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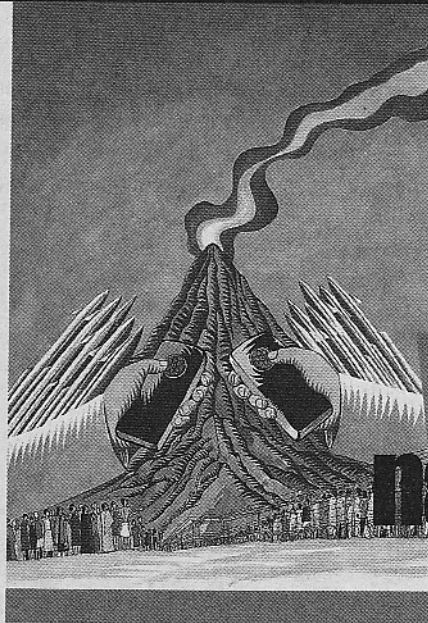
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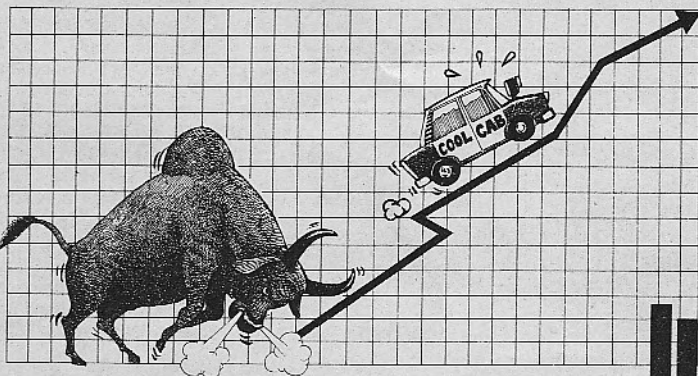
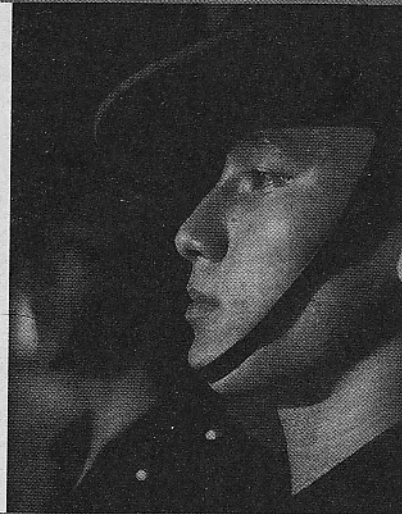


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Abdominal recollections

Abdominal laughter seems to have escaped me over the past several decades to where I had essentially forgotten that it exists. However, when the "Abominably yours" column (May 1999) announced the "Annual Worst Airport Loo in South Asia (Except Nepalgunj) Contest", it did indeed give me a good bout of it.

Yes, that was a loo I once knew well. But since my encounter with it in the fall of 1992, its existence had all but escaped me. The May issue brought it back graphically, and with deep personal meaning.

My encounter with that second-to-none tourist attraction came as my son Tim and I were marking time at the Nepalgunj Airport. We were making a connecting flight back to Kathmandu on the day after our adventuresome 35-day trek in northwestern Nepal. We had been the very first trekkers to cross an unnamed mountain range from Mustang into Dolpo. There we spent many days trekking through and across one of the last forbidden reaches of the Himalaya. (For a complete account, see my 1998 publication, *Himalayan Echoes: A Septuagenarian's Traverse of Mustang and Inner Dolpo*, Pilgrims Book House, Kathmandu.)

With all those out-of-this-world objectives behind us, we were very content to sit at the airport for a good three to four hours—relaxed, comfortably fixed to our bench, awaiting patiently our flight as we reflected on what had been the trip of a lifetime.

Tim's and my eyes frequently came to rest on a portal through which thronged travellers, with their exits through that door coming rather quickly after their entry. From the adjustments that were being made to their garments on the way out, and the occasional fragrant whiffs that came from that direction we knew it had to be a loo.

The urge struck us more or less simultaneously, and we were quick

to agree that the solution to our needs had to be met somewhere else than that loo. Our demands had been satisfied that very morning in a primitive world—one of clean air and wide open spaces, where elimination could be taken care of physiologically as it has been done from time immemorial for man and animal alike.

Through the windows of the airport building, we could see wide open fields covered in tall grass. As we had done for the last 35 days, we took care of our urge in complete comfort, quite inconspicuously and without the slightest offence to our senses. And that was that: the whole experience relegated to the easily forgotten past, never again to be remembered.

Until your "Abominably yours". The confirmation that our assessment about the loo at Nepalgunj was right was justification enough for a grin. The idea that this loo tops the list was indeed justification for a hearty bout of abdominal laughter. For that alone, you have my deep-felt thanks!

*Phillip Sturgeon, MD
Zermatt, Switzerland*

Nostalgia trip

The articles on *JS* (June 1999), a magazine I used to swear by while growing up in Calcutta in the 1970s, brought back many happy memories. There has been nothing quite like it since, and though *JS* folded up, its influence, I would like to believe, is still there all over the contemporary Indian media.

Bhaskar Menon's piece "Calcutta Days" was another nostalgia trip—the world of St Xavier's College and journalism that he writes about is one that I was to experience decades later. The fun that Jug Suraiya and Dubby Bhagat must have had in bringing out *JS* is something my friends and I—all new to newspapering—re-lived in the 1980s in the early days of *The Telegraph*.

Congratulations on one of the best issues of *Himal* that I can remember.

*Kaushik Mitter
New Delhi*

Oh, what an arse

I enjoyed your issue on the Calcutta magazine *JS*, with the master stroke of its last issue's cover as your own cover. However,



the exclamation "Oh Calcutta", which you added at the bottom of the cover page, has connotations that go further than might appear at first sight.

To a British reader the words mean only one thing – the show, "Oh Calcutta!", put on by Kenneth Tynan in London's West End a quarter of a century ago, whose cast for the first time

in the UK played totally nude, full frontal and rear. It proved immensely popular, though it also gave rise to a good deal of outrage, notably in Calcutta itself, whose municipal authorities protested that it was deeply insulting and had sullied their city's good name. In fact, though, the show's name had nothing to do with Calcutta, but was only the anglicised shorthand for the admiring French exclamation: "*O, quel cul tu as!*" (Oh, what an arse you've got!).

Was there the same satirical significance in your front cover?

John Rettie
London

Latin assumptions

"The Southern Cone and the Subcontinent" (Himal, May 1999) notes that there are five differences between the Argentina-Brazil and India-Pakistan situation, differences that preclude India and Pakistan from turning their rivalry into cooperation in a manner similar to that of Argentina and Brazil. Four of these differences are actually assumptions that must be examined more closely.

First, it is stated that Argentina and Brazil enjoy a US nuclear umbrella which is presumed to exist over the Western hemisphere. But in reality, the US nuclear

umbrella is given only to NATO allies and to select Asia-Pacific allies such as Japan and South Korea, and not to other countries; Argentina and Brazil enjoy no nuclear umbrella.

Second, it is stated that Argentina and Brazil do not have a long history of rivalry because their last war was in 1828. This is incorrect because despite the absence of conventional wars, the military and security planners on both sides distrusted each other until very recently. Argentina's 1982 attack on the Falklands and its attempts to forge ahead in the nuclear field during this period were viewed by Brazil's

military as a sign of Argentina's aggressive behaviour. This led Brazil's elites to perceive a serious security threat from Argentina, and to therefore pursue nuclear and missile programmes.

Third, it is stated that Brazil has never dominated Latin America the same way that India dominates South Asia, and this is a reason for Argentina to not distrust Brazil. However this is true only to a degree; Brazil is certainly the dominant power in South America, and Argentina is its main rival in the region, in much the same manner that Pakistan is India's main rival in South Asia.

Fourth, it is stated that India and Pakistan will never join Argentina and Brazil in becoming members of a "patently discriminatory" non-proliferation treaty (NPT). This reasoning fails to recognise that Argentina and Brazil were just as (if not more strongly) opposed to the "discrimination" in the NPT as India. Yet, over time, in

the mid-late 1990s, both these countries recognised that it is better to put aside ideological opposition (to the "discriminatory" nature of the NPT) and join a treaty to gain practical benefits (such as technology transfer), especially if there are no security costs involved. In a similar manner, while India and Pakistan may certainly not sign the NPT, they could sign other treaties such as the comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT) and a future fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT) in exchange for the benefits of technology transfer.

The article correctly notes that China is a major factor in the security situation in South Asia, because of which India cannot give up its nuclear option, and because of which neither India nor Pakistan will sign the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states. However, nuclear deterrence in South Asia (or for that matter, anywhere in the world) is not as stable as assumed. Although nuclear weapons may deter the use of nuclear weapons, it may not deter conventional war or low-intensity conflict and proxy wars (which the superpowers fought against each other in Africa, Asia and Latin America, and which India and Pakistan are fighting in Kashmir).

Nuclear weapons were not the only factor in keeping peace in Europe after World War II; conventional deterrence that was reinforced by strong alliances (NATO and the Warsaw Pact), and the absence of deep-rooted ideological differences or territorial conflict, were also very important factors in keeping the peace in Europe. The above issues should be recognised when considering the causes of nuclear proliferation and the effects of nuclear weapons in South Asia.

Dinshaw Mistry
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SOUTH ASIA

US AND THEM

Most Indians believe that any debate on the Kargil war is unpatriotic or simply anti-national. Most Pakistanis believe that their prime minister is fighting a brave war, not only against India but also against the rest of the world. Both sides want to teach the other side "a lesson". Jingoism is lucrative. Patriotism, like the World Cup, is sold through cable.

What is lost is reasoned debate, criticism of what brought the two nations here, the role of the armies, innocent lives lost, and most importantly, how do we prevent South Asia from careening to the brink like this again. In Pakistan, they will not discuss the misplaced military derring-do which ignited this little war. And in India, they will not talk of the Kashmir problem, which provided the larger backdrop to the entire crisis.

This is nationalism with blinkers, a fever that blinds you to the injustices of the past, and the failures of the present. It is the last refuge of those that have failed in every way to command the respect and support of the people of their own countries. Vulgar propaganda to whip up passions so that local lapses are forgotten. This must be exposed because it involves the lives of hundreds of soldiers and thousands of civilians on both sides.

When the momentum of war unsheathes the big guns, and boys start coming home in coffins, talk of reconciliation is branded treachery. If you are not with us, you are against us. Us and them. Denounce jingoism in New Delhi or Islamabad today and in all likelihood, they will pounce and pronounce you anti-national. They will say, "This has united the country. Our people are one again, why are you against that?" We are not, but is getting all worked up to demonise the brother as the enemy the only way to national unity?

People will show you a photograph of a dead soldier's mother and ask how you cannot do anything but cry. As pictures pour into the hysterical media, the fervour grows. (There is no such thing as a truly free press after the first soldier dies.) The bodies are flown back home, and their funerals covered live by sniffing correspondents, and patriotic spreads. On the streets of Lahore, demonstrators believe

that Pakistan can financially and militarily survive this war, and that the question of Kashmir must be resolved now, with complete accession of course. In India, extremists bay for blood and a final nuclear solution.

Consider for a moment the convenience of all this to the ruling parties. Nawaz Sharif—probably the most powerful democratic leader in Pakistan since 1947—has been able to get away with censorship, profligacy and crack-downs on dissent. Voices that ask for an explanation for the increasing role of the military and the Taliban are silenced.

On the other side in India, a caretaker minority government conducts the war without any interference from the Opposition. Even the people feel that a Rajya Sabha debate would be anti-national and bad for soldier morale. This is the way the world ends: in the symmetrical din of united hysteria when you will not notice the finger creeping up to the nuclear trigger until it is too late.

Leaders of the two countries have an unenviable task ahead. Any solution must first show victory for both sides, Vajpayee and Sharif must at least show that they have negotiated from a position of strength. This will take a lot of doing and some more blatant lying. Vajpayee goes into this with elections filling up his mind. He has to show that he stopped at the LoC only because *he* wanted to. People will want to know why he did not go ahead and just "finish them off". He must be ready with an answer.

Sharif must have some explanation for his agitated people about why he agreed to pull back after meeting Clinton, and he cannot admit the truth that the country is financially ruined. If all this goes without some serious rebellion, and when the dust from this fiery self-generated rhetoric settles, they must both start at the beginning to detoxify the minds of the people they poisoned.

And what of the rest of South Asia, the little countries that watch apprehensively from the sidelines, as well as those regions within Pakistan and India who feel so remote from Islamabad and New Delhi? For the first time, the direction of prevailing winds is a factor in deciding where to buy a home in this newly-nuclear Subcontinent. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is supposed to meet in summit this November in Kathmandu in November. Will India and Pakistan have stopped trying to strangle each other by then? ▲




CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Whose nationalism?

The Kargil mess may well lead to the use of Great Power influence in South Asia, something which New Delhi has resisted for decades.

by Praful Bidwai





For a military engagement which New Delhi is at pains to say is not war, only an "operation", Kargil has been remarkably dirty, tough and bloody. India claims it has killed more than 490 Pakistani soldiers, but it has only taken one prisoner of war. A Indian field commander was quoted as saying his men would rather kill the passionately hated enemy than take prisoners. In any case, it would have been a bother to handle extra logistics at high altitudes.

The two countries' propaganda machines participated wholeheartedly in the Subcontinent's first real television war, pouring venom upon each other: "cowards", "betrayers", "treacherous", "snakes", "rogue state" and the like. If Pakistan's mujahedeen—the actual combatants, rather than the army regulars, according to Islamabad—were prone to emotionally and religiously charged language, India's Hindu-sectarian warmongers were no better. They bayed for the Bomb: yes, use nuclear weapons against Pakistan and give a "final" reply to the "centuries-old" aggression by Islam.

This view was expressed in its full malevolence in *Panchajanya*, the mouthpiece of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological mentor and organisational gatekeeper of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which leads India's ruling alliance. This was a diatribe against all Muslims, "barbarians" as they were by their "very habit and nature". This race of "cunning snakes", *Panchajanya* said, had forgotten that India could have "beheaded" 94,000 Pakistani PoWs in 1971, but instead fed "milk" to these "snakes". They now had to be taught "the final lesson" through nuclear weapons: "why else did we make the Bombs? And why ballistic missiles?"

An extreme view for sure, but senior BJP leaders chose not to dissociate themselves from it. Rather, they joined Pakistan in exchanging inflammatory nuclear rhetoric. There were no fewer than nine statements by Indian and Pakistani officials threatening to use nuclear weapons, or boasting of readiness to meet the nuclear threat from the "enemy".

Revenge was also in the air as news came in of Nawaz Sharif's 4 July meeting with Bill Clinton and his promise in effect to withdraw Pakistani-backed forces from the Indian side of the LoC. There was much gloating over Sharif's diplomatic-political "humiliation"

and a demand that India should now compound it with a military defeat.

The Pioneer daily was quite brazen: "There can be no ceasefire agreement till the last intruder has vacated Indian territory, alive or dead, preferably the latter... [The intruders] must be taught a lesson so severe that neither they nor their succeeding generations ever contemplate such a misadventure. Only [then] can the government consider resuming dialogue. In any case, it is not a dialogue, but a monologue...that India wants to hear... Pakistan must solemnly declare in a chastened and remorseful tone that hereafter it will never again plot to wrest Jammu and Kashmir..."

Indian hawks, inside and outside the government, wanted the present Indian operation to escalate into a full-scale war, which India must decisively win. The RSS was emphatic that it was time for India to cross the LoC and "recapture" the Pakistani part of Kashmir. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Kalyan Singh demanded of New Delhi to declare war on Pakistan. And a BJP MP was taking busloads to Kashmir with "We Want War" placards. Meanwhile, newspapers and television channels set up special funds to help in the war effort.

BJP is India

One reason why the propaganda war and the real military operation were relentless could be that New Delhi was taken totally by surprise when in May it discovered that hundreds of Pakistan-backed mujahedeen had occupied up to 700 sq km of Indian territory in Kargil, across a 150 km-long front. Clearly, the "intrusion" had been planned and launched months in advance, even before the much tomtommed end-February Lahore summit which was wrongly presented as a "breakthrough" and a "historic" event, although it did have symbolic significance (see "Vote of Overconfidence", *Himal*, May 1999).

Soon, surprise turned into bitterness and rancour over Pakistan's "treachery". This was largely the result of the BJP's own misassessment of the Lahore Declaration, which did not even commit the two states to arms control or serious crisis prevention, nor preclude limited conflict at the LoC, although it paid lip service to the Shimla agreement of 1972. (The LoC has been "active" for decades, witnessing periodic shelling from both sides, especially in summer.)

A more important reason for the rancour was the BJP coalition's frustration at, and its

desperate attempt to play down, its gross ineptitude, misjudgment, irresponsible conduct and grave failures:

—New Delhi relaxed surveillance at the LoC, and for many months ignored multiple intelligence warnings and confirmed reports—until it was too late. It was guilty of intelligence failure, strategic miscalculation, political misjudgment and breach of military command. For three weeks in May, Defence Minister George Fernandes was at loggerheads with the armed forces.

—It failed to use diplomatic means and, instead, thrust the task of repulsing the intruders on a poorly prepared army, which was drafted in the thousands without height acclimatisation and proper gear.

—The Union Cabinet, equally hurriedly, lurched into launching airstrikes without carefully computing their costs, or their efficacy, which was conceded by the air force

chief to be unsatisfactory. Regardless, the airstrikes were accelerated to a round-the-clock schedule a month later.

—Deployment of elite divisions and the best of weaponry have produced indifferent results. By its own account, the army has repulsed the intruders to the extent of two to three km (of the seven to eight encroached upon). Of the five main sub-sectors, its successes in the first seven weeks were limited to two.

Faced with these failures, the BJP adopted a two-track approach: whipping up jingoism, chauvinism and fake appeals to “national unity”, and inviting the United States and other major powers to intervene on its behalf to exert pressure on Pakistan to withdraw its troops. The second

involved subtle invocation of the danger represented by South Asia’s nuclearisation. For instance, the 19 June G-8 statement from Cologne broadly supporting India’s stand on the LoC did not come spontaneously, but was inspired by a special letter to Bill Clinton from Atal Behari Vajpayee, in which

the Indian prime minister underlined pressures to cross the LoC.

The letter can only be interpreted as a combination of entreaty and subtle blackmail. Like Pakistan’s tactic last year to convert its weakness into bargaining strength to extract economic concessions after Chagai, India’s calculation was to persuade the US to put pressure on Pakistan, something which was achieved when in Washington Sharif agreed to reaffirm the LoC’s sanctity.

Towards achieving that, in the first place, the BJP had to make large numbers of people identify the ‘national interest’ with the ‘defence’ of remote locations such as Drass and Batalik which they may not even have heard of before. This would mean the virtual elimination of the distinction between the Indian nation and the BJP-led government (reduced to a minority last April). But this would happen only if the Kargil conflict was detached from its domestic context and presented as a straightforward military confrontation between an undifferentiated, homogeneous India, and an equally undifferentiated Pakistan.

This would mean tearing Kargil’s organic links from the realities of India and Pakistan—misgovernance, growing dominance of sectarian ideas, increasing hold of vengeful nationalisms, and deep crises of legitimacy. These factors are intimately linked to forms of rule and their ideological legitimations specific to the rise of political currents that threw up a Vajpayee or a Sharif. These tendencies have themselves been degrading of democracy. Strengthening them can only further harm the public interest.

The M-word

Equally problematic has been the BJP’s reliance on external mediation for short-term gains. It is not India, but the US, which has benefitted from the diplomatic setbacks to Pakistan. Contrary to official claims, India did not resist external intervention or mediation. Rather, it invited it, albeit by another name. The M-word is hotly, repeatedly, rejected by New Delhi and Washington. In truth, what has happened over the past month is a triangular exchange of proposals, through emissaries, telephone calls and letters—all under US supervision.

Bill Clinton’s top officials got involved in these exchanges early on. This cleared the way for extraordinarily close intelligence-sharing between India and the US on Kargil, as heard in the famous tapes of the



conversation between Pakistan's General Pervez Musharraf in China and his deputy in Pakistan. Clinton called Vajpayee on 14 June and Sharif the following day. Frequent consultations on 3 and 5 July between the US officials and their Indian counterparts provided clinching evidence of the tripartite mediatory process.

Clinton would not have shared with Vajpayee the latest 'readouts' of his talks with Sharif at midnight, nor would US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott have talked at length with Jaswant Singh the following morning, had they not already agreed on mediation. Of course there was an understanding that the term itself would not be used. Mediation can take many forms, Camp David being just one example. One does not have to be a conspiracy theorist to recognise others, such as conducted indirectly, through long-distance calls. India solicited, and was party to, mediation over Kargil, whose direction and pace were largely controlled by Washington DC.

In the long run, nothing would suit the US more than a privileged presence in South Asia. A deal over Kashmir will give it a vantage position in the heart of Asia, next to China, at the leading edge of the terrain where the Great Game was played between Russia and imperial Britain. Whatever this might do for the BJP in the short run, it is bound to undermine India's half-century-long struggle to minimise Great Power influence in this region.

The move will at once play into the hands of those who want India to join the US camp. Perhaps that is the deeper meaning of Jaswant Singh's emphasis on the fantastic theory of "global" conspiracy of which Kargil is merely one part. The theory being the spread of Islamic fundamentalism through a "rogue state", "jihad", narcotics and the Talibans. This must have been music to the ears of the US Far Right.

However, it is not merely enough to be wary of the US. It is equally important to recognise the historic folly of South Asia's nuclearisation, to which the BJP was the crucial contributor. Without nuclearisation and the precipitous worsening of regional security, the US would have neither embarked on an assertive mediatory role, nor got a degree of acquiescence for it from the world community.

There are, however, some redeeming aspects to the present situation. The BJP's clandestine diplomacy soliciting US mediation

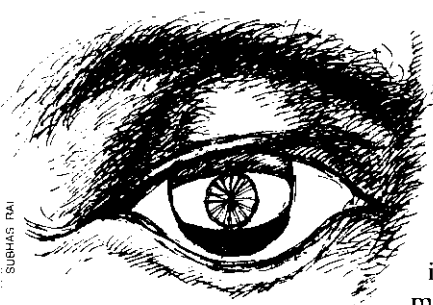
has not gone down well with the Opposition. The Congress and the Left have been critical and suspicious of it. It bears recalling that the BJP has a definite pro-Western bias, which goes back to the Cold War days. Given the general strength of nationalism in India, some of its more distorted and chauvinistic forms do have appeal and are not easy to resist. But resistance there has certainly been—from political leaders, peace activists, media commentators, scholars, even from the families of Indian soldiers who died in Operation Vijay.

Perhaps the most telling remarks on this last item came from Kanakammal, mother of Kargil hero Lt Col R. Viswanathan. She held out the olive branch, saying that the people of Pakistan and India should be loving, rather than killing, each other. She refused to draw comfort from the fact that her son had laid down his life for a good cause. "Can we still love each other?" she asks. "People tell me that I should console myself in the thought of my son's martyrdom... My mind does not reassure me... I would have thought so if [Pakistan] was an enemy country. In fact, those who should be loving each other are slaying each other."

This gives one the slenderest of hope that it might still be possible to stem the tide of communal nationalism, and return to the road of sanity. But there is one primary precondition for this: South Asia must be denuclearised. So long as India and Pakistan possess nuclear weapons and a near-deployable mass-destruction capability, their military leaders will feel tempted to recklessly raise the threshold of conventional conflict. Far from producing security or stability, nuclear weapons will only ensure that South Asia remains vulnerable to more and more Kargils, low-intensity warfare, periodic eruptions of hostilities just short of fullscale battle—all with a dangerous potential for nuclear havoc. ▲



SUBHAS DAI



Since early May there has been a see-saw military, political and diplomatic struggle between the two Subcontinental protagonists, Pakistan and India. Islamabad's position has been that the guerrillas who have captured the heights overlooking the Drass-Kargil-Leh road, are Kashmiri freedom fighters struggling for their long-denied right of self-determination. New Delhi, on the other hand, accused Pakistan of sending regular army troops along with the mujahideen to take control of these strategic heights.

India eventually decided, after examining the pros and cons of widening the conflict across the Line of Control (LoC) or even across the international border, on a strategy of containment within the narrower objective of regaining the Kargil heights. This narrower framework meant higher casualties on the Indian side because of the difficulty of traversing slopes against dug-in defenders where the terrain offers no cover.

New Delhi calculated that it does have the political will and military morale, despite the heavy casualties, and can sustain the cost in human and material terms. A near-consensus domestically and the willingness of the Indian military command to accept constraints allowed India to continue with an operation in which it suffered disproportionately heavy casualties.

With regard to Pakistan, the intriguing question is whether the Kargil heights seizure was part of the normal stepping up of guerrilla activity during summer, or whether it had more ambitious objectives. If it were the former, little can be added, except to mention in passing a failure of Indian intelligence. The guerrillas' presence was only discovered by accident when two Indian army patrols happened to spot them. The true extent of the guerrilla presence did not sink in until the Indian army had carried out an aerial survey of the area, which revealed that between 400 to 700 guerrillas had seized the heights. This could have put them in a position in any future war to threaten the sole overland logistics link with the Indian forces deployed in Siachen, i.e. the Srinagar-Drass-Kargil-Leh road.

But the Kargil seizure could have other strategic objectives with military, political and diplomatic dimensions. Militarily, if the seizure could be maintained for a reasonable period of time and at least until winter sets

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by Rashe

in, it could open up possibilities of forcing either an Indian withdrawal from Siachen, or a trade-off between the Kargil heights and the Siachen Glacier.

Politically, it could reflect the impatience in Islamabad with lack of progress in bilateral discussions on Kashmir under the Lahore Declaration process after the fall of the BJP government in end-April. Despite the fact that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India heads a caretaker government until elections are held in September-October, the hope may have been to force New Delhi back to the negotiating table in a serious mode. Diplomatically, since the bilateral process had not yielded results, an internationalisation of the Kashmir issue may have been sought to bring it back onto the frontburner.

If we assume for the sake of argument that all or some of these objectives formed part of the Pakistani thrust into Kargil, or at least were taken on board once things hotted up on the Line of Control, we can examine the results achieved or likely to be achieved in the foreseeable future and then draw up a balance sheet of gains and losses.

Missing Kashmir for Kargil

Militarily, the inherent difficulty of holding on to the Kargil heights in the face of overwhelming firepower and numbers has become a key question as the battle drags on. India has weighed the costs of heavy casualties against the bigger costs of potentially adverse international intervention if the conflict is widened. It has relied on the political consensus to hold on to Kashmir no matter what the cost, which informs its domestic political spectrum (the weak and scattered chinks of rationality represented by liberal opinion notwithstanding). India's slow but definite gains against the guerrillas have produced collateral pressures for a withdrawal of the guerrillas from what is

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Rahman

turning into a suicidal mission.

The political timing of the Kargil seizure, if the idea was indeed to force New Delhi back to serious negotiations, could not have been worse. A caretaker government heading into an election was hardly likely to be in a position to negotiate, let alone offer any flexibility or concession on such a major issue. There has been speculation in the Indian press after the visit to Pakistan by the US emissary General Anthony Zinni regarding proposals purportedly from Islamabad for India to allow safe passage to the guerrillas, quoting the precedent of the Hazrat Bal shrine siege. Whether these reports hold any water or not is not known.

However, Western diplomatic pressure on Islamabad is mounting, especially after Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington DC and London, and these could take various forms, economic, political, diplomatic. The dependence of the Pakistani economy on the goodwill of the West, and particularly the US, to keep foreign fund flows going makes Pakistan that much more vulnerable to 'persuasion'.

It goes without saying that such 'persuasion' seeks to maintain the status quo on Kashmir, while advocating peaceful negotiations. Pakistan's experience indicates that retaining the status quo has always proved favourable to India. Any disturbance of New Delhi's hold on Kashmir, even if partial or temporary, serves to refocus the attention of the global community on a long-neglected, festering wound. But in trying to disturb the status quo in its favour, the manner in which Pakistan pursues this tactical goal is crucial. This cannot happen by ignoring the ground reality.

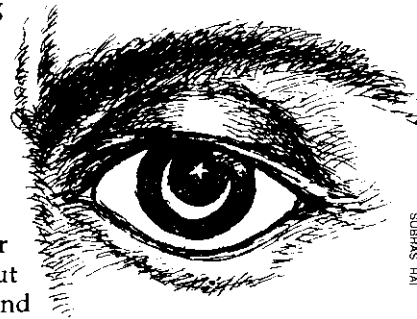
The Pakistani army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, put his finger on the problem by describing Kargil as "a tactical, military issue", while Kashmir as such was "a strate-

gic, political" one. In other words, to see only the Kargil part of the picture represented by the Kashmir problem, is to miss the forest for the trees. However, in the present instance, Islamabad appears to have failed to persuade the global powers-that-be of the justness of this linkage. On the contrary, opinion seems to have hardened in the West that the status quo must be restored before diplomatic "business as usual" can be resumed.

Most thinking people in Pakistan are by now convinced that there is no (regular) military option to obtain a solution to Kashmir, particularly after both India and Pakistan have demonstrated their nuclear capability. The irregular military option (guerrilla war) faces considerable political and ideological disabilities, especially since the Kashmir guerrilla movement has acquired a fundamentalist hue over time. This does not appear to be sufficiently inspiring for large numbers of the Kashmiri people who are well known for their traditional religious tolerance. This despite continuing repression by the Indian military in Kashmir.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been castigated by the right-wing, religious, fundamentalist opinion for stating an obvious truth that without both India and Pakistan going beyond their "stated positions", no solution to the Kashmir problem is possible. The hue and cry against him for saying that, particularly in the Urdu press, reflects the limitations which restrict the country's political leadership. No flexibility, political or diplomatic, is allowed to any Pakistani leader to even explore some middle ground. Any such suggestion is treated as treason, betrayal, the worst kind of skullduggery. For such ideologically 'pure' elements, it is either all or nothing as far as Kashmir is concerned.

Before it is too late, sober heads must begin to ponder how much cloth we have remaining and how to cut it. Passion cannot replace cool calculation required for a strategic plan for peace. The Pakistani leadership must take into account a heavily dependent economic structure, an inability to rouse the world's conscience beyond rhetoric, and the lack of a solid consensus across the domestic political divide. The risk is that any attempt to work out a strategy based on the art of the possible would fall foul of Pakistan's ideological hawks.



The Kargil cliffhanger

by Iqbal Jafar

For his devastatingly critical book on the South Asian Subcontinent and its peoples, Nirad Chaudhari chose an intriguing title: *The Continent of Circe*. Who or what was or is Circe? When I bought the book many years ago, I found Circe was an enchantress who lived on the island of Aea in the Aegean Sea. When fog and storm took Odysseus to her island lair, she caused his companions to lose their human form, and thus began one more of the many ordeals of Odysseus. This is Greek mythology and, for Nirad Chaudhari, an interesting allegory for the subject of his book.

Myths and allegories apart, even a cursory survey of the major political events of South Asia during this century does suggest in one's mind an image of a Subcontinent that is, indeed, under some kind of spell that inhibits good and promotes evil. It is, however, not a spell cast by an enchantress. It happens to be wholly self-induced and fostered by a kind of death-wish such as the one that drives lemmings to the sea.

Only in February this year Indians and Pakistanis were seen sobbing on each other's shoulders like long-lost cousins. In that fitful fever of friendship they signed as many as three documents, and found no less than 20 points of agreement. But good things are not meant to last for long in the Continent of Circe. Now, only four months later, they are foaming at the mouth and scraping the ground under their feet like two ill-tempered bulls, moments before charging at each other.

All the ingredients of a full-scale war fell into place: a long-festering dispute, appar-

ently not amenable to resolution through peaceful means; failure and suspension of diplomatic efforts to remove the immediate cause of an ongoing localised armed conflict; the two armed forces moving closer to each other and to the expected battlefields; and, worst of all, an ever-worsening hate campaign in the media.

We have been there before, time and again, during the last 52 years, for we keep vacillating vigorously from the threshold of peace to the brink of disaster with equal zeal and ease. This time round, however, the brink is much higher and more hazardous, both literally and figuratively. Conscious of the consequences of a wider conflagration, the Pakistani media has, for a change, shown greater sense of responsibility as all the leading dailies, with one exception, have counselled restraint and caution.

The Indian media, no less conscious of the consequences, has chosen to give free rein to its ability to incite the people and encourage the government to solve the problem of Pakistan once and for all. The consequences are acceptable on the assumption (*The Times of India*, 16 June) that "escalation will impose additional costs for both India and Pakistan but the burden will be proportionately much higher for the latter". *Hindustan Times*, in its editorial of 14 June, has given an advice that expresses the dominant view today in India. Without mincing words, it advised: "It is important that India not fight on Pakistan's terms that could make Indian soldiers fodder for the Pakistani cannons. The Indian military should be allowed to pursue a strategy to fight on its own terms with the goal of not only recovering the lost territory but proving the Pakistani aggression to be a highly costly misadventure unsuitable for replication in the future." The editorial concludes with these ominous words: "Kargil has left India with no choice but to do what it failed to do in the past."

Meanwhile, public sentiments are also being aroused against Pakistan almost on a daily basis. Writing under a provocative caption, "Jackal's Trap", on 14 June, *The Times of India* editorialised thus: "The G-8 will have



to be enlightened about Pakistan's mindset: a mixture of militarism, tribalism and religious fundamentalism which leads to barbaric practices like mutilating bodies of captured soldiers." Again, in the editorial of 17 June, it reverted to the same theme with lurid details: "In an act of savagery with few parallels, the Pakistan army tortured six Indian soldiers, including a young lieutenant, gouged out their eyeballs, burnt them with cigarette butts, and chopped off noses, ears and their genitals." The editorial also claimed that the "International Red Cross has independently confirmed signs of injuries and torture on the bodies, obviously while in Pakistani custody."

Since the allegation about the torture of six Indian soldiers has opened a floodgate of hatred against Pakistan in India, and is disturbing if true, I looked for its confirmation by independent sources. In the first place, I have not come across a single eyewitness account of those bodies by even an Indian reporter. Second, Pamela Constable, reporting for *Washington Post* from Delhi, did quote (12 June) Jaswant Singh's allegations about the torture of six Indian soldiers, but went on to add: "Although India's accusations could not be corroborated independently, they seemed to all but ensure failure for talks scheduled here Saturday between Singh and Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz aimed at defusing tensions in Kashmir."

Finally, I contacted the office of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) itself. What the ICRC has confirmed is that it has issued no statement, report, or finding regarding the alleged torture of Indian soldiers, nor is it the practice or function of the ICRC to do so under such circumstances. The story is, thus, obviously false, but it has achieved the purpose for which it was fabricated; the enraged Indian public is now demanding revenge.

Sharif position

In a situation where mass hatred is about to reach a critical point, talking sense can be very risky. George Fernandes tried to play it cool by exonerating the government of Pakistan, to keep the doors of negotiations open, and by talking about safe passage for the infiltrators, to bring about a quick end to the conflict. The media and the politicians promptly condemned him for being a fool, if not a spy, and demanded his resignation.

In Pakistan too something similar is go-

ing on. While the hate campaign is getting into high gear here as well, a 'heretic' has also been discovered: none other than the prime minister himself. While talking to newsmen on 19 June, he was reported to have said that Kargil-like situation would be repeated elsewhere so long as the Kashmir dispute was not resolved. He, therefore, stressed the need for a negotiated settlement of the Kashmir dispute, and went on to say that Pakistan would be prepared to look even at proposals falling outside its 'stated position' of the past 52 years. This was a constructive, pragmatic and a courageous statement for a Pakistani prime minister to make. However, while the Indians have raised the roof over the Kargil part of the statement, the Pakistani super-patriots are trying to howl him down for having considered even the possibility of going outside the 'stated position'.

Now, what is the stated position that the prime minister is willing to deviate from? The stated position is that the question of accession of the State of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan be decided through a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under the auspices of the United Nations in accordance with the Resolution 47 of 1948 of the Security Council, and the Resolution of 13 August 1948, of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan. Both India and Pakistan had agreed to what was proposed in those resolutions. All this sounds very simple so long as we do not bother to know the modalities of implementation laid down in those resolutions whose compliance we insist upon. It is time to remind ourselves of those modalities that we

One of many unsourced exhortative advertisements in The Times of India. "Don't take panga" is Hindi for "Don't act cocky". And opposite, cartoon from the Pakistani daily, The News.



literary south asia

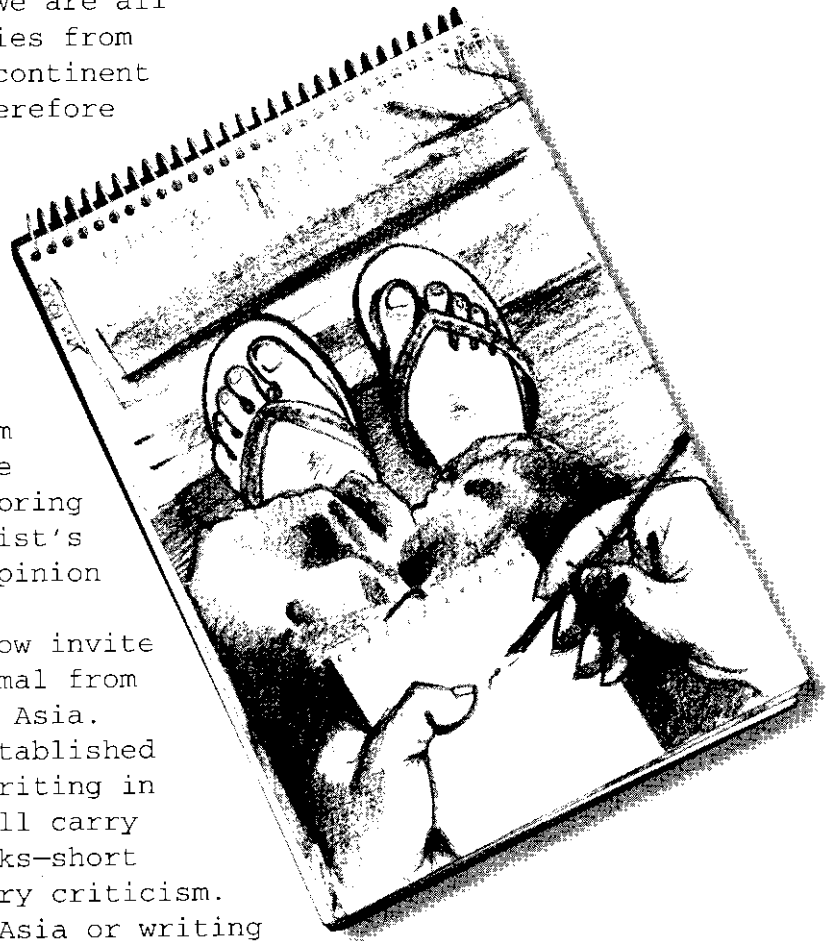
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tend to ignore while arguing for the implementation of those resolutions.

Under both the resolutions the first step was demilitarisation of Kashmir. The process of demilitarisation as laid down by the Security Council and, later, by the commission on India and Pakistan required that:

* Tribesmen and other Pakistani nationals who had entered the State for the purpose of fighting, and Pakistani troops would be withdrawn; and

* On being notified by the commission that the tribesmen and other Pakistani nationals have withdrawn, and the Pakistani forces are being withdrawn, the Government of India would begin to withdraw the *bulk* of their forces in stages to be agreed upon with the commission. (Emphasis added)

Now, would any of the critics of the prime minister favour the idea of vacation of Azad Kashmir by the Pakistan Army and of entire Jammu and Kashmir by all non-Kashmiri militants, while India withdraws only the bulk of its forces and that too in stages and within a time-frame that the resolutions do not specify? And what does bulk mean, if anything? No wonder, therefore, that the resolutions could not be implemented despite half a century long process of negotiations, advice and

well-meaning interventions.

It should be obvious by now that the search for a feasible solution of the dispute over Kashmir has to begin with the acceptance of two self-evident assumptions: one, the dispute cannot be solved by use of overt or covert force; two, the will of the people being the decisive factor, neither Pakistan nor India can claim whole of the State of Jammu and Kashmir as it is divided into Muslim and non-Muslim majority areas that are historically, culturally and administratively separate and identifiable.

What the prime minister has said now should have been said long ago, and now that it has been said, the Indian leadership should respond in a constructive manner, instead of basking in the warmth of hate and revenge. Unfortunately, however, Nawaz Sharif is not likely to get a positive response under the present circumstances.

The Continent of Circe has its own rules of the game where right things happen at the wrong time and the wrong things happen at the right time. For the present, we the South Asians would rather go to war first, with our 'ultimate' weapons, and talk later. We certainly would like to talk later, but to whom, one may ask.

(Reprinted from Dawn.)

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The Ladakh connection

Beyond failure of military intelligence, Kargil represents New Delhi's intellectual bankruptcy. A Ladakhi scholar in New Delhi provides a different perspective.

by P. Stobdan

The Pakistani intrusion in Kargil has a ring of *déjà vu* about it. Back in 1948, it was also on 9 May that the Pakistani Ibex and Eskimo Forces had captured Kargil and Drass. They advanced towards Leh before being pushed back with the onset of winter.

Later, in 1962, when the Chinese People's Liberation Army marched into Ladakh's eastern flank, an incompetently-led and ill-equipped Indian army was taken by surprise. At that time, too, the issue of intelligence failure had been raised. It was only after strong international condemnation that the Chinese troops withdrew to positions north of the MacMahon Line. A repeat of this situation is likely now on the Line of Control.

One question that will not go away is, why does Indian territory get constantly encroached upon, and why does its military habitually get caught napping? Since the 13th century, Kargil has been a strategic point for invading and defending armies alike. It is uniquely placed at a junction that opens up onto four valleys (Drass-Suru-Wakha-Indus). While the Tibetan name for Kargil seems to refer to *kar* (white) and *akhil* (location/place), it is alternately spelt as *gar-gil*, meaning "cross-junction", signifying a location at the cross-point between Skardu-Leh and Kashgar-Srinagar.

The Pakistani military has always considered Kargil a vital funnel for operations into Ladakh. Their three-pronged strategy this time was to cut off Drass and Kargil from Leh and Srinagar, before the snow melted on the Zoji-la Pass. Then they wanted to enter the Indus Valley through Batalik and Chorbat-la to capture areas up to Khalbse, and get to Shyok Valley to recapture 254 sq miles of Turtuk. The Pakistani army may well have accomplished their objectives but for the early opening of the Zoji-la due to unexpectedly less

winter snowfall.

Pakistan has been eyeing Ladakh for a number of years, primarily to regain areas it lost to India in the 1971 war. However, it faced two difficulties. First, unlike Kashmir Valley, Ladakh was not ripe for an Islamic revolution, though efforts had been made to communalise the region through subversive means. Secondly, the rugged treeless topography is not favourable for guerrilla operations. Pakistan has therefore resorted to occasional but heavy artillery shelling in Kargil since the summer of 1997, in order to scare the locals away from the high ridges.

This tactic seems to have helped the Pakistani side significantly through the undermining of Indian intelligence gathering. There had been a gradual decline in human activity even in the summer in the high pastures abandoned by nomads. The overall objective may have been to disrupt communications, destroy supply dumps and gain the aid of the local populace in a general uprising.

New Delhi's assessment has always been that the area along the frontier with Baltistan is not prone to infiltration and subversions. On the surface it does appear that the Shia Purig-pa and Wahabi Shias of Ladakh would be averse to the Pakistani gameplan, but it is nevertheless clear that the Pakistanis had a well thought-out plan for an Islamic uprising in Ladakh.

It has not helped that India committed a blunder back in 1979 when a separate administrative zone of a Muslim-majority Kargil was carved out of a Buddhist-dominated Ladakh. In the short term, this may have succeeded in undercutting Ladakh's demands for greater autonomy, but by the early 1990s, the Shias of Kargil were refusing to play by New Delhi's book. They not only refused to support the Union Territory status for Ladakh but also rejected the offer of Autonomous Hill Council status. This

seems to have been essentially to mark solidarity with the Kashmiri cause. The Kargil crisis thus seems to hark back to intellectual shortsightedness of some years previously.

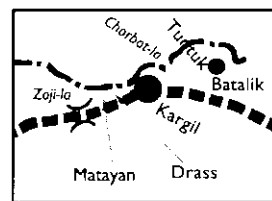
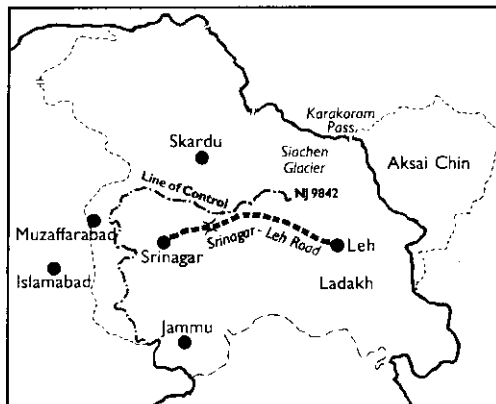
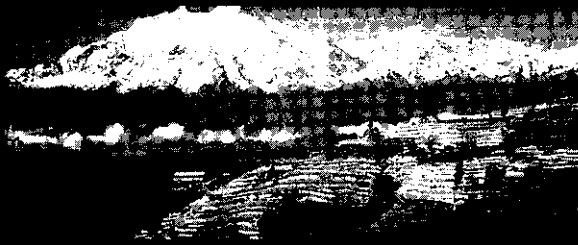
Without doubt, there were flaws in India's military command and deployment strategy as well. To have left the entire stretch of over 75 km of a vulnerable border to a lone brigade in Kargil was a mistake, especially since the Pakistani threats to Ladakh had become clear since 1997. By intruding into Kargil, Pakistan has opened a new front *vis-a-vis* India: militarily, it wants to control the high ground, and politically, it wants to widen the scope of the Kashmir conflict on the ground.

Pakistan also has an ideological agenda that looks beyond Kargil into China's Xinjiang province as well. The attempt by Pakistan-based Islamic militant outfits to penetrate western China has been known to be foiled by the Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan, which threatened Islamabad with severe consequences should it try to push its Islamic agenda beyond Afghanistan. There are reports that hundreds of Chinese Uighur militants trained by the Jamaat-e-Islami and Tablik-e-Jamaat are stranded in Pakistan due to China's strict

vigilance. The possibility of militants looking for a passage via Kargil into Xinjiang cannot be ruled out.

It is quite clear that New Delhi's policies in Ladakh have contributed to Pakistan's strategic designs. New Delhi's myopic bifurcation of Ladakh on communal grounds and its policy of giving a free hand to Srinagar to deal with Ladakh affairs have disturbing implications for national security.

Correcting these mistakes may not be easy, as Pakistan has shown its capacity in the present conflict to sustain high-altitude guerrilla warfare tactics. If India is serious about defending Ladakh, it will have to re-shape its policy, both by a hearts-and-minds programme among Ladakhis, and by gearing up military preparedness and beefing up the local militia, the Ladakh Scouts. This can only be done if Ladakhi infantry units are conferred with regimental status. India can perhaps live with its Kashmir problem, but further neglect of Ladakh may be suicidal.

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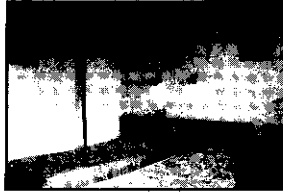
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**New Delhi and Islamabad seem to covet only territory
civilians who have become refugees of this undeclared war.
Line of Control find the**

by **Idrees Bakhtiar**

Chikothi is a small village in Azad Kashmir barely 15-km from the Line of Control. Villagers stand about in the bazaar when the air suddenly reverberates with the sound of artillery. The booming gets louder, but no one panics or runs for cover. "It's a routine," said one shopkeeper nonchalantly. Nearby, a mosque and a small clinic lie half-destroyed by recent Indian shells. A market had been burnt to ashes and a pile of rubble is all that remains of a shop.

Chikothi is one of scores of small villages and towns on the Pakistani side which are directly exposed to the Indian guns on the mountains beyond. "Don't stand here in a group," advised a resident. "You can't see them, but they are watching you and the civilian population is their main target." Even as he was saying this, a young man with a bleeding leg is being taken to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Muzaffarabad, the capital of Azad Kashmir. Civilian injuries have become commonplace.

The favourite target of the Indian Bofors guns seems to be Khalyana, a village about six-km from Chikothi. Arshad Abbasi, the chairman of the Khalyana Union Council, said that at least 18 neighbouring villages have been hit badly. Even so, many of the villagers have not moved out of the area.

They know that life in the refugee camps may be safer, but not any better. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Line of Control pass their lives in squalid tented camps that punctuate the scenic hills. Their survival conditions are tough, having to battle against harsh weather, scarcity of food and lack of shelter. Some have been living in these camps for years, others arrived after the recent fighting broke out — neglected

victims of an undeclared war. But still, you don't run into many who speak out against the war. In fact, quite a lot of them support the mujahideen cause.

The worst affected in this conflict are the residents of Neelum Valley. The valley is a sitting target for Indian guns from the mountains beyond the Neelum, the river that flows into Muzaffarabad from the LoC in the east. "Wounded people are brought to the hospital every day," said a doctor at the CMH, once a military hospital, but which has been treating civilians for several years now. Over the past month since the latest fighting broke out, 33 civilians have been treated at the CMH.

Even as the doctor was explaining the situation, a young boy, Farid, is rushed in with injuries in his legs. "Farid had gone to the bazaar to buy some food for the family when he was hit," explained Abdus Salam, who had accompanied him from Nagdar in Neelum Valley. After examining him, the doctor says Farid will have to be sent to Lahore. "Most of the victims are hit in the lower parts of their bodies," said the doctor. Just then, news comes in that a muezzin and a woman have died from exploding shells. "Every day, 100 to 150 shells are fired on our villages," said Salam, weeping.

Ghulam Rasul, the local member of the legislative assembly, says about 150,000 people have been affected in Neelum Valley. The tension has closed businesses and tour operations, leaving thousands without jobs. The valley has lost four of its six major markets in the Indian shelling.

Neelum Valley now has no hospital, college or school. It did have a 20-bed hospital, before it was destroyed in the shelling. This means that all the injured have to be taken

(Continued on page 22)



ace of war

**ry. They do not seem to care much about their own
eclared war. Himal's writers on either side of the
at civilian life is hell.**

by Tapan K. Bose

In war, all attention focuses on the battlefield. The soldiers are the main concern of the media. This is natural. However, this one-sided coverage often ignores or plays down the plight of civilians caught in the conflict. Civilians get killed, maimed and dispossessed. They are forced to leave their homes. The government often fails to come to the rescue of helpless villagers as it gets pushed along by the momentum of war. During territorial wars, the border population gets pushed around by the very army which is supposed to protect it.

The ongoing war in Kargil has displaced about 200,000 people on both sides of the Line of Control. An official of the Jammu and Kashmir government reported that the heavy shelling by Pakistani forces in Akhnoor sector of Jammu has forced about 70,000 persons to leave their home and take refuge in school buildings and tents. While the government claimed that all arrangements had been made for proper relief of the refugees in Kargil and Jammu sectors, there were newspaper reports that the government had failed to provide even the basic necessities. The refugees complained that they were forcibly evacuated from their homes without proper notice. A few newspapers also reported that in the Kargil sector civilians were forced to work as porters for the army without any pay, even though others said that they were doing this willingly.

Gagan Geer

I visited Gagan Geer, a village of Gujjars, the nomadic pastoral tribe of Kashmir on 21 June. Lying at the base of a craggy mountain ridge that rises to about 6000 metres, Gagan Geer is about 6 km southwest of Sonmarg,

the summer tourist resort on the Srinagar-Leh road. The village is home to about 60 Gujjar and 20 Kashmiri families.

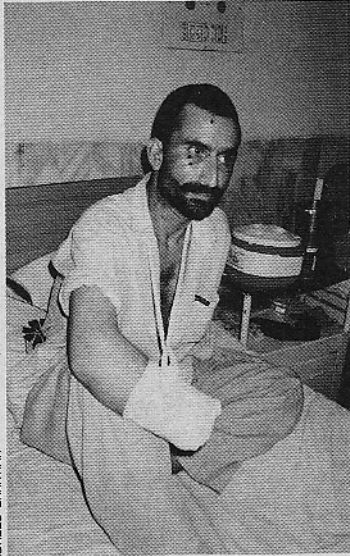
Just outside the village, next to the Forest Department's check-post, is a makeshift refugee camp. It consists of four tin-roofed storage sheds of the Public Works Department of the Srinagar government. On 2 June, about 400 Kargil war refugees were brought to this camp.

All of them came from Pandrass, a village situated at a height of 2200 metres across the Zoji-la pass between Matayan and Drass, the area of military engagement. Pandrass has a mixed population of Gujjars, Baltis and Dardic people. While the Gujjars of Pandrass have no kinship bonds with the people of Baltistan across the other side of the Line of Control in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, the Balti and Dardic people of Pandrass have cultural, linguistic and familial ties with Baltistan. All the residents of Pandrass are Shia Muslims and they survive by rearing goats and sheep and growing high-altitude millet.

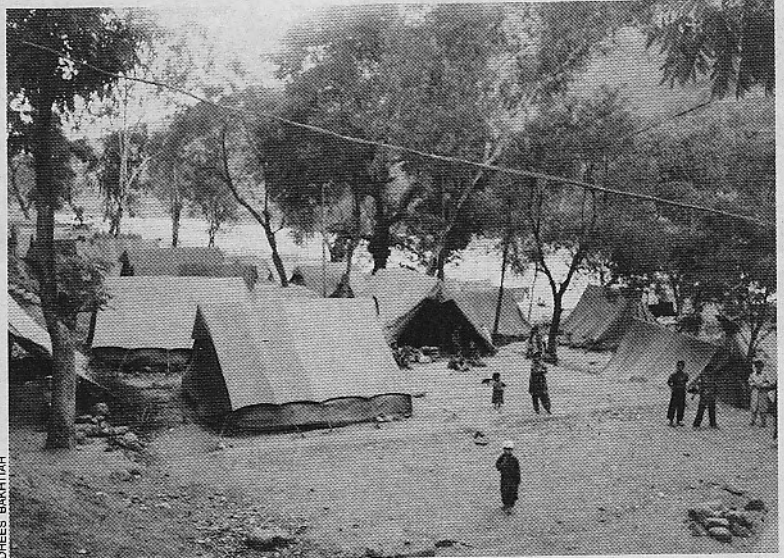
Having heard on the radio and television that the Jammu and Kashmir administration had made adequate arrangements for the Kargil war refugees, I was more than a bit surprised to see their living conditions at Gagan Geer. Each of these tin sheds measuring 1800 square feet has become the home for 20 families. Every evening, the people pack themselves inside, where night temperatures drop to 5 degrees Celsius. They had hardly any cooking utensils, very little bedding and virtually no extra clothing.

The refugees said they were not allowed to bring their own survival food and gear because there was no space in the small trucks which brought them to Sonmarg on

(Continued on page 23)



IDREES BAKHTIAR



IDREES BAKHTIAR

Amputee at the Combined Military Hospital at Muzaffarabad. Refugee tents near Chikothi.

Pakistan

to the CMH. Even that is not easy. There is no ready transport, roads have been badly damaged and cannot easily be repaired because of the firing.

Schools and colleges in Azad Kashmir have either been destroyed or forced to close down. Schools are built like bunkers for students to take shelter from the incessant shelling. But that could hardly provide cover for nine of them recently, when they succumbed to shells falling on their school. Literacy in Azad Kashmir used to be higher than the rest of Pakistan, but it is now on the decline.

For the moment, though, all that the refugees are worried about is food. Last year on, the government started giving each of the displaced 200 rupees a month as assistance. "You cannot even pay for tea with this amount," said one woman sitting next to her makeshift kitchen with her children. Even voluntary relief organisations have stayed away mainly because of difficulty of access.

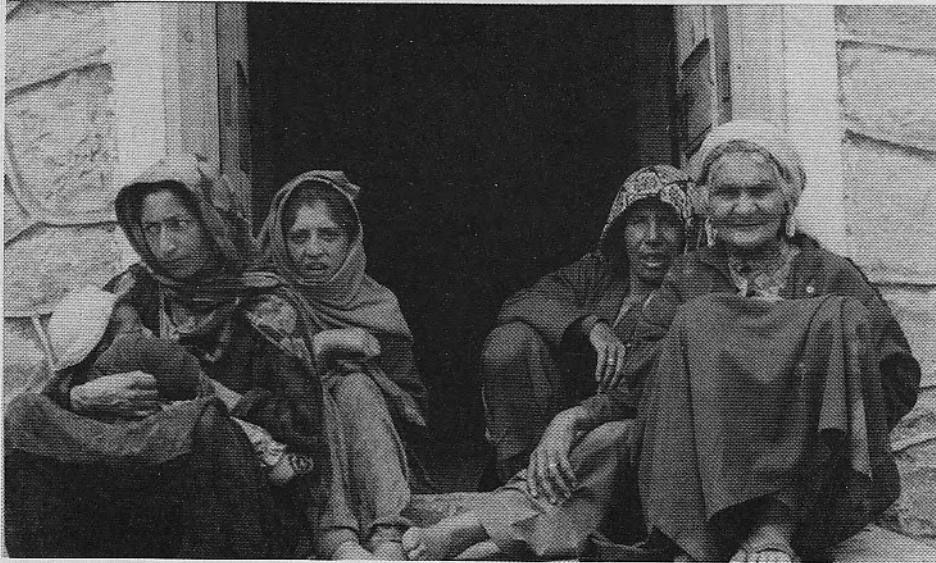
Some families have been forced to live on wild plants, while others have adopted a rationing system of their own. If the father eats in the morning, says a refugee, he doesn't take his share in the evening. The children get preference and the adults may wait for 24 hours for a meal. "We have become nomads," said Ghulam Rasul, his face clearly reflecting anger and frustration.

The authorities, on their part, are in no state to provide adequate relief. This year, an estimated 51,000 people have been displaced from the Neelum Valley alone, but

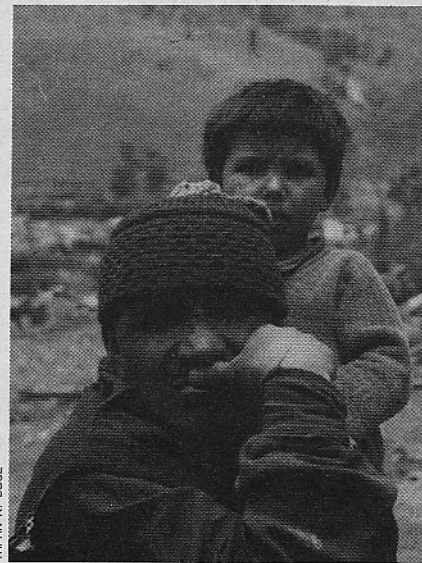
there aren't even enough tents to house them all. Hundreds of refugees are living in the open, braving the cold winds sweeping down from the mountains. Some have taken shelter under the trees, while a few have found shelter in caves. The lucky ones have put up with their relatives and about 1500 families have been shifted to various other places in Pakistan. The prices of essential commodities are five times more than in the city.

Given how concerned the government of Pakistan is about this disputed territory, its apathy towards the plight of the people living here is quite incomprehensible—especially given the fact that the valley's importance is not purely strategic. This is, after all, an area rich in resources. Its rivers can generate hydropower, and then there are timber and rubies.

In Chikothi, Abbassi explains that his people are ever alert to the sound of guns. They have all built their own bunkers. "Whenever they sense danger, they go into the bunkers till the firing stops." However, after the Kargil escalation, the Indian shelling became so intense that many moved out. Having lost so much and suffered so heavily, the people here say they are determined not to see their sacrifices frittered away on the negotiating table. They want a final solution to this problem, and not a compromise that gives away everything they have fought for over the last 50 years. The final solution, of course, is the "freedom of Kashmir from the Indian yoke". ▲



TAPAN K. BOSE



TAPAN K. BOSE

India

the evening of 2 June. The famous tourist resort has many well-equipped huts owned by the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation, but the Deputy Commissioner told them that they could not stay there and should instead proceed to Gagan Geer where arrangements had been made for their stay.

No official of the Jammu and Kashmir administration was present at Gagan Geer refugee camp on the morning of 21 June. The camp had no electricity. There was only one water tap, which provided water for about four hours a day for the entire population of 400 refugees. There were no bathrooms or toilets. Several Kashmiri ministers and politicians had visited the camp and promised electricity and tents, but till the end of June, nothing had happened.

Carrying the army's load

On arrival at the camp, the refugees were given five kilos of rice per person and four litres of cooking oil per family, but they had no money to buy fuel wood, vegetables or meat, the last being part of their staple. Meanwhile, the local public health centre was unable to cope with the sudden influx of refugees as it was designed only for the small resident population of the village. All said, it was obvious that the civilian authorities, ill-prepared to handle the refugee influx, had just dumped the refugees at Gagan Geer and gone away.

The refugees themselves claim that there was no reason for them to have been moved.

Situated between Matayan and Drass, Pandrass is protected from the shelling by the high mountains on both sides. These mountain shepherds say that while it is possible for intruders to sneak into Matayan on the west and Drass on the east, there were no trails leading into Pandrass from the Pakistani side. Till the time they were forcibly evacuated by the Indian army, their village had not been attacked.

On 14 May, an Indian army major and some soldiers had visited the village and indicated that the army might need to evacuate the village as they were planning to set up heavy artillery guns there. The villagers pointed out that they did not have to leave even during the 1947-48 war in the Kargil sector. The major was not convinced, and, according to the villagers, he suggested that they should agree to be evacuated to Sonmarg, or go over to the Pakistan side.

Later in the day, all the residents of Pandrass were ordered to go down to the Leh road to get new identity cards. However, this turned out to be a ruse. While the rest were transported to Sonmarg, about 45 able-bodied men were forced into an army truck and driven to a place called Bhimbet. They were told that they had to help the army in carrying guns, ammunition and other supplies to a high mountain post called Shaduri. Abdul Gafur, Wazir and Ghulam Mohammad (not real names), who were used as porters, described working for seven days under excruciating conditions. The mountain was covered with snow, and there were large

Refugees at Gagan Geer.



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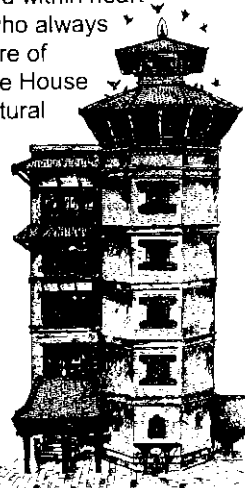
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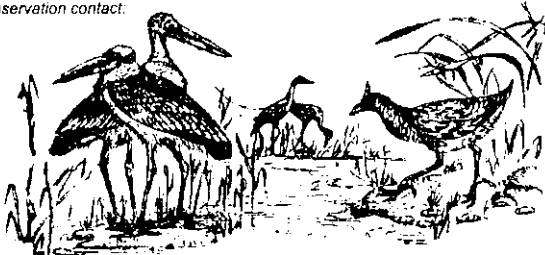
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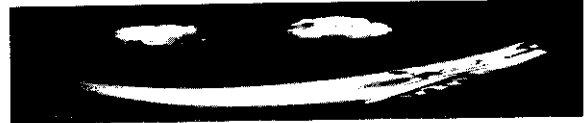


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OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1200	1900
WINTER SCHEDULE EFFECTIVE FROM 28TH OCTOBER 1998/1999					
FLIGHTNO	DAY	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR
OS4444	Thursday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900
OS4446	Saturday	KTM	VIENNA	1300	1900

patches of exposed old ice. There was no cover and there was regular firing by the intruders and Pakistani soldiers from the heights they occupied, forcing the shepherds to climb only at night. Each of them loaded with about 30-kg of military equipment scaled the sheer icy slope for about six hours to reach Shaduri post during the night. With little food and without proper clothing and shoes, the 'porters' were heavily exposed. Abdul Gafur and six others suffered severe frost bite and were finally taken to Kargil hospital.

Upon discharge from the hospital ten days later, the shepherd learnt from a bus driver that the entire village had been evacuated on 2 June and that the villagers were now living in the Gagan Geer refugee camp. He got a lift in a local truck to Sonmarg and finally reached the camp on 7 June.

The Jammu and Kashmir administration is not unaware of the camp conditions. But visits by politicians like Mian Altaf, a minister of Jammu and Kashmir, and Mehbooba Sayeed, the opposition leader in the legislative assembly, have only yielded promises and nothing else.

It is clear that the refugees will not be able to return to Pandrass this winter, even if the war comes to an end by September as is be-

ing indicated by the Indian defence establishment. By the middle of August, the Zoji-la pass gets snow-bound. After September, it is closed. It will be impossible for the villagers to carry back adequate quantities of food and fuel to Pandrass after the onset of winter, making it impossible for them to survive the severe winter of Kargil. They have also lost most of their animals, the main source of their livelihood. The government has to therefore, plan a longer stay for them, at least till the spring of 2000, and then these people will need help to re-start their life.

Without belittling the sacrifice made by soldiers at the warfront, it is necessary to point out that the lives of the non-combatant civilians are as important. The countries that go to war do suffer huge losses by way of war expenditure, but what is not computed is the loss of production, destruction of civilian assets and overall disruption of civilian life.

The Kargil war has already created 200,000 refugees in Pakistan and India. Gagan Geer is just one example of an ongoing and growing humanitarian disaster in the making. Governments need to defend their borders, but the real challenge of governance must go beyond territorial security and include human security. ▲

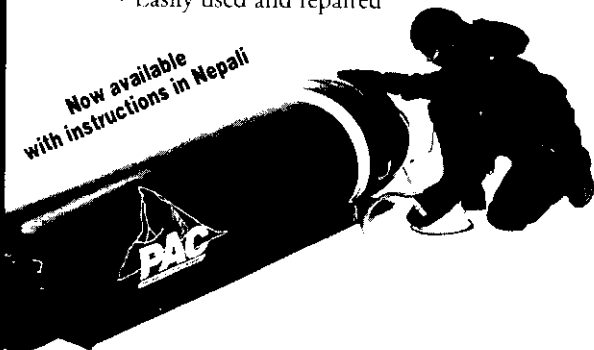
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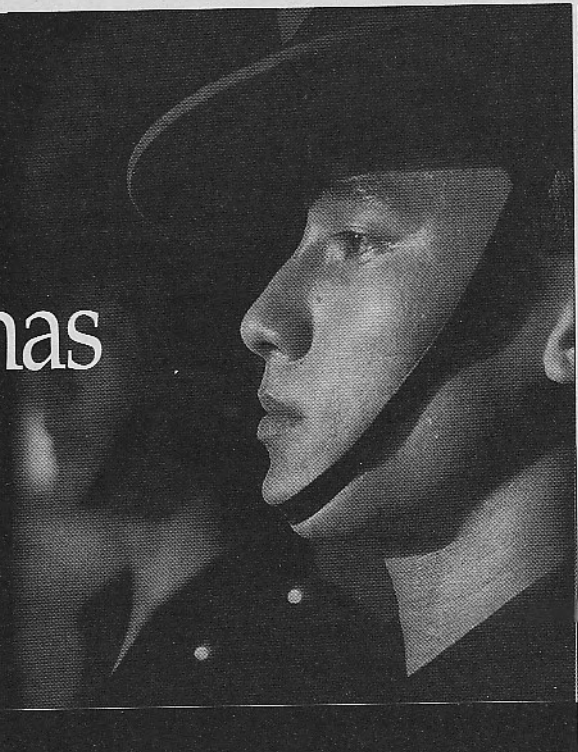
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Next time, send in the Gurkhas

"If we'd had a division of Gurkhas in Albania when the war began, it wouldn't have taken us almost three months to get to Pristina."

by *Anatol Lieven*



B.M. NIVEN/THE MOUNTAIN KINGDOM

NATO seems to have won in Kosovo, but no one could call it a very glorious victory – and to be fair, not even the tabloids have tried very hard to do so. Since the war began, headlines about “glory” and “heroes” have remained in their usual place on the sports pages.

But as John Keegan has written, the apparent victory of NATO air power does mark a critically important moment in military history. Some 15,000 Serbian soldiers have been killed and wounded without a single NATO casualty to date – a result which recalls 19th century colonial victories like Ulundi or Omduran, where, respectively, thousands of Zulus and Sudanese were cut down by higher technology for a mere handful of British casualties.

But while air power may in some circumstances win campaigns, to control the peace, ground forces have to occupy territory; and ground forces can be attacked if not by frontal assault then by terrorists and urban guerrillas. So we still need good fighting infantry.

From this point of view, Kosovo has several disquieting aspects. The

first is the excessive fear of casualties among Western politicians, most noticeably in the US (the Blair government in London deserves some credit for moral courage in this regard). The second concern stems directly from this fear. It is that coming on top of the Gulf war and NATO's alleged success in Bosnia, Kosovo will confirm in Western populations, politicians and – most dangerously of all – soldiers the belief that wars can and should be won without the loss of Western life. Western military planners will be encouraged to direct yet more resources towards ‘smart’ bombs and missiles, rather than to ground forces. Even more soldiers will be encouraged to think that the armed forces are really just a career like any other and that joining them does not imply a vow of readiness to risk one's life.

To the West's potential enemies, therefore, Kosovo delivers a mixed message: respect for NATO's technological sophistication and firepower will be combined with contempt for its unwillingness to make sacrifices.

It is easy to attribute our fear of losses to decadence, pure and simple. But there are other factors, too. The nature of both modern society and the modern armed forces means that to some degree, and especially in the US, voluntary military service really is a career like any other. Armies can, fortunately, no longer rely simply on a mixture of aristocratic officers and youths from poor areas for cannon-fodder. The need to compete for high-quality recruits in a high-wage labour market means that other incentives have to be offered – and a high risk of getting killed is not one of them.

None of this would apply if Western countries were actually invaded, or their vital interests threatened. In such a case, I have no doubt that sooner or later, the great mass of the population would rally in self-defence, and plenty of brave soldiers would be found. But the fact is that modern mass armies have rarely fought hard in distant wars in which their country's national interests were not truly engaged. Even under Stalin, Russian soldiers fought much harder to defend Moscow and

Leningrad in 1941 than they had the previous year in the attack on Finland.

At the height of popular imperialism before the World War I, colonial states always used professional armies for their imperial conquests, leaving conscripts to guard their borders. The difference today is that even most Western professional forces have ceased to be culturally separate from the mass of the population and have come to share its hostility to sacrifice for anything less than vital national goals.

This applies especially to the US, because despite all the talk inside the Beltway of American vital interests, if you come from Alabama or Kansas, your real interests in the Balkans are very slight. By classical standards, the US today has only four vital interests: the old principle that no hostile power should control the Atlantic or Pacific littorals facing the US; hegemony over central America; access to cheap energy in West Asia; and the safety of Israel, because a powerful section of American public opinion regards Israel and the US as essentially one country. Beyond these areas, there are no interests for which an American soldier could legitimately be asked to

die—and Clinton's approach to a ground war in Kosovo reflected this fundamental reality, which we need to recognise. We cannot go on relying on the US to do our duty for us.

Great Britain is not the first "civilised" state or state system to be faced with the difficulty of finding national soldiers who are ready to fight wherever they are sent. The problem goes back to at least 2500 years, and the solution has always been to hire foreign mercenaries. Much of British military history of the past 300 years is associated with mercenaries: Hessians and the King's German Legion up to Waterloo; Gurkhas up to the present day, including in the Falklands.

In Sierra Leone, where Britain had an economic interest but could not deploy its own troops, the use of private mercenaries seemed on the way to becoming institutionalised. The storm over Sandline has put a stop for the moment to such informal state sponsorship, but given the dynamics of the situation there and elsewhere in Africa, it seems bound to recur.

In these circumstances, the obvious solution for Britain is to rebuild the Gurkhas to the strength that they had until a few years ago. This

should be combined with a redeployment of British development aid to give much more of it to Nepal. Even if Gurkha pay and pensions were raised to take account of their having to be stationed in Britain, they would still be far cheaper than British soldiers; and the fact that this pay is already many times the Nepali average wage means that the British army can choose the very best recruits from that country.

Finally, of course, the Gurkhas are not just any mercenaries but a force whose British traditions go back 184 years and include 13 Victoria Crosses. As Field Marshal Slim put it: "God created in the Gurkha an ideal infantryman, brave, tough, patient, adaptable, skilled in field craft, intensely proud of his military record and of unswerving loyalty." There are few such soldiers in the West today. We should make the most of them. If we'd had a division of Gurkhas in Albania when the war began, it wouldn't have taken us almost three months to get to Pristina. ▲

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CHANDAN SHERKAR (KATHM)



Perhaps it was fated that among the first two British casualties on the ground as part of NATO forces in Kosovo, would be a Nepali Gurkha soldier. Sergeant Balram Rai of the 69 Gurkha Field Squadron of the Royal Engineers was working in a school compound near Pristina clearing cluster bombs dropped during NATO's aerial campaign when they exploded, killing him and a British officer.

Fated because his death has suddenly put the spotlight on the issue of the British Gurkha's pay and pensions. It was indeed news to a large section of the British public that Sergeant Rai's widow will receive a compensation that is only 7.5 percent of what the widow of a British sergeant would get (a lump sum of

GBP 19,092, annual pension for five years of GBP 939 and GBP 771 every year as opposed to a lumpsum of GBP 54,548 and GBP 15,192 every year that a British sergeant's widow would get).

Against the backdrop of some amount of public indignation, several British political leaders raised their voices against this indication of bias. Even Prime Minister Tony Blair's office acknowledged that those arguing against the disparity were "making a pretty powerful point". All this came at a time, interestingly, when back in Kathmandu an uninspiring movement in Nepal by two groups of former Gurkhas demanding pay and pension parity with their British counterparts had been floundering.

Tripartite agreement

The Gurkhas (a term the British use to denote soldiers from Nepal) became part of the British Army in 1817. But, along with their Indian peers, were always paid less than the British soldier. Even after Indian independence when only the Gurkha regiments among the various 'native troops' were divided between Britain and India, Britain continued with the practice of paying the Gurkha less.

For 50 years after being taken into the British army, the British Gurkha's basic pay remained a mere fraction of his British counterpart's. (The Indian army has not made any such distinction. Gorkhas, as the Gurkhas are called in the Indian army, enjoy the same facilities regarding pay,

Unequal equals

The Gurkha pensioner gets less than his British counterpart. This is a colonial legacy that creates an underclass of loyal, but cheap, soldiers.

by Deepak Thapa

pension and promotion as Indian troops.) He was given overseas allowances which varied depending on where he was stationed, Hong Kong, Brunei, the UK, or elsewhere. The varying earnings, it was rationalised, reflected the standard of living in the different places (although this did not apply to British soldiers regardless of their posting).

It was only in 1997—a full 180 years after fighting under the British flag—that the allowances of the Gurkha were raised to be on par with the take-home salary of the British soldier. (By which time the size of the British Gurkhas, timed with the British pullout of Hong Kong, was reduced from 8000 to a 'token' number of about 3900.) But even so, the

pension the Gurkha receives upon retirement, tagged as it is to the basic pay scale which is far less than that of the British soldier, remains a pittance—about a 20th of what a British soldier gets.

The British government has two arguments to justify the differential pensions. The first of these is that it follows the letter of the November 1947 tripartite agreement of Britain, India and Nepal which decided on the future of the soldiers in the British and Indian armies. The British government's view is that the agreement clearly lays out that the pay scale of the Gurkha would be similar to that of the Indian soldier—although it only states that Gurkhas will receive rates of pay that "approximate to those laid down in the

Balram Rai's widow and two children look on as his body arrives at Kathmandu airport from Kosovo.

present Indian pay code" (emphasis added).

It becomes clear when reading the agreement that it was only meant to be a temporary arrangement, concluded in some haste since British rule had already ended in India. Among some *ad hoc* provisions is an annexure setting forth the suggestions of the Nepali government, including one that asks that "in all matters of promotion, welfare and other facilities the Gurkha troops should be treated on the same footing as the other units of the parent army", regarding which the main body of the agreement says that "the views of the two Governments [viz. Great Britain and India] thereon will be communicated to the Government of Nepal in due course". The annexure also contains a section that states: "The above mentioned points are to be incorporated in a treaty and or agreement to be signed between the parties in due course."

Whether the views of the British and Indian governments were "communicated in due course" to Nepal, or if a further treaty/agreement was concluded and if so, what its contents were, has not been made public by any of the three governments. The silence on the part of the two foreign governments is somewhat understandable, but it is inexplicable that the Nepali government should continue to keep mum on the matter, particularly because it was an agreement entered upon by a patently non-representative regime of the Ranas, which was in its death throes at the time of signing.

Race relations

A half century ago, when the sun was only just setting on the Empire, perhaps it had seemed natural for outright discriminatory clauses like the one on different pay and pensions

for soldiers of the same army to be included in an international document. But times have changed. The premise behind the tripartite agreement has been challenged in a British court by retired Gurkha Lance Corporal Hari Thapa, who was born in England and now lives in Wales. Corporal Thapa claims that his GBP 17.50 monthly pension after 15 years of service in the British army amounts to racial discrimination

(For that matter, the court could also look into the fact that Gurkhas are not given direct commissions into the British army.) The pension issue of all the former Gurkhas, some 26,000, probably hinges on the outcome of this case, since a judgement either way is going to set a precedent.

The second argument of the British administration concerns the difference-in-living-standards mentioned above, which is also the rea-

obvious point, preferring instead to hark back to age-old ties between the two countries, the special relationship that the Gurkha shares with his *saheb*, that they are not mercenaries but an integral part of the British Army, or other such homilies. There is no doubt that Gurkhas are held in some regard by the British, but the fact remains that the Gurkha comes cheap.

Lahuray, dhakray

It does not further the cause of raising the Gurkha's pensions, however, that Kathmandu-based organisations like the Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen's Organisation (GAESO) try to seize every opportunity to put Britain on the defensive. The latest was over the deployment of Gurkhas in Kosovo, which GAESO says goes against the 1947 agreement, a contention that does not hold water. There is no doubt that GAESO has done much to raise the level of general Nepali consciousness about the Gurkhas' fate, as was seen in the unprecedented press interest that Sergeant Rai's death and compensation generated. But one cannot help wondering that, after all, these ex-servicemen have nothing to lose. Even if it means goading the British to an extent that they consider putting an end to the whole business of maintaining the Gurkhas. The pensioners among them will continue to get their money. The losers would then be the nearly 4000 Nepalis who serve in the British army at any one time, and the loss of a significant source of employment to the Nepali highlanders and cumulatively a source of wealth for the whole country.

The end of Gurkha recruitment is certainly what a section of the Nepali political spectrum have wanted for a long time. This is especially true of the Left, which likes to see the Gurkhas as representative of the bondage to an 'imperialist' power. This ideological argument, however, never did correspond with the socio-economic reality of Nepal. That in 1998, (according to British army sources in Kathmandu) there



While ex-Gurkha activists in Kathmandu concentrate on pensions from the British government, Nepali highlanders were fighting "Pakistan-backed forces" in Kargil. Picture shows Gorkhas en route to the battlefield in late June. The Gorkha in the Indian army does not face differential treatment, getting similar pay, pension and promotions as his Indian counterpart. In terms of numbers, there are at least 10 times more Nepalis serving in the Indian armed forces than with the British Gurkhas.

under the Race Relations Act 1976 — a British legislation meant to bar discrimination on all grounds, including nationality.

There is some amount of legal ambiguity here though. A Gurkha gets a pension after 15 years in the army, while a Britisher would have to serve 22 years. But it can easily be argued that given a choice between being pensioned off after 15 years and working seven more years to be eligible for equal pension, there can be no doubt that the Gurkha would opt for the latter. The Commission for Racial Equality of the UK is backing Thapa's case, and it remains to be seen if the courts decide whether there has been a violation of the Act.

son for the unequal compensation for Sergeant Rai's widow. This argument is classically reflected in the British Ministry of Defence spokesman's reaction to the Thapa case. Despite the fact that the former Gurkha now lives in the UK with full residency rights, the *Daily Telegraph* of London quoted the official as saying: "Gurkha's pensions are intended to support them in Nepal. Suggesting they get the same as British soldiers is ridiculous."

The differential pensions should be recognised for what it is: the legacy of a long-past colonial era meant to create an underclass of loyal soldiers. The British government would be loathe to admit this

were 30,000 applicants for the 230 recruits eventually selected is a powerful rebuttal of the Leftist position. There is no doubt that for many a highland lad, recruitment into the British Army is the passport out of the drudgery of a hard mountain life. And it has been that way for close to two centuries. (Having enjoyed a period in government, the mainstream Left now seems to have understood the compulsions of realpolitik. The Left politicians have not only buttoned up in their demands to stop Gurkha service in foreign armies, but, in a neat *volte face*, are now most vociferous in their call for equal pay and pensions.)

There is also the question of who speaks for the Gurkhas. Due to the British policy of recruiting Gurkhas only from particular 'martial' groups, there has been a clear cleavage in Nepali society between those who went into the British army and those who didn't—the *lahuray* and the *dhakray*. So, while the lahuray families benefitted monetarily in the largely subsistence hill economy, the elite among the dhakray have consolidated state power in their hands over the course of the nearly two centuries since Nepalis began soldiering for the British. It has been institutions dominated by the dhakray which regard the Gurkha tradition as an affront to the collective national honour and which have been calling for an end to the Gurkha recruitment.

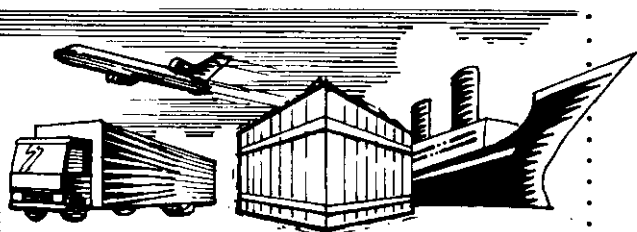
The cleavage mentioned above also explains the general indifference shown towards the Gurkhas' case by Nepal's non-martial (and 'establishment') communities, as also the unresponsiveness of successive Nepali governments. The wording of the 1947 agreement makes it clear that the various matters raised therein warranted subsequent discussions. But even the democratic governments in Kathmandu since 1990 have shown little inclination to come clean with the terms and conditions under which Nepalis serve in the British and Indian armies. All that successive prime ministers have done is to 'promise' to raise the question of pensions with the British government, which, for the acquiescence to the 1947 agreement it implies, is an approach that is more like that of supplicants seeking munificence.

Following the acute embarrassment over Sergeant Rai's compensation, the British government recently announced that the question of pension and gratuities would be examined. But the embassy in Kathmandu once again pulled out the 1947 agreement, perhaps with a view to playing down any expectations. What is it about this document that its provisions are made out to be written in stone? Why can it not be changed to reflect the changed times? If the British want to maintain their Gurkhas, and there is no reason why they should want it other-

wise, the Nepali government should take the initiative to ask for a review and if need be work out a deal with Britain separately from India.

Given that the employment situation within Nepal is not likely to change any time soon, there is a compelling reason for the Gurkha to continue serving in the armies of Britain (and India). If Nepalis can drive buses in the Gulf, sweep the floors in Tokyo, do hard labour in South Korea, and by the millions work menially in India, why should employment in a foreign army, with the acquiescence of Nepali society and government, be called off?

Gurkhas can still play a vital role in the British armed forces. Britain's role in the world stage may have shrunk, and chances of direct conflict situations may have gone down. But Kosovo-like peace-keeping obligations can only increase. There is also the fact that the British armed forces, like most Western armies, face a shortfall of volunteers. That is where the Gurkha connection, with a tradition and opportunity incomparable, comes in most useful for Britain. And the Gurkha supply line does extend indefinitely (as long as poverty dogs the Nepali hills) from which the British army can pick the very best. For a price no more expensive than native British soldiers, the Union Jack can still flutter proudly—held aloft by the famous soldiers from Nepal. ▲



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Digital freedom

Free software allows users to look into the computer's software, and not treat it just as a mystical black box.

by *Frederick Noronha*

W elcome to India, a talent-rich powerhouse of software skills. But this is also a powerhouse that is resource-poor, and as it discovers its abilities recognised across the globe, ironically enough, India finds itself unable to afford the price of 'legal' software badly needed for its own use.

What is the escape from this bind? Piracy is not a long-term solution, so young Indian engineers and computer scientists are looking deep at an unusual solution. It originates in distant Finland, and is an operating system—the software essential to run a computer—called Linux.

Linux is part of what is called "open-source software", and works a lot like proprietary versions of UNIX operating systems and Windows NT. However, unlike operating systems like Windows, Linux users have access to the system's underlying software code and are allowed to even modify it under certain conditions.

"Linux is a developer's heaven," says G. Sagar, software developer and web-designer from Bombay. Unlike commercial software, you can get Linux legally for less than INR 100 (USD 2.50), and there is no need to pay for the software each time it is installed on a new machine—the same software can be legally copied across dozens or hundreds of computers. Furthermore, there is no need to pay for every up-

grade, add-on or other features. Once set up, Linux requires very little maintenance.

These are some of the factors that has given Linux a near-fanatical set of supporters across India. And many opt for it not because of its almost nil cost, but because of its quality. Being an "open source", Linux gives you the chance to go into its innards and work on it.

Above all, it allows older computers to get a new lease of life since it runs effectively even on slow systems like 386 or 486 personal computers.

There are now LUGs (Linux User Groups) in various parts of India (and other South Asian countries), and even big

companies are opting for it. Fanatic volunteers will do almost anything to promote it and share the product with others. "Penguin Power" reads a T-shirt sold by a small firm in Bangalore, a reference to Tux, the penguin-mascot of Linux.

The free software movement as we know it was founded in 1985 by an American, Richard M. Stallman, who believes that a book or a piece of software is a global resource. The basic tenets of free software are: freedom to study, freedom to change, freedom to share or distribute, the right to 'sell' free software, and the condition that the software 'source' has always got to attach "binaries" to enable computer professionals to

understand how programmes were put together.

Linux itself was invented some eight years ago by Linus Torvalds, then a student at the University of Helsinki. Dissatisfied with the available choices for operating systems, Torvalds wrote one he liked. He then went on to make the source code publicly accessible on the Internet, leading to a community of developers that has built on, improved upon and expanded on his work.

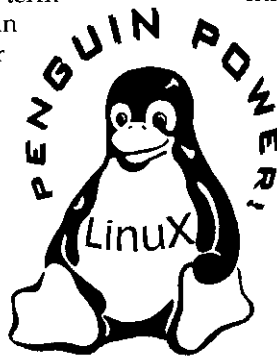
Linus's invention renders piracy redundant. "You do not have to work with pirated software anymore. The support is available for Linux in abundance in the Internet through mailing lists," says Ramakrishnan M, an electronics engineer from Madras.

Current estimates of Linux users worldwide put the number at 8 to 10 million. And as the Linux source code (the internal instructions that make up the software) is publicly accessible, there are now thousands of developers around the globe, often working voluntarily, on developing the system.

Implications of this are manifold, such as in education. "Free software allows teachers and students to look into the computer's software, and not just treat it as a mystical black box," says assistant professor of computer science V. Vinay of Bangalore's Indian Institute of Science. "Children like to play with things, tear them apart and—if we are lucky—put things back. Free software encourages such exploration."

Linux also could bridge the gap between the world's computer haves and the have-nots, something which has been widening. Linux and other software like it also offer security. "Free software is software that can be trusted [by us in India] as we have the source code," says Vinay of Bangalore. This comes handy in a situation where Indian computer users are increasingly getting squeezed by astronomical software prices, the falling value of the rupee, and accusations that those who cannot afford to pay are pirates.

Looking into the future, Linux's



potential is immense. It can be tailored to local requirements, seen as crucial since most commercial software are US-based. Importantly, there have been discussions on how Devanagari fonts could be used on Linux. "Deployed on a large scale, Linux will save India a large amount of foreign exchange," says Vinay. But

for that to happen, he stresses the need of local language integration.

On the Linux-India mailing list, there are regular discussions of what initiatives could be taken to develop specific software products that would cater to Indian requirements. There's also talk of holding 'install-fests' — where users could bring their

computers and install Linux off a server to their machines — and also of connecting Linux computers to VSNL, the major Internet service provider in India. "The future of Linux worldwide is brighter than a thousand suns," says Bhyrava Prasad, country manager for Insight Solutions. If that is true, shine on, Linux.

Hooked on arsenic

AN UNPRECEDENTED crisis of drinking water contaminated by natural arsenic affects nearly 100 million people in West Bengal and Bangladesh. Experts dealing with the toxicity of arsenic now have a potentially even bigger problem: recent research shows that arsenic-polluted water is tastier than normal water, and is addictive. "It's a shame that we have taken so long to discover the addictive nature of arsenic," says environmental scientist Dipankar Chakraborty.

Groundwater in the affected districts of West Bengal and Bangladesh have 30 times more arsenic content than what is regarded safe. The problem is alarmingly worse in Bangladesh, where some 70 million people — more than half the country's population — are at risk from arsenic-contaminated water.

The addictive nature of arsenic makes it even more difficult to find a solution to this huge crisis. Says Chakraborty, "Upto four million people sick with chronic arsenic poisoning have got so used to drinking arsenic ground water that they have acquired a taste for the water of death."

Arsenic is a slow, versatile and gruesome killer, attacking living tissues and in many cases damaging blood vessels. People get skin disorders and cancerous tumours leading to almost inevitable death. The milder disorders it triggers include conjunctivitis, nausea, diar-

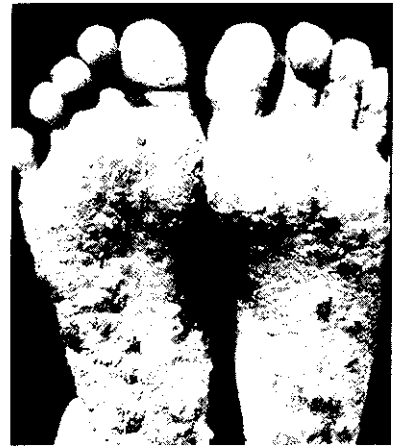
rhoea and fatigue. Affected people are easily recognisable: inflamed eyes, skin lesions, gangrene and skin growths. As arsenic takes over the body, nails rot and horrific skin conditions develop.

Arsenic accumulates slowly in the body until it reaches lethal levels, and stays in the system for months even if only uncontaminated water is administered. The body has no mechanism to eject arsenic quickly; it is slowly removed in hair, nail and skin.

Arsenic, in the form of insoluble salts, occurs naturally in the bedrock below the alluvial deposits of the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta in Bangladesh and West Bengal. Under normal conditions, the ground water stays relatively free of arsenic. But because of uncontrolled exploitation of ground water to meet increased demands for water, arsenic becomes active and enters the ground water, affecting people who get drinking water from handpumps.

Most of those affected in Bangladesh and West Bengal are poor subsistence farmers, who now also face social ostracism because of the skin lesions caused by arsenic. There have been many instances of broken marriages, as husbands send their disfigured wives back to parental homes. There are also those who see their sores as divine punishment and refuse to see a doctor; it's a different matter that most wouldn't be able to afford the expensive medical treatment.

Prevention against arsenic poi-



Soles of arsenic-poisoned patient.

soning is not very difficult. There are simple strategies which can help lower the levels of poison in water. Like using a modified clay tube which absorbs the arsenic. Or letting the water stand overnight to allow the iron and arsenic in the water to bind together and sink to the bottom before filtering it through a bale of hay.

Equally important as prevention or cure is to raise awareness about arsenic's lethal effects. In Bangladesh, contaminated handpumps are painted red to warn users, but it is not of much help since many villagers have no other source of water. In West Bengal, an awareness campaign to educate students and their families through schools is planned.

But first, scientists have to get their act together. Says Chakraborty, "We need to understand the precise nature of the problem first — including the addictive properties of arsenic." They have to be quick with that, time is running out for 100 million people.

-S.N.M. Abdi



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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

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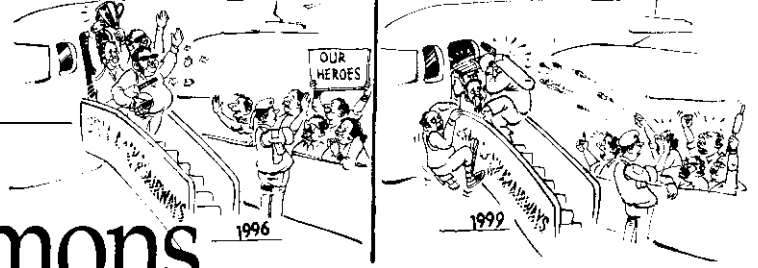
Time, February '99



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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Darlings to demons



SUBHAS RAI

It used to be said that Sri Lanka's two major religions were Buddhism and Cricket. The successes registered by Sri Lanka in international cricket, particularly the winning of the World Cup in 1996, had added more religious fervour to the game. The country was the best in the world, and the Sri Lankans were ecstatic. Besides, the game transcended ethnic differences plaguing the strife-torn country. The Tamil spinner Muraleetharan, for instance, was almost a national icon.

In the run-up to the 1999 games, Sri Lankans deluded themselves into believing that their team was still on top of the world four years later. Aided and abetted by an adoring media, there was an unrealistic yet powerful expectation that "King Sri Lanka" would win the cup for the second time in succession, a feat that had only been performed by the West Indies in 1975 and 1979.

This make-believe world came crashing down when Sri Lanka did not even make it to the second stage of the 1999 games in England. The collective psyche of the country was bruised. Overnight, the darlings became demons.

When the first batch of seven players returned home, a strong contingent of policemen were there to protect them from irate fans. Graffiti accusing the team of betrayal were visible everywhere. There was no VIP treatment as players had to go through customs just like ordinary citizens. From "Heroes to Zeroes" was how one newspaper described the return.

Compare this with the delirium that greeted the team when they came back with the World Cup in 1996. There was unprecedented exhibition of national adulation, starting from the thousands that thronged the airport. The cricketers were treated like national heroes and bestowed with the high civilian

honour of "Deshamanya" (honoured by country). Even the reserve players were honoured. The players received land grants and cash prizes, and advertisement and endorsement opportunities came by plenty. Love mails, too.

Now there is a lot of hate mail. Some even want the income tax authorities to be let loose on the team. A major reason for the people's resentment rises from the perception that the cricketers had become rich individually, but had not bothered to repay their gratitude to the country.

Ultimately, it was the other religion, Buddhism, that came to the rescue. Buddhist precepts emphasise the impermanence of all things. It is also supposed to teach one how to handle success and failure with equanimity. Newspaper editorials sermonised along these lines to assuage the wounded ego of a whole nation.

But that did not prevent the leader of the pack, Arjuna Ranatunga, much loved until recently as "Captain Cool", from turning into the pet object of hate. With several of his close family members controlling the Sri Lankan cricket board, it was an open secret that the rotund skipper exercised hegemony over the working of the team, even stepping out of the captain's brief.

Ranatunga is said to have been responsible for the unfair exit of Dave Whatmore, the Australian coach who had helped propel the team into world champion glory. There were other instances of deserving players being victimised and cronies getting rewarded. As long as Sri Lanka was winning no one bothered, but having failed abjectly it is now a different cup of tea and Ranatunga, despite his powers, has been among the first casualties of the witch-hunt, with Sanath Jayasuriya replacing him as skipper, and

Whatmore being reinstated as coach.

Further complicating matters is the politics of cricket. In the run-up to the elections for the board presidency, the current president, Thilanga Sumathipala, was pitted against Clifford Ratwatte, brother of Prime Minister Sirima Bandaranaike and maternal uncle of President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Sumathipala, the eventual winner, had the backing of the Ranatunga family, headed by pater familias Reggie Ranatunga, a deputy minister who enjoys a certain amount of political clout.

Sports Minister S.B. Dissanayake is also known to be partial towards the Ranatunga clan, while two of the former skipper's brothers are key officials of the board. So, it would not be surprising if Ranatunga's captaincy had been decided not by his performance on the cricket but in the corridors of politics.

Even as Sri Lankan cricket gets about setting its house in order, it is more important that the attitude towards cricket change. When the team left for Britain there were religious ceremonies to invoke blessings, with a sacred thread tied around the arm of each player. Expectations were high.

Sri Lankans stayed away from work and sat glued to their TV sets watching the preliminary matches. But when the team started losing, the sets were shut off in disgust. Few seemed interested in cricket for cricket's sake. Notions of sportsmanship vanished. There was conspicuous apathy towards the matches played by other nations. Clearly, Sri Lankans (and other South Asians, given similar reactions in India and Pakistan towards their own teams) should treat it as a sport instead of a pseudo-nationalist cult.

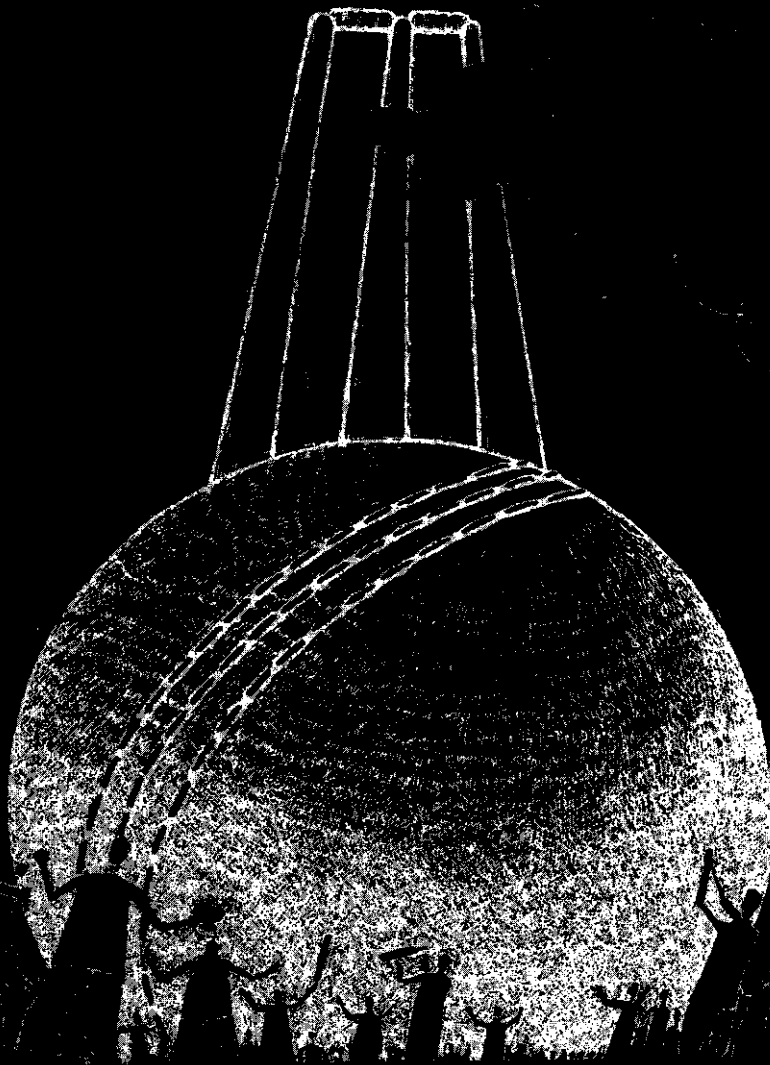
▲
-D.B.S. Jeyaraj

The Tao of cricket revisited

Unlike the heroes of cinema but like those of politics, the cricketer is doomed to betray the hopes and ambitions of his fans.

by Ashis Nandy

SKILLMAN, RM



Untrained in political theory and unversed in the discipline of cultural studies, I had thought that the story of cricket in India told in *The Tao of Cricket* (first published in 1989) could be a handy trope for having my say on the tragicomic spectacle of an ancient society running breathlessly to become a modern nation-state. I felt the story worth telling since India's intellectual and media elite seemed to love that panting, perspiring race and eager to pay the price of the deculturation and homelessness that often went with it. The diseases of the rich and the powerful have a charm of their own.

Precisely because its political analysis was unacceptable and painful, *The Tao of Cricket* has been read more as a cultural history of cricket than as a deviant political psychology of popular culture. As a result, many have been unhappy. Cricket lovers have felt betrayed because the book is not adequately sensitive to the nuances of the game; the serious scholars have been unhappy because of the levity of my tone and cursory treatment of weighty issues like state, nationalism, popular religion, development and progress. To a lot of Indians though, my story of cricket might have been a disappointment, but not its politics.

Cricket has a way of taking over its South Asian fans, even when they self-consciously resist being taken over. Cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai claims cricket to be a "hard cultural form" with values, meanings and practices that are hard to break; it changes those socialised into it more than it itself changes. No wonder even some of the hard-eyed cricket nationalists in South Asia seem to have secret selves. They want India to win all their matches, but they also enjoy the game's laid-back, languid style, representing the rhythm of a lost lifestyle and invoking an imaginary, idyllic homeland in the past that paradoxically serves, as in some Chinese traditions, as the blueprint of an alternative future.

This inner tension of cricket has sharpened in South Asia in the recent past. This is surprising, for cricket itself has been changing globally. As it has become a billion-dollar enterprise, it has softened as a cultural form. Spectator demands have begun to push it further away from its original cultural role as a typically 19th-century game, enshrining pre-industrial values in an industrial society and serving as a critique of the latter.

In the popular culture of South Asian cities, cricket today is less a tacit defence of traditional *bushido*; it is becoming an open celebration of productivity and professionalism. Even the fact that the Indian team is the world's best-educated cricket team—only three of the national players, presently, are not graduates—has come under scrutiny. Some believe that while cricket is their life, their education socialises them not to make it a life-and-death issue. That is why they so frequently do not win.

Some may argue that cricket has always been a spectator sport and, hence, a part of the entertainment industry. They may give examples to show that international cricket, when shorn of its hypocrisy, has always been partly driven by nationalism. Others may say that, despite its 19th-century flavour and dependence on traditions, cricket's ability to supply a tacit criticism of the urban-industrial vision, too, has worn off with the introduction of the slap-bang dramatics of its one-day version.

The dominant model of heroics in cricket today depends much more on the values of the global market and nation-state system and is designed to alleviate the routine and tedium of everyday life through a nationalist project drummed up, paradoxically, by transnational capital. Yet, while cricket is changing to adapt to the dominant culture, the game has also shown that it can defy its new well-wishers, keen to integrate it into the global entertainment industry as a new item of mass consumption. Unlike the heroes of

cinema but like those of politics, the cricketer is doomed to betray the hopes and ambitions of his fans. He is always a flawed hero who, even after giving a superhuman performance, can exit on a note that reveals his human frailty. The hero in cricket is permanently at a limbo, simultaneously more human and more superhuman. Odds or the laws of statistics always catch up with him, even when declining skills due to age or injury do not.

As an open-ended game, cricket offers one an enormous number of excuses for failure—captaincy thrust on immature shoulders, technical flaws unattended in early life or victimisation by umpires. In India, there is, additionally, insufficient nationalism and professionalism, the absence of killer instinct, innate submissiveness (as a former Indian world champion in badminton, Prakash Padukone describes it) or a 'nice guy' syndrome (as former Pakistani cricket captain Imran Khan calls it). However, at some point one comes to recognise that the cricketer's form may dip once in a while naturally. Cricket involves playing dice with destiny and, in reaction, the game invites more desperate efforts to produce a perfect theory of individual achievement and agency that would explain all fluctuations in fortune as a matter of only skill, strategy, commitment and leadership. That is why when riding the crest of success, the cricket hero seems more superhuman than most other sportspersons; he takes on and defeats fate itself.

South Asians love their cricket hero because he represents an odd mix of achievement and failure. Only after retirement does he become a figure that does not arouse anxieties in the spectator about the spectator's own limitations and failures. That, too, if he primarily remains a retired cricketer like S. Mustaq Ali or Sunil Gavaskar and does not become a politician or cricket administrator, like Chetan Chauhan or Gundappa Vishwanath. The retired cricketer is the only player who in retrospect

seems to have been reasonably perfect. It is not the fickleness of the fan or the quick changes in fashion, and has to do with the distinctive ideals of the hero and heroism that cricket endorses and which resist and subvert the conventional ideal of the hero.

This partly explains the voluminous literature on cricket. Most writings on cricket can be read as a psychological defence against the encroachments of probability upon a collapsing world of certitudes. They are either a celebration of probability, an attempt to explain it away as a mere artefact, or a story of someone's defiance of it. In this respect, cricket is a great but anachronistic 19th-century game that threatens to become a signpost to the future, too. With the collapsing edifice of certitudes that we have inherited from the last century, the 21st century may well turn out to be a charter of new experiments with cultures that have not been brainwashed by this century's public passions.

Can South Asia, after panting through the last two centuries to emulate and equal the West in so many spheres, learn to identify not with the West's dominant self, but with the West's dissenting, underground, contraband self, straying from the official line on sane, rational, constructive dissent? I hope against hope that the answer turns out to be 'yes'. I am encouraged by the observations of cricket writer Suresh Menon, ventured nearly a decade ago, on the basis of confessions made by some Indian and Pakistani test cricketers. Menon says that senior players in India and Pakistan are no longer taken in by the hype. They have realised that the much-trumpeted rivalry between the two teams is actually built up by officials, usually hardboiled politicians moonlighting as cricket administrators and mainly concerned with gates, and the media, perpetually looking for a good story.

Nothing has endorsed the thesis that cricket is becoming a mirror rather than a critique of life more

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flamboyantly than the experience with the 1996 World Cup. The co-hosts for the competition were India and Pakistan, two countries divided by the same passions. In their reactions to victory and defeat in cricket, one is sometimes only a comic version of the other. One of the saddest consequences of Partition, a letter to the editor of *The Times of India* once complained, is that neither India nor Pakistan can enjoy even a cricket match as sports; they have to "build it up as a grim test of national superiority".

Social and environmental historian and cricket writer Ramachandra Guha recently narrated his observation of an India-Pakistan one-day cricket match in a stadium. He described the way overworked, overpaid, half-drunk yuppies among the spectators find in nationalism an excellent disguise for their communal sentiments.

Reading between lines of Guha's story, one gets a chance to gauge the passions—the free-floating violence and the sectarian venom looking for targets—that constitute the underbelly of India's public life today. What prompts societies to behave like adolescent fan clubs? Why do nations vest their self-esteem in the performance of 11 young players, mostly in their 20s? I fear that the answer is painful. What the politicians, bureaucrats and business persons cannot or will not do, the cricketers are expected to. They are expected to be the ideal citizens who, while conforming to the conventional tenets of citizenship, would bring the success that eludes others in more crucial spheres of life. Cricket heroes have become, for the increasingly uprooted, humiliated, decultured Indian, the ultimate remedy for all the failures—moral, economic and political—of the country.

While India, according to its middle classes, is constantly losing out to its erstwhile imperial rulers and is unable to bend its recalcitrant neighbours into docility despite its newly acquired nuclear teeth, the cricketers are expected to correct

their feelings of inefficacy and emasculation. That is why the Indians believe that their team never loses because the other teams are better; it loses only because the selectors are faction-ridden, the captain is incompetent, the players do not have the killer instinct or the umpiring is bad!

Ultra-nationalism is not unknown to the rich and the powerful, though its logic may be different. American sports is great not because American government tends it, but because the American market does. The American nationalists only take for granted that their team would do well. The games in which they are not good, they do not consider worth patronising. The Europeans have their football nationalism, the most notorious of the genre; it is often associated with the hooliganism of unemployed youth.

The oddity in South Asia is that it is an unpredictable, uncertain game like cricket that has to cope with the feelings of inadequacy and grandiose ambitions of their citizens. Despite the widespread belief that the ideal cricketer is the ideal citizen and, therefore, should 'naturally' win his matches for his country, cricket still remains notoriously insensitive to training, preparation and talent. Despite the efforts going on for more than a century, it continues to be in South Asia, as the historian of cricket Mihir Bose puts it, a *tamasha*—a mix of "fun, fiesta, magic and glamour".

The game does not yield results commensurate with a team's skills either. For, it is a game of luck that has to be played as if it were only a game of skill. I have argued that you win in cricket when you negotiate your fate better than the other team does. Actually, you never win against the other team; you win or lose against yourself and your own fate. Nationalism in such a game is a liability, not an asset. Individual players know and acknowledge this, but do not dare to say so.

In South Asia, ultra-nationalism could well take over the game and

destroy it, mindlessly and perhaps even purposelessly. For cricket can never, in response to national investments, guarantee adequate returns in national glory. Just when one thinks one has sewn up the future by producing the world's best team, some humbler team forces one to repeat the trite adage about the uncertainties of the game. Cricket is a game of destiny that does not recognise men and nations of destiny.

Cricket is not a good cure for emasculation either, though it has been built up as such since Victorian times. There has always been a difference between the masculinity in the cultures of cricket in former colonies and the masculinity associated with 19th-century English cricket. When the Victorians said that cricket was masculine, they had, strangely, a rather classical Brahminic concept of it in mind. The good cricketer was masculine because he had control over his impulsive self and symbolised the superiority of form over substance, mind over body, and culture over nature.

Above all, cricket was masculine because it symbolised serenity in the face of the vagaries of fate and incorporated the feminine within the game's version of the masculine. The new masculinity of cricket is built on raw performance and the superiority of substance over style and of the physical over the mental. It only further integrates cricket in the nationalist frame and in the entertainment business. In any case, to be on the safe side, I was not rooting for India in the World Cup of 1999. Given the growing communal and ethnic chauvinism in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the victory of any of these South Asian countries could have stoked hatred and jealousy. ▲

(This article is adapted from the preface to the forthcoming new edition of The Tao of Cricket. Printed with permission from the publisher, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.)

Mediafile

DOES IT make sense for an **archipelagic nation** with a capital island, which you can jog around in all of 45 minutes and has such a small road network that you can go anywhere for 10 rufiya flat-rate, to continue to import more and more vehicles? No, but that does not stop Male-vians from taking delivery of Japanese vehicles, none of which incidentally can go over 15-mph, ever. Neither does it stop Suzuki from advertising its vans in full-page inserts in the *Aafathis* newspaper. Watch out Maldives, you are contributing to global warming.

THE TITLE given for a film now showing in Male, while obviously very uplifting in the Divehi language, may not do much to enhance its marketability among those who can only read the Roman script – **Himyenim**.

IF YOU have not heard the sound of **Divehi**, the language of the Maldives, dial in on shortwave 25 (11.695 Khz) at 10 pm Indian time, 10:30 pm Sri Lanka time, every Friday. You will hear a special radio programme for “Maldivians living in India and Sri Lanka” belting out songs in English, Hindi and, yes, Divehi. Those living elsewhere are, of course, allowed to tune in as well, according to a senior official in the Maldivian foreign ministry.

IF STAR and Zee had any pretensions about evolving into South Asian television and news channels, that has certainly been dashed by the rash of Indian **patriotica** being splattered across the screens these past couple of weeks in the wake of Kargil warfare. Why could they not have left the flag-waving to government-owned Doordarshan and got on with becoming responsible subcontinental channels which report the facts and do away with the saccharine and bile. On this their first real test with a regional war at hand, the satellite channels showed themselves off as ‘Indian’ after a fashion, and hardly regional.

CARTOON SAYS it all regarding the state of the Pakistani nation, the Pakistani citizen within aforementioned nation – and cricket!

WHICH LEADS me to New Delhi’s info minister **Pramod Mahajan’s** directive banning Pakistan TV from the cable networks in India. Now, how is it that the rulers of India do not seem to trust their citizenry, which surely knows better than to believe PTV propaganda about the war up north? Indians hardly need to be protected from PTV, because PTV is so bad in its news and current affairs program-



ming (but not in its drama serials, mind you) that Pakistanis themselves have been willing to suffer the India-centricism of Star and Zee just to have an alternative to PTV.

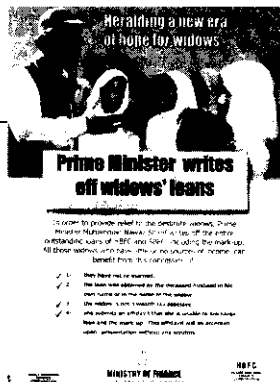
SELF-SAME MAHAJAN, protege we think of the tiger of Maharashtra, goes one step further and has VSNL, the government internet service provider for India, to black out the Karachi *Dawn* website from Indians subscribers. Now *Dawn* is about as sober and urbane as any South Asian newspaper can be. What will we see next? A ban on New Delhi’s *The Asian Age* newspaper for carrying *Dawn* articles on its op-ed pages?



FROM BILLBOARDS and newspaper advertisements, this lady with a birthmark on her right cheek looks alluringly out at Colombo commuters. She is **Shehara Jayaweera**, a former model. More than her birthmark, however, it is her swimsuit and sizeable upper girth that got her the attention, in Chhetria Patrakar’s estimation. And what about her film *Seetha Re*, filmed by first-time director Dharmasiri Wickremasinghe? Well, according to a local tabloid, the character played by Shehara is raped by three men at different times. “I saw the rushes and the rape scenes while dubbing it,” reported Shehara herself. “It is covered by expressions, emotions and sound effects.”

GLOBAL SOCIETY is an international non-profit organisation based in Hiroshima which seeks to promote peace and cooperation by “placing **younger generation of intellectuals** as target groups”. As stated in a faxed press release, the society wants more people to know about itself and recently it announced an Executive Board. The moving spirit of Global Society seems to be its Secretary General, Hilarius Costa, a Bangladeshi national. With a name like that, while conceding that even homogeneous Bangladesh has its minorities, I will just have to take the organisation at its word!

SAY IT ain’t so, **Your Holiness!** Here is an AP release: “Celebrations of the Dalai Lama’s 64th birthday have been cancelled in sympathy with the Indian armed forces fighting intruders in Kashmir.” It’s really time for the Dalai Lama’s handlers to get serious. Tibet is/was a proud sovereign nation whose government in exile need not pander to New Delhi beyond a certain point. The birthday celebrations could merely have been done on a low key. Instead, why this calling-to-attention press release, and are we sure that the Indian



public opinion was even demanding such a gooeey gesture from Dharamshala? Or does the government-in-exile know something I do not about its status in India?

LEST I be accused of being a cantankerous **Niradhbabu-type** who is too cynical to be any good, let me congratulate Mian-saheb, the prime minister of Pakistan, for "heralding a new era of hope for widows" by writing off widows' loans given out by the Small Business Finance Corporation and the House Building Finance Corporation (both of course of Pakistan). One of the conditions, as given in this ad in *The Nation* of 15 June, is that the widows who have re-married cannot take advantage of this concession. That is fair.

IF YOU need to buy any of the following **household items** as advertised in *The News*, make haste to H. No. 7. Main Double Road, F-10/2 Islamabad: "Italian dinning set, single bed with spring mitres in steero pipe, American dinning with cupboard, T.V troules, luxury lumps different colour, Walle China penal, Super big Toshiba and Sonyo, waiting house Pehlco, luxury walle clock..."

NEVER THOUGHT I would see the day when West Bengal—home state of the **best and the brightest** of Indian cinema—would get so fearful of Bangladeshi films that they have to turn protectionist. According to *The Asian Age*, they are circling the wagons out there in Kolokota. "Films made in Bangladesh threaten our artistes and technicians, and we want to protect our film industry," so said the West Bengal Minister of Information and Culture Buddhadev Bhattacharya, he who is tipped to take over when ole' man Basu bows out. The minister added, "Moreover, these films are sub-standard and against our culture." What I would like to know is exactly where the admittedly low-brow fare being dished up by the Bangla filmwallahs differs from West Bengal's Bangla culture.



THE INTER Services Intelligence will not love them for such flagrant interference in the affairs of another state, but good to see New Delhi journalists show abiding interest in Lahore editor Najam Sethi's health and safety, when he was in government custody last month.

ONE COULD **regurgitate**, even though this came to me late. 11 May, the day of the Pokharan bombing was celebrated in India as Technology Day, to mark a year which (according to chest-thumping government advertising) included the "triple nuclear explosion at

Pokharan". A stamp was issued, showing the nuclear reaction in its well-known stylised form. Now, this is an icon which saw a lot of use back in the 1960s, and I thought we had finally forsaken the whole era of nuclear madness. To think that India and Indians are just now discovering the icon. Oh, South Asian backwardness!

PIO cardholders to get NRI rights, says the headline, noting that **people of Indian origin** can now "get parity" with Non-Resident Indians when it comes to exemption of visa when returning to the motherland, and all kinds of other sweet economic perks on the side. Bangladeshis and Pakistanis are apparently not included in this GOI scheme, but more than two hundred thousand people are expected to apply during the first year—PIOs from as far afield as Fiji, Malaysia, Kenya and Trinidad and Tobago. But I see a problem, or (alternatively) a solution linked to all that doth plague this Subcontinent. If we go pre-1947, then we are all (expect for those awful Nepalis who never got colonised) 'Indians', right? So, then, if we take 1947 as the benchmark, everyone is a PIO, with freedom to come and go. With this one little concession from the biggest-member-by-far-of-SAARC, the closed borders of South Asia (and Nepal's with India is "open" anyway) will at one go be flung open. We can finally then begin to focus on real living.

Sheikh Hasina Wajed, riding high in Bangladesh after succeeding to remain in office and riding out the waves of *hortals* and *bandhs*, is one plucky lady and will be forgiven for having a twinkle in her bespectacled eyes. And now she has announced that she will donate those very eyes for "posthumous transplantation". This reminds one of the late Manmohan Adhikari, former prime minister of Nepal, whose demise was followed by a quick and efficient donation of his lenses by a doctor on stand-by. Now, I wonder which sitting king, president or prime minister has similarly pledged body parts for transplant. Would be interesting to know, but I suspect that it is only Sheikh Hasina at this point.

The Afghani Taliban's view of the world is a bit jaundiced, but did the Shah M. Book Co. of Kabul think it was going to attract tourists to Afghanistan with this postcard of "A Regional Barber"? At the very least, this was just a tonsorial sizing rather than a circumcision in progress. We can be thankful for small mercies.

—Chhetria Patrakar





Mythology in psychology

Rather than the clinical psychologist, that he is by training, Akhter Ahsan appears more like a sufi saint, equally at ease with using Islamic and Hindu spiritual traditions to heal people's minds.

by Zaigham Khan

At a time when alternative methods of healing are getting increasingly popular in the West and elsewhere, along comes a new branch of psychology that is one of the most concrete manifestations of spiritual healing. "Image Psychology" uses pictures of nature, parents and of gods and goddesses to treat patients suffering from psychological and even physiological problems. It considers the image to be the element most central to human activity and expression, in the same manner that behaviourists consider behaviour central to mental development.

Using the image as the focus of study, Image Psychology looks at various functions and operations of the mind and body, and employs this complex information to improve the human condition. Dr Akhter Ahsan is a leading exponent of the method and says it works "like magic". He is, however, quick to add, "But it is science, since it conforms to all conditions that the discipline of psychology imposes upon its students and is far more effective than what has been so far practised

in the name of psychology."

A Pakistani expatriate now settled in the US, Ahsen is regarded as an important theoretician, clinician and experimentalist who has tried to unite the best in both Eastern and Western traditions of science and philosophy. His work spans such diverse disciplines as psychotherapy, education, sociology, literature and mythology. Ahsen's massive body of work on psychology, which comprises of more than 25 books and numerous articles, forms the backbone of the school of Image Psychology.

The parents of this pioneering and provocatively original psychologist were originally from Kashmir who moved to the town of Sialkot in Punjab and finally to Lahore. It was from Lahore's Government College that Ahsen received his Master's degree and later a PhD from the University of Punjab. He then joined the Pakistani army, but quit 10 years later in the wake of the 1965 India-Pakistan war. He then flew off to the United States where he acquired another PhD and began his own practice.

More than a clinical psychologist, Akhter Ahsen sounds and reads like a sufi saint who feels equally at ease with Islamic and Hindu sources and spiritual traditions, and uses them to heal people. During a recent visit to Pakistan, Ahsen treated a young woman suffering from epilepsy using the image of the Hindu god, Ganesh. His book, *Ganesh - Broken and Misshapen* (1995) gives a sequence to the hymns for the God found in various sacred sources. Many of Ahsen's friends ask him to recite his mystic writings amidst the light of mustard oil lamps in a temple.

The book, originally published by Brandon House, was almost immediately sold out when it was republished in Pakistan. This work and Ahsen's other works have rekindled an interest in Hindu mythology among other litterateurs in Pakistan. A leading Urdu poet, Zafar Iqbal, for example, recently wrote "Hey Hanuman", an invocation to the simian god from the Hindu pantheon.

Ahsen's Image Psychology concentrates on the Eidetic Image,

an inner mental picture which is so concrete and real that it can be scanned and experienced by the visualiser as if it were an actual occurring. This creative picture in the mind serves as the source of new thought and imagination, and also generates fresh, repeatable, revealing experiences during the cure. Image psychologists claim that the Eidetic Image is genetic, with a grip over the human mind powerful enough to transform it. As Ahsen puts it, "Image is being in Psyche."

As a reviewer put it, "What Dr Ahsen appears to be emphasising is that spontaneous psychical visual experience can be linked to emotional and psycho-physiological states to relieve anxiety and conflict and understand pattern of behaviour. This is pioneering work." As images are studied at various levels, one is able to play with their infinite possibilities and induce desired changes in a patient's state of mind.

Reclamation project

In his search for Eidetic images – the healing images – Ahsen finds mythology the most revealing form of collective thought, and many of his books deal either directly or indirectly with mythology, or have a strong mythological bent. Mythology is vital to the study of the human consciousness and its origins, says Ahsen. "We have forgotten mythology and this forgetfulness is ripping us apart, tearing our minds, our souls, our hearts, our history and our future." He dismisses the works of Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud as "19th-century stuff" and believes instead that "we are at the threshold of a whole new era where mythology and origins are being reclaimed".

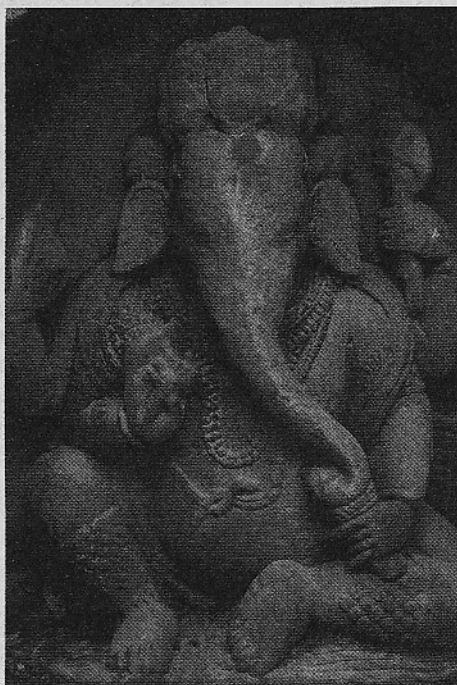
It is through such a "reclamation" of image and mythology that Ahsen hopes to effect a cure for mental illness. "I attempt to establish certain staged conditions of imagery – meaning that you bring in a few images and almost establish a state of interaction with them in the mind. When you have done that, you

discover that these images possess a magical quality capable of revealing the source of disturbance as well as the key to healing."

Ahsen says that his method is more effective than psychoanalysis, and repeatable clinical experiments seem to back his claim. He opposes psychoanalysis as a method that relies on words rather than images, assuming that the word uttered by the patient contains clues about the source of his or her illness. "The more a patient talks, the more the disease will be revealed – this is psychoanalysis. I am opposed to that view. It is the image seen by the patient that knows all the secrets of the disease."

Deconstructing psychotherapy

Image Psychology aims not only to cure mental illness but also to protect the mind from psychological disturbance – a form of psychological preventive medicine.



Ganesh therapy.

"There is more than one method of treatment," says Ahsen. "You can lop off the afflicted organ, you can treat it or you can prevent it from becoming diseased in the first place. I think psychology is still oriented

towards the surgical method. Whatever is diseased, lop it off. The methodology, the approach appears very modern but it is really very archaic. Psychotherapy has become rationalistic. It has become laden with assumptions which need to be deconstructed, need to be smashed."

Nature, according to Ahsen, is still the best cure for most human ills. "The only place where god finally appears is our inner self, our nature, not in our creations – most of which are just an endless patchwork that we heap upon Nature. If Nature holds the key to wellbeing, "image gives you the same vitality that Nature gives to a wild pigeon", asserts Ahsen. It is through image that he hopes to reactivate the healing powers of Nature.

In Ahsen's terminology, Eid is the "jubilation of Nature". Ahsen's provocative vision of the future also borrows heavily from religious mythology. "I feel our next leap will see us either as pigeons living in allotted spaces which will continue to shrink with time and terms of manoeuvrability, or all this will be replaced by a wholly different system of Nature in which man will give up his knowledge – sacrifice it at the altar of Nature. He will become free, having known everything. Either way, things cannot go on like this. I feel that we have finally reached a point of really knowing that the whole damned thing is an exile."

Predicting the dissolution of civilisation, Akhter Ahsen believes that apocalypse has been foretold in all mythological and religious traditions. "We started as Titans and ended up mice bred in the laboratory of civilisation, but all the sacred books say that we will return to the Garden of Eden. This means that laws will go to hell. They will be torn apart and only then will Eden arise again. Up to that time there will be nothing but more and more laws, which will be like chains. More and more breeding of the rats until there is nothing left. Then we will throw them all away."

"I learnt it from Nepal"

IN EIGHT books, Dr Michael L. Dertouzos—engineer, inventor, theoretician and director of the Laboratory for Computer Science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—predicted the many ways the information revolution would affect human lives.

In the 1970s, he forecast that one-third of all American homes would soon have personal computers. In 1980, he announced the coming of a worldwide Internet culture. Indeed, it was under Dr Dertouzos' directorship of the Laboratory for Computer Science that Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web.

So what is he thinking about now? Over cups of hot tea, in his Cambridge office, he offers some hints.

You recently gave a deposition in the Microsoft antitrust suit. How does your old friend Bill Gates feel about the testimony you offered?

I suspect he may be a little disappointed. I was asked in my testimony, "Are browsers part of the operating system or applications?" "Today, browsers are applications," I answered. "Tomorrow, they will be merged." That was the point where Bill and I didn't see eye to eye. The Microsoft position is they've already merged.

When you gave that deposition, you also said that you differed with Gates on the effect of the computer revolution on the rich and the poor. What did you mean?

We differ on that and on some of his views on "frictionless capitalism". He thinks consumers and suppliers are going to meet on this gigantic football field called the Internet and they are going to do deals together without an intermediary. It's a seductive idea.

In my opinion, it is right for about 15 percent of the marketplace. But wrong for 85 percent. It will happen on standard products and products that do not involve trust questions—relatively small products.

Bill sees this expanding world of networking as an opportunity for poor people to sell their wares, get educated, participate in the world marketplace and pull themselves up from poverty. I see the exact same thing

with a time scale of 15 years—and ONLY, if we help.

How did you arrive at a 15-year time frame?

I learnt it from Nepal. A while ago, I had this naive assumption that I could go to Nepal, obtain computers and training for the Nepalese and get them to have a 20 percent jolt in the GNP. But here's what I found out: only 30 percent of the Nepalese are literate. Of that 30 percent, only 10 percent speak English. Even if I got someone to provide every one of them with a computer with communications, what could they do with them? They have no skills to sell.

To get people to do this, I would have to educate them, and people don't get educated overnight. So, 15 years. From this and other experiences, I've concluded that the information revolution, if left to its own devices, will mean that the rich are going to buy more computers, be more productive and become richer, and the poor will not be able to do that and will stand still.

History teaches us that whenever the gap between rich and poor increases, we have all kinds of troubles.

— CLAUDIA DREIFUS IN "A CONVERSATION WITH DR MICHAEL L. DERTOUZOS: A PRAGMATIST ON WHAT COMPUTERS CAN DO" FROM *NEW YORK TIMES*.

Patriotica

IN THE surge of revenant patriotism reverberating through the length and breadth of the nation it would be pertinent to take stock, however hurriedly, and decidedly against the plea for censorship, of some disturbing trends emerging in an orchestrated manner, whose long-term impact on the polity can be deadly. These are blurring the lines between genuine patriotism and "patriotics", the former a passion; the latter a craft, a skill, a tool to exploit, for profit and aggrandisement. When the fires of Kargil will have been put out, and the day of reckoning will dawn, we may find, to our surprise, the nation bereft of some very valuable assets in the despoliation of which the "enemy" had no hand.

Kargil threatens to be a historic watershed in matters germane to our polity. Things that were unthinkable, behaviour that was unpardonable, donned sacerdotal mantles of virtue, ostensibly under the pressure of circumstances, viz. a border aggression by an implacable enemy. The exigency seemed to sanction expediency trashing the niceties that even a formal and feckless democracy swears by and tries its very best to appear living by.

There is frothy euphoria about the US having tilted towards India, seen the "justice" of our position, and aligned itself with us, the party of the good. This is a dangerous illusion. First, it is conceding the US a role that India never in the past agreed to, and with good reason. It dilutes Indian sovereignty, and unwittingly pushes Kashmir (as a protectorate on the anvil) into the hegemonic orbit of an expansionist and aggressive superpower. It sows the seeds of unending suzerainty of the US, incessant bloodbath (as in Ireland, Lebanon, Palestine, etc), and reduces India and Pakistan both to per-

We have you surrounded...



Delivery vans gathering intelligence in UK?

petual supplicants to Washington for a dose of Pax Americana. The geo-political interests of a superpower may not be identical with those of a Third World nation, however large or democratic. And, the foreign policy of the US has been notoriously free from ethics or notions of justice and humanity. To presume otherwise is to be blind to history.

Let Kargil be no fixture of our polity. Let not jingoism and hatred be our staples of state, a la Pakistan, that has desperately sought over 50 years a credible and viable *raison d'être*.

—I.K. SHUKLA IN "IN THE WAKE OF KARGIL: PARIOTICS"
FROM AN INTERNET POSTING OF THE INDO-PAK CITIZENS
AGAINST WAR IN KARGIL [HTTP://WWW.MNET.FR/AIINDEX/
KARGIL/KARGILINDEX.HTML].

Hounded by Afghans

BEHIND THE history of modern day Afghanistan are two intertwined stories. One is of the modernisation throes of Afghanistan. The other is the story of the last imperialistic thrust of the Soviet Union.

The two came together because the search for ways to improve an isolated, backward Asian kingdom led a small number of Afghans to embrace the Soviet model of communism. Once they had achieved power almost accidentally, most other Afghans rejected their naive attempt to remake society in order to impose that model. The USSR went to their support. This turned a remote civil war into a world issue.

The Soviet Union did not become involved in its longest war because of any intrinsic importance of Afghanistan to Moscow. Ensuring Afghan adherence to Marxism-Leninism was not a goal that in itself could justify such an involvement. Instead, the involvement showed Soviet determination, at the height of Leonid I. Brezhnev's power, to assert Moscow's authority wherever the USSR perceived danger or opportunity. After the determination of the Afghan people to maintain their independence had bloodied the Soviets while devastating their own country, the imperialistic thrust ended. But, again, Afghanistan was not the cause. Moscow's abandonment of the Kabul regime was a result of long-festered Soviet internal weaknesses, some of which had been exacerbated by the Afghan war. Belated recognition of those weaknesses, rather than any battlefield defeat or the war's immediate costs, produced the changed Kremlin thinking that led to the Soviet Army's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Those weaknesses later brought the collapse of Soviet communist power and of the USSR itself. Aid to Kabul ended.

Without Soviet aid, Afghan communists lost power. Afghanistan turned inward to resume its struggle over modernisation. The Soviet model had been discredited. Another model, of greater reliance on Islam for answers, had been strengthened. Traditional factors of national unity had

been weakened, leaving uncertainty about Afghanistan's political structure and coherence. And a land that stumbled into war while seeking economic development had been blasted backward into an even more desperately primitive economic condition.

—HENRY S. BRADSHER IN *AFGHAN COMMUNISM AND SOVIET INTERVENTION* (OUP, KARACHI, 1999)

New Dawn

URLS OF alternative sites to access the *Dawn* newspaper (Karachi) from India after the authorities blocked the site:

Anonymizer

<http://www.anonymizer.com/>

Dawn via Anonymizer

<http://anon-ascella.free.anonymizer.com/>
<http://www.dawn.com/daily/19990705/>

Aixs Net Privacy

<http://aixs.net/aixs/>

Dawn via Aixs Net Privacy

<http://aixs.net/aixs/nph-anon.cgi/>
<http://www.dawn.com/daily/19990705/>

Lucent Personalized Web Assistant (Registration required)

<http://www.bell-labs.com/project/lpwa/>

WebFringe Anonymizer (Site down on day of publication)

<http://www.webfringe.com/anon/>

Interfree Services Anonymizer (Pay service)

<http://www.interfree.com/anon/index.htm>



Truck literature

WHILE WHAT has come to be known as truck art is now famous outside its home which is Pakistan, truck literature — as that name alone can do it justice — is not. It is a pity that this column has to be in English because no

TO BE CALLED A CRIMINAL IS BELOW YOUR DIGNITY

POWER THEFT IS A CRIME AGAINST THE NATION

The following cases constitute power theft, and are liable to immediate legal action.

1. Direct connection from the line and cable
2. Illegal extraction of energy through any means
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ADVERTISMENT IN THE NEWS, LAHORE

translation can do truck literature justice, so some of the utterly untranslatable bits will have to remain in the original.

The driver's door on many trucks has a painting of the F-16 or the painter's idea of what an F-16 looks like which is a cross between a space-ship and an eagle—and the words "pilot gate" written under it. Drivers obviously think of themselves as space travellers. How else can one explain legends such as: "May God be with you, you rocket propeller" or "Who says I will die when death comes looking for me; I am a driver, I will give death a 'cut' and speed away" or "O you who makes merry in the face of death; May God be with you as you drive your rocket."

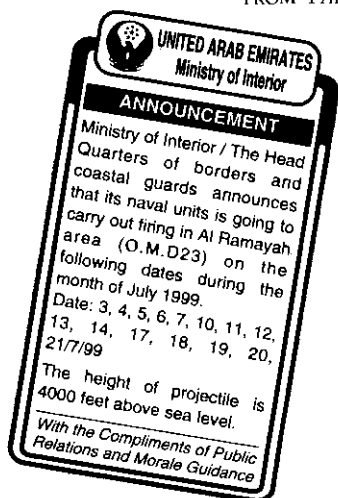
If I had to choose a truck literature classic, it would have to be: "*Puppoo yar tung na kar*" [Don't bother me, friend]. These five words contain everything that the average Pakistani feels about life and the state of the country in general. And here is Mr Pessimism himself: "What kind of a life is this, what kind of a world! Wherever you look, there is injustice."

One bus had the following notice written on the side: "Please do not put your arm or other parts of the body outside the window." "Other parts of the body" deserves to be recognised as one of the more inventive sayings of our time. In Karachi, one truck informed all onlookers, "Warning, love is injurious for your health: Ministry of Love."

Since all buses and trucks as a rule drive at the speed of light, it is only appropriate that they should carry messages such as these, "Either overtake me or lump it" or "Time is my enemy" or "Honk if you want to get ahead", or "If you are honest, you will get there" or "Drive slow, drive always" or "Brother dear, keep your distance" or "Put your foot on the pedal, let's leave town and let it all come right".

Truck, bus and rickshaw drivers are smart people. They know that survival lies in keeping on the right side of police which is why many of them carry the slogan "Salute to Punjab Police". That means that while they may still meet an accident, they are insured against getting killed in a police *muqabila* [encounter]. In a country where few have anything nice to say about the police, trucks carrying this reassuring sign are guaranteed protection from Punjab's bravest...

KHALID HASAN IN "LITERATURE ON THE ROAD"
FROM *THE NEWS*.



THE KHALEEJ TIMES, DUBAI

Burma and India

INDIA AND Burma have traditionally had a very close relationship due to their historical, cultural and administrative ties. Buddhism came from India to Burma and established abiding cultural ties between the people of the two countries. During the freedom struggle against colonial rule, the national leaders of the two countries developed close political links which survived for years after independence. Nehru and U Nu shared a common world view and India helped in many ways when the newly independent Burma was in crisis. India extended military assistance to U Nu, in fact saving his "Rangoon Government" from falling to insurgents. Even after General Ne Win seized power in 1962, the relationship between the two countries remained positive...

The growing relationship between Burma and India is a source of worry to Burmese pro-democracy activists based in India. In 1997, 11 Burmese army defectors who joined with pro-democracy groups based on the Indo-Burma border were secretly deported by Indian military intelligence. A Burmese student activist who was a UNHCR-recognised refugee was also included in the deportation.

Last February, six guerrillas were killed and 73 arrested in an Indian military operation, code-named "Operation Leech", targeting the Arakan Army and the Karen National Union, both of which are struggling against the junta in Burma.

When Burmese pro-democracy activists tried to organise a political conference on Burma in January this year, the venue, the Constitution Club in New Delhi, cancelled at the last minute without explanation. However, Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh told Burmese pro-democracy activists at a Global Conference on Democracy, held in New Delhi in February, that India is committed to protecting their security and freedom.

But the strength of this commitment can only be tested over time, as it faces resistance from a growing lobby in India striving to establish a "working relationship" with the government in Burma.

— SOE MYINT IN "INDIA AND BURMA: WORKING ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP" FROM *THE IRRAWADDY*.

Junk.com

MANY INTELLIGENT people do not browse the Web. And they do not stand to lose too much. Compared with media such as magazines, television and radio, the Internet has the lowest entry barrier to 'publishing'. This does wonderful things for the democratic spread of information, but terrible things for the aesthetics of the media.

Currently, every teenager who can write three lines in HTML christens himself 'Web Developer' and puts up a site that assaults the senses of those who have the misfortune of visiting it. Our vaunted 'information superhighway' is cluttered with clumsy, irrelevant junk put

up by enthusiastic amateurs. On an individual level, this is a minor mistake—and for those with wisdom and a sense of humour, a forgivable mistake. This is the price we have to pay for the freedom of the Internet.

But the larger issue is that the Internet is dominated by millions of 'professional' sites that are inane in concept, pointless in design and useless in content. Companies are progressively acquiring the habit of creating sites not for their audience, but for exhibiting that they are as technologically 'with-it' as the rival firm down the road. Content thus becomes the handiwork of people mentally trapped in the eight-inch by ten-inch limitation of a printed page. And programmers foolishly try to impress with elements that jump, bounce and sing across the pages, distracting instead of involving the user.

Despite the rather anarchist nature of the Internet, we need as strict criterion of judgement of Web content as we have for other mass media. It is the only way to ensure that quality accompanies Web sites, these objects of mass media and mass experience that are destined to become part of our culture.

This rigour of user judgement does not yet exist, since most surfers are still overwhelmed by the novelty of the medium. They gush about the browsing experience itself, rather than evaluating its quality and meaning.

The Internet is an amazingly useful source of information, of breaking news and of the opinions of assorted individuals across the globe. But because of the low quality of most Web sites, it is far from delivering on its promise of being an interactive intellectual experience. Of being an environment that is alive with the immediacy of meaningful interaction. Of providing the joy of spontaneous encounters with unexpected knowledge.

Which are all the things that the Internet can do, and other media cannot. Until those who develop Web sites understand this, many intelligent people will still have a legitimate excuse to ignore the Internet.

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Categories for US/Canadian media outlets

I. Outstanding story on South Asia Print

1. "Deadly Crop: Difficult Times Drive India's Cotton Farmers To Desperate Actions" —Jonathan Karp, *The Wall Street Journal* (USD 200+certificate), a story about the very real costs of modernisation plans gone wrong in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.
2. "Taliban's Roots in India" —Kenneth J. Cooper, *The Washington Post* (certificate), a report from Deoband, India, on an Islamic seminary that

influenced the theology of the Taliban.

3. "Whiz Kids: Inside the IITs" —Manjeet Kripalani, *Business Week* (certificate), a look at the Indian Institute of Technology — successful breeding ground for Wall Street and Silicon Valley leaders.

II. Outstanding story on South Asia

Broadcast or New Media

1. "Ground Zero" —CNN and CNN.com staff (USD 200+certificate), an in-depth look at the return of nuclear weapons to the world's stage. Award is to both the TV and Web staff.
2. "Hacking Bhabha" —Adam Penenberg, *Forbes.com* (certificate), an investigation into the hacking of India's top nuclear research centre by Americans.
3. "Bhutan: Paradise Opens Its Gates" —Hilary Brown, *ABC News* (certificate), a rare television look inside the Himalayan kingdom.

III. Outstanding special project on the South Asian nuclear tests, all media

1. "The Bomb is Back: Lessons of the New Nuclear Age" —*Newsweek* staff (certificate), a 11-page report following India's nuclear tests.
2. "Living with the Bomb: India and Pakistan in The Nuclear Age" —*Time* staff (certificate), an in-depth look at the effect of the tests on India and Pakistan.
3. Nuclear package —*The Wall Street Journal* staff (certificate), a package of stories reported from New Delhi, Islamabad, Beijing, Washington and Istanbul.

Certificate of Special Recognition to *The Nation* for its two cover stories on nuclear weapons, "The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons" by Jonathan Schell and "The End of Imagination" by Arundhati Roy.

SAJA, the South Asian Journalists Association, was founded in March 1994 as a networking group for journalists of South Asian origin in New York City. It has grown into a national group of more than 500 journalists working for leading newspapers, broadcast networks and new media outlets in various cities in the US and Canada. Internet versions of the award-winning articles are available at <www.saja.org>.

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SAVAGING THE CIVILISED

'The best of Indians'

Even if you put all our modern patriots together, Verrier Elwin was a better Indian by far.

There was a certain justice, if that's the word I want, in reading this book during a time of clamour over foreign birth. When we are smack in the middle of a mindless race to define loyalty to India solely by coordinates on a map, it is good to read about Verrier Elwin. Foreign name, foreign birth, a missionary Christian to boot when he came to India, but the man lived and died Indian. Not Indian just because he was issued with the necessary documents, but Indian because of a lifelong commitment.

I do not mean to reduce a book, a life, to just these terms. But as it happens, this book was published and I got to read it at a time when the spectre of Sonia Gandhi wielding power is driving Indian 'patriots' into a frothing frenzy. Turning the pages of *Savaging the Civilised*, one can not but be aware of the mockery Elwin's life makes of notions of patriotism as they are sold to us today. For my money, even if you put all our modern patriots together, Elwin was a better Indian by far; in fact, the very comparison is faintly insulting to the man. If the criterion is an understanding of and an empathy with Indian lives, I would much rather have trusted him to lead India, to do good for India, than almost anybody who jostles for the privilege today.

And again, because we live in peculiar times, Ramachandra Guha's one great achievement in this book is that he forces us to think about being Indian. Are we so identified by simply being born here, or is



Savaging the Civilised

by Ramachandra Guha
OUP, New Delhi, 1999
pp x+398
INR 595

reviewed by Dilip D'Souza

there something more to it? Is being Indian as trivial a matter as a place on a map? Or should we ask more of ourselves? Or do we deserve more from ourselves?

Born 1902 in Dover, Verrier Elwin took a degree from Oxford in 1924 and landed in India in late 1927. He was going to India, he wrote to a friend, "to test both the missionary and religious vocation". Many years later, he was also to write in his memoirs that the move was an "act of reparation...to give instead of to get, to serve with the poorest people in-

stead of ruling them, to become one with the country we had helped to dominate and subdue".

The young Verrier was touched by the rising tide of Indian nationalism. From lectures and meetings with people who had spent time in India, he knew about Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent movement for India's freedom, a moral struggle. Combining his religious bent with the appeal of Gandhian values, Elwin joined the Christa Seva Sangh (CSS) in Poona. The CSS modelled itself on the Hindu idea of an ashram, particularly the one conceived by Gandhi at Sabarmati. Service to the poor, simple living and identification with India: these were the CSS precepts. Jawaharlal Nehru himself was to take notice. While the church was "usually wholly ignorant of India's past history and culture", the CSS people were exceptions, and their "religion has led them to understand and serve and not to patronise", wrote Nehru.

Gonds over Gods

This was the air Elwin was breathing as he began life in India. It is curious, then, that by the mid-1930s, he no longer wanted it. This man of the church was disillusioned with his church. The one-time admirer and friend of Gandhi had also come to

disagree with him, having been "put off by Gandhism". There is something almost refreshing in Elwin's willingness to admit that the God that brought him to India had failed him, but that nevertheless he was more sure than ever that India was where he wanted to make his life.

This apparent conundrum was the fulcrum of Elwin's life, and is the core of this book. To live in India, to be aware of what happens around you in India, is often to be frustrated with the perversities of India. This, indeed is the fundamental dilemma of every Indian who has his/her eyes open. And yet, there is no other country in the world that offers so much to discover, to learn, to absorb, to write about. This is what drove Verrier Elwin, and what Guha speaks to me of Elwin, in this biography.

Following a suggestion from the industrialist Jamnalal Bajaj, Elwin moved in 1932 to Mandla district (in today's Madhya Pradesh) of the Central Provinces, to work with the Gond tribe. He settled in Karanjia, a tiny town near the source of the Narmada. With his life-long friend Shamrao Hivale, he set up the Gond Seva Mandal, running an ashram there. Elwin's years in Karanjia are the subject of his delightful and insightful 1936 book, *Leaves from the Jungle*. Not a scholarly treatise, essentially a diary, this slim volume is peppered with Elwin's self-deprecatory humour, even as it informs on Gond life. Elwin's eye for detail here is but a foretaste of the more serious writing he would do over the next 25 years, years spent living among his beloved tribals. In that sense, it is a record of a significant first step he may not then have been conscious of taking—towards becoming India's foremost anthropologist and authority on tribal life.

In *Leaves From The Jungle*, Guha tells us, Elwin "find[s] out more about himself as he finds out about

Gonds". Not just about his "growing rejection of Gandhi and Christ", but also about a "shift in vocation that was already under way". Elwin had come to India, in some sense, to "serve" its people, through Christ to begin with, and by extension, in "providing education and medical relief". But less than a decade later, he was to understand that his talent lay in writing about India's tribals—"indeed, he could help the tribals by writing about them". It was this understanding that opened the floodgates for Elwin's writing.

Rewarding read

For the paths Elwin's life took from then on, I will leave you to read the book. But it is these quiet yet profound shifts in Elwin's ideas, in his thinking, in his focus, in the kind of man he wanted to be, in his very image of himself, that make Elwin the intriguing character that he was. Guha explores all these vividly, weaving them into a life-sized picture of Verrier Elwin to make this biography a rewarding read.

Are we so identified by simply being born here, or is there something more to it? Is being Indian as trivial a matter as a place on a map? Or should we ask more of ourselves? Or do we deserve more from ourselves?

Elwin was a man of eminence and integrity who counted among his friends some of the greatest Indians of this century. But Guha puts some muscle into that cardboard image, and is able to describe for our benefit Verrier Elwin as an essentially, fundamentally, profoundly, Indian man. Regardless of his birth, accent, clothes, looks. Regardless, let's be sure of this, of his becoming an Indian citizen in 1954. He was Indian before, besides and above any of these trivial details.

A subtle point, perhaps. But the fact that Guha chose to paint a portrait of the man who makes this point

is a tribute to the author's own understanding of Elwin. There is no doubt Guha admires Elwin. But it is not the unqualified admiration of a hagiographer. It is the respectful admiration you develop for a complex, driven man. A man who explores his many interests to the fullest. A man with foibles that only deepen and round out the respect. "I have also dogged the shadows which Elwin chose to keep out of his [autobiography]," Guha writes, "and so reveal that his life was more troubled and altogether more interesting than he made it out to be." Such doggedness, of course, is the privilege of the biographer; Guha pursues history admirably.

One complaint is with the chapter notes. This is a massively researched book and Guha is thorough about giving his reader the source for every quote or excerpt he uses. These are via footnotes, which unfortunately are bundled in the last pages of the book. For a book like this, that's a distraction. There is no perfect solution here, but the bibliographical notes could have been separated from the few explanations; the former to remain at the back, the latter at the bottom of each page.

Trifles apart, *Savaging the Civilised* is a beautifully nuanced portrait of a fascinating man. It is also a timely and necessary portrait. Call it an obsession

if you like, but to me the book addresses a question whose answers get shallower by the day: what does it mean to be Indian?

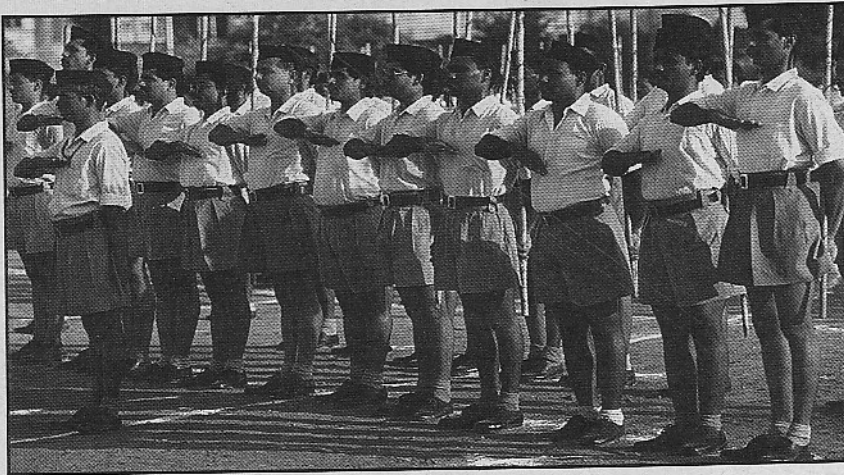
On 25 February 1964, three days after Elwin died, Calcutta's *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* carried one answer to that question. It was inserted by the Bengali Little Theatre Group and the Minerva Theatre of Calcutta. It read:

*In memory of
Dr Verrier Elwin
the best of Indians.*

Amen, Elwin may not have said, to that. ▲

More, tell us more

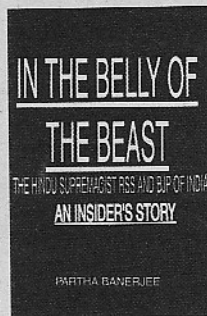
A convert from the Hindutva ideology eagerly tears into it, but does not tell us the secret behind its popular appeal.



Supremacists in shorts.

The phenomenal growth of the Hindu fundamentalist right-wing in the 1980s and 1990s and its significant political repercussions on the day-to-day, lived practice of secular politics have spawned a virtual cottage industry of scholarship in India. In recent years, concerned scholars and activists have attempted to interrogate this nascent Hindu revivalist consciousness, its growth as an ideological formation, and the role played by the RSS (Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh) in organising and fomenting daily communal practice and prejudice.

While approaches and answers have varied, most of this writing has shared the characteristic of being acutely critical of the RSS and Hindu fundamentalism from a position outside, so to say, the "belly of the beast". It is against this backdrop that Partha Banerjee's book promised to be a fascinating and



In the Belly of the Beast: The Hindu Supremacist RSS and BJP of India—An Insider's Story
by Partha Banerjee
Ajanta Books International,
New Delhi, 1998
164 pp, INR 195

reviewed by Lalit Vachani

unique intervention. Banerjee spent 15 years working as a dedicated *swayamsevak*, while also being the joint secretary of the BJP's student wing, ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad), in West Bengal before breaking away and renouncing the RSS ideology as "fascist, supremacist, divisive and therefore, harmful to mankind". The intentions of the author are courageous and admirable: to

challenge the orthodoxies of an organisation to which he had once belonged at the risk of alienating old friends and making new, often dangerous, enemies.

The loosely structured chapters in *In the Belly of The Beast* provide a brief historical background to the RSS and its setting up of allied parties and organisations—the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal; the structure of the Sangh Parivar and the off-shoots of the RSS (the ABVP, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, and so on); daily socialisation and indoctrination of RSS recruits in its *shakhas* (branches) and in the OTCs (Officer Training Camps); an account of the festivals that the RSS celebrates; its role in stoking communal violence and its patriarchal, backward-looking mindset with ominous consequences for the Indian feminist movement.

Of great interest are the appendices dealing with the dissemination of Hindutva ideology via the Internet along with a listing of relevant websites, as also excerpts from an article by Atal Behari Vajpayee in which the supposedly moderate Hindu ideologue adopts a strident anti-Muslim stance. There is also an autobiographical essay by the author's father, Jitendranath Banerjee, who continues to remain a staunch *swayamsevak* even after his son's breaking away from the organisation.

The book is a very competent and contemporary overview of the activities of the RSS, its organisational structure and linkages, its intolerant ideologies, and the missionary zeal with which it

promoted Hindutva in the post-Emergency era. The subject matter that Banerjee chooses to draw upon is huge, but his canvas, a slim 164-page book, is perhaps insufficient to 'tell all'. Ironically, the book suffers from a tendency towards excess – it is almost as if Banerjee has taken it upon himself to disavow and debunk every conceivable myth that the RSS seeks to inculcate in its recruits. This more often than not leads to a polemical review of recent RSS activities and refers the reader back to already existing scholarship on the RSS, as opposed to providing fresh insights based on the experience of having been an RSS volunteer.

In fact, the most insightful moments occur when Banerjee dispenses with the polemical, and brings to the fore his own experiences as an RSS man. In the chapter, "Beyond the Sanghathan: my days of politics Indian style for the 'non-political' RSS", Banerjee describes his work for the RSS during the turbulent years of the Emergency from 1975-1977, providing a fascinating glimpse into the organisational strategies and *modus operandi* of the swayamsevak. The author's experience is substantiated by his father's essay, which at one point says, "All can be sacrificed for ideals but ideals are not to be sacrificed."

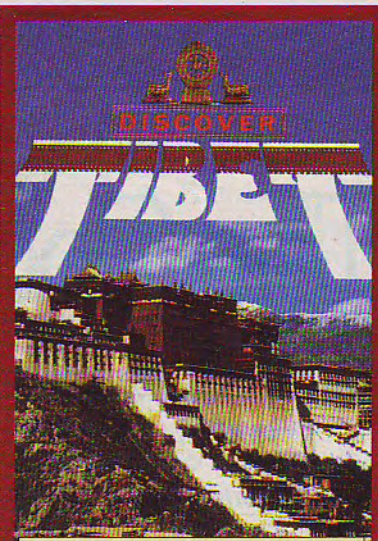
This is one of the most interesting sections of the book, suggesting the tantalising possibility of an autobiographical narrative by an insider. The dialogic interplay between the author's explanatory commentary in the footnotes and the original text allows the reader to enter into a conversation between two generations of swayamsevaks: the older, who still is a staunch believer, and the younger, who writes from the reflective vantage point of critical distance.

In sum, Banerjee gives out a great deal of information about the 'beast', its growth and development, and its menacing demeanour. However, there is little of the insider's story, a perspective that would have helped flush out inval-

able details of the 'belly', its inner workings, its processes of assimilation and reproduction. Certain key questions remain, which activists like Banerjee who have seen the underside of the RSS are best equipped to discuss: How do fundamentalist organisations like the RSS make intra-organisational ideology compelling for their own recruits? How can we explain the phenomenal growth of the RSS cadres? What is the role of the RSS shakha in providing the lure of a playground for young children and establishing community networks in middle and lower middle class neighbourhoods? What is the sense of empowerment that participation in RSS activities seem to provide to disenfranchised groups and individuals?

In his efforts to justify his disenchantment with RSS ideology and practice, Banerjee neglects the crucial question of 'enchantment' or attraction – i.e. what exactly drew him (and continues to draw others) to the organisation in the first place? The process of indoctrination of the swayamsevak entails the acceptance of the benevolent mask of the RSS. It is both the playground and the social club, which ultimately takes over the swayamsevak's world, his life and his common sense. The organisation and practice of communal politics in the form of Hindu sangathan then begins to function semi-autonomously.

It is vital to explore the foundations of the RSS' popular appeal and 'success' if we are to move beyond a mere expose or negative critique of the organisation. Only then can concrete strategies be formulated for secular intervention. One sincerely hopes to hear more from Partha Banerjee in the future; and that *In the Belly of the Beast* will only serve as a first work – an invaluable compendium of background information on the RSS – for the personal-political insider's story that will follow soon. ▲



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The Cool-Cab indicator

The Indian economy is on a roll, ask the Bombay taxi driver.

by **Shantanu Nagpal**

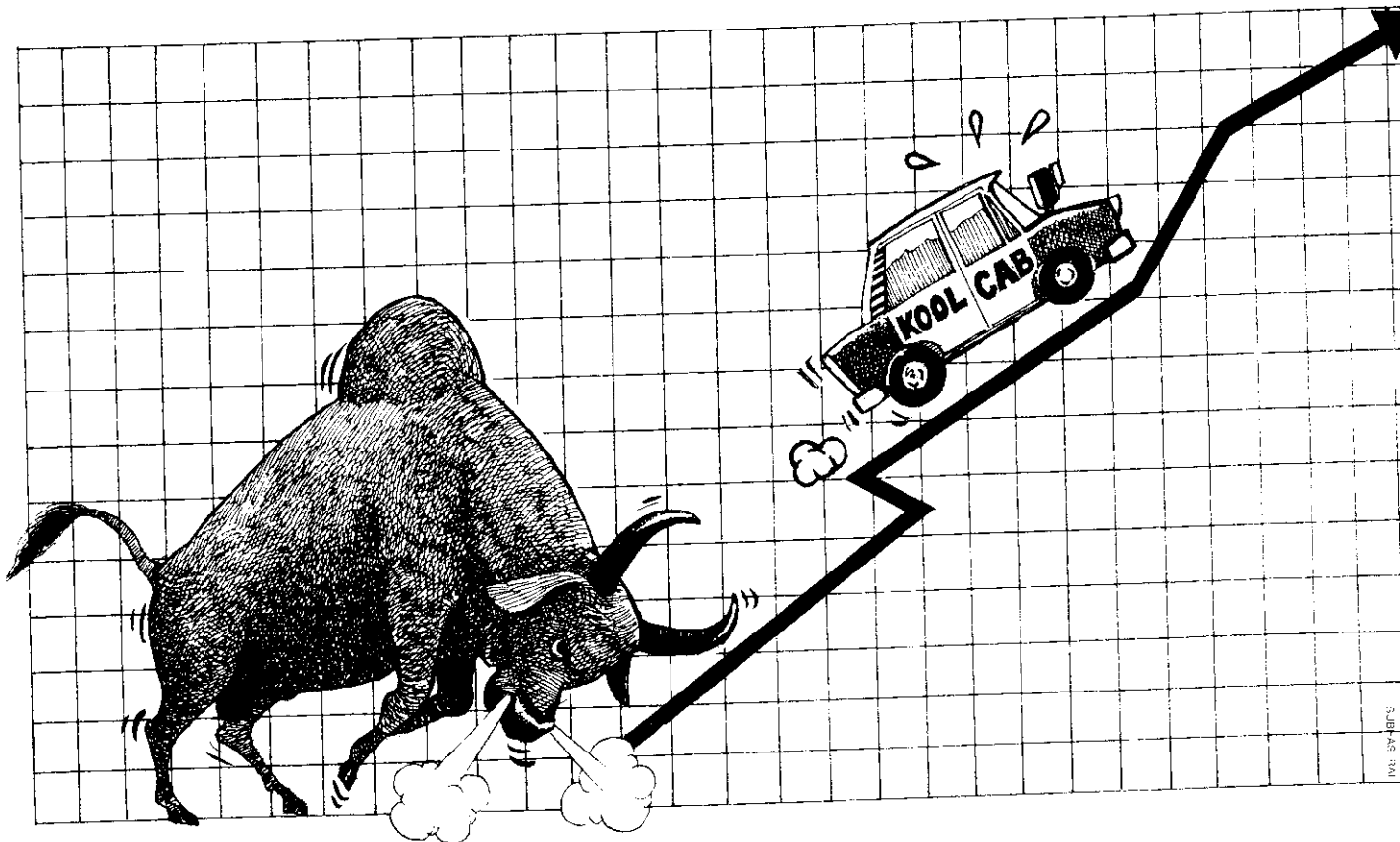
Cool Cabs are the electric-blue, air-conditioned taxis that were introduced in Bombay about five years ago. Unfortunately for the taxi-owners, by the time people got hooked to the comforts of the cab, recession struck, asset prices crashed and Bombay felt it the hardest. Brokers, lenders, bankers, who would have taken the cab on their journeys home to the suburbs, opted instead for car pools—shared non air-conditioned taxis—and even went back to travelling by train.

All that has begun changing again. "Tezee (speed) has returned," said a Cool Cab driver recently. "Just when I had given up and was thinking of changing my taxi from A/C to non A/C, good times are back."

Drivers must thank the Bombay Stock Exchange, which has managed to turn around a lost cause with an unprecedented surge in stocks over the last few months. Economists, policy makers, advisers and columnists might debate the "essen-

tials of a sustained economic recovery", but for both the stock exchange and the Cool Cab driver this boom is here to stay. So what has happened and why is the stock market ignoring pronouncements of Wise Men?

Recessions are good in the long term, and that is the lesson stock markets have learnt from the US economy. The recent resilience of the US economy is in large part directly attributed to the chastising depression of the early 1990s.



Recessions force companies to pare down, cut capacity, improve productivity, and overall make better utilisation of scarce and expensive capital. Unproductive assets change hands as small and unviable units get swallowed up by bigger ones. In India, most of this process has just been set in motion, and in a few more years, industry will see the benefits of productivity improvements.

The recession was hard and as the Cool Cab driver said, "It questioned the whole idea of being in a city like Bombay." Stocks were punished and investors fled. "There were no takers for the simple black and yellow cabs, forget our blue ones. And even if I did manage to get a ride, they would ask me to switch off the air-conditioner and charge them normal fare."

The recession has been blamed on the crash in world commodity prices, and the government's failure to provide basic infrastructure—uninterrupted power, wagons, roads, consistent policy—for Indian industry. This oversight hurt at a time when world commodity prices went on a tumble. The big Indian companies, which manufacture commodities like cement, steel, aluminium and polymers, reported sharp drops in earnings and this sent stocks on a deep, depressing downslide. Infrastructure bottlenecks worsened the situation because it meant that companies had to pay extra for delays, locking up precious capital. Jobs, particularly in the service sector, were put in jeopardy, and as stock and property prices declined, individual wealth began to erode and there were cutbacks in spending.

Increasing commodity prices (spurred by a South Asian recovery) provided the impetus for good times. As the fortunes of some of India's largest companies are related to commodity prices, stock prices of these companies suddenly began looking cheap, especially when compared to other companies in the region. The buying spree in the stock market began with the foreign

investor who had thus far stayed away simply because Southeast Asia looked better than the Subcontinent. Curiously, the fact that it is a caretaker government in charge in New Delhi was cited as a positive factor! "They can't spring any surprises on us now," said a foreign institutional investor.


Low interest rates meant that improved liquidity now started trickling back into stocks. Economists and other fortune-tellers, however, say that this is not enough proof, and that there are yet no signs of a "recovery". They cite low credit off-take, poor bank balance sheets and infrastructure bottlenecks. But the fact is the stock market keeps surging. Who then is making the mistake, the investors or the economists?

The Cool Cab driver believes that the brokers and investors he carries home every day know what they are talking about. "They say 'one stock, it will go up and it does!'" he said. "These guys know what they are talking about." He is right. Stock brokers seldom miss an opportunity. They might overdo the asset price surge or they might overkill a slump, but they know when they see a recovery. And this time, they think they have seen something good and lasting.

Analysts will provide a thousand *post facto* justifications like "realign-


ment of foreign portfolios to give increased weight to Subcontinent stocks", but the bottomline is that Indian companies have begun the painful process of turning the corner, and it was only a matter of time before someone saw that. If you are an investor then don't worry about jelly-fish economists, this is the time to hit the sea running. Kargil and the threat of war is holding the market back, and as soon as that stand-off is resolved, the markets will really take off.

This time next year you as an investor will not regret your decision, by then Indian companies will start showing the results of productivity improvements. The stock markets now are adjusting for next year's results. Cool Cab s are never wrong, their air-conditioners are now purring.



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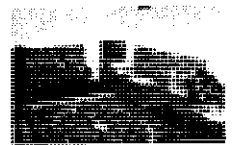
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One more flat tyre

by Afsan Chowdhury

Atal Behari Vajpayee's South Asian 'road transport' diplomacy, begun with his much-hailed trip to Lahore, has been deflated, as it were, by the bangs of big guns going off in Kargil. Meanwhile, to the region's east, it doesn't at all appear that his second innings at bus diplomacy, this time with the Dhaka-Calcutta service, will smoothen out India-Bangladesh relations as some thought it would.

The recent trade talks between the two countries were a downbeat exchange, and as things stand, there is little chance of Bangladesh improving the balance of trade that continues to tilt massively towards India. The meeting between Sheikh Hasina and Vajpayee in Dhaka recorded discrepancies, reflecting political realities which both sides still don't appear ready to deal with. Both leaders met exclusively for less than half an hour followed by the official meeting which lasted only 20 minutes.

The statements read out by India and Bangladesh on the issues discussed and decisions taken varied, further diminishing the value added to the meeting. Briefing the media, Vajpayee said that both sides had agreed on "multi-modal communication links which will facilitate free movement of traffic between both countries". On trade, he said "India had in principle accepted the request for duty-free access on a non-reciprocal basis in selected items of export interest to Bangladesh". Vajpayee mentioned agreement on developing a framework for border trade. But the Bangladeshi prime minister did not refer to any of these issues explicitly in her statement. She just said that discussions had been held on various issues. Vajpayee also stated that the issues would be discussed

by the technical expert group due to meet soon. Sheikh Hasina did not mention that either.

Two agreements were signed during Vajpayee's 19 June visit to Dhaka. One was on a INR 2 billion (USD 47 million) loan to Bangladesh over the next three years, while the other was on developing trade relations between the Indian and Bangladesh federations of chambers



A.B. Vajpayee (r) and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu (l) with Sheikh Hasina.

of commerce. Again, the two prime ministers gave varying accounts on how the loan was to be utilised. While Vajpayee said that the money would be used to enable supply of transport equipment and capital goods to improve infrastructural facilities in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina said that nothing had been finalised and the utilisation matter would be discussed at the next joint economic commission meeting.

An indication of the differing positions was best reflected when Vajpayee said that India had accepted that the export base of Bangladesh is limited and that it needs to be augmented by goods and services that are of interest to India. Obviously, the question then was whether that meant facilitating export of gas to India, a thorny political issue in Bangladesh. Hasina sitting next to Vajpayee imme-

diately retorted, "Bangla-deshis will decide what Bangladesh wants to export, they [the Indians] can't decide alone. There may be many thoughts on our mind but it is we who will first decide what we can export from here."

All said, the trade imbalance between Indian and Bangladesh is becoming a political embarrassment and is putting pressure on the Bangladesh government and parties. It also projects India as an overbearing big brother, and the benefits are being reaped by the anti-India political Right. In the past eight years upto 1997-98, Bangladesh had run a cumulative trade deficit of 4.5 billion dollars, with a further 1 billion dollars trade imbalance expected by the end of this year. This is a statistic that is becoming more political than economic.

Bangladesh has been seeking zero tariff for 25 items such as jute and jute goods, leather products, plastic and ceramics, melamine, cosmetics, toiletries, processed foods, etc. But Indian experts say these sectors can barely influence the trade deficit. They say Bangladesh should be looking towards natural gas, and the transit facilities to Indian vehicles to the Northeast.

Bangladesh can earn more than BDT 10 million (USD 208,000) per day if transit rights are given to Indian vehicles, says Bhaskar Sen of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry. He also says that market studies should be done before the zero tariff items are selected because Bangladesh goods won't be competitive in the interior states of India because of freight costs and other factors. For example, the generic medicine Paracetamol sells in Bangladesh for BDT 6 (USD 0.13), while in India the same sells for INR 2.50 (USD 0.05). It's only Bangladeshi readymade garments that Sen sees as being a good export item to India.

Obviously, these are technical issues requiring non-political fixes. But before economics arrives, politics must leave the stage. ▲



Primate researchers have finally discovered what we suspected all along—that the Great Apes have a culture after all. Humans at the University of St Andrews in Fife now know that the courtship ritual of chimps, the foraging techniques of baboons and the particular way in which the gorilla tickles herself with twigs are not instinctive, as humans mistakenly believed, but the product of a culture that is passed down from generation to generation of primates.

This is a huge breakthrough that vastly expands our knowledge of the roots of human behaviour as well. It means that our ape cousins have the ability to lay down the rules of, for instance, table manners just as humans do. Chimps from the Tai forest in Ivory Coast use leaves to dish out termites and suck them off noisily with their lips. But upper class chimps in Gombe in Tanzania frown on this practice, preferring the more genteel way of picking the termites daintily off the mound, flicking off the sand, and chewing them without slurping.

Frans de Waal, primatologist at Emory University in Atlanta, is quoted by the *New Scientist* as saying: "The evidence is overwhelming that chimpanzees have a remarkable ability to invent new customs and technologies, and they pass these on socially rather than genetically."

What this proves is that humans have been apeing apes all along. Human culture and civilisation, including many of its unique aspects like gender roles, caste hierarchies, etiquette and even the way humans wage wars have their origins in the Great Ape Culture.

The habit of an alpha male gorilla to develop a martyr complex if he is not scratched on his favourite spot by his favourite girlfriend after a heavy meal has its equivalent in the Male Stolen

Spotlight Syndrome in humans. Some human males I know are similarly hurt when they do not derive the admiration they think they deserve from female colleagues for saying "homemaker" instead of "housewife". An extreme case of this occurs when male victims of affirmative action favouring women feel that what they go through neutralises the historical suffering women have endured since the dawn of creation.

Primatologists have also observed pampered male baboons which love to hear themselves talk. They hoot all day long from their perch in the canopy even though their female fans are bored out of their furs. The female baboons yawn widely and look around with droopy eyelids while he holds forth on the El Nimo Effect and the quality of nuts this year. A similar cultural trait in humans is the Male Explanatory Syndrome. You can always tell a human male with this affliction if he begins every sentence with: "Having said that..." or "Let me put it this way..." You can then be sure that he will then proceed to paraphrase in excruciating detail everything everyone has just said.

Given the close links between Great Ape Cultures and Human Cultures, the time has therefore come to combat speciesism and guarantee all primates the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of pleasure. The New Zealand parliament is already moving to grant apes and other hominoids their basic rights. At the rate we are going it looks like primates will be enjoying human rights before humans can enjoy theirs.

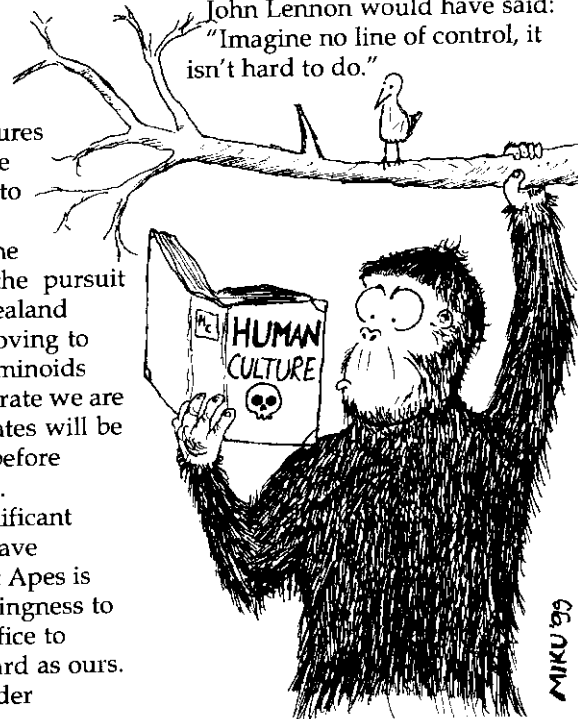
One of the more significant cultural traits humans have inherited from the Great Apes is patriotism, and our willingness to make the supreme sacrifice to defend territory we regard as ours. And even there is a gender

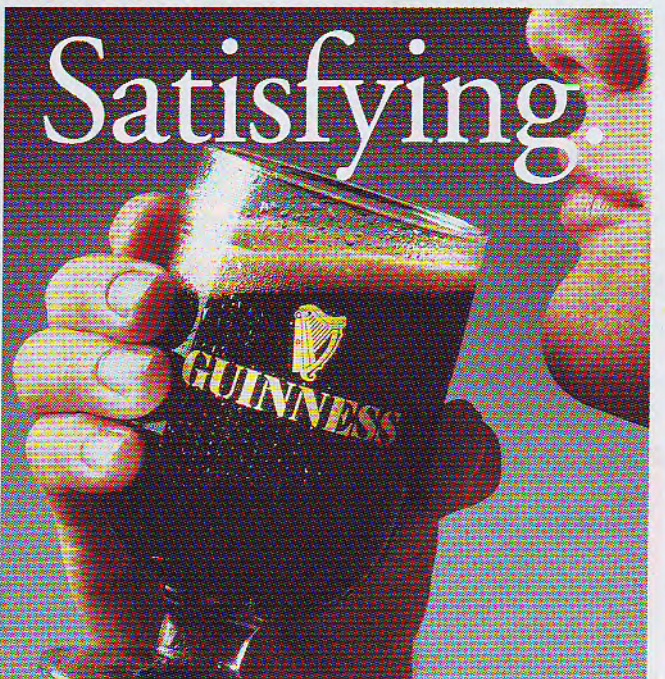
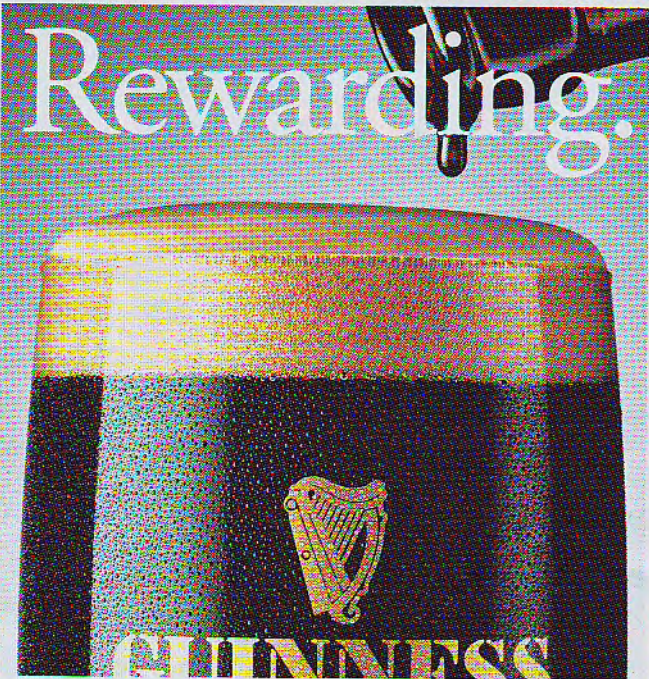
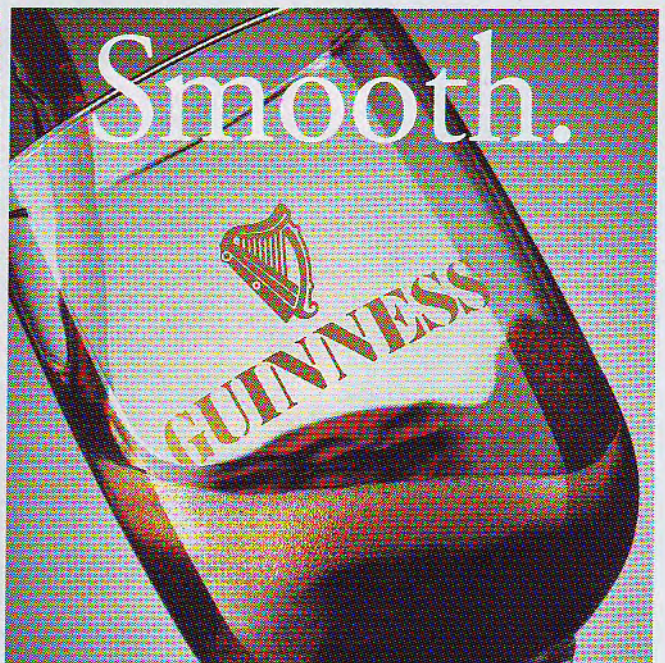
demarcation—the female Rwandan Mountain Gorilla is not bothered if a neighbouring tribe usurps a strategic tree whereas as the Protector Male swings away on a vine to engage the enemy in hand-to-hand combat.

It's the same with South Asian Males. I often fantasise about what would be happen to the Line of Control if our governments and armies, instead of being the phallogentric edifices of patriarchy, were actually matrilineal queendoms.

Well, first of all, we would start by declaring the whole region a No Man's Land. OK lads, get out, and let the ladies fix this thing. Then we would dejargonise the entire military theatre of operations: call Drass and Batalik Sub-Sectors, for instance, The Vale of Flowers. The DGMO (Director General of Military Operations) on both sides we will call what they really are: "Executive Director for Reciprocal Slaughter and Annihilation". And since when did a line of control start having "sanctity"? What about the sanctity of human life?

John Lennon would have said: "Imagine no line of control, it isn't hard to do."





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