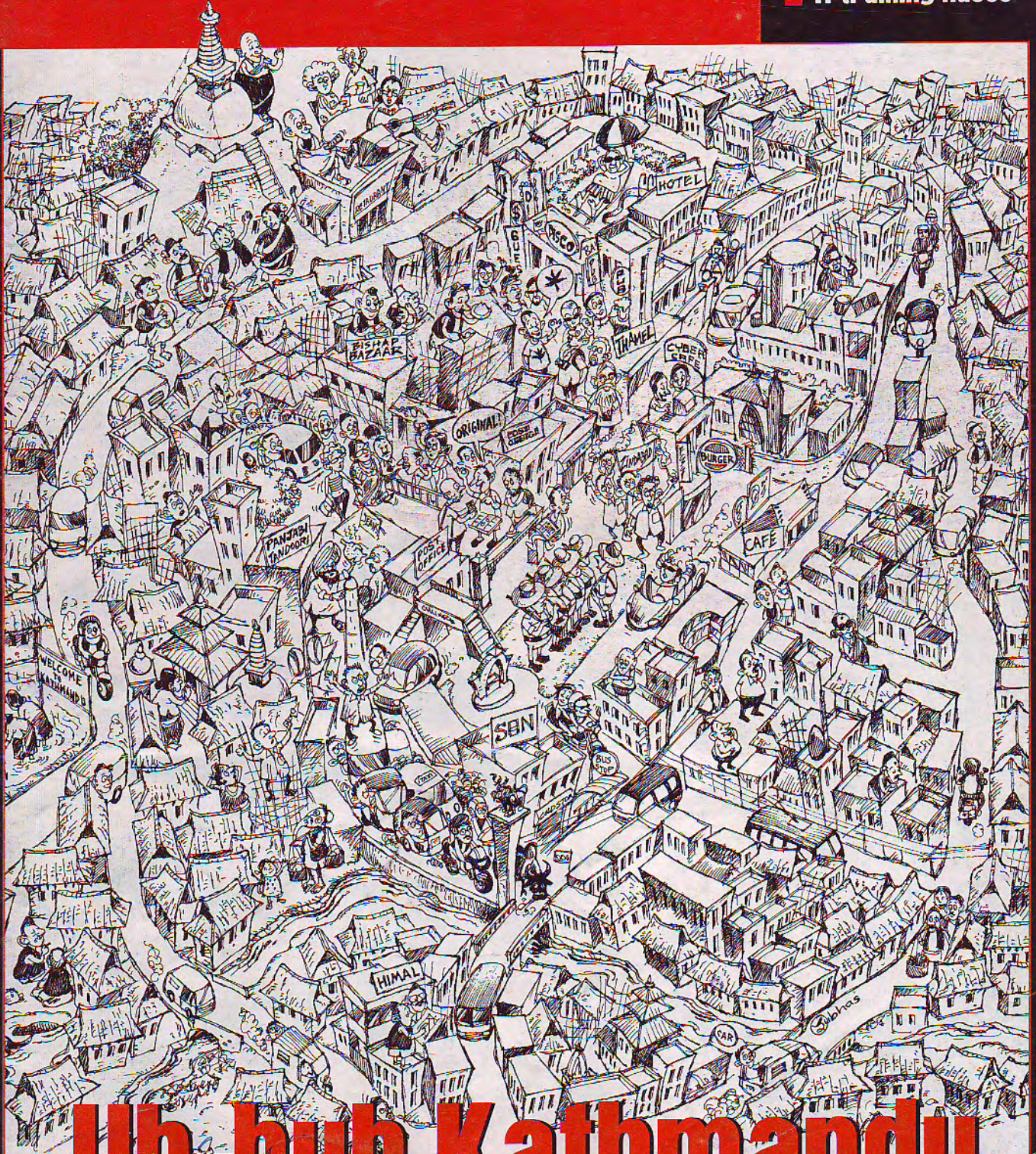


September 2001

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

- Nagaland ceasefire
- Madrasa mindset
- IT training fiasco



Uh-huh Kathmandu

Bangladesh BDT 80 Bhutan BTN 60 India INR 50 Nepal NPR 50 Maldives MVR 40 Pakistan PKR 80 Sri Lanka LKR 80 Elsewhere USD 4/GBP 3

New Himal cover design by Subhas Rai

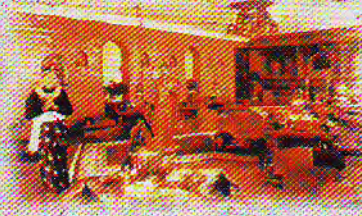
THE SECRET OF KATHMANDU

Nepal has eight World Heritage sights and has won two Heritage Awards. One for the Medieval City of Bhaktapur and the other for Dwarika's Hotel.

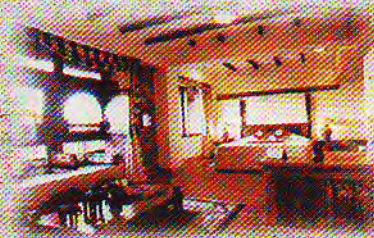
The magnificent buildings of Dwarika's with the most intricate wood and terra-cotta work of the best craftsmen and every piece of wood work an original and centuries old.



70 first class standard and deluxe rooms, including a royal suite and 4 other suites, each beautifully furnished with traditional textiles and unique custom made furniture and individually decorated with hand carved windows and a character of its own but having one common factor-a very spacious bathroom with oversized bathtub, separate WC and shower, twin vanities and dressing area. Every piece of furniture has been designed and made in the in-house workshop.



At Dwarika's the splendor of the Malla art and architecture is kept alive. The complex incorporates the multifarious features of Nepal's Heritage into one inimitable property.



KRISHNARPAN

Dwarika's Hotel, a winner of PATA Heritage Award now offers you not only the secrets of Nepalese art, architecture and hospitality but Krishnarpan a special Nepalese restaurant in a historic and beautiful setting.

Here, local chefs prepare ceremonial feasts of 6 to 20 courses for an honoured guest from the finest meat, vegetables, grains and lentils, all blended with aromatic spices, purified oils and saffrons.

Krishnarpan invites you to capture a moment of history of rife and ancient culture, to dine at tables with centuries old lattice woodwork, served on years old traditional plates, bowls and glasses by charming hosts and hostesses dressed in different ethnic wear.



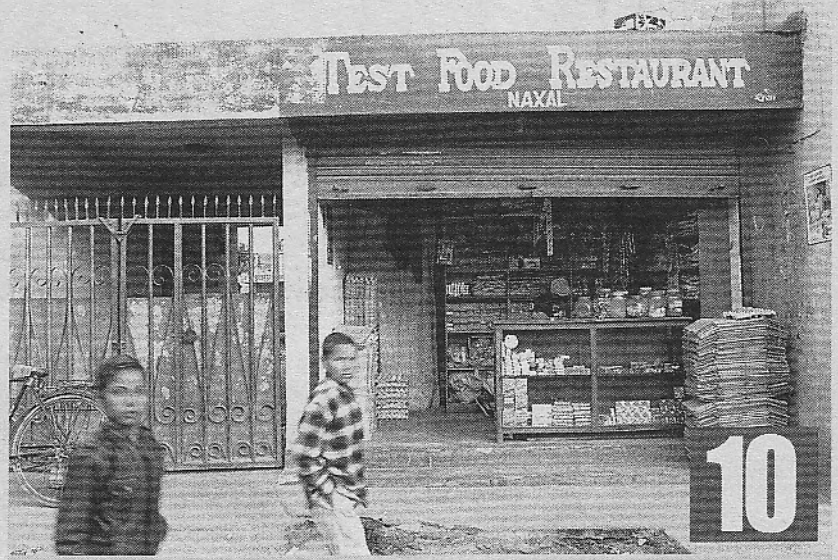
DWARIKA'S HOTEL

Battisputali, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 470770, 473724 Fax: 977-1-471379
E-mail: dwarika@mos.com.np
Website: <http://www.dwarikas.com>

A Living Tribute to the Architectural and Cultural Heritage of Nepal

Come share a mystical experience of the past with us at Krishnarpan!

COMMENTARY	4
Monsoon Political Review	
ESSAY	10
Kathmandu, I will come back to you <i>by Farjad Nabi</i>	
OPINION	24
The Indian State and the Madrasa <i>by Yoginder Sikand</i> A Khaki Constitution? <i>by Mushahid Hussain Sayed</i>	
MEDIAFILE	28
REPORT	30
Nagaland: Lessons of the Past <i>by Ram Narayan Kumar</i> It's IT everywhere <i>by Gaurab Raj Upadhaya</i> Leicester in the age of globalisation <i>by Prasun Sonwalkar</i>	
TOWN DIARY	40
Between the Temple and the Beach <i>by Rudy Mohan</i>	
RESPONSE	42
Spilling the beans <i>by Subir Bhaumik</i>	
VOICES	44
FILM REVIEW	48
The Fish of Gods <i>reviewed by Anagha Neelakantan</i>	
BOOK REVIEW	51
India & Pakistan: Inventing the Nation <i>reviewed by Sreeram Sundar Chaulia</i> India's Newspaper Revolution <i>reviewed by Shanuj V.C.</i>	
LASTPAGE	60



! Kathmandu !



Windows Shopping

Contributors to this issue

Editor

Kanak Mani Dixit

Associate Editor

Thomas J. Mathew

Copy Editor

Shanuj V.C.

Contributing Editors

COLOMBO Manik de Silva
DHAKA Afsan Chowdhury
ISLAMABAD Adnan Rehmat
NEW DELHI Mitu Varna
Prabhu Ghate
WINNIPEG Tarik Ali Khan

Design Team

Chandra Khatiwada
Bilash Rai (Graphics)

Ad-Marketing

Nandita Bhatt
advertising@himalmedia.com

Subscription/Overseas Sales

Anil Karki
subscription@himalmedia.com

Nepal/Northeast India, Sales

Sudan Bista
sales@himalmedia.com

Anagha Neelakantan is an editor with the *Nepali Times*.

Farjad Nabi is a journalist and independent filmmaker based in Lahore.

Gaurab Raj Upadhaya is a Kathmandu-based IT consultant and journalist.

Mushahid Hussain Sayed was federal minister for information and media development in Nawaz Sharif's cabinet.

Prasun Sonwalkar is a journalist currently engaged in research at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester.

Ram Narayan Kumar is a campaigner, social worker, free-lance journalist and specialist on Indian Punjab on which he has published two books. He is based in Austria.

Rudy Mohan is a beach-boy and research scholar based in Hyderabad.

Sreeram Sundar Chaulia is a research student at the London School of Economics and Political Science and works on Indian foreign policy.

Yoginder Sikand is a student of Islamic history and freelance writer based in Bangalore.

Cover art by Subash Rai.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Subscription rates

	1 year	2 years
Nepal	NPR 540	NPR 1000
India	INR 580	INR 1125
Rest of South Asia	USD 18	USD 34
Hongkong/Brunei	USD 22	USD 42
Elsewhere	USD 40	USD 75

Send payment in local currency in favour of our subscription agent.

Country	Agent
Bangladesh	International Book Agencies Ltd., 61, Motijheel C/A 2nd floor, Dhaka. Tel: +880-29-9551308/9560584
India	Central News Agency (P) Ltd., 23/90 Connaught Circus, New Delhi 110001. Tel: +91-1-7529385/777 0536
Maldives	Asrafee Bookshop, 1/44 Chandhane Magu, P.O. Box 2053, Male. Tel: +960-32-3424
Nepal	Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Tel: +977-1-543333-36
Sri Lanka	Lake House Bookshop, 100, Sir Chittampalam, Gardiner Mawatha, Colombo-2. Tel: +94-1-4321051/430581/430582

Note: Subscribers can send payment to local subscription agents in equivalent local currency. Please notify any change of address.

Australia	Indra Ban, 12, Norfolk St, Paddington 2021, Sydney. Fax: +61-2-635 3207
Sweden	Empatum AB, Box: 26159, 100 41 Stockholm. Fax: +46-8-141088
The Netherlands	Frans Meijer, Zwaneburgwal 278, 1011 JH Amsterdam. Fax: +31-20-625 6690
UK & Ireland	Joti Giri H SAUK, 33 Tyers Terrace, London SE 11 5 SE. Tel: +44-171-582 9355 Fax: 0207 820 9915. e-mail: himaluk@talk21.com
Germany	Suedasien-Buro, Redaktion 'Suedasien', Grosse Heimstr. 58, 44137 Dortmund. Tel: +49-231-136 633
North America	Barbara Bella & Associates, 500 Sansome Street, Suite 101, PO Box 470758, San Francisco CA, 94147. Fax: +1-415-986 7860.

Subscribers sending payments directly to the Kathmandu office from countries other than Nepal should do so at the rate quoted for their respective countries by demand draft/cheque in US Dollars/GB Pounds drawn in favour of "Himalmedia Pvt Ltd" at Subscription and Overseas Sales Department, Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.

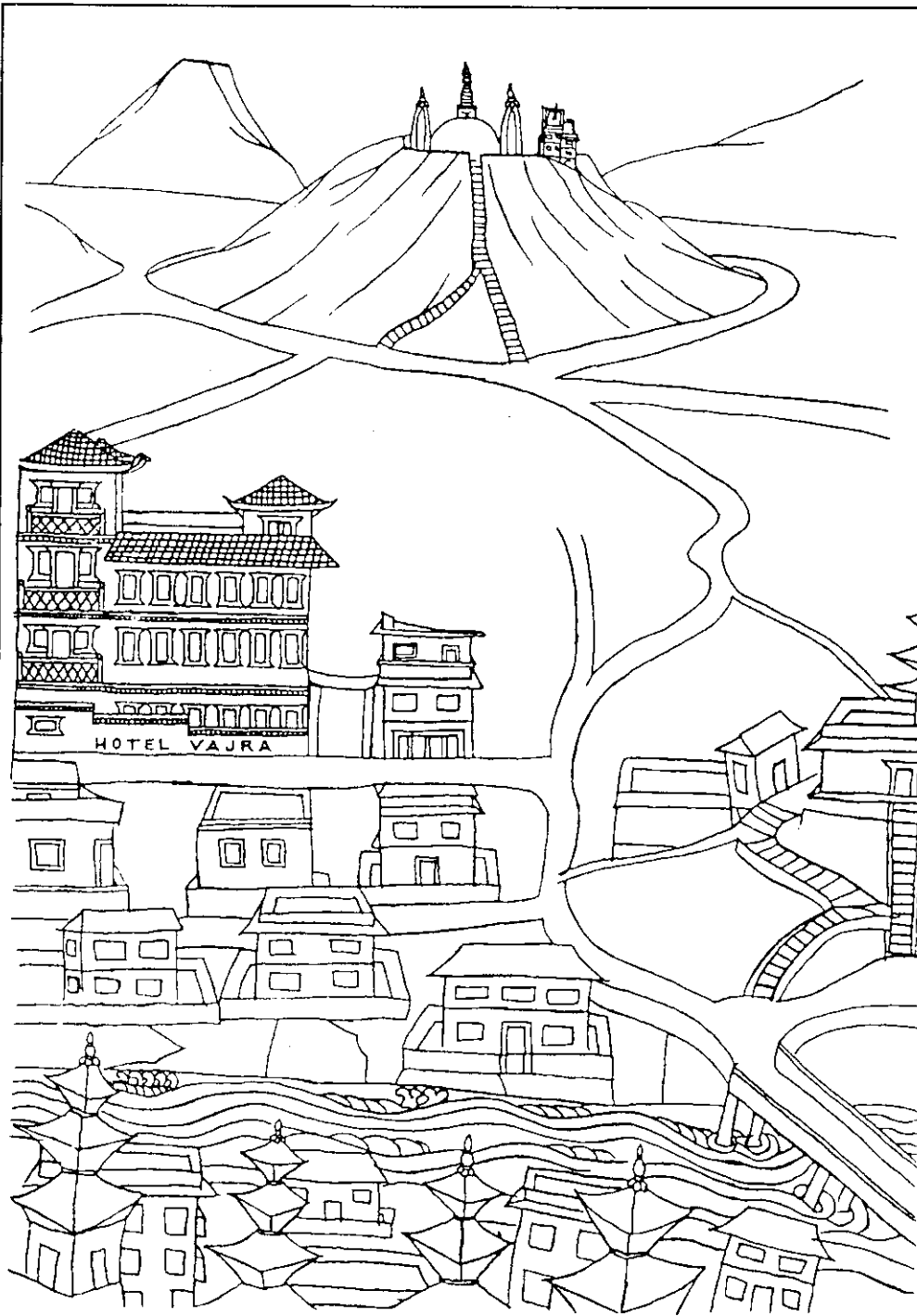
Subscribers who wish to pay through AMEX, VISA or MASTERCARD can fax details to: +977-1-521013, or email us at: <subscription@himalmedia.com>. For AMEX cards please include contact phone numbers.

www.himalmedia.com

Himal is published and distributed by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd
GPO Box 7251,
Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: +977-1-543333, 523845
Fax: 521013
Email: editors@himalmedia.com
http://www.himalmag.com
ISSN 1012-9804
Library of Congress Control Number
B8912882
Printed at: Jagadamba Press, Kathmandu
Tel: +977-1-521393, 543017



Himal was a Himalayan journal from 1987 to March of 1996, when it became a South Asian magazine.



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 overlooking, chaotic Kathmandu.

Time.



in Kathmandu, the Vajra

Swayambhu, Dattu Bijyaswori, PO Box 1084, Kathmandu
Phone: 977 1 271545, 272719 Fax: 977 1 271695 E-mail: vajra@mos.com.np

MONSOON POLITICAL REVIEW

Northeast India is definitely in a worse state than Kashmir, with not even a strong case of cross-border infiltration to force the situation to such a pass.

POLITICS IN South Asia, as the summer rains end, presents a dismal picture of turmoil. In Bangladesh, impending general election has unleashed a ferocious struggle between the two main political combatants. The future of the country does not rest in the animosity between Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, but who will tell them that? In Sri Lanka, the Sinhala-Tamil schism has for the moment been overtaken in intensity by the conflict between the government and the opposition, despite a crippling LTTE bomb attack on the capital's airport which reduced the prized national airline—the best run in South Asia—to half its fleet. Nepal is at a defining moment in its history as the Maoists and the political mainstream are locked in what seems to be an intractable knot between republicanism and consitutional monarchy. In Pakistan, the military commands the political arena, and has managed to enforce a semblance of order on a fractured land. It is too early to say how the experiment in partyless local democracy will work out in the long run, although this is one determined general in the middle of it all. India, repeatedly rocked by defence and financial sector scandals at the centre, prepares for what promises to be a violent and vituperative election in the crucial state of Uttar Pradesh, not too long after a round of state assembly elections left the ruling NDA combine in New Delhi reeling from dramatic reverses. Ayodhya and the Ram temple issue, and the ghost of the Babri Masjid are returning to haunt the Hindus and Muslims of the country. South India seems relatively less crisis-ridden, although Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa could change all that in one afternoon of ego-centricism. Meanwhile, violence in the now-familiar flashpoints of the Subcontinent continues without let or hindrance. All of Jammu and Kashmir is now officially under a security blanket. Northeast India is definitely in a worse state than Kashmir, with not even a strong case of cross-border infiltration to force the situation to such a pass.

Sri Lanka: Between the LTTE and the deep blue sea

Sri Lanka is stricken by a three-way conflict. It is presently a Sinhala vs Sinhala vs Tamil

fight. The two main Sinhala parties, the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP), are still far away from forming a national government, something they have been talking about for some time now. President Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe, cannot seem to hammer out an all-party government in Colombo which could have been the prelude to a consensual approach in dealing with the Tamil insurgency.

Instead, Chandrika seems now willing to abandon dialogue with the opposition in order to start dialogue with Vellupillai Prabhakaran, whose insurgency itself assumed stunning proportions with the 24 July attack on the Colombo airport and airforce base.

Kumaratunga now heads a government reduced to a minority after one of its partners, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, broke away from the ruling coalition. Faced with a no-confidence vote, the President chose to prorogue parliament and shelve the matter for the present. Parliament is now slated to reconvene on 7 September, and that session should tell us whether Kumaratunga will resign from office and introduce a protocol of politics so rare in this part of the world, or continue with the South Asian practice of misusing office to contrive a new majority out of thin air.

There is talk now that the UNP is seeking an end to executive presidency, and wants the prime ministership for itself, which means a French-style government, with the president holding no portfolio but being consulted on all decisions. Ranil Wickremesinghe is under pressure from his party not to agree to a national government at a moment when the PA's hands are weak. Any deal with the government, they say, ought to come after the government is defeated on the floor of the House. As if to push the country further towards the edge, the monsoon has been here in name only as the Sri Lankan south contends with unprecedented drought.

Nepal: Teetering constitutionalism

Up north, Nepal, gripped by a Maoist insurgency for the sixth year running, has seen a royal massacre and a new government led by Sher Bahadur Deuba. The mountain kingdom is going through its worst series of crises in modern history. And unlike what many had thought to be an insurgency that would peter out, the

For over 2000 years the name Annapurna has symbolised all that is glorious in Nepal.....



..... Annapurna, a name that celebrates Nepalese culture in its many forms. She is the goddess of plenty. The name for mighty cluster of peaks rising 26,000 feet above Nepal. Annapurna valley is the home to the *Thakalis*, one of history's most disciplined, organised and far-sighted communities. It is the birthplace of the Yartung festival and sanctuary to one of the most fragile eco-systems in the world.

Hotel De L'Annapurna, a place that strives to live up to its illustrious namesakes. Renovated rooms, an inviting lobby lounge, three speciality restaurants, a cake shop, coffee shop and a bar, swimming pool, health club, fitness centre, tennis and snooker. All in the heart of Kathmandu. (A step away from sight-seeing, shopping, entertainment and business). Experience the glories of the land of Annapurna. Experience Nepal.

HOTEL DE L'ANNAPURNA

No. 1 address in Kathmandu



Durbar Marg, P. O. Box 140, Kathmandu, Nepal
Phone: 977-1-221711, Fax: 977-1-225236
E-mail: annapurna.kathmandu@tajhotels.com
Website: www.taj-annapurna.com.np



Come to Kathmandu in October! Come to Film South Asia '01!!

The Russian Culture Centre, Kathmandu, 4-7 October 2001

The organisers of Film South Asia '01 were overwhelmed by the quality of films received and among them the diversity of themes, treatment and motivation. The subjects of the 45 films selected for competition range from identity politics to sexual questioning, from spiritual quest to diasporic angst, and from playful profiles to historical re-evaluation. You can get to taste these fine offerings at the third FSA. If you miss it, keep watch for a Travelling Film South Asia (TFSA) in your city or nearby.

Films in Competition in FSA '01

Title	Director	Details	Subject
1. Aamala	Elizabeth Snider	Nepal: 22 min	Lifestyle/Gender - Mustang mother
2. Abhimanyu's Face	Ranjan Palit	India: 27 min	Culture/Profile - Tribal passion
3. After Sunset...	Tahir Khilji, Naheed Khilji	Pakistan: 40 min	Lifestyle/Sexuality - Massage message
4. All the World's My Stage	Farah Deba	USA: 25 min	Diaspora/Literature - Famous names
5. The Art of the Impossible: A Portrait of V.P. Singh	Juliet Reynolds	India: 45 min.	Politics/Profile - Mandal mania
6. The Bee, the Beer and the Kuruba	Vinod Raja	India: 63 min	History/Displacement - Forest feature
7. Bengalis in the World of Fish	Nilanjan Bhattacharya	India: 29 min	Culture/Food - Culinary delight
8. Between the Devil and the Deep River	Arvind Sinha	India: 65 min	Displacement/Embankment - Engineering folly
9. Between the Lines	Parvez Imam	India: 11 min	Migration/Exploitation - Bangladesher Delhi
10. Born at Home	Sammera Zain	India: 60 min	Public health/Reproduction - North Indian midwifery
11. Closed-door-and-stuff-inside-the magazine Syndrome	Altaf Mazid	India: 38 min	Profile/Soliloquy - Guwahati dreaming
12. Colours Black	Mamta Murthy	India: 30 min	Sexuality/Child Abuse - Bombay blight
13. Cricket Lives in Lahore	Farjad Nabi	Pakistan: 13 min	Lifestyle/Sports - Bowled over
14. The Dream	C. Saratchandran	India: 35 min	Education/Indigenoussness - Alternative learning
15. The Festival of Spring	Samina Aslam	Pakistan: 29 min	Lifestyle/Urban Culture - Kites over Lahore
16. Freedom!	Amar Kanwar	India: 60min	The State/Displacement - Indian center and periphery
17. The Great Indian Yatra	Yask Desai, Shweta Kishore	India: 60min	Tourism/Contradictions - Dharamsala, Goa, Agra
18. Guhya	Kirtana Kumar	India: 55 min	Religion/Feminism - Devi and dualism
19. In Search of Meera's Buddha	Murad Ali	India: 29 min	Art/Profile - Hillbound Buddha
20. Jari Mari:Of Cloth and Other Stories	Surabhi Sharma	India: 74 min	Lifestyle/Economy - Mill-worker slum
21. King for a Day	Alex Gabbay	Bangladesh: 33 min	Profile/Globalisation - Clintonbhai in Dhaka
22. King of Dreams	Amar Kanwar	India: 30 min	Sexuality/Introspection - One man's mind
23. Let Me Also Come to School	Simantini Dhuru	India: 56 min	Lifestyle/Education - Little lost schoolhouse
24. A Rough Cut on the Life Times of Lachuman Magar	Dinesh Deokota	Nepal: 39 min	Poverty/Profile - Naughty old man
25. The Loom	K.P. Jayasankar, Anjali Monteiro	India: 49 min	Cityscape/Poetry - Bombay abstract
26. Michael Jackson Comes to Manikganj	Nupur Basu	South Asia: 57 min	Globalisation/Popular culture - TV South Asia
27. My Migrant Soul	Yasmine Kabir	Bangladesh: 35 min	Migrant labour/profile - Death in Malaysia
28. Now That's More Like a Man	Farjad Nabi, Mazhar Zaidi	Pakistan: 35 min	Culture/Masculinity - Women on men
29. Our Boys	Manzare Hassin	Bangladesh: 42 min	Culture/Masculinity - Boys on boys
30. Pakistan and India Under the Nuclear Shadow	Pervez Hoodbhoy	Pakistan: 32 min	Politics/Nuclear War - Deadly footage
31. Paper Flowers	Rajiv Krishnan	India: 25 min	Lifestyle/Sexuality - Eunuchs at work
32. Perception - The Other Canvas	Fauzia Khan	Bangladesh: 54 min	Art/Profile - Six Bangla artists
33. The Play Is On...	Pankaj Rishi Kumar	India: 52 min	Culture/Politics - Kashmiri theatre
34. The Quest for Peace in Nagaland	Bharat Bhusan	India: 30 min	History/Politics - Television feature
35. Ramlila	Ananta Sridhar, Sanjay Pande, Subhash Kapoor	India: 28 min	Culture/Theatre - Streetside in Delhi
36. Scribbles on Akka	Madhushree Dutta	India: 60 min	History/Religion - Ancient ascetic, modern times
37. She Wants to Talk to You	Anita Chang	Nepal/USA: 28 min	Gender/Profile - Nepal's women in America
38. Shere Punjab	Rahul Das	India: 11 min	Lifestyle/Eatery - Its a driver's life
39. A Sun Sets in	Shahid Nadeem	Pakistan: 45 min	Religion/Politics - The bishop's ultimate sacrifice
40. Sunrise Radio	Shai Heredia	UK: 17 min	Diaspora/Popular culture - London bhanga
41. Turf Wars-Conservation Claims in the Great Himalaya National Park	Sanjay Barnela Vasant Saberwal	India: 41 min	Conservation/Conflict - Its park vs. people
42. Two Assassinations and an Accident	Kabir Khan	India: 25 min	Politics/History - Revisiting the Emergency
43. We Have the Same Kind of Blood	Berit Madsen	Nepal: 41 min	Culture/Discrimination - The bewildered Dalit
44. We Homes Chaps	Kesang Tseten	Nepal: 65 min	Portrait/Introspection - Schoolboys become men
45. Where RU on ICQ?	Avinash Roy	India: 6 min	Culture/Internet - Chat

SPEAK UP FOR THE DOCUMENTARY !

Film South Asia, Himal Association, Patan Dhoka, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Phone: +977-1-542544, 548142; Fax: +977-1-541196; Email: fsa@mos.com.np
www.himalassociation.org/fsa

Maoists have gone from strength to strength, and are now in a bargaining position that would have been thought inconceivable only a couple of years ago—all the result of disarray among and within the mainstream, above-ground parties. As we go to press, the Maoists and the government are holding talks, with the rebels steadfastly holding on to their demands for an interim government, constitutional changes and the proclamation of a republic. As a sop to get the rebels to the negotiating table, the Deuba government has announced a 'revolutionary' socio-economic package, with land reform as its main agenda, a possibly unworkable plan which alienates the middle and upper classes of the Tarai at one go while the hill-centric parties sit smugly and espouse easy redistributive ideology. The situation overall is taral, but those who would welcome a comeback for an authoritarian monarchy fail to realise that times of flux are when to consolidate parliamentary democracy and not revert to autocracy.

Bangladesh: Violently political

And in Bangladesh, if it is an election year, can bloodshed be far behind? Other countries have violent insurgencies and movements, but Bangladesh's mainstream politics are without doubt the most violent in our region. With elections scheduled for 1 October, the two main parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League, have stepped up their attacks on each other. The most perturbing news of the last year has been the murky agenda of whoever has been organising the massive blasts that have resulted in many deaths in Ramna Maidan, Kotalipara and other venues. The hope is that these are extremist and fanatical elements (religious or political) rather than groups linked to the main parties, which would truly spell disaster. The two prima donnas, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are contesting in four and five seats respectively, displaying an abject lack of confidence in themselves and their party institutions. The future, however, if it is to be discovered can be located in Bangladesh's successful experiment with neutral caretaker governments. This time, too, it is likely that the caretaker government of Justice Latifur Rehman will be able to deliver a credibly elected government. While election observer teams sometimes have questionable value, it is a fact that Begum Zia restrained from rejecting the results of

the last election in 1996 because of the presence of South Asian (led by Neelan Tiruchelvam) and Western election observers. This time, Jimmy Carter will be there together with others to ensure that this election too will deliver a credible government which can serve a full term. May the best woman win!

Pakistan: General elections?

For all the long-term ramifications of military rule, Pakistan presents a more optimistic picture, strictly relative to what is happening in the neighbourhood countries. Perhaps because the country is run by a general, it does seem to have more 'direction' compared to the freewheeling anarchy elsewhere, though Pervez Musharraf's critics are vehement (see Mushahid Hussain Syed's "General Musharraf's Roadmap: A khaki constitution?", p. 26). With the legitimacy and national credibility gained at the Agra summit, the general returned to Islamabad having gained in stature—not a little because of the smart talking he did before India's seniormost editors, aired inadvertently by an Indian satellite channel. Musharraf has shown an ability not to get bogged down in rhetoric, except in the case of Kashmir. In his Independence Day address on 14 August, he etched a "roadmap" for his country where he pledged general elections in October next year. While the nature of these elections are as yet unclear, at least the general is locked now to the date. Meanwhile he has deftly begun to take on the radical mullahs, cracking down on some religious outfits that espouse violent action. If there is a secret channel between New Delhi and Islamabad right now, and we are sure there is, Vajpayee is sure to have indicated satisfaction on this score.

Alternative power centres are being created by the military regime with the non-party local bodies now in place. On the face of it, Musharraf's appears to be the most polished form of politics that Pakistan has seen in a long while and one can do without doubting his sincerity. But since the combination of politician-general rarely works, it is clear that he will have to set an agenda when he releases the polity once again to the parties, come October next. The question then will be whether he will trade in his epaulets for the politician's kurta, and start a party of his own?

The Subcontinent of India

India, as befits any pretender to regional domination, has to handle a host of problems

Pakistan presents a more optimistic picture. It does seem to have more 'direction' compared to the free-wheeling anarchy elsewhere.

A social science journal featuring:

- research articles in economics, sociology, political science and other emerging disciplines
- scholarly commentary on topical developments
- in-depth reports on people's struggles
- regular columns by eminent social scientists
- book reviews
- weekly statistical updates on the Indian economy
- analytical review of company performances
- monthly review of the money market

SPECIAL ISSUES

- Review of Political Economy
- Review of Women Studies
- Review of Labour
- Review of Agriculture
- Review of Industry and Management

Subscription rates

	Inland (including Nepal and Bhutan) (in Indian Rupees)				Foreign (annual rates in US \$)			
	Six Months	One year	Two Years	Three Years	Air Mail		Surface Mail	
					Institutions	Individuals	Institutions	Individuals
Institutions	-	800	1500	2200	Pakistan, Bangladesh & Sri Lanka 80 50 65 30			
Individuals	350	650	1150	1700	USA, Canada, UK, Europe, Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Russia 150 100 90 65			
Concessional Rates					All other countries 100 70 70 50			
Teachers/Researchers	-	425	-	1150				
Students	-	350	-	-				

- Concessional rates are available only in India. To avail of concessional rates, certificates from relevant institution is essential.
 - Remittance by money order/bank draft/postal order requested. Please add Rs. 14 to outstanding cheques towards bank collection charges.
- All remittances to Economic and Political Weekly, Hitkari House, 284 Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400001
Phone: 269 6072/73, Fax: (022) 269 6072, Email: epw@vsnl.com

... the place is heaven, let's sketch the journey"



མཚོ། རྒྱ་ཤིང་འདྲེ་ལྷག་ལ།

TIBET

Nature
Travel-TIBET
Announces
Special Offer 2000!

14 days: Zhangmu in Zhangmu
out minimum 08 pax.
US\$ 870 (Indian National
INR 37999) p/p for local agents.
US\$ 1195 (INR 43999) p/p
full service basis.

7N/8D (Fly in, Drive out)
Min: 05 Persons Basis
Standard: US\$ 468 p/p
Deluxe: US\$ 665 p/p

Departures:
June- 10 & 27
July- 04 & 15
August- 08 & 22

MT. KAILASH PILGRIMAGE YATRA 2000

Instant inquiry?
Kathmandu Agent



Pacific
Travels & Tours (P) Ltd.

Tel: 424759, 429094 Fax: 00-977-1-418444

E-mail: pacific@obol.com

Joint Venture with

Tibet Nature Travel International Corporation East Beijing Road, Lhasa

www.pacifictoursnepal.com

VACANCY

Post of

Executive Director

Regional Centre for Strategic Studies
2 Elibank Road, Colombo-05, Sri Lanka

Required from May 1, 2002, it is the top executive position for a regional think tank on strategic issues related to South Asia. The tenure is for a fixed and non-extendable term of three years. Attractive remuneration is available at expatriate scale in Sri Lanka. The desired candidate will be a mature strategic analyst, familiar with regional and international strategic issues, well known internationally and with extensive publications in the field. She/he will have demonstrated executive and administrative capability suitable for running such an institution. Should also have the ability and experience of raising funds to support the Centre's activities.

Desired candidates will please apply with detailed cvs to the above address by **November 15, 2001**.



RCSS Website: <http://www.rcss.org>

that are seemingly intractable. Itself a subcontinent on its own right, India's politics is divided by region, with Kashmir and the Northeast as the publicised and unpublicised flashpoints respectively. Despite the hiccups all over the Indian map, however, the India of a billion plus continues to prosper in disparate and quiet corners. The states that one hears about the least are where things are on the mend, or a-building. Take your pick—Andhra, Haryana, Karnataka, and even West Bengal!

The Northeast is a "problem region" that Delhi cannot let fester for much longer. The latest drama unfolded following the agreement in Bangkok on 14 June this year, between New Delhi and the Naga militant group, the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah). Under this agreement the four-year-old ceasefire has been extended by one more year and several thousand square kilometres. This provoked disquiet in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and most importantly Manipur, which saw the agreement as the beginning of New Delhi's recognition of the concept of Nagalim or Greater Nagaland, which has been a long-standing NSCN demand. Manipur saw the strongest protest because it has four Naga-dominated districts—Senapati, Tamenglong, Ukhrul and Chandel. The final word on the pact is yet to be heard, although Home Minister L.K. Advani made an unilateral announcement that the ceasefire would be withdrawn from the states other than Nagaland (*see* Ram Narayan Kumar's "Nagaland: Lessons of the Past", p. 30). In the face of this, the Nagas themselves have shown welcome restraint. The reaction of the neighbouring states shows not only the Indian government, but also the Nagas themselves, how enormously complicated a matter it is, this demand for statehood, autonomy or whatever, when the demography on the ground is even slightly murky. The sudden explosion in Manipur will hopefully force the insurgents all over the Northeast to look at their own demands and try and gauge how far they are feasible on the ground.

The Agra Summit helped heap unprecedented attention on Kashmir, which has not benefited, and continues to burn. The chances of a political settlement seem slim, and the militants from across the border are if anything more inclined to violence as the Indian government recently gave more powers to the security forces in

the state under the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act (1990). This security blanket now also includes Jammu, and the Act could see an escalation in human rights violations by the state in this most continuously troubled corner of South Asia since 1947.

A related matter, fast on the heels of this J&K announcement, Home Minister Advani made a public statement regarding amnesty to the police, paramilitary and army men accused of violations of human rights. The minister also talked of bringing in an anti-terrorist law on the lines of the lapsed Terrorists and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA). This string of decisions will, to say the least, further alienate the Kashmiris from the Indian state, while also having ramifications elsewhere. The BJP-led NDA combine is turning back the clock in quintessentially short-term measures which do not tackle underlying issues of identity and state violence.

The southern state of Tamil Nadu, recently witness to a form of comical politics on the basis of which the retributive and whimsical Jayalalithaa is back at its helm, is seeing a dance of state vis-à-vis centre which is the other larger trend worth watching in the India that does not face insurgencies. Days after assuming power, Jayalalithaa locked up former chief minister Karunanidhi, in the city jail. Karunanidhi's party is one of the partners at the centre, and as we go to press, the chief minister is spoiling for a fight with the centre to rally forces around her and divert attention from the pending criminal charges against her. There are current and potential centre-state problems all over, which tend to get the short-shrift in the fire-fighting that characterises Indian politics.

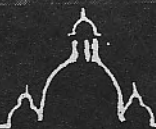
In the elections to several state legislatures a few months ago, the BJP and its allies received a severe drubbing. Fault-lines have already appeared within the alliance, and party managers are more preoccupied with saving the government than getting it to perform. Considering that it required a threat of resignation by the prime minister to get one of its allies to toe the line, it remains a matter of conjecture as to how long the government survives the burden of its internal contradictions and tensions. The autumn season should be an interesting time for Indian politics. ▽

The future of Bangladesh does not rest in the animosity between Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, but who will tell them that?

KATHMANDU, I WILL

A Lahori let loose in the Nepali cap

text and pictures by Farjad Nabi



COME BACK TO YOU

al.



Picturising Kathmandu town from lovers' lookout.

Lahore:

The bell rings. It is Suqrat. He is here for advice.

"I am going to Kathmandu, give me advice."

I look at him, sizing his desperation. "Karachi to Kathmandu. Sit on the left. Window seat." He thanks me and leaves. I am the wise one, people come from all over for my advice...

Kimdol:

Outskirts of Kathmandu. At the feet of the great Swaymbunath. I am amidst Tibetans matriarchs spinning their prayer wheels, clockwise. Everything is clockwise here. The mo mos are closed with a clockwise twirl. The tea is stirred clockwise. Eyes are rolled clockwise.

This is TCR, Tourist Corner Restaurant to you, which is not on a corner. Raju is looking cool in his U2 T-shirt, he's playing Jim Morrison. Some locals are savouring their *thukpas* on the next table. I am sipping my veggie soup and staring at the posters on the wall. The panoramic sweep of the Annapurna range. The walls are pastel green. A German couple enters and suddenly the quietness explodes in a barrage of "Ya ya", "Ya ya". The woman laughs at her own jokes like a doll on batteries. The man, it seems achieved enlightenment a long time ago but then it got lost in his hair or beard. He wears a lost expression. Ye shall find it. Ya ya.

Raju's mates are here and the card game is on over whisky. It is still afternoon.

"What are you doing in Nepal?" he asks absentmindedly, eyes fixed on his cards, "trekking...visiting... sight seeing...?"

"...Thinking..." I say after a pause.

A nod of the head which says, 'Of course, naturally, I know what you mean'. What other city can give such a weird answer such understanding? The *thukpa* is yet to arrive. I look out of the window towards the Kimdol centre. The women

Essay



are perennially drying their hair, sweeping the front steps, filling up water. The ubiquitous dog is lazing in the sun. The rooster is strutting. The hairdresser is dozing.

Suddenly the front door is wrenched open and a scruffy white man blurts in a French tone "CNN?" Raju has to oblige and grudgingly flicks the channel from the laidback cricket test between England and Pakistan, to the latest typhoon about to hit some one-horse town in the land of the free. The nasal correspondent is calculating the damage in millions of dollars. "Thank you Marty, we'll catch up with you later."

The Frenchman watches this news as if his life depends on it, and maybe it does, but when he sits through the ensuing basketball scores and list of hotels showing CNN with the same wild eyed raptness, I suspect something amiss. The monsieur fin-

ishes his tea and leaves. The locals exchange bemused glances, shakes of the head, smiles and a laugh—foreigners.

We flick back to cricket. *The Kathmandu Post* is full of news about Pakistan and India; a committee has been formed to organise celebrations for King Birendra's birthday; a survey has asked what you'd like to be considered, sexy or smart. Cindy Crawford says smart, Jennifer Lopez says sexy. More news. Nepali boys are providing sex to tourists. A 30-something Belgian lady has been interviewed in this connection. "They are sensitive and look me in the eye when I talk to them," she is reported to have said.

The remote control has ended up with one of the young monks, in their maroon robes and shaven heads. Flick, flick—Mithun Chakraborty, pause, two rhinos copulating, a motorcycle crashing—flick—Karishma Kapoor in white tights—pause (guilty one)—flick, flick, flick—Robbie Williams, CNN weather, a wrestling match, the habits of the spider monkey—flick, flick...

Stop man, correction, stop monk. This fickle flicking. You're supposed to know all about stillness and patience and watching time go by and detachment, I shout in my head.

A monk with a remote is a dangerous monk. He will fill up all the emptiness and shatter all the stillness that you have garnered over the years with a few fickle flicks.



On my sun-washed terrace I'm having a *sangtra*, very slowly. Serendipity takes you to the books left by others in rooms and my lot has been *The Naked Ape*.

"I love you, I love myself," rises the voice. "Peaceful valley, shakti radio, HBC 94.7 FM". The messages are supposed to work subliminally. Supposed to. We are soon to be reminded that this technique isn't very effective by a certain unknowing film star called Hrithik Roshan and much later, by a berserk crown prince.

I go down and I'm out. Kimdol is a microcosm. Tibetan prayer flags flutter languidly setting afloat free prayers for everyone as far as the breeze carries the words. I walk down to the square. On one side is Sudhir the hairdresser's shop, opposite a butcher's with expectant dogs a picture of patience outside. The D.S. Cold Corner offers cold drinks and film editing facilities.

A monk with a remote is a dangerous monk.



A few general stores and a beauty parlour signboard with a painting of a beautiful woman who looks like Oscar Wilde. A new shop has sprouted, "Email, Hotmail and Plastic Flowers" proclaims the sign outside.

Inside, incense fills the cyber space. A woman is talking to her in-laws in the U.S over the internet telephone. Yes, it really is plastic flowers our young entrepreneur is selling. A bouquet for NR 150. I wish him luck and walk on.

Taxis. I get one, a green Maruti which sputters, and wait for the question: "Where you from?"

"You tell me," its like an auto reply function.

"Errr... India?"

"Nope."

"Errr... where?"

So I tell him and watch his face to see it lit up by a smile and sure it comes right on. Why are taxi drivers in South Asia pleased when you tell them that you are from Pakistan? Be it Kathmandu, Colombo and yes hard to believe, even Dhaka. Is it part of some SAARC resolution?

Over time I have figured out this. Taxi drivers in South Asia are happy to hear that you're Pakistani because:

a) You're not Indian.

b) You're not Indian.

"Pakistanis very good," gushes the Maruti driver. I nod sagely as we unconsciously switch into a mixture of English and filmi Hindi, the lingua franca of the Subcontinent.

"One man from Pakistan sat in my taxi and said, 'Bahadur I want a girl', so I arranged a girl for him, young and beautiful. Then they go for lunch and send me a beer outside. Very good man. Then I took him to Nagarkot for one night with the girl and he gave me one thousand rupees. Very good man. Would you like me to arrange a girl? Bahadur is no pimp but it can be arranged."

Bahadur I'm sorry, you're no pimp but I'm not a very good man.



Bahadur's taxi has taken me through Dhalko, past Sunshine laundry, past the wholesale woman on whom I have a wholesale crush, past the "Vote for Sun" wall chalking and past the leaning house bolstered up by wooden beams. My meeting point is Naradevi, which I later found out is the temple of Kali.

He was supposed to be here ages ago. I watch children in grey uniforms go by.



A young Buddhist monk appears clutching a piece of paper and looking lost. He drifts towards me and without uttering a word, hands me the paper. On the paper is a curse that two thirds of our people face at least once in their lives—an address and directions written in English.

My Nepali, Hindi and Punjabi fail spectacularly in the first 35 seconds. I don't manage in showing him the way, but I do manage in attracting a small crowd. Finally someone suggests in rapid Tibetan that he should start with taking a right and the rest will take care of itself. The crowd disperses and I heave a sigh of relief and return him the cursed paper. That's when the monk looks me straight in the eye and says with an effort:

"You are a kind man," and melts back into the crowd.

Still reeling from the simplicity of these

Why are taxi drivers in South Asia pleased when you tell them that you are from Pakistan?



Motorcycles in Kathmandu have attitude.

five words, I see Kiran appear like a ray of the sun. He kicks his Bajaj and his Bajaj kicks him back and we're on our way. Motorcycles in Kathmandu have attitude. Chinese and South Korean, sleek angry machines which growl and prowl weaving in and out of the cycle rickshaws and the popcorn sellers. Girls hug their men who are also growling and prowling. Two helmets in love. A closer look and it turns out that the intimidating machines are actually 125 cc domestichearted two wheelers and won't climb the Swayambhu uphill even if you swore at them in Chinese or South Korean. Same goes for the drivers.

On to the promise of a place called Jatra, which lies in Sat Ghoomti, a peaceful nook of Thamel. Jatra is inconspicuous and un-

assuming, an old house with secrets inside. The secret we are to unravel tonight has come all the way from Mustang—apple and peach brandy.

Amit Gurung is here. He's got the guitar and he plays *O Zindagani*. He's from Nepathya, I am told, a very famous band and Amit is an icon himself. I wouldn't have known, for his ego isn't showing. The guitar is passed on and now Manod is playing it. How come every other guy in this city can play the friggin' guitar?

Alok has just become a father and everyone's congratulating him. Before Jatra, he and his partners almost bought a petrol station. Someone puts on Abba and the rest follows.



The whole place is lit up with oil lamps, they line the walls of terraces and rooftops. The drone of prayers carries across from the monasteries.

"So what's going on here?" asks Kiran puzzled, as he is dropping me off in Kimdol. "It's the Dalai Lama's birthday, of course," I say almost scoldingly and walk away almost in a huff. Down the road to home a pack of playfully hostile dogs joins me as an escort.

Behind my back I can feel Kiran sheepishly kicking his Bajaj.



The bassist was singing *Wish You Were Here*, as if he meant it. This is the band Criss Cross and we're at the washed out party of Deependra Gauchan and his brigade of 20-somethings. The struggling bonfire is trying to infuse half a hope into the half optimistic revellers, but the spirit has been dampened. The song has ended and the earnest bassist comes up to me.

"I was singing that for our former guitarist. He died of drug abuse."

"I know."

"You're Muslim."

"I know."

"So am I," he flashes a guilty look at the beer in his hand. "But I only drink beer not whisky." Oh, this sounds interesting.

"Why is that?"

"Because I'm only half Muslim".

I don't recall, if his father was the Muslim or his mother or one of the grandparents, but this young man was definitely 50 percent Muslim and therefore 50 percent alcohol proof. I was in half a mind to suggest that he should stop inhaling when he



smoked, but let it go. Who says an identity crisis can't be sorted out.

Deependra comes in. He wants me to stop being such a bore and dance. I assure him that I was already at it, just that he is just too drunk to notice. He looks unsure but doesn't press me anymore. This is the man who fronted Kathmandu's consciousness band, The Naked Truth, long years ago. These boys were rebels, they wouldn't stop short of a revolution. One fine morning they upped the heat and did away with the 'Truth', becoming simply The Naked but the revolution still did not arrive. If they were still around, they'd be called The Knackered.

Deependra is still a live wire but already many of his sentences are beginning with, "When we were your age..." as he exhorts his apolitical and apathetic brood of media boys and girls. Let it go Deependra, these kids are 50 percent gone.

Manod comes and drags me to the dance floor. I can't demur because Manod has seven brothers and each one's name begins with an 'M'. It's a rooftop. I can see the jail.

■■■■

In the taxi going home, Kantipur FM comes through crystalline. The subject of the discussion in progress is "Plastic bags: good or bad". Callers are giving their opinions.

"I think plastic bags are bad," says Ramyata.

"Cool, Ramyata," chuckles the D.J. in his yankee twang, "Why do ya think so?"

"Because ummm, they get, ummm, stuck."

"Yeah, right on," gushes the yank. "Who you wanna give a shout out to?"

"To Himani, my bestest friend."

"Anything special?"

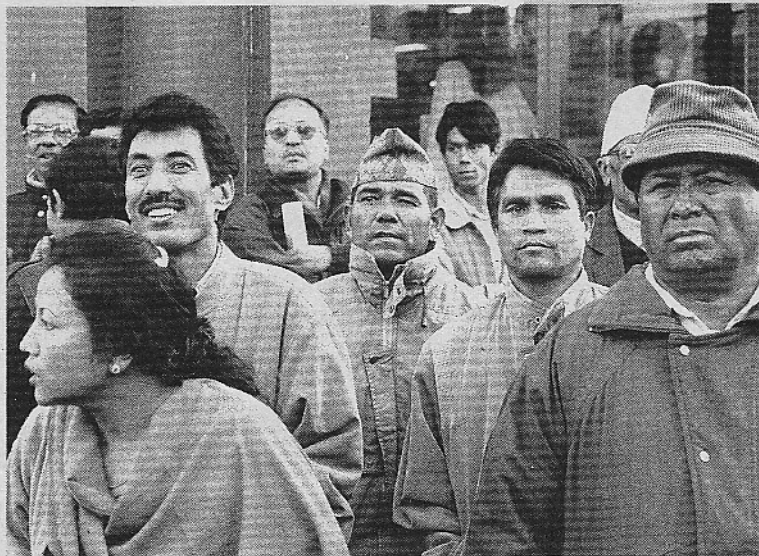
"Oops... I did it again."

"You got it," and he laughs the universal fake laugh of all FM DJs. And as Britney Spears started lamenting that she had done it again, the desperation of the taxi driver finally peaked, he turned down the radio and turned around to me:

"Where you from?"

■■■■

U.G. is Bhutanese. Not only that, he is illegal. Not only that he used to be a monk in Bhutan. And not only that when he arrived in Kathmandu he traded his robes for a leather jacket and partied for two years



Kathmandu crowd watching Hrithik effigy hang.

straight. U.G. works at his uncle's antiques shop but his ambition in life is to go to New York and drive a cab. He goes bright red by the third drink.

Alka is looking bored behind the bar, Kishna and his mates are having a mini party on the house, as it is Kishna's joint; the almost-always deserted Classic Bar & Restaurant.

U.G. is with friends, Naresh, Manoj and Sunil. They are drinking Tibetan beer and local whisky to celebrate U.G.'s first date with a girl he has been wooing. It is only a matter of time when U.G.'s red-faced entreaties draw me into their magic circle, "just for five minutes".

"So what do you think of Nepali girls?"

"I think they are beautiful."

"I think Pakistani girls are beautiful."

We both nod sagely. "Where have you seen them?"

"What?"

"Pakistani girls."

"On television."

"Of course."

"I think Nepali and Pakistani girls are the most beautiful in South Asia."

"That is so true."

"There are 18 beautiful girls in India and all of them are in the film industry. The rest are like, like"... he was struggling... "mathematics students."

"Yes, but they are better to talk to than Pakistani girls," I venture.

"Who wants to talk yar?"

Silly me. Of course, who wants to talk.

"I once went out with a Muslim girl," Sunil.

"How was it?"

There are 18 beautiful girls in India and all of them are in the film industry.

While all twinkling hell was breaking loose in the anti-India wave, trust only a Sikh to keep his business open.

"Very hard."

"I went out with a Sikh girl," Naresh.

"You know what I like about Nepali girls?" I hear myself saying.

"When they are wearing jeans, they are in the jeans. Like the jeans become them and it, the whole Western aesthetic just... just... goes with their hairdos and footwear and eyes... you know."

Everyone nods philosophically. They have no idea what I'm going on about. Neither do I.

"Whereas when a Pakistani or an Indian girl wears jeans, it looks like they are wearing jeans. Something outside of themselves. They don't become it."

This is getting thicker. I am waiting for the goddess of political correctness to send forth a bolt of lightning any time. In the meantime...

"But you know what?" We all turn to Amit who has emerged from behind *The Kathmandu Post*.

"What?"

"Princess Anne looks like a man."

"Masculine," calls out Alka from behind the bar. "You should say 'masculine'."

"Yes, right, 'masculine,'" agrees Amit, "like a man."

This is hopeless.

■■■■

Outside on New Road, there is trouble. The Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan, who my friends believe to have evolved from a mule, lookwise strictly, has offended Nepali sensibilities by allegedly saying something as stupid as, 'I hate all Nepalis'.

The beauty of it all is that he is supposed to have said this two weeks ago. And as it later turned out, he didn't say it at all. This morning I had been one of the bemused on-

lookers as a group of young men assembled an effigy of Hrithik. Fat housewives wrapped in saris cackled and little kids looked in puzzlement at the sight. This motley assembly of the morning had given way to a grim and grave mob by evening. Is it Hrithik's effigy they are burning?

New Road with its flash of electronic goods and fat Indian seths is closed. Shutters down. Lights off. I go close to the bonfire, on a wall close by a handmade placard addressed to Mr. Roshan explains painstakingly how the superstar has so much in common with a dog, especially a dog in the act of fornication. There is an attempt at explaining this rather convoluted connection visually as well but it makes things even more complicated. In the flickering firelight I can make out the words: "Your eyes are like twinkling testicles."

Hmmm....

While all twinkling hell was breaking loose in the anti-India wave that swept Kathmandu that night, trust only a Sikh to keep his business open. The Sher-e-Punjab restaurant with its Coca Cola sponsored neon sign, was trying to live upto its name. 'The Lion of Punjab' was braver than the clock- and camera-selling merchants, well half as brave at least, as it kept half a shutter open.

Inside, the telly is showing a cricket match between South Africa and Zimbabwe accompanied by the sound of swearing in Punjabi. I'm very much at home. One look at the menu and my mouth waters, daal with aachaar and roti and raaita. The sardarji behind the counter is curious as he sees me fall on the food. Punjabi flows freely across the divide between us.

"So what have you been eating around here?" he finally pops the question.

"Mo mos."

A flash of pain crosses his face. "Mo mo?" he blurts the word out in distaste, nose wrinkled. What he actually means to say is "Why?" Disapproval. If a man is known by the company he keeps, a Punjabi is known by the food he eats. The Sardarji at the adjoining table gets up and comes over.

"You from Lahore? I'm from Jammu. Professor of Geography at the University. These are my students, we're here for New Year's, and this is my family." A sweep of the hand, a wife with shopping in her eyes, two children with glazed eyes transfixed by the cricket of the day.

The group of young boys who are here



for New Year's is eating in silence. Sher-e-Punjab teases them in the typical Punjabi *juggat* or one-liners, "Whoever is feeling scared should have an extra roti." I laugh despite myself. "So what do you do?"

"I'm a *patakar*." My Hindi has become polished.

"Oh which paper do you write for?"

"*The News on Sunday*, sometimes."

"English?"

I look at the professor and try to fathom the geography of this question. But in the end it is just a Sardar thing. I get an update on the politics of Kashmir and he on our general. Kathmandu magic again. Where else can Indian and a Pakistani discuss Kashmir in Punjabi, while watching Gary Kirsten bat, with angry Nepalis demonstrating outside?

The shutter of Sher-e-Punjab is like a half cocked gun. Down at any second. Suddenly I'm not a Pakistani anymore. How can anyone tell? The irony of the situation is too fantastic. Some 50 years ago my grandparents were huddling in their homes scared of Sikh mobs and now in another time and place I am huddling *with* the Sikhs, in this scene straight out of Partition.

■■■

On the way out, I have to stop at J.S. Photos. This is the best place for black&white prints. Uma has led me here and I keep coming back. "Namaste Salik bhai." Salik is a Muslim name, 'namaste' has not much to do with Islam and neither does Salik himself. He is a Shrestha. Out of the nine or so men I have acquired a nodding acquaintance with since my arrival, four are Shresthas. A low-intensity terrorist act in Nepal could consist of going to the cinema, a jam packed hall, much like at our friend's blockbuster *Kaho Na Pyar Hai*, before it got chucked out of Kathmandu cinemas, and in the middle of the film yell out, "Mr. Shrestha your house is on fire!" A mini stampede is guaranteed.

On the other hand, I'm in half a mind to stumble into a Tibetan chai shop and collapse on the floor with the words, "Tsering, I love you." It would leave all the men red faced and every other woman blushing. And the one person who would not be called Tsering, would not be a Tibetan. Salik bhai hands me the photos. I say goodbye and walk straight into a wedding band. I bounce back into the shop. "A Marwari's wedding," says Salik bhai wryly with an undertone the connotation of



which I can only guess at. Every community has their Marwaris, rich and bloated traders, who're always complaining how bad the business is.

The bridegroom seems malnourished. Women decked in gold waddle around, men in awkwardly fitted suits follow the brass band listlessly. Boy, weddings are the same everywhere.

When the procession is past, I make my way towards the budget tourist quarter. Past the allegedly yak wool shawls I head towards Thamel. On the way the Chhetrapati bandstand, Thahiti with the Mona Lisa music shop. Years ago we had rented motorbikes from here and gone to Nagarkot. A little detour at Jyatha and into the obscure little shop in a cove for my annual visit. This is where I have returned over the years to buy hand-drawn images of mandalas and mythological animals with no names.

Where else can Indian and a Pakistani discuss Kashmir in Punjabi, while watching Gary Kirsten bat, with angry Nepalis demonstrating outside?





As soon as I start hearing revoltingly sugar-coated 'Namastes' and groveling bows and smiles, I know I'm in Thamel.

"You're from Pakistan," says the shop owner who is also the artist. For the first time, someone has it right and I am relieved. "You work for TV," he adds. I'm surprised at how much he remembers and kick myself for not even remembering his name.

He's been at work at some new images. It is a tough choice and as always I agonise and oscillate. Finally I decide on a dragon and he gives me a generous discount.

"Because I'm your regular customer," I beam self-congratulatingly.

"No, because you're my neighbour," he states matter of factly.

We say goodbyes and I'm back on the main road, eyeing rice paper calendars and herbal teas. Yes, I remember now. His last name is Chitrakar.

"Monkey Temple sir, Monkey Temple, I'll show you," a young guide latches on to me. This derogatory name for dumb tourists never fails to raise my ire. "It's called Swayambunath!" I feel like hollering in his face, but just holler inside my head instead and walk on. As soon as I start hearing revoltingly sugar-coated 'Namastes' and grovelling bows and smiles, I know I'm in Thamel. I think of Madhu and how this anti-Bombay sweetness got on her nerves.

"Hash, sir!" a passing form murmurs. Oh no, I hadn't shaved or combed my hair, and I walk in a daze normally, so it was going to be a bad day. Another one, 'Smoke sir, very good hash, right here I have.' Shake of the head, polite 'no'. By the fifth or sixth approach I had had it. "Hash?! What?! You're selling HASH?!!" That did the trick, the pusher slunk off.



It is only the next morning I realise how close things had been or how far they had gone. Two people dead, one little girl playing at home. Stray bullet by the trigger happy Nepali police. I am angry and disgusted. Everyone is talking about it. Raju, Sudhir, Bishnu, Didi. I detect a sense of surprise in the atmosphere, an unfamiliar fear. Then I realise that unlike my violence-immune Pakistani self, my Nepali hosts are not used to people dying easily and unnecessarily.

To get my mind off the events I go into "Email, Hotmail and Plastic Flowers". Nur Jehan is dead, long live Nur Jehan; Clare is in Australia; Huma has had another baby boy; A friend from BBC radio wants a first-hand account of what he calls a contradictions in terms—"Nepali anger". "What is Hri-thick Roshan upto?" he has written. I type back.

'Nothing, it's just a twinkling thing, you won't understand.'



The sun is bright; the day is crisp and friendly and does not judge me, just like Kathmandu... or do I speak too soon. It's the day after the violence, a bandh is in force. The roads are empty, people stroll down the middle with families. I see Manisha lounging about in her night clothes with friends, Alka is learning to drive the motorbike. I walk through Tahachal into Chhauni, the cantonment area, where soldiers are returning from home leave. This area is green and peaceful, the National Museum is close by. If you visit you can see a cannon used in the war of 1857 against the British, a whale bone and half a tiger sticking out of a wall. And that is exactly what it is, half a tiger, sawed off at the waist and stuck onto a wall. I checked the other side of the wall to see if the tiger made it through but there was nothing.

This is a rich area so perhaps that's why Sri Rajneesh's ashram is housed here. It has a closed and austere face, unwelcoming. Backroads take me to Kalimati where I hang out on the footbridge with the chicken and vegetable vendors, down below pigs are feeding off the filth in the river, or what used to be one. The Bagmati is an open sewer now.

I stroll around aimlessly. In one corner elderly men are having a very competitive game of marbles with their grandchildren. Onlookers are family and friends who pass jokes and taunts, egging the players on.

Where has this Kathmandu been? Strikes are good to remind us of our purpose on earth, i.e. play marbles with the young ones. Something hits me on the back of the head, I swivel around. It's a wild berry, now rolling away on the pavement. I glower at the giggling girl selling tomatoes on the ground, but she's not the guilty party.

A sarcastic voice from behind me calls out, "Khan Market, Khan Market." Oh I see. I'm a Dehliite. My list of suspects narrows down to a gang of boys sitting on the bridge rail and I try to stare them down but blink first. Brother, if only you knew what I would have to go through to get to Khan Market.

With my idyllic vision of the pacifist Nepalis lying cracked with the berry, I walk up to Maru Tole ("...this is where travellers used to rest on their journeys..." a guide says breathlessly to a tourist aunty and they both hurry past a wooden structure). A few more steps and the panorama of the Kathmandu Durbar Square unfurls dramatically.

■■■

Time for tea. Naresh, Sunil, U.G. and Amit are already at the Classic. From the window we can see the hawkers of Basantapur square. Antiques, curios, blackened by shoe polish, brightened by tooth powder, burnt, new stuff paraded for the tourists.

"Japanese tourists are like ants," Naresh is explaining. He should know, he runs an antiques shop. "They all go where one goes, all do what one does." Tell me more Naresh. He launches into his routine of *The Nepali Guide* with a group of Japanese tourists.

"This is the temple of Shiv," he says in the Nepali guide voice. "Cleek, cleek, cleek," he clicks the cameras in Japanese with a Japanese face.

"This is the Royal Palace." The invisible cameras whirl to the right, "Cleek, cleek, cleek."

"This is my grandmother." "Cleek, cleek, cleek." The square is wrapping itself up and the burgundy of its brick floor is revealed.

If there is any intermingling of myths, it is in this very place. Gods are manufactured at will, new masks, expressions and powers, the Tantrik god of wrath, the Kathmandu god of rains, this goddess, that consort.

Somehow talk has turned to religion, history, the whole lot. "Muslims were very cruel," Naresh expounds over his third whisky. "When they invaded India, they raped women and killed children." I stare



at my glass. Naresh has studied in a school in Amritsar, it's not his fault. My info on Hindus is not much different from my history school books. Out of the corner of my eye I can see the others exchanging nervous glances. I make as if nothing has happened.

Evening is falling. They're playing *No Woman, No Cry* on the stereo.

■■■

Madhusree is my friend from Bombay and she is feeling social. Bang in the middle of Thamel she starts chatting to a Kashmiri shop owner, a young man who looks tired and frightened. She listens to him intently as he pours out his travails of leaving home and coming to this place.

"There are people who are on your side," she assures him as he listens vacantly. I know what she's going to do next.

"You see this man?" No Madhu, don't do it. "He's a Pakistani and he's my friend." The Kashmiri's eyes widen.

"How can that be possible?" he finally

Strikes are good to remind us of our purpose on earth, i.e. play marbles with the young ones.

Kimdoi morning mist.



Essay



manages.

I shake hands with him and don't know what to say. On one side is Madhusree on the other myself and in the middle a Kashmiri immigrant selling carved wooden boxes to Israeli tourists. Oh Kathmandu.

"It's a fight between the two of you *aur beech mein maarey hum jaa rahay hain*," he says without any fight or accusation in him. Now even Madhu doesn't know what to say.

"Japanese tourists are like ants."

The Kashmiri exodus has turned to Kathmandu and they've become like migrant birds, going south in the off-season to Goa. Uprooted, the only trade they know is the tourist trade and there's a visible change taking place in Thamel. More shops with Muslim names, more shops with the number 786 written in Arabic numerals at the top of the entrance. Numerologically 786 translates into the Quranic verse read before beginning anything, *Bismillah ar Rahman ar Rahim*, "I begin in the name of Allah the most Benevolent the most Merciful."



■■■

We end up at Maya Cocktail Bar. Low key, low lights. Usually they play Miles Davis but tonight is Latino night so things are getting nautical. As it sometimes happens in this Jungian world of ours, I overhear the conversation of an old British couple at the adjacent table.

"The Kashmiri immigrants are on the rise, dear," observes the man as he sips his wine and looks out at the street below.

"Oh are they ever," agrees the woman.

Through the window I see Nightingale Book Club. I was there a few weeks ago. A young Japanese man was browsing through Japanese porn. Cleek, cleek, cleek and I'll send it to your mom.

"No thanks, I don't need a bag," I restrained the shopkeeper from putting my book in a Nightingale Book Club plastic bag.

"No solution to pollution without revolution," he declared with mock gravity. "Well said comrade, but don't despair, the revolution shall come one day," I assured him playing his game.

"Not in our lifetime, it won't." So I paid for Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* and came out. He was talking in Japanese when I left.

Disillusioned idealists are on the rise, dear. Oh are they ever.

■■■

Bhai Rattan. His shop is like nothing I have seen before. Sea shells, conches and all kinds of crustacean stuff line the shelves. One shelf rack is dedicated entirely to pebbles. What on earth is this all about, in landlocked Nepal?

"These items are sacred for the Buddhists, they use them in their prayers," Bhai Rattan enlightens me. He goes on to give me minute details about the levels of sacredness of a shell with a clockwise twirl and a one in an anti-clockwise twirl. By the end of it I'm in a twirl myself, clockwise. Bhai Rattan, who is not a Buddhist himself, brings the shells over from India and that's why he is quite articulate in Urdu. So after the formality of showing me the shop is done with, we come to the real business... tea and *gup shup*.

Between me shouting into his deaf ear and him wandering off from Urdu into Nepali, the two of us have an animated political debate on democracy in Pakistan and Nepal. Bhai Rattan has seen it all, a supporter of the late Nepali icon B.P Koirala, he

is bitter and disillusioned with the current circus being passed off as democracy in his country.

"Your Zulfiqar Bhutto, father of this Benazir," he says. "When he was hanged me and my friends protested on the roads."

"In Kathmandu?" I ask incredulously, but it's more of an exclamation than a question.

The image of a youngish Bhai Rattan chanting pro-Bhutto slogans on the streets of Kathmandu is beyond my apolitically hampered imagination.

I am humbled.



A brown dog curled up in the middle of the dirt road is asking to be photographed. Dogs sleep like cats in Kathmandu. On the steps of temples, in the middle of squares and roads, they curl up and doze. They come alive at night but compared to the level of aggression of their cousins in Lahore, they are a jolly lot. And why wouldn't they be? They are worshipped in this place for heavens sake. The Dog Puja day is a day which I have the fondest memories of. Dogs with garlands and tilaks on their forehead, being fed and washed and generally made to feel important. In Nepal every dog has his day. Every second home has a dog. And each of them has the same "Beware of Dog" sign which would lead you to believe that it is an Alsatian but it is not.

I think of the dogs in Lahore who are leading a dog's life. If you make eye contact with them they cower and slink by, expecting to be hit by a stone, and more often than not they are. It's a game for small kids and adults alike. And when its night and you run into a pack of them, boy are you in trouble. They are vindictive and vicious and it is very understandable.

What if the dogs of Lahore came to know of the dogs of Kathmandu? I wonder. "Rhubarb, rhubarb, rhubarb," excited yelps and corner meetings.

"...Kathmandu is the heaven..."

"...opportunities there..."

"...no discrimination..."

They would clamour for it. Clamouring for Nepali visas, learning how to bark in Nepali, "Immigrate to Nepal" would say the posters in every Lahore alley. "No need to know Java script." Entire packs would cross the Indian border at night to steal their way to Kathmandu. Those who would get across would sponsor the rest in Lahore. Some would be deported. Some would mar-



ry locally for nationality. Then they would have puppies not knowing if they are Nepali or Pakistani.

Dear Mom & Dad, I hope you are well, I am fine. Kathmandu is a wondrous city full of free food and dark alleys. I have already found a job, lying in the sun; My howling and growling prowess is coming in very handy here, as the local dogs are very soft spoken and easily pushed around. In fact in some areas our competition is with the monkeys. Can you believe it? Will call for you soon, woof. Moti.

"Ball!"—some kids playing cricket below in my direction. I pick it up and flick it back, almost causing a run out.

"You know cricket?"

"Of course."

"Where you from?"

"Pakistan."

"Pakistan..." think, think, think, "Your God Allah."

I rock back but recover quickly.

"Right. And your God?"

"His Holiness the Dalai Lama."

"Your English is very good."

"Thank you."

"Okay, see you."

"Bye bye."

Yes, the English of the young ones is good indeed but even otherwise I've had no communication hiccups at all. Laziness, or not feeling the need, my Salvation Army *Learn Nepali* book remains unopened. Usually Urdu with a few Hindi words thrown in works, if not, English is very widely understood. And when I get stuck for a word and all else fails, I very quickly learned to try a Punjabi one and many a time, it worked. Strange.

Even the names of Nepali months are exactly the same as those of the Punjab.

"No solution to pollution without revolution,"



“Where is Pakistan?”
 “You go to India and turn right.”

When I had reported this to Nazneen, my Pakistani friend who has adopted Kathmandu as home, her thoughts were similar; “Very strange,” she had said.

Perhaps it's not so surprising, as Buddhism itself once extended across the north of Punjab right into Afghanistan... as we've all been reminded recently.



I make my way up the small hill opposite Swayambunath. It's an unwinding path, a drunken boy stumbles by, up ahead I meet a broken beer bottle still foaming. There used to be a lake where Kathmandu stands. And one day the sage Manjushree took a boat-ride to a hill in the middle of the lake and ordered the construction of a magnificent stupa. This is where the Swayambunath now stands. On the way back, Manjushree stopped at another spot. That is where New York Pizza is now.

One last climb and I'm facing the flat grassy summit with what look like huge volcanic rocks minding their own business in the middle. Schoolchildren here as well. They're stealing smokes. On the edge, two lovers look across the city. The yellow building on the summit which I could see from my terrace is the Olix Ling Monastery and it regurgitates a clutch of tiny monks with freshly shaven heads. They play and gambol like children, which is what they are, but for some reason I expect them to be different, serious perhaps.

More and more to my horror I'm discovering how my eye of looking at my own people has become Westernised, and I haven't even read the *Lonely Planet* book yet. The little monks should be new for me, not exotic. The pair of lovers sitting on the edge is a different story though. That is as exotic as they come in Pakistan. Whenever I see a

couple in love, holding tight on the motorbike, in a bar, on a grassy hilltop holding hands, as if it's the most natural thing in the world, which it is, I curse Lahore. The most romantic city in the north of the Subcontinent and you cannot walk down the street or laze around in the sun and certainly not clutch your beloved on a motorbike... unless you are very foolhardy or belong to the same gender.

I sit against a volcanic rock, and watch an eaglet testing its control in the stiff breeze. Who did I give my copy of Jonathan Livingston *Seagull* to?

Patan:

I have to pick up some gifts. A poster of the panoramic snow mountain range including Everest and rice paper handbags. Suqrat has written from Lahore. His nieces have been squabbling over the bags he bought from Patan and he needs more.

I take solace in *The Walker's Guide to Patan*, a rare document.

“Kupondole: If Kathmandu is a jungle, this neck of the woods would be inhabited by developmental mammals.”

This is not very helpful is it. I rummage in my bag and fish out *The Flea Market Guidebook* and open it at random.

“Cows are sacred, they go and sleep where they want. Watch out for them, if you must stretch them out while sitting on the floor. Never step over anyone, and always move your feet to let people avoid stepping over you.”

Thank goodness I read this because I was planning to stretch the next cow I came across. Miffed, I stuff all the guide books back in the bag and step into Patan at random. “Badaam, badaam, badaam,” the vendor directs his spiel towards me. Hmm... almonds won't be a bad change. But as I move forward, it turns out that his ware is peanuts. Strange quirk of language has turned the Urdu/Hindi word for almonds into peanuts in Nepal. Well, okay, let's have peanuts then. Sitting in the sun, munching on peanuts, the most natural thing to chat about is if there is any work in Pakistan. The peanut man tries to convince me that he can cook and do goldsmith's work as well. I try to convince him that:

- a) There is no work in Pakistan.
- b) I do not own a factory.

However these inanities do little to put a damper on the conversation and we stumble along in broken Urdu, Hindi, Nepali,

Punjabi and body English. Which brings him to the next logical question:

"Where is Pakistan?" A valid question and not very simple to answer when, as I suspect, one is not too familiar with the world map.

"You go to India and turn right," I say hopefully.

"And where is America?" I try and then realise that it is futile.

"It's big," is all I can offer.

"Actually I want to be a waiter in Hong Kong," he confides. His cousin is already there and any day now he'll call him over. Wise choice.

"These peanuts are stale aren't they," I ask my man matter of factly.

"Yes, by a month at least," he answers with a sheepish grin and makes to return my five rupees.

Now that we have shared our life stories, dreams and geography, there can be no lies between us. There can be no reimbursements either.

■■■

Time to go.

Sitting at TCR again. Hardcore trekkers wolfing down food. Kantipur FM blaring Nepali songs. Raju playing cards and sipping whisky in the afternoon. Discovery Channel is showing a documentary on crows.

The Mao rebels have commandeered a helicopter. Dudley Moore's career is in doldrums. The taxi driver lugs my bags on to the back seat. It's a red Maruti, what we call Mehran in Pakistan. One last round of Kimdol before we head for the airport. Sudhir is giving a *maalish* in his hair salon which is as audible as it is revitalising. Schoolkids in blue sweaters returning from school. The dog and the rooster are basking in the sun side by side.

Bhai Rattan's shop is closed. The scrawl on the piece of cardboard says "For Sale". My idea of Kathmandu remains surface, but my love for the place runs much deeper... story of my life. The flyby ends and we're off on a tangent towards the airport. The topic of discussion is of course the riots and the taxi driver enlightens me as to how the whole game was a charade to destabilise the government of prime minister Koirala, "a very shrewd man".

"So what do you think will happen?" I ask him.

"I don't know, all I can say is that *sena sarkar* is the best for this country," he pro-

fesses. An ominous prediction—and when it comes from a taxi driver, you'd better take it seriously. We ride in silence past the Royal Palace.

"Where you from?"

"You tell me."

"Israel?"

Oh man. It really is time to go.

I turn to the radio for rescue and barge straight into Cat Stevens.

Kathmandu I'll soon be seeing you. And your strange bewildering times won't hold me down...

Lahore:

The bell rings. It is Suqrat. He is here for his bags and posters. A cup of tea, chit chat, this and that. I am prepared with a piece of advice in case he asks for one; "When eating popcorn, never make eye contact with a monkey." But there's no such request. He collects his gifts and gets up to leave. At the door, he pauses and turns around:

"Kathmandu to Pokhara. Sit on the right. Window seat."

Nevertheless, I remain the wise one. ▽

In Nepal
every dog
has his day.



The Indian State and the Madrasa

It is unfair to view madrasas as simply breeding grounds for secessionary forces. It is here the poor Muslim student atleast gets a semblance of education.

by *Yoginder Sikand*

Ever since the Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition assumed office at the Centre in India, there has been a spate of attacks on Muslim madrasas (religious schools), mosques and dargahs, in various parts of the country. Senior Hindutva leaders, within and outside the government, have issued statements alleging that the Pakistan secret service agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), has infiltrated numerous madrasas all over the country, particularly in districts along the country's borders with Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh. A detailed report of the Indian intelligence agencies claims that some of these madrasas are training grounds for ISI spies and anti-Indian 'terrorists'. The report goes on to suggest that the *muftis*, *maulvis* and *imams* in these religious schools may have been replaced by what it calls "highly fanatic agents of ISI", secretly working for the break-up of India. In May 2001, a ministerial group for the "reform of internal security" headed by Home Minister L.K. Advani, released a 137-page report that recommended, among other things, a close scrutiny of madrasas.

There is some evidence that the political rhetoric and high level recommendations are actually being translated into practice by the executive organs of the state. A recent report published in the Delhi-based Muslim fortnightly, *Milli Gazette*, quotes what it calls "a mischievous circular" issued by the Uttar Pradesh government that suggests that Hindutva elements are seriously preparing the ground for a "communal civil war" in the state. The circular, signed by Senior Superintendent of Police, Lucknow, BB Bakhshi, has been issued to the state police as a guideline on how to keep a vigil on "ISI activities". The circular says that ISI is "leaving no stone unturned" to disrupt life in the state, and is luring Muslim and Sikh youth "to involve them in subversive activities", besides also fanning anti-Hindu sentiments. The circular, reports the *Milli Gazette*, instructs the Station House Officer of every police station to "prepare a register of Muslim and Sikh families living in his respective area". In particular, a list of newly-constructed madrasas and mosques should be kept and

these are to be closely monitored.

Predictably, Muslim organisations have been quick to register their protest. The *Milli Gazette*, which sent a team to inspect several of the madrasas along the Nepal-India border being monitored by the police, reported that none of the dozen Muslim seminaries that the team visited had any association whatsoever with the ISI. In not one of these madrasas was any sort of physical instruction, leave alone military training, being imparted. The report adds that these madrasas have no history of provoking Hindu-Muslim conflict. In fact, one of them had several Hindu students and teachers on its rolls, while another had several regular Hindu donors. Official sources have so far failed to name the madrasas involved in ISI activities. Politicians, like the former UP chief minister, Ram Prakash Gupta, have not come out with anything concrete. The state's Director General of Police (DGP), Sriram Arun, while asserting that the ISI was active along the Indo-Nepal border, is said to have denied that madrasas were being used as hideouts. Likewise, the DGP of Rajasthan admitted that madrasas near the border areas are "neither centres of ISI nor have they ever participated till date in any anti-national activities". Clearly, the madrasas are being made to bear the brunt of a propaganda exercise.

There are several thousand Islamic schools spread all across India. Most mosques have a primary religious school or *maktab* attached to them, where Muslim children learn the *Qur'an* and the basics of their faith. For children who desire to specialise in religious studies and train as imams and maulvis, numerous large seminaries or madrasas exist, with each Muslim sect having its own chain of such institutions. For many poor families, madrasas are the only source of education for their children, since they charge no fees and provide free boarding and lodging to their students. Given what is said to be the dismal level of Muslim access to education, and the marked anti-Muslim bias that has been incorporated into the curricula of government schools, madrasas are often the only

available educational option for children from poor Muslim families. Madrasas have thus been playing an important role in promoting literacy among the Muslims, who have the dubious distinction of being, along with Dalits, the least educated community in India.

Historically too, madrasas have contributed to the national cause. Graduates from the madrasas as well as the founders of some of the leading Muslim seminaries in India played an important role in the struggle against the British, a fact that is conveniently ignored in India's school history text-books. Prominent ulama-led uprisings against the British in the 1857 revolt, and, for decades after, the reformist ulama kept aloft the banner of defiance in the Pathan borderlands till they were forcibly put down by the British. Madrasa teachers and students, such as Maulana Obaidullah Sindhi and Maulana Barkatullah Khan Bhopali were among the first Indians to demand complete freedom for India, at a time when Hindu and Muslim communalist groups were supporting the British. It is a fact, lost to those in the Hindutva crusade as well as the larger populace, that most madrasas vehemently opposed the Muslim League and its two-nation theory, insisting on a united India where people of different faiths could live in harmony.

This is not to suggest that all is well with the madrasas today. Many madrasas in Pakistan, for instance, have emerged as breeding grounds for self-styled jihadists, including the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba which wants to emancipate Kashmir. It appears that the experience of madrasas in Pakistan has fuelled the fear of madrasas in India, but clearly such a fear is misplaced as there is no evidence of Indian madrasas being actually involved in similar activities.

Instead of targeting the madrasas as potential sources of instability, a sensible Government of India could have used them, firstly, to improve education among the dejected Muslim classes. Further, the madrasas could even be used to help improve India's relations with Muslim countries and even to help influence the policies of countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan towards India. If the state had sought to work in tandem with these madrasas, instead of increasingly alienating them, they could even serve important foreign policy goals by helping to combat the radical appeal of the jihadist elements within Pakistan, while assuaging Muslim fears of a threat to their identity and their religious freedom in India. Indian madrasas, such as the Dar-ul 'Ulum at Deoband, the Mazahir-ul 'Ulum at Saharanpur and the Nadwat-ul 'Ulama at Lucknow, are widely respected all over the Muslim world. The Deoband school, in fact, is the largest madrasa in the whole of Asia and the second largest in the world. Many Muslims in neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh follow the precepts established by these madrasas.

Most critics of the madrasas have probably never visited a madrasa, and so much of what is said is pure hearsay. Yet, it may indeed be true that in some madrasas, students are taught to see all non-Muslims in far from flattering colours, as irredeemable infidels, as rebels against God doomed to perdition in Hell and so on. This understanding of the 'other' is actually something that they share with Hindutva militants, whose image of Muslims is no less lurid. A critical examination of the fiery rhetoric of the Lashkar-i-Tayyeba or the Students Islamic Movement of India, on the one hand, and groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal, on the other, reveal just how much they share in common despite their apparent differences—an undying hostility to democracy and secularism, an incurable allergy to pluralism, and an absolute lack of genuine tolerance for people of other faiths, to name just a few traits. The myth of an irreconcilable hostility between Hindus and Muslims is as central to radical Islamist agenda as it is to the Hindutva worldview. The targeting of the madrasas can only play into the hands of both Hindu as well as Islamic militants, and further reduce the receding prospects of Muslim-Hindu inter-faith dialogue—and, with it, the possibility of changing the way some madrasa students might be taught to look at people of other faiths.

If madrasas continue to be targeted, there seems little hope for them to be able to drag themselves out of the morass of educational redundancy they find themselves in. Alert teachers as well as students of madrasas are increasingly concerned with what they see as their outdated and increasingly irrelevant curriculum and methods of teaching. As a leading Indian Muslim social activist and intellectual, Nejatullah Siddiqui, writes in his recently-published Urdu work, *Dini Madaris: Masa'il Aur Taqazey* (Religious Madrasas: Problems and Prospects), there is a growing realisation among the Muslims of the pressing need for madrasas to reform their syllabi to enable their students to face the challenges of modern life and to evolve a more relevant understanding of their faith. But, many Muslims insist, this cannot be imposed by force. It is only in a climate of peace and security, when Muslims are free from what they might perceive to be threats to their faith and identity, that madrasas can begin a process of reform. Instigating attacks against them and fanning the flames of anti-Muslim terror will not only undermine the conditions for reform, but might even make the fear of militancy a self-fulfilling prophecy. The orchestrated campaign against the madrasas of India by extremist Hindu elements, and backed by the centre and state governments, must be seen as yet another assault on the rights of the Muslims and on institutions that are basic to the preservation and promotion of their faith and their sense of identity. ▽

General Musharraf's Roadmap A Khaki Constitution?

What kind of democracy does the military regime contemplate after the 2002 general elections? The military is a poor choice for political engineering.

by *Mushahid Hussain Sayed*

The much-awaited 'roadmap' regarding a timeframe for general elections announced by General Pervez Musharraf, tucked away almost as an aside in his long speech of 14 August, actually clarifies only two things. First, like his military predecessors, General Musharraf intends to be around for a long time, an intention apparent in the pronouncement regarding a 10-year schedule of development projects that he launched in the same speech. The symbolism of the occasion was captured in a somewhat graphic manner by the only chair in the centre of the large stage at the Convention Centre in Islamabad from where the President rose to make his address. Second, by the last day of the expiry of the Supreme Court mandate, i.e., 11 October 2002, the military regime plans to hold six different election exercises in a 10-day period beginning 1 October 2002, to the National Assembly, Senate and four provincial assemblies.

Some hardened cynics have likened the roadmap to that famous description of a bikini: "What it reveals is suggestive, but what it conceals is vital".

- a. The roadmap did not mention what type of elections are being planned, party or non-party, and only later was it officially clarified that the polls would be on party basis. The confusion arose because the local elections were also non-party, while General Zia-ul-Haq's 1985 general elections had precluded participation by political parties;
- b. The roadmap 'conceals' what kind of constitutional amendments are being envisaged, whether they will end up defacing the 1973 Constitution's parliamentary character;
- c. The roadmap 'conceals' the precise date and mode of transfer of power, relegating this key aspect to what is termed as 'Phase IV';
- d. The roadmap 'conceals' when political activities will be permitted to be active, as they were outlawed after the ban imposed ostensibly as a "temporary law and order" measure prior to then US president Bill Clinton's five-hour stopover in March 2000. (Officially it was later clarified that

these would be permitted 90 days before the polls.)

However, the most inexplicable part of the roadmap is the inordinately long time in the run-up to the general elections. There are 14 long months from the present to D-Day in October 2002. When president Clinton had pressed General Musharraf to give a roadmap in March 2000, the latter had declined on the plea that if a timeframe was provided that early on, "the bureaucracy will wait me out and nothing will get done in the meantime". But now, that is precisely what's going to happen, between August 2001 and October 2002.

Why do military regimes take so long to do the obvious, in the process adding to their problems and creating new headaches for the country?

- a. General Ziaul Haq announced a roadmap spread over 18 months beginning on 14 August 1983, and ending with the elections in March 1985, with a similar infatuation with phases starting with local polls followed by a non-party election with a mass agitation thrown in between;
- b. General Yahya Khan allowed almost a year for an election campaign through his roadmap, the Legal Framework Order (LFO), whose ambiguity contributed to the country's undoing;
- c. General Ayub Khan started his re-election campaign two years in advance under the garb of a year-long 'Decade of Development' meant to "educate the people about achievements" in that period, followed by presidential elections in the fall of 1969.

Meanwhile, General Musharraf's military regime laments the economy's refusal to revive, and wonder why the educated and the professionals continue to flee the country or why the bureaucracy is sitting pretty. The answer in the latter case is simple: they are trying to 'wait out' this interregnum in probably the officialdom's longest 'go-slow' period in Pakistan's history, which has even necessitated an unprecedented personal presidential 'love letter' to all serving civil servants of the DMG. Basically, a "we still need you, please cooperate with us" appeal; it has fallen on deaf ears.

The most critical question is what kind of democra-

cy will emerge as a result of the October 2002 polls: genuine parliamentary democracy, French-style dominant Presidency with a fairly-strong prime minister, a variation of the Turkish and Indonesian models, or a return to the Pakistani 1985 Ziaist model?

If indicators are anything to go by, Pakistan could end up with a structure that was originally envisaged in General Zia's March 1985 Restoration of Constitution Order (RCO) but which was shot down by the National Assembly after an intense 45-day debate. A khaki president, a khaki-tinted Constitution, a khaki-dominated National Security Council, a khaki-run accountability process that would also 'vet' politicians before they are permitted into the political arena, and a khaki-backed local government structure where the Army Monitoring Team will 'assist' each Nazim under a new more politically-correct nomenclature, i.e., District Support Team.

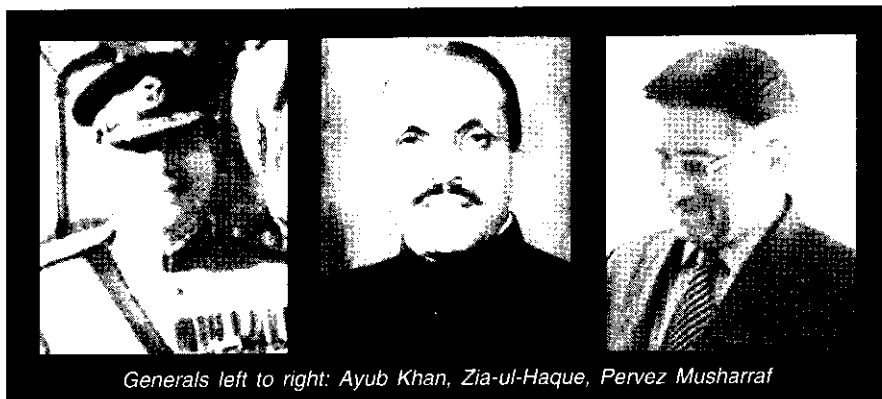
If this were to come to pass, with the clock being turned back to March 1985, if not to earlier times, then this would not be a new system of 'checks and balances', but rather a new experiment of quasi-democracy with an intrusive military and shades of Indonesia under General Suharto. In that case, not only would Pakistan's 1973 Constitution undergo radical 'reconstruction' but, equally importantly, the Mission Statement of the Pakistan Armed Forces would have to be altered, from "defending the country" to "governing the country", with both being full-time occupations.

In this context, it is instructive to examine the experience of Turkey, and Suharto's Indonesia. In both, the Army has had an intrusive presence in the political system and in neither, has the army been able to provide political and economic stability. After Suharto's Ayub Khan-style exit, stability there turned out to be a smokescreen, and the unravelling of the 'New Order' leaving in its wake a ruined economy, a polarised polity, a fractured state which was forced to concede independence to East Timor, and, from the military's point of view, the unkindest cut of all—the failure to destroy the political legacy of the person it had reviled the most for three decades, President Soekarno, whose daughter returned to office with popular support and the military's backing.

Turkey is another good example of failure in political engineering by the khaki. After three and a half coups, hanging of a prime minister, installation of a khaki-dominated National Security Council and the banning, three times over, of the Islamist Party under khaki prodding, what is the net result? The Islamist Party has now resurfaced under a new title, the Justice and Development Party, and its leader, Tayyab Er-

dogan, is by far Turkey's most popular leader according to opinion polls. He had been mayor of Istanbul where he ran an efficient and honest administration. As Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister, Masut Yilmaz, a Kemalist, has said, "in all democratic countries, politics determines national security, but in Turkey, national security determines politics". Moves are already afoot in Turkey to clip the military's political wings.

Indonesia and Turkey aside, Pakistan's own political past should be a good guide for the military regime. In 1985, General Zia was at the peak of his power, certainly more 'powerful' than General Musharraf is today. He had pulled off the hanging of Bhutto, he had survived the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy agitation, he had managed a successful and credible non-party election through a 52 percent turnout,



Generals left to right: Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haque, Pervez Musharraf

he presided over a booming economy courtesy the Afghan war, law and order was pretty much under control, and, above all, within the context of the dependency mindset of our ruling elite, he had enjoyed absolute, unwavering American support. Even when so comfortably placed, General Zia too was unable to impose decisions by diktat: within 48 hours of the National Assembly's convening, through a secret ballot, it rejected his choice of Speaker and forced him to alter his constitutional amendments, relating to the National Security Council.

Given such illuminating and relevant examples, the military regime of today's Pakistan has no alternative but to read history and learn from it. The goal should not be to enhance an individual or institution's unlimited power or accord it a status of permanent political primacy in the power structure. That will neither work nor will it last. General Pervez Musharraf should extend the offer that he repeatedly made to the Indian prime minister, to the political forces at home as well, to talk to him at "any time, anywhere and on any issue". This will help the military regime to reach out to the political forces, so that consultation leads to consensus on new 'rules of the game' that are vital for political stability. Only then will a 'new beginning' have really been made for a movement towards Pakistan's democratic destination, without detours.

Mediafile

THIS IS how absurd it can get. Some Calcuttans have gone ahead and built a temple for Amitabh Bachchan. The god, as you can see in the picture, is in coat and tie. That gives me an idea, maybe it's time to give all the



gods and goddesses a touch of modern haute couture. A Saraswati in a frock, and a Shiva in jeans. What would Hindutva say about that? And Hanuman with an M-16 instead of the mace.

FED UP of all these headlines—"Musharraf reiterates Pakistani position on Kashmir", "Vajpayee says Kashmir an integral part of India", etc. Now, that's just dog-bites-man news, editor sahebs and sahibas! Give me news, like man bites crocodile! Or, like, "Musharraf confirms Lashkar Ban" or "Vajpayee calls for Kashmir referendum".

WOW! HERE is proof that Druk Yul is surging ahead of the rest of us if you did not know that already. A Bhutanese movie has been rejected by that country's National Film and TV Review Board, because of its poor production quality. *Kuensel* quotes a board member as saying that the film's use of language, camera, sound, and editing were all so poor that the film could be exhibited only if the necessary improvements were made. Think of the Bollywood, Lollywood and Kollywood production that would be canned if they had film boards with the Druk spine!

ALL MY sympathies are with Indian undergraduate and postgraduate students, who will now have to put up with courses in Jyotishastra (Vedic astrology) and Karmakand (Brahmanic rituals). This is yet another instance of the foisting of obscurantist ideology on all and sundry. It seems that it is only the "only Hindu kingdom" where people do not have to wear religion on their sleeves. May the invisible line of the international border keep fundamentalist Hindu agenda firmly on the Uttar Pradesh side of the border.

CONGRATULATIONS TO Kathmandu's 85-year-old student Bal Bahadur Karki, more popularly known as "Writer Ba", for securing a first division in his school-leaving certificate (SLC) exam. Gran'pa now has his mind set on further studies: "I want to study arts, major English, economics and political science."

IT USED to be you subscribed to a publication because you wanted to read it. Those days are gone. Today we are more concerned about freebies that come with the subscription offer. In the case of the 137-year-old *Pioneer* daily, you are offered a *karahi* and a frying pan. This, from a paper that used to once upon a different era carry Winston Churchill's Boer War despatches and which had Rudyard Kipling on its staff. Such was life.

WHEN THE Bihar government has a website of its own, then you know Laloo's truncated kingdom has stopped snoring, is stirring, and may just wake up. But wait! This website is hardly meant for investment, for education, or for good governance. The Bihar website is but a tourist information page, aimed at Westerners interested in Buddhist places of worship. Well, it was a thought...

"AS HOURS ticked by yesterday, people throughout the country waited with bated breath for the final moment." What was it, this moment meant to grab the national attention? Nothing, just some editor in the late night shift in *The Independent* of Dhaka having a creative time of it. That, in fact, was how the paper described Parliament coming to a close after Sheikh Hasina finished a none-too-creditworthy five years in power. The headline was "The end comes at 9:35 at night". Looks like the editors sure were glad to see Madam go, and were eager to hammer the nail into the coffin.

TALKING OF haute couture, this one's a first. New Delhi's petrol pump attendants are now wearing de-



signer outfits, created by students of the capital's National Institute of Fashion Technology. The natty uniform is a blue T-shirt with an orange collar and an orange stripe across the chest, and blue trousers with an orange label. At least, this seems more worth it than all

the unwearable attire that is paraded in fashion shows meant for the tasteless.

THE NEWS daily from Islamabad is a good paper, but do they expect even the learned locals to understand all the abbreviations they use to fill up the headlines and text? Take *one day's* front page headlines, and this is not the complete list: "Irsa endorses Kalabagh Dam"; "SBP allows withdrawal of deposits from NFDC"; "Important Ecnec meeting today"; "LT leader among four killed in held Kashmir"; and "PTCL spends Rs. 400m on health care every year". Read, Irsa stands for Indus River System Authority; SBP, State Bank of Pakistan; NFDC, National Development Finance Corporation; Ecnec goes unexplained in the story; LT is for Lashkar-e-Tayba; and PTCL stands for Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited. Well, GIVL this DJOY.

OKAY, BRING up the Tehelka files please. Okay here... Now what's the latest? Okay. What is my take, you ask? Well, if it was right for the web magazine to give bribes for their sting, then it was okay to have employed prostitutes. Now if giving bribes was wrong, then 'pimping' was too. Plus, at least now Tehelka knows who its friends are in the media. The corporate broadsheets, so nicely bypassed by the pioneering electronic magazine, would not have easily forgiven Tejpal and his merry band. And, as it turned out, they did not.

NOW, TO go back to the Tehelka screen, remember what was most interesting about that handover of cash to Bangaru Laxman, then president of the BJP? There was this transparent glass writing-lectern through which the low-angled camera shot caught the money passing hands. Well what do you know, Jana Krishna-murthy is the new president. And I saw from a recent picture that that lectern *is still there!*

IT HAS been some 17 years since the massive gas tragedy in Bhopal took place on 2 December 1984. And the victims have not really been compensated, with legal procedures making them run around in circles. Many books have been written, some good and others really poor. The latest, *It Was Five Past Midnight*, by Dominique Lapierre of *Freedom and Midnight* and *City of Joy* fame. Well, he has just won big bucks in bagging the prestigious Prix Des Maisons De La Presse. So how 'bout some for the victims of the Methyl Isocyanate?

MEANWHILE, A book is out already on the royal mas-

sacre in Kathmandu, by the name *End of the Line: The Story of the Killings of the Royals in Nepal*, by AP correspondent Neelesh Misra. Shall reserve my comments till I get hold of it.

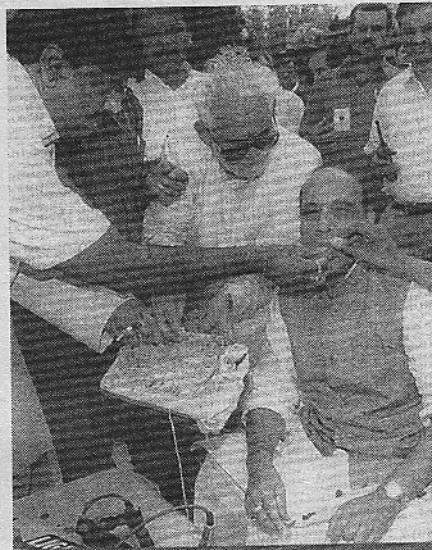
TELL ME it is not true, Your Holiness. Here I have it, a news item that the chairman of the UN Human Rights Commission presented a National Citizen's Award for 2001 to the Indian Oil Chairman, M.A. Pathan, in New Delhi. "Others who received the award for distinguished service in their chosen fields were Minister for Human Resources

Development Murli Manohar Joshi, Member of Parliament Somnath Chatterjee, ghazal singer Jagjit Singh and the Dalai Lama, among others." Now, has Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama, forgotten that he is head of state of a country called Tibet? Otherwise why would he stand in line behind Indian luminaries to receive an award? Further, he has hardly a "chosen field" as, remember, he is reincarnate lama where you are born into the position. It just does not behoove His Holiness to be shoulder to shoulder with obscurantist ministers and those who have made "outstanding contributions to the petroleum industry of India".

THERE'S SOMETHING so nauseating about the rituals of Uttar Pradesh politics. Here you can see the chief ministerial oral crevice being stuffed with sweets by his cronies, not for any grand electoral triumph, but for sacking one of his ministers.

HERE, I would like to make a deft turn to the narrative and talk sex. Not dirty. Just sex. It appears that British men and women spend almost 40 hours making love in bed (or elsewhere), with each lovemaking session lasting an average 21 minutes. Italians and Spanish love sessions span 14 and 15 minutes, respectively, while the Russians hold a record sex sessions, with the quickest quickies imaginable—all of four minutes a time! Fade to South Asia. Where would the land of the Kamasutra find itself? Unfortunately, methinks, the levels of sensuality have dipped precipitously since the days of Vatsyayan, and I would not be surprised if the average male-dominated sex session in this our very own Subcontinent is about three minutes. Anyone is free to challenge my estimate, but there it is.

—Chhetria Patrakar



NAGALAND

Lessons of the Past

by Ram Narayan Kumar

The ceasefire agreement between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Muivah), announced by prime minister IK Gujral on 24 July 1997, is more than four years old. The agreement promised to bring about a lasting political solution to this long-drawn-out conflict through unconditional dialogue at the highest political level to be conducted in a neutral country. A set of ground rules and modalities to implement them, finalised on 12 December 1997 and further revised on 13 January 2001, aimed to facilitate the negotiations on politically substantive issues that underlie the five decades' long war.

A number of basic questions occur even as we try to evaluate the agreement at the end of its four tumultuous years: What progress has the promise of dialogue made in this period? Is there sufficient transparency in the process? Have both the sides been observing the ground rules, in letter and spirit? Has the Ceasefire Monitoring Group, set up to supervise adherence to these ground rules and to investigate complaints of their violations, been functioning effectively? Has the ceasefire brought respite from the violence and unremitting harassments, that has been the Nagas' lot over the past 50 years? Do they feel sufficiently relieved to acquire a stake in its continuance?

A central problem of the ceasefire agreement was that it did not include revocation of draconian laws, such as the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1953,

Nagaland Security Regulation, 1962, Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, and Assam Disturbed Areas Act, 1955, which allow the security forces to violate fundamental rights with impunity on the pretext of countering insurgency. With such laws still in force the role of the army and the paramilitary during the operation of the ceasefire was never really clarified. Given that there was a civil administration functioning under normal constitutional law and a security administration operating under special laws, the subordination of the military to civil authority and the legal demarcation of respective roles was a precondition for the success of the ceasefire. This issue itself arose from the related question of the state government's role in a ceasefire agreement between the Union of India and an insurgent group in the state. How do its agencies go about their law and order functions without jeopardising the special terms of the agreement?

There were two other aspects of the situation crucial to the efficacy of the ceasefire. For one, the attitude of the other insurgent groups and factions involved in the long war with India, who have not been included in the agreement, is vital to the maintenance of peace. And to what extent are civil society organisations uncontaminated by the violence, involved in the process of finding a just peace? If the 1997 ceasefire was in limbo, it was precisely because the modalities of the agreement failed to address these fundamental issues.

But there were also other specif-



Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah.

ic grievances. In the four years since the peace process formally began, dialogue made no progress because the NSCN(IM) insisted on universal coverage of the ceasefire, which the Union Government had been unable to enforce after initially promising it. General Atem and P. Shimrang in Dimapur, two main representatives of the NSCN(IM) in the region, made it clear during discussions that unless the government of India kept its pledge there was no point in continuing with the ceasefire. On 8 May 2001, the Ministry of Home Affairs confirmed receiving an ultimatum from Isak Chishi Swu, chairman of the NSCN(IM) and Thuingaleng Muivah, its general secretary, threatening to withdraw from the peace-process if the government of India failed to honour its commitment to extend the cease-fire to "all the Naga areas". Seemingly, this threat had an effect.

On 20 May 2001, *The Indian Express* reported that the prime minister's representative was leaving for Bangkok for talks with the leaders of the NSCN(IM). The report also in-

dictated that the chief ministers of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the other states affected by the Naga question, had agreed to include the Naga-populated areas of their states within the ceasefire zone. One day before their scheduled meeting in Bangkok, the People's Front government in Manipur collapsed after being defeated in a confidence motion tabled by chief minister Radhabinod Kojiam. Kojiam belonged to the Samata Party, a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance running the Union Government. The state then came under President's rule. An editorial comment in *The Statesman* on 28 May 2001, indicated that the fall had been engineered to facilitate the extension of the Naga ceasefire to the Manipur areas since Kojiam's government was vociferously opposing it.

The negotiations in Bangkok yielded results. On 14 June 2001, the Union Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, announced that it has been agreed to extend the ceasefire for one more year without territorial limits. In response, a large number of Manipuri political groups including the Samata Party, Manipur People's Party, All Manipur United Clubs Organisation (AMUCO) and All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU) said that they were against the extension and would oppose it. The Congress chief minister of Assam also voiced the same sentiment. The ostensible concern was the territorial integrity of other Northeastern states since the NSCN(IM) was laying claim to the Naga-inhabited hill areas.

The Bangkok agreement was a belated recognition of the argument that the peace process, in order to be meaningful, had to be comprehensive, that its objectives could not be accomplished if the antagonists seek an accord in one state while remaining belligerent in other areas. The extension also suggested total abjuration of violence by both the sides and the restoration of a rational process to resolve political differences. It presupposed accountability, the end of impunity, and the

repeal of 'black laws' such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. In this sense, the June extension of the ceasefire opened the way to a just peace for all the people in the Northeast. But the violent agitation for its repeal in the other states has added a new twist to the process.

AMUCO and AMSU called for a three-day strike in Manipur to protest against the extension of the ceasefire. The popular agitation, although limited to the valley of Imphal, became extremely violent. On the third day of the strike, mobs stormed the government buildings and torched the State Assembly building after assaulting several legislators and former ministers. The police had to open fire to stop the unruly crowds from invading the house of Radhabinod Kojiam, the outgoing chief minister of the state. This resulted in several deaths. Despite the imposition of curfew, violent protests continued.

Naga organisations showed sensitivity to the emerging situation. The All Naga Students' Association of Manipur (ANSAM), the Naga Women's Union of Manipur (NWUM) and the Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights mourned the deaths in the police firing. They issued a statement appealing to all "Meitei brethren" and the Naga population in the state to "maintain communal harmony at this critical juncture". "The need of the hour is peace and dialogue among ourselves," the statement emphasised. Thuingaleng Muivah clarified that the agreement to a universal ceasefire with the Government of India "deals only with the ceasefire, nothing beyond that. The declaration of a ceasefire is not against anyone and it does not deal with territorial limits." He further explained, "We have agreed not to fight in any part of India or Asia or anywhere. There is no reason for anyone else to interpret it more than that." The Naga HoHo, the apex body of all Naga tribal councils, convened a special meeting to consider the situation. Its statement pointed out that the violent protests in Imphal Valley "revealed the ex-

tremely complicated and sensitive challenges the Nagas face to evolve a workable solution with our neighbours. Ultimately, we need a settlement that will ensure security, stability and peace for ourselves and for our neighbours. Our actions will decide whether we develop and survive together in a changing world or drag one another down to a common hell of perpetual animosity and violence, which can only be destructive to all." The statement called on the Nagas not to "ignore or treat lightly the intensity and depth of our neighbours' insecurity about their future", and went on to suggest that the leaders of both the communities should sit together and find a common approach to deal with the controversy.

These statements from the Naga organisations, however, did not mollify the protesters and the violent agitation continued. Thousands of Nagas fled Imphal Valley to the safety of the hills. On 27 July, the Home Minister of India told reporters that the government had decided to rescind the Bangkok agreement and to once again limit the ceasefire to the state of Nagaland. According to him, the leaders of NSCN(IM) were agreeable to the decision. The crowds in Imphal celebrated the announcement.

V.S. Atem, the seniormost leader of the NSCN(IM) in the region, issued a stern warning that his organisation "cannot be a party to any ceasefire that is restricted only to the State of Nagaland". He denied the home minister's claim that his organisation had endorsed the annulment of the extension. In a separate statement faxed to the Press Trust of India from Amsterdam, Swu and Muivah said that they have not agreed to the government's decision to rescind the 14 June Bangkok agreement. The statement said: "Of course, both sides believed that better understanding could certainly be arrived at in the course of talks... Therefore, any announcement, declaration or statement given by the Home Ministry are unfounded. They are in no sense acceptable to the Nagas."

Does the lay reader, who daily scans through newspapers and probably also watches television, understand why this trend of events is not favourable for the prospects of peace in the region? Does he or she sufficiently emphathise with our forebodings that history may repeat its vicious cycle unless civil society develops an informed aversion to its inveteracy and forges a collective will to break free? One needs to become aware of the content of Naga history because there is no other way of understanding the mechanisms and compulsions which, again and again, drive people back into blunder. History tells us of the evils of doctrinaire intransigence, and so too of the dangers inherent in compromises that are born of fear and greed, or foisted on unsuspecting people by stealth and deception. If repetition of our past tragedies is to be avoided, it is necessary to not only expose the falsehoods of the victors, but also puncture the myths of innocence that the vanquished all too easily develop to conceal their failings.

For the sake of learning from the past, let us briefly recount an episode from the 1960s. In May 1964, New Delhi constituted a Peace-Mission consisting of Jayaprakash Narayan, B.P. Chaliah, then chief minister of Assam, and Michael Scott, an English pastor sympathetic to the Nagas, and it worked out a ceasefire agreement between the Government of India and the Naga underground. The agreement was a prelude to political negotiations to peacefully resolve the conflict. While endorsing the principle of self-determination of all subject people, the Peace Mission suggested that the Naga underground could "on their own volition, decide to be a participant in the Union of India and mutually settle the terms and conditions for that purpose". The Mission asked Government of India "to consider to what extent the pattern and structure of the relationship between Nagaland and the Government of India should be adapted and recast, so as to satisfy the polit-

ical aspirations of all sections of Naga opinion..." Both the sides rejected the proposal. Members of Indian Parliament demanded Jayaprakash Narayan's arrest for suggesting that it was more important to have friendly Nagas "on our frontiers closely associated with us in some new constitutional manner rather than unfriendly and discontented Nagas kept forcibly within the Indian Union."

Jayaprakash Narayan resigned from the Peace Mission in February 1966 after the Naga underground expressed lack of confidence in his impartiality. The ceasefire agreement between the two recalcitrant parties was made to last till September 1972 because the logic of 'peaceful' attrition had taken over. Minoo R. Masani, the leader of a parliamentary delegation to Nagaland in February 1965, said: "As the weeks and months pass, peace brings with it a relaxation of tensions. This involves, insofar as the village population is concerned, a freer expression of opinion and a greater assertiveness against the demands and exactions of the (underground) 'Naga Federal Government'. Now that the Indian army no longer operates, the villages are turning to the state administration and the Indian army for protection against the underground. Fear is diminishing. People do not wish to pay taxes endlessly to the 'Naga Federal Government'... So far as the underground is concerned, a long period of peace must involve a measure of disintegration. The men from the jungles are going home to the villages to eat and sleep with their families. They taste the joys and comforts of domestic life. This is something that Mao Tsetung's rules of guerrilla warfare do not permit of. Those who have talked to small groups of Naga underground men find, in private conversation, that they are already becoming more reasonable and there is no desire to go back to the jungles..."

Even as the ceasefire agreement declared on 25 July 1997 is already four years old, and no substantive

progress has been made in negotiations, these words of complacency are being heard all over again. No doubt, the Naga people want peace and the men languishing in the jungles long for simple domestic pleasures.

However, if we do not reach the source of their discontent which brought them to the path of war with India, their political recalcitrance may soon reassert itself. As for the Naga warriors and their leaders, they will hopefully recognise what their movement at all its twists and turns, has been doing to their people. Those who waste themselves in the pursuit of utopias can probably contribute no more to history than others who apathetically resign themselves to a self-perpetuating status quo.

Bertrand Russel, the English philosopher and a well wisher of the Nagas who indirectly contributed to the formation of the Peace-Mission in 1964 by recommending it to Jawaharlal Nehru, introduced the concept of "compossibility" while discussing the idea of existence in the writings of Leibniz, famous seventeenth century German philosopher. Shorn of complications, Russel's concept suggests that every predicate, necessary or contingent, past, present, or future is already implicit in the notion of the subject that carries it. So, ultimately, the existence of these predicates is not affected by our capacity and incapacity to observe them, nor by their being manifest or latent, nor by their contradicting or not contradicting each other. Applied to the history of the Indo-Naga conflict, which so far has largely remained a chronicle of lost opportunities, Russel's idea of "compossible" may point in the right direction. Instead of bemoaning all the possibilities and opportunities that were not seized, it is necessary to realise that the lost opportunities are not, and indeed cannot be, lost for good.

Then and only then will history cease to be the dead-weight it has been until now. ▽

POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT

Executive Director
Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust
Colombo, Sri Lanka

The Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust is a one-year-old grant-making institution that has been established to carry on the activist-intellectual legacy of the late Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam in the spheres of human rights, peace-building, constitutional and legal reforms and democracy.

Position: Executive Director

Duration: Two years, on contract.

Reports to: Board of Trustees

Duties and Responsibilities: To increase the corpus of the Trust and provide leadership to a start up grant-making body devoted to stimulating and funding projects on issues of peace-building, national reconciliation, minority rights and pluralism, and the advancement of the arts and social sciences in Sri Lanka and internationally. In so doing, to develop and implement a comprehensive fundraising strategy, to oversee the administration of the funds, and to oversee the Trust's programmatic development. These responsibilities will include the following:

Increase and diversify fundraising. This will include a combined strategy of grant solicitation, individual gifts, annual direct mail, and special events.

Grant solicitation will entail the maintenance of a regular schedule of grant submissions, sustaining relationships with funders, and researching and cultivating new funder prospects from the foundation, aid, and corporate communities.

Individual gifts will require the cultivation and solicitation of gifts from large and small donors, including the development of a program for solicitation that utilizes the skills of the trustees.

Annual direct mail will be a new component of the Trust's fundraising initiatives and will require designing and writing annual direct mail solicitation appeals and helping to identify prospect lists.

Special events include events to raise funds or the profile of the Trust and will entail coordination of committees and volunteers.

Oversee the Trust's Programming and Stimulate New Projects and Identify New Implementing Partners. The Trust is an activist funding body that provides support for projects it stimulates and for unsolicited projects. The Executive Director will be responsible for keeping up to date on literature and developments of the issues supported by the Trust and will work with the trustees and the advisory board to expand the Trust's programming and identify project ideas and implementing partners.

Oversee the assessment of Grant Applications and Responses. Work with the trustees and advisory board to evaluate proposals and systematize the process of review and response.

Provide leadership and coordination to Trustees and International Advisory Board. This will require attendance at monthly Trust meetings and regular communications via email to trustees and the international advisory board about Trust activities. There should be an effort to draw trustees and board members into the fundraising process, identify new ways to utilize their diverse talents and backgrounds and stimulate their continuing participation in both fundraising and programming. By the end of the two year period, the Executive Director will have set in place an ongoing and sustainable fundraising strategy for the staff and trustees to continue under the guidance of the Executive Director's replacement.

Increase the Trust's Profile in Sri Lanka and Internationally. Be able to articulate and promote the goals and objectives of the Trust, respond to criticism of the Trust or its work, and generally increase the Trust's profile in Sri Lanka and internationally.

Identify and Perform Other Duties as Required. This may require public speaking engagements, public relations, training or other responsibilities that may arise in a start-up endeavor such as the Trust.

Cultivate an Open and Respectful Working Environment. As an international institution with a diverse, international support base, which is committed to fostering peace and multiculturalism, the Executive Director will through example and guidance ensure that the Trust's objectives are adhered to in all work and interactions within and on behalf of the institution.

Qualifications: The successful applicant will be an experienced individual with a high degree of initiative, organizational skills and commitment to the objectives of the Trust and carrying forward Neelan Tiruchelvam's activist-intellectual legacy. The successful applicant will have the following qualifications.

Substantial fundraising experience and demonstrated success in achieving fundraising goals.

Excellent written, oral and social skills and an ability to cultivate positive relationships with donors, grant recipients, funders, trustees, international advisory board members and staff.

Organizational, management and administrative skills.

Familiarity with and commitment to human rights, peace building, democratic reforms and issues of social justice in Sri Lanka and South Asia preferred.

Masters degree in business, law, arts or social sciences or equivalent experience.

Remuneration: US \$30,000 - \$36,000, plus standard benefits package.

Start Date: November 1 2001.

Application Deadline: September 30 2001

To Apply: Send cover letter, resume, and a list of four references to:

Attn: Executive Director Search

Neelan Tiruchelvam Trust

108/1 Rosmead Place

Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Or E-mail to: NTTrust@diamond.lanka.net

It's IT everywhere

Most IT workers trained in the Subcontinent are barely competent code writers. Inadequate skill is not merely the denominator common to the unemployed professional in the US and the unemployable professional in South Asia, it also explains the paradox of labour scarcity in a region whose cities seemingly abound in training facilities.

by **Gaurab Raj Upadhaya**

Of late, the media has been awash with reports of Information Technology (IT) personnel in the United States, many of them South Asian, being given the pink slip in the US. In the years since the boom in Silicon Valley, this is probably the first wave of negative reports on the software industry. As IT stocks crashed early this year on the NASDAQ and other financial markets, triggering a recession in the US economy, the technology hype gave way to more realistic assessments. Internet companies, overvalued on the bourses the previous year, started laying off frantically. Giants like Cisco, reporting the first loss in 11 years, put the brakes on ambitious expansion plans and began downsizing.

But the US trend is no reflection of what is happening elsewhere. In Asia the situation is radically different. East Asian economies recovering from the 1997 economic crisis are now spending on technology again. Businesses in Asia are just gearing up towards a new phase of automation and the demand for skills is growing, although at a slower rate than earlier. People who can design applications to integrate new generation mobile phones with the Internet are still in high demand. But there are no media reports of South Asian workers riding this boom nearer home. This is quite

unlike the situation a few years ago, when statistics of the expanding Subcontinental workforce in North American software companies were being paraded as proof of the miracles the so-called New Economy would perform for the Third World in general. No one, then, had bothered to look inside the hood to examine the profile of these workers and the nature of the jobs they were performing.

Today, all accounts suggest an acute scarcity of IT personnel in South Asia. In May, *AsiaWeek* reported that by 2006, two million IT jobs would remain vacant in India. In Nepal, software companies, despite hiring all available local talent, face a shortage of qualified personnel. In fact the supply situation is so grim that at least one American company was forced to move its entire operations from Kathmandu to Bangalore because Nepal lacks skilled personnel in adequate numbers. The paradox of South Asia hiring when the US is laying off is noteworthy enough. But what is even more striking is the shortage of IT professionals in a region where institutes that claim to impart professional training have mushroomed in the most unlikely nooks.

An illusory surplus conceals a real scarcity and this gap between demand and supply can be understood only in terms of the difference



between the skill level required by professional companies and the quality of the certified personnel being produced by South Asian countries. In the tech world, the real core of a company is made up of people who know the basics, who design products and write the pseudo-code (i.e. code written in everyday language, which is then used by coders to write real code in the programming language of choice). System analysts then analyse these designs. Coders simply write the code in a skilled but mechanical routine. It is not difficult to understand why coders can always be dispensed with. In hard times, the analysts and designers can write and verify the code themselves.

In a sectoral recession, coders who are sound in the fundamentals can always learn new languages quickly or move on to higher levels with some effort. But those whose knowledge is limited to rudimentary coding are bound to be laid off. A web designer who is proficient only in HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language—the language that drives the web), will not be able to code easily in C++. A coder comfortable only with a Graphical User Interface (GUI) to programme for the web in Java, is unlikely to adapt easily to C programming in the more abstract non-GUI environment.

This factor was completely over-



looked in media celebrations of South Asian IT workers making it good in the US and of South Asia being poised on the edge of the information highway on account of its vast reserve army of technically qualified labour. The plain fact is that most of the IT workers trained in the Subcontinent are barely competent code writers or less, superfluous in recessionary circumstances. Inadequate skill is not merely the denominator common to the unemployed professional in the US and the unemployable professional in South Asia, it also explains the paradox of labour scarcity, at a time of high demand, in a region whose cities seemingly abound in training facilities.

Who is to blame?

Computer education in the Subcontinent falls into two broad categories. There are the advanced level institutions which are part of elite state-run universities or which belong to the high-technology education network initiated primarily by the government with some degree of quality private participation. Unfortunately, there are not enough of these institutions to go around, and to which admissions are based on demanding criteria. Students trained at such institutions are on par with global standards. Given the social and structural con-

straints, graduates with such skills are few in number. For instance, the combined total of all computer scientists graduating from the elite Indian Institutes of Technology every year adds up to just a little over a 1000. The story is worse, if anything, in the other countries of the region.

A notch below the elite institutions are the various centres attached to universities in the relatively smaller cities like Kathmandu and Allahabad. These centres may not be as advanced as the top rung in terms of research capacities, but they do produce competent computer engineers. However, the number of students that such centres can accommodate is also fairly limited. For instance, in Nepal the number of locally educated students graduating annually is 72. Kathmandu University (KU) and Tribhuvan University's Institute of Engineering (IOE), including affiliate institutes, have about 600 students of computer engineering at different stages of completion. This year alone, more than 18 colleges offering engineering and bachelors degrees in computer applications (BCA) have come up. The number of students being currently trained can meet only 10 to 15 percent of the demand. By 2003, local graduates will be able to meet only 45 percent of the demand. As the demand grows, colleges will have to increase the intake at the risk of diluting quality. The situation is much the same in the other South Asian countries.

Those who cannot make it to the elite institutions have to make do with the computer training institutes that dot the Subcontinental landmass. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which do not have any real high level infrastructure for computer sciences, depend entirely on these private shops to provide training. The proliferation of these institutes has been responsible for the misleading figures that are generally cited in the media about the number of IT professionals in South Asian countries. A recent report in the Delhi daily, *Economic Times*, contrasted India's annual turnout of 122,000 software

professionals with Pakistan's 10,000. On the other hand, a Pakistan report on IT training claimed a surplus workforce and an annual turnout of 110,000. This segment of the economy is a welter of statistical confusion and there is little scope for verification in the absence of any kind of government regulation.

Whatever be the statistical truth, the term 'software professional' is clearly being used in a very loose sense. For instance, it is estimated that only about 10 percent of Pakistan's IT graduates each year are competent to be employed in reputed organisations, and of them only seven percent are expected to find suitable placements. And in India, whose software industry's projected revenue of 10 billion USD by year 2002 is the envy of the neighbours, the bulk of the trainees are neither designers nor system analysts. They, by and large, punch code for off-shore projects that software giants have sourced out to Indian companies. These firms have already begun to feel the effect of the US recession.

The primary responsibility for creating this easily dispensable work force lies with the unregulated computer education schools ('institutes', 'academies', they all go under high-sounding names). The prospect of a H1-B visa to the US lures unsuspecting students to these institutes, where they are deluded into believing that they are getting the qualifications that the market demands. In Nepal, Kathmandu alone is estimated to have more than 1000 computer 'schools'. Like elsewhere, in Nepal too, there are two types of private institutes. One is the barely visible, low-end outfit located in small towns and the less prosperous parts of the cities. These enterprises provide basic computer literacy, familiarising students with Windows and standard office applications. These places charge modest fees and are very low on infrastructure, with some of them still using monochrome monitors. It is not unusual to find students who have just passed out of one course

being hired as instructors for the new session. In general, such institutes are relatively harmless since they do not pretend to offer more than what is there to see.

The bulk of the IT revenue is cornered by brand-name firms which ensure their visibility through newspaper advertisements, billboards and street banners. These institutes operate in cities and larger towns and claim to provide advanced training. Some of these are stand-alone, single-city enterprises with a modest capital base, with, at best, a branch or two. But the most prominent and influential institutes are the franchise chains such as NIIT, Aptech, SSI, Informatics, Pentasoft, which have transborder operations. In India, NIIT is the market leader with over 2228 centres. With its annual revenues of USD 73 million, it provides computer training to 140,000 students nationwide. In Pakistan, the Indian company, Aptech has franchise operations in Karachi, Lahore, Sialkot and Rawalpindi. It has 15 centres in Bangladesh and also operates in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

These institutes normally teach so-called higher level courses in programming, database and other hot topics, for which they charge exorbitant fees, which can go as high as USD 1600 a course. Typically, these institutes offer packages with certifications that sound impressive to untutored ears. Certificates on offer include Advanced Diploma in Software Engineering, Higher Diploma in Software Engineering, Diploma in Information System Management, and Certificate of Proficiency in Information System Management. Students do not have much of a choice of the tools they want to learn since they are forced to enrol for a complete package that lasts between six months to three years. A two-year diploma at one of these institutes costs as much as USD 5000. Though these organisations are hesitant to reveal student enrolment figures, it is estimated that each centre averages at least 2000 students every year.

While all these institutes have

nice glass-panelled, modern-looking space and state-of-the-art physical infrastructure, it is their level of instruction that leaves much to be desired. They certainly boast well designed interiors, and the front office is always staffed by people who know the current buzzwords—JAVA, OOP, Oracle 9I, SQL et al. Their marketing strategy is impeccable. The 'executives' at the front office can quote figures for the precise level of professional demand for a particular programming language or database proficiency. But informed questions on technology fetch pure marketing bluff and factually incorrect information. To the query "Why use JAVA, when it is so slow on the Internet?" this writer was told to join the course on how to make JAVA run faster on the Internet. JAVA is slow because it needs a virtual machine on top of the operating system to enable trans-platform functionality. An institute claiming to speed up JAVA through a computer course must surely be short-changing its students.

In the real terms, despite the higher fees charged by this category of institutes, the kind of IT education imparted to students does not equip them for the market very much more than the poor-cousin establishments that provide the basic literacy do. Doubtless students in these institutes are exposed to a greater number of software tools, and work on better hardware, but their understanding of systems is, as a rule, very poor. That certainly is the view of the job market. In Nepal, for instance, one is hard-pressed to locate a single graduate from a branded institute who works in a software company. The director of World Distribution, a software development firm in Kathmandu, was of the opinion that graduates from these franchise institutes fare well only in administrative and marketing jobs. He does not consider them suitable for software development jobs.

The fundamental problem with such institutes is that in most cases they are run by people who are themselves not familiar with the technology. These institutes thrive on the

current buzzwords to attract students, and the courses are designed in a way that emphasises learning a few tools rather than the philosophy of information systems. As a result, when specific technologies change, the knowledge acquired is virtually obsolete, in some cases even before the student completes the course. Quite naturally, they have then to enrol for the next session or drop out of the race. The overall consequence of such a curricular approach is that certified professionals lack computing fundamentals, are unable to even troubleshoot or perform helpdesk functions, and cannot remotely conceptualise alternative systems. In essence they are "tool literate" rather than "technology literate".

The rapid penetration of the market by franchise chains all over South Asia does not augur well. With their marketing skills and ubiquity they mislead society into believing that it is 'catching up' with the West when in fact it is a few smart South Asians who are taking other South Asians for a ride. In all the countries of the region, the curricula are roughly the same within and across the franchise chain. Since the franchise business model is based on standardisation of course content, the same level of obsolescence and mediocrity is reproduced across borders. In the circumstances, South Asia cannot develop any substantial software technology relevant to its needs. Consider this: India has software powerhouses that cater to North American requirements but it does not have a single mass media product operating in any local language. In contrast, smaller economies in Europe, and SE Asia have their own version of the Windows operating system. The current system of training does not at all induce a sense of the local. The franchise curriculum, whose primary function is to produce code punchers for Western software, integrates students into the global systems of interconnected networks. Where does that leave the Subcontinent? ▽

Leicester in the age of globalisation

by Prasun Sonwalkar



Multi-lingual sign in Leicester railway station.

Oldham, Burnley, Bradford and Leeds are less than three hours' drive from the unassuming city of Leicester in the East Midlands, but that physical proximity conceals a vast social distance. Since April this year, these towns have become symbols of race trouble in Britain, prompting fears of riots spreading elsewhere and also reminding many of the high tide of racism of the early 1970s. But Leicester, with the highest population percentage of non-whites in Britain and projected to soon become the first European city with a non-white majority, presents a rare picture of multicultural harmony. Indeed, its picture of ethnic co-existence has become the subject of study for many European cities with ethnically diverse populations.

Until recently, Leicester was known as the home of the Attenborough brothers (Richard and David), Gary Lineker the footballer, Thomas Cook (who took the first group of tourists from Leicester to Loughborough in 1841). It was also known

for its university and traditional manufacturing industries. Now, it is held up as an example of how a multicultural society works in the age of globalisation.

Leicester last witnessed Oldham-like trouble in 1972, when the racist National Front tried to evict the thousands of Asian immigrants who arrived here on being expelled from East Africa, mainly by Uganda's Idi Amin. Today, Leicester evokes a fierce sense of loyalty among non-whites who do not feel as comfortable or safe anywhere else in Britain. Ethnic diversity appears to be the cornerstone of its harmony. Leicester, as a recent City Council document put it, has "The joy of being a truly diverse society... (with the) potential to become the UK role model for cultural diversity and inclusion."

The city is considered as the birthplace of English language, where warring Anglo-Saxons and Vikings set aside their differences and lived peacefully, sharing their trade and languages. Leicester has

also had a long history of prosperity, having been a major commercial centre since Roman times. It attracted people from all over the world, but the massive immigration of Asians of East African origin disturbed the underpinnings of harmony. In 1972, the City Council, worried that "the entire fabric of our city is at risk" from immigrants, inserted a tersely worded advertisement in a Ugandan daily, warning potential immigrants: "In your own interests and those of your family you should...not come to Leicester".

But come they did, and the 1991 census recorded that ethnic minorities constituted 28.5 percent of Leicester's population, the highest in any British city. The City Council now expects this figure to go up to 35 percent in the 2001 census. But according to Paul Winstone, "race relations policy officer" of the City Council: "Already 50 percent of school children of five years' age are non-white, and by 2011 we are talking of a non-white majority. Nowhere has this happened peacefully, and we are proud of what we have achieved in Leicester over the last 30 years. We don't want anybody to see this as a threat to the English way of life, since the majority will consist of several minorities. Leicester is now a permanently multicultural society. Today the Asians have political power, economic power and cultural discipline. The sky is the limit for them."

In Britain, some city neighbourhoods have had minority white populations for decades, but unlike the US, there are not yet whole towns or cities in which the ethnic minorities constitute the majority. This explains the wide interest in Leicester's success in race relations. All the City Council documents are published in Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati and Urdu besides English. The welcome sign at Leicester railway station too carries all these languages. Says Robert Colls of the University of Leicester: "Good race relations is like good cricket—simple, easy, not trying too hard. It hasn't been self-conscious; it just crept on us over the last 30 years. Leicester



PHOTOGRAPH BY GUY LAWRENCE

Belgrave street.

grows in your esteem when you visit American cities divided by racial tensions."

Leicester has ethnic minority representation at the highest levels: an Asian MP (Keith Vaz), and Asians as the deputy chief of police, chief executive of the City Council, lord mayor and deputy to the lord lieutenant. A third of the councillors are non-white. In 1979, two percent of the City Council employees were from the ethnic minorities. Today the figure is 22 per cent, and growing. Asians own over 3000 small and medium enterprises, accounting for nearly a half of the city's commercial turnover. These Asian businessmen include at least six millionaires. Leicester is a city relaxed with itself, comfortable with the idea that it has actually overcome the trauma of racial conflict of the 1970s, and has come out the other side. There is little of the edgy energy of Coventry or Birmingham or Manchester. Its city motto is a testament to its unassuming steadiness "Semper Eadem"—Always the Same.

The crucial reason for this success in race relations is the atmosphere of dialogue that was promoted and the very characteristic of the East African immigrants. As Winstone says: "We were lucky we got a commercial class of Gujarati Hindus from East Africa between 1968 and 1975. Their sheer business culture has saved us." Winstone's

point is that the Gujarati Hindus, as the dominant community, were flexible, hard-working, and trying to fit into the larger society, while preserving their own cultural institutions. They came with some capital and complete families. They had a sense of commerce, having been businessmen or skilled workers in East Africa. A very different group went to places like Oldham or Bradford, who were mainly rural, poorly educated Muslims, who became unemployable when mills closed down. Leicester, on the other hand, offered jobs in the textile industry, cheap housing, and it did not take long for Gujarati Hindus to accumulate capital. Says Winstone, "In the 1970s, they were treated like dirt, and kept their heads down. But the 1980s saw them striking out on their own. Today they employ whites or have bought the very places where they once worked. For all these reasons, the British National Party never got off the ground here."

The Asians from east Africa were well practised at blending in. Unlike the mostly Urdu-speaking Muslim population of cities like Bradford, Leicester's Gujarati and Punjabi population were on the second leg of their long journey from India. They had already developed strategies for integrating, as a minority ethnic culture, into an alien society. Leicester has thus come to be termed a Gujarati city, and the City Council aptly has a "twinning" ar-

angement with the local government of Rajkot in Gujarat. It is therefore not surprising that Leicester alone contributed 3 million pounds for Gujarat earthquake relief, compared to the British government's 11 million pounds.

Unlike elsewhere in Britain, there were no incidents in Leicester after the Babri Masjid demolition in December 1992. Most Muslims are involved in trade and in partnerships with Hindus. The multi-religious character is evident from the number of religious places in Leicester. Relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities are less tense than in the Indian Subcontinent, and this has prompted Professor Richard Bonney, director of the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism, University of Leicester, to propose an Institute for the Study of Indo-Pakistan Relations in Leicester. Bonney says, "Here Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs get on together pretty well and many of them are successful in business. Good community relations are good for business."

Belgrave Road is a prime example of the power of Asian business. It was a derelict district when the Gujarati Hindus arrived, but has since been turned into a throbbing commercial centre, showcasing the latest in Indian food, music and fashion. A branch of the Bank of India reinforces the dominant Indian presence. The City Council has several plans for the Road, called the "Golden Mile", including promoting ethnic tourism. Leicester has two Asian radio stations, is the headquarters of the BBC Asian Network and Sabras, while Midlands Asian TV (MATV) has become Britain's first Asian terrestrial channel. Three cinema halls show Bollywood films exclusively.

The City Council's positive approach has been crucial in assimilating the ethnic minorities over the years. In the 1980s, every ethnic group was given large amounts of money for cultural activities. Winstone admits it amounted to bribery, but says that those days are now gone, with the community being

encouraged to help themselves. "But we do take care of major projects like lighting during Diwali, swimming pool, etc," says Winstone. According to Laksmi Datta of Shama Women's Centre, a local voluntary organisation: "The City Council has been very cooperative. They have funded our centre for the past 15 years, which has enabled us to provide vital educational, social and leisure services to ethnic minority communities".

Prabin Hazarika, brother of noted singer-musician Bhupen Hazarika, was among those who arrived here from East Africa. He remembers the hostile reception of the immigrants when they arrived. Even those who had been educated in Britain were denied jobs, but later government initiatives helped build bridges with the white population, primarily through the establishment of race bodies. But the immigrants too contributed to this process. As Hazarika says, "We were peace-loving, resilient, wanted to survive and do well. We were aware

that to live in a foreign country we have to abide by their rules."

Bonney says a generation has come up reading an inclusive school curriculum. He points out that the younger generation of whites are now used to faiths other than their own, and the teenagers of today have experience of multicultural schooling. Says Bonney, "Today, when we go to parts of England that are white bastions, my daughters are saddened at the absence of anyone from the Indian Subcontinent."

School-going Asians are taken aback when asked about whether they face any racism or problem from white colleagues. Narinder, 15, is out shopping with three white schoolmates, and looks completely blank, even scornful, when asked about racism. He has never experienced any, neither has anyone in his family. Says his friend Roger, "We have grown up with each other. We don't see each other as Asian or white. Maybe that's a problem in London, but it isn't here."

However, the larger picture of

harmony hides smaller ones of ennuï among the disadvantaged population who have seen their Asian neighbours grow economically and politically. Winstone says the Afro-Caribbeans often complain of neglect, of having become the underclass. "Not everyone like the Gujarati Hindus is a winner here. The Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are way behind them. It is curious that even though Muslims here are mostly from India, there is some distrust. Of the five gurdwaras in Leicester, two are pro-India, two remain pro-'Khalistan', whose leaders seem to be living in a time warp. That is why I say that if there is a riot or a clash in Leicester, it will be among the non-whites and not between the whites and Asians or Afro-Caribbeans."

For now, the picture of harmony promises to hold good. But even the most optimistic are keeping their fingers crossed, hoping that Leicester remains untouched by the fires of Oldham or Burnley.

NEPALI Times

NEPALI DAILY NEWSPAPER

News that matters to people who matters

Yes! I wish to subscribe Nepali Times, the weekly news paper.

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____
(I wish to pay by cheque)

Cheque No. _____ dated _____ drawn on _____ bank

Or charge my   

No.

Expiry month year

	6 Months (26 Issue)	1 Year (52 Issue)
Nepal	450 NPR	800 NPR
India	1100 INR	2150 INR
South Asia	25 USD	48 USD
Hongkong/Gulf	30 USD	58 USD
Europe/Japan	34 USD	66 USD
Elsewhere	39 USD	76 USD

Himalmedia Pvt. Ltd.
 GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal. Phone: 543333
 Fax: 977-1-521013

E-mail: subscription@himalmedia.com URL: www.nepalitimes.com



by Rudy Mohan

Puri

Between the temple and the beach

The hundred thousand residents of Puri, in coastal Orissa, think that beyond their municipal limits nothing exists, at least in civilisational terms. Perhaps they cannot be faulted. Puri was, after all, once part of the Kalinga of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BC. And it continues to be one of the four sacred Hindu pilgrimages of India.

Puri residents are surrounded by water, and the breakers of the Bay of Bengal in the east and south are just a part of it. It is all water beyond this ancient holy town and destination of pilgrims and tourists. To the south, not far distant, is Chilika, Asia's largest fresh water lake. Close at hand to the north-west is the more modest and unassuming Lake Sar. The river Barghab flows a little to the west. And then there are the five holy lakes of the town—Markanda, Shweta Ganga, Narendra, Indradyumna and Parvati Sagar.

Puri, not more than a few kilometres in length and breadth, gets its sanctity from the 12th century temple of Lord Jagannath (an incarnation of Lord Vishnu), built by the Ganga dynasty ruler Anangabhimadeva Chodagangadeva. The tallest Vishnu temple in the world, the Jagannath temple, also called the Purusottama khetra, is one of the finest expositions of the 'Pancharatha'-style of Kalinga period architecture. Hindu devotees from all over the country, particularly northern and western India, throng this coastal city for a divine high. From overseas, on the other hand, the Westerners come for a package trip of sea, sun, yoga and antiquity.

Puri embraces all with its saline hospitality, the tourists from the West, the devout locals, the sloppy government officials and all those who come for a *darshan* of Jagannath, the humpty-dumpty God whose

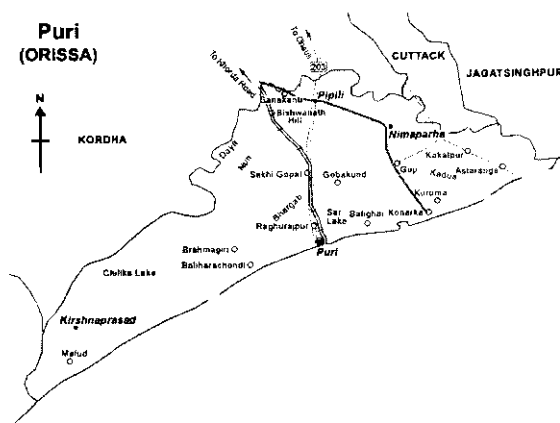
chariot is pulled by the multitudes on the Rath Yatra or "Car Festival Day". Far cry, indeed, from juggernaut, the industrial metaphor for relentless force that took its name from the deity of this ancient town.

The tall, narrow buildings of the town look as if at any moment they could stray absently into the streets. The pace of life is languid. Everything in Puri moves slowly, including the automobiles. The people are seemingly lazy, which may have to do with profound religiosity. Those who live with such devotion in the shadow of the Lord can jolly well afford to cool their heels. Life, after all, is taken care of by Vishnu

the preserver, no less. Then there is that balmy seaside weather. And ofcourse, there is the euphoria that comes from *bhanga*, a local drink of cannabis paste and milk that stills the restlessness and restrains ambition. Bhang in Puri is a social trip for which even therapeutic uses have been found. At times it is used as a specific for minor ailments like fever and cold.

Puri-ites scorn modernity as a rule and scoff at sophistication, but do not seem to mind the good life, that includes succulent food, robust humour, music and laziness. That is possibly what enables them to reconcile to the town's dependence on tourism, both domestic and foreign. You might hear a lot of slogan-shouting against the undesirable influence of Westerners who come to tan their skin along the Puri coast, but deep down everyone realises just how important the tourist is. The economy thrives on the lure of the beach and the temple.

Puri presents a continuous buzz as pilgrims, mostly there for the *darshan* of the Lord, gawk at the sights and bump into bicycles and pedestrians in the narrow





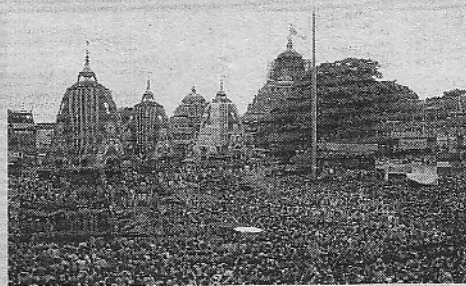
lanes. The seaside spots with their shells and corals have a rather different story to tell. One part of the long, sprawling beach will be occupied by Indian families. Here, piety lets its hair down and lounges in the sand after the labours of the day. Under the god's benign gaze (from the beach one can catch a glimpse of the top of the temple), the pilgrims make merry on the soft sands, as the tireless waves wash their feet in precise rhythms. Beach frolic is Indian-style, with saree-clad women wading into the swells, with screams of delight at an unusual experience. For many land-locked Indians, this could be their first experience of the sea.

But then there is the other part of the beach. This part is close to the fisher village and the *firang* tourist is its principal *habitué*. They are all there, the Israeli recruit rushing for his return ticket on learning of a bomb attack on his Tel Aviv neighbourhood, the inscrutable Japanese tourists looking stoned with or without mind-altering substances, or the young American and British brats, creating a fuss over the absence of discos and night clubs. Regardless of origin, all *firangs* fall in love with Puri and tend to overstay. Puri had its brush with sex, drugs and rock and roll, the slogan of the sixties. Some of it still lingers. The locals, whose economy is interwoven with lives and pleasures of these fair-skinned visitors, remain, for large part, ambivalent to-

wards them. It is peaceful co-existence.

The names of the beachside hotels and restaurants recall a hippie era. Traveller's Inn, Xanadu, Hotel Z and Pink House carry the shabby aura of RL Stevenson's nautical novels on their fading walls. The menu at the thatched-roof restaurants are hardly local. Spaghetti, macaroni with tomato and mashed potato with cheese sauce are more likely to remind you of the Adri-

atic culture, or, at the very least, Kathmandu's Thamel. Served hot, with the salty dampness of the sea breeze sticking to your skin, the macaroni can be a delightful meal at any time of the day. The majestic lobsters appeal as much to your visual aesthetics as it does to the gastronomic. The Pink House restaurant, almost touching the shore, gets one a fantastic view of the



wavy greenish water and the golden polished sands. In fact, from here (and particularly if you have already had your quota of bhang), the froth in the beer mug seems to simulate the foam of the marine turbulence just a few yards away.

But that is not all, for the temple town has other diversions too. At the end of a languid day, when the gloaming turns to darkness and you prepare to get back to town from this Mini Europe, as the locals call it, a chant cuts through the evening air—"Bom Bhole"—and the holy smoke curls upwards. ▽

Spilling the beans

by *Subir Bhaumik*

I AM again forced to join issue with Irfan Ahmed and respond to his Response "The inescapable circularity of spytalk" (August 2001, p. 46). Mr Ahmed's love for "metaphor, irony and stylistic devices of language" ensures he says in three pages what he could have said in four paragraphs.

I would reiterate that Bangladeshi journalists fight shy of reporting on military matters and issues they believe are sensitive with the security establishment. That is one Pakistani legacy the media in Bangladesh has not been able to shrug off—and I will say this again and again until the situation changes. No reporter working on defence issues can afford to "be not on talking terms with the military establishment". If a general does not speak, your skill is to ensure that a colonel will spill the beans.

Four years ago, when the leader of the Assamese rebel group ULFA, Anup Chetia, was arrested in Dhaka,

Bangladeshi journalists fight shy of reporting on military matters and issues they believe are sensitive with the security establishment.

I scooped the story, not my BBC colleagues in Dhaka. The BBC's Dhaka office—and every Bangladesh paper for that matter—stayed away from reporting it because no military or police source was owning up. I knew it because I know the ULFA as closely as any security agency in my country, and they gave me the details, which was confirmed to me by a personal secretary of a senior minister. Only later, when Chetia was produced in court, did the press in Dhaka pick up the story. Meanwhile, I had a tough time convincing my BBC colleagues in London and Dhaka on the veracity of the story.

The Bangladesh government denies the presence of Northeast Indian militants on its soil despite the substantial degree of patronage they receive from the DGFI (Directorate General of Forces Intelligence). It is obvious why the military-security establishment is reluctant to confirm events like the arrest of Anup

Chetia, or for that matter, three attempts on the life of ULFA commander-in-chief Paresh Barua, two of them in the busy Gulshan locality of Dhaka. In exposing the role of the Assam police and Indian intelligence in launching these attacks, I even named the Bangladeshi mafia syndicate used to perform the planned hits. Sections of Indian intelligence is very upset with me because the DGFI has cracked down on the crime syndicate. If Mr Ahmed wants to see how these criminals are being sheltered in Indian safe houses, he will have to visit Calcutta and I will show him. (If of course he can recognise some of the leading crime bosses of his country.)

Dhaka journalist Saleem Samad (the only Bangladesh journalist I know who enjoyed the confidence of the Shanti Bahini because of his unbiased reporting on the Chittagong Hill Tracts situation) was able to confirm the latest attack on Paresh Barua near the Egyptian embassy in his report to *Teelka.com*, though he says he was snubbed and heckled by DGFI operatives for trying to unravel the case. The Paris-based RSF observation quoted at the end of his piece by Mr Ahmed vindicates my contention—that reporting on sensitive matters like defence can bring major trouble for a journalist, which is why he or she avoids it. However, the situation is different in India, where journalists do enjoy the advantages of institutionalised democracy as a result of which *Teelka*-type expose are possible. However, many reporters still get jailed or killed in Northeast India, from where I have reported for two decades now.

Going over my record of covering the work of insurgents and intelligence agencies, let me say that I was able to expose RAW's role in supporting the insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts because I had good contacts with both factions of the Shanti Bahini. Also, people within RAW spoke against their own officials because even the RAW is no monolith—as the ISI is in Pakistan. Recently, I exposed the Indian military intelligence's first using the Burmese rebel group, National Unity Party of Arakans (NUPA), and then dumping them. Himal carried that expose, as did *The Times of India*, *Teelka.com* and the BBC. That was Operation Leech, projected as an inter-services operation by India but what in reality evolved as a cold-blooded killing of the entire NUPA top leadership. This

was a story of how spies play foul with all human ethics and how they perpetuate their interests in the name of defending the nation. Truth, Mr Ahmed, is stranger than fiction.

Can Mr Ahmed show one Bangladesh media report which comes even close to the expose of Operation Leech or the expose of the RAW's role in the Chittagong Hill Tracts? I have reasons to be very proud of Bangladesh for so many other things, for the great work its NGOs have done in the field of micro-credit, gender emancipation and even population control (contrary to popular image in India), but I am sorry there is hardly any tradition of investigative journalism in the country.

I think I know more about explosives than Mr Ahmed does. But even he must know the difference between country-made bombs that Bengalis have hurled since the days of Khudiram Bose (1905 attack on a British official) and a 76-kilogram explosive police found at Kotalipara. Also the difference between remote-controlled bombs that exploded in the Awami League office at Narayangunj and the country-made bombs gangsters hurl at each other in street fights (where casualties are rarely double digit). If you don't understand explosives, don't talk about them.

The conversation between the ISI's Colonel Nasir and his boss Brigadier Riaz was intercepted, taped and handed over to Gholam Rehman, chief of Bangladesh's

internal security agency, the NSI. I have a complete transcript of it, and a copy of the tape as well. It was verified and found authentic by Rehman and his officials, whose competence in security matters is surely more profound than Mr Ahmed's. It is after that exercise, and not on the basis of my report that the Bangladesh government prepared a bill ensuring special 'SSF' security to the daughters of Sheikh Mujib for all time to come. The whole parliament in Bangladesh passed the bill. Now, Islamic fundamentalists and the Mujib killers would have reasons to feel upset about that.

About the LTTE involvement in the plot to kill Sheikh Hasina, I can fax or mail Mr Ahmed a copy of a DGFI report on this issue. And also one by the Indian intelligence bureau which was procured with great difficulty. Everything that I have said or reported as a journalist can be established. If the government in Bangladesh was happy with the BDR's exercise in Padua and had endorsed it, why should it remove the BDR chief on the eve of its handing over power to a caretaker government. I am sure the BJP government in India decided to up its ante and escalate the crisis by asking the BSF to attack the BDR at Boroibari, for that would have helped the BJP in the Assam elections where the Bangladeshi is the favourite whipping boy. But I agree with Mr Ahmed on one point. No party in Bangladesh can afford to be anti-Indian in reality. ▲

GREENPEACE

Greenpeace International is the world's leading environmental campaigning organisation. As a coordinating body of over 30 national and international offices worldwide Greenpeace is at the forefront in placing global issues at the top of the global agenda.

Join the team at Greenpeace International based in Amsterdam. We are currently looking for:

Issue Coordinators – Genetic Engineering & Toxic

To coordinate a worldwide team of researchers, direct action and political campaigners to develop and implement strategies to achieve agreed global objectives concerning Genetic Engineering and/or Toxic Pollution campaigns within approved budgets and time lines.

The successful candidate will be able to inspire, motivate and manage 8-12 staff. He/she must be strategically directed, creative, risk-taking and professional in all aspects of their work.

Must be able to monitor external social, economic and political events in order to guide development and adjustment of strategic plans. He/she is responsible for campaign operating budgets.

The successful applicant will have considerable experience in dealing with the media, the public and be able to relate across cultures. It is very important for the successful candidate to be able to actively and publicly challenge political standpoints to achieve campaign objectives whilst maintaining Greenpeace principles.

Applicants should send a cover letter together with their C.V. by **September 10** to:

Ms A. Groot, Greenpeace International, Keizersgracht 176, 1016 DW, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. OR
E-mail: recruitment@ams.greenpeace.org Fax: +31 20 523 6239.

**Possession of E.C. passport or valid Dutch work permit advantageous.*

Jinnah's bungalow

THE NEAT flowerbeds once planted with petunias have disappeared. These days bats are the only inhabitants of the house where Mohammed Ali Jinnah—the exacting founder of Pakistan—used to live. In the garden where Lord Mountbatten once strolled snakes preside over an untrimmed empire of rotting vegetation, ferns and towering palm trees.

The sprawling white bungalow—which played a crucial role in the partition of British India—is now at the centre of a bitter dispute between Pakistan's military dictator General Pervez Musharraf and Jinnah's only child, his daughter Dinah Wadia. Wadia, who lives in New York, last week wrote to India's Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, demanding that the house in Bombay's exclusive Malabar Hill district be returned to her.

Her demand coincides with a fresh attempt by Musharraf to get Jinnah's house back for Pakistan. In his disastrous summit with the Indian prime minister at Agra earlier this month, the general renewed Pakistan's claim to the historic property. The bungalow, uninhabited for two decades and falling apart, should be given to the Pakistani government so that it could be used as a consulate, he suggested.

The row is embarrassing for Pakistan's military regime since Jinnah's daughter and grandson have both made it clear that they regard the general's claim as "inappropriate". Neither lives in Pakistan and their existence is an uncomfortable reminder that the tolerant, secular Muslim state envisaged by Jinnah—a Westernised liberal—has been subverted over the past half a century both by the army and Islamic fundamentalists.

"Jinnah House has absolutely nothing to do with Pakistan. It was my grandfather's personal residence and one that he loved dearly. How does that involve Pakistan?" Jinnah's grandson, Nusli Wadia, said last week. He lives in Bombay, where he runs a successful textile company, and recently hinted that his grandfather, who believed in democracy, would be less than delighted at the way his beloved Pakistan had turned out.

Dinah Wadia's letter offers India an opportunity to wriggle out of a tricky diplomatic situation. In 1948 the bungalow was leased to the British High Commission, which occupied it until 1982. It has since remained locked. Indian government sources have indicated that they are likely to treat her claim sympathetically, since Pakistan can hardly object if the house is eventually given back to Jinnah's heir. "We have no intention of handing it to Pakistan," one source said.

Bal Thackeray, the flamboyant leader of Bombay's ultra-nationalist Hindu Shiv Sena party, has come out strongly in support of the Wadias. "Today they [Pakistan] are asking for Jinnah House. Tomorrow they may want the Taj Mahal and the day after the Qutab Minar [an historic tower in Delhi]," he told journalists

last week.

Yesterday Jinnah House was barred to all visitors. A bored security guard dozed in front of the rusting gate, with its sign: "Photography is prohibited". "Not even the PM is allowed in," the guard said. In the garden, pigeons clattered around the overgrown mango trees and palms. The elegant building, with its pointed arches and pleasant columns, was clearly in poor shape. Much of the walnut panelling had rotted.

Despite advancing decay, the bungalow continues to occupy an important place in the Subcontinent's divided history. Mohammed Ali Jinnah was deeply attached to the house, which he built 'brick by brick' in 1936—the year he returned to India from England to take charge of the Muslim League. He employed a British architect, Claude Batley, a Muslim contractor, a Hindu plumber and Italian stonemasons. The total cost was 200,000 rupees—a vast sum for the time.

The two-and-half-acre property now sits on some of the most expensive real estate in the world. The site in central Bombay, overlooking the sea, is estimated to be worth at least £15 million. In her letter to Vajpayee last week, Wadia promised not to demolish her old family house or to develop it commercially, if she were to get it back. "But since it is a decision that has political implications, it has been put on hold," Nusli Wadia said.

In the run-up to independence, both Gandhi and Nehru visited Jinnah at the bungalow, which he reluctantly vacated a week before partition on 7 August 1947, hinting he would return from Pakistan soon on holiday. He told Bombay's then prime minister, B.G. Kher, to look after the property. Although by this stage Jinnah knew he was dying from tuberculosis—it would kill him the following year—he said: "Some day I may come back and live here."

"THE BATTLE OF JINNAH'S BUNGALOW" BY LUKE HARDING IN THE SUNDAY OBSERVER, LONDON.

The embankment trap

WE ARE slowly rising up the ladder of devastation engineered by the vested interests. It was within the state for us like the one with the Kosi, the Kamala, the Bagmati or any such embankments. Then we graduated into bothering the fellow states like Bihar and West Bengal, in case of the Mahananda embankments, and Bihar and UP, in case of the Ghaghra embankments. We deserve to be congratulated for extending the folly of embankments its well-deserved international status.

Engineers were forgiven for the collapse of the Tacoma Suspension Bridge and the Tay River bridge, in the 19th century, because the effect of the wind stresses over the structures was not known then. They discovered how to handle the winds much later and now nobody can ignore the winds while designing the structures. Unfortunately, that wisdom is not coming to the embankment builders. They close their eyes

to the extent of sedimentation within the river embankments. There used to be a railway line connecting Nirmali to Bhaptiahi, in the Supaul district of Bihar. There used to be a bridge on this railway line that got washed away following the 1934 earthquake of Bihar. The railway line was abandoned subsequently. There was a railway station called Rehadia between Nirmali and Bhaptiahi and it fell between the Kosi embankments. I visited the place a few years ago and could step on the roof of the railway station structure without any help. Does one need a better example to assess the extent of sedimentation within the embankments?

Similarly, it has not rained in Bihar and there is a severe drought. Why does the Kosi Project not irrigate the 7.12 lakh hectares of land as promised in the original project report? Why should the state be declared a scarcity area? Will some body take the responsibility for this failure?

Some of you might have seen Kusheshwar Asthan. It is flooded again without any rains in the area. The annual report of the Water Resources Department of Bihar says that the waterlogged area in the state is 9,42,000 hectares. It was only 9,00,000 hectares till last year. Where from this addition has come? The government has a plan of INR 318 Crores to correct water-logging in 23 chauras of the Kosi and the Gandak basin and spent just one crore rupees in 1999-2000 and that too after 10 years of inaction. Will it not take 318 years to drain the water out from these 23 chauras at fixed prices?

When we talk to media and, in fact, that is what we have been doing for the past so many years, we are often told about the "flood fatigue" that the media suffers from and I am often told, "*Kya Mishraji ! Aap ko aur koi kaam nahin hai?*" I am at a loss to convince anybody who matters that the things are not moving the way they should. I am told that the 10th Five Year Plan document has a lot of praise for the embankments and the government is likely to pursue the programme with full vigour. If the establishment is patting its back despite the failure all over, God alone can save us, not from the storm but the sailors of the ship.

Let us do something instead of blaming each other. I must assure you, if the local people feel that the embankments are doing more harm than good and are threatening their existence, they will neither come to us or the governments, they will just breach them. This is already happening in our places and will happen wherever the folly exceeds the tolerance limits. We must ensure that there are tears in the eyes of the bride before we beat our breasts while bidding a farewell. Let us try to see that the embankment builders see reason in it. They do not know what they are doing. They are blind and deaf. They need to be shown and hear something that they refuse to see or listen. Technical folly is not geographical. Any government with resources and the technical skill would do the same. Our Bihar government is hell bent on extending the embankments despite the flood prone area almost tripling in the plan period.

In a sense, it is good that the issue will now be debated and we must use this opportunity to explode the myth that the embankments around themselves.

FROM AN EMAIL BY DINESH KUMAR MISHRA, CONVENOR OF THE BIHAR-BASED BARH MUKTI ABHIYAN (MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM FROM FLOODS).

The diplomat's servant

BARELY DRESSED, he ran out on naked feet from the stately residence in the diplomatic enclave of the city of Ottawa on a bitterly cold snowy night, unmindful of the frozen ground. He was screaming. Had it been Pakistan, he could have gone on running as nobody would have paid him the least attention, but this was Canada.

Before long, he was spotted by a police cruiser, stopped, taken in and moved to a hospital where he was pronounced safe though not too far from hypothermia. They also found that the man who spoke little English was confused and incoherent to the point of being insane.

This happened many years ago. The man was a Pakistani and served in the Ambassador's household. Long work hours, lack of freedom, lack of company, lack of money, lack of proper food and constant tongue lashings had finally taken their toll and the man who had arrived happily not long before looking forward to the good life in North America had suffered a breakdown. He was bundled home and the matter was hushed up, and with it, yet another case of diplomatic slavery.

Some years ago, the domestic servant of an Indian World Bank officer went berserk because of unremitting ill treatment and abuse. One day, he picked up a kitchen knife and killed the mistress of the house. He received a light sentence on the basis of extenuating circumstances. No normal human being could be subjected to such treatment and hope to retain his sanity. In one incident, an Asian diplomat's imperious and foul-mouthed wife in Washington, in a bout of ill temper that was her hallmark, had ordered her maid, a simple village woman, to get out of the house in the middle of the night. A Pakistani cab driver had taken pity on her and put her up till she had found a more humane employer.

Abuse of diplomatic privileges is not confined to Indians and Pakistanis. However, the worst offenders by and large are the privileged ones from the so-called Third World whose elite have about as much love for the huddled masses as Josef Stalin had for civil liberties. In early June this year, Human Rights Watch produced a stunning report that should put the perpetrators of these unspeakable cruelties and indignities to shame but I fear no such thing will happen because those who commit such acts are already beyond shame.

Domestic workers come to the United States on special visas and, ironically, despite the abusive treatment, they are often reluctant to leave their

employers or file legal complaints to defend their rights because of fear of reprisals at home, cultural and social isolation, ignorance of US laws, lack of local friends or contacts, the difficulty of finding another job and fear of losing their legal immigration status. The inability to speak English is also a major factor. But nothing illustrates the conditions in which many of these domestic workers live better than the narrative accounts provided by some of them to Human Rights Watch. Most are employed by diplomats but there are also those who are sponsored by American citizens...

FROM "DIPLOMATIC SLAVEHOLDERS ABUSE DOMESTIC WORKERS IN THE USA", BY KHALID HASAN IN IFO TIMES.

Vedic quotient

LET ME begin by asserting that those who do not understand the past, or refuse to understand it, invariably end up misunderstanding the present and are unable to move forward into the future. We are faced today with the makers of educational policy in the central government who seem not to understand the Indian past.

There is a constant harking back to the remote past, encapsulated in the phrase Vedic. Irrespective of its historical or civilisational authenticity, this capsule is being forced upon us with the claim that all knowledge is contained in the Vedas and therefore the Vedic capsule amounts to a total education.

There is little recognition of the fact that in the course of Indian history, various Indian thinkers discussed the knowledge contained in the Vedic corpus, and some had doubts about various aspects. This process of debate and questioning, the presentation of views and counter-views, both within India and among scholars from other parts of Asia, has been at the root of advances in knowledge in pre-modern times. Much that we pride ourselves on, as Indian contributions to world civilisation, often developed independently of the Vedic corpus and occasionally even in opposition to it. Significant contributions from the past are thus set aside in this obsessive concern with the Vedic capsule.

In saying this, I am not denigrating the study of the Vedic past, but am emphasising that the past has to be assessed in a historical context, and I would further insist that the context has to be, that of critical, rational enquiry. This is now being denied by replacing enquiry with a received version of the past which is then treated as the authentic version.

The claim is made that this is a return to indigenous knowledge, but the new educational curriculum draws its legitimacy from 19th century colonial views of India, and from the priority that European Indologists gave to Brahmanical texts and world-view. Indigenous systems drew not only on mainstream texts in the language of learning but also on texts in a variety of regional languages, which could question the former if need be, as also on observed knowledge.

A major pedagogical change in the last few decades has been the professionalising of various subjects, particularly in the social sciences. Each subject is preferably taught in such a way that it also demonstrates its own methodology which draws as much as plausible on evidence of proven reliability, on a logical analysis and on rational generalisations. This demands an intellectual rigour in setting out the structure of the subject. The training that results from such teaching, as for example in history, enables both the teacher and the student to be aware of the difference between mythology and history.

There is now a retreat from these processes and mythology is taking over from knowledge. Mythology has a role in creative imagination but should not replace knowledge. Instead of further professionalising the subjects taught at school and college, they are being replaced with subjects that have virtually no pedagogical rigour, such as Yoga and Consciousness or cultivating a Spirituality Quotient. These cannot form the core of knowledge and replace subjects with a pedagogical foundation, although yoga can be an additional activity.

The narrowing of knowledge is being attempted in part by giving a single definition to Indian culture and society, and projecting this through educational channels, and describing it as the sole heritage that is of any consequence to us as a society and a nation. Yet this goes against one of the fundamental concerns of the Indian experience both of the past and of the present.

Among the more significant questions that have continually been at the core of Indian activity, is that of the relations between the needs of the central power in a state and the articulation of variant forms of control manifested by regional and local powers. At the most obvious level in the past, this relationship determined various structures relating to administrative and economic policy. But it is also evident in cultural expression where a distinction was often maintained between the mainstream culture, and the culture and language of the region.

Relations between the two varied from close interlinks on some occasions, to tensions or even confrontations on other occasions. What is relevant to us today is that in the past, cooperation between the Centre and the regions needed an immense degree of sensitivity to social and cultural variations and an understanding of why those arose. We are facing a similar problem today.

The question is whether we should accept the kind of homogenisation of education and culture that is being imposed on the country, or, should we attempt to define the modern, educated Indian through an educational policy sensitive to a range of social and economic concerns, and to new systems of knowledge, a sensitivity that will provide us with a worthwhile present and enable us to perceive the inter-connections with the past?

Can the interface between the Centre and the states

in a federal polity, help us in this matter? Education is not merely about making millions literate, it also involves teaching young people to cope with a changing society, which today means being more aware of the world than ever before, and to creating a worthwhile life for themselves. Therefore, to impose a syllabus oriented to studying an imagined past utopia is to erode the potential of the next generation. Focusing on a utopian past is also a mechanism of diverting attention from having to improve the present in order to provide a better quality of life.

Accountability to the public and transparency in governance is necessary in formulating educational policies. We must know who is drafting educational policy and who have been consulted in doing so, and what has been the participation of professionally qualified persons in the determining of the curriculum in a subject. It requires responsible people and these in turn have to be responsible for what they are doing. Educational policy is both important and sensitive and cannot be left to the whims of a small circle of politicians and bureaucrats.

A sensitive understanding of the interface of Centre and region is essential to any educational policy. Two states with high rates of literacy are Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. Each is very different from the other in terms of economic resources and the way they are used; in the hierarchy of castes and the distribution of classes; in religions and religious sects; and in languages. These aspects also undergo change. Can we set aside all this and merely insist on children in both areas studying Sanskrit, Vedic Mathematics, a vague subject called social science, and Yoga and Consciousness?

The imposition of the Vedic capsule would be an educational disruption in both regions, educationally negative for many people and resented by others. But what they do have in common, are the aspirations that result from education. Schooling and curriculum would have to relate up to a point to the local conditions and ethos, and these would involve a degree of interest in regional concerns. The question is how best these can be introduced without denying the importance of national concerns a matter of some sensitivity. Educational policy has to be such that the aspirations, at least of regional concerns, are recognised as an intrinsic part of those that are of national interest. This would ultimately be more viable than forcing everyone to conform to a top-down policy.

Educational policies in states that do not have a BJP government have a greater responsibility to defend secular education and the continuance of multiple cultures. This is often easier at the state level where multiple cultures are more visible, but would require considerable thinking about education in terms of what is being taught and which

groups are appropriating educational facilities. Where parties not belonging to the NDA, tie-up with the Sangh parivar to harass those supporting secular education, the acts of such parties should also be questioned. Education should not be made the scapegoat for dubious political manoeuvres.

We may well be taking a risk with the future of the next generation by giving them the type of schooling that will not equip them to handle the complexities of our times. These are serious matters that concern the future of an entire generation of young Indians and should be critically discussed and reviewed. But then the Indian middle-class is notoriously unconcerned about what is taught to its children through schooling. All that matters is the game of numbers, marks and percentages.

The new policy, it is said, will reduce social disabilities and the replacing of subjects at school will reduce the burden on the child. Social disabilities can be met to some extent by professionalising what is taught in other words teaching mainstream subjects as systems of knowledge, without mystifications. The way a subject is taught has a social context and this has a bearing on social disabilities. For example, will Vedic Mathematics be taught through memorising shlokas in Sanskrit or essentially as methods of calculation? In the former case obviously upper caste children will have an advantage; in case of the latter, the quality of what is taught will have to be assessed comparatively with other mathematical methods. If it were to be something more than a slogan, would this kind of mathematics prepare a foundation for the child to handle contemporary technologies requiring mathematics?

FROM "COLOURED CURRICULUM" BY ROMILA THAPAR IN HINDUSTAN TIMES.



Bad movie, bad anthropology

What does god sound like? Exactly like one Alan Wenger, who tells us—in more words than are strictly necessary—the story of the Raji people in mid-western Nepal. Or so Jean Queyrat, director of the documentary *The Fish of Gods* would have us believe.

As the film opens, with the camera gliding through forest and over rocky banks, to skim the surface of a wide turquoise river, Wenger intones: “The Raji people live at the confluence of the Karnali and Babai rivers. The tarai is an isolated region in western Nepal. The Raji are people of a few numbers but many legends.” There could not be a worse start to a film though the filmmakers make a valiant attempt at telling us where we are going, and fail miserably. For one, no map that this reviewer has looked at, hints at the possibility of these two rivers meeting within Nepal’s territorial borders. They come close in the south-west of Bardiya National Park, but of a grand “confluence” there is no evidence. The first lesson of old-fashioned ethnography is: survey the territory and make a map. “Western Nepal” is hardly evocative, self-explanatory or even accurate, made up as it is of Himalayan mountains, mid-hills and plains. And the tarai is hardly restricted to western—mid-western, to be specific—Nepal, but runs along the southern length.

If *The Fish of Gods* were at all a reflexive film, meditating on its own modes of expression, the opening shot would have been a brilliant comment on the endeavour. But it misses the forest for the trees, and barely is it out of the woods, than it attempts to walk on water. Like the previous sentence, it is a confused mixed metaphor of a film, the reactionary bastard child of anthropology’s attempt to reinvent itself over



the last 20-something years.

Queyrat decides to show and tell us about these, “the Raji” people, by focusing on what he suggests is a vital annual community ritual: a trip in December to “the source of the Karnali”, to try and catch a fish,

the golden *majir*, which Rajis revere as an omen of prosperity and which, on these annual fishing trips, “allows itself to be caught.” Here again the geography is muddled—the Karnali originates in a glacier in Kalapani, which is certainly not

where this film is set. And it is unclear whether all Raji people make this trip, or only these, the Raji of Ghatgaon—the film gives no indication how large the Raji community is, and if there are more than those we see, where all in Nepal they live.

If the account of Queyrat and Wenger is to be believed—and there are reasons to view it with some scepticism, given the inconsistencies in it—the Raji are river people. Here, this means that they own no land, live on the fish they catch and barter it for grain. And they pan gold dust. And here, at the gold dust, is where things get interesting. For the Raji, or at least those of Ghatgaon village, which seems to have no more than 40 or so people, gold is something of a fetish.

After half-a-dozen references to “the fish of the gods”, “the golden *majir*”, “the fish with the golden scales”, and the undertaking about to commence, we are told a legend. Apparently, one of the protagonists of the film, the village headman Fakir Bahadur, likes to tell this story quite a lot. No, he doesn’t actually tell us that himself and neither do his friends. In fact, we don’t hear them speak for more than a total of three minutes in this 26-minute-long film, and that too as conversation in the background, so we’ll just have to take Mr Wenger’s word for it, thank you. This is the story:

One day as the Rajis were fishing, they met a princess who wanted to cross to the other side of the river, but the current was too strong. The young woman said make a puja, an offering to the goddess Kanyakumari and everything will be alright. They made the puja, the river suddenly became still and the princess was able to cross easily. As she set foot on the other bank, a rainbow appeared, forming a bridge over the river. The young woman climbed the rainbow and walked towards the sun. To thank the Raji, she threw a handful of gold dust into the river and the river began to gleam. The dust settled on the golden majir. The princess was none other than the goddess Kanyakumari. Ever since,

the Raji make an offering each time they catch a golden majir, because the fish of the gods is a sign of prosperity.

It’s a nice story, even if, compared to the story-within-a-story legends that are modelled on an illiterate dope-fiend’s understanding of karma and circular existence and are the curse of the Subcontinent, it seems to begin *in media res*. But we won’t ask why the goddess/princess was there, why the deception was necessary, or whether she had reason to test them. Instead, we will ask why more is not made of the story. Perhaps it would have detracted from the narrative flow chosen for the film to ask the people of Ghatgaon—and tell us—what they would do if they did not manage to catch the *majir* that winter. Is there a substitute offering they could make? How would they continue these trips if the place they traditionally found the *majir*, “the source of the Karnali”, simply stopped yielding fish for them to eat—after all, the

The Fish of Gods

Director: Jean Queyrat

France/Nepal

Colour, VHS/PAL, 26', English, 2000

catch here is already getting smaller, “there are too many fishermen now and too few fish”.

This point is, this isn’t just any old story, it seems to be central to how the Rajis of Ghatgaon understand and order their life and society—why else would the women of Ghatgaon spend every winter panning the river for a few grams of gold dust? Why would the men undertake such an endeavour year after year even as the trip became less easy and the prospects of success, few and fewer? Perhaps it is a fact that “since they have nomadic souls, the Raji like to be surrounded by nature in the middle of wild, unspoilt landscapes.” Perhaps it is simply an excuse for a male bonding trip, but unfortunately, despite Wenger’s insistence that the women stay behind to pan for gold and this fishing trip is all-men, there are

a number of figures on the boat and the bivouac who are undeniably of the female make.

There is one sure sign that this legend—and the symbolic value of gold for the Raji—and the hunt for the golden *majir* are more than the simple reward-to-a-good-people and quest to keep this privilege alive, respectively. The headman Fakir Bahadur’s son, Uday Bahadur, is also to go on the trip, for the first time, as “some day he will lead the Rajis and have to know how to fish”. The narrator tells us that his father talks to him on the trip, man-to-man: “You know the history of our people. You also know how to fish for the food we eat everyday. Soon you will be able to feed your wife and your children. I am very proud of you. Now you must discover what has brought us here, to the source of the Karnali, the golden *majir*, the fish of the gods.” The trip, it turns out, is a quest narrative about prosperity yes, but it is fundamentally an initiation rite which culminates in returning to the community’s home ground with a trophy, a prize and a successor to the chief. The legend, then, is more important, and gold occupies a more symbolic position in the Raji world than *The Fish of Gods* suggests.

It is possible Queyrat and his crew are right, and the Raji as a society are indeed a functionalist’s dream, but the chances are pretty slim. Which brings us to why the film has the narrative it does: a simple story about the search of a simple people for a fish that will ensure them prosperity in the year to come. This “prosperity” is never defined, neither protagonist, Fakir Bahadur or Uday Bahadur, is fleshed out as a real person, the Rajis’ location and context are not important enough to be explained other than in the vaguest, most fleeting terms—what, for instance, do they do with the little gold dust they find?—and we are told nothing about the impetus for such a film. It would not be surprising if chance viewers of the *The Fish*

of *Gods*, were tempted to think the Rajis are simply boring people, far less interesting than the scenery they are props in.

The Fish of Gods fails in large part because it does not give voice to its subjects. Surely, after close to three decades of guilt-ridden anthropology where the writer's or filmmaker's efforts to bring in not just "the native's voice", but many "native voices", have resulted in a plethora of works with a lot of talk but little analysis, or analysis that is really high theory looking for "examples", there is no excuse for this. Worse, the narrator is not even an honestly ill-informed outsider. Two minutes into the film, he introduces himself as a miller in the area, not a Raji, but a friend of Fakir Bahadur, "with great respect for this people and its history". This is such a strange move, that it must have a deeper, more involved rationale that simply passes this reviewer by. As for blithe statements about "nomadic souls" and unsubstantiated (for us) assertions that the Raji "are very respectful of the world around them", they just go to show that no matter the supposed revolutions in anthropology—the "interpretive turn", "thick description," the "textual turn", the understanding of "performance"—the discipline retains its links to people's passion for travel, the unfamiliar, and exotic and "simple" folk.

The methods of observations, terms of explanation and null hypotheses gentlemen travellers and ethnologists of yore made use of, might well have been so inherently unsuited to what they wanted to study that they came up with conclusions and explanations that were sometimes bizarre and often totally off the mark. But because they had generally spoken to more than two or three informants and because they tried to get a broad picture of a society, they did gather enough detail to make their work informative at a very basic level, so that, even with flawed data, one could if one tried come up with different explanations for a particular marriage taboo or whatever was under dis-

cussion. Early anthropological films did something similar. There is plenty to object to in them, but they showed you things from up close, unlike this film, which seems content with pretty pictures of the Raji and their setting. This is a shame, because except for one instance, everyone seems blissfully oblivious to the camera. Queyrat misses the opportunity this sly, almost unnoticed camera provides to shed light on the dynamics of relationships in this group of people, to help us really get to know them. As it is, all it is helpful for is divination, reading people's faces when the narration gets too much or simply seems inaccurate.

The assertion that *The Fish of Gods* is the bastard child of anthropology's attempt to reinvent has its roots in this slippery slope. Since the 1970s, anthropology has been trying to do its damndest to fix its problems. The focus on "voice" and who has it, the politics of representation, have been vital debates, and the focus on intangibles, the difference between a blink and a wink—"cultural" anthropology—has been an important change in orientation. The new focus on "culture" somehow took away the need to be fluent in mapping or kinship terminology, and made the discipline more fanciful, more diffuse. These changes did not only arise out of a newfound sense of justice or decency, but in large part because many of the people anthropologists were writing and making movies about now had access to the garbage they often produced. But the professionalisation of anthropology was at all possible only because of the old guard's "flawed" terms of understanding and explanation: without their protective glaze, without the overwhelming assumption that anthropology could explain race, ethnic and class "worldviews" so Others could be understood, helped, *spoken for* on the world stage—without all of this, anthropology would have remained the preserve of dilettantes and travellers.

"Reinventing" anthropology changed the rules by which the dis-

cipline judged its own, but not the basic grid it rested on. And as it became more focused on "culture" and letting people speak for themselves, it found new justification for its foundational conceit that it could explain the entire truth about whole societies, which is why today anthropology has come to stand in for history, for English literature, political science, even and, yes, travel writing.

But a film like *The Fish of Gods* falls between the cracks, seemingly steering clear of over-theorising trendiness, but without any contemporary resources to draw upon to make something in the image of classical anthropology. Few such undertakings are of *inherent* interest to anyone, which the makers of *The Fish of Gods* do not seem to understand. One way to make them of interest is to provide a reference point, or a comparison of some sort, even if it is two Raji stories in different tones. Cultural anthropology loves stories, anecdotes, oral history, and even if this film did not want to go down the path where the simple *fact* of presenting an oral history, or an account of migration or hybridity overwhelms the actual story itself, or where the story is used to *illustrate* concepts like Polyphony, rather than arise out of such research practices, it would have done well to respect the value of its stories more.

But first of all, viewers are owed a more reliable account of the legend and the hunt for the *majir*, or at least one that seemed to truly emanate from the Raji's world and that of their neighbours. And if *The Fish of Gods* had played up the visit of the travelling Damai troubadours to the Raji camp, and their narration of one history of the Rajis to a captive audience, including young Uday Bahadur (in exchange for a dozen fish), we would have had one story, one history more, from a different perspective, to fill in our picture. And even if the narrator as the all-knowing voice of god had occasionally shown up, he would have been more tolerable, more believable even.

'Imagined Communities' in a Shaky Subcontinent

Ever since Ian Talbot essayed, in 1996, a remarkable autobiography of Khizr Twana, an outstanding but hitherto unrecognised pre-partition politician and followed it up, in 1999, with a magisterial survey of Pakistan in the last five decades, he has acquired a reputation for historically rich and theoretically stimulating writing. His oeuvre is predicated on fundamental continuities in the Subcontinent's history before and after independence, which is why his later work, *Pakistan: A Modern History*, was able to meticulously trace many contemporary authoritarian trends in the country to antecedent British administrative methods. For Talbot there was certainly no "end of history" in 1947. He is, ergo, of greater relevance than the average South Asian chronicler, who tends to probe no further than the "stroke of the midnight hour". In his new volume, *India & Pakistan*, Talbot addresses the confounding issue of identity formation in the highly fluid and volatile subcontinental environment before and after 1947. Expectedly, he does not fail the reader.

Given the complexities of identity formation, competing theories vie for scholarly affection. There are primordialists, who see the nation as a "natural order". Perennialists differ from primordialists in that they consider nationalism to be rooted in long-standing but mutable ethnic allegiances. Modernists, on the other hand, regard it as a recent construct arising from socio-economic transformations of the last two centuries. Of these, the modernist perspective has been the most dominant and has had a potent influence on nation-building schemes of many Third World states, including Nehruvian India. Talbot's model is a synthesis of all the three

approaches, and portrays nationalism as a "blend of tradition and modernity".

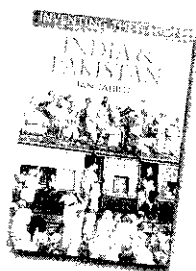
Pre-1947 melting pot

In Talbot's assessment, a sense of both 'Indianness' and religious community pre-dated British rule. John Company did not 'imagine' identities into existence but significantly rearranged them by introducing new mediums of communication and new arenas of political competition. The late 19th century

while on paper catering to modernisation/divide-and-rule, ironically fostered a "traditionalisation of Indian society" and provided the impetus for the socio-religious reform movements whose messages played a vital role in the national movement for freedom.

One manifestation of this traditionalisation was the 'Hindu renaissance' that swept *fin de siecle* Indian society. Did this tendency spring merely from a desire to counter colonial stereotypes even while imitating colonial knowledge or did it have a genius of its own? Talbot cautions those who assert the primacy of the British role against ignoring the creativity and originality of indigenous agency in recasting identities. However, he still presents most Indian ideas of Indianness as being built upon Orientalist notions. For instance, Swami Dayananda, Mahadev Ranade, Jyotiba Phule and P. Sundaram Pillai borrowed from depictions of ancient India by Orientalist like Max Muller.

At the same time, it is worth asking if there were not oral and generational traditions, scriptures and legends that preceded colonial knowledge, which extolled the Vedas and posited Aryans or Dravidians as the original uncorrupted natives of the peninsula. No doubt, Ram Mohan Roy was inspired by Western rational and empiricist thought, but can the same be said of Swami Vivekananda, whose 'construction' of Indian identity was suffused with a spirituality bereft of Orientalist baggage? Also, consider the cults of Kali and Durga, analogies of the anthropomorphic Bharat Mata, which were prominent nationalist motifs in the novels of Bankim Chatterjee, the early writings of Aurobindo Ghosh and the politics of Lokmanya Tilak. Likewise, the cult of Shivaji in Marath-



India & Pakistan: Inventing the Nation

by Ian Talbot
Arnold Publishers, London, 2000
Price: USD 74, Pages: 312
ISBN: 0340706325

reviewed by
Sreeram Sundar Chaulia

communication revolution and educational changes enabled exchange of ideas which "knit India together like never before". Colonial perceptions of the nature of Indian society (martial-races theory, the essentialisation of caste in the census, and Orientalist association of languages with religions) profoundly altered what Indians thought of themselves. Colonial institutional development (revenue settlements, gradual constitutional reform that made municipal politics a major conflict zone, and separate electorates which engendered a rush for recognition as 'minorities'),

wada became a rallying point for imagining a virile Hindu past. In the United Provinces, the cow-protection movement mobilised Hindus of reformist and traditionalist persuasions to a common cause. Were not all these symbols of identity adapted from popular cultures of specific regions rather than myths propagated by European thinkers?

Whatever its genesis, the neo-Hindu renaissance hurried Muslim, Sikh and 'depressed classes' into community consciousness, especially as Indian nationalism seemed often to shade-off into Hindu nationalism. The Congress Party's inclusive ideology was not always convincing partly due to the presence of orthodox Hindu leaders like Madan Mohan Malviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, Purshottam Das Tandon, Vallabhai Patel and Rajendra Prasad (all of whom shared platforms and beliefs with militant Hindu nationalists like Vinayak Savarkar and Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar). Moreover, the use of Hindu cultural symbols was pronounced in nationalist politics, thereby giving it the appearance of a "Hindu-tinted Indian nationalism". Muslim ideas of separateness, arguably, came from Islamic universalism and the fraternity of all Muslims politics (*ummat/millat*) without heed to geography or geo-politics, a theme that was regularly emphasised by the poets Altaf Hali and Allama Iqbal, not to mention Syed Ahmad Khan. Hindu militancy in the Punjab and colonial simplifications of Sikhism as a sub-sect of Hinduism gave rise to a codified and distinct neo-Sikh identity through Lakshman Singh's "Singh Sabha movement" and other Khalsa Panth associations, culminating, in 1897, in Khan Singh Nabha's famous pamphlet, *Ham Hindu Nahin* (We Are Not Hindus).

These new caste, religious and national identities were not mutually exclusive or conflicting until their later politicisation. The prospect of constitutional reform lay at the root of community politicisation and polarisation. The formation of the Muslim League in 1906

sprang from UP *ashraf* (elite Muslim) insecurities in the aftermath of Hindu domination of municipalities and local councils. The Hindu Mahasabha (1915) was a product of Punjabi Hindu insecurities after the introduction of separate electorates neutralised their dominance in local bodies, and due to fears of colonial bias toward Muslims. The Akali Dal came up in 1920 because of Sikh disappointment at being awarded only a tiny fraction of Provincial Council seats by the Reform Act of 1919. It was also this act, which enabled the Justice Party (precursor to the Dravidian movement in the Madras Presidency) to mobi-

For India, the sizeable Muslim population was simultaneously an uncomfortable reality to square up to as well as 'proof' of the illegitimacy of the two-nation theory.

lise on behalf of the "Tamil Nad for Tamilians" demand.

Such manifestations of ethnicity-based politics were subsumed, by the time of independence, within larger processes. In the end game of empire, why did 'nationalism', represented by the Muslim League and Congress, triumph over calls for a Tamil Eelam, Khalistan, Purba Pakistan, Pakhtunistan, Nagaland etc.? Talbot explains this in terms of the relative strengths of these identities. The Congress was relatively "unique in its grassroots support and organisational strength". The Muslim League, despite weak organisation, was able to demonstrate its strength in the 1946 provincial elections through the lethal marriage of 'elite communalism' and 'popular communalism', abruptly transforming Jinnah into the "sole spokesman" of the millat at the expense of the more accommodative Muslim politics of Punjab Unionist

Party. In the closing stages of the Pakistan struggle, the assertion of Islam's civilisational incompatibility with Hinduism was also a major factor in mobilising mass support. In contrast, Akali demands for a Sikhistan/Khalistan, ran into British resistance, owing to what Talbot calls colonial "attachment to the concept of a United India". Besides, unlike the Congress and the League, Akali Dal remained perpetually divided by faction and region. "Frontier Gandhi" Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan's demand for a Pakhtun state, while enjoying broad support in the Pushto Northwest, failed to register its presence in the 1946 hustings, *inter alia* because it was 'deserted' by long-time ally, the Congress. In the Madras Presidency, E V Ramswamy Naicker's Dravida Nad vision was also outrightly rejected because of the complications it posed for an all-India settlement between the Congress and the League, and because the Congress penetrated this constituency of non-Brahmin Tamil-speaking Vellalas. Many other regional, ethno-national and linguistic minorities' demands 'lost' in 1947. However, they were by no means extinguished, and carried over unfinished agendas to independent India and Pakistan.

Identity reconfigurations

Partition affected perceptions in India of what was, despite Pakistan, the world's largest Muslim community. Were Indian Muslims 'left behind'? Had they chosen to stay back? Did geography and the quirk of historical circumstance prevent them from joining their 30 million coreligionists? For India, the sizeable Muslim population was simultaneously an uncomfortable reality to square up to as well as 'proof' of the illegitimacy of the two-nation theory. The mass migration and massacres in August 1947 created a "refugee constituency" for Hindu nationalists and widespread hostility towards Muslims in North India. Within the Congress, while Nehru personally strove for a 'secular-progressive India' as the an-



A centrally located hotel offering traditional tibetan hospitality.
Well-appointed guest rooms with multi channel TV, telephone and the only rooftop restaurant in the valley. Come feel the warmth of TIBETAN hospitality...



**TIBET
RESORT**

Lakeside, Pardi
P.O. Box No. 101
Pokhara, Nepal
Tel: +977-61-20853, 24553
Fax: +077-61-25206
E-mail: tibetres@cnet.wlink.com.np

Review

your guide to
Nepal active holidays
Tibet
Bhutan
India

For
Hotel
Tour
Trekking
Climbing
Flight
Rafting
Jungle Tour



Eco Trek, Nepal

URL: www.ecotreknepal.com
email: info@ecotreknepal.com
Fax: 00977-1-420490, Tel: 424112/424113
PO Box: 6438, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal
Cell: (00977) 9810 20061, 26595

**"By far the best deal in the
inexpensive range of hotels"**

Frommer's Nepal

**Our personalized service matches the
highest quality for a comfortable stay.**



Features:

- on a quiet lane, situated conveniently in the heart of the tourist district of Thamel.
- business and travel centre (email, fax, private phones, trekking, rafting and safari)
- satellite TV, safety deposit, air conditioning, elevator and luggage storage
- bath-tubs with 24-hr hot shower, roof-top garden and friendly staff



HOTEL EXCELSIOR (P) LTD
GPO Box 9432
Narsingh Camp, Thamel, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 411566/257748 Fax: +977-1-410853
email: excel@wlink.com.np
URL: http://www.catmando.com/excelsior



Looking for a nice,
clean three-star facility that's quiet
and peaceful with authentic Tibetan
decor and within ten minutes'
walking distance from the tourist
shopping area of Thamel?

What better choice than Hotel Tibet!



HOTEL

TIBET

PVT. LTD.

Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal

For reservations

Tel: 00977-1-429085/86/87/88

Fax: 00977-1-410957

e-mail: hotel@tibet.mos.com.np

http://www.hoteltibet.com

tithesis of 'reactionary Islamic Pakistan', the party still had a strident anti-Muslim segment, particularly at the state level. UP chief minister Govind Ballabh Pant was one of the first Congress luminaries to publicly question the Muslim community's 'loyalty to India'. After the 'Congress system' crossed the limit of unpopularity and anti-incumbency by 1989, the BJP rose to prominence declaring, "India would be strong only if it acknowledged the genius of its Hindu culture".

Besides the rise and broader acceptance of Hindutva, another big identity remoulding in contemporary India has been the rise of Other Backward Castes (OBC). Affirmative action took a new turn with the 1989 extension of reservation in government employment and education to 'backward castes'. This, a la 'positive discrimination' of the British Raj, gave a fillip to new collective self-consciousness among myriad *jatis* (castes) and sub-*jatis*, which were previously passive in defining themselves. Today, a multitude of identities straddles across modern India. To some, Hindu and Indian have become coterminous. To others, caste identities matter as primary categories for locating themselves. One billion Indians inhabit, in Shashi Tharoor's words, "one billion Indias".

The Pakistani state was less successful in adjusting to diversity, essentially due to lack of democratic institutions, according to Talbot. Pakistan had to deal with nation building from scratch. Most Muslim League stalwarts had migrated from the United Provinces and lacked legitimacy in West and East Pakistan. A vice-regal tradition, inherited from the Raj's "West Punjabi police state", was neatly transferred to the army and bureaucracy after 1947 in the absence of civilian challenge. An unrepresentative body politic put paid to Jinnah's express desire for a loose federal structure and a secular non-ideological state. The effects of Islamisation and centralisation on an ethnically plural society were disastrous for Pakistani unity in the long-

term. A Pakistani that abrasively pushed Sunni-Shia, Deobandi-Barelvi and Punjabi-non-Punjabi differences under the carpet in the name of a monolithic, unitary and theocratic state (especially under Zia-ul-Haq, 1977-1988) owed much to the country's depoliticisation and poor institutional growth in civil society.

Pakistani nationalism demonised 'Hindu India' just as many in India coined self-images of being 'that which is not Pakistani'. But this reactive neighbour baiting failed to cut ice among all the ethnic constituents and proved an entirely inadequate basis for constructing a national community. In India, Hin-

The effects of Islamisation and centralisation on an ethnically plural society were disastrous for Pakistani unity in the long-term.

du communal portrayal of Muslims as lustful and barbaric did not carry significant weight beyond the Gangetic Plain. In Pakistan, testified by Baloch leader Sherbaz Mazari, jingoistic anti-Indian politics found no purchase in Balochistan, Sindh and NWFP. Three full-scale wars and a quasi-war two years ago have kept the flame of a threatening Indian behemoth alive but also diverted resources into what historian Ayesha Jalal has labelled "political economy of defence". Regional economic disparities have intensified the feeling of a state striving for 'Punjabiisation' and given rise to a 'Kalashnikov culture' represented by movements like the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Karachi. Altaf Hussain's "secondary state" is as much an unhealed sore of partition as it is a reaction to what Talbot calls "the formal state's inability to tackle socio-economic problems or provide

law and order".

Sub-nationalism

National, communal and ethnic energies have erupted into violent anti-state insurgencies since the end of the 1960s in both India and Pakistan, prompting speculations of fragmentation and "declining nation-states". In the earlier period, India co-opted Tamil sub-nationalism by creating linguistic states in 1956 and 'domesticating' the Dravidian movement, while Pakistan dealt with the Pakhtunistan demand by bringing in Pushtun nationalists into the army and bureaucracy. But Bangladesh, mohajir nationalism, Khalistan and Kashmir have torn the myths of enforceable pan-Indian or pan-Pakistani nationalism. The road to the division of Pakistan is reminiscent of Hindu-Muslim estrangement in colonial North India. Sustained Bengali marginalisation in Pakistani affairs began in 1952, and assumed proportions that convinced rising stars like Mujibur Rahman that East Pakistan was being colonially exploited. The extent of Bengali disenchantment was proportionate to the dominance of the Punjabi establishment in Islamabad. Talbot sees evidence of a refusal to learn from history in the Pakistani state's handling of mohajir militancy since the mid-1980s.

In the case of the Khalistan insurgency (1984-1992), Indian authorities refused to address the underlying problem of Sikh ethno-nationalism. Initially, both the militant leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and the Akali Dal called for greater autonomy within the Indian Union. Uneven distribution of Green Revolution prosperity, the rise of the Khalsa religious orthodoxy in response to "wheat-whisky culture" and Sikh insecurity following influx of Hindu landless labourers from UP and Bihar constituted the general background to rising Sikh demands for "fairer treatment" by the centre. But in the face of the central government's palpable lack of sincerity, the call for autonomy graduated into violent

secessionism. India's much trumpeted asset, democracy, proved its undoing, because the prime minister Indira Gandhi cultivated Bhindranwale in a bid to unseat the Congress party's Punjab rivals, the Akali moderates. Operation Bluestar (5 June 1984), Mrs. Gandhi's assassination and the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi reopened bottled-up ghosts of *zulm* and *ghallughara* (massacre). Militancy in Punjab was abetted by more than the obvious 'foreign hand', Pakistan, as Sikh diasporas in Britain and North America remitted large donations to the Khalistan cause as a demonstration of "politics of the homeland". If Punjab was saved for India, it was thanks to factionalism among militants and efficient but abusive counter-insurgency, whose blisters continue to haunt the celebrated ideal of a 'multi-ethnic democracy'.

The Kashmir insurgency from 1989 has been an even greater challenge to Indian unity. It is undeniable that New Delhi mismanaged Kashmiri sensitivities and rigged polls in the state, and clung to unrepresentative and unpopular *sa-traps* and irked an increasingly literate and upwardly mobile Kashmiri society. Ironically, Kashmir has entered popular Indian perception as an inter-country dispute, whereas the roots of Kashmiri disaffection lay in centre-state disharmony within the Indian Union. A "mailed fist" strategy of wiping out terrorists has yielded counter-productive results unlike in Punjab and the counter-insurgency is yet to claim even propagandistic 'normalcy'.

In the final analysis, Talbot sagacious advice to India and Pakistan, struggling against seemingly insuperable challenges of militant

identities, is to "replace politics of confrontation with politics of accommodation". Easier said than done, but if the import of this simple yet profound prescription is imbibed even in iotas by decision-makers in Delhi and Islamabad, it will go a long way in resolving some fundamental antinomies and threats to their respective societies and nationhoods. From the stylistic point of view, what stands out memorably is Talbot's deft disentangling and intermeshing of contemporary and historical phenomena. Barring a few factual and descriptive inaccuracies, *Inventing the Nation* is a major historical account of the sub-continental identity voyage of the last two centuries and a unique one in crossing the Rubicon of 1947 and updating the narrative to present-day India and Pakistan. ▽

The Great Indian Newspaper Revolution

In India, regional language newspapers were once the poor cousins of their English counterparts. But in the last quarter of the past century, these 'lower castes' began coming into their own, and now enjoy considerable clout. Robin Jeffrey's *India's Newspaper Revolution* is about how these language papers—the *Eenadu's* and the *Punjab Kesari's*—have become an important part of life for a vast constituency of Indians. But more importantly, it is about the forces that are at play behind the making of a newspaper.

The print economy

The advertiser looms large in Jeffrey's work. The obvious fact is that it is advertisement revenues, and not any missionary zeal, that drive most newspapers. Newspaper proprietors are constantly in search of advertisers, to whom they flaunt

readership figures and the buying capacity of their readers. "I sell my news and views to the reader, and I sell my readers to the advertisers," Jeffrey quotes the managing director of a Marathi newspaper.

For decades after Indian Independence, advertisements were the preserve of the English language papers. Advertisers felt that only English readers had the disposable income and purchasing power. But much has changed since then. As local language papers burgeoned, and their reach and quality improved, national advertisers came to realise the value of the regional market and adapted to it. So the well-established local language papers had it good both ways—from the national advertisers as well as the local advertisers. Jeffrey cites the example of the Telugu daily, *Eenadu*, which broke new ground in seek-

ing out new advertisers and kinds of advertisements. It introduced the concept of "district dailies" (tabloid inserts, each focusing on a single district), which helped the paper develop a readership in small-town and rural Andhra Pradesh. This also created a new breed of small local advertisers.

By the early 1990s, *Eenadu* had thousands of its marketing people going from door to door to push the virtues of advertising. The effect was sometimes comical. An Andhra farmer mourned the death of a stud bull in a full page ad. Local advertising, indeed, had arrived. *Eenadu* then went on to do matrimonials, real estate ads, obituary notices, and anniversaries. Notes Jeffrey: "Obituaries required delicate negotiations with the deceased's relatives and friends... obituaries had added reward because various ceremonies after the funeral might also be advertised. A single death, uniting a notable deceased with an energetic *Eenadu* agent, could even generate a sixteen-page supplement. Sales-agent banter included speculation about how many pages of obituary-supplement a particular politician might be worth."

EPSON
THE POWER TO CREATE

INK JET PRINTER
EPSON STYLUS™ C40SX
C20SX



EPSON's Affordable, Speedy
1440 dpi Photo Quality Printer



MERCANTILE
OFFICE SYSTEMS

Durbar Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal Tel: 220773/243566/243066 Fax: 225407
Branch Office : Siddhartha Path, Hetauda, Tel: 20211, Bharatpur Height, 20656
E-mail: market@mos.com.np

As for matrimonials, Jeffrey says, "Matrimonial advertisements, solicited in consultation with wedding photographers, could be extended into a regular earner by keeping track of anniversaries and birth of children... *Eenadu* in Vijayawada kept much of this information on computer and fed details regularly to its agents. Able salespersons kept their own notes and reminded potential advertisers in time to take an ad to celebrate a wedding anniversary, a birth or a birthday." And it was not merely *Eenadu* which was breaking new ground in advertising. Up north, *Punjab Kesari*, "the largest circulated Hindi daily", started putting out lottery ads and classifieds.

Advertisements have come to rule the roost, and is in no way considered "useless" as Mohandas Gandhi had regarded them. The other Congress leader, Jawaharlal Nehru, too, was suspicious of making "people buy things they do not want", and seems to have got it right when he said advertisers "manipulate the manipulators". But the fact of the matter is that the print media-advertisement nexus is an inexorable one. Advertising has taken newspapers to the remoter nooks, turned readers into consumers, and given locals a paper of their own, one which apparently carries their own views or those they can easily identify with.

Extending Tentacles

Things were very different for the language papers before the late 1970s. It was both a technical and economic struggle, and it needed a particular set of "technical, political and economic circumstances" to fuel the newspaper revolution in a country with 19 official languages and 10 major scripts, and where half the population did not know how to read or write. For many years, the prohibitive costs of printing in different scripts stunted the growth of the language press. By the 1980s, however, things had changed dramatically.

The newspaper revolution began with the arrival of new print-

ing technology. Printing in the Indian languages was never easy, as the Indian scripts proved to be unwieldy for the Guttenberg press. As Indian scripts have a symbol for every spoken word, the number of characters required ran into the hundreds. While a printer's "case" for an English font would consist of 80 "compartments" (for 26 upper-case and 26 lower-case letters, and numerals from zero to nine, as well as punctuation marks), the "case" for an Indian language font had to consist of a minimum of 300-400 compartments. To create type in Indian scripts meant a great deal of effort and money.



India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian Language Press, 1977-99

by Robin Jeffrey
Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000
Price: INR 545, Pages: xviii+234
ISBN: 019 565392 0

reviewed by **Shanuj V.C.**

The new combination of off-set press and computer finally gave Indian scripts the visibility of its Roman counterpart. Ironically enough, Indira Gandhi's Emergency (1975-77), set up a situation that transformed the language press forever. The censorship of Emergency created insipid newspapers and falling readership, but when it ended, the curiosity level had risen so high that proprietors started looking at the newspaper business as a potentially profitable one. It helped that by the late 1970s, there were millions of Indians with relatives abroad who repatriated money and ideas. For its part, the Indian government began to ease controls, which meant that printing equipment could now be imported. This "liberated" the

Indian script. By the 1990s, the situation had changed so dramatically that villages which had rarely ever seen the face of a newspaper, found it arriving by the early morning bus. The publication centres themselves were no longer confined to state capitals; like the post office and hospital, a newspaper office became a landmark in small towns.

With the 'locals' on the way to being hooked, the next step was to localise the content of the paper. As proprietors began competing for readers by spreading into the 'suburbs', it became apparent that readers wanted to know more about their locality in a language that they could understand and enjoy. While national and international news still held an important place, it was in the area of local news that newspapers made giant strides. Hundreds of stringers were hired, with the result that unlike in the earlier days, when news from the remoter districts came to be carried days after an event, now it saw the light of day the very next morning. Local events thereby acquired as much importance as major national events. At the very beginning of the book, Jeffrey recounts a conversation with an Andhra Circle Inspector who says that "newspapers have made the police's job more difficult. Once if one policeman went to a village, the people were afraid. Now, six police may go to a village and people are not afraid. Newspapers have made them know that the police are not supposed to beat them." "I'll go to the newspapers" has by now become a common enough threat.

'Indian' owners

Compared to other countries, the ownership pattern of Indian-language is quite diverse. These owners, Jeffrey says, are the "linchpins of the Indian state" who connect their regions to India, and India to their regions. But national integration is not their primary objective, rather it is profit and influence that these regional newspaper owners seek. As their newspapers' reach grew, most of the proprietors who

were once traders with printing presses, transformed themselves into capitalists, and began enjoying tremendous influence among politicians and bureaucrats. In much the same way that advertisers began acknowledging the purchasing power of Indian-language readers, politicians realised that their vote banks were being swayed by what newspapers wrote.

The diversity of ownership stems from the diversity of Indian languages. While in theory it might seem workable that an owner could run a paper outside his area, in practice, this threw up hurdles in a business that "depended on language and local knowledge". As a consequence, smaller proprietors could not be gobbled up by the big fish. And since there were several players in the market, newspapers could carry a wider variety of news and views, something so essential to a democracy.

This, of course, could have given rise to the possibility of centrifugal and secessionist tendencies in a country of so many different cultures. That this did not take place, and instead the press traversed the other direction of promoting and strengthening Indian unity, was partly due to the self-image of the proprietors. Writes the author: "The twenty or thirty owners of the largest newspapers in Indian languages saw themselves as members of an Indian elite. As capitalists in a difficult industry on which India's chafing economic controls had often impinged, they frequently banded together to defend their interests. Moreover, ...they basked in the influence they increasingly wielded in New Delhi and the deference and respect shown them by national bureaucrats and politicians." Owners were also impelled by the realisation that profitable newspapers needed national and multinational advertisers.

But this is not to suggest that Indian-language newspapers only propagated the legitimacy of the Indian state. Far from it. The content was also "subtly local", and, in some cases, proprietors have sup-

ported political parties and movements opposed to the central government. Even so, they were always subliminally pushing "the legitimacy of an Indian state and an Indian nation". All the papers use national news agencies to report "Indian weather, Indian cricket, Indian stock-market prices and Indian politics" and forever remind readers editorially that they are Indians first and foremost.

Jeffrey makes the important point that the secessionist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and the Northeast owe much to the underdevelopment of local capitalism and the absence of successful newspapers. He cites the case of Assam, where, in the mid-1990s, the ratio of Assamese-language daily papers to Assamese speakers was about 11 per 1000, whereas the national average was three times greater. And in the smaller northeastern states, there are no newspapers big enough to find mention in the *Press and Advertisers' Yearbook*, the holy book of national advertisers. Kashmir, too, had done without long-standing dailies, while in Punjab, the most successful Indian state in terms of capitalist agriculture, an established daily press in Gurmukhi (the script in which Punjabi is written) evolved only lately. Says Jeffrey: "The places where the newspaper revolution did not begin in the 1970s were more likely to produce challenges to the Indian state. In such places, the absence of thrusting, capitalist-run, India-focused daily newspapers meant that a large number of people did not have the sense each morning that they were sharing over their newspaper the experience of India with tens of millions like themselves."

Content and profile

The proprietors of course call the shots, but it is the editors and reporters who shape what goes into a newspaper. There was a time when Indian-language editors were powerless, given the government's exclusive preoccupation with English papers. But now they have come to exercise immense influence. Jeffrey

quotes the resident editor of the Hindi-language *Punjab Kesari*, Ashwini Kumar, who recalled a phone call from the prime minister: "So [Prime Minister Narasimha Rao] rang me up. He said, 'I read your editorial... How can you say [I've not achieved anything]?... I want to tell you that I have done this, I have done that.' "This is [a] very important thing. Earlier, the politicians never used to do this with Hindi editors." This exchange between the editor and the prime minister is a reflection of the status and prestige the Indian-language journalists have acquired. Unfortunately, there is a downside to this success of the "language press". As "gatekeepers", local editors and reporters are also liable to carry their prejudices, biases and ulterior motives into the newspapers. Jeffrey cites the instance of the police firing in Ayodhya after Hindu zealots razed the 16th century mosque there: "In the most bizarre example a gatekeeper of *Swatantra Bharat*, a Hindi daily, inserted a handwritten '1'—on the offset plate—in front of '15' in a front-page headline to inflate the number said to have been killed in police firing..."

Meanwhile, with newspapers reaching out to newer territories and readers, the number of journalists and stringers have grown exponentially. Jeffrey notes that the average number of journalists per newspaper was up from about 15 in the early 1960s to 40 in the 1990s. But diversity of social representation leaves much to be desired. Dalits and women remain quite peripheral to the press. Although Dalits constitute 15 percent of the Indian population (totalling roughly 150 million) in the 1990s, barely a handful worked as reporters or sub-editors, leave alone as editors in all of India. Stories about Dalits therefore lacked the insight that a Dalit journalist could have given.

As for women, Jeffrey points out that in the 1990s, they held about eight percent of the jobs in Indian newspapers, and were constantly at the receiving end of "conservatism

and gender bias". It was easy to deny jobs to women on the ground that they "marry and leave". In what is surely the most striking travesty, *Vanitha*, a Malayalam women's magazine, had only one woman working in its editorial staff. A woman journalist's task, the male establishment concluded, ought to be fiction and soft stories on art and culture. And working in small-town papers was seen to be precisely what 'respectable' women ought not to be doing, because these papers were associated with the "owner-trader-politician-criminal nexus". The presence of woman also called for special 'infrastructural' changes. Thus a time came when the Marathi newspaper Sakal's office could no longer do with simply a 'staff toilet'. And its management even decided to have flower vases, to perhaps acknowledge the presence of six women journalists on the staff.

Controlling the power of print

The power of the printed word is such that there are always forces trying to control it. In the newspaper world, Jeffrey contends, the contest for control takes place in two broad areas. The first is between the newspaper and the state, with the state attempting to rein in newspapers ostensibly to protect citizens by preventing outrageous and harmful matter from being published. The other area of conflict involves individuals seeking to control publications, and journalists trying to eke benefits on the basis of their control over reportage of news.

The first case of running a newspaper in the state's threatening presence, Jeffrey likens to dancing with a bear—"distance and formality are essential, for one partner at least". Jeffrey says Indian newspapers have been waltzing with the bear for two centuries. In the second case, the individuals trying to influence a paper's editorial policies could represent any of a number of interests—radical politics, criminal lobbies, advertisers, politicians or businessmen.

Other than these two broad areas of contest, two other types of

control too are at work. Newspapers obviously try to influence the readers, and proprietors try to make newspapers their mouthpieces. The contest between the journalist and the proprietor is constant—"journalists want to determine the nature of what they produce", while the proprietors want the newspaper to reflect their own requirements with the refrain "whose newspaper is it anyway". So with the various equations of control over newspapers, such as governments seeking to interpret what is good or bad for the readers, or with politicians, insurgents and criminals attempting to

Jeffrey makes the important point that the secessionist movements in Punjab, Kashmir and the Northeast owe much to the underdevelopment of local capitalism and the absence of successful newspapers.

get the newspaper to tell their version of an event, it is a challenging game for proprietors and journalists, themselves often working at cross purposes. In some cases, if a proprietor or journalist does not toe the line of a particular pressure group, it could even mean physical harm, while the rewards from playing along, could be significant.

Jeffrey highlights the fact that the expansion of capitalism in India is best reflected in its newspaper industry—"the development of Indian-language newspapers provides a thermometer for taking the temperature of Indian capitalism". According to Jeffrey, the Indian newspaper industry, with its unceasing wooing of advertisers and other players in the market, has borne out the worst fears of India's freedom fighters, that of "ceasing to be a mission

and becoming a trade".

But at the same time, as Jeffrey is quick to remind us, the Indian-language papers have triggered a "million mutinies" by carrying the voices of millions of Indians rebelling against their circumstances. Newspapers give space to more and more people to "air grievances, demand remedies and organise action". However, such public-spirited activity need not always be liberal. Such activities also bear the capacity to promote biases and communal behaviour. Just as a public park can be occupied by all kinds of elements, a newspaper is a vehicle of different views and news. But whatever may be the case, it is obviously important to safeguard this "free-speech public sphere" from censorship.

Looking into the future, Jeffrey dwells briefly on television and its impact on print's future. Citing the case of the United States, he points out that surveys have shown that two-thirds of households with television sets also bought newspapers, while less than a third of non-TV households were newspaper subscribers. He believes that the 'language' newspapers will be able to adapt and ride the television revolution. The future of print journalism is assured, he says, simply because the growth of literacy in Indian languages is "slow, unstoppable and immense". Although in terms of advertising revenue, it is television that has a larger share, the fact that advertising volumes continue to rise, suggest that Indian-language papers will not lose their share of advertising any time soon, particularly as advertisers become more "ethnocentric".

Jeffrey's work on the 'language press' is grounded in meticulous research and hard analysis of a trend that will become even more vital for India and South Asia. This is indeed a path breaking study from the Australian scholar, whose ability to marshal an argument with a rich mixture of information and anecdote has ensured that it is more than just an academic tome strictly meant for the arcane world of research. ▽

Downside Up

A world upside down may do South Asia a lot of good. This is a place where a lot of not-so-nice things are happening with no one able to do anything about it. Perhaps the sheer act of turning things topsy turvy on the map will help us right our collective bearings, and the way we think of our terrain, ourselves, and our neighbours.

Think of it this way: Pakistan has always thought of India as the enemy to the east. Suddenly, north is south, east is west, and the enemy is just not there!

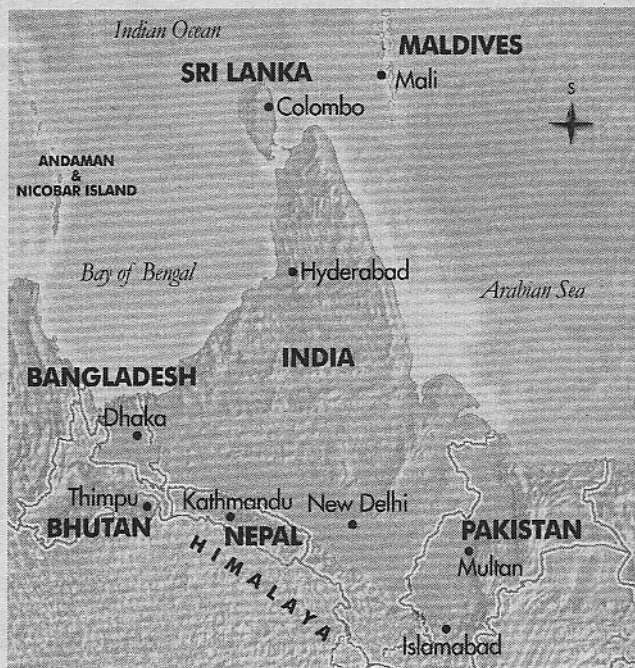
This is just a taste of how things will change. In the Universe within which the earth spins, the North Pole and the South Pole are equally important. But because the Northerners monopolised science, history, cartography and astronomy, we Southerners are relegated to the nether world. Actually, of course, there is no reason why what is presently North should monopolise the top of the page. Actually, there is no reason why the top of the page should necessarily be 'good', but let that be. If we cannot change the goody-goody image of top of page, for now we will simply change the configuration of what goes in there—we will turn the map downside up, reverse the text to be right side up, and sit back and watch the fun.

North is where good is supposedly located. The *gora* Aryans, say our Hindutva pals, came in from the north and colonised the Gangetic *mairdaan*. The South was where the lumpen dark-skinned Dravidians were pushed towards. The Himalayan chain, marking off the northern edge of the Subcontinent, is seen to be the pure fount of all wisdom and dignity. North, after all, was where the rishis meditated where Kailash holds court as Meru, the centre of the universe. The north is where Shiva hung out and Indra reigned (if these are gods, why do we always speak about them in the past tense?). And the North northern Gangetic plains was where Prince (later King) Ram held court, and the South was where the demon king Rawan ranted and raved and incarcerated the kidnapped (fair-skinned) Sita.

For the writers and interpreters of South Asian mythology, North was Good, and South, passable. So much so that when the river turns north, called *Uttar Bahini*, that is where you locate your holiest spots. This point of view is ingrained into the secular mind as well, starting with the idea that the cardinal direction is north with reference to which everything is defined.

As long we cannot changed this mindset, better to convert the map. Easier that way.

Lanka is now in the north, and it is entirely appropriate that the country of SAARC with the highest per capita income (Maldives) is now right up there on top. The poorest regions (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh,



The Cartographic Jolt.

Nepal) and the most violent (Kashmir, India's North-east) now scabble around the bottom of the page.

The very shape of countries will provide us with refreshing changes. Rather than a "tear drop" isle, Sri Lanka becomes an inverted comma. Now looking less like a porpoise set to dive, Pakistan looks like a cocked revolver ready to fire. Bangladesh's head is no longer the Rajshahi district rearing up against the flanks of Assam and West Bengal; it becomes more a country with a Bart Simpson head made up of deltaic islands. Kashmir does not head India any more, and the republic is now a pointed, tilted pyramid. The Himalaya is no longer a northern frontier, but a southern wall.

In this new-look South Asia, seen through fresh eyes, it will be impossible for New Delhi to remain the capital of India. How could a city so far to the *south* ever do? The same goes for Islamabad, so close to the Kashmir and Afghan frontiers. In this new configuration, better that Hyderabad (Deccan) and Multan be the capitals, respectively.

The SAARC summit is coming up. Let's propose this to the sumitting presidents and prime ministers about turning South Asia on its head. Nothing seems to really make us jettison our historical baggage of enmity, so perhaps a cartographic jolt is what will make us see the light.

Kanah Dixit



the explore nepal group

Vistas & Vignettes of Kathmandu Valley & Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Bhojan Griha... a grand old building restored and converted into the finest restaurant serving traditional ethnic cuisine Kantipur Temple House... a hotel that combines the unique architecture of a Newari Temple with traditional decor to create the perfect ambience Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp... a remote luxury safari tented camp in eastern Nepal for exclusive sightings of rare wild water buffaloes & hundred of bird species We like to bring you more with our deep commitment towards restoration & conservation.



Kantipur Temple House

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Camp

Bhojan Griha

Post box: 536, Kathmandu, nepal.
Tel: 247078, 247079, 247081, 226130 Fax: 977-1-224237/243250
e-mail: explore@mos.com.np Website: www.catmando.com/the-explore-nepal-group

१०००
१००००
१०००००
१००००००

Speak up for the documentary

Film South Asia 2001

Festival of South Asian Documentaries

4-7 October 2001, Russian Cultural Centre, Kathmandu

You are wasted if you are not there. Or catch the travelling fest in your city in 2002.

Organised by

हिमालय रज्जोसिस्त्राबल
HIMALAYA RAZZO SISTRABAL

HIMAL