HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

October 2000

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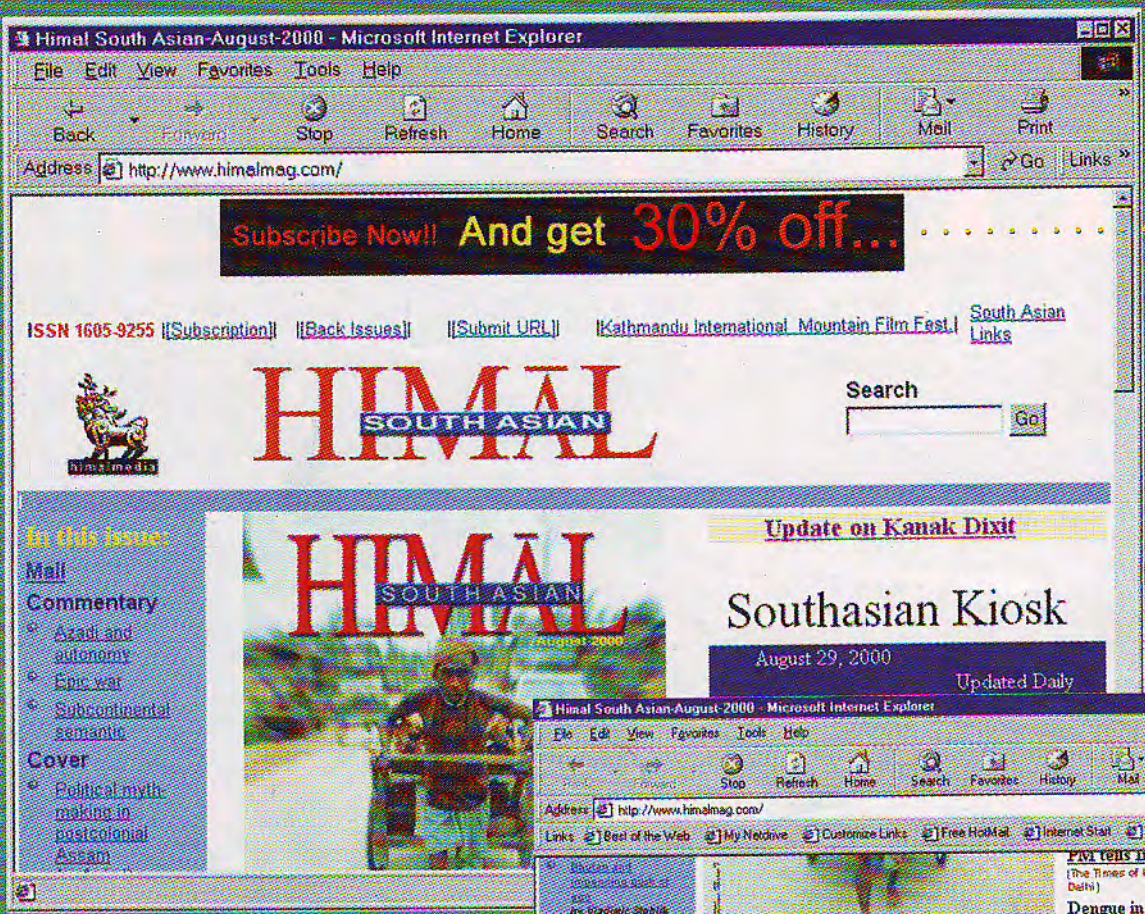

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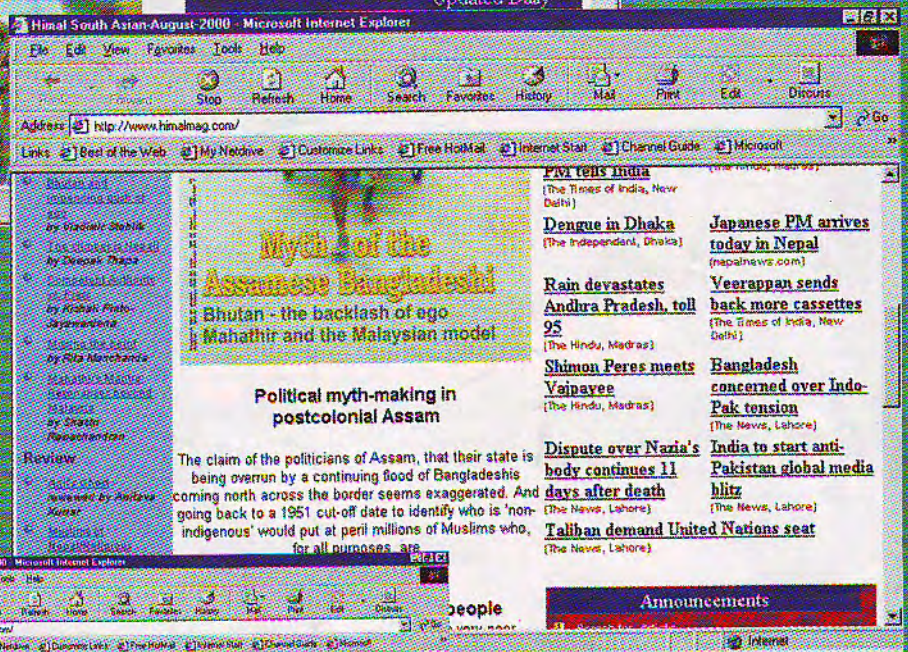

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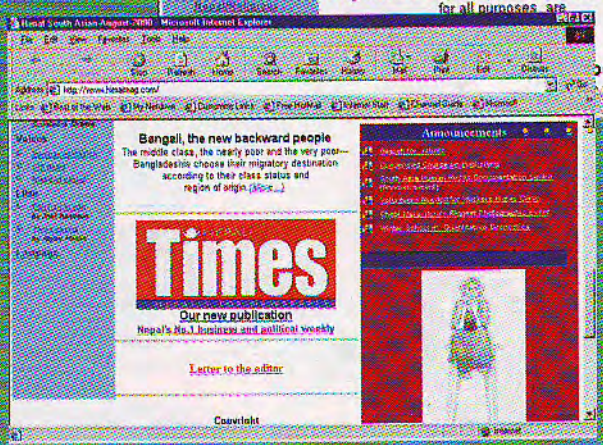

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10

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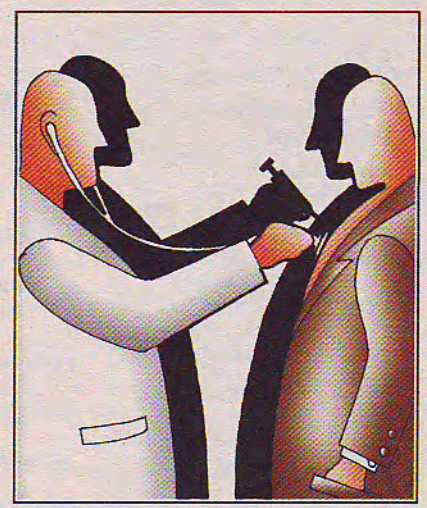


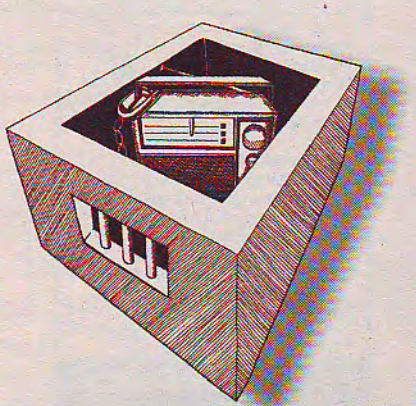
22

Medical ethics

(The Hippocrates oath pictured above and used as icon on the pages of the cover story, is taken from the original at the Asclepeion hospital in Athens, Greece.)

37

Radio inactive



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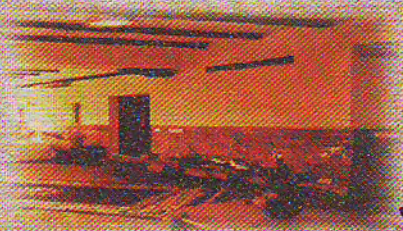

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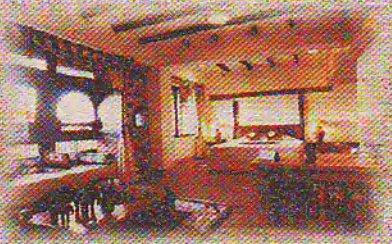

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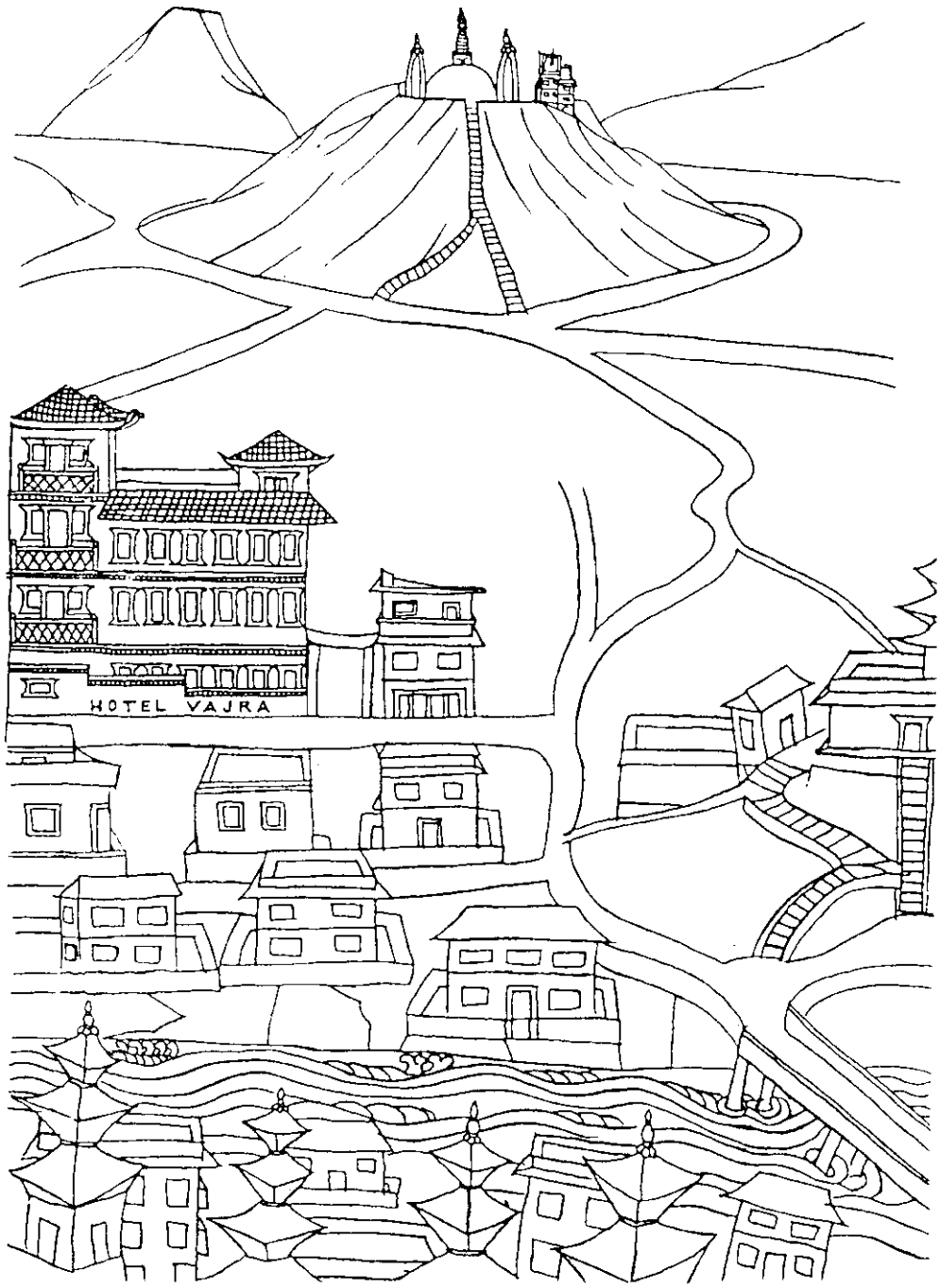

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Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

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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PAKISTAN • BANGLADESH

SHE SAID, HE SAID

THESE APPEAR to be dicey moments for Pakistan's military supremo General Pervez Musharraf who in this instance took umbrage at what Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed had to say about the khaki claddies chucking elected political leaders from state power as it has often happened in Pakistan and Bangladesh. He read in the Bangladesh prime minister's speech at the UN Summit an attempt to interfere in the internal affairs of Pakistan. Musharraf cancelled a meeting with Hasina at the last moment in a huff, and a stream of bad feelings have flown between the two since then. But it is almost certain that Pakistan's chief executive had read the Bangla prime minister's rhetoric wrong.

Fact is, Hasina gives a hoot about the who or the how of running Pakistan. She is intensely focussed on the trial of her family's killers—her family was wiped off on 15 August 1975—who were almost to a man, all military men who incidentally had fought Pakistan in the Bangla liberation war of 1971. After she came to power, much of her energy has been devoted to make sure they hang. The magistracy has tried them all—in presence or in absence—and passed the expected death sentence. The verdict is now being heard at the Supreme Court for confirmation.

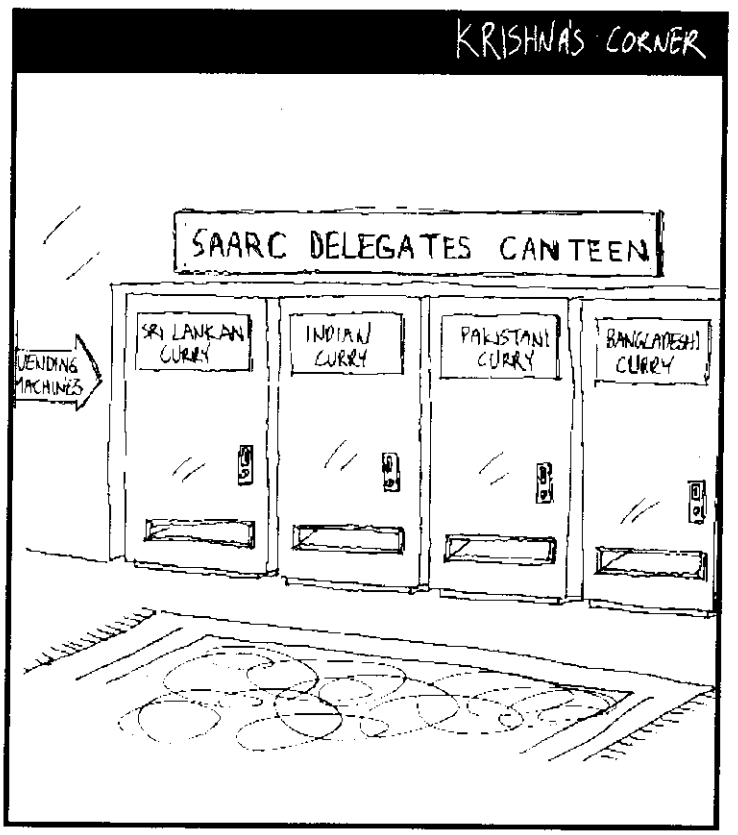
But the trial has been prolonged, and has taken much of Hasina's ruling period. She is deeply troubled by the fact that despite all the efforts and inspite of personally leading the charge from her prime minister's chair, the legal system has defied her attempt to finish off the task she had set as her highest personal and political priority. Pakistan doesn't at all figure in that scheme of things. Military coup plotters and their friends do.

To ensure that her family's role in the country's history is well-remembered, Hasina has named everything from bridges to stadia to roads, parks, hospitals, etc after her parents and other members of the family since she came to power. This is where the military comes in.

Her father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who had led the nationalist movement which birthed Bangladesh, was killed with his entire family and numerous other relatives in Bangladesh's first military coup. Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana were abroad at that time, and were thus spared. So she understandably has little love for that military which takes over civil power. She doesn't trust them fully either, and even had a retired general cum close relative reactivated and put in charge of the army, no doubt hoping that blood ties would overcome other loyalties.

At the time of his death, Mujib was the president of the country and leader of an ill fated one-party political system. After the coups and counter-coups that followed, a military government led by Gen. Ziaur Rahman was finally installed. Though Zia was not part of the killing, many Awami League (AL) members believe that he either conspired from the shadows or at least knew what was on, but didn't stop the moves. Less partisans say that he refused to either participate or get involved in any way with the coup. In fact, one group of the plotters had gaoled him briefly before he manoeuvered himself to power in November 1976 after a series of abortive and non-abortive take overs.

Gen. Zia reintroduced the multi-party government—a popular demand—and to keep the still-formidable AL at bay, did encourage any and all anti-AL groups including pro-Pakistan forces, to stage comebacks as also getting those back from Saudi Arabia, where many had camped after Bangla independence.



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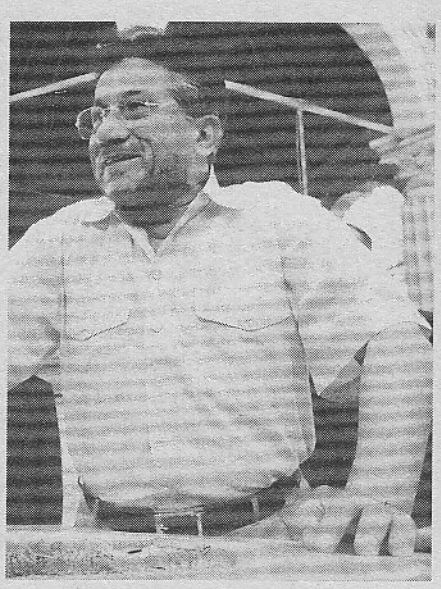
They did emerge, physically and politically, in the post-Mujib era, surfacing either in Zia's own party called Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP) or other constructs. Even the Maoists gave up insurgency, and promptly vanished from the political scene. But some still bat for the BNP now.

Partisan loyalties do live on. One such person is Jehangir Mohammed Adel, once a leader of Muslim League, who is now being tried for sedition for hoisting a Pakistani flag atop his Dhaka residence on 14 August, the Pakistan Day. But this is an extreme case, as in general, anti-Pakistan feelings are never high. Musharraf may have changed that a bit now.



Hasina spoke; Musharraf over-reacted.

The other hate figure in Hasina's life is of course Khaleda Zia, present leader of BNP and ex-prime minister of Bangladesh, now doing her best to oust Hasina from power using the hartal strategy. Khaleda is Gen. Zia's widow, and was a political novice till she took over the party in 1981. This was after Zia was killed by his fellow officers, all veterans of the 1971 war, in a botched coup attempt. The coup members were mostly hanged by then military chief Gen. Ershad who was later accused of being part of that coup.

The BNP was also dislodged from power in the early 1980s by Gen. Ershad in another military coup months after it had won the presidential election defeating the AL candidate. The BNP then took to the streets for the next decade, spending almost a decade leading street agitations and arguing that a military government which overthrows an elected civilian government should also be overthrown by any means including mass upsurge. Khaleda was considered an uncompromising foe of Ershad, while Hasina was a trifle softer.

In the ensuing 1991 parliamentary elections, Khaleda was a surprise winner as most expected Hasina and her established party machine to sweep to power. But even when they were fighting Ershad, they never stopped slugging each other. It is generally held that Ershad survived a decade not because he was doing wonders, but because he successfully played off Khaleda and Hasina against each other. The mutual hatred of the two leaders are legendary, and both have accused each other of the worst, including funding bump-off attempts.

Hasina sees Khaleda as leading a party spawned by the military, and therefore deserving no political space in Bangladesh. Many AL leaders also feel that they, more than others, have the legitimacy to rule Bangladesh, not least because the country fought the 1971 war under Hasina's father Rahman and his party Awami League.

Conversely, the BNP sees the AL as an intolerant party that set up the scary one-party rule and is therefore anti-democratic, hence unfit to govern Bangladesh. Khaleda presents her party as an anti-Indian platform. India is certainly less popular than Pakistan in Bangladesh because of many reasons including problems arising out of the Ganga water sharing that devastated Bangladesh, regular border skirmishes, migrant issues, unbalanced trade flow and India's big-neighbour kind of stances.

The BNP was in fact pushed out of power by the AL through prolonged street agitations which ran from 1994 to 1995. In the ensuing elections of 1996, the AL won consigning the BNP to the opposition. The BNP has tried, and is still trying to arouse the streets, but that hasn't worked, partly because the public dislikes military rulers like Ershad much more. The BNP has allied itself with Gen. Ershad's Jatiyo party—once an arch enemy—and the Islamic fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami to form an alliance which if it fails to oust Hasina, will fight the polls jointly.

The byzantine political configurations result from the mutual hatred that both ladies generate. This is what drives Bangla politics. Hasina's reference to military takeovers in her UN speech had little, if nothing to do with

Pakistan. Musharraf's was an overreaction from a disappointed man who saw India hit it off with the US, while his own campaign there was in the doldrums. It probably had nothing to do with Hasina's speech.

The Washington Post has done a story on the topic and mentions that, compared to the royal treatment that Atal Behari Vajpayee enjoyed, Musharraf was practically ignored by the US administration. Given the present US tilt towards India, he was seriously piqued and was probably angered that his legitimacy was further trashed by Hasina whose country doesn't even have a nuclear arrow, not to speak of sophisticated missiles. While the Bangladesh leader was grinding her axe at the international fora against her arch enemy, she had no inkling that it was making waves in the entire SAARC. Her ambitions may have been met.

The subsequent statements by the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry also makes the content of her speech clear. The spokesperson has said that it was a principled statement and not directed against any person or country. In fact, Hasina loves her acceptability at the SAARC level, and has never taken the 1971 issue to any international level to avoid a showdown with Pakistan.

Meanwhile, India is obviously cheering the whole episode as Pakistan hasn't gained any brownie points from the issue. Some Pakistani political analysts have said that the CEO has managed to get into a fight with a key South Asia ally. Bangladesh has an active relationship with India and shares a common boundary as well as many unresolved issues. The migrants issue is a serious sore point for both. In Bangla politics, India matters, while Pakistan exists only as part of a dreadful past and as a counterpoise to India. Pakistan has more friends than enemies in Bangladesh, and at least some activists, which is why anti-Indian groups can operate from there. But the present episode will make Pakistan's activities based in Bangladesh—if any—more difficult.

But Hasina also may thank the Pakistan leader for providing an issue just as election time draws near. She can call on political nostalgia and genocidal memories to whip up voter sentiments against the BNP, which is imaged as Pakistan-friendly. She has already called for a formal apology from Pakistan for what happened in 1971, and this time it will be a potent issue, at least for the time being. One more to add to her basket of the past which helps her deal with the present.

It will be difficult for the BNP now. The anti-Indian card will no longer be as big an ace as it was before. The BNP will have to respond with something concrete on the issue, and that can hardly be a defence of military take-overs. But if she criticises Pakistan, she will be seen as second fiddling Hasina, which will also go against her party. It is a political catch-22 that she might wish she wasn't caught in.

Hasina was given support by India after her father's assassination in 1976. She remains grateful. Now, she will have cause to be grateful to Pakistan for what could have been an avoidable reaction. It is all in the SAARC spirit.

SRI LANKA

WISHING FOR A HUNG PARLIAMENT

CAN A hung Parliament that is widely predicted in the run-up to Sri Lanka's 10 October general elections, be the troubled country's great opportunity to abandon the traditional confrontational politics, and work towards a consensual government and the resolution of the ethnic problem that has led to a 17-year-long civil war? Some analysts and intellectuals looking for positive aspects of an otherwise grim scenario concede the possibility.

Most observers agree that neither President Chandrika Kumaratunga's ruling People's Alliance (PA) or the opposition United National Party (UNP) led by Ranil Wickremesinghe, are likely to win a comfortable working majority in the 225-member Parliament, particularly in the context of the country's proportional representation system of elections that makes large majorities improbable, if not impossible. Although the picture can change in the four weeks before the poll, as Liberal Party leader Professor Rajiva Wijesinha says, "Unless there is a lot of cheating, no party will get an absolute majority." S.L. Gunasekera who leads the new Sinhala Urumaya Party emphatically agrees: "A hung Parliament is a certainty if there is a free and fair election."

But there are widely held fears that the election will neither be free nor fair, and that the government will maximise the advantages of incumbency to boost its own chances. Already the anticipated violence has erupted with seven persons including a candidate, being killed in election-related incidents. While


MIN BAJRACHARYA

Will Kumaratunga have the last laugh?

Kumaratunga maintains the public stance that the election must be won "by fair and legitimate means", and says that "we have no intention of winning by violence, thuggery or stuffing ballot boxes", there has yet been no credible explanation offered on why an independent election commission that has long been demanded was not appointed in time for the elections.

Kumaratunga was first elected prime minister in August 1994, and was elected to the nearly all-powerful presidency three months later after her main opponent was assassinated by the Tamil Tigers. She pledged to abolish this office by July 1995 but failed to deliver, and won a second six-year term in December last year when she herself narrowly escaped a Tiger assassination bid at her final campaign rally. She remains a prime target of the LTTE, and has been forced by security considerations to limit her campaign appearances. Kumaratunga still says that she will abolish the presidency through a new constitution if her party is returned in October, but she wants a six-year transitional provision that will keep her in office with all powers intact for the forthcoming term.

For his part, Wickremesinghe, a former prime minister, has promised to "clip Chandrika's wings", and says that the president will have to learn to live with an opposition-led Parliament which will restore the supremacy of the legislature using existing constitutional provisions. "From 11 October (the day after the elections), we will ensure that she will only be a nominal president. The Parliament and cabinet will be more powerful." But given the powers the present Constitution vests in the president, it is not going to be as easy as campaign rhetoric makes it sound, for it is Kumaratunga who will have to decide who commands the most parliamentary support and pick a prime minister when the election results are in.

Sri Lanka has had a brief 3-month experience with the president and the prime minister belonging to two different parties when the UNP's 17-year rule was ended in 1994 by a whisker of a victory by the Kumaratunga-led PA. But the then president Dingiri Banda Wijetunga, catapulted into office in the wake of president Ranasinghe Premadasa's assassination, was a lame duck nearing the end of his term. He adopted a conciliatory, non-confrontational attitude towards Kumaratunga who served briefly as prime minister under him, until she consolidated her power by being elected president. By ensuring the support of Tamil parties in Parliament, she was able to convert what was initially a single-vote advantage in the legislature into a comfortable working majority.

But it is going to be different this time round. Wickremesinghe believes that Kumaratunga's 700000 majority over him at the last December's presidential election he expected to win, was largely influenced by sympathy votes following the attempt on her life three days before polling. Whether the UNP can retain the backing of minority Tamil voters who supported Wickremesinghe for the presidency, remains an open question. But Kumaratunga's government is unpopular, particularly on the cost of living issue. Another imponderable is whether the Tigers will once again attempt to influence the election result by deploying their suicide bombing capability. They've already played their hand with a 15 September suicide bombing in Colombo that killed six and injured 28. Smaller parties that can tilt the balance of power by appealing to voters disenchanted with both the PA and the UNP, are also a part of the equation.

Even the state-controlled media now trumpeting PA propaganda have admitted to the likelihood of a close finish. Meanwhile, the *Sunday Observer* commented in its editorial that "there is every possibility that the coming Parliament will truly reflect the will of the people and could lead to a new chapter of consensual politics in the annals of Sri Lanka." Ken Balendra, head of John Keells Holdings, the country's biggest business conglomerate, looks forward to that day. He says that nothing could be better for the country than the PA and the UNP working together: "A national government will be ideal."

—Manik de Silva

UNAIDS REPORT

There are 34.3 million adults and children living with HIV/AIDS in the world today.

Realpolitik of AIDS

The South Asian response to AIDS is still mired in denial, ignorance and wishful thinking. But with more than a million AIDS orphans in the region, it is time the problem is tackled head-on. Look to Uganda for the answers.

by ***Mitu Varma***

"...EXTREME POVERTY is the world's biggest killer and the greatest cause of ill-health and suffering across the globe," said South African President Thabo Mbeki in his opening address to the 13th global AIDS conference in Durban in July. Even as he was speaking, a number of people began walking out.

South Africa is home to the largest number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world—a staggering 4.2 million.

"Some in our common world consider the questions I and the rest of our government have raised around the HIV-AIDS issue...as akin to grave criminal and genocidal misconduct. What I hear said repeatedly, stridently, angrily, is—do not ask any questions!"

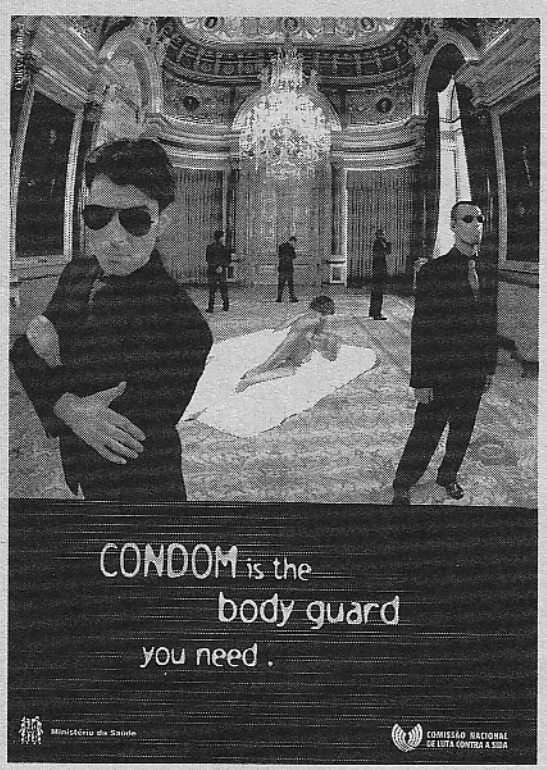
The president went on to say that the repeated assaults of a large number of diseases on the immune systems of Africans because of the endemic poverty, could have led to the collapse of the systems. And that led him to question if all the ills of Africa could be blamed on a single virus.

President Mbeki raised global ire when he set up a commission to probe whether safe sex, condoms and anti-retrovirals (ARVs), were the only answer to the health crisis confronting his country. Most people surmised that he was questioning whether HIV in fact caused AIDS. The president took considerable pains to explain that he had in no way pulled back from

strategising and implementing a full-fledged programme to tackle the disease in the conventional way.

But no one, especially in the Western media, seemed in a forgiving mood. The president was panned for diverting energies from the fight against AIDS by raising unnecessary questions, and for not providing South Africans access to anti-retroviral drugs for treatment.

Indeed, the whole debate during the Durban conference seemed to turn to the issue of access to treatment. It wasn't so much access to care and treatment of "opportunistic infections" or prophylaxis (preventive treatment), but access to ARVs that was taken as the core concern. Before the grand opening ceremony, Winnie Mandela and other celebrities led a march to demand access to treatment. Justice Edward Cameron of South Africa delivered the prestigious Johnathan Mann memorial lecture at the opening plenary to repeated applause. Justice Cameron is a revered public figure who came out into the open about his HIV positive status, and actively began campaigning for access to treatment for the resource-poor. He stressed that nine-tenths of the people living with HIV/AIDS were in poor countries. "Given the epidemic's two most significant changes, in demographics and in medical science, it must surely be that the most urgent challenge it offers to us is to find constructive ways of bringing these life-saving drugs to those millions of people whose lives can be spared by them," he said.



The ARVs act against HIV at different stages of its lifecycle, inhibiting its reproduction and boosting CD4 or immune cell counts. They are taken in a combination of three or more drugs of two different types, and have dramatically improved the quality of life of those suffering from AIDS in the developed world. In fact, a lot many scientists have begun talking of AIDS as a manageable disease like diabetes which can be brought under control through drugs.

But the drugs for AIDS are so very expensive, more so because the patent on most has not expired. And they require rigorous monitoring while being administered; viral load, or the measure of the virus circulating in the body, and CD4 counts, have to be taken constantly to monitor dosage. Patients have to take a number of pills, maybe up to 30 a day for the rest of their lives since viral loads shoot up and C4 cells go down once the medication is stopped. The drugs are also highly toxic and carry many side effects, the long-term ones not even known. Patients tend to develop resistance to some of the drugs and the combination may have to be changed from time to time to remain effective. Tests to detect resistance can cost between USD 400 to 800.

> In South Asia, the stigma attached to AIDS is still so strong that there are few voices that call for access to treatment.

It is easy to see that these drugs are beyond the means of most Africans or South Asians. But it simply is not just about the lack of access to drugs, it is also overwhelmingly about the absence of health infrastructure to deliver and monitor the drugs. For instance, while USD 1500 is the expenditure on health per person in Northern America and Europe, in some Asian and African countries, the spending is less than USD 20 per person. Structural adjustment policies advocated by the World Bank have further squeezed expenditure on public health in most developing nations.

While the industrialised world boasts of 200-300 doctors and 500-1000 nurses per 100,000 people, that figure for South Asia, excluding India, is 33 doctors and 24 nurses. While France and the US have 8.7 and 4 beds per 1000 people respectively, Bangladesh has only 0.3 beds per 1000 people. To come up to even 10 percent of the money spent on the health of each person by countries in the industrialised world, Bangladesh would have to raise a sum of USD 13 billion annually, a figure equivalent to 29 percent of the country's GNP.

It is only through this kind of an investment that access to ARVs through the public health

A poster that speaks for itself.

system would become feasible, although this cannot pay for the drugs themselves. Increased expenditure on the public health system would obviously help combat a host of other diseases, which would then mean a reduction in the transmission of HIV. For instance, decreasing sexually transmitted infections would cut down on HIV infection. It would also help prevent HIV infected persons from contracting a number of other opportunistic infections once they are removed from the environment.

The cost of ARVs varies from country to country, depending on patent laws, import duties, registration costs, taxes, distribution costs and dispensing fees. While costs in South Africa are prohibitive because of patent laws and value added taxes, in India they are much cheaper because the Intellectual Property Rights of the WTO do not come into operation here for another four to five years, and the Indian pharmaceutical industry is manufacturing, packaging and even exporting the drugs. In India, the indigenous manufacturer Cipla says the basic triple therapy will soon be available for USD 2500 a year as opposed to USD 9950 in the United States. But the costs are still prohibitive for a country where the per capita income is a mere USD 370 per year.

A sample of the memory box (below), and 11-year-old Nkosi Johnson, born HIV-positive, making a speech at the opening of the Durban conference.

- Our family came from...
- Your grandparents' names were...
- These are some of the jobs our family did...
- I was born in... Your father was born in...
- When I was growing up this is what it was like...
- Our family values and traditions were...
- You walked when you were... You first talked when you were... Your first words were...
- Your favourite foods were... You didn't like to eat...
- When you were little you loved to...
- Your favourite book, game, cartoon character, TV show were...
- I always laughed when you...
- I always remember the time...
- I hope you never forget the time...
- Here is the most important advice I would like you to remember when you are grown up...
- I want to tell you how much I love you...

Poverty and AIDS

AIDS in South Asia is a widespread phenomenon. In Sri Lanka, it is the women migrant workers who are the most affected. In Bangladesh, pervasive poverty and unemployment, frequent natural disasters, high mobility and migration, the low socio-economic status of women and their trafficking, commercial blood donation and the high prevalence of STDs, are recognised by the UNDP as factors favouring the spread of HIV in that country.

War and refugee movements in Afghanistan, poverty, trafficking, migration, and the secondary status of women in Nepal, and poverty, income and gender disparities and high rates of sexually transmitted diseases are recognised as predisposing factors in India in the UNDP report on AIDS in South and South West Asia, 1999.

The common thread everywhere turns out to be the lack of resources and under-development in each of these countries. This brings us back to President Mbeki's opening address where he repeatedly stressed the links between poverty and not only with AIDS, but a host of other diseases, and the fact that a public health crisis is facing most of us in the developing world.

Given all these factors, where do South Asians stand in the global debate on AIDS? The African National Congress government in South Africa has clearly laid down that it is not going to provide ARVs through its public health system for a few, till it can afford to provide them for all its people. The stance does not seem at all remiss when seen against the country's struggle for equity in the apartheid days.

Nono Similela, chief director of the South African HIV/AIDS programme, says the drug regimens require doses on full stomachs with clean drinking water. Even these are not available in most parts of Africa and South Asia. Defending her president, she says that while AIDS activists say no African leader has political commitment, they refuse to listen to anyone who has a different perspective to offer.

South Africa's strategic plan for HIV/AIDS and STD (for the period 2000-2005), concentrates on bringing all sections of the people together in a massive effort at providing prevention and care. Meanwhile, the country is also grappling with tremendous social and political issues post-apartheid. In an already divided society, AIDS has managed to create one more rift. The clamour for access to ARVs has generated very emotional responses for, and against, the government's stance. The pharmaceutical industry also has a key role in this contentious debate since it has too much at stake.

In South Asia as yet, there is no clamour for ARVs. In fact, the stigma attached to the disease is still so strong, that there are few voices that

dare to call for access to treatment. It is true that the right to good health, treatment and care, is a basic human right, and it is criminal to deny people access to drugs because of lack of resources. But till such time as South Asia can work itself out of the resource crunch, where is it to look for answers?

North of South Africa to Uganda, it would seem. A country with as poor a resource base as most of South Asia, Uganda has managed to bring down its prevalence rates from a remarkably high 30 percent to 10 percent between 1992 and 1996.

The Uganda lesson

Denial, ignorance and plain wishful thinking still characterise a lot of South Asian responses to the AIDS pandemic. The result is often an ineffectual, piecemeal and fragmented approach that only skirts the issue without tackling it head on. On the other hand, a relative success story like Uganda is characterised by strong political commitment, a coherent and integrated approach, and an openness that allows discussion on key issues like sex and sexuality.

The Ugandan government's first official response to the epidemic was in 1986, just about when the Indian government also woke up to AIDS. The then health minister, Dr. Rukahana Rugunda, told a shocked World Health Assembly in Geneva that Uganda had a problem with AIDS at a time when the disease was associated with homosexuality, and stigma. Like India, Uganda too set up an AIDS Control Programme in the Ministry of Health in 1986. But they soon realised that the consequences of the epidemic went far beyond merely health. In 1992, they set up the Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC) by a statute of Parliament and placed it directly under the office of the president.

President Yoweri Museveni spoke about the problem from every platform, increasing awareness and reducing the stigma attached to the disease. In 1994, the UAC came up with the Multi Sectoral Approach (MASA) where programmes for AIDS control were created in 12 line ministries. NGOs, CBOs, the private sector, religious leaders and a host of other players were involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Young people were provided counselling and support through youth centres that sought to address queries on sex in an open and frank manner. Two path-breaking publications for very young children and teenagers—*Young Talk* and *Straight Talk*—were started to provide accurate information about reproductive health issues. These are read by more than one million children and adolescents. They talk about the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence, sexuality and safe sex, including abstinence, STDs, including HIV and AIDS, menstruation, pregnancy, family planning and life skills.

The Straight Talk Foundation also organises visits to schools by doctors, nurses, midwives and counsellors to talk about these issues, while also producing popular radio programmes on the subject. Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) has been promoted in a big way and community initiatives have led to the formation of a number of care and support organisations, the best known of which is TASO (The AIDS Support Organisation). It has eight centres around the country and offers services in testing, counselling, treatment, care, and emotional, medical and social support.

Another such organisation is NACOWLA or the National Council for Women Living with AIDS, which provides a strong emotional and financial support network for affected women through self-help schemes. Among their more touching schemes is the one where mothers get together with their children to write "memory books" to record their family history and important moments, so that the family legacy remains with the children once their parents are no more.

MAIL & GUARDIAN

An appeal to Mbeki outside the Durban conference venue.

Uganda has at least two million AIDS orphans. They are categorised as children under the age of 15 who have lost either their mother or both parents to AIDS. At first there were homes for AIDS orphans, but now the Ugandan policy is to trace the relatives of as many children and send them to live with their ex-

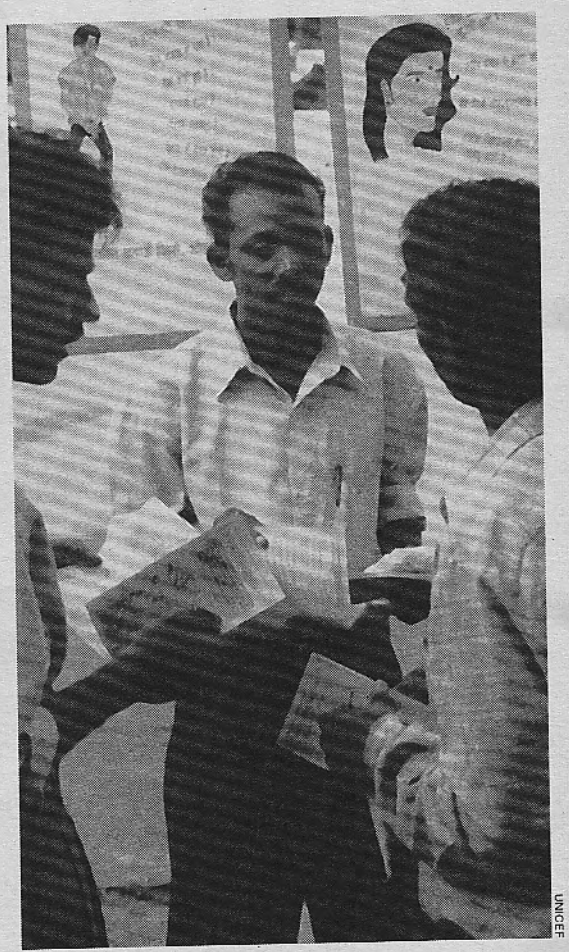
tended families. The government provides financial support for their education and upkeep. However, there are still child-headed households in the country, and some homes for orphans still remain, as there are many whose relatives could not be tracked down. But at least the government has a policy on the issue, and is trying hard to deal with this very difficult problem.

By contrast, at a post Durban conference in New Delhi, a top official from one of India's most affected states, stood up and said there were as yet no children affected by the pandemic in our part of the world. There are 5.6 million AIDS orphans in South and South East Asia, according to the latest UNAIDS figures.

In Uganda, there are public figures who have helped in fighting the taboo associated with the ailment. The famous singer Phil Lutaaya, who declared himself HIV positive and then campaigned against the illness through his music, was responsible for raising awareness among the youth in a very big way. The dynamic war hero, Major Rubaramira Ruranga, tours the country exhorting soldiers to avoid the infection, and offering hope to those who have it. Major Ruranga has been HIV positive since 1989, and has started the National Guidance and Empowerment Network (NGEN).

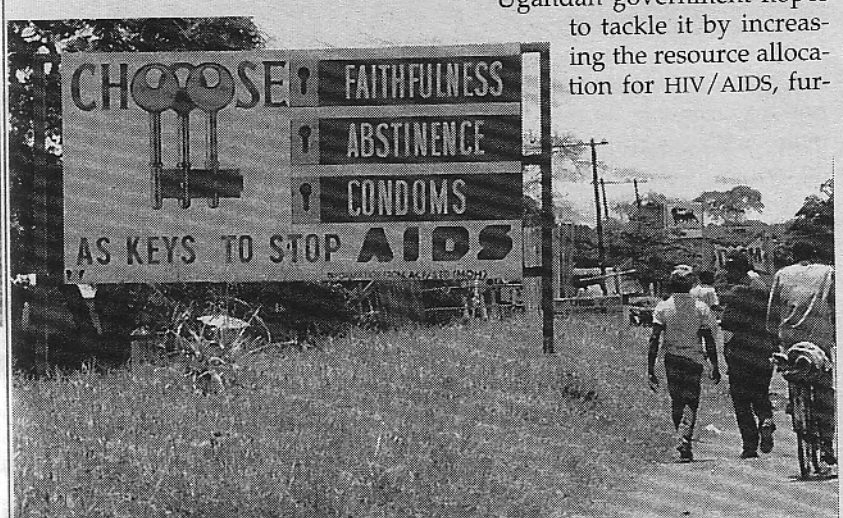
Studies in Uganda have shown that there has been a discernible behaviour change as a result of such intensive campaigning. Two in three persons in the country are able to cite at least two acceptable ways of protection against HIV, the proportion of people who have ever used a condom has risen from 7 percent in 1989 to 42 percent in 1995, at least 57 percent of women and 64 percent of men have restricted their number of sexual partners, and the median age for the first sexual encounter in girls rose to 16 years in 1995 compared to 15 years in 1989.

Prevalence rates, however, have been stagnating at 10 percent for some time now. The Ugandan government hopes to tackle it by increasing the resource allocation for HIV/AIDS, further integrating the national AIDS policy with other initiatives like the country's Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), and improving monitoring and evaluation networks. It is also looking at decentralising power to local governments to formulate their own action plans, providing prompt treatment for opportunistic infections, increasing information dissemination to 10-24 year olds, and encouraging regional initiatives.


UNICEF

Professor J Rwomushana, Coordinator Health and Research at the UAC says Uganda prefers to concentrate on its efforts in developing life skills and encouraging behaviour change. It cannot afford to divert attention to a campaign for access to ARVs, since they are well aware that the government cannot afford the drugs right now. Uganda's success story stems in large measure from the fact that the whole country has realised the magnitude of the problem, and has come forward to combat it. This flows from the fact that there is no single person you can talk to in Uganda whose family has not been directly or indirectly affected by AIDS. The question is, can South Asia afford to wait till things come to such a pass?

A billboard along an Ugandan road (below), and Indian activists discussing a campaign.



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ASIA FELLOWS PROGRAM 2001-02 INVITES APPLICATIONS FROM SOUTH ASIA

The ASIA Fellows Program 2001-02 offers opportunities to outstanding young and mid-career Asian scholars, policy makers, journalists and media professionals, to study and conduct research in a participating Asian country for up to nine months from or after July 2001. Applications are accepted for projects in the **arts, humanities and social sciences.** The ASIA Fellows Program is funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation to the Institute of International Education (IIE).

Fellowship Activities: Fellowships may involve a variety of activities, including field-based research, language study, or courses related to another Asian country (preferably in a different region of Asia). Fellows may also have opportunities to present guest lectures or to conduct seminars and workshops at the invitation of host institutions. The program is open to applicants who are **citizens of and resident in** Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Republic of Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, the People's Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea. Projects can be carried out **only** in these countries. The program is not open to applicants from Afghanistan, Singapore, Japan, Hong Kong, North Korea, or Taiwan, and projects cannot be carried out in these countries. **In this notice, we invite applications from citizens of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka only.** Projects must focus on an Asian country **other** than the applicant's own. While an applicant from South or Southeast Asia may propose a project in a country within his/her own region, preference is given to applicants who propose to study or conduct research in a region of Asia other than their own (e.g., a fellowship to an Indian scholar or professional for research/study in China). Applicants should not plan to study or conduct their research in a country with which their home country has a difficult diplomatic relationship because of the uncertainties of securing an affiliation and obtaining a visa for research or study for a long-term stay. Fellowships are not for the principal purpose of completing doctoral dissertations.

Eligibility Requirements

- Citizens of the above South Asian countries
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- Proficiency in English or in the language of the host country appropriate to the proposed research project
- A minimum of 3 years of university teaching experience for scholars or 5 years of work experience for professionals
- Preference is given to candidates under age forty-five and to those without recent experience in the proposed host country.

Application Forms: Please write, fax or e-mail for Information Brochures and Application Forms:

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Tel./Fax: 91-11-460-4126/27; 469-8201, E-mail: upiasi@del2.vsnl.net.in

For further information, access the ASIA Fellows Program website:- http://www.iie.org/cies/asiafellows/
Deadline for Completed Applications: January 14, 2001

Old diseases die hard

Malaria and TB remain the biggest killers in a militarised region that gives scant priority to health care.

by ***Rajashri Dasgupta***

There are some legacies of the past that refuse to be showpieced on a museum shelf. In the South Asian Subcontinent, even at the beginning of a century as medically advanced as this one, it is 'ancient' diseases like tuberculosis (TB), malaria, acute respiratory infections (ARI), including pneumonia and influenza, and diarrhoeal diseases, that remain the leading killers. Unlike smallpox that has been consigned to medical history books, these diseases continue to stalk the region wreaking havoc on the population. And given the political economy of the region, it is unlikely that they will bid farewell anytime soon.

Despite gigantic strides in modern medicine and the discovery of powerful anti-TB and -malarial drugs, it is significant that more people are dying today of the two diseases than in any other period in history, especially in the developing world. About 98 percent of the two million TB deaths every year and 95 percent of the eight million new cases are in the developing world. In South East Asia, TB kills 2000 people every day. In Bangladesh, it afflicts more than 60 percent of the adult population and in India every year, 500000 people die of the disease.

The world's most important tropical disease even now—malaria—kills more people than any other communicable disease except TB. It is the major public health problem in 90 countries and is endemic in eight South East Asian countries. According to a UNICEF report, it kills 3000 children every day, and is one of the major causes of under-five deaths. According to a 1998 WHO report on infectious diseases that affect under-five children, 3.5 million died of ARI, 2.2 million of diarrhoeal diseases, I.5 million of TB, and 0.9 million of measles.

There is no doubt that these deaths and illnesses are inextricably linked in developing countries to poverty. Living in impoverished dwellings, with immune systems weakened by malnourishment, the Subcontinent's poorest men, women and children are more prone to deadly diseases. Malaria and TB are diseases that impact at least three times more greatly on the poor than any other disease. Studies reveal how in North Bangladesh, TB patients spend USD 130 on private doctors, while also losing 14 months of work time thereby pauperising an already impoverished population. Another study in Bangladesh shows that 40 percent of the households smitten by TB, sold assets and livestock to pay for the treatment, and also accumulated debts. In India, a survey in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra revealed similar findings as families had to borrow money and sell land, pushing them further into the poverty trap. It is poverty that breeds these diseases and coexists with them in a vicious circle, each reinforcing the other.

South Asia has remained one of the most deprived regions in the world, despite its rich resources, both natural and human. According to the Human *Development Report* (1997), the region has remained the poorest, most illiterate and the most malnourished. With 600 million people living below the poverty line and

A TB patient with his family in a Bangladesh village.

in conditions that match Sub Saharan Africa, it has 395 million illiterate adults, and 50 million children without access to schools. Its illiteracy levels exceed those of Sub Sahara--51 percent as against 43 percent in Sub Saharan Africa.

As global poverty increases, three billion people in developing countries live on as less as USD 2 a day, one billion do not have adequate housing, while 840 million suffer from malnourishment. At the other end of the spectrum, however, the assets of the three richest people in the world are more than the combined gross national product (GNP) of the 48 least developed countries. In fact, the three richest officers of Microsoft have more assets (USD 140 billion) than the combined GNP of the 43 least developed countries.

Consequently, indiscriminate borrowings by governments of South Asia to face the domestic crisis has led to a debilitating debt burden, disproportionately large compared to the GNP. This burden saps their economic vitality and drains scarce resources from social sectors, to service and repay high levels of debt. Too often a country has to divert resources, with the result that it has to deprive its people of health care, nutrition and education. In fact, each baby in South Asia on an average begins life encumbered with a debt of USD 417.

Today, the total external debt as a percentage of the GNP of some countries in the Subcontinent like Sri Lanka is as high as 51 percent, Nepal 49 percent and Pakistan 47. According to an IMF study, all of South Asia spends more on debt servicing than on basic social sectors like primary health care, nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and education.

Poor man's diseases

Prioritising resources is a controversial issue; the persistence of the major diseases in South Asia is a commentary on the state of the public health policies and systems, and the allocation of funds. During the 1990s, the IMF induced Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was launched in the region, and privatisation of public services became the key. In 1997, India's public expenditure on health was only 0.7 percent of its GDP, while it was 0.8 percent for Pakistan. With an over-emphasis on controlling population growth and achieving 'targets', resources for critical public health programmes to prevent contagious diseases, have been further curtailed leading to the virtual breakdown of primary health systems.

The outlay on control of communicable diseases in India declined from about 30 percent of the total health budget to a mere 8 percent by the early 1990s. On the other hand, population control programmes began to absorb 25 percent of the health budget, compared to 6-8 percent in the Second and Third Five Year Plans. The financial cutbacks on malaria control programmes in the early 1990s due to SAP has had a disastrous effect in the region, admits Gautam Basu, joint secretary, Health, Government of India. "In the mid-1940s, with the introduction of insecticides into a well developed health infrastructure and control system, death rates were practically halved, creating demographic history," says Dr Hiranthi Wijemanne of Sri Lanka. "A major reason for the resurgence of malaria today is because the malarial parasite has become resistant to insecticides. Malathion has proved to be ineffective during the epidemic. Resistance to insecticides like Malathion is also because of faulty and inadequate spraying. Moreover, the degradation of the environment such as piling garbage, stagnant choked rivers and water bodies have become lethal breeding grounds for mosquito larvae."

Immunisation and infection containment strategies can only work if the public health services are enhanced, and the capacity and the quality of the health sector improved in general. The synergy between immunisation and the health system is critically essential. This is amply reflected in the relative success of the southern states of India, where, for example, the incidence of polio has fallen sharply. "This

is because the health infrastructure there is much better organised and managed than the northern states. Even routine immunisation for diphtheria, BCG, tetanus of children has done well," says Dr Robert Kim-Farley, WHO representative. On multi-drug resistant TB patients, Farley says, "More and more patients are becoming resistant to TB drugs precisely because they are unable to take full course of the treatment. There are bottlenecks in the continuous supply of drugs." When a patient discontinues treatment due to non-availability of drugs in the market or because he cannot afford it, he becomes resistant to the medicines. This has fatal consequences. The situation is aggravated in the Subcontinent because the health system is inadequate and non-existent in many parts.

"What is required is a basic health system which should be accessible, acceptable and accountable to the people," says Imrana Qadeer of Social Medicine and Community Health, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. A survey of 170 rural women living 25 kilometres from the industrial town of Bokaro, India, showed that none of them were even aware of the existence of a primary health centre (PHC). One had visited the centre once in her life and had found it closed. A random survey in the Subcontinent shows the dismal state of PHCs where there is no doctor or medicine, and most structures have been converted into cattle sheds. Patients complain that in the name of 'free' treatment, doctors charge them not only for the medicine but also for consultation.

With the impending introduction of the new Patents Law in India and Bangladesh due to pressure from the World Trade Organisation, drug prices have already shot up substantially (by some estimates by as much as 200 to 800 percent). For example, in India, the cost to the patient for diagnosis and successful treatment for TB is an average USD 150, more than half the annual income of a daily wage labourer. In Bangladesh, TB is known as the "king's disease" because only the rich can afford treatment. The poor are increasingly at the mercy of the emerging nexus of multinational drug companies, private doctors and their nursing homes, and expensive diagnostic laboratories.

It is in this context, that the resurgence of deaths due to malaria or TB, despite the availability of powerful drugs, can be best understood. The poor have no access to health care or life-saving drugs. "TB and other diseases being a poor man's disease have been neglected for several decades," says Qadeer. Despite government rhetoric on its commitment to eradicate killer diseases from their respective countries, a cursory survey of programmes tell a different story. Recent reports on TB programmes in India show among the reasons for poor performance are dismal organisational set-up, inadequate funds and shortage of drugs.

Unhealthy budget

Today, in 80 countries across the world less than 50 percent of the population have access to health care. Of the USD 60 billion spent worldwide annually on health research (public and private), only about 10 percent is spent on 90 percent of the world's health problems--those that affect the poorest people. "Never have so many had such broad and advanced access to health care. But never have so many been denied access to health," says a WHO report. It is also significant that the WHO woke up to the TB menace and declared it a global emergency only when the illness was 'discovered' in a patient in New York.

THE HINDU

Queuing up at a TB sanatorium near Madras.

Though debt imperils the progress of nations, waiving debt will not induce national governments not to indulge in social trade-offs. The vested interest of domestic ruling elites and their links with international powers is well established, says Qadeer. "It is important to understand the absorption of the ruling elite in the transglobal community of consumerists. They force structural adjustments within national economies on the people in the name of efficiency and progress."

Governments of developing countries have a notorious reputation for favouring their elites over their poor, and are responsible for the deteriorating health conditions in their countries. Much of the borrowed money whether in Pakistan, Burma or India, goes into callous expenditure in buying arms, investment in inappropriate projects, and personal overseas bank accounts. "Peace in the Subcontinent will re-

sult in a large 'peace dividend' and release large resources which can be re-deployed for strategies of direct attack on poverty and illiteracy," says economist Sushil Khanna.

It is not only the level of military expenditure that is an issue. Also important is the fact that a disproportionate amount of this is on 'foreign' arms. In other words, says Khanna, the proportion of expenditure on foreign goods (import intensity) is far higher in military spending than social sector expenditure. South Asia is largely a 'closed economy' and the economic development in the region has been constrained by availability of foreign exchange. "A cutback in military expenditure will be adequate to reduce the pressure on balance of payments by diverting demand away from the global 'merchants of death,'" says Khanna.

In a recent report by the International Institute of Strategic Studies, India's defence budget for a 1.2 million-strong military has gone up by 21 percent compared to the previous year's budget. Thirty percent of this budget will be spent for procuring weapons and on military research and development even as India embarks on large-scale development and deployment of missile systems. It is telling that the outlay for military hardware procurement has increased by 30 percent over last year's 16 percent increase.

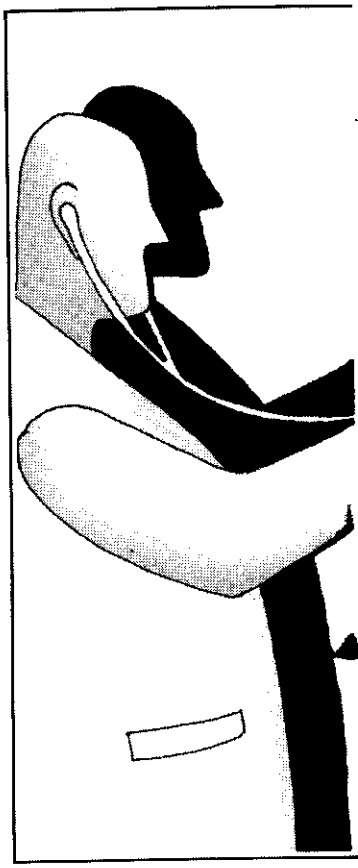
What is obvious is that there are funds available—but not for development. *The Human Development Report for South Asia* estimates that merely an outlay of one percent of the GNP on education would be adequate to send all the children to school in South. This is meagre if we take into account that it is less than what is spent on cosmetics in the US or on ice cream in Europe annually. Says Khanna, "The abominable social conditions persist not because of lack of resources but political will."

The tragedy of the Subcontinent is that the overwhelming amount of death and illness along with the debilitating socio-economic consequences, are immensely preventable. Diseases like malaria and TB do not have to be the death noose they once were. But that will only happen once the social and economic issues are addressed. But where's the political will to achieve such an end?

Guinea Pigs in

South Asia does not have clear guidelines for medical research. Multinational firms eager to push their products take advantage of a 'drug-naive' population.

by ***Sandhya Srinivasan***



"How long have you been on the medication? What are your symptoms?" These and a dozen more personal questions were the price I was paying for checking my blood levels of a prescription drug at the pharmacology department of a government hospital. I should have gone to one of the city's fancy diagnostic centres, where time is money, and only essential questions are asked. But my doctor had insisted that I get the test done at this department, and who was I to challenge her?

Why was such a detailed case history being filed I wondered, as I stared at the paint peeling off the walls while waiting for various ledgers to be thumbed through and long forms filled out. Why did the government doctor insist on going through all my medical papers and taking notes from them? She certainly had more questions than my own doctor had asked. And why did my doctor insist that I come to this centre for the test? "She wanted to save you money," said my interrogator. Kind thought that, but I was already out a couple of thousand rupees in this personal medical saga, and a few hundred more were hardly likely to make a difference.

Then the government doctor made an offhand remark: "We're doing research on your problem, building up a picture of the Indian situation..."

When I returned to pick up the test results, I asked if my medical records were going to be used for any research. "We conduct various studies here, write papers; they might refer to such records..." Do they get permission from the people whose records they use? "The notion of informed consent in India is very recent, and anyway, these are retrospective studies using medical records..."

"In that case, please note on my record that I do not give consent for it to be used for research purposes," I said abruptly, irritated as much by the doctor's evasiveness as her intentions. I stormed out of the office, my anger at the forces determining my own health and treatment, now directed at this cavalier attitude towards getting personal information for a research study.

That was the first time I got a tiny taste of what it felt like to be a 'research subject'—an object of unwarranted attention. The 'researchers' cared about only one thing: how the details of my health translated into a research paper for them.

Dangerous tests

While this experience disturbed me, the government doctors were only milking me for my fascinating medical history. They weren't depriving me of treatment, or using me as a guinea pig for new drugs. And this irritating experience was really nothing compared to what I discovered in the months that I spent investigating the sad state of research ethics in India.

I'd read of poor North Indian women with

n South Asia

MANOHAR RAI

pre-cancerous lesions of the cervix, who were observed but not given treatment—this as a part of documenting the natural history of cervical cancer. (Researchers at the Indian Council of Medical Research, under whose aegis the study was conducted, argued that at the time of the study, the guidelines didn't require informed consent.)

In the country's commercial capital, Bombay, people with severe angina were paying private doctors thousands of rupees for transmyocardial revascularisation, a procedure of unproven benefit. The company manufacturing the equipment provided it free of cost to the doctors, in order to collect data on the treatment and promote the equipment at the same time. (Later, a review in *The Lancet* concluded that the procedure might reduce symptoms "at the cost of notable operative mortality". Also, it made no difference to other measures of cardiac health such as exercise capacity, survival or cardiac function.)

In Karnataka and West Bengal, American doctors on a mission to control the population of the poor, were providing allopathic and traditional practitioners with pellets of Quinacrine, a potentially carcinogenic anti-malarial drug, to insert into the uteri of women desperate for an end to child-bearing. The drug causes inflammation and damage in the fallopian tubes—effectively a chemical sterilisation. Quinacrine sterilisation was promoted despite warnings from the WHO asking for toxicology tests. The doctors reported on these sterilisations as research.

This procedure was being carried out on thousands of women in India, Bangladesh, Vietnam and other poor countries. A writ petition in the Indian Supreme Court by activist organisations forced the Drug Controller of India to undertake to ban this unapproved practice, though the court did not insist on following up on the thousands of women who had already undergone the procedure, to see if they had developed complications. And reports indicate that the practice has continued despite the ban.

My own outrage does not begin to match that of Sharad Onta from the Resource Centre for Primary Health Care in Kathmandu, Nepal, who launched an agitation against clinical trials for a Hepatitis E virus vaccine. The trials were co-funded by Smith Kline Beecham and the US government's Walter Reed Army Institute of Medical Research, and conducted at its Nepal field station, WARUN. This particular viral infection affecting the liver can kill one in three affected pregnant women. It is spread through contaminated water, and is probably responsible for up to 90 percent of jaundice cases in Kathmandu where one in two people show signs of previous infection (one in 50 get the clinical disease), and Hepatitis E epidemics occur annually.

However, Onta argued that for the people of Kathmandu, it made better sense to tackle the Hepatitis E problem by cleaning up the water supply. But that wouldn't suit the researchers. Testing the vaccine depends on the community being provided a poor water supply, so that many research participants are exposed to the virus. To make sure the vaccine works, you need a good number of your research participants to get infected. The more common the disease, the smaller the sample size needed, and the faster the trial can be completed.

Onta also argued that it was highly unlikely that any such vaccine would become available and accessible to the people of Nepal, let alone to others in the developing countries. (The real market would be military personnel and West-

Ethical island

IF ANY country in the region is serious about medical ethics, it has got to be Sri Lanka. Professor Janaka de Silva, faculty in the department of medicine, University of Kelaniya and joint editor of the *Ceylon Medical Journal*, argues that ethics committees in Sri Lanka are hard to get past. "Medical ethics is a well-developed area in the country," he writes. "Most medical schools have ethics modules running through the five-year course." (Only a couple of medical schools in India have an extended programme on medical ethics in the syllabus.)

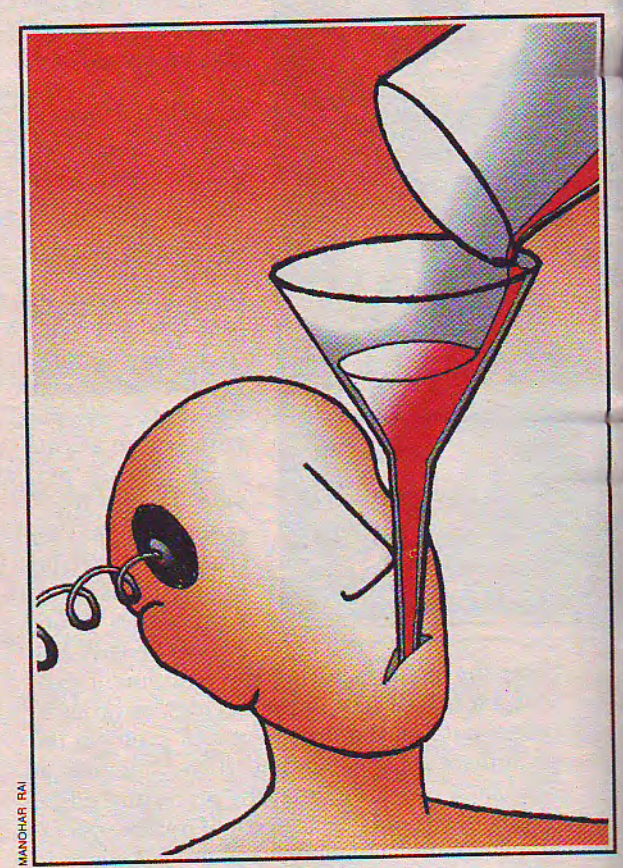
As for collaborative research in Sri Lanka, de Silva delineates the criteria: "There are three 'requirements' for international collaboration: the subject must be relevant to Sri Lanka, the material difficult to collect in the West, and it should be an area in which Sri Lanka does not possess the technical expertise, such as basic science research in tropical diseases." All universities and research institutes have ethics committees, and the Sri Lanka Medical Association provides ethical review of researchers without direct access to institutional ethics committees. Though research is not registered in a central system, it is registered with the various universities or grant providers, university research committees, the National Research Council, or the National Science Foundation. And research grants cannot be awarded unless ethical approval from the relevant ethics committee is submitted with the proposal. Most journals will not publish articles unless an ethics certificate is submitted with the paper.

This system works fairly well, according to the professor. "In fact some of the ethics committees and journals are considered too demanding and strict by many researchers in this country. Research in paediatrics is the toughest to get ethical clearance for. The Sri Lanka Medical Association has a standing committee for ethics which reports to the Council every month." Professor Priyani Soysa, chairman of National Health Research Committee, notes that the committee is preparing legislation on ethical review for all research in the country.

The system works better in Sri Lanka than in India probably because "it's a smaller country, easier to regulate, people are literate and becoming more demanding", writes de Silva, who argues that this has resulted in powerful and independent ethics committees with top rate researchers. Academic discussions on research often include references to ethical issues.

But what is to prevent individual researchers from coming in and conducting their own research, without institutional support? This might happen in survey research, de Silva concedes, "but interventional research such as drug trials, or anything requiring taking blood or tissue samples, may not be conducted without permission." A foreign doctor who wants to do that "would have to get registered locally with the Sri Lanka Medical Association". Presumably, then, the medical association's ethics committee would be kept informed.

ern travellers to the developing countries.) According to *The Lancet*, where this controversy was reported, the trial was suspended by the deputy mayor because procedures for informing the local government had allegedly been ignored. Also, though Rob Scott, head of the WARUN field station, insisted that volunteers had given their informed consent to participate in the research, the deputy mayor insisted that "they had not told the people clearly what they were doing... Nepal should not be made a laboratory for the interests of the American army." WARUN officials maintain that the controversy was politically motivated, and that stopping the trial would deprive people in developing countries of the benefits of life-saving research.



MANOHAR RAI

Informed consent

This last controversy is the classic debate on the ethics of collaborative research between developed and developing countries. It has come back into the public eye for two reasons. First, pressures on drug companies to produce new drugs and fast, is sending them in droves to developing countries where trials can be done cheap. An article in *The Economist* (29 January 2000) declares that India has 'not-so-healthy' people in "industrial quantities, and contract-

research organisations (CROs) which undertake clinical trials and other services for pharmaceutical companies, are beginning to notice".

The magazine mentions three CROs in India: Quintiles Transnational, a North Carolina-based company with an Indian joint venture whose customers are mainly American and European pharmaceutical firms, recently started clinical trials in India; the Bombay-based pharmaceutical company Nicholas Piramal expects to have revenues of INR 100-120 million within three years; and Max India signed a deal with an affiliate of Harvard Medical School to conduct clinical trials in India.

The article notes that the United States, Japan and the European Union agreed some years ago on common standards for running clinical trials. This means the US would accept data (towards drug approval) from anywhere in the world as long as those standards were met. Trials in India would cost less than a third of what they would in the West. Access to large numbers of people suffering from diseases like cancer, heart disease and AIDS drastically cuts the time needed to bring new drugs to the market. The existence of a 'drug-naïve' population, particularly to AIDS drugs, further simplifies and shortens the research process.

The technological revolution in India is also proving that the country has the resources to conduct trials that meet Western standards. It is another matter that ethics is more difficult to monitor, and may fall by the wayside. Or that the benefits of such research are unlikely to become accessible to the people on whom such drugs are tested. In fact, almost the entire Subcontinent is available for drug research, according to an Internet listing of various companies in the area which conduct this work for a fee.

People have argued that such research does not bother to get true informed consent, and exploits patients' medical illiteracy. Informed consent is not a one-time event but a process which must ensure that potential participants are given all necessary information and its implications, understand this information, and are in a position to make a voluntary decision on participation. The fact is that the consent process is influenced by many factors, including potential participants' economic circumstances, their health, their access to health services, and by whether the researcher really tries to communicate all the necessary information. A signed consent form is no guarantee of informed consent.

Unfortunately, some researchers take the position of the South African branch of a well-known CRO when it was ordered to stop all drug trials after reports of deaths. The company's representative insisted that the company had ensured that the participants had given their voluntary informed consent. How did that take place? "We checked all the forms to see if they were signed."

Research abuse

With the population hysteria, much of medical research in poor countries seems to concern contraceptives. Women's organisations such as the Saheli Women's Collective in Delhi and the Forum for Women's Health in Bombay, have held that contraceptive research is fundamentally different from other research: contraceptives are used by healthy women, and not for the prevention or treatment of any disease. Over the years, various activist publications have carried detailed articles challenging the many research projects on provider-controlled, long-acting hormonal contraceptives such as implants, injectables and, now, anti-fertility vaccines. For example, in the March 1985 issue of the *Socialist Health Review*, researcher Ramla Bauxamana dates India's role as a testing ground for contraceptives back to the 1960s, initiated by various international organisations. She estimates that by 1985, at least 50,000 women had taken part in research on various intra-uterine devices and hormonal contraceptives, through contraceptive testing units in Delhi and 14 other cities. Another article in the same issue argues that contraceptive research has tended to focus on provider-controlled methods, and was being conducted without evidence of informed consent or long-term follow-up—a theme repeated in publication after publication over the years.

The most recent controversies have been on the safety and efficacy of anti-fertility vaccines, and their ethical testing. In Saheli's 1998 publication, *Target Practice: Anti-Fertility Vaccines and Women's Health*, the writers argue that current research violates international guidelines on the scientific basis for human trials, on research with unpredictable hazards, risk-benefit assessment, informed consent, the use of lactating women as research subjects, and protection of participants who suffer injury.

The toothless watchdog in the many cases of unethical research brought to the media's attention, has been the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR). Though in 1980, the ICMR's policy statement on medical research called for setting up ethics review boards at all research institutions, and insisted that it would not fund research which had not undergone ethical review, this national body has been unable to play a major role in the monitoring of its own research, not to speak of other organisations. Se-

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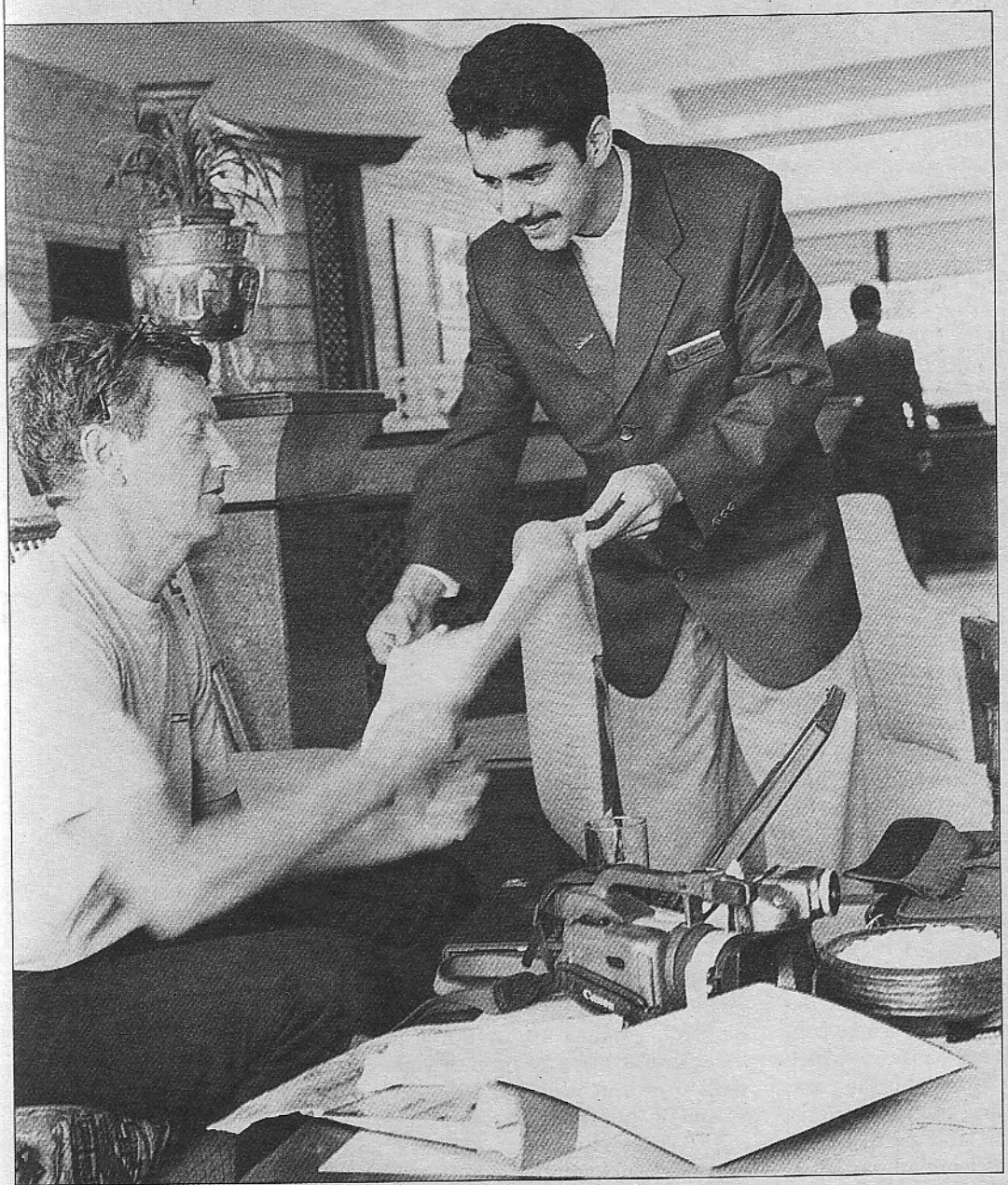

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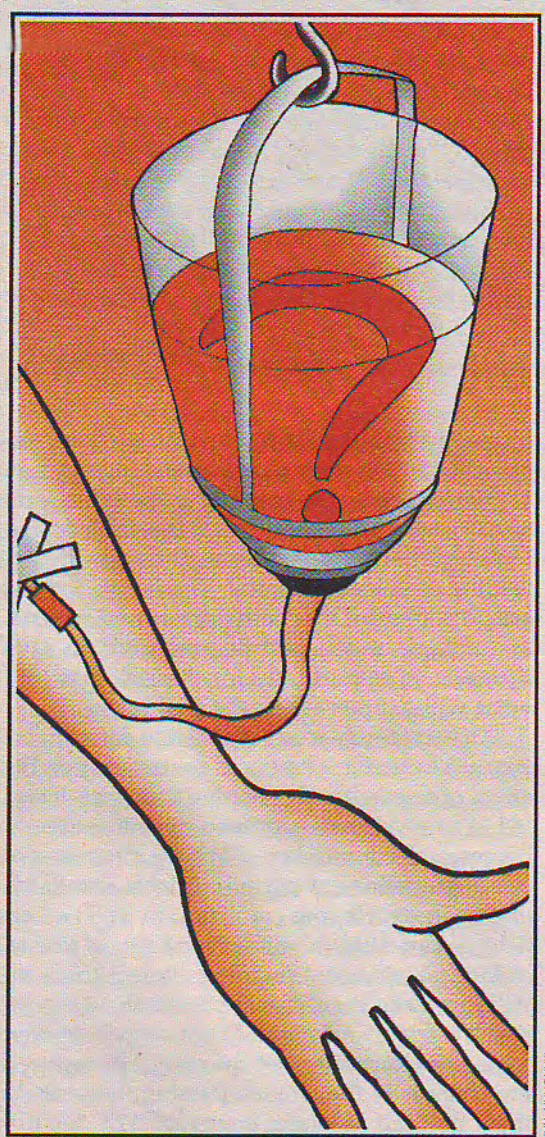
nior officials have admitted that many of the ICMR's own institutions do not have functioning ethics committees. Even where committees exist, they are driven by internal politics and the pressure for funds. They are worried that if the ethics committee rejects the project, the project—and the associated funds—will go to another institution. Not a small matter in these days of cutbacks.

Equally important, the ICMR has no say in research it does not fund. So unethical research is exposed by activist organisations and the press, but goes unpunished in the absence of a strong regulatory system. Nor can victims of research abuse count on the legal system to help them. In the US, errant researchers can be sued. In countries like India, even the rich don't believe the legal system works; the poor will rarely consider approaching it for justice.



MANOHAR RAI

Violations

The search for an AIDS vaccine is a good example of the potential for unethical research and how desperate people volunteer to become guinea pigs. In May 1999, IS Gilada, the founder-director of an NGO working with HIV patients, was arrested for helping a US company test a vaccine on 10 HIV positive people. The vaccine, administered in 1994, reportedly was based on a strain of bovine immunodeficiency virus. Investigating officer Dhanraj Vanjari charged that "Experiments were conducted under the guise of treatment... The doctors may have obtained consent, but the patients were under the impression that they were receiving treatment, not an untested, unapproved vaccine." The authorities responded four years after the trials, when one of the HIV-positive people filed a criminal complaint; he was under the impression that the vaccine was a cure for AIDS. The petitioner died and the case was pursued by his relatives. More recently, the National AIDS Control Organisation announced that India would participate in properly regulated trials for AIDS vaccines, for which cohorts from 'high risk' groups were being identified—STD clinic clients, commercial sex workers and injecting drug users.

No debate in Pakistan

MEDICAL ETHICS, particularly research ethics, is not debated extensively in Pakistan, says Kausar S Khan of the Aga Khan university. But his university has been teaching bioethics to undergraduate students for at least a decade, and recently introduced it at the resident doctors' level. Though the university ethics review committee reviews all research within the institution, there is little information on trials in other centres. "Though bioethics has entered the discourse in the physicians' community in Pakistan, it is not as organised as it should be," says Dr Khan.

The Pakistan Medical Research Council (PMRC) has its own Ethical Review Committee that reviews any research project submitted involving human beings, for approval and funding. In 1992, when the PMRC conducted a national health survey in collaboration with the US National Centre for Health Statistics, and the Federal Bureau of Pakistan, there were no research ethics guidelines in the country. A paper published in the October 1992 issue of the *Pakistan Journal of Medical Research* describes the ethical issues addressed in the course of the survey, and its compliance with WHO guidelines. The standards set in the survey guided future epidemiological studies in the country. An institutional review board was established during the study design period.

Unsafe practices

BANGLADESH HAS long been the site of extensive research in maternal and child health and in contraceptives, including the hormonal implant, Norplant, and injectable hormones such as Depo Provera. A medical researcher notes that there is strong opposition to the way both family planning and other research is carried out in the country but provides no further comments. In her article on the *Global Reproductive Health Forum* page, Farida Akhtar of UBIGIN, a Bangladesh-based NGO, declares: "Research and premarket trials are carried out on the bodies of poor women in Bangladesh for new contraceptives. Women become subject of these trials without their knowledge or consent...More coercion is exercised as they do not want to give women any choice of opting out of the trial." However, the article provides insufficient details on the studies referred to.

In an undated article on the site www.quinacrine.com, professor Syeda Nurjahan Bhuiyan, a senior faculty member of the Chittagong Medical College, reports of having sterilised 710 women since 1989 with an antimalarial drug not approved for use as a chemical steriliser, through the medical college and two community clinics. Her comment on the women's profile is telling of how the practice is seen by the involved doctors: 65 percent of the women were between 31 and 40 years old; 78 percent had four or more children; 80 percent were either illiterate or had only a primary education, and 75 percent had a family income of less than 3000 taka a month. There is no mention of information to the women, let alone consent, nor of how many women were actually followed up on and for how long, but the doctor reports that "side effects were mild and transient", and that there were "no life threatening complications". Bhuiyan states that QS is safe and "acceptably effective".

One organisation that may be heading towards the right direction is the International Council for Diarrhoea Disease Research, Bangladesh (IDDR,B)—at least going by the fact that it mentions the functioning of its ethical review committee. This research body funded by various international organisations, carries details of its history, composition and ongoing work. It has an ethical review committee that meets regularly to examine and consider the ethical issues of research protocols involving human subjects, and has a subcommittee to monitor on-going research. The 15-member full committee comprises four from the Council, one each from the Programme Coordination Committee, Bangladesh Medical Research Council, WHO's Country Programme Office in Bangladesh, and eight from varying disciplines.

A senior HIV researcher once remarked on the irony of AIDS vaccine research. The experimental group is given the vaccine, the control group a placebo. Both groups are supposed to be counselled in safe practices, and then observed to see how many become infected with HIV. In order to prove the vaccine's efficacy, the control group must get a relatively high rate of infection. In other words, the researcher needs participants to undertake unsafe behaviours and for some of them to develop a fatal condition so that the vaccine is proved effective. In a 1994 presentation to the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Riedar Lie, professor of philosophy at the university of Bergen who worked in Sri Lanka, noted that vaccine trials were being initiated in developing countries without any guarantee that they will be available there once it is proved effective—a stated ethical requirement.

Research on AIDS drugs has begun in earnest in India. According to *The Indian Express*, various trials looking at the feasibility of drugs to reduce vertical transmission, as well as prophylactic treatments for health workers exposed to HIV in their work, are taking place in 11 centres across the country. In Sangli, a local NGO successfully challenged the trial design looking at HIV transmission through breastfeeding in a local hospital. *The Indian Express* article points out that both doctors and patients are looking at collaborative research on AIDS drugs as an opportunity for these drugs: "But what will happen when the trial is over?"

AIDS research was responsible for triggering off a heated international controversy on the ethics of research in developing countries. It also led to a movement—opposed by one section of the research community—to revise international ethics guidelines to permit variable standards of care in developing countries. In 1997, an article and an editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine* attacked ongoing clinical trials involving more than 15,000 pregnant, HIV-positive women in Asia and Africa, which wanted to see if a short course of the drug AZT reduced the chances of the women passing the virus to their children (a longer course of AZT, the 076

regimen, was accepted as standard treatment in the US). The problem was that the women in the control group were given a placebo or sugar pill instead of the established treatment. Such research would have failed ethical review in the US. It also violates current international guidelines requiring that Western researchers in developing countries provide study participants clinical care that meets the standards of care in their home country.

The studies' proponents argued that the longer course of AZT was too expensive and difficult to administer in the research environment. Alternative study designs would require a longer study, and this information was needed urgently to help thousands of women in developing countries. The participants, they said, had given their informed consent, and local ethics boards had approved of the studies. Finally, the argument was that the control group would not have had access to the drug anyway.

However, others pointed out that the researchers had got their information by knowingly putting participants at risk, which went against all ethical principles. And the benefits of this research would not go to the participants' community—where even the short-course AZT was unaffordable because pharmaceutical companies fought to keep the prices high—but to the developed world.

More recently, a study in Uganda looking at the role of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV viral load as risk factors for heterosexual transmission of HIV, omitted to provide STD treatment to one group in the study. Also, contrary to standard practice in the US, researchers did not ensure that HIV-positive people informed their partners of their status. Ninety partners became infected with HIV during the course of the study.

Such controversies have been directly behind the current move in the World Medical Association to revise the Declaration of Helsinki. The Helsinki Declaration is one of a set of international statements developed to address ethical issues raised by international research. Although not legally binding, such statements carry a lot of weight in the international community, and are taken seriously by regulatory bodies that formulate ethical guidelines or regulations for biomedical research. If the Declaration is revised, researchers in developing countries will be required to provide participants the care depending on the standards in the country where the research is being done.

ICMR guidelines

Such controversies, and the growing potential for drug research in India may have also hastened the ICMR's own interest in developing ethical guidelines for research. Perhaps it also envisaged the need for guidelines and an ethics review structure in place if India were to become the research centre it aspired to be.

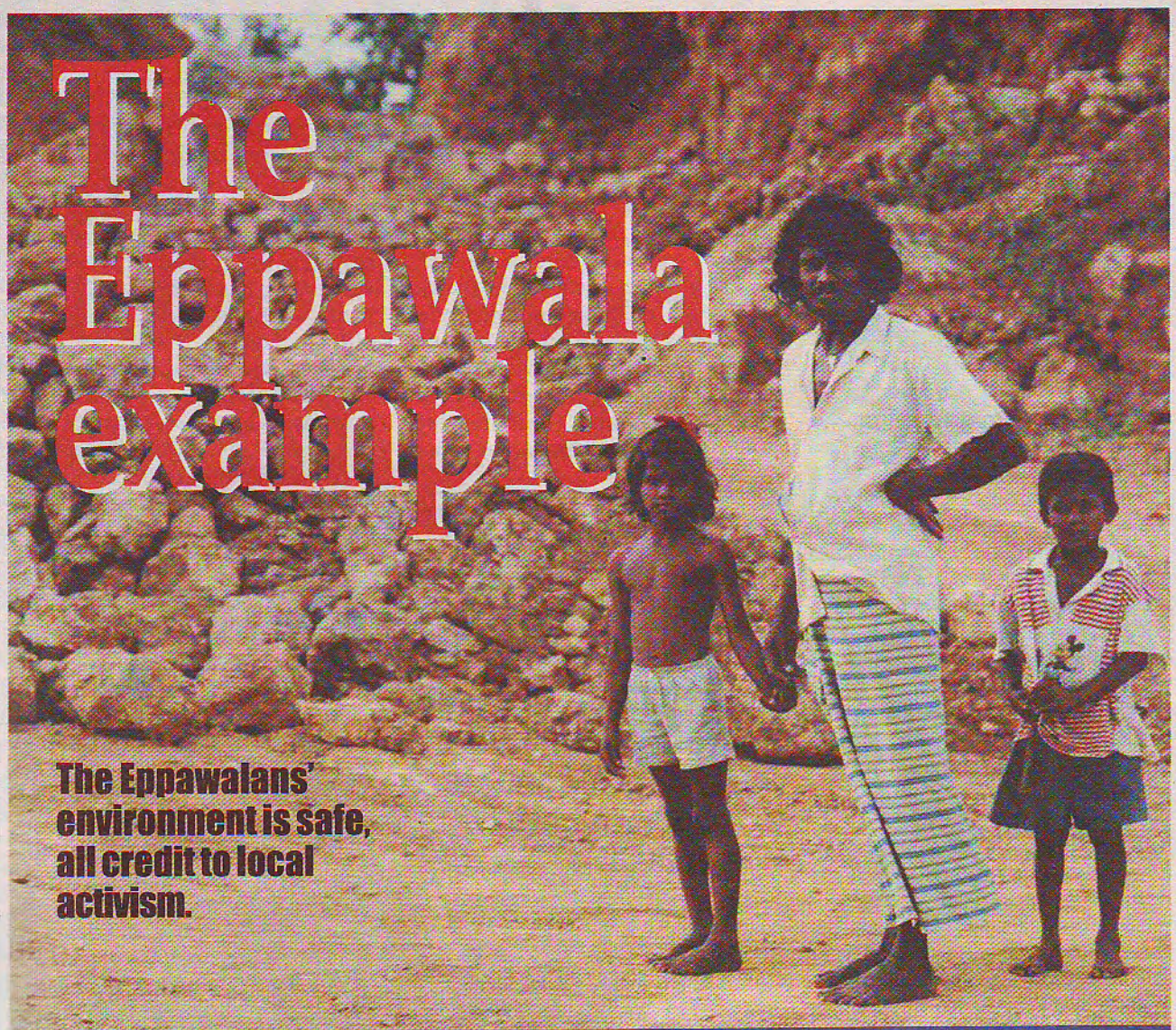
Drawn up in 1997, the proposed guidelines were the first effort to set down detailed guidelines. The last document addressing this subject was a four-page policy statement issued in 1980, and acknowledged as inadequate by senior ICMR officials. Over the next year, the ICMR held a series of public discussions all over the country

However, these guidelines attempted too much. For example, they included within their scope assisted reproductive technologies such as in-vitro fertilisation and related technologies used primarily—but not exclusively—for infertility, for which it set down standards of practice, not research. It also failed to articulate the different issues arising in research and medical practice, and this was particularly evident in the sections on transplants and assisted reproductive technologies. At the same time, the proposed guidelines did not adequately address genuine problems in research ethics, which Indians are bound to encounter with growing collaborative research. There has been no information on how they will be implemented; nor how they will govern institutions outside the ICMR's ambit. Still, the 1997 guidelines will represent a big step forward for research ethics, once they become public.

In July 2000, a report in *The Times of India* announced that after more than two years of deliberations, the ICMR's guidelines had been finalised and would be made public within a week. It's September and we're still waiting.

Meanwhile, the WHO has pointed out that 90 per cent of health research in the world addresses the problems of the healthiest 10 percent of the population. We need research which addresses the needs of majority of our people. The question is: can this be done ethically and effectively?

The Eppawala example



The Eppawalans' environment is safe, all credit to local activism.

by *Tharuka Dissanaike*

It was the common man's victory. For the seven residents of Eppawala, the judgement by Sri Lanka's Supreme Court was more than a mere victory over the state institutions and the giant multinational company they had taken to court. It was a reaffirmation of their fundamental right to have control over life and work, and above all, their right to be part of the decision-making process that brings change to a traditional way of life.

On 5 June, which happened to be World Environment Day, a three-judge bench ruled in favour of the seven petitioners, among them rice farmers and a Buddhist monk, who had dared to take on the United States mining Goliath, Freeport MacMoran, which had all the legal and engineering resources of a Fortune 500 company at its disposal.

In the judgement, Justice Amerasekera said that the petitioners have established an imminent danger to their fundamental rights by a large-scale mining project, backed by Freeport MacMoran. The company proposes to mine a huge phospate deposit in the Eppawala locality in central Sri Lanka, to produce fertilisers for export.

The petitioners argued that their fundamental right to have choice over livelihood and residence was being threatened by the proposed mine. The project would cover a core area of 56 square kilometres with a buffer zone of another 10 kilometres, and would displace 12,000 people, including the seven petitioners. They pointed out that the multinational was attempting to circumvent Sri Lanka's environmental laws,

which call for public participation in project appraisal, and effectively trying to isolate the residents and public opinion from the decision-making process.

The company has stayed silent on the judgement. Its local partner, Sarabhumi (Pvt) Limited, threatened to take the government to court for breach of promise, shortly after the judgement was delivered, but has since kept a low profile.

The government caught the worst of the Supreme Court's disapproval over the proposed mine. In 1997, a government committee held a final round of negotiations with Freeport MacMoran and its subsidiary IMC Agrico, arriving at a mineral investment agreement that gave the company exploration and mining rights for 30 years in the core and buffer area. In exchange, the government only claimed a 10 percent shareholding in the new joint venture set up to mine the deposit.

The huge mineral deposit, close to the ancient capital of Anuradhapura, was 'discovered' by scientists in the early 1970s. Since then, the government has been using very limited quantities, 40,000 metric tonnes a year, to produce phosphate fertiliser for local needs.

Twenty years ago, the state began hunting for a foreign joint venture to exploit the deposit and rake in foreign exchange for the government coffers. Sporadic bouts of negotiations followed by long years of slumber discouraged many an investor, but not Freeport MacMoran and IMC Agrico. The first round of official negotiations with the company commenced in 1994 and ended with the mineral investment agreement in 1997, at a time when the government was hard pressed to raise cash to fight the ongoing civil war against the militant guerilla group, LTTE.

Initial studies at Eppawala show a proven deposit of 25 million metric tonnes of high-grade phosphate and a probable reserve of 35 million MT. The Ministry of Industrial Development has stated that the company would mine just 26.1 million MT in 30 years, leaving the country with a substantial deposit at the end of contract.

The lack of thorough scientific study on the extent and area of deposit was a factor that kept surfacing during the court hearing. The Supreme Court clearly directed the government to desist from entering into any contract before comprehensive exploration determines the exact extent, quantity and quality of the mineral deposit. The court agreed that the government's shareholding of the mining company, at 10 percent, would be woefully small if the deposit was found to be much larger than earlier estimated. This would translate to a lopsided profit sharing, leaving the country at a disadvantage while the multinationals make their billions and leave a trail of destruction.

Unlike many large-scale environmental issues fought by NGOs and lawyers in sterile legal battles, Eppawala is refreshingly different since the people of the area were not overawed by the aura of a giant company.

Freeport MacMoran's reputation in the gold mines of Iriyan Jaya in Indonesia was a factor played up by the environmental lobby opposing the project. The company's track record of pollution, destruction and bad public relations with indigenous communities, was a huge blot against the local company, which eventually tried to distance itself from Freeport MacMoran.

Unlike many large-scale environmental issues fought by NGOs and lawyers in sterile legal battles, Eppawala is refreshingly different since the people of the area were not overawed by the aura of a giant company. The case was filed by residents imploring the Supreme Court to prevent the imminent danger to their fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. The petitioners, including Buddhist monk Mahamankadawela Piyaratna, successfully argued that the government, through the mineral investment agreement, has ignored their rights to life, work and residence in the area of their choice.

The state institutions and the company tried to argue that the threat is imagined and not real until the company completes exploration, and then go on to decide the extent of the mine. But the court ruled: "Fairness to all, including the petitioners ... and not the comfort of the mining company should be the deciding factor."

The proposed mine ploughs through an ancient irrigation system, designed over 2000 years ago to support rice agriculture. Engineers of the past used a system of underground aquifers to feed mineral nutrients into the irrigation channel, Jaya Ganga (river of triumph), which carried the fertilised water to rice fields north and west of Eppawala. The irrigation channel still supports a huge cultivated area and provides drinking water to 100 villages upstream. Heavy mining would cause immeasurable harm to the channel, pollute its waters and create a hazardous situation for farmers dependent on its water.

The judgement, while ordering the state to carry out comprehensive studies of the deposit and means of its use, also prohibited the state from contracting any such project outside the premise of national environmental laws.

Quoting the Rio Declaration, the judges stated: "Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. To achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it." Indeed.

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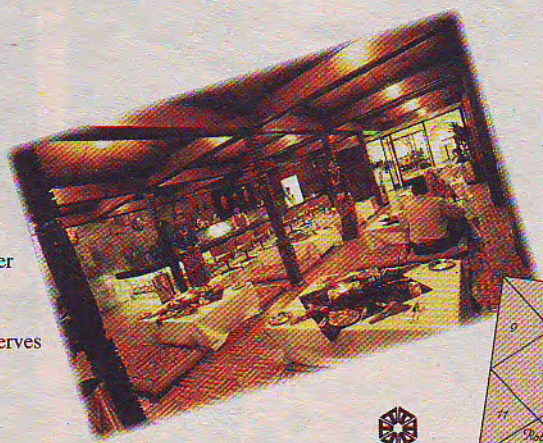

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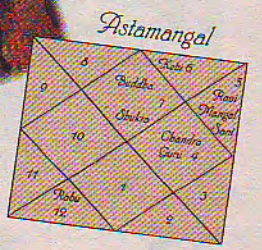

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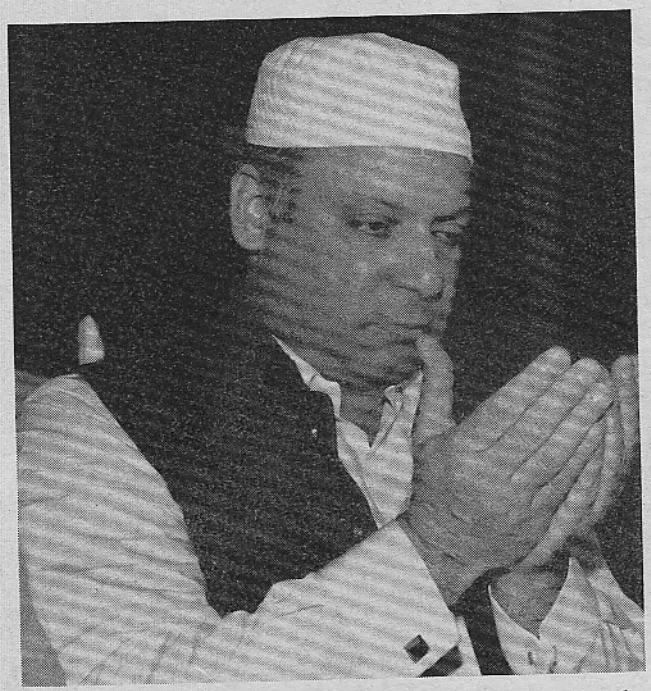


Bad weather friends

When two sworn and once-powerful enemies are in trouble, what do they do? Become friends, of course.

by M. Aurangzaib

These are strange times for Pakistan. A military government announces a grassroots democracy plan and a local elections schedule, and a powerful former prime minister is convicted of corruption and disqualified from politics for 21 years. But most of all, a de facto end to the political careers of the country's two best-known politicians—Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

A clever little amendment in the Political Parties Act by the military government means that not only can the convicted persons not take part in general elections, they can't even hold office in a political party. But Bhutto and Sharif are likely to be not the only victims. Influential Minister for Local Government, Omar Asghar, said at a recent seminar that "thousands of politicians" might be disqualified to give Pakistan a clean leadership for the future. Thousands! Whew!

The chief 'disqualifying machinery' is the dreaded National Accountability Bureau with the sinister acronym of NAB. A senior official of NAB confided that as many as half of the 600 politicians who contested the last general elections in 1997, may be declared ineligible from contesting for public office because they have filed in inaccurate statements of their assets and properties. "We have checked the statements filed with the Election Commission by most of the candidates who were elected to National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies and are not surprised to see that they are mostly grossly inaccurate," he said. Government officials say all political parties will have to elect new leaders who neither have been convicted in a court of law nor have any criminal cases pending, thus paving the way for a "third force".

An official of the Election Commission said the body was engaged in drafting tough electoral reforms that would make past offenders ineligible from contesting polls. "The amendment in the Political Parties Act will not only stop violators of the law from holding a public office, it will also prevent them from being eligible from holding party office," he said. He also said that among those who "stand automatically disqualified" considering their convictions by courts of law, include Bhutto and Sharif. Both heavy-

weights of Pakistani politics have also been convicted in different cases of corruption and gross misuse of power, and sentenced by the courts.

Sharif, for example, was in early August convicted of violating the country's tax laws by concealing the ownership of a helicopter in his wealth declarations. In line with the accountability law, he was given the maximum punishment—14 years rigorous imprisonment and banned from taking part in politics for 21 years. He was also fined PNR 20 million (USD 40,000). Earlier this year, he was jailed for life on two counts of attempted hijacking and terrorism by an anti-terrorism court. The charges stemmed from the dramatic events of 12 October 1999 when the army chief General Pervez Musharraf's plane was denied landing at Karachi airport after being mysteriously sacked. In the stand-off that ensued, the military toppled the government in a bloodless coup and seized power. Sharif was arrested and has been in jail since.

Then there is the never-say-die Bhutto who is now in exile, and facing arrest on setting foot on Pakistani soil. In a case filed by the Sharif government early last year, she was convicted by the Lahore High Court of accepting kickbacks worth millions of dollars in allotment of government contracts during her days in power. She, along with her husband Asif Zardari, was sentenced to five years in jail, fined USD eight million and disqualified from politics.

As soon as the ban on convicts from holding public and party offices was announced, a strange thing happened. Not many had thought they would see it happen and it was a sight to behold. Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and arch rival Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) got together formally on one platform for the first time ever. Bitter foes of yesterday, compelled friends of today.

The venue was the meeting of the noisy and rickety 42-party All Parties Conference (APC) convened by the granddaddy of Pakistani politics—the evergreen Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan—to discuss restoration of democracy. While the meeting's overt symbolism—the first broad, united political alliance against the present military government—was not lost on anyone, it's other, more relevant significance was stark too: it has led to an alliance between the two largest and the most influential parties of the country, which between them have come to power through democratic elections six times and given the nation four prime ministers: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Mohammed Khan Junejo, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif.

The conference was also the first time in the political career of deposed premier Sharif that he allowed his party to sit with Bhutto's PPP. Not all have forgotten him repeatedly saying that Bhutto and her party were security risks for the country. And of course, it is all together too early to forget that the PPP actually had greeted the ouster of the Sharif government ten months ago hollering with joy, its leaders actually distributing sweets. Not many in Pakistan thought the party that symbolised resistance against military rule, would actually be welcoming a military coup.

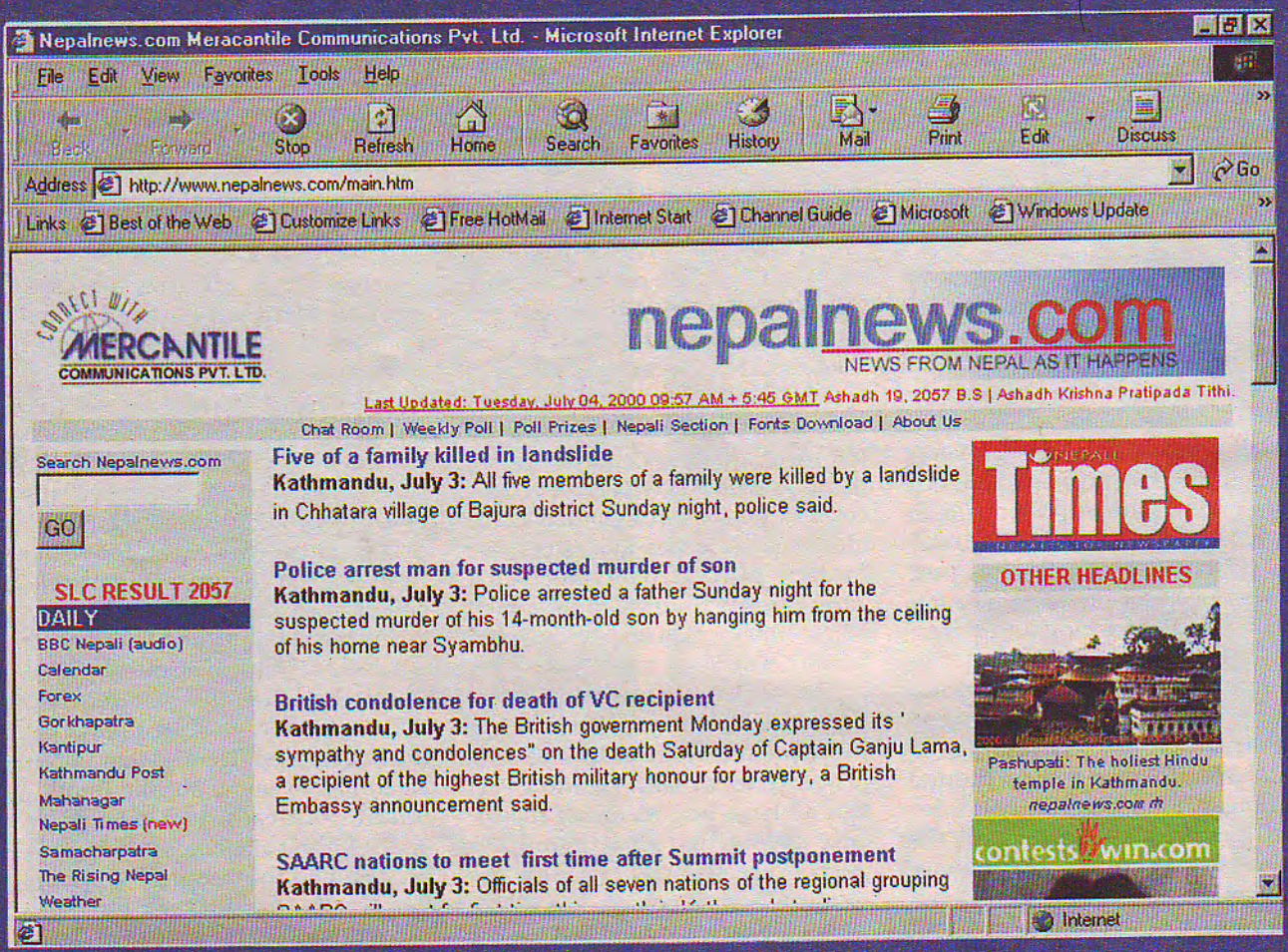
Whatever the outcome of the flirtation between the PPP and the PML, the coming together of Bhutto and Sharif's parties does indicate the first major shift—some would term it a sea change—in Pakistani politics in a decade. For the past decade, the four Bhutto and Sharif governments, alternating every two and a half years on an average, have outdone each other by way of misrule and poor governance. There is little to choose between their 1990s and the 1980s presided over by military dictator General Ziaul Haq, as far as people's progress and prosperity are concerned.

Sharif's dalliance with the PPP is easily explained—he more than anyone else knew that he had little mass support and that senior party leaders had left him in the lurch, and there was nothing else left to do but to mend fences with other parties, especially his arch-rival Bhutto's PPP, to keep himself politically alive. In a letter written from jail read out to a high-level party meeting, Sharif said the political setup in the country must have the full participation of Benazir Bhutto. This coming from a man whose one pet hatred was Benazir, whom he did not even grant an audience the two times he was in power. What's more, Bhutto returned the favour by urging the military not to decide the future of the country without consulting both her and Sharif!

As far as Bhutto and Sharif go, it is a case of 'you scratch my back and I scratch yours'. No wonder then that some other leading politicians are not amused. Here's what Imran Khan has to say about the Bhutto-Sharif political tête-à-tête: "The Sharif-Bhutto alliance is nothing but an insult to the people's sensibilities because they haven't forgotten the serious allegations the two have been levelling against each other and processing corruption cases in courts against each other. Sharif was convicted for corruption last month in a case actually filed by the Bhutto government, and Bhutto was convicted for corruption last year in case filed by the Sharif government."

Former president Farooq Leghari is equally sceptical. He says the PML and the PPP have "cleverly manipulated" the smaller parties in order to get together and gain political legitimacy. Leghari calls them "strange bedfellows" who are driven by the ulterior motive of escaping from the noose of the law.

But even this last bid at restoring lost glory seems a futile effort, at least for some time in the future. General Musharraf's government is firmly in control, and faces no problems in setting its own pace for returning to democracy, which is the Supreme Court-sanctioned three-year period. Meanwhile, the he and she of Pakistani politics can sweat it out in friendship.



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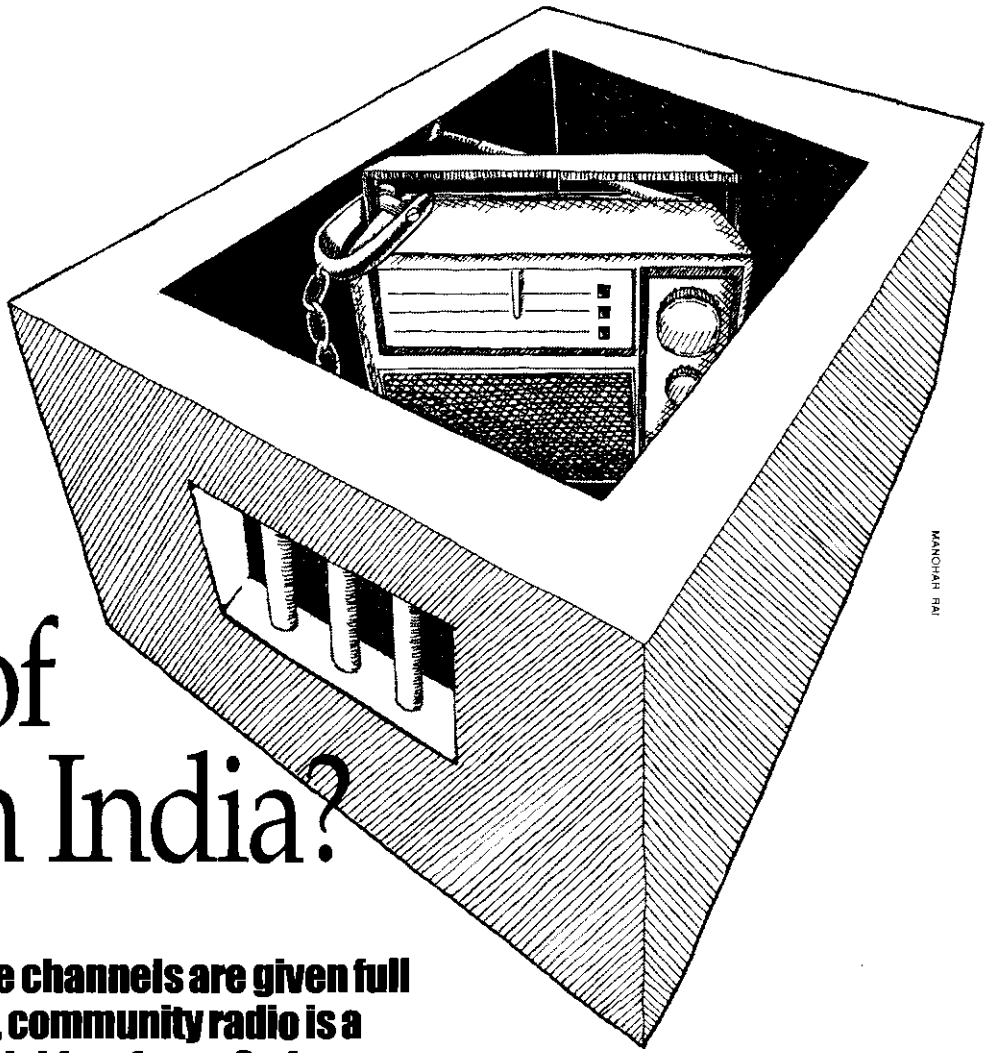

MANOHAR RAI

Who's afraid of radio in India?

While the big satellite channels are given full bombardment rights, community radio is a medium that the officialdom fears. Sad.

by Frederick Noronha

India claims to be the world's largest democracy, but it fears of opening up the airwaves to the commonman. Its democratic traditions may be far stronger, yet countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka are edging past it in making radio relevant to their citizens. India's reluctant march towards democratising radio indeed makes the intentions of its rulers suspect.

Broadcasting in India is speedily shifting its profile. Indian radio is currently changing from being a government monopoly to highly-commercialised broadcasting. But this needs to be democratised too. Privatisation and total deregulation will not mean much to the average citizen if radio fails to get a chance to make a difference to his or her life. India has so far clearly given step-motherly treatment to public service, community, educational and development broadcast networks.

Over five years back, the Indian Supreme Court made an interesting ruling. This judgement strongly critiqued the long-held government monopoly over broadcasting. In early 1995, the court declared the airwaves as public property, to be utilised for promoting public good and ventilating plurality of views, opinions and ideas. The judgment held that the "freedom of speech and expression" guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution includes the right to acquire and disseminate information; the right to disseminate includes the right to communicate through any media, print, electronic or audio-visual. "The fundamental rights," said the judgement, "can be limited only by reasonable restrictions under a law made for the purpose... The burden is on the authority to justify the restrictions. Public order is not the same thing as public safety and hence no restrictions can be placed on the right to freedom of speech and expression on the ground that public safety is endangered."

Judges Sawant and Mohan held that: "Broadcasting is a means of communication and, therefore, a medium of speech and expression. Hence in a democratic polity, neither any private individual, institution or organisation nor any government or government organisation can claim exclusive right over it. Our Constitution also forbids monopoly either in the print, or electronic media."

The judgement rightly noted that

Indian broadcasting was being governed by archaic laws. The Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 was meant for a different purpose altogether. When it was enacted, there was neither radio nor television, but both these media were later sought to be fitted into the definition of "telegraph". In view of this, the judges said it was essential that the Indian Parliament "steps in soon to fill the void by enacting a law or laws, as the case may be, governing the broadcast media, i.e. both radio and television". The judges also instructed the federal government to "take immediate steps to establish an independent autonomous public authority representative of all sections and interests in the society to control and regulate the use of the airwaves".

Local radio

But what has been the official response to this progressive judgement? Reluctantly, the state-controlled broadcaster, All India Radio, was given some level of 'autonomy'. For the most part, this meant that the organisation would have to concentrate on earning revenues, and foot a growing part of its own bill. In mid-November 1999, the government announced that the bidding process to set up 140 FM (frequency modulation) stations in 40 cities had closed to "overwhelming response", with 349 potential broadcasters finally left in the race for a license.

Questions were however asked as to who was given a chance to enter this race, and how much publicity had in fact been accorded to the move to privatise radio broadcasting. By early August 2000, it was announced that some 26 companies have received letters of intent from the Indian government, after bidding to set up FM radio stations in 40 Indian cities. Three companies were not given letters "as clearance had not come from the Home Ministry", as news reports put it.

But how open is open? Can the diversity of a country of one billion be reflected by a little over two dozen companies, who will be broadcasting mainly entertainment programmes from cities across urban India?

Argues professor B.P. Sanjay of the Sarojini Naidu School of Communication of the University of Hyderabad: "The license system (for setting up private FM radio stations) and the response is reminiscent of the telecom bids. The companies in the name of low returns are likely to default on the price and would expect a package to bail them out, and, as is the case with many other auctions, the government will respond. We have to really wait and watch the developments with regard to many or diverse uses of radio, if any, by the media giants. The communities who want and deserve some attention are yet to get their voices heard."

For decades, India's radio stations have been centralised, government-controlled, over-dependent on relays, and lacking in editorial independence. In recent years, a small number of citizens' groups across India have been pushing for something altogether different, through the community radio model. Recently, a group meeting in Hyderabad issued the Pastapur Initiative on Community Radio, released at the end of a four-day UNESCO-sponsored workshop from 17-20 July. It pointed out that "a truly people's radio should perceive listeners not only as receivers and consumers, but also as active citizens and creative producers of media content".

The workshop said that if the government is really serious about freeing broadcasting from state monopoly, then it needs to proceed to its logical conclusion by expanding the available media space, and permitting communities and organisations representing them to run their own radio stations. It was also pointed out that community radio should have three key aspects: non-profit making, community ownership and management, and community participation. Community radio is distinguished by its limited local reach, low-power transmission, and programming content that reflects the educational, developmental and cultural needs of the specific community it serves.

India could well benefit from the creation of a three-tier system of broadcasting in the country: a state-owned public service network (existing framework); commercial private broadcasting; and non-profit, people-owned and -managed community radio stations.

Delhi-centred

Permission for low-cost community radio has long been on the cards. But while dozens of FM radio stations are currently being set up by the private sector, the rules for setting up non-profit stations are yet to be framed. Even educational institutions and universities—like the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Shantiniketan, the National Law School University of India and Jamia Milia—have been waiting to reach out via the airwaves.

Non-profit and development organisations have been lobbying for more than five years to get the go-ahead to broadcast information that could help the "information poor" to get an understanding of issues critical to their lives. Recently, neighbouring countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka made waves by allowing non-profit community radios to be set up. Asian countries like the Philippines has already shown the beneficial impact of such locally-managed, non-profit initiatives taken up by the citizens themselves. Nepal's Radio Sagarmatha, run by a body of environmental journalists, has attracted attention globally for its unique style of operation in a Subcontinent where radio has so far been tightly government-controlled. Despite an unhelpful attitude by the government, Radio Sagarmatha has been airing information-based and green messages.

Sri Lanka too is showing the way. "In Sri Lanka, we are using a community radio station in Kotmale to find information on the Internet, which readers ask for via phone or

post. This helps villagers to get access to the information superhighway," says University of Colombo journalism lecturer Michael J.R. David. He is the project leader of the Kotmale community radio station, which took off in May 1999, and is being studied worldwide as an innovative experiment in development communication.

India's state-owned All India Radio (AIR) had set up a string of local radio stations some years ago, and in the last decade, its programmes have focused more on the rural population and the urban lower middle classes. But again, the stations are not exactly locally relevant, neither are they community-run. Repeated changes in governments and bureaucratic red tape have meant that community radio is still to become a reality in India.

Bazlur Rahman of the Bangladesh Coastal NGOs Network for Radio and Communication says that Dhaka is expected to license non-profit radio for community groups in 2001.

T.H. Chowdary, advisor to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Nara Chandrababu Naidu on technology matters, said at the recent Hyderabad meeting that, "On FM, the bandwidth permits a very large number of low-powered radio transmitters. There can be up to 5,000 FM stations, roughly the same number of tehsils (district sub-divisions) in India."

Today, it is technically and economically feasible to set up hundreds, if not thousands, of low-powered FM radio stations across the country. These would not interfere with one another. What is lacking are the government laws to permit this, and the political will to allow radio to play its role in a country like India.

For instance, two young men, Vikas Markanday and Dayal Singh of Rohtak in Haryana, both aged 21, have assembled a low-cost FM radio transmitter that they hope will spread useful information that could bring about change in the lives of villagers, including on agricultural practices. "Such radio can play a vital role in low-cost communication. Rural developmental issues can be taken up, illiteracy can be overcome. Farmers in the field could easily be given the information inputs they need," says Markanday. Both the radio activists belong to Nutra Indica Research Council, a non-profit NGO in Rohtak that seeks to put rural innovators in touch with scientists. Weighing approximately 12 kilograms, their entire "radio station" fits into a briefcase, with the transmitter having a range of 10-15-km radius.

And it has not been because of any lack of proposals that community broadcasting has not taken off in India. Some of the suggestions have been: small transmitters with a reach of ten kilometres; a studio with recording and broadcasting facilities; and broadcast hours in keeping with local context.

Media advocacy groups have been pressing for licenses to be given to universities (particularly agricultural universities, medical institutions, adult and legal literacy organisations), registered cooperatives, women's cooperatives and other suitable public bodies. "Our problem has been a Delhi-centric approach to broadcasting. One fear is that (community broadcasting and grassroots radio) could become inconvenient for the existing power-structure," says prominent media critic K.E. Eapen.

Rediscovery

What has also happened alongside is the Indian middle class' rediscovery of the radio with the FM boom of the 1990s. But it has also got to be mentioned that for the bulk of citizens of the country, radio has always been the only affordable electronic gadget. Recent studies suggest that radio in India has a potential listenership of 98.5 percent of the country's population. There are some 104 million radio homes, double the number of TV homes.

And it has to be said that the radio is not merely a "poor man's device". In affluent Europe, radio plays a major role in the community's life, taking across relevant, local information in a way perhaps no other media can. It is particularly effective in the busy morning hours, while TV takes over in the evenings.

The Indian officialdom, however, is still apprehensive of opening up radio to the people. Although officials say that AIR's low-powered stations in semi-rural areas—some 89 exist already—could offer one-hour time slots to panchayats or "bonafide" representatives of the communities, they then entangle the entire debate on the identifying process of which non-profit or voluntary organisation is a "true representative of the community". They then make token gestures such as allowing non-profit groups time-slots on existing official channels.

All sections of non-official radio are barred from airing news, even though the officialdom doesn't mind the entire globe bombarding India with whatever programmes via satellite. One argument proffered is that of the difficulty in monitoring radio stations in the "remote corners". Imagine the same yardstick being applied to all the small newspapers. Anyway, why should the government presume that all citizens of this country have malafide intentions? Is it not possible to have a broadcasting regulatory authority to ensure that broad guidelines, and preferably a voluntary code, be respected?

Media critics like Sevanti Ninan have aptly asked the question: "Why is (the government) so nervous about opening up a medium that has powerful development potential? Are media groups such as the owners of the *The Times of India* and Midday more benevolent than development groups? Why is a 52-year-old democracy so terrified of positive decentralisation?"

All questions that could indeed do with some answers.

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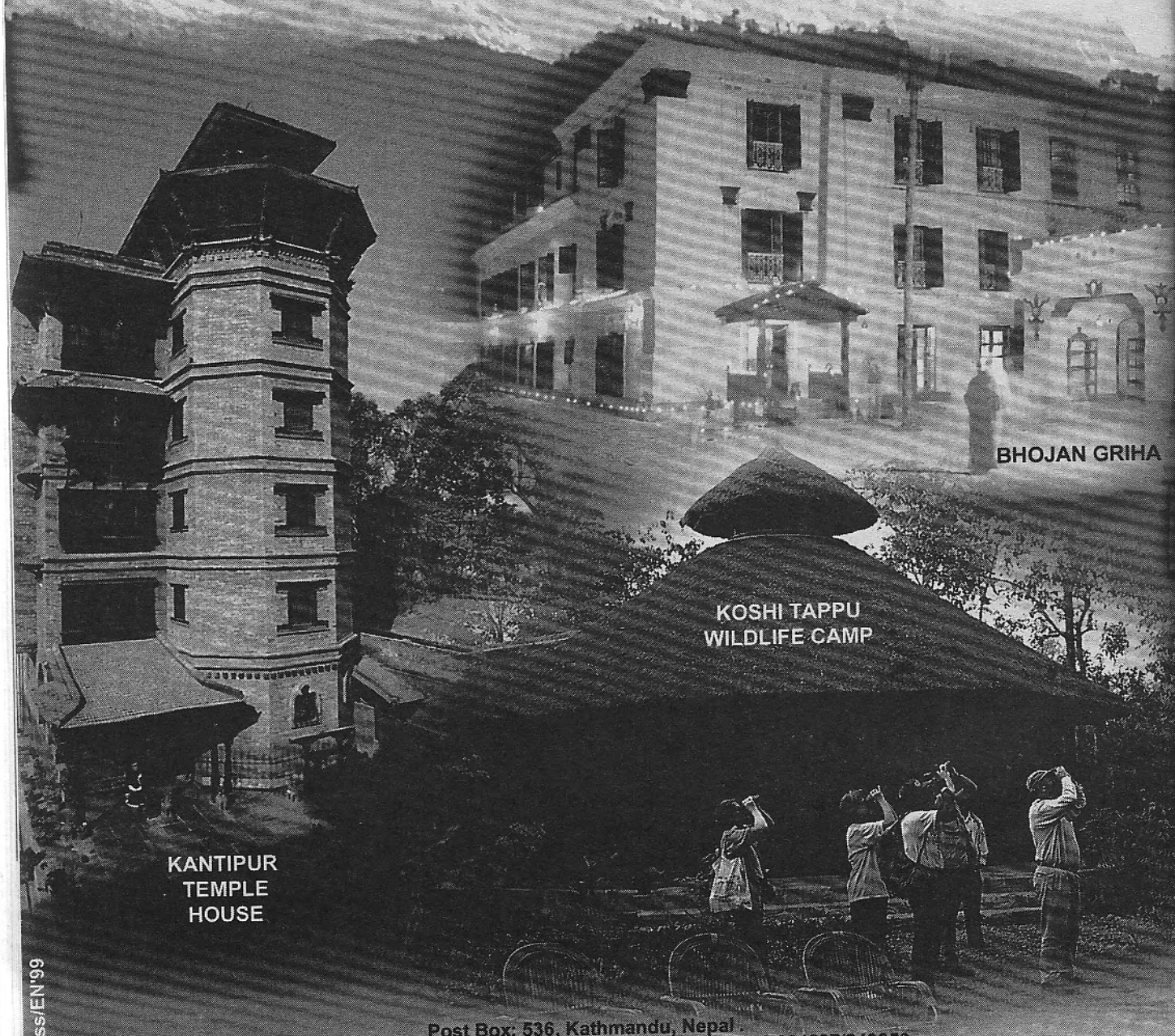

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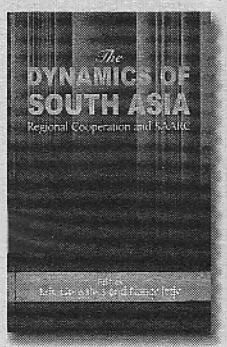
Books Received

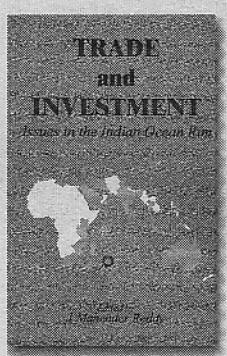
A Decade of Confrontation: Sri Lanka and India in the 1980s
by John Gooneratne
Stamford Lake (Pvt) Ltd, Pannipitiya, Sri Lanka, 2000
pp ii+239
ISBN 955 8156 39 6
SLR 540

This book concentrates on the divisive diplomatic issues that kept Sri Lanka and India at loggerheads during the 1980s, while also providing a perceptive analysis of some of the controversial policies of successive Sri Lankan governments which led to the breakdown of the ethnic harmony in the island. It also shows how the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) never overcame the effects of the controversies that surrounded it while being despatched to Sri Lanka's troubled north and east.



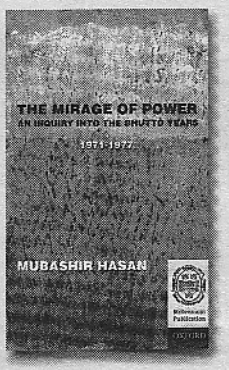
Dynamics of South Asia: Regional cooperation and SAARC
Edited by Eric Gonsalves and Nancy Jetly
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1999
pp 277
ISBN 0 7619 9315 0
INR 375

This volume of essays by a representative group of policy-makers, diplomats and scholars, both from within the region and beyond, advocates the need for enhancing dialogue between the countries of South Asia in order to find a common ground. The volume is also part of an extended exercise in mapping out interstate relations in the areas of political relations, security concerns, technological and commercial issues, intellectual and cultural commonalties, and the impact of foreign aid. The contributors stress the importance of economic and cultural linkages, and the need for South Asia to re-invent its regional agenda on the basis of cooperation and mutual understanding.



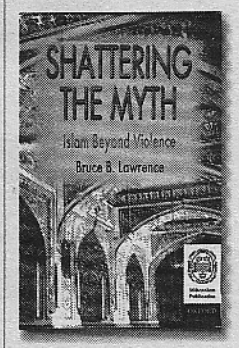
Trade and Investment: Issues in the Indian Ocean Rim
Edited by Mahender Reddy
Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 2000
pp xii+500
ISBN 81 207 2286 8
INR 750

This volume is the outcome of the proceedings of the seminar on "Trade and Investment Issues in the IOR-ARC", organised by the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, held in Maputo. Apart from the papers presented at the seminar, the book also contains the various recommendations made by the representatives from academics, private sector and the government.



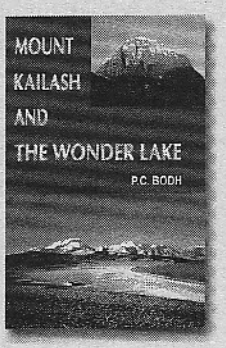
The Mirage of Power: An Inquiry into the Bhutto Years (1971-77)
by Mubashir Hasan
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000
pp xi+393
ISBN 0 19 579300 5
PNR 495

In this book, the six years of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rule in Pakistan, are recorded and analysed by one of his closest associates. This is an insider's view of the Bhutto years, and for the first time reveals the details of the shift of state power from the people to the military-bureaucratic establishment. The author also dwells on the factors that contributed to the fall of Bhutto.



Shattering the Myth: Islam Beyond Violence
by Bruce B. Lawrence
Oxford University Press, Karachi, 2000
pp xix+237
ISBN 0 19 579386 2
PNR 495

Islam is often portrayed in the West as an alien, violent, hostile and monolithic religion, whose adherents are intent upon battling non-believers throughout the world. This work demonstrates that these conceptions more accurately reflect the bias of Western reporters than they do the realities of contemporary Islam. The author shows that Islam is a religion shaped as much by its own postulates and ethical demands as by the specific circumstances of the Muslim people in the modern world. It is time, the author says, to replace inaccurate images of Islam with a recognition of the multifaceted character of this global religion and of its widely diverse followers.



Mount Kailash and the Wonder Lake
by P.C. Bodh
Book Faith India, New Delhi, 2000
pp 164
ISBN 81 7303 260 2
NPR 960

This book in verse is the story of the author's pilgrimage to Mount Kailash. His poetry records the perceptions of a Hindu pilgrim making the arduous trip to this holy site. It captures the spirit of Mount Kailash in all its details.

Alternative history of a borderland

A pictorial narrative of an unexplained land.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland
by Willem van Schendel, Wolfgang Mey & Aditya Kumar Dewan
White Lotus Press, Bangkok, 2000
Price not mentioned
ISBN: 974-8434-98-2

reviewed by ***Pratyoush Onta***

I have never been to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) and I first heard of it in the campus of Brandeis University during the fall of 1984. I had just arrived in the suburban Boston campus from Kathmandu, and befriended some Bengali students from Calcutta. Some weeks into the semester, one of them, Kaushik Ghosh, asked me if I wanted to accompany him to visit a senior student from Bangladesh who lived off-campus. The idea of going outside the campus and the additional possibility of acquiring non-cafeteria food for dinner was quite attractive. That is how I first met Prasanta Tripura and got to know a bit about his homeland—the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The same evening I got to hear about the differences between the Bengali and the Chittagong hill person. Prasanta had asked Kaushik if he was a Bengali. After a yes, Kaushik, who knew Prasanta came from Bangladesh, had bounced back the same question. In replying, Prasanta had paused a bit and said, "Yes... but actually I am a Tripura from the Chittagong Hill Tracts." Many dinners later, and perhaps after trying to explain things to those of us who had not known homes outside of urban environments, he had said, "You guys from Kathmandu or Calcutta have more in common with people from Boston or New York than with me!"

These conversations among three South Asians and the play of identities contained within them, have defined my fascination for the CHTs since then. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Living in a Borderland* by historian Willem van Schendel and anthropologists Wolfgang Mey & Aditya Kumar Dewan, records many such encounters at several levels, and it is no surprise that Prasanta, now an anthropologist, is thanked by the authors for help rendered in the making of the book.

Talking of encounters, this book is first a record of the encounter between photographic technology and the land and the people of the CHTs. More than 400 photographs—many of them being published for the first time—make up the bulk of the book. Many of these photographs come from private collections of families with ties with the CHTs. The original photographers were both outsiders—travellers, colonial and post-colonial officials, academics, missionaries, journalists, development workers—and insiders who could afford a camera. Although the authors do not dwell at length on shifts in photographic technology and their implications for the political economy of access to the medium, these factors certainly influenced the medium's engagement with the CHTs.

Photographic technology had established itself in the plains of South Asia by the 1850s, and had reached its borderlands such as the CHTs or Nepal by the 1860s. The photographs included in this volume cover the century plus period between the 1860s and the 1970s. Till the early decades of the 20th century, the photographers were predominantly outsiders. But as costs reduced, many CHTs people began wielding the technology, and started consuming it in various capacities. As part of the growing practice of the use of these visual cultural evidence by historians and anthropologists of South Asia, the authors interpret the photographs both as an evidence of the conventions that were imbibed in the consumption of the medium and as a record of the social history of the region. The latter is told as a history of encounters and self-fashionings.

The CHTs are strikingly different from the alluvial plains of the rest of Bangladesh. As the American geographer David Sopher (who is seen in one of the photographs but whose work is surprisingly not listed in the references) put it in the 1960s, the hills are "an expression of simple folding in youthful sedimentaries: the resulting ridges, 1500 to 2000 feet high, are seven to ten miles apart." But the social identity of the region was constructed within the political history of encounters between the region and its people with outsiders.

In the pre-colonial era, the hills were run by small self-governing entities of various tribes. By the first half of the 19th century, this 'government' was controlled by two hill chiefs living in Rangamati and Bandarban, who were assisted by various subordinates. The British, although they took over the Chittagong plains, did not change this arrangement with the hills. The CHTs remained a part of the Regulation District of Chittagong until 1860 when the British took over. The tribal leadership was incorporated into a larger colonial bureaucracy but the CHTs still maintained the status of a 'unique district'. In 1947, the CHTs were included in what be-

came East Pakistan, and the land and its people became subject to the developmentalist whims of the Pakistani government. The construction of the Kaptai dam in the late 1950s disrupted the physical and social geography of the CHTs in a major way. After the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, the CHTs became the subject of 'national integration' discourses of the majority Bangladeshi Bengalis. Subsequent developments saw the rise of tribal militancy in the form of armed groups. An accord has put an end to this violence, but that took place after the period covered in this book.

Within this political history, the photographs and the texts given in 19 thematic chapters tell us about the creation of the colonial aristocracy, the public display of power by the local chiefs and elites, the overlordship of Pakistan, and the development projects that were initiated in the CHTs. Within these power relations, the photographs and the texts also discuss the Westerners' discovery of "a rustic paradise" of "simple" people and the paternalism of the post-colonial Bengali sahibs. Other obsessions in the form of bodies and costumes, images of nature, religious practices in the hills (including missionary efforts), and the coming to terms with modern machines are also dealt with.

Another encounter that characterises this book is contained within the theoretical terrain of history-writing. The photographs and the accompanying text speak of a framework that asserts to decentre the dominant nationalist narratives of the history of Bangladesh and recognise an alternative telling of social history—one in which attention is paid to gender and class dynamics. The two themes that have characterised nationalist history writing in Bangladesh have been the making of the Bengali nation and the emancipation of the Muslim. By refusing to mould the social history of CHTs within this bi-polar nationalist framework, the authors give birth to a new social memory of the region using written and visual sources as their primary archive. It is a largely successful effort.

However, one wishes that they could have also considered framing their analysis more fully against the post-1971 imperatives of development nationalism and the accompanying Bengali discourses of national integration whereby efforts were made to "bring the tribes of CHTs within the national mainstream". While the authors do dwell on this kind of Bengali paternalism in the conclusion and elsewhere, it is a theme that deserved a much fuller treatment. Such an analysis could have dissected, for example, the book *Tribal Leadership and Political Integration* edited by R I Chowdhury and published from the University of Chittagong in the late 1970s. And for a book described as the first comprehensive work on the CHTs, the reference list is too brief and selective.

CHTs women being prepared for a photograph.

As far as recent books on historical encounters and the politics of identities in South Asia are concerned, this volume does not match the comprehensiveness of a work such as *Life and Death on Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering* (1999, Princeton) by the anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner. But for its use of photography as the building block of an alternative history, it is an exemplary text for our region. Like the authors, one can only hope that it will give rise to comparative historical narratives that overcome the dominance of a variety of "lowland-oriented nationalisms". △

People's history of Partition

Pakistan came into being not simply because of Muslim communalism.

More than half a century after the single most violent and traumatic event in Indian history, the wounds of Partition are yet to fully heal. Much has been written about Partition and the events preceding and following it. Yet, as Mushirul Hasan notes in his prologue to this book, almost all the literature available on the subject deals with the realm of high politics, of the protracted, and ultimately futile, negotiations between the Congress, the Muslim League and the British. What is missing from most accounts of Partition are the voices of ordinary people whose fates were decided by politicians in Delhi, Shimla and London. This book seeks to draw out these ignored, margina-lised voices, to illustrate the meanings of the Partition event for those common people affected by it, and to portray the element of immense human suffering that it brought in its trail.

In his introduction to the volume, Hasan writes that the commonplace perception of Partition as simply an outcome of Muslim communalism needs to be debunked. Like the Hindus and, indeed, all other communities, the Muslims of India were (are) not one homogenous whole. They were divided on the lines of caste, ethnicity, sect, region

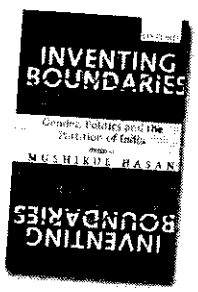
as well as social class, and thus exhibited a considerable diversity in terms of political positions and views. It would clearly be fallacious to take the Muslim League's "two - nation" theory as having been acceptable to all Muslims.

As the author points out, groups like the 'low' caste Momin weavers of Bihar, many Shias and sections of the *ulama* were vehemently opposed to the Pakistan demand. The creation of Pakistan, he says, needs to be seen in the wider socio-economic context, and an unwholesome obsession with a political explanation is unwarranted. Social discrimination and economic backwardness made many Muslims amenable to the idea of a separate state. Adding to this was the threat posed by the rising tide of caste Hindu chauvinism, both within as well as outside the Congress, which made the promise of a Muslim land even more attractive to many, more than it ordinarily would have.

If the Muslim League came up with the "two-nation" theory in 1940, prior to which Jinnah had been an ardent advocate of Indian unity, we would do well to remember that long before this the Hindu Mahasabha under Savarkar and others had already come to the conclusion that Hindus and Muslims represented two different, indeed antagonistic, nations.

Inventing Boundaries is divided into three broad sections. The first consists of essays written in the 1940s on the merits or otherwise of the Pakistan scheme. Dr. Ambedkar's piece, "Thoughts on Pakistan", extracted from his tome, *Pakistan or the Partition of India*, is included in this section. While Ambedkar could have been expected to have taken a somewhat balanced position in the debate on Partition, being neither a Muslim nor a Hindu, he seems to fall into the trap of communal stereotypes that Hasan warns readers against in his introductory essay. Thus, Hindus and Muslims are spoken of as neatly divided and homogenous categories, ignoring the considerable degree of religious syncretism that bind Hindu and Muslim groups at the local level. By speaking of Hindus and Muslims as monolithic groups, Ambedkar seems unmindful of the considerable diversity within each of them. As he sees it, there is no possibility of any inter-religious dialogue or understanding between Hindus and Muslims, and thus Pakistan emerges as a logical conclusion.

Two essays by Muslim League ideologues, Kazi Saiduddin Ahmad and Jamiluddin Ahmad, advocate the establishment of a separate state for the Muslims on the grounds that, allegedly, the Hindus and the Muslims are so opposed to each other, that a united India is an impossible proposition. As against this, an essay by Radha Kamal Mukerjee, penned in 1944, argues that



Inventing Boundaries—Gender, Politics and the Partition of India

Edited by Mushirul Hasan Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000
INR 595
ISBN: 019 565103 0

reviewed by **Yoginder Sikand**

Pakistan would be an economic disaster, being set up in the most backward parts of the Subcontinent. He argues passionately for a union of workers of all religions against feudal and capitalist structures as the only way out of the communal tangle.

A piece by the noted communist activist Sajjad Zaheer, published by the communist party in the same year, is also reproduced here. Zaheer, in line with the position of his party, sees the Pakistan demand as reflecting the legitimate right to self-determination of the Muslim nationalities of the north-west and north-east of India, but, as the title of his essay, "A Case For Congress-League Unity", suggests, he sees the possibility of the Muslim League and the Congress coming to an agreement which could satisfy all communities.

The second section consists of analysis of hitherto neglected voices in the whole event. Ordinary students had a leading role to play in promoting the Pakistan project, particularly in Muslim-minority provinces, as Hasan shows in his essay on the changing profile of the Aligarh Muslim University. Set up by Sir Sayyed Ahmad Khan in the 1880s and intended to be the training ground for a class of Muslim elite allied to the colonial administration, by the 1920s, Aligarh, Hasan points out, had been swept by the tide of Indian politics and, with the Khilafat movement, soon turned into a major centre of anti-British, pro-independence activists. Soon, even groups such as the Congress and the communists began establishing a presence in its precincts. However, as Indian independence drew closer, fears of caste Hindu domination grew increasingly real, and Aligarh soon emerged as the epicentre of the Pakistan movement.

On the other hand, as Yohannan Friedmann shows in his article on the Jamiat-ul Ulama-i-Hind (The Union of the Ulama of India), crucial sections of the Muslim public remained vociferously opposed to Partition till the very end. The ulama or Muslim divines of the Jamiat opposed the Pakistan demand, visualising, instead, a common Indian nationhood (*muttahida qaumiyat*), citing as precedent the treaty entered into by the Prophet Mohammed with the Jewish tribes of Medina, considering the Jews and the Muslims to be members of one nation (*qaum*). In addition, the 'ulama were opposed to the Muslim League for what they saw as the un-Islamic ways of its leaders, and for creating a climate of anti-Muslim feeling in the country which would militate against Islamic missionary work among non-Muslims.

Although women are inevitably the worst hit in rioting and communal violence, their stories are rarely told in dominant narratives about Partition. Two essays, one by

Urvashi Butalia (author of *The Other Side of Silence*, Himal review, Dec. 1998) and the other jointly written by Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon (*Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, Himal review, Dec. 1998), deal with the trauma of the women victims of Partition violence. They show how at such times, women's bodies come to be seen as markers of community 'honour'. A raped woman thus comes to symbolise the castration of the other community, as well as a sign of 'impurity', which can be removed by her being abandoned by her community or even by her having to commit suicide in desperation. Some 50,000 Muslim women and an estimated 35,000 Hindu and Sikh women are believed to have been abducted during the Partition turmoil.

In his essay on "Businessmen and the Partition of India", Claude Markovits says that economic factors played a crucial role in leading to Partition. On the one hand, the fledgling Muslim bourgeoise, faced with its much stronger caste Hindu counterpart, feared a Hindu-dominated united India. Hence, a separate state, Pakistan, was seen as an attractive economic proposition to them, as it indeed was to large sections of educated middle class government servants in Muslim-minority provinces, particularly Bihar and the UP.

On the other hand, Markovits points out that important sections of the caste Hindu bourgeoise, too, went along with the Partition demand, fearing that if an agreement were reached between the Muslim League and the Congress based on a loose federation, their economic interests, which called for a strong centre, would be badly affected. He quotes, to prove his point, Gandhi's close ally, the Calcutta-based Marwari industrialist G.D.Birla, as writing as early as in 1942 to Gandhi's secretary that, "I am in favour of separation and I do not think it is impracticable or against the interests of Hindus or of India".

The third part deals with fictional representations of the violent times that accompanied Partition. Included here are stories by noted Urdu writers Saadat Hasan Manto and Intizar Husain. In addition are an essay by Dipesh Chakraborty on representations in Bengali Hindu accounts of the violence in East Bengal, an analysis of progressive Hindi literature in the immediate post-Partition period and the ways in which the theme of Partition and Hindu-Muslim relations is tackled therein, as well as a thought-provoking interview with writer Bhisham Sahni, best known for his portrayal of the orgy of violence in his novel Tamas.

This book makes a valuable advance in our understanding of the Partition event and, at the same time, persuasively argues a case for a refashioning of the ways in which the history of inter-community relations in South Asia must be written. No longer will monocausal explanations at the level of high politics suffice. What is needed is a genuine people's history, which foregrounds ordinary people at the centre of any historical discourse. △

Exploring ambivalence

ALTHOUGH THE exalting of information technology tycoons—the new mascots of Indian pride—has begun, we are still struggling to come out of the intellectual stupor induced by the nationalist slogans of the post-independence years; we have yet to fully register the loss of our old certainties. And if that loss wasn't undermining in itself, we are now being propelled through immense changes, social and psychological as much as political and economic, and it is all happening too fast, much, much faster than what any society previously experienced. Not surprisingly, most people in this rapidly mutating society end up living unexamined lives; it is not easy for them to know what they were and what they are now becoming: Kapil Dev and Azharuddin didn't only lose touch with the world in doing what they did, they lost touch with themselves, success on the cricket field catapulted them into a world they were unequipped, in the most important ways, to deal with; it complicated their personalities in ways they have no means of ever understanding. In some sense, in their wounded pride and fierce bravado, they are still innocents, still without the self-knowledge of the fully formed individual, their rawness quite like that of the people who once exalted them and are now full of rage. There are many more internally deracinated people like them in India today, easy preys for New-Age healers, the mind-quelling banalities of Vaastu and Reiki and Chicken Soups for the Soul—people whose self-image is a blur.

This makes the novelist's task all the more difficult in India. His attempt everywhere else, since he emerged with the 19th century European bourgeoisie, has been to capture a people's self-image and fix its essential features, and he has depended for that on some basic stability and coherence in the social order; he has depended on a high degree of individuality among his bourgeois subjects. Among a people only superficially modern, living instinctive lives, and unwilling or unable to confront the challenges of self-creation and self-knowledge, the novelist frequently finds himself at a loss. This is why the form of the short-story often seems more suitable to him. This is also why the novels of R.K. Narayan, who is one of the few Indian writers in English to have written from deep within his world, have such promising beginnings and what seem like unsatisfactory endings: the characters emerge from the world of custom and ritual, briefly and futilely experiment with alternative selves, and then drift back to the passivity and sterility of pre-modern India.

Romantic myth-making and linguistic wizardry—which constitute the borrowed narcotic of magical realism—do not solve, but merely avoid, the problems of writing about a semi-modern people in a modern art form. But then the rare novelist who has little use for myths or ready-made histories, who doesn't run away from, or distort, his material and instead attempts to bring a complex personal perception to it, is usually met with indifference and bemusement, if not hostility. A recent example is Amit Chadhuri's novel, *A New World*, whose strange fate has been to be recognised everywhere except India as the masterpiece of subtle insight that it is. The novel's dense and beautifully concealed network of implication and suggestion—always the sign of great art—lays out the emotional and spiritual costs of the changing world we live in: the suffering that often goes unacknowledged, which the novelist has little choice but to register obliquely, without garish captions. But most people in a fast-moving and stressful world, though full of suffering themselves, don't have the detachment to sense that kind of deeper imaginative truth about their own lives.

FROM "A JOURNEY WITHOUT MAPS: READING AND WRITING IN ENGLISH" BY PANKAJ MISHRA IN <WWW.TEHELKA.COM> "

Whisker wise

WOMEN SELDOM make passes at men with mustaches. Dorothy Parker didn't say that, my wife did—or wounding words to that effect—when we met for the very first time. I had a mustache then, a fine, manly specimen, which I twirled up at the ends for extra effect. By our third meeting, it was gone. In sum, I gained a lovely wife but surrendered forever my right to a mustache. On balance, I would say that the contract has been an agreeable one.

That doesn't stop me from cultivating a sturdy nostalgia for my mustache, or from looking back occasionally—and wistfully—on the days when I was free to grow one. These feelings came to the surface some days ago when my brother, who lives in Delhi, sent me an urgent request for his favorite brand of mustache wax, which he believed I could buy in New York. He's running dangerously low on supplies bought last year in Europe and does not want to have to resort to Fix-O, the local Indian brand. Fix-O is a gooey, green substance that causes a slight encrustation of the mustache, so I understand his panic.

He may, I fear, have to make do with Fix-O for an uncomfortable while. My inquiries in New York—at several barbers'—proved fruitless. Determined to find some decent wax, I resorted next to the Internet. Typing the word "moustache" (as I was taught to spell it) did not help, as I was flooded with results that were mainly for homosexuals. ("Beards and Moustaches by Gayscape", "Moustache: Relax Club for Gays" and so forth.) "Mustache," spelled the American way, proved marginally less lurid.

I did, eventually, find "Skippy's Mustasjevoks" (at www.skippys.no), a Norwegian company run by a man called Ole Skibnes. (Here's what he says about himself: "I'm a resident of the city of Trondheim, Norway. I'm married and have three lovely daughters. In addition to my passionate work with this firm and other mustache related activities I work as a policeman in Trondheim police department.") I have asked Mr. Skibnes if he can ship his wax to India, and await his

response. I think my brother's problem is nearer resolution.

Cosmopolitan America's disregard for the mustache can be gauged from the fact that the last president to sport any sort of facial hair was William Howard Taft. One can also be sure that if either Al Gore or George W. Bush chose to grow a mustache this month, neither would make it to the house where Taft once lived.

This popular abhorrence could be the result of a medley of factors: an obsession with hygiene, for one, crossed with a certain Protestant ethic, by which self-betterment is associated with a "clean look". Besides, men no longer need the mustache as a virility symbol. In the old days—of the Civil War, of Crimea, of Kipling's subalterns on the Afghan frontier—a hirsute swarthiness was part of virility, of a warrior code. But as war-making has become more efficient, men no longer need to look fierce, or even manly.

The cult of the mustache persists only in ultra-patriarchal societies, like India or Turkey. This, simply put, is a case of "me man, hairy, dominant/you woman, hairless, submissive." In our cities, as male dominance abates, few men are hirsute. Those with beards are preponderantly college professors and orthodox Jews or Muslims.

Mustaches still offer a complex anthropology. As my Internet encounter confirmed, the mustache has enjoyed a certain status as a gay "signifier" in the West. But a homosexual academic I questioned told me that the mustache has now "receded as a gay accoutrement, just as gays themselves have begun to recede from view, losing their distinctive tribal marks as society's tolerance increases."

In urban America, mustachioed men are now more likely to be blue-collar—cops, firemen, construction workers—or people from a non-American culture, where facial hair is not disdained. In parts of rural India, the act of twirling your mustache in the presence of a woman is enough to suggest that you desire her. This, not surprisingly, could lead to violence, especially if the woman has a male relative present to take umbrage...

FROM "MANLY MEN KEEP A STIFF UPPER LIP, AND A BARE ONE" BY TUNKU VARADARAJAN IN THE THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Nostalgia

CROSSING INTO the 50s, is the story of my generation which grew up with Pakistan. We have gone through all its moods and upheavals. Our rights and wrongs, beliefs and value systems have kept changing as we matured through our different phases.

My earliest images are of the frightening times around the Partition when my father, a government official, was posted at Kasur, a border town. As a toddler, I saw and can now vividly recollect the sight of a few dead bodies wrapped in coffins lying below a railway bridge. In those days, people talked about the bloodshed between the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs. Those gory bodies were of some Sikhs.

But then, as I joined school, there was no more talk of the Hindus and Sikhs. People only occasionally lamented and blamed the British for leaving behind the unresolved issue of Kashmir. Our parents often reminisced nostalgically about the friends who had parted for India.

Everyone spoke of the jovial times with the Sikhs. The oldies in the villages even praised the British for their fairness and justice. We read Indian magazines and enjoyed Indian films. There was also a distinct residual British culture in us. Ladies wore coats in winters with brooches. Breakfast meant porridge and half-boiled eggs. *Nihari* or *payas* were still not in fashion.

Every film had a club scene with a dancer, a drunkard at the bar and a musician who expansively lifted up his clarinet. The Punjabi parents wanted their children to speak in Urdu if not English. Even our home had an English pram.

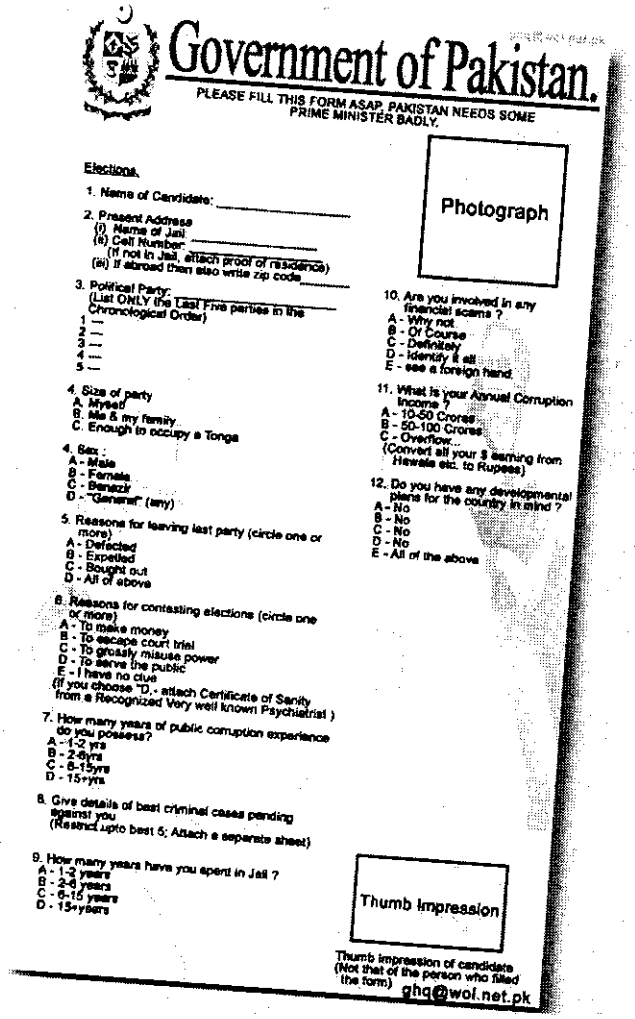
It was a clean secular culture with no ideological conflicts. Religion signified spirituality and not ritualism. The mosque and the maulvi commanded deep reverence. Zakat required no affidavits and filing of returns. It was inconceivable that a person claiming to be a religious scholar would carry weapons or someone could be murdered in a mosque. An honest man was respected, graft was considered a sin and earning a good name in the society meant a great deal.

Our parents quoted Saadi and Hafiz. My school taught me Arabic, Persian and English from Class 1. While the government schools were not as good, the private institutions provided a high quality education. Teachers were respected. The curriculum was of an international standard. The history books had yet not been altered nor had the Maths, Urdu, English and Social Studies books been Islamised.

The fact that Quaid-i-Azam wore stylish clothes, consumed alcohol or enjoyed Western food was a non-issue. Patriotism was not limited to wearing shalwar-kameez or displaying religiosity.

In the agriculture sector, there was prosperity with bumper crops and a general sense of contentment prevailed. Fast-paced urban life did not exert a strong-enough pull for migration towards the big cities. The cities were clean and the civic services worked. In Lahore, I remember, water tankers regularly sprinkling water on the sides of the roads in the afternoons to settle the dust. Big cities provided good entertainment which included latest films in clean cinemas where families congregated for matinee shows on holidays.

City night-life offered night clubs with dance and music programmes. Hotels had well-stocked bars and the clubs ran *tombolas* and social evenings. World-famous bands and troupes visited Pakistan. No one bothered how the others lived as long as it did not infringe upon the rights of society. Four-star comfort and Chinese food had arrived. Meanwhile, we had invented our very own dish—Balti Ghost of Landi Kotal. Cantonments were well outside the cities. Military was paid well and it lived within its own self-contained islands enjoying an elevated status and a respect from the com-



Government of Pakistan.

PLEASE FILL THIS FORM ASAP. PAKISTAN NEEDS SOME PRIME MINISTER BADLY.

Elections.

1. Name of Candidate: _____

2. Present Address
(i) Name of Jail _____
(ii) Cell Number _____
(If not in Jail, attach proof of residence)
(iii) If abroad then also write zip code _____

3. Political Party: _____
(List ONLY the Last Five parties in the Chronological Order)
1 —
2 —
3 —
4 —
5 —

4. Size of party
A. Myself
B. Me & my family
C. Enough to occupy a Tonga

4. Sex :
A - Male
B - Female
C - Benazir
D - "General" (any)

5. Reasons for leaving last party (circle one or more)
A - Defected
B - Expelled
C - Bought out
D - All of above

6. Reasons for contesting elections (circle one or more)
A - To make money
B - To escape court trial
C - To grossly misuse power
D - To serve the public
E - I have no clue
(If you choose "D", attach Certificate of Sanity from a Recognized Very well known Psychiatrist)

7. How many years of public corruption experience do you possess?
A - 1-2 yrs
B - 2-5yrs
C - 5-15yrs
D - 15+yrs

8. Give details of best criminal cases pending against you
(Restrict upto best 5; Attach a separate sheet)

9. How many years have you spent in Jail ?
A - 1-2 years
B - 2-5 years
C - 5-15 years
D - 15+years

Photograph

10. Are you involved in any financial scams ?
A - Why not
B - Of Course
C - Definitely
D - Identify it all
E - see a foreign hand

11. What is your Annual Corruption Income ?
A - 10-50 Crores
B - 50-100 Crores
C - Overflow...
(Convert all your $ earning from Hawala etc. to Rupees)

12. Do you have any developmental plans for the country in mind ?
A - No
B - No
C - No
D - No
E - All of the above

Thumb Impression

Thumb impression of candidate
(Not that of the person who filled the form)

ghq@wol.net.pk

munity. As a profession, it provided prestige, honour and glamour. In short, there was a feel-good situation all around. Those were the golden fifties.

The turning point is Ayub Khan's takeover and the first jolt in a normal flow of events. Most of us, unaware of its long-term implications, welcome it. The first blow and beginning of our downward slide comes with the 1965 war. Urdu media whips up a war frenzy and a blind animosity towards India. We all go whole hog for the war. The war brings no results but a huge reservoir of patriotism gets frittered away on an ill-planned and an uncalled for war. Growth of economy is halted.

After the 71 elections, the military, in its naivete, does not transfer power to the majority leader, Sheikh Mujib. Bhutto's socialism follows and systematically destroys all our industrial and educational apparatus. Zia's Islamisation compounds our problems by introducing intolerance in society. Then Benazir and Nawaz Sharif, like two little devils, fool around for some time with no clear vision. The sad saga continues. But that is another story...

FROM "THE GOLDEN FIFTIES" BY NAZAR HAYAT, IN DAWN MAGAZINE.

TRANSLATO ERGO SUM

A LETTER came recently to my father's office from a Bengali gentleman in Calcutta. The author of the letter, unknown to my family, explained that he was a life-long writer of fiction, adding that his "pen covers was never still". This prolific gentleman, impressed with the fact that I, with my recognisably Bengali name, had won the Pulitzer Prize, wanted to know how he himself might apply for the honour. On the phone, I explained to my parents that it hadn't been a matter of applying, that it had actually been the single greatest surprise of my life, something like winning the lottery without ever having bought a ticket. When my father asked whether Indian nationals were eligible for the Pulitzer, I told him what I knew: that the book had to be by an American citizen, and deal, preferably, with "American life". At this point my mother interjected that the judges had made an exception in my case. I might have been naturalised as an American citizen when I was eighteen (I was born in London), but in her eyes I am first and forever Indian. Furthermore, my book, in her opinion, wasn't about American life. It was about people like herself and myself—Indians. I suppose I should be grateful that my mother wasn't on the Pulitzer committee.

I draw attention to this anecdote because it exemplifies the perplexing bicultural universe I inhabit, the expectations and assumptions I have always shuttled between. My mother has lived outside India for nearly thirty-five years; my father, nearly forty. Since 1969 they've made their home in the United States. But there were invisible walls erected around our home, walls intended to keep American influence at bay. Growing up, I was admonished not to "behave" like an American, or, worse, to "think" of myself as one. Actually "being" an American was not an option.

I believe what first drove me to write fiction was to escape the pitfalls of being viewed as one thing or the other. But what I have discovered upon publishing my book—*Interpreter of Maladies*—is that authorial freedom is limited to the process of writing itself, in the private sphere of creation.

Once made public, both my book and myself were immediately and copiously categorised. Take, for instance, the various ways I am described: as an American author, as an Indian-American author, as a British-born author, as an Anglo-Indian author, as an NRI (non-resident Indian) author, as an ABCD lost and found author (ABCD stands for American born confused "desi"—and is an acronym coined by Indian nationals to describe culturally challenged second-generation Indians raised in the US). According to Indian academics, I've written something known as "Diaspora fiction"; in the US, it's "immigrant fiction". In a way, all of this amuses me. The book is what it is, and has been received in ways I have no desire or ability to control. The fact that I am described in two ways or twenty is of no consequence; as it turns out, each of those labels is

accurate.

The earliest story in my book, "A Real Durwan," was written soon after returning from a visit to India in 1992, in my bedroom in my parents' house in Rhode Island. This story and another, "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar," have been attacked by Indian reviewers as having a "tunnel vision" of India.

My only defence is that my own experience of India was largely that of a tunnel—the tunnel imposed by the single city we ever visited, by the handful of homes we stayed in, by the fact that I was not allowed to explore this city on my own. Still, within these narrow confines, I felt that I had seen enough of life, enough details and drama, to set stories on Indian soil.

An Indian man I met at a dinner party in New York, speaking of "A Real Durwan", disagreed with me. He felt I had misrepresented the plumbing technologies of Calcutta. "All houses in Calcutta have sinks," he informed me, indignantly, assuming that I had never been there myself, or at best had been there once or twice as a child. I did not argue to the contrary, in spite of the fact that my maternal grandparents' house —the house the story was based on—had no sinks but rather a series of plastic and metal red buckets from which we washed our hands and bathed. I realised that, according to this man I had carelessly construed the city from which he originally hailed. Mistranslated it, if you will.

What this gentleman was suggesting is something that has been stated more explicitly in certain reviews of my book in the Indian press. And that is that I, being an ABCD, lack the cultural ambidexterity to write about Indian life and characters in an authentic way. I have been accused of setting stories in India as a device in order to woo Western audiences with exotica.

Non-Bengali reviewers make bad noises about the fact that I only write about Bengalis, only one of India's numerous regional populations. Even after I won the Pulitzer, *India Today*, a national news magazine, wrote that my setting stories in Calcutta was "an unwise decision." Most disturbing of all was a review in an Indian paper called *Business Standard*, in which the reviewer, discussing *Interpreter of Maladies*, comments upon the infatuation of Mr. Kapasi, a part-time Indian tour guide, with the Indian-American Mrs. Das. In this story, Mr. Kapasi is intoxicated by the sight of Mrs. Das's bare legs and short skirt, things I had safely assumed many of the world's men found arousing. But Mr. Kapasi's intoxication was not universal in the reviewer's mind; it was "apalling[ly]" stereotypical, severe condemnation for a fiction writer. The review continues: "This could be understandable if the writer were a complete foreigner, but not from someone who flaunts her Indian lineage."

To avoid this sort of review in the future, I suppose I could decide to play it safe and never write about India or nonimmigrant Indians again. I am the first person to admit that my knowledge of India is limited, the way in which all translations are. I am impeded not only by my own lack of proximity but by the fact that my parents' impressions—one of my main resources when writing about India—are also arrested in time; the country they left in the sixties is, in many respects, unrecognisable to them today.

...Rendering an Indian landscape into English, with or without sinks, is one thing. Dialogue is wholly another. Because Bengali is essentially a spoken language for me, because it occupies such an aural presence in my mind, forcing my Bengali characters to speak a tongue they either can't or wouldn't speak in a given scene is one of my most daunting challenges. It is a disorienting and at times highly dissatisfying thing to do. I must abandon a certain sense of verisimilitude in the process, a certain fidelity.

...Such tactics aren't feasible for a general audience, except in very short doses. In some instances I do retain Bengali words in my stories. The *durwan* of "A Real Durwan" is one example. I liked the sound of the word in Bengali, and the full phrase, with the two English words in front of it, sounded perfectly normal, just as it is normal for me and even for my parents to slip the occasional English word into Bengali conversation. (Even the coinage ABCD betrays a similar linguistic hybridisation.) The phrase *bechareh*, an epithet used to designate a pitiable person, also appears in "A Real Durwan". I included it not out of any need to be culturally accurate, but due to the whims of my own quasi-bilingual brain.

...In my dictionary, the biblical definition of translate is "to convey to heaven without death". I am struck by the extent to which this decidedly Western, nonsecular definition sheds light on my own personal background of Eastern origin. For in my observation, translation is not only a finite linguistic act but an ongoing cultural one. It is the continuous struggle, on my parents' behalf, to preserve what it means to them to be first and forever Indian, to keep afloat certain familial and communal traditions in a foreign and at times indifferent world. The life my parents have made for themselves here has required a great movement, a long voyage, an uprooting of all things familiar in exchange for an immersion into all things strange.

It has required, moreover, an endless going back and forth, repeated travelling, urgent telephone calls, decades of sending and receiving letters. Somehow they have conveyed the spirit of their former world to the here and now, where it exists for them, still thriving, still meaningful.

Unlike my parents, I translate not so much to survive in the world around me as to create and illuminate a nonexistent one. Fiction is the foreign land of my choosing, the place where I strive to convey and preserve the meaningful. And whether I write as an American or an Indian, about things American or Indian or otherwise, one thing remains constant: I translate, therefore I am.

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THIS ISSUE

anjum hasan
-five poems

A N J V M
H A S A N

Holiday

My friends from the vast city drive to a dirty town at the base of a hill on a weekend at the fag end of summer. Everything is distance, the low sky shimmers, the warm air gleams with light.

Good, says everyone. Excellent. They take their luggage up to their rooms, wash the grit from their hair, humming. The town is as old as a stony hill and large as one decrepit neighbourhood. Night fills it like a slow water thick with dreadful secrets.

My friends never have to choose between logic and excitement. They plan the hours carefully, then walk in the morning to where fifteen empty buses sing love songs while their pilots sleep among the vacant seats, forever condemned to dream of flight.

Precise late morning shadows mingle beneath the feet of small town tourists: awful shirtless men holding baby boys, families the size of wedding parties, married girls so blank-eyed they might have left themselves elsewhere, in that other hot and ochre town where they were born. My friends slowly turn brown or browner, full of a careful happiness among the waterfalls and the sensuous boatmen who wander, oar in hand, half in dream and half in hunger.

Good, says everyone. Excellent. The night smells of fish and old granite cooling. And also of pineapple, garbage and rivers. My friends drink in their hotel room at evening. Caught between despair and understanding, we presume to touch the heart of things. Places we see yield their light, their memory for what would these still green trees be if they were not trees for us?

And that is the holiday at the base of a hill in the town with the white-haired waterfalls. The vast city is untidy, complex, full of lies and defeat. My friends will disappear into it, their car joining twenty others at a murderous red light. We have seen them for this short while—only because the town was tacky and little, and they were in their brightest summer clothes.

Untitled

Wandering among twisted streets on long dry afternoons, in those shrieking bazaars that are a conspiracy whispered through the broken teeth of pavements, I am made homeless by distance. I would like the horizon to travel with me like in the old days when the air was cool as a white reed and the far houses wore the deep colours of evening. But these are neighbourhoods wide as towns, where each house hums a different silence—like a family in which no one has spoken to the others for days. And the restless roads unfold without end—a tumult of forgetting that even the clouds cannot measure.

I hoard the day's few treasures and bring them out when day-light dips behind the city's far terraces. I like the wild-eyed mask on some quiet awning, the lusty grape, the fever in the eyes of old, diffident men who walk in those burning mornings where cars insult stillness and motionless trees behind public walls refuse to yield their sweetness to the air. The cries of bare-footed flower-sellers in the early morning, the wind sifting like tinkering rain through the fronds of one proud palm, the names of playing children shouted into the twilight—these are my flimsy refuges.

O night, O night within night, I want to peel you like the mystical forgotten onion. These distances mock at my gifts and I have no maps. I want, sitting here, to discern the deep movement of rivers and women's voices made tender by dawn, the rooftop weeping of cats in the heat and the magical breathing of electric cables—just a few of those palpable signs that make the city stir beneath one's desolate heart. But I make my home alone, in unlikely places: the dark comforting corners of restaurants, the window in which a leaf moves and changes, the calm bed ever anchored to the morning's dull and tepid light.

ANJUM HASAN

Rain

You will hear it waking to the roar of a ceiling fan,
in the rustling of dry palm leaves, in pebbles pouring
from a lorry onto the dusty street. The lips of the warm
wind, trapped between scaffolding and terrace, will
whisper soundless words of memory through
the window's grating. You will hear it in the last aeroplane
of the night (whose sound you will mistake for thunder),
in the alphabets of the birds, in indignant pressure
cookers. Your thirst will be vast as the sky. You will look
for it in the evening, searching for one cloud among
tremendous shadows, and at night when it might come
from a great distance and touch the city with a new light.

You won't find it in the few grey leaves of March
or behind the thin red crescent burning itself out
on a fevered patch of sky. Your hair will grow electric
with the dry heat of the day, your dreams shot with
the silver lightning of monsoon nights, the blue green
violet nights celebrated by crickets, the mountain nights
where fate is linked to umbrellas, and feeling to the
violent hours that clatter on those heights.

But Venus' eye is clear here. You will look for it
in refrigerators at night, slice water-melons with
its taste on your tongue—unfeeling, red-hearted fruit—
and buy cucumbers in despair. You will almost forget
the sadness of mist, but remember how quickly mirrors
darkened and streets turned grim, and wait for the same
blanket to be fastened over the sky and change
the quality of this harsh, unvarying light.

Always the 'where' of where you are is a place in the
head, established through skin, and you recognise
the address not in numbers or names but through familiar
patterns of bird-song, traffic, shadows, lanes.
And when you go away only envelopes bear the name
of that tiny dot of geographical space where everyone
knows you now stay. For the memory of each of the
body's ancient senses remains the same, for years
remains the same: bewildered by dry winds in
April, aching for rain.

Not Alone

If you think to be alone is to walk about in the rooms of your house and hear the neighbours dying on their terraces and see the evening busily gathering in the jacaranda trees, you're wrong. You're not alone yet.

And if you think to look into the mirror is to be alone, you're wrong again because the mirror says, you're poor, perplexed, where is the centre of your light, where is that essential recognition? Of yourself?

You're not alone when you sit alone on your bed and suck at a fruit and let the juice dribble down your chin, onto your chest, down between your breasts and then fall asleep with sticky fingers dreaming. Any dream proves it.

To be alone is to be here, but I am always somewhere else. I am always falling, my love: a parachute on fire, the last branch of the tree that stands apart, the cloud that somebody tore up, the dream weighed down with pillows, the descent ...

A N J V M
H A S A N

WHERE I LIVE

I live now in a haunted place without remembered
ghosts—no bitter weeds, no webs of light, no single hair
curled sweetly on the mirror's glass, but one dark room
where books ignore their neighbours in the aluminium
trunk and an evening smelling of wet leaves and complex,
treacherous sewers.

I think I've lost the beauty that filled my throat with its
difficult sadness, its harrowing indifference. Gone bright
doors, gone shafts of never-changing, happy light, gone
freshly-minted dawns, gone February, gone July, gone
cotton carders with their flaming eyes, gone that whole
rich yearning life.

I live now among tight-faced houses coloured like
matchsticks, 21-inch t.v. screens in badly-lit rooms, people
endlessly polishing their bikes, road maps full of right-
angled streets and little squares of jaded green, the
engineering student's alarm clock at five, after which I lie
awake wondering who meagerly measures
out days like these.

But none of this kills the habit of awareness I have that
melts the world into a nectar for the senses more readily
than love devours a face, or grief breathes in and out the
air of absence. I am without a place. I want three seasons
keeping time in the sky and valleys which the evening fills
with its dark blue waters.

I always wanted to be alone. But now
I'll never be the good witch
I was at home: burrowing into diaries
full of love secrets and spite,
always raging but always quiet, bred
in novels, raised on memories
and silence. This is not silence.
Even when the world is still,
even when just dogs and street-lights live,
this is not the silence of the night.

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The Famous 7

MANOHAR RAI

Ever wondered at the way our leaders meet at the UN and get really intimate, backslapping and indulging in general locker-room behaviour. The sworn foes who deliver near hysterical hate rhetoric at home cozy up while on a junket. A sure case of politics making strange bedfellows, but missed. After all, it doesn't make the headlines like Clinton shaking hands with Castro or Lazio grabbing Arafat, but then its happening. After the recent Millennium Summit, I just couldn't take it any more. Called up this lady who's on Interpol's most wanted list. "What's up with these jokers? Am I missing something here?" I asked. "Well, this is one of the many cans that the journos haven't pried open. Will you take me on a holiday to Kerala this winter?" she bargained like one of those sold out to the latest best-seller destination.

After I made an indifferent promise, she gave me a mole's account of a recent bash, held at a nonde-script fishing village on the Saurashtra coast. "It was all drunken revelry. I would even call it conspirato-rial foreplay." The real agenda, she said, was to get Clinton to expand his definition of the "most danger-ous place on earth" to cover the entire Subcontinent and then apportion parts of the region to MNCs for 'care-taking'.

The night was as black as it could get. In the salty wasteland, only the gaggle of alcoholic mirth broke the night's stillness. The SAARC rendezvous was taking place at a top-secret location. While the region slept, these guys and girls met to finally bury the misery of SAARC and give it away to the best bidder. But before business, it was pleasure.

Vajpayee and Musharraf sat growling at each other in the best canine tradition. Like they say, you can take the politician out of the country, but you can't take the pit bull out of the politician. A tipsy Jigme was trying to convince Koirala that there were serious "metholodigical" flaws in the Nepali enumeration of Bhutanese refugees, said to total 100 million. "My dear friend, it was only a stip of the lung," explained a slurring Koirala. His biographers may note that it was a rare slip from a leader with an otherwise impeccable PR record.

Vajpayee and Musharraf were now going strong. India's poet-prime minister and master of nonsense verse broke into a choice couplet about Pakistan being a noisome neighbourhood bowwow. Musharraf, having heard it already at New York, and unable to stomach a repeat, aimed a barrack kick into the prime ministerial knee. Vajpayee yelped and had to be carried off for a painkiller shot. Gayoom laughed into his drink and sputtered away looking for a corner to let out.

Mohammed Ali, a Pakistani fisherman once jailed for illegally entering Indian waters, kept up a steady supply of fried pomphret. It is said that Ali did pomphrets the way pomphrets liked to be done. This delicacy was washed down with a few pitchers of toddy bled from the scraggly date palms that litter the coastline. Sheikh Hasina religiously abstained. She kept looking out of the window, between bites of pomphret and a con-stant mumble of "it doesn't beat the Hilsha". "She is so used to looking out at the hartals," explained an MNC aide. "It leaves her with the mixed feeling of being both wanted, and unwanted."

Musharraf kept up a steady gaze at Chandrika, interpreting her vacuous stare for an invite. Vajpayee, the most eligible bachelor in the Subcontinent, was trying to court her by reciting some couplets that the lady just couldn't figure. Chandrika couldn't be bothered either way. Tipsy from the wine and a shot of arrack, she was seeing visions of having personally led a force into the North that brought the LTTE to its knees. She was now riding triumphant into Colombo, into a tumultuous ticker tape parade and the reverber-ating chants of a million Buddhist monks.

"I love your company guys," said Gayoom. "You attract world attention like a dung heap attracts flies." The distance from the mainland allowed him this detached perspective. "Stop being SAARcastic," quipped Vajpayee the chronic punster, nursing his knee and waiting for the applause. "If you don't, we'll step up our production of greenhouse gases till you get that sinking feeling." The MNC big boys by now had an inkling of what they were getting into.

— Samuel Thomas

Jouranlism without borders

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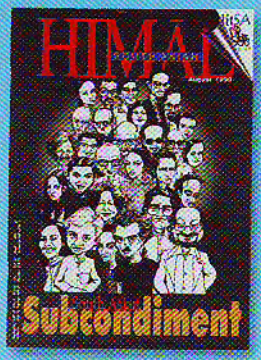

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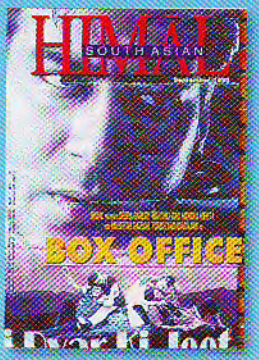

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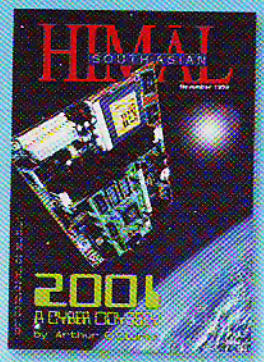

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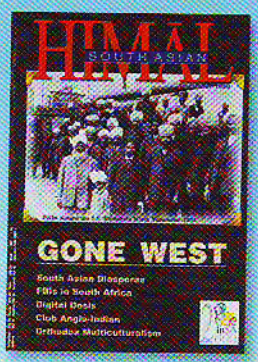

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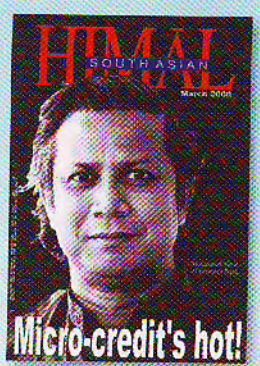

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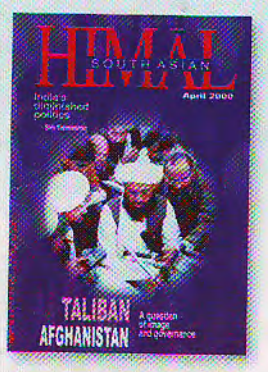

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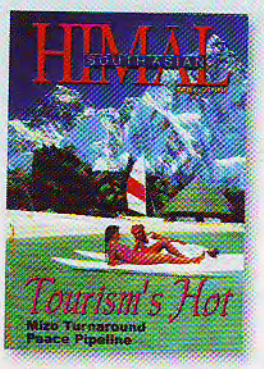

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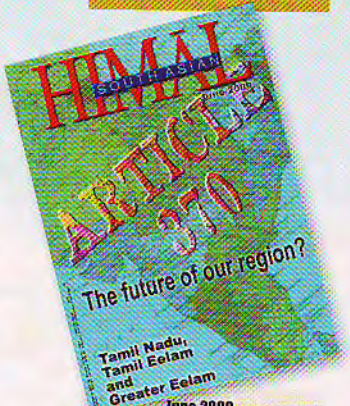

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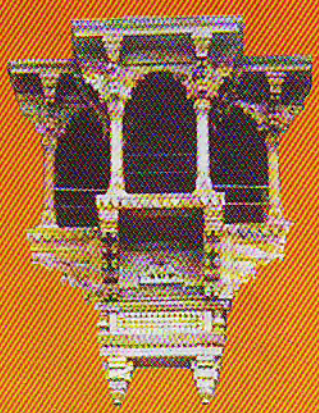

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