Gyong La, Indian forces occupy and control the commanding heights, and Pakistani military efforts since 1984 have been aimed at dislodging them from these positions. This strategy puts Pakistan at a distinct disadvantage as Pakistani forces have to carry the assault up steep terrain to the Indians, who have the much easier military task of sitting tight and defending their positions.

But as long as Pakistan does not commit its forces to an offensive against the Indian positions, it is the Indians who are at the disadvantage of being deployed at much higher altitudes. The Pakistani military has easier land access to its posts as roads and tracks have been brought up to Pakistan's lower base camps over the years. On the other hand, in order to block Pakistan's access to the Siachen Glacier, India has no option but to maintain

its hazardous posts on the Saltoro Ridge, thereby exposing its forces to dangerous altitudes, weather, and terrain. India's strategy is also extremely expensive in financial terms: most of the Indian pickets and posts on the Saltoro Ridge are maintained by air. Personnel, weapons, ammunition, fuel, and food are usually flown in by helicopter, and occasionally para-dropped.

Despite India's declared position on the Siachen dispute, there are different perspectives, concerns, and objectives in the Indian policy community. Three are readily discernible: a) maintaining the deployment on Siachen at all costs, b) negotiating a military disengagement with Pakistan, and c) withdrawing Indian forces from the glacier, unilaterally if necessary.

The advocates of a negotiated or unilateral Indian withdrawal base their position on several arguments. They argue that the disputed region is uninhabitable, and therefore has no strategic value. Some believe that a Siachen settlement could be the first step in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute. Others argue that the Kashmir and Siachen disputes can be unlinked, and that Siachen can



be resolved without compromising on Kashmir. They hold that the Saltoro Range is a killing field and that the much higher altitude of the Indian posts exacerbates India's problems. There is also the opinion that the financial costs of India's Siachen operations represent a huge waste of much-needed resources. Most important of all is the feeling that the Siachen conflict is a cruel, costly, and unnecessary war that must be brought to an end.

Views like these are valid, but they do not represent the predominant Indian perspective on Siachen. Indeed, the very fact that the advocates of withdrawal are already convinced that a resolution of the conflict is desirable and possible makes them less important than that section of opinion that opposes withdrawal but would consider a compromise provided certain conditions are met.

Subtle distinctions are important among Indian analysts and policy-makers who oppose a withdrawal of Indian forces from their current deployment on the Saltoro Range. Some are convinced that India must hold on to Siachen at all costs. They argue that Pakistan is conducting a highly successful low-cost proxy war in Kashmir, at considerable

cost to India. The only theatre in which India is able to pay Pakistan back in its own coin is on the Siachen Glacier itself, where India has a distinct tactical advantage. No matter what the cost, India must therefore stand firm. Any compromise on Siachen would relieve the pressure on Pakistan in the one place where it really hurts and would thus be tantamount to falling into a Pakistani trap.

Another hardline position is that India must not withdraw from Siachen because its occupation represents a major military victory for India. India won the race for the glacier, and now controls the commanding heights on the Saltoro Range. Over the last 14 years, Pakistan has tried innumerable times to displace the Indian forces, and has always had to withdraw with severe casualties. India has had to do nothing but sit tight and periodically repel a Pakistani assault. Any Indian withdrawal will leave Pakistan with an open door to the heights. Pakistan would gain in negotiation what it has been unable to obtain on the battlefield. Whatever the cost, India must therefore stand firm and maintain its current deployments.

The viewpoints articulated above may ap-



Pakistani military mountaineers on Siachen.

pear equally hawkish, with neither willing to countenance an Indian withdrawal from the Saltoro heights. However, a closer look reveals significant differences between them. No agreement with Pakistan that involves an Indian withdrawal would ever satisfy the policy makers and analysts for whom the real value of Siachen is that it is a bleeding ground for Pakistan. In contrast, a resolution can be devised to meet the principal concerns of Indian policy-makers and analysts opposed to a Pakistani occupation of the Saltoro heights and Siachen following an Indian withdrawal.

The latter group would back a negotiated Indian withdrawal provided it was convinced that India could, with adequate warning, forestall any Pakistani attempt to move into positions vacated by India.

The key to an agreement on the Indian side would lie in convincing as many hardliners as possible within the Indian policy-making community that an Indian withdrawal would not be tantamount to handing Siachen over to Pakistan. This implies that the Indian army would have a major say, virtually amounting to a veto, on any Siachen agreement. In terms of Indian policy-making, the Siachen issue is thus extremely unusual, because ordinarily military institutions in India are firmly subordinate to civilian authority. However, the memory of defeat at the hands of China in 1962 is very much alive in India, and no politician or bureaucrat is likely to interfere in matters of professional military judgment.

Eyeball...

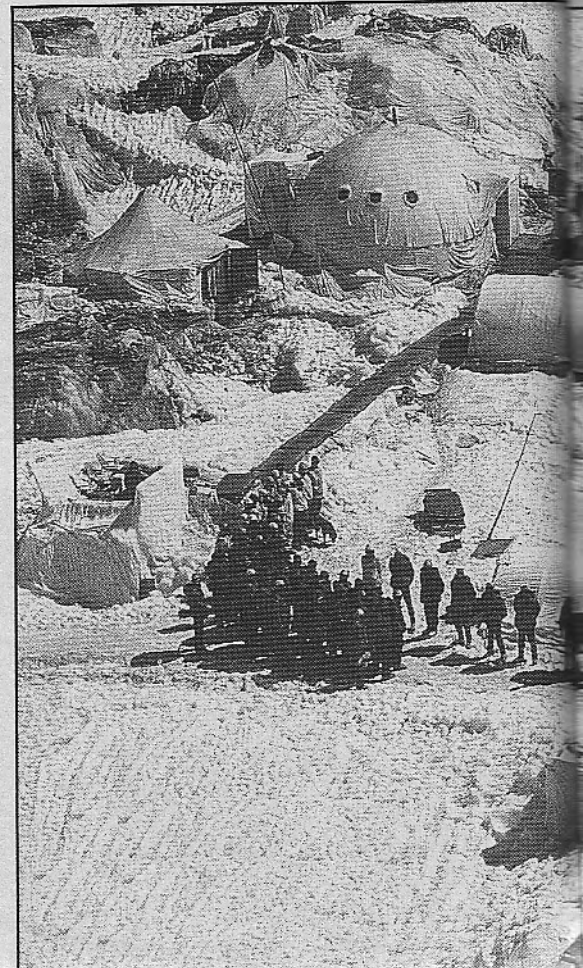
In Pakistan's perceptions, the Siachen dispute is relevant to the dispute with India over Kashmir, albeit indirectly. Pakistan claims that the Siachen Glacier and its approaches fall within the Pakistani-controlled and administered territory of Jammu and Kashmir, more specifically in the Baltistan district in the Northern Areas. The claim that Siachen is a part of Pakistan's Northern Areas is significant because Pakistan has, since independence, gradually incorporated the Northern Areas within the state, while maintaining that the Northern Areas were never under the direct jurisdiction of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in undivided India.

No steps have been taken, so far, to integrate the Northern Areas formally within Pakistan, but such a move cannot be ruled out in the future. The anomalous status of the Northern Areas provides Pakistan with the

justification, when the need arises, to separate the Siachen conflict from the larger dispute over Kashmir. Siachen is thus portrayed as a regional issue by Pakistani officials as opposed to Kashmir, which, it is stressed, is an international issue.

Although the dispute over the Siachen region is recognised as a by-product of Partition, because the area was left undelineated, all Pakistani governments have claimed permanent administrative control over this "sub-district" of Baltistan. They also claim that Pakistani administrative control has international recognition. For example, international mountaineering expeditions to the vicinity of the Siachen Glacier have obtained permission from Pakistani authorities since the 1950s. Cartographic international recognition for Pakistani territorial claims is also cited, including several international atlases that show the Siachen Glacier as lying well within the Pakistani-controlled portions of the LOC.

Pakistan admits, however, that its claims to administrative control did not translate into actual physical presence. No permanent posts were established due to the inhospitable terrain and harsh climatic conditions. Pakistan was willing to accept the territory as no-man's land until India deployed its forces in the Siachen area in 1984. By Pakistani percep-



tions, this violated the spirit of the Shimla agreement, which specified neither side would resort to the use of force to resolve bilateral disputes.

The primary objective of Pakistan's strategy has been to drive the cost of occupation high enough to force India to make concessions in any future settlement on Siachen. The declared policy in Pakistan is equally consistent. As the Siachen Glacier and its approaches are located within Baltistan, Pakistan will not accept the status quo on Siachen since it views India's military presence on the glacier and its environs as illegal.

However, Pakistani policy-makers have demonstrated a certain flexibility on the Siachen issue, unlike in the India-Pakistan dialogue on the larger dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan's refusal to negotiate its basic demand for a plebiscite on Kashmir contrasts sharply with its willingness to consider measures ranging from redeployment to demilitarisation regarding the Siachen dispute—a recognition that the Siachen dispute involves territory of little strategic value, but which drains funds, manpower, and military hardware.

It is clear that a unilateral Pakistani withdrawal can be ruled out because Indian forces control most of the glacier's territory, includ-

ing the high ground on two of its three major passes. There are three policy options before Pakistani decision-makers: a) to continue the armed conflict, b) to sign an agreement limited to conflict containment, or c) to reach a comprehensive and permanent settlement with India. The adoption of any of these options depends on the perceptions, preferences, and bargaining power of various sections of Pakistan's policy-making community.

Hardline elements, including influential segments within Pakistan's military establishment and civil bureaucracy, favour a continuation of the conflict because India is perceived as the aggressor. For this segment of Pakistani opinion, a negotiated settlement is regarded as an unnecessary concession. The military stalemate is seen as favouring Pakistan because neither side can claim to have ousted the other from the disputed territory. A more important motive for continuing the conflict is the desire to avenge the initial Pakistani military reverses by seeing India bleed through its comparatively higher human and financial costs.

More moderate elements within the political leadership as well as in the civil-military bureaucracies favour a negotiated settlement. But even among them, there are concerns, based on a history of mistrust, that In-



Helicopter supply lands on Indian side of Siachen.

- dia would attempt to use a settlement to
- legitimise its claim over the disputed area. Any agreement that alters the territorial status of the Siachen region to Pakistan's disadvantage would thus be opposed. This explains Pakistan's rejection of Indian proposals for authentication of actual ground positions prior to a withdrawal or the delineation of the Line of Control beyond NJ 9842 along existing ground positions in the Siachen region. There would, moreover, be considerable internal opposition to any settlement without adequate safeguards—political and technological—ensuring that the disputed region does not become vulnerable to Indian encroachments in the future.

...to eyeball

Continuous negotiations have been held to contain and resolve the conflict ever since the outbreak of hostilities. As early as 1984 and 1985, flag meetings were held, with little success, between Indian and Pakistani sector commanders. Since January 1986, several high-level talks have been held between Indian and Pakistani defence and foreign secretaries as well as senior military personnel.

In 1989, an understanding to resolve the dispute was reached. According to the joint statement at the end of the defence secretary-level talks, "There was agreement by both sides to work towards a comprehensive settlement, based on redeployment of forces to reduce the chances of conflict, avoidance of the use of force and the determination of future positions on the ground so as to conform with the Shimla Agreement and to ensure durable peace in the Siachen area."

The two countries also came close to a resolution in November 1992. At the sixth meeting of the series, an India-Pakistan agreement was reportedly reached that envisaged the mutual withdrawal of troops from key passes to new positions, and the creation of a "zone of complete disengagement" through troop disengagement and redeployment. The delineation of this area of "peace and tranquillity" would be "without prejudice" to the known position of either side. The agreement also reportedly included pledges by both states to refrain from reoccupying vacated positions.

No new positions would be occupied in the designated zone nor would any "activity"—"civilian or military"—be allowed within the designated zone. Time schedules for disengagement and redeployment were to

be worked out to the "mutual satisfaction" of both sides, followed by the formation of a joint commission that would be responsible for "delineation of the Line of Control beyond NJ 9842". Until the area was formally delineated, monitoring mechanisms would be devised to prevent the occurrence of violations. Apparently, either side could resort to "any means", including the use of force, in the event of a violation of these commitments.

The two countries, however, not only failed to implement these tentative agreements, but one or the other side denied that any tangible agreement had been reached on either occasion. The difficulty in reaching or implementing any mutually agreeable proposal was due to a number of factors, ranging from domestic political constraints to differences over the determination of redeployment positions, the demarcation of the proposed demilitarised zone, and ensuring the inviolability of such a zone. The significance of the understandings reached in 1989 and 1992 cannot, however, be understated since they identify potential areas of agreement and discord in any future agreement of the Siachen dispute.

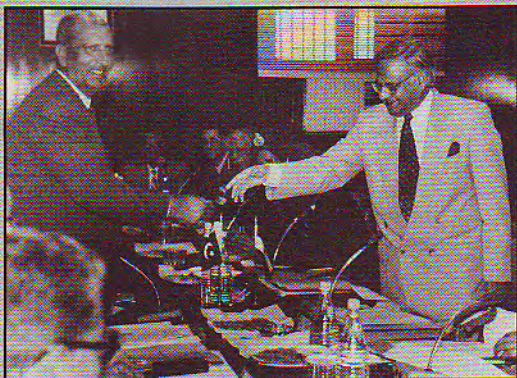
With the resumption of the India-Pakistani dialogue in 1997, the Siachen dispute is once again on the formal agenda of ongoing talks (*see facing page*). While the outcome of these negotiations depends on complex, intertwined, external and internal determinants, a future understanding of the dispute could take any of the following shapes: a) an accord to de-escalate hostilities, b) an understanding to disengage military forces, or c) an agreement to demilitarise the area.

This taxonomy does not imply that the three types of potential agreements would necessarily be reached in sequence or even in isolation from one another. Each type of agreement and its conflict management or conflict resolution features will depend on several broad principles or pre-conditions. Thus, levels of mutual trust and confidence and/or mutuality of interests will determine both the nature and the parameters of any potential agreement. Another important precondition is the degree of political will on the part of authoritative decision-makers to reach a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the dispute, including their demonstrated ability or desire to avoid intractable issues.

De-escalation. The primary objective of an accord to de-escalate would be to reduce the chances of conflict, while ending active hostilities in the Siachen Glacier region. Such an agreement would include several conflict-management mechanisms. The features of the

Icy relations

THE LATEST round of talks between Indian and Pakistani defence officials held between 5 and 13 November 1998 in New Delhi faltered over the disputed Siachen Glacier even as both sides continued to trade artillery fire that claimed the lives of 13 soldiers from the two countries in the week leading up to the talks.



All smiles before the talks: Gen Khan and Kumar.

After three hours of heated negotiations, Pakistan's defence secretary, Lt Gen (retd) Ifthikar Ali Khan, turned down his counterpart Ajit Kumar's offer of a cease-fire on the Siachen, demanding instead the implementation of a nine-year old proposal for military disengagement and the re-deployment of military forces.

Kumar said Pakistan's proposals were "strange and bizarre" as it wanted any cease-fire agreement monitored by a "third party", a proposal New Delhi strongly rejects in what it has been insisting is a bilateral dispute. The defence secretary said India's priority was to address the "existing ground reality" dominated by daily exchanges of fire and ambushes by Pakistani patrols on Indian pickets. He said India's proposed cease-fire would defuse the "atmosphere of confrontation" and in time could be followed by talks on disengagement and troop re-deployment.

For its part, Pakistan said a cease-fire agreement would only "freeze" the current situation, not lead to peace or troop disengagement and would thereby provide India the opportunity to consolidate its position. "It is a very difficult and complex situation. It will take time," said Gen Khan.

Pakistani officials also denied attacking Indian posts in Siachen nine times over the past month to gain

tactical advantage ahead of the talks. They said "normal shooting" may have taken place but no "unusual activity" took place at Siachen.

Meanwhile, Indian officials said their attempt in the talks was to "set the record straight" in what has "inaccurately" been referred to as the Siachen conflict. Their view is that India's positions are on the Saltoro Ridge while the Siachen Glacier is further to the east. "The posts sited on Pakistani maps do not tally with those on Indian ones," said one.

As a former brigade commander who served on the glacier said, "Siachen is way behind India's front line." According to him, India had been on the Saltoro Ridge since 1987 and Pakistan's refusal to accept the ground position is behind the impasse in the peace talks.

Between 1986 and 1997, six round of talks on the Siachen have been held. The November meeting followed peace talks in the Islamabad in October, the first since both sides conducted nuclear tests in May. The seventh round, too, proved inconclusive but the two neighbours have agreed to continue talking about the Siachen during the next round, the dates for which have yet to be announced.

Rahul Bedi

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P.O.Box 5815, Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone: +977-1-417082 Fax: +977-1-419479
Email: atlas@uncrosa.com.com.np

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accord could specifically include restrictions on any quantitative increases in weaponry, and an agreement to refrain from aggressive behaviour such as offensives to occupy new territory or to dislodge rival troops. The agreement could also prohibit either side from fortifying its presence in the disputed region by inducting new military units.

Disengagement. An agreement on military disengagement could incorporate many of the clauses of an agreement specifically aimed at de-escalating hostilities, including confidence-building measures such as prior notification of overflights and flag meetings between Indian and Pakistani sector commanders. Such an accord would, however, move from conflict management to conflict resolution since it would demonstrate the willingness of both parties to find a more comprehensive solution to the dispute. It could also serve as a continuum from cease-fire to demilitarisation should the political will exist.

Relocating troops to minimise the chance of conflict implies both a gradual reduction of forces in forward positions and an incremental dismantling of forward pickets and observation posts. Forces would then be re-deployed and repositioned in agreed upon areas. Other measures could include a limitation on overflights. While artillery batteries at the various posts and positions could remain in place, an agreement for military disengagement could envisage gradually downgrading weapons systems, including removing sophisticated military systems such as surface-to-air missiles.

Demilitarisation. The demilitarisation option is the most comprehensive solution for the Siachen dispute. It would require, as essential preconditions, an immediate cessation of hostilities and the prevention of any potential re-occurrence of armed conflict. The creation of a demilitarised zone would cause the complete withdrawal of all military presence on and in the environs of the glacier. Such a withdrawal would be accompanied by the destruction of bases, pickets, and observation posts, the removal of all military hardware from the disputed area, and a prohibition on aerial patrolling and reconnaissance by either side.

The agreement would also include a commitment on both sides to refrain from reoccupying vacated positions. Another confidence building measure could be the use of hotlines between force commanders as well as senior personnel at military headquarters, including Directors-General of Military Op-

erations. Above all, an appropriate regime of monitoring technologies and verification procedures would be identified and instituted to ensure the viability of the accord.

Hostile climate

After years of hostilities, neither India nor Pakistan are any closer to achieving their stated objective of acquiring control over the disputed territory through the use of force. Policy-makers in both states have begun to examine the possibilities of a negotiated agreement, partly as a result of the military stalemate and partly because of the mounting costs of the conflict in terms of lives and money. The Siachen dispute covers territory of little strategic importance for either state, while it serves as yet another irritant in the uneasy relationship between India and Pakistan.

A peacefully negotiated settlement of the Siachen conflict appears especially logical since the glacier's inhospitable terrain will continue to deter Indian and Pakistani attempts at acquiring military predominance. At the same time, an agreement on Siachen will not impinge, either militarily or politically, on the position of either side in the resolution of their other, more major differences. A settlement of the dispute would, however, reduce bilateral tensions, thereby improving the climate for future steps towards peace. Specifically in the context of the Siachen dispute, even a policy option that merely reduces hostilities would serve as a first step towards the conclusion of a more comprehensive agreement.

S. Ahmed is a specialist on South Asian security and a freelance journalist based in Islamabad. V. Sahni is Associate Professor in International Politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and Research Professor in International Studies, Centre for Economic Research and Teaching, Mexico City. This article was adapted from Cooperative Monitoring Centre, Sandia National Laboratories, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Occasional Paper/1 "Freezing the Fighting: Military Disengagement on the Siachen Glacier".

High stakes

by Harish Kapadia

*How many deaths will it take till he knows/that too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind./The answer is blowin' in the wind.*

-Bob Dylan

It is commonly believed that prior to the beginning of the conflict in 1984, the Siachen Glacier had been lying in quiet isolation. Given the inhospitable climate of this region, such a helief is understandable, but it is one that is far from true. The glacier has had visitors for a long time, both local and foreign.

In the valleys to the west of the glacier live the Baltis, who have an interesting story to tell about the Siachen Glacier, which they know as Saichar Ghainri. The story goes that there used to be a small Yarkandi village at the entrance of the Teram Shehr Glacier (see map on pg 24), where the Yarkandis met the Baltis for trade. (The Workman couple—*more on them below*—found the walls of such a settlement in 1912). It so happened that once some of the Yarkandis descended the Ghyri nala and abducted a Balti woman to their glacier village. Desiring revenge, the Baltis sought the help of a famous mullah. Telling them to place it on the Bilafond la (pass), the mullah gave them a *tawiz* (amulet) whose power would punish the Yarkandis. His instructions to the Balti villagers were to return via the Nubra valley after placing the *tawiz*. But the latter disregarded the mullah's instructions and returned the way they had come. Soon a great storm hit the Siachen Glacier and caused great destruction. It is believed the storm would have destroyed everything in the glacier had the mullah's directions been followed completely.

As it was, the destruction was not total and the wild roses that grow in plenty near the snout of the glacier and in the lower valleys were spared. It is these roses which give the

Siachen Glacier its name: Siachen—the Place of Roses (in the Balti language, "sia" is "rose" and "chen" is "place of").

Beginning with W. Moorcroft, who passed near the glacier's snout in 1821, the existence, length and location of the Siachen Glacier was a matter of much speculation among Western explorers during the colonial period. In 1848, Henry Starchy became the first Westerner to discover "Saichar Ghainri" ("ghainri" is "glacier" in Balti); he ascended it for two miles from its snout in the Nubra valley. E.C. Ryall of the Survey of India sketched the lower part of the glacier in 1861, and ascribed to it a length of 16 miles.

During his famous second Karakoram journey in 1889, Sir Francis Younghusband (then Colonel Younghusband) approached the area from the Urdok Valley. He was seeking a crossing into the Subcontinent from Central Asia. Following a side valley of the Urdok Glacier, he reached the Turkestan la. Looking down at the Siachen Glacier from the north he felt this pass, and not Bilafond la as it was then believed, was the main axis of the Karakoram. In other words, Younghusband thought that the axis along the Turkestan la (along with the nearby Indira Col) was what separated South Asia from Central Asia. Defining the actual axis thus meant that several square kilometres of territory would be added to British India at the expense of Chinese Turkestan (now Xinjiang province). Younghusband's explorer's instincts were correct, but since this was still uncharted terrain he could not be sure.

Younghusband's belief was confirmed in 1909 by T.G. Longstaff, who, along with



Arthur Neve, and Lieutenant Slingsby, was the first to traverse this great glacier. At first, they crossed over the Bilafond la (or, Saltoro pass, as Longstaff called it then) and named the glacier in the east Teram Shehr (Destroyed City) in keeping with the legend of the mullah which was narrated to them by their Balti porters. The peaks there were named the Teram Kangri group. They then retreated by the same route and went down the valley and approached the Siachen Glacier via the Nubra valley. Longstaff climbed up from the Siachen snout in the south and observed the same peaks as he had identified from the Bilafond la. This was conclusive proof of the length of the Siachen Glacier and the actual location of the Turkestan la—an important discovery as it established the true dimensions of the Karakoram. What he wrote in his book *This My Voyage* is quoted often:

Younghusband was a true prophet. Col Burrand of the Survey had suspected the truth. The avalanche-swept pass, whose foot Younghusband had reached 20 years before, was on the main axis of the Karakoram range which thus lay miles farther north than had been believed. We had stolen some 500 sq miles from the Yarkand river systems of Chinese Turkestan, and joined it to the waters of the Indus and the Kingdom of Kashmir.

The next important explorers to visit the Siachen Glacier were the famous Workman couple. Fanny Bullock-Workman and William Hunter Workman were Americans who had a special interest in the exploration of the Karakoram, and they focused their attention on the Siachen Glacier in the years 1911 and 1912. Entering via the Bilafond la, the Workmans camped on the glacier with a large entourage of porters and two Alpine guides. This group spent more than two months on the glacier and they climbed many peaks and visited almost all the corners of the upper Siachen. Grant Peterkin, a surveyor attached to this expedition, surveyed the glacier thoroughly and named a few peaks, including Teram Kangri, Apsarasas and Ghent. Names like Sia la, Junction Peak, Hawk, Tawiz and a few others were given by this expedition. It was the Workman expedition which visited and named Indira Col (col=lowest point on a ridge) after the Hindu goddess, Laxmi, one of whose many names is Indira. (The general supposition that this col was christened after Indira Gandhi, prime minister when Indian troops captured the position in 1984, is erroneous.)

In 1929, Dr Ph. C. Visser of the Netherlands, on his fourth trip to the Karakoram, explored the two Terong glaciers and the Shelkar Chorten glacier which were unknown

Author poses on Indira Col West (5840m). This is the divide between South and Central Asia. Peaks in the background are around the Urdok Glacier in the Shaksgam Valley, ceded to China by Pakistan. (See map overleaf)

till then. In his group were Rudolf Wyss and Khan Sahib Afraz Gul of the Survey of India, who stayed in the Terong Valley and completed surveying and naming the main peaks in the lower part of this great glacier. In the same year, the Duke of Spoleto expedition (Italian) crossed the Karakoram by the Muztagh pass and reached the Turkestan la from the north. They descended from the Turkestan la after discovering the Staghar and Singhi glaciers.

The survey and exploration of the Siachen was completed a year later by another Italian, Giotto Dainelli. Recounting his journey up to the Teram Shehr glacier junction through the Nubra valley in the *Himalayan Journal*, Dainelle wrote:

...thus reaching the Siachen tongue with all my baggage, a caravan of seventy coolies and six and a half tons of food for the men, carried by an additional caravan of ponies and supplementary coolies. On the

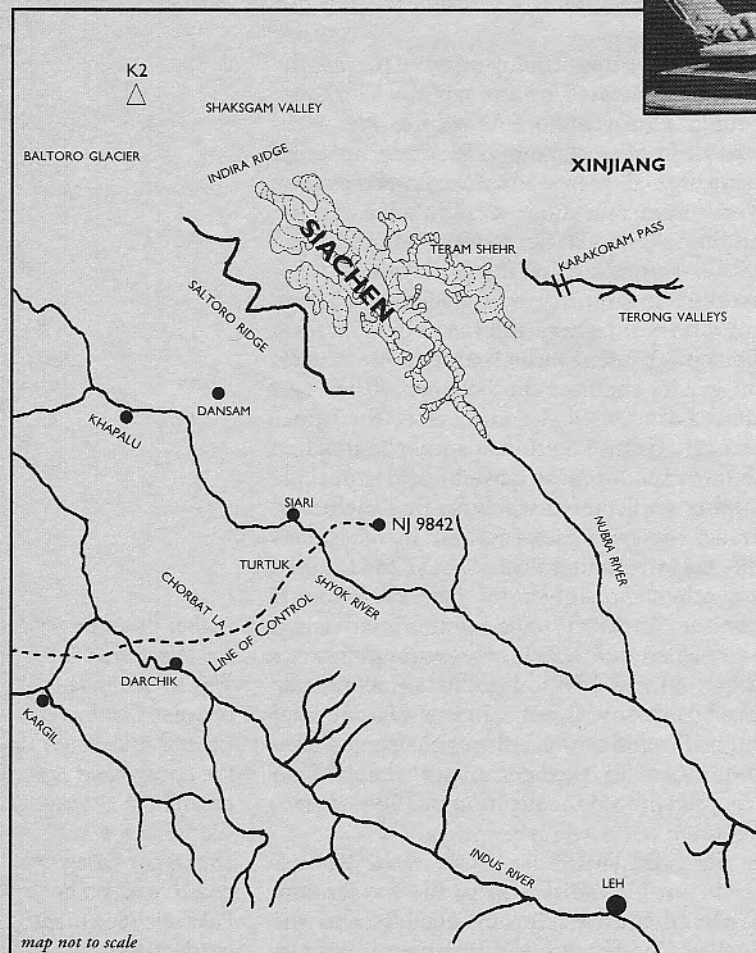
9th of June—exactly two months after my departure from Florence—I was heading for my first depot up the glacier. I hope my English colleagues will appreciate this rapidity of execution, which I consider a record! (Compare this with present timings—one can reach the glacier's snout within three days from Delhi without taking even a single step on foot.)

Dainelli, with a Miss Kalau as his only companion, stayed at the Teram Shehr junction and carried out various geological surveys. He could not return by the same route due to flooding of the Nubra valley in the lower reaches, so he crossed over to the Rimo glacier in the east by a 6200 m pass which he named Col Italia.

World War II, and the turmoil of Indian Independence that followed, put an end to all activities in this area for a few decades. With the India-China War of 1962, the entire area became 'restricted'. Restricted even for Indian climbers, al-



The Workmans.



though it is known that some parties from Indian security agencies did visit Bilafond la.

The ambiguity about the exact delineation of the border is behind today's conflict. The 1949 India-Pakistan agreement demarcated the cease-fire line as extending up to the point known as NJ 9842 near the Shyok River, after which the line moved "thence north to the glaciers", leaving the boundary vague (see preceding story for details).

The one opportunity to do away with this uncertainty came during the 1972 Shimla talks. It can be safely said that there may not have been any fighting on the Siachen if, during those talks, Indira Gandhi had pressured the Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to agree to demarcate the borders along the Saltoro Ridge, as is the situation today. A desperate Bhutto had pleaded with the Indian prime minister that he be trusted to do this at a later date, as he did not want to antagonise his generals. "Aap mujhpe bharosa kijiye (Trust me)," he is reported to have said.

Even as the ambiguity about the line of control remained, however, between 1972 and 1983 Pakistan promoted and permitted many foreign expeditions on the Siachen Glacier. These expeditions, accompanied by Pakistani

army liaison officers, generally crossed over the Gyong la, Bilafond la or Sia la to enter the glacier, and climbed many peaks on the glacier. These climbs set the ground for Pakistan's claim to the glacier. It has to be noted here that, apart from the 'political statement' these expeditions made, the teams were able to make explorations and climbs of the highest order.

During this same period, the Indian army also sent three expeditions to the glacier. Two of these were led by well-known climber Col N. Kumar; these expeditions reached Indira Col and climbed several other peaks, including Saltoro Kangri and Teram Kangri. The fact that these expeditions (1978, 1980 and 1981) took place was made public only in 1983. The Indian government made an attempt to pass them off as mountaineering ventures but their actual intentions were pretty obvious.

However, maps soon began to be published in Europe showing the extended line of control joining the Karakoram Pass in the east following the Pakistani claim. These maps conceded the entire Siachen Glacier to Pakistan, and showed Pakistan and China sharing a long common border to the east of Siachen.

Then in 1984, Pakistan gave permission to a Japanese expedition to attempt Rimo, a peak located in a side valley east of the Siachen and overlooking parts of Aksai Chin. Such an expedition would have linked Pakistan-controlled Kashmir with China, along the historic trade route that leads to Chinese Turkestan over the Karakoram Pass. The Indian army decided to take action to prevent the expedition from proceeding, and thus began the Siachen imbroglio.

Soon after India occupied positions on the glacier, the first Indian mountaineering expedition arrived in the Siachen to counter the policy adopted by Pakistan in the past. The next year, in 1985, an Indo-British expedition (led by this writer with Dave Wilkinson) was given permission to climb Rimo peak, approaching it from the Nubra valley in India. Their success and the international publicity generated created awareness that the area was controlled by India. An American team followed in 1986 and reached the Indira Col.

(There was one more chance for peace over the Siachen Glacier when Gen Zia-ul Haq and Rajiv Gandhi agreed to a cease-fire. Tensions on the glacier eased but not so domestic political tensions, particularly in Pakistan. Benazir Bhutto, then in the opposition, marched the streets with bangles on a plate for Pakistani generals. "Wear these bangles if you cannot fight on the Siachen," she taunted.

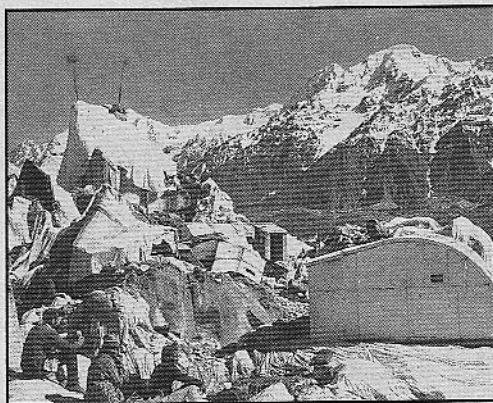
Unfortunately for peace in Siachen, Gen Zia was killed in a plane crash in 1988, Benazir came to power the next year and hostilities resumed on the glacier. One of her first official acts was to visit the Pakistani side near the Siachen Glacier. Peace has had no chance after that.)

Mountaineering on the main glacier ceased until 1996, when an Indian team from Bombay, again led by myself, arrived on the glacier with full clearance from the Indian government. The expedition first climbed in the Terong Valley but was not allowed to proceed to the upper glacier. Someone in the army hierarchy had decided not to allow the team to go further. This reflected rather poorly on the Indian army. However, after protests and a critical report, the situation was rectified within a year and it was decided to allow Indian mountaineers on the glacier.

In 1997, an Indian women's team (led by Bachendri Pal, the first Indian woman to climb Everest) traversed the glacier and stood on India Saddle, a point some seconds north of Indira Col. And earlier this year, our Bombay team returned to the glacier to complete their unfinished venture. This expedition reached Indira Col West (5840 m), India Saddle (6000 m), Turkestan La (5810 m), and made the first ascent of a peak on the Teram Shehr Plateau, Bhujang (6560 m). The team also named some high peaks on the Teram Shehr Plateau, including one in honour of Khan Sahib Afraz Gul, the Indian surveyor mentioned above. Indian climbers had finally arrived on the glacier.

Rare rose

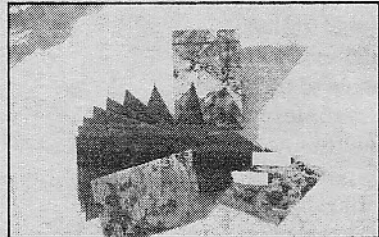
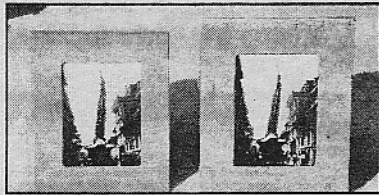
For the past 14 years, soldiers of the Indian Army have been in the Siachen. The army lives on the glacier under a severe resource crunch. Supplies are taken up by helicopter but there



Parachute cloth camouflage of an Indian post.

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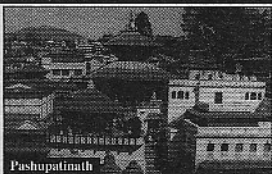
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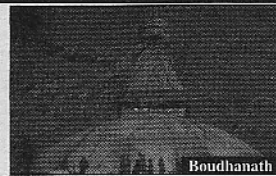
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Typical Newari Woman



Boudhanath

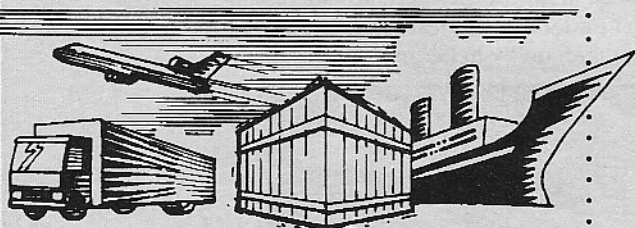
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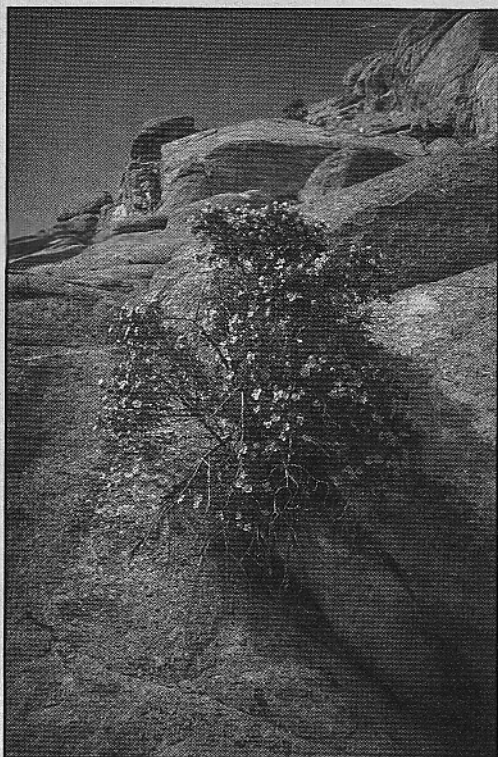
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HARISH KAPADIA

is always a shortage of air transport, sometimes even to bring down the injured. Under such circumstances it is hardly surprising that the glacier is under severe environmental strain.

Much of the garbage is put into crevasses or dumped on rocks and snow. In winter, all this is covered under a thick layer of snow and the entire area appears like a beautiful white sheet. But come summer, all the cans, drums and human waste come to the surface and litter is seen everywhere. The worst offenders are the tetrapacks in which fruit juices are delivered on the glacier. These aluminium packs, which cannot be burnt or destroyed, line the routes which are traversed by the army and are a major eye-sore. The army cannot burn the garbage on the glacier, and neither can it destroy it there, much less bring it down.

The weather pattern in the entire area of Ladakh and the East Karakoram is also changing; whether it has anything to do with the ongoing war in Siachen cannot be ascertained yet. The East Karakoram is no longer a rain shadow area and receives several inches of rainfall. The Siachen Glacier snout itself has receded by about 800 metres in the last 13 years. The glacier looked barren and without snow cover during our 1998 expedition. The Terong glaciers, particularly the North Terong Glacier seemed to be receding fast and most of the ice-penitents and lakes had disappeared during the last decade. Icefalls in the Safina

Valley (which we had crossed in 1985) and the Shelkar Chorten Valley seemed more broken and difficult.

The rose plants, too, have suffered. Many were cut and their stems used as decorative pieces and even as tent-pegs. After I drew the army's attention to this destruction, the military authorities gave assurances that the rose plants would henceforth be declared a rare species and no harm would be done to them. When this happens it could set the stage for full environmental protection of the glacier.

Some serious thinking about the environmental concerns on the Siachen Glacier needs to be done. The war has taken a heavy toll of men and material on both sides. It is an impasse in which no side seems to be gaining. Soldiers face each other, both sides have artillery (though the rarefied atmosphere makes nonsense of ballistic data), millions of rupees are spent daily to maintain these forces where casualties due to the altitude and cold are nine times higher than those due to combat (an estimated USD 2 million is spent daily by the two armies on the glacier).

Perhaps the time has come to end such a stalemate. A possible solution was mooted in the *Himalayan Journal* in 1993 by Aamir Ali, an Indian living in Geneva: persuade India and Pakistan to withdraw their armies and establish an "International Park of the Rose". Such a park can be placed under the guardianship of the United Nations and the International Union of Alpine Associations, or, by including the territory held by Pakistan, it can be administered jointly by India and Pakistan as a transnational park. But this is a matter for the governments of India and Pakistan to consider. As a mountaineer and lover of this glacier I can only hope that steps are taken soon to conclude this never-ending war and save the beautiful Siachen.

The mullah, whose tawiz which destroyed the glacier in the first instance, had made another prediction: if, due to human folly, the storm did not cause total destruction of the glacier, another 'storm' may visit the glacier in a century to complete the job. This war seems to be fulfilling his prediction. ▲

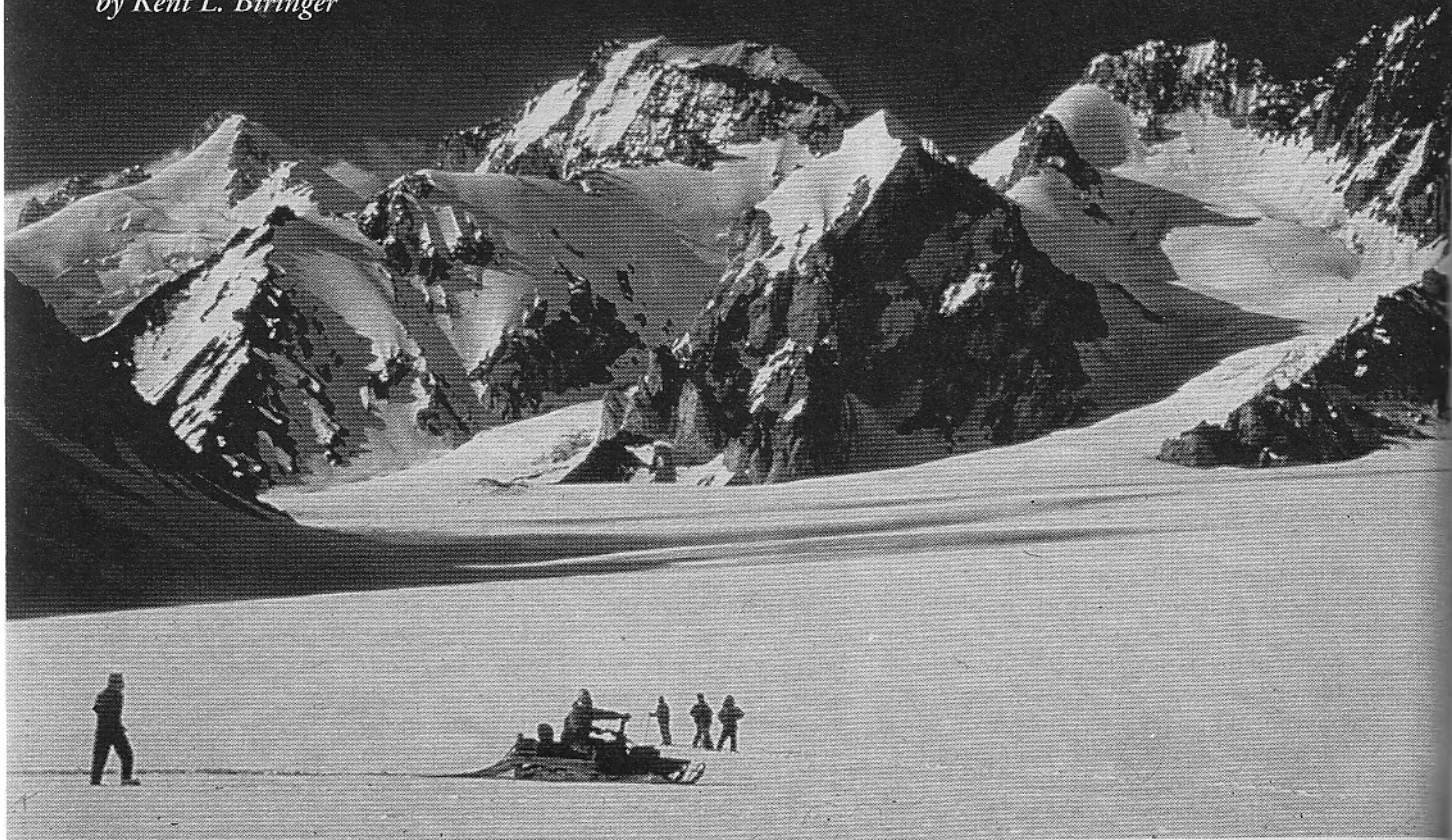
Bombay-based mountaineer H. Kapadia is Honorary Editor of the Himalayan Journal and author of several books on the Himalaya. He is at present working on a book on the Siachen Glacier, among other projects about his Himalayan experiences.

Siachen rose.

PEACE DIVIDEND

Siachen Science Club

by Kent L. Biringer



HARISH KAPADIA

With only slight adjustments in the cease-fire line after subsequent wars, the division of Kashmir has continued for five decades. And since 1984, the state's Siachen Glacier region has become a 20,000-foot high battleground between India and Pakistan.

There are differing views on the military significance of the Siachen Glacier, but the dispute has an undeniably strong political significance. However, as India and Pakistan have worked to reach agreement on many issues over the years, Siachen has been discussed as a potential location for cooperation by the two sides through disengagement of troops from the region. In 1989 and again in 1993, a settlement on the issue was nearly reached. The high cost in financial and human terms of continuing this confrontation make it an excellent candidate for cooperation while

minimising strategic or military disadvantage.

Many factors will influence a resolution of the Siachen conflict. While political will is the predominant factor, it will be affected by other issues too. The desire to reduce human suffering and to save money are two other important factors that justify resolution. Mechanisms which provide assurance that the terms of an agreement are met will be required in order to support political will. These mechanisms may include monitoring systems, inspection regimes, and cooperative projects, all of which can help ensure compliance with whatever agreement is made.

The concept introduced here is to substitute a scientific presence in the Siachen region for the military one. The goal of establishing a "Siachen Science Centre" would be to satisfy the requirement for a national presence in the area that would help ensure that

Indian military snowmobiles.

the terms of a military disengagement agreement are met, while advancing the cause of science in many fields. The project could be conducted cooperatively by Indians and Pakistanis but with the possible participation of other regional and international participants and sponsors.

The Siachen Science Centre would consist of a scientific research facility within a designated zone in the Karakoram Range. It would consist of a base camp with the potential for outlying field sites where scientific instruments could be placed. Creating smaller-scale outposts in the vicinity of the base station is also possible. The centre would be staffed by scientists, engineers, and technicians conducting research, along with necessary support staff, which could be of bilateral, regional or multinational mix.

The location high in the Karakoram Range in the western part of the Himalayan Mountains offers many advantages as a base for conducting scientific research. Depending on the location of the facility, it has the potential to be the highest altitude manned research station in the world. That fact, coupled with its isolated location, unique geology, and geographical position, would make it a special location for research.

Astronomy: The high altitude of the Siachen Glacier would enhance astronomical research high above much of the earth's atmosphere. The remoteness of the location, far away from sources of light pollution, is an advantage for astronomy.

Geology: The potential to increase geological knowledge about this region is great. A more detailed understanding of rock origins as well as plate tectonic movements could be developed through systematic study of local rock outcroppings. Palaeontology studies of fossil records in the area could further define the geologic history of the area.

Atmospheric Sciences: Atmospheric science would benefit from a more comprehensive study of weather patterns in the complex terrain of the Himalaya. A series of meteorological stations could enable more accurate weather forecasting. A study of atmospheric and ice-bound pollution could also provide useful information on global as well as regional pollution concerns.

Glaciology: Glaciology studies can provide insight into climatic variations throughout history. Snowfall and glacial melt provide the source of rivers such as the Indus. Therefore, hydrologic studies may provide insight into relationships among snowfall, glacial activity, and river flows in critical water resources.

Life Sciences: Biological and botanical

studies of life in this high, harsh environment would also add to the collective body of scientific knowledge.

Physiology: Controlled physiological studies of the effects of high altitude on humans are possible in this high-altitude laboratory. This could lead to improved methods for preventing high altitude sicknesses and for treating those who suffer from them.

Psychology and Behavioural Sciences: Investigating the effects of a multinational group working together for prolonged periods in this hostile climatic environment would be a valuable study.

In addition, engineering knowledge could be gained from the deployment and operation of such a science centre. Lessons will be learned in the design, deployment, and operation of the severe climate shelters needed. Many of the communications and logistical issues associated with supplying and maintaining a remote installation would provide a chance to add to knowledge and demonstrate cooperation on these subjects.

The centre can also serve as a test bed for characterising and operating monitoring systems in a severe environment. One can even envision a Siachen Worldwide Website that could include information from the glacier. The Australian Antarctic Division has such a capability on their Internet site, in which photographs and current weather conditions at their Mawson Station in the Antarctic can be viewed.

There are nearly endless possibilities for research and monitoring opportunities in such a centre. The topics listed above are only intended to be representative of those that may be of interest to South Asian countries. Establishment of such a centre could include a research hoard that could accept proposals for those wishing to pursue scientific or technical projects in the glacier environment.

While the concept of cooperative scientific research may be new for South Asia, there are many precedents for different features of this proposal. There is an extensive history of people working together in confined spaces in hostile environments. These include remote outposts such as lighthouses, radar sites, and military outposts (including the Siachen itself). Commercial enterprises, such as mineral and oil exploration, often include the establishment of remote outposts to develop and operate mines or oil fields. Cold weather oil production stations, such as the one in Prudhoe Bay, Alaska, present another precedent from which to draw experience in designing, building, and operating the needed equipment and facilities. Other candidate

THE ANTARCTIC TREATY

A model for Siachen?

Article I

Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes only. There shall be prohibited, *inter alia*, any measures of a military nature, such as the establishment of military bases and fortifications, the carrying out of military manoeuvres, as well as the testing of any types of weapons. The present Treaty shall not prevent the use of military personnel or equipment for scientific research or for any other peaceful purpose.

Article IV

1. Nothing contained in the present Treaty shall be interpreted as: a renunciation by any Contracting Party of previously asserted rights of or claims to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica;

a renunciation or diminution by any Contracting Party of any basis of claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica which it may have whether as a result of its activities or those of its nationals in Antarctica, or otherwise;

recognition or non-recognition of any other State's right of or claim or basis of claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica.

2. *No acts or activities taking place while the present Treaty is in force shall constitute a basis for asserting, supporting or denying a claim to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica or create any rights of sovereignty in Antarctica. No new claim, or enlargement of an existing claim, to territorial sovereignty in Antarctica shall be asserted while the present Treaty is in force.* (emphasis added)

Article VII

In order to promote the objectives and ensure the observance of the provisions of the present Treaty, each Contracting Party whose representatives are entitled to participate in the meetings referred to in Article IX of the Treaty shall have the right to designate observers to carry out any inspection provided for by the present Article. Observers shall be nationals of the Contracting Parties which designate them. The names of observers shall be communicated to every other Contracting Party having the right to designate observers, and like notice shall be given of the termination of their appointment.

Each observer designated in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article shall have complete freedom of access at any time to any or all areas of Antarctica.

All areas of Antarctica, including all stations, installations, and equipment within those areas, and all ships and aircraft at points of discharging or embarking cargoes or personnel in Antarctica, shall be open at all times to inspection by any observers designated in accordance with paragraph 1 of this article.

Aerial observation may be carried out at any time over any or all areas of Antarctica by any of the Contracting Parties having the right to designate observers.

Each Contracting Party shall, at the time when the present Treaty enters into force: Reports from the observers referred to in Article VII of the present Treaty shall be transmitted to the representatives of the Contracting Parties participating in the meetings referred to in paragraph 1 of the present Article.

Article X

Each of the Contracting Parties undertakes to exert appropriate efforts consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to the end that no one engages in any activity in Antarctica contrary to the principles or purposes of the present Treaty. This facilitates the exercise of their functions under the present Treaty, and without prejudice to the

respective positions of the Contracting Parties relating to jurisdiction over all other persons in Antarctica, observers designated under paragraph 1 of Article VII and scientific personnel exchanged under subparagraph 1 (b) of Article III of the Treaty [relating to exchange of scientific personnel between expeditions and stations], and members of the staffs accompanying any such persons, shall be subject only to the jurisdiction of the Contracting Party of which they are nationals in respect of all acts or omissions occurring while they are in Antarctica for the purpose of exercising their functions.

Without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article, and pending the adoption of measures in pursuance of subparagraph 1 (e) of Article IX, the Contracting Parties concerned in any case of dispute with regard to the exercise of jurisdiction in Antarctica shall immediately consult together with a view to reaching a mutually acceptable solution.

Article IX

1. Representatives of the Contracting Parties named in the preamble to the present Treaty shall meet at the City of Canberra within two months after the date of entry into force of the Treaty, and thereafter at suitable intervals and places, for the purpose of exchanging information, consulting together on matters of common interest pertaining to Antarctica, and formulating and considering, and recommending to their Governments, measures in furtherance of the principles

and objectives of the Treaty, including measures regarding: use of Antarctica for peaceful purposes only; facilitation of scientific research in Antarctica; facilitation of international scientific cooperation in Antarctica; facilitation of the exercise of the rights of inspection provided for in Article VII of the Treaty; questions relating to the exercise of jurisdiction in Antarctica; preservation and conservation of living resources in Antarctica.

3. Reports from the observers referred to in Article VII of the present Treaty shall be transmitted to the representatives of the Contracting Parties participating in the meetings referred to in paragraph 1 of the present Article. [para 2 omitted]

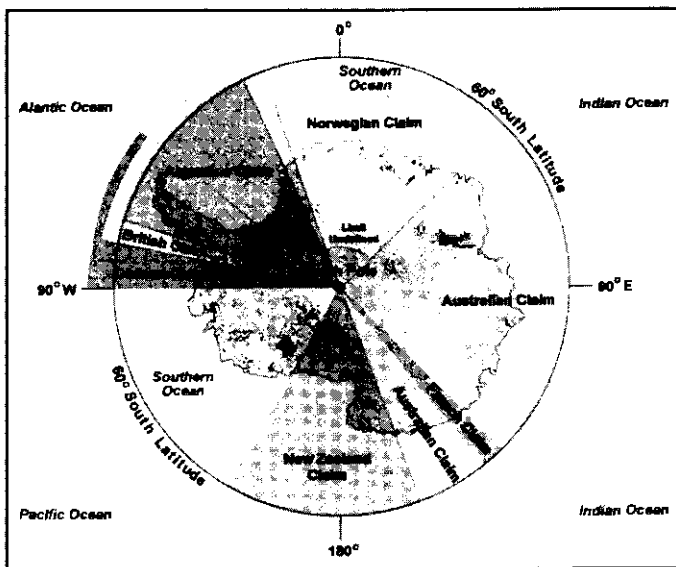
Article X

Each of the Contracting Parties undertakes to exert appropriate efforts consistent with the Charter of the United Nations, to the end that no one engages in any activity in Antarctica contrary to the principles or purposes of the present Treaty. This article reinforces the underlying intent that all efforts be made to meet the spirit as well as letter of the Treaty.

Article XI

1. If any dispute arises between two or more of the Contracting Parties concerning the interpretation or application of the present Treaty, those Contracting Parties shall consult among themselves with a view to having the dispute resolved by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement or other peaceful means of their own choice.

2. Any dispute of this character not so resolved shall, with the consent, in each case, of all parties to the dispute, be referred to the International Court of Justice for settlement; but failure to reach agreement or reference to the International Court shall not absolve parties to the dispute from the responsibility of continuing to seek to resolve it by any of the various peaceful means referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article.



programmes from which to gain knowledge useful in establishing a Siachen Science Centre include naval submarine programmes and the US and Russian space station and space shuttle programmes. However, the most applicable precedents for establishing a South Asian centre in the Siachen area are scientific stations and outposts in the Arctic and the Antarctic.

International efforts for cooperative Arctic research include examples of land-based stations, ship-based research, ice-based monitors, and remote-transmitting buoy networks. The land-based stations are established in particular countries but have scholars and advisory boards that represent international participation. One example is the Arctic Centre in Finland, which has an advisory board of 13 members representing nine countries. A decision to deploy national research stations at Siachen could be addressed in a similar fashion.

Another cooperative example is that of the International Arctic Buoy Programme that maintains a network of automatic data buoys in the Arctic Basin to monitor pressure, temperature, and ice motion. The programme is funded and managed by eight countries, and over 24 international research institutes participate in data collection and assessment. The Siachen area could provide a similar opportunity to engage a variety of international participants in a similar cooperative research programme.

Particularly pertinent to the Siachen issue is the precedent of the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. The treaty set aside the entire continent for peaceful scientific use only and outlined the requirements for successful coexistence on the continent.

Since its entry into force in 1961, 39 countries, including the seven original claimants to portions of the continent, have become signatories to the treaty. Under the terms of the Treaty, all claims are held in abeyance for the term of the Treaty and no new territorial claims can be submitted. India is one of the state parties to the Treaty having signed it in 1983. The Indian Department of Ocean Development coordinates and executes the national Antarctic programme and maintains stations including one at Maitri Antarctica (70°45'S, 11°44'E) which is operated throughout the year. The Pakistanis, although not signatories to the Antarctic Treaty, maintain the Jinnab Station in Antarctica through their National Institute of Oceanography.

The Antarctic Treaty bans any military activity in the defined area and prohibits nuclear testing. It limits national programmes

to those of scientific research and ensures the free exchange of information and scientists among countries. Inspection rights are granted to the facilities and operations of other countries with a presence on the continent. Provisions are made to have an open skies regime, enabling aerial observation at any time over any and all areas of the Antarctic by any of the Contracting Parties that have the right to designate observers. Regular consultative meetings of the signatory states are held and disputes are resolved by peaceful negotiation including use of the International Court of Justice.

Currently 25 nations maintain a full-time presence on the continent. As of today, the treaty has been in force for 37 years and represents one of the great accomplishments of international cooperation. Research in the Antarctic is pursued in many of the scientific disciplines suggested for the Siachen Science Centre. In the case of astronomy, for example, the Advanced Telescope Project (ATP) and South Pole Infrared Explorer (SPIREX) project collect information on the astronomical qualities of the region and study faint stars and galaxies.

While not a perfect model for South Asia, there are many features of the Antarctic Treaty that might be considered for application in Siachen. Some of these include demilitarisation of the area of concern, dedication of the area to scientific research, establishment of research centre(s) that share information and are open to joint inspection, deferring resolution of territorial claims, and resolving disputes through peaceful means.

Resolution of the Siachen Glacier dispute will require both political will and the monitoring and confidence building measures necessary to ensure compliance with agreements reached. The political will to address issues of conflict in South Asia is growing as India and Pakistan begin the second half of their first century of independence. The governments of India and Pakistan appear interested in establishing increased dialogue and cooperation. The conflict over the Siachen Glacier now appears to be a good candidate for such cooperation. A Siachen Science Centre may offer one piece of the solution.

K.L. Biringer is Principal Member of the Technical Staff, Cooperative Monitoring Centre, Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico. This article is adapted from Cooperative Monitoring Centre Occasional Paper/2 "Siachen Science Centre: A Concept for Cooperation at the Top of the World".

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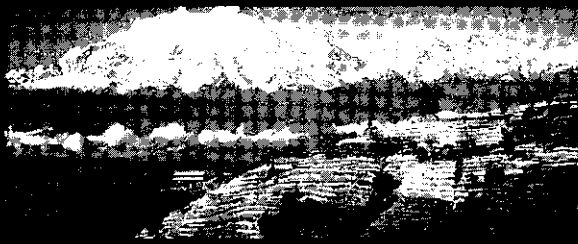
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On your mark, get set... get married



SURJAS RAY

HE IS getting on my nerves," said a young unmarried Pakistani woman. She was referring not to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's recent resort to military courts in Karachi and Sindh, but to the 'prohibitions on marriage' he chose to impose through a notification issued in late November.

The new order, as originally reported in the press, said that all marriage ceremonies for the next three years will have to take place in the period between two of the five daily Muslim prayers of Asr and Maghrib. The Asr prayers are said in the late afternoon and the Maghrib prayers at sunset. Effectively, it leaves people—depending on the time of the year they choose to get married—between one to two hours in which to get it over with.

The order made an allowance for weddings for which invitation cards had already been sent out, but strict implementation is planned for after the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr in the third week of January. A day after the notice was issued, a spokesman clarified that the government did not intend to restrict wedding times to between the Asr and Maghrib prayers, adding that "all" it wanted was to ensure that wedding ceremonies were

held before sunset.

The new ordinance is the second in Sharif's campaign to use state authority to transform the traditionally lavish marriage ceremonies into simple affairs. He had ordered a two-year ban on serving food at weddings just a month after coming to power in 1997. (The ban is to end in March next year but an extension is likely.) The new order took people by surprise since there had been talk that even the earlier one would be watered down and that at least one dish would be allowed to be served at wedding parties.

In the two years since it was imposed, the food-ban has been implemented selectively. Where the enforcing authorities have been strict, usually in the case of the lower and middle class marriages, even bridegrooms have ended up spending their wedding nights in the lockup. On the other hand, people with influence have been openly flouting the law. The less powerful have had to resort to more discreet methods for entertaining marriage guests, such as using the basement of banquet halls and restaurants for 'underground' marriage parties. There have also been instances where the whole lot of

guests were taken to posh diners under the garb of 'routine clients'.

The new order is obviously an attempt to restrict wedding ceremonies to a period of the day when it would be difficult for people to break the law under the cover of darkness. However, the difficulties that the new ban can cause are unlimited. What, for instance, if the poor guy and his *baraatis* (marriage procession) fail to turn up within the time prescribed for the holy ritual by the state? Will he have to wait for the next day, or what could be even more frustrating, fix an altogether new date for the marriage? And what if it happens all over again?

Those beginning to feel the weight of the 'reformist' Sharif ideas are wondering what the prime minister may be contemplating next. Instructing people whom to marry and whom not to? Placing restrictions on couples, asking them not to see each other before they are 'legally' and 'religiously' declared man and wife? Limiting the number of marriages in a family—in case population control manages to surpass other important issues on the government's list of priorities? The possibilities are endless.

The question now being asked is if the army will be given the job of seeing that the new marriage order is being followed. Such an arrangement would be in the fitness of things. If armymen can hold courts to punish terrorists in Karachi, if they can build roads in Lahore, if they can remove encroachments in cities, if they can be asked to supervise entry tests to colleges in the North West Frontier Province, supervising marriages will be but a small matter.

-Asha'ar Rahman

Moratorium on hartals

BANGLADESHIS ARE not sure how seriously they are to take the ruling Awami League's recent call that *hartals* be banned permanently, a call that enjoins upon the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to announce a similar ban too. Considering that the Awami League (AL) had used strikes—often lasting for days—to create an impossible situation for the BNP to provide any real governance, the scepticism is understandable.

The AL's call came after a three-day hartal called by the BNP protesting what it called an attempt on the life of BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia while commemorating 7 November at a mass meeting. That was the day in 1975 when a military uprising had swept her husband, the late Gen Ziaur Rahman, to power. Although Gen Zia was killed five years later, 7 November has always been observed as a 'Day' and even former president Gen Hussain M. Ershad, who was not in any way connected with the event (he was at a defence college in India at the time), kept up the tradition. But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would have nothing to do with anything connected with Gen Zia. She decided instead to move the 'Day' forward and declared 3 November to be National Mourning Day. On this date in 1975 four AL leaders had been killed in jail; the party had been ousted out of power with the assassination of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman some months earlier.

Between celebration and mourning, this year's 7 November BNP meeting was disrupted and Begum Zia had to leave the venue in a hurry, finding her way through a mist of tear gas. The next day, 8 November, was the day the judgement on the murder of Sheikh Mujib and his family was to be announced and it passed without event. But even before Sheikh Hasina could properly celebrate the verdict against her family's killers (see pg 6),

the BNP called a two-day hartal beginning 9 November to protest against government policies in general but specifically against what it saw as an attempt on Begum Zia's life.

The strike turned out to be violent and a number of activists from both sides were killed. So, as protocol demands, Begum Zia extended her hartal call for another day. Dhaka citizens felt that winter had finally arrived. Summer, it is generally observed, is too hot for serious street politics.

Having herself called so many hartals in the past, Sheikh Hasina is well aware of their potential. She therefore declared that the AL would never call a hartal and asked the BNP to follow suit during a meeting with national media leaders.

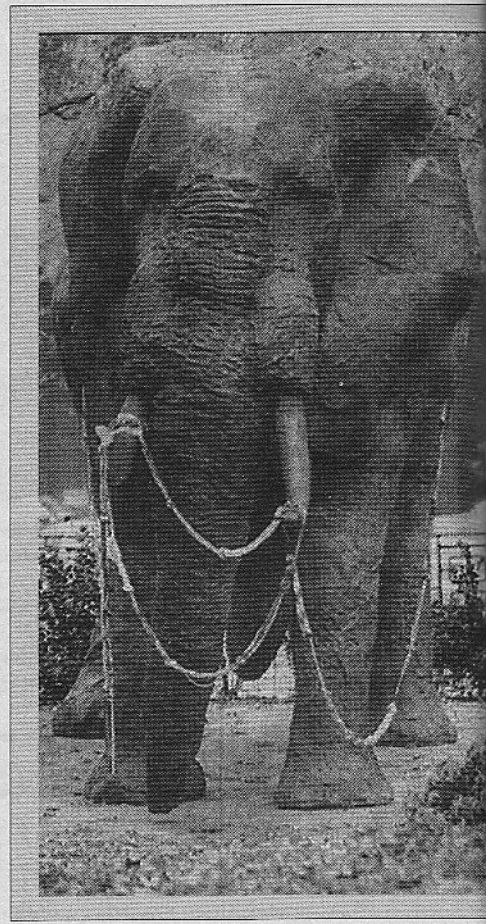
Khaleda Zia didn't make any immediate comment but one of her old/new party leaders Moudud Ahmed, ex-BNP minister under Gen Zia before deserting the BNP for the Jatiyo Party (JP) of Gen Ershad, under whom he served as vice president of Bangladesh, and again a BNP leader after losing both his seats in the 1996 parliamentary elections, immediately responded to the press.

Barrister Ahmed would know about hartals. As a JP leader he himself was ousted by a hartal that stretched on *ad infinitum*. He said that the hartal call was acceptable provided the AL compensated for the loss incurred to the national exchequer due to the total 173 days of hartal called by the AL between 1991 and 1996. (The BNP calculates that amount to be BDT 519 billion/USD 10.8 billion) He also said that the AL should resign within a month and call for mid-term polls.

Newspaper polls have shown that over 75 percent of the people support the joint moratorium on hartals. And while most people haven't taken the matter too seriously, everyone knows that pressure to swear off hartals is on from both within and without. It

may be possible to ignore the public opinion of the Bangladeshis themselves, but foreign buyers and investors aren't as accommodating. Bangladesh is facing pressure to end this method of politicking. At numerous international investors' fora it has been said that the conflict between the two leaders is the main cause behind lack of investor interest. The parties will have to do something to show that they aren't going to shoo investors away.

With this year's floods having damaged USD 4 billion worth of resources, and pressure mounting on the ready-made garments and frozen food sector—the country's two main exports—the politicians will have to respond somehow and with something.





"Positively impressed"

SINCE FLEEING Bhutan more than eight years ago, around 100,000 Lhot-sampha refugees have been surviving on hope, willpower and the largesse of Western aid agencies in UNHCR-run camps in Jhapa in south-eastern Nepal. Talks between Bhutan and Nepal have so far been unsuccessful, and India, through which the refugees streamed into Nepal, has refused to be drawn into the matter, insisting it is a bilateral matter.

A joint ministerial committee formed in July 1993 reached a deadlock in early 1996. However, recent reports suggest that Bhutan and Nepal are inching closer to a breakthrough. Both sides are keeping their cards close to their chests as January 1999, when foreign ministers of the two countries will meet in Kathmandu to discuss re-

patriation of the refugees, nears.

Patralekha Chatterjee met Francois Fouinat, Director, Asia and the Pacific, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in New Delhi and talked to him about the Lhotshampas and other refugee groups in South Asia. Fouinat was on his way back to Geneva after a visit to Nepal and Bhutan.

• *On his assessment of the situation of the Bhutan refugee crisis:*

This has been our concern for a number of years since UNHCR has been helping the refugees in the camps in Nepal. We are as interested as anyone else to see if there can be a solution to this problem because the refugees have been living in the camps for so long. The fact that so many people continue to live in camps is obviously something nobody likes.

It was with a lot of expectation that I undertook a visit to Bhutan and Kathmandu. And I must say that I was positively impressed by what I noticed to be the determination of the new government in Bhutan to bring about a solution to the problem in the bilateral framework that has been established to negotiate on this issue with Nepal. I conveyed my impressions to the Nepali authorities. I hope some positive developments will take place soon between the two countries aiming, or at least beginning, to find a solution to this long-standing and difficult issue.

• *On the constraints ahead:*

I suppose the fact that this question has been stalled for so many years suggests there are no easy solutions. There are so many dimensions and as people dealing with refugees, we are also of the opinion that this is not a simple and easy situation and it will need a combination of political determination, understanding and sensitivity to reach a solution.

• *On the condition of the refugees:*

As far as refugee camps go, these are among the best looked after.

• *On India's role:*

There seems to be a feeling on both sides that the bilateral approach is what they will be following.

• *On whether Asia's financial crisis has affected UNHCR's attitude towards refugees in the region:*

To some degree. The fact that economic activities are diminishing in the region means that the most vulnerable fringes of the workforce which are probably the illegal immigrants are being targeted. This is an accepted development. The problem is that, sometimes, among these most vulnerable fringes, you find people in a refugee situation. They are refugees but have not gone through the former channels. This is what we call mixed migration.

Take the case of Malaysia and Indonesians. When you are repatriating thousands of illegal immigrants, there is always a possibility that a few among them who need genuine protection also get mixed up in the crowd. This is a problem because movements of people are taking place in the Asia-Pacific region in a large scale across borders.

• *On the situation of the Sri Lankan refugees in India:*

Repatriation has stopped since 1995 and right now, there is no immediate prospect of resuming repatriation.

• *On the Rohingyas and the talks between Myanmar and Bangladesh:*

I think we are now seeing the end of this long-festering problem. Two hundred and thirty thousand out of the 250,000 refugees have gone back safely to Myanmar. The remaining 20,000 should be also returning home soon.

• *On their safety:*

One of our largest operations is in that region. There is a lot of international staff and activities to monitor their situation and also to help the refugees to reintegrate.

• *On political obstructions to UNHCR activities in Myanmar:*

No, I don't think there are any.

Elephantine trouble

THE LAWNS of the United Nations Sculpture Garden now has a life-size 7000-pound bronze African bull elephant, a joint gift from Kenya, Namibia and Nepal to promote the cause of wildlife awareness. But some days before the sculpture was to be unveiled on 18 November by Secretary General Kofi Annan, Nepal's permanent representative to the UN, Narendra Bikram Shah, decided that the elephant was too well endowed. Reported the chairman of the group that had funded the sculpture, Hans Janitschek: "I received a call from the ambassador from Nepal, who said: 'The penis is enormous. We brought in an expert to look. There has to be a surgical operation.' Where this expert came from I do not know."

This led to a meeting at Under-secretary General Alvaro Desoto's office. The solution was ingenious: plant some bushes to block the view.

Arming farmers

THE RECENT proposal to set up an armaments factory in Sri Lanka to supply firearms to farmers to protect themselves and their crops against wild animals (read elephants), raises more problems than it solves. It also comes at a time when elephants are being slaughtered indiscriminately in the country—eight were killed within one week in September. Implementing the proposal would encourage more such killing, or maiming of wildlife, while creating a community of armed men and women who can become a menace to society, especially during festivals when, fortified with alcohol, people usually take the law into their hands to settle old scores and resolve family feuds.

This is not to discount the problems faced by people living close to wildlife. Parks and reserves are not insular, and wildlife, especially elephants, spill over and frequently roam outside the borders. Elephants can easily destroy a year's staple food crop of a peasant family in a single night, and at times the destruction includes death of family members. Unless such losses are compensated for adequately and promptly, farmers will continue to call for killing wildlife that pose a threat to them.

Since competition for natural resources is a fact of life, the number of animals any conservation area can support depends on how much the people are willing to tolerate these animals. Many farmers have already

lost their patience with the marauding elephants in the face of mounting losses and absence of relief from the authorities concerned. In many rural areas, there are no protective fences to keep wild animals at bay, and farmers have to stand 24-hour vigil; during the cultivation season, the vigil can extend for three or four months. This is a serious drain on a family's labour and health.

But the solution hardly lies in arming the farmers. Instead, efforts have

the farmers perceive the value of elephants. The average Sri Lankan finds nothing worthwhile in having elephants around. For many who live next to protected areas, elephants are a curse, and their killing akin to the removal of pests.

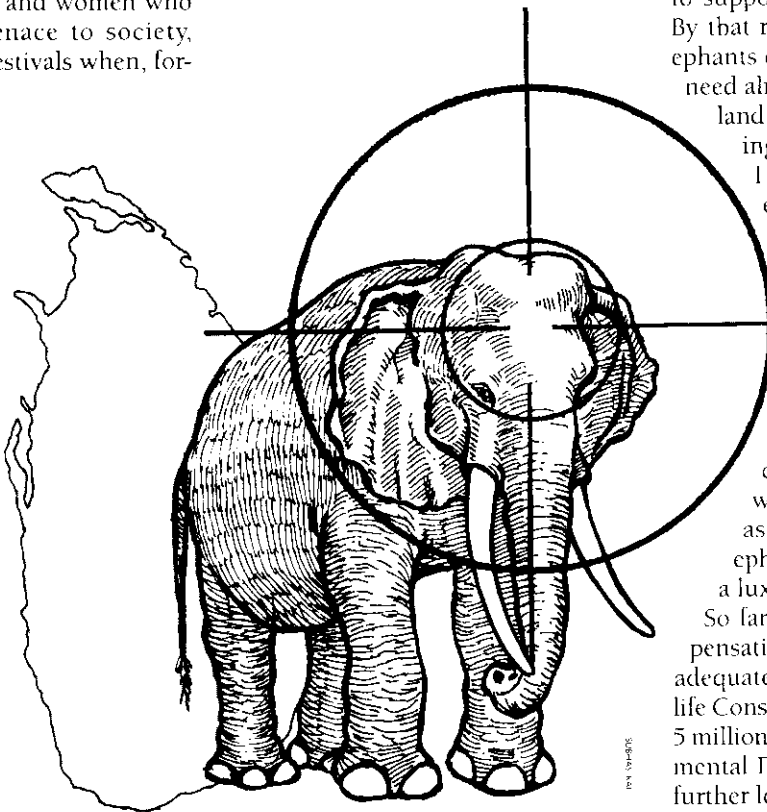
A combination of high human population growth and the declining fertility of land has led to increased encroachment and degradation of forests inhabited by wildlife. It takes about five square kilometres of land to support an elephant in the wild. By that reckoning, the 4000-odd elephants estimated to be in Sri Lanka need almost a third of the country's land area to survive. The existing protected areas cover only 12.5 percent of the land area, enough only for 1600 elephants.

One of the ways to mitigate human-elephant conflicts is to encourage sensible land use, and to ensure that losses caused by elephants are promptly and adequately compensated. For people who face the many problems associated with poverty, elephants must surely be a luxury, a luxury that they cannot afford.

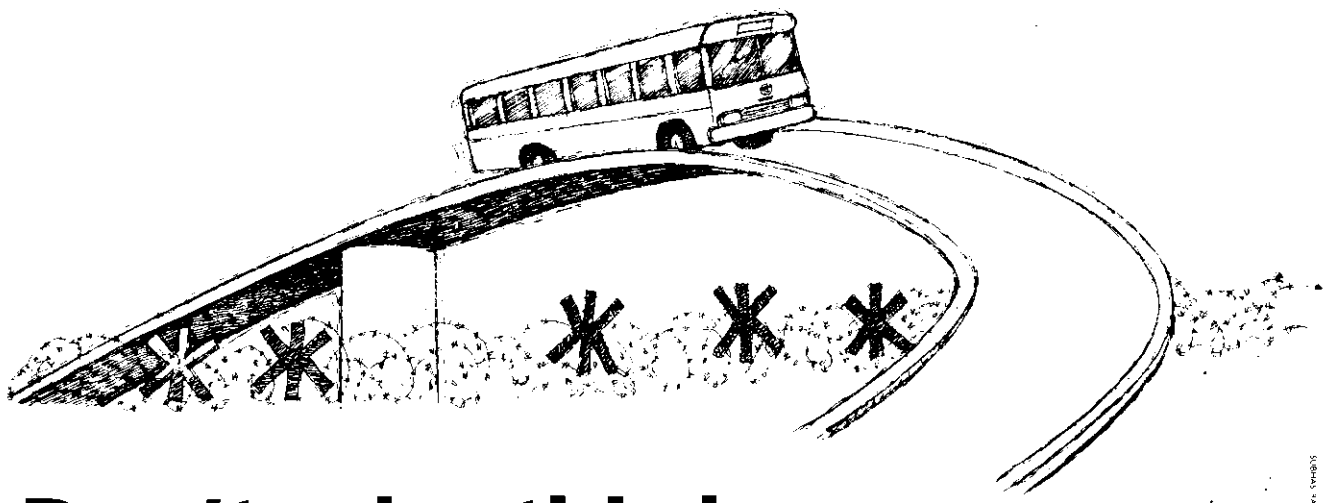
So far, the amounts paid as compensation have been much too inadequate. The Department of Wildlife Conservation, after receiving USD 5 million through the Global Environmental Facility, is now negotiating a further loan of USD 40 million. But a substantial amount of these funds usually go to expatriate consultants. If only a portion of these financial resources were spent to improve the lives of people affected by elephant depredations, it may be possible to enlist their support in reducing the slaughter of elephants.

The other option, arming the farmers, can only be a prelude to disaster.

-Charles Santiapillai Jayantha Jayewardene



to be made to figure out why so many elephants are being killed in Sri Lanka. Many of the elephants that fell victim to the farmers were tusk-less bull elephants. These are killed neither for the ivory (which they lack) nor for the meat (elephant meat has never been popular in Sri Lanka). Instead, as well-known Zimbabwean conservationist Graham Child points out, the real cause may lie in the way



Don't miss this bus

IT WAS at a meeting in New York in September this year that the prime ministers of India and Pakistan agreed to establish a roadlink across the Wagah border. But, despite many rounds of top-level talks between officials of the two countries, the New Delhi-Lahore bus service, described as "one of the few areas of convergence of views" in the humpy dialogue process, has yet to get off the mark.

A luxury bus carrying 50 passengers did leave New Delhi on 6 November for its 526-kilometre journey. But it could not cross over as, the Indians claimed, nobody was there to receive them. Pakistan, for its part, clarified that the delay in launching the New Delhi-Lahore bus service was due to "bureaucratic problems holding it up", and not because of Pakistan "dragging its feet", as charged by Indian officials.

The bus service is not simply what defence experts would call a 'confidence building measure'; it is a matter of great human interest. The emergence of nation-states in the Subcontinent after the departure of the British put in place unique demographic patterns, such as the presence of transnational ethno-lingual and religious communities.

South Asian Muslims, who make up nearly half the followers of Islam worldwide, are almost equally distributed in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Punjabis are spread over many parts of India and Pakistan, besides

the two Punjabs. Villages and towns of Pakistan's central Punjab are packed with people from Jullandhar, Batala, Amhala, Amritsar, Hosbiarpur, Gurdaspur and many other parts of what are now in the Indian states of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab. The family of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif are originally from around Amritsar and so strong are their memories that they have named their new housing settlement near Lahore after the village they left behind in India. For that matter, former Indian prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral was born in Jhelum, now in Pakistan.

Sindhis inhabit the most compact desert in the world, the Thar, stretching across the borders of the two countries. Kashmiris are divided along the two sides of the Line of Control. Most of Sikhism's holy places are in Pakistan as are shrines of many revered Muslim saints in India.

The urge to travel to meet separated families, nostalgic neighbours and old friends is strong. But mutual suspicion and a history of unflinching animosity have never allowed normal means of travel to become a routine affair. Tough visa regulations, an airfare that is too high for most Indians and Pakistanis and the Samjhota Express train that runs between India and Pakistan twice a week, fail to ease off the pressure of long rows of would-be travellers outside the diplomatic missions of the two countries.

That is why many in Punjab and elsewhere had welcomed the news of the start of the three-times-a-week bus service across Wagah. But the proposed Delhi-Lahore bus service ended up where all good intentions to improve Pakistan-India ties usually do: nowhere. There is a view that easing cross-border contact will facilitate terrorism, implying that tough travel restrictions (in place now) will curb it. One has only to look at the situation in both countries to see how unfounded this argument is. On the contrary, such projects of great public interest are more likely to help cool down sentiments of hostility. This is an issue the parliamentarians of the two countries (who themselves do not need visas to travel across) must take up and pursue to make a difference to the lives of thousands of ordinary citizens who wish to see old faces and places.

"Why I look forward to this bus service is because of the comfort that my 75-year-old father will have in travelling to his native village in the hills of Himachal Pradesh. For, in any case, the old man has to take a bus after getting off the train," said a young Punjabi bureaucrat.

The nostalgia for the places where they were born and brought up before they chose to migrate is widespread, especially among the older generation. Said one of them summing up the sentiment: "We have our dead hurried there."

-Najum Mushtaq

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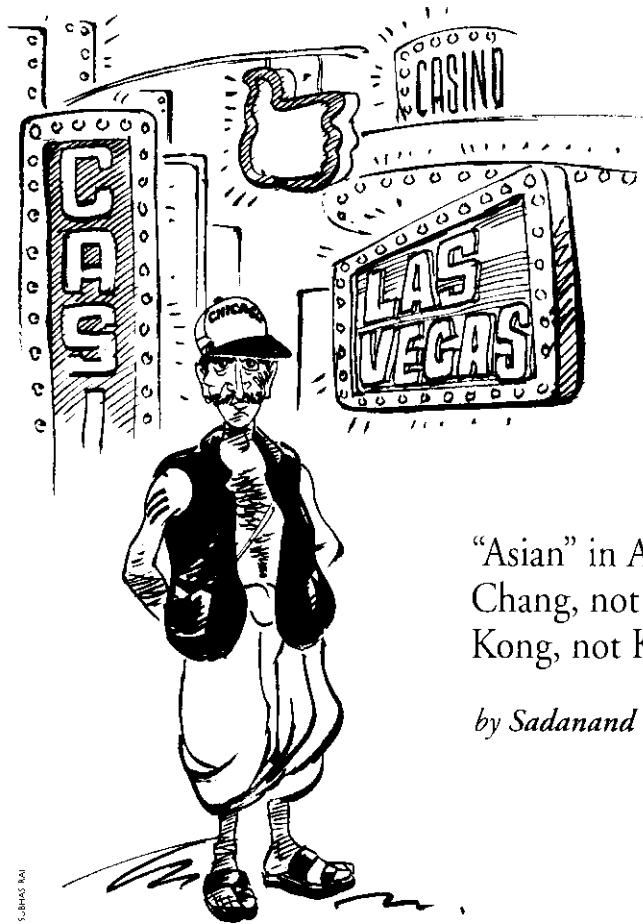


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“Asian” in America means
Chang, not Chakravarti;
Kong, not Kumar.

by *Sadanand Dhume*

Indian-American

Everyone has a vice. Mine is email, or, more specifically, an on-again off-again addiction to the listserve of the South Asian Journalists Association. The list hosts a collection of journalists, academics, activists and students, most of whom submit to a daily barrage of junk email without having the excuse of living in boring old Princeton, New Jersey, with an Ethernet connection in the bedroom.

The SAJA list is home to some of the most momentous Indian American debates of our times. Did Madonna insult Hindu culture by wearing a *bindi*? Should Taco Bell be sued for giving a pious man a beef burrito when he asked for a bean burrito? Should fat white women in Queens be allowed to use *mehndi*? Only rarely does an Indian American political is-

sue rise above the din of outrage over insulted gods and stolen customs. One recurring distraction is the debate over whether Indians belong in the Asian American movement.

A small hut vocal minority of Indian Americans wants our relatively young community to become part of the well-entrenched, well-funded Asian American movement. They argue that piggybacking allows Indians to use Asian American cultural and legal institutions, freeing scarce resources for other activities (such as protesting *mehndi* abuse). They say the political clout of 10 million Asian Americans added to 1.1 million Indians will help us further our shared interests in immigration policy, prevention of hate crimes and stereotyping by the mainstream media. Some in-

sist that Indians have no choice but to join the Asian American movement simply because the United States census counts Indians as Asians.

Fortunately, Indian participation in the Asian American movement is doomed to remain the Ford Edsel of ethnic politics, an embarrassment best forgotten. The sooner Indians and Asian Americans learn to accept this, the sooner they will realise that an amicable parting is better for both sides than a shotgun wedding. Indians will be forced to forge a coherent identity of their own. Asian America will be rid of a large, unwieldy group whose commitment to an Asian identity is watery at best and confused at worst.

What Indian Asian Americans (even the term sounds awkward) don't understand is that political power and cultural recognition are never won by getting others to fight your battles. The Jews, the Greeks, the Armenians and the Irish have learnt this lesson well. Whether Indians like it or not, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans will always define the mainstream Asian American movement. Instead of allowing Indian Americans to integrate into mainstream America and claim a slice of the American pie, the Asian American movement asks us to fight for the crumbs of the much smaller Asian American pie. Indians should remember that nine times out of ten the token Asian American political appointment will go to a Chang before it goes to a Chakravarti, to a Kong before a Kumar.

Ethnic elephant

Asian American expansionism naively hopes that a hastily constructed identity, or worse, a US government census form, can replace ties built on a foundation of shared culture, ethnicity and historical experience. This defies common sense. It is ludicrous to expect a refugee from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan to feel some magical affinity towards his Singaporean neighbour, or for Maldivian taxi drivers to discover that they have a lot in common with Japanese sushi chefs. Ethnicity is the elephant in the room that must be acknowledged. East Asians are bound by racial ties and, to a lesser degree,

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As sure as taking it there yourself

by cultures with roots in Confucianism. Indians don't share this with them. When I stroll through Jackson Heights, Queens, home to cheap curry houses and fashions imported from Bombay, I feel an immediate sense of belonging. In Chinatown I am an outsider, unable to penetrate the blank stares of the shopkeepers or to make sense of the difference between Mandarin and Cantonese.

Despite claims to the contrary, there is little that Indians share with East Asian Americans that we do not also share with other immigrants. Mexicans and Arabs also face racial discrimination and glass ceilings. Many Latin Americans and Africans come from sexually conservative male-dominated cultures. The work ethic is prized by Jamaicans. Russian kids feel pressured to perform well in science and mathematics.

Unlike our Vietnamese, Korean and Chinese counterparts, recent Indian immigrants often speak fluent English and understand the working of a functioning democracy with a free press. Moreover, Indians have not shared the suffering that marked the early Asian experience in this country. Unlike the Chinese, we didn't come here to build the railroads in California. Unlike the Japanese, we weren't interned in prisoner of war camps during World War II. The first significant wave of Indian immigrants came here in the 1960s, when the most important battles of the Civil Rights movement had either been won or were about to be won. For the most part, these pioneers were educated professionals: doctors, engineers and professors. You don't earn the right to hold a grudge against white America by sticking needles into overfed kids in Tennessee or teaching Physics 101 to bored undergraduates.

Identity begins at home

You may ask why an Asian American identity must come at the expense of an Indian American identity. Why can't we be both Indian American and Asian American? This is a valid question, but it ignores one crucial fact: Indian Americans have yet to forge a coherent identity of their own. Cut loose from the Subcontinent, we have

e-Patriots

E-MAIL, Internet, and worldwide websites are showing up the sad confusions of the great Indian middle class nationalist who goes ballistic about the power and glory of his motherland while sitting in front of his computer screen in California's Silicon Valley or in a gloomy apartment in New Jersey. Having satisfied his consumerist cravings and being overcome with syrupy nostalgia about a country which is at least 10,000 miles away, the Indian professional or businessman living in the United States can afford to wax eloquent about Sanskrit civilisation and nuclear achievement. The problem is that very few of his white American neighbours or colleagues are impressed by either Sanskrit or the Pokharan explosions and the nearest Indian friend is not readily available for a morale-boosting chat.

Solace is at hand and the patriotic US-Indian can now broadcast to the world his paranoia and his yearning for India's greatness with a click of his computer-mouse. A typical example is an e-mail letter sent by an Indian living in Texas to *India Today* soon after the May 1998 nuclear tests: "...India made the right move by proving its nuclear capabilities. A weak India surrounded by powerful nuclear weapons states is a sure recipe for subjugation and the demise of the world's largest democracy. Now that India has shown the world the 'stick', it will have to work on the 'carrot' to maintain peace."

Ignoring the daily drudgery of hundreds of millions of labouring children, women and men in India, the US-Indian zips his e-mails to English-language dailies or weeklies in Delhi or Bombay, exhorting their readers to keep the faith and work for the abstract glory of the motherland. The Indian back home is routinely berated for his lack of patriotism by the Indian sitting in Los Angeles, Houston or New Haven.

Indian periodicals are deluged with e-mail letters to the editor from Indians living in the West, particularly in the United States. These letters are usually hyper-nationalist in tone and aggressively defensive about the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). They often suggest that the lower castes and the religious minorities are to be despised or feared.

The recent rash of violent incidents in the Indian states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh directed against Christian clerics and institutions by the BJP's sister organisations has not resulted in any significant condemnation by the US-Indian who half-believes that Christian "missionaries" have invited these attacks on themselves. The US-Indian has not yet realised that such attacks could lead to a backlash by white Christian fundamentalists against Indians living in the US, especially now that these assaults have been widely publicised by the US media.

Nor does the US-Indian notice the hypocrisy of vehemently promoting the grandeur of ancient Indian texts and traditions, of which he has no deep knowledge, as he has most likely been educated in India in schools and colleges run by Jesuits or other Christian orders while his children are now attending schools in the US which are as American as apple pie.

For this breed of middle class, upper-caste US-Indian, the debacle just suffered by the BJP in the November elections to the local legislatures of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi could be most puzzling. It would be extremely difficult for the US-Indian to acknowledge that about 80 percent of Indian voters belongs to the labouring classes and to the so-called lower castes. The price of food and the quest for social and economic dignity are far more crucial for that 80 percent than the jingoistic flag-waving and the abstract motherland-worship propagated by the BJP and its electronic warriors overseas.

-Jawid Laïq

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divided ourselves by region, language and religion. To look without before first dealing with divisions within is tantamount to jumping ship. Why force-feed a feeling of kinship toward Japanese Americans when there remains such a wide gap between Tamils and Gujaratis? Between Hindus and Muslims. Between recent arrivals from India and those who arrived via the sugar plantations of Guyana or former British colonies in Africa. And between Indians born in the United States and those born in India.

The seamy truth of the Indian infatuation with Asian America is that it offers an easy alternative to Indians vaguely ashamed of their origins. Until recently, East Asia was home to the greatest post-war economic miracle since the Marshall Plan put Western Europe back on its feet. Cars are made in Japan, computers in Taiwan, vacuum cleaners in Korea and toys in China. India is where Mother Teresa goes to save souls and Strobe Talbott goes to save the world from nuclear holocaust. When was the last time an American child was told to

finish his peas because children were starving in Japan?

Contemporary American identity politics teaches us two things. First, that the most powerful ethnic interest groups are built on shared ties of history, customs and culture, or at least the perception of such shared ties. Second, that successfully mobilised groups often retain some affinity with their country of origin. (Israelis, Greeks, Poles, to name only a few.) The Asian American movement fails both these tests. Primordial ties are conspicuous by their absence. The interests of our countries of origin are often in direct conflict. China, for example, practically created the Pakistani missile and nuclear programmes. The fuzziness of an Asian American identity prevents us from influencing US policies on trade and proliferation that affect our families in India.

Indian Americans will achieve political and cultural power only when we learn to acknowledge our weaknesses and build upon our strengths. Our weaknesses include an inability to move beyond petty re-

gional and religious divisions and an unwillingness to accept that though many Indians are doctors and architects, many also drive taxis and wait on tables. Our strengths lie in our relative affluence, strong cultural ties, educational achievements, geographical concentration, rapidly growing numbers and large representation in key sectors of the American economy such as software and medicine.

Fostering a stronger Indian American identity does not mean quarrelling with the Asian American movement, but choosing allies depending on the issue at hand. We ought to draw a firm line between cooperation and cooption. In the final analysis, this is about making choices. As an Indian, I choose Shahana Azmi over Gong Li. Vikram Seth over Amy Tan. Vadas over wonton soup.

S. Dhume is an Indian American living in Princeton, New Jersey, who has written for the Far Eastern Economic Review, the Earth Times and Little India. A version of this article appeared in A Magazine: Inside Asian America.

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Legacy of a

Dilip D'Souza traces his mutated connection with Portugal.

On the windswept northern coast of Namibia, in a desolate spot reached after several hours along a desolate highway, one comes across a huge colony of seals. One afternoon some years ago, I stood there, looking in wonder, awed by the sheer number of animals, by the fleshy, quivering, noisy mass that stretched from my toes into the spray-misted distance. The place is called Cape Cross, a name about which I was only mildly curious then.

I have since regretted that lack of curiosity. The seals were interesting and photogenic, true, if smelly. But if I ever go back, I might spend less time gazing at them. I might instead stroll over to gaze at the object that gives their home its name: Cape Cross.

In 1485, Diego Cao, a Portuguese sea captain, came ashore and erected a cross here. The Portuguese had a tradition of erecting wood or limestone crosses wherever they landed. They were symbols of Christianity, visible proof of possession of a piece of land. But they were most useful as landmarks for passing ships. To his successors on those nearly virgin sea lanes hugging the African coast, Cao's cross was a sign that the Portuguese had safely reached that far down the coast.

By the late 19th century, the original cross was crumbling. The Germans, colonial masters of South-West Africa as it was then known, removed it to a Berlin museum. In 1895, they brought a replica of the original from Germany and erected it at the spot. That replica is what stands at Cape Cross today.

Quest for India

When Diego Cao erected his cross, he was just the latest in a series of Portuguese adventurers who had been pushing further and further south. They had sailed beyond several points that had each, in turn, seemed like points of no return: Cape Bojador, the River Ouro, Guinea, Angola, Cape Cross. Sailing south, they had something very definite in mind. They were looking for the point where the African coast would turn decisively east, for what such a turn would almost surely mean—the sea route to the East. To India. Once they rounded Africa, these seafaring heroes were sure, only open sea would separate them from the riches of India.

Sure enough, Bartholomieu Dias sailed past Cao's cross in 1487 and soon found the coast of Africa swinging east. He had rounded the huge continent, but his men had had enough of fierce storms and forced him to return to Portugal. "He had seen the land of India," wrote a historian of the time, but "he did not enter it".

In 1497, another Portuguese sailor struggled around Africa's southern tip and set his sails to ride the winds north and east. From Malindi in present-day Kenya, an Arah pilot guided him across the Indian Ocean. And on 20 May 1498, after 12,000 miles and 316 days at sea, Vasco da Gama touched land near Calicut. That day changed an entire region's history. It is now also a subject of much controversy, but of that, more later.

Vasco da Gama might never have reached Calicut if not for the cross that stands

lonely cross

firm on a lonely Namibian shore. As for me, I feel a very personal connection to Cape Cross. In an odd way, I would not be who I am if Cao had not erected his cross; in fact, millions of Indians would not be who they are. And that's why, on my next visit to Cape Cross, the cross might interest me more than the seals.

Old and new

The story of da Gama's great voyage is really the story of the Caos and the Dias before him: brave men who pushed the boundary of Portuguese discovery ever southward, outward, from that little country in the Iberian peninsula. It is amazing that this tiny slice of Europe produced such a stream of courageous explorers, as well as kings who believed in and backed their efforts.

Prince Henry the Navigator (d. 1460) is credited with being the catalyst behind Portugal's exploration of the world. But it was really under John II (r. 1481-1495), that Portugal's age of seafaring glory began. John dispatched Cao and Dias on their voyages and set the stage for da Gama's later success. Together, these men turned Portugal into the prime maritime power of the era.

With that kind of intoxicating history, one cannot help think that Portugal must have been an exciting place to live in 500 years ago. It's easy to imagine late 15th-century Lisbon as a roiling, thrilling city, flush with comings and goings and news of the latest expeditions. Surely few other cities could have matched the heady sense of adventure Lisbon must have been drenched in then.

Late 20th-century Lisbon carries few signs of those stirring times. It looks and feels like the other European capitals. There are plush Cartier and Gucci boutiques, upscale restaurants, even a tiny Metro with the obligatory schematic map. Frenetic construction is everywhere: spiffy new buildings, dramatic new Metro stations on an ever-expanding network and so on. To the jaundiced eye, it is missing a certain spirit, perhaps even an identity. Lisbon seems much less unique today than it once must have been although this criticism is unfair considering the changed times.

Still, one does get a feeling in Lisbon of yearning, a sense that Portugal wants back that heady feeling of world leadership that Vasco da Gama had brought. Tired of being known as Europe's perennial poor cousin, Portugal seems to be saying, "Let's reclaim that place in the sun we once knew." The sprucing up of Lisbon is a sign of that.

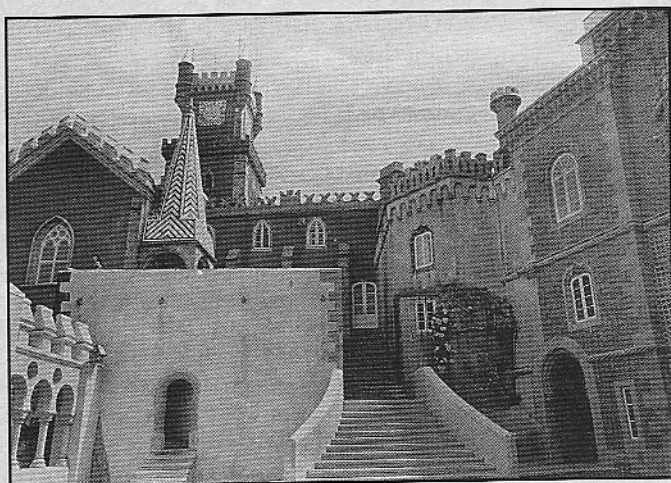
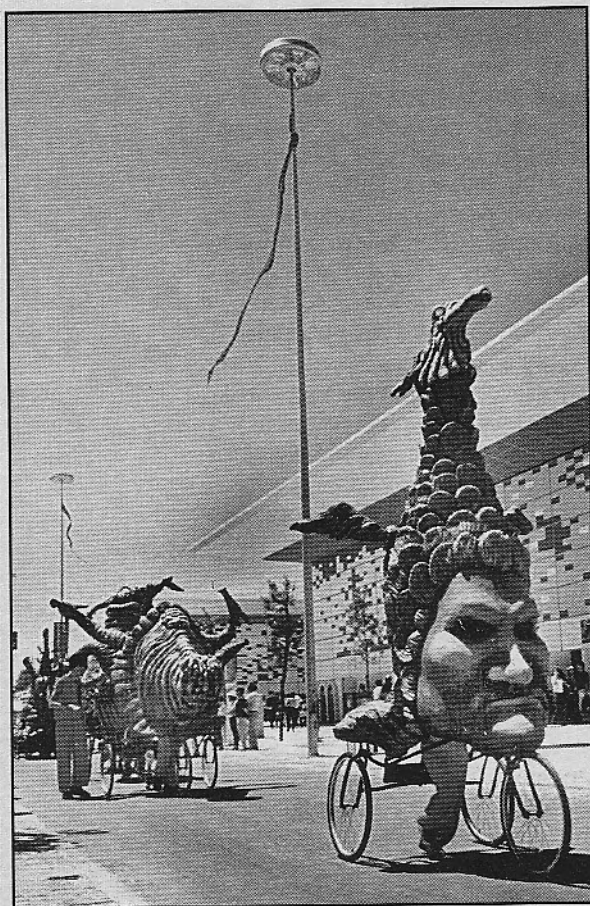
An even more visible sign attracted multitudes to its riverfront site through the summer of 1998. Lisbon deliberately bid to host Expo 98 this year, 500 years after da Gama reached India. Even its theme, "Oceans", is a reminder of glories past. Grand words tumble over the event: "The Portuguese language, an ocean of cultures", "The greatest ever Portuguese cultural event, at the turn of the millennium, in which Portugal seeks to discover a new face, highlighting its multicultural vocation" and on and on.

Expo 98 was a flashy, colourful, techno-dazzle affair. The architecture was end-of-millennium futuristic, the fountains innovative, the pavilions full of whiz-bang wizardry. The ticket-checking machines were so smart, they needed people to monitor how they performed. A gorgeous new bridge over the River Tagus put you right at the site. Its name? Naturally, the Vasco da Gama bridge.

All that jazz could not unfortunately make up for a definitely underwhelming experience. The crowds were staggering. Lines to enter popular pavilions snaked



Clockwise from top: seals laze about at Cape Cross, Namibia; Rachol Seminary in Goa showing Portuguese influence; palace at Sintra near Lisbon built by various kings over many years in different styles; strange creatures on tricycles at Expo 98. Pictures by author.



for hours. The hordes meant that outdoor seating was at a premium; seating in shade practically non-existent. Razzle-dazzle, Expo style, has no place for trivialities like trees or shelters to offer shade. With Lisbon's blazing summer sun beating down, with the long distances to cover on foot, finding a pavilion with a tolerable wait to enter was itself a draining exercise.

Things improved very little once indoors. "Puerile" was the word that came to mind. The "Knowledge of the Seas" pavilion was plastered with quotes—phrases simply lifted from the notebooks of Portuguese sea captains, no thought given to significance or relevance. In a similarly simple-minded way, displays showed that some things float, some things don't. The frame of a large wooden caravel dominated one hall. Inexplicably, it was upside-down. Nearby, a little visited pavilion had several poems from Portuguese-speaking countries, with English translations alongside. Astonishingly, the poems were translated word-for-word from the Portuguese. In English, they made no sense.

If that was how Lisbon planned to attract the world's attention all over again, it was a shame the effort was so mediocre. Built this way, Diego Cao's cross would have crumbled long before the late 1800s. Vasco da Gama's ships would have collapsed well before rounding Cape Bojador in present-day Morocco, once a major milestone in the trip along Africa's coast. The sea route to India would never have been found.

And, almost certainly, my name would not be what it is.

Goa's uniqueness

Those the Portuguese converted in India were given Portuguese names: Sousa, da Cunha, Ferreira, da Gama and others; though over the years, some mutated into forms not seen in Portugal, like D'Souza. Personally, I have little use for religion; neither do I speak any Portuguese. But it was on my trip to Portugal that I realised and comprehended that, in a real sense, without Portugal, without Vasco da Gama, without that cross in Namihia, I would not be who I am.

Beginning with Afonso de Albuquerque's conquest of Goa in 1510, Portuguese influence on the west coast of India waxed and waned for centuries. But Goa remained a Portuguese colony until 1961, a full 14 years after the British left India. There's a significance to that presence that has been somewhat muddied in the Goa of 1998, the 500th year since Vasco da Gama's landing. An angry debate has raged in Goa over da Gama's legacy (see *Himal January 1998*). Should Goa celebrate, or even observe, the 500th anniversary? After all, Vasco da Gama brought the catastrophe of colonialism to India and the resentment is keenly felt.

Just before the Indian President K.R. Narayanan left on a recent trip that took him to Portugal, Goa's Deshpremi Nagrik Samiti (Patriotic Citizens Committee) wrote to ask him not to "fall prey" to any moves by Portuguese authorities to get him to pay tributes to "their hero", Vasco da Gama. Others urged him not to participate in the Vasco celebrations, not to visit the explorer's grave in Lisbon's Mosteiro dos Jeronimos.

The language the Samiti used certainly speaks of real enough sentiments. But consider what Dinar Camotim, Professor of Civil Engineering at the Technical University of Lisbon, himself of Goan Hindu descent, pointed out one evening in a Lisbon bar: Goa owes its very existence, its identity, to Vasco da Gama. If it had not been for him, those 3700 square kilometres would have formed just another stretch of Maharashtra or Karnataka. Nothing would distinguish it from those states.

Certainly, the colonialism that Vasco brought caused harm that still haunts us. But it happened. Colonialism was disastrous, but history is hardly good or bad: it happens. In this case, for better or worse, it also gave many of us in India a certain uniqueness, a certain something to set us apart from the crowd. It may not be much, it may not matter much, it may not even be worth a thought. But it is there.

I can't speak for anyone else. For me, that's enough to make a second trip to Cape Cross worth contemplating.

D. D'Souza is a computer scientist based in Bombay.

"Celebrity Weekends with Jay Leno", announce the billboards as I head out towards New Delhi's IGI airport. Another says, "Jay Leno Strips Clinton". This is what the world has come to: American talk show hosts talking nothing about events that should least concern an Indian are apparently good enough to advertise in "Hamara Bharat Mahaan". Globalisation proceeds.

We have seen many graphic images from Indonesia recently, of the storming of police barricades, tear gas shells exploding, and people dying on the streets. Bangladesh, too, hosts such riot scenes during the habitual hartals, but we hardly get to see it. BTV screens are occupied otherwise. This is where print media steps in. Here is an image from *The Daily Star* of riots in Dhaka's North South Road. Now don't you think print has some purpose?



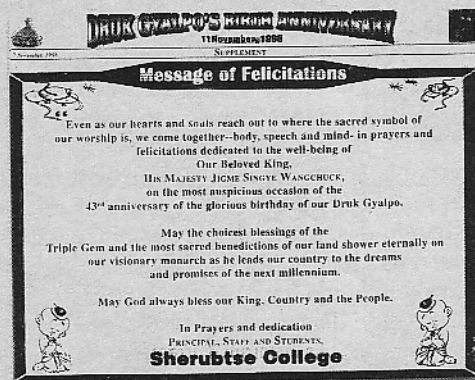
The Ambassador of India to Nepal, Shri K.V. Rajan, held an alumni party in Kathmandu on 20 November. This was to be a get-together of "Nepalese alumni of Indian academic institutions". There was a big crowd at the India House grounds alright, but that was only a drop of Nepal's India alumni. More than half of all educated Nepalis probably have their degrees from Indian universities, and a significant number make do with fake certificates from Bihar. How Mr Rajan distinguished between the various alumni in his invitation list is anybody's guess. Anyway, I have never heard of an alumni get-together that encompasses an entire country.

I do not mind the principal, staff and students of Sherbutse College in Bhutan expressing their deepest admiration for His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk on his 43rd "glorious birthday", nor their wish that the "choicest blessings of the Triple Gem and the most sacred benedictions" of the land be showered "eternally on our visionary monarch as he leads our country to the dreams and promises of the next millennium". In its cloying obeisances, this is not much worse than the Indian Railways' full-pagers extolling the virtues of Railway Minister Nitish Kumar. What I would request the Sherbutse folks to do next time around is to please, please consider employing a graphic designer other than using awful fonts and images of balloons and

cuddly babies from the computer stock.

The **Gross National Happiness**, concept floated by King Jigme, and flogged for all it was worth by King Jigme, has now been picked up by Jigme Thinley, the prime minister equivalent of Druk Yul. Appearing before the "UNDP Millennium meeting in Seoul" in late October, Mr Thinley

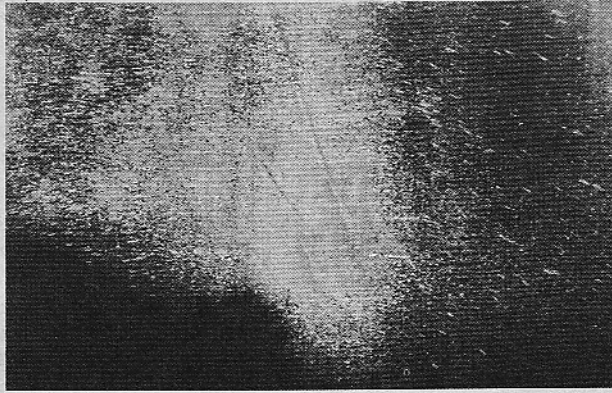
made remarks that could only be taken without a smirk by New Age acolytes bedazzled by the Shangri La that Bhutan projects itself as. It has always been the conviction of King Jigme, said Mr Thinley, "that the ultimate purpose of government is to promote the happiness of the people". I am sure that this was the case with all governments, from the Fifth Republic to the Third Reich. Said Mr Thinley, "While the primary goal of development is happiness, the very subject finds little mention in development plans and programmes." Have to disagree in totality: the ultimate goal of all development programmes, anywhere, is happiness. Essentially, Mr Thinley's GNH index seems to ignore the fact that economic well-being is the real source of happiness, in Bhutan or in the Doorns. In essence, the GNH principle reads like an unlikely take off on the Asian Values debate that raged in Southeast Asia for a while and which is already passe. The Bhutanese ruling elite's theory seems to be that as long as the people are *happy*, why should they be made unhappy with political freedom?



I am always very pleased to read SAARC press releases. Such as this one, titled Saarc Visa Exemption Scheme Expanded, which is very nice in telling me that reps from the seven member-countries met in an Expert Group, and that they had held "detailed deliberations" resulting in a "number of recommendations" for "streamlining the procedure". I am also told that the Visa Exemption Scheme was "initiated to promote close and frequent contacts among the people of the SAARC region" and that 20 new categories were added to the existing 21 categories. What the press release does not tell me is what were the 20 categories which were expanded!!

The biggest con on the Indian public was carried out the morning after the Leonid meteor shower peak of pre-dawn 18 November. We all know that the air show was a dud, of course. For the papers, the timing of the showers

was most awkward, not allowing time for witnessed accounts. So most seemed to have decided to fake it. Take the piece by Seema Singh of *The Times of India*, which was given banner treatment on page one, "Spell-binding spectacle of meteor shower". She wrote in a way that the unwary would think of it as live reporting, whereas the sentences were couched subtly that you could never really accuse her of faking it. There was one slip, however, when Singh reported that "Hundreds of thousands of people across the country watched the brilliant show". Meanwhile, with no pictures that could be used to show off the much touted Leonids, most editors fell for time-lapse photography of the stars taken over Chiang Mai or the Great Wall, of China. What millions of newspaper readers in India got to see were simply stars making a streak across the sky because the camera was kept on a "B" setting. Wake up, editors.



Remaining with *The Times of India*, see what kind of copy gets through when you now have a newspaper run from the marketing

"If I am correct, your paper is like Ganett — publishers of USA Today — in terms of reach across the nation. It also has prestige like The New York Times, correct?"

desk rather than the editor's. An interview session with the chief executive of the Gallup Organisation, James K. Clifton, about the group entering India has him telling the *Times* reporter, "If I am correct, your paper is like

Ganett—publishers of *USA Today*—in terms of reach across the nation. It also has prestige like *The New York Times*, correct?" Not only is this note carried in the text of the interview, it is also unblushingly carried as the single blurb of the piece. This reminds me of an editor of the *TOI*, when it still had an editor, saying, again unblushingly, that his was the second-most important job in India, after the prime minister's!

Nepali industrialist Hulas Chand Golcha is the latest to fall for it, the Man of the Year Award, presented by the make-believe American Biographical Institute, which tells unsuspecting individuals who have grandiose views of themselves that they have been selected to the high position for their commitment to society's

upliftment. All you are required to do is to send in a couple of hundred dollars for "your own individualised laminated plaque or shingle". This is apparently a scam that works particularly well with South Asians from all over, so exalted is their view of themselves for having done so little for "society's upliftment". (The accompanying ad congratulating Mr Golcha appeared in the *Kantipur* daily, placed there by the duly impressed Marwari community in Kathmandu.)

Managed a sneak view of Singapore while in transit, and realised yet again how awful it is that this Westernised Southeast Asian city-state (which pompously calls itself a "nation") has not retained its true original name, "Singhapur". If only names had something to do with affluence, imagine where Gorakhpur and Muzaffarpur would be today! It is the Han work ethic that has elevated *Singhapur*, whereas, in the Indo-Ganga maidan, we are like that only.

In Singhapur, you will be glad to know, at least one thing is outright boring—the newspapers. Take *The Straits Times*, whose anchor story with a massive colour photo to go along with it on 30 November was, and I am not kidding, "Award for widow who's 'best mother'"! Apparently, Madam Quan Poh Eng was only 37 when her husband died 27 years ago, leaving her with six young children to bring up. She "pulled herself together", coped, became a hawker, and in November 1998 was honoured with the Best Mother Award from the Bukit Timah Community Development Council district. I do not know which is better, to have clean **chewing-gum free sidewalks**, or to be forced to read news such as this.

The "international news" in *The Straits Times* can get slightly interesting, something which it holds in common with its rather ragged Nepali counterpart, *The Rising Nepal*. And so here's a headline, "Non-govt bodies under scrutiny for foreign links". The story is about how the Malaysian Home Ministry is checking the background of several NGOs for activities which threaten national security. So, it is not merely in South Asian states, from Pakistan to India to Nepal, where the custodians of the establishment are worried about the ability of NGOs to muddy the waters. And to this they bring in the fear of the **foreign hand**. It is outmoded, this fear of foreign funding, unless it is from the CIA, KGB, RAW, ISI.

— Chhτρια Patrakar

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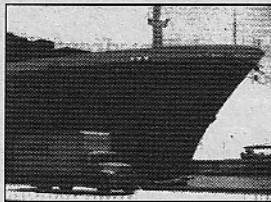
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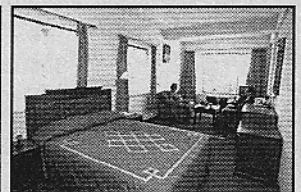


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Interviews with Deepa Mehta and Naseeruddin Shah by Rehan Ansari at the Toronto Film Festival.

“There is film being made that is not ‘Bombay’ and not ‘Western’” -Deepa Mehta



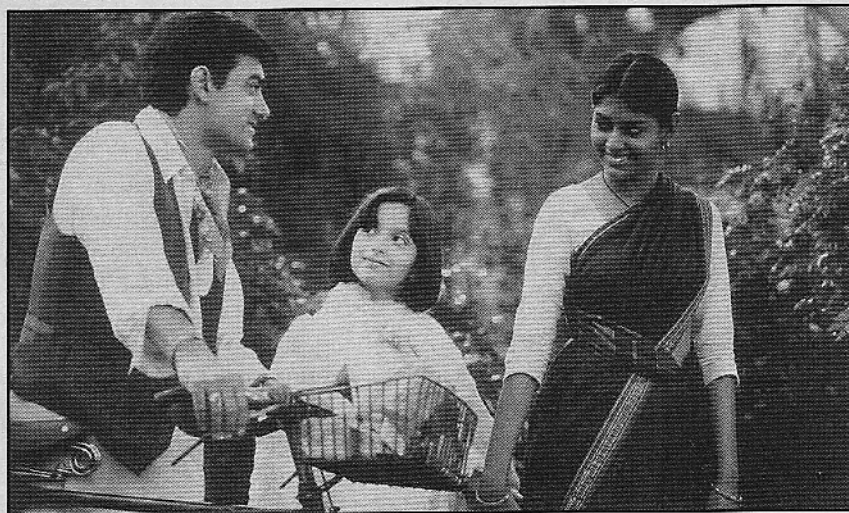
Toronto-based Indian director Deepa Mehta emigrated to Canada in 1973 and made her first film, *Sam and Me*, in 1990. Two years later, she went on to direct Hollywood stars Jessica Tandy and Bridget Fonda in *Camilla*. After her stint in Hollywood, Mehta set about making the first movie in her trilogy of *Fire*, *Earth* and *Water*. *Fire* (1996), about the transgressive relationship between two sisters-in-law in a middle-class Delhi household, received much critical acclaim though it ran into problems with the censor board in India. The film was released in India only last summer.

• There were six films at the Toronto film festival that had South Asian, but mostly Indian, talents. Is this a promising sign?

I would not say “promising”. Next year there may not be six films with South Asian content and talent. But it is inspiring. Speaking from a personal point of view I see the evolution of a hybrid filmmaking. There is film being made that is not ‘Bombay’ and not ‘Western’, and I mean that in all aspects of film. In terms of talent, production design, how the director deals with actors and characters have a sensibility that is no longer one that comes out of Indian cinema.

• What does this sensibility allow you to do?

I can be uninhibited about subject. Whether it is about choices for women (*Fire*) or Partition (*Earth*) I did not have to think about the repercussions as I would have in India. Nor did I have to wonder about the



Amir Khan and Nandita Das in *Earth*.

director board. That being said, the Indian censor board has passed *Earth* without a single cut. So you never know. The film will be released in India on 5 November. I wish it were being released in Pakistan simultaneously.

• How did you come across Partition as a subject?

I have always thought about it. I grew up in Amritsar and my father went to Government College Lahore. So I grew up with the disillusionment of Partition. Sectarian war, as a sub-

ject, fascinates me. So when I came across Bapsi Sidhwa's book, where a Partition story is told from the point of view of a child, I loved it.

• *Who did you imagine were the audience of the film? It is a melodrama, and a love story starring the popular Bollywood hero Aamir Khan. Will it cross over to the West?*

I did not think of an audience when I made the film. It is a personal enterprise. The film has very little English in it. I decided that the film be mostly in Urdu, Punjabi and Gujarati because I could not imagine the characters speaking English.

Nobody knows Aamir Khan outside the region. Who has seen

[Khan's] *Ghulam* in the West? But I want everybody to see the film. Most people in the West have seen *Gandhi* and have no clue about Partition and the other side of Independence.

I think calling the film melodrama is a put down.

• *I was referring to your idea of hybrid filmmaking. Earth has a love story, songs, and Aamir Khan but at the same time the film leaves you with an unresolved crisis unlike conventional melodrama. Did you think of Lahore as a location?*

I wanted to shoot the entire film in Lahore. We applied for permission at the Ministry of Information but did not hear from them. Simply did not

hear from them. This was last August [1997] and I had to start shooting by January.

• *Naseeruddin Shah says that expatriate filmmakers and writers lack an intimacy with the Indian subject.*

I have spent half my life in India. I grew up in Delhi. But do you have to live in India to be insightful about India? A lot of people talk about this issue of being in or out. It may have to do with insecurity.

• *What is your next project?*
Water. I am putting my passion of *Fire* and *Earth* to rest. It is set in the 1920s in Banaras. I am writing the screenplay myself.

“You don’t hear of writers and painters worrying about their audience” -Naseeruddin Shah

“Naseer!” The man yelled from two feet away from us. “Who would have thought I would run into you walking up Yonge St!” This was a South Asian man running into Naseeruddin Shah and myself as we were walking to catch a film at the Toronto Film Festival. “I have seen your films and they have been so important to me,” he says.

Before we ran into this man I was thinking of writing for a Toronto newspaper and introducing Naseeruddin Shah as India's Dustin Hoffman, or the thinking person's Indian actor. I felt the insanity of meeting him in a city where nobody knew him, and living in another city (Lahore) where nobody can meet him (or, more importantly, see him perform on stage as in *Mahatma Versus Gandhi*, which has just completed runs in Bombay and Delhi). Naseer signed the man's package and allayed my panic.

Naseeruddin Shah's roles in Shyam Benegal's movies made him an icon of the Indian New Wave Cinema of the 70s. For me, a kid growing up in Karachi, his images were memorable because they did not adhere to formula. But these films were not popular; your local videowallah still refers to them as 'art films'.

However, the “Ghalib” Naseer played for Gulzar and Doordarshan crossed over into the popular imagination, and that includes the imagination of Pakistanis between Karachi and Mississauga, Ontario, whose local videowallahs keep only the Bollywood potboilers.

Naseeruddin Shah was at the Toronto Film Festival showcasing two of his premiered films. I had a chance to talk to him about *Such A Long Journey* and *Bombay Boys* in the context of international productions having Indian talent behind them, and to address questions of audience, expatriate writing, political art, Pakistani cinema and the film he wants to make on *Gandhi*.

In person, Naseer expresses the same kind of anger, disillusionment, humour, frustration and compassion that we have come to expect from his screen performances. It seemed a strain on his voice to talk. He neither smiled nor nodded. None of the usual gestures gave him away. I would sharpen a witticism, wait for an opening and only then would I get a smile out of this oyster. One another thing, his speech retains the anglicisms of the 60s. Like my father he can say: “Tell that Charlie to bugger off.”

• *What did you think of Deepa Mehta's Earth?*

Did not like it. Is there no other subject for these filmmakers? Is there nothing they can show from contemporary India? I know Partition is the most important subject, but the way *Earth* and *Train to Pakistan* treat it, it does not move me at all. Three pages of Manto tells you what you want to know.

Earth is melodrama. It is the use of the Indian formula film genre to tell the story of Partition. What I like is that *Earth* kept within that formula.

Earth is also Hollywood formula. The sex scene was more important than the scenes of partition violence. Cinema cannot serve a didactic purpose. It cannot change the world. Cinema is not art either. I think an artist as a filmmaker comes along once a century. The best cinema can do is to give images of the contemporary.

• *What about the Indian cinema you were part of in the 70s?*

The so-called New Wave Cinema of the 70s was not art. It was not a movement. It was a group of people. These filmmakers wanted anything but a formula film. So a lot of films were applauded that did not have merit. And they all lost money. So that now if you want to make a film off the beaten track you will have a hard time because of the memory producers have of those films.

These days Mani Ratnam does well with finding the balance between the art and the commercial.

• *You want to make a film yourself now, based on the play Mahatma Versus Gandhi. For a person who claims to not be interested in politics this is one hell of a subject. To put together a film of this kind you will have to pursue it zealously.*

(Cracking a smile) I am interested in Gandhi the private person. Obviously his public life affected his private but I am interested in Gandhi the father. This is an area about which

little is known. And it is not talked about. The play is about a father and a son, and I am interested in it because I had a difficult relationship with my father.

• *What do you think of this international South Asian, but mostly Indian, cinema-making you are watching in Toronto? Indian novels are being made into films by Indians, or in collaboration with Indians. Will there be opportunities for roles, and storytelling of the kind you prefer?*

These writers and filmmakers are expatriate. They lack an intimacy. In the film *Such a Long Journey*, though the story is based around 1971, I feel there is such a distance from the Bangladesh War. I still felt 27 years away from it.

• *Give me another example of this lack of intimacy.*

For example, in *Bombay Boys*, the Naveen Andrews character should have become a Bollywood star, and we should have seen what happens after that. But these expat filmmakers are not familiar with the industry, have not grown up with that—they would not know.

• *So what would you have done if you were making that film?*

There are these three expatriates who come to Bombay in search of something. One of them finds out that he is a

mediocre musician, another finds his brother. The third stars in a film, which is a hit, but leaves the film world at the end of the movie. I think he should have been shown to have found stardom. What happens to people who have talent, or no creative urge at all, when they become stars in Bombay? They actually believe people love them. Mr Bachhan (Amitabh) to this day doesn't understand why his films are failing. How can people not love him? It does not even occur to him that he may be giving a sub-standard product. Govinda

the character is Govinda the person off-screen. But you have to be from the industry to know this.

• *Perhaps these expatriate filmmakers, as you call them, are figuring out their audience.*

You don't hear of writers and painters worrying about their audience. There are very few writers writing in India. These people you hear of are all outside.

• *What about cinema in Bengal or in the South?*

Telugu cinema is very big. They have big budgets and innovate on the formula. But it is impossible for me to act in the languages of the south. I tried. I had to repeat numerals for dialogue: *ikees bees chabees satees ikees*. And then be dubbed over.

• *What about playwrights?*

We do theatre in Bombay in Gujarati and Marathi and Hindi. But it is mostly Beckett, Ionesco, Pinter and Brecht. I wish we did plays written by Indians but there have been, say, three Indian plays written in the last 50 years. It is difficult.

The censors are terrible. You can't show corrupt officials. The kind of satire I saw in the Pakistani show *Fifty/Fifty* of the late 70s would be impossible in India.

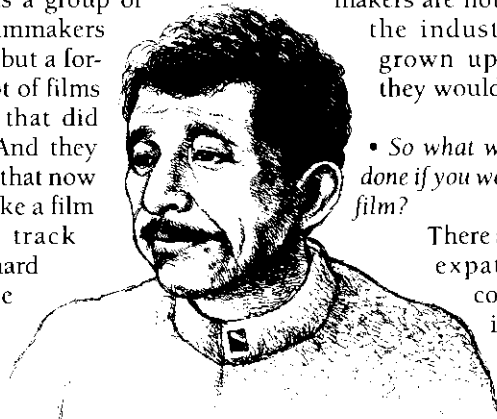
• *Have you seen Pakistani films?*

Yes, some from the 70s. Nadeem was a good actor. What are Pakistani films like these days?

• *Formula films reign. Though the pace of Urdu film production has picked up over the last couple of years. Which means less rape and violence. The formula in Pakistan was the Maula Jat formula. It sired hundreds of Punjabi clones. They crowded out everything.*

Yes, the formula film. It's the *Sholay* syndrome. What happened to Nadeem?

• *He was part of it. Judging from cinema hoardings I remember from the mid-80s he tried his hand at playing the angry middle-aged man. He lives in Lahore.*



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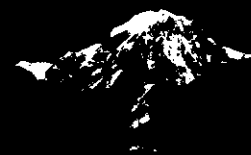
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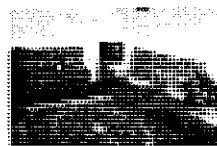
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Separated at birth

Dayawanti/Ayesha could easily be a character out of a Gabriel Garcia Marquez novel. So could her son Ranamama, and his sister Subhadra. But this isn't fiction and they aren't characters in a surrealistic setting conjured up by a master writer. Urvashi Butalia draws upon their stories—of her grandmother, her uncle and her mother—to start off her insightful work on the Partition from the point of view of the people who lived it.

The Other Side of Silence is an attempt to deal squarely and honestly with one of the biggest traumas of history from a perspective that is traditionally ignored when examining the division of the Subcontinent in 1947, the accompanying displacement of 12 million people, the massacre of an estimated 200,000 (the contemporary British estimate) to two million (a later Indian estimate) people, the slaughter that "sometimes accompanied, sometimes prompted their movement".

"As always," writes Butalia in the first chapter, "there was widespread sexual savagery: about 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion)." A major point in the hook is the issue of women being seen as the repositories of 'honour' and 'property'. The writer delves into the state recovery programmes, in which social workers were given the task of tracking down and bringing back Hindu women to India and Muslim women to Pakistan, sometimes against the wishes of the women themselves. Children, however, were often allowed to stay behind if they had been abducted, or were the result of mixed marriages or illegitimate unions—although girls of 13 years or older were considered women.

Herself the product of a family of 'Partition refugees', Butalia makes the

journey back into that traumatic period through interviews, starting with those closest to her (Subhadra, her mother, and Ranamama, the uncle who stayed behind in their ancestral Lahore, just 20 miles inside the Pakistani Punjab border) as well as of those she encounters quite by chance, like the auto-rickshaw driver with whom a casual conversation turns into a deeper dialogue, and the beggar woman who had come from a small village in (now Pakistani) Punjab and ended up on the streets of Delhi.

Concluding his narrative of the harrowing journey from Pakistani West Punjab to the Indian side, Rajinder Singh, the auto-rickshaw



The Other Side of Silence

by Urvashi Butalia
Viking, New Delhi,
1998
INR 295

reviewed by
Beena Sarwar

driver, tells Butalia: "We saw a trainload of Hindus had been killed and in Dera Baba Nanak, a trainload of Musalmaans who had come from the direction of Ludhiana had been killed... they killed each other's people... When we got to Dera Baba Nanak, they said to us, you have come home. But we thought, our home was over there. We have left it behind. How can this be home?" Butalia does not comment on straight narratives like these, allowing the interviewees to just speak in their own unstructured, rambling manner, to allow the readers to draw their own conclusions, much like the way she herself did.

"In this way, I moved from one

person to another, one story to another, and collected stories, almost randomly." This method has its limitations, as the author herself admits, but it has also given her a great deal of freedom, including that of structuring the hook in an unconventional way, which is how she felt most comfortable, given that the interviews do not fit any particular pattern. Some of the stories are threaded through the chapters, through references and quotes, while the full text of the interview is provided elsewhere. And through it all is Butalia's own non-judgemental voice, questioning, analysing, reflecting.

In addition to interviews, Butalia draws upon diaries, memoirs, newspaper reports and documents like enquiry commissions, letters, pamphlets and books. From these emerge the many different 'voices' of Partition, interspersed with her own distinctive voice.

Although one of the hook's limitations is the writer's lack of access to people on the Pakistani side of the border (barring Ranamama), the interviews given by people in India could well have been given by people in Pakistan. There is no 'good' or 'bad guy' here—just ordinary people, victims of traditions, circumstances, economic problems, swept along by a tide they didn't understand. But they are not always victims. The hook is also an attempt to come to grips with the phenomenon of "ordinary peaceable people" having "driven their neighbours from their homes and murdered them for no readily apparent reason than that they were of a different religious community".

Torn between the "desire to be honest and be careful", the writer finds no easy answers, but then, she is wise enough not to expect any. And she does manage a fine balance between honesty and treading with care. Although much is left unsaid, it is clear that the motive behind with-



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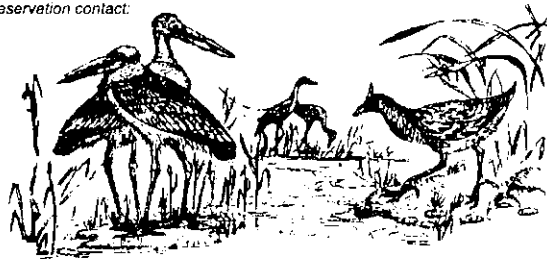
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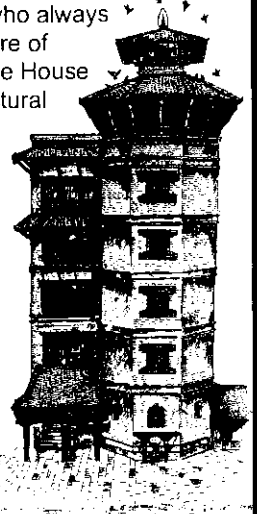
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OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1200	1900	
WINTER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1998/1999						
FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR	
OS4444	Thursday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900	
OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900	

holding details is sincere. There is throughout the book a rare self-questioning, a conscious attempt to place people at the centre of events, to avoid passing judgement or theorising. Many of the insights provided by the writer are therefore all the more valuable.

Starting with her own family, Butalia finds that there are many layers to a perceived reality because people prefer to gloss over or forget what happened. The complexities of family relationships can bring people close, or push them apart. In the case of her mother and uncle, the writer, during the course of her research on the subject of Partition, acted as catalyst and brought them together again in the family house in Lahore, bridging decades of silence and suspicion.

But, things are not as simple as they seem. The layers of distrust built up over the years still remain in this fascinating human story in which you suspect a great deal has been left unsaid because of the writer's strong sense of ethics and the compulsion to protect those she has interviewed.

What is stronger, the ties of religion, or of blood or of land? Shockingly, the uncle who stayed behind in Lahore confesses that his new family (after Partition, he married a Muslim and converted to Islam) are strangers to him and distrust him because of his Hindu origin. His children, he says, tolerate him only because of his

house—the collateral which was instrumental in enabling him to marry in the first place. When he meets his niece Urvashi, after she seeks him out on a visit to Lahore, the poignancy of his situation is revealed when he says, it is the first time “I am speaking to my own blood.”

What about his family, she asks. “They are your blood, not me”. “No,” he said, “for them I remain a stranger. You, you understand what it is I'm talking about. That is why you are here on this search. You know. Even if nothing else ever happens, I know that you have been sent here to lighten my load.”

It is this encounter that triggers off Butalia's determination to complete the book, as it strikes her how many more people like him have lived all their lives with silences, and why, given these silences, “we, who had studied modern Indian history in school, who knew there something called the Partition of India that came simultaneously with Independence, had never learnt about this side of it? Why had these stories remained hidden? Was there no place for them in history?” Substitute “Indian history” for “Pakistani history” and the question remains as valid.

It is not just Ranamama who has been silent for some four decades. As Damyanti Sahgal, the dedicated social worker whose story figures largely in *Silences*, talks to the writer, details of

her experiences come as news to her own sister Kamla. Damyanti's story also comes across as a microcosm of the story of so many women whose lives were disrupted by Partition. Her account is significant for another reason: her insights and descriptions are, as the writer points out, “particularly valuable in retrieving the history of such violence—rape, forcible abduction and marriage, and a further violence of the kind perpetrated by the State in its relief and recovery operation”.

Butalia's own questioning includes what to leave out and what to put in, and even, indeed, whether she is on the right track. The questioning is reinforced when she was asked over and over again: “Why do you want to know this? What difference will it make?”

With the same rare spirit of self-questioning, Butalia admits that her own identity (middle class, Punjabi, half-Sikh) would undoubtedly have a bearing on the way people responded to her. “What value then ought I to place on their memory, their recall? Often, what emerged from the interviews was so bitter, so full of rage, resentment, communal feeling, that it frightened me.” Nevertheless, she pushed on, “simply because it meant so much to me”—an intensity that comes across in no uncertain terms in this sincere and empathic work.

Women of the Partition

Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition is a timely book for all of South Asia. For the chilling stories of violence perpetrated during the partition of India and Pakistan in the name of religion, nation, property and territory, and how women, their lives and bodies became objects on which this violence and claiming were played out, have lessons for countries negotiating their own partitions and futures.

The authors document and analyse the testimonies of Hindu and Muslim women who were victims of

partition violence as well as of those who worked at refugee homes and repatriation services. Women's experiences have hitherto been marginal, used in the official histories of the period. While the issues surrounding partition violence against women were widely discussed in the Indian parliament before the Abducted Person's Act in 1949, the authors make clear that the Indian State was acting in this instance not so much for the welfare of the women themselves but as a benevolent state rescuing its citizens from the enemy

'Other'—Muslim Pakistan. Women were pawns in the construction of each nation and state.

Documenting and analysing the experiences of women of that period is therefore a particularly significant project: the testimonies of the women who bore the brunt of rape, displacement, destitution and who sacrificed themselves as symbols of their families' honour challenge the rhetoric of nationalism and statehood. They affirm that men and women are constructed as citizens of the nation state in very different ways.

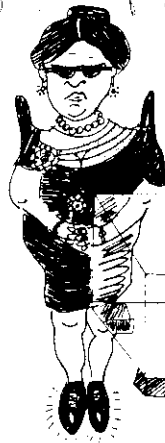
TYRANTS GALORE

YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE IS THE MESSAGE FOR ALL PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE TYRANTS IN OUR MIDST.

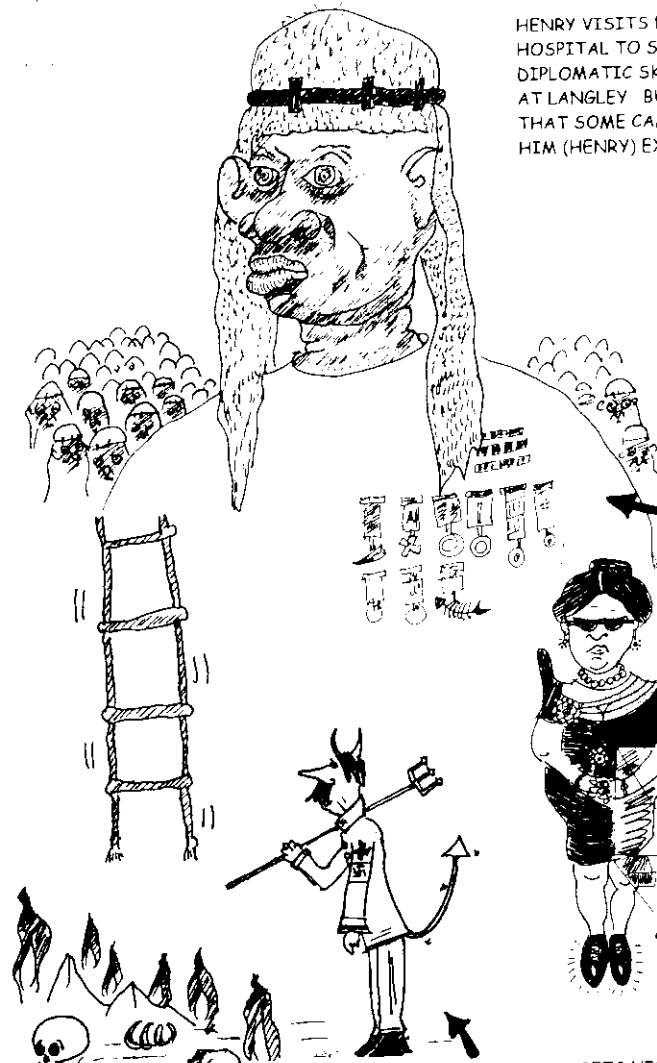
HENRY VISITS HIS OLD FRIEND GEN. PINOCHET IN HOSPITAL TO SEE IF HE COULD USE HIS CONSIDERABLE DIPLOMATIC SKILLS TO GET HIM (PINOCHET) SAFE HAVEN AT LANGLEY BUT HENRY DISCOVERS TO HIS DISMAY THAT SOME CAMBODIANS IN VANCOUVER ALREADY WANT HIM (HENRY) EXTRADITED TO CANADA AS WELL.



AFTER A LENGTHY LEGAL TUSSE AND UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM UGANDAN ASIAN LEGISLATORS, GEN. IDI AMIN IS TO BE EXPEDITED TO BRADFORD. BUT HE IS RELUCTANT TO LEAVE THE SAFETY OF SAUDI ARABIA AND WITHOUT HIS 356 GRANDCHILDREN AND 5,227 GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN.



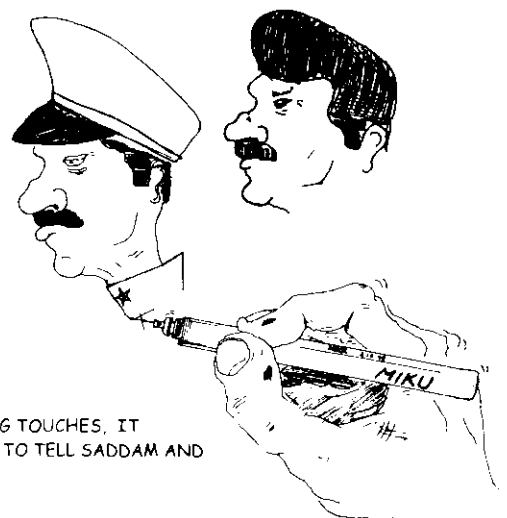
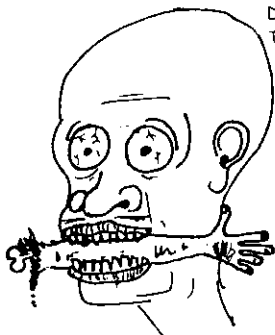
IMELDA TAKES HER BELOVED FERDIE OUT OF HIS CRYPT, AND HIDES HIM IN A SECRET BANK VAULT IN ZURICH SO THAT SHE CAN SAVE ON THE EMBALMERS AND SO THAT HE WILL DISAPPEAR FROM AMONG THE LIVING DEAD.



ONE DAY IN HELL, ADOLF FINALLY GETS HIS MARCHING ORDERS TO CLIMB THE ROPE LADDER TO PURGATORY WHERE HE WILL FACE AN EXTRADITION HEARING TO DETERMINE WHETHER AN EX-HEAD OF STATE IS ENTITLED TO IMMUNITY IF HE OR SHE IS DECEASED.

WHILE DINING ON CHOICE ROAST IN A GOURMET RESTAURANT IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, EMPEROR BOKASSA IS GREETED WITH THE NEWS THAT THE INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE IN THE HAGUE WANTS TO TRY HIM FOR EATING HIS POLITICAL OPPONENTS.

AS THE ARTIST PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES, IT BECAME INCREASINGLY DIFFICULT TO TELL SADDAM AND STALIN APART.



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