

April 2002


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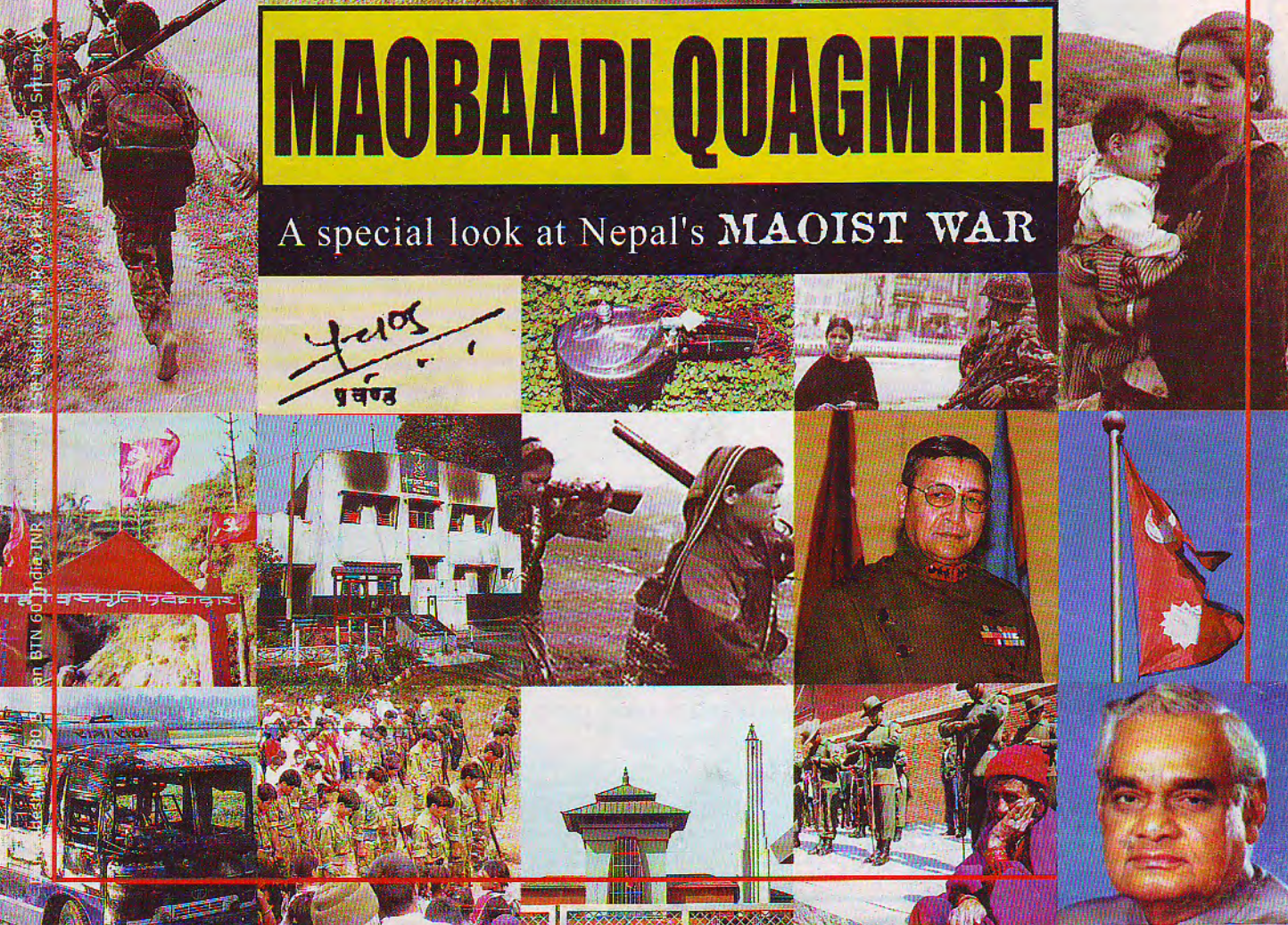
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MAOBAADI QUAGMIRE

A special look at Nepal's MAOIST WAR



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Indra

Nepal, 9th-11th century, Copper alloy, gth. Object 23

In this superb cast image Indra sits at ease holding a symbolic lotus seed in his hand extended in charity (varada mudra). His expression is benign and, unique to him, third eye is horizontal. He wears a magnificent three-crested crown but is otherwise chastely ornamented. His lower body is draped with a loincloth decorated with rosettes to simulate a textile pattern.

Photograph by Rupert Steiner, Printed at Jagadamba Offset, Patan.

P A T A N M U S E U M

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Maobaadi Quagmire



Nepal's Maoist war, now in its seventh year, has become a fight to the death between 'people's warriors' and army *sipahis*, while politics takes a back seat on all sides. As the monsoon months approach, when the army's logistics will become more difficult, there is added apprehension in the air. The country has now been at war with itself for half of its modern democratic existence – and its future is less secure now than at any time before.

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Communalism at Large

The BJP's weaknesses as a political party make it doubly dangerous as far as the non-Hindu minorities of India are concerned.

Of the many liturgies of nationalism in India, the one that has risen to political and rhetorical prominence in recent years bears the unmistakable stamp of a municipal parochialism which, in some of its agendas, is not very different from the cosmopolitan provincialism of the post-September 'free world'. Because of the convergence of views on the holy war against 'Islamic terrorism', which has now been made part of the official business of the rest of the world, vide Resolution 1376 of the normally defunct UN General Assembly, executive functionaries in the world's largest democracy, elevated to office for no particular expertise save the incendiary lessons learnt on the parade grounds of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), have felt themselves a lot freer use the administrative machinery they command to renew their attacks on Muslim life, property and freedom.

The continuing violence in Gujarat and the enactment of a new 'anti-terrorism' legislation, which, even before its ratification by parliament, had been invoked with sectarian selectivity against Muslims, do not just coincide with the new global offensive against Islam. They also closely follow on the heels of the second major fiasco that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies have encountered in two successive rounds of elections to state legislatures in the country. The global onslaught merely provides the indulgent climate in which exceptional violations of fundamental democratic rights can take place. Domestic electoral compulsions supply the immediate and sufficient impulse for both the riots and the legislation and therefore raises ominous questions about the future trajectory of Indian democracy.

The BJP has not renounced its sectarian agendas, a hope entertained by many on the assumption that the compulsions of coalitional governance would push the party to the centre of the political spectrum and hence moderate the fundamentalism of its avowed social programme. The empirical circumstances of the Indian polity militate against the abstract validity of this assumption. The BJP is

not a party that accommodates a social diversity the way the Congress Party does and is therefore not compelled by any internal pressure to find an intrinsic balance. In the event, any moderating influence on its programme must come from its allies, who, having locked themselves in a compact of power, have a strictly limited capacity to exert the requisite pressure.

Given the narrow elastic limits of sustainable coalitions, both the communal BJP and its allegedly secular allies device tactical methods of accommodation without having to deviate from their sometimes antagonistic agendas. It is precisely this predicament that expressed itself through convoluted charades during the second half of March. The allies (such as the Trinamool Congress, the Samata Party) vocally asserted their opposition to the BJP's stealthy attempts to introduce Hindutva agendas, especially when the Attorney General of India pleaded in the supreme court that a temple-related ceremony be allowed on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi premises, currently in the possession of the Uttar Pradesh government. Yet they tacitly concurred with it once their own secular credentials had been adequately displayed for all who cared to see and believe. As Defence Minister George Fernandes, leader of the Samata Party and the 'convenor' of the ruling coalition, subsequently conceded, the allies cannot dictate to the BJP on the nature of its relations with the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other fraternal organisations that were at the forefront of the Gujarat riots.

Minorities and Us

The carnage in Gujarat that followed the Godhra killings indicates the tinderbox that India has become. Unlike so many other countries of the world, the devastation that can visit the country of one billion, once matters truly spiral out of control, can only be imagined. It is for this reason that various writeups in this issue of HIMAL directly and indirectly take their cue from Gujarat and the mal-treatment of minorities in South Asia. Besides the Muslim minority of India, they include the minorities of Bangladesh and of Pakistan. For a ray of light, hold your breath as you look to Sri Lanka, where the Sinhalese and Tamils seek accommodation after sixty-five thousand dead.

In the light of this inability, or unwillingness, of the allies to enforce even a moderate discipline on the BJP, the party's most fatal political weakness could well have the most serious repercussions for the safety of India's Muslim minority in the future. The BJP has at various points in the past, through the efforts of its fraternal organisations, mobilised a significant mass of Hindus to its electoral advantage. But it has failed to consolidate this into a permanent and secure base on which a reasonably stable

and moderate policy could have been constructed. That the absence of a continuous mobilisation has eroded the base built up during the first half of the 1990s is evident from the steady decline in the BJP's electoral performance from 1998 to 2002. The irresponsibility of its politics arises from this particular statistical trend, and therein lies the danger to the Muslims and other minorities of all kinds.

Hindu Mobilisation

At no time in the past, after coming to power at the Centre, has the BJP's vituperation against Muslims attained the pitch it has reached after the party's disastrous performance in the February elections to four state legislatures, including, most importantly, Uttar Pradesh. This menacing attitude was an early recognition of its evaporating base among once-mobilised Hindus. Soon thereafter, the executive body of the RSS issued a veiled warning to all Indian Muslims. A few days later, communal disturbances erupted in Gujarat. And even as BJP stalwarts in New Delhi express inane regrets over the mass killings, RSS functionaries have been unable to contain their glee at the turn of events.

The BJP's strategy therefore is quite clear, if it has to avoid a repetition of the recent debacle in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere. The party's strategists know from past experience that successful mobilisation leading to worthwhile electoral dividends requires a continuous state of Hindu-Muslim tension that can be sustained over a few years. Consequently, with elections in Gujarat due in the near future and with general elections scheduled for 2004, the foot-soldiers of the BJP's front organisations can be expected to indulge their ghoulish tastes so that the parent party is furnished the necessary environment and the accessories to repeat the triumphs of the mid-1990s.

Ironically, this is an outcome that suits the 'secular' politics of the BJP's allies as well as many others in the opposition, with the obvious exceptions on the Left. The aggressive cultivation of the Hindu vote by the BJP enables the equally aggressive cultivation of the insecure minority by parties that exclusively cater to specific combinations of castes. The secular constituency is predominantly just an arithmetic outcome of electoral calculations and therefore does not represent a real political commitment to secularism. This raises a further question about the capacity of India's electoral democracy to create a substantive secular foundation, as opposed to the partial and incidental secular veneer that exists today.

Latent communalism

In the pious folklore of liberal fundamentalism there is a casual textbook assumption that competitive politics automatically accommodates all competing social groups of any sizeable numerical strength. There is little in the Indian case to bear out validity of such a mechanical equation, while the recent attacks on the

Hindu minority in Bangladesh, by both the major national parties, provide clinching evidence to the contrary (see page 18). The 40-odd years of Congress rule in India rested crucially on the consolidation of the Muslim vote and yet, long before the rise of Hindutva, there was no dearth of anti-Muslim riots under the various Congress regimes both at the Centre and in the states. Clearly, maintaining the party's protectorate over the minority involved periodic reminders of their permanently insecure status in a Hindu-majority nation. The ritual sacrifice of Muslims was a necessary precondition for the electoral dominance of the Congress. In fact, the latent communalism in the Congress Party's secularism broke out in all its virulence during the Emergency period.

The semblance of defence of the beleaguered minority in India today is a welcome departure from the current global norm of anti-Muslim bigotry. But there is good reason to believe that Indian democracy presently does not go beyond an electoral secularism to which there is no necessarily benign logic. The contingent, often accidental, aspect of the outcomes of such politics are best indicated by the case of Bihar, which under four decades of Congress rule was a notoriously riot-prone state. In the late 1980s Rajiv Gandhi magnanimously redefined the party's secularism to subsume both Muslim and caste-Hindu agendas, including the fundamentalists trends in both. As a result both groups were alienated from the party, and Bihar, like many other states passed out of the Congress Party's hands, as a backward caste formation led by Laloo Yadav came to power with the help of the dalit and Muslim communities. In the decade and more since then, the state has not witnessed a single Hindu-Muslim riot, which is no statement on the inherent tolerance of Bihari society, but says much about the administrative investment in the Muslim community, whose loyalty has been secured. In such situation if nothing else, at least lives have not been lost.

On the other hand, it is possible that in certain areas the electoral arithmetic could render the minority vote entirely dispensable. Or, the preoccupations of institutional politics could make the minority temporarily irrelevant to the political calculation, as is evidently the case presently in Tamil Nadu. In the recent vote on the Prevention of Terrorism Bill in the Indian Parliament, both the main rival formations from the state, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, an ally of the BJP at the centre, and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), found it possible to vote in favour of the legislation, which is widely perceived as a law against Muslims. This was because both parties in this instance were competing for the BJP's favours and hence could dispense altogether with the 'Muslim sentiment'. Within a few days, communal trouble erupted in the south of the state. The law and order establishment in the state has reacted swiftly, but the damage has already been done.

Because India's electoral process does not necessarily provide guarantees against the more carnivorous forms of majority mobilisation, there has been a tendency to rely on the two other institutions of Indian democracy - the Supreme Court of India and the media. The former was quick to respond in firmly secular fashion when called upon to make a ruling on the VHP's immediate plans at Ayodhya. The media's conduct through the Gujarat riots was more equivocal. But the Supreme Court and the media are both unrepresentative, and are prone to vacillations. They have less stakes in the defense of Indian secularism than the elected representatives.

Vacillating institutions

The Supreme Court, in its ruling on the so-called "undisputed site" at Ayodhya that came up for litigation, categorically asserted the fundamentally unalterable secular character of the polity, which under the existing grim circumstances is no doubt heartening. The problem is that the courts, like Rajiv Gandhi and many others in their time, can quite easily redefine the meaning of secularism. In fact the judicial system has had a none-too-honourable role to play in the Ayodhya dispute. The supreme court has consistently ruled that, pending a final settlement, the original status quo, ie that the disputed mosque and its land should be left as it stood at the point when the dispute was first admitted in courts in the early 1950s, should be maintained. In effect there was once a disputed mosque with a disputed Hindu idol in it.

The pretence of a status quo is still maintained but its substantive content has repeatedly changed — from a disputed structure, to a disputed site on which there was no longer a disputed structure, to an undisputed site adjoining the disputed site, on which disputed ceremonies are urged to be permitted and so on and so on, ad nauseam. The supreme court has had a hand in the making of this deteriorating status quo. On at least two occasions the supreme court chose, in the name of an irresponsible freedom and at the cost of secular good sense, to dismiss petitions seeking injunctions against two events that contributed to accentuating the dispute. In the late 1980's it refused to forbid *shilanyas* ceremonies at Ayodhya during Rajiv Gandhi's premiership and again in 1991 did not disallow LK Advani's mechanised chariot trip from Somnath in Gujarat to the disputed site. Both events had a direct bearing on the eventual demolition of the mosque. Similar prejudicial judgements in the future are not precluded by any mechanism intrinsic to the judicial system.

As for the media, there is a small segment of it whose reaction to the Gujarat riots and other attendant developments has been refreshingly at variance with what has been on display in the past many years on sensitive matters. Unfortunately, a large section of the media is not immune to the incitements of Hindutva.

Perhaps inevitably, over the period of the Ram Janmabhoomi mobilisation, the media, ensconced in tall buildings in the affluent localities of Delhi and other capitals, in close proximity to the centres of power, and pretty much out of touch with everything else, saw the transient mob of Hindutva and believed it to be the pulse and the will of the people. Being the instrument of democracy that is most vulnerable to threats and inducements, there is little that is predictable about its long-term conduct in similar situations. The reportage between 1990 and 1993, on Advani's *rath yatra*, the demolition of the mosque, the riots that followed, the Bombay bomb blasts and other developments, is still too recent to be overlooked.

In balance, until such time as administrative and judicial mechanisms that safeguard the secular principle equally in all situations can be put in place, the fate of Indian secularism and its minorities, and hence of minorities elsewhere in the Subcontinent will in all likelihood continue to rest on the contingent benevolence of the electoral system. That is too thin a hope to live on for a mass of humanity to whom death is dealt at random by the hoodlums of the RSS. ▽

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Caste aspersions

A critique that condemns without comprehension.

IT IS difficult to find the correct tone for this response to Sriyavan Anand's "Eating with our fingers, watching Hindi cinema and consuming cricket" (*Himal* March 2002). There are points he makes that I agree with entirely, and the validity and genuineness of his overall concern are quite evidently unquestionable. Yet, there is so much in his article, both about the film and about the sport, that does not quite measure up to the standards of rigour that a purposive politics must command. To make matters worse, there are factual inaccuracies. But most of all, his argument is politically naive if not downright irresponsible.

Casual solecisms on irrelevant issues detract from the merits of Anand's more serious concerns. There are in his article many statements whose import and relevance have not been made adequately clear. Take, for example, some of his remarks about cricket and sports in India. He laments that cricket is 'uninternational', that "one half of the population, women, are effectively excluded" from playing it, and that "in a nation of one billion only 14 can make it to the national team". Now, what is "uninternational"? If a dozen nations play a sport, then it surely is international, if international is what we are talking about. Cricket has limited international reach, yes. These limits are determined by the limits of the British colonial empire, yes. It is not a global sport, yes. But international it still is. And surely, the international reach or otherwise of a sport need not be taken as reflection of its intrinsic worth: *kabaddi* is a case in point. Regarding women being excluded from cricket, strictly speaking that is not correct. But even if one does not read the statement literally, is not that even more the case with football, the one genuinely global team sport? What about boxing, the sport that has been an important medium of black assertion? And that only 14 make it to the national side cannot be reason for criticism, surely: national teams in any sport are of finite size and constitute only a tiny fragment of a country's population. The more relevant point is whether, at least in theory, the best available talent in the country is chosen for inclusion in a team of six or eight or 14 as the case may be. Perhaps I am nitpicking. But political critiques should be precise.

Anand argues that cricket is "inherently brahmanical". Not simply that it is an upper-caste dominated sport, but that in its neglect of the body, it is inherently brahmanical. Fitness in sport is no doubt an absolute value. The point is that its form will vary according to the relevance to the sport in question, depending as it

does on the demands the sport makes on the particular aspect of the physique that is intended to be taxed. The physique and fitness demanded of a tennis player is very different from that demanded of a footballer, which again is very different from that of a boxer. In track events, a sprinter's fitness is different from that of a middle distance runner, not to talk of the marathon runner. This is obvious.

But what about cricket? Wicketkeeping is reportedly among the most physically demanding specialisations in international sport, as is fast bowling. Spin bowlers and batsmen need their own kind of fitness if they have to be any good. Perhaps Anand is operating with a Graeco-Roman conception of the physique as interpreted by the classicists of Renaissance Europe, particularly its sculptors. Where does that leave Sumo wrestling, whose mysteries I have yet to penetrate, but which quite clearly is a sport for its many enthusiasts, even if to many others the fight seems to be over almost before it starts and the physical appearance of the wrestlers does not conform to the aesthetic idea of the fit body that Anand has in mind?

When Anand argues that cricket is upper-caste dominated, he is more on track. It is undeniable that dalits have not featured in the Indian test squad. It is also very likely that a caste bias operates in the selection process of teams all the way from the school to the test levels. (Though as an aside, we may note that the two Bombay batsmen that Anand characterises as brahmins, Gavaskar and Tendulkar, are actually *saraswats*, a subcaste that eats meat, though not beef, and sees itself as being distinct from brahmins. Also, it would be interesting to find out the original caste of the Christian cricketers Chandu Borde, ex-India captain and currently chairman of selectors, and Kiran More, ex-India wicketkeeper.) Yet, curiously, for Anand upper-caste domination has no class character. Thus, the reason for the lack of lower caste sporting excellence, we are told, is to be found not in poverty, not in the lack of a balanced diet, not in the lack of basic training facilities, and so on, but in the in-breeding enforced by the caste system which results in stunted bodies!

And even on this point, Anand is probably wrong. I am no expert in these matters, but a colleague has this to say: "Hindu conjugal laws take great pains to keep marriage outside closed pools of blood and lineage by insisting on two criteria of separation, namely that though marriage must happen within caste and sub-caste confines, not just the *gotra* but more crucially the *sapinda* must be different (just the single criterion of *gotra* can cause the marriage to stray back into the 'undesirable' zone of conjugal proximity and cause in-bred blood lines)". In any case, my feeling is that in a Subcontinent that has made something of a specialisation of proliferating its numbers, the size of castes and subcastes are probably large enough to prevent sanguinary inbreeding of the kind that is reputed to cause congenital deviations. This is not a defence of Hindu-

ism's conjugal system or its form of social organisation, just a point of rigour concerning inbreeding and physical capacities. Anand does not do much service to Ambedkar by quoting him outside the context of his times.

But what about the film itself? "Lagaan is being celebrated", Anand informs us, "by secularists, nationalists, subalternists, leftists, pseudo-secularists, BJPites, academics, critics and filmgoers alike." This is simply not true. The Hindutva brigade has not hailed the film. A friend reports that in her undergraduate class, her students, coming as they do from upper-caste, middle-class, conservative backgrounds with ideological sympathies for Hindutva, criticised the film for appeasing dalits and the minorities. And the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarti Parishad's journal *Chhatrashakti* published, in July 2001, an article that hailed *Gadar* and criticised *Lagaan* for their respective notions of nationalism: *Lagaan*, it said, is "jingoistic", while *Gadar* is "non-partisan". In his enthusiasm to run down the film, Anand, by lumping them with the rest, does the fascists great service.

Anand characterises *Lagaan* as being a *purana*, which has "scant regard for historicity". Yet what is ahistorical is Anand's critique. *Lagaan* is a commercial Hindi film. A fair critique of *Lagaan* cannot proceed from within the confines of a purely abstract radicalism, but must take account of the history of this form of high-budget mass entertainment, place *Lagaan* in that history, and then assess its progressive or regressive character.

Anand is right in saying that *Lagaan* is a Gandhian film. But what precisely is Gandhian about the film? To my mind, three important elements: one, that not only is the struggle against the colonial oppressor entirely non-violent, but even the possibility of a violent struggle is not considered. In other words, non-violence is the common sense. This is seen not just in the struggle against the British, but also vis-a-vis the traitor Lakha, who is saved from an angry mob by Bhuvan and converted to the cause by persuasion. Two, the depiction of the raja as a closet nationalist is of a piece with Gandhi's insistence that the national movement should not extend to the Indian princely states. Three, the insistence on unity across classes of the colonised against the coloniser, and the relegation of all internal contradictions to that forever future moment of true *swaraj*.

This political-ideological position is deeply contradictory, and necessarily involves erasures. In the film, these erasures are most evidently present around the character of the dalit, Kachra, and the raja. Thus, for instance, we never learn what Kachra thinks about the match and his participation in it, and the question of

what happens to him after the match is over is never considered. Similarly, the raja's closet nationalism puts a cloak on the collaborationist role played by Indian princes under colonialism. My point is not that these erasures are not present, or that they should not be critiqued, but that in spite of them, the film is actually quite remarkable in what it says.

The central plank of Anand's criticism is that Kachra "is a good spinner not because of ability, but because of his disability. The token Dalit is further Dalitised". This is unfair. From the cricketing point of view, it amounts to saying that Muralitharan owes his phenomenal record to his deformity, not talent and hard work. At a larger level, physical deformity in Hindi cinema, as indeed most commercial cinema across the world, normally elicits ridicule or derision, or is associated with villainy. Kachra's handicap, on the other hand, can be seen as a physical symbol of his social location. In other words, Kachra is doubly disadvantaged — by his caste as well by his handicap. The crucial question is not the fact of his handicap, but what role Kachra plays in the win, despite his handicap.

The cricket match itself is carefully constructed, and all the members of the Champaner eleven — which actually numbers 13, including as it does the boy Tipu and the British coach Elizabeth — contribute to the win. But without doubt, the three performances that prove decisive in the end are the leg-spinner's hat-trick which engineers a middle-order collapse of the rampaging British, the injured batsman's heroic innings, and the captain's century capped by the last ball six. These feats are performed by the handicapped dalit Kachra, the Muslim Ismail, and the peasant hero Bhuvan. Any fair critique of *Lagaan* is incomplete if it does not acknowledge this fundamental political statement, the very statement that the Hindutva

brigade has found unpalatable. Kachra, then, is in line with a whole range of characters in literature, drama and film, where the weakest of the weak overcome their social and physical handicaps to accomplish heroic deeds: the hunchback of Notre Dame, or the deaf-mute daughter in *Mother Courage*. It is indeed surprising that Anand, who heaps scorn on the film for what it fails to show, does not bother to acknowledge what it does show.

And it is this political statement that Hindutva finds unpalatable. The ABVP journal, attacking *Lagaan* for its lack of realism, says, "Lagaan strives to be very 'secular': Hindus and Muslims live harmoniously in this Kutch village... and it is the crippled Harijan who indirectly helps the 'Indian' team beat the British".

Anand states that he saw *Lagaan* "reluctantly", some six months after the film was released. His resolve is

**A fair critique of
Lagaan must
take account of
the history of
commercial
cinema, place the
film in that history,
and then assess
its progressive or
regressive
character.**

pretty strong, because even when they dragged him kicking and screaming into the auditorium, he was obviously determined not to see Kachra's match-turning hat-trick. Poor Ismail and his brave knock is not even mentioned in Anand's 7000 word-long article. (What would Anand say if someone were to attribute this to an anti-Muslim bias?) But there is much else he did not see. He claims that the debate over the inclusion of Kachra is "the only moment where an internal problem forces a confrontation in the film. All other flimic confrontations are with the external Other — the white, British male". This is simply incorrect. Lakha is part of two confrontations: first, when he tries to prevent Ismail from joining team Champaner arguing that they (the Hindus) will not accept him, and then again when his own treachery is revealed.

Curiously, Anand gets Kachra's bowling arm wrong: his handicapped arm is not his left, as Anand says, but his right. This would not have occasioned comment here, but for the fact that the problem is larger: Anand routinely mixes up the left and the right. His comments about AB Bardhan (who is not an MP as suggested), are a case in point. Reading Anand, one would imagine that the communist Bardhan has endorsed the Hindutva agenda. That suggestion is scarcely warranted by the context. Bardhan, in the immediate aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition, is merely making the point that the sangh parivar, which claims to speak for all Hindus, does nothing of the sort, and that there are many traditions within Hinduism which are antithetical to Hindutva. Gandhi's politics is deeply problematic — and communists have been traditionally accused of being too harsh on Gandhi — but recalling Gandhi, against the very fascists who killed him, is a legitimate political strategy. It does not imply endorsement of the entire Gandhian programme, much less of Hindutva.

But even more astounding is Anand's ignorance of the material conditions of the people whose cause he claims to uphold: "How does the lagaan... affect the Dalits? What is the problem that Dalits have with the white coloniser-state? Are not their problems more linked to the caste-colonialism sustained by the raja and the caste Hindus of the village?" Anand is innocently oblivious to rural reality. Those who are not, know that an increase in the tax burden is disproportionately passed on to the agricultural labourer and to artisanal and service castes, either in the form of reduced wages or as increases in labour and other levies. It could also lead to a general rise in prices or to a shortage of foodgrain in the event that the tax is in kind. There are any number of economic effects to the detriment of non-landed classes that readily come to mind, precisely because that is how they have manifested themselves repeatedly. So both the landed and the landless have an interest in the reduction of tax, because the tax on produce is only nominally a tax on the producer. Happily for the landed in Champaner, this elementary

fact does not escape Kachra! The film itself may not explicitly recognise this point since it is simply recounting a nationalist saga. Whatever gloss nationalism itself may apply to it, such are the hard dynamics of national movements that cause social alliances to be forged, whether one approves of them or not.

Yet, of course, *Lagaan* is not a revolutionary film, any which way one looks at it, and whichever kind of revolution one desires, red, blue or green. It is a charming fantasy tale that constructs a Gandhian utopia. But coming as it does in our times, when the progressive current in the commercial film industry (which saw its heyday in the 1940s and early 50s with films like *Dharti ke Lal*, *Do Bigha Zameen*, *Awaara*, etc) has now been dead for some two decades, when for the last decade there has been an increasing communalisation of films, when the rare representation of lower castes in films are derogatory and villainish, *Lagaan*, with its foregrounding of the dalit-Muslim-small peasant combine, in spite of its erasures and silences, is basically progressive. Anand's critique is politically irresponsible because it condemns without comprehension. Anger and passion are virtues only if harnessed to a critical perspective. You cannot fight what you do not understand.

Sudhanva Deshpande
New Delhi

Relax!

GOODNESS! HAVING read what's wrong with *Lagaan*, in the March issue of *Himal*, I was certainly left feeling extremely small for having thoroughly enjoyed a Hindi film after so many years. That is till, I sat back and analysed what exactly it was that had left such a pleasant feeling in my heart.

I am in no way familiar with Bollywood-speak, but I feel fairly certain that the producer and director of *Lagaan* did not have any aspirations of doing an Ambedkar or Gandhi on the audience and merely meant to provide commercially viable 'entertainment'. And, on my part I would not be completely honest if I did not add, entertainment at its refreshing best. For an industry remarkable for the brashness with which it reduces stalwarts of history like Asoka into obnoxious sex symbols and mutates the magical *vyahritis* of the *Gayatri Mantra* into meaningless chants of 'the bold and the beautiful', *Lagaan* is a seminal piece of work.

Anand, no doubt, has painstakingly researched his rhetoric against *Lagaan*, but such nitpicking seems more appropriate for the esoteric and academic running down of some 'Theory of Social Reforms' rather than a critical appreciation of art; and that too of one of the most simplistic of genres. Secondly, I too have at times felt dismayed at the 'games' played on the 'backstages'

of the world of cricket, but it would be unfair to accuse Khan and Gowriker of trying not just to promote such practices but also of attempting any overt PR of the game. Furthermore, though Anand wants to extend the current trend of debate on historicity to cover its accuracy or inaccuracy in *Lagaan*, and even though most of Anand's indictments of political incorrectness will hold in the 'court of law', I feel *Lagaan* like any other work of 'art' deserves the creative license that has been the hallmark of Indian artistic criticism for centuries.

For what after all is the substance of 'art'? Indian thought maintains, it is -

*Apurvam yad vastu prathayati vina karanakalam
Jagadgrava prakhyam nijarasa bharat sarayati ca*

Art is -

That object which not having any antecedent (*apurvam*), though inspired by the manifested world, is created by the infusion of individualist and intrinsic emotions (*nijarasa bharat*).

On this account alone *Lagaan* can be allowed to play around with its facts and figures for it is the 'figment of imagination' of its creator. However, the *sloka* goes on to state that the act of creation is accomplished both by the creator and the spectator or *sah-hridaya*. Maybe there is a need for more *sah-hridayata* here.

Lagaan certainly found an empathetic *sah-hridaya* in me. It resolved a quandary I have been mulling over for the past few years. The South Asian urbanites have so distanced themselves from their roots that they can no longer identify with their own art forms. For the past fifty years this void has found solace in the 'make-believe' world of celluloid. However, the silver screen has been a capricious 'mistress' and has mangled the perceptions of its worshippers for years on end. Today, Travolta look-alikes driving Buicks, living in English manors and singing 'Vande Maataram' are the icons of 'nationalistic fervor'. Manicured and pedicured women in designer folk-outfits go through their *arati* and *karvachauth* rituals supposedly reviving the power of religious rituals. We are duped into forgetting that they cleverly camouflage the fact that they are merely the voice of the 'market' with the implicit purpose of the creation of capitalist tastes and the making of uncritical minds.

The use of art as a 'purposive tool' cannot be denied. 'Ram Rajya' is a myth that found universal acceptance and popularity through the untiring industry of the ancient *kathakars* and travelling bards of old.

Whatever ethics still remains ingrained in our depraved hearts comes from these modes of centuries of social mimesis. However, the postmodern world has trampled over these age-old forms of entertainment leaving a people bereft of their myths and legends. *Lagaan* is just such a myth.

I salute *Lagaan* for successfully incorporating the

art of the old 'kathakar' to give new dreams to our sorry world. *Lagaan* is not about cricket. *Lagaan* is about hope; about courage in the face of adversity; about the ability to be fair to one and all, including one's opponent; it is about a woman defying the cruel rules of a man's world; it is about equality; but best of all it says all this in a language familiar to its own people. I hope with all my heart that *Lagaan* is awarded the Oscar.

Lubna Mariam
Sagaur, Bundelkhand

Hats Off

THANK GOD Siriyavan Anand has voiced an opinion against the chorus of *Lagaan* lovers. Anand is right to take the movie to task for advancing a self-indulgent view of sports and Indian society - frankly, it is time that someone said something critical about this over-hyped production.

More to the point, it is down-right pathetic how much people in India salivated over *Lagaan's* Oscar nomination. This is just the latest example of how people in this country long for America's recognition to validate themselves. I think it is only fitting that *Lagaan* lost to a Bosnian film.

It is past time someone stood up and started a real debate - hats off to Siriyavan Anand.

Laxmi Iyengar
Bokaro

Southside-up map

Hmm...

DEAR SIR,

Just now I have seen the map which is being sent to your subscribers. It is the worst advertising that you could have.

All the printing is "upside down"! So much time and effort and money has been put into producing this map. It certainly is a good looking map.

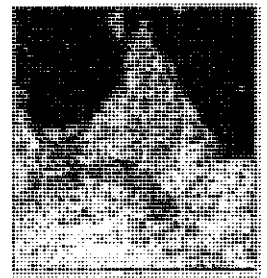
It is incredible. Sorry to be the messenger of very bad news for your magazine.

And a few days later in another email...

I have seen the map India and Pakistan. It is the greatest goof that I have seen in the history of the map making.

Please look closely at the map and recall.

Joseph Lall
Taxila





The ties that bind

THE BOUNDARY between Nepal and India is nothing more than a brick and lime masonry structure built during the days of the Empire. Its 'Das Gaja' of no-man's-land serves as the playground for both village urchins and petty smugglers.

Closing this border is something of an obsession with the Nepali hill elites, who raise the issue from time to time. Across, on the other side of the open border, we are witness to the arrogance of the political elite of New Delhi's South Block, which periodically tries to dictate the terms of the "special relationship" between Nepal and India. This cat-and-mouse game has been going on for decades, and seems to break out with virulence every time a matter sensitive to either side is being negotiated.

In the light of such an ambiguous relationship, CK Lal's "Cultural flows across a blurred boundary" (*Himal* February 2002) is timely and bold. Lal has been writing with sensitivity about many social and political issues concerning both India and Nepal, but in this essay we encounter a hitherto unknown aspect of his public persona. The hidden urban regional planner in him has come to light. He has given us a new vista to mull over — the Ganga Rectangle, which encompasses the Nepal Tarai, north-eastern Uttar Pradesh and north Bihar. These three areas together make up a common cultural entity with a potentially shared future — either of resurgence or dissent into oblivion, depending on how the tide turns.

Daniel, as planner, has come to judgement and Nepal's planning apparatchiks will do well to heed his advice in formulating the forthcoming Tenth Plan. The tarai can, as CK Lal argues, take the lead in the development of the larger region on the strength of its many advantages, but for its potential to be realised, much has to be done by way of preparing the foundations, including the acceptance of many ground realities.

India is the natural market for Nepali manufactures, since for the present, the domestic economy's capacity to absorb its own productive output is limited. On the other hand, India is still over-protective about its home market. Perhaps the global trend towards liberalisation will in the future ease the situation and provide Nepal with more export opportunities.

For the market opportunity to be capitalised on, however, there must be a compatibility in the equation between the two countries so that an economic interaction will evolve to mutual benefit. Since neither side can change the attitude of the other through com-

pulsion, from Nepal's point of view it is best for Nepalis to change their attitude so as to induce a reasonable response from the Indians.

This is where hard realities must be squarely faced. It is only through a clear evaluation of strengths and weaknesses, assets and liabilities that a pragmatic solution can be found. There is no denying that India has treated Nepal shabbily in the past, but the past can be rectified in the future. The distribution of benefits between the two countries in bilateral relations has certainly been to Nepal's disadvantage. These can be corrected in new arrangements because these do not arise from insurmountable differences.

The differences that do exist do not lie at the mass level on either side. It is the handiwork of a few professional Indian Brown Sahibs, who are by instinct prone to asserting and displaying their 'superiority'. This attitude on their part provokes an equal and contrary reaction among some Nepalis. This tendency reached its climax during the heyday of the Panchayat, when a lobby arose within the body politic of Nepal which took pleasure in further vitiating an already clouded atmo-

sphere. Any anti-Indian posture was deemed to be valourous. The obvious point was overlooked — that this neither solved the bilateral problem nor did anything for the development of Nepal. When such deadlocks happen, it is the weaker side that loses, as the terms of the unequal relationship become less liberal.

Once the climate of mistrust is dispelled and attitudes-of-mind shed, it is possible to get on with the task along the lines suggested by CK Lal. The tarai can be made the engine of

growth even if the economies of scale favour the Indian side and despite the commercial protectionism south of the border. The tarai, for instance, can become a very profitable entrepot for trade between India and Tibet. During Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji's recent visit to New Delhi, the Indian government had proposed trade access to China through the Chumbi Valley. But the fact is that Nepal still has a comparative advantage if the access through the passes at Rasuwa and Kodari improved.

There are aspects of CK Lal's argument some of which I want to supplement and others I will join issue with.

Present-day Nepal is the aggregate of various entities. The writer has mentioned the contributions by Shakyamuni Buddha and Adi Sankara to the enrichment of Nepal's heritage. The places where Buddha and Sita were born happen to be in modern-day Nepal. But quite surprisingly, he has omitted to mention the other religious luminary, Mahavira, who was born just a short distance from Nepal.

Lal is very critical of Rana Jung Bahadur, particu-

There is no denying that India has treated Nepal shabbily in the past, but the past can be rectified in the future.

larly his support for the British during the Indian Mutiny. But it must not be forgotten that it was because of Jang Bahadur that Nepal became the proud inheritor of Lumbini, the birthplace of the apostle of peace. Lal has failed to consider this positive aspect of Jung Bahadur's India policy. The real discoverer of Lumbini was not his nephew Khadga Shumshere but Jung Bahadur himself. The British Indian government of the day had no inkling of the importance of the site; else this parcel of land would not have been repatriated to Nepal. Vincent Smith, the historian, was to weep over that loss!

Lal's other point of criticism is that the Rana hired hagiographers to claim Rajput ancestry. While that may be true, the fact is that Thakuris can be of any caste. "Thakur" simply means "chief" or *raja* of a locality or region. A thakur can be a Magar, Chhetri, or any other caste. In India, a Thakur is Brahman in Bengal, barber in Bihar, Rajput in UP. It will be well worth remembering that the Parmars of Rajasthan themselves are Agni Kula Chhetria, a latter day entrant into the clan of Rajput rulers inducted as Kshatriyas about 1500 years ago at Mount Abu after ritual purification.

Lal has aptly designated the relationship across the border between the northern and southern plains, between the 'tarailis' and the people of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as a *roti-beti* (bride and bread) relationship. But he has left out a significant factor, i.e. the lure of the dowry that is liberally provided by the parents of Indian girls to the advantage of Nepali grooms.

On the more developmental aspects of his argument, the monsoon flooding is an illustration of how dealing with the central government in New Delhi acts to the detriment of both Bihar and Nepal. The classic case is that of the Narayani irrigation project. When the canals are breached in Bihar, Nepal does not get the allocated amount of water. Each year Kathmandu approaches New Delhi, but repair work is never undertaken in time and hence Nepal loses a fair amount of irrigation water. Trans-valley tunneling and a more uniform distribution of water, groundwater renewal projects and flood control will be of greater mutual benefit, but the opportunities are unnecessarily being squandered.

Lal writes, "Nepal Tarai is emerging as a dynamic region in its own right and will before long be creating reverberations along the entire Gangetic belt." There are aspects of Nepal's economic and infrastructural planning and policy that have not been conducive to exploiting this potential. The obsession with diversifying trade though a Bangladesh corridor has been so strong in the past that it ignored other realistic possibilities like building an east-west railway or linking Kathmandu with the Indian railway network. Even tiny Costa Rica has built railways linking its capital with

the seaport, something that Nepal could emulate since the conditions in the two countries are very similar.

Moreover, Lal needs to be reminded that the East-West Highway, conceived of during the short premiership of BP Koirala (and not when King Mahendra took over) was finally completed during the reign of King Birendra. How could Lal, the highwayman, have missed the history of the highways and the Soviet connection? (The survey was completed with Soviet assistance already before Mahendra's reign began in earnest.) Perhaps he was more occupied with regional planning.

In the context of the comparative advantage that the tarai has over the hills, Lal mentions schools, hospitals, industry, agriculture and so on. To this I would like to add tropical horticulture to cater to the expanding Indian market. Thailand is a good model to follow.

In the last section of his essay, Lal refers to the resurgence of the vernacular dialects of the Ganga Rectangle that is taking place in the Nepal Tarai. The development of local languages is a healthy phenomenon. Cultural and linguistic diversity is a strength and not a weakness. Nepal, though a Hindu kingdom under its Constitution, is a secular country, and it

should avoid the bad habits of the southern neighbour's northern parts — the communalised, caste-based vote bank politics and its criminalised accessories.

Though CK Lal dwells at some length on Mithila, he has overlooked its contribution to enriching the Gorkha royals since the time of King Girbana. Is it not a corollary of the history of Sita repeated in the 19th century, with Mithila providing the

queen to the Nepal Durbar? Let us also not forget that Kulachandra Gautam, a resident of Mithila, has provided the Nepali version of the Tulidas Ramayana.

As a kid I remember passing through Darbhanga (a corruption of Dhanur-bhanga — i.e., the breaking of the bow of Lord Siva by Rama at King Janak's court at Mithila) on the way to Chhapki in Saptari District. I remember this area before it was annihilated by the Kosi 60 years ago. I also remember someone giving me an alternative etymology — that it is called Dwar Bangala, the gateway to Bengal. The poet Vidyapati was indeed a great master of Mithila and his writings influenced early Bengali literature too. It should be made available to the rest of Nepal as well.

CK Lal should be thanked for reminding us about the glory of the Ganga Rectangle. Let Mithila, Kapiļvastu, Lichhavi and Vaishali herald the future with the glory of their past. Come Vidyapati Come! Speak Gandaki speak!

Gauri N Rimal
Kathmandu

Nepal's economic and infrastructural planning and policy have not been conducive to exploiting the tarai's potential.



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

Ketaki Sheth
Inside Outside.

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

John Collee
The London Observer.

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

Time.



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SRI LANKA

THE CONVERGENCE FOR PEACE

SO FAR both peace and anti-peace activities outside the conflict areas of Sri Lanka's North and East have been small. A demonstration for peace in early March saw a few hundred gather in Colombo's main railway station. The Buddhist monks who led a delegation to the Norwegian embassy to protest against the ceasefire were even fewer. The lack of passion one way or the other actually reflected the general satisfaction with the prevailing ceasefire. On 15 March, however, the Sarvodaya Movement commenced a massive peace operation with daylong meditation in the city of Anuradhapura, to be followed by rural programmes that will go on till 31 December. In their pamphlets, the organisation has urged people to prepare themselves even prior to the meditation by refraining from eating meat or speaking ill of anything. The participants will be silent throughout the four-hour meditation. There will be no militancy or controversy, only empathy and unity.

This peace meditation programme comes at a special time. The guns have fallen silent, yet the gulf between the conflicting parties remains and has to be bridged by outside mediators. The primary objective of the peace meditation is to orient the individual and collective consciousness of people away from violence so that the political leaders will be forced to make constructive decisions. At this juncture, when the Sinhala peace constituency is under pressure, the importance of creating such an environment and of Sarvodaya's capacity to bring together people of different persuasions cannot be overemphasised.

Pongu Thamil

The Sarvodaya peace meditation programme, with its emphasis on silence and harmony, is an important antidote to other types of mobilisation taking place in the country by people who are politically motivated and use nationalism and images of violence in ways that generate apprehension and hatred. Critically, the series of

events that have been taking place in the North and East under the theme of Pongu Thamil, or Tamil Uprising, has sent a mixed message. The LTTE and many mainstream Tamil political parties have been fully involved in these events. The celebratory showing of videos of Sri Lankan military defeats and the killing of hundreds of soldiers, the slogans demanding the eviction of the military from the Tamil Homeland, and the symbolic burning of a giant military boot are considered inflammatory by Sinhala society at large.

The justification for Pongu Thamil is that the long suppressed sentiments of the Tamil people are being permitted to emerge in a cathartic release that is healing to them. Certainly the festive air at the Pongu Thamil events and the ability to openly condemn the institutions of the Sri Lankan state in the presence of Sri Lankan soldiers may be providing a measure of satisfaction to people who were long subjected to controls and harassment. Another justification is that Pongu Thamil represents the LTTE's efforts to achieve politically what it hitherto was seeking to achieve by force of arms. Shortly after a well-attended Pongu Thamil event in the major town of Vavuniya which attracted some 40,000 people, the LTTE opened its first political office in a government-controlled area of the north-east.

The LTTE, being a non-state actor, will be apprehensive of a permanent cease-fire that puts it at a disadvantage vis-a-vis the government, which has political legitimacy backed by economic resources. Mobilising the people through Pongu Thamil appears to be part of the LTTE's strategy to strengthen itself in the context of the ceasefire. While this makes sense, the LTTE should also be aware of the difficulties that its campaign could put the government into. The LTTE and the government need to cooperate if the peace process is to be sustained. There is a need for more understanding and less provocation. Though most of the by and large Sinhala population is satisfied with the ceasefire, there is general disquiet



Jaffna University students at a Pongu Thamil rally.

The guns have fallen silent, yet the gulf between the conflicting parties remains and has to be bridged by outside mediators.

among them due to the deliberate fanning of Tamil nationalism. Such a disquiet will grow if an attempt is made to hold a Pongu Thamil in the central hills among the Indian Tamil population.

In this emotion-laden context, the peace meditation campaign launched by the Sarvodaya Movement could be restraining at a time when hardliners, provoked by the celebrations in Jaffna, may well try and mobilise an anti-peace campaign. The peace process is tenuously balanced and both the main parties must tread carefully to reassure their civil constituencies. In this respect the Prime Minister's visit to Jaffna is as illustrative as it is historic.

The Jaffna visit

Ranil Wickremesinghe's visit to Jaffna was historic, because it came a full twenty years after his uncle JR Jayewardene went there as President in 1982. Thereafter, Jaffna became virtually out-of-bounds for government leaders. The anti-Tamil riots of July 1983 are generally taken as the moment in which the war for Tamil separation got out of control. A lack of government commitment to the well-being of the people of the north coupled with fear of LTTE assassination kept the top government leadership away from the northern capital.

What is most hopeful and promising about the present peace process is the sense of realism that is apparent within the top government leadership. Although sections of the mass media tried to make out that the prime minister's visit to Jaffna was a triumphal one, there is no indication that the prime minister himself felt that way.

However, winning the hearts and minds of the proud people of Jaffna is going to be an uphill task for any government leader. The wounds of war are much too deep and raw. Take the town of Chavakachcheri, which today lies in ruins; its schools, temples, houses and commercial establishments brought down just two years ago by a government which felt compelled to destroy the town to preserve Sri Lankan rule over it. After nearly two decades of war, and many events of a similar nature, the leader who can win the affection of the Tamil people will be one who empathises with them and acknowledges their claim to self-determination in their areas of traditional habitation. Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has still not come to that point, at least he has not done so publicly. But the

purpose of the Prime Minister's visit was not to win the hearts and minds of the people of Jaffna – it was intended more as a message to his Sinhala electoral base, that the peace process was about re-uniting the country, and not about dividing it. Such political manoeuvres have become necessary because there are enough opponents of the peace process who have been arguing that the ceasefire agreement paves the way for the strengthening of the LTTE and the eventual division of the country.

If the Sarvodaya peace operation and the Prime Minister's visit to Jaffna represent two internal factors that are keeping the peace process on track, there is also a complementary external factor that reinforces their impact. Even a year ago it seemed very unlikely that the United States would take any strong interest in the Sri Lankan conflict, but 11 September evidently changed the situation. The formal position of the US today is that it will take action against terrorism in any part of the world, and will help governments that face terrorist challenges to overcome them. But in fact the main thrust of the US-led war against terrorism has so far been against Islamic countries and terror groups. Sri Lanka provides the US an opportunity to take a stand that is not against an Islamic group.

The visit of the US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca to Jaffna along with a US special forces brigade commander at the very time that the prime minister was evidently meant to send a strong message of US support to the process. It sent a very strong signal to sceptics and supporters in both the North and South that Sri Lanka has become an important arena for a US peace building effort. The show of US support is of particular importance in view of the widespread Sinhala perception that the government may have gone too far in opening up the roads and country to the LTTE. This apprehension of even the moderate majority of Sinhalese would be assuaged by the US reassurance that it is watching. This will strengthen the government's hand in pushing forward and taking risks despite the lack of bipartisan political support.

Self confidence

However, there is an aspect to the US stance that has added stridency to the pro-war Sinhala nationalist groups. Just prior to the synchronised visits to Jaffna, the American



Jaffna's visitors Ranil and Christina.

ambassador in Colombo, Ashley Wills, made a strong public statement chiding the LTTE for its continued human rights abuses, particularly those targeting the Muslims in the east. In his statement he referred to "increased LTTE recruitment in Sri Lanka's north and east, including of children, as well as kidnapping and extortion, especially of Muslims".

Indeed, even those who publicly condemned the ambassador's statement would privately acknowledge the truth of the allegations. There is no doubt that the offences identified by him have been taking place, with even independent human rights organisations such as Amnesty International calling on the LTTE to desist. And, it is not only Muslims who have been feeling the heavy taxation of the LTTE, but also Tamils in areas newly accessible to the LTTE on account of the ceasefire agreement.

Although Tamil politicians and media reacted negatively to the US allegations, the immediate response of the LTTE itself was much milder. The LTTE's chief negotiator, Dr Anton Balasingham, pledged that the LTTE was committed to the peace process. Subsequently he also said that the LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was concerned about the allegations and would take action against any LTTE violations of the ceasefire agreement. Dr Balasingham added that the LTTE would also invite Amnesty International to send a delegation to LTTE-controlled areas to ascertain the truth for themselves.

These are promising signs of self-confidence in the LTTE, that at this time there is no one to take their place in the hearts and minds of the Tamil people, certainly not the government. Added to this are promising signs that the LTTE is making the transition to a political organisation, one that is prepared to deal with the rest of the world on the basis of give and take, and accountability on the basis of international human rights norms.

For the present there seems to be a convergence of significant forces that add up to a fairly strong thrust for peace, and if this trend towards moderation in politics continues at the level of the government, the LTTE and the civil societies on both sides of the divide, the prospects for peace will be come considerably brighter. ▽

- Jehan Perera

SOUTH ASIA

TIME OF RECKONING FOR THE BARONS OF DEVELOPMENT

LEADERS OF the institutions that guide global economic development have set 2015 as a target date for reducing by half the number of human beings who live in extreme poverty. The World Bank seems to have launched this campaign and many institutions have joined, including international NGOs like OXFAM and CARE and national agencies like Britain's Department for International Development. A United Nations conference met recently in Monterrey, Mexico, to rally support for this exercise. Those most influential in setting the global agenda for economic development agree that reducing poverty must be the top priority and that reducing extreme poverty immediately is imperative. 2015 symbolises their seriousness and sense of urgency. If they succeed, life will improve for hundreds of millions of people in the next 13 years.

Some history might be useful for those in the public who would join this campaign or seek to monitor its conduct and progress. 'Poverty' came to the fore in the global development agenda during the 1990s, a decade famous for the rapid pace of globalisation, when markets monopolised the minds that planned our global future. The United States exemplified fulsome free-market growth promoted by global development institutions, led by the World Bank.

The Economist (26 April, 2001) called the nineties "probably the most exuberant period of wealth creation in human history," and showed how the bulk of new wealth came into the hands of the rich. Millionaires and billionaires multiplied, and by 2001, the richest one percent of the world population came to hold a third of the world's wealth. More than half the world's 425 billionaires live in the US, which exemplifies trends in global inequality. Between 1977 and 1999, the richest 20 percent of American households in-

The people of South Asia must get involved in the 2015 campaign and hold the leaders of the global development regime accountable.

Share of Global Income for the Richest 20% and Poorest 20% of World Population

Year	Share of Richest 20%	Share of Poorest 20%	Ratio of Richest to Poorest
1960	70.2%	2.3%	30 to 1
1970	73.9%	2.3%	32 to 1
1980	76.3%	1.7%	45 to 1
1989	82.7%	1.4%	59 to 1

creased their share of national income from 44 percent to 50 percent, and the richest 1 percent increased their share *six times* more, from 7 percent to 13 percent. In America and around the world, the economic boom accomplished very little poverty reduction and it actually worsened extreme poverty. The most severe new poverty fell on Africa, where average households now consume 20 percent less than 25 years ago.

The nineties epitomised and aggravated a much longer trend. In a study for the World Bank, aptly entitled, "Divergence, Big Time," Lant Pritchett calculated that between 1870 and 1985, ratios of per capita income between the richest and poorest countries increased more than six-fold, as income levels dispersed over an ever-widening range of variation and the richest and poorest economies clustered on opposite ends of a broader spectrum. The 1992 UN *Human Development Report* indicated that global inequality accelerated in the 1970s and 1980s (see chart).

The campaign to reduce extreme poverty by half before 2015 thus came into being as the world's public was about to learn that the poorest of the poor have been steadily increasing as a proportion of the world population at the same time as the richest of the rich have been steadily amassing an ever-larger proportion of the world's wealth. Global economic growth has benefited people and places roughly in proportion to the size of their portfolios and attractiveness for investors. In the 1990s, people in the Silicon Valley and Wall Street got hugely rich but people with nothing to invest, in places with nothing to offer investors, made nothing.

Inequality grows during periods of economic growth, and poverty persists and deepens, despite growing overall pros-

perity, in part because investors move assets out of less attractive places into better-endowed places that become more attractive for more investors; and in part because investors reap more than low-wage earners who see the cost of living rise faster than wages. People with low incomes in risky, vulnerable, insecure areas inhospitable to capital investment lose out when economic growth is driven solely by market decisions.

Despite the fact that markets do not eliminate poverty, because they tend to move new wealth away from poor neighbourhoods, most NGOs and governments follow market doctrines. They secure dividends by concentrating investments in relatively favourable environments. The poorest people in the poorest places have thus disappeared in practice — if not in ideology and publicity — from NGO networks and government programmes, almost as surely as they vanished from private marketing surveys and business plans.

Increasing inequality and extreme poverty strain the legitimacy of global development institutions. The leaders of global development live in rich countries. They depend on rich country contributions. They follow rich country policies. They nonetheless strive to benefit everyone in the world, rich and poor alike. They believe that market-led economic growth is the best route to prosperity for all. A boom decade like the nineties is a good test of this belief. If economic success such as registered in the nineties coincides for too long with growing wealth disparity and abject poverty, their reputation must eventually suffer.

2015 is thus a deadline of significance. It represents an effort to valourise the current leadership of global development regime amidst increasing polarisation of rich and poor.

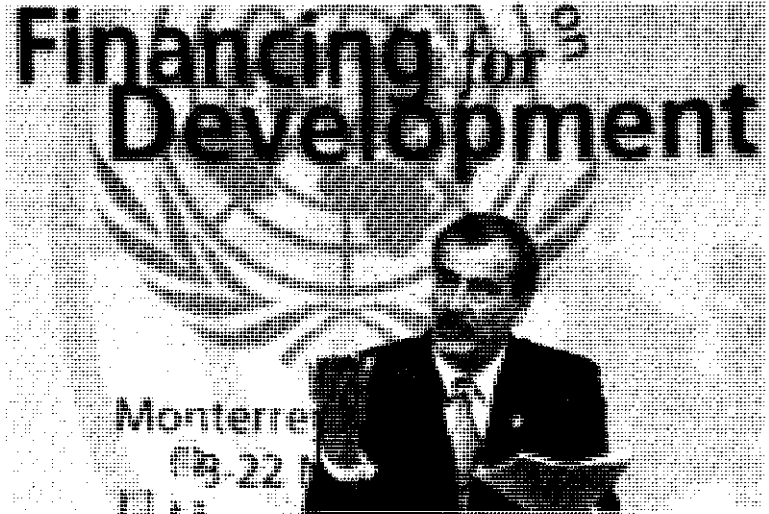
In a world of globalisation, the possibility that world political institutions may someday represent poor people in proportion to their numbers makes this polarisation ominous. Rich country leaders represent a shrinking global elite minority. OECD countries shrank as proportion of world population from 20 percent in 1960 to 15 percent in 1993. A mere ten percent of the world's people live in twelve countries with over USD 20,000 per capita GDP, mostly in the US (45 percent), Japan (21 percent), Germany (14 percent), and France (10 percent). Eighty percent of the world's

The leaders of global development live in rich countries. They depend on rich country contributions. They follow rich country policies.

people live in 36 African and 19 Asian countries with under USD 1000 per capita GDP, large proportions in China (34 percent), India (26 percent), Indonesia (5 percent), Pakistan (4 percent), Bangladesh (3 percent), Nigeria (3 percent), Viet Nam (2 percent), and Philippines (3 percent).

Most of the global public lives in countries where the 2015 campaign will operate. Experience in those countries should enter directly into global debates about economic development. Rich countries now control the lion's share not only of world wealth but also of world knowledge. The best facilities for studying the world are in rich countries. The US has a dozen libraries each holding more books about South Asia than reside in all the major libraries in South Asia combined. Most funding to study the condition of the world is in rich countries, where the most prestigious, well-funded academic paradigms emerge for economic and policy analysis as well as for historical and cultural studies. The assessment and monitoring of the 2015 campaign should move in the opposite direction.

The people of South Asia should not only join in the institutional partnerships that will advance the 2015 campaign, but



Mexican President Vicente Fox addressing the Monterrey Conference.

also hold the leaders of global development regime accountable for the campaign's success. Representatives of international development agencies operating in South Asia should engage the public in open dialogue about the conduct of this campaign and about the features of free-market globalisation that the campaign seeks to ameliorate.

– David Ludden

Third Orientation Course in South Asian Peace Studies

The Third South Asian Human Rights and Peace Studies Orientation Course of the **South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR)** will be held in Kathmandu, Nepal from **3 August to 17 August 2002**. It is a foundation course intended for peace and human rights activists, media persons, researchers, academics, and persons involved in policy work on conflict resolution. The course will take into account various forms of violence, war, and intervention, their impact on democracy, and will draw on the experiences of human rights and peace activism, and the moral resistance to war in South Asia and elsewhere.

Registration fee for South Asian participants is US \$ 100 (or its equivalent in Nepali rupee) and participants from outside the region US \$ 250 (or its equivalent in Nepali rupee). Board, lodging and course material for the selected candidates will be provided by SAFHR. Participants will have to support their own travel. The age limit for participation is 35 years. Women and activists from refugee and minority groups are particularly encouraged to apply. Applications must reach Peace Studies Desk in the South Asia Forum for Human Rights (3/23, Shree Durbar Tole, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Kathamndu, Nepal; GPO Box 12855, Tel: 977-1-541026; Fax: 527852, E-mail south@safhr.org) by **20 April 2002**. Applications by fax or e-mail will be valid. Applications will have to be supported by full particulars, 1000-word statement on the relevance of the course to the work of the participant, and names of two referees whose recommendations should reach independently SAFHR peace studies desk. The application must include all necessary details such as language skill, experience and nature of current work. The statement has to include candidate's own idea of peace and human rights activism, and the relation of the applicant's work with SAFHR's peace studies programme. In selection of candidates the 1000-word statement will be accorded importance. The 15-day course will be participatory, involve intense course and fieldwork, include visual studies, and will be preceded by reading and assignment-work for 2 months. Frontline activists and researchers in human rights will be sharing their knowledge and experience with participants towards developing an enriched understanding of issues of justice and peace in South Asia. Interested applicants may visit the website www.safhr.org

Violence against minorities in Bangladesh

A 'minority' in minority

Violence against Hindus, though seemingly religious in content, actually has many complex and 'secular' origins.

by *Imtiaz Ahmed*

Bangladesh's election day on 1 October 2001 was relatively peaceful. The election itself was relatively fair. But, things began to change immediately thereafter, indeed, right with the announcement of the election trends that indicated that the regime in power, the Awami League, was heading for the worst ever electoral performance by a national party in Bangladesh. A clear winner emerged in the combination of moderate and right-wing forces under the leadership of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The dramatic violence that soon erupted in many parts of the country had two notable characteristics.

The first is the routine post-election violence that is a part of Bangladesh's democratic history: Winners normally attack losers with an immense sense of pride and vengeance. The most conspicuous part of this violence is the seemingly biased role of the police, who either merely watch the spectacle or, more shamelessly, participate in the proceedings on the side of the winner. The second is more horrifying and concerns the attack on the minorities, mainly Hindu. Here, what is conspicuous is the participation of members of almost all major political parties – BNP, Jamaat-e-Islam, and even the Awami League, traditionally regarded as a pro-minority party. Needless to say, the police either looked on passively or, as is being alleged, was party to the attacks.

While there is a tendency to attribute partisan post-election violence to polarised politics and the culture of intolerance – something that has been politically and socially ingrained from the colonial period onwards – the attack on minorities is seen to be more an outcome of a global phenomenon, with the suffering of the Hindus mainly linked to their status as a minority in 'minority' in Bangladesh. There may be some truth to this view, but it does not capture the complex nature of an issue which is more 'internal' and related to the mode of governance that is pursued and practiced in Bangladesh. But before venturing on that issue, it is

necessary to clarify one or two points related to the organisation of violence in Bangladesh.

Post-election violence is not something new here. There were violent incidents after both the 1991 and 1996 elections, although the scale was more modest than the last episode and the targets more dispersed and non-religious. Also, violence against Hindus took place even before election day, when the interim government was in place to conduct the polls. There were reports in mainstream newspapers that in several places (Sathkhira, for instance) it was the members of the Awami League who were involved in covertly harassing and attacking Hindus, possibly with the intention of blaming right-wing groups and winning the sympathy and votes of the minority and secular forces. This

clearly suggests that violence against the Hindu community, although seemingly religious in intent, is actually more complex and, ironically, more secular in content.

Although the two parties differed on practically every issue in the latest episode, both the BNP government and the opposition Awami League provided near identical

figures on the post-election violence against Hindus. According to the figures provided by the Home Minister, some 266 murders and 213 rape cases were recorded in the first 25 days of October across the country. Most of the murders were recorded in Dhaka, Feni and Chittagong districts, while most of the rape cases were recorded in Bogra, Sirajganj and Naogaon districts. The Home Minister, however, did not specify the Hindu community as being the target of such attacks. A week later the Awami League in a written statement claimed that since the BNP government took over some 300 party leaders, workers and members of the minority community had been killed and over 300 women, including 50 minor girls, were raped throughout the country. No breakdown, however, was provided as to the location of such murders and rapes.

There seems to be what one would call a *majoritari-*

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an consensus in-so-far as violence against the Hindu minority is concerned. The near-identical figures and the fuzziness in pinpointing the victims communally only show that both the parties are well aware that too much attention on the minority question is politically suicidal in a country whose governing principle has fallen prey to the modernist creed of majoritarianism. A closer scrutiny will make this clear.

Social Engineering

The mode of governance can be either regimented or democratic. Regimented regimes, which can be either military or civilian, are generally of two distinctive types: authoritarian and totalitarian. Democratic regimes, on the other hand, are less varied, and involve civilian control, although shades of difference are always there. What distinguishes regimented regimes from the democratic regimes is the fact that the latter is more supportive of the goals of human freedom. Such a difference, however, must not blind us from the fact that a common element binds them together, and that common element is the *will of the majority*. Indeed, modern states, whether regimented or democratic, are all modern *majoritarian* states, which are principally organised and reproduced by way of constructing the *nation* and the *nationalities*.

In the case of regimented regimes, such organisation is more deliberate and often crude, marked by a policy of using and reusing artefacts and ideas to unify the majority section of the people nationally. Such artefacts and ideas range from religion to race, on the one hand, and from public schooling (with emphasis on the dominant language) to social engineering on the other. But once these ideas mature, directed as they are at the majority section of the people, they tend to alienate those who do not fit the unifying categories. In the case of democratic regimes, however, the organisation of majoritarianism is more related to electoral politics, where parties are forced to woo the majority community to win elections. In a socially fragmented society, often the party or the candidate will settle for the easiest way, and that is, heat up communal or religious feelings to organise the nation and the nationalities.

In both cases, we soon arrive at a situation where minorities are not only left alone and alienated but also are reproduced as *communities* or *sub-nationalities*, having distinctive socio-political agendas from that of the majority community. It is only a short step from here to making the minority the scapegoat of all ills (social, economic, even political) and a majoritarian target of abuse, murder, rape and other forms of violence, indeed, with the avowed intention of organising and reproducing the power of the majority community. In the case of Bangladesh, polarised politics and the culture of intolerance, including a disempowered civil society, further deepens the state of ill-feeling and mistrust between the Hindus and the Muslim majority, in the process putting at risk the fate of the minorities.



A picture from the Human Rights Congress for Bangladeshi Minorities' website.

Is there a way out? This must be answered by identifying tasks at three different levels. Firstly, we must try to be *protective*. The primary task is to protect the members of the minority community from the violence organised by the members of the majority. We must urgently create new structures and institutions at this level, mainly to take up the cause of the victims. Such structures and institutions could include the creation of an ombudsperson, the establishment of an independent and autonomous human rights commission, the creation of roving and on-the-spot judicial courts, and the continuous monitoring of communally-motivated violent acts by governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Secondly, there must be *preventive* activity. Here, the task includes improving the law and order situation, not only by strengthening the number of security personnel (police, ansars, neighbourhood security bodies, and the like) in violent-prone areas but also, and more importantly, by initiating police reforms. Such reforms should work for a better understanding of the police and the sociology of policing and could include 'de-governmentalising' the structure of the police force, arranging for police education on communal relations, creating more interactions between the police and civil and non-governmental agencies – including those speaking for women and children.

Finally, *curative* measures. The task would be to further democratise democratic practices, with the objective of arresting the progressive alienation of the minority Hindus that is structurally rooted in the organisation of modern democracy and majoritarianism. It was Mahatma Gandhi who said that modern democracy is a "heartless doctrine" where 51 percent can impose its will over 49 percent. In a pluralist society, this can visit disaster upon a minority community. The task, therefore, is to reinvent representation (locally, regionally, as well as nationally) in which people are not always placed in the minority or even viewed or categorised as a minority. The wider task, should therefore range from curricular reforms at all levels of education to decentralising the parliament. No doubt, the challenge is immense. ▽

'Gujarat' and the Pakistani state

The stark horror of what is happening in and around Ahmedabad must alert Pakistanis to their own reality. In India, at least, extremism can be combated by the public will.

by *Aasim Sajjad Akhtar*

Gujarat has been brought to its knees over the month of March. The gory developments in the state, however, do not come as a surprise. It is the naked communalism and bigotry propagated by the government at the centre over the past couple of years that has allowed extremists, who would otherwise be isolated, to engage in massacres with the patronage of local law enforcement officials. The magnitude of the killing in Gujarat, as in other incidents in the past, has been enough for many in Pakistan to announce how thankful they are that Pakistan exists. Many have started freshly espousing the virtues of the two-nation theory. But this is faulty analysis.

In the first instance, it is well worth remembering that safety from the clutches of religious fanatics is something that Pakistan's Hindus and Christians have not had the pleasure of experiencing. After the eruption of violence in Gujarat, extremists in Rahim Yar Khan district of Punjab attacked and seriously injured two men from the Hindu Siraiki community, which forms part of the region's true indigenous population. Rather than bask in a false sense of security, the stark horror of what is happening in and around Ahmedabad should remind Pakistanis of what has been a reality in their own country for too long. There is no cause for any feeling of relief when we know that the Pakistani establishment – just like India's newly-risen parochial parties – has systematically patronised extremist groups since the late 1970s.

Not long ago, General Pervez Musharraf promised the people a clampdown on armed groups operating in the country and an end to the insane cycle of violence. Instead, the situation is getting worse: as if to make a statement, Sunni supremacists have repeatedly targeted Shi'a doctors in Karachi (see page 22). These killings would not have happened if the government had in fact taken firm measures as promised. Intelligence agencies that are not able to prevent such murderous sectarian incidents should be disbanded. The attack

on a church in the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad proved to be a big embarrassment to the government because of high-profile casualties, but even here the law-enforcement and intelligence officials were proven hapless.

It is not that the intelligence agencies cannot deal with extremism if they want to. It is just that they are busy with what has preoccupied them for the past 30 years—keeping a strict watch on political activity and agitations of any kind. This leaves the murdering fanatics free to run riot. Clearly, the promises made by Gen Musharraf are not being kept, and the military regime is proving to be as repressive as any that has come before it – despite loud claims of moving Pakistan on the road to genuine democracy.

With political parties muted, one may well wonder whether the government really needs political intelligence. Sadly and ominously for Pakistan, the little political activity that remains is inviting the wrath of an establishment and elite-dominated state intent on preserving the status quo. Whether it is the movement of squatters, or activism by landless tenants or fisherfolk, the state has moved to ruthlessly suppress the disempowered.

The government has condemned civil dissenters to the zone of terror by bringing them under the ambit of anti-terrorism legislation.

It is difficult to be anything other than skeptical about the true intentions of the military government. The rumours about jihadi groups simply having camouflaged their operations while remaining hand-in-glove with the establishment cannot be dismissed out of hand. However much the Pakistani-on-the-street badmouths India, and seems to be almost (shamefully) gleeful at how Gujarat has degenerated into chaos, we must understand that the Indian polity stands on much firmer ground than Pakistan's.

Extremism in India is rearing its ugly head, but is neither institutionalised nor patronised by the state establishment as it is in Pakistan. It is the current polit-

However much the Pakistani-on-the-street badmouths India, we must understand that the Indian polity stands on much firmer ground than Pakistan's.



Gujarat burning



Pakistan agitated

ical dispensation in India that has given rise to the carnage in Gujrat, but the Bharatiya Janata Party government does not represent an irreversible trend, while extremism in Pakistan is permanent until such a time as the Pakistani establishment abandons it. The country's civil and military administrations have been responsible for propagating violence over a period of time, and unlike in India, the general public in Pakistan is largely powerless to do anything about it.

Indian democracy is hardly perfect, and it is that democracy that has given a party like the BJP the chance to inject its destructive ideology into the political mainstream. But the BJP coming to power had as much to do with the Indian public's disillusionment with almost 50 uninterrupted years of Congress rule as it did with the politics of the BJP itself. The shameful events in Gujarat have compounded the frustration the Indian public has been feeling toward the BJP government on account of a number of unpopular policies, and it is likely that the BJP will not survive the next general election – the debacle in the Uttar Pradesh state elections suggest as much. The Indian public at large does not generally identify itself on communal or religious lines, and Gujarat has probably convinced people that it is time to accept the failure of the BJP experiment.

This does not mean that extremism does not and will not continue to exist in India. Rather, it shows that should the average Indian reject it through the electoral process, extremism can be combated by the public will. The point lies not in refuting the multitude of contradictions that make up the Indian state and society, including the marginalisation of minorities—whether religious or otherwise. Instead, it rests in the idea that the vast Indian public has some level of control over the kind of politics and society that it wants, with Kashmir being the obvious exception.

The decision of the Indian Supreme Court to prohibit the extremist Vishwa Hindu Parishad from starting a planned *shilanyas* of a temple on the site of the demolished Babri Masjid is yet another example of the built-in self-correcting mechanism in India that ensures the reign of public interest. The last time Pakistan's own

Supreme Court was called on to make a decision of major significance, it decided that a military coup against an elected government could be legitimised for three whole years. It is plausible to assume that if a situation similar to that of Gujarat were to exist in Pakistan and the Pakistani government was as supportive of extremists as Atal Behari Vajpayee's government was of the VHP, the Supreme Court in Islamabad would have gone with the government.

At the end of the day, there are many similarities between extremists in India and Pakistan. Both overseas Pakistanis and Indians inexplicably support extremist groups; and extremist parties are able to mobilise more street power than other parties. However, Indian democracy does give ordinary Indians some possibility of rejecting extremism. Furthermore, the Indian intelligence agencies do not manipulate the electoral process to bring extremists into government, nor can the extremists count on the judiciary remaining hostage to the establishment's wishes. Pakistanis, in the government and intelligentsia alike, never tire of reminding one another (and others who care) that parochial parties in Pakistan have never garnered more than 7 percent of the total vote during elections. In that case, it is an even bigger indictment of the military establishment for having pandered to the extremists and made them what they are today.

India has not experienced an increase in poverty over the last decade and a half like Pakistan has. India is not mired in foreign debt on such scale that it has had to surrender economic sovereignty to the West and the Bretton Woods institutions. It would be inaccurate to say that all of these differences exist because India is a democratic state and Pakistan never has been one.

But it is high time that Pakistan too was finally allowed a continuous political process. At least, then, citizens could feel responsible for who and what they bring to power, and not have extremism imposed on them by those who presume to dictate what is right and what is wrong. ▽

Violence against minorities in Pakistan

Under the gun: The Shi'ites of Karachi

Sectarian violence in Sindh is spiralling out of control, and it is doctors who are being targetted. Those with the means are emigrating to safer locations, but most among the targetted minorities find a government unable or unwilling to protect them.

by *Hasan Mansoor*

A violent end awaited Dr Aal-I-Safdar Zaidi, a consultant nephrologist, who had returned to Pakistan three months ago after an 11-year stint in the United States, when he left for work at the Karachi Kidney Centre on the morning of 4 March this year. At a traffic signal in the centre of the city two armed men on a motorcycle pulled up alongside his car and sprayed him with bullets. Shot in the head and face, Zaidi collapsed onto the steering wheel. The assailants escaped well before the shocked bystanders could react.

Syed Jawad Ali, 60, ex-manager of Commercial Union Insurance Agency, and Zamarrud Husain, 40, were coming out of the Imambargah Baqayyatullah in Defence Housing Society after Maghrib prayers when two armed men on a motorcycle intercepted them. They opened fire killing Jawad Ali and injuring his friend before escaping.

Professor Syed Azhar Hussain Zaidi, 55, principal of the Superior Science College, Karachi, and his son, Ashar Hussain Zaidi, lecturer in the same college, were more fortunate than Dr Zaidi and Jawad Ali. When their car reached the college gate two armed men opened fire with auto-matic weapons and fled. Fortunately for the injured men, there were college students present who rushed them to the Jinnah Postgraduate Medical Centre. The lives were saved after a marathon effort by doctors.

These are not stray incidents but part of a systematic pattern of violence that once again haunts the port city of Karachi. In the first few months of this year alone, such targetted killings have already claimed 15 lives and left 10 people injured. Of those killed, six were doctors. The city's 6000 practicing doctors now live in constant fear and, according to Dr Habibur Rehman Soomro, a Karachi-based member of the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), 30 doctors have fled the country during the first two weeks of March alone and many others are preparing to follow suit. In the last two years, more than 200 doctors have emigrated from Pakistan

to escape targeted violence. "Escape can never be a solution to this problem", says Dr Tipu Sultan, president of PMA Karachi. "We are still going strong and believe we will fight it out." Amidst this mayhem, there are some defiant voices.

Sindh Health Minister Ahsan Ahmed said more than 2000 doctors have applied in the past one year to leave because of the security situation and the economic crisis. Since 1994, seventy-seven doctors have been murdered. Of them more than 50 have been killed in the last five years. In 2000, eight doctors were killed. Last year, seven doctors lost their lives. And already this year, six doctors have fallen victim, according to PMA figures.

What is alarming from a long-term perspective is that this wave of violence is selective and sectarian. City police say the majority of the recent victims belong to the Shi'ite sect. At a meeting with PMA office-bearers, the provincial home secretary Mukhtar Ahmed admitted that members of banned jehadi and sectarian outfits might be involved in the recent killings of the doctors. Since 1997, six suspects have been arrested for the murder of six doctors and all the arrested are activists of banned extremist Islamist

jehadi parties. "Their aims are obvious. They want to disrupt a smooth life, create chaos so that the brightening prospects of foreign investment could be discouraged," Pakistani interior minister Moinuddin Haider said. This view is echoed by other senior members of the administration. According to the Sindh home secretary, the onslaught on the doctors was targetted at the government's efforts to attract foreign investors to the southern port city. Those arrested had a more sectarian explanation. "We killed the six doctors because they are Shias. They are *kafirs*, not Muslims," Arif, one of the suspects, said.

Figures compiled by the Citizen-Police Liaison Committee of Karachi (CPLC) show that least 332 people — 190 Shias and 142 Sunnis — have been killed since 1994. The years 1994 and 1995 were the worst with 196

"It is better to stop earning than to stop living."

killings, 98 each of Shias and Sunnis. 1996 was the best year, for it saw only one killing. Most observers credit former interior minister Naseerullah Babar for introducing tough measures against lawless elements in Karachi. Since then, however, the figures have gone up, despite the military rule that the country has been under since 1999. The IGP Sindh, Kamal Shah, said as many as 59 people fell victim to sectarian violence in the city during 2001. This included 35 Shias, 20 Deobandis and 4 Brelvis. A total of 35 cases were registered and the police arrested 22 accused.

Recently, a doctor, son of a renowned ENT specialist, was killed in Gulshan-i-Iqbal. The murder prompted his brother, himself a doctor, to wind up years of practice and leave the city. Another doctor, who practiced in the Saddar area of Karachi, shifted to Canada after he received threats. But not everyone can afford to leave. "The doctors who have resources and are fortunate enough to settle easily elsewhere are leaving," says Dr Shershah Syed, secretary general of PMA. "But the large majority is not so lucky and is staying here praying for good fortune." And they are protesting, too. On 13 March, Karachi doctors went on a one-day strike and all major government and private hospitals, with the exception of the emergency facilities, remained closed. "We saw no other way out to attract the attention of the authorities," said Dr Syed. The strike produced a response from the government, which has agreed to issue firearm licences to doctors. The doctors in turn have demanded that the police train them to use the weapons. In the meanwhile, they have demanded the immediate arrest of the killers and speedy trials through anti-terrorism courts.

There are at least 7000 doctors practicing in Karachi. Of them, more than 6000 are general practitioners (GPs) who are exposed to very high levels of danger as they offer easy targets. "We have very limited resources and manpower," a senior police official said. "It is very difficult to provide security to such a large number of doctors operating in every nook and corner of the city".

The Karachi Police is 30,000 strong. A large number of policemen are deputed outside mosques, imambargahs and holy places of the minority communities. And police officials have asked PMA to prepare a list of doctors working in sensitive localities where more protection may be needed. This proposal of the police may not solve the problem, sources say, since the recent murders have taken place in all parts of the city, from slums to posh neighbourhoods. The doctors in various sensitive areas have shut down shop and most of them are reluctant to resume practice despite assurances by the PMA and the police. "I don't think I am safe", says a frightened GP operating a clinic in the Landhi area of Karachi. "It is better to stop earning than to stop living."

Sectarian Police

The recent spate of violence has made it clear to the



A jihadi activist at a Karachi rally.

police and administrative authorities that the ban on terrorist outfits ordered by General Pervez Musharraf needs to be followed up with tough measures on the ground to curb the sectarian menace. Deputy Inspector General (Operations) Karachi, Tariq Jamil, claimed that three sectarian organisations are responsible for the violence, but declined to name them for fear of alerting their activists. The DIG also said the police had identified the killers of at least three doctors murdered in separate incidents in different parts of Karachi but refused to give their names. But there is another angle to the story as well which can be a serious source of worry to the provincial and national establishments. There are indications that some elements within the police force might have colluded with the killers in carrying out the attacks and escaping the police net. "They have some accomplices in the police force too," DIG Jamil concluded. He went so far as to hint at the involvement of a police officer, and cited him as one of the suspects. According to sources, this particular officer is known to have sectarian leanings. Such police involvement in sectarian strife may not be restricted to isolated individuals, particularly given the activities of religious preachers. A police constable, who was recently arrested, said he joined an extremist sectarian group after coming under the influence of a prayer leader. The protection of the uniform enables such individuals to par-

ticipate in the violence and evade suspicion. "By the time we got to him he had killed eight persons, including three Shi'ite doctors", a senior police official said.

The police have also come across a new phenomenon. "Some of the killings may involve professional hitmen. Hired killers are involved in the killing of people of both sects. They are also used by rival ethnic groups," says a senior police official. Police officers say it is very difficult to penetrate the network of hired assassins because most of them operate independently or in very small groups and disperse immediately after the task is accomplished. This seems plausible since most religious activists have either gone underground or have been arrested in recent crackdowns. "It makes sense for them to employ hired killers to do sectarian cleansing", says a security official.

The sectarian strife in Karachi has roots in the Punjab. Violence has claimed hundreds of lives in Punjab's various central cities, particularly Jhang. Homicide experts in the Sindh Police believe a number of sectarian gangsters hailing from Punjab are now in Karachi. "They are rigid in their beliefs they carried from Jhang and the neighbourhood towns and kill people belonging to rival sects as they did in their native towns", a senior police officer said.

Before the 11 September attacks on America, the main force behind sectarian extremism was considered to be the proliferating jihadi organisations. These outfits were supposed to have had training camps in Afghanistan and the disputed territory of Kashmir. And neighbouring Iran was seen to be the training ground for Shia militants till recently. After the war in Afghanistan, a shift in the government's policy towards the jihadi outfits led to the banning of four Sunni and two Shia organisations. It was thought that this would bring some respite from the cycle of religious extremism. Instead, things have got a lot worse despite that fact that the remaining outfits have been asked to confine their activities inside Kashmir.

Government officials have steadfastly avoided giving an answer as to why they have failed to control the situation, even though there is no longer the threat from Taliban- and Kashmir-oriented sectarian organisations. "We have controlled the mob psyche but organised crime like that is still a far cry", Interior Minister Moinuddin Haider said. According to him, the government had been launching de-weaponisation campaigns from time to time and succeeded in controlling the smug-



Church under guard in Karachi.

gling of weapons from up-country to Karachi. "We have controlled it to a great extent but much still remains to be done," he said.

These much-publicised de-weaponisation campaigns have had a chequered history in Pakistan. It was launched back in 1986, when General Zia ul Haq was ruling the country. Since then five such campaigns have been undertaken, with negligible success. Not more than 5000 weapons have been retrieved by the government in all these years. When Moinuddin Haider became the Governor of Sindh five years ago, there was a great deal of talk on the de-weaponisation of Karachi. However, the plan did not see the light of day due to the "political exigencies" of the rulers of the time. Today, the law and order situation in Karachi

has taken a turn for the worse. As a matter of law on paper, the Pakistan government promulgated an anti-weaponisation law on 15 February 2001 prescribing harsh punishments for those who are in possession of illegal weapons or involved in their sale and transaction. In practical terms, this law has not yet been implemented. Since its promulgation, no one has yet been punished under its terms.

Meanwhile, the killings go on and among the sectarian groups themselves, there are conflicting views on the violence. The president of the banned Shia outfit, Tehrik-I-Jafaria Pakistan Sindh Chapter, Hasan Turabi said that the number of Shia Muslims killed showed that it was a one-sided affair. "I have been saying that Sunni extremist elements are behind these murders. They are involved too in the murder of those Sunnis who they deem unfit in their narrow criterion of Islam", he said. On the other hand, Qari Usman, Information Secretary of the pro-Taliban Jamiat-I-Ulema Islam Sindh, believed that neither Shia nor Sunni activists are involved in the ongoing murders. According to him, "This is a conspiracy against Islam and the killings are sponsored by the US and Indian intelligence agencies".

The Jamaat-I-Islami's Professor Ghafoor Ahmed expressed similar views. And Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, one of the moving forces behind the anti-US rallies during the war on Afghanistan, had this to say, "The military government has outlawed all organisations it believes are involved in terrorism. They have imposed curbs on *madaris* (seminaries) and even female *madaris* have not been excluded. Musharraf should inform the people as to who is killing innocent people now." ▽



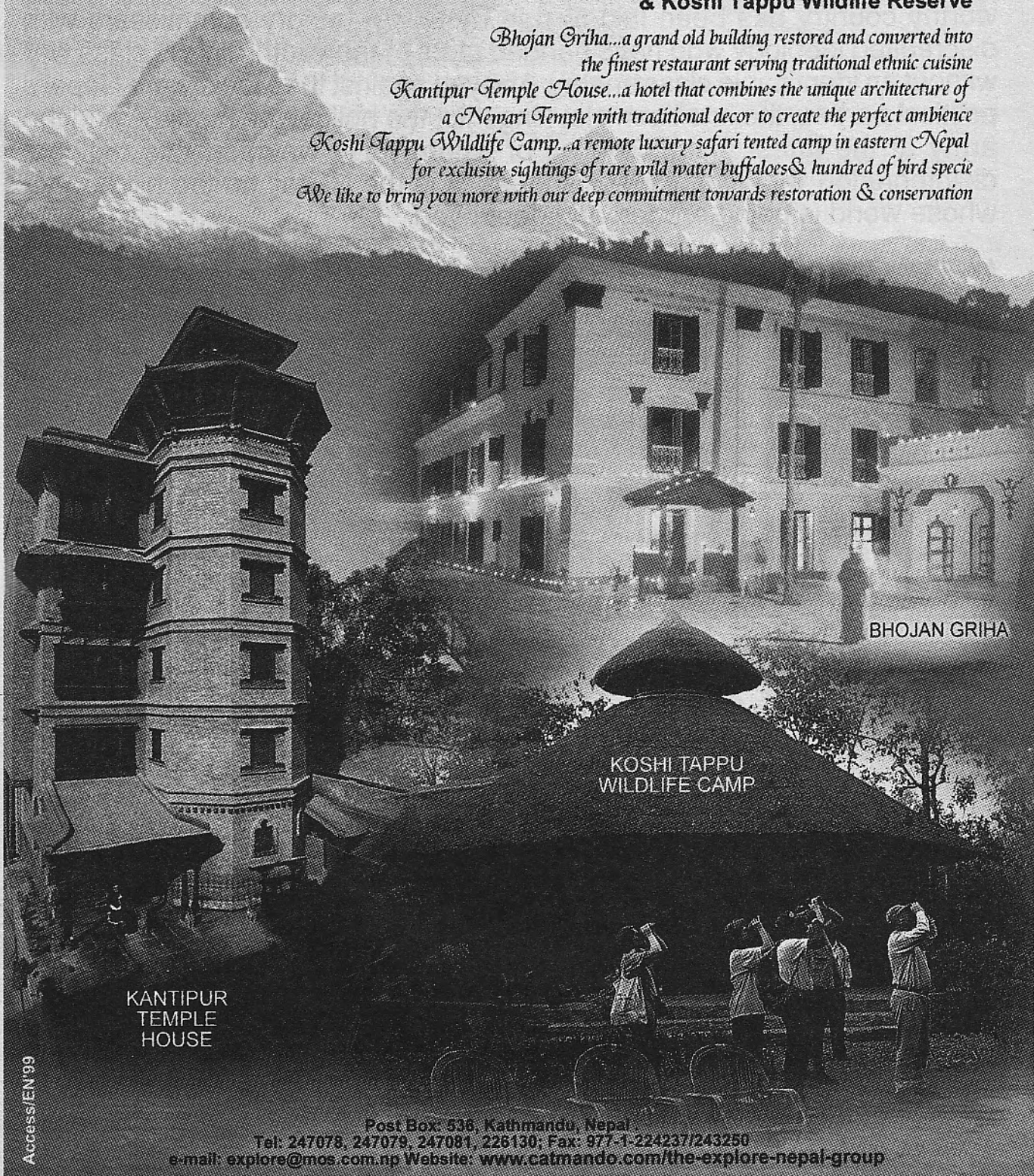
the explore nepal group

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Erosion of the Nepali world

Nepal has entered a telescoped period of self-destruction in which a perfectly worthy country has been laid to ruin by power-hungry commissars with discredited ideology who have handed guns to the youth. This is class war without an identifiable class enemy. Arrayed against the Maoists are Nepal's political parties, the intelligentsia, kingship, the police, the media – and the army at the latest instance – all of whom have watched this national disintegration with singular selfishness. It is the Nepali on the hill terrace whose world is being eroded and destroyed.

by Deepak Thapa

If, apart from the killings on both sides, there is a single factor that has been constant about the 'People's War' launched by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), now in its seventh year, it is its unpredictability. Unpredictable not only in what the Maoist leadership is going to do next, but also in terms of how events are going to develop in the mainstream of Nepali politics.



SUBHAS PAI



MIN. BARACHANDRA

Artist's conception of Prachanda; Prime Minister Deuba

Take the flip-flop sequence of events of the past year. In February 2001, the Maoists held their second national conference, which announced that "the guiding thought" of their party would henceforth become "Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and Prachanda Path". Besides confirming General Secretary Prachanda to the new "highest post" of chairman, the meeting significantly left out the long-standing demand for a constituent assembly to draw up a new constitution for Nepal. This was taken as a softening in their stance, but even as the government was readying to respond, the Maoists went on a spree of attacks, killing scores of policemen.

The next surprise came after the 1 June slaughter of King Birendra and his family. The Maoists claimed the killings to be part of a larger conspiracy since, they said, the late king had been unwilling to use the army against them. Further, they asserted that "On some national questions we and King Birendra had similar thoughts" and that they had had "an undeclared working unity" with the late king. The Maoists tried to capitalise on the fluid situation created by the civic disturbances in the wake of the royal massacre by instigating the people,

and the army, to rebel against the new monarch, Gyanendra, holding him responsible for the killings along with the then prime minister, Girija Prasad Koirala, and Indian and US intelligence agencies.

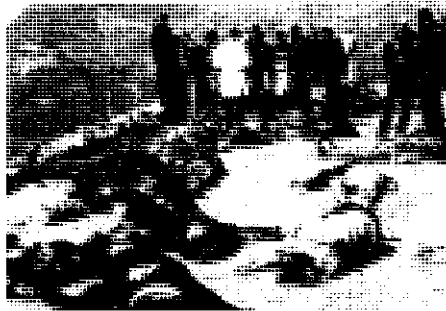
The Maoist attempt to drive a wedge between the new king and the masses did not prove effectual, and the massacres of policemen

as the representatives of the state continued. Finally, in July, a beleaguered Koirala called it a day, paving the way for Sher Bahadur Deuba, also of the Nepali Congress, to take charge. This was a changeover the Maoists had been looking forward to, given Deuba's loud submissions for a negotiated settlement. A ceasefire was declared by both sides, and three rounds of talks were held over three months (during which the demand for a constituent assembly popped up again). But then, on 23 November 2001, exactly four months to the day after the truce was announced, the Maoists broke it and plunged the country into a state of emergency. This time, they had dragged in the army as well.

In the political sphere, Deuba and Koirala have undergone a role reversal. Deuba used to be the Maoists' darling, and his elevation to prime minister was celebrated by Pushpa Kamal Dahal ('Prachanda') as a victory over "the fascist Girija faction". Today, Deuba has turned an ogre for the Maoists, having clamped down the emergency, declared them 'terrorists', and ordering the soldiers out to pursue them. In the meantime, the Maoists have sent feelers to Koirala, who remains the powerhouse of the Nepali Congress, in the hope of



weakening Deuba's resolve to get them to give up their guns before sitting down for talks. In a recent interview, Prachanda has gone so far as to praise Koirala as a staunch advocate of parliamentary rule. As for the main leftist grouping, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) — recently unified once again after a splinter group returned to the fold — after years of calling for a "political solution" to the "ultra-leftist adventurism" of the insurgents, it has come out in support of the state of emergency, and armed action against the rebels.



Killing terraces of police (left) and Maoist dead.

'Fascist ruling gang'

The royal succession passed off smoothly enough, given the dire circumstances, and the Maoist role as agent provocateur notwithstanding. But the intense media interest which brought hundreds of journalists from all over to cover the Shakespearean tragedy sprung by a love-crazed prince suddenly led to the discovery of the raging insurgency. It was open house for the international press, as reporters trooped off into the mountains in the company of Maoist interlocutors and reported to the world on what was happening in the midhills of Nepal. Nepali newspapers were not far behind either, as reporters went on 'guided tours' organised by Prachanda's followers. There was a surreal feel to it all, not unlike the Narayanhiti royal killings.

Never ones to miss an opportunity, the Maoists were soon back in action. While there was no doubt about the institutional loyalty of the army towards the new man under the bird-of-paradise crown, the rebels were able to take advantage of a new equation at the apex of state power to step up their attacks. If that was a strategy to force the government to the negotiating table, it seemed to work when Sher Bahadur Deuba took the helm in July. Deuba, who had been heading a government commission looking into the Maoist issue, was known to claim in private that he could resolve the problem in a jiffy and was itching to get going. It was this confidence that drove Deuba to declare a ceasefire as soon as he took office, an offer that Prachanda immediately reciprocated.

It was clear from the beginning that the road to dialogue would be a rocky one, for the non-negotiables on the two sides were so far apart — one side wanted a republic while the other side was steadfastly behind the Constitution of 1990. It did not help that the talks were conducted wide out in the open, with the three designated Maoists representatives in particular setting out their negotiating positions in public rallies. There were no secret talks taking place behind the scenes as some may have hoped — what the public saw was what it got. The Maoists did not budge from their three main demands, which were for a new constitution, a republican state,

and an interim government to make both happen. There were other clauses as well, but of the kind that forms the standard plank of any other party. No one expected miracles from the meetings, but there was hope that a breakthrough of sorts was in the offing and that it was the Maoists who would relent.

For the Maoists, the truce was an opportunity to reach out to the public — and also to be exposed. The rebel cadre emerged from hiding and began organising mass meetings all over the country, including in major urban centres. The biggest of them all was to be a rally on 21 September in Kathmandu, for which the Maoists claimed they would bring a quarter million people into the Valley. With the Maoists finally making a bid for Kathmandu, the capital-centric national authorities got worried enough to ban public meetings. This came in the wake of the 11 September attacks, and the government was emboldened by the worldwide condemnation of terrorism (to which chorus Kathmandu also lent its voice). Sensing the changing mood, the Maoist leadership called off plans for the Valley rally, and a possible showdown was averted for the moment.

Even as this was going on, there were arrests of Maoist sympathisers. Meanwhile, the rebels did not let-up in attacks on supporters of mainstream parties (although the police enjoyed a brief respite). Each side accused the other of endangering the talks, but neither pulled out, and the situation did not seem hopeless. Just as the third phase of talks was to begin on 13 November, the Maoists dropped their demand for a republican Nepal. Even though they continued to insist on an interim government and a constituent assembly, this was seen as a sign of flexibility — or, more optimistically, as a letting go of the rebel's entire *raison d'être*. However, the third round too proved inconclusive with the demand for a constituent assembly proving unresolvable. Still a breakdown was not announced and Prime Minister Deuba declared, "I am hopeful that the Maoist problem will be solved from the coming round of talks. The government is committed to solving the problem through dialogue and I also personally pledge to solve the problem."

A couple of days later, Prachanda came out with a statement claiming that there was no more justification for the ceasefire, which sent alarm bells ringing within the government and prompted Deuba to ask Maoist strongman to reconsider his decision. Unheeded, the



Royal Nepal Army sipahi and the People's Liberation Army fighter

insurgents took one of their most precipitate actions to date on 23 November, mounting a surprise attack on an army garrison in the western Nepal inner-tarai district of Dang. Declaring the Maoist attack a betrayal, three days later Deuba imposed an emergency, termed the CPN (Maoist) a "terrorist" organisation, banned it and all its fraternal organisations, and declared that there would be no further talks until the rebels gave up arms.

The attack in Dang showed a fair degree of confidence among the militant leadership, for they surely knew that the army would finally then be forced to emerge from the barracks where they had been comfortably ensconced for the entire six years of the 'People's War'. On the day of the attack, the Maoists also announced the formation of a 37-member United Revolutionary People's Council of Nepal, described as "an embryonic Central People's Government Organising Committee" under the convenorship of Baburam Bhattarai, who had earlier headed the political wing of the CPN (Maoist) before it went underground in 1996. In effect, this meant that the Maoists had set up an alternative government.

What could have led to the Maoists to back out of the talks? A letter dated 3 December marked for heads of diplomatic missions in Kathmandu and jointly signed by Prachanda and Bhattarai, says: "As an immediate political solution, we proposed the formation of an interim government, drafting of a new constitution and proclamation of the republic. But when the idea of a republican form of state was not acceptable to the ruling side we put forward an alternative proposal of convening an elected constituent assembly so as to give the ultimate right of choosing between a monarchy or a republic to the sovereign people themselves. As this proposal, too, was summarily rejected and the fascist ruling gang mobilised the royal army throughout the country we had no other alternative than to return to the people and continue with the movement."

The statement can be seen as a face-saving attempt to

explain the renewed fighting. It is possible that the rebels' political leadership saw no advance other than through political compromise, whereas the military wing felt its momentum weakening as the negotiations progressed. Days before the Dang attack, there was speculation in the press that the Maoists' military wing was urging a breaking off of talks. The surprise assault on the army base could have been the militants' way of creating a *fait accompli* to prevent the political leadership from reaching for accommodation within the existing system.

It will be up to the historian to trace the sequence of events that led to end of the ceasefire, but the rebels have been quick to point out that the supposed differences within the party were "just the figment of imagination of the reactionaries, if not a deliberate disinformation campaign to confuse the masses". Indeed, given the vociferous refusal by parliamentary parties to consider even a constituent assembly, the Maoists could have been looking for a reason – as laid out above – to begin fighting in order to be able to bargain from a position of strength when negotiations began anew.

Rather than discuss why the Maoists broke the truce, it may be more useful to examine why they got into it in the first place, given that their demands were so fundamentally opposed to the existing structures of state. Prachanda's views on negotiating strategy might offer some illumination. Talking to *A World to Win*, the magazine of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement, in May 2001, he said: "Our guiding principles on the question of negotiations are the experiences and summation of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty under Lenin's leadership and the Chunking negotiations under Mao's leadership." (Instances where the Bolsheviks and Mao's forces talked peace while building up strength for an offensive.)

By the time the Maoists agreed to the talks, they knew that their next adversary would be the men in green. The rebels seem to have used the respite to regroup, sharpen tactics and access more advanced weaponry. Already, by that time, their core fighting cadre had graduated from musketry to .303 rifles, and it was time to move up to automatic weaponry. There were reports of an arms cache of 400 assault rifles being interdicted on 2 November in northern Burma, thought to be headed for the Maoists.

State in emergency

This is the second time the country has been under a state of emergency. The first was after the royal takeover of 1960, when the multiparty democratic system was abolished in favour of direct rule by King Mahendra and political parties were banned. But that was at least two generations ago and few people have any memories of it. This time, a democratic government suspended all fundamental rights and freedoms, and Deuba made it clear that he was aware of what he was doing. "I am fully convinced that all the Nepali people, political parties and the civic society is aware of the fact that a government accountable to the people won't take such a difficult



MIN. BARACHARYA

decision if an unfavourable situation did not exist," he said in an address after imposing the emergency.

Two reasons can be posited for the weak protest against the imposition of the state of emergency. One is that the government-Maobaadi talks had since peace hopes were raised, the rebels lost sympathy when they walked out of the talks and attacked the army in Dang. More significant, perhaps, was the behaviour of the Maoist cadre during their time aboveground.

One way that the 'People's War' had touched people in all brackets was the 'donations' that were demanded for the 'cause', sometimes on pain of death. While this was a permanent feature in areas where the Maoists were in total control, such as demands for food and lodging, collections were made in cities like Kathmandu as well, albeit clandestinely. With the ceasefire, the Maoists suddenly acted high-handedly. The extortions became pronounced in the run-up to the proposed 21 September mass meeting, and 'donations' were demanded from all and sundry, despite the Maoist leadership's avowal to put an end to such collections. Meanwhile, factories, schools and even individuals were asked to get ready to billet the masses that would arrive for the rally.

For the first time, the capital experienced first-hand what the people elsewhere had been living with. The situation could well have turned ugly had the rally gone ahead as planned, but, even without it, there was a positive mindset towards armed action against the Maoists among the Kathmandu middle class. That seems to have made all the difference in how the capital's influential section views the emergency.

If the general public's attitude towards the curtailing of rights was favourable, the press too bent over backwards to please the government. The Nepal Media Society, an alliance of the major dailies formed ostensibly to keep out foreign investment in the Nepali media, announced its intention to write "in favour of parliamentary system and democratic constitution, keeping in mind the situation of law and order in the country". Daily newspapers that had been using various euphemisms to refer to the Maoists, overnight took the government's cue in labelling them 'terrorists', limited their coverage of the emergency to government handouts, and generally backed off from their role as public watchdog.

To give them due credit, the much-maligned political weeklies continued to report in their inimitable fashion despite the government's expectation that journalists would fall in line. In fact, one of the first post-emergency actions of the government was to take into custody journalists from newspapers considered Maoist mouthpieces. And within days, it even came out with a controversial list of do's and don'ts for the press to follow. Further, to prove that it meant to business, the government began to jail journalists seen to be deviating from its injunction. As of the end of March, more than 70 journalists had been taken into custody. Many of these arrests were carried out by the army, which, by arrogating

powers far beyond its jurisdiction, has been surprisingly enthusiastic in the crackdown on the press for perceived slights, large and small, occasionally making faux pas due to its feeble intelligence mechanisms.

Selective annihilation

"In establishing our form of actions, the first, second, third and fourth priorities have been accorded to: ambush and mining, raid and commando attack, various types of sabotage, and selective annihilation", said Prachanda in the *A World to Win* interview. "With savagery," he might have added.

Even before the ceasefire, the Maoists had been known to execute policemen who had surrendered, while their 'annihilation' of supposed 'class enemies' and 'informers' were often accompanied with displays of the barbarism. Granted that the Maoists and their supporters, particularly in the hill districts of the midwest, had been at the receiving end of police brutality in the past. But, in the present phase of fighting, there is added viciousness to the Maoist actions. Security personnel have been found hacked and mutilated before being killed, while, increasingly, the Maoists seem to have no qualms about harming innocents in their zeal to sow terror.

The Maoists seem to have decided to put all political agendas aside and focus entirely on creating a sense of panic nationwide. Whereas the insurgents had earlier left Kathmandu blissfully free of their actions, other than some 'soft' bombs placed for scare value in the houses of prominent politicians and bureaucrats, now the bombs are for real and ordinary people are getting killed. Going by their unconcern, the Maoists probably view such losses as nothing more than 'collateral damage'.

The successes against the army — both the surprise attack on Dang and a subsequent decimation of a platoon in Achham district — led to a new-found Maoist confidence. However, while the rank and file seem to have been let loose to carry out 'action' against political people at the village level, such as the killing of school teachers, the topmost echelon seems to have no illusions about the impossibility of toppling the state. Prachanda's press statement in mid-February, on the sixth anniversary of the People's War, provides a hint: "Our party appeals to all parties within parliament and outside and pro-people forces to come together against the military dictatorship of the near-dead feudal autocracy. In this historic moment we are ready to be involved in talks, dialogue, fronts or show any kind of flexibility." Significantly, he added, "We have never closed the door for talks to find a political solution and we will never do so in the future either."

The offer of talks was repeated in another statement



Why was the C-in-C so shrill?



Will Shri Vajpayee refuse safe haven?

two weeks later. Not long after, a group of human rights activists announced that they were gearing up to bring the two sides to the negotiating table again, while news leaked out that Congress Party President Girija Prasad Koirala had been in touch with a top Maoist leader through an intermediary. (What is interesting in all of this is the typically 'Nepali' approach of carrying out talks in the open, when everyone knows secrecy is what is required to hammer out real deals.) When Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India in late March on an official visit, mainly to seek support in tackling the followers of Prachanda Path, at least two senior Maoist leaders were known to be on standby to try and meet the prime minister in Calcutta. Although the meeting did not take place, it shows that at least one voice within the Maoists is for talks.

In the meantime, the Maoists have continued with their vituperation against King Gyanendra (and his son, Paras). The insurgents obviously consider the king an easy target considering that Gyanendra is still hobbled by the inauspicious beginnings to his reign. In an interesting letter directed at potential tourists to Nepal, put up on the web in March, Baburam Bhattarai tries to manipulate foreigners who know little about Nepali politics, indicating that the Maoists' fight is against an absolute monarch, whereas, if anything, the war is against the Nepali Parliament. Indeed, the Maoists would have everyone believe that the emergency is solely the king's doing, whereas the fact is that it has the concurrence of the mainstream political parties.

Their bluster and doublespeak could be hiding a creeping fear among the rebels that they could be facing tougher times. To begin with, the whole world's establishment is now arrayed behind George W Bush in his 'war on terror'. The international and regional scenario therefore looks bleak for Nepal's Maoists. The possibility of capturing state power in Nepal, too, seems remote although the rebels certainly can — and seem to want to — inflict maximum damage on the society.

Procuring arms may not be a problem given the treasury chest the Maoists have built up and which they frequently replenish through looting banks and extracting 'donations', including from national-level politicians, bureaucrats and police officials. But the goodwill they had gained through the social reforms initiated in core areas where they hold sway is not going to last forever, as the populace gets restless for an end to the bloodletting, and for development projects, which have ended in large parts of the country, to restart. The government has cut down the development budget to support the expensive army operations, while NGOs, INGOs and the aid agencies

have mostly retreated to the security of the Kathmandu Valley. While the Maoists may control swaths of countryside, the fact is they are unable to introduce significant development works that would be the way — rather than fear — to buy the long term loyalty of the people.

The most immediate concern for the Maoists could be finding willing volunteers to fill their ranks. It is reasonably clear that the large rural populace that seems to support the Maoists — even to the extent of joining their people's government at village level — do so out of fear and coercion. When push comes to shove, the Maoists will probably find that they have only a few thousand hardcore fighters willing to fight for the cause. Recruiting is going to be more difficult since the mountainsides of Nepal have emptied of young men in particular, who are escaping forced conscription into the Maoist force as well as harassment during the ongoing security operations by a military that is unable to distinguish between different shades of red. They are leaving the country in large numbers as is evident from the increase in demand for passports in remote districts following the onset of emergency, and others have either fled to India or sought shelter in the cities and highway settlements of Nepal.

Sipahi vs. Maobaadi

The Maoists have shown a capacity to spread terror, and the intensity of their attacks is increasing by the day. Considering the situation with utmost gravity would be the Royal Nepal Army. The attack on the Dang barracks tarnished the army's image before it was even deployed. All in all, it seemed clear that the army brass which had watched the police being mowed down by the rebels over the years had not been preparing itself for the inevitable war that was slowly, but surely, wending its way to its doorstep. Army officers were known to boast that they would finish off the Maoists in a week, but it turned out to be an empty boast. Meanwhile, what people had considered the Maoist bluff about taking on the army seemed to be a misreading. After the army deployment their command and control structures have not collapsed as was expected by so many pundits. After years of taunting the army, the Maoists had actually demonstrated their willingness to take it on.

The army received another devastating blow to its operations and image in mid-February in Achham district, when the Maoists attacked the district headquarters and annihilated the army platoon stationed there together with the district police force. Dang was a surprise attack, but Achham seemed to show poor leadership and field ability.

It was not hard to foresee that the Nepali army would find the going tough against a rebel force that has honed its fighting skills over the past six years, using all tactics fair and foul, including villagers as human shields, swarming into police posts, psy-war through loud-speakers, and calculated use of committed core cadre when the time came to make the kill. In addition, the Maoists are innovative, building their own arsenals as



Yelios
प्रचण्ड

well as developing indigenous weaponry in the form of 'pipe bombs' as landmines, 'socket bombs' as grenades, 'pressure-cooker bombs' for death-dealing force, as well as low-pressure 'banner bombs' and Molotov cocktails for psychological impact. Most importantly, the Maoists know their mountainous terrain. The perceived superiority of the army's weaponry is likely to be cancelled out to some extent as the Maoists turn the captured weapons on Nepali soldiers.

The Royal Nepal Army's strengths are those of any reasonably well-trained fighting force except that the soldiers are now having to deal with a guerilla force consisting of their own countrymen and -women. But for every conscientious officer and *sipahi* who is presently out on the field braving the rebel's bullet are not a few who rue the day they joined the army for a comfortable, effortless career. The weaknesses are many. For a force whose central strategy to tackle the 'enemy' has always been jungle warfare, the army has been found to be significantly lacking thus far.

To be sure, it is hobbled with the task of securing 75 district headquarters, transmission towers, hydropower stations, the royal palace and other royal precincts and national parks. In addition, at least a couple of thousand of the army's soldiers are away on plum peacekeeping assignments. The problem with numbers is genuine. On the face of it, the Royal Nepal Army's strength does not look so bad: a 50,000-strong force pitted against a guerilla band consisting of perhaps a few thousand committed fighters. But, Prime Minister Deuba did not correct his interrogator on CNN's Q&A when she suggested that the army had no more than "6,000 to 10,000 troops" and that "you don't have that manpower or military capacity to really fight".

A severe lack of intelligence has also hindered army operations, which makes one wonder what its much-vaunted Department of Military Intelligence (DMI) [check] was doing in the interim. That the 23 November Achham rout could take place at all, and that a thousand-odd rebels could gather undetected in the surrounding villages before the attack, indicates that the army commanders had been taking the Maoist threat lightly. Or they may have considered themselves invulnerable – not an unlikely possibility given that the last time the army was out was in 1990 when unarmed demonstrators heading towards the royal palace were cowed down by the sight of soldiers in full battle regalia. Going by the report of one Nepali journalist who was taken in by the military and interrogated blindfolded over ten days, the armymen seem to be gathering 'intelligence' from the daily newspapers.

Cause for even more concern is the battle-worthiness of the army. For decades, its role has been limited to providing the pomp and pageantry during public ceremonies in Kathmandu. The last time the Royal Nepal Army saw any real action was in the early 70s when



As left, Prachanda's signature, now well recognised through press releases, public demonstrations and elections (above), bus torched by the rebels in early February which saw the death of innocents

troops were involved briefly in skirmishes with the CIA- and India-backed Tibetan Khampa guerillas camped along the northwestern frontier of the country to engage the Chinese army. Since then, the only field experience the Nepali army has had has been as UN peacekeepers.

Institutionally too, the Royal Nepal Army has its problems, and that surely has a bearing on its professionalism. Stories of corruption having to do with *raasan-pani* (supply procurement) go back decades, and one recent report even involved the sale of arms and ammunition to militant Islamic groups during a peacekeeping tour of duty in Lebanon. Influence-peddling is rife, particularly to do with selection as the UN's blue helmets where income is high. Successive democratic governments since 1990 have not dared look into the workings of the army, and because of that it is often said that the army is probably the only institution that has not been politicised by the politicians who have meddled everywhere, including the national police force.

But that is only half the story. There is politics in it, and it is politics of a by-gone era. The Royal Nepal Army likes to trace its roots to the conquest and subsequent unification of modern-day Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the tenth direct ancestor of the present king, in the mid-eighteenth century. It is no secret that the force's first loyalty has always been to the monarch; that the 1990 Constitution has transferred the country's sovereignty to the people has not really mattered – that the politicians have themselves shown themselves individually to be deserving of the army's fealty is a different matter. The men who traditionally form the officer corps at the highest levels come from Kathmandu's elite class and the position of army chief for close to two centuries has always been reserved for a small group of the powerful Khas-Thakuri caste close to the royal family. For want of a better term, the Nepali army is feudal as only an institution that refuses to change with the times can be. What else would you call an army that requires fully-trained soldiers to help out as domestics in the houses of officers and, in some cases, in the houses of their relatives as well?

One of the biggest weaknesses of the army, like any organisation that has allowed fat to grow around its



Mourning the dead: PLA in Rolpa (left) and the RNA at Aryaghat, Kathmandu

midriff, has been a hyper-sensitivity towards criticism and an unwillingness to consider itself also a people's institution that can be challenged by civil society. Which brings up the most important issue of civilian control of the army. It was a sign of the conditions under which the present constitution was framed that, unlike in any other democratic system where the army is automatically under the authority of the civilian executive, the compromise formula worked out between the palace and the people placed it under a National Defence Council. And the king, as Supreme Commander, was to "operate and use the Royal Nepal Army on the recommendation of the National Defence Council". In principle, the NDC is dominated by the government with the prime minister and the defence minister forming a civilian majority of two against the commander-in-chief, who is also theoretically nominated on the advice of the prime minister. But the army has marched to its own drummer, and this did not matter as long as it was not required to respond to a nation in crisis.

The officer corps' defence is that being kept away from the grasp of the civilian governments has allowed the army to remain uncontaminated, unlike the police force which has been made corrupt and robbed of motivation by the politicians. One could have accepted that argument had the army showed its ability to hit the ground running once it was deployed, utilising its strengths to maximum advantage and moving proactively against the Maoists. Instead, there seems to be an attempt at covering up inadequacies by pointing at the terrain, the vastness of the exercise, and the ineptness of politicians, and so on.

Commander-in-Chief Prajwalla Shumshere Rana put forward his best arguments at the passing-out of officers at the Army Staff College on 28 March, when he berated the Nepali political establishment for its ineptness. "Who is responsible for the present state of the country?" he asked. "Was it mal-governance (*kusashan*) or was it the army? How just is it to burden the army with this difficult situation created by political reasons?" The speech was breath-taking for its lack of sense of time, place and propriety. One would hope that it is merely the angry letting off of steam of an about-to-retire C-in-C, but it is not unlikely that his speech would not have been vetted by the Royal Palace. In which case, the question as to whether this was a trial balloon being set afloat by

conservative elements in the Nepali polity has answers that are pregnant with ominous possibilities.

The commander's statement is as political a statement as any that can come from the army, but if the past is any guide, the government will let the admonishment pass quietly. After all, it did not remind the army chief about his impropriety in asking his Indian counterpart for arms or when he made a similar request to US Secretary of State Colin Powell when he came visiting in January. And it is not likely to at this juncture, especially when it needs the army to deal with the Maoist insurgency.

The challenge to civilian authority has become increasingly apparent over the years, and Gen Rana's outburst is only the latest event. First came the self-same army chief's demand nearly two years ago that an all-party political consensus evolve before the army is deployed. Then, in July 2001, Girija Prasad Koirala resigned as prime minister following the army's reluctance to come to the rescue of the police during a hostage-taking crisis. Even though the constitution does not require an emergency for the army to be called out of the barracks, it has been reported, with Koirala concurring, that proclaiming an emergency was a precondition set by the army before it would go after the Maoists. The arbitrary arrest of journalists, often without the knowledge of the government, is only the latest instance of the contempt shown by the highest echelons of the army for civilians.

Revolutionary dynamo of South Asia

India was one of the first countries to support the declaration of the state of emergency, and its Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh the first to declare the Maoists 'terrorists'. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called up King Gyanendra (and later Prime Minister Deuba as an afterthought, it seems) offering "whatever assistance is required" in the fight against the Maoists, and this was followed up with some military equipment and two scout helicopters. Soon, Indian newspapers were implying that it was only a matter of time before Indian troops arrived in Nepal to fight the Maoists, although Sher Bahadur Deuba denied any such possibility. "There will be no foreign troops here at all," he told the press. "Our army is capable of dealing with the situation."

Apart from being an act of good neighbourliness, there is more at stake for India in controlling the insurgency in Nepal, and that has to do with its possible tie-ups with Indian Maoist groups in an arc spreading from Nepal, through Bihar, Jharkhand, parts of West Bengal, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra up to Andhra Pradesh. Deuba's recent visit to Calcutta is also believed to be to address the West Bengal government's concerns about possible linkages between Nepal's



Maoists and the Kamatapur Liberation Organisation in strategically sensitive northern Bengal, and the implications of a militant network extending further to Bodo and Assamese militant groups and on to the Indian Northeast's numerous insurgencies.

That Nepal's Maoists have received support from Indian ultra-leftists, most notably the Maoist Communist Centre and the Communist Party of India Marxist-Leninist (People's War), is established. Besides a moral boost received from these 'fraternal' militancies in the early days (and which is now reversed, with the Nepalis as the role-models for their Indian counterparts), the Maobaadi have clearly received training in camps in India, said to be in far corners, including Bengal, Punjab and the deep South. The Indian groups have also been helping identify the illegal arms bazaar in India and granting use of shelters to the Maoist leadership; the last has been critically important as they have had to flee Nepal with the emergency and army action.

The inter-Maoist linkages became more than fraternal when, in June 2001, a meeting was held somewhere in West Bengal, to form the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organisations (CCOMPOSA) "to unify and coordinate the activities of the Maoist parties and organisations in South Asia 'to spread' protracted People's War in the region." The committee, which includes four Indian Maoist groups, seems obviously encouraged by the success so far of the Maobaadi. Its joint statement reads: "The irresistible advance of the New Democratic Revolution or protracted People's War in Nepal under the leadership of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) is changing the political geography or revolutionary dynamics of South Asia."

In early January, a press statement issued by CCOMPOSA declared "its wholehearted solidarity with the revolutionary forces in Nepal" and warns "all the external reactionary elements, particularly Indian expansionism, not to intervene militarily or otherwise there and let the Nepalese people decide their own political future themselves."

While members of the Indian public who do not know much about Nepal in any case are convinced that China is behind the Nepali Maoists — for no other reason than an absence of historical learning and the name 'Mao' — New Delhi strategists and pundits profess to see the hand of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in the rise of Nepal's Maoists. This would seem patently absurd were it not for the fact that it is a matter of faith with the establishment in New Delhi and the media that feeds off it. It is also a charge that the Maoists themselves scoff at with credibility. The October 2000 issue of its party organ, *The Worker*, says: "It [the Indian government] had been labelling People's War in Nepal since its initiation as

being funded and trained by ISI agents. In fact BJP is so phobic against communism that it has labelled the MLM [Marxist-Leninist-Maoist] groups waging People's War in India as ISI agents!" The Maoists believe that, "The Indian state is using ISI whip for the short term benefit in order to malign People's War in Nepal, for the long term strategy it is brandishing ISI stick to bring Nepal under its defence-umbrella."

It became clear during Prime Minister Deuba's end-March trip to India that some arms of the Indian government want to use the Maoists as a bargaining chip. "You take care of ISI infiltration, we will take care of Maoists in Nepal," seemed to be the proposed quid pro quo. The New Delhi establishment has an exaggerated sense of the use of Nepal by the ISI as a base for activities against India, but Indian authorities could still use the argument to demand a larger say in Nepal's security affairs in return for curbing the insurgents' activities in India.



One of the many police posts attacked

The one factor that is uncontested is that India is the staging ground for the Maoists of Nepal, and more so since the emergency crackdown in Nepal. Former prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala has even gone to the extent of claiming that India was helping the Maoists by providing a safe haven to their leaders. The accusation was refuted by the Indian embassy in Kathmandu, but the fact remains that despite making all sorts of conciliatory gestures to help the Nepali government

fight the Maoists, India has been turning a blind eye to their activities within its own territory. Meetings are called, rallies held, and prominent Maoist interlocutors openly pursue their activities and move around without restriction freely organising meetings in the name of front organisations. For having taking the initiative to term the Nepali Maobaadi 'terrorists' even before the Nepali state had done so, the Indian government is surprisingly lenient towards the insurgents enjoying safety.

The political parties

It comes as no surprise that despite all the killings that have gone on for more than half a decade, the response from the political parties of Nepal has been most uninspiring. While none tire of declaiming that the 'root causes' of the insurgency needs to be tackled, there seems to be no vision of how that is to be done other than to say — "politically". Prime Minister Deuba did start off on what seemed to be the right foot, announcing an eight-point reformist programme as soon as he took office in July last year. His plan included the issue of land reform and what could be considered sops to the backward ethnic and dalit communities, and women. But, Deuba soon got mired too deep in the quagmire of politics to do anything about it, and his reforms are hanging fire to date.

Despite the rhetoric against corruption emanating

from all parties, a much-anticipated anti-corruption bill was quietly shelved. Rather than strengthen the statutory Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority, the one institution that is showing some energy in the generally debilitated Nepali polity, Deuba has formed a commission to investigate the property of just about everyone who has held public office, including in the bureaucracy, since 1990 (and their families). No one believes anything will come of it and the faith in government is eroded further.

On the other side of the parliamentary divide, the role of the main opposition CPN (UML) has been intriguing. It did make the mandatory noises against the imposition of the state of emergency, but willingly added its numerical strength to the ruling party to make up the required two-third majority to get it approved by parliament and extended for another three months after the first period ended in late February. The calculation obviously seems to have been that the party will stand to gain with the decimation of the Maoists.

In return for the support extended for extending the emergency, the CPN (UML) expects the government to reciprocate with a constitutional amendment. Changing the Constitution (which its general secretary, Madhav Kumar Nepal, helped draft in 1990) has been the hobby horse of the CPN (UML) for quite some time now, and given its 'progressive' provenance, one would expect the changes it proposed to reflect its philosophy and worldview. More so, since its present rationale for tinkering with the Constitution has been to pre-empt the revolutionary agenda of the Maoists. But a look at the proposed changes give the lie to everything the party professes, and shows it to be more interested in getting to the seat of power than in genuine reforms. Essentially, the party wants an all-party government to hold elections, and for this selfish reason it is willing to take the country through an exercise of constitutional reform. It seems the 'Aemaley' (the 'UML' acronym in Nepali) has been out of power for three long years and 'wants in' through constitutional amendment.

Politics, meanwhile, continues as usual. Having handed over the responsibility of dealing with the Maoists to the army, the politicians have decided that there is no need for their involvement in governance. A senior and junior minister have just had a slanging match over who was more corrupt — until both were forced to resign. "The obscenity is that all this is happening during a month when 300 Nepalis died fighting each other", commented the weekly *Nepali Times* dryly, and that said it all. The former prime minister, Girija Prasad Koirala has begun to create difficulties for the sitting prime minister, just as Deuba gave him headaches while he was on the high seat at Singha Durbar. Koirala would like to have a broad democratic alliance of all parliamentary parties, an idea that the UML does not dislike even if the idea has been

floated its old nemesis (Koirala). (Koirala has another agenda as well. Since he feels let down that the army was not released when he was prime minister, he wants to also push through the constitutional reform so that the army is brought firmly within the grasp of civilian government.)

While the politicians and political parties go about trying to manoeuvre themselves into positions of power, they have failed to address a major cause of dissatisfaction in a large section of Nepali society. They have not bothered to understand why the critical support base of the Maoists consists of the ethnic communities and dalits. One reason that ethno-nationalism has not boiled over after ethnic assertion took off in the early 1990s with the advent of democracy may be that the Maoists have diverted the steam to their use. From the very beginning, the Maoists have made gestures to win the 'minority' communities over, going to the extent of setting up various 'liberation

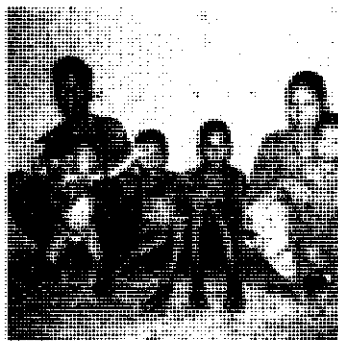
fronts' for each major ethnic and regional group. The latest concession comes in the form of their Revolutionary Council's 'draft constitution', which proposes to divide the country into nine "autonomous regions" under "a system devised on the basis of self-determination".

While the Maoists thus cynically manipulate the sentiment of the 'backwards', the state machinery and political parties have made insincere gestures and provided platitudes aplenty. The democratic setup has not been sensitive to the needs of the historically deprived, and

even the constitutional amendments that are proposed provide little for these classes and communities. The recent formation of the National Women's Commission is a case in point to prove the insensitivity of the managers of the Nepali state. The much-overdue body could at least have been made more representative, but of the eight members in the Commission (which includes the prime minister's mother-in-law!) seven belong to the dominant Bahun-Chhetri community. The choice is clearly aimed at ensuring the representation of the political parties rather than the population at large.

King, Country and India

The quality of life in the Nepali midhills has considerably deteriorated this past half-decade. In some parts, Maoists are in control, elsewhere bandits are masquerading as insurgents. The politicians visit their villages and districts no more. Local fairs, ceremonies and rituals have been abandoned, perhaps never again to be revived fully. The blasts of musketry to herald Dasain celebrations and other joyous occasions will be heard no more as guns kept as heirlooms from as far back as the war with the British (1814-16) are surrendered by villagers to the authorities (that is, those still remaining after the rebels' appropriations). Families leave their homesteads to live as refugees in roadhead settlements, and young men flee to



Refugees from Maoist hinterland



work as ever-cheaper menial labour in India, the Gulf and Southeast Asia.

If the Maoist strategy is to wreck the economy and plunge the nation into chaos, they have succeeded in large measure. Vital infrastructural installations are being destroyed, the tourism industry is more or less in its death throes after the attack on the Lukla airstrip, which reverberated around the globe. The garment industry is a skeleton of its old robust self, and every aspect of production and industry is producing at a fraction of its capability. There are no more investors coming in to Nepal, and only foreign aid, remunerations from expatriate labour, and financial reserves accumulated in past years have kept the economy standing, but not for much longer. More and more money is being siphoned from development into fighting the insurgency, and development works are at near standstill.

More people have died in the four months of the emergency than during the five years leading up to the ceasefire in July last year. The ratio of security personnel (soldiers and policemen) to Maoists (or those suspected to be so) killed is more or less the same. Which only goes to show that the war is not going so much in favour of the government as it would like it to be. Moreover, it is clear that a large number of those killed by the security forces are either innocent victims of mistaken identity, sympathisers, or those forced by the Maoists to join local-level 'people's governments'. The core of the Maoist fighters apparently remain unscathed.

Manning the frontline are the hapless policemen with their antiquated .303 rifles. If they are to continue to be the first line of defence against a guerilla force that swarms out of the mountainside, the least the government could do is equip them with automatic weapons. It is the travesty and tragedy of Nepal that everyone knows the lowly policemen are being sacrificed in the name of the state, that many more are bound to die cruel deaths, but there is no attempt or even discussion about procuring better guns for them. To add to the sense of tragedy, the only reason these policemen do not desert their posts seems to be the generous posthumous compensation that the state pays the families of the dead.

The army has slowly geared itself up and, from the numbers of dead they have been notching up every day, is beginning to go on the offensive. There are some heartening reports — indirectly collected in these days of truncated press freedom — of responsible army commanders who take risks to save innocents from the crossfire. But, increasingly, as the scale of confrontation increases, the soldiers are also getting trigger-happy. The hills of Nepal are not happy places today. There are obviously many civilians dead, which is a matter of greatest concern even if it is not being reported by a press that is not out there. The daily average of presumed insurgents to have

been killed over the last month is around ten, which is a terrible figure but it now fails to make an impact. Indeed, the daily death count has become so routine that the terror and loss that it represents does not touch the television viewer or radio listener any more. Besides the number of those dead, the question arises, how many are injured? That is never reported, which could indicate a take-no-prisoners policy.

Even as the army goes on the offensive, the Maoists have given up all semblance of having a political agenda. Besides attacking government installations and ambushing army patrols, many Maoists are also descending to patently criminal activity — bombing passenger buses, placing landmines and booby traps on hill trails, executing policemen, and killing village-level party activists and teachers by the dozen.

The monsoon rains are just two months away, and the Maoist strategy would be to wait it out till then, after which the logistics-heavy army machinery would grind down to a snail's pace. Without helicopter support, the soldiers would find it difficult able to patrol and man their positions, leaving the platoons open to surge attacks, as happened to the policemen before them. If no breakthrough — political or military (both of which seem unlikely as of this writing) — is achieved, Nepal is in for a dreadful monsoon and autumn. Meanwhile, the Maoists will regroup, restock, and come back to fight another day.

Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka, a known hardliner who was in the same job when the Maoist genie was allowed to emerge following to police atrocities in the mid-western hills, has conceded that it could well take three years for suppression of the Maoist problem even with the army out. Back in his earlier term as home minister, he had claimed he would bring the situation under control "in four or five days". His change of tone could speak of reality sinking in, and the reality could well be that ultimately the two sides will have to face off at the negotiating table.

The hovering presence in the polity is that of King Gyanendra, known for a sharp and calculating mind and who, by his own admission, prefers to be more active than his laid-back late brother, Birendra. Murmurs of a royal takeover have been in the air for quite some time, and there is no doubt that a section of the population regards the monarchy as the "last hope". And yet it is unlikely that King Gyanendra will take the jump, if only because the one weapon he had to use to tackle the Maoists — the army — is already out in the field. Besides, looking beyond the Maoists insurgency which the new king too surely wants to see defused, he will surely want to protect the image of a severely battered royalty, which can no longer happen when the king both reigns and rules.



The king, in the royal palace, contemplates the country's dilemma

NHM BHARACHARVA

It is interesting that in the waxing and waning of their enmity index, the king has now become the arch enemy of the Maoists, and those who do not know how the political parties have ruled the roost (and soiled it) these past 12 years would be willing to believe Baburam Bhattarai's canard that the Maoist battle is really with the king. For his part, the king has been saying that he would like the Maoists to join the mainstream, although he has made it clear that it can only be after they disarm. The government position on talks is similar. "I don't want to legitimise the Maoists again by entering into dialogue. They have to prove their sincerity. The proof of that would be if they lay down their arms", said Deuba in a press interview in late March.

So, with the political parties bickering with each other and within each other, the army already out but not delivering, and a weakened monarchy as yet trying to find its moorings, the Maoists would be getting ready for a long haul – or at least to continue to fight beyond the monsoon. True, the long-term prognosis is not good as far as the Maoists are concerned, for the international climate is quite inimical to what they represent, but the Nepali physical and political terrain is conducive to their

survival for some time to come. And with that will come continuing tragedy, probably at an increased scale as the level of desperation increases among the ground-level cadre.

Everyone is agreed that there must be talks, but simply mouthing this desire is not enough and one must be able to suggest what results the talks may have. As things stand, there is little likelihood that the mainstream political forces will want to succumb to the Maoist demand – with a gun pointed to the head as it were – that the constitution be changed, and an interim government be named. Even if the Maoist public relations exercise would want the world believe that Nepal is a feudal polity run by the king, the country is a democracy, although far from perfect, run by political parties in Parliament. So, the flexibility would obviously have to come from the Maoists, who are presently made up of gun-wielding youth that want to wrest state power through the barrel, manipulated by the top-rung leadership who know better.

This top-rung leadership presently resides in India, and under little pressure from the authorities there. If the need of the hour is to bring the Maoists to the negotiating table, the responsibility plainly lies with New Delhi, and it is asked not to act as a big brother but as a friendly neighbour. To act on his oft-repeated promise to help Nepal tackle the Maoist insurgency, Atal Behari Vajpayee can simple make it difficult for the Maoists leadership to operate out of Indian territory. For, it is the open border guaranteed by the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and Nepal (and the bugbear of all Nepali leftists, including the Maoists) that provides them the scope to act with impunity against the Nepali state. This is a particular privilege that the Maoist leaders have — of being able to take refuge in the very state they profess to despise, using the open border, to hit back at the home country.

Nepal should not be begging India to stop serving as a Maoist haven, but rather demand that while India may not be able to stop the movement of the rank and file across the open border it can surely act on the Maoist leadership that it monitors so closely. And the demand of Kathmandu should not be that India arrest and extradite these Nepali citizens, only that their activities be made difficult enough that they will return to their home country to fight a battle that is Nepal's own concern.

This simple act by India as a friendly neighbour has the potential of untying the tragic knot that has tied the Nepali establishment, the Maoists and the suffering public of Nepal. For, the Maoists will be forced to be more amenable to negotiation once they are asked to stay the ground within their own country. And as the Maoists seek compromise, the Nepali establishment would be well advised to provide the insurgents with the space that they need to come above ground and join open politics. It will be a hard task, particularly because so much blood has already been spilt, but it can be done.

The brave new Nepali post-Maobaadi world may yet be ushered in without much more violence. Once its is made clear that India cannot be used as a base, Nepal's Maobaadi could find cause to reach a compromise. They will come to the table with more flexibility, and this time they will stay there. Astute political negotiations by the government, aided by all political parties, would ensure that the Maoists are facilitated to come above ground, and to ultimately run for elections. The Maoists, for their part, could work to get back their image as social reformers, and work to bring change through political movements rather than 'peoples war'. If they do it well, they could yet emerge as a third force in the party politics of the country. They must realise that there are no short cuts to power, and certainly not through the barrel of the gun. △

Himal on the Maoists

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Reflecting on contemporary Nepali angst

Only ten years ago, Nepal was a country full of hope for its future. How have things gone so horribly wrong?

by Dipak Gyawali



MONTAGE BY BILASH RAM

To understand today's tormented Nepal – from the non-functioning Parliament with its uninspiring leadership to the dead-end of the Maoist-inspired Emergency – one has to go back in history, not too far back, but just far back enough to see some of the strands that weave the present with the past and establish the patterns for the future.

The first of these threads is the plebiscite of 1980 and the failure of the Nepali state to adopt reforms that would make it more representative. After all, almost half the voters said at that time that they would want a reformed Panchayat that gave space to political parties. However, the king-led leaders of the Panchayat opted for bureaucratic closure (we won, you lost: we rule, you shut up) rather than opening up the political space to include the opposition. In an eerie parallel, leaders of today's democratic dispensation are repeating the same mistake, using procedural arguments denying constitutional reform against a Maoist antagonist that does not believe in the framework itself.

The second of the threads is the role of India, which has inherited together with the Raj, its "Great Games" paranoia regarding the northern mountains and what lie behind it. "Security concern" has formed the staple of Indian foreign policy in the region for the past half-century, as a corollary of which India ends up supporting costly clients rather than faithful friends in the neighbourhood. Given the obsolescence of the Himalaya as a military barrier in the age of star wars, this "security concern" vis-à-vis Nepal is technological atavism – in reality it is Nepal that should have "security concerns" vis-à-vis the dacoit-infested badlands of the Bihar and Uttar Pradesh periphery. Nepal's political leadership, however, reacts to India with extreme behaviour of its own, from anti-Indian rhetoric bordering on xenophobia at one extreme to obsequious toadying before Delhi officialdom on the other. The Maoists, too, have exhibited proclivities at both ends of the spectrum.

The third is Nepal's political economy, whose

texture has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. At the end of the Rana rule, Nepal's state structure was feudal, with the government's primary revenue coming from land taxation. Today, land revenues amount to less than one percent of the state's income, the bulk of which comes from import duties. This single fact alone would indicate that the Nepali state is no longer ruled by feudals: it has long passed, especially since the 1980s, into the hands of the trading class *comprador bourgeoisie*. The Maoists want to overthrow feudalism in a country already ruled by merchants, and both the 'democrats' and communists in Parliament cannot see beyond a liberalisation that creates opportunities for imported capital but not jobs for Nepal's youth.

These developments of domestic and external political economy since the late Panchayat period show that a global mass consumption culture and an assertive middle class aspiring for fruits of that culture have all-too-quickly become basic features of the Nepali polity. The political forces across the spectrum, meanwhile, are stuck with political slogans more appropriate to a situation that prevailed in 1950 and do not inspire today's youth. The Maoist, too, are stuck with this old mindset even though their 'people's war' has occurred against the new backdrop.

Designer kleptocracy

The political parties responsible for the change in 1990, primarily the Nepali Congress and the Communist UML, have given up their ideologies – democratic socialism and proletarian dictatorship, respectively – without transparent and honest intra-party debate. Not only have they failed to punish the wrongdoers of the Panchayat years, they have converted politics into a lucrative business of contract commissions and appointments. They have also failed to maintain crucial norms of fair play and decorum in parliamentary practice, which has contributed to the decline in legitimacy of the system as a whole.

The decline began early, with the failure to act on

the Mallik Commission report by punishing those guilty of fiscal malpractice and human rights violations during the dying days of the Panchayat. At the time, it was portrayed as magnanimity of the new rulers who did not wish to be vindictive, although it is clear now that the new rulers wished only to emulate the erstwhile corrupt. Smuggling, including drug trafficking, reached and surpassed Panchayat levels. The bureaucracy became thoroughly politicised with senior appointments going not to the professionally deserving but the crassly obsequious. Nepal Police promotions, revenue collection and project construction posts as well as diplomatic assignments were practically auctioned. The parliamentary opposition, mainly the UML but at two points in 1995 and 1997 also the Congress, broke all norms of moderation that the Westminster model requires. Holding parliament hostage and bringing the country to a standstill – as the UML did with the jeep-accident death of its charismatic general secretary Madan Bhandary – became the norm.

In another body blow to the system, the Supreme Court overruled a prime minister's right to call for fresh elections, a fundamental instrument needed to discipline the House. As a result, Nepal entered into a period of unstable coalitions where the parties simply concentrated on raking in the spoils of office. Unsavoury instruments were used to buy factional loyalty, including the infamous life-long pensions to MPs and permission to import duty-free luxury vehicles (the former mercifully struck down by the Supreme Court as unconstitutional). Those who carried out such fraud on the voters still stand at the helm of the state, which they have made to look like a designed kleptocracy. Today's Maoist violence erupted as a misdirected catharsis of a system never properly cleansed.

Constitutional contradictions

There are numerous defects to the 1990 Constitution. To begin with, it ensures that the Nepali army can be ordered into action by the government only through a politically cumbersome procedure involving the National Defence Council, which makes recommendations to the king as supreme commander-in-chief. This is a system designed to ensure maximum paralysis in times of national emergency, and the late Birendra remained unsure to the end on the matter and kept the army in the barracks even as the Maoist insurgency directed against the state and constitutional monarchy gathered steam.

Strangely for a democratic dispensation, the Constitution has no provision for assuring local self-governance even though 'decentralisation' has been the buzzword since the plebiscite of 1980. Without this protection, units of local self-governance are at the mercy of the ministries and assorted national level politicians. Further, the constitutional provisions are stacked against smaller parties, which cannot fight elections under a party symbol unless they have received three

percent of the total national votes cast. Ostensibly introduced to prevent the mushrooming of many smaller parties (why not, one may ask, in a country of geographical diversity and myriad minorities?), this makes no sense in a system where parties are not provided state funding. Clearly, this is meant to ensure the monopoly of the large parties, and one may recall the case of a wing of the United Peoples' Front that split from the parent body that makes up today's Maoists. They tried their best, to the extent of filing a case in the Supreme Court, to be recognised as a national party but to no avail. Thus denied space in the open polity, they went underground, justified in the process by this constitutional defect.

Some argue that the Constitution has merely been manipulated by unscrupulous leadership, but that its provisions are fine. How is it, then, that such a 'perfect' system has thrown up such imperfect and unrepresentative leaders in three general elections? First of all, the winner-take-all system of voting instead of proportional representation means that a 'representative' can represent as little as a third or a quarter of the voters in a multiple candidate election. Second, the representation of minority ethnic groups and dalits is wholly disproportionate to their demography, with no dalit having won an election even though they constitute a seventh of Nepal's population. This structural flaw in the basic law has fuelled ethnic and dalit sympathies for the Maoists.

There are other lacunae in the Constitution, such as those relating to sharing of international river waters and citizenship, which need legislative clarification. But no such elucidation has been done for a decade after the Constitution's promulgation. This delinquency by Parliament has kept the country from embarking upon a programme of effective water resources development, and have prevented genuine Nepali citizens of the Tarai receiving their due recognition. Such failure by the above-ground political mainstream allowed the Maoist underground to exploit popular disillusionment.

Maobaadi irony

Just before they went underground with the declaration of a "people's war" in 1996, the Maoists issued a 40-point demand to Sher Bahadur Deuba, during his first stint as prime minister. Deuba never responded to list, which cumulatively would have made an effective plan for a sustained social movement. But the Nepali Maobaadi quickly forgot their own agenda of social reform and today, six years later, they have lost a significant part of their popular support base. Several factors have contributed to this.

The most critical departure among the Maoists has been the dominance of militarism as opposed to political mass action: the movement has passed from the "political commissars" to the military commanders, a fate both Lenin and Mao successfully avoided in their



respective revolutions. The result has been a loss of control by the Maoist high command over their cadres, who are running amok with extortions and summary executions under the pretext of *jana karbahi* ('people's action'). Since there is no control or accounting over money so collected, the leadership has now to take the blame for all loot, including those by perhaps common criminals masquerading under Maoist slogans.

The Maoist response to the royal massacre of 1 June 2001 also did them considerable damage, for they tried to politicise and take advantage of a gruesome family murder. Actually, the tragedy is remarkable for its lack of political content, and the parallel is not the Romanovs of Russia but Columbine High School of Denver, Colorado. In an act of rank opportunism, and before investigations had even been contemplated, the Maoists decided to cash in on the genuine public revulsion by labelling it a plot by the "Girija-Gyanendra clique". They went as far as to incite the military to revolt. All of which backfired, because it turned out that the monarchy had deeper roots than their strongmen comrades had imagined, and which is quite independent of the personality of the monarch. The result of this miscalculation has been a significant erosion of the Maoist political space, which in turn has goaded the political leadership (by the very reason of their miscalculation) to become more military-minded.

Given that the Maoists were considered the most anti-Indian among Nepal's political forces, it is an ironical twist of political fate that they are now suspected of "Indianism". The unravelling started with an internet interview by Prachanda where he proposed a "South Asian Soviet Federation". Given the geo-politics of a region dominated by India, there were Nepalis none too happy with this rush to ally with groups south of the border. When above-ground leftist activists protested against several embankments in India which were submerging parts of the Nepal Tarai, they found Maoists had gone strangely silent despite their anti-India rhetoric. Today, this rhetoric is practically non-existent in Maoist press releases and pamphlets.

The silence on India is seen as the rental price the Maoists were paying to be able to operate out of safe havens in India, and this is particularly true after the declaration of the state of emergency apparently forced the Maoist leadership to en masse cross the border. Compare this to the situation of BP Koirala who refused to pay the price of subservience demanded by Indira Gandhi and returned to Nepal in 1977 with his programme of national reconciliation. Then there was the meeting Prachanda held with the entire front-ranks of Nepal's above-ground leftist in the West Bengal town of Siliguri, obviously with the knowledge of the Indian intelligence. Further, there are credible reports that Indian security personnel escorted two Maoist leaders from New Delhi to Siliguri in late March, for a planned meeting with Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba that did not happen.

All said and done, the Maoists' nationalist credentials are currently in tatters. Their politics has descended to criminality, they have abandoned political mass action for brutal *jana karbahi*, and they are seen to be increasingly beholden to India.

Historical saddle

What will be the way out of this quagmire? It is always difficult to predict which way water at the cusp of a saddle will flow, for the slightest of events can trigger avalanches of creativity or negative responses. Nepal is standing on one such saddle-point in its history and much will be made in the future of the acts of wisdom or pettiness of its leaders.

It is quite obvious that the Maoist problem and the rot within the parliamentary parties of Nepal are but two sides of the same coin. The solution would have to start from a reform of the political parties and the framework within which they operate. One can identify at least four primary steps in that direction.

The first is for a graceful exit by failed leaders of the past. If parliamentary parties are to be run like feudal fiefdoms (once a president always a president, once a general secretary never again any lower party job), discredited leaders will take the party down with them. Newer and as-yet-unsullied faces must therefore take charge. The second is for corruption trials, so that the public scepticism of the system is replaced by confidence. Third, the system must be reformed to improve both representativeness as well as accountability. This would mean more autonomous local self-governance in the medium term, and promise of a "democratised" army on the longer term, with obligatory voluntary service by all with a year or two of conscription.

Finally, and immediately, fresh elections have to be called. This is because the state of emergency has robbed the current Parliament and government of moral legitimacy. The emergency, after all, is declaration of failure of political management resulting in the citizens' loss of civil liberty. Those who failed in meeting the expectations of the public trust should therefore be asked to submit to a new mandate. A bureaucratic-legalistic argument that they have been elected for five years is irrelevant after the moral legitimacy has been lost.

In the absence of these reform measures, people will begin to give credence to the as-yet loose talk of some frustrated army officer "doing a Musharraf" on the Nepali polity. A sense of order is always attractive to the masses fatalised by an anarchic kleptocracy. It has happened before with the Tokugawa shoguns in Japan, in Thailand under a king who still reigned, with Nasser in Egypt, and even in Nepal with Jang Bahadur in 1846. That is one of the ways political waters can flow from this saddle-point in history, unless those in the saddle today do something credible to quickly reform themselves.

CHHETRIA PATRAKAR has to warn you before you get started on this Mediafile – this installment is Delhi-fixated, with special genuflections towards *TOI*.

THIS COLUMN has long been a battering ram as far as the Indian National English Media (INEM) headquartered in New Delhi is concerned. Now Chhetria Patrakar thinks s/he knows why the news pages of INEM are becoming increasingly juvenile. It has to do with the schizophrenia of trying to be national newspapers of record on the one hand and trying to appease the New Delhi consuming classes on the other. Thus, the op-ed pages, which are read by the more 'serious' readers, still retain some of their old flavour of questioning and challenging authority, while the news pages have completely surrendered to the market. The primary pressure to go the way of the market is, of course, the appeal of satellite television, which the newspapers (most importantly the market leaders *The Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*) have to try and counter with fast, racy, lightweight coverage. But this then takes away the role these newspapers have had of setting the national agenda since British times.

THE MOST proximate example of the tabloidisation of the INEM is to be found in the coverage surrounding the death of Natasha Singh, the estranged daughter-in-law of Congress Party stalwart Natwar Singh. That her 'mysterious' death should be given banner headline treatment in national dailies can only mean that

the editors (and publishers) do not feel the need to cater to the national level when a juicy story full of gossip possibilities presents itself within the Ring Road (or at best in Noida and Qutub

Enclave). Natasha's story

whets the appetite, the editorial class discovered, for death and whiffs of wrongdoing among Delhi's socialite echelons. And so you have the Jessica Lal case, where a model was shot dead at a upscale watering hole, or when a gangster-politician's sons are said to have murdered a boyfriend of their sister. This run of death-and-disorder stories began three or four years ago when a lady was killed and stuffed into a tandoor in one of New Delhi's hotel-restaurants. That's when the editors, already under directives from publishers to turn a profit, discovered the potential of inside-the-Ring-Road mortuary stories. Meanwhile, have you noticed, no one is out there really covering the crime beat, but this is an affliction that touches all of South Asia's newspapers.

SO WHAT does *The Times of India* do, besides putting

Who killed Natasha?



Help solve the case. Even as investigations into the sensational murder of Natasha Singh continue, if you'd like to remain anonymous familiar with her movements on Saturday evening can write to us at whokillednatasha@timesgroup.com without revealing identity and share information which could provide vital clues to the police.
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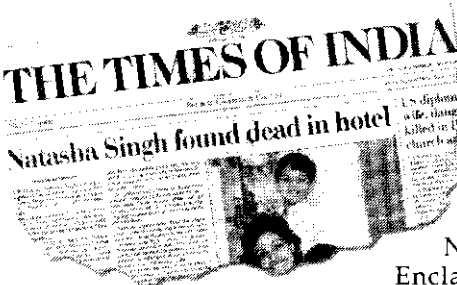
up its banner headline on Natasha? Right there, on Page One top right, they have a box which says: "WHO KILLED NATASHA", inviting readers to send in their opinions to whokillednatasha@timesgroup.com giving clues as to who killed the lady. All indications are that this was a suicide by a troubled woman who was separated from her husband and missed her two sons terribly. But do not let that inconvenience you in creating an atmosphere of wrongdoing.

The *Times* lead editorial of the following day tried to propose that the 'crime' involving Natasha Singh once again showed how law and order in the capital region had deteriorated. Arre baba, editor sahab, this was not a crime as far as the eye can see!

TO REVERT to my case, the Natasha Singh case proves that the INEM should now be called NDETP, ie the New Delhi English Tabloid Press. Sure, there is a place for titillating society coverage, but the world over this is the territory of tabloids that do not have higher pretensions of leading a country or Subcontinent. Well, the New Delhi press arrogates to itself – through nothing more than its proximity to Raisina Hill – the job of covering national (and Subcontinental) issues with objectivity and diligence. How can there be much objectivity and diligence when the first murder, suicide or culpable homicide by a member of the top-level politico-bureaucratic or business classes makes the editors go into paroxysms of glee for the opportunity afforded? Afforded for what, you ask? Why, to sell!

AT THE risk of beating an already dead horse, there is one more *TOI* shennanigan I cannot allow to pass without comment. For those of us too busy wallowing away our lives on this side of the Pacific, the *Times* kindly posted all the Hollywood Oscar winners and losers on its website. Well, actually, they didn't just post. They fawned. All five of the *TOI* e-edition's top news stories on 25 March were Oscar related.

TO GIVE credit where it is due, after I am finished lambasting the Dilliwallah press-wallahs, Chhetria Patrakar needs to doff his/her hat at the television anchors and reporters who covered Gujarat post-Godhra. Truly, they played a role in limiting the carnage. And I go with Shekhar Gupta of *Indian Express*, who said on Rajdeep Sardesai's *The Big Fight*, that the coverage of violence – showing charred bodies and incinerated dwellings – cannot be seen as regressive. "When I



Halle Berry wins the Oscar for best actress

THE OSCAR: Halle Berry wins the Best Actress Oscar for *Monster's Ball*. Her first portrayal of a captured and abused female in the film made her story Monday.

No Man's Land beats Lagoon VI

THE OSCAR: *No Man's Land* was named Best Foreign Language Film. *Lagoon VI* was named Best Documentary Feature.

Oscars kick off with style, humour

THE OSCAR: The 74th annual Academy Awards, the Hollywood equivalent of the Oscars, kicked off with a bang on Monday night.

Lifetime awards for Politzer, Redford

THE OSCAR: Sidney Poitier received an Honorary Academy Award for his career in film. He was the first African American to receive the award.

Connelly wins best supporting actress

THE OSCAR: Faye Dunaway won Best Supporting Actress for *Shogun*. She was the first woman to win the award for a supporting role in a film.

covered the Nellie massacre [of thousands of Bangla-speaking Muslims in Assam in 1983] it took days for the word to get out," said Gupta. Now, with the word getting out right away, the Gujarat Government of Narendra Modi and the central government were forced to react sooner than later – even though it was not soon enough for so many.

EVEN THOUGH the nationalist Bharatiya flavour comes across in Indian satellite television's coverage of regional geopolitical issues, it is pleasant that when it comes to domestic coverage the channels have tried to keep to the high ground. What I mean is that liberalism and an inclusive-view of the Indian 'nation' did seem to permeate satellite television, particularly the English-language channels, when it came to coverage of the post-Godhra events in Gujarat.

BUT THERE is a concern about another aspect of Indian satellite television – and that is the discussions happening on Star, BBC, Z, what-have-you. It is quite disconcerting to see Hindutvawaadis telling the representatives of the minority community "you Muslims this" and "you Muslims that..." This is a departure achieved in these last few months, with politicians and other public people openly speaking of the Muslims of India as one monolithic group that acts out violent activities as one. As one avowedly open-minded editor of a regional English newspaper of India confided in Chhetria Patrakar recently, "What I do not understand is, why would the Muslims have gone and done such a dastardly thing in Godhra..." This mindset of so many among the Hindu opinion-making intelligentsia, of regarding Indian Muslims as a unitary and directed force, is what is most scary about present-day India, because the violence it sparks can allow massive pogroms of the kind the world has rarely seen. This, indeed, is the mindset which drives a) the English regional editor to give Muslims a generic identity, b) has the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pass an ominous resolution asking the Muslims in India to be mindful of keeping the Hindu majority in good humour, and c) Vir Sanghvi, television host and editor of *Hindustan Times*, who after denouncing in December last the "intelligentsia" who opposed the idea of war with Pakistan in the aftermath of the 'failed' attack on the Indian Parliament, now rails against 'secularists' for being partisan in their sympathy for Muslims only.

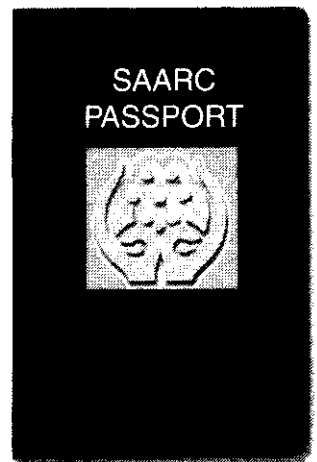
SUSHMA SWARAJ went to a SAARC Information Minister's Conference in Islamabad, and got interviewed on Pakistan Television, which was surely a first.



She came out guns blazing, but more than what she had to say, the fact that she got on to PTV must be considered significant. Meanwhile, some insider mole tells Chhetria Patrakar that the meeting of Information Ministers was conducted in a most cordial manner. However, its coverage on the satellite media and elsewhere seemed to indicate an acrimony that was not there. When the Bangladeshi Foreign Minister spoke impromptu of the difficulty so many delegations had in arriving in Islamabad due to the ban on overflights by India and Pakistan to each other's airlines, at the inaugural ceremony, Gen Pervez Musharraf had responded in good humour that he would be willing to

open the skies immediately if the Indian Minister present could do something about it. Ms. Swaraj replied pleasantly enough that as a "mere minister", she did not have the authority to do so. The coverage the next day had it that there was an India-Pakistan row.

THERE ARE 'rumours' that the SAARC Information Minister's meet has decided to allow accredited journalists of South Asia to travel without visa in all the regional countries. Somehow, I find it hard to believe. I will see it when I believe it. From what I gathered, even if the info ministers okayed this arrangement, it still has to be given the green signal by the Standing Committee of SAARC, made up of foreign ministers.



TALKING OF the cancellation of the overflights of Indian Airlines and Pakistan Airlines flights, which hits not only India and Pakistan but also Nepal and Bangladesh, it is interesting how little media consternation there is on the ban. This indicates, really, how small the constituency is for bilateral amity between the two countries. It seems to me that there are so few Indians and Pakistanis who benefit from the Bombay-Karachi and Delhi-Lahore air corridors that people are just not bothered. As for those junketeers who use foreign-funds to meet in each country, why complain if you get a trip via Dubai in the bargain? And so, some important South Asian air passages have been closed off and that is bad. But not enough of us are exercised.

—Chhetria Patrakar

Pakistan's Economy

Sinking or swimming along the Indus?

Islamabad has received considerable economic assistance for its role in the 'anti-terror' frontline, but the debt trap is deep and production is in the doldrums. Temporary external gains can only buy time for structural change.

by **Naween A Mangi**

In the last five months, Pakistan's economy has been portrayed in the international media as a star performer among the world's emerging economies. Propped up by debt relief and enhanced foreign aid flows in return for its role as a frontline state in America's war in Afghanistan, Islamabad's financial performance has shot to the forefront of South Asia's economic achievements since 11 September. Moody's Investors Service has upgraded Pakistan's credit rating and foreign investors have come back to Pakistani shores. Beneath the surface, however, the country's endemic economic troubles continue to run deep. Agricultural output is faltering on account of a persistent water crisis, industrial growth remains negligible, and domestic investors keep away, wary of political uncertainties and inconsistency in government policy.

The pluses

Still, it cannot be ignored that the economy has returned from the brink of bankruptcy and possible default on sovereign debt to a position of stability and liquidity. Indeed, in the last three months, the Karachi Stock Exchange benchmark index of 100 shares has climbed almost 30 percent to a two-year high on the back of both local and foreign demand. As cash has begun to flow into the real estate market, property prices have shot up. And foreign investors — both direct and portfolio — who have long shunned

a country plagued with political strife, law and order problems and bureaucratic hurdles, have taken renewed interest in Pakistan. Foreign portfolio investors have poured USD 20 million into the Karachi stock market in the last two months, compared to a net outflow of foreign funds last year. And foreign direct investment between July and De-

Since 11 September, Moody's has upgraded Pakistan's credit rating. But beneath the surface, the country's economic troubles continue to run deep. Agricultural output is faltering and industrial growth remains negligible.

cember 2001 amounted to USD 205 million, 39 percent higher than in the corresponding period the previous year.

Pakistan's first big break came post-11 September, when President General Pervez Musharraf negotiated with Washington a lifting of the economic sanctions imposed after the May 1998 nuclear tests. This led to an agreement with the Paris Club for the restructuring of

USD 12.5 billion of external debt. In turn, this led to the resumption of a USD 596 million standby arrangement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which, after being completed in December, and to a long-term USD 1.3 billion poverty reduction and growth facility loan.

The debt rescheduling amounts to savings of USD 1.1 billion this year, USD 0.9 billion next year and USD 0.8 billion in 2004, however, although this relief is welcome, two-thirds of the debt rescheduled under the agreement relate to concessional loans and not to the more expensive and burdensome commercial credits on which payments will still need to be made. More importantly, the move to reschedule a portion of external debt should not be seen as anything more than a first step towards a long-haul extrication from a deep debt trap. Pakistan's stock of public debt as a percentage of revenues is over 600 percent and annual debt service payments on external debt amount to USD 6-7 billion a year, consuming more than two-thirds of export earnings.

The second big stride for the Pakistan economy has been the appreciation in the value of the rupee, which in the open currency market has climbed to Rs 60 to the dollar currently as against Rs 67 last summer. In fact, had the central bank not been intervening in the market to prop up the dollar for the benefit of exporters, the rupee is likely to have risen to Rs 55. Meanwhile, the US crackdown on the *hundi* system of

money transfer, part of Washington's strategy to curb terrorist activity, has led to a surge in remittances coming into Pakistan through banking channels. In the first eight months of the current fiscal year, workers remittances have crossed the USD 1.3 billion, more than 100 percent higher than in the previous year. And this figure is expected to continue rising as portions of the estimated USD 10 billion that come through unofficial channels are routed through above-ground banking channels instead. This inflow has, for the first time, given Pakistan the cushion of more than USD 5 billion in foreign exchange reserves.

On the import front too, the country has gained from lower international oil prices, which have kept a cap on the oil import bill and allowed the economy to record a historic balance of payments surplus of USD 1.2 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year. Indeed, low international oil prices have also helped keep year-on-year inflation under 3 percent, according to figures from the State Bank of Pakistan, the central bank.

The minuses

But even on the external account, it has not been all good news. Cancelled export orders after 11 September, particularly in the textile sector, the global recession and the threat of war with India are expected to cumulatively cost Pakistan about USD 100 million a month. This means the country's export target for the year, of USD 10 billion, will be missed by at least USD 1 billion.

The trouble is that improvements on the external front and the resumption of aid flows are far from enough to spur growth in the real economy which is the key to generating income to pay down debt. Perhaps one of the weakest areas of government remains revenue collection. In a country where just 1.2 million people pay taxes out of a population of 140 million, restructuring the Central Board of Revenue (CBR), the country's central tax collecting body, should have been among the

Structure of the Economy (% of GDP)

Year	1980	1990	1999	2000
Agriculture	29.5	26.0	27.0	26.3
Industry	24.9	25.2	23.7	22.8
Manufacturing	15.9	17.4	15.5	15.1
Services	45.6	48.8	49.2	50.9
Private consumption	83.1	73.8	79.0	76.9
General government consumption	10.0	15.1	10.4	11.0
Imports of goods and services	24.1	23.4	20.0	19.1

Average Annual Growth (% of GDP)

Year	1980-90	1990-00	1999	2000
Agriculture	4.3	4.4	1.9	6.1
Industry	7.3	3.9	4.9	-0.1
Manufacturing	7.7	3.5	4.1	1.4
Services	6.8	4.4	5.0	4.8
Private consumption	4.3	4.9	7.5	0.9
General government consumption	10.3	0.7	-6.9	7.0
Gross domestic investment	5.8	1.8	-9.2	4.1
Imports of goods and services	2.1	2.5	-5.4	-2.3

government's top priorities. But the CBR remains corrupt, inefficient and ineffective. Although the government has managed to meet IMF conditions and impose a general sales tax on retail trade, it is not expected to yield much.

The government will miss its tax collection target of 430 billion rupees, a target that was set after two downward revisions on the plea of lower customs duty collection because of sagging imports. Not just that, but total tax collection will come in below last year's levels, and the government will then once more be squeezed by its inability to meet IMF conditions. Revenues have also not been forthcoming through the privatisation of state assets. The government was unable to meet its target of raising USD 1 billion last year through privatisation because unstable conditions kept foreign investors away. This year, Islamabad may succeed in selling off 26 percent of the state owned telecom monopoly Pakistan Telecommunications Company, and the United Bank, but it is unlikely to meet the ambitious goal of living off Habib Bank and the debt-ridden Karachi Electric Supply Corpora-

tion, among others.

Meanwhile, mounting defense expenditure, in particular the massive cost of deploying forces along the border with India, is still not accounted for and is likely to lead to a larger-than-expected fiscal deficit.

Even more troubling, perhaps, has been the economy's slack response to favourable external conditions. A water shortage of crisis proportions throughout the country has meant that the increase in agriculture output will not be higher than 2.5 percent for the fiscal year. Cotton and wheat may perform along lines seen last year but will still miss government targets, while sugar may fare slightly better. Rice production, on the other hand, will be disappointing.

Large-scale manufacturing has languished. This sector grew by an impressive 6.7 percent last year but is unlikely to top 3 percent by the close of this year in June with major industries — textiles, food, beverages and tobacco leading the declining trend. Textile exports — which account for about 60 percent of Pakistan's total exports — have declined 3 percent from last year's levels and continue to remain weak with can-

celled export orders leading to factory shutdowns and layoffs in the industry. This will not improve substantially in the rest of 2002, since world growth will remain contained at 2.5 percent and declining growth in Pakistan's main markets, the US, Germany and the UK, will keep demand low. Indications are that there has been no noticeable pick-up in demand, and performance may deteriorate further by the end of the fiscal year since the textile industry has largely retreated into the shadows, wary and unwilling to make fresh investments. This is especially troublesome because the industry is in desperate need of new inputs of modern machinery in order to compete with India, Sri Lanka, China and Thailand when textile quotas are phased out under World Trade Organisation rules in 2005.

Domestic investment remains

virtually nonexistent despite external improvements and is likely to suppress growth through the end of the calendar year. Credit demand in the first half of the fiscal year was 50 percent lower than last year, strongly indicating investor reluctance. Indeed, it seems investors will wait until general elections, scheduled for October 2002, are over and a smooth transition has hopefully been achieved. Only then will they take the plunge. And that means the real economy will remain sluggish until the early days of 2003 at best.

The central bank has taken advantage of the strong currency and brought interest rates down significantly in the last six months in a bid to support the real economy. But despite a reduction in the discount rate from 12 percent to 9 percent, banks have so far been shy to follow through with reductions in lending rates which have dipped

only slightly and currently hover around the 14 percent mark. With government national savings schemes offering deposit rates as high as 14 percent, banks are unable to compete with the government for customer deposits. Moreover, despite significant progress in reform of the banking sector, non-performing loans amounting to Rs 308 billion continue to be a substantial drag on the national economy.

Pakistan will close the fiscal year with a GDP growth rate of no higher than 3 percent. But a troubled textile sector and further export declines will exert significant pressure on growth. And unless Islamabad aggressively focuses on restructuring the CBR and improving tax collection and emphasises sectoral reform, it will be difficult to truly separate temporary external gains from actual structural improvements in the economy. A



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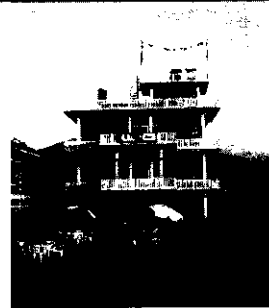
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The Regime of Death

(With God hijacked by the reactionary rabble, the only hope is Left)

Friedrich Nietzsche's declaration of God's death was highly premature. Were He dead for good, so many innocents would not continue to kill and die in His name. Death ruled South Asia in March, and the fury enveloped more than one point of the compass.

After enduring the curse of Taliban and the death and destruction wrought by Enduring Freedom, **Afghans** had to cope with the divine tremors of 26 March, which left thousands dead under the rubble. What has Al-Qaeda's Allah done to His people wishing only peace in the lap of Hindukush?

It is not certain whether those who hurled grenades at a church in Islamabad on 17 March were Mullah Omar's followers, but there is little doubt that they were fanatics of one faith attacking the followers of another. If faith in God teaches human beings to kill one another, perhaps it's time for Him to take a vacation.

No respite

Mercifully, He does seem to have taken time off in **Sri Lanka**. Helped by the Norwegians, the Sinhals and Tamils finally seem to have come to their senses. The fragile truce between the Colombo Government and the Tigers of Prabhakaran continues to hold, even though there is no telling for how long, now that the US has put itself firmly behind Ranil Wickremesinghe. Saarcy says this because history is replete with instances of ceasefires ending as soon as Uncle Sam chooses a side – and the resulting conflict merely becoming fiercer. Whatever her good intentions, Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca must be dissuaded from starting a process that would transform the Indian Ocean into a giant lake meant for the US naval forces' aquatic games. Indeed, with the Indian foreign policy establishment completely backbone-bereft in the face of that fire-breathing anti-terrorist George W, it rests on South Asian media and civil society to warn off the Superpower from the Indian Ocean.

North and east of the Bay of Bengal, the ruling party and the opposition in **Dhaka** are baying for each other's blood over a pointless controversy: whose photographs should watch the inefficiency of Bangladeshi baboos led to the absence of the Awami League from



Friedrich Nietzsche



Narendra Modi

the official Independence Day celebrations on 27 March. There is no saying what the clerics and the armed forces will do to this country if the political forces remain at loggerheads for much longer. Everywhere, they have begun to see the Pakistani General as a kind of precedent-setter, only they do not realise how much they lack. As it is, hardcore Islamists have been burning temples and taking potshots at Bangladeshi Buddhists, Christians and Hindus.

One shudders to think of the fate of the minorities if the institutions of governance were to weaken further in a society where national solidarity is still rather fragile, despite the shared heritage of a common Bengali literature and culture.

Up north across the Brahmaputra/Padma in the Himalaya, **Bhutan** is the only South Asian country that has so far succeeded in its undeclared drive of "ethnic cleansing" by driving a good proportion (one-seventh by a credible count) of its Nepali-speakers to the refugee camps of eastern Nepal. But such a "success" has irreparably damaged the 'Buddhist' image of the country, just as has been done by the fire-breathing reactionary monks of Serendib. Better late than never, King Jigme Singye Wangchuk seems to want at least some of his former subjects back to salvage his reputation.

When Chakra Prasad Banstola (former Nepali foreign minister and senior Congress party man) arrived in Thimphu on a mission of quiet diplomacy, he not only met the prime ministerial equivalent Khandu Wangchuk and foreign minister Jigmi Y Thinley, but King Jigme himself. Something is brewing, and Saarcy thinks this can only be for the better. For, the two Himalayans, Nepal and Bhutan, can hardly afford to be at loggerheads. Besides, for all the hi-fi diplomacy and genuine development Thimphu has to its credit, which regime would want history to judge it as having depopulated a seventh of its population? That, after all, would probably be the highest proportion in world history. The curse upon the Lhotsampa highlander refugees as the summer loos begin to hit them tenth year running can only be rescinded by the deity in Thimphu, and thus he will be judged by posterity.

West of Thimphu, and over across Sikkim-Darjeeling, an unseasonal downpour lashed **Nepal** and raised

the hopes of a better spring crop. The God of Hate in this multi-ethnic country is a class icon, and his wrath has been devastating. Since the believers of the Maoist faith commenced their class war seven years ago, thousands have died on the altar of that fallen Chinese God. Even then, his Nepali followers and detractors alike refuse to realise that the salvation doesn't lie in killing each other. Rebels have called for a five-day *bandh* without sparing a thought for the effect such an extended forced closure would have on an already tottering economy – or the thousands of students sitting for the School Leaving Certificate examination in the middle of it all. Clearly, Lord Pashupatinath has lapsed into a hashish-induced trance, and He is incapable of responding to the cries of help from his people.

Hey Ram!

The situation is uniformly grim almost everywhere else in South Asia, including in Burma, where the junta refuses to budge despite relentless pressure from the international human rights and democracy constituency. But it is **Bharat** that makes Saarcy despair for the future of South Asia. The Bhartiya Janata Party's debacle at the polls in several states, one had thought, would lead to the decline of communal politics. Hope, however, has an extremely short life-span in the Almighty's scheme of things. A Hindu backlash added fuel to the raging Ayodhya fire when nearly a hundred of *trishul*-wielding *karsevaks* were burnt to death in a dastardly attack on the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, Gujarat. The diabolical act of burning people alive in the name of one God led to others using the name of another God to kill many times that number. The killings in the name of Ram in Ahmedabad were of pogrom proportions.

Gujarat may be the birthplace of Gandhi, but it is being ruled by communalists who subscribe more to the views of his killer Nathuram Godse. What is taking place in Gujarat even as I write this, is not the usual communal rioting that India has known for nearly 150 years. It is calculated and cold-blooded not in spite of the state, but with the active encouragement of an administration that handed over the streets to Hindu fanatics. In a civilised, truly god-fearing society, Chief Minister Narendra Modi would have been tried for



Karsevaks at Ayodhya in December 1992.

aiding and abetting vigilante justice. One shudders to think of the fate of political, religious and ethnic minorities with the recently passed draconian law Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) in the hands of mobsters like Modi.

While India has seen a steady rise in Hindu fundamentalism since Independence, the influence of the Saffron Brigade has always remained limited to the trading classes of the Cow Belt of the states of BIMARU (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh). Its tentacles began to extend

wider and dig deeper when the Centre under PV Narashimha Rao (and Rajiv Gandhi before him) failed to protect the Babri Masjid, leading to the Black Sunday of 6 December 1992. It was in **Ayodhya**, on that day, that the fanatical hounds tasted blood and became the Hindu Taliban that took full advantage of the BJP's enthronement in the Delhi Darbar.

The Saffron Brigade has now completely taken over the India that is Bharat, and in a twisted kind of way its network is consonant with the Varna Vyabastha.

For the Brigade's four components function in a co-ordinated and complementary way. At the top of the pyramid is the parent organisation, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which performs the brahminical function of manufacturing the ideology of 'Hindu-nationalism'. This was the concept enunciated once again by the Pratinidhi Sabha of RSS in Bangalore during March – it asserted that the fate of the minority depends upon the "goodwill of the Hindus". In the RSS worldview, non-Hindus have no

This is simple escapism of course – too afraid to stare the looming danger of triumphant capitalism in the face, insecure communities manufacture manageable enemies closer at hand.

right in Bharatvarsha.

The BJP is the political arm, acting as the Kshatriyas of resurgent Hinduism. Led by political leaders with the gift of doublespeak, the party swears by the secular constitution of India drafted by Dr BR Ambedkar but advances the fanatical agenda of RSS Guru MS Golwalkar. "When Parliament was attacked I felt angry. The attack on Orissa Assembly made me ashamed", declared LK Advani, although he refused to ban Bajrang Dal, the member of the Saffron Family that was the sole cause of his 'shame'. Messers' Ashok Singhal and Vinay Katiyar of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad are the Vaisyas raising and managing funds for the Saffronite cause. Under the protection of Black Cat commandos provided by an indulgent state, Singhal spews venom upon minorities and milks the nominal Hindus of

the NRI diaspora, separating them from their dollars.

The Saffron Shudras are to be found in the various affiliates of RSS, including the storm-troopers of Bajrang Dal that rape nuns, burns missionaries and their children, and ransack legislative assemblies without the fear of the law. The fire-breathing Mahanth of Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) – Ramchandra Das Paramahansa of Ayodhya – is also a Saffron Shudra who leads the so-called *karsevaks* creating Ram Shilas, the carved rock pillars of the temple-to-be which will bring nothing but everlasting shame to the dharma.

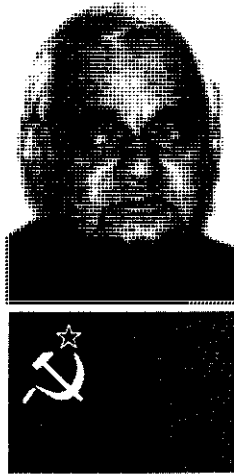
Were Ram the benevolent and historical godking we are told he was – rather than the distanced Aryanised macho male of the Ramayana television serial which is to blame in no small measure to Hindutva as it has evolved – he would doubtless have put a stop to all this nonsense taking place in His name. He would have pulled up the likes of Advani, Singhal and Paramahansa and roundly upbraided them. But how could he (Ram) be real when he could not even save his most ardent devotee, Mahatma Gandhi, from the devilish designs of Nathuram Godse?

Salvation

Recently, one of India's most prominent Midnight's Child fumed from the pages of *The Guardian*, "What has happened in India has happened in God's name. The problem's name is God." **Salman Rushdie** is right, but as usual, only partially. God is the problem, but the guilt of making Him the cause of our troubles rests with the Politics of the Right, a space that Rushdie himself finds comfortable in his new *avatar* of a loyal George W apologist.

The spectre of triumphant capitalism has heightened the siege mentality in countries that have been left behind in the race to modernity. The Therevadan monks, who march on **Colombo** streets opposing any accommodation with the Tamils, openly express their fears, "We are but 14 million people alone in this world. No one else speaks our language, shares our culture. Who else is the guardian of us but Buddha? And, here we stand on a small island staring north at 70 million Tamils." The implication being that about 3 million Sri Lankan Tamils are but a part of the larger Tamil population across the narrow Palk Strait.

Similar fears enervise **Islamists** in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the Mahayana Buddhists of Bhutan, and the Hindutva *sants* of India. The decline of Nehruvian Socialism has weakened secularism in India, and Hindu fanatics openly fan the fears of Islamic resurgence on the one hand and the Christian threat on the other. This is simple escapism of course – too afraid to stare the looming danger of triumphant capitalism in the face, insecure communities manufacture



manageable enemies closer at hand. Thus, even as Atal Behari Vajpayee is forced to bow to the American Dollar and its agenda, he takes out his anger by getting POTO passed by a joint session. God is thus a minor problem; the major problem is the disappearance of politics of hope.

The solution is self-evident: the hope lies somewhere left of the centre in the realm of politics. Comrade Jyoti Basu may have left a lot to be desired on the development front, but his success in keeping ethnic cleansing out of politics in perennially strife-torn West Bengal is nothing less than a miracle. As Gujarat destroys itself, West Bengal shines like a crown jewel.

For the societies of South Asia, as indeed for all the countries of the South, redemption lies in the resurrection of Marxism from the debris of religious fanaticism and communal hatred. That is, if Nietzsche is right, and one hopes he is. May his soul rest in peace up there, so that we can live in peace down here. ▽

– Saarcy

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

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Adventures on an Elephant

Travels in and around Chitwan

Nepal's Royal Chitwan National Park is home to wild tigers, domesticated elephants and an abundance of the Indian One Horned Rhinoceros. Occasionally, it needs to unload rhinos on Bardiya, Nepal's other major tarai reserve.

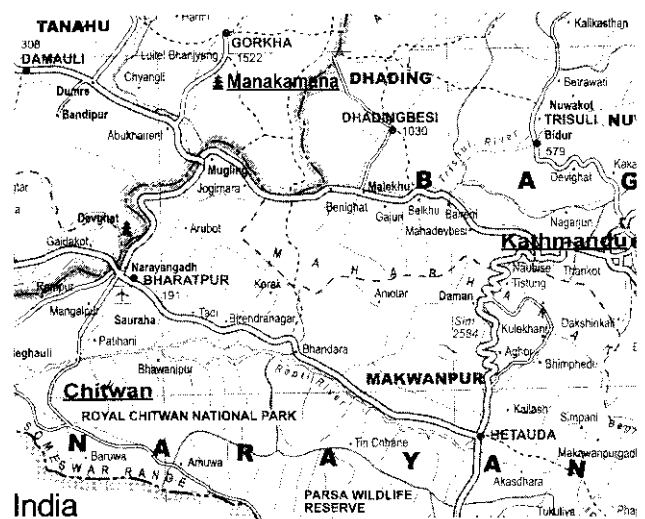
by Andrew Nash

Long before it was demarcated into nation-states, the Indus-Ganga-Brahmaputra belt that constitutes the northern half of South Asia was one long, wild tract where the rhinoceros ruled supreme. Indus Valley civilisation court seals indicate the presence of the rhino in today's desert-like Pakistani Punjab, and dense jungles and riverine forests all the way across to the Lohit in Assam, provided ideal habitat until the human population became sedentary and needed to clear the jungle. And clear it did, from before the time of Siddhartha Gautam (Buddha) more than 2.5 millennia ago, through the rise and fall of various indigenous dynasties, through the Mughal years and down through the imperial times to the modern era. What remained by the 1950s of this great South Asian jungle swath were tracts in the Nepal Tarai and in Assam, and these were the only two places on earth where the South Asian rhino continued to exist in significant numbers. Even today, these forests are a fraction of what they once were, and now what is left of rhino country is protected as national parks.

This is where the Royal Chitwan National Park comes in, a former hunting preserve of the Ranas of the Kathmandu Durbar, which in the last quarter-century has earned a name as one of the best managed wildlife preserves of South Asia. So successful has it been, through erstwhile royal patronage, that the Chitwan rhino population is larger than its forested flats and grasslands can handle. The park needs to 'export' them.

I was sent to Chitwan to learn about the rhino relocation programme for a Kathmandu newspaper whose over-worked regular staff was stretched that weekend. The trip to Chitwan involves a 'four hour' bus ride from Kathmandu to the park. I use inverted commas because that estimate assumes certain ideal conditions, none of which applied to our trip. After leaving from Kathmandu's Thamel neighbourhood an hour late, a truck accident delayed us for another hour before we even reached the Trisuli-Narayani River Valley, which constitutes the principle leg of the Kathmandu-Chitwan journey.

After clearing the accident, the bus driver pulled



over for a tea break 2.5 hours and 50 km into the trip. Nepal's Maoist struggle is being played out principally in the countryside, and while there is a State of Emergency in place and news of massacres is all too common, there is a curious languidness with which Nepalis seem to countenance the situation. Across from the roadside teashop hung a red banner written in English: "Long Live Communism-Marxism-Maoism! Pranchanda Path!" Were the people too afraid/supportive of the Maoists to take the sign down, and what of the policemen who patrol the highway in pickups? 'Let us live and let live while we kill elsewhere' seemed to be the unwritten code that left this banner fluttering defiantly in its place.

After stopping for an extended lunch and for several military checkpoints, we reached Chitwan at around 3 pm. Our 'four hour' trip, for which I had awakened at 6:15, was finally complete. The purpose of the visit was, of course, to learn about the rhino relocation programme beginning the next morning. We suffered through a two-hour official briefing on the subject before being deposited inside the national park for dinner. There are seven 'inside' resorts, or concessions, inside Chitwan Park today, following the precedent set by the



Scene from an earlier time: 11 Ranas and 5 rhino heads.

American-managed premium resort, Tiger Tops. It was Tiger Tops which started elephant safaris and jungle walks by local guides, and until environmental correctness took over, the resort allowed tigers to maul tethered buffalo calves for the benefit of tourist viewing.

Today, with the buffalo bait a thing of long ago, tourists have to be lucky to view even a tiger dropping in Chitwan. But there are rhinos aplenty, and the area around the Sauraha entry point (which has developed budget lodges much like Kathmandu's Thamel quarter) in particular sports many 'tourist rhinos'. These human-friendly beasts engage in leisurely mastication and provide tourists with enough opportunity to photograph their (the rhinos') formidable flanks, sideways, full-frontal with horn, and backside with its tiny twitching tail.

Many budget lodges and so-called resorts now dot the national park's northern boundaries, on the 'outside' of the Rapti River, the park's northern frontier. Sauraha has the heaviest concentration of lodges as well as tourist knick-knack stores and Internet cafes. The inside resorts are said to have great leverage over park officials, which seems logical given the higher level of income and influence of their proprietors. At the resort where we were brought in for dinner, the presence of a soldier drinking in uniform at the reception seemed to offer indirect confirmation of influence-peddling.

Rhino rodeo

The Royal Nepal Army guards the Chitwan jungle together with the National Park Warden and his forest guards, and the two together have done a creditable job of keeping poachers out of the jungle. The Maoist threat, at present, has restricted the army presence within the park to only seven locations, thereby leaving large sections unguarded, leading to fears that rhino poaching

may rise yet again. The other impact of the rise of Nepali Maoism has been the ban on *khar khadai* collection this winter. During February every year, Park authorities used to allow villagers entry into the forest for a period of two weeks to collect reeds and grasses for thatch roofing, fencing and the like. Villagers from all over Chitwan valley would descend on the national park and carry away a year's worth of thatch and fencing, while also carefully bundling dead and fallen timber. This year, there was no *khar khadai*, and this has affected the poorest of the poor, particularly the Tharu indigenes.

Chitwan is a wide inner-Tarai (*bhitri madhes*) valley that was completely forested with riverine and Sal (*shorea robusta*) jungle as late as the 1960s. Before the hill people of Gorkha, Syangha and Lamjung descended from the hills to colonise Chitwan in the 1960s and 1970s, only the Tharu inhabited its vast jungle. These jungle people, immune to malaria, lived in patches on the forest floor and were the unacknowledged lords (and ladies) of Chitwan until American aid and the World Health Organisation arrived with the programme of malaria eradication. Once the anopheles was tackled, it suited King Mahendra to promote his plan of settling the plains as much as possible with hill people as a way of ensuring that hill Nepalis inhabited the land rather than migrants coming up from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. With the encouragement of His Majesty's Government, the hill people flooded down to colonise the forests that were first finished off with the authorities' blessings by timber contractors. The forest receded till as far as the Rapti river to the South, which was when the king and government alike woke up to the need to preserve at least a part of the Chitwan forest.

On the night of our dinner in the park, the guests huddled in the sparsely lit areas while the forest's trees



NARESH NEUPANE/WWF NEPAL

A rhino being loaded for transport to Bardiya.

haunted us silently from all sides. The pre-dinner 'cultural presentation' (which is a fairly standard feature in all of Chitwan's concessions) involved local Tharu boys performing a stick dance for the assembled guests. The dozen-odd dancers coordinate a cyclical train of moving bodies, thrashing sticks against their partners' in a performance that is both amazingly well coordinated and provides its own musical beat. The crowd seemed appreciative at first, but after the whisper chain communicated the arrival of dinner, only a few guests remained for the dance's close, myself not included. Such is the fate of 'cultural' performances that are reduced to pre-dinner spectacles at tourist lodges.

At 8 am 'sharp' the next morning (at least according to the pre-arranged itinerary), we were deposited back at the inside camp to board elephants. The rhino programme is a joint effort of international donors, national NGO conservationists and government officials charged with animal protection. The much-publicised success of the programme over the years has assured that more than a dozen VIPs, local and expatriate, will be on hand to watch the annual relocation. This year, four ambassadors and several top Nepali bureaucrats made the trip to Chitwan.

The morning of the relocation played witness to a comedy of more than one hundred people stuffed onto 40 elephants and their *howdahs* coordinated in the pursuit of a solitary rhino. Royal Nepal Army troops took up positions on elephants with their automatic rifles, and one wondered if they were protecting the diplomats from Maoists or the wild animals. The *howdahs* themselves are not the elaborate wickerwork structures of yesteryear, but wooden joists balanced on jute bags where the legs dangle down the elephants

sides – which make for a fairly uncomfortable ride once you begin to notice it.

During the Rana period, similar processions witnessed British royalty and assorted viceroys being feted by the Kathmandu oligarchs, who requisitioned hundreds of elephants to entrap and dispatch leopards, tigers, rhinos, sloth bear, wild boar and chital deer.

The national park is a 938 sq. km odd polygon carved out of the central Nepal Tarai, and India's Bihar state is within a stone's throw of its southern boundary. The word 'tarai' is thought to come from Persian and means 'damp', which is a well-suited description of this land watered by the Rapti and numerous tributaries. The late King Birendra created the country's first national park in 1973 out of land that his father had demarcated as

the Mahendra Deer Park fourteen years earlier. Nepal's conservation history dates back to 1957, when the first rhino protection law was passed (Assam, India, created the first South Asian rhino reserve in 1907).

In 1986, the country initiated a major rhino translocation programme to help keep the Chitwan population at a manageable size and create a viable population in the Bardiya forest, about 350 kilometres to the west along the East-West Highway. The first South Asian rhino translocation took place in India in 1984, although Nepal has better developed its programme over the years – Indian conservation officials were on-hand this year to learn about translocation techniques.

Back at our rhino rodeo, the single beast we were stalking was driven out by the phalanx of elephants into one of Chitwan's many grasslands, which are rhinos' ideal habitat with their abundant shoots to munch and water holes in which to wallow. Once the rhino was in the elephant grass, the *mahout* drivers arranged the elephants in a line at the edge of the trees to prevent rhinos from escaping into the underbrush. The "lead elephant" carried a park official near to the none-too-happy-looking rhino, which received a tranquiliser dart on its hind quarters. The animal succumbed to the sedation within fifteen minutes, after swaying in an unsteady stupor for some time. A cloth was put to cover the rhino's eyes, measurements were taken, and a tractor dragged the animal into a wooden cage.

One-horned diplomats

Interest in rhinos is not limited to modern diplomats sitting haunch-to-haunch on the backs of elephants. In earlier times, hunting expeditions established kings as rulers of the wild, in addition to rulers of men. Emperor

The Shrine of the Mind's Wish

MIDWAY BETWEEN Kathmandu and Chitwan, on the highway along the Trisuli River, a line of cable cars is on the move. They start low, cross the river and rise nearly vertically hundreds of feet to disappear into the mid-day clouds that hug the hillside. This is the Manakamana Cable Car, the longest in South Asia, which leads up to the hilltop shrine from which it takes its name.

Manakamana – the shrine of the mind's wishes – is an ancient power place that goes back beyond the days when Prithvi Narayan Shah of Gorkha ventured out in conquest to unify Nepal. Indeed, Manakamana rests on a long ridgeline that goes all the way to the fortress town of Gorkha, a few hours' walk away. One indication of Manakamana's antiquity is the non-Brahmin officiating priest. He comes from the Magar ethnic group, one that has historically inhabited the lower midhills of central Nepal, the upper midhills being the preserve of the Gurung community. (Some historians think that the ruling Shah dynasty of Nepal is of Magar extraction.)

Until just a few years ago, the trip to Manakamana was a grueling four-hour hike up unforgiving terrace-farmed slopes. A family of successful development contractors from Narayanghat in Chitwan decided that the hilltop shrine provided the best location for a viable cable car. They contracted a top-of-the-line Austrian cable car company to set up the ropeway, and the gamble has paid off. It is said that the cable car has already paid for itself in a handful of years, and the company continues to pack it in.

The meaning of the pilgrimage has definitely been affected, if it means that you gain merit by toiling up the slope to Manakamana. Instead, today you travel upwards comfortably in a six-seater cable car. The ride can be an experiment in the surreal, of blended discordant realities. On the car ride up, I sat between an American tourist with a Nikon camera and a Hindu pilgrim holding a rooster intended for sacrifice. Such ironies are not uncommon here, as the porters who continue to carry 80-kg loads up the hillside underneath the pathway of the cable cars can testify.

Manakamana's history dates back to the reign of Gorkha King Ram Shah (1606-1633). According to legend, the King's wife possessed divine powers, which were known only to the Queen and her mentor, Lakhan Thapa. When the monarch discovered his wife's powers, he died at the moment of revelation. As the Queen prepared to commit *sati* on her husband's pyre, she confided in the distraught Lakhan that she

would reappear near his home, as she did several months later. The new king granted Lakhan the right to build a temple at the site and to serve as its priest. His lineage has continued to protect and serve Manakamana, and the current Thapa-Magar pujari is a seventeenth generation descendant of the original priest.

The cable car delivers its passengers to the southward flank of the ridge on which the Malla-period two-tiered pagoda temple rests. The ropeway station is far enough from the shrine that a new hilltop town has come up along the curving path that leads up – enough space to create tourist and pilgrim traps that seem to have left the townsfolk nice and happy at their good fortune. Our visit coincided with the eve of Maha Shivaratri (The Day of Shiva), and there appeared to be a flux of pilgrims to the site and notably few Western tourists intruding on the scene. The

temple itself is located in the northwest corner of a stone plaza, behind which a low wall demarcates the site of animal sacrifice. A young boy's cries filled one corner as his parents struggled to shave his head in a *bratabandha* (*mundan*) ceremony. Scraps of hair littered the cobblestones beneath the boy's struggling body, next to which Hindu mendicants chanted from scrolls.

For the pilgrims, the centre of attention is the sanctum sanctorum of the Manakamana temple, where resides the deity Bhagawati to grant all wishes of the mind. For the tourist – local or foreign – attention will be drawn northwards at the nearby panorama of Gorkha Himal, and its peaks of Manasulu, Himalchuli and Baudha, which tower over the low midhills. Visible from up here is the nearby hill trading post of Bandipur across the Marsyangdi river valley, and the districts of Kaski, Lamjung and Gorkha. To the south is Chitwan and the tarai and India beyond.

'Religious tourism' is a difficult task, and one which should involve self-imposed limitations on the part of the visitor. The struggle of a place like Manakamana – one that has been invaded by a cable car – is one of self-definition. It is a site now required to awkwardly reconcile its earlier role of holy worship with the new function as a tourist destination. Purists would ban tourists from the site, but tourists also bring in the money that sustains the temple and the locals. Besides, tourists are no longer just the Westerners – Nepalis and Indians come as hybrid pilgrim-tourists. Manakamana therefore emerges as a showcase of the odd juxtaposition of the 'modern' and the traditional, of cable cars and porters, Kit Kat wafers and *dal bhat*. ▽



Manakamana temple

Zahir-ud-Din Babur – who led Mongol, Turkish, Iranian, and Afghan invaders into South Asia to establish the Moghul Dynasty in the early sixteen century – reportedly hunted rhinos near the Indus in 1519. Babur's great-grandfather, Timur (Tamerlane), sacked Delhi in 1398 and hunted rhinos in north Punjab in the same year. Rhinos can also serve a useful diplomatic purpose. The sixteenth century King of Canbay sent his Portuguese counterpart a rhino from the port of Goa – the prehistoric origins and looks of the rhino gives it an exoticism that faraway rulers have found riveting. In more recent history, Nepal has provided some of its 'excess' rhinos to foreign zoos for consideration of foreign aid and goodwill.

The Great Indian One-Horned Rhino is distinguished by its single horn and its armour plating. According to Hindu lore, the rhino received these skin shields as a gift from Lord Krishna, who wished to replace arrow-vulnerable elephants with a more compact battle animal. Krishna captured a rhino and bestowed upon it the leg plates and trained it to fight. The problem was that the rhino lacked the mental capacity of the elephant to comprehend and follow orders, so it was driven back into the forest. Perhaps Krishna was hasty in his rejection: There are some ancient accounts of Indian kings using rhinos in battle as 'tanks' by fastening tridents to their horns and sending them in front of advancing infantry. In point of fact, the shields of all ancient infantry in the Subcontinent used rhino leather.

The *shikars* (hunts) of the rajas and maharajas, while they were high profile events, did not really make a dent in the rhino population of South Asia. The real loss in numbers came with the disappearance of the jungles over the centuries, and with the sudden loss of the little remaining terrain (in Nepal and Assam) to expanding population in the twentieth century. Today Chitwan is one of the westernmost habitats of the rhino; habitat destruction in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has prevented rhinos from repopulating their ancestral homelands.

In this context, the rhino revival in Chitwan is significant. Out of a total remaining South Asian rhino population of about 2000, Chitwan alone boasts 542 rhinos, according to the most recent Chitwan animal census from two years ago. There are various unconvincing uses that the rhino's various body parts are put to, and the use of rhino hide as shields for foot soldiers was probably the only truly utilitarian use. When new kings ascend the throne in Nepal, they are supposed to do an esoteric *puja* astride the carcass of a dead rhino. Rhino urine is said to treat all kinds of maladies from rheumatism to skin disease, and the fluid kept in little bottles hangs in houses as a talisman. In Chitwan, village kids (with guts) rush up behind rhinos to

collect the liquid as the beasts urinate – this being not as difficult an exercise as it sounds because the rhino is built like a tank and, like tanks, finds it hard to turn and get at someone on its behind.

Besides habitat loss, poaching is the most proximate reason for the rhino presently an endangered species. Most rhino's are poached for their horns' perceived aphrodisiac properties. The horn's use as the handle for the knives of Arabia, too, is a problem. South Asia is a 'materially poor' region, as they say, and so there are enough members of society willing to kill rhino to fulfill the libido of Han Chinese, whose traditional medicine attributes special powers to the rhino horn. A debate is currently raging among conservationists in different rhino countries about whether stocks of dead rhinos' horns should be put on the market or whether this would only generate greater interest and provoke poaching.

Interestingly, the rhino 'horn' is not even a horn, but compressed hair – keratin fibres – cemented into a harden mass to the flesh. Like so many other Subcontinental artefacts, the largest recorded South Asian rhino horn (two feet long) now resides in the British Museum.

Back to the site of the rhino capture. Poaching and loss of its keratin-laden horn was the least of the captured animal's worries at the moment. Rhinos are, in a word, wild – they are not keen on capture and enclosure. Once the animal was loaded into its transport cage under the inspecting eyes of the

When tourism drops, everyone in Chitwan suffers – from the lodge owners to the elephant *mahouts* and forest guides.

dignitaries, veterinarians administered an antidote so that the animal would be conscious during the long road trip to Bardiya. The captured rhino reacted quite badly to its new surroundings once awakened, rocking against the cage's wooden walls. A German film crew that was peering in pulled back in haste. The rhino's antics alarmed the circled VIP'ed elephants, one of which then charged the assembled crowd, sending people fleeing. As I took shelter behind the cage, I wondered fleetingly about the state of 'donor funding' for the state of Nepal, already burdened by so many tragedies, if a whole gaggle of ambassadors were to be trampled by Asian Elephants stampeding as the result of a Great Indian One Horned Rhinoceros. Fortunately, Nature's revenge on mankind proved benign, with the caged-animal quickly calmed and my deliberations on post-disaster foreign aid applications rendered moot. The translocation organisers wisely decided not to tempt fate again and hustled away the dignitaries to an elephant breeding centre. There is another successful breeding programme within the national park for the gharial crocodile – although it would make as much sense to maintain a rhino breeding centre, one would think.)

Chitwan and 9/11

Chitwan is both a wildlife reserve and a tourist destination – in fact allowing resorts within the boundaries of the national park is said to go against international concessions. The concession owners appear to be aware of this anomaly and seem to be preparing for the day when public opinion will swing towards non-renewal of their contracts. Against such a day, most have already bought up choice properties along the Rapti and Narayani rivers, but they clearly mean to stay within the park as long as they are allowed.

In the Chitwan area, more than 90 percent of revenue comes in from the tourist dollar and the park can only exist as a wildlife preserve if local residents consider the existence of wild animals to be more of a benefit than a nuisance. The United Nations has a 'Park and People' project underway, which seeks to help develop the social and economic infrastructure in the villages surrounding parks and help villagers take advantage of wildlife areas. As the case is, the bulk of the income from wildlife tourism in Chitwan is taken by 'outside' businesses. 'Outside', however, is a relative term – it can be a company owned by Western interests, or a Kathmandu Valley businessman, or the lodge-owner from the district headquarters of Bharatpur, or the market-savvy recent migrants who have colonised Chitwan Valley. At the bottom of the totem pole are the Tharu, who with a few exceptions man the lower rungs of the tourism industry of Chitwan.

Sauraha is 'downtown' Chitwan. Its two main thoroughfares meet at a point just above the Rapti river, from where jeeps (in the dry season), elephants and dugouts ferry tourists into the jungle across the water. Close to the junction of two roads stands Namyuen Restaurant, home to Chitwan's only Chinese cuisine. I stumbled into Namyuen because its name stood out from the generic Hippie-era restaurant names that are the blight of Thamel and Sauraha alike ("Third Eye", "Namaste", "The Hungry Eye", and so on).

Namyuen is an odd little place. Its owner is Emily Lin, a Chinese national born in Lanking who first visited Chitwan as a tourist back in January 2001. She met a local man, Rajesh Puri, and returned the following summer to invest USD 6500 to open the only Chinese restaurant in the area. With the help of Rajesh's younger brother, Gopal, they opened Namyuen on 9 September, just in time to take advantage of the annual post-monsoon tourist onslaught. Or so they thought. Opening a tourist venture the second week of September 2001 proved to be as inauspicious as things can get. Nepal's tourism has been reeling under multiple onslaughts of the Maoist activity of the last few years, the Narayanhiti royal massacre of 1 June 2001, and 11 September. Even though the country's resilient tourism industry was able to withstand the other bodyblows, the war in Afghanistan, added to India-Pakistan tensions following the 13 December militant attack on the Indian Parliament, proved too much. Tourism arrivals



A colonial guest takes aim during a Rana hunt party.

plummeted, and investors, professionals, service staff, labourers and countless others have all been affected. In Chitwan everyone suffers, from the lodge owners to the elephant *mahouts* and forest guides.

Back at Namyuen, Lin and Puri admit that things have not turned out as planned, but hold out hope that their sagging fortunes might reverse in the coming months. "Because I'm not educated, I could not find another job," says Rajesh. "But I could work in a restaurant. I want to be busy."

The next morning, with the first batch of rhinos safely on the road, my hosts decided to send me back to Kathmandu to write my article. After a rousing night at the Rhino Lodge bar, I packed my bags and dragged my involuntary form onto the bus at 7 am for the trip back to Nepal's capital. I was unwillingly jolted awake on the bus by a heated discussion of Assamese politics by the visiting Guwahati conservationists and veterinarians, after which I struggled against the window for some much-needed sleep. However, before restocking my reserves, we pulled off at the same teashop we had stopped at two days before. I sank silently into one of the benches and noticed that the red Maobaadi banner was still hanging across the road. After finishing my tea, I walked over and read the sign again before reboarding the bus.

During a Maoist strike in February, I read that soldiers shot and killed a man as he hung a Maoist sign on a street corner in Kathmandu. Yet here no one seemed to notice the banner, and after three days it was still hanging within the clear sight of the very road that hundreds of soldiers drove on every day. The previous day, Maoists had killed a soldier in an ambush in Chitwan, which brought home the strange reality of a country which survives on tourist revenue even in the midst of a bloody Communist insurgency. I walked back to the bus a little puzzled, but Nepal can often be a confusing place for outsiders. When it comes down to it, that's part of the country's charm. ▲

Hoodbhoy and the Bomb

There has been a disappointing dearth of critical analysis on Pakistan's and India's nuclear programmes. An Islamabad physicist steps forward to fill part of that space.

At a recent workshop on regional security organised by the *Regional Centre for Strategic Studies* in Sri Lanka, I met a number of scholars holding diverse views and perceptions from the different countries of South Asia. Among those present was Pervez Hoodbhoy, a nuclear physicist from Islamabad, whose views are of particular interest, considering both his professional background and the general absence of the kind of critical opinion he holds in the Subcontinent, especially on nuclear matters.

With a PhD in nuclear physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Hoodbhoy has been on the physics faculty of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, since 1973. He is the author of *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (Zed Books, London, 1990) and is one of the leading voices of dissent in Pakistan, a peace and anti-nuclear activist and a prolific writer on social and political issues, particularly those relating to the nuclear policies of India and Pakistan. His serious concern with the nuclear situation in the region has found expression in a video documentary film that he has made, which also provides an insight into his perceptions of the issues concerned.

Shadow over South Asia

Drawing from the lessons of history, the 33-minute video documentary *Pakistan and India Under the Nuclear Shadow* examines the dangers and repercussions of the nuclearisation of South Asia. Through interviews, visuals and archival footage, the film candidly depicts the nuclear

dangers that imperil the people of India and Pakistan, and the urgent need for peace. In the course of the film, several academics, peace activists and journalists examine the political and economic consequences of the 1998 nuclear tests and the subsequent militarisation of the region, while retired military officials of the two countries assess



Pakistan and India Under the Nuclear Shadow

Eqbal Ahmed Foundation, 2001
Produced by Pervez Hoodbhoy
Text by Zia Mian

reviewed by Teresa Joseph

the strategic impact of the tests in South Asia. The film also contains clippings of the leaders of mainstream Islamic as well as *jihadi* groups expounding their views on the bomb. The film was produced and directed by Hoodbhoy for the Eqbal Ahmed Foundation, named after the late South Asian scholar and pacifist. Zia Mian of Princeton University's Program on Science and Global Security provided the text for the film.

Opening against the backdrop of the 1945 nuclear tests by the United States and the nuclear holocaust in

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the film gives a brief historical overview of the development and spread of nuclear weapons, before focusing on the nuclear tests in India and Pakistan in 1998. Scenes of public euphoria and celebrations after the tests in both countries are juxtaposed with scenes of protest. However, the spontaneity of the celebrations is called into question, as there had been a deliberate projection of the tests as both a technological achievement and an absolute imperative for ensuring security. This kind of orchestration was particularly evident in some of the government-controlled electronic media.

Hoodbhoy points out that the portrayal of the tests as a technological achievement was in fact a myth. The first atom bomb was the product of technological innovation, but now it is more a question of money than scientific knowledge, which is abundantly available. Interestingly, AQ Khan, the so-called father of the Pakistan bomb, is shown admitting as much. Retired military officials of the two countries point out that the tests actually worsened regional security, as demonstrated by the Kargil conflict.

The full-blown arms race in the Subcontinent has disproved the theory that nuclear weapons would stabilise regional competition. The concept of minimum deterrence has also proved to be completely erroneous. Hoodbhoy points out the inevitable logic to the escalation of nuclear weapons and missiles as he underscores the fact that militarisation cannot bring peace.

The film provides insight into the nuclear weapons delivery systems and missile developments of the two South Asian adversaries. This is depicted against the background of the US-USSR missile development programmes and their debilitating impact on the Soviet economy and society. It points out that in the event of an arms race between India and Pakistan, the latter could suffer a similar fate, considering the state of

its economy and the huge expenditure on debt repayment and defence. Statistics and interviews reinforce this argument.

Hoodbhoy emphasises the criminality of the huge expenditure on militarisation. A single fighter plane costs more than what it would take to run all of Pakistan's universities for two years. Veteran human rights lawyer Asma Jehangir succinctly points out that nuclearisation has only made people poorer, the military more powerful, the hawks more hawkish and the liberals more marginalised – a situation which could have negative consequences for any society. Similarly, a journalist points out that if Pakistan had refrained from responding to the Indian tests with its own, it would not only have enjoyed moral superiority over India, but would also have been able to avoid the negative fallout of the tests, while India would have faced stronger international condemnation.

The nuclear tests also destroyed all hopes of peace from the Lahore peace talks. Retired Indian Admiral L Ramdas and retired Pakistani Lt Gen Talat Masood point out that not only did the tests fail to achieve the international military recognition that they sought, but actually resulted in a deterioration of the regional security situation while creating a false sense of confidence.

Nuclear triumphalism

At the other end of the spectrum are religious leaders and representatives of organisations like the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammed. The film shows footage of their rally speeches in which they claim that the bomb belongs not just to Pakistan alone but to Islam, and that it would be a matter of great joy if all Muslim countries obtained nuclear weapons. With pro-nuclear mobilisation of this kind, it is not surprising that the streets of Pakistan witnessed the celebration of the bomb as a symbol of the country's strength and invulnerability, and as the instrument of some grand

mission. Hoodbhoy underscores the point that Kargil was the first war in history that was actually caused by nuclear weapons. Elaborating on this, he points out that Pakistan sent its forces across the LoC, with the confidence that the nuclear shield would deter India from retaliating. In the climate of nuclear triumphalism the political-military establishment in Pakistan felt secure that it could successfully pursue its policy objectives vis-a-vis India.

In this context, Hoodbhoy forcefully emphasises that there is no such thing as safe nuclear command and control system. There are both technological as well as fundamental problems involved in command, control, communication and intelligence systems. The geographical proximity of the two countries and their missile capabilities provide each with very little time to think,

A single fighter plane costs more than what it would take to run all of Pakistan's universities for two years.

weigh options and respond. History has proved that accidents can and do occur. A nuclear war could occur either by chance or as a result of a deliberate decision, but in either case it would have disastrous effects of terrible dimensions. Poignant and hard-hitting black and white images of the 1945 nuclear holocaust tragically drive home the point.

The film ends on the more positive note of the growing realisation of the dangers of nuclear weapons in South Asia and the consequent increase in the number of protest movements in both countries. It effectively concludes that the bomb has not been able to bring peace and security to the

Subcontinent and argues that there is an urgent need for disarmament and peace.

Shoestring fightback

The film has evidently been made on a shoestring budget, but the spirit behind it compensates for deficiencies of technical finesse. There is also a dearth of adequate footage and opinions from India, which is understandable, since the film was made in Pakistan. More to the point, the film is unable to address the domestic political factors that have fueled the nuclear weapons programmes of both countries, the nuclear histories of the two nations prior to 1998 and the perspectives of political parties and leaders in Pakistan. Of course, 33 minutes scarcely suffice to examine such a range of issues. In any case, the message is more important. The initiative on the part of the filmmaker is laudable, particularly when we are all aware of the lack of audibility of voices of dissent on such issues in the region. The film is essential viewing for every concerned citizen of South Asia, even if only to assimilate criticisms of the arguments that justify the nuclear build up and to visually comprehend the effects of nuclear combat. As Hoodbhoy points out, just because the world has lived with the threat of nuclear war and nuclear accidents for fifty-five years and somehow survived, is not sufficient guarantee that it can live with these weapons forever.

In the course of personal conversation, Hoodbhoy revealed some of the difficulties he faced in making the film. Since the theme and thrust of the film evokes the hostility of government as well as militarist groups in society, there were not too many people willing to be associated with the project in any way. Finding a studio to process the film was itself a daunting task, and it was with difficulty that a studio could be persuaded to co-operate, on the condition of strict anonymity. Hoodbhoy even found it difficult to get someone to do the voice-over,

even among friends, and ultimately he had to do this himself. Obtaining footage for the film was also difficult, which is evident from Hoodbhoy's reluctance to reveal most of his sources.

Initially, the response to the film was quite welcoming, but since 11 September, reactions have been increasingly negative. Even in Hoodbhoy's own physics department, where the film was screened two months ago, the audience was largely unappreciative.

Hoodbhoy points out that the most serious cause for concern in the India-Pakistan nuclear scenario was the total lack of understanding of each other's technological capabilities. As part of a Pugwash delegation, he had met Prime Minister IK Gujral in early 1998, and expressed his anxiety about the regional nuclear situation. He was reassured

that contrary to his perception, Pakistan did not have nuclear capability nor did India have weapons capability – both assurances that were rendered false only a few months later in the May tests. Hoodbhoy also draws attention to the fact that there were no bomb shelters in either India or Pakistan, neither do the governments of either country encourage discussion of such issues, presumably so as to prevent civil society from being overly concerned. And yet, a nuclear attack would be the most terrible thing that could ever happen. A large fraction of the populace might be vapourised, but the after-effects would be felt by millions of people for generations to come.

Hoodbhoy sees no incongruity in being a nuclear physicist as well as an anti-nuclear activist. He says that it was only in the early years

that nuclear physics was concerned largely with weaponisation. Now it has moved on much further to addressing questions such as the origin of the universe and other non-militaristic pursuits. He feels that scientists must come out against the bomb. Besides his work at the University, Hoodbhoy is currently working on a thirteen-episode television serial called *Asrar-e-Jehan (Mysteries of the Universe)*, aimed at fostering an understanding of science among ordinary people.

Amidst the drumbeats for militarisation and nuclear build-up in the Subcontinent, scarce voices of sanity come as a breath of fresh air and need to be heeded. As the concluding words of Hoodbhoy's film assert: "India and Pakistan *must* give up the atom bomb and *must* make peace – there is no other choice".

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Keeping the faith in troubled times

South Asia is almost carelessly profligate in the matter of ethnic and religious diversity. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism were born in the region. Christianity reached here long before it made it to Europe – St Thomas is believed to have arrived in Kerala in the 1st century AD. And though Islam arrived much after it had spread to Europe and Africa, there are more Muslims in South Asia than in any other major region of the world.

As a natural consequence of the dispersal of religious communities across such a vast territory, every religion exists as a minority faith somewhere in the region. Some of these minorities, like the Muslims in India or the Hindus in Bangladesh, number in the millions, while others, like the Kalash of northern Pakistan or the Jews of Kerala number only a few hundred.

A major gap in the literature on the religions of South Asia was the absence of a systematic survey of the different minorities in terms of faith. This has, to some extent, been rectified by the two-volume *Religious Minorities in South Asia*, which provides a general overview of the history and contemporary status of the many religious groups in the region.

The first volume covers the religious minorities of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka, while the second volume focuses on those of India. The essays are written by specialists who, in most cases, are members of the respective communities they deal with. The essays are uneven in quality, some being extremely general while a few are well-researched and documented.

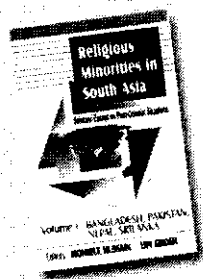
Three of the ten essays in the first volume deal with the religious minorities of Muslim-majority Bangladesh. In the chapter on Bangladeshi Buddhists, Bimal Bhikshu, of the World Chakma Organisation, argues that although a predominantly Buddhist area, the

Chittagong Hill Tracts were forced to join Pakistan in 1947 against the will of the people. From then on, it has been a continuous tale of woe for the Buddhists of the country. Displaced from their lands and with their territory flooded by Bengali migrants, many were forced to flee to India. Like the Buddhists, the Christian and Hindu minorities have been subject to considerable discrimination and oppression. RW Timm, a Christian priest and member of the Dhaka-based Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh, surveys the contributions that the Christians have made to the country, particularly in

that Hindus would be able to live as equal citizens. Ghuhathakurta notes, however, that this has not happened. The political use of Islam by regimes in search of legitimacy, the growth of right-wing anti-India Islamist groups, and the spread of anti-Hindu sentiment as a reaction to the oppression of Muslims in India, have all compounded the fears of an insecure Hindu minority, causing a flood of refugees to India which has yet to subside.

Across to the north, Nepal, the only so-called official Hindu state in the world, has small Christian and Muslim minorities. Marc Gaborieau's essay discusses the spread of Christianity in Nepal from the seventeenth century onwards. He notes that until recently, conversion from Hinduism to any other religion was a punishable crime in the country. According to him, Christians were relegated to the status of 'low castes' in a country where the constitution, until the advent of democracy, was based on the discriminatory Brahminical law-code of Manu. Today, while proselytising is prohibited, conversion is allowed, leading to a growth in the number of Christians. The Muslims of Nepal are a more well-established community, with a long history of their own. Sekh Rahim Mondal makes a general overview of the different Muslim ethnic and occupational groups, which, like the Christians, were until recently officially treated as outcasts by the state. In general, despite being a predominantly Hindu state, Nepal's social climate does not seem to adversely affect minorities in the way that it does in the rest of the Subcontinent.

Pakistan, which was established as the first Islamic republic in the modern world, has a sizeable non-Muslim population. The book devotes three essays to discussing the Ahmadis, Christians and Parsis of the country. Strangely, discussion on Hindus, who constitute a size-



Religious Minorities in South Asia—Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations (2 vols.)

Manak Publications, 2002, INR 950 (2 vols)
ISBN: 81-86562-89-3

Edited by Monirul Hussain and Lipi Ghosh

reviewed by Yoginder Sikand

education and health. Christianity found converts among the tribals and low caste Hindus of the country. Timm outlines the growing threat that the community faces from right-wing Islamist groups. Meghna Ghuhathakurta of Dhaka University discusses the problems of the large Hindu minority in Bangladesh. Between 1947 and 1971, when the country was part of Pakistan, the Hindus of Bangladesh suffered considerable discrimination. There was hope after independent Bangladesh emerged



Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam: minorities all, in different parts of South Asia.

able community, especially in Sindh, is conspicuously absent. Zulfiqar Gilani's article on the Ahmadis focuses on the troubling question of what it means to be a Muslim, and the competing interpretations of Islam, which in the case of Pakistan has resulted in the Ahmadis or Qadianis being declared non-Muslims by the state. Human rights activist Peter Jacob looks at the problems of Pakistani Christians, largely descendants of 'low' caste Hindu converts. Jacob argues that although the Christians have made valuable contributions to Pakistani society, they remain victims of widespread discrimination. This is very different from the situation encountered by the small, though affluent and influential, Parsi community of Karachi, as Nasreen Ghufuran points out in her paper. The Parsis in general do not face the kind of problems that other minorities in South Asia do, a reality that is equally in evidence in India.

To the far south, Sri Lanka has been in the grip of Sinhala Buddhist-Tamil Hindu conflict for close to two decades. The two chapters on Sri Lanka – by Paul Casperez on the Christians and Bertram Bastiampillai on the Muslims – focus on the issue of inter-ethnic and inter-religious strife, dealing with the different strategies that these communities have adopted to cope with a war between, essentially, the two other communities.

The entire second volume is devoted to the religious minorities of India. Almost all the contributors brought together by the editors agree on the growing threats to peace and inter-communal harmony emanating from right-wing Hindutva quarters. Thus, while the Constitution of India guarantees complete equality to all citizens irrespective of religion, many from minority communities have to face considerable discrimination, and sometimes attacks and pogroms organised by right-wing religious groups. This often happens in collusion with the agencies of the state. India's largest religious minority, the Muslims, are discussed in two papers, one by Asghar Ali Engineer and the other by Monirul Hussain. They are both concerned with the issue of how India can come to terms with its multi-religious situation and how Muslims can reconcile their faith in Islam with their status as minorities, while at the same time promoting better relations with people of other faiths.

While the Muslim case has been complicated by recent politics, the Parsis of India, as AB Rabadi reports, and the Jains, as Ranu Jain points out, provide examples of how a religious minority can survive and flourish in a society otherwise torn by communal strife. The Sikh situation is rather more ambiguous and has not been adequately explored here and Gopal Singh's paper on the Sikhs is disappointing. His is a

passionately argued piece that seeks to prove that the Sikhs are a separate nationality, but it tells us little about the actual condition of the community. On Indian Buddhists, Sukomal Chaudhuri's paper deals with the established communities of the trans-Himalayan region, while SK Deokkar's piece discusses the neo-Buddhist Ambedkarite Dalit converts. The Indian Christians are dealt with by Bonita Aleaz, who makes an insightful survey of the major developments in contemporary Indian Christian theology, particularly the rise of socially-engaged ways of understanding the Christian message in today's India.

Although many of the essays in the two volumes are general surveys and contain little more than what a regular newspaper-reader would already know, they provide a useful overview of the situation of religious minorities of South Asia. With religious and ethnic strife tearing apart established societies, it is clear, as the work suggests, that the question of religious minorities in each country can no longer be seen in isolation from the wider developments of the region. With the rise of what may be termed right-wing militant majoritarianism in each country, every religion is under threat. South Asia's future must bear close scrutiny, and books such as this will help do that. ▽



Empowering the oppressed: grassroots advocacy movements in India

by John G Sommer
Sage, New Delhi, 2001
pp 202, INR 225
ISBN 81 7829 061 8

Arguing that traditional approaches to development usually address the symptoms rather than the causes of

oppression, this work examines social movements struggling against caste, class or gender discrimination. In a survey that considers female self-employment, bonded labourers, unionising, and other facets of social oppression and struggle in India, the author takes an advocacy position for increasing government budget outlays to oppressed citizens and urges wider social demonstrations.

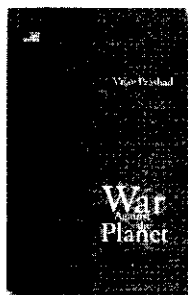


Decision-making in village Nepal

by Casper J Miller
Pilgrims Publishing, Kathmandu, 2000
pp 270, NPR 472
ISBN 81 7769 063 9

Originally written as a dissertation at Kathmandu's Tribhuvan University, this study examines village decision-

making through literature review, fieldwork studies and empirical data. Although the book was first published in 1990, even as Nepal was transitioning from the Panchayat system, this recent reissue is nevertheless useful for policy-planners and for development studies. The book carefully sifts through the different approaches to leadership within Nepal's various ethnic communities, including analysis on the traditional leadership role played by Bahuns (Nepal's hill Brahmins). The work includes notes and data on fieldwork done in the Tinau Kholu watershed in western Nepal.



War against the planet: the fifth Afghan war, imperialism, and other assorted fundamentalisms

by Vijay Prasad
LeftWord Books, New Delhi, 2002,
pp 110, INR 75
ISBN 81-87496-19-3

A collection in part of a series of articles published in *Outlook* and *Counterpunch*, this book is a compre-

hensive overview of the circumstances surrounding the US military action in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001. Though fairly brief, this work surveys US foreign policy in West and South Asia in the post-World War II period, with

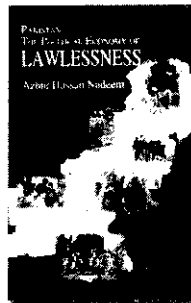
particular focus on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Western oil interests in the Persian Gulf. The author places contemporary Indian and Pakistani military posturing into a broader geo-political context and examines the changing roles of the two countries after 11 September. In his analysis of religious-political violence, Prasad attempts to explain the rise of 'Hindu-right' politics in India; he also argues that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is a by-product of the failure of Arab secular socialism and Washington's policies in the region.



Party building in Nepal: Organisation, Leadership and People

by Krishna Hachhethu
Mandala Book Point
Kathmandu, 2002
pp vii+311, no price listed
ISBN 99933 10 13 1

Political scientist Hachhethu's book is a comparative study of the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Marxist-Leninist) as they have evolved over the seven decades. The author, of Tribhuvan University's Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, breaks down his analysis of political parties into their stages of formation, survival and build-up. He pays special attention to the role of outside forces on the development of Nepal's political democracy, and the extent to which special circumstances influenced party building. The book also discusses the development of ideology, populist politics and leadership structures. This book is of particular interest to those who would like to understand the country's experience with the last 12 years of parliamentary democracy, and the role of the parties in the wrong turns and right turns of this period.



Pakistan: The political economy of lawlessness

by Azhar Hassan Nadeem
Oxford, Karachi, 2002
pp 388, PKR 495/USD 18
ISBN 0 19 579621 7

Widespread corruption, chaos and mismanagement have all been trademarks of the Pakistani economic development of the past decades. This assessment of the Pakistani economy, written by an 'economist-criminologist', attempts to take into account the impact of lawlessness on economic development, with close scrutiny paid to the 1969-1996 period.

Compiled by Deepak Thapa, Social Science Baha, Patan

The South Asian Squat

There is one reason why the human species as a whole, and South Asia in particular, is slowly losing its mooring and hold on reality. We no longer squat.

That's right, sitting on one's haunches, with the buttocks near the ground and the legs completely folded. The world's well-to-do have stopped doing this, even though humans evolved with the squatting posture as part and parcel of anthropoid evolution and means of sit-down relaxation.

My hypothesis: Squatting provides blood to the brain, presumably for two reasons. The constriction of blood in the legs provides more juice for the brain. Likewise, with the body all bunched up, there is more blood pumped into the cranium, which is good for the grey cells.

There are other advantages to squatting: when resting one does not need a chair; when going to the loo, one does not need a commode; when standing in line, one can simply get down on one's haunches and watch the world go by. You topple over less easily if your centre of gravity is lower to the ground. A significant amount of time is spent closer to the earth when one squats, which can only be good. While sitting, chatting, thinking, or visiting the loo, hours a day would be spent with more blood flowing in the brains if one is squatting rather than sitting. The quality of thought is better when you squat.

Squatting surely makes people more true to the soil. If presidents and prime ministers squatted more than they stood or sat, it stands to reason that they would take decisions that are more sensitive to the masses. As it is, sitting is seen as the first step out of the quagmire of poverty. The first thing that a household brings in once it has some disposable income is the chair. A chair requires a table. Schools bring in benches. The *nai* discards the sit-down shave, brings in the chair and mirror, and becomes 'barber'.

Not that one had only to squat. You could also sit cross-legged. Can you imagine Siddhartha Gautam

meditating on a chair? While difficult, you can certainly imagine him squatting, talking to his disciples. The Egyptian pharaohs sat, as is clear from all the statuary they left behind, which is why their civilisation disappeared. But all our ancestors squatted, which is why there is still a South Asian civilisation. Try and imagine South Asian personalities both mythical and historical sitting on chairs, and you will understand how remote it is

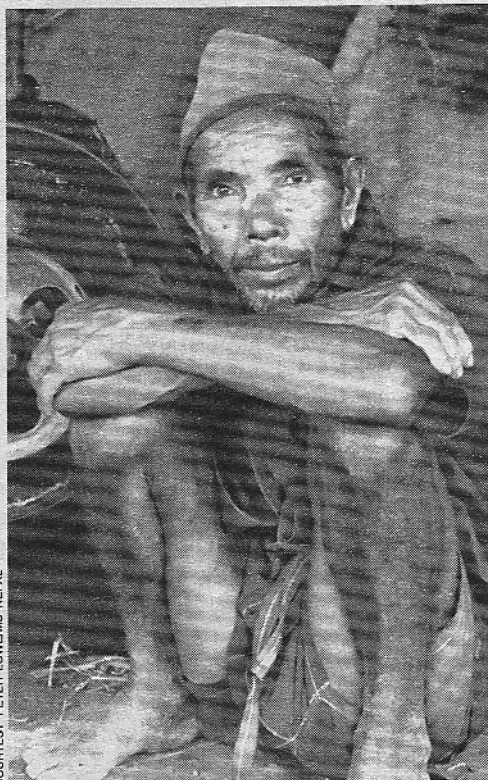
from our heritage and evolution—Krishna, Shivaji, Akbar, Rani of Jhansi or the Sirdi Saibaba sitting on chairs!

In essence, therefore, the suggestion runs thus: Sitting on chairs robs us South Asians of our genius, which is more easily accessed when we squat. This makes our muscles more elastic, our back muscles more supple, and with a low centre of gravity makes us topple less. Sitting closer to the ground, we see less of the surrounding landscape and are able to concentrate more on people and issues close at hand. Just remember one thing—the atomic bomb was discovered by American and German scientists who used the commode. What does that tell you?

The answer is clear. Offices have to get rid of tables and chairs and pull all down to ground level. What to do with the computers, you ask? Well, who said computers needed chairs? Students who sit on the ground rather than shifting their bottoms on hardwood benches would probably learn better. A minister

who sits at ground level would probably be more honest. Parliaments where the MPs squatted or sat cross-legged would probably throw up better governance and more qualitative debates. The UP State Assembly would not see the kind of uproar it does on a regular basis, if the legislators squatted.

So, South Asia, let us go back to our haunches. If nothing else will bring peace, maybe this will.



COURTESY PETER LOWE/ANS NEPAL

The quality of thought is better when you squat.

Kanishk Prasad

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.

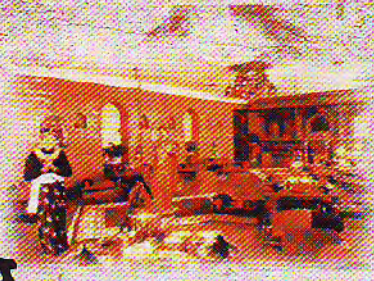
The magnificent buildings of Dwarika's with the most intricate wood and terra-cotta work of the best craftsmen and every piece of wood work an original and centuries old.



70 first class standard and deluxe rooms, including a presidential suite and 4 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.



DWARIKA'S



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 Village, 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.



DWARIKA'S

Dwarika's Village

Battisputali, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Tel: 470770, 473725 Fax: 977-1-471379

E-mail: dwarika@mos.com.np

Website: <http://www.dwarikas.com>

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.

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

A Living Tribute to the Architectural and Cultural Heritage of Nepal

*We love Kathmandu
That's why we are at its heart*



Being the first five-star hotel in Kathmandu has its privileges. For example, we chose our premises at Kings Way - the core of Kathmandu. Our guests are simply delighted being just seconds away from Kathmandu's premier shopping & business district. Being part of the Taj Group has its privileges too. A history of excellence and a legacy of being the best in the business. A combination that seems to suit our guests perfectly.

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