HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

February 2001

Bangladesh BDT 60 Bhutan BTN 50 India INR 50 Nepal NPR 50
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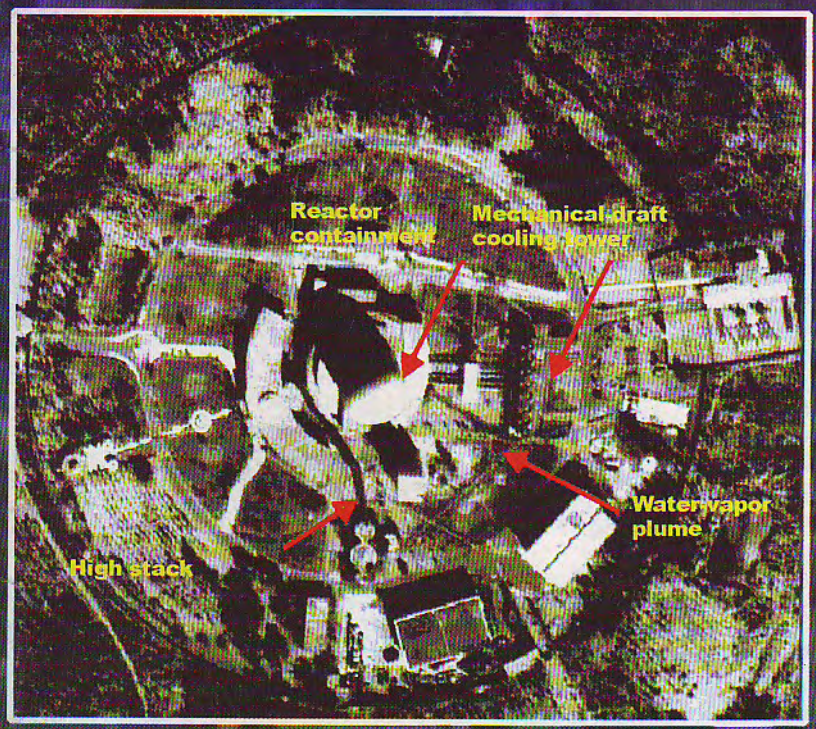
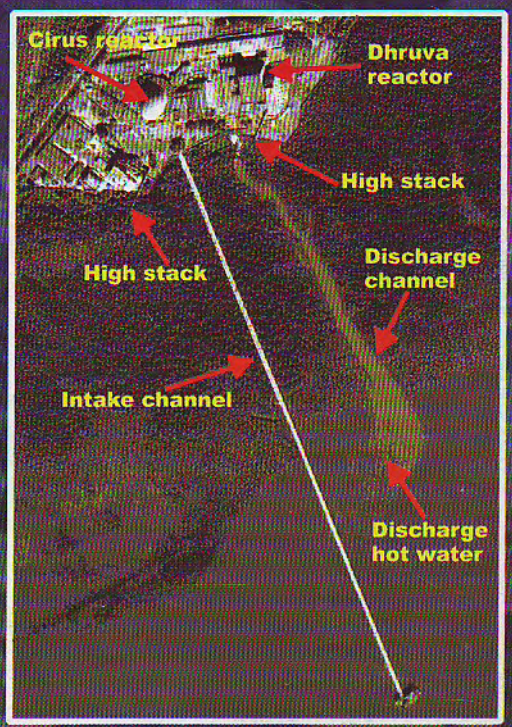


Khushab Plutonium Reactor, Pakistan



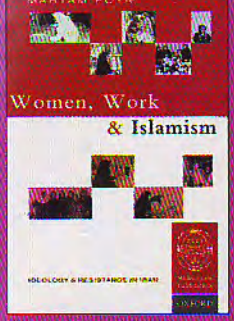
Cirus and Dhruva Reactors, India

Eye in the Sky: Restraining the Indo-Pak Bomb

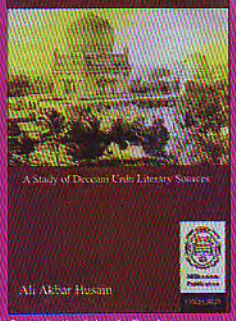
Bhutanese Dead on Highway 31

Whoever Heard of Alma Ata ?

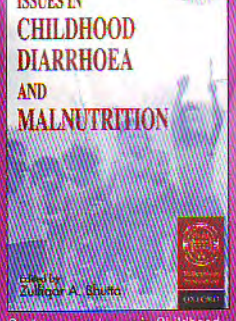
Hate India, Love India: December in Kathmandu



Women, Work, and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran
Maryam Poya Rs 395



Scent in the Islamic Garden: A Study of Deccani Urdu Literary Sources
Ali Akbar Husain Rs 595



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Zulfiqar Ahmed Bhutta Rs 550

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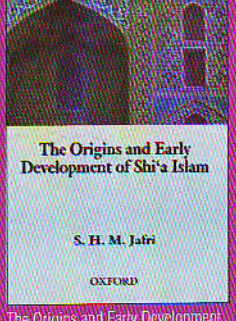
M. Athar Tahir Rs 250



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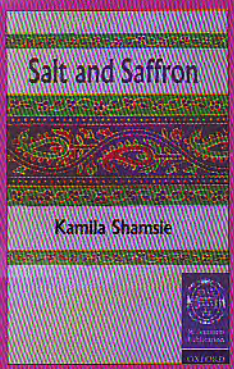

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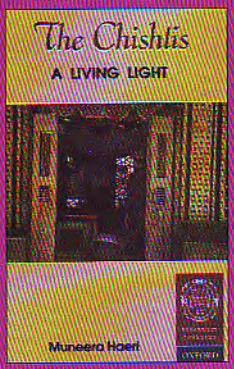
Kamila Shamsie Rs 325



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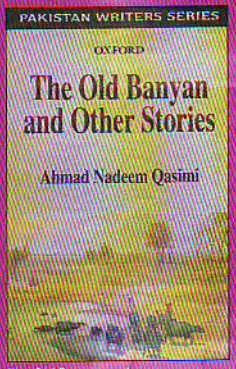
Muneera Haeri Rs 395



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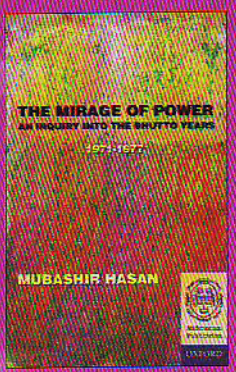
Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi Rs 295



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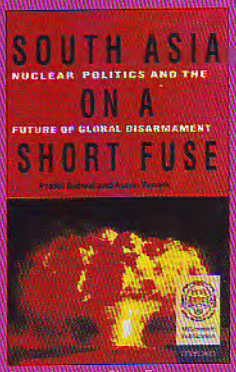
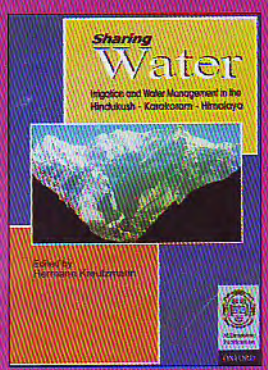
Mubashir Hasan Rs 550



South Asia on a Short Fuse
Prafull Bidwai and Achin Vanaik Rs 595



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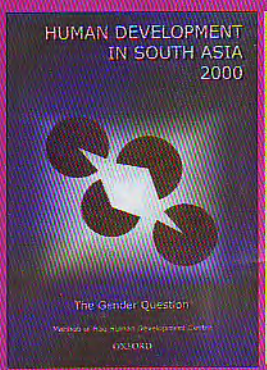
(Ed.) Hermann Kreutzmann Rs 595



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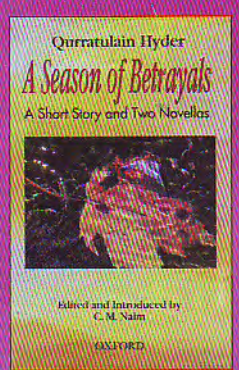
(Prep.) Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (HB) Rs 450 (PB) Rs 350



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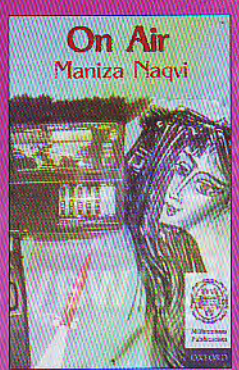
Qurratulain Hyder Rs 295



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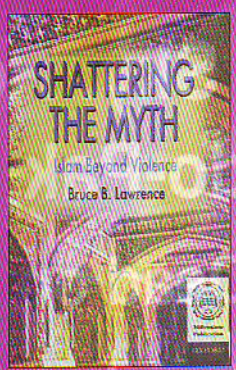
Mariza Naqvi Rs 250



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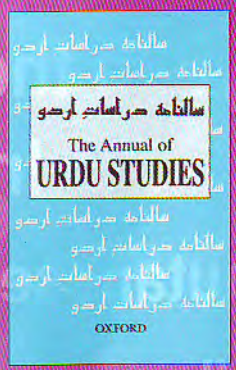
Bruce B. Lawrence Rs 495



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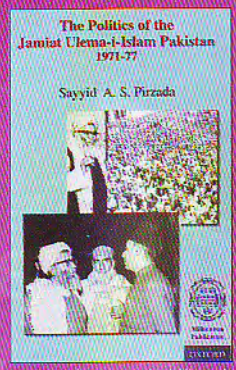

The Politics of the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Islam Pakistan, 1971-1977
Sayyid A.S. Pirzada Rs 595

HIMAL SOUTH ASIAN

Vol 14 No 2

February 2001

Hate India, Love India

12

Mystery of a Kashmir massacre

36

45

No more Noor

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Since the January issue was a litSA bumper, there is no litSA section in this issue.—*Editors*

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Allan's fantasies

While I agree with many points raised by Nigel J. R. Allan ("The tyranny of scholarship", December 2000), I am amazed at his very biased attitude, blaming "Germanic" research on the Himalaya while glorifying North American science. Let me just clear two points.

Firstly, in the same way as Nepalis reject being called Indian, the Alemnaic (rather than Germanic) Swiss certainly don't like to be mixed up with Germans, or for that matter, Nazi Germany. It is unfair no matter whether they are German-, French- or Italian-speaking Swiss.

Secondly, Allan seems to have read too many of those bizarre fantasies churned out by the global occult right-wing crowd that firmly believes in a Nazi-Tibet connection. Studying serious sources instead, he would have known that Hitler never corresponded with the Dalai Lama. The present one was only born in 1935, and was not even in Lhasa until spring 1939. Hitler himself, an Austrian-turned-German, was *not* interested in Tibet (or India as is often claimed). The highly occult oriented Heinrich Himmler—besides some other top Nazi leaders—was interested, but fortunately never visited Tibet as claimed by Allan. But Hitler did support the unwelcome Schaefer Nazi Expedition in winter 1938-39, when one member, anthropologist Bruno Beger did physiognomic measurements pretending to be a "doctor sahib". (Much like this pretext, today blood is taken from indigenous people so as to steal their genes for commercial and racial purposes by international scientists, including from the US, for example, in the Amazon region.)

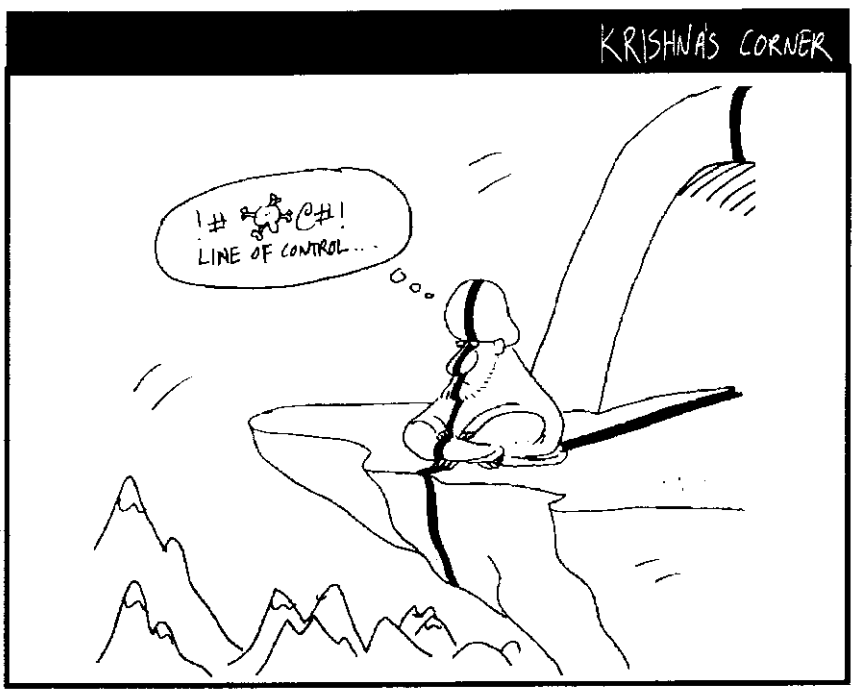
It is hard to believe that Beger, now in his 80s and a convicted Nazi criminal, recently published his own proud account of this nasty expedition. In Sikkim and Tibet, he took measurements of 370 persons, mainly Tibetans including naked young girls, and also Lepchas, Sherpas and Nepalis. He made face casts of 17 (frightened-looking) persons, and impressions of fingertips and hands of around 350 people, not to mention 2000 photographs.

Beger was always on the lookout for *Aryan* or what he called "Europide" races. Nazis worldwide (just look at their Websites) even today translate Aryan into "white superior master race", while Nazi Germany had reduced it simply to "German" (white, blue eyes and blonde hair—a far cry from what Hitler himself looked like). Tibetans themselves are still not aware who Beger really was, and perhaps they don't want to know what perpetual claptrap is published about Hitlerism and Tibet. (If you can read German, go to <www.tourism-watch.org>, click "infodienst # 16" and read "Tibet Mythos", which I wrote in 1998.)

All Asians should be aware that many European visitors feel embarrassed, even outraged, at discovering swastikas everywhere. Although we have done our best to spread the word around, many still do not know that the swastika was hijacked in the late 19th century by Austrian occultists, and in the early 20th century misused by German and Austrian Nazis, and later by all other Nazis.

And, if you are going to Zurich before early May 2001, do not miss the thrilling exhibition, "Traumwelt Tibet: Westliche Trugbilder" (Dream World Tibet: Western Hallucinations), by Martin Brauen in the Museum for Ethnologie, which belongs to Zurich University. (<www.musethno.unizh.ch>) He has also written an equally fascinating book by the same title (Haupt Verlag/Publishers, Berne, 2000); the book also deals at length with the alleged Tibet-Nazi connection.

Ludmilla Tuting
Berlin



Allan replies:

Ms. Tuting's response to my review raises two objections which really relate to one sentence about Tibet. In addition, contrary to what she says, I do not "glorify" North American research and "blame" Germanic research. Anyone who has read my work knows that I am critical of much foreign sponsored "Big Science" when applied to the human condition in the Himalaya. I am not alone. Read Ken Hewitt's critical comments in "Human Impact on Mountains" and "Mountains at Risk" for starters.

The "bizarre fantasies" attributed to me on the Nazi-Tibet connection come from distinguished scholars of Tibet (both of them Germanic). The late Agehananda Bharati (Leopold Fischer), a renowned Indologist and sometime editor of a Tibetan journal, knew about the Hitler-Dalai Lama correspondence from his WW II days and from his having travelled extensively in Tibet in the 1950s. (He was a personal friend of the current Dalai Lama.) The exchange was with a former Dalai Lama. On the other matter, I have a 1960s photocopy of an old photo showing Himmler welcoming the Schaefer party at an airfield, captioned Damsung, north of Lhasa. The 1997 Mythos—Tibet (Cologne) book, in a section on the Tibet-Nazi connection written by Reinhard Greve, shows the same photo (Figure 2) of Himmler and Schaefer, but the caption says Berlin, which is the most likely location for the photo. A Nazi link with Tibet is easily apparent from the photo and Greve's discussion.

In addition to investigating the human biology of Himalayan people, one should remember that the acquisition of crop germplasm was a major endeavour for these 1930s Nazi expeditions for the reasons I mentioned in my review.

Nigel J. R. Allan
Truckee, California

South Asian balance

Your Himalayan Journal-turned-Himal South Asian is perhaps the only publication truly devoted to the South Asian region. Albeit slightly tilted towards India, I still think it is a balanced South Asian magazine. The cover story ("Satellites and South Asia") of December 2000 was a correct analysis of the impact of satellite television. But the message of the cartoon in Krishna's Corner was lost somewhere. On the other hand, Martin Sokefeld's photo feature gave one a great introduction to Pakistani truck art.

Abhas Parajuli
Kathmandu

Damp litSA

I am a trifle disappointed by the January literature special. As a literature freak, I expected to see a sample of some good writing by South Asians. Instead, mostly I had to put up with an interview which was as lengthy as it was boring. It abounded in cryptic one-liners: "Modern, but a kind of contra-modern"; "You spoke about Descartes and I responded about Descartes"; etc. And the Lastpage had an inaccuracy—the Indian Airlines flight IC 814 from Kathmandu to Delhi was hijacked a year ago, and not two years as mentioned.

Ruchi Joshi
Connecticut, USA

BHUTAN

KILLINGS ON HIGHWAY 31

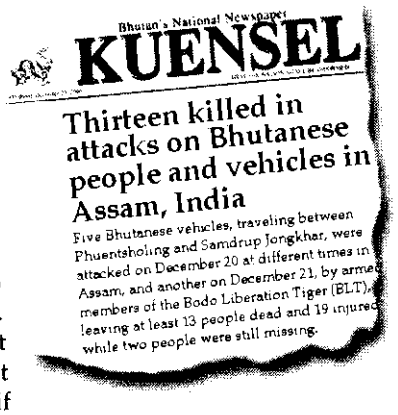
EVEN IN the perspective of the Subcontinent's violent Northeast, which provides such fertile soil for militancy, there must be more than one eyebrow raised at the recent killing and injury of Bhutanese citizens by extremists on Indian soil just south of the border. On 20 and 21 December, a number of Bhutanese buses and cars were fired at indiscriminately by gunmen, leading to the death of 13 and injury of many more.

The vehicles were using Highway 31, which is an important transportation artery linking the Northeast's economic hubs like Siliguri and Guwahati. For the Bhutanese, this road also provides a vital link between the country's eastern and western regions.

While it was intriguing that the incidents along Highway 31 did not attract the international media's attention, the killing and maiming of its innocents were painful for Bhutan, a country which rarely sees violence of this kind, and certainly not on this scale. And as troubling for the authorities in Thimphu were the murky reasons behind what seemed to all observers to have been a pre-meditated exercise. In that sense, Thimphu was more surprised than hurt.

For the last few years, the use of Bhutan's dense southern forest by Bodo militants fighting Assamese domination has been a major source of worry for King Jigme Singye Wangchuk and his subjects. The challenge has been to maintain the country's prized sovereignty by keeping the Indian Army away from operating within Bhutan, and yet keep New Delhi satisfied that everything is being done to flush out the militants. Meanwhile, the Bodos can hardly be wished away, for they will continue to populate and control the southern flanks of the Bhutanese state. Added to that, the highly armed and motivated militant groups have the ability to violently destabilise Bhutan, and that is what was most worrying about the December killings.

Two prominent insurgency groups from Assam are currently camped in the southern Bhutanese forests, driven there under pressure from Bangladesh when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and West Bengal's chief minister Jyoti Basu came to a painfully-negotiated understanding on the sharing of water from the Farraka Barrage. The Indian Army has made it quite clear that it would like to 'flush' the militants out of Bhutan. Thimphu, by the looks of it, has not agreed. A bloody conflict between the Indian military and the militants, if it is at all possible across the 300-kilometre stretch of dense forest, does not appeal to the Druk government. The militants, meanwhile, have been made to understand that they are not welcome on Bhutanese soil. The long sessions of the Tshongdu (National Assembly) in Thimphu has repeatedly declared that they have to be evicted, by force if necessary. The Bhutanese government has also been building a military force, ostensibly for this purpose.


Bhutan's National Newspaper
KUENSEL

Thirteen killed in attacks on Bhutanese people and vehicles in Assam, India

Five Bhutanese vehicles, traveling between Phuentsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar, were attacked on December 20 at different times in Assam, and another on December 21, by armed members of the Bodo Liberation Tiger (BLT), leaving at least 13 people dead and 19 injured while two people were still missing.

Allegations by Assam's Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta imply that the NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) is worried about Thimphu's pressure for a negotiated departure from the Drukyul forests. The open threats of military action emanating from the Tshongdu also certainly have them concerned. The killings may have been meant to provide a sampling of what awaits the Himalayan kingdom if Thimphu does decide to get aggressive.

If the killings were carried out by the BLT, as stated by the Bhutanese police, the situation is even more complex. It would seem that the Bhutanese authorities would have had to be rather certain before the Thimphu police was allowed to air its speculation. What adds to the intrigue is that the BLT is not in any way threatened by the Bhutanese at present, and is in fact presently aligned with the Indian government.

Thus, the tension has been building, not only along the Duars but also between New Delhi and Thimphu, quite uncharacteristic of the long-professed mutual understanding between the two capitals. There are no obvious adversaries here but there are several potential motives. So who killed the Bhutanese? And why? This is high intrigue, and the only plausible theories remain unspoken. △

INDIA • CHINA

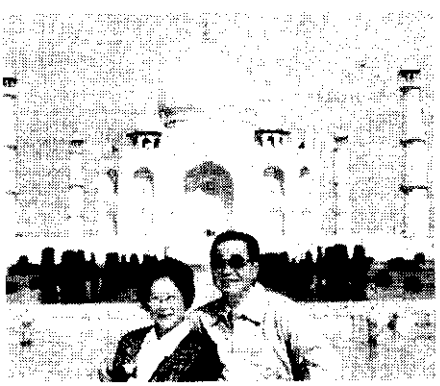
CHINESE CHECKERS WITH LI PENG

LI PENG, CHINA'S second most powerful leader, came visiting India in early January, and clearly his interest was more than a pose with Mrs. Li in front of the Taj. A lot had happened to the world and Asia since his earlier trip of 1991, fast on the

heels of the Tiananmen Square massacre. In South Asia, India (and Pakistan) had gone openly nuclear and New Delhi is now in full embrace with the United States.

For India and the rest of South Asia, it is the direction taken by Beijing that is a matter of immense strategic and economic concern. Although no longer viewed as an enigma, China is a subject of abounding interest, concern and speculation. Changes in that one country will affect everyone. Deprivation of freedom of expression and association is unsustainable in a globalised economy within the information age, and the cataclysmic upheavals which will overtake China when (not if) the tight lid of political control comes off will have consequences for global security.

In the big league, China stands alone as a country that does not accept a pluralistic and democratic value system. Its socialism, modified to market-socialism by the cynical dictums of Deng Xiaoping, has little to do with egalitarian order and is instead a thin cover for one-party dictatorship. But political backwardness has not blunted China's economic clout, and it is perhaps the only country outside the Western hemisphere in a position to launch a trade war against the United States.



Mr. and Mrs. Li at Taj Mahal.

It is the recognition of this economic prowess, rather than Beijing's willingness to conform to international rules, that has gained it membership into the World Trade Organisation. Unlike the case with India, China's imminent entry into the WTO will not hamstring it with multilateral arrangements. It has sewn up bilateral agreements that give it tremendous, and even unfair advantages, in the international trading system.

The one all-important issue, of course, is that China is the world's biggest nuclear and missile proliferator, and Beijing can only become more unyielding with the new Bush administration taking charge in Washington, with its agenda to develop the National Missile Defence (NMD) programme. This will give China the excuse it needs to increase and upgrade its own stockpile of nuclear weapons and missiles. New Delhi cited Chinese designs as the compelling reason for carrying out its 1998 Pokharan II tests, and now it (and the rest of the region) will have to live with the risks of a Chinese counter-proliferation to the American NMD.

The atmospherics of Li's India visit, surprisingly, did not indicate that the matter of proliferation of nuclear weapons and [fissile material] had been discussed at all. Likewise, there was no talk of unresolved border problems, a legacy of the 1962 war. China has occupied several thousand kilometres of Indian-claimed territory.

Li's speeches and responses while in India signified that this was an attempt at the highest political level to strengthen relations, manage tensions and clear the way for increased economic interaction. This meant skirting intractable areas and addressing issues where there is convergence of interest. One of them could be in developing a triangular cooperation between Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi, but then none of the three want to be seen to be the one trying to bell the American cat. This was a proposal mooted over three years ago by then Russian prime minister Yevgeni Primakov. The Chinese were not initially enthusiastic but have warmed to the idea in recent months. Beijing now favours a detailed discussion through Track-II diplomacy for "intellectual clarification of the issues involved".

Not much is likely to come of this, certainly not in the near future. Moscow is using it more as a 'China card' to put pressure on the US and Western multilateral agencies whose help it needs. New Delhi, too, is unlikely to pursue the formation of such an arrangement if developed along anti-US lines given the new cosiness in India-US relations.

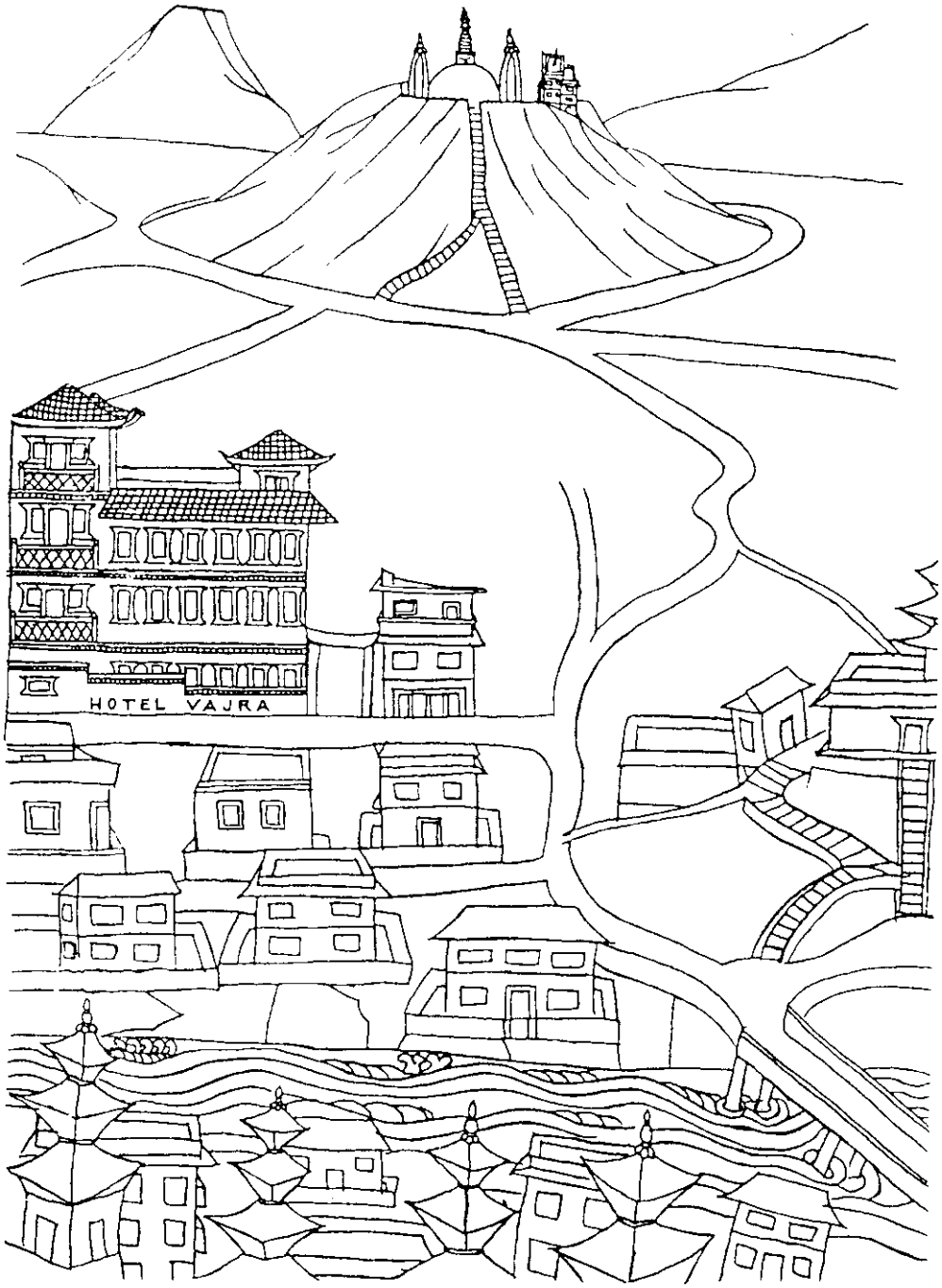
The "missing trust" that Li spoke of while in Delhi is unlikely to disappear even if the two countries manage to maintain cordial relations. A lesson for New Delhi, whose defence minister cited China as "Potential Threat No. 1" to justify the 1998 nuclear tests, is that Beijing's power on the international stage is not based on its nuclear arsenal. It has more to do with China's stupendous economic achievements. India is sadly lacking the economic foundation so necessary to acquire muscle on the world stage. It is China's economic growth, not its missiles alone, that is the greater challenge to democratic India.

—Shastri Ramachandran

INDIA

NOT AMUSING

THE PUBLICATION of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's much-talked-about "Musings" in leading Indian newspapers in early January, and the post-publication recriminations in the national press, register quite clearly the depths that Indian journalism is plumbing at this stage. Central to the unseemly quarrel was the exclusive rights to use verbatim the prime minis-



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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

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

John Collee
The London Observer.

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

Time.

in Kathmandu, the Vajra

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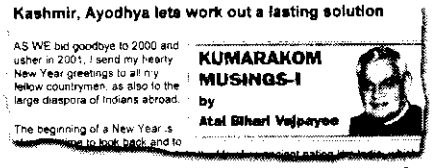
ter's policy sermon composed in Kerala.

The stampede to publish Vajpayee's two-part contribution was followed by vehement protests and expressions of deep hurt, once the newspapers realised that they were being made to share the booty from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

It all began when the prime minister, on a year-end southern holiday, was driven indoors by rain and security considerations. He whiled away the hours by penning his "Musings", a rambling discourse on the Babri Masjid affair, the Kashmir dispute and the nation's future, a thinly disguised attempt to cast himself as a statesman in the Nehruvian mould. The prime minister's men decided that these passing thoughts had to be brought to the people, so the PMO's PR outfit devised a strategy to distribute the contribution to more than one newspaper. Among the 'chosen' were *The Times of India* (*TOI*) Bombay edition, *The Hindu* Madras edition, *The Hindustan Times* (*HT*) Delhi edition, and *The Tribune* of Chandigarh.


Kashmir, Ayodhya lets work out a lasting solution

AS WE bid goodbye to 2000 and usher in 2001, I send my hearty New Year greetings to all my fellow countrymen, as also to the large diaspora of Indians abroad.

The beginning of a New Year is ... to look back and to ...

KUMARAKOM MUSINGS-I

by

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

The rivalry between the *TOI* and the *HT* is fierce, particularly in Delhi. After the publication of "Musings", the two papers carried follow-up stories of how they were tricked into believing that the two-part piece was given them as an exclusive. There were insinuations about the PMO's partisanship, including that of H. K Dua, media advisor to the Prime Minister (who served as editor of both the *HT* and the *TOI*) and Sudheendra Kulkarni, a bureaucrat who often writes the PM's speeches.

There is cause for reflection on the state of the Indian national media when an issue like this becomes cause celebre without going into the heart of the matter. It is one thing for newspapers to comment on or appreciate the oratorical talents of political leaders. It is an entirely different matter to get into altercations over exclusive claims to publish so-called articles, which in this case was speech material dressed up in essay format. During the past decade, there has been a trend towards soliciting readymade pieces from political heavyweights, particularly former prime ministers (now abundant, given South Asia's increasing lifespans, and more frequent downfall of coalition governments), and camouflaging their writings as interviews and articles. This, despite the fact that the bulk of such contributions is the handiwork of ghostwriters. Practically the entire length of Vajpayee's meandering sermon consists of passages like this one:

The beginning of a New Year is always a time to look back and to look ahead. A year is but a speck in the life of an ancient nation like India, which is ever youthful in spite of her great antiquity. However, unlike our nation, all of us have a limited life. Each new generation, therefore, has to give a worthy account of itself in its own lifetime, aware that its contribution to India's progress will be judged essentially on two counts: One, how many 'legacy problems' inherited from the past has it resolved? Two, how strong a foundation has it laid for the future development of the nation?

By fighting over each other to publish unabridged contributions such as this, the Indian national press has been compromising the principles of reporting and editing. As every sub-editor knows, speeches are to be summarised and unwieldy articles are to be edited down. Sycophancy should have no place in the editor's cubicle, and the editors should understand that readers have standards. A newspaper is not a mouthpiece. If there is a compulsion, the (ghost) writings of politicos should go into the edit (or op-ed) pages.

It is so simple: Prime Minister Vajpayee's musings should have been published and distributed in toto by the Press Information Bureau. It is not the role of the independent media to print such pieces, and much less to fight over the issue of exclusivity.

The tendency of editors to publish political twaddle of party chieftains is only one recent trend. It goes hand in hand with the commer-cialisation of newspaper publishing as a whole, where the bottom line guides the media houses rather than editorial content. In the process, the rich legacy of Indian journalism is being squandered.

—Swaraj Chauhan

PAKISTAN

CAN AND WILL THE LOCALS GOVERN?

POLITICAL PARTIES across the spectrum have questioned the military government's claim that elections to local councils in 18 of the 106 administrative districts in Pakistan, which they were barred from participating in, represent a return to "genuine democracy". The military government, on the other hand, insists that the purpose of the exercise is to create local bodies through "a devolution of power to the grass roots level". There are aspects of the elections that seem, on the face of it, to be reformist in intent, but there is also enough evidence to justify the charge levelled by the political parties that the military government

is merely delaying democratic restoration through such stratagems.

The elections, the first of a three-phase schedule, held at the end of December 2000 under tight military supervision and severe campaign restrictions, introduced some new measures which the military says will ensure the political presence of various social groups. One-third of the seats on the councils were reserved for women, but women's activists and groups have scoffed at this 'cosmetic' measure, since women will merely provide the mask behind which the traditional male dominance of the political process can continue. Seats have also been reserved for other groups, such as non-Muslim minorities. The catch in the case of minorities is that they are only allowed to vote for a single representative on each council, prompting some Christian and Hindu organisations to boycott the polls.

Predictably, both the government and the political parties have conflicting versions of the success of the elections. Official figures claim a 46 percent voter turnout and Election Commission data shows that 21,890 candidates contested the 7648 non-reserved seats to the 956 councils for which voting took place. However, official figures also concede that 10 percent of the total seats, most of them reserved for minorities, were filled without contest because there were no rival candidates. Besides, as many as three-quarters of the seats reserved for non-Muslims remained vacant. Spokesmen of political parties were quick to question the official version. "There was little interest in these elections and we feel this exercise is actually aimed at prolonging the return to democracy", said a Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) official.

Clearly the dispute about the success of the election is crucially linked to the larger concern of political parties about the long-term intentions of the military government. Potentially, the military could adhere to the Supreme Court's two-year deadline for the restoration of democracy and yet retain its dominance in national politics by circumventing the existing political process and using the time at its disposal to gradually create a hierarchy of 'guided democratic' institutions. From the local bodies upwards, this could serve to marginalise or divide current political formations. Local bodies without party delegates are perhaps seen as a good launching pad if they can be turned into breeding grounds for a new stratum of civilian political clients who could cement a base for whatever domesticated dispensation is visualised for the higher levels. The fact that no timetable has been announced for elections at higher levels suggests that the future course will be dictated by what happens in the remaining phases of the local-body elections, to be completed by the end of June 2001.

All the three major party leaders, Benazir Bhutto of the Pakistan Peoples Party, Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League and Altaf Hussain of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, are currently in exile. For this reason, the military could find it easy to push for a parallel political process. There is as yet no indication of when political parties will be allowed to participate in the electoral process. Most importantly, the government claims that its objective is the devolution of power to district and town committees to the extent that even the district police and civil administration will be answerable to them.

If the devolution plan is genuine, the new system will effectively abolish the system of controlling the districts through the powerful deputy commissioner. However, the government's equivocation betrays its insincerity. While the chairman of the National Reconstruction Bureau speaks of local bodies with enormous powers, Musharraf himself says that the councils will only have limited regulatory and financial autonomy and their power will be restricted to formulating development plans free from interference by political parties.

It seems unlikely that the military will make too radical a concession to elected bodies and the intention may well be a limited devolution scheme with the purpose of introducing a new set of agents in the mechanisms of power at the district level, currently monopolised by civil servants and locally dominant political figures.

But both the military and the political opposition are trapped in their respective dilemmas. Experiments in controlled democracy are fraught with the danger of spiralling out of control and the government has to steer a careful course. That the elections to the local bodies are spread over six months and three phases is an indication of Musharraf's caution. The situation is equally delicate for the political parties. Considerations of political survival compelled the constituents of the 18-party Alliance for Restoration of Democracy to sponsor candidates to local bodies despite condemning the election as a farce.

If this trend continues in the phases of elections to come, the military will have forced the constituents of a common political platform to be locked in fierce competition at the ground level in elections that they do not officially recognise, and in which they have no recognised status. The military regime for the moment seems to hold the advantage, but how long this will continue depends as much on its own conduct as on the acumen or lack of it of the political opposition.△

—Adnan Rehmat

The Paradox of the Nepali Mindset

Hate India, Love India

by **Pratyoush Onta**

They said,

"Hrithik Roshan insulted Nepal. We should avenge that insult. Burn his posters on the streets, tear up his postcards. Torch his film and the movie hall where it is being screened."

"You ask for proof that Hrithik actually said it? The people on the streets do not need proof!"

"Hrithik is India. India is our big brother. Big brother imperialist! Respect our sovereignty! Go home big brother India!"

"Burn tyres! Show your love for the Nepali nation."

"Anti-India means anybody looking Indian must not be spared. Is this the house of Mr so-and-so?"

Others said,

"It was not supposed to happen in Nepal. We are a peaceful people. Riots – especially those that target a specific group – were only supposed to happen elsewhere in South Asia, not in Nepal."

It is now clear that the actor Hrithik Roshan did not insult "Nepal and Nepalis" in any of his interviews. It is also clear that the rumour that started the whole trouble in the mid-Tarai Nepali towns was spread by someone who hoped to ignite a conflagration. Clearly, he got his wish, seeing the damage done to the national psyche after the Kathmandu riots of 26-27 December.

In the aftermath of this nerve-racking episode, the 'anti-Indian' nature of the rioting has received much play, both in the Nepali and Indian media. But of course it is much more than that, and to relegate it to purely a hostile outpouring against India and Indians would be restrictive and incorrect. Within India itself, there is voluminous literature on the why and wherefore of riots which prove that monochrome portrayals tend to be faulty.

Indeed, there are several corrections to make at the outset. While international media reports suggested that all of Kathmandu Valley was ruled by mobs during those two days, the actual theatre of disturbance was confined to small pockets within Kathmandu town only. Patan and Bhaktapur, the other two cities of the Valley, remained

calm. Even within Kathmandu, the demonstrations were restricted to the downtown areas of New Road, Ratna Park, Jamal, Thamel, Baneswar and Kalimati, without spillover to other localities. There were tyre-burnings in some locations along the Ring Road. The whole Valley was not burning.

In downtown Kathmandu (around New Road and Indrachowk), shops belonging to Nepalis of all ethnic and caste origins were attacked. Private property – irrespective of ownership demography – was destroyed. In some other places, however, there was selective targeting of shops owned by Indians as well as people of Tarai origin. Stone-throwers destroyed shopfronts and wrecked signboards.

Social truths

Indeed, Indians and 'Indian-looking' Nepalis became targets of violence. But it has also to be said that the selective and exaggerated reporting of the Kathmandu incidents by the Indian press and television helped fuel the logic of the riot organisers. The constant reiteration that this was an "anti-Indian riot" created the "social truth" that it had been an exclusively anti-Indian riot! That it was, but it was equally also an anti-Nepali riot and anti-property riot.

A second striking aspect of the events of end-December was that they were opportune for the forces that want to put an end to Nepal's experiment with political democracy. The violence might have begun as a response to the quote attributed to Hrithik Roshan but very soon it became an anti-government protest. Apart from those affiliated to the various party-led student organisations, both the Maoists and royalists were out on the streets in force. The Maoists were looking for newer ways to disrupt life in Kathmandu after their student wing had successfully forced all schools to close for a week in early December. The royalists who want the king to re-assume active power (so that they may get back to their authoritarian functions, under cover of the crown), for their part, have been using every opportunity to make the multi-party democratic establishment look more inefficient than it really is.

This was also an occasion for the small left parties to demonstrate evidence of their existence through street action. In retrospect, it is clear that the momentum of the riots was carried by these small left parties plus the pro-Maoist and pro-palace forces. Hrithik Roshan may have provided the spark. Anti-Indianism stoked the fire. And together they provided the excuse this time around. Next time it could be something else entirely.

It may have been asking too much from out-of-country reporters who know next to nothing about the complexities of Nepali society, its history and politics, to cover the riots other than through hyperbole. But if the Indian press and television wants to mature into a credible source of news and analysis for all of India and the rest of South Asia, then it will have to do better than it did covering the "Hrithik Riots".

Ambiguities of the left

No matter how we read the events of late December 2000, we cannot deny a strain of anti-India sentiments in Nepali society. The broad contours of the history of this sentiment are well known, but its deeper manifestations deserve closer scrutiny. It may surprise some, but the 'anti-India' sentiment does not have a permanent place even in the hearts of those who have shouted slogans against India on the streets or participated in supposedly 'anti-India' protests. It is more than likely that many of those who tore Hrithik Roshan's posters on the streets went home and listened to Hindi songs over commercial FM radio or watched a Hindi movie on video (the satellite feed of Hindi movies through cable operators had been yanked by the time they had reached home).

The Nepali anti-India sentiment is a deeply ambiguous one, and nowhere is this more true than among the leaders of the Nepali left. After all, they learned their Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao, by and large, from Hindi translations of the original German, Russian and Chinese. And I would suppose that comrades Prachanda and Baburam acquire the guns and bullets for their Maoist platoons from the small arms racket in India.

In other words, the anti-India sentiment occupies only a particular (and limited) domain in the lives of the protestors and leaders alike. For, the same "anti-Indian" Nepali consumes Indian products profusely, travels in India on pilgrimage or pleasure as if it were his own backyard, and leaders in particular have no compunction in seeking help from the Indian embassy in getting sons and daughters admitted to Indian colleges and universities. This paradox of the Nepali mindset, hating and loving India at the same time, must be understood by anyone who seeks to know the country and report on it.

This paradox manifests itself in oft-visible acts of political opportunism. The need to portray themselves as opponents of Indian interests in Nepal is paramount for the political survival of small left parties, particularly when they do not hold the deciding balance in government coalitions. Take for example the case of Bamdev Gautam, present leader of the Communist Party of Nepal-Marxist-Leninist (CPN-ML), members of whose student wing led the riots in Kathmandu, and who upbraided a BBC interviewer on air for daring to enquire if he had proof of Roshan's reported anti-Nepal statement. Today, out of power and somewhat remote from it given his separation from the rump CPN-UML, Gautam tries hard to portray himself as anti-Indian. However, he did not have the diligence to vote against the overwhelmingly pro-India Mahakali Treaty signed some years ago. As someone who was himself some time a worker in India, Gautam may have tried to understand the kind of backlash anti-Indianism within

Nepal can have vis-à-vis the hundreds of thousands of Nepali labourers in India. But then, personal opportunism and lack of principles and contemplation are the hallmarks of the Nepali politician today.

Indian gatekeepers

The spatial distribution of the 'anti-India' sentiment within Nepal also deserves attention. This xenophobic attitude perhaps exists strongest in the large *pahadi* (hill) population that migrated to the Nepal Tarai since the eradication of malaria, and which lives in close proximity to the *madhesi* plains-people and the Indians close by across the border. The attitude may also survive to a smaller degree in the original inhabitants of the Tarai, the indigenous forest-dwellers who have been squeezed out of their habitats by homesteaders from north and south. However, in the wake of the events of late December, it would seem that the hub of this hateful sentiment is within Kathmandu Valley itself.

The anti-madhesi sensibility of the original inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley was built up over history by rulers with a need to point at an enemy without. This inherited sensibility found occasion to grow in the 'anti-India' intellectual discourse of the Nepali left and of the proponents of the Panchayat regime (the nationalist vocabulary of these two strains are almost identical). It is because of this coming together of historical animosity on the one hand with the modern-day dogma of the Panchayat and the left on the other, that an 'anti-India' protest can transform so very easily into an "anti-madhesi" one. Although no one seems to quite know the dynamics of this slippage, this was how a protest against Hrithik Roshan quickly snowballed into a targeting of Nepalis of Tarai origin.

The "hate India, love India" Nepali paradox is also, of course, tied to acts of political opportunism in India. While the average Nepali is predisposed to 'love' India for the myriad of cultural and social links he has south of the border, his 'hate' is, besides the source already mentioned, stoked by the way in which the Indian state and establishment have targeted Nepal for various ills that are mostly India-specific. Take for example, the social currency given to the fiction that the Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence is encouraged by the Nepali state itself to do mischief in the neighbouring Indian heartland. Indian media managers and scholars in centres engaged in research of neighbouring countries show a remarkable willingness to accept the position of the Indian state on this matter. No wonder, the point of view of these gatekeepers transfers so easily to the population in general, and the Indian state's version of "anti-Indianism" in Nepal becomes the public's belief.

If the Indian press and television wants to mature into a credible source of news and analysis for all of India and the rest of South Asia, then it will have to do better than it did covering the "Hrithik Riots".

For long, Nepalis have told themselves that they are a peaceful people. Orientalist visions of the ever-smiling Nepali contributes to the durability of this self-image. But just as the nationalist psyche can entertain both fascination and revulsion against India, so too can a 'peaceful' people reach deep into their dark inner-selves to find violent ways to settle scores. Long before the Maoists began to demonstrate this trait, it had been expressed on the streets of Kathmandu as part of the People's Movement of 1990. In the immediate aftermath of the democratic restoration, some people who were deemed spies of the old regime were held captive by a "pro-democracy" group. They were killed in public over a period of hours, and their bodies were taken around the city in a macabre celebration of "people power". Even as this happened, in broad daylight, Kathmandu residents by the thousands chose to watch and not intervene. In 1992, this writer had asked, "What is it that allows people to be murdered in such a way? Why is it that such violence was tolerated by the same people who had only recently brought an end to a supposedly ruthless system? ....Do these killings constitute an aberration or are they evidence of deeply embedded violent tendencies in our society?" From today's vantage point, it is easy to see that those killings were not an aberration.

If Kathmandu's residents were capable of such violence in 1990, we have become even more violent due to the particular history of the intervening decade. Anyone who cared to notice that the rioters in Kathmandu were overwhelmingly young and male would have to ask whether being young and male are significant for an understanding of violence in Nepal today. They are. High levels of unemployment amongst semi-educated youth, easy circulation of pessimism in college campuses, and the macho ways in which personal and societal problems are solved in the universe of Nepali and Hindi films, have given birth to a highly violent masculine imagination among this segment of the population.

The rioters in Kathmandu were living that imagination. Ghetto violence of the urban underclass in the US is sometimes explained as emanating from "having nothing to lose". The situation of Nepal's semi-educated, unemployed young males is not very different, and within Kathmandu there is also added the conspicuous consumption, within close proximity, of the suddenly-rich classes. The events of late December 2000 prove that Nepalis, too, are also a violent lot, and any further exploration of the Hrithik Riots will have to begin with that acknowledgment.

Nepali nationalism and the nation state

by **Tapan Kumar Bose**

If the mass media is any index of public memory, the end-of-year riots in Kathmandu triggered by the supposed anti-Nepal comments of an Indian film celebrity appear to have been relegated to the back of the Nepali consciousness. Having learnt to live with the crippling burden of repeated bandh shutdowns, the Kathmandu intelligentsia seems to have shrugged off the agitation that degenerated into communal riots as a bad experience better forgotten. Which is a pity, because the nasty turn of events has a deep bearing on the further evolution of Nepali society.

In the effervescent politics of new democracy, Hrithik Roshan's unstated 'derogatory' remarks against Nepal and Nepalis provided opportunity for yet another show of strength on the streets – mostly by the left parties (joined by the opportunistic right) in the name of wounded national pride. But something went horribly wrong. Instead of coming together against a common enemy, the defenders of 'national honour' turned against their own kind.

No one knows when and how, but at some point during the riots, the anger against India transformed into mob attacks against Indians and 'Indian-looking' people of Tarai origin. Dark-skinned *madhesis* – and anyone else who looked similar, including many from the hill castes – were beaten up and humiliated in the Kathmandu streets and bylanes. What began as a reassertion of national pride turned into communal violence which deepened the divide between the *parbatey* hill people and the madhesi plains-people. If the purpose was to strengthen national unity, this agitation achieved the opposite to a degree that takes the breath away.

The reaction of the hill-based activists has roots, at its deepest, in the vision of nation state. 'Nation' is the most powerful political concept of the day and no Nepali mainstream political party wants to lag behind in appealing to nationalism. In Nepal, as elsewhere in South Asia, the worst crime is to be 'anti-national' or 'unpatriotic'. But 'nation' as understood can never encompass everyone, particularly in the diversity that marks this country of hill, plain and high mountain.

After-the-fact peace marches have limited utility.

Exclusionary agenda

Before the 'nation state' came along as a by-product of European history two centuries ago, there was the 'territorial state', where authority was vested in the ruler – the emperor or king. Power flowed from the top, and the identities of the people *per se*, whether ethnic or national, did not make much difference to their political status. However, with democratic revolution challenging the role of absolute rulers, the 'nation' became the source of political authority, representing as it did an identity based on religion, language, custom, shared history, and so on. The nation states of Europe thus emerged coalescing around established identities. But even there, the subsuming of disparate identities was not complete, and so you have today the Scot nation, the Basque nation or the Bretons retaining their exclusive identities and smarting under the more dominant nations within which they have been contained.

If such is the case in the continent which gave birth to the nation state, how much more it gets difficult to contain the disparate identities of South Asia within that structuring, and Nepal in particular with its incredible diversity of population. Neither the nation state concept nor the political ideologies imported from the West – including by the left – are adequate in themselves to provide for the needs of a country like Nepal. The nation state can certainly be used as a building block, but the European model has to be

adjusted for the play of identities. This clearly has not been well understood, from the stone-throwers at street-level right up to the members of political central committees.

The ideology of nation state, especially when not adapted to local conditions, becomes quite inadequate during times of economic crisis. In Europe, periods of economic downturn battered the values and institutions of liberal democracy which had kept baser instincts at bay, and gave rise to chauvinistic nationalism that emphasised homogenous national identities. Mass xenophobia and racism formed the core of this new nationalist ideology, now known as Fascism. Meanwhile, those who sought to preserve their linguistic, ethnic, cultural or religious identities suddenly gained a new description - 'minorities'.

In Nepal's case, the entire evolutionary gamut from territorial state to nation state has been telescoped into a few decades. And fascism, certainly, was there on the streets of Kathmandu in the dying days of 2000 for all to see. And the fact that there has not been enough introspection in Nepali media and academia since that unfortunate eruption indicates that the exclusionary dogma lurks just under the surface, awaiting the next instability, the next excuse.

Doubtless, an extreme reading of nationalism formed the core of the Panchayat regime's political outlook. But within the looser fit of parliamentary democracy, the politicians and intelligentsia together should have popularised a more inclusive definition of Nepali nationalism and not the rigid hill-centered visions maintained by the traditional political elites. This they did not do, and precious time has been lost since 1990 in fashioning a definition of what and who constitute the Nepali nation. As in neighbouring countries, Nepal's new democracy too remained a mere formal process, with state power cornered by a privileged few. Antagonism is rife therefore among people belonging to different ethnic, religious, linguistic and indigenous communities. And now this antagonism is being exacerbated by a deepening economic crisis.

Regressive nationalism

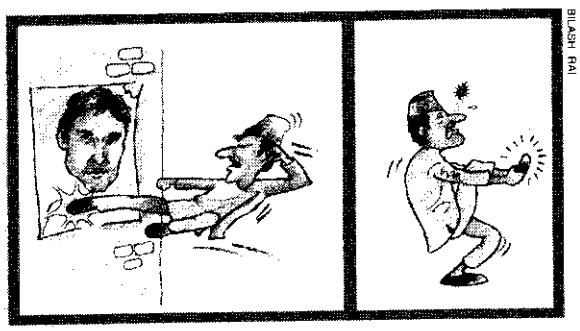
THE LEFT of the South Asian countries is still trapped in the 1950s mould of "progressive role of nationalism in the struggle against imperialism". In their eagerness to participate in the building of strong nation states as bulwarks against imperialism, they became willing partners with the worst type of self-serving right-wing politicians masquerading as nationalists. As a result, in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, the left parties have not only failed to take up the cause of the oppressed minorities, they even oppose the demands for autonomy and constitutional safeguards for the marginalised and oppressed communities—on the ground that this would weaken national unity.

The undivided Communist Party of India, which until the early 1950s supported the right of self-determination of nationalities, today finds imperialist design behind the struggles of the people of Kashmir and the oppressed nationalities of India's Northeast. On the question of preserving territorial integrity and national sovereignty, the Indian left is as uncompromising as the Hindu fundamentalist BJP. In Bangladesh, the left parties had rejected the Chakma indigenous people's demand for regional autonomy. They even supported president Ziaur Rahman's ruthless military crackdown in the Chittagaong Hill Tracts in the name of fighting Indian imperialism.

In Sri Lanka, the inability of groups like the LSSP to relate to the Sri Lankan Tamil community's demand for justice finally pushed the left movement into the laps of one of the most ultra-nationalist of formations, the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, the JVP. Over in Pakistan, the real political challenge to the dictatorship of Ayub Khan was posed by the left. But then the emerging unity of the workers and peasants, which was making a credible challenge to the Pakistani state, fell apart on the question of sharing political power with the eastern wing and providing justice to the Bengalis. The left movement of Pakistan disappeared into wilderness and the county broke up into separate nation states—Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The rigidities of blinkered ethno-nationalism and neglect of minorities has played a primary role in the fall of the left in the various countries of the region. For the sake of its future, the powerful and surging left of Nepal would best study that experience and see where it may have gone wrong in Kathmandu as 2000 turned to 2001.

—*TKB*



BILASH RAI

Rainbow spectrum

Lenin said that people would be willing to give up their communal or clan identities and embrace higher ones like 'class' and 'nation' when they find that being a part of a larger unity they would be stronger and benefit more. Lenin was correct only up to a point. For it turns out that while adopting a new identity, people do not give up their older identities, composites of their values, ideas, practices, superstitions

and prejudices. And in times of crisis and strain people often fall back on these old identities. Anthropologists call this the process of 'ethnic survival', and in Marxist terminology this is a 'non-antagonistic contradiction' which can be resolved by accommodating these identities within the body of the larger or higher identity in a non-coercive manner. The disintegration of the once-mighty Soviet Union shows that these 'non-antagonistic' contradictions do not get resolved, and old national and ethnic identities prove mightily resilient.

In so many countries, the failure of politicians, academics, the media and other societal agenda-setters has led to violent ethno-nationalism. In Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Chechnia, Rwanda and Congo, it took the horrible form of ethnic cleansing. Postcolonial Sri Lanka's attempt to create a homogenous Sinhala national identity brought on a horrific civil war. In India, the enterprise of imposing a monolithic Hindu national identity on all the people has strained the fragile social matrix, as a result of which communal riots take place not so infrequently. The power elite of Nepal seems intent on taking the country up this same path by relying on an ultimately unworkable nationalism that lays down an exclusionary Nepaliness defined by the hill-castes.

The one country in the world that should be proud of its rainbow spectrum of identities is Nepal. It is up to Nepal, then, to show the way to others in South Asia that a nation state can be defined, and can survive and prosper, in the absence of a monolithic identity. Nepal's politicians and political parties should rise to the occasion and accept that the political ideology of nationalism is divisive. It is essentially a power concept, used to hold down people, to stifle opposition, invoked by the elite to divert attention of the oppressed from the real issues of social and economic justice by pointing to the threat of the 'enemy outside'. Extreme nationalism manipulates the sentiment of the common people, that is all.

In Kathmandu, at the turn of the Gregorian new year, almost all the political leaders of Nepal, irrespective of their party affiliations, were one with the angry mobs against India and (soon enough) against the madhesi. Particularly the parties of the left, from the Maoists to the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (UML), invoked 'national pride' and saw a resurgence of 'progressive nationalism' as the crowds went on a rampage. Seemingly uncaring of the richness of identities that is Nepal's most prized possession, they unleashed a Frankenstein's monster on the unsuspecting people. (It goes to the credit of CPN-UML that it dissociated itself from the agitation after two days, but much of the damage had been done by them.)

For Nepal to benefit from parliamentary democracy and for the Nepali population to gain in wealth and security, the prescription is clear. 'Nation' must be rescued from the hands of the oppressive elite which uses it to divide the people. The understanding must be democratised to accommodate all identities. When that happens, Nepal will be a beacon for all South Asia. If not, the deadly virus of communal hatred will destroy both the nation and its democracy.

The Press and Mr. Roshan's Non-Remark

by ***Shanuj VC***

There are no gatekeepers anymore... Things are no longer vetted by the press. They're vetted by the public.

- Tom Rosenstiel, director, Project for Excellence in Journalism, 1998

There is presumably a distinction between spreading a rumour and reporting a rumour that is being spread. Presumably, also, it is not the kind of idle distinction that can be dispensed with, in the interest of meeting newsroom deadlines. But there was little in the conduct of the daily press during the two days of mid-winter rioting in Kathmandu to differentiate between news reporting and rumour-mongering. Is it that the competitive environment of breaking news makes the media just an accessory to the mass circulation of hearsay in a time of trouble?

This was certainly the impression conveyed by many of the Nepali papers which started the whole drama, as well as the Indian dailies which were not to be found wanting in the ensuing turmoil. While most of the Nepali publications made haste to publicise an unverified statement attributed to a rising Bollywood star whose views ought to have little bearing on the relations between nations, many Indian dailies, especially those based in Delhi, were not slow in fabricating their own version of the unfolding events in Nepal.

Nationalist Xenophobes

It all began on 15 December with the

Chitwan Post, a small-town Nepali language newspaper published from Narayanghat, south west of Kathmandu Valley. The paper reported that a section of Chitwan youth had burnt the effigy of the actor, believing that he had expressed dislike towards "Nepal and Nepalis". In retrospect, it does not look at all bad that the capital's media exhibited its habitual lethargy in picking up news that originates anywhere outside the Valley rim. The national dailies played the news all of 10 days later, on 25 December, but the superior status of reporting or editing a daily from the capital does not always translate into professionalism. So, the first reports from Kathmandu all assumed that Hrithik Roshan did express hatred towards Nepal and Nepalis in a STAR Plus interview of 14 December (some also reported that it was Zee that aired the programme, presuming that the channel which was notorious for unsubstantiated 'anti-Nepal' coverage a year earlier during the Indian Airlines hijack, must have been the culprit). It was obvious that no one had fact-checked or crosschecked.

Even by the critical second day, the papers had not verified the authenticity of the news they were peddling. There was only a trite attempt at putting in the qualifier 'alleged', and a play given to the actor's denials of any denigration of Nepal and Nepalis. Thereby, the editors left it to readers, after a barrage of near-inflammatory reportage, to decide whether to take a Bollywood upstart on his word or not.

The Kathmandu press did not see it fit to come out openly and say that since they were unable to trace the source of the actor's anti-Nepal remarks, it ought be treated as a rumour. What had happened was that the gatekeepers of the Nepali media too got caught up in the ultra-nationalist wave of the moment, and perhaps even saw in the unfolding drama the power of their aggressive journalism to shape national events.

The Kathmandu Post, the largest English daily and sister publication of the powerful Nepali daily *Kantipur*, had this to say in an editorial, "The spontaneous outburst of the students and the youth community against alleged anti-Nepal remarks by an Indian actor goes to show how deeply Nepalis feel about their country and the people." Ergo, it did not matter that the remarks may not have been uttered by Mr. Roshan at all. Even if unstated, they had the potential to indicate the depth of Nepali nationalism! This was as good as the left leader Bamdev Gautam telling an insistent BBC Nepali interviewer that it did not matter what the actor did or did not say because the people had spoken.


चितवन पोष्ट
CHITWAN POST WEEKLY
CARAVAN
Premium
A Friend in Hard Times

Report in the Chitwan Post of 15 December.

In a later editorial, the *Kathmandu Post* tried to put up a defence saying that what it had done was "to report the events that took place", without introspection as to how the national press as a whole (and mostly, of course, the vernacular media) had triggered the events in the first place. It was on this high and self-righteous moral ground of objective reporting that responsible journalism met its nemesis in the newsrooms and editorial desks of Kathmandu.

Paratrooper journalists

If the Nepali press was culpable for lighting the match at ground level, the Indian national press played its well-honed part as well, with its casual misreading of the events in 'faraway' Nepal. This negligence has affected the Nepali's image in India and spelt disaster to the smaller country's economy, in terms of tourism, investments, exports and so on.

As everyone other than some members of the New Delhi press corps accepts, the national Indian media follows a statist and establishmentarian line when it comes to foreign and geo-strategic affairs. And on Nepal, over the past decade, the national press and the incipient satellite channels have been joining the unquestioning drumbeat identifying the kingdom as a willing accessory of the Inter Services Intelligence agency of Pakistan, and as a smuggling conduit deliberately meant to destabilise the Indian nation.

The peaking of this unfair coverage against a hapless Kathmandu, quite incapable of fighting back either with diplomacy or media, came to pass during the extended Indian Airlines hijack drama of December 1999. In particular, the satellite channels got their first taste of made-for-television drama and played it to the hilt with casual coverage of how Nepal as a nation was culpable for the event. That experience, in fact, stoked the anti-Indian xenophobia lurking in the wombs of the Nepali intelligentsia, which again got its outlet with the non-remark by Mr. Roshan.

And so, as rioting began in Kathmandu, the Indian press leapt readily on to its tiresome hobbyhorse of Nepal as an ISI haven remote-controlled by the Bombay mafia. While all this may be pleasing to the

Indian security establishment, there has to date been no convincing evidence that this ISI link exists to any degree more than other conduits that the Pakistani agency doubtless uses. Also, the ratcheting up of Indian super-nationalism during the Kargil conflict, as loudly proclaimed in India's first television war, was bound to turn sour on the intelligentsia in neighbouring countries, and Nepal was no exception.

This time around, the major Indian dailies stressed solely the anti-Indian nature of the riots to the exclusion of all the other significant aspects. They failed to take notice of the rapidly changing events on the street, for what began as a violent expression of anger against Hrithik Roshan and things Indian, changed rapidly into a hate campaign against Nepalis of Tarai origin, who, it has to be noted, are *not* Indians. If anything, then, this was a terrible expression of internal angst where Nepali turned against Nepali due to the lumpenisation of politics in the young democracy.

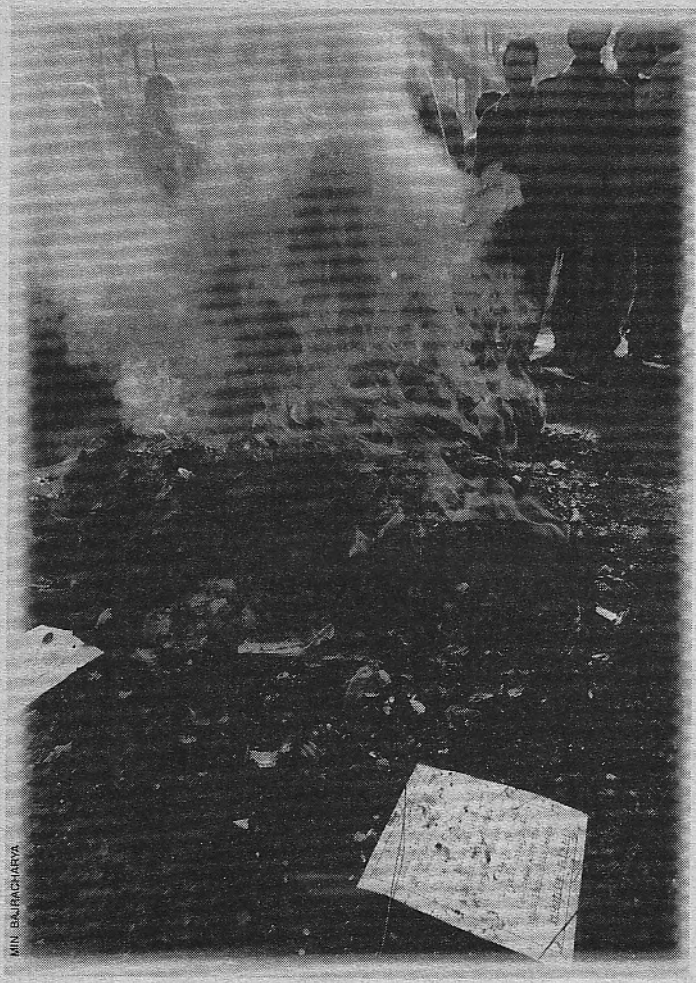
And it became clear before long that the target of the demonstrators, a not unexpected coming together of the far rightists (who want the king back) and far leftists (who want the king out completely), was the Nepali political establishment. Indeed, it is said that the government of Girija Koirala would have collapsed and an extra-constitutional denouement reached had Madhav Kumar Nepal of the mainstream Left CPN (UML) not come up with a crucial statement of support to the government at the critical hour.

But the media south of the border, in English as well as the vernacular, was hardly bothered about the complexities of politics in the northern kingdom. As most Indian papers and channels prefer to cover Nepal by sending in parachute journalists, no one had the time to tarry around and understand the complexities. Certainly, the reporters chose to remain silent on the changing turn of events, and the public in India got to see nothing but one continuous anti-India agitation. Interestingly, no one thought it worthwhile to report that while there was definitely a lot of vandalism and terrorising of Indians and 'Indian-looking' people, there were no deaths reported among these groups. In fact, those who died were individuals caught in the mob violence that the police sought to quell.

There were some attempts to present the "other side" through the columns of friendly Nepal-watchers, but in a sense these were contaminated by the original sin—mostly attempts, often patronising and unconvincing, to explain the reasons for Nepali antagonism towards India. And all of it really meant nothing, because they once again harked back to the weary trail of cultural similarities between Nepal and India, and the bonds of friendship that tie them. The doughty Gurkha's commitment to defending Indian borders was again dusted off and presented as proof of this very special relationship.

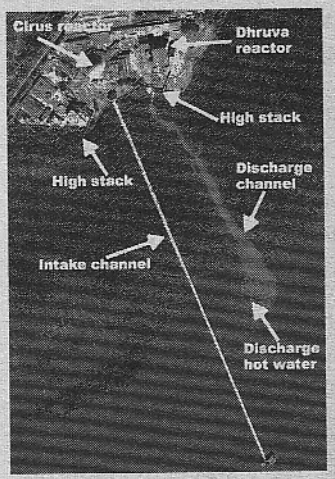
On the whole, it was with remarkable ease and haste that both the Indian media and the Nepali press abandoned the principles of responsible journalism. The Nepali press of course started it all, still wet behind the ears and with many of its firebrand practitioners too young even to have participated in the People's Movement of 1990. The Indian journalists, with their Delhi-centric uncaring and aloof attitude, chose not to dip into the minutiae of Nepali politics and by presenting a monochromatic vision of the happenings of end-December, did more than its share to tar Nepal and Nepalis.

Hrithik Roshan, certainly, never said that he "disliked Nepal and Nepalis". But one wonders what conclusion Nepal and Nepalis are to derive vis-à-vis Indian editors and television producers. Meanwhile, at least we are now informed of the esteem in which Mr. Roshan holds Nepal and Nepalis—his domestic help and his personal assistant are both from the Hindu kingdom.

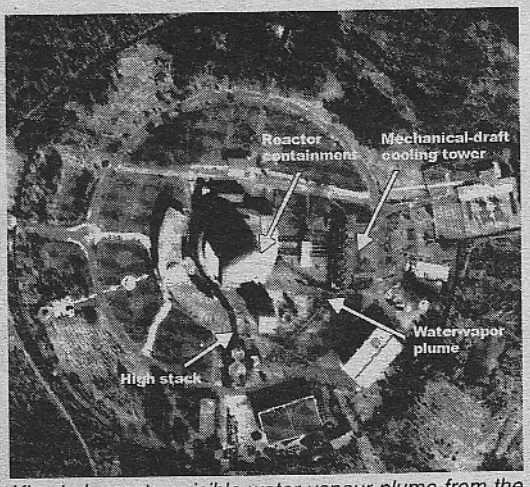


MIN BAJRACHARYA

Burning tyres in Kathmandu.



Trombay reactor: visible hot-water discharge into upper Bombay bay.



Khushab reactor: visible water-vapour plume from the cooling tower.

Eye in the Sky

India, Pakistan and Nuclear Confidence

A water vapour plume from a cooling tower vent at Khushab and the discharge of hot water at Trombay prove that Pakistan and India are producing plutonium for nuclear weapons. Easily available satellite images should be used to make them stop proliferation in South Asia.

by ***Hui Zhang***

Control of the production and use of fissile materials is central to non-proliferation. The main international controls on fissile materials are embodied in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The treaty requires all member states (except the five chartered nuclear weapon states, the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France and China) to pledge not to manufacture or acquire nuclear weapons and accept "full-scope" International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. Unfortunately, three de facto nuclear states, Israel, India and Pakistan, have not yet signed the NPT and are believed to be continuing the production of fissile materials for weapons.

The recently concluded 2000 NPT Review Conference urged India and Pakistan to do the following: accede to the NPT and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT): to maintain the moratorium on testing; observe a moratorium on fissile material production for weapons; and strengthen their non-proliferation export control measures. In a bid to blunt international criticism in the aftermath of their nuclear tests in 1998, both countries have reaffirmed that they will maintain their testing moratorium until the CTBT enters into force. However, recently obtained commercial satellite imagery reveals that both countries are still operating their nuclear facilities and adding to their stocks of fissile materials besides engaging in a missile race. Since the hostility between the two countries magnifies the implications of a regional nuclear race, effective measures at the international level are imperative if this race is to be halted. It is necessary in the first instance to persuade both countries to freeze production of weapon-usable nuclear materials. As a concomitant, the international community needs to create a favorable political environment for arresting nuclear proliferation. This includes resuming the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) negotiation and devaluing nuclear weapons possession.

Pakistan's plume

The recent development of high-resolution commercial satellite imagery, especially following the launch of the IKONOS satellite by the US Space Imaging Company on 24 September 1999, provides the opportunity for monitoring the operating status of unsafeguarded nuclear production facilities. This is significant because it could potentially contribute to maintaining nuclear moratoria even in a climate of acute bilateral distrust. The two one-metre resolution IKONOS satellite images of Pakistan's Khushab plutonium production reactor and India's Cirus and Dhruva reactors at Trombay, acquired in February 2000, illustrate the potential of this technique.

The construction of the unsafeguarded Khushab reactor was reportedly completed in 1996. After Pakistan announced that Khushab

had started operating in April 1998 its operational status had not been independently verified. Although an analysis on Landsat-7 thermal imagery from July 1999 was conducted, it was unable to establish conclusively if the reactor was operational or not. The new 1m-resolution image shows many more details of the reactor facilities than did the previously released 10m-resolution SPOT image of the same site, acquired on 21 May 1992, which could not resolve the dome, cooling towers and high stack—the characteristic visible features of a reactor.

The IKONOS image clearly shows the reactor's mechanical-draft cooling tower, with a water-vapour plume issuing from at least one of its eight vents. This is a standard cooling tower used to remove heat from the reactor core to prevent a meltdown of the reactor fuel. In the tower, cooling is caused by evaporation from drops of films of water to a flow of air. Air discharged by the towers is usually saturated. A visible water-vapour plume is therefore ordinarily formed when the warm, humid air leaving the tower mixes with colder atmospheric air, leading to super-saturation and condensation of small water droplets. The plume can be quite long when the ambient air is near saturation. A visible water-vapor plume from the cooling tower is evidence that a reactor is in operation.

While it is generally assumed that the warm water-vapour plumes from cooling towers are detectable by thermal infrared (TIR) images, it has been found that using existing commercially available satellite, TIR does not always lead to detection. On the other hand this 1m-resolution image at visible band provides an important way of monitoring nuclear activity by detecting such plumes. Based on the dimension of the resolved cooling tower image, the reactor power is estimated at 50MW, which is sufficient to generate enough plutonium for a few nuclear weapons every year. This particular image provides direct evidence of Pakistan's growing nuclear capability. There is also enough evidence to reasonably surmise that Pakistan has resumed Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) production at the older Kahuta centrifuge enrichment plant (CEP), despite a declared moratorium on such production since 1991. These two facilities contribute importantly to Pakistan nuclear weapons programme.

India's discharge

The other 1m-resolution image shows the Cirus and Dhruva reactors in Trombay, India. These reactors use natural-uranium fuel and heavy-water moderator. The 40MW Cirus reactor began operation in 1960 and produced the plutonium for the May 1974 nuclear test (Pokharan I. This reactor is currently being refurbished. The 100MW Dhruva reactor commenced operation in 1985. Both reactors produce plutonium for India's nuclear weapons and operate without IAEA safeguards.

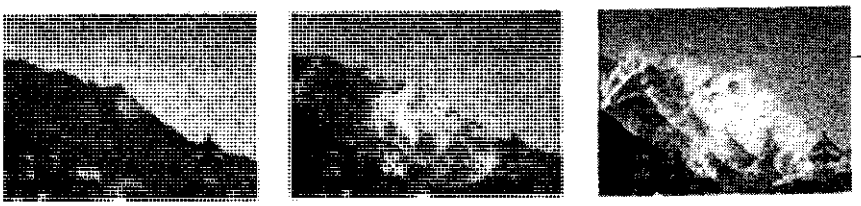
The once-through cooling system of the reactors can be clearly identified in the image. The cooling water from the bay is drawn through the long structure—the intake channel. The discharged water flows back into the bay in the stream—the discharge channel. While the warmer cooling water is discharged into the estuary through an open channel and mixed with the cooler receiving water, the convection and the flow of the discharge water will lead to localised changes in surface roughness and would disturb normal current flows. It is expected that these changes will be observable in images at visible and near-infrared band (VNIR) through the different hues of the cooling and receiving waters.

As the image shows, the Dhruva research reactor at Trombay (the Cirus reactors is currently shutdown) was discharging hot water into the upper Bombay bay through a stream, confirming that it was operating when the image was acquired in February 2000. India could also be using its unsafeguarded power reactors to increase its plutonium stocks. There has also been talk of building a new plutonium production reactor comparable to the 100MW Dhruva plant.

As these images clearly show, India and Pakistan are operating dedicated reactors to build up their plutonium stocks and it is time for the international community to urge both countries to declare a moratorium on the production of weapon-usable fissile material. Stopping such production will be to the benefit of both countries, which are still recovering from the diplomatic, strategic and economic consequences of their tests in 1998. High-resolution satellite imagery can be of use in maintaining the moratorium.

Under a moratorium, both countries would shut down their major nuclear production facilities, including the reactors at Trombay and Khushab and the CEP at Kahuta. On-site inspections can be avoided, and with it will be dispelled all fears of potential loss of sensitive information about these defence-related nuclear processing sites. Instead, both countries can use the newly available high-resolution commercial satellite images to verify production freeze independently. So long as these reactors remain inoperative there will be no water-vapour plumes from Khushab and no hot water discharge at Trombay. In the event that they are re-operationalised, these reactors require at least several weeks of irradiation to produce a useful concentration of plutonium in reactor fuel. Hence a site-revisit through 1-m resolution commercial satellites once in several days should be adequate to detect an operating plant.

However, there is one caveat that should be entered. According to one estimation, it will be difficult to monitor the operating status of plants like Pakistan's Kahuta CEP by satellite imagery. Because of their small size and relatively low energy intensity, these plants do not require special cooling systems such as the easily visible cooling towers. Also the TIR imaging system on current generation commercial



Before, during and after the tests on 28 May 1998 at Pakistan's first nuclear test site; looking from west to east. Strangely, images of India's blasts are not available.

satellites, cannot measure the roof temperature increase associated with their operation. One way around this problem would be to monitor the uranium hexafluoride production facility used for Kahuta CEP. The production of uranium hexafluoride is an energy-intensive chemical and electrochemical process, and may be detectable from the associated heat signatures. Also such activity at these sites as the shipments between the uranium hexafluoride production facility and the CEP site could be monitored by satellite imagery. Hence it will still be possible to monitor the moratorium.

The recent advances in commercial observation satellites can help India and Pakistan build considerable mutual confidence in a declared moratorium by independently obtaining high-resolution satellite images of each other's key nuclear facilities. Both countries can now obtain such images from more than one source. Beside the IKONOS satellite, the Russian firm, Sovinformsputnik has also started providing 1-m ground resolution satellite images.

It is expected that a dozen more of such satellites from several different countries will be in orbit over next few years. Although they are less capable than military imaging satellites, images from commercial satellite are sufficient to monitor the operating status of these production facilities. Unlike classified spy satellite photos, which are limited to a few countries, commercial satellite imagery can be purchased quite freely.

Of course, for such an approach to succeed a favorable political environment must be provided for arresting nuclear proliferation in South Asia. At the international level, the nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime should be strengthened. One immediate measure is to resume negotiations on a global Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), which has been deadlocked in Geneva since 1993. In fact, following the appeal by the recent 2000 NPT Review Conference to the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to commence negotiations immediately with a view to reaching an agreement within five years, there has been strong endorsement for prompt negotiations and conclusion of an FMCT by the CD.

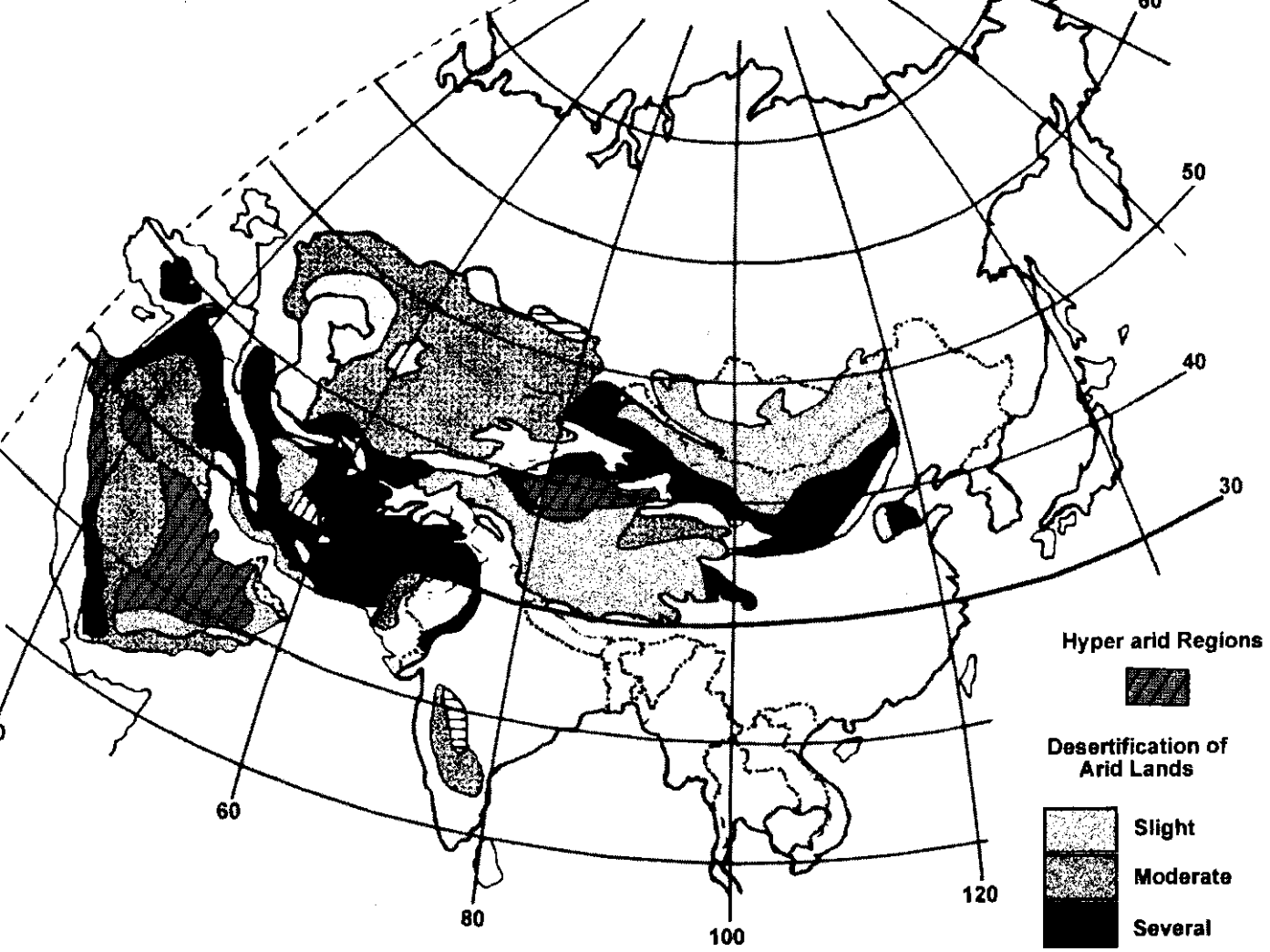
Such a treaty, if it materialises, could end the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, and make irreversible the drawdown of nuclear weapons material in the arsenals of the United State and Russia. It will also cap the size of all potential nuclear arsenals. A universal FMCT would also draw the three de-facto weapons states into the nuclear non- proliferation regime. The FMCT is therefore one key building block in the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

To achieve this, the five nuclear weapon states will need to take some practical nuclear disarmament measures to devalue their own nuclear weapons possession. For instance, the United States will have to refrain from going ahead with the national missile defense (NMD) system being pushed by the new administration in Washington DC and its Defence Secretary. The NMD which could damage the whole international arms-control regime and halt progress on nuclear disarmament. Already, because of its concern that the possible deployment of a US NMD system will intensify competition in outer space, China is unwilling to enter FMCT negotiations independent of agreements to prevent an arms race in outer space. *(See also commentary, page7)* Without China's participation in the FMCT, India will not sign it and Pakistan in turn will not sign it unless India does.

It is also necessary to maintain the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, because without it further nuclear disarmament will not be possible. The United States and Russia should de-alert their nuclear missiles and all the five nuclear-weapon states ratify the CTBT, which has becomes the more urgent after the US Senate's rejection of it last year. The United States and Russia will also have to implement START-II and III as soon as possible and commit to deeper cuts in their arsenals to a level comparable to that of the other three nuclear weapon states, which will induce the latter to join in nuclear disarmament.

These are expectations of a huge magnitude and not at all of the kind that can be realised overnight. But there are signs of hope yet. At the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the 187 NPT member states adopted the first-ever consensus Final Document that strongly endorses the treaty and spells out ways to strengthen the non-proliferation regime. The five nuclear weapon states have also unequivocally undertaken "to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals" and it is believed that the five nuclear-weapon states have ended their production of plutonium and HEU for weapons. While this process continues at the international level, within South Asia it is important for India and Pakistan to de-escalate their rapidly accelerating nuclear weaponisation programmes. If they have the interest in it, commercial-satellite based monitoring of fissile-material production is now possible.

(For more information and images, visit http://www.isis-online.org)



Deeds, declarations and desertification

by ***Shastri Ramachandaran***

The Declaration on the Commitments to Enhance the Implementation of the Obligations of the Convention to Combat Desertification" may sound a mouthful. But it is unlikely to still the hunger of those ravaged by the devastating sweep of desertification around the globe and in the Subcontinent. The Fourth Conference of Parties ("COP4") to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), was held in the affluent city of Bonn, hardly impoverished for being no longer a capital city. On the contrary, the city is doing well as an upgraded international congress centre. And the city's wealth was evident in the mass of its inhabitants thronging the shopping centres, even while delegates met to discuss an excruciating problem affecting the world's poorest one billion in more than 100 countries, mostly in Africa. The only gift to the meek that have inherited an earth scorched by desertification was the Bonn Declaration. A poor man's gift at best, produced after painful negotiations over 12 days, reflecting goodwill and little else from the better-endowed delegations among the 175 countries gathered for COP4.

Desertification is too dry a subject to get anyone excited, it seems. It is about the parched regions of the world that are neither exotic nor enticing for tourists, even the eco-tourists. Desertification brings to

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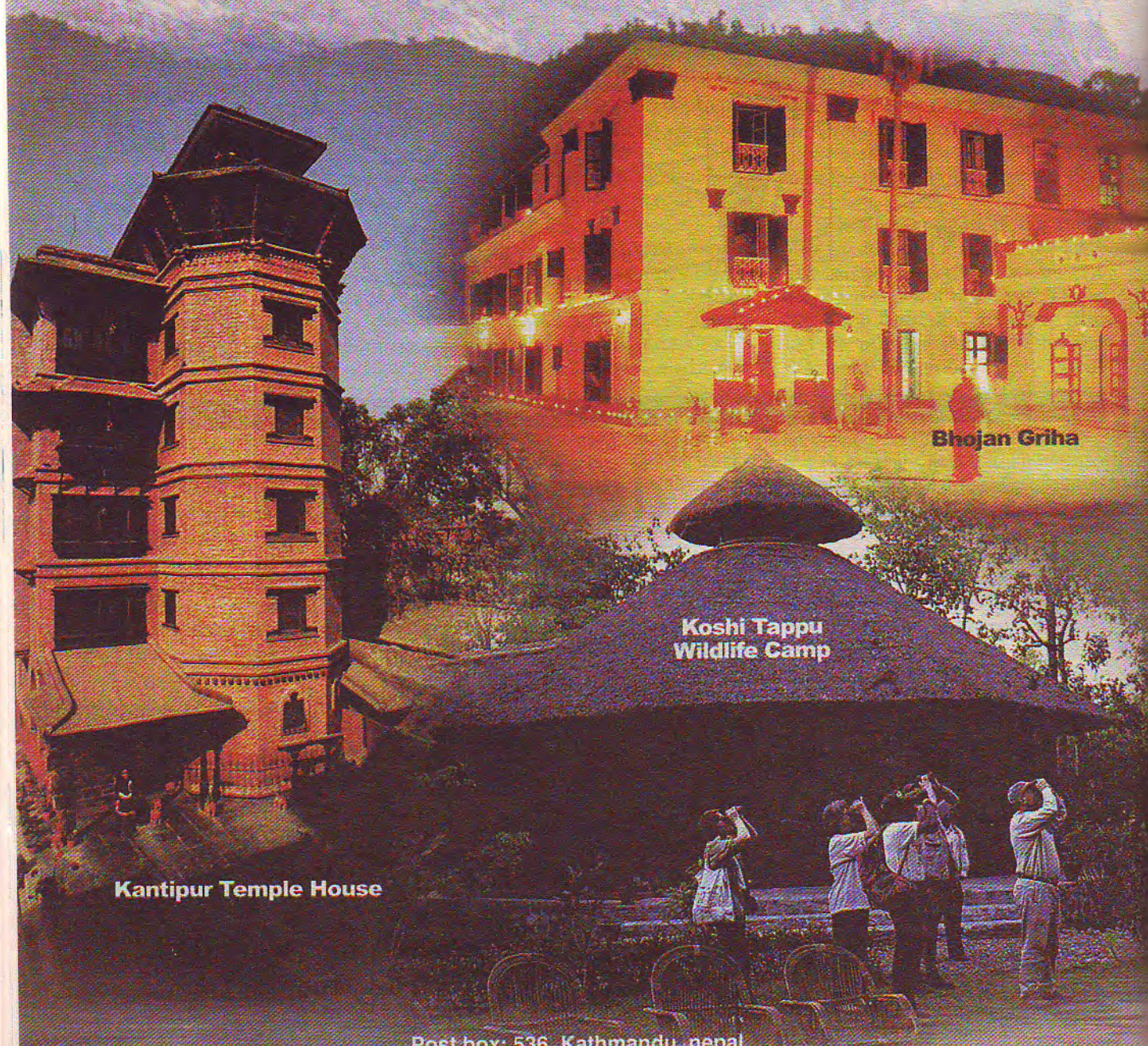

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mind images of creeping desert sands, but the term actually refers to land degradation, loss of soil fertility and conditions of drought that transform once-fertile agricultural dryland regions. Poverty, political instability, deforestation, improper irrigation, climate change, urban expansion, migration, famine, food scarcity and loss of life and livelihood are all both causes and consequences of the vicious cycle of desertification.

Poor cousin

Those hardest hit by desertification are the poorest in the poor countries. The Convention, which came into force six years ago and is now ratified by 172 countries—the US being one of the last to do so—is a poor cousin of the conventions on biological diversity and on climate change that emerged from the Rio Earth Summit of 1992. It is literally a poor man's convention, both by subject and the funding neglect it suffers from. Implementing the CCD is as remote as in the beginning, mainly because desertification is not a priority for the donor nations. It is not fashionable, and does not carry the same glamour associated with eco-politics. Simply said, the poor have not been able to 'sell' desertification.

The aim of the Convention is to protect the more than one billion people and their degraded lands by promoting effective "preventive" and "regenerative" action. To use a cliché, the fight against desertification is about "sustainable development". But how this is to be achieved is a question that has gone unanswered through the three earlier conferences that preceded Bonn. At COP4, a discerning observer would have been constrained to say that if money is what is required to fight back desertification, it certainly will not be forthcoming.

Of course, the Bonn Declaration did "reaffirm its obligation" to provide substantial financial resources and other forms of support to affected developing countries and to promote the mobilisation of new and additional funding, including (incredibly) from the private sector. The only area where this general call for funding was explicit was the Declaration's request that the parties take action "to improve and facilitate further access" of affected countries to the resources of Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Given that the fight against desertification is stymied for want of money, the tight-fisted approach of the developed countries was a way of showing the poor countries the door. What the poorer countries had been lobbying for was a full-fledged funding mechanism for the Convention, but at COP4 they realised soon enough that no such mechanism would be allowed to be created by the rich nations. Once this grim realisation dawned, it was rearguard action all the way to settle for the next best—a 'window' to fund anti-desertification work via the GEF. Even this was resisted by the richer planetary brethren till almost the very end.

So, at this point, fighting desertification, there is not even a budget to run the secretariat. The industrialised countries are dead set against any fresh financial commitments as a matter of 'principle', and suggest "multi-source financing". Indeed, every developed country delegation took the line that funding must be found "within the existing framework of development cooperation". Aggressively led by the European Union, the argument was that the donors' efforts could never substitute for action from the affected countries themselves. For, surely, none understood the problems of desertification better than the people from the affected areas. "This valuable knowledge must be drawn upon, not only at the local level, but also at the national and regional level to ensure sustainability".

It would be a laughably righteous conclusion, this call for use of "traditional knowledge" to solve desertification, if the problem were not so serious for a thousand million people. And the posture is in stark contrast to the indulgent one adopted by the North and the multilateral institutions when it comes to topics such as globalisation, the environment or human rights. When environmental, economic, trade, political and security interests of the North are involved, there is no dearth of interventionist prescriptions. Instead, here the starving and the dying are told that they alone know best how to survive and are not in need of a rescue lifeline.

Northern righteousness

Simply put, the developed world is asking the affected countries to fight their own battle. There is nothing in the Convention to Combat Desertification to motivate the rich nations—unlike in the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change or Persistent Organic Pollutants. Their own populations are not directly affected (as yet), nor is there much for the private sector to profit by investing or selling technology. Desertification does ofcourse affect the long term security of the industrialised North (through migration, global instability, etc), but not where it matters today for the decision-makers.

Even in the suggestion to use the GEF window, there is a catch: the "implementation annex" to the CCD adopted in Bonn makes the countries of Eastern and Central Europe also "parties", together with the developing countries of the South. "New and specific attention" would be devoted to countries of Central and Eastern Europe "affected by drought and desertification in consideration of their particular conditions which include problems and challenges related to the process of economic transition".

Since these economies are eventually to be integrated into Fortress Europe—NATO, EU and the rest of it—this is simply an attempt to hijack desertification funds to develop Western Europe's backyard. The underbelly of Europe must be well fed. So much for the Convention's stress of the "global dimension of desertification".

COP4 was expected to be a point

of departure—moving from reports, assessments and analyses to a declaration of commitments to implement. Yet, in Bonn, much of the time was spent in reviewing country reports—34 of the 150 received between 1999 and 2000. The rest will have to await money and a mid-session conclave in spring 2001. Bonn was to have been the place to launch special efforts to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought between 2001 and 2010. But no country is opening its wallet, and now the mass of humanity is being made to compete for scarce resources with the Eastern and Central Europeans.

Deserted ghetto

In many of the affected developing countries, the state has either collapsed, or been sucked into multiple conflicts. It is in no position to carry out the basic task of governance or provide the survival infrastructure for citizens. Yet, such countries are being asked to generate the political commitment and marshall the resources to battle desertification. Of course, it is convenient for these governments of the South, and their elite, to adopt the jargon of "partnerships with people and ngo's". This, too, is why the pious call in Bonn for partnerships with sections of civil society was such a convenient and knowing fraud.

All that Hama Arba Diallo (executive secretary of United Nations Secretariat of the Convention to Combat Desertification), could say, then, was: "But what can be done. We have to carry on and hope to combat desertification as best as we can".

An alliance of disabled poor states tied to unwilling rich countries cannot be expected to march in step with the demands of the world's poor. There are not even enough ngo's interested to put up a façade for "sections of civil society". Barely a few hundred are accredited to the CCD, compared to the thousands for the Rio environment convention. Issues like biodiversity, climate change and persistent organic pollutants offer better prospects as income generators for ngo's and corporates, as much as for governments. Even in South Asia, with expanse of desertifying land, the Desertification Convention does not stir much interest—it is a ghettoised problem handled by the bureaucrats of the environment ministries. The minister himself is not interested, and it does not figure on the horizons of foreign or finance ministries.

The fate of the victims of desertification spread over three continents is unlikely to change very much between now and 'COP5' in September 2001, or between now and 'Rio Plus 10' next year. Desertification, forgotten by governments of South and of North, will only spread more. If the poor cannot fit in to the scheme where they can attract investment and interest by way of technology, exports and know-how transfer, then they must be condemned to the causes of their poverty. △

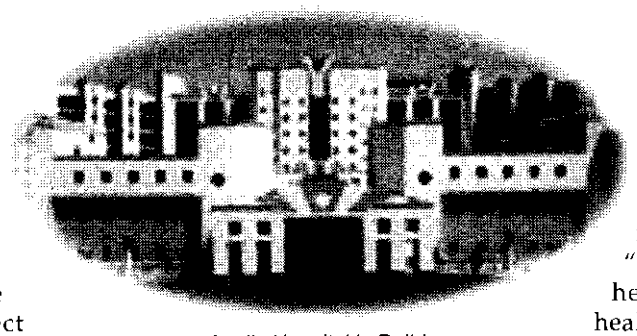
Whoever heard of Alma Ata?

In the headlong rush to embrace market-friendly solutions, our governments are letting go of their responsibilities for public health. The Health for All slogan is but an embarrassing reminder of idealistic days long past.

by ***Sandhya Srinivasan***

The Man in Black on the flight to Dhaka could have been a photographer on his way to cover the People's Health Assembly. After all, this meeting on globalisation, poverty and health had attracted worldwide attention and the international press. As it turned out, the gentleman was an architect from Bangalore carrying designs for the Dhaka branch of the Madras-based Apollo Hospital chain, which has plans to nurse the Bangladeshi elite back to good health. Even as all over South Asia the well-to-do are beginning to access the best in medical care via the medium of organisations such as Apollo, the divide between the medical haves and public health have-nots, has begun to expand rapidly.

That, indeed, was going to be the main subject of concern for the participants from 93 countries congregated at the village of Savar near Dhaka in the first week of December. The People's Health Assembly was the culmination of a year-long international campaign against international economic policies which have inflated prices, increased unemployment, and heightened job insecurity and economic equality between and within nations. These processes have reduced the availability of food, social services and health care for the poor, and the immediate repercussions have been felt in the medical fitness of people, and their susceptibility to disease.



Apollo Hospital in Delhi.

The choice of Bangladesh as the site for the conference was appropriate, for its story has been one of a step forward and two back when it comes to public health. Once famous as an inspirational David among Goliaths, thumbing its nose at the pharmaceutical giants and going the way it thought was right in drug policy, Bangladesh has come back to the fold of developing countries who do as they are told. In the not-too-distant past, during the regime of Hussain Mohammad Ershad, the community-based organisation, Gonoshasthaya Kendra, had helped formulate a national drug policy that resisted the pressures of multinationals and thwarted the dumping of inappropriate and dangerous drugs. A set of limited medicines of known efficacy was popularised, and the country became the toast of the public health fraternity worldwide.

Times have changed, and today Bangladesh is better known as the stomping ground of some pretty dubious health research, particularly on controversial contraceptives.

In many ways, the country's situation simply reflects the larger Subcontinent's capitulation to the demands to international interests. According to one estimate presented by researcher Kamran Abassi, who has studied "the World Bank and world health", 35 percent of the health sector funding in Bangladesh is coordinated by a consortium of 10 donors and aid agencies, headed by the Bank. The Bank's lending is tied to the government implementing health policy 'reforms' which include cost recovery for government health services, and replacing public services with ngo and private sector services.

Those in government, academia and media, who should be concerned about such measures and their impact on public health, are not keeping watch. The average life expectancy at birth in Bangladesh is just about 55. Almost 20 percent of deaths are from typhoid; another 25 percent are from tetanus, TB and diarrhoeal infections. Simply and starkly, at least 45 percent of deaths in the country could be prevented with clean water, better nutrition and decent living conditions, coupled with access to simple health services. At the root of such dismal statistics is the sustained and systematic erosion of the concept of primary health care.

The People's Health Assembly was convened to address these kinds of consequences emanating from the current health sector trends

in developing countries. Through a combination of plenary sessions, concurrent workshops and testimonies, the Assembly presented a rich portrait of what is being done and undone in health care around the world, as well as the struggles of individuals and organisations to keep some space for public health in an increasingly hostile economic and political environment. At the end of five days, the assembly approved a People's Health Charter on globalisation and people's health, with a package of demands on people's right to health through primary health care.

Good Health by 2000

Speaking at the Assembly was Halfdan Mahler, director general of the World Health Organisation in the 1970s. He recalled the build-up within the WHO of a movement for primary health care (PHC), which was what eventually led to the Alma Ata meeting of 1978. The Alma Ata Declaration was a historic document which explicitly linked ill health to poverty, inequality and lack of socio-economic development. It pointed out the need to address these underlying causes of illness as well as to provide health services for all as a matter of right.

As public health specialist Imrana Qadeer of Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) says, the Declaration's call for "Health for All by the Year 2000" had identified primary health care "not as elimination of disease by targetted technological means alone but as a complex of strategies that determined people's livelihood and quality of life". However, even as the Declaration was being signed in the Kazhak capital, it came under attack from within the international health establishment. The concept of integrated primary health care was quickly replaced by a 'selective PHC' approach—a package of technological, 'cost-effective' solutions. Selective PHC, Dr Qadeer argues, ignores the fact that there are multiple political, social and economic determinants of health and disease. It also focuses on making the best use of scarce health resources without questioning the reasons for this scarcity.

This quick about-turn on primary health care, almost before the ink was dry on the 1978 Declaration, was no accident. Australian economist, David Legge notes that the forces controlling international trade have always been committed to a model of socio-economic development that runs contrary to the principles enunciated at Alma Ata. It is

Public Health Bus to Bangladesh

ON A foggy Kathmandu morning on 2 December, a disparate group of Nepalis got into two long-distance buses. There were 70 in all, among them well-known doctors, policy-makers and heads of public health organisations, but more than 40 were straight from the villages, where they worked as village health workers, midwives and non-governmental organisers. They were all headed for Bangladesh, to the People's Health Assembly, which was taking place at a village outside Dhaka 4-8 December.

There were a couple of things unconventional about this Nepali delegation. The participants were all going by bus, not a surprising thing to do given the costs involved. But by and large, the participants to South Asian meets and junkets go by air, which always more than doubles the costs of getting participants together. The Nepali organisers hit upon a not entirely novel, but certainly largely untried, idea of going by bus. This meant that the very nature of the group could also better reflect the public health fraternity of Nepal in its diversity.

The participants were prepared for a difficult trip that would cover 1400 km, traversing the length of Nepal, cutting through the 'Chicken's Neck' section of India near Siliguri, and heading down through North Bangladesh to Dhaka, across the Jamuna.

After a full day of driving through the Nepali hills and Tarai, we reached Nepal's eastern border at Kakarbhitta at 8 in the evening. Starting early the next day, passing through Naxalbari, Siliguri and Jalpaiguri, we arrived at noon in Chyangrabanda on the Indo-Bangla border, guarded on this side by the Border Security Force. The BSF jawans kept us there for hours, asking questions about our mission and destination. It turned out that they had a letter from some government secret service agency alerting them to an ISI agent named 'Yuvaraj' with a forged Nepali passport with us in the bus. They let us through after they were convinced that the one Yuvaraj in our group was who he said he was.

By the time, greatly relieved, we entered Burimadi in Bangladesh, it was already 3 pm. It was another 600 km to Dhaka, but the road was wide and well-built, the result we were told of loving care and attention devoted to this region of northern Bangladesh by Hussain Mohammad Ershad when he was ruler. Looking out at the scenery rushing by, one lady passenger remarked how the landscape was exactly like that of the Nepal Tarai. Indeed, that had to be so, as the Nepal Tarai was less than 50 miles away as the crow flies. We were kept entertained, meanwhile, by Bangla friends who plied us with *'khaja'*, beaten rice and sugar.

these forces, he argues, that are responsible for a widening 'global health gap'. To cite just one instance, the ratio of age-specific death rates of developing to other countries has gone up steadily since 1950, indicating widening gaps in resources and access to health care.

Even as the WHO members committed themselves to primary health care, developing countries faced an extended economic crisis caused by the unfair economic trading system. This crisis forced developing countries to borrow extensively from multilateral lending institutions, and by the early 1980s, these countries were not in a position to service their debts. At this point, international financial institutions imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes on borrowing countries as a condition for further credit. The economic downturn had already pushed "Health for All" to the back of national agendas, and now the demands for structural adjustment cut into the already under-funded public health services. All problems were attributed to state-controlled planning and protectionism, and the suggested panacea was to join the world economy as a free marketeer. The new creditor-driven dispensation presided over the dismantling of the limited welfare establishments in developing countries. The impact was swift and ruthless, and the result is to be found today in the inadequacies of health care, among the sick and the dying, across the expanse of South Asia. The name of Alma Ata has begun to sound alien even to those greying practitioners and activists who attended the conference in 1978.

Globalising public health

The links between the much-vaunted opening up to the liberalised economy and the health-related impoverishment of the people can be graphically illustrated by studying the trends in the industrialised Indian state of Maharashtra, across the face of the Subcontinent from Bangladesh. In January 2001, a two-day special cabinet meeting unanimously approved a new industrial policy and proposed changes to labour legislation. Under the new policy, factories with less than 300 workers can shut down without a by-your-leave. Waste disposal agencies, canteens, security agencies, gardens, courier firms and 100 percent export-oriented units are exempted from the provisions of the Contract Labour (Prevention and

We had crossed the great bridge over the Jamuna around midnight, and arrived in Dhaka at three in the morning of 4 December, and it was some more time before we made it to the dormitory of Gono University at the village of Savar, outside the capital. There was not much time for sleep before the conference began in the morning.

What struck the participants from Nepal most during the conference was the link made clear between economic globalisation and the impact that countries like their's had to face. Also, closer home, they were able to comprehend better the ongoing process of privatisation of health, with the pauperisation of government hospitals and health posts even while nursing homes and private hospitals got established to cater to the upper classes, particularly in Kathmandu.

In Dhaka, Nepal's own well-known public healthwallahs were there to speak of Nepal's experience, and against the worldwide trends in public health. These included doctor-activists Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Renu Rajbhandary, Aruna Upreti, and public health worker Sharad Onta. And among the participants was David Werner, whose "Where There is No Doctor" (translated into 86 languages) is known to many a health worker in its Nepali translation. Werner told the Nepali delegation with evident concern, "Your government is showing very little commitment to delivery of quality health care to your people."

What struck the Nepali participants most was the vocal opposition to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to the extent that there was hooting all over the meeting hall when the Bank representative Richard Skolnik took to the floor. Many of the Nepali delegates, of course, did not understand what was being said and had to be constantly updated with translation by their co-participants.

SHIVA GAUNLE

Delegate Nanda Kumari Shrestha at Savar, Bangladesh.

As the hall was resounding with opposition to the Bank representative, Nanda Kumari Shrestha was trying to make sense of it all. She is a 65-year-old who has spent decades working as a midwife in Baguwa village, 20 km north of the hill town of Gorkha. "Why is that *goray* (paleface) not being allowed to speak?" she asked a neighbour. The friend, who did not have much better English, explained what was going on. A light of understanding came to Nanda Kumari's eyes, and she exclaimed, "So he is the guy responsible for making our midwifery kits more expensive!"

The effort of busing it to Bangladesh, it seemed, was worth it.

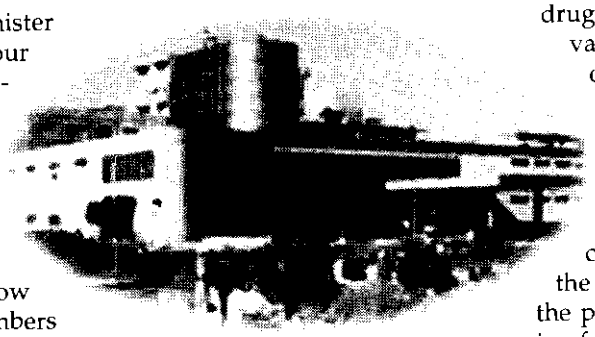
—Shiva Gaunle

Abolition) Act. The chief minister holds that the changes in labour legislation and the new industrial policy will help industrial production and improve the "work culture".

Such policies led to the steady 'informalisation' of the workforce. Bombay labourers suddenly made 'casual', borrow money to have sick family members treated by private doctors in the slums. This seems a cheaper option to giving up a day's wages to line up at the municipal hospital. In any case, these days, the government hospitals no longer provide free medicines. The patient's families also believe that private doctors are doing them a favour by charging INR 30 for an injection, whereas it is more than likely that the intervention was both unnecessary and dangerous.

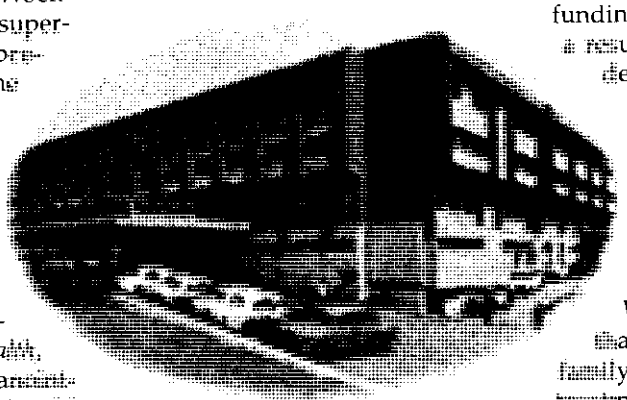
Health groups and unions in Bombay have long been protesting user fees in municipal hospitals, and making the poor pay for essential drugs and tests. But the state government is unmoved. Instead, in the belief that the city has no shortage of public facilities but needs yet another five-star hospital, in January, the Maharashtra government signed an agreement with Wockhardt Hospitals Ltd to run a superspecialty hospital on the premises within the grounds of the general hospital.

All this is in tune with the World Bank's prescriptions, and the hakims at 1818 H Street in Washington DC must have been pleased. As Mahler noted, by 1993, the World Development Report *Investing in Health*, published by the Bank, had anointed the Bank as a substitute World Health Organisation, directly controlling health policy in developing countries. The package pushed by the Bank includes reduction in welfare, dismantling of public services, introduction of service charges in public institutions, and the promotion of the private and voluntary sectors. Yet, as survey after survey has shown, user charges for health services reduce usage, at the expense of people's health.



Apollo Hospital in Hyderabad.

After Zimbabwe introduced structural adjustment in 1990, even as per capita expenditure on health care fell by a third, the mortality rate of under-fives went from 101/1000 to 162/1000. In India, where structural adjustment was instituted in 1991, the 1998-99 National Family Health Survey found that infant mortality rates in the nine states surveyed, had gone up. In Guyana, notes Mohan Rao, a public health specialist at the JNU, "Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, malnutrition, child death rates, unemployment and poverty rose dramatically as result of the implementation of the SAP package."



Apollo Hospital in Chennai.

Another example of gains in public health being squandered is the Indian state of Kerala, with its health indicators comparable to those of developed countries. This achievement was the result of decades of work, but now the public health system is being starved of drugs and facilities. The state's private sector grows uncontrollably, outpacing the public sector in personnel, hospital beds and with twice as many doctors, and much more sophisticated technology. B. Ekbal, an activist, says that with increasing health care costs and the progressive marginalisation of the poor, the Kerala model is drifting far from its much-vaunted roots and towards the American model. In the process, 40 million people are losing their health care coverage.

Across the Palk Strait, Sri Lanka's success in opening its markets has similarly led to impoverishment of public health. Nimalka Fernando, secretary of the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality in Colombo, notes that Sri Lanka's famed public health system had started to collapse immediately with the implementation of the 1977 structural adjustment package, which included increased privatisation and reduced social spending, a clampdown on trade unions, and the growth of free trade zones unencumbered by labour legislation. Food support for pregnant women is now a thing of the past; the midday meal programme for school has been discontinued. Due to lack of funding for spraying, there has been a resurgence of malaria. The incidence of babies of low birthweight is on the rise, anaemia is widespread.

Health programmes promoted by the World Bank today are nothing more than a further refinement of 'selective PHC'. The 1993 World Bank report proposed that poor countries provide only family planning, prevention of and treatment for a few infectious diseases, and immunisation for children. All other services could be provided by the private sector, it was said. Such interventions not only ignore the conditions in which these diseases exist, they promote a private sector that sees health care only as a source of profit.

A good example of this is the

Health for the rest, a scene from a public hospital.

propagation of oral rehydration solutions in Nepal, says Sharad Onta, a Kathmandu public health activist. The prescription for diarrhoea, which is the main killer of Nepali children, is ofcourse, oral rehydration solutions. But the underlying cause is economic, the result of contaminated water supply compounded by poor nutrition. Besides the problems with policy focus, the concept of ORT is used by industry to exploit families through aggressive marketing of oral rehydration solutions.

Back to basics

The proponents of structural adjustment point to the fact that in many poor countries, the bulk of health expenditure is in the private sector and hence borne from personal resources. Such high private spending, they argue, indicates that people will and should pay for health services. But this arguments misses the fact that demand for health care is one of the most elastic, shaped not so much by the immediate consumer (the sick person) but the medical establishment which stands to gain at each instance. In countries like India, where 80 percent of health expenditure is privately incurred, the poor will reduce food intake in order to pay for health services. This will make them more vulnerable to disease. And indeed, studies suggest that health care is the second most important cause of indebtedness in India today.

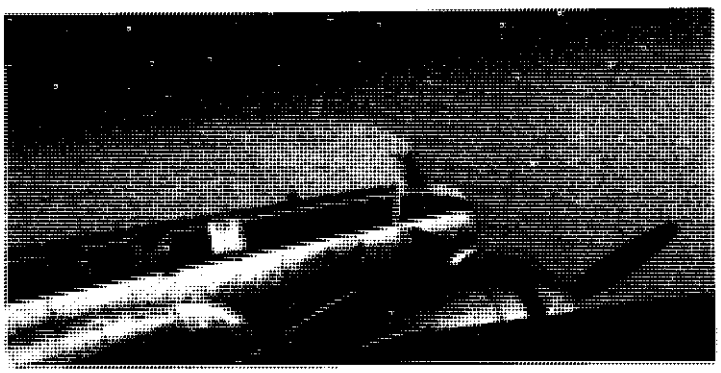
What then lies ahead? The hundreds of participants at the Public Health Assembly outside Dhaka went away, at the very least, with a better understanding of the global processes which affect the life and health of the individual child, woman and man in the developing world. Within South Asia, which contains the bulk of the world's poor and ailing, this understanding must now lead to activism for renewal of faith in primary health care, and away from the wide-eyed acceptance of market-led technological fixes to medical problems. The challenge of the moment is to confront the real sources of power, said James Obrinsky, former president of the medical relief organisation, Doctors without Borders (Medicine sans Frontiere). And this must be in a way that does not result in its premature co-opting.

A 'Pakistani' in 'India'

What we need are soft borders and hard drinks, suggests the actor-director from Pakistan, contemplating all the friends he has made in India, thanks to one peace initiative or another.

by ***Salman Shahid***

This was the time before turbo-props and jets. At Lahore's Walton airport an aircraft with two large piston-engines placed on wide wings sat on its tail and looked up at the sky wonderingly.



A DC-3 sitting on its tail.

What I boarded was a DC-3, the Dakota. To get to your seat you had to be a minor acrobat, walking uphill along the narrow aisle. If my mother had not supported my rump as I negotiated the incline, I could have easily rolled into reverse. But a mother in need is a mother indeed and mine proved to be a truly supportive one that day. Before long, I was seated and strapped and peering out of the flat-paned rectangular windows as the engines roared into life and we taxied out.

As the plane lifted into the air, its fuselage straightened out to level. Before long, flying east, we had crossed over the Pakistani to the Indian Punjab.

The year was 1958, or it could have been '59. We were visiting Aunty Romilla and Aunty Prem in Delhi, childhood friends of my mother's whom Partition had quite not divided. Aunty Romilla had a spacious flat, or so it seemed to me at the time, right on Connaught Place. Her husband had a business manufacturing pencils, and I spent that whole winter in Delhi receiving free gifts of the most wonderful sets of pencils. The brand name was Moonlight, and they were so brightly emblazoned that they glowed in the dark.

Being already some kind of a movie aficionado I went to the cinema. The first film I chose to see in Delhi was *The Lone Ranger*. I was very little but I did it alone. The practice in Lahore at that time was to break the film in the middle with an interval. But here in Delhi, interval took place after the adverts, followed by an uninterrupted film. As a consequence, I mistook the end of the film for the intermission and re-entered the auditorium. When the man at the entrance asked me for my ticket, I realised my mistake and quickly cooked up a story about having left a valuable while watching the earlier show. We spent some time trying to find this mythical item, until I thanked the staff for their labours, heaved a seven-year-old's sigh of philosophical resignation as to my assumed loss and left the hall.

I was amazed to see Lahore's Regal, Odeon and Plaza cinema houses magically transported across the border, not realising that these were the names given to the talkies in all Indian cities before Partition. Just like the gymkhanas and the Oberoi hotels. That the sweets and *mithais* this side of the border were more colourful, was another impression.

By that time, Parliament Street had already got the large office blocks it still sports today. We had nothing to match them in Lahore. Karachi might have had something similar, but I hadn't visited that city as yet. Islamabad was still in the womb. Delhi was larger, bigger, as has always been the case.

I remember a canal that ran right by India Gate. When I returned, decades later, in 1993, the canal was not there, and what is more surprising, no one seemed to remember it. Upon reflection, I feel that perhaps my child's eye saw a canal in the reflecting pools that run by the Raj Path towards the Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Indian President's palace.

This time, I had appeared on the Indian scene with

my wife Beena, a journalist. There was another change: we were not staying with my mother's pals but with a contemporary friend, Shabnam Hashmi. We decided to leave ourselves to Shabnam's devices, and this included a visit to the office of her organisation SAHMAT. There, we got acquainted with a host of Indian writers and artists. Habib Tanvir was a frequent visitor. He later visited Lahore as well and there were plans to stage his play, *Jinnay Lahore nahin waikhaiya*. A Ravi Shankar performance was also scheduled, but then our bearded bigots stepped in to quash all hopes.

At the house of Shamshad Hussain, we met Bisham Sahni. He is the writer of *Tamas*, the popular Doordarshan serial on Partition so well-known to Pakistani audiences. This artistic milieu was so familiar yet strange that it left Beena and me feeling quite inebriated. But we never rose to that sublime level to which our host Shamshad seemed to have ascended. I reminded him three or four times of my name but this did not help, as he eventually mistook me for my wife.

We met a barefooted Indian yeti a couple of days later. He turned up like Goldilocks straight onto Shabnam's breakfast table. I'm talking of M.F. Hussain, Shamshad's father. A raging controversy was on at the time because of M.F.'s supposed desecration of the image of Ganesh. Much of the uproar seems to have been instigated by professional rivals under the garb of wounded religious sentiment.


Young Salman.

We were soon in Bombay, staying in filmmaker Saeed Mirza's Bandra office flat. His own apartment was in an adjacent block. Saeed is an Uzbek and he wished very much to make a trip to Pakistan's Frontier region, though people of his stock are to be found more frequently farther north, in Afghanistan and beyond. We met Anand Patwardhan, the documentarist, as well. Reclined on a large green trunk in Anand's lounge, from which he seemed to have emerged and which served as a divan, was Srinivas Krishna, another man of the movies.

Krishna was premiering his first movie, *Masala*, in Bombay. Saeed Jafri was playing one of the parts in the film and when he phoned to talk to his young director, I had a chat with him as well. Saeed is a friend of my father's, who spent more than half his years, and most of his professional career with the BBC as a television producer in London and then Birmingham. Saeed had worked with father for decades in England. Despite the connection I was not able to fish an invitation for the premiere.

One evening, we stopped by at Saeed's flat, to discover that he had Basu Bhattacharya and Gulzar over. The latter enjoyed hearing me talk, because my accent reminded him of the area he hailed from, Dina, located near Jhelum in northern Punjab. Rather than soft-spoken artistes, the area is better known for producing an endless crop of fearless sons who filled the British legions right down to the end of the Raj.

We left Bombay, unknowing that this was the last time we would visit it while it still officially started with a 'B'. A couple of nights more in Delhi and we were back in Pakistan.

We had now developed an Indian connection. Soon afterwards, the Pakistan-India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy was formed. The number of our encounters with Indians grew. Friendships were cemented. Rati Bartholomew, a teacher at the Drama School in Delhi was by now a fast friend. When she visited Lahore, we had discovered that we were distantly related. I also found a kind and benign step-uncle in India, Neel Batra, veteran journalist and radio man.

While the camaraderie grew, the mood of the masses continued to be disruptively swayed by politicians on both sides. After the Babari Masjid was demolished, Lahoris responded by toppling no less than a few dozen mandirs that had remained on the municipal map since 1947. All at the instigation of 'interested parties' who wished to occupy the valuable land on which they stood. It was around then that I received a call from the Goethe Institut—the Pakistani equivalent of the Max Mueller Bhavans of India. They wanted to know if I was interested in attending a workshop on Bertolt Brecht in Calcutta.

The Indian Airlines flight was delayed by a couple of hours because of which I arrived at Dum Dum at what is technically three in the morning but is really the darkest hour of the night. There was no reception party waiting for me. I got myself into a cab, thinking about the night runners of Bengal as in the John Masters book, and disembarked at a small hotel opposite, what seemed, an ominously large police station. Handed my passport and documents at the reception. Checked into my room and spent the rest of the night watching MTV.

Certain developments within the Subcontinent happen simultaneously, no matter how deep the divide between our societies and economies. One has been the emergence of the dish antennae on our collective horizon. The other is dug-up roads simultaneously in cities all over in the name of a so-called optic fibre. Another is the official consent of respective governments to allow private airlines to operate (Bhoja Air, Jet Air, Buddha

Air, take your pick). And strangely, the habit of taking a gift of flowers when visiting. That, too, has taken root insidiously right across the Subcontinent from Calcutta to Karachi.

Theatre in Calcutta was inexpensive and good. I recognised Arthur Miller's *All my Sons* midway through the Bengali performance. Satyajit Ray had just passed away so I could not even make an abortive attempt to see him. I believe he was a frequent theatre-goer, though he modestly declined to indulge in this particular form which he felt was in good hands. I saw a very good film, *Fishermen of the Padma River*, which recorded Utpal Dutt's last appearance on celluloid. Incidentally, I chanced to be on a film jury with the man who had made *Fishermen*, Gautam Ghose, at the Film South Asia Documentary festival in Kathmandu in 1999.

The Calcutta trip concluded with a visit to Barrackpur, where we witnessed performances of traditional Bengali folk theatre, called Jatka, by a group of itinerant actors. This was the kind of theatre that had influenced Brecht in the formulation of his own theatre practice. A storm had raged in the vicinity, disrupting phone and electricity lines; the Barrackpur railway station was shrouded in ghostly moonlight with dozens of pale lanterns scattering shadows. On the way back to Calcutta, since there were no seats available on the passenger *gaadi*, we found ourselves in a *maalgaadi* occupied by sacks of vegetables bound for the big city. Myself, I spent a thrilling night sitting on an oversized turnip.

As we descended from the train at Calcutta, a large crowd of people was chanting slogans against Pakistan. I thought they had somehow got wind of the fact that an alien on board the goods wagon had been sitting on a turnip through the night and that was the cause for the commotion. But, thankfully, it was the Babari Masjid episode which was continuing to provoke common ire. Thanks to the benevolence of the Almighty, I was able to weave my way through the rabble without being asked to produce my citizenship papers.

Later, my fellow travellers were hard-pressed to hide their embarrassment for the shower of abuse that the cabbie, on our way from the station to the Max Mueller Bhavan, heaped on all varieties of Pakistanis. When we dispensed the cab, they apologised to me. I advised them not to take matters too much to heart, since on occasion they could confront similar sentiments for themselves, on my side of the border. This somehow rested their conscience, and with friendships intact I departed Calcutta for the last time before it became Kolkota.

The next opportunity to come over from Lahore was in 1998. Pokharan and Chagai had happened. My wife and I now had a child in tow. Just as our countries had crossed the nuclear threshold, we had become a nuclear family. To cross the threshold of peace was left to private individuals and organisations on both sides of the divide, and so SAHMAT held a conference to condemn the Subcontinent's nuclearisation. Beena was a delegate, and I came baby-sitting. In fact, that's what I wrote as "purpose of my visit" on the visa application form, although I could also have written "to protest nuclear bombs".

The conference was attended by many people of India I had already got to know. Shyam Benegal, whom I met when he was invited to Lahore by the Faiz Foundation. Shabana Azmi, whose film, *Fire*, had just caught it and got banned. Arundhati Roy, who turned a novelist shortly before India made it its business to nominate a world beauty queen annually, otherwise I earnestly believe this presentable lady would have opted for pageants rather than publishers.

These stars aside, denuclearisation was supported by a cast of tens of thousands that evening. We took a candle-light peace march in the twilight, right to the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Imagine, we, Pakistani's, doing this right in the heart of the Indian citadel. The evenings in Delhi were spent affirming our solidarity with all sorts of befitting beverages. Some lovely afternoons were spent at the Delhi Press Club, with Praful Bidwai (lately of a broken neck, but alright otherwise) serving his Praful Special, an ignitable item composed of a green chilly dunked irretrievably into an amount of vodka. Clearly, it was a recipe ferreted from the Indian ordnance factory, and one which could prove more lethal to Pakistanis than the Indian bomb.

This was also the time that my daughter saw her first movie in a theatre. It was K2H2, *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai*, and it really happened to all of us who went to see it. These Pakistanis, a man, a woman and an infant, thoroughly enjoyed the film which was truly great family entertainment. Sharukh and Kajol must be told.

Arundhati had us over for dinner one night, at her lovely space in Delhi. I discovered that she is an architect by training, who also worked as a script girl for her husband Pradip Krishen, who formerly was a director. Subsequently, both changed their professions. She became the novelist we know her to be, while her husband became a conservationist. I told them I was also conserving myself for a Praful Special for the next afternoon.

And suddenly, the trip was over. They do have a habit of ending abruptly as dreams. But that is not the end of the story. There are moments when being unemployed and on the fringes of society can prove to be a boon. You see, the British Council had organised a SAARC short story writing competition, and one of the judges had been a government civil servant from Lahore. Unfortunately he could not go to the awards distribution ceremony in Delhi because his employer (Government of Pakistan) would not give him a No Objection Certificate (NOC). So, the Council needed a replacement fast. So, I might well meet this article in Delhi, India.

That would be the fifth time I would have gone East of the Border. May there be many times more, really. After all, what we need is soft borders and hard drinks. Isn't that the purpose of the peace initiative?

THE MYSTERY OF Chitt

The writer, co-chief of *The New York Times* New Delhi Bureau, tries to make sense of the killing of 35 Sikh men in the Kashmir village of Chittisinghpora. This detailed account of what happened and what did not, including reportage from both India and Pakistan, was written for *The New York Times Magazine* and carried by the South Asian Journalist Association (SAJA) Website.

by **Barry Bearak**

Scapegoat or culprit? Mohammad Suhail Malik in chains.

When Bill Clinton visited India in March, it was the first visit by an American president in 22 years. Among the careful preparations for the historic occasion were a painstaking cleanup around the Taj Mahal, a reconnoitring for wild tigers he might glimpse on a VIP safari and the murder of 35 Sikh villagers in a place called Chittisinghpora.

This massacre, occurring on the evening of 20 March, preceded Clinton's arrival by only a few hours. It was a monstrous way to transmit a message, whatever that message was, and the scale of the killing was large even amid the exceptional sorrows of the Kashmir Valley. The slaughter was also remarkable in that the victims were Sikhs, a religious minority never before targeted during a bloody decade infused with grief. In the aftermath, the valley's 60,000 Sikhs faced the possibility that they were now someone's strategic quarry and that a mass migration might be a sensible reaction to the danger.

The killers came to the village at about 7:20 pm. They shunned the openness of the steep and twisting mountain road and hiked instead through the nearby apple orchards and rice fields. There were perhaps a dozen of them, perhaps twice that. They were dressed in what appeared to be the regulation issue of the Indian Army.

Darkness had fallen across the hamlet, where 200 families, almost all Sikhs, eked out a living in a spot of

isinghpora

rugged Himalayan beauty. Their ancestors had been rooted in this same windswept place—often in the very same dwellings—for generations. Chittisinghpora is a palette of greens and browns and yellows. A creek runs through it like a lifeline across the palm of a hand. Walnut and pine trees provide canopies of shade above deeply sloping footpaths. The houses are mostly made of mud bricks and weathered timber, many of them with A-frame roofs and open lofts stuffed with hay.

That evening, the electricity was out, a frequent problem, and many villagers had lit candles and were listening to news of the presidential visit on transistor radios. The homes are spread out. There are no phones. Most people were unaware of the armed strangers standing at opposite sides of the village, near its two gurudwaras. The intruders gathered up men who were returning from evening prayers and collected several more from nearby stores and houses. They worked hurriedly. Some had their faces covered with black cloth, the patka often worn by soldiers on search operations. Two Sikhs—out of curiosity or helpfulness—approached the commotion with lanterns and were taken off with the rest for their trouble. In all, 37 men were rounded up.

Panic had yet to set in, for the rousting of civilians was nothing unusual. Chittisinghpora lies in an area rife with the militants who are fighting a hit-and-run war against India. Some of these guerrillas are Kashmiris whose purpose is a separatist insurrection; the rest are Pakistanis and other foreigners waging a *jihad* to wrench the largely Muslim territory from a largely Hindu country. Occasionally, the militants impose on a village for food and sanctuary, and house-to-house searches by the Indian soldiers in pursuit are not uncommon. Indeed, the arriving strangers told the Sikhs they were on the trail of three guerrillas. But while the story was believable, Karamjeet Singh, a high-school teacher and one of the 37, thought something was suspiciously awry. These soldiers did not seem like the army, he recalled later. Some were taking swigs from a bottle and staggering. They spoke in Urdu and not the Hindi more common to soldiers. He whispered his fears to the others. Many had become similarly scared and were now preoccupied with the mumbling of prayers. In an impulsive instant, the teacher darted towards a shallow ditch and crawled away through the mud.

Of the 36 who remained, only one, a 40-year-old named Nanak Singh, survived. And only he among the villagers was an eyewitness to the actual carnage. The Sikhs were herded into two groups and made to kneel, facing the gurudwaras. The weather was cold, the wind brisk. The men were wearing heavy garb across their shoulders, and their heads were covered with the turbans required by their faith. They were killed with efficiency, shot first with a persistent rat-tat-tat from a volley of machine-gun fire, then with single bursts by executioners who moved from one fallen Sikh to another, stilling motion and silencing moans. Singh was at first saved by the shield of a toppling body. Then he was wounded in the hip during the second round of shooting. He tried to lie perfectly still. He remembers that some of the gunmen had faces painted in the raucous fashion of Holi, a Hindu festival being celebrated that day. As the killers marched off, a few called out the parting words "*Jai mata di*", a Hindi phrase of praise for a goddess. The entire attack lasted about half an hour.

President Clinton, acting with caution, condemned the massacre without casting blame. In that agnosticism, he was unusual in this region of 1.1 billion people. India and Pakistan have been fighting each other since their synchronised birth 53 years ago, usually with Kashmir, which they both claim, as the cause. Amid all the unknowing of what took place in the remote darkness, both Indians and Pakistanis were decidedly sure of who was responsible for the murders. As is their habit, they clung to nearly identical versions of reality, only with the role of villain reversed. In India, people saw the treacherous connivance of Pakistan, up to old tricks and once again trying to focus the world's attention on woebegone Kashmir; in Pakistan, they saw the sinister hand of India, trying to make the Muslim "freedom fighters" seem detestable while American policy makers were present to watch. This was typical of the world's two newest nuclear powers. A half-century of enmity had done more than lead them into three all-out wars and several smaller ones. It had distilled the murkiness of their mutual grudges into clarified good and evil. One thinks the other capable of almost anything—and they are just about right.

The first articles in Indian newspapers reported with confidence that "militants" had committed the crime. That the killers were dressed in army fatigues was easily explained away, for guerrilla groups often

donned such clothing. The drunken behaviour and Hindi slogans were seen as crude, preposterous impersonations of Indian soldiers.

Officialdom backed these early assumptions. Within a day, the country's powerful national security adviser, Brajesh Mishra, said there was absolute proof that two of the bigger militant groups in Kashmir—Lashkar-e-Taiba and Hizbul Mujahideen—were guilty of the bloodshed. "These outfits are supported by the Government of Pakistan," he declared in an explanation most likely aimed at the press corps in the Clinton entourage. In India, there is no such need to connect the dots. Most journalists assume that the militants receive their guns and take their orders from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency.

Subsequent articles were enlivened by scoops. Leaks from anonymous government sources told of intercepted communications that contained the actual orders to kill the Sikhs. And on 25 March, any doubts about culpability were seemingly put to rest with the announcement that a collaborator had been apprehended. After interrogation, he had guided security forces to a mountain redoubt in the village of Panchalthan, where five of those who had massacred the Sikhs were hiding. In an ensuing shootout, the guerrillas were killed. Indian authorities predicted that they would soon catch the rest.

In Pakistan, the Chittisinghpora massacre was first reported as the work of "unidentified gunmen", but then the state television station swiftly cobbled together the evidence and concluded that "the Indian Army was involved in this gory incident". Follow-up stories in newspapers and on TV made an easy tiptoe from facts alleged to facts presumed to facts that could be taken as history—and the accepted version came to be that Indian commandos were guilty of the atrocity. Indeed, any other possibility was deemed implausible by editorialists and commentators. After all, they said, freedom fighters in Kashmir attack military targets, not innocent civilians. And besides, they never move in such large numbers. If they had, they would have been detected and eliminated beneath the bare trees of early spring.

During the week of the Clinton visit, I spent time in both countries and was struck then—as so often before—by the parallel and yet opposing realities. In the following months, I kept repeated company with the Chittisinghpora massacre, pondering it as a metaphor, which has been easy enough, and puzzling over it as a whodunit, which has been a general bafflement.

I might have expected as much. The Kashmir conflict has a way of boiling truth into vapour. Every fact is contested, every confession suspect, every alliance a prelude to some sort of betrayal. People ambushed, caught in cross-fires, snatched away, hideously tortured, buried and forgotten in clandestine graves: all this has become commonplace ever since the rebellion against India began in late 1989. Atrocities—real and concocted—are employed as necessary skulduggery. The death toll has been tabulated at more than 34,000 by the Indian government. Others insist the count is double that.

In both nations, my questions about blame often provoked impatience, as if the answers ought to be obvious to anyone but an idiot or a child. Indignation sometimes substituted for any response at all. I would be asked in return: How can you think we would be evil enough to kill all those people? How can you think we would be so dumb?

Stubborn animosity between nations is nothing uncommon, of course. But for India and Pakistan, the long years of ill will have been especially regrettable, diverting each from its most pressing woe, the lingering catastrophe of pervasive poverty. In Pakistan, the loser in all three wars, the discord has added the burden of chronic political instability. Democracy has failed to take root.

In May 1998, the costs of continuing the hostility rose appreciably. India—with a new government led by Hindu nationalists—tested several nuclear devices. Soon after, and predictably enough, Pakistan responded in kind. The minute hand lurched forward on the doomsday clock, and world leaders began taking a closer look at belligerence in the Subcontinent. What they saw was alarming: two arch enemies eyeball to eyeball across a disputed cease-fire line. Daily barrages of artillery fire. A guerrilla war engineered by one, whittling away the patience of the other. Hatred, vengefulness, obstinacy.

Bill Clinton had apparently done some risk analysis of his own. Not long before his India trip, he called the region "the most dangerous place in the world".

What are the right lies?

Chittisinghpora is a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. To make the journey is to observe something akin to the military occupation of paradise. Moghul emperors in the 17th century thought these clear streams and lush mountains the closest thing to a heaven on earth, and 20th-century tourists once agreed. But now the highways are booby-trapped with IEDs, improvised explosive devices. Drivers are regularly pulled over, civilians routinely frisked. Army caravans move slowly in a continuous serpentine, skirting roadblocks and barricades, their passengers pointing rifles out of canvas-topped vehicles. Soldiers in olive flak jackets stand at regular intervals, their attention shuttling from the busy growl of the traffic to the ominous quiet of surrounding fields of saffron and mustard seed.

My visit to the village did not come until nearly six months after the massacre, and by then many there had told their stories again and again to confusing effect—to the police, to the military, to politicians, to reporters, to human rights groups, to Sikh leaders from India and abroad. Quoted versions varied not only from person

to person but also from day to day. Villagers themselves quarrelled about what—and whom—they had seen and heard.

In hopes of penetrating the contradictions, I recruited a friend, Surinder Oberoi, a Sikh journalist based in Srinagar and one of the best reporters I have met in India. He in turn enlisted a Sikh businessman who had advised many of the families in Chittisinghpora since the killings. We would make the drive together. But before leaving, the businessman wanted to look me over. He was not immediately friendly.

"So you want to know the truth?" he said in an accusatory voice loud enough for oratory. "Don't you know the truth can get these people killed?"

I inquired then as to why he was assisting us. "I think it is time for the truth to come out," he answered in lower decibels. "Yes, I think now it's time."

His presence certainly opened doors. In Chittisinghpora, we were greeted warmly, taken into a brightly painted house and seated solicitously on the floor, as is the custom, with thick cushions for our backs. Several bearded men rushed in and out of the room and introduced themselves. I tried to keep track of who was who by the colour of their turbans.

"Tell this man the truth," the businessman urged.

And one of the older Sikhs seemed pleased to take this as his cue. "We have told many stories to many people, but today we will tell only the whole truth," he promised in preamble to a declaration: "It is a fact that our people have been killed by a conspiracy of the intelligence agencies of Pakistan. One month before the massacre, there were militants who spent time in our village. They were from Pakistan, and they made friends with us. And this is how we were thanked, with a barbaric act."

Actually, there was nothing new in this synopsis. Immediately after the massacre, during a time that teemed with rage, a few villagers had blamed a handful of Pakistani militants who had visited Chittisinghpora in the weeks before. While such stopovers were hardly uncommon, these guerrillas were exceptional in the casualness of their mingling. They were said to have once strung their rifles to trees and watched a sandlot game of cricket. Now, reflecting back, it was thought that they had actually been scouting the village with a murderous plot in mind. A few Sikh widows said they had recognised the voices of these men at their doors leading their husbands away to die. They said the marauders seemed to know where people lived—and had even called out some names. In a few retellings, Mohammad Yaqoob Wagay, a young Muslim milkman who lived nearby, had accompanied the killers. He was an imam who often led prayers at the mosque. He loved cricket. He was friendly with these and other guerrillas, and the police had since taken him into custody.

But within days of the massacre, there had been a retreat from much of this finger-pointing. Doubt was now emphasised. Maybe the killers had been militants, maybe the army, maybe neither. This newly avowed uncertainty was a result of counsel from some of India's leading Sikhs. They believed that if their people were to stay in the Kashmir Valley, good relations had to be maintained with the surrounding Muslim majority, which—while exhausted by the endless violence—was largely sympathetic to the militants. To these leaders, unwavering neutrality was clearly preferable to what New Delhi was then proposing. The government wanted to give weapons to the Sikhs, as it had to Hindus, to form "village defence committees".

In Chittisinghpora, I received a lesson in this tactical ambivalence. The older Sikh who had been talking was interrupted. A long argument began, with stunted English set aside for gusts of Punjabi, not a word of which I understood. Oberoi was amused. He leaned over to me and whispered, "They're debating whether it is for the greater good of the village to lie to you, and if so, what are the right lies to tell."

Some of my hosts eventually grew embarrassed at their neglect of a guest. By way of apology, they told me that villagers had done a lot of fibbing since the massacre and that I should not be offended. It was a matter of survival; there were fears of a second raid. Besides, outsiders with less right to lie had also been doing it. It upset them how often their statements—and misstatements—had been misquoted by people with private agendas.

What followed was a very odd interview, with several men trying to agree on—and then dictate—appropriate words for my notebook, politely alerting me as to which ones were true and which were not, though everything was expected to be published. In either case, they demanded that their names be spared except when the topic turned to money, which it often did, and then they wanted to stand personally behind their deep umbrage. Donors, public and private, had given more than USD 20,000 to each family that lost men in the massacre. But the villagers said everyone had suffered and so everyone deserved cash. They reminded me that if Bill Clinton hadn't come to India, the killings would never have occurred—and that Americans had some obligation to mitigate their suffering.

We spoke for well over an hour, stopping for a lunch of eggplant, rice and red beans. Then I took a stroll through the village to talk to others. Some were reticent, some not. Some made me

wonder if their recollections were merely inventions to help them make sense of their grief. Always, I kept trying to bring them back to the matter of blame. If they thought the militants did it, how sure were they? The answer was: Not very. Could anyone identify a single one of the attackers? The answer was: No. If this fellow Wagay had been involved, what exactly was his role? The answer was: God only knows.

On 25 March, when Indian officials announced their reprisal against five of the guilty militants, they said that it was Wagay whose confession had led them to the hideaway in Panchalthan, about 11 miles from Chittisinghpora.

But speaking of lies, that one seems to have been a big one.

Panchalthan fiction

In the district of Anantnag, most people I met had long overcome any doubt about the massacre. To them, it seemed an open-and-shut case, with the Indian authorities—and not the militants—to blame. They were unsure of the particulars, or how high up the conspiracy went, but they supposed that the actual killing had been done by *iqwanis*, or renegades, former guerrillas who were now nothing more than shiftless mercenaries. In the past, the authorities had used these men for some of the nastier misdeeds of effective "counterinsurgency".

The clincher for these suspicions was the incident at Panchalthan. The army's Rashtriya Rifles and the state police's elite Special Operations Group had supposedly cornered the five guerrillas in a herdsman's shack. Mortar fire then carried the day. Though the bodies were hideously burned and mutilated, the dead were all said to be Pakistanis who took orders from a well-known commander named Abu Muhaz. Nimble and timely sleuthing solved the crime on President Clinton's last full day in India.

But this was yet another truth that seemed destined for the ethers. Gravediggers said they had discovered a local man's identity card with the charred bodies. One even thought he recognised the remains of his cousin. Muhaz himself appeared at a village mosque near Chittisinghpora and told people that none of his cadre had been killed; he suggested that they find out who had. As it happened, several men from the area were mysteriously missing. Speculation took off at a gallop: had Indian forces kidnapped them, murdered them, burned them and then tried to pass off their unrecognisable bodies as foreign militants? In the moral vacuum that has become Kashmir, such things are possible. Relatives of the missing men demanded an exhumation of the bodies. They organised protests.

On 3 April—nine days after the Panchalthan shootout and two weeks after the massacre—a raggedy procession came down from the mountain pastures and onto the main road, toward the city of Anantnag, the district capital. There were hundreds of people at the start, then more all the time, chanting, "We want justice". They passed uneventfully through several military checkpoints, but when they reached a small traffic circle in the town of Brakpora, they were fired upon. The spray of bullets came from behind a bunker made from bags of cement and manned by federal and state police officers. Eight protesters—seven of them farmers and shepherds from the village of Brari Angan—were killed. Some were shot in the back as they fled. Police officials claimed that their men were only returning fire, but a judicial inquiry found otherwise. Unwarranted panic was the kindest explanation.

Three days later, the marchers received their wish. The five bodies were dug up by a forensics team from Srinagar. Hundreds of people, many of them unruly, turned up for the morbid two-day event, though there was not much to see. Blankets were held up to sequester the graves. Only doctors and public officials and family members were allowed to examine the blackened and disfigured corpses. These relatives occasionally burst into tears as burial shrouds were removed, professing to recognise a ring on a finger or a cyst on a scalp or a shred from a familiar sweater. One woman identified her husband from a fragment of jaw attached to a fluff of beard. Then the next day she changed her mind, settling on a different bag of remains, this time pointing to a bend in the nose, a hole in an ear and the shape of the torso.

The five men killed at Panchalthan are now believed to be two farmers from Brari Angan, both named Jumma Khan and one of them a man of 60; two shepherds from the village of Halan, Bashir Ahmed Butt and Mohammad Yusuf Malik; and one young cloth merchant from the city of Anantnag, Zahoor Dalal. Or at least these are the people whose families were given the bodies. Dr. Balbir Kaur, head of the forensics team, said it was hard to disinter the dead properly in the midst of a mob, and she hardly considered the emotional graveside identifications to be definitive. DNA samples were taken, but nine months later the tests have yet to be done—an inexplicable delay in so important a case. Whatever the results, scientific chicanery will now be presumed.

I later interviewed three of the families of the victims. Both of the Jumma Khans, their relatives said, were taken from their homes by men in army attire and led off into the night. Zahoor Dalal, the merchant, had simply disappeared, out for an evening walk, due back in minutes to count the day's receipts. His mother sat silently on the floor for the better part of an hour while I spoke with his uncle. Tragedy had signed its name to her pale oval face, and finally a moaning began from deep inside her, turning slowly into a wail.

"I will only meet him again now in the other world!" she cried.

Once more, I was confounded. I couldn't be sure that any of these people had really lost their loved ones at Panchalthan, but I was nearly sure that they were sure. In any case, the story was drifting elsewhere. By

then, many of the authorities—in the government, in the intelligence services, in the police—had quietly abandoned the merchandising of their once airtight case. In a revised analysis, Wagay, the milkman, was now thought to be innocent. Poor soul, he had been gruesomely tortured during questioning, a police official told me. He now remained locked up on the minor charge of breaching the peace. This was for his own safety. Someday, he would be a crucial witness in that ugly, regrettable business, the Panchalthan incident. That shootout was now considered a murderous fiction contrived by ambitious men in the Indian security forces. Pending further investigation, there were promises to punish those responsible.

I had developed some sources in high places. A few were familiar with the accumulating evidence and willing to share it, though their trustworthiness was also nothing I took for granted. One source told me: "After Chittisinghpora, there was tremendous pressure to catch the militants. Name, fame, money, career: those were the reasons to fake an encounter. They couldn't catch the militants, so they picked up locals. Unfortunately, locals have families that ask questions. It didn't work."

Important people were chagrined. To their relief, however, another militant had recently been captured, someone, they said, who truly had partaken in the massacre—someone who had even fired shots. His name was Mohammad Suhail Malik.

"Would you like to talk to him?" I was asked.

Mohammad Suhail Malik

Oddly enough, I had already interviewed the new prisoner. This had happened unexpectedly. On the return drive from Chittisinghpora, the Sikh businessman spotted a friend, another prominent Sikh, in a car going the other way. The vehicles stopped, and the two men went off for a private chat. This friend, using his influence, had just met Suhail Malik, who, so far as he could tell, was rendering an authentic confession. He agreed to help us get into the small compound that served as the Indian interrogation centre.

Malik is an 18-year-old with an upstart beard and hair that falls down into his eyes. He appeared sombre and tired, a suitable look for someone in his predicament. I twice offered him a chair, but he refused, preferring the floor. A heavy chain sagged between the tight manacles on his wrists. He barely moved.

Conditions for the interview were far from ideal. There were six of us in a small, dark room, including a nervous guard who felt the liaison lacked adequate approval. A display on one wall carried horrid snapshots of dead militants. Malik responded to every question, but his answers were spare, repeating details I had already read in a police dossier in Srinagar: he was from the city of Sialkot, in Pakistan. He belonged to the militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which had tutored him in marksmanship and mountain climbing. He sneaked into India in October 1999, carrying the rupee equivalent of USD 200 in expense money. He took part in only two missions before Chittisinghpora, one an attack on an army outpost, the other an assault on a bus carrying soldiers. He knew nothing about the plot to kill the Sikhs until immediately beforehand, as he stood in an orchard. He used his weapon when commanded. "I fired, but I don't know if I killed anyone," he said laconically. "I suppose I did. I don't know."

The conversation was mostly in Urdu, once again a language I did not speak. I could study his eyes but not his phrasing or inflections, the little clues as to what was being held back in the privacy of his head. When we left, I asked Surinder Oberoi, my journalist friend, if he thought Malik was telling the truth.

"Yes, I think so," he answered after a pause. Then he added a cautionary shrug and a sentence that stopped after the words "But you know..."

Malik showed no signs of physical abuse, but, as with Wagay, the torture of someone in his situation would not be unusual. Once, over a casual lunch, an Indian intelligence official told me that Malik had been "intensively interrogated". I asked him what that usually meant. "You start with beatings, and from there it can go almost anywhere," he said. Certainly, I knew what most Pakistanis would say of the confession--that the teenager would admit to anything after persistent electrical prodding by the Indians. And it left me to surmise that if his interrogators had made productive use of pain, was it to get him to reveal the truth or to repeat their lies?

My second talk with Malik came the next day, courtesy of the more formal invitation. This session was less hurried but still unsatisfactory. Three of us were asking questions, including someone from the authorities. The prisoner, chains in tow, still refused a chair. I told him again that I was an American journalist trying to get at the facts. I could only imagine how far-fetched that sounded to an 18-year-old Pakistani in an Indian jail.

I asked about his family. His mother was dead, and his father ran a small general store. Malik had attended a government school through the fifth grade, but like many boys in Pakistan, he had switched over to a madrassah, a religious academy, where the books and courses were free. He knew parts of the *Koran* by heart. "If I could, I would spend my entire life learning about the holy prophet," he said.

We again went over the de-

tails of the massacre. I tried to test him, asking for descriptions of the village. But he said he had not seen much in the darkness. He had been ordered to shoot—and so he shot.

He did not have much more to add. "We were told what to do and not why," he said. "Afterward, we were told not to talk about it."

He allowed that he was likely to spend the rest of his life in an Indian prison—and yes, he said, this was a dreary prospect. He would have preferred the glory of martyrdom.

His eyes, usually downcast, had occasionally drifted about, and with this talk of a purposeful death, all of us in the room grew aware of a loaded Kalashnikov leaning against a wall in the corner. With a flicker of a smile, the gun's careless owner slowly rolled the wheels of his chair to the right, blocking the manacled prisoner's path to the weapon. Malik never looked that way again.

I was curious to know how he had linked up with Lashkar-e-Taiba. It was one of the largest—and perhaps the most unflinching—of the dozen or so militant groups. Malik said he had heard their speeches while he studied in the city of Lahore. He trusted their vision of the world—and said he trusted it still. Penance did not accompany his confession. As for the 35 dead Sikhs, he said they may have been civilians, but they could not have been innocents. "The *Koran* teaches us not to kill innocents," he said. "If Lashkar told us to kill those people, then it was right to do it. I have no regrets."

This one time, he seemed to think his answer too abbreviated. His lips pursed, his eyebrows narrowed. He said: "When I was sent here from Pakistan, I was told the Indian Army kills Muslims. It treats them badly and burns their mosques and refuses to let them pray. They must be freed from these clutches."

Then he looked at me curiously, seeming to ask, Isn't that so?

Whose Kashmir?

Civics lessons about Kashmir are necessarily complicated. The term itself is confusing. In common coinage, it refers to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, home to an estimated 9.5 million people. But the state has several distinct regions, of which the fabled Vale of Kashmir—with about half the population—is but one. Only there do people speak Kashmiri—and only there do they have a strong sense of being a separate nation. Roughly two-thirds of the Jammu region is Hindu, a population far more comfortable under Indian aegis. Buddhists make up about half of sparsely populated Ladakh. They speak Tibetan and worry more about domination by Srinagar than by New Delhi. The happiest solutions for one chunk of the state are unlikely to be very pleasing to another.

Jammu and Kashmir was once an even larger domain, an unnatural amalgam of fiefs brought together for expedience by the Subcontinent's British colonial masters. In 1947, when India and Pakistan were being born, it nominally belonged to the Hindu maharajah, Hari Singh. Before departing, the British asked the region's 562 landed potentates to choose one nation or the other. These decisions by and large followed a certain logic of geography or religion. But Singh, preferring independence, dawdled past the deadline. This unrealistic conceit ended when tribesmen from Pakistan's northern frontier came to the aid of a local rebellion. The maharajah then anxiously reconsidered, casting the lot of his predominantly Muslim realm with predominantly Hindu India. To many Muslims, it seemed that Kashmir had fallen under the thumb of the infidel. War broke out between the two infant nations, and an ensuing cease-fire left about one-third of the most populous part of Kashmir with Pakistan and two-thirds with India. The United Nations, itself a newborn, pushed for a long-term solution.

Agreements reached in 1948 and 1949 called for the Pakistanis to withdraw all their troops and for the Indians to pull back the bulk of theirs. This was to be followed by a plebiscite, allowing the people to pick the nation they wanted to join. But none of these actions ever took place, with both sides blaming the other for reneging. The wisdom of Solomon did not prevail; the baby was split.

Indian-controlled Kashmir, while never happily a part of the nation, was a relatively peaceful place until the rebellion's start in 1989. This uprising gathered fuel from various combustibles, among them Kashmiri nationalism and rigged elections that favoured New Delhi's preferences. Pakistan eagerly supplied the tinder of combat training and guns.

At first, the foot soldiers were entirely home-grown. Kashmiri youth, lit with the fever of *azadi*, or freedom, thought they could unbind the ties to India with some well-placed explosives and high-profile kidnappings. They misjudged New Delhi, which considered the insurrection a threat to the very idea of nationhood—and was willing to fight back without pernickety regard for gentlemanly tactics or human rights. They also misjudged Islamabad, which came to favour only those rebels it could bend to its will. Many militants themselves strayed from unselfish purposes. They became no more than criminal gangs, and Kashmiris began to dread both sides. Some 250,000 Kashmiri Hindus, known as Pandits, fled the valley, fearing for their lives.

The character of the rebellion has since changed. Though hundreds of Kashmiris are still making war in the mountains, most have laid down their guns, if not their dreams of azadi. More and more, the guerrillas, like Malik, come from elsewhere. They know little about Kashmir and its people. Their interest in liberating the land is not so much for the benefit of the Kashmiris as for the ideal of a pan-Islamic state.

The differing passions of the different militant groups make diplomacy particularly hard. When the prospect of peace raises its hand, it usually results in a rap on the knuckles. Last summer, one militant group

declared a brief cease-fire, but the others considered the move traitorous and stepped up attacks. Now India has announced a temporary pause in its initiation of military operations, and Pakistan has responded with a partial withdrawal of troops from its side of the cease-fire line. There is talk about the possibility of talks, though in the past, talking has yielded only the repetition of entrenched views. After half a century of fighting, compromise seems a betrayal of past sacrifices.

For its part, Pakistan finds the militancy a cut-rate way to torment India, which has 350,000 troops tied down in Kashmir. But however much a bargain, the guerrilla campaign has also become part and parcel of Pakistan's own precariousness. In the late spring of 1999, a more ambitious incursion into Indian-controlled Kashmir nearly provoked an all-out war and ended in humiliating retreat. Months afterward, amid the recriminations, Pakistan's army—as has been its habit—overthrew the elected government, and Gen. Pervez Musharraf named himself chief executive. At first, he was welcomed as a potential saviour by the downcast nation. Pakistan stands at the brink of bankruptcy, spared from default only by an IV drip from international lenders who have grown exasperated. The possibility of a collapse into anarchy is the great reiterating topic of the educated elite. Though it was hoped that the general could stamp out corruption and balance the books, he has instead found himself betwixt and between, coveting approval—and money—from the West while bowing to powerful fundamentalists at home. For him, the struggle for Kashmir may well have become a necessity for survival as well as a crusade of the heart. Pakistan has thousands of armed if impoverished zealots who are long on righteousness and short on respect for the government. Pursuing the holy war against India may be all that diverts them from fomenting jihad at home.

The Jihadis

Suhail Malik is such a zealot. He intrigued me. And as my interest in him grew, I was puzzled by why I seemed alone in my curiosity. News of his capture had gotten little attention in the usually aggressive Indian press. A TV station had run a short spot; a wire service had put out a few paragraphs. This seemed oddly neglectful, but an Indian friend explained to me that Kashmir was redundant with outrages, and people suffered from "massacre fatigue". Chittisinghpora had been papered over by fresher death.

In fact, it was one of these other massacres that led the police to Malik. Thirty Hindu pilgrims on retreat in Kashmir were gunned down on 1 August. Two militants were killed at the scene. As investigators tell the story, an address found on one of these men led them to Aligarh in the state of Uttar Pradesh. There, a month later, they happened upon Malik, taking an authorised break from the hard work of jihad.

I wanted to interview the teenager once more, this time without the authorities present. Somehow, I thought I could win his trust, offer him an out, persuade him that he did not have to confess to the massacre unless it was true. I was grasping. I wanted to study his eyes again. But I never secured the necessary permissions.

The closest I got was his family. Had Malik and I talked, I could have told him about my recent trips to Pakistan. I had seen his father and his favourite uncle and a man he reveres, Prof. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, the leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba (the Army of the Pure) and its parent organisation, Markaz Ad-daawah Wal Irshad (the Centre for Preaching). Of the three, the professor was the easiest to locate. His organisations are a prominent force in Pakistan. The jihad in Kashmir is not their only occupation. They run more than 130 madrassahs as well as a modern-looking university that rises out of the wheat fields near Lahore. Saeed, a retired professor of Islamic studies at an engineering college, preferred to see me in that city itself. We met in Lashkar's "media centre", a small room filled with young men writing at computer terminals.

The professor, a big, doughy man, is quite gracious for someone so often regarded as a terrorist. Cookies were served on a silver plate. We talked for a time before I took out Malik's photo and told him of the young man's confession. Saeed shook his head. "We do not believe in killing innocents," he said, stroking his henna-tinted beard. "I have condemned this very massacre." He glanced at the picture a second time and said he doubted that Malik had ever belonged to Lashkar. And, as a professor would, he offered me some guidance: "It is very easy to extract statements with torture. Look, you can see he is handcuffed and not free to talk." The photo was then passed around the room. A dozen or so acolytes had come to observe the interview. One of Saeed's aides harrumphed with derision. "This man's beard is not anywhere long enough," he said, as if I were trying to pawn off some charlatan as a legitimate Lashkar militant.

In Lahore, I also tried to visit Malik's uncle, an herbal doctor named Zafar Iqbal. He, too, is a religious scholar. I went to his home several times, but I was always told that the doctor had gone out and that he might not return for hours or days or even longer. I inferred from this that Iqbal was disinclined to talk about his nephew's possible involvement in a massacre. He may have been warned by Pakistani intelligence agents, for I was being

followed everywhere. The men were very obvious about it. They questioned my driver and translator. They tailgated our car.

Eventually, someone at Iqbal's home slipped up and mentioned that the doctor had gone to the annual convention of the Jamaat-i-Islami political party. I found him in a huge field outside Islamabad amid a crowd of 350,000 people. This was not so hard to do. Pakistan's leading fundamentalist party is well organised. Every city had its own cluster of tents off to the side, and every tent had a roster of names. Malik's uncle had apparently withered under the sun and left the open air, where powerful speeches were firing the masses with talk of the Kashmir jihad. Repeatedly, America and India were condemned. Pakistan's government—regarded as insufficiently pious—was also taking a grandiloquent beating.

When I approached the doctor, he was resting on a blanket, talking with friends and wearing a name tag. He is a white-haired man with piercing eyes. He did not want to say much. In fact, he denied that he knew any Suhail Malik. This of course was a lie, and he did not care that I was aware of it. He told my translator: "You, being a Pakistani, should not help these foreign agents. They come in the guise of journalists when they are really agents of the Christians and the Jews."

I had gotten a more hospitable reception from Anwar Malik, Suhail's father. He owns a tiny general store in Sialkot, a city not far from the border with Kashmir. The elder Malik had been hard to find with the grudging information I was given by his son. Sialkot had the air of newfound prosperity. Sporting-goods companies have made it a manufacturing centre for soccer balls, which are exported the world over. Modern office buildings have been constructed with ornate windows and facades. Drivers in new four-wheel-drive vehicles blast their horns to get past sluggish donkey carts that block their way.

The family's house is across a lane from the store, beside a stagnant pond laden with blooms of garbage. The home is large as such places go, and much of the furniture is made of polished wood and looks relatively new. Anwar Malik led the way into a room with a double bed, an armoire and a chest of drawers. Drapes covered the windows. One wall had a bright painting done on a felt background. Another held the glossy decals of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

I didn't know if the father was aware of the fate of his son, so I tried to approach the subject gently. A short, stout man of 53, he replied quietly that yes, he had heard something about it. Pakistan and India are neighbours. Urdu is similar to Hindi. People in one country sometimes watch the TV shows of the other. A friend had seen Suhail's face on a news show. Anwar was unsure what it was all about. He wanted to know more. "This is painful for me," he said. "Nothing like this has ever happened in our family."

Anwar has two sons. The older has gone to work in Saudi Arabia and is earning good money. Suhail, on the other hand, had been adrift for a while, sometimes living in Lahore, sometimes Sialkot. The father was vague about his son's decision to go fight in Kashmir. Despite the decals, he insisted that he did not know which, if any, group Suhail had joined. He began to wring his hands and his words meandered. "If you look at things from an Islamic perspective, going to Kashmir was the right thing to do," he said. "But we are poor people. If you look at things from the family perspective, considering our circumstances, you would have to think otherwise."

I took out the photo. Anwar studied it. His lips quivered slightly. By then, one of Suhail's boyhood friends had entered the room. He seemed tickled with the snapshot. To him, the manacles were like jewellery. "It's a great picture!" he declared.

Anwar left the room and returned with a bottle of mineral water. He waited to open the seal, so as to assure me that the contents were untainted. He said the obvious, that he had never had an American in his home before. I told him that I travel quite a bit. I had even been to this sorrowful place Chittisinghpora and had been living with a great mystery. I had yet to solve it to my satisfaction, but it had become my wise tutor in Kashmir's misshapen history.

"An awful thing happened in that village," I said, pushing the conversation into the discomforting place it had to go. I told him about the grief of the Sikh families and described what had gone on that night: the lining up of the men before the gurudwaras, the bursts of the machine guns, the bloody heap. And I told him Suhail had confessed to this terrible thing in front of me.

Until then, I had merely been someone with news of his son. But now I was also a man with an accusation that required some sort of response. I was asking him to consider the opposing reality from across the border—and I wanted him to imagine it with his son in the role of villain. He considered all this for a time. And finally, with a father's sincerity, he said: "I don't think so. It can't be. My son is confessing, you can say, because the Indians have beaten him. My son is just like me, and I would not do anything like this."

As we talked a bit longer, a memory suddenly fell into place. It brightened him with relief, and he sat up straight. Chittisinghpora: the name had not meant much before, but he recalled it now. This was the massacre committed the night Clinton arrived.

The relief then converted into actual cheer and a delicate smile. He spoke to me with the kindness of someone assisting a stranger in an unfamiliar town. "Everyone knows about this crime," he said patiently. "The Indian Army did it."

Noor Jehan (1926-2000)

No more Noor

by ***Ayesha Akram***

A FORTNIGHT before "Madam" Noor Jehan's death, I was sitting in her daughter Zil-e-Huma's house, chatting away with Huma and her son, Ahmed Ali Butt. Huma and Ahmed are both singers in their own right, but both differ greatly from the maestro whose genes they have inherited. It took Huma quite a long time to convince her mother to allow her to sing at private functions (something that Noor Jehan strongly condemned and never indulged in personally), but when she got the permission, her mother arranged a top-of-the-line orchestra to accompany her daughter. But Ahmed had a tougher time in getting grandma to accept the heavy metal music that he loved. "She wouldn't even let me touch my guitar when she was in the house," said Ahmed.

The after-dinner chat threw up myriad memories. Huma suddenly made a remark, "I think no Subcontinental figure will ever be able to lead a life like her's." She then looked at us as if daring us to disagree, but of course we knew that that indeed was the case. With her passing, the Melody Queen has deprived us of a talented and flamboyant star who was one of the few iconic links to pre-Partition South Asia.

While she had a religious following among the older generation of South Asians everywhere, I have often wondered why Noor Jehan held such a hold over the populace of Pakistan. True, she gave us beautiful numbers, but this doesn't explain the volume of tears that flowed on the day of her passing in the holy month of Ramadan, on 24 December 2000. It must have had to do with the persona she exuded, one that was fiercely patriotic. The day the India-Pakistan war broke out on 6 September 1965, the singer defied a curfew and drove alone to record her *"Mere Dhool Sipahiya"*—a beseechingly patriotic number.

When PTV ran "Tributes to Madam Noor Jehan", the producers were paying as much of a homage to the soulful voice as they were to the woman who was one of the pioneers of Pakistan's film industry. Noor Jehan was born Allah Wasai in 1926 at Ferozepur in undivided India. It was her mother who believed that her daughter had something exceptional to give to the world, which is what gave birth to a career beginning at age seven.

Ferozepur seemed no place for a budding star, so in 1930 the mother shepherded the entire family into Calcutta. The only notable milestone of those years in Calcutta was that Allah Wasai got her legendary name—Noor Jehan (then called 'Baby' Noor Jehan). Though the touring drama company that Noor Jehan joined in the city was doing decently enough, her mother was not satisfied, and so in 1937 it was off to Lahore to try their luck.

In Lahore, Noor Jehan met the man who changed her life. Film producer Dilsukh M. Pakoli roped her in as the leading lady in *Khandaan*, the movie that became the biggest grosser of 1941. This success opened all doors, and soon Noor Jehan was churning out money-spinners like *Naukar*, *Village Girl* and *Zeenat*. *Khandaan* also gave Noor Jehan her first romantic obsession, the director Shaukat Hussain Rizvi. The marriage took place soon enough, and the couple was to weave a professional chemistry that had people rushing to the turnstiles. It was while in Lahore that Noor Jehan recorded hits like *"Naacho Sitare Naacho"* and *"Kisi Tarah Se Mohabbat Mein"*. It was in Lahore that she provided the public with some glimpses of the singing sensation of tomorrow.

During Partition, the husband-and-wife team decided to opt for Pakistan. It was an excruciating decision, and many thought that it could only spell doom for Noor Jehan's career. It did not happen. In the studio set up by Rizvi, Noor Jehan acted and sang in *Chann Wey*, which ran to full houses in both India and Pakistan. This was Noor Jehan's first appearance in a Punjabi film as a heroine. The success was soon repeated in *Duputta*, *Anarkali* and *Intezar*.

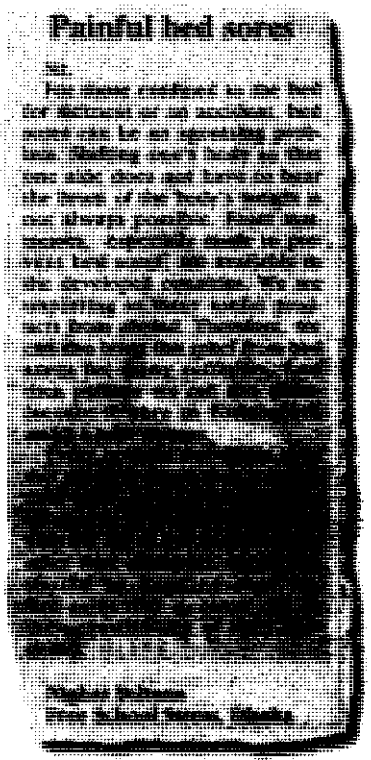
Even as her career achieved new heights, Noor Jehan fell out of love with Rizvi. She had fallen for actor Ejaz Durrani, but the marriage that followed had a rider to it. Durrani wanted his lover to quit acting, a demand to which she acceded. Rather than marring her career, this decision actually enabled her to excel in what she was best at. As a film star, Noor Jehan had not had the time to devote to singing, and a film career would hardly have allowed her to render the 3000-odd songs that places her among the world's singing greats.

Noor Jehan was born in undivided India, and she died a Pakistani. As many old artistes like her fade away, it is important to remember the particular gracious ease with which they managed to retain devotion of the masses across time and space. Noor Jehan died a Pakistani, but it was a whole Subcontinent that was the poorer for her passing.

DID I hear someone say s/he wanted to organise a South Asian cartoonist convention. On a boat in the Sunderban? Well, let us not invite the gentleman who scratches out the Jocoserious column in *The Assam Tribune* of Guwahati, for inflicting this toon on us.

■

THEN THERE is Nighat Sultana, who lives in Free School Street in Dhaka, and has been indulging in some free thinking, making forays into unknown quarters for topics to enliven the letters page. She hit upon a gem, the subject of "painful bed sores", which is the heading the Dhaka *Independent* editors gave to her very emotive prose. Here it is to the left:


Painful bed sores

■

ACROSS THE Subcontinent in the Karachi bourse, apparently "Cotton lacks buying interest", writes *The News*. The cotton market's performance was lacklustre, and spinners were glued to the sidelines awaiting the PCGA report about phutti arrival during the previous fortnight. Meanwhile, it seemed the phutti arrival would force the ginners to offload their accumulated stocks at lower prices. Now, Chhetria Patrakar is obviously behind in his cotton-related vocabulary, and this lack will have to be rectified before the next phutti arrives, and certainly before the ginners once again offload their accumulated stock.

■

EVEN IF late, I would like to mark the murder, in October, of Tamil journalist Mailvaganam Nirmalaranjan in Jaffna. Nirmalaranjan, who had just filed a report for the BBC's Tamil service was suspected to have been shot by a former militant Tamil group, which has now joined the side of the Colombo government. The dangerous living of good journalists working in the violent so-called mofussil is not understood enough by those attached to the 'national press' and living remote from death and destruction. True, the quality of journalism at ground level, and by definition in the vernacular, is quite appalling right from Multan to Guwahati. However, the good news is that the journalism feeding the South Asian masses can only get better. The bad news, at that future time, will be that there will be many more incidents of violence against journalists. That, too, by definition. For, once the quality of journalism improves close to the ground, many more local-level suppurations will come to a boil. And it is often the messenger who is attacked. National journalists in the big cities will then feel the pang of irrelevance, but at least they will be (relatively) safe from the goonda's rod or the assassin's bullet. Not so the mofussil journalist.

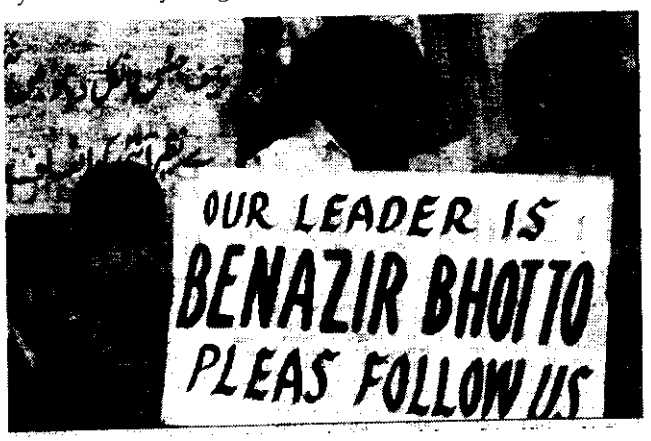
■

THE Incredible Caption Writer of Pakistan surfaces again! I heard someone was organising a jamboree of South Asian Caption Writers (SACW) in the Rann of Kutch (RoK), and my suggestion to the organisers, including the funding source, Freiderich Eggnog Stiftung, is that this particular person not be invited. The crime? Prose profusion, in the process killing the photographic subject. Here is the offending item from *The News*, under a picture of a young boy and a girl sifting through garbage:

> *There is no telling where the Ferris wheel of poverty and misfortune stops its vicious circle for these little children, for whom the words play, rest, chocolate, candy and education sound Greek. Searching through garbage their childhood passes in a wink only to thrust them into a nightless journey of adult life, wherein time seems frozen and weather boisterous.*

■

THERE IS one question in response to this sign carried by a Karachi young'un, besides the couple of misspell-



ings which can of course be forgiven. "Our leader is Benazir Bhotto, Pleas follow us." Where? Into exile, I presume...

■

JOURNALIST SANJOY Hazarika, with his column "A Route Map to the Northeast" in *The Asian Age*, tries his best to spread understanding about the complexities of this region to Delhi-wallahs. "Our myopic metropolitan media with its focus on Iftar parties and the Ayodhya mess could not care less" about the problems of the Northeast, he writes, and adds, "What took the cake was *The*

Pioneer writing an editorial about Manipur and titling it 'Kohima calling'. Kohima is the capital of Nagaland. Imphal is the capital of Manipur." If the press gets it wrong, and it does so with unfailing consistency, can others be blamed for getting nothing right?"

■

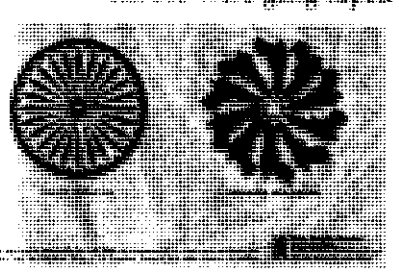
I WONDER what the do-gooding Norwegian mediators trying to bring Colombo and the LTTE to the negotiating table felt when the resurgent Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna came out with protests demanding "Norway Go Home". Humid Colombo must have suddenly felt cold, and the frigid climes of Oslo most inviting. Well, Chhetria Patrakar hopes that the good-hearted gentlemen from the North are not disheartened by the ravings of unrepentant rightists/leftists (at that extremity, it does not matter what you are), and that they keep to it. Mediators must have guts of steel, otherwise don't get into it.

■

VIEWFINDER'S "Lahore Diary" in *Dawn* informs us that, as happens every so often in our towns and metros, his city fathers and mothers have decided to go on a dog decimation drive. Except this one has a twist to it. "The Municipal Corporation of Lahore has invited proposals from the general public for making gainful use of dead dogs." In particular, the MCL is inviting expressions of interest from private parties interested in exporting (dead) dogs or "putting them into some gainful use at home". Someone seems to think that there must be uses for departed canines, but does not have a clue of what that could be. Not much for-ex there, that's for sure.

■

BANGLADESH ANNUAL data accession time. The Bureau of Human Rights Bangladesh reports the following: "A total of 6234 people have been killed and 40,116 people have been wounded in different incidents, like hijacking, theft, robbery, terrorist activities, acid throwing, rape, abduction, repression for dowry, campus violence, political killings, suicide, death in police custody and natural disaster since January 1 to December 25." A total of 615 rape incidents took place [I think this must be more like 615 rape incidents were 'reported'], of which 305 were gang-raped and 84 died during the incidents. A total of 181 women fell victim to acid throwing, and 81 women died [again, I am sure, this reflects only reported episodes] in dowry killings. Ninety people died in police custody. Meanwhile, continuing this deluge of Bangla data, at least 10 million people of "Bangladeshi origin" have migrated to different countries in the last 60 years, including North America and Western Europe, according to the International Organisation of Migration.



■

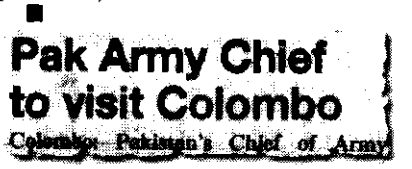
THERE IS a real loss of proportion in this ad placed by the Indian Ordnance Factories on the occasion of the Indian Republic Day (26 January), designed by the Hindustan Thompson Agency. Using the Ashok Chakra on the left, to signify all that is secular and liberal of the Indian republic, the entity, which comes under the Ministry of Defence, had the daring to copy the chakra with a placement of pistols and bullets. Too graphic, and too indicative of the militarisation that is overtaking Indian society.

■

IF ONLY the strategists who plan for nuclear warfare and fissile materials development slept on the job as these two gentlemen are doing during a seminar on nuclear restraint and risk reduction, we would have a much more peaceful South Asia. On the left is J.N. Dixit, former Indian foreign secretary, still

going strong in the high-level seminar circuit, and on the right Maqbool Bhatti, a former diplomat of Pakistan. The meeting took place in Islamabad in mid-January, and the AP caption reports, "The predominant argument at the seminar was that both India and Pakistan should have a close monitoring system to avoid and accidents." Actually, the best way to avoid nuclear accidents is to go to sleep on the job.

■



THE LAST time a Pakistan army chief visited Colombo, he came back to rule the country. I shuddered for General Musharraf when I saw this headline in end-January. What is Pakistan up for next?

—Chhetria Patrakar

A Left Women's Movement

Saying "land to the tiller" is gender-insensitive. "Land to those who work on it" is not.

At a time when academics, non-governmental agencies and international donors are preaching the virtues of small-scale mobilising efforts, local reforms and individualised initiatives, the sheer scope of the All India Democratic Women's Association's working and vision appear as daring as they are urgent. With well over five million members, AIDWA is the largest women's organisation in India, and its campaigns include struggles against dowry deaths, child sexual abuse, media objectification of women, and domestic violence. It has also sustained a campaign for enhancing women's participation in politics, for securing their economic independence and for joint-ownership by wife and husband of redistributed surplus agricultural land.

The organisation's campaigns, analyses and demands have finally been summarised in seven booklets. These publications reflect both the vibrancy of the Indian women's movement and the concerns of an influential segment within it. Moreover, since AIDWA's work has so often been either denigrated or ignored by mainstream scholarly studies, these seven booklets enable activists and scholars to independently and critically evaluate the aims and methods of the organisation, and measure the importance of the left women's movement in India.

The booklets bring together AIDWA reports on the statistical indices of the condition of women's lives and conference papers on the most important issues faced by India's women today. They constitute forceful critiques of government's policies that affect women. More importantly, they propose a systemic strategy to combat the increasing social, political and economic impoverishment of women. Understanding of the discrete issues affecting the Indian women's movement requires taking into account the various interconnections. After all, the totality of the oppression is marked by the integral links among caste despotism, the coercions of liberalisation, and the designs of conservative religious ideologies.

The approach to the problems leaves its imprint on the solutions proposed. AIDWA's demand for co-ownership by wife and husband of redistributed agricultural land is fundamental to its strategy of securing economic independence for women. And to emphasise the value of women's agricultural labour, AIDWA amended the slogan "land to the tiller" to "land to those who work on it" (since tilling of the soil is an exclusively male preserve, whereas there are many other laborious tasks which are typically performed by peasant women).

This kind of intervention against gender inequality in land reform movements is only one aspect of the organisation's approach. "The Triple Burden, Some Issues of Class and Caste Oppression of Women" reports a stunning figure—66.6 percent of all agricultural women workers are of scheduled (or lower) castes. On the other hand, there has been a shift in agricultural production from subsistence crops to cash crops, which decreases the need for agricultural day labourers, many of whom are lower-caste women. This economic trend is seen to be a consequence of the government's pursuit of liberalisation policies, which increasingly promote the privatisation of communal village lands and other resources. As a result, dalit women become more dependent on upper caste landowners for their survival, since they cannot supplement their daily wages by rearing animals or growing small crops on the communal lands.

In this change in the agricultural workspace, AIDWA sees a trend that is part of the overall picture of neo-liberal India, where the margins for political, social and economic independence are being systematically reduced. The booklet on "Women in the New Economic Order" explains the pervasive violence of upper castes against lower castes in this evolving agricultural scenario. "It is more than possible for the most backward social practices to be co-opted and marketed in modern new form," says the booklet. Against this background, AIDWA's demand for sweeping land reform and equal rights to land ownership, is also a frontal attack on the conditions that foster the ongoing caste, class and gender oppression.

The booklets on population policies, anti-Muslim communalism and reservation for women in government jobs, address the daily social discrimination faced by women. "Population Policy and Women's Health" reports on a campaign by a coalition of women's groups and other social justice movements,

All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) Publication Series. "Population Policy and Women's Health", "Not a Uniform Civil Code but Equal Rights, Equal Laws", "Women in the New Economic Order", "Women in Politics, Issues and Experiences", "RSS: The Ideological Onslaught on Women", "The Triple Burden, Some Issues of Class and Caste Oppression of Women", and "Women and Violence". New Delhi, 1999.

reviewed by ***Elisabeth Armstrong***

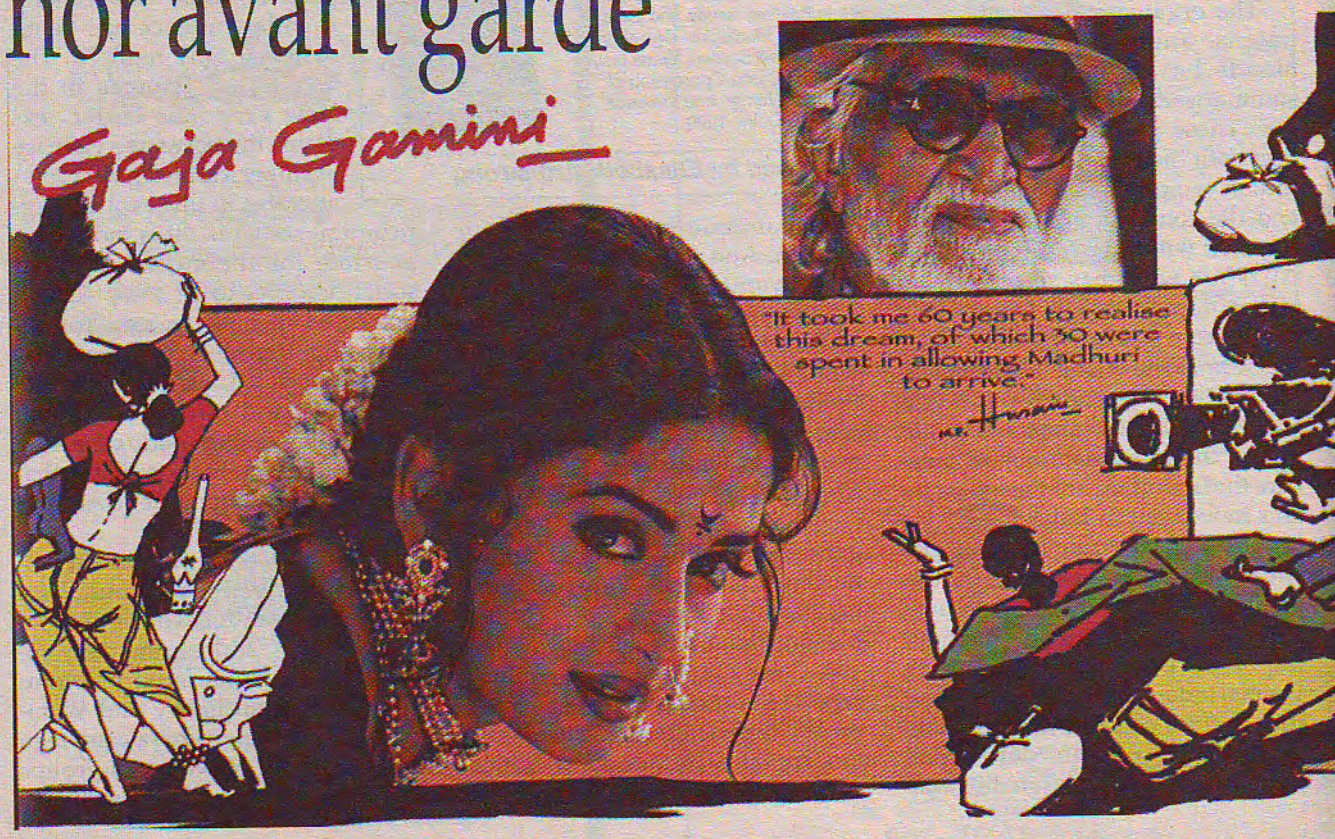
against the dumping of coercive and unsafe birth control methods on India and the Indian government's complicity in forcing these methods on women. As part of this campaign, AIDWA sought to shift the terrain of debate from population control to women's health needs. Its demand for greater access to complete health care and the continuance of drug price controls, is predicated on the idea that women are more than just agents of reproduction.

But the movement for women's health struggles against an international climate in which birth control is seen "as the panacea for all social and economic ills of the Third World" and even literacy is thought to be more a means to promote population control than to better people's lives. In addition to analysing the areas of struggle, these booklets present a wealth of statistical evidence on inequalities in health-care access. In a nation where 75 percent of all disease is due to malnutrition, contaminated water and non-immunisation, and 84 percent of health-care costs are paid for privately, the need to transform national health priorities from population control to a more holistic vision of the nation's health needs, is clearly self-evident. *(See reports from the Peoples Health Assembly held in Dhaka in December, page 27.)*

These booklets condense the abundant knowledge gained by a national-level people's organisation in the course of its continuous activism. Though not elaborated on in this series, the myriad regional and local challenges made by AIDWA also help us in the analysis of the national and international scene. The writings are not purely academic, and help in understanding how to organise at the mass scale, from the grassroots on up. For example, a detailed and practical discussion about organising the vast sector of home-based workers is followed by a pointed assessment of its approach. This combination of organisational knowledge and systemic political analysis is perhaps the most strikingly original aspect of these booklets.

At times, the articles in the publications seem disjointed and repetitive, but this is inevitable in any compilation of documents from a movement that is ongoing and not interested in resting on its laurel. Unfortunately, these essays cannot document the effects of long-term activism in the various locales nor how these campaigns sustain AIDWA. One therefore waits for a fuller and rounder picture of work by a rare, well-organised, mass-based group that has not lost its voice, unlike so many others.

Not mainstream, alternative, nor avant garde



A Hussain who does not bother about an audience is not the Hussain we know. And, for sure, Gaja Gamini is a bomb.

reviewed by ***Sujoy Dhar***

A brick wall stands alone in space. A painter stops by. He draws an image of a woman. The woman springs alive. She starts walking, in time and space. What results is *Gaja Gamini*, painter Maqbool Fida Hussain's jerky brush with cinema.

The lady arrives at the Benaras ghats furiously pursued by her two lovers—the carnal lord Kam Dev and the painter Leonardo Da Vinci. If that's bizarre, we also have the poet Kalidas and the scientist C. V. Raman, on this mission of marking the divide between illusion and reality—well on not that grand a mission actually, it's just about Gaja Gamini's presence and absence.

The 80-year-old painter goes berserk in his first attempt at handling celluloid. The flamboyant artist, whose words have occasionally to be taken with moderate amounts of salt, says the film was inspired by his unabashed infatuation for Bombay's curvaceous Madhuri Dixit, now sadly Mrs Nene. According to Hussain, it took him 60 years to make the 120-minute film, half of that spent waiting for Gaja Gamini to turn up. The film, he said while in Calcutta for the premiere showing, is a tribute to "the woman who gave birth to me, to the woman I lived with, and to the woman who lives in my works". Well, good enough, but the Calcutta audience did not get similarly inspired.

Gaja Gamini has it all, a feel-good operatic setting designed by Sharmistha Roy, stirring music of Bhupen Hazarika, some fine camerawork by Ashok Mehta, and Madhuri Dixit's tooth-paste smile. And yet it does not work, as mainstream, alternative *or* avant garde cinema, which means a good opportunity lost in trying to sensitise the South Asian masses (yes, beyond India as well) to the possibilities of film. For no other vehicle was better than one with superstars Madhuri, and Shah Rukh Khan thrown in for good measure.

The grandiosity of the venture reminds one of Peter Brook's staging of *Mahabharata*, but *Gaja Gamini* falls flat. The man who has made his millions drawing horses in varying poses, however, is unrepentant. "I didn't expect Gaja Gamini to run for more than four days, but surprisingly it is running for the fifth week in New Delhi. I am least bothered about its acceptance and its box office success. I have not done it for money, as my horses are still powerful."

Which is a trifle fanciful, for a Hussain who does not bother about an audience is not the Hussain we know.

Friend Mrinal Sen, director of some repute, tries to say it without saying it: "I shall not call this a film, nor shall I call it a variant of it. Watching it and blissfully surviving, I prefer to call it an audio-visual wonder that lasts 120 minutes." When pressed, Sen replies, "It is an illogical extension of cinema though Hussain calls it a logical extension of painting." High praise or disguised pan? Elsewhere, Sen said as elliptically, "I shall ask the viewers to save their visual virginity..."

What Hussain would like us to believe is that *Gaja Gamini* is a portrait of the power and mystery of Indian womanhood. She is the bridge between the past and the future, she is all of them—Sangeeta, Shakuntala, Monica and Mona Lisa. She goes to meet other women made famous by their creators—Premchand's Nirmala, Tagore's Abhisarika, Manto's Sindhu and Noorbibi of Satara. And when these women meet, the occasion turns into a dialogue of silence, in which one cannot hear their voices. They march silently in protest in a display of feminine *shakti*.

Meanwhile, Kalidas goes to the Kerala jungles to create his legendary character, Shakuntala. She falls in love with a Victorian prince and finally emerges in the new-age avatar of Monica splendidly dressed in blue, waiting for her photojournalist lover (played by Shah Rukh). The lover goes away on a war assignment, and Gaja Gamini is left alone. Only the brick wall remains.

The movie is a visual wonder, no doubt. And the acting is fairly adequate. But *Gaja Gamini* does not have the cinematic worth, say, of another artist's tryst with celluloid, Salvador Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*. Most bitterly, Madhuri Dixit fails to capture that hidden sensuality that Hussain claims the Indian women have and which he asserts are to be found in the actress in abundance.

Hussain gives a parting shot to the questioning reviewer: "The film is like a long painting. Either you like it, or you hate it. When Picasso painted Guernica many rubbished it and many hailed it as a masterpiece."

Indus or Sarasvati civilisation?

EFFORTS TO identify the Indus Civilisation with the Rigvedic culture was based mainly on three assumptions: That the Indus civilisation was Sarasvati-based; that the Rigvedic culture was co-eval with the Indus Civilisation; and that the Rigvedic culture was no different from the Indus in language, religious practices and urbanism.

A critical examination of the Indus-Sarasvati nomenclature given to the Harappan culture reveals its untenability. In fact, the Rigvedic references to the Sarasvati do not always pertain to a particular river alone. In its early parts, it perhaps meant the Harakhvati (Harirud) of Afghanistan and the Sindhu (Indus). The Nadistuti hymn in the 10th Mandala does refer to the Sarasvati flowing in between the Yamuna and the Sutlej, but there is no indication that the Sutlej and the Yamuna ever joined it. Descriptions of the Sarasvati as a mighty river joining the sea here either means the Indus or it glorifies Sarasvati as the highest deity as is usual in the Rgveda.

The morphology and Landsat images of the Ghaggar-Hakra (the lost Sarasvati) reveal no connection with the Nara in Sind and the Rann of Kutch either. In fact, it disappears near Beriwala and Marot in Cholistan. The supposed courses of the Sutlej and the Yamuna joining the Ghaggar-Hakra might be earlier beds of the tributaries later caught by these rivers. The wide bed of the Ghaggar-Hakra could have been the consequence of large quantities of water having flown through it during Pleistocene times. This is indicated by the terraces carved by the Ghaggar and its tributary the Markanda in the Shiwaliks. The Ghaggar-Hakra or Sarasvati might have carried a little more water than the Indus, in Rigvedic and earlier times on account of its congenial climate. But it was not perennial and the Sutlej and Yamuna certainly did not constitute its tributaries.

The contention that the Indus Civilisation was Sarasvati-based is misleading. The Ghaggar-Hakra (Sarasvati) valley was not colonised by the Harappans simultaneously all over its extent. The Hakra-ware (pre-early Harappan) sites mainly lie in the Cholistan region, while the early Harappan and Harappan sites are located to the east in the Bahawalpur region, northern Rajasthan and the adjoining parts of Haryana and Panjab. The holy land of Kurukshetra and the adjoining parts to the north as well as the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab were first colonised only in late Harappan times. This suggests settlements moving from the west to the east in successive periods. Similarly, the evolutionary stages of the cultures from the neolithic to the Harappan period are documented in Baluchistan and the Indus Valley and not in the Indo-Gangetic divide. The Harappan towns in the Divide have been planned *de novo* as known from Kalingan II, Banawali IC, Kunal IC, etc. The largest and richest Harappan cities (Mohenjodaro and Harappa) occur in the Indus Valley and not farther east. Last but not least, the Harappan geography from Manda and Ropar in the Shivalik foot-hills in the north to Daimabad in the Tapti Valley in the south, and from Sutkagendor near the Iranian border on the Arabian sea in the west to Alamgirpur and Hulas in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab in the east, far exceeds the geography of the Rgveda (from the Kabul river in the west to the Ganga in the east). The rivers of Gujarat and Saurashtra find no mention in the Rgveda.

FROM THE "ARYANISATION OF THE INDUS CIVILISATION" IN *THE MAKING OF HISTORY* (TULIKA, 2000).

Market-place Gandhi

THE WRITER G.V. Desani had once provided a literal translation of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's name. It was "Action-Slave-Fascination-Moon Grocer."

This is a strange, tantalising combination of qualities. These qualities are difficult for me to summon when I see Gandhi smiling from his portrait on office-walls in India. In America, I have also seen Gandhi's image on huge hoardings. They appear under the words "Think Different". There is a tiny logo in the corner showing a rainbow-striped apple. A somewhat different set of emotions are evoked in this case. Salman Rushdie has commented on this phenomenon: "Once a half-century ago, this bony man shaped a nation's struggle for freedom. But that, as they say, is history. Now Gandhi is modelling for Apple."

A year ago, coming out of the subway in New York City, I saw a sign that said "Gandhi was a great and charitable man." Beneath, in smaller type, were the words, "However, he could have used some work on his triceps." The sign advertised Equinox Fitness clubs. If you joined early, the sign said, you could save 150 dollars.

I confess I like the use to which Gandhi is put by the Equinox Fitness Club. I didn't at first, but now I do. No doubt the Mahatma would have found the price of the packet a bit steep. But, I think he would have liked the thriftiness of the early-membership plan. More seriously, though, I regard him safer in the hands of a physical-fitness gym than in the thick embrace of, say, the thankfully-deceased Sitaram Kesri or the not-quite-gone Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Frankly, compared to the stuffy pieties of the government-museum Gandhi, I'd gladly opt for the irreverent Gandhi of the market-place. Long live Gandhi Chhaap Safety-Match. Long live Bapu Mark Jute Bag. Long live Mahatma Brand Dalda.

Of course, I am left with questions. Do I really want to see Gandhi selling deodorants to a guy in Dadar? "Cleanliness is next to Godliness. Free your body of foreign odours!" Perhaps not. But, for the moment, I want to call for a shift away from the sanitised Mahatma to a more worldly Gandhi. This would be the Gandhi whose name Desani translated as "Action-Slave-Fascination-Moon Grocer."

This shift is visible in the world of Indian writing in

English. Gandhi the Mahatma has given way, over the past 50 years, to a more maverick Gandhi. In Nayantara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, we see Gandhi through a young woman's eyes that are full of adulation. "My own reaction was mingled with reverence. Could it be true that a man could talk of love and truth and goodness, and apply these religious terms to politics and not be laughed at? Could it be true that such sentiments could actually guide a nation's policy? Yet in India all these things were true."

A few decades into the realities of independent India, and the scene appears irredeemably altered. In Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August*, what we are left with is the post-apocalyptic image of the Gandhi Hall which looks like "something out of a TV news clip on Beirut.." Outside this building with its broken window-panes and bombed appearance is the "statue of a short fat bespectacled man with a rod coming out of his arse." This is the postcolonial Gandhi . And I like him because—and I don't know how to put this delicately—nothing seems foreign to his body. Which is to say, my worry about his being used to sell deodorants is really an irrelevant question. Gandhi can take in anything and still keep smiling. A satyagrahi always stays on top of the world. This is also non-violence taken to its real and proper extreme. In a country sodomised by its leaders, here is a leader who has chosen to stand among the people with a rod up his arse.

In the early eighties, I was in college in Delhi. Each morning, I rode on a bus that took me past the memorials to national leaders, including Gandhi. During those years in college, I came across *Kanthapura* on my required reading list in an English course. Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, a novel about the Gandhian revolution, had been first published in 1938, almost a decade before the independence. The novel was about the inhabitants of a village, innocent of any history, suddenly swept by the powerful tide of Gandhi-worship.

While our teacher discussed the book with us, in the world outside our classroom, another myth of Gandhi was being born. The British film-director Richard Attenborough was shooting his movie on Gandhi in Delhi. The newspapers printed updates of the shooting. There were complaints about Gandhi being played by an actor who wasn't an Indian; then came the giddy news that Ben Kingsley was at least half-Indian. One of my fellow students, a stocky man who studied history and rode a motorcycle, had a small role in the film. One day someone came to class with the news that there were buses waiting outside the college gates. We could all go and join the scene of Gandhi's funeral that was being shot that day. Attenborough needed a huge crowd of well-behaved extras. Hollywood was going to bring our freedom struggle alive for us. Reading *Kanthapura* was a part of the mix of the moment, a moment that spoke of a discovery of the past in such stylised ways.

Today, many years removed from my college experience, while flipping through Rao's novel, I can see that Gandhi is more of an inspirational presence than a real person in those pages. But, I don't recall having had that feeling 20 years ago when I had just entered college. I had perhaps felt then that I was learning a lesson about our national past. Rao's highly mannered syntax might even have conveyed to me the removed grandeur of idealism. I was oblivious, at that time, even of the ways in which, despite the archaic description, the male narrator's encounter with Gandhi is suffused with a palpable sexual charge: "And the fanner said, 'Take it brother,' and Moorthy stood by the Mahatma and the fan went once this side and once that, and beneath the fan came a voice deep and stirring that went out to the hearts of those men and women and came streaming back through the thrumming air, and went through the fan and the hair and the nails of Moorthy into the very limbs, and Moorthy shivered, and then there came flooding up in rings and ripples, *'Gandhi Mahatma ki jai!'*—'Jai Mahatma!', and as it broke against Moorthy, the fan went faster and faster over the head of the Mahatma, and perspiration flowed down the forehead of Moorthy."

It would be impossible for someone like me, born some decades after the independence, to imagine such an awe-struck relationship with the Mahatma. Our freedom as postcolonial Indians has also meant a freedom from Gandhi-worship, at least from the kind of devotion that was Raja Rao's.

Newer Indian writers have undoubtedly played a small part in this whole process of demystification. For example, Salman Rushdie's essay in *Time* magazine stressed Gandhi's more human contradictions: "For all his vaunted selflessness and modesty, he made no move to object when Jinnah was attacked during a Congress session for calling him 'Mr. Gandhi' instead of 'Mahatma,' and booed off the stage by Gandhi's supporters."

Consider a more recent polemical essay on authenticity in Indian writing by Vikram Chandra. The piece was published in *The Hindu*. Chandra painted a portrait of Gandhi where he was less a holy man on a pedestal and more of a tactical mix of the East and the West, of the high and low, of the sacred and also the secular: Be fearless, like that suave cosmopolitan M.K. Gandhi, that most international of *khiladis*, who told us repeatedly that while his political gurus were Gokhale and Ranade and Tilak, his spiritual gurus were Tolstoy and Thoreau and Ruskin, and that he got his non-violence not from the *Gita*, but from the Sermon on the Mount. Remember that Gandhi's audience was not just Indian, but also everyone else; that all his actions, the spectacle of his revolution and the revolution of his self, were performed simultaneously before a local audience and a global one. He spoke to us, to those he loved, but in speaking to us he was also speaking to all the world, and in speaking to the world he wanted nothing less than to change all of it.

Chandra's Gandhi is a happy borrower. He is not unlike the Bombay criminals in this respect. Chandra describes them as "those CCTV-using, Glock-firing, Bholenath-worshipping gangsters." Chandra finds them

appealing because they "do whatever it takes to get the job done."...

The historian Partha Chatterjee has written: "The 'message of the Mahatma' meant different things to different people..." According to Chatterjee, what Gandhi's words "meant to peasants or tribals was completely different from the way it was interpreted by the literati." Following Chatterjee, it is quite interesting to me how what newspaper-editors call "ordinary Indians" also in their own unremarkable ways have made Gandhi their own. I think that the Gandhi of the Indian marketplace that I was earlier championing—Long live Gandhi Chhaap Safety-Match. Long live Bapu Mark Jute Bag. Long live Mahatma Brand Dalda—is an example of that easy accommodation.

The people, in fact, might be ahead of writers and editorialists. As the research of Shahid Amin reveals, peasants in Gorakhpur in 1921 were producing a "many-sided response to Gandhi." In the spring of 1921, *The Pioneer* carried an editorial about a report in the Gorakhpur newspaper *Swadesh* which had cited reports of miracles popularly attributed to the Mahatma: "Smoke was seen coming from wells and, when water was drunk, it had the fragrance of keora (*pandanus odaratissimus*) an aloe-like plant which is used in the manufacture of perfume; a copy of the Holy *Quran* was found in a room which had not been opened for a year; an Ahir who refused alms to a Sadhu begging in Mahatma Gandhi's name, had his *gur* and two buffaloes destroyed by fire, and a sceptical Brahmin, who defied Mr Gandhi's authority, went mad and was only cured three days afterwards by the invocation of the saintly name!" ...

FROM "GANDHI'S TRICEPS" BY AMITAVA KUMAR IN <WWW.TEHELKA.COM>

Agni

INDIA, BY test-firing nuclear-capable Agni-II, has nudged the whole region further forward on the path of a deadly arms race. The missile, one among the many that Delhi's ambitious Integrated Missile Programme has produced, can take out, technically, any target in Pakistan; besides it can reach deep into China carrying nuclear warheads.

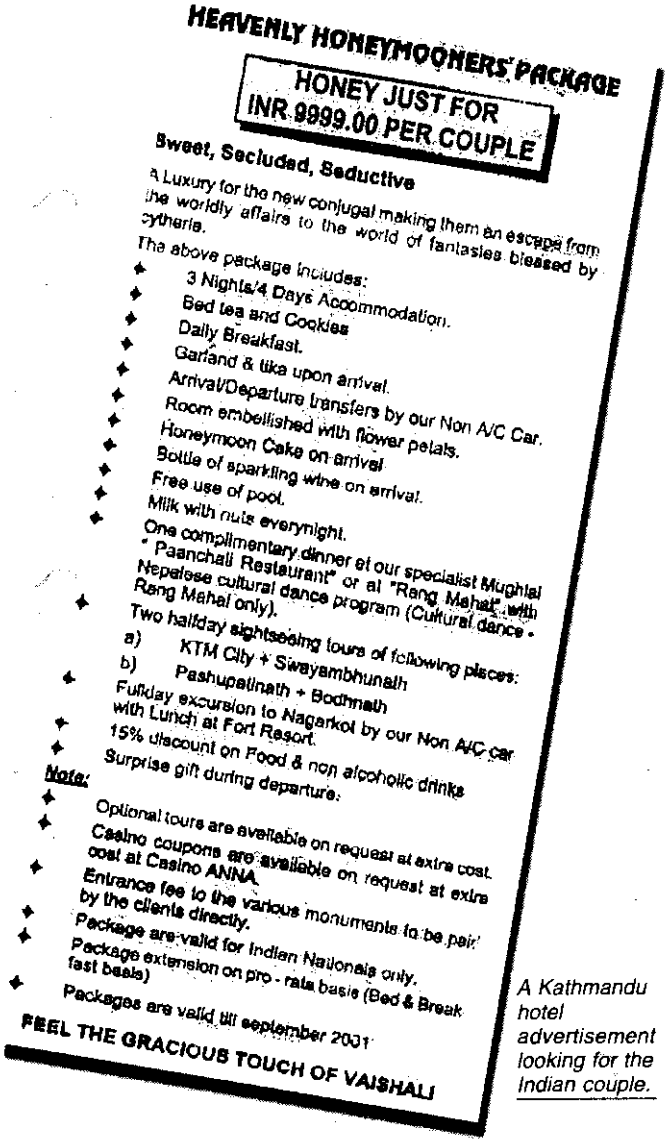
The justifications that have accompanied the test are an affront to the intelligence of all South Asia watchers, who have witnessed India over the years use the name of defence and peace to acquire some of the most aggressive weapons of war. India does not face any palpable security threat that would necessitate or rationalise its ceaseless and frantic attempt to lace itself with missiles and nuclear bombs. It is crystal clear that as part of a well-thought out and long-term design to play a dominant global rule, India wants to stock itself with all the sinews it believes are integral to emphatically claiming this status.

While India is welcome to its ambitions, the problem is that its pursuit is harming regional stability. Given India's track-record of dealing with the neighbours, its nuclear and missile possessions can only invoke fear and worry in the neighbourhood. Each time India tests an improved version of a nuclear-capable missile, its talk of being sincere in reducing the chances of a nuclear confrontation sounds hollower than before. A country cannot conceivably be a votary of peace and be interested in augmenting its prowess to make total war.

The vibrations generated by the Agni-II test would now be felt in Pakistan as well, where the feeling is pervasive that as India is continually upgrading its nuclear or missile capability, there is an inescapable imperative for Islamabad to cement its guard. China, too, cannot be unmindful of the implications of the Agni test. All the more because it came about at the fag-end of Li Peng's visit.

In all, India's conduct on strategic issues that are central to building a durable peace order in South Asia is most undesirable. Regrettably, the high priests of non-proliferation, who are ever-ready to impose sanctions on Pakistan, remain generally happy in dealing with Delhi.

FROM "TERRIBLE TEST" IN THE NEWS, ISLAMABAD.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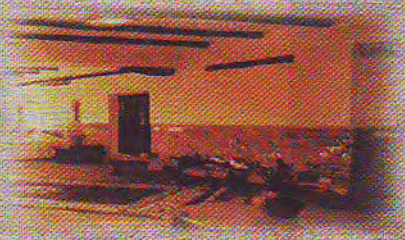

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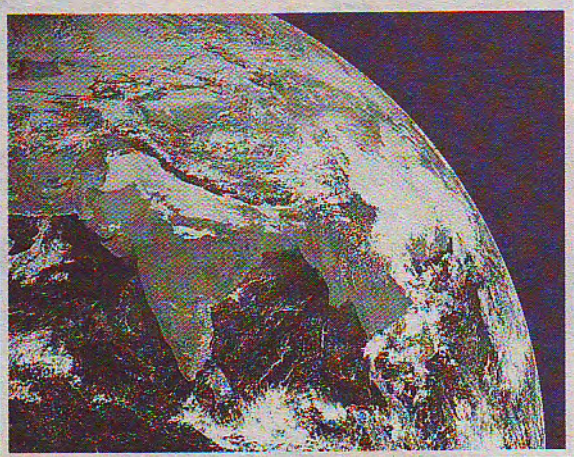

This winter, the freezing masses of the world are to be found not in Siberia, Europe or the great expanse of the American north. We are they, here in the Indus-Ganga plain, in a populous swath stretching from Multan to Siliguri. Without central heating, or heating of any sort, we sit huddled in the tens of millions under quilts and blankets, awaiting a sun that is unable to pierce through the fog for weeks on end.

Flying over the area these days, as I did on 5 January coming east from Europe, what you see below is a covering of thick white cloud that starts as soon as you leave Balochistan's rugged rockiness and enter the Indus catchment. From here, it is one continuous sea of milky foam extending, unmindful of demarcated borders and barbed wire, over Lahore and on to Amritsar, Delhi, Lucknow, Benaras, Patna.

Only when the plane banks left, and heads north with the hills of Nepal coming up to greet the fuselage, does the fog let go of its grip. In fact, just a few hundred feet vertically above the freezing plain, all is clear. The first hills of the Churay (or Siwalik as it is known further west), and you are already in bright sunshine, imbibing radiated warmth and ultraviolet rays.

This satellite image was taken on 5 January 2001 and provided by the earth station at Dundee at 5 am GMT, which is about midday in South Asia. If you superimpose a population map over this picture, you get about 500 million people shivering under the fog.

Was it always like this? Forget ozone holes that affect a few million at best in the southern extremities from Terra del Fuego to New Zealand. The Indo-Gangetic fog must account for the highest mass misery index in the world. For this is a region mostly used to heat and humidity, not sunless frigidity. The economics of warmth generation is such that most of the people do without heat for the short months of winter. We make do by swaddling in blankets and clothing. Meanwhile, the Tibetan and semi-Tibetan sweater merchants selling mass-produced acrylic from Jullunder factories make brisk business.

Other than this cheerful lot of Himalayan people who spread out their wares from Chandigarh to Dibrugarh, the rest of northern South Asia's population waits winter out in misery. Nothing in the world can quite compare, if you can imagine, of the cumulative pain and suffering of the 500 million individuals shivering in the Indo-Gangetic fog.

The only question remaining is, is this phenomenon new? For the last few years, we have seen unusual extended sun-less periods. Delhi airport fog-outs have of course quickly become legendary, and trains run late. The potato crops fail on the Ganga plain, and everywhere, bricklayers are laid off as there is no sun to dry the mud. So, it does seem to be a local climate change phenomenon, but one that we are not too bothered about because no one in the West has flagged it. Besides, the largest mass of people affected lives under the cloud in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, voiceless for being so many and so problematic.

One plausible cause for this Indo-Gangetic fog is the proliferation of irrigation canals and of multiple cropping. The other is inappropriately placed flood-control embankments in the plains, which end up blocking drainage rather than blocking floods. Both raise the water vapour content on the surface, and when the cold winds blow in from the northwest, the pea-soup fog sets in. The sun does not shine, and the ground does not heat enough to dissipate the inversion effect.

So yes, the unremitting clouds which have begun to hug the Indus-Ganga plain in mid-winter is probably something new, at least in terms of its thickness and longevity. People suffer.

Let the scientists decide if this is so, and after that let someone do something about it.

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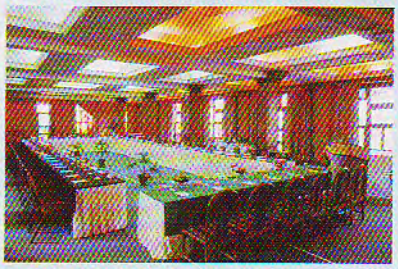

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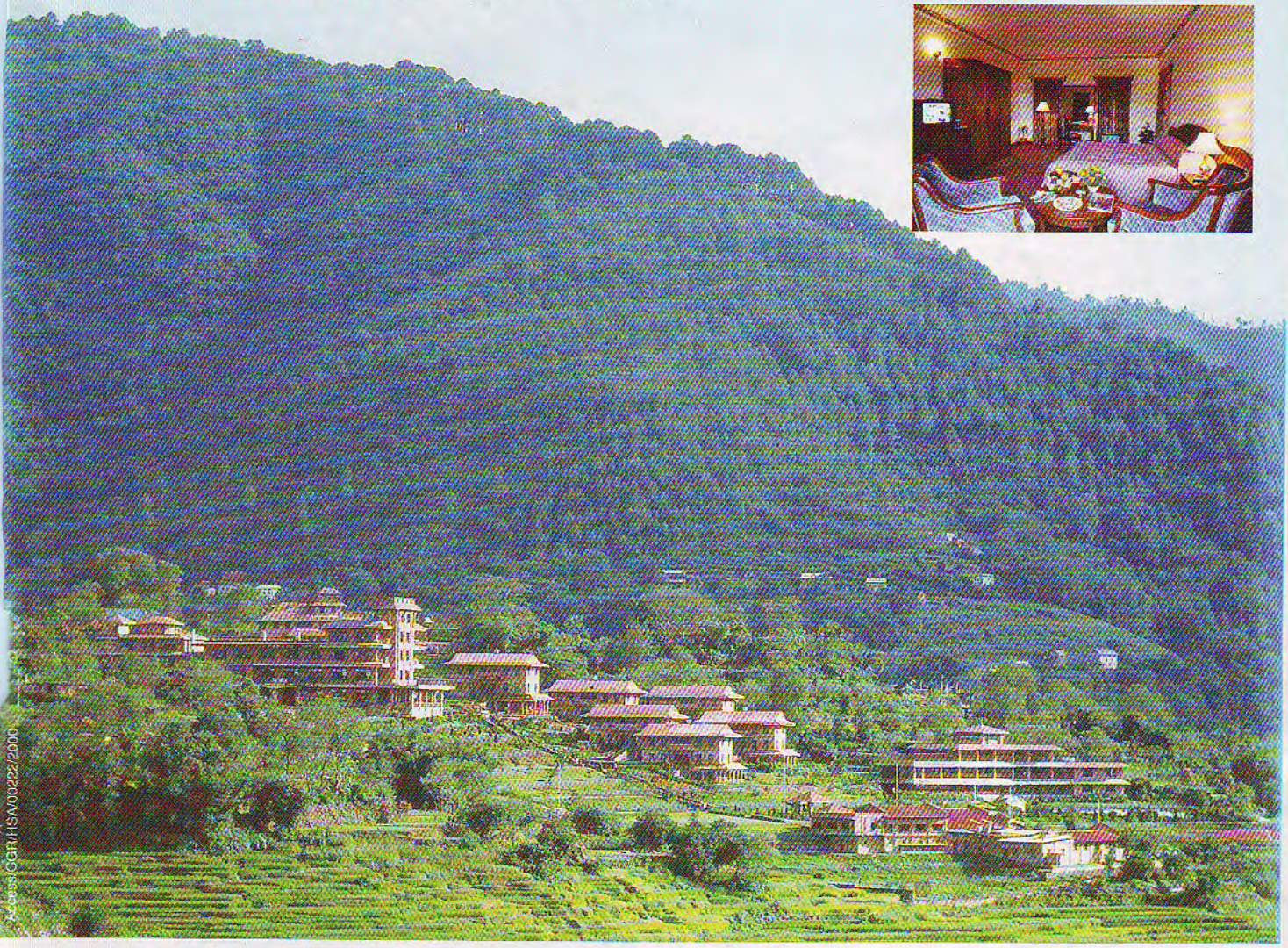

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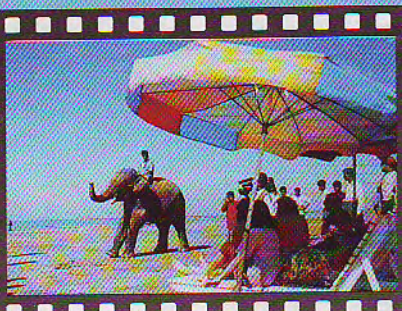

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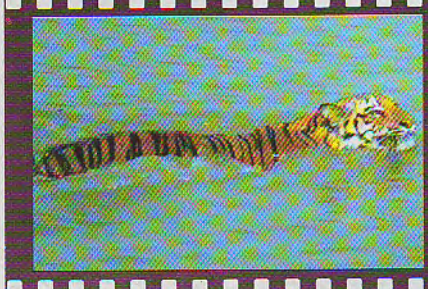

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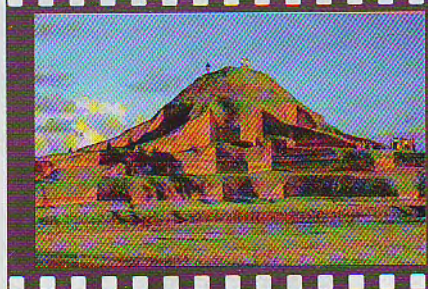

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