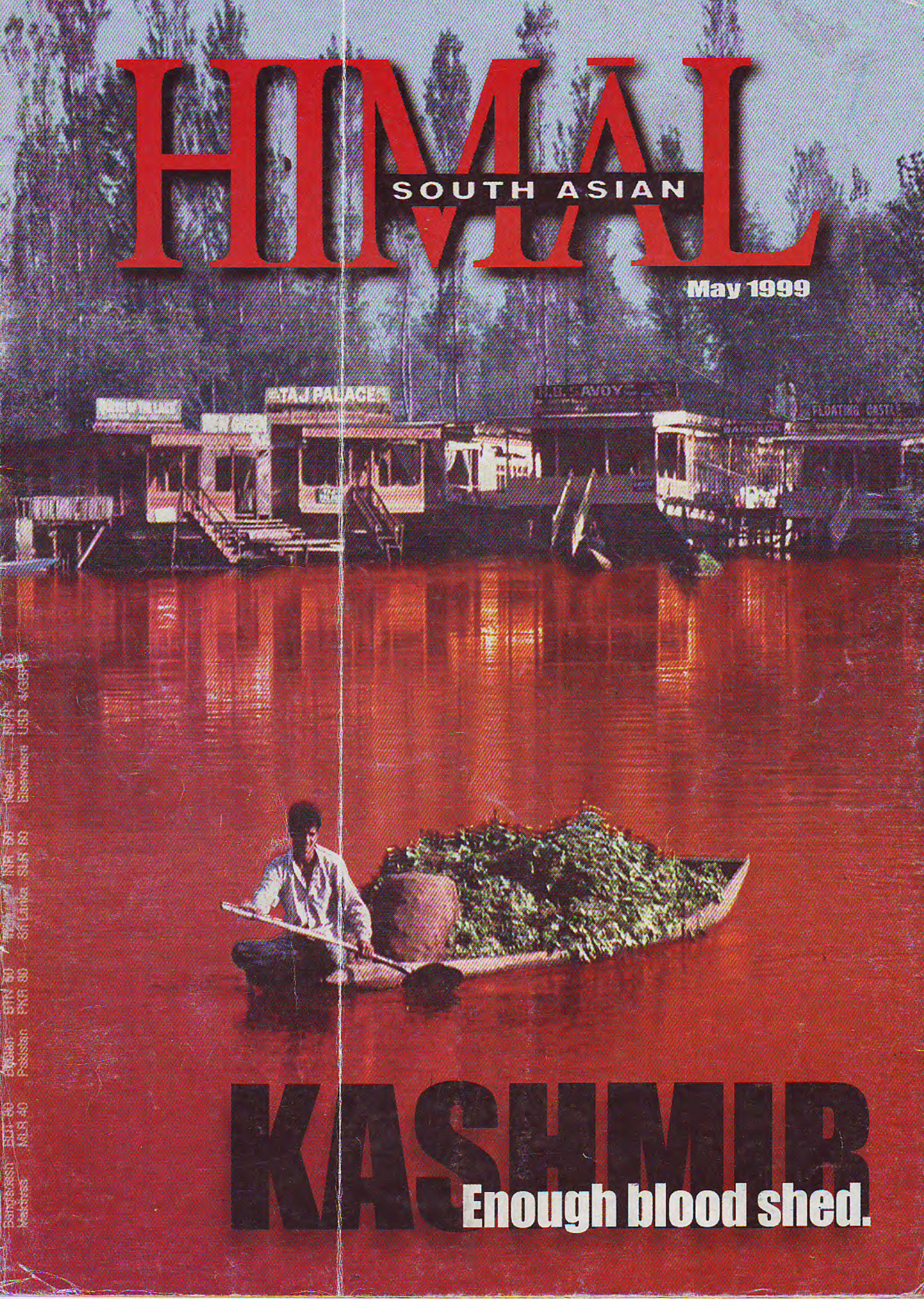


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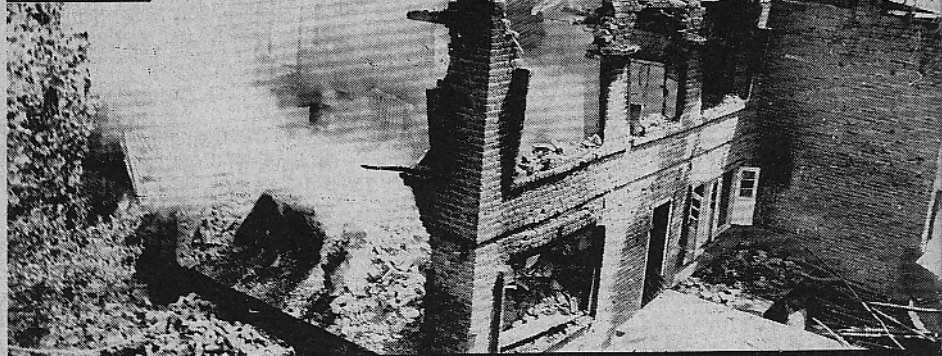
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10 A WILLING SUSPENSION OF REASON



Kashmir is the main excuse that India and Pakistan use to justify the high cost of their militarisation. Peace in Kashmir is not an option. It is imperative for South Asia's progress.

The battle among Pakistani politicians to outdo one another in proving their empathy for the Kashmir cause is as intense as the militant struggle in the Valley.



Who's Left?

After Man Mohan Adhikari

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Waive the wave ban at Wagah

A Sri Lankan on the India-Pakistan frontier finds that (bus diplomacy notwithstanding) a border is a harsh, hostile and irrational place.

Sri Lanka does not have land boundaries. Children in Colombo grow up looking vaguely out across the Indian Ocean knowing that somewhere past the horizon is Madagascar. There are no physical symbols of demarcation — guards, uniforms, checkposts, gates, barbed wire and time differences — that occur within metres. I have stepped across three borders in South Asia: Kodari (Nepal-Tibet), Dawki (Bangladesh-India) and Wagah (Pakistan-India). My vote for South Asia's Most Serious Frontier goes to Wagah.

Kodari doesn't really count. It is a sleepy town at the foot of a looming mountain, guarded by indulgent PLA guards who permit you to step across and briefly stock up on noodle soup and rice wine. Nonetheless, it is a *bona fide* checkpost complete with Chinese flag and a three-hour time difference. As you sit on the Nepal side having a leisurely 9 am breakfast, the farmer across the river in Tibet is on Beijing time, and thinking of lunch.

The Dawki border up near Sylhet in northeastern Bangladesh is slightly more vigilant, due to the general insurgency in the area. We were a group of four — one Nepali, one American, one UN Passport holder and myself, a Sri Lankan. Just as diverse was the status of our travel documents. The Nepali needed no Indian visa but had no Bangladeshi re-entry permit. The American had a multiple entry Bangladeshi visa but no Indian visa. I had a multiple entry Indian visa but had already used my

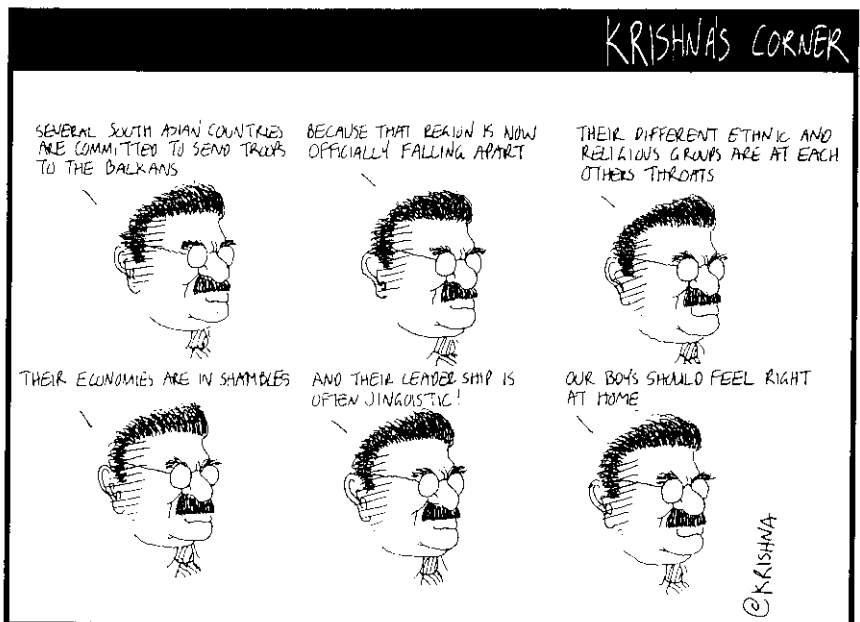
Bangladeshi single entry visa. Luckily, the UN passport holder flashed the sky blue document and we were all allowed to cross for 10 minutes. I bought a cake of Indian-made Lux soap, looked longingly at the misty mountains of Meghalaya in the distance, then crossed back.

Compared to the two, Wagah is a border that takes itself seriously. From Lahore, it was just a short evening drive to Wagah, 22 miles away. We made it to the gates just in time for some macho goose-stepping. A few shouts of "Pakistan Zindabad" and "Jai Hind", and many more cheers and claps. The Pakistan Rangers strutted around like roosters, while the Border Security Force matched steps on the other side.

Flags were lowered, gates

slammed and padlocked, and the show was over. Not so. The visiting men were kept waiting behind a chain, and women and children shown to the front, and we found ourselves right in front of the gate. On the other side, under a sign saying "The World's Largest Democracy", the Indians were waving vigorously at us. Our natural instinct was to wave back, but after a minute or so of waving a menacing Pakistan Rangers guard blocked our way, and instructed in Urdu: "Don't do that."

We continued to wave. Considering the way the Indians were waving at us, it would have been hard not to. The guard went on, "Forget them! What do you have to do with them?", and again sharply ordered us to stop waving. We



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asked to see someone in charge, and the commanding officer obliged. We told him what had happened and asked him why we were not allowed to wave.

"It is against the law."

"What law? Show us the law. Which book is it in?"

"My orders are that no one should wave."

"But why not? They were waving at us, why shouldn't we wave at them?"

"Because my orders are that no one should wave."

"But if there is no law, why shouldn't we wave?"

"We spend 24 hours, day and night protecting you from them, and you come here for one day, and you want to wave at them?"

"I am from Sri Lanka. All I read in the newspapers these days is about friendship between Pakistan and India. If your prime ministers can shake hands with each other, why can't the Pakistanis wave at the Indians?"

"Let that be, that's at the highest levels. It's different here. All right, you can wave, then. If you want to wave, wave. Go ahead. Wave."

"Thank you. I already did. But will the other people be able to wave? Will you change things here? Can they wave?"

"No, we will not change the law. But you can wave if you want to."

Deliberately missed the point.

Citing security requirements, the officer would not tell us his name, or rank.

He tried to make amends by offering us tea, but we said no. And regretted it, minutes later, as we drove back to Lahore leaving him to sit in a chair, chin in hand. Another chance of friendship missed, and another chance to make things better thrown away. He had his orders, we had our principles and no tea was sipped that evening.

I wish we'd had that cup of tea, and I wish that Nawaz Sharif

would change the 'rules', and let the Pakistanis wave back. Building bridges by means of buses, declarations, and fewer visa requirements isn't enough.

India may well be the world's largest democracy, but Pakistan is a democracy too, and waving is a democratic right.

— Aruni John

Here's to Yeti

Us ladies have such a raw deal that we're truly grateful when a mag takes us and our concerns seriously. That's why I, for one, felt quite devastated when you removed Yeti from your magazine (and your staff?).

Himal wasn't the same without her--indeed, instead of turning eagerly to the last page first, I now had to turn the pages as if they were leaden. Full of good stuff no doubt, but well...not half as much fun. So, thank you editors, for reinstating Yeti, who's surpassed herself in the April issue with her politically correct vocabulary. Just thought I'd put in some additions which Yeti seems to have left out (perhaps because of her age?). Here they are:

men-o-pause (what men never do)—or perhaps we should say what women want but men never do?

men's-tru-ation (if only it WAS men's, but alas...)

*Urvashi Butalia
New Delhi*

We apologise to our readers in Sri Lanka who were unable to purchase their copy of the April 1999 issue (Sri Lanka: Unending War) by virtue of its being held up at the colombo customs. Editors.



KARACHI JOURNALIST Hasan Mujtaba has been declared second runner-up for the 1998 SAIS-Novartis Prize for

Excellence in International Journalism awarded by Johns Hopkins University for his article "Among the Sand dunes of the India-Pakistan Border" (Himal, October 1998). The annual SAIS-Novartis Prize has been established by The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) of John Hopkins University and is given in recognition of "outstanding achievement in the coverage of international affairs".

Mujtaba's article dealing with the plight of Bangladeshi women being traded along the Rajasthan-Sindh border for sex work, has been commended for breaking new ground and raising public awareness. Mujtaba is a senior reporter with the Karachi-based *Newsline* monthly.



AUTHOR AMITAV Ghosh has been nominated for the 34th National Magazine Awards in the Reporting Category, for his

piece titled "A Reporter At Large: Countdown; Why Can't Every Country Have the Bomb?". Ghosh's article on the nuclear bomb cult in the Subcontinent appeared in *The New Yorker*, and was carried in South Asia exclusively by Himal in November 1998 under the title "Countdown: Insurgency of an Elite".

SRI LANKA

The return of JVP

THE JVP is back. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the party with Marxist roots which fuelled two failed insurrections in the country in 1971 and 1987-88 that led to the killing of tens of thousands, has emerged as a key player in the Sri Lankan political arena following the recent elections to five provincial councils.

The ruling People's Alliance (PA) won the highest number of seats in all the provinces in the 6 April polls, but it faced a tough contest in two of them. In the densely populated Western Province, where a quarter of the country's people live, the PA and the main opposition United National Party (UNP) each won 44 seats, and in the Central Province, the second biggest in terms of population, the PA took 24 as against the UNP's 23. And due to election rules that give the highest vote-getter in all five provinces two bonus seats in each of the provincial councils, the PA ended up with the most seats. Even so, the balance of power in the Western Province (which includes the Colombo metropolitan area) will be determined by the JVP, which won eight of its total haul of 15 seats there.

For the moment, the party which once said "a plague on both your houses" to the country's two contending power groups, has no plans to prop up either side even in return for provincial ministerial offices. "We are not supporting anyone to form a government," said JVP General Secretary Tilvin Silva after the results were declared. "But we will use our power to work for the country and support development."

That may be easier said than done, for the JVP has a gory past to come to terms with first. During the 1970 elections, the then emerging JVP helped Sirimavo Bandaranaike and her United Front (UF) sweep the elections.

The UF alliance — the precursor to the present PA — included the country's old left, the Trotskyist Lanka

Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party, with Bandaranaike's own centrist Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) calling the shots. But a year later the JVP had turned against the government and launched its first insurrection. Armed with home-made bombs and shotguns commandeered countrywide, JVP fighters of both sexes, many barely out of their teens, captured police stations in many parts of the country in a surprise onslaught in April 1971.

With many parts of the country in the control of insurgents, a frantic Bandaranaike sought and obtained foreign military help to put down the revolt. Indian soldiers were used to secure the main Katunayake air base, while Indian and Pakistani pilots flew logistical sorties. (Foreign troops, however, were not deployed directly in anti-JVP operations). The 1971 uprising was brutally suppressed with an estimated 20,000 young people killed.

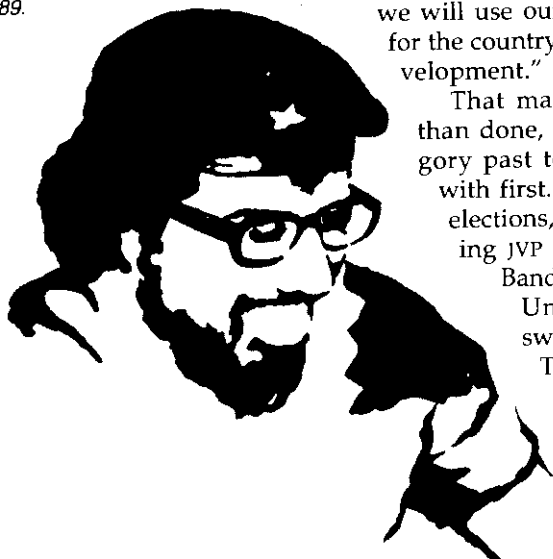
The JVP, or what was left of it, got back at the UF government in the 1977 elections when it supported the huge landslide for the UNP that swept Bandaranaike out of office and annihilated her allies of the old left which had been a romantic and vigorous presence in the Sri Lanka polity even before Independence in 1948. The victorious J.R. Jayewardene government released the JVP leaders from jail on their undertaking that they would enter the political mainstream. Asked what would happen if they resorted again to armed insurrection, president Jayewardene had said ominously, "Let them first find a place to hide."

Jayewardene lived to rue those words. Embattled with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam gaining ascendancy in the North and the East, the president brought in Indian troops in 1987 to deal with the Tamil Tigers. This was sufficient provocation for the JVP to leap on to the SLFP bandwagon in anti-government protests. Adopting a fiercely anti-Indian stance, the JVP launched its second armed adventure in 1988.

Compared to the violence of the second revolt, 1971 turned out to have been a picnic. The war in the North-East had militarised the country, and the JVP used weapons and deserters from the army with deadly effect. The JVP's ability to kill at will created a fear psychosis and the government was virtually brought to its knees.

A beleaguered Jayewardene who had been flirting with the possibility of a third

JVP founder Rohana Wijeweera. Killed in 1989.



term decided to retire, bequeathing the UNP leadership to prime minister Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1988. The country was on the brink of anarchy and the government hardly in control when the JVP made a monumental blunder. It threatened to wipe out families of members of the security forces if they stood loyal to the government. That threat sparked a brutal campaign to root out and destroy the rebel movement. Thousands were killed with the security forces bumping off anybody suspected of having even the remotest connections with the rebels. Tyre pyres with burning bodies were a common sight on roadsides. A specially commissioned rapid deployment force of the army eventually liquidated the JVP leadership in 1989 and Premadasa was quickly able to restore normalcy. Human rights organisations estimate that up to 60,000 were killed.

For now, the JVP, emboldened by its strong showing at the recent polls, expects to do even better in the forthcoming election in the Southern Province, a traditional JVP stronghold. However, the party, outlawed first by the UF in 1971, and then by the UNP in 1987, knows it has to correct its violent image. Says General Secretary Tilvin Silva: "The government wants to project the JVP as a violent group. That is not correct. The JVP was not responsible for the insurrections. It was done by a group of former JVP members who were angry over the proscription of the party."

Although that claim may not wash in the minds of the electorate, the JVP is particularly attractive to urban youth and has significant support in the universities. With both the PA and the UNP committed to market economy and divestiture of state enterprise to private ownership, the party has its attractions for 'disadvantaged' young people whose best job prospects lie with the shrinking state sector.

For the Sri Lankan polity, however, the elections had another message, besides the JVP's rising popularity. Out of the total 5 million votes polled, nearly 350,000, or 14 per cent, of the votes were marked invalid. Many of these were the votes of people who have tired of both the PA and the UNP, but do not wish to vote for the JVP as an alternative. That they still took the trouble of going to the booths to invalidate their votes is something to be noted with the seriousness it demands. ▲

INDIA

VOTE OF OVERCONFIDENCE

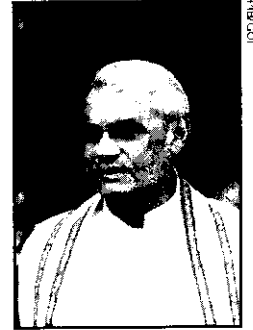
THE COLLAPSE of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government barely 13 months after coming to power has sent an unambiguous message to India's politicians: ultranationalism, hawkishness on matters of security, and nuclear and missile muscle-flexing can hardly guarantee political survival.

The BJP has long been identified as the only political party in India that is a strong, unconditional votary of nuclear weapons and missiles. It has demanded a nuclear bomb for India since 1951 — when India's security environment was qualitatively better than at any time in the 1980s or 1990s and fully 13 years before China crossed the nuclear threshold. One of its first decisions upon coming to power in March last year was to conduct a nuclear test, a decision made even before it had won a confidence vote in Parliament by a razor-thin margin made possible by abstentions.

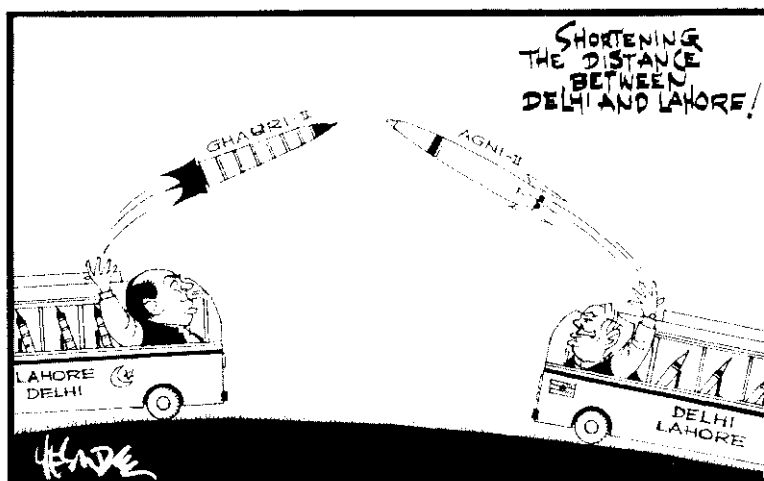
Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee did not even share the decision to test with his cabinet, although the BJP's ideological mentor and organisational master, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, was privy to it. Even Defence Minister George Fernandes was not told about it till a few hours before the 11 May 1998 tests.

The BJP had thought that nuclearisation would produce a popularity wave in its favour — a delusion strengthened by the selective, exaggerated pictures of jubilatory scenes among some of its hardcore supporters immediately after the tests. The opposite happened, especially after Pakistan's own tests deflated the jingoistic claim that India's nuclearisation was a great scientific-technological achievement unique to the Third World.

By July, more than two-thirds of Indians polled in relatively systematic opinion surveys were saying that they were opposed to the manufacture of nuclear weapons. Most non-BJP politicians speaking in Parliament criticised the diversion of resources and distortion of social priorities that accompanied nuclearisation. And in November 1998, voters in three important Hindi-speaking states delivered a stunning verdict against the BJP in legislative elections in which the party



Atal Behari Vajpayee:
Nuclear tests did not
save his government.



deliberately had made the tests a major campaign issue.

The tide of public opinion turned against the ruling coalition's nuclear policies for three main reasons. First, nuclearisation had lowered, rather than heightened India's stature in the world, attracting it flak not just from the Great Powers, but also from the Global South, particularly from within the neighbourhood. The sanctions, reprimands from multilateral fora, and negative reactions that followed, underscored India's isolation.

Secondly, as the Bomb's social and economic costs unfolded, official claims sounded increasingly hollow. The tests took place amidst an explosion of jingoism, male-supremacist, aggressive nationalism, and bellicosity towards India's neighbours. This vitiated the social climate, promoting secrecy, intolerance and suppression of dissent, and legitimising insensate violence.

The BJP's ideological brotherhood saw nuclearisation as the assertion of India's 'Hindu manhood'. But in economic terms, even a small nuclear weapons programme is enormously costly—of the order of USD 10 to 15 billion—raising the country's already bloated military budget annually by more than 20 percent. And even this gives India only a fairly rudimentary nuclear arsenal, about a fifth the size of China's.

Thirdly, nuclear weapons involve a Faustian bargain: they are liable to reduce, not enhance, security. India has entered into an arms race not just with Pakistan, lowering mutual security, but also with China, which has a 30-year nuclear and missile lead, and an economy three times India's. To any observer, this is strategically disastrous and

economically ruinous.

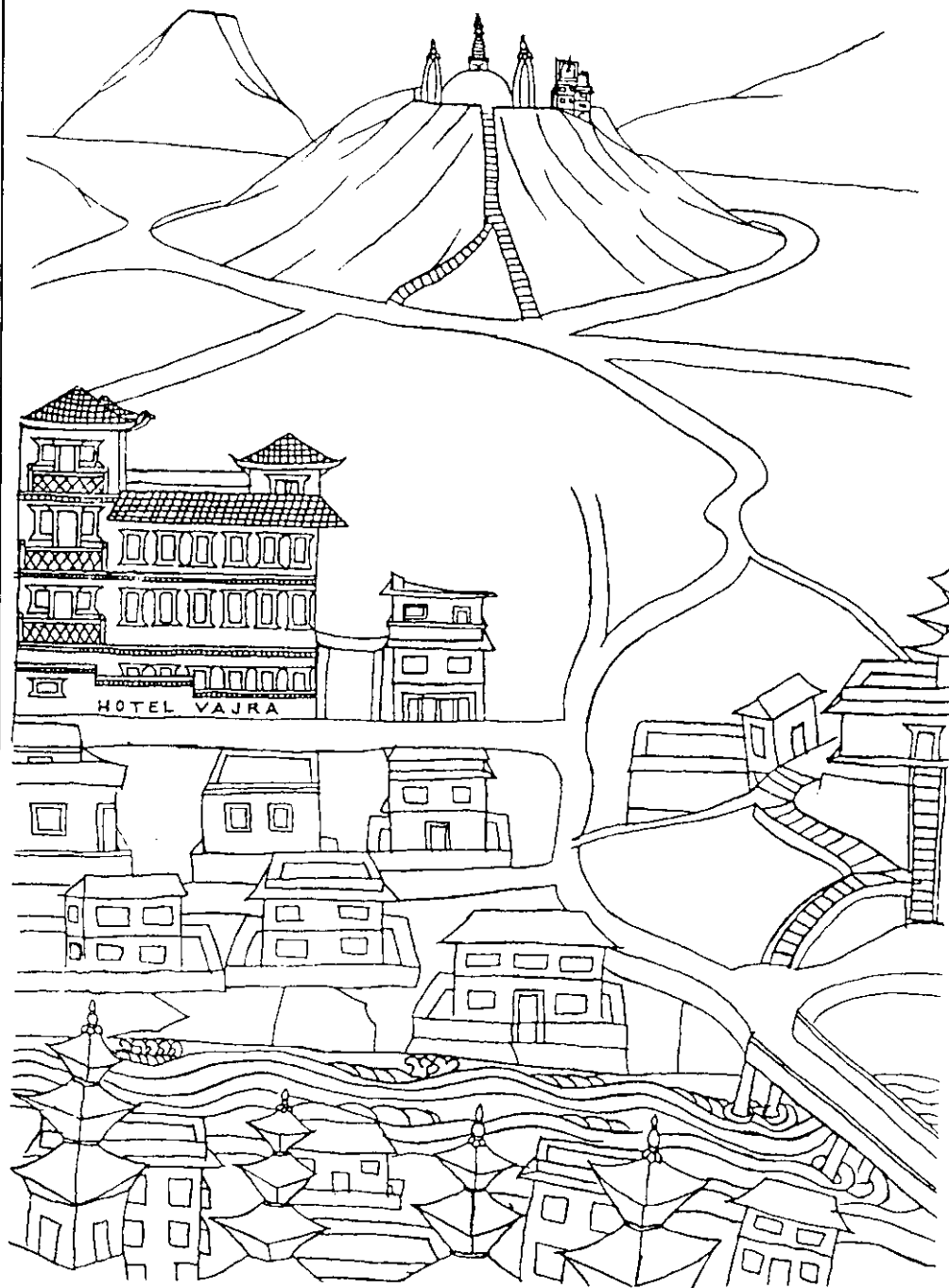
In the specific situation of the Subcontinent, with its history of three India-Pakistan wars, intense mutual suspicion, hostility and strategic miscalculation, nuclear weapons are extremely destabilising. There is little strategic distance between India and Pakistan, with missile flight-time to many target points as low as three to five minutes. The possibility of accidental, unintended or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, always real—as revealed hundreds of times during the Cold War—is particularly stark in the India-Pakistan case. For many Indians and Pakistanis, nuclear weapons are now a felt danger, not abstract, distant entities.

Adverse public opinion on nuclear weapons is one factor that restrained the Indian government from undertaking a new round of tests although it was under pressure from political hawks and hardline scientists in the nuclear and defence establishments. This group's compulsion was the nagging knowledge that their claims of a hydrogen bomb test and high yields of fission weapons were being widely questioned by independent-minded scientists at home and abroad. In the end, it was this hostile public mood that impelled Vajpayee to take the bus to Lahore on 20 February and hold a conciliatory summit with Nawaz Sharif.

However, public opinion alone is no guarantee that India's policy-makers will radically alter their stance with a change in government. If a Congress-led government comes to power after the elections, it is likely to go slow on nuclear weapons development; but at the same time, it might be reluctant, given past pronouncements of some Congress leaders on that issue, to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT).

Whatever happens, it is no small gain that Indian politicians have realised that hawkishness does not guarantee votes. The generally critical reaction of the Opposition to the 11 April Agni missile test is a healthy sign. As is the emergence of a significant nuclear disarmament and peace movement in India. If this grows, South Asia's denuclearisation—and the prospect of global nuclear disarmament—will not be as remote as it might seem.

— Praful Bidwai



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

Vajra, a serene assembly of brick buildings, grassy courtyards, ivy-covered walls and Hindu statuary is a calm oasis over looking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time, February '99



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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JITENDER GUPTA/OUTLOOK

The 1950s witnessed the revival of nationalism in India. Like most Indians of that decade, I grew up believing in the great destiny of India. We looked to the future and saw India as a prosperous, peace-loving and powerful country, a leader among the community of nations. We were proud that despite the partition of the Subcontinent on religious grounds, India remained committed to secularism.

Our teachers never tired of pointing to Kashmir, a Muslim-majority state's voluntary accession to India. It was the badge of India's secularism. The majority of our teachers and our parents were nationalists. Most of them believed that Hinduism was compatible with secularism, as it was a tolerant and open system. They believed Islam was rigid and intolerant. They blamed the Muslims primarily for the Partition riots and killings. Not a single Muslim family lived on our Calcutta street. There were no Muslim students in our school.

The continued persecution of Bengali Hindus in East Pakistan roused passions and there were occasional outbursts of anger on the streets when innocent Muslims of

Calcutta became targets of violence. Yet it did not seem to sully our secularist image or shake our belief that Hinduism was more tolerant than Islam. These incidents were explained away as mere aberrations. It escaped everybody's notice that perhaps we were tolerant of the Muslims because they did not live among us. The fact that the Muslims were the butt of jokes also did not seem to bother most of our elders who professed to be secularists.

It was in my first geography lesson that I learnt that Jammu and Kashmir was an integral part of India. At home, we were told that Kashmir was linked to India from the days of the Mahabharata. Many holy shrines of the Hindus including the sacred cave of Amarnath were located in the Valley. The Hindu history of Kashmir was the main focus of our lessons in school. The 8th-century Hindu king of Kashmir, Lalitaditya of the Karkota dynasty, was the hero of our history teacher. We learnt that Lalitaditya's kingdom had extended from beyond Amu Darya (Oxus) in central Asia in the northwest to Bengal and Assam in the east. We were also told that though the Karkota dynasty was able to repulse the attacks of the Arab invaders from Sind in the 8th and the

*Indian para-military
Rashtriya Rifles
training Village Defence
Committee in Kishtwar
district.*



KASHMIR

A willing suspension of reason

Kashmir is the main excuse that India and Pakistan use to justify the high cost of their militarisation. It is not merely the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir who suffer from this rivalry—peace in the Subcontinent is held hostage by this dispute. Peace in Kashmir is not an option. It is imperative for South Asia's survival.

by *Tapan Bose*

9th centuries, the Valley finally passed into the hands of Muslim rulers in the 14th century.

The map of India that we learnt by heart and reproduced from memory at every examination included the entire territory of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir as a part of India. According to this map (which is still being drawn by the school-children of today), India's borders extended upto Afghanistan in the west. In our geography books, Kashmir was described as a virtual paradise on earth—the jewel of India. We learnt about the exceptional beauty of the place, its people and their wonderful crafts. We also learnt that Pakistan had tried to snatch this jewel from us immediately after Partition despite the fact that the Maharaja of Kashmir had acceded to India. We were told that the Indian soldiers had fought valiantly against Pakistani intruders and secured it for us. However about two-fifths of the territory of Kashmir was still under the control of Pakistan and the task was to liberate the Pakistan-occupied parts of Kashmir.

We were also told that Pakistan even after its defeat had not given up its designs on Kashmir. It kept on pressurising India in in-

ternational fora with the support of Britain and America to give up Kashmir. It was hinted that some disgruntled Muslim elements were trying to foment trouble in the Valley, as they wanted Kashmir to merge with Pakistan on the ground that it was a Muslim-majority area. However, our teachers told us that the majority of the Muslims of Kashmir were secular and had resisted the Pakistani attackers and that they did not want to join Pakistan.

We were not told anything about the commitments made by India to the people of Kashmir at the time of accession. We were not told anything about the terms of the instrument of accession and the 1952 New Delhi Agreement, under which Kashmir was to remain virtually independent in all respects except in matters relating to defence, foreign affairs and currency. We were not aware that Nehru had committed that the people of Kashmir would get a chance to decide about their final political status. Nor did we learn anything about India's acceptance of the UN Resolution on plebiscite.

Shawl ties

The love affair between the Bengalis of



T. NARAYAN/OUTLOOK

Patrolling a Srinagar street.

Calcutta and Kashmir is an old one. My family was no exception. The Kashmiri shawl had a pride of place in every upper class Bengali wedding. Every year Kashmiri shawl traders visited the homes of the Bengali Babus with fresh supplies of exquisitely embroidered shawls for men and women. In fact, most of these traders had regular patrons and the relationship was built over generations. Very few Muslims were allowed free access to upper-class Hindu localities of Calcutta in the 50s and 60s, and the Kashmiri shawl traders and the Afghans who brought dry fruits and spices were the few exceptions. Afghans were not really seen as Muslims by most Bengalis. They were the Kabuliwallas made famous by Rabindranath Tagore. However, Kashmiris were real Muslims and at school we had learnt that some of them were Pakistani agents.

I knew that my mother's family had lost all their property to Muslim peasants in East Bengal after the partition. I knew that the Kashmiri leader Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah had jailed the Bengali nationalist leader, Shyama Prasad Mukherji, and he had died in prison of some mysterious disease. Most Bengalis were happy that Sheikh Abdullah was jailed for his pro-Pakistani

policies. I had heard that under the influence of the deposed Sheikh Abdullah many Kashmiri Muslims had become supporters of Pakistan. I was worried that some of the Kashmiri shawl traders might be agents of Sheikh Abdullah. I wanted to question them. Fortunately, I never got a chance to interrogate the Kashmiri shawl traders in my early youth. I had to wait nearly 20 years before I was able to put the same question to a Kashmiri.

Educating an Indian

My first visit to Kashmir was in 1984 as a documentary filmmaker. I wanted to make a film on the handloom and the shawl industry of Kashmir. Sheikh Abdullah, the Lion of Kashmir was dead. His son, Farooq Abdullah, was the chief minister. "Operation Blue Star", "Bhopal gas tragedy", "Assassination of Mrs Gandhi" and the "Mass killing of the Sikhs" were yet to happen. However, my faith in the moral authority of the Indian state had already been shaken by the state-sponsored killings of Naxalites and the blinding of under-trial prisoners in Bhagalpur district of Bihar. Through my Naga friends at Delhi University I was already familiar with the atrocities perpetrated by the Indian army in the Northeast.



I had already made my first 'protest' film, *An Indian Story*, on the Bhagalpur blindings. I was by then no longer a proud Indian nationalist.

I had been exposed to the horrible deeds of the Pakistani army in Bangladesh during the 1971 war, which I had covered for a Delhi magazine, and this had hardened my attitude towards Pakistan. I could not believe that anyone in their right mind would want to be a part of that state. And as I believed that a section of the Kashmiri Muslims, particularly members of the defunct Plebiscite Front and Al-Fatha were pro-Pakistan, I met some of them and engaged them in discussions on the relative merits of India and Pakistan.

I argued that India despite its shortcomings was a better place and that it has been rather generous to Kashmiris compared to how West Pakistan had dealt with Bangladeshis. With statistics available from Government of India sources, I pointed out that India had invested enormous amounts of funds in the state for its development. I also pointed out that India supplied food rations to the Kashmiris at a very cheap rate at the cost of the poor in the rest of the country. I also used the clinching argument that Kashmir was a symbol of India's secularism and if it ever went to Pakistan, it would have severe repercussions on Indian Muslims in the rest of the country.

The Kashmiris were not convinced. They said that if the claim of the Bangladeshis to independence was justified on the grounds that their civil rights were trampled upon and that the party elected by them was not allowed to form a government, the same principle should be applied to Kashmir. In theory, India had given maximum autonomy to Kashmir and had made a commitment that Kashmiris would be allowed to determine their political future, yet till the late 1960s, Kashmiris did not enjoy any civil and political rights. The 'fundamental rights', which we in India took for granted were not available to the citizens of Kashmir.

I was told that it was only in 1977 that Kashmir had had its first fair and free election. Until then, all opposition party candidates who enjoyed any support of the people were disqualified by the returning officers under orders of the government. Kashmir was virtually ruled by the Indian intelligence agencies and the governments in Srinagar were puppets in the hands of Delhi. It was pointed out that in none of the

elections had accession to India been an issue. Even the Constituent Assembly of the state, elected in 1951, was not empowered to decide on the issue of accession.

In response to my arguments about development projects, they pointed at the pathetic condition of the roads, virtual absence of industries, the lack of jobs for educated youth. The fact that very few Kashmiri Muslims held senior-level jobs in the state government was a cause of resentment, particularly as Kashmiri Muslims were never employed outside the Valley. I also learnt that Kashmir was to gain little from the massive investment in the hydel projects in the state.

Contemporaries of Sheikh Abdullah who were his comrades in Kashmir's freedom struggle in the 30s complained that New Delhi was undermining Kashmir's social values by promoting a class of greedy self-serving corrupt politicians to power. They warned that if New Delhi did not mend its ways, one day Kashmir would go up in flames. One of the older Kashmiri leaders pointed out to me that in the 1950s and 60s, when the Plebiscite Front was supposed to be very active, there were fewer pro-Pakistan Kashmiris than there were in the 80s.

I was face to face with Kashmiri nationalism, or *Kashmiriyat*, and was struck by the Kashmiris' devotion to their culture and identity. I also got a glimpse of the depth of Kashmiri resentment and the historic wrong that had been perpetrated by New Delhi. A Kashmiri academic asked me to read Kashmir's history. He introduced me to the books written by Vigne, Wakefield, Lawrence, Sufi, Bazaz, Bamzai, Lamb and Saraf. Some of these were banned in India, as they were supposedly pro-Pakistani books. My education had just begun.

Islamic Kashmir

Though Muslim military incursions to Kashmir began as early as the 8th century, it was not until the beginning of 14th century that Islam had any impact on the people of the Valley. Islam did not come as the faith of the conquerors. Itinerant Sufi mystics took it to the Valley as the message of love. The masses accepted Islam, as the appeal of the Sufi mystics was similar to that of the contemporary Hindu Shaivite rishis of Kashmir. In fact, the two developed a symbiotic relationship. The Pirs came to be known as Rishis and were revered by Muslims and Hindus alike.

The first note of discord was struck in the



Paramilitary trooper in Baramullah district.

beginning of 15th century, when Sultan Shikander ascended the throne of Kashmir. He tried to forcibly convert all Hindus of the Valley to Islam. As a result, most non-Muslims, particularly the Brahmin Kashmiri Pandits fled the Valley. Shikander's successor Zain-ul-Abidin, who ruled Kashmir from 1420 to 1470, was a remarkably benevolent king. During his rule Kashmir witnessed a cultural renaissance and economic prosperity. He invited the Pandits back to Kashmir. He also brought master craftsmen from Iran to the Valley and laid the foundation for the Kashmiri shawl (*jamawari*) and carpet industries.

The Chak dynasty that succeeded Zain-ul-Abidin misruled the kingdom for nearly a century. In 1585, during the reign of Akbar, the Mughals annexed Kashmir and deposed

T. NARAYAN/OUTLOOK

its last local ruler, Sultan Yusuf Shah Chak. His queen, Haba Khatoon, is remembered till today by Kashmiris for the soul-stirring songs she composed after being separated from her husband.

Kashmiris enjoyed unique prosperity under the Mughal emperors, who visited the Valley often. They built palaces, forts and gardens. It was under the liberal and indulgent rule of the Mughals that Kashmiri art, architecture, crafts, and industry reached its zenith.

With the waning of Mughal power, the region passed into the hands of the Afghans, when Ahmad Shah Abdali conquered the Valley in 1752. The Afghan governors ruled the Valley with an iron hand, and heavy taxation ruined the people. Between 1804 and 1806, Kashmir was devastated by floods, a severe earthquake and exceptionally freezing winters. Thousands of Kashmiris lost their lives in the natural disasters. Property, crops and businesses were lost. Rather than help the suffering population, the Afghan rulers imposed additional taxes to finance its military expeditions.

Suffering from hunger, disease and malnutrition, the Kashmiris, both Muslim and Hindu, approached Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab. He conquered the Valley in 1819 after three military excursions, and appointed raja Gulab Singh as the governor of Jammu. Gulab Singh was an ambitious man. With the help of his brother Dhian Singh, who was the gate-keeper of Ranjit Singh's harem in Lahore, he was able to convince the Sikh ruler to endorse his military expansion programme.

Between 1827 and 1840, the Sikhs carried out several military campaigns in the north-west and east of the Valley. The independent kingdoms and tribal chieftains of Rajouri, Poonch, Kishtwar, Gilgit, Skardu and Ladakh were conquered and the expeditions ended only with the defeat of the Dogra-Sikh army in the battle of Tuklakote and Toyo in western Tibet against the Chinese.

The Kashmiris who had hoped that the Sikh rule would be benevolent were in for rude shock. As records show, the Sikh governors of the Valley were as ruthless as the Afghan rulers. The military expeditions were excessively punitive and brutal. Opponents of the regime were beheaded and their women and children either killed or sold to slavery. Often, the severed heads of the victims were hung from poles in market places



or on the wayside as a warning to the people.

Sikh rule came to an end as a consequence of Anglo-Sikh war in 1845-46. In 1846, Lord Hardinge, the Governor General of India sold the entire territory of Jammu and Kashmir, including the northern territories of Gilgit, Hunza, Yasin and Baltistan to Raja Gulab Singh for seven and half million Nanaksahi Rupees (at that time 10 Nanaksahi Rupees equivalent to £ 1). This was Gulab Singh's reward for betraying the Sikh rulers of Punjab. Nearly two million people were sold to slavery.

Linguistic drift

Though all the people of the state are today known as Kashmiris and they seem to embrace Kashmiriyat as their identity, Kashmir proper, or the Valley, accounted for only a 20th of the 85,000 square miles of the territory over which Raja Gulab Singh established his rule in 1846.

The region comprises of numerous remarkably different linguistic and cultural zones. The language spoken in the Valley and its surrounding areas is Kashmiri, classified by linguists as the most advanced of language of Dardic group of languages. The tribal people of Gilgit, Yasin and Skardu speak other forms of Dardic languages with varying degrees of affinity to Kashmiri.

Although these languages have a common origin, Kashmiris and non-Kashmiri speakers of Dardic tongues seem to have drifted far apart. Even in the Valley a small minority of the nomadic Gujjars speak Gojri, which is a dialect of Rajasthani. To the west of the Valley, in Jammu (India) and Muzaffarabad (Pakistan) the languages spoken are Dogri, Chhibali and other dialects of Punjabi – taxonomically further removed from Kashmiri. In Rawlakot and other hilly parts of Azad Kashmir (Pakistan) the local inhabitants speak Pahari which is closer to Gojri spoken by the Gujjars of the Valley. Over most of the Indian-controlled Ladakh and Pakistani-controlled Baltistan, various Tibetan languages are spoken. Finally, the tribes inhabiting Hunza, and highland tracts of the northernmost parts of Gilgit are known to speak Burushaski, or Buruishki – a language which, the linguists are yet to assign to a known language family.

During my first visit to Kashmir, I moved around the countryside, filming people at home and at work, documenting their crafts, lifestyle, and their culture. I ate their food,

listened to their stories, poetry and songs. I attended the gatherings of the sufis at Hazratbal and listened to their songs. I visited the shrines of Nund Rishi and Baba Rishi, the two guardian saints of the Valley. I heard the village women and men sing the songs of Haba Khatoon and Lal Ded while spinning the *pashmina* or working on the loom.

I did not see the face of extreme poverty in Kashmir, which one found elsewhere in India. Almost all Kashmiris had a home and a small piece of land. I found the rural Kashmir peasants adept at many skills, and the farmers were skilled weavers. It was the women of Srinagar who spun the superfine pashmina yarn that was used in the making of the fabled jamawari shawl.

Delhi Raj

What also struck me was the Kashmiris' political consciousness. They considered the Mughals, the Afghans, the Sikhs and the Dogras all alien rulers. The central government in New Delhi was similarly regarded as alien and the local government its stooge.

Sheikh Adbullah was allowed to return to the Valley after the 1975 Beg-Parthasarathy Accord, which made it clear that Jammu and Kashmir was "a constituent of India" and the Indian Parliament retained the power to "legislate on any matter concerning the territorial integrity of India".

The Sheikh formed a government with the support of the Congress party. In 1977, after the Congress party withdrew its support, he recommended dissolution of the Legislative Assembly and holding of fresh elections.

The governor of the state, B.K. Nehru, despite pressure from the local Congress leaders and the central government that the local Congress party should be allowed to form a minority government, dissolved the assembly. New Delhi was furious with him.

Meanwhile, a major political change had taken place in the rest of India. In the 1977 mid-term election, Indian voters defeated Indira Gandhi and her Congress party. A coalition government led by the Janata Party came to power in New Delhi with Morarji Desai as prime minister. Apparently, Desai rejected the practice of disqualifying Kashmiri electoral candidates on the basis of secret intelligence reports. He ordered that the central government's intelligence agencies not interfere in the state



SIDIQ SHAFAT

Pelting stones at security forces in Mysoorma street, Srinagar.

assembly elections.

The Kashmiris voted overwhelmingly for Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference party. The Janata Party government did not last long in New Delhi. By 1980, Indira Gandhi was back in power, and she reverted to the old policy of squeezing the Kashmir government. B.K. Nehru was removed from the post of the governor, and Jagmohan Malhotra, Mrs Gandhi's trusted bureaucrat-turned-politician, was sent to replace him. The local Congress party started a campaign for the removal of the government of Farooq Abdullah, who had become chief minister after the death of his father, Sheikh Abdullah, in 1982, on the ground that Farooq and others of the National Conference party were engaged in anti-national activities such as providing shelter to the Sikh extremists of Punjab. The chief minister started parleying with other opposition parties to seek support for his government.

In mid-1984, Mrs Gandhi took two actions that were to have far-reaching implications for India's politics. One was the infamous "Operation Blue Star" on the Sikh holy shrine, the Golden Temple, on 5 June. The other was the removal of Farooq Abdullah from power on 2 July.

Several National Conference members of

the state legislature were enticed into defecting from the Abdullah government. Based on a so-called head count of supporters held at the Governor House, Jagmohan sacked the Abdullah ministry and installed one led by Abdullah's brother-in-law, G.M. Shah, with the support of the local Congress party.

What happened during Operation Blue Star and its subsequent impact on Indian politics is well known. However, little was reported in the Indian media about the mass popular upsurge that took place in Kashmir after the forcible removal of Farooq Abdullah. I was present in Srinagar on the fateful day — two days after the Muslim festival of Eid. People were still in a celebratory mood when New Delhi decided to strike. Throughout the night and in the early hours of the morning, plane-loads of Indian security personnel landed in Srinagar. A similar operation had been undertaken on 27 October 1947, when Indian troops were airlifted to Srinagar to fight the Pakistani intruders who were closing in on the Valley. At that time, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir had invited the Indian troops; this time the legally installed government of the Valley was not even informed.

By about 8 am in the morning, the newly



arrived central forces were deployed at all strategic places of the city. The state police was not allowed to intervene. Movement of all public and private vehicles was halted. Pedestrians were asked to go back to their home. Shops were closed down. An undeclared emergency was imposed. In 1975, Mrs Gandhi had done the same thing in New Delhi and other state capitals of India before she declared a state of emergency. In Kashmir, an official proclamation was not even considered necessary.

An officer of the Border Security Force stopped me on the road near Srinagar's Lal Chowk. He advised me to return to my hotel. It was only when I produced my press card and insisted that I had an appointment with a senior government official that I was allowed to continue on my way. I moved about the city a little and witnessed the utter confusion and bafflement in the eyes of the people as they were being stopped and asked to go back to their homes.

Farooq Abdullah was still the chief minister when I met him at his official residence at about 11 am. He had no control over the central forces, which had taken over Kashmir. The orders apparently had come from the governor. By mid-day his government was sacked. The entire valley burst into protest. There were protest rallies, meetings and demonstrations in every street corner and village. The Valley remained under prohibitory orders and curfew for nearly three weeks.

The rest is recent history. In 1986, communal riots broke out in the Valley. The G.M. Shah Ministry was removed and Jagmohan imposed governor's rule over Jammu and Kashmir. Farooq Abdullah was reinstated after he agreed to join hands with Rajiv Gandhi's Congress party. The people rejected Farooq for his compromise. The National Conference split, and by 1987 a new political party, the Muslim United Front (MUF), had emerged, challenging the integration of Jammu and Kashmir with India. The MUF decided to participate in the 1987 elections and several of its young activists were illegally arrested and tortured. The polls were rigged and the MUF candidates were defeated.

Between 1987 and 1990, the Farooq Abdullah government faced public discontent for the failure of his government to meet the basic needs of the people. All his development plans, based on the promises by Rajiv Gandhi, had failed to take off. Prices

of basic commodities shot up. The Valley was virtually without electricity.

Farooq responded to the public dissidence that followed with brute force, branding all critics Muslim fundamentalists. He claimed that Pakistan-trained militants were behind the agitation. He raided Srinagar's Jama Masjid on 25 August 1989 and arrested about 250 persons. On 8 December 1989, members of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front kidnapped Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the then Indian home minister in the newly formed National Front government. They asked for the release of five of their comrades being held by the state government, a demand that was conceded to by the central government five days later, despite opposition from Farooq. Militancy had arrived in the Valley.

On 19 January 1990, Jagmohan, who had left Kashmir after completing his term in July 1989, was re-appointed governor of Jammu and Kashmir. Farooq Abdullah resigned in protest.

Nuclear-tipped

India and Pakistan have gone to war twice over Kashmir: in 1947 and 1965. Even the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, which began on the soil of former East Pakistan, spilt over onto Kashmir. Three wars and a 10-year-long military engagement in the Valley, which India calls "Pakistan's proxy war" and Pakistan "Kashmir's freedom movement", do not seem to have reduced the passion for violence and hatred. The rise of religious fundamentalist politics on both sides of the border, despite the resumption of 'official talks' seems to have hardened the official positions on Kashmir. Last year, after conducting a series of nuclear tests and declaring India had become nuclear weapon state, India's home minister warned Pakistan of horrible consequences if Pakistan did not desist from interfering in Kashmir. Within a fortnight of India's nuclear explosions Pakistan followed suit.

One would have hoped that by now the hollowness of the argument that "nuclear weapons and missiles are a deterrence to war" would have become apparent to civil societies in India and Pakistan. Only a small coterie benefits from war, but for the majority of the people of the two countries war can never be a good business. And there is no doubt that there is a war going on in Kashmir.

The city of Srinagar, the state capital,



SIDIQ SHAFAT

Another killing,
another victim.

looks like occupied territory with army bunkers in every street corner and armoured vehicles patrolling the streets. In the years since the 1989 *intifada* (uprising), government sources estimate that 60,000 people have been killed. More than 5500 people are "missing" and nearly 30,000 Kashmiris languish in custody without trial. The total strength of all varieties of armed forces deployed by India in the strife-torn valley is about 400,000.

The Indian armed forces have been given "special powers" which allow them to conduct cordon-and-search operations, set up road blocks, arrest, interrogate and forcibly relocate civilian populations as well as shoot to kill. Indian soldiers in the Valley enjoy *de facto* legal protection against prosecution by civilian courts. Not a day goes by without exacting its toll of victims and suffering. Yet, with the exception of a handful of persons, vast majorities of India's peoples believe that Indian soldiers are defending Kashmir against Pakistan, which is conducting a 'proxy war' in the Valley through mercenaries.

On the other hand, most Pakistanis believe that in the Valley of Kashmir, Indian soldiers are engaged in the mass killing of Muslim men and gang rape of Muslim women fighting for freedom. Very few Pakistanis are ready to face the fact that the so-called Kashmiri freedom fighters, trained

and armed by the Pakistan army and other agencies, are equally guilty of killing of innocent people, rape and abductions.

What is most unfortunate is that the common peoples of India and Pakistan who should have no illusions about their respective government's ability to abuse human rights, apparently endorse the militarist approach to the Kashmir issue. This willing suspension of reason regarding Kashmir is common amongst all sections of Indians and Pakistanis.

Peace for progress

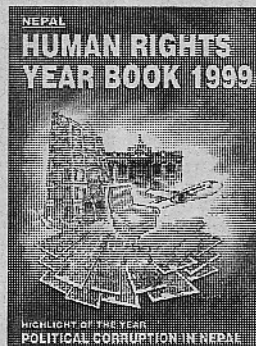
International pressure on India and Pakistan after their nuclear misadventure forced the two governments to restart the official talks that were stalled four years ago. But the lack of progress in the two recent rounds, the first in Islamabad and then in New Delhi, shows that both sides remain virtually incapable of resolving their so-called outstanding disputes, particularly the one on Kashmir, through negotiations.

In the last 50 years, India and Pakistan have held about 80 rounds of "official dialogues" to resolve various bilateral disputes, without much success. The main reason behind the failure of the talks is the inflexible positions of the two governments on Kashmir (*see sidebar*).

The situation is further complicated by political instability in the two largest coun-

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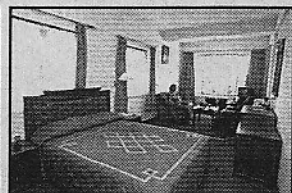


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tries of the Subcontinent. Both are increasingly coming under the grip of religious fundamentalist politics. The alliance between religious fundamentalists and rightist political groups in Pakistan supported by sections of the Pakistani army is seriously undermining democracy in that country. This alliance had nurtured and promoted the Taliban in Afghanistan and Islamic militancy in the Valley of Kashmir.

Similarly in India, rightist religious forces of 'Hindutva' continue their hate campaign against Pakistan. The Indian media tends to project the movement in the Valley as completely Pakistan-sponsored. They turn a blind eye to the abuse of human rights of the ordinary citizens of Kashmir by the Indian security forces in the so-called 'national interest'. In the Valley, both militant groups and their above-ground political supporters such as the Hurriyat Conference, continue to put forward separatist demands, including full independence which neither India alone, nor Pakistan and India together are at all likely to concede to.

Farooq Abdullah became chief minister once again in 1996, after militancy in the Valley began to wane after the bloody years of the early 1990s. But the installation of his so-called popular government through a military-controlled election has further vitiated the prospects of a political solution to the crisis in Kashmir. Farooq has effectively reduced Kashmir to a territorial dispute by advocating the complete merger of Jammu and Kashmir into India after conversion of the line of control (LoC) into the international boundary between India and Pakistan, a move opposed by most of the separatist groups, both pro-independence and pro-Pakistan.

The high cost of the militarisation of Pakistan and India, justified to a large extent because of the Kashmir dispute, has imposed a heavy economic burden and seriously undermined democratic rights of the peoples in both countries. It is not merely the peoples of Jammu and Kashmir who suffer from this rivalry between India and Pakistan, but also, in varying degrees, all the peoples of India and Pakistan as well as the larger South Asia.

Peace in Kashmir is not an option. It is imperative for South Asia's progress. India and Pakistan must work towards a solution without either side losing the goodwill of the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

Indian Position on Kashmir

THE STATE of Jammu and Kashmir is now and has been since its accession to India on 26 October 1947 an integral part of the Indian Union. Nothing agreed to by India in the UN Security Council of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949, or in any subsequent instrument, alters this status or in any way modifies Indian sovereignty over the state.

The only component of the Kashmir issue legally admissible in the talks between India and Pakistan on the future status of the state pertains to Pakistan vacating the territories illegally occupied by it. The future status of the state is otherwise an exclusively domestic matter to be resolved, within the four corners of the Indian Constitution.

Talks between India and Pakistan in regard to the future status of the state should be held within a strictly bilateral framework and in conformity with the Shimla Agreement of July 1972.



Pakistani Position on Kashmir

THE STATE of Jammu and Kashmir is now and has been since the end of British rule over undivided India, a disputed territory. The state's accession to India in October 1947 was provisional. This understanding is formally acknowledged in the UN Security Council resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949 to which both Pakistan and India agreed and which remains fully in force today, and cannot be unilaterally discarded by either party.

Talks between India and Pakistan over the future status of the state should be focused upon securing the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people via conduct of a free, fair and internationally supervised plebiscite, as agreed in the aforementioned UN Security Council resolutions.

The plebiscite should offer the people of Jammu and Kashmir the choice of permanent accession of the entire state to either Pakistan or India.

Talks between India and Pakistan with regard to the future of the status of the state should be held in conformity both with the Shimla Agreement of July 1972 and the aforementioned UN Security Council resolutions. International mediation in these talks should not be ruled out.

JUNAGADH

Case study of one princely state at Partition that has relevance to Kashmir.

MOST INDIAN and Pakistani intellectuals, whether they live in the Subcontinent or abroad, seem to subscribe to the official truths on Kashmir. It is easy to walk the high moral ground, particularly when one is innocent of facts. Going back in history to take a look at how the issue of accession of the princely state of Junagadh (now in the state of Gujarat) was settled by India would help us understand the fallacy of some moralistic positions.

According to the census of 1941, 80 percent of the population of Junagadh were Hindus. But the ruler was Muslim. (Jammu and Kashmir was ruled by a Hindu King and about 80 percent of his subjects were Muslim.) Two days after Independence newspapers reported that the Nawab of Junagadh had acceded to Pakistan. The chronology of events that followed Junagadh's accession to Pakistan and Pakistan's acceptance of the accession has been recorded by the eminent Indian jurist A.G. Noorani, in his book *The Kashmir Question* (1964, Bombay), from which the following relevant passages have been taken. The events concerning Junagadh was recorded by Noorani to show the stand taken by the governments of India and Pakistan with regard to cases of disputed accession. This was as relevant in 1964 as it is today.

On September 12, Nehru sent a telegram to the Prime Minister of Pakistan which said: "The Dominion of India would be prepared to accept any democratic test in respect of the accession of the Junagadh State to either of the two Dominions. They would accordingly be willing to abide by a verdict of these people in this matter, ascertained under the joint supervision of the Dominion of India and Junagadh. If, however, the ruler of Junagadh is not prepared to submit this issue to a referendum and if the Dominion of Pakistan, in utter disregard of the wishes of the people and the principles governing the matter, enter into arrangement by which

Junagadh is to be part of the Federation of Pakistan, the Government of India cannot be expected to acquiesce in such an arrangement."

On September 22, the governor-general of India wired to the governor-general of Pakistan: "Acceptance of accession to Pakistan cannot but be regarded by the Government of India as an encroachment on Indian sovereignty and inconsistent with friendly relations that should exist between the two Dominions. This action of Pakistan is considered by the Government of India to be a clear attempt to cause disruption by extending the influence and boundaries of the Dominion of Pakistan in utter violation of the Principles on which partition was agreed upon and effected."

In a communiqué issued on September 25, 1947, the Government of India set out their views and said that the "relationship of Junagadh to either of the two Dominions" should be "determined by a free expression of the will of the State".

On October 4, the Government of India considered the Junagadh situation. "It was decided to inform the Prime Minister of Pakistan that the only basis on which friendly negotiations could start and be fruitful was the reversion of Junagadh to the status quo preceding the accession of Junagadh to Pakistan and that the alternative to negotiations was a plebiscite."

In a statement on October 5, 1947, the Government of India recalled that the Governments of India and Pakistan had declared their determination in the Joint Statement issued on September 20 to rule out war. The Government set out their views in regard to the accession of Junagadh and said that they would not accept it "in the circumstances in which it was made." The Statement said: "Any decision involving the fate of large numbers of people must necessarily depend on the wishes of these people. This is the policy which the Government of India accept in its entirety and they are of the opinion that dispute involving the fate of the people of any territory should be decided by a referendum or plebiscite of the people

concerned. This is a method at once democratic, peaceful and just. They suggest, therefore, that the issues regarding Junagadh should be decided by a referendum or plebiscite of the people of the State. Such a referendum or plebiscite should be held under impartial auspices to be determined by the parties concerned."

Two days later, the Government of Pakistan issued a statement setting out their views on the accession of Junagadh. The statement suggested the withdrawal of troops by the Government of India from Sardargarh and Batva and by Junagadh from Babariawad. "The Pakistan Government has also informed the Government of India of their willingness to discuss the conditions and circumstances in which a plebiscite should be taken by any State or States." In the light of events that happened later, it is a matter of regret that the two Governments did not explore this avenue to which both were then moving.

On November 9, 1947, India Armed Units moved into Junagadh. A telegram sent the same date by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the Prime Minister of Pakistan mentions a request made by Major Harvey Jones, Senior Member of the Junagadh State Council, appealing to the Government of India to take over the Junagadh administration. "This request was made in order to save the State from complete administrative breakdown and pending an honourable settlement of several issues involved in Junagadh's accession."

The Government of Pakistan lodged a protest and contended that in view of the accession of Junagadh to Pakistan it continued to remain a part of Pakistan territory. When the Kashmir question came up before the Security Council in 1948, Pakistan raised the question of Junagadh but after a few inconclusive debates in March, April and May 1948 the question was never raised again.

In February 1948 the Government of India held a referendum in Junagadh and by an almost unanimous vote the people showed their preference for India.

-Tapan Bose

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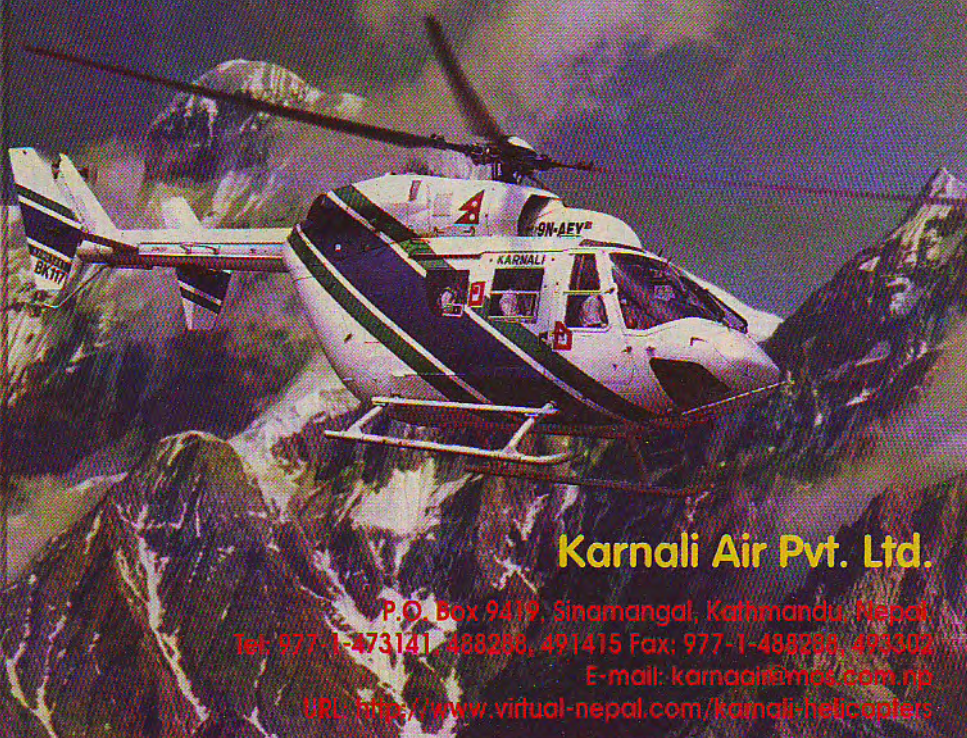
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Nothing left to lose

Successive Pakistani governments have painted themselves into a corner over Kashmir by their overuse of rhetoric and emotion. This has locked Pakistan into an all-or-nothing position.

by *Rashed Rahman*

The 'state' of Azad Jammu and Kashmir came into existence with a formal declaration of its founding and 'independence' on 24 October 1947 in circumstances surrounding Independence and Partition. It consists of a sliver of territory that remained under the control of the pro-Pakistan elements in Kashmir around Independence. But from the very beginning, the state was beset with anomalies.

Considerable areas—the Northern Areas comprising Gilgit, Hunza, Baltistan—which had been part of the Jammu and Kashmir state before Partition remained outside the territory of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir entity. They came to be administered directly from Pakistan, an arrangement that continues to this day.

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) represents but five percent of the total territory

of the undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir. According to the latest census (1998), AJK has a population of 2.91 million, of which 88 percent live in rural areas. The state lacks industry and its agriculture has been declining over the years. This has increased dependence even for basic

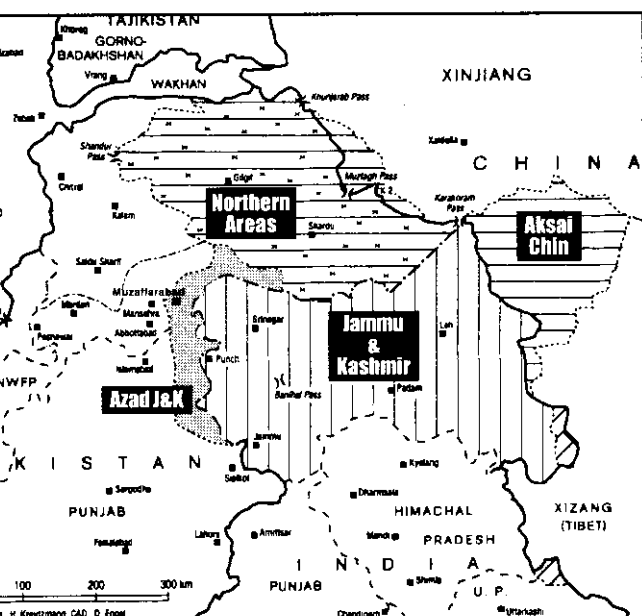
foodstuffs on Pakistan, particularly the adjoining province of Punjab.

For the first 27 years of its existence, AJK was administered by an informal council comprising of a president and a few ministers. A Legislative Assembly was set up in 1970 and four years later a constitution was promulgated to mark the transition to a parliamentary democratic system, with the president as the constitutional head of state, and the prime minister as the chief executive, drawing his legitimacy from a majority in the Assembly. Along with these formal accoutrements of a parliamentary democracy, the state also has its own High and Supreme Courts.

The independence of Azad Jammu and Kashmir has, however, always remained confined to paper. The state has always looked to Pakistan for support in defence and finance despite the brave rhetoric espoused by all AJK politicians about the territory being the 'base camp' for the liberation struggle of the whole of Jammu and Kashmir.

Politically, the state has been characterised by in-fighting among its various political factions as they contend for the spoils of office. The friction between political factions has provided ready ground for interference, intervention and manipulation of the political process by rulers in Islamabad, starting with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, under whose tenure the 1974 constitution was promulgated.

The myth of AJK being a 'base camp' for the Kashmiri liberation struggle is used by all parties and factions to prove their legitimacy. Ironically, the general view in the state is that it is the AJK politicians themselves who have let down the cause of Kashmiri self-determination.



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The AJK budget is heavily underwritten by the Government of Pakistan. The consistent financial support to the small state of AJK has provided it a level of service and facilities that is the envy of the rest of Pakistan. At the same time, there are charges that Pakistani aid over the years has largely been squandered by successive corrupt and incompetent administrations of AJK.

The cost for Pakistan has not only been financial. Politically, the commitment to the Kashmir cause has meant a huge defence expenditure. This has led to the concomitant strengthening of the military and bureaucracy's hold on the national agenda and politics throughout the 52 years of Pakistan's existence. Yet the attitude towards AJK of all Pakistani governments—military and civilian—has been ambiguous. These governments have neither recognised AJK as a sovereign state, nor pressed for international recognition for it as an interim form of a liberated state of Jammu and Kashmir.

At the time of the framing of the 1974 Constitution, Bhutto is said to have toyed with the idea of incorporating the entity as the fifth province of Pakistan, but dropped it because of opposition from inside AJK, and also because it would have complicated Pakistan's case regarding the disputed status of Kashmir.

In addition, the vast expanse of the Northern Areas, more than five times the area of AJK, have been given little representation or rights (*See Himal May 1998*). They are administered by a Northern Areas Council set up and controlled from Islamabad, with token local representation. Demands have been made from time to time by the people of the Northern Areas to be either incorporated into AJK or Pakistan itself, or failing both, be given the right to elect their own representatives and administer their affairs democratically. There has so far been no response from Islamabad or Muzaffarabad, the capital of AJK. The result is that the Northern Areas remain one of the poorest and least developed territories in Pakistan.

The federal government in Islamabad maintains a Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, responsible for overseeing all aspects of the administration of the state and the Northern Areas. For all intents and purposes, despite the facade of a parliamentary democracy in Muzaffarabad (a facade that is lacking in the Northern Areas), the government of AJK is run by the Ministry of Kashmir Affairs, which holds the purse strings.

Wag the dog

Despite AJK's dependent status, however, because of the emotional content of the Kashmir issue for large numbers of Pakistanis (although it can be argued that this tribe is declining with the passage of time), the liberation rhetoric of Kashmir has given AJK politicians the power to shake up Pakistani politics from time to time.

The tail has managed to wag the dog quite effectively for 52 years, with the cost being borne by the Pakistani population as a whole. For example, the AJK politicians did not welcome the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's ride on the inaugural bus to Lahore from Delhi to sign the Lahore Declaration with Nawaz Sharif to seek a peaceful, negotiated settlement of all issues between them (including Kashmir). Almost unanimously, the AJK politicians have opposed any step taken towards a more 'normal' relationship between India and Pakistan, citing, among other reasons, the fact that Kashmir was being discussed over and above the heads of the people of Kashmir, without whose participation no settlement would be acceptable.

But with the insurgency in Kashmir winding down into a smaller, fundamentalist-led effort, and military means to wrest Kashmir becoming unthinkable since both India and Pakistan have achieved overt nuclear status, there is no alternative to diplomacy to settle Kashmir and other issues. Which means there is the very real possibility that the status quo is likely to remain frozen for the foreseeable future. This is a logical and reasonable conclusion, but one which Pakistani leaders would find difficult to sell to their own people. Through their use as such of rhetoric and emotion on Kashmir, Pakistani politicians have painted themselves into a corner. Kashmir is described as the 'core' issue between Pakistan and India, and one that even goes to the 'core' of the undefined and undefinable 'Pakistan Ideology'.

AJK politicians reacted to the Lahore Declaration by describing it as an attempt to flog the dead horse of the Shimla Accord. They insist to this day that there is no other acceptable solution except the referendum promised in the UN resolutions in 1948/49, which remains unimplemented to date. The fact that the UN resolutions may no longer hold any appeal for the international community, or that the resolutions have become archaic does not trouble them. They remain locked into an all-or-nothing position. ▲

Kashmir in Pakistani politics

At the slightest hint of normalisation of relations with India, every Pakistani government is accused of selling out on Kashmir. Yet, as the 1998 elections showed, a political party that stood for better relations with India won a record majority in parliament.

by Zaigham Khan

There is a Kashmir battle fought within Pakistan that is perhaps as intense as the militants' fight in Indian Kashmir and certainly much more vicious than the Pakistani diplomats' harangue of their Indian counterparts at the UN. This is the one fought by Pakistani politicians in an attempt to outdo one another in proving their empathy for the Kashmir cause.

If India claims that Kashmir is an "integral part" of its territory, Pakistan too can claim that Kashmir is an integral part of its domestic agenda. Politicians feel that they can win over the common citizen by appearing to champion the Kashmir cause. The opposition of the day makes full use of it to destabilise or at least embarrass the sitting government in Islamabad. And the government, for its part, has to appear to be doing





something on Kashmir and uses the official media to portray its 'achievements' on the issue. All of which only serves to play into the hands of hawkish elements in the establishment and, in effect, makes it almost impossible to solve the Kashmir issue through negotiations.

Pakistan has felt the need to invoke Kashmir to garner public support right from the beginning when it supported the militia push to capture Kashmir in 1947. But after the 1947-48 war with India, the Kashmir issue remained in cold storage for nearly 20 years, at least on the domestic front. That is until Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the charismatic foreign minister of military dictator Ayub Khan from 1963 to 1965 (and later prime minister), realised its 'potential' and popularised it at the mass level.

Even as Jawaharlal Nehru found it difficult to move on Kashmir in the last years of his life, fearing what he called a "Hindu backlash" within India should the UN-mandated plebiscite on Kashmir be held, Bhutto succeeded in taking Pakistan's Kashmir policy back to the initial two years of the problem which was marked by extreme suspicions, high emotions and armed conflict in which civilians were also involved. He used his showmanship and rhetoric, so far unsurpassed in Pakistan's politics, to mobilise mass support on his government's stand on Kashmir. In the process, he became a hero and that contributed to his ascendancy to the office of the prime minister.

Bhutto played an instrumental role in pushing India and Pakistan to the 1965 war which was basically fought over Kashmir, unlike the 1971 one in which Kashmir remained largely unaffected. He then used the war and its aftermath to further his own political career. Even his addresses to international fora were made with the audience back home in mind.

Particularly memorable was Bhutto's speech at the UN Security Council on the night of 22-23 September 1965, while the war was still on. Pakistanis who heard it live on radio were enthralled as Bhutto thundered: "The people of Jammu and Kashmir are part of the people of Pakistan in blood, in flesh, in life, in culture, in geography, in history, in every form. We will wage a war for a thousand years, a war of defence."

The war went on for only 17 days. On 10 January 1966, Ayub Khan and Lal Bahadur Shastri signed the Tashkent declaration stating their "firm resolve to restore normal and

peaceful relations between their countries and to promote understanding and friendly relations between their peoples". Bhutto, who was soon kicked out of the cabinet, accused his former boss of a sellout in Tashkent and it was this 'sellout' charge that ultimately led to Ayub Khan's fall.

Bhutto himself came under similar flak when he signed the Shimla agreement on 2 July 1972, which stated that India and Pakistan had "resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations or by any other peaceful means mutually agreed upon between them". The opposition instantly labelled the agreement a sellout worse than Tashkent, and insisted that it included a secret agreement by Bhutto to forego Pakistan's claim on Kashmir.

Bhutto was forced to defend himself in the strongest language possible. "I tell you as a Muslim and I swear on oath. I swear in the presence of Almighty Allah that there has been no secret agreement...On the vital question of Kashmir...we have made no compromise. We told them categorically that the people of Kashmir must exercise their right of self-determination."

Though the rhetoric continued, Kashmir was once again relegated to the background of the Pakistani political scene in the 1970s. For most of the 1980s, too, the political parties were busy fighting for basic human rights and had to concentrate on the miseries of the Pakistani people. However, with the re-establishment of democratic rule in Pakistan in 1988, and subsequent beginning of the ongoing insurgency within the Valley, Kashmir once again moved centrestage.

The official media, now armed with the power of colour television, rose to the occasion. It launched dozens of programmes every week to highlight the situation in Indian Kashmir. Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations joined hands with Pakistan Television to produce some of the most expensive and popular drama serials on Kashmir showing human rights violations and the militancy in Indian Kashmir in graphic terms, fuelling angry reactions among the public.

Kashmir emerged once again as a hobby-horse with Pakistani politicians. The credit, however, for an extremely hawkish stand on Kashmir goes to Zulfikar Bhutto's daughter and leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Benazir Bhutto. There appeared to be some compulsion on daughter Bhutto's part to take such a position since the oppo-

Qazi Hussain of the Jamaat-e-Islami addressing Lahore crowd on the eve of the Vajpayee visit in February.

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sition led by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) constantly portrayed her party as anti-Pakistan, pro-West and pro-India during a decade-long martial rule and later when she became prime minister in 1988. Despite her extremist stance, the Muslim League played the Kashmir card against the PPP government whenever it got the chance.

But Kashmir helped Benazir in other ways too. When a revered democratic icon and a thorn in every government's flesh, Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, leader of the small Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP), had to be accommodated in Benazir's second coalition government (1993-1996), a parliamentary Kashmir Committee was formed and Nasruallah Khan was made chairman with the status of a federal minister. His committee was given a generous annual budget of PKR 100 million. More than the Kashmiri struggle, Khan soon became associated with his Lexus Sedan and expensive foreign tours.

When Kashmir was dropped from the Security Council agenda in 1996, the committee came under fire from the opposition in Parliament for its "lethargic performance". Opposition legislator Gohar Ayub said: "Nothing has proven a bigger farce than this Kashmir cause crusade which has only ended up in the letting down of the Kashmiri and Pakistani people."

Nawabzada responded by accusing Gohar Ayub's father, the late Ayub Khan, of squandering a golden opportunity in 1962, when, instead of helping Kashmiris begin a *jihad* (in Nawabzada's view, they were ready for it), the dictator had almost bartered away Kashmir during his Delhi visit where he allegedly offered a joint-defence pact to Indian prime minister Nehru.

Nasrullah Khan, however, got his chance to get back a year later when the musical chair of Pakistani politics put Ayub in charge of foreign affairs and Khan was thrown out of the parliament. He accused the PML government of falling prey to international conspiracies on the issues of Kashmir and Pakistan's nuclear programme. He warned that the "government will not hesitate in compromising on Kashmir and its nuclear programme and signing a treaty on the two issues to the detriment of the country".

And in September 1997, when the Kashmir issue was altogether omitted in the annual report of the UN Secretary General, Benazir declared it a failure of the Nawaz

Sharif government.

It is by now expected that any sitting opposition will accuse the government of a sellout on Kashmir at the slightest hint of normalisation of relations with India. When Rajiv Gandhi visited Pakistan in 1989, Nawaz Sharif accused Benazir of compromising on Kashmir and when Nawaz met Gujral in February 1998, Benazir was quick to accuse him of taking a "line of compromise".

But for all that, no one plays the Kashmir card in Pakistani politics more than the religious parties. In the early days after independence, religious parties largely seemed disinterested in Kashmir. In fact, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, the founder of the Jamaat-e-Islami, opposed Pakistani involvement in any armed conflict in Kashmir arguing that Islam did not allow a proxy war. Religious parties, lacking a concrete agenda, took up the Kashmir cause only after it had been popularised by politicians like Zulfikar Bhutto.

The war in Afghanistan played a role in hardening the stance of the religious groupings. The war so militarised the parties that after it was over, they faced the problem of redefining themselves. For the largest of them, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the new war cry became: "*Ham Jashn-i-Kabul mana chukay. Ab ao chalo Kashmir chalain*" (We have celebrated the victory in Kabul. Now let's go to Kashmir).

Kashmir has become a stick in the hands of the religious parties with which they can beat any government, and cry foul at the slightest indication of normalisation of relations with India. The Jamaat gave a call for strike and observed a black day when Vajpayee visited Lahore in February this year. It accused Nawaz of "humiliating himself in front of Vajpayee" and trying to divide Kashmir. Parties like the Jamaat tie up Kashmir with such issues as buying potatoes from India or selling sugar, which, "amounts to betraying the freedom movement in the occupied Valley".

But for all the posturing, the last elections proved that a political party in Pakistan can rise to power without playing the India and the Kashmir card in domestic politics. During the 1998 election campaign, Nawaz Sharif vowed to build better relations with India and take an initiative in this regard if he came to power. His party won with a record majority. ▲



TESY MUZAMIL JALEEL

Kashmir's worse

Women are the silent sufferers in the war over Kashmir.

by *Rita Manchanda*

Women have been the worst hit in the war in Kashmir. They have been killed in crossfire, shot in public demonstrations, blown up in grenade explosions or in shelling along the line of control (LoC), and have been raped by the security forces, by anti-government militants and by pro-government militants.

Though incidents of militancy overall may have declined, especially in urban areas, there has been greater terror and social violence. The 'success' of the Indian counter-insurgency strategy, drafted by the former head of India's intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and then governor of Kashmir, Girish Saxena, depended on infiltration and subversion of militants. But the appearance of renegade militants, the *naqli*

mujahids as they are called, and the pro-government militant has destroyed not only the political movement for *azadi* (freedom), but also Kashmiri society. That puts women at greater risk.

There is a new trend of "unidentified militants" breaking into homes in villages and shooting the women. Before the insurgency flared up in 1989, kidnapping, molestation or killing of women were rare. That is why there was shock and disbelief in 1989 when Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the then union home minister, was kidnapped.

Subsequently, both the security forces and the armed militants started using rape as a weapon to punish, intimidate, coerce, humiliate or degrade. Investigations by human rights groups into allegations of gang rape by the security forces show that it was being routinely used in search-and-



cordon operations.

Women activists like Anjum Zamrood, general secretary of the Muslim Khawateem Markaz, say that if Kashmiri women had become *mujahids*, they would have faced the full repressive might of the security forces. "It's a good thing they never picked up the gun. It would have legitimised women becoming the targets," said Zamrood.

The most dreaded agency is the Special Task Force (STF) of the J&K Police and the worst offenders are the special police officers (SPOs), drawn from the pack of surrendered militants. Some of the worst excesses against civilians, and women in particular, have been at the hands of the STF. And, as they have the backing of the security forces, villagers play it safe and don't register any complaints. Said Asiyah Andrabi, head of the Dukhtarane Millat, "For the Indian forces, it is difficult to recognise who is who."

Renegade militant

The lawlessness has left thousands like Mehjooba victims. On 31 July 1998 at 11 pm,

off half

the STF led by a "renegade", an informer who had once worked for Mehjooba's father, barged into the house accusing the 21-year-old woman of hiding four guns. "A rag was stuffed in my mouth and I was beaten and given electric shock. Unable to take any more, I told them the guns were hidden by the river. There were no guns there but I had to tell them something. They held me down in the river till I was half dead. Brought back I was beaten again. I knew nothing to tell them."

The renegade militant, recruited as an SPO, then pointed to the next house, saying the guns must be there. An elderly neighbour was hearing this through the common wall and was terrified that her daughter would face a similar ordeal. The elderly lady suffered a heart attack and died. The incident made headlines in print and on TV. It brought Mehjooba further harassment. A few months later, the family moved away to escape the STF.

Wives, sisters and mothers of militants have been particular targets of intimidation. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front

(JKLF) chief Yasin Malik's two sisters, Abida and Amina, live with him in the heart of Srinagar. They had never been physically attacked until October 1997, when a contingent of STF climbed in through the first-storey window late at night and brutally beat up the women. Malik was away. "No, our neighbours did not come to help us. If they could do this to us, what would they do to them?" asked Abida. The women of the house, including Yasin Malik's aged grandmother were again attacked in October 1998.

Burqa tales

In the last couple of years, violence against women have taken a new form: rape is not usually a part of it. In an incident in the Surankot area of Poonch, late at night, militants knocked on the door of Abdul Gani. No male member was at home. The two women inside did not open the door. The militants broke open the door, lined up Latifa Bee and Khatija Bee and shot them.

In another incident in the Mahore area of Udampur, three militants entered Maisina Begum's house and kidnapped her son, Majid, as a possible recruit. Maisina approached her brother, a member of the local Village Defence Committee. Armed, he chased the militants and freed the boy. The militants came back and killed Maisina Begum. Police said that she was killed on suspicion of being an informer.

More and more Kashmiri women are being seen as *mukhbirs*, or informers, and becoming targets of the militants. In the early years of militancy, there were reports of women branded as mukhbirs being raped and killed. These tales of atrocities by the militants were cashed in by the J&K propaganda cell to deflect accusations of human rights violations by the security forces. The BSF, at a press conference in February 1993 organised for visiting journalists from Delhi, highlighted the case of Shahina (19) who was accused of being an informer. Shahina explained that the militant group Ikhwan ul Muslimeen had kidnapped her younger brother, hoping to recruit him. Desperate to secure his release, she went to the BSF camp. Her brother was rescued and two militants taken prisoner. Shahina then was kidnapped, first, by the JKLF and punished with 41 lashes, and later by Ikhwan militants who repeatedly raped her. Shahina escaped, and eventually joined the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) as a constable.

Women who go to the security camps to

get their sons or husbands released run the risk of being branded informers. But, as a senior Kashmiri journalist put it, in the last few years there has been increasing suspicion in the people's mind of women as mukhbirs. This has been reinforced by the image of burqa-clad women going into the STF camp near Bakshi stadium in Srinagar. They are in fact CID or CRPF constables, but this is enough to label them as mukhbirs. The burqa, once the ideal cloak for subterfuge in the service of militancy, enabling the smuggling of arms, explosives and even wanted militants, now has come to further confuse affiliations.

At the same time, it has to be said that some women may also turning informers for the money. A toll of 60,000 dead has meant the loss of a great many male earning members. There are at least 15,000 widows and thousands of semi-widows of the disappeared.

Attacks on women definitely appears to be on the rise, especially in the hill districts of the Jammu division. This could be because women are turning their back on mili-

tancy. In the Kashmir conflict, it has been a truism that women have formed the backbone of the struggle. In the early phase of populous public protest, women in flowing burqas and chador were massed in front of every protest demonstration. When repression pushed the struggle underground and armed conflict became the metaphor of protest, women would open the doors to militants, and in some cases, protect them by calling them sons-in-law. But as the militancy got corrupted and the politics of extremism became an end in itself, women began to shut their doors to the knock of the militants.

Culture of impunity

It was no longer easy to make out the real mujahid from the *naqli* one. Victoria Scofield in *Kashmir in Crossfire* quotes a Kashmiri student telling her the story of his next door neighbour. The militants knocked at her door one night and asked for money. "In the old days she would have asked them in and given them food. This time she refused and shut the door in their face. So they pushed



Lieutenant General Krishan Pal, commander of the Indian Army's 15 Corps stationed in the Srinagar Valley, has a reputation for being a straight-talking officer, something which has often dragged him into controversies. Rita Manchanda spoke to Gen Pal about the Indian Army's success reducing the army-militant "kill ratio".

"US OR THEM?"

• *In New Delhi, there was great enthusiasm about the India-Pakistan diplomacy. As someone who has to deal with the daily ground reality in the Valley, are you cynical?*

It goes without saying that, ultimately, differences will get settled through dialogue. One must not be cynical. In any case, we don't lose anything in accepting to dialogue. However, as regards the ground situation in the Valley, there is no change commensurate with the kind of diplomacy they are talking about. If anything, there is renewed effort at infiltration.

• *The two prime ministers are committed to intensifying the dialogue on Kashmir and to build mutual confidence and trust...*

I'd like to see that translated on the ground. We [field commanders of both the sides] should be able to

talk. Prime Ministers Sharif and Vajpayee are talking. Then why are they firing? Can they change the status of this line [LoC] by firing? Can I? No, we can't. It's a futile exercise, unnecessarily creating tension and exposing our men.

• *Don't confidence building measures extend to some kind of regular contact between field commanders to defuse tension?*

We are supposed to have a hotline between Uri and the other side. Even that communication link remains disrupted. We want to be able to use it. But they are not maintaining their end. My perception is that the other side is not interested in allowing field formation contacts. Every time the line is out on our side, we maintain it, they don't. Communication is possible only through Delhi.



the door in and shot her." Why are Kashmiri women, once privileged in society, and beyond violent attack, becoming victims of excesses? Is it the increasing presence of foreign militants who are not linked to Kashmiri society and therefore not constrained by its mores? There have been press reports of "command marriages" at the point of a gun where foreign militants have sexually exploited local women. However in one of the worst cases of atrocities as in Sailon massacre when 18 people, mostly women and children, were brutally hacked to death, three SPOs backed by an army unit posted in Bafliaz, were implicated. It reflects the brutalisation of a society over 10 years of armed conflict.

It is a fact that mass rape by the security forces has been a major propaganda plank in the pro-separatist campaign to indict the Indian government for human rights abuses in Kashmir in the international fora. But it is also a fact that there is generally a pattern of impunity and non-accountability when it comes to incidents of rape or violence. Investigations are more a cover-up than

an inquiry.

Earlier, every reported incident provoked wide public outrage. But now, as terror and intimidation have taken their toll, protests are few and far, and the guilty go unpunished. The state government and the army discredit the complainants, and the offenders—pro-government militants, the police, para-military forces or the army—are left free. The restoration of electoral politics in 1996 has not seen a break in this culture of impunity. Even as you read this, in all likelihood, a woman is being raped or killed in Kashmir. ▲

A gutted militant hide-out.



SIDIQ SHAFATI

• It is generally understood that the foreign militants are battle hardened and very 'competent'.

If they are so battle hardened, then why don't they stage an ambush? There has been zero ambush. They are scared to even snipe at convoys. They are cowards. They only fight when they are cornered.

• They don't surrender?

They have no business to be here. They will be shot. The local boys we give a chance to surrender. The question is, why is he here? He is not a part of this society. We are not enthusiastic about his surrender. We want to send a message: You come here, you will be shot!

• What is the strength of local militants vis-a-vis the foreign militants?

Some 47 percent of the militants killed were foreigners. From that we can deduce that the number of foreigners active make up about 70 percent of the militants. The local component is about 20 to 30 percent. I have gone to every village and

mapped the local boys missing. The largest group has about 400 to 500 active militants.

• There have been strong rumours of the Taliban being active in Kashmir. Is there a reason to be anxious?

There are no Taliban on the ground. We've killed close to 700 militants this year. At least one of them should have had a Taliban linkage. As of today, there is no Taliban activity. In any case, it is not a matter of concern. Kashmir society is suffused with Sufism. They are more liberal and better educated than Afghan society. The Hanafi and Wahabi influence there make fundamentalism more acceptable. Here, who will accept the Taliban? Not the women.

• Human rights activists accuse the army of blasting houses and killing civilians.

You have to understand. In one

instance in south Kashmir, there were three militants in a house. The people from the adjoining houses all came out. The owner of the house in which the militants were hiding, was a known sympathiser. He didn't come out. So what do you do, leave the house alone? The militants keep firing. Who is using civilians as shields—us or them? Earlier, my troops would enter and search the house. We lost so many men in the process. For what purpose, it is stupidity of the highest order. What can be done with a bullet need not be done by a man entering and exposing himself.

• But in the process, you are alienating civilians.

No, wherever a house was blasted, the people said, it was necessary. We even reconstructed the houses. Houses can be rebuilt but I can't get back my men. ▲

BANGLADESH IS ahead of the rest of us in using the vernacular media to get ahead, which is why the **prissy anglophone South Asian hares** will be taking a nap while the Bangla tortoise surges ahead. The latest proof is in an ambitious television talk-shop titled *Mithoshkriya* being aired on Bangladesh Television dealing with "family life education" (read sex-ed). The programme, run by M. Emamul Haque of the Family Planning Association of Bangladesh, deals with topics as off-limits as homosexuality, masturbation, menstruation. AFP reports that Haque gets around taboo topics by using indirect terms, for example, referring to "when it happened" while referring to a woman's period.

XINHUA REPORTS from Colombo, 24 April, that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Film Festival, "the first of its kind", will be held in Sri Lanka in September this year to boost interaction within the region. The two-week festival, based on a "concept" of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, will screen both feature films and documentaries as well as short films. President Kumaratunga has directed the Ministry of



Posts, Telecommunications and the Media to coordinate the preliminary arrangements, and "a high powered eight-member committee has been appointed to coordinate

the arrangements". All very welcome and happy for South Asia. But in the excitement, did Mme Kumaratunga's advisors know that a certain magazine that some of us read has already been the "first" to organise a South Asia film festival and is already set to organise the next **South Asian documentary film fest** in the selfsame September?

WELL, HERE is a film that the Colombo film fest organisers must show, so they will do well to get in touch with its Madras backers. I refer to the Tamil movie *Swayamvaram*, which has 16 directors, and was shot in 24 hours—all in an effort to get into the Guinness Book of World Records.

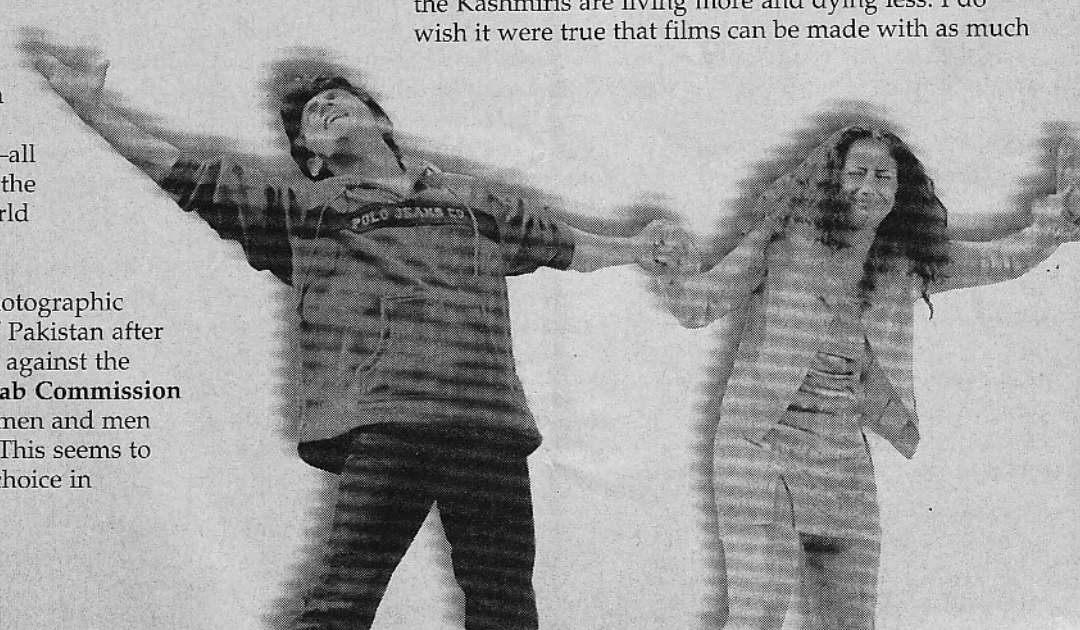
ONE OF the better photographic images to come out of Pakistan after the corruption verdict against the Bhuttos by the **Ehtesaab Commission** was the picture of women and men lying hither and yon. This seems to be a protest mode of choice in

Pakistan, more particularly with the women supporters of the Pakistan People's Party.

THE *DECCAN Chronicle* pulled a fast one on 1 April by announcing that India and Pakistan planned to form a common currency, the **IndoPak** by January 2000. The IndoPak would be pegged to the Indian rupee at its rate against the USD on 31 December. The value of the combined currency would be 1.1 Pakistan rupee. All I can say is that this kind of light-hearted spoof we can have more of all over, and I think the Hyderabad-based *Deccan Chronicle* can reach for it easier than the slightly stuffy cousins in Naya Dilli.

BAD TASTE is a trait that **Ole Faithful George Fernandes** is cultivating for god knows what end. And so, there he was brandishing a poster saying that the Congress party, in a country of 100 crore, could only find a foreigner to put forward as prime minister. Add opportunism to bad taste. We expected better from George, flamboyant nemesis of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency and Coca Cola thereafter.

THE PROOF that **Kashmir** (of J&K) is normal, apparently, can be gauged when Hindi films start showing in Srinagar cinemas and Bombay stars dare the militants to come shoot (uh-huh) in the happy valley. The Indian National English Media plays ball, giving lavish coverage to these events, if only to confirm that the Kashmiris are living more and dying less. I do wish it were true that films can be made with as much



abandon as seen in this shot (that word again) of (Indian) actor Aamir Khan and (Nepali) actress Manisha Koirala, in Gulmarg.

LIBERAL TALK coming from the deputy chief minister of Meghalaya D.D. Lapang, who has, according to the *Assam Tribune*, slammed the

protaganists of **isolationism** by saying that "if Meghalaya is to reap the blessings of development, the ice of seclusion has to be broken". Vehemently opposing the demand made by some to introduce an "inner line permit", Lapang said that tribal identity cannot be preserved by "hiding in jungles". He added, "Let us join the mainstream of the country. Meghalaya cannot remain a liability for India." Interesting stuff, and I guess the gentleman deserves to be heard.

"CHENNAI" I will never utter, "Myanmar" is for pruders, and "Mumbai" may as well be on the Moon. I refuse to submit to new **localised names**, and so am opposed to the proposal by Chief Minister R.V. Janakiraman to rename Pondicherry as Puducherry. Everyone has local roots and hence everyone feels more comfortable with local names, but someone must speak for the larger mass of South Asian humanity which has to learn the names all over. And what have we here! There is a guy in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly who wants Bangalore converted to Bengaluru. Over my dedu bodu! It is time to forget the imperial hangover, India!

HERE IS a news item straight from Bengaluru, which says that the naming of wine and meat stalls after national leaders "is being opposed". Apparently there is a **Mahatma Gandhi Wine Store** in that city. With a name like that (the city, not the store), well it might!

BHUTAN TELEVISION plans to go on air 2 June, which will be the "peak" of the silver jubilee celebrations of His Majesty the King's coronation, reports *Kuensel*. This is the time when television viewing will be "legitimised" in Druk Yul that has a ban by the Tshongdu (National Assembly) in place since 1992, which is obeyed more in disregard if dish antennae all over Thimphu are any indication. The editor of *Kuensel* writes knowledgeably of the challenges the young BTV will face in trying to present quality programmes, and I would agree with him when he writes: "With sustained effort, we will eventually be able to convert traditional Bhutanese arts and talents into meaningful, healthy, and entertaining programmes. Our rich literary heritage represents a vast source of programme content." Will BTV succeed where Rupavahini, Bangladesh TV, Nepal TV, Doordarshan and Pakistan TV have failed? One can

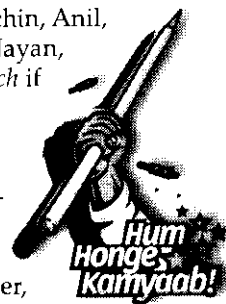
hope, for the smaller the country, the more possible it is to carry through policy, as we all know so well.

Ice of seclusion needs to be broken : Lapang

From Our Spl. Correspondent SHILONG, March 31 - *Assam Tribune* Deputy Chief Minister measures. On the prevailing law-and-order situation in the State Sri Lapang

AIWA PROMISES the Indian team made up of Azhar, Sachin, Anil, Ajay, Saurav, Rahul, Nayan, Srinath a **Mercedes** each if they bring home the cricket World Cup to

India. The tagline for the ad is *Hum Honge Kamyab*. Which has me wondering if Aiwa is big in Pakistan, and whether they are also promising Mercedes on the other side of the border, with the same Urdu rouser.



THERE IS a limerick contest that the *Colombo Island* carries, catering to the issues of the day that press heavy upon the English readers in Serendib. I would therefore not be surprised if you, reader, are as much at, ahem, sea, as Chhetria Patrakar was upon reading the editor's choice limerick, which had something to do with a scandal relating to a minister of information and the board of a newspaper group. That is all I am able to make out. Here it is, titled "Fools rush in" by Dr Jeyam Samue of Talawakelle:

*Breathe freely, readers, we have naught to fear,
Our press lords grow funnier every year,
Ma India in censors garb arrayed.
He can e'en put old cato in the shade.*

*Who says all Beira boys are fools,
They do come from the best of schools,
Since news like pearls, not meant for pigs,
Must be managed by board of prigs!*

All-party meet on condoms

JANAKPURDHAM, April 5 (RSS) - Over five thousand condoms are reported to have been stolen from the Sherpa Project Office at Mansinghpatti Village Development Committee in Dhanusha district where it was stored for the AIDS control programme.

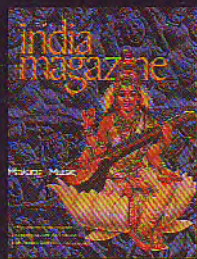
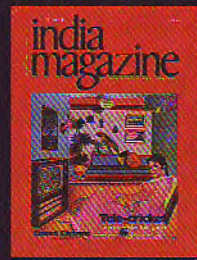
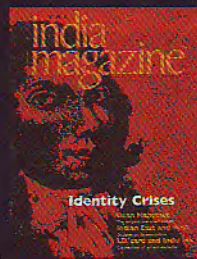
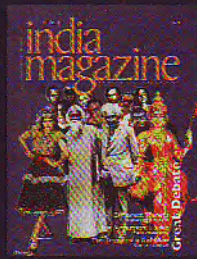
Nepal family planning district unit secretary Nathulal Das says the thieves breached a wall at the project office to commit the theft.

An all-party meeting was also held on Saturday at Mansinghpatti on taking steps to track down the thieves.

AN ALL-PARTY meet on condoms! Should have got an invitation!

— Chhetria Patrakar

Columbus didn't read it you should



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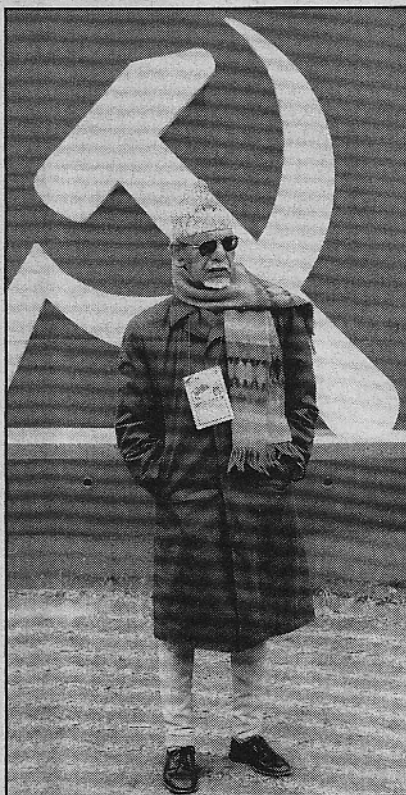
Not many Left

by **Praful Bidwai**

Man Mohan Adhikari will be deeply mourned by all South Asians who value democracy and decency in public life and are committed to promoting popular sovereignty. His death is not just a blow to the Left in Nepal. It marks the departure of a whole generation of leaders in South Asia who played a crucial role in the process of decolonisation and democratisation in the region over the past half century. This generation of leadership, now in its seventies and eighties, was thrust into the political mainstream by the great events of the post-War period. It combined a radical ideology of social transformation and empowerment of the underprivileged with a political practice defined by relatively modest goals of gaining independence, creating and consolidating democratic institutions and setting up political organisations.

The decline and fading out of this generation highlight the predicament of the Left in many countries of South Asia, in particular Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, and to an extent in Bangladesh. The Left, especially from the Marxist spectrum, has always enjoyed a high intellectual and moral stature in these countries. It influenced the ideological formation of large, often dominant, sections of the liberal intelligentsia. It attracted the best and the brightest among students and the youth until the 1970s. And its general standing in society and politics has been far in excess of its share of the vote, of the order of 7 to 12 percent of the overall.

It is this, and its leaders' dedication, their high personal integrity, and reputation for incorruptibility, that ensured that the South Asian Left would not get marginalised following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the discrediting of the



Man Mohan Adhikari, Nepal's "democratic communist" died on 26 April 1999, after collapsing during his campaign as the prime ministerial candidate for the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist). Adhikari, like the late B.P. Koirala, prime minister of Nepal, 1959-60, had fought for Indian independence from the British and had been jailed for his efforts. Later, he stood up against his country's autocratic Panchayat monarchy with quiet self-assurance, and helped bring the communists into mainstream politics after the transition to democracy in 1990, becoming in the process the world's first elected communist prime minister. This was in the post-Soviet Union days when the communists were already being regarded as political dinosaurs. The world may not have noticed, but Nepal and South Asia have lost a democrat and a communist.

statist model of socialism, as happened in many other parts of the world. In these countries, the Left has stagnated or declined, although relatively slowly over the past decade or so. However, there are indications that this present phase may not last long and parts of the Left could be entering a critical downward phase.

In Nepal, the phenomenon has taken the form of splits in the communist parties and the emergence of a remarkably violent Maoist faction. In Sri Lanka, the once-very-powerful Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) first split, and then saw its base steadily erode, and its cadres leave—to the point where it was left with only four members of parliament (MPs), and reduced to a small group within the ruling People's Alliance (PA). In April, its most charismatic leader, Vasudevan Nanayakkara, quit the PA to join the opposition in protest against the PA's conservative policies and its failure to honour its own promises. More important, the LSSP's trade union base has shrunk significantly. The Communist Party too has been reduced to a small, single-MP, rump. In Bangladesh, the Left suffered repression under right-wing regimes, and democratisation has not led to its rapid growth.

In India, the recent political crisis, which precipitated the fall of the BJP-led right-wing government and led to the announcement of fresh elections, saw the Left lose some of its shine. Cracks developed in the unity of the Left Front for the first time in over a decade. The Communist Party of India-Marxist and the Communist Party of India got deeply involved in moves to garner votes against the Vajpayee government from unreliable, amorphous quasi-centrist parties and leaders. They favoured the replacement of

the Vajpayee government by a Congress-only minority government, but the smaller parties in the Front, the Revolutionary Socialist Party and the Forward Bloc, rejected the move, advocating 'equidistance' from the BJP and the Congress. The central issue here was how to strike a balance between short-term tactical considerations of keeping Hindu-communal forces at bay, and the larger, longer-term, agenda of the Left. Overemphasis on the first would alienate the Left's own cadres and eventually lead to its eclipse. Expedient tactical alliances with unreliable centrist forces have already cost the CPI dearly. Its membership decreased by a fourth or more in a decade, especially in the North. Its trade union wing has long stagnated. And its parliamentary representation, once as high as 30-plus, has fallen to single-digit levels.

The communist parties in South Asia have been called upon to respond in recent years to new phenomena such as the growing self-assertion of the 'low' castes, the steady rise of ethno-chauvinist and communal influences among the elite, and a neo-liberal economic policy offensive by aggressive industrial and finance capital. Unless the Left thinks up creative responses to these challenges, projects coherent alternative radical policies, and regains its influence in the intelligentsia, it will find it hard to resist its decline and marginalisation. It still has not lost its intellectual and moral capital, but it is only dipping into it, no longer renewing it.

And yet, South Asia will be the poorer without a healthy Left which has often set impressive records of good governance, and which reminds policy-makers of the unaddressed agendas of justice and equity in these super-hierarchical, extremely unequal and poor societies.

Man Mohan Adhikari may not be a household name in South Asia beyond Nepal, but what he represented was something worthy, and hopefully a new crop of visionary left leaders will arise, in Nepal and elsewhere, to carry on his work. ▲

Bhutan.net

BETTER LATE than never. Bhutan has finally lifted its ban on television and the Internet. On 2 June, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) begins its television network, while Druknet goes online. The date marks the 25th anniversary of King Jigme Singye Wangchuk's coronation.

But the ban on satellite dishes — more flouted than followed — will remain, says the state-run *Kuensel* weekly. In an editorial, the paper said the arrival of a national television channel would mean that the satellite dishes dotting the Thimphu skyline would be a thing of the past: "Once Bhutan is able to telecast national programmes and selected international programmes the cumbersome and expensive dish antennae become unnecessary. Hopefully, they will even disappear."

These antennae, many of them "old" ones being dumped on Thimphu from India's Gangtok and Darjeeling, "are a grating contrast to the important national policy of maintaining the traditional look of our houses and towns", wrote *Kuensel*.

The television service, initially only available for Thimphu, will be featuring programmes both in Dzongkha (the Bhutanese national language) and English. There is no reference in the announcement to Nepali, spoken by a significant portion of Bhutanese. "Ours will be a public service television channel that will complement the radio, the print media and the Internet by providing information, education and entertainment and by being a catalyst in the task of nation-building," said a BBS spokesman.

The Internet service, meanwhile, is being touted as the "most advanced and most reliable" of its kind in South Asia, although it is not clear how the claim is being made given that service has yet to start. Druknet, a unit of the Division of Telecommunications, will be the Internet service provider (ISP), and will be satellite-linked.

Already, concerns are being raised about obscenity on the Net. The government has adopted some Internet codes of conduct, while it will also be promoting 'netiquette'. Since total regulation of contents is impossible, *Kuensel* says the Ministry of Communication will go about it with a "light-touch approach".

Welcome to the web, Bhutan, and may free access to the world of information help in your task of "nation-building". ▲

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Ad in Kuensel.

It's the lead, stupid

THE RESULTS of what is the world's largest study of its kind have shown that lead pollution is silently turning Indian city kids stupid. The study conducted on 22,000 children below the age of 12 in Bangalore, Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Hyderabad and Vellore earlier this year to examine the effects of lead poisoning revealed that 51.4 percent children have more than 100 micrograms of lead per litre of blood, which has resulted in reducing their IQ by nearly six percent.

Said Stephen Null, director of Friends of Lead Free Children (FLFC), the American non-profit organisation that conducted the study: "Lead poisoning grinds down a genius to the level of average intelligence, and an average child becomes disabled. Children can never hope to achieve their full potential, as long as they live in a lead-polluted atmosphere."

Besides the brain, lead particles from car exhausts poison children's liver, lungs, bones and soft tissues. Seven sources of lead poisoning have been identified: gasoline additives, food-can soldering, lead-based paints, ceramic glazes, drinking water systems, cosmetics and cooking utensils. By far, the biggest culprit is gasoline; only a small percentage of gasoline sold in India is of the unleaded variety.

"Some lead sources are typically Indian," said T. Venkatesh, a leading Indian biochemist assisting the FLFC, "The *kalaai* [lead oxide coat on the bottom of bronze, brass, copper and aluminum cooking vessels], the paints on our pencils, which children chew, the paint on clay images of gods and goddesses we immerse in our rivers and lakes round the year. Some traditional hair dyes and

cosmetics also contain lead."

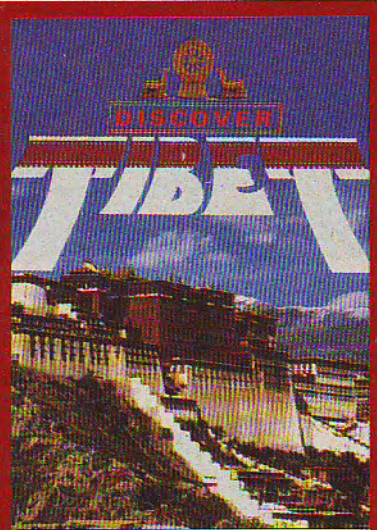
Experts attribute hyperactivity, behavioural problems, loss of hearing and concentration among children to lead poisoning. High lead concentrates can lead to swelling of the brain, coma, convulsions and even death. "Even a foetus is not spared, as lead reaches it through its mother's blood and the umbilical cord, destroying a lot of its abilities even before the child is born," said Null.

"In the US, all the petrol has been converted to the unleaded variety and the results have been dramatic. But in Indian cities, only about 8 percent of petrol sold is unleaded, and that too is available only in selected cities and towns."

Venkatesh, who is preparing a dos and don'ts pamphlet for circulation on behalf of FLFC, had a few suggestions. "We have to change our habits. Never eat anything wrapped in newspapers, as newsprint contains lead. We should wash our hair at night before going to bed to get rid of lead particles gathered during the day. Floors should not be swept, only mopped with a wet cloth, to prevent lead dust from rising."

This prescription may be difficult to follow, but the FLFC study seems to have shaken up the authorities a bit. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee admitted in a letter to the organisation that lead poisoning is the second major health hazard in the country after AIDS, and promised to make unleaded petrol compulsory throughout India "for the sake of our children". Now the powers-that-be will have to match his words with actions.

— **S.N.M. Abdi**



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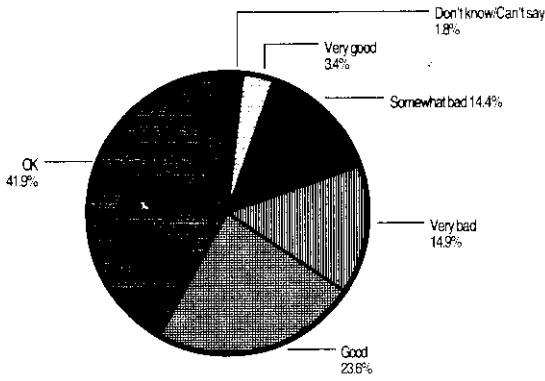
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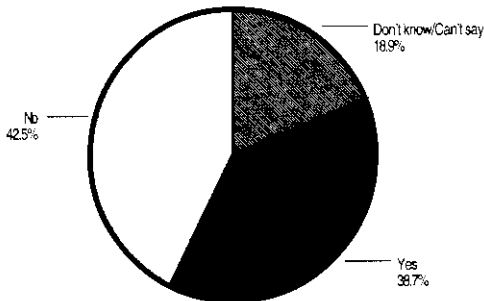
Pre-election

Public opinion poll

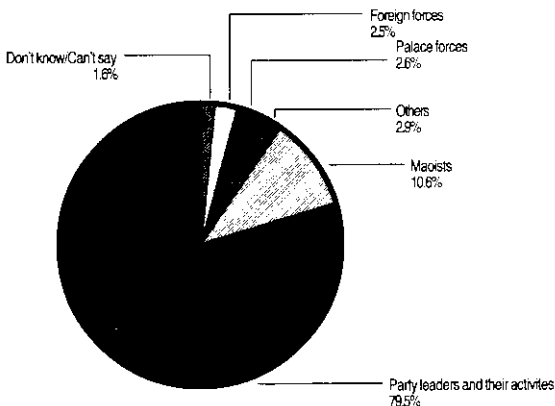
How the country is doing as compared to 10 years ago.



Is democracy under threat?



If so, who is trying to harm democracy?



As Nepal prepared for general elections in May, the results of a country-wide opinion poll created quite a stir when it was published in mid-April. The poll, seeking to find out how voters assess the country's politics, political parties and politicians, was the first of its kind and scope in Nepal. Conducted by the research group ORG-MARG Nepal in late February and early March for the media organisation HIMAL Association, some of the poll findings came as a total surprise. The survey presented a country-wide assessment of the way people are going to vote in the elections, the third since the restoration of democracy in 1990. It also made clear that these percentages should not be construed as translating into a proportionate number of parliamentary seats (as indicated by the 1994 elections, in which although the Nepali Congress secured 33.4 percent as against the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist-Leninist's 30.9 percent, the latter ended up as the largest party in Parliament). But despite this disclaimer that the poll did not attempt to predict the composition of the future parliament, it invited a fair amount of brickbats and bouquets from the country's highly partisan political press, which saw it to be precisely that.

This had mainly to do with the findings regarding the CPN (UML). Conventional wisdom had it that since a large faction of it had broken away to form the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) in early 1998 (which took away 40 MPs of the united party's 89 in the outgoing Parliament), the votes would also be divided with the Nepali Congress standing to benefit. The poll, however, indicated that an overwhelming proportion had stayed with the original party. It was the CPN (UML), with 31.9 percent of the respondents favouring it, and not the CPN (ML) with its 3.9 percent, that was likely to prove the main opponent of the Nepali Congress. The Nepali Congress, with 32.2 percent votes polled in its favour, also put up a strong showing. The deciding factor as far as the elections are concerned, however, appears to be the undecided 14.5 percent which may vote either for the NC or the UML in the general elections slated to take place in two phases on 3 and 17 May 1999.

But despite the strong position of the CPN (UML) in the opinion poll, its share of votes in the elections could swing either way by the death of its chairman and former prime minister Man Mohan Adhikari on 26 April (see page 37). While the sympathy factor could work to the CPN (UML)'s advantage, the lack of a leader of his stature may ruin the party's chances. Adhikari's great personal appeal was confirmed by the survey which showed that he was the most popular candidate for prime ministership, far ahead of the NC's candidate for PM, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and the present incumbent

Indicts the politician

Girija Prasad Koirala, also of the NC. At the same time, a majority of the respondents felt Adhikari's nine-month-long government in 1994-1995 was the best since 1990.

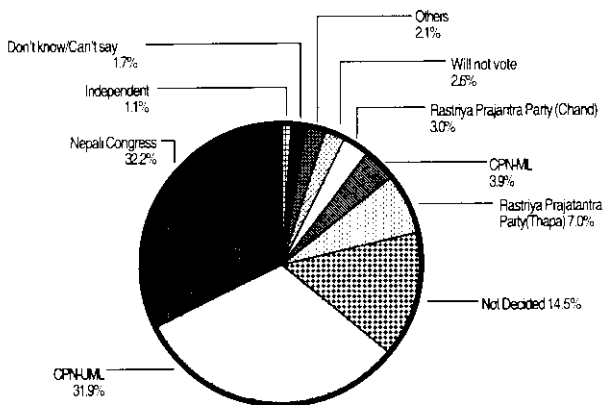
There were more surprises in response to the query whether the country's 10-year-old democratic polity was in any danger. From Day 1 of the new political set-up that emerged after a 50-day sometimes-bloody political struggle in 1990, politicians have been clamouring about the "threat to democracy" – a reference to the political events of 1960 when, after a brief period of parliamentary politics, the king staged a takeover and absolute monarchy reigned for 30 years. But more people felt there was no threat to democracy than those who believed there was. And, this should serve as a warning to politicians as among the latter an overwhelming majority felt the danger emanated from the political parties and the leaders themselves, rather than from the usual round of suspects such as palace sources or the "foreign hand".

Another indictment of Nepal's political parties (all of the major ones have been in government at some time or the other) came by way of the query as to how the people perceived the present state of the country as compared to 10 years ago. A fairly high percentage felt that the country is doing okay (*thikai* in Nepali, implying that things are so-so). But more people thought that the country was somewhat worse off than those who thought it was doing better.

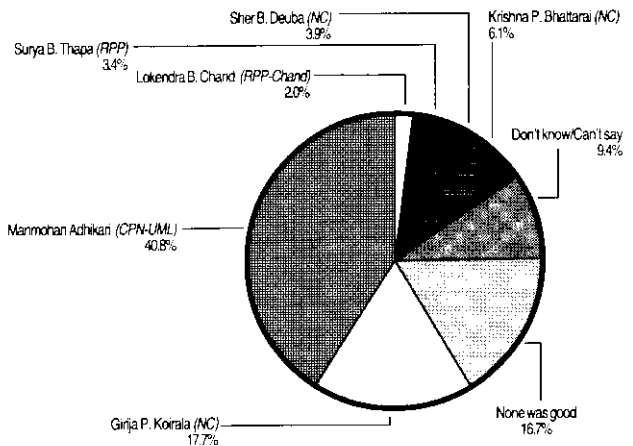
The opinion poll also came up with interesting findings (largely corroborating conclusions from earlier studies) on the relationship between ethnicity and preference for political parties. This was an important distinction to make in an ethnically diverse country like Nepal, and one that could perhaps effect changes in the perception of political parties. Among the two largest communities – Bahuns and Chhetris (hill Brahmins and Kshatriyas of Nepal who make up 29 percent of the population) – there is an almost equal preference for NC and CPN (UML). Among the hill ethnic groups, the preference was divided, with NC being favoured by Gurungs and Magars (totalling 10 percent), and the CPN (UML) being favoured by Tamangs, Rais and Limbus (with a combined strength of 10 percent). Among the Dalits (the 'oppressed' classes with another 10 percent), the preference was for CPN (UML), while the Tarai people (from near the country's south, bordering India, with 31 percent) showed a clear inclination towards the NC.

"In a context where people listening passively to politicians has been the norm, this exercise seeks in a sense to reverse the roles – where people speak out and politicians have to listen," said the poll report. If it has been able to achieve that much, the exercise should be considered a success. ▲

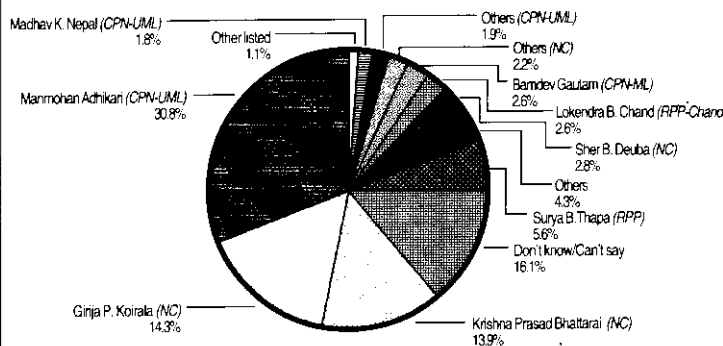
Political party intending to vote for in upcoming election.



Best government since restoration of democracy.



Choice of future prime minister.



The pie-charts have been taken from 1999 General Election Opinion Poll: How Voters Assess Politics, Parties and Politicians (Himal Association, 1999).

The Radical Mediocrity of South Asian Social Science

OR

Why the Brown Man Must Be Heard

by *Ramachandra Guha*

There is a well-known South Asian social scientist, a particular favourite of the editor of *Himal*, who describes himself on the jacket of a book as active in the environmental, human rights, alternative science and peace movements. Now I cannot say about the other three, but if this worthy is active in the environmental movement, then my name is Medha Patkar.

Exaggerated claims to a personal radicalism are the staple of South Asian social science, made with carefree abandon by man and woman, young and old, Nepali, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indian, Bangladeshi and (I dare say) Maldivian. It was once all right to label a piece of work in descriptive terms, that is, to label a study of land relations in eastern Nepal as, precisely, *A Study of Land Relations in Eastern Nepal*. Now it would be presented as *An Action-Research Project or Programme of Participatory Intervention*, written by an activist intellectual or intellectual activist.

Why have these claims become necessary? First, to elevate the author, to dignify him or her with a moral authority that is believed to come through association, however tenuous, with a social movement or political project. Second, and simultaneously, the claim is made to intimidate readers, to coerce them into an *a priori* acceptance of the results of the article or book placed before them, to make certain that they ask no questions about the means by which these results have been arrived at. For how can one begin to challenge a study advertised as a critique of Western hegemony or an attempt to give voice to the voiceless? If one raises doubts about the reliability of the data or the validity of the methodology, one runs the risk of being made complicit in the projects of colonial/feudal/patriarchal domination.

A particularly egregious example of this kind of behaviour was on display in the celebrated debate on the death of Captain Cook, conducted between two of the most highly regarded anthropologists in the world. Marshall Sahlins, of Chicago, and Gananath Obeyesekere, of Princeton but once of Peradaniya, disagree on how the death of the explorer was viewed by the native Hawaiians who caused it. But where Sahlins stays with the evidence

and his particular interpretation of it, Obeyesekere also advances, in support of his view, his nationality, the ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka, and to cap it all, the random reflections on the State of Humanity of a Colombo taxi driver.

The fact that his own skin colour, and the colour of some of his friends (including the unnamed cabbie) more closely approximate the pigmentation of the Hawaii islanders has encouraged Obeyesekere to claim privileged status in the debate, to argue that this allows him greater access to the voices of brown men speaking another language in another place in another century. It must be said however that the Princeton man was merely reproducing strategies perfected in Delhi and Dhaka, where one's caste, gender or alleged participation in the environmental, human rights, alternative science and peace movements automatically assure the correctness of one's views and the authenticity of one's data.

There was a time when such claims were regarded as unnecessary even by those well-placed to make them. Consider the case of Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-72), a man who was both one of India's leading anthropologists and a partisan of the Indian national movement. Bose was jailed by the British for participating in the Civil Disobedience movement in the 1930s. Later, in the forties, he served as Gandhi's secretary while the Mahatma was on a walking tour in the riot-torn villages of eastern Bengal.

This associate of Gandhi kept his politics and his scholarship strictly separate. He wrote on urgent and topical issues such as the fate of tribal people, the economic life of cities, but never asked that his research findings be given a special hearing because, unlike other anthropologists of the day, he had a background of social activism. Nirmal Bose would always scrupulously demarcate the personal and the scientific, never feeling the need in his academic work to advertise his own, frequently deep, political engagements.

Could the activist claims of today's social scientists be a product of deep-seated insecurity, a worry that their research work cannot ride on its own, that the frailties of

evidence and argument need to be buttressed by bluster? One consequence of the radical mediocrity of South Asian social science has indeed been the declining significance of empirical research. This is especially marked in the two academic disciplines this writer knows best: history and anthropology.

Unlike more speculative subjects (such as economics, which when shown something in real life responds: "It may work in practice, but does it work in theory?"), these disciplines once prided themselves on the systematic and steady collection of facts. The historian burrowed away among old documents, moving from one archive to another in the attempt to reconstruct, from numerous disparate fragments, aspects of the world we have lost. The anthropologist spent a year or more in the field, learning a new language and whole-heartedly participating in the material and ritual life of his or her chosen community, so as to present a more faithful and comprehensive account of aspects of the world we still have.

Over the past 20 years, the importance of field work and archival work has been greatly undervalued in the university.

Within both history and anthropology, the move has been towards discourse analysis through the study of printed texts.

All over the place, in the United States as much as in South Asia, political posturing has tended to take the place of careful research. Thus, the historian exhumes a book written by a long-dead colonial official and damns it as racist, or, for variation, takes apart a tract by a nationalist icon such as Nehru or Jinnah.

The anthropologist, meanwhile, indulges in acts of intellectual parricide, in the deconstructive destruction of his forebears. Earlier (and safely-deceased) anthropologists are arraigned on all kinds of charges, from being agents of colonial rule to simple exploiters of the knowledge of their informants.

Admittedly, there are still some historians who work away in the archives, as well as the odd ethnographer who likes to rough it out in the field. But they are decidedly not the ones in the vanguard of their profession, not the ones in fashion, not the ones looked up to by the young. Now is the moment to make your reputation through phony radicalism, by imputing motives and abusing

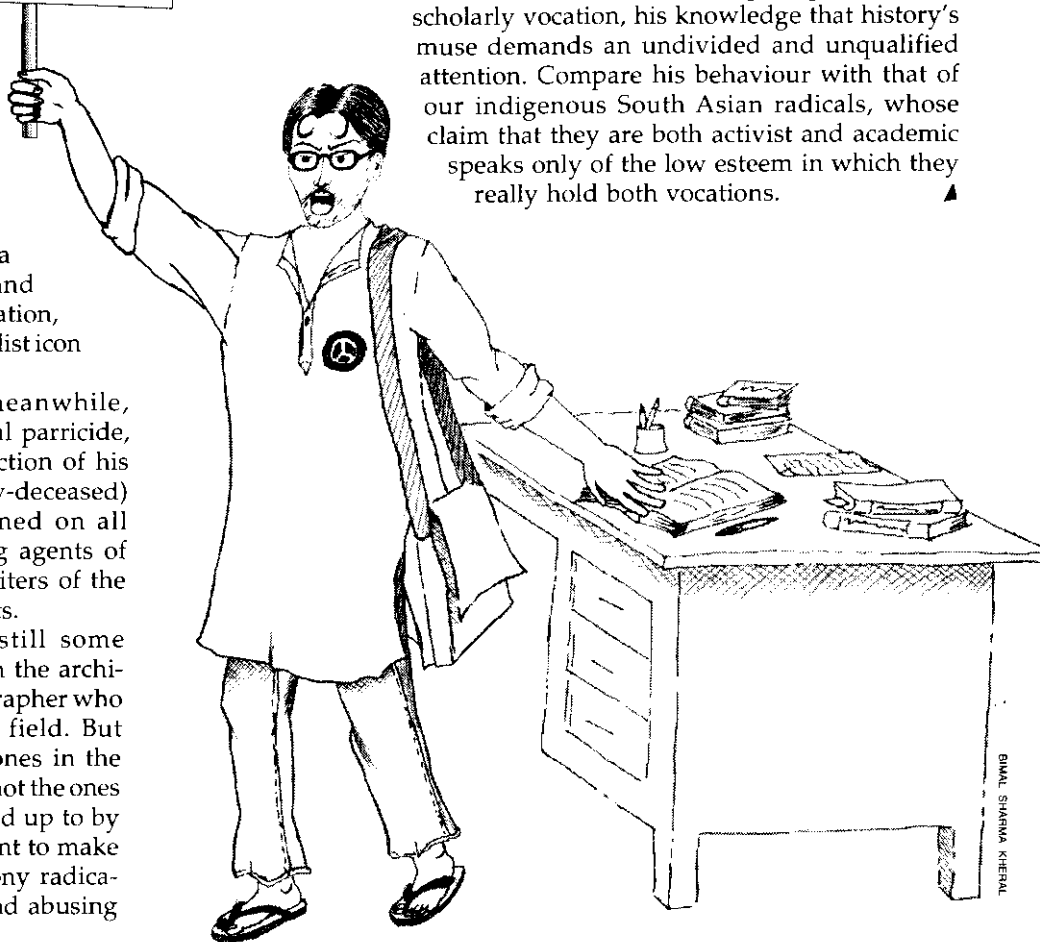
from the comfort of your armchair the work done in distant places by honest, hardworking scholars. There are signs that the fashion is passing, but it has already exacted a terrible toll, by polluting the minds of talented but impressionable students, directing them away from the kind of work that shall last.

Contrast the careers of our mediocre radicals with the intellectual honesty of a scholar who happened to be white, male, and British—all the wrong things to be nowadays, a triple disqualification for one's work to be taken seriously. His name was Edward Palmer Thompson, and he is an exemplar for our humbug-ridden times. A future biographer of E.P. Thompson shall have to distinguish four phases of his career: communist educator, historian, peacenik, and historian again.

In the late 70s, at the peak of his influence in the academy, Thompson abandoned scholarly work, throwing himself into the peace movement. At the time, he had two or three major books half-finished but when his conscience called, he set his drafts aside to lead the opposition to the deployment of nuclear missiles in Europe. Thompson returned to complete his books only after the peace movement had died a natural death, with the end of the Cold War.

All the while that he was an activist, Thompson did not so much as glance at his notes. This was because of his abiding respect for the scholarly vocation, his knowledge that history's muse demands an undivided and unqualified attention. Compare his behaviour with that of our indigenous South Asian radicals, whose claim that they are both activist and academic speaks only of the low esteem in which they really hold both vocations. ▲

PROTEST!



The Southern Cone and

Argentina and Brazil agreed to mutual nuclear renunciation, and turned their rivalry into cooperation. Could India and Pakistan do the same?

by **Varun Sahni**

It is a year since India and Pakistan shook the needles of seismic monitoring devices around the world. But the consequences of Pokhran II and Chagai Hills have not been particularly earth shattering. Neither the status nor the situation of the two countries in the international system has changed in any noticeable way. Both states remain what they have been for 50 years: two developing countries in a fractured region; two middle powers with very different capacities and potential, bound by history in a mutual security dilemma that is difficult, if not impossible, to unravel.

The loud noises of condemnation emanating from the "international community" were, as it is retrospectively evident, "all sound and fury, signifying nothing". The frenetic activity of the great powers to isolate both India and Pakistan was an exercise in futility. Middle powers may lack the capacity to challenge the way in which the great powers run the international system, but they are sufficiently powerful to defy any great power attempt to put them into cold storage.

A year later, although the dust raised by the tests seems to be settling, the nuclear scene in South Asia remains as opaque as ever. Theatrical gestures, such as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's taking the bus to Pakistan, and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif meeting him at the border, keep alive the hope that things will not get out of hand. But will the Bus best the Bomb? Frankly, it is still far from

clear whether *bhangra* on the border will lead to a substantive breakthrough in bilateral relations.

Much is being made of the new "spirit of Lahore" that is said to be permeating India-Pakistan relations. Can the two countries, in their new mood of cooperation, be expected to reach an understanding on the nuclear issue? Curiously enough, we may find an answer to this question not in South Asia but in the southern cone of South America, where there is a prototypical example of mutual nuclear renunciation worth examining and which may provide some clues about the future behaviour of India and Pakistan.

Mercosur

The relevance of this case to South Asia comes from the Argentine-Brazilian rivalry that was a perennial feature of international relations in South America. In its essence, this was a competition for influence in the region. In particular, Argentina perceived Brazil as seeking to establish its 'sub-hegemony' in Latin America under the umbrella of US hegemony.

From the Argentine perspective, this made Brazil the biggest impediment to the creation of an anti-US Latin American solidarity under Argentine leadership. Traditionally, two geopolitical axes were said to dominate the Southern Cone: Buenos Aires and Lima *versus* Rio de Janeiro and Santiago de Chile. The nuclear rivalry between Buenos Aires and Brasilia was merely a subset of their larger competition for

influence in the region.

It is important to underline that the Argentine-Brazilian rivalry was never based on a territorial dispute or an identity conflict. The two countries were therefore able to overcome their traditional hostility and become close friends when they discovered a community of interests that outweighed their antagonism. Moreover, it was the generals on both sides who broke the ice.

In 1980, under shared pressure from the US, the military governments of generals (and presidents) Jorge Videla and João Figueiredo signed an agreement on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. This marked the beginning of the Argentine-Brazilian nuclear *entente*, a process greatly strengthened by Brazil's open support for Argentina during the Falklands/Malvinas war against Britain in 1982, which, for the Argentine generals, demonstrated conclusively that Brazil was not an enemy.

Thus, when the democratic transition took place in Argentina and Brazil, in 1983 and 1985 respectively, the new civilian presidents found that their generals had already opened up the path to bilateral nuclear cooperation. By 1991, nuclear cooperation between the two countries was in full swing, culminating in the setting up of the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials.

In the ultimate analysis, both Argentina and Brazil felt that they had more to gain from economic

the Subcontinent

cooperation than from nuclear competition. The nuclear understanding between the two South American giants was an essential first step towards a process of regional cooperation and integration. The Common Market of the Southern Cone (Mercosur) is self-evidently based on the new strategic relationship between Argentina and Brazil.

The lesson for the Subcontinent thus is clear: as long as India and Pakistan remain at loggerheads, regional cooperation in South Asia is a pipe dream.

Important differences

If Argentina and Brazil were able to bury the nuclear hatchet, why should India and Pakistan not be expected to do likewise? There are, unfortunately, five important differences that make a bilateral nuclear deal between India and Pakistan highly unlikely, and perhaps even undesirable.

The triangulation of China. Most Western analysts see only two routes to denuclearisation in South Asia: an India-Pakistan bilateral deal, or a regional nuclear-free arrangement. Neither is acceptable to India, for the simple reason that China is left out of the equation in both scenarios.

Although China is not a part of South Asia, there is a deep-rooted belief among Indian policymakers and analysts that China is a critical element in South Asian regional security. Geo-strategically, China is at the very heart of Asia. Indeed, China defines Asia as the only Asian country that abuts into every sub-region of Asia. Thus, for many Indian policymakers, any geo-strategic (as opposed to geographic) definition of South Asia must necessarily take China into account.

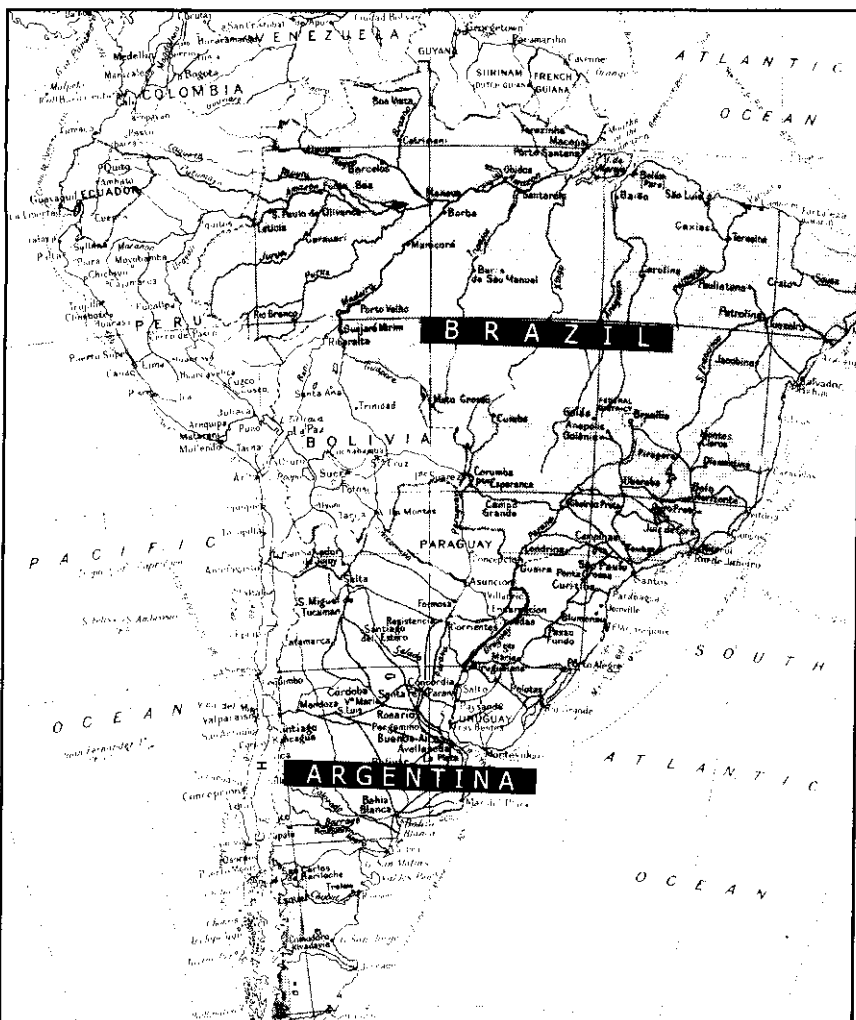
Viewed from New Delhi rather than from Washington, this proposi-

tion isn't as ridiculous as it seems at first. China is a country with which India has fought—and lost—a war in 1962. India deploys nearly half a million soldiers on its disputed northern border with China. Indian policymakers have repeatedly expressed their concern about nuclear and missile co-operation between China and Pakistan. In other words, China is a part of India's 'security complex'. It is thus patently unrealistic to expect Indian policymakers to ignore China's nuclear capability.

Nevertheless, many analysts persistently ignore the "China factor" in India's security planning, and continue to draw a spurious and artificial equation between India and

Pakistan. India, with a population of 980 million, is nearly 80 percent of China's size (population of 1.2 billion) and over eight times larger than Pakistan (population of 120 million). Nevertheless, India's attempt to contend with China is seen as hopelessly ambitious, while Pakistan's determination to match India step for step is seen as perfectly natural. This flawed perception of an India-Pakistan equation lies at the root of understanding the security problem in South Asia.

It is undeniable that in recent years New Delhi's relations with Beijing have significantly improved. Nevertheless, China remains the cardinal country in India's international calculations for the



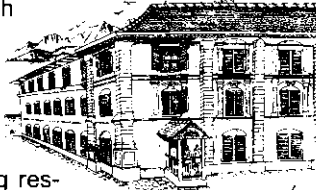


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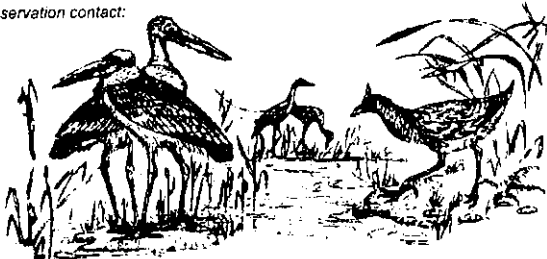
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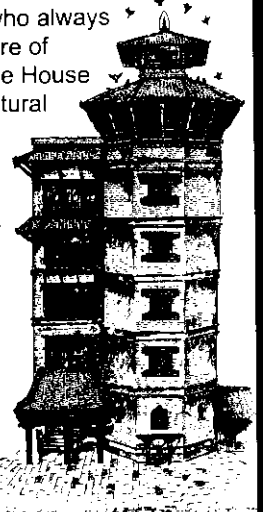
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OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1200	1900	
WINTER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1998/1999						
FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR	
OS4444	Thursday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900	
OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900	

foreseeable future. In the Southern Cone, the Argentina-Brazil relationship was never subject to the triangularity that exists in South Asia.

The lack of a nuclear umbrella.

One reason why Argentina and Brazil could renounce nuclear weapons is because an implicit US nuclear umbrella exists over the entire Western Hemisphere. South Asia has never been under the nuclear umbrella of a single extra-regional power, nor is it likely that such a nuclear umbrella will exist in the future. It could be argued that the US and Soviet nuclear umbrellas did cover Pakistan and India respectively during the later years of the Cold War. This is at best a debatable proposition. Furthermore, even if these two umbrellas did exist during the Cold War—and it was not a *single* umbrella—they no longer do.

The burden of history. The shadow of the past lies much darker between India and Pakistan than it did between Brazil and Argentina. The last time Argentina fought against Brazil was in 1828, and the last occasion when Brazilian and Argentine soldiers faced each other in battle was in 1852, when Brazil intervened in an Argentine civil war. In contrast, the last war between India and Pakistan was in 1971, which resulted in Pakistan losing half its territory and population. Although open war between the two has not occurred since then, their armies continue to engage each other in hostile action, most notably since 1984 on the Siachen Glacier.

The shattering of asymmetry.

The regional configuration of power in South Asia and South America are also vastly dissimilar. Brazil has never dominated South America, or even the Southern Cone, in the way India dominates South Asia. The Indo-centric nature of South Asia is a fact of history and geography that India cannot avoid and its neighbours cannot ignore.

Geographically, India forms the core of South Asia and its neighbours the 'periphery'. India shares borders

with each of the other countries in the region, while none of its neighbours share a land border with any South Asian country other than India. Indian power far outweighs the combined power of all its regional neighbours. Thus, ever since the break-up of Pakistan in 1971, South Asia has remained locked in 'structural insecurity', a product of the power asymmetry in the region. Traditionally, the only way the other countries of South Asia could contend with Indian power was by resorting to external balancing—seeking extra-regional intervention—which India always resolutely opposed.

Pakistan's military insecurity was further accentuated after 1971, for two reasons. The first reason has to do with Pakistan's lack of strategic depth relative to India. Unlike India, which has a large hinterland that is safe from Pakistani attack (and which can 'absorb' a Pakistani offensive), the entire territory of Pakistan presents a target for Indian firepower at times of war. Pakistani defence planners are quite familiar with India's preferred war strategy: an armoured thrust in the plains of Punjab and Sindh coupled with an attempt to gain air superiority. With major cities like Lahore just a stone's throw away from the border, the possibility of an Indian armoured breakthrough remains a military nightmare for Pakistan.

Secondly, Pakistan has a distinct numerical inferiority vis-a-vis India in conventional forces. For both these reasons—geography and numbers—it is in Pakistan's interest to possess the Great Equaliser. Thus, Pakistan's nuclear deterrence has at last broken the security dilemma in South Asia by giving Pakistan strategic parity with India. Indeed, the countries of South Asia might well discover that the new situation contains within itself the seeds for a durable peace in the region.

The rejection of discrimination.

Finally, it is extremely unlikely that India and Pakistan will ever join Argentina and Brazil in becoming

members of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), which, whatever its supposed virtues might be, is a patently discriminatory arrangement. For this singular reason, non-proliferation can never become an international norm, like non-aggression and non-intervention have been for 50 years.

Those dreaming of, and working for a new dawn of regional understanding in South Asia, will undoubtedly find these conclusions pessimistic, maybe even depressing. However, peace is never built on dreams alone. Even more than those who plan for war, it is the duty of those who work for peace to be realistic. Argentina and Brazil discovered that they could be friends not under the leadership of visionary statesmen, but rather in the grim era of particularly nasty military dictators.

If India and Pakistan are unlikely to agree to a mutual renunciation of nuclear weapons, what does the future hold for a nuclearised South Asia? Can the two countries reach some kind of nuclear understanding?

Nuclear weapons in South Asia may enhance Pakistan's sense of security, which is a prerequisite for durable peace in the region. The danger in South Asia lies much more in an accidental launch than in a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan arising out of deterrence or crisis instability. The primary task facing Indian and Pakistani diplomats and security specialists is to design a fail-safe system of monitoring that ensures the effectiveness and reliability of the lines of communication between both countries. If nuclear weapons could keep the peace in Europe for half a century, there is absolutely no reason why they cannot be just as safely effective in Asian hands. ▲

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Peace through triangulation

by **Arvind Kumar**

One year after India and Pakistan defiantly tested their nuclear bombs, their triangular dialogue with the United States playing middleman appears to be leading to nuclear restraint. And now after the conclusion of eight rounds of talks by the United States with India and Pakistan, there is general optimism that this will resolve matters like the signing of the CTBT (comprehensive test ban treaty) by the two neighbours.

In October 1998, the American Congress voted to provide limited authority to the president to waive economic sanctions against both the countries, which he did soon after. Some analysts believe that this was done specifically to bale out Pakistan's tottering economy. Which is possibly true, but the fact remains that India itself has not scored too badly at the talks, namely, in the form of possible restoration of defence ties with the US.

Military circles in India believe that discussions with a high-level US steering group has cleared the way for military exchanges and possible joint naval exercises. The last time the Indian and US navies conducted joint exercises was in 1992.

At the same time, it has also been pointed out that the triangular talks, with US Undersecretary of State Strobe Talbott acting as go-between, have not produced anything concrete. While it may be too early to expect results, what has become clear is that unless major non-proliferation issues are discussed at greater length, India and Pakistan will find it difficult to come to any sort of agreement.

The US has spelt out the core non-proliferation issues. It wants India and Pakistan to sign the CTBT

and ratify it, declare moratorium on the production of fissile material, restrain nuclear and missile capabilities, and tighten export control regimes bringing existing export control laws on par with international standards.

The general perception is that India is all set to sign the CTBT before September 1999, and that it may conduct another round of nuclear tests before signing. If India joins the CTBT without linking it to time-bound global nuclear disarmament, it will be roundly criticised both at home and abroad. The benchmarks identified by the US nowhere mentions global nuclear disarmament. That the US did not consider this an important aspect during the triangular discussion does not come as a surprise. But the fact that India, the pioneer of the nuclear disarmament campaign, should also have chosen to remain silent on the issue is indeed ironical.

If India signs the CTBT without any further nuclear tests, questions will be raised as to whether India's scientists have the capability to improve upon the earlier tests. The other aspect, of course, concerns what India would receive in return for ratifying the CTBT. The coming months should provide vital clues about India's course of action. And if India signs the CTBT, Pakistan will follow suit, as per Pakistan's official position for many years.

As for the declaration of moratorium on the production of fissile material, India has already rejected

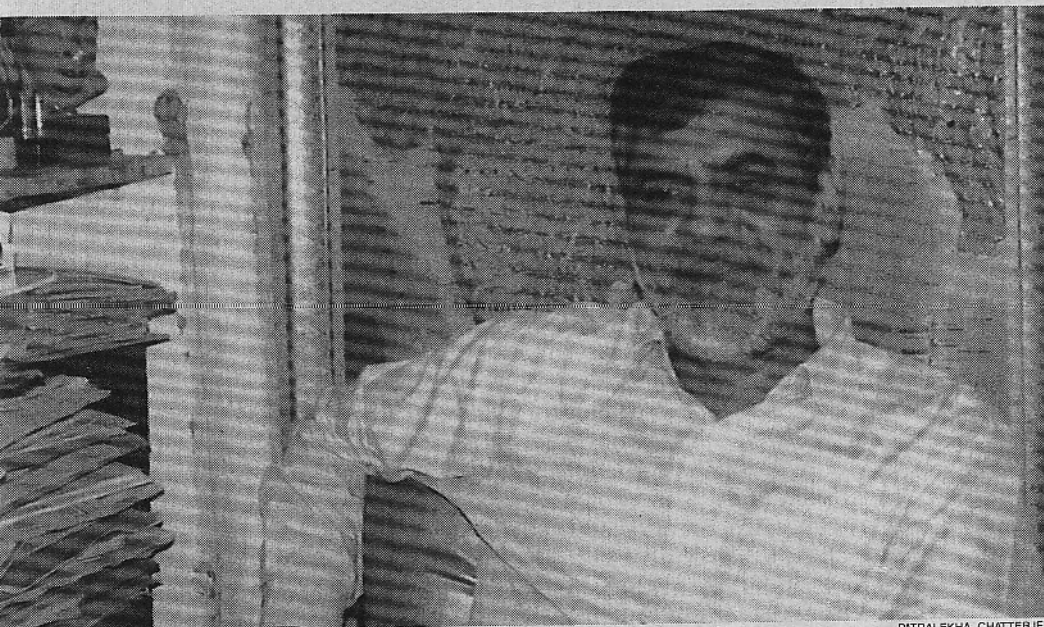
it, while Pakistan too is not likely to abide by it. The two sides have taken different positions on the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) being negotiated at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Immediately after it conducted its nuclear tests, India said that it would participate in the negotiation process at the Conference on Disarmament with the understanding that the treaty would follow and discuss the provisions made in the UN General Assembly resolution 48/75 L. The resolution was co-sponsored by India and the US in 1993 and states that the FMCT has to be non-discriminatory, multilateral and international, effectively verifiable, and that it would ban the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices.

Pakistan's stance, however, has been different: it insists that the FMCT should be retrospective in its scope and nature, taking into account the existing stockpiles. While about 36,000 nuclear warheads are held by the Big Five, with the US alone possessing tons of fissile materials, India's and Pakistan's stocks are in kilograms.

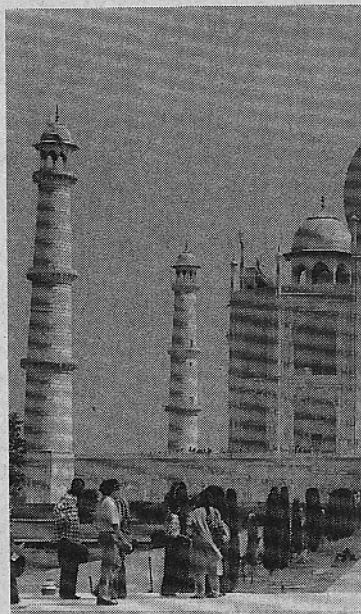
On export controls, India has agreed to review its existing laws and, if needed, make amendments to bring them to international standards, although the most recent Indo-US talks in New Delhi in March 1999 on export controls made no headway. Pakistan is not known to have any export control law and the immediate task before it is to draw up a stringent export control policy.

These measures will help sustain the positive atmosphere that the triangular dialogue has created in the region. The world can well do with a peaceful and prosperous South Asia.

Unless major non-proliferation issues are discussed at greater length, India and Pakistan will find it difficult to come to any sort of agreement.



PATRALEKHA CHATTERJEE



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The good of the cause

He has been burnt in effigy in Agra, people have threatened to "bash him up", others have offered him bribes to drop a case. Meet Mahesh Chander Mehta, India's one-man environment protection force.

by *Patralekha Chatterjee*

Mahesh Chander Mehta remains undaunted. Best known for the Supreme Court decision which closed smoke-belching foundries in the vicinity of the Taj Mahal, Mehta's efforts have led to new policies and guidelines in India and expanded the scope of existing law to bring environmental protection within the constitutional framework. Winner of a slew of international awards, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Public Service (1997), the activist has a far more creditable distinction which makes his colleagues go green with envy: the 52-year-old Delhi-based lawyer has *never* lost a case.

For someone who is perhaps the most famous environmental lawyer in India, it is ironic that Mehta did not set out to be either an environ-

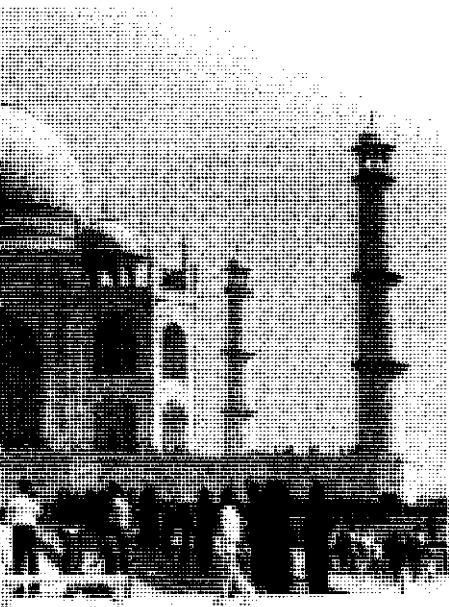
mentalist or a lawyer. Born one of eight children to a farming family in Jammu in northern India, Mehta had fairly conventional aspirations—he wanted to be a doctor. It was only after he failed to get into medical college that he studied law and political science. After practising at the Jammu High Court for 10 years, Mehta shifted to Delhi and the Indian Supreme Court in the early 1980s.

A remark at a party in 1983 that lawyers were too greedy a bunch to be interested in public causes like saving the Taj Mahal pushed Mehta towards environmental activism. He dug up press clippings, read books, and visited the Taj to see first hand what was happening to Shah Jahan's 400-year-old monument to love. The trip convinced him that Agra's air

pollution was affecting the Taj's marble.

The biggest polluters, he discovered, were the small coke-burning iron foundries that dotted Agra. Six months of study later, Mehta filed a petition before the Supreme Court. Result: 200 factories were closed down and another 300 ordered to relocate. The Court also ruled that a green belt be created around the Taj Mahal, and a 23-km bypass constructed so that heavy traffic would not have to go into Agra city.

In his tiny office in his rented house, spilling over with files, books and trophies, there are two glass bottles, which are among Mehta's most cherished possessions. These bottles contain dirty brown liquid, samples of drinking water from Bichhri village in Rajasthan that were



Taj Mahal, there were those who criticised him for putting a monument before livelihoods.

"Saving the Taj is not only about cultural heritage or environment. It is also about economics," he says. Without the Taj, Agra would be just another grimy north Indian town, enveloped in dust, filth and noise. "Don't consider Taj Mahal as a monument alone. See it as an industry, a non-polluting one. If we preserve it, this industry will yield dividends for hundreds of years more. Calculate the foreign exchange it has earned in the last 50 years. It is a golden goose, why kill it? If we protect it, we will also protect 250 other historical monuments in the Taj trapezium, including three World Heritage sites."

The Taj Mahal draws more than four million people to Agra every year, 30 percent of whom are foreign tourists. Without the tourists, the taxi drivers, rickshaw-pullers and souvenir sellers of Agra would lose their jobs. The campaign to save the Taj had ensured a safety net for those at risk: the Court order stipulated that anyone sacked was to be given six years' wages and money.

Mehta also took up what some say is the hopeless cause of cleaning up the Ganga. After having proved in the Supreme Court that the Ganga is dangerously polluted, Mehta has now turned his attention to other rivers. The lawyer thinks India's biggest environmental problem is the impending water crisis, and the pollution of major rivers and groundwater.

Despite his successes, Mehta admits that judicial activism is necessary but not sufficient to bring about the changes he hopes for. "You need to create an environmental awareness among people so that they can protest." He predicts that the day is not far off when a "revolution will break out in India over such day-to-day issues as clean water, clean air". In the far corners of India, protest movements are already gathering momentum, and Mehta says what is needed is "coordination". He may be just the man for that job. ▲

displayed as evidence before India's Supreme Court. In 1988, press reports began appearing in the Hindi media of a protest movement in the obscure village Bichhri, where people were falling sick and animals were dying. Mehta decided to take this up as his next challenge after the Taj. He found out that five small industries manufacturing pesticides and hydrochloric acid were discharging untreated effluents that had contaminated the entire groundwater of Bichhri and 14 other villages. He filed a petition in the Supreme Court against these factories and suddenly Bichhri was news.

Several environmental groups sent fact-finding missions to the village and started a sustained campaign to keep Bichhri in the national consciousness. The Supreme Court eventually closed down the factories and attached the property of the owner to recover funds to rehabilitate the area. It will take many more years before villagers can safely drink water from tubewells in Bichhri, but the situation would have been far worse had Mehta and the Supreme Court not swung into action.

A shrewd mind underpins Mehta's activism. He knows that environmental arguments alone will not win him cases. In the case of the

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Chomsky on India

WHAT WAS your overall impression of India?

The questions being debated in India — whether to use import restrictions, or to adopt neoliberal policies — can't really be answered in general. Like debt, import restrictions aren't good or bad in themselves — it depends on what you used them for. In Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, where they were used to build up a domestic industrial base and market (as in Britain and the US in earlier years), they proved to be a good idea (for the home country, at least). But if you use them to protect an inefficient system and the super-rich who profit from it, they're bad.

Here's a personal anecdote that illustrates things that are very real, but that you can't measure. After a talk in Hyderabad, some friends were driving me to the airport. When we were about two miles away, the traffic completely froze up. Every inch of the road was covered by a bicycle, a rickshaw, an oxcart, a car or whatever. The people were sort of quiet; nobody was making a fuss.

Only about 20 minutes, we realised that the only way to get to the airport on time was to walk. So my friends and I started threading our way through this immense traffic jam.

Finally we got to a big highway that was blocked off. There are lots of cops and security forces everywhere in India, but here there were *tons*. My friends talked them into letting us cross the road, which we weren't supposed to do, and we finally made it to the airport (which was semi-functional because it was cut off from the city).

Why was the highway closed down? There were signs next to it saying *VVIP*, which I was told means *Very Very Important Person*. Because some "VVIP" — we later found out it was the prime minister — was expected at some indefinite time in the future, the city was closed down.

That's bad enough — what's worse is the fact that people tolerated it. Feudalistic attitudes run very deep in India, and they're going to be hard to uproot...

What has to be overcome in India is enormous. The inefficiency is unbelievable. While I was there, the Bank of India came out with an estimate that about a third of the economy is "black" — mainly rich people who don't pay their taxes. Economists there told me one-third is an underestimate. A country can't function that way.

As elsewhere, the real question for India is, can they control their own wealthy? If they can figure out a way to do that, there are lots of policies that might work.

NOAM CHOMSKY INTERVIEWED BY DAVID BARSAMIAN IN
THE COMMON GOOD (ODONIAN PRESS, 1998)

Tit and tat

I WAS surprised to see the eye-catching headline on page 7 of your April 23rd issue, which boldly stated "Two Tits". Whose tits are these, I wondered, and where can I see them? I quickly flipped back to the first page, which I had somehow glanced over without noticing this

earth-shaking scoop.

Alas, it turned out that the story in question was actually about the recent spate of missile tests by India and Pakistan, which had been printed under the ill-fated title, "Two Tits for One Tat". What has happened to the standards of journalism? In the future, please ensure that any headline which indicates the presence of mammary tissues is accompanied by a suitably prurient story. Otherwise, your readers are likely to continue to express their gravest disappointment, as I have today.

Sincerely,
Zeeshan Hasan
54 Dhanmondi R.A., Road 2A
Dhaka 1209

LETTER TO THE EDITOR IN *THE HOLIDAY WEEKLY*, DHAKA.

Buddhism naturally

BUDDHISM IS one of the important philosophical and religious traditions of the world. Once I participated in a seminar which was attended by many renowned scientists. Among them was Dr Raja Ramanna, a very well-known nuclear physicist who has been often referred to as "Sakharov" of India. Dr Ramanna said he was very impressed by the fact that Buddhism does not believe neither in a creator nor in a theory asserting that things have independent existence. From an unbiased scientific perspective he admired this position and was very receptive towards it.

It is very clear that the Buddhist approach to knowledge is very close to the scientific approach. Buddhist Mahayana philosophy stresses the importance of establishing the truth on the basis of the "two truths". Now, when we talk about establishing the two truths, we are talking about understanding the basic law of nature. The Buddhist approach is very much related to the basic law of nature and it is on this basis that we engage in a path of practice and mind transformation. We can see therefore that this approach is very scientific and based on in-

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THE NEWS, LAHORE

Where they stand

THE CIRCULATION of some overseas publications in India (figures are from the Audit Bureau of Circulation for the second half of 1998):

1. *Time*: 27,185
2. *Newsweek*: 12,625
3. *The Economist*: 8,143
4. *Fortune*: 5,440
5. *Asiaweek*: 4,201
6. *Business Week*: 3,605
7. *Far Eastern Economic Review*: 2,863
8. *Asian Wall Street Journal*: 561

vestigation and experimentation.

It seems to me that the difference between the scientific method and the Buddhist method is that until now the scientific method is limited to the physical world and it is not able to extend its investigation to the non-physical world. For example, areas such as the experiential nature of the mind or that of non-associated compositional factors, are not the object of scientific experimentation. In the same way, scientists do not talk about the existence of past and future lives, and they do not talk about it not because they have found evidence of the non-existence of past and future lives. They do not talk about it precisely because they have not found evidence of their non-existence. My personal view is that if the scientists were to find evidence of the non-existence of past and future lives, the Buddhists would have to accept it.

THE DALAI LAMA IN "THE INTRODUCTION TO THE BUDDHIST TANTRIC TRADITION" FROM *TIBET HOUSE BULLETIN*.

One man's nationalism...

NATIONAL HISTORY is usually much older than the nation-state, and indeed it has many layers, and realistically, nationalism itself is pluralistic, but the aggressive nationalists often thrust upon the nation a reified account that rejects all divergent views as tainted and odious. From the new conceptual viewpoints, the rigid, monolithic and dominating version of nationalistic history has come under fire. Several post-modernist thinkers have challenged linear descriptions of India's past. Dr Ayesha Jalal has challenged the Pakistani history that flourished at the hands of bureaucrats and the political leaders for which, reportedly, she has angered the Pakistan government that does not like to question the officially validated history. She not only challenged the kind of history taught in the Pakistani school textbooks, but she also raised critical questions about Mr Jinnah, the architect of Pakistan that few rarely dared to do before her.

Regrettably, Bangladesh history is still the victim of the politicised imagination and invented memories, and

surely, the monopolistic patriotism and a relentless fixation on the past are totally unwarranted for a healthy historiography. What is often delineated as the "freedom struggle's consciousness" was not monolithic in 1971 although it was the Awami League that led the fight for independence and later on made a unilateral claim on national history. Numerous historians have either hunkered down or participated in the politically dictated mission of rewriting Bangladesh history. Bangladeshi historical account has become a protected craft zealously guarded by those who claimed to be nationalist, a freedom fighter, verified or unverified, a victim of the Pakistani crackdown, and undoubtedly, the reminiscence of the liberation struggle is the privileged arena of those who fled to India in 1971.

Few credits go to those who were trapped in Bangladesh and suffered all the miseries of a war-torn nation. Bangladeshi historical account is nearly a jigsaw puzzle of the tales of 1971, but such anecdotes themselves do not necessarily satisfy the rigours of historiographical tests. Bangladeshi nationalistic account has also been the victim of the politics of rage, personal vendetta, political rancour, witch-hunt, and the impossible-to-verify accusations that enmeshed with the extravagant historical claims.

The Bangladeshi comprehension of the past and its sense of identity is not just a theoretical debate. Some people are using their historical demands, without any objective criterion of measuring patriotism, either to get power, job, prestige, business, influence, recognition and privilege or to malign others, and satisfy their personal ego.

M. RASHIDUZZAMAN IN "SAVING HISTORY FROM THE PATRIOTIC DIATRIBES AND INVENTED MEMORIES" FROM *DAILY STAR*, DHAKA.

American or British system?

SHOULD THE parliamentary system of government, adopted by India in emulation of the Westminster model, be scrapped? Would not a presidential form of government, akin to that of the US, be more appropriate for India?

B.R. Ambedkar, chairman of the Drafting Committee of India's Constituent Assembly, once remarked that "a constitution is as much a matter of taste as clothes are. Both must fit, both must please." The present constitution of India now neither fits nor pleases. It is appropriate that a nation like India—immense, ambitious and passionate—should review its political institutions. They were adopted only 50 years ago, in the most audacious democratic enterprise in history, and adopted for no reason that should compel the country to persevere with them now that they have failed.

The framers of India's constitution, driven by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister, opted for the Westminster model because it was "familiar," a word Mr

lated to the Yuan, Ming, Ch'ing dynastic periods. There has not been systematic research on most of this collection. This is likely to change Tibetological research in the way the finds of Dunhuang documents did for Chinese Buddhist studies at the outset of the century.

Michael was a brilliant scholar on Himalayan studies and a highly skilful fund raiser. One of his two great wishes was to establish a Centre for Tibetan and Himalayan Studies at Oxford. It was close to being fulfilled. Weeks before he died, the appeal committee raised a substantial endowment for the establishment of the Centre. The patronage of Himalayan Studies and the direction for younger scholars is much poorer without his learned and beneficial guidance. His other wish was to see his beloved wife Nobel laureate [Aung San] Suu [Kyi] whom he was barred from seeing for many years.

KARMA URA IN "DR MICHAEL ARIS, THE DOYEN OF BHUTAN STUDIES, PASSES AWAY" IN *KUENSEL*.

Condom diameter

FHI [FAMILY Health International] has conducted a series of human use studies in developing countries to evaluate the acceptability of pre-lubricated latex condoms of different diameters. The size of these condoms is measured in terms of their lay-flat widths (the width of a flattened condom measured perpendicular to the length). Studies were conducted in Asian countries using smaller condoms and in African countries using larger condoms, assuming that penis size might affect acceptability of different sized condoms...

Convenience samples of about 150 men in three Asian countries (Philippines, Sri Lanka and Nepal) compared smaller condoms (49 mm lay-flat width) with standard condoms (52 mm). More than 2000 condoms of each width were used. Findings from all three sites suggest approximately equal proportions of men prefer each of the two condom sizes. When men from the site in the Philippines rated the two condoms on a five-point scale from "liked very well" to "strongly disliked", the distributions of ratings were almost identical. About equal proportions of men liked the smaller or the standard width condoms with respect to which condom stayed on better, which was more comfortable to wear, and which they would prefer for future use. Findings were similar in Sri Lanka, except that almost two-thirds of the participants preferred standard condoms for future use.

In Nepal, results were mixed: about two-thirds of the men indicated that they liked the standard condoms better, while a similar proportion reported that the smaller

condoms were "more comfortable". More than half of the participants indicated no preference with respect to future use and about a third preferred the smaller condoms.

FROM "RECENT ADVANCE, FUTURE DIRECTION" IN *FAMILY HEALTH INTERNATIONAL*, 1999.

Sonia and yet so far

THERE IS something obscene about the idea of Sonia Gandhi becoming prime minister of India, a distinct possibility which our "neo-Bolshie" English media has been highlighting day in and day out. Even more gross is the fact that vast sections of progressive intellectuals in India are veering round to accepting her.

It's time all those lustily cheering Sonia Gandhi and awaiting the moment when she ascends the throne stopped for a moment and acknowledged a few facts that they appear to have overlooked in their unseemly haste to see the back of Vajpayee and the BJP-led coalition.

For starters, they can go through the 35 words in the *Who's Who* section of "Manorama Yearbook 1999", published full 13 months after Sonia made a grand "announcement" in December, 1997 (through a letter signed by her secretary), that she would be campaigning for the Congress in the 1998 general elections.

Says the Yearbook: "Gandhi, Sonia (b. 1946): Italian by birth, naturalised in India. Wife of former Indian PM Rajiv Gandhi, widowed on his assassination. Meteoric rise from primary membership to presidency of Congress Party in just two years."

Surprisingly, there is no mention of her educational qualifications. We don't know whether she holds a PhD or is just an MABF (Matric appeared but failed). What did she graduate in? Political science, sociology, psychology, history, literature? Does she have a master's in chemical technology, food processing, agricultural engineering?

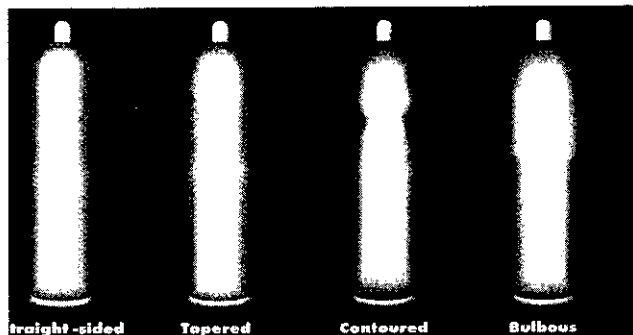
A diploma in astronomy, aeronautical or space research? Perhaps a certificate in nursing or as a laboratory assistant? Has she done research on marine life in the Suez Canal, the mating habits of penguins on the North Pole, or on how kangaroo kids in Australia learn to hop?

Nobody in the Indian media has cared about Sonia Gandhi's qualifications. They remain a state secret hidden behind the fortified walls of 10, Janpath.

That is what makes the idea of Sonia becoming prime minister obscene. It is not suggested that all she possesses is a diploma in shorthand and typing (as is widely believed), but isn't it unfair on the part of the lady and of her party to have thrown a veil of secrecy over her qualifications despite the fact that they are now bidding to make her Prime Minister?

The people have a right to know whether the Congress Party is about to foist on the country a woman who is best qualified only to be "dictated" to (both literally and figuratively)?

FROM "SOMETHING OBSCENE", EDITORIAL IN THE INTERNET MAGAZINE *THE INDIAN LAMPOON*.



Tolerance, pluralism and Islam

How should Muslims live in a plural society, and what role should they play in the reconstruction and development of such a society?

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam has increasingly been viewed by certain circles in the West, and in India, as the great, menacing 'other'. American academics like Samuel Huntington and India's own Hindutva ideologues have done much to peddle the thesis that because Islam, allegedly, cannot tolerate other religions, Muslims and non-Muslims can never live in peace in a plural society.

Contrary to this belief, historical record shows that, barring certain specific exceptions, Muslims have actually been at ease with religious plurality and have been able to comfortably co-exist with people of other faiths. While the history of Sufism in India can be taken as a past example, calls for inter-religious understanding from within the Indian Muslim community in contemporary times also show how the issue stands at present.

It is in this context the book under review is important, not only because of its topic but also because of its author. Fazlur Rahman Faridi is a member of the central advisory council of the Jama'at-i-Islami-Hind, the leading Islamist organisation in India, and editor of both its English organ, *Radiance* and its Urdu monthly, *Zindagi-i-Nau*.

Faridi writes that Muslims are no strangers to situations of religious plurality. The town of Medina in the Prophet's days itself was home to numerous Jews and Christians. The great Muslim Umayyad and Abbasid empires had significant Jewish and Christian minorities, as did the Turkish Ottoman empire, and they were granted considerable autonomy to administer their own communal affairs.

From these minority groups, writes Faridi, the Muslims learnt

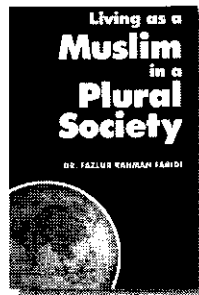
much, for Muslims "have always been generous in absorbing desirable and useful features of other societies". Thus, from the Zoroastrian Persians, Muslims learnt certain military techniques, from the Greeks the Unani system of medicine, and from the Byzantines the "culture of *hijab*", or the veil.

But that was when Muslims were the politically dominant community, and free-borrowing from others did not in any way threaten their own overall supremacy. Times have

changed, says Faridi, and in modern plural societies today, which are generally based on secular principles, all individuals have equal rights irrespective of religion. This places Muslims in an entirely new situation, one which Islamic jurisprudence, developed in the medieval context of Muslim political supremacy, did not envisage. For Muslims this constitutes "an unprecedented challenge". It is this challenge that Faridi seeks to come to terms with.

In particular, the questions he asks, and seeks to answer are: How should Muslims in general, and Indian Muslims in particular, live in a plural society? And, what role should they play in the reconstruction and development of such a society? Faridi believes that while maintaining their separate identity, Indian Muslims must attempt to reach an understanding with other communities living in the country. An important area where Muslims must cooperate with their compatriots, he says, is in the struggle against poverty, suffering and oppression that afflict many, irrespective of caste and creed. "It is Islamically reprehensible to turn one's eyes away if the oppressed belongs to an alien community."

"Love for one's homeland is not the prerogative of one community exclusively," and thus Muslims also have a responsibility towards the country. Islam, Faridi says, lays down two basic obligations on its followers—service to God and service to humanity, irrespective of religion, for "all human beings are equal in the sight of Allah". Muslims must cultivate good relations with all others who live peacefully with them, and here the writer quotes a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "A Muslim from whose mischief neighbours are not safe, shall never enter paradise."



Living as a Muslim in a Plural Society
by Fazlur Rahman Faridi
Islamic Foundation,
Madras, 1998
pp 105, INR 65

reviewed by **Yoginder Sikand**

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Flexible Islam

Faridi will need to do some tough talking if his co-religionists are to realise the onerous task he has set before them. To begin with, this thesis calls for a critical redefinition of traditional religious understandings on matters related to inter-community affairs, which means sifting through centuries of hidebound tradition to re-discover Islamic 'truth'. Muslims must be reminded that Islam "recognises and respects the sanctity of freedom of thought and action" and that any effort to "coerce others to alter their views" amounts

to a gross violation of the divine plan as the *Qur'an* itself says that "there is no compulsion in religion".

Rather than focus simply on what keeps different religions apart from each other, Muslims need to be reminded that in the Quranic understanding of divine revelation, God sent his messengers "in all nations, in all times and climes". They all preached the same basic message—submission to God, or, in Arabic, *al-Islam*.

Faridi himself concurs with the general Muslim belief that the revelations brought by messengers other than Muhammad were later tampered with, and that, therefore, the *Qur'an* is the only scripture that remains unsullied. However, he insists that "the *Qur'an* does not negate the essential elements of all revealed religions". And, going even further than this acceptance of the "essential elements" of the other two religions traditionally classified by Muslims as "revealed religions"—Judaism and Christianity—he says that it applies "equally to all faiths and creeds that are not commonly included in the category of revealed religions such as Hinduism and others".

These religions represent the same pursuit of some elements of the Truth, although, in his opinion, they have "lost the original totality of Reality". Faridi thus accords a considerable degree of legitimacy to other religions even as he asserts his faith in the ultimate truth of Islam itself. This marks a major departure from an influential section of traditional Muslim opinion.

At a more practical level, this innovative presentation of the concept of religious plurality also makes serious demands on how ordinary Muslims must relate to other religions and their followers. For one thing, Faridi says, Muslims must "refrain from demonisation of others", for as the *Qur'an* advises Muslims, they "must not revile those whom they invoke other than Allah". Moreover, Islam believes in the "essential goodness of man", which "is not limited to Muslims only". The "most

significant" value in Islam, next only to the oneness of God, reminds Faridi, is "the unity of mankind".

Faridi writes that rather than branding all Hindus as demons as a reaction to anti-Muslim Hindu propaganda in India, Muslims need to reach out in compassion and solidarity with sensible Hindus and others in a joint struggle against fanaticism and communal hatred. For Muslims to stereotype all Hindus as their enemies only serves "the vested interest of certain pseudo-religious cliques" that seek political mileage for themselves, and "derive their income and social prestige through a clever design to manipulate prejudices born of ignorance". He adds, "To shun other cultures and traditions is frequently interpreted as a necessary condition for the preservation of one's own", but Muslims must realise that "this is a patently misguided perception" that can only "end up in a world torn asunder by hatred".

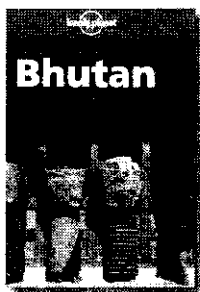
Perhaps the most interesting, and certainly the most path-breaking suggestion that Faridi has to make, deals with traditional views related to Islamic jurisprudence. He writes

that Muslims today must look to the *Qur'an* and the *sunnah*—the practice of Muhammad—for inspiration and instruction, rather than being tied down by the interpretations of the faith provided by medieval Muslim scholars whose opinions were largely specific to their own particular contexts. If Islamic law is to remain true to the Quranic spirit, it must move beyond a rigid adherence to the rules laid down centuries ago and recover its inherent dynamism and flexibility to meet the needs of changing circumstances and contexts. Muslims need to understand that "the flexibility of Islamic law has always been recognised by the Islamic jurists", and that reason and social context have been accorded a prime place in Islamic juristic endeavours.

Faridi's book is likely to cause more than just a ripple among Muslims in India and elsewhere, but if it initiates a debate within the community and between Muslims and others it would certainly serve an urgent purpose. And this, not simply to prove Huntington and the Hindutva brigade wrong.

Planet Bhutan

Visiting Bhutan is an honour bestowed on the few who get to go. Here is a book that will help make you make the best of it.



Bhutan
by Stan Armington
Lonely Planet
Hawthorn (Australia)
1998
309 pp, USD 12.99
ISBN 0 86442 483 3

reviewed by **Don Messerschmidt**

Bhutan is one of those South Asian destinations meant for a few hardy tourists, and even fewer researchers, scholars and development workers. Isolated geographically at the eastern end of the Himalaya, and culturally by a policy that discourages hordes of visitors, it remains a remote and intriguing place; the locals have limited access to the international media—national television and Internet will be arriving only

later this year. Visiting Bhutan is an honour, and living and working here (as this reviewer does), all the more so. Thus, it's welcome that a new and truly well-written book about the country, its geography, history, culture and society, has appeared.

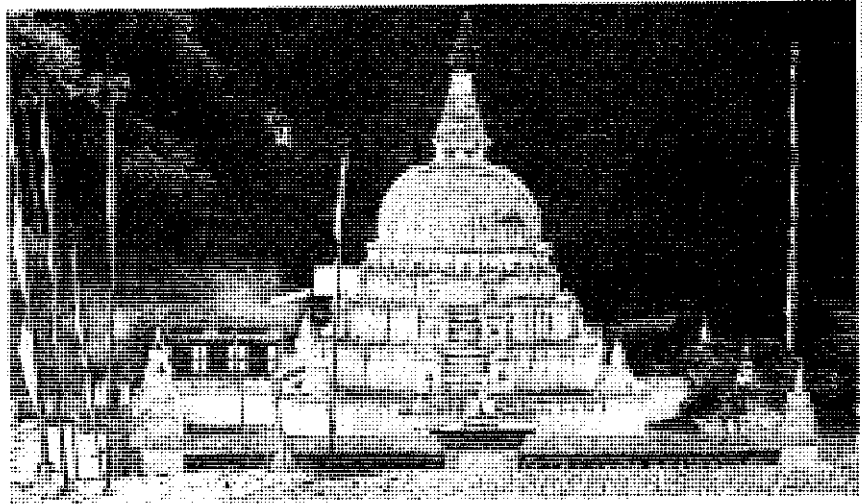
The few outsiders who go to Bhutan each year have gradually contributed to the growing literature about Bhutan. Stan Armington's is the latest 'guidebook' to the country, and it does an excellent job of bridging both touristic and scholarly interests; with the one informing the other in such a way that both the casual and the sophisticated reader gets to learn a great deal.

Armington is a well-known figure in Himalayan travel. He first toured Nepal in 1969, then stayed on as a trekking guide, and is now the owner-operator of one of the largest trekking firms in Nepal. He has travelled to Bhutan numerous times, exercising a keen eye and a lucid pen in the preparation of this book.

I would briefly examine *Bhutan* from two points of view. One, as the curious visitor, whether he or she travels by car, treks, or is in the arm-chair; and the other, from the perspective of an anthropologist who sees in it a comprehensive glimpse of some of the richness and wonder that make Bhutan such an awesome destination.

For the regular tourists, Armington offers pretty much what they would want and need to know: notes on health and safety, travel to and within the country, key aspects of geography and society, including the languages spoken (with a section on useful phrases, and a glossary), all listed in a detailed index. The colour photographs are splendid, and there are numerous small maps, although readers would have gained much more had there been a large topographical road map.

The section on "Facts for Visitors" is especially interesting, with sage advice—on barking dogs, challenging toilets, various annoyances and dangers (altitude, winding roads, vehicle breakdowns, the weather, leeches, hotel services), and



Chorten Kora was modelled on the stupa of Boudhanath in Nepal and is a focus of worship for Buddhists from all over Eastern Bhutan.

for those with particular lifestyle persuasions (such as gay, lesbian). There are also tips on responsible trekking behaviour, the social importance of gift-giving, and even one on how to put on the Bhutanese national dress (the men's *gho* and the women's *kira*). The descriptions of travel and trek routes, spectacular landscapes and of local attractions, are thorough without being tedious. The style is quick, to the point, and often witty.

From a mildly scholarly perspective, *Bhutan* has no dearth of interesting asides in special sections and boxes. Armington does a great job, in a few pages, of relaying the basics of Bhutanese history (religious, secular and political), and backs it up with a good bibliography. The book also touches on current affairs (both internal and regional), including the ethnic troubles along the southern border (where tourists rarely go).

Armington is superb in his description of one of Bhutan's most popular and fascinating cultural attractions, the annual Dances of Tsechu, which is held at virtually every *goemba* (a Mahayana Buddhist monastery or temple) and *dzong* (a fortress-monastery) in the country, in each place at a different time. Armington then colourfully describes the figures of "Drukpa Kagya Buddhism", interprets the Buddhist "Guardians of the

Four Directions", and dwells on Bhutanese textiles, stamps and the different types of the ubiquitous prayer flag.

Of particular interest to this reviewer is Armington's coverage of the life, history, geography and culture of central Bhutan (Bumthang) and the far east (Mongar, Lhuentse, Yangtse and Trashigang). Bumthang's central Choskhar Valley is one of Bhutan's culturally significant sites, with the Jakar (white bird) town and the impressive Jakar Dzong at its centre. For many, Choskhar, with some of the oldest temples, is Bhutan's religious heartland. Bumthang's temples house some beautiful and ancient wall paintings, some of which unfortunately are in acute deterioration.

It is in upper Choskhar Valley that one can see the beautiful and rare black-necked cranes in season. It is one of only a few places in Bhutan where they winter-over. Armington describes some interesting day walks around Bumthang and its vicinity, to many of the more famous sites. The photography is spectacular.

Mongar is the next town of size beyond Jakar, a seven-hour, 193-km drive through some of Bhutan's most exciting landscapes. On the way, the traveller passes through the smaller Ura Valley, with its almost Swiss-like farms and villages. Then the road

becomes narrow with abrupt curves passing along some very steep cliffs. After crossing Thrumsing La (pass) at 3750 m, it rapidly drops 3200 m to Lingmethang within a distance of only 84 km.

Near Mongar, a side road leads up into the geologically impressive and historically important valley of the upper Kuri Chhu river, once an important trade route to Tibet. The Kuri Chhu is a major headwater of the Manas river system which drains eastern Bhutan into Assam, where it joins the mighty Brahmaputra. For the adventurous traveller, the upper Kuri Chhu is noted for its thrilling "Class-5" kayaking. Trashigang, 92 km beyond Mongar, was also a major trade centre. It is dominated by a brightly painted 17th-century dzong strategically perched high above the

Kulong Chhu, and is the site of the famous Iron Bridge, first built two centuries earlier.

A side road from Trashigang leads to Trashiyangtse, in the neighbouring Yangtse district. Yangtse is famous for its hand-made wooden bowls, black-necked cranes in winter, and the sacred Chorten Kora, site of an annual pilgrimage and a colourful fair. The Chorten Kora is patterned after the larger Boudhanath Stupa of Kathmandu Valley. Local legend has it that a monk went to Kathmandu and carved a model of Boudhanath into a large white radish, with which he returned to Yangtse to build a replica. "The reason that Chorten Kora is not an exact copy of Boudhanath," writes Armington, "is because the radish shrunk during the trip and distorted

the carving a bit."

The book is full of such charming tidbits of fact and fancy. Armington writes briefly, and well, of each major site along the way, and describes in boxes some of the more interesting aspects of religion and history of the region. And while many guidebooks are cut and dried, each reading very much like the other, where Armington succeeds is in the dose of adventure he injects into the book.

Bhutan is, in sum, an excellent resource and traveller's compendium, sure to become a classic among guidebooks. This is the most encyclopaedic, practical source of information on Bhutan yet published for popular consumption, in a readily comprehensible style. This one will be hard to beat. ▲

Film South Asia'99

The second edition of the festival of South Asian documentaries

30 September - 3 October 1999

Film South Asia, the competitive festival of documentary films, invites entries from filmmakers of the Subcontinent and the world. The biennial event brings together the best non-fiction films of South Asia. It provides a visible platform for new works and helps promote a sense of community among independent filmmakers. Film South Asia '99 is also committed to developing a larger audience and market for South Asian documentaries within and outside the region.

Dates and Venue

FSA '99 will be held in Kathmandu for four days running, from 30 September to 3 October 1999 (Thursday-Sunday). Films will be screened back-to-back, and a three-member jury will announce awards at the closing ceremony. Time will be set aside for discussions following all screenings. Talk programmes and symposiums will be held concurrently.

Criteria

Documentary films completed after 1 August 1997, if selected, will be admitted to the competitive category. (Entrants may ask not to be included in competition.) Films made before

the cut-off date will join the non-competitive category.

Entries have to be on South Asian subjects, broadly understood. They can cover any subject in the range available to filmmakers, from people, culture, lifestyle and adventure to development, environment, politics, education, history and so on. Entries that have not been released publicly will receive priority. Filmmakers need not be South Asian.

Entry is free of cost. All entries must reach the Festival Secretariat in Kathmandu by 30 June 1999.

Entry Forms

Contact the festival office for entry forms. Entry forms can also be downloaded from <http://www.himalmag.com/fsa>.

For more information, contact

Manesh Shrestha, Festival Director
PO Box 42, Patandhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-541196/542544; Fax: 977-1-521013;
Email: fsa@mos.com.np

Film South Asia'99 is organised by *Himal* in association with International Television Trust for Environment (ITVE).



I know you have all been waiting patiently to hear my views on the momentous discovery of a new solar system in the Constellation Andromeda which astronomers found by tracking the imperceptible gravitational wobbles of a star 44 light years away from us and what this means to the post-post feminism discourse, but I first have to turn to the more mundane matter of announcing the Annual Worst Airport Loo in the Subcontinent (Except Nepalgunj) Contest.

For those of you who arrived late, let me just state here that the contest is part of this periodical's ongoing effort to bring to public notice little known flashes of mediocrity in all aspects of human endeavour in our favourite Subcontinent. South Asians have the ability, despite all odds, to exhibit in no uncertain terms and wherever and whenever possible, a total disregard for their Fellow Man. It is this effortlessly selfseeking approach to life that sets South Asians apart from people from most other Subcontinents in the known universe.

The individualism of South Asians also manifests itself in our obsession with getting into the Guinness Book of World Records. Aside from being already noted for having the world's fastest clock and the world's tallest dwarf, various South Asian countries already hold, or are on the verge of holding, various world records:

- Pulling a ten-ton Tata Truck with the help of one's tongue
- The shortest coalition government in world history
- Baking the world's largest buttered nan by solar power
- The world's first prime minister to partake of a frothy yellow drink that was not a beer
- The first woman to give birth on the summit of Mt Everest in winter without the help of oxygen and Sherpas
- The biggest payoff in the history of howitzer exports

since the induction by Atilla the Hun of 3000 crossbows from an unnamed Viking arms dealer

One of the records I have personally set all by my own lonely self is the Longest Toilet Wait while on an overnight flight to Europe. For some as yet unexplained reason, the entire economy class cabin decided to get up and use the facilities while flying Somewhere Over The Western Sector. Whether this set off emergency red lights in the cockpit with an accompanying digital female voice that repeated the audio-warning to the Captain: "Delhi Belly. Delhi Belly. Delhi Belly...", I do not know. But my claim to fame for which I must send in an application to the chaps at Guinness is that I waited right across the length of the Anatolian Peninsula and well into the Baikan quagmire before my turn came, by which time the bathroom was looking like a septic tank that had suffered a direct hit by Hurricane Mitch.

One of the hazards of flying to and from (and within) South Asia is that in-flight toilets do not meet ICAO and WHO guidelines for basic human rights. Instead of lavishing budgets foolishly on personal videos showing 24 films simulatenously, airlines should go for personal sanitation stations. This can take the form of tubes with unisex adaptors that allow passengers to attend to natural calls without having to be getting up and going all the time.

Singapore Airlines has taken

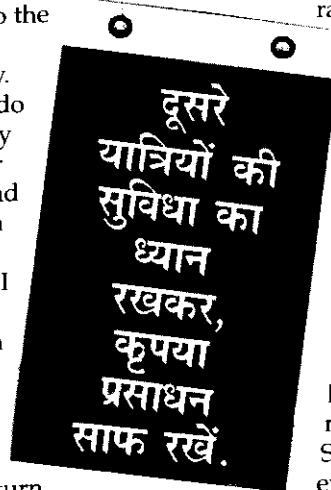
the unprecedented step of putting up a little sign in Hindi in the toilets of its Delhi-Singapore flights in which it warns potential toilet anarchists of the severe punishment that awaits them on arrival at Changi. Trivia time: Singapore airport derives its name from a former Japanese POW concentration camp converted into the World's Cleanest Prison. (Source: Guinness Book of Records)

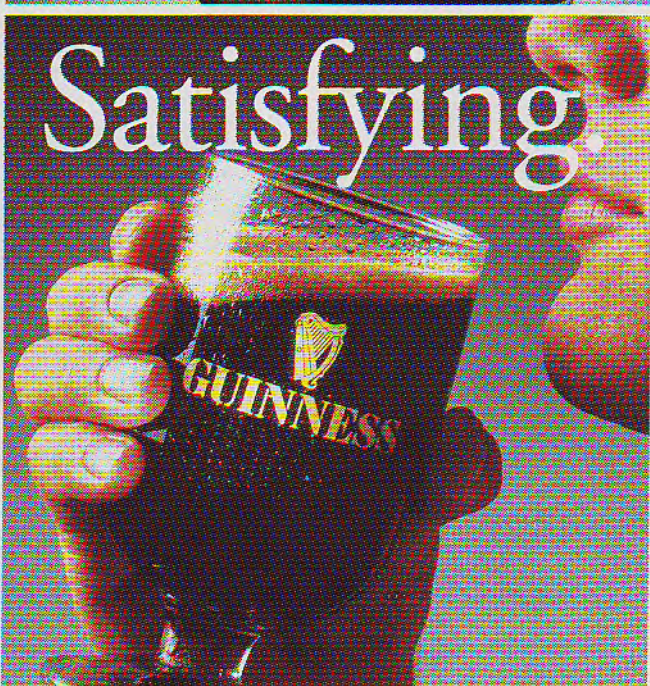
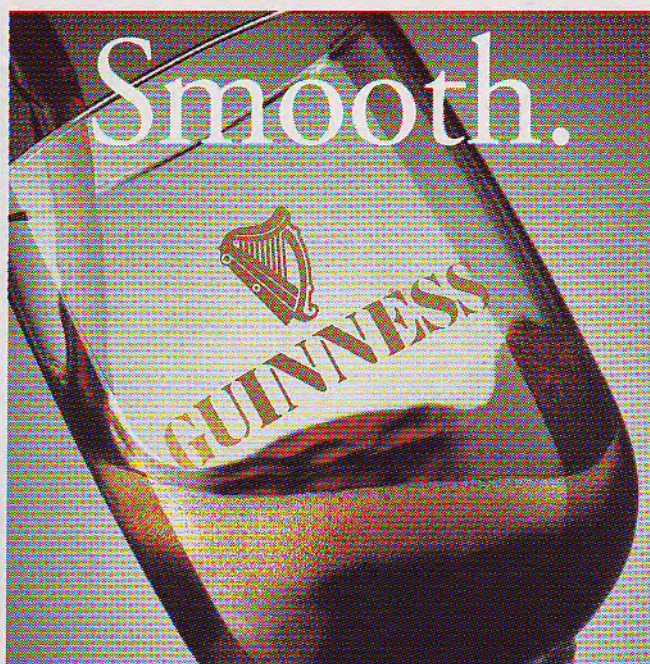
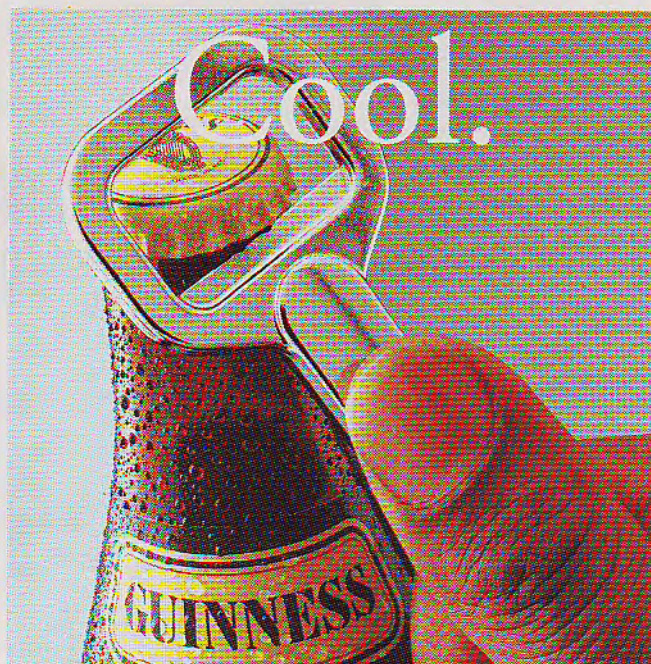
Going by prevalent Singaporean law against such heinous crimes as not flushing, the punishment for making a Big South Asian Mess in the aircraft toilet will probably be 50 lashes on the offending buttock with a wet rattan cane, or a 5000-

Singapore Dollar fine. Or both.

There are those among us who are envious of countries which have sacrificed individual freedoms for the sake of cleanliness and order. I cannot say that when confronted by our lack of bowel discipline as a society, such vile thoughts have not also crossed my mind from time to time. Spanking a billion people every day is no joke. Our nations of numb bums are going to grind to a halt.

So, without ado any further, let me announce the Annual Worst Airport Loo in South Asia (Except Nepalgunj) Contest. Note: The toilet at Nepalgunj Airport is not eligible to apply because it has an unfair advantage by virtue of the fact it has had no water supply for the past six years. Pilots landing there in bad weather have been known to use the toilet as a beacon to land by relying entirely on their sense of smell. And that definitely deserves to be a new South Asian entry into the Guinness Book of World Records or Ripley's Believe It Or Not. Whichever.





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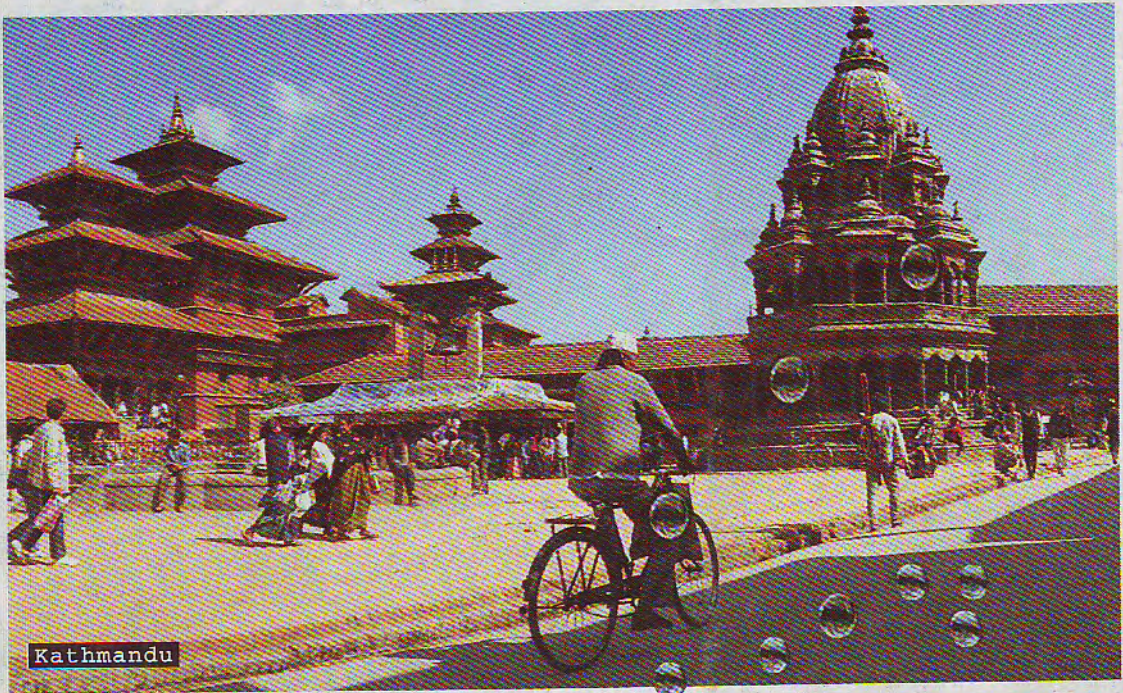
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